

BRIEFLY



An Iraqi dancer from a folk arts ensemble performing Saturday during the opening of the seventh Babylon International Festival. Troupes from fifty countries are taking part in the two-week festival which is held annually despite UN sanctions. — AFP/UNB photo

Taiwan takes delivery of 2 US jets: Taiwan has taken delivery of two more US-made E-2T early warning aircraft which will take part in a scheduled military exercise for Taiwan's October 10 National Day, a local newspaper reported yesterday. Reuter says from Taipei.

The government bought four E-2Ts from US defence contractor Grumman valued at Taiwan 20.5 billion dollar (749.5 million US dollar), the ruling Nationalist Party-owned newspaper, the Central Daily News, said. It took delivery of two other E-2Ts on September 3.

Japan detains 87 foreigners: The Japanese coast guard stopped three boats believed to be smuggling foreigners into the country and detained 87 people late Saturday, AP reports from Tokyo.

Authorities who stopped a Taiwan-registered fishing boat near Shimoda, 90 miles southwest of Tokyo, found 57 passengers and four crew members aboard, officials said Sunday.

Typhoon Ryan hits Japan: Typhoon Ryan's heavy rain and 168-kph (100mph) wind gusts flooded about 300 homes and cut electricity to about 17,400 homes in southwestern Japan early Sunday, but no serious injuries were reported, AP reports from Tokyo.

Ryan was on course to sweep northern Japan by Monday. Police reported landslides and rocks falling from rain-softened cliffs in 28 places throughout southern Japan. More than 1,500 buildings were damaged by heavy rain.

Arafat to meet King Hussein: PLO leader Yasser Arafat will visit Jordan on Sunday to meet with King Hussein an official in Amman said Saturday, AFP reports from Amman.

Arafat went into talks late Saturday with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in Taba, Egypt on the extension of Palestinian autonomy in the occupied West Bank.

7 cops killed in Mexico: Seven police were killed and two others seriously wounded Saturday in an ambush in the southern state of Guerrero, the state run Notimex news agency reported, AFP says from Mexico City.

The news agency said a gang of about a dozen assailants opened fire on a motorised police patrol in Tierra Caliente. AR-15 and AK-47 automatic weapons were found at the scene of the shooting, according to the report.

Car bomb kills 1 in Colombia: A powerful car bomb tore through an office building's basement parking lot late on Friday in Colombia's northwestern city of Bucaramanga killing at least one person and seriously injuring six others police and military officials said, Reuter reports from Bogota.

They said the bomb, believed set by leftist guerrillas exploded at 11:15 pm edt (0315 GMT Saturday) in the underground parking lot of the Financial Corporation of Santander Building in the city's centre.

Georgian commando chief held: The commander of a special forces unit was arrested Saturday, the latest suspect in a sweep that has followed last month's assassination attempt against leader Eduard Shevardnadze, AP reports from Georgia.

Gela Papuashvili, head of the Georgian Security Service's Alpha commando unit, was being held for "possible involvement" in the Aug. 29 car bombing outside Shevardnadze's offices, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Floods kill 9 in Tehran: Nine people were killed in flooding after torrential rain swept across a region of central Iran, the official IRNA news agency reported yesterday, AFP says from Tehran.

The victims from the floods on Saturday belonged to a nomadic tribe in Shahr-E-Kurd, 500 kilometers (300 miles) south of Tehran, it said. The mayor of Parsan, a city near Shahr-E-Kurd, said the heavy rain and hail had also damaged roads, bridges and farms.

US accused of supporting Tibet's independence

BEIJING, Sept 24: China, in an official editorial, accused the US government Sunday of covertly supporting independence for Chinese-ruled Tibet, reports AP.

The Xinhua News Agency commentary marked the second time in four days China has criticised President Clinton's September 13 meeting with the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner.

"Time and again Washington has publicly admitted that Tibet is part of China and declared that it will not recognise an independent Tibet," Xinhua said.

"But covertly the US government and the Congress have been backing the separatist activity of the Dalai Lama for a long time," Xinhua said.

The news agency did not identify any covert support beyond the Dalai Lama's well-publicised meetings with Clinton, this year and twice previously, and with members of Congress. The United States briefly aided anti-Chinese Tibetan guerrillas in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Xinhua's strident tone contrasts with the tentative, but positive steps both sides are taking to improve relations after months of confrontation.

Foreign Minister Qian Qichen is due to meet his US counterpart, Warren Christopher, in New York this week for talks on a possible summit between Clinton and Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

Five killed as Tigers, troops clash
Press lambaste censorship imposed in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Sept 24: The Sri Lankan press today lambasted the blanket censorship imposed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga's one-year-old government and warned that the country may be slipping into authoritarian rule, reports AFP.

The English language Sunday Times said the censorship enforced under tough emergency regulations to prevent reports on the military campaign against the Tamil Tiger guerrillas was absurd and counterproductive.

"With the President's media phobia assuming such proportions that she feels her biggest opponents are not on the other side of parliament independent newspapers, the government

Thursday took a drastic step towards authoritarianism," The Sunday Times said.

The government argued that the censorship was necessary to protect national interest but the main opposition United National Party (UNP) said it was to preempt criticism on the government's handling on the war against the rebels.

Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe said his UNP was seeking an early debate on the censorship slapped on both local and foreign correspondents from Thursday for the first time in six years.

Chief censor Edmond Jayasinghe said the censorship was to prevent publication locally of war-related re-

ports that could harm security forces and national interests.

Under the emergency laws, the government can seize newspaper offices, radio and television stations and news agencies if they violate the censorship. Journalists could face jail terms ranging from three months to five years.

The censorship was approved by the cabinet headed by President Kumaratunga who came to power last year on a pledge to unshackle the media and restore press freedom.

But she has been having an uneasy relationship with most local newspapers and has recently filed criminal defamation suits against two

newspapers — The Sunday Times and the Sinhala language Lakbima weekly.

AP adds: At least five people were killed as the military and Tamil rebels fought in northeastern Sri Lanka, military officials said Sunday.

On Saturday, three civilians were killed when rebels fired gunshots on their moving tractor, said T H Senarathne, a military spokesman.

Another person was seriously wounded in the attack at Parakramapura in Welioya, about 270 kilometres (170 miles) northeast of Colombo.

One soldier and a rebel were killed in clashes over the weekend, Senarathne said.

3 N Koreans defect to S Korea

SEOUL, Sept 24: Three North Korean lumberjacks have arrived here to seek asylum, raising the number of defectors from the communist state this year to 14, the Foreign Ministry said Sunday, reports AP.

The defectors, who flew in from an identified third country Saturday, were identified as Kim Kwang-il, Kim Bong-chol and Huh Kwang-il. They escaped from a North Korean-run logging camp in Siberia and lived in hiding in former Soviet republics.

Their defection was arranged by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Other details were not available pending investigation by the government intelligence agency.

The capitalist South says it accepts North Korean escapees for humanitarian reasons.

'Iraq planned to invade S Arabia during Gulf War'

WASHINGTON, Sept 24: In soon-to-be published memoirs, James A Baker III, the American secretary of state during the Gulf War, says Iraq also planned to invade Saudi Arabia — a fact he didn't know until the conflict had ended, reports AP.

Excerpts of Baker's book, "The Politics of Diplomacy," are being published in this week's issue of Newsweek.

Several weeks after the war ended, Baker learned that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had sent a message to Iran's President Hashemi Rafsanjani, "describing his intentions of living in peace with Iran on land which he referred to as our 840-kilometer seacoast," Baker writes. "Saddam was describing a new frontier extending from present-day Iraq to the United Arab Emirates — which, of course, would include Saudi Arabia's Persian Gulf seacoast."

Singapore plans to buy submarines

SINGAPORE, Sept 24: Singapore has announced plans to buy its first submarine, a hot item on military shopping lists these days in the Asia-Pacific region, reports AP.

"We need to learn more about submarine operations and how they add to the capabilities of the fleet," Defence Minister Tony Tan said Saturday.

Sweden will sell the 25-year-old Sjoormen and, starting in April, train 40 Singapore sailors in undersea warfare in the next four years, Tan announced.



US President Bill Clinton speaks with former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell (L) at the 25th Congressional Black Caucus Dinner on Saturday in Washington. Powell is widely speculated to be preparing to declare himself as a candidate for presidency but has not yet made a formal declaration. — AFP/UNB photo

Pakistan should head for talks instead of arms race: Pranab

NEW DELHI, Sept 24: India today said Pakistan should make efforts to resume the stalled bilateral dialogue instead of unleashing an arms race in the region in the wake of the UN move to transfer to Islamabad 370 million dollar worth of advanced military equipment, reports PTI.

The US Senate clearance for the arms transfer would have "deeper implications" for India since not a "single shot" from Pakistan has been fired at any direction other than India in the last 47 years, the External Affairs Minister, Pranab Mukherjee told PTI in an interview on the eve of his visit to the

New York at the head of a high level delegation to attend the 50th session of the UN General Assembly.

Describing as unfortunate the Senate's approval, Mukherjee said the arms package would enhance Pakistan's military striking power and compel India to ensure that its security requirements were not compromised.

"I hope good sense would prevail on Pakistan and it would resume constructive dialogue with India instead of focussing on arms race. We are ready for talks," Mukherjee said.

Stating that India has voiced its concern over the

military package to Pakistan on several occasions to the US administration, Mukherjee said he would convey New Delhi's regret during meetings with US officials on the sidelines of the UN session.

To a question, Mukherjee said the arms transfer should not have any adverse impact on the Indo-US ties. Don't visualise any such impact, he said.

Mukherjee said being a developing country India would like to utilise its scarce resources but developments like the arms transfer to Pakistan would force New Delhi to divert these resources.

Suu Kyi says her release doesn't indicate change in Myanmar

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 24: Myanmar democratic activist Aung San Suu Kyi says her release from house arrest is no indication of change in Myanmar and that it should not result in an torrent of foreign investment and aid for the current junta, reports AP.

"I am just one person who has been released, why should that make a difference?" Suu Kyi said in an interview published in The Sunday Star.

She added that there are still thousands of political prisoners in Myanmar which chose her opposition party, the National League for Democracy, to lead the country in 1990 elections.

The military government refused to recognise the

election, and imprisoned Suu Kyi and thousands of other NLD members soon after. The 1991 Nobel peace winner was released from house arrest earlier this year.

Britain is reported to be the biggest investor in Myanmar up to March 1 this year with a total of dlr 647.76, followed by France with dlr 465 million. The United States ranked fifth with 203.19 million dlr.

"I believe aid should be gradual and conditional on the process and pace of democratisation," she told the Sunday Star two weeks ago at her house in Yangon.

The 51-year-old popular activist believes the military government is trying to pattern itself on the Indonesian political system, where the

military is dominant.

She declined to say if this was acceptable to her NLD and added, "It is not for NLD to say. The question is whether it is acceptable to the people of Myanmar."

On the new constitution being drawn up, which might bar Myanmar married to foreigners from holding political posts, she said, "Some say it is aimed at me — that would be a great pity because no national constitution should be written with one person in mind," she added.

Suu Kyi married a British academic 23 years ago, but held on to her Myanmar nationality. She has refused to go overseas or to see him in Britain for fear the junta may not allow her back into the country.

Off the Record

What's in a name?

MANILA: In keeping with the global fight against discrimination toward women, a senator on Sunday proposed outlawing the use of feminine names for storms or typhoons, reports AP.

Senator Ernesto Herrera called the practice unpleasant and unwelcome, saying it "tends to perpetuate subtle biases against women."

"Unconsciously or unwittingly, the practice of giving weather disturbances feminine names might be based on the erroneous and decadent stereotyping of women as moody and whimsical, and worse, unreliable and destructive," he said.

While Guam alternates between male and female names and Japan uses numbers for typhoons, the Philippine weather bureau has continued to use exclusively female names for tropical storms in the Philippine area.

An average of 19 such storms hit the Philippines each year. The worst year in recent decades was 1993, with 32 storms.

A bureau pamphlet said the practice of giving feminine names to typhoons and tropical storms was started before the end of the 19th century by Australian weatherman Clement Wragge, who also was said to have "bestowed the honor" on politicians he hated.

Herrera did not say how storms should be named.

Ludy Alviar, a woman forecaster, said the weather bureau had thought of using alternate male and female names in 1990 but the plan has not prospered.

But, she asked: "What's in a name? After all, it's only for record purposes."

Non-stop balloon flight around the world

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida: A Dutch pilot borrowed NASA's Mammoth space shuttle hangar on Saturday to test a huge 200-foot (61 metre) helium balloon planned to make the first non-stop balloon flight around the world, reports Reuter.

"This is the last real aviation challenge — to go completely around the world in a balloon," said Henk Brink, a helicopter pilot who hopes to launch the balloon sometime after November 1. Brink's trip will take between six and twelve days, depending on the strength of jet stream air currents.

The balloon, which weighs 21,000 pounds (9525 kilos), was too big to be inflated and checked for leaks anywhere else, he said.

"We searched everywhere in Russia and Europe for a building big enough to test the balloon but couldn't find one," Brink said. When NASA heard about his plight, space agency officials offered to loan Brink the use of the giant vehicle assembly building in Florida where space shuttles, solid rocket boosters and the fuel tank are put together for each mission.

During its trip, the helium balloon will use sensors to take measurements of the ozone layer and ultraviolet rays in projects funded by the Russian Ministry of Science and the European Community.

'Lesbian rights are human rights'

BEIJING: A group of about 20 Lesbians unfurled a long purple banner in a silent protest to demand greater rights from the UN Women's Conference Friday, disrupting a plenary session, reports Reuter.

At the end of the first speech of the afternoon plenary session, the women hung a 25-ft (seven-metre) banner, reading: "Lesbian rights are human rights" from the balcony of the top gallery of the meeting hall in Beijing, witnesses said.

They then each held up a multi-coloured placard emblazoned with a similar slogan.

Within a minute, United Nations security guards arrived and ended their silent protest, removing the women, including two who had to be forcibly ejected from the meeting hall, the witnesses said.



Children play as prisoners Saturday with a 12-metre King Kong at the city of sciences in the La Villette park in Paris. King Kong is part of a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the movie cinema installed at the Geode, part of the La Villette complex. — AFP/UNB photo

Kashmiris confident of gaining independence from India

SRINAGAR, Sept 24: Six years after the struggle began, Muslim leaders of the picturesque Himalayan state of Kashmir remain confident of gaining independence from India, reports AP.

Some 4,000 Muslim guerrillas backed by nearly 800 mercenaries mainly Afghan, are waging a bloody war against thousands of Indian troops across the Kashmir Valley, making it one of Asia's bloodiest conflicts.

More than 12,000 people have been killed by official count, many more have been injured and thousands have been arrested and allegedly tortured since 1989 but the brutal campaign shows no

signs of ending.

We are supremely confident of achieving our goal of Kashmir's independence, prominent Muslim leader Ali Shah Geelani said in an interview here. "There is no break in the will of the people."

India can never solve this problem with bullets, asserted Geelani, 65, of the Jamiyat-e-Islami, the political wing of the Hizbul Mujahideen, the most powerful of scores of guerilla groups in Kashmir.

No force on this earth can defeat the Kashmiri people, said Adeeel Javed Mir, a leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, the premier separatist group

which vowed Saturday to resume a military campaign it suspended a year ago.

The war is bleeding India, and sparking tension with neighbouring Pakistan, which disputes Kashmir's ownership and is accused by New Delhi of arming and training the militants.

Kashmir once a tourist haven, has turned into a virtual killing field since Muslim militants shot dead a pro-India Muslim politician in downtown Srinagar in July 1989, marking the start of the separatist struggle.

Kashmir was brought under direct federal rule by New Delhi in 1990 as vio-

lence escalated. But the situation has only worsened over the years, most mainstream politicians have fled the state.

The streets of Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital of some 800,000 people, is dotted with sandbag bunkers covered by huge nets to ward off grenades.

Hundreds of grim faced Indian troops holding automatic weapons and radio sets patrol the streets and guard vital installations while army and paramilitary trucks constantly cruise by.

On an average 10 people are killed everyday in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state.

Europeans urged to leave Afghanistan
France pulling its top diplomat out of Kabul

PARIS, Sept 24: France on Saturday said it was pulling its top diplomat out of Afghanistan and called on its nationals as well as other Europeans to leave the country, where the capital faced attack by Taliban rebels, reports AP.

The French Embassy in the Afghan capital Kabul said it "recommends" that its nationals in Kabul and the surrounding region "temporarily leave Afghanistan," according to a French Foreign Ministry statement released in Paris.

The embassy in Kabul represents France as well as the 16 nation European Union, whose nationals number only several dozen in Afghanistan.

The French charge d'affaires, the country's top-ranking diplomat in the capital "will himself prepare to leave the city as quickly as possible," the Foreign Ministry said.

The Taliban rebels, about 40 kms (24 miles) south of the capital on Wednesday gave Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani five days to step down or face an offensive on the capital. He has rejected the demand.

The Taliban militia of former Islamic religious students is the strongest opposition arrayed against Rabbani's forces.

Muslim insurgents who threw out the communists from power in 1992 have turned their weapons.