

Blasts rock Medellin despite emergency

BOGOTA, Colombia, Nov 12 : Eight bombs exploded in Medellin and one blew up in Cali, killing one person and wounding at least 35 as violence that prompted the President to declare a state of emergency continued unabated, reports AP.

The national police chief, Gen Miguel Gomez, blamed the rebels Wednesday for the bombings, and raised the possibility they may be working with the Medellin cocaine cartel.

"We've been doing studies in Medellin and found that in some of the latest attacks people from the Popular Militias are acting against police," Gomez told Caracol radio. "But they are certainly under orders from others."

The Popular Militias are urban fronts for the leftist guerrillas.

Gomez did not specify who he thought was giving the orders, but all nine bombs that exploded Wednesday and on Tuesday night were placed at police posts. The Medellin cartel has allegedly been paying bounties for killings of police.

A police officer was shot to death Wednesday afternoon, bringing to 25 the number of police killed in Medellin in the last two weeks. Officials blame drug traffickers' assassins for the killings and say they are in retaliation for the Oct 28 killing of a cartel leader in a police shootout.

The bomb in the southern city of Cali was detonated Wednesday morning as people arrived for work, injuring about 25, three seriously.

A spokesman for Cali's mayor, whose office was across the street from the blast, said pamphlets from the guerrilla group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, were found near the site.

Israel wants to wreck ME peace talks: Arafat

CAIRO, Nov 12: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, in Cairo for consultations with Egyptian leaders, has accused Israel of aiming to wreck peace talks with the Palestinians, reports Reuter.

Arafat discussed the Palestinians' growing frustration over the year-old peace talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and then met for three and a half hours with Foreign Minister AMR Moussa and presidential adviser Osama Baz.

Airport sources said Arafat's 'Foreign Minister' Farouk Kaddoumi, flew in from Jordan late in the evening and Moussa told reporters meetings on the peace talks would resume today.

Arafat said as he left the Egyptian Foreign Ministry: "These (peace) talks are taking place in inappropriate circumstances because the aim of the Israeli plan is to wreck the Palestinian track."

"For a whole year... there has been no progress for the Palestinian side because the Israeli side still refuses to accept Resolutions 242 and 338, which apply to the Palestinian occupied territories, he said.

The two United Nations Resolution require Israel to

withdraw from occupied Arab land in return for peace.

Arafat repeated long-standing PLO objections that the Israelis were proposing a mere



administrative body for Palestinians in the territories when the US negotiated ground rules for the talks laid down that they should be given self government.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation, which is officially excluded from the talks but in practice directs the Palestinian delegation, has been increasingly concerned at the lack of results.

PLO groups based in Syria and significant numbers of Palestinians in the occupied territories have been voicing opposition to the talks and urging Arafat to pull out before he makes fatal concessions.

PLO leaders have also been worrying either Syria or Jordan, the two other main Arab parties negotiating with Israel, might reach agreements before the Palestinians, leaving them acutely vulnerable to Israeli pressure.

Bill Clinton's victory over President George Bush in this month's US presidential election has added a further element of uncertainty for the Arabs because the president-elect has appeared more sympathetic than Bush to Israel.

There was no word on what ideas the Palestinian and Egyptian leaders might have discussed to unblock the peace talks, which are nearing the end of their seventh round in Washington.

AP adds: Israel walked out of a multilateral conference on

Middle East refugees Wednesday, charging the Palestinians had violated an agreement on the makeup of their delegation.

However, Rodney Moore, a spokesman for the Canadian Ministry for External Affairs said the conference proceeded without the Israelis.

More than 35 countries were at the conference on refugees in the Canadian capital, part of wider Middle East peace talks that began last year in Madrid.

Shlomo Ben Ami, head of the Israeli delegation, said Israel had agreed to attend because of an Egyptian-brokered compromise in which the Palestinian delegation would not consist of members of the Palestine National Council, the Palestinians' parliament-in-exile.

"We are very, very sorry to discover that the Palestinian delegation did not abide by this understanding," said Ben Ami. "Therefore we are not taking part in this meeting."

The Israelis objected to the presence of Muhammad Hallaj, director of the Washington-based Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine. Hallaj, head of the Palestinian delegation here, is a member of the PNC.

Clinton file : Tamposi denies any wrongdoing

WASHINGTON, Nov 12 : A State Department official who was dismissed after directing a search of State Department files on Bill Clinton during the election campaign Wednesday denied any wrongdoing, reports AP.

In a letter to a newspaper in her home state of New Hampshire, Elizabeth Tamposi said she was proud of the three years' service in the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

President George Bush dismissed Tamposi following reports that she had ordered a pre-election search of files on both Clinton and independent candidate Ross Perot. She was to vacate her office by Wednesday afternoon.

But her dismissal is unlikely to silence calls for further investigation into the scandal, which turns on whether Tamposi's office sought to help Bush's re-election campaign by digging up compromising material on Clinton.

Regarding requests from the press for information on Clinton in the runup to the November 3 election, Tamposi said, "I took no action that I deemed wrong or inappropriate."

Concerning charges that her bureau searched the files of Perot and Clinton's mother, Tamposi said that at no time did she initiate or attempt to expedite a review of any pas-

port files. She also said she was involved in the searches only to ensure that her bureau properly conducted media requests "with appropriate safeguards for all passport information."

"I did not approve, encourage or condone any review of



Elizabeth Tamposi

passport records other than those specifically identified" in requests from the news media under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), she said.

State Department officials have been quoted as citing FOIA requests on Perot but none on Clinton.

"The end of the campaign is not the end of the story," the Washington Post editorialized Wednesday.

Israeli bombers raid Hezbollah base

JERUSALEM, Nov 12: Israeli bombers raided a suspected base of the Muslim fundamentalist group Hezbollah in south Lebanon Wednesday night, the military command said, reports AP.

The raid came amid heightened tensions on the frontier with Lebanon, where a series of barrages from Hezbollah (Party of God) gunners have hit northern Israel. The Jewish state has responded with artillery fire, driving Lebanese civilians northward.

The Israeli jets struck near the village of Sadiqqin, seven miles (10 kilometers) north of the border. The military statement said the alleged bases were used as a meeting place and exit point for

"terrorist acts." No ward was immediately available on casualties.

All of the Israeli jets returned safely to base, the army said.

Earlier Wednesday, Israeli forces and pro-Iranian Shiite Muslim guerrillas held their fire after three days of violence in south Lebanon that marred Middle East peace talks in Washington.

The turbulent region was quiet Tuesday night and early Wednesday, despite Israeli military buildings along the border and inside Israel's self-designated security zone Tuesday.

Israel tripled the number of long-range artillery guns in the zone.

Guns fall silent in Sarajevo

SARAJEVO, Nov 12: Guns were silent in the Bosnian capital early Thursday but flames reportedly raged in one of the government's last strongholds in the north, where a new cease-fire was expected to be most sorely tested, reports AP.

Army headquarters had reported quiet when the truce deadline arrived at midnight (2300 GMT Wednesday), and only occasional bursts of small arms fire could be heard in Sarajevo as morning broke.

Dozens of previous truces have failed, many within hours. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, whose forces surround the capital and control 70 percent of the republic, said late Wednesday that if the truce fails, he will order more Serbs into Bosnia and "call on

all Bosnian Serbs currently in Serbia and Montenegro to come and defend the borders" of his self-proclaimed state.

The cease-fire was most vulnerable around the few government-held towns in northern Bosnia, and in Western Herzegovina, where heavy fighting between Serbs and primarily Croat forces has been reported since Sunday.

The hard-pressed Bosnian government military reported shelling Thursday morning to the north of Sarajevo in the battered towns of Olovo, Maglaj, Doboj, Tesanj and Gradacac.

It said part of Gradacac, 115 kilometers (70 miles) north of Sarajevo, was in flames.

Serb positions in Herzegovina apparently were shaken

by the fighting. An organization of Bosnian Serbs in new, truncated Yugoslavia urged Serbs to join the fight, and local commanders appealed to Yugoslav federal President Dobrica Cosic to send in the regular army.

That was unlikely because the new Yugoslavia, consisting of only Serbia and Montenegro, now views Bosnia as a separate country. Cosic also is trying to distance himself from the nationalist policies of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

The Croat military command in the western town of Mostar reported Serb shelling immediately after the cease-fire deadline. Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency also reported heavy fighting but did not make clear whether it continued after the deadline.

ROK Presidential polls Dec 18

SEOUL, Nov 12: The government, rejecting objections from the opposition, decided on Thursday to hold presidential elections on Dec 18, with an official 28-day campaign period to begin Nov. 20, reports AP.

It was the first major action taken by Prime Minister Hyun Soong-jong who was named to the post in a partial cabinet reshuffle in October for the purpose of ensuring fair elections.

As usual, the election day was designated a temporary holiday to help more people to vote.

But the selection of Dec 18 as the election day immediately met criticism from the major opposition Democratic Party (DP) that the day, a Friday, is likely to lower voter turnout, which have in the past favoured the ruling party.

Off the Record

Who ate Patten's puppy?

HONG KONG : Hong Kong Gov. Chris Patten's dog was returned safely Thursday, proving unfounded the fears it had been snatched by gourmands, reports AP.

A government statement said the seven-month terrier, named Soda, was found by two runners early Thursday morning in a country park.

Soda had disappeared into a bush near a reservoir on Sunday during a hiking trip with Lavender Patten, Patten's wife.

The two runners will donate the reward of 1,000 Hong Kong dollar (US 129 dollar to charity, a government spokesman said.

Many here had worried that the dog may have been picked up by restaurateurs specializing in dog meat, a popular Cantonese dish.

On a stopover in Hong Kong Monday, Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans joked, "The governor's dog is probably a supreme delicacy. They'll turn it into hors d'oeuvres for (senior Chinese leader) Deng Xiaoping who, I'm told, eats four puppies a day."

Many Chinese called Evans' remarks insulting. But Evans said Wednesday in Canberra that calling a person a dog-eater was considered in China "as a compliment on that person's gourmet taste."

... To protect them from molesting males

SEOUL : Commuter trains in Seoul will set aside coaches for women only starting next month to protect them from pawing by male passengers, reports AP.

The Korean National Railroad said Thursday it will designate two out of 10 coaches for Seoularea electric trains as 'women only.'

Male passengers will be discouraged from riding on these coaches, it added.

Many female passengers on Seoul's trains and subways complain that in rush-hour crowds, they can't escape from molesting males. On subways, pushers are employed at peak hours to squeeze passengers into the cars so the doors can close.

Most South Korean women are too shy to protest openly when they encounter sexual harassment on the train.

The Seoul subway system said, however, it will not designate women only coaches for operational reasons.

The pawing problem recently led the largest opposition Democratic Party to propose legislation to increase penalties for sexual harassment on public transport or in public places.

Record year for Matisse

NEW YORK : It's a record year for Matisse in New York City, reports AP.

The French artist's "Harm-ony in yellow" painting was purchased Wednesday night for 14.52 million dollar by an anonymous bidder at Christie's auction house. It was the most ever paid for a work by the artist.

The painting is among some 30 pieces by Matisse for sale this week, as New York auction houses and collectors try to profit from the successful Matisse retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. The show is the largest exhibition of the artist's work.

"Harm-ony in yellow," which is in the museum's exhibit, reportedly belonged to a Swedish collector. The 1927-1928 oil on canvas depicts a woman resting her head on a table.

Claude Monet's 1919 "Waterlily Basin" went for 12.1 million dollar to an American private collector at the auction, which featured works by some of the greatest impressionist and modern artists of this century.

The 6 1/2 footlong (2-meter long) Waterlily painting is from the estate of Ralph Friedman, a Manhattan philanthropist.

"No Monet Waterlilies like that has been on the public market in a long time," said Andre Emmerich, president of the Art Dealers Association of America.

BRIEFLY

Iran to reopen war-battered port: Iran will reopen the port of Khorramshahr, a city that was virtually razed during Iran's 1980-88 war with Iraq, to merchant ships this week, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported Wednesday, reports AP from Nicosia.

The port on the Shatt-al-Arab waterway will reopen Saturday after 12 years, the agency reported in a dispatch seen in Nicosia.

Khorramshahr Gov. Mahdi Jaberi said most of the passage has been cleared of mines and wrecked ships left from the war, allowing vessels with up to three meters of draft to enter the port.

Russia may transfer arms to China: Russia is planning to transfer weapons and military technology to China worth at least 500 million dollars as partial repayment of credits from Beijing to Moscow, Interfax news agency reported Wednesday, AFP from Moscow says. Chinese military leaders voiced interest in acquiring aviation technology and equipment for anti-aircraft systems, including the newest SU-27 and MIG-29 fighter planes, during recent negotiations in Moscow, the report said.

US eases embargo on Vietnam: The United States has eased its embargo against Vietnam by lifting a restriction blocking direct telephone links, an official from American Telephone and Telegraph (AT & T) said Thursday, Reuter reports from Hanoi.

The United States allowed resumption of direct phone links in April for the first time since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, but said US telephone payments for Vietnam had to go into blocked accounts pending full lifting of the embargo.

Vietnam refused to set up direct phone links under those conditions, saying it lacked the cash to cover its own costs for US Vietnamese calls under the blocked account system.

Blasts kill 2 in Karachi: Rescue workers retrieved two bodies from a sewer yesterday after two explosions rocked a bazaar in Pakistan's biggest city of Karachi, police said, Reuter reports from Karachi.

The blasts on Wednesday night ripped through a book market near the offices on state-run Radio Pakistan, injuring 16 people, four of them seriously, police said. Police did not rule out the possibility of a bomb.



PAKISTAN : Supporters of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto decorate their clothes with her picture during a rally on Wednesday. The rally was a result of Benazir's call for a long march in Islamabad to dislodge the present government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif November 18. Thousands of protestors from throughout the country are expected to turn out for the march. — AFP/UNB photo

No return to communism: Yeltsin

BUDAPEST, Hungary, Nov 12: Russian President Boris Yeltsin on Wednesday praised Hungary's revolt against Communism in 1956 and promised to open Russian archives on the brutal repression of the uprising, reports AP.

"There is no returning to Communism, neither in my country, nor in Europe, nor anywhere in the world," Yeltsin said in an address to the country's parliament. "We bow before all victims of the 1956 revolution."

Yeltsin said he hoped the Russian archives would shed light on how Soviet troops and tanks were used to crush the revolt in Hungary, a former Soviet satellite.

Previous Soviet regimes have said Hungarian officials asked for intervention to suppress the revolt, which was termed a counter-revolution.

The last of the Soviet troops stationed in Hungary withdrew in June 1991.

Yeltsin, on his first trip to Hungary since the breakup of the Soviet Union, spoke of a

new era in relations based on mutual respect.

"The horrible past is over," Yeltsin said. "Now is the time of reason."

Hungary was the first country to extend diplomatic recognition to Russia after it declared independence in 1991.

The two countries signed agreements for the disclosure of documents on the 1956 revolt, the return of Hungarian art works taken to the Soviet Union after World War II and a financial settlement

Myanmar destroys big drug haul

YANGON, Nov 12 : Myanmar, the world's largest source of illicit opium and heroin, burned a large drug haul Thursday in the presence of members of the US Congress and of the Drug Enforcement Administration, reports AP.

Members of the US House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, led by chairman Charles B Rangel, D-N.Y., watched the flames devour 115 kilograms (253 pounds) of No 4 heroin and 293 kilograms (644 pounds) of marijuana, along with other drugs. The Congressmen were on a private visit.

Myanmar authorities said the drugs were seized from traffickers, and produced as evidence in their trials. It was the sixth public burning of drugs in Yangon during the past two years.

Honecker, associates go on trial for Berlin Wall killings

BERLIN, Nov 12 : Former East German leader Erich Honecker went on trial for manslaughter Thursday in what many consider Germany's most important criminal proceeding since the Nuremberg war crimes trials, reports AP.

The trial began at 9:30 am (0730 GMT) under tight security at Berlin state court.

For many Germans, the trial is a long-awaited chance to bring to justice a regime that ruled by terror until collapsing in 1989 in peaceful revolution.

On trial with Honecker, who is 80 and suffering from liver cancer, are his former secret police chief and four other toppled cronies.

Seated across from Honecker in Berlin state court were relatives of East Germans killed while trying to flee to the West.

Honecker is accused in the killings of 13 people who tried

to escape to West Germany. The prosecution denies assertions that the trial is politically motivated. It says the killings were crimes even under East German law.

Also on trial this week in separate proceedings were two former East German prosecutors and a former judge who took part in 1950 Communist show trials used to stifle opponents of Stalinist rule.

Prosecutors in the Honecker case say the Communist leadership gave the shoot-to-kill orders and ordered installation of deadly border devices.

Nine of the victims in whose deaths Honecker is charged were killed by mines and booby traps at the border. Four were shot at the Berlin Wall.

The other defendants are : former secret police chief Erich Mielke, 84; ex-Premier

Willi Stoph, 78; former Defence Minister Heinz Kessler, 72; Hans Albrecht, 72, once a party chief in Suhl; and Deputy Defence Minister Fritz Streletz, 66. All are charged with manslaughter.

Only Honecker, Mielke and Stoph are charged in all 13 cases.

Guarding against possible outbursts from spectators, authorities barred any objects that could be hurled at Honecker.

Among those named as victims is Chris Gueffroy, fatally shot at the wall at age 20 in February 1989 — the wall's final victim.

His mother, Karin Gueffroy, was among five relatives of victims scheduled to appear in the Berlin District Court as co-prosecutors.

Under German law, lawyers for the five can cross-examine the defendants.



The manslaughter trial of former East German leader Erich Honecker and five of his associates begins in Berlin. — Star TV photo

Shining Path men take over radio station in Ecuador

GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador, Nov 12: Presumed guerrillas who back Peru's Shining Path insurgency took over a radio station in this port city 175 miles (275 kms) southwest of Quito late Wednesday, police said, reports AP.

The unidentified men painted slogans on the studio walls of Radio Guayaquil in favour of Shining Path leader Abimael Guzman before stealing transmitting equipment.

Guzman, whose 12-year insurgency has claimed more than 25,000 lives on both sides, was arrested in mid-September and sentenced to life in prison in early October.

It was the second attack on an Ecuadorian news media outlet by Shining Path supporters in less than two months.