

Clinton asks Senate to okay ozone treaty amendment

US President Bill Clinton has asked the Senate to approve a treaty amendment that would expand controls on chemicals that deplete the ozone layer, which helps shield humans from skin cancer and other diseases, says a USIS press release.

Early ratification by the United States is important to demonstrate to the rest of the world our commitment to protection and preservation of the stratospheric ozone layer and will encourage the wide participation necessary for full realization of the amendment's goals," Clinton said Tuesday in a statement.

The amendment to the ozone treaty, formally known as the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer, was negotiated by ministers from about 90 countries last November in Copenhagen, Denmark.

It adds three chemicals or chemical classes to the list of substances that are being controlled because they have been found to deplete the ozone shield. The production and use

of methyl bromide, commonly employed as a pesticide, will be frozen at 1991 levels in 1995 while scientific studies determine how best to phase out its use.

The hydrobromofluorocarbon class of chemicals, used as fire retardants, which will be banned beginning in 1996.

A third class of chemicals, hydrochlorofluorocarbons, will be virtually phased out by the year 2020 and completely banned by 2030.

The Montreal protocol began several years ago the process of phasing out the use of compounds that destroy the ozone layer in the stratosphere. The original timetable has been compressed as scientists have found that the chemicals are causing more damage than first thought.

The timetable was shortened at Copenhagen for Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), used in refrigerators and air conditioners, and carbon tetrachloride, used in dry cleaning and as a fumigant in warehouses. The phaseout deadline was set at January 1, 1996.

Geneva peace talks resume today Bosnian warring factions promise pause in fighting

SARAJEVO, July 22: Bosnian peace talks looked set to resume following a one-month break after warring factions promised a pause in the fighting, meeting one of Muslim President Alija Izetbegovic's main terms for attending, reports Reuters.

International mediators announced on Wednesday they had assurances, from all three sides in the Bosnian civil war - the Muslims, Serbs and Croats - that they would halt attacks to give a better chance of success for negotiations set to begin in Geneva on Friday.

Mediator Lord Owen said Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegovic, who had so far rejected invitations to new talks, had agreed to come if Bosnian Serbs honoured a pledge to halt an offensive close to the capital Sarajevo.

Early on Wednesday fighting was still raging on the government-held stronghold of mount Igman overlooking Sarajevo, which has been under Serb siege for 16 months.

It was too early to tell whether the Serbs, as well as Croat force battling against Muslims in southern and central Bosnia, had muzzled their guns to allow the talks to go ahead.

The peace talks are due to discuss a plan drafted by Serbia and Croatia for a three-way partition of Bosnia along ethnic lines. Muslims are opposed to the plan but Izetbegovic has hinted his people might have to accept it or something similar.

The Bosnian leader is also insisting that before he goes to Geneva, relief supplies to stricken Muslim settlements, which according to the UN have

been blocked by Bosnian Croats, must be allowed through.

European Community envoy Willy Claes, who set Izetbegovic in Sarajevo on Wednesday, said later in Zagreb: "President Izetbegovic was clear. He told me that he and his colleagues are ready to go to Geneva very soon."

"He is asking for two things. First, that some humanitarian actions be facilitated. Secondly, President Izetbegovic asked that offensive military actions stop."

At the weekend the UN accused local Croats in Bosnia of blocking around half the emergency aid effort need for refugees in the former Yugoslav republic.

On Wednesday, Croats denied they were blocking aid, blaming delays on Muslim-led government forces.

Claes, the Belgian Foreign Minister, told reporters in Zagreb that Izetbegovic had not given a precise date as to when he would attend the Geneva talks. "When I asked the President if he was prepared to give me a precise date, he told me that this was not possible and he was waiting for some answers to questions."

Claes said Izetbegovic was also waiting for messages, including one from Washington, on Wednesday night.

In Washington, Secretary of State Warren Christopher called the deteriorating situation in Bosnia tragic, but said there was nothing more the United States could do.

The United States is doing all it can consistent with our national interest, and described the Bosnia situation as the world's most difficult diplomatic problem.

Off the Record



PARIS: Fashion designer Yves Saint-Laurent (R) kisses the bride of the show of his Autumn/Winter 1993-94 High Fashion Collection in Paris Wednesday. —AFP photo

Love shines through death

SUVA, (Fiji): A love-struck Fijian student fell to his death after stowing away in the under-carriage of a London-bound aircraft to avoid being separated from his girlfriend, Fiji aviation officials said Thursday, reports Reuters.

Mohammed Shamim's body was found on Wednesday, his 18th birthday, just off the end of the tarmac of Fiji's main international airport at Nadi.

Shamim had attempted to hide in the landing-gear bay of the aircraft last Friday to avoid being parted from his girlfriend, a British citizen named Kurisha, who was in the passenger section of the aircraft returning to her family in England.

In a letter left with a friend, Shamim said: "I will farewell Kurisha at the Airport in the shortest possible time and then put my plan into action."

"I will fix myself near the wheels of the jet and as the aircraft rises to the sky, I will be pulled inside the under-carriage with the wheels."

"What is the next life, death or victory? If I do not appear on Friday, you should know that I am no more, or in another country. Again, if I do not re-appear on Monday, telephone my mother and tell her everything."

"Wait for two more days before searching for my dead body." Fiji Aviation Security officials have announced an investigation into how Shamim gained access to the tarmac and aircraft.

Snake makes water crisis!

MANILA: A severe water shortage crisis has hit a wide area of metropolitan Manila, and Filipinos blamed a sleepy serpent for this latest calamity, reports Reuters.

The state waterworks office said the metre-long (three-foot) snake fell asleep on Wednesday in a major pumping station in suburban Quezon city, causing a short circuit that zapped the pumping system.

"It was found hibernating inside a transformers," an employee at the waterworks office said. The snake was killed by the short-circuit.

About 800,000 residents have been without water since, and officials said repairs would take three days.

Many areas in Manila itself have been suffering from a water shortage for months because of a lack of rain, aggravating life in a city already suffering from six-to-eight-hour daily power blackouts since last year.

Miss America getting a new look

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J.: Miss America is getting a new look but high-priced make-up artists and hair designers won't have anything to do with it.

This fall, for the first time in the 73-year-old pageant, contestants will have to style their own hair and apply their own cosmetics.

The change, along with a new producer for the Sept. 18 television show and a more relaxed dress code, is aimed at updating the pageant and attracting younger viewers, said pageant director Leonard Horn.

The show's Nielsen ratings have been slipping, from No. 1 in 1988 and 1990 to No. 10 last year.

Contestants say the changes, which allow evening wear — including pants — in addition to the floor-length, beaded gown of yesteryear, reflect the new woman.

"In the past there was more of a mold that they were looking to fill, and now they're looking for a woman who can make her own mold," Miss Michigan, 23-year-old Stacey Heisler of Livonia, said Wednesday.

Miss New Jersey agree, but both contestants said they weren't ready to dispose of some traditions.

"I enjoy wearing the gown. That's probably my favorite part," said Michele Sexton, 24, of Spring Lake heights. "That's what makes the pageant special."

17 bodies found in South African black townships

JOHANNESBURG, July 22: The bodies of at least 17 people were found in South African black townships on Wednesday as democracy negotiators began preparations to debate a draft constitution aimed at ending white rule within weeks, reports Reuters.

Police said the bodies in Tokosa, Katlehong, and at a migrant worker hostel in Daveyton township had gunshot, axe and stab wounds.

The townships, east of Johannesburg, are situated almost 20 km (12 miles) from the trade centre where negotiators received a draft interim constitution from a committee of expert.

Negotiators on Monday will begin debating the draft which is widely expected to bring within weeks the first stage of a transition to democracy.

The draft constitution would consist of constitutional principles submitted by 26 political parties and groups participating in the multi-party democracy talks.

The democracy talks which began on Monday after a two-week break had been proceeding without Inkatha, the KwaZulu homeland government and the pro-apartheid Conservative Party (CP).

The three have accused the government and the African National Congress (ANC) of pushing decisions through the forum by use of "sufficient consensus".

Russian troops shell Tajik rebel targets in Afghanistan

MOSCOW, July 22: Russian troops shelled Tajik rebel positions inside Afghanistan early today, the Interfax News Agency reported, says AFP.

Interfax, quoting informed sources here and in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe, said gunners of the 201st Russian Army Division sent to bolster units deployed along the Tajik-Afghan border opened fire in retaliation for shelling from Afghan territory.

The Defense Ministry said it was not aware of any new incidents along the Tajik-Afghan border.

Interfax news agency meanwhile said the situation remained "tense" in Tajikistan, a former Soviet Central Asian Republic where pro-communist forces who seized power last December have been unable to put down guerrilla attacks by Tajik rebels based in

Afghanistan. Wednesday, Afghan-based Tajik rebels staged another attack on Russian units at a Tajik-Afghan border post and an explosion at a nearby hospital left many dead and wounded, Itar-Tass reported.

The news agency then quoted its correspondent in the Moskovsk border area as saying two soldiers of the 201st Russia division were wounded in intense artillery attacks along the border late Tuesday.

It quoted Lieutenant Colonel Vasily Matukh, a commander of a border guard unit, as saying that a large scale offensive from the Islamic Tajik rebels could not be ruled out.

Matukh said the Tajik rebels and Afghan Mujahideen guerrillas had amassed a significant number of tanks and other military equipment along the border.



NEPAL: A young girl is rescued by police in Manahari village, 140 kilometre south of Kathmandu Tuesday. Eighty-six bodies have been recovered after massive floods and landslides swept away more than 160 villagers living in huts. —AFP photo

US, UK urge Palestinians to set aside Jerusalem issue

JERUSALEM, July 22: The United States and Britain urged Palestinians to set aside the divisive issue of Jerusalem for now and reach a quick agreement with Israel on self-rule, reports Reuters.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Washington and British Foreign Office Minister Douglas Hogg in Jerusalem both said on Wednesday negotiations on Jerusalem should be delayed until a later stage of Arab-Israeli peace talks.

"Jerusalem is one of the most sensitive aspects of the negotiation. It's a final status matter," Christopher told reporters in Washington ahead of his Middle East shuttle mission to begin on August 1.

Talks on interim self-rule for almost two million Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories have faltered over Jerusalem's status.

Israel claims all the holy city, including Arab east Jerusalem which it captured in 1967, as its undivided capital and refuses to discuss any compromise at this phase.

Palestinians insist Arab east Jerusalem, which they view as their cultural and spiritual centre, be included in self-rule. Christopher implored the sides to reach a joint declaration of principles on self-rule using a US document proposed at the last round of peace talks to bridge the disagreements.

"And I think that should be the focus at the present time to see if we can't move toward getting an understanding of the parties as to what the basic concepts will be affecting occupied territories," he said.

The US document omitted any reference to the area to be included under the proposed agreement for limited self-rule. It also said Jerusalem would be raised only in talks for a permanent settlement to begin three years after the original self-rule accord.

However a previous US document given to Palestinians before the peace talks opened 20 months ago said they could raise the subject of Jerusalem at any point in the negotiations. Hogg, visiting Jerusalem on

Wednesday, prodded Palestinians to agree to interim self-rule quickly because it would "enable them to take control to a very high degree of their own fate and their own lives".

He said: "The issues raised by Jerusalem are extraordinarily difficult and are probably best settled at the end of the process when much progress has been made on other issues."

Christopher said he was not expecting any breakthrough during his visit. In the negotiations between Israel and Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestinians.

Dalai Lama calls for Suu Kyi's release

NEW DELHI, July 22: Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama called today for the unconditional release of Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, reports AFP.

The Dalai Lama expressed "concern" for Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent four years under house arrest, and said he was making the appeal to the Myanmar military junta as a Buddhist monk.

In a statement, he said he was making "a special appeal to the military regime in Myanmar for the early and unconditional release of our fellow Nobel laureate."

Scam: Arjun rules out change of Cong leadership

NEW DELHI, July 22: A leading Congress Party rival of Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on Wednesday ruled out a change of leadership over allegations that Rao accepted money from a stockbroker, reports Reuters.

Human Resources Minister Arjun Singh, who has openly challenged Rao's leadership several times in the past eight months, told reporters he did not want Rao to step down.

"Why should there be a change?" he asked, questioned about newspaper reports that he discussed the issue with Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar.

Bombay stockbroker Harshad Mehta has accused Rao of accepting 10 million rupees (320,000) dollar.

Nelson's group said 49 journalists were killed or presumed killed worldwide in 1992, with violence in Turkey and Bosnia accounting for more than one-third of the dead or missing.

Orme said 31 journalists have lost their lives in Yugoslavia in the past 2-1/2 years, the most anywhere since the Vietnam War.

Army Lt Col Charles Ricks, a Pentagon public affairs specialist, said the Persian Gulf War, when the military and news organisations were often at sharp

Sino-British talks on HK yield no results

BEIJING, July 22: Britain and China had no progress to report today after an eighth round of talks on controversial democratic reforms proposed for Hong Kong ahead of its 1997 return to Chinese sovereignty, says Reuters.

Sir Robin McLaren, London's ambassador to Beijing and its chief negotiator, refused to say whether progress was made in three mornings of talks with China's representative, Jiang Enzhu.

"It's very difficult to say whether one is running or walking, frankly, but I certainly had the feeling we were engaged in serious discussions," McLaren told reporters.

Dates of ninth round were to be announced later in the day. McLaren hinted that round nine

would not be the last, saying he could not discuss "the dates of the round after that."

McLaren's testy demeanour contrasted with the more relaxed, even playful tone he displayed after earlier rounds, suggesting that the slow pace had begun to wear on his patience.

"I don't want, each round, to find you asking me whether or not there has been progress," McLaren snapped at reporters at one point, noting his distaste for having always to "think up a new adjective".

McLaren balked at characterising the talk's pace, even though both sides said at the round's outset that they expected faster progress in the wake of Douglas Hurd's trip to Beijing this month.

Artillery attack on UN checkpoint in Mogadishu

ROME, July 22: Somali militiamen fired several artillery rounds at a checkpoint controlled by Pakistani troops serving with the United Nations in Mogadishu, the ANSA news agency reported on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

The Italian news agency, quoting local sources, said there did not appear to have been any casualties in the attack at a post near the site of the Hotel Olympia.

The report said the incident began around 1800 GMT and lasted for some five minutes.

Twenty-four Pakistanis were killed on June 5 in an attack for which Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed is blamed.

Earlier on Wednesday two Zimbabwean soldiers serving with UN forces in Somalia were injured by sniper fire in Mogadishu.

A German Defence Ministry statement said the two men were riding in a convoy for the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM).

The statement said one Zimbabwean was in a German military truck and the other was in a truck whose nationality was not known. A German officer and an Egyptian soldier also travelling in the German truck were not injured.

AFP adds: The United Nations will continue to disarm the warring factions in Somalia and use force if necessary. Assistant Secretary General for peacekeeping operations Kofi Annan said Wednesday.

200 more German troops arrive in Somalia

MOGADISHU, Somalia, July 22: Two hundred more German soldiers arrived in Mogadishu on Thursday as part of the biggest deployment of troops on foreign soil by the Bonn government in nearly 50 years, reports AP.

Today's armed conflicts pose more danger to journalists

ARLINGTON (Va), July 22: Today's armed conflicts — with their shifting lines, unclear enemies and multinational forces — mean more dangers and increase casualties for journalists, war correspondents and others said Wednesday, reports AP.

Already this year, five journalists have been killed in Somalia and five in the former Yugoslavia, William Orme of the Committee to Protect Journalists said at a conference on "Journalists in Peril."

Often, he said, reporters are being attacked because they are perceived as being part of a UN

or Western force, not as a neutral observer.

"Balanced journalism is a concept that is not widely embraced" in many areas of conflict, said Tom Squitieri, a USA Today correspondent who was wounded by shrapnel in Sarajevo, Bosnia, earlier this year. "If you use neutrality as a shield, you better get a better flak jacket."

Several journalists at the seminar said the job of a war correspondent has been complicated by the multilateral nature of operations in countries such as Bosnia, Somalia and

Cambodia.

The United Nations, for example, has been reluctant to provide air transportation for journalists into Bosnia, forcing them to take dangerous overland routes. "We are going to see more deaths before this year is out" unless an arrangement with the UN peacekeeping force is worked out, Orme said.

Without UN support, said Josh Friedman of Newsday. "The press keeps falling between the cracks. In trying to cover these increasingly violent situations,"

Four Western journalists were killed by a Somali mob in Mogadishu earlier this month after US planes launched a UN air strike against Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed.

Anne Nelson, also of the Committee to Protect Journalists, said that since the strife in El Salvador in the 1980s, journalists have felt they could cross from one side of a war to the other with impunity.

But that idea is not working in today's conflicts, and with multilateral forces "you don't have a centralised military authority to tell you where you're allowed to go and what you're

allowed to do," she said.

Nelson's group said 49 journalists were killed or presumed killed worldwide in 1992, with violence in Turkey and Bosnia accounting for more than one-third of the dead or missing.

Orme said 31 journalists have lost their lives in Yugoslavia in the past 2-1/2 years, the most anywhere since the Vietnam War.

Army Lt Col Charles Ricks, a Pentagon public affairs specialist, said the Persian Gulf War, when the military and news organisations were often at sharp

odds over coverage, taught the military that a media presence on the front line is a fact of life and "Control is really a meaningless concept."

Peter Arnett, who covered the Gulf War from Baghdad for CNN, said the "vastly greater appetite for information" has increased pressures on news organisations to provide on-site coverage of conflicts.

"Journalists have never been in more danger, nor have they ever been more important," Arnett said.

The conference was sponsored by The Freedom Forum.

3104 Iraqi Kurds flee to Iran

GENEVA, July 22: Thousands of Kurds have fled from northern Iraq to Iran in recent weeks to escape hardship and many more are expected to follow, Red Cross Societies said on Wednesday, says Reuters.

A spokeswoman for the Geneva-based International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said it had been informed by the Iranian Red Crescent that 3,104 Kurds had crossed the Iranian border so far.

Citing a cable from the Iranian society, she added, "the number of refugees is expected to increase."