

BRIEFLY

Honasan's "No" to Corazon's call: Fugitive Philippine coup leader Gregorio Honasan on Wednesday rejected a government call for him and his forces to surrender by November 23 or face a military manhunt, reports Reuter from Manila.

"Under conditions of uncertainty prevailing now I am not about to surface, surrender or return to military control", Honasan said in an interview with the Manila radio station. The Radio did not say where it interviewed the rebel army officer.

President Corazon Aquino last week gave Honasan until Saturday to turn himself in or risk capture.

The military has offered a reward of five million pesos (185,000 dollars) for the capture of Honasan, who nearly overthrew Aquino in December 1989 in the sixth and bloodiest army coup attempt she has faced in her five years in office.

6 Blacks killed in S Africa: Gunmen staged a pre-dawn attack Tuesday on homes in a rural black township, leaving six dead and 11 injured, police said, reports AP from Johannesburg.

Police said they arrested 11 people at the scene of the battle in Kwandengezi, a township outside the Indian Ocean city of Durban. The region has been torn by black faction fighting since the mid-1980s, as the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party battle for supremacy.

Local ANC official Bheki Cele blamed the attack on a criminal gang that had targeted ANC members. Meanwhile, Inkatha official Kim Hodgson claimed the fighting was between rival factions within the ANC.

In other violence, police said a black man was killed Monday evening when a hand grenade exploded at a workers' hostel in Soweto, outside Johannesburg.

More than 5,000 blacks have been killed in faction fighting in the past two years.

Chinese CP plenum Nov 25: The central committee of the Chinese Communist Party is to open its eighth plenary session November 25 to discuss major agricultural policies, a pro-Beijing newspaper reported in Hong Kong Wednesday, reports AFP.

The crucial two to three-day forum is expected to ratify policies aimed at strengthening the agricultural sector and resolving problems with rural projects, the Ta Kung Pau daily said.

Under the party's constitution, the plenum is also likely to hold elections to the central committee, the paper said.

The resolving of rural problems was fundamental to the next 10-year development plan, endorsed during the National People's Congress in April, it said. Under the agricultural blueprint, China plans to increase grain production to 500 million tons by the year 2000.

Bandits kill five Pak police: Bandits have killed five policemen and wounded five others in an ambush in Southern Pakistan, police said Wednesday, reports Reuter from Karachi.

The 10 officers were patrolling the road between Sukkur and Larkana on Tuesday when they were attacked 45 km (30 miles) from Sukkur.

The region is one of the worst affected by gangs which prey on villages and kidnap people for ransom.

Further south in Hyderabad, bandits kidnapped two Customs inspectors returning from an industrial zone at Nooriabad on Tuesday.

Admiral Howe replaces Robert Gates: President George Bush Tuesday nominated Admiral Jonathan Howe as the number two man on the National Security Council (NSC), replacing Robert Gates, the new Head of the Central Intelligence Agency, reports AFP from Washington.

Admiral Howe, 56, has been a NATO Commander for Southern Europe based in Naples, Italy, and commanded the US Naval forces in Europe.

The NSC, which advises the President on National Security matters, is currently headed by retired Air Force General Brent Scowcroft.

Civil unrest displaces over 1 million in Lanka

WASHINGTON, Nov 20: Civil unrest in Sri Lanka has uprooted more than a million people from their homes in the island nation, according to a refugee report, says AFP.

The private US Committee for Refugees (USCR) said the beleaguered Sri Lankans among them Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese have also sought refuge abroad, more than 210,000 are living in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu and others are located in western asylum countries.

The USCR based its report, titled Sri Lanka land of refugees on a site visit to areas of displacement inside Sri Lanka and to refugee centres in India.

The report outlines the

Cabinet reshuffle compels Masri govt to resign

AMMAN, Nov 20: Jordanian Prime Minister Taher Masri and his 25-member government resigned today after failing to secure parliamentary backing for a cabinet reshuffle, reports AFP.

Authoritative sources said King Hussein had accepted Masri's resignation, adding that the King was now expected to ask his cousin and former chief of the Royal Court, Zeid Ibn Shaker, to form a new government.

Masri, named Prime Minister on June 19, said his decision to step down was aimed at "strengthening the democratic process in the country."

The Prime Minister was forced to resign when discussions with parliamentary blocs failed to produce majority backing for a proposed reshuffle ahead of the December 1 opening of the new legislative session.

In October 49 members in the 80-seat parliament signed a statement opposing the Masri government.

displaced person situation since tensions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority erupted in July 1983 in three days of rioting in which about 2,000 Tamils were killed and 200,000 driven from their homes.

By August 1991, the Sri Lankan government counted 644,000 internally displaced people in a total population estimated at 3.5 million.

The government is facing a serious financial drain from its relief efforts, spending about five million dollars a month on aid to displaced persons according to the report, government officials say it will need substantial assistance from international donors to sustain the relief effort in 1992.

The USCR included the following recommendations to promote safety and humane treatment for the displaced Sri Lankans until the Sri Lankan government and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam can negotiate a peace settlement.

The United States and other governments should provide bilateral aid to Sri Lanka for the relief effort.

Washington and the international community should increase their contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross for their Sri Lankan programmes.

And the United States should consider giving Sri Lankan asylum seekers temporary protected status.

Bush's visit to Japan rescheduled

TOKYO, Nov 20: President Bush may visit Japan in early or mid-January, Japanese officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Islamabad takes tough line over N-weapons row

US must respect Pak sovereignty: Ishaq

ISLAMABAD, Nov 20: Pakistan's leaders have taken a tough line over a nuclear weapons row with the United States which has halted all US aid for a year, reports Reuter.

President Ghulam Ishaq Khan accused Washington of applying discriminatory laws to Pakistan which could hardly be expected to produce the desired result of curbing its nuclear programme, a government statement said.

"Pakistan respects US laws but the US should also respect Pakistan's sovereignty and its national policies formulated as an independent nation to

meet its security concerns and geopolitical compulsions", the President told senior US military commander General Joseph Hoar.

In Bahawalpur, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told a political rally on Thursday that Pakistan would reject all foreign aid offered at the expense of its honour and integrity.

Hoar, chief of the US Central Command, met Ishaq Khan and Sharif on Tuesday as talks on the nuclear issue began between Pakistani officials and US Under-Secretary of State Reginald Bartholomew.

Bartholomew is the highest-ranking official to visit Pakistan since American aid was halted in October last year because of fears that Pakistan was developing nuclear weapons.

He is also due to meet the president and prime minister on Wednesday before leaving for India on Thursday.

The president's remarks, unusually quoted in full, appeared to set the tone for the nuclear talks, which neither side expects to lead to any immediate breakthrough.

"In the interests of mutually beneficial relations with its

traditional and new allies, the United States must demonstrate through consistency of policy that it is a credible friend", he told Hoar.

Pakistan argues that the Pressler Amendment, the US law under which aid was halted, is applied only to Pakistan and not to its long-time foe India which exploded a nuclear device in 1974.

Washington accepts that Pressler is one-sided but insists that Pakistan should cut back its uranium enrichment programme at least to the levels before April last year.

Washington believes Pakistan speeded up efforts to make weapons-grade uranium at its 'secret Kahuta nuclear facility' outside Islamabad last year when tension rose dangerously with India over a Muslim uprising in Kashmir.

Pakistan routinely denies trying to make nuclear weapons, but is widely believed to be at least close to it.

Meanwhile, AP adds: Powerful lobbyists in this Islamic republic want Pakistan's conservative government to get off the fence and declare itself a nuclear power.

This while senior officials are in Islamabad to ask Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to swear off a nuclear arms race on the subcontinent.

Bartholomew is pushing for a regional nuclear non-proliferation agreement between Pakistan and its long-time enemy, India, according to a diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Pakistan has always been the nuclear dove on the subcontinent, having offered India at least half a dozen to sign a mutual nuclear non-proliferation treaty, analysts say.

So far, India has refused.

In June, Sharif offered to convene a five-nation summit to work out a South Asia agreement for banning nuclear arms. He suggested the summit include Pakistan, India, China, the Soviet Union and United States.

Pakistan believes India possesses the capability to build a nuclear bomb having exploded one in 1974.

One of the most powerful men in Pakistan until his retirement last August, Gen Mirza Aslam Beg has established a conservative think tank that has been pressing for military self-reliance in the region through nuclear arms proliferation.

Akram Zaki, Pakistan's Secretary General and No 2 man at the Foreign Ministry, dismissed these lobbies as "futuristic and unrealistic."

Pakistan's government insists it has no nuclear weapons.



VUKOVAR: Some remaining inhabitants of the destroyed city of Vukovar leave their homes while a Yugoslav federal army soldier carries their belongings. — AFP photo

India slams Soviet support for Pakistan

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: India's Foreign Minister Tuesday said Moscow had been told of New Delhi's "unhappiness and disappointment" in voting in favour of a Pakistan resolution for a nuclear-free South Asia at the United Nations, reports AFP.

Madhavsinh Solanki, on his return from the Soviet Union, said it had also been pointed out to Moscow that Soviet support for the Pakistani proposal came despite its friendly relations with India.

"We told the Soviet Union

which maintained a traditional relationship with India decided to support Pakistan's resolution on a nuclear-free South Asia," Solanki said.

New Delhi exploded a nuclear device in 1974, saying at the time it was committed to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, but in the last two years has accused Islamabad of pursuing a weapons-oriented nuclear programme.

Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey said Solanki had "conveyed our displeasure in unmistakable terms" to the Soviet government leaders.

Solanki quoted Pankin as having explained that the decision was in keeping with the stand taken by Moscow in conjunction with Washington on nuclear disarmament programmes.

He said Pankin promised that Moscow's decision in no way diminished its close relationship with India.

Dubey, apparently referring to China, with which India went to war in 1962 over a still unresolved border dispute, said: "We know nuclear weapons are located in vicinity of our borders."

Gorbachev orders Soviet experts back from Afghanistan

MOSCOW, Nov 20: Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has ordered the earliest possible return from Afghanistan of all Soviet military advisors sent by the Soviet Defense and Interior Ministries and State Security departments, reports Xinhua.

The Soviet newspaper "Izvestia" said yesterday that Soviet missile experts will also be reduced in Afghanistan. The presidential decree was announced after a delegation of the Afghan interim government visited Moscow on November 10-15 and an agreement on Afghanistan's future was signed.

From Islamabad AFP adds: The Soviet Union has started pulling out its military personnel operation Scud missiles against Mujahideen rebels in Afghanistan, a top resistance leader here said today.

Moscow has never admitted Mujahideen allegations that hundreds of Soviet officers and advisers were stationed in Kabul and Jalalabad, operating and guiding the Afghan army in the launch to surface long-range missile battery against the resistance gunners.

"According to information received today, the Soviet

Union has started withdrawing its Scud missile operators," Burhanuddin Rabbani told a news conference on his return from Moscow where he led a resistance delegation at last week's talks with Soviet and Russian officials.

The Soviet Union officially pulled all its forces out of Afghanistan in 1989, nearly 10 years after invading the country in the wake of factional fighting in the Communist government in Kabul.



PRAGUE: Several thousand high school students demonstrate in support of Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel's new measures aimed at breaking the deadlock Czech-Slovak talks on the future of the federation and at creating greater powers for the president. — AFP photo

By-elections herald end of Gandhi dynasty

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was killed six months ago, but he has only now been politically buried, reports AP.

The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty governed India for most of its independent lifetime. But during this weekend's parliamentary elections, Gandhi's name was rarely heard.

That was far different from last June when the dominant Congress Party, mourning Gandhi's May 21 assassination, campaigned as the torchbearer of his legacy.

Now Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, a 70-year-old veteran who was chosen to lead the party because of his close ties to the Gandhi family, has been distancing himself from Gandhi.

The men of Gandhi's former inner circle are nowhere to be seen among Rao's advisers or ministers.

Rao's style is the antithesis of Gandhi's impulsive, autocratic, high-profile manner. Rao is a cautious, low-keyed seeker of consensus.

Congress portrayed the by-election on Saturday as a referendum on the performance of Rao's 5-month-old government and its sweeping economic reforms.

The party now led by Rao won eight of the first 12 seats to be declared. Winners of another three seats were to be announced later.

The by-election did not, however, give Congress the majority it needs in Parliament to pass legislation without help from opposition parties.

Without even visiting his constituency in his native southern state of Andhra Pradesh, Rao won his contest

with nearly 90 per cent of the vote. It was the largest landslide in India's history.

Critics charged that Congress activists had intimidated would be opponents against running. Nevertheless, the huge margin allowed Rao to shed an image as caretaker leader and to emerge from Gandhi's shadow.

The election improves Narasimha Rao's position both in the party and in the country," Chopra said.

Congress (I) candidate YS Rajashekar Reddy won the Cuddapah seat in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, vanquishing regional politician CR Ramachandran by more than 418,000 votes, the United News of India (UNI) said.

Andhra Pradesh is Rao's home state, whose Nandyal constituency put him in parliament Sunday night by a world record margin of

580,000 votes.

Cuddapah was the 12th seat to be decided out of 15 contested in Saturday's by-elections. Rao's first test of the ballot since the May-June general elections that resulted in the Congress forming a minority government.

The Congress (I) has won eight of the 12, one more than had been predicted by political pundits, and the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) two.

The Communist Forward Block and the Bahujan Samaj (Masses) Party bagged one seat each.

The Congress can now face the legislature with greater confidence knowing that its political stock has risen in the country and that it has not been politically orphaned by the May 21 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The Indian Express said.

Off the Record

Mysterious space object rushing towards earth

LOS ANGELES: A mysterious object will fly near Earth next month, and scientists don't know if it's a new type of asteroid or a 2-year-old Apollo rocket that shot past the moon and is now coming home, reports AP.

The object, estimated to measure one yard to 11 yards (about one metre to 10 metres) wide, "is the smallest asteroids ever discovered, if not the smallest - if it is an asteroid," said Steve Ostro, an astronomer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena.

Whatever it is, it will fly within 290,000 miles (466,610 kilometres) of Earth at about 1000 or 1100 GMT on December 5, Marsden said Monday by telephone from Cambridge. It won't hit Earth or the moon, he said.

The only asteroid observed flying closer to the planet was a 30-foot-wide (10-metre-wide) chunk of rock that flew 106,000 miles (170,554 kilometres) from Earth on January 15, Marsden said. That was less than half the distance between Earth and the moon and was considered a "near miss" by astronomers.

Paul Chodas, a Jet Propulsion Laboratory aerospace engineer, said his calculations show the object is an asteroid, but it may be an upper stage from one of the rockets that sent Apollo spacecraft to the moon from 1968 through 1972.

Some of those rockets were intentionally crashed on the moon for seismic studies, but four rockets flew past the moon, escaped Earth's gravitational pull and were last reported orbiting the sun, he said.

Most manmade space debris orbits Earth; the mystery object is in a solar orbit.

James Scotti, a University of Arizona scientist, discovered the object November 6, through the university's 36-inch (1-metre) Spacewatch telescope on Kitt Peak.

The mystery object is about 1.2 million miles.

Dog meat is all right

SEOUL: A judge ruled Tuesday that dog meat cannot be described as a "repugnant" food in South Korea because many Koreans enjoy it, reports AP.

Judge Kim In-su of the Seoul District Civil Court ruled in favour of Chung In-chun, a dog meat seller seeking compensation from a taxi company for spinal injuries he suffered when a taxi collided with his motorcycle in August.

Chung's claim for about 300,000 dollars in compensation was based in part on income lost for inability to carry out his sales activities since August.

The taxi company refused to pay, contending that Chung's business was illegal. It said he was selling dog meat banned by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs as a "repugnant" food.

But the judge, in South Korea's first court ruling on dog meat, said the nation's food law doesn't specifically ban it.

Although dog meat has not been sold openly at restaurants, the government's crackdown on its sale has been unofficial so far, he said.

Along with beef, dog meat is one of South Korea's most expensive food items. It is sold unadvertised at many restaurants.

To avoid foreign criticism, open sales of dog meat all but ended during Seoul's preparations of stage the 1988 Olympics.

Looted Czarist amber treasures in Germany

MOSCOW: Treasures from the famed "amber room" at the Czarist palace in Russia — stolen by the Nazis at the end of World War II — have been found on a Soviet military base in eastern Germany, a newspaper disclosed Tuesday, reports AP.

The room was one of the great masterpieces of pre-revolutionary Russian artistry, along with Faberge eggs and the Czar's jewels, and consists of large wall panels and other furnishings made from the rare, honey-colored resin.

The decorations were stripped by German soldiers from the walls of a famous chamber in Catherine's Palace at Tsarskoye Selo, a village outside St Petersburg.

In its report, Rabochaya Tribuna, did not identify the military base where it said the treasures were discovered. But it said the entire cache could be worth 150 million dollars.

Also found were several gold icon frames stolen from the Russian city of Novgorod, the newspaper reported.

It said Soviet military intelligence learned of the whereabouts of the stolen artifacts months ago, but that documents disclosing the news - whether deliberately or by accident - never reached Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin.

There are "suggestions that either the papers were deliberately concealed by members of (former KGB Chairman Vladimir) Kryuchkov's KGB with the idea of creating their own political capital, or lost in the archives of the arrested Communist Party's Central Committee," the newspaper reported.

Amber is the fossilized resin, or sap, from a now-extinct species of pine tree. It varies in colour from light yellow to dark brown, is often transparent, and sometimes contains the well-preserved remains of insects or leaves trapped for millennia in the resin.

Deal for unconditional release of hostages

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 20: Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar disclosed Tuesday that there is agreement in principle for the remaining hostages to be released unconditionally by Christmas, reports AP.

It was the first time no conditions were attached by hostage-holding Shiite Muslim groups in an agreement involving the release of the Westerners, according to the UN chief.

Past negotiations have depended on issues such as Israel's detention of several hundred Arabs in southern Lebanon, or Israel demands for information on its missing servicemen.

Perez de Cuellar stressed he received pledges from the hostage-holders that the cases of the five remaining Western hostages will not be linked with other issues.

"The key is that there are two different questions, they are not really interrelated" he told reporters before departing for Europe.

Referring to Monday's release of American Thomas Sutherland and Briton Terry Waite, he said "What is very important to explain, for instance in this particular case, is that they have been freed with no counterparts."

Perez de Cuellar said he has had pledges in principle to free the remaining hostages by Christmas but he stressed that a lot of work remains before a deal can be settled on.

The negotiations among the Israelis and the hostage-holders, and Syria and Iran are still in play and are more complex, he said.

"As for the Lebanese detainees, it is a case in which there is a 'trade' of information with the Israelis against the freeing of (Arab) hostages," he said.

"It is a totally different business as far as the Westerners are concerned," he said. He stressed that the release of the Westerners was not linked to other issues.

Initially, the kidnappers linked to the Hezbollah to free about 300 Arabs, mainly Shittes held by Israel's proxy South Lebanon Army militia.

Sixty-six have been freed, but the prisoner the Shittes want most, Hezbollah cleric Sheikh Abdul-Karim Obaid, remains in captivity.

The remaining American hostages are Associated Press chief Middle East correspondent Terry Anderson, journalism professor Alann Stein and Joseph Cioppio, acting comptroller of the American University of Beirut.

Secret ballot to choose UN Secy-Gen today

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 20: The Security Council will hold a formal secret ballot on Thursday to choose a new UN Secretary-General, Council members said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

If no clear winner emerges, a second formal ballot will be held on Monday.

Council members discussed arrangements for the voting during lengthy closed-door consultations.