

BRIEFLY

Fidel Ramos in Brunei:

Philippine president Fidel Ramos arrived in Brunei yesterday for a three-day visit, aimed at strengthening bilateral ties and attracting investments and trade from the oil-rich sultanate, officials said. AFP reports from Bandar Seri Begawan.

Ramos was accompanied by wife Anelita and a nine-member official delegation comprising the Philippines' secretaries of foreign affairs, trade and communications as well as the chief of the armed forces.

Hezbollah kills 2 Israeli troops:

Two Israeli soldiers were killed and three wounded in a pro-Iranian guerrilla ambush in South Lebanon early yesterday, security sources said. Reuter reports from Marjayoun.

The sources said pro-Iranian Hezbollah guerrillas ambushed an Israeli patrol in the Aishiyeh area inside the Jewish state's occupation zone in the south. At the same time, the guerrillas showered rockets and mortar bombs at posts of Israeli and allied forces in the area.

Landslides claim 21 in Vietnam:

Landslides caused by floods have killed 21 people in Vietnam's mountainous Lai Chau Province bordering China, the Communist Party Daily Nhan Dan reported yesterday. Reuter reports from Hanoi.

Losses in the flooding late last month were estimated at 25 billion dong (2.3 million dollars), it said. Nearly 200 houses and 1,600 hectares (4,000 acres) of rice fields were destroyed.

US actor Bert Freed dies:

Bert Freed, a veteran actor who appeared in such movies as "Paths of Glory," "Billy Jack" and "Halls of Montezuma," has died at the age of 74, a spokesman for the Screen Actors Guild said on Friday. Reuter reports from Los Angeles.

He said Freed died of a heart attack on Tuesday while vacationing near Vancouver. Freed appeared in more than 75 films and 200 television programmes.

Singapore hangs 3 foreigners:

Two Nigerians and a Malaysian convicted of heroin trafficking were hanged at Singapore's Changi Prison, the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) said on Saturday. Reuter reports from Singapore.

Nigerian nationals Gabriel Okonkwo, 33, and Paul Okechukwu Ngwudo, 29, were arrested in December 1990 in a hotel room in Singapore for trafficking in 538.3 grams (18.99 ounces) of heroin, it said. Malaysian Lim Swee Thong, 43, was arrested in June 1991 at a bus stop bordering Malaysia for trafficking in 24.91 grams (0.88 ounces) of heroin, a CNB statement said.

Book on Deng's career:

You may not be able to see the man himself, but now you can at least read the book recounting the career of Chinese patriarch Deng Xiaoping, who turns 90 this month. AFP reports from Beijing.

The career of Deng Xiaoping — a great man and his century — has been published by the People's Liberation Army Literature and Art Publishing House. The People's Daily announced yesterday.

Cholera, Malaria kill 200 in Uganda:

Cholera and Malaria epidemics have killed some 200 people in western Uganda in the past two months, the official New Vision newspaper reported on Friday. AFP says from Kampala.

The diseases have struck Rubanda county in Kabale district where health officials said hospitals had run out of drugs and were unable to stop the epidemics. "The situation is grave," the newspaper quoted a health official as saying.

Gunmen massacre 5 in S Africa:

A family of five, including two toddlers, was massacred by gunmen in a black township east of Johannesburg, police said yesterday. AFP reports from Johannesburg.

Police spokesman captain Govindasamy Parimothoo said two gunmen burst into the house in Wattville township late Friday and sprayed the family with AK 47 assault rifles.

Arafat arrives in Alexandria:

PLO leader Yasser Arafat arrived in the coastal city of Alexandria yesterday for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and probably with US Secretary of state Warren Christopher. Reuter reports from Alexandria, Egypt.

Arafat flew from the Egyptian side of the border with Gaza with a large delegation including former negotiator Faisal Al-Husseini and two leading members of the Palestinian self-rule authority — Nabil Shaath and Yasser Abed-Rabbo.

Robberies on rise in Japan:

The number of robberies committed in Japan hit a record high in the first six months of the year, although the total number of crimes dropped, newspapers said yesterday. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

The number of crimes carried out by foreigners also hit a record for the first half of the year.

The number of robberies rose six per cent in January-June 1994 over the same period last year to reach a six-month record of 1,325, a national police agency report was quoted as saying.

Japan's defence official to visit US:

Japanese Defence Agency Director General Tokutomi Tamazawa plans to visit Washington in September 12-17 for talks with US leaders, a newspaper said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Tamazawa is expected to discuss bilateral issues and North Korea's suspected nuclear arms development programme, the Mainichi Shinbun said.

Christopher resumes ME peace shuttle

EGYPT, Aug 6: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher opened a new Middle East peace shuttle on Saturday, calling first on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak for his help on the stalled talks between Israel and Syria, reports AP.

Mubarak, assuming the role of a go-between, has tried to bring Syrian President Hafez Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin together in the wake of Israel's agreement with Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. But Christopher admitted he faced wide gaps between the two sides.

"They are wrestling with the toughest issues," Christopher said before leaving Washington.

"My own impression is there is progress to be made," he said, but he added that a major breakthrough was unlikely.

The focus of the stalemate is the Golan Heights, a strategic enclave Israel won from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War and has successfully used as a buffer to prevent cross-border attacks.

Assad insists Israel relinquish all of the territory, but Rabin wants to hear Syria's peace terms before considering a total pullout. Rabin also has called for a resumption of direct talks with

Syria, which were suspended last February in Washington. But at this stage Assad is content to negotiate through Christopher, who has accepted the go-between role as the only available option.

Still, a senior aide, who demanded anonymity in talking to reporters on Christopher's US Air Force jet, acknowledged, "There can be no deal that is not done directly."

He said Christopher hoped in his talks in Jerusalem and Damascus to create an "environment" that would make direct Israeli-Syrian negotiations possible. But if they resumed direct discussions now, the two sides only would engage in a "recitation of their positions," the aide said.

Rabin has offered to give up at least part of the Golan Heights and to uproot 13,000 Jewish settlers, while Assad in May provided the Israeli leader via Christopher with some elements of his peace offer. Neither side was satisfied.

In the meantime, Israel and Jordan signed a non-aggression pact. On Monday, Christopher plans to cross the border between them in symbolic gesture of a new mood in the Middle East. Israel and the PLO, meanwhile, are working to expand Palestinian self-rule on the West Bank.

Serbs bow to NATO threats, return 4 heavy weapons

SARAJEVO, Aug 6: Bosnian Serbs bowed to threats of more NATO air strikes and returned four heavy weapons including a tank they seized from the United Nations, a UN spokesman said today.

NATO hit the Serbs with an air attack on Friday and the UN commander in Bosnia, Lieutenant-General Sir Michael Rose, told them he would order more strikes if the weapons were not returned by today.

UN spokesman Major Rob Annink told Reuters that a T-55 tank, two armoured personnel carriers and a Praga anti-aircraft gun snatched from the Ilidza weapons collection point in Sarajevo were handed back by the Serbs late on Friday night.

A Bosnian Serb liaison officer had told the UN that a fifth weapon grabbed from the compound, an anti-aircraft gun, would be turned over today.

Annink said the return of the five weapons would remove the immediate threat of more air strikes, but NATO could still be called in if the condition was not met in full.

"There is just a pause and we may well continue (with air strikes), but there is no deadline. We are giving the Serbs the opportunity to reorganise and think it over," he said.

In nearby Pale, a senior official said "the Bosnian Serbs' self-declared assembly was expected to meet again next week and could declare a state of war and full mobilisation."

Momcilo Krajisnik, the parliament's Speaker, told reporters he expected the assembly to convene in the next two days.

Krajisnik said he expected the parliament to "declare a state of war, general mobilisation and rationing of supplies. The Parliament can make such a decision at its next session to be held in the next two days."

AP reports from Moscow: Russian officials said on Saturday the Bosnian Serbs provoked the NATO air strike outside Sarajevo, and they also urged the Serbs to end their opposition to the latest international peace plan.

"It is regrettable that the Serbs themselves... have given a pretext" for the air strike, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement issued late Friday night.

Russia, a fellow Orthodox Slav nation, has shown the most sympathy to any outside power for the Serbs during the Bosnian war. But Russia said the Bosnian Serbs have only themselves to blame for Friday's attack in which two U.S. A-10 planes hit a Serb anti-tank weapon south of Sarajevo.

The attack came after the Bosnian Serbs seized weapons from a UN-monitored weapons collection point.



Two young girls sprint past a team of Ukrainian soldiers as they take aim at a new Serbian sniper position on Friday in Sarajevo. — AFP photo

India removes all bunkers around Hazratbal Mosque

SRINAGAR, Aug 6: Thousands of Muslims thronged Kashmir's holiest mosque on Saturday after security troops dismantled the bunkers whose removal was the focus of a rebel campaign for nearly a year, reports AP.

Priests unlocked a safe at the Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar, examined a holy relic that Muslims believe is the hair of Prophet Mohammad (SM) the founder of Islam, and declared it safe.

They told the crowd that the glass vial containing the hair had not been damaged, a charge frequently voiced by Muslim militants since troops laid siege to the mosque last October.

Separatist guerrillas had announced that Muslims would not allow Hindu pilgrims to the Amarnath shrine later this month unless security forces are withdrawn from the mosque.

The government announced on Tuesday it will pull its soldiers out of the mosque, which was the scene of a 32-day standoff between the rebels and the army.

Soldiers had laid siege to the mosque to flush out rebels hiding there. The standoff ended when the guerrillas

walked out.

But the government said the bunkers were needed to prevent rebels from using the mosque as a base of damaging a holy relic.

More than 9,500 people have been killed in Jammu-

Kashmir since the Muslim insurrection flared four years ago. Rebels complain of discrimination against Muslims by the federal government of mostly Hindu India.

On Saturday, two priests used separate keys to unlock a safe kept in the first-floor vault of the mosque, in the presence of police, Hurriyat leaders and journalists.

"The relic is safe and has not been touched," said Ghulam Khadir Drabu, chairman of the Aqaf Trust that governs all mosques in Kashmir.

Priests will consecrate the mosque and the relic in the next few days before opening it for prayers, Drabu told The Associated Press.

Shortly after midnight, about 500 soldiers guarding the mosque removed all 15 sand bunkers.

Hurriyat leader Abdul Ghani said the government move was "late but correct." He urged residents of Srinagar to light lamps at night to celebrate the occasion.

"The conflict between the government and the militants has been lessened. We are very happy," said Ali Mohammad, who lives near the shrine.

Only humanitarian goods are allowed through the blockade.

The Canadian officers will join soldiers from Argentina, Brazil and the United States to make up the 88-member force.

The UN has imposed sanctions against Haiti in an effort to force the country's military regime to step down and allow the return of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the democratically elected president.

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