

BRIEFLY

US actor Villechaize dead: Herve Villechaize, the diminutive actor whose shout, "The plane, the plane" greeted arriving guests on TV's "Fantasy Island" in the 1970s and '80s, committed suicide Saturday, his publicist said. He was 50, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Villechaize, who left behind a note and tape recording saying he was despondent over health problems, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, said publicist David Brokaw.

"We're obviously tremendously saddened by his passing," Brokaw said. "He was loyal, he was a great friend, he loved to have a good time, he was interested in so many things his artwork, the acting, children, animals, going places."

Gunman kills 3 in Bangkok: An unidentified man killed three people and wounded four others when he opened fire with a handgun and threw a grenade in a packed Bangkok nightclub in the early hours of yesterday, police said, AFP reports from Bangkok.

The gunman escaped after the shooting aboard a "tuk-tuk" — a three-wheeled taxi vehicle commonly used on the streets of the Thai capital.

Police said they had no motive for the attack, though witnesses said the man had been earlier seen drinking heavily at the nightclub.

King Hussein puts off China tour: King Hussein of Jordan has postponed a visit to China because of political developments, official sources said on Saturday, Reuters reports from Amman.

The monarch and his American-born wife Queen Noor were to have visited Beijing from September 13 to 16 at the invitation of president Jiang Zemin.

Fire leaves 17 dead in Chile: Seventeen people, most of them young, died in a fire at a gay discotheque in Valparaiso Saturday, police said, AFP reports from Chile.

About 100 people were inside the divine disco when fire broke out at about 3.00 am (0700 GMT), consuming the building and causing the collapse of the second and third floor.

Rescue workers searched all day for bodies and survivors among the ruins of the nightclub in this port city, 110 kilometers (68 miles) west of Santiago.

Authorities said the fire was apparently caused by an electrical fault, but there was speculation it had been set.

Blast near Yemeni PM's home: The home of Yemeni Prime Minister Hadier Abu-Bakr Al-Attas was rocked by a loud explosion but there were no injuries or damage, the government newspaper Al-Thawra reported yesterday, Reuters says from Sanaa.

The newspaper said police believed the explosion at 8.15 pm (1715 GMT) on Saturday just outside Attas' home was intended to cause panic.

The newspaper gave no other details and officials were not immediately available to confirm the report.

US to sell 41 Harpoon missiles to Taiwan

TAIPEI, Sept 5: The United States is to sell 41 short range surface to surface missiles to Taiwan, a newspaper said here today, reports AFP.

The announcement of the sale is expected to trigger another round of protests from China, which lashed out at Washington over the deal late last year to sell F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan, the China Times said.

It said the sale of surface-to-surface Harpoon missiles and the F-16 jets deal represented a major shift in US arms sales policy towards Taiwan.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry has declined to comment on the reported sale of the McDonnell Douglas-made Harpoons, which have a range of 130 kms (83 miles) and can carry warheads over 550 pounds.

The newspaper, quoting unidentified sources, said documents relating to the sale were signed by Taiwan and US representative in Washington Saturday.

The cost of the deal was not disclosed but Taiwan has been spending freely in recent months on upgrading its defence, including 5.8 billion US dollars for 160 F-16s, the first of which will be delivered in 1995, and 3.8 billion dollars for 2000-5 jets from France.

Some of the missiles are expected to be fitted in three Knox-class frigates which Taiwan has leased from the United States. The ships are scheduled for commission in October after refitting at Long Beach naval base, California.

Major uses biography to insist loyalty to Thatcher

LONDON, Sept 5: British Prime Minister John Major has used an apparently authorised biography to insist he was loyal to Margaret Thatcher before she lost a 1990 leadership challenge, reports Reuters.

The Sunday Express newspaper published extracts of "The Major Enigma" by journalist Penny Junor in which Major rejects claims he betrayed the woman who shaped his government career.

"I won't oppose Mrs Thatcher," Major is quoted as saying when former cabinet minister Michael Heseltine challenged her for the leadership of the ruling Conservative Party.

After Thatcher stepped aside, Heseltine lost a three-way race against Major and Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd.

The Sunday Express extracts also quote current Chancellor of the Exchequer (Finance Minister) Kenneth Clarke as saying Major was deeply concerned at being sounded out to replace Thatcher as leader.

"He said he had promised Margaret and couldn't run himself," the newspaper quoted Clarke as saying.

The biography comes at a handy time for Major after allegations in a memoir by former minister Kenneth Baker that Major was less than fulsome in backing Thatcher.

Thatcher is to publish her long-awaited memoir of almost 12 years in power next month. Elaks have suggested she will attack Major and expose intrigue that forced her out.

Major is himself facing question marks over his leadership following policy reversals, a recession and record lows in opinion-polls as well as by-election defeats.

Typhoon Yancy kills 37 in Japan

TOKYO, Sept 5: Typhoon Yancy tailed off today after lashing Japan with two days of violent winds and heavy rains that left at least 46 people confirmed or presumed dead, police said, reports Reuters.

At least 37 people were killed, 195 unaccounted for and 155 injured in southern Japan, police said.

With the help of power shovels, hundreds of rescue workers continued to search for people buried in a huge mud-slide triggered on Friday by torrential rains in Kinpo, Kagoshima on the southern island of Kyushu.

Thousands of Muslims expelled from South, central Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Sept 5: Thousand of Muslim civilians have been expelled from south and central Bosnia, including former inmates of Bosnian Croat prisons resembling concentration camp victims, UN refugee officials said Saturday, reports AFP.

The greater majority of the wave of more than 10,000 men, women and children have been driven by the Bosnian Croat militia (HVO) to the town of Jablanica, which is held by the mainly-Muslim Bosnian forces, said Ray Wilkinson, Sarajevo spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

They include males released from various HVO detention centres, the spokesman added.

Many ex-inmates, "have broken fingers and bruises... from prison beatings" while most are extremely thin and look like "concentration camp victims from the Second World War," Wilkinson said, citing a report by UNHCR official who spent several hours in the town some 60 kilometres (35 miles) southwest of here.

The news came as the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) announced a dramatic intensification in clashes between Bosnian Croat forces and the Bosnian army in their battle for the southern city of Mostar and Gornji Vakuf and several central Bosnian towns.

Wilkinson added that many of the 10,000 civilians, who have been expelled during recent weeks, arrived in Jablanica with no personal possessions and were "already begging for bread in the streets."

The UNHCR hoped to get Representative to Jablanica soon to evaluate the expelled civilians' needs, which were already extremely urgent, especially in view of the approaching winter, the spokesman added.

Wilkinson could not confirm reports of HVO militiamen deliberately opening fire on expelled civilians.

But he said that suitcases, bags, clothing, blankets and personal possessions were strewn along the road from the Croat checkpoint of Vrdi near Jablanica, indicating that "the civilians indeed fled in terror."

Some 800 Muslim women, children and pensioners were expelled from Apatina and Stolac, south of Mostar, arriving in Jablanica on August 24.

Some 400 others arrived there three days later, while 450 male former detainees reached the town on August 31, Wilkinson added.

About 3,000 Muslims were expelled by the Croats from Blagaj region to Jablanica and by the Serbs from mount Igman, which overlooks the capital, to the Konjic region, Wilkinson said.

He added that about 2,000 Muslims from the Prozor region had also been forcibly moved by the Croats to Kistanica, near Jablanica.

Meanwhile a UNPROFOR spokesman here reported that a Bosnian army shell killed four people in the Croatian part of Mostar Friday, the second day after the Geneva peace talks on Bosnia-Herzegovina broke up in disagreement.

Spokesman Major Idesbald Van Biezebrouck told journalists he had no figures for Bosnian casualties, but said there had been increased artillery and heavy machine gun fire across Mostar.

Fighting was also fierce in the central Bosnian town of Gornji Vakuf, he said, with Croat and Bosnian forces battling for the town with all grades of weapon.

In Istanbul, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic said he expected the Geneva talks to reconvene not in the coming week, but the next.

The Bosnian delegation held to its demands for more territory than that allocated under the present partition plan for the war-torn republic plan drawn up by mediators Lord Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg, Izetbegovic said.

Lestislators voted for a motion stating that the aim of such talks was a "peaceful settlement of the conflict," which has lasted five years and left more than 10,000 people dead, Har-Tass news agency reported Saturday.

Off the Record

'Don't bring food, bring money'

BATAC (Philippines): The mayor of this sleepy northern town has some advice for the thousands expected to show up for the funeral of former President Ferdinand Marcos: "Don't bring food. Bring money," reports AP.

Marcos' body returns Tuesday from Hawaii, where he died in exile nearly four years ago. The four-day wake is expected to draw thousands of supporters, especially from among Marcos' fellow Ilocano-language speakers.

A large turnout would overwhelm the facilities of this farming community of 50,000 people, which has few restaurants or public toilets and only one small inn.

Residents of Batac are using the event as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to cash in on the anticipated flood of mourners. Shops are stocking up on Marcos T-shirts, buttons and caps, with pictures of the late strongman and slogans such as "Marcos, a True Hero."

Adelina Lumagap, who runs a small shop across the street from Marcos' future tomb, said she was doing a brisk business selling Marcos T-shirts at 150 pesos (5 dollars) each.

"We're happy he's finally coming home," Lumagap said.

Scissors remained inside stomach four years

NEW DELHI: An Indian woman who complained of abdominal pains for four years had a nine-inch (23-cm) pair of scissors removed from her stomach, The United News of India reported yesterday, reports Reuters.

UNI said 29-year-old Meena Purohit had taken drugs for the pains since an operation in 1989. She was rushed to hospital about three weeks ago when a swelling appeared, and an X-ray revealed the surgical instrument had been left inside her. Surgeons removed the scissors.

Dinosaurs had immune system

MELBOURNE: Preliminary research on a dinosaur skeleton provides evidence that dinosaurs had immune systems to fight infections, the daily newspaper The Age reported Saturday, according to AP.

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It appeared that the dinosaur's immune system fought the infection of the marrow and surrounding bone in the same way humans would, researchers found.

The partial skeleton of the 50-centimeter (120-inch) tall dinosaur, a Hypsilophodontidae, was discovered earlier this year in Otway Ranges in southwestern Victoria state.

Paleontologists Tom Rich of the Museum of Victoria and his wife Patricia Vickers-rich of Monash University noticed that one rear shin bone appeared diseased or damaged.

OIC supports Palestinian self-rule plan

DUBAI, Sept 5: The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on Saturday gave its backing to an Israeli-PLO deal for Palestinian self-rule but said it was only the first step towards an Israeli withdrawal from Jerusalem, reports Reuters.

The OIC Secretary-General Hamid-Al-Ghabid has welcomed the progress made... on Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza and Jericho," a statement by the Jeddah-based OIC said.

Ghabid described "the interim arrangements as bold first steps towards achieving the goal of just and comprehensive settlement, which would result in the Israeli withdrawal from Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Holy Jerusalem) and all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories."

Under the proposed deal Palestinians will be granted interim self-rule starting in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho and extending later to the rest of the occupied territories.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation is a full member in the 51-member OIC.

The OIC regards Arab East Jerusalem, home to Islam's third most holy shrine, as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

The Foreign Ministers of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council are due to meet in Riyadh today and high on their agenda is the proposed PLO-Israeli deal.

AFP adds: Optimism was growing today for the early signing of an agreement on limited Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories, though Palestinian hardliners were maintaining their opposition.

International Support for the deal struck secretly in Oslo by PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli officials boosted the prospects for a formal settlement, following the endorsement given early Saturday by Fatah, the mainstream faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

In Washington, a Palestinian official said Saturday the United States was ready to organize a signing ceremony for the accord in the White House.

Nabil Shaath, coordinator of the Palestinian delegation at the Middle East peace talks, said US officials would like the signing: take place next week.

Jordan's King Hussein, who earlier criticised the PLO for not consulting him on the accord, Saturday threw his full support behind the agreement, which would grant limited autonomy to the Palestinians, starting in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank city of Jericho.

The King told a press conference in Amman that the accord was "a serious, comprehensive and balanced attempt on both side to move forward to a just and durable peace."

In Tel Aviv, upwards of 50,000 people carrying Israeli and Palestinian flags held a demonstration in support of the accord, responding to a call by Labour, the left-wing Meretz Party and the anti-annexationist movement peace now.

In Paris, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali praised the Israeli and Palestinian, saying the deal was "a first step, and we will need more courage and patience."



A soldier hands a drink to one of the suspects, including 11 Iraqis and one Kuwaiti, in the security court in Kuwait City Sept 4. The general prosecutor, General Badr Messad, called for the death penalty of the suspects accused of a plot to assassinate former US president George Bush during a visit to Kuwait in April last.

Bhupen Hazarika's cassette on science-based songs released

CALCUTTA, Sept 5: The eminent singer, Dr Bhupen Hazarika has released a cassette containing Assamese science-based songs produced by the National Council of Science and Technology Communication, reports PTI.

Releasing the cassette at a function at Assam Bhavan here last evening, Dr Hazarika, the chairman of Science Through Folk Art Committee of the Science Association of Bengal, said that the main object of it was to popularize science at the grassroots level through songs based on folk tunes.

The cassette entitled "Mukul Akash", contains eight Assamese songs. Earlier a similar cassette on Bengali was released in 1991.

Crackdown on Shining Path rebels: 300 held

LIMA, Sept 5: About 300 people have been arrested in Peru during an army sweep against the rebel Shining Path begun last month in the Andes, military officials said Saturday, reports AFP.

The offensive, launched by army and police troops on August 26 and widened into dense jungles on Friday, is aimed at capturing Shining Path leaders.

Authorities are seeking in particular Julio Cesar Mezzich, the alleged Second-in-Command of the Maoist group who is suspected to be hiding in the Amazon.

Among those detained were 30 suspected members of a Shining Path Unit and seven rebels who work directly for Mezzich, authorities said.

Most of the others arrested were undocumented peasants, they said.

Meanwhile in Ayacucho, police said a Shining Path column killed nine peasants in a raid on an area.

According to police, an undetermined number of rebels entered the community and using hatchets and machetes killed the nine, including four children.

Ayacucho is the stronghold of the Shining Path and the site of the start of its armed battle against the government in 1980, which has cost more than 26,000 lives.

Reuters adds: Maoist guerrillas hacked to death nine people, including four children, in Peru's Andean highlands, security forces in Ayacucho said on Saturday.

Sihanouk decides to restore ties with UN mission

BANGKOK, Sept 5: Cambodia's changeable head of state, prince Norodom Sihanouk, has decided to restore ties with the UN peacekeeping mission, according to a letter released Sunday, reports AP.

On Saturday, UN mission chief Yasushi Akashi received a letter from Sihanouk saying he was severing ties with the mission after seeing news reports that it opposed him becoming king again. Sihanouk cancelled an invitation for Akashi to meet with him in China next week.

But that communication was revoked in another letter to Akashi, dated Saturday. Sihanouk said he was changing his mind after a satisfactory response from Akashi, and out of respect for him and the UN secretary-general.

The prince is in Beijing, where he has an official residence. Copies of the letter were released Sunday by Sihanouk's office.

Also released Sunday were copies of letters to Cambodian country.

"I do not have the right to oppose the wish of the sovereign Cambodian people who already have freely chosen their legal representatives to constitute the Parliament of Cambodia," he told his son Prince Norodom Ranariddh, leader of the biggest party in the ruling coalition.

Sihanouk asked that he not be involved in the Parliament's final decision on the Constitution.

Sihanouk, who had ruled Cambodia as king or head of state for three decades, is head of state of the current interim government formed after UN-organised elections in May.

The newly elected national assembly is to take charge later this month after adopting the constitution.

Originally, a committee of assembly members drew up a draft that did not call for a monarch.

Fighting between Liberia, Ivory Coast resumes

MANROVIA, Sept 5: Fighting has broken out along the frontier between Liberia and Ivory Coast, the committee overseeing Liberia's ceasefire announced Saturday, without saying who the combatants were, reports AFP.

The fighting was taking place near the Ivorian town of Tai, some 400 kilometres (240 miles) west of Abidjan and the Liberian town of Towai, 175 kilometres (105 miles) northwest of here, a statement from the all-party committee said.

But the statement said the committee was "unable to say exactly who was engaged in the fighting."

Committee head Colonel Laszlu Forgacs had "immediately despatched two UN military observers to the scene to investigate the circumstances of he fighting," the statement said.

Tanakpur dam project Nepali communists want govt to scrap deal with India

KATHMANDU, Sept 5: More than 4,000 activists from four communist factions burned a copy of the Indo-Nepalese agreement on Tanakpur dam Saturday and called on the government to scrap the project, a police source said, reports AFP.

The factions included the United Peoples Front (UPF), the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, the Nepal Communist Party (Marxist, Leninist and Maoist) and the NCP-Mashal.

The protesters called on the ruling Nepal Congress government to scrap the plan for the hydro-electric project, saying the agreement was a "betrayal" of the Nepalese people and that the issue should be renegotiated with India.

The Tanakpur dam issue — which involves a water sharing agreement with neighbouring India — has been roundly condemned by Nepal's communist parties, who say the government, led by Girija Prasad Koirala, had not referred the agreement to parliament for approval.

Members from the four left-wing factions burned the copy of the agreement, chanting anti-government slogans.

New cabinet in Algeria

ALGIERS, Sept 5: Algerian Prime Minister Edha Malek on Saturday formed a 25-member government after 15 days of political consultations, official sources announced here Saturday, reports AFP.

Lankan crisis 'a terrorist problem': Wijetunga

COLOMBO, Sept 5: President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga repeated on Saturday he would not allow a division of Sri Lanka, calling the present crisis was "A terrorist problem but not an ethnic issue", the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation said, reports Reuters.

"The LTTE terrorists demand a separation to establish Eelam. I will not allow a division of the country," he said.

Wijetunga told a meeting of regional council officers in the southern Hambantota district that he was committed to protecting Sri Lanka's integrity, restoring peace among all communities and strengthening the country's progressive movement.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been fighting a bloody war for 10 years in pursuit of establishing a homeland in the north and east, which they call Eelam for the minority Tamil community.

More than 30,000 rebels, government troops and civilians have died in the conflict.

The Tigers, as well as many moderate Tamils, believe successive governments have done little to redress discrimination against them by the majority Sinhalese community.

Tamils account for 2.5 million of Sri Lanka's 17 million people.

Although the Tigers say the Tamil people living in the north and east are one, the Tamils who live in the east do not want a merger of the two provinces, the SLBC quoted Wijetunga as saying.

One of the main obstacles to ending the war is the question of the northeast province which is now merged.

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Paleontologists Tom Rich of the Museum of Victoria and his wife Patricia Vickers-rich of Monash University noticed that one rear shin bone appeared diseased or damaged.

Azeri assembly for direct talks with separatists

MOSCOW, Sept 5: The Azerbaijani parliament has voted for direct negotiations with the separatist leaders of the Armenian-dominated enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, in a move that raises the tentative prospect of a negotiated settlement to the five-year conflict in the Caucasus, reports AFP.