

BRIEFLY

5 Maoists shot dead in Andhra:

Police on Friday shot dead five Maoist militants after trapping them in a village hideout in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, AFP reports from Hyderabad.

The gunbattle erupted in Padkal village after the members of the outlawed People's War Group (PWG) refused to surrender and instead fired at policemen, a police spokesman said in this state capital.

Police found a huge quantity of arms and ammunition in the house, and launched a massive hunt to capture seven other PWG militants who escaped during the pre-dawn fighting, the state capital.

UN suspending public tours:

Guided tours of the United Nations, a 41-year tradition and fall favourite for school children, will be suspended because of security scares caused by roaming terrorists, UN officials said Friday, AP reports from the United Nations.

The General Assembly convenes September 21 and officials are increasingly concerned about meandering terrorists during the hectic period of motorcades, receptions and speeches by heads of state from 184 nations.

Ahmed Fawzi, a spokesman for UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said public tours would cease September 18.

Two bank robbers killed in HK:

Two suspected bank robbers were shot and killed and four people were injured Friday in a bank holdup in a busy tourist district of Hong Kong, police said, Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

Two bank employees were stabbed during the holdup and two police officers were shot and wounded, one critically, when they confronted the robbers as they left the chase Manhattan bank branch in the Tsimshatsui district, police said.

Police traded gunfire with the suspects outside the bank as they tried to flee with bags of cash. One of the suspects was killed on the spot and a second died later in hospital.

A third suspect escaped, police said.

Quake rocks Japan:

A fairly strong earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale shook a wide area of northern Japan Saturday, the Meteorological Agency said. No casualties or damage were reported, AP says from Tokyo.

The earthquake struck at 1.55 pm (0455 GMT). Officials said its epicentre was located 70 kilometres (44 miles) under the sea off the town of Urakawa in Southern Hokkaido, about 830 kilometres (520 miles) northeast of Tokyo.

Azerbaijan for ties with US:

Azerbaijani leader Geydar Aliev told a special US envoy Saturday that his country wants better relations with the United States and help in ending the war with Armenia, AP reports from Baku.

"The situation in Azerbaijan is complicated. Internal tension exists. Armenian aggression continues. We need contact with representatives from Washington," Aliev told Strobe Talbott, the envoy.

5 Somali employees of CNN

killed in clan fighting

MOGADISHU (Somalia), Sept 11: Five Somali employees of the Cable News Network were killed and five wounded Friday in three hours of clan fighting that was finally broken up by machine-gun fire from a US Blackhawk helicopter, reports AP.

It was some of the worst clan fighting in months. Earlier in the day at least 27 mortar shells or rocket-propelled grenades were fired at UN positions and Pakistani peacekeepers came under fire while clearing roadblocks.

No UN casualties were reported. The CNN employees were killed and wounded in what appeared to be an attempt to hijack a vehicle rented by the television network. It quickly escalated into a firefight between two subclans.

Four Somalis were killed in the fighting, and CNN spokesman Steve Haworth in Atlanta said the network was told a fifth died in surgery later.

"CNN deeply regrets the tragic deaths of the five Somalis employed by us in Mogadishu, as we regret all the suffering there," CNN president Tom Johnson said in a statement.

The CNN employees were members of a subclan of the Hawiye, while the carjacker belonged to another subclan.

The fighting centered on an area around a hotel that houses foreign journalists, forcing them to stay indoors under cover most of the afternoon.

The United Nations, which usually does not interfere in clan conflicts, sent Bangladeshi troops to monitor the battle and U.S. Blackhawk helicopters to scatter the opposing fighters with machine-gun fire.

The Associated Press. "UNITA is well-armed and fighting with its heart."

Manuakola, UNITA's chief negotiator at peace talks with the Angolan government in May, said UNITA was unfazed by a UN threat to freeze UNITA assets abroad and expel its representatives from foreign capitals if fresh peace talks are not convened by Sept 15.

"UNITA has a home in Angola that it won by blood and luck. Sanctions won't drive us out of it," Manuakola said.

Manuakola and UNITA's top general, Arlindo Pena, were in Lisbon to pitch Savimbi's proposal to halt hostilities and resume negotiations.

"We want a chance to speak rationally without the pressure of combat," Manuakola said.

Meanwhile, fighting continues to rage for the rebel-besieged central Angolan city of Kuito.

"We will never accept peace by imperialism," Manuakola told

PLO wants presence of UN troops in Gaza, Jericho

UNITED NATION, Sept 11:

The PLO wants the United Nations to be involved in implementing Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip and Jericho through a military or paramilitary presence, the PLO's UN observer said Friday, reports AFP.

Nasser Al-Kidwa said he relayed that message to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali during a meeting here Friday.

Boutros-Ghali, an Egyptian diplomat who was involved in the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel, said he was ready to "work hard to help everybody so that the people in Gaza and Jericho will feel there

is a basic difference."

He noted that a high-level working group had been set up Wednesday to prepare a development plan for the Gaza and Jericho.

But "if (Israel and the PLO) need a presence of the UN to control the elections or... observers," Boutros-Ghali said the United Nations is prepared to make such a contribution if requested. The Israel-PLO pact is "an historic achievement which

deserves the whole-hearted support of the entire world community," a spokesman for the UN chief said.

Kidwa said the Israelis, who have until now been reluctant to accept UN intervention in the

Israeli-Arab conflict, "have less and less reasons to object."

According to a UN statement, Kidwa underscored the importance of the Palestine Liberation Organisation Chairman Yasser Arafat attaches to UN participation in executing the agreement between Israel and the PLO. Kidwa said after his meeting with Boutros-Ghali that Arafat wants to visit UN headquarters in New York during the General Assembly that begins September 21.

Debate at the General Assembly is slated to begin September 27. US President Bill Clinton is among those scheduled to address the assembly, along with Israeli Foreign

Minister Shimon Peres.

The main part of the General Assembly usually extends into the third week in December. Arafat first addressed the assembly in 1974.

Kidwa said he believed talks still were on-going on the level of official representation for the signing Monday of an Israel-PLO pact on Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip and Jericho at the White House in Washington.

If Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin attends, Arafat will as well, he said.

Hours earlier in Jerusalem, Rabin announced that Peres would sign the document for Israel.

Serbs defy orders to lift blockade of Bosnian town

BELGRADE, Sept 11: Serb soldiers have defied orders to lift their blockade of the Bosnian town of Banjaluka and have closed petrol stations and bars in a crackdown on war profiteers, military sources said today, reports Reuter.

Between 200 and 300 soldiers seized control of the northern Bosnian Serb stronghold on Friday. They demanded the arrest of racketeers who have made fortunes during the 17-month civil war between Serbs' Muslims and Croats.

The men, most of them on leave from front lines, ignored an order to return to their units by the regional corps commander, General Momir Talic.

They imposed an overnight curfew and a spokesman at the town's army press centre said by telephone: "The situation (last night) was calmer than normal. There was no shooting which was unusual for us."



Bosnian Muslims wait to get some food at a school in Jablanica, central Bosnia Sept 9 after being released from a Croatian prison camp in Dretelj, south of Mostar. More than 700 Muslim prisoners have been expelled from this Croat detention camp. — AFP photo

BJP launches motorcade campaigns

NEW DELHI, Sept 11: India's

Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched a new phase of its push for power today in the run-up to four state elections due by December, reports Reuter.

A party spokesman said four BJP leaders began motorcade campaigns in different parts of the country, ostensibly against efforts by the ruling Congress Party to introduce legislation forbidding the use of religion as a political issue.

The minority Congress Party withdrew proposed legislation from parliament last month when centrist opposition parties denounced it as draconian and refused to give it their expected support.

The proposed legislation was clearly designed to cripple the BJP, which has surged from the political fringes to become the official parliamentary opposition on the back of a campaign to

replace a northern mosque with a Hindu temple.

The 16th century mosque at Ayodhya, which Hindu nationalists said was built by India's first Moghul emperor on the birthplace of the Hindu God, Rama, was torn down by Hindu zealots in the presence of BJP leaders last December.

That unleashed frenzied violence around the country in which more than 2,000 people were killed, most of them from the 100-million strong Muslim community in India's overwhelmingly Hindu population of 880 million.

The Congress Party of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao is still debating whether to reintroduce bills to separate religion and politics in the next session of parliament due in November or to seek other ways to achieve the same aim.

But the BJP launched its motorcade campaign with the

avowed goal of hammering the religious theme that has rewarded it with 119 parliamentary seats, up from just two in 1984.

Senior BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani vowed to keep focusing on Ayodhya, where the party wants to build a temple to Rama on the exact site of the demolished mosque, and rouse public opinion against the proposed legislation.

The Ayodhya movement "cannot be thwarted by devious devices or despotic measures like the anti-religion bill," he told a news conference in the southern city of Bangalore on Friday.

Advani began his motorcade campaign from the nearby city of Mysore and planned to join three senior colleagues leading similar columns in Bhopal, capital of the central state of Madhya Pradesh, on September 25.

In the next two weeks, the four columns plan to pass through most of India's 25 states, stopping for campaign speeches frequently on the way.

"People will be churned up on this issue," Advani predicted. Advani was arrested in 1990 on a similar motorcade while heading for Ayodhya but said he did not think the government would try to stop the current campaign. "The consequences will be disastrous if they try to stop it," he said.

Madhya Pradesh is one of four states due to hold elections by December. All four — the others are Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh — were ruled by the BJP until last December.

The Congress government dismissed the state administration on charges of failing to maintain law and order during the Hindu-Muslim riots that followed the destruction of the mosque.

Iran won't accept UAE claims on Abu Musa islands

TEHRAN, Sept 11: Iran said today that it was ready to receive a senior official from the United Arab Emirates for negotiations on an island dispute, but stressed that it would not accept any preconditions, reports AFP.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman, quoted by state radio, said Iran "would not accept any claims" from the UAE as preconditions for talks on the disputed islands of Abu Musa, greater Rubn and lesser Tunb in the Gulf.

"It is their choice whether they want to come or not," he said referring to a decision by UAE to cancel a visit here next week by its minister of state for Foreign Affairs.

A UAE spokesman said on Friday that Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al-Nahayan's trip had been cancelled because the UAE is convinced that there is no desire by the Iranian side to ensure the success of the visit.

ROK seeks US help to settle North Korean N-problem

SEOUL, Sept 11: South

Korean President Kim Young-Sam today asked Washington to closely cooperate with Seoul to settle the North Korean nuclear problem saying the North must never be allowed to develop nuclear weapons "under any circumstances," reports AFP.

His comment came during a meeting with visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs Robert Gallucci, who has held two rounds of talks with North Korean first Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kang Sok-Ju, in June and July.

A presidential press release said Kim told Gallucci a solu-

tion to North Korean nuclear issue was "essential" for the stability of the Korean Peninsula.

Kim expressed regret and concern that North Korea was "insincere" in its talks with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), while avoiding dialogue with South Korea, the press release added.

The IAEA and North Korean officials met last week in Pyongyang but failed to reach agreement on allowing IAEA inspections of North Korea's secretive nuclear facilities which are suspected of developing nuclear weapons.

Off the Record

Film presenting scene of a sexual assault on Madonna

VENICE, Italy: The last American offering of a sex-and-violence laden Venice Film Festival arrived true form — Abel Ferrara's "Snake Eyes," screened Friday, reports AP.

Madonna and Harvey Keitel star in the movie about a director who sets out to make a film about a marriage's breakup and finds himself in a real-life situation echoing the plot. Madonna is sexually assaulted in one scene.

The festival, in its 50th year, ends Saturday with the awarding of the Golden Lion for best film and awards for best actor and actress.

The Venice public has already seen Italian actress Francesca Neri avenging herself of three sexual attackers — only to die a bloody death in Carlos Saura's "Dispara." Sheryl Fenn turns to the man who has amputated her arms and legs with the words "I need you," in Jennifer Lynch's voyeuristic "Boxing Helena."

Some critics have deplored the fact only three of the festival's 34 films, both in and out of competition, are directed by women. "Venice risks showing women in the usual way: objects of seduction, bodies to possess," critic Stefania Berbeni wrote in Panorama magazine.

In "Snake Eyes," Keitel plays the director who has a second-rate TV actress, Madonna, for his female lead. The male lead, James Russo, is not happy playing opposite her, and Keitel stirs up off-camera emotional tension.

'Say no to moon cakes'

TAIPEI: Cracking down on government corruption, Taiwan's prime minister has ordered civil servants to say no to moon cakes — expensive pastries traditionally given as gifts in the fall, reports AP.

"As the Mid-Autumn Festival approaches, many people are giving out gifts, and I want you to stop taking gifts right away," the Government Information Office quoted Premier Lien Chan as saying in a Cabinet meeting Friday.

It said Lien specifically singled out moon cakes, pastries filled with lotus seeds or dates. These cost up to 2,000 Taiwan dollar (US \$175) a box, but businessmen are known to further sweeten the offering by stashing cash or valuables in the package.

Not a fish, but a bomb

PORTLAND: A big bullet-shaped object snared in a fishing net 10 miles (16 km) off the Oregon coast is a World War II-era bomb, the Coast Guard said Saturday, reports AP.

The 500-pound (225-kilo) ANM-43 airdrop bomb appeared to be dented and damaged. "It's pretty much deemed to not be dangerous at this point," said Petty Officer Ted French of the Coast Guard District offices in Seattle.

"It's an old, old piece of ordnance," he said. However, the Coast Guard closed a 10-mile (16-km) section of the Columbia River at its mouth for the safety of other vessels and escorted the fishing boat War Cloud to Tongue Point in Astoria, said Lt. Larry Kennedy.

Two crew members aboard the War Cloud found the bomb in their nets late Friday. It measured about 3 1/2 feet (one meter) long and 20 inches (50 centimeters) in diameter.

US Senate okays \$ 375m for Nevada N-test site

WASHINGTON, Sept 11: The

United States Senate approved 375 million dollars on Friday for Nevada nuclear test site operations next year in case the current worldwide nuclear test moratorium is broken and US nuclear tests resume, reports Reuter.

It rejected by 62-31, an effort to cut 202 million dollars of President Bill Clinton's 429 million dollar nuclear test funds request during the moratorium but did not cut funding to this year's level of 375 million dollars.

The 202 million dollar cut in a 261 billion dollar defence bill was proposed by Senator Tom Harkin, a Democrat from Iowa, who said it made no sense to continue full funding for United States nuclear testing during the 1994 financial year when there should be no tests.

Clinton has extended a US moratorium on nuclear testing through September 30, 1994,

the end of the US government's 1994 financial year, provided no other country tests atomic weapons.

But Senator James Exon, a Democrat from Nebraska, said the Nevada nuclear test site must be kept in operation.

"I hope we never have to test again," Exon said. "I have a feeling, though, that maybe somewhere along the line some other country will begin testing."

Exon proposed, however, that Clinton's 429 million dollar request for the US testing operation be cut to this year's level of 375 million dollar. The Senate agreed by voice vote.

In another action, the Senate rejected 67-28 an effort to cancel the radio ground wave emergency network that Clinton or a future United States president would use to order nuclear retaliation if the United States was devastated by a surprise attack.

The government said in a statement in the capital Abuja on Friday that Abiola agreed contacts with interim head of state Ernest Shonekan to put off his planned return on Sunday so as not to disrupt public order.

It is the third time the 56-year-old multi-millionaire businessman has postponed his return home.

Jakarta to send military engrs to Somalia

JAKARTA, Sept 11: Indonesia plans to send 70 military engineers to Somalia at the end of October, armed forces spokesman Brigadier General Syarwan Hamid has said, reports AFP.

The Republik daily Saturday quoted Hamid as saying the engineers would be sent "because the duty of our troops there are only to rehabilitate the areas where they are placed."

Hamid could not be reached for comment Saturday but an official at the armed forces information office confirmed the report.

Hamid said the men would join the UN peacekeeping forces in Somalia.

US cracks sale of fake visas to Abdel-Rahman's men

WASHINGTON, Sept 11:

Undercover agents have cracked a counterfeiting operation that sold US entry visas to thousands of Egyptians, including some who attended the mosque of jailed Muslim cleric Omar Abdel-Rahman, government officials say, reports AP.

The documents were not detected by US border inspectors partly because they were very high quality fakes, said the officials.

All spoke on condition of anonymity, and none of the agencies involved in the probe — the FBI, Immigration and Naturalization Service and Bureau of Diplomatic Security at the State Department — would make an official comment.

The sophisticated counterfeiting operation, which use color photocopying, illustrates the difficulty of detecting such fraud and underscores the porousness of US border controls.

"There's so much counterfeiting of immigration documents," said INS spokesman Verne Jervis.

After a six-month investigation, including help from an informant, authorities determine that the counterfeiting operation was based in the United States and most of the visas were sold to Egyptians — some in the Alexandria, Va. area, said the officials. A few were sold to East Europeans.

Investigators also found that some of those who got the visas

and entered the United States attended the al-Salam mosque in Jersey City, NJ, where Abdel-Rahman sometimes preached until he was taken into custody on July 2. The blind preacher, an Egyptian, was indicted last month in connection with the World Trade Center bombing and alleged plots to blow up other New York City landmarks.

Fourteen other men, many followers of the Sheikh, have also been arrested. There was no indication whether any of them used the forged visas.

A marketer of the visas has been arrested and is expected to be indicted next week, said the officials. They declined to disclose details of the indictment.

Investigators are still trying to determine how many visas

were sold, how many of those who bought them got into the United States and how many are still here, the officials said.

They also want to know whether the visas were used, primarily by people wishing to enter the United States to improve their economic situation or whether some wanted to come here to commit crimes or terrorism.

The officials said they have little hope of catching the people who came into the country using the forged visas.

Counterfeiting is a persistent problem. Two years ago, Jervis said, investigators uncovered a Los Angeles operation that forged some 250,000 documents — including Social Security cards,

driver's licenses and immigration documents — with a street value of \$10 million.

The problem of detecting forged visas is compounded by the crush at the large airports through which many travelers enter this country, he said.

When several Boeing 747s land at the same time at Kennedy International Airport in New York disgorging hundreds of foreigners, for example, INS inspectors don't have the luxury of closely examining the entry visas stamped into each passport, Jervis said. The process usually takes less than a minute.

The airlines, the airports, even congressional committees pressure the INS to speed up the flow of passengers, Jervis

said. At the counter, inspectors place the visas under a dark light to see if they fluoresce. The way they're supposed to, he said. But good fakes often don't show up in this test.

If a passenger or document makes an inspector suspicious, he or she can be taken to another room and examined more closely. The INS said Jervis has one of the best forensic labs in the country where suspected forgeries are examined.

The INS also has begun sending its inspectors to train airline personnel around the world so that they can detect forged visas before a passenger boards a plane for the United States.

Abiola to delay his return home

LAGOS, Sept 11: Nigeria's election contender Moshood Abiola has agreed to delay his return home, signalling he has secretly been in touch with the nation's unelected interim government to resolve its current political crisis, reports Reuter.

The government said in a statement in the capital Abuja on Friday that Abiola agreed contacts with interim head of state Ernest Shonekan to put off his planned return on Sunday so as not to disrupt public order.

It is the third time the 56-year-old multi-millionaire businessman has postponed his return home.