

BRIEFLY

Clinton to meet Rabin Nov 12:

President Bill Clinton will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Washington November 12, the White House announced Tuesday. AFP reports from Washington.

The two leaders will discuss "issues of mutual concern, including the Middle East peace process and US-Israeli bilateral relations," a White House statement said.

Japan honours 42 foreigners:

The Japanese government announced 4,495 recipients of its annual spring awards Wednesday, including 42 foreigners from 15 countries, cited for outstanding contributions to cultural understanding. AP reports from Tokyo.

The Prime Ministers' Office reported that among the two foreign recipients of the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun, one of the highest awards, was a former Colombian finance minister Rodrigo Llorente Martinez, who contributed to bilateral relations.

Hezbollahman killed in Lebanon:

A Guerrilla was killed Tuesday as he tried to infiltrate Israel's self-declared "security zone" in southern Lebanon. Israel's proxy militia said. AFP reports from Lebanon.

The South Lebanon Army (SLA) said the guerrilla, believed to be a member of the pro-Iranian Hezbollah, was killed when Israeli artillery shelled a group of guerrillas at Sojud, on the edge of the central sector of the zone.

Sojud has been a target of Hezbollah attacks since the signing of the PLO-Israeli Autonomy Accord, rejected by Hezbollah and other radical Lebanese and Palestinian groups.

Pak police seize heroin:

Police seized 1.5 tons of refined heroin from a pickup truck in western Pakistan, one of the largest drug confiscations ever made in the country, an official said Tuesday. AP reports from Peshawar.

Police acting on a tip stopped the truck Monday night on an isolated road in the Khoidadkel area, about 120 kilometers southwest of Peshawar and in the rugged border region near Afghanistan.

6 elephants electrocuted:

Six elephants were electrocuted near a national park when one of them bumped into a high-power cable and the five others rushed over to see what had happened. AP reports from Guwahati.

The accident occurred Sunday on a tea estate in the north-eastern state of Assam, where most of the tea produced by India is grown. United News of India said Wednesday.

Bosnian army launches major offensive against Croats

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nov 3: Civilians fled in panic as the Bosnian army launched a major offensive on the Croat-held town of Vares in central Bosnia, the United Nations said Wednesday, reports AP.

Government troops attacked from the north, northeast and southwest with infantry, artillery and mortars on Tuesday, and fighting raged through the day as the Muslim-led forces closed within 2.5 miles (four kilometres) of Vares, said UN spokesman Lt Col Bill Aikman.

The area about 20 miles (35 kms) north of Sarajevo had quieted down overnight and Wednesday morning, but Aikman said it was not clear whether the Bosnian advance would continue.

The Bosnian army, which has been fighting Croats for control of large swaths of central Bosnia since peace talks began faltering, earlier this year, captured three villages on its march south from Dubostica toward Vares, Aikman said.

Another attack was launched south of Vares, but it was unclear how it was progressing, Aikman said.

The result has been what was described as civilian chaos in the town of Vares, he said.

"Refugees are everywhere and there are significant numbers trying to escape."

Several hundred refugees, mostly Croats, were moving east on the road out of Vares,

but were having trouble with mines and roadblocks, Aikman said.

Vares had a prewar population of 22,000, but Aikman said half the town had already been evacuated.

In the capital, besieging Bosnian Serb forces continued delaying efforts by UN engineers to fix vital electrical lines.

Critical institutions like hospitals and the bakery have been without electricity since Saturday, and the rest of the city hasn't had power in more than a week.

No electricity means no running water and no heat as freezing temperatures set in. To stay warm, residents have been braving snipers to venture out and chop down what few trees are left, or chip bits of wood from the roots of trees felled last winter for fuel.

With temperatures dipping below 32 degrees F (0°C), the Serbs have foisted mountains of paperwork on UN peacekeepers to delay them and block electricity and supplies from reaching the city.

The tactic threatens to prove almost as deadly as the shelling and sniping that began when Serbs besieged Sarajevo 19 months ago.

Engineers who said they needed just a few more hours to fix the main electrical transmission line to the city were barred Monday by Serbs who said there was fighting in the area.



A small boy carries home two heavy wooden planks which he was able to find somewhere in Sarajevo Monday. Finding firewood for cooking and heating is a growing problem in Sarajevo as winter approaches. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Anti-abortion activist defends shooting of abortion doctor

WICHITA: An anti-abortion activist who admits shooting an abortion doctor says she has had a change of heart. Such violence should be left to men, she told a newspaper, reports AP.

"As far as guns and bombs and that kind of thing, I think women should just stay out of the way and let the men do that sort of thing," Rachelle "Shelley" Shannon said in Tuesday's Wichita Eagle. "I didn't think that before. This is my recently developed viewpoint."

Dr. George Tiller was shot in both arms as he drove out of his Wichita clinic's parking lot last August 19. Shannon, of Grans Pass, Ore, was arrested hours later as she attempted to return a rental car at an Oklahoma City airport.

Shannon, who is being held on a million dollar bail at the Sedgewick County Jail, already had admitted to the shooting in letters to another newspaper.

During telephone and personal interviews with the Eagle, Shannon defended her actions. "I'll always know I did the right thing," she said.

Shannon, 37, has pleaded innocent to first-degree murder and two counts of aggravated assault. Her trial is to start December 6. She said she will testify that she shot Tiller, but did nothing wrong.

"There is killing that is righteous or just. Even if I spend the whole rest of my life in prison, I did the right thing, I might have did a lousy job, but I tried."

Beer most popular drink among Chinese

BEIJING: Beer is now the most popular alcoholic drink among Chinese, muscling out traditional rice wine and spirits, according to an industry survey, reports AP.

China is also close to becoming the world's second largest manufacturer of beer, the official Xinhua News Agency said Tuesday, citing a survey prepared for a national brewers' meeting in eastern Zhejiang province.

China is expected to produce 12 million tons of beer this year, second to the United States in beer output, Xinhua said.

The country's beer-making capacity has grown at an annual rate of 20 per cent since 1984, when the country produced just over 2 million tons of beer, the agency said.

China has more than 800 breweries, up from 400 about ten years ago, the report said.

Chinese per capita beer consumption is 15 kilograms (33 pounds) annually, lagging behind Germany's 140 kilograms (308 pounds). Most Chinese beer drinkers are urban males between the ages of 20 and 40.

'Charles a notorious playboy'

BAGHDAD: A Baghdad daily on Tuesday labelled Britain's Prince Charles "A notorious playboy" and questioned his credentials for attacking Iraq's treatment of marsh Arabs, reports Reuter.

"Suddenly, Prince Charles, the playboy known to warehouses and cells of night throughout Europe ... turns into a patron of sublime values and good morals," the news paper Babel said in a signed editorial.

It was reacting to a public speech last week at Oxford University in which, in a rare and outspoken foray into foreign policy, the British Royal heir accused Iraq of repressing Shi'ite Arabs of the southern marshes.

Charles called Saddam Hussein's government a "terrifying regime" that persecuted the southern people by draining the marshes their communities relied upon. He dismissed as "obscene" official claims that the operation was for agricultural reasons. "How many more obscene lies do we have to be told before action is taken?" he asked.

The Babel editorial written by Nasrallah Dawoodi, editor-in-chief of the official newspaper Al-Iraq, said an anti-Iraq campaign was being exposed "in its dirtiest form and most vicious aims through the recent falsehoods made by Charles."



Georgian troops enter Khobi, clash with rebels

MOSCOW, Nov 3: Fierce fighting broke out Tuesday in the Georgian town of Khobi as government forces entered the town to try to win it back from rebel forces, Moscow television reported Tuesday, reports AFP.

It reported violent gunbattles on the streets as the government troops clashed with forces loyal to ousted president Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

Agencies reported earlier that troops had been strengthening their positions Tuesday outside Khobi, one of the last rebel strongholds.

Reinforcements of troops and tanks have been steadily moving into the area to avoid any repetition of last week's clashes during which Khobi and Senaki fell into rebel hands, Itar-Tass reported.

This build-up of strength has been aided by the deployment of Russian units along key communications routes, while some 1,000 soldiers and tanks are regrouping in the west of the country.

Last Friday the rebels, aided by armed volunteer from the

Russian Caucasus, repelled Georgian troops creating panic among the soldiers, after the troops had successfully won back a number of strategic towns.

Elsewhere six ships from the Black Sea Fleet were due to leave their base at Sevastopol on Tuesday to defend the Georgian ports of Baitumi and Poti in the name of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Interfax News Agency reported.

The agency did not state whether infantry troops aboard the ships would land at Georgian ports or stay on their vessels.

The operation is being supervised directly by admiral Eduard Balin, commander of the Black Sea Fleet, who had a long telephone conversation last week with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, Interfax said.

Military sources quoted by Interfax said the fleet included a patrol boat, a mine-sweeper and four assault ships transporting marine infantry units.

South African leaders agree to set up unity govt after polls

JOHANNESBURG, Nov 3: South Africa's democracy negotiators formally agreed on Tuesday that a government of national unity should be installed after all-race elections due next April, reports Reuter.

But they failed to agree on how big the cabinet should be or for how long the government should serve, referring these issues to a technical committee of experts.

President F W De Klerk's government has proposed that all parties winning at least five per cent of the vote have cabinet representation and that the administration elected in April serve for five years.

Nineteen of the 21-groups participating in the multi-party constitutional talks outside Johannesburg backed the general principle of a national unity government.

The five right-wing black and white groups that have quit the talks, linked in the freedom alliance, began a separate two-day meeting on Tuesday with government cabinet ministers

on their demands for a federal system.

One of the freedom alliance leaders, Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the Inkatha Freedom Party, said ahead of the meeting that political leaders must agree and federal constitution before the election.

"All we want guaranteed in a constitution are our human rights," he told a meeting of businessmen in Johannesburg.

"The idea that which ever party is in the majority in a constituent assembly should write a final constitution is absolutely unacceptable to us, he said.

Buthelezi said a majority in a constituent assembly chosen in April would be able to tear up an interim constitution.

"As it now stands, in the advent of any party or parties coming into power, we can forget about a constitution which will entrench strong regional government, let alone federalism."

entrench property rights and the right of free enterprise," he added.

He said the freedom alliance believed the entire democracy negotiating process "is intrinsically flawed and must therefore be scrapped."

Buthelezi said the only way to break the impasse between the government and the ANC on the one hand and the freedom alliance on the other was for a summit between the leaders of the three groups.

The ANC has rejected such a summit and the government's response has been cool.

Delegates to the multi-party constitutional talks have put back by one week Friday's deadline for agreement on an interim constitution to see the country through to black majority rule.

Another white umbrella group, the Afrikaner Volks Front (AVF), met in Pretoria on Tuesday to discuss a "people's state" and the AVF's role within the freedom alliance.

Abdel-Rahman transferred to new cell

NEW YORK, Nov 3: A Muslim cleric accused of masterminding a terrorist bomb plot against New York landmarks was transferred from an upstate New York prison to a specially-designed Manhattan cell with shower and conference room, reports AP.

Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman is awaiting a conspiracy trial in federal court.

Amid tight security, the 55-year-old Egyptian preacher was transferred via helicopter, ferry and car from Otisville prison in upstate New York to a cell here.

Abdel-Rahman, who is blind, diabetic and has difficulty walking, will be held in a two-room cell designed to meet his needs.

"It's a special accommodation because of his circumstances" but not as fancy as some news reports have suggested, said Romolo Imundri, chief marshal for the southern district of New York. "I wouldn't describe a 9-by-12 (3 metre-by-4-metre) cell with bath and shower that way."

Jackson cancels concert in Mexico City

MEXICO CITY, Nov 3: Pop star Michael Jackson has cancelled a concert in Mexico City because of health problems, according to a television report Tuesday, reports AP.

A spokesman for Jackson, who began his five-stop tour of Mexico on Friday, said that the singer had to undergo oral surgery but would be back on stage Thursday.

Jackson's world tour "Dangerous" has been plagued by illness and cancelled shows since it began in Asia, as well as by charges he sexually abused a boy at his California ranch.

No criminal charges have been filed against Jackson but the 13-year-old boy has filed a civil suit and his lawyer stepped up efforts to expedite the trial, asking the court to force Jackson to return to the country.

On Tuesday, the Los Angeles Times reported that Jackson is seeking a six-year delay on the suit.

Floods claim 70 lives in Honduras

TEGUCIGALPA (Honduras), Nov 3: At least 70 people are dead and 149 others missing after three days of torrential rains and flooding officials say, reports AP.

"The floodwaters swept away homes and entire families," said Vice President Roberto Mariné Lozano. Bodies have been found miles (kilometers) from their homes, he said.

Some 15,000 people have been made homeless by the rains and flooding, officials said Tuesday.

Flooded rivers blocked key sections of the coastal highway, inundated vast tracts of banana, rice, cacao and sugar cane plantations, and wiped away flimsy homes. Callejas viewed the damage by plane on Tuesday.

Officials said they didn't have an immediate estimate, but expected damage in the millions of dollars from the storms that began over the weekend.

President Rafael Leonardo Callejas said he was prepared to announce a state of emergency for about 8,400 square miles (22,000 sq. km.) of territory in the northern Atlantic provinces of Yoro, Cortes, Atlantida and Colon.

Some of the biggest losses were in the farming valleys of Aguan and Leon, where Chiquita Brands and another company, Castle and Cooke, operate large banana and African palm plantations, said Mariné Lozano, also head of this country's emergency response commission.

Mariné Lozano said the damages appeared to surpass two tropical storms, Bret and Gert, which lashed this country in the past two months, leaving 60 million dollar in total damages and 35 deaths.

Disaster officials "are rushing to meet the basic needs of the homeless, supplying shelter, medicines, clothes and food," he added.

Russian navy to continue N-waste dumping

MOSCOW, Nov 3: The Russian navy will continue dumping radioactive waste in the Sea of Japan until better disposal ways are devised, a Russian news agency reported Wednesday, says AP.

The Pacific Fleet will dispose of nuclear waste in keeping with schedule in areas of the Sea of Japan, which are known to IAEA and world public opinion, Adm. Georgy Gurinov, the fleet commander, was quoted by Itar-Tass as saying.

Japan and South Korea protested last month after a Russian tanker poured 900 metric tons (990 tons) of low-level waste into the Sea of Japan.

Russian officials contend the International Atomic Energy Agency had been notified and the dumping posed no environmental threat.

Bowing to international pressure, however, the Russian government canceled a second dumping slated for mid-November, and said it would

end the practice if it could get foreign aid to build disposal facilities on land.

Gurinov said ocean dumping must continue because the fleet had only two special tankers, and their holds were overflowing with waste from nuclear submarines.

The tankers were old and "keeping the hazardous load ... means threatening the environment and health of many people, and we have no right to do so," he was quoted as saying on Vladivostok television Tuesday.

"Latest measurements show the dumping of waste in no way has affected the ecology of the Sea of Japan and poses no danger to man," Gurinov said.

"We welcome, however, promised Japanese aid to build a nuclear waste-treatment plant."

"We need such assistance ... because it guarantees safety to the people of our countries," Gurinov said.



Ghulam Ishaq Khan (L), former President of Pakistan, meets with Asif Zardari (R), husband of Premier Benazir Bhutto in Islamabad Wednesday. Hectic consultations continue among politicians of various factions ahead of next week's presidential election. — AFP photo

New Jerusalem Mayor supports Jewish settlement

JERUSALEM, Nov 3: Ehud Olmert, a right-wing lawyer who ousted Jerusalem's celebrated Mayor Teddy Kollek, on Wednesday declared his support for Jewish settlement in Arab areas of Jerusalem — a statement that provoked instant alarm among Palestinians, reports AP.

Olmert, a former Cabinet minister and rising power in the Likud party which opposed the Israel-PLO accord, ended Kollek's 28-year reign as mayor of this holy city where Palestinian-Israeli relations are especially sensitive.

Olmert, whose campaign focused largely on Kollek's advanced age of 92, said in a radio interview that he would not oppose Jewish settlement in Arab neighbourhoods and indicated a makeshift settlement set up in recent weeks

on the Mount of Olives would not be torn down as Palestinians have demanded.

"Every Jew can purchase property anywhere in Jerusalem and anywhere in the land of Israel, and I don't conceive of acting otherwise," said Olmert, who will take office after official results are posted in 10 days to three weeks.

Olmert's statement brought immediate criticism from Palestinians who feared City Hall would encourage a new campaign by militant Israelis to move into Arab areas. Such actions provoked clashes with Palestinians during the Likud government of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

"The first statement we have heard from Olmert is that Jews have right to live anywhere in the city. This will create tension and clashes," said Hanna

Siniora, a Palestinian politician and former newspaper editor.

"For sure, we will see more settlements creeping on to Arab land. Likud will also try to foil any attempt at understanding between Palestinians and Israelis on the issue of Jerusalem," he added.

Jerusalem, a city of 155,000 Arabs and 390,000 Jews, is the fault line of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Israel, which captured the eastern sector of the city from Jordan in 1967, claims all of Jerusalem as its eternal capital. Palestinians demand control of the Arab section and want to make it the capital of a Palestinian state.

The mayor has no role in talks over the future status of Jerusalem but can set the tone for relations between Arabs and Israelis in a city with a hair-

trigger temper when it comes to religion and politics.

An official close to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said the Likud has proven itself as a thriving party," said Olmert, whose brother Yirmi also won a mayoral race in Givat Shmuel near Tel Aviv.

Local issues, and not a change of heart about the PLO-Israeli accord, appeared to be the reason for the new broom in most city halls.

Saying he had no regrets about trying for a seventh five-year term, Kollek said, "I am very sorry for Jerusalem and for the residents that will now have to endure the future that will now come."

He attributed his defeat to a large stay-at-home vote, especially among Palestinians.

"I think we shouldn't make light of Likud's chances to return quite quickly to power. The Likud has proven itself as a thriving party," said Olmert, whose brother Yirmi also won a mayoral race in Givat Shmuel near Tel Aviv.

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modern lifestyles should extend to the Sabbath.

Olmert's alliance with the ultra-religious raised fears that City Hall would stop issuing licenses to businesses, such as pubs and movie theaters, allowing them to open on the weekly day of rest. Others feared increasing ultra-religious influence on public schools.

"Jerusalem was just starting to open and blossom, like an oyster showing its pearl. The smallest thing, however, will cause it to close immediately," said Eyal Shani, 34, a chef at the Ocean Restaurant.

According to projections by Israel's cable television, Kollek's labor-aligned party lost four seats in the 31-member city council, where Likud won six seats and ultra-religious parties won 12 seats.

French MPs okay bill limiting political asylum

PARIS, Nov 3: French MPs on Tuesday overwhelmingly adopted a constitutional reform bill limiting the right of political asylum, reports AP.

The bill must now be adopted by the senate, without amendments, and to become law must be adopted by the Congress of both houses of parliament at Versailles, west of Paris, by a three-fifths majority.

The National Assembly approved the reform by 447 votes to 85, with Socialists and Communists voting against.

Because of the overwhelming right-wing majority in parliament, the bill is expected to be passed without problems by the congress.