

Rutskoi, Khasbulatov allowed to vote

MOSCOW, Dec 10: The imprisoned hard-line leaders who had resisted President Boris Yeltsin's call to disband Russia's old parliament will be able to vote Sunday for a new one, a news agency said, reports AP.

Former Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, former parliament speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and six others are being held in solitary confinement in Lefortovo Prison for their roles in the political violence that left more than 140 people dead in Moscow on October 3 and 4.

Supporters of Khasbulatov's parliament took up arms after Yeltsin disbanded it, and they rioted in the streets October 3. The next day, Yeltsin put down their resistance with tanks and troops.

The eight men, charged with inciting riots, have been forbidden from running in the new parliamentary elections, but the Interfax news agency said Friday they will be allowed to vote.

3 Britons freed

BAGHDAD, Dec 10: Iraq released on Thursday three Britons imprisoned for illegal entry and the British emissary who negotiated their release, said no deals were made, reports Reuters.

One, former Security Minister Viktor Barannikov, plans to vote because he is "not indifferent to the fate of the state and its prospects for development," his lawyer told Interfax.

Benazir urged to open new chapter in ties India to defend Kashmir at any cost, says Vajpayee

NEW YORK, Dec 10: Bharatiya Janata Party leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee has asked Pakistan to realise that India would defend Jammu and Kashmir as its integral part whatever be the cost, reports PTI.

No amount of pressure from interested parties would succeed in deflecting India from its resolve," he told a press conference here Thursday.

At the same time, he said, the government of India too must realise that policy of drift in Kashmir has cost the country heavily, both in terms of blood and money. It is time to evolve a well thought out policy based on firmness and understanding.

Urging the new Pakistani government to change its attitude towards the issue to enable it to be resolved, Vajpayee said during the Shimla summit, the then Prime Minister Z A Bhutto, who had negotiated agreement with Indira Gandhi, had given the assurance that the issue would be finally resolved by making the line of actual control with minor adjustments as the international border.

Internal political compulsion did not allow Bhutto to honour that commitment. His daughter (present Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto) should be courageous enough to open a new chapter in Indo-Pakistan relations," he said.

Vajpayee said when he became the Foreign Minister, he had gone through the record and found clear mention of the fact Bhutto had agreed that the final settlement would be on the basis of the line of actual control.

Asked whether his party would accept this solution as it would leave a part of Kashmir with Pakistan, he said it was a hypothetical question. "Let Pakistan formally propose it, we will respond."

If the upcoming foreign secretary level talks in January are to succeed, he said it is necessary that Pakistan government stop looking at the Kashmir issue from a narrow communal angle.

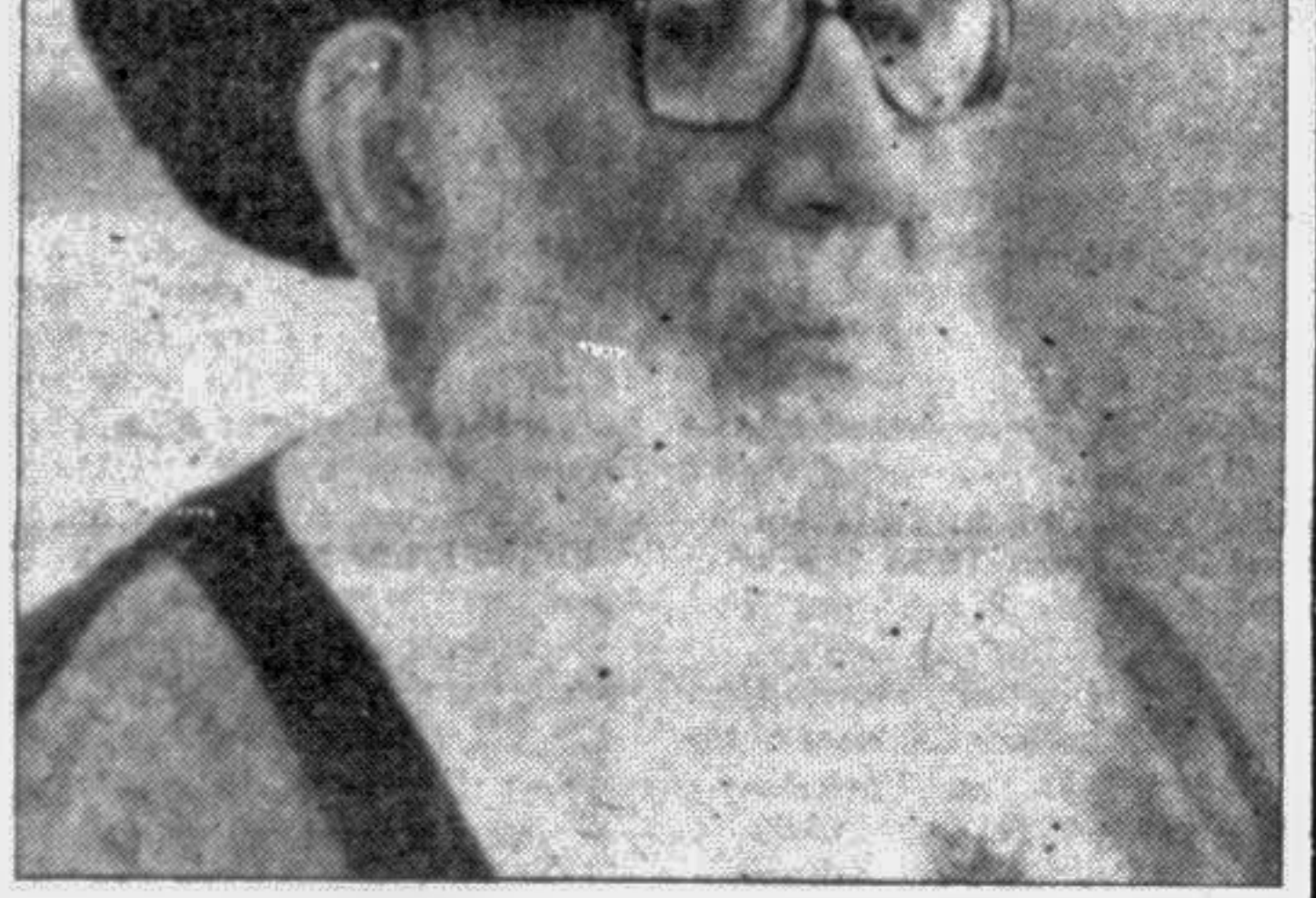
The India people have rejected theocracy for all times to come and would never accept the 'pernicious theory' of Kashmir valley going out of India just because it happened to a Muslim majority state.

BRIEFLY

Golpaygani dead: Grand Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Golpaygani, a pre-eminent spiritual leader among Shi'ite Muslims, died in a Tehran hospital Thursday of a lung disease. He was 96, according to Tehran Television, AP reports from Nicosia.

The sun which shone in the world of Islam for more than three-quarters of a century, set at dusk," the broadcast said in a news bulletin that interrupted regular programming.

The broadcast, monitored in Cyprus, said the government proclaimed a week of national mourning, and urged believers not to converge on the Shahid Rajale hospital to pay their respects.



File photo of top Shi'ite Muslim cleric Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Golpaygani. — AFP photo

Laatasi Tuvalu's new PM: The Pacific island state of Tuvalu's 12-member parliament chose Kamuta Laatasi as its new Prime Minister yesterday according to a report by the Pacific News Service received here, AFP reports from Sydney.

Incumbent Bikenibeu Paeniu was defeated by seven votes to five in the leadership challenge. Radio Tuvalu said.

Laatasi was a former private secretary to Tuvalu's first Prime Minister, Sir Toaripi Lauti.

24 killed in Mali clashes: Twenty-four people died and 50 were wounded in the West African state of Mali in clashes between two communities locked in a 54-year-old dispute over a rural house, state radio said on Thursday, Reuters reports from Bamako.

Typhoon claims 13 in Vietnam: Typhoon Lola, the latest in a series of storms to batter Vietnam, left at least 13 people dead and 86 missing as it swept across three southern provinces, government agencies reported Friday, AP reports from Hanoi.

Lola struck just before midnight Wednesday night with winds of up to 120 kilometres (75 miles) an hour, after killing 146 people in the Philippines last weekend.

The typhoon damaged about 5,000 houses and schools in Khanh Hoa, Ninh Tuan and Lam Dong provinces, the government agencies and newspapers said.

Cop shot dead in Egypt: Suspected Muslim militants attacked a police station in southern Egypt on Thursday, killing one officer who was guarding the station and injuring another, AP report from Cairo.

The Interior Ministry and witnesses said three men, armed with machine guns, escaped after taking the policemen's guns.

The attack occurred in El-Kusiya, about 320 kilometres (200 miles) south of Cairo, near the town of Assiut, a hotbed of fundamentalism.

Labours break off relation with Tories in Commons

LONDON, Dec 10: Britain's opposition Labour Party late Thursday broke off all relations with the government in the House of Commons in a dramatic response to Tory plans to guillotine two bills announced in last week's budget, reports AFP.

Labour leader John Smith described the government decision to guillotine — or force through the bills by limiting debating time — as "contemptuous, brutal, peremptory, oppressive and arrogant."

His action means Labour will mount opposition even to non-contentious legislation in the Commons and is likely to make life extremely difficult for the

government, forcing MPs to stay late in the Commons every night.

It means the end of "pairing" between MPs — an unofficial but accepted system whereby a Labour MP is permitted to miss a vote so long as arrangements are made for a Tory MP to be absent as well.

It also means the legendary "usual channels" procedure — whereby government and opposition whips work out arrangements with an independent official to get legislation through the Commons — will be closed down.

The Labour decision follows opposition fury with the announcement by the Leader of the House, Tony Newton, that he was to guillotine all stages of the bills on national insurance and sick pay — thereby forcing them through the Commons in a single day.

Bills are rarely guillotined at this early stage in their progress. But Newton has explained to friends that it would otherwise be difficult to get them through — as budget measures — in time for implementation next April.

Smith said, "It is outrageous to treat the House of Commons in such a contemptuous fashion. Such important bills ought to receive proper parliamentary debate and scrutiny."

Asked whether his party would accept this solution as it would leave a part of Kashmir with Pakistan, he said it was a hypothetical question. "Let Pakistan formally propose it, we will respond."

If the upcoming foreign secretary level talks in January are to succeed, he said it is necessary that Pakistan government stop looking at the Kashmir issue from a narrow communal angle.

The India people have rejected theocracy for all times to come and would never accept the 'pernicious theory' of Kashmir valley going out of India just because it happened to a Muslim majority state.

PLO-Israel meet tomorrow

CAIRO, Dec 10: PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin will meet in Cairo on Sunday to resolve obstacles facing an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho due on Monday, a PLO official said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

In Jerusalem, Rabin's spokesman Oded Ben-Ami said the premier has not ruled out a meeting but said: "there is no decision yet."

Nabil Shaath, Chief of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) negotiating team with Israel, told reporters in Egypt: "Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will meet Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Cairo on Sunday."

ALMA-ATA, Kazakhstan, Dec 10: Kazakhstan's parliament voted Friday to disband and let President Nursultan Nazarbayev rule by decree. Lawmakers also ordered the government to find them new jobs, reports AP.

The parliament, called the Supreme Soviet, was elected in 1990 when oil-rich Kazakhstan was still part of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine's possible arms sales to Iran worry US

WASHINGTON, Dec 10: The United States, concerned that economically hard hit Ukraine might find a lucrative weapons market in Iran, has warned the former Soviet Republic against such sales, US officials said Thursday, reports Reuters.

"We remain very concerned about reports of transfers of arms to Iran and actively seek to discourage them," the State Department said in a written reply to questions about US protests to Kiev on this issue.

"Ukraine assured us they would exercise restraint in arms transfers to areas of concern," the Department said in a statement.

It added that "the issue of responsible arms sales is one we discuss with a number of governments including Ukraine."

The Department's statement provided no further details.

But officials said the administration was worried in particular about the possible sale of missiles to Tehran and that warning to Ukraine have been issued.

Concerns about possible arms sales to Iran — which the United States has branded an outlaw state and accused of international terrorism — is the latest tension of surface between Washington and Kiev.

The United States and its allies are increasingly anxious about Ukraine's foot-dragging on commitments to give up the nuclear arsenal it acquired when the Soviet Union collapsed.

Ukraine's nuclear missiles and bombers make it the world's third-largest nuclear power after the United States and Russia and in recent months Kiev has stiffened its conditions for destroying and dismantling them.

Some NATO Foreign Ministers warned Ukraine last week that if it persists in delaying on giving up its arsenal, it will be denied the special partnership status being fashioned by the western alliance for former Warsaw Pact states.

US officials have said a promised relationship with Ukraine, including financial assistance, cannot flower if Kiev does not abide by its promises

to give up the weapons.

Ukraine's ambassador to the United States, Oleg Bilorus, complained at a meeting with reporters that Ukraine was branded inaccurately as a nuclear proliferator and had made more progress than acknowledged on dismantling its stocks.

He admitted, however, there is a growing pro-nuclear lobby in the Ukrainian parliament.

Ukraine's economy is in a downward spiral and US officials are worried that, like Russia, it will seek to market military hardware for hard currency.

President Clinton has made halting the spread of weapons, particularly nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, a high priority of his administration.

Washington imposed sanctions on Russia to halt a rocket engine sale to India. It protested against Moscow's transfer of submarines to Iran but failed to stop that transaction.

The United States is the largest arms exporter in the world and many countries argue that it should not have a free hand marketing weapons while they are unfairly restricted.

Kazakh parliament dissolved

ALMA-ATA, Kazakhstan, Dec 10: Kazakhstan's parliament voted Friday to disband and let President Nursultan Nazarbayev rule by decree. Lawmakers also ordered the government to find them new jobs, reports AP.

The parliament, called the Supreme Soviet, was elected in 1990 when oil-rich Kazakhstan was still part of the Soviet Union.

US admiral for political reconciliation in Somalia

MOGADISHU, Dec 10: The head of United Nations operations in Somalia, who once defamed warlord Mohamed Farah Aided as a terrorist, is now encouraging Somali peace talks and says political reconciliation is vital, reports Reuters.

Retired US Admiral Jonathan Howe, speaking a year after US marines streamed ashore in Mogadishu on a mission to end famine in Somalia, said on Thursday he wanted to see reconciliation among all factions in the war ravaged country.

Encouraging this week's talks in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa is only part of his new plan for rehabilitating Somalia after the failure of taking on Aided militarily.

US officials are smarting from a public outcry at home over their decisions to help fly Aided to Ethiopia only weeks after condemning him for the killing of American servicemen.

"I didn't fly Aided to Addis Ababa," Howe told reporters.

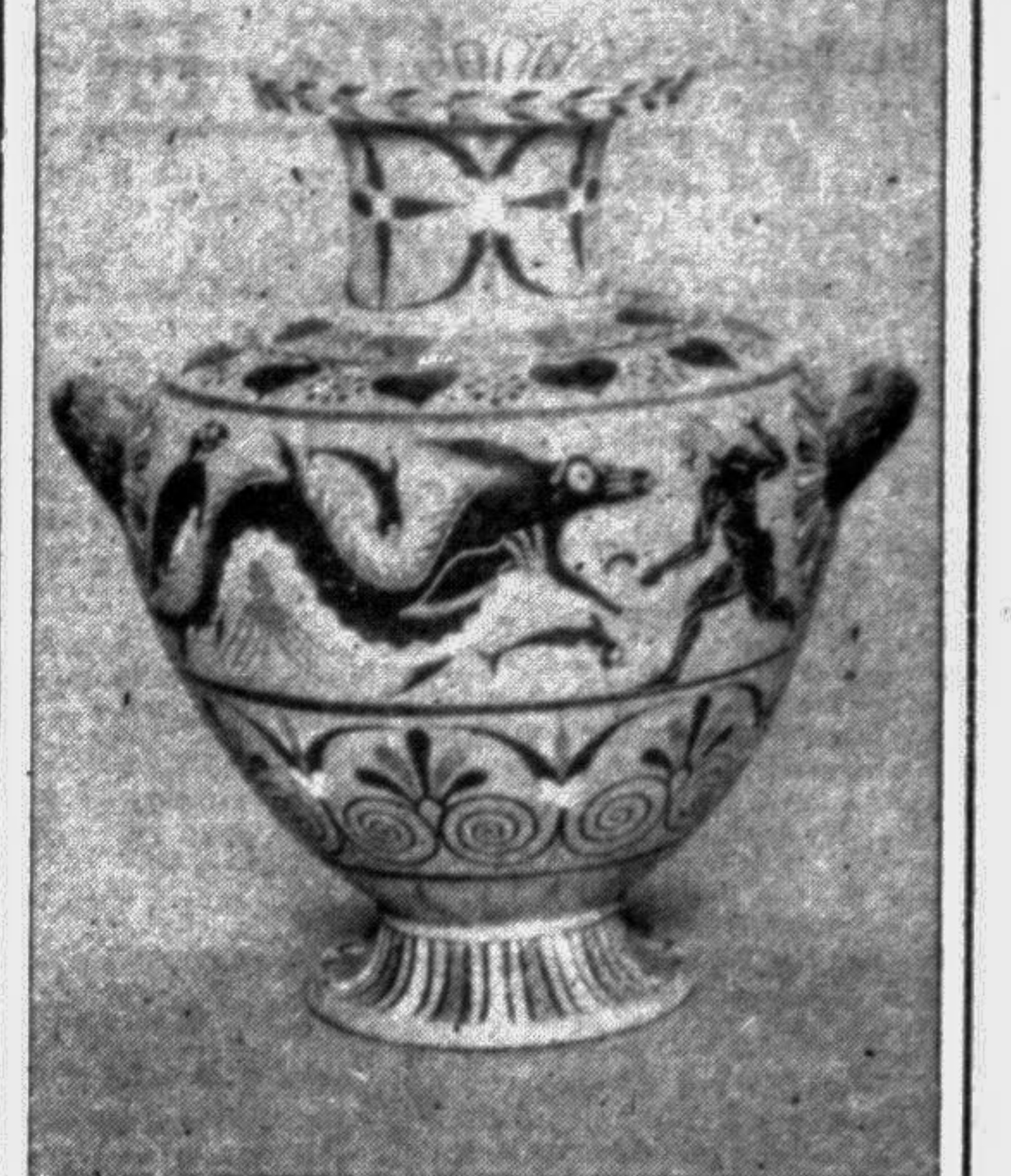
In July Howe said the United Nations would never negotiate with "terrorist" Aided and offered a dollar 25,000 reward for his capture after the killing of 24 Pakistani troops.



American singer LaToya Jackson, sister of mega popstar Michael Jackson, poses with an Israeli soldier in Bethlehem in the West Bank on Thursday during a private visit to Israel. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Greek vase fetches world-record price



This 2000-year-old Greek vase fetched a record sum of 3,287,290 US dollars, ten times its estimated value, when it was auctioned by Sotheby's in London, Thursday. — AFP photo

LONDON: A Greek vase decorated with scenes from mythology fetched a world-record price for an antiquity on Thursday when it sold for 2.2 million pounds (dollar 3.29 million) at a London auction, reports Reuters.

The 6th BC century vase featuring the Greek God hero battling with a giant sea monster was the star attraction at an antiquities sale by auctioneers Sotheby's.

"I can't believe it. I am stunned," said the head of Sotheby's antique department, Felicity Nicholson, who had set a top estimate of 300,000 pounds (448,000 dollar) for the piece.

The vase was sold by a private trust and went to an unidentified telephone bidder, Sotheby's said.

Marriage going out of fashion

MOSCOW: Marriage seems to be going out of fashion in Russia where the number of couples who wed fell by 20.3 per cent in two years while the divorce rate rose 15 per cent, the Russian Social Security Ministry said Thursday, reports AFP.

A ministry study quoted by the agency Interfax said the number of separations rose by 83,000 between 1990 and 1992 while the number of marriages dropped 268,000 in the same period.

One in two people will divorce during their lifetime, and a third of all divorces were among young couples who had lived together for less than five years, the agency added.

Some 14 per cent of children are from one-parent families, four per cent increase on the 1989 statistics.

And the number of children born outside marriage is also on the increase, having risen from 16 per cent in 1991 to 17.1 per cent in 1992, the agency added.

Winter a SAD time

WASHINGTON: Despite the holidays, it's the SAD time of year for millions of people the world over. Experts say long nights and gloomy days can cause Seasonal Affective Disorder, the depression and listlessness of the "winter blues," reports AP.

Dr. Norman E. Rosenthal, a psychiatrist with the National Institute of Mental Health, said Thursday that the short days and reduced sunlight of winter trigger a change in brain chemistry among many people. The change may set off a vicious cycle of depression now formally recognized in medical literature as Seasonal Affective Disorder.

"Winter after winter, these people experience lethargy and fatigue, sadness and despair," Rosenthal told a news conference. He said the illness disrupts personal relationships, causes victims to overeat, gain weight and to become indifferent toward their jobs.

For years, the "winter blues" have been regarded as "psychiatric curiosities," Rosenthal said. But the publication of SAD case studies represents "an acknowledgement by the medical community that this is a real illness."

Rosenthal reports in the JAMA articles that people suffering from SAD have been successfully treated by systematic exposure to high levels of artificial light. Somehow, he said, this added light absorbed by the eyes restores the balance of brain chemicals.

Women, by a margin of 3 or 4 to one, are more often affected by SAD than men, and the disorder in women usually starts after puberty and diminishes after menopause.

Typhoon hits Philippines again

MANILA, Dec 10: The Philippines was struck by its second typhoon in a week today just as it was beginning to recover from a storm that killed at least 177 people in the country, reports Reuters.

Typhoon Manny hit Sorsogon on the southern tip of the main Luzon island and Northern Samar around dawn, weather forecaster Narciso Iborra said.

By mid-morning it was battering smaller islands west of Luzon with 85 knot winds but was mostly over open water. It was expected to hit Marinduque and Mindoro in the next 24 hours.

'Asian concept about human rights is belied by facts'

WASHINGTON, Dec 10: The argument by some Asian governments that economic development automatically leads to improved respect for human rights is belied by the facts, Human Rights Watch said Thursday, reports AFP.

The "Asian concept" of human rights promoted by east Asian governments, which plays down political and civil rights and stresses cultural differences, became a key factor in the region in the past year, the US-based human rights group said in its annual report.

The concept was produced by "authoritarian east Asian governments which felt they deserved praise, not censure,

for their efforts to alleviate poverty; even if some civil rights were curtailed in the process," the report said.

It has been shown that repression can impede development; inability to speak out against bad policies can stymie economic progress," the group said in its report.

Many Asian non-government organisations took a stand against the "Asian concept" in the past year, notably against the idea that it should be left up to their governments to decide when development was sufficient for human rights to be considered.

The idea that once countries such as China, Vietnam, and Indonesia had expanded sufficiently economically to allow an improved human rights record was of little comfort to those currently in prison, the report said.

It also belied the experience of China, where economic reform has been accompanied by increased political repression.

"The Chinese government continued to arrest, detain, and torture peaceful critics and to interfere with freedom of expression," the report said.

"Releases of dissidents were carefully timed to manipulate world opinion," particularly in relation to China's bid to host the 2000 Olympics which failed largely due to protests over its human rights record.

"Torture continued despite an upsurge in prosecutions of police and prison officials," and those who were released were harassed, the report said.

In Myanmar, the ruling junta "continued to be a human rights pariah, despite its cosmetic gestures to respond to international criticism," such as allowing family visits to 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, who remained under house arrest for a fifth year.

In Cambodia, the success of peaceful elections "obscured the very real human rights problems that remained, including the failure to hold officials accountable for abuses," the report said.

In Hong Kong the government's pro-form stance in the run-up to the handover to China in 1997 was "tarnished somewhat in July when governor (Chris) Patten argued that there was no need for an independent human rights commission, as called for by the legislative council."

Human rights watch blamed political leaders for continuing violence in the wake of the 1992 destruction of a Hindu mosque at Ayodhya, accusing them of trying to "exploit rising tension between Hindus and Muslims" for their own ends.

ROK unhappy over Ghali's plan to visit DPRK

SEOUL, Dec 10: South Korea Friday reacted cautiously to the announced visit to North Korea by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali this month, saying it would be welcome if it produced progress on the nuclear issue, reports AFP.

"Our position was and is that Boutros-Ghali's North Korea visit is favourable if it will contribute to solving North Korea's nuclear problem," an official said on condition of anonymity.

"But we are concerned that North Korea may try to use the visit for political propaganda," he added.