

BRIEFLY



Chechen demonstrator raises his fist, standing next to a woman holding up a poster with Dzhokhar Dudayev's portrait, during a rally in Grozny Friday. Moscow's troubleshooter in Chechnya, Oleg Lobo, had announced in August, that elections in Chechnya could not be held until most separatist fighters had surrendered their weapons. — AFP/UNB photo

12 killed in NZ bus mishap: At least 12 people, including four children, were killed when a bus plunged more than 40 metres (about 130 feet) off a bridge in New Zealand's North Island Sunday night, the New Zealand Press Association reported yesterday. AFP reports from New Zealand.

The report said the bus, which had been converted into a home and was privately owned, went over the Mohake a river bridge and crashed into a ravine.

Earthquake shakes Kobe: An earthquake registering 3.4 on the Richter scale shook Kobe and vicinity in western Japan early last morning but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, the Meteorological Agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicentre of the quake which occurred at 3:19 am (1819 GMT Sunday), was located about 10 kilometres (six miles) under the seabed in Osaka Bay, the agency said.

11 die in Virginia plane crash: A plane carrying 10 parachutists slammed into a house and caught fire in Shackelfords Sunday, killing the pilot and all the skydivers authorities said, AFP reports from Virginia.

It could not be immediately determined if anyone was inside the home said Virginia State Police spokeswoman Mary Evans.

3 drug smugglers held in Bogota: Colombian police have arrested three US citizens smuggling drugs in less than a week, police said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Bogota.

The three young Americans were arrested carrying heroin or cocaine as they boarded flights at Bogota's El Dorado Airport, said Police Commander Colonel Guillermo Riano. He said Roger Brandon, of Chicago, was caught with nine pounds (four kilos) of cocaine hidden in his backpack before he took a flight to Houston, Texas on Saturday.

6 killed in SA violence: Six people have been killed including two policemen and two youths, in separate incidents in Kwazulu-Natal province of South Africa, police said Sunday. AFP reports from South Africa.

One of the policemen, seriously injured after he was attacked at Isipingo on the province's southern coast Friday, died on his way to hospital. His assailant turned himself in to the police.

2 Vietnamese get life-term: A court in central Vietnam has sentenced two government accountants to life in prison for embezzling funds meant for disabled war veterans, an official report said Monday. AP reports from Hanoi.

The chairman of the Da Nang city committee for labour, war invalids and social affairs was also sentenced to 17 years in jail, in one of the country's biggest corruption trials in recent months, the Communist Party daily Nhan Dan (The People) reported.

Israel to free 300 Palestinians: Israel plans to free 300 Palestinian prisoners to mark the signature of an agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organisation on the extension of autonomy across the occupied West Bank, police said late Sunday. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

They said a Cabinet Committee chaired by Police Minister Moshe Shahal had set out the criteria for releasing the detainees.

2 cosmonauts return to earth: A Soyuz-TM-12 spacecraft carrying a two-man Russian crew returned safely to earth on Monday from the Mir orbital station where the cosmonauts had spent more than two months in space, news reports said, AP says from Moscow.

Anatoly Solovyov and Nipolal Budarin landed in the stepped of northern Kazakhstan as planned at 10:52 am Moscow time (06:42 GMT), the Interfax news agency reported. During their stay, the two cosmonauts worked on restoring the solar batteries on the Mir space station, the agency said.

DPRK-KEDO talks open in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 11: North Korea and a US led international consortium opened talks here today on providing light water nuclear reactors to Pyongyang, reports AFP.

It was their first meeting since North Korea agreed to accept nuclear reactors selected by the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), jointly set up by the United States, Japan and South Korea.

Gary Samore, a US official in the 14 member KEDO delegation, said he expected the results of the two-day talks to be presented at a KEDO meeting in Tokyo on Thursday.

KEDO was entrusted with implementing the reactor supply clause of the Geneva accord struck last year between Washington and Pyongyang.

UN ban encourages hard up Iraqis to steal antiquities

BAGHDAD, Sept 11: When word reached Baghdad that another archaeological site was being looted, the Antiquities Department rushed an armed team to halt the illegal dig in the southern city of Amara, reports AP.

It took a fierce gunbattle to drive away dozens of nomads who had gouged huge craters and carted off hundreds of cuneiform tablets more than 4,000 years old.

Muayad Damerji, head of the government's Antiquities and Heritage Department, lamented that the thieves probably damaged many tablets by hacking out holes with shovels and other tools.

"These people were peasants who had no idea what they were doing," he said. "They might as well have been digging for rocks."

Iraq's economic crisis has

left the Antiquities Department desperately short of cash. That has meant a near shutdown of the museum system and the extensive archaeological work that was being carried out in ancient Mesopotamia, the "cradle of civilisation."

Iraq lists 4,000 pieces that were stolen from its museums in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, including jewelry, pottery, coins, cylinder seals and terra cotta figures. The number of items taken from archaeological sites probably numbers in the thousands as well, officials say.

Only one item has been recovered — a cuneiform tablet confiscated from a London art dealer and returned by British authorities in 1992.

Damerji receives regular

reports of clandestine digs in a country that has 10,000 archaeological sites and only a handful of poorly paid guards to protect them.

The history of Iraq is the history of the ancient world," said Damerji. "And this treasure is being badly damaged."

In southern Iraq, it is mostly peasants who either stumble upon sites or are offered money by foreign smugglers to dig up known sites, Damerji said.

In northern Iraq, there are tales of highly organised digs by people with European features around the towns of Irbil and Sulaimaniya, areas now controlled by ethnic Kurds.

The relics are smuggled out to Jordan or Iran and eventually make their way to Europe, most often to London, said Damerji, who

has run the Antiquities Department for 18 years.

Economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations after Iraq invaded Kuwait "make it difficult to buy our daily bread, and this has encouraged people to steal our national treasures," Damerji said.

The illegal dig in Amara, which took place in February, is one of the few cases to end with authorities retaining some of the treasures.

After the intruders were driven off, officials counted 240 freshly dug holes, some 12 feet (4 meters) deep and 15 feet (5 meters) wide. Many tablets undoubtedly were taken away, but authorities recovered 470 others — enough to fill one of the larger rooms at the Iraq Museum in Baghdad.

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American pressure has prevented international contacts with Iraq by such groups as the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, based in Paris, he said.

"It's UNESCO's job to send inspectors and help us track down these missing items."

Indian minister, Himachal governor resign

NEW DELHI, Sept 11: Indian Urban Development Minister Sheila Kaul and the Governor of the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh, Sudhakarrao Naik, have resigned, officials said today, reports Reuter.

They said Kaul resigned from the cabinet late on Sunday night hours after Naik met Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and submitted his resignation. Newspapers quoted officials of Rao's ruling Congress Party as saying Kaul could be offered Naik's post.

Naik, who was appointed governor in July 1994 had previously been chief minister of the western state of Maharashtra. India's most industrialised state

**7 soldiers, 4 Tigers killed in ambush
Lankan police uncovers LTTE plot to kill Rao**

COLOMBO, Sept 11: Sri Lankan police have uncovered a plot by Tamil Tiger separatists to assassinate Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao of India, police said Monday, reports AP.

A rebel suspect being interrogated by police for allegedly planning to kill President Chandrika Kumaratunga disclosed the plot to kill Rao, said HMGB Kotakadeniya, deputy inspector-general of police.

One Tamil rebel already had been sent to New Delhi, India, to collect information on Rao's movements, the rebel suspect, Sinnarasa Murundan, told his interrogators, said Kotakadeniya.

The Indian Embassy in Colombo said it had not been informed by the Sri Lankan

government about the threat to Rao's life.

"We will be passing on the information to the Indian High Commission in Colombo, and the Indian police will be brought in to investigate the threat," Kotakadeniya told The Associated Press.

It was not immediately clear why Rao was being targeted.

Murundan told police that Prabhakaran, who directs the guerilla force from a secret base in the rebel-held north, had ordered him to kill Mrs Kumaratunga before the end of the year. Alternative plans to kill her had been sent to senior guerilla commanders for approval, he said.

Police were hunting for a Tamil woman named Ranjini,

who was to carry out a suicide attack on Mrs Kumaratunga by throwing herself on the president's car, Kotakadeniya said.

Meanwhile, seven soldiers were killed in a Tamil rebel ambush and four guerilla divers died while trying to infiltrate a northern naval base, the military said Monday.

A tractor carrying the soldiers was blown up by a pressure mine on Monday morning, said Maj T Dunuwille, a military spokesman. Another 11 soldiers were wounded in the attack at Wel-Oya, 220 kilometres (135 miles) northeast of Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital.

The guerilla divers were detected while trying to

reach the Kankesanthurai base in the Jaffna Peninsula, 315 kilometres (195 miles) north of Colombo, early Sunday, said Dunuwille.

Navy gunboats dropped dozens of grenades into water and recovered four bodies, including that of two women. They were carrying explosives to blow up warships in the harbour.

Another report from New Delhi adds, suspected Tamil rebels threw two bombs toward the home of a Sri Lankan diplomat in the southern city of Madras early Monday, but no one was injured, police said.

Police in Madras said the assailants were from a little-known Tamil group, The Tamil Liberation Army.

Israel gives PLO control over 6 more areas on WB

JERUSALEM, Sept 11: Israel has given the PLO control over six more areas of civilian affairs on the West Bank as negotiations continue to spread self-rule across the territory, officials said today, reports AFP.

A short ceremony took place at the headquarters of the Israeli military administration to mark the handover on Sunday of municipal affairs, statistics, gas and fuel, labour, trade and industry, and insurance.

"Israel has handed over to the Palestinians the equipment necessary to run the six areas," said General David Baril, deputy chief of the administration.

He said under Israeli rule the budget for all six was just four million dollars.

Israel and the PLO on August 27 signed an accord transferring eight civil powers to the Palestinians.

But the handover of agri-

culture and postal services has been delayed for "technical" reasons, officials said.

Palestinians began taking responsibility for their daily affairs across the West Bank last autumn when Israel transferred education, health, tourism, taxation and social welfare.

Israel and the PLO resumed negotiations late Sunday at the Red Sea resort of Eilat in a bid to strike an agreement for the second phase of autonomy, which includes army redeployment outside Palestinian population centres, the transfer of civilian powers and elections to an autonomy council.

Israeli officials said the Jewish state would offer the PLO more control of Hebron in a bid to break the deadlock over the flash point city which is holding up an accord.

Afghan factions eager to observe ceasefire: OIC

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Sept 11: Representatives of various Afghan parties said Sunday they were willing to observe a ceasefire provided that all factions did so, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) said here, reports AFP.

The Jeddah-based body said its Secretary-General Hamid Algabid had separate talks on the situation in Afghanistan with Foreign Minister Najibullah Lafrai, the vice-president of the Islamic National Front of Afghanistan, Pri Syed Hamid Gaylani, and representatives of the Supreme Coordination Council.

The OIC said in a statement the talks covered the situation in Afghanistan and the possibility of ending the civil war in that country.



Actress-singer Barbra Streisand holds up her Emmy awards for outstanding individual achievement in directing in a variety or music programme for "Barbra Streisand The Concert" at the 47th Annual Primetime Emmy Awards on Sunday in Pasadena, California. — AFP/UNB photo

Court rejects Sanjay Dutt's bail plea

BOMBAY, Sept 11: A top actor accused of playing a role in the serial bombing of Bombay in 1993 was refused bail Monday, even though prosecutors had no objection to him receiving it, reports AP.

Judge J N Patel issued a brief order rejecting Sanjay Dutt's bail plea — the third one in the last one year — and said he would issue reasons for the decision later in the day.

Last month, the Central Bureau of Investigation told the court it had "no material or information to suggest that the accused would abscond, tamper with evidence or impede the trial."

It said, "The prosecution has no objection to release on bail of Dutt and 11 others in the case."

Dutt was arrested in April 1993 on charges of possessing an illegal AK-56 assault rifle and helping store a consignment of arms, ammunition and explosives allegedly sent by one of the main accused terrorists from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

He was let out on bail a month later, but the Bombay High Court cancelled that and put him back in jail in July 1994.

Iran warns Kuwait over 'massive' US military presence in Gulf

TEHRAN, Sept 11: Iran warned Kuwait over a "massive" US military presence in the Gulf during a visit here by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the official news agency IRNA said today, reports AFP.

President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani urged Kuwait, in talks with Sheikh Sabah on Sunday, to "avoid allowing foreigners to interfere in regional affairs," it said.

Rafsanjani also called on Kuwait and other Gulf Arab monarchies "not to be influenced by enemies," in their decision-making.

Sheikh Sabah made a brief visit to Iran on Sunday

with a message for Rafsanjani from Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Jabr Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Interior Minister Ali Mohammad Beshrati was even more direct when he told Sheikh Sabah: "The American military presence in the region will create tensions and aggravate differences between regional states," IRNA reported.

The warning came after 1,400 US forces started a 45-day exercise on Kuwait soil late last month. Kuwaiti troops are due to join the desert manoeuvres in mid-September.

Iran has strongly condemned the manoeuvres, held to dissuade Iraq from

launching fresh attacks on Kuwait.

Talks between Iran and Kuwait focused on the situation in Iraq with the two countries agreeing on the need to preserve their neighbour's territorial integrity.

AFP adds from Dubai: The US Navy had 43 ships around the Arabian Peninsula on Sunday, one of its largest deployments since the 1991 Gulf War, a US Navy spokesman said.

He said the increase in numbers was due to a turnover as the aircraft carrier Independence replaces the Lincoln in the Gulf.

Off the Record

Nelson who? Boris what? Michael Jackson — yes! yes!

NEW YORK: Nelson who? Boris what? Kids are far more familiar with athletes and entertainers than politicians and world leaders, according to a poll done for a new publication, Time for Kids, reports AP.

The Michaels — Jordan and Jackson — topped the recognition list, with 96 per cent of the youngsters surveyed saying they know who the basketball star is and 94 per cent familiar with the pop superstar.

Only 21 per cent recognised the name Boris Yeltsin and 20 per cent Nelson Mandela, according to the poll released Sunday.

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton was recognised by 82 per cent, just 4 percentage points lower than Tom Hanks and much higher than Rush Limbaugh, recognised by 48 per cent.

Time for kids is an eight-page weekly classroom newsmagazine produced by Time editors. It makes its debut this week.

The poll was conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide and is based on telephone interviews with 500 US children, ages 9 to 12. Interviewing was conducted from Aug. 8-20. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Water theme dominated this yr's Venice Festival

VENICE, Italy: Movie promotions took on a water theme this year at the Venice Film Festival, reports AP.

Denzel Washington emerged from a Venetian lagoon in a submarine supplied by the Italian navy to promote "Crimson Tide."

Kevin Costner sailed in to promote his budget-breaking blockbuster "Waterworld."

Then there was Italian soft-porn director Tinto Brass, who arrived in a gondola with a cargo of scantily clad starlets from his "PO Box Tinto Brass."

The festival ended Saturday with Paris-based Vietnamese director Anh Hung Tran's second movie "Cyclo" taking the top Golden Lion award.

Sled dogs' new record

CONTHY, Switzerland: A record 239 sled dogs harnessed together in a 270-metre (297-yard) train pulled a 12.5 ton truck for more than 50 metres Sunday to set a new record, reports AFP.

The record, set at the Second International Sled Dog Salon held in this western Swiss town, beat the previous one of 224 dogs, organisers said.

'US dream to topple Saddam won't be materialised'

BAGHDAD, Sept 11: The United States is making a big mistake if it thinks it can topple the government of President Saddam Hussain in Baghdad, the ruling Baath Party newspaper Al-Thawra declared today, reports Reuter.

It said there was no way for such a dream to materialise, just as "the Satan's hope of a return to Paradise did not come true."

Iraqis would in no way agree to be ruled by "a coward traitor," the paper said in reference to the defector Lieutenant-General Hussein Kamel Hassan, a son-in-law of Saddam and was a key figure in his government.

The Americans in particular and Iraq's enemies in general make a big mistake... when wishfully thinking of changing the political regime in Iraq," Thawra said.

It said the US should not think that toppling the regime in Baghdad would be an easy matter.

The Americans and Iraq's enemies seem to believe that changing the regime is easy and make others think that it will not be a complicated problem and they can do it any time and whenever they wish.

"The reality and course of events will prove the opposite," the paper said.

Another reports from Jakarta adds: US Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright said today UN economic sanctions against Iraq would continue for some time and urged the international community to be careful before lifting them.



Iraqi chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council Izzat Ibrahim faces members of the Iraqi parliament who unanimously approved Sunday in Baghdad the nomination of Saddam Hussain as the sole candidate in the country's first presidential referendum. — AFP/UNB photo

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These tablets are not riveting reading. Recording agricultural production figures, they are essentially a 4,000-year-old Farmer's Almanac.

Aside from occasional exhibits, the museum has been closed to visitors since the Gulf War. Its magnificent collection, with relics from the earliest human settlements more than 6,000 years ago, are locked away in store-

rooms.

Before the war, at least a dozen teams of Western archaeologists visited Iraq each year. That all stopped due to the comprehensive embargo placed on Iraq by the United Nations.

Damerji's budget has been wiped out by runaway inflation. He had 75 vehicles to patrol archaeological sites before the war. Today only six are in service due to a lack of money and spare parts, he said.

American pressure has prevented international contacts with Iraq by such groups as the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, based in Paris, he said.

"It's UNESCO's job to send inspectors and help us track down these missing items."

Indian minister, Himachal governor resign

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