

China denies link to Pak missile plant

BEIJING, Aug 26: China today denied a US newspaper report linking it to the construction of a missile plant in Pakistan, reports Reuter.

Asked to comment on a Washington Post report that China had supplied blueprints and equipment for the plant, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said: "The US newspaper report is entirely groundless."

The spokeswoman had no further comment.

The Washington Post reported on Sunday that US intelligence officials had concluded that Pakistan was secretly building a medium-range missile factory in a suburb of the northern city of Rawalpindi, near Islamabad.

The newspaper said that the development raised the prospect of a new Sino-US dispute over arms proliferation.

The partially completed plant was expected to be capable

of producing most of the major components of a missile modelled on the Chinese designed M-11 in a year or two.

Some US officials believed the factory would produce precise duplicates of the missile, according to the Washington Post.

The United States has twice imposed limited economic sanctions against China for selling M-11 missile launchers and finished missile components to Pakistan, but withdrew the curbs after Beijing promised to stop such deliveries.

A White House spokesman said he could not confirm the story but said the United States took such reports seriously.

We do not believe it is in the best interests of the United States or of any other country to supply Pakistan with the capacity to manufacture or deploy weapons of mass destruction, the spokesman said.

GROZNY, Aug 26: Despite a setback in negotiations with Chechen rebels, Russia's security chief insisted the peace process was on track, reports AP.

The peace process is in motion, Alexander Lebed told Associated Press Television on Sunday. The joint patrols are working, local commanders have started to withdraw troops. And on the 29th, the real withdrawal will begin.

Lebed returned to Moscow on Sunday, interrupting peace talks and casting doubt on the future of a political agreement to end the 20-month war. Lebed said he was only working out "legal difficulties."

The fate of an earlier ceasefire accord signed by Lebed and separatist commanders also appeared uncertain, with the Russians citing truce violations and a top commander refusing to meet with his Chechen coun-

terpart.

Before leaving Chechnya, Lebed issued an appeal to the Chechen people to be "sensible and patient" during the difficult negotiations for peace.

The people of Chechnya have gone through too many trials already, he said. The war cursed by all should go into the past.

In Grozny, Russian Gen Vyacheslav Tikhomirov refused to meet with the rebel chief of staff Aslan Maskhadov to sign a withdrawal agreement, saying he would not "play cat and mouse" following a rebel attack on a Russian convoy Saturday night.

There were no casualties, but the rebels forced 58 servicemen to disarm, the Russian army said. Russian officers said they would halt the withdrawal of troops from the Chechen capital due to the incident, the Interfax news agency reported.

Chechen and Russian units were supposed to start pulling out of Grozny Sunday. Next week, the Russians are to leave several southern regions and, eventually, Chechnya altogether.

The rebels said the attack was a "provocation" by a fringe group and Maskhadov repeatedly pledged to return the weapons.

AFP adds, thousands of civilians who fled Grozny last week began flooding back into the shattered capital over the weekend, apparently placing further faith in the peace-making ability of security supremo Alexander Lebed.

Lebed is a good lad. All the Chechens have 100 per cent confidence in him, said Aisha, 37, who returned to her home in a northern district of Grozny which she had fled last Wednesday night.



President of Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat (R) and Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda shake hands after their press conference in Arafat's office in Gaza City Sunday. Japan has sought to contribute to the Middle East peace process primarily through economic assistance, including more than 200 million dollars in aid to Arafat's Palestinian Authority over the past two years and pledges another 200 million by 1997.

— AFP/UNB photo

Plavsic calls for creation of single Serb state

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Aug 26: Biljana Plavsic, interim leader of the Bosnian Serbs called Sunday for the creation of a single Serb state and ruled out any union with non-Serbs, reports AFP.

She rejected "unification with the Muslims and Croats," saying Bosnian Serbs "want the unification of all the Serbs of the Balkans in a single state called Serbia."

Plavsic who replaced Radovan Karadzic as president of the Republika Srpska the Serb entity in post-war Bosnia was speaking at a meeting in Zminje, south of Banja Luka in the north west.

Later at an election rally of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) in Prnjavor, Plavsic was

quoted by the Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA as saying "there is an alternative to peace ... the Serb nation and its state are more sacred than any peace."

The SDS which is backing Plavsic for president of the RS can state with a clear conscience that we have achieved a state freedom and democracy, said Plavsic, urging voters to back the SDS in next month's elections in Bosnia.

The Speaker of the Bosnian Serb parliament Momcilo Krasic said at the same meeting that the Serbs would never accept a unitary state in Bosnia.

Bosnia is not a state and we did not accept it as such in Dayton (where the peace accords were thrashed out). We will set up joint bodies but we will not permit the creation of a unitary state in Bosnia.

In a climate of rising political violence, the NATO-led peace force is bringing in hundreds of fresh military police for the September 14 election. Election day plans also include weapons searches and radio appeals for calm.



Chinese Premier Li Peng (R) and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad toast the signing of a series of tripartite and bilateral business agreements on Monday at the great Hall of the People.

— AFP/UNB photo

Israeli claim over Jerusalem has no legal value

CAIRO, Aug 26: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's insistence that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish state have no legal validity, Egyptian foreign minister Amr Mussa said Sunday.

These claims have no legal value. Jerusalem must be negotiable and the UN's resolutions on Jerusalem must constitute a basis for negotiations, Mussa told reporters.

Israel, which captured and annexed east Jerusalem in 1967, claims the whole city as its undivided and eternal capital. The Palestinians, backed by Arab states, claim east Jerusalem as their own future capital.

Since coming to power in June, Netanyahu has said he will refuse to negotiate Jerusalem's future, which was to be discussed in talks on a final peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.

World meet seeks to turn the tide of child prostitution

STOCKHOLM, Aug 26: In a roach-infested Bangkok brothel, teen-age prostitute Noi Wattana said she considered herself lucky — her manager hadn't beaten her yet in her first week of work, reports AP.

In a bright Stockholm conference hall, delegates from 122 countries gather Tuesday in hopes of cutting the complex web of circumstances that has dragged Noi and hundreds of thousands of other children into the sex trade.

The World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children is the first international attempt to find solutions to a problem with a dreadful toll: Children taken from their families, forced to submit to sex, beaten, and if they escape, often treated as prostitutes.

Noi, who claimed to be 17 but looked several years younger, had seen much of that suffering only a week after being brought to the brothel by a friend of her

impoverished family, a 20-year-old prostitute.

"My mother knows what I am doing," she told a reporter in Bangkok. "I've called her a few times already. She always cries, I cry, too."

Sweden is sponsoring the conference in cooperation with UNICEF and non-governmental groups. Lisbeth Palme, the widow of murdered Prime Minister Olof Palme, headed the Swedish host committee.

The number of child prostitutes isn't known, although it's clearly enormous. The Thai government estimates the country has 40,000, but UNICEF puts the figure at 300,000. Philippines officials say the number there is about 60,000. Estonia, with only 1.5 million people, has 1,000. Social Affairs Minister official Jaan Ruutman said this month.

While child prostitution is not a modern phenomenon, experts say developments in recent decades have combined to

make it grow. Among them, according to a congress background document:

Fear of AIDS has fuelled demand for younger prostitutes, in the mistaken belief that they are less likely to carry the virus. In fact, children are more vulnerable to infection than adults because they are more easily damaged internally and young membranes are more porous.

In many countries, the prosperity of some sectors of the population increases envy and desperation among those left behind, inducing them to sell their children to brothels.

Modern materialism combines with traditional belief in many societies that children, especially girls, are little more than property to be exploited.

Advances in information technology makes it easier for pedophiles to communicate with each other and organise "sex tours."

Governments often react

with no more than bewilderment and resignation.

Tourism is all about adventure and sex is part of adventure, said Kariuki Ndume, a Kenyan tourism official who opposes prostitution.

Prostitution, whether by children or adults, is an integral part of tourism."

In the face of all those factors, a five-day conclave of discussions and speeches might seem to be ineffectual. Organisers and participants don't expect any immediate, concrete change to come from the congress. But they don't expect the gathering to produce well-meaning and quickly forgotten statements, either.

I think Stockholm will be a turning point; it will create a sense of outrage, said Mark Connolly, a New York-based UNICEF worker.

I don't know if the purpose is to embarrass governments, necessarily, said Christa Giles, a UNICEF spokeswoman. We

think the conference will raise awareness and encourage the adoption of laws."

Some countries have already taken some legal steps. In May, Thai Prime Minister Banharn Silaphacha admitted his administration had not done enough to combat the problem. His government formulated a comprehensive plan to supersede haphazard enforcement efforts.

Swedish law allows prosecution of Swedes who commit acts overseas that violate Swedish law and used this provision in 1995 in the high-profile conviction of a 69-year-old man for having sex with a 13-year-old boy in Thailand.

Other countries, including Britain, are considering such laws.

In July, a British man was sentenced to 14 to 17 years imprisonment in the Philippines for sexual contact with two young boys.

We're a lot further ahead

than we were five years ago, said Christine Beddoe of the Bangkok-based group End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism.

Whatever changes are motivated by the congress can be amplified by the victims themselves. Connolly, who spent four years working with street kids in Guatemala, said many child prostitutes need only a small amount of help.

After two or three years (in brothels), they're like rag dolls, he said. But the first year they wake up every day wanting out. There are so many kids I've seen who make it, by their own determination and will.

For Noi, the young prostitute in Bangkok, a strong will isn't enough yet.

I want to go home to my village, she said, but they won't allow it.

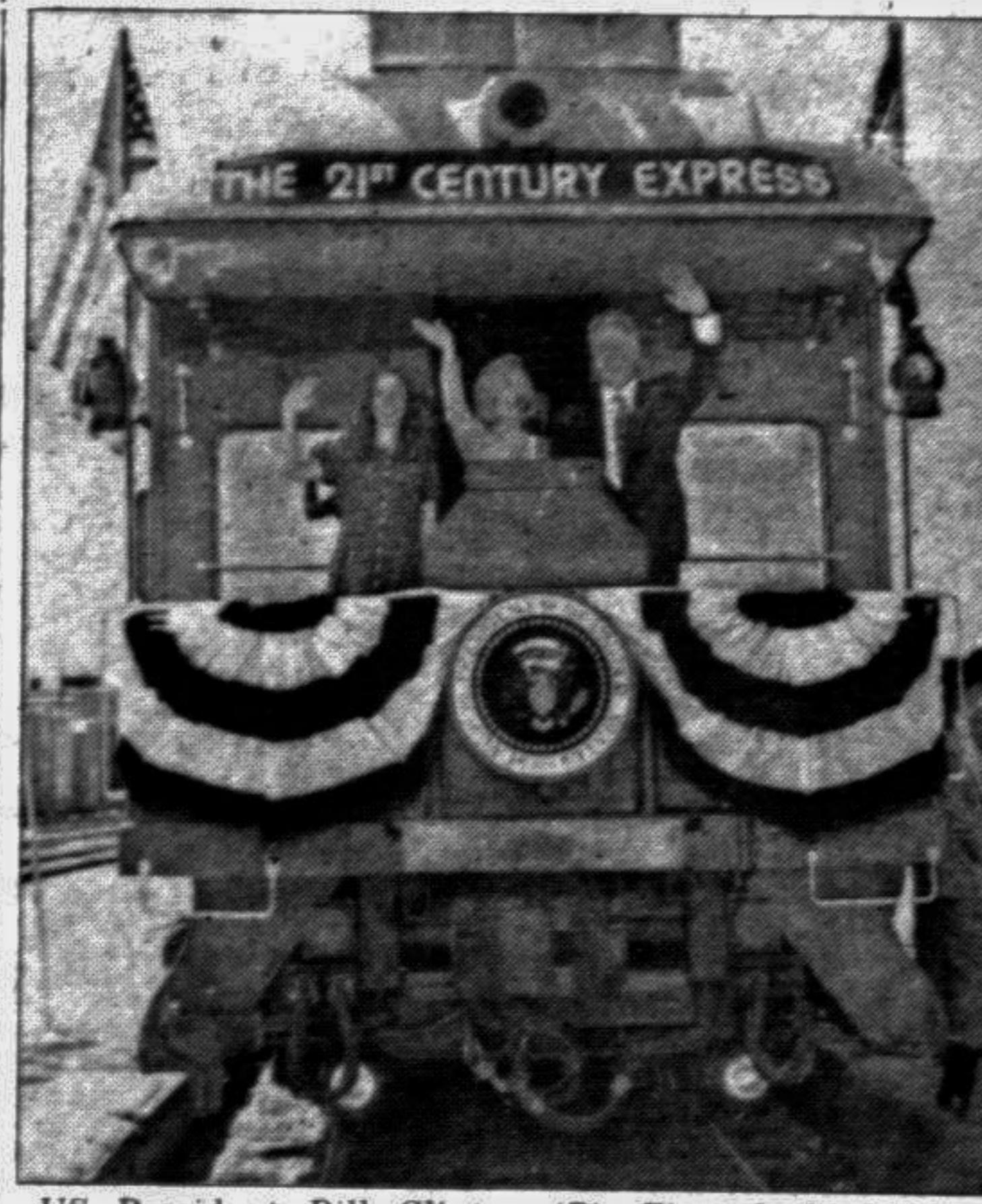
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Hamas man gets life term plus 20 yrs in Israel

JERUSALEM, Aug 26: An Israeli military court has sentenced a Hamas militant to life plus 20 years in prison for planning a suicide bombing and other attacks against Israelis, reports AP.

Iman Sider, a 30-year-old resident of east Jerusalem, was sentenced Sunday in Lod military court for organizing and providing the weapons used in a shooting attack in Jerusalem in October 1994. Two Israelis were killed. Sider was charged with planning a December 1994 but only the bomber was killed when he missed the bus intended as a target and blew himself up at the station instead.

Sider was also charged with planning to kidnap Israeli soldiers as part of his activities in Hama's military wing.



US President Bill Clinton (R), First Lady Hillary Clinton (C), and daughter Chelsea (L), wave from the "21st Century Express" campaign train Sunday in Huntington, West Virginia. The train will carry Clinton 400 miles across the US to Chicago and the Democratic National Convention. — AFP/UNB photo

Democrats kick off their '96 convention in Chicago

CHICAGO, Aug 26: Democrats kick off their 1996 convention today, eager to exorcise the ghosts of their notorious 1968 gathering in Chicago and to launch President Bill Clinton on the way to a second term in the White House, reports AP.

Gore, however, refused to comment on a Washington Post report Sunday that Pakistan was secretly building a medium range missile factory using blueprints and equipment supplied by China.

With Clinton leading Republican challenger Bob Dole in two new weekend polls by five and 12 percentage points, one of the biggest Democratic problems will be to create enough news to persuade voters to pay attention.

The president did his part by embarking on Sunday on a four-day Harry Truman-style "ittle-stop" train tour through the American heartland, stopping each day to unveil a new

policy initiative.

Day one found the president chugging through coal-rich Appalachia Hills in West Virginia and K-nucky, past cornfields, cow pastures, dilapidated barns and mobile homes, and people waving flags.

At a sunset rally before several thousand people in Chillicothe, Ohio, Clinton drove home his theme of the day — that Dole's proposed 15 per cent income tax cut was irresponsible and would drive the country towards bankruptcy.

Clinton was in a feisty mood, which continued in a CNN interview on Sunday evening in which he angrily blasted Republians for hounding many of his staff and associates over the White water affair.

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Off the Record

Charles awaiting public approval for Camilla Parker Bowles

LONDON: Prince Charles wants to win public approval for Camilla Parker Bowles, a British tabloid said Sunday, alleging the prince set up a photo opportunity of the two at a remote "love nest," reports AP.

But the photographic proof offered by the News of the World is a fuzzy picture, apparently taken from some distance, of Charles and a man deep in conversation several meters (yards) away from a pair of unidentifiable women — one of whom was said to be Mrs. Parker Bowles.

The News of the World said Saturday that the "intimate pictures" it was publishing Sunday suggested the couple were "orchestrating a campaign to get public acceptance for the illicit romance that wrecked Charles' marriage to Diana."

The divorce of the heir to the throne and Princess Diana is to become final on Wednesday. Diana, 35, has blamed Mrs. Parker Bowles, the prince's sometime lover, for the marriage breakup.

Buckingham palace denied the photos were set up.

We categorically deny that these photographs are the result of what amounts to a photo opportunity connived at by the palace, a spokeswoman said.

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