

US, S Korea reaffirm defence commitments

WASHINGTON, Oct 8: The United States and South Korea on Friday voiced concern about the North Korean security threat and declared a continuing need for their closest military cooperation, reports AP.

The two countries "remain deeply concerned by North Korea's continued build-up of conventional military forces as well as its development of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles," US Defence Secretary William Perry said after the 26th annual US-Korean Security Consultative Meeting.

"We are particularly concerned that the North Korean nuclear issue remains unresolved," Perry said at a joint news conference with South Korean Defence Minister Rhee Byoung-tae.

The two sides reaffirmed an earlier decision to upgrade South Korea's command role as of December 1. Control over

certain joint forces will be transferred to the chairman of the Korean joint chiefs of staff from the US-led joint command, where it has been ever since the 1950-53 Korean War, Perry said.

To maintain "our combined deterrent capability," Perry said, "we have agreed to continue to modernise and maximise our combat capabilities through close consultation on all military issues," and to continue combined exercises "necessary for defensive readiness."

That includes the "Team Spirit" joint manoeuvre that frequently angers North Korea. Dates of this year's exercise have not been set, they said.

Rhee said the 100-day mourning period for the late North Korean President Kim Il Sung ends in mid-October after which the North's intentions may become clearer.

Demand for resignation of President, PM rejected Pak govt ready to hold dialogue with opposition

ISLAMABAD, Oct 8: The ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has rejected the demands of the opposition leader Nawaz Sharif for the resignation of the president, the prime minister and holding of fresh elections, reports Xinhua.

Reacting to the opposition's 11 point package to hold dialogue with the government, Senator Sheikh Rafiq, secretary general of PPP, said the government is ready to hold dialogue with the opposition on any suggestion of constitutional reforms.

This might include proposals put forward by Nawaz Sharif like assurance to allow the

assemblies to complete their legitimate tenure, no-confidence motion against the prime minister and the supremacy of the parliament, he said in a statement issued Friday on behalf of PPP in Lahore, capital of Punjab Province.

Nawaz Sharif, president of the main opposition Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz group), Thursday presented a new "constitutional reform package" at a combined parliamentary convention of the opposition here, containing 11 proposals for reforming the constitutional framework.

The opposition leader claimed the package can be

implemented provided President Farooq Leghari and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto resign from their offices.

Sheikh Rafiq in the statement suggested to Nawaz Sharif, the former prime minister, to accept the offer of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to lead the Pakistani delegation to the United Nations on Kashmir issue.

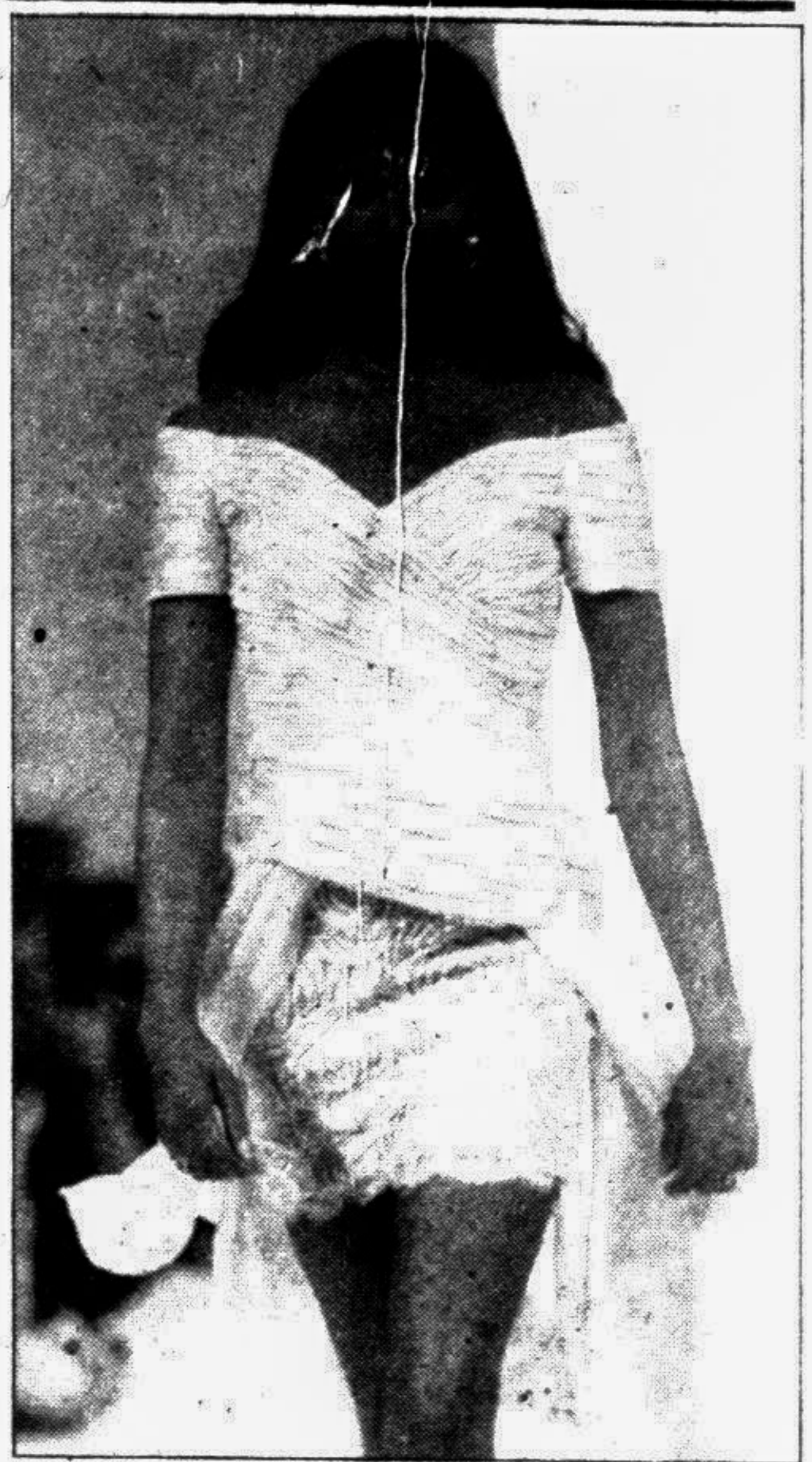
Meanwhile hundreds of opposition activists have been arrested by police across Pakistan ahead of a general strike called by opposition leader Nawaz Sharif, an opposition spokesman said today. Some 250 workers from

the opposition Pakistan Muslim League (PML) including former Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed have been detained in nearby Rawalpindi and about 300 in southern Karachi, Siddique Alfarooq said.

Speaking by telephone from PML headquarters here, the spokesman said large-scale arrests had also been made in other cities and towns since Friday. But he could not give a nationwide total immediately.

Sharif has called for a countrywide transport and business shutdown on October 11 as part of the opposition's three-week old campaign aimed at forcing Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to resign.

Off the Record



Top model Naomi Campbell presents an evening dress by Polish-born British designer Tomasz Starzewski on Friday, the first day of the London Fashion Week.

— AFP photo

Bullfighting no more an exclusive male domain

ARANJUEZ, Spain: Spanish bullfights, glorified by Ernest Hemingway as manly rituals, may never be the same, reports AP.

Palettes, bras and flowers flew into the ring from a women-only crowd of 8,500 after each kill by bullfighter Jesulin de Urbique. At one point in the made-for-television show, a woman parachuted into the ring and presented the 20-year-old matador with a kiss and a bouquet.

"He's so sweet," said a spectator identifying herself only as Rosabel. "He's really wonderful. He's very young, very spontaneous. He has a distinct style," said Victoria Roldan 60, who travelled with about 50 other housewives to watch the 3 and 1.2 hour show.

Spain's first all-female audience in a mostly male preserve was organised by TV station Antena 3 to capitalise on Urbique's popularity — he was rated Spain's favourite matador in a newspaper poll published Friday.

Traditional fans dislike him, saying he's more of a showman than an artist. But free tickets lured a capacity crowd to this town 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of Madrid.

Chants of "Jesulin, Jesulin" swept the ring as the fighter went through his moves. After a kill, Urbique took his time on the traditional parade around the ring, pausing to kiss women in the audience and sign autographs.

Urbique, who grew up poor, admits it's about money and not art. He is expected to have appeared in some 160 fights when the season ends this month, more than any other matador in history.

"Money is very important to me. I would not place myself before a bull for the love of the art," he said in a recent interview.

In the end, even the skeptics seemed convinced. Chiqui Cebran, 39, jumped up as Urbique passed by an screamed, "Come on, up here."

Hospital: advantageous venue for rapists?

INVERNESS: A male nurse faces charges of raping four female patients while they were under anesthesia at a hospital, and police are investigating claims by more than 20 other women that they may also have been sexually assaulted, reports AP.

Bruce Alan Young was arrested Monday night when an other nurse at Citrus Memorial Hospital reported seeing him having sexual intercourse with an unconscious 15-year-old girl in the surgical recovery room.

"Every complaint is being investigated," said police Chief Bill Vitt. "We are checking each victim's story in order to put them at ease."

Two rape charges were filed against Young on Monday and two later in the week.

Young, 45, has been a registered nurse since 1990. Inverness is near Florida's Gulf Coast, about 70 miles (112 kilometers) north of the Tampa Bay area.

Refugee camp showered with contents of latrine

GOMA, Zaire: A latrine serving 3,000 people a day exploded Friday, showering a refugee camp with its contents, a UN spokeswoman reported Saturday, says AFP.

"The pressure just got a bit too much," said Lyndal Sachs, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. She said the latrine at the Kituko camp, one of five on this stretch of the Zaire-Rwanda border, was positioned on top of a hill, which made fall-out worse.

The contents of the latrine went "straight up," she said.

Iranian opposition allows HR group to visit its bases

NEW YORK, Oct 8: An Iranian opposition group based in Iraq agreed on Friday to allow a human rights group to visit its bases to investigate allegations of human rights abuses, reports Reuters.

"We welcome an inspection by any impartial group," Massoud Rajavi, head of the People's Mujahideen Organisation said late Friday in a statement issued by a spokesman in Washington.

Earlier Friday, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch/Middle East said in a letter to Rajavi they were concerned about allegations of torture and detainment of Mujahideen supporters who have tried to leave or criticize the organisation.

"The allegations are nonsense and rubbish," Rajavi said, adding that earlier this year the human rights group was invited to investigate the allegations.

He said they never responded.

"The people who want to leave are threatened by the Mujahideen. They are told they will be killed if they leave," Elaha Hicks, a Human Rights Watch/Middle East researcher said.

"We have received lots of complaints from Mujahideen supporters saying they want to leave and don't want to fight any more against Iran," she added.

'Golden Triangle' drug lord executed

BEIJING, Oct 8: A man called a major drug lord of the "Golden Triangle" between China, Myanmar and Laos has been executed, official media reported Saturday, says AP.

Yang Maoxian, 48, was executed Friday shortly after being convicted of smuggling hundreds of kilograms (pounds) of heroin into China, the People's Daily said.

The report did not say how Yang was executed. Executions in China are usually by a single gunshot to the head.

Yang was arrested May 8 after crossing the border into the southwestern province of Yunnan, which borders Myanmar.

The provincial Supreme Court found Yang guilty of smuggling 212 kilograms (464 pounds) of heroin, 42.6 kilograms (94 pounds) of which he carried, the report said.

Nepali communists open campaign for Nov polls

KATHMANDU, Oct 8: The Nepal Communist Party — United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) on Friday formally opened its campaign for mid-term polls in November by announcing an election manifesto highly critical of the ruling party, reports AFP.

NCP-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal criticised the ruling Nepal Congress Party and the government of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, saying that it had "thrown out all opportunities to strengthen the multi-party system, provide relief to the people thrust the country towards the road of progress."

The forthcoming mid-term polls should be turned into an opportunity to create democratic norms and values, to consolidate national sovereignty

and to safeguard the people's right and welfare," he said.

The party has fielded 200 candidates to compete for 205 seats in the parliament. The polls are planned for November-15.

The NCP-UML, which is the second largest political party after the Nepal Congress (NC), also targeted the government's handling of the Trankpur hydroelectric dam and irrigation project.

The NCP-UML general secretary quoting the manifesto claimed that the Koirala government had not acted in the national interest when it concluded a deal with India in 1991 to provide land within Nepal's borders for the project in return for water and power rights and construction costs.



World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General Hiroshi Nakajima (R) talks with Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao in New Delhi on Friday. The WHO chief is in India for a first-hand assessment of the plague outbreak which has left more than 50 people dead.

— AFP photo

India doubles efforts to gain UNSC seat

NEW DELHI, Oct 8: India has doubled its efforts to gain a permanent seat on the Security Council, the most powerful organ of the United Nations, at the 49th session of the General Assembly currently under way, reports IPS.

But it is already running up against odds related to New Delhi's nuclear posture and the dispute over Kashmir.

In the past few months, Indian leaders have spared no effort to lobby for a position on the Security Council whose expansion is on the agenda centred on the 50th anniversary of the UN next month.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao raised the issue during his visit to the United States last May. Indian ministers and diplomats have since approached leaders of Russia, Britain, France and Germany as well.

The latest approach was made to Japan earlier this week when Indian Minister of State for external Affairs Salman Khursheed met Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei Kono in New York. The response to the Indian effort has not been negative, but is hedged with conditions and reservations.

For instance, President Clinton emphasised that the US was strongly for the entry of Germany and Japan into the Security Council, but that did not mean that it was "not open" to suggestions of other countries (such as India) joining in too.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl recently reiterated general support to India, but made no firm commitment. Moscow appears less than keen to support India's bid while Japan has straight away asked India to sign the Nuclear Non-

Proliferation Treaty of 1970.

India, Pakistan and Israel, all believed to be nuclear capable states, are not signatories to the treaty which prohibits the development of nuclear weapons by all states other than the big five, and calls upon the latter to undertake negotiations towards nuclear disarmament.

India's position on the NPT is that it is unequal and discriminatory and has failed to prevent "vertical proliferation," or a nuclear arms race and the acquisition of more and more sophisticated nuclear weapons by the atomic powers.

India exploded a nuclear device in 1974 and has since pursued a deliberately ambiguous nuclear policy, saying at times that it does not have a bomb and at others that it may have or acquire one. None of the big powers is comfortable

with India's nuclear posture.

On the thorny issue of Kashmir too, New Delhi faces some pressure from the US and to a lesser extent from France, Germany and Japan, although Britain is now closer and Russia fairly sympathetic to it.

India's claim to the Kashmir valley has been a subject of dispute with Pakistan and figured in international forums since the sub-continent's independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

Over the past five years, the issue has acquired in a different character with the eruption of a mass agitation for "azadi" variously translated as autonomy, freedom and independence in Kashmir.

New Delhi claims Pakistan has been arming and aiding Kashmiri militants.

UN airlift to Sarajevo suspended

SARAJEVO, Oct 8: The humanitarian aid airlift into Sarajevo was suspended Saturday, a day after gunfire hit two UN planes at the airport, reports AP.

The airlift is vital to Sarajevo's survival as it provides about 80 per cent of the city's food. UN officials said a winter stockpile of food has already been exhausted and they hoped the airlift could be resumed quickly.

UN spokesman Maj. Koos Sol said gunfire that hit one plane Friday was believed to have come from the Bosnian government side, and shots which hit the second plane from the Bosnian Serb side. There were no injuries. The airlift was only re-

suspended Friday after a two-week suspension. At least four planes landed, bringing in 100 tons of food or a half-day supply for the city's 360,000 residents, said Peter Kessler, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Angered over a NATO air strike on one of their tanks Sept. 22, Serb troops had blocked UN movements and kept the Sarajevo airport closed with veiled threats to shoot at planes.

They agreed to reopen the airport only after tough negotiations this week that also led to an exchange of 300 prisoners by Serb and government forces. On Friday, Bosnian Serbs refused to give clearance for a

convoy carrying nearly 100 tons of food to Sarajevo. The last food convoy to reach the Bosnian capital arrived the day of the air strike.

"This is a grim start to winter season in Sarajevo," Kessler said in Zagreb, Croatia. "Sarajevo has exhausted a winter stockpile of food that the UNHCR began to build up."

Kris Janowski, a UNHCR spokesman in Sarajevo, said there were only enough rations in the city to last three days.

Kessler said the five countries participating in the airlift would meet Saturday to review the situation. "We hope to resume the airlift later today," he said. On Mount Ignjan, southwest of Sarajevo, peacekeepers

continued to move Bosnian government soldiers out of a demilitarised zone. It was the first large-scale UN operation against the Bosnian government since the war began 2 1/2 years ago.

The aggressive action appeared aimed at preventing an escalation in fighting between Bosnian Serb and government troops after 20 Serbs were killed in a commando raid.

Sol said that 521 government troops had been "pushed out of the area," since the sweep began Thursday afternoon.

"We expect there are still some (government) soldiers in the northern part of the zone," he said.

BRIEFLY

Guerillas bomb 6 SLA targets: Guerillas bombarded six fortified positions of the pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia at dawn today but caused no casualties, security sources said, reports from Marjayoun, Lebanon.

They said the guerillas pounded the positions in Israel's south Lebanon occupation zone with mortar bombs and rocket propelled grenades for about 90 minutes.

The SLA responded by shelling suspected guerilla positions, the sources added.

Chinese Navy Chief Zhao dies: China's Navy Chief-of-Staff, Vice-Admiral Zhao Gouchen, died of an unspecified illness in Beijing last month, official media said on Saturday. He was 59, Reuter reports from Beijing.

Zhao died on September 27, the People's Daily newspaper and the Xinhua News Agency said. It gave no explanation for the delay in reporting his death and did not say if a replacement had been named.

5 fishermen killed in Brazil: Five fishermen in northeastern Brazil were brutally murdered for stealing coconuts from a private plantation, a police officer said on Friday, Reuter reports from Rio De Janeiro.

The fishermen from Maceto, Alagoas state, were looking for coconuts after failing to land a catch Sunday when they were caught by watchmen. Jose Rangel, an aide of Vanderley said.

102 kg heroin seized in UK: A sniffer dog ignored a truckload of candy bars and homed in on nine million pounds (12.5 million dollars) worth of heroin hidden in the trucks doors, British customs said on Friday, AFP reports from London.

A spokesman said the 102 kilograms (225 pounds) of heroin was found in a lorry that arrived in Kent by ferry from Vlissingen, Holland, on Thursday. The 53-year-old Greek driver was being questioned.

ROK denounces Chinese N-test: South Korea on Saturday denounced China for conducting a nuclear test and urged its giant Communist neighbour to join an international effort to stop such testing, AP reports from Seoul.

"We deeply regret the Chinese nuclear test, which came at a time when major nuclear powers are engaged in active negotiations for a test ban," the Foreign Ministry said in a brief commentary.

US anthropologist Asch dies: Anthropologist and documentary filmmaker Timothy Asch, whose films chronicled the lives of isolated cultures, has died after a lengthy battle with cancer. He was 62, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Asch had been a professor of anthropology at the University of Southern California since 1982, and was the director of the university's Centre for Visual Anthropology. He died on Monday at his home in Los Angeles, USC spokeswoman Zsa Gershick said Friday.

3 die in Assam bomb explosion: Three people were killed in a powerful bomb explosion overnight Friday in the far-eastern Indian state of Assam, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today.

Seventeen others were injured in the blast at Diphu town, the news agency said. No further details were available.

Guliyew new Azeri PM: Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev Friday appointed Faud Guliyev to be acting Prime Minister of the former Soviet republic, a presidential decree said, Reuter reports from Baku.

Guliyev, currently first deputy premier, will succeed Suret Huseynov, who was sacked on Thursday after Aliyev accused him of taking part in a coup attempt in the northwestern city of Gence on Tuesday.

4 Algerian cops shot dead: Four police were killed and a fifth seriously wounded here when gunmen opened fire at them, a newspaper report said yesterday, AFP reports from Algiers.

The four died when the assailants sprayed their car with gunfire from a red peugeot 205 at Miramar, West Algiers, early Thursday.

The fifth policeman was hurt inside the building where he lives after his colleagues dropped him off around 7:30 am (0630 GMT).

Ex-king denied entry to Romania: Former King Michael was denied entry to Romania Friday by officials who said he failed to apply formally for a visa. AP reports from Bucharest.

The government's excuse was technical, but its message was political: Officials remain concerned that Michael, forced to abdicate in 1947 by the communists, may try to restore the monarchy in Romania.

A statement broadcast on state radio criticized "the irresponsible attitude of some leaders of the political parties who encouraged an illegal visit."

Remains of 2 US airmen discovered: A Sino-US team has discovered the remains of two US airmen, who died in a crash 50 years ago, on a glacier in the Himalayan foothills in Tibet, the China Daily said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The remains of three US crew members and the wreckage of a US transport-plane were discovered at the same site in September last year.

Ariane rocket launched: An Ariane rocket was successfully launched on Friday carrying two telecommunications satellites, for Mexico and Thailand, the European Space Agency said, AFP reports from Kourou, French Guyana.