

BRIEFLY



A girl, holding a Russian flag, dances in front of a float during festivities to honour Russian National Flag Day outside the Kremlin in Moscow, Saturday. — AP/UNB photo

King Hussein leaves hospital:

Jordan's King Hussein has temporarily left a Minnesota hospital where he is having cancer treatment to spend a long weekend in Washington, his wife Queen Noor said in an interview aired Saturday, AFP says from Washington.

Queen Noor, a guest on the Larry King Show taped on Friday said King Hussein had flown in his private jet to the US capital for four days respite from chemotherapy which the king is undergoing at the Mayo Clinic.

New Nigerian FM named:

Nigeria's military leader General Abdul Salam Abubakar Saturday named a former ambassador to Washington as the country's new foreign minister and a respected banker as its new minister of finance, AFP says from Abuja.

Abubakar appointed ambassador IC Olesimeka to the top post as foreign minister and Ismaila Usman, former deputy governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, to head the finance ministry.

Mild tremor shakes Manila:

A mild earthquake shook wide areas of the main island of Luzon, including the metropolitan Manila area, Sunday but there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, official said, AP reports from Manila.

Government seismologists said they were still determining the cause and epicentre of the tremor, which struck the capital and provinces as far away as 100-km at 1:36 pm (0536 GMT).

Road mishap claims 7 in Taiwan:

A van carrying tourists from Taiwan collided with a truck Saturday in northern China, killing the van driver and six Taiwanese, police said yesterday, AP reports from Beijing.

One person was seriously injured, and seven other people suffered less serious injuries and were taken to a local hospital, said a Yumen Traffic Police officer who gave only his surname, Ren.

Robert Kennedy's son gets married:

Surrounded by family members dressed in morning suits and white flowered dresses, the youngest son of the late Robert F. Kennedy married a school teacher Saturday, AP says from Massachusetts.

Douglas Kennedy, a reporter for Fox News in New York City, married Molly Stark, a Vermont native who now teaches autistic children at St Mary's Catholic Church in New York's Brooklyn borough.

Yeltsin returns to work today:

President Boris Yeltsin will return to work in his Kremlin office on Monday after a five-week vacation that has given him little rest, Russian news agencies reported yesterday, AP says from Moscow.

Gloomy weather marred the first days of the president's holiday, and the country's rolling financial crisis deepened by the day. Yeltsin interrupted his break last weekend to discuss the government's efforts to cope with the crisis with Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko, international financial envoy Anatoly Chubais and other economic policy makers.

Gaddafi meets Chadian president:

Muammar Gaddafi met with Chadian President Idriss Deby who arrived in Tripoli Saturday to inquire about the Libyan leader's health, Libyan television reported, AFP says from Tripoli. The Chadian president arrived by air at Tripoli airport coming "directly from N'djamena," the report said without detailing whether Deby had violated the UN embargo on air travel to Libya.

Protima Bedi's dead body found:

Rescue workers found the body of Protima Gauri Bedi, a famous Indian classical dancer, who died along with other pilgrims in the landslide, AP reports from Lucknow. Her body will be handed over to her relatives Sunday, Press Trust of India quoted police officer Gautam Kaul as saying.

20 Indians die after taking liquor:

Twenty people died after consuming bottle liquor in a village in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi. Sixteen others were in hospital. Doctors said the condition of them was critical. Most victims were poor villagers. Local authorities suspended 14 policemen in the area for allowing the sale of moonshine.

Ecuador troops begin leaving Peru:

Ecuadorian troops began to withdraw Saturday from a disputed region where it fought a brief war with neighbouring Peru in 1995, easing a tense border standoff, Peru's Foreign Ministry said, AP reports from Lima.

"Ecuadorian troops have begun to withdraw from the western slope of the Cordillera del Condor. The withdrawal should be concluded in seven days," a Foreign Ministry news release said. Peru charged two weeks ago that 300 Ecuadorian troops had infiltrated its territory and were "face-to-face" with Peruvian troops in a remote stretch of mountainous jungle, 900-km north of Lima.



Head of Iran's Expediency Council Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, left, receiving French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, right, Saturday in Tehran. Vedrine arrived in Tehran Friday for a 2-day official visit. — AP/UNB photo

International

US missile attacks

UNSC meets today to discuss Sudanese protest

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 23: The UN Security Council meets behind closed doors Monday to discuss a Sudanese protest against US missile strikes, and to weigh a response in the Iraq crisis, reports AFP.

The 15 member states are to discuss Sudan's complaint following Thursday's US missile strikes against a Khartoum pharmaceuticals factory which according to Washington manufactured a precursor chemical used to make VX nerve gas.

The Sudanese government says the plant was only used to produce medicine.

Sudan wrote to the council on Friday demanding an urgent meeting and calling for a fact-finding mission to verify the US claims. The Sudanese stand is backed by the UN Arab group.

British and Jordanian engineers involved in the Al-Shifaa plant's construction said on Saturday that the factory did

not lend itself to chemical weapons production.

Sudanese President Omar El-Beshir said on Saturday that Khartoum was not seeking a UN condemnation of Washington, noting that the United States holds veto power as permanent member.

In a letter to the Security Council Thursday, outgoing US ambassador Bill Richardson said that the attacks on facilities linked to the organisation of exiled Saudi national Osama Bin Laden were in self-defence.

The missile strikes also caused "moderate to severe" damage at six terrorist camps in Afghanistan. White House spokesman Michael McCurry said.

They were ordered in retaliation for the August 7 twin bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam which killed 257 people, including 12 Americans.

Because of delays in translating the Sudanese letter from Arabic, diplomats said that it was not known whether the council would react on Monday to the Sudanese request for a fact-finding mission.

The Security Council has not been seized with a complaint from the Taliban over the Afghanistan strikes. The Islamic militia, who control the territory where the alleged bases are located, are not officially recognised by the United Nations.

Also Monday, the council is to be briefed by UN special envoy Prakash Shah following his failure to persuade Iraq to reverse a decision suspending cooperation with UN weapons inspectors.

Before leaving Baghdad on Wednesday, Shah said that "there is no change in the Iraqi decision but they want to continue cooperation with the UN

for ending the sanctions."

But he said that the Iraqi government, which announced a freeze on cooperation with UN arms inspectors on August 5, was prepared to continue cooperating with long-term monitoring operations and with the UN humanitarian aid agencies in Iraq.

On Thursday, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz rebuffed an attempt by UN special commission chairman Richard Butler, acting on the council's request, to resume the disarmament dialogue broken off by Baghdad.

According to western diplomats, a US proposal to suspend the regular two-monthly council sanctions review could be discussed by the council in the coming days in a bid to press Iraq to comply with the disarmament requirements.



Members of the United Nations mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan carry the casket of Italian Lt Col Carmine Calo upon its arrival at Islamabad from Kabul, Afghanistan Saturday. Calo, said UN officials, was deliberately targeted in Kabul after US cruise missiles hit Afghanistan Thursday. — AP/UNB photo

Bin Laden calls for Jihad against US

WASHINGTON, Aug 23: Saudi Millionaire Osama Bin Laden called on Muslims around the world to take up arms against the United States after US strikes on suspected terrorist sites in Afghanistan and Sudan, his spokesman told Knight Ridder News Service, reports AP.

Bin Laden made the call for a "Jihad" or holy war because, "The attack against the sovereignty of Sudan and Afghanistan is an attack against the entire Islamic nation," his spokesman Sheikh Omar Barki told the news service Friday from London.

Barkri added that the Saudi renegade had issued anti-American communiques that also called for attacks on Arab nations with close ties to Washington and warned Muslims to stay away from US embassies and installations.

Washington launched missiles Thursday on Bin Laden's suspected base in Afghanistan and a chemical factory in Khartoum allegedly connected with him after signalling the Saudi exile as the mastermind behind the twin bombings on US embassies in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam August 7.

The spokesman reiterated that Bin Laden denied responsibility for the embassy attacks which killed more than 250 people, including 12 Americans.

He endorsed it but he did not order it. He is not a coward. If he had ordered this, the would take responsibility for it, the spokesman said.

Barkri said Bin Laden had no connection with the Islamic Army for Liberating the Holy

Sites the group that has claimed responsibility for the embassy bombings, "this is a new group... it is not a Bin Laden organisation," Barkri said.

But he did acknowledge that Bin Laden's organisation was responsible for "bombing against American forces in Saudi Arabia."

"We admit that," he said without giving details.

In November 1995 a car bomb ripped through a Saudi national guard building in Riyadh, killing five American advisers and two Indians.

On June 25, 1996, a truck

bomb blasted through the Khor Towers military complex near Dahrn, killing 19 US soldiers and wounding 386.

The spokesman said Bin Laden had expected an attack and was nowhere near the targets in Afghanistan when the missiles flew.

"For the past four weeks he was on the border near Pakistan," Barkri said adding that the multimillionaire would now begin moving from country to country to evade detection. "He will continue his struggle until the liberation of Islamic land."

Soldiers fight to save soggy dikes as Yangtze crests

BEIJING, Aug 23: The Yangtze River crested on Sunday in the city of Jiujiang, pounding soggy dikes where 300,000 soldiers and armed police scrambled to patch cracks, reports AP.

Flood waters dropped only slightly at swollen Dongting Lake on the Yangtze and rose at Jiujiang and other areas downstream from the major industrial centre of Wuhan, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported.

Meanwhile, the river was rising upstream as well as a result of heavy rains, meaning more flood problems soon downstream. Officials warned that dikes protecting cities were softening and cracking after weeks of water pressure.

The heavily populated

Yangtze River basin has been hardest hit in China's worst flood season in 44 years. At least 2,000 people have died nationwide, but the toll is expected to rise.

The government, reluctant to divulge bad news, has not updated the tallies in more than two weeks. Since then, floods in the northeast have washed out villages and threatened major industrial centres and the country's main oil field.

Flooding along the Yangtze has affected 240 million people, about one-fifth of China's population, and caused losses of at least 200 billion yuan (24 billion dollars), according to government estimates.

In Heilongjiang province, China's northeastern corner, 1.5 million people have been flooded out, Xinhua reported.

Patten urges world to get tough with China

HONG KONG, Aug 23: The territory's last colonial governor is urging the world to take a much tougher approach toward China, which he says in his controversial book is becoming a threat to world peace, a newspaper reported Sunday, reports AP.

In an exclusive review of Chris Patten's soon-to-be-released book, Sunday Morning Post said Patten criticises world leaders, with the exception of a few US policymakers, as too soft on Beijing.

Patten describes China as being able to "bully its way around the region as long as it is allowed to do so," and the world too obsessed with a vast Chinese market that "does not matter very much to many of us," is turning a blind eye to China's human rights records, the Post said.

The Chinese government may still be able to terrify its own people when necessary. But I see no reason why the rest of us should wake up in a Sino-sweat in the middle of the night," Patten writes in "East and West," which goes on sale Sept. 7, the Post reported.

Patten's book had been dropped by publisher HarperCollins, run by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, allegedly for fear of upsetting Beijing. He later made a deal for his book with publishing house Macmillan.

The former governor had a strained relationship with the Chinese communist leadership for much of his five years as governor. Beijing often criticised him.

To protest the democratic reforms he engineered without China's consent, Beijing dismantled the elected pre-handover legislature and replaced it with a mostly handpicked interim body when it regained Hong Kong. A new legislature was elected in May.

Although some Hong Kong people blamed Patten for staking the territory's future for his reforms, recent polls showed most respondents said he was a far-better leader than the Beijing-appointed post-handover chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa.

In his new book, Patten also criticises US President Bill Clinton for his warming relations with China, the Post said.

12th day of stand-off

Doctors barred from visiting Suu Kyi

YANGON, Aug 23: Myanmar's military government has barred doctors from visiting opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who is suffering from kidney problems, her political party said Sunday, reports AP.

Suu Kyi has entered the 12th day of her nonviolent protest on a rural road against the military restricting her from travelling outside Yangon. She and three colleagues are camped inside a van 32 kilometres west of the capital.

The personal physicians of Aung San Suu Kyi were not allowed to see her Saturday, said Tin Oo, the vice chairman of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

"They waited for a response from the authorities, but they did not get any. The authorities did not give any reason. We are trying to get permission today," Tin Oo, a former general, defence minister and Buddhist monk, said.

Suu Kyi's doctors were permitted to visit her twice earlier in the week. They said after examining her the first time that

she was suffering from low blood pressure and some kidney problems. On Friday, they said her blood pressure had improved.

Suu Kyi has offered to end her protest if the government releases from prison members of her party elected to parliament and all those arrested after May this year.

No detained NLD members have been freed yet, Tin Oo said Sunday.

The NLD set Aug 21 as a deadline for the military to convene the parliament elected in 1990. The NLD won 82 per cent of the seats in the assembly, but the military, which has ruled Myanmar, also known as Burma, since 1962, ignored the result.

After the deadline passed, the NLD announced it would call a parliament session on its own, setting up a serious confrontation with the government.

The military responded with mass arrests of NLD members on previous occasion the party attempted to hold meetings.

Saddam slates 'insulting' behaviour of UNSCOM

BAGHDAD, Aug 23: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has denounced the "insulting" behaviour of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) for disarming Iraq, the official Iraqi news agency INA reported Saturday, says AFP.

"The UNSCOM inspection teams deliberately carried out their activities on Friday when people rest and Muslims pray," Saddam Hussein said during a recent meeting of the pan-Arab leadership of the Baath Party, the Iraqi branch of which holds power in Baghdad.

Hussein at the same time faulted UN arms experts for working "during national holidays with the aim of provoking and insulting the Iraqi people," INA said.

Baghdad suspended cooperation with UNSCOM and the International Atomic Energy Agency on August 5.

Iraq has demanded modifications in the makeup of UNSCOM which it says is under US dominance, and the lifting of UN sanctions imposed following Baghdad's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Iraqi parliamentary Speaker Saddam Hamadi met here Saturday with his Indian counterpart G M C Balayogi, who assured him of the support of the Indian people in the UN arms inspection crisis, INA said.

During the meeting, Hamadi presented the latest developments in relations between Iraq and the UNSCOM "and the provocative acts of UNSCOM chief Richard Butler, who works at the instigation of the United States to prolong the embargo," INA said.

Balayogi said he stood by the side of Iraq, which has fulfilled its commitments regarding UN resolutions and that the embargo on Iraq should be lifted, the agency said.

The Indian parliament firmly supports the unity of Iraq and its sovereignty and India is disposed to develop relations with Iraq in very area," he said.

Later in the day, Balayogi met with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz, INA said without providing further details.

2 Pakistanis held for killing UN official in Kabul

ISLAMABAD, Aug 23: Two men have been arrested for the killing of an Italian UN official in Kabul and they will be tried by an Islamic court, Taliban chief Mullah Mohammad Omar said Saturday, reports AFP.

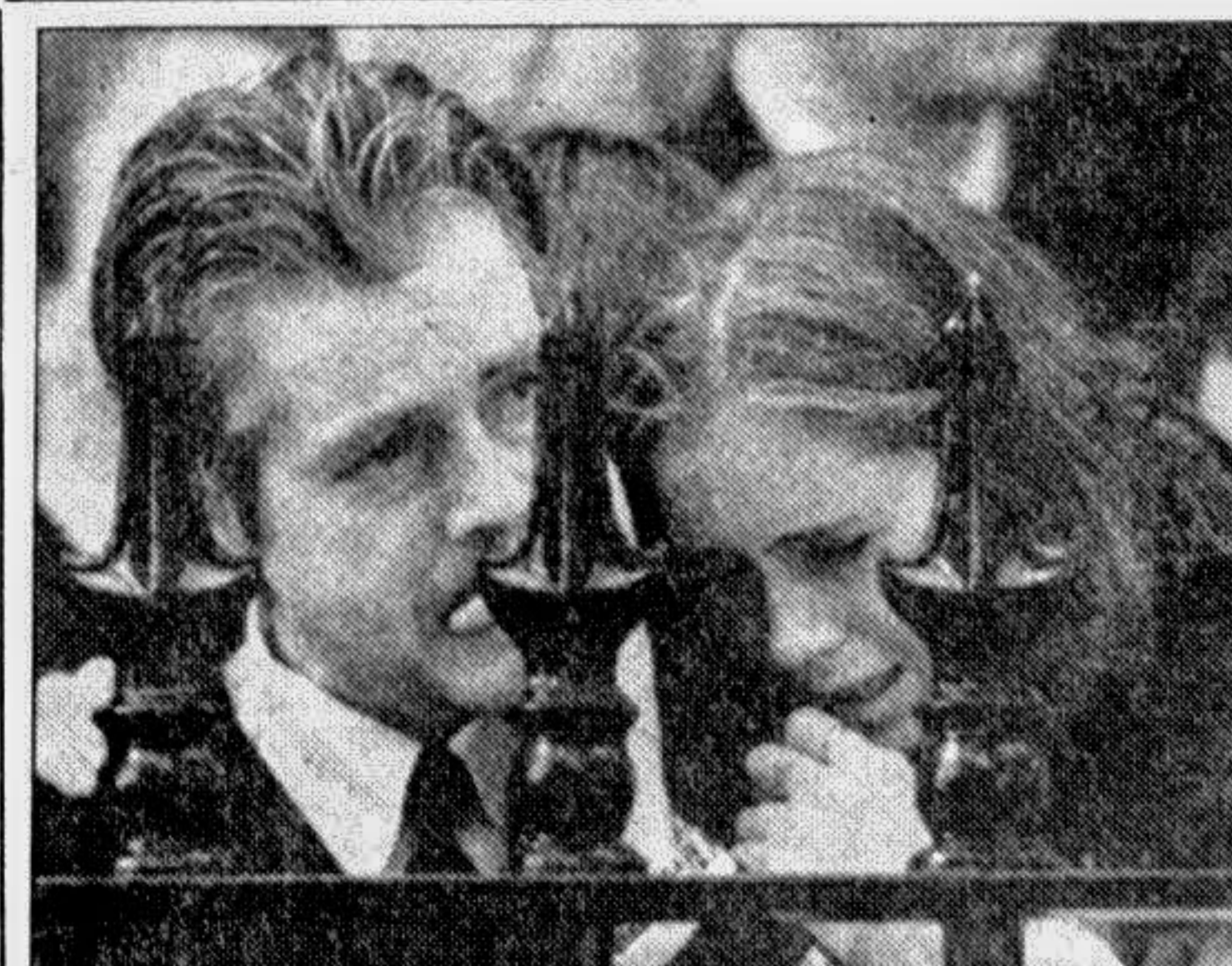
In a statement from his southern Kandahar base, Omar said both men were Pakistanis, the private Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported.

AIP identified them as Haq Nawaz and Muslim and said both will be tried under Islamic Shariah law.

The accused have been transferred to Kandahar and Omar said if the Islamic court passed the death penalty they will be executed, the Pakistan-based agency reported.

Two UN officials working for the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMIA) Eric Lavertu from France and Lieutenant Colonel Carmine Calo from Italy, were attacked while travelling in a vehicle by gunmen Friday.

Calo died of his injuries Saturday, while Lavertu suffered only minor injuries.



Two relatives of an Omagh bomb victim are overcome with emotion as they listen to the service of remembrance behind the railings of the courthouse in Omagh, Saturday. — AP/UNB photo

Clinton pledges to lead all-out fight against terror

MARTHA'S VINEYARD, Massachusetts, Aug 23: President Bill Clinton pledged here Saturday to lead an all-out fight against terror, even as Sudan's President threatened retaliation for US missile attacks in Afghanistan and Sudan, reports AFP.

The president also bore down on Osama Bin Laden who is blamed for the August 7 bombings at US embassies in East Africa that left 257 dead, amid signs that US airports, tourist sites and transport system were tightening security.

Clinton announced Saturday he had signed an order barring

US companies from doing business with groups linked to the wealthy Saudi exile.

"Our efforts against terrorism cannot and will not end with this strike," Clinton, who was vacationing in Massachusetts, said of Thursday's US attacks.

"We have realistic expectations about what a single action can achieve, and we must be prepared for a long battle," he said in his weekly radio address.

A US official acknowledged that the Afghanistan-based alleged terrorist mastermind was wealthy and had a "far-flung empire."

"No one anticipates that this is going to have an enormous disruptive effect immediately," the official said privately. "But the degree in which this hems him in over time, especially if we get the cooperation of allies, could well be significant."

As Clinton's address was broadcast, Sudanese President Omar El Beshir joined Bin Laden in threatening to retaliate for the US missile attacks.

In Khartoum, El-Beshir promised to "retaliate against aggression."

"We are ready to return a blow in double," the leader of Sudan's Islamic regime told an estimated 10,000 people.