

Pak troops clash with drug traffickers

ISLAMABAD, Nov 29: Pakistani paramilitary forces seized more than one tonne of opium after a gunbattle in north-western tribal areas on Sunday, officials said, as the government moved to ratify the death penalty for traffickers, reports Reuters.

Local officials said there was a prolonged exchange of fire between paramilitary forces and drug smugglers in the early hours of Sunday in Bajaur Tribal Agency area on the rugged border with Afghanistan.

The officials said the traffickers escaped, leaving a pickup loaded with 1.1 tonnes of opium that was being smuggled to another area, apparently for processing into heroin in laboratories in the tribal areas where Pakistani law does not apply.

Law Minister Iqbal Haider presented to the National Assembly (lower house) a decree imposing the death penalty on drug traffickers, which was approved by the previous interim president and must be ratified by the new parliament.

The decree, which amends an existing Law, raises the maximum penalty of 25 years in jail to death, while the minimum punishment for drug offences is raised to 25 years from two years.

It also provides for forfeiture of assets acquired through the illegal narcotics trade.

Pakistan is trying to combat its burgeoning drugs trade that has made it the world's largest supplier of heroin after Southeast Asia's notorious golden triangle.

Air force bombs Tamil Tigers' boats CWC hints at quitting Lankan govt

COLOMBO, Nov 29: A crucial political ally of Sri Lanka's ruling party Sunday set a one-month deadline to win wage demands for Tamil plantation workers and hinted it could withdraw its support to the government, reports AFP.

The Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), with a vote base of 500,000 Tamils of Indian origin said it would give President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga's administration one month to resolve political and trade union issues.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the (policy making) national executive today, a Tamil source said. There was no immediate reaction from the ruling party.

The block vote of the CWC has been crucial for successive United National Party (UNP)

governments to remain in power for the past 16 years.

Political analysts say the UNP would be in a major crisis without the CWC support.

The CWC leaders Thondaman, who is also Tourism Minister, has been holding talks with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and several other UNP figures in a bid to hammer out a solution, political sources said.

Thondaman has been demanding higher wages for plantation workers and accommodation in the government for a breakaway faction of the ruling party, the sources said.

Tamil sources quoted Thondaman as telling the national executive that progress in his talks with the government had been slow and the outcome so

far had been unsatisfactory.

Another report says: The Lankan air force has bombed Tamil rebel boats crossing a northern Lagoon, a military spokesman said today.

The air force engaged some rebel boats which were on the Lagoon close to Pooneryn on Sunday, he said, referring to the northern military base which was attacked earlier this month.

He was unable to give any casualty figures or the number of boats involved. It was not known if the rebels had been planning another attack on the base.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) almost overran the Pooneryn base, across the Lagoon from their Jaffna peninsula stronghold,

on November 11. It was the military's worst defeat in the 10-year-old war.

The Tigers are fighting for a separate state in the north and east for the 2.5 million Tamil minority community.

Military sources said 637 soldiers and sailors were killed or missing in the Pooneryn attack while the LTTE said it killed 1,000 soldiers and lost 411 of its own fighters.

Traffic across the Jaffna Lagoon is banned by the military. But civilians, who say they have no options, travel across in fishing boats accompanied by Rebel vessels.

If the LTTE had been successful in pushing the military out of Pooneryn, it would have had unhindered access across the Lagoon to the mainland.

Angolan talks enter critical stage

LUSAKA, Nov 29: Talks to end Angola's civil war entered a critical stage today with negotiators trying to integrate rebel and government armies and wrap up discussions by week's end, reports AP.

"They are on the final lap home and everything succeeds or fails this week," a diplomatic source told Reuters.

The sources said negotiators, now in their third week of talks, had virtually closed debate on a ceasefire to end the world's bloodiest war, killing more than 1,000 people a day.

But they said UN envoy Aloune Blondin Beye, who has imposed a news blackout on the talks, has not announced when the truce would take effect.

The negotiators from Angola's government and its

UNITA rebel foes made no comment as they silently entered Lusaka's Mulungushi conference centre, venue of the meeting, shortly after 10 am (0800 GMT).

Diplomatic sources monitoring the slow-moving talks in Zambia's capital Lusaka said Beye wanted the meeting to end this week.

The sources said UNITA which has fought a brutal war against the government since Angola's independence from Portugal in 1975, wanted its guerrillas to form 50 per cent of a new national army.

But the government, which won elections judged free and fair by the UN last year but which UNITA disputes, held out for a much smaller rebel input, they said.

6 die as Norwegian gas ship explodes in ROK

SEOUL, Nov 29: Six people were killed and at least 10 seriously injured Monday in an explosion aboard a Norwegian-registered liquefied petroleum gas carrier, police said, reports AP.

The explosion occurred while the 36,770-ton Nyhammer was docked for repairs at the Hyundai Mipo Drydock Co. Ltd. at Ulsan, 300 kilometres (186 miles) southeast of Seoul.

Martime police said the dead included the ship's Norwegian captain, two Norwegian crew members and three Koreans. The Norwegian Embassy declined to release names, pending notification of next of kin.

The explosion ruptured the ship's gas tank, and police said the risk of a secondary explosion remained high. The docks were sealed and hundreds of

police and firemen were brought to the scene.

The danger of a new blast was preventing rescuers from entering the ship cabin to determine if there were additional casualties, maritime police said.

The ship carried a crew of 28 which included five Norwegians and 23 from the Philippines, maritime police said. They said it had docked at Ulsan last Thursday for repairs.

The Koreans killed included Hwang Sung-Ha, 36, the dock assistant manager, Cho Daehoon, 32, a worker and Kim Chong-Sang, a dock worker, police said.

The Hyundai drydock is the largest ship repair facility in Korea. Company officials said they had never had a major accident.



People holding portraits of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussain celebrate the arrival of a Cypriot freighter carrying foodstuffs on Friday at the port of Umm Qasr. — AFP photo

Prosecutor fired for beating witness in Japan

TOKYO, Nov 29: A prosecutor accused of beating a witness during questioning in a major bribery scandal was fired Monday in the first case of its kind in Japan, reports AP.

Although human rights groups and lawyers in Japan have often charged authorities with violent interrogation tactics, Hitoashi Kanazawa is the first Japanese prosecutor to be fired for using violence against a witness, according to Justice Ministry records.

Kanazawa, 33, is accused of slapping a lumber company executive and threatening to throw him out a 12th-floor window during an October 14 interrogation that was part of a bribery scandal involving construction executives and politicians.

The executive, whose name has not been disclosed, sued the government November 8, saying his cuts required two stitches and a week of treatment to repair.

"For a prosecutor to have used such violence against a witness is impermissible in a country ruled by laws," said Justice Minister Akira Mikazuki in announcing the firing.

Mikazuki said he was "shocked" by the affair and added that Kanazawa may be subject to criminal prosecution.

The minister denied that Kanazawa's actions reflected common practice among prosecutors, calling the case, "Unique." Japan has no regulations on the length of an interrogation and the witness or suspect's lawyer is usually not present.

Inkatha gives conditions to participate in elections

JOHANNESBURG, Nov 29: The Inkatha Freedom Party has announced conditions for taking part in national elections and was expected to present them Monday to the government, reports AP.

At a meeting of its Central Committee on Sunday, the Zulu-based group disavowed a pact signed by one local Inkatha branch and the Neo-Nazi white Afrikaner Resistance Movement.

The signing Saturday made headline news and was portrayed by right-wingers as a historic symbol of black and white opposition to the African National Congress. Inkatha's national leadership said the pact was not sanctioned by the Central Committee and held no weight.

Because of their mutual opposition to the ANC and government, Inkatha and right-wing white groups have formed a negotiating coalition known as the Freedom Alliance. But Inkatha is reluctant to be portrayed as an ally of pro-apartheid groups and has sought to win black support by stepping up demands for a separate Zulu homeland.

At the meeting, Inkatha leaders reiterated this demand by listing several conditions aimed at giving regional governments greater powers in a new constitution.

Major UN project to dismantle Iraq's war machine likely

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 29: UN and Iraqi officials this week began devising plans for long-term monitoring of Iraq's industries in what would be the last major UN project in dismantling Baghdad's war machine, reports Reuters.

But Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, Tareq Aziz, whose visit resulted in acceptance of the crucial monitoring programme, fears that no matter what his country does the United States will influence the UN to delay lifting the embargo on oil exports.

Permitting the sale of oil is linked to Iraq's compliance on the weapons-monitoring programme.

The sanctions, imposed shortly after Iraq's troops in-

vaded Kuwait in August 1990, include host of other demands, such as recognising the Kuwaiti border and accounting for all missing Kuwaitis.

Bowing to the Security Council's continuous refusal to ease the sanctions, Iraq formally agreed Friday to long-term monitoring of its arms potential.

Rolf Ekeus, chairman of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM), in charge of scrapping Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, estimates he would need about six months to put the monitoring programme into place after the parties agree on plans to survey Iraq's industries that might be converted to weapons use in the future.

UNSCOM may ask for some

factories to be dismantled and is bound to watch where and how teams of scientists and military engineers are employed.

If UNSCOM reports to the Security Council it has completed its work, the Council is obliged to consider seriously lifting the oil embargo, which has cripple Iraq's economy.

Aziz has objected several times to the long waiting period that Ekeus says he needs to determine whether Iraqis interfere with the monitoring project.

Aziz believes the six-month wait came because of pressure from the Clinton administration, which he fears will continue to block any easing of sanctions.

Ghali's envoy may mediate Afghan ceasefire

KABUL, Nov 29: The personal representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Sotiris Mousouris, and two other foreign delegations, arrive in Kabul on Sunday, Foreign Ministry officials said, reports AFP.

Mousouris, who is on a two-day official visit, will have talks with President Burhanuddin Rabbani, Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, former Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Masood, and Shi'ite faction leader Abdul Ali Mazari.

"Mousouris might talk about a ceasefire with the officials he meets but he didn't come here to mediate a ceasefire," said a senior Afghan official.

He was referring to the month-long fighting between the armed forces of Hekmatyar and Masood, who are battling for control of the Tagob valley east of Kabul.

"Mousouris is here to accelerate the process of U.N aid to Afghanistan, especially to the people of Kabul's for the coming

winter," another official noted. His programme for today is understood to be of a personal nature, including a visit to Kabul famous museum, which has been subjected to bombardment and looting.

From it, a four-man delegation headed by the Director of the Asian Department of the

270 more Khmers defect to govt

PHNOM PENH, Nov 29: Another 270 Khmer Rouge guerrillas defected to the government over the weekend, bringing the total to more than 3,000 in three months, a senior government official said today, reports AFP.

The surrender accompanied a conciliatory gesture by the guerilla leaders, who said Sunday that they wanted to talk to the Cambodian government about what they called the 'fine initiative' by King Norodom Sihanouk to swap the guerillas' zones of control for ministerial posts.

Foreign Ministry flew into Kabul on a four-day visit, and from Paris, the new French Charge d'Affaires, Didier Leroy, also arrive in the capital Sunday morning.

Leroy, a fluent Persian-speaker who served as consul in Kabul from 1980-84, and who was in charge of the Pakistan and Afghanistan desks of the French Foreign Ministry from 1989-90, will stay for two weeks in Kabul.

The purpose of my visit is to re-establish the ties of Afghan-French friendship which began in 1921, Leroy told AFP.

A senior Afghan Foreign Ministry source stated that a promised ceasefire for the Tagob fighting is stalled due to irreconcilable differences between the factions.

But Hekmatyar is calling for a special arbitration commission to settle for once and for all these differences between his Hazb-i-Islami faction and Masood's personal Shoorai-Nazar faction.

BRIEFLY

1500 PLA men to join police:

Some 1,500 Palestinian fighters based in Iraq are preparing to join the Palestinian police force being set up in the Israeli-occupied territories, the PLO's Baghdad representative Azzam Al-Ahmed said Sunday, AFP reports from Baghdad.

The fighters, members of the Palestine Liberation Army — the PLO's armed wing — were due to have travelled to Jordan in the past few days, but were delayed because of problems which emerged at the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in Cairo, Ahmed said.

15 drowned in India:

At least 15 persons, mostly women and children, drowned when the tractor trolley on which they were travelling fell into a pond near village Baison Khera under Bighapur police station circle near Unnao early yesterday, PTI reports from Unnao.

Official reports said the 45 passengers were going to Kuluahagar ghat for taking a dip in the river Ganges on the occasion of Kartik Poonima when their trolley turned turtle on the culvert of a deep pond.

Some of the people managed to swim ashore while women and children drowned in the deep pond.

Zemin in Lisbon:

Chinese President Jiang Zemin arrived on late Sunday for his first official visit to a European Community country since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, AFP reports from Lisbon.

Jiang Zemin, who is on a 24-hour visit, was met at Lisbon's military airport by his counterpart Mario Soares.

The two men are to discuss the future of the Chinese enclave of Macao, which has been administered by Lisbon since 1557. But is due to be ceded to Beijing in 1999. Jing Zemin returns to Beijing Monday night.

Escobar family refused visa:

Germany refuses tourism visa Sunday to four of the family of wanted Colombian drug king pin Pablo Escobar, after they arrived at Frankfurt Airport, the chief of the border police Klaus Severin said, AFP from Frankfurt.

He added that Escobar's wife, Maria Victoria Henao De Escobar, her daughter Manuela, her son Juan Pablo, and his fiancée Ochoa Sanchez would remain under police protection until a date had been fixed for their departure from Germany.

Militants kill 17 people in Algeria:

Seventeen people, including an eight-year-old girl, have died in violence across Algeria during the past five days, the official news agency APS said on Sunday, Reuter reports from Algiers.

Quoting security force sources, APS said "terrorists" — the official term for Muslim militants — had killed seven civilians, including the girl and her father, in attacks since Wednesday.

It said that three security force personnel, including a police officer, die in clashes with fundamentalists since Wednesday.

Bothmer dies of cancer:

Bernard V. Bothmer, an expert in ancient Egyptian art, died of cancer. He was 81, AP reports from New York.

Bothmer, a New York University professor known for his expertise in Egyptian sculpture of the Late Period (approximately 750 BC to 100 AD), died Wednesday at New York University Medical Center.

The Manhattan resident began teaching at New York University in 1960 and was named the Lila Acheson Wallace professor of Ancient Egyptian Art in 1982. He taught until two weeks before his death.

Reshuffle in Turkish cabinet

ANKARA, Nov 29: Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller reshuffled her cabinet on Sunday, changing five ministers of her own True Path Party (DYP), reports Reuters.

Ciller, who took office in June, made no changes among ministers of her coalition government's junior partner, the Social Democrat Populist Party, Anatolian news agency reported.

She replaced Rifat Seraroglu with Kazim Dinc as Health Minister and named four new ministers of state, Ali Sevkî Arık, Mehmet Ali Yilmaz, Abdubaki Atac and Nurhan Tekina.

Gulf governments accuse Asian maids of abusing children

ABU DHABI, Nov 29: Stung by a flood of unfavourable reports in international media about the maltreatment of Asian domestic helpers, Gulf governments are giving their side of the story, reports IPS.

A recent police study published in Dubai details some of the crimes allegedly committed by Asian maids against their employers. They are accused of abusing the children they have been hired to look after and sometimes of even attacking employers.

The story of a maid who poured kerosene and set on fire a two-year-old baby to get even with her sponsor is among the more gruesome cases cited by the report. The baby through

bly disfigured survived after his parents took him to Germany for treatment.

Foreign maids are also accused of smashing children's heads against the wall when they did not sleep and shutting them inside freezers to stop them from crying. Some employers even claimed domestic helpers used black magic to force children to extend work contracts.

This first-ever study by the police was prompted by allegations of sexual abuse and torture levelled against their Arab employers by maids from Asian countries like the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Independent observers say that although there are proba-

bly instances where migrant domestics abuse children, this is far outnumbered by the mistreatment of maids by employers. They say in many cases, cruelly-treated maids take out their anger on their young wards.

The Gulf country where violence against domestics seems most common in Kuwait, where about 150,000 Asian women work. As many as 10,000 are Filipinos whose knowledge of English combined with their catholic background make them among the most sought after by Arab employers.

In July, 400 Filipino maids who accused their employers of abuse have returned home in batches under a Kuwait-gov-

ernment funded repatriation programme. Their return coincided with the repatriation from Kuwait in early July of 20 Indian maids.

Since April 1992, Kuwait has sent home a thousand Asian workers who sought refuge in their embassies after fleeing employers.

Kuwait officials dismiss the allegations of sexual and physical abuse as either fabricated or exaggerated. The maids are prepared to go to any lengths to wriggle out of contracts and return home they say.

They point to the arrest and sentencing on mid-July of a Kuwaiti man and his Lebanese wife for killing their Filipino maid as proof that criminals are

brought to justice.

The maid Sonia of Panama died in March in a Kuwaiti hospital. She was already in a coma when she was admitted and bore the marks of severe burns and beatings.

Earlier, a Jordanian couple were sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for causing the death of another Filipino maid through starvation and beatings. There sentence has since been reduced to two years after an appeal.

News of Asian domestics jailed for theft or nabbed by the police because after deserting employers is often reported in the Gulf press.

In June, a Filipino maid was beheaded in Saudi Arabia for

murdering her employer, his wife and teenage son. The woman admitted killing them with a kitchen knife. But before execution, she told officials she had been raped by the father and son.

According to Dubai police figures, 135 maids were arrested in the first nine months of last year for being involved in "illicit sexual relationships." Police say the number of cases of maids found drinking alcohol is also increasing.

An estimated 67 per cent of the maids in the Emirates are Shri Lankans. The rest are Indians (23 per cent), Filipinos (9 per cent) and Bangladeshis (1 per cent), according to the Ministry of Planning.

Liberal attorney claims victory in Honduras polls

TEGUCIGALPA, Nov 29: A liberal attorney imprisoned by previous dictatorships was the apparent winner Sunday of Honduras' fourth civilian presidential elections since the end of military rule, reports AP.

After the opposition conceded, Carlos Roberto Reina claimed victory before a cheering crowd of Liberal Party followers late Sunday, saying: "We have won the battle."

Reina had a lead of roughly 53 per cent to 40 per cent over Oswaldo Ramos soto of the ruling conservative National Party, in a survey of about 100,000 votes from around the country by two national radio networks.



Miss World Lisa Hanna, 18, of Jamaica poses with first runner-up Miss South Africa Jacqui Mofokeng (L), 21, and Miss Philippines Sharmaine Gutierrez, 19, who came third, at the Sun City superbowl on Saturday. — AFP photo