

## BRIEFLY

**Grenade found outside US Embassy:** A grenade was found outside the US embassy in Jakarta but was defused, an embassy spokesman said yesterday. Reuters reports from Jakarta.

The grenade was found outside the embassy compound late on Tuesday night, acting spokesman Karl Stoltz told Reuters. It was about 10 O'clock last night, in front of the embassy, not within the embassy, Stoltz said, adding that police were informed and a bomb squad defused the device.

**7 killed in Manila restaurant:** Seven people were slain when a gang shot and robbed their way through a restaurant, a gasoline station and a convenience store in northern Manila before dawn yesterday. Philippine police said, AFP reports from Manila.

The dead were all staff or customers in the establishments, including an off-duty cameraman for government television named Elmer Duque.

**Saudi FM visits Libya:** Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal whose country helped work out a compromise on the Lockerbie affair, arrived in Tripoli on Tuesday, Libyan state television reported, AFP says from Tripoli.

Prince Saud said he planned to "follow up on issues discussed" during a visit to Tripoli at the beginning of June by Crown Prince Abdallah bin Abdel Aziz.

## 120 killed in fresh clash in Nigeria

LAGOS, July 28: At least 120 people have been killed in fighting which broke out Monday between two feuding communities in eastern Nigeria, reports in two newspapers said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The fighting involved residents of the Aguleri and Umuleri communities in eastern Anambra state, said the reports in the state-run Daily Times and the independent Vanguard newspaper.

The reports were not immediately confirmed.

A police official in Anambra State Police Command contacted by AFP by telephone in the state capital Awka declined to comment immediately, pending

a report on the situation.

The reports follow separate

communal clashes in southern

and northern Nigeria in the

past ten days that have left

more than 100 people dead.

The Daily Times newspaper

quoted a witness as saying that

bodies littered the streets of

the town of Otuocha.

Fighting had begun early

Monday and automatic gunfire

was heard in the area of Otuocha late Tuesday, he told the paper.

Dozens of people died in April this year when fighting last erupted between the two communities in continuation of an arcane 86-year-old dispute over control of a patch of land.

## US replaces NATO commander Clark

TOKYO, July 28: The United States is replacing NATO commander General Wesley Clark, US Defence Secretary William Cohen said here Wednesday, insisting however he was satisfied with his performance, reports AFP.

Clark, NATO's top commander in Europe, would be succeeded by General Joseph Ralston, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Cohen told a news conference here.

But Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon denied a Washington Post report that Clark was being replaced next April in the light of tension with the Pentagon over the conduct of NATO's war against Yugoslavia.

"Absolutely not," said Bacon, who was visiting Japan with Cohen.

## Space shuttle Columbia returns to earth

WASHINGTON, July 28: The space shuttle Columbia returned to earth late Tuesday after deploying an orbiting X-ray telescope that will scrutinise some of the most violent forces in the universe, reports AFP.

After a five-day mission, Columbia touched down at the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida, at 11:20 p.m. (0320 GMT Wednesday) with its first female commander, Eileen Collins, at the helm.

After concerns generated by two mechanical problems during take-off last Friday, the shuttle landed without incident, easing into the docking station after deploying a parachute to brake its speed.

It was the 12th night landing by a US space shuttle.

During the mission, the five-member crew successfully launched the 1.5-billion-dollar Chandra telescope, which will examine the most powerful sources of X-rays in the universe, including black holes, colliding galaxies and the remains of supernovae.

The observatory, which was released from Columbia's cargo bay last Friday, will float in space for five years.

Columbia, one of the oldest US space shuttles, embarked on its first space flight in 1981.



NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin (L) talks with space shuttle Columbia Commander Eileen Collins (R) on runway 33 at Kennedy Space Center, Cape Canaveral, Florida yesterday after Collins landed the shuttle with the rest of her four-person crew. The Columbia and her five crew members returned from a five-day science mission in space that included the release of the Chandra X-Ray Observatory.

— AFP photo

## International

## India, China ready to sign protocol for N-free SE Asia

SINGAPORE, July 28: Southeast Asian nations ended three days of talks with their key overseas partners Wednesday after winning pledges from both India and China to observe a regional nuclear-weapon-free zone, reports AP.

The pledges were a victory for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which has been trying to convince nuclear powers to recognise the zone once it is established.

During the next year, 10 countries will look at moving from confidence-building to preventive diplomacy to deal with disputes among its members, Thailand's Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, the new ASEAN chairman, told a closing news conference.

He said a "major priority" will be completion of a code of conduct to manage conflicting territorial claims over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Four ASEAN nations, plus China and Taiwan, claim portions of the islands.

Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said China would "associate itself" with the code process "when the time comes," said Surin, announcing that the next ASEAN meetings would be held July 24-29 in Bangkok.

Tang pledged on Tuesday that China would sign the nuclear-weapon-free zone protocol. ASEAN convened a commission on Saturday to create the zone under a treaty ratified in 1997 to prevent development, manufacture or control of nuclear weapons in the zone.

The ministers discussed cross-border problems such as pollution, drug smuggling, sex slavery, and the millennium computer bug, as well as the nuclear-weapon-free protocol.

"India is fully committed and is ready to sign the protocol," Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said Wednesday.

After meeting with the Southeast Asian foreign ministers,

ASEAN also asked Russia, Canada, Japan, Australia, the European Union, South Korea, India, New Zealand and Mongolia.

The meetings attempted to bypass thorny issues such as the crisis between China and Taiwan over Taipei's recent claim of equal statehood.

But Tang warned other nations of the possibility of armed conflict if they interfere in what he said was a domestic matter.

Both Russia and ASEAN

have been ravaged by plunges in their currencies. In Asia, rapid currency declines two years ago triggered the region's worst recession in decades and dragged millions of people back into poverty.

At this meeting, in discussion on the economic crisis, there was a strong mood of optimism," said the host, Singapore Foreign Minister Shanmugam Jayakumar.

ASEAN foreign ministers meet each year for several days with their key dialogue partners.

— AFP photo



Philippine Foreign Minister Domingo Siaazon (L) and his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh (C) bid farewell to Singaporean counterpart S. Jayakumar at the end of the ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting yesterday.

— AFP photo

## US, Russia agree new arms talks

WASHINGTON, July 28: Russia and the United States agreed Tuesday to a new round of talks on reducing long-range nuclear weapons in a sign that tensions have eased over the war in Yugoslavia, reports AFP.

Vice President Al Gore and Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin announced the decision after the regular meeting on US-Russian economic and scientific cooperation.

"Because of the tensions ... you're not going to expect this kind of action in the Duma next week," he said, adding that Washington had set no deadlines for the negotiations.

But he added that he was now "more optimistic" about our ability to reach agreement on both issues."

Stepashin acknowledged that there had been "some cooling over Kosovo so this was a very important" move towards the arms negotiations.

Stepashin also met briefly with US President Bill Clinton to discuss issues ranging from arms proliferation to the struggling Russian economy to the upcoming summit on recon-

struction for the war-torn Balkans.

US concerns about Russia's arms proliferation were raised earlier this month amid reports that Russia may revive arm sales to Syria.

And Russia protested Monday that plans to set up a US-Japan anti-ballistic missile defence system would undermine the balance of forces in Asia and spark a regional arms race.

Washington and Tokyo are planning to bolster security ties with a project to establish an early warning system against ballistic missile attacks.

But Stepashin's primary aim here is to build confidence in Russia's struggling economy to attract US investors and win approval for a 4.5 billion dollar credit line to Russia from the International Monetary Fund.

## Barak, Arafat agree to review changes to Wye accord

EREZ CROSSING, Gaza Strip, July 28: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat agreed here Tuesday to take two weeks to study possible changes to the Wye River land-for-security agreement, reports AFP.

Arafat said an Israeli-Palestinian joint committee would meet starting Wednesday or Thursday to discuss Barak's proposals, which were not spelled out in detail.

"On our side we are committed to our commitments, including the security commitments," Arafat added following two hours of talks with Barak at an Israeli military base at this crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

"We will continue our policy of zero tolerance to terror and violence," the Palestinian leader said.

Arafat also said he had asked Barak to end further Jewish settlement "so we can resume the final status negotiations" on such questions as the borders of the Palestinian entity, refugees and the status of Jerusalem.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Asked what will happen if

the Israeli leader rejects Barak's request, Barak said:

"I told him our position is implementing agreements, including Wye, honestly and accurately."

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Asked what will happen if

the Israeli leader rejects Barak's request, Barak said:

"I told him our position is implementing agreements, including Wye, honestly and accurately."

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arafat, while agreeing to the two-week request, reiterated that he wanted full implementation of the US-brokered Wye accord, which was signed in October and negotiated by Barak's predecessor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

— AFP photo



Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat (R) shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak before their meeting at the Erez crossing point on Tuesday.

— AFP photo

## UK to ban foreign donations to political parties

LONDON, July 27: British political parties are to be banned from receiving donations from foreign companies and individuals who are not registered voters in Britain, the government announced in Parliament.

"For too long, public confidence in the political system has been undermined by the absence of clear, fair and open statutory controls on how political parties are funded," Home Secretary Jack Straw told the House of Commons.

The bill is likely to become law later this year because Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour party government has a huge majority in the Commons.

The bill also envisages a 20-million pound (dls 32 million) limit on spending by political parties in the campaigns before national elections, and compulsory disclosure of political donations over 5,000 pounds (dls 8,000).

The draft bill follows a series of disputes over parties — mainly the opposition Conservative Party — getting money from wealthy foreigners or tax exiles.

At the center of the latest controversy is the Conservative's treasurer, Michael Ashcroft, who lives in Florida and amassed a fortune in Belize, a former British colony in South America.

Ashcroft, a major Tory

donor is suing The Times of London for alleging that he has been monitored by the US Drug Enforcement Agency over pos-

sible links to drug runners. A lawmaker later repeated the allegations in Parliament.

Traditionally, the Conservatives have long relied on big business for funds, while the giant labour unions helped bankroll Labour.

However, corporate donations to the Tories have fallen in the past decade — partly because Blair's New Labour is no longer perceived by many business leaders as a threat.

Straw has denied that the bill is aimed at Ashcroft. But he said it would be a "serious problem" for the Conservatives because of their penchant for secrecy over funding.

A government-appointed inquiry committee last year said the Conservatives acknowledged receiving more than 16 million pounds (dls 27 million) from foreigners between 1992 and 1997.

At May 1997 national elections, Labour spent 26 million pounds (dls 41.6 million) and Conservatives 27 million

## Special UN mission to visit Myanmar

SINGAPORE, July 28:

Myanmar Foreign Minister Win Aung confirmed here Wednesday that a special United Nations mission will soon visit his country, but said it was still unclear whether the World Bank will join the mission, reports AFP.

Win Aung, speaking at the end of annual talks between Southeast Asia and its key partners, gave no specific dates but appeared to confirm that the mission led by senior envoy Alvaro de Soto would arrive in September.

Asked if Myanmar had agreed to a definite date for a UN and World Bank mission in September, he said: "We have planned this trip a long time ago and because of the convenience of the dates of the timing to visit our country ... there will be a visit," he said.

Whether someone from the World Bank will be accompanying De Soto or not is the decision of the World Bank and the United Nations," he said.

"If so and when they come, of course we will discuss about the possibilities in many fields," he said.

In July, a four-man team representing Finland, Portugal, the EU secretariat and the European Commission travelled to Yangon to hold sensitive talks with powerful junta First Secretary Khin Nyunt, and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.