

BRIEFLY

Mahathir to join solar summit:

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad left Friday for a visit to Zimbabwe, Portugal and the United States, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Mahathir is to be in Zimbabwe until September 17 to attend the World Solar Summit aimed at stepping up usage of solar energy.

He then visits Lisbon for three days to call on Portuguese President Mario Soares and hold talks with Prime Minister Antonio Guiterres.

From Portugal Mahathir is to fly to Boston where he plans to explore research facilities at the nearby Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Black Americans honoured:

After being ignored by history for 130 years, thousands of black soldiers who fought in the American Civil War got their due Thursday when the site for a national monument to their efforts was officially dedicated, AP reports from Washington.

Some 185,000 blacks fought in the nation's bloodiest war. But when the war ended, they were largely forgotten, and they were intentionally left out of a 1865 victory parade in Washington.

About 500 other people attended the ceremony in Washington's historically Black Shaw neighbourhood, where the African American Civil War Memorial will be built. The neighbourhood is named for abolitionist Robert Shaw, who led one of the first black Civil War regiments, the Massachusetts 54th.

Typhoon death toll now 162 in China:

The death toll from typhoon Sally, which battered southern China earlier this week, has risen to 162, official media said yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

The Typhoon had injured more than 5,000 and flattened more than 272,000 houses when it raged across southern Guangdong province on Monday and sliced into neighbouring Guangxi region the next day, the China Daily said.

It said 50 people were still missing.

Labour widens lead over Tory:

Labour has widened its lead over the ruling Conservatives and would win 51 per cent of the vote if an election took place on Friday, according to an opinion poll published Friday, AFP reports from London.

The Labour Party gained one point since August while the Conservatives at 28 per cent lost two points, the poll published in The Guardian indicated.

The Liberal Democrats lost three points to 15 per cent while other parties gained between two and five points, showed the poll carried out by ICM.

Arab League backs Ghali:

Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whose hopes for re-election face the prospect of a US veto, received a renewed expression of support on Thursday from the 22-member Arab group, Reuter reports from United Nations.

At a lunch in Boutros-Ghali's honour, the group's current chairman Ambassador Gaafar Allagany of Saudi Arabia, reiterated the backing for a second term voiced by the Arab League at a summit in Cairo in June.

GCC states to hold war games:

Helicopters and forces from Gulf Arab states arrived in Kuwait on Thursday for military exercises, Bahrain's official Gulf news agency reported, but the exercises did not appear to be related to the crisis with Iraq. Reuter reports from Dubai.

The agency said a number of helicopters from the air forces of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states arrived at a Kuwait air base for exercises that will be held between September 14-19.

The agency said the manoeuvres were part of a GCC programme of joint exercises. The GCC is a military, political and economic alliance that groups Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

24 children fall from staircase, die in China

SHANGHAI, Sept. 13: Twenty-four Chinese children were killed and another 98 injured when a crowd rush down a narrow school staircase ended with students falling and being trampled in waves. Wenhui Bao daily said today, reports AFP.

The primary school children, from a rural area in south-western Yunnan Province, were hurrying to attend a daily flag-raising ceremony Monday in their school's front courtyard when disaster struck, the report said.

The school's two courtyards are connected by a passageway, and a staircase only 1.27 metres (4.2 feet) in width, and the mob rushed to send those hurt to the hospital, but 24 died and 17 others were seriously injured, the daily said.

Junta restores parliament, lifts ban on political parties in Burundi

BUJUMBURA, Burundi, Sept. 13: Burundi's military-led government restored the parliament and lifted ban on political parties Thursday, seven weeks after a military coup, reports AP.

"The assembly is restored in its original form and there are no conditions on political parties," Jean-Luc Ndzeye, spokesman for the military government, said after the announcement was made on state-run radio.

Military ruler Maj. Pierre Buyoya seized power on July 25, dissolving the parliament, suspending the constitution and banning political parties. President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya fled to the US ambassador's residence, where he remains.

The constitution remains suspended, however, enabling Buyoya to remain in control.

Buyoya said he staged the coup as the only way to stop the ethnic violence in Burundi which has claimed more than 150,000 lives since 1993. He also accused Ntibantunganya and his Hutu-dominated FRODEBU political party of organising a genocide against Tutsis, who make up only 14 per cent of the population in Burundi.

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Buyoya had been quiet in the latest US-Iraqi confrontation, which focused mainly on Iraqi aggression in northern Iraq. That changed when the Pentagon announced Wednesday that Kuwait had agreed to let eight US Air Force F-117 stealth fighter-bombers use a Kuwaiti air base for potential strikes on Iraq.

That amounts to "an act of war against the Iraqi state," said Deputy Prime Minister Tarig Aziz. He likened the situation to the 1990 period just before Iraq invaded Kuwait, which the Iraqis consider a renegade Iraqi province.

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