

BRIEFLY

Kravchuk wins by-election: Former President Leonid Kravchuk won election to parliament, just three months after being narrowly defeated in his bid for a second term as Ukraine's leader, election officials said yesterday. AP reports from Kiev.

Kravchuk, a former Communist Party ideology chief, received 87 per cent of the votes cast in Sunday's by-election in a two-candidate race to fill a seat vacated by the death of a lawmaker.

4 die in Indian train mishap: Four people were killed and nine injured Sunday when they were struck by a tunnel while riding on the top of a train to Chandigarh, a railway official said. AP reports from Chandigarh.

The 13 people were among many Indians who travel to the state of Punjab each year to apply for jobs as railway ticket collectors. Every year, 32,000 people take an exam for only 600 vacancies in that position.

Russian guards kill 22 Tajiks: Russian guards controlling Tajikistan's uneasy frontier with Afghanistan killed 22 Tajik rebels who tried to enter the former Soviet republic over the past two days, a border-guards spokesman said yesterday. Reuter reports from Dushanbe.

He said the rebels had stepped up cross-border attacks after representatives of Tajikistan's ex-communist government and the opposition signed a temporary ceasefire in Tehran on September 12.

Attack on Kohl's party offices: An arson attack on the Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) offices near Bonn caused damage estimated at half-a-million marks (about 300,000 dollars), police said on Sunday. AFP reports from Bonn.

A police spokesman said the attack, which happened overnight Saturday, could have been politically motivated. The party is led by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

18 British sailors hurt: Eighteen British sailors were hurt, five of them seriously, when a lifeboat crashed into the sea on Sunday during a routine rescue exercise on a ferry in this French Channel port, local authorities said. AFP reports from Cherbourg.

The accident, which happened around 10:30 am (0930 GMT), involved sailors from the P and O Car ferry Pride of Hampshire, which covers the Portsmouth-Cherbourg route for the British company.

44 arrested in China: Forty-four people, including a Myanmarese, have been arrested in a major bust that smashed eight drug rings, an official report said on Monday. AP reports from Beijing.

Yang Maoxian, from Northern Myanmar, was among those arrested by police in southwest China's Yunnan province in May, the China Daily reported. Yunnan borders Myanmar and Laos, which together with Thailand make up the "Golden Triangle," responsible for most of the world's opium and heroin production.

Temple damaged in Australia: Australia's largest Jewish temple, the Central Synagogue at Bondi Junction in Sydney's eastern suburbs, was greatly damaged by fire on Sunday night. Reuter reports from Sydney.

The fire gutted the main sanctuary of the three-storey synagogue, which has 3,000 members. The fire was believed to have started in a second-storey air conditioning unit, and there were no suspicious circumstances, a fire brigade spokesman said yesterday.

Plea for Japanese citizenship: Members of a Japanese citizens group said Monday they will ask their government to grant citizenship to children of Japanese fathers and Filipino mothers, AP reports from Manila.

Most of the mothers were Filipino entertainers in Japan, said the Rev Toshifumi Aso, a Protestant pastor and secretary general of the Citizens' Network for Japanese-Filipino Children.

Photographer found dead: An Algerian news photographer was found dead on Sunday from a knife attack in a town west of Algiers, security sources said. AFP reports from Algiers.

The photographer, Mouloud Baroudi, worked for the National Film News Agency. His body was found at around 7:00 am (0600 GMT) on Sunday morning near his house in the town of Mahlem near to Tipaza, a security services statement said.

Medics for former Yugoslavia: Indonesia yesterday sent 219 military medics to war-torn former Yugoslavia. Reuter reports from Jakarta.

Mainly Muslim Indonesia, which chairs the 111-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), already has 25 military observers among the UN peacekeeping forces stationed in Bosnia.

Extremists kill 2 in Egypt: Suspected Muslim militants killed a village guard and a farmer in the southern Egyptian town of Mallawi, which has become the focus of attacks by extremist groups, security sources said yesterday. Reuter reports from Assiut, Egypt.

They said gunmen shot and killed village guard Aliam Sayyid Ibrahim as he was walking from his field in the village of Al-Shamsi, near Mallawi 220 km (130 miles) south of Cairo, late on Sunday.

Thai floods claim 18: A young boy died of injuries on Monday bringing to 18 the number of holiday-makers killed when a flash flood swept down a mountainside into a stream where swimmers frolicked. AP reports from Nakhon Nayok.

"It happened so suddenly — the water overflowed from the mountain," said Charathai Teetprach, governor of Nakhon Nayok province. "It has never happened in 40 years." The provincial hospital said the 18th victim, a boy about five or six years old, died on injuries sustained by the torrent of water on Sunday at Wang Takrai park, 90 kilometers (56 miles) northeast of Bangkok in Nakhon Nayok province. At least six others were being treated and 11 were reported missing.

Nicole Kidman UNICEF envoy: UNICEF on Monday appointed Nicole Kidman as its goodwill ambassador in Australia. AP reports from Sydney.

"Its work is a major contributor to correcting the problems faced by those less fortunate than we are," said the Australian-born actress, who is married to box office superstar Tom Cruise.

Buthelezi storms into TV studio

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 26: South African state television said it planned the "strongest possible" legal action against Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who stormed into a television studio during a live interview on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Police confirmed today that a gun was confiscated during scuffles in a Durban studio of the state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) during the Prime Time Agenda programme.

Television viewers saw a handgun waved as cameras tried to track a fracas when Buthelezi, leader of the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party, burst into the studio to be rate Prince Sifiso Zulu.

Garbage heaps in Surat put the lie to 'war' against plague

SURAT, Sept 26: Tons of garbage remain uncleared across this plague-infested western Indian city, mocking official claims that a war has been declared on the deadly disease, reports AFP.

Huge piles of decaying waste are a familiar sight in all residential and commercial districts, much of it left behind by unprecedented floods that ravaged Surat last month.

Tens of thousands of shanty dwellers live in the midst of such dirt and squalor, seemingly unconcerned that the rats which carry the plague-causing fleas thrive on these garbage dumps.

Panic stricken residents have fled the city, the centre of India's diamond trade, in

the hundreds of thousands while those who have remained behind are bitter about the lethargy of the administration.

The anger has even triggered attacks on municipal sweepers in recent days.

"What can we do? Asked a worried Praveen Privedi, the district magistrate of Surat, where at least 44 people have died of plague. "We know the situation is very serious, but so many municipal employees have run away from here."

A team from the New Delhi-based National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) which toured Surat last week was shocked by what it saw — the long accumulated garbage and numerous pools of stagn-

ant, dirty water.

"If the problem is not addressed immediately, it will surely lead to another epidemic," warned an NICD official speaking on condition of anonymity.

Local doctors wholeheartedly agree.

"The Surat administration is nonexistent," said Pradeep Pette, a physician. "Eighty per cent of the municipal staff is not reporting for duty. How can such filth be removed?"

Desperate residents have simply taken to burning the garbage heaps. Young men can occasionally be seen setting fire to trapped rats on busy streets in line with an official order to destroy all rodents.

Surat, with a population of

some two million, is divided into two halves by the river Tapti, which flooded the city late last month, leaving behind huge amounts of rubbish and dead animals.

Residents said carcasses were taken away days after they began to rot.

"I don't remember when I last saw anyone clearing garbage near my house," said Vishnu Saha, a 39-year-old factory worker and resident of Ved road, one of the poor neighbourhoods worst hit by the plague.

"When it comes to sanitation, there is no government in Surat," added Hari Solanki, a shopkeeper. "You have to be either influential or pay bribes to get your garbage removed."

But people here are not im-

pressed. In some areas, municipal employees who turned up for work following the 50 rupee offer after weeks away from the job were pounced upon and thrashed by angry residents.

"This has led to more problems," said Pravedi. Surat's senior most civil officer. "Among my staff even those who have been reporting for duty are not willing to go to many places."

On Sunday, a senior municipal officer's promise at a press conference here to have all garbage cleared away within a week drew mocking laughter from local journalists who said they had heard such pledges too many times before.

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