

# Malaysia seeks int'l confce on Strait of Malacca

**KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 24:** Malaysia wants an international conference to discuss safety in the Strait of Malacca to resolve fears about a major catastrophe after a recent series of accidents, an official said Thursday, reports AP.

Minister of Science, Technology and Environment Law Heng Ding said the meeting should include the littoral states of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia and all nations that use the strait. Major users include ships from the United States, Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Britain, France, Liberia, Panama and Australia.

A 95,000-ton tanker and a container ship collided in the 1,000 kilometer (600-mile) long strait on Sunday, spilling more than 2,000 tons of the tanker's 40,000 tons of crude oil into the water.

Law and other Malaysian officials have repeatedly warned of a possible major catastrophe in the strait that serves about 200 large ships and thousands of small fishing and other vessels daily.

Officials have cited such fears as a reason for opposing the passage of a ship carrying a ton of deadly plutonium from France to Japan late this year.

Among recent accidents in the strait were two tanker collisions in July and the sinking of the Royal Pacific passenger cruiser on Aug 23. In June, the US Navy destroyer Ingersoll crashed into a merchant ship, and a chemical tanker exploded in Malaysia's Port Klang.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad proposed an international agreement for a levy for the strait's users to raise money to improve safety measures and rescue operations.

The International Maritime Organization based in London says the number of piracy in these waters totaled 52 during the first four months of this year, while the total rose to 130 last year from 35 in 1990.



**UNITED NATIONS:** Croatian President Franjo Tudjman (R) and Alija Izetbegovic (L), the President of Bosnia-Herzegovina, talk with reporters after concluding a joint Wednesday press conference. The presidents announced a coordination of defensive efforts between their countries.

# Bosnia, Croatia sign defence pact

**UNITED NATIONS, Sept 24:** The President of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina on Wednesday announced a mutual defence pact to battle Serbian aggression, reports AP.

The agreement was announced, ironically, just minutes before a Security Council subcommittee enforcing the arms embargo against the former Yugoslav republics met to hear evidence on a plane-load of weapons bound for Bosnia that Croatia impounded.

Despite an earlier defence pact signed in July, relations between Bosnia and Croatia have soured in recent months. Muslims accuse the Croats of secretly conspiring with Serbs to carve up Bosnia between them. Last month, Croat forces close to Sarajevo turned back at least two arms shipments to Sarajevo's besieged defenders, Bosnian defence officials said.

Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, meanwhile, announced that he does not intend to ask UN peacekeepers in his country to stay beyond March 1993, when their mandate expires.

He said the Serbs in Croatia will be peacefully integrated into political life by then, so "there will be no need to extend the mandate of the UN."

In fact, tensions have been high in some of the Serb-dominated areas patrolled by the 10,000 UN peacekeepers deployed in Croatia. The UN troops are separating Serb separatist and Croatian troops whose fighting left 10,000 dead last year.

At a news conference, the Bosnian and Croatian leaders said their governments had agreed to ask the Security Council to lift the blanket arms embargo on Yugoslavia so they can match the weaponry of the Serb militias.

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic conceded that he had found no sympathy so far in the Security Council for the request.

The new agreement is an expansion of a July 9 pact between Croatia and Bosnia, which applied mainly to defence of their border areas, Tudjman said.

The new accord commits the two countries to mutual defence across their entire territories and to set up a joint committee to coordinate defensive efforts until aggression has been stopped entirely," according to the text.

The Serbs, furnished by the Serb-led Yugoslav army, have weaponry, especially tanks and artillery, that is vastly superior to that of the Croats or the Muslims.

# Islamabad warns media not to defame armed forces

**ISLAMABAD, Sept 24:** The Pakistani Defence Ministry warned newspapers on Wednesday they could be prosecuted if they printed stories defaming the armed forces, reports Reuter.

A ministry spokesman said the government had taken serious note of "some baseless and utterly false stories" in local newspapers blaming senior army officers for a plane crash that killed military president Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq four years ago.

Newspapers and magazines have printed stories marking the fourth anniversary of Zia's death last month naming some army officers, including former chief Mirza Aslam Beg.

The official APP news agency quoted the spokesman as saying: "there is no truth in such stories."

"The aim of the writers appears to create not only sensationalism but also to bring into disrepute individual military officers in particular and the Pakistan armed forces in general."

He said technical inquiries and criminal investigations "do not substantiate the kind of stories appearing in the press from time to time."

He said the media should not publish stories "full of conjecture and rumours" adding that "any propaganda which defames or brings into ridicule the armed forces is an offence under the law and must not be indulged in."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif named a high-level judicial commission last month to investigate Zia's death. The inquiry was the second ordered by Sharif since he came to power in 1990.

Mystery still surrounds the August 17, 1988, crash of the C-130 in the desert near the Punjab province town of Bahawalpur.



**FRANCE:** A parking lot for cement mixers in Saint-Privas, a small town in southern France, as it appeared on Tuesday following violent storms that swept through the region. At least seven people were killed on Tuesday during a second day of exceptionally heavy rainfall.

# ME peace talks Glimmers of hope mark end of sixth round

**WASHINGTON, Sept 24:** Israel and its Arab neighbours are winding up month-long negotiations, having finally begun the give-and-take designed to end 44 years of hostility, reports AP.

The sides are tentatively scheduled to return here Oct 21 for a seventh round of peace talks. An announcement of the date was expected after Thursday's adjournment of the sixth round.

Negotiators from both sides say this was the first round since the talks began in October in which the sides engaged in real negotiations.

"There are glimmers of progress," said a senior administration official. "We've done some crawling and maybe some tentative walking," he said, "but there's still a long way to go."

Negotiators attributed the movement to the new Israeli posture adopted by the left-leaning government that last July replaced the hardline administration of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

Nonetheless, all expressed frustration with the gaps between their positions and predicted a long and difficult negotiation remained.

"But don't take it that way as pessimistic, don't take it that the discussions so far were not useful," said Syrian spokesman Bushra Karadani.

The peace process is very complicated and the issues at hand are of great importance. So we should use some patience," she said.

Despite the useful discussion of each side's position, she said, Israel continued to reject Syria's demand for a total withdrawal from the Golan Heights, which it captured in a 1967 war.

Israel has promised to return to the negotiating table next month with a new formulation of its position regarding withdrawal, she said.

"There are elements of agreement and that is something I am very pleased about," she said.

Any agreement revolves mostly around each side's acceptance of the other's legitimate security concerns, Karadani said.

Syria also appears to be offering ideas to advance the talks.

"I don't want to raise any euphoria," a senior Bush administration official said Wednesday. But he told reporters in New York that "we've heard something interesting" from Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa during his meeting with US Acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. He said it would be conveyed to Israel.

Israel hopes these informal discussions will evolve into working groups that will negotiate various aspects of Palestinian self-rule, such as education, the judicial system and taxes.

# Germany seeks permanent UN Council seat

**UNITED NATIONS, Sept 24:** Germany joined a chorus of calls Wednesday for a permanent seat on the powerful UN Security Council and also offered to contribute troops to UN peacekeeping forces, reports AP.

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# SAARC can be more effective, says Premadasa

**ISLAMABAD, Sept 24:** The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) can be further developed and used as even more effective instrument for regional cooperation, Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa has said, reports Xinhua.

The Sri Lankan President, who is here on a two day state visit to Pakistan, made the remarks at a banquet in his honour hosted by Pakistan president Ghulam Ishaq Khan at the presidential palace here Wednesday night.

It (SAARC) could provide the framework for the improvement of the lives of the people of South Asia, President Premadasa said.

He said the media should not publish stories "full of conjecture and rumours" adding that "any propaganda which defames or brings into ridicule the armed forces is an offence under the law and must not be indulged in."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif named a high-level judicial commission last month to investigate Zia's death. The inquiry was the second ordered by Sharif since he came to power in 1990.

Mystery still surrounds the August 17, 1988, crash of the C-130 in the desert near the Punjab province town of Bahawalpur.

# Sharif to visit China Oct 6

**BEIJING, Sept 24:** Pakistan Premier Nawaz Sharif will pay a 4-day official goodwill visit to China from October six to ten, a Foreign Ministry spokesman announced today, reports PTI.

The spokesman did not give any details of the composition of Sharif's delegation nor the subjects to be discussed during the visit.

It will be Sharif's second visit to China as Prime Minister. He had been here late February last year.

Pakistan's Minister of State for Defence Ghaus Ali Shah is expected to visit China shortly after Sharif's trip.

# BRIEFLY

**Deng is in good health:** China's 88-year-old paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, is in good health, his son told the Xinmen evening news in a rare mention of the patriarch's well-being in the official press, Reuter reports from Beijing.

"Recently comrade Xiaoping has been very healthy," Den Pufang was quoted as saying in the Wednesday edition of the Shanghai newspaper.

Deng Pufang said his father was very concerned about Shanghai's development.

Although the elder Deng holds no official posts and makes few public appearances, he remains the key figure in Chinese politics.

**Fatah officer killed in Beirut:** A military officer of PLO chairman Yasser Arafat's mainstream Fatah guerrilla group was assassinated Wednesday in the southern port city of Sidon, police said, AP reports from Beirut.

They said unidentified assailants shot and killed Lt Nimir Shibli, who goes by the nom de guerre of Abu Kayyed, outside his house after sundown.

Police gave no other details about Shibli's murder, the latest in the tit-for-tat blood feud pitting the Palestine Liberation Organization against Abu Nidal's Fatah-Revolutionary Council faction.

Shibli was the 10th Palestinian figure assassinated since June 8, when unknown gunmen shot and killed Atef Bseiso the PLO's security and intelligence chief, outside the Meridien-Montparnasse hotel in Paris.

**Kurdish rebels set a ship afire:** Turkish Kurdish guerrillas set a passenger ship on fire Wednesday, Anatolia news agency reported, AP says from Istanbul.

No injuries were reported.

The ship, which ferries passengers between the Asian and European sides of the Bosphorus, suffered considerable damage as shown on private television station Interstar, but details were not available.

The Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) claimed responsibility for the attack in anonymous telephone calls to local newspapers soon after the attack, Anatolia said. A similar attack was staged by the Kurdish guerrillas here a month ago.

An explosion started a fire on the state-owned Sarayburnu a few minutes after passengers disembarked around 0900 pm (1800 GMT), Anatolia quoted eyewitnesses as saying.

**IRA blasts bomb in Belfast:** A large IRA bomb exploded outside a government forensic science laboratory on the outskirts of Belfast Wednesday night, causing widespread damage to the building and nearby homes, police reported, AP says from Belfast.

Belfast ambulance service said in a statement that at least 12 people were treated for injuries from the blast at Newtownbreda on the southern outskirts of the city. But none was believed seriously hurt.

The Irish Republican Army fighting British rule in Northern Ireland telephoned a warning before the bomb went off and army bomb disposal experts were moving in to investigate when the blast occurred.

Police headquarters in Belfast said in a statement that the bomb had been left in a van parked outside the laboratory.

# Clashes in Israel: 12 hurt

**Nine Arabs and three Jews were wounded on Wednesday in a scattered attacks and clashes in Israel and occupied Arab lands, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.**

Israeli troops shot and wounded eight Palestinians in clashes that erupted in the Gaza strip's Bureij and Jabalya refugee camps during a general strike in protest at the course of Middle East peace talks in Washington, Israel radio said.

# US assures sale of F-15 jets to S Arabia for defensive purposes

**WASHINGTON, Sept 24:** A proposed sale of 72 F-15 fighter jets to be sold to Saudi Arabia would be equipped for defensive purposes only and pose no threat to Israel, administration officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Frank Wisner, under Secretary of State for International Security Affairs, told a congressional panel, "this sale promotes vital US foreign policy and security interests."

Wisner said 24 of the warplanes would be built for defensive air-to-air combat missions, and the remaining 48 would be capable of attacking tanks and ships, under the proposal by the administration of President George Bush.

The planes that would cost nine billion dollars would not have the sophisticated equipment of the most advanced F-15s in the US arsenal, Wisner added.

Pentagon official Carl Ford told the panel that the Riyadh government has renewed assurances that it has "no aggressive intentions" toward Israel or other states.

But some members of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, who said the sale goes against the president's pledge to stem the flow of arms into the volatile Middle East.

"By making this sale, the United States will be undercutting its professed concern for region arms control," said representative Lawrence Smith of Florida. "We will be adding measurably to the threat facing our closest Middle East ally, Israel."

But Wisner said the sale is important in help Saudi Arabia fend off possible attacks from neighbouring Iraq.

# Corruption, scandal dog Indian govt

**NEW DELHI, Sept 24:** In his 14 months in office, Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao has tried to clean up the image of his governing party. But he can't seem to rub off the tarnish, reports AP.

Shaking off the kickbacks scandal that cost the Congress Party 1989 election, Rao led Congress back to power last year. But in the last six months, it has again been stained by the questionable dealings of men at the top.

On Tuesday, Rao won the reluctant resignation of the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, an elected official of Rao's home state, after he was censured by the state High Court.

The court accused Janardhana Reddy of "bias" when he pushed through a bill allowing private medical and dental colleges to reserve half their admissions for high-paying "donors". Among the beneficiaries were to be his wife, son and Congress supporters.

In the neighbouring southern state of Karnataka, Chief Minister Sarekoppa Bangarappa is the target of an ouster campaign by members of his own Cabinet led up with his shady land deals and tax concessions to liquor barons.

Payoffs are a way of life in India — from the clerk who takes 50 rupees (dhs 1.80) to process a drivers license in a day instead of week, to judges of the highest courts.

Politics can be a big money spinner, especially on the local level where favours like building contracts and licenses can be dispensed for a healthy percentage.

"Corruption now is so pervasive that it has infected the highest level of the judiciary, politicians and bureaucrats," said political analyst Bhabani Sen Gupta in an interview.

Sen Gupta said the trend of political corruption began after the passing in the 1960s of the generation who fought for India's independence, who were men of undisputed authority and integrity.

"There used to be a public demand to punish corruption and ethical lapses. But in the last 20 years the politicians' own sense of ethics has diminished. Power has become all important," said Sen Gupta, of the Independent Center for Policy Research.

The Congress Party governed India for all but three years since independence in 1947, but lost the 1989 elections because of charges that party functionaries shared 50 million dollars in bribes from Sweden's Bofors company in an arms deal.

Congress was coming back from the Bofors disgrace when former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in May 1991. Rao took over the party and completed the election comeback that Gandhi had begun.

While Rao remains personally untainted, the cases against the two chief ministers are just the latest of many embarrassments for his administration.

His ambitious economic reforms, launched last year, were put on hold for months after dozens of brokers, bankers and government officials were accused of illegal deals in a 1.1 billion dollar stock swindle — the nation's worst financial scandal.

One businessman jailed in the stock scam, Venkataraman Krishnamurthy, had headed various key state industries for two decades and had been on virtually every important economic planning committee for the past 10 years.

Railroad Minister Jaffer Sharief has come under attack for inexplicably awarding a dhs 190 million contract to the Swedish-Swiss company Asea Brown Boveri for 30 electric locomotives. Locally made engines, slightly less powerful, are available at less than one-tenth the cost, critics said.

The Congress Party has no monopoly on corruption, however.

The starkest illustration of unsavory politics came September 13 when Mahendra Singh Bhatti, a member of the Uttar Pradesh state legislature from the opposition Janata Dal party, was gunned down in his car while stopped at a railroad crossing.

competition between the Comanche and Apache helicopters, the F-22 advanced fighter, the new versions of the F-18 and the AX long-range bomber.

2 billion dollar to help convert defense industries to civilian production and to aid workers changing jobs as defense plants close or retool for post-Cold War missions.

For the Strategic Defense Initiative, 3.8 billion dollar compared with Bush's request for 5.4 billion dollar. The Senate level was 500 million dollar below the amount endorsed by the House.

No money for the V-22 Osprey, a Marine aircraft that takes off like a helicopter, then swivels its propellers forward to fly like an airplane. The House included 785 million dollar for the experimental craft; some money to continue the programme is expected to be in the final version.

# Off the Record

**Jilted boyfriend seeks to visit tiger**

**AMSTERDAM:** First she broke off their relationship, then she banned him from seeing the pet tiger, reports AP.

Now Piet Cerfontaine is so upset at being denied access to the seven-year-old tiger he claims he helped his former girlfriend raise, he's gone to court for visiting rights.

Cerfontaine, 59, said in an account published Wednesday that he hasn't seen the tiger, named Malaysia, since June, when ex-girlfriend Anneke van Ham threw him out along with four pairs of underpants, two shirts and an electric shaver, according to press reports.

Anneke, 58, said she thought Piet wanted to use the tiger visiting rights to regain her affections.

"If that's his plan, he's got it all wrong," she said in De Telegraaf, the Netherlands' largest daily.

"He was never very interested in Malaysia anyway."

But Piet told the paper that he was involved in the tiger's upbringing since the couple bought it as a cub in 1987.

**Love-sick pilot**

**ALBERTA:** A love-sick pilot who buzzed his ex-girlfriend's neighbourhood for nearly two hours was overwhelmed with emotion but low on fuel and crashed into her living room when the plane's tank ran dry, reports AP.

"I told him he wasn't welcome in my home," said the woman's father as he surveyed a living room filled with shattered glass and bits of aluminium fuselage on Wednesday. "I guess this is how he got in."

The woman, Donna Lorenz, and her parents fled the house before the crash, which left pilot Randy Mock with serious skull fractures and facial injuries.

Police evacuated about 100 people to a shopping mall parking lot as Mock, 30, swooped and dipped a Cessna two seater in the pre-dawn flight. He stalled the plane several times and clipped the top branches of a tree.

**I was his first girlfriend**

**DARWIN:** A World War II romance between an American soldier and an Australian woman has been rekindled, ending in a whirlwind wedding 50 years later, reports AP.

Glenn Hicks, then aged 22, and Dorothy Gill, 17, spent five months going steady in the central Australian town of Alice Springs in 1942.

Last Sunday, the two finally got married.

"I was his first girlfriend and he was my first boyfriend," the new Mrs. Hicks said of her wartime courtship. "We were pretty naive."

Hicks, of Boise, Idaho, was sent to Alice Springs in the Outback after the Japanese bombed the Northern Territory's capital Darwin, 1,200 kilometers (745 miles) to the north.

**Police stuns kidnapper**

**MANILA:** A Filipino-Chinese businessman who was kidnapped and released for ransom was stunned when he went to report the crime: His captors were members of the police general's staff, reports AP.

The incident, told the The Associated Press on condition no further details be published, is part of a wave of kidnaping that is raising concern about a possible new corruption network within the 100,000-member National Police.

Police say they have no complete figures on abductions — which mostly target well-heeled Filipinos of Chinese descent — because victims often do not report the crimes.

But Filipino-Chinese sources say at least 22 people have been seized in Manila since Aug. 4. More than 30 other Filipino-Chinese have been abducted on Mindanao Island during the past year.

# Senate slashes Bush's request \$250b defence bill okayed

**WASHINGTON, Sept 24:** The Senate on Wednesday approved a 250 billion dollar Pentagon spending bill for the coming year that sharply cuts President Bush's request for the "Star Wars" defence system, reports AP.

Endorsed on a vote of 86-10, the measure now goes to a House-Senate negotiating committee to work out differences between the two chamber's versions.

The total Senate spending figure for the Strategic Defense Initiative is a cut from this year's 270 billion dollar and from the 261 billion dollar President Bush had requested for the year beginning Oct 1. The House bill provides 251 billion dollar.

Among provisions in the Senate version: 3.4 billion dollar for a group of tactical aircraft programmes for which the Pentagon had sought a total of 4.1 billion dollar. The decision effectively will force