

12,000 Palestinians jailed in Kuwait

TUNIS, Nov 4: Some 12,000 Palestinians are jailed in Kuwait as a punishment for Palestinian support of Iraq during the Gulf war, PLO leader Yasser Arafat charged yesterday, reports Xinhua.

billions US dollars as a result of the massive expulsion of an estimated 280,000 Palestinians from Kuwait and other Gulf states, Arafat claimed.

In a speech to the three-day international conference on Palestinian human rights that opened here, the Palestine Liberation Organisation leader said another 2,000 Arabs remain in Kuwait prison, with about 2,500 Palestinians reported missing since the war ended last February.

The Palestinians, with the PLO as their leadership, sided with Iraq when the United States and its allied troops unleashed the Gulf war triggered by the Iraqi invasion on Kuwait in August last year.

The current international conference on Palestinian human rights was sponsored by Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania.

Pak Interior Minister involved in loan scandal

ISLAMABAD, Nov 4: Pakistan's political opposition released documents on Sunday that showed a connection between Interior Minister Shujaat Hussain and a multi-million dollars financial scandal, reports Reuter.

The opposition led by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto have made Hussain and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif the targets of their anger over the collapse of the cooperatives earlier this year when they were unable to repay their mostly small investors.

Farooq Leghari, deputy leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), told reporters the documents showed Hussain had got a bank loan against government bonds owned by one of several financial cooperatives that collapsed this year.

Businesses owned by both men borrowed money from the cooperatives, but they have denied any wrongdoing. Leghari said the only solution to the present mess was to form a national government of all political forces.

He alleged Hussain secured another loan for his family industrial empire by mortgaging state land and that the family had defaulted on its bank borrowings in the past.

Bhutto and her PPP government were dismissed last year by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan on disputed charges of corruption.

French engineers in Kashmir stop work

JAMMU, Nov 4: French engineer at a hydro-electric project in Kashmir have declared three months' mass leave to protest the kidnapping of a colleague by Muslim militants, a spokesman for the engineers said here today, reports AFP.

The engineers have threatened to launch a formal strike to protest Silva's abduction and the failure of police to find him.

One hundred and fifty engineers stopped work Saturday afternoon at the Dulhasti project, 150 kilometres (93 miles) from Jammu, Kashmir's winter capital, the spokesman said.

Officials from the Dumez-Sogea-Boris-Saf consortium, based in New Delhi, were unavailable for comment Sunday.

Their action came a day after the Al-Fatah separatist group released a picture of Frenchman Antonio Silva, who went missing on October 14 and whom the group claims to be holding hostage.

Work had previously slowed on the 300-Million-Dollar project when night work stopped following Silva's disappearance.

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Preparations for SAARCs summit under way Blanket of security in Colombo: 1,000 rounded up

COLOMBO, Nov 4: Soldiers and police today threw a blanket of security over the Sri Lankan capital Colombo, ban on trucks and stray cattle ahead of a seven nation south Asian leaders summit, officials said, reports AFP.

Hundreds of soldiers and police armed with automatic assault rifles searched cars and buses at virtually every street corner causing traffic snarls during the morning rush hour, witnesses said.

The measures were taken ahead of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit to open here Thursday, police said.

In a major crackdown over the weekend, police rounded up over 1,000 street urchins and beggars as the authorities began a campaign to spruce up the capital for visiting leaders.

Police banned container trucks and heavy lorries for a week to prevent damage to overhead structures, flags, bunting and banners greeting leaders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan.

Several government buildings along the ceremonial drive have been freshly painted and residents have been told to colour wash their homes and illuminate their compounds with coloured bulbs.

Local authorities along a 35 kilometre (20 mile) drive from the international airport to the city centre have been asked by police to prevent stray cattle crossing the highway during the summit.

Parking has been prohibited in several areas in the city and the hotel where the visiting leaders would be accommodated has been shut to other guests.

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Off the Record

Disney fantasy meets cruel financial reality

PARIS: Like Mickey Mouse himself, staff at Euro Disney — the 5,000-acre theme park east of Paris, due to open next April — are condemned to wear a fixed smile. By the time the first paying customers arrive, the smile may be somewhat strained, after predictions of two million British visitors in the first year were not borne out by the travel industry.



Smiling through: Mickey Mouse floats over the building site that will be Euro Disney

At Disneyland in California and Disney World in Florida, attendances have dropped by 20 per cent, despite a reduction in entry fees. Disney shares have also fallen on the stock market.

Deals have been struck between large travel companies for what was seen as a lucrative slice of the European market, but figures for confirmed bookings are scarce. "I cannot tell you how many bookings we have," said a spokesman in the Euro Disney office in Paris.

Regardless, the collective staff grin became rigidly joyous at the weekend for the unveiling of Sleeping Beauty's castle. In deference to the host nation, the 15-storey edifice is also called Le Chateau de la Belle au Bois Dormant.

Euro Disney staff from the United States, or cast members as they are known, had some difficulty smiling and speaking French at the same time. At the weekend unveiling ceremony, security for Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy and three leading members of the Disney board was tight. Large men in what appeared to be Afrika Korps uniforms and high boots patrolled in site accompanied by matching sandy-coloured albatrosses. The guards smiled; the dogs just looked hungry.

At first sight Davy Crockett's Camp, just one among many fantasies being brought to life at Euro Disney, had the sinister look of a German prison camp. Sandrine ("I am the cast member chosen to guide you round this fantasy resort") seemed to lose her smile just for a moment when it was suggested the sign at the camp gates should read "Stalag Luft Disney."

Sea wins this round, says Bush

KENNEBUNKPORT (Maine): President Bush surveyed the devastating damage that a fierce Atlantic storm dealt his turn-of-the-century oceanside home on Saturday and proclaimed: "The sea won this round," reports AP.

But as he stood in a yard littered with stones, mud, broken glass and overturned furniture, the president vowed to rebuild the three-story home that has been in his family since 1903. He said he had some insurance, but it wouldn't come close to the amount needed to restore the house and its furnishings. The home was assessed last year at \$2.2 million. Local Realtors, however, have said it is worth considerably more.

Bush said many years' accumulation of books and personal belongings had destroyed or washed out to sea in the storm that ravaged the Atlantic coast on Wednesday and Thursday. At the height of the storm, 30-foot (10-meter) waves crashed over the house and the rocky point on which it sits, the president said.

The main part of the house is severely damaged," Bush said as he and a group of reporters stepped gingerly over broken glass and twisted pieces of wood and metal that had once been the Bush's living room. "All that nice living room went out to sea," an obviously pained Barbara Bush told reporters.

But, she added philosophically: "We are very lucky, we Bushes. A lot worse things happen in life." Bush said his "heart went out" to others up and down the East Coast whose homes were also damaged by the storm.

An affair indeed

NEW YORK: Singer Bette Midler says talk show host Geraldo Rivera forced her to inhale a drug in an encounter she calls "interview rape," reports AP.

Rivera has described their 1972 meeting in her apartment bathroom as the start of an affair and a spokesman on Saturday strongly denied Midler's charge. Midler gives her account in a profile of her in December's Vanity Fair.

"You call that little thing an affair? He's such a toad. He has the nerve... He's such a user," Midler told the writer, Kevin Secumms. In his memoir, "Exposing Myself," Rivera described a month-long affair with Midler, including a bathroom liaison.

Midler, however, told Secumms that Rivera and an unidentified producer shoved her into the bathroom and forced her to inhale amyl nitrite, a stimulant sometimes called "poppers." Soon Geraldo was groping and molesting her, she told Secumms.

Jeff Erdel, a Rivera spokesman, accused Midler of making the claim to promote her new movie, "For The Boys." "For her to claim Geraldo had to force her to have sex is preposterous," Erdel said from his home in Island Park. "This relationship was