

BRIEFLY

Israel-PLO talks postponed: Talks between Israel and the PLO on extending autonomy have been postponed until November 29 because of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's tour abroad, a Palestinian official said on Tuesday. AFP reports from Gaza City.

The negotiations which have been taking place in Cairo aimed at organising elections to a Palestinian autonomy council had been scheduled to resume on November 21. Tayeb Abdelrahim, the head of PLO chief Yasser Arafat's office, told AFP.

Cuban kids may get US asylum: President Bill Clinton is considering granting asylum to several thousand Cuban children currently held in a refugee camp at the US naval base of Guantanamo, Cuba. The State Department said on Tuesday. AFP reports from Washington.

State Department spokesman David Johnson said, "The presence of some 2,700 to 3,000 children at the refugee camp raises important humanitarian concerns," as they are unable to attend school. The president has not yet made a decision. Johnson added.

2 Tamil Tigers shot dead: Government troops shot dead two Tamil rebels in separate confrontations, but the guerrilla's unilateral ceasefire was holding in Sri Lanka. Military officials said on Wednesday. AP reports from Colombo.

The rebels were killed during cordon and search operations in eastern Batticaloa district on Tuesday. Troops also recovered weapons, ammunition, explosives and hand grenades, officials said.

Naga rebels kill 9 Kukis: Suspected Naga tribal militants gunned down nine members of a rival tribe in the far eastern Indian state of Manipur on Monday, the Press Trust of India reported on Tuesday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

The killers ambushed a vehicle in which the victims, who belonged to the Kuki tribe, were travelling in Chandel district, the news agency said.

PLO executive body meets: The PLO's executive committee met for the first time in autonomous Gaza yesterday despite a poor turnout, and threw its weight behind the efforts of the Palestinian self-rule authority, AFP reports from Gaza City.

Only eight out of its 18 members took part in the session called by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Row over VOA station in Lanka: The fate of a Voice of America (VOA) broadcasting station in northwestern Sri Lanka that some villagers believe could be used for military purposes will be decided by a government committee, officials said on Wednesday. AP reports from Colombo.

Construction was suspended in October after a fisherman was killed when police opened fire at protesters outside the site in Iranawila, 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of Colombo.

Jordan to protect peace pact: Jordan will protect the peace it made with Israel and will not allow its land to serve as a base for the enemies of peace, King Hussein vowed on Tuesday. AFP reports from Amman.

"Most Jordanians supported the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel," the king said in a speech broadcast on radio and television. "The minority opposed to it must respect the majority's opinion," he added.

E Timor University closed: East Timor University has been closed until next week in a bid to quell anti-Indonesian protests by students, professors said on Wednesday. AP reports from Dili.

Classes at the 2,100-student campus were suspended because a peaceful student demonstration on Sunday was followed by violent clashes between riot police and a mob of indigenous East Timorese. They were reportedly angered by long-running ethnic tensions with newcomers from other parts of Indonesia.

18 shot dead in Burundi: Eighteen people were killed in an attack by marauding gunmen on an army post in southern Burundi early this week, the official ABP news agency reported yesterday. AFP says from Bujumbura.

Sixteen of the attackers and two child hostages they had seized died in the attack Monday night at Buyengeru in Bururi province, a local ABP correspondent reported.

New Tajik president sworn in: Tajikistan's new president was inaugurated on Wednesday, and he promised to pursue peace even as fighting continued on the country's war-torn border with Afghanistan, AP reports from Dushanbe.

Emomali Rakhmonov, Tajikistan's leader since late 1992, was elected November 6 with 60 per cent of the vote in the impoverished former Soviet republic.

HK hosts paintings fair: The eighth fair of important old master and modern European master paintings and sculpture opened in Hong Kong yesterday, Xinhua reports from Hong Kong.

The paintings on display and sale were done by some of the most noted Flemish and Dutch old masters from the 17th and 18th centuries and modern masters.

Sweden probes sabotage threats: Swedish police are investigating if a link exists between sabotage threats against Lithuanian nuclear plant and their arrest of a Lithuanian national who threatened to blow up the same installation. Prosecutor General Jan Danielsson said Tuesday. AFP reports from Stockholm.

"We have asked Lithuanian authorities for information on this man, who will be charged soon, and the organisation he claims to represent," Danielsson said.

UN urges W Sahara referendum: For years, the people of the Western Sahara have been promised the chance to choose between independence and union with Morocco. The UN Security Council has made a fresh appeal to both sides in the dispute to get on with it. AP reports from United Nations.

After three years of planning and little to show for it, the council on Tuesday urged Morocco and independence-seekers to allow "no further undue delays" for a proposed UN-organised referendum. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali is to visit the area this month to try to coax the two sides into some progress.

US close to full diplomatic ties with Vietnam

HANOI, Nov 16: The United States is close to establishing full diplomatic relations with Vietnam, but its former enemy still must do more to clear up the fates of missing American servicemen, a US senator said Wednesday, reports AP.

The Vietnamese must try harder to resolve the remaining 55 cases of US soldiers and airmen last seen alive in the Vietnam War, said Sen John Kerry, D-Mass. Hanoi also must provide more documents that would help locate other missing, he added.

Most of the 1,624 Americans unaccounted for in Vietnam are known to be dead but the United States hopes to recover their remains.

Trouble-gripped Karachi on verge of nervous breakdown

KARACHI, Nov 16: When Karachi's top official gets to the office, his sleeves are rolled up, his phones are ringing furiously and dozens of men are waiting in the sweltering hall to ask urgent favours, reports AP.

There are no easy days for Faheem Khan as he tries to save one of the world's most troubled cities.

"I'm surprised myself sometimes how the city carries on with all its problems," Khan said in an interview with the Associated Press. "We have unemployment, crime and pollution. People are chasing each other through the streets with guns every day, but the city survives."

Just barely, many people say. The congested, steamy

'Only US can break Indo-Pak deadlock over Kashmir'

NEW YORK, Nov 16: Only the United States can break the deadlock between India and Pakistan over divided Kashmir and prevent a possible war, the chief of the Pakistani-governed portion of the region said on Tuesday, reports AP.

States and its Middle Eastern allies have the economic clout to get India to reach a negotiated settlement, said Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan, president of Pakistani-ruled Kashmir.

"The key to the problem lies in the United States," Qayyum Khan said at a news conference. "If the United States would take a bold decision recognising the reality of the situation, it would not be very difficult."

Qayyum Khan was going to Washington, where he planned to meet later this week with members of Congress. He was speaking on behalf of his state, but a Pakistani official said his

views were similar to those of the country's federal government.

When India was partitioned by Britain in 1947, Kashmir's ruler signed a treaty joining India after Pakistan invaded. But India has never held a promised vote to let residents of Jammu-Kashmir, its only mostly Muslim state, choose which country it wants to join.

Pakistan has denied Indian charges that it supports the guerrilla war, but says it wants Kashmiris to be allowed to vote on which country they want to join.

India has vowed never to give up Kashmir.

Pakistan and India, both of which can make nuclear weapons, have fought three wars since 1947 — two of them over Kashmir.

"There has to be a solution, or let the two countries go to war," Qayyum Khan said. "If ever there is going to be a nuclear strike, it is going to be in that part of the world."

Qayyum Khan also cautioned that delaying a settlement increases the influence of Muslim radicals in Kashmir.

"May be Iraq is supporting them, or Iran is supporting them. It could come to a point where India cannot control it," he said.

US general to head UN peace mission in Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Nov 16: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali appointed a US General on Tuesday to head the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti but offered no timetable for the hand-off to the international force, reports AP.

Boutros-Ghali, who made a brief visit here, told a news conference that questions relating to the restoration of a secure environment and recruitment of a 6,000-strong UN contingent have not been resolved.

"Has security been restored to Haiti and do the United Nations have the necessary forces?" Boutros-Ghali asked. "It is too soon to answer

these two questions," he said. The secretary-general announced he had asked the UN Security Council to endorse the UN Security Council's choice of General Daniel Shroeder to be the commander of UN peacekeepers in Haiti.

Schroeder would serve under the UN representative in Haiti, Lakhdar Brahimi of Algeria.

Boutros-Ghali also said that he would appeal to the international community to grant 77 million dollars in aid from UN funds to Haiti.

It was Boutros-Ghali's first visit to Haiti, but the second by a UN secretary general since the Duvalier family dictatorship fell in 1986.



Palestinian policemen wave a Palestinian flag as they celebrate on Tuesday in Jericho the 26th anniversary of the proclamation of an independent state of Palestine by the PLO on November 15, 1988 in Algiers. —AFP photo

Asian states buy 20 pc of world's fighter planes

WASHINGTON, Nov 16: One of every five fighter planes produced in the world is sold to Asian countries, which have launched a military buildup to ease fears of US disengagement in the region, an international study said on Tuesday, reports AP.

"Many nations fear that the United States will further reduce its commitment and cease to play a stabilising role in the region after the year 2000," the Institute for Defence and Disarmament said.

From 1994 to the year 2000, China is expected to produce more aircraft for domestic use than any other country in the world and it will be second only to the United States in aircraft production according to the study.

Countries in Asia, excluding India and Pakistan, are expected to buy between 150 and 160 combat planes by the year 2000 with China alone purchasing half of those.

China produces some 110 fighter jets each year compared to the 340 it built in the 1970s.

Taiwan plans to put aside 30 billion dollars between 1994 and 2000 on military expenses, half of which will be spent on purchases of fighter jets, the defence think tank said.

Taiwan has set a record for purchases of combat planes and has ordered the manufacturing of 210 fighter jets to be delivered by the year 2000.

South Korea has decided to compensate for the smaller US presence there by earmarking one-third of its national budget, or 11.4 billion dollars, to purchase combat planes.

Malaysia is piecing together a rapid-deployment force that will include the 44 newly-imported combat aircraft bought from Russia, Britain and the United States.

India asks private sector to develop military hardware

NEW DELHI, Nov 16: The Indian armed forces on Tuesday invited the private sector to help develop and build military hardware to end decades of dependence on foreign suppliers, reports AP.

The call was the first major appeal directed at entrepreneurs by the military, which thus far has relied on imports and eight ramshackle state-owned factories for its equipment.

Industrial leaders attending a session here with military brass agreed that such a partnership could boost the share of indigenous military goods in annual supplies to the defence forces from the current 30 per cent to 70 per cent by 2005.

The former Soviet Union supplied up to 70 per cent of New Delhi's military needs, and the USSR's disintegration has sparked a huge spare parts crunch for India's armed forces.

India's production of defence spare parts and other equipment is valued at four billion rupees (133 million US dollars) a year, while its annual military import bill is more than 332 million dollars.

The Indian air force, the world's fourth largest, accounts for 60 per cent of all defence imports, officials said at a meeting organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the air force.

"As equipment grows older,

the import bill will double," warned APJ Abdul Kalam, architect of India's ambitious programme to develop an array of guided missiles, rockets and a futuristic light combat aircraft.

India's hopes to assemble a ballistic missile with a rocket engine imported from Russia flopped after the United States pressured Moscow to scrap the deal.

"The pressures can be avoided through a high level of self-sufficiency," Kalam said.

The CII said the military's offer opened a challenge to the industry to upgrade its technology for the armed forces and for foreign trade opportunities.

Pakistani troops besiege TNSM stronghold

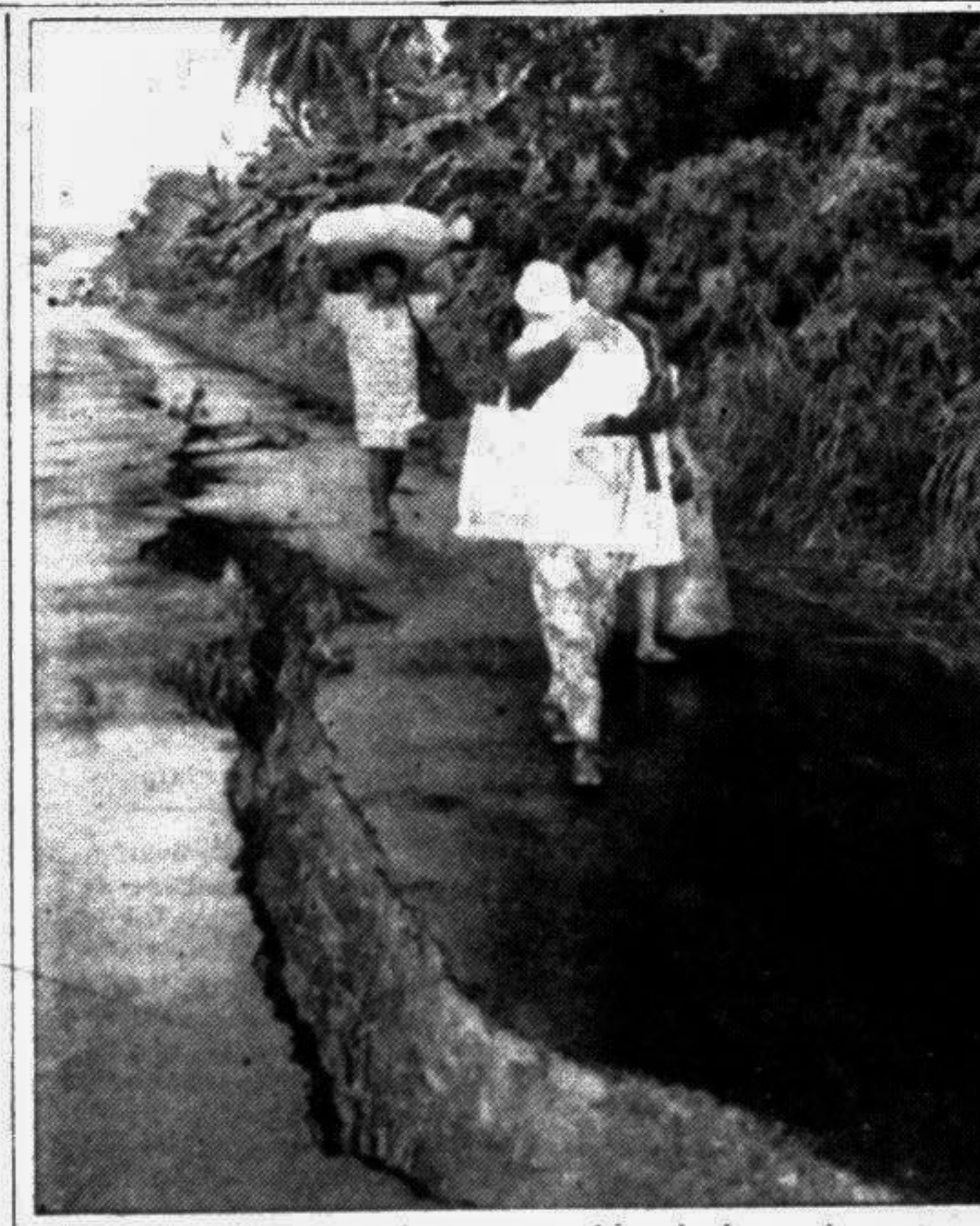
PESHAWAR, Nov 16: Pakistani troops have defeated most of the rebel Islamic militants in a remote northwestern region near the Afghan border, government officials said yesterday, reports Reuter.

The troops surrounded a militant stronghold at a village on the border yesterday and demanded that the rebels release 22 hostages still held by them and surrender their local leader Sher Bahadur, the officials said.

The militants calling for Islamic laws in their semi-autonomous tribal area released one army captain they had held since November.

Militant leader Sufi Mohammad last week disowned his followers' campaign after authorities announced the enforcement of the Sharia laws in the Malakand division area of the North West Frontier Province within a month.

But some leaders of his Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-i-Mohammadi (TNSM) organisation said they did not trust the government.



Residents walk yesterday on a road cracked open by a strong earthquake which hit Mindoro Island in central Philippines on Tuesday. — AFP photo

Benazir assures Palestinians of continued aid

ISLAMABAD, Nov 16: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto told a senior Palestinian official on Tuesday that Pakistan would continue to aid the Palestinians as a religious and moral duty, officials said, reports AP.

Benazir told Faruq Kadumi, who handles the PLO's foreign affairs, on the first day of his three-day visit here that "Pakistan would keep providing Palestinians with political, moral and material support as a religious and moral obligation," the officials said.

Earlier Kadumi and Pakistani Foreign Minister Asef Ahmed Ali signed a protocol establishing a Pakistani-Palestinian commission to promote economic and technical cooperation between Pakistan and the Palestinian autonomous areas of Gaza and Jericho, an official statement said.

Kadumi and Ali held wide-ranging talks on topics that included the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir and the Middle East peace process.

20,000 Indian troops die in Kashmir since '89

ISLAMABAD, Nov 16: A Kashmiri guerrilla commander claimed on Tuesday some 20,000 Indian soldiers had been killed since 1989 in the ongoing dispute over Kashmir, reports AP.

Syed Salahuddin, who identified himself as a commander from the Hizbul Mujahideen resistance group, told a news conference here that more than 40,000 Kashmiris had also died in the fighting.

Reports from India have put the overall death toll at around 10,000 over the past five years in violence linked to the Muslim secessionist revolt in the southern two-thirds of Kashmir controlled by New Delhi.

Hizbul Mujahideen is one of the main militant groups fighting the Indians. It said Salahuddin was visiting Pakistan and the Islamabad-controlled northern third of Kashmir to meet refugees from the "Indian-occupied" part.

Salahuddin thanked Pakistan for its political and diplomatic support, and said "much more is needed to be done since it (Pakistan) is a

party in the Kashmir case." India blames Pakistan for training and arming the Kashmiri militants waging the separatist drive in its only Muslim majority state — a charge denied by Islamabad. The dispute over Kashmir has been a catalyst for two of the three wars the neighbouring countries have fought since their independence from Britain in 1947.

In his press conference, Salahuddin said the number of Indian troops in Kashmir had gone up to 600,000 and claimed that 300 Israeli personnel were training Indians in counter-insurgency techniques.

His claims could not be immediately verified. He said the Kashmir problem could only be resolved through armed struggle because India "is not willing to settle it through peaceful means."

Salahuddin accused the Indian forces of committing large-scale human rights violations including torture and rapes.

Protest mars Prince Andrew's Argentina visit

BUENOS AIRES, Nov 16: A violent demonstration outside the British ambassador's residence in Buenos Aires on Tuesday marred the first day of a visit by Prince Andrew billed as a sign of reconciliation after the Falklands war, reports Reuter.

A group of about 100 protesters including war veterans and fringe left wing groups set fire to British and US flags and charged police barriers. Police and mounted officers charged wielding truncheons.

Police said dozens of protesters were arrested. A Reuter photographer saw one being carried away in handcuffs with his face covered in blood.