

International

Remaining differences resolved

Russian, Chechen commanders complete ceasefire accord



Russian federal soldiers and Chechen rebels sit together atop an APC as Russian troops withdraw from the Vedeno district Monday in accordance to truce agreement signed between Russian national security chief Alexander Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov, the chief of Chechen staff.

NOVYE ATAGI, Russia, Aug 27 Russian and rebel military commanders in Chechnya said they had resolved their remaining differences, today and completed a ceasefire agreement brokered last week by Kremlin envoy Alexander Lebed, reports Reuters. Russian General Vyacheslav Tikhomirov told reporters in the Chechen village of Novye Atagi that a dispute over weapons seized from Russian soldiers would pose no further obstacle. Separatist Chief of Staff Aslan Maskhadov said both sides had pledged to void any further breakdown in the peace process. Tikhomirov said troops would resume pulling out of Grozny on Wednesday after halting at the weekend when a group of soldiers had their weapons taken. Withdrawal from some southern districts of Chechnya would be completed today, he said. A final army withdrawal from the region would be the subject of new talks in the future, he added. Earlier report says. 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. Russian and Chechen military com-

manders met Tuesday to discuss a dispute over stolen weapons that has blocked the withdrawal of Russian military units from Grozny and threatened a fragile truce, reports AP. Russian Lt. Gen. Vyacheslav Tikhomirov met with Chechen separatist chief of staff Aslan Maskhadov at the village of Novye Atagi, some 15 kms (10 miles) from Grozny, according to a statement from the Russian military. The Russian military suspended its withdrawal after accusing the Chechens of taking dozens of weapons from Russian troops over the weekend. The Chechens returned some weapons and arrested renegades, allegedly behind the attack, but the Russian military said it wanted all the guns returned. The truce agreement calls for both sides to withdraw their forces from the Chechen capital, leaving security in the hands of joint military patrols. The Russian Chechen patrols have been operating in Grozny since Sunday. Grozny was quiet Tuesday, with several markets reopening on the outskirts of the city after having been shut down during the fighting earlier this month. Hundreds of refugees were returning to the city, much of which was taken by the rebels in a surprise assault earlier this month. The Russian military command said Tuesday its forces came under fire from rebel forces six times overnight in various parts of Chechnya and three soldiers were wounded. There was no way to verify the claim. Alexander Lebed, the national security chief who worked out the truce with the separatists to stop the fighting in Grozny, was hoping to see

President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow to discuss the truce. But a statement Tuesday from Yeltsin's office said the president was on vacation and no meetings were planned. Yeltsin put the former general in charge of resolving the conflict, but has since wavered in his support of Lebed's peace efforts. Lebed submitted a draft peace agreement to Kremlin legal experts in Moscow on Monday, and also met with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Chernomyrdin's office confirmed that the meeting took place, but would not comment on what was said. The contents of the draft agreement have not been revealed. A spokesman for Lebed, Alexander Barkhatov, said there were several versions under discussion, among them one that provided for new elections and a referendum on Chechnya's political status. He did not elaborate. The pivotal issue in Lebed's talks with separatist leaders is Chechnya's political status. Chechens want independence from Russia. Moscow says it will never allow that. The former general said Sunday that there were forces in Moscow opposed to peace in Chechnya. Lebed also has said he has evidence of a plot to assassinate him. He did not say who planned to kill him. Chechnya declared sovereignty in 1991. In December 1994, Yeltsin sent troops to crush the separatist movement. More than 30,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the fighting.

Mother Teresa celebrates 86th birthday in hospital



CALCUTTA, Aug 27 Mother Teresa spent her 86th birthday in a hospital bed Tuesday, surrounded by doctors treating her for a lung infection and a faltering heart, reports AP. Prayers were held across India for the Roman Catholic nun who has inspired millions with a mix of piety, frugality and selfless service to the poor and the ailing. Doctors at the Woodlands Nursing Home in Calcutta have expressed cautious optimism over her response to treatment during the week.

Benazir rejects caretaker admin Pak govt to hold by polls on all vacant seats

ISLAMABAD, Aug 27 Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto Monday brushed aside threatened embolic resignations by opposition deputies, saying the government would hold by-election on all vacant seats, reports AFP. Speaking to reporters, she once again rejected the opposition demand for snap elections under a caretaker administration. But the prime minister offered to hold a dialogue with the opposition on electoral reforms, increasing number of seats in parliament and reserving a quota of seats for women. Some eight opposition MPs, along with 20 provincial deputies, presented their resignations to national opposition leader Nawaz Sharif during an anti-government rally in Peshawar on Sunday. The resignations can take effect only after they are submitted to Speakers of the assemblies. Sheriff's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) has said resignations of all opposition members of parliament and four provincial assemblies would be made effective at an appropriate moment. The opposition parties together have a total of 42 deputies in the 87-member senate and 86 in the 217-member national assembly, besides their members in the provincial legislatures. Most are from Sheriff's party. More than 14 opposition parties and religious groups, including the PML, are currently waging a united campaign to oust Benazir, whose five-year term ends in 1998, accusing her of corruption and economic mismanagement.

UN refugee agency says Bosnian polls will reward warmongers

SARAJEVO, Aug 27 Next month's Bosnian elections will merely reward those who started the country's devastating war if current conditions are not changed, the UN refugee agency said Monday, reports AP. The warning came as election organisers faced a decision on whether to postpone part of the September 14 vote because of concerns that registration lists have been manipulated to cement ethnic division. Figures released last week suggest that the ruling Bosnian Serb party is seeking to achieve its wartime goal of creating a homogeneous Serb territory by deciding where ethnic Serbs will vote. Refugees are allowed to vote at their current residence or where they might want to live in the future. According to international officials, Bosnian Serb authorities have in some places conditioned humanitarian aid on refugees registering elsewhere than their prewar homes. Many received registration forms which already indicated the location at which they were to vote, Soren Jensen-Petersen, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' top envoy to former Yugoslavia, said in a statement. As a result, it said, Serbs have been effectively denied the option to return to their homes in the federation, the 51 per cent of Bosnia under Muslim-Croat rule. The Serbs, Croats and Muslims have all been accused of using voter registrations to further their war aims.

World meet on child prostitution opens in Stockholm

STOCKHOLM, Aug 27 Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson today opened the first world conference aimed at stamping out child prostitution and sexual exploitation, reports AFP. The congress, which gathers some 1,200 delegates from 126 countries and 50 non-governmental organisations, NGOs, hopes to find ways to combat the prolific sex industry that sees millions of children thrust into prostitution each year.

China reaffirms support for N-test ban treaty

BEIJING, Aug 27 China today reaffirmed its support for a global nuclear test ban treaty blocked by India last week, saying the pact would be an important step in achieving total nuclear disarmament, reports Reuters. Although the final draft of the treaty probably didn't totally satisfy any country, it was in general balanced, the official People's Daily newspaper said in a commentary. India blocked the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) at the conference on disarmament in Geneva, saying the pact did not contain a clause committing the five declared nuclear powers to a timetable for nuclear disarmament. New Delhi's stance, which was seen as effectively thwarting 2-1/2 years of negotiations at the conference on disarmament, drew widespread but generally muted foreign criticism. India has also pledged to oppose any forwarding of the draft treaty to the United Nations General Assembly. China said many countries had compromised to complete the treaty and that the issue of a disarmament schedule could be discussed in future negotiations. The completion of the test ban treaty would be an important and practical step in the gradual process of achieving total nuclear disarmament, it said. China has pledged support for the pact since reaching a deal with the United States that made international inspections of nuclear sites more difficult than in earlier drafts of the accord. The newspaper said China advocated the complete ban and destruction of nuclear weapons but that there was little hope other nuclear powers would soon adopt the same stance.

29 killed as Kurdish factions clash in Turkey

ANKARA, Aug 27 Heavy fighting broke out between two rival Kurdish factions in northern Iraq at midnight Sunday and at least 29 people were killed, one of the groups said on Monday, reports Reuters. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) said the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) had broken the US-brokered ceasefire agreed between the two parties last week. The factions reached a ceasefire on Friday after a week of fierce fighting which had put an end to a truce agreed a year earlier. The PUK leadership who pledged to end fighting and cooperate with the latest US initiative started a major military offensive against KDP positions, the KDP said in a statement. It said heavy fighting started at midnight in the region dividing the two warring factions, with the PUK aiming to break through to KDP's headquarters in Salahuddin.



US First Lady Hillary Clinton (L) talks with Tipper Gore, wife of US Vice-President Al Gore, Monday at the Women's Leadership Forum in Chicago.

Construction of missile factory US rejects public denials from China, Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Aug 27 The United States on Monday rejected public denials from China and Pakistan of alleged cooperation to build a missile factory near Islamabad and said it was looking into allegations of the transfer, reports AFP. 'We make our decisions based on our own information gathering,' State Department spokesman Glyn Davies said after Beijing and Islamabad denounced US press reports of the joint construction project as groundless. 'The fact that China and Pakistan have made public announcements won't alter the course of events from our standpoint,' Davies said. 'We're going to continue to look into this very, very actively,' he added. The Washington Post quoted unidentified officials in a report published over the weekend that said China had helped build a missile factory near the northern city of Rawalpindi in violation of US non-proliferation laws. The factory will be able in a year or two to produce parts for a missile to the medium-range Chinese-designed M-11, the report said. Davies did not confirm the report and said the US government was 'looking into the general matter of transfers from China to Pakistan.' 'We've not come to any conclusions at this stage that would warrant sanctions,' he said. In Beijing, the Chinese Foreign Ministry earlier blasted the report as 'totally groundless' and Pakistani diplomats said there was 'no defence factory in Rawalpindi.'

BRIFFLY Hashimoto arrives in Peru: Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto arrived in Peru Monday for a visit of about 24 hours that will include talks with President Alberto Fujimori. AFP reports from Lima. Hashimoto, on a five-nation Latin American tour, received full military honours and a 21-gun salute at the El Callao air base on arrival. Tuzla mayor wins int'l peace prize: Selim Beslagic, mayor of the Bosnian city of Tuzla, has been awarded the 1996 Sean MacBride Peace Prize for helping preserve the city's multi-ethnic population despite the Bosnian war, the International Peace Bureau announced Monday, AP reports from Geneva. Tuzla is now the emblem of an alternative to the nationalism on all sides that threatens to dominate the coming election period, said the bureau, a coalition of 160 independent peace groups. Blast kills 5 in China: An explosion at an alcohol factory in South China has killed five people and seriously injured three, an official newspaper reported, AP says from Beijing. The explosion Saturday in southern Hunan province, destroyed the factory which was designed to produce 'baijiu' — a local spirit made from grain and sorghum — but had been rented out to a business selling oil paints, the Legal Daily reported. Theft in Amritsar's Golden Temple: A gold-plated ornament has been stolen from Amritsar's Golden Temple, AFP reports from New Delhi. The theft, reported on the night of August 24, was the first ever recorded from the temple.

Removing Kashmir issue from UNSC agenda to mount border tensions

ISLAMABAD, Aug 27 Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sardar Asf Ali Khan said Monday that the deletion from the UN Security Council agenda of its dispute with India over Kashmir would increase border tensions in the Himalayan region, reports AFP. 'He was commenting on the United Nations Security Council's procedural decision last month to remove 50 items from its agenda, including Kashmir, which have not been discussed in the previous five years.' All told reporters UN military observers posted in Kashmir to monitor border violations would be withdrawn if the decision was implemented. This would increase tension along the border and endanger peace and security in the region, he said. Ali said after protests by Pakistan and Arab and African countries the Security Council had referred the decision to its relevant working group for a review.

Majority South Koreans believe Chun, Roh will be pardoned

SEOUL, Aug 27 A majority of South Koreans believe jailed former presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo will be pardoned, an issue likely to become a political football in the run-up to next year's presidential election, reports AFP. A survey commissioned by the independent Hankyoreh newspaper showed that 69 per cent of Koreans believe Chun and Roh will be granted amnesty, while 31 per cent assume they will not. With regard to Roh's jail sentence, about half of those surveyed found it appropriate, 37 per cent too light and 12 per cent too heavy. Politicians said pardoning the two former military generals-turned-presidents would become a hot issue in the run up to the presidential election in late 1997. The government will feel pressure to show leniency to Chun and Roh before the election because of the large voting block in populous north Kyongsang, home province of the two, they said. The high-profile trial of Chun and Roh, praised here as a historic event that helped correct past wrongs, was marred by media blunders. At the time of the Kwangju bloodshed in which 200 people were killed by official count when martial law troops put down a pro-democracy uprising in 1980 Lee Hee-Sung was martial law commander and Ju Young-bok defence minister. Citing lack of evidence, the court cleared Chung-Ho-ying and Hwang Young Si, two former generals accused by the prosecution of being deeply involved in the killings in Kwangju of the manslaughter charge. But Chung and Hwang were found guilty in helping Chun in the military mutiny and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Major newspapers in Seoul hurriedly changed editions without any notice for this morning delivery to replace incorrect editions they had distributed earlier. Television station pool reporters which were largely blamed for the media blunder, put out corrected news reports to late to be picked up by most editions.

Off the Record It's only God's wish

DUBAI: A Saudi account of the near-beheading of a condemned woman has given a rare glimpse into crime and punishment under Saudi Arabia's version of Islamic law, reports AP. The detailed account from a public square in the holy city of Makkah appeared Monday in the Al-Eqtisadiyah newspaper. It told of a woman pardoned by her victim's father only moments before her scheduled death. Saudi executions are usually conducted in public, although few foreigners have witnessed one. Usually they are reported briefly in newspapers, Monday's account, unusual in its detail, described not only the process of execution, but the power a victim's family can have over the fate of a criminal. A Saudi newspaper Al-Eqtisadiyah gave this account: Najah Al-Kariss was locked in a police truck Sunday when she heard the roar of the crowd. She knew that meant the first execution of the day — of a Pakistani man convicted of armed robbery — had been carried out. Hers would be next. She would be led out of the truck in the head to toe veil that all women in Saudi Arabia wear in public, and beheaded with a sword for killing a man who had tried to 'harm' her. The newspaper did not say how. As the executioner wiped the crescent shaped blade of his sword, Al-Kariss asked to see Dakheel Al Luhaybi, the father of the man she killed. A guard opened the truck door, and Al Kariss stepped into the 43-degree C (109 degree F) sun, in a tearful appeal, she begged Al Luhaybi to spare her. Under Saudi law, criminals can be pardoned only by the families of their victims. Al-Luhaybi, 66, had already heard appeals from the woman's friends and family, had even been offered 1 million dollars to grant the pardon, he said. His wife and children, however, were opposed to it, and he had resolved to watch Al Kariss die. But after hearing the woman's pleas — and after the intercession of police officers and others in the crowd he consulted family members again and decided to forgive Al-Kariss in order to gain God's blessings. Al Kariss wept with gratitude, and as word circulated through the square, the crowd began chanting 'Allahu Akbar,' Arabic for 'God is great.' Some spectators cheered and ululated, while others fought back tears, the report said. It said Al-Kariss would be freed as soon as the family signs papers acknowledging the pardon. It did not indicate whether Al-Luhaybi would take 1 million dollars. Intoxicated toddler! CLEARWATER, Florida: A mother was charged with child abuse after a neighbour found her 3-year-old daughter staggering drunk and naked in the street, reports AP. Eileen Pozniak, 37, was being held Friday at the Pinellas County Jail on \$15,000 bail. She was charged with child abuse and resisting arrest. Police arrested her Thursday when they were called by a neighbour who noticed the toddler staggering outside. First I got her out of the road and then I walked her up to her house, said a neighbour, Michelle Christman, 22. The door was standing open. I told her to go inside and came back home and called police. The child reeked of alcohol and was visibly intoxicated, said police Sgt. Doug Griffith. Tests showed she had a blood-alcohol level of .10, above the .08 level at which a motorist is presumed intoxicated in Florida, Griffith said. It was not clear what the child drank or where she got the alcohol. The girl was released to Pozniak's mother.

Asian children experiencing new form of colonialism thru' dish

MANILA, Aug 27 From lofty Himalayan villages to the outlying atolls of the Pacific, Asian children today have access to a dizzying diet of television on the dish, reports IPS. The region's youngsters can sing along to the latest on Music Television (MTV), or follow the escapist drama of Western serials. Elections, war and disasters unfolding halfway across the world are beamed straight into millions of Asia's households. Media experts are worried about what this invasion from the skies will do to local diversity as Asians, especially children, are assimilated into the global monoculture. The problem, they say, lies in the huge imbalance in today's media free market. Nearly all global media services and products come from the West, in particular the US audiovisual industry, and are beamed through a mainly one-way process into Asian countries where local programming is often weak. 'We should be in no doubt that this is what we are now experiencing — a new form of colonialism — not at the point of a gun and not by brutality. We are simply inviting the colonisers in,' said Patricia Edgar, director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation. 'Many of these programmes show lifestyles that many people can't handle,' she said in an interview during the recent Asian summit on child rights and media held in Manila. Mahfuz Anam of The Daily Star in Bangladesh is not surprised. 'When we look out of the hotel window, we could be anywhere: In London, Sydney or Bangkok. Is it any surprise that our children grow up with Western values?' The globalisation of media services has allowed freer information flows, but news and entertainment companies have merged in recent years into multi-media megaliths. Says Edgar: 'Instead of being diverse and multicultural the global culture emanates primarily from one source, a global village called Los Angeles.' The United States exports 120,000 hours of programming to Europe alone, while the global trade in programming is growing by more than 15 per cent a year. Countries like Britain have a hard time accessing US media markets, and '94 out of every 100 film dollars spent in Australia goes back to the United States. This has driven some European countries to try, though without success, to impose quotas on US programmes and films shown on European television. The struggle to hold their own is probably harder for Asian countries, some of which worry that too much foreign programming may be reshaping values at a time of frenzied modernisation and the spread of a consumerist culture. 'More important than government repression of cultures today is the effect of market forces,' the 1996 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said. It noted that globally marketed consumer products and media are 'superimposing a uniform and stultifying view of the world.' 'While the world's more than 1.2 billion TV sets can help spread knowledge and understanding and help hold governments accountable for their actions they can also be a new form of cultural domination through the incentives and values they inculcate,' the report said. In the last decade many media companies have promised to bring culturally sensitive programming in local Asian languages, but the satellite TV revolution has taken hold so swiftly and easily that it will take time before local programmes can compete. In recent years some players have gone regional or tied up with local firms to produce local-language cable channels with wider mass appeal. In India, which has a strong entertainment and news tradition, competition for the broadest market is heating up and cable has erupted with local programming and satellites beaming down in local languages. Even the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which used to be beamed into South Asia by Star TV, has moved to another satellite and many now have to use more local material to expand viewership and advertising. Nevertheless, experts say children are at special risk of being smothered by the avalanche of foreign programming. 'There should be a