

BRIEFLY

Press Freedom Awards Declared:

Journalists who fought death threats, repressive regimes and religious fanatics in Turkey, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Cuba, and Hong Kong have been named recipients of the 1994 International Press Freedom Awards. AP reports from New York.

Underscoring the dangers reporters face overseas, the Committee to Protect Journalists said on Friday awards will be given to four journalists slain two years ago, most likely by paramilitary forces, in Tajikistan's civil war.

6 Chinese die in stampede:

Six students were killed in a stampede at a high school in the midwestern Chinese city of Xian, it was reported yesterday. AFP says from Hong Kong.

Ban on scarves protested:

A Malaysian social activist group Friday protested a recent French government ban on wearing Muslim headscarves in schools, calling the move a form of "social persecution." AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Hanoi applies to join ASEAN:

Hanoi has formally applied to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the staunchly anti-Communist group formed at the height of the Vietnam War, senior ASEAN officials said yesterday. Reuter reports from Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei.

Canadian PM in China:

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien arrived in Beijing yesterday at the head of a 300-strong delegation that hopes to sign more than one billion dollars in contracts during a six-day China mission. AFP reports from Beijing.

Turkey expels 4,793 foreigners:

Turkey has expelled 4,793 foreigners from the country in the past 10 months, Turkey's Anatolia news agency reported on Friday. Xinhua says from Ankara.

Menem expelled from HR Group:

President Carlos Menem was expelled from an Argentine human rights group on Friday for remarks that the board interpreted as condoning the military's "dirty war" in the 1970s. Reuter reports from Buenos Aires.

Bombs explode in Tajikistan:

Four explosions went off in the Tajikistan capital Dushanbe on Friday and Security Minister Saidamir Zukhurov said they were intended to disrupt Sunday's presidential elections and constitutional referendum. Itar-Tass news agency reported. Reuter says from London.

4 Russians die of poisoning:

No one was injured in the blasts, which occurred at the electoral commission telephone exchange, agriculture ministry and a major printing works in the city, the agency, monitored by the BBC in London, said.

Guatemala govt, rebels meet:

Four people died and 11 were in critical condition after eating poisonous mushrooms in the Krasnodar region of southern Russia, the Ministry for Emergency Situations reported on Friday. AP says from Moscow.

4 die in Indonesian plane crash:

The Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (APDH) accused the Peronist leader of "vindicating torture, murder, exile, stealing children, looting homes as war booty ... as part of the usurpation of power by the use of force."

Rafsanjani blasts US:

A total of 22 people were hospitalised in the poisoning case, including six children, the ministry said in a report carried by the Interfax news agency.

Crew of sinking boat rescued:

Guatemalan government negotiators met with leftist guerrilla leaders in Mexico City on Friday for a new round of talks to end a 33-year-old civil war that has killed more than 100,000 people, officials said. Reuter reports from Mexico City.

Singer Crosby hospitalised:

The talks will focus on the rights of Guatemala's majority population of indigenous Indians and will continue until November 9 in the picturesque town of Valle de Bravo, about 60 miles (100 km) west of Mexico City, the officials said.

1 killed in Nepali clash:

Four people died as their twin otter plane crashed and burned in the thick jungle of Indonesia's easternmost province of Irian Jaya, an airport official at the provincial city of Jayapura said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Tajik peace talks end:

The Sentani Airport official said that the aircraft, owned and operated by a private charter company, Pt Trigana Air Service, crashed on Friday a few kilometres (miles) north of the Pantai Lake in the central mountainous range of the province.

UNITA threat to withdraw accord:

Speaking at Friday prayers at Tehran University, Rafsanjani said the United States was under an illusion to think it could block the flow of goods to Iran.

Saudi Arabia refuses to accept basing of arms for US troops

WASHINGTON, Nov 5: Saudi Arabia has refused to accept basing of arms for US troops who might again be sent to the Gulf, but the United States will press the Saudis to reverse that position, a senior defence official said on Friday.

The official also told Reuters that Kuwait will pay the largest share of the estimated 600 million dollar cost of a recent US military buildup in the Gulf against Iraq, but that Washington also expected Saudi Arabia to help pay the bill.

The Saudis aren't letting us put (military) stuff there. They have told us right now that they are not in favour of this but we hope they will change their mind, said the official who asked not to be identified.

"It is still very much on our agenda with them."

The official responded to questions about a New York

Times report that the Pentagon had virtually given up on trying to get the Saudis to base enough tanks and other equipment in their country to supply a brigade of more than 2,000 US troops if those troops were again needed to face Iraq.

Kuwait and Qatar have each agreed to provide basing for enough tanks and other supplies for a US brigade and the Pentagon is searching for a base in the region for enough equipment for a third brigade.

The Saudis currently provide basing for dozens of US warplanes, but have been reluctant to accept supplies for American ground troops because of opposition to such a move by Muslim fundamentalists.

A more recent problem for the Saudis according to Pentagon officials, is that they are strapped for cash because

of flat oil prices and the huge cost of the 1991 Gulf War.

The New York Times reported on Friday that Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan indicated to Defence Secretary William Perry during a recent visit to Jeddah that Saudi Arabia might have a hard time paying its share of last month's US buildup to face Iraqi troops massed near Kuwait.

Sultan also pointed out during the meeting that the Saudis were already spending billions on US weaponry the report said.

It is very clear that the Kuwaitis will pay by far the largest share of the Gulf buildup cost, the defence official told Reuters Friday, but we fully expect that the Saudis will participate in the Gulf Cooperation Council commitment to pay for this.

The official said that at least four Gulf Cooperation Council

countries were expected to go further. In addition to the buildup of more than 30,000 troops over 200 warplanes and several dozen warships last month.

But the official refused to go further. In addition to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, other countries in the council are the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Bahrain.

The New York Times said the Pentagon was now concentrating on trying to get the United Arab Emirates to accept equipment for a third US brigade of ground troops.

But the senior US official insisted that Perry had not given up on persuading Saudi King Fahd to change the Saudi position.

The secretary has been clear that there are still discussions and I think these discussions will go on, said the official, who added: "They may never be over."



A Pakistani doctor examines a pair of siamese twins, joined at the head, at the airport before their departure for Canada yesterday. The two-year old twins, Hira (R) and Nida (L) are to be separated by a complex neuro-surgical procedure at the Children's Hospital in Toronto. — AFP photo

UK national mastermind in abduction of 4 westerners

NEW DELHI, Nov 5: The man who masterminded the abduction of three Britons and an American to secure the release of 10 jailed Muslim guerrillas was a British national of Kashmiri origin, Indian police said today, reports AFP.

Ahmed Umer Syed Sheikh, a Muslim arrested in the Northern State of Uttar Pradesh, was a British national who came to India from Pakistan, a senior police officer in the Uttar Pradesh town of Ghaziabad said by telephone.

Ghaziabad senior superintendent of a police A K Jain told AFP that Sheikh was a student at the London School of Economics and had been

born in London. Jain said Sheikh was caught after being wounded by police at a village about seven kilometers (4.3 miles) from Ghaziabad soon after they rescued Bela Joseph Nuss, an American who was among those kidnapped on October 31.

Jain said Sheikh went by the Hindu alias of Rohit Sharma and had planned and executed all four kidnappings. He is a trained militant, a terrorist," Jain said, adding that his interrogation "has given us a lot of information about his group and associates. He came from Pakistan and there is a Pakistani link."

The three British tourists who were rescued after police stormed a hideout in Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh on November 1 said they were abducted in New Delhi by a man who called himself Rohit Sharma. Two policemen and a kidnapper were killed in an hour-long gunbattle which followed the storming. The three Britons were freed unharmed but at least three other militants escaped.

The American and Britons were kidnapped by a previously unheard of Kashmiri militant group called Al-Hadid (The Blade) which demanded the release of 10 Kashmiri guerrillas, including three members of the powerful Harkat-ul-Ansar.

UN to maintain sanctions on Iraq, hopes US

WASHINGTON, Nov 5: The United States expects the United Nations Security Council to maintain unchanged its programme of sanctions against Iraq when it next discusses the matter on November 14, a State Department spokesman said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Iraq's troop buildup near the Kuwaiti border last month has killed off support for easing the trade sanctions even among countries relatively sympathetic to Baghdad, spokesman Mike McCurry said.

"We're confident that the Security Council will agree with us that no change in sanctions is warranted at this point," McCurry told a news briefing.

The Security Council holds consultations on the sanctions, imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, every 60 days.

Kumaratunga under fire for curb on news speeches

COLOMBO, Nov 5: Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga is facing criticism for imposing restrictions on election coverage by state-owned radio and television, reports AP.

Kumaratunga, who is contesting the November 9 presidential polls, has instructed the television station not to allow election speeches by her rivals that carry "defamatory references" to her.

Similar orders were also given to the managers of the state-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation that has a monopoly over broadcasting news.

Although the Election Commission mandates the broadcast of campaign speeches by candidates in the presidential race, the government officials who run the television station are allowed to edit the

UN Council happy over US-DPRK agreement

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 5: The Security Council in a statement on Friday said it was satisfied with a recent nuclear accord between the United States and North Korea and asked the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to carry out related monitoring activities, reports Reuter.

Under the October 21 accord, North Korea agreed to freeze and eventually dismantle its existing graphite-moderated nuclear reactors.

In return, the United States will head an international consortium to finance and supply North Korea with a new generation of light-water nuclear power plants less suited to the production of fuel that could be used to manufacture weapons.

"We are not at all happy with the freedom of the media under the present government," Srimala Dissanayake, told reporters.

The state-owned media is not giving the opposition enough publicity, which is very partisan and unfair."

Mid-term congressional polls a major test for Clinton

DULUTH, Minnesota, Nov 5: President Clinton's prestige and capacity to govern are at stake along with the careers of the endangered Democrats he is embracing in the closing days of the mid term campaign, reports AP.

In many ways, Clinton's presidency is on the ballot — and his campaigning reflects that he is mindful of this.

Clinton's political efforts over the past week, and his schedule for the days ahead, have been frantic — covering two and even three states a day as he crisscrosses the United States nonstop, to next Tuesday's voting.

Preparing to spend a week campaigning in California — a state crucial to his own 1996 re-election bid — the

president on Friday sought to capitalise on a new unemployment report to trumpet his economic policies.

"We have delivered what the American people have long wanted," he said after the Labour Department reported that the US unemployment rate had dropped to 5.8 per cent in October — its lowest level in four years.

He was clearly ready to play his economic card in California, whose long stagnant economy is finally beginning to come out of the doldrums.

It was no coincidence that Clinton's first scheduled stop in southern California was at the Los Alamitos Naval Air Station, where he was to formally announce the signing of

a 1.6 billion dollars contract between China and McDonnell Douglas for the sale of 40 jetliners.

Midterm elections are always indirect referenda on presidents, but Clinton raised the stakes — and the political risks — with his final week of non-stop campaigning.

"At least he's trying hard and working hard. He didn't hide. He's out there swinging. And Americans like that," said Thomas E Cronin, president of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, and the author of several books on the presidency. "He didn't shrivel up or give up."

His home stretch campaigning to the Pacific Coast,

Northeast and the upper midlands — including Friday's appearance here in behalf of Democratic Senate hopeful Ann Wynn and a planned return visit to Minnesota on Monday.

For the most part, he's been campaigning where White House strategists in advance knew he would find receptive audiences and heavy local media attention — and staying away from states like Texas and Florida where he's less popular.

"HE'S HERE" screamed the banner headline on Friday's Duluth News Tribune. His role in the final days "is to travel around the country and help define the country and help define the choice between Republicans and Demo-

Off the Record



US singer Whitney Houston tries on a traditional Ndebele blanket at a press conference on Friday at the Johannesburg Children's Museum. Houston, in South Africa for a three-concert tour until November 19, pledged 286,000 dollar to South African children's charities. — AFP photo

Woman gives birth to septuplets

BUENOS AIRES: A woman who underwent artificial fertilisation treatment gave birth to septuplets Friday morning in Cordoba, Argentina's second largest city, but three of the babies died shortly after delivery, reports Xinhua.

According to information from Cordoba, the four surviving babies remain in the Halac Hospital and are, like their mother whose identity is being withheld, in good health. The woman was admitted to the Allende Hospital in Cordoba after nearly six months of pregnancy but gave birth to septuplets in the Halac hospital. No information was given about the babies' sexes.

Hospital director Carlos Martinez Cano told the local press that the surviving babies are fine and he was confident that their condition will remain stable in spite of the fact that they were born premature.

The woman, 30, became pregnant through artificial fertilisation since she was unable to conceive naturally.

Fergie on 'Baywatch'?

LONDON: The Duchess of York, estranged wife of Queen Elizabeth's second son Prince Andrew, has been offered a role in a celebrity episode of the popular US television series "Baywatch". British newspapers reported yesterday, reports Reuter.

"A script has been prepared for her, and she has already had talks with the show's hunky male lead and director David Hasselhoff. The Daily Star, a popular tabloid, said.

British entrepreneur Richard Branson is expected to appear in the same episode of the lifeguard show which is due to be screened next year. The show is broadcast in about 50 countries.

"I have had detailed discussions by phone. I am expecting a call from her." The Daily Mirror quoted Hasselhoff as saying.

The flapper-haired duchess, popularly known as Fergie married Prince Andrew in 1986 and the couple separated in 1992. They have to young daughters.

The Daily Mail, another tabloid, said Hasselhoff met the duchess and Branson when a trip on Branson's Virgin Atlantic airline to the Baywatch set was auctioned on behalf of one of Sarah's favourite charities.

Jilted lover's fiery revenge

HONG KONG: Twelve female students were killed and two injured in a dormitory fire started by a man apparently seeking revenge after being jilted by his girlfriend at a college in the eastern Chinese province of Shandong, said a report yesterday, reports AFP.

Zhang Zonglin, a 49-year-old student of traditional Chinese medicine from inner Mongolia, was arrested and later confessed to the crime. He allegedly torched the dormitory on October 30, the semi-official China News Service said.

The report said Zhang had "improper relations" with his girlfriend, who was identified only by her surname Li, after he started an internship at the Shandong College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Jinan last year.

The couple broke up over the summer, and Li later ignored Zhang whenever he came to her dormitory, the agency said.

The report did not say whether Li was among the 12 students killed.

Eiffel Tower staff go on strike

PARIS, Nov 5: Tourists wishing to ride to the top of the Eiffel Tower were turned away on Friday due to a strike by workers demanding more staff and improved facilities for visitors, reports AP.

It was unclear how long the two left-wing labour unions leading the strike intended to keep workers off the job, but such actions in France seldom last longer than 24 hours.