

French police detain 88 FIS activists

PARIS, Nov 10: French police detained 88 suspected Algerian fundamentalists Tuesday in a nationwide sweep ordered after a series of kidnappings, murders and death threats against French nationals by Islamic militants inside Algeria, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Edouard Balladur said the operation, led by counter-espionage and intelligence police, was "to verify that each person on our national territory respects the law of the republic."

Those detained included Moussa Kraouche, president of the Algerian Brotherhood, which is believed to be the front in France for Algeria's outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). A second brotherhood official, Djaffar El Houari, was also detained, police said.

The Interior Ministry said 88 persons had been detained in the operation and six others put under house arrest. Some 65 homes and 11 offices were searched, it said.

The operation touched nu-

merous cities and towns, including Paris, Lille, and Nancy in the northern half of the country plus Lyon, Marseille, Nice, Bordeaux and Toulouse in the south.

French police said they believed there were between 50 and 100 "hard core militants" linked to the FIS in France, with the vast majority of the Algerian community opposed to the movement's extremist beliefs.

Police involved Tuesday included the Directorate for Surveillance of the Territory (DST), which handles counter-espionage operations, the agents from Renseignements Generaux, the political police.

The sweep came two weeks after three French consulate officials were kidnapped in Algiers and four days after French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua warned that Algerian militants would not be permitted to turn France into a rear base for violent activities in Algeria.

Ghali steps up efforts to rid Somalia of chaos

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 10: UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali stepped up his campaign to rid Somalia of chaos and starvation, urging the world not to abandon the East African nation "before our work is done," reports AP.

The United Nations chief's plea Tuesday came a day after his clash with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher over Washington's speeded-up withdrawal from Somalia.

Boutros-Ghali is waging a public relations campaign for a commitment to remain in Somalia and ensure its political and economic stability. The United States, stung by the death of 18 American troops in Somalia, plans to withdraw all its troops by March 31.

There are now 7,500 US troops in Mogadishu, and another 8,650 remain offshore. One UN official said

Boutros-Ghali expressed to Christopher his concern about what happens after the Americans pull out. Another said Boutros-Ghali cited a "snowball effect" in which most of the other countries with troops in Somalia plan to follow the United States in withdrawing, creating a "large, gaping vacuum." Both officials spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

UN political affairs and peacekeeping aides will get a chance to review the problems Wednesday, when they meet at headquarters with Robert Oakley, the Clinton administration's envoy to Somalia.

The meetings are part of an effort to allay Boutros-Ghali's concern that Oakley at least has been duplicating and at worst been undermining UN peacekeeping efforts in Somalia.

The issue is coming to a head because the mandate for

the 26,000-strong UN force expires November 18. Boutros-Ghali is expected to make his recommendations about how to cope with the American withdrawal and revise the mandate in a report to the Security Council this week.

He expressed his concerns to the African American Institute in New York on Tuesday night. In his prepared remarks, the UN chief cast doubt on whether the international community has the political will to fulfill its duties in Somalia.

"The international community must not give up on places like Somalia," he said. In a reference to the US pullout, he added, "Let us not abandon Somalia before our work is done."

President Clinton has said the United States will try hard to restore stability to Somalia before the withdrawal. Wa-

shington is urging the United Nations to take the heat off Gen Mohamed Farrah Aided, wanted in a June 5 attack on Pakistani peacekeepers.

The United States also has joined Aided in urging the United Nations to release 43 remaining Somali detainees, including three of his top aides. They were captured October 3, sparking the 15-hour firefight that killed 18 US soldiers, one Malaysian peacekeeper and an estimated 300 Somalis.

Sixteen detainees were freed overnight Saturday.

Other moves the United States is suggesting to restore stability include establishing a commission to investigate the killing of the Pakistanis; creating a Somali police force; and holding an international humanitarian aid conference for Somalia in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on November 29.

Raphel concerned at war in Afghanistan

KABUL, Nov 10: A senior US official met Afghan leaders during a day's visit to Kabul on Tuesday, expressing dismay over instability in the war-ravaged country, an Afghan minister said, reports Reuters.

Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Robin Raphel was the most senior American envoy to visit Afghanistan since before the Soviet invasion 14 years ago.

"Ms Raphel was disappointed that stability could not be maintained in Afghanistan," Afghan Foreign Minister Hidayat Amin Arsaala told reporters after the US envoy met President Burhanuddin Rabbani, Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and former Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Masood.

He said Raphel told the Afghans that Washington had to channel aid elsewhere because of the security situation in Afghanistan, which has seen frequent factional fighting even after the western-backed Mujahideen guerrillas took power early last year from a collapsed Soviet-backed government.

Raphel, who arrived from Pakistan and returned there after the meetings, was not available for comment on her talks.

However, Arsaala quoted her as telling the Afghans that the Clinton administration would

be willing to reopen its embassy in Kabul and resume normal relations with Afghanistan subject to an improvement in the security situation.

As she met the Afghan leaders in the capital, forces of Hekmatyar and those of Rabbani and Masood continued their week-old fighting in Tagab valley some 80 km (37 miles) northeast of Kabul.

Forces of Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami Party seized two foreign reporters in the area on Monday. But a Hezb spokesman said on Tuesday the reporters — New Zealander Terence White of the Agence France Presse and Johan Jennings, a US national working for the Associated Press, would be released.

Raphel also expressed concern about the large-scale production of narcotic drugs in Afghanistan and alleged backing to extremists by some Mujahideen groups, Afghan source said.

"The government assured her it would make every effort to control the cultivation of poppies, but that economic alternatives were difficult to introduce for farmers in a poor country," Arsaala said.

"The Afghan government appealed for help, and it gained the impression the US would help where it could," he said.

US rejects proposal to lift sanctions on Serbia

WASHINGTON, Nov 10: The United States dismissed Tuesday a proposal by France and Germany to lift economic sanctions on Serbia in exchange for territorial concessions to Bosnian Muslims, reports AP.

"We are interested in anything that would help move the peace process," State Department spokesman Michael McCurry said. "But I don't think at this point a discussion of sanctions or lifting of sanctions is something the United States is enthusiastic about."

France and Germany have proposed the gradual lifting of sanctions against Serbia if the Serbs agree to give up between three and four per cent of the

territories they control in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Earlier Tuesday, Belgrade hailed the EC diplomatic initiative, officials radio said.

"We hail the European Community's initiative but the decision to make territorial concessions belongs to the (self-proclaimed Bosnian) Serbian republic," the radio said.

Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic reiterated on Monday that peace could not return to Bosnia-Herzegovina without the lifting of sanctions.

Yugoslav president Zoran Ljilic asked UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali Tuesday to refer the issue of lifting the sanctions, imposed in

May 1992, to the Security Council, according to the Tanjug news agency.

Protesting that his country was being constructive and pacifist, Ljilic said in a letter to Boutros-Ghali that "maintaining sanctions while it is clear that our country has committed no aggression and that it is not part of the conflict is a violation of international law and the UN charter."

The 12 EC Foreign Ministers decided in Brussels earlier on Tuesday to discuss a common diplomatic initiative for ex-Yugoslavia, including the Franco-German proposals, at a meeting in Luxembourg on November 22.

Aided faction agrees to sit with UN, US

MOGADISHU, Nov 10: The faction headed by Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aided has agreed to take part in the next round of security talks with the United Nations and the United States, a US military spokesman said today, reports AFP.

Colonel Steve Rausch said the Somali National Alliance (SNA) had agreed to participate in the weekly meeting of the security advisory committee here later this week.

"UNOSOM and the US are pleased by the renewed indications of SNA participation in the discussion process," Rausch said.

Three days ago, Aided announced that his faction would not attend the round table conference.

BRIEFLY

Freedom Award for Powell: Former President Ronald Reagan on Tuesday presented his Freedom Award to retired General Colin Powell and both men urged swift passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Reuters reports from Sini Vally.

Powell, who stepped down in September as the 12th chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and is considered a possible future candidate for president, received the award at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in this Los Angeles suburb.

UNHCR puts off operation in Lanka: The United Nations High Commission for Refugees said Wednesday it has suspended all relief operation in the war-torn northern Sri Lanka and pulled out its staff, AP reports from Colombo.

The UN agency, which had two relief centers in northern Sri Lanka accommodating 32,000 people, cited security reasons for evacuating its four representatives on November 9.

The statement noted an anti-UN demonstration by 1,000 people October 30 in front of the Madhu Relief Center for displaced Tamils. The center was not getting adequate supplies of food and basic goods, it said.

Malaysian King in Britain: Queen Elizabeth II welcomed Malaysia's king on Tuesday and declared Britain's determination to work with his country as it develops into an industrialized nation, AP reports from London.

The queen's daughter Princess Anne and her husband Cmdr Tim Laurence were at Gatwick Airport to meet Sultan Azlan Shah and his wife, Tuanku Bainun and traveled with them to London by royal train.

Prime Minister John Major, the queen, and her husband, Prince Philip, met the train at London's Victoria station, and the queen took the visitors to Buckingham Palace in a seven-carriage train.

Moroccan PM re-appointed: The current Moroccan Prime Minister, Mohamed Karim Lamrani, was re-appointed to the post Tuesday evening by King Hassan II, an official statement said, AFP reports from Rabat.

Lamrani, 74, who has led an interim administration since August last year pending legislative elections, has been asked to form a new government, the statement said.

The statement said the King had received Lamrani during the day and told him of his decision to appoint him premier, and to name his government as soon as possible.

Mitterrand is ill: French President Francois Mitterrand, 77, cancelled several engagements on Tuesday after suffering a bout of lumbago, officials said, Reuters reports from Paris.

Mitterrand, who suffers from a slow-growth prostate cancer, postponed a meeting with visiting Namibian President Sam Nujoma.

He also deferred meetings on Tuesday with a trade union leader and the Chilean Senate President.

Former rebel slain in El Salvador: A former guerrilla has been found tortured and shot to death, a leftist group said Tuesday. It brought to 25 the number of ex-rebels killed since El Salvador's civil war ended in January 1992, AP reports from San Salvador.

N-issue to dominate ROK-US summit

SEOUL, Nov 10: President Kim Young-sam ordered his defence minister and intelligence chief Wednesday to prepare contingency plans for dealing with North Korea's continued refusal to accept inspections of its nuclear facilities, reports AP.

Kim also said worries about Communist North Korea's suspected development of nuclear weapons would top the list of topics in his upcoming talks with President Clinton.

"Development of nuclear

weapons by North Korea must be stopped," Kim told a meeting of security-related ministers, according to chief presidential foreign security aide Chung Jong-uk.

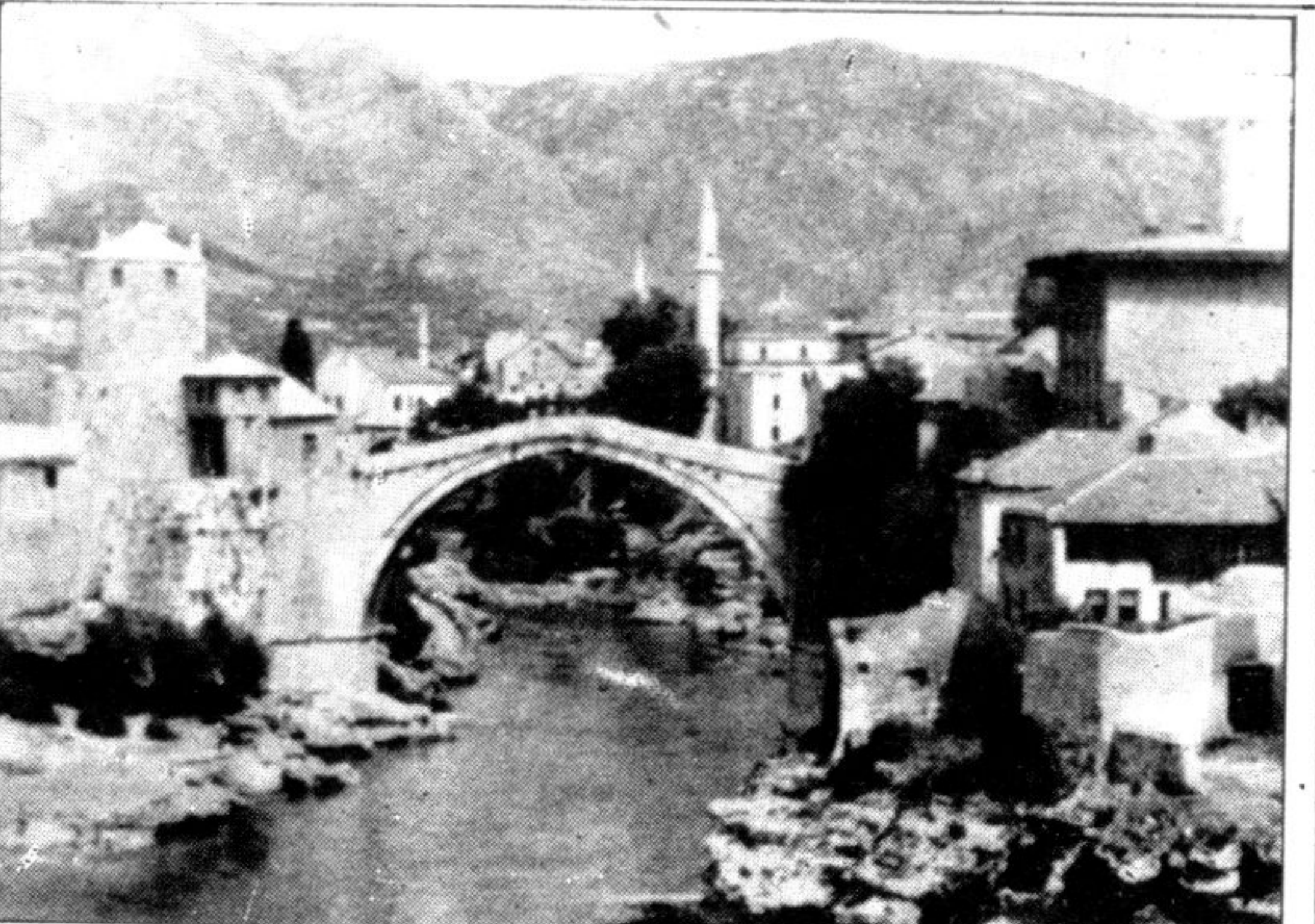
Also Wednesday, the military announced war games Nov. 15-25 that will involve virtually all of the 36,000 US troops and most of the 650,000 South Korean troops stationed in Korea.

The "Fool Eagle" exercises are designed to test defenses against North Korean aggres-

sion. Most are planned south of Seoul, but the military said some training will occur between the capital and the heavily armed Korean border.

"All possibilities should be considered in preparing for all circumstances," Kim told his ministers.

"Our government as well as the United States has been continuing to ask North Korea to allow inspections, but North Korea has refused even North-South talks by giving excuses," Kim said.



An undated file photo showing the renowned 16th century bridge over the river Neretva in Mostar. The bridge was destroyed by shelling on Tuesday and collapsed into the river. The bridge, featured on tourist postcards and posters, was built in 1566 and declared part of the world's heritage by the UNESCO. — AFP photo

US Congress for law to curb TV violence

WASHINGTON, Nov 10: Congress seems intent on passing a law to restrict television violence, but protectors of the First Amendment are betting no such measure ever will be enforced, reports AP.

The courts won't allow it, lawyers for the American Civil Liberties Union and the television networks say.

Nevertheless, the bipartisan momentum in Congress for legislation to reduce violent TV programming is strong.

Eight bills have been introduced. They range from a requirement that TV sets be manufactured with a computer chip that could be programmed to block violent shows to a mandate that the Federal Communications Commission make reducing TV violence a condition of television station license renewal.

One or a combination of them is likely to start moving toward enactment at the beginning of next year.

Attorney General Janet Reno told the Senate Commerce Committee recently that several

of the bills would pass constitutional muster. But she acknowledged later that she was not familiar with all the case law, so the Justice Department is continuing to review the subject.

The concern is and always has been that TV violence causes the real thing, particularly among young people. Supporters of the legislation say the courts have allowed restrictions to protect children and point to limits on indecency.

But indecency is different, say First Amendment advocates.

It has been specifically defined as references to excretory functions and sexual organs. Although a ban on such talk has been rejected by the Supreme Court, the broadcast industry has generally accepted that it should be restricted to between 8 pm and 6 am.

Violence, however, has never been defined by law. And even if it were, lawmakers see some violence on television as beneficial. News shows, for example, would be exempt

from restrictions and "good" violence, such as war dramas or depictions of brutality designed to deter such behavior, also would be all right.

Lawmakers oppose "happy" violence, which is akin to slapstick, and sensationalistic or gratuitous violence.

But imagine the questions the FCC will have to ponder if a law is passed and the commission must draw the boundaries.

Would it be acceptable to show a woman shooting a rapist in self-defence, but not a mugger shooting an innocent victim?

How much spilled blood would be needed to illustrate the horrors of war without being gratuitously gory?

The National Coalition on Television Violence defines violence as "the deliberate and hostile use of overt force by one individual against another."

Using that definition, would a drama about the Civil War be allowed on the air when children might be watching?

The creative community has traditionally made these judg-

ments and critics of the push for new legislation say the public should complain to them, not to Congress.

The law can't tell the difference between good and bad violence," says Attorney Floyd Abrams, a First Amendment expert who successfully defended NBC against charges that a rape shown in the 1978 made-for-TV movie "Born Innocent" caused a similar real-life incident.

"When you start talking about banning or limiting or channeling the amount of violence on TV, you are talking about directly interfering with First Amendment rights," said Abrams.

"Speech about violence is not only integral in the most important works of film and literature in our history, but has been explicitly protected."

Off the Record



A robin landing on a dripping garden tap by 52-year-old John Watkins from Woodford Bridge in Essex, England, which has won this year's prestigious British Amateur Photographer of the Year Award, Tuesday. — AFP photo

Rats cause traffic headache

MOSCOW: Hungry rats are causing a major headache for motorists and traffic police in Moscow, reports AP.

Many traffic lights in the Russian capital don't work because rats have been eating through underground cables that control the signals. The Rossiyskaya Gazette reported Wednesday.

"Rats are to be blamed for this," traffic police spokesman Ivan Belyzh was quoted as saying.

The rats eat the plastic coated cables more quickly than the understaffed traffic department can fix them, the report said.

Widespread exam fraud

HARARE: Police said Wednesday they uncovered a widespread fraud scheme that enabled thousands of high-school students to cheat on examinations, reports AP.

Advance copies of question papers were sold for between 3 dollars and 15 dollars to teenagers taking ordinary and advanced level exams, said police spokesman Phebon Magede.

Virtually all subjects were available, and some pupils bought specific questions written out by hand to help them prepare the answers, Magede said.

He said pupils gave descriptions of sellers who approached them, but no arrests have been made.

The Education Ministry said the fraud could lead to the nullification of thousands of results, causing delays in entrance to colleges and universities as new tests are rescheduled.

About 400,000 pupils are writing their high school exams. The Education Ministry said officials were investigating possible leaks from teachers or the ministry's own exam supervisors.

Guard robs bank to collect overtime pay

MANILA: A security guard found a novel way to collect his overtime pay: he robbed the bank he was supposed to be guarding, police said, reports AP.

Officers said Mador Pocaan, 27, and two companions entered the Capitol Bank in suburban Muntinlupa late Tuesday as he and other employees were working overtime.

Armed with a shotgun, the robbers announced a holdup, collected 800,000 pesos (dls 28,500) in a bag and then fled out the back door, police and other employees said.

Employees telephoned the police as soon as the robbers left. But it took responding patrolmen more than an hour to break the padlocks that the thieves had used to lock the front and rear entrances.

Police rushed to the address that the guard had given the security agency but discovered it was false.

Haven for map lovers

WASHINGTON: The Smithsonian Institution, which runs most of Washington's museums, has opened a haven for lovers of maps, reports AP.

Big maps and little maps, round maps and square maps, long skinny maps and gigantic wall maps.

There are maps that stick to the wall with velcro. Maps hand drawn on ancient vellum. Maps on computer screens. And maps made of sticks tied together with bark strips.

The first thing the visitor sees is a challenge to the whole idea of the impartial map pointing out that for all their apparent objectivity maps are never neutral.

Like advertisements and other forms of graphic design, they present information selectively, reflecting particular points of view it says on the wall.

Aspin has no plan to resign

WASHINGTON, Nov 10: Defence Secretary Les Aspin has received continual assurances that President Bill Clinton is satisfied with his work and has no plans to resign, a Pentagon spokeswoman said Tuesday, reports AP.

"There are no plans for anyone here to resign," said Pentagon spokeswoman Kathleen Delaski.

Delaski was asked about recent reports citing senior White House officials and members of congress as saying Aspin was the weakest in the president's national security team.

"I challenge the premise of those reports," Delaski said. "We continually get assurances that the president is satisfied, very satisfied, with secretary Aspin's performances."

Delaski said Aspin met with Clinton at the White House Monday night to brief him on the situation in Somalia. The topic was strictly Somalia, she added.

Aspin came in for sharp criticism after 18 US army rangers were killed in Mogadishu.