

BRIEFLY

Kohl arrives in Cape Town:

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl arrived in Cape Town late Saturday on a ground breaking first visit by a German leader to the newly-democratic South Africa. AFP reports from Cape Town.

Kohl was met by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo at Cape Town's Airport after arriving shortly after 10:00 pm (2000 GMT).

Chechens kill Russian commander:

A Russian tank commander was killed in a grenade attack by Chechen fighters near the village of Kurtshaly. The Interfax news agency reported yesterday citing military sources. AFP says from Moscow.

Another member of the tank crew is missing and was probably taken prisoner by rebels in the attack 20 kilometers (12 miles) west of the capital Grozny. Russian military headquarters said.

Floods claim 82 in Haryana:

Eighty two persons were killed and 253 heads of cattle perished in recent floods in Haryana, an official spokesman Saturday said. PTI reports from Chandigarh.

As many as 72336 houses and 1558 roads have been damaged as a result of floods, the spokesman said adding 42815 persons have been evacuated from the flood-affected areas and shifted to relief camps.

12 die in Pak road mishap:

Twelve people were killed and 13 others injured when a bus and a van collided head-on on the main highway in Pakistani province of Singh, news reports said yesterday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

The accident occurred near Mahesar late Saturday as the driver of the van tried to overtake a truck and ramed into the bus, newspaper Dawn said.

AEJ to go on strike in Algeria:

Algerian editors are set to launch a three day strike to protest the continued assassination of journalists by suspected fundamentalists, a journalist union said Saturday. AFP reports from Algiers.

The Association of Newspaper Editors (AEJ), which numbers the majority of independent newspaper editors among its members announced the strike to start Monday in a statement after four journalists were killed in another bloody week in Algeria's three year civil war.

Ex-Congressman Whitten dies:

Former Rep Jamie Loyd Whitten, a Mississippi farm boy who served a record 53 years in the House and exerted quite but powerful control over the nation's purse strings, died Saturday. He was 85. AP reports from Jackson.

Whitten, a Democrat who retired in 1994, died from complications of chronic cardiac and renal disease, said Drs Keith Mansel and Michael King, his physicians at Baptist Memorial Hospital-North Mississippi Oxford. He had been hospitalised since Monday.

2 more newsmen killed in Algeria:

Islamic extremists killed a journalist for Algeria's state-run television and his wife, a technician there, security forces said Saturday, bringing to five the number of people working for the media killed in less than a week. AP reports from Algiers.

Said Brahim, 35, and his wife Radja, 25, were killed while driving their car near Cherabga, east of Algiers, security forces said without elaborating.

10 shot dead in Rio dance party:

Ten young people, including an 11-year-old girl, were shot dead early Saturday when a drug gang intent on expanding its territory moved in on another gang's territory at a dance party, police said. AFP reports from Rio de Janeiro.

Sonic 300 young people were attending a "funk" party in one of the town's slum districts when some 20 members of one of the most powerful criminal gangs in Rio, the "Third Command," broke in on the dance firing machine guns.

Yeltsin leaves for Black Sea:

A day after parliament castigated his government and urged him to take strong foreign policy actions, President Boris Yeltsin headed as scheduled Sunday for a vacation on Russia's Black Sea coast. AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin flew on Sunday morning to the resort city of Sochi, his press service said. He was expected to spend up to two weeks there, relaxing, playing tennis and holding occasional meetings with aides and political leaders.

Jewish settlers storm school:

Jewish settlers stormed into a Palestinian girls' school in the West Bank city of Hebron yesterday, beat its headmistress and later injured 10 girls who had marched to city hall to protest, witnesses said. Reuter reports from Hebron.

EU dismisses French offer to extend its N-umbrella

SANTANDER, Spain, Sept 10: France's offer to extend its nuclear umbrella to its European Union partners has been dismissed as a bid to deflect a wave of criticism over the resumption of testing in the South Pacific, reports AFP.

If they see the issue like this, why didn't they ask us for our opinion before they carried out a test, Dutch Foreign Minister Hans Van Mierlo said at weekend talks here.

The informal gathering of foreign ministers was the first chance the other EU states had to officially register their dismay at the decision by Paris to begin a programme of up to eight nuclear explosions in the Mururoa Atoll.

Van Mierlo's comment reflected a widespread view among the 14 other EU states that President Jacques Chirac's suggestion last week that the independent French nuclear deterrent could be "Europeanised" represented a piece of political opportunism.

Danish Minister Nils Helveg Peterson added that despite the high public profile given to the idea over the last week France had not actually tabled any concrete proposals to that effect.

"I'd be against them if there were any but so far I've not seen any proposals," he said. "We're members of NATO, the NATO umbrella is still there and I see no change in that situation."

Al-Faran extends deadline

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 10: Al-Faran guerrillas holding four westerners hostage in India's troubled Kashmir region extended their deadline indefinitely as Indian officials said today that talks were continuing, reports Reuter.

"Al-Faran has in response to an appeal made by relatives of the hostages reviewed its decision and extended the deadline further," the militant group said in a statement delivered to the Urdu-language Al-Safa newspaper on Saturday.

The deadline expired on Saturday evening, local time. But Al-Faran did not fix any time or date for a new deadline.

Strike cripples Karachi, 5 killed Pakistan to move its embassy in Kabul to 'safe place'

ISLAMABAD, Sept 10: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said today that Pakistan would move its embassy to a "safe place" in Afghanistan after demonstrators ransacked and burned its Kabul mission last week, reports Reuter.

After visiting the wounded ambassador and other embassy staff at a military hospital at Rawalpindi, near Islamabad, she told reporters that Pakistan had considered breaking diplomatic ties with Afghanistan, but had decided not to.

Benazir said she had told her Foreign Ministry "not to keep the embassy in Kabul and transfer it to a safe place".

Pakistani Foreign Minister Aseff Ahmad Ali said Islamabad had sent a protest to President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government in Kabul, demanding an apology and compensation.

Tension between Kabul and Islamabad reached a new pitch last Wednesday after thousands of protesters attacked the Pakistani Embassy in the Afghan capital, killing one staffer and wounding 28 others, including the ambassador and military attache.

The crowd was protesting against alleged Pakistani support for the opposition Taleban movement, which captured the key western city of Herat from pro-government forces on Tuesday.

"It was a pre-mediated attack," Ambassador Kazi Humayun told Benazir as he sat in his hospital bed, with a stitched scalp, broken upper tooth and his face still showing bruises from the beating he received from the Afghan

attackers.

"We are okay," murmured military attache Brigadier Ashraf Afridi, who could not rise from his bed as Benazir asked about his condition. "Afghan people are our brothers. It is only a group which wants to destroy our relations."

AP adds: A militant ethnic group brought Pakistan's largest city and financial pit to a standstill Sunday with a strike to protest alleged police abuse against its female activists.

By midday snipers had killed at least four people and a pro-government activist was tortured and hanged, police said.

The body of Faiz Mohammad was found in the back of an abandoned taxi, a police spokesman said.

Authorities believe the killing was the work of Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) extremists, who are members of the same group responsible for Sunday's strike.

Despite the killings, the protest, which left the city's usually teeming streets abandoned and businesses closed, was peaceful compared with similar strikes in recent months.

More than 1,400 people have been killed in ethnic violence in Karachi so far.

Paramilitary troops and heavily armed policemen deployed throughout the city's key trouble spots were given authority to shoot on sight anyone carrying a weapon.

"We've told police to shoot at anyone disrupting normal civil life," said Interior Minister Nasrullah Babar.



Demonstrators gather Saturday during the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament protest against nuclear testing, outside the French Embassy in Knightsbridge, London. — AFP/UNB photo

Mladic ready for concessions on improving access to Sarajevo

MOSCOW, Sept 10: NATO strikes were discontinued.

Bosnian Serb Commander General Ratko Mladic is ready for concessions on improving access to besieged Sarajevo but will not withdraw heavy weapons from around the city, a senior Russian envoy said today, reports Reuter.

First Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told ITAR-Tass news agency in Belgrade after three hours of talks with Mladic on Saturday that the weapons, whose withdrawal the United Nations has demanded, were needed to defend the Serb population.

Ivanov told Tass: "Mladic said that he was ready to immediately start talks on a truce with Croatian and Muslim commanders if the

free passage of humanitarian and logistic convoys for the UN protection force in Sarajevo, would not cut off water, power and gas supplies, for the city, and would take no military actions except in self-defence.

Asked by Tass whether Mladic would meet the demand to move his heavy weapons out of the 20 km (12.5 mile) exclusion zone around Sarajevo, Ivanov said Mladic told him that the weapons were required to defend the Serb population.

Another reports from Sarajevo adds: "Unusual" movements of Bosnian Serb heavy weapons have been spotted around Sarajevo since Saturday evening but there is no evidence any have been withdrawn from the area, a UN spokeswoman said today.

"We have monitored some unusual movements of vehicles and heavy weapons around Sarajevo since 8 pm (1800 GMT) on Saturday," said Major Myriam Souchaki.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic said on Saturday his forces had withdrawn their weapons from the zone, a claim the UN in Sarajevo rejected.

Today's UN report of weapons and vehicle movements left Serb intentions in doubt.

Serb forces have been told to withdraw their weapons along any of three routes.

Srinagar BBC office blast victim dies

SRINAGAR, India Sept 10: AFP's Srinagar photographer Mushtaq Ali died early today in hospital of injuries received three days earlier in a parcel bomb explosion, doctors said, reports AFP.

All 30, a freelance photographer for Agence France Presse (AFP) in the Kashmir summer capital for the past five years suffered extension injuries in the blast Thursday at the office here of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and had been given little chance of survival.

Doctors at the Soura Institute of Medical Sciences had said that Ali, who also worked for Asian News International Television, was clinically dead but was being kept alive by a respirator and other life support systems.

Ex-governor of Herat vows to dislodge Taliban

TEHRAN, Sept 10: The former governor of the western Afghan province of Herat, Ismael Khan, vowed here today to dislodge the Taliban militia which captured the strategic region bordering Iran, reports AFP.

Ismael Khan, who fled to Iran Tuesday after the fall of Herat's main city of the same name, said in an interview with Jomhuri Islami Daily that "resistance cells" had been formed in Herat, 120 Kilometers (90 miles) from the Iranian border, to fight the Taliban.

"Operations are underway and we will soon liberate Herat," he said. "Most of the regions in Herat are currently under the control of forces loyal to the former governor, who is a strategic ally of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani."

Riyadh govt keeps distance from visiting Iraqi minister

DUBAI, Sept 10: Saudi Arabia has distanced itself from a visit by an Iraqi cabinet minister to the Kingdom, saying it has nothing to do with the Riyadh government, reports Reuter.

Iraq's Religious Affairs Minister Abdul-Muneim Ahmed Saleh has arrived in Saudi Arabia, the first Iraqi minister to visit the Kingdom since Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

The official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said late on Saturday that Saleh would attend a meeting held by the Jeddah-based Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which groups more than 50 Muslim countries.

Off the Record



A 17-year-old student Yesmin Palanduz (C) from Turkey is all smiles wearing the crown of the "Queen of the World" after winning this beauty contest in Baden-Baden, Germany Friday night. Runners up were 25-year-old "Queen of Germany" Beate Almer (L) and 20-year-old Norwegian model Skaug Syvertsen (R). — AFP/UNB photo

Charles at war with his father?

LONDON: Britain's heir to the throne, the Prince of Wales is at war with his father the Duke of Edinburgh over nature conservation, the Mail on Sunday reported, says AFP.

Quoting sources close to Prince Charles, the paper said that their relations, "never particularly close," had now reached an unprecedented low in the wake of the Duke's decision to fell 63 ancient oak trees in Windsor Great Park.

The felling of the trees was suspended half way through for review last week after conservationists raised a storm of protest, saying the oaks were a vital habitat of animals and insects.

The Mail on Sunday said the prince had launched a savage attack in private on his father president of the world wide fund for nature whom he accused of Vandalism. Their philosophies are totally different towards such issues as the management of the royal family's extensive properties, the paper quoted its source as saying.

'Showgirls' — too hot to handle

SANTA MONIA: Two big theater chains won't show it, a few newspapers won't advertise it and the Christian right won't like it. "Showgirls" almost has it made.

The explicit account of Las Vegas Strippers is the first studio film since 1990's "Henry and June" to carry the adults-only NC-17 (No children under 17) rating. With its constant nudity, rough language, soft-core sex and occasional violence, "Showgirls" was assumed to be an impossible sale — too hot to handle.

The conventional wisdom held that you couldn't find films like this at the local mall multiplex: You had to mingle with the raincoat crowd at the Pussycat to sneak a peek.

Yet three weeks before the movie's Sept 22 premiere, MGM has secured nearly 1,000 theatres nationwide for the film's debut weekend, far more than showed "Henry & June". The studio also has not struggled to purchase "Showgirls" advertising, buying a flood of national TV and print spots. And starting Sept 11, video stores will give away 250,000 promotional videocassettes of a "Showgirls" trailer to promote the movie's theatrical release. The video is rated NC-17.

"Showgirls" may be the biggest test yet for the NC-17 taboo, but the taboo so far is losing badly.

"The whole myth that you couldn't release an NC-17 film widely was just that — a myth," says Gerry Rich, MGM's executive vice president of worldwide marketing.

Less than three years ago, MGM (under different management) canceled a planned NC-17 release of Madonna's "Body of Evidence." The studio said then theater owners and newspapers would shun the film unless it came out with the less-restrictive R rating.

The adult-oriented films "Damage," "Natural Born Killers," "Sliver" and "Basic Instinct," among several others, similarly were re-edited to avoid the NC-17 mark — often with sufficient publicity to drum up prurient interest for the truncated, R-rated version.



A Bosnian Serb looks down at a bridge that was destroyed in NATO air raids in the Bosnian Serb-held town of Srbinje (former Foca), Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

Floods in Delhi render 35,000 homeless

NEW DELHI, Sept 10: The Indian capital struggled today to avert an outbreak of epidemics in the aftermath of New Delhi's worst flooding in 17 years which left some 35,000 people temporarily homeless, officials said, reports AFP.

New Delhi Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana said mobile medical clinics had been sent to relief camps to prevent water borne diseases from breaking out among the thousands of evacuated people living there.

"We have rushed safe drinking water and free medicines. I want to hurry the return trip to normality," Khurana said of a nonstop operation by his administration to prevent epidemics.

Fears of an outbreak of typhoid, gastroenteritis and malaria gripped this city of 12 million people as floodwaters gradually receded today from submerged residential districts.

Officials added, however, that the Jamuna remained two metres (6.6 feet) above the danger mark.

"We expect the Jamuna would go down to its normal levels within two days," a municipal spokesman said.

Municipal authorities reopened a flooded bus terminal, India's largest, while train services which came to a halt last week would resume Monday once submerged tracks are cleared.

Relief workers also drained waterlogged intersections and residential districts.

Beijing confce reaches accord on half of contentious issues

BEIJING, Sept 10: Delegates at the Beijing World Women's Conference have reached agreement on about half of the contentious issues in a draft platform that will set a course for women's rights and equality for the next decade, officials said today, reports Reuter.

The progress came despite a blistering broadside from the Vatican, which on Saturday attacked the stand of the European Union on the family charging it sought to roll back parental rights, belittle motherhood and undermine religious faith.

The sharp criticism, which saw the Vatican abandon a soft approach it adopted for the first six days at the United Nations Fourth

World Conference on Women, drew the ire of feminists who said the Holy See was clearly isolated and on the defensive.

The main negotiators of the charter stayed behind closed doors as they began a seventh day trying for a consensus on contentious language in the platform that will chart a course giving women more power over their own bodies and more political participation into the next century.

In the first six days of the UN's biggest ever meeting, delegates agreed on some 50 per cent of so called holy brackets planks those with contentious phrases, primarily about disputes on whether modern views of women's

rights should take precedence over traditional religious views, a UN spokesman said.

With five days to go before the declaration is issued, half the 430 bracketed items have been solved, the spokesman said.

The hottest topic of the weekend is the health section. UN spokesman John Mathiason said, with negotiating teams hoping to remove the final brackets around the most outstanding controversies before Monday.

These included parental rights and responsibilities, sexual rights and the review of laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abor-

LTTE kills seven troops

COLOMBO, Sept 10: Tamil rebels ambushed an army patrol in northeastern Sri Lanka on Sunday, killing at least seven soldiers, military official said, reports AP.

Nearly 50 rebels attacked the soldiers at Punani, 190 kilometers (120 miles) east of Colombo, the Sri Lanka capital. Four soldiers were critically wounded, the officials said.

The military fired back but the rebel casualties were not immediately known.

The guerrillas have been fighting for a separate homeland in the north and east since 1983, accusing the majority Sinhalese of discrimination in education and jobs. More than 36,000 people have been killed.