

BRIEFLY

Britons lower guard: British soldiers in Northern Ireland officially lowered their guard yesterday in response to an IRA ceasefire, swapping helmets for berets and reducing the number of patrols, Reuter reports from Belfast.

They could have picked a worse day for it. Rain pured down, drenching the exposed necks and ears of the unfortunate "squaddies" on early morning duty.

Alija lashes out at UN: Bosnia's president, stung by Pope John Paul II's decision not to visit Sarajevo, has lashed out at the United Nations for warning the Vatican the trip could be dangerous, AP reports from Sarajevo.

President Alija Izetbegovic on Wednesday also said the United Nations should do more to silence Serb guns around the besieged capital. The Vatican announced the cancellation of the Pope's visit Tuesday after it failed to win Serb guarantees of safety for those who turned out to see the pope.

Crime on rise in China: Serious crimes in China rose by 20 per cent in the first six months of this year, the official press reported Thursday. AP reports from Beijing.

Overall, the crime rate was up 5.9 per cent compared with the same period last year, the China Youth News and China News Service reported, citing figures from the Ministry of Public Security. China does not release the number of criminal cases in reporting its crime statistics.

2 N Koreans defect to South: Two North Koreans, including a student who had studied in China, defected to South Korea on Thursday, bringing to 42 the number of escapees from the impoverished communist country so far this year, AP reports from Seoul.

Papuan PM declares truce: Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan declared a ceasefire with rebels on Bougainville island from yesterday making another key step to ending a six-year-old secessionist conflict, AFP reports from Port Moresby.

The indefinite ceasefire would take effect from midnight (1400 GMT), Chan told the Pacific nation's parliament.

Clinton to visit China: China said yesterday US President Bill Clinton had accepted an invitation to visit Beijing, but no dates had been set, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The visit would be the first by a US leader since George Bush came in February 18, shortly before a wave of Chinese democracy demonstrations.

Bees attack 140 Mexicans: A swarm of African killer bees attacked 140 people on Wednesday in the central Mexican state of Zacatecas, official news agency Notimex said, Reuter reports from Mexico City.

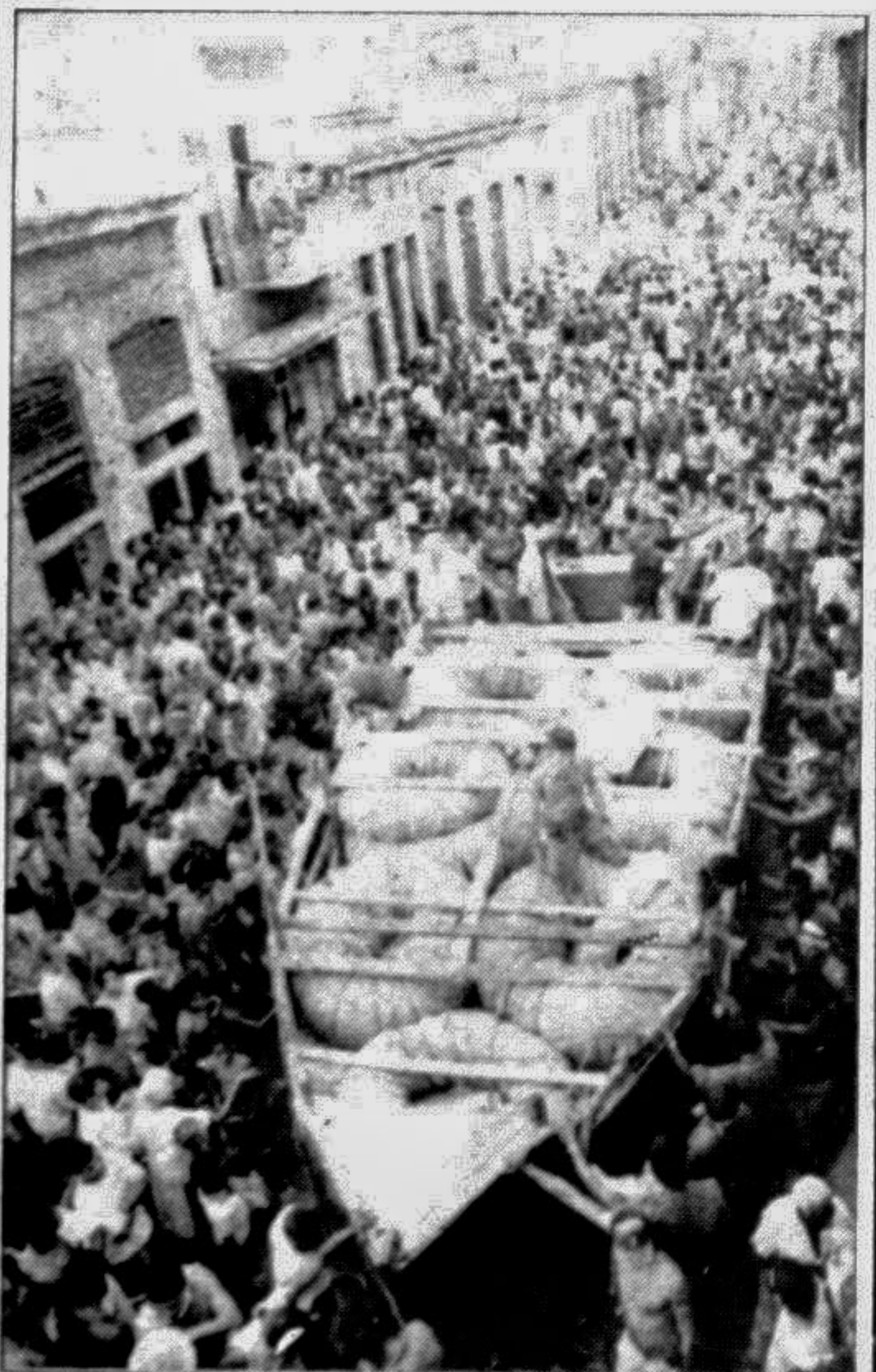
Local police in the town of Concepcion Del Oro said the attack occurred at a funeral for one of the town's residents, the agency reported.

US rock pianist Hopkins dies: Pianist Nicky Hopkins, who played on rock 'n' roll songs like "Jumping Jack Flash" by the Rolling Stones, has died at age 50, AP reports from Nashville.

Hopkins died on Tuesday at Saint Thomas Hospital, apparently of complications from abdominal and heart ailments. As a studio musician, he also played on "Sympathy for the Devil" and "Tumbling Dice" by the Rolling Stones, "Song Is Over" by the Who, "Revolution" by the Beatles and "Volunteers" by the Jefferson Airplane.

US guards rescue 1029 Cubans: The US coast guard rescued Wednesday 1,029 Cuban asylum seekers in the Florida Straits, a spokesman said, AFP reports from Miami.

On Tuesday 68 were rescued and 1,129 the previous day. Some 27,000 Cuban refugees have been picked up since August 5, when Cuban President Fidel Castro lifted most restrictions on leaving.



People on a Havana street throng around a large raft as it is secured on top of a truck before heading for a beach near Havana on Wednesday to carry more refugees away from the country. — AFP photo

Mine kills 8 in Phnom Penh: Eight people died after their taxi ran over an anti-tank mine thought to have been laid by Khmer Rouge guerrillas, in northwest Cambodia this week, the country's mine action centre said yesterday, Reuter says from Phnom Penh.

The taxi ran over the mine last Monday on a national highway near Battambang, said a spokesman for the centre.

Author of Shogun dead: Best selling author James Clavell, whose novels included "Shogun" and helped create the modern literary blockbuster, has died of cancer at the age of 69, his publishers said Wednesday, Reuter reports from New York.

Claudia Riemer, spokeswoman for publisher Dell Delacorte press, said Clavell died Tuesday in Vevey, Switzerland, where he had a home.

US marines begin exercises: Nearly 2,000 US marines began exercises on the tiny Puerto Rican island of Vieques on Wednesday in preparation of a possible US invasion of Haiti, AFP reports from San Juan.

The troops were practising to evacuate the 3,500 Americans living in Haiti said spokeswoman Elizabeth Jones of the Roosevelt Roads naval base in Puerto Rico.

Ghali for moratorium on Afghan war

ISLAMABAD, Sept 8: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali on Wednesday called for a moratorium on fighting in Kabul to allow humanitarian aid to enter the Afghan capital, a UN spokesman said, reports AFP.

Boutros-Ghali, who is in Pakistan for a three-day official visit, made the call during a meeting here with Mujahideen leaders, shortly after he had received a briefing from his special envoy to Afghanistan, former Tunisian foreign minister Mahmoud Mestiri.

Mestiri, who has been trying for several months to bring together the warring factions, said there was a "lack of political will" in favour of peace, the spokesman said.

The envoy, whose plans for talks collapsed last week, said he would make another attempt to bring the leader of the various factions back to the negotiating table, to which would also be invited representatives from non-combatant groups in the hope these could bring pressure on the others.

Since the Mujahideen defeated the former communist government in Kabul in April, 1992, factional fighting for control of the capital has left more than 12,000 dead and thousands more wounded.

Boutros-Ghali also held talks with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto who immediately raised the thorny question of Kashmir, the official Pakistani news agency APP said.

She also raised the issues of Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Somalia, where Pakistan has troops as part of a UN peace-keeping force.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars

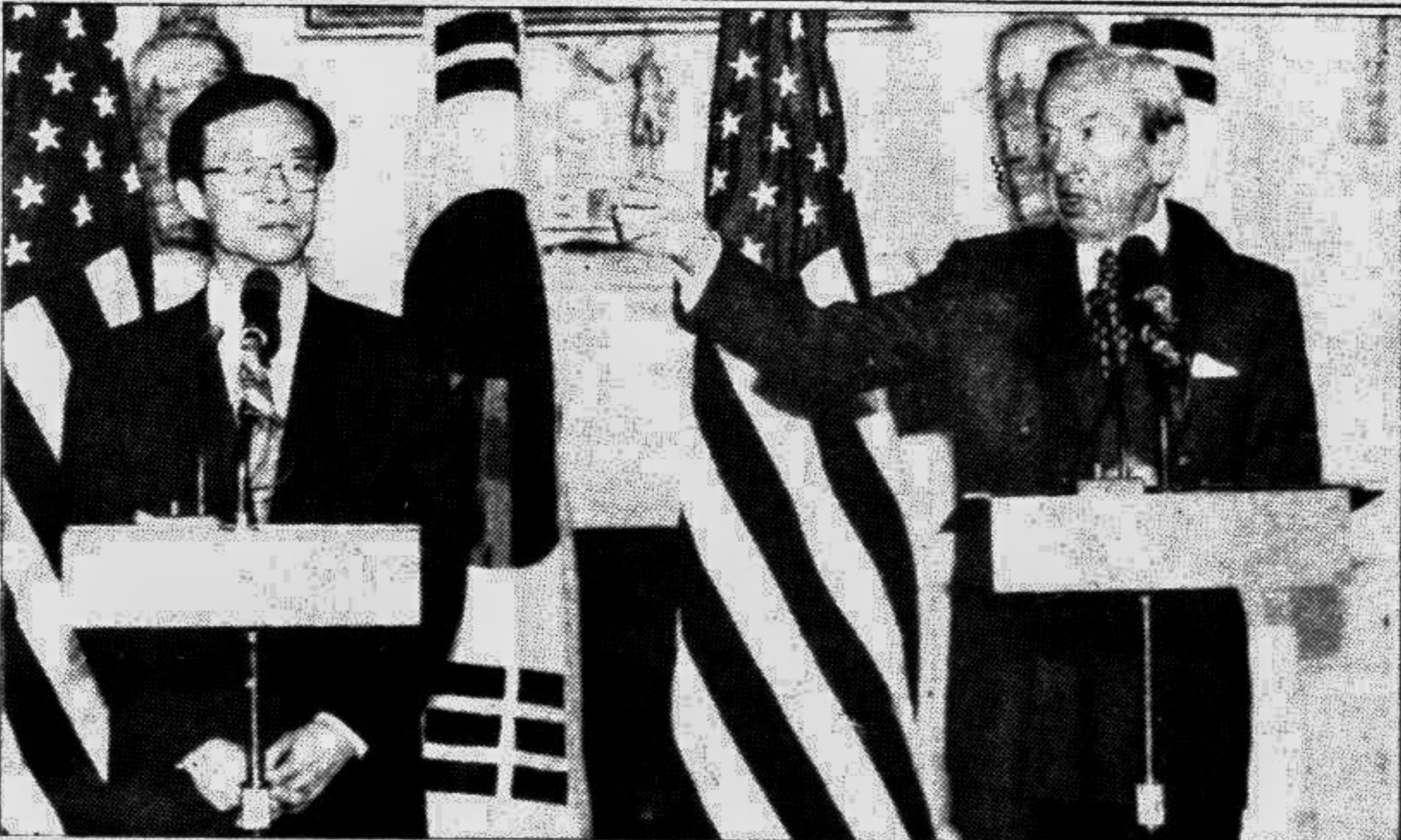
since independence in 1947 over Kashmir, the northern third of which is controlled by Islamabad.

New Delhi accuses Pakistan of arming and training Muslim separatists fighting in the Indian part of the state.

Pakistan denies the claim, but extends moral support to what it calls a legitimate struggle for self-determination by Kashmiris and has called on the UN to intervene in line with a 1949 UN resolution which called for a referendum on the issue.

Boutros-Ghali also met with Foreign Minister Asf Ali Khan and was due to meet President Farooq Ahmed Leghari late Wednesday.

Today he is scheduled to visit Lahore before leaving for New Delhi, the second leg of a trip which will also take him to China and Japan.



US Secretary of State Warren Christopher (R) and South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo speaks to reporters on Wednesday after their meeting at the State Department. Christopher reaffirmed US commitment to South Korea's security and gave assurances on Washington's aims in talks with the North. — AFP photo

Lanka asks Tamil rebels to free all captives

COLOMBO, Sept 8: The government has asked Tamil rebels to free all their military and police captives, in a move the guerillas could see as a condition for proposed peace talks, reports AP.

Last month, a socialist coalition won control of Parliament and the prime ministership by promising unconditional negotiations with the rebels, who are fighting for a homeland in Sri Lanka.

Since then, both sides have appeared willing to meet, but they also have made demands that could delay negotiations.

First, the guerillas set three conditions: Lift an economic embargo on rebel-held territory, declare a ceasefire, and allow people to travel in and out of guerilla-controlled areas.

The government responded by partially lifting the embargo. That prompted the guerillas to free 10 of their police captives on Sunday, and apparently to

drop their other two conditions.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga sent the guerillas a letter through the Red Cross saying she is ready to negotiate, but it also urged them to free all their captives, said Anuruddha Ratwatte, the deputy defence minister.

More than four years ago, the Tamil guerillas captured many soldiers and policemen in raids during the last round of peace talks in the 11-year-old insurrection.

Estimates of the number of police and soldiers held ranges all the way from several dozen to several hundred.

When they freed 10 captives Sunday, the rebels invited Kumaratunga to the northern town of Jaffna for peace talks about the insurrection that has killed 34,000 people, but she has not answered it yet.

Her letter did not say all

the captives must be free before negotiations can be held, but the rebels may see it as a condition, and that could once again delay peace talks.

That also could happen because of the structure of Sri Lanka's government and Kumaratunga's desire to change it.

During last month's election, she promised to submit a constitutional amendment that would restructure the government by giving the president's many powers to the prime minister. As president, Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, controls the military and can overrule decisions reached by Parliament and the prime minister.

So far, Kumaratunga has won Wijetunga's support, even though his party lost the parliamentary election for the first time in 17 years and many of its members oppose the peace talks.

US decision angers China

BEIJING, Sept 8: China said Thursday that the United States' decision to upgrade relations with Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a renegade province, would seriously affect Sino-US relations, reports AP.

The Clinton administration has decided to upgrade official contacts with Taiwan in recognition of its strong commercial ties with the United States, but will not change its policy of recognising Beijing as the legitimate ruler over all of China, including Taiwan.

Foreign Ministry Shen Guofang said Thursday that the US move "seriously violates the principles" on which Sino-US relations are based and "interferes with the internal affairs of China".

Thai govt urged to halt forced repatriation

BANGKOK, Sept 8: Amnesty International launched a blistering attack today on Thailand's treatment of asylum-seekers and other refugees, urging the government to halt forced repatriation, reports AFP.

In a report received in Bangkok, the London-based human rights organisation alleged that some refugees had been subjected to beatings and extortion as well as unjustified detention.

It also criticised Thailand for failing to establish any procedures for determining refugee status, meaning there is "no opportunity to have their claims for asylum examined by the authorities."

"It is a disgrace that asylum-

seekers in Thailand — who have fled from their own countries often in fear for their lives — are treated no differently from migrants working without a permit, or tourists who have overstayed on a visa," Amnesty International said.

The organisation said that refugees from Myanmar, the largest single group in Thailand, faced increasingly harsh treatment in Thailand as well as forcible repatriation to an area where they are at even greater risk.

It called for an immediate halt to forced repatriations in general and to deportations to the Halookhanie refugee camp on the Myanmar side of the border in particular.

Malaysia wants peaceful solution of Kashmir crisis

ISLAMABAD, Sept 8: Malaysia supports the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute, said its Deputy Foreign Minister here on Wednesday, reports Xinhua.

Addressing the seventh extraordinary session of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) of foreign ministers, Fadzil Che Wan said: "Malaysia is concerned over the recent development in Jammu-Kashmir, and urged all parties concerned to settle their differences amicably without resort to violence."

Punjab CM's grandson held

CHANDIGARH, Sept 8: Police in the northern state of Punjab Thursday arrested a grandson of the chief minister on charges of abducting a French woman tourist and molesting her, reports AP.

Gurkirat Singh, 20, and two of the chief minister's security guards captured Katie Dorrend, 24, from her friend's house on August 31 at gunpoint and took her to an abandoned factory shed where the three sexually assaulted her throughout the night, police said.

She filed a complaint after she was released the next day.

The incident once again focussed attention on the tyrannical behaviour of security forces and government officials of Punjab, where they were given sweeping powers to fight a 10-year Sikh separatist insurgency.

James Bond Director Young dies in France

LONDON, Sept 8: Terence Young, who directed the first, second and fourth of the hugely successful James Bond movies starring Sean Connery in the 1960s, died on Wednesday, his daughter reported, says AP.

Young was 79. He died in hospital in Cannes in southern France. His daughter, Juliet Nissen, said in London that she understood he had died of a heart attack.

Young directed the first of the Bond movies, "Dr No," based on Ian Fleming's novels about British spy James Bond and starring Ursula Andress playing opposite Connery as agent 007, in 1962.

Mixing sex, violence, and offbeat humour against expensive sets and exotic locations, "Dr No" was a massive box office success and proved a winning formula for the other Bond movies.

The second, "From Russia With Love," again directed by



Terence Young

Young and starring Connery, Robert Shaw and Daniela Bianchi, appeared in 1963.

The third, "Goldfinger," directed by Guy Hamilton, appeared in 1964, and the fourth, "Thunderball," with Young back in the director's chair, in 1965.

Tall, uninhibited and effervescent, Young was born in Shanghai in China and directed many other movies. They included "Storm over the Nile" in 1955, "Triple Cross" in 1966, "Mayerling" in 1969 and "The Gigsaw Man" in 1984. But his Bond movies were the ones that proved most popular with audiences and they are still regularly shown on television.

Militant attacks mark Sheikh Abdullah's death anniversary

SRINAGAR, Sept 8: Kashmiri Muslim militants staged attacks on Indian troops here today to mark the anniversary of the death of Kashmir's first Chief Minister after independence in 1947, police said, reports AFP.

Ten people were killed in secessionist-linked violence in the strife-torn Kashmir valley on Wednesday, police said, but no casualties were reported in today's attacks by Muslim guerillas on the security forces.

Muslim militants fired on patrolling Indian troops and their camps at several places in this state summer capital today to mark the 12th anniversary of the death of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, the 'Lion of Kashmir'.

Abdullah earned the sobriquet for freeing Kashmiris from the despotic rule of a

Hindu Maharajah in 1947 but he is reviled by many Kashmiri Muslims today for allegedly selling out the Muslim-majority state to predominantly Hindu India.

Police said Abdullah's family prayed today at his mausoleum bordering Srinagar's Dal Lake under tight security and heavy gunfire from militants. The marble tomb has seen damaged twice by rebels.

The surrounding area, including the Hazratbal Mosque, Kashmir's holiest Islamic shrine, was cordoned off for search operations, he added.

Twenty-two people, including a leader of an umbrella body grouping Muslim militants and politicians, were arrested overnight to pre-empt violence in the troubled Himalayan region claimed by both India and Pakistan, police said.

Pakistan reopens embassy in Kabul

KABUL, Sept 8: Pakistan reopened its embassy in Kabul on Monday, six months after it was ransacked by anti-Pakistani protesters, a Pakistani diplomat said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Pakistan's Charge d' Affaires Tariq Azizuddin said Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani has sent a mission to Islamabad three weeks ago asking for the embassy to be reopened and guaranteeing the safety of its staff.

The Pakistan government decided to accept these assurances and reopen the embassy with a full complement of nearly 40 staff... including four diplomats", Azizuddin said.

Pakistan moved its diplomats to the relatively calm eastern city of Jalalabad after the Kabul embassy was

stormed in February following the killing by Pakistani authorities of three Afghans who had hijacked a school bus in Islamabad.

Pakistan, which has moved its embassy to the site of the former British embassy in Kabul, also has consulates in Mazar-E-Sharif in the north and Kandahar in the south.

Renewed factional fighting which began in Kabul in January has forced all other embassies except Iran's to close.

About 11,500 people have died in the struggle between Rabbani and his foes led by Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum since Afghan guerillas replaced a collapsed communist government in 1992.

Off the Record

Beach cleanup yields 1.7m cigarette butts

WASHINGTON: Combing beaches and along US inland waterways, volunteers found a rusted cookie sheet, suitcases, a 5-pound (2.25-kg) pack of cocaine, a lottery ticket and enough cigarette butts to stretch 28 miles (45 kms) if placed end to end, reports AP.

Those were only a few of the 7.3 million pieces of trash, debris and other discarded wastes collected and catalogued by volunteers for the Center for Marine Conservation in the group's sixth annual beach and waterway cleanup.

More than 158,000 volunteers covered 4,500 miles (7,240 kms) of shoreline in 32 states and two territories during the cleanup most of which took place in September 1993. A summary of what they found was released in a report Wednesday.

A similar cleanup is planned for later this fall. The center, an environmental group that works to protect marine wildlife and their habitat, has sponsored an annual volunteer beach cleanup programme since 1988.

Among the items collected in the latest sweep were: 1.7 million cigarette butts, 344,502 pieces of glass, 203,330 straws, 333,996 bottles, 210,553 cans, 134,547 cups, 40,508 balloons, 30,326 light bulbs and fluorescent tubes, 10,166 plastic syringes, 55,470 plastic trash bags and 6,636 condoms.

British press resists temptation

LONDON: The British press on Thursday resisted the temptation to splash full-frontal pictures of a naked heir to the throne but relished the tale of the peeping Tom Paperazzo who caught the Prince with his trousers down, reports AP.

The tabloid Sun came closest to revealing Prince Charles in all his glory. Under the caption "one can't see a thing," its front-page carried a not-yet-revealing picture of a Queen Elizabeth II look-alike peering intently at the German magazine Bild Zeitung published Wednesday, with its blurred picture of the Prince wearing nothing but a towel slung nonchalantly over his shoulder.

According to the Times, snatched nude photographs were offered to some British tabloid newspapers Thursday for about 30,000 pounds (45,000 dollars).

300 dolphins saved

SYDNEY: Fisheries officers have saved about 300 dolphins from being slaughtered by villagers on a tiny Pacific island news reports said Thursday, says AP.

Radio Kiribati said the mammals were stranded last week in a shallow lagoon on Christmas Island, 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles) south of Honolulu, according to a report by Pacnews, a Pacific-area news agency.

Islanders killed 10 of them for food before Kiribati fisheries officers arrived and used boats to guide them out to sea.

The radio said while dolphin strandings were common on the island it was unusual for so many to be trapped. Christmas Island is part of the republic of Kiribati, an ex-British colony formerly known as the Gilbert Islands.

West can deal with Muslims, but not the Vatican

CAIRO, Sept 8: The first abortion battle at the UN population conference shown that Western nations can make a deal with Muslims — but not the Vatican and its staunchest allies, reports AP.

Abortion has proven so contentious that delegates negotiating a 20-year plan to slow world population growth assigned it to a special committee. It will report back by Friday.

The main committee took up the less troublesome issue of finance Thursday. W A Meier, an adviser to the New Zealand delegation, said members were holding to the draft plan's target of 17 billion dollars in spending in the year 2000 to finance the blueprint.

He said they were still

quibbling about how the funds would be allocated among categories such as family planning, AIDS prevention, research and reproductive health.

The abortion debate revealed growing anger among many delegates at the Vatican's domination of the conference with abortion, which most governments consider peripheral to the real issues of population and development.

In the most visible example, some delegates groaned and booed when the Holy See's representative stood up to oppose compromise language on how to deal with unsafe abortion.

"I think the Vatican is trying to hijack" the conference, said Naomi Wanyama, Uganda's

undersecretary of finance and its representative on the negotiating committee.

Former US congresswoman Bella Abzug, a member of the US delegation, said: "I don't think one religion should come into an international conference... and hold up its procedures."

Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, one of two women leaders at the conference, said she feared family planning goals would become meaningless amid all the compromise going on to satisfy the Vatican.

"I tried to put up the stop sign... on behalf of the women of the world," she said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Her aim, she said, was to

halt attempts "to water down the reality of unsafe abortions," and to block efforts to limit access to family planning information and contraceptives.

Brundtland's hard-hitting, no-nonsense speech at Monday's opening session stole the show and energised women's rights activists.

On Thursday, the leader of the Iranian delegation, Mohammed Ali Tashkiri, spoke before the conference and called on Brundtland to withdraw one sentence in her opening statement "in which she attacked religious beliefs."

He did not specify the sentence, but Brundtland spoke about religion being an obstacle to family planning on the basis of morality and then added.

Thai police chief under fire for deporting Ashaari

BANGKOK, Sept 8: Thailand's police chief has come under fire for deporting the leader of the Al-Aqam Islamic sect last week and the Interior Minister wants him to explain his actions, reports AP.

Interior Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh on Wednesday ordered Police Chief Pratin Santiprapot to submit a written report explaining why he deported Ashaari Muhammad without ministry approval, said Chavalit Wichayasut, a ministry official.

Police Capt. Ariya Panthujuk said Pratin had not received the request and therefore had yet to respond.

Pratin ordered Ashaari's deportation last Friday.