

BRIEFLY

Lankan clash leaves 7 dead:

Seven soldiers, Tamil rebels and civilian guards have been killed in separatist violence in Sri Lanka, military and police sources said yesterday. Reuter reports from Colombo.

In the eastern Trincomalee district, rebels fired at an army observation post on Wednesday, killing three soldiers, also in the Trincomalee district on Wednesday, troops ambushed and killed two rebels, a military spokesman said.

W Bengal begins film festival:

India's West Bengal state government has launched a year-long "centenary of world cinema (1895-1995)" celebrations with the screening of several films of yesteryears and holding exhibitions, seminars, Satyajit Ray memorial lectures and film workshops. Xinhua reports from New Delhi.

Efforts are also on to screen a large number of significant films produced both in India and abroad over the century, official sources said in New Delhi yesterday.

330 killed in Afghan war:

A week of fighting between rival Shiite Muslims in the Afghan capital has killed as many as 330 people and wounded 1,100, a Red Cross official said Wednesday. AP reports from Kabul.

The figure was much higher than previous estimates of the dead. Most of the casualties were taken to the Red Cross-run Karte Se Hospital, which has been cut off by fighting, said Mohammed Naheen, a medical officer for the International Committee for the Red Cross.

Anti-Yeltsin rally in Moscow:

About 5,000 Russians marched through central Moscow on Wednesday in angry commemoration of President Boris Yeltsin's decision one year ago to dissolve the old Russian parliament and call elections for a new legislature. Reuter reports from Moscow.

Banners compared Yeltsin with an old-style Russian Tsar. "The regime is on its deathbed," read one poster. The crowd chanted slogans like "put Yeltsin's gang on trial" and "Soviet Union".

30 feared drowned in India:

About 30 people were feared drowned when a country boat capsized in river Damodar near Durgapur on Wednesday. PTI reports from Calcutta.

The boat was ferrying passengers between Ramprashadpur Ghat near Ondal and Mejia in Bankura. About six persons managed to swim to the bank.

Iran cabinet okays proposal:

The Iranian cabinet has endorsed the incorporation of Qazvin into Tehran province following riots in the northern city last month. Iranian television reported. AP says from Nicosia, Cyprus.

The cabinet session, chaired by President Hashemi Rafsanjani, approved a proposal Wednesday to shift jurisdiction over Qazvin, a city of 750,000 located 80 miles (130 kilometers) northwest of the capital Tehran, from Zanjan province, the television said.

Bush slates Castro:

Former US President George Bush, giving a seminar speech on Wednesday in Spain, said Cuban leader Fidel Castro was "going against the current and his days were numbered." Reuter reports from Valladolid, Spain.

"Castro cannot sustain the Communist model in Cuba much longer," he said. "The future of the island lies in its integration with the political models of the rest of the Latin American countries."

2 mass graves in Rwanda:

UN troops operating in southwest Rwanda have discovered two mass graves overflowing with around 4,000 rotting bodies, a spokesman for the UN assistance mission in Rwanda said on Wednesday. AFP reports from Kigali.

Major Jean Guy Plante said the dead, who appeared to have been killed in "old incidents" had been discovered on Tuesday in two sites in the Gafunzo region, close to the edge of Lake Kivu, bordering on Zaire.

Pak soldier shot in Somalia:

A Pakistani soldier serving with the United Nations operation in Somalia was wounded by a stray bullet fired in clashes between clans in the southern sector of Mogadishu, UN officials said on Wednesday. AFP reports from Mogadishu.

Meanwhile the Irish aid group Concern temporarily suspended its operations in Somalia, one of the Somali leaders of the group Mohamed Ahmed Karab said.

Ex-US envoy to Myanmar dies:

David Osborn, a former US ambassador to Myanmar who used his mastery of Japanese and Chinese to help resolve several diplomatic crises, has died. He was 73. AP reports from San Diego.

Osborn, nicknamed "the bicycle ambassador" during his years in Myanmar because of his love of cycling, suffered head injuries during a recent bicycle accident and never recovered. He died on Friday, his wife, Helenka, said.

Mozart statue unveiled:

London's first statue of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was unveiled by Princess Margaret, sister of Queen Elizabeth, on Wednesday near the house where the composer wrote his first two symphonies in 1764 at the age of eight. Reuter reports from London.

The bronze sculpture by Briton Philip Jackson stands on a triangle of land in Pimlico, a district of central London west of the houses of Parliament.

Japan welcomes Myanmar talks:

Japan on Wednesday welcomed the talks in Yangon between Myanmar's leading opposition figure, Aung San Suu Kyi, and top leaders of the ruling junta, the Foreign Ministry said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

"Japan hopes that this dialogue will make a substantive progress in future toward an early solution of Suu Kyi's house arrest," the ministry said in a statement. It added that Tokyo also hoped that "further progress will be made toward the improvement of the human rights situation and the realisation of democratisation" in Myanmar.

Youths wane interest in army:

Malaysian youth, who once used to flock to join the military, no longer think it is a glamorous job, the army chief says. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The waning interest, although not critical, has become a pressing problem and could jeopardize the country's security in the long run. Gen. Ismail Omar said on Wednesday night.

TV cameras out of US courtrooms:

After a three-year experiment, a judicial panel has ordered all TV cameras out of US federal courtrooms — a decision that was met with dismay by advocates of greater press freedom. AP reports from Washington.

The vote announced on Wednesday by the policy-making Judicial Conference of the United States rejects a policy that 47 states have adopted for non-federal courts. It also rejects favourable findings in a 3 and a half year experiment that allowed cameras in a small number of federal courts. The conference sets policy, and only Congress has the power to reverse it.

Leghari in Turkey:

Pakistani President Farooq Leghari said in Turkey on Wednesday that his country was continuing its efforts to lift the UN arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims. Reuter reports from Ankara.

"We stand side by side with our Muslim brothers in Bosnia because they defend a just cause," Leghari told Anatolian News Agency on the first day of a three-day visit.

Militant killed in Egypt:

Police on Thursday killed an Islamic militant wanted for allegedly slaying a Spanish youth in an attack on a tourist bus, the Interior Ministry said, reports AP from Cairo.

Police acted on a tip that Ahmed Mohammed el-Sinman was hiding on a farm in Qena, 280 miles south of Cairo. They cordoned off sugar fields and shot el-Sinman as he tried to shoot his way out, a ministry statement said.

Police found a submachine gun and forged identity card near his body.



Bangladesh author Taslima Nasreen (2nd L) talks with her German publishers Dr Peter Priskil (R) and Beate Mittmann of the Ahnman-Verlag of Freiburg at the first day of the symposium on freedom of expression in Stavanger, Norway on Wednesday. — AFP photo

China continues close military links with Pakistan

BEIJING, Sept 22: China, continuing its close military links with Pakistan, has delivered six jet trainer aircraft to the Pakistani air force, the official China Daily said today, reports Reuter.

The handover of the jets worth more than 20 million dollars marked the export debut of the K-8 trainer, designed, made and tested at China's Nanchang aircraft manufacturing company.

China has built 21 of the K-85 so far, and Pakistan is interested in buying more of the planes, which were developed under a 1986 pact between the two countries, the newspaper said.

Pakistan has openly bought Chinese arms since the 1960s, but both sides have firmly denied US allegations that Beijing may have sold M-11 missiles or their components to Islamabad in violation of the missile technology control regime.

AFP from Karachi adds: The Pakistan army for the second day on Tuesday continued a house-to-house search operation to recover illegal weapons in one of the city's troubled districts, officials said.

Security agencies have so far recovered 74 unlicensed weapons, including handguns and automatic rifles, and over 900 rounds of ammunition in

the congested lines area, officials said. Three people have been arrested on charges of possessing unlicensed weapons.

The army, paramilitary troops and police launched a joint operation Monday morning to "arrest criminals who are involved in ethnic and sectarian violence and recover illegal weapons," officials said.

The four square kilometre (1.6 square mile) area, was cordoned off by security personnel and house-to-house searches were conducted over two days. Some 1,000 houses fall within the cordoned area and the operation is continuing.

The crackdown comes in

Malaysia will buy 18 Mig-29 from Russia

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 22: Malaysia's Defence Minister said Malaysia will take delivery of 18 Russian-built Mig-29 fighters with improved engines according to schedule, the New Straits Times newspaper reported today, says Reuter.

The paper quoted Najib Abdul Razak as saying Russia was working on an improved Klomov RD33 engine for the Mig-29s and there was no delay in the delivery of the planes during the agreed 10 to 12 months period after the contract signing.

"The Russians are bound by the 550 million dollars contract to deliver Mig-29s with the upgraded engines," Najib said.

Malaysia is buying 16 Mig-29 single-seaters and two Mig-29 UB twin-seaters, to be paid for partly in palm oil.

Sharif intensifies movement

ISLAMABAD, Sept 22: Opposition leader Nawaz Sharif's challenge to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has intensified in the light of his successful appeal for a strike to demand the government's resignation, analysts said yesterday, reports AFP.

Karachi's independent daily Dawn noted that Tuesday's strike was the first such nationwide stoppage since the 1977 movement mounted by the Opposition against the premier's late father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Sharif summoned a meeting of the Opposition supreme council yesterday amid reports that he would call for further protests.

Officials said the strike was timed to occur on the eve of a visit yesterday US energy sec-

retary Hazel O'Leary and more than 70 American investors, and was intended to project an image of instability.

Political sources, however, said that despite the strong opposition showing on Tuesday, Bhutto remained in control because President Farooq Leghari comes from her party and Army Chief Abdul Waheed vowed to stay off politics.

Addressing senior officers on the eve of the strike, the army chief asked the soldier "to concentrate fully on purely professional matters, leaving other things to the people concerned."

Zia's son Ejaz Ul Haq, a key PML organiser, said the party did not want a "third force" to intervene this time.

Off the Record



A little boy enjoys the overall view after climbing the top of the monument, which symbolises the friendship between the Russian and Ukrainian people, in Kiev on Wednesday. — AFP photo

Ban on sex education in the land of Kama Sutra

NEW DELHI: India, the land of the Kama Sutra and erotic temples, has decided to continue its ban on sex education in its schools, reports AP.

After a yearlong debate, the government decided against introducing it to the public school curriculum, an official said Thursday.

Though the issue has been discussed before, it was revived by the advent of satellite television. Many parents felt that because of TV promiscuity, children should learn about the dangers of unhealthy and premature sex in school.

"The government is not enforcing any curriculum on sex education because academicians are not in favour of it," India's Human Resource Development Minister, Arjun Singh, told reporters Wednesday.

But Singh's spokesman said the decision is binding on government-run schools where children from lower middle class and poor families study, while private schools will be free to make their own decision.

Sexuality would appear to have been more acceptable in ancient India, where the Kama Sutra — a manual of sexual behaviour — was compiled and where explicit sex was carved into stone for Hindu temples.

... to escape voodoo curse

DALLAS: Two women were convicted Wednesday of aggravated assault for gouging out their sister's eyes in an effort to drive out a demon, reports Reuter.

Doretha Crawford, 34, and Beverly Johnson, 35, of Arcadia, Louisiana, were convicted in state district court in Dallas of gouging out their sister's eyes during a two-day car trip from Louisiana in March to escape a voodoo curse.

Myra Obasi, who was blinded in March, testified during the trial on behalf of her sisters and said she was controlled by an evil spirit the day she lost her eyes.

None of the sisters could remember the moment when the eyes were removed. The injury was discovered March 18 when Obasi went to Parkland memorial hospital in Dallas.

Mother of two sacked for sexually harassing driver

LONDON: A female railway conductor was sacked by British rail for sexually harassing a train driver, a newspaper reported on Thursday, says Reuter.

Janette Huxwitt, 37, sent so many steamy love letters to bachelor co-worker Richard Gula that he complained to his bosses and the mother of two children was fired.

"I'm shattered. It's totally over the top," Huxwitt told the mass-market Sun newspaper. "I've always loved the railways," she added.

A spokesman for British rail said Huxwitt, who worked in the northeast region of the country, was dismissed for breaching the company's harassment policies.

Tuanku Jaafar 10th King of Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 22: A former diplomat and the ruler of a rubber-rich Malaysian state was Thursday installed as the nation's 10th king under a unique system of elected monarchy, reports AP.

In traditional ceremonies, Tuanku Jaafar Tuanku Abdul Rahman assumed the throne as he kissed the Quran, the Islamic holy book, to the accompaniment of music from a Malay wind instrument and drums.

Sitting on his throne atop a yellow-carpeted dais, Tuanku Jaafar, 71, unsheathed an kissed the "Kris," the sword of the government, to formally accept a five-year term as the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, or King.

Clinton asked to declare immigration emergency

SAN DIEGO, Sept 22: Gov Pete Wilson asked President Clinton on Wednesday to declare an immigration emergency in California, reports AP.

"You have acknowledged the illegal immigration crisis in other states," he wrote, referring to Clinton's recent aid to stop Cubans flooding Florida. "I implore you to take immediate action to assist the people of California."

US Attorney General Janet Reno responded that the Clinton administration had made great progress in tightening the border and blamed the extent of the problem on decades of neglect.

Abacha rules out release of Abiola

ABUJA, Sept 22: Nigerian junta chief General Sani Abacha has stated that the treason trial of opposition leader Moshood Abiola will go ahead in spite of demands for his unconditional release, the Independent Daily Champion reported on Wednesday, says AFP.

The trial, which began on July 6, was expected to resume later on Wednesday at the High Court in the federal capital, Abuja.



French President Francois Mitterrand (R) and Nepal's King Birendra pose for photographer on Tuesday at the Elysee Palace in Paris. — AFP photo

US deploys aircraft carriers ahead of talks with DPRK

TOKYO, Sept 22: The United States had deployed an aircraft carrier group off the Korean coast in a "very strong message" to Pyongyang ahead of the resumption of US-North Korean talks, the head of the Pacific Fleet was quoted today as saying, reports AFP.

The group comprises the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk, three cruisers, a frigate and two supply ships. Admiral Ronald Zlatoper, the fleet's new commander, told the US armed forces daily The Stars and Stripes.

"That's significant, because in the past, we haven't had carrier battle group presence in this region," he said. US and

North Korean delegations met again in Geneva on Friday in a bid to decide a safe replacement for North Korea's controversial nuclear programme, which Washington suspects has been harnessed for military use.

Zlatoper said: "We certainly hope for a diplomatic settlement in the Korean situation. However, I think the Haiti example is a good example of how very strong military force can influence diplomacy."

"That's why we're putting the carrier battle group up there off the Korean peninsula. I think it sends a very strong message."

Zlatoper arrived in Tokyo

on Tuesday and is to meet the US ambassador here, Walter Mondale, as well as Japanese military officials.

Reuter reports: North Korea said it is eager to resolve the dispute over its nuclear programme when talks with the United States in Geneva resume on Friday this week.

"The delegation of the DPRK will make every sincere effort to achieve a substantial resolution of the nuclear issue..." the North Korean delegation said in a statement upon arrival in Geneva.

The statement was issued on Wednesday and quoted by Pyongyang's official news agency KCNA, monitored in

Tokyo.

The delegation said the talks were expected to focus on ways of fitting together simultaneous steps to be taken by both sides, with a view to implementation of a previous statement by North Korea and the United States.

At an August meeting with the United States in Geneva, North Korea promised to freeze its nuclear programme and replace its existing reactors with outside assistance in return for moves towards diplomatic recognition by Washington.

"It is hoped that the United States side will respond fully

to the DPRK's active efforts," the delegation statement said.

AP from Washington says: The Clinton administration is organising a group of Asian and European nations headed by South Korea to provide North Korea with electrical energy that it would lose if it stopped building two new nuclear reactors.

Chief US negotiator Robert Gallucci, before heading for Geneva to resume negotiations with North Korea on Friday, said key roles would be played by South Korea, Russia, Japan and China. He said the United States had also talked to other European and Asian nations.

China regrets diplomat's death

BEIJING, Sept 22: China has formally expressed deep regret and condolences to Iran over the deaths of an Iranian diplomat and his son in a shooting rampage in Beijing that left nine people dead, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Thursday, reports AP.

Iran delivered a protest to the Chinese charge d'affaires in Tehran over the shooting Tuesday morning on a busy Beijing street. Iran's deputy foreign minister told Tehran Radio.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian said at a briefing that an Iranian delegation had arrived in Beijing to investigate.