

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 reinstatement 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 Daly, 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 Salonika 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 Skegonell 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 Abkhazian 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 Hualien 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. AFP 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 Sang-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. AFP 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.

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 guerilla zones.

The government on Wednesday partially lifted the embargo on rebel-held northern Sri Lanka in an effort to lure the guerillas 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 Reuter.

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.

"Whatever action against Libya will represent a big danger for its author, who will pay highly its price," he added in a 70-minute speech at a night-time mass rally in Tripoli.

"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.

"There are those who cannot come to Libya without authorisation from the American embassy ... only those who are courageous come to Libya ... whoever relies on America is the first among the little people," Gaddafi said.

Constitutional convention begins in Myanmar

BANGKOK, Sept 2: Some 700 delegates answered the chairman's gavel reconvening the constitutional convention in Yangon today and resumed efforts to hammer out a new charter for Myanmar.

The convention, which had been in recess the last five months, is working to produce a new constitution for Myanmar that will restore democracy to the impoverished southeast Asian nation but maintain a leading role in government for the military.

Roughly one-third of the delegates were hand-picked by the ruling junta and are committed to supporting a continued leadership role for the military.

Another third are members of opposition political parties, including the main National League for Democracy (NLD), while the rest represent various segments of Myanmar society ranging from ethnic minorities to labour unions.

Haitians allowed to leave country

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Sept 2: The military-backed government has begun allowing Haitians granted US political asylum to leave Haiti, the American Embassy said Thursday.

Ninety-one Haitians took two buses to the neighbouring Dominican Republic on Wednesday and caught charter flights to the United States, embassy spokesman Stanley Schragar told The Associated Press.

Nearly 2,000 Haitians with US approval for political asylum, many of them key supporters of exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, were blocked from leaving when commercial air travel to Haiti was banned July 30. The ban was part of world sanctions aimed at forcing the army out of power.

The *de facto* government had refused to allow the Haitians to leave by charter flights or other means since the ban. No reason was given for the government's turn-about.

Human rights groups

weakly applauded Wednesday's release.

"This is a small first step," Kenneth Roth, director of the private Human Rights Watch organisation, told The Associated Press.

But he said it doesn't help the vast majority of Haitians who face severe repression and are forced by the United States to choose between in-terminable detention in Guantanamo and a largely inaccessible in-country processing procedure.

Roth was referring to the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where the Coast Guard has been sending all Haitians who fled by sea. Other Haitians who want to leave have to undergo a lengthy US procedure in their country for asylum. Fewer than 5 per cent of applicants are accepted.

Although up to 3,000 political killings have taken place since soldiers overthrew Aristide in 1991, *de facto* Foreign Minister Charles David insisted Wednesday that those accepted for US asylum face no danger.

Mubarak urges Muslim states to attend Cairo meet

CAIRO, Sept 2: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak advised Muslim nations they would be the losers if they boycotted a UN conference on population in Cairo, reports Reuter.

In an interview published by the London-based Al-Hayat newspaper today, Mubarak urged Muslim countries to attend to get a chance to oppose clauses in a draft document they feel violate Islamic teachings and principle.

Their presence will make it harder for resolutions to be passed on matters they oppose, he argued.

"If there are some items in the proposed document with ambiguities, that could be interpreted in many ways, wouldn't it be in the interest of the Islamic nations for their representatives to attend, oppose and stand up to any interpretation that is against religion and the Islamic Sharia?" Mubarak asked.

Marijuana seized from Indian ship

MOSCOW, Sept 2: Russian customs agents inspecting an Indian-flagged cargo ship seized 240 kilograms (530 pounds) of marijuana, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported Friday, says AP.

The ship had been transporting prefabricated metal pieces from Poland to Lithuania via the Russian port of Kaliningrad when it was searched, the news agency said.

Customs agents worked in cooperation with local police and counterintelligence officers, ITAR-Tass said.

In another smuggling case, customs agents in Russia's Far East confiscated 134 kilograms (295 pounds) of ephedrine, a substance commonly sold in China but banned in Russia because it can be used to make a narcotic substance.

The substance, worth an estimated 120 million rubles (54,000 dollars), had been concealed in suitcases carried by Russian and Chinese citizens, ITAR-Tass said.

Vietnamese celebrate Independence Day

HANOI, Sept 2: Patriotic songs, family picnics and fireworks were the order of the day Friday as Vietnamese celebrated the 49th anniversary of their country's independence, reports AP.

For many children and adults alike, brilliant weather on National Day meant ice cream sundaes and animal-shaped balloons at the Lake of the Restored Sword in the heart of downtown Hanoi.

On state-run television, readings of patriotic poems and a film about a Vietnamese insurrection against the colonial French government replaced popular dramas from China and Japan.

Newspapers praised the memory of Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam's foremost nationalist and pioneer communist, who declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam independent of both France and the defeated Japanese on September 2, 1945.

France to attend NATO meet

PARIS, Sept 2: France will attend a meeting of NATO defence ministers this month for the first time since it withdrew from the alliance's military command in 1966, officials said today.

Government officials told Reuters that Defence Minister Francois Leotard would attend the meeting in Spain at the end of this month.

France, while remaining a full political member of the 16-nation alliance, withdrew from its military structure in 1966 in protest at what Paris saw as US domination of European security issues.

While France has no intention of rejoining NATO's military structure, western diplomats said it represented a major step towards closer relations with the alliance in the post-cold war era.

Off the Record

\$ 4.25b settlement on breast implants

BIRMINGHAM (Alabama): A judge approved a 4.25 billion dollar settlement on breast implants Thursday, finalising the largest liability agreement between patients and implant manufacturers, reports AP.

Attorneys for foreign recipients immediately objected to the ruling by judge Sam Pointer, which they said did not set aside enough money for overseas settlements.

More than 90,500 women have applied for the compensation agreed to in April by some 60 companies, including Dow Corning Corp, which will pay two billion dollars of the settlement.

Each woman suffering from diseases blamed on the implants will receive between 105,000 dollars and 1.4 million dollars, but those amounts could be reduced if officials find there is not enough money to cover all the claims.

About 15,000 recipients — about half of them foreign — rejected the settlement, claiming that at least 200 billion dollars would be needed to cover all the claims.

A September 16 deadline was set for applications in the first set of payments and recipients will have 30 years to draw from the fund.

Vaccine alone not enough to defeat AIDS

WASHINGTON: A powerful vaccine alone will not conquer AIDS and it could even make the epidemic worse, say researchers who find it will take safe sex practices and other changes in behaviour to eradicate the virus, reports AP.

Experts studying how to halt the AIDS epidemic report this week in the journal Science that publicity about an AIDS vaccination could be enough to cause a sharp increase in cases because it may create a false sense of safety and cause people to take more risks.

"We could have a reverse outcome if risk behaviour increases as a consequence of a vaccine being available," said Sally M Blower, an epidemiology specialist at the University of California, Berkeley. "You could end up with a more severe epidemic."

Blower and Angela R McLean, an Oxford University epidemic expert, used the gay community in San Francisco as a model to study what would be required to wipe out HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. They concluded that final answer does not lie in vaccinations alone.

AIDS is a disease that is principally spread through sexual intimacy, or the sharing of needles among intravenous drug users. Safe sex and clean drug needles are known to reduce the spread of the disease, and are key to conquering AIDS, said Blower.

Pig head sightings up on Japanese streets

TOKYO: Residents in a Tokyo suburb have come face-to-face with 150 bodiless swine in 16 separate pig head sightings recently, police said Friday, adding that an investigation is planned, reports AP.

In the most recent pig head sighting, a 28-year-old housewife found 10 of the heads in vinyl bags on a city road in Omiya, just north of Tokyo on August 28, said Minoru Tsunoda, an official at the city's Environment Bureau.

"It's beyond comprehension," Tsunoda said. But for the woman who found the swine craniums, it was traumatic: "I was so scared by the pig heads I got goose bumps," she was quoted as saying by the national daily newspaper Mainichi Shimbun. The newspaper did not name the woman.

The bureau and police are planning a joint investigation of the rash of apparent illegal dumpings, which pose a health hazard.

Annual pig head sightings have grown exponentially in Omiya since 1992, when a total of five cases were reported, followed by 10 last year.



A model displays a pure white sculpture-like ensemble of Hong Kong designer William Tang on Thursday during the first ever Hong Kong Fashion Week — Spring/Summer '94. — AFP photo

Moscow summit to draw Russia, China closer

MOSCOW, Sept 2: Chinese President Jiang Zemin arrived in Moscow this afternoon on a five-day official visit to Russia at the invitation of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, reports Xinhua.

When the Boeing-747 plane landed at Moscow's Sheremetevo-1 Airport, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and some other Russian leaders were waiting there to welcome President Jiang.

In Moscow, the Chinese leader will discuss with Yeltsin and other Russian leaders ways of building friendly and good-neighbourly relations and mutually-beneficial cooperations between the two countries.

Jiang is also expected to

sign a package of documents including a Chinese-Russian joint declaration on bilateral relations.

Earlier, AP report said, President Jiang headed for Moscow Friday for a summit expected to bring the two nations closer than they have been in decades.

If all goes as planned during the visit, Jiang's first to Europe since becoming president, the two military powers of the East will never again point their nuclear weapons at each other.

During Jiang's visit China and Russia are also expected to sign a border accord that puts to rest most of the two countries' territorial disputes, and

they are to discuss ways to bolster ballooning bilateral trade.

Jiang then travels to the Ukraine and to France.

"I believe that my visit will help push relations between China and these countries to a new high and that this will have a positive impact on world peace, stability and development," Jiang told reporters before his departure.

Relations between Beijing and Moscow have not always gone smoothly. An alliance based on their shared allegiance to communism broke down in the early 1960s and the two sides feuded until the late 1980s.

An official rapprochement

was formally reached in 1989, and trade and other ties have expanded since the signing of a joint declaration in 1992.

China's Communist leaders were dismayed by the collapse of the Soviet Communist empire, and they have rejected Russia's subsequent democratic reforms as unsuitable for their own developing nation.

"There cannot and should not be just one system of democracy," Jiang said. "You must accept various systems of democracy, otherwise, it is not democratic."

"China and Russia have different situations and it is natural for them to take different steps with regard to reform," he added.

2 Palestinians shot dead

GAZA CITY, Sept 2: Unidentified gunmen shot dead a Palestinian estate agent and his son Thursday in the autonomous Gaza Strip, police said, reports AFP.

Yussef Al Makassia, 50, and his 24-year-old son Majdi were killed when gunmen shot at their car as they drove through Gaza City.

The attack was not immediately claimed.

In the Intifada or Palestinian uprising, which began in the occupied territories in December 1987, several estate agents suspected of selling land to Israelis through fictitious middlemen were killed.