

BRIEFLY

7,000 Lankans back home: The first batch of more than 7,000 Sri Lankan refugees from camps in southern India returned to the island on Tuesday on board an Indian vessel, officials said.

Bomb defused in Belfast: Soldiers early yesterday defused a bomb, apparently planted by Protestant extremists, outside a bar in the Belfast's Catholic Falls Road district, police said.

Row over Shaka Day in SA: Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini lacks the authority to cancel tribal celebrations for a legendary ancestor, nationalist leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi says.

Zhirinovskiy denied visa: Nationalist Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has been denied an entry visa to Norway because of his behaviour on past foreign visits, the foreign ministry said.

Cabinet shake-up in Chile: President Eduardo Frei shook up his cabinet Tuesday, replacing his Foreign Affairs, Interior and Education ministers and Chief of Staff.

Cambodian talks resume: Negotiations to secure the release of three western hostages being held by Khmer Rouge guerrillas in southern Cambodia have resumed, a senior army commander said yesterday.

Irish troops leave Somalia: The final contingent of Irish troops which had been serving in the United Nations forces in Somalia arrived in Dublin on Tuesday night, government sources said.

CIS summit on Oct 21: The next Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit, originally set for October 6, will be held in Moscow on October 21 at the request of Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma.

UN advance team in Guatemala: A UN advance team arrived on Tuesday to ensure the army and guerrillas keep their pledge to end atrocities, AP reports from Guatemala City.

Cholera claims 7000 this year: Cholera has killed more people so far this year than in the whole of last year, including 4,181 in Zaire's refugee camps, according to the latest World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics.

Liberia's condition worsens: Aid organisations and officials of the African peacekeeping force claim there has been a serious worsening in the humanitarian conditions in Liberia since fighting flared up last month.

US court upholds anti-porn law: A US federal appeals court reinstated on Tuesday a law requiring people who produce sexually explicit films and photographs to keep records of the names and ages of their actors or models.

13 die in Mexican mishap: Thirteen people were killed and another 27 injured on Tuesday when a train slammed into a bus in the central state of Mexico, officials said.

Discovery lands safely: CAPE CANAVERAL, Sept 21: Six astronauts brought the space shuttle Discovery down safely in California on Tuesday after two days of bad weather kept them from landing in Florida.

Junta's talks with Suu Kyi may ease political impasse: YANGON, Sept 21: The first official meeting between the country's ruling junta and detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi sparked some optimism Wednesday.

Biola's health deteriorates: LAGOS, Sept 21: The treason trial of Nigeria's would-be president, Moshood Abiola, was set to resume on Wednesday as defence lawyers scrambled to get the hearing halted and to secure his release on health grounds.

Off the Record: MURAYAMA doll soon to go on sale: TOKYO: Sometimes it seems like Japan's Socialist Party will try anything to get ahead.

2 elderly sisters die together: DOYLESTOWN: For 10 years, the two elderly sisters lived together and took care of each other.

Biggest military contract with Paris
Pakistan to buy 3 French subs

ISLAMABAD, Sept 21: Pakistan has decided to buy three French-built Agosta 90-B submarines complete with technology transfers for around one billion dollars, officials and reliable sources said here today.

The deal will be one of the biggest military contracts ever concluded by Pakistan. The package calls for improvements to Karachi dockyards where one of the three submarines will be built using French technology.

included China, Sweden and the Netherlands. Britain had proposed selling its upholder class submarines which are serviced with the Royal Navy.

According to reliable sources, the deal with France will also include the sale of SM 39 sea-to-sea missiles built by French Aerospatiale.

The missiles are considered more effective than the Exocet, which proved itself during the Falklands conflict, and their sale to France would be the first to any foreign country, the sources said.

According to the sources France clinched the deal with its commitment to transfer technology to Islamabad, a key demand of the Pakistan navy.

in Cherbourg but assembled in Karachi and the third will be fully-built in Karachi.

Pakistan will then be in a position to construct its own submarines.

Pakistan's main concern in buying submarines is to prevent any blockade of Karachi, the country's main seaport, which could severely damage the economy within a few weeks.

France had already become a major supplier of military hardware to Pakistan which has operated two Agosta submarines since the late 1960s.

France has also supplied 100 Mirage Jets, Puma and Lama helicopters for the country's air force as well as Breguet-Atlantique naval patrol aircraft.

The new Agosta submarines have a maximum underwater speed of 17 knots and can be used at a maximum depth of 320 meters (1040 feet). The submarine will be equipped with an air independent propulsion system which doubles the length of the time it can stay submerged.

Sweden had offered to supply its T-96 type Gotland submarines currently in service with the Australian navy. But an internal debate erupted about selling such vessels to what was considered a "conflict risk zone."

The offer was shelved earlier this year.

China had proposed to sell its S-20 submarines and late-comer, the Netherlands, had offered Moray type submarines. But neither country was considered a serious contender in the deal.



US soldiers guarding the main gates to the Port-au-Prince harbour look on as a Haitian policeman swings his baton to disperse Haitians on Tuesday.

Ban on protests in Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Sept 21: Haiti's defacto government issued a ban on street protests late Tuesday, saying it was acting to avert a bloodbath in the wake of a US intervention to restore democracy, reports AP.

Meanwhile US troops continued to pour into the country, including 1,800 marines from the US Wasp which landed earlier in the day in Cap-Haitien, 260 kilometers (160 miles) north of here.

The ban came after police with clubs dispersed protests by supporters of exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, beating one man to death, as US troops stood by.

US military officials said some 6,000 US troops were expected in the country by midnight. Most of them in Port-au-Prince.

Professional agitators of a well-known sector of the population are profiting from the presence of the US military cooperation mission to resume their subversive activities with the goal of leading the country to chaos, the government said.

The statement issued by information minister Jacques Saint-Louis said all public demonstrations were banned to avoid "chaos and a bloodbath so wanted by some in the country."

Under an agreement negotiated by former President Jimmy Carter, Haiti's military leaders are supposed to step down no later than October 15, clearing the way for Aristide's return.

Reuter from UN says: The Secretary-General of Amnesty International on Tuesday sharply criticised the Clinton administration's deal with the Haitian military, saying it allowed killers to go free.

Pierre Sane, in a speech to non-governmental organisations at the United Nations, was referring to the deal reached in Port-au-Prince on Sunday that he said would allow the military to take an "early and honourable retirement" under a general amnesty.

US envoy shuttles from Syria to Israel for ME peace

JERUSALEM, Sept 21: A top US envoy shuttled from Damascus to Jerusalem on Tuesday, trying to keep up the momentum toward a peace accord between Israel and Syria, reports AP.

that the gaps in positions were still wide. "Now, it is clear that there is a definite will to make peace, but no definite way to achieve it," he said.

US envoy Dennis Ross arrived Tuesday after meeting earlier in the day with Syrian President Hafez Assad.

Ross, the US peace coordinator, said after meeting with Assad for six hours on Tuesday that the two had discussed the issues "at great length and detail."

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, meanwhile, confirmed Tuesday for the first time that quiet contacts have been taking place through the Syrian and Israeli ambassadors to Washington.

Ross said he felt there was a lot of seriousness about achieving peace and "we'll be working in that direction."

There are no secret negotiations. There are meetings with the ambassadors, and things of this sort, Peres told reporters.

At the core of the dispute are the Golan Heights captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war. Syria wants Israel to commit itself to a complete withdrawal before discussing the type of peace it envisions.

However, Peres suggested between the widely popular democracy leader and the junta.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said he was ready to give up a slice of the Golan immediately, without uprooting a Jewish settlement, to be followed by a three-year testing period in which the two countries would establish normal relations.

Taiwan may suspend cultural link with China

TAIPEI, Sept 21: Taiwan may suspend sporting and cultural links with China because of Beijing's hostility to President Lee Teng-hui attending next month's Asian Games, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

The government also may declare Tang Shuei, an official of China's body that handles links with Taiwan, persona non grata for remarks he made last week. Yeh Chin-fong, vice chairman of the Mainland Affairs Council, told legislators.

The government will consider suspending sports and cultural links because of the Chinese Communists' unfriendly moves.

WASHINGTON, Sept 21: Former President Jimmy Carter has been holding separate meetings with representatives from North and South Korea at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, The State Department said on Tuesday, reports AP.

The former president had been instrumental in defusing a confrontation between the United States and North Korea earlier this year, and on Sunday reached an accord with Haiti's military leaders that averted a US invasion.

State Department spokesman Michael McCurry confirmed that Carter met with the North Korean ambassador to the United Nations Monday and the South Korean ambassador on Tuesday.

Volcanoes rage for 3rd day around Papuan city: PORT MORESBY, Sept 21: Two volcanoes raged for third day Wednesday around the devastated port city of Rabaul, and officials warned residents in nearby coastal villages of a new possible danger - tidal waves, reports AP.

The National Broadcasting Commission used its shortwave radio service to warn residents to take cover if they noticed a sudden drop in the sea level, an early sign of tidal waves, also known as tsunamis.

The water will definitely rise again, and tidal waves could happen, the broadcasts said. Hugh Davies, a geology professor at the University of Papua New Guinea, said continuous earthquakes for volcanic eruptions could trigger the huge waves, but none had been reported as of Wednesday.

Algerian talks fail

ALGIERS, Sept 21: A fourth round of talks aimed at ending Algeria's Islamic insurgency closed in failure on Tuesday, with no agreement on a final communiqué and no date set for a future meeting, a source said, reports AP.

spoke on condition of anonymity.

The result contrasted with the high expectations for the closed-door meeting following President Liamine Zeulal's decision to move the nation's top two Islamic leaders from a military prison to house arrest to encourage progress.

There had been reports a truce was in the making, but violence has continued. An armed group commandeered a train on Monday in the Berber region of Kabylie, forcing the passengers off and setting it afire.

But the Islamic Salvation Front was absent from the closed-door session between five opposition parties and Zeulal.

A Salvation Front official said Madani and Belhadji, who were released from prison last week and placed under house arrest in a secret location, would not attend negotiations because they considered themselves still jailed.

Abassi Madani, head of the banned group, and his deputy, Ali Belhadji, are thought to hold the key to ending 2 and half years of violence that has left at least 10,000 people dead.

Madani and Belhadji want "total liberty, the rehabilitation of all their leaders," the unidentified official was quoted on Tuesday as saying in the El-Hwar newspaper.

Participants at the 11-hour session decided to "continue the dialogue on a bilateral level," according to the source close to the negotiations, who

Off the Record

Murayama doll soon to go on sale

TOKYO: Sometimes it seems like Japan's Socialist Party will try anything to get ahead. First it allied with its arch-enemy to get its leader the prime ministership. Then it jettisoned almost all of its basic policies, reports AP.

Announcing the official Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama doll, soon to go on sale at Socialist Party offices everywhere.

A limited edition of 1,000 dolls, complete with the prime minister's trademark bushy eyebrows, will be available starting next month for 1,800 yen (dlsr 18).

It's the brainchild of party public-relations man Hiroshi Imai, who's doing his best to promote Murayama's motto of "politics gentle to people."

2 elderly sisters die together

DOYLESTOWN: For 10 years, the two elderly sisters lived together and took care of each other. When constant health problems convinced them it was impossible to go on, they decided to die together, reports AP.

Arlys Van Horne, 83, and Kathryn Lachner, 82, were found shot to death Sunday in their two-bedroom apartment in what authorities ruled a murder-suicide.

A note on the dresser indicated the women had planned their deaths. "Life has become a daily battle with aches and pains, and the frustrations of trying to cope with unending health problems," the note read. "We don't feel that the Lord meant us to end our days this way."

"Since euthanasia is denied us in America, we are taking the only available way out."

Authorities say Van Horne shot her sister once in the chest with a .38-caliber handgun, then fired two shots into her own chest.

The women were known as "The Sisters" at the Pine Run Retirement Community, where they had lived together since each became a widow about 10 years ago.

Molestation charge to go

LOS ANGELES: Prosecutors have decided not to file child molestation charges against Michael Jackson, the Los Angeles Times reported yesterday, reports AP.

Jackson was accused in a civil lawsuit of molesting a 13-year-old boy he befriended while the two pursued their friendship in Los Angeles and at Jackson's "Neverland" ranch in Santa Barbara County.

Prosecutors are likely to say they considered the teenager, now 14, a credible witness - but he has declined to testify, unidentified sources told the Times.

The sources said an announcement was expected yesterday. Larry Feldman, the teenager's lawyer, told the Times he met with prosecutors from Santa Barbara and Los Angeles counties Monday. He would not disclose what was said.

"I believe a statement will be made shortly outlining the district attorneys position," Feldman said.

Los Angeles District Attorney Gil Garcetti said Tuesday that a decision would be made "very soon," but he would not be more specific. Santa Barbara District Attorney Tom Sneddon also declined to say anything more.

Jackson, 35, has been under investigation by both district attorneys since August 1993. There has been renewed interest in the investigation after his May marriage to Lisa Marie Presley.

Although Jackson denies any wrongdoing and has not been criminally charged, he reportedly reached a multimillion-dollar settlement in the civil suit with the teenager and his family.



Discovery lands safely

CAPE CANAVERAL, Sept 21: Six astronauts brought the space shuttle Discovery down safely in California on Tuesday after two days of bad weather kept them from landing in Florida, reports Reuter.

Discovery landed to a touchdown at 5:12 PM (2112 GMT) with navy Captain Dick Richards at the controls. The shuttle was to have landed on Monday, but thunderstorms and thick clouds forced it to spend an unscheduled 11th day in orbit.

Junta's talks with Suu Kyi may ease political impasse

YANGON, Sept 21: The first official meeting between the country's ruling junta and detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi sparked some optimism Wednesday that Myanmar's political impasse could be eased, reports AP.

Hopes arose because the meeting Tuesday was widely reported in the official media and all participants were shown smiling in the televised coverage.

It was the first face-to-face meeting between junta leaders and the 49-year-old Suu Kyi since the Nobel Peace Prize winner was placed under house arrest in July 1989.

Analysts say tensions in military-ruled Myanmar will continue until some kind of compromise can be reached between the widely popular democracy leader and the junta.

"This is a positive move toward peaceful settlement of the political stalemate between Aung San Suu Kyi and the military," said a senior politician, who demanded anonymity.

Most people in Myanmar insist that their names not be used when discussing politics for fear of punishment by the repressive regime.

News Analysis

pink traditional Myanmar jacket with matching pink longyi, a type of sarong. Also present was Lt Gen Khin Nyunt, the secretary who is reputed to be the actual power behind the junta.

The report did not give any details of the meeting, held at the Defence Ministry guest-house in Yangon.

Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Prize for her non-violent promotion of democracy, looked slim and healthy.

US Rep Bill Richardson of New Mexico, who in February became the first outsider to visit Suu Kyi during her extended house arrest, said he was encouraged by Tuesday's talks.

"I hope they are more than just good public relations. I hope they get into her release and an eventual political role for the opposition," he said, speaking by phone from his Washington office to The Associated Press in Bangkok.

British husband and two sons have been allowed regular visits.

According to the monk, both Suu Kyi and the junta leaders were eager for national reconciliation and agreed to meet for dialogue to settle the political stalemate in the country.

The junta has held power since violently suppressing pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988. Suu Kyi was detained for allegedly endangering public security in 1989.

Abiola's health deteriorates

LAGOS, Sept 21: The treason trial of Nigeria's would-be president, Moshood Abiola, was set to resume on Wednesday as defence lawyers scrambled to get the hearing halted and to secure his release on health grounds, reports AP.

For the third time this month, the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) raised the alarm, saying the millionaire businessman's health had deteriorated again.

Traces of blood had been found in his urine during the latest medical examinations on Friday, NMA doctors said. They added that he had lost the use of his right leg and risked paralysis unless he were admitted to hospital for treatment.