

BRIEFLY

Ghali to visit India from Sept 8: United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Ghali will pay a three-day visit to India from September 8 for high-level discussions on all aspects of the UN activities, especially the peacekeeping operations. It was learnt here yesterday. Xinhua reports from New Delhi.

Mandela visits his ex-prison: Nelson Mandela returned Tuesday to a prison where he was held for six years, this time as a president intent on helping the inmates. AP reports from Cape Town.

Mandela spoke to the prisoners at the Pollsmoor maximum-security prison where he was jailed from March 1982 to August 1988.

"The overcrowding is beyond words," he told a news conference afterward. "That is something disturbing." He said he would raise the prison overcrowding issue with his Cabinet.

Stolen uranium seized in Russia: Authorities arrested two unemployed men and seized 9.5 kilograms (21 pounds) of uranium-238 that had been stolen from a secret nuclear centre, a news agency reported Wednesday. AP says from Moscow.

Russian police and counter-intelligence agents arrested the two men and seized their stolen material on Sunday. ITAR-Tass said, quoting source in the Russian Interior Ministry. The uranium-238 was stolen from the secret nuclear centre in Arzamas-16, one of a network of closed cities built during the Soviet era for the research and development of nuclear weapons.

Shenzhen to grant visa-free entry: China's State Council will allow the southern special economic zone of Shenzhen to grant 72-hour visa free entry to foreign visitors, a newspaper said yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The decision was recently granted in a move to promote tourism in the zone set up to attract foreign investment and technology, the China-funded Ta Kung Pao said.

Sweden freezes aid to Lesotho: Sweden has frozen its economic aid to Lesotho following removal of the democratically elected government in that country, the Swedish Foreign Ministry announced on Tuesday. AFP reports from Stockholm.

Israelis kill 2 in S Lebanon: Two guerrillas were killed in a clash with an Israeli patrol inside the strip of territory Israel occupies in South Lebanon, security sources said Wednesday. AP reports from Marjayoun.

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a guerrilla squad infiltrated late Tuesday into the village of Gantara, just inside the central sector of the enclave Israel maintains as a "security zone." An Israeli patrol spotted the infiltrators and fighting ensued.

Bomb blast hurts 3 in Austria: A pipe bomb exploded in the southern city of Klagenfurt early Wednesday, injuring three policemen, including one who lost both arms, authorities said, AP reports from Vienna.

Police had no immediate leads on who left the bomb in front of a bilingual school. Officials were alerted by a resident living near the school who said he saw someone leave an unidentified object in front of the building, the Austria Press Agency reported.

Suharto undergoes medical check-up: Indonesian President Suharto underwent a medical check-up yesterday after complaining of kidney problems. State Secretary Mardiono said, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Mardiono said that a presidential team of doctors had examined the president after he complained that he felt stones in his left kidney. The doctors found that the stones had already dissolved and there was no need for further treatment.

China to launch satellite: China will launch an Australian communications satellite Sunday, a China-backed newspaper in Hong Kong said Wednesday, reports AP from Hong Kong.

Optus B3, owned by the Sydney-based company Optus Communications Ltd, will relay television signals and telephone calls to Australasia, the Wen Wei Po reported.

Iran, Turkmenistan sign gas deal: Iran and its northern neighbour, Turkmenistan, have signed a major deal to pump Europe-bound Turkmen gas across Iranian territory, Iran's official news agency said Wednesday, AP reports from Nicosia.

20,537 killed for dowry in India: A total of 20,537 Indian women have been killed over four years starting in 1990 over marriage dowries. Minister of State for Home Affairs P M Sayeed said yesterday, reports AP from New Delhi.

India should go for N-bomb: BJP

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: India's main opposition party today demanded that the government should go for nuclear weapons to counter nuclear threats from arch rival Pakistan, reports AFP.

The Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said this was necessary in the wake of Tuesday's revelation by former Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif that his country possessed nuclear weapons.

"We have always believed and said that Pakistan is a nuclear power," BJP spokeswoman Sushama Swaraj said here. He (Sharif) has only confirmed our apprehensions.

"We strongly believe that India should have a (nuclear) bomb to counter this threat from Pakistan. We have demanded this before. But it has

become all the more necessary now."

Sharif, who was in office for two-and-a-half years until he resigned last year, reportedly told a public rally in the Pakistani held Kashmir: "I confirm that Pakistan possesses an atom bomb."

The Pakistani government's stand has always been that it has the ability to produce nuclear weapons but that it has taken a policy decision not to make one — a position also voiced by Sharif during his rule.

India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, says it does not have a bomb. In June, however, Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao said India would keep its nuclear option open.

India refuses to sign the

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), calling it discriminatory against countries which do not have nuclear weapons. Pakistan says it will not sign the treaty until India does.

Sharif's comments drew no immediate reaction from the Indian government and the Secretary of the Department of Atomic Energy, R. Chidambaram, refused to comment.

"As a scientist, I have no comments," the Indian Express Newspaper quoted Chidambaram, as saying. "He (Sharif) is a politician. You should probably ask in Indian politician..."

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since their independence in 1947.



Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif addressing a public meeting at Neela Butt in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir August 23. Sharif said his country has nuclear weapons, and warned India against launching a nuclear attack against Pakistan. The government strongly denied Sharif's statement. — AFP photo

Palestinians take control of education system in WB

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Aug 24: Israel signed over the school system of this key town to Palestinian control Wednesday, reports AP.

"We have inherited a problematic education system," said Mohammed Siwwar, director of the Teachers' Union in the West Bank.

The change is expected to do little toward solving problems of overcrowding, decayed facilities, and students whose concentration has been severely disrupted by the seven-year uprising against the occupation.

Cheating on final exams was rampant, with any teachers who attempted to interfere facing the threat of having their cars torched.

Among the biggest questions was where the Palestinians will get the estimated \$40 million to run the

various departments they are scheduled to take control of in the West Bank.

The signing ceremony in Ramallah Wednesday coincided with negotiations in Cairo for extending that control to health, culture, welfare, tourism and taxation. Agreements could be signed this week.

Palestinians have asked donor countries for \$9.5 million to cover expenses before they organize to collect their own taxes. Officials refuse to give an overall budget figure for the schools.

International donors have been slow in transferring the \$800 million pledged for schools and other development projects, demanding that the Palestinians first organize a strict accounting system.

The entire education system in the territories still under Israeli occupation is due to

be in Palestinian hands by August 29, part of the plan to widen Palestinian autonomy beyond the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho. The school year starts Sept. 1.

During the 27-year occupation, only the top administrators were Israelis in the education system that included 12,000 employees serving 250,000 students.

"This is the first step in the West Bank to controlling civil authorities," said Naim Abu Humus, director-general of education for Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's self-rule authority, as he signed the agreement.

"We hope donor countries will help us do our job," he added.

Israeli officials also cautioned that without more money, the Palestinian school system could crumble.

UN blames Aided's men for killing Indian troops

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 24: There are "clear indications" that members of General Mohamed Farah Aided's militia were responsible for killing seven Indian peacekeepers in Somalia, a UN spokesman said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The comments came after three militia were detained and being questioned by Indian forces.

"It has not been firmly established who is responsible for the attack, but there are some rather clear indicators that the three interviewed are all said to be members of the sub clan of General Aided," said spokesman Fred Eckhard.

Gunmen massacred seven soldiers and wounded nine belonging to the UN operation in Somalia, but the motive for the attack was unknown. Three Somalis were killed and three captured.

Abiola sues HC Chief Judge

LAGOS, Aug 24: The jailed opposition leader Moshood Abiola on Tuesday sued the Chief Judge of the Federal High Court for his continued trial on treason charges at the specially created Federal High Court in Abuja, reports AFP.

The action, filed on democratic lawyers, named Chief Judge Batunde Beforé and federal Attorney-General Olu Onagoruwa.

The suit said the trial of Abiola in Abuja is illegal, unconstitutional, null and void, since the offences for which he was charged were allegedly committed in Lagos.

The action cited section 45 of the federal High Court Act which states that "an offence shall be tried at court exercising jurisdiction in the area or place where the offence was committed."

The suit also asked the court to issue an injunction restraining the respondents from proceeding.

Talks on Jerusalem yield no results

RABAT, MOROCCO, Aug 24: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators made no headway in four days of talks in Morocco over the future status of Jerusalem, the official MAP news agency reported, says AP.

The negotiating teams also traded proposals, without reaching any accord, on the role of Jewish settlers in the Israeli-occupied territories.

The closed-door meetings were held under the auspices of King Hassan II, who heads the Arab League's committee on Jerusalem. The city is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The delegations were headed by Eli Dayan, a Labour Party member of Israel's parliament, and Ahmed Taibi, a political adviser to Palestine Liberation Organisation Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Almost no details of the talks, which ended late Tuesday in Casablanca, filtered out.

Off the Record



Miss Korea Hyun Ah Sung, who was crowned Miss Photogenic for the '94 Miss International beauty pageant, poses during a press preview on Wednesday in Tokyo. Some 52 contestants will be vying for the Miss International crown on Sept 4 in the final competition. — AFP photo

First lady stripped of official functions

LIMA: President Alberto Fujimori said Tuesday night that he was stripping his wife, Susana Higuchi, of her official functions as Peru's first lady, saying unscrupulous advisers had skillfully fed her political ambition, reports Reuter.

"I have decided to separate my wife from her functions of first lady, a job which she, on the other hand, has rejected publicly and on repeated occasion," Fujimori said in a televised address to the nation.

"From now on, Higuchi can carry out her political activities in open opposition to the government when and where she pleases, like any citizen, but not as first lady," he added.

Fujimori has been visibly affected by public statements by Higuchi, from whom he has been living apart since her public protest this month over an electoral law that bans her from seeking office and criticism of his rule.

Higuchi, who uses her maiden name, has made "generalised and vague accusations" of corruption in Fujimori's government which generate uncertainty and damage the country's image abroad, the president said.

Madonna stalker jailed

LOS ANGELES: A 26-year-old drifter who claimed to be Madonna's husband got a year in jail for scaling a fence around her Hollywood Hills estate, reports AP.

A trial was supposed to have begun Tuesday for Todd Michael Lawrence of Arizona, but he unexpectedly pleaded no contest to attempted entry into a building and battery on a police officer, both misdemeanors. He was then sentenced and ordered to go immediately to jail.

He had faced up to 2 and 1/2 years in prison.

Lawrence was arrested July 19 at Madonna's house after a guard saw him scale a fence.

Court records show Lawrence had been stalking Madonna for two weeks before his arrest. He once rang the front gate buzzer at Madonna's home and told her assistant he was Madonna's husband, records show.



Typhoon death toll now 1000 in China

BEIJING, Aug 24: China's prosperous eastern province of Zhejiang has been devastated by a killer typhoon, with the city of Wenzhou alone saying today its worst storm in 160 years killed at least 1,000 residents, reports Reuter.

The province as a whole faces economic losses that provisionally top 1 billion dollar, officials said.

Officials in Wenzhou reached by telephone said 771 people were confirmed dead in the greater metropolitan area, with at least 490 people missing.

"Of the missing, I guess we won't be able to find 300 or so," said city propaganda official Chen Weiguang. "This was our worst storm in 160 years."

He said the figures were certain to rise since three of the worst-hit countries in Wenzhou had not reported in

because they were still inundated by flood waters.

A small island in the coastal municipality was completely swallowed by the raging tides.

Chen said he did not have an estimate of the number of people seriously injured by typhoon Fred, which roared through Zhejiang at the weekend, dumping rain and causing some of the highest tides in 20 years.

Provincial officials today could not give accurate casualty figures for the province as a whole, repeating that about a quarter of the province's 42 million people had been affected by the storm.

High winds and pounding rains destroyed farmland, collapsed thousands of houses, cut electricity, ruined roads and forced thousands of factories to shut down.



A Rwandan refugee is pushed back by a Zairean paratrooper on the border bridge Ruzizi on Tuesday. Zairean authorities are strictly controlling the refugee flow leaving Rwanda as a result of the inter-ethnic war. — AFP photo

Somali kidnappers to free Swedish aid worker soon

STOCKHOLM, Aug 24: Somali kidnappers holding a Swedish aid worker appeared ready to release her without a ransom, a Swedish aid official said Tuesday, reports AP.

Lena Thelander, 28, a worker from the private charity International Aid Sweden, was taken hostage August 7 in Mogadishu, apparently by clan members seeking money.

A Somali women's organisation has been negotiating with clan elders for Thelander's release, said Per Lindahl, spokesman for International Aid Sweden, in an interview with Swedish Radio.

Lindahl said the negotiators have reported that the kidnappers were about to set the woman free.

"It can be soon, it may take another few days... I am rather hopeful," Lindahl said in the interview.

Indian troops kill 10 Kashmiri militants

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 24: Indian paramilitary police shot dead 10 Kashmiri Muslim separatists today as members of two militant groups held a meeting, police said, reports Reuter.

They said one civilian was also killed as security forces raided a house in the village of Dangarpora in the central district of Budgam, after a tip-off that the meeting was taking place.

Eight of the militants killed belonged to the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which is fighting for a reunited and independent Kashmir, and included a district commander identified as Bashir Ahmed, they said.

Two belonged to the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, which wants to join Pakistan, ruler of one third of Kashmir.

India and Pakistan have

fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947, two of them over Kashmir.

There was no immediate information about what discussions were taking place between the two groups, which have fought each other in the past.

Police said paramilitary troops surrounded the house in Dangarpora early today and called on the militants inside to surrender. The militants opened fire in reply, they added.

There was no information on whether the security forces had suffered casualties during the latest clash in a bloody rebellion against Indian rule over two-thirds of Kashmir.

Police and hospitals have reported more than 17,000 deaths in the rebellion since it erupted in 1990.

France, Germany to help stop N-material smuggling

PARIS, Aug 24: France and Germany today expressed their concern over the recent nuclear material smuggling and their readiness to take all measures to help stop it, reports Xinhua.

The news came after French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe and his German counterpart Klaus Kinkel held two-hour talks in Bordeaux, southwestern France, today.

The two ministers announced that European Foreign Ministers will gather in Germany soon to work out measures to fight the nuclear material smuggling.

Waves of Cuban refugees cause havoc for rescuers

KEY WEST, Florida, Aug 24: With no sign that Cubans are heeding US advice to stay home, the coast guard has called in more ships to intercept refugees sailing towards Florida, AP reports.

Hundreds of flimsy rafts and inner tubes bobbed in the choppy Florida Straits Tuesday, stretching the resources of their rescuers close to the breaking point. There were 3,077 refugees rescued, the most in one day since the 1980 Mariel boatlift.

The bodies of eight rafters washed ashore near Havana, Cuban radio reported. Those who search for refugees say many others are dying, though the exact number will probably

never be known.

"We've never seen anything quite like this," said coast guard Lt. Cmdr. Jim Howe. "We're throwing everything at it that we have."

Cuba acknowledged for the first time Tuesday that it has relaxed its migration policy, although it remains opposed to illegal departures and blames the United States for prompting the current exodus.

"It's total chaos out there and it's getting worse," said Arnaldo Iglesias, a leader of Brothers to the Rescue, a group of Cuban exiles that searches for rafters. "We are begging people, 'Please don't do it.'"

The Brothers to the rescue

planes drop packages of Snickers bars, fresh water and smoke flares to rafters. Pilots call in raft locations to the coast guard.

Howe said the coast guard gets to all the rafts that are spotted, although it sometimes takes a few hours.

"There's nothing we can do about that, other than send a message saying: Stay home," Howe said.

A total of 280 Marines were dispatched from Camp Lejeune, NC, to assist with security and crowd control aboard refugee-carrying coast guard and navy ships.

During the Mariel boatlift, which brought 125,000 Cubans to Florida's shores in five

months, as many as 5,000 refugees came ashore in a day. So far this year, about 16,000 Cubans have come ashore.

Cubans have been fleeing in greater numbers since the Aug 5 riots in Havana which prompted Cuban leader Fidel Castro to threaten another Mariel.

Unlike the Mariel exodus, when most Cubans came in boats carrying a dozen or more people, the recent rescues average only three or four people per raft.

Since last week's policy change by the Clinton administration, Cubans intercepted at sea are being taken to the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, on Cuba's southeastern tip,

where they will be held indefinitely.

In Washington, Defence Secretary William Perry described Guantanamo as a "boring, frustrating" place with nothing for arriving Cubans to do.

Another defence official worried about restiveness. "It's not clear that three squares a day and a soccer field are going to be enough" to maintain calm, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Several Caribbean countries agreed last month to take in Haitian refugees interdicted at sea and US officials are now trying to renegotiate those agreements to include Cubans. The White House has pre-

16000 children killed in Bosnia

ZAGREB, Aug 24: The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina has killed more than 16,000 children since it erupted in April 1992, the UN Children's Fund said today, reports AP.

UNICEF special envoy Tom McDermott said in a statement that nothing could justify the bloodshed involving children in the ex-Yugoslav republic, putting the exact number at 16,614.

The figure was released after the killing of five children in an attack on a school in the northwest Bosnian enclave of Bihać over the weekend. Seven others were injured in the incident.