

Croat, Muslim forces exchange 1000 POWs

SARAJEVO, Oct 20: Bosnian Croat and Muslim forces released more than 1,000 prisoners late Tuesday in southern Bosnia-Herzegovina, an official of the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) said, reports AFP.

305 Croat prisoners from a camp in Kofij who were taken away in trucks escorted by Spanish UN troops. Two of the prisoners decided to remain in the town.

Two convoys of prisoners had reached the demarcation line between the two sides south of Jablanica, Brigitte Treyon said.

The releases were agreed in Geneva in September by Bosnian, President Alija Izetbegovic and his Croatian counterpart Franjo Tudjman — for the Croats and Muslims — and on Saturday, by Bosnian Foreign Minister Haris Silajdzic and Momcilo Krajisnik, parliamentary speaker in the self-proclaimed Serb republic in Bosnia — for the Muslims and Serbs.

Some 554 Muslims — half number held by Croats in the southern town of Gabela — were released there and taken to Jablanica in ICRC trucks escorted by UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) troops while 174 others were released but chose to stay in the area.

ICRC officials are to meet separately Wednesday and Thursday with Serb and Muslim leaders to prepare for talks a day later between Silajdzic and Krajisnik.

The Croats also freed 47 Muslims detained in Drecej. The Muslim side released

BRIEFLY

Koirala hails Benazir: Nepalese Prime Minister Gijra Prasad Koirala Tuesday sent a message of congratulation to his Pakistani counterpart Benazir Bhutto on her swearing in, state-run radio said, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

He wished Bhutto success and expressed his confidence that the friendly relations between Nepal and Pakistan would be further strengthened during her term in office.

3 Chinese killed in chopper crash: Three Chinese crew members were killed when their helicopter plunged into the sea after slipping off an oil drilling platform in the South China Sea, a newspaper reported here Wednesday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The accident happened late Saturday when the helicopter tried to land on Nanhai No. 1 oil drilling platform, the Wen Wei Po newspaper said.

Male to deport 252 foreigners: The Maldives government is set to deport 252 foreigners who have been working illegally in the capital of Male for as long as three-years, immigration officials said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Maldives.

They said the workers — Indians, Bangladeshis and Shri Lankans — had arrived on short holiday visits and stayed on to work in hotels, shops and as taxi drivers.

The crackdown began three days ago when immigration officials went through the capital of 65,000 residents searching for foreign nationals who had overstayed.

By Monday night, the authorities had detained 252 foreigners and said they would question and deport them.

Rabbani appeals for aid: Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani on Tuesday appealed for funds to finance post-war reconstruction and described the collapse of the Soviet Union as a victory for Muslims, AFP reports from Abu Dhabi.

Rabbani, speaking to reporters during a visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), said the Soviet forces had badly damaged the infrastructure and other economic sectors during their decade-long occupation of Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan needs plenty of money and relief aid to rebuild itself," he said.

80 more executed in China: Eighty criminals were executed in the southern Chinese province of Jiangxi in the first two weeks of October, the province's legal journal said in its latest edition received here Tuesday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The 80 had been accused of crimes ranging from murder to rape, armed robbery and extortion, the journal said.

The deaths marked a new step in an ongoing crackdown on crime and corruption in which hundreds have been executed after public rallies.

Indian arrested in Bangkok: An Indian man was arrested Wednesday at Bangkok International Airport allegedly for possessing and trafficking heroin, a customs official said, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Gurmit Singh Jaswal, 39, was arrested, following a tip-off, as he was about to board a flight to Singapore. The official said 1.5 kilograms (3.3 pounds) of heroin were found under his coat.

Convicted drug traffickers face the death penalty in Thailand where foreigners are however usually given commuted sentences and prison terms of 20 years to life.

17 die in Chinese coal mine blast: At least 17 people were killed and 23 others missing in a mine explosion in the eastern Chinese coastal city of Xuzhou in Jiangsu province, the Wen Wei Po Daily said Wednesday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The bodies of the 17 victims in the explosion, which occurred in a coal mine on Monday had been recovered, but 23 others were still unaccounted for and their chances for survival were slim, the daily said.

Authorities in the area were still investigating whether the cause of the blast was due to coal dust or gas, it said, without giving any further details.

200 more Khmers surrender
PHNOM PENH, Oct 20: More than 200 Khmer Rouge spies living in and around the Cambodian capital have surrendered and turned in their weapons following another government amnesty offer, spokesman Ek Sereywhat said today, reports AFP.

The 231 infiltrators, belonging to divisions 330,801 and 920 turned themselves in between 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM on Tuesday, he said.

"I think this is very important because for the first time, those underground Khmer Rouge accept to show themselves and reports to the royal government," Ek Sereywhat said. "Many of them have been in Phnom Penh for many years already. They are the underground force."

Rivalry in Georgian forces may cause fall of Kutaisi
KUTAIISI, Georgia, Oct 20: An impassioned pledge by Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze to defend Kutaisi from approaching rebels could be undermined by rivalry over who commands government troops in the western city, reports AFP.

With rebel forces under ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia just 15 kilometres (10 miles) from the city, a militia chief is resisting Shevardnadze's appointment of Defence Minister Giorgi Karkarachvili as commander.

Djaba Ioseliani, head of a militia known as Mkhedrioni or "Horsemen of Georgia", said in an interview that while the defence minister was in charge of military operations, under the

Rabin doubts PLO's ability to govern

Israel may delay handing over power

Jerusalem, Oct 20: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was quoted on Tuesday as expressing concern about the PLO's ability to govern nearly two million Palestinians in the occupied territories, reports Reuter.

In a landmark peace agreement signed last month, Israel agreed to transfer wide authority to the Palestine Liberation Organisation starting in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho.

"I expressed concern about the ability of the PLO to take over the administration at this time because it had never been responsible for a living organism which has to be fed, educated, housed and provided with services," an official quoted Rabin as telling the Foreign Affairs and Defence committee.

Israel and the PLO are to resume talks on Wednesday in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba on implementation of the "Gaza-Jericho first" agreement.

Rabin said the Israelis will begin explaining to the Palestinians at Taba the structure of the civil administration — the Israeli military government which has ruled Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank for the past 26 years.

Under the accord, Israeli forces will withdraw from most of Gaza and Jericho by April 1994 and turn over authority for internal security and virtually all aspects of daily life.

Palestinians will have limited powers in the rest to the West Bank.

The next round of Taba talks are expected to focus mainly on the release of thousands of Palestinians prisoners and the disputed borders of the autonomous region of Jericho.

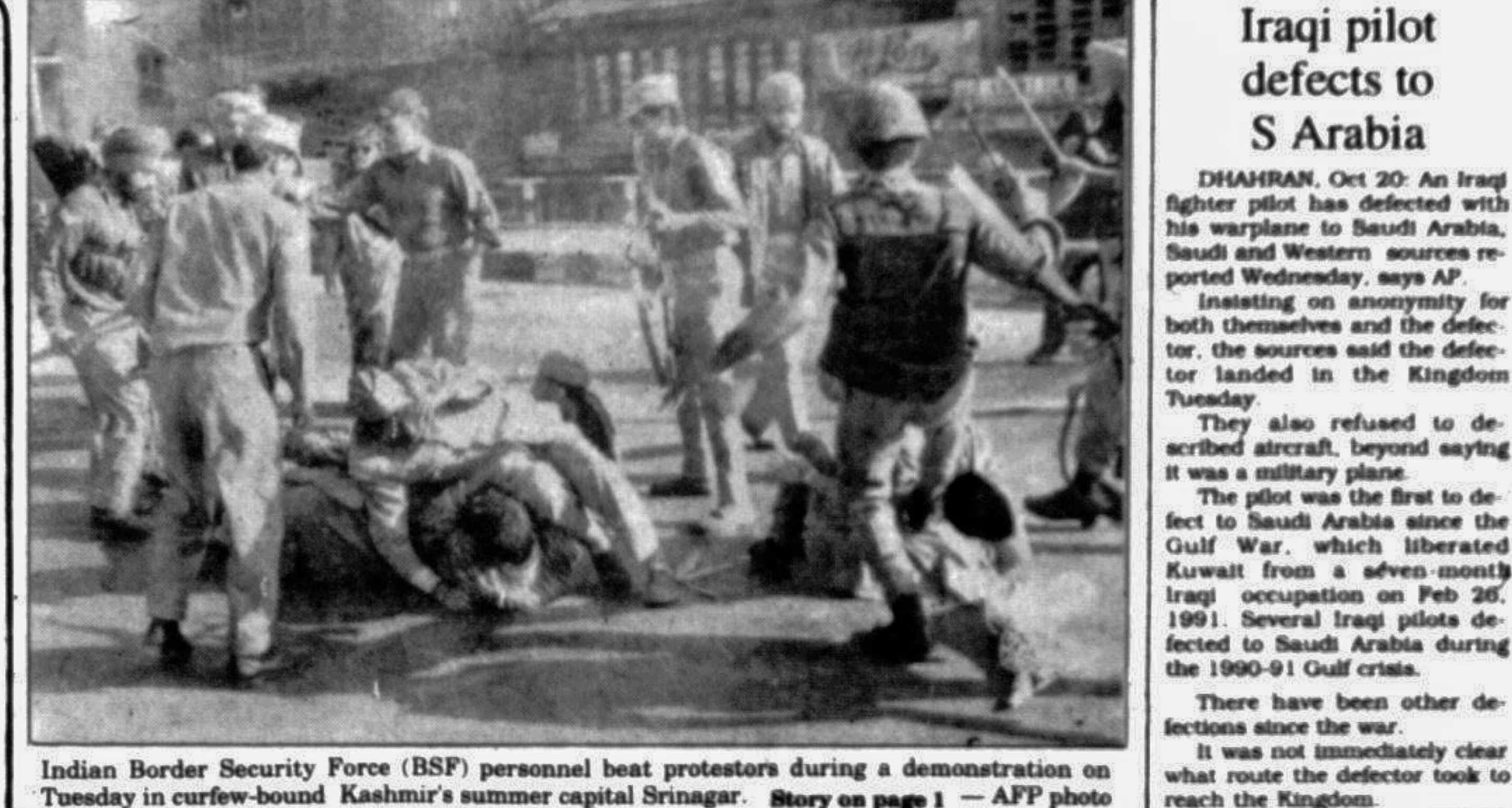
AFP adds: The December 13 deadline for Israel to start handing over power to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and Jericho is too tight, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Tuesday, according to state radio.

"We will not be in a position to respect the two-month deadline that we set in the declaration of principles," Rabin reportedly told a closed-door briefing of the Parliamentary Defence and Foreign Affairs committee.

"We did not realise it would be so difficult and there are hundreds of details we did not know about," the premier added.

But he said he hoped "security questions, which are the most important, will be settled in two months, the radio reported.

The declaration, signed in Washington on September 13,



Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel beat protesters during a demonstration on Tuesday in curfew-bound Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar. Story on page 1 — AFP photo

Hekmatyar blasts US, Russia for trying to remove him

KABUL, Oct 20: Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has lashed out at both the United States and Russia for allegedly trying to remove him from the Afghan political scene, reports AFP.

Washington, Hekmatyar alleged, had promised conditional recognition of a government formed by President Burhanuddin Rabbani if he drops Hekmatyar, and Moscow was printing money for Afghan troops opposed to his Hezb-I-Islami faction.

The radical Hezb leader made the accusations in a magazine interview given in his temporary headquarters in Chaharasyab, 25 kilometers (15 miles) south of Kabul and released in part in the capital Tuesday.

In the interview Hekmatyar said Washington had made the recognition offer on the condition that Rabbani appoint Syed Ahmed Gailani as prime minister in place of himself.

Rabbani is leader of the Jamiat-I-Islami faction, while Gailani leads the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan.

The US had also demanded the reappointment of northern Mujahedeen leader Ahmed Shah Masoud as defence minister and of two others of its preference in the posts of foreign minister and army chief of staff, Hekmatyar said.

He also charged that the US had sent commandos to Pakistan nine months ago as a "practical step towards implementing this plan," but did not elaborate.

Moscow, he said was guilty of "direct intervention in Afghan affairs," by printing Afghan currency and distributing it to northern troops opposed to the ex-communists.

One jailed for 25 yrs in failed IRA attack

LONDON, Oct 20: A London court on Thursday sentenced Irishman Patrick Kelly to 25 years in prison, for his part in an aborted IRA attack in central London and complicity in the attempted killing of a policeman, reports AFP.

Kelly, 41, was arrested in November last year in northern London when he was driving truck carrying 3.2 tonnes of home-made explosives to central London on the eve of the annual Lord Mayor's Show Parade, which traditionally draws a huge crowd.

The truck had been re-painted and its license plate blackened. It was spotted by two unarmed policemen.

One of them was wounded by two bullets when Kelly's companion opened fire as they fled on foot.

Message of love to China

SINGAPORE, Oct 20: Nobel Laureate Mother Teresa today said she was taking a message of love to China but would leave hopes for better ties between the Roman Catholic church and Beijing in the hands of God.

"I am very happy to be going to Shanghai. Pray for my success," she told AFP, taking a break from blessing babies and children at a small mission run by nuns from her fabled order, the Missionaries of Charity.

The 83-year-old Albanian nun who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 said she will leave here Friday for Shanghai to open a home for handicapped children, the first by the missionaries of charity in China.

She has been invited to China by Deng Pufang — the son of paramount leader Deng Xiaoping — who was left crippled after falling from a fourth-storey window during the Cultural Revolution, apparently after having been pushed by Red guards.

Asked what she would tell Chinese leaders at meetings in Shanghai and Beijing, Mother Teresa said: "I will say peace be with you. I will tell them to love one another."

Mother Teresa's visit to China is her second in four years. Fame for her work with the destitute and the dying in Calcutta, the visit is taking place amid what some Catholics hope is a thaw in relations between China and the Vatican.

"I leave that in the hands of God. We should pray for that," she said to a suggestion that her visit could firm ties between China and the Holy See, severed in 1957 when Beijing moved to create a "patriotic church."

Despite the ruptured ties, millions of Chinese remain loyal to the Vatican, although they are forced to worship secretly.

Iraqi pilot defects to S Arabia

DHAHRAN, Oct 20: An Iraqi fighter pilot has defected with his warplane to Saudi Arabia, Saudi and Western sources reported Wednesday, says AP.

Insisting on anonymity for both themselves and the defector, the sources said the defector landed in the Kingdom Tuesday.

They also refused to describe aircraft, beyond saying it was a military plane.

The pilot was the first to defect to Saudi Arabia since the Gulf War, which liberated Kuwait from a seven-month Iraqi occupation on Feb 26, 1991. Several Iraqi pilots defected to Saudi Arabia during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis.

There have been other defections since the war.

It was not immediately clear what route the defector took to reach the Kingdom.

Russia may stop dumping N-waste

SEOUL, Oct 20: Russia has promised to declare in November that it will halt dumping of nuclear waste at sea, South Korea's foreign minister said Wednesday, reports AP.

Russia's dumping of more than 2,37,000 gallons (900 metric tons) of low-level radioactive liquid waste into the Sea of Japan over the weekend has led to strong protests in South Korea and Japan.

Japanese Foreign Minister Tsutomu Hata called his Russian counterpart by telephone Wednesday to urge an end to the dumping, Japan already had called in the Russian ambassador for two days in a row to hear protests.

Rightist leader commits suicide in Japan

TOKYO, Oct 20: A Japanese rightist leader died Tuesday after shooting himself in the head at the Asahi Shimbun headquarters in Tokyo after meeting with the President of the newspaper company, police and company officials said, reports AFP.

Shusuke Nomura, 57, visited executives including President Toshitada Nakae on the 15th floor of the building to complain about the newspaper's reports on his political party, The Society of Wind, the officials said.

When the Asahi executives tried to end the talks, Nomura suddenly pulled a gun and shot himself. "I'm not here to discuss such vague matters," he was quoted as saying before pulling the trigger.

Off the Record

Akihito 'a cushion' for her!

TOKYO, Oct 20: Thirty-some years ago, when Japan's Empress Michiko was a newlywed princess still learning her way around the palace, her critics did their sniping in private, reports AP.

Recently, however, Michiko might well be afraid to open up a magazine for fear of what's inside.

Over the past few months, Japan's soft-spoken empress has been criticized for everything from staying up too late at night to entertaining too many private guests at the palace to being too bossy with her servants.

One anonymous critic went so far as to say Emperor Akihito had become "a cushion" for her to sit on.

"This is Terrible!" declared a recent cover of the popular Ladies Own weekly, which forswore its penchant for scandal to come to Michiko's defence.

"The media have generally been too soft on the imperial family," said Minoru Hamano, a former imperial chamberlain and author of several books on the emperor and empress. "Now they are being plain nasty. This is not a good trend."

Even Michiko, who turned 59 Wednesday, was moved to make a rare expression of displeasure.

"If I have been inconsiderate, if in any way my words have hurt someone, then I ask forgiveness," the empress said in a written reply to several questions presented to her before her birthday.

"But," she added, "I feel great sadness and bewilderment when news reports are not based on reality."

Fight for custody

GRAND RAPIDS: Long Han Hong and Phan Hue Ong gave their 4-month-old daughter away when they were recent immigrants from Vietnam living on welfare. Eleven years later, she is fighting them in court to stay away, reports AP.

Despite court-ordered weekly visits with her, Hong could not tell trial lawyers Monday what school his daughter attends or the name of her doctor. He also said he learned what grade she was in by reading it in the newspaper. He denied abusing her but admitted chaining another child in the basement for a couple of days when he misbehaved.

Hong was the first witness called in the custody trial of Jenny Yang, who filed a lawsuit to remain with the custodial parents with whom she has lived since she was an infant.

She is asking the judge to decide the custody issue based on her best interests.

Hong and Ong testified they were tricked into giving their new-born daughter to childless acquaintances who told them the white mark on the baby's face meant she would bring them bad luck unless they let another couple care for her.

"That does not apply to me"

MANILA, Philippine President Fidel Ramos denied Wednesday rumours that he is the father of a love child and maintains a second family, but refused to comment on whether he had an extramarital affair with a prominent socialite, reports AP.

Ramos told a foreign press luncheon that he felt harassed by the ongoing controversy concerning his alleged relationship with Rosemarie "Baby" Arenas, a matronly of Manila's society pages, and "my family is of course very concerned."

While, deploring media interest in the story, the retired general distanced himself from the government takeover of shares in a newspaper which reported the alleged liaison, and pledged to preserve press freedom.

The Philippine daily inquirer, the country's most popular newspaper, last week carried an investigative report saying that Arenas was a major influence in the corridors of power, and suggesting she had a son by Ramos.

The 65-year-old leader, married to educator Amelita Ramos, said the report itself noted that the 15-year-old child's legally registered parents were Arenas and her now-stranded husband, businessman Ramon Arenas, "and that's it."

Questioned on the reputed practice of Filipino politicians of maintaining second families, Ramos said "that does not apply to me."



Wealthy Manila socialite Rosemarie "Baby" Arenas as a fudge during the Miss Asia Pacific beauty contest October 10. Rumors and denials on Arenas' affair with Ramos hit the local newspapers, with one carrying an investigative report saying Arenas was a major influence in the corridors of power. — AFP photo

Rivalry in Georgian forces may cause fall of Kutaisi

state of emergency he had overall responsibility for the situation — which placed Karkarachvili under his command.

At Karkarachvili's request, Shevardnadze reaffirmed Tuesday that the defence minister was in command of all government troops, the presidential press office said.

But there was no sign of the conflict having been patched up when the defence minister arrived here to take control of efforts to stop Gamsakhurdia's forces advancing closer to the capital Tbilisi.

Officials refused to say where Karkarachvili was based but he had yet to show up at the town hall where Ioseliani has his command post.

The rivalry reflects deep di-

visions in the Georgian government forces, who in past weeks have lost the key port of Poti and two main towns on the road east to Tbilisi, Samtredia and Khoni.

The 1st corps of the Georgian army has around 2,000-3,000 men in Kutaisi, which straddles the supply road from the Black Sea to Tbilisi, while the horsemen have about 2,000 paramilitary troops, who are officially civilian.

Gamsakhurdia has about 2,000 poised outside the town who are, according to Ioseliani, "better equipped than us but fewer in number."

Fighting broke out overnight Monday with artillery exchanges between government and rebel forces outside the city but Tuesday was calm as reinforcements were rushed to the town.

Gamsakhurdia's forces have always attacked at night or dawn, colonel Georgia Arveladze of the horsemen said, saying they had not ruled out an attack early Wednesday.

"Our force is set up for attack, not defence. If Gamsakhurdia's forces attack, that would be bad," the young officer said.

"It's up to us to launch an offensive and retake Samtredia and we should do it quickly, taking the initiative even without waiting for more equipment from Tbilisi," he said.

Residents of the town, the second largest in Georgia with a population of 300,000, were keeping a watchful eye on

troops milling outside the town hall, in front of which a tank and artillery piece were parked.

But few seemed too concerned about the town being taken over by Gamsakhurdia's forces.

"If they bombard the city, then it will be dangerous but afterwards, they might kill the mayor and Ioseliani if they find them but I don't believe they'll kill civilians," one resident said.

Gamsakhurdia's forces have struck at a low point in Shevardnadze's presidency, just after Abkhazian rebels in the west of the country took control of the regional capital of Sukhumi, forcing the Georgian president to beat a humiliating retreat.

The horsemen, mostly veter-

ans of the conflict against the Abkhazians, seem clear why they are fighting but it is not for Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister who took over after Gamsakhurdia's ouster in January 1992.

Another, David, 24, said: "I'm not fighting for Shevardnadze, but for Georgia against Russia, which is using all means to try to weaken us because it wants to take back Georgia."

Georgian officials have repeatedly accused Russia of backing the Abkhazians but have appealed for Russian military help, which was rebuffed Monday, although Foreign Minister Andrei Kozirev indicated a day later that aid was being considered.

More than 1,300 homeless in Tokyo

TOKYO, Oct 20: Despite being one of the world's most prosperous countries, Japan is seeing an increase in the number of homeless people, living in the capital's subways and cardboard boxes, a newspaper reported today, says AP.

There are 78 cardboard box "houses" currently set up in a subway near Tokyo's commercial district of Shinjuku, the Mainichi daily said, adding that numbers of homeless people had risen with the lack of seasonal employment in the ongoing recession.

According to figures released last March, some 1,300 homeless people were living in Tokyo, but the newspaper said the numbers were probably much higher.