

Myanmar will rewrite constitution to include role of army

BANGKOK, Oct 3: Myanmar military government has formed a steering committee to draft plans for a constitutional convention later this year, official Yangon radio said Friday, reports AFP.

The junta directed the 18-member committee to ensure that the new charter includes a role for the military in Myanmar politics, and that it preserves the nation and ensures its solidarity and sovereignty, it said in a broadcast monitored here.

UN Council votes to seize Iraqi oil assets abroad

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 3: The UN Security Council voted Friday to seize Iraqi oil assets abroad to finance UN activities in Iraq and pay war reparations, reports AFP.

Resolution 778, adopted by a vote of 14 in favour and China abstaining, affects up to one billion dollars worth of assets and oil, mostly in the United States, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

The money seized will be transferred to a UN-managed escrow account and be used to finance UN disarmament and humanitarian activities in Iraq, including buying food and medicine for civilians.

Provided that this paragraph shall not require any state to transfer of such funds in excess of 200 million dollars. "Decides that all states in which there are petroleum or petroleum products owned by the government of Iraq, or its state bodies, corporations or agencies, shall take all feasible steps to purchase or arrange for the sale of such products at fair market value, and transfer the proceeds as soon as possible to the escrow account provided for in Resolutions 706 (1991) and 712 (1991)."

Russia to go ahead with sale of submarine to Iran

WASHINGTON, Oct 3: Russia has informed the United States that it intends to go ahead with a sale of diesel submarine to Iran, despite US opposition, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Friday, reports AFP.

The Russians have told us that they intend to proceed with the sale, Boucher told reporters here. A Pentagon official had said September 25 that a Russian-made Kilo submarine sold by Russia to Iran was expected to reach the Gulf in a matter of weeks.

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One beheaded in Taif: A Saudi murderer was beheaded Friday at the mountain resort of Taif and an Indian thief had his right hand off, according to Saudi television, AFP reports from Riyadh.

Citing the Interior Ministry, it reported that Mohammad Al-Dussari was beheaded for killing a relative. Indian Mohammad Taxi was found guilty of a series of thefts in a building occupied by foreign workers in Mandeb, central Saudi Arabia. His right hand was cut off in accordance with Islamic law.

Sikh rebel leader shot dead: Security forces shot dead Friday a hardcore Sikh militant wanted for some 500 killings in the northern state of Punjab, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

A group of three militants clashed with security troops outside Chak Mahi village in the separatist-torn state's industrial district of Ludhiana, PTI said. All three were killed and one was later identified by police as Gurmukh Singh believed to be responsible for some 500 slayings, the news agency said.

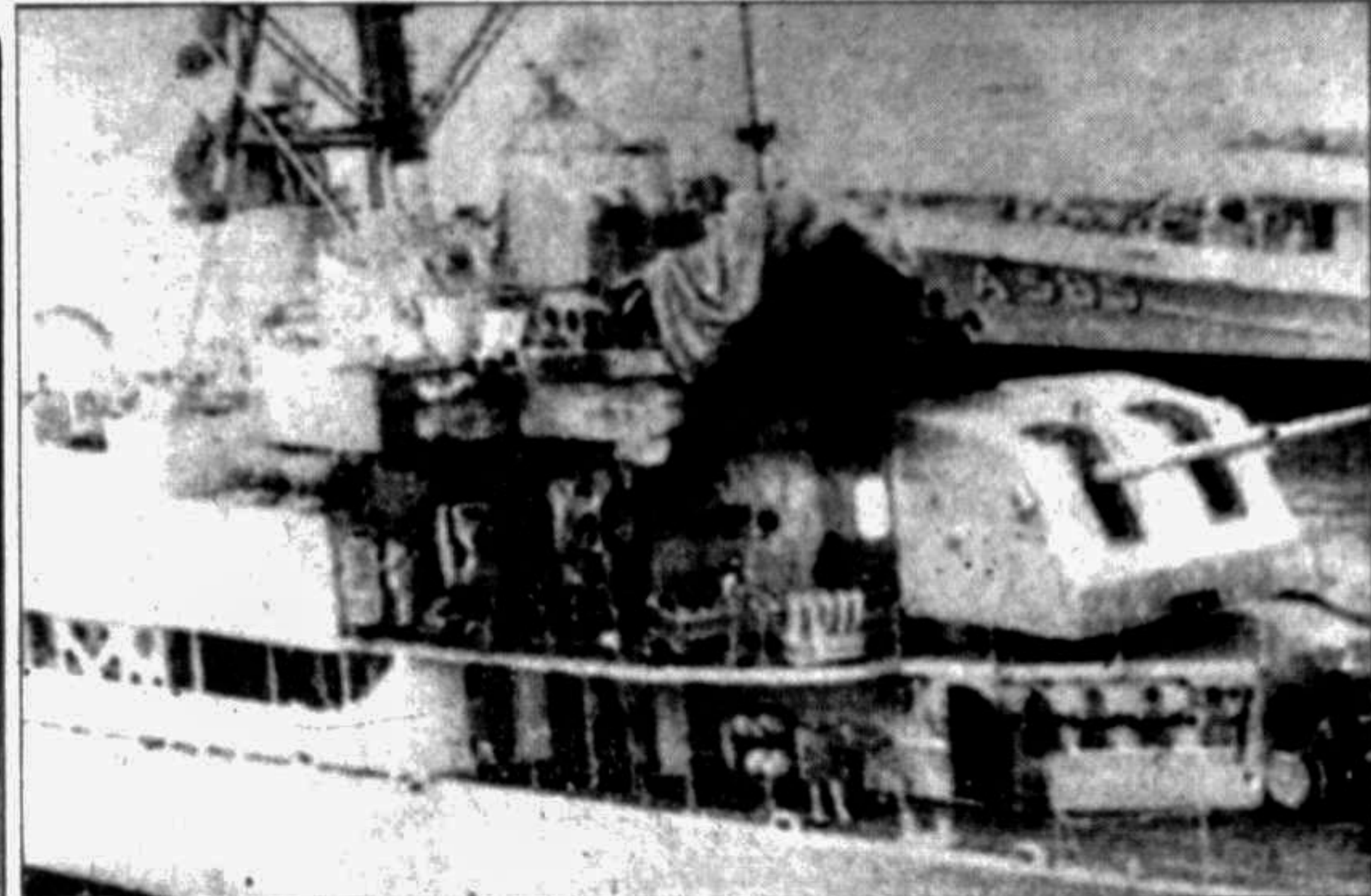
Another militant, alleged to be responsible for some 100 murders and identified as Bhupinder Singh, died in a similar encounter Friday outside Punjab's Sikh holy city of Amritsar.

King meets Buthelezi Thursday: United Nations mission Chief in South Africa Angela King will meet KwaZulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi next Thursday to encourage him to return to negotiations with the government, King confirmed Friday, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

She said UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had also contacted Buthelezi to try to persuade him to reopen the channels of communication he slammed shut Sunday in protest against deals negotiated between the government and the ANC to restart democracy talks.

Twenty-three UN observers have arrived in South Africa since September 16 as part of a UN mission established in August under Security Council resolution 772 to help quell violence and monitor negotiation efforts.

King said 27 more observers would be arriving here later this month and another "one or two" experts would be sent to help judge Richard Goldstone, who heads inquiries into violence.



LONDON: This sky news video grab released by the British news agency Press Association, shows the bridge of the Turkish destroyer Muavenet, which was hit by a missile from the US aircraft carrier Saratoga late October 1 during overnight exercises in the Aegean Sea. — AFP/UNB photo

China offers meet with Taiwan

BEIJING, Oct 3: China has proposed a meeting with Taiwan to lay the groundwork for talks on ending a 43-year ban on direct contacts, the official Xinhua news agency said today, reports AFP.

Beijing and Taipei have already agreed to hold the first top-level meeting of semi-official organisations that are tasked with facilitating reunification. The 'mainland's straits exchange association proposed holding preparatory talks to work out the agenda, time and

place for the meeting, Xinhua said. Taiwan's strait exchange foundation chairman Koo Chen-Fu agreed in August to meeting his mainland counterpart Wang Daohan to discuss financial ties. "As for the exact place of the meeting, we will give active consideration to Koo's requirement and it will be decided through preparatory consultation," Xinhua quoted a September 30 sea message as saying. Koo is a member of the Decision-Making Central Stand-

UN commission to probe war-crimes in Y'slavia

NEW YORK, Oct 3: The United Nations is about to appoint a commission of independent experts to investigate reports of war-crimes in the former Yugoslavia, western diplomats here said, reports AFP.

The move, which is without precedent in UN history, comes in a draft resolution to the Security Council co-sponsored by the United States, Britain, France and Belgium. The proposal is already under intensive discussion at other levels of the UN. The resolution requires the Security Council to ask UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to name "an impartial commission of experts" which would "examine and analyse" reports of atrocities and determine if there had been breaches of international humanitarian law and the Geneva convention.

Moscow concerned at Kashmir unrest

ISLAMABAD, Oct 3: The secretary general of Pakistan's foreign ministry has returned from Moscow saying Russia is concerned by unrest in Indian-controlled Kashmir, it was reported Saturday, says AFP.

Akram Zaki, who returned Friday, said the Russian leadership expressed concern over "human rights violations" there. They also underlined the need for a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir issue to ensure stability in South Asia, he said. Thousands have died during the past 30 months in the Indian-administered part of Kashmir where militant groups have been waging a secession-

Premadasa ready to talk with LTTE

NEW DELHI, Oct 3: Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa said Friday his government would resume peace talks with the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) subject to certain conditions, reports AFP.

Premadasa said the talks could go ahead if the LTTE, fighting for an independent Tamil state "Eelam" renounced their armed opposition and agreed to recognise the right of other Sri Lankan parties to take part in elections. Premadasa, who arrived here on a three-day state visit Thursday, responded to a reporter's question about New Delhi's request for the extradition of LTTE Chief Velupillai

Prabhakaran, saying that "all procedures" would be followed. Indian police allege that the LTTE is responsible for the slaying of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by a suicide bomb attack in southern India last year. Premadasa also suggested that India and Sri Lanka should consider signing a peace and friendship treaty. Premadasa's current Indian tour is chiefly in his capacity as Chairman of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). He has already visited Pakistan and Nepal, and is to tour other member states before the next SAARC summit to be held in Dhaka.

Premadasa, who had talks with Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma and Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on Thursday, called for the enhancement of trade among the SAARC nations on a preferential basis. He said Colombo had already decided unilaterally to buy as much as possible from the member states of the grouping. Another report says: President Premadasa ended a state visit to India today and flew to Bhutan, the next stop of a regional tour as chairman of a South Asian grouping. Premadasa, who was given a ceremonial farewell on the forecourt of the presidential

Vietnam keen to ease relations with US

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 3: Vietnam's Foreign Minister on Friday urged normalisation of relations between Hanoi and Washington and said his country had done everything possible to cooperate in resolving the issue of American servicemen missing in action, reports Reuter.

"We continue to strengthen existing relations with countries in various continents and at the same time enter into relations with countries in regions with which we have had only rare contacts in the past, such as recently with countries in the south Pacific, the Gulf and Latin America," Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam said in a speech to the UN general assembly. "The normalisation of relations between Vietnam and the United States will benefit not only the Vietnamese and the American peoples but also peace and stability in south-east Asia." Cam said Vietnam had "turned the page of past history" and looked forward to the future. "Proceeding from this spirit and from our humanitarian policy, we have done whatever possible in cooperating effectively with the United States to settle the question of American missing in action during the Vietnam war."

Kashmiris revise decision on foreign tourists

JAMMU, Oct 3: A hardcore Muslim militant group in Kashmir Friday announced a climb-down in a blanket order it announced recently asking "all foreigners" visiting the picturesque state to quit in 72 hours, reports AFP.

The heavily armed Hizbul Mujahideen, which issued the order said it had now decided to exclude all other foreign nationals except Israelis from the ban. The statement said the revised decision was prompted by "stout opposition" from some of the other Muslim militant groups, who are also fighting for the secession of the northern border state from Indian rule. The Hizbul had issued the order Tuesday claiming that Israeli intelligence agents had entered the Himalayan state as tourists to help Indian security forces crush the bloody secessionist campaign.

Indian child labourers have no time to enjoy independence

SIVAKASI, Oct 3: Darkness at noon. A girl who says she has forgotten how the world looks during the day is articulate enough to voice her predicament. "I hate this job; but you see, I cannot fight fate." So totally helpless that she does not even think of overcoming it, reports PTI.

Four years have passed since thirteen-year-old Kalachevi joined the ranks of the labourers at the infamous match factories of Sivakasi. It is a misnomer to call them child labourers, because they are not children in any sense except in one over which society has no control — their age. It is that hour of the morning when most people draw their blankets tight around them and sleep the soundest. Kalachevi would love to do that, but it is 0230 hrs, time for the loud knock on the door. The match factory agent, the paid alarm of the village, is going from house to house, banging on the doors with his bamboo stick. The knocks spread out along the villages bordering Pandalgudi. Almost every household in the area sends a child to the factories.

Kalachevi's day has begun. It is a 50 km ride by bus to the match units of Sivakasi, Aruppukottai and Sattur. Sometimes, she will get place to sit. Mostly, she covers the distance standing. Dawn breaks and the children enter the dark, stuffy sheds where the matches are made. The tin roofing will make it unbearably hot later, but right now it is quite cool. There are no machines except human ones in these factories. With plenty of practice, sitting in rows on the floor, the girls and boys set to work automatically. The small sticks, arranged in neat rows on collapsible wooden planks, are dipped in chemicals, dried and then packed in match boxes. The working day is 10 hours long, the working week is seven days. Remuneration is Rs 120 a week. Few of them need the goading of the supervisors to work faster. Kalachevi, who braved the anger of her masters to speak to this writer, says, "The speed is okay. At least, it keeps me engaged from thinking about myself and my future."

Future. What kind of future does this girl dream of for herself? What does she think of her past? The rush of anger in Kalachevi's face at the question is disconcerting. "School everyday. While travelling in the bus, I dream of going to school. My brother is studying in the village school. But my parents never allowed me to go." She knows that it is her sex which weighed against her. Looking up briefly from her task, she says, "I have to earn for the family. We have land but it is not cultivable. There was no rain and no employment for men. My father goes to work, but that is not enough. The factories prefer young girls and children as they are better suited to the work."

What about the much-touted economic independence working has given these boys and girls? "Independence to whom?" she shot back. "I am locked up for 10 hours here. Three hours' travel, where is the time to enjoy independence? We are all chained by the money we earn, even god cannot save us."

"See, this is Bhuvana. She has been married for three years, but she is the lone breadwinner of the family. Her husband has not been able to find a job." So marriage is no escape? "It is my husband's decision. If he asks me to work, I have to work. If he wants me to stay at home, I will stay back." An afterthought: "And if he kicks me out, I will come back here." Apart from the ever present danger of fire or explosion (16 people died in an explosion in a Sivakasi cracker unit two weeks ago), there are other health hazards in this job. "All of us suffer from constant and painful headaches. Some of us get periodic fever and cough. When it is unbearable, I take an advance from the owner and visit the local doctor for medicines," Kalachevi says. In Sivakasi, an official involved with investigation of explosions in fireworks units said over 500 lives had been lost in 200 accidents in the past 10 years. "It is needless to tell you that most of them were children. Though the conditions here are on the national agenda thanks to the relentless pressure kept on by the media, child labour is actually on the rise."

Perot spends \$1b for TV ads

DALLAS, Oct 3: Ross Perot is pressing his reborn presidential candidacy, spending over 1 million dollar on television ads and asserting his appeal would fall "if the American people are too soft" to subscribe to stiff economic proposals, reports AP.

There will be pain everywhere. It's like World War II. We had shared sacrifice", Perot said of his programme for deep spending cuts an higher taxes. "We'll all have to do it together, I can't do it for you," Perot said in an interview with Barbara Walters on ABC television, one day after he announced he'd changed his mind and would go ahead with the independent presidential challenge he abandoned in mid-July. Although he is a distant third in polls, Perot said of his prospects of elections: "That's up to the American people — I am more than willing to go down in flames if the American people are too soft to face it."