

LTTE condemns artillery attacks on Jaffna

COLOMBO, Oct 1: Tamil rebels Saturday condemned the military's attacks on civilians in rebel-held areas in what could be an obstacle to the talks to end the 11-year-old ethnic war, reports AP.

"Barbaric aerial and artillery attacks on the Jaffna peninsula left 20 civilians dead. This is surely against the spirit of the peace process," the rebels said in a statement from their headquarters in northern Sri Lanka.

They were apparently referring to Sunday's military operation near Achchuvelli town, 310 kilometers (191 miles) north of Colombo, which officials said killed 75 rebels.

"As far as we know, no civilians were killed," said Major Rohan Induruwa, the military spokesman.

Four government officials plan to visit the rebel stronghold of Jaffna on Oct 13 and 14, to discuss ways of ending the Tamil insurrection.

which has left more than 34,000 people dead.

The socialist government which came to power in August immediately offered to hold unconditional peace talks. The guerrillas agreed even though Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga to Jaffna has rejected their demand for a cease fire. The military advised against a cease fire because the rebels could fortify their positions during that period.

Since then, fighting has escalated between the two groups. The rebels blew up a naval ship, killing an estimated 25 sailors. In an apparent retaliation, the military attacked the rebels.

The ethnic war has focussed on the alleged discrimination of the minority Tamils by the majority Sinhalese, who control the government.

Tamils make up 18 percent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people.

Arafat warns against new Jewish settlements in WB

TUNIS, Oct 1: PLO chairman Yasser Arafat warned Israel on Friday against any expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, after Israeli officials said 15,000 homes were to be built along the borders of the West Bank, reports AFP.

Speaking to reporters here at the end of a short visit, Arafat said "any expansion of settlements or confiscation of land for building new (Israeli) homes would be a flagrant violation" of the peace accords signed by Israel and the PLO.

Arafat also said he had met officials of his mainstream Fatah movement in Tunis to discuss plans for holding elections to a Palestinian autonomy council. The PLO leader has said the elections should take place in November.

On Thursday Israeli Housing Ministry officials said the

Jewish state was planning to build 15,000 homes along the borders of the occupied West Bank.

Earlier Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin pledged to reconsider his decision to allow new building at the Jewish settlement of Alfe Menashe inside the West Bank.

Rabin made the promise in a cabinet meeting after Palestinian and even some ministers protested.

Arafat asked Tunisia to send transport experts to Gaza during a brief stopover in Tunis on Wednesday, when he met President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

The PLO leader, who was based in Tunis for 12 years, returned to Gaza for good on July 12.

Another reports from New York says: US Secretary of

State Warren Christopher said Friday the six Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council have agreed to lift partially their boycott against Israel.

Christopher said the council made a "commitment no longer to enforce secondary and tertiary aspects of the boycott and not to discriminate against US companies."

The United States and the council also pledged to keep sanctions in place against Iraq.

"We agreed that we must maintain the sanctions as long as Baghdad fails to carry out all UN resolutions," Christopher said after meeting representatives of the GCC in New York.

The GCC groups Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Meanwhile, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres will have meetings over the week-

end with the Foreign Ministers of Arab League members Tunisia and Qatar, an Israeli source at the United Nations confirmed today.

Neither country has diplomatic relations with Israel. All three ministers are in New York for the UN General Assembly.

The source said Peres would discuss with his Tunisian counterpart, Habib Ben Yahia, prospects for establishing low-level diplomatic relations, similar to those recently agreed between Israel and Morocco.

The meeting with Qatar Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani would focus on enhancing economic links.

The sources said this would be the second meeting between the two countries' ministers, who also conferred during last year's general assembly.

Off the Record

Postman jailed for stealing sex devices

LONDON: A postman was sentenced to one year in jail after stealing enough sex aids to fill eight mailbags, reports AP.

Authorities said Michael Hales, a 21-year veteran of the postal service, learned to spot sex packages sent through the mail by identifying their brown paper wrapping and foreign stamps.

During a five-year spree, Hales stole inflatable dolls, magazines, photographs, condoms and other items, prosecutors said in Kingston Crown Court.

"Your motive was your own sexual gratification," Judge Giles Forester told Hales at Friday's sentencing.

"I accept it was not for financial gain. But public confidence in the postal service is necessary and in this case there has been a serious breach of trust."

Hales was caught when his work locker and home in southwest London were searched after a supervisor became suspicious.

Human gene eases Parkinson-like condition in animals

NEW YORK: Rats with a brain condition like Parkinson's disease showed improvement when a human gene was inserted in their brain cells, a finding that suggests a possible treatment for people, reports AP.

The strategy has also shown promise in monkeys, said researcher Dr Matthew During of the Yale University School of Medicine.

Parkinson's disease, which robs people of control over their movements, affects millions of people worldwide.

Like Parkinson patients, the rats lacked a crucial substance called dopamine in a certain part of their brains. The inserted gene let cells make a substance called tyrosine hydroxylase, which indirectly stimulated dopamine production.

Scientists used a harmless virus called an adeno-associated virus to deliver the gene into the rat brain cells. The work is reported in the October issue of the journal Nature Genetics by During and colleagues at Yale and elsewhere.

Fred Gage, a professor of neuroscience at the University of California at San Diego, called the findings encouraging. Studies using other viruses have gotten similar results, he said. Scientists will have to compare the results of research with the virus During used against results with other viruses, he said.

At a recent scientific meeting, During reported preliminary results showing that the strategy also reduced Parkinson-like symptoms of tremor, rigidity and slow movement in African green monkeys.

Priest accused of caressing woman

SINGAPORE: A Singapore court has jailed a Roman Catholic priest who touched and caressed a Filipino woman on a Singapore airlines flight, a newspaper reported on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Emmanuel Joseph Arumainayagam, 40, who holds a Sri Lankan passport, was sentenced to one week in jail and fined 500 Singapore dollars (\$377 US dollars) after he pleaded guilty to using criminal force against her, the Straits Times said.

Both Arumainayagam and the 22-year-old Filipino boarded the flight from Manila to Singapore on September 23, the paper said.

At some point during the flight, Arumainayagam who was sitting two seats away from the woman, reached across the unoccupied seat between them and touched her waist and caressed her arm.

The woman complained to the crew and asked to change her seat. The priest was arrested on arrival at Singapore's Changi Airport.

Space capsule

PARIS: The European Space Agency signed a contract Friday for the French company Aerospatiale to build an experimental space capsule for a test launch without a crew in 1996, reports AP.

The two-seat capsule, called the Atmospheric Reentry Demonstrator or ARD, would cost 2.1 billion francs (dfrs 396 million), according to the contract.

Europe wants "to show its credibility and capacity" to contribute to the building of spacecraft like the multinational effort to build the orbital station Alpha, said Jean-Marie Luton, director general of the 27-nation European Space Agency.

A new Ariane 5 rocket is to launch the capsule in April 1996 from Korou, French Guiana, on the northern coast of South America, site of current Ariane launchings.

The first Ariane 5 is to be launched about six months before the capsule test.

The capsule's mission will be a suborbital flight to last about two hours, splashing down in the Pacific. It will test materials and instruments used for thermal protection, re-entry and retrieval.

The capsule will play a role in the agency's project to build a Crew Transport Vehicle, though no launch date has been announced. The manned capsule is expected to touch down on land.

Hutus take control of refugee camp in Zaire

GOMA, Oct 1: Hutu bandits seized one of the largest refugee camps in eastern Zaire on Friday, and all United Nations and relief agencies pulled out after staff members were threatened, UN officials said, reports AP.

"We've had our colleagues physically threatened with rocks and machetes," said Lyndall Sachs, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "This was a verbal threat that we took seriously. The last thing we need is aid workers killed."

There has been violence and several threats over the past few days at the Katala refugee camp, home to an estimated 270,000 Rwandans who fled in July.

A Zairean boy scout, helping to control traffic at the camp, was killed Wednesday in a fight with Hutu militiamen. Hutu refugees also threatened UNHCR staff trying to move traders to a new market site at Katala because of a false rumor that they were being taken back to Rwanda.

The incident at Katala took place as a high-level delegation of UN and Zairian officials was in Goma to assess security at the camps and investigate the possibility of separating defeated Hutu soldiers from civilian refugees.

Sachs said the bandits made direct threats against seven international aid workers by name.



Aristide loyalists beat up a man (R) believed to be an 'attache', an armed civilian backing the military regime during a rally in downtown Port-au-Prince on Friday. — AFP photo

Uzbek warplanes bomb northern Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Oct 1: Uzbekistan's warplanes on Friday bombed Afghanistan's northern province of Kunduz, killing and injuring several people, state-run Radio Kabul reported, says AFP.

The fighters attacked Afghan territory at mid-day, said the report, which was monitored here.

The radio broadcast, controlled by supporters of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, said that fighting has continued in Ergank, near Kunduz City, for the past four days, killing or wounding some 200 people.

The clashes are between presidential troops and the Hezb-I-Islami faction of ex-premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who has received help from the Uzbek forces of General Rashid Dostum. Dostum controls several provinces in northern Afghanistan.

The report said the president's troops had captured about 300 enemy soldiers, including some generals.

The government troops also seized six tanks in the fighting.

The president has accused in the past the Uzbek regime of President Islam Karimov of "interference" in Afghan internal affairs.

Meanwhile Reuter adds: A UN peace mission on Friday condemned what it called a brutal round of fighting in Afghanistan and renewed an appeal to warring factions to immediately stop all hostilities.

The mission, led by former

3000 Egyptians arrested in 5 days

CAIRO, Oct 1: Egyptian police have arrested more than 3,000 people in a nationwide crackdown in the past five days, Cairo security chief Mahmud Wagdi said on Friday, reports AFP.

Wagdi, quoted by Egypt's Middle East News Agency, said 1,862 of those arrested were wanted for various crimes, but he did not specify whether they included suspected Islamic militants.

Tunisian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Mestiri, said in a statement that is "views with alarm and distress the savage hostilities taking place in and around (the capital) Kabul."

"The mission condemns this brutal round of fighting, which has no clear winner but only losers," the statement issued in Islamabad said.

The renewed peace appeal came three days after a devastating rocket and mortar attack on the war-shattered Afghan capital that Kabul radio said killed at least 58 people and wounded 224.

The radio, which is controlled by President Burhanuddin Rabbani, blamed the attacks on his opponents led by Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum.

The UN statement said the fighting was all the more disturbing at a time when Mestiri was consulting prominent independent Afghans on peace ideas in the third phase of his mission that began earlier this year.



Some 500 persons attend inauguration ceremonies in the prayer room of the new mosque in the central French city of Lyon on Friday. The 30-million franc project (about 5 million dollars) was partly financed by Saudi Arabia. — AFP photo

Students protest ban on Islamic headscarves in France

PARIS, Oct 1: In the first major challenge of a new government ban, hundreds of high school students mobilised Friday in support of four Muslim girls barred from classes because they insist on wearing Islamic headscarves, reports AP.

The protest outside the Roman-Rolland school in Goussainville, a heavily immigrant suburb 27 kilometers (17 miles) north of Paris, highlighted the divisiveness of France's long running scarf controversy. While most students back the girls, many teachers support the ban's goal of keeping public schools free of religious influence.

"It shouldn't be a choice

between education and faith," said Rachid Amaoui, 20, a Moroccan born student who helped organise the protest. "It's an attack on Muslim culture, and we're not going to stand for it."

Dozens of riot policemen deployed near the school. But the estimated 300 demonstrators many who came by train from neighbouring suburbs were peaceful as they awaited word on whether school administrators would support their campaign.

The school's administrative council, however, adopted the ban in its own rules during a meeting Friday evening. Students vowed to continue their strike, but no incidents

were reported after the meeting and police stationed outside the school left Friday night.

The protest coincided with a warning to France's Muslims by Interior Minister Charles Pasqua that they must ensure their religion conforms with French laws and traditions.

It would be a major risk if influences contrary to our values, and our conception of the rights of men and women, developed in your community," Pasqua said in Lyon at the inauguration of a long delayed new mosque.

An association of Lyon residents had campaigned for at most 15 years against construction of the 31 million

franc (dfrs 5.8 million) mosque, the second largest in France. It has a 25-meter (82-foot) high minaret and can accommodate 2,500 worshippers.

Much of the funding for the mosque came from Saudi Arabia. The Saudi ambassador to France attended the inauguration, as did Roman Catholic, Jewish and Protestant leaders.

Pasqua, in charge of the national police, has overseen a crackdown on French based sympathisers of Muslim fundamentalists in Algeria and sought to deport illegal immigrants many of them Muslims from North Africa.

"France and Islam must soon reach an accord," Pasqua

said. "For Islam, this means total acceptance of the French reality, including its principles as a secular republic."

"There shouldn't simply be Islam in France," he said. "There should be an Islam of France."

A leftist union group, the General Confederation of Labour, said Pasqua was guilty of "hypocrisy and provocation" in his speech.

"The laws which he and his government have passed have made life more difficult for immigrants in France, including many Muslims," the federation said.

Debate over the wearing of headscarves at public schools has simmered in France for

five years. It flared with new intensity when Education Minister Francois Bayrou announced an outright ban a few weeks ago on the scarves and other "ostentatious" religious symbols worn by students.

The four girls barred from classes at Goussainville have declined to speak publicly about the dispute, though they have shown up each weekday at the school library. Some of the young men organising the protests on their behalf have been depicted by French authorities as under the influence of fundamentalists.

Islam, with a 5 million adherents in France, is the country's second-largest religion after Roman Catholicism.

BRIEFLY

Indian bus mishap claims 35: At least 35 persons were killed and 60 others injured, many seriously, when a Balasore-bound private bus fell from a bridge into a nullah near Basta, about 35 kms from Balasore yesterday, according to official sources. PTI reports from Balasore.

12 injured persons were admitted to the district headquarters hospital here where condition of six was critical.

Burundi chooses new president: Burundi, teetering on the brink of an ethnic bloodbath like this year's mass slaughter in neighbouring Rwanda, chose a new president on Friday, Reuter reports from Bujumbura.

The National Assembly elected acting President Sylvestre Ntibantuganya, a member of the majority Hutu tribe, to replace the head of state killed in the multiple assassination in April that touched off the Rwandan massacres.

Gas tanker blast kills 4 in Bombay: Four people were killed Saturday when they inhaled toxic chlorine gas which leaked from a tanker following a road accident near Bombay, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reports from New Delhi.

Some 280 others were taken ill and taken to hospitals when the tanker exploded after crashing into another tanker on a highway in Thane, near Bombay, PTI said.

2 UN aid workers held in Turkey: Turkish authorities have arrested a Briton and an American working for a UN aid agency after Turkish border guards caught them in possession of ammunition, the Anatolia news agency said, AFP reports from Ankara.

The agency did not say when Joseph Donahue of the United States and Christopher King from Britain were arrested. The arrest has not been announced by the Turkish authorities.

6 die in Milan explosion: An explosion probably caused by leaking gas ripped through an apartment house Friday, killing at least six people, officials said, AP reports from Milan, Italy.

Fifteen other people were injured when the blast wrecked the bottom floors of the seven-story building in downtown Milan.

Ex-Argentine ruler Viola dies: Former dictator and General Roberto Viola, who ruled Argentina for nine months in 1981, died Friday of a heart attack, according to an official source, AFP reports from Buenos Aires.

Viola, 76, had been in the hospital since Wednesday under intensive care.

3 Indians killed in Mexico: Three indigenous Indians were killed in a clash between rival religious groups near the bitterly divided southern Mexican town of San Juan Chamula, officials said Friday, Reuter reports from Mexico City.

The killers, members of the area's dominant group of so-called Catholic traditionalists, attacked four Evangelical Christians with guns and sticks in the small village of Ikalumtic about an hour outside San Juan Chamula.

Kim to be sworn in this month: North Korean leader-designate Kim Jong-Il will be officially sworn in as state president and party general secretary this month, a southern newspaper said yesterday, AFP reports from Seoul.

The Han Kyoreh Shinmun, in a dispatch from its Washington correspondent, quoted an official of the Korea-North American Friendship Association as saying he had been invited to attend the inaugural ceremony in Pyongyang.

UN extends mission in Somalia: The Security Council decided on Friday to prolong the mandate of its 15,000 peacekeepers in Somalia for another month until it reaches a decision on whether to withdraw the troops, AFP reports from United Nations.

In a resolution adopted by a vote of 14 in favour with one abstention from the United States, the Security Council said the mandate would be extended for a period of one month expiring October 31.

Hamas activist shot dead in WB: Israeli troops late Friday shot dead a militant from the Islamic resistance movement Hamas as he was preparing to attack a Jewish settler leader near the tomb of the patriarchs on the West Bank, military sources reported, AFP says from Hebron.

They said Nader Naim Abu Shaher, 20, was slain by troops guarding the tomb as he was about to assault Rabbi Meir Levinger. One of the soldiers was stabbed and wounded in the back by Shaher, according to the sources, who said the troops then opened fire on him at point blank range.

7 killed in Russian plane crash: An overloaded cargo plane carrying 19 people and tons of vegetables crashed Friday while trying to take off from an airport in Russia's Far East, authorities said. Seven people were killed, AP reports from Moscow.

The twin-engine turboprop Antonov-8 went down at the Chafbukha airport in the Khabarovsk region, said Anatoly Streletsov, a spokesman for the Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations.

IAEA resumes tech aid to Israel: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Friday it had resumed technical assistance to Israel, broken off in 1981, Reuter reports from Vienna.

A statement issued by the Vienna-based UN nuclear watchdog said the decision had been taken at the IAEA's annual general conference in Vienna earlier this month.

Volcano erupts on Kamchatka: The Klyuchevskiy Volcano in Russia's Far East has come to life, spewing ashes as high as 13 kilometers (8 miles) into the air, the State Ministry for Emergency Situations said Saturday, AP reports from Moscow.

The volcano, in a sparsely populated part of the Kamchatka Peninsula, does not endanger any towns, ministry duty officer Eduard Kozhukov said.