

BRIEFLY

2 car bombs explode in London: Two car bombs exploded in residential areas of north London Friday night, fire bridge officials said it was not immediately known if there were casualties, reports AFP from London.

The blasts brought to six the number of explosions in the capital within the past three days. London fire brigade said one of Friday's explosions was outside Arnos Grove underground station, the other outside the Royal British Legion Club in Southgate.

Sikhs kill 5 in Punjab: Sikh militants Friday shot dead five security personnel after robbing a bank in the northern State of Punjab, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports AFP from New Delhi.

Three militants robbed a village branch of the Indian government Owned United Commercial Bank of some 200,000 Rupees (67,000 dollars), at Sidhwan in Punjab's Jalandhar district.

While fleeing the scene the trio opened fire on a security forces vehicle killing five including an Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police and seriously injuring a head constable, police were quoted as saying.

In another incident militants gunned down Mohinder Singh, a local farmer and four of his family at Ghariali in Amritsar district late Thursday.

Four militants and another civilian were killed in incidents elsewhere in the state late Thursday and Friday, the news agency said.

Guatemalan truck mishap claims 6: At least 6 people died and another 20 were injured when they were moved down by a truck in southern Guatemala on Friday, the Fire Department said, Reuter reports from Guatemala city.

The driver lost control of the truck and drove into a busy pedestrian square in the town of Stiquinala, about 30 kilometers south of Guatemala city, Fire Department spokesman Emilio Najera said.

Rock fall claims 7 in S. Africa: Seven miners were killed and two were still missing following a rock fall Friday in the Doornfontein Gold Mine west of Johannesburg, AP says from Johannesburg.

Goldfields, the company that owns the mine, also said 11 miners were injured in the accident, which occurred 910 meters (1,000 yards) below the surface.

The company did not release the names or races of the dead and missing, but most of the country's mines are black. Hundreds of gold miners are killed each year in accidents in South Africa, which is the world's largest gold producer and has the deepest mines.

7 Palestinians shot at in Gaza: AFP reports from Jerusalem: Israeli troops shot and injured seven Palestinians when they dispersed demonstrations in several parts of the occupied Gaza Strip on Friday, Palestinian sources said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

They said the shootings occurred during protests in support of a 10-day Old prison hunger trek by some 5,000 Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails. Five protesters were hurt in the Buret refugee camp, and two in Gaza city.

Meanwhile, police said talks had been underway between the prison authorities and the detainees for the past two days.

34 Brazilians killed in bus plunge: At least 34 people were killed and 16 others Friday when a bus plunged into a ravine 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Curitiba in southern Brazil, police said, reports AFP.

The bus, which was carrying about 50 people, fell 50 meters (yards) before crashing to the ground in an isolated area, police said.

Pope in Dominican Republic: Pope John Paul arrived on Friday in the Dominican Republic — his first trip abroad since undergoing major surgery three months ago, reports Reuter from Sant Domingo.

He was met by President Joaquin Balaguer, diplomats, soldiers and local dignitaries during a private welcoming ceremony.

Group of school children with signs of greeting were the only members of the public at the airport ceremony. But the public will see him along the motorcade and at other events during his third visit to this country.

2 die in S Carolina bus plunge: Two motorists were killed when three cars plunged off a bridge washed by flash flooding in South Carolina, officials said Friday, reports AFP from South Carolina.

Between 18 and 24 centimeter (7 and 9-1/2 inches) of rain fell in the area near the Georgia border, knocking out telephone service and tearing away railroad tracks, leading to the derailment of a freight train.

Three cars plunged off the end of a bridge into Cape Creek, killing two people and injuring three others.

Floods kill 23 Vietnamese: At least 23 Vietnamese were killed or missing in floods in central Vietnam that destroyed many homes and crops, the Vietnam news agency said Saturday, reports Reuter from Hanoi.

The floods were caused by heavy rains in five coastal provinces. One person was killed in Quang Nam-Danang, two in Quang Tri province, while 20 others died or were missing in Quang Binh, the agency said.

The floods left about 2,500 people homeless, washed away thousands of tonnes of stored rice, flooded thousands of hectares (acres) of rice and vegetable crops and damaged roads and the railway that links northern Vietnam to the south.

Rain claims 9 in Jakarta: Nine people died and at least another 40 are missing after torrential rain triggered landslides near the West Java City of Tasikmalaya, a regional government official said Saturday, reports Reuter from Jakarta.

The landslides started early on Thursday morning, burying several houses in the villages of Sodong Hilir and Mantaja, the official said by telephone.

Another five people were injured, he said, and rescuers were continuing to look for survivors.

The rainy season has come earlier than usual this year, bringing heavy storms and floods to much of the western half of the tropical Archipelago.

Canada welcomes proposals for reforms in HK

OTTAWA, Oct 10: Canadian External Affairs Minister Barber McDougall Friday welcomed proposals for democratic reforms in Hong Kong proposed earlier in the week by the British colony's new governor Christopher Patten, reports AFP.

McDougall's office issued a statement quoting the minister as saying: "We support governor Patten's efforts to expand and broaden democracy in Hong Kong. We believe that democracy is the key to security Hong Kong's future after 1997."

Patten is due to make an official visit to Canada next month and will participate in events linked to festival Hong Kong.

Bosnia starts trials for Serbian 'war criminals'

SARAJEVO, Oct 10: With his close-cut hair, bony face and deferential manner, prisoner Zdravko Grujic looks more like the waiter he once was than the war criminal he now stands convicted of being, reports AP.

On Friday, in the dock of a shell- and bullet-pocked courtroom, the 39-year-old ethnic Serb was sentenced to 10 years in prison by a five-judge panel for betraying his country and possessing a weapon without permission.

Grujic is among 114 men and four women facing judgement this month in the first series of war-crimes trials held by the military court of Bosnia-Herzegovina in besieged

Sarajevo. Authorities say any Bosnian Serb who takes up arms against the elected Muslim-led government is a traitor and a criminal.

Grujic was captured May 30 wearing a Serbian uniform, clutching a semi-automatic rifle and carrying two hand grenades.

But he says he is a hapless victim, pressed into the Serbian rebel forces under threat that his house would be destroyed and his relatives killed unless he agreed to fight. He was taken prisoner near Bosnia's lines when he went to help a neighbor whose house was burning, he said.

"I didn't know it was forbidden to have a gun. I swear I

didn't know," he protested during an interview shortly after his trial. The two burly guards sitting across the table from him couldn't help laughing.

"I am a prisoner of war, not a criminal," Grujic asserted. "I did not fire one bullet. My hands are not bloody."

Grujic, married and with an elderly mother, was a waiter in the cafe in Sarajevo's Central Hotel before the war. Now, he is incarcerated a short distance away in a former army barracks converted into a military prison and court complex.

Of his court-appointed lawyer, he said: "For over 20 years I was serving him coffee." In the four months since his capture, Grujic said his

weight has dropped from 85 kilograms (187 pounds) to 60 kilograms (132 pounds) because of the prison diet and because of "fretting" about his situation. Interviewed in the presence of guards, he said he no complaints about his treatment.

But that weight drop is not all that unusual in Sarajevo where most of the population has lacked reliable food supplies since the siege of the Bosnian capital began in April.

The court is located uncomfortably near one of the fiercest battle zones in Sarajevo, and bullets and shrapnel frequently fly through the windows, leaving holes in the curtains and pockmarks in the plaster.

"This is crazy hell, madness totally," Grujic said. "Somebody has to stop this. Even in my cell I am a little bit frightened."

Senad Kreho, a 32-year-old lawyer acting as president of the military court, said there have been 60 trials since Sept 1, with the 118 still planned.

Judges were transferred from the civil courts and every five-judge panel has at least one ethnic Serb and one ethnic Croat to ensure fairness, he said. The trials vary in length depending on the number of witnesses and evidence, he said. "They have the opportunity to defend themselves. They have a jury in the court. They

13 more killed in violence

India reinforces troops on Kashmir border

JAMMU, India, Oct 10: Two Indian troops and eight Muslim militants were among 13 people killed in Kashmir as Indian troops on the border were reinforced against a planned march by militants later this month, officials said Friday, reports AFP.

Militants fighting for the Muslim-majority state's secession from Indian rule threw grenades on an army convoy at Kianpora, some 60 kilometers (40 miles) from Srinagar, the state's summer capital later

Thursday. Two troops were killed and one more injured, state government officials said Friday.

In other incidents, eight militants were killed in gunfire exchanges with security forces in a number of incidents overnight Thursday, including three at Pattan, outside Srinagar, officials said.

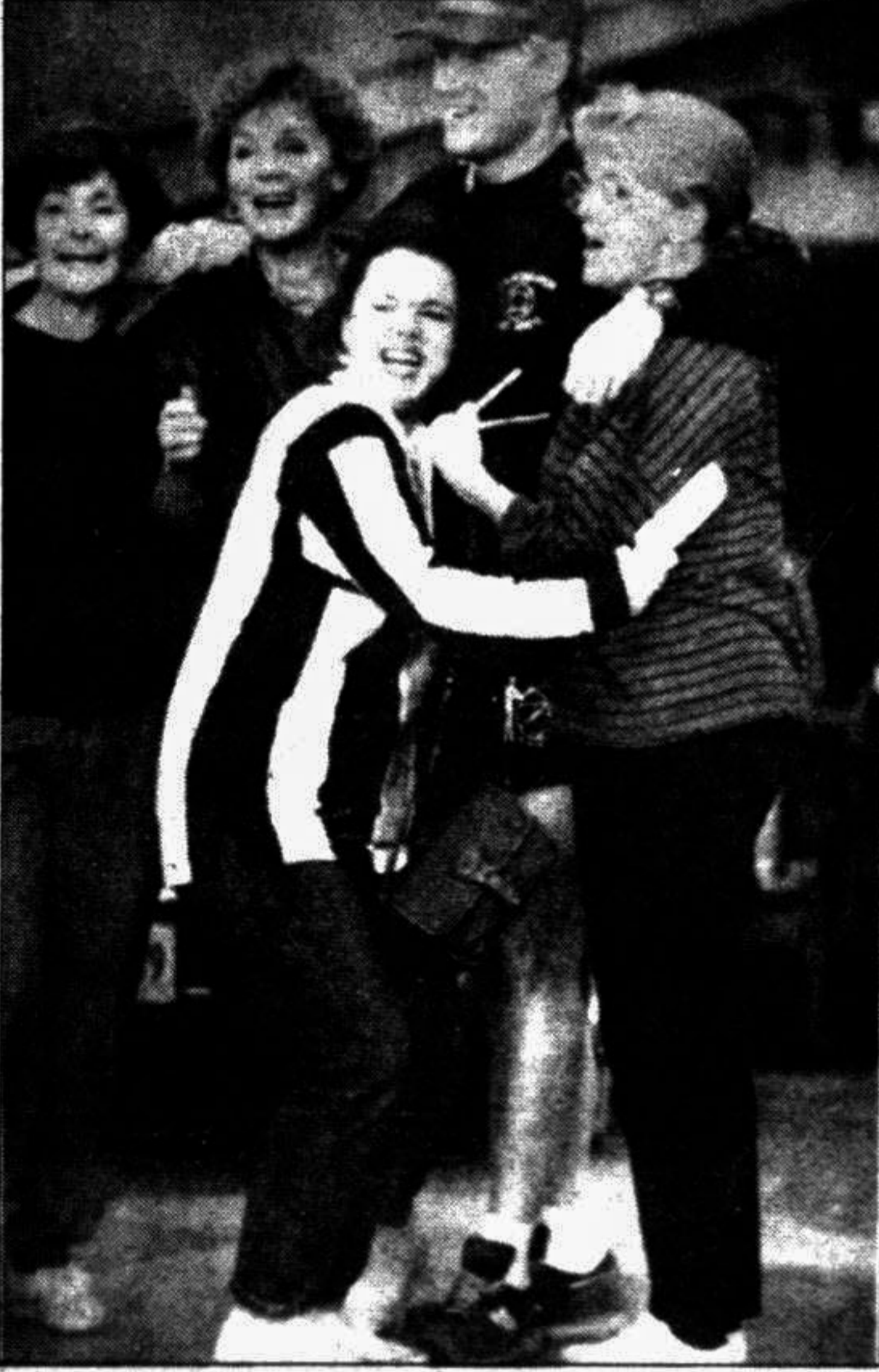
One civilian was killed in the crossfire at Pattan. Militants shot dead two civilians Friday in Kashmir valley's Tughadhar area, said the

officials here in this winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir state.

Defence officials here Friday said "more" troops were being put on the line of control and the border forces ordered to be on maximum alert against the October 24 March.

Meanwhile, a bomb blast damaged a Hindu temple in Jammu, though no one was injured or killed, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

No one claimed responsibility immediately.



KANSAS CITY, Missouri: Democratic Presidential Candidate Bill Clinton stops to pose for pictures with some admirers as he leaves his hotel October 9 to go for an evening jog. Clinton is preparing for the October 11 presidential debate in St. Louis. — AFP/UNB photo

I am not 'starry-eyed' about Europe: Major

BRIGHTON, ENGLAND, Oct 10: British Prime Minister John Major vowed Friday that he would never "come hell or highwater" allow Britain's identity to be lost in a federal Europe, reports AFP.

Defending the Maastricht Treaty on European Union in front of a bitterly divided Conservative Party conference, Major asserted that Britain had negotiated a "better agreement" than its European partners.

Stressing that he was not "starry-eyed" about Europe, he told party delegates in his closing address that "We obtained for Britain the flexibility and freedom which others signed away."

"I will never — come hell or high water — let our distinctive British identity be lost in a federal Europe," he said.

While seeking to allay the fears of Eurosceptics in the party, whose position has been greatly strengthened by the pound's undignified exit from the European Monetary System, Major reiterated his desire to put the country at the heart of Europe.

"Leaving Europe policy to the French and the Germans... that is not a policy for Britain. It would be a historic mistake — and not one your government is going to make," he said.

"Britain could not 'break our world,' on ratification of the treaty, he argued. "Who would ever trust Britain again? We

would have broken faith, a demanding position in which no British government should ever be placed."

But in seeking to meet the concerns of those in his party, who could vote against Maastricht's ratification in the House of Commons, Major went further than ever before in outlining British opposition to federalism.

"Let no one in the conference be in any doubt: this government will not accept a centralised Europe," he declared. "Understand the determination of this prime minister to put the interests of this country first — now and always."

And he added closer ties with Europe would not affect the bond with the United States. Britain provided "an unbreakable link" between Europe and the US and that relationship across the Atlantic would remain his aim.

Major reiterated a chant of no, no, no when he reiterated that the government would be bringing the Maastricht Treaty bill back to parliament for ratification as he wants it passed by early next year.

But he won applause for his opposition to federalism. Addressing and enumerating fears about the treaty, he stressed that Britain is not committed to a single currency, immigration is specifically excluded, and on jobs and working conditions he had refused to sign the social charter.

Kuwait may sign defence pact with Russia, China

CAIRO, Oct 10: Kuwait is considering signing a defence pact with Russia and is discussing similar possibilities with China, Kuwaiti defence Minister Ali Salem Al-Sabah Al-Salem has said in an interview published here, reports AFP.

Since the end of the Gulf War in February 1991, Kuwait has signed defence pacts with the United States, France and Britain.

"We are examining the possibility of concluding a security agreement with Russia and their are also consultations with China," he said.

"Even disarmed, Iraq represents a danger (for Kuwait) because of its large population," he added.

French observers allege rigging in Angolan polls

PARIS, Oct 10: Four French observers at the Angolan elections said Friday they witnessed irregularities during the voting, including intimidation and cases of non-respect for a secret ballot, reports AP.

The observers said observers and the international press should be called in to help verify the final results.

They said it was regrettable that observers had no access to the collection process, locally or nationally, during last week's election.

"Given recent events, this is unfortunate, of a nature to compromise the democratic process," a statement by the observers said.

The observers are Didier Bariani, a former minister and mayor of one of Paris' 20 districts; Jacques Gasseau, former French ambassador to Luanda; Claude Goasguen, deputy mayor of Paris; and Yves Verwaerde, a European parliamentary deputy.

The four were among 800 international observers who monitored the election. The final result, being contested by

candidate Jonas Savimbi, the former rebel leader.

Savimbi was trailing President Jose Eduardo dos Santos Savimbi and his aides have accused the government of rigging the election, raising fears of a new outbreaking a 16-year civil war that was halted by peace accords last year. At least 350,000 people died in the 1975-91 war.

But US officials said Thursday that Savimbi aides had assured them that he will accept the election results if officials from his rebel party are permitted to completed an investigation into their claims of fraud.

The French observers said there were cases of voting booths turned toward the offices of voting administrators so that the vote was not secret.

Other criticism cited in the statement included cases of intimidation, police near and in some voting bureaus and the late start of voting in some areas known to be favorable to Savimbi's UNITA because of an absence of material.

Israel to attend regional multinational talks

WASHINGTON, Oct 10: Israel has informed the United States it will abandon its boycott and attend multinational talks on economic developments in the Middle East and on refugees, the State Department announced Friday, reports AP.

American diplomats will now get in touch with Palestinian representatives to determine "what their attitude is," spokesman Richard A Boucher said.

The economic talks are scheduled to open to Paris on October 29 and the talks on refugees on November 11 in Ottawa, Canada.

Israel still refuses to meet with officials of the would be parliament of a Palestinian state or with Arabs from East Jerusalem. The reason is Israel does not want to encourage statehood or seem to be willing to give up part of its capital.

The Palestinians, however, may try to force the issue now that Israel, in a policy switch, has dropped its objections to parliament for ratification as he wants it passed by early next year.

Israel had boycotted previous rounds after the Palestinians, with US support, said so-called diaspora Palestinians had the right to attend.

Meanwhile, Arab-Israeli peace talks, which are due to resume here on October 21, are limited to Palestinians from the Israeli-held territo-

ries. The United States, supports the restrictions.

The multinational talks, which deal also with such issues as water shortages and environmental problems, supplement the peace negotiations. They are designed to get Arabs and Israelis used to talking to each other about a wide range of issues.

But the dispute over the Palestinians delegation produced an Israeli boycott, while Syria and Lebanon have stayed away on the ground such discussions are premature before there is peace.

There is no indication Syria and Lebanon have changed their mind despite Israel's conciliatory gesture.

Myanmar frees 31 more politicians

BANGKOK, Oct 10: Myanmar freed another 31 political prisoners Friday, bringing the total number released since April to almost 700, state-run Radio Yangon reported, says AFP.

The 26 men and five women had been held in a provincial jail in Myaungmya, in southern Myanmar, the radio said. It gave no other details in its broadcast monitored in Bangkok.

Myanmar military rulers announced in April they would free political detainees no longer considered to be threats to national security.

Off the Record



CALIFORNIA: Actress Elizabeth Taylor (L) and her husband Larry Fortensky arrived at the opening performance of the Montreal based "Cirque Du Soleil" on Friday, on the Santa Monica Pier. Taylor and Fortensky celebrated their first anniversary on October 6. — AFP/UNB photo

Madonna gets publicity boost for 'sex' book

PARIS: Four years ago, Madonna made a flap in Paris when she threw the prime minister her panties. This time, the sizzling songstress might have to hand over something harder to part with back taxes, reports AP.

Not to worry. The furor is no doubt good for the sale of the book she is here to promote. "Sex," a pictorial account of Madonna's fantasies, goes on sale Oct 21.

The book got a boost a day before Madonna's Thursday night arrival with a report it might be censored. The tabloid, Le Parisien, made the announcement in a front-page story accompanied by a colour photo of the undressed star.

The 25,000 copies to go on sale here were indeed given the once-over by the Interior Ministry. But, the ministry said, so are all foreign publications arriving here. "Sex" was examined and deemed acceptable to the French public.

Madonna's taxtravails might prove more worrisome. The daily Liberation reported Friday that she owes more than 10 million francs 2 million dollar in taxes, interest and penalties dating from her first two French concerts in 1987. In the audience was Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac, then France's premier, who was on the receiving end of her doffed panties.

Liberation said her counsellors are to meet in the coming days with tax officials to try to erase the debt.

The singer's record company issued a press statement saying the "rumors" about her taxes were groundless, and that neither she nor her advisers had been officially contacted.

Madonna, who is dressed by avant-garde fashion designer Jean-Paul Gauthier, has a loyal following in France, a nation which appreciates pizzazz and loves to dissect the cultural and sociological implications of America's stars.

The singer, who first visited Germany and Italy, is even scheduled to appear on the prestigious Sunday night talk show "7 sur 7". Host Anne Sinclair's last guest was Premier Pierre Beregovoy.

'You should hide your head in shame'

NEW YORK: Vittorio "Vic" Amuso, boss of a notorious New York Mafia family, was sentenced Friday to life without parole for ordering numerous killings and heading a lucrative illegal empire, reports AP.

Amuso, a murderer said to offer no mercy to his victims, sought no leniency from a federal judge. Amuso was also fined 250,000 dollar.

Outside the courtroom, Amuso's wife, Barbara, angrily accused one of the prosecutors of framing him.

"There's been an injustice done here," Mrs Amuso shouted at Assistant US Attorney Charles E Rose "You should hide your head in shame".

Amuso, 57, was convicted in June of all 54 counts in a racketeering indictment charging him with nine murders, extortion, gambling and labour corruption.

"Mr Amuso stands before you," his attorney, Gerald L Shargel, told US District Judge Eugene H Nickerson at the sentencing. "He maintains his innocence in the face of this verdict. He is of the view that his conviction was based on testimony that was both purchased and perjurious". Shargel said Amuso will appeal.

Amuso said nothing during the proceeding. Afterward, he quickly shook hands with his lawyers and walked out with federal marshals who returned him to jail.

Amuso, boss of the Lucchese crime family, was the second Mafia boss to receive a life sentence.

Too late for action

BRUSSELS: Angry environmentalists carved up the front garden of a house owned by EC Environment Commissioner Karel Van Miert last week, but got the timing wrong — he had moved out, reports Reuter.

The group protesting against EC funding for a tunnel through the Pyrenees were told after ploughing holes across the garden that the house had been left to Van Miert's estranged wife some time ago, an EC official said.

Jagan sworn in as Guyana's president

GEORGETOWN, Oct 10: Former hardline Marxist Cheddi Jagan of the People's Progressive Party was sworn in as Guyana's third president in a brief ceremony here Friday, reports AFP.

Among those present at the ceremony were the outgoing President Desmond Hoyte, of the Centrist People's National Congress, former Prime Minister Hamilton Green, and Prime Minister-designate Sam Hinds. Also present were members of the diplomatic corps and business leaders.

Although final results have still not been issued, Jagan's Party won a clear majority in last Monday's poll.