

BRIEFLY

Major to visit Hague, Berlin: British Prime Minister is to visit The Hague and Berlin in mid-week. Downing Street said on Tuesday. AFP reports from London.

After lunch with his Dutch counterpart, Socialist Wim Kok, Major will set out his vision of future of the European Union in a speech at the University of Leiden.

Iraq's denial: Iraq's deputy prime minister has denied reports that Baghdad has had contacts with Israel aimed at making peace with the Jewish state in return for the lifting of UN sanctions. AP reports from Nicosia.

In a signed article in Wednesday's edition of the London-based Al-Quds al-Arabi daily, Tariq Aziz said: "There is no basis for the claims about contacts between Iraq and Israel."

Tajik list of extremists: The former Soviet Republic of Tajikistan has handed over to the United Nations a list of seven Islamic militants which it claims are mercenaries, according to a document released on Tuesday. AFP reports from United Nations.

The list included citizens of Iraq, Algeria, Afghanistan and one national simply identified as "Arab". Tajik ambassador Lakim Kayumov claimed that more than 100 fighters from 10 countries have backed Muslim opposition forces in their guerrilla warfare against the pro-Communist government in Dushanbe.

Mexican leader shot dead: An opposition political party said one of its leaders was shot and killed on Tuesday and another detained in southern Chiapas state, AP reports from Mexico.

Both leaders belong to the Democratic Revolutionary Party, whose supporters say their gubernatorial candidate was robbed of victory by fraud in last month's election.

Hurd to visit Japan: British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd will visit Japan from September 16 to 19 for talks with Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama and Foreign Minister Yohsei Kono, the Foreign Ministry said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Hurd will visit Tokyo on the last leg of his Asian tour, which also covers Thailand, Vietnam and Hong Kong. He will discuss bilateral and international affairs with Japanese leaders, the ministry said.

China, Ukraine sign accords: Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Ukrainian counterpart Leonid Kuchma, meeting in Kiev, on Tuesday signed several agreements to boost bilateral ties, Interfax news agency reported. AFP says from London.

The agency, in a dispatch monitored in London by the BBC, said the two leaders signed a joint political statement as well as an agreement covering cooperation between Ukrainian and Chinese law enforcement agencies and a protocol on an exchange of information at the level of foreign ministers.

Fire claims 8 in Taiwan: A fire swept through a dormitory housing members of a troupe of performing artists in southern Taiwan early yesterday, killing eight people including a two-month-old baby, state radio reported, Reuters says from Taipei.

The blaze engulfed the building in the early hours of Wednesday. The eight occupants — two men, five women and the baby — were quickly overcome by smoke and were unable to escape, the radio quoted firefighters as saying.

ROK journalist visits DPRK: A reporter from a pro-opposition newspaper in Seoul has arrived in Pyongyang, becoming the first South Korean journalist to visit the North since Kim Il-Sung died in July, the daily's spokesman said yesterday. AFP reports from Seoul.

Chong Yon-Ju, 48, Washington correspondent of Hankyoreh Shinmun, arrived in Pyongyang late Tuesday aboard the North Korean national flag carrier Korean Airways linking China's Beijing to the North Korean capital, the spokesman said.

Haitian lawyer shot dead: A Haitian lawyer working for a prominent law firm was shot and killed in front of the courthouse next to an army barracks on Tuesday afternoon, witnesses said. Reuters reports from Port-Au-Prince.

Haitians gathered in the street around the body. Said the dead man was Charles Jean Baptiste, a lawyer in his early 40s.

Discovery blasts off Friday: The space shuttle Discovery was cleared for launch this week after engineers ironed out several mechanical problems, NASA said on Tuesday. AFP reports from Cape Canaveral.

"We think we've got three clean engines and we're ready to give it a try on Friday," said commander Richard Richards. "We've made a lot of progress with Discovery over the last couple of weeks." Discovery is to blast off Friday at 4:30 pm (2030 GMT) on a nine-day mission to study the earth's atmosphere with lasers.

Russian plane crashes: A MIG-23UB fighter jet crashed in central Russia on Wednesday, killing both air defence pilots aboard, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported. AP says from Moscow.

The plane, a two-seat training version of the standard Russian air force fighter, took off for a routine flight and crashed in the Yaroslavl region after reaching cruising altitude, the agency said.

6 held from Yangon brothels: Myanmar authorities have raided a high class brothel in Yangon, detaining the owner and six women, state-run Radio Yangon reported on Tuesday. AFP says from Bangkok.

The raid, August 25, took place at a motel in a wealthy part of the city, the Radio said in a report monitored in Bangkok, adding that clients were charged more than 13,000 kyats (2,000 US dollars) for sex with a prostitute.

Rao in Singapore: Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao arrived in Singapore yesterday for a three-day official visit. AFP reports from Singapore.

Rao was received at Singapore's Changi Airport by Information and Health Minister George Yeo. Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong will formally welcome the 73-year-old Rao at a ceremony at the Istana, official residence of Singapore President Ong Teng Cheong, today before talks.

Canada to send N-experts: Canadian nuclear specialists will work full-time in nuclear plants in Russia to improve safety practices and engineering designs, the Canadian embassy in Moscow said yesterday. Reuters reports from Moscow.

It said the specialists would be sent to Russia under a protocol agreement launching a joint nuclear safety and engineering programme.

Beijing confce in Oct: Chinese premier Li Peng and the foreign ministers of Australia, South Korea and Indonesia are to attend a high-powered conference in Beijing next month on Asia-Pacific issue, organisers said yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Trade Minister Supachai Panitchpakdi, Chinese Vice Premier and Economic Czar Zhu Rongji and "a very senior member" of the US administration are also expected, according to the draft programme.

13 arrested in S Korea: Prosecutors have broken a South Korean drug ring and arrested 13 people for smuggling, trafficking or taking drugs, prosecution officials said yesterday. Reuters reports from Seoul.

An official at the Suwon district prosecutor's office said Cho Sung-Soon, 38, and seven others had been charged with smuggling 450 grams (one pound) of amphetamines into the country between May and July and trafficking the drugs. Suwon prosecutors also arrested five others, including the president of a medium-sized company, on charges of taking the drugs on a regular basis.

LTTE attack on Lankan army ahead of peace talks

COLOMBO, Sept 7: Tamil Tiger guerrillas attacked an army outpost in northeast Sri Lanka, killing one soldier, as the Colombo government prepared to initiate a peace dialogue to end ethnic violence, military sources said, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched the overnight assault on an army unit at Padaviya and escaped after killing the soldier and wounding several others, a military spokesman here said.

The violence came as the government nominated a top civil servant to prepare the ground work for possible peace talks with the LTTE in an effort to end its separatist campaign which has claimed the lives of 30,000 since 1972.

Lionel Fernando has been asked to work out framework for talks, official sources said adding that he was expected to travel to the LTTE-dominated northern Jaffna peninsula shortly.

Fernando was once the top civil administrator in the Jaffna peninsula and also the governor of the Tamil majority northeastern province till he was made secretary to the Ministry of Information, Tourism and Aviation.

The government of Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga has already received an invitation for the LTTE supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran to visit Jaffna or send a representative to open negotiations.

All previous attempts to politically and militarily end the

conflict have ended in failure and often led to increased fighting between the Tigers and government forces.

Defence sources said the government was considering restoring electricity to LTTE-held areas. It was also planning to free some LTTE suspects held by security forces to strengthen the peace process.

Both sides have been making reciprocal gestures in the past week giving momentum the peace effort begun by Kumaratunga who came to power following last month's parliamentary election.

Meanwhile Reuters reports: The government will respond to Tamil rebel leader Prabhakaran's call for peace talks by asking him to name an emissary. Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte

said today.

"We will respond by asking them to nominate someone we can talk to. We are very keen to go ahead with talks."

He said the new People's Alliance (PA) government regarded a facsimile message signed by Prabhakaran as a direct invitation for negotiations.

According to a rebel newspaper, Prabhakaran has asked Tamilchelvam, head of the group's political section, to deal with the PA government which was voted into power last month after 17 years of United Nations Party rule.

For the past 11 years, Sri Lankan security forces have been fighting a fierce war with the LTTE, who want a separate state in the north and east for the 2.5 million Tamil minority community.

World War II bomb explodes in Nagaland

NEW DELHI, Sept 7: A bomb dating from World War II exploded in the far eastern state of Nagaland where Japanese troops unsuccessfully fought the British to enter India, the Press Trust of India said on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Officials in the state capital Kohima said the bomb went off on Monday when a labourer struck it with a spade while digging a hole in a city district. Nobody was injured, they added.

The frontier state with its Christian-majority tribal population fiercely devoted to India's former British rulers was a battleground towards the end of the war.

Tajik polls postponed

DUSHANBE, Sept 7: Tajik lawmakers voted Wednesday to postpone this month's presidential election and a referendum on the new constitution, saying they needed more time to make them more democratic, reports AP.

"We call on the Opposition to nominate its candidate for the top government post," parliament Speaker Emomali Rakhmonov told the parliament session. His remarks were reported by the Interfax news agency.

The election was initially scheduled for September 25, but so far only Rakhmonov and Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov, the former Tajik premier and now ambassador to Moscow, have been nominated as candidates.

Deputies voted 153-3 to postpone the election until November 6.

Indian floods leave 600 more dead

NEW DELHI, Sept 7: Flash floods sparked by incessant monsoon rains have claimed at least 600 more lives in central and coastal India taking the toll to about 1,200, reports said on Tuesday, says AFP.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said downpours in central Madhya Pradesh province, adjoining Gujarat and Maharashtra, the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh and coastal Orissa had claimed about 600 more victims and rendered some two million homeless.

Estimates in July said at least 600 people were killed and some one million people forced out of their homes following the onset of the monsoons a month earlier.

Nigeria doubles detention period

LAGOS, Sept 7: Nigeria's military regime doubled the permitted period of detention without trial on Tuesday to crack down on people considered to be a security risk to the nation, the official News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) said, reports AFP.

The federal military government promulgated a decree providing for detention for an initial renewable period of three months. NAN said.

Iran gets Chinese missile boats: US commander

MANAMA, Sept 7: Iran has recently acquired four or five Chinese Huguang missile boats to bolster its rearmament programme, the US Navy commander in the region reported Tuesday, says AP.

"The threat from Iran is certainly growing" Vice Adm Douglas J Katz told The Associated Press in an interview as he winds up a two-year tour as commander of the US Central Command in the Gulf.

He is scheduled to formally hand over to Vice Adm John Scott Reed in Bahrain Wednesday.



Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto (R) chats with Prime Minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina Haris Siladzic (L) during extraordinary session of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which began in Islamabad yesterday. Benazir inaugurated the three-day extraordinary session of Islamic foreign ministers. — AFP photo

Al Arqam foreign members ordered to leave Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 7: All foreign members of the banned Al Arqam sect in Malaysia have been ordered out of the country immediately, the Immigration Department said on Wednesday, reports AP.

In announcing a series of moves against the 100,000-member Islamic sect, department spokesman Aris Chonin did not say what action would be taken against those who did not leave.

Aris said foreigners who are members of the messianic group banned last month for deviationist teachings, would be refused entry into Malaysia even if they have a valid visa and passport.

Aris also advised Malaysian members of the sect now abroad to return immediately

before their passports are invalidated. Malaysian embassies and missions have been ordered to stop renewing the passports of suspected Al Arqam members, he said.

Al Arqam claims to have branches in Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Australia, France, Egypt, Iraq, Germany, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Japan, Jordan and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Zabidi Mohamad, legal adviser to the sect, was reported to have been detained by police Tuesday night. Police declined to confirm the report in Wednesday's Star Daily.

Police, however, said that sect spokesman Jalani Jamani was now detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

This brought to four the number of people detained since Friday under the ISA, which provides for indefinite imprisonment without trial. Sect leader Asaari Muhammad, his wife Khadijah Aam and another of the movement's spokesmen, Said Sulaiman, are the others.

Human rights groups in Malaysia and Thailand and Malaysian parliamentary opposition leader Lim Kit Siang have criticised the arrests and called for trials.

Officials said the sect was banned for deviationist teachings, including claims that Asaari talked regularly to the Prophet Muhammad (SM), founder of Islam, and that Asaari was the modern messiah.

Rwandan govt send troops to take control of Hutu areas

KIGALI, Sept 7: The Tutsi-led government sent troops to begin taking control of southern Rwanda, where 500,000 Hutus have sought UN protection against feared reprisals for wartime massacres, reports AP.

The new government, trying to consolidate its July victory, has promised it will not tolerate reprisals against Hutus for the slaughter of an estimated 500,000 people, mostly civilians from Rwanda's Tutsi minority.

But there have been reports of retaliation against Hutus in other parts of the country, and UN officials worry that frightened Hutus in the southwest might flee to already crowded refugee camps in neighbouring Zaire.

In Brussels, the monitoring group Human Rights Watch said Tuesday it feared revenge

killings by soldiers loyal to the new government have claimed hundreds of lives and urged the United Nations to take action to prevent deaths.

Alison Des Forges, an investigator for the group, told reporters that three mass graves had been found north of the central city of Gitarama packed with hundreds of bodies, many had their hands tied and had apparently been beaten to death while the area was used as a military camp by soldiers of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front army, she said.

Des Forges said there was evidence supporting reports that hundreds of people were killed near a veterinary school in the southern city of Butare. The RPF has sealed off the school and denied entry to journalists and rights workers, she said.

In Zaire on Tuesday, sol-

diers of the defeated Hutu government said they would move to a new refugee camp as part of a UN effort to separate them from the general refugee population around the border town Goma.

The soldiers, who harbour hopes of making the majority Hutus the dominant ethnic groups again, have been accused of intimidating and sometimes killing refugees who want to return home.

The new Tutsi-led government, installed by the victorious Rwandan Patriotic Front rebels in July, sent about 150 soldiers Tuesday into a protection zone set up by French troops in Rwanda's southwestern corner as a haven for Hutus fleeing the rebel forces.

The French withdrew from the zone last month, leaving control of the area to a reluctant United Nations.

UN suspends aid flight to Sarajevo

SARAJEVO, Sept 7: Aid flights to Sarajevo were suspended Wednesday after two planes were hit by gunfire, deepening frustration in a city already angered over the Pope's decision to cancel his visit, reports AP.

Pope John Paul II on Tuesday cancelled a visit to the Bosnian capital because of increased firing over the past few days around the airport and extensive Bosnian Serb violations of an exclusion zone for heavy weapons around Sarajevo.

Some Sarajevans, under siege for 29 months, blamed the papal cancellation on the United Nations, which warned against the trip for safety reasons. UN special envoy Yasushi Akashi was singled out for criticism.

"Akashi should be tried as the worst criminal," the newspaper Oslobođenje quoted res-

ident Franjo Cvitanovic as saying.

The Serbs have repeatedly thwarted visits by world figures. US Defence Secretary William Perry called off a trip last month because of Serb threats. US official Richard Holbrooke abandoned plans to fly in this week after Serbs shot at a UN helicopter.

The Serbs have been tightening the siege of Sarajevo, closing the road over Mount Igman to the Southeast that is the only land route out.

The two aircraft were hit Monday and Tuesday, as Serbs and government troops exchanged gunfire in the airport area. No injuries were reported, and UN spokesman Maj. Dacre Holloway said the bullet holes weren't found until the planes returned to Zagreb, Croatia.

UN military flights were continuing Wednesday.

Off the Record

Devi sues 'Bandit Queen' makers

NEW DELHI: Reformed "bandit queen" Phoolan Devi is suing the makers of a highly-acclaimed movie on her life as an outlaw in the badlands of northern India, her lawyer said yesterday, reports AP.

The suit was filed in the Delhi High Court on Tuesday, charging that Devi's right to privacy had been violated by the film "Bandit Queen" and seeking damages which could run into millions of rupees, Pravin Anand said.

Director Shekhar Kapur, producer S S Bedi, author Mala Sen, whose book about Devi was the basis for the screenplay, and Britain's Channel 4 Television, which commissioned the film, were named as defendants.

"Broadly what she says is that her right to privacy has been violated by the film, which shows graphic details of sexual encounters which she never authorised them to show, gang-rape, for example," Anand told AFP.

"Under the Indian Penal Code, even the name of a rape victim cannot be disclosed by another even in writing. That in itself is a punishable offence," he said.

The film, which was applauded at this year's Cannes Film Festival and at Preview in India, has not been shown to Devi despite repeated requests and the former outlaw was not consulted during its making, he said.

"A film made on her gets to be made and screened without her being interviewed a single time. They did not show her even a rough cut of the film," Anand said.

"Richard Attenborough made a film on the life of Mahatma Gandhi. Can you imagine... if Gandhi had been alive, would he have made it without talking to him once?"

Damages would depend on the money-spinning potential of the film, he said. "Since it is a global venture, they could run into millions of rupees."

"Bandit Queen," her lawyer said, was a "radical departure from her true life story."

Kingly Charles naked in sunshine

BONN: Germany's mass-circulation daily The Bild yesterday broke new ground in the media's obsession with intimate pictures of Britain's royal family by printing a picture of a nearly nude Prince Charles on its front page, reports Reuters.

"Kingly Charles naked in the sunshine" blared the headline next to blurred photograph, apparently taken with a telephoto lens of the bronzed heir to the British throne standing wearing nothing but a folded white dressing-gown draped over his left shoulder.

The Bild raved about 45-year-old Charles' body — "hunky like a Greek statue" on the basis of what it called the first nude picture of the Prince, Queen Elizabeth's eldest son.

It did not reveal how the picture was taken, but it said Charles had been walking indoors from the pool during a holiday in Barroux in southern France at the village of a family friend, Baroness Louise de Waulhorst.

It said Charles was spending a solitary holiday walking, swimming, painting, driving around in his range rover and getting irritated only by the attentions of intrusive photographers.



Chinese Defence Minister in Delhi for talks

NEW DELHI, Sept 7: Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian arrived here today at the head of a high-level military delegation for talks that will reinforce a steady improvement in Sino-Indian relations, reports AP.

Chi's six-day official visit returns a July 1992 trip to Beijing by then Indian Defence Minister Sharad Pawar.

An Indian Defence Ministry spokesman described the visit as one more step in the "confidence-building" process undertaken by the two countries, which in 1962 fought a war over a border dispute that led to a 14-year freeze in diplomatic relations.

"You cannot expect an agreement or anything like that," the spokesman said. "It is aimed at further smoothing our relations, which are already on a positive track."

Chi was to have dinner with

Indian Commerce Minister Pranab Mukherjee in his only official engagement Wednesday. The Chinese delegation visits the Taj Mahal town of Agra on Thursday to witness a parachuting demonstration.

Official delegation level talks are set for Friday. The agenda includes measures to step up trade, particularly across the newly opened border trading posts, and possible troop cuts that the Indian spokesman called an ongoing process.

The Asian giants have in recent years tried to improve their ties in such areas as trade, pushing to the back burner the border dispute.

A series of high-level visits have been exchanged this year as part of the normalisation process, which includes an agreement to keep the peace on the frontier.



US pop singer Michael Jackson and his wife Lisa Marie Presley enjoy their honeymoon at Euro Disneyland in Paris, where they have been staying in the Sleeping Beauty Suite of the Disneyland Hotel on Tuesday. — AFP photo