

BRIEFLY

Bombs blast at wax museum: Four small firebombs exploded in London early Thursday, two in Madame Tussauds wax museum and two in the Imperial War Museum three miles (4.8 km) away, police reported, says AP from London.

Scotland Yard said in a statement that nobody was hurt in either of the pre-dawn attacks.

The devices at the wax museum, one of Britain's top tourist draws, started a fire in its basement Chamber of Horrors which features models of especially notorious killers. Two of the wax models were destroyed.

The firebombs at the Imperial War Museum, another popular tourist venue housing weapons, uniforms and other exhibits from Britain's military past, caused no damage.

Ghali for talks on East Timor: UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali called Wednesday for "informal consultations" between Portuguese and Indonesian foreign ministers "without preconditions" on the dispute over East Timor, reports AFP from United Nations.

The talks could be started while the two officials are present in New York for the 47th UN General Assembly, Boutros-Ghali said in a report.

The Jakarta government annexed the former Portuguese colony in 1976 in a move not recognized by the United Nations and opposed by separatists in East Timor. Portugal broke off diplomatic relations with Indonesia following the action.

US, France discuss Y'slav issue: US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney and French officials discussed the situation in Yugoslavia on Wednesday, but seemed to remain at odds over whether an air exclusion zone should be proclaimed over Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports AFP from Paris.

Cheney told reporters after talks with French Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy that the two had had "good discussions," but that he had "no new policy to announce."

"I don't believe there are fundamental differences between the United States and France on these issues," he said.

He was replying to a question on disagreement between the two countries in talks at the United Nations on the exclusion zone, favoured by France which has peace-keeping troops stationed in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

11 die in Netherlands fire: Eleven people died and five were critically injured here Wednesday when a fire broke out in a hostel for homeless and elderly people, police said, reports AFP from The Hague.

The fire, which broke out in the early hours of the morning, caused major panic in the hostel, which was believed to have housed some 40 people.

The roof of the building collapsed in the blaze, and police said it was possible, but not likely, that some victims could still be buried under the debris.

It was not immediately known whether the fire was accidental or deliberately set.

7 killed in US chopper crash: Seven people were killed Wednesday when a tour helicopter slammed into the side of an inactive volcano on the Hawaiian island of Maui, authorities said, reports AFP from Hawaii.

Fire battalion chief Conrad Ventura said the French-made AS-350B helicopter crashed in a densely vegetated area on the three thousand metre volcano in Haleakala National Park. There were no survivors, Ventura said.

Peter Beckner of the Federal Aviation Administration in Honolulu said that six passengers and a pilot were on the helicopter when it went down.

Early reports from the crash site suggest that there was a fire after the crash, said Police Lieutenant Creighton Kamana.

Manila to close embassy in Belgrade: The Philippines will close its embassy in Belgrade but keep its relations with Yugoslavia, Foreign Secretary Roberto Romulo said Thursday, reports Reuters from Manila.

That's another manifestation of how we feel about (the situation in Yugoslavia), Romulo told reporters, referring to alleged human rights abuses by Serb forces against Muslims and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Philippines downgraded its relations with Yugoslavia last month by withdrawing its ambassador to Belgrade.

Romulo said Manila would maintain relations with Belgrade on a non-resident basis through its embassy in Greece.

Koreas to install hot line between defence ministers

SEOUL, Sept 17: North and South Korea agreed Thursday to install a hot line between their defence ministers within 50 days, the first concrete step between the two nations' armies to ease decades of tensions, reports AP.

The agreement to install a hot line and to activate committees to implement a historic peace pact came at a meeting of the two sides' prime ministers in North Korea's capital Pyongyang.

The Prime Ministers failed to reconcile substantial differences on nuclear inspections, reunions of divided families and other issues, South Korean pool reports said.

But the agreements reached allowed both sides to claim progress in the eight round of the prime ministers' talks, the highest channel of dialogue between the rival Koreas since partition in 1945.

"It is great progress, on the road to unification," North Korean Premier Yon Hyong

Muk said at the signing, according to pool reports.

The hot line is symbolic in that it will be the first official communications link between two nations that have remained hostile and technically at war for four decades. The border between them remains tightly sealed and there is no mail, telephone service or travel between the two sides.

The only telephone link has been between the Red Cross offices of the two sides.

South Korean Prime Minister Chung Won-shik, who said earlier that activating the committees was only a "second-best solution," called the results significant.

"From now on both sides should make efforts to faithfully implement agreements to advance national unification," Chung reportedly said.

The accords activate joint committees to discuss economic exchanges and political and military issues as a step

toward implementing a historic pact on reconciliation adopted in February.

The committees are to start meeting in November at the border village of Panmunjom. A ninth round of prime ministers' talks is scheduled Dec 21-24 in Seoul, the reports said.

Worries over suspected North Korean nuclear weapons development remain, the reports said. South Korea has said there will be no major progress in inter-Korean relations until nuclear issues are resolved.

Differences to be debated in committee sessions are far-reaching and will not be easy to resolve, said South Korean pool reports and officials in Seoul.

These include North Korean demands that South Korea abolish a national security law that bars inter-Korean contact without government approval, and demands to limit

press coverage and to ban third party agreements, such as sanctions, against the other side.

The two sides also disagree over limitations on arms buildups along their heavily fortified border, the use of air or sea blockades and whether to a, low military reconnaissance.

A separate nuclear ban treaty was adopted in February. Despite dozens of working-level meetings, the two sides have failed to agree on guidelines for mutual inter-Korean nuclear inspections outlined in the treaty.

The nuclear issue is the most divisive between the longtime rival Koreas and has blocked progress on other issues. The United States, Japan and other major powers have backed the South's demand for more thorough inspections than those begun this year by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

SAARC confce on children opens in Lanka

From S Bari

COLOMBO, Sept 17: A major obstacle to progress in the South Asian region is the state of its children, according to UNICEF's Executive Director, James P. Grant. Grant issued this warning at the opening of the SAARC ministerial conference on Children in South Asia.

The conference was inaugurated here Wednesday by Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa. The gathering of ministers from the seven SAARC countries — Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka was also addressed by Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Harold Herat.

The purpose of the conference is to discuss the plans of the various governments in the field of children and development. Following the World Summit on Children in New York two years ago, countries that have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child drew up plans of action for their concerned ministries. According to a source in UNICEF, which is a major backer of the conference, "It's time to see how well these plans of action are being implemented."

The Bangladesh delegation is headed by Minister for Women's Affairs and Social Welfare Tariqul Islam. His entourage includes staff from both his ministry and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Islam offered a vote of thanks to host country Sri Lanka and current SAARC chairman President Premadasa on behalf of the delegates in the hall.

A colourful ceremony involving over 1400 children began the day. President Premadasa's speech was intermixed with a dance-drama that considerably brightened the mood.

The day ended with delegates being divided into working groups on specific problems relating to the rights of children. Each group is to be chaired by a different member country. Bangladesh is chairing the group on Poverty Alleviation.

The decrees, published by the official Saudi press agency, also appointed Sheikh Saleh Bin Mohammad al-Lihaidan as president of the higher judicial council.

Abdullah Bin Mohammad Al-Sheikh was appointed justice minister to replace Bin Jubair.

The reforms announced by King Fahd on March 1 will include alongside the appointed Shura Council at the national level a number of provincial advisory councils across the country.

Members of these councils have yet to be nominated.

The reforms gave the kingdom its first written basic law alongside the Islamic Sharia code. Residents will for the first time enjoy some guarantees of personal freedoms and security from an arbitrary search and arrest.



PARIS: French President Francois Mitterrand kisses a girl presenting him with flowers on his leaving hospital September 16 after being diagnosed with prostate cancer and after undergoing an operation last Friday. President Mitterrand said he saw no reason to resign as his brain remained intact.

— AFP/UNB photo

Nuclear reactor sale to Iran for peaceful purpose, China claims

JERUSALEM, Sept 17: Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen said on Wednesday a nuclear reactor his country sold to Iran was for peaceful purposes only and was being monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency, reports Reuters.

"Iran is a signatory to the treaty for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons," Qian told reporters during a three-day visit to Israel.

"Iran also completely accepts the safeguards by the IAEA," he said, adding "The IAEA has already sent a delegation and inspection team to Iran. Therefore I believe their nuclear programme is not nuclear weapons."

Israeli-Chinese arms links have been shrouded in secrecy for years but Israel has been outspoken in its concern over possible Chinese military sales, including nuclear technology, to other Middle East countries. Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said he discussed the matter with Qian and was told "they would not do anything that could complicate the situation in the Middle East" on this matter.

Israel and China established diplomatic relations last January. Qian is the highest-ranking Chinese official to visit the Jewish state.

US regrets China's plan to boycott arms talks

WASHINGTON, Sept 17: The United States on Wednesday expressed disappointment over China's plan to boycott the next round of arms control talks because of the proposed US sale of F-16 fighter aircraft to Taiwan, reports AFP.

The White House said Washington would continue to press Beijing to attend the meeting, to be convened by the five major weapons exports in November in Moscow.

"Clearly, it is disappointment to us because we think those talks are very important and we think China should participate," spokesman Martin Fitzwater said.

Western sources in France said that China called last week for the next round of talks on arms proliferation be put off until next year.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen said Wednesday that Beijing would likely boycott the talks following Washington's announcement on the sale of 150 F-16s to Taiwan.

A state department source speaking on condition of anonymity said "we are not

taking to no for an answer."

Zian called President George Bush's proposal to sell the F-16s a violation of agreements between Washington and Beijing.

On September 2, Bush approved the sale, reversing a 10-year policy of limiting arms sales to Taiwan, arguing that it was necessary to maintain the balance of power in the region.

"We reject China's linkage of the F-16 sale and the arms control process."

We encourage China to reconsider its position and to remain engaged in the talks," state department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

He called Qian's announcement "regrettable" and said he hoped Beijing, while views Taiwan as its own, would reconsider.

Boucher noted that China was taking part in the current multilateral round of Middle East arms control talks in Moscow, held alongside the Arab-Israeli negotiations in Washington.

Facilities set up to destroy Iraqi weapons

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 17: UN experts have set up facilities in Iraq to destroy Iraqi chemical weapons, but estimate the operation will take six to 12 months, officials said here Wednesday, reports AFP.

A facility at Muthanna, Iraq, was set up between September 5 and 12 and will be used to inactivate nerve gases. The team earlier set up a separate facility at the same location to destroy mustard gas, which also is part of the arsenal of weapons to be destroyed under UN Resolution 687 that ended the Gulf War.

Bush-Clinton debate cancelled

WASHINGTON, Sept 17: The first proposed debate between US president George Bush and Democratic challenger Bill Clinton was cancelled Wednesday after the White House objected to a proposed format for the confrontation, reports AFP.

White House spokesman Martin Fitzwater said early Wednesday that Bush wanted a debate along the lines of that in 1988, with a panel of journalists questioning the candidates.

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Ghali decries \$17 billion debt to United Nations

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 17: Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali on Wednesday decried the 1.7 billion dollars debt to the United Nations and encouraged the Security Council to combat massive violations of human rights, reports Reuters.

The 47-page annual report was his first evaluation of UN activities since taking office in January and runs through the gamut of controversies facing the world body.

"Never before in its history has the United Nations been so action-oriented, so actively engaged, and so widely expected to respond to needs both immediate and persuasive," he said in the report, citing complex peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Angola and El Salvador.

Analysing the UN's perennial cash shortage, Boutros-Ghali said states were behind 908.5 million in regular dues and 844.4 million dollars in peacekeeping contributions for a total of more than 1.7 billion dollars.

The United States owes about 731 million of this amount but intends to pay more than 300 million dollar by December.

He said that at the end of August he was able to pay staff salaries only by borrowing from peacekeeping funds.

"Perennial shortages, the absence of reserves and a debilitating uncertainty over the

immediate future, are the main characteristics of the financial situation," he said.

As his predecessor Javier Perez de Cuellar before him, Boutros-Ghali recommended that interest be charged on moneys paid late and he be authorised to borrow commercially should other sources of cash be inadequate.

Major police shake-up in China

BEIJING, Sept 17: China has begun a major shake-up of the 1.2 million member police force, firing unqualified officers and requiring more training for others, an official newspaper said Thursday, reports AP.

Jiang Xianjin, vice minister of the Public Security Ministry, said orders have been issued recently barring police from abusing detainees, meddling in economic disputes or engaging in business, the China Daily reported.

Jiang said as a result, cases involving police malpractice have diminished, the newspaper reported.

Jiang said 1,546 such cases were reported from March through June, with 272 involving bribery, fraud or smuggling and 211 involving illegal detention or other abuses of power.

Off the Record

Foster parents better than own parents

ORLANDO: A 12-year-old boy trying legally to sever ties with his parents so that a foster family can adopt him says he hopes his lawsuit seeking a loving, stable life helps other children who suffered abuse and neglect, reports AP.

The boy, identified only as Gregory K, is the focus of an unprecedented court case in which he charges his natural parents with mistreatment and neglect throughout his young life.

He wants a judge to authorize his adoption by a family in central Florida that he's been living with since October 1991. The child's natural mother is fighting the lawsuit and wants her son back. The boy's father, who is divorced from the mother, has been waffling but lately said he would not contest the matter.

The youngster will appear on the ABC News television programme "20/20" on Friday, arguing that children like him should have a choice in their foster care.

In the videotape released by the programme, he criticized his mother for abandoning him to his alcoholic father at the age of 4, and then to a succession of foster homes.

Gregory K has spent only seven months of the past eight years with his mother and two younger brothers.

"She left me in the foster home for years — she didn't call me or anything," Gregory told interviewer Barbara Walters. "When she found out that I was happy and I wanted to stay where I was, she decided, 'Oh well, I don't want you to be adopted, so I'm going to try to get you back.'"

"I just want a place where I feel safe and that I'm happy, and that I know people will always be there for me," the boy added.

First balloon race to cross European road

BANGOR: Five balloons, defying the terrible odds of a 3,000-mile journey, soared off Wednesday to begin the first trans-Atlantic balloon race, reports AFP.

Only five of the 16 attempts at ballooning across the Atlantic have succeeded. Five flights ended in tragedy.

The five, two-man teams from the United States, Britain, Germany, Belgium and Holland, left in moonlight on the perilous race which will be won by the first balloon to cross any European road.

Hundreds watched the high-tech helium balloons lift off for the three to five day race. Five hours after takeoff, the balloons had reached the US-Canadian border.

The teams are racing for a two-foot (60-centimetre) bronze trophy. A second prize will be awarded to the team that goes the farthest. The American team hopes to land in Russia.

Madame imprisoned for prostitution ring

PARIS: "Madame Claude", who once headed France's biggest luxury call-girl network, was sentenced to three years imprisonment and a million franc (200,000 dollar) fine on Wednesday on charges of re-establishing a prostitution ring, reports Reuters.

Claude — real name Françoise Grudet — was immediately set free because 30 months of her sentence was suspended and she had been held in custody since March.

Grudet, 69, had been accused of organising 17 models and dancers into a prostitution ring patronised by top French and foreign businessmen. The girls were aged between 19 and 27. Grudet, whose career has been the subject of several films, received 25 per cent of the 10,000 franc (2,000 dollar) fee which the girls charged clients, the court heard.

She served several prison terms between 1975 and 1979 for procuring and evading taxes after police broke up her famed call-girl ring which operated in the 1960s and 1970s.

The French press said at the time that her clients included several foreign heads of state.

Columbus found guilty of

ST PAUL: Are you better off today than you were 500 years ago? reports AP.

In a mock trial Wednesday, attorneys for Christopher Columbus tried to prove that some things haven't changed much since the explorer "discovered" the New World in 1492.

The jury didn't buy it. Columbus was found guilty of murder, torture, slavery, forced labour, kidnapping, violence and robbery during his reign as governor of Hispaniola. Judas deduced on charges of rape, international terrorism and genocide.

Columbus, 541, of Italy, was sentenced to 50 years of community service for each count, to be spent educating people about his true deeds.

The trial was sponsored by the University of Minnesota Law School's Human Rights Centre to coincide with the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing in North America.

Defence attorneys portrayed their client as a "deeply religious... upwardly mobile merchant-mariner" who was merely acting by the standards of his day and under the orders of his queen.

Move to implement political reforms in Saudi Arabia

DUBAI, Sept 17: Saudi Arabia's King Fahd today took the first step in "implementing political reforms promised six months ago by appointing the Speaker for a proposed Shura (consultative) Council, reports Reuters.

Decrees issued by the King

Fighting in Bosnia intensified

SARAJEVO, Sept 17: Fighting in Bosnia intensified on Wednesday killing 370 civilians and wounding 370 and Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegovic protested to UN Security Council against Serb air strikes, reports Reuters.

"We lodge a serious protest with the Security Council about the brutal air bombardments of Bihać, Jajce, Gorazde and Bosanski Brod," Izetbegovic said. Sarajevo Radio reported the casualty figures.

Izetbegovic also set a new condition for his side to attend the peace talks in Geneva on Friday.

Russia secretly tests most powerful chemical weapon

MOSCOW, Sept 17: The Russian military has secretly tested the world's most powerful binary chemical weapon, developed by the former Soviet Union, a newspaper reported Wednesday, reports AP.

The weekly Moscow News said the test took place during the first three months of this year at a proving grounds on Ustyurt Plateau, near the city of Nukus in Uzbekistan.

It said the site was chosen to avoid detection by US spy satellites, which frequently targeted another test site at Shikhanj in central Russia.

The newspaper said Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov might not have known about the test.

The article was signed by Vil Mirzayanov and Lev Fyodorov, identified as "doctors of chemical sciences."

The newspaper said the test was conducted despite President Boris Yeltsin's announcement January 29 that "Russia adheres to the agreement on non-production and destruction of chemical weapons, signed with the United States in 1990."

The 1990 agreement has not yet been ratified by either

the US Congress or the Russian Parliament. It calls only for a halt in production and a reduction in stockpiles of chemical weapons. It does not restrict testing, said Elissa Harris, a senior research analyst at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, by telephone.

"The Russian test, if it did in fact take place, was not a violation," she said.

Binary chemical weapons have two components that are not lethal until they are mixed, making them safer to store. Moscow News said the Russian weapon was developed from a

"new poisonous agent" developed at Moscow's Scientific Research Institute for Organic Chemistry and Technology.

The effects of the poisonous agent were permanent, the newspaper reported, adding without elaboration that people who were exposed to it have remained invalids.

The weapon is "the most powerful in the world," surpassing those developed in the United States, the article said.

Production of the weapon began in the Volga River city of Volgograd. Later, in the spring of 1991, then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev awarded

the weapon's designers the Lenin Prize, the country's highest scientific honour, Moscow News reported.

It identified two of the recipients as the Moscow institute director, V. Petrunin, and Gen Anatoly Kuntsevich, deputy chief of Russia's chemical forces. The newspaper said Kuntsevich recently was appointed to head a presidential Committee on Problems of Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions.

Turning to the Moscow institute itself, the paper reported that it lacks proper filters and is releasing small but

dangerous concentrations of poisonous agents into Moscow's atmosphere.

According to Moscow News, eight to 10 kilograms (17.6 to 22 pounds) of deadly chemicals are usually kept at the institute.

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