

## Hezb-I-Islami forces push back Mujahedeen

SAROBI, Afghanistan, Nov 15: Hezb-I-Islami forces led by Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar were Sunday pushing back Mujahedeen guerrillas commanded by Ahmed Shah Masood in a violent battle in the Tagab valley east of Kabul, reports AFP.

Followers of former defence minister Masood were forced back to their stronghold at Njrab, about 70 kilometres (45 miles) northeast of the capital after having lost the village of Tagab.

From the heights of Hezb-I-Islami stronghold of Sarobi, it

## Yeltsin receives death threat

MOSCOW, Nov 15: Russian television announced on Sunday that Boris Yeltsin had received a death threat — but the casual tone of the newsreader suggested it was not being taken seriously, reports Reuters.

The Russian leader's engagements on Sunday had included watching the men's final of the Kremlin tennis cup. Vesti television reported.

was possible to see heavy black smoke hanging in the valley, which echoed to artillery fire and the intermittent drone of government aircraft.

In Kabul, officials of the defence ministry, which is still effectively controlled by Masood, called the Tagab battle "decisive with heavy losses on both sides," though no specific numbers were given.

But the Hezb said 250 of Masood's men had been killed and a leading commander, Zardad, said this forces had taken the Njrab heights and expected to take Masood's stronghold within hours.

Sources confirmed that Tagab, which had been controlled by Masood forces, had fallen to the Hezb-I-Islami.

From Sarobi, tanks could be seen advancing along the bottom of the Tagab valley.

In the past two weeks, the two factions have fought along a fluctuating frontline for control of Tagab, strategically located between their bases.

# Prisoners' issue overshadows PLO-Israeli peace agreement

CAIRO, Nov 15: A senior PLO official said on Sunday the PLO would not sign a peace agreement with Israel on schedule next month unless Israel gave a written commitment to free thousands of Palestinian detainees, reports Reuters.

Nabil Shaath, leader of the Palestinian team negotiating the detailed agreement on Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, was speaking to a news conference after three days of discussions between 27 Israeli, Palestinian and American peace activists.

"We want the Israeli side to release these prisoners as soon as possible, I don't think the Israeli government should delay this under any pretext," he said.

"Believe me, in December this agreement will not be signed if we don't have a written commitment on the release of prisoners. I assure you I will not be a party to its signature without a full commitment on the release of all prisoners," Shaath said.

Under a declaration of principles signed by the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) and Israel in September, the Gaza-Jericho agreement is due to be signed by December 13.

Shaath said the PLO had obtained several verbal commitments from Israeli foreign Minister Shimon Peres and other officials that the release would be forthcoming.

Israel has so far freed some 600 prisoners detained since the Palestinian uprising began against Israel in 1987.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Israel held only 9,500 Palestinian prisoners. Israel press reports have spoken about 13,000 prisoners and detainees and the PLO has demanded the release of between 12,000 and 13,000.

Shaath said the sixth round of PLO-Israeli talks would resume in Cairo today and tomorrow a secret location and away from the press to end differences over the Israeli withdrawal and security arrangements.

The main obstacles in the negotiations.

The PLO-Israeli negotiations, which began in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba in October, were suspended two weeks ago after the Palestinian delegates walked out saying the Israeli withdrawal did not go far enough.

But following an Egyptian mediation, both sides resumed talks in Cairo last Monday and announce a breakthrough after two days.

The PLO said Israel agreed to cut the number of its troops in Gaza in what amounted to a withdrawal rather than a redeployment.

Asked whether there would be a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat in Cairo after the December 13 deadline, Shaath said:

"Meanwhile, Israel accepted PLO chairman Yasser Arafat's condemnation of the killing of a Jewish settler, but urged him Sunday to rein in Palestinian radicals opposed to the peace accord."

## Off the Record

*"If you can't be famous at least be notorious"*

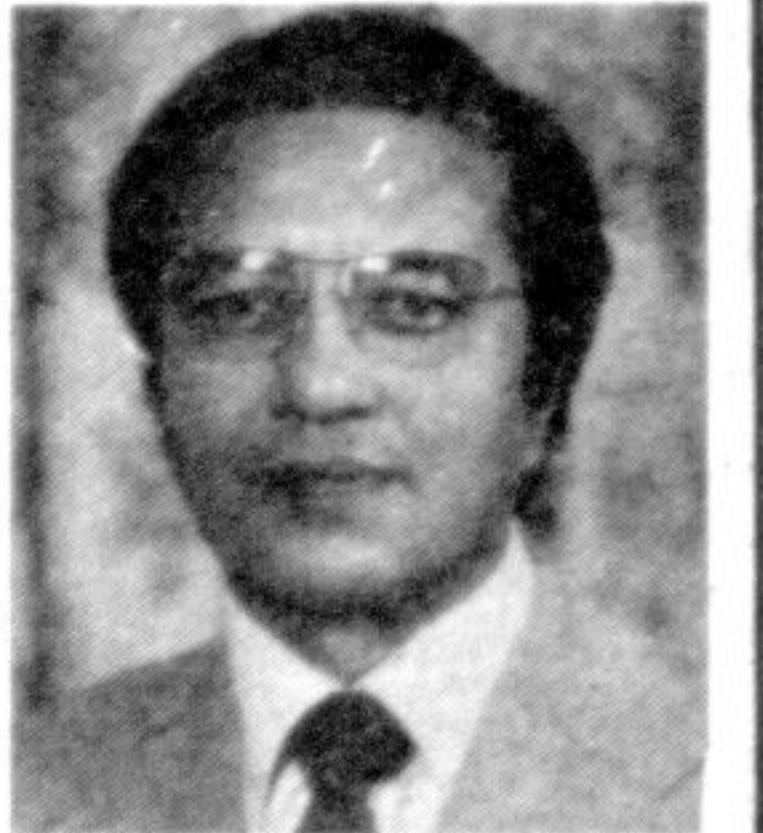
KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 15: "If you can't be famous, then at least be notorious," Malaysia's outspoken Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said on Monday about his reputation as the scourge of western governments, reports Reuter.

"So far, I haven't found that people are losing interest in Malaysia because of my remarks," Mahathir said in reply to a question at an international investment conference.

"In fact you have to be a little notorious, if you can't be famous," he said.

He said Malaysia is the least-known country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which also groups Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

"Even Brunei is now more well-known because the richest man in the world lives there," Mahathir said, referring to Brunei's Sultan Hassan Ali Bolkia, who is worth an estimated 31 billion US dollars.



## Gun is magic!

LONDON: Cowboy, as he calls himself, reached inside his leather jacket to show off the tool of his trade, reports AP.

"This gun is magic," he said. "It gives me respect in a pinch, and it's helped make me a load of money." Cowboy fondled the US-made Browning 9 mm pistol — under the table so no one else in the loud, smoky pub could see.

"I don't want to kill anyone," Cowboy said, but added: "I might have to, to protect my patch. There's people who'd still me as quick as a bullet to take over my business."

Cowboy, a drug dealer and armed robber, agreed to speak on condition he not be identified further. Police are not sure how many Cowboys there are in Britain, which is known for restrictive firearms laws and unarmed policemen, but crimes involving guns are increasing rapidly.

Strict laws make it difficult for a British civilian to own a pistol or shotgun legally, and ban all automatic and semiautomatic weapons.

## Engineer forced to have sex with Pentagon official

SANTA MONICA: An IBM engineer is suing the computer company over her claim bosses forced her to have sex with a Pentagon official so IBM could get millions of dollars in a government funding, reports AP.

Veronica Gunther, 35, alleged superiors threatened to fire her in 1991 and 1992 unless she maintained a sexual relationship with Gary Denman, director of the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency or ARPA.

International Business Machines Corp. and two of Gunther's managers, Ray Blonn and Nancy Green, were named as defendants in the state court lawsuit filed Friday. It seeks unspecified damages.

IBM spokesman Scott Brooks said the company doesn't comment on pending litigation. ARPA spokeswoman Jan Walker also declined to comment. Efforts to locate Blonn, Green and Denman over the weekend for comment were unsuccessful.

Gunther has been on medical leave from the company since January, after twice attempting suicide while suffering from severe depression.

## Libya closes border with Tunisia over Lockerbie issue

TUNIS, Nov 15: Libya closed its border with its western neighbour Tunisia on Sunday in apparent protest against new United Nations sanctions over the Lockerbie airliner bombing, official Tunisian sources said, reports Reuter.

The only border crossing, Ras Ajdir on the road to the Libyan capital Tripoli, was closed.

The official Libyan news agency, Jana, reported that local political assemblies in Ras Ajdir and at Umsaid, on the eastern border with Egypt, were holding sit in protests against the sanctions.

Jana did not say explicitly that the borders were closed but the local assemblies, called Basic Popular Congresses, at the two border checkpoints are composed mainly of policemen and customs officials.

There was no immediate word in Egypt of any change at the Libyan borders.

## 700 Lankan troops still missing

COLOMBO, Nov 15: At least 700 government soldiers are still missing in northern Sri Lanka's Pooneryn where an army camp and a navy base were attacked by Tamil rebels last Thursday, reports Xinhua.

About 400 missing soldiers out of a contingent of 1,800 in Pooneryn were believed to be trapped in the jungles in and around the area, according to defence ministry sources here today.

A radio of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today announced that they have captured 58 government soldiers in the Pooneryn area.

About 350 of the remaining troops have been injured, the sources said, adding that they are being airlifted to hospitals in north central Anuradhapura and Colombo.

General Hamilton Wanasinghe, the Defence Secretary, has meanwhile appealed to voluntary medical officers to report to the main army

hospital in Colombo as there is urgent need for more doctors, especially surgeons.

The official army death toll in the last three-day's rebel attack has not been given yet, but independent estimates published by local press here said it could be around 400.

A main government paper 'Daily News' today said that President Dingiri Banda Wijetunge has issued instructions to service commanders to strengthen defences in all military establishments, mainly in the northern province.

Sri Lankan government forces remain engaged against rebel forces of the LTTE, major military arm of minority Tamils fighting for a separate state in north-east since 1983.

AFP adds, the death toll from recent fierce fighting in northern Sri Lanka between Tamil Tiger guerrillas and security forces was set to exceed 1,000, defence sources said today.



Shri Lankan airforce personnel watch Sunday, over wounded army soldiers, injured during a government sea-borne assault to end a Tamil guerilla siege of the Pooneryn military base. Sunday, waiting to be loaded onto a military plane in this northern airbase. — AFP photo

## BRIEFLY

**Mine blast kills 11 in India:** A senior police officer and 10 other people were killed Sunday by a land mine apparently set by Marxist rebels in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, news agencies reported, AP says from New Delhi.

Two civilians were riding in a van with a police squad, commanded by a superintendent, when the blast occurred. They were returning from investigating suspected arson by the People's War Group, an outlawed organisation that claims to protect peasants against large landowners.

**Rebel Kurds free Dutch hostage:** Separatist Kurds released a Dutch national after keeping him hostage for a month, Turkish state television said on Sunday, AP reports from Ankara.

The hostage, identified as Jean Martin Moss, was released late Saturday in the southeastern province of Bingol, about 800 kilometres (480 miles) from Ankara, the report said.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) guerrillas kidnapped Moss from a passenger bus on a highway near Bingol on October 14.

**Palestinian shot dead:** Two Palestinians attacked a Jewish settler in the West Bank town of Hebron on Monday with axes, and the settler shot to death one of the assailants with a pistol, Israel Radio reported, AP says from Jerusalem.

The settler was in serious condition, the radio said. The army closed the area to search for the escaped assailant. The violence comes at a time when two Jewish settlers have been killed the past two weeks by Palestinian militants opposed to the Israeli-PLO accord of September 13. Each killing set off settler vigilante raids in which enraged settlers blocked roads, burned tires and opened fire on Palestinian motorists.

**US researcher kidnapped:** An American conducting linguistic research was seized by six gunmen in the southern Philippines, authorities reported Monday, says AP from Manila.

Sulu provincial police said Charles Walton of Chicago was abducted Sunday night on the island of Pangutaran, 850 kilometers south of Manila.

The kidnapers fled aboard two speedboats and were chased by police on another boat, the police said in a report. However, police gave up the chase because of bad weather and a shortage of fuel, the report said.

**Kohl arrives in Beijing:** German Chancellor Helmut Kohl arrived in Beijing yesterday beginning a six-day trip designed to promote German business interests in China's fast-growing economy, Reuter reports from Beijing.

Kohl, accompanied by 40 senior German business executives, arrived at Beijing airport and was greeted by an official welcoming delegation, witnesses said. The visit is Kohl's first since Beijing's brutal 1989 crackdown on the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests, and while in China he will also go to Shanghai and the southern city of Guangzhou.

**Suharto in Tunis:** President Suharto of Indonesia arrived in Tunis yesterday for a three-day state visit at the invitation of Tunisian President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, Reuter reports from Tunis.

Suharto is the current chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Tunisia is a member.

**17 tourists killed in Karnataka:** Seventeen tourists were killed when their van collided with a truck in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, local media said yesterday, Reuter reports from New Delhi.

The Press Trust of India said the crash happened on Sunday on a main road just northwest of the state capital, Bangalore. It did not say if the tourists were Indian or foreign. They were en route to Bangalore from Tumkur, 60 km (40 miles) away.

## Foreigners allowed to adopt Chinese children again

BEIJING, Nov 15: China is again allowing foreigners to adopt children after a nine-month suspension, a government official said Monday, reports AP.

"We no longer refuse to allow foreigners to adopt if they meet the conditions in the 'implementation measures' that were released on November 10," said Ge Changrong, a spokesman at the Civil Affairs Ministry.

China last year promulgated an adoption law that set the same basic conditions for foreigners as Chinese: They must be childless, at least 35 years old and have the financial

means to raise a child.

The Civil Affairs Ministry set up a national Adoption Center in September 1992 to centralise foreign adoptions, which had been processed by local governments and resulted in bureaucratic confusion and corruption.

But in February, it temporarily suspended foreign adoptions, saying it had to work out new regulations.

The new measures, which took effect last Wednesday, apply to foreign adoptions only. It requires all foreign adoptions to be handled by foreign governments or foreign adoption

agencies, apparently barring individual foreigners from handling their own adoption cases.

The measures also permit Chinese adoption agencies to charge fees, based on unspecified guidelines set by China's finance and commodity price-setting departments.

They also allow Chinese orphanages to ask foreign adoptive parents to compensate for the cost of raising the child until its adoption. The regulations say the foreigners are not required to pay such a fee, but are permitted to if they agree. The money can only be used to improved conditions at the orphanage.

## Bush for Sino-US 'good relations'

HONG KONG, Nov 15: Former US President George Bush has expressed hope that the US government will maintain "good relations" with China, a report said today, reports AP.

Bush, who made a one-day trip across the border from here to China's special economic zone of Shenzhen on Sunday, was quoted by the Beijing-run Ta Kung Pao as saying that "I always feel that China and the United States must maintain good relations with each other."

He made the remarks in a meeting with Wang Zhongfu, the Vice Mayor of Shenzhen, adding ties between the two countries were "important" to the United States and to the world.

## Deng in 'superb' health

BANGKOK, Nov 15: China's 89-year-old supreme leader Deng Xiaoping is in 'superb' health and takes a daily walk for exercise, his eldest son said today, reports Reuter.

"My father's health is superb," Deng Pufang told a news conference in the Thai capital Bangkok.

"He is a strong man who performs daily exercise by walking and playing bridge. His bridge talent is at the world champion level."

Deng Xiaoping still monitors the political situation but spends most of his daily life in retirement as a normal citizen, Deng Pufang said.

"He spends his time like other retired people because he believes the leaders of the younger generation are capable of leading China and replacing him for the task of developing the country."



Looking for the tidbit in her trainer, Sascha Houcke's mouth, 11-month-old giraffe Safari (L) plants a little kiss during a recent, undated performance of the circus "Baum". — AFP photo

# Tamils in Jaffna caught between govt and the Tigers

JAFFNA, Sri Lanka, Nov 15: After 10 years of guerrilla warfare, life has become so grim on the Jaffna Peninsula that some Tamils are losing patience with the rebel army fighting for their independence, reports AP.

A few years ago, Tamils were enthusiastic about the war and supported the rebels. Now, some civilians even stop visiting reporters in the street to complain.

A farmer said: "The Tigers take part of our produce, calling it a tax. What we grow is so little and parting with anything is so difficult."

In the words of a shopkeeper, "We are caught between

the government and the Tigers, who believe in a logic only they can understand."

Both requested anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Newspapers censor themselves. They never criticise the Tigers and carry every statement the rebels provide. The Tigers also have their own radio and television stations.

"We feel the Tigers are fighting a legitimate freedom struggle, but this does not mean that we approve of everything they say and do," said John Ambalawana, the Anglican bishop in Jaffna.

The peninsula is surrounded by government soldiers and

ships. Warplanes fly overhead, sometimes dropping bombs on villages.

Last Thursday, the Tamil Tigers overran a base on the southern shore of Jaffna Lagoon in an effort to punch a hole in the siege of Jaffna.

The four-day battle for the Pooneryn army and navy base was the largest battle of the decade-year-old war. By Sunday, the rebels withdrew and the army recaptured the base, but more than 1,000 combatants were believed killed, about half on each side.

The Tigers had been preparing for a counterstrike since a government offensive

last month in which 500 rebels, soldiers and civilians were killed. In Jaffna, the Tigers used posters, newspaper ads and street dramas to recruit young fighters.

"The future is gloomy, the army is at our door," Anton Balasingham, spokesman for the rebels, said in an interview a few days before the latest offensive. "We are mobilising the entire Tamil nation for war."

Beat Schweizer, who works for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Jaffna, said the people are under "tremendous pressure" from both government forces and the Tigers.

## Angolan govt to meet rebels to end civil war

LUANDA, Nov 15: The government has agreed to meet UNITA rebels face-to-face to negotiate an end to Angola's 18-year civil war, but the rebels have not said if they will attend, a Western diplomat said Sunday, reports AP.

A government negotiating team left for United Nations-sponsored talks scheduled to begin Monday in the Zambian capital of Lusaka, the diplomat said on grounds of anonymity.

But Rui Oliveira, spokesman for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, known by the Portuguese acronym UNITA, would not confirm that a rebel delegation would attend.

"The government has not

communicated to us any willingness to negotiate," Oliveira said in Lisbon, Portugal. "The government is more concerned about dropping bombs than ending the war."

He said, however, that rebel officials were meeting Sunday at the rebel base in the central Angolan city of Huambo to draw up an agenda for talks.

UNITA has been fighting the government since independence from Portugal in 1975. A peace accord took effect in 1991, but fighting resumed 18 months later when UNITA lost democratic elections and accused the government of cheating.

UN special envoy Alouine Blodin Beye has called a news blackout on the negotiations.

## US, ROK begin military exercises despite North Korea's protest

SEOUL, Nov 15: The United States and South Korea began large military exercises Monday despite warnings from Communist North Korea that they threaten peace on the divided Korean peninsula, reports AP.

The "Foil Eagle" exercises, which last about 10 days, add to already-mounting tensions over the North's suspected development of nuclear weapons.

The 28th annual exercises began south of Seoul, with most of the 36,000 US troops in South Korea and the 850,000 South Korean troops participating, military officials from both sides said.

US and South Korean offi-

cials say the exercises are routine and defensive in nature. But the war games have drawn special attention because of tensions caused by North Korea's suspected nuclear development.

North Korea said in a statement Sunday that the exercises could jeopardise efforts to solve the nuclear issue through dialogue.

The North called the exercises "dangerous war gambles rendering the situation extremely strained and gravely jeopardising peace on the Korean peninsula."

North Korea has refused international demands for inspections of its nuclear facilities.

has claimed more than 18,000 lives, began in 1983.

Many Tamil civilians still support the rebels, who seek an independent state in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, but life has become very difficult on the Jaffna Peninsula.

A few journalists based in Colombo reached the peninsula on a Red Cross ferry to the rebel-held port of Point Pedro and were taken to Jaffna in a Red Cross jeep. A Tiger vehicle returned them to the port several days later.

Scars of battle are everywhere: bombed-out buildings, destroyed automobiles, craters left by artillery shells.