

International

BRIEFLY

Major arrives in Saudi Arabia:

British Prime Minister John Major arrived in Jeddah on Sunday for a 24-hour visit to Saudi Arabia, Saudi officials said. AFP reports from Jeddah.

Major was to hold talks with King Fahd and Defence Minister Sultan ibn Abdul Aziz about strengthening British-Saudi economic and military ties, informed sources said in the capital Riyadh.

Editor detained in Cairo:

The State Security Agency was holding the editor-in-chief of an opposition newspaper for questioning Monday about allegations he published false articles in exchange for money from Iraq, AP reports from Cairo.

An agency official confirmed statements by the Liberal Party that editor Mustafa Bakri of its daily Al-Ahrar was interrogated Sunday and was being held until he posts bail of 5,000 Egyptian pounds (drs 1,500).

ROK city mayor resigns:

The mayor of the major city of Inchon resigned on Monday because of a multi-million dollar scandal that has exposed years of pervasive embezzlement by tax officials, AP reports from Seoul.

"I am grieved that I was not able to uproot the longstanding corruption and illegal goings on," said Choi Ki-sun said in the large port city 30 kilometers (19 miles) west of Seoul.

Gunmen kidnap 2 in Colombia:

Unidentified gunmen have kidnapped a member of Colombia's National Congress along with a former local politician in a small town in northwestern Antioquia Province, the Caracol radio network said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Bogota.

The network cited an official of the provincial government as saying Congressman Juan Ignacio Castrillon and former mayor Alberto Builes Ortega were kidnapped late Saturday in the municipality of Yolombo, more than 95 miles (150 km) northwest of Bogota.

168 militants held in Egypt:

Egyptian police have arrested 168 suspected Muslim militants linked to a new series of attacks, the Middle East News Agency said on Sunday, a day after four policemen and a UN worker were shot dead, AFP reports from Cairo.

Police in the past two days rounded up 151 suspected militants from 15 provinces across Egypt, and were investigating their roles in recent attacks, the news agency said.

Israel opens park in West Bank:

Hoping to transform an archaeological site important to Arabs and Jews into a tourist attraction, Israel has opened a West Bank park where tradition holds that the prophet Samuel is buried, AP reports from West Bank.

The park at Nabi Samuel is the first such site dedicated in the Israeli-occupied West Bank in the year since Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation signed a treaty for Palestinian self-rule.

US for Algerian peace talks:

The United States wants to see Algerian opposition groups renounce violence and begin talks with the government to seek a political solution to the country's crisis, he new US ambassador to Algeria said on Sunday. AFP reports from Algiers.

"We believe that the solution to the crisis in Algeria requires a credible political process," US ambassador to Algeria Ronald E Neumann said, according to a television report.

7 Indonesians killed:

A train ran over and killed six students from a Muslim school and a woman riding on the back a bicycle in South Sumatra, the Antara news agency said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

A seventh student and the bicycle's driver were seriously injured in the accident, which occurred on Saturday as the victims were making their way across the railroad tracks at an unguarded crossing near the school in Palembang, Antara said.

British tourist dies in NZ:

Police on Monday identified a tourist killed in an avalanche on New Zealand's highest peak, Mount Cook, over the weekend as Lisa Jane Travell of Essex, England. AFP reports from Christchurch.

"She obviously had some knowledge of tramping because she hired crampons and an ice axe and took them with her," Lake Tekapo senior constable Bill Apes said.

Typhoon claims 2 in Japan:

Two died and seven others were missing on Monday in northern Japan after they were washed away by rough waters churned up by Typhoon Melissa, coast guard officials said on Monday. AP reports from Tokyo.

Four others were treated at nearby hospitals, and 21 more were safely rescued, they said.

Fires kill 1,019 in China:

In the first half of this year killed 1,019 people and caused 540 million yuan (62.8 million dollar) in direct economic losses, an official report said on Monday. AP reports from Beijing.

The first six months saw 21,090 fires nationwide, excluding forest fires and fires in the military, the Economic Daily said. That was an increase of 28.2 per cent from the same period last year. Economic losses also rose, but the report did not say by how much.

FPOE gains in Austrian polls:

Austria's far right Freedom Party (FPOE) made startling gains in regional elections Sunday in the Vorarlberg province in the west of the country, three weeks ahead of general elections, official results showed. AFP reports from Vienna.

For the first time in a regional election, the nationalistic FPOE beat the Social Democrats (SPOE), the senior partner in Austria's two-party coalition.

7 cops hurt in Athens blast:

A powerful bomb exploded in Athens yesterday morning, injuring seven policemen, including three seriously, police reported. AFP says from Athens.

They said the blast occurred at 0345 GMT as a police bus was passing through the northwestern Perissos quarter of the Greek capital. Five of the injured officers were hospitalised.

Social Democrats win Swedish elections

STOCKHOLM, Sept 19: Swedish voters have brought back the Social Democrats to lead the country out of its economic crisis, but the leftist-leaning party will face difficulty in making major reforms, reports AP.

After an election campaign dominated by financial issues, voters on Sunday gave the Social Democrats 45.6 per cent of the vote, according to final returns.

That's enough to return Ingvar Carlsson to the prime minister's post three years after being ousted, but it won't give his party an outright majority in the 349-seat Parliament.

Women were the clearest winners in the voting, taking more than 40 per cent of the Parliament seats, according to preliminary results.

Final results weren't expected until Wednesday.

Even so, there will still be 15,000 US forces in Haiti for

2 volcanoes erupt in Papuan city: 30000 flee home

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea, Sept 19: About 30,000 people fled the port city of Rabaul hours before two volcanoes erupted Monday, spewing smoke kilometers (miles) into the air, reports AP.

There were no reports of casualties or major damage, but police said communications to the city were poor.

Emergency officials said they had unconfirmed reports that a third volcano nearby had also erupted. There were also fears that hot vents under Rabaul's harbour might break out.

Authorities ordered a mass evacuation late Sunday after a series of earthquakes rocked the city, 500 miles (800 kms) northeast of Port Moresby, the capital. The largest had a magnitude of 5.1.

Witnesses said Rabaul, which is ringed by several

dormant and live volcanoes, was almost deserted. A thick black haze had blocked out the sun.

Loud explosions from the eruptions were matched by violent thunderstorms. Rain mixed with volcanic ash blanketing the ground to form a sticky mud.

The rain is mixing with the ash. The whole place is covered with ash ... eight to 10 inches deep," resident Ashton Peters told the Australian Broadcasting Corp, a few hours after he woke late to find the city empty.

"There are lots of big mushroom clouds coming out, very thick and heavy, building up again and again," said the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Rabaul, Karl Hesse, in a telephone interview from his home 10 miles (16 kms) away.

"Rabaul is pitch black," he said. "It is very dramatic. It doesn't look good for Rabaul."

Plantation owner Max Henderson, watching from a mountain top 15 kilometers (9 miles) away, said: "Rabaul is covered by a huge pitch black cloud which is may be 60,000 feet (18,000 metres) feet high. I don't know if Rabaul is still there.

Volcanologists said Tavurvur volcano at the end of Rabaul airport's runway erupted just before dawn. Vulcan volcano, a mile (1.5 kms) away, erupted two hours later.

The two volcanoes last erupted in 1937, killing 507 people. Scientists say the area has been volcanically active for millions of years.

Police reported no panic among fleeing residents who were used to regular civil defence drills. Many had taken refuge in schools and church missions away from the city.

Rabaul airport was closed just before Tavurvur volcano erupted. The last airplane took off just before the eruption began, officials said.

Rabaul, on the island of New Britain, is a picturesque port city whose bay is part of an ancient collapsed volcanic crater.

Seismologists and volcano experts constantly monitor volcanic activity in the area and have long predicted an eruption. They say the city and the bay sit atop a huge mass of molten magma that has been steadily expanding under enormous pressure during the past few decades.

The city was last evacuated in 1984 when a series of earthquakes took place, but there was no major eruption.

Other major eruptions were recorded in 1767, 1791, 1850 and 1878.

Iraq holds secret talks with Israel?

LONDON, Sept 19: Israel and Iraq, traditionally among the Middle East's most bitter enemies, held secret talks in Morocco last month to try to draw up a peace treaty, the Sunday Times newspaper said. reports Reuter.

Quoting sources from Britain's secret intelligence service, the newspaper said Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and an Israeli delegation led by Housing Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer met in Rabat.

"Security officials say the peace summit is the latest in a series of meetings between the two sides which have been brokered by Moroccan diplomats at the United Nations," the newspaper said.

It added that Aziz was understood to have sent a message to Gad Yaacobi, the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, calling for a meeting as Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein no longer thought of Israel as an enemy since the signing of the peace accord with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

A survey by the University of Hong Kong for the Ming Pao newspaper showed 67 per cent opposed Beijing disbanding the district boards in 1997. Of the 7,000 respondents, 67 per cent said Beijing's disapproval made no difference to their vote.

In percentage terms, the turnout was only slightly higher, at 33.1 per cent, than 32.5 per cent in 1991. But in absolute terms the 693,283 votes cast was about 60 per cent higher than the previous elections. Patten's reforms have widened the franchise.

DPRK blames IAEA for complicating N-talks with US

SEOUL, Sept 19: North Korea accused the international nuclear watchdog agency Monday of complicating nuclear talks with the United States by demanding inspections, reports AP.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) must stop putting a spoke in the wheel of North Korea-US talks, North Korea's official Korea Central News Agency said, quoting an unnamed Foreign Ministry spokesman.

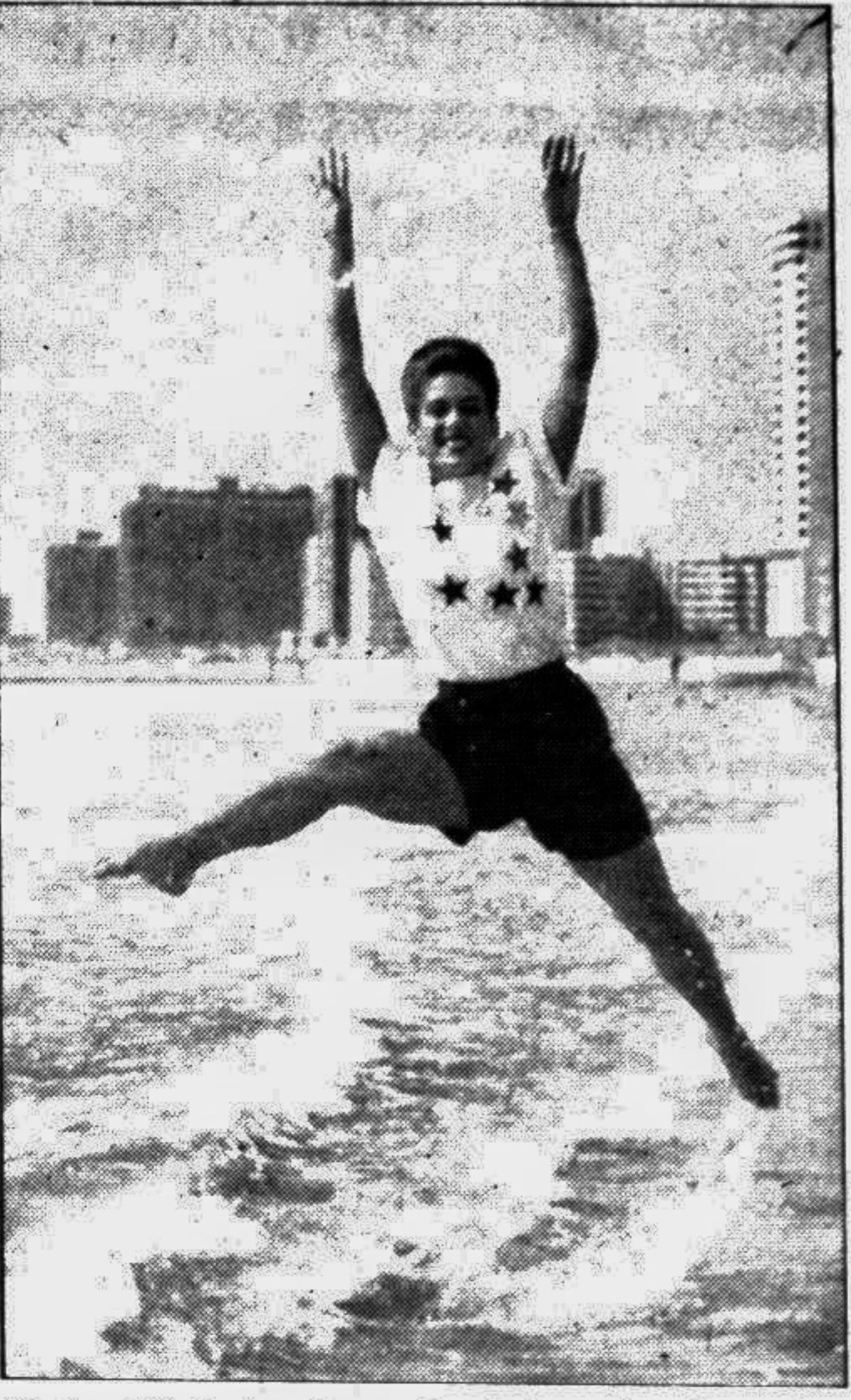
Peacekeepers' anti-sniper patrols in Sarajevo

SARAJEVO, Sept 19: French UN peacekeepers deployed anti-sniper patrols in Sarajevo today as the Bosnian capital echoed to gunfire after heavy weekend fighting between its mainly Muslim defenders and besieging Serbs, reports Reuter.

The patrols were concentrated along a stretch of city centre road overlooked by a wrecked tower block that once housed the Bosnian parliament and is now a vantage point for snipers.

Western reporters said sporadic small arms, machinegun and rocket-propelled grenade fire could be heard from the area of the Jewish cemetery and "it was enough to put a spring in the step of people going to work."

Off the Record



Heather Whitestone jumps for photographers September 18 after being named Miss America 1995 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Whitestone, representing Alabama, becomes the first deaf woman to win the beauty title. — AFP photo

China embarks on moral education campaign

BEIJING: Worried that the relaxation of Communist ideology has left Chinese youth drifting, the nation has embarked on a moral education campaign that combines patriotism with old-fashioned Confucian values, reports AP.

Nothing subtle about this campaign: The official mouthpiece of the Communist Party, the People's Daily, carried a full-page of essays Monday on the value of Confucianism in modern society.

And the newspaper's front page carried a set of four reports on progress in promoting 'patriotic education' nationwide.

The reports were the latest in a series of high-profile calls for moral education for the country's youth, and a reminder of the Communist Party's determination to retain some control over individual beliefs despite the nation's newfound dedication to materialism.

Hoping to instill a sense of conservatism, rather than Western-style democratic liberalism, the aging leadership of the Communist Party has expressed open admiration for traditional Confucian values such as those encouraged by staunch anti-Communists in Singapore.

The Confucian school does not oppose profiting through merchandise and money but advocates fairness in buying and selling.



Maina, an eight-year-old Nepali girl who is revered as the living goddess Kumari, sits in her golden chariot during the Indra Jatra festival in Kathmandu on Sunday. The girl lives in a 16th century official residence, and is only taken out once yearly on the occasion of the Indra Jatra festival. Maina will no longer be Kumari when she reaches puberty or when any bodily injury causes her to bleed, as blood flows only from the bodies of humans and not those of gods.

— AFP photo

UK backs Japan for UNSC seat

TOKYO, Sept 19: British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd today offered his country's support for Japan's campaign to get a permanent seat on the UN Security Council during talks with Prime Minister Tomomi Murayama, reports AP.

Press reports said Murayama insisted that Japan would seek a permanent place on the Security Council during talks with Prime Minister Tomomi Murayama, reports AP.

And George Bush — who as president condemned the military's overthrow of Haiti's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide — said he thinks it is a huge mistake to use military force to restore Aristide to power.

Still, Bush said he appreciated what Clinton was going through. "I've been there," he noted.

Bush said sending someone else's son or daughter into battle "is the hardest decision that any president can make."

But only time will tell whether the narrowly averted invasion will in fact allow Haiti not to become a military quagmire for Clinton.

China and Russia have not yet made clear their view. Around 35 countries in all are backing Japan.

Social Democrats win Swedish elections

WASHINGTON, Sept 19: President Clinton's high-risk decision to commit US troops to combat in Haiti was the toughest call of his presidency.

The next month to police terms of the agreement — and they could be targets of guerrilla attacks in a nation where violence has long been the norm.

The operation is "still not without risk," Clinton noted.

Putting US forces in harms way is one of the most wrenching — and loneliest — decisions that a president can make.

As he made his solitary decision to order paratroopers into Haiti — they were recalled

from a White House podium.

The full-scale invasion ordered by Clinton, which would have brought near certain US casualties, was only narrowly averted. Only the realisation that US warplanes were actually in the air persuaded Lt Gen Raoul Cedras and two other military leaders to relinquish their hold on power.

That's enough to return Ingvar Carlsson to the prime minister's post three years after being ousted, but it won't give his party an outright majority in the 349-seat Parliament.

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Wave of relief sweeps White House after accord with Haiti

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Although no one suggested Haiti could have become another Vietnam, Clinton groped with some of the same problems that bedeviled Lyndon Johnson — whose military policies he protested as a college student at Oxford.

The issue was how to justify risking US lives in what was essentially a civil war.

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