

BRIEFLY



South African President Nelson Mandela, left, holds up his Congressional Medal of Honour presented to him by President Bill Clinton during a ceremony at the Capitol Wednesday in Washington. —AP/UNB photo

Mandela begins Canada visit:

South African President Nelson Mandela arrived in Ottawa Wednesday for a two-day state visit, which began officially yesterday, during which he will receive the Order of Canada, AFP reports from Ottawa.

Mandela is the first foreign leader to have been accorded the honour which will be one of three major highlights of his visit.

7 held in UK anti-terrorist drive In an anti-terrorist operation before dawn Wednesday, police arrested seven men in London but would not reveal what they were suspected of doing, AP reports from London.

The British news agency Press Association said it was understood that the operation was aimed at associates of Osama bin Laden, the Saudi dissident who has been linked to the bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Scotland Yard provided few details, but did say the arrests were not thought to be linked with any unsolved terrorist incident.

French PM arrives in Beijing:

French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin arrived in Beijing yesterday to start a three-day official visit to China aimed at cementing political and economic ties, AFP reports from Beijing.

He was met at Beijing Airport by Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yingfan. Paris and Beijing are keen to push forward their "global partnership" concept launched last year by presidents Jacques Chirac and Jiang Zemin.

5 die in Japanese plane crash:

A small plane crashed in a mountainous area in western Japan killing all five people on board, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The Cessna 210 plunged into a mountain near Takatsuki city some 350 km west of Tokyo late Wednesday about 25 minutes after taking off from a nearby airport, a police official said. Police found the wreckage of the plane and recovered the bodies, including the 32-year-old female pilot. All five were qualified pilots from a local aviation club.

3-day rampage thru' Caribbean

Hurricane Georges kills over 110

SANTO DOMINGO, Sept 24: Hurricane Georges killed 70 people in the Dominican Republic and left hundreds missing before sweeping over Cuba and threatening the Florida Keys. In all, more than 110 people were killed in the storm's three-day rampage through the Caribbean, reports AP.

Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernandez, in a televised address to the nation Wednesday night, confirmed the 70 dead and the missing, including 45 who disappeared when a school being used as a shelter washed away Wednesday.

He asked for unity in reconstruction efforts and urged people "to pray and ask the Almighty to help the destiny of our people."

Fernandez said more than half the power grid in the Dominican Republic was destroyed by Georges' 110-mph winds at a cost of \$1.1 billion. Seventy per cent of the country's bridges were damaged or destroyed, and 90 per cent of its banana and other plantations were destroyed, he said.

Georges pounded the Dominican Republic Tuesday after barreling through Puerto Rico. It struck Haiti on Wednesday, where 27 were reported killed, before moving on to Cuba and

menacing southern Florida.

At 11 pm EDT (0300 GMT Wednesday), Georges was centered 60 miles northwest of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and was moving west-northwest at 12 mph. Its winds had significantly slowed to 75 mph, down from 110 mph when the storm swept over Puerto Rico.

The mammoth storm was on a trajectory that could send it crashing into the Florida Keys by late Thursday or early Friday.

Hurricane watches were in effect for the north-western Bahamas and parts of Florida. The Cayman Islands issued tropical storm warnings for Little Cayman and Cayman Brac, and heavy rains were expected in Jamaica.

In Florida, up to 80,000 people were ordered to begin evacuating the exposed Florida Keys on Wednesday. Cars, trucks and sport utility vehicles streamed along the two-lane highway linking the island chain to the Florida mainland.

South Florida was put under a hurricane watch and Gov. Lawton Chiles declared a state of emergency in central and southern Florida, allowing the state to use the National Guard, lift tolls along evacuation routes and purchase emergency supplies.

Major differences remained. Beijing insists that formal talks begin with political discussions about reunification. Taipei wants to start with practical issues such as fishing disputes. By not labeling next month's meeting as talks, the issue may be skirted for the time being.

Koo will then go to Beijing and meet with President Jiang Zemin, Vice Premier Qian Qichen and Chen Yunlin, director of the government's Taiwan Affairs Office — a schedule that shows the importance Chinese leaders attach to the visit.

Koo and Wang, elder statesmen charged with trying to forge relations between the rival governments, have not met since their first talks in Singapore in 1993. Plans were under way for a second meeting in 1995 when China shut down negotiations in anger over what it perceived as Taiwan's drift

International

Nawaz Sharif says

Pakistan to unilaterally adhere to N-test ban treaty

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 24: Pakistan's prime minister said Wednesday his country would unilaterally adhere to the nuclear test ban treaty, but warned that compliance would depend on whether rival India resumed its tests and on the world lifting sanctions imposed after the tests, reports AP.

Nawaz Sharif said Pakistan was ready for adherence before a nuclear conference in September 1999.

"In this regard, we expect that the arbitrary restrictions imposed on Pakistan by multilateral institutions will be speedily removed," Sharif told world leaders at the UN general assembly session.

"We also expect that discriminatory sanctions against Pakistan will be lifted," he said.

First India and then Pakistan carried out nuclear tests last May, drawing international sanctions and calls to sign the test ban treaty.

Sharif warned that Pakistan would comply with a ban on nuclear tests only so long as India did not carry out any more tests.

"If India were to resume nuclear testing, Pakistan will re-

view its position," Sharif said. Pakistan and India are old enemies, having fought three wars, including two over the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir.

Artillery duels across the Kashmir dividing line, which is monitored by the United Nations, routinely break out between the hostile neighbours.

The last major exchange was in late July and early August, when shelling killed more than 100 civilians on both sides of the border.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee met with Sharif earlier Wednesday and afterward said that his country's nuclear policy did not depend on Pakistan.

"Both countries are taking independent decisions. Pakistan is free to decide on the CTBT, but India will decide independently," said Vajpayee. It was unclear whether he knew then about Sharif's decision to sign the treaty.

Vajpayee emerged from the lunch meeting saying "a new chapter in Indo-Pakistan relations is being opened." But he said that referred to trade and economic cooperation.

He told reporters there was no new progress on Kashmir or the nuclear treaty.

"We touched upon several topics, one of which was that cross-border shelling on both sides should be stopped," said Vajpayee, whose meeting with Sharif took place on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session.

Vajpayee said there would be further talks on Kashmir when the foreign secretaries of both sides met in Pakistan for a three-day meeting scheduled to start Oct. 15.

He said he also discussed nuclear non-proliferation with Sharif, but refused to go into details.

The meeting between the two leaders was the second since their nuclear tests.

Vajpayee said the two sides agreed to boost trade, and economic links.

Sharif held a one-on-one meeting at the United Nations on Monday with President Clinton.

India, which exploded its first nuclear device in 1974, has long objected that the CTBT freezes the advantage Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States have gained by decades of testing.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he welcomed Pakistan's decision to sign on to the nuclear treaty.

"The government of Pakistan is to be commended for heeding the concern of the international community," he said in a statement.

Economic sanctions were imposed against both countries after the tests, but India — with its more robust economy — has managed to weather them better than Pakistan, which has been pushed to the brink of economic collapse.

Pakistan's agreement to halt future tests should unblock suspended international loans.

A joint team from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank has been in Pakistan since earlier this month to try to put together a package of credits and loans.

Pakistan has a \$32.1 billion external debt and an acute shortage of foreign currency.

Japan may ease sanctions on Pakistan

NEW YORK, Sept 24: Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura said Wednesday Tokyo may ease sanctions on Pakistan after the country shows readiness to sign a nuclear test ban treaty, reports AP.

"If Pakistan clarifies its stance, we want to ask major countries to cooperate in removing a freeze on loans to Pakistan," Komura told Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, officials said.

Japan, the only country to ever have nuclear weapons used against it, has led anti-nuclear test protests by announcing economic sanctions on both New Delhi and Islamabad after the two countries carried out nuclear tests in May.

German polls

Thousands in eastern states yet undecided

MAGDEBURG, Germany, Sept 24: Three days before Germany's general election, Janet Isberner and thousands of east Germans like her say they are disillusioned with politicians and are not sure how they will vote, reports Reuters.

"They all make these promises and in the end don't do a thing," said Isberner, a native of the eastern city of Magdeburg who relies for her livelihood on temporary state work schemes.

"All I know is that (Helmut Kohl's) Christian Democrats are out of the question and so is the (far-right) German People's Union," she added.

The eastern states are crucial to Kohl's re-election campaign and to the challenge by his Social Democrat (SPD) rival Gerhard Schroeder, largely because pollsters say far more voters there than in the west remain undecided.

First weddings on Mt Everest

HONG KONG, Sept 24: Twenty-two couples from the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou are on their way to Tibet for the first weddings on the world's highest peak Mount Everest, it was reported here today, reports AP.

The couples have divided into two groups with the first leaving on Wednesday for the Himalayan peak, the Beijing-backed Wei Po daily said.

The wedding, organised by the Communist Youth Party in Guangzhou, will be set on a grand camp of the mountain, some 5,200 meters (17,160 feet) above sea-level, the report said, without giving a date.

She said that only family members, relatives and close friends could visit her suburban house. Anwar's political supporter were prohibited from entering the house.

Azizah said the order received at the police headquarters also stated that if she breached the order, she could be detained and charged in court.

The police arrested Anwar on Sunday under the ISA, which allows for indefinite detention without trial, and said he would be charged in court within a week.

Anwar has been accused by police of a series of crimes, including unlawful sex acts, disturbing public order, interfering with police investigations, and leaking state secrets.

He has adamantly denied all the charges against him. He says trouble started when he began questioning Mahathir's policies and autocratic leadership, and became a popular alternative to the prime minister.

Anwar's lawyers, Amnesty International and two local opposition parties have demanded he be brought to court and charged.

Since his arrest a dozen other men, including leaders of the ruling party's youth wing and opposition parties, have been detained under the ISA.

The government has issued numerous reminders that the reform movement's occasional demonstrations are illegal. After police used tear gas and chemically-laced water jets to disperse a crowd chanting "Reform, reform" in front of the courthouse on Monday, there have been no rallies.

On Tuesday, the government issued restrictions blocking foreign news broadcasting agencies from transmitting footage that shows Malaysia in a negative light.

Government facilities will not be allowed to be used for sending negative stories on Malaysia," said Mohamad Rahmat, the information minister. He said, however, that private satellite uplinks could be used by broadcasters. The impact of the new restriction was not immediately clear.

Neither Anwar's family, nor lawyers, have been allowed to see or speak to him since his arrest.



Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, left, and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee shake hands at the beginning of their meeting in New York, Wednesday. — AP/UNB photo

Malaysian police prohibit rallies at Anwar's house

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 24: The wife of Malaysia's detained former deputy prime minister and finance minister Anwar Ibrahim said police had prohibited any meetings and rallies at her house, the official Bernama news agency said today, reports agencies.

It quoted Wan Azizah Wan Ismail as telling reporters after returning from police headquarters, where she went for questioning on Wednesday, that a restriction order was issued under Malaysia's Internal Security Act (ISA).

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Under the compromise, only companies deemed H-1B dependent, those whose workers are comprised of 15 per cent or more visa holders, must certify they are not displacing American workers. Major employers such as Microsoft wouldn't be affected because their percentage of H-1B workers is well below the 15 per cent.

The deal increases penalties for willful violators and gives the Labor Department some authority to initiate investigations on its own. It also requires a \$500 filing fee for each visa application and renewals. The fees would raise more than \$75 million annually to be used for new training and scholarship programmes for US citizens.

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UNSC passes resolution asking Belgrade to end bloodshed in Kosovo

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 24: The UN Security Council (UNSC) on Wednesday warned Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic of possible "further action" unless he takes concrete steps to end bloodshed in Kosovo, reports AP.

The 15 member council adopted Resolution 1199 by 14-0 votes.

China abstained on the ground that the conflict between Serbian forces and separatist ethnic Albanians in the southern Yugoslav province was an internal matter, and warned that the resolution could encourage the separatists.

The resolution calling for ceasefire negotiations and immediate steps to improve the humanitarian situation in the Serbian province, states that the Security Council is acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Chapter VII provides for enforcement measures including military action.

Meanwhile, US President Bill Clinton Wednesday increased pressure on Belgrade following passage of the UN Security Council resolution demanding an end to bloodshed in Kosovo.

Late Wednesday Clinton urged Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to "act immediately to end the conflict between Serbian forces and separatist ethnic Albanians in Kosovo."

In a statement Clinton said the UN resolution "places responsibility squarely on President Milosevic to take the concrete steps necessary to prevent a major humanitarian disaster and restore peace in the region."

The president further said that Washington and its allies "are moving NATO activities from the planning stage to readiness to act."

With more than 250,000 Kosovars displaced from their homes and cold weather coming, Milosevic must act immediately to heed the will of the international community," Clinton said.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in New York suggested that Belgrade had committed "crimes against humanity" in Kosovo.

"We have grave concerns about reports of summary executions and men of military age being singled out and taken away," Albright said in a statement after passage of the UN resolution.

Netanyahu also said the two parties were close to an agreement on the transformation of three per cent of the West Bank territory into a "nature reserve" under Palestinian control.

The four-year-old Palestinian authority now controls totally or partially 60 per cent of the Gaza Strip and 27 per cent of the West Bank.

State Department spokesman James Rubian said Wednesday's meeting had settled no major issues including the scope of Israeli redeployment in the West Bank and the security measures that would follow.

He said Albright planned to meet with Palestinian leader over the weekend in the United States and that she would have additional meetings with Netanyahu in the coming days in New York.

The United States and the Palestinians want the Israeli army to reduce its troops strength by 13 per cent in the West Bank.

quickly act to put an end to corruption, poverty and deforestation.

"I ask our new National Assembly to see to it that the new Royal Government of Cambodia comes to life, as a symbol of national reconciliation... able to make an effort and sacrifices so that our country can rapidly rise out of the state of underdevelopment," he said.

Parliament was to be convened after weeks of tensions between Hun Sen's ruling Cambodian People's Party, which captured a majority in elections held July 26, and the two opposition parties that claimed Hun Sen won the polls through fraud and intimidation.

The opposition threatened to boycott parliament and organised spirited street rallies in the capital of Phnom Penh calling for the Hun Sen's ouster.

Police violently broke up the demonstrations, killing at least four people and injuring or arresting dozens of others. A ban was placed on foreign travel by all opposition legislators.

As the situation threatened to spin out of control, the opposition agreed to end the boycott and attend tripartite talks, which were led by Sihanouk on Tuesday.

Parliament is scheduled to meet in the capital early next week to elect its leadership and to try to form a government.

La Nina losing out to El Nino in the Pacific?

PASADENA, California, Sept 24: There is a terrific battle over versus cold going on in the Pacific Ocean, and La Nina may be losing out to El Nino, reports AP.

The latest information from NASA's Topex-Poseidon satellite show the Pacific Ocean running both hot and cold as the phenomena evolve.

The very, very strong signal we had last winter from El Nino continues to linger, and embedded in that is this La Nina signal that began last May, oceanographer Bill Patzert said Wednesday. "It looks like the El Nino signal remains pretty strong, and the La Nina signal seems to be waning a little bit. But both signals are very, very strong."

El Nino is the phenomenon in which a large mass of warm water across the equator begins to pile up against the west coast of South America. La Nina is essentially the opposite — cold water that exists along the coast of South America extends out to the central Pacific.

Both are linked to changes in global weather patterns. Topex-Poseidon measures sea surface height, an indicator of the ocean's heat content.

Scientists said the new image shows the rapid cooling that occurred in the central tropical Pacific has slowed and the area of cold water known as La Nina has slightly decreased since August.

Rivals Taiwan, China plan breakthrough visit

BEIJING, Sept 24: Rivals Taiwan and China cemented plans Thursday for a mainland visit by a top Taiwanese negotiator that both sides hope will break a three-year stalemate in ties, reports AP.

After a day of talks and a working banquet, negotiators for the estranged rivals agreed by early Thursday that Taiwan's Koo Chen-fu will first travel to Shanghai next month to see his counterpart, Wang Daohan.

Koo will then go to Beijing and meet with President Jiang Zemin, Vice Premier Qian Qichen and Chen Yunlin, director of the government's Taiwan Affairs Office — a schedule that shows the importance Chinese leaders attach to the visit.

Koo and Wang, elder statesmen charged with trying to forge relations between the rival governments, have not met since their first talks in Singapore in 1993. Plans were under way for a second meeting in 1995 when China shut down negotiations in anger over what it perceived as Taiwan's drift

away from the goal of reunification.

In an indication of the sensitivities in bringing the sides together, Koo's Oct. 14-19 trip to China is being characterized as a visit with opportunities to chat — something less than formal talks.

Still, negotiators for both sides appeared satisfied with the results of Wednesday's meetings.

White House, Congressional leaders reach visa compromise

WASHINGTON, Sept 24: The White House and congressional leaders settled long-standing differences Wednesday night over expanding a visa programme to provide high-tech industries with more skilled immigrants, reports AP.

The House will consider legislation as early as Thursday that would set aside 142,500 new visas over the next three years for foreign computer programmers, engineers and other specialists eagerly sought by Silicon Valley and other high-tech employers.

Congressional Republicans and the Clinton administration had skirmished over the visa programme for months. The White House threatened a veto of an earlier version worked out by House and Senate leaders, claiming the measure didn't provide enough protections for American workers.

Both sides expressed satisfaction with Wednesday's agreement, which was hammered out by Senate Judiciary Immigration subcommittee Chairman Spencer Abraham and Gene Sperling, head of the president's National Economic Council.

"I am convinced this legislation is crucial to maintaining American economic competitiveness and to protect American jobs," Abraham said.

Sperling said the deal represents a "good, hard-fought compromise that really addresses the major concerns of the parties involved."

Microsoft's Bill Gates, Intel's Andy Grove and other high-tech executives have been lobbying intensively for an increase in the H-1B visa programme, currently capped at 65,000 visas annually. That limit was hit in May, months before the Oct. 1 start of the new fiscal year, depriving the industry of talent it desperately needs.

Information technology leaders contend labour shortages jeopardise the industry's growth and could force them to set up shop overseas. But critics led by organised labour, said the industry is exaggerating the problem and recruiting foreigners to hold down salaries of US workers.

The Senate in May passed a bill to temporarily raise the visa ceiling. But the drive ran aground in the House amid concerns that the legislation lacked provisions to prevent companies from firing American workers so they could hire foreigners at lower wages.

Under the Abraham-Sperling compromise, the programme would increase to 115,000 visas in each of the next two years and drop to 107,500 in 2001 before reverting to the original 65,000 limit.

A key sticking point was the administration's insistence that employers stipulate they have not displaced an American worker with a visa holder, and that employers certify they

have tried first to recruit domestically. High-tech executives said the provisions were onerous, and Abraham said there was little evidence of wrongdoing by H-1B employers.



Actress Kate Winslet and her boyfriend Jim make their way through the streets of Paharganj, New Delhi on Tuesday after a shoot on location for the Jane Campion film 'Holy Smoke'. Parts of the film are being shot in various locations in India over the next couple of weeks. —AP/UNB photo