

BRIEFLY

New Pak naval chief appointed:

The Pakistan government has named Mansur Ul Haque as the country's new naval chief replacing Admiral Saeed Khan who is retiring early next month, a defence ministry statement said yesterday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

Haque, 57, who has been promoted to the rank of admiral, will take over as the 13th chief of the Pakistan naval forces on November 9, it said.

Top Chinese official held:

The head of public security in southwestern Guizhou province has been arrested on charges of taking bribes worth up to 170,000 yuan (20,000 dollars), an official report said on Thursday. AP reports from Beijing.

Guo Zhengmin, 52, is one of dozens of local officials — usually high-ranking members of the ruling Communist Party — who recently have been reported to have been arrested for violating corruption and vice laws.

Fire guts Tbilisi TV centre:

Fire gutted the main broadcasting centre in Georgia, leaving the beleaguered former Soviet republic without television, officials said on Wednesday. AP reports from Tbilisi.

Fire broke out in an equipment room about half way up the 273-meter tower Wednesday morning. The blaze was extinguished about five hours later, said Zurab Batashvili, a spokesman for the interior ministry.

Aid for Kuril quake victims:

Japan will send emergency supplies this weekend to earthquake victims of the Kuril Islands. Chief Cabinet Secretary Kojo Igarashi said on Thursday. reports AP from Tokyo.

The top government spokesman told a news conference the supplies, worth about 15 million yen (150,000 dollars) will be shipped to the islands of Kunashiri and Shikotan on Saturday and Sunday.

US FDA okays sonic bone healer:

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved a new device to help broken bones heal faster. AP reports from Washington.

The Sonic Accelerated Fracture Healing System uses low-intensity pulses of ultrasound on fractures in the lower leg and lower forearm.

Guatemala volcano spews ash:

A volcano rumbled and spewed ash from a newly opened crater, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of villagers on Wednesday amid fears of a possible eruption. AP reports from Guatemala City.

Pacaya, a 4,805-foot (1,500-metre) volcano, has damaged crops with two days of falling ash, prompting the evacuation of at least 300 people from around its slopes.

Li Peng to visit S Korea:

Chinese Premier Li Peng will visit Seoul this month for the first time, it was announced in Seoul yesterday amid hints from Geneva of progress in Washington's nuclear talks with North Korea. AFP reports from Seoul.

Announcement of the five-day visit by Li, long an advocate of negotiations — not force — to thwart Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions, also came as the South appeared to be balking at the speed of US-North Korean rapprochement.

Threat to disrupt Cong rally:

Maolist guerrillas have threatened to disrupt an election rally to be addressed by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao next week at his village in southern India, a newspaper reported yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

The outlawed People's War Group (PWG) said it will not permit India's ruling Congress (I) Party to hold the rally at Vangara village on Tuesday, the Hindustan Times reported.

Jordan, Israel may sign peace deal Nov 16

EILAT, Israel, Oct 13: The heads of Israel and Jordan held a surprise meeting Wednesday evening, an Israeli television reported that a peace treaty between the two countries may be signed next month in the United States, reports AP.

The report by Israel Television, citing unidentified sources, couldn't be confirmed. It said the treaty may be signed Nov 16 in Denver, Colorado.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Jordan's King Hussein met in the Jordanian capital of Amman to discuss the status of peace talks between their countries, said Oded Ben-Ami, Rabin's spokesman.

Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres flew to Amman in the early evening and returned to Tel Aviv after two and a half hours of talks with the Jordanian monarch at his palace, Ben-Ami said.

"The meeting advances the peace talks between Jordan and Israel and shows the effort to continue the peace process despite terrorist attacks," he said, adding that the meeting had been scheduled earlier, this week.

It was the prime minister's third meeting with Hussein since their dramatic Washington, DC, summit in July, when they declared an end to their countries' 46-year state of war and launched negotiations on a formal peace treaty.

Gunfire halts aid airlift into Sarajevo again

SARAJEVO, Oct 13: Gunfire halted the humanitarian airlift for the second time in a week Wednesday, frustrating efforts to replenish dwindling food stocks as Sarajevo braces for its third winter of siege, reports AP.

Aging Sarajevans who depend on soup kitchens for their only hot food may suffer. Planned German Red Cross flights to supply those kitchens had to be scrapped.

Five people, including four children, who were taken to the airport to fly out for medical treatment, had to be returned to Sarajevo's Kosovo hospital, said Kris Janowski of the UN relief agency.

Bullet holes found in three UN planes and mortar fire around Sarajevo's beleaguered airport late Tuesday halted all aid flights Wednesday morning.

But the aid airlift was scrapped entirely after three planes on logistics flights for UN peacekeepers came under fire after they landed. One was hit by small-arms fire, said UN spokesman Lt. Col. Tim Spicer.

Aid planes supply about 80 per cent of the food and other needs of 360,000 Sarajevans, now preparing for a third miserable winter since Bosnian Serbs laid siege to their city in April 1992.

Feeding Sarajevo this winter is becoming a race against time. The airlift was up and down for much of the summer. Last Saturday when relief planes had flown only one of the previous 15 days, Janowski said Sarajevo had three days

food left.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Red Cross piled on rare Sunday relief flights last weekend in an attempt to stockpile for winter.

The UN aid agency also is trying to increase the number of land convoys, which had been blocked or delayed by Bosnian Serbs until this week.

Even if they get through, "there is no way the land convoys can make up for the interrupted airlift," Janowski said. "We are still extremely concerned about the airlift interruptions."

Pro-British groups announce truce in N Ireland

BELFAST, Oct 13: Pro-British Protestant paramilitaries announced they would "universally cease all operational hostilities" from midnight Thursday, reports AP.

The ceasefire, announced in a press conference in Belfast on Thursday, follows an Irish Republican Army (IRA) ceasefire which began six weeks ago on September 1.

British Prime Minister John Major had said this morning that the prospect of a ceasefire by loyalist groups in Northern Ireland was "a remarkable step forward" after the IRA ceasefire announced six weeks ago.

Search for kidnapped Israeli soldier continues

Palestinian police arrest 300 militants in Gaza

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, Oct 13: Palestinian police arrested 300 Islamic militants in an extensive sweep Thursday after Yasser Arafat came under intense Israeli pressure to find a soldier-held hostage by a fundamentalist group, reports AP.

Palestinian police chief Brig. Gen. Nasser Yousef said that 9,000 troops were involved in the operation that began around 10 pm (2000 GMT) Wednesday night.

"The search is continuing. We are trying our best to get to the soldier, but we haven't succeeded yet," Yousef said.

A Palestinian security official at Gaza's central jail, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said 300 Islamic militants had been arrested in the sweep.

Yousef said the detained included five stringers for the Reuters news service that on Wednesday released a chilling videotape of missing soldier Cpl. Nachshon Waxman appealing to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to save his life by answering his captors' demands. A Reuters videotape also

showed one of Waxman's captors, who said he was from the militant wing of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas group, announcing the kidnapping. The videotape was released on Tuesday.

At least one of the journalists had been freed from custody by early morning, Hamas sources said.

Arafat decided on the mass sweep of Islamic militants after he failed to get any information from Hamas political leaders. Palestinian sources said.

The Palestinian leader was also swayed by an insistent phone call from Rabin, the sources added.

Rabin has warned that the peace process would be severely damaged if Arafat failed to make a serious effort to rescue the missing soldier.

"I repeat, and say that the soldier Nachshon Waxman is in Gaza, and I put the full weight of responsibility on Arafat," Rabin told Israel radio on Thursday, adding that Israel had no plans to send in troops to search for the soldier. After meeting with his top

security lieutenants late Wednesday, Arafat decided "on new measures to implement law and order," said his spokesman Marwan Kanafani.

A top aide, Ahmed Tibi, told Israel radio that the extent of the search was unprecedented. Tibi added, however, that there is no evidence to support Israeli claims that Waxman is being held in the Gaza Strip.

In the meantime, many Hamas activists on wanted lists have gone underground.

Three policemen came and broke down the door, charged into the house and started searching," said Dr. Mahmoud Zohar, one of the top leaders of Hamas.

"They were looking for the soldier, but I don't know why they broke into my house," he told The Associated Press.

The arrests could lead to a potential showdown between the autonomy authorities and the fundamentalist-led opposition — a conflict Arafat had been hoping to avoid since self-rule was established in Gaza and the West Bank town

of Jericho in May.

The crisis began Tuesday with the release of the videotape in which militants, who said they belonged to Hamas' military wing, claimed to be holding 19-year-old Waxman. They said they would kill him unless Israel released 200 Arab prisoners, including Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, by Friday. Yassin has called on the captors to spare Waxman's life.

Waxman, an Israeli-American dual citizen, is the 10th Israeli to have been kidnapped by Islamic militants since 1989. All the previous captives were killed.

Imad Faloji, one of the Hamas political leaders who met with Arafat, told The Associated Press the abductors were acting on their own.

"Arafat told us they don't want the Israeli army to enter Gaza and reoccupy it," he said. "We told them that as politicians for Hamas, we have no relations with the military wing and Arafat should not take hasty measures that will only lead to infighting."



British troops arrive in Kuwait City on Wednesday. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said British transport planes were arriving in the city at a rate of one every two hours carrying military hardware from bases in Cyprus. The operation continued until Thursday evening.

— AFP photo

US continues military buildup in Kuwait

KUWAIT, Oct 13: The United States continued its military buildup in Kuwait on Thursday despite increasingly firm confirmation that Iraqi troops are pulling back from the border and going home after a week-long show of force, reports Reuters.

"As fresh US troops poured into the oil-rich Gulf emirate, US marines planned high-profile amphibious and airborne exercises to show the Kuwaitis they were back once more to protect them from Iraqi threats."

US defence officials in Washington said on Wednesday elements of half the estimated

80,000 Iraqi troops sent to the border last week were boarding trains and moving north. One official said the Iraqis appeared to be moving back to Baghdad and northern Iraq.

"We feel that we're seeing elements of about half the force loading up," he said. "The indications are that they are going home."

This was the firmest US confirmation so far of Iraqi assertions since Monday that it is pulling its troops away from the disputed frontier and sending them back north.

But Washington officials said 19,000 marines were ordered to Kuwait on

Wednesday and the build-up would continue while US and allied leaders considered ways to prevent Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from threatening his neighbours again.

A US official at the United Nations said Washington was backing off the idea of a land exclusion zone that would bar all Iraqi troops and heavy weapons from southern Iraq.

Instead, it was considering introducing a Security Council resolution to forbid Iraq from deploying elite units with an offensive potential in areas where they could threaten Kuwait.

10 killed in Afghan fighting

QUETTA, Oct 13: Fighting between the forces of a local Afghan commander and a religious group has killed 10 people and injured 20 in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar Province, diplomats said, reports Reuters.

The exchange of rockets and artillery between local commander Akhtar Jan, who is in charge of the spinboldak check post about 120 km (80 miles) northwest of the Pakistani city of Quetta, and the group erupted on Monday, said Abdul Khaliq at the Afghan consulate in Quetta.

The fighting had stopped on Wednesday and intermediaries were trying to negotiate a permanent ceasefire, but guerrillas of the two sides were maintaining battlefield positions in the area, he said.

China for more defence ties with US

BEIJING, Oct 13: China expects military exchanges with the United States to increase and sees Defense Secretary William Perry's visit as a chance to improve overall relations, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Thursday, reports AP.

"We hold a positive attitude to the development of relations between the two armed forces," Chen Jian said at a weekly news briefing.

Perry is scheduled to arrive in Beijing on Sunday after a visit to the Persian Gulf for talks with leaders in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

US offers concessions to DPRK in Geneva talks

SEOUL, Oct 13: The United States has offered new concessions that would give North Korea five years until opening its nuclear facilities to full outside inspections, a Seoul official said on Thursday, reports AP.

The concessions, described by the official as "widespread," may touch off new frictions with South Korea, unhappy with what it calls Washington's conciliatory stance on the Communist North's nuclear programme.

Rep. Lee Se-ki, chief policy-maker of the governing Democratic Liberal Party, said in a report to a party meeting that the United States made the concessions in talks with North Korea under way in Geneva.

"It is worrisome that the US-North Korea talks in Geneva are taking an unusual direction," Lee said.

Lee's remarks came amid reports that the United States and North Korea were close to breaking the deadlock over how to open the North's nuclear facilities to full international inspections.

Key pending issues involve terms for providing North Korea with new modern nuclear reactors, scrapping 8,000 spent fuel rods removed from a reactor early this year and US diplomatic recognition of Pyongyang's communist government.

According to Lee, the US proposal means that special inspections of two suspected North Korean nuclear facilities could be delayed until work on

two new reactors to be built in the North is 75 per cent completed.

The US proposal clashes with South Korea's insistence that special inspections should be made before new reactors, to be provided by the West, arrive in the North.

In an interview with The New York Times last week, South Korean President Kim Young-sam denounced the United States for trying to make "a half-baked compromise" with North Korea.

NATO to open office in Moscow

BRUSSEL, Oct 13: NATO plans to open an office in Moscow by the end of the year inside the French Embassy there, a diplomatic source said Wednesday, reports AP.

It will be the first time the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has a permanent representation in Russia.

The partnership was launched at the start of the year offering greater military cooperation between the Atlantic alliance and former eastern block countries but stops short of full membership.

The purpose of the new NATO office in the Russian capital will be mainly to provide information to the Russian army, according to the diplomat, who said it is being set up on an "experimental basis."



Jenny McCarthy (C) elected playmate of the year, poses on Wednesday with Carrie Wescott (L) and Allison Armitage (R) to publicise the 10th MIPCOM, the big autumn fair of the audiovisual world where television executives see programmes from around the world with a view to buying them for their own TV channels.

— AFP photo

Off the Record

Cook dismissed for exposing Rao's eating habits

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narasimha Rao dismissed his cook not because of his recipes but because he told the world what the Indian leader ate, a newspaper reported, says AP.

Govindan Nair was asked to leave the prime minister's kitchen last month after he gave an interview to the Times of India daily describing how Rao savored roast grams without salt and traditional south Indian delicacies, a newspaper said Wednesday.

"He had no business talking to the press about the prime minister," a spokesman in Rao's office said Thursday on condition of anonymity.

The news of Nair's removal was reported on the front page by Wednesday's edition of Newstime, a daily published from Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh. Rao's home state.

Nair had not been sacked but transferred to the state government's guest house in New Delhi, the spokesman said in an interview.

Nair, who cycled daily to the prime minister's official residence in central New Delhi from his home about 25 kilometers (12 miles) in a poor suburb, always travelled abroad with Rao.

But he was asked to leave as he was packing foodstuff for Rao's visit to Singapore and Vietnam last month, Newstime said.

Due to dowry demands ...

NEW DELHI: A New Delhi school teacher has shot into the headlines and won praise by cancelling her wedding just hours before the ceremony because of last minute demands for a higher dowry, reports AFP.

Minoo Duggal, the 25-year-old daughter of a Lieutenant Colonel in the Indian Army, had been scheduled to marry Arun Gulati, a 28-year-old army captain, here Saturday.

But just two hours before the Hindu ceremony was to begin, her family told the groom's parents the marriage was off, newspapers reported Wednesday.

A notice was posted at the hall where the nuptials were to have taken place informing guests: "Today's marriage cancelled due to dowry demands. Inconvenience regretted."

The Duggal family's dowry difficulties have focused attention on what is widely considered one of the most serious ills plaguing Indian society.

Some 5,000 dowry-related murders are committed in India each year, according to government statistics, and the practice of giving exorbitant dowries leaves thousands of families on the brink of bankruptcy.

The Duggal's story is not untypical — except for their unusual decision to call off the wedding.

Lt Col Vijay Sagar Duggal, the bride's father, said the marriage, as is common in India, had been arranged through a newspaper matrimonial column.

He said that in discussion with the groom's family he had agreed to spend 200,000 rupees (6,650 dollars) on the wedding and dowry, virtually the entire life savings of a man earning around 10,000 rupees (330 dollars) a month.

"Indecent haggling and other demands followed," the officer said, and he reluctantly agreed to throw another 25,000 rupees (830 dollars) into the pot.

On the eve of the wedding the groom's family allegedly asked for more, including a steel wardrobe, a television set and another 100,000 rupees, Duggal said.

"I told them that I had already crossed my budget but was prepared to give another 20,000 for a television set," he said.

"But the demand for 100,000 rupees was too much. I knew my daughter could not be happy because the demands would continue," he told the Indian Express.

Cat runs up large phone bill

BRISBANE: A siamese cat ran up a large bill by knocking a telephone receiver off its cradle and then hitting the redial button, an Australian newspaper reported on Thursday, reports Reuters.

But the cat's owner did not have to pay the bill because Australia's telephone ombudsman ruled that communications laws did not provide for animals making calls. Brisbane's Courier-mail said.

Crush on crustacean

LOS ANGELES: The latest celebrity on Sunset Boulevard is a live Maine lobster weighing 12.5 pounds (5.5 kilograms), that's probably headed for hot water, reports AP.

But diners and workers at Gladstone's 4 Fish have a crush on the crustacean — recently named Spike — and are pleading for his life.

"We came in and saw him last Friday, fell in love with him and just kind of adopted him," said waitress Julie Gleason. She added that Spike isn't prone to making snappy comebacks at servers who occasionally pull him out of his tank for a closer look.

Spike is believed to be about 65 years old, but his days may be numbered. His date with fate is November 1, when he will be given away during a drawing.

"I hope whoever gets him doesn't kill him," Gleason said. "I mean, he's survived two wars."



Local Indians pull a rope tied to the statue of Christopher Columbus in Mexico City on Wednesday during a protest against the discovery of America. The protest marked Cultural Race Day celebrated throughout Latin America. The rope was used as a symbol. The statue was not toppled.

— AFP photo