BRIFFLY

Voting ends in Serbia: Voting ended in Serbia Sunday in a referendum to determine whether the constitution should be amended to allow early legislative and presidential elections, reports AFP from Belgrade.

Some 6.9 million people were registered to participate in the poll, though ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo region massively boycotted the referendum.

Serbia cancelled the province's autonomous status in 1989 in a bid to tighten its control over the region which is 90

Muslims leaders in the south Serbia Sandzak region also called on voters to stay away from voting booths.

Earthquake shakes Vanuatu: Panic-stricken residents of the capital of Vanuatu rushed from their homes after a moderate earthquake shook the town yesterday, reports AFP from Port Vila.

Francis Bondoux of the French seismological research institute Orstom said the quake, with an intensity of 5.2 on the Richter seale, was centered about 30 kilometres (18 miles) south-southwest of here and last 30 seconds.

"Everyone here was very scared," Bondoux said, adding: "most residents rushed out of their homes."

The tremor struck at 6:24 am (1924 GMT Sunday) and uprooted some trees but caused neither structural damage nor casualties, according to state-run radio Vanuatu.

Israeli troops kill 2 Jordanians: israeli soldiers shot dead two infiltrators from Jordan, the Israeli army said Monday, Reuter says from Jerusalem.

An army spokeswoman said two Jordanians crossed into the Israel occupied West Bank about seven km (four miles) north of Jericho late Sunday. 7 more killed in Kashmir violence: Two

top militants were among seven persons killed in the Kashmir Valley since Saturday night while security forces arrested 40 subversives and recovered arms and ammunition during the period, reports PTI from Jammu. Three militants, including a 'group commander' and a

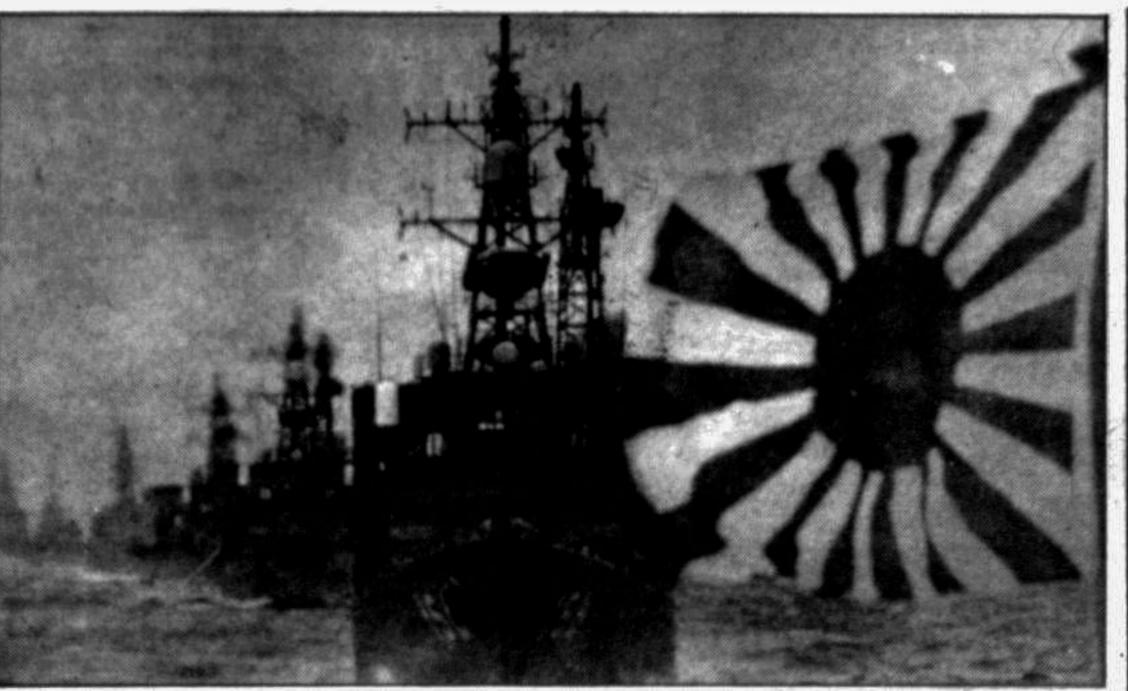
'section commander' were killed in an encounter with secu-

rity forces at Abi Guzar in Srinagar city Sunday, an official spokesman said. Blast near Khomeini's burial place: home-made bomb detonated at a cemetery south of Tehran where the late founder of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah

Ruhollah Khomeini, is buried, Iran's official media reported, says AP from Nicosia. The Islamic Republican News Agency said the explosion Saturday at the sprawling Behesth-e Zahra cemetery, 10 miles (16 kilometers) from Tehran, caused no casualties. It

Israeli killed in Gaza: An Israeli was killed inside the Gaza Strip yesterday only hours after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin vowed to crush growing Palestinian demonstrations against Israeli occupation, reports Reuter from Jerusalem.

The army, which had imposed a curfew on most of the 750,000 Arab residents of the Gaza Strip, said an Israeli technician was killed by a blow to the head with a hoe while visiting a Jewish settlement in the densely populated terri-



SAGAMI BAY, Japan: The flag of the Rising Sun, formerly used by the Japanese Imperial Navy and now used by the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (MSDF) flutters in the wind while a fleet of the MSDF makes its way in Sagami Bay on October 11. - AFP/UNB photo

Shevardnadze elected parliament chairman

LONDON, Oct 12: Former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze was elected chairman of the Georgian parliament in legislative elections held today, according to preliminary results reported by the Interfax news agency, reports AFP.

The agency, in a dispatch monitored here by the BBC quoted Radio Russia as saving Shevardnadze had received 80 per cent of the vote in an election in which voter turnout also came to 80 per cent.

Shevardnadze, the only candidate for the parliamentary post, is currently head of the Georgian State Council. In nine of the 84 districts

located in areas hit by civil strife, voting did not take place at all.

Fresh fighting poisons post-poll atmosphere in Angola

LUANDA, Oct 12: An outburst of violence has further poisoned the post-election atmosphere in this southern African nation, reports AP.

UNITA soldiers pounded an area of downtown Luanda with machine-gun fire, mortar shells and grenades on Sunday, Killing at least four people in a half-hour barrage.

The rebel group opened fire after a bomb exploded near a hotel they used as a base and two men in an unmarked car shot and wounded two UNITA guards.

The fighting increased tensions which had been mounting since UNITA cried fraud in the September 29-30 elec-

tion and threatened to return to the civil war that wracked Angola for 16 years.

The conflict ended last year with peace accords between UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) and the Angolan government. The United States was UNITA's main supporter during the war - one of the major battlegrounds of the Cold War but US aid stopped ir March and relations have since

UN monitors and election observers from the United States, Russia and Portugal were immediately called in by both sides to help mediate Sunday's clash.

Thailand asked to press neighbour for democracy

ASEAN urged to take harder line against Myanmar

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 12: Thailand came under pressure today to take the lead in pressing for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar amid renewed calls on the Association of Southeast Asians (ASEAN) for a stronger stand. reports AFP.

Singapore Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng, speaking to reporters after chairing the closing session of an ASEAN congress, said he agreed with suggestions that as Myanmar's closest neighbour, Thailand should show the way.

Wong said there was still no consensus on how to deal with Myanmar, but that all six ASEAN members were prepared to discuss it together and had collectively met with Myanmar Foreign Minister John Gyaw outside a recent meeting of the UN General Assembly.

Representatives of the congress had strongly expressed their thinking it was time for ASEAN to take a stronger stand against Yangon and that Thailand should play the lead role. Thatland shares a long border with Myanmar and is said to have extensive dealings in timber and gems with Yangon.

"Each country (in ASEAN) has its own position on how to deal with the Myanmar issue. He have not had a consensus to say these are the following things we will do on Myanmar," Wong said, adding that ASEAN was prepared to continue what Thailand described as "constructive engagements" with Myanmar.

He said that at the recent UN meeting the Myanmar minister briefed the grouping on the plans Yangon had for its national convention.

"ASEAN also conveyed strong sentiments when expressing its views about what it has heard is happening in Myanmar," Wong said, adding that it was not discussed with the Myanmar Foreign Minister whether or no democracy is being restored quickly enough.

"We, being ASIANS, just listened to him and we will wait to see what happens next," Wong said.

ASEAN groups Thailand and Singapore along with Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Brunei.

The military seized power in Myanmar in 1988 and while it has shown some signs of liberalisation this year, including the release of a number of political prisoners, it maintains a tight grip on the country.

ASEAN last year rejected attempts by the United States and the European Community to impose a harder line against Myanmar saying that it preferred 'constructive dialogue."

Since 1988, when the Myanmar military killed thousands of civilians in suppressing a democratic uprising many western nations have banned arms sales to Myanmar, suspended aid and halted financial assistance.

Hasnan Habib, adviser to the Indonesian minister of state for research and technology, said it was time ASEAN took a stand on Myanmar, "not to hurt Myanmar's feelings but to wean Yangon back into the international community."

Sukhumbhand Paribatra, director of Thailand's institute of security and international studies said Bangkok viewed the Cambodian problem and the Myanmar situation differently.

Off the Record

A sleepy facial for Bush

WASHINGTON: Hairdresser Zahira Aziz loves to tell about the time she gave President Bush a facial and he fell fast asleep in his chair, reports AP.

"Once, he raved about how great it was," said the henna haired Afghani woman gesturing with long pink fingernails. "I said, 'I didn't do anything Mr. President, was just standing by watching you sleep."

Facials ? For the macho sportsman ? And his former. Secretary of State, Jim Baker too?

The White House treats the issue as a state secret, and isn't eager to confirm pampering more commonly associated with the opposite sex. Spokesman Sean Walsh said

brusquely, "I don't think so." He promised to call back but never did From the Democratic camp came this: Bill Clinton definitely doesn't do mud packs. But he does get his hair cut ev-

ery three or four weeks at US Male-Female Hair Styling Centre in Little Rock. Baker comes in to see Aziz for facials every few weeks. There's no reason for Bush and Baker to be embarrassed, she

"People used to think it was sissy," she said. "But men are paying more attention to their grooming now."

She showed off a flaming cat engraved on her left hip NEW YORK: Rumps, breasts, backs, thighs, hips, calves,

ankles - all were adorned with ink and on display as human canvasses showed off their body art for each other and a panel of judges at the seventh annual Tattoo Festival, reports AP. Equal parts art exhibit, freak show and peep show the festival drew hundreds of tattoo artists and wearers.

This is not a moment for shyness. This is a moment for exhibitionism" exhorted Ari Roussinoff, a New York filmmaker who served as master of ceremonies.

Some sported one demure tattoo; others were covered with intricate designs. Some bore simple black etching; others boasted colorful flesh tapestries.

"It's addictive," said Tanya Shilshtut, 18, of New York, who got on stage to show off a flaming cat engraved on her left hip.

"If I was a male, I'd probably tattoo my whole body." A panel judged contestants in male and female categories for best black and white work, Best Four-Colour Work, Most Unique Work and Best Flash, the term for a board of drawings

displayed at a tattoo artist's studio. One by one the competitors paraded before the judges. They posed, they preened, and when necessary, they

Backs and buttocks were popular places for tattoos; skulls, devils and voluptuous, nude or scantily clad women were common subjects.

Bush's undershorts

beat Clinton PIQUA, Ohio: Linda Roth wanted a brief but of history. Or a bit of briefs history. So she paid 325 dollar for a pair of President Bush's undershorts, reports AP.

Bush donated the autographed undies for this weekend's Great Outdoor Underwear Festival.

"Buying the underwear was a piece of history," said Ms. Roth, who bid by telephone. She said she also bought the shorts "to encourage people to vote for George Bush."

Bush may be - ahem - behind in the polls, but he beat Democrat Bill Clinton in the bidding. Ron Bell of Troy paid 200 dollars for a pair of shorts autographed by Clinton and his

running mate, Al gore. The festival started in 1988 to promote the city and it heritage. In the early 1900s, Piqua had eight knitting mills

that produced lingerie, men's shorts and other underwear. One mill remains in operation.

Proceeds from the auction go toward future festivals. Rabin must choose

a chair carefully

SERUSALEM: Arthur Miller had a warning for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin: Choose a chair carefully, reports AP. The playwright arrived on Saturday for a performance of his "Death of a Salesman." He told reporters of his visit to Tel

Aviv's Habima Theater 15 years ago for a showing of the play. "On my left sat Rabin, and I didn't know it but that was the last night of his regime," Miller said. "I'm coming back here -

eign bank account her by his wife.

N Korean N - programme

US arms expert says

still a serious concern SEOUL, Oct 12: A US arms

control expert said Monday suspicions remain about North Korea's nuclear program, and inter-Korean inspections are essential to allay fears that it is building nuclear arms, reports

made no mention of damage."

Michael Moodie, assistant director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, said instability in isolated Communist North Korea and a continuing arms buildup make the Korean peninsula one of the most dangerous spots in the world.

."The nuclear program in North Korea, in particular, remains a serious concern," he

North Korea opened to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency earlier this year, but has refused to agree with South Korea on rules for separate bilateral inspections under the two Koreas' 8-month-old nuclear

The IAEA is a step in the right direction, but only a step." Moodie told a news briefing. "Suspicions continue to exist. IAEA safeguards alone are not going to be enough to allay concerns that nuclear weapons exist."

The South wants to make unannounced sudden inspections at any suspected civilian or military facility. The IAEA inspects only specific sites listed by the host nation.

"If the North will agree, there will be no sanctuaries where nuclear facilities could be hidden," said Moode. Some experts dispute whether inter-Korean inspections could be all-encompassing and prevent North Korea from hiding some facilities.

Moodie said it was not appropriate for Washington to deal directly with North Korea until nuclear issues are solved.

Egyptian govt vows to crush extremists

CAIRO, Oct 12: The Egyptian government vowed on Saturday to crush Muslim extremists and called on the people to join the fight against terrorism, reports Reuter.

We are determined to crush Ahese groups whatever the burdens or sacrifices, interior ministry Mohammed Abdel-Halim Moussa told reporters." The responsibility of facing terrorism and extremism extends to every citizen on Egyptian soil."

Moussa was commenting on a bomb blast on a train in southern Egypt that killed four people and injured nine last

The bomb exploded before a Muslim militant could throw it from the window of a train toilet at security troops near Dayrut railway station, about 300 km (180 miles) south of

Moussa said police had iden tified the bomber on Saturday.

Telephone calls to news media claimed responsibility for the attacks on behalf of the underground El-Gama'a El-Islamity (the Islamic group).

Moussa, reiterating the official attitude of the govern-

ANC men protest amnesty plan African National Congress said groups were coe to an But if De Klerk's ruling agrement on simulishing a in a statement. The ANC said Parliament, mu racial interim govern-

CAPE TOW | South Africa), Oct 12 : Some 10,000 ANC protesters marched Monday on Parliament to protest a government amnesty plan that would cover policemen and soldiers who committed crimes under apartheid, re-

ports AP. President F W de Klerk, whose political reform effort has been stalled for months, was expected to unveil the plan Monday afternoon when he opens a special session of Parliament.

"It is clear the government intends to protect itself and its agents from public in estigation of its crimes against the South African people," the

which excludes the 30-million black majority, "has neither the legitimacy nor the moral right to pass legislation." The demonstrators chanted

and sang as they marched peacefully through downtown streets toward Parliament, led by ANC Deputy President Walter Sisulu. Police lined the streets but

did not intervene. Also, several United Nations observers, part of a 30-person delegation, monitored the march.

De Klerk called the special session of Parliament months ago when black and white

ment. The lawmakers were expected to convene briefly to pass legislati , allowing blacks to serve in the national government.

But the negotiations on ending apa cid collapsed in June amid mounting political violence in black townships.

De Klerk decided to go ahead with the Parliamentary session, hoping it would improve the atmosphere for talks. His popularity has been slipping due to the political stalemate as well as the ongoing violence and the flounder-

National Party passes the amnesty legislation, it is certain to further heighten tensions with the ANC.

The ANC and other black opposition groups say scores of policemen and soldiers committed crimes under apartheid, including the murder of black activists.

They argue that such acts should be prosecuted, or at least documented, before amnesty is considered. The ANC has said if it comes to power it would repeal any amnesty granted without its consent.

Palestinian prisoners still on hunger strike



NABLUS, West Bank: A Plestinian prisoner flashes the V-sign next to his comrades in the court-yard of the Jneid Prison here October 11. 5000 Arab prisoners have launched a hunger strike September 28 protesting in human conditions of cover crowding, beatings and solitary - AFP/UNB photo confinements.

than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners took their hungerstrike into a third week today, lawyers said, after police announced the end of the protest, which sparked mass unrest in the occupied territories, reports AFP. Police Minister Moshe

JERUSALEM, Oct 12: More

Shahal said Sunday night that representatives of the 5,000 prisoners, who launched the fast for better conditions on September 28, had told the prison authority the action was police spokesman said the authorities would set up a

committee Tuesday to examine the prisoners' humanitarian complaints, which include beatings, overcrowding, prolonged solitary confinement and poor health care. "Promises" had been made

to meet some of their demands, official Israeli sources

But lawyers said more than 1,000 prisoners at Ashkelon, Beersheba, Ramle and Nafha were holding out to ensure a satisfactory outcome to the strike.

he better not sit next to me." In April 1977, Rabin resigned amid a scandal over a for-

Mubarak in Beijing

BEIJING, Oct 12: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak arrived here today for a five-day official visit at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Yang Shangkun, Xinhua news agency reported, says AFP.

Minister Yang Fuchang greeted Mubarak at the airport, the official news agency said. Yang is to host a banquet in honour of his gue-t Monday

evening. Mubarak last visited China

in May 1990, five months after a trip by Yang to Egy pt.

Famine-hit Somali villagers survive on grass. SOMALIA, Oct 12: The huge international relief effort for Somalia's starving people has bypassed Bashir Ibrahim Muktar and his family -

they've been reduced to eating

grass to survive, reports AP. They're far from alone. Abdule Ibrahim Haidar, Finance Minister Liu commissioner of the Acaba Zhongli and Vice Foreign district, says thousands of people in the district's 376 villages are surviving on grass because the relief effort has

been insufficient to feed all the agencies to provide food and

Muktar lives just 5 1/2 but has received no response.

but he and his two wives and nine children have decided not to try their luck at the aid kitchens there, fearing they might not get food, or could die of disease or exposure in the refugee-swollen city.

miles (9 km) from Bur Acaba,

Instead, they have decided to stay on their land and put their trust in Allah. "The circumstances force us to stay," said the 38-year-

old farmer. "There is nothing targeted only the city of Bur else to be done." Haidar said he had asked Even there, the food has the Red Cross and other seeds to the districts villages,

to keep Somalis from migrating to large towns in search of food, have started distributing food to rural parts of the Baidoa region, about 40 miles (65 km) to the northwest. But they don't have the food or manpower to launch a similar operation in

Relief agencies, which want

The tragedy of Wafdiai is typical of many small farming villages which were caught in the fighting that ousted former dictator Mohammed Siád Barre in January 1991. "Supporters of Barre's regime came here and started

looting food and killing

people," said Mohammed Yere Aden, 67, a village clan elder. "We had cattle, camels and goats, too, but they were also looted. Now, we have nothing." Before the fighting and

famine, about 600 people lived in Wafdiai, a cluster of conical huts with mud-baked walls and thatched roofs set in dusty, sparse scrubland. Today, about 200 people are left, Aden said.

Muktar said about 1,000 people from several villages in the area died in the fighting. "Because of the famine, most people passed away and some of them disappeared,"

said Shek Birkan Hussein

leader. "We have been eating grass

Aden, 80, the village's Muslim

for two months," Muktar said. "Before then we had been cooking animal skins. But there are no skins left."

Aden produced a basket from his hut, filled with pieces of a grass called kabla, which had been gathered earlier in the day. He empted it on a skin mat. That was dinner for him, his wife and seven children.

The grass is first boiled in water, said Hawa Yusuf Maalin, 50, a mother of six. "When it gets cold, you squeeze it to dry the water out and then you eat

Shek Aden said the village

needs food, seeds, medicine and farm tools. "We trust our God and we

shall beg our God to help us, and to bring rain and seeds so that we can plant," he said.

If he had money, Muktar said, "I would have gone some place nearby and bought seeds and planted everything there is to grow."

But now the tall, gaunt farmer looked at the fallow fields, wondering when there will be no more kabla - and

what his family would eat then.

Abu Nidal man killed in Lebanon LEBANON, Oct 12: An ac-

tivist of terrorist mastermind Abu Nidal's Fatah-Revolutionary Council was shot and killed by a lone gunman in this southern port city Monday, security sources said, reports AP.

Antar, 35, a former Fatah-RC officer, with a silenced pistol at 7:10 am (0510 GMT) as he was getting into his car. Antar was the 11th

One source, speaking on

condition of anonymity, said

the attacker shot Ahmed

Palestinian to be assassinated in the latest spate of violence.