

BRIEFLY

Jordan pays tribute to Grant: Jordan and UN officials on Thursday paid tribute to James P. Grant, the former executive director of UNICEF who died last week, as a man who had saved the lives of millions of children in the Middle East. AP reports from Amman.

Grant, an American who headed UNICEF for 15 years before he resigned Jan. 26, two days before his death, was known for his dynamic and often unorthodox but effective approaches to government leaders to adopt protection and health care for children as a policy.

Sihanouk cured of cancer: Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk is almost totally cured of cancer but his health is still at risk due to blood circulation problems caused by thickening arteries, the Cambodia daily newspaper said yesterday, reports Reuter.

"The King's cancer is in complete remission but he suffers from high levels of cholesterol with effects on the arteries (that) are clearly cause for alarm", said the newspaper, quoting a report from a Geneva-based cardiologist treating the 72-year-old monarch.

Vietnamese FM in Manila: Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam arrived in Manila yesterday for a three-day visit expected to include talks with Philippine officials on the disputed Spratly Islands. Reuter reports from Manila.

"I'm very happy to come over to Manila. I hope this session will promote the growth and development of relations between our two countries," he told reporters upon his arrival.

Blast kills SLA commander: A commander for the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army and two bodyguards were killed Friday in a roadside bomb explosion, security sources said. AP reports from Marjayoun, Lebanon.

The bombing, which was claimed by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, touched off artillery duels along the western sector of an Israeli-occupied border enclave, the Lebanese sources said.

Japan puts off H-2 rocket mission: Japan said yesterday it was indefinitely postponing the third H-2 rocket mission pending the outcome of technical evaluations and unprecedented negotiations with fishermen to extend the winter launch season. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The announcement by the science and technology agency followed weeks of uncertainty surrounding the launch, which was first scheduled for February 1 and later postponed to February 22.

Mandela to visit ROK: South African President Nelson Mandela will visit South Korea in July, the chief presidential spokesman said Friday. AP reports from Seoul.

"President Mandela's July visit is very significant," presidential spokesman Yoon Yeo-joon quoted South African Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo as saying.

Nzo, on a three-day visit to South Korea, was paying a courtesy call on President Kim Young-sam.

Blasts at Filipino police outpost: Grenade and dynamite blasts hit the back of a police outpost in this southern city before dawn on Friday, causing heavy damage to a parked car and breaking the windows of an adjacent building, an investigator said. AFP reports from Iligan, Philippines.

Police officer Edward Tubil told reporters the explosives had apparently been aimed at the commercial building and not at the precinct house.

Bosnian FM threatens new round of war in May

SARAJEVO, Feb 3: Bosnian Foreign Minister Irfan Ljubijankic, dismissing calls for another peace conference, Thursday denounced the international community for its "lack of morality" and warned of a new round of fighting in May.

Ljubijankic told AFP in an interview here that a new international peace conference as proposed by French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe would "dilute all the results of the contact group so far."

"It would put all things at the beginning, at zero ... we would not welcome such a thing."

The five-nation contact group — Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States — has temporarily shelved efforts to revive bilateral Bosnia talks in the face

of Serb rejection of its peace plan. The Muslim-led Bosnian government accepted the proposal last July and is pressing the group to set a deadline after which the Serbs must say yes or no to the broad outlines of the scheme.

"We will not change our attitude," the foreign minister vowed. "We have reached the bottom line of our concessions."

Asked if war were the only prospect, in the absence of any movement on the diplomatic front, when the current cessation of hostilities with the Serbs expires April 30, he

replied: "it would seem so." Ljubijankic described proposals for yet another international gathering on Bosnia as "an attempt to avoid responsibility of the contact group. The problem is that the group and the whole international community has no answer to the Serbian 'no'."

He urged the West to press harder on the Serbs to accept the plan but added: "The problem is the weakness of the international community. It has a lack of personalities and a lack of morality. The plan should be the only plan, with deadlines, time limits. Otherwise it's a piece of paper, an abstraction."

The proposal would allot a Muslim Croat federation 51 per cent of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Serbs — who now control 70 per cent — the

rest. Source close to the group have said Serb leaders have in effect agreed to share the country on a 50-50 basis but are dissatisfied with the quality of land they would receive.

Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic, currently visiting Washington, Wednesday flatly rejected Juppe's plan for an international conference.

Ljubijankic stressed that the government would not abandon its demand for a lifting of the embargo, imposed in 1991, if there were no concrete progress on the contact group peace plan.

"There is not enough will in the international community," he charged. "There is force but there is no will. If that is so, we have our legal right to self-defense."



A group of women from the Muslim part of the city of Mostar hold prayers inside the damaged mosque on Wednesday, on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan. — AFP photo

LTTE sets up 5 new camps in Batticaloa

COLOMBO, Feb 3: Tamil Tigers guerrillas have set up new camps across the north and east of the island during a truce with security forces, defence officials said today, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTEE) have established at least five new camps in the eastern Batticaloa district, the officials said. They had earlier been driven out of the district by the military.

"Ground troops are concerned because the Tigers also seem to be roaming in the east freely and collecting a lot of supplies and money from the civilians," a defence official said.

He said the authorities were aware of two new LTTE camps in the northwestern Mannar island, apart from the reconstruction of bunkers damaged in attacks by security forces in recent years.

ROK urges DPRK to allow reunion of families

SEOUL, Feb 3: A senior South Korean official urged North Korea today to allow families separated since the Korean War in the early 1950s to be reunited in Pyongyang in April, reports AFP.

Vice Premier and Unification Minister Kim Deok also urged the North to grant businessmen and journalists free access to each other's country when Pyongyang hosts a cultural and sports festival.

"We sincerely hope that the North allows separated families to take part in the festival and reunite with their relatives," Kim said.

Amnesty protests 2 executions in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Feb 3: Human rights group Amnesty International protested today against two recent executions in Indonesia, saying these were the first in four years and raised fears for others still on death row, reports Reuter.

The London-based group said in a statement it was alarmed to learn Indonesia had executed two men — a retired army sergeant and a Malaysian convicted of smuggling heroin.

UN human rights report

Myanmar junta's reign of fear continues unabated

GENEVA, Feb 3: The Myanmar junta's reign of fear continues unabated with widespread executions, torture, slave labour and forced relocations, according to a new UN human rights report, says AP.

Special investigator Yozo Yokota renewed calls for the government to improve its record and to release jailed opposition leaders, including Nobel Prize winner Aung San Sau Kyi.

A UN delegation will visit the country this weekend to act as intermediary in three days of discussions on human rights and democracy starting on Monday. The Myanmar government agreed to the visit last year.

Yokota, a Japanese professor, based his report on a visit to the Asian country last November. His account will be considered by the UN Human Rights Commission under a procedure reserved for countries with the worst violations.

"The people always seem to be fearful that anything they or their family members say or do could put them at risk of arrest and interrogation by the police or military intelligence," wrote Yokota.

He said many were too frightened to approach him. His discussions with opposition figures were held at a government guest house so conversation was inhibited. He was not allowed to meet Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for more than five years.

However, Yokota said the cities of Yangon and Mandalay seemed less tense than during his visit the previous year. He added the government was cooperating more with UN agencies and private humanitarian organisations.

Yokota said an "unknown number" of civilians continued to be arrested for criticising the military junta, which took power after suppressing pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988.

Torture, including "severe beatings, shackling, near suffocation, burning, stabbing, rubbing of salt and chemicals in open wounds," was routine during interrogation and imprisonment. Rape was also common, he said.

Yokota said he had received "numerous communications" about Myanmar military forces murdering civilians.

"Soldiers have opened fire with light arms against civilians without any evident provocation," he said. "Such situations have frequently been reported in the context of attempts by the army to arrest and detain civilians for the purposes of forced portering and other labour."

The "porters" are forced to carry heavy loads of ammunition, food and other supplies between army camps, usually over mountains.

Israel may lift closure of WB, Gaza

JERUSALEM, Feb 3: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, back from an unprecedented summit in Cairo with Arab peace partners, convened security advisers Friday to consider lifting the closure of the West Bank and Gaza, reports AP.

The closure was keeping tens of thousands of Palestinians from attending Friday prayers in Jerusalem, the first of this year's Ramadan month of fasting.

It has also caused economic hardship for the Palestinians. More than 100,000 have been cut off from jobs in Israel.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said on Israel Radio that Israel should ease the measure, imposed after a January 22 suicide attack by Islamic extremists that killed 20

Israeli soldiers and a civilian. Rabin and Peres returned earlier today from a Cairo meeting with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians. It was the first time Israeli leaders met at the same time with the leaders of all the Arab signatories to peace accords with the Jewish state.

In Jerusalem, more than 1,500 police were deployed in and around the Arab quarters of the Old City to quell any protest during today's prayers, Israel Radio said.

Fearing the sermons would whip up protests, Israel wanted to reduce the number of worshippers in the mosques. Police roadblocks throughout the city checked Palestinians heading toward the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam.

Last year, 75,000 people attended Friday Ramadan prayers, but police expected only 40,000 this year due to the closure.

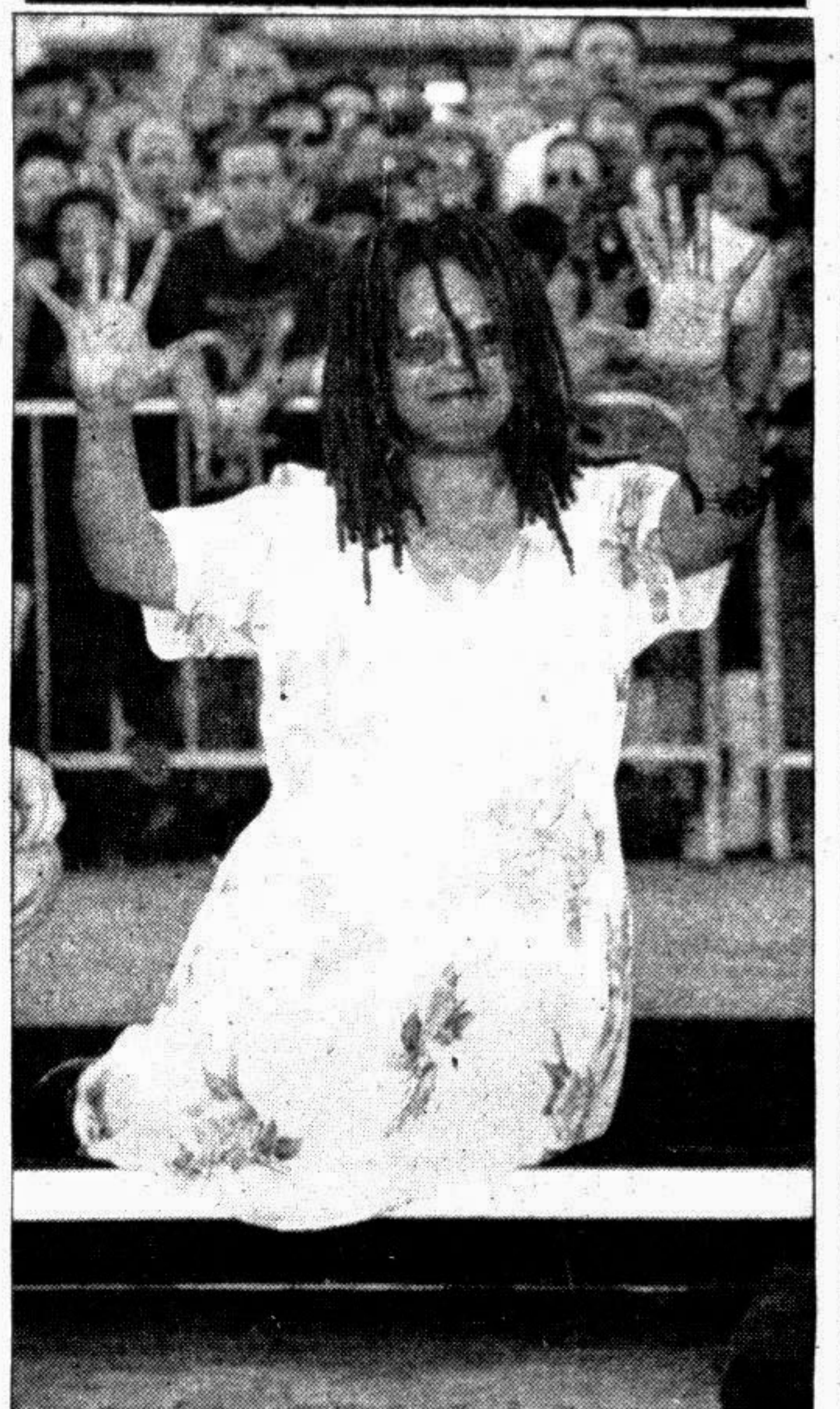
Security sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they would recommend Rabin ease the closure to allay Palestinians' frustrations during Ramadan.

But near Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem, border police turned back about 50 Palestinians from the West Bank trying to attend prayers in Jerusalem.



From left, Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin, King Hussein of Jordan, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, posing on Thursday for photographers prior to their meeting in Cairo. — AFP photo

Off the Record



Academy Award winning actress Whoopi Goldberg displays concrete covered hands on Thursday after placing the imprint of her hands, feet and braids in wet concrete in front of Mann's Chinese Theater in Hollywood. — AFP photo

Country of little romance

TOKYO: Twenty-five per cent of Japanese men — a higher percentage than in other nations surveyed — say they would not want to marry the same partner again, according to a survey published on Friday, reports AFP.

The Poll, published by the Mainichi Shimbun and conducted by the Canadian publishing house Harlequin, found that the percentage is the highest of the 19 countries it surveyed.

Only four per cent for Canadian husbands, six per cent of British men and seven per cent of males in Australia, Germany and the United States said that they would not want to marry their current partner.

"When we looked into female attitudes towards men two years ago, Japanese men were rated as less romantic, but with these results, Japanese women may find it difficult to blame their partners," said Ayako Hirao, Editor for the Japanese edition of Harlequin.

"I guess Japanese woman, for their part, do not try to increase chances to feel romance with their partners in daily life," she said.

Sixty-six per cent of the 401 Japanese respondents to the poll said they would tie the knot again with the same partner if given a second chance, the second lowest proportion among those surveyed.

The poll questioned 5,312 men from 19 countries between February and April 1994.

Effective remedy?

STOCKHOLM: A man who reportedly thought his ill wife got too little attention at a hospital found an effective remedy Thursday: He smashed his car through the front door, reports AP.

Once inside Sahlgrenska Hospital in the western Swedish town of Goteborg about 5 am, the man - whose wife is a patient - found the reception area empty except for one surprised person.

"Call the television people," the man shouted from his car, according to the national news agency TT.

The onlooker, however, answered that he preferred to call the police. So the intruder put his car in reverse and backed out the same way he entered, TT reported.

Police tracked the man from the car license plate and arrested him a few hours later at his home, where he was waiting. Police said he was angry at the lack of attention at the hospital for his seriously ill wife, TT said.

The man, whose name was not released, likely will be charged with damaging property. He will be required to pay the 100,000 kronor (dhrs 13,300) repair bill, TT said.

Peru, Ecuador agree on terms of truce

RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 3: Peru and Ecuador have agreed in principle to a ceasefire proposal made by international mediators during negotiations here to end their week-long border war, a Brazilian official said early today, reports AFP.

Brazilian Ambassador Rego Barros told reporters that Peruvian and Ecuadoran negotiators had submitted the proposal to their respective governments for consideration and that they were waiting for an answer.

Barros said the terms of the ceasefire proposal, which he did not elaborate, were agreed to during negotiations Thursday.



File photo dated March 29, 1994 of British actor Donald Pleasence with his wife Linda, after he received the Order of the British Empire at Buckingham Palace. Pleasence died on Thursday at his home in France. He was 75. — AFP photo

Discovery blasts off: Discovery blasted into orbit on Friday with a woman in the pilot's seat for the first time in NASA history, bound for an unprecedented rendezvous with the Russian space station. AP reports from Cape Canaveral.

The 4.5 million-pound (2 million-kilogram) space shuttle lit up the sky for miles (kilometers) around as it rose from its pad at 12:22 am (0522 GMT) on twin pillars of flame.

Japan's quake toll rises to 5,243: The death toll in last month's earthquake in Kobe and its vicinity reached 5,243 on Friday as police confirmed the unreported deaths of 139 people, a police spokesman said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Survivors had taken away the bodies without an official autopsy, the spokesman said. Six people are still recorded as missing following the quake which injured another 26,804.

5 more IRA inmates to be freed: The Irish government announced on Thursday that it would free five more IRA prisoners to help to underpin Northern Ireland peace negotiations. Reuter reports from Dublin.

The previous government freed six prisoners in a Christmas goodwill gesture to reward Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Army's political wing, after the IRA declared a ceasefire on September.

Deng's daughter off to Paris: Deng Rong, youngest daughter of Chinese patriarch Deng Xiaoping, left Beijing yesterday for a week-long visit to Paris to promote the biography she has written of her father. AFP reports from Beijing.

She boarded an Air France plane accompanied by one of her children only a few minutes before take off, using one of the airport exits reserved for leading figures in the communist regime.

Boeing makes emergency landing: A new Boeing 777 jetliner on a test flight made a safe emergency landing on Thursday after suddenly losing altitude. Four injuries were reported. AP says from Seattle.

UK composer gets Siemens Prize: The British composer Sir Harrison Birtwistle will receive the 250,000-mark (165,000 dollars) International Music Prize of the Ernst-von-Siemens Foundation. It was announced on Thursday. AP reports from Munich.

The foundation praised Birtwistle as one of the most original British composers of the day and singled out his recent stage work, "The Second Mrs. Kong," for winning wide acclaim. The prize will be given at a ceremony May 2 in Munich.

Two die in Chinese club fire: Two people were killed by a fire which gutted a hotel nightclub in the southern Chinese town of Shenzhen and forced more than 200 to flee, the Beijing-controlled Hong Kong daily Wen Wei Po said yesterday. Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

It said hundreds of police and firefighters fought the blaze at the Luoho Hotel which caused losses of 9.98 million yuan (1.18 million US dollar).