

BRIEFLY

India may send troops to Rwanda:

The Indian government is likely to send troops to Rwanda as part of the UN peacekeeping force, a government official and diplomats said on Friday. Reuter reports from New Delhi.

"It is being actively and positively considered," the official, who asked not to be named, told Reuters. "It is being looked at favourably."

Israel closes mosque in WB:

The Israel army closed a mosque and blocked off roads in Ramallah on Friday to avoid a repeat of demonstrations that left one Palestinian dead last weekend, military sources said. AFP reports from West Bank.

Troops ordered the Gamal Abdel Nasser Mosque closed for 48 hours, imposed a partial curfew and shut off access roads to this occupied West Bank town to avoid disturbances, the sources said.

US leaves Somalia by Sept 15:

The United States will pull all its remaining diplomatic and military staff out of Somalia by September 15, the US envoy to the bandit-ridden African country told on Friday. Reuter reports from Mogadishu.

"We are leaving by the middle of September," Daniel Simpson said in an interview. He said Washington's decision to end its mission was due to the failure of Somali factions to reach a peace accord and a worsening security situation.

24 drowned in Baluchistan:

Twenty-four people, including 16 children, were drowned on Friday when their minibus was swept away by floods in Pakistan's Baluchistan province, a local government official said. Reuter reports from Quetta.

The bus was travelling near the eastern Baluchistan town of Dera Bugti when it was swept away by a sudden flood caused by rains, the official Zafar Baluch said.

US, Caribbean leaders to meet:

A key US diplomat and a senior Defence Department official will meet Caribbean leaders next week to discuss continuing problems in Haiti, State Department spokesman Mike McCurry said on Friday. Reuter reports from Washington.

Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Deputy Secretary of Defence John Deutch in Jamaica on Tuesday will meet Foreign and Defence Ministers of the nations of the Caribbean Community (Caricom).

ME naval confce from Aug 29:

Canada will host a symposium for naval officers from the Middle East that for the first time will bring together high-level Israeli and Arab officers. External Affairs Minister Andre Ouellet said on Friday. AFP reports from Ottawa.

The conference, to be held in the eastern city of Halifax from August 29 to September 1, will focus on joint search and rescue operations, prevention of accidents at sea and cooperation in enforcing security in the region.

2 Algerians held in Rabat:

Police captured two members of an Algerian armed group planning attacks on banks, security forces and citizens at large, Morocco's Interior Ministry announced on Friday. It said Algerians would henceforth need visas to enter the country. AP reports from Rabat.

The announcement represented the first sign that an Islamic insurgency in neighbouring Algeria may have spilled into Morocco.

Wildfire claims one:

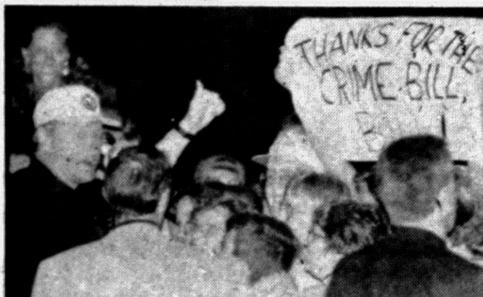
A volunteer tractor operator who spent long days trying to help contain a 4,500-acre (1,820-hectare) wildfire was killed when flames exploded through the area where he was cutting firebreaks. AP reports from Sams Valley.

Sydney Bruce Maplesden Jr, 25, was killed on Thursday night by a fire that had advanced within two miles (3 kilometres) of this rural community, where more than 100 homes had been evacuated.

AI criticises US crime bill:

President Bill Clinton's new crime bill, which will increase the use of the federal death penalty, is "a major setback for Human Rights in the USA," Amnesty International said in a statement on Friday. AFP reports from London.

This extension just adds to the grave concerns we already have about the use of the death penalty in the USA, which is applied disproportionately to the poor, minority groups, the mentally ill or retarded, and those without adequate legal representation, said the statement issued by the London-based Human Rights group.



US President Bill Clinton greets well-wishers after arriving on Martha's Vineyard on Friday. The Clintons started their vacations after Congress passed the crime bill and started their recess. — AFP photo

Clash leaves 34 dead in Turkey:

Army sweeps through southeastern Turkey have left 23 Kurdish rebels and 11 soldiers dead on Friday, officials said. AFP reports from Ankara.

The operations are being conducted against Kurdistan Workers Party guerrillas in the Hakkari, Bingol and Sirkak regions, according to a statement from authorities in Diyarbakir who coordinate the fight against the 10-year-old insurgency.

Indonesian plane crashes:

A private airplane has crashed into an elementary school building in Indonesia, killing its pilot and copilot, but hurting no one else, an official news report said on Saturday. AP says from Jakarta.

Antara News Agency said the ultra-light plane, on a flight from Jakarta to Semarang in central Java, about 544 kilometres (340 miles) to the east, crashed into the left side of the school building in Semarang late Friday but did not cause serious damage.

Tarek Aziz to go to UN:

Iraqi Deputy Premier Tarek Aziz was to arrive in the United Nations on September 10 to push again for an end to an international oil embargo against his country, diplomatic sources said on Friday. AFP reports from United Nations.

His arrival coincides with preparations for a new debate in the UN Security Council on the sanctions against Iraq scheduled for September 14-15.

6 Moros die in Philippines:

Six Muslim guerrillas working as security guards on a dam project were killed in a gunbattle with army troops in the southern Philippines on Saturday, the military said. Reuter reports from Cotabato City.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels were killed in a shootout near the dam project in Cermen.

Gunmen kill 2 in Egypt:

Suspected Islamic fundamentalists in upper Egypt killed one policeman and injured another late Friday, hours after a similar attack nearby claimed a tourist's life, the official Mena press agency reported. AFP says from Cairo.

The conscript policeman, who was on guard with a colleague outside a building in the village of Genua, was used as a police housing unit, was killed when a gang of unknown assailants open fired with automatic weapons, the agency said.

Serbs set to reject int'l peace plan

PALE, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Aug 27: Bosnia's Serbs began voting Saturday in a two-day referendum that is expected to give an resounding 'no' to an international peace plan, reports AP.

The balloting was widely considered irrelevant by the outside world, including neighbouring Serbia, which has branded it a crude attempt by Bosnian Serb leaders to legitimize their rejection of the plan.

The mood was grim and defiant in Pale, the Bosnian Serb stronghold just east of Sarajevo, as polls opened on a cool, cloudy day.

"Everyone will vote no," said Mico Stancic, a man in his mid-70s, as he cast his ballot. "There is no way that we could accept this suicidal plan."

The United States has warned that continued rejection could prompt the lifting of an arms embargo on the

Muslim-led government, which has been outgunned by Bosnia's minority Serbs in 28 months of war.

The peace plan, proposed by the United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany, would reduce Serb holdings to 49 per cent of Bosnia from the current 70 per cent. A rival federation of Bosnian Muslims and Croats, who have accepted the plan, would get the remaining 51 per cent.

But Bosnian Serb leaders say the division would leave them with an unviable state and prevent them from uniting with Serbia, the largest of the two remaining republics in Yugoslavia. The quest for such a union was the reason they started the war in April 1992 as Bosnia seceded from Yugoslavia.

Radovan Karadzic, president of the self-proclaimed Serb state within Bosnia, denounced the plan in a televi-

sion broadcast Friday in Pale.

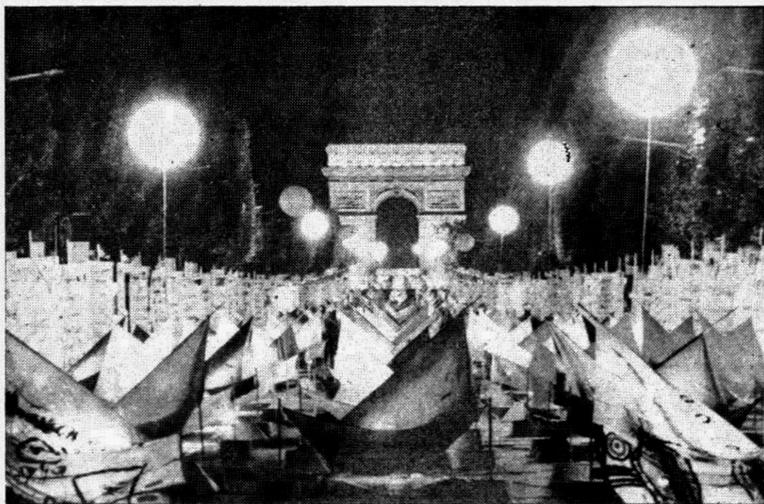
He threatened to block all UN aid supplies traveling across Serb territory to Muslim areas and vowed to crush the Sarajevo government's forces.

"The Muslim state will cease to exist," he said. As for the possible lifting of the arms embargo, Karadzic said, "They may get arms, but by then they would not have enough people to use them."

"Bosnian Serbs contend that the peace plan gives most of Bosnia's natural resources, factories, mines and strategic towns to the Muslim-Croat coalition.

His bitter complaints, fervently spread by his own propaganda machine, are shared by most Bosnia Serbs.

"Whoever votes for this plan is a traitor of the Serbian nation," said Nenad Markovic, a Serb fighter in Grbavica, a Serb-held district of Sarajevo.



Long lens view of a sea of flags and banners flying over the Champs Elysees in Paris on Friday, during a ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of General Charles De Gaulle's victorious march down the avenue after the liberation of the French capital. — AFP photo

Lanka receives military hardware from Russia

COLOMBO, Aug 27: Sri Lanka has begun taking delivery of secondhand military hardware bought from Russia under a 72-million dollar deal to re-equip security forces fighting Tamil separatists, officials here said, reports AP.

The first consignment of BMP one and two model armoured personnel carriers ordered from Russia's Veontech state enterprise were received two weeks ago and more were expected shortly, a defence ministry official said.

Under the deal Sri Lankan security forces will acquire, among other things, eight MI-

17 helicopters, around 200 BMP-1 and BMP-2 armoured vehicles, three Antonov AN-32 model transport planes and two patrol craft.

"These will enhance the combat capabilities and help improve logistics for frontline troops," an official said. He said the deal was backed by an agreement to supply spare parts.

He said a Russian delegation called on President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga after the official handing-over ceremony.

The Sri Lankan side wanted them to increase bilateral trade in other spheres also and particularly wanted

Russia to buy more Sri Lankan tea, the official said.

The arms deal was entered into by the previous administration of the United National Party (UNP) which lost the August 16 parliamentary elections to the leftist People's Alliance (PA).

The PA has already suspended a controversial 750-million dollar deal by the then UNP government to buy seven new Airbus aircraft.

New Premier Chandrika Kumaratunga has asked French-led Airbus industries for more time to reconsider the aircraft deal which should have been concluded on Monday.

Indonesia bans Al-Arqam

JAKARTA, Aug 27: Authorities in nine of 27 Indonesian provinces, including the capital Jakarta, have banned the activities of the Malaysia-based Al-Arqam Muslim sect from its territory, an official said here today, reports AP.

An official with the Attorney General's office said that provincial attorney generals of Jakarta, East Java, Central Java and West Nusa Tenggara have joined five other provinces to ban Al-Arqam.

"The teaching of Arqam is considered potent (enough) to disturb the harmony of religious life in Indonesia," the official said.

Five provinces — Aceh, Riau, West Sumatra, North Sumatra and West Java — had already banned the activities of the sect in their respective areas.

Indonesian authorities are due later this month to pronounce their verdict on the fate of the Al-Arqam, which has already been banned at its home-base, Malaysia.

A team of representatives from the religious affairs and home ministries, the military and its intelligence agency, were currently studying the movement in an effort to decide whether to recommend a government ban.

The ban would be produced by the attorney general's office. Attorney General Singih has said he needed more time to study the sect before making the decision.

The presence of the Al-Arqam movement in Indonesia has already sparked differences among the country's Muslims.

AP from Kuala Lumpur says: Fifteen voluntary groups, in-

cluding civil rights activists, on Saturday accused government of torturing and persecuting members of a banned Islamic sect.

"We are concerned with the principle of freedom of religion which is guaranteed by our federal constitution," said a statement by Suaram, a Malaysian umbrella organisation comprising human rights, religious, environmental, women's and students' groups.

On Friday, the Malaysian government gave police sweeping powers to arrest members of Al-Arqam, which was banned August 5 for allegedly spreading deviationist Islamic teachings. The government said the sect had become a national threat and was sowing disunity among the country's predominantly Muslim population.

Confce on 'Prophet's message for West' in UK today

SHEFFIELD, England, Aug 27: With a massive assembly here Sunday, the second in England in three weeks, Britain's 1.5 million strong Muslim community is making its presence increasingly felt, reports AP.

Organised by the United Kingdom Islamic Mission (UKIM) around the theme, "the Prophet's message for the western world," the conference here Sunday is expected to draw 2,000 Muslims and speakers representing Islam from several Muslim countries.

Billed speakers include Rashed Ghannouchi, leader of Tunisia's Annahda Movement, in exile in London the past three years, and Qazi Husain Ahmad, leader of Jamaat-Islami, one of Pakistan's two

Islamic fundamentalist parties. Earlier this month an international conference of Muslim fundamentalists attracted more than 6,000 Muslims to London's huge Wembley Stadium, where some Arab leaders were castigated for being too close to the West.

That conference, held shortly after car bomb attacks against the Israeli embassy here and a Jewish charity — blamed by Israel on Muslim fundamentalist groups — also engendered hostility from Britain's large Jewish community.

Britain's Muslim community, with more than 500 mosques and dozens of Quranic schools, is considered by experts as one of the most active in Europe.

has produced a plethora of Islamic organisations — nearly 300, according to some estimates — scattered throughout the United Kingdom and claiming few links with one another.

Nearly half of Britain's Muslims trace their roots to the Indian sub-continent, predominantly Pakistan and Bangladesh. Others come from Arab countries, as well as Nigeria, Turkey and Malaysia.

The Wembley conference, staged by the Organisation of Islamic Unity, was one of many attempts, according to Islamic experts, to unify the country's diverse Muslim community.

A myriad other groups aspire to the same goal, from the Muslim cultural centre of London, preaching a moderate and tolerate Islam, to the

US to compensate victims of April incident in Iraq

WASHINGTON, Aug 27: The United States said Friday it would pay 100,000 dollars in compensation to the families of the 11 foreign nationals who were killed in the April downing of two military helicopters in northern Iraq, reports AFP.

The payments will go to the families of the six British, Turkish and French military members killed in the April 14 incident, Pentagon spokesman Major Tom Laroque said.

The families of five Kurdish workers employed by the US government will receive a death benefit in the range of 20,000 to 30,000 dollars and the Pentagon will supplement that payment to bring it up to 100,000 dollars.

The Pentagon said in a report released earlier this year that the pilots of two US fighter planes had misidentified the helicopters as Iraqi and that crews on the observation plane had failed to tell the pilots the choppers were friendly.

Twenty-six people aboard the two US army helicopters were killed in the shooting by the fighter planes that were patrolling a restricted zone over Iraq.

Family members of the US military personnel on board the aircraft were eligible for a 100,000 dollar insurance payment and all but one had contributed to become eligible for a 200,000 payment.

Thailand won't allow LTTE men

BANGKOK, Aug 27: Thai authorities are to take steps to keep Sri Lankan Tamil separatists out of Thailand to thwart reported plans for terrorists activities here and in Europe, local newspapers said today, reports AP.

The Nation Daily quoted a well-informed Interior Ministry source as saying members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is fighting for a Tamil state in northeastern Sri Lanka, would be kept out of Thailand.

The LTTE may be using Thailand as a stopover for terrorists en route to Europe, according to documents sent to Bangkok from Sri Lanka, the daily said.

Government officials were not available today to comment on the reports.

DPRK opposes US proposal

SEOUL, Aug 27: North Korea is resisting a US proposal to hold low-level talks in Pyongyang and wants all meetings in Washington or New York, reports said Saturday, according to AP.

Preparatory consultations for the talks held in New York earlier this week hit a snag due to differences over the venue, with the United States proposing two teams of experts meet in Pyongyang and two others in Washington, Yonhap News Agency said, quoting Seoul government sources.

But North Korea, during a working-level preparatory session in New York on Thursday, insisted the expert talks be held in either Washington or New York, the South Korean national news agency said.

Mortar attacks on two Irish police stations: 10 hurt

BELFAST, Aug 27: Two Northern Ireland police stations were attacked by mortars on Friday, and 10 people were hurt at a bar when one of the bombs exploded prematurely, police said, reports Reuter.

The attacks came hours after an Irish-American delegation met the IRA's political wing Sinn Fein and expressed hope about a possible ceasefire in the Northern Ireland conflict.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Off the Record

105-yr-old files for divorce after 75 yrs together

TEHRAN: A 105 year-old Iranian has filed for divorce from his 100-year-old wife, saying he had stopped trusting her after 75 years together, a newspaper reported on Saturday, says AFP.

Mohammad Ismael Bahrami appeared in person to lodge his request at a court in Samirahm in central Iran, as his two children — aged 60 and 70 — held his arms for support, the Daily Salam said.

Bahrami told local reporters that he could not get along with his wife, Fatemeh Razavi, because she no longer followed his orders.

Razavi took advantage of her husband's trust and put money that was to be invested into her own bank account, he said.

"I can no longer live with her and want to get rid of her," Bahrami said.

Razavi, for her part, said the couple were happy until a month ago, but now she did not want to continue living with her husband.

Public caning for rapists?

KUALA LUMPUR: Less than a week after Malaysia unveiled a plan to flog women who immigrate illegally, a Cabinet minister said the government is also considering public caning for rapists, reports AP.

The government also plans to cane offenders older than 55, now exempt from the punishment, said Social Development Minister Napsiah Omar Napsiah, the Star newspaper reported Saturday.

"If they commit rape, then the punishment should also reflect the seriousness of their offences," she was quoted as saying.

Elderly people, who are looked upon as senior figures and respected, should be given the heaviest punishment if they betray that trust," Napsiah said Friday at a closing ceremony of annual games for handicapped people from six southeast Asian nations.

Malaysian law allows only men to be caned for drug offences, armed robberies and kidnapping. The caning is done on bare buttocks and often leaves scars.

Last Sunday, the Home Minister said the government was planning to expand the law to include women illegal immigrants who are brought into the country by labour agencies to work as maids. But he said the caning will be gentle and with clothes on so as not to break the skin.

The new proposal will take into account public opinion, said Napsiah, speaking in Johore Bahru town, 300 kilometers (180 miles) south of Kuala Lumpur.

She said the move is intended as a deterrent against victimisation of women and children.

Pachyderm Picasso

CALGARY ALBERTO: A Canadian zoo elephant is making a bid to become a Pachyderm Picasso by creating a collection on paintings that will be auctioned next month, reports Reuter.

Kamala, a 19 year-old female Sri Lankan, elephant at the Calgary zoo, holds a brush with its trunk and paints coloured abstract paintings for zoo visitors.

"We'll set up the easel and the paints and her ears will be flapping because she really gets into it," said Dave Perceval, an elephant keeper at the western Canadian zoo.

The elephant learned to paint as part of the zoo's animal behavioral enrichment programme, under which animals are given various activities to stimulate their intelligence, Perceval said.

We sort of monkeyed around with all of our elephants, but Kamala was the only one that had the dexterity and interest to keep painting, the elephant keeper said.

Kamala started out with watercolour paint on paper, but has since graduated to doing non-toxic acrylic painting on canvas, most of which look like a series of colourful dots and lines.

Perceval said six of the elephant's paintings are expected to fetch hundreds of dollars at a silent public zoo auction on September 10.

Trees injected fish genes

STOCKHOLM: Genetic researchers in northern Sweden are injecting trees with Arctic Fish genes to see if they become more persistent to cold, reports Reuter.

"It's actually less spectacular to use a fish gene than a bacteria gene from an evolutionary point of view," said researcher Olle Losson.

As part of field work for a six-year long experiment, the trees have recently been introduced into the Swedish forest.

The fish genes from Arctic flounder are being injected into trees along with 18 other gene sequences, including those from fireflies and bacteria, to see if any of them provide protection for the trees in the harsh Arctic winter.

Delhi blames Sikhs for bombing in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: India on Friday blamed Sikh separatists for the bombing of a school bus in northern Jammu and Kashmir state that killed eight people, including five children, reports Reuter.

Interior Minister Shankarra O Chavan told Parliament the bombing was carried out on Thursday by the Khalistan Zindabad (long live Khalistan) militants from Punjab state.

Police had earlier suspected Muslim Kashmiri separatists fighting New Delhi's rule of Jammu and Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in mainly Hindu India.

Sikh militants are fighting for an independent homeland in Punjab, which they call Khalistan or land of the pure. But their campaign has been largely dormant in recent years.

Chavan said the groups was also responsible for the bombing of another bus on July 7. "Investigation in the previous bombing has shown that Khalistan Zindabad force which has its roots in Punjab and receives directions from the Pakistani Intelligence Service was involved," Chavan said.

117 killed in Pak floods

ISLAMABAD, Aug 27: Due to heavy rainfalls and floods 117 people were killed and over 9,900 cattle were lost during the current monsoon season in Pakistan, a government press release published here today said, reports Xinhua.

High-level US team to visit 3 African states

WASHINGTON, Aug 27: President Clinton is sending a high level delegation of Americans to Burundi, Rwanda and eastern Zaire to help find solutions to the region's political and humanitarian crisis, the White House said on Friday, reports Reuter.

All three countries have been affected by the inter-tribal fighting between Hutus and Tutsis which led in Rwanda to the displacement of millions of people many of them into neighbouring Zaire. Hundreds of thousands were massacred.

American forces have been deployed in refugee camps in Zaire and at Kigali Airport in Rwanda to help with the reception and distribution of relief aid.

studies centre, said he saw no signs of 'radicalisation' in Britain's Muslim community.

"This community is extremely law abiding and not a single Islamic organisation in this country has been involved in violence," he said.

Anthony Hyman, a British terrorism expert, rejected the thesis that Britain had become a staging area for Islamic extremist groups.

"London is still a major centre for the Middle East, notably by virtue of Arabic newspapers published here," he said, "but that doesn't make it a centre for terrorism."

He said Britain's Muslims had had no involvement in past violence in London linked to the governments of Islamic countries.

Muslim 'Parliament' of Great Britain, which has publicly supported the Iranian *fatwa*, or death sentence against British author Salman Rushdie.

Only one group, the Islamic Party of Britain (IPB), founded in 1989, has run candidates in local British elections, obtaining negligible results.

In its latest monthly newsletter, the IPB terms "Martyrs" sympathisers of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) being detained in France.

The FIS militants are also supported by a group calling itself the Algerian community of Great Britain, which has organised demonstrations in front of the French embassy here.

Basil Mustafa, professor at Oxford University's Islamic