

India to get 20 Mig 29s from Russia

NEW DELHI, Nov 24: Russia has agreed to sell 20 Mig-29s to India to help it install a fourth squadron of fighters on the country's northern border with Pakistan, a newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

The Indian Express said New Delhi clinched the 466 million dollar deal with Russia during Defence Minister Sharan Pawar's visits to Moscow in September and earlier this month for talks on joint production of Mig jets in India. India presently has three squadrons (60 planes) of Mig-

29s which it purchased on a rouble-rupee trade from the former Soviet Union before its disintegration.

It also has a fleet of several older models of Migs as well as other Soviet-built military planes such as Sukhoi bombers, Antonov and Tupulov transporters and helicopters.

The daily said the Defence Ministry is 'tightlipped' over the mode of payment, referring to Moscow's insistence on selling military hardware against foreign currency, and India's hopes on maintaining previous trade practices with

the new federation. Air force officials were not immediately available to confirm the report, but Ministry sources said the Mig-29 deal had been hammered out since August.

The express said that Moscow was also keen to set up a Mig-29 overhaul plant in India, adding that the deal was likely to be clinched during a planned visit here by Russian President Boris Yeltsin early next year.

India would offer maintenance services to Iran and Malaysia once the 183 million dollar facility is built, it said, adding that a time-frame for the setting up of the unit would be worked out after the deal is put on paper.

Joint production of the state-of-art fighter, codenamed fulcrum by north Atlantic Treaty Organisation, would be the next step in Indo-Russian Defence Cooperation, the daily added.

India began exploring western arms bazars as the disappearance of the Soviet Union triggered a military spares and hardware crunch. The former union previously met more than 60 per cent of the country's defence needs.



SUBIC NAVAL BASE, Philippines: A US Navy C-130 cargo transport plane flies over USS Belleauwood during the departures of last remaining planes at Lubi point air station in Subic Naval Base November 23. On November 24 the helicopter carrier will sail out US navy men completing the US pullout after nearly a century of presence in the Philippines. — AFP/UNB photo

Ramos promises to protect Amerasians

SUBIC BAY NAVAL BASE, Nov 24: President Fidel Ramos pledged Tuesday that his government would protect Amerasians left behind now that the US military has closed its last base in the Philippines, reports AP.

"We shall not neglect the social concerns that have arisen from Subic's existence as a military base," Ramos said during the ceremonies closing the installation. "Foremost among these is what the people of Olongapo call the 'throwaway children,' or the Amerasians in our midst."

Ramos said the government would do everything possible to ensure them with enough opportunities to become educated, productive and useful citizens.

There are an estimated 50,000 Filipino-Americans in this country of 65 million. But Filipino Amerasians have no claim on US citizenship unless their fathers acknowledge paternity and sponsor them for resettlement.

US law allows children of American fathers born in Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia to emigrate and become US citizens. But the Philippines, the only former American colony, was not included in the 1982 law.

Off the Record

Her boyfriend left without paying enough

SUBIC BAY NAVAL BASE, Philippines: American troops swept and embraced girlfriends for the last time Tuesday before boarding a ship sailing away, ending a nearly century of US military presence, reports AP.

More than 1,000 sailors and Marines left aboard the USS Belleauwood for Okinawa after ceremonies transferring the Navy's largest base in Asia to Philippine control. The ship's loudspeaker blared out with Lee Greenwood's 'I'm Proud to Be an American.'

"We're always happy when the Americans are around," said Evelyn Wantin, 22, as she watched the vessel slip through the harbor into the South China Sea. "We prefer Americans to Filipinos because they respect us."

Troops arrived at the docks in full uniform, including rifles. A few carried infants. After tearful embraces, they marched up the gangplank and sailed away.

One woman, Liza Miranda, 18, cried to a reporter that her boyfriend had left "without paying me enough."

Earlier, Vice Adm. Robert Kelly, US naval commander in the Pacific boarded a P-3 plane as a "symbolic last man" to depart the Philippines, which the United States ruled as a colony from 1898 until 1946.

His plane circled above the hills surrounding the bay and then dipped its wings in farewell. A few troops, mostly officers, are to leave by commercial flights Wednesday but the base is now empty.

US troops developed the installation after seizing the Philippines from Spain in the Spanish-American War.

No agreement to see Allen's biological son

NEW YORK: Woody Allen on Monday rejected a demand by former lover Mia Farrow that he sign a written agreement so that he could see his biological child, reports AP.

Farrow's lawyer, Eleanor Alter, said last week Allen would be allowed to see 4-year-old Satchel only if he signed a formal visitation agreement or if he got a court order.

The demand for a written agreement stemmed from Farrow's belief that Allen was going to allow Satchel to be "used as a prop," as after put it, in his interview with '60 minutes' for a segment aired on CBS Sunday night.

The boy arrived for a visit at Allen's apartment during taping last week for the segment. But he wasn't shown on the programme.

In a letter Monday to Farrow, Allen's lawyers, Harvey Sladkus and J Martin Obten, wrote, "We find that there is absolutely no reason for Allen to be suddenly required to approve a stipulation since there has been no breach on Allen's part of the informal visitation agreement."

After and other spokespeople, for Farrow couldn't be reached for comment.

Allen, 57, and Farrow, 47, are in a nasty custody dispute over their two adopted children Dylan, 7, and Moses, 14, and their only biological child, Satchel.

The actress, who had been Allen's lover for 12 years, accused him in August of sexually molesting Dylan. Connecticut and New York authorities are investigating the charge, which Allen denies.

War heroes need no gays

CANBERRA: The end of a ban on homosexuals in the military was criticised by veterans and praised by gay and human rights groups on Tuesday, reports AP.

The cabinet decided Monday to end a longstanding policy of forcing gays to leave the 70,000 strong Australian Defence Force (ADF).

The binding decision was made despite opposition from defence chiefs and the Armed Forces Federation, which represents male and female soldiers.

The chiefs have not commented publicly. However, federation spokesman James Morrison said homosexuals could jeopardise the cohesion of a fighting unit.

Prominent veterans loudly reiterated opposition to the move, which is similar to a commitment by US President-elect Clinton to admit gays to the American military and a like decision by the Canada government.



THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL: A Female bodyguard keeps vigil while Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi addresses a rally in Tripoli Sunday. — Star TV photo by T A Khan

Arafat obstacle to agreement: Rabin ME talks in danger, says PLO

TUNIS, Nov 24: Palestinian delegates will travel to Washington and Moscow to warn the sponsors of the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations that the talks are in danger, PLO official Yasser Abed Rabbo said Monday, reports AFP.

They will say the next round of talks will end "in failure if Israel sticks to its plan" for autonomy in the occupied territories, said Abed Rabbo, information department head for the Palestine Liberation Organization.

travel dates were not given. Palestinian sources said Faisal Husseini, the leader from the occupied territories, will lead the delegation to Washington, and Mahmoud Abbas, a PLO executive committee member, will head the one to Moscow.

Abed Rabbo said the PLO leadership, which met last weekend in Tunis, has not decided on whether, Palestinians will attend the eight round of negotiations on December 7, as proposed by the United States.

Palestinians want the round postponed until after US President-elect Bill Clinton takes office on January 20.

The Lebanese government on Monday invited the three other Arab peace talks participants -- the Syrians, Jordanians and Palestinians -- and also the Egyptians to a co-ordination meeting in Beirut next Sunday and Monday.

They will reportedly discuss the Palestinian request to delay the eighth round of talks.

Palestinians agreed that Israel's autonomy plan "cannot lead to the pursuit of fruitful negotiations," he said.

The plan "seeks to legalize the occupation, break the unity

or Palestinian territory, and perpetuate the annexation of Jerusalem and extend Israeli settlements" in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, he said.

The Palestinians rejected the autonomy plan when the seventh round of peace talks ended last Thursday.

The plan proposes joint control over nearly one quarter of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the five-year autonomy period, while Jewish settlements would remain under Israeli control.

In Damascus, meanwhile, 10 Palestinian groups opposed to the peace talks called for a general strike to be held Sunday in the occupied territories and in Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin

charged on Monday that PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat was the "sole obstacle" to an interim autonomy agreement with the Palestinians.

Meanwhile Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad has said he refused to meet Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin because a summit could set back the Middle East peace process and even spark war.

Peace may bring such meetings, but such meetings can not bring peace, said Assad in an interview with the US weekly magazine Time published Monday.

"A meeting of heads of state to discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict might lead to war instead of peace because when there are differences at the (top) leadership level, there is nobody to mend things," he warned.

Yeltsin seeks truce with opposition

MOSCOW, Nov 24: President Boris Yeltsin on Tuesday appealed for a "political truce" with opponents just two weeks before a critical session of parliament that he said could determine the future of Russia, reports AP.

It is clear that Russia needs a respite from completely useless political confrontation," Yeltsin told leaders of autonomous republics within Russia. His remarks were reported by the Itar-Tass and Interfax news agencies.

Yeltsin suggested a stabilization period of one to one and a half years, saying that continued political bickering "can bleed the country dry and lead it to a dead end."

It is necessary to have a political truce for the duration of the stabilization period," he said.

The Russian Congress of People's Deputies is scheduled to convene December 1 in the Kremlin. Hard-liners have said they will seek to oust Yeltsin's acting prime minister, Yegor Gaidar, and strip Yeltsin of his power to issue presidential decrees.

The 1,046-member parliament is a holdover from the Soviet era. It is dominated by former Communists elected in 1990, long before the Soviet

Parliament deputies must "set the working tone in the formation of a new Russian state," Yeltsin said. "Only this will make it possible to preserve Russia as a single, independent, unified state and give an extra impetus to economic reforms."

Also on Tuesday, Yeltsin announced that he would fire Yegor Yakovlev, the head of state broadcasting.

Yakovlev has been increasingly criticized for TV coverage of ethnic conflicts, particularly in the northern Caucasus. Yeltsin said he was sacking him "for serious violations" in the coverage. There was no mention of who would replace Yakovlev.

Meanwhile, Russian newspapers on Tuesday devoted much attention to a recent attack on Yeltsin and his team of reformers by a hard-line newspaper, Sovetskaya Rossiya.

The newspaper on Saturday suggested Yeltsin's reforms were being carried out on behalf of US intelligence agencies. Yeltsin spokesman Vyacheslav Kostikov denounced the article as a "provocation" related to the upcoming congress.

Further, Baha'is are not recognized as having religious marriage or divorce rights, or inheritance rights. They are barred from entry to colleges and other higher institutions. As "unprotected infidels," their civil rights are often disregarded, and many Baha'is are refused jobs.

He also cited other abuses against Iranians who protested against the government.

After riots broke out in April and May in the cities of Mashhad and Shiraz, provoked by government attempts to clear away shantytowns, "people were sentenced following unfair trials and procedures," Galindo found.

At least 18 persons were condemned to death, Galindo said, and "new public demonstrations in September are expected to result in further executions."

Galindo has been monitoring human rights in Iran since the Commission on Human Rights decided to keep watch on the Islamic Republic's policies in 1984.

1000 held under emergency law in Egypt

CAIRO, Nov 24: More than 1,000 people, including political prisoners and "other criminals," are imprisoned under Egypt's emergency law's Interior Minister Abdel Halim Mussa said here Monday, reports AFP.

Mussa told parliament's legislative committee that "1,123 persons were detained in accordance with the emergency law" imposed after Muslim fundamentalists assassinated President Anwar Sadat in 1981.

"Certain countries and foreign organizations have an interest in destabilizing the country through terrorist operations led by Muslim fundamentalists," he said.

BRIEFLY

Clinton to meet Reagan: President-elect Clinton will take time out from a California vacation to meet with former President Reagan on Friday, a Clinton spokeswoman said Monday, AP reports from Macon.

"He's moving into the White House and he thinks it would be a benefit to talk to someone who's been there," said spokeswoman Dee Dee Myers. She added that Clinton had requested the meeting, to be held at Reagan's Los Angeles office.

Clinton plans to spend the weekend vacationing near Santa Barbara at the beachfront home of Harry and Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, television producers and Clinton campaign contributors.

Clinton met with President Bush at the White House on his first post-election trip to Washington last week.

Castro hails US mission: Cuban President Fidel Castro on Monday praised an American mission that defied a US trade embargo to bring aid to the island, AP reports from Mexico City.

Castro praised the Pators for Peace mission as "an example that dignifies the American people," according to the state-run Prensa Latina news agency, monitored here.

Some of the 103 members of the delegation toured Havana on Monday, a day after their 12.5 tons of aid, transported by caravan to Mexico, were placed aboard a Cuban ship that set sail on Sunday.

Prensa Latina said the delegation heard Cuban officials denounce the 30-year-old US embargo of the island and describe the economic difficulties caused by the collapse of the Socialist bloc, which accounted for 85 percent of Cuban trade.

3moregunned down in SAfrica: Gunmen shot dead three people near Durban on Monday taking the death toll in South Africa's township violence to at least 21 since the start of the weekend, police said, Reuter reports from Johannesburg.

They said the latest victims were killed in Umlazi Township in Natal province, where a feud between the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party erupted in 1984. Since then more than 12,000 blacks have died in political violence.

Police said 11 blacks had died in Natal since Friday night. Nine were killed in townships around Johannesburg.

In one of the worst incidents, gunmen in two speeding cars killed five blacks at a taxi rank near springs east of Johannesburg with a hail of AK-47 fire on Friday night.

5 Canadian sailors rescued: Five Canadian sailors were flown to Puerto Rico on Monday after they were rescued from their disabled craft, flipped by a huge Atlantic wave about 150 miles from shore, AP reports from San Juan.

The five, two of whom were slightly injured, were ferried to the US destroyer Peterson, then flown to Puerto Rico to arrange return home, Navy officials said.

They had been sailing from the Carolinas toward the Caribbean island of Antigua when the wave struck at 3 am Saturday, braking the 38-foot sloop's mast in three places and sending the vessel on a 360-degree roll.

All five sailors managed to remain on the disabled craft, from where they were rescued by the US Navy late Saturday afternoon.

Quake hits Alaska Islands: An earthquake registered at 5.4 on the Richter scale occurred Monday in the Pacific Ocean about 190 miles (300 kilometers) southwest of Adak in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, the US Geological Survey reported, AP says from Washington.

The quake, which took place at 2:53 pm local time (0053 GMT), was felt on Adak and Amchitka islands, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injury, said a survey spokeswoman Rebecca Phipps.

The Richter scale is a measure of the strength of an earthquake as recorded by the ground motion. Each increase of one whole number indicates a tenfold increase in the strength of the quake. An earthquake with a magnitude of 5 can cause considerable damage in populated areas.

Bombs blast in Belfast: Two bombs exploded in central Belfast Monday night, damaging buildings, police said, AP reports from Belfast.

No one was injured in the explosions outside a bank and at the nearby offices of a motoring organization, said a spokesman who was not identified.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks. The outlawed Irish Republican Army has been waging a bombing campaign in the center of Belfast as part of its military campaign to end British rule in Northern Ireland.

Newsman shot dead in Bosnia: A journalist from the Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA, Dusan Tepic, was killed Sunday near Brecko in northeast Bosnia-Herzegovina, Belgrade television reported Monday, AFP says from Belgrade.

Tepic was on a reporting assignment when he was killed in fighting for the highway linking northern Bosnia with western Serbia.

ZAGREB, Croatia: A Muslim refugee from the occupied Bosnian town of Brecko washes her laundry outside the Resnik barracks which was converted to house some 4,000 war refugees in former Yugoslavia. — AFP/UNB photo

Li Peng rejects compromise over Patten's plans

BEIJING, Nov 24: China's hardline Premier Li Peng ruled out compromise over Hong Kong governor Chris Patten's plans to broaden democracy in the British colony, the official Xinhua news agency reported today, says Reuter.

In comments to leading pro-Beijing figures from Hong Kong, Li accused Patten of breaching Sino-British agreements with his plans to throw the legislature open to a popular vote.

"Any counter proposal or any compromise plan on the basis of the Hong Kong governor's plan is unacceptable," Li was quoted as saying.

It was first public comment by Li on what has turned into a blazing war-of-words between Patten and Beijing.

Iran 'excessively' using death penalty for political crimes

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 24: Iran is making 'excessive' use of the death penalty, and earlier this year hanged one-third of those condemned for political crimes, a UN report obtained Monday said, according to AP.

In the report, a UN human rights investigator found that torture is often used illegally to force false confessions from the accused, and legal procedures may be unfair and summary.

Oppression of followers of the Baha'i religion has been stepped up, with arbitrary arrests and detentions continuing, the report said. A Baha'i man was executed this year for no apparent reason, after a 3 1/2 year suspension of executions of Baha'is.

The report will be introduced into the General Assembly subcommittee that deals with human rights issues on Tuesday; the whole General Assembly is expected to adopt it in December.

A copy of the report was obtained by The Associated Press on Monday.

"It is appropriate to maintain international supervision of the human rights situation" in Iran, concluded Reynaldo Galindo Pohl of El Salvador, an investigator appointed by UN Commission on Human Rights.

Galindo relied on visits to Iran, press reports, responses from the Iranian government and interviews with Iranian expatriates to compile his report.

"Common methods of physical torture reportedly include suspension for long periods in contorted positions, burning with cigarettes, and, most frequently, severe and repeated beating with cables or other instruments on the back and the soles of the feet," Galindo said. "It was reported that sometimes a blanket or cloth is stuffed into the victim's mouth to stop him or her from screaming and making it hard to breathe properly."

Torture to force confessions or extract information is forbidden under Iran's constitution, but Galindo noted that prohibition "continues to be flouted."

Galindo said there were 224 publicly reported executions from January-July 1992, including 66 for political crimes. Iranian defendants are

executed by hanging. There is excessive application of the death penalty...." Galindo said.

Baha'is have come in for particular persecution in Muslim Iran, Galindo said.

It has been reported that, since 1979, Baha'is have been systematically harassed and discriminated against for their religious beliefs and that 199 Baha'is have been killed; 15 other Baha'is have disappeared and are presumed dead.

"It was said that arbitrary arrest and detention of Baha'is continues in Iran," Galindo said.

Further, Baha'is are not recognized as having religious marriage or divorce rights, or inheritance rights. They are barred from entry to colleges and other higher institutions. As "unprotected infidels," their civil rights are often disregarded, and many Baha'is are refused jobs.

He also cited other abuses against Iranians who protested against the government.

After riots broke out in April and May in the cities of Mashhad and Shiraz, provoked by government attempts to clear away shantytowns, "people were sentenced following unfair trials and procedures," Galindo found.

At least 18 persons were condemned to death, Galindo said, and "new public demonstrations in September are expected to result in further executions."

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