BRIEFLY

Prince Edward in Ivory Coast: Britain's Prince Edward arrived Sunday in Yamoussoukro for a four-day visit to Ivory Coast, national radio said, AFP reports from Abidjan.

Queen Elizabeth's youngest son is visiting as part of his work for youth organisations and was welcomed at the airport by Foreign Minister Amara Essy and Sports and Youth Minister Rene Diby.

Edward is also due to meet Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara in Abidjan as well as British businessmen working here.

14 Cambodians die in stampede: Fourteen people were killed and 17 injured outside the Royal Palace in a stampede to see fireworks in honour of the king's birthday, police said Monday, AP reports from Phnom Penh.

Thousands of Cambodians had been given the rare opportunity Sunday to enter the yellow spired palace on the 71st birthday of King Norodom Sihanouk.

Queen Elizabeth to visit Germany: Queen Elizabeth II of England will be in Germany Wednesday and Thursday for a visit of inspection to soldiers of the royal engineers stationed in Hamelin, the British embassy in Bonn announced, AFP reports.

She will also meet officials in the lower Saxony town famed for its legendary pied piper.

As part of her military inspection, the queen will cross a pontoon bridge slung over the Weser river by the royal engineers and visit some of them in their barracks.

Flood in France, 4 missing: Heavy flooding Sunday in the mountains of Corsica washed away bridges and isolated three villages. Four people were missing, AP reports from Ajaccio.

The Cavo and Conca rivers cut off roads, knocked out electricity and flooded dozens of houses in three villages north of Porto Vecchio, on the southern end of this French Mediterranean island.

A firetruck bringing four people from one of the villages was washed away by floodwaters, but the occupants escaped. Heavy rains prevented helicopter evacuations.

Norwegian tanker blasts, 2 die: A Norwegian oil tanker exploded Sunday morning at a northwestern port, killing at least two persons. Three others are missing and presumed dead, AP reports from Port of Spain.

Samuel Brewster, a welder from Trinidad, and an unidentified man were killed when the Lady Oslo, exploded at 10.30 am (1430 GMT) at a port in the Chaguarama region.

Flames engulfed the tanker shortly after the explosion but firemen quickly extinguished them, authorities said.

4 Filipinos killed in blast: A bomb exploded and killed four Filipinos as a fisherman was trying to saw it in half, police said on Monday. Reuter reports from Manila.

Eduardo Malibiran found the bomb in a river north of Manila near Balanga town, Bataan Province, over the weekend and was trying to cut it up to sell for scrap metal, police said.

While cutting it open, the bomb blew up, killing Malibiran and three bystanders.

Peruvians approve new constitution

LIMA, Nov 1: Amid heavy security to guard against terrorists, Peruvians on Sunday approved a constitutional referendum seen as a vote of confidence in President Alberto Fujimori, according to unofficial results, reports AP.

Preliminary exit polls by the country's most respected polling firm, Apoyo, showed 55.3 per cent in favour of the constitution and 44.7 per cent against.

Apoyo did not give a margin of error, but its projections in past elections have been extremely accurate. Official results are expected within five days.

Fujimori suspended the old constitution, dissolved the legislature and seized special powers in April 1992, saying the moves were necessary to get control of the economy and put down a Maoist insurgency.

Approval of the new constitution would endorse his mandate and restore legitimacy to his government. It also would allow him to run for re-election in 1995.

"This constitution will give Fujimori the power to do whatever he wants," said Fernando Rospigliosi, a political scientist at the Center for Peruvian Studies. The presence of observers from the Organisation of American States will help Fujimori's international standing, he added.

The vote was closer than expected. The government had been counting on a 60 per cent approval rating.

Analysts said the lower than expected support reflected disapproval over Fujimori's handling of the economy, which is in a deep recession. His free market reforms and austerity measures have thrown thousands out of work and made millions poorer.

A last minute bombing campaign by the Shining Pathguerillas also apparently cut into Fujimori's support.

Voter turnout was heavy, and officials decided to let the polls stay open an extra hour.

Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori (C) waves to supporters on Sunday while casting his vote at a local polling station with his wife Susana Higuchi (L) as Peruvians go to the polls to decide on a new constitution. — AFP photo

British police frees Kalugin

LONDON, Nov 1: British police on Sunday released without charge a former KGB general they questioned in connection with the 1978 poisoned umbrella murder of Bulgarian dissident Georgy Markov, reports Reuter.

Oleg Kalugin had been detained on his arrival at Heathrow airport on Saturday evening, police said. He had come to London to take part in a television documentary about the British secret service.

Kalugin, who in the past has accused the KGB of helping to murder Markov by providing technical advice to the Bulgarian secret service, had been held for almost 24 hours.

Police declined to give any further details of the incident. The Russian embassy had demanded Kalugin's immediate release.

Markov, who worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and was a vocal critic of former communist leader Todor Zhivkov, died in 1978.

Clinton-Zemin meeting in Seattle is of great significance: Li Peng

HONG KONG, Nov 1: Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng has said the meeting between Chinese President Jiang Zemin and US President Bill Clinton in Seattle in mid-November is of "great significance," a China-Watching monthly said today, reports AFP.

Stressing the need to avoid confrontation, Li said good relations were essential for peace "in the Asia Pacific region."

In an interview, Li told the Hong Kong-based monthly Wide Angle: "A meeting between top leaders of the two countries itself is a good thing and is of great significance."

The meeting will be the first US-China summit since 1988 and will take place before the opening of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum Summit on November 19.

"We are willing to develop Sino-US relations and have good cooperation," Li said. "But we are against hegemony."

"We have exercised great restraint on many matters, but our restraint is not without principle," Li said.

"It conforms with the common interests of the two countries and is conducive to safeguarding peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region for China and the United States to maintain a stable and constructive relationship."

Li reiterated that both sides should increase trust, reduce troubles, develop cooperation and avoid confrontation."

Ahead of the Seattle summit, Clinton decided last month to boost high-level contacts with China to ease strained relations.

Third French hostage freed in Algeria

PARIS, Nov 1: The third French hostage kidnapped in Algeria by suspected Muslim fundamentalists a week ago had been freed, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

He told a news conference at a Paris airport, where he welcomed back the first two hostages, that Michele Thevenot was now at the French embassy in Algiers.

Primrose can heal rheumatoid arthritis

PHILADELPHIA, Nov 1: A substance found in evening primrose and borage seeds has been found effective in treating rheumatoid arthritis, a medical journal reported Sunday, says Reuter.

A study reported in the current issue of annals of internal medicine found that gammalinolenic acid, present in relatively large quantities in seed oils of the two plants, significantly reduced symptoms such as swollen and tender joints in arthritis patients, with "negligible" adverse side effects.

The oils are commonly available in health food stores in doses far lower than those used in the study.

"Gammalinolenic acid in doses used in this study is a well-tolerated and effective treatment for active rheumatoid arthritis," the report said.

Strike paralyses Kashmir

SRINAGAR (India), Nov 1: A strike called by Muslim separatist groups to protest the Indian army's siege of the Hazratbal Mosque paralysed the Kashmir valley today, reports AFP.

Shops and businesses, government offices, educational institutions, banks and post offices were shut throughout the Muslim majority valley, private vehicles remained off the roads.

There have been intermittent strike calls since thousands of Indian army troops laid siege to the picturesque Hazratbal Mosque on October 15, trapping some 50 armed Muslim guerillas and 70 civilians inside.

The authorities on Monday lifted a curfew from throughout Srinagar, the summer capital of the state except areas around the mosque, the holiest Islamic shrine in Kashmir.

But no end to the tense standoff at the mosque appeared in sight.

Negotiations aimed at ending the crisis collapsed on Saturday after Muslim leaders mediating between the Kashmir government and the rebels holed up inside the shrine pulled out.

The Indian army wants the militants to give themselves up. The gunmen have refused to surrender and insist on safe passage to end the stalemate which has triggered numerous street protests in Kashmir.

Some 7,000 people have died since 1989 in a Muslim separatist drive in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state.

PLO, Israel resume negotiations

TABA (Egypt), Nov 1: Israel and the PLO resumed today negotiations to implement Palestinian autonomy in the shadow of violence across the occupied territories, reports AFP.

Israel was expected to put forward a timetable for a military withdrawal on the occupied Gaza Strip followed by the West Bank town of Jericho, which have been granted autonomy under the September 13 agreement.

Meanwhile settlers blocked roads in the territories for the third straight day and Israelis fired shots at Palestinians as trouble erupted near Ramallah on the West Bank in a continuation of protests over the murder of a settler on Friday.

Two Palestinians died Sunday, one shot by soldiers and another by his Israeli employer who was stabbed.

The setting up of a Palestinian police force, prisoner releases and the handover of authority are also on the agenda of this fourth session of negotiations which started at this Red Sea resort on October 13, the day the autonomy agreement came into effect.

Today's talks began with a meeting between the two heads of delegation, Israeli General Amon Shahak and Nabil Shaath, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's political adviser.

Russia to produce more fighter jets for sale to China

TAIPEI, Nov 1: Russia will produce the latest Sukhoi SU-33 and SU-35 fighter jets for China in addition to current sales of more than 26 SU-27S for the mainland, the Taiwan-based United Evening News reported Sunday, reports AFP.

The former Soviet Union last month delivered at least three SU-27S to China, the paper said, quoting unnamed sources.

It said the rest of the 23 or more planes are still under production at a plant in Komsomolsk, in the Khabarovsk territory.

Like the MIG-29, the SU-27 is a supersonic all-weather counter-air fighter, with look-down/shootdown weapon systems and beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles.

The paper said the total number of the jet sales is more than 98, although existing information said it is around 24 to 28. The sales order include the improved versions SU-33 and SU-35.

The Chinese air force's emblems have been painted on the tails of some of the assembled planes, whose delivery began in the summer of 1992, the paper said, adding that China has posted engineers and test pilots at the Komsomolsk plant for technology transfer and flight training.

Air force pilots have been assigned to fly several planes already delivered to China, and training flights have been conducted over Liaodong peninsula and Shanghai, but not Hainan island as some papers have reported.

Payment was made mostly through barter trade with 24,000 tons of canned meat, daily necessity items and winter clothes as part of the payment, the paper said.

Meanwhile, Taiwan announced Saturday that Washington had agreed to lease T-38 jet-trainers to Taiwan in a deal worth 49 million US dollar.

The 38S are used by the US Air Force to train pilots picked to fly F-18 and F-15 fighters.

DPRK, IAEA hold talks on inspections

SEOUL, Nov 1: North Korea and the International Atomic Energy Agency were holding talks to try to reach agreement on the scope of inspections to be carried out at the North's secret nuclear facilities, reports said Monday, says AP.

MBC Television said the international inspection agency turned down over the weekend North Korea's compromise offer to allow inspectors to change batteries and film in surveillance cameras this week.

Instead the UN watchdog agency is demanding broader, routine inspections which it hopes will be a step toward resolving concerns over North Korean nuclear weapons development, MBC said.

Off the Record

No 1 secret of longevity

TOKYO: What's the secret to long life? The Japanese government asked the experts — its oldest citizens, reports AP.

And the answer was, basically: Chill out. You'll live longer.

The survey, commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, asked 2,851 people aged 100 years or older for their No. 1 secret of longevity.

The largest portion, 15 per cent, cited taking life as it comes as the most important factor.

Other advice: Eat and drink in moderation; early to bed and early to rise; have religious faith; work hard.

Also: Be a woman. Eighty per cent of the centenarians are.

Being a farmer is also apparently conducive to long life. The largest portion of centenarians — 42 per cent — had engaged in agriculture or forestry as their primary job.

The survey, conducted from March to May of this year, was based of face-to-face interviews with the centenarians or members of their families.

There are 4,802 people at least 100 years old in Japan, according to the latest government figures. Japanese have the world's longest life expectancy.

World's oldest wall discovered

JERUSALEM: A wall nearly 6,000-year old — believed to be the oldest in the world — has been discovered in central Israel, the department of antiquities said Sunday, reports AFP.

The wall, 25 metres (yards) long and 110 centimetres (44 inches) thick, was exposed by excavators during road-building in the Wadi Ara region. It dates back to around 4,000 BC.

A square tower was discovered on the same site — the largest to be found from that period, measuring 80 hectares (200 acres). Two skeletons dating back to 5,000 BC were also found.

10-yr-old boys charged with murder

PRESTON, England: Two 11-year-old boys, who allegedly skipped school to steal a child, Monday faced trial for abducting and murdering a toddler who strayed from his mother at a crowded shopping mall, reports AP.

The accused boys, who were 10 at the time of the crime, are the youngest ever charged with murder in Britain.

The crime haunts those who watched the tragedy unfold on television.

Fuzzy security videotapes broadcast around the world showed a small blond boy who wandered away from his mother outside a butcher's shop in Liverpool. An older boy took the trusting 2-year old's hand and followed a friend onto a busy street.

Two days later, on Valentine's Day, James Bulger's body was found 2 1/2 miles (4 kms) away near a railroad track.

In addition to abducting and murdering James, the two boys are charged with attempting to abduct another 2-year-old boy earlier the same day. They pleaded innocent to all three charges at a preliminary hearing in May.

Under British law, the accused boys cannot be named, nor can any information be revealed which would identify them.

At their first court appearance in February, angry crowds pelted police vans carrying the boys with stones and eggs. The trial was moved to Preston, 30 miles (50 kms) north of Liverpool, a faded port city.

Both boys were expected to attend the trial each day. They will sit on a specially raised dais so they can see witnesses over a railing which runs in front of them.

Ten is the youngest age at which children can face criminal charges in Britain. Jurors must decide whether the boys intended to commit their crimes or a prank went horribly wrong.

To be held criminally responsible "the child has got to know that what he did was seriously wrong, not just naughty," Laurence Lee, an attorney for one of the accused boys told the Associated Press.

Millions of frogs cause traffic jams

TEHRAN: Millions of frogs have overrun 10 kilometres (six miles) of a road leading to the city of Nahavand in southwest Iran, Hamahahri newspaper said Sunday, reports AFP.

The frogs first appeared on Thursday following heavy rain fall and have caused traffic jams. The phenomenon may have been the result of warming of the earth under the surface, experts told the paper.

Heavy fighting near Kabul

KABUL, Nov 1: In some of the worst fighting in months, President Burhanuddin Rabbani's forces waged a fierce battle Monday with an archrival to the northeast of the capital, reports AP.

The latest fighting in Tagao, a town 60 kilometers (40 miles) to the northeast of Kabul, marked an escalation of recent battles between Rabbani's troops and the rival Hezb-e-Islami faction led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the nominal prime minister. Rabbani's troops control most of Kabul, while Hezb-e-Islami guerillas holds some territory just outside the city.

In a dawn attack on government positions, Hezb-e-Islami used ground troops and rocket fire on two fronts, a defence ministry spokesman said. Government forces repulsed the attack, and heavy civilian casualties were reported, the spokesman added, without giving any figures.

He described the fighting as the worst between Rabbani's forces and Hezb-e-Islami guerillas since early this year.

Hekmatyar's spokesman in Kabul, Qutbuddin Hillal, declined to comment.

Rabbani, Hekmatyar and most other guerilla leaders are Muslim fundamentalists who want to establish an Islamic state. But none has the power to control the entire country.

Afghanistan, one of the poorest countries in the world, has been at war since the former Soviet Union invaded in 1979. The Soviets withdrew in 1989, but the fighting has carried on among the Afghans.

Cambodian Minister of the Interior You Hokry (L) offers gifts to the new Miss Phnom Penh Tham Marineth after a beauty contest yesterday, the first organised in the country for decades. — AFP photo

Serb forces return two British helicopter

SARAJEVO, Nov 1: Serb forces returned two British helicopters to the UN protection force in Bosnia on Sunday after a protest from the UN peacekeeping commander, reports Reuter.

UN spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Bill Aikman said the two helicopters returned to Bosnia headquarters in Kiseljak at 5:15 pm (1615 GMT) following their release by the Serbs in the eastern town of Sokolac. The aircraft had been grounded there for two days.

"We have our two 'copters back from Sokolac after high-level discussion in Belgrade," Aikman told Reuters.

A UN spokesman in Kiseljak, Niels Pedersson said eight crew members and one passenger were released.

Accidents claim 43 in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Nov 1: Forty-three people were killed and 23 other seriously injured in a bus accident on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, local police said, reports AP.

Maj Sudjunan, the chief police spokesman in Sumatra's northernmost province of Aceh, said the accident occurred Saturday in the town of Lhokseumawe when two buses collided on a slippery bend. Passengers hurled out of the buses were then hit by another passing bus.

It was the worst accident in the region in 16 years, Sudjiman said by telephone. Twenty-seven people died instantly and another five died in the hospital.

Meanwhile, 11 people were killed and two others injured Saturday when a van hit a bus in Padang, the capital of West Sumatra.

Police said the van was speeding, lost control and hit the bus. All the passengers in the van died.

2 Palestinians killed

BEIT EL, Occupied West Bank, Nov 1: Two Palestinians were killed Sunday in confrontations with Israelis, and Jewish settlers vowed to step up protests following a settlers murder, reports AP.

Trying to rein in the escalating unrest, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin chastised both Arab and Jewish opponents of the Israel-PLO peace accord, and accused Jewish extremists of calling for his assassination.

"Enemies among the Palestinians ... murdered a Jew because he was Jew.

CIA tried to fund critics of Aristide

LOS ANGELES, Nov 1: The CIA tried to funnel money to critics of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide during Haiti's 1987-88 presidential campaign but Senate opposition blocked the plan, the Los Angeles Times reported Sunday, says AP.

The CIA did pay key members of the current military regime controlling Haiti from the mid-1980s until at least the 1991 coup that drove Aristide from office, The New York Times reported Monday.

The payments, made to Haitian generals and politicians, were part of the CIA's normal intelligence-gathering operation, The New York Times said, quoting government officials it didn't name. The payments, which the newspaper called "modest," were for information on a range of subjects, including cocaine smuggling and political turmoil.

Aristide supporters criticised the payments, but Rep. Robert G. Torricelli, a member of the House Intelligence and Foreign Affairs committees, defended them as crucial to US efforts to gain an understanding of Haitian politics.

"The US government develops relationships with ambitious and bright young men at the beginning of their careers and often follows them through their public service," the New Jersey Democrat said. "It should not surprise anyone that these include people in sensitive positions in the current situation in Haiti."

The government officials who disclosed the payments told The New York Times they were not made with the intent of installing any particular person as Haiti's president.

When the CIA tried to funnel money to Aristide's critics in 1987 and 1988, he was not a candidate for president at that time, but his calls for a boycott of the military-sponsored election figured prominently in the campaign.

The CIA planned to thwart the boycott by providing secret money to some candidates, the Los Angeles Times said, citing two current and former US intelligence officials with direct knowledge of the affair.

"We were engaged in covert action on behalf of the National Security Council," the paper quoted one of the sources as saying. "We were involved in a range of support for a range of candidates."

The plan was killed after Senate Intelligence Committee members objected to interfering with the election and demanded to know whom the CIA wanted to give the money to.

CIA spokesman Kent Harrington refused to comment, the Times said.

At the time of the covert operation, Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest, preached liberation theology, a philosophy blending Catholicism and self-determination that has been popular in impoverished regions of Latin America and Africa.

The Reagan and Bush administrations generally opposed liberation theologists and fought both Aristide's positions in the 1980s and his candidacy in the 1990 election, in which he won a two-thirds mandate.

Last month, a senior intelligence official, Brian Latrell, revived a dated CIA study that included allegations that Aristide is mentally unbalanced, the paper said. The charge stirred opposition to President Clinton's Haiti policy.

Aristide was ousted by a military coup in 1991. His plans to return to Haiti Sunday with United Nations support were thwarted, and opponents have been threatening to replace him if he does not resign.