

Fighting leaves 30 dead in Nagorno-Karabakh

MOSCOW, Nov 15: Violent fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in the disputed southern Nagorno-Karabakh territory has left an estimated 30 people dead since Friday, news agencies said Saturday, reports AP.

Azerbaijan's Defence Ministry accused Armenia of launching the attack Friday night in the Mardakert District of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Interfax and ITAR-Tass news agencies said. But Karabakh officials blamed Azerbaijan.

Major's popularity slumped to lowest level

LONDON, Nov 15: British Prime Minister John Major's popularity has slumped to the lowest level of his two-year premiership, with more than 70 per cent of people in a new poll saying they had little or no confidence in him, reports Reuters.

The Harris poll for Sunday's Observer newspaper found that Major's ruling Conservatives, surprise victors in an April election, are now 19 points behind the opposition Labour Party in voter esteem after a succession of crises and policy U-turns.

It is Labour's biggest lead since the dying days of Margaret Thatcher's leadership in 1990, when the government's plunging fortunes prompted a party "coup" which brought Major to power.

To add to the gloom, Major's once soaring personal popularity has hit a new low.

Of the 1,043 people questioned, 73 per cent said they had little or no confidence in his abilities as Prime Minister. Only one in 20 said they had a "great deal" of confidence in his performance.

the tiny Armenian-held region in Azerbaijan since 1988, killing more than 1,500 people and driving thousands from their homes. The violence has defied settlement by Russian and foreign mediators.

Interfax quoted the pro-independence Karabakh News Agency as saying Azerbaijani forces retreated after the fighting, leaving bodies of 34 men on the field. Two Armenian fighters also were killed.

But Azerbaijan claimed there were 30 bodies of Armenian fighters, not Azerbaijani. It said Armenia also lost a tank and two armoured personnel carriers.

Neither claim could be independently verified. Fighting raged in another former Soviet hotspot Friday in the Central Asian republic of Tajikistan. The Tajik security ministry said rebels attacked a suburb of the capital Dushanbe, killing four people.

Tajikistan, bordering China and Afghanistan, descended into bloody clan and territorial warfare in September when a coalition of democratic and Islamic groups forced ex-Communist President Rakhmon Nabiyev to resign.

Skirmishes have erupted since then across the impoverished state. The security ministry said government forces managed to take back some land in the pro-Nabiyev southern region of Kulyab, but that the situation was tense.

The fighting has been fuelled by gun-smuggling from Afghanistan. Border guard officers on Saturday warned Russian President Boris Yeltsin they would strike unless their units were reinforced, ITAR-Tass reported.

They claimed local Tajik and Afghan officials were "conniving"

Iran, Syria, Turkey voice clear disapproval of Kurdish govt

ANKARA, Nov 15: Iran, Syria and Turkey voiced clear disapproval on Saturday of the self-declared Kurdish government in northern Iraq and vowed to prevent Iran's disintegration, reports Reuters.

Foreign ministers of Iraq's three neighbours said after a meeting in Ankara that they attached the utmost importance to Iraq's territorial integrity and political unity.

"We believe that acts and efforts that may divide Iraq and developments which may lead to the disintegration of Iraq will have negative and dangerous consequences for regional peace and security," the ministers said in a joint statement.

Turkey invited Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia for talks on northern Iraq after the Iraqi Kurds declared a federate state within Iraq on October 4 and then stages an opposition congress to plan how to topple President Saddam Hussein.

Saudi Arabia did not attend the Ankara meeting.

"We believe that the future

political structure of Iraq must be decided only by the free choice and consent of all the people of Iraq, based on democratic principles," the ministers said.

But they made clear they were not happy with the Iraqi Kurdish administration. They challenged the legitimacy of last month's opposition congress in Kurdish-held territory attended by Sunni, Shi'ite, Kurdish, Assyrian and Turkoman factions.

"It's a chaotic situation in northern Iraq," said Ali Akbar Velayati of Iran. "There's no responsible government there."

Dismissing attempts by the opposition congress to promote itself as a viable alternative to Saddam, he said at a news conference. "Who can prove that what has been decided there is on the basis of the will of the majority of people of Iraq?"

Syria's Farouq Al-Shara described the congress as "a way which might lead to dividing

Iraq, which we cannot accept." Velayati and Turkey's Hikmet Cetin noted that Iraqi Kurdish leaders had denied that they wanted Iraq's disintegration.

But the three foreign ministers said they wanted to prevent the current disunity of Iraq from becoming permanent.

"The existing situation should not be consolidated or legalised as the partition of Iraq," Cetin said.

The Baghdad government and its Kurdish foes have criticised the Ankara meeting as meddling in Iraq's internal affairs.

Iran, Syria and Turkey, which all have restive Kurdish minorities of their own, deny any desire to interfere, but say any partition of Iraq would threaten their own security.

Cetin said Turkish forces which have been fighting alongside Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas to drive separatist Turkish Kurds from their bases in northern Iraq had begun to re-

turn to Turkey. "I have made very clear that we have no objective of starting there... and our security forces will withdraw. They have already started to bring some forces back," he said.

Syria and Turkey backed the US led coalition in last year's Gulf war against Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Iran, which condemned Saddam's seizure of the Emirate, opposes any western military presence in the Middle East.

A strong current of opinion in Turkey blames the deterrent force maintained by the United States, Britain and France for creating conditions in which a de facto Kurdish state can arise.

The Kurds held parliamentary elections in May and then set up a regional administration for the three northern governorates they control. The 105-member parliament voted on October 4 for a federate Kurdish state within a democratic, united Iraq.

UK govt okayed \$ 5 lakh arms export to Iraq in '90

LONDON, Nov 15: A multinational company in Britain exported to Iraq 250,000 pounds (484,000 US dollars) worth of equipment essential in nuclear weapon programme weeks before invasion of Kuwait in 1990, The Times reports today, reports Xinhua.

The export was reportedly under the approval of the British government. Enquiries obtained by the Times Friday showed the apparatus capable of assisting in weapon production and essential to support a nuclear weapon programme was sent to the Iraq Defence Ministry by Philips Scientific in Cambridge.

The case came to light when the Labour Party's trade spokesman Robin Cook released three documents dating back to the days when Prime Minister John Major was Foreign Secretary between July and October of 1989.

The documents informed junior ministers of the conclusive evidence that machine tools exported by the British Company Matrix Churchill had been used in munitions facto-

ries against official guidelines. They also revealed that in addition to the Iraq Defence Ministry Philips's customers included the Tuwatha Atomic Energy Center, where two research reactors were bombed during the Gulf War, and the Hussein Establishment, Iraq's largest manufacturer of mortar and artillery shells.

John House, managing director of Philips scientific at the time of exports, confirmed that consignments were sent to Baghdad but emphasized that the defense ministry consignment was for use in a military hospital. He also argued that he did not know the Hussein Establishment was a munitions complex until after the start of the Gulf War.

Independent scientists were quoted as saying that a large part of the consignments could be used to check the atomic structure and elemental composition of conventional explosives and nuclear materials to measure purity, a function essential to support a nuclear weapon program.



TOKYO: Members of Greenpeace Japan watch their flag ship, the Rainbow Warrior arrived at the Tokyo port November 15. The Rainbow Warrior is here to protest on going Japanese plutonium shipment on its way to Japan from France. — AFP/UNB photo

Politicians, media exploiting democratic values: Mubarak

CAIRO, Nov 15: In an impassioned attack on Muslim fundamentalist violence sweeping parts of Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak today warned politicians and the media against exploiting his country's democratic values, reports Reuters.

Mubarak, referring to recent shootings of western tourists by fundamentalists in southern Egypt, told his parliament many crimes were being committed under the cloak of democracy.

"Some forces alien to the democratic work are trying to exploit the climate of tolerance and freedom to publicly incite violence, spread discord and divisions and promote destructive thoughts which

call for ruining one of the most important national revenues which is tourism," Mubarak said.

"Democracy has given these people the chance of rising and moving to inject their poison" through democratic platforms which they were using to "justify their vicious crimes."

"Such people could not have moved... under a totalitarian regime that does not allow any opposition view... nor (could) the followers of violence and terrorism... have dared to scratch the security of Egypt."

Mubarak was implicitly referring to Adel Hussain, the editor of the opposition Al-Shaab newspaper who officials accused of inciting Muslim

militant groups to attack tourists in a recent editorial.

Muslim militants, fighting an underground war against the government, have stepped up their raids on tourists, damaging the country's number one foreign currency earner.

An estimated three million tourists visited Egypt in the year to July, pumping about 3 billion into the country.

On Thursday, five militants ambushed a bus of German tourists in The Nile valley province of Qena in southern Egypt.

Security forces were searching for the gunmen in sugar-cane and corn fields near the upper Egyptian town today.

13 Sikhs killed in encounters with forces

CHANDIGARH, Nov 15: Thirteen militants were killed in different encounters with security forces in Punjab early today, reports PTI.

Four militants of the Babbar Khalsa were killed in Majitha area of Amritsar district. One of the slain ultras was identified as Kuldip Singh alias Fajul, an area commander of the outfit.

Seven AK-47 rifles, six rocket launchers, 300 detonators and over 6,000 cartridges were recovered from the site. In the same district, three militants of the Khalistan Liberation Force were killed in Tarn Taran area.

Ten AK-47 rifles one AK-74 rifle, 11 plastic bombs, and over 900 cartridges were recovered from the site.

A woman militant Harvinder Kaur Khalsa alias Mummy, and her male accomplice were killed near village Gungrana

Peres in Cairo for talks with Egyptian leaders

CAIRO, Nov 15: Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel arrived Sunday to discuss with Egyptian leaders the stalled Middle East peace negotiations, reports AP.

As the only Arab country linked by peace treaty with Israel, Egypt is not a party to the talks. But both sides see Cairo as an important interlocutor, a conduit for Israeli ideas and an adviser to the Arabs on how to negotiate with the Israelis.

Peres had breakfast with President Hosni Mubarak shortly after his arrival and was meeting later with the Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Their main topic was expected to be the status of Israel's negotiations with Palestinians over the future of the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

US senators for oil embargo against Libya

WASHINGTON, Nov 15: Ten US Senators Friday called UN economic sanctions against Libya "too mild" and urged President George Bush to press for an international oil embargo to force Tripoli to extradite two accused terrorists, reports AFP.

In a letter to the President, the Senators said that a ban on Libyan oil exports could help efforts to bring to trial the suspects indicted in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, it killed 270 people.

"The current sanctions against Libya have been too mild to be effective," said the letter drafted by Senator Edward Kennedy.

Carter warns Russia not to expect direct US aid

MOSCOW, Nov 15: Former US President Carter said Saturday world leaders including President-elect Clinton should push Ukraine to give up its nuclear arms, an issue likely to be one of Clinton's first foreign policy challenges, reports AP.

Carter also said he would advise Clinton to boost technical assistance to the ex-Soviet republics and remove remaining Cold War restrictions on trade. But he warned Russia

not to expect more direct US financial aid.

"US aid other than food... likely will be minimal. Our country's budget has been all but destroyed in the last 12 years," said Carter, missing few opportunities during a news conference at the US ambassador's residence to criticize the policies of Presidents Reagan and Bush.

Carter, 68, made the comments after a five-day trip to Russia and Kazakhstan.

Off the Record

Charles had his birthday without Diana

LONDON: Prince Charles stayed home Saturday for his 44th birthday. His wife didn't, reports AP.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said the prince had no public engagements and was at home. Princess Diana was in Paris for the second day of a three-day solo trip, visiting a ballet class and chatting with volunteers at an AIDS information centre.

British press reports, fueled by the couple's distance on the prince's birthday, included a story in the Daily Mirror on Friday that detailed a taped telephone conversation between Charles and a married woman friend.

Wisconsin shoes for Clinton

PORT WASHINGTON, Wis: President-elect Clinton may wear a bit of Wisconsin on Inauguration Day, reports AP.

The Allen-Edmonds Shoe Corp. received an order to make two pairs of 13-Ds for Clinton by January 20. The request came from Don Perkey's Shoes in Paragould, Ark. That's where Clinton has long bought his shoes.

The latest order included a pair of black calfskin plain toe tie models called the Belgium. They cost 230 dollar. Clinton also ordered the Spencer, a black patent leather tie, at a price of 220 dollar.

Drug addict sets herd of children on fire

MANILA: A suspected drug addict heeded 10 children to a dump site north of the Philippine capital and set them on fire, leaving seven dead and one in critical condition, the Manila Times newspaper said Sunday, reports AFP.

The children, aged between four and 11, were led by the unidentified suspect to a vacant lot in Malabon town last Monday, where they were doused with flammable chemicals from cans left over from a nearby construction site, it said.

Two of the children escaped, sustaining minor burns, it added.

The daily quoted a family friend of six-year-old Pedro Pastor, who is confined at a government hospital in critical condition, that the two other survivors described the attacker as "dark, middle-aged, and apparently under the influence of banned drugs."

Women voting an 'evil innovation'

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti women opposed to political rights for women have sent parliament a petition saying that women voting and standing for election is an "evil innovation," reports Reuters.

The parliament, elected by men in October, has a clear majority in favour of votes for women and the speaker, Ahmed Al-Saudoun, said last week that women would be able to vote sooner or later.

But the petition, submitted by women students of Islamic Law and Islamic Studies at Kuwait University and published on Sunday, said the vociferous campaign by women demanding political rights was not representative.

BRIEFLY

Naga rebels kill 50 in Myanmar: A total of 50 villagers were killed by anti-government Naga insurgent group in the northern Myanmar township of Sagaing division, according to an official report here Sunday, reports Xinhua from Yangon.

About 5 am on November 8, a group of 25 Naga insurgents killed 35 Makuri Naga rationals of Htainne-Hlina village in Leshi township of the division.

Fifteen more Nagas of Rawpami village of the township were killed at about 6 am on November 11 by the same insurgent group, the report added.

Myanmar has a dozen of anti-government armed organizations which have existed for over 40 years since, the country won the independence in 1948.

Rebels shell Afghan troops: Rebels shelled government troops guarding the southern edge of the capital Saturday in their fiercest attack since a ceasefire was signed nearly three months ago, reports AP from Kabul.

The fundamentalist Hezb-e-Islami faction fired as many as 60 rockets and artillery shells on government posts, kicking up plumes of smoke and dust.

Both sides said they had no casualties, and neither reported any civilian deaths or injuries.

But Iranian state television, quoted by the British Broadcasting Corp, said the rebels also fired on three residential areas, and that "many residents were killed and injured." The report did not elaborate.

The Defence Ministry said it had ordered its troops to hold their fire and honour the cease-fire signed August 28 between Hezb-e-Islami chief Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the interim Islamic government.

Bus mishap claims 3 in England: A bus full of foreign students hit a highway bridge near Oxford on Saturday, killing three women and injuring 23, four of them seriously, police said, reports AP from Oxford.

None of the victims were immediately identified by name or nationality, police said.

Thames Valley Police said the passengers, who included Japanese, Italian, Russian and French students from the International Language School in London, were on the 85-mile (135 km) return trip to the capital from William Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The bus was involved in an accident with a car, and as a result slammed into the bridge, police said.

Gunmen kill 2 in Belfast: A pro-British gunman opened fire in a north Belfast bookmakers shop Saturday, killing at least two people and wounding 13, police said, reports AP from Belfast.

After raking the crowded shop with bullets the attacker threw a grenade among the dying and injured, then sped away in a stolen car later found abandoned, police and witnesses said.

"I am appalled by what I have seen. It's vicious sectarian crime," said Chief Superintendent Tim Lewis, police commander in north Belfast, who had just walked out of the bullet-riddled shop in Belfast's Old Park Road area.

The Ulster Freedom Fighters, an outlawed pro-British "loyalist" gang, said it carried out the attack to avenge an IRA bombing in Coleraine, 45 miles (70 km) northwest, hours earlier.

"We again warn Sinn Fein and the IRA that the theater of war will be full of casualties from the republican (anti-British) community in the coming weeks."

Britain protests Iran's statement on Rushdie

LONDON, Nov 15: Britain delivered an official protest to Iran on Thursday over a renewed demand for the execution of author Salman Rushdie, reports AP.

Foreign Office minister Douglas Hogg summoned Iranian charge d'affaires Gholamreza Ansari and delivered a protest "in the strongest possible terms" to a statement by Iranian Supreme Court chief Ayatollah Morteza Mohtadade, the Foreign Office said.

Moghtadade was quoted Wednesday as saying it was the duty of all Muslims to implement the death sentence

Clinton will leave foreign policy to Bush until Jan 20

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas, Nov 15: President-elect Bill Clinton and his transition team made clear on Saturday he would leave foreign policy up to President George Bush until January 20, and added that Clinton would meet few, if any, would leaders before his inauguration, reports Reuters.

In his strongest statement to date on the subject, Clinton said he would support a decision by Bush to send his chief of state, former Secretary of State James Baker, to the Middle East if it would help advance the stalled peace process.

"I think they'll do every-

thing they can to keep it going," Clinton said of the Bush administration as he completed nearly six hours on the golf course. "I'll support whatever they do. It's President Bush's call. I'll support."

Clinton spent a restful day on Saturday as he prepared to host top congressional Democrats today and then make his first visit to Washington later in the week.

Samuel Berger, the Clinton transition's National Security adviser, said Clinton would leave US foreign policy to Bush until Clinton is inaugurated on January 20.

"We intend to be as

supportive as possible of President Bush during this period," Berger told Cable News Network's "newsmaker Saturday."

Clinton received congratulatory calls from various world leaders after his election on November 3. Many have expressed interest in what a Clinton Presidency would be like.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin has said he met Clinton as soon as possible. While stressing that Clinton would concentrate on domestic affairs, Berger said continuity was also important and that

"America has one President at a time."

"I know that at some appropriate time, Governor Clinton would like to meet with President Yeltsin and other leaders. But that would not, in my judgement, happen before he is President. I think that there would be very few such meetings that would take place, if any, before he becomes President," Berger said.

House of Representatives Speaker Thomas Foley, Senate majority leader George Mitchell and House majority leader Richard Gephardt are to meet the President-elect

tonight over dinner at the governor's mansion here. The congressional leaders are hoping to put behind them a gridlock era marked by poor relations with President Bush and his repeated voters of their legislation.

Foley signalled willingness to work with the new team but also suggested Clinton might have to go slower on some elements of his ambitious domestic agenda.

"I think the President-elect understands... that some of these problems are going to take a little longer to resolve than the first two or three months of the administration."

Germany recognises Bosnia

BONN, Germany, Nov 15: Germany will become the third nation to grant diplomatic recognition to strife-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Foreign Ministry in Bonn said Thursday, reports AP.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Hans Schumacher said notes of diplomatic recognition will be exchanged when Bosnian Foreign Minister Haris Silajdzic visits Bonn on Friday.

Germany will wait until fighting in Sarajevo subsides before opening an embassy, said Schumacher.

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