

BRIEFLY

Myanmar soldiers kill 5: Myanmar soldiers have overrun a Karen guerrilla camp near the Thai border, killing five of the defenders. Thai army sources said Wednesday, reports Reuter from Thailand.

The troops, backed by a mortar barrage, seized Maw Pa zoon, an outpost near the Karen stronghold of Kawmoora, after a two-hour fight on Tuesday night. Four Karen guerrillas and a Myanmar student were killed, a Thai army source said. A combined force of about 300 guerrillas and dissident students had defended the camp. About 1,000 Karen civilians have fled across the Moei river to seek refuge in Thailand since fighting erupted last week.

US jet crashes during training: A US air force F-16 fighter jet crashed during training near Shaw Air Force Base in south Carolina on Tuesday, a base spokeswoman said, AFP reports from South Carolina.

The pilot ejected and was taken to hospital. No information was immediately available on his condition. The single-engine plane crashed into a field near the base's runway, the spokeswoman said. Nobody on the ground was hurt and the plane was not carrying missile or other explosives, officials said.

Morocco expels 50 Malians: Morocco expelled about 50 Malians Tuesday in a campaign to stem the flow of Africans illegally crossing the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain, reports AP from Morocco.

The Malians were flown from the Mohammed V Airport in Casablanca to Bamako, the capital of Mali, the official MAP news agency said, after being rounded up at the northern Moroccan port of Tangier.

Moroccan and Spanish authorities have been cooperating in recent weeks halt a wave of emigrants from Morocco and other African states increasingly braving the choppy straits in rickety boats. Most are trying to escape harsh economic conditions in Africa for a better life in the European Community. Dozens of people are believed to have drowned attempting the crossing.

S African Minister resigns: South Africa's Minister for State Affairs, Gerrit Viljoen, resigned Tuesday, citing health problems, reports AFP from Pretoria.

Viljoen the government's Chief Negotiator with the African National Congress during ill-fated constitutional talks last year, had been suffering from ill-health for some time, government sources said.

Settlers go to storm Rabin's home: Hundreds of Jewish settlers Tuesday tried to storm the home of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to protest a wave of Palestinian attacks on Jews, police said, reports AP from Jerusalem.

Police said they were unable to use tear gas and other traditional means of dealing with rioters because the settlers had brought along infants and children.

Police and paramilitary Border Police pushed them back over the fences and arrested a number of protesters, said police spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby. Israel radio said at least 30 were detained.

Rabin was not home, and later scores of settlers marched to a hotel where the prime minister was speaking.

Juvenile crime ups in China: In a sign of a growing crime problem in China, one in five juveniles released from jail goes on to commit more crimes, an official newspaper reported Wednesday, says AP from Beijing.

The Ministry of Justice recently released results of a survey of 160,000 convicted criminals who were released from 1982 to 1986, the China Daily reported.

Among offenders under age 18, the recidivism rate was 20 per cent, far higher than the 7 per cent for all criminals, the report said. The survey also followed 2,700 juvenile delinquents under age 16. One-third returned to crime after they were released from reformatories, it said.

FIS armed group splits : 17 held

ALGIERS, Oct 28 : An armed terror group linked to the banned Islamic Salvation Front has been broken up and all 17 members arrested, Algerian police claimed Tuesday, reports AP.

The arrests in Djelfa, 275 kilometres (170 miles) south of Algiers, add to recent claims of success against the dozens of armed bands formed after the Salvation Front went underground in February.

The report came hours after three police officers, one retired, were slain by automatic weapons fire in two ambushes south and east of the capital, police sources reported.

The official APS news agency meanwhile reported that a vast anti-terror operation is currently under way in the mountainous region of Lakhdaria, east of Algiers.

Over the past two months, authorities have reported arresting or killing several chiefs

Battles disrupt relief work in Somalia

MOGADISHU, Somalia, Oct 28: Relief programmes to feed Somalia's thousands of starving are unraveling amid clan battles, broken agreements and the looting of vast amounts of food, reports AP.

Battles between rival factions have forced the cancellation of UN relief flights all week to the town of Bardera, where more than 10,000 people are reportedly starving, and to the southern coastal town of Kismayu.

UN planes have not used the Mogadishu airport for six days for similar reasons. On Sunday, US Air Force flights to the town of Baidoa, one of the worst-hit areas, were suspended after a plane was hit by a bullet.

SLMC gives 30 days ultimatum Lankan Muslims seek protection

COLOMBO, Oct 28: The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has appealed to Speaker M H Mohamed to use his influence with the government and his international connections to help protect Muslims in the northeast, reports Xinhua.

In a press statement issued Tuesday evening, the SLMC said that it has requested the Speaker to visit every Muslim village and mobilize the Muslim youth to join the government army for the protection of Muslims in the northeast, especially in Anuradhapura and Polonnarawa districts.

AFP adds: Security forces

Nearly 200 Muslim civilians were killed on October 15 by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main military group of minority Tamils fighting to set up a separate state in the north and east of the island country.

The statement urged the Speaker to take full responsibility for the protection and security of Muslims.

If no meaningful steps are taken and results demonstrated within 30 days, the SLMC will be "compelled to pursue alternative strategies," the statement added.

Off the Record

I have 200 roubles

MOSCOW: Mikhail Gorbachev, fined the symbolic sum of 100 roubles for contempt of Russia's constitutional court, said on Tuesday that German well-wishers had sent him enough to pay twice over, reports Reuter.

Gorbachev brought light relief to a news conference by holding up two 100-rouble notes donated by his fans and signed, in German, "From German students" and "From your friends."

"I already have 200 roubles, so I'm going to pay," the former Soviet leader joked.

The fine, equivalent to 25 US cents, was imposed on Gorbachev by his refusal to give evidence at hearings to decide the fate of the banned Communist Party, which he formerly led.



She asked him to wear condom

AUSTIN, Texas: A grand jury has indicted a man accused of raping a woman who asked him to wear a condom. Another grand jury had refused to bring charges last month, prompting protests, reports AP.

Joel Rene Valdez, 27, was indicted Tuesday on charges of aggravated sexual assault and burglary with intent to commit aggravated sexual assault, District Attorney Ronnie Earle said.

"We think that the right message is being sent now," said Earle.

Police said Valdez broke into the women's home and held a knife on her; he admitted hidden in her home but said she consented to sex.

The refusal of another grand jury to indict Valdez set off protests from women's groups and others, including a rally by about 100 people outside the county courthouse.

The woman in the case told the Austin American-Statesman she was ecstatic about the indictment. She had not testified before the first grand jury, but did appear before the second. Police have not identified the woman.

The woman said she told the grand jury "that just because I protected myself from rotting of AIDS for seven years doesn't mean I consented."

She also said, "I'd like to thank all the people that took an interest in my case. It gives me a new faith in people."

Unless she is retouched

TOKYO: Japanese customs officials ruled Wednesday that Madonna's "Sex" violates obscenity standards and cannot be imported unless some of the book's nude photographs are retouched, reports AP.

It was not immediately clear how the decision would affect plans for the upcoming Japanese edition of the book.

Customs officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the books will not be allowed into Japan unless four areas are retouched. They refused to elaborate.

Under Japan's unwritten obscenity standards, virtually anything is allowed, including poses that imply a link between violence and sex, as long as genitals or pubic hair are not shown. Retouching usually involves scratching out the offending part.

Tokyo-based Dohosha, publisher of the Japanese edition of "Sex," said it was considering how to respond to the customs decision, including the possibility of revising the sections in question.



SIDON, Lebanon: A Lebanese policeman surveys the damage Tuesday caused by an Israeli air raid October 26 against Hezbollah positions east of Sidon in southern Lebanon. In recent Israeli raids against strongholds of Palestinian and Islamic groups in Lebanon at least one person was killed and four injured. — AFP/UNB photo

Cameroon declares emergency in north-west province

YAOUNDE, Oct 28: President Paul Biya of Cameroon has declared a three-month emergency in north-west province, the centre of protests against this month's presidential elections, Radio Cameroon, said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The area is one of two English-speaking provinces at the forefront of opposition to Biya.

Biya was declared winner on Friday in the first free presidential elections since independence and riots broke out in opposition strongholds.

Most of the rioting has been in the north-west town of Bamenda and the commercial capital Douala.

On Monday riot police in Douala scattered hundreds of anti-government protesters with tear gas, beating many

demonstrators severely, according to eyewitnesses. About 50 people were arrested.

Opposition sources said security forces also used teargas to scatter demonstrators in Bamenda.

But they denied an earlier opposition report that paramilitary police stormed the Bamenda home of chief opposition leader John Fru Ndi and shot several people.

A strike called by Fru Ndi's Social Democratic Front (SDF) paralysed schools, offices and shops in Bamenda.

The opposition has pledged to continue its protest.

Fru Ndi declared he had won the elections even before official results proclaimed Biya duly elected.

The state radio said on Tuesday Biya was scheduled to be sworn in for a third term in

office on November 3. The authorities clearly hope the emergency will put a lid on trouble expected on that day.

Biya's ruling party has accused Fru Ndi of planning secession for the English-speaking provinces and on Tuesday the government accused him of rebellion.

"By declaring himself president of the republic... John Fru Ndi, leader of the SDF has deliberately and manifestly engaged in open rebellion against legal authority, his undeclared goal being the partition of the country... a statement from the prime minister's office said.

The SDF, pouring scorn on the accusation, has said Fru Ndi, as 'elected' president of all of Cameroon, has no need to rule over only a portion of the country.

Korean talks on opening military hot line fail

SEOUL, Oct 28: Talks on opening a military hot line between rivals North and South Korea broke down Wednesday over South Korea's threat to resume military exercises with US troops, officials said, reports AP.

Seoul threatened last week to resume the exercises unless Pyongyang allowed inter-Korean nuclear inspections that would resolve suspicions about whether the North is developing nuclear weapons.

Pyongyang responded that a resumption of the 'Team Spirit' exercises would cause a complete halt to North-South dialogue.

In Wednesday's border meeting, the North Koreans asserted that because the South has decided to resume Team Spirit, it is completely meaningless to install a South-

North military hot line,' a South Korean statement said.

Under a peace accord adopted in February, the Koreans were to set up the hot line before the end of the year to avoid accidental fighting across the heavily armed border.

The statement said, however, that North Korea's position made it impossible to open the hot line by the November 6 deadline specified in earlier agreements.

"This way, the North made it clear that they have no intention of installing a military hot line by the agreed deadline," it said.

The 'Team Spirit' exercises, to rehearse defences against North Korean attack, had been held annually since 1976 but were cancelled this year to help promote inter-Korean dialogue.

Inter-Korean relations have become strained in recent months, however, over nuclear issues.

The North, one of the world's few remaining hard-line Communist countries, is suspected of developing nuclear arms. It allowed international inspections of its nuclear facilities for the first time in May.

But South Korea, Japan, the United States and other Western countries demanded deeper inter-Korean inspections.

Under a nuclear arms ban accord, also adopted in February between the rival Koreans, each side is required to accept inspections by the other of suspected nuclear weapons sites. So far, however, they have failed to agree on inspection rules.

Bush signs bill to open files on Kennedy

PADUCAH, Kentucky, Oct 28: President George Bush Tuesday signed a bill authorising the release of files on the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy, saying he hoped it would put to rest lingering questions about the murder, reports AFP.

"In the minds of many Americans questions about President Kennedy's assassination remain unresolved," Bush said in a statement issued during a campaign stop here.

He said that while thousands of documents on the case had already been made public, those that remained sealed had caused speculation about their contents.

"Because of legitimate historic interest in this tragic event, all documents about the assassination should now be disclosed," he said, acknowledging that exceptions could be made in some cases.

"I sign the bill in the hope that it will assist in healing the wounds inflicted on our nation almost three decades ago," he said.

Public interest in the assassination has been heightened by the release last year of Oliver Stone's film "JFK", which argued that Kennedy was murdered by the CIA in a conspiracy with the US military industrial complex.

Opposition plans to oust Saddam

SALAHUDDIN, Oct 28: The main Iraqi opposition groups met on Iraqi soil for the first time on Tuesday night to plan the overthrow of President Saddam Hussein and try to map out a future for their country, reports Reuter.

Several hundred delegates and observers from Europe, North America and the Middle East are taking part in the meeting of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) in rebel-held Kurdistan.

They plan to elect an executive leadership which they say will lay the foundations for a democratic and united Iraq.

Massoud Barzani, Head of the Kurdish Democratic Party, told delegates the destiny of Iraq was in their hands.

Ramos okays 10-pt for talks with communists

MANILA, Oct 28: The government on Wednesday proposed a ten-point agenda for talks to end the 23-year Communist insurgency in a move that one former rebel said would help start the peace process, reports AP.

Haydee Yorac, chairwoman of the National Unification Commission, said President Fidel Ramos has approved ten "refinements" to a government-rebel declaration signed during exploratory talks in the Netherlands in August.

Yorac, whose commission also deals with military dissidents and Muslim secessionists, said the refinements would "form an integral component of the substantive agenda."

Kurds to abandon bases in N Iraq

SALAHADINE, Iraq, Oct 28: Turkish Kurds fighting the Turkish government have agreed to abandon their bases in northern Iraq, a spokesman for Iraqi Kurds said Tuesday, reports AP.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) agreed "in principle" to evacuate "all its bases along the (Iraqi-Turkish) border," said Borham Salih, a spokesman for Turkish Kurds who have tried to drive the PKK from Iraq in three weeks of fighting.

This agreement which has still to be "formalized," deals with the "total PKK accord for observing the decisions, laws and rules of Iraqi Kurdistan," said Salih, who represents the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

The accord would end fighting that began October 5 — when the PKK rejected an ultimatum from Iraqi Kurds asking them to leave northern Iraq — and comes ahead of a

crucial meeting of the Iraqi opposition in Salahadine. It focuses on the evacuation of three main PKK bases in northern Iraq: in the triangle of the Iraqi-Iranian-Turkish border, south of the Turkish town of Cukurca, and near Zakhko, which is close to the borders of Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

There was no immediate comment from Ankara, which launched a major ground and air offensive against the PKK on October 16.

In Ankara earlier, the semi-official Anatolian news agency said Turkish air and ground troops on Tuesday struck at PKK positions despite reports that they had agreed Monday to Iraqi Kurdish terms for ending the fighting.

Iraqi Kurds, despite their ethnic ties with the Turkish Kurds, want to belong to a federated Iraq and are seeking to prevent Turkish retaliatory strikes inside Iraq.

Myanmar's military government appears as firm as ever

YANGON, Oct 28: Four years after seizing power in a bloody coup, Myanmar's military government appears as firmly installed as ever, diplomats here say, reports AP.

"The SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council — the Junta's official name) entirely controls the situation and knows perfectly that no one can contest its power," one western diplomat in Yangon said.

Having annihilated virtually all opposition, the Junta has loosened its grip a little during recent months, but without relaxing its overall control.

Last month, the SLORC lifted the curfew and martial law imposed since 1988, while in August it reopened universities which had been shut since December following a series of student demonstrations.

Since General Than Shwe replaced general Saw Maung at the head of SLORC in April, the military claim to have released some 700 political prisoners.

According to diplomats, a military court in Yangon sentenced around a dozen people, including six students on September 23 to between six and 14 years in prison for distributing anti-government leaflets in May and June.

Asked about this, Colonel Ye Thut, a member of SLORC's information committee would only say, "action was taken according to law" and that "incitement of riot or anti-government activities is illegal."

Such sentences are not unusual in Myanmar. According to one diplomat, three or four students, including two leaders, Thet Htun Et Ko Ko Gyi, arrested during the demonstrations of last December, received prison sentences of between 15 and 20 years this summer.

Aung San Sun Kyt, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1991 and a symbol of opposition to the Junta, continues to live in her own house on university avenue, guarded day and night by soldiers who forbid the photographing of the entrance to her home.

Put underhouse arrest in July 1989, she has not set foot in the street since then, only occasionally venturing into her garden for a walk,

according to the former Soviet ambassador.

She has had no contact with anyone from the outside world, except her husband, who has been allowed to see her twice, in May and July, — and her two sons, none of whom have been able to persuade her to leave the country as the Junta had hoped she would.

"We cannot yet foresee when she will be released," Colonel Ye Thut said, adding that she could always return to her "permanent address" at Oxford in England whenever she desired.

In refusing to accept the Junta's conditions for her release — to leave Myanmar and renounce all political activity — Aung San Sun Kyt remains a serious hindrance to Yangon's hopes of restoring relations with the rest of the world particularly western countries which suspended all aid to Myanmar in 1988.

These countries have demanded the freeing of Aung San Sun Kyt and the transfer of power to the winners of elections held in 1990 — the National League for Democracy (NLD) — which won 392 of the 485 seats contested.

Of this total, once those who have been

killed, have disappeared, been arrested, or declared ineligible, are excluded, there remain only 250 current NLD deputies.

The Junta has harassed several dozen other deputies who could also be declared ineligible under various pretexts, such as having omitted to make a declaration on the funds they used during their electoral campaign.

The Junta announced at the end of last month the creation of a committee to have the way for a national convention which would gather representatives from all walks of Myanmar life, including those deputies elected in 1990 who have not been declared ineligible.

To meet probably at the end of December or the beginning of January, the committee's purpose is to write a new constitution. It has already explicitly been told this task includes guaranteeing the army's leading role.

"The best you can hope is a gradual evolution like Indonesia or Thailand," said one diplomat, adding that he could not rule out the possibility of the military entrusting power within the next year to a civilian government — one that it could control closely — in a bid to try and counter international criticism.

Buenos Aires workers call strike Nov 9

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, Oct 28: The country's biggest labour group will stage a general strike on November 9 to protest the policies of the Peronist Party government it helped elect, organizers said Tuesday, reports AP.

"No one wants a strike for its own sake, but if there aren't solutions to the demands of the labour movement, it's inevitable that the General Labour Confederation is going to confront the government," said Saul Ubaldini of the beer workers union.

President Carlos Menem, labour's candidate in 1989, seemed unworried. "No strike is going to twist the direction of my government," he said several days ago when the vote was pending.