

Filipino reds kill 15 police officers

MANILA, May 10: Fifteen members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) were killed and five wounded in an ambush by communist guerrillas north of here today on the eve of national elections, a senior official said, reports AFP.

The pre-dawn attack came hours after the close of a three-month election campaign marked by 51 deaths in poll-related violence, including 10 people who died in two bombings Saturday in the southern island of Mindanao.

PNP Deputy Chief Gerardo E Flores said the police were ambushed after being sent to a village near Enrile town in Cagayan province to check out a reported concentration of New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas.

Flores said PNP reinforcements had been sent to hunt

down the attackers.

"This is a big loss for us," he said.

The ambush in Cagayan about 400 kilometers (248 miles) north of Manila, came a month after 40 soldiers and guerrillas were killed in a major clash in the adjacent mountain province.

The PNP has been deputised for election duty. They are charged with guarding polling stations and preventing armed groups from disrupting the vote.

AP adds: No arrests have been made in the killing. Some politicians said the rebels could have staged the killing in collusion with rival candidates in Monday's national election.

Tensions were also running high after the Commission on Elections disqualified Rodolfo Aguinaldo.

ME talks begin today Israel to boycott two sessions

TORONTO, May 10: Middle East peace talks open in several capital around the globe this week, but Israel has decided to boycott two of the sessions because it doesn't want to talk to Palestinian exiles, reports AP.

The contentious issue of who should attend these multilateral talks from the Palestinian side has threatened to derail them ever since they began in Moscow in January. The United States and Russia support the presence of Palestinians from outside the occupied territories.

The Israelis fear that if Palestinian exiles attend, their presence would open up the issue of their right to return to the lands they fled in 1948 as Israel was being born.

Most other countries, including the American and

Russian co-sponsors of the talks, feel the presence of these Palestinians is essential. Some question the usefulness of discussing the Palestinian refugee problem without talking directly to the refugees themselves.

The first sessions of the

Here is the lineup of multilateral Middle East peace talks that begin this week with the dates they start, the city and the topic. May 11-12, Brussels; Regional Economic Development, May 11-14; Washington; Security and Disarmament, May 13-14; Vienna; Water Management; May 13-15, Ottawa; Refugees, May 18-19, Tokyo, Environment.

multilateral talks, which essentially are open to any country that feels it has something to contribute to peace in the Middle East, begin Monday.

Washington is hosting talks on arms control and the 12-nation European Community

will lead discussions on economic issues in Brussels, Belgium.

On Wednesday, talks open in Ottawa on refugees and in Vienna on water resources. A last set of meetings is scheduled to begin May 18 in Tokyo on environmental issues.

These talks complement the ongoing bilateral talks between Israel and each of its Arab neighbours separately. In those negotiations, Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip are part of the Jordanian delegation.

The Israelis notified Ottawa that they would not take part in the talks on refugees. Israel also notified Portugal, current president of the European Community, that it would boycott the discussions in Brussels.

The Syrians and their Lebanese allies have let it be known that they are not interested in joining the multilateral talks.

Hanan Ashrawi, the Palestinian spokeswoman for the talks, said the Palestinians agree with the Syrians that there must be progress in the bilateral talks for the multilaterals "to make any sense."

But she said the Palestinians also view the multilateral talks as a way "to put pressure" on the bilaterals.

BRIEFLY

Bush phones Yeltsin: President George Bush telephoned his Russian counterpart Boris Yeltsin on Saturday to discuss the agenda of their summit talks in Washington next month, the White House said, reports from Washington.

Spokesman Gary Foster said the 35-minute conversation was "a very good, cordial discussion" which focused on what will be the first formal US-Russian summit, scheduled for June 16 and 17.

He added that the question of US economic aid to Russia was not raised.

On February 1, Yeltsin held an informal session with Bush at the US leader's Camp David presidential retreat in the Maryland countryside.

Suchinda pledges no bloodshed: Prime Minister Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon Saturday reaffirmed his intention to avoid bloodshed and not use force against more than 100,000 protesters challenging his leadership. Xinhua reports from Bangkok.

Suchinda believed the political tension would gradually ease, local newspaper The Nation reported Sunday.

Speaking to reporters afternoon Saturday after attending an ancestry worship ceremony, Gen Suchinda said he still had the unwavering support of the five-party coalition government.

I believe the situation will continue to improve every day from now, he said.

Six Iranians held in Quito: Six Iranians and an Italian detained in Quito last week on suspicion of being linked to the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Argentina will be deported Saturday after authorities cleared them of any involvement in the attack, officials said, AFP reports from Quito.

The detainees will be deported to Iran, via Santa Fe de Bogota and Caracas, because the criminal investigation office here concluded they did they belong to any terrorist organization.

Investigators were unable to link them to the March 17 car bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires which claimed at least 28 lives and destroyed the building.

In Buenos Aires, Argentine authorities found no evidence that the suspects were involved in the attack. The suspects said they were in Iran at the time of the incident.

5 shot dead in Pakistan: Five persons including a police officer were shot dead by four armed men in Hyderabad city, Sindh province on Saturday night, Xinhua reports from Islamabad.

According to local press reports Sunday the five victims were killed by indiscriminate shooting in a VIP ward of a hospital where they were visiting a hospitalized friend who was shot in the legs by two unknown assailants.

The killers also tossed a hand grenade into the ward and three others were seriously injured, the reports said.

After the assassination took place, fears of more violence have crippled the ethnically polarized city, according to the reports.

PLO denies media report: The president of the PLO's parliament-in-exile, Sheikh Abdel Hamid Al-Sayeh, on Saturday denied recent media reports that Palestine Liberation Organisation Chief Yasser Arafat had sole control over the groups' finances, AFP reports from Tunis.

Arafat 'is not the only manager' of PLO funds or those of its mainstream group fatah, Sayeh said in a statement released here.

The statement, he said, came in reply to suspect and hostile information carried by the media.

The head of the Palestine National Council (PNC) said the PLO had no bank account which could be unlocked through Arafat's sole signature.

2 killed in roof collapse: Two Chinese Engineers were killed when the roof of a newly-built cabin collapsed on them at a copper project in Pakistan's southwestern province of Baluchistan, officials said on Saturday, reports Reuters from Pakistan.

The accident happened on Friday at the Saindak Project, near the Iranian border, where about 400 Chinese are working.

12 Palestinians hurt in Clash: Israeli troops Sunday shot and wounded 12 Palestinians in clashes Saturday in the occupied Gaza Strip, where residents were observing general strike to mark the start of the 54th month of the Intifada, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Hospital sources said most of the Palestinians from the Shati refugee camp and Gaza city were shot in the legs and were out of danger.

Witnesses reported that the troops opened fire on Palestinian taking part in anti-Israeli protests.

Schools open in Kabul

KABUL, MAY 9: Grade schools opened Saturday in the capital for the first time in six months, and found themselves caught between the communism of the past and the Islam of the future, reports AP.

The opening of Kabul's 102 elementary schools and high schools was a sign of the new government's attempts to restore order. A cease-fire remained between rival rebel factions jockeying for control of the city.

With his Soviet-made book-bag — a Red Army soldier emblazoned on the side — 11-year old Najibullah looked ready for class. But at the French Lycée in the center of town, his teachers said they didn't know what to teach him.

The collapse of the Soviet-installed regime and its Communist philosophy and the establishment of an Islamic republic have placed teachers, and other professionals, in a difficult position.



KABUL: Young girls study their books on May 9 on the first day back at school after a break in classes of six months, the longest academic break in 14 years of war. Attendance in classes was thin with most parents holding their children back until the current situation stabilises. —AFP/UNB photo

India may ban LTTE activities

KOCHI, May 10: A decision by the government of India on banning the activities of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) can be expected soon, according to the Union Minister of State for Home, MM Jacob, reports PTI.

The matter was already before the union cabinet, he told newsmen here today.

The centre had examined the various aspects of the issue including the legal and political, and come to the conclusion that if the activities of the LTTE and of organisations 'loyal' to it or abetting or aiding it, were allowed to continue unfettered in normal life and peace and tranquillity in Tamil Nadu were likely to be affected, he said.

AIDS spreading fast in Asia

MALE, May 10: The fatal disease AIDS is spreading faster in Asia than anywhere else in the world, Commonwealth ministers were told on Saturday, reports Reuters.

The most recent statistics show that by the year 2000, there will be more AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) cases in Asia than in any other region in the world. Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anyaoku told the first meeting of Commonwealth youth ministers.

Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom said AIDS would become the single largest cause of death in the world in the next 10 to 20 years.

"It will still national will and

pride and bereave thousands of families with the loss of loved ones," he said.

Ministers and officials from 38 countries are taking part in the four-day meeting. It will discuss among other issues, the effectiveness of youth ministries, youth community services and literacy.

Issues like AIDS, drugs use, unemployment and social unrest are not on the agenda but are likely to be raised.

Some delegates said youth unrest arising out of economic problems was causing concern in many countries in Asia and Africa and must be discussed.

Anyaoku said in his opening address that the environmental challenge was the greatest facing humanity since the future of the earth was at stake.

"Only now is the world beginning to wake up to the many ways we are despoiling our planet, plundering its riches and endangering its survival," he said.

"It is now time for the world to act, most particularly at the earth summit in Rio next month."

Anyaoku said it was the young people who picked the conscience of their elders on the environment and pointed the way to appropriate action.

"It is often the case, when we think about young people, that we are too ready to perceive them negatively rather than positively," he said.

"It is tempting to see young people as part of the problem of AIDS, unemployment and poverty rather than as part of the solution."

Thai opposition not happy with compromise

Accord to amend constitution

BANGKOK, May 10: Thailand's embattled government, faced with huge street protests demanding that the unelected Prime Minister quit, says it has agreed with the opposition on changes to make the constitution more democratic, reports Reuters.

But it was not immediately clear whether the agreement would fully satisfy tens of thousands of demonstrators involved in the worst political unrest for two decades.

The Speaker of the lower house of parliament said yesterday, after a meeting of government and opposition members, that both sides had agreed to amend the constitution to require that the Prime Minister be elected.

"We agreed that there is a way to help solve the conflict of opinions by amending the constitution," state radio Thailand quoted Athit Uritrat as saying. He said the resolution for the amendments had been submitted to King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

The armed forces chief, Air Chief Marshal Kaset Rojananil, said yesterday night that any constitutional amendments would depend on how soon members of parliament wanted to go ahead with them.

An estimated 100,000 demonstrators poured into central Bangkok that night in support of opposition leader Chamlong Srimuang's bid to force Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon to resign.

Chamlong ended a six-day hunger strike earlier yesterday but vowed to continue fighting to oust Suchinda.

A pro-military five-party coalition which won a narrow majority in March 22 general elections last month asked Suchinda to become Prime Minister.

Suchinda, who did not run in the polls, stepped down as armed forces chief to take the post. He had helped stage a February 1991 coup which ousted the previous elected government.

Opposition groups said they

were not entirely happy with the compromise which did not specify when Suchinda should step down.

Chamlong said he needed an assurance from Suchinda that the agreement would not be dishonoured later.

"It is not a lot to ask," a lot to ask, he said. "He should give the people something because they have lost a lot."

By daybreak today, about 2,000 demonstrators were still on the streets, most lying exhausted on a broad avenue leading from the democracy monument to a bridge blocked off by police with barbed-wire.

The constitution drawn up after the February 1991 coup does not specify that the Prime Minister must be elected a point which opposition and student groups had strongly criticised.

Chamlong, an immensely popular former Bangkok Governor, also announced he would step down as leader of his Palang Dharma ("moral force") party to continue the

protest and unify the opposition.

Armed forces chief Kaset said the amendments to the constitution would depend on "the discretion of members of parliament whether to proceed with amending the constitution quickly and cautiously."

He said Suchinda had no objections to the amendments.

Prison rebels in Lima surrender

LIMA, May 10: Rebels in the nation's top security prison surrendered Saturday night after police stormed the cell block they had held for four days, entering through a hole they blasted in a prison wall, reports AP.

Three was no immediate word on casualties in the violence, which began in the morning and intensified after the government decided to act in the afternoon.

Off the Record

Stolen in Belgium found in London

LONDON: Police said Saturday they were investigating an art theft after they seized a stolen Magritte painting at a leading London auction house, reports AP.

The oil-on-canvas "Dedicated Comrade" was stolen in Belgium in 1979, a Scotland Yard spokeswoman said.

The surrealist work, measuring 32 inches by 40 inches (80 centimeters by 100 centimeters), is valued at 3 million dollars said the spokeswoman, who was not identified, she could not say where it had been stolen from.

Police seized the painting at Sotheby's London showrooms Friday, she said.

It shows the silhouette of a man wearing a bowler hat and a pair of curtains with a bowler hat shape cut into them.

Belgian Rene Magritte, who died in 1967 at age 69, was one of the leading surrealist painters. His works often juxtapose realistic images in a deceptively simple ironic style.

Sexual revolution sweeps Russia

MOSCOW: A sexual revolution is sweeping post-communist Russia as young people catch up with the west's permissive era, reports Reuters.

Russian teenagers say they now talk freely about sex and change their partners without the inhibitions of the past.

They see the behaviour of their parents' generation under the old Soviet system as furtive and hypocritical.

The turning point came four years ago at a private Kremlin showing of Little Vera, Russia's first film with an explicit sex scene. It prompted then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to walk out in disgust.

But the film, a product of his own glasnost political reforms, was a sell-out as young Russians saw this vital aspect of their lives depicted on screen for the first time.

Last year's collapse of communist power finally swept away a legacy of official puritanism.

Today, films like Little Vera are shown on television and in cinemas and sex magazines are sold on street corners.

Seks, as it's known to Russians, remains a generation gap problem. Large number of young people get married in order to sleep with their partners because many parents find sex before marriage unacceptable.

Young singles complain bitterly they have nowhere to go to be alone together. For them, Russian's chronic shortage of housing is a worse problem than the scarcity of contraceptives.

There is little privacy in a state that supervised everyone for decades. Russian doesn't even have a world for privacy. Like most young Russians, Dima, a 21-year-old Moscow street-trader lives with his parents. They disapprove of premarital sex. In the summer I can take my girl friend to the woods or to the beach, but in winter it is more difficult, he said.

Britain will pay damages to pregnant victims

LONDON: The British Defence Ministry announced that it would pay damages to hundreds of women who were forced out of the armed forces between 1978 and August 1990 because they became pregnant, reports AFP.

The ministry estimated in a statement released late Saturday that the number of women concerned by the decision was between 3,800 and 4,400, but it did not say how much money would be paid out to them.

The Sunday Telegraph reported that the decision could cost the government up to 80 million pounds (140 million dollars).

Until 1990, British military regulations required female soldiers who got pregnant to leave the armed forces.

Children exports — a profitable business

SANTIAGO: Chile ranks second in Latin America, next after Colombia, in the export of children for adoption abroad, it was reported here Saturday, says Xinhua.

The latest figures disclosed by the Ministry of Justice indicated that 200 permits have been issued by minors' courts in the country since 1989 to allow over 1,600 minors to go abroad for adoption: 673 1989, 664 in 1990, and nearly 300 up to May of this year.

In 1991 foreign couples paid 5,000 to 20,000 US dollars to be able to adopt a child, a press report said.

There are also illegal transactions involving Chilean lawyers, doctors, nurses, social workers, hospital personnel and other people, it added.

The Santiago press disclosed yesterday that a female judge of the minors' court in Santiago has been found to belong to an organization which has illegally sold 20 children to the United States.

The mothers said that their children had been looked after in nursing homes before they were taken out of the country without their permission.

In the 20 cases, transactions were effected with the adoptive fathers paying 50,000 dollars per child.

CSCE threatens to suspend Yugoslavia

BELGRADE, May 10: An imminent threat to Yugoslavia of suspension from the main forum uniting the nations of Europe failed to halt the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports Reuters.

Shelling resumed in the Ilidza area, southwest of the Bosnian capital Sarajevo late on Saturday, following reports of widespread fighting across the former Yugoslav republic throughout the day.

The reports killed off fading hopes of a lull following Belgrade's dismissal on Friday of virtually all its headline generals, while the week's peace

efforts by the United Nations and the European Community appeared to have had little effect.

The belated and partial pullout did not impress most members of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which holds Yugoslavia, and its dominant republic Serbia, responsible for fighting which has cost several hundred lives.

On the fourth day of a meeting in Helsinki on Saturday, 50 of the 52 CSCE nations agreed on a draft text which would partially suspend Yugoslavia from its decision-making until June 30.

Yemen lifts death penalty on Ali Nasser

SANAA, May 10: The presidency of Yemen has lifted the death sentences on the former President of South Yemen, Ali Nasser Mohamed, and five aides for their role in a 1986 power struggle which left nearly 4,000 dead, it was announced here, reports AFP.

An official statement released Saturday said the amnesty was agreed on late last month by unified Yemen's collegial presidency, headed by General Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The statement did not say if Ali Nasser, who currently lives in Syria according to informed sources, could return to Yemen.

Bush, Clinton urge more aggressive help for inner cities

LOS ANGELES, May 10: President Bush and expected Democratic rival Bill Clinton both toured Los Angeles riot areas this week and both came away condemning the violence, commiserating with its victims and urging more aggressive government help for America's inner cities, reports AP.

The two visits were very different, just as the two men are different. One was a presidential trip with all the trappings of power and all the stagecraft. The other was the visit of a candidate with few of the resources of an incumbent.

But in many ways, the Bush and Clinton tours were alike.

Both politicians touched the major bases — touring burned-out areas of the city to get a first-hand look at the devastation, even if Bush did most of his touring from the security of an armoured limousine.

They both visited firehouses, met with police and local officials, heard cries of hopelessness from black city dwellers and cries of fear and anger from Korean-Americans.

Both Bush and Clinton were accused by critics of playing politics in coming to Los Angeles. And the promises for action of both were met with skepticism from residents who have long lived under the burdens of extreme poverty and widespread violence and prejudice.

The Los Angeles riots have already imprinted a mark on the public policy debate of this presidential election season. And planks on the inner city seem certain to be part of both the Democratic and Republican platforms this year.

As the president came to Los Angeles, his administration was seeking to blame the riots on the liberal policies of previous Democratic administrations.

He returned to Washington vowing to work with Congress on bipartisan solutions. "Casting blame gets us absolutely nowhere," he told a group of black residents at a youth club in South-Central Los Angeles.

And in a Saturday morning radio address Bush vowed to fight hard for his plans to promote business development and jobs in the inner

cities and help public housing tenants by their homes.

"I can already bear some of the critics out there. They'll say, well, you've proposed all this before. That's true, they're right. But now it's time to act on these proposals," Bush said.

Bush spent less time than Clinton actually moving among the people affected by the riot. But a heavy dose of raw emotion still managed to get through the protective envelope in which Bush travels.

Bush heard real pain and anger. He heard it from a black woman who said she was afraid to leave her house or let her grandchildren play in a nearby park. And he heard it from a tearful Korean-American woman who told Bush everything her family had worked for decades for was gone and now they can't make the mortgage or car payments.

And he heard it in the resigned voice of an unemployed black construction worker who said he'd been trying for over a year to get work but "it just won't happen" because "there are very

few blacks able to get into that type of work."

Democratic Mayor Tom Bradley said Bush "seemed to get information that he was unaware of" during the visit and he believed Bush left the city with "a total commitment" to help.

Clinton, who was in Los Angeles on Monday, beating Bush by three days, left calling for the government to move more aggressively to confront the problems of the cities including initiatives to encourage investment in the inner city.

Bush has been sounding some of the same

themes. Of course, there's no way that either Bush or Clinton can escape playing politics or being accused of playing politics, as they press their rival inner-city plans.

"How many rebellions is it going to take, a George Bush?" asked Rep. Maxine Waters, a Democrat whose district included the heaviest rioting. "You have to stop playing politics. You have to have domestic programmes where is the peace dividend?"

NASA to place 16 small landers on Mars

PASADENA, California, May 10: NASA plans to place 16 small landers on Mars by 2003 to test the planet's soil and rocks and observe the weather, reports AFP.

The landers, which are still in the development stage, would be sent on four separate launch vehicles between January, 1999 and May 2003, the jet propulsion laboratory announced Friday.

The first lander, possibly including a robotic rover, would be launched in 1996 as a precursor to the Mars environmental survey (Mesur). The rover would also search for subsurface water.