

BRIEFLY

British soldier injured: A British soldier was wounded when his vehicle was attacked in the east Bosnian pocket of Gorazde on Wednesday evening, a UN spokesman said yesterday. Reuter reports from Sarajevo.

We suspect the attack came from the Serb side but that is not yet confirmed," he added. The UN soldier's condition was not known. Gorazde is a Muslim enclave surrounded by Serbs and defended by UN peacekeepers, including British troops.

France, Germany support Poland: Poland won support from France and Germany yesterday in its bid to join the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), according to the three countries' foreign ministers meeting in Germany, AFP reports from Bamberg.

In the ministers' final statement, France and Germany said they would act to garner "active support" from their fellow members in the European Union for Poland's membership bid.

Tamil repatriation from Monday: India will resume repatriating Sri Lankan Tamil refugees on Monday following the election of a new government in the island an official said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

A total of 7,155 Tamils would leave for Sri Lanka by ships, escorted by the Indian navy and coast guard. While 5,029 Tamils would sail for Sri Lanka's northeastern port town of Trincomalee, the others would go to manner in the north-west, the Press Trust of India (PTI) on Thursday quoted the official as saying.

Liberian govt offices stormed: Soldiers of the armed forces of Liberia stormed government offices and a radio station in the capital Monrovia yesterday, Foreign aid workers said. Reuter reports from Ivory Coast.

African peacekeeping troops had contained the insurgents — remnants of an ousted government's army in the building they told Reuters by telephone from Monrovia.

Crackdown on drug trafficking: More than 100 people were arrested in Italy and the United States yesterday in an international crackdown on drug trafficking, Italian police said. Reuter reports from Rome.

The arrests were carried out in central and southern Italy and Sicily and in Italian-American communities in the states of Florida and New York, they said.

Floods claim 10 in Manila: At least 10 people were killed in floods caused by a tropical storm which brought heavy rain to the northern Philippines, relief officials said yesterday, Reuter reports from Manila.

The storm struck Cagayan province and the northern Batanes islands earlier this week, a statement said.

Guatemalan talks Sept 26: Representatives of the Guatemalan government and leftist guerrillas have agreed to revive their stalled peace process and return to the negotiating table, officials said yesterday. Reuter reports from Oslo.

The two sides would meet for new peace talks in New York or Mexico on September 26, Norwegian officials said. "The parties have agreed to return to the negotiating table. The meeting was very successful," said Petter Skauen, advisor for Norwegian church aid which was helped the peace effort.

Blast in Paris edn office: A bomb exploded early yesterday in the headquarters of the Paris education authorities, causing severe damage to the building and in the immediate neighbourhood, AFP reports from Paris.

Windows were blown out and three vehicles parked in the street, the Rue Curial in the centre of the capital, were wrecked. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast, which occurred in the entrance hall of the building. But investigators said unofficially that the target and the nature of the explosive used indicated that Corsican separatists were to blame.

Abacha sacks 3 top officials: General Sani Abacha's military junta sacked three of Nigeria's regional military administrators and re-shuffled seven others, national radio said on Wednesday, AFP reports from Abuja.

The three men sacked were administrators for the Bauchi region, in northeast Nigeria and Oyo and Edo, both in the southeast. All three were immediately replaced.

90 N-smuggling cases: Ninety instance of nuclear smuggling were uncovered in Germany in the first half of 1994, the government said on Wednesday, AFP reports from Bonn.

The figure was revealed by government officials in response to a parliamentary question from the opposition Social Democrat Party. German federal police recorded 241 instances of nuclear trafficking in 1993, 158 in 1992 and 41 in 1991, the officials added.

7 killed in SA blast: Seven people were killed in a blast at an explosives factory owned by chemicals giant AECI at Modderfontein just east of Johannesburg late Wednesday, a spokesman for the plant, Mike Blizzard said, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

Blizzard said the explosion occurred in the nitroglycerine packaging area where mining explosives are made. The cause of the blast had not immediately been determined and a full investigation would begin on Thursday, he said.

Nigerian flood leaves 10 dead: Severe flooding has hit several towns in northern Nigeria, forcing thousands to flee their homes and claiming at least 10 lives, officials and media reports said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Lagos.

Thousands of people fled their homes in the northeastern city of Maiduguri after a dam burst causing widespread flooding, local official said.

US ends aid cutoff in Lesotho: The United States joined Wednesday's celebration of the return of Lesotho's elected government, saluting the country and leaders who helped arrange it and announcing the end of an aid cutoff, AP reports from Washington.

The State Department said "the people of Lesotho, and the international community as a whole, would accept nothing less" than the restoration of constitutional rule. The change allows the United States to end suspension of aid, it added. Current annual aid is 15 million dollars.

Army recaptures Bujumbura: The Burundian army on Wednesday afternoon retook control of the capital Bujumbura, ending two days of fighting by Hutu extremist groups against Tutsi-led government troops, AFP reports from Bujumbura.

Fighting which had raged all day on Tuesday renewed early Wednesday but was quelled in the early afternoon, government sources said. Government troops then set about cleaning up operations in the Kamenge, Kinama and Cibitoke districts.

CNN sees no violation of law: CNN was convinced it had the right to broadcast recordings of deposed Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega's jailhouse phone calls despite a judge's order, a CNN lawyer testified Wednesday, AP reports from Miami.

But network executives cringed when they heard anchor man Bernard Shaw's introduction, which suggested other wise. Stuart Pierson told a judge in the cable television network's contempt trial.

Hun Sen accused of murder: The Khmer Rouge guerrillas yesterday accused Cambodian co-premier Hun Sen of ordering the murder earlier this month of newspaper editor Non Chan, AFP reports from Bangkok.

In a broadcast monitored in Bangkok, Khmer Rouge radio alleged that Hun Sen, who left September 2 for medical treatment in France had ordered that the murder of Non Chan should take place while he was out of the country.

US push to lift arms ban on Bosnia may fail

LONDON, Sept 15: The US push to lift an arms embargo for Bosnia's Muslim-led government looks increasingly likely to fail, undermining pressure from major powers on the Serbs to accept a last-chance peace plan, diplomats say, reports Reuter.

Despite opposition from key European allies, Washington has said it will seek UN approval for lifting the embargo in October if the Bosnian Serbs continue to reject the plan.

But US and European diplomats said it was becoming clear that Washington would probably fail to get the number of votes needed to lift the ban, since many members of the UN Security Council would abstain.

The US administration is under strong domestic pressure to lift the ban unilaterally if that approach fails. But it is far from sure that Congress could muster the two thirds majority in both houses needed to force President Bill

Clinton's hand.

In addition, US officials have told European governments that they are lobbying hard to prevent this happening since the administration is aware of the problems it would cause.

"Unless there is a major change of circumstances in Bosnia, something where the Serbs really provoked us all, the whole arms embargo thing is losing steam and the Americans know it," said one European diplomat who asked not to be identified.

Britain and France, the major contributors to the UN force in Bosnia, have said lifting the arms embargo will mean pulling out their troops and an end to the aid operation as winter sets in — something which Washington could be blamed.

There is also the risk of a major diplomatic row with Russia, which has strong traditional links to the Serbs, and the chance of a split with

European allies if the United States ignores the wishes of others and acts unilaterally.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher signalled the administration's caution earlier this week, saying that any unilateral move would be "some steps down the road" and that it would depend on circumstances in Bosnia at the time.

In public at least, European allies still say pressure to lift the ban could become irresistible despite their objections.

While this is intended to push the Serbs towards peace, diplomats say it is becoming clear that the threat lacks credibility — especially since the Europeans are lobbying furiously in private for the United States to drop the idea.

"It does undermine the pressure on the Serbs a little, but that is preferable to all the horrible consequences of lifting the arms embargo," said another diplomat.

Arafat urges Yeltsin, Clinton to focus on ME

MOSCOW, Sept 15: Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) chairman Yasser Arafat today urged Russian leader Boris Yeltsin and US President Bill Clinton to focus their attention on the Middle East at their forthcoming summit, reports Reuter.

Arafat, on a stopover in Moscow, discussed Russia's role in Middle East peace moves during talks with Russian first Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Itar Tass news agency said.

It quoted him as saying he hoped the planned September 26-29 summit in Washington would serve to reinforce the role of both powers as co-sponsors of the Middle East peace effort.

Arafat, speaking after talks with Ivanov welcomed the efforts which Russia as co-sponsor of the Arab-Israeli peace process had made Tass said.

Euro Parliament body suspends contacts with Turk parliament

ANKARA, Sept 15: The European parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission has decided to suspend all contacts with Turkish parliament for its trial of pro-Kurdish deputies, Turkey's Anatolia news agency reported from Brussels yesterday, says Xinhua.

The decision was made by the presidential council of the Foreign Affairs Commission because Turkey continued to try the former deputies of the now banned Democracy Party.

The main effect of the decision if it is approved by European Parliament will be that the Turkey-European Union Joint Parliament Commission meetings, an important contact platform between Turkey and the union, will be suspended.

The Presidential Council of the Foreign Affairs Commission said in its statement concerning the decision that the suspension will remain in force as long as the "uncertainty surrounding the trial of the former deputies remained."

The decision was expected to be voted on at the end of the month during the general assembly meetings of the European parliament in Strasbourg, and diplomatic sources said it is highly likely that the commission's decision will be endorsed by the parliament and come into force.

The European Parliament earlier this year adopted resolutions condemning Turkey for lifting the parliament immunity of pro-Kurdish deputies and forcing them on trial for treason.

Thoolia added that certain groups within the European parliament were also preparing to call for a total suspension between the parliament and Turkey, as well as to suspend the enactment of the customs union proposed to come into force in 1995.

11 UN observers freed in Liberia

ABIDJAN, Sept 15: Eleven of the 43 UN military observers detained in Liberia were freed on Wednesday and crossed into Ivory Coast, one of the officers said, reports Reuter.

He declined to be identified by name but said the 11 were all safe in the northwest-border town of Danane.

"There was some mistreatment but we were not beaten up. Some of our things were taken," he told Reuters by telephone.

He said the military observers who were released were three Uruguayans, two Indians, two Czechs, one Austrian, one Slovak, one Chinese and one from Guinea-Bissau.

The North Koreans said the last session was due to start at 7 pm (1700 GMT), but reporters saw no Americans turn up. At 9 pm a North Korean official announced without elaboration that there would be no further talks on Wednesday.

"We plan to have a news conference at 10 am (1400 BST)" today, the official said.

Officials from North Korea and the United States declined to provide any details about why a final meeting the Koreans had said was scheduled for Wednesday evening at Pyongyang's old embassy to the former East Germany, did not take place.

The Americans have divulged nothing about the progress of the negotiations, designed to lead North Korea to Switch from plutonium-producing nuclear technology to a variety that would make it difficult for Pyongyang to produce atomic weapons.

The Koreans had hinted the talks were going well.

When ever fences appeared to be mending, another flap would roll back progress toward friendly relations.

The most recent controversy came late last year when Prime Minister Paul Keating called Mahathir "recalcitrant" for not attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum summit in the United States.

Off the Record



TAIPEI. A woman appreciates the world's largest coral, certified by the Guinness Book of Records, displayed yesterday at a jewellery show held in the World Trade Centre. The coral, 125 centimetres (48.8 inches) in height, 70 centimetres (27.3 inches) in width and 70 kilograms (154 pounds) in weight, is owned by a private local collector. It was found by fishermen in the waters near Penghu (Pescadore), in 1980. Its value is estimated at 600 million Taiwan dollars (22.6 million US dollars). — AFP photo

'Elephant for hire'

NEW DELHI: Mohammad Akram's business card reads "Elephant for hire," reports AFP. Superimposed over a drawing of a magnificent tusker in full regalia, it says: "Decorated elephants for marriages, receptions, birthdays, functions, exhibitions, fairs and processions."

The 34-year-old Akram is a *hathi wallah*, or elephant dealer. He rents pachyderms by the hour by the day or by the week. A simple telephone call and he'll have a two-tonne elephant at your doorstep within hours.

His five charges — Chameh, Champa, Chanchal, Chandni and Dimple — live beneath a bridge spanning the Yamuna river in a shantytown of cinderblock and mud huts.

Akram is one of the oldest elephant rental *wallas* in the Indian capital and his family has been catering to the elephantine needs of its residents since 1969, when his father moved here from the eastern state of Bihar.

Demand is greatest for marriage ceremonies and birthday parties, Akram says, although he has had some unusual requests over the years.

Some time back, he took a group of Australians partridge shooting in the state of Rajasthan on elephant back. The hunters persuaded Akram, despite his misgivings, to make the elephant pick up a dead partridge with its trunk.

Enraged by the blood from the downed bird, the elephant bolted. "I couldn't control it and the foreigners fell off," Akram said with a chuckle.

Love letter reaches sweetheart after 50 yrs

SOFIA: A love letter from a Bulgarian woman to her sweetheart has arrived at its destination — half a century late, reports Reuter.

The woman from the central city of Veliko Tarnovo mailed the letter to a lawyer in a village 40 km (25 miles) away, inviting him to a dance at her house, newspapers said on Thursday.

The envelope, stamped "April 19, 1946 10:00 am" was opened by clerks of the village post office on Tuesday. They were unable to trace the recipient.

Yeltsin to form elite army network

MOSCOW, Sept 15: President Boris Yeltsin has ordered an elite army network to be set up around Moscow with its own chain of command to put down eventual unrest by repatriated Red Army troops, it was reported here, says AFP.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta newspaper said the network would help "neutralise actions" by discontented soldiers recently withdrawn from Germany and the Baltic states.

"A ring of elite divisions is being set up around Moscow in which troops will be employed under special working terms

and conditions, the paper said in a report on Wednesday.

The elite network would be drawn from the second motorised Tamanskaya Division, the fourth armoured Kna temirovskaya Division, the 27th motor used brigade as well as regiments, parachute brigades and logistical units, the paper said.

Special interior ministry units stationed around the capital, including the former Dzerzhinska Division, will also be part of the network which, the paper said, would rise to 50,000 men between now and the end of the year.

Malaysian ties with Australia improving

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 15: It was unthinkable a few years ago and improbable even last month. But on Wednesday, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad sheathed his usual barbs for Australia and praised bilateral ties, reports AP.

Relations between the two nations had been frigid since former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke described as "barbaric" the 1986 hanging by Malaysia of two Australians for drug trafficking.

Whenever fences appeared to be mending, another flap would roll back progress toward friendly relations.

The most recent controversy came late last year when Prime Minister Paul Keating called Mahathir "recalcitrant" for not attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum summit in the United States.

Now it appears the past is being forgotten.

"Close interaction with an open mind helps... shift the paradigm towards constructive understanding. Understanding builds friendship and contributes to peace and harmony," he said while launching the Malaysia-Australia Foundation.

His presence at the launch itself was a major break from the past. For years, Mahathir refused to officiate at any Australian functions. Malaysian officials were told not to attend such occasion unless absolutely necessary.

Meant to foster non-governmental relations between the two countries, the foundation is headed by Sarawak state's top official, Abdul Taib Mahmud. It comprises Malaysians who studied in Australia

Over 450 Iraqi refugees cross into Iran

TEHRAN, Sept 15: Iran said today that more than 450 Iraqi refugees crossed into the Iranian border region in the last few days, raising to 1950 the number of Iraqi refugees in Hur al Howzeleh region, southern Iran, reports Xinhua.

These refugees mostly women, children and the elderly, are in urgent need of foodstuff and medicine, Iran's official news agency reported today, adding that there is fear of the spread of epidemic diseases.

Last week seven Iraqi refugees died on the Iranian border due to shortage of foodstuff and medicine. Among them five were children.

Ahmad Hussein, Director General in charge of foreign nationals affairs at the interior ministry, said last month that about 615,000 Iraqi refugees are living in Iran.



A Haitian boy tries to reach the bodies of two persons who had disappeared in Port au Prince where he discovered on Wednesday — AFP photo

Arab FMs back Palestinian claim over Jerusalem

CAIRO, Sept 15: The Arab League Wednesday backed the Palestinian claim to sovereignty over Jerusalem and called for more aid for Palestinian self-rule, reports AFP.

Arab Foreign Ministers meeting here unanimously adopted six resolutions on the Palestinian cause, which said "Sovereignty over Jerusalem belongs to the Palestinians," and the holy city should be "the capital of Palestine."

Jordan was chairing the session which opened Wednesday.

The PLO had requested

Arab backing for its claim to sovereignty over Jerusalem after Israel signed a joint declaration with Jordan in July recognising a special Jordanian role in administering Muslim holy sites in the city.

Israel, which seized east Jerusalem in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war has declared the holy city to be its eternal capital.

The Arab League also adopted a resolution calling on Arab countries to "provide all possible aid to the Palestinian people to allow them to recover their rights and establish an independent state," Rawabdeh said.

Opening the meeting, Secretary General Esmat Abdel Meguid urged member states to help fund Palestinian self-rule, saying a financial commitment was "necessary to allow a global programme to be launched, capable of promoting the required development in the autonomous territories."

The meeting also heard calls for Arab reconciliation, to heal the rift caused by the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis.

Fifteen ministers turned up for the meeting, while the other seven countries were represented by their permanent envoys to the Cairo-based organisation.

Chinese city vice mayor held with prostitutes

BEIJING, Sept 15: The vice mayor of a southern Chinese city has been arrested along with two other city officials in a crackdown on rampant prostitution in southern China, reports AP.

The official newspaper Yangcheng Wanbao reported that the vice mayor of Bellu, in the southern province of Guangxi, was arrested along with two other city officials during a business trip to Shenzhen, just across the border from Hong Kong.

The three were caught soliciting prostitutes on the street and taking them into their hotel rooms, and one was caught taking a bath with his female companion, it said.

US-DPRK talks end under news blackout

BERLIN, Sept 15: Five days of talks between North Korea and the United States on the communist states nuclear programme concluded under a news blackout, but the Koreans said they would meet the press in Berlin this morning, reports Reuter.

The Americans have divulged nothing about the progress of the negotiations, designed to lead North Korea to Switch from plutonium-producing nuclear technology to a variety that would make it difficult for Pyongyang to produce atomic weapons.

The Koreans had hinted the talks were going well.

Officials from North Korea and the United States declined to provide any details about why a final meeting the Koreans had said was scheduled for Wednesday evening at Pyongyang's old embassy to the former East Germany, did not take place.

The North Koreans said the last session was due to start at 7 pm (1700 GMT), but reporters saw no Americans turn up. At 9 pm a North Korean official announced without elaboration that there would be no further talks on Wednesday.

"We plan to have a news conference at 10 am (1400 BST)" today, the official said.



File picture dated November 5, 89 of entertainer George Burns (L) with actress Brooke Shields in New York at an event sponsored by the Museum of Broadcasting honouring his work in radio and television. Burns, 91, went into surgery at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Centre in Los Angeles on September 13 following a fall. —AFP photo