

BRIEFLY

Accord to reopen Mogadishu Port: An agreement has been reached to reopen Mogadishu Port which was closed two weeks ago following an attack on aid shipment to famine-stricken Somalia, a UN spokesman said Friday, reports AFP from United Nations.

The agreement, mediated by UN special envoy to Somalia Mohammed Sahnoun and the UN chief for humanitarian affairs Jan Eliasson, took effect Friday, the spokesman said.

The Mogadishu Port was closed August 28 after an attack on a humanitarian aid shipment. The first members of a UN force that will comprise more than 4,000 troops were to arrive in Somalia on Monday to oversee aid distribution.

Ghali will send mission to Georgia: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali is to send a mission to Georgia this weekend to look into prospects of establishing a permanent UN presence there, a UN spokesman said Friday, reports AFP from United Nations.

The mission will follow up on a September 3 ceasefire agreement between the governments of Georgia and Russia and representatives of Abkhazia, said Francois Gthuhani, Gustave Feissel, Director of the UN Political Affairs Department will head the mission to "explore the possibility of establishing a United Nations presence in Georgia," Gthuhani said.

1m Sudanese flee homes: Civil war in southern Sudan has forced more than 1 million people to flee their homes, a UN agency said Friday and appealed for food to help hundreds of thousands of refugees, reports AP from Nairobi.

The southern Sudan, an area roughly the size of France, has been the scene this year of heavy fighting in the 9-year-old war between forces of the government in Khartoum and secessionist rebels.

"A situation of dramatic suffering is unfolding in Sudan," said World Food Programme Director Catherine Bertini in a prepared statement.

Brazil's one 4th children poor: A 'frightening' report by the census bureau reveals poor children make up nearly one-fourth of Brazil's 146 million people, reports AP from Brazil.

The report released Thursday said 35 million children live in families with a per capita income of less than 45 dollar a month.

Brazil's per capita income is about 190 dollar a month.

Although Brazil's 1988 constitution forbids children under 14 to work, 7.5 million children do. Forty per cent of them are between the ages of 10 and 14, the study showed.

IPU admits Croatia: The Inter-Parliamentary Union, representing parliaments from around the world, admitted Croatia on Friday, reports Reuter from Stockholm.

The union said six other countries -- Benin, Botswana, Mali, Moldova, Sudan and Uzbekistan -- also joined the group during its annual conference, which ends yesterday (Saturday).

The new members bring to 118 the total number of parliaments represented in the Geneva-based body.

25 killed near Turkey's border: Twenty-five people were killed and at least five wounded in an attack by Kurdish separatists on a town in Agri province near Turkey's border with Iran, local officials said Friday, reports AFP from Ankara.

Four soldiers and a policeman were killed when Kurdish rebels opened fire on members of the security forces in the Agri village of Musabey on Wednesday, the officials said.

Twenty Kurdish rebels, including four women, were killed in the fighting and three soldiers and two policemen were wounded, they added.

30 feared dead in Lankan blast: Nineteen bodies of soldiers and five civilians have been recovered from the mid-sea ferry blast by Tamil rebels on Thursday, local press reported Saturday, says Xinhua from Colombo.

Thirty people were feared dead as the ferry was blasted by rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at Kilivedy, south of the eastern Trincomalee Military Harbour.

The LTTE is fighting in the north and east of the island country to set up a separate state of minority Tamils.

Tehran close to obtaining N-bomb

WASHINGTON, Sept 12: Iran is making rapid advances in nuclear and chemical weapons programmes designed to turn the country into the dominant power of the Gulf region, an Iranian opposition official said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Alireza Jafarzadeh, a spokesman for the People's Mojahideen of Iran, told a news conference the Tehran government was "coming closer to obtaining a nuclear bomb" thanks to a nuclear development budget that had been boosted from 200 million dollar in 1991 to 800 million dollar this year.

The latest Iranian opposition warnings about the Tehran government's alleged nuclear ambitions coincided with a visit to China by Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani at the head of a delegation that includes top military officials.

Rafsanjani announced in Beijing on Thursday that China would supply a 300-megawatt nuclear plant to Iran. The deal is part of increasingly close Iranian-Chinese cooperation, which has raised considerable suspicions in the West.

Rafsanjani said the nuclear plant would be for civilian purposes and there were no plans for new military contracts between Iran and China.

Last February, Argentina announced it had cancelled an 18 million dollar deal to supply nuclear equipment to Iran because of concern it might be used to develop weapons.

Jafarzadeh, who cited intelligence gathered by his group's supporters in Iran, said the plant China agreed to supply is meant to complete a nuclear centre at a military base at Darkhovin, 50 kilometres (30 miles) northeast of Abadan.

US plans to sell 2 warship weapons systems to Japan

WASHINGTON, Sept 12: The administration of President George Bush notified the US Congress on Friday that it intends to sell two naval warship weapons systems to Japan for 66 million dollar, reports Reuter.

The equipment includes one Phalanx high-speed gun used to shoot down attacking warplanes of missiles at close range and a guided missile vertical launching system for use by surface warships against other surface vessels.

The sale is expected to become official in 30 days without objection from Congress, Defence officials said.

Chavan's statement under fire
Opposition sees Y'slav-like situation

NEW DELHI, Sept 12: A reported statement by Home Minister S B Chavan that he favours the formation of a tribal state in India's east has prompted criticism that such a move could lead to a 'Yugoslavia-like' situation in the country, reports AFP.

It also puts Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao in a tight spot as his government had promised an answer by Tuesday to a 50-year-old tribal demand for a separate homeland in Bihar state.

Chavan, a trusted lieutenant of Rao, denied Thursday making the remark two days earlier, saying he had only been reflecting one of three options currently before an experts' panel reviewing demands for a tribal state of Jharkhand.

The panel had recommended an exclusive state for Bihar tribespeople only as a final option.

Nevertheless, the denial prompted Jharkhand activists to call for a one-day general strike in Bihar next Tuesday, followed by an indefinite blockade of road and rail transport that would begin the following day.

The activists suggest carving 35 per cent of Bihar -- the part richest in forests, coal and minerals -- out for a tribal state, but envision a 'greater Jharkhand' including areas from three adjoining states -- West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

Rao, alarmed by the rapid turn of events, invited Bihar state Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, a maverick politician belonging to the opposition Janata Dal (people's party), for a meeting Friday to discuss the issue.

He also asked Bihar's tribal

leaders to the Indian capital today for talks on the issue which threatens to snowball into another full-fledged separatist campaign in India.

Chavan, whose reported statement Tuesday was described as 'unfortunate and irresponsible' by a meeting of opposition parties, has been asked to cut short a tour of the northeast and rush back to help Rao troubleshoot.

Indian newspaper said Rao planned the weekend meetings after his cabinet's own political affairs committee failed to come up with an answer to the Jharkhand issue Thursday.

The developments follow a statement from Yadav's government in Bihar warning that a separate state of Jharkhand could result in an old Yugoslavia-like situation which could be disastrous for the country.

The home minister's remarks would cause problems of law and order, transport blockades would become an everyday affair, and a small incident could lead to regular attacks on mines, factories and power stations, it said Thursday.

Yadav's administration says a separate state comprising Bihar's rich Chotanagpur and Santhal parganas regions would drive non-tribespeople out to the state's arid north, plagued every year by droughts or floods.

"The home minister's statement could lead to serious consequences, giving fillip to separatist movements all over the country," Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Harkishan Singh Surjeet warned.

The Communist Party of India, which supports Bihar's Janata Dal administration, opposes the Jharkhand drive, saying a grant of a tribal statehood in Bihar could prompt similar demands in Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

Homeland activists in Bihar's south say settlers from the crime-prone north have been exploiting the region's mineral wealth for centuries without sharing it with original inhabitants.

Championing the present campaign is Sibhu Soren, leading light of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM, Jharkhand freedom front), which has five MPs in parliament and tens of thousands of activists.

The JMM and its militant students wing have rejected New Delhi's suggestion of either federal territory status for Jharkhand tribals or an autonomous council covering those parts of Bihar where tribespeople form a majority.



Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao receiving Vietnamese Prime Minister at Rastrapati Bhavan in Delhi recently. —Star TV photo

Russo-Japanese war of words hot up over Yeltsin's abortive trip to Tokyo

TOKYO, Sept 12: Japan is threatening to scrap plans to host an international conference on aid for the former Soviet republics as a Russo-Japanese war of words heated up over President Boris Yeltsin's aborted trip to Tokyo, reports Reuter.

Clearly angered by charges from Moscow that Japanese intransigence was to blame for the diplomatic fiasco, Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe gave a warning on Friday that he might decline to chair the conference, set for October 28-29.

"If we are to go by what is being said now in Russia, there may be no point in holding the conference here, with me as its chairman," Watanabe said in an interview with Kyodo news service published overnight.

"Given the present situation, we may have to reconsider," the Foreign Minister added.

Watanabe was quoted as saying he would make a final decision on his return from next week's UN General Assembly Meeting in New York, where he was expected to meet Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.

He rejected remarks by Yeltsin earlier in the day in the Russian city of Cheboksary that the visit had been called off because Japan had proved 'too categorical' in its demands that Russia hand back four north Pacific islands seized at the end of World War II.

Kyodo said Watanabe insisted the Japanese government preferred to accept Yeltsin's Wednesday statement in a telephone call to Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa that was postponing his trip because of Russian domestic problems and not because of any dissatisfaction with Japan.

Yeltsin had been due to arrive in Japan on Sunday.

In his interview, Watanabe indicated that Japan had planned to offer new humanitarian and technical assistance for Russia at the ministerial-level conference. Some 70 countries and 15 international organisations had been expected to attend.

In his Kyodo interview, Watanabe said that if Japan's approach to the territorial dispute was really so inflexible that Yeltsin might choose to postpone his visit, the Russian leader should have said as much to him when the two men met in Moscow in early September.

The Foreign Minister said Japan had recently 'toned down' its long-standing demand that Russia return all four disputed islands at the same time.

It was calling only for Russia's recognition 'in some way or another' of Japan's residual sovereignty over the four, with Japan being flexible on the timing, modalities and conditions for their return.

"Japan was too categorical about the Kurile islands,"

Off the Record

Japan — paradise for car thieves

TOKYO: Japan is a paradise for car thieves, according to a police survey released Friday, which shows that one in five drivers parking on city streets leaves the keys in the ignition, reports Reuter.

A national police agency check of some 15,000 cars in late July showed that 10 per cent of cars parked anywhere in the country, during the day or overnight, were left with the keys in the ignition.

The percentage climbed to 20 per cent in cities.

Almost 26 per cent of all cars checked by police were left unlocked, the report said.

A police agency official said the survey was prompted by a recent increase in car thefts, until now relatively rare. Japanese car insurance policies do not cover theft.

"It's never really been a big problem and we're hoping it will stay that way by getting people to be more careful."

Lady's not a tramp she's a heroine

LOVELAND, Colo: Lady's not a tramp, she's a heroine, reports AP.

The 9-year-old Husky retriever mix risked her life to save an 8-year-old girl from some rattlesnakes during an outing, the youngster says.

Teresa Martinez says she heard the buzz of a rattlesnake -- then several rattlers -- as she led a pack of children into some bushes.

"I heard a twitching noise like a snake -- I saw a snake," the girl recalled. "He didn't look very nice. It sounded like a monster coming up from the ground."

Lady, the family dog, bounded to the rescue.

"Lady got right in there for the kids," said Teresa's mother, Laura.

The dog attacked the snakes and Teresa ran for safety -- but not before she saw one of the snakes strike Lady.

"It went up, came down, and then she bit," Teresa said.

Lady kept fighting the snakes until all the children were safe. The dog came away with three bites.

The family took Lady to a veterinary hospital. By the time they arrived, Lady's head had swollen and one eye was shut, Teresa's mother said.

Lady was treated and is back home. Her face is shaved and sore, but she's getting a heroine's treatment -- hot dogs with her medicine.

Political dunce cap for misspelling

WASHINGTON: Vice President Dan Quayle, who got a political dunce cap for misspelling the word potato, Friday gleefully pounced on a box in the New York Times that spelled his name 'Quale,' reports AP.

"If they're going to insist that I spell the word potato correctly, I am going to have to insist that they start spelling my name correctly," Quayle said on a C-SPAN television call-in show.

The newspaper misspelled Quayle's name in a box highlighting candidates' television appearances.

Quayle drew wide ridicule for instructing a boy in a spelling bee in a Trenton, NJ, classroom on June 15 to add the extra letter 'e' at the end of the word potato, thus misspelling it 'potatoe'.

Quayle said he took his cue from an errant "teacher spelling card ... and we're still talking about it."

"C'mon, give me a break, folks," said Quayle. But he added, "We all make mistakes."

Fossils of earliest Homo Sapiens discovered

CHENGDU: The fossil of Wushan man, the earliest Homo Sapiens discovered in China, is now on display at Wushan country in Sichuan province, reports Xinhua.

Also on display are fossils of giant apes, Chinese bears, subspecies of the giant panda and stegodon, the cultural ruins of the Wushan man and stone tools used by Wushan man.

The Wushan cultural ruins were unearthed in the autumn of 1986. Carbon dating shows that the Wushan man culture belongs to the Pleistocene period between 2,010,000 and 2,040,000 years ago.

The display hall opened on August 26 is temporary. The local government plans to build a bigger Wushan cultural relics museum.

Bush okays sale of 72 F-15 planes to S Arabia

ST LOUIS, Sept 12: President Bush on Friday announced approval of the sale of 72 F-15X fighter jets to Saudi Arabia, saying it was 'in the interest of world peace,' reports AP.

Bush stressed the economic benefit for the local area of the sale of dlr 5 billion sale. The company says the deal, still being negotiated, will save the jobs of more than 7,000 workers.

Last week, Bush had made a similar announcement at a General Dynamics plant in Texas concerning the sale of F-16 fighters to Taiwan.

Israel opposes the sale but sees no way to fight the deal, Israeli officials said Friday prior to the announcement.

"Israel is against any supply of particularly advanced military equipment to a country that is in a state of war with Israel, and Saudi Arabia is still in a state of war with Israel," said Zalman Shoval, Israel's ambassador to Washington.

"But ... Israel cannot determine for the United States its policies of supplying arms," Shoval added in an interview with Israel television.

White House Chief of Staff James A Baker telephone Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Thursday to inform him of Bush's decision, said Oded Ben Ami, Rabin's spokesman on defence issues.

"We are consulting closely with the government of Israel to ensure that steps are taken to provide for the maintenance of Israel's qualitative military edge," the White House said in a fact sheet accompanying the announcement.

It said first delivery of the planes to Saudi Arabia would be in 1996 and the last in 1999.

Use of Daya Bay N-plant approved

BEIJING, Sept 12: An official report Saturday said authorities have approved the use of nuclear materials at the controversial Daya Bay nuclear plant, the target of protests from residents in nearby Hong Kong, reports AP.

The newspaper China Daily said the approval means the Daya Bay nuclear power plant, just 30 miles (48 kilometres) from Hong Kong, is entering the final stage of construction.

At Daya Bay, where two 900-megawatt reactors are under construction, work was halted for nearly two months in 1987. Officials said 316 steel reinforcing bars had been left out when the first layer of concrete was poured for the foundation.

Hong Kong is to receive about 70 per cent of Daya Bay's electricity, but residents of the British colony have protested its construction and expressed concern about earthquake risks.

Hurricane Iniki hits Hawaii

HONOLULU, Hawaii, Sept 12: Hurricane Iniki lashed Hawaii with winds of up to 180 miles per hour (290 kms per hour) on Friday, forcing evacuation of tens of thousands of people, flooding roads and damaging beachfront homes, reports Reuter.

The hurricane, the first to strike the Hawaiian islands in 10 years, brushed past heavily populated Oahu and was taking aim for a direct hit on Kauai, a sleepy resort with about 50,000 residents, forecasters said.

Twenty-foot (six-metre) waves swamped coastal highways on Oahu, and high winds ripped down lines, knocking out electricity to an estimated 30,000 homes, civil defence officials said.

The roofs of several homes and businesses were blown off on Oahu, and number of beachfront structures were reported destroyed on Kauai as the island braced for the full onslaught of the storm.

"It looks like we're going to get clobbered," said civil defence official Courtney Harrington.

The hurricane was so fearsome that navy officials ordered warships to leave Pearl Harbour to ride out the storm at sea.

Honolulu Mayor Frank Fasi went on radio and television to tell residents he had informed the White House that the island would be a disaster area and that President George Bush should be prepared to send in troops and assistance.

"This is one of the worst disasters we are going to experience in recent memory," Fasi said.

The last hurricane to hit Hawaii was Iwa in 1982, which brushed Oahu and overran Kauai, killing one person and causing 234 million dollars worth of damage.

Major Queen's private guest this weekend

Kingdom about the importance of the monarchy.

"It is an entrenched, enduring and valuable part of our way of life," he said.

Buckingham Palace on Friday dismissed as "speculation" a report that the Queen wanted to talk frankly with her first minister about the problems besetting the royal family.

Scandal about the Queen's children's marriages has, however, increasingly exposed their ordinariness and fuelled their clamour, especially against the 'lesser' royals, who also live on public money via the civil list.

It has also boosted calls for the Queen -- one of Britain's wealthiest landowners -- to start paying taxes like everyone else.

The year has been one of royal family divorce, separation and intimate revelations and has shown a once adulatory tabloid press turned red in tooth and claw and baying for royal blood.

"Fergie's Duchess of York, separated from the Queen's second son Andrew since March, caused excruciating embarrassment to 'the firm' last month when a photographer snatched her in intimate poolside poses with her American financial adviser, John Bryan.

The photos were splashed across newspapers both here and abroad.

A book published in June by Andrew Morton, "Diana, here true story," said the Princess

of Wales suffered from an eating disorder, and had attempted suicide in despair at her unhappy marriage to heir to the throne Prince Charles.

And in the most open defiance yet of royal sensibilities, the top-selling Sun Newspaper published the next of a secretly recorded 1989 telephone conversation between a woman said to be Princess Diana and an unknown admirer.

In it the woman described her husband as making her life "torture."

Not content with that, the Sun made available special telephone lines for the public to listen into the tape and judge for themselves.

The Queen's only daughter Princess Anne was formally divorced from her husband Mark Phillips just a few months ago.

Newspapers here have not been slow to offer opinions on the damage-limitation advice that Major might give to the embattled Queen during his stay.

The independent newspaper suggests an end to all civil list payments other than to the Queen herself and an end to the Queen's immunity from taxation on her private income.

It also proposes that the Queen and Prince Charles distance themselves from the 'lesser royals.'

The top-selling tabloid Sun on Thursday gave Major the benefit of two pages of its opinion, opening on page one, with "the Sun is not amused."

Seven Sikhs shot dead in Punjab

NEW DELHI, Sept 12: Indian police have shot dead seven Sikh militants, including the younger brother of one of the most wanted men in the state of Punjab, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported Friday, says AP.

Security forces killed Nirver Singh Manochahal, a self-styled lieutenant general of the outlawed Bhindrawale Tigers Force of Khalistan (BTKF), in the border region of Tarn Taran overnight Thursday.

Senior superintendent of police Ajit Singh said Manochahal, who carried a reward of 500,000 rupees (19,000 dollar) on his head, was responsible for smuggling arms and ammunition from neighbouring Pakistan for the BTKF.