

Indian named as UN envoy at ME talks

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 21: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali named India's UN ambassador as the world body's representative at multi-lateral Middle East peace talks, a UN spokesman said, reports AFP.

Chinmaya Gharekhan will take over the post in January after retiring as his country's ambassador, said spokesman Juan Carlos Brandt.

Gharekhan will coordinate the United Nations role in working groups on arms control and regional security, water resources, the environment, economic development and refugee issues, Brandt said.

The United Nations has become a full-fledged delegate to the multilateral talks after attending the opening of the Middle East peace conference in Madrid a year ago as an observer.

Gharekhan began his diplomatic career at the Indian Embassy in Cairo in 1959. He has also served as the number two diplomat in Belgrade and ambassador to Hanoi and UN headquarters in Geneva.

'Sharif, Benazir two sides of same coin' Long march gives impetus to Pak politics

ISLAMABAD, Nov 21: Pakistan's most glamorous politician, opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, usually pulls crowds in their tens of thousands. This week she drew just a handful, reports Reuter.

The former Prime Minister had issued a rallying cry to the masses to join a "long march" on parliament house in Islamabad to force the removal of a government she accuses of corruption and rigging elections in 1990.

In recent weeks tens of thousands have gathered at rallies around Pakistan to hear the 39-year-old Bhutto rail against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his policies that she says are ruining the country.

Or they came to glimpse the Muslim world's most beautiful politician whose flashing eyes, imperious gestures and personal charisma are rare qualities among Pakistan's usually dour leaders.

On Wednesday, a crowd of just 5,000 braved thousands of police firing tear gas, paramilitary forces wielding batons and army patrols to crowd into central Rawalpindi to join Bhutto's 18-km (11-mile) march on parliament.

People seem fed up with politicians. "It makes no difference to me who is in power," said housewife Surriya Khanum. "They all come from the same lot."

"Both (Bhutto and Sharif) are two sides of the same coin, said electrician Ajmal Khan. "None of them is sincere with the people, they are more interested in coming to power."

Both Bhutto and Sharif claimed Wednesday as a triumph - Bhutto because she forced the government to impose a massive security clamp down that virtually paralysed much of the north of the country. Sharif because he stopped the march.

"Hour country needs peace," said one of the protesters.

Nusrat Bhutto, mother of Benazir Bhutto, on Friday explained to the reporters in Karachi how she was held captive after being arrested on November 18 while leading a protest rally.



Nusrat Bhutto, mother of Benazir Bhutto, on Friday explained to the reporters in Karachi how she was held captive after being arrested on November 18 while leading a protest rally. — AFP/UNB photo

said milk seller Ishaq sitting in his horse-drawn gonga cart. When Benazir was in power Nawaz Sharif launched a movement to get rid of her and now it is the other way around. This game should end and bring peace.

The government arrested thousands of opposition activists nationwide to prevent the march, probably preventing many diehard supporters from reaching Rawalpindi. A few made it.

One group of five men said they had come from Sargodha, 200 km (125 miles) south of the capital.

"We will come at her call time and time again, said one of the Pakistan Peoples' Party activists.

While only a few joined Bhutto's long march, only a few sided with Sharif.

"Bhutto's movement is for the poor people, said Mohammad Ishaq, a mason working for a daily wage.

"This government is responsible for unprecedented price rises. How can we live? he said. If this government continues we will be starving."

Bhutto blames the government for unemployment and inflation, accuses it of corruption and rigging elections in 1990 and says it must go to make way for free and fair elections.

"You can't imagine how hard it has become for a poor man to make ends meet, said taxi driver Mohammad Anwar. "Even onions are selling at 12 rupees (0.50) a kg. Bhutto is a brave woman."

"She represents us and is fighting for our rights, said housewife Shehla Jabeen. Sharif has made our life miserable."

Bhutto has never said how she wants to remove Sharif or what policies she would offer in his place.

HC to examine Yeltsin's ban on Salvation Front

MOSCOW, Nov 21: A high court said Friday it will examine the legality of President Boris Yeltsin's ban last month on an opposition group, setting the stage for the second major judicial challenge to Yeltsin's power, reports AP.

The Constitutional Court's press service said the review was tentatively set for November 30, one day before the parliament convenes in a session that will be consumed by debate over Yeltsin and his reforms.

Hard-line factions that dominate the Congress of People's Deputies plan to seek the reversal of many reforms and removal of Acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar. Some of the groups united last month into the National Salvation Front and demanded Yeltsin's removal also.

Yeltsin had quickly banned the group, saying it wanted his overthrow. The ban was part of Yeltsin's effort in the last month to weaken his foes and win over some centrist critics before the Congress opens.

BRRIEFLY

Rao meets Arafat : Indian Prime Minister Narashima Rao met PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat on Friday to discuss Middle East peace negotiations and the need for international protection for Palestinians, the Palestinian news agency Wafa said, Reuter reports from Tunis.

Rao, on his way to Senegal for a meeting of 15 Non-Aligned leaders, also met Tunisian Prime Minister Hamed Karoui.

Yeltsin back home : Russian President Boris Yeltsin returned to Moscow on Friday after a three-day visit to South Korea. Itar-Tass news agency said, Reuter reports from Moscow.

The former Cold War enemies signed a friendship treaty, forged a military cooperation accord and agreed to study a potentially lucrative gas exploration project in Siberia.

Yeltsin now faces a tough political battle at home as opponents of his economic reform policies prepare to challenge his government at next month's session of the Congress of People's Deputies, Russia's highest legislature.

UNHCR for more aid to Bosnia : The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Friday called for a doubling of relief to war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina to prevent wide-scale death from starvation there over the winter, AFP reports from Geneva.

UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond predicted "many deaths this winter" unless efforts were stepped up to supply the 9,100 tonnes of aid per week Bosnia requires compared with the 4,500 tonnes currently being delivered weekly.

Redmond said the UNHCR's fleet of 157 relief trucks in Bosnia could be increased by another 100 vehicles to be supplied by Belgium and the Netherlands.

He said the UN air and land convoys under the protection of UN peacekeepers would continue over the winter, despite the onset of the first snowfalls.

8 robbers executed in China : Eight train robbers have been executed and 37 others in their gang sentenced to jail for 49 train robberies in which six people were injured, the official press reported Saturday, AP says from Beijing.

The Henan Higher People's Court announced the sentences on Friday, and the eight sentenced to death were immediately executed, reports in the People's Daily (Renmin Ribao) and Legal Daily (Fazhi Bao) said.

Executions in China are by a single bullet to the back of the head.

Five were given death sentences with a two-year reprieve. If they exhibit good behaviour during the two years, their sentences will be commuted to life imprisonment. Three were sentenced to life imprisonment, and the remainder were given jail terms up to 15 years, the reports said.

The gang wielding knives, sticks and daggers, preyed on a train route in southern China stealing more than 8,000 yuan (dhs 1,418) and 12 watches.

Fire leaves 16 dead in Taiwan : A fire set by an arsonist ripped through a nightclub in Taipei early yesterday killing at least 16 people and injuring a similar number, Taiwan police said, reports AP.

Police said they arrested a 38-year-old man named as Tang Ming-Hitung who ignited a gas tank in the nine-storey building after quarrelling with staff at the Fairy World Club Karaoke Bar.

The blaze was started around 3:30 a.m. (1830 GMT Friday) in the second floor of club, where firefighters found one body. Some 15 other people died in hospital while police said another 15 were still being treated for injuries.

Train blast kills 6 in China : Detonators in a waiting freight train exploded, killing six people and injuring 100 at a train station, an official newspaper reported Saturday, AP says from Beijing.

A negligent smoker started a fire under the freight car, attracting a crowd of people. Before they could extinguish the fire, the detonators inside ignited and exploded ripping apart the train car, the China Daily reported.

Five people were killed immediately, and the sixth died on the way to the hospital. The dead and injured included railway workers, farmers and local residents.

The reports said the explosion occurred last Friday at the train station in Xian, in central China. It said the detonators were produced by a defence plant and were loaded on to a freight car parked on a special track near the station.

Cuba calls to end US embargo

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 21: Cuba said on Friday it expected to win adoption of a General Assembly Resolution next week calling for the elimination of the long-standing United States economic embargo against Havana, reports Reuter.

"We hope that the draft resolution presented by Cuba will be supported by most members of the United Nations and expect it to be approved, ambassador Alcibiades Hidalgo Basutto told a news conference.

Cuba raised the issue of the US embargo at last year's assembly session but the item was deferred until this year. It is due to come before the 179-Nation Assembly next Tuesday.

WINDSOR, Nov 21: Royals and commoners joined Friday to rescue art treasures from a fast-spreading fire that destroyed a banquet hall and severely damaged other state rooms at Windsor Castle, the weekend home of the queen, reports AP.

At least five firemen and three civilians were taken to hospitals with minor injuries, police and fire officials said.

Queen Elizabeth II spent the afternoon of her 45th wedding anniversary surveying the damage and helping to evacuate treasures from the castle, a royal residence for 900 years.

"The queen is devastated, absolutely devastated," said

Mediators fail to convince Serbs

ZAGERB, Nov 21: Mediators Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen ended a two-day visit to Croatia on Friday apparently without convincing Serbs to comply with a UN peace accord in the Serb-held Krajina region, reports Reuter.

"We made very little progress... there are no changes, was all that Vance would say at Zagreb Airport as the two chairmen of the Geneva Conference on Yugoslavia boarded their plane.

Earlier on Friday at a meeting in Erdut, in Serb-held Croatia, he described the situation as bleak.

The situation which has been presented here is very difficult. It is a bleak situation, in many ways, but I think some progress has been made, the UN special envoy told reporters.

The two men were in

Croatia for a first-hand study of reasons for the failure of Vance's plan for demilitarisation of three UN protection areas captured by rebel Serbs last year.

The Serbs on Thursday refused to accept demilitarisation, arguing it would leave them open to Croat attack, in particular after the Yugoslav federal army withdrew from their territories.

A demilitarisation is out of the question, "Knin radio reported Bozo Martinovic, a local Serb official, as saying. Knin is the seat of the Krajina region, and long a thorn in the side of nationalist Croats.

The Serbs insist on the right to self-determination and to choose the state where they want to live, arguing that Croatian secession from Yugoslavia last year has de-

prived them of their own country.

Another report adds: Serb forces have scored fresh military gains after launching a heavy artillery assault on the Bosnian town of Travnik in an apparent attempt to open a new corridor towards Sarajevo.

The Bosnian Serbs' news agency SRNA said Serb forces on Friday captured the villages of Sestec and Potkraj near Travnik, and consolidated their positions. Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, is only some 80 km (50 miles) to the south.

A Reuter correspondent with British UN troops in nearby Vitez said a barrage of constant shelling could be heard from noon onwards from the direction of the town, a major refugee centre defended by Muslim and Croat fighters.

The offensive was launched as the French commander of UN peace-keeping forces in Bosnia met Serb leader Radovan Karadzic to urge the Serbs to honour a collapsing ceasefire.

A Croat military commander admitted two days ago that Serb forces had broken through the front line near Travnik and had the town, 80 km (50 miles) west of Sarajevo, at their mercy.

Journalists in Vitez said Turbe, a suburb of Travnik, suffered the brunt of the bombardment but four shells also hit the previously unscathed centre of the town, dating from the days of Ottoman Turkish rule.

Bosnian military commanders in Sarajevo refused to comment on the attack, which could presage a tightening of the seven-month Serbian siege of the Bosnian capital.

Russia to halt sub production only in FE MOSCOW, Nov 21: A deputy premier said Friday that Russia plans to stop making military submarines only in the Far East, not across all of Russia as President Boris Yeltsin had indicated Thursday, a news agency said, reports AP.

Deputy Premier Valery Makharadze made the comments during a visit to the country's largest submarine plant at Severodvinsk, near the northern Russian port city of Arkhangelsk, the Itar-Tass news agency reported.

Yeltsin had announced during a speech to the South Korean parliament on Thursday that Russia would cut its submarine production in half and eventually stop output altogether within two-three years.

But Makharadze told workers at Severodvinsk they should not worry because Yeltsin meant only that production would be phased out at plants in the Russian Far East, near South Korea.

"As regards Severodvinsk, on Nov 8 a presidential decree was signed to set up a nuclear shipbuilding centre here," Makharadze was quoted as saying by Itar-Tass.

Makharadze said the new centre would be set up even as the government converted parts of the plant's military production to civilian output. The plant recently has begun making fishing trawlers, Itar-Tass said.

Itar-Tass gave no other details. It was unclear which Far Eastern shipbuilding plants would be closed and how many submarines they produced.

Russian officials have said they plan to continue making military products that are profitable. Another deputy minister, Georgy Khizha, has said Russia must not give up the world arms market to the United States.



WASHINGTON: Haidar Abdel Shafi (R), Chief Palestinian negotiator at the Middle East peace talks, speaks to reporters at a press conference called on Friday by all of the participating Arab nations. — AFP/UNB photo

India won't allow Amnesty to visit Kashmir, Punjab

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: India will bar the London-based Human Rights Group Amnesty International from visiting the troubled Kashmir valley, Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan was quoted as saying on Friday, reports Reuter.

Chavan, quoted by the Press Trust of India, said: "India will not allow Amnesty International to visit Jammu and Kashmir state. We have to clear many issues before we allow them to visit Punjab."

Speaking at the end of a meeting with a visiting Amnesty delegation, he added: "The government has no objection to Amnesty visiting Punjab, but the timing of the visit would have to be decided by us."

The Human Rights Group

asked on Tuesday for permission to visit Kashmir and Punjab where Indian security forces have been accused of widespread human rights abuse.

The government has sent large numbers of troops to both states to combat insurgencies by separatist groups fighting for independence. International human rights groups, including Amnesty, have not been allowed to visit the states in the past.

Kashmiris have repeatedly charged Indian troops with the rape, torture and murder of civilians. The government dismisses most of the charges as propaganda. It admits to a few excess but says the cul-

prits are punished.

"While we are prepared to take action against any violations of human rights coming to our notice, nothing should be done to dampen the morale of the security forces which have to work in difficult circumstances," Chavan was quoted as saying.

During its week-long stay, the Amnesty delegation met officials of the Home, Defence and External Affairs ministries.

An official spokesman described the talks as "Confidence building measures," marked by a free and frank exchange of views, adding that Amnesty greatly appreciated India's efforts to set up a human rights commission.

Off the Record

Little Rock is so proud of Clintons

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas: Little Rock, the capital of Arkansas, was so proud of Bill and Hillary Clinton that for a while it considered renaming its airport after the future first lady, a newspaper said Friday, reports AP.

Some proposed dubbing the current Little Rock Adams field regional airport the Little Rock Hillary Clinton Airport, the Arkansas Democrat gazette reported. It said local authorities studies the idea at the end of October.

The name change would have recompensed Mrs Clinton, who is an attorney, for her approximately 12 years of work on development of the airport, but the proposal was rejected in the face of local opposition, the paper said.

Mrs Clinton was said to have been less than keen on the idea.

'Start a gay beat'

HONOLULU: Newspapers should pay more attention to covering gay issues as homosexuals become more visible in society, a lesbian journalist told a national conference of editors, reports AP.

"The world is changing in wonderful and exciting ways," said Deb Price, the nation's first openly gay columnist writing about gay life in a mainstream newspaper. "Our job as journalists is to chronicle those changes."

Price urged members of the Associated Press Managing Editors association Thursday to set up gay beats and assign homosexual journalists to cover them.

"Our newsrooms must be diverse if we are to serve readers," said Ms. Price. "There's a lot of desire among readers, whether gay, gay friendly or curious, to know about the gay lifestyle."

"I think it's a great idea to start a gay beat," she said, sparking a lively discussion. One editor asked if gay reporters might have a conflict of interest in covering gay issues.

"If being part of a group is a conflict, we shouldn't have all these white men who are straight covering the Senate," she said "In my opinion a good journalist is a good journalist."

Price's column has been appearing for six months in the Detroit News and is syndicated by Gannett newspapers. She also is news editor of the Detroit News Washington bureau.

Some editors were reticent about a gay beat and one asked if Price's column might sway readers unsure of their sexual orientation.

Anglicans allow women as priest

SYDNEY, Australia: The Anglican Church voted on Saturday to allow the ordination of women as priests, ending two decades of debate but prompting fears of a split within the ranks of its faithful, reports AP.

The church's highest body, the 220-member General Synod, passed the reform when a necessary two-thirds majority was gained by only one vote, church officials said.

The church of England in Britain made a similar change last week, also after a narrow vote.

Individual dioceses in Australia now can decide whether to ordain women. Several, such as the one that includes the largest city, Sydney, already have said they will not.

Church Primate, Melbourne Archbishop Keith Rayner, told a news conference that about 60 women will be ordained by Christmas. He conceded that a breakaway by some who oppose the move is "inevitable."

"There will be strains and there will be those who will be deeply hurt and I feel for them," Rayner said.

News of the decision was greeted with cheers and tears by about 170 women deacons waiting outside Sydney's St Andrew's Cathedral. Some have been ready to take priestly vows several years.

The Anglican Church was founded in Australia by the Church of England two centuries ago. Strong links remain, but both are now legally separate.

Kazakhstan to join NNPT

LONDON, Nov 21: Kazakhstan agreed on Friday to join the 1968 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and to help curb the arms race after several days of talks with Britain, reports Xinhua.

Kazakhstan's Vice-President Erik Asanbayev had talks with senior British officials, including Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and Trade and Industry Secretary Michael Heseltine.

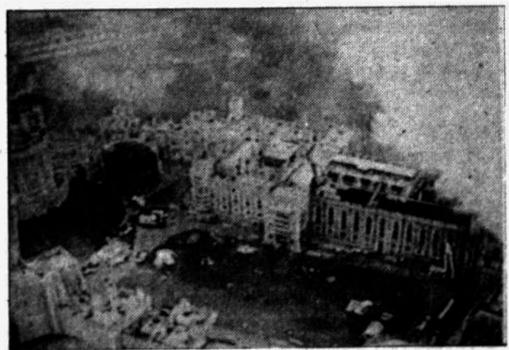
A statement issued by the British government said, "The two sides agreed on the importance of preventing the proliferation of all types of weapons, they noted the importance of maintaining satisfactory export controls to prevent the uncontrolled export of weapons-related technology."

Prince Andrew, who was at the castle 20 miles (33 kms) west of London when the fire broke out.

The fire, which began in the queen's private chapel shortly after 11:30 a.m. (1130 GMT), engulfed the entire northeast corner of the palace. But more than 200 firefighters kept it from spreading to the adjacent private apartments occupied by the royal family.

The firemen appeared to have contained the blaze by mid-afternoon, but it flared again more than seven hours after the first alarm.

Flames danced above the castellated roofs into the night, and the fanciful towers stood in black relief against



An aerial view of Windsor Castle on fire. — Star TV photo

fountains of sparks and billowing smoke turned orange by the fire.

Firefighters regained control by 8:30 p.m. (2030 GMT) and the flames subsided. But smoke billowed in to the sky late into the night and David Harper, the fire commander at the scene, said the blaze might not be extinguished until mid-day Saturday.

Andrew, the Duke of York, said he had been inside St. George's Hall, where the monarch has toasted Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, Lech Walesa and other world leaders. The ornate ceiling collapsed, he said, and "It's a pretty nasty mess."