

BRIEFLY

NASA-Boeing accord: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Boeing agreed on the key elements of the international space station contract, they announced Thursday in a joint communique.

The agreement covers the scope of the work and reinforces NASA's confidence that the station will be completed on schedule and within budget limits set by President Bill Clinton and Congress.

Dispute over Falkland Islands: Argentina has rejected Britain's protest in the latest dispute over the Falkland Islands, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday. AFP reports from Buenos Aires.

In a statement, the ministry said it was sending a letter of protest to Britain, which had dismissed Argentina's re-instatement of claims over the islands in the south Atlantic.

Pope prays for N Ireland: Pope John Paul II said Friday that he is praying that Northern Ireland is moving toward "an increase of trust, mutual respect and harmony on the part of everyone involved," AP reports from Dublin.

The Pope's message to Cardinal Cahal Daily, the Roman Catholic primate of Ireland, was released by the Catholic Press and Information Office in Dublin. The message came on the second day of a cease-fire called by the Irish Republican Army.

Quake rocks Greek border: A powerful earthquake rocked the Greek-Macedonian border Thursday, sending panicked residents running into the streets and injuring at least 10 people, seismologists and press reports said, according to AFP from Salonika.

The seismic laboratory at Salomika University in Northern Greece said the quake registered 5.9 on the Richter scale.

Catholic shot dead in Belfast: A Catholic man was shot dead late Thursday in north Belfast, police reported, the first shooting since a ceasefire announced by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) came into effect at midnight on Wednesday. AFP reports from Belfast.

Police said the unnamed man was working with a colleague on a car in Skeggonell Avenue at around 11:00 pm local time (2200 GMT) when two gunmen appeared through a hedge and fired five shots.

Argentina wants ties with Iran: Argentina favours normalising ties with Iran after relations were strained by allegations that the Islamic republic was involved in a deadly anti-Jewish attack in Buenos Aires. Tehran radio said yesterday. AFP reports from Tehran.

In a message to the Iranian charge d'affaires in Buenos Aires, the Argentinian government said it accorded a great deal of importance to ties with Iran and wanted to strengthen links between the two countries, the radio said.

US picks up 1500 Cubans: Nearly 1,500 Cuban rafters were picked up at sea by the US coast guard Thursday, as US and Cuban government officials met to discuss the refugee crisis. Reuter reports from Miami.

Wednesday the coast guard picked up 2,159 Cubans from small homemade rafts and boats, pushing the total for the entire month of August to 21,300.

Zemin invites Clinton: Chinese President Jiang Zemin renewed yesterday an invitation to US President Bill Clinton to visit China. AFP reports from Beijing.

"We have already invited President Clinton to visit China, so if he decides to come we will accord him a warm reception," Jiang told reporters before leaving China for a 10-day European tour.

6 die in Bombay bldg collapse: A dilapidated five-storey building collapsed in a Bombay suburb, killing six people and injuring 11 others, police said Friday. AP reports from Bombay.

The building was evacuated recently after heavy rains in the western metropolis. An adjacent bakery collapsed by the impact of falling debris on Thursday night, police said.

US envoy meets Shevardnadze: UN Ambassador Madeline Albright assured Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze on Thursday that the United States supports the return of Georgian refugees to the breakaway province of Abkhazia. AP reports from Tbilisi.

"We discussed the Abkhazia problem, and the peacekeeping mission, and our views on that and other issues coincided," Shevardnadze said after their meeting.

10 Thai women held in Taiwan: Taiwan police have arrested 10 Thai prostitutes in an eastern county and local policemen are suspected of involvement in the case, a prosecutor said yesterday. Reuter reports from Taipei.

"We are investigating into the case to see if any policemen are involved in the case," the prosecutor in Huilien county told Reuters by telephone. Police arrested the Thai women at a local brothel last Tuesday, but the arrests were not made public.

11 die in Java accident: An express train has collided with a bus in Central Java, killing all 11 people on board the mini-bus, police said Friday. AP reports from Jakarta.

The collision Thursday in Kebumen, about 500 kilometres (310 miles) southeast of Jakarta, occurred when the bus stalled in a railroad crossing and was hit by a train from Solo, also in Central Java, said Col Mutamin Sunoto of the local police. He said all of the victims were killed instantly and the bus was dragged 500 metres (yards).

Perez Balladares takes charge: President Ernesto Perez Balladares took office on promises to transform Panama's economy and step up the war on drug traffickers, street crime and political corruption. AP reports from Panama City.

Five years after Gen Manuel Noriega was toppled by a US-led invasion, the dictator's party returned to power with Thursday's inauguration of Perez Balladares. But the 48-year-old millionaire businessman said his party had reformed.

2 shot dead in Egypt: Suspected Muslim extremists shot and killed a policeman and a police guard in southern Egypt, the government said Friday. AP reports from Cairo.

The latest violence came as 15,000 people were pouring into Cairo for the UN International Conference on Population and Development, which opens Monday. The radical Al-Gamaa al-Islamiya, or Islamic Group, had warned participants to stay away or risk violence.

Mandela in Jakarta: South African President Nelson Mandela arrived in Jakarta yesterday for a two-day unofficial visit in his capacity as leader of the African National Congress (ANC). AFP reports from Jakarta.

Mandela, greeted by Foreign Minister Ali Alatas at the airport declined to comment on the purpose of the visit but promised to give more details after Mandela had met with President Suharto.

France confirms death: The French Foreign Ministry confirmed Thursday that a French national was killed August 25 in the western Algerian city of Oran. AP reports from Paris.

The French newspaper *Le Monde* reported earlier that Rene Bouhanna, a Jewish French national aged about 60, was shot to death outside his Oran home.

ROK FM goes to US Monday: South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo will leave for Washington on Monday for talks with US President Bill Clinton and senior officials on the North Korean nuclear issue, officials said yesterday. AP reports from Seoul.

The visit was announced a day after the State Department said US negotiators would hold twin meetings with their North Korean counterparts September 10 in Berlin and Pyongyang to discuss reactors and exchange of liaison offices.

International

Army tell Kumaratunga to reject Tamils' demand

COLOMBO, Sept 2: The armed forces have told Sri Lanka's new government to reject the Tamil rebels' demand for a ceasefire until peace talks begin, military sources said Friday, reports AP.

The military fears the rebels would use a ceasefire to build up their defences in the 11-year ethnic conflict, as they did during 13 months of peace talks that ended in June 1990.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga held a four-hour meeting with three military chiefs and field commanders, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

The government confirmed that the meeting took place, but refused to say whether the military had opposed a ceasefire.

"We are very interested in the government holding peace talks, but not keen on declaring a ceasefire that would be a respite to the Tamil Tigers," said a source who was at the meeting.

The prime minister assured the military officials that they would be involved in the peace process. She also repeated her socialist government's commitment to ending the conflict, which has killed more than 34,000 people, the source said.

The Peoples' Alliance (PA) won control of Parliament in an August 16 election and offered unconditional peace talks with the insurgents, who are fighting for an independent homeland.

But the Tamil Tigers then set three conditions for talks:

lifting a four-year embargo on basic commodities in rebel-held areas, declaring a ceasefire, and allowing people to travel in and out of heavily guarded guerrilla zones.

The government on Wednesday partially lifted the embargo on rebel-held northern Sri Lanka in an effort to lure the guerrillas to peace talks. The embargo impoverished 600,000 Tamils of Jaffna Peninsula by depriving them of basic commodities such as soap, candles, batteries and kerosene.

The rebels from the Hindu Tamil minority accuse the majority Buddhist Sinhalese of discrimination in jobs and education. Tamils form 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people.



Palestinian school girls wearing traditional Muslim dresses sit in their classroom in the Ramallah High School in the West Bank on Thursday. The school year opened yesterday in the West Bank with Palestinians in charge of their own education system for the first time.

— AFP photo

Gaddafi threatens to destroy North Africa, ME

TRIPOLI, Sept 2: Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, celebrating his 25 years in power, warned on Thursday that western countries would pay a high price for any attack against him and threatened he would also set fire to North Africa and the Middle East, reports AP.

The Libyan leader, whose country has been under UN sanctions since 1992 to pressure him to hand over for trial two men suspected of involvement in the 1988 bombing of an American airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, said he would never hand them over to the United States or Britain for a trial there.

We want to inform them

(the western countries) ... and let them know that there is a giant air and land force," Gaddafi said, commenting on the military parade in Tripoli he watched earlier in which 1,000 Soviet-made tanks as well as jet fighters took part.

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There are two million people ready to enter the battle ... Libya will blow up North Africa, it will open the borders from the Atlantic to the Gulf and distribute arms to all those who want them: We will trans-

form the area from the Atlantic to the Gulf into a hell," he said.

Gaddafi appeared upset that several Arab and African heads of state he invited to attend the celebrations did not make the trip.

Only the heads of states of Algeria, Chad, Sudan, Mali and Comoros Islands attended, while more than 70 countries sent lower level delegations. They were present at the rally.

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