

BRIEFLY

US intelligence chief in China:

The director of the US Defence Intelligence Agency has been in China this week as part of the resumption of Sino-US military ties after a five-year break, the US Embassy said Wednesday. AP reports from Beijing.

Spokesman Robert Laing denied that the visit was a secret, but said he could not disclose whom Lt Gen James Clapper was meeting or what was on his agenda.

Russia cleans oil spill site:

Cleanup work resumed Wednesday at the site of a huge oil spill in northern Russia, after harsh Arctic weather had blocked workers from reaching contaminated areas. AP reports from Ussinsk, Russia.

Heavy storms had prevented workers from bringing cleanup equipment to the damaged areas of pipeline over the weekend, said Anatoly Streltsov, spokesman for the Ministry for Emergency Situations.

UK prisoner on hunger strike:

A British prisoner, forced to "eat up his vegetables" when a child, has gone on hunger strike because the sight of them now makes him sick, his sister said on Tuesday. Reuter reports from London.

Tyrone Kostromin is trying to force cooks at Channings Wood prison in Devon, south-west England, to change his diet. "It is just that every time he gets vegetables it turns him off eating anything else. They make him sick," sister Lorna Roberts told reporters. "When we were little he was made to eat up his vegetables and even now he is grown up he won't eat them."

10 farmers bury themselves:

At least ten farmers buried themselves up to the neck in a lettuce field near Lima Tuesday to protest what they said was an illegal bid to evict them from their land, police said. AFP reports from Lima.

"We are prepared to die before they evict us. We will even bury all our families along with us," Carla Cabrera told reporters as a friend heaped earth around her body.

UN team visits Kabul:

International UN staff visited Kabul on Tuesday for the first time in seven months to inspect UN premises and assess humanitarian needs in and around the war ravaged Afghan capital, Reuter reports from Kabul.

"We would like to be able to visit Kabul frequently and hope this will be part of a series of such missions," the leader of the five man delegation, Martin Barber, told Reuters at Bagram Military Airbase, about 70 km (44 miles) north of Kabul.

Jyoti's call to partymen:

The West Bengal chief minister, Jyoti Basu, made a fervent call to his partymen to ensure that they were not alienated from the people in anyway and should try to keep in constant touch with them taking lessons from the development leading to the fall of Soviet Union. PTI reports from Calcutta.

He was addressing a public meeting at the Netaji Indoor Stadium here to mark the 77th anniversary of the November revolution in the former Soviet Union and also to observe the 30th anniversary of the CPI(M)'s seventh congress.

British official to visit Myanmar:

A senior British official is to visit Myanmar for the first time since the Myanmar elections of 1990, following "encouraging signals" from the Myanmar junta, the foreign office said Monday. AFP reports from London.

Foreign Office Assistant Under Secretary of State David Dain will visit Myanmar, for talks with the ruling military regime in accordance with the European Union policy of critical dialogue.

Menem sues newspaper:

President Carlos Menem has filed a slander suit against a newspaper which cast doubt on his claim to have been tortured under the former military dictatorship. AP reports from Buenos Aires.

Menem said on Tuesday he was taking legal action against the tabloid Pagina 12 to foil "a plot" by the Buenos Aires daily and local human rights groups to undermine his leadership. The left leaning paper published an article on October 30 in which it quoted former prisoners under the dictatorship as saying Menem was never tortured and that he had cried upon being arrested.

Palestinian shot dead:

A Palestinian was shot and killed during a clash between Israeli army troops and stone throwers in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Tuesday, Palestinian sources said. AP reports from Jerusalem.

They identified the victim, who they said was killed by army gunfire, as Mahmoud Ghaleb Hamayle, 32, from a nearby village.

Puerto Rico police raids drug labs:

Police said on Tuesday they raided two home laboratories in this US commonwealth that were cultivating marijuana plants so pure they fetched more than twice the usual price. AP reports from San Juan.

Authorities discovered the labs after a grower put a dying plant on his balcony, hoping the sun would revive it. Someone recognised the plant and reported it to police.

2 kidnappers held in Lebanon:

Two men have been arrested for plotting to kidnap a suspect wanted by US authorities for the 1985 hijacking of a TWA airliner in which a US navy diver was killed. Judicial sources said on Tuesday. AP reports from Beirut.

The planned to turn Hassan Izzidine, a Shiite Muslim, over to the United States, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

N-sub mishap off Pacific coast:

The US navy on Tuesday reported a nuclear submarine accident off the Pacific coast and said it was investigating the incident, the second involving a nuclear powered sub in the area this year. Reuter reports from San Diego.

The accident occurred about 14 miles (23 km) out to sea on Monday evening when the periscope of the USS La Jolla struck a torpedo retriever boat causing minor damages to both craft, the navy said.

ROK offers to exchange newsmen:

A South Korean journalists group on Wednesday proposed to send a press delegation to the inaugural ceremony of Kim Jong Il, the North's heir to power, in a package of proposals to open an exchange of journalists with the Communist state. AP reports from Seoul.

"The first ever exchange of journalists would promote understanding between the two Koreas," the Journalists Association of (South) Korea said in the proposal addressed to its North Korean counterpart.

Confce on migrant Muslim women:

An international conference on migrant Muslim women will be held here on Saturday under the patronage of UAE supreme council member and ruler of Sharjah Dr Shaikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qassim. GNA reports from Sharjah.

The conference aims to highlight the problems facing migrant Muslim women. About 250 delegates from 28 countries will attend the conference.

Cholera breaks out in Gaza:

A 30-month-old child has died of cholera and 15 people have contracted the disease in the autonomous Gaza Strip, the Palestinian health minister said on Tuesday. AP reports from Jerusalem.

Riyad Zanoun told a news conference another 14 people were hospitalised with cholera symptoms and were being tested. The toddler, Wafa Jabber of Gaza City, died on Monday five hours after falling ill with the intestinal disease, usually transferred by contaminated food or water.

Hamas opens talks with PLO:

The Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas has opened talks with the Palestinian Authority on participating in self rule, senior PLO official Nabil Shaath said in an interview to be published here today. AFP reports from Cairo.

It is no secret that Hamas and other Palestinian opposition factions have set up intensive dialogue with the Palestinian authority on how they will take part in social and political institutions. Shaath told Al Ahran newspaper.



Sri Lankan Prime Minister and presidential candidate Chandrika Kumaratunga cast her vote yesterday at a heavily guarded polling booth outside Colombo. — AFP photo

Wijetunga for an end to terrorism

COLOMBO, Nov 9: Outgoing President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga appealed to Sri Lankans today to end terrorism and violence in the island nation, once regarded as a peaceful paradise, reports AFP.

In an address to be televised late today, he said he prayed for an end to the island's Tamil separatist conflict, which has claimed over 30,000 lives since 1972.

"I am appalled by the fact that Sri Lankan society is fast deteriorating and disintegrating morally, socially and ethically. Violence and acts of barbarism have become the order of the day," he said.

"Wijetunga said he was 'deeply sorry that the spectre of terrorism continues to stalk this beautiful and blessed land of ours'."

The 72-year-old Wijetunga has announced he will retire from politics after the presidential election contested by Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga and the main opposition candidate, Srma Dissanayake.

Fresh fighting in Afghanistan

KABUL, Nov 9: The national highway from Kabul to the Pakistan border was cut for a few hours today just east of the capital due to fighting between various Islamic factions that support or oppose Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, reports AFP.

The enemy infantry attacked us early in the morning... and mostly put us under a heavy bombardment," said pro-Rabbani troops based at Hudkhell village, about three kilometres east of Kabul.

The dawn attack was launched by fighters from Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami faction, who attacked Hudkhell from positions on the outskirts of Kabul's suburbs.

Pro-Rabbani troops said, however, that in contrast with a similar assault launched 10 days ago, Hezb-i-Islami forces did not manage to cross the Kabul river, a natural and war boundary in the area.

Many vehicles heading out of Kabul, including a United Nations land cruiser, were forced to return to the battle-torn city due to the fighting. Pro-Rabbani soldiers stationed near the former military academy, some 10 kilometres outside Kabul, said they also came under heavy bombardment by Hezb-i-Islami Wednesday. The loyalists added that a workshop complex was hit in the assault and was set ablaze.

According to a defence ministry spokesman, one jet strike was made against south Kabul, where Hezb-i-Islami are fighting alongside their Shiite allies of the Hezb-i-Wahdat faction.

Wolf attacks 6 Bangladeshis in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 9: A rabid wolf attacked six Bangladeshi guards and killed a small herd of sheep in Doha, north of Kuwait City, before it was caught two days later by security forces, officials said on Tuesday, reports AFP.

The Bangladeshis were guarding beach homes in Doha when they were attacked by the wolf Sunday. After a long search security officials shot dead the animal Tuesday.

The six guards, who were all injured in the attack, were rushed to an infectious diseases hospital by passers by who heard their cries for help.

The wolf roamed into the residential area from a desert region nearby.

US still against easing UN ban on Iraq

WASHINGTON, Nov 9: Iraq's recognition of Kuwait's sovereignty and borders as reported by Russia on Tuesday, is not enough to achieve a lifting of UN sanctions against Baghdad, the State Department said, reports AFP.

"Border recognition would meet only one of a number of requirements to which Iraq has not complied, and would not in itself establish Iraq's peaceful intentions which were called into question by its provocation in October," said State Department spokesman David Johnson.

"Our policy regarding Iraq and UN Security Council sanctions remains that Iraq must comply fully with all the relevant Security Council resolutions," and a recognition of Kuwait alone did not meet the requirement, Johnson said.

"We would oppose any UN Security Council action which might lead Iraq to conclude that the Security Council might consider modifying the sanctions before Iraq has met fully its obligations," he added.

Japan to promote security talks with neighbours

TOKYO, Nov 9: Japan's defence agency plans to promote security dialogue with neighbouring China, Russia and South Korea, a newspaper said today, reports AFP.

The agency will resume top-level exchanges with China suspended since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing and promote similar talks with Russia, the Ashahi Shimbun said.

Warships will also make exchange visits between Japan and South Korea for the first time, the daily said.

The moves are part of Japanese efforts to diversify its military policy and strengthen the Japan-US security treaty, Ashahi said.

As part of its own major policy reviews, the United States has embarked on formal military exchanges with China and agreed to conduct joint military exercises with Russia.

UK to complete Kuwait pullout by Christmas

LONDON, Nov 9: Britain said on Tuesday it would withdraw by Christmas troops it had sent to Kuwait because of fears of an Iraqi invasion, reports Reuter.

The government has decided to begin the withdrawal of forces recently deployed to counter Iraq's threat to Kuwait, a statement by the Ministry of Defence said. The withdrawal should be complete by Christmas.

It said the decision had been made because of a reduction in tension since the reinforcement were first deployed on October 11.

Our forces have played a vital role in helping to maintain the sovereignty and integrity of Kuwait and uphold the authority of the United Nations, Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind said in a statement.

India to help probe Dissanayake's killing

COLOMBO, Nov 9: India on Tuesday responded to a Sri Lankan request for assistance in probing the assassination of the island's opposition leader Gamini Dissanayake by a suicide bomber here, diplomats said, reports AFP.

Indian High Commissioner Nareshwar Dayal wrote to Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar saying that Colombo's request for help was under serious consideration at the highest level, diplomats said.

They said New Delhi was yet to nominate investigators but Tuesday's response was a signal that India had agreed in principle to send experts to join the local probe team.

Colombo sought help from

neighbouring India after Dissanayake's widow, Srma Dissanayake, specified two Indian investigators that she wanted included in the inquest into her husband's death at a campaign rally here on October 24.

Dissanayake last week named D R Karthikayan, joint director of the Central Bureau of Investigations and head of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) which probed Gandhi killing and forensic scientist professor P Chandrasekaran.

"I have every reason to believe that they could make a valuable contribution to the present investigation, especially in view of their extensive previous experience in matters such as this," Dissanayake said.

Off the Record

Screaming, kicking — Di's ways of dealing with marital stress

NEW YORK: Screaming, kicking and pounding the bed with a tennis racket are part of Princess Diana's way of dealing with her marital stress, says the Author of her latest biography, "Diana: Her New Life," reports AP.

"There's all kinds of ways she does it," author Andrew Morton told the TV news magazine "Eye to Eye with Connie Chung" in an interview to be broadcast Thursday. "She does kickboxing with a guy to just help release the anger that she feels. She'll occasionally beat the bed with a tennis racket."

He said Diana also is seeing a therapist who "encourages people to shout and scream and yell their heads off and just let it all hang out."



Surprise turns tragic

WEST MONROE: A girl who jumped out of a closet and shouted, "Boo!" when her parents came home in the middle of the night was shot and killed by her own father, reports AP.

"I love you, Daddy," were 14-year-old Matilda Crabtree's last words to her father.

No charges were brought against 53-year-old Robert Crabtree, Ouachita Parish Chief Deputy Richard Fowell said, the case would be turned over to the district attorney, as a matter of routine.

"It's sad," Fowell said. "This is something every kid has done. I don't know how the father is going to live with it." Matilda and a friend, whose identity was not released, were supposed to be spending Saturday night at the friends' home but had decided to go to the Crabtree's while Matilda's parents were away, Fowell said.

When Matilda heard her parents drive up around 10 p.m. Sunday, she and her friend came up with a practical joke. They hid in her bedroom closet and made noises to make her parents think someone had broken in, Fowell said.

Crabtree got his gun, and when Matilda jumped out, he started father pointed the .357 caliber pistol loaded with hollow-point bullets and shot his daughter in the neck, the chief deputy said.

She died at a hospital 12 hours later. Her friend was also hurt.

Fowell said it shows how scared people are in their own homes these days.

"We live in such a violent world," he said.

"Kissing bandit"

CLEVELAND: It was the kiss of theft. That's what a judge decided Monday, sentencing a woman to 50 years in prison for slipping men tranquilizer-laced champagne and robbing them as they slept, reports AP.

Tabetha Dougan, 22, was dubbed the "Kissing Bandit" because she would pass wine or champagne from her mouth to those of her victims during a kiss. Three men told police they awoke to find their homes burglarised.

Charges were dropped in one case because the man was too embarrassed to testify. She was convicted of burglary and theft in the other two cases.

Dougan, who did not testify, said before sentencing that she was innocent. She will be eligible for parole in about six years.

The judge rejected a defence request to sentence her on probation, noting that one of her victims was 75 years old.

Kids murder for money

SYDNEY: A group of girls lured a man into a country park in an Australian country town where three boys beat him to death and then spent his money on cartons of beer which they drank in a school yard, a court was told on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The boys aged 11, 12 and 15 appeared in the Wagga Wagga Children's Court charged with murdering 55-year-old Peter Baker.

Bail was refused. Baker was found last Sunday in the victory memorial gardens in Wagga Wagga, in southern New South Wales.

"This was a planned, premeditated course of action," police prosecutor Ken Finch told the bail hearing.



US Senator Edward Kennedy (2nd L) stands with stepson Curran Raclin, 11, (L), wife Vicki Kennedy (C), stepdaughter Caroline Raclin, 8, and Kara Kennedy (R) before voting at the Hyannis West Elementary School on Tuesday. Kennedy reportedly has a comfortable lead in the polls. — AFP photo

Protection of minorities a must for religious freedom

PENANG, Malaysia, Nov 9: A country's commitment to religious tolerance and freedom must be measured by both its ability to protect the religious sensitivities of its minorities and its willingness to deal firmly with religious extremism, reports IPS.

It is significant to note the response of the Penang Education Department and the State Minister of Education responded to allegations that certain school principals were barring Hindu girls from wearing the pottu, the red mark worn by Hindus on their foreheads. The authorities immediately came out on the side of the pupils.

By their action, the Malaysian authorities not only asserted that a religious symbol with meaning for a particu-

lar community would be protected, but also emphasised that different religious identities are part and parcel of the mosaic of Malaysian society — of which 53 per cent is Muslim, 19 per cent is Buddhist, and the rest is Taoist, Hindu, or Christian.

Contrast this with the rule introduced by the French government which prohibits Muslim schoolgirls from wearing the headscarf that most Muslims regard as an important element of religious attire.

At the same time, however, craftily drafted regulation allows girls from France's majority Christian community to wear their religious symbols to school.

This covert discrimination against the Muslim minority in

France fits into a pattern of systematic harassment and persecution of this community which has intensified in recent months. Yet France is eulogised by liberals in both the West and the East as one of the staunchest defenders of human rights in the world.

Britain, another European country which liberals regard as a marvellous inspiration for human rights and democratic rule, once forced one of its loyal Sikh as citizen to fight a long legal battle in order to keep his turban — one of the articles of his faith — while in the service of a public institution in London.

It is rarely noted that very few governments are prepared to move vigorously against extremist tendencies, especially within the majority commu-

nity. The Indian government, for example, has so far failed to take decisive action against rabid, bigoted elements within the majority Hindu community who were directly and indirectly responsible for the demolition of an illustrious mosque revered by the Muslims in India.

Some of the majority community's leading intellectuals have adopted principled positions on ensuring justice for the Muslim minority in India. But its dominant political elite, mainly because of electoral considerations, have continued to appease those forces seeking to distort the teachings of Hinduism for their own interests.

As a result, the Muslim minority feels threatened, even

besieged and has begun to develop a persecution psychology — in spite of what India's secular constitution says about human rights and cultural freedom.

In Pakistan, another Asian country that is predominantly Muslim, the government has also been giving in to ultra-conservative religious elements whose demands have adversely affected both women's rights and the general populace's freedom of conscience and expression.

While curbing religious extremism within the majority community is a fundamental prerequisite for the enjoyment of certain types of human rights, there is very little appreciation of the importance of such action among human rights activists in the West.

Christopher meets top ROK officials

SEOUL, Nov 9: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher went into talks here today with top South Korean officials, starting with an early morning one-on-one session with Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo, reports AFP.

Han and Christopher who is on his first visit to Seoul since the signing of the October 21 Geneva accord designed to halt North Korea's nuclear programme, talked for 30 minutes privately with news and officials said.

The two then went into a fuller meeting at the Foreign Ministry with senior South Korean policy makers and Under Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs Winston Lord and ambassador at large Robert Gallucci, the man who negotiated the accord for Washington.