

BRIEFLY

Queen Elizabeth in Canada:

Thousands of wellwishers lined the streets of Halifax on Saturday to give a hearty welcome to Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, who started her 10-day visit to Canada in this royalty-loving province, reports Reuter from Halifax.

Onlookers burst into applause as the motorcade carrying the Queen and her husband, Prince Philip, came into sight. When she descended from the car, the flag waving crowd cheered wildly.

Indonesia, S Africa set up ties:

Indonesia and South Africa have established diplomatic relations, the official Antara News Agency said yesterday. Reuter reports from Jakarta.

The agency said a communique was signed on Friday at the United Nations in New York. Indonesia, which chairs the 11-member Non-Aligned Movement, opened a consulate in South Africa in February.

Congolese stampede toll now 150:

At least 150 people, mostly children were trampled or suffocated to death here Friday in the crush when panicked worshippers crammed into a local church to avoid a sudden storm. AFP reports from Brazzaville.

Dozens of seriously injured people were hospitalised at the university hospital centre in the capital and in local clinics, according to the official ACI news agency.

16 executed in China:

Authorities in southern and central China have executed 16 criminals for robbery, murder and rape, local press reports seen on Saturday said, AFP says from Beijing.

The Intermediate Court of Guangzhou, the capital of southern Guangdong Province, sentenced 15 criminals to death on Wednesday and the penalties were carried out immediately, the Nanfang Daily said in its edition of the same Day.

Khalq activist hanged in Iran:

Iran hanged a man in public on Saturday for plotting to bomb a mosque in the southern city of Zahedan, the Iranian News Agency IRNA reported, Reuter says from Nicosia.

IRNA describing Bahram Abbas-Zadesh as a member of the Iraqi-based opposition group Mujahideen Khalq, said onlookers chanted "death to America" as he was hanged in a Zahedan square.

15 die in Georgian train mishap:

At least 15 people were killed and dozens injured early yesterday when a Georgian passenger train crashed into a stationary freight train just outside the capital Tbilisi, the Interior Ministry said, Reuter reports from Tbilisi.

The passenger train was travelling from the industrial suburb of Rustavi to Tbilisi.

2 Ugandan ministers die:

Uganda's government of President Yoweri Museveni this week lost two ministers, who both died after short illnesses, AFP reports from Kampala.

On Tuesday a deputy minister of state for security in the president's office, Keba Balaki Kiraya, 70, died at Uganda's main Mulako Hospital, six hours after admission for respiratory failure and chest pain, officials said.

A junior minister of finance and economic planning, Abbey Kafumbe-Mukasasa, 48, died at the same hospital early Saturday morning, after admission Monday for stomach pains and vomiting.

Blast damages 15 shops in UK:

A bomb exploded in the British seaside town of Bognor Regis on Saturday, damaging around 15 shops, police said. There were no reports of any casualties, Reuter reports from London.

A police spokesman said a caller identifying himself as speaking for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) gave a warning that an explosive device had been planted in the town around half an hour before the blast.

Floods claim 6 in Taiwan:

Heavy rains spawned by Typhoon Doug caused floods in the southern Taiwan port of Kaohsiung, leaving six people dead and one missing and cutting off main roads to the city, police said yesterday, Reuter reports from Taipei.

The torrential rains dumped 75 cm (29 inches) of rain on Kaohsiung on Friday and Saturday, turning its suburbs into muddy lakes and submerging the main highway to Taipei under several feet of water, police said.

Train crash hurts 60 in Scotland:

A train carrying more than 150 passengers collided head-on with a driverless locomotive just outside Edinburgh on Saturday, rail representatives said, AP reports from Edinburgh.

Sixty people were injured in the crash, a mile east of the Scottish capital, a hospital spokeswoman said. An investigation into the crash was under way.

Paris hospital fire kills 2:

Two people were killed and six seriously injured when fire swept through a hospital for elderly people in Paris on Saturday, the fire brigade said. A spokesman said 44 other patients suffered from smoke inhalation, Reuter reports from Paris.

Quake rocks northern Japan:

A fairly strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.5 hit northern Japan Sunday, but there were no immediate reports of injuries or damage, reports AP from Tokyo.

The Central Meteorological agency reported the earthquake, which struck at 6:07 pm (0907 GMT), registered an intensity of four on Japan's scale of seven in Ofunato, 420 kilometers north of Tokyo.

ICRC opens new office in Rwanda:

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has opened a new office in northwest Rwanda to provide aid and support services for refugees returning home, the organisation said Saturday, AFP reports from Nairobi.

The sub-office at Ruhengeri was opened to help carry out food distribution, water, sanitation and other programmes for people returning to their homes and for those who remained there through the civil war, an ICRC statement announced.

Dante II rescued in Alaska:

The Dante II robot that spider-walked its way into a volcanic crater was lifted out by helicopter on Saturday, more than a week after a misstep sent the 1,700-pound (770-kilogram) NASA explorer sprawling in the boulder-strewn landscape, AP reports from Anchorage, Alaska.

Scientists from Carnegie Mellon University took advantage of good weather to mount the hurry-up retrieval of the eight-legged robot, developed for NASA and brought to Alaska to test its ability to explore terrain similar to that on other planets.

Pakistan for regional ban on arms of mass destruction

ISLAMABAD, Aug 14: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said today Pakistan wants a regional ban on weapons of mass destruction and significant cut-backs in conventional arms, reports Reuter.

But in a speech marking Pakistan's 47th Independence Anniversary, she said her country, at odds with India over Kashmir, had to defend itself against its larger neighbour.

"The stability and security of South Asia require that it not only be free from weapons of mass destruction, there should also be a significant reduction in conventional weapons."

"For this, our proposals are

Turkmenistan, Pakistan vow to work for Afghan peace

ISLAMABAD, Aug 14: Turkmenistan and Pakistan vowed to work for peace in neighbouring Afghanistan in an agreement reached shortly after Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov arrived in Islamabad on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Niyazov, here on a three day visit, and Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto told a news conference, they had also discussed regional peace and the Muslim revolt in the Indian ruled part of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir.

He said his country was ready to play host to any conference to discuss the Afghan issue.

Benazir said the two sides had also discussed plans to supply natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan.

still lying at the table," she told dignitaries outside parliament in Islamabad, where visiting Turkmenistan President Saparmurat Niyazov was guest of honour.

Describing the Kashmir dispute as an "unfinished agenda" from the sub-continent's partition at independence in 1947, she said Pakistan would always support Kashmiris fighting Indian rule.

Bhutto urged India to hold talks with Pakistan to settle the dispute by means of a UN-mandated plebiscite. India, which holds two-thirds of the Himalayan region, has rejected this.

She accused India of building up its forces in Kashmir to

crush a four-year old revolt by Muslim militants seeking outright independence or union with Pakistan, and said New Delhi's tests of advanced missiles had "sent a wave of unease through Asia."

Recalling Pakistan's three wars with India — two over Kashmir — since the two countries won independence from Britain, Bhutto said: "We face a country five to six times bigger in resources which seeks to become the world's third-largest military power despite the hunger and poverty of its people."

She said a social action programme was Islamabad's top priority, but said Pakistani Muslims would prefer to go

hungry than to "live like slaves".

Pakistan has said it wants to work for global and regional peace but could not compromise its security or accept discriminatory conditions over its nuclear programme to persuade the United States to resume arms supplies cut off in 1990.

Pakistan says it is able to make nuclear weapons but has decided not to do so. It refuses to sign the International Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty unless India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, also does.

"Pakistan cannot take any unilateral step on the nuclear issue, because it is linked with our security," Bhutto said.



Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (R) with Turkmenistan President Saparmurat Niyazov (L) addresses a joint press conference on Saturday in Islamabad after signing an agreement on matters of common interest between the two countries. They also discussed Kashmir and Afghanistan problems in their formal talks. — AFP photo

9 guerrillas shot dead in Manipur

NEW DELHI, Aug 14: Indian troops shot dead nine insurgents in a fierce two-hour gunbattle in the northeastern state of Manipur today, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says AFP.

The fighting erupted when a group of soldiers on patrol spotted a large gathering of insurgents belonging to two outlawed groups in the Chandel district of Manipur bordering Myanmar, the news agency said.

Two other militants were injured and one was arrested. Soldiers recovered three automatic weapons, a rifle, two radios and a large quantity of ammunition from the site.

Most of the dead men reportedly belonged to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), which has been waging a bloody four-decade-long campaign to secede from the neighbouring state of Nagaland.

Another Japanese minister resigns over war remarks

TOKYO, Aug 14: A Japanese minister resigned today after his comments playing down Japan's wartime guilt outraged Asian neighbours, reports Reuter.

Shin Sakurai is the second minister in three months and the fourth in eight years to quit after attempting to whitewash his country's militaristic past.

"I have decided to resign because I could not continue to cause problems for the Murayama administration," environmental agency director general Sakurai, who has ministerial rank, told reporters.

China and South Korea angrily denounced Friday's comments by Sakurai that Japan had not meant to fight a war of aggression during World War II.

An embarrassed Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama, who called the comments deplorable, hastened to apologise to avert a major diplomatic row.

Leftists press for Koirala's ouster

Strike paralyzes Kathmandu

KATHMANDU, Aug 14: Much of Nepal's Kathmandu valley closed down today in a general strike called by the leftist opposition to back its demands that Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala give way to a national government, reports Reuter.

Shops, factories and schools shut for the day and few vehicles took to the roads of the three towns of the valley, the main focus of a political battle over Koirala calling early elections in November, 18 months ahead of schedule.

The private Kathmandu research centre said the strike would cost Nepal, one of the world's 10 poorest countries, some 50 million rupees (about 1 million dollars) in lost income.

Koirala dissolved parliament and called for early polls after losing a key vote in parliament last month because 36 dissidents in his Nepal Congress Party absented themselves

from it.

The leftist opposition says elections cannot possibly be free and fair under an administration run by Koirala, appointed as caretaker Prime

Minister, and that he should give way to an all-party national government.

Today's was the latest in a series of strikes to press the opposition demand, and more are expected. But leftist leaders said they wanted to avoid the violence that usually plagues Nepal's political crises.

"From our side, it will not go beyond democratic norms," said M K Nepal, head of the unified Marxist-Leninist Party, the second largest in parliament.

Nepal said the opposition would decide the next stage of its campaign after August 23, when the supreme court is due to rule on a petition seeking restoration of parliament.

The Congress dissidents said when parliament was dissolved, King Birendra should have appointed another member of the party as prime minister.

India apologises for entry of 5 cops into Nepal

NEW DELHI, Aug 14: India has apologised to Nepal for the illegal entry of five Indian policemen into the Himalayan state in search of a Nepalese criminal, the Asian Age newspaper reported today, says AFP.

The daily reported an unidentified federal Home Ministry official as saying that New Delhi had tendered an apology for the "inadvertent action" of the policemen from the western Indian state of Maharashtra.

Off the Record

TV documentary on Diana's life?

LONDON: Princess Diana has held secret talks with veteran US broadcaster Walter Cronkite to discuss arranging a television documentary about her life, Britain's Mail on Sunday newspaper reported, says Reuter.



The Mail, quoting what it called friends of the princess, said the documentary would be her response to an interview with Prince Charles by British journalist Jonathan Dimbleby broadcast two months ago.

In the candid interview, Charles admitted adultery after the breakdown of his marriage to Diana.

The frank admission was seen by Royal watchers as part of a campaign to improve the Prince's negative public image.

Opinion polls showed a rise in public support for the heir to the throne after the programme.

The talks with Cronkite took place recently aboard two yachts near Martha's Vineyard on the US East Coast, said the newspaper.

The Mail said Cronkite had assured Diana the documentary, which would include a meeting at her home as well as access to her sons William and Harry, would be handled sensitively.

Music lessons improve 'spatial reasoning'

LOS ANGELES: Young children who take music lessons may be on their way to doing better in math, chess and even reading maps later on, a study suggests, reports AP.

It found that 3-year olds who took keyboard and singing lessons for just a few months showed gains on a test of ability to reason about how objects relate to each other.

Such "spatial reasoning" is handy for a variety of tasks including higher math, geometry and engineering, said researcher Frances Rauscher of the University of California, Irvine.

Music training "could have really enormous significance for education," she said. Although "you're not going to make your child into an Einstein," music training may help children develop their spatial reasoning, she said.

Angola will offer security to UNITA leaders

LUSAKA, Aug 14: Angolan government negotiators agreed on Saturday to offer special security to leaders of the rebel UNITA movement, taking the country's marathon peace talks closer to a conclusion.

Both government and UNITA delegates confirmed to AFP that at a plenary session the rival sides agreed on nine points which will guarantee that UNITA leaders are not prosecuted for exercising freedom of speech or assembly.

UNITA spokesman Jorge Valentin said "we agreed that the concept of security in the first place should guarantee the existence of an open society that allows free discussion about our country by opposition parties."

It was resolved that it is the responsibility of the state to organise this special security for UNITA leaders and the government agreed that everyone from the president, the judiciary, the National

Assembly and other legislative organs will guarantee this security.

Valentin said the two sides also agreed that the United Nations would provide and international guarantee that this security would be accorded to UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).

"We had very useful and practical discussions and we hope this spirit will continue in the coming week so that we can overcome the remaining issues and come to a final peace agreement," he said.

Although the agenda of the peace talks, which began here in November last year, has almost been completed, the two sides are still to resolve the issue of UNITA's participation in administration.

They also still have to tackle the question of who governs the rebel stronghold of Huambo, an issue which Deputy Foreign Minister Georges Chicoti said last week could derail what has been achieved so far.

Chechnya buying arms to form 'people's militia'

MOSCOW, Aug 14: A leading Moscow-backed opposition group in the breakaway Russian republic of Chechnya is mobilising "volunteers" and buying arms to form a "people's militia," interfax news agency reported Saturday, says AFP.

The provisional council, which set up a shadow government at the beginning of the week, has acquired two helicopters and is in the process of buying armoured vehicles, interfax said, quoting the group's press department.

The council did not say where it got the military equipment or who might join the militia.

Interfax quoted an unidentified source as saying the shadow government have begun stockpiling food, medicine and clothes for both the future militia and civilians.

On Thursday, Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev declared martial law and ordered a general mobilisation to counter what he said was an imminent Russian invasion to bring the northern Caucasian Republic, which he unilaterally declared independent in 1991, back under Moscow's control.

He said half a million men in his small Muslim republic were ready to give their lives in a Jihad, or holy war, against Russia, and close air space to all unauthorised flights.

However analysts said Dudayev's move was aimed mainly to neutralise the opposition, particularly the council, which is based northwest of the capital Grozny.

Dudayev claims the opposition is armed and organise by Moscow in a drive to win back control of the republic.

India, China may cut border troops after Dec talks

NEW DELHI, Aug 14: India and China may begin reducing troops along their winding, disputed border after bilateral talks scheduled for December, the Chinese ambassador here was quoted today as saying, reports AFP.

Indian and Chinese experts will meet at the end of the year and are likely to come out with specific steps... on force reduction," Cheng Rusheng told (PTI).

"The reduction of military forces shall be carried out by stages in mutually-agreed geographical locations sector-wise," he told the news agency in an interview.

Germany seeks talks with Russia to stop plutonium smuggling

FRANKFURT, Aug 14: German authorities made what could be the biggest seizure of bomb-grade plutonium, and the alarmed government Saturday sought talks with Moscow on the growing problem of nuclear smuggling from Russia, reports AP.

Two Spaniards and a Colombian man were arrested at Munich airport Wednesday when they arrived from Moscow aboard a Lufthansa plane with up to 500 grams of weapons-grade plutonium in a piece of their luggage.

Police confirmed the arrests Saturday after two German magazines, Der Spiegel and Focus, reported the discovery.

Security sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told The Associated Press the seizure was 500 grams.

Focus also reported that amount, but Der Spiegel said it was at least 50 grams.

Experts have speculated that about 100 grams of extremely pure plutonium-239, in the hands of an expert with sophisticated equipment, could be fashioned into a nuclear bomb.

It was the third instance in which bomb-quality plutonium had been confiscated in Germany.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl, calling the nuclear smuggling a

"grave danger," said Saturday he had already exchanged letters with Russian President Boris Yeltsin and planned to talk with the Kremlin leader as soon as he returns to Bonn.

Kohl is on vacation in Austria.

Kohl said he wanted to send an envoy to Moscow to help trace the origin of the plutonium and prevent further smuggling.

Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel called for a new comprehensive system of controls and urged Russia and neighboring states to step up their own controls.

The men arrested Wednesday were probably couriers for "underpaid Russian atomic scientists," the Bavarian Interior Minister, Guenter Beckstein, told Der Spiegel in excerpts released Saturday.

Police officials said further details, such as how police knew where to look for the plutonium couldn't be released "on tactical grounds."

German authorities suspect that the nuclear materials ultimately could be bound for terrorist groups or such countries as Iran, Iraq or Libya.

German officials have said they believe the nuclear materials are being sold by high-ranking Russian scientists who aren't being paid due to the highly chaotic Russian economy. Russian security officials say only lower-level employees are involved in the nuclear smuggling.

Der Spiegel said Viktor Sidorenko, deputy Russian Minister for Atomic Energy, was on the same plane with the men arrested. He was flying to Germany to attend a meeting with the Bavarian officials about civilian nuclear projects, the magazine said.

Authorities initially suspected Sidorenko, but said their suspicions were unfounded, Der Spiegel said.

FBI Director Louis Freeh, who travelled through the re-

Serbs rebuff UN plea

SARAJEVO, Aug 14: Bosnian Serb leaders on Saturday rebuffed a top UN official's plea to reverse course and accept an international peace plan, reports AP.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic said after meeting with UN envoy Thorvald Stoltenberg that maps calling for Bosnian Serbs to settle for 49 per cent of the republic "cannot be accepted, either by the leadership, the parliament, or by the people."

Stoltenberg had met Friday in the capital of Serb-dominated Yugoslavia with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, and travelled Saturday to the Bosnian Serb headquarters Pale just east of Sarajevo.