

Fighting sparks new fear of civil war in Angola

LUANDA, Angola, Oct 30: Heavy fighting has been raging in the central city of Huambo between police and the former rebel movement UNITA, with many casualties, Angolan state news media said, reports AP.

The fighting sparked new fears that the civil war might resume.

The war in Angola has practically already started, government spokesman Aldemiro Conceicao told Portugal's TSF radio on Thursday. "It's all on a razor's edge."

Huambo provincial Gov Manuel Baltazar said on state TV that UNITA troops were trying to capture his residence and other public building in the city.

There are many casualties on both sides, Baltazar said of the Thursday fighting. He gave no numbers.

It was not immediately possible to independently verify the reports. But a senior UN observer on Wednesday confirmed government claims of UNITA troop movements in the central highlands.

If combat reports are confirmed, the fighting would be the worst since peace accords

last year ended a 16-year civil war between UNITA and the once-Marxist government. The war broke out on the eve of Angola's independence from Portugal and killed at least 350,000 people.

Risk of war had mounted after UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi denounced last month's multi-party elections as fraudulent and threatened to renew warfare.

Savimbi had turned Huambo into his stronghold since fleeing there from the capital after results from the September 29-30 vote showed UNITA — the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola — losing.

Angolan state radio said UNITA was using heavy arms to attack government positions in Huambo, Angola's second city, 310 miles southeast of the capital Luanda.

State radio and television in Huambo stopped broadcasting and much of the city of about 500,000 was without electricity, Luanda radio reported.

State radio said the state airline TAAO cancelled flights out of Huambo, leaving stranded hundreds of residents trying to flee the city.



ANGOLA: Fierce fighting has broken out between government troops and UNITA rebels in the town of Huambo Friday. The governor of the province is reported to have fled. South Africa has denied allegations that it has been helping UNITA with troops and helicopters. — Star TV photo

40,000 Myanmar women forced into prostitution in Thailand

STRASBOURG, Oct 30: The European parliament Thursday called for an international commission to investigate reports that thousands of Myanmar refugee women are being forced into prostitution in Thailand, reports Reuter.

The parliament also called on foreign ministers of the 12 EC countries to take strong measures against the Myanmar government, "such as an economic boycott," over its "persistent violation of human rights."

A European parliament resolution said it was "repelled by reports that 40,000 Myanmar women, some of them very young girls," were forced into prostitution in Thailand, then murdered once they became "unusable." The Assembly called on EC member states "to adopt concrete measures to put an end to the scandal of sex tourism."

Hindu-Muslim clash over sex scandal in India

NEW DELHI, Oct 30: Soldiers were Thursday patrolling an Indian town revere by Hindus and Muslims after tension related to a sex scandal sparked rioting, prompting an indefinite curfew, reports and residents said, according to AFP.

Soldiers, backed by police and paramilitary forces, were keeping vigil in Ajmer town, which residents reported by telephone was quiet after two days of street clashes between Hindus and Muslims beginning Monday.

Police had arrested 32 rioters and were conducting a house-to-house search for illegal arms in Ajmer, the Press Trust of India (PTI) and the Hindustan Times newspaper said.

The Times said that although the immediate cause of the violence was a number of altercations involving Hindus and Muslims, the real reason was a sex scandal involving scores of young Hindu women and Muslim men.

"Since the scandal came into the open, tension had been building up here," a resident said. "Hindus thought Muslims had given a bad name to Ajmer, and the Muslims thought they were being

blamed for the folly of a few. "Everytime there was a brawl [between any Hindu and Muslim], it added to the tension," he said. "But the scandal was at the bottom of everything."

'China one of Iran's best friend'

TEHRAN, Oct 30: Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said China was one of Iran's "best friends" during his talks Wednesday with Chinese Defence Minister Qin Jiwei, reports AFP.

China's partnership in Iran's economic and industrial plans has broadened mutual cooperation, Rafsanjani added, according to the official IRNA news agency.

Beijing is "one of the best friends of the Islamic republic of Iran", Rafsanjani was quoted as saying.

Qin, who arrived in Iran on Tuesday, said "during my visit to Iran I observed good progress in construction of the country," and he paid tribute to stronger ties between Tehran and Beijing, IRNA reported.

Russia may impose emergency

MOSCOW, Oct 30: President Boris Yeltsin on Thursday hinted at further steps against his hard-line foes in the Russian parliament, blaming them, for slowing his economic reforms and endangering the country, reports AP.

The situation is not simply difficult, it's more like critical," Yeltsin told Russian journalists, the Itar-Tass news agency said.

A top Yeltsin aide, State Secretary Gennady Burbulis, said Russian leaders were discussing imposition of emergency rule. Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev warned Yeltsin's parliamentary foes they can be replaced, Russian media reported.

The comments were among the most alarmist yet from Yeltsin's team, "which has come under intense attack in recent weeks from nationalist and pro-Communist lawmakers. Yeltsin lashed back Wednesday by banning a right-wing party and declaring a maverick legislative police force unconstitutional.

"All this boils down to an

open war against the people, and takes society back to the times of dictatorship," Alexander Prokhanov, of the banned National Salvation Front, said at a press conference.

Police armed with billy clubs blocked a crowd of at least 100 people carrying red flags and hand-painted posters from entering the building where the Front was meeting. "Down with the lying government" screamed one woman to the crowd as she tried to push her way past the police.

Yeltsin mounted the offensive ahead of a December 1 session of the Congress of Peoples Deputies, the sole body empowered to prolong his special economic powers and hold a no-confidence vote in his government. Yeltsin said he still hopes to postpone the session until March or April.

Yeltsin has a few options other than a routine rescheduling, such as disbanding the parliament and declaring direct presidential rule. But he risk being labelled a dictator or an old-style

Communist boss by using them, and triggering a worse backlash.

The Congress is dominated by pro-Communists, elected before the collapse of the Soviet Union, who have vowed to force the government's resignation and curb Yeltsin's economic reforms.

There is a feeling that the reforms are losing momentum, due to a growing opposition to them," Yeltsin said in an interview published Thursday in the newspaper Arguments and Facts.

There will be only shouting at the Congress, which is being convened to make the government resign," Yeltsin was quoted as saying. But he also belittled the hard-liners, saying they had no popular backing.

The president apparently was trying to keep the hard-liners off balance and out of the political arena, while he makes overtures to a centrist opposition bloc called Civic Union, led by industrial chief Arkady Volvsky, Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi

and lawmaker Nikolai Travkin. Civic Union could take a wide government role "as soon as it works out a constructive economic programme," Yeltsin told the newspaper. It was another sign he was trying to broaden his base beyond the pro-reform Democratic Russia coalition, which has condemned Civic Union.

Kozyrev, speaking separately, warned hard-line lawmakers who are demanding the government's removal that they can also be replaced.

"The government is not a permanent feature, nor should the parliament consider itself such," Kozyrev said.

Deputy Prime Minister Valery Makharadze, speaking earlier this week, said that if Yeltsin decided to impose direct rule, "the overwhelming number of the regions will not only support him, but will implement it."

Yemen's elections postponed

SANA, Yemen, Oct 30: A bomb exploded outside the German Embassy Thursday shortly after a committee of political leaders announced the postponement of the first elections since this nation was reunited two years ago, reports AP.

Police said a dynamite bomb shattered windows and damaged a wall surrounding the Germany Embassy compound. There were no casualties in the 7 pm (1600 GMT) blast, they said.

The bomb was placed on the sidewalk outside the compound, but it was not immediately clear if the embassy was the target.

Yemen's intelligence organization, the Political Security Department, is across the 100-meter-wide (328-foot) road from the embassy.

The blast appeared to be part of a campaign of assassinations and bombings that have plagued Yemen in recent months.

It occurred shortly after the Supreme Committee for Elections said it had decided to postpone Yemen's first election since North Yemen and South Yemen were reunited two years ago. The election had been scheduled for November 21, and the committee wants to postpone it until February 18.

An official announcement Thursday said the committee's decision has been conveyed to the five-member presidential council led by Ali Abdullah Salch.

Salch had been insisting that the vote be held on time as stipulated in agreements for the merger two years ago.

The committee demanded that the presidential council officially confirm that new date.

The committee said in its message that its decision was based on "technical and intrinsic difficulties."

US presidential voting process

WASHINGTON, Oct 30: The US presidential vote November 3 is not won by carrying a nationwide popular vote, but by winning an electoral college vote five weeks later by representatives of 50 states and the district of Columbia, reports AP.

Each state is allotted a number of electoral delegates based on its representation in Congress.

California, the most populous state, has 54 electoral delegates, New York: 33, Texas: 32 and Florida: 25. The district of Columbia, which does not elect voting members of Congress, nonetheless has

three delegates to the electoral college.

To win the presidency, a candidate must win a majority of 270 of the 538 electoral votes, determined in winner-take-all elections in the 51 jurisdictions.

In winning a state, a candidate wins a "slate" of electors who then attend the electoral college to cast their vote. These electors are pledged to their candidate, but in rare cases they have changed their votes.

As a result, a candidate can win the electoral vote by capturing delegate-rich states without winning the popular

vote. This rarely happens, but did occur in 1876 with the victory of Rutherford Hayes and again in 1888 with Benjamin Harrison's election.

If there is no majority in the electoral college vote, the president would be elected by the House of Representatives in a special vote in which each state would be allotted one vote.

Thoms Jefferson was elected this way in 1800, as was John Quincy Adams in 1824.

In such a case, the vice president would be elected by a separate vote in the Senate.



TOLEDO, OHIO: US Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton (R) talks to students and others on Thursday after a rally at the University of Toledo. Clinton said that US President George Bush view of the economy shows his "low standard" and says "something worse about his presidency" than any political opponent ever could. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Iran frees 200 Iraqi POWs: Iran on Thursday released 200 Iraqi prisoners captured during the eight-year war between the two countries, Tehran radio reported, says AFP.

It said the POWs were handed over to Iraqi authorities at the Khosravi border post, in the presence of representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Iraq's Defence Minister Ali Hassan Al-Majid has said his country had already released all the Iranian POWs from the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war and accused Tehran of still holding 20,000 Iraqis.

But Iran says 5,000 Iranian POWs are still in Iraq, while the ICRC has referred to a figure of at least 1,000.

12 hurt in Belfast blast: A bomb exploded in Glengormley north of Belfast early Friday, injuring 10 civilians and two policemen, damaging homes and destroying the concrete anti-blast wall protecting the police station, police reported, AP says from Belfast.

Police headquarters in Belfast said in a statement that none of those injured was badly hurt in the blast which occurred about 1 am (0100 GMT).

No group immediately claimed responsibility.

15 Algerians on remand: Twenty-seven people were arrested Thursday in the Setif region of eastern Algeria for illegal possession of arms and ammunition, the Algerian news agency APS reported, AFP said from Algiers.

Fifteen of them were remanded in custody and the 12 others conditionally released, the agency said.

On Wednesday 15 people were arrested at Laghouat in the south and 10 others at Tiemcen in the west on similar charges.

Kittani Ghal's envoy to Somalia: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali is naming Ismat Kittani, an Iraqi diplomat with extensive UN experience, as his new special envoy for Somalia, Security Council ambassadors said Thursday, AP reports from United States.

Kittani is a former president of the General Assembly, and served as Iraqi ambassador to the United Nations in the later years of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War.

He has recently been working for the United Nations on various special projects.

Kittani is an Iraqi Kurd, and is well respected among the UN diplomatic community.

Quake hits Japan: A strong earthquake with a preliminary reading of 6.9 on the Richter scale hit Tokyo and other cities in eastern Japan Friday, the Central Meteorological Agency said. No damage was deep underground.

There were no warnings for Tsunami seismic waves from the 11:50 am (0250 GMT) tremor, which was centered 400 kilometers (250 miles) below the sea floor just off Torishima Island, about 580 kilometers (360 miles) south of Tokyo.

On the Japanese scale of one to seven, the quake registered a two in Tokyo, Fukushima and Nikko and one in Mito, Utsunomiya, Yokohama and other cities near the metropolitan area. A tremor of two will mildly shake buildings.

The Japanese scale is not convertible to the Richter scale, which measures the magnitude of a quake at its epicenter according to ground motion as recorded on seismographs.

Israeli court remands Jarar: An Israeli military court on Thursday remanded a Lebanese guerrilla suspected of leading 14 groups in attacks on the Jewish state and its allies Israeli radio said, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

It said Khalil Jarar, deputy commander of the pro-Iranian Hizbollah (Party of God) in the Nabatiev area of South Lebanon, was carrying 10 hand grenades and three Kalashnikov rifles when he was captured in Lebanon three months ago.

Cuban parliament okays direct election

HAVANA, Oct 30: Cuba's National Assembly on Thursday passed a new electoral law which will allow the Cuban people to directly elect a parliament within the framework of the country's one-party communist system, reports Reuter.

The new legislation, approved after a single day of debate, replaced the existing indirect election system through which members of the National Assembly and provincial assemblies had previously been appointed.

"We have been fortunate enough to achieve a law that will perfect our system — it will also increase the quality of the National Assembly, its experience and its knowledge."

Bosnian women fighting alongside men on the front

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Oct 30: In a muddy trench, just a rifle shot from the front a dozen young women prepared for patrol on a steep Sarajevo hillside, reports AP.

Shouldering her Kalashnikov and extinguishing a pungent Balkan cigarette, Velida Biharcic singed: I never in my life dreamed I would carry or shoot a gun. It's not right. I should be walking around with my boyfriend instead of sleeping with this gun."

Ms Biharcic is a member of a 60-woman infantry unit from Pofalci, a northern Sarajevo neighbourhood where some of the heaviest house-to-house fighting has occurred during Sarajevo's six-month war.

To secure Sarajevo's northern flank from besieging Serbs, Pofalci's men stormed the nearby Zuc hill in May, leading to hundreds of deaths and hundreds more wounded.

Since then, Pofalci's women have banded together to help keep the hill.

"Some of us made the decision out of revenge. Most of us saw the need to help. There was no choice," said Mara Perisic, an infantry-woman. Automatic weapons fire rattled from

Zuc's crest as she spoke. In Bosnia's outnumbered, outnumbered army, the women are fighting alongside better-trained men on the front, rotating in and out every five days. Other women fight in the Bosnian army, but the Pofalci unit is the only one that is all women, except for the officers.

Whether women soldiers should be sent into battle has been a divisive issue in the United States following the Persian Gulf War, in which women troops had support roles. Even in Israel, known for its mandatory draft for women, female soldiers do not see combat. In Pofalci, men soldiers were at first dubious about fighting alongside women, but lost their doubts in the heat of battle, said Omar Gabela, the unit's male commander.

The women, wearing distinctive blue headbands emblazoned with Bosnia's fleur-de-lys emblem, fought and held their ground.

"They don't have as much training, but they show more courage than the men," said Gabela. "Perhaps it's because they're all volunteers."

The women are Muslims, Serbs and Croats, but say they consider themselves merely neighbours. The war in Bosnia began when Serbs rebelled against the majority Muslims and Croats, who voted for secession from Yugoslavia on February 29. More than 14,000 people have died.

"I never think that I am Serb when I am fighting. I am with my friends, my neighbours," said Daliborka Torbica, 20, one of the squad's two Serb women.

After five months of combat the women insist they are the equals of any soldier, man or woman. They are proud of their accomplishments and ashamed of some Sarajevo men who are unwilling to fight.

"They are just mice," said Ms Biharcic, undisguised contempt in her voice. Like soldiers everywhere, the women talk about their work with an age-old mixture of bravado and black humour.

"It's a nice feeling to kill a man, especially if you know he is going to kill you," said 21-year-old Mirsada Hromo. "You get a special feeling when you see him walking toward you, want-

ing to kill you and you just shoot him."

Maybe we should charm them first so they'll walk a little closer," Ms Biharcic said.

Nerminka Isovic was an 18-year-old high school student when Bosnia's war began. Now, her long blonde hair cascading over her camouflage fatigues, she speaks bitterly of the life she lost.

What I do now is because I miss the life I used to have, she said. "I'm fighting for the life they took away from me. I think I have the right to live like other girls in the rest of Europe."

Ms Biharcic said the Serbs must be surprised when they discover they are fighting women. "They obviously don't know who they are dealing with," she said. "But as soon as they find out, they're dead."

Remza Cavrk, 22, said she is used to the fear of death. But what the women dread is being captured, with the grim certainty they will not be treated like male POWs. We always save one bullet for ourselves, she said.

Fru Ndi put under house arrest

CAMEROON, Oct 30: Opposition leader Fru Ndi, placed under house arrest after claiming he beat President Paul Biya in presidential elections, said Thursday he would not join a coalition government, reports AP.

Fru Ndi, reached by telephone Thursday at his home in Bamenda in northwest Cameroon, said a French delegation sent to Cameroon this week contacted him about negotiations for a coalition government.

Fru Ndi said he rejected a proposal that he share power with Biya, but would support new elections.

Off the Record

'Sex' on peak

NEW YORK: Some say it's raunchy. Some say it falls apart. But Madonna's new X-rated book "Sex" is selling — well enough to top The Washington Post best-seller list, reports AP.

"We're thrilled... and I'm sure Madonna is, too," said Diane Ekeblad, associate director of public relations at Warner Books.

Worldwide sales total 600,000 to 650,000 copies of the 49.95 dollar opus, which shows Madonna — all of her — in various sexual fantasies including with men and women. Warner has printed one million copies, 500,000 for US distribution and 500,000 overseas, Ekeblad said.

"Sex" was No 1 on the Post's best seller list Sunday, topping Desert Storm Commander H. Norman Schwarzkopf's "It Doesn't Take a Hero".

"Sex" has yet to appear on The New York Times list, said Times spokesman William Adler disputing one published report that it will be No 1 on the November 8 list.

"How could they know that? The list for two weeks hence does not exist," said Adler.

Ekeblad said when the 500,000 US copies of "Sex" are sold, that's the end of the show. "We will not be reprinting it in the US," she said.

Why? "Because we did it and we did it well and we believe in leaving the party while you're still having a good time," she said, adding "It'll become a collectors item."

Massacre for a gold chain

NEW DELHI: A frog swallowed a gold chain that a woman bather had left on a river bank, leading to a massacre of many frogs in southwestern India, a newspaper reported Friday, says AP.

Relatives of the woman in Thannermukkom, a village in Kerala state caught the frogs and slit their bellies in search of the 16-gram (1/2 troy ounce) chain after the chain-stealing frog leaped back into the water, The Hindu newspaper reported.

They found the chain in the belly of the 68th frog.

Prize for combating AIDS

Actress Elizabeth Taylor on Thursday met King Juan Carlos of Spain on the first day of visit during which she will receive the prestigious Prince of Asturias prize for her work combating AIDS, reports Reuter.

Taylor, who was suffering from a heavy cold, made no statements to the media on arrival from Los Angeles.

On Saturday, she is due to receive the prize from Prince Felipe of Asturias, heir to the Spanish throne, in the northern Spanish town of Oviedo.

