

BRIEFLY



Actress Jenny McCarthy, shown in this March 24, 1997 file photo, doesn't regret the career moves she's made, but don't expect her to pose in Playboy again or return to her role as the clownish sidekick on MTV's "Singled Out." McCarthy hopes her new NBC sitcom, "Uenny," will show people that she's more than a pretty face. "This is where I wanted to get to," she said in Wednesday's Daily News.

— AP/UNB photo

Strong typhoon approaches Japan: A strong typhoon, packing winds of up to 144 kilometres per hour (89 miles), was heading toward Japan's eastern Pacific coast Thursday morning, AP reports from Tokyo.

Typhoon David, the 20th of the season, was about 950 kilometres (589 miles), south-southeast of Tokyo, as of 10:00 am (01:00 GMT), the Meteorological Agency said. It was moving northwest at a speed of 20 kilometres (12 miles) per hour, and was expected to hit Japan and other eastern coastal areas by Friday morning, the agency said.

748 die of cholera in Tanzania in 97: A total of 762 people have died of cholera and meningitis in various parts of Tanzania since January, Xinhua says from Dar es Salaam.

Among them 748 of the deaths were caused by cholera out of 4661 people who contracted the disease, principal secretary in the Ministry of Health Ray Mrope said here Wednesday. Besides, nineteen people were killed out of 136 who had been attacked by meningitis, he added.

Floods claim 14 in Thailand: Flooding in northeastern Thailand has killed at least 14 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless, government officials said yesterday, Reuters reports from Bangkok.

A statement issued by the civil defence centre in Bangkok said 14 people had died during several days of flooding in four northeastern provinces when the Mekong river overflowed following heavy monsoon rain last week. Flood waters still covering large areas on the banks of the river had begun to recede and the water level in the river had dropped to 8.30 metres from 10.4 metres by Wednesday afternoon, the statement said.

Strong quake hits Indonesia: An earthquake measuring 5.8 on the Richter Scale has hit northern Indonesia, the Hong Kong Observatory said yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The epicentre of the quake, which struck late Wednesday, was in the Molucca sea, some 200 kilometres (120 miles) east-northeast of the Sulawesi island city of Manado. It hit at 1456 GMT Wednesday, the observatory said in a statement and earthquake measuring 5.0 on the Richter Scale can cause considerable damage.

Noted comedian Skelton dies in US: Comedian Red Skelton, whose career spanned 20 years from vaudeville to television, died Wednesday after a long illness at a hospital in Palm Springs, California. He was 84, AFP says from Los Angeles.

The man who fashioned himself as a loveable down and out clown died at Eisenhower Medical Centre in Rancho Mirage. The family asked that the nature of his illness not be disclosed, a hospital spokesman said. Comedian Milton Berle lamented the passing of his close personal friend and an entertainment icon. "The world has lost a gem, and icon, and original — Red Skelton," Berle to CNN about Skelton who did radio, vaudeville and starred in the early days of television. "I lost a very, very close friend... he did it all and he did it great."

Russia won't return Kuril Islands: President Boris Yeltsin said Thursday he won't relinquish control of the Kuril Islands, captured from Japan more than 50 years ago, and a solution to the dispute will have to be worked out in the next century, AP reports from Moscow.

"We cannot give the islands back. (Russian) society would not understand this," Yeltsin said Thursday according to the ITAR-Tass news agency. "It is up to new generations in the 21st century to resolve the problem of the Kuril Islands," Yeltsin said during a visit to Oryol, about 400 kilometres (250 miles) southwest of Moscow.

International
Clinton rejects ban on land mines

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18: Stirring worldwide criticism, President Bill Clinton rejected a ban on land mines that was endorsed by 89 countries. He said the accord would jeopardise "the safety and security of our men in uniform," reports AP.

Bristling at suggestions that the United States was blocking a global ban, the president said Wednesday that he was willing to bless a limited prohibition, but added, "there is a line that I simply cannot cross."

"No one should expect our people to expose our armed forces to unacceptable risks," he said.

Clinton announced his decision shortly after representatives of the 89 nations rejected US demands for changes and accepted the text of a land mine treaty. Representatives of an additional 20 countries were in Oslo, Norway, for the talks as observers, but without voting rights.

The text calls for a total ban on production, export and use of anti-personnel mines. The countries are expected to formally accept the draft text Thursday, and supporters hope the actual treaty will be signed in Ottawa in December.

Land mines kill or maim more than 25,000 people every year.

Without US support it will be difficult to incorporate other key countries — such as Russia, China and India — that are not a part of the treaty process.

Still, Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said, "we were not prepared to pay any price" for Washington's approval. He spearheaded the push for a ban.

Jan Egeland, deputy Norwegian foreign minister,

predicted that Clinton will support the treaty. "I believe international forces in the United States will be tremendous," he said.

US Sen. Patrick Leahy, one of the Senate's leading proponents of a land mine ban, criticized Clinton's decision. "US policy on land mines has largely arisen from Congress, not the White House, and we will move forward with our legislation to ban anti-personnel land mines," Leahy said.

Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Jesse Helms wrote Clinton to say he "wholeheartedly concurs" with the president's decision Wednesday but criticised him for sending negotiators to Oslo in the first place.

Both the Senate and House have passed resolutions or sent letters urging Clinton to provide more leadership on the land mine issue.

Clinton telephoned allies this week in a failed bid to include a nine-year delay in implementing the agreement, exemptions for certain land mines and the right for any nation under attack to withdraw from the pact.

Flanked by his foreign policy team, Clinton told reporters that a total ban would leave 37,000 US troops in South Korea vulnerable to an attack from the north.

Explosives that are deployed with anti-tank mines are banned under the accord and the United States considers them critical to prevent tampering with anti-tank mines and protect against an armored assault. Conventional land mines would slow down a massive advance of troops, Clinton said.

Japan, Poland and Australia have supported all or parts of the US view



President Clinton speaks at the White House Wednesday where he spoke about land mines. Refusing to bend to global pressure, the president rejected a draft treaty that would create an immediate and total ban on anti-personnel mines, saying the accord would endanger US troops.

— AP/UNB photo

UK won't help
seize assets
of Benazir

LONDON, Sept. 18: The British government has told Pakistan it will not help seize assets allegedly held here by former Pakistan premier Benazir Bhutto and her family, a press report said today, reports AFP.

The Financial Times said the foreign office, acting on legal advice, has told the Pakistan government it cannot officially sanction the freezing of bank accounts or properties linked to the Bhutto family because there is no bilateral agreement covering mutual assistance in crime investigations.

25 feared dead
as bus plunges
into sea in India

RAMESWARAM, Sept. 18: More than 25 passengers were feared killed when the state government bus in which they were travelling shot off the Pamban bridge and fell into the sea last night, police said, reports PTI.

According to eyewitnesses, the bus climbed a half-a-foot high platform and smashed the concrete railings before falling into the sea. The driver apparently lost control of the vehicle at the middle portion of the bridge where the wind velocity normally is very high, they added.

Police said the bus from Ramanathapuram was not crowded as it was a night service and expressed the fear that more than 25 passengers would have died. They said three of the passengers had been rescued but rescue operations had been hampered by the heavy wind and pitch darkness.

They said the bus could not be seen as it had plunged into an area where the water was deep and currents heavy.

US blasts SLORC
for refusing to
talk to opposition

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18: A senior US official criticised the military regime in Myanmar Wednesday for refusing again to talk to the leader of movement to bring democracy to the country, reports AP.

Testifying before the House International Relations Committee, John Shattuck, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, said the US goal in Myanmar "is to start a genuine dialogue between the SLORC and the democratic opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi and with representatives of ethnic minorities."

Indo-Pak talks end without any progress

NEW DELHI, Sept. 18: Indian and Pakistani diplomats ended three days of talks Thursday aimed at ending half a century of hostility, but no progress was reported beyond an agreement to carry on the negotiations, reports AP.

"Further consideration was required," said Talmiz Ahmed, the Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman after the third round of negotiations between the two South Asian rivals ended in New Delhi.

The two sides were still trying to create what they called "mechanisms" to carry forward the dialogue to bring peace along a border over which three wars have been fought since the two nations became independent in 1947.

Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Shamshad Ahmed, obliquely apologised for the lack of progress, although he did not blame India.

"Thank you for your remarkable patience with us," Shamshad Ahmed told dozens of reporters and television crew waiting outside the conference hall.

The media interest was an indication of the expectation that the world had from the negotiators of the two nations, Shamshad Ahmed said.

"We were able to understand each other's position in a better manner," he said.

Despite a meeting in May between the prime ministers of the two nations to revive a dialogue that had been stalled for three years, diplomats have not yet been able to begin discussing substantive issues such as the dispute over Kashmir.

The talks could be accelerated after next week's meeting

between Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral of India and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan in New York when the leaders travel for the UN General Assembly meeting.

"We are clear in our mind that the serious dialogue should continue," said K Raghunath, India's Foreign Secretary, who led the peace talks.

The talks had seemed in danger of collapsing last month when the neighbours exchanged artillery and mortar fire across their border. Both nations also expelled non-diplomatic staff from the other's embassies over the last few weeks, accusing them of espionage.

"Despite an air of uncertainty that preceded our departure," the Pakistani side travelled to New Delhi to demonstrate its commitment to the peace process, Foreign Secretary Ahmed said.

But little progress can be expected until the two countries begin talking about the dispute over the northern state of Kashmir, which is divided between the two nations. India accuses Pakistan of training and arming the rebels in Kashmir.

14 countries urge UNGA to
consider Taiwan's readmission

UNITED NATIONS, Sept. 18:

Facing certain defeat, 14 small African Latin and island states asked the General Assembly on Wednesday to consider readmitting Taiwan to the United Nations, reports AP.

It was the fifth straight year that Taiwan's allies in the developing world have sought to place the issue of the Taipei government's eventual readmission on the agenda of the 185-member General Assembly.

The General Assembly opened its 52nd session Tuesday. The committee was expected to vote on the proposal later Wednesday.

China strongly opposes representation for Taiwan, which it considers a renegade province. As a permanent member of the Security Council, the Beijing government wields considerable influence within the world organization.

During a debate in the General Assembly's general committee, the ambassador from the Solomon Islands, Rex Horoi, said the refusal to consider admitting Taiwan represented an "ideological excess of the Cold War."

He also said refusal to discuss the issue denied "a vibrant democracy of 21.5 million people's right to participate in the United Nations."

He said Taiwanese participation in the United Nations "would increase the opportunity for interaction with representatives of the People's Republic of China and provide 'an important opening to reunification negotiations.'"

Other calling for adding Taiwan to the agenda included Burkina Faso, Chad, Dominica El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent

Fresh fighting erupts
in Afghanistan

KABUL, Sept. 18: The United Nations has delayed an evacuation of its staff from the opposition stronghold of Mazar-e-Sharif after fighting erupted again near the airport, reports AP.

Two UN planes were waiting in Pakistan to withdraw 13 UN staff members and other aid workers from the battered northern city, which was threatened by the Taliban religious army last week.

UN officials had hoped to fly into the Mazar-e-Sharif on Wednesday, but fighting broke out along a road about 20 miles (35 kms) away. Shelling could be heard from the city, and the Taliban were believed to be within firing range of the airport.

Mazar-e-Sharif is the largest city in northern Afghanistan and the headquarters of an alliance opposed to the Taliban.

In fighting last week, the Taliban briefly seized the airport but were driven back over several days. Their forces bombed and shelled Mazar-e-Sharif, but more damage was caused by renegade soldiers inside the city who seized on the chaos to loot aid offices and homes, carrying off computers, carpets and even generators.

Losses could run into the millions of dollars, said Sarah Russell, spokeswoman for the UN Development Program for Afghanistan.

"It was completely random," she said by phone from Islamabad, Pakistan. "People from the town took advantage of the mayhem."

Both roads into the city are at least partially blocked, making the airport the only way out. But UN officials said they still did not feel comfortable flying planes in with the fighting.

The earliest the flights could begin is Thursday, Russell said. The Red Cross also plans to fly some staff out, but that evacuation may not get under way for another three days.

The Taliban control the southern two-thirds of Afghanistan, where they have imposed a strict brand of Islam that has stanchied endemic corruption in many regions but has barred most women from working and deprived girls of even basic education.

Magnetic field
around Mars
detected

PASADENA, California, Sept. 18: Scientists have detected a magnetic field around Mars that could help answer key questions about whether life ever existed on the red planet, US Space officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

The magnetic field was discovered by Mars Global Surveyor, a small robotic craft orbiting Mars since September 11.

Vice President Al Gore hailed the discovery as proof that surveyor, launched 10 months ago, was well worth its dollar 148 million price tag.

"Mars Global Surveyor has been in orbit for only a few days, yet it already has returned an important discovery about the red planet," he said.

"This is another example of how NASA's commitment to faster, better, cheaper Mars exploration that began with Mars Pathfinder is going to help answer many fundamental questions about the history and environment of our neighbouring planet."

Queen to attend memorial
concert for Diana

LONDON, Sept. 17: Queen Elizabeth II will attend a memorial concert for Princess Diana in November, for the benefit of a favourite charity of the princess, reports AP.

Buckingham Palace said organisers of the Nov. 12 Mozart concert, which Diana was to have attended, has asked the queen to attend, "and Her Majesty is delighted to do so."

The Royal Academy of Music's Symphonic and chorus, conducted by Sir Colin Davis, will perform at Royal Festival Hall in London for the benefit of the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children and the Royal Academy of Music's 175th Anniversary.

Diana was president of the hospital at the time of her death Aug. 31 after a Paris car crash. She was president of the Royal Academy of Music from March 1985 to July 1996, the month before her divorce from Prince Charles became final.

At the time, Diana gave up her patronage of 100 charities and retained a half-dozen.

The palace said Wednesday that members of the royal family had, during the past year, taken up 94 of the charities that Diana had relinquished.

No decision has yet been made on possible future royal patronage of five of Diana's six official charities — the National Aids Trust, the Leprosy Mission, Centrepoint (homeless youngsters), London's Royal Marsden Hospital, and the English National Ballet.

The queen is already patron of the Great Ormond Street Hospital, of which the princess was president.

Ukraine FM
elected UNGA
President

At the opening of the 52nd session of the United Nations General Assembly held on Tuesday at UN Headquarters in New York, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Hennadiy Udoenko was elected the President of the 52nd session, says a press release.

Prior to being assigned to the post of Foreign Minister, he was Ukraine's Ambassador to Poland from 1992 to 1994. He also holds the diplomatic rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

One killed as Hezbollah
attacks Israeli troops

MARJAYOUN, Lebanon, Sept. 18: Guerrillas on Thursday attacked the Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon, killing one Israeli soldier and provoking an Israeli air strike and artillery bombardment, Lebanese security officials said, reports AP.

The bombardment of Lebanese villages facing the zone injured five civilians, one seriously, the officials said.

In a second retaliation, two Israeli jets fired two missiles at suspected positions of the Iranian-backed guerrilla movement Hezbollah. There was no immediate report of casualties.

The exchange began when Hezbollah militants fired rockets and mortars at a string of positions of the Israeli army and its allied South Lebanon Army militia in the occupied zone, killing one Israeli soldier

and wounding an off-duty militiaman, the officials said.

SLA artillery and Israeli tanks retaliated by firing dozens of shells at settlements and suspected Hezbollah hide-outs facing the zone, said the Lebanese officials, who spoke under customary rules of anonymity.

Hezbollah struck again, wounding three more Israeli troops in Rihan, the village six miles (10 kilometers) north of here where the Israeli soldier was killed earlier, said the officials in Marjayoun, the main town in the occupied zone.

The officials said the Israeli guns fired at least 10 flechette shells on the town of Nabatiyeh, 37 miles (60 kilometers) south of the Lebanese capital, Beirut. The shells, which scatter metal darts on impact, are banned by an international convention on warfare.

Settlers seek expansion in disputed areas of Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, Sept. 18: The move by Jewish settlers into an Arab neighbourhood in east Jerusalem this week is part of a gradual — and potentially explosive — campaign by right-wing Jewish groups to expand their presence in disputed areas of the holy city, reports AP.

The goal is to prevent Jerusalem from being redivided and block Palestinians from setting up a capital in the eastern sector of the city, which Israel captured from Jordan in the 1967 Mideast war.

Jewish settlers, who have bought up properties in several Arab areas in recent years, touched off a crisis with Palestinians this week when 11 settlers moved into two houses in the Ras al-Amud neighbourhood that his home to 11,000 Palestinians.

As attention was focused on the Ras al-Amud dispute, the Supreme Court handed Jewish settlers a victory in another part of east Jerusalem on Wednesday by allowing the takeover of an Arab home in the Silwan neighbourhood.

"I was born here. All my seven children were born in this house," said Fatima Karain, 50, a mother of seven who had tried to reclaim her 40 square metre (430 square feet) second floor apartment, seized by settlers in 1991.

"This is a sheer injustice," said this house east Jerusalem with Jewish neighbourhoods to prevent redivision of the city, where 422,000 Jews and 180,000 Palestinians live.

According to Danny Seidemann of the leftist Israeli group Ir Shalem, Jews own 51

homes in the Muslim quarter of the walled Old City, about a dozen in Silwan, and several others elsewhere. More projects are planned as settlers target Arab neighbourhoods.

US millionaire Irving Moskowitz, who financed the purchase of the two houses in Ras al-Amud, also has plans to build a Jewish housing project in the neighbourhood.

According to the Israeli daily Maariv, Moskowitz has also bought large tracts of land in nearby Abu Dis financed homes in the Muslim quarter of the Old City, and owns buildings in Silwan.

He also bought a defunct Arab hotel in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, which he plans to renovate and reopen, Maariv said.

Ras al-Amud is particularly important to the future of the city, said Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon — a settler patron in the government.

He said Palestinians wanted to set up their capital in a corridor linking the Arab village of Abu Dis on the outskirts of the city, with the Temple Mount in the heart of the Old City.

He contended that the Mount of Olives area, including Ras al-Amud, is the only route for that corridor.

"An open corridor in which there is no Israeli presence is in my view a great danger," said Sharon.

Sharon and the settlers contend Jews should be allowed to live anywhere they wish and that the houses were bought legally.

Palestinians strongly oppose selling homes in Arab neighbourhoods to Jews. They fear the settler presence will become an argument for permanent Israeli control and dispossession of Palestinians.

According to Shikret, the settlers use subterfuge, sending collaborators or underworld figures to purchase property from Arabs. Some deals are concluded in secret, and "we only know about them when we see settlers inside the properties," he said.

In the case of Mrs. Karain's former residence in Silwan, the settlers based their claim on a 1994 Israeli court ruling defining it as "absentee property."

As a girl, she lived in the house with her grandmother,

while her father, the formal owner, lived separately in the Jordanian capital of Amman.

When Israel seized east Jerusalem from Jordan, Mrs. Karain's father was suddenly in a different country and potentially, an absentee.

The settlers moved into the home after buying the downstairs apartment from the Arab owner in 1991.

About a week later, an Israeli court ordered both sides out of the contested apartment while legal proceedings began. The Supreme Court decision Wednesday upheld the 1994 ruling.

All these years, I have been waiting for good news, to come back to my house," she fumed. "We are dealing with crazy people."

Korean peace talks resume

NEW YORK, Sept. 18: After an unprecedented move to combat food shortages in North Korea, the United States joins delegations from three other countries Thursday to try to arrange a conference to bring lasting peace to the divided Korean peninsula, reports AP.

Officials from the United States, China, North Korea and South Korea tentatively agreed last month to hold a conference in Geneva, Switzerland, to negotiate a peace agreement to replace the 1953 armistice which halted fighting in the Korean War.

But the four delegations could not agree on the shape of the agenda after North Korea insisted that the conference discuss the withdrawal of the 37,000 American troops from South Korea.

North Korea also insisted

that the conference discuss a peace treaty with the United States that excludes South Korea. Facing deadlock, the delegations agreed to adjourn and resume the talks Thursday at Columbia University.

The United States and South Korea have insisted that the talks not include the issue of food aid to North Korea. A series of recent harvests and aid of foreign currency have led to a severe food shortage in North Korea.

But Asian diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, believe the North is using the on-going talks to press for food aid to stave off famine.

On Wednesday, US officials announced that the United States would send a team of experts to North Korea to assess the country's grave food situation.