

BRIEFLY

Police official escapes kidnappers : A senior Kashmiri policeman has escaped his kidnappers after being held hostage for 10 weeks by militants fighting Indian rule of the Himalayan region, police said today, reports Reuter from Srinagar.

Deputy Superintendent Purn Anand took advantage of an army search operation to elude his guards from the Al-Omer Mujahideen on the outskirts of Srinagar on Sunday night, police said.

Anand slipped out when his guards were distracted by soldiers searching for militants and weapons near the house where he was held.

Al-Omer kidnapped Anand on September 24 and demanded the release of several detained colleagues.

Azerbaijan becomes OIC member : The Soviet Muslim republic of Azerbaijan has become a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Senegalese Foreign Minister Djibo Ka announced in Dakar Sunday, reports AFP.

"We have received a letter from the President of Azerbaijan seeking admission," Ka told Senegalese television.

He also said Albania had been accepted as an observer to the OIC.

With Azerbaijan, the OIC, which is scheduled to hold a summit meeting here starting Monday, will have 45 members.

Comoros envoy taken hostage : Students from the Comoros Islands in the Indian Ocean have taken their country's ambassador to Senegal hostage to protest about non-payment of their grants, the official Senegalese news agency APS reported on Sunday, says Reuter from Dakar.

The agency said the students had been holding the ambassador, Yaliya Jamadar, for three days in the Comoros consulate in Dakar.

The ambassador, resident in Paris but accredited to Senegal, had come to Dakar to take part in a summit of the 45 member Organisation of the Islamic Conference due to open on Monday.

Senegalese police have surrounded the consulate but sources close to the students said the ambassador had asked them not to intervene.

HK to force Vietnamese back home : The British colonial government is making plans to forcibly repatriate the second group of Vietnamese boat people in a month, reports AP from Hong Kong.

Colonial security forces plan to move 28 Vietnamese on Tuesday from an island detention center to Hong Kong's international airport, where they board a flight to Hanoi, a government statement said.

In all, 12 men, six women, seven boys and three girls will be sent home, said C K Yeung, a spokesman for the Hong Kong Security Branch. Twelve of the 28 arrived in Hong Kong as late as October 30, he said.

There are tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees in this British colony.

The operation follows the forcible repatriation of 59 Vietnamese on November 9.

Five Sikh militants killed : Police say they have killed the five Sikh militants allegedly responsible for massacring 26 people in a shooting spree last week, news reports said Monday, reports AP from Delhi.

Police tracking the gunmen after Thursday's shooting caught up with them on Sunday travelling in a village area near Hissar on the border between the states of Haryana and Punjab, said the newspapers and news agencies.

Three men were killed in an hour-long battle. The two who escaped were later surrounded and shot by another police patrol, the reports said, quoting Director General Kalyan Rudra of the Haryana state police.

The gunmen were believed to belong to the Khalistan Commando Force, one of the main militant groups fighting for a theocratic state in Punjab, where Sikhs are in a slight majority.

16 killed in Lankan violence : Thirteen Tamil rebels and three soldiers were killed over the weekend when the army tried to expand its defense lines around a military airstrip in the rebel-held Jaffna Peninsula of northern Sri Lanka, military officials said Monday, reports AP from Colombo.

The heaviest fighting was on Sunday when eight rebels and a soldier were killed, said the officials at the Joint Operations Command in Colombo.

At least 8,000 people have died since June 1990 when the Tamil Tigers resumed their campaign for an independent homeland in the northeast of this Indian Ocean island.

President Ranasinghe Premadasa has repeatedly called on the Tigers to surrender, and a Tamil politician has been in contact with the guerillas to formulate a peace plan.

Kabul won't seek arms from other sources

KABUL, Dec 9 : Afghan President Najibullah said on Sunday he would not seek weapons from other sources to fight Western-backed guerrillas after Moscow cut off supplies next month, reports Reuter.

He told a news conference that foreign interference in the country must cease and he renewed his call for a ceasefire to help to end the 13-year-old Afghan civil war.

"Once these two conditions are fulfilled, Afghans can come to a speedy resolution of all their differences," he said.

The United States and the Soviet Union are due to halt weapons supplies to the warring sides by January 1 to

promote a U.N. peace plan providing for a ceasefire and transitional government leading to elections.

Najibullah said Kabul would not seek fresh sources of weapons. "The task is to reduce the arms in the country and not seek ways of bringing in new supplies," he said.

He denied reports of heavy fighting between rival pro-government militia groups in the western Afghan city of Herat in the past week.

Witnesses from the area had said militia groups fired at each other from tanks and armored vehicles and regular army troops had also clashed with the militia groups.

Crackdown on Tibetans ahead of Li's visit to Delhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 9 : Police swooped on a Tibetan refugee camp in New Delhi on Sunday and arrested pro-democracy activists ahead of a visit to India this week by Chinese Prime Li Peng. Tibetan activists said.

"They have picked up most of our lades may be more than 30. We are certain there will be more arrests," Karma Samten, Information Secretary of the pro-democracy Tibet Youth Congress, told Reuters.

A police official at the Majnu Ka Teela refugee camp said about a dozen people were arrested but did not specify the charges.

Li, who begins a five-day visit on Wednesday, will be the first Chinese Prime Minister to visit India since Chou Enlai in 1960, two years before the two countries fought a border war.

India has accepted and even supported pro-democracy Tibetan refugees. The Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, has made his base in India.

In 1988, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, trying to restore normal relations, went to China and agreed to curb Tibetans from carrying out "activities hostile to China."

Chinese Ambassador Cheng Ruisheg said on Saturday that India had yet to fulfill Gandhi's promise.

India's position is that Tibet is an autonomous region of China. Accordingly, we agreed that India will not permit any anti-China activities from its soil," Cheng told a news conference. "That remains to be followed up."

Samten said the arrests of Tibetan refugees signaled the first major crackdown by India on the pro-democracy movement.

About 100,000 Tibetan refugees live in India and some of them are expected to stage anti-Chinese demonstrations during Li's visit, he said.

"We are planning worldwide demonstrations to coincide with Li's visit," Samten said. "We plan demonstrations in India too, but I cannot give details as we are under surveillance."

Cheng said India and China, both under international security for alleged human rights violations, shared a common perspective on the issue.

"We are delighted that the fundamental viewpoint between the two governments is quite similar," he said.

China has been severely criticised over human rights abuses since its bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

India has been accused of human rights excesses in its Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir state, virtually paralysed for two years by a bloody separatist movement, and in Punjab where it is fighting Sikh separatists.



WASHINGTON : Israeli Deputy Minister for Information Benjamin Netanyahu (c) shakes hands with US-Jewish demonstrators Sunday outside the Israeli delegations hotel in Washington. To the left is Cabinet Secretary Elyakim Rubinstein, head of the Israeli team to negotiate with the Palestinians and Jordanians. — AFP/UNB photo

Rulers are beasts: Nasrullah Khan Pakistan turns into a fascist state: Benazir

KARACHI, Dec 9 : Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, denouncing mysterious attacks on her female friends, accused Pakistani leaders on Sunday of turning the country into a lawless, fascist state, reports Reuter.

"There is no democracy in Pakistan, there is no law in Pakistan," she said in an interview. "It is a fascist state."

Bhutto's comments followed a statement by elderly politician Shaukat Hayat on Saturday that her daughter, a friend of Bhutto, was molested by five gunmen for seven hours on November 27.

Molestation of women is generally understood in Pakistan as sexual abuse.

"This is not the first incident," Bhutto said. "Just last month another political lady... was raped."

Bhutto accuses the administration in her home province of Sind of unleashing a reign of terror against her followers and friends. She says more than 2,500 activists of her Pakistan People's Party were arrested in a 12-day-old crackdown.



Sind Chief Minister Jam Sadiq Ali said last Tuesday the crackdown was against "terrorist elements" and only 318 people had been detained. The Sind government on Sunday ordered a high level judicial inquiry into Hayat's allegation, which sparked protests from other politicians and human rights activists.

"Pakistan has turned into a jungle where the rulers are beasts," veteran politician Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan told a news conference in the Punjab province capital of Lahore. "This is no longer a country of civilised people."

Several political and human rights groups in Lahore called for protests throughout the province on Thursday. The women's action forum in Karachi planned a protest rally for Tuesday.

President Ghulam Ishaq Khan sacked Bhutto as Prime Minister last year on disputed charges of abuse of power during 20 months of government. He has set up tribunals to try her and several of her cabinet ministers.

17 killed in Soweto violence

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 9 : At least 17 people were killed in shooting and stabbing attacks in the black township of Soweto after an Inkatha Freedom Party rally, police said Monday, reports AP.

Police said at least 13 people were injured in the fighting that erupted Sunday when about 12,000 Inkatha members, many of them armed, left a rally in the sprawling township outside Johannesburg.

Fighting continued during the night with scattered attacks on vehicles and homes, police said.

The fighting was the worst in Soweto in recent months. Police reinforcements were deployed to try and head off the revenge killings that often follow such incidents.

The dead included seven people whose bodies were found Monday in a house near a Soweto workers' hostel that is an Inkatha stronghold, police said. Police had no details on the identity or political affiliation of the dead in the house.

In incidents in other parts of the country, police said eight people were killed in political violence, including six people in the eastern province of Natal.

Imelda pleads innocent to tax fraud charges

MANILA, Dec 9 : Former first lady Imelda Marcos and her son pleaded innocent Monday to tax fraud charges, and the judge ordered their trial to begin next week, reports AP.

Judge Thomas Tadeo said the first hearing would be held December 16 and he hoped to complete the trial within 90 days.

The widow of former President Ferdinand Marcos stood clutching a rosary as a clerk read a summary of the seven charges against her. She responded "not guilty" to each one.

Her son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., pleaded innocent to the two charges against him.

About 200 Marcos supporters cheered as Mrs Marcos and her son left the courthouse in suburban Quezon City. They chanted "Imelda — not guilty."

Mrs Marcos denounced the charges as harassment.

"The sad part about it is that the ultimate victim of injustice is the Filipino people because [of]... the time and energy the government has wasted," she told reporters after the arraignment.

Sweden concerned at collapse of Soviet central authority

STOCKHOLM, Dec 9 : Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt expressed concern on Sunday at what he said appeared to be the collapse of the Soviet Union's central authority, reports Reuter.

Commenting on an agreement by Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia to create a commonwealth of independent states, Bildt said this was bound to affect Sweden.

"We are a small country on the periphery of a collapsing superpower,"

Soviet unrest may lead to warfare: Baker

WASHINGTON : Unrest in the Soviet Union could lead to the kind of warfare that has rent Yugoslavia, with the added danger of nuclear weapons thrown in, Secretary of State James A. Baker said Sunday, reports AP.

Interviewed on CBS-TV's "Face the Nation," Baker said he believes "there will continue to be efforts to maintain some sort of a center" in what has been the Soviet Union.

But Baker's comments came before the Soviet media reported that the Soviet Union's three Slavic republics Russian, Byelorussia and Ukraine — forged a new alliance and said

Mikhail Gorbachev's government was dead.

The news agency Tass said the agreement creates a new "commonwealth of independent states" with its capital in Minsk instead of Moscow. The Soviet Union "as a subject of international and geopolitical reality no longer exists," Tass quoted the agreement as saying.

White House spokesman Bill Harlo said Russian President Boris Yeltsin called President Bush on Sunday afternoon to tell him about the action. Yeltsin told Bush he would provide more details later, Harlo said.

Slavic commonwealth seems to be final blow for Gorbachev

MOSCOW, Dec 9 : The formation of a commonwealth by the three Slavic states of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia on Sunday seemed to be the coup de grace for the former Soviet Union and the government of Mikhail S Gorbachev, reports AP.

The agreement goes a long way toward cooling potentially explosive friction between Russia and Ukraine, the two most populous and wealthy of the former Soviet republics.

But it does not resolve a host of other questions stemming from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Those questions include the fate of Kazakhstan and other Asian republics that had been expected to remain in the Union.

Russian Federation President Boris N Yeltsin, newly elected Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk and Byelorussian leader

Stanislav Shushkevich reached the agreement in a remote corner of Byelorussia.

It was the latest shock to the Soviet Union since Gorbachev became head of the Communist Party in March 1985. The most serious blow to the central government was a failed coup by party hard-liners in August.

Since the coup, Yeltsin and other republic leaders have stripped the central government of power. The Communist Party, formerly the country's main unifying force, virtually ceased to exist after Gorbachev quit his post as leader of the party and suspended its activities on Aug 24. Yeltsin banned the party in Russia.

Since the coup, the three Baltic states have reasserted their independence. All of the other 12 Soviet republics, except Russia and Kazakhstan,

have declared their independence.

But even after announcement of the Slavic commonwealth, the exact shape of the new alliance was unclear.

"I do not know how future events will develop, since there are still Kazakhstan and the other republics," said Vladimir Mashits, Russian representative on the inter-republic council established after the coup to coordinate policy among the republics. "I wouldn't rush to an evaluation."

Before announcement of the commonwealth, Gorbachev insisted in an interview Sunday that it would take more than a declaration to bury the union.

"The union still exists," he told Ukrainian television. "Your brothers might say it doesn't or they might talk about the former union. No, it's not a structure, not writing or speech. It's reality. It's people. It's life. It's society. This is

what the union is."

The leaders of the three Slavic states, who were to meet with Gorbachev in Moscow on Monday, pledged to keep central command over the armed forces and nuclear arms, to destroy atomic weapons under international supervision, and to meet Kremlin commitments to the United Nations.

But Soviet media reports on the deal appeared to leave uncertain how the new commonwealth would live up to treaties signed recently by Gorbachev, such as an agreement with Washington to slash nuclear arsenals and with NATO to drastically reduce conventional armies.

In a separate agreement, the commonwealth would retain the ruble as a currency, although republics could issue their own money. It also would create a joint banking and financial system.

Gorbachev, in the Ukrainian TV interview, warned that dismembering the Soviet Union would be catastrophic.

"We have reached a kind of limit and after this limit comes instability," Gorbachev warned, referring to the civil war in Yugoslavia.

Gorbachev had a similar reaction in September 1990, when the exiled Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn called for dissolution three Slavic states.

The Soviet president has been pushing for a new Union Treaty to form a loose confederation among the Soviet republics, but has been unable to conclude that deal.

The Slavic agreement announced Sunday seemed designed in large part to forestall a formidable array of economic problems looming after Ukrainian voters a week ago overwhelmingly endorsed in-

dependence from the Soviet Union.

But the agreement could complicate Russia's relations with Kazakhstan, about half ethnic Russian and Ukrainian, and the four republics of Soviet Central Asia, which have Muslim majorities and sizable Russian minorities.

Failure to include Kazakhstan in the commonwealth could cause serious friction. Russians, concentrated on Kazakhstan's northern border with Russia, want to secede from Kazakhstan and unite with the Russian Federation.

Kazakhstan, which together with Russia is one of the two former Soviet republics to declare independence, is an economic powerhouse. It also has on its soil a number of strategic nuclear weapons and has balked at handing them over to Russia.

Off the Record

Schwarzkopf knows little about management

BITHOVEN, Netherlands : "Stormin' Norman" Schwarzkopf said he knew Jots about leadership, but little about management, reports AP.

That didn't stop more than 300 Dutch captains of industry from paying up to 3,000 guilders (dfls 1,666) to listen to the views of the Gulf War hero on how to run their firms.

Schwarzkopf gave the lecture Wednesday at the headquarters of the Philips electronics multinational in this southern Dutch city. The title of his lectures: "Human Resources Management: What I learned from the Gulf War."

Schwarzkopf also said a leader must have the courage to make decisions even if he is not well informed, according to RBG spokesman Rogier Noordenbos.

Dutch newspapers covering the visit focused as much attention on the refusal of a small-town Dutch mayor to greet the hero of the Gulf War.

"He is the person who devised the most efficient way possible to kill as many people as possible," Jan Ritsema, mayor of Bergen, said in a telephone interview. "There is too much blood on his hands."

During the Gulf War, opinion polls showed most Dutch supported allied intervention to free Kuwait from Iraqi rule and the Dutch sent Navy frigates to back the US-led action.



Bitter X-mas for UN staffers

UNITED NATIONS : This Christmas season is not too jolly for staffers at the United Nations. Holiday salary advances have been canceled, and UN staffers even worry that they won't get paid this month, reports AP.

Day and night, UN financial chief Kofi Annan telephones foreign ministers and finance ministers pleading that their countries pay their arrears on back dues or make early payments on their 1992 UN dues.

It's tough to be one of the approximately 32,000 UN staffers worldwide these days, Annan said. "They wonder whether they'll be able to put bread on the table the next time that the check is supposed to be coming."

"And nobody wants to work for an organisation that's perceived as a hand-to-mouth, shoestring operation. We all want to feel that we're working for a prestigious outfit," Annan said, and "excellence costs money."

There are lots of deadbeats among UN member-states. As of early December, only 115 of the 166 UN members had paid their dues in full.

Devine Miss M now domestic Miss M

NEW YORK : Bette Midler has gone from the divine Miss M to the Domestic Miss M, reports AP.

"I'm a fabulous cook, and my husband is a fabulous cook," the singer-actress said in the January issue of Ladies' Home Journal.

"I collect cookbooks. I love good food. I sew. You won't believe it, but I sew. We decorate. We go to flea markets and swap meets."

Miss Midler's latest thrill: growing her own vegetables. She doesn't miss the fast lane.

"Everything in this country is about speed, about going faster, having more status, more money. And I find that's not really the way."

Miss Midler, who is married to Martin von Haselberg, has a 5-year-old daughter. She said her love of domesticity is fun.

"Doesn't it sound like fun? A different kind of fun."

Obscene but artistic

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn : A judge has ruled that city officials can't prevent the musical "Oh! Calcutta!" from being shown at a city-owned theatre, even though they claim the play is obscene, reports AP.

Chancellor R Vann Owens said "Oh! Calcutta!" producers have a legal right to stage the play, which includes nudity and simulated sex, at the Tivoli Theatre.

Singer Entertainment Ltd. Inc. of Port Murray, N.J. Plans to present the play January 23.

Owens' decision came nearly three weeks after a jury, in an advisory opinion following a four-day trial, said the play wasn't obscene under guidelines established by the US Supreme Court.

Jurors said "Oh! Calcutta!" was patently offensive, but said it had artistic value and didn't appeal solely to prurient interests.



PRAGUE : Spanish Infanta Cristina (l), daughter of King Juan Carlos and British actor and author Sir Peter Ustinov share a light moment after the performance of WA Mozart's opera "Don Giovanni" December one on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Mozart's death. — AFP/UNB photo

US fails to maintain neutrality: Arafat

TUNIS, Dec 9 : PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat on Sunday blasted the United States for what he termed its blind support for Israel and its failure to maintain neutrality in Middle East peace efforts, reports AP.

The Israeli enemy wants neither peace nor international legal recognition," he charged in remarks published here marking the fourth anniversary today of an anti-Israeli Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories.

Unfortunately, Israel finds support and assistance from its American ally, Israel is the spotted child of all the governments that have come to power in the United States.

Arafat was speaking ahead of the expected resumption Tuesday by Palestinian delegates of bilateral talks with Israel in Washington, within the Middle East Peace Initiative sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union.

The two sponsors are spoiling it (Israel), particularly the United States, which treats it as an ally and friend, according to the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization.