

BRIEFLY

Rao ends Malaysia trip: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao left for home yesterday after a four-day official visit in Kuala Lumpur to strengthen economic ties. AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Rao, building on his sweeping market reforms, assured Malaysia businesses that India's economic policies aimed at harnessing foreign investment would not be reversed despite domestic criticism.

Pak FM meets Rabbani: Pakistani Foreign Minister Asef Ahmad Ali, on a peace mission to Afghanistan, met President Burhanuddin Rabbani, in Kabul on Friday. Reuter reports from Islamabad.

Both sides agreed to cooperate with each other, the official Kabul Radio said. The broadcast, monitored in Islamabad, quoted Rabbani as saying his government wished to build strong links with all countries, specially with neighbours and particularly with Pakistan.

3 killed in Panama violence: Rock-throwing workers and riot police fought street battles on the first day of a general strike, and police said three people were killed. AP reports from Panama City.

Labour unions, including the powerful construction and banana workers' organisations, called the open-ended stoppage to protest legislative proposals to curb their clout. Friday's violence began when police started removing barricades set up by workers to block traffic in this seaside capital. Police hurled tear gas grenades and fired in the air in an attempt to open the streets.

Actress Lupino dies in US: Ida Lupino, who starred with Humphrey Bogart in "High Sierra" and went on to become one of Hollywood's first women directors, died at age 77. AP reports from Burbank, California.

Lupino, who had cancer and recently suffered a stroke, died at home Thursday night, said Marry Ann Anderson, her former secretary. Born February, 1918, in London, Lupino was only 15 when she got her first film role in the British production "Her First Affaire."

Meet on Gulf War MIAs fate ends: Kuwait and Iraqi officials ended a two-day meeting on Friday on clearing up the fate of people missing since the 1990-91 Gulf War, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said. Reuter reports from Geneva.

The humanitarian agency, which sponsored the private talks in Geneva, said they had been held in a "positive spirit" and should lead to facilitating the task.

Kuwaitis march for Bosnians: More than 2,000 Kuwaitis on Friday participated in a solidarity rally in Kuwait for Bosnian Muslims and denounced UN and Western policy toward war-ravaged Bosnia. AFP reports from Kuwait.

A protest march had been planned but was cancelled because of security reasons cited by police, an organiser said. The protest route would have run past the Emir's palace and a few embassies, including those of the United States and Britain.

Indian national to die in Lanka: An Indian national, Mangalam Rajamani Shanmugasundram has been sentenced to death by a Sri Lankan court on charges of heroin smuggling. PTI reports from Colombo.

Shanmugasundram, 43, of Tamil Nadu was sentenced by the High Court judge at Negombo, a suburb of the capital on Tuesday. He was caught by the police with 113.66 gms of heroin on his arrival from India on June 30, 1993.

Christopher arrives in Vietnam: United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived in Vietnam yesterday on the higher level visit by a US official to the communist country since the end of the Vietnam War. Reuter reports from Hanoi.

Christopher's plane touched down at Hanoi's Noi Bai Airport, set in a patchwork of rice fields, some 30 km (20 miles) north of the Vietnamese capital, at about 0940 local time (0240 GMT).

Russian foreign office gutted: Moscow's Foreign Ministry mansion was heavily damaged by fire that also partially ruined its precious art collection, officials said Saturday. AP reports from Moscow.

The fire in the historic, two-story brick building in downtown Moscow broke out Friday evening. More than 200 firemen and 43 vehicles fought the flames for three hours. Russia's Main Firefighting Department reported.

Arafat turns 65: Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chief Yasser Arafat celebrated his 65th birthday on Friday, the same day his new born daughter went home from a Paris hospital. AFP reports from Gaza Strip.

About 1,000 people celebrated Arafat's birthday with a massive party on the Gaza Strip, which included a parade of horses.

Qatari Emir due in KSA today: The new Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad ibn Khalifa al-Thani, will visit Saudi Arabia on Sunday, a senior official in Dhaka told AFP Friday.

The trip will be Sheikh Hamad's first foreign visit since he overthrew his father as Qatar's leader in a bloodless coup on June 27. The senior official, who requested anonymity, did not say how long the Emir would stay or what the focus of the discussions would be.

Blast outside US officials' home: A car bomb exploded outside the home of a US forest service official in Carson City causing damage but no injuries, police said yesterday. Reuter reports from Carson City, Nevada.

A spokeswoman with the Carson City sheriff's office said the bomb exploded outside the home of district manager Buy Pence late on Friday.

French actress faces drug charge: Sultry French actress Beatrice Dalle, convicted of shoplifting from a jewelry store three years ago, was charged Friday with possession of heroin and cocaine, and ordered to see a doctor. AP reports from Paris.

Miss Dalle, 30, was charged with "complicity in use and passing on drugs." She had been arrested Tuesday evening at her apartment with four other people, two of them foreigners in France illegally. Police first arrested two suspected drug dealers on the ground floor of the building.

8 more killed in Karachi violence: KARACHI, Pakistan, Aug 5: At least eight more people were killed in the Pakistani city of Karachi on Friday as a renewed wave of violence raised the death toll in two days to more than 32, police said, reports Reuter.

They said two bullet-riddled bodies bearing marks of torture were found in the boot of a car from the central Gulbahar area, where paramilitary rangers and police launched a joint operation last month to flush out militants.

Gunmen shot dead a 30-year-old man in western Orangi town area, while another youngster was shot dead in the central Azizabad area, a stronghold of the ethnic

Kurds kill 9 in Turkey: HATAY, Turkey, Aug 5: Kurdish rebels fired rockets at a village in this southeastern province late Friday, killing nine people, including four children, the Anatolia news agency said Saturday, reports AP.

The rocket attack on Akbez village began at around 11:00 pm (2000 GMT). Four people were injured.

Rebels have attacked villages they suspect are collaborating with Turkish security forces. Kurdish rebels have been fighting for autonomy in southeastern Turkey since 1984. More than 16,000 people have been killed.

Yankees open new era with former foe Vietnam: (MIA). Christopher joined an honour guard of US military personnel and diplomats as the four coffins draped with the stars and stripes were carried aboard a US Air Force jet to be flown to Hawaii for forensic examination.

US flags flew by the airport terminal and were draped across the coffins for the first time now that the countries have established diplomatic relations.

The quest to recover the remains of more than 1,600 MIAs has dominated relations since the end of the war in 1975.

"This issue will remain a number one priority on our agenda with the government of Vietnam," Christopher said.

"I will reinforce that message today and tomorrow in every meeting I have with the Vietnamese leadership and in every public appearance I make."

But he added that Vietnam and the United States should now work together to improve human rights, to counter the scourge of illegal drugs and to promote economic reform, he said.

Christopher announced that the State Department would name a career diplomat, Desais Anderson, as charge d'affaires at the embassy he will open tomorrow.

Republicans in Congress who believe Hanoi has not done enough to account for MIAs have threatened to hold up approval of an ambassador and the House of Representatives has voted to withhold funds to expand the US liaison office that opened early this year.

Although the two countries have begun talks on a number of economic and other issues, US officials are obliged to put MIAs at the top of the agenda because of the powerful lobby of families of those still listed as missing.

All the missing are believed to be dead and there is little hope of recovering many more remains. Some 55 so-called "discrepancy cases" where uncertainties remain about the fate of the missing services personnel are still to be resolved.

Christopher will meet Vietnam's three top leaders — President Le Duc Anh, Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet and Communist Party general secretary Do Muoi — during the weekend stay. He will also give a speech to local students.

The last US Secretary of State to visit Vietnam was William Rogers who travelled to Saigon in 1970 when the government there was allied with the United States.

Relations were established almost 31 years to the day after the "Gulf of Tonkin incident," an alleged attack by North Vietnam against the US navy that prompted President Lyndon Johnson to send ground troops to Vietnam.

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Delhi, Moscow on the verge of nuclear reactor deal: Pranab

MOSCOW, Aug 5: India and Russia are rapidly strengthening their economic and military ties and are on the verge of a nuclear reactor deal, Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee said Friday, reports AFP.

Mukherjee told reporters after meeting with his Russian counterpart Andrei Kozyrev that "economic cooperation and bilateral trade between the two countries has expanded" with trade volume expected to double from 1992 levels by the end of this year.

Trade between the two countries is projected to total 1.6 billion dollars by the end of the year, the Indian embassy said.

Mukherjee said a decision would be made "very shortly" on a proposal for India to build a softwater nuclear power reactor with Russian help. A group of Russian specialists is travelling to India to discuss the issue, he said.

The two giants — Russia is geographically the biggest country in the world, India is the second most populated country — are also continuing a thriving arms trade begun in the Soviet era.

Mukherjee said the weapons programmes were important to give India muscle in its power struggle with neighbouring Pakistan.

But the reactor will not have military applications, said Mukherjee in response to fears that India, as well as Pakistan, is developing atomic weapons.

"India is committed to not manufacturing nuclear weapons," he said. But a large conventional arsenal must be built, he added.

"Surely we cannot ignore the threat, particularly when Pakistan is armed, or is attempting to be armed, with sophisticated weapons to enhance its striking capability," he said.

Mukherjee said Indian-Russian relations were increasingly close and that Kozyrev reassured him that Moscow had no intention of selling Pakistan weapons too, despite rumours in the Russian press to the contrary.

Kozyrev was quoted by Interfax news agency as saying that Moscow would not allow pressure from third countries to prevent the sale of nuclear technology to New Delhi, in an apparent reference to the United States, which strongly opposes Russia's nuclear reactor sale to Iran.

Moscow supports New Delhi's bid for a permanent seat on the powerful UN Security Council and also backs India's authority in Kashmir, he said. India accuses Pakistan of aiding Kashmiri separatists in their battles with Indian authorities.

The two countries will increase cooperation in fighting terrorism and investments to modernise their economies.

They will coordinate their policies in central Asia, an unstable area lying between India and Russia. One priority is to prevent "the threat of Islamic fundamentalism growing in this area," Mukherjee said.

Mukherjee will visit Saint Petersburg on Saturday before leaving Russia the following day.

Thatcher urges to defy UN ban, help arm Bosnia: ASPEN, Colo. Aug 5: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on Friday called on "independent nation states" to break with United Nations policy and help arm Bosnia so it can defend itself, reports Reuter.

"The Serb aggressor is being appeased while we do not even allow the Bosnians to be supplied with the arms with which to defend their homes, their women and their children," Thatcher said in a speech at the Aspen Institute.

"The essential condition for bringing the war in Bosnia to a quicker as well as a just conclusion is the lifting of the arms embargo, as the US Senate, Congress and the Islamic countries have seen," she said.

Both Chambers of Congress have voted to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia, but no shipments can begin until UN peacekeepers have been withdrawn.

40,000 people join internet to protest French N-test plan: TOKYO, Aug 5: More than 40,000 people from 92 countries have joined a protest on the computer internet against France's plans to resume nuclear testing, a Japanese daily reported today, reports AFP.

Three post-graduate students from Tokyo University, who organised the protest, submitted the petition with 43,212 signature collected through the computer network to the French Embassy here Friday, the Mainichi Shim Un said.

Seishi Shimizu, 23, and his two partners called for the support of anyone who is against nuclear tests on the internet between July 10 and August 2.

Germans were the most active protesters, with 10,000 adding their names to the petition, while 9,000 Japanese joined in, the Major Daily said. There were also more than 1,300 signature from France, it said.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat raises a painting of Jerusalem, which was offered to him by supporters for his 65th birthday Friday during a ceremony in Gaza City. Arafat's Palestinian Authority urged Washington to expel Hamas political director Mussa Abu Marzuk, who was arrested on July 25 upon his arrival in the United States, to an Arab country, and not Israel. — AFP/UNB photo

Allied powers split over Croat offensive against rebel Serbs

BRUSSELS, Belgium, Aug 5: The European Union suspended ties with Croatia and NATO threatened airstrikes Friday as Croatian forces launched a major assault to regain Serb-held lands. But Russia suggested Western governments in fact backed the offensive, reports AP.

Exposing differences that have long hurt peacemaking in former Yugoslavia, France, Britain and Italy condemned the Croatian attack.

While Germany and the United States chided Croatia, they showed some sympathy for its wish to regain control over the so-called Krajina, lost in a 1991 war with rebel Serbs.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl told German television, "After experiencing how part of the Serb leadership achieved gains with brutal violence, it's natural the others are now at a point where they say, 'We have to react.'"

In Washington, the State Department said it "regrets this resort to force" by Croatia.

The North Atlantic alliance threatened airstrikes if Croatian troops menace or harm UN peacekeepers.

Later, Croat forces killed a Danish peacekeeper and two Poles, but no NATO warplanes were sighted over Croatia.

The 15-nation European Union suspended talks with Croatia on a trade and cooperation agreement and froze aid.

An EU statement condemned Croatia but also the Krajina Serbs for an attack this week on Bihać, a Bosnian enclave.

The EU governments urged Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to avoid participation in current operations.

Widely seen as the instigator of the Yugoslav war, Milosevic eager to see a UN trade ban against Serbia lifted — indicated he won't come to the aid of Croatians. Yet he called Croatia "the greatest danger for peace in the Balkans."

Germany pushed the West to recognise Croatian independence in 1991, a move seen by other European nations as hastening war there and in neighbouring Bosnia.

The United States has been working hard to forge an alliance between Croatia and Bosnia's Croats and Muslims to counter-balance the Serbs.

Germany and the United States tend to see Serbs as the aggressors in former Yugoslavia.



Chihiro Hazama (C), a 7-year-old school girl, works on a sketch of the Atomic Dome Saturday, on the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima Atomic Bombing. Hazama arrived in Hiroshima with her family to take part in the memorial service together with some other 9,000 visitors. — AFP/UNB photo

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White House threatens to veto Senate defence bill

WASHINGTON, Aug 5: The White House threatened Friday to veto a 265 billion Senate defence bill with an anti-missile defence plan that it said would "effectively abrogate" the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, reports Reuter.

President Bill Clinton's National Security Adviser, Anthony Lake, raised the threat in a letter to Senate Democratic leader Thomas Daschle.

The US Senate voted Thursday to establish in the defence bill a new US policy calling for construction of a multi-site anti-missile system by 2003 to defend US cities despite the US-Soviet ABM Treaty's limit of one site per country.

In our view, these provisions, if enacted into law, would effectively abrogate the ABM Treaty," Lake said.

"The effect of such actions would in all likelihood be to prompt Russia to terminate implementation of the START I (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) and shelve ratification of START II, thereby leaving thousands of warheads in place," he added.

The two START treaties would reduce nuclear warheads to 3,500 each for the United States and for former Soviet republics.

"Let me be clear, unless the unacceptable missile defence provisions are deleted or revised and other changes are made to the bill the president's advisers will recommend that he veto the bill," Lake said.

Senate supporters of the multi-site anti-missile defence said it is needed because a number of small hostile countries are trying to develop long-range missiles and some of them are also trying to develop nuclear and chemical weapons.

Colombo plans mid-term polls if peace bid fails

COLOMBO, Aug 5: Sri Lanka will likely hold elections if the latest government plan to end the island's separatist war fails, a pro-government newspaper said today, reports AFP.

The sweeping political reforms proposed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to resolve the ethnic conflict which has claimed over 50,000 lives since 1972 must win a two-thirds majority in parliament.

AP adds: Nearly 2,000 soldiers carried out a "limited offensive" against Tamil rebels in northern Sri Lanka, killing at least one guerrilla and losing five of their own men, the military said Saturday.

Rebel radio broadcasts, monitored by the military, said that up to 50 rebels were wounded in the attack.

believed it could improve on its one-seat majority in new elections, making the peace issue central to its campaign.

Kumaratunga declined to answer questions about election plans. "We will answer that at the right time," she said.

The peace package would give extensive autonomy to eight regions, including areas where rebel Tamils dominate.

The President planned to dissolve parliament and call fresh polls if she was unable to get the vital backing of the opposition United National Party (UNP), the pro-government Ravaya Weekly said in editions to be released Sunday.

An advance copy obtained Saturday said the government

Off the Record

Monk failed to reform himself

SINGAPORE: A convicted molester who tried and failed to reform himself by becoming a monk has been ordered jailed and caned for outraging the modesty of two young girls, a newspaper reported Saturday, reports AFP.

Lim Chien Kiat, 45, was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in jail and eight strokes of the cane by a court Friday. The New Paper said.

He was convicted of molestation seven times since 1973, telling the court in his last appearance that he had prayed day and night "to keep out of trouble," it said.

He became a monk in 1989 but the attempt to reform himself was unsuccessful and he left the order because he could not fit in, The New Paper said.

Lim molested a 12-year-old girl and a 13-year-old girl in two separate incidents in April, and was caught the second time.

Is it possible?

ANCONA, Italy: A 43-year-old woman who gave birth to a baby weighing more than three kilograms (6.6 pounds) Friday was unaware she had been pregnant, hospital sources said, reports AFP.

The woman, who already had two children, arrived in the morning complaining of severe pain in her belly and gave birth shortly thereafter in the hospital emergency room, said a source at the Chiaravalle Hospital here.

The woman said that she had only gained four or five kilos (nine to 12 pounds) in the previous nine months and had continued to menstruate. She had attributed any changes to hormonal imbalances due to menopause.

300m-year-old lizard's skeleton discovered

GOTHA, Germany: German and American scientists have discovered a 300 million-year-old lizard's skeleton in the Thuringen Forest, near Gotha, central Germany, scientists said Friday, reports AFP.

According to Thomas Martens, curator of paleontology at Gotha's Natural History Museum, the metre-long (three-foot) skeleton's species has not yet been identified.

The saurian group of reptiles originally included lizards, crocodiles and several extinct forms, but is now technically restricted to lizards.

The primitive forms of vertebrate animals are not to be confused with dinosaurs which lived some 150 million years later and were larger, Martens explained.

Poor bees

BADAJOS, Spain: Not even bees have been safe from the sweltering temperatures that have roasted much of Spain this summer, reports AP.

Temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius since late July have melted the wax honeycombs inside some 4,000 beehives in the provinces of Cordoba and Seville.

Thousands of queen bees and bee colonies have been destroyed and losses were estimated at 168,000 dollars, said Juan Fernandez, spokeswoman for the Association of Small Farmers, on Friday.

Serbs commander Gen Mladic demoted

PALE (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Aug 5: The Bosnian Serb commander, Gen Ratko Mladic, was demoted Friday to the position of adviser to leader Radovan Karadzic, who announced he was assuming command of his armed forces, reports AP.

The move came amid increasing signs of a rift between Karadzic and Mladic, the chief Bosnian Serb military strategist during the three-year war in Bosnia.

Karadzic announced the change during an interview on Bosnian Serb television in which he said he was assuming the position of supreme commander, Mladic, he said, would be his adviser.