

**Junta refuses to release Abiola**

LAGOS, Nov 14: Nigeria's military junta said on Sunday it had refused to heed a court order to free Moshood Abiola because the jailed opposition leader was charged with an offence punishable by death, namely treason, and thus not bailable, reports AFP.

The government refused to release Abiola on bail in compliance with the November 4 order issued by the Federal Appeal Court in Kaduna, northern Nigeria, and filed an appeal to challenge the ruling in the Supreme Court.

Abiola, detained since June 23, has been charged with treason.

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**Pak govt-opposition rift widens**

ISLAMABAD, Nov 14: The rift between Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and her opposition apparently widened Sunday with the arrest of the opposition leader's father on charges of tax evasion and fraud, reports AP.

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who lost an election to Benazir a year ago, said the arrest of his father was an act of vindictive politics.

"This victimisation and harassment is an attempt to divert my attention from national issues on which I am leading a mass agitation campaign," Nawaz Sharif told a news conference in the capital.

Several months ago Sharif began an anti-government campaign of rallies, train marches and nationwide strikes in an attempt to destabilise Benazir.

Benazir's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, spent more than two years in jail during Sharif's term in office.

**2 WWII bombs defused in Italy:**

Several thousand people were evacuated from their homes, rail traffic was diverted and a road was closed on Sunday as Italian police defused two World War II-era bombs, AFP reports from Rome.

In the Adriatic port city of Trieste demolition experts deactivated a bomb containing 120 kilograms (240 pounds) of TNT that was dropped by the Americans in 1944, and in the northern town of Bielozno, near the border with Austria, some 2,500 people were evacuated to allow police to defuse a 150-kilogram (330-pound) bomb.

**Floods hit Sri Lanka:** Major floods which swept through the eastern province of Sri Lanka following unusually heavy rains over the weekend, have rendered over 30,000 families homeless according to reports reaching Colombo yesterday. Xinhua reports from Colombo.

The worst affected area is Muttrur where over 10,000 families have been affected by the deluge. In the eastern coastal areas of Trincomalee 1750 families were affected. In another eight districts of the province, around 15,000 more families were rendered homeless.

**7 Tajik rebels shot dead:** Russian border guards killed seven Tajik rebels who tried to cross the war-torn Tajik-Afghan border, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported on Monday, AP says from Dushanbe.

The fighting occurred on Sunday, the same day Tajikistan's pro-Russian government and pro-Islamic opposition exchanged prisoners as part of a cease-fire agreement. Russian border troops also destroyed one of the opposition's weapons storage facilities, the news agency said. No Russian troops were killed.

**Tropical storm heads for Florida:**

Tropical Storm Gordon headed toward Florida after it toppled tents and flooded Haiti, but it caused little damage at the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where thousands of refugees are kept, AP reports from Miami.

The storm packed sustained winds of up to 45 mph (70 kph) and torrential rain on Sunday night. Gale warnings were posted for the east coast of Florida from St Augustine to the Dry Tortugas. The storm wasn't expected to hit land until late Monday.

**Gunman killed in US shootout:**

Two heavily armed gunmen in bulletproof vests and military fatigues opened fire on Sunday night, triggering a wild street shootout in which police killed one gunman and four people were wounded, AP reports from San Francisco.

The other gunman was listed in stable condition with a bullet wound in the leg after the shooting in Pacific Heights, a well-to-do neighbourhood of high-rises and Victorian houses, police spokeswoman Barbara Davis said.

**Rebels kill 21 in Bogota:** Rebels attacked a village police station, killing the police chief before being repelled by a paramilitary group in one of the year's bloodiest attacks. At least 21 people were killed, police said on Sunday, AP reports from Bogota.

The attack on Saturday in San Pedro de Uraba, 430 kilometers (250 miles) northwest of Bogota, came as President Ernesto Samper was preparing an initiative to end more than three decades of warfare by about 10,000 leftist guerrillas.

**Tajik prisoners exchanged:** Tajikistan's government and exiled opposition forces on Sunday finally carried out a prisoner exchange under a ceasefire deal struck in Islamabad earlier this month, a United Nations official said. Reuter reports from Dushanbe.

**Clinton asks Turkey, Greece to defuse tensions**

ANKARA, Nov 14: US President Bill Clinton has asked Turkey and Greece to defuse bilateral tensions by rescheduling separate manoeuvres they plan to hold at the same time in the Aegean, the Anatolia news agency said on Sunday, reports AP.

Air and sea manoeuvres by the two neighbours are scheduled for November 16, the date on which an international convention on sea rights will allow Greece to extend its territorial waters from six to 12 nautical miles.

Washington announced on Friday it was dispatching the cruiser Cape Saint George to the Aegean to ensure a reduction in tensions between the countries.

The new premier's hus-

**India developing sea-based missile system**

NEW DELHI, Nov 14: India is developing its maiden sea-based missile system at a top secret project at the Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE) in the southern Indian city of Bangalore, naval experts here said. reports IPS.

The system will be armed with a highly explosive conventional warhead capable of hitting targets on land and at sea, they said, once fully developed, it would be able to carry a nuclear warhead, they added.

The development of project 'Sagarika', meaning oceanic, is indicative of India's quest for

self reliance in missile technology, they said.

India already has an advanced integrated guided missile programme (IGMP) for intermediate range and short range ballistic missile, poised to go into production.

Sagarika is slated to be a submarine launched cruise missile (SLCM) with a 300 km range. It is estimated to cost 35 million dollars and is likely to be deployed by 2000, the experts said.

Although Sagarika was due for test launching in 1996-97, the recent death in Moscow of

the scientist heading the project is expected to delay it beyond the original schedule.

Models of the missile are currently undergoing wind tunnel testing which simulates its real-life performance and trajectory.

ADE sources say Sagarika will be a "low-flying air-breathing" missile system with a low trajectory. In flight, it will cruise at an altitude of 15 to 1000 metres above ground, achieving high sub-sonic speeds.

Guided by reconnaissance aircraft or satellites and a ter-

rain contour matching system, the multi-phased missile can ultimately be directed accurately to its targets.

The designing of the Sagarika project began more than two years ago when India decided to develop indigenous missile capability.

The decision came after the disintegration of the Soviet Union made military hardware scarce for Indian defence forces. India also found its fledgling missile programme severely hampered by western cartels anxious to prevent the proliferation of missile tech-

nology.

ADE officials said two major obstacles had to be overcome before 'Sagarika' could be accurately deployed by the Indian navy. First, they had to try fitting the missile from a submarine and second, construct a suitable submarine for the launch.

Experts said the technology required for launching a cruise missile from a submarine was far more complex than any other category of missiles, including the harpoon and anti-ship missiles delivered via torpedo tubes.

**Islamic Jihad leader Shami arrested**

JERUSALEM, Nov 14: Palestinian police arrested the spiritual leader of the radical Islamic Jihad as part of a crackdown on Muslim militants. PLO officials said today.

Sheikh Abdullah Shami, 40, leader of the Islamic Jihad, or Holy War, was arrested at his home in the Shejaeiyeh neighbourhood of Gaza City. PLO

sources close to the Islamic Jihad said Palestinian police tracked Shami, surrounded his house and arrested him. Police arrested 20 more Islamic militants during the night, bringing to 180 the number picked up by PLO leader Yasser Arafat's police.

Shami is the spiritual leader of the Islamic Jihad, which rejects the Israel-PLO peace agreement. It advocates an Islamic holy war to eliminate Israel and free the West Bank and Gaza Strip from Israeli occupation.

The group has claimed responsibility for a number of deadly attacks inside and outside the Jewish state.

Anticipating the crackdown, Islamic Jihad leaders went into hiding immediately following Friday's suicide bombing that killed three Israeli officers and wounded 16 Palestinian and Israeli police.

The attack took place at the same time as a protest by thousands of supporters in Gaza City at which Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. Shami, the main speaker, stood on an Israeli flag as armed followers fired into the air.



— AFP photo

**LTTE keen to resume peace talks**

COLOMBO, Nov 14: A unilateral ceasefire was holding in Sri Lanka on Monday amid hope that the Tamil Tiger rebels were keen to resume peace talks with the government to end the decade-old insurrection, reports AP.

"There has been no rebel attack since Saturday," said Brig Gemunu Kulatunga, the military's spokesman.

Military intelligence reported on Saturday that Tamil Tiger chief Velupillai Prabhakaran had ordered his guerrillas to retaliate only if attacked.

Since the rebels have not officially announced the ceasefire, the government has not reciprocated the action, although there have been no offensives by the military.

No reason was given for the ceasefire, but Prabhakaran's

order came hours after Chandrika Kumaratunga was sworn in as president. She polled an overwhelming 62 per cent of the vote on a pledge to end the decade-old

insurrection, reports AP.

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**Off the Record****Victim of 'excessive anger'**

NEW DELHI: A pride of lions pounced on a lioness and devoured her in an eastern Indian zoo, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported yesterday, says AFP.

The bizarre incident in the Nandankanan open zoo was discovered this weekend when rangers found the half-eaten carcass of the four-year-old lioness, it said.

They attributed the attack to "excessive anger" towards the female cat by her mates and said the lion pride had lived harmoniously even with a herd of deers in the sprawling zoo.

**Saddam lives it up**

NEW YORK: Saddam Hussein is spending as much as one billion dollar on palaces and presidential retreats while many in Iraq are destitute. US officials pressing to keep economic sanctions on Saddam told The New York Times, reports AP.

Since losing the Gulf War in 1991, Saddam has not only repaired the damage allied bombing did to his government's palaces but expanded them and also built new ones around the country, the newspaper said in Monday editions. It cited US officials that it did not identify.

The work is expected to triple the number of residences for the government elite, the officials said. It includes the construction of a presidential palace at Lake Tharhar.

The Central Intelligence Agency provided the one billion dollar figure, although US officials admit that is a rough estimate.

The officials plan to raise the spending issue as part of a push to keep economic sanctions on Iraq, the Times said.

They say the luxury building programme comes at a time when many in the nation of 20 million are broke, robberies are on the rise and even members of the Iraqi middle class are forced to sell their possessions to make ends meet.

The fact that Saddam Hussein is spending hundreds of millions to build palaces and refusing to use the humanitarian programme the United Nations has authorised shows the hypocrisy of his claims that he is concerned about his people's suffering, an American official said.

**Ban on sex-screening of foetuses**

BEIJING: China will ban sex-screening of foetuses and will forbid couples carrying serious genetic diseases from having children under a new family health law to take effect in January, officials said yesterday, reports Reuter.

"We have a clearly stated policy not to give identification of foetuses, so we have made it illegal to give tests," said Health Minister Chen Minzhang, unveiling the new law at a news conference in Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

One article decrees that sex identification of a foetus by technical means is strictly forbidden, except when needed on medical grounds. Doctors who perform such tests, which are not difficult, could lose their licences.

Due to a lingering tradition of preferring sons to daughters, some parents, allowed only one child, choose to abort rather than give birth to a baby that tests will be a girl.

The new law also bans marriage for people diagnosed with a serious genetic disease considered medically inappropriate for bearing children, unless the parents agree to be sterilised or to take long-term contraceptive measures.



— AFP photo

Zinzi Mandela (R), the daughter of the South African president, poses with model Iman, the wife of pop star David Bowie, after a charity fashion show to aid hungry South African children on Sunday at Sun City.

**Bandaranaike dynasty embarks on new tenure to govern Lanka**

COLOMBO, Nov 14: Sri Lanka set a world record today with a mother-and-daughter team for premier and head of state the landslide victory of the ruling People's Alliance at last week's presidential polls, reports AP.

Sirima Bandaranaike, 78, already in the history books as the world's first elected woman Prime Minister, was sworn in today for the same job, but with less powers, before her daughter, President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The two women clasped hands and wished each other long life at the ceremony held at the official "temple trees" residence of the president.

The Bandaranaike dynasty now includes three prime ministers and a president.

The new premier's hus-

band, Solomon Bandaranaike, won the post in 1956 but was assassinated in 1959. The widow was elected premier the following year.

Like her mother, Kumaratunga too became a political widow in February 1988 when her film-star-turned politician husband Vijay was gunned down in front of her and their daughter Yasodara, 14, and son Vimukti, 12.

Elected premier only last August, Kumaratunga, 49, told an interviewer that she was uncomfortable with high office, but she took it to like a duck to water because ruling the country was "like a family business".

Kumaratunga won a 1.99 million-vote majority at Wednesday's presidential poll and became the country's first

woman president Saturday.

Despite the successes of the upper-caste family, the Bandaranaike have been plagued by the bitter rivalry between an Oxford-graduate son and a French-educated daughter.

Kumaratunga first made her mark as the country's first Chief Minister in May 1993. After that, she rose like a meteor while her younger brother Anura Bandaranaike's career led.

Asked what her message to Anura Bandaranaike was after her presidential victory, Kumaratunga said: "Usually I don't like to be deaf and the dumb."

She has resisted moves by the mother to bring back Anura to the SLFP fold.

The flamboyant Anura, 45, had got used to partying and long overseas holidays during his more than 16 years as a front-bencher in the opposition.

Despite the difficulties of being in the opposition for 17 years till parliamentary polls

last August, "Mrs B" — as the premiers affectionately known — managed to hold her Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) together. The SLFP is the main constituent in the ruling alliance, which she also leads.

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Suddenly, the responsibility

of leading the SLFP fell on Mrs B, a housewife and political novice cruelly dubbed the "dumb doll" by opponents.

Kumaratunga said Saturday that she would be one of the first countries she would visit as president.

**Russian defence minister may be dismissed soon**

MOSCOW, Nov 14: