

International

BRIEFLY

Businessman shot dead in Moscow: A Russian businessman who lived in Italy was shot to death in a lounge at one of Moscow's most upscale hotels, news reports said Tuesday. AP reports from Moscow.

The man, identified by police as Dmitry Naumov, 49, was gunned down Monday evening at the downtown Hotel Tverskaya. He was paying about 1,000 dirr a night for a luxury suite, the Interfax news agency said. Naumov was a top manager of the Russian-Italian company Dimex, the report said.

Japan launches small rockets: Japan launched a small rocket containing several scientific experiments briefly into space Wednesday. The rocket lifted 200 kilometers (125 miles) above the earth then returned back down as scheduled, AP reports from Tokyo.

The TR-1A rocket splashed down in Pacific waters 14 minutes and 20 seconds after lifting off at 7:00 am (2200 GMT Tuesday) from Tanegashima Space Center in southern Japan.

China lifts veto on German FM's visit: The Chinese government yesterday lifted a veto on a visit by a German's foreign minister Klaus Kinkel, imposed because of a dispute over Tibet, AFP reports from Beijing.

The official Xinhua news agency said the dispute was ended during a meeting Tuesday between China's foreign minister Qian Qichen and Kinkel at the United Nations in New York.

9 more die of Dengu fever in Delhi: Nine more people have died in an outbreak of mosquito-borne Dengue fever in the Indian capital, pushing the death toll from the epidemic to 28, newspapers said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

The latest deaths occurred in various hospitals across the capital Tuesday as 49 more patients were admitted, taking the number affected by the fever to 276. The Hindustan Times and other dailies said.

Storm Willie kills 10 in Vietnam: Tropical storm Willie killed at least ten people during its rampage through the central provinces of Vietnam over the weekend, a national committee handling natural disasters announced yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

Nine deaths were recorded in Nghe An Province, a committee official said, noting the toll was a provisional one. Willie left thousands homeless and caused millions of dollars worth of damage, the official said.



Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati (R) signs the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty on Tuesday at the United Nations. —AFP/UNB photo

Israel to build 780 new homes in West Bank

JERUSALEM, Sept 15: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has promised to build 780 new homes in Jewish settlements in the West Bank to appease a coalition partner in his government, a television report said Tuesday, reports AP.

The report on Channel Two television said Netanyahu agreed to the additional construction in the settlements after religious leaders of the United Torah Judaism Party threatened to leave Netanyahu's coalition government unless housing demands for the ultra-Orthodox were met.

In a meeting with deputy housing minister Meir Porush Sunday, Netanyahu promised he would prepare the ground for 580 additional apartments in the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Sefer, the report said. This was in addition to the 1,800 housing units already approved by Netanyahu's government for the ultra-Orthodox West Bank settlement.

Netanyahu also promised to prepare ground in Beitur, another ultra-Orthodox West Bank settlement, for 200 more apartments, Channel Two said. The government has already approved 900 new homes there.

Netanyahu, who took office in June, has angered Palestinians and other Arab leaders with his tough policies, including support for Jewish settlement construction which was held at bay under the previous government.

Palestinians and the United States consider settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip obstacles to peace. The Palestinians hope to establish an independent country in the territories.

Reuters adds, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) called on the Security Council on Tuesday to reverse Israel's action in opening an entrance to a tunnel in the old city of Jerusalem, saying it endangered the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Islamic structures.

In virtually identical letters to the president of the Security Council and Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, PLO UN observer Nasser Al-Kidwa said the tunnel was opened on Monday evening "under the protection of army units" and extends for approximately 500 yards (metres), parallel to the western wall of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Air attacks in North Sri Lanka, 5 civilians killed

COLOMBO, Sept 25: Intense air attacks by government forces have killed at least five civilians and wounded several others in north Sri Lanka, Tamil Tiger Guerrillas said today, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said the civilians were killed in air and artillery attacks by the army, which captured the rebel-held village of Murasumottai Tuesday.

The LTTE's clandestine radio station said it lost some 12 women fighters and three men while resisting the military push mounted Sunday.

However, defence officials said at least 95 guerrillas were killed and more wounded in the fighting, which also killed 45 government soldiers and wounded 85.

The LTTE has not given any estimates for army losses, saying only that they were heavy.

Sindh govt asks doctors to help probe Murtaza s killing

KARACHI, Sept 25: The Government of Pakistan's Sindh province asked doctors on Tuesday to help investigate the killing of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's brother, amid accusations that police shot him in cold blood, reports Reuters.

It said in a statement a medical board was being set up at the request of Murtaza Bhutto's widow Chinwa to look into allegations that there was no exchange of gunfire between police and Murtaza's bodyguards when he was killed on Friday.

Murtaza's supporters have accused police of ambushing and killing him in cold blood near his Karachi home. Police say they fired in self defence after the bodyguards started shooting.

Six of Murtaza's companions were killed in the shooting and a seventh died of his wounds the next day.

Australia urges China not to retaliate over Dalai Lama s visit

CANBERRA, Australia, Sept 25: Australia urged China on Wednesday not to launch trade retaliation against it over a planned meeting between its prime minister and Tibet's exile Dalai Lama, reports AP.

Prime Minister John Howard is scheduled to hold a private meeting with the visiting Buddhist leader on Thursday despite strong and repeated protests by China.

Howard says he regards the Dalai Lama as a spiritual figure. China maintains that he is an political exile agitating for Tibetan independence from Chinese rule.

The Dalai Lama has said he will ask Howard to support his campaign for greater self-rule in Tibet to protect its cultural and religious heritage.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang has said the meeting would be tantamount to interference in China's domestic affairs and would cast a shadow over Sino-Australian relations and unavoidably influence the political, economic and trade relationship.

Mother Teresa leaves hospital

CALCUTTA, Sept 25: Mother Teresa was released from hospital today and taken back to her religious order after being given a clean bill of health, a doctor treating the revered Roman Catholic missionary said, reports Reuters.

Eyes closed and hands folded, the 86-year-old nun, who was taken to hospital last week after falling from a chair, was carried on a stretcher into the Missionaries of Charity Order where nuns greeted her with applause, witnesses said.

"God bless you," Mother Teresa said to Sister Fredrica, the Order's second ranking nun, as she was carried into the Missionaries of Charity Headquarters, her home in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta.

To the sound of the Chapel Bell, about 30 nuns surrounded Mother Teresa and danced in joy before she was taken to the order's prayer room, witnesses said. After she was carried to her room where she was examined by a doctor, they said.

Afghan govt confirms fall of town Taliban capture strategic town of Sarobi

ISLAMABAD, Sept 25: Afghanistan's Taliban Islamic militia said today it had captured the strategic government town of Sarobi, east of the capital, in overnight fighting, reports Reuters.

Taliban sources, quoted by a Pakistan-based Afghan news service said the militia took the town, 70 km (44 miles) from the capital, in overnight fighting. No independent confirmation was immediately available.

Afghan government military officials today confirmed the fall of its key stronghold of Sarobi to the rival Taliban Islamic militia in fierce overnight fighting.

"Sarobi fell at about midnight but our forces still control the surrounding hills," a senior military official told the news agency.

The Taliban, supported by tanks and armoured personnel carriers, attacked in waves from the district centre of Hisarak on the southern front of the town, completely overwhelming Sarobi's defenders, the Sikh Gorge to the east of Sarobi then fell back without a fight after government positions to the south of the strategically vital town were overrun.

Taliban sources said on Tuesday that their forces had advanced towards Sarobi, which lies in Kabul province, on two fronts, from Hisarak district in the adjoining Nangarhar province to Jendakal mountain about 10 km (six miles) from the town, and along the main eastern Jalalabad-Kabul highway.

Earlier AFP report says, the Taliban Islamic militia pushed back government forces from a key eastern base of Sarobi after an overnight assault, Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said today.

The militia seized a large quantity of arms and ammunition from the fleeing government troops, it said.

AIP said at least 50 government soldiers were killed in the fighting. The Taliban losses were not known. The private news service said further details were awaited.

The fall of the vital district centre 70 kilometers (43 miles) east of Kabul to the rival Taliban could cause new difficulties for government forces defending the Afghan capital, observers said.



US President Bill Clinton (L) shakes hands with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov on Tuesday at the United Nations. The two met on the sidelines of the 51st UN General Assembly. — AFP/UNB photo

US working on new policy towards Iraqi Kurds

WASHINGTON, Sept 25: The US government is beginning to piece together a new policy towards Iraq's Kurds, with neither side under any illusion that Kurds count for much on Washington's list of priorities, reports AP.

Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau met last week in Ankara, Turkey, with Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic party. He also is trying to arrange a meeting with Barzani's rival, Jalal Talabani, of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

US officials said Tuesday that contacts have been made in recent days with the PUK, but no meeting had been set. The United States wants the two rivals to patch up their differences, but there is no sign it is doing so with any sense of urgency.

Historically, competing interests have always forced the United States to treat Kurds as second-class citizens, worthy of humanitarian assistance and protection from Saddam but little beyond that.

For example, the United States has discouraged the establishment of a separate Kurdish entity in northern Iraq in deference to Turkey's wishes and to the US goal of avoiding the dismemberment of Iraq.

Turkey has long feared Kurdish nationalism, sensing that the establishment of a separate Kurdish-controlled region in Iraq could inflame the millions of Turkish Kurds who aspire to their own national identity.

Faced with a choice between placating Turkey, a NATO ally, and supporting the Iraqi Kurds' nationalist aspirations, it was no contest: Washington sided with Turkey.

Beyond that, a partitioned Iraq would only make Iran look that much larger, emboldening it to intimidate the Gulf region in a way that Saddam has been able to prevent.

In addition, the United States never showed a keen interest in helping the rival Kurdish factions heal their rift after it deteriorated sharply in May 1994. The administration limited itself to sending low-level emissaries to seek an accommodation.

To the extent that the United States was pulling its punches before in dealing with the Kurds, it is more wary than ever now that Barzani has handed Saddam a strategic victory by temporarily inviting him back into Kur territory to do battle with Talabani's forces.



Britain's Princess Diana (L), Washington Post owner Kathryn Graham, Vogue Magazine editor Anna Wintour, designer Ralph Lauren, and Georgetown University President Leo J. O'Donovan (R) work the receiving line during a multi-million dollar fundraising event for the Nina Hyde Centre for Breast Cancer Research late on Tuesday in Washington, DC. The benefit is named after Hyde who was the Washington Post's fashion editor who died of breast cancer. — AFP/UNB photo

I want to be man who lost the maximum number

HYDERABAD, India, Sept 25: Kaka Joginder Singh will stand as an election candidate for the 308th time in October, reports AFP.

The 62-year-old has high hopes for the upcoming state elections in India's southern Andhra Pradesh state.

Singh is convinced, with good reason, that he is on course to extend his fun of 307 consecutive state and parliamentary poll defeats.

"I do not want to go down in history as the persons who contested the most elections in the world," he says.

"Rather, I want to be the man who lost the maximum number."

Netanyahu's 100 days: Middle East less peaceful

JERUSALEM, Sept 25: One hundred days into Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's administration, the New Middle East is starting to look a lot like the old one, reports AP.

The Palestinians are furious, Egypt is spewing accusations, and the specter of war with Syria is in the air. Budding relations with the Gulf states are on hold — and even ties with Jordan, Israel's closest ally in the region, are losing their warmth.

But Netanyahu, who says his predecessors went too far in appeasing the Arabs, says he's right on track.

"We said we are going to bring change. We'll negotiate differently, we'll insist on security and we shall move forward," he told a news conference before leaving Tuesday for Europe. "We have done exactly what we said at the outset we would do."

But the Arab world seems increasingly skeptical about Netanyahu's intentions to honestly pursue the peace process begun by his dovish predecessors.

The crux of the problem is Netanyahu's unwillingness to quickly push ahead with the Israeli-PLO autonomy accords — the centerpiece of the "New Middle East" envisioned by Netanyahu's predecessor Shimon Peres.

Netanyahu — who opposed the previous government's land-for-peace policies — has made no move to follow through on Israel's promised withdrawal from most of the West Bank city under Israeli control, or from large areas of the West Bank that divide Palestinian cities into islands of self-rule.

The Hebron pullout — supposed to take place by March —

was postponed by the Peres government, and Netanyahu is now seeking to renegotiate its conditions. In the meantime, no progress has been announced on other fronts — such as talks on a final peace settlement, or outstanding issues such as the disposition of water and fuel resources.

The standoff has led to growing frustration among Palestinians. An increasing number of protests in recent weeks have led to violence, and Palestinian leaders have warned to the possibility of a new uprising. Caught between a people demanding tangible results from the peace process he championed and a new Israeli government unwilling to make concessions, Yasser Arafat has called Netanyahu's policies "a declaration of war."

Netanyahu, however, says the delays are imperative to ensure security — pointing out that there have been no bombings since he took office. Four suicide attacks by Islamic militants in February and March killed 63 people in Israel.

"We're not going back to the pattern we had before, where people talked about peace and we had terror in the streets," he said.

At the same time, he insists his government is "moving along" on the Palestinian track and has entered "substantive negotiations."

But the lack of evidence of such movement has had repercussions throughout the Middle East.

Egypt, which in 1979 became the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, has accused the new government of reneging on agreements and stalling the peace process and threatened to cancel a regional economic summit it is hosting in November.

In recent days, one Egyptian minister accused Netanyahu's government of using "the language of dinosaurs" for refusing to accept a Palestinian state, and another suggested Netanyahu should see a psychiatrist. The barbs made front-page headlines in Israel.

After years of sputtering peace talks, relations with Syria have worsened under Netanyahu, who opposes returning the Golan Heights Israel captured in 1967. Tensions grew to the point that recent Syrian troop movements in Lebanon set off widespread speculation in Israel about the possibility of war.

The deteriorating relations have not been confined to Israel's neighbours.

Moroccan King Hassan II said this week that the peace process was "in a state of crisis" and Qatar, one of two Arab Gulf states to establish economic

Off the Record

Highest bravery award for a dog called Fizo

SYDNEY: A dog called Fizo will today be presented here with the RSPCA's highest bravery award for saving three children by risking his own life to attack and kill a deadly snake which had been poised to strike, reports AFP.

Even after being bitten himself, the tenacious eight-year-old silky terrier clung to the snake, biting it until it was dead, the testimonial says.

The purple cross recognises animals showing exceptional bravery, but Fizo is the first judged by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) to be worthy of the award since it was established in 1992.

A spokeswoman for the RSPCA said that award recognised "selfless heroism" shown by Fizo in defending the children.

"What Fizo did was special because normally when a dog is bitten by a snake they let go, but Fizo's tenacity kept him going until he killed it," she said.

The snake was identified later as a 1.5 metre (almost five feet) brown snake, one of Australia's most aggressive and deadly.

The presentation will be made by Agriculture Minister Richard Amery in the New South Wales parliament house, from which Fizo would normally be banned under a strict "no animals allowed" policy. The ban has been waived for the occasion.

Fizo was holidaying with his owner, Donna Watson, at her parents' home near Taree, on the New South Wales coast north of here, in January 1995 as the snake slithered near the nine-year-old niece, Rachel sky.

Pill doesn't raise long-term breast cancer risk

NEW YORK: Birth control pills don't raise a woman's long-term risk of breast cancer, a huge international study found, reports AP.

It found no sign of increased risk for women who had stopped taking the pills more than 10 years before.

It did show a small increase in breast cancer rates for women who had quit more recently or who were still using the pill, but that might only mean the cancer was being diagnosed earlier than in other women, the researchers said.

The Associated Press reported the results in June when they appeared in The Lancet, a medical journal. The study is now being reported in the September issue of the journal Contraception.

The analysis, directed by Dr. Valerie Beral of Oxford University, combined data from 54 studies in 25 countries. The studies included 53,297 women with breast cancer and 100,239 women who hadn't been diagnosed with the disease.

Dr. Carolyn Westhoff of Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Centre in New York, who wrote an editorial accompanying the Contraception paper, said the elevated rate in current and recent users of birth control pills does not mean the pills cause breast cancer.

"Cancer is a disease that develops over many years. If the pill actually caused cancer, you would see a delayed effect, not an immediate one," Westhoff said in a statement.

BJP accuses Gowda of playing foul

NEW DELHI, Sept 25: India's main Hindu Party Tuesday accused Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda of playing foul before a crucial state election campaign, reports AP.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) formally complained to the autonomous Election Commission about Premier HD Deve Gowda's poll pitch in Uttar Pradesh State. BJP spokesman Yashwant Sinha said.

"It is a flagrant violation of the code of conduct," Sinha said of Gowda's alleged promise to the electorate to raise official job quotas to 10 per cent for the poor and increase funds for irrigation.

"The Prime Minister is going merrily ahead with more open, more flagrant and more willful violations of the code in his campaigning in Uttar Pradesh," India's Election Chief TN Seshan had banned the announcement of populist measures in the run-up to any election, arguing it could sway voters.

Deve Gowda's centrist Janata Dal (People's Party) and the BJP are fighting a bitter contest in the upcoming elections in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous province and a key region of the politically-important northern belt.

Sinha said Deve Gowda's alleged promise to increase funds for irrigation and new canal systems in Uttar Pradesh to nine billion rupees (257 billion dollars) and a pledge to set up 25 new sugar mills were reprehensible.

"This is nothing but a slap in the face of the election commission," Sinha said. The BJP, which formed a short-lived government after the may general elections, calls Deve Gowda a usurper who used the Congress (I) Party to come to power.

Suu Kyi may be accused of political crimes

YANGON, Sept 25: Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi may be accused of political crimes for her outspoken attacks on the military government, state-run newspapers said today, reports Reuters.

"In the not too distant future she will be accused as a political criminal," said a commentary in all three official newspapers.

"This is because her decisions and wrong deeds have led to many events which cannot be redeemed politically."

Myanmar's media is tightly controlled by the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), with has ignored Suu Kyi's repeated calls for dialogue since her release from six years of house arrest in July 1995.

Suu Kyi has also condemned human rights abuses in Myanmar and urged foreign investors to withhold funds until the SLORC agrees to work towards democracy and improve its human rights record.

The newspapers accused Suu Kyi and the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) of using foreign media to attack the government.

The commentary said calls for foreigners not to invest in Myanmar would hurt the Myanmar people, not the government.

"Therefore, it is high time the people realise... that the selfish acts of the National League for Democracy could bring about ill effects," it said.

The National League for Democracy was "neither aware of the prevailing situation nor does it have any experience to rule the country and this is a very dreadful and frightening thing."

DPRK envoy refuses to meet UNSC president UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25: The UN Security Council president said Tuesday that North Korea's UN envoy had refused to meet him to explain an infiltration by a North Korean submarine into South Korea.

To conserve precious farmland

BEIJING, Sept 25: People in the eastern Chinese port city of Ningbo will have to create their dead instead of burying them from next month in a move to conserve precious farmland, Xinhua News Agency said today, reports AFP.

"Ningbo is among the first group of coastal cities in the country that have been opened up to the outside world," the official Chinese news agency said.

"But its outstanding economic achievements are in sharp contrast to its backward traditional funeral and interment customs."

Only 17 per cent of the city's dead are cremated, far below the national average, it said.

From next month, burials will not be allowed and the production and sale of coffins banned.