

Qatar boycotts GCC meet

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 22: Interior ministers from five of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states met here late Saturday with Qatar boycotting the talks because of a border dispute with Saudi Arabia, reports AFP.

Kuwait's Interior Minister Sheikh Hammud Al-Sabah made no reference to Qatar's absence, instead underlining the need for solidarity (between the GCC states) to overcome the challenges aimed at the security and stability of the Gulf countries.

GCC Secretary General Abdullah Beshara called for joint action to consolidate security of the GCC which groups Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

The meeting, first scheduled for early November, was adjourned when Qatar refused to participate. Doha had threatened in mid-October to no longer participate in GCC activities and to boycott its summit, to be held in Abu Dhabi by year's end, if no settlement was reached with Riyadh.

Qatar has already boycotted the GCC's November 14 Defence minister's meeting in Kuwait.

Treason charge against Nusrat, three others

ISLAMABAD, Nov 22: Treason cases have been registered against Pakistan opposition leaders including Begum Nusrat Bhutto, chairperson of the biggest opposition party — Pakistan People's Party (PPP), a local press report said today, according to Xinhua.

The Muslim daily today said Nusrat Bhutto, mother of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, was charged with treason along with three other top opposition leaders Mustafa Khar, Chowdhury Aitzaz and Jehangir Badar by Lahore police.

Nusrat Bhutto was arrested on November 18 while leading a procession from Lahore to join the opposition's long march on Islamabad on that day and was sent to Karachi two days later.

The report quoted well-placed sources as saying the PPP workers who were arrested before the long march from their residences in

Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad were likely to face



Nusrat Bhutto charges like subversion and terrorism.

Benazir Bhutto and her mother, now confined in Karachi, were banned from entering into the capital and its twin city Rawalpindi and Peshawar, capital of the northwest frontier province, for 30 days from November 19.

However, Benazir Bhutto-led People's Democratic Alliance (PDA), which issued the call for the long march on Islamabad, vowed to continue the long march and planned to launch a train march from Karachi to Rawalpindi on November 23.

The PDA claimed that so far about 25,000 opposition leaders and workers have been arrested in different parts of the country.

An earlier AP report adds: The government rejected Benazir Bhutto's demands for early elections as scores of her supporters were arrested in demonstrations across Pakistan.

Chaudhry Nisar Ali, the special adviser to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, said the next parliamentary elections, would not be held before late 1995, when the Conservative Islamic government's five-year term expires.

"We have come to power in a legal and constitutional manner," Nisar Ali said. "The government will not allow her to adopt unlawful and unconstitutional methods to oust it."

But Ms Bhutto remains undeterred in her promise to bring down Sharif's government, which she claims is corrupt, repressive and illegal, and her demand for fresh elections under the supervision of a neutral national government.

Thousands of police in riot gear descended on the cities of Lahore, Peshawar and Rawalpindi on Saturday to stop or break up street protests. At least 100 people were arrested, according to witnesses and government estimates.



WINDSOR, England: Queen Elizabeth II inspects the ruins of Windsor Castle with a fireman November 21. The raging fire which broke out November 20 is now under control but still not extinguished. —AFP/UNB photo

Govt promises to restore Windsor Castle

LONDON, Nov 22: Britain's government has promised to restore fire-gutted Windsor Castle to its original splendour but as the flames went out, a row smouldered over who should foot the enormous bill, reports Reuters.

The 30-hour blaze, fought at its height by more than 200 firemen, ravaged an entire wing of the world's largest inhabited Castle. It reduced sumptuous state rooms including 600-year-old St George's Hall to charred and smoking rubble.

It was a disaster for Britain's heritage and a personal tragedy for Queen Elizabeth, who let the shock at the partial ruin of her favourite Palace show on her face when she inspected the devastation in a raincoat and gumboots on Saturday.

An even greater catastrophe was averted when a human chain of workers, headed by the Queen and her second son Prince Andrew, toiled for hours to remove the monarch's private art collection to safety after the fire took hold on Friday.

National Heritage Secretary Peter Brooke said "The heart of the nation" had gone out to the Queen.

BRIEFLY

Tornadoes hit Texas: Tornadoes caused serious damage in southeast Texas on Saturday, including the destruction of planes in airport hangars. Several injuries were reported but there were no deaths, officials said, AP reports from Houston.

Tornadoes hit at least six countries, said Bill Read of the National Weather Service.

Injuries were reported across the area, but no official count or details were available, said Robert White of the Houston Emergency Operations Center. The twisters formed along a line of severe thunderstorms that dumped heavy rains across the area. A twister slammed West Houston Airport, destroying at least 20 small planes stored in three hangars to ride out the storms, said Woody Lesikar, airport manager.

Fire in Argentine plane: Over 100 passengers were evacuated from an Argentine airlines Boeing 737 late on Friday night after fire broke out as it prepared to take off from San Luis, the official Telam news agency reported on Saturday, Reuters says from Buenos Aires.

The plane was destroyed in the blaze. Two of the 110 passengers and crew were slightly injured during the emergency evacuation at the provincial airport 900 km (550 miles) west of Buenos Aires.

Telam said the fire started after a wheel jammed while the plane was taking before attempting takeoff, causing a wing tip to hit the ground and skew the plane off the runway. Aerolineas Argentinas made no comment on the incident.

13 die in Thai road mishap: Thirteen people were killed and some 15 injured in a road crash in northern Thailand, according to a press report yesterday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

The accident took place late Friday in Wiang Chal, in Chiang Rai province, when a 10-wheel truck crashed into a minibus carrying children and their parents returning from a sports event, the Bangkok Post said.

Attempts to contact local police official yesterday additional details were unsuccessful.

Iranian copter still missing: Iranian authorities have been searching for a civilian helicopter which went missing with 15 people aboard in the country's southwest 11 days ago, the Daily Keyhan reported Saturday, AFP says from Tehran.

The chopper, whose type was not specified, had been leased by a company tied to the Energy Ministry and was heading for the Bazoft region south of the mountainous province of Chahar Mahal-O-Bakhtiari for an inspection mission, the paper said.

Iran's air force chief, Colonel Ali Ansari, is participating in the search operation, Keyhan said, adding that a reward had been set for locating the 12 passengers and three crew members.

Avalanche claims 7 in France: Seven people were killed by an avalanche Saturday at Val Thorens in the savoy region of southeast France, police and rescue service workers said, AFP reports from Val Thorens.

Rescue teams had to work in difficult weather conditions amid continuing snowfalls and it was not known if there were more people still buried.

Four out of five wounded people who had been rescued died despite resuscitation attempts by medical teams who went to the scene.

The Val Thorens Ski station was expected to be closed yesterday out of respect for the dead.

6 killed in Algerian clashes: Two policemen were killed by an armed group in the Medea region, 90 kilometres (55 miles) south of Algiers on Saturday, while three armed civilians and a soldier died in a clash the previous day, police said, from AFP reports from Algiers.

The two police were on a routine patrol at the time of Saturday's attack. The assailants escaped, seriously wounding a third policeman and slightly injuring a passer-by as they did so. Police also said three civilians and a soldier died in a clash on Friday between a special anti-terrorist unit and a group of armed civilians at El Bayadh, 400 kilometres (250 miles) south of the capital. Five members of the group were arrested.

An earlier report spoke of two dead and four wounded among the group, and one soldier wounded.

Colombia adopts new measures to fight rebels

BOGOTA, Nov 22: The government issued new emergency decrees Saturday designed to weaken the financial base of leftist rebels and drug traffickers, reports AP.

Finance Minister Rudolf Hommes said the government plans to investigate suspicious bank accounts and punish private companies that do business with Marxist insurgents.

The measures fall under a national state of emergency declared by President Cesar Gaviria two weeks ago. Authorities have blamed rebels and Medellin drug smugglers for at least 75 killings this month. Many of the victims were policemen.

US sailors pack up all remains except their Amerasians

SUBIC BAY NAVAL BASE, Nov 22: In the empty, gleaming-white buildings of the largest American naval base in Asia, sailors and Marines are packing up all that remains of nearly a century of US military presence, reports AP.

On Tuesday, the last of them will leave Subic, bringing down the curtain on what began as America's only colonial adventure.

In September 1991, the Philippine Senate rejected a new 10-year lease on the only remaining US base in the former colony. Leaders of the movement described it as an attempt to achieve "genuine independence."

Meanwhile AFP adds: Local officials estimate that 2,000 Amerasians below 18 years of age live in Olongapo alone, most of them are the children of bar girls. Another large group is found in nearby Angeles City, which hosted a US air base until last year.

By a cruel quirk of history, the Philippines, the only country colonized by the United States, was excluded from a 1982 law allowing offspring of US soldiers stationed for specific periods in Thailand, Korea and Indochina to opt for US citizenship.

US and Philippine groups are working to correct this by lobbying American congressmen to pass legislation to help what an Olongapo-based missionary, father Shay Cullen, calls the throw-away children of the US navy.

Social workers say that despite close cultural ties between the two countries, being an Amerasian carried and abandoned by a US serviceman carries a social stigma in the Philippines. Most of them live in poverty.

They are growing up without ever knowing their fathers, said Natty Saraspi, who administers an Olongapo center for Amerasians funded by the Pearl Buck Foundation, a US group dedicated to America's forgotten children.

Children of Black Americans suffer even more: "normal brown Filipinos would even the fair skin of White mestizos," but look down upon ebony-skinned Amerasians.

Clinton's cabinet not before Dec

ARKANSAS, Nov 22: President-elect Bill Clinton and his aides denied on Saturday they were behind schedule in planning their move into the White House, saying it takes time to find the right people for the right jobs, reports Reuters.

We're doing fine, we're working hard on it, Clinton told reporters when asked why he was moving slowly on the transition to power.

Arkansas state's Democratic Governor, who beat President George Bush in the November 3 election, officially takes office after his inauguration on January 20.

Clinton has said he will not name his cabinet until December and will choose staff carefully from a wide field of candidates, Republicans and independents as well as Democrats.

Clinton took time out on

Saturday to play 18 holes of golf before betting down to business with Vice President-elect Al Gore and Transition Director Warren Christopher. The men closeted themselves inside the Governor's mansion to swap names and trade ideas but later kept their cards close to the chest.

"We're going ahead with the transition process" said Christopher, who is interviewing potential candidates for jobs in the new administration.

"I suppose it's bound to take too long but when you want to do it carefully, when you want to do it comprehensively and thoroughly, the time will be well spent, Christopher told reporters.

Clinton aides deny anyone has been offered a cabinet post and say they expect the pace will quicken after the thanks giving holiday on Thursday. The slow process, while it risks seeming undecided, is

fully in keeping with Clinton's style.

When the Democratic Governor cast out his net for a running mate, he dispatched Christopher to look long and hard before finally settling on Gore, the junior Senator from Tennessee.

Where as President Bush started naming names immediately after winning office four years ago — trusted friend James Baker was picked for Secretary of State hours after Bush proclaimed victory — many of his predecessors have taken a more leisurely route.

But the task facing Clinton is daunting, he must try to fulfill the high hopes he raised on the campaign trail and find the agents of change who can work their way through the political maze of the capital.

There are 14 cabinet-level jobs to fill and scores of deputies and assistants to find

covering policy areas from foreign affairs to health care to trade.

The first hints of what might lie ahead could come soon. Clinton was expected to make his final choices this weekend for the men and women who will lead cluster groups — teams that will fan out into the federal bureaucracy to prepare for the new administration's takeover.

Next comes policy, and options should be drawn up by mid-December so Clinton can confer with lawmakers and make sure his plans for change are not "dead on arrival" in Congress, said Communications Director George Stephanopoulos.

"The Governor will have senior appointments probably before Christmas and that's on the pace of all transitions," said Stephanopoulos. He said talk of slowness was silly.

Britain 'armed both sides' during Iran-Iraq war

LONDON, Nov 22: Britain's Conservative government has already under fire for allegedly sending arms to Iraq over the decade leading up to the Gulf War, also sent weapons to its arch-enemy Iran, a newspaper said here today, reports AFP.

The Weekly Independent today said that Britain in particular "armed both sides" in the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from 1980 to 1988.

"Much of the trade with Iran was known to government departments," the paper said, adding that it had uncovered documents, court testimony and witnesses that pointed to "the existence of a broad network of links which fed Iran with military supplies ranging from spare parts to shells."

The paper in particular quoted an Italian Magistrate, Felice Casson, who is due to take part in the trial in Venice of 40 people accused of arms

trafficking with Iran.

It said Casson had stated that it was "obvious" from the case that Britain and British companies had been involved in the traffic.

Separately the Sunday Times newspaper said that the United States had accused Britain of also being involved in Iran's current arms build-up, which is taking place after its rival Iraq suffered a crushing blow in the Gulf War.

Washington has recently been seeking to restrict arms supplies to Tehran, "which among other advanced hardware has recently purchased sophisticated Russian submarines."

The Sunday Times said that some of the firms suspected of helping Iran in its current build-up were among those that had earlier armed Iraq in the run-up to the Gulf War early last year.

"The US has accused British

firms of being indirectly involved in Iran's huge rearmament programme, which they regard as one of the greatest threats to the security of the West," the paper said, saying the accusation had come from acting US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

"Some of the same firms also supplied the regime of Saddam Hussein, playing a part in Iraq's rearmament used to wage its subsequent war with the western-led alliance after the invasion of Kuwait," the paper added, referring to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

Earlier this month it was alleged in a London court that the British government had knowingly supplied arms and equipment with military applications to Iraq in the years leading up to the war, and that cabinet officials had sought to cover up the sales. A parliamentary debate is to be held on the allegations on Monday.

Pan Am bombing: Libya reiterates surrender of two suspects

DUBAI, Nov 22: Libya, facing the threat of tougher UN sanctions, has again said it ready to surrender two agents wanted by the West for their alleged role in the bombing of an airliner over Scotland, an Arab paper reported today, says Reuters.

The UAE newspaper Al Ittihad, quoting diplomatic sources, said UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had received a message from Tripoli saying it accepted that the two should stand trial before a "just court which should be agreed upon."

Diplomatic sources in New York, who believed Libya was playing for time ahead of a possible new sanctions vote, told Reuters the world body was unlikely to take the offer seriously.

The UN is expected to review sanctions against Libya in mid-December and possibly widen the embargo if Tripoli does not comply with demands to hand over the two for their alleged role in the 1988 bombing of the Pan Am jet over Lockerbie, in which 271 people were killed.

The sources said copies of the Libyan message, similar in tone to others which had led to nothing, had been handed to British and French UN envoys with whom Boutros Ghali was expected to discuss the issue on Monday or Tuesday.

Off the Record

'Sex' a 9-day wonder

DUBLIN: Madonna's book 'Sex' has been banned in Ireland a month after it went on sale, reports AP.

Several hundred copies of the pop star's controversial picture book were snapped up when it became available in the Irish capital.

But the Censorship Board, chaired by Irish Circuit Court Judge Diarmuid Sheridan, decided Friday that new supplies should not be sold.

Press Association, the British national news agency, said booksellers in Dublin indicated Saturday that an appeal against the decision was unlikely. It quote one unidentified bookseller saying: "Sex" was a nine-day wonder when it first came to Dublin, but the book was always unlikely to make much of an impact on the crowded Christmas market.

"I don't think its banning will have a great effect on the world of literacy. Not too many tears will be shed."



Hitler's paintings on auction for second time

FLORENCE, Italy: The owner of 20 water-colours by the late Nazi leader Adolf Hitler said Saturday she intended to put the paintings up for auction a second time, in spite of the failure of first sale and a growing row over their future, reports AFP.

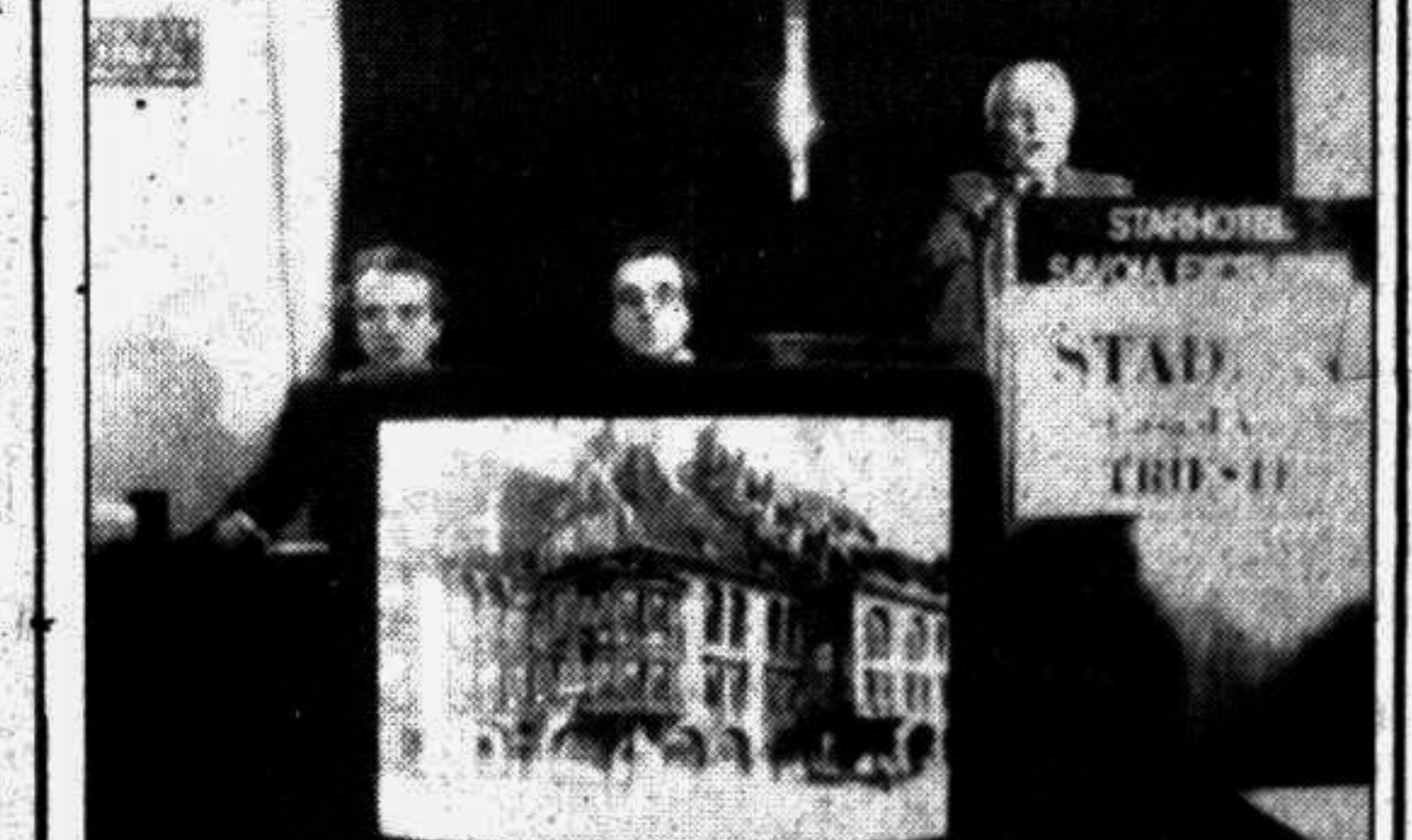
Imelda Siviero's proposal to sell off the paintings, done by Hitler during his youth as a would-be art student in Vienna, has sparked protests by the European Jewish Council and is opposed by Giorgio Morales, the mayor of Florence, where the paintings were kept for many years.

A first attempt to sell the works at Trieste, in northeastern Italy late Friday proved a failure, though the auction was attended by 200 people.

The Italian authorities on Thursday insisted that the paintings be kept in Italy. The culture ministry has expressed concern that the water colours, apparently dating from a six-year period before World War I, should not fall into the hands of seekers of Nazi memorabilia.

However Mrs Siviero, sister of the late art collector Rodolfo Siviero who discovered the paintings at the end of World War II, said she would rather tear them up than sell them to the state.

The UN is expected to review sanctions against Libya in mid-December and possibly widen the embargo if Tripoli does not comply with demands to hand over the two for their alleged role in the 1988 bombing of the Pan Am jet over Lockerbie, in which 271 people were killed.



TRIESTE, Italy: A British auctioneer Stephen Christea takes bids on Saturday during the auctioning of water colours painted by the former Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. The 25 paintings by Hitler are shown on a large TV screen for bidders as they are small. —APP/UNB photo

Palestinian shot dead in Gaza

JERUSALEM, Nov 22: Israeli troops shot dead an armed Palestinian Saturday near Khan Younes in the Gaza Strip, army sources said, reports AFP.

The killing took to three the number of Palestinians killed by troops in the occupied territories in less than 24 hours.

Earlier, in the day military sources said border guards in the occupied West Bank had shot dead two Palestinians who had evaded capture for almost two years, in an incident that occurred overnight on Friday.

In the overnight shooting, guards chased Ahmad Mustafa Dakka, 21, and Amine Kassem Rahal, 29, in Arrabah village, in the northern West Bank,