

BRIEFLY

Ghali begins tour of 7 nations: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali left New York on Friday for a tour of seven European and Central Asian nations that is likely to focus on peacekeeping. AP reports from United Nations.

Boutros-Ghali's first stop was to be London. He will next visit France, Romania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova.

Peres to visit Morocco: Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres will visit Morocco next Friday to inaugurate the office of Israeli interests, the government news agency MAP reported on Friday. AP reports from Rabat.

Peres will be accompanied by several ministers when he opens the office in Rabat, the report said. He will have several meetings with Moroccan officials on cooperation between the two countries, which do not have diplomatic relations.

Oil tanker sinks off HK: A Maltese-registered oil tanker broke apart and sank in rough seas on Saturday. Nearly 20 hours after the first distress call 19 of the 36 crew were still missing, the government said, AP reports from Hong Kong.

The 19,855-ton Thanassis sailing from Russia to Singapore capsized and sank 324 nautical miles (372 miles) southeast of Hong Kong, a government spokeswoman said.

Colombia fires 174 policemen: In a purge of Colombia's national police, 174 officers were fired for taking bribes from drug traffickers, the government said on Friday, AP reports from Bogota.

Officials announced a "disciplinary emergency" in August and launched an investigation of 2,685 officers and superiors. Defence Minister Fernando Botero Zea and national police director Octavio Vargas said in a statement.

Kukis kill 4 villagers: At least four villagers were killed and two others seriously injured when suspected armed Kuki militants attacked Aimol Khullen Amring village under Tengnoupal police station in Manipur's Chandel district last night, PTI reports from Imphal.

Official sources, yesterday said that about 30 armed suspected Kuki activists surrounded the village at around 23:30 hours and attacked each house.

France expels Moroccan imam: The imam of the mosque at Woippy in eastern France was deported to Morocco within hours of his arrest after a government decree said he was a danger to France, official sources said yesterday, AFP reports from Metz.

Abdellali Habboun had made anti-French and anti-government statements against integration and respect for French social norms, they said.

Paris blackout hits 30,000 homes: Cafe dinars ate by candlelight and traffic snarled Friday night after a fire at an electrical power station left 30,000 households in Paris without electricity, firefighters reported, AP says from Paris.

Underground cables were damaged by the fire, knocking out power to the households in Paris' 11th district near Place de la Bastille.

Asian arts festival opens in HK: The 15th Festival of Asian Arts, an event designed to promote the cultural exchanges among countries and regions in Asia-Pacific, opened on Friday at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, reports Xinhua from Hong Kong.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Dr Ronald Leung Ding-Bong, chairman of the Locala Urban Council which organises the event, said that the festival had helped bring people in the Asia-Pacific region closer with enhanced friendship and mutual understanding since it was started in 1976.

UK jails 2 Americans: Two Americans were sentenced to prison on Friday for operating the biggest illegal drugs factory ever discovered in Britain, AP reports from Maidstone.

Thomas Beaver, 52, from San Diego, California, and Joseph McGill, 54, from River Ridge, Louisiana, had both denied setting up the factory, which churned out 2 million pounds (3.25 million dollars) worth of the illicit drug speed, or methamphetamine, everyday.

World's highest airport opens: Tibet has inaugurated the world's highest airport and the second major civilian airfield in the Himalayan region of China, the official China Daily said, Reuter reports from Beijing.

A China Southwest Airlines Boeing 757 flying from Chengdu in Sichuan province made the maiden landing last week at the Bangda Airport in eastern Tibet, which lies 4,739 metres (15,548 feet) above sea level.



South Korean high school girls toss flowers into the water off the broken end of Seoul's Sungsoo Bridge yesterday in memory of nine of their classmates who were among the 32 killed when the bridge collapsed during rush hour on Friday. — AFP photo

Japan ready to help DPRK build reactors

TOKYO, Oct 22: Japan repeated its willingness to help North Korea build two light-water reactors on Friday, but insisted that other nations concerned, including the United States, also share the cost, reports AP.

"We are willing to cooperate on the project," Chief Cabinet Secretary Kozo Igarashi told reporters. But he added, "I cannot comment at this stage on how much of the financial costs we can share."

The Foreign Ministry reacted against the US announcement that Japan and South Korea would bear most of the four billion dollars required to build two light-water reactors in North Korea. Kyodo news service said.

A ministry source told the news agency: "Nothing has been decided."

15000 Burundians flee to Zaire to escape clashes

BUJUMBURA, Oct 22: An estimated 15,000 refugees have fled from northwest Burundi to Zaire in the past ten days to escape clashes between Burundi troops and gunmen, the UN food agency said today.

Gemmo Lodesani, Burundi representative for the World Food Programme (WFP), told Reuters the refugees fled from Cibitoke province, where officials say at least 29 civilians were killed in fighting between the Tutsi-dominated army and extremist Hutu gunmen.

They say the attackers are gunmen of the outlawed Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (Palipehutu) but the military says Hutus from the defeated army in neighbouring

Nuclear pact falls short of expectations: ROK

SEOUL, Oct 22: Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo on Saturday cautiously welcomed the US-North Korean nuclear deal although he said South Korea was not totally satisfied, reports AP.

"Some of its contents fall short of our expectations, but overall the deal reflects our minimum policy goals," Han said in testimony before the National Assembly.

In a pact signed in Geneva on Friday, North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear activities,

but it was also given at least five years before it will have to allow special inspections at two suspect nuclear sites. In recent years, North Korea has repeatedly reneged on treaty obligations to allow such inspections.

"The special inspections will be delayed more than we expected," Han said.

But South Korea praised its communist rival's agreement to allow the thorough special inspections for the first time since it threatened to with-

draw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty almost two years ago. The treaty bans the spread of nuclear arms and makes inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency obligatory.

The North maintained that allowing thorough inspections at the two sites, which it claimed to be non-nuclear military facilities, would infringe on its sovereignty. It also claimed a "special" North Korean status that exempted it from thorough investigation.

"Now it is most important for North Korea to faithfully uphold its obligations under the new deal," Han said at the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee.

He said the new, safer reactor promised to North Korea in Friday's deal would be designed by South Korea, which would play a major role in their construction. But he added that Seoul would not help compensate for the energy lost by decommissioning the North's older reactors, which produce nuclear weapons ingredients.

In Tokyo, unnamed government sources said Japan plans to pay for about 20 per cent of the 4 billion dollars effort to build the new safer reactors, according to Kyodo News Service.

Top diplomats in North Korea's neighbouring countries praised the nuclear deal, while analysts and anonymous government sources wondered aloud whether North Korea would abruptly begin honouring its international treaty obligations.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei Kono has said Tokyo "highly evaluates" the US efforts that led to the compromise.

But newspaper editorials in Japan on Saturday universally said the US had conceded too much. By allowing North Korea to avoid international scrutiny, the agreement "postponed Japan and South Korea's largest objectives for five more years," said a typical editorial in the major daily Asahi Shimbun.

UN Security Council called on Bosnia's government to pull its troops out of a demilitarised zone (DMZ) around Sarajevo as a UN envoy headed on Saturday to talk with Serbs and pre-empt a strike to drive their foes out, reports Reuter.

The president of the Security Council called in Bosnia's UN ambassador late on Friday to ask that the Sarajevo government withdraw its troops from Mount Igman overlooking Sarajevo despite the preconditions it set hours earlier.

The council members expect all parties to respect the August 14, 1993 agreement and to withdraw any forces they may have in the demilitarised zone without preconditions," said British Ambassador Sir David Hannay, the council president.

He said UN officials "are really quite worried about the situation and feel it has quite a considerable potential to cause damage."

UN asks Bosnian govt to pull troops out of DMZ

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US chief negotiator Robert Gallucci (L) and North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok-ju acknowledge the applause after signing the nuclear agreement in Geneva on Friday. — AFP photo

Clinton to spur Syria, Israel toward deal during ME tour

WASHINGTON, Oct 22: President Clinton hopes to spur Israel and Syria toward a peace treaty when he meets with Syrian President Hafez Assad during his Middle East trip next week, reports AP.

At a White House news conference Friday, he said he hopes the visit will give momentum to the plodding peace talks between the two nations.

"I want there to be more progress," Clinton said in announcing he would go to Damascus next Thursday. But some aides were pessimistic about prospects for a breakthrough.

At their first meeting, last January in Geneva, the Syrian leader offered Israel the prospect of "normal peaceful relations."

But five shuttle trips to the region since by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher have failed to produce a compromise

on three tough issues: peace terms, the future of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and arrangements for security at the border.

Christoph... and top aides have described their achievements as only incremental. The president said he was going to see Assad because "talking with him we will continue to make some advances" in the 3-year-old negotiations.

But some senior Clinton aides voiced doubt his seeing Assad again would transform the slow-moving process.

The more modest goal is to use Clinton's visit "to give the process a push," said one aide, briefing reporters at the White House on condition he would not be identified.

Clinton's other main objective is to reassure Israel after a wave of violence has shaken its people's confidence that the

landscape is truly changing. The president said he wanted above all on the trip to "stand with my friends."

And Clinton said he had directed the FBI to redouble its scrutiny of activities in the United States in behalf of Hamas, the fundamentalist group that claimed responsibility for killing more than two dozen Israelis in a week's time.

The trip, designed initially to celebrate conclusion of a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, is shaping up as even more extensive than the five-nation trek that President Nixon made to the area in June 1974.

Clinton will visit Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Syria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia over three days. He also will meet in Cairo with Yasser Arafat, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and tour religious sites in east Jerusalem despite concerns for his security.

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No fundamentalists in Saudi Arabia: Fahd

CAIRO, Oct 22: Saudi Arabia has no Islamic fundamentalists but detained more than 150 dissidents last month because they exceeded the limits of free speech, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd said in an interview published on Friday, reports Reuter.

"There are no fundamentalists, extremists or militants in Saudi Arabia... these (detained) people made use of available resources provided by the state such as mosques and gathering places where they talked to people in all freedom for expressing whatever was on their mind," King Fahd told Egypt's Al-Ahram newspaper.

"They went beyond what could lead to harm to society and it was necessary to stop them, particularly because they violated the consensus of the highest scholars on (Islamic) advice and guidelines," King

3 members of Abu Nidal group jailed

ST. LOUIS, Oct 22: Three members of the Abu Nidal organization got 21 months in prison Friday for plotting acts of terrorism — a sentence that drew protests from Jewish groups and surprised even the defendants, who had faced up to 20 years, reports AP.

The State Department has described Abu Nidal as the world's most dangerous terrorist group. The St. Louis case was the first indication that a cell was operating in the United States.

Tawfiq Musa, 45, of Milwaukee, and brothers Saif Nijmeb, 35, of the St. Louis suburb Bridgeton, and Lule Nijmeb, 30, of Dayton, Ohio, pleaded guilty in July to federal racketeering charges that included allegations they smuggled money and information.

Off the Record



A young girl competes for the fourth Miss Vietnam crown in Hanoi on Friday. The 35 finalists are being selected amongst 1,200 girls all over the country. Miss Vietnam will be crowned tonight after a three-day contest in Hanoi. — AFP photo

Secret bunker with treasured documents found empty

LONDON: An underground bunker which housed Britain's most priceless manuscripts during the Second World War was opened Friday for the first time in nearly 50 years — but the only thing inside were electrical cables, reports AP.

During the war, some 90 ton of manuscripts, including historic government documents, rare Greek bibles and 4th century texts, were hidden in the bunker to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Nazis if Britain was invaded.

Amid tight security, 25 containers of items were returned to the British Museum in London after the war ended in 1945. The cave was then sealed.

Library staff and an architect were not sure whether any treasured documents had been left behind, so they brought in a bulldozer to clear tons of rocks and earth in front of sealed bomb-proof steel doors at the underground bunker in the grounds of the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.

Library staff and an architect used flashlights to examine the cave, about the size of a large bungalow.

"We didn't find any gold bars or anything else of interest left behind," said Mark Mainwaring, the library's director of administration.

Offensive greeting card!

CHICAGO: A greeting card company apologised Friday to Muslims and agreed to stop printing a greeting card they found offensive, reports AP.

Recycled Paper Greetings Inc announced the settlement after the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations launched a two-month telephone, fax and letter-writing campaign against the company. Mohammad Saed of Lawrence, Kansas, even went on a hunger strike for two weeks in September in protest.

The offending product, a get-well card, features a woman with a veiled face on the front. Inside, it reads: "So you're feeling like Shiite. Don't Mecca big deal out of it."

Shiites are members of one of Islam's two most popular sects. Mecca, a city in Saudi Arabia, was the birthplace of the prophet Mohammed and is the spiritual center of Islam and Muslim religion.

Malaria kills 2000 in Rajasthan since Sept

NEW DELHI, Oct 22: A deadly strain of malaria has killed at least 2,000 people in India's western Rajasthan state since September, claiming many more victims than an outbreak of plague, newspapers said today, reports Reuter.

The Indian Express newspaper said cerebral malaria had killed more than 4,000 people since September. Another daily, The Pioneer, quoted non-governmental health organisations as saying the toll was at least 2,000.

Health Ministry Director-General A K Mukherjee told Reuters 70,711 people had tested positive for the mosquito-borne disease that broke out four weeks ago in Rajasthan state.

He said 229 deaths were confirmed malaria cases. "Our assessment is 229 deaths have occurred, which is very small."

Mukherjee said. Asked to comment on newspaper estimates of the number of deaths, Mukherjee said: "We are getting the latest facts from Rajasthan. Unless we get the latest facts, we can't say anything."

Mukherjee said the disease had been identified as plasmodium vivax malaria. The drug for its cure is very strong and effective, he said.

The newspaper reports confirmed, would indicate many more people had died of malaria in Rajasthan, a popular tourist destination on the border with Pakistan, than of a recent outbreak of pneumonic plague in all of India which killed at least 57 people.

The Express said a national malaria eradication programme team sent to Rajasthan had "got deeply disturbing results."

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Mukherjee said the disease had been identified as plasmodium vivax malaria. The drug for its cure is very strong and effective, he said.

The newspaper reports confirmed, would indicate many more people had died of malaria in Rajasthan, a popular tourist destination on the border with Pakistan, than of a recent outbreak of pneumonic plague in all of India which killed at least 57 people.

The Express said a national malaria eradication programme team sent to Rajasthan had "got deeply disturbing results."

Typhoon kills 11 in Philippines

MANILA, Oct 22: Eleven people were reported dead in the Philippines today after the passing of typhoon Teresa which went on the sink a Maltese-registered oil tanker in the south China sea leaving 19 crew missing, reports AP.

President Fidel Ramos declared Manila and 10 nearby provinces ravaged by the typhoon as calamity areas.

Ramos announced in a national address that four people died, most of them hit by falling debris. News reports said five persons were killed in a vehicle smash-up caused by the typhoon north of Manila. Falling coconut trees crushed to death two more persons in southern Laguna province.

Four other people were missing and seven were rescued from a fishing boat that sank off Cavite province across Manila bay, a town mayor said.



Boats are sunk at the Manila Bay pier by Typhoon Teresa's powerful winds yesterday. — AFP photo