

BRIEFLY

Blast kills 8 in Pakistan: An explosion in an illegal fire cracker workshop killed eight people including six members of the same family, the state-run news agency said Friday, AP reports from Islamabad.

The explosion late Thursday destroyed a three-story building in the central Punjab town of Multan, about 600 kilometers (360 miles) south of the Pakistani capital of Islamabad. According to the Associated Press of Pakistan the owner of the house, Shaikh Ikramuddin, was running an illegal fire cracker workshop in his basement where the explosion occurred.

Malaria claims 84 in Maharashtra: Malaria has so far claimed 84 lives in Maharashtra, including 74 in the metropolis, the State Health Minister, Dr Daulatrao Aher disclosed Thursday, PTI reports from Bombay.

Addressing a press conference in Bombay, the minister said these deaths occurred during the past six months between April and September. About 1,23,782 persons were affected by the epidemic with the districts of Thane, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Pune and Sangali being the worst-hit.

Lanka to host C'wealth confce: Sri Lanka is to host the 41st Commonwealth Parliamentarians Conference from October 3 to October 12, an official statement said yesterday, AFP reports from Colombo.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga will open the conference, which will be held in Colombo and attended by some 400 delegates from more than 50 member states, the statement said.

3 books selected for Booker Prize: In a surprise announcement that drew gasps from the audience, judges selected only three novels instead of the customary six for the prestigious 1995 Russian Booker Prize, AP reports from Moscow.

Nominated Thursday for the prize, given to the best Russian-language novel, were Georgy Vladimov's "A General and His Army" about World War II, Oleg Pavlov's "Red-Tape Tale" about life in today's Russian army, and Yevgeny Fyodorov's stylistic "The Odyssey."

Commuters attack train in Bombay: Angered by delays on a suburban railroad line, commuters set fire to one train and stoned at least eight others Friday morning, a Central Railways official said, AP reports from Bombay.

No injuries were immediately reported, but a portion of the train line was still closed in the afternoon, the spokesman said. The violence began at 8:40 am in the suburban city of Thane, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of Bombay, when passengers were angered by a delay in a train's departure, he said.

Menem arrives in S Korea: Argentine President Carlos Menem arrived in South Korea today for a four-day visit, the first such official trip by an Argentine head of state, Reuter reports from Seoul.

His visit to South Korea is part of a 12-day trip to the region to boost Argentina's trade and commercial ties with booming Asia.

France detains 4 Greenpeace men: Four Greenpeace activists were detained on Fangataufa Atoll on Thursday as speculation mounted France's secondary nuclear test site would be used for the next and possibly most powerful test, Reuter reports from Papeete, Tahiti.

A Greenpeace spokesman in the Tahitian capital Papeete said the four activists entered the military exclusion zone around Fangataufa Atoll at 2:10 am Tahiti time (12:10 GMT).

5 die as WW II jet crashes in US: A vintage B-26 bomber, reviled during World War II as a "widow maker," crashed and burned Thursday in a rural oil field, killing all five crew members, AP reports from Odessa, Texas.

The camouflage-painted plane, a Martin Marauder, was practicing for an air show south of Odessa when it went down, the Federal Aviation Administration said.

Ex-minister killed in Algiers: A former interior minister was shot and killed Thursday in an attack by unidentified hit men in broad daylight in the centre of the capital, security forces said, AP reports from Algiers.

Aboubakr Belkaid, 50, was shot as he crossed a city square near the Casbah just after midday Thursday.

An influential member of the FLN, or National Liberation Front, formerly Algeria's sole political party, Belkaid was considered a pro-democracy, moderating element in Algerian politics, helping to draft a multiparty constitution in 1989.

Mexican cop kills 3 passengers: A Mexican policeman coldly opened fire on rush hour passengers in a crowded subway car on Thursday, shooting three people to death and wounding at least four others authorities said, Reuter reports from Mexico City.

The alleged killer 22 year old Ernesto Cruz Jimenez fired 10-rounds from his Browning 9mm pistol as his subway train stood at the La Raza metro stop in northern Mexico City.

2 Russian soldiers killed: Two Russian soldiers were killed and two were seriously wounded after a pistol attack in Dushanbe Thursday, the country's Interior Ministry said.

The four soldiers, members of the 201st Armoured division stationed in Tajikistan, were attacked by an unidentified group as they were walking home, the ministry's press services told AFP.

Floods claim 25 in Vietnam: Twenty-five people, most of them children, have died in flooding that has hit the southern Vietnamese provinces of an Giang and Dong Thap, according to the latest toll published yesterday by the Nhan Dan Daily, AFP reports from Hanoi.

The three-week-old flood alert on parts of the Mekong River now threatens the provinces of Long An, Tien Giang and Kien Giang, and is causing serious damage to farming an infrastructure, the Communist Party newspaper said.

Mandela postpones Canada visit: President Nelson Mandela has postponed his planned visit to Canada next month to be home in the run up to local government elections, AP reports from Pretoria.

The Foreign Affairs department said Mandela would likely make the trip early in 1996.

Turkey police HQs guard killed: A policeman died after unidentified gunmen opened fire on the main entrance to the Istanbul police headquarters later Thursday, informed sources said, AFP reports from Ankara.

The policeman, who was on guard outside the building was hurt in the attack and died in an ambulance on the way to a hospital. Security forces launched a massive manhunt to find the killers.

Sudanese President in Hanoi: The President of Sudan, General Omar Al-Bachair, arrived Hanoi Friday on an official visit aimed at reinforcing economic and political ties with Vietnam, a Vietnamese sources said, AFP reports from Hanoi.

It is the first visit to Vietnam by a Sudanese head of state since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1969.



US President Bill Clinton (C) observes as Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (2nd-L) and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (2nd-R) sign a Palestinian autonomy accord in the West Bank during ceremonies at the White House in Washington DC on Thursday. Also watching the signing from the rear are Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (C) and King Hussein of Jordan (2nd-L). — AFP/UNB photo

Russia pulls out 13,000 soldiers from Chechnya

MOSCOW, Sept 29: Some 13,000 Russian soldiers have been pulled out of Chechnya since the signing of the demilitarisation agreement in July, said the deputy chief of the Russian forces in the region, General Pavel Maslov, reports AFP.

They included the 8,000 Interior Ministry forces and 5,000 soldiers, said General Maslov from Asinovskaya, on the border between Russia, and its two republics Chechnya and Ingushetia, 50 kilometres (31 miles) east of Grozny.

Between 30,000 to 40,000 Russian troops had been deployed in Chechnya after Russia moved to recapture the breakaway republic in December last year.

Iran sells arms to 14 countries

NICOSIA, Sept 29: Iranian security forces will launch large-scale maneuvers in Tehran to climax week-long military celebrations that opened with a massive military parade, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported, says AP.

In an important disclosure, Iran's defence minister, Mohammad Forozandeh said Monday that Iran has not only reached near self-sufficiency in its weapons needs, but is exporting arms and military technology to 14 countries.

"Today we have the ability to produce all sorts of weapons, and our goal is to mass produce them," he said.

"Today, we're exporting arms and ammunition to 14 countries, and in the production of some we are even transferring technology," IRNA quoted Forozandeh as saying.

Koreas locked in verbal duel at UNGA

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 29: North and South Korea engaged in a verbal duel on Thursday after South Korean Foreign Minister Gong Ro Myung expressed concern in a speech to the General Assembly over the human rights situation in the communist North and urged Pyongyang to carry out reforms, reports Reuter.

Gong also called on the United Nations to help reestablish contact among millions of Koreans whose families have been separated for more than 40 years.

Exercising his right of reply at the end of the day, Kim Chang Guk, a counsellor in North Korea's UN Mission, said Gong "attempted to hurl mud at us and mislead the world public."

Israel intends to pull out of 6 West Bank towns by '95

JERUSALEM, Sept 29: Israel intends to pull out of six West Bank towns by the end of the year, but cannot commit to a firm date. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said in remarks broadcast Friday, reports AP.

The pace of troop withdrawal depends on the construction of bypass roads for Jewish settlers, Rabin told Israel army radio in an interview from Washington.

"In the wording of the agreement, there is no commitment although it is our intention" to complete withdrawal by the end of 1995, Rabin said.

Rabin's remarks reflected a compromise he worked out with PLO chief Yasser Arafat

just before Thursday's White House signing of their agreement on Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank.

Arafat first demanded that Israel commit to a troop pullback from the West Bank towns of Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Ramallah and Bethlehem by the end of December, army radio said.

Rabin refused to set such a deadline, telling Arafat all depended on how quickly settler bypass roads can be built around Bethlehem and Ramallah.

"I have a commitment to the settlers not to pull out of Ramallah and Bethlehem before there is an appropriate solution for their travel," Rabin said on army radio.

The agreement already stipulates that Israel has until March 30 to redeploy in the seventh city, Hebron, where 450 Jewish settlers live among 120,000 Palestinians.

The starting date for a troop pullback remained unclear Friday.

Arafat said Thursday night that the withdrawal would start about October 8. However, Israeli officials have said the two sides had not yet agreed on a starting date.

Israeli Gen. Uzi Dayan, a top negotiator, said in an interview published Friday that Israel would move some isolated bases out of the West Bank before pulling out of the cities.

Lanka raises defence budget by 25 pc

COLOMBO, Sept 29: Sri Lanka has increased its defence budget by almost 25 per cent to 33.9 billion rupees (670 million dollars) for 1996 amid an escalating Tamil separatist war, official figures showed today, reports AFP.

The government's appropriation bill for next year showed that spending on the Defence Ministry will rise from an estimated 27 billion rupees (554 million dollars) to 670 million dollars in calendar 1996.

The government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga which came to power last year on a promise to restore peace and unite the ethnically divided country raised taxes by 1.5 per-

centage points after fresh fighting broke out in April.

"The defence expenditure will certainly go up even this year since the situation has changed drastically. The budgeted figures are certainly unrealistic," Deputy Finance Minister G L Periris told reporters recently.

He said the government had a clear strategy to increase defence expenditure without causing inflationary pressure. "We have some simple practical measure based on robust common sense, Periris said declining to give details.

He said expected to present new revenue proposals before parliament in November.

Beware of bubblegum

WASHINGTON, Sept 29: A four-year-old child was choked to death by a bubblegum that he was chewing when playing at his home in Cleveland, Ohio, earlier this week, reports Xinhua.

Cory Ruper reportedly fell when chewing the gum Tuesday and it caught in his throat, blocking his airway. His mother was able to remove the gum from his throat and started cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

But the gum had blocked the airway for too long a time, causing irreversible brain damage.

Local officials called it a rare case. "We've had children choke before, but we've been able to resuscitate them," said assistant Cleveland fire chief William Standen.



This photo provided by ABC TV on Thursday shows US actor Christopher Reeve (L) with newswoman Barbara Walters during an interview at the Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation in West Orange, New Jersey. Christopher paralysed in a horseback riding accident, is shown in his first interview since his accident. — AFP/UNB photo

Debashree bags Best Actress National Award for '94

BOMBAY, Sept 29: She is the comely heroine who has hogged the limelight in Bengali cinema, but Debashree Roy has had to wait for two decades for national recognition, reports PTI.

"Unishe April", that fetched Debashree the coveted Best Actress National Award for 1994, has also confirmed her metamorphosis into a character actress. The Bollywood heroine, who shot into fame with Aparna Sen's award winning film "36 Chowringhee Lane" in the 80s, has bagged the Rajat Kamal for her powerful enactment of a lonely doctor whose solitude stems from a celebrity mother.

And "Unishe April" proved auspicious for Rituparno Ghosh, the youngest of the Bollywood film directors, also Ghosh, a relatively unknown director, has done the Bengali cinema proud by

bagging the Swarna Kamal for the film-his second as a film director.

Born to late B K Roy and Ajitha and brought up in the tinsel town of Tollygunje, Debashree made her first appearance as Gadadhar in "Ramkrishna" as a toddler even before her first birthday.

"But, the first film I had to act was Tarun Mazumdar's 'Kuhel' at the age of five", she recollects.

Debashree credits her mother for her entry to the tinsel world. "My mom was very keen in putting me into films and was the main force behind me".

Nicknamed "Jhumki", Debashree and her sister Runki made a quite name for themselves as singer-dancers.

"I was prettier than my sister and it was in one such dance show that Tarun da (Tarun Mazumdar) spotted

me. He is like a family friend and all my schooling and grooming was done by him," she says reflecting how she was taken for "Dadar Kirti".

From childhood itself, she was very quiet and soft spoken, says Ram Mukherjee, veteran film director, who cast her in three of his films. He is Debashree's brother-in-law also.

After "Dadar Kirti", offers started pouring from directors like Ajay Kar, Bhubuti Laha, Biren Mitra, Prabhat Ray and Gautam Ghosh. Debashree, who won laurels for her acting in "Bholobasha Bhalobasha", "Nati Bhradodini" and "Brisbhrikshya", says "I loved working with all of them".

On the award winning "Unishe April", the actress says "It is a moving portrayal of the complexities of modern life. Basically, the film is an honest attempt to explore

a mother-daughter relationship.

Produced by "Spandan", a Calcutta cultural organisation and based on Rituparno Ghosh's own story, the movie's climax comes within a single day with Aditi Sen (Debashree) and her mother (Aparna Sen) discovering their identities through each other when the rift between them comes to the fore on the 19th death anniversary of her father, from which the film takes its name "Unishe April" (April 19).

Ghosh had discussed the script with her in 1993. "I was thrilled to portray the estranged doctor but, the script was rejected by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) until "Spandan" decided to fund the film".

Rituparno Ghosh is an intense director and has shown his aptitude by winning ac-

Iran denies shift in N-accords with China

TEHRAN, Sept 29: Iran said Thursday there were "no changes" in its nuclear cooperation agreements with China after a US official said Beijing had agreed to scrap a deal to sell Tehran two lightwater nuclear reactors, reports AFP.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmud Mohammadi said Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen had assured his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Velayati on Monday during a meeting on the sidelines of the UN general assembly that his country was "serious" about continuing nuclear cooperation with Iran.

"There is no sign of any changes in the position of the Chinese government on peaceful nuclear cooperation with the Islamic republic," he told the official Iranian news agency IRNA from New

York. A senior US official, asking not to be named, said Wednesday that Qian had "made it clear" in a meeting in New York with his US counterpart Warren Christopher that the deal with Iran "will not be implemented."

In Washington Thursday, a state department spokesman reiterated those comments, saying US officials had received assurances from China on the matter.

"We have no reason to doubt Qian," said spokesman John Dinger.

Beijing signed an agreement in September 1992, during a visit to China by President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, to sell Iran two 300 megawatt reactors.

The United States, accusing Iran of seeking to develop nuclear weapons, has pressured China to cancel the deal.

Off the Record

'Most flashing capital'

MOSCOW: A top government official says Moscow can claim a new title: "most flashing capital of the world," reports AP.

That's flashing, as in blue lights flashing from atop thousands of cars.

Russian Deputy Interior Minister Alexander Kulikov told a government meeting Thursday that, in addition to those on police cars and ambulances, some 2,500 cars in the capital have blue lights on top.

That doesn't even count the illegal ones that anyone can purchase at a corner kiosk for about 250,000 rubles (dix 50-60) and plug into their car cigarette lighter.

"The analysis of the situation shows that Moscow has become the most flashing capital of the world," Kulikov said, according to the official Itar-Tass news agency.

About 800 of the lights, the official said, belong to commercial ventures. The private MOST Bank has nearly 100 armoured vans equipped with the lights and Russia's Defence Ministry has at least 57, he said.

Now her world is full of just one man

LONDON: Jackie Collins world is full of just one man: developer Frank Calzagini, reports AP.

"We've known each other for a long time and we feel the timing is perfect to get engaged. We're passionate best friends," Britain's Press Association quoted the writer as saying about her Los Angeles beau.

No wedding date was mentioned in the report Thursday.

It will be the third trip to the altar for Collins, who wrote the best sellers "Hollywood Wives" and the "The World Is Full of Married Men."

Collins second husband, Oscar Lerman, died in 1992 after 25 years of marriage. She divorced her first husband, Wallace Austin, in 1965.

New drink to fit for long, cold nights

OSLO, Norway: Finally, a drink fit for the long, cold nights of the frigid Arctic: vodka with dash of ground reindeer horn, reports AP.

The new drink, being developed by Norway's state liquor monopoly, combines the kick of vodka with the supposed potency-enhancing punch of reindeer horn, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

In many parts of Asia, horns including those of reindeer are believed to enhance virility. And reindeer horn is plentiful in Norway, where about 1 million reindeer roam the tundra.

So a Swede spiced up regular vodka with a dash of reindeer horn, in hopes of breaking into the Asian market, especially in China, the Oslo newspaper Verdens Gang reported.

Sissel Edvardson, spokeswoman for the state Vinmonopolet, confirmed that the monopoly was producing test batches of the Reindeer Horn Vodka for a Swedish company. She refused to give any details. "The recipe is a trade secret."

Keeping Di a secret

LONDON: Rugby star Will Carling, whose friendship with Princess Diana has attracted intense media interest, said Thursday night that he and his wife are splitting up "for the time being," reports AP.

The 29-year-old sportsman, who captained England in the World Cup rugby tournament in South Africa this year, "announced with regret tonight that he and his wife Julia have agreed to spend some time apart," said a statement.

The statement made no mention of Diana. It said: "They (the Carlings) want to emphasise that nobody else is involved and they hope that by allowing themselves time apart to reflect they will be able to get back together as soon as possible."

On August 13, Mrs Carling, 30, was quoted by the weekly London tabloid The Mail on Sunday as saying her marriage to Carling was firmly intact despite the strain of disclosure of his friendship with Diana. Carling and his wife, who runs her own public relations company, married on July 19 last year.

The friendship between Carling and Diana was first disclosed on August 6 by another weekly tabloid, The News of the World, which spoke of them having "secret trysts."

Though she never received formal training, Debashree picked up dance movements from films and shows. Today, she is the founder and moving spirit behind the Calcutta-based "Nantraj Troupe", which has enthralled audience all over the country.

Recipient of many awards like Satyajit Ray Award, Uttam Kumar Award and Bengal Chalachitra Puraskar, she is married to leading co-star Prosenjit.

On mounting criticism that many others were sidelined for the National Award, she replies in a choked voice "I fully deserve it for all the good work done since childhood".

It, however, remains to be seen whether "Unishe April" will mark the beginning of a new era for the dying Bengali cinema as also a boost to the star's sagging career.