

BRIEFLY

Kohl won't seek reelection: Chancellor Helmut Kohl said Friday he will not seek re-election four years from now if he defeats Social Democratic rival Rudolf Scharping on Oct. 16, AP reports from Bonn.

Kohl has been in office since 1982, longer than any postwar German leader other than Konrad Adenauer, who was West German chancellor for 14 years.

According to opinion polls, Kohl could very well win a fourth term on Oct. 16. He would replace Adenauer as longest-serving.

LTTE kills 2 Lankan soldiers: Tamil separatist guerrillas yesterday killed two government soldiers and wounded another in northeast Sri Lanka shortly after escaping an army ambush in the region, military officials said, AFP reports from Colombo.

Gunmen from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) shot dead the soldiers in coastal Trincomalee district after attacking troops who were planning to ambush the guerrillas, military officials said.

5 US troops killed in chopper crash: Five US soldiers were killed when their helicopter crashed in central South Korea, the US military command in Seoul said Friday, AP reports from Seoul.

The HH-60G helicopter from the 33rd Rescue Squadron at Kadena Air Base in southwestern Japan, was on a routine training mission when it crashed shortly after 8 pm (1100 GMT) on Thursday near Jochewon, 150 kilometres (94 miles) south of Seoul, according to an official written statement.

Manila-Tehran bilateral accord: The Philippines and Iran have signed a bilateral agreement to improve relations between the two countries, the Philippine foreign affairs office announced on Friday, AP reports from Manila.

Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto Romulo and Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati signed the agreement Oct. 5 in New York, according to the announcement.

Singapore executes Ghanaian: A 28-year-old man from Ghana who was convicted of drug trafficking was hanged Friday, the 84th person to be executed by Singapore for a narcotics offence, AP reports from Singapore.

The island-state made the death penalty mandatory in 1975 for anyone caught bringing in or taking out of Singapore as little as 15 grams (a half-ounce) of heroin.

Letter bomb defused in Austria: A letter bomb sent to a monastery housing foreigners seeking asylum was defused by police on Thursday in the fourth such incident this week, AP reports from Vienna.

No one was injured in the incident, but there were fears yet more letter bombs were still travelling through the mail.

The letter bomb was sent to the monastery in the western province of Tirol on Wednesday, media reports said. It was only discovered on Thursday.

15 pc Americans below poverty line: About 15 per cent of Americans lived below the poverty line in 1993, a slight increase compared to the previous year, according to an annual report released on Thursday by the US Census Bureau, AP reports from Washington.

Some 30 million Americans earned an annual income of less than 14,763 dollars, considered as the minimum level by statisticians. In 1992, 14.8 per cent of Americans lived below the poverty line, then fixed at 14,335 dollars a year.

Blast claims 5 in Philippines: Five children were killed and two other persons were wounded when suspected members of a religious cult exploded a grenade inside a house outside this southern city, police said today, AFP reports from Cotabato, Philippines.

The attack on the house of Muslim farmer Duday Bandila before dawn Thursday in Kabacan town outside this city, which killed five of his children aged six to 15, could have resulted from a personal grudge, police said.

Khmers step up troop movement: Cambodia's outlawed Khmer Rouge guerrillas stepped up troop movement near Ankor Wat Temple in northwest Siem Reap province, a senior government official said yesterday, Reuters reports from Phnom Penh.

But provincial second deputy governor Hem Bunheng said the temple complex was still safe for tourists to visit, despite the nightly planting of land mines by government troops around the temples to stop thefts of antiquities.

C'wealth Prize for Indian writer: Indian author Vikram Seth has been awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for his widely-praised best seller, *A Suitable Boy*, a 1,349-page epic about love and marriage in his native land of the 1950s, AP reports from Singapore.

Seth, who shot into fame with *The Golden Gate*, a 300-page sonnet about San Francisco's loves and lovers, was chosen from four nominees for the Best Book award. The prize was given on Thursday at a dinner here.

Clashes leave 70 dead in Burundi: Some 70 people have been killed since the beginning of the week in Mubutu, south of Bujumbura, during army operations to disarm civilians, the Burundi Press Agency said here on Thursday, AFP reports from Bujumbura.

The agency did not give details, but said both Hutus and Tutsis were among the dead.

Amnesty denounces ROK: An international human rights group denounced South Korea on Friday for executing 15 criminals, and demanded it abolish capital punishment, AP reports from Seoul.

London-based Amnesty International said it will send letters to the South Korean government expressing deep regret over the executions and demanding the government commute all death penalties.

Rains kill 25 in Andhra Pradesh: Torrential rains lashed the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, killing at least 25 people, police said Thursday, AP reports from Hyderabad.

Six people, including two women and two children, were found buried as two houses collapsed in Hyderabad, the state capital, a police spokesman said.

Five students were washed away in flash floods in Cuddapah, 250 kilometres (155 miles) south of Hyderabad, while crossing an overflowing rivulet in an ox cart, Bhaskara Prasad, a top state administrator, said.

Quake hits west Java: An earthquake measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale hit Indonesia's west Java province early Thursday but there were no reports of casualties or damage, the Meteorological and Geophysical Agency said, Reuters reports from Jakarta.

The epicentre of the earthquake was 62 km (40 miles) southwest of Bandung, the provincial capital. It struck at 00:24 am local time.

'Peace media' seminar ends: Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian journalists on Wednesday wound up a three-day 'peace media' seminar in the Cypriot capital aimed at helping to clear the hurdles of misunderstanding and misinformation, AFP reports from Nicosia.

Four Palestinians from the West Bank, three Israelis and three Jordanians took part in the seminar organised by the London-based economist intelligence unit and sponsored by the European Union (EU).

Russian border guard killed: Snipers killed a Russian border guard after shooting at his truck in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe, the Interfax news agency reported on Thursday, AP says from Moscow.

Unidentified attackers fired the shots from a grenade launcher at a truck carrying six border guards and several civilians late Wednesday night.

Fresh bid to break deadlock in Syrian-Israeli track Christopher starts ME trip today

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7: Secretary of State Warren Christopher begins his fifth Middle East mission in five months Saturday with Israeli-Syrian peace talks still blocked over the occupied Golan Heights, reports AFP.

With both sides holding firm in their positions, Christopher says he hopes to "bridge the considerable gap" to reach an accord that could be one of the last major components of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace agreement.

Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq Al-Shara said Thursday in Washington that a full Israeli pullout from the Golan Heights was a prerequisite for peace. The strategic heights were seized in 1967 in the six-day war.

"Syria is prepared to meet the requirements of peace,"

Shara told reporters before a meeting with Christopher. The forefront of these requirements is the full withdrawal from the Golan.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin this week defended his peace policy before parliament on Monday, vowing that Israel would not give up any of the Golan without total peace with Syria.

"No force will make us move a single centimetre on the Golan plateau if there is not total genuine peace," Rabin said as he opened the winter session of parliament.

Israel has proposed a limited withdrawal from the Golan, without uprooting Jewish settlements in the territory, with a three-year probationary period before further withdrawal.

With Israeli Foreign

Minister Shimon Peres in Washington this week, United States sought to help resolve one of the disputes over the Golan by pledging to participate in an international peace-keeping force in the region as part of a peace settlement.

Questions on the timetable for Israeli withdrawal and security measures are not insurmountable obstacles, said Shai Feldman of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"The ultimate depth of Israel's withdrawal and the tangible expressions of Syria's commitment to normalise relations with Israel pose much deeper problems," Feldman added.

Many Israelis believe the Golan holds a strategic importance, particularly with relative peace in the region in recent years, the analyst said.

Feldman said Washington has a chance to win over Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad by dangling the benefits of the "peace dividends" he can reap from an accord, including investment credits and other forms of US economic aid.

But despite the stalemates over Israeli-Syrian discussions, progress was made this week in Arab-Israeli relations this week with Tunisia and Israel agreeing to establish liaison offices and six gulf monarchies agreeing to ease their economic boycott of Israel.

Christopher is due to arrive in Israel Sunday, visit Damascus Tuesday and travel on to Amman Wednesday, before returning to Israel. He will go to Damascus again Thursday and wind up his tour with a stopover in Cairo on October 14.

China conducts second nuclear test

BEIJING, Oct. 7: China conducted its second nuclear test this year on Friday, defying pressure on it to join an international moratorium on such blasts, reports AP.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement confirming that an underground nuclear test had been conducted, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Friday's test explosion, China's third in just over a year, demonstrated Beijing's determination to build strong defenses against perceived Western bullying.

The first news of the test, which had been expected for weeks, came from Australia. Acting Foreign Minister Gordon Bilney said the blast in northern China was detected by the Australian Seismological Centre in Canberra at 1:25 pm (03:25 GMT).

It had an estimated yield equivalent to between 40 and 150 kilotons of TNT, Bilney said.

China also conducted tests in October 1993 and June 1994. Unlike other major nuclear powers, including the United States, China has refused to join an international moratorium on nuclear tests.

But it maintains that its own tests have been limited in scope and says its nuclear weapons are solely for defensive purposes.



German top model Claudia Schiffer poses at the Frankfurt International Book Fair where she is promoting two of her new books. The new books are presenting a collection of her pictures by fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld. — AFP photo

Azeri PM sacked

BAKU, Oct. 7: Azerbaijan's prime minister, fired after President Geydar Aliyev accused him of masterminding a coup attempt, said Friday he had been framed by Aliyev's inner circle, reports AP.

Surat Huseynov's dismissal was sealed late Thursday night by the Azerbaijani parliament, which also stripped him of immunity.

Aliyev said Huseynov's relatives led the rebellion in the city of Gyanzha, his power base, on Monday night when rebels temporarily overthrew local authorities. Three government soldiers and seven opposition fighters were killed in fighting.

Speaking to parliament, Huseynov denied the accusations, saying he had fulfilled all of Aliyev's orders, and couldn't be held responsible for his relatives' actions. He also demanded that authorities establish a special commission to investigate the rebellion.

Lawmakers ignored his proposal, and voted 31-1 to confirm his ouster.

The latest crisis started Sunday night, when about 100 members of a special police unit took the nation's top prosecutor hostage and exchanged fire with government troops, wounding six soldiers.

The police rebels, headed by deputy Interior Minister Rovshan Javadov, demanded the ouster of several top officials but said they weren't challenging the president's authority.

Saddam mobilises troops along Kuwaiti border, claims opposition

NICOSIA, Oct. 7: Iraqi opposition groups claim Saddam Hussein has ordered a mobilisation of elite troops along the border with Kuwait, while threatening to mount "a new confrontation against the outside world," reports AP.

The Iraqi National Congress said in a statement Thursday that Republican Guard divisions encamped in northern Iraq have been "rapidly moving towards the cities of Basra and Amara" near the southern border with Kuwait.

But UN monitors at the border said all appeared quiet on both sides.

"We don't have any information about massing troops at the border," said Besselin Kostov, spokesman for the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission.

The congress, based in Iraq's semi-autonomous northern Kurdish area, is an umbrella for groups opposed to Saddam, the Iraqi president.

The opposition claim came at a delicate time in international efforts to restrain Iraq from further aggression four

years after its Aug. 2, 1990 invasion of the Gulf emirate that ended when a US-led military force routed Saddam's troops.

On Thursday, Baghdad warned it would prevent UN monitoring of its military facilities unless the UN Security Council fails to ease the embargo on oil sales it imposed after the Kuwait invasion.

The council meets next week to discuss whether Iraq

has met UN conditions for lifting the embargo, which has devastated Iraq's economy and increased poverty by depriving the country of its main revenue earner.

After a meeting Thursday between Saddam and his Revolutionary Command Council, the state-run Iraqi News Agency said Iraq had no option but to "prepare for a new position that would put things in order to deliver the Iraqi people out of this tragic suffering."

An official Kuwait response, published Friday in the Al-Watan newspaper, called the Iraqi pronouncements "an open threat to the security and stability of Kuwait."

The Iraqi National Congress statement said the redeploying troops were based around Mosul and Kirkuk, cities just south of the Kurdish safe haven Western countries set up after the 1991 Gulf War.

The statement said the mobilization comes in the wake of several threats by the Iraqi regime to launch a new confrontation against the outside world.



Saddam Hussein

Abiola vows to die in jail

LAGOS, Oct. 7: Mashood Abiola, detained since June for declaring himself president in defiance of Nigeria's military rulers, has vowed to die in jail rather than renounce his claim, his lawyer said in remarks reported today, reports Reuters.

Lawyer Godwin Ajayi said after a court hearing on Thursday that mediators in the Nigerian crisis had urged Abiola to forget his presidential claim in order to be granted bail.

But Abiola had replied "death is better than disgrace." An appeal court on Thursday indefinitely reserved ruling on Abiola's bail request, raising the prospect of a long stint in detention for the man presumed to have won an annulled presidential election in June 1993.

His trial for treason at a high court in the capital Abuja for proclaiming himself president has been suspended pending an appeal court decision on whether the Abuja court has jurisdiction over the case.

Abiola's arrest in June led to two months of strikes and riots.

Off the Record



This photo shows unnamed twin lowland gorillas on October 3 and released from the Bronx Zoo in New York on Thursday. The new-born males, whose August 8 birth was announced on Thursday, are only the sixth set of such twin-born in captivity in the world. — AFP photo

Deng — the luckiest old man

BEIJING, Oct. 7: China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping may be retired from all his powerful official posts, but he has now been formally named the luckiest old man in the world, the official media said today, reports Reuters.

The organisers of the Lucky Old Man Life Knowledge competition named Deng as winner of the "Special Lucky Old Man" prize at a ceremony in Beijing, the China Business Times reported.

"Everyone felt that comrade Xiaoping is the great architect of our nation's socialist reform and opening up and of its modernisation," the newspaper said, calling Deng by his given name in a sign of respectful intimacy.

"He is the creator of socialism with Chinese characteristics," the newspaper continued.

'Married Americans have better sex'

CHICAGO: A sweeping new survey finds that married Americans have better sex — and have it more often — than single people who don't live with a boyfriend or girlfriend, reports AP.

Forty-one per cent of married people say they have sex at least twice a week, while just 23 per cent of single, non-cohabiting people reported being that active, according to the survey. Couples living together reported the highest rate of all, with 56 per cent saying they had sex at least twice a week.

Three quarters of married women say they always or usually had an orgasm during sex, compared with 62 per cent of single women.

About 95 per cent of men reported having orgasm during sex.

And those amorous marrieds tend to stay together: 75 per cent of men and 85 per cent of women said they remain faithful to their spouses.

The study was conducted in 1992 by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center.

Iraq threatens to block arms monitoring

MANAMA, Bahrain, Oct. 7: Iraq threatened on Thursday to block an international monitoring system of its military facilities if the UN Security Council failed to ease a 4-year-old embargo of Baghdad at a meeting next week, reports AP.

The threat was published in Al-Qadisiya, the Iraqi Defence Ministry's newspaper, as Rolf Ekeus, chairman of the UN Security Commission, wound up a four-day visit to Baghdad.

The daily warned, "There will be no monitoring unless the Security Council sets a date for lifting the oil embargo."

On arrival later in Bahrain, the commission's regional headquarters, Ekeus said that the monitoring centre in Baghdad had been "provisionally operated." He did not elaborate.

But the Paris-based radio Monte Carlo, an Arabic language broadcast, quoted him as saying in Baghdad that UN weapons experts were "examining this mechanism right now, and two days later we shall announce its implementation."

He said Iraq had no confidence in Ekeus.

Belgrade denies arms supply to Bosnian Serbs

UNITED NATIONS, Oct. 7: Yugoslavia's foreign minister denied reports Thursday that his country has been shipping arms to Bosnian Serbs and urged the United Nations to lift economic sanctions against Belgrade, reports AP.

Foreign Minister Vladislav Jovanovich said that "only the entire lifting of sanctions could bring the arrival of peace in Bosnia in a very short time."

The Security Council eased sanctions against travel, sports and cultural contacts Wednesday after monitors on the Yugoslav-Bosnian border reported that the frontier was closed to all but humanitarian aid. But a crippling economic embargo remains in place.

Serbia, the dominant member of Yugoslavia, shut the border to press for an easing of the sanctions and pressure Bosnian Serbs to accept an international peace plan in a few weeks.

Bosnia's Muslims and Croats have already accepted the plan, which would reduce Bosnian Serb holdings in the republic from 70 per cent to 49 per cent.

Jovanovich said lifting all sanctions against Yugoslavia would convince Bosnian Serbs to accept an international peace plan in a few weeks.