

BRIEFLY

Iraqi FM due in Pakistan today:

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Saeed al-Saif will visit Pakistan this week in what will be the two nations' highest level contact since they lined up on opposite sides in the Gulf War, reports Reuter from Islamabad.

Saif may meet Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto as well as Foreign Minister Asif Ali Zardari during a three-day visit starting Saturday, a foreign ministry spokesman said on Thursday.

Arafat invites Suharto: PLO chairman Yasser Arafat has invited Indonesian President Suharto to visit the Gaza Strip and Jericho autonomous areas, the official Antara News Agency said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Antara said that the invitation was included in a letter from Arafat congratulating Suharto on Indonesia's 49th Independence Day anniversary, which was on Wednesday.

Myanmar buys 2 Chinese frigates:

Myanmar has bought two frigates from China capable of being fitted with ground to ground missiles in a move to modernise its navy, the military specialist magazine Jane's Defence weekly reported in its latest issue on Thursday. AFP reports from London.

11 climbers rescued in Java:

Indonesian search teams rescued 11 climbers from forest fire raging since Monday on the slopes of a central Javanese volcano, the official Antara News Agency said yesterday. Reuter reports from Jakarta.

Strong winds hampered efforts around Mount Merbabu, 3,142 metres, to fight flames that had destroyed at least 350 hectares of forest by Thursday.

Two smugglers to die in China:

Authorities in south China have sentenced two people to death for smuggling luxury cars, a Beijing-funded newspaper in Hong Kong said on Friday. AP reports from Hong Kong.

Two Chinese border police officers who helped the smugglers also received death sentences suspended for two years, the daily Wen Wei Po said. Suspended death sentences are sometimes commuted to life imprisonment if the accused behave well in jail.

15 die in Russian bus plunge:

A bus plunged off a highway overpass after the driver fell asleep early Friday, killing 15 people and injuring 21, officials said. AP reports from Moscow.

The accident happened before dawn on the Novokashirsky Highway, 35 kilometers (21 miles) southeast of Moscow, said Igor Morozov, a spokesman for the Russian traffic police.

US-Russia jt exercises in Sept:

US-Russian joint peacekeeping manoeuvres are scheduled to be held in September 2 to 10 in the southeastern Russian town of Petropavlovsk, the Pentagon said on Thursday. AFP reports from Washington.

Some 250 troops of the US third infantry division of the armed forces, based in Germany, will participate in the manoeuvres along with 250 soldiers of the Russian 27th motorised division, said spokesman Denis Boxx.

French soldier killed in Sarajevo:

A French UN peacekeeper was killed Friday at Sarajevo's Jewish cemetery, one of the most bitterly contested frontlines near the city center, AP reports from Sarajevo.

Col. Bertrand Labarsouque, spokesman for the peacekeeping forces in Sarajevo, said the soldier was fatally wounded in the head by a single shot. It was not immediately known who had fired. UN officials were investigating.

NATO pays tribute to Woerner:

NATO paid tribute Thursday to secretary general Manfred Woerner, whose death last weekend leaves the Western alliance facing a difficult task in choosing a successor, AP reports from Brussels.

"I know that today we no longer live in a world of heroes, but to me Manfred Woerner had all the requisite qualities," acting Secretary General Sergio Balanzino told a meeting of ambassadors from NATO's 16 member nations.

China executes 3 workers:

Three Chinese working in state enterprises were executed Thursday for corruption, continuing a year long nationwide campaign against graft, the People's Daily reported yesterday, says AFP from Beijing.

The Beijing Daily, meanwhile, reported Friday that five men had recently been executed in the Chinese capital for murder and theft.

Colombian rebels kill 18:

Eighteen people were killed and at least two injured when guerrillas attacked a civilian bus Thursday night, said radio RCN quoting military sources, reports AFP from Bogota.

Officials told the station the terrorists, who believed the bus was carrying troops, opened fire after using explosives to halt the bus.

Japan to launch H-II rocket Aug 28:

The launch of Japan's domestically developed H-II rocket has been rescheduled for August 28 after two aborted launch attempts earlier this week, the National Space Development Agency said Friday, reports AP from Tokyo.

The launch at Tanegashima Island, 615 miles (985 km) southwest of Tokyo, is to put a 2-ton government satellite into a geostationary orbit and herald Japan's entry into the satellite launching business.

6 Russians held in Frankfurt:

Police on Friday announced the arrest of six Russians on charges of strangling a Frankfurt brothel owner, his wife and four prostitutes, AP reports from Frankfurt.

The bodies of Gabor Bartos and the five other victims were found Sunday at Bartos' brothel in Frankfurt's fashionable Westend district.

Prince Philip visits grizzly haven:

Prince Philip toured Canada's only sanctuary for grizzly bears as the British Columbia government officially designated it a provincial park, AP reports from Prince Rupert, British Columbia.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Cashore, travelling with the Duke of Edinburgh, announced the park designation Wednesday for the Kutzeyatne Valley in the province's far north.

Thailand urges Asian big powers to better ties with DPRK

WELLINGTON, Aug 19: Thailand's deputy foreign minister today urged Asia's major powers to improve relations actively with Pyongyang, reports Reuter.

The most effective way of dealing with the problem is to include other countries in the region, particularly the big powers — the Chinese, the Japanese, the South Koreans, AP reports from New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon.

It is the responsibility of the entire Asian Pacific region to help the isolated Stalinist state gain a sense of legitimacy and acceptance in international circles.

KEY WEST, Fla. Aug 19:

As hundreds of Cubans landed in Florida and thousands more gathered along the Cuban shoreline, Attorney General Janet Reno announced Thursday that Cubans arriving by boat will be detained, effective immediately, rather than released, reports AP.

Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles, who earlier Thursday had declared an immigration emergency, said he was delighted by the decision. He said it sends a strong message to Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

This keeps Castro from being able to call the shots in regard to immigration policy, he said. "It also allows us to make sure these people get the proper health screening, that other screening is done. Right now, we don't know who is coming in. Castro could be

sending agents."

Chiles' emergency declaration authorises the Florida National Guard to help deal with the ragtag flotilla making the perilous 90-mile (145-km) crossing of the Florida Straits. Guard troops currently are on standby.

There are hundreds of people, perhaps thousands, massing on the shores of Florida, Chiles said. "A true emergency exists for the state of Florida."

He urged Cubans to stay in their homeland, saying: "The Castro government is clearly weakening and the day of freedom in Cuba is near."

Castro apparently is carrying out his threat to open Cuba's ports after the worst rioting of his 35-year communist rule. In 1980, 125,000 refugees arrived in Florida in

five months.

The Coast Guard has rescued 2,750 Cuban refugees from the Florida Straits this month, including 547 on Wednesday, the biggest single day since the 1980 exodus. By late Thursday, 527 refugees had been picked up.

Reno said the detentions would continue until a determination is made on how they should be processed by the INS.

Since 1966, Cubans arriving in Florida have been released to relatives or other sponsors in the United States upon their arrival, after being interviewed by immigration officials.

Until Reno's announcement, Cubans who arrived were briefly questioned by US Immigration and Naturalisation

Service agents at the Coast Guard base in downtown Key West and then taken by bus to the Cuban Transit Center. From there they go on to Miami, home to the largest Cuban community outside Havana.

At the transit centre, a small blue cluster of buildings, Maritza Matarram, 15, of Miami Beach, worked 18 hours straight until 4 am Thursday and was back on the job five hours later, taking down information from the refugees.

"Sometimes it is very sad hearing the stories," she said. "I just can't keep from crying sometimes."

A new arrival said he sailed with a group of 15 Cubans after hearing the Castro government was no longer stopping refugees from leaving.

"Before, when we try, they

risking their lives to get to the United States only to land in what some described as jail."

"I'd like to tell (Renol) that she needs to put herself in these people's shoes and think how she would feel after fleeing Cuba and then landing in jail," said Leticia Ramos, who was at the exile-run transit center to await the arrival of relatives who were on their way to the United States.

Daniel Ortiz, 23, who was picked up by the Coast Guard late Wednesday, said he didn't expect Reno's announcement to make a difference in the flow of refugees. He said hundreds of people in his village of Cogiman, which has about 7,000 residents and is near Havana, were building rafts and making other plans to leave when they left the communist island Tuesday.

CMJA conference in Zimbabwe from tomorrow

The tenth triennial conference of the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association (CMJA) will be held at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, August 21-27, says a press release.

This year the conference has put its focus on judicial independence through judicial education. The participating judges and magistrates from Commonwealth countries will examine various elements which make up judicial independence and will then explore the acquisition of enhanced knowledge and skills — judicial education — necessary to buttress that independence. They will also explore the interaction of these two critical preoccupations of the judiciary and magistracy of today.

International

Pakistan denies involvement in plutonium smuggling

ISLAMABAD, Aug 19: The Pakistan government on Thursday denied any involvement in plutonium smuggling through Germany, reports AFP.

"We regret the statement made by Berlin state officials regarding an alleged plot to ship plutonium to Pakistan. We note that no arrest have been made and no radioactive material seized. Yet, a 'suspicion' has been voiced," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

"A constant campaign to implicate Pakistan in every clandestine activity related to nuclear matters is obviously directed by quarters with a vested interest in maligning Pakistan," he said.

The German daily Die Welt reported that German police on Wednesday arrested a Pakistani, two Poles and a

allegations stems from the fact that a Pakistani is amongst those under investigation, it should be noted that Germans and Poles are also cited as being part of the same ring," he added.

"We suspect that either plutonium was sent to Pakistan or was about to be sent," an official from the local German Justice Department was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

The Pakistan embassy in Bonn also put out a similar denial on Thursday, adding that Pakistan did not need plutonium as it already had the technology to manufacture nuclear weapons.

Islamabad has always de-

nied possessing a nuclear weapon, while confirming it has to means to make one.

Western experts believe the country has either already built one or more nuclear weapons and if not could do so in a very short time.

Islamabad denies Indian charges that it is training and arming Kashmiri militants seeking independence or union with Pakistan.

An estimated 17,000 people have been killed in the four-year Muslim uprising in two-thirds of Kashmir under Indian rule.

Rao greets Chandrika

COLOMBO, Aug 19: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao today congratulated the new Sri Lankan Premier Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, reports PTI.

In his message, Rao, who was probably the first world leader to felicitate Mrs. Kumaratunga, recalled the close relations between the two countries which, he said, withstood the tests of time. "I look forward to working closely with you in strengthening these relations," Rao said.

Mrs. Kumaratunga was sworn-in as the 11th Prime Minister of the island by President Dingir Banda Wijetunga at the president's official residence this morning along with her 20-member Cabinet.

The new premier, who was a visiting lecturer in the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi has working knowledge of Hindi.

Sarajevo airport put on red alert

SARAJEVO, Aug 19: UN peacekeepers put Sarajevo airport on red alert on Thursday after a mortar round exploded next to the runway and three aid planes spotted gunfire underneath them after take off, UN officials said.

No UN relief flights to the Serb blockaded Bosnian capital were hit but a UN military spokesman told Reuters the airlift would resume only if the red alert was lifted.

"The airport has been put on status red, which means it is closed," Commander Eric Chaperon, a spokesman for the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), told Reuters.

Major Dacre Holloway, another UNPROFOR spokesman, said a 120mm mortar bomb crashed onto a taxiway next to the main tarmac in the late afternoon.

"There was also gunfire about 200 feet below the last three flights out, we're not sure whether the planes might have been targeted. There was no hit," he said.

The rebels were joined by Afghan and Arab mercenaries, he said.

"That's not only Tajikistan's domestic affair, it's a challenge

Off the Record

Honecker is back!

FRANKFURT: Germans thought they were rid of Erich Honecker. But he's back, in the form of a computer virus, reports AP.

On Aug 13, the 33rd anniversary of construction of the Berlin Wall, a likeness of the late former East German leader popped up on thousands of computer screens.

After the playing of the East German national anthem, computer programmes were destroyed "by the order of the DDR (East German) Council of Ministers."

"Honecker's last revenge — I'll be back," was then displayed on screens.

Honecker was the nickname given to the stern-looking communist leader, who died in May in exile in Chile.

Ralph Werthman, from the Bochum GDATA company which specialises in combating computer viruses, said his firm has set up a special telephone hotline for computer users to report the virus.

His company is developing software to destroy the Honecker virus.

Couple spent night in motel with corpse under bed

FORT LAUDERDALE, Florida: Police searched Thursday for a German couple who spent the night in a motel near the beach unaware that a corpse was under their bed, reports AP.

The dead man was identified as 47-year-old Bryan J. Gregory, who police said used multiple aliases and had previously been charged with crimes ranging from fraud to drunken driving and arson.

The German couple, who are not suspects in the murder and were not identified by police, checked into the Villa Venice motel Monday night and checked out Tuesday. Two of their children had stayed in an adjoining room.

"They had noticed a strong odour for several days," city police spokeswoman Sonya Friedman said of motel employees. "They just thought it was a bad smell. No one bothered to look for the source until it became overwhelming."

Police discovered the body Wednesday wrapped in plastic and tucked under a platform bed.

Wedding plans go up in smoke over a bubble-bubble

KUWAIT: Marriage plans went up in smoke when a groom refused his fiancee's demands to stop smoking the bubble-bubble, a water pipe used throughout the Middle East, the Saudi newspaper Al-Madina reported yesterday. The man in an unidentified southern region of the kingdom preferred to stay single after she made it a condition of wedlock, the newspaper as saying.

Attempts at reconciliation by the couple's relatives were futile, Al-Madina said.

Russia on Friday demanded the Afghan government take urgent steps to stop attacks from its side of the border.

Afghanistan has denied supporting the rebels, but concedes it has little control over the region.

Russian troops are patrolling the border in the former Soviet republic, helping to bolster Tajik government forces in their battle against Islamic rebels.

The Russians were able to defeat Friday's assault with the help of an artillery barrage, Malyutin said. One Russian commander even called in an artillery attack on his own position to turn back the rebels.

Soldiers in one outpost repelled 15 attacks overnight, Col. Vladimir Novikov, acting commander of Russia's border guards in Moscow, told Reuters.

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