

BRIEFLY

Tareq Aziz to attend UN session:

Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz plans to come to the United Nations on Monday for any discussions the Security Council may have on the latest crisis on Iraqi troop movements towards Kuwait, diplomats said on Thursday.

Foreign Minister Andrei Kozirev has already said he would attempt to be in New York on Monday to brief Security Council members on his trip to Baghdad.

Strike paralyses Italy:

There was no place like Italy on Friday: No newspapers to read, no buses to chase, no schools to attend, and no government bureaucracy to battle, AP reports from Rome.

Cholera claims 12 in Pyongyang:

Foreign travellers returning from Pyongyang said yesterday that about a dozen people had died in the North Korean capital, in a cholera epidemic that first broke out on the country's western coast, AFP reports from Beijing.

Polls in Macedonia tomorrow:

Citizens of Macedonia, the historic centre of conflict in the Balkans, go to the polls on Sunday for their first national elections since independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, AP reports from Skopje.

Quake shakes Bali, Lombok:

An earthquake measuring 5.0 on the Richter scale rocked Indonesia's resort islands of Bali and Lombok yesterday but there were no reports of damage or casualties, the official Antara news agency said, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

18 rebels to face trial in Egypt:

Eighteen Muslim militants are to stand trial in a military court accused of involvement in an attack in the Red Sea resort of Hurgada last month in which three people including a German tourist were killed, AFP reports from Cairo.

12 die in Guatemalan road mishap:

Twelve people were killed and 13 seriously injured when a lorry crashed into a bus in eastern Guatemala on Thursday, police said, Reuter reports from Guatemala City.

S Korean killed in HK shootout:

A South Korean computer expert was killed in a shootout between police and a gunman who had hijacked his taxi, authorities said on Friday. The gunman also died, AP reports from Hong Kong.

2 policemen shot in Egypt:

Gunmen shot and wounded two police guards and a civilian in an attack in the south Egyptian town of Mallawi, one of the centres of the conflict between police and Muslim militants, security sources said yesterday, Reuter reports from Cairo.

Nepali smuggler held in Jakarta:

A Nepalese man, who collapsed at the Jakarta airport, was arrested after doctors found 103 tubes packed with heroin in his stomach, police and news reports said Friday, AP says from Jakarta.

N Korean guard defects to South:

North Korea concentration camp guard has defected to South Korea, the 45th to do so this year, the South's intelligence service said yesterday, Reuter reports from Seoul.

7 shot dead in Durban:

Unknown attackers shot to death seven men, some of them bound with wire, in a squatter settlement near Durban overnight, police said Friday, AP reports from Durban, South Africa.

Trade Unionist jailed in Indonesia:

A court has sentenced a second trade unionist to jail for organising a workers' protest that turned into bloody ethnic riots, officials said on Friday, AP reports from Jakarta.

166 die of malaria in Rajasthan

NEW DELHI, Oct 14: An outbreak of malaria in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan has left at least 166 people dead during the past month and the death toll may be higher than 500, the Hindustan Times reported today, reports AFP.

The newspaper said malaria sufferers began flooding hospitals in western Rajasthan bordering Pakistan during the first week of September. It said up to 60,000 cases of the mosquito-borne disease had been reported in the affected areas.

Twenty teams of doctors have been dispatched to western Rajasthan to help cope with the outbreak, the newspaper said.

US to go ahead with plan of 'no-drive' zone in S Iraq

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Oct 14: The United States plans to declare a new 'no-drive' zone to keep Iraqi heavy armour and Republican Guard troops out of southern Iraq, a senior US defence official said on Friday, reports Reuter.

The official said the zone would be policed with the threat of air strikes.

"I don't know whether you want to call it a decree on our part of a directive or an ultimatum, I think you have to assume we're not going to negotiate with Saddam Hussein over the terms of a 'no-drive' zone," said the official, who added that UN support would not be necessary for such a move.

The official who asked not to be identified, spoke with reporters after US Defence Secretary William Perry met Saudi Arabia's King Fahd Thursday night.

King Fahd was said to have expressed support for the idea of a buffer zone to protect Kuwait from another Iraqi attack like the one that started the 1991 Gulf War.

AP adds: The United States will increase its troops strength in the Persian Gulf beyond the levels currently planned if Iraqi army units delay their withdrawal from the Kuwaiti border area, Defence Secretary William Perry said on Friday.

Referring to an apparent delay by more than a division of Iraqi Republican Guard units from southern Iraq, Perry said the United States is prepared to send more than the 30,000 ground troops and roughly 500 warplanes already on their way to the Persian Gulf.

"We cannot accept deployment which we consider threatening and destabilising," Perry said at a news confer-

ence on Friday. "If the Iraqi forces return to their original location, we will terminate our deployment when it is completed and shortly thereafter, begin a withdrawal."

In addition to the US forces already slated for deployment to the Gulf, the Pentagon has two additional divisions of ground troops and additional tactical air units standing by for possible duty in the Gulf region.

Although Perry would not specify what additional actions might be taken, he has already raised the possibility of pre-emptive strikes against the Iraqi forces if necessary.

In Washington, a White House official speaking on condition of anonymity said earlier that three Iraqi brigades, or about 3,500 troops, had paused near the town of Naziriyah. One of the units is heavily armed with tanks, the

official said. For the United States, this mission will involve a beefed-up contingent of air force fighters that will patrol southern Iraq once a ground force of about 30,000 US soldiers withdraws.

Perry also hoped to persuade Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to permit a larger deployment of US warplanes and an expanded storage depot of tanks and other armoured vehicles.

"I want to look ahead a little bit after this crisis is resolved, how do we cooperate in a military way to posture ourselves better to prevent future crises," Perry said.

Iraq's Ambassador to the United Nations, Nizar Hamdoun, said in a telephone interview that the Republican Guard troops had pulled back to Nasiriya, about 30 miles north of Basra on the Iraq-Kuwait border.

Grenade attack on Chinese team in Vietnam: 17 hurt

HANOI, Oct 14: Unidentified assailants hurled at least one grenade at a Chinese business delegation, injuring seven Chinese and 10 Vietnamese just weeks before a summit between the Communist neighbours, Chinese and Vietnamese sources said Friday, reports AP.

The attack Thursday night in southern Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City could further strain relations that are already tense because of longstanding disputes over territory and offshore oil-drilling rights. Many Vietnamese also dislike China because it occupied Vietnam for many centuries and invaded as recently as 1979.

The grenade attack occurred as a group of nearly 200 Beijing officials and businessmen were getting off a tour boat at the Saigon river front in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly called Saigon.

Le Nhat Lao, the boat's owner, said he was walking with the Chinese away from the boat when several grenades were thrown, injur-

ing seven Chinese and 10 Vietnamese in the legs. He said he did not hear the attackers say anything, and that he was not aware of any argument or confrontation before the attack.

A port guard immediately arrested one person and police made two more arrests soon after, Lao said. He said he did not know who the suspects were or what their motives might have been.

A diplomat at the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed the attack took place but said he did not know how many were injured, their names or their conditions. He said he believed only one grenade was thrown.

He said it was too soon to comment on how the attack might affect plans for Chinese President Jiang Zemin to visit Vietnam next month. He said the embassy has not lodged any protest with the Vietnamese, adding that more information was needed.

Angry commuters set 2 trains on fire in Bombay

BOMBAY, Oct 14: Angry commuters today set two trains on fire in the second violent protest in a week against long delays on the rail network into India's commercial capital, a railway spokesman said, reports Reuter.

Hundreds of commuters stoned railway property and set fire to platform stalls at Bombay's suburban Borivali Station as they were left stranded by the breakdown of a train on the city's western railway.

Firemen were battling to put out a blaze in six coaches of the "flying rance" express, caught in the rioting that broke out after the line was blocked by the stalled train.

Another 12-coach train was also set on fire and services were curtailed, the railway spokesman said.

Kashmiri leader freed from jail

JAMMU, Oct 14: Shabir Ahmad Shah, a prominent Kashmiri Muslim separatist leader considered a "prisoner of conscience" by the Human Rights group Amnesty International, was released from prison here today, reports AP.

Shah was given a warm welcome by scores of supporters who had gathered outside the high-security central jail in this Kashmiri winter capital, witnesses said.

The 40-year-old Shah has spent nearly 20 years in prison.

Top Pak diplomat to visit US for talks on ties

ISLAMABAD, Oct 14: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will send a top Foreign Ministry official to Washington next week for talks on bilateral relations, officials said on Thursday, reports AP.

The official, Najmuddin Sheikh, who holds the post of foreign secretary, said the talks would focus on areas that "do not fall under the constraints" of the Pressler Amendment, a US anti-proliferation law.

The US economic and military aid to Pakistan has remained suspended since October 1990 because of suspected development of nuclear weapons by Islamabad to counter rival India's nuclear potential.

Sheikh, who is due in Washington on October 20, said the talks would aim at developing relations in areas such as trade, investment, exchange of visits and humanitarian assistance by non-governmental organisations.

He indicated that the nuclear controversy would come up, saying the whole range of bilateral relations would be discussed.



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (R) meets Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozirev in Baghdad on Thursday. Kozirev held talks to defuse Gulf tensions as the United States said Iraq's threat to Kuwait was not over yet. — AFP photo

US-DPRK accord soon:ROK

SEOUL, South Korea, Oct 14: The United States and North Korea are expected to reach agreement by this weekend on detailed rules for opening the communist country's nuclear facilities to full outside inspections, a South Korean official said Friday, reports AP.

Testifying before a parliamentary committee, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hong-Koo said South Korea would accept the agreement if it does not deviate from "broad principles" set for resolving the North's nuclear problem.

The testimony of Lee, the top government official in charge of inter-Korea affairs, reflected the limitations of South Korean diplomacy in dealing with the North's nuclear issue.

In the past week, South Korean officials have made no secret of their discontent with what they called Washington's

conciliatory stance on the North's nuclear programme.

Both sides are within the reach of agreement this weekend, Lee told the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee.

Lee, who also serves as the unification minister, said South Korea disagrees with the United States on some details of rules on how and when to replace the North's nuclear programme with a system less suitable to weapons development.

He said US-North Korea talks under way in Geneva are in their final stage of conclusion and the discussion focused on when and how to conduct special checks at two suspected North Korean nuclear sites.

A UN demand for special checks of the two sites at the North's main nuclear complex of Yongbyon touched off the current nuclear dispute on the

Korean peninsula. The North, claiming the sites to be military installations, has refused to open them to inspectors.

At Geneva talks, North Korea, changing its earlier position, has agreed to open the two sites to inspections but disagreed on when, according to Seoul officials.

South Korea wants special checks to be conducted as early as possible, at least before new modern nuclear reactors, to be provided by the West, arrive in the North within two or three years.

South Korean officials are upset by reports that the United States has made new concessions concerning the timing of special inspections.

On Friday, South Korean Foreign Minister Han Seung-Joo discussed the issue in a 20-minute telephone conversation with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher.



A girl and her family's pig swim in flood water outside her home in Thanh Binh district, Vietnam. Recent flooding in the Mekong region has left at least 180 people dead and caused an estimated 80 million dollars in damage. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Vatican cracks down on divorcees

VATICAN CITY: Cracking down on liberal trends, the Vatican has ruled out communion for Roman Catholics who divorce and remarry unless they receive an annulment or abstain from sex with their new partner, reports AP.

A letter to the world's bishops issued on Friday and approved by Pope John Paul II seeks to stamp out a growing practice — particularly in the United States and other western nations — of allowing some remarried Catholics to receive communion if they believe the breakup of the first marriage was not their fault or beyond their control.

The sharp stance by the Vatican could be another blow to the Church's standing in the West, where divorce rates are high and Church membership is declining.

But the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States said the letter was a reaffirmation of church teachings and not intended to alienate divorced Catholics.

Hoppers cause traffic havoc

CANBERRA: Thousands of kangaroos, the national emblem of Australia, are wreaking havoc on the roads of its national capital, reports AP.

Police estimate one in three traffic accidents is the result of cars hitting or swerving to avoid the marsupials.

Wildlife rangers said hundreds of kangaroos have been killed by passing cars but local government officials have resisted calls for shooters to cull the numbers.

"I find the idea of killing kangaroos abhorrent," said Rosemary Follett, Australian Capital Territory chief minister.

Environmentalists theorise the kangaroos have come to Canberra's suburbs in search of grass at a time when the surrounding countryside is suffering its worst drought in a generation.

Bacteria beneficial to babies?

LONDON: Giving babies "good" bacteria in their infant formula drink helps protect them from harmful infections, US researchers reported on Friday, says Reuter.

The doctors, working at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Maryland, studied 55 babies aged five months to two years, giving some formula spiked with the benign bacteria and some ordinary formula.

Those given the "good" bacteria — which are normally found in the human gut — had diarrhoea less often. Diarrhoea which is usually caused by bacterial or viral infections, kills millions of infants around the world.

"We found that the feeding of milk formula containing bifidobacterium bifidum and streptococcus thermophilus reduced the rate of rotavirus-associated diarrhoea from 19 per cent to seven per cent," they wrote in the Lancet medical journal.

The benign bacteria not only destroyed the bad viruses in the gut, but also prevented the spread of disease because the babies excreted less of the virus in their faeces.

Where guns replace fists....

ATLANTA: The homicide rate among young American men aged 15 to 19, more than doubled between 1985 and 1991, and researchers attribute the rise to drug gangs' recruiting of younger members and increased use of guns instead of fists, reports AP.

"When it comes to violence, in the past what may have led to fistfights now leads to gunfire," Dr David Satcher, director of the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, said on Thursday.

The homicide rate for males aged 15 to 19 jumped from 13 per 100,000 in 1985 to 33 per 100,000 in 1991, a 154 per cent increase, the CDC said. The nation's highest homicide rate — 41 per 100,000 — is among men aged 20 to 24, according to the CDC.

"We've got to get guns out of the hands of these kids — it's an epidemic," said Alfred Blumstein of the Heinz School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. He contributed to the CDC study.

Cedras will get free security in Panama for two weeks

PANAMA CITY, Oct 14: Toppled Haitian strongman Raoul Cedras, newly in exile here, will get Panamanian cost-free security guards for two weeks as a humanitarian measure, President Ernesto Perez Balladares said, reports AP.

If he doesn't have a lot of money? "That's his problem," Balladares said in an interview Thursday night at his ornate colonial harbour front headquarters. If Cedras wants security after 15 days he must find a way to pay for it.

"If he doesn't mingle in internal politics, which I don't think he wants to do, he can stay," the portly president told a small group of reporters.

Balladares 48, said he took the politically risky decision to admit Cedras, who arrived early Thursday with his family by chartered jet, after receiving phone calls from President Clinton and former President Jimmy Carter earlier in the week.

"[Carter said he] felt that these people who would come were not thugs, that they were decent people," said Balladares, who has been in power less than two months.

Opposition politicians have attacked him for allowing Cedras a haven in Panama despite Panama's long record of offering asylum to toppled heads of state, dictators and the democratically elected alike.

Dictators who found refuge in Panama have included Gen

Juan Peron of Argentina and Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran. Toppled presidents and rebel leaders alike got asylum in Panama during Latin America's heavily militarized 1970s.

"The people who have reacted negatively will keep on reacting negatively. I'm not going to convince them that it is good for the country to have Cedras and his people here," said Balladares.

Cedras was forced by his own agreement and the presence of 20,000 American troops in his homeland to step down and make way for the return of exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, whom he and others toppled in a coup three years ago.

Aristide is to return Saturday to Haiti.

Balladares has made no move to warm up to Cedras and said he has not talked to him and doesn't plan to.

"What's the point?" he asked.

A wealthy American-educated businessman, Balladares is a low-key sort of man with a quiet, almost pookish sense of humour. He is known as "El Toro," or "the bull" because of his stature, and a statue of a gilded bull, head down and ready for action, graced his table in a conference room where the interview was held.

He moves easily in international political and banking circles, and credited it on Panama's importance.

Panama is of bigger interest that its size would merit, at least partly because of the Panama Canal," he said.

He has made important progress toward getting commitments for international loans for Panama but readily admits that problems that have plagued the country for years remain.

"We have a huge drug problem, we haven't even started to work on it," he said and added that Panama will take all the technical and other help it can get to stop it.

"Our sovereignty is violated by the drug dealers, not by the agencies that come to work with us," he stated.

He said Panamanian agents are working with money laundering specialists from the United States to try to improve that situation as well.

Panama's banking secrecy laws have made it attractive for those who launder drug money.

"There is abuse (money laundering) in the free trade zone here," he said. "We have done very little so far."

Both problems are tied to Panama's own toppled dictator, Manuel Antonio Noriega. People close to Balladares say he wants to make progress on both fronts since he belongs to his revamped version of Noriega's Democratic Revolutionary Party.

Balladares has vowed to keep the party free of military influence and to move it back toward the populist goals of its founder, the late Gen. Omar Torrijos.

100 Khmers defect to govt side

PHNOM PENH, Oct 14: Up to 100 outlawed Khmer Rouge guerrillas have defected to the government side after leaving their base in Vine Mountain where three westerners are believed to be held hostage, a senior army officer said today.

"In a report received Thursday afternoon, about 100 Khmer Rouge from Phnom Vor (Vine Mountain) defected to our side in Kampot," Lieutenant-General Chhun Socheat told Reuters.

General Socheat said the three western hostages — Briton, Mark Slater, 28; Frenchman, Jean-Michel Braquet, 27; and David Wilson, 29, from Australia — were still being held at the Khmer Rouge base in Vine Mountain.