

International

BRIEFLY

Kim ends Latin America trip

President Kim Young-sam said Monday his 12-day trip to five Latin American countries has laid a foundation for more South Korean investment in the region. A report from Seoul.

Our country will actively participate in the region's privatization projects, infrastructure building and natural resources development," Kim said on returning home from his trip to Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Peru. Kim's trip was the first to the region by a South Korean president.

Azeri, Kazak leaders sign accord

The presidents of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan signed agreements Monday to improve cooperation between the two former Soviet republics, especially in the development of Caspian Sea oil and gas fields, AP reports from Baku.

Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev and Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev, in their first summit meeting, agreed that their countries should work together to accelerate oil and gas development. A joint statement on the Caspian Sea called for using it only for peaceful purposes.

Troops kill 11 rebels in Colombia

Colombian troops killed 11 leftist guerrillas on Monday in the latest round of clashes in a two-week-old rebel offensive. An army commander said. Reuters reports from Bogotá.

The first battle took place early on Monday when soldiers headed off attacks by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) on communities near the town of Puerto Parra, about 175 miles (280 km) from Bogotá, in northeastern Santander province. Gen Rafael Hernandez Lopez said seven guerrillas were shot dead and large quantities of arms and munitions were seized.

Israeli chopper crashes

An airman was killed and two were missing after an Israeli military helicopter crashed in the Mediterranean Sea during exercises, the Israeli Army said yesterday. Reuters reports from Jerusalem.

The army said communications with the Dolphin type helicopter were lost on Monday. Searchers found the body of one crewman about three hours later of the incident along with the wreckage in the sea opposite the northern Israeli town of Nahariya. The two other crewmen were missing.

40 held for firing in joy in Lebanon

Lebanese army troops have arrested 40 people for firing their guns in joy after a baby boy was born to a prominent family in northern Lebanon, the state-run National News Agency reported Monday. AP says from Beirut.

The agency said the gunfire in the town of Zgharta and Eshden Sunday night was to celebrate the birth of a baby boy to the wife of Assad Karam, Karam, who is in his 40s, hails from a family descended from Youssef Karam, an 18th century warrior who battled Ottoman Turkish rule in Mount Lebanon.

Floods kill 12 in Sudan

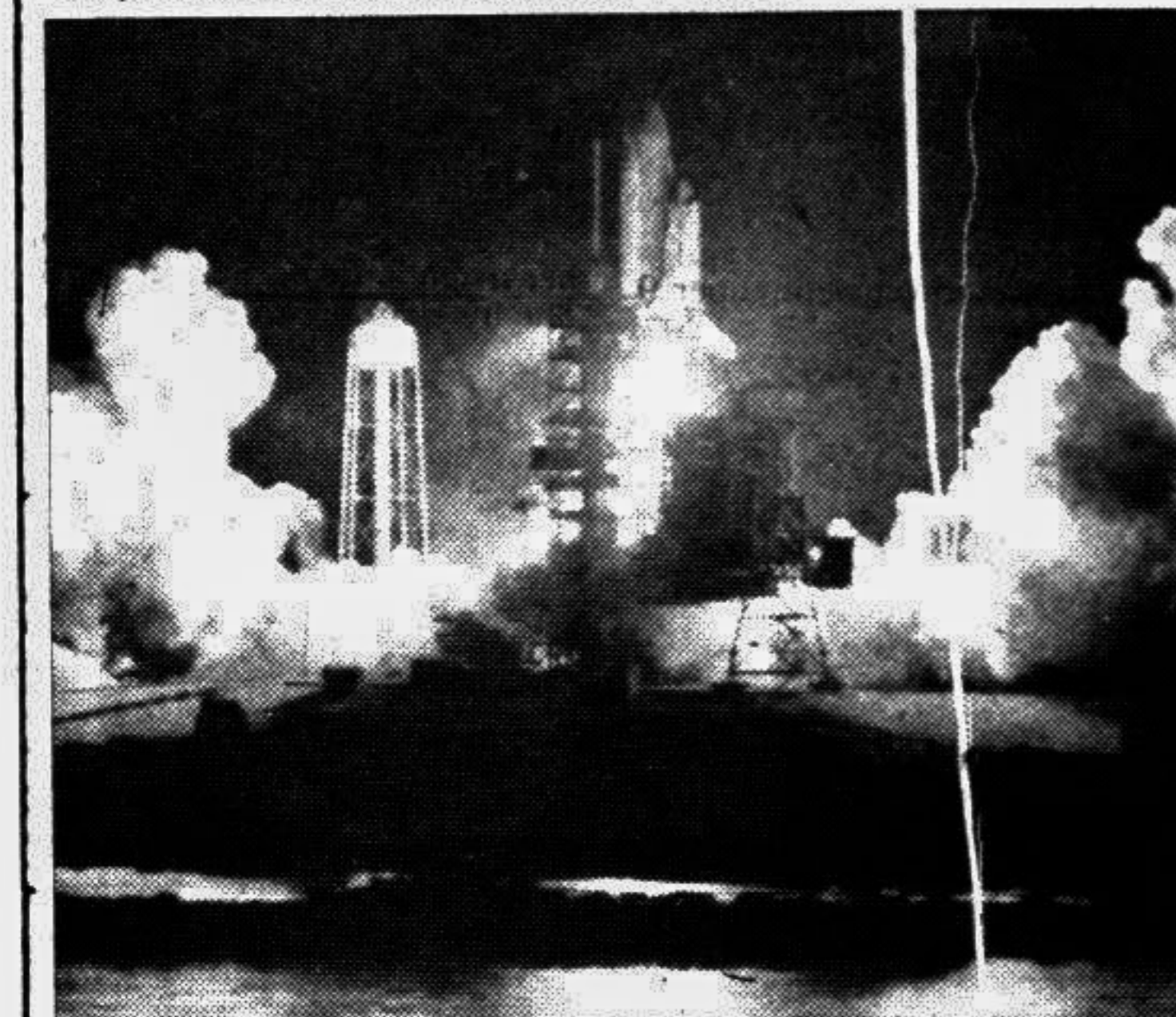
Surging water swept through shantytowns near the Sudanese capital, killing dozens of people and leaving thousands homeless, Sudanese television reported Monday. AP reports from Khartoum.

The floods were the latest to devastate the poor region around Khartoum, where the White Nile and Blue Nile coverage. State-owned television broadcast footage of flood waters inundating shantytowns in the southern suburb of Mayo.

Cholera outbreak kills 77 in Yemen

A 2-month-old outbreak of cholera has killed 77 people in Yemen and infected hundreds of others, a health official said Monday. AP reports from Sana'a.

The epidemic broke out in mid-July in the country's southern Shabwa province and was diagnosed as cholera with the help of international aid agencies, said Abdul-Rader Muttahar.



The Space Shuttle Atlantis blast off launch pad 39A at Kennedy Space Centre early Monday. Atlantis and a crew of six are scheduled to dock with the Russian Space Station Mir. — AFP/UNB photo

France starts scrapping N-missiles in Alps

APT, France, Sept 17: Part of a streamlining of its post-Cold War defence, France on Monday started scrapping its 18 land-based nuclear missiles in the Alps, and will rely solely on planes and submarines for its nuclear deterrent, reports AP.

In a ceremony led by top French military brass, the commanders of the installation at Albin Plateau in southeastern France handed over the keys that launch the missiles.

Actual dismantling of the missiles, each 50 times stronger than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, is to last two years. The S3D missiles, weighing 25 tons, were kept in concrete silos on the base stretching over 300 square kilometres (115 square miles).

The missiles of the First Strategic Missile Group, with a range of 3,500 kilometres (2,100 miles), went into service in 1971 during the Cold War and were aimed at cities in the Soviet Union.

Two teams of two officers, stationed 450 metres (1,300 feet) underground, were on permanent alert, capable of launching the missiles within 40 seconds.

A page of military history has turned, President Jacques Chirac said in a message read during the ceremony. "But the will of the nation to guarantee its ultimate security in all circumstances remains."

In abandoning its nuclear defence triad, France still maintains five submarines with nuclear-tipped missiles and about 60 Mirage 2000N and Super Etendard bombers with nuclear warheads.

Despite the end of the Cold War, France insists on maintaining an independent nuclear defence.

When Chirac announced the closing of the Albin Plateau in January, he completed a final series of underground nuclear test blasts aimed at ensuring the effectiveness of a new warhead.

"It's not 25 years for nothing. On the contrary, it is 25 years of peace," said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Jean Rannou.

China routinely opposes all overseas tours by the Dalai Lama who has been in exile since an abortive uprising against Chinese rule in Tibet in 1959.

China blasts Dalai Lama's visit to Australia

BEIJING, Sept 17: China expressed its anger today over the visit to Australia by Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, reports Reuters.

"With regard to the Australian side... allowing the Dalai Lama to visit and arranging meetings with senior government officials, we express deep regret and strong dissatisfaction," a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said by telephone. "Response depending on the development of the situation," the spokesman added.

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Iraq begins to meet US demands to end Persian Gulf crisis

WASHINGTON, Sept 17: As President Clinton offers assurances he is not trying to force a showdown, Iraq is beginning to meet American demands to end the Persian Gulf crisis, reports AP.

The key test, say US officials, is whether Saddam Hussein threatens his neighbours or allied forces.

Denying the United States is cooling down because some of the allies oppose further military action, these officials say allied support is stronger today than it was when US Tomahawk cruise missiles were launched against Iraqi military targets two weeks ago.

On a trip Defence Secretary William J. Perry and Assistant Secretary of State Robert H. Pelletreau made to the Persian Gulf "we found support for more action," said a senior US policy-maker Monday, who asked not be identified. "Everybody says they would support us in defending our forces."

Kuwait agreed Monday to permit several thousand US troops to deploy near the Iraqi border, while Bahrain told Perry over the weekend it was willing to serve as a base for American forces and weaponry.

But Saudi Arabia has not permitted the United States to launch air strikes against Iraq from Saudi territory, and last Saturday foreign ministers of the Arab League endorsed Iraq's "territorial integrity" and strongly condemned "foreign interference" in Iraq — an apparent criticism of the American attacks.

On Monday, meanwhile, curbing back from two weeks of bellicose US statements, Clinton said "we have sought no confrontation with Saddam Hussein. We never did and we don't now."

In fact, Clinton said the US military buildup in the Gulf did not mean the United States was seeking a clash with Iraq.

"My concern," he said, "is that we limit Saddam Hussein's ability to threaten his neighbours, that we do it with the no-fly zone and, in so doing, we keep our pilots safe."

US officials, acknowledging the temperature was being lowered, insisted the reason was not the mixed views of the allies, though they were taken into account.

Rather, the officials said, Saddam's actions on the ground were the key. In this respect, they said Iraq had stopped threatening American and allied warplanes flying over northern and southern Iraq.

Saddam's response to two other demands is less clear. These were that he not threaten his neighbours, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and that he comply with UN resolutions.

That is the central question, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said of Saddam's behaviour toward the two oil-rich neighbours, which the United States fought to defend against Iraq in the 1991 Gulf war.

"We have to be realistic about Saddam Hussein. He has invaded his neighbours before and he has threatened them since, and we have got to assume that he is capable of doing both again."

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili (L) announces new measures to protect military forces from terrorist overseas as Deputy Defence Secretary John White (R) looks on Monday at the Pentagon in Washington DC. Shalikashvili said the US has no plans for a strike against Iraq unless the actions of Saddam Hussein warrant the US to do so.

Lebed in Chechnya to tackle problems in peace process

GROZNY, Sept 17: Russian security chief Alexander Lebed held talks Tuesday in Chechnya to try to resolve problems that prompted federal forces to halt their withdrawal from the Caucasus Mountains republic last week, reports AP.

Lebed told journalists that the goal of his trip was to "smooth out the rough edges" of the peace process, the Interfax news agency reported.

The Security Council secretary met first with Russia's troop commander in Chechnya, Lt. Gen. Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, at the Khankala base just south of Grozny. He later headed for talks in Novye Atagi with Aslan Maskhadov, the separatists' military commander with whom he signed peace accords last month.

Progress toward a permanent settlement has virtually halted — largely because of the mixed reception on the Russian side to Lebed's peace deal and its perceived concessions to the rebels.

The acerbic Lebed referred to Tikhomirov on Thursday as "a little hotheaded" for suspending the pullout from Chechnya over a dispute about prisoner exchanges.

Tikhomirov was reacting to

what he called an unacceptable demand by the rebels — insisting on the release as POWs of Chechens held for crimes unconnected to the war.

Lebed also is intent on speeding the formation of a coalition government in Chechnya, to avoid the "Afghan variant" of factional fighting, he said Tuesday en route to Chechnya.

The main two factions in Chechnya, separatists and pro-Moscow officials, have accused each other of planning armed

attacks and have refused to cooperate in putting together a true coalition government.

The separatists have included three former officials of the Russian-installed administration in a proposed coalition government that they would dominate.

But Doku Zavgayev, the leader of the Russian-installed administration that was forced to abandon Grozny last month, has boycotted those efforts, calling it a "government of collaborators."

The rebels, meanwhile, have said they are ready to resume fighting with Russia if the peace agreement breaks down.

Lebed met with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin on Monday to discuss plans to form a coalition government. They reportedly agreed to set up a commission to address specifics of the settlement, including rebuilding Chechnya's economy.

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