

Bomb rocks public rally in Colombo

COLOMBO, Nov 3: A powerful bomb blast has rocked a public rally of ruling party dissidents in central Sri Lanka, leaving scores of people wounded in a huge stampede, officials said today, reports AFP.

Dissident leader Gamini Dissanayake said the attack late Saturday in Pannala town was a "deliberate attempt by the government to sabotage" their meetings, which were held to drum up support for sweeping constitutional reforms.

Four people were seriously wounded in the blast while dozens were hurt in a stampede, local officials said adding that several vehicles near the stage were also damaged.

Local press reports said today, that the attackers had escaped in a jeep after opening

fire.

Saturday's bomb attack was the first direct strike against the ruling party's breakaway wing since their failed attempt to impeach President Ranasinghe Premadasa and scrap the executive presidency.

Dissidents have repeatedly said that their lives were in danger and accused the government of activating hit squads against them.

The United National Party dissidents, together with the opposition, on August 28 submitted a 12-page charge sheet against the president.

The impeachment moves was later rejected by the parliamentary speaker, who himself is now facing a second no-confidence vote in parliament for his action.

Mystery blast kills 80, damages hundreds of buildings in N Korea

SEOUL, Nov 3: A mystery explosion which rocked a North Korean town four days ago killed up to 80 people and wrecked or damaged hundreds of buildings, a South Korean Defence Ministry source said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

"I heard between 60 and 80 residents were killed and many others injured in the explosion," he said.

The blast occurred early on Wednesday near the railway station at Pyonggang seven km (four miles) north of the central part of the military demarcation line dividing the peninsula.

The source said it destroyed or damaged nearly 400 buildings within a radius of four km (2.5 miles).

"We don't know what caused the blast. There are no signs of unusual movement at the border because of the incident, he added. No further details were available.

Earlier report adds: A huge explosion has ripped through a North Korean town near the border with South Korea, killing scores of people and inflicting extensive damage, South Korea's domestic Yonhap news agency said today.

Yonhap, giving the first details of the scale of the blast on Wednesday, said scores were killed, hundreds injured and many buildings within a radius of four km (2.5 miles) destroyed.

It said the explosion happened near the Pyonggang railway station seven km (four miles) north of the military demarcation line dividing the peninsula.

A Defence Ministry spokesman in Seoul said on Saturday a southern military observation post had reported a huge explosion and flames in Pyonggang on Wednesday. He said the military was unable to determine what caused the blast.

Yonhap said North Korean media carried a brief report on Thursday about the Pyonggang blast, saying troops helped in rescue work.

The explosion is presumed to be an accident which is

nothing to with an atomic bomb test," it said.

The Defence Ministry spokesman said on Saturday: "Taking into account the scale and the flames and sound, it is believed that there was an explosion either in a big armory or an oil storage tank."

The spokesman was not available for comment today on the Yonhap report.

The agency said the explosion was much more powerful than a blast in the southern South Korean city of Iri in 1977 when a freight train carrying dynamite blew up, killing 56 people and injuring 1,300.

North and South Korea, still technically at war since the 1950-53 Korean conflict, are split by the demilitarized zone.

Burma denies illness of Suu Kyi

RANGOON, Nov 3: A senior Foreign Ministry official on Sunday denied a report spread by a rebel group that dissident leader Aung San Suu Kyi was seriously ill due to a hunger strike, reports AP.

"These are baseless rumours. They (foreign media) fabricate fictitious stories purely for entertainment," said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity. It was the first high-level government comment on the rumour.

Mrs Suu Kyi, 46, winner of

the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, has been on a hunger strike to protest conditions of her arrest, the Nobel awards committee in Oslo, Norway, said Friday.

On Saturday, a rumour circulated in Bangkok, Thailand, that she may be seriously ill or dead. The rumour came from a small, little-known insurgent group inside Burma called the Democratic National Army.

Other rebel groups that passed on the rumour to embassies and journalists in Bangkok stressed they could not confirm it was true.

Western diplomats in Rangoon, contacted by telephone from Bangkok, said they had no information to support the reports.

One diplomat said Saturday he was certain Mrs Suu Kyi was well a few days ago.

Tin Htoon, first secretary at the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok, said Mrs Suu Kyi was fine and denied she had begun a hunger strike.

Mrs Suu Kyi has had little contact with the outside world since Burma's military junta placed her under house arrest in July 1989 for leading a non-violent, pro-democracy movement. But the Nobel committee said she knows she won the prize.

Pak diplomat summoned in Kabul

ISLAMABAD, Nov 3: The Afghan Foreign Ministry has summoned Pakistan's top diplomat in Kabul for the second time in a week to protest over alleged Pakistani interference, Afghanistan's official Bakhtar news agency reported today, says Reuters.

The Charge d' Affaires was handed a protest note yesterday charging that a Pakistani helicopter recently flew Afghan Mujahideen into southern Afghanistan on an inspection tour of rebel posts.

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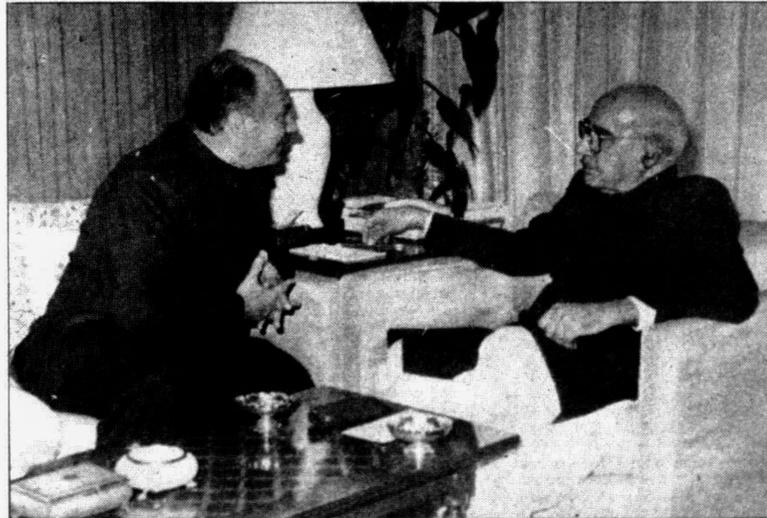
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ISLAMABAD: Prince Karim Agha Khan spiritual leader of the Ismaili Sect, meets the Pak President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. The prince arrived here Friday on a 17-day visit to Pakistan. — AFP/UNB photo

Ishaq seeks European help for Kashmiri self-determination

ISLAMABAD, Nov 3: Pakistan President Ghulam Ishaq Khan urged the European Parliament on Saturday to help Kashmiris achieve their right to self-determination, reports AFP.

Talking to a visiting nine-member delegation from the European parliament, he said Pakistan expected the body to "stand up for principles," according to a press release issued by the president's office.

Ishaq Khan said India should renounce its "ostrich-like" attitude and recognise the need to resolve the 43-year old dispute.

More than 3,000 people have died in the Indian part of divided Kashmir since early last year in violence linked to a

Muslim separatist campaign. India accuses Pakistan of aiding the secessionists with arms and training but Islamabad says it only extends moral and political support to the Kashmiri struggle.

The two countries have fought two wars in the past over Kashmir, of which one-third is under Pakistan's control.

At the 90-minute meeting with the delegation, Ishaq Khan said the European Community should allow developing countries greater access to its market, if it is "genuinely interested" in their development.

Speaking at a reception hosted here later by the main opposition People's

Democratic Alliance, delegation leader George Stevenson said the European Parliament wanted to create an environment between Pakistan and India for the Kashmir dispute's "peaceful solution."

"Self-determination for Kashmiris, said Stevenson, is very important."

A Pakistani foreign office spokesman, talking to reporters here, said that the normalisation of relations between Pakistan and India depended on a settlement of the Kashmir issue.

The spokesman said Pakistan had demanded an end to "repression" in the Indian part of Kashmir at a two-day meeting between foreign secretaries of the two countries which ended here Thursday.

Imelda strokes Marcos hair

HONOLULU, Nov 3: Imelda Marcos prayed and stroked the hair of her late husband Ferdinand on Saturday, hours before she was scheduled to leave for the Philippines and end her exile of nearly six years, reports AP.

The body of the ousted Philippine leader, who died in Honolulu in 1989, was in a casket set in a wooden box used as a vault. Since his death, Marcos' air-conditioned tomb at Valley of the Temples Memorial Park in suburban Honolulu.

Mrs Marcos sat next to the open casket during a prayer service.

Later, she told reporters she wasn't going to bring the body with her on the flight to Manila.

Mrs Marcos wants to bury her husband in Manila, but the government of President Corason Aquino will only allow the body into the country if it is buried in Marcos' home province of Ilocos Norte.

Mrs Marcos and her husband fled to the United States in 1986 when a civilian-military revolt swept Mrs Aquino into power.

In the Philippines, Mrs Marcos faces tax fraud and other charges that she and her husband embezzled billions of dollars during Marcos' 20-year rule.

Canadian military plane crashes: 5 killed

ALERT (Northwest Territories), Nov 3: Survivors of a military plane crash near Canada's northernmost point were being airlifted off Friday after spending two bone-chilling days in a blizzard that stymied rescue attempts, reports AP.

Five of the plane's 18 passengers were killed in the crash, Lt Comm Wally West said. Another four were seriously injured and the other nine suffered minor injuries.

The pilot, Capt John Couch, a married father of two, was among those killed.

20,000 attend monkey's funeral

NEW DELHI, Nov 3: Over 20,000 people on Saturday attended the funeral of a monkey which religiously prayed at a Hindu temple here every day for the last decade, local press reported today, says Xinhua.

After a funeral procession, people washed the monkey's body in the waters of the Ganga river and immersed it in the Yamuna river in Delhi, treating like a human being.

The ageing monkey died a natural death.

35 killed in Peru clashes

At least 35 people have been killed in clashes between the military and guerrillas around the country, military sources said Saturday, reports AFP from Lima.

Fighting between Shining Path guerrillas and government forces Friday killed at least 29 rebels, three police officers and a soldier in San Martin, some 700 kilometers (420 miles) northeast of here, and in Ayacucho the southwest rebel base, according to initial police reports.

Officials said a 60 day state of emergency was declared in 50 areas around the country in order to facilitate counter-insurgency operations.

In the Andean San Martin province 20 guerrillas and two police officers were killed when a Shining Path column attacked police headquarters in Tananta while one rebel and an army sergeant were killed in clashes at Nuevo Horizonte.

Eight more rebels and an officer died in fighting southeast of Lima in Ayacucho and two members of a rural self defence group were shot by rebels in Huayhuas near Ayacucho.

Malaysia to launch satellite: Malaysia is negotiating with a US group to build and launch a telecommunications satellite in 1993, Bernama news agency quoted Telecommunications Minister S. Samy Vellu as saying, reports Reuters from Kuala Lumpur.

The project would be run by a private firm on behalf of the Malaysian government, Samy said on Saturday after opening a regional telecommunications conference.

"We need two-and-a-half years before the project could be finalised," he said.

Discussions with the US group, which he declined to name, had focused on cost estimates.

Samy said Malaysia would spend 1.3 billion ringgit (473 million dollars) to upgrade telecommunications facilities by 1995, mostly to introduce new networks and provide infrastructure in rural areas.

Irwin Allen dead

Irwin Allen, producer of big-budget disaster epics including "The Towering Inferno" and "The Poseidon Adventure," died Saturday of a heart attack. He was 75, reports AP.

Allen, a Malibu resident who had been semi-retired for the past year, died at Santa Monica Hospital Medical Center, said hospital spokeswoman Grace Cheng. His health had been failing for the past few months, said Al Gaff, his cousin.

Allen earned the nickname "Master of Disaster" because of his disaster hits. "The Poseidon Adventure" was made in 1972.

Allen cited human nature for the success of his films. "People chase fire engines, flock to car crashes. People thrive on tragedy," he said. "It's unfortunate, but in my case, it's fortunate."

"The bigger the tragedy the bigger the audience."

Allen also was noted for science fiction and fantasy works, such as the film and television series "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea," and the television shows "Lost in Space," "Time Tunnel" and "Land of the Giants."

Allen is survived by his wife, Sheila. Funeral services were scheduled for Wednesday.

US warplanes in Iraqi sky: US warplanes on Friday carried out low and high altitude flights over Iraqi villages breaking the sound barrier and causing injuries to civilians, Iraq's officials press reported Saturday, says AFP from Baghdad.

Civilians were injured by glass which shattered when US warplanes broke the sound barrier over Mosul (northern Iraq) during several overflights of the town on Friday, the pro-government Al-Jomhuriya newspaper said.

It also reported considerable damage to civilian property. Other dailies said US warplanes also buzzed Zakho, Dohuk, Amadiyah and Nineve in northern Iraq over the past few days.

Baghdad has lodged several complaints in recent months with the United Nations over what officials here have described as American provocations.

IRA rebels bomb Belfast hospital: 2 UK troops killed

BELFAST, Nov 3: Irish Republican Army (IRA) guerrillas bombed a top-security Belfast hospital, killing two British soldiers and prompting the government to condemn the guerrillas as "fascist beasts" who deserve to be in hell, reports Reuters.

Seven people were injured when the bomb smuggled into the military wing of Musgrave Park hospital exploded on Saturday, police said.

The IRA, fighting to end British rule over northern Ireland, hid the Semtex bomb in the basement of the hospital where victims of the province's 22-year-old conflict are treated.

The bomb, planted by a staff bar and directly under an operating theatre, exploded as medical staff sat in a recreation room watching the closing minutes of the World Cup final between Australia and

England on television.

A senior British government official, Richard Needham, white with rage after visiting the devastated hospital, said of the IRA: "Hell is where these people ought to be."

Needham, voicing one of the strongest British condemnations of the IRA, added: "Nobody who believes in political democracy will ever give one millimetre to the fascist beasts who undertake this sort of mayhem."

Leading northern Ireland trade union officials Tom Gillen said: "We have reached a new low in depravity."

Among the injured was five-year-old girl treated for burns and smoke inhalation. She is the daughter of one of other injured survivors of the blast, which blew out windows and security ceilings.

The dead and injured had to be dug out from the rubble.

Rescue teams, working in pouring rain and fading light, had to tread cautiously for fear of ruptured gas mains igniting.

An IRA spokesman, telephoning a Belfast radio station to claim responsibility, said: "We planted the bomb in a bunker in the officers' mess. We breached high security."

The security lapse at the heavily guarded hospital immediately prompted a top-level review by the British Army and northern Ireland police to see how the IRA managed to smuggle in the 20-pound (nine-kg) bomb.

It went off just metres from a children's ward full of mentally handicapped youngsters and others suffering from cerebral palsy. Some were as young as 14 months old.

Erring US Senators pledge to voters to mend their ways

WASHINGTON, Nov 3: In a sudden outbreak of humility in the US Senate, some prominent politicians have confessed their shortcomings to their voters and promised to mend their ways, reports Reuters.

Senator Edward Kennedy, a Democrat, conceded in a speech in his home state of Massachusetts last month that he had personal faults. He did not specify them but highly published reports have mentioned womanising and drinking.

Assistant Republican Senate leader Alan Simpson admitted being too "cocky" and

told his Wyoming voters he would handle his personality differently.

Howard Metzenbaum, another Democrat, apologised in an Ohio newspaper for harsh criticism of a Senate witness with an unproven charge the man had sexually harassed a woman.

How unusual were these admissions?

"They're worried," said Washington political scientist Stephen Hess. "Being a Senator means you never had to say you're sorry."

He said the Senators must

have been reading opinion polls or talking to aides who told them they could be in trouble with the electorate.

Senate historian Don Ritchie agreed it is rare for a Senator to apologise for personal traits, but that's what each did.

Appearing at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government named after his late brother, Kennedy said: "I recognise my own shortcomings, the faults in the conduct of my private life. I realise that I alone am responsible for them, and I am the one who must con-

front them."

In 1969, he appealed for support from Massachusetts voters after the Chappaquiddick tragedy when a young political worker, Mary Jo Kopechne, drowned in a pond, trapped in a car Kennedy had been driving after they attended a party.

Kennedy's admission of personal failings came a week before the start of the trial of his nephew, William Kennedy Smith, charged with raping a woman at the family's oceanfront mansion in Palm Beach, Florida.

Off the Record

In honour of Ron

SIMI VALLEY (California): All five living US President will attend the opening of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library on a remote hilltop here on Monday, posing a giant security headache, reports Reuters.

Sharpshooters will guard the library from nearby hills in the rugged countryside and the security force is expected to include more than 1,000 police, Sheriff's Deputies, Secret Service and FBI personnel.

They will be there to guard against attacks on Reagan and his wife Nancy, President George Bush and his wife, Barbara, Richard and Pat Nixon, Gerald and Betty Ford, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, and Lady Bird Johnson, widow of Lyndon Johnson.

Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and California Governor Pete Wilson will also be among the 60 guests on the Podium in front of the Spanish style two-story building.

One of the biggest headaches, according to Secret Service agent Douglas Carver, is coordinating all the protectors. Each President has his own security detail.

Father at 106

TEHRAN: A 106-year-old Iranian has fathered a child and both are doing well, newspapers reported here Saturday, reports AFP.

Assadollah Zandi Tsharkhestani from Arak in central Iran had suffered a mild heart attack when he heard earlier this year that he was to become a father.

The newborn Mohammad weighed three kilos (6.6 pounds) at birth and is in excellent condition, the newspapers said.

The boy's mother is Tsharkhestani's fourth wife. His previous three spouses are deceased. Only the first one had given him children but they had all died young.

Tsharkhestani said his secret for longevity was taking care of teeth, eating fresh meat and walking a lot.

Gregory Peck again

NEW YORK: When Gregory Peck began making films, the old studio system was breaking down and an actor's image depended as much on his own instincts as on the judgment of a studio boss, reports AP.

It came naturally to Peck, whose stage work in college had transformed him from a shy teenager to a confident young adult. He was only 6 when his parents split up and by the time he arrived in Hollywood in the early 1940s, he had learned to make all the important decisions by himself.

"Maybe I had an indifferent, stubborn streak which may have come from an instinct for self-preservation and the knowledge I was going to have to do it on my own, nobody was going to help me," Peck explained during a recent interview.

"I was never owned by anybody. I never signed an exclusive contract. I was pretty much a free-lance player. I can take some of the credit for the successes and a lot of the blame for the failures. I never thought anybody was shaping me or creating an image."

Yet another Princess in Japan

TOKYO: After 26 years and six births, all girls, Japan's imperial family was expecting a male child, but alas, when Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko's first grandchild was born last month, it was another girl — another princess who, by law, can't assume the throne, reports AP.

Had the enormously popular Princess Kiko given birth to a boy, the newest member of the world's oldest hereditary imperial family would have been third in line to the throne, after his father, Prince Akishino, and his uncle, Crown Prince Naruhito.

But as a girl, she doesn't count. And when she marries, she'll lose her royal standing altogether.

Ms Mitsuishi said the male-only succession law reflects the men-first attitude that dominates Japanese society. "How can we expect the public to change if the palace doesn't?" she asked.

Along with Emperor Akihito's two sons — Akishino, 25, and imperial heir Naruhito, 31 and single — five princesses are in line to assume the throne. Emperor Akihito's third and youngest child is Princess Nori, 22.

Reigning became a man's line of work by law in 1889 under Japan's first modern constitution, which defined the emperor as a living god, "sacred and inviolable."

Government officials defend the imperial law as preserving royal traditions.

Opponents say that argument is shaky, and point to the history of royalty in Japan.



KINSHASA: Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko K Ngbendu Ngbendu Diaka talks to reporters aboard the presidential yacht 'Kamanyola' during a short trip on the Zaire river. New Prime Minister Bernardin Mungu Diaka and his government were sworn in November 1. — AFP/UNB photo