

BRIEFLY

Kim visits border with ROK: North Korean leader Kim Jong Il has visited the heavily armed border with rival South Korea in a rare public appearance, the North's official news agency said Friday. AP reports from Seoul.

It was the first time that the 53-year-old Kim has personally visited the Korean Demilitarised Zone that separates the two rival Korean states. The Korean border is the world's most heavily armed, with nearly 2 million troops deployed on both sides. The Koreans are still technically at war since no peace was signed at the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Israelis oppose settlers removal: A majority of Israelis oppose the removal of Jewish settlers from the volatile West Bank town of Hebron, according to a poll published yesterday. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Fifty-six per cent were against and 39 per cent in favour of evacuating the 400 Jews from the heart of the city which is home to 120,000 Palestinians. Five per cent voiced no opinion in the survey by the Dahaf Institute for the Yediot Aharonot newspaper. It covered 500 people and had an error margin of four per cent.

Iran, Iraq sign accord on POWs: Iran and Iraq have signed a preliminary agreement on prisoners of war, the missing and refugees from their 1980-1988 war, the official news agency IRNA reported yesterday. AFP reports from Tehran.

It said the memorandum of understanding was signed on Thursday by deputy foreign minister Hussein Sheikh Oleslam and his Iraqi counterpart Saad Abdelmajid Al-Faisal.

Arafat-Peres meet today: Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat will meet on Saturday in Cairo to try to overcome obstacles to an accord on wider Palestinian self-rule, a PLO official said yesterday. Reuter reports from Gaza.

"There are still many sticking points — basic ones like Hebron, detainees and prisoners, territorial issues, the civilian sphere and security," chief Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Korei told reporters.

Lanka seeks aid to locate jet: The government is seeking foreign assistance to locate and possibly retrieve a military plane that crashed into the sea, killing 75 people, the navy said Friday. AP reports from Colombo.

"We do not have the capabilities to locate the wreckage which is believed to be at a depth of 1,000 metres. The government has requested foreign assistance," said Air Commodore Jayalath Weerakkody, director of air force operations.

Reporters' group protests raids: An international journalist group has asked President Chandrika Kumaratunga to stop police from raiding newspapers that published articles critical of her government. AP reports from Colombo.

Reporters Sans Frontiers said in a letter to Mrs Kumaratunga that it considers the raids an abuse of power by Sri Lanka's authorities and a serious hindrance to press freedom. The letter was made available to local reporters on Friday. The Paris-based independent organisation represents journalists worldwide and works toward defending press freedom.

Leghari in KSA to perform Umrah: Pakistani President Farooq Leghari arrived Friday for performing Umrah to Islam's holiest city, the official Saudi Press Agency reported. AP says from Jiddah.

It said Leghari, who was accompanied by several officials, was received at King Abdul-Aziz Airport by the adviser to the Saudi court, Ali bin Hassan al-Shaer. Leghari and his companions were expected to proceed to the holy city of Makkah, 60 kilometres (37.5 miles) east of Jiddah, for performing Umrah.

Hindu 'godman' held in India: Police have arrested a Hindu holy man accused of arranging the murder of his lover's husband. In a separate case, police were under pressure to arrest another one with close links to India's top leaders and notorious criminals. AP reports from New Delhi.

The twin cases, headlined in many of Friday's newspapers, brought attention to a small group of holy men who wield vast influence and sometimes control huge fortunes donated by devotees in India and abroad. Among the most famous in India is Chandraswami, whose arrest reportedly was sought Thursday after his name was linked to a noted underworld figure.

4 Moscow gangster shot dead: Four Moscow gangster have been shot dead in attacks which police believe may signal a power battle between rival Mafia groups in the Russian capital. ITAR-Tass news agency said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Moscow.

Two leading members of the Galyanov Mafia clan were gunned down with a Makarov pistol on Thursday while taking a shower in a gym. It quoted police as saying, "In the opinion of the police officers, they were victims of a fight for spheres of influence," the agency said.

Samper's aide arrested: Colombian authorities arrested Juan Manuel Abella Thursday, the man who served as financial director for President Ernesto Samper's campaign. RCN radio reported. AFP says from Bogota.

Attorney general's office agents arrested Abella as part of the investigation into allegations that Samper's campaign accepted at least six million dollars from the notorious Cali drug cartel.

Bosnian army capture another Serb-held town in northwest

SARAJEVO, Sept 15: The Muslim-led Bosnian army captured another Serb-held town in northwest Bosnia early today, officials Bosnian radio said, reports AFP.

The Bosnian Army 5th Corps entered Bosanski Petrovac, 50 kilometres (30 miles) southeast of the Bihac enclave, early this morning, the radio said.

Bosnian government and Croat forces have made steady military gains against the Serbs in Western and central Bosnia over the past few days, seizing some six per cent of Serb territory, according to UN officials.

On Thursday, the 5th Corps, based in the north-west Bihac enclave, took Thursday Kulu-Vakuf, 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of Bihac, in its push southwards of the enclave.

The 5th Corps is continuing now towards Kljuc, 20 kilometres (12 miles) east of Petrovac, the radio added.

On Wednesday, the Bosnian Army's 7th Corps based in central Bosnia, advancing towards the north-west, had captured the town of Douji Vakuf, some 50 kilometres southeast of Kljuc.

The officers of the 7th Corps said their aim was to link with the 5th Corps which has been cut off from the rest of the government troops.

Croat forces have meanwhile seized the key central Bosnian town of Jajce.

Reuter adds: Bosnian Serbs have won a respite from NATO air bombing by agreeing at last to lift the siege of Sarajevo while the diplomatic dash for peace intensifies.

US officials said in Washington on Thursday that the Serbs had agreed to haul

their big guns away from Sarajevo in return for a 72-hour halt in NATO's bombing of Serb targets.

There's been an agreement for NATO to pause in the bombing to give Bosnian Serbs 72 hours to comply with the agreement they made, a senior US official said.

The news broke after US envoy Richard Holbrooke had met separately with the leaders of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia to work on details of a peace plan. Holbrooke was due to brief the five power Contact Group on Bosnia.



A Palestinian family expelled from Libya, who got permission from Israel to enter Gaza, begin their journey by bus from Salloum, the Egyptian border with Libya Wednesday. Libya stated that it had decided to expel thousands of foreigners because many of them were carrying contagious diseases such as AIDS and Ebola fever. — AFP/UNB photo

US rejects Chinese demands for ban on Taiwan's leaders' visit

WASHINGTON, Sept 15: The United States rejected Chinese demands for a total ban on visits by government leaders of offshore Taiwan, reports AP.

The State Department on Thursday also brushed aside Beijing protests about a new issue troubling US-China relations, President Clinton's casual meeting Wednesday with the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan Buddhist leader.

Spokesman Nicholas Burns said the United States "cannot agree" to China's proposition that US visas be denied to leaders of Taiwan. The issue added to the strain

of US-Chinese relations when Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui was allowed a private entry visa in June to attend an event at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, his alma mater.

"It is entirely possible that leaders of Taiwan will visit the United States in the future," Burns said.

While agreeing with Beijing's "One China" policy, Burns said the question of US entry is a "decision that the American government must make of its own accord." Christopher will reiterate this to Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen at a

New York meeting next week that could determine whether Clinton and Chinese President Jiang Zemin meet in October, he added.

Burns said the administration also feels "very comfortable" about Clinton's brief meeting with the Dalai Lama, the third of his presidency, and it should not impact relations with China.

The meeting "was the courteous thing to do and it's been done in past years," he said. "It should have been no surprise to anyone that the president would have dropped in on a meeting with the Dalai Lama."



Environmental organisation Greenpeace members stage a protest action outside the Frankfurt Fair Thursday and use different car manufacturers' cars to make a point that a reduction of gasoline consumption by half is possible. — AFP/UNB photo

Flood, food shortage force N Korea to deviate from its ideology

SEOUL, Sept 15: North Korea's recent cries for help tempt the world with a chance to buy influence in the course of a country that has been a dangerous renegade for decades, reports AP.

Flooding and food shortages have forced increasingly isolated North Korea to diverge from its ideology of juche, (pronounced 'joo-chay') or self-reliance, and seek aid from its worst enemies.

"You could see this as North Korea opening its doors a bit," said Ola Almgren, who led a UN team that visited recently to assess damage from summer rains that the North said were the worst in 100 years. "It is an opportunity for the international community to improve its relationship with that country."

Or maybe not. Recent giveaways of food and fuel worth hundreds of millions of dollars and the promise of nuclear reactors worth \$4 billion haven't changed the North's cantan-

keros attitude. It continues to rant about the donors — detested capitalist rivals South Korea, the United States and Japan.

A trail of broken agreements with the West and defaults on debts has left the North's credibility so low that many are skeptical about its claims that the floods caused \$15 billion in damage and affected nearly one-fourth of North Korea's 22 million people.

Its reputation as a nuclear renegade and designation by Washington as a country that supports terrorism don't help, either. And developments in Bosnia are relegating the crisis in North Korea to a small footnote.

The West has longed to pry open the North and draw it into rapprochement with South Korea and the rest of a world, from which it has been estranged for half-century.

But defectors from North Korea in the past couple of years have described widespread food shortages, especially in the countryside, where people reportedly survive on a bowl of gruel per day.

A harsh winter and little

aid could push the country toward famine and even starvation.

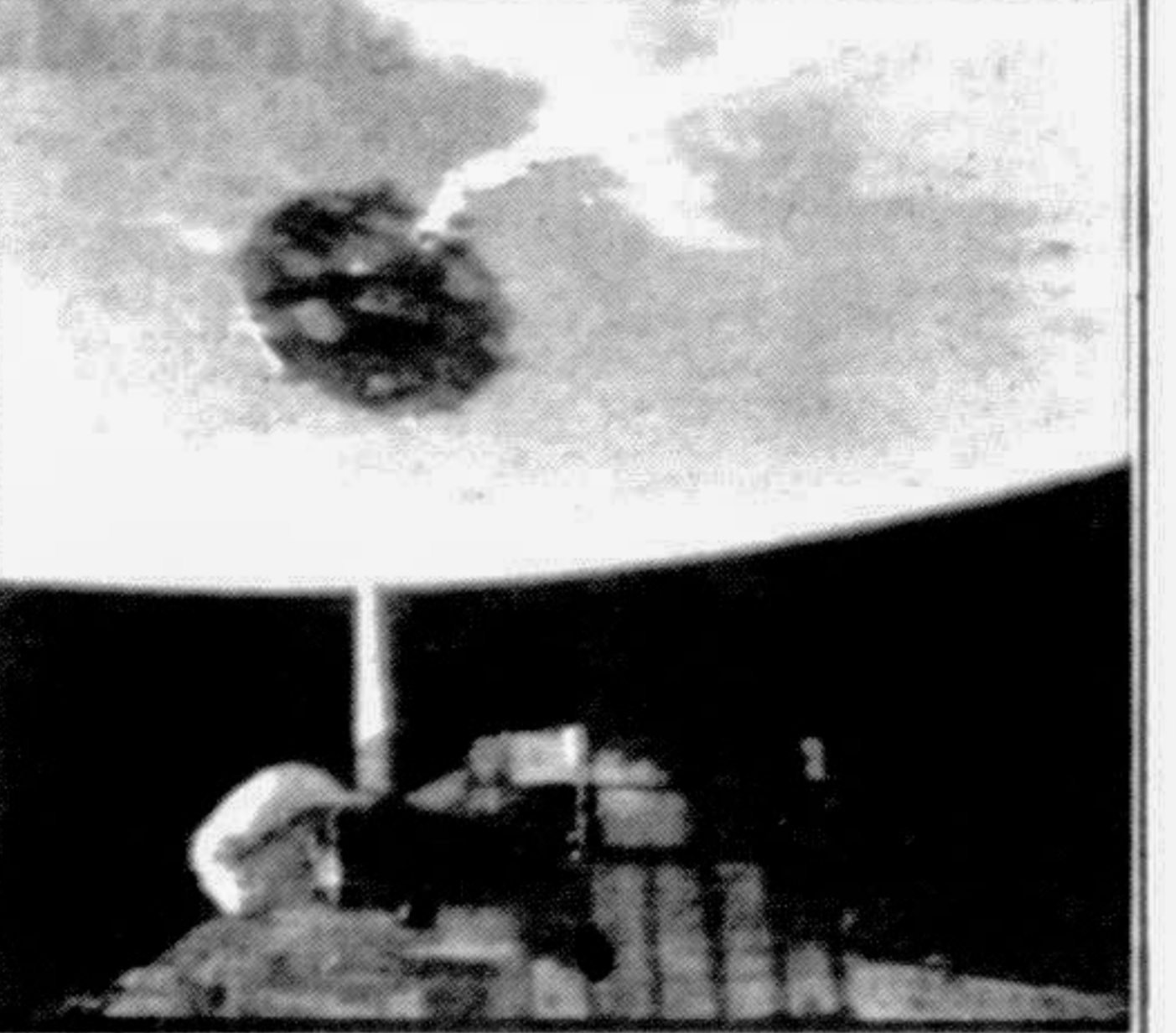
No one realistically wants that, since it could lead to a complete collapse. South Korea wants unification but not overnight, fearing the economic and social costs.

Some analysts have even suggested China might intervene militarily if the North appeared about to fall because it would be unhappy with a united Korea as a neighbour. That would not solve the North's food problems, because China has its own, and would just create new problems with the West.

The floods, which have hammered the North's already-battered economy, may, provide the best opportunity to effect real change. But the world must tread carefully in a political landscape that no outsider can chart with certainty.

No one can even be sure who's running things in the reclusive country.

Off the Record



The Wake Shield satellite (top) is captured Thursday by Space Shuttle Endeavour's (bottom) robot arm. The Wake Shield has been orbiting the earth free of the Space Shuttle for three days to allow the growth of very pure crystals for semiconductors. — AFP/UNB photo

This time crocodile's tears is real one!

BRISBANE: Lottering is an offence in the tiny town of Bamaga — especially for crocodiles, reports AP.

A 3-metre (10-foot) crocodile was released into the wild Friday after spending the night in the town jail for getting too close to a playground.

Wildlife officers used tranquilizer darts to subdue the crocodile after it was found on a riverbank near Bamaga, located on the tropical northeast tip of Australia.

They kept it behind bars overnight as a safety precaution. Later, with its feet and jaws tied, it was loaded onto a pickup truck and taken to a remote swamp and was set free.

Crocodiles which once were hunted nearly to extinction, are now a protected species.

She failed to have the taste of marriage

NICOSIA: A 24-year-old bride from Britain collapsed and died of unknown causes 30 minutes after her wedding on Thursday in a Cyprus holiday resort, police said.

Police in Paphos, on the island's western coast, told Reuters that Joanna Cook from Enfield, England, collapsed on the steps of a hotel half an hour after her registry office wedding to Kerion Leybourne, 26 at the town hall of Paphos.

The couple, escorted by Cook's parents and friends, were on their way to their wedding reception which was to take place at the Venus Beach Hotel when the woman lost consciousness.

Police said the wedding took place at 1:30 pm, she collapsed at 2 pm and she was pronounced dead at 2:50 pm.

First aid was administered by bystanders but she was dead on arrival at a government hospital. "The state pathologist and her embassy have been notified," the police spokesman said.

The spokesman told Reuters the woman suffered from migraines. A post-mortem may be held on Friday but it would only be done with parental consent, the spokesman added.

Benazir drops treason charges against Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Sept 15: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto withdrew treason charges — a crime that carries the death penalty — against Nawaz Sharif, her arch rival and former prime minister, as well as several other leading opposition legislators, news reports said Friday, reports AP.

Sharif, who now heads the opposition in Parliament, his former interior minister, Shujaat Hussain and several members of the opposition were among 15 people charged several months ago with treason.

At the time it was feared that the charges would worsen an already tense standoff between Benazir's government and opposition legislators, who have been demanding her resignation due to the country's political and economic problems.

It wasn't immediately clear why Benazir ordered the charges dropped or whether it signalled a thaw in relations between her and her political opponents.

The treason charges against Sharif referred to a June 1993 incident when he was prime minister, the authorities said. He was accused of subverting the constitution in an attempt to gain control of Punjab province.

Taliban forces threaten to attack Kabul

ISLAMABAD, Sept 15: Taliban forces have demanded the resignation of President Burhanuddin Rabbani and have threatened to attack the Afghan capital if he does not step down, the Pakistani daily, The News, reported today, says AFP.

Diplomats, members of humanitarian organisations and all foreigners should leave Kabul to avoid being caught in possible fighting, the report quoted a Taliban spokesman as saying.

Mohammad Hakim Munib also advised all Kabul residents to leave the city or take shelter in safe locations.

The Taliban, a militia of Islamic religious students whose forces are positioned south of Kabul, set no deadline for Rabbani's resignation.

The minister of defence said an attack on the capital was "imminent."

allowing the victory of presidential forces against the Taliban near Kabul last March.

Since then, almost no rockets have been launched against Kabul and the nearest frontline is 35 kilometres (20 miles) to the southwest of the capital, near Maidan Shah.

Rabbani's regime, which after the fall of Herat at the beginning of the month now controls only one large Afghan city, Kabul.

Seeds to purify drinking water

LONDON, Sept 15: British scientists have discovered seeds that can be used to purify drinking water and could be used to prevent the deaths of millions of children in the developing world. The Times reported today, says AFP.

Seeds of the Moringa Tree, which is native to northern India, can render water safe to drink in an hour, according to Geoff Folkard from the University of Leicester.

Egypt, Ethiopia for joint action against Sudan

CAIRO, Sept 15: Egypt and Ethiopia are studying joint retaliatory action against Sudan for its alleged backing of an assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, an official here said today, reports AP.

"Egypt and Ethiopia are examining retaliatory measures against the Sudanese regime after the discovery of evidence linking it to the assassination attempt on Mubarak," a senior Egyptian Foreign Ministry official told AFP.

Mubarak also decided on Thursday to reduce Egypt's level of representation in Sudan by withdrawing the ambassador and replacing him with a charge d'affaires.

Relations between Egypt and Sudan have been severely strained since the June 26 machine-gun attack on Mubarak's motorcade in Addis Ababa. The President escaped unharmed.

The foreign ministry official did not rule out the possibility of Egypt and Ethiopia bringing a complaint against Khartoum before the

UN Security Council for its refusal to extradite three Egyptian Islamic fundamentalists suspected in the attack.

"It is premature to talk of taking it to the United Nations, a decision on this matter has not yet been made," he said.

Sudanese officials deny any involvement in the assassination bid, but Ethiopian officials said last week they had obtained solid proof linking Khartoum to the attack.

Violence claims 101 in SA last week

DURBAN, South Africa Sept 15: At least 101 people have been killed in South Africa's volatile KwaZulu-Natal province over the past week, police said today, reports Reuter.

Figures from the previous week showed 73 people were killed in the province, heartland of the country's nine million Zulus.