

Bosnian Serb rebels offer to open 10 land corridors

SARAJEVO, Sept 23 : Bosnian Serb rebels have offered to open 10 land corridors out of Sarajevo so civilians can escape the six-month siege of the capital, a Serb leader said Tuesday, reports AP.

Gen. Philippe Morillon, deputy commander of the UN peacekeeping forces, said he hoped similar corridors would relieve other besieged Bosnian cities.

But some members of the Muslim-led government say that if the population abandons Sarajevo and other remaining government strongholds, it will lift all restraints on the Serbs' military forces and weaken the defence of the cities.

Biljana Plavsic, aide to Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, told The Associated Press the Serb side had proposed allowing civilians to leave at a meeting with Morillon on Monday at Serb headquarters in Pale, east of Sarajevo.

Morillon told reporters that

corridors to Sarajevo and possibly other besieged cities would "give the population the means to go in and out." But he warned: "I hope there will not be a major exodus."

After nearly six months of almost daily bombardment by Serb artillery, morale is sagging among the nearly 400,000 citizens left in Sarajevo.

Many war-weary residents want to leave the capital. Others oppose an exodus.

"If they open up land corridors, the question is who will be left in Sarajevo to turn out the lights? — probably only Karadzic," said Zdravko Grebo, an independent Sarajevo journalist.

But Morillon, who had just returned from Dobrinja, a hard-hit government-held Sarajevo suburb, said he received an extraordinary lesson in courage from the suburb's residents.

"I've seen the extraordinary solidarity there... a formidable ray of hope."

Int'l drug smuggling bid foiled in Manila

MANILA, Sept 23: Police said Wednesday they had cracked a major international Hong Kong smuggling operation with the arrest of 10 alleged members of a gang that shipped drugs to the United States and Asian countries, reports AP.

Vice President Joseph Estrada, head of a presidential anti-crime task force, presented the 10, including one woman, at a news conference. All were said to be Hong Kong nationals.

Police said the 10 were members of the 14-K and Wo Sing Wo gangs based in the British Crown Colony. They said one of them, Pang Chun Chung, served as a heroin courier to the United States.

"We ousted the leadership

of the Philippine connection to Hong Kong," said Col Reynaldo Berroya. "For sure we got the top personalities of the 14-K." Estrada said the 10 were arrested in three separate raids in the Manila suburbs starting September 17. In the first raid, police arrested Kwok Kam Wa, allegedly the Philippine-based chief of the network.

Berroya said Kwok was wanted in Hong Kong for murder and drug smuggling. Estrada said six of the 10 would be deported to Hong Kong, but police were still considering whether to charge the others here.

Estrada said he would fly to Hong Kong on Thursday to present fingerprints and other evidence to authorities.

Yeltsin may reschedule Japan trip

TOKYO, Sept 23: Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who cancelled a visit to Japan this month because of a territorial dispute, could reschedule the trip for late this year or early 1993, reports Reuter.

Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Shokhin told Kyodo news agency in Washington on Tuesday that exact dates had not yet been discussed.

Relations between Russia and Japan soured after Yeltsin called off his September 13 visit with just four days notice.

He blamed Japan, telling Russian reporters that Japanese leaders were too uncompromising in their demands for the return of four islands seized by Soviet troops in 1945.

Japan refuses to sign a World War two peace treaty or extend major economic aid to Russia until the dispute is resolved.

Dalai Lama rejects Beijing's invitation

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: The Dalai Lama's office here today rejected a Beijing invitation for the Tibetan god-king to visit China, and said a dialogue with the Chinese leadership cannot be held with preconditions, reports AP.

"At this point of time, a visit to China is out of question," a spokesman said in response to the invitation, renewed in a white paper on Tibet released in Beijing by the official Xinhua news agency.

The Dalai Lama has made a very categorical statement that he first wants to go to Tibet to see form himself the conditions there, spokesman Migyur Dorji said. "The Chinese have not responded so far."

The report released in Beijing said the Chinese government was willing to "contact and negotiate with the Dalai Lama," but that it would not make the "slightest concession to the fundamental issue of maintaining the motherland unification."

Dorji said while the Dalai Lama favoured negotiations with Beijing, negotiations would be impossible if China refused to discuss the possibility of granting Tibet.



MOSCOW: A pro-Yeltsin demonstrator argues with a militia officer in front of parliament in Moscow about where her contingent can stand after the communist demonstrators were allowed to stand closer to the parliament building where the Soviet supreme started its fifth session on Tuesday. The Soviet Supreme is expected to discuss several urgent problems including economic reforms and the situation in Georgia. — AFP/UNB photo

US-Jordan joint army exercises resume

NEW YORK, Sept 23: The United States has resumed joint military exercises with Jordan, the Arab kingdom that tilted toward Saddam Hussein in the 1990 Persian Gulf War, Assistant Secretary of State Edward P. Djerejian said Tuesday, reports AP.

The disclosure marks a reversal of the ill feelings the Bush administration held for Jordan when that nation shunned the Arab coalition against Iraq and failed to police its border to screen out goods banned under a UN economic blockade of Iraq.

"We always had very good relations with the United States — in the economic, political and military field," Foreign Minister Kamal Abu Jaber said as he met with Acting Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger. The relationship is now going to a higher level.

Eagleburger and Djerejian declined to provide any details, although a senior US official said the exercises went very well and that Jordan's enforcement of the anti-Iraq sanctions had improved.

The Bush administration is holding back about 50 million dollars in two years of military aid to Jordan. The official declined to say whether it would be released. Speaking to reporters under rules that shielded his identity, the official said there isn't "a necessary relationship" between the resumed military exercises and US military aid.

The exercises are the first joint undertaking of the United States and the Arab kingdom in three years.

Jordan is holding peace talks with Israel under US sponsorship in Washington and is considered the most moderate of the Arab parties in the negotiations.

Earlier, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres reluctantly gave up on an effort to meet here with his Syrian counterpart to try to advance peace prospects.

Israeli-Syrian peace talks in Washington have been on a roller coaster for more than a week, looking promising one day and near an impasse the next.

French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, seeking to carve out a greater French role in the peace process, visited Damascus and Jerusalem two weeks ago and, according to some reports was trying to arrange a meeting in New York between Peres and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa.

The idea would be to open another negotiating channel. The dovish Peres long has advocated greater Israeli conciliation toward the Arabs.

"We have to meet with all ministers, without reservations, without excuses, without hiding," Peres told a reporter in Eagleburger's hotel suite. "We have to meet face to face, talk sense and try to bring the peace to the right place."

He told parliament's foreign affairs and defence committee that Syria had not yet shown willingness to make full peace with the Jewish state.

"Therefore I believe that large-scale decisions would be difficult to achieve at the current level (of talks)," a committee official quoted Rabin as saying.

"If the process continues it will have to be at other levels," Rabin said.

Israeli officials are currently holding a sixth round of talks with delegations from Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians in Washington.

The Israeli-Syrian meetings opened with a flurry of unexpectedly upbeat statements by the Israelis but by last Thursday Syria said the talks were at an impasse.

US pressure over the weekend helped ensure both sides resumed meetings on Monday.

Rabin did not refer to Israeli media reports last week that the US and Egypt were working to arrange a meeting between the Israeli leader and Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad.

Senior western diplomatic sources said such a summit was out of the question for the time being.

They noted that Rabin favoured secret bilateral contacts of the kind that led to Camp David.

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Off the Record

Toughest men contest opened to women

BRISBANE: The winner of a contest to find the toughest man in the Australian Outback could be a woman, reports AP. Dennis Hayes, organizer of the Power Brewing Iron Bushie competition, says the contest will now be opened to women.

"The women out here can do the same as men... shearing, carrying and counting sheep... so we thought we'd give them a go," he said.

There hasn't been a rush of female entrants eager to try for the title and the 500-dollar (365 dollar) prize money, but there's plenty of talk around town, he said.

Men and women who do throw their hats in the ring will face a gruelling schedule of tests at Blackall in central Queensland state on Oct 10.

They have roll a 190-kilogram (419-pound) bale of wool, climb a tractor-trailer and hurdle over 20 fences. Then there will be what locals say is the most important attribute needed to survive in the Outback — the ability to drink a hot bottle of beer when the fridge fails.

Entrants will have to down a hot stubble some time before jumping the hurdles... and they'll get a cold chunk of damper (a form of bread) to go with it," he said.

Other competitions the same day will test sheep-counting skills, horsemanship and sheep-dog trials.

Siren system to defend people

SINGAPORE: Singapore has completed a system of 220 air raid sirens designed to cover the entire city-state as part of its programme of total defense for its three million people, reports AP.

Under construction for more than a year at a total of about 14.5 million dollar (US 9 million dollar), most of the German-made sirens are mounted on the top of buildings.

The three signals used in the system, which will be tested for the first time on Sept 29, can be heard on a telephone hot line, Civil Defense Commissioner James Tan said Tuesday.

A series of short wails warn of impending danger, the all-clear is a long wailing tone and an "important message" alert consists of short, sharp pulsating tones.

Singapore's total defense policy was drafted in 1982 when Vietnamese troops occupied Cambodia and is aimed at involving the predominantly Chinese civilian population with the military in a national emergency.

In addition to the sirens, 117 bomb shelters have been built or are near completion. Nine underground subway stations have been fortified as shelters and others have been built in schools, hospitals and other public places.

Perot repents for his mistake

DALLAS: Ross Perot said Tuesday he "made a mistake" in dropping his independent presidential challenge, delivering yet another broad hint that the billionaire may engage in active campaigning in the final weeks of the race, reports AP.

The Texas businessman, who is on the ballot in all 50 states, complained that neither President Bush nor Democratic nominee Bill Clinton had offered serious proposals to deal with the nation's budget deficit.

Perot made the complaint on a day when he held separate, private meetings in Washington with Bush's campaign chief James A. Baker III and Ronald Brown, chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

Former Perot media adviser Jim Squires said Perot had no illusions of winning such a race, but that he might begin running ads and making speeches in key states like Texas and Florida, where he could affect the outcome.

"This is an invitation to Bill Clinton to put a serious economic proposal on the table," Squires said.

Interviewed on "CBS This Morning," Perot said he thought when he abandoned the race in July that the major parties would more directly address economic issues that worry him and his supporters.

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BRIEFLY

Fire kills 13 in Taipei: Fire ripped through a Karaoke club in Taiwan in the early hours of yesterday killing 13 people and injuring two others police said, AFP reports from Taipei.

The fire broke out in the kitchen of a seafood restaurant and spread quickly the Karaoke club, two storeys above, in Hsinchu city south west of Taipei. The club had no fire escape.

Police reported difficulty in identifying the bodies as rescue workers searched the rubble for more victims.

Those injured included the club's owner, who was treated in hospital for smoke inhalation.

The cause of the fire — which broke out at 12:15 a.m. (1615 GMT Tuesday) and lasted about 45 minutes — was not immediately known.

Confce on aid for Somalia: A conference on the coordination of humanitarian aid for Somalia will be held here in early October, a spokesman for the United Nations said Tuesday, AFP reports from Geneva.

Ministers from participating countries, as well as representatives of the Arab League, the Organisation of African States and humanitarian organisations will attend the talks, the spokesman said.

The UN department of humanitarian affairs will present a "new plan of action" to the conference to overcome problems of coordination and security in the famine-stricken region.

The United Nations intends to transport 200,000 tonnes of food to Somalia's 4.5 million starving people before the end of the year, but looting in the country is holding up distribution.

6 Albanian diplomats held: Six Albanian diplomats in Boston for a reception celebrating their nation's return to democracy were arrested for soliciting a prostitute who turned out to be a police decoy, a police spokesman said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Boston.

The six, aged 52 to 68, were driving at the weekend through the city's red-light district known as the "combat zone", when they stopped to ask the undercover policewoman to perform a sexual act for 10 dollars, the spokesman said.

The six, who were not identified, were formally booked for the crime, he said.

One police source said the diplomats, who represent Europe's poorest nation, urged the decoy to take an American express charge card for the transaction.



Chuan Leekpai new Thai PM

BANGKOK, Sept 23: Chuan Leekpai, whose Democrat Party led the narrow victory over pro-military parties in the Sept. 13 general election, became Thailand's 20th prime minister Wednesday, reports AP.

An official of Parliament read a decree from constitutional monarch King Bhumibol Adulyadej appointing Chuan. The decree was placed atop a golden urn on an altar-like stand adorned by a portrait of the king. Chuan knelt before the stand and bowed deeply three times during the short, simple ceremony at the Democrat Party headquarters.

Chuan's appointment was a foregone conclusion since his party won the most seats in the House of Representatives election. A lawyer by training, Chuan, 54, held several ministerial posts in previous governments and has a reputation for honesty and integrity but also indecisiveness.

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Rabin rules out full withdrawal from Golan Heights

JERUSALEM, Sept 23: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said on Tuesday Israel could not reach peace with its arch foe Syria without giving back some conquered land and raising the level of current negotiations, reports Reuter.

But Rabin ruled out a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights captured from Syria in the 1967 Middle East War.

"I don't want the precedent set in peace negotiations with Egypt, by which everything was returned, to be repeated in the Golan Heights," he said during a visit to a school in northern Israel.

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Rock paintings of Gupta period

PATNA, Sept 23: The recent discovery of rock paintings dating back to the Gupta period in a village in Gaya district of Bihar, has established for the first time the continuity of pre-historic paintings upto the Gupta period, according to the director of archaeology Dr Prakash Prasad, reports PTI.

The discoveries were made in a hillock near Baltharwa village on the Imamganj-Saherghati road, 50 km from Gaya, Dr Prasad told newsmen.

He said that bricks dating back to the Gupta period were also found at the site.

Dr Prasad said that his department had chalked out an ambitious plan to give new direction to archaeology by constructing rural archaeological sheds, where antiquities, hitherto neglected, would be kept for the people to see. It would also attract tourists.

He said this would ensure that the relics retained their intrinsic glory and not sent to museums far away from the places of discovery.

He said that he had suggested to the state government that such sheds could be constructed under the rural development programme. The first such shed would be set up in some villages of Gaya district, he said.

He also said that lakhs of stone idols lying uncarved for in the countryside. At least 3,000 idols were found in Both Gaya recently, he added.

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SARAJEVO: A nurse holds up one of the youngest victims of war, a four month baby on Tuesday in the children's ward of the Kosevo hospital in Sarajevo. The little boy lost a leg during shelling of the besieged city. — AFP/UNB photo

Fence literally divides Tamil-Sinhalese in Lanka

TANDIKULAM, Sri Lanka, Sept 23: The bamboo and barbed-wire fence is not an international border, but it might as well be. People who pass through it do everything but get their passports stamped, reports AP.

After a decade of civil war between Tamil rebels and the Sinhalese government, the heavily guarded fence literally divides Sri Lanka's two main ethnic groups.

The Tamil-held area north of the fence is slightly less than one-third of the island, which rests like a teardrop in the Indian Ocean off the tip of India.

Every time Iyappan Krishnan comes to Tandikulam to buy potatoes, it is like venturing abroad a distasteful trip

from his Tamil homeland to a Sinhalese nation.

After a 20-mile (32-kilometre) walk from his village, Krishnan passes through an opening in the fence to reach the town. Young Sinhalese soldiers, who have orders to shoot Tamil rebels, watch impassively through slits in their wooden bunkers, machine guns ready.

Hundreds of Tamils go through the border routine every day.

Down the road, Sinhalese officers frisk the visitors in a whitewashed police post before they get passes for the market at Vavuniya, a mile (1.6 kilometers) away.

standing in a line of about 50 people, most of them men. "If we want medicines and good food, we will have to bear with