

## BRIEFLY

**7 die in ROK boat fire:** The casualty toll in a pleasure boat fire on Monday in central South Korea rose to seven confirmed dead and 36 injured among the 127 people on board, news reports said. AFP says from Seoul.

South Korean television aired amateur video footage of the fire which showed the whole superstructure of the sleek white craft drifting near the bank of a lake in the central province of Chungcheong. The boat was engulfed in flames and a column of dense black smoke billowed into the air.

**Encephalitis kills 13 in India:** Thirteen persons died of encephalitis in different places of Kamal district in Haryana late last week, an official spokesman said yesterday. PTI reports from Chandigarh.

**Quake hits western Japan:** A moderate earthquake with a preliminary magnitude reading of 4.3 rocked two ancient capitals and a major population centre in western Japan Monday morning, a local observatory said. AP reports from Tokyo.

There were no immediate reports of damage or injury from the 11.51 am (0251 GMT) earthquake that hit Kyoto, and Nara, police said.

**2 shot dead in S Egypt:** Suspected Muslim fundamentalists on Sunday night shot dead a seven-year-old girl and a policeman, and wounded five others in southern Egypt, the Interior Ministry said. AFP reports from Cairo.

The gunmen got out of a pick-up truck and opened fire on policemen guarding a police dormitory and a patrol car that happened to be passing by in the town of Malawi, in the Minya Province, 241 kilometres south of Cairo, police sources said. They then fled.

**Inmate murders 4 in US:** An inmate at a minimum security prison in rural Alabama brutally murdered four people on Sunday morning, including the prison warden and his wife, prison officials said. Reuter reports from Birmingham, Alabama.

The murders occurred in the pre-dawn hours at the state prison cattle ranch in Greensboro, the officials said. Prisoners are routinely allowed to roam freely around the ranch.

**Filipino mountaineer killed:** One mountain climber was killed and 26 others are missing after Typhoon Teresa caught up with them on Mount Halcorn south of the Philippine capital, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Manila.

Air force Colonel Felipe Gaerlan said over radio station DZXL that one of the 27 university students was confirmed dead, but added that details were not immediately available.

**Dubai okays Indian passengers:** The Emirate of Dubai has lifted a ban on the entry of Indian passengers into the United Arab Emirates which it imposed after plague broke out in India in September, an Air India official said yesterday. Reuter reports from Dubai.

**4 die in Riyadh shootout:** Four people died and two others were wounded when security forces stormed a Saudi home to free hostages taken by a group of Filipinos, authorities said on Sunday. AFP reports from Riyadh.

Those killed in the shootout on Saturday were a two-month-old baby, a driver, a maid and one of the hostage takers who had been demanding a ransom of 10 million dollars. The security forces managed to free the other hostages.

**Turkey frees German TV team:** Four people working for the German television channel ARD were released late Sunday after being held for 36 hours while their possessions were searched for material critical of the Turkish regime, German diplomats said yesterday. AFP reports from Ankara.

The four, correspondent Dieter Sinnhuber and his female assistant, both German, and two Turkish cameramen were detained at the north-eastern town of Hopa near the border with Georgia.

**Australian jets collide:** Two Australian Air Force Macchi jet trainers collided in midair yesterday in a remote area north of Sydney but the two pilots ejected safely, an air force official said. Reuter reports from Sydney.

The accident occurred during a routine combat training exercise involving three jets. Group Captain John Kinder said.

**Grand Ayatollah hospitalised:** Iran's 100-year-old Grand Ayatollah Ali Akbari, the supreme spiritual guide for Shi'ite Muslims, was hospitalised on Sunday for unspecified reasons, the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency reported. AP reports from Nicosia.

**7 still missing in Black Sea:** Four people died and seven are still missing after a Russian cargo ship sank in the Black Sea Friday evening, Turkish naval sources said. AFP reports from Ankara.

The vessel, the 'Survive', sank in a violent storm off the Turkish coast near Kanyarca at around 11:00 pm (21:00 GMT). Fifteen crew members were able to reach the shore in a liferaft.

**11 die in Brisbane bus mishap:** At least 11 people, most of them members of a widows' club, were killed yesterday when a bus carrying them on a shopping trip plunged down a steep embankment 13 km north of the Australian city of Brisbane. Reuter reports from Brisbane.

**New Israeli dy army chief:** General Matan Vilnai, Israel's southern region commander, has been appointed army deputy chief of staff and will take up his duties on January 1, officials said on Sunday. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Vilnai, born in Jerusalem in 1944, is a veteran of the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars and the Lebanon campaign. His main task as chief of southern command was the suppression of the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories.

**Honduran tanker sent to Kuwait:** A Honduran tanker suspected of breaking the UN embargo on Iraq was diverted to Kuwait on Sunday for investigation. AP reports from Kuwait.

The tanker, Al-Mahrousa, carrying 3,000 gallons of fuel, entered Kuwaiti waters on Sunday afternoon, said Col Musceeb Najm, a spokesman for Kuwait's Defence Ministry. Najm said earlier that the tanker's crew admitted loading the fuel at the Iraqi port of Basra.

## Ruling party wins regional polls in Spain

VITORIA, Spain, Oct 24: The ruling Basque National Party (PNV) won regional elections in the Basque country in Spain on Sunday while the support for the political wing of the illegal, separatist ETA movement fell, exit polls said. Reuter reports.

The PNV won 26.3 per cent of the vote gaining 19 of 20 seats in the 75-seat regional parliament in Vitoria, according to an exit poll announced at the end of voting by Spanish RTVE television.

The station said support for the PNV had slipped since it won 22 seats in 1990 with 28.3 per cent of the vote.

# PLO agrees to crack down on Muslim radicals

CAIRO, Oct 24: Israel and the PLO agreed at talks today to fight Palestinian terror groups and move ahead with their peace accord jeopardised by the Islamic group Hamas which killed 22 people in a Tel Aviv bomb attack, reports Reuter.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, speaking after eight hours of talks in Cairo which lasted until the early hours of today, said Israel would also try to look into its closure of the West Bank and the Palestinian self rule areas of Jericho and Gaza, imposed in response to the Tel Aviv

attack. "The general conclusions we reached are that the parties are going to fight violence and terror which are endangering peace," Peres told a news conference.

"We don't want to slow or harass the economic development of the Palestinian authority... and in spite of the horrible events that took place, we decided to go ahead with the peace process, to continue our negotiations," he said.

Hamas, which opposes the PLO-Israeli peace accord, has attacked Israeli targets three

times since October 9. "We have asked the Palestinians to fight terror and they said they are... determined to do so," Peres said.

Asked what measures Israel asked the Palestinian authority to take to crush Hamas, Peres added: "Well, you don't fight terror with flowers."

"We told the Palestinians we don't expect you to be 100 per cent successful but we expect you to be 100 per cent determined and clear on where you stand on terrorism," asked if there was room for negotiation with Hamas, Peres said: "the problem with

Hamas is not its voices but its noises. The cartridges they are firing and the people they are killing."

Peres said in a joint PLO-Israeli statement the Palestinian delegation, led by Nabil Shaath, presented "the harmful effects of the closure on the Palestinian people and economy and pressed Israel to lift it."

Shaath, who flew to Madrid immediately after the Cairo talks without giving a news conference, warned Israel that collective punishment would keep the peace "explosive".

## Arms for Myanmar rebels seized in Thailand

THA PHRAYA, Thailand, Oct 24: Thai border units today seized a truck loaded with heavy weapons and ammunition destined for ethnic Burmese guerrillas, as it entered the country from Cambodia, a police official said, reports AP.

Police Colonel Santhawat Thawattana, deputy superintendent of police of this border town, said the arms cache included a 75-millimetre recoilless gun with three rounds, a Russian-made heavy machine gun with 79 rounds, 51 AK-47 assault rifles with magazines and 249 82-millimetre mortar shells.

The two men in the truck, both Thais, confessed that they had been hired by another Thai to collect the weapons from Cambodian soldiers at the border, Santhawat said.

The arms — concealed in the truck's water tank — were to be resold to insurgent Burmese guerrillas.

## Aristide chooses new PM

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Oct 24: Hoping to win over business leaders wary of his populist past, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide has reportedly picked one of their own as his prime minister, reports AP.

Within days, Aristide will announce his selection of Smark Michel, 57, a longtime associate who served briefly as Aristide's commerce minister in 1991, a source close to the government said late Sunday on condition of anonymity.

Aristide dropped his first choice for prime minister, interim Foreign Minister Claudette Werleing, because her leftist beliefs inspired vigorous opposition.

Aristide's selection of close but inexperienced associates for his first Cabinet alienated the business community, and some in the middle and upper classes remain wary of the president's intentions.



Freed Kashmiri Muslim leader Shabir Ahmad Shah is greeted by jubilant supporters on Saturday in northern Kashmir. Shah, speaking to a crowd of nearly 10,000 people, told fractious secessionist groups to join hands in the struggle to end Indian rule. — AFP photo

# Heavy fighting in south Kabul: 24 civilians killed

KABUL, Oct 24: Some 24 civilians were killed and 88 wounded in attacks on troops loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani on the fourth day of heavy fighting in South Kabul today, hospital and local sources said, reports AP.

Fighters from the Shi'ite Hezb-i-Wahdat faction, backed by artillery from their Pushtun Hezb-i-Islami allies, launched a dawn attack against pro-Rabbani troops in the Dehrazang area, briefly capturing the Barikot cinema.

The rockets fired by the Hezb-i-Islami into central Kabul wounded 88 civilians and killed at least 24 others, seven of whom died in a direct hit on a taxi and a bus, according to hospital and local reports.

The offensive was repulsed

by a heavy bombardment, which included two jet attacks with rockets and aerial bombs, and close house-to-house fighting in the ruins of the front line.

The cinema was recaptured soon after by pro-Rabbani troops, as ammunition carriers ran the gauntlet of Wahdat fire through the rubble to supply their gunners, armed with RPG-7 anti-tank rockets and 82mm recoilless rifles.

The neighbouring former Russian Cultural Centre, which apparently also briefly fell to Wahdat forces, was again in pro-Rabbani troops, soldiers in the cinema said.

The fighting did not deter civilians on bicycles from making their daily runs to the Hezb-i-Islami headquarters at Charasiab, some 25 kilometres

(15 miles) southeast of here, to stock up on firewood, cooking oil and wheat flour.

On the mountain-top above the road to Charasiab, pro-Rabbani forces could be seen shelling positions occupied by Wahdat troops, who returned fire with a spray of exploding cannon shells.

The fighting had stopped by noon, apart from the continuous bombardment of rival faction positions by pro-Rabbani heavy weapons posts on the surrounding mountain-tops.

The Hezb-i-Islami faction, led by former premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar claims it is shooting at military targets to force the resignation of Rabbani, but civilians have been bearing the brunt of the continuing bombardments.

## S Korean POW escapes North after 43 years

SEOUL, Oct 24: A South Korean army officer has escaped communist North Korea after 43 years of captivity, the government's top intelligence agency announced on Monday, reports AP.

2nd Lt Cho Chang-ho, 64, was semiconscious when a South Korean fisheries service ship rescued him from a small wooden boat near the country's west coast before dawn on Sunday. The Agency for National Security Planning said in a statement.

An undetermined number of people on the wooden boat had sent distress signals with flashlights, attracting the attention of the fisheries service ship, 128 kilometers southwest of Kunsan, a port on the West coast, the agency said.

It said the boat carrying Cho was believed to be of South Korean origin, but the fisheries service ship let it go without checking its identity or other people aboard.

Intelligence agency officials

presumed that the boat might have picked up Cho drifting in high seas.

Further details about how Cho escaped were unavailable because he was admitted to a hospital suffering from pneumonia and an apparent brain haemorrhage, the officials said.

An initial investigation showed that Cho was captured by Chinese troops in 1951 while serving in the Korean War. China fought on North Korea's side in the 1950-53 Korean War.

The intelligence agency said Cho has relatives in Seoul, including Choi Philip, the former South Korean ambassador to Libya.

In North Korea, Cho spent most of his time in prison and coal mines until he escaped recently, the intelligence agency said.

This year, 46 people have escaped from the North to the capitalist South. Cho is the first to escape by sea.



Sinn Féin leader Martin McGuinness gives an interview on BBC television on Sunday in London. This is the first time McGuinness has visited mainland Britain since lifting of the exclusion orders against him by Prime Minister John Major. — AFP photo

## Off the Record



Miss Vietnam 1994, Nguyen Thu Thuy, waves after winning the title on Sunday in Hanoi. 18-year-old Thuy is a student at Hanoi Foreign Affairs School. — AFP photo

## Ming Ming returns home

LONDON: Ming Ming, the Chinese panda who refused to mate, returned home to Beijing yesterday, reports Reuter.

London Zoo tried to mate her with Bao Bao from Berlin Zoo but the fur flew and keepers had to intervene with fire extinguishers to separate the warring pandas.

Ming Ming was accompanied home on her 5,000-mile (8,000-km) journey by zoo director Jo Gips and keeper Michael Carmen.

"We have had pandas at the zoo for 20 years and I've looked after Ming Ming for the last three years," Carmen said. "I hope there will be a panda at London Zoo but I cannot see there being one in the foreseeable future."

"There is no point in her staying here on her own," he added. "It's best she gets back to China and into the breeding programme."

## Diamond studded wedding gown

SINGAPORE: Diamonds are forever. Or at least for a day. Reports AP.

When celebrity TV actors Yang Liang and Li Nanxing get married November 11, the bride's flowing off-white wedding gown will be studded with about 500 diamonds worth about 2 million Singapore dollars (1.4 million US).

"I will have to keep looking at the floor to make sure none of the diamonds drop off," said Li, who has been voted the Most Popular Male Actor three times.

The jewellery will be loaned by a local shop, which also is giving the bride — for a day — rubies, sapphires, soft sea pearls and aquamarine pearls, the tabloid New Paper reported Saturday.

Insurance is expected to run into tens of thousands of dollars.

Some 1,200 people are expected at the wedding and reception. Singapore television's Chinese drama division will stop all filming that night so all staffers can attend the glittering wedding.

The bride will wear seven other outfits that day, including a gold-coloured miniskirt and a fire-engine-red long gown. One of Li's jackets will be studded with 36 diamonds, the New Paper said.

## Algerian militants set ablaze passenger train

ALGIERS, Oct 24: Suspected Islamic militants intercepted the Trans-Maghreb Express from Algiers to Tunis and set it on fire in a recent attack near Setif, the daily Liberte (freedom) reported today, reports AP.

The paper said the gunmen stopped the train at Hamman Ouled Yelles about 200 kilometers southeast of Algiers late on Friday and made the passengers get out before setting fire to the carriages.

The attackers also robbed passengers of their identity

## 11 Serb soldiers killed in DMZ

PALE, Bosnia, Oct 24: Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) sources said today 11 Serb soldiers were killed in a weekend attack by Muslim-led Bosnian government forces in a disputed demilitarised zone (DMZ) outside Sarajevo, reports Reuter.

Chab, 44, had been kidnapped the same day on the road from Tighzirt to Dellys. His body was found late Saturday at the nearby town of Benchoud.

## Saudi warplanes intercept Yemeni plane

SANAA, Oct 24: Saudi warplanes intercepted a Yemeni civilian plane which was on a routine flight from Sanaa to Al-Buqa near the Saudi border, the official news agency Saba reported here on Sunday, reports AP.

The Yemeni Foreign Ministry was planning to lodge an official protest with the Saudi authorities after the Dash-7 plane was intercepted. Saba said without giving further details.

The Al-Buqa region lies some 382 kilometres north of Sanaa and 20 kilometres south of Najran province.

# Balladur hits out at rival presidential candidate

PARIS, Oct 24: In a departure from his usual patrician politesse, Premier Edouard Balladur has aimed a low blow at his rival for the conservative presidential ticket, sure to fuel divisions within the majority that he is trying to repair, reports AP.

In an interview published on Monday, Balladur suggested that Jacques Chirac, head of the Rally for the Republic party, was sitting in an ivory tower out of touch with the times.

"Jacques, for a long time now, has taken refuge in his party like in a citadel," the conservative newspaper Le Figaro quoted Balladur as saying. "Is that the spirit of the

Fifth Republic?"

Balladur's appraisal of Chirac came in response to a question about the monetary crisis in the summer of 1993. He said Chirac remained silent at the time "so as not to upset anyone in the RPR (the party)."

The remarks were the bluntest yet by Balladur, whose lordly comportment and measured calm have gained him cartoon portrayals as a prim gentleman in a powdered wig.

But sparring within the conservative party over whether to back Chirac or Balladur as candidate in spring presidential elections is anything but polite.

Cabinet ministers have gone at each other in public over

the issue, with Interior Minister Charles Pasqua snidely suggesting this month that Foreign Minister Alain Juppe think of stepping down to permanently campaign for Chirac.

The divisions in the rightist majority, which crushed the Socialists with a landslide victory in 1993 legislative elections, are perceived all around as self-destructive.

The public backbiting, along with a corruption scandal that has forced two ministers out of office and put one in jail, has taken a moral toll on the government.

Both the press and politicians are now referring to the majority as the "losing ma-

jority."

The cover story in the latest issue of the news weekly L'Evenement du Jeudi reads: "The Right: Investigation into a Collective Suicide". An accompanying picture shows a portrait of Balladur with seismic cracks in his face.

Polls have long shown Balladur as the winner in the two-round presidential race in April and May, but his margin has recently slipped. October polls show Balladur losing 3-5 percentage points in favourable ratings compared to September.

More striking, a poll this month by the Sofres firm for the first time showed the potential Socialist candidate,

European Commission President Jacques Delors, on a par with Balladur, with each man getting 50 per cent of the vote. The same poll a month earlier showed Balladur with 55 per cent of the vote and Delors with 45 per cent. No margin of error was given.

Chirac and Balladur have mostly refrained from direct attacks, leaving jibes to their lieutenants. And Balladur has insisted that governing comes before campaigning, at least until January.

"In six months, I might be on vacation," he told Le Figaro. "I say it. I repeat it. We must govern as best we can until the election."

Last week, Balladur called