

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.

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 actively deployed by the Indian navy. First, they had to try firing 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.

The technical capability to successfully perform this task has yet to be demonstrated in India. None of the 18 submarines of the Indian navy is capable of launching a cruise missile and it is not even possible to modify them for the task.

But the Indian navy is not altogether without experience on submarines with cruise missile capability. In the eighties, India had leased a Charley-1 class nuclear powered submarine capable of firing cruise missiles from the Soviet Union.

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, reports AP.

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

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, trod on an Israeli flag as armed followers fired into the air.

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.

Mohammed Sharif, 70, was arrested at the family home in the eastern Punjab capital of Lahore and is charged with setting up bank accounts under false names to avoid paying taxes. Interior Minister Nasrullah Babar said.

If convicted of tax evasion and fraud, he could be sentenced up to seven years in jail and fined millions of dollars.

Nawaz Sharif vehemently denied the charges.

The elder Sharif's arrest is nothing new in Pakistan's rough-and-tumble politics. Sitting governments routinely arrest their political opponents.

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



Sirima Bandaranaike (L) takes her oath as Prime Minister before her daughter President Chandrika Kumaratunga in Colombo yesterday. — 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 war.

Kumaratunga, the first female to hold the office in Sri Lanka, has pledged to continue her quest to end the 11-year-old war that has claimed 34,000 lives.

Initial negotiations were suspended when Kumaratunga's main opponent, Gamini Dissanayake, was killed along with 56 others by a suspected, Tamil rebel suicide bomber on Oct. 24.

"No decision has been taken on when to resume talks," Navin Gunaratne, a member of the four-person government negotiating team, told The Associated Press in an interview.

BRIEFLY

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 Bionzo, 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 Muttur 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, Reuters 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.

Nepali Congress may not win enough seats to form govt

KATHMANDU, Nov 14: The ruling Nepali Congress (NC) party was reported to be gaining ground over its political rivals on the eve of tomorrow's general election, but analysts doubted it would win big enough to form a government on its own, reports AP.

The main opposition Nepal Communist Party-United, Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) party was said to be losing support — particularly in the east — following clashes with its former leftist allies, the United Peoples' Front-Nepal (UPFN) which is boycotting the poll.

So far seven people have been killed in campaign-related violence, three of whom were shot by police.

All political parties were ordered by the Election Commission (EC) to stop campaigning from midnight Saturday.

Analysts said straw polls indicated that the electorate was swinging towards Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala for the poll, called mid-term in an attempt to end party infighting and restore political stability.

The failure of leftist factions

to form a united front has played into the government's hands, said analysts. But they pointed out that the ruling party may not win enough seats to form a government.

87 demonstrators held in E Timor

DILI, Indonesia, Nov 14: The Indonesian military said it had arrested 87 demonstrators in troubled East Timor as armed troops and police confronted pro-independence protesters for a second day today, reports AP.

Witnesses said several hundred security personnel were guarding government buildings in the provincial capital, Dili, where rioting broke out on Sunday.

Police were blocking entrances to the city's university to stop outsiders from joining a campus demonstration by about 500 students who oppose Indonesian rule of the former Portuguese colony.

The unrest spotlighted Indonesia's human rights record as President Clinton joined other leaders at a Pacific rim trade summit.

The prospect of forced collaboration with the right-wing Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) was looking increasingly likely, they said. This would lead to difficult negotiations over the formation of a cabinet and distribution of portfolios, they added.

An army intelligence source projected that the NC would win between 90 and 95 seats in the 205-seat parliament.

Other analysts were more conservative and predicted the NC would emerge as the largest single party with between 80 and 85 seats.

More than 100 international observers from 40 countries have arrived in Nepal to oversee the elections.

In addition, a 500-member election observation committee, made up of six groups affiliated to the US-based Nepal human rights committee will monitor polls in more than 70 of the 75 districts.

Altogether 1,442 party candidates and 384 independents are running, representing 64 different parties.

The NC has 205 candidates. The NCP-UML is fielding 196 candidates and the RPP has 203.

Junta used germ warfare against Karen rebels?

BANGKOK, Nov 14: British experts who travelled to rebel-held areas of Myanmar recently are investigating allegations that the country's military government has used germ warfare against rebel tribes people, reports AP.

Baroness Caroline Cox, deputy speaker of Britain's House of Lords, was scheduled to give a press conference in London on Monday about the British team's trip of Karen-held territory earlier this month.

The Karen are the last major ethnic minority group still based along the Thai-Myanmar border.

Over the past year, Karens have claimed that military planes dropped dozens of devices with balloons attached around their villages. They allege the devices, normally used in meteorological work, contained a foul-smelling substance and that after its release people died from a cholera-type illness.

In one village, Karen medics told the team that 185 people died from the disease, which was previously unknown in the area.

Ethiopia to try Haile Mariam, 21 others

NAIROBI, Nov 14: Ethiopia's High Court has summoned exiled former dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam and 21 of his old officials to stand trial on charges of genocide, state radio said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

Addis Ababa Court demanded they appear on December 13, adding that if they failed to do so they would be tried in absentia, said the radio monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in Nairobi.

"The accused are summoned to appear in court on the date mentioned ... if the accused do not appear in court in accordance with the court summons, then their cases will be heard in their absence", the radio quoted a spokesman as saying.

The maximum penalty for the charges they face is death.

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 deer 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 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 Tharthar.

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 fetuses

BEIJING: China will ban sex-screening of fetuses 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 Reuters.

"We have a clearly stated policy not to give identification of fetuses, so we have made it illegal to give tests," said Health Minister Chen Minzhong, 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 show 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.



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. — AFP photo

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 husband, 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 to it 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 plunged.

Anura lost a leadership battle to her and defected to then ruling United National Party (UNP) in December last year. Their elder sister, Sunethra, maintains a low profile politically, but supports their mother.

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.

Asked what her message to Anura Bandaranaike was after her presidential victory, Kumaratunga said: "Usually I don't speak to the 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.

For a brief six months Anura was Minister of Higher Education, a reward from the

UNP government for ditching the family last December. After defecting, Anura said his mother was "not very happy" but called her a "tough nut".

"We are a very civilised family unlike the Bhuttos," he said, referring to present feuding in the family of Pakistan Premier Benazir Bhutto. He also justified his affection by saying his father had helped to form the UNP.

Solomon Bandaranaike set up the SLFP in 1951 after being sidelined by the UNP, and went on to win a sweeping victory at the 1956 elections. He was assassinated by a Buddhist monk in September 1959.

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

However, she rode the crest of a sympathy wave and went on to be the world's first elected woman premier in 1960. She lost the 1965 election, but staged a comeback five years later and ruled the country till 1977.

Despite her lack of experience, the convent-educated Mrs B played a key role in defusing tension between India and China after the brief border war between those two nations in 1962.

The Bandaranaike were close to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty in India, which helped her sort out long-drawn disputes with their giant neighbour.

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

Russian defence minister may be dismissed soon
MOSCOW, Nov 14: Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev may be dismissed soon, a Russian MP said here on Sunday, reports AP.

"Next week may be the turn of the head of the Defence Ministry," Nikolai Gonchar, a deputy of the Russian upper house of Federation Council said on private NTV television.

Gonchar is the chairman of the Federation Council's budget committee.

Grachev's name was cited in the probe into the death of Russian journalist Dimitri Kholodov, who was killed while opening a parcel bomb after announcing that he would publish a report on widespread corruption in the Russian army.