

Russian govt will not compromise on reform

MOSCOW, Nov 26: The Russian government will not compromise on the main points of economic reform, despite the reshuffling of Boris Yeltsin's Cabinet, acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar told Russian lawmakers Thursday, reports AP.

Gaidar spoke amid speculation that two more top officials, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and State Secretary Gennady Burbulis, might resign Thursday. Mikhail Poltoranin, a Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Information, quit Wednesday.

The political jockeying is part of the run-up to next week's session of the 1,046-member Congress of People's Deputies, the country's highest legislative body.

Sikhs will seek Clinton's help to stop human right abuse in Punjab

AMRITSAR, India, Nov 26: A Sikh political party said today it was petitioning US President-elect Bill Clinton to help stop alleged human rights abuses by security forces in India's troubled Punjab state, reports AP.

The Akali Dal (M), led by dismissed police officer Simranjeet Singh Mann, urged Sikhs to report instances of police repression in the form of affidavits and mail them to its offices in the northern state.

It mentioned such abuses as illegal arrests, "fake encounters" in which suspects had been gunned down in cold blood by police, and confiscation of the family assets of Sikh militants.

The affidavits will be sent to

Clinton in early 1993 "to press him to intervene (to stop) the inhuman acts of the government of India," the party said in a statement released in this Sikh holy city.

It said Sikhs had prayed for Clinton's victory in the November US presidential election, and sought his help in stopping the "anti-Sikh policy and murder of humanity by government agencies" in Punjab.

The Indian and Punjab state governments have denied frequent allegations by human rights activists that security forces were killing suspects in cold blood and that they were harassing innocent civilians.

It has dismissed such charges as propaganda designed to demoralise security

forces, and in turn cited random killings and kidnappings for ransom by Sikh militants, who are battling for a separate Sikh homeland.

Meanwhile PTI adds: Doordarshan today drew a lot of flak from agitated members in the Lok Sabha for not showing visual clips of yesterday's boat club rally organised by the left parties and Janata Dal.

Raising the matter during the zero hour, the CPM member, Basudev Acharya, said Doordarshan did not show the huge workers' rally in Delhi, though it promptly showed the rally addressed by the Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs, Mamta Banerjee, at Calcutta, organised by the West Bengal unit of the Congress-I.

Acharya was supported by party colleagues as well as Janata Dal member, Ram Vilas Paswan, and the BJP member, ML Khurana, who all described the "biased" coverage of Doordarshan especially when opposition parties were involved.

The Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, Ajit Panja, mollified the members, saying Doordarshan "missed it without any bad intention."

Panja said there was no interference from him or his ministry in the episode and said as soon as he got to know after listening to the Hindi bulletin, he ordered an inquiry into the matter and subsequently in the English bulletin it was incorporated in the

bulletin itself.

Explaining the reasons for non-coverage of the Delhi rally, the minister said the ongoing work-to-rule by Doordarshan employees had affected the normal functioning and the Additional Director General (News) was asked to obtain the visuals of the rally from private stringers.

A Calcutta report says: Indian Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports Mamta Banerjee announced today that she would quit the federal cabinet to take on the Marxist-controlled West Bengal state government.

She made the dramatic announcement at a rally of some 500,000 supporters of the ruling Congress (I) party here in the West Bengal state capital.

Off the Record

He gives AIDS to her thru' unprotected sex

PORTLAND, Ore: An HIV-infected man accused of trying to give AIDS to a 17-year-old girl through unprotected sex was convicted Wednesday of attempted murder, reports AP.

Alberto Gonzalez, 28, also was found guilty of attempted assault, delivery of marijuana and contributing to the sexual delinquency of a minor. He was found innocent of two counts of first-degree sexual abuse.

The girl, now 18, testified she had unprotected sex with Gonzalez in 1990. She has tested negative for the AIDS virus.

Jurors in Multnomah County Circuit Court deliberated for about 7 1/2 hours over two days before reaching their verdict.

"It's judicial and racial prejudice," Gonzalez protested as he was led away in handcuffs.

Deputy District Attorney David Peters praised the verdict: "It sends a very important message to people around the country about their behaviour."

Defence attorney Carolyn Mrech said in closing arguments that no evidence was presented showing that Gonzalez intended to kill the girl. She also said AIDS doesn't qualify as a deadly weapon.

Peters said Gonzalez knew he had the AIDS virus when he had sex with the girl and he knew the consequences of his actions.

Two men who had served time in jail with Gonzalez testified that he had told them he wanted to infect women the virus. The defence disputed that testimony, saying the witnesses were unreliable.

This will whet people's appetites

ARLINGTON, Va: Denzel Washington, who plays the title role in "Malcolm X", said fascination with the 1960s black activist should be more than a fashion statement, reports AP.

In the year before the Spike Lee film was released this month, clothing emblazoned with the single letter 'X' has proliferated.

"It saddens me to think about how many 'X' hats are out there, and nothing between the ears — people calling themselves 'Malcolm the 10th', Washington said in the November 27-29 issue of USA weekend magazine.

"But awareness is a beginning," he said. "Maybe this film will be a nudge, lead to other things, whet people's appetites."

Washington won an Academy Award for best supporting actor in "Glory". His other film credits include, "Cry Freedom" and "Mississippi Masala."

Cop to die for raping his Lankan maid

FUJAIRAH, United Arab Emirates: A policeman has been sentenced to death for raping his Shri Lankan housemaid, the first time capital punishment was ordered in such a case in the United Arab Emirates, court officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

The policeman was convicted and sentenced on Tuesday by the Fujairah Criminal Court, the officials said, refusing to be identified. They identified him only by his initials RSH, a UAE national, and said he is 32 years old.

The court was told that on June 9, 1990, the policeman wrestled his housemaid, identified by her initials SS, to the floor and raped her, the officials said.

They would not release other details of the crime or the trial.

Capital punishment, carried out by a firing squad, is allowed under the UAE judicial system. But the last execution that was carried out was in 1979, according to the court officials.

They said this was the first time a policeman has been convicted of rape and the first time a rapist has been sentenced to death.



LONDON: A puppet representing Queen Elizabeth II from the satirical TV show "Spitting Image" browses through the new "Spitting Image" book "Goodbye" published this week and on sale for 2.99 pounds. —AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Pak observer shot in Somalia: A Pakistani military observer was wounded by sniper fire Wednesday on a United Nations mission in Somalia, UN officials said, reports AFP from UN.

The officer was in stable condition after being wounded in the left shoulder, a UN spokesman said. He was driving a vehicle in Mogadishu with two other observers who were unhurt.

The wounded officer was evacuated to Nairobi for medical treatment.

UN officials intend to issue a "strong protest" over the incident but so far have no information on the attackers.

Relief operations in war-and famine-ravaged Somalia have been hindered by numerous sniper attacks and ambushes.

Floods kill 11 in Albania: Floods killed 11 people and left 35,000 homeless in Albania last week, Agriculture Minister Rexhep Uka said on Wednesday, reports Reuter from Tirana.

"With a harsh winter expected this a terrible blow for the new Albanian democratic government," Uka told a news conference.

Most damage was caused when the Mati River, some 70 kms (45 miles) from the capital, Tirana, burst its banks.

The floods were a cruel blow to Albania, Europe's poorest country, as it emerges from more than four decades of communist isolation and centralised mismanagement. Uka said 140 houses had been completely destroyed, and 40 schools, hospitals and kindergartens badly damaged.

HK suspends search for crewmen: Hong Kong rescue officials on Thursday suspended their search for three missing crewmen from a Chinese military vessel that capsized Wednesday after being rammed by an unidentified cargo ship, reports AP from Hong Kong.

"The possibility of anybody surviving longer than 12 hours is remote," said Philip Weaver, senior marine officer with Hong Kong's marine department.

But Weaver said Chinese and Hong Kong authorities have asked local fishermen to continue looking for the three missing officers from the Chinese patrol boat Kung Biri 001.

Mongolia seeks emergency aid: Mongolian Prime Minister Punsagyn Jasray has made a new appeal for emergency aid, saying his country needs 20 million US dollars to make it through the bitter winter, reports Reuter from Ulan Bator.

"Mongolia is now in its most difficult stage," Jasray told Reuters late on Wednesday.

He said the cash was desperately needed to pay for imports of petroleum products from Russia, including heating oil to fend off nighttime winter temperatures already plunging as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus one degree Fahrenheit).

"If fuel is cut, there is danger that local districts, hospitals and schools will be frozen, and that would lead to unprecedented trouble in the country," Jasray said.

Quake rocks Indonesia: An intense earthquake measuring 5.5 on the Richter scale was recorded Wednesday near Sulawesi, Indonesia, the Hong Kong Observatory reported, says AP from Hong Kong.

A short observational statement said initial reading of the quake, recorded at 6:08 pm Hong Kong time (1008 GMT), determined the epicenter to be about 390 kilometers (248 miles) east-northeast of Manado, Sulawesi.

The observatory has no further details.

The Richter scale is a gauge of the energy released by an earthquake, as measured by ground motion recorded on a seismograph.

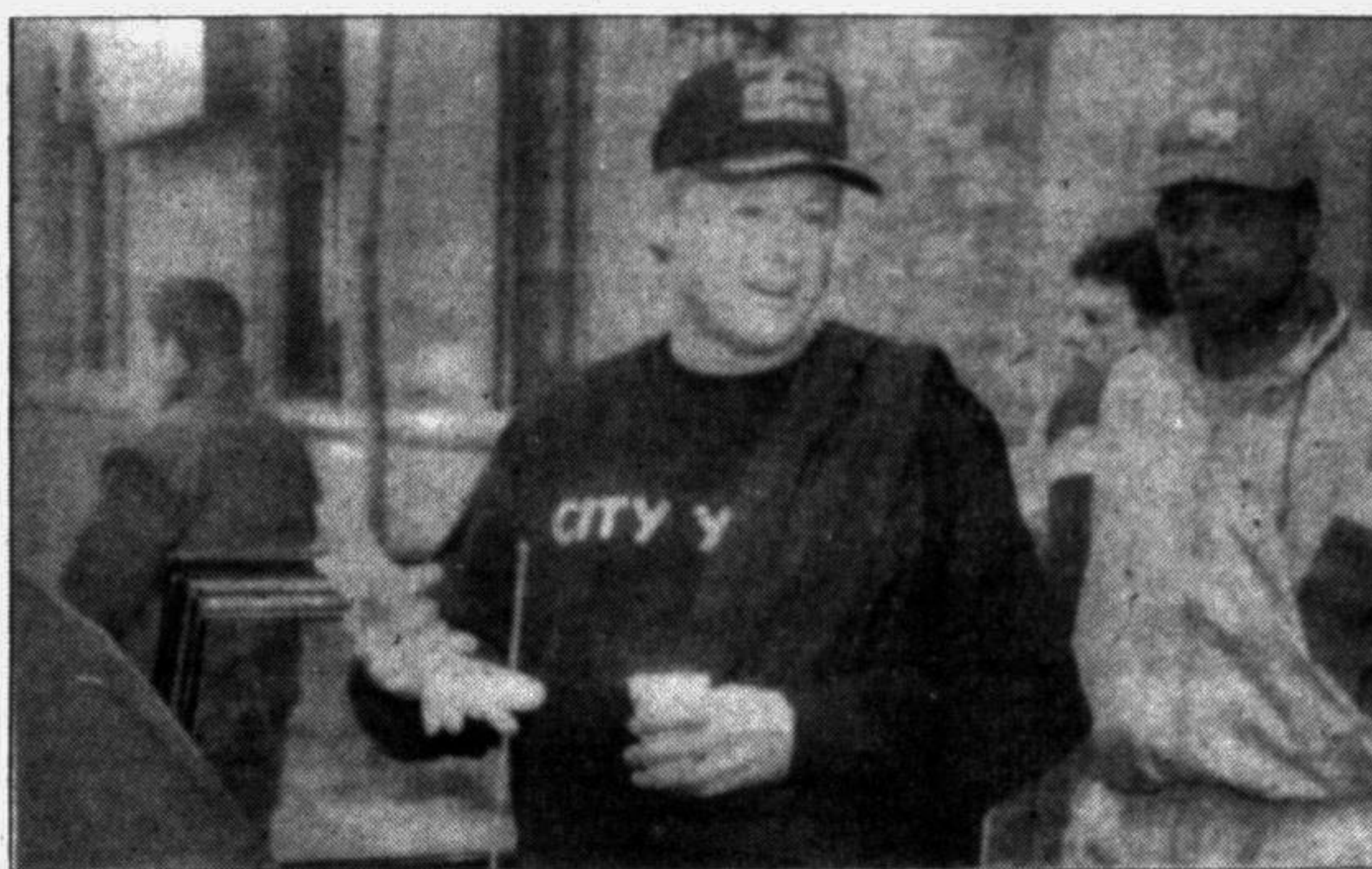
Pakistan seizes 55 kg heroin: Pakistan authorities seized 55 kilograms (121 pounds) of "fine quality" heroin and arrested two alleged smugglers near northwestern Peshawar, bordering Afghanistan, officials sources said yesterday, report AFP from Islamabad.

Police, acting on a tip off Wednesday, chased and captured a vehicle in which the drug was concealed. The two arrested are Pakistani nationals.

During the first six months of this year, 704 kg (1,549 pounds) of heroin and 2.2 tonnes of opium were seized in Pakistan.

Tajik factions to end war: The chiefs of Tajikistan's warring militias pledged Wednesday to end the fighting that has ravaged this central Asian republic for the past five months, reports AFP from Khodjant.

The heads of the pro-communist and Islamic armed factions which have been fighting for power in the former Soviet republic announced in turn to the parliament gathered in this northern city that they were for peace.



LITTLE ROCK: US President-elect Bill Clinton (C) heads for his limousine as he leaves the Little Rock YMCA November 25 after an early morning workout. Clinton met with US Senator Lloyd Bentsen D-Tex, November 24 for several hours as part of the transition and appointment process. —AFP/UNB photo

80 per cent food, medicine stolen

Plan to send UN troops to Somalia

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 26: The Security Council is laying plans for UN troops in Somalia to fight back against warlords who have stolen up to 80 per cent of the food and medicine sent to the starving land, reports AP.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was told Wednesday to outline how to protect efforts to save some 2 million Somalis threatened by famine, said the council president, Ambassador Andre Erdos of Hungary. He said the council would consider the plan next week.

In Washington, the United States late Wednesday offered up to 30,000 armed troops to get food and other aid to thousands of starving people in Somalia, Bush administration officials said.

The offer was extended by Acting Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger to Boutros-Ghali.

A UN agency suspended its relief shipments Wednesday, a day after gunners in the capital, Mogadishu, hit one of the agency's ships with artillery fire.

"The feeling is that the Council decided that the situation went too far to be tolerated, and too far to use the same practices and methods that we have used so far," Erdos said.

The peacekeepers have been hampered by orders to cooperate with "Somali authorities," but those authorities are the same warlords who stole food and medicine in the

chaos that erupted after President Mohammed Siad Barre was overthrown in January 1991.

By UN estimates, some 300,000 Somalis have died. As thousands more die each week, an outraged public has demanded that the Security Council give its forces authority to use force to defend their mission.

"We need a very concrete plan of action — how many, where, what to do, how to re-formulate our mandate," Erdos said.

He said he foresaw "tangible actions to carry out the UN assistance to Somalia, and to restore some kind of normalcy to that country."

Erdos seemed to be suggesting the peacekeepers will

get orders similar to those of the UN forces in Bosnia — they can open fire to defend their mission, not just in self-defence, and will not have to cooperate with local thugs.

"Something that is especially disturbing is that 70 to 80 per cent of all the humanitarian aid is looted," Erdos said.

About 3,000 UN peacekeepers are ready to leave for Somalia, but UN officials have not been able to pin down agreements with Somali warlords to get them into the country, Erdos said.

About 500 Pakistani UN troops are already in the country, and have secured the airport.

Sanctions on Cuba to promote democracy: US

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 26: President-elect Clinton believes tougher sanctions on Cuba will promote democracy in the communist country, despite a General Assembly resolution against tightening the US embargo, reports AP.

The assembly on Tuesday approved a resolution asking the United States to repeal a law extending the US embargo on trade with Cuba to include US subsidiary companies in other nations.

Many European and Latin American nations also have criticized it as excessive punishment for a country struggling with severe economic hardship now that its Soviet block patrons have disappeared.

The Bush administration, which supported the act, had no comment Wednesday on the UN vote, said Judy Smith, deputy-White House press secretary.

Under the law, subsidiaries of US companies based abroad may now be prosecuted if they do business with Cuba, and ships trading with Cuba are barred from US ports for six months.

The main aim of the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 is to hasten the end of Fidel Castro's one-party rule now that the Cold War's end has left him increasingly isolated.

The Bush administration, which supported the act, had no comment Wednesday on the UN vote, said Judy Smith, deputy-White House press secretary.

Clinton endorsed the law, which was drawn up by Democrats and passed in September by two-thirds of the

Cuba happy over UNGA decision on US embargo

HAVANA, Nov 26: Cuban Foreign Minister Ricardo Alarcon Wednesday expressed "profound satisfaction" over the UN General Assembly vote rebuking Washington for a law seeking to force other nations to tighten the US embargo on Havana, reports AP.

The General Assembly, in a vote of 59 to three with 71 abstentions Tuesday, rejected the so-called Torricelli law as a violation of the principle of sovereignty and urged member nations not to enforce it.

The law signed last month by President George Bush bans foreign subsidiaries of US corporations from doing business with Cuba. Several countries have said they would not enforce this provision and maintain that their own laws take precedence in governing the activities of US subsidiaries on their territory.

The Torricelli law "is an insult to humanity," Alarcon told a news conference.

The foreign minister said Bush's signing of the law was a way of saying "I give the orders on your territory."

Alarcon said President-elect Bill Clinton will inherit a situation that is both "a challenge and an opportunity" in US relations with Havana and said Cuba would continue to battle what he called the "curse" of the three-decade-old US embargo.

The Cuban official ridiculed a recent US decision to confiscate Cuban-made cigars and rum that travelers seek to bring into the United States for personal use.

"It forces Americans to smoke poor quality cigars and prevents them from drinking better rum that is available on the US market," he said.

BBC Hindi service gets ABU award

NEW DELHI, Nov 26: The BBC Hindi service has bagged this year's Asian-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) award for its programme on the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, reports PTI.

The prize, announced at the 29th General Assembly of ABU, the body of all Asian and Pacific broadcasters, in Bali, Indonesia, has been awarded for the programme broadcast in the early hours of May 21, 1991, soon after Gandhi was assassinated.

The judging panel for the prize for external broadcast programmes paid tribute to the speed of the reaction, the clarity of the narrative and the balanced, comment on Rajiv Gandhi's life and political history.

Commons body to investigate Queen's tax-free status

LONDON, Nov 26: As newspapers kept up attacks on the queen, a House of Commons committee has ordered an inquiry on whether taxpayers get value for money from the way Buckingham Palace and other bits of state-owned royal real estate are run, reports UNB.

The Daily Mail, meanwhile, reported Thursday, that another all-party Commons body, the Public Accounts Committee, is to investigate Queen Elizabeth II's finances and tax-free status.

The London tabloid added that Prime Minister John Major's Cabinet is also considering a separate inquiry into Civil List payments of taxpayers' cash voted annually by Parliament to the queen and seven members of her family.

The inquiry move by the Public Accounts Committee Wednesday night follows an announcement Monday by National Heritage Secretary Peter Brooke that his department will foot the bill for repairing fire-damaged Windsor Castle with taxpayers' money.

Part of the castle, the 900-year-old second home of the queen 20 miles (30 km) west of London, was severely damaged by a fire on Friday. Repairs will reportedly cost tens of millions of pounds.

Brooke's announcement angered some opposition Labour Party legislators. One, Dennis Skinner, said 90 per cent of recession-hit Britons resent taxpayers hitting to pay.

The queen should be made to pay for it," Skinner said.

The queen has a personal fortune variously estimated from 89 million pounds (dls 135 million) to 6.5 billion pounds (dls 9.8 billion). Many Britons are angry she pays no income tax.

Prince Edward, 28, the youngest of her four children, on Tuesday rejected demands for her to pay part of the repair costs, dismissing reports that she had 6.5 billion pounds (dls 9.8 billion) as "absolute crap."

The Public Accounts Committee has asked the National Audit Office to carry out the value-for-money inquiry. It will cover Buckingham Palace, the queen's main London home; Windsor Castle; St James' Palace, Kensington Palace and Clarence House, all

in London; and Holyrood House in the Scottish capital Edinburgh.

Two other chunks of royal real estate — the queen's country estate at Sandringham 95 miles (150 km) northeast of London and her holiday castle Balmoral in northeast Scotland — are not included because they are part of her privately-owned possessions.

In addition to the queen's private fortune, the royals receive more than 50 million pounds (dls 76 million) in taxpayers' money from the government each year.

This includes dls 44.3 million last year for the upkeep of royal palaces and castles plus Civil List payments to the queen and seven members of her family which totaled 9.97

Nouhak succeeds Khaysone as Laotian president

BANGKOK, Nov 26: Two hard-line, pro-Vietnamese Communist veterans have been named to the top leadership posts of Laos, according to media reports made available Thursday, says AP.

Nouhak Phoumsavan, who chaired the National Assembly, was named president Wednesday to succeed Khaysone Phomvihane, who died last Saturday, according to official Laotian radio.

Taking over Khaysone's other position as head of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) was Gen. Khamtay Siphandon, who had served as premier.

A cartoon in the Daily Mirror showed massed ranks of unemployed, bankrupt and homeless Britons. One tells the queen: "May I say on behalf of everyone here, how sorry we all are about your horrible year."

The Daily Star in a cartoon showed a poor family surrounded by unpaid bills and eviction notices. The man tells the woman: "It could be worse — you could be the queen."

A London broadsheet, The Independent, said in an editorial: "It is obvious that the current style of monarchy — an unstable mixture of high Victorian grandeur and soap opera — that has emerged by default is not sustainable."