

BRIEFLY

19 die in Indian liquor tragedy :

At least 19 people died and 30 others were taken ill Friday evening in a liquor tragedy in the Hazaribagh and Koderma districts in Bihar state, Xinhua reports from New Delhi.

Home Secretary J L Arya said that the deaths occurred in Kondratoli, Jamokhari, Orda, Jagdih and Pathargha villages in the two adjoining districts of South Bihar. Arya said that the liquor was sold by a liquor shop where excise raids were underway.

Syrian stand on ME peace :

Syria has done "everything necessary" to secure peace in the Middle East, Prime Minister Hafez Al-Assad said in an interview yesterday, AFP reports from Cairo.

"Syria has done everything necessary for a strategic peace to meet people's interest in the region," Zohbi told the Egyptian daily Al-Ahram.

Irish party to pick new chief :

Ireland's largest party met yesterday to select a new leader to replace Albert Reynolds, who resigned this week as prime minister, AP reports from Dublin.

Widely tipped to take the helm of Fianna Fail is Finance Minister Bertie Ahern, 43, the plain-spoken rising star of the party. Colleagues say he has a knack for reaching compromise with opponents — a skill Fianna Fail will need to stay in power.

5 journalists hurt in Gaza :

Three Palestinian journalists were shot by a Palestinian police and two American photographers were beaten up during bloody clashes in the Gaza Strip on Friday, AP reports from Gaza City.

The wounded included Associated Press photographer Ahmed Jadhallah, who were shot in their hands. Reuters TV cameraman Shamseddin Ouda was hit in the shoulder and was in fair condition.

Filipino fire claims 4 :

Four people perished in a fire that gutted an apartment in the Philippine capital yesterday, police said, Reuters reports from Manila.

Initial investigation showed the fire was caused by a candle.

Danish brigade for UN duty :

Denmark has set up a 4,500-soldier brigade ready for deployment on possible U.N. peacekeeping missions on as little as two weeks' notice, the Danish defence minister said on Friday, AP reports from United Nations.

Peacekeeping missions often have been handicapped by the length of time needed for member countries to assemble forces. The Danish soldiers could form part of a "standby force" ready for action on short notice, said Defence Minister Hans Haekkerup.

Armed Forces Day in Haiti :

Shielded by bulletproof glass, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on Friday saluted a parade of unarmed soldiers belonging to the army that ousted him three years ago, AP reports from Port-au-Prince.

The occasion, was the annual Armed Forces Day, traditionally a celebration of Haiti's independence from French colonial rule. But the army, blamed for thousands of political killings while Aristide was in exile, kept its role low key in this year's parade.

Radioactive bar found in Estonia :

Seven people were taken to hospital on Friday after a radioactive metal bar was found in a house near the Estonian capital, officials said, reports Reuters from Tallinn.

The Estonian rescue department said in a statement released on Friday that 100 roentgens of radioactivity per hour had been measured at the house in Kiisa, a small town 40 km (30 miles) south of Tallinn.

Chissano Mozambique's president :

Joaquim Chissano of the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) was elected president in the first round of elections held in the east African country with 53.3 per cent of the votes, officials announced yesterday, AFP says from Mozambique.

The results from the October 27-29 poll were originally scheduled to be announced on November 16 but were delayed "for technical reasons," officials failed to produce the results as expected on Friday.

Lebanese warlord on trial :

Former Christian warlord Samir Geagea went on trial on Saturday, facing a possible death penalty if convicted of bombing a church and killing a political rival, AP reports from Beirut.

The Lebanese news media called it the most important trial since Lebanon gained independence from France in 1943.

Lagos airport blast a sabotage :

An airport blast that occurred during a visit by a U.S. congressional delegation may have been sabotage, a newspaper reported Saturday, AP reports from Lagos, Nigeria.

The explosion at the Lagos international airport's arrival hall Thursday also coincided with the one-year anniversary of Gen. Sani Abacha's seizure of power, which wrecked hopes for a return to civilian rule this year.



French President Francois Mitterrand (R) listens to British Prime Minister John Major on Friday in Chateaux, France, before the 17th annual Franco-British summit.

— AFP photo

Wife of actor Guess convicted :

The estranged wife of actor Michael Guess has been convicted of shooting him to death during an argument, AP reports from Newark.

Christine Austin Guess, 31, was found guilty of reckless manslaughter Friday. She faces up to 10 years in prison and is scheduled to be sentenced in January.

Fresh bid to end Angolan war

LUSAKA Nov 19: Southern African leaders meet in the Zambian capital on Saturday in a new bid to ensure a peace pact ending 19 years of civil war in Angola is signed as scheduled this weekend, reports Reuters.

President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe will chair the meeting of the so-called frontline states, which include Zambia, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa.

The leaders are also due to witness the signing of the pact on Sunday by Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos and UNITA rebel leader Jonas Savimbi.

— AFP photo

Source of all corruption in India is politics?

BANGALORE, Nov 19: India's Chief Election Commissioner TN Seshan accused the nation's industrialists on Friday of being a key source of corruption in politics and urged them to stop funding elections for personal gain, reports Reuters.

"India's biggest scourge is corruption," Seshan said in a lecture organised by the greater Mysore Chamber of Industry, a business club in the southern Karnataka state.

"The source of all corruption is politics," he said. "But there are funds, the politicians don't want."

UML chief Adhikary set to become PM
Nepali Congress Party
concedes defeat

KATHMANDU, Nov 19: Nepal's liberal Congress Party conceded defeat in the Himalayan kingdom's general elections today as its communist rivals sought to patch together a coalition to help it govern divided electorate, reports Reuters.

"We are out of power," Congress spokesman Mahesh Acharya told Reuters. "The indications are we will have to sit in the opposition."

With 175 of 205 parliamentary seats decided, the communist party, Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) had won 83 seats while Congress, the outgoing ruling party, had 62.

"I think it is very clear the voters don't want us in the government," Acharya said. "We have to abide by this verdict."

Congress and the communists fought side by side for decades against autocratic rule, finally putting an end to the kingdom's absolute monarchy in 1990 with pro-democracy demonstrations in which more than 50 people were killed.

Acharya said a UML-led government would have to respect democracy, the constitutional monarchy and human rights, as well as congress's economic policies of liberalisation.

"There is no reason for us to be disheartened," Acharya said. "Congress policies will be carried out. They (UML) have to be pragmatic."

UML President Man Mohan Adhikary was set to become the next prime minister, UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal said.

Adhikary, 72, survived 17 years in jail under previous autocratic governments and upheaval in his movement to merge two rival communist strands in 1991.

The UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal said the party's parliamentarians would have to formally approved Adhikary as their choice to be prime minister. Then King Birendra would have to name him in a formality that could take some time, diplomats said.

With its chances of an outright majority apparently fading, the UML began the task of building a coalition, meeting elder statesman and former Congress leader Ganesh Man Singh who broke with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala earlier this year.



Sonia Gandhi and her daughter Priyanka stand in prayer before the monument to slain Prime Minister Indira Gandhi yesterday in New Delhi to mark her 77th birthday.

— AFP photo

Rao in a tough spot over
Gen Joshi's successor

NEW DELHI, Nov 19: The death of India's army chief has upset careful plans on naming a successor without angering generals in the race for the top job of the world's fourth largest fighting force, analysts said today, reports AFP.

General Bipin Chandra Joshi, 59, died here on Friday after a game of golf.

The highly decorated general, who became army chief on July 1, 1993, complained of shortness of breath and was taken to a military hospital where he died of a heart attack.

The officer, who steered the army through a period of transition following the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union — India's main military ally — was the first chief of the country's million-plus army to die while in office.

Joshi was scheduled to continue in office until December 1995, and some of his immediate juniors are slated to retire from the army before then.

"His death places Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao in a tough spot because now he will have to change carefully-laid plans in naming his top commander," said an expert from India's Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis.

Rao, who holds the defence portfolio, is expected to name Joshi's successor on Monday after consultations with President Shankar Dayal Sharma, supreme commander of India's armed forces, the military said today.

The army has lost a far-sighted chief, Sharma said on Friday as Joshi's death thrust on him and Rao the difficult

task of choosing the right man.

"In choosing a commander, Rao is in the unenviable task of either going by seniority and setting up a precedent, or risk superseding several top-ranking officers," the Indian Express said today.

At least one contender for the chief's post quite the army in the early 1990s alleging he was superseded by a junior.

India's top army job traditionally goes to one of the commanders of the country's five military zonal commands, but the present chiefs are out-ranked by two generals, including the army's vice-chief, Lieutenant General Surinder Nath.

"But neither of the two have held full charge of any of the five commands, which disqualifies them for the job," said a senior army officer.

Heavy fighting in Bihac

SARAJEVO, Nov 19: Heavy fighting raged today in and around the northwestern Bosnian enclave of Bihac as the UN Security Council was poised to adopt a resolution threatening air strikes against invading Croatian Serbs, reports AFP.

The Security Council was expected to adopt a resolution later in the day threatening military action against the breakaway Croatian Serbs who have joined Bosnian Serb forces in attacking the enclave.

On Friday, Serb Planes, flying out of the Croatian Serbs' breakaway region of Krajina, struck at the UN-declared safe area of Bihac town with napalm and cluster bombs.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Secretary General Willy Claes, in an interview with CNN said the

time for action against the Serbs had come.

Mainly Muslim Bosnian government and Bosnian Serb forces remained locked in "fierce" fighting on the Grabez plateau, east of the Bihac town, for control of the high ground overlooking the UN-declared safe area, while invading Muslim rebel and Croatian Serb forces closed in around the northern town of Velika Kladusa, a UN protection force spokesman said here.

But it appears that forces from the RSK (Croatian Serb Forces) have been unable to make gains in the town, Thant Myint U added.

Heavy fighting also flared around Ripac, to the southwest of Bihac town, but there appeared to have been no major change to confrontation lines in the enclave on Friday, he said.

Bosnian Serbs Friday shelled the UN-declared safe area of Tuzla, in northern Bosnia, for the fifth day in a row.

They now linked their attacks there to demands that government forces lift their siege of Ahil.

Sarajevo radio said two children were killed and three people wounded by shelling of the town on Friday, but the UN spokesman could not immediately confirm this.

Meanwhile, senior UN officials, including Viktor Andreyev, the civil affairs coordinator here, were hoping to travel today to the nearby Serb stronghold of Pale to protest recent Serb attacks on Sarajevo, the shelling of Tuzla and a continuing Serb blockade of fuel convoys to the besieged Muslim-held enclaves in the east of the country.

politics will change and it is possible to hope that its character will change," he said.

Politicians and businessmen said Seshan's close watch on state election campaigns this month in Karnataka and neighbouring Andhra Pradesh had had some effect.

In both states, he has restricted campaigns to what parties say are shoestring budgets. There are no loudspeakers blaring slogans and election music nor posters on the city walls, giving the campaign a clean if bland appearance.

The Seshan phobia is working and it has had a sobering effect," said Hari

Kumar, owner of the Bangalore-based Deccan Herald newspaper.

"It is not as though the role of money has disappeared from elections altogether," Kumar said. "But Seshan has made it that much more difficult for political parties to use it as a weapon."

Seshan, leading what has been described by the media as a one-man campaign against corruption in politics, said he was due to retire after two years.

There's not much time. I have only 24 months and 18 days to go," he said.

JKLF leader Butt
killed in road
accident

SRINAGAR, Nov 19: Gulam Nabi Butt, a leading Muslim separatist in India's troubled Kashmir region, died today after being seriously injured in a road accident earlier this month, officials said, reports Reuters.

Butt, 54, was senior vice-president of the pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) which seeks a unified Jammu and Kashmir uniting the two parts of the Kashmir valley ruled by India and Pakistan.

Butt was hit by a speeding motorcycle ten days ago while walking down a road in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, the only Muslim majority state of mainly Hindu India.

JKLF was founded in the mid-1960s by his brother Muhammad Maqbool Butt who was hanged in 1984 in New Delhi on a murder charge.

Gulam Nabi Butt was himself jailed several times by India, which rules two-thirds of the northern Kashmir valley.

Muslim separatists are waging a four-year-old battle against India.

Nagas kill
25 Kukis
in Manipur

NEW DELHI, Nov 19: Tribal militants killed 25 people overnight in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today, reports AFP.

Some 30 armed guerrillas belonging to the Naga tribe attacked Manipur's Thingam village late Friday and opened fire with automatic weapons, PTI said.

The victims were members of the rival Kuki tribe. Several others were injured in the raid.

The Naga attackers also torched 20 Kuki homes before fleeing, PTI added.

The attack came two days after Kuki guerrillas killed nine Nagas in the area, which borders Myanmar.

Naga-Kuki clashes have left more than 1,000 people dead in northeastern India after inter-tribal rivalries flared there a year ago.

HR prize to 2
dissidents
angers China

BEIJING, Nov 19: China reacted angrily today to the awarding of the Robert Kennedy Human Rights Prize in Washington to two detained human rights activists, Wei Jingsheng and Ren Wanding, reports AFP.

"To give this human rights award to these people is a gross interference in China's internal affairs under the pretext of human rights," a foreign ministry spokesman said.

The award, including a 30,000 dollar prize, was presented by the late Kennedy's widow and accepted on Wei and Ren's behalf by Liu Qing, an exiled dissident living in the United States.

The Chinese spokesman said the prize was unwarranted given the criminal status of the two dissidents.

Colleagues fed up
with Zhirinovsky

MOSCOW, Nov 19: Fed up with Vladimir Zhirinovsky, more than 200 legislators tried Friday to banish the outspoken ultranationalist from the parliament floor for three sessions after his latest outburst, reports AP.

But despite a 204-60 backing in the State Duma or lower house, the measure failed for lack of an absolute majority of the 450 member body.

The move came after a shouting Zhirinovsky, during hearings on a counterintelligence bill, accused the head of the Federal Counterintelligence Service of being an agent for the Mossad, Israel's secret service. He called the agency, a successor to the KGB, "a branch of the CIA and Mossad."

Muslim militants break
one-day truce in Gaza

GAZA CITY, Nov 19: Hundreds of Muslim militants stoned Palestinian and Israeli troops on Saturday and attacked a Jewish settlement despite a truce aimed at pulling Palestinians back from the brink of civil war, reports AP.

The protests came after clashes on Friday between Muslim worshippers and Palestinian police that left 13 people dead and more than 150 wounded.

The one-day truce was worked out overnight by Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab physician, and Sheikh Abdallah Darwish, leader of the Islamic

movement in Israel, composed of the heads of various Israeli town councils.

Under the agreement, PLO police pledged not to interfere in funeral marches scheduled for later Saturday and militant Muslim leaders promised to restrain their followers.

About 300 supporters of the Muslim militant group Hamas converged on an Israeli army checkpoint outside the Jewish settlement of Netzarim on Saturday and pelted soldiers with stones.

Israeli troops fled into the settlement. Protesters followed and threw stones at Netzarim's watchtower. Troops fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds, wounding a 17-year-old in the chest.

The protesters also stoned about two dozen Palestinian police trying to stop their advance. The Palestinian forces left the area without firing shots.

In the West Bank town of Hebron, hundreds of Hamas followers burned pictures of PLO chief Yasser Arafat and stoned Israeli soldiers who fired tear gas and live bullets.

In Tulikarem, also on the West Bank, troops fired to disperse Hamas protesters and Arab reporters said several Palestinians were wounded.

Merchants throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip closed their shops in response to a strike call by Hamas.

Friday's clashes in Gaza City between Muslim fundamentalists and Arafat's security forces were the worst since Arafat took charge of Gaza.

Troops ready
for possible
Tamil attack

COLOMBO, Nov 19: Sri Lankan security forces today braced for possible attacks by Tamil rebels ahead of their annual Heroes Week dedicated to thousands of militants killed in the island's ethnic conflict, officials said, reports AFP.

Troops were alerted to the possibility of rebel attacks shortly after the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on Friday revoked to their unit laterally declared seven-day ceasefire a day before it was due to expire, officials said.

"Since the ceasefire is off, we believe the Tigers will try to do something before or during Heroes Week. Troops have been ready since the so-called ceasefire came into effect," a military spokesman said.

Off the Record



BOOKMAKERS' FAVOURITES FOR THE MISS WORLD TITLE: Isle de Meulemeester (L) of Belgium and Branka Bebic of Croatia at Sun City on Friday before the final yesterday.

— AFP photo

For keeping 75 sex videos...

BANGKOK: A 69-year-old senior Buddhist monk has been arrested on pornography charges after he was found to be in the possession of 75 sex video cassettes and 377 magazines, police said yesterday, reports AFP.

"I just wanted to look at them. I don't see anything wrong with that," Mahasupin Kunaro, an assistant to the abbot at a monastery in the southern Thai province of Nakhon Si Thammarat, was quoted by a police spokesman as saying.

The arrest follows an operation on Thursday in which a police officer had asked for an audience with the Buddhist leader and was invited to watch a Japanese pornographic film.

The monk was also found to have three bottles of whisky in addition to a television and a video player.

Belief in shamans and
spirits still rife

SEOUL: When the housewife started seeing shadows pacing out of the corner of her eye, she didn't think twice about where to go for help, reports AP.

She sought out a shaman.

"It was the spirit of my husband's deceased first wife haunting the kitchen. She was too hungry to make the journey to the afterworld," Cho Kyu-Soo, an 49-year old devout Methodist, explained matter-of-factly.

Cho said the ghost disappeared after she hired a shaman to perform a ritual offering of food to appease it. Now she feels free.

Skyscrapers and church steeples line the streets of Seoul, and satellites beam rock music videos to living rooms. But many Koreans, old and young, still cling to the age-old belief in spirit possession and destinies written in the stars.

Jilted lover's fiery revenge

RABAT: A young man poured petrol over a girl and set her alight after she spurned his proposal of marriage, press reports said on Friday, reports AFP.

They said that Taoufik Abdelmajid took his revenge after learning that Malika Sarfari, 20, intended to break off their relationship. He waited outside her school with a can of petrol and committed the act when she confirmed her decision.

They said Sarfari was in a coma with serious burns in a specialist Rabat hospital.

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