

BRIEFLY

Charles to visit Germany in Nov: Britain's Prince Charles is to pay an official visit to Germany in November, palace officials said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from London.

The heir to the throne will visit Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Munich from November 13 to 16 at the invitation of German President Roman Herzog.

Demirel due in Bosnia today: President Suleyman Demirel will travel to Bosnia on Friday to meet with Turkish troops in the UN peacekeeping force and with Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegovic, AP reports from Ankara.

Demirel's visit comes at a time of heightened concern in Turkey over the fate of the Bosnians after the Serbs escalated their offensive in the Muslim enclaves. Turkey contributes to the UN force in Bosnia with a mechanised infantry unit of about 1,500 soldiers and 260 combat vehicles.

Heat wave claims 9 in Spain: Temperatures that soared to 44 degrees (111 Fahrenheit) in the southern province of Seville caused two more deaths Thursday, raising to nine the number of people who have died in a four-day heat wave. AP reports from Seville, Spain.

All of the dead were elderly people who suffered from chronic ailments such as asthma, said a spokeswoman for the health department of the Andalusia regional government. The temperature in the city of Seville has reached 41 degrees Celsius (106 Fahrenheit) every day since Monday.

New Thai govt sworn in: Thai Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa and his 48-member government were officially sworn in before King Bhumibol Adulyadej yesterday. Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Following the ceremony at King Bhumibol's Chitlada Palace, Banharn and his ministers travelled to the nearby prime minister's offices for their first cabinet meeting.

Bus mishap claims 16 in Ghana: Sixteen people died as a bus skidded into a truck Wednesday night, police said, AP reports from Accra.

Police said a number of other people were injured in the collision near Nkawkaw, 200 kms (125 miles) north of Accra. Hamidu Abdulai, Nkawkaw divisional police commander, said the bus, which was being driven at high speed, skidded out of its lane and hit the truck.

Chechen peace talks resume: Russian and Chechen negotiators resumed peace talks in the capital of the rebel republic yesterday, both armed with new proposals after a three-day break in negotiations, AFP reports from Grozny.

During the last three days, they have come up new ideas. "we have come up new ideas, now we are going to examine them," said a member of the Russian delegation, Arkady Volsky, without elaborating.

China for dialogue with ASEAN: China wants greater dialogue with ASEAN nations, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen told his Indonesian counterpart Ali Alatas, while dismissing concerns over China's nuclear testing programme, AFP reports from Beijing.

During a meeting in Beijing late Wednesday, Qian said China attached great importance to its relations with the association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), citing the grouping's role in promoting regional peace and stability.

Alatas, who arrived Wednesday for a three-day official visit, said Indonesia would continue to help coordinate and cement Sino-ASEAN relations.

4 die in US office shootout: A disgruntled employee went on a shooting rampage at a city office building on Wednesday, killing four of his co-workers, police said, Reuter reports from Los Angeles.

One man died at the C Edwin Piper Technical Centre in downtown Los Angeles and the other three died of injuries at a local hospital, said Lt. John Dunkin, a police spokesman.

Space supply ferry off to Mir: An unmanned space ferry loaded with supplies for the Mir orbiting station took off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome Thursday, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, AP says from Moscow.

The report said the Progress M-28 transport would dock with the Mir on Saturday. The freighter, launched by a Soyuz rocket, was carrying 2.4 metric tons (2.64 short tons) of fuel, food, water and research equipment for the two-man crew aboard the Mir, the report said.

Larry Hagman suffers from cancer: Larry Hagman, who became a TV legend as scheming oil baron J R Ewing in the long-running US nighttime soap "Dallas", has a cancerous tumour on his liver and will need a transplant to survive, his doctor said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Los Angeles.

Hagman disclosed in late June that doctors had detected a small tumour on his liver. Subsequently tests showed it was malignant.

6 die in Egyptian family feud: Six people, including a senior police officer, were killed when police tried to break up a shootout between two feuding families in southern Egypt on Wednesday, security sources said, Reuter reports from Assiut, Egypt.

They said Major-General Rifaat Ashour, who was deputy head of Central Security Forces in southern Egypt, and five of the men involved in the fight were killed when one of the families turned its guns on police on Badari island in Assiut Province.

Protest against N-test in Chile: Chilean youths occupied the entrance to the French embassy in Santiago late Wednesday for about an hour and a half to protest France's plans to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific, police said, Reuter reports from Santiago.

At least six unarmed people, all members of the Centre Left Party for democracy entered the embassy grounds but remained just inside its gates, refusing to leave or let anyone in or out, police said.

US heat wave death toll now 738: Heat and foul weather has claimed the lives of 738 people in the United States, officials said Wednesday, as some cities prepared for another round of scorching weather toward the end of the week. AFP reports from Chicago.

In Chicago alone, the death toll mounted to 436, rising by 60 from Tuesday.

2 Dutch climbers reach K-2 peak

ISLAMABAD, July 20: Two Dutch climbers and their two Pakistani porters have climbed the world's second highest mountain in northern Pakistan. The Nation newspaper said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The team, led by Ronald Narr, reached the 8,611-metre (28,250 feet) K-2 in the Karakoram range on Monday from Abruzzi ridge, the paper said. No official confirmation was immediately available.

The Nation said the Dutch expedition was descending to its base camp.

Adnan returned Sarajevo to die

SARAJEVO, July 20: Shrapnel killed 13-year-old Adnan Hadzic on Wednesday, two months after he returned home to Sarajevo from Germany where he fled with his sister when the Bosnian war erupted in 1992, reports Reuter.

"I didn't want them to come home but my girl didn't want to spend her life as a cleaner, she wanted to study and she couldn't afford it there," said his father, 46-year-old Amir Hadzic.

"We prepared a shelter two months ago for their return and he was killed."

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Bosnian Serb forces ring Zepa

SARAJEVO, July 20: Bosnian Serb forces have surrounded Zepa town but there is no evidence Serb troops have actually entered the main settlement in the United Nations declared "safe area," a UN spokeswoman said today, reports Reuter.

"We think there is some substance to the Bosnian Serb claim to have surrounded Zepa town but we have no evidence they have entered Zepa itself," Major Myriam Souchaki, a UN spokeswoman in Sarajevo, told Reuters.

"There was a meeting at UN observation post 2 (southwest of Zepa) on Tuesday afternoon at 1600 (1400 GMT) between the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian army with the UN present to discuss the issue of evacuating civilians."

Souchaki said she had no details of the outcome of that meeting.

Bosnian Serb authorities said on Wednesday evening that the 17,000 Muslim in Zepa had surrendered to Serb forces, Bosnian government officials denied it.

There are no reporters in Zepa to provide independent

confirmation of the Serb claim. The movements of 79 Ukrainian peacekeepers in the pocket are severely restricted, limiting their ability to monitor and report on events.

UN sources said that when UN Commander for Bosnia, Lieutenant-General Rupert Smith, met with Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic after midnight on Thursday, Izetbegovic was pessimistic about the enclave's ability to hold out.

The tone of the conversation suggested that Izetbegovic was resigned to the defeat of Zepa," said one UN official.

An earlier report says: The Bosnian Serb army said it had captured the eastern enclave of Zepa as Western allies debated the use of NATO air power to defend nearby Gorazde, another UN-declared "safe area."

"Zepa has surrendered," said a statement issued on Wednesday evening by Bosnian Serb army headquarters, adding that civilian representatives of Zepa's mostly Muslim population accepted defeat at a meeting with Serb Commander Ratko Mladic.



UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (2nd right) poses with (L-R) Ismat Kitanji, under-secretary general and senior advisor to Boutros-Ghali, Kofi Annan, under-secretary for the department of peacekeeping operations, Thorvald Stoltenberg, Co-Chairman of the International Conference on former Yugoslavia, Sadako Ogata, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and Marrack Goulding, under-secretary for the general department of political affairs in Geneva on Wednesday after their meeting to discuss the situation in Bosnia.

'Both sides may miss July 25 deadline'
Israel, PLO reach 'important understandings,' says Peres

JERUSALEM, July 20: Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Israel and the PLO reached "very important understandings" in talks to meet Tuesday's deadline for an accord to expand Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank, reports Reuter.

Peres met PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in Egypt on Wednesday while their peacekeepers kept negotiating in a northern Israeli town in talks to extend 14-month-old Palestinian self-rule beyond Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho.

"There was an important meeting at the highest level,"

Peres told Israel radio today. "Very important understandings were reached. They must now be formulated in writing and with caution."

Specially, Peres cited progress on what to do about scarce water resources and the redeployment of Israeli troops away from Palestinian population areas.

But he did not want to make the achievements public because, he said: "I prefer they be formulated carefully and precisely."

He also welcomed Arafat's promise "of steadfastness to act against terror." Israel says concern over security for more than 100,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank has delayed the expansion of self-rule.

Peres, Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, meeting in Alexandria on Wednesday, had appeared to make little progress towards an accord that has been postponed several times over more than a year.

Mubarak spoke of an understanding on Palestinian elections, due to take place once Israeli troops redeploy, and other issues but he gave no details and said the two sides could miss their latest July 25 deadline.



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (C) gestures during a joint press conference with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (L) and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (R) in Raas Altin Palace in the coastal town of Alexandria in Egypt on Wednesday. President Mubarak said that Israelis and Palestinians would very soon reach an agreement on extending self-rule in the West Bank.

ICRC accused of supporting LTTE

COLOMBO, July 20: A leading Buddhist monk has accused the International Committee of the Red Cross of supporting Tamil rebels and asked President Chandrika Kumaratunga to expel it from Sri Lanka, newspapers reported Thursday, says AP.

"This organisation is a total fraud. It is supporting the separatists in the north," said the monk, Walpola Rahula, who claims to have documents to prove his accusations.

Rahula, well known for his literary works on Buddhism, made his statements on Tuesday during a ceremony to mark the release of his biography, written by a local journalist.

Tamil rebels have been fighting since 1983, for a homeland in the north and east for the Tamil minority. They allege discrimination by the Sinhalese majority, which controls the government and military. At least 35,000 people have been killed.

Most Sinhalese are Buddhist and most Tamils are Hindus.

The monk's statement followed government criticism of the Red Cross for

telling the media about the military's bombing of a Catholic church and school in Jaffna Peninsula during last week's military offensive.

The Red Cross issued a statement saying 13 babies and 52 other people were killed when a bomb reduced to rubble the Saints Peter and Paul's Church and the adjoining school near Jaffna town.

Kumaratunga has ordered an inquiry into the bombing, which the military officially says it cannot confirm because troops are not in control of the area.

UAE condemns UN for failing to deter Serbs

ABU DHABI, July 20: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) President on Wednesday condemned the United Nations for failing to deter Bosnian Serb forces and called for lifting an arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims, reports AFP.

Sheikh Zayed Ibn Sultan Al-Nahyan said Arab and other Muslim nations should move to stop the Serb "aggression and massacres" against Bosnians by putting pressure on the world's big powers to take action.

"The arms embargo against the Bosnian people should be lifted immediately so they will be able to defend themselves and confront the ugly racist attacks against them," he told the official news agency WAM.

Japan formally asks France to halt N-testing

TOKYO, July 20: Japan summoned the French ambassador to the prime minister's residence today and lodged its strongest protest to date over French plans to resume nuclear testing in the Pacific, officials said, reports Reuter.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Kozo Igarashi met Ambassador Jean-Bernard Ouvreu and handed him a formal government demand to halt the testing, officials at the prime minister's residence said.

It is the strongest diplomatic measure Tokyo has taken on the issue since President Jacques Chirac announced last month that France will resume underground nuclear explosion experiments at the Mururoa Atoll in the Pacific Ocean.

Normally, ambassadors are only summoned to the Foreign Ministry, and not to the prime minister's residence. "I will relay in detail the contents of my meeting with Igarashi to Paris," Ouvreu said, but he refused to elaborate.

US congressman nominates Wu for Nobel Prize '96

SAN FRANCISCO, July 20: US congressman has nominated human rights activist Harry Wu, jailed in Jaffna for espionage, for the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, his office said yesterday, reports Reuter.

Wu has tirelessly documented numerous instances of human rights abuses and shed light on the many illegal and inhumane activities occurring in the Chinese prisons, Congressman Pete Stark said in his letter to the Nobel Nominating Committee in Oslo, Norway.

He has effectively promoted this cause like no one else, often times at great personal risk, Stark, a California Democrat, said.

Wu, who has alleged human rights abuses in China's prison system, was detained in China on June 19 and later accused of espionage. The United States has called for his immediate release.

Wu was born in China and spent 19 years in Chinese labour camps for political activities. Now a US citizen, he lives in Mipitapa, 50 miles (80 kms) south of San Francisco, which lies within Stark's congressional district.

Nigeria blames US, UK for undermining its integrity

LAGOS, July 20: Angered by criticism of its human rights record and of the secret trial of an ex-ruler, Nigeria accused the United States and Britain Wednesday of undermining its integrity, reports AP.

A statement by Gen Sani Abacha's military government said Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi summoned US Ambassador Walter Carrington and British High Commissioner, or ambassador, Thorold Masefield and handed them a protest note.

"The governments of the two countries have pursued policies which threaten the good relations and undermine the integrity of the government of Nigeria," the statement said.

Earlier Wednesday, a delegation from fellow Commonwealth nations urged the government to back down from harsh sentences given to Gen Olusegun Obasanjo and members of his military government that held power in the late 1970s.

Off the Record

Charles is in the safe side

LONDON: Prince Charles was at the controls last year when a Royal Air Force jet overshot a runway and ended up nose-down in a bog. But it was the captain's fault, a government report said Wednesday, reports AP.

Charles, who has been flying for 25 years, was not blamed but he let it be known that he won't take the controls of Royal Squadron aircraft or helicopters in the future.

On June 29, 1994, the British Aerospace 146 twin-engine jet, with 11 people aboard and Charles at the controls, landed too fast on a runway on the Isle of Islay off Scotland, blew a tire and came to rest with the nosewheel sinking in soft ground. No one was injured but the plane was damaged.

In its report on the investigation, the Ministry of Defence blames the "incident" on the captain for allowing a mishandled approach and landing to continue beyond a point from which a safe stop was possible.

On the flight, the crew was given information about island conditions including a 23 mph (37 kph) surface wind.

To avoid cloud, the captain told the prince to follow a procedure that would line up the plane on a runway that had a tail wind, on an approach path higher and faster than normal, the report said. He made no mention of the tailwind, it said.

The navigator, too, came in for stern criticism.

"For failure to advise the captain of the tailwind component, and to draw his attention to the inaccurate approach parameters, the inquiry also deemed the navigator to be negligent," the report said.

Neither man was named.

Not crime, not sex or bad grades, but...

NEW YORK: Drugs — not crime, sex or bad grades — are the biggest problem US teenagers face these days, a new survey found, reports AFP.

Despite ranking drugs way ahead of other troubles, however, nearly 50 per cent of those polled said school substance abuse programmes did little or no good.

In the survey, conducted by the centre on addiction and substance abuse at Columbia University, 32 per cent cited drugs as the biggest problem facing teenagers now.

Next in line was violence and crime in school, cited by 13 per cent. Only five per cent cited other crime and violence, while 10 per cent cited social pressures, and five per cent cited sexual issues.

As for anti-drug programmes in school, a scant nine per cent said they help keep kids away from drugs, while 41 per cent said they help a fair amount, 29 per cent said not too much, and 19 per cent said not at all.

Some 87 per cent said in the survey its very or fairly easy for peers to obtain cigarettes, 73 per cent said the same about alcohol, and 58 per cent claimed that about marijuana.

Luck was not favourable this time

OXENBOURNE, England: A 23-month-old girl drowned in a fish tank in her bedroom in this southern English town Wednesday, a week after she was rescued barely conscious