

BRIEFLY

16 killed in Pak road mishap: A van carrying a wedding party crashed into a tree, killing 16 people, in the northeastern Pakistan province of Punjab news reports said yesterday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

The overcrowded vehicle was hit from behind by another van before it smashed into the tree on Friday near the town of Toba Tek Singh, the reports said.

Russian team to visit N Korea: Russia plans to send a delegation to Pyongyang this year in an effort to sell light-water nuclear reactors to North Korea, a news report said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Panov was quoted by Japan's Kyodo news service as saying in Moscow on Friday that the delegation would be sent to North Korea in December.

Prince Rainier operated on: Prince Rainier of Monaco underwent heart surgery on Friday, a procedure carried out "in good conditions," the palace of this tiny Mediterranean principality said. AP reports from Monte Carlo.

Rainier, 71, was operated on at the Cardiothoracic Center here, according to a brief palace statement.

4 forgers held in Taiwan: Taiwan has arrested four suspects and seized forged Chinese renminbi valued at 224 million Taiwan dollars (8.5 million US) in the southern county of Kaohsiung, a newspaper reported yesterday. Reuter says from Taipei.

The China Times quoted a government investigation bureau official as saying that the four planned to ship the forged renminbi to China's southeast and buy drugs and weapons.

US frees 2 Haitian junta men: The United States has released at least two well-known military sympathisers it was holding as suspects in crimes committed under military rule, an official close to the government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and other sources said on Friday. Reuter reports from Port-au-Prince.

American troops last week set free Max Paul, the former head of the country's Port Authority and close ally of the military government. A source close to the Aristide government also said Romeo Halloum, a notorious bodyguard and enforcer for ex-dictator Lieutenant General Raoul Cedras was released.

Two Kurdish groups unite: The two main rival Kurdish groups in northern Iraq have united under a joint leadership to prevent a recurrence of fighting between them and coordinate their struggle for an independent state. AFP reports from Nicosia.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Jalal Talabani, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Massud Barzani, announced the agreement in a statement signed by the two leaders received in Cyprus.

Organisers blamed for Polish fire: Police blamed organisers on Friday for neglecting safety regulations in a suspected arson fire at a concert hall that killed two people and injured more than 300 young rock fans in Gdansk, AP reports Warsaw.

The fire broke out Thursday night at the Gdansk shipyard concert hall, where spectators had gathered for a rock concert and a live broadcast of the MTV European Music Awards ceremony from Berlin.

Egyptian policeman shot dead: Suspected Islamic extremists shot dead a policeman as he walked to work in a southern village, the Interior Ministry said yesterday. AP reports from Cairo.

The assailants fled on foot after killing Ahmed Abbas Hassan on Friday night in the village of Moishat el-Maghaita, the ministry said in a statement. The shooting brings to 14 the number of people killed this month in and around Mallawi, a stronghold of the militants 260 kilometers (160 miles) south of Cairo.

Java eruption toll now 41: The death toll from the eruption of the Merapi volcano near Yogyakarta, central Java has risen to 41, a civil defence official said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

"41 people have died in hospital," Windu Wiryanto told AFP by telephone from the natural disaster coordinating post in Yogyakarta.

15 die in Tamil Nadu blast: The death toll in the explosion that occurred at Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu's Kamarajar district Friday night has risen to 15, district officials said yesterday. PTI reports from Madurai.

They said phosphorus stored in a house near a fireworks factory had caused the blast, which razed to the ground all the houses in the area.

Strike to affect Aussie flights: Two Australian airlines anticipate major service disruptions on Monday because of a 24-hour strike by the Transport Workers Union, AP reports from Melbourne.

Qantas, the principal international carrier, expects about 25,000 passengers on 150 flights will be affected by a cut in deliveries of jet fuel. Ansett, the domestic carrier, said it was trying to ensure minimum travel disruptions.



German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (R) applauds French President Francois Mitterrand who received the 1994 German Media Prize in Baden-Baden, Germany on Friday. — AFP photo

20,000 Somalis cross into Ethiopia: About 20,000 Somali refugees have crossed the border into Ethiopia to escape recent clashes in the self-styled independent state of Somaliland, an official Ethiopian newspaper said yesterday. AFP reports from Addis Ababa.

The Addis Zemen newspaper said 19,531 Somali refugees and displaced persons had sought refuge in Ethiopia and were currently living in five camps along the frontier. The Ethiopian government expressed dismay at the new arrivals at a time when there are already 185,000 refugees on its soil.

Blast leaves 10 dead in Nigeria: Ten Nigerian villagers illegally pumping fuel from a leaking pipeline near their homes in the southwest Ondo state were killed when it exploded and caught fire, the Daily Times reported yesterday. AFP says from Lagos.

The blast occurred on the outskirts of Aba Kila village on a Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) conduit carrying fuel to the depots at Ore, the newspaper said.

100,000 Afghans vaccinated: More than 100,000 women and children were vaccinated in a one-week immunisation campaign, the first such programme in this war-torn city in more than three years, officials said Saturday. AP reports from Kabul.

The United Nations sought a cease-fire from November 19-26 so mothers and their young kids could visit hospitals and health clinics without the fear of rocket attacks.

Benazir seeks recognition for nuclear restraint

LONDON, Nov 26: Pakistan is a model of Islamic moderation and nuclear restraint and should be rewarded if it is to resist extremist pressures, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said in an interview in today's Times, reports AFP.

"Pakistan, since 1990 has seen a cut off of aid. It has still not detonated a nuclear device, or exported nuclear technology. It has shown respect. For what? For further criticism? Or for recognition and reward?"

"There's a growing movement within Pakistan that says 'if you're not getting anywhere for being good guys, then what's the point?' said Benazir in the interview published on the eve of her official visit to Britain.

"I conducted a poll and 90 per cent thought Pakistan should detonate a nuclear device. It's a dangerous situation. Pakistan has showed restraint. This should be recognised and rewarded."

"If it isn't, the forces of

moderation will be thrown to one side and the forces of extremism will take over. We have a lot of extremists around. We don't want another Bosnia," continued Bhutto.

"Pakistan is the only moderate Muslim country in the region. It's very important to support moderation in the Muslim world. Pakistan could be a role model."

Benazir said she was frustrated at the continued refusal by the United States to release aid or deliver F16 fighter bombers that have been paid for.

Nor was Washington rewarded Islamabad for helping to oppose the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, for its role in world-wide peacekeeping or its moderation in the dispute with India over Kashmir, she said.

According to Benazir, the Pressler Amendment preventing export of the F16s is discriminatory and should be repealed. She insisted that the West should stop insisting that Pakistan take unilateral steps

and should adopt an even-handed approach to her country and India.

"We agreed to send a contingent to Haiti under the US flag. But one must ask (whether) the Pressler Amendment helped to achieve the aim of nuclear non-proliferation in the region?"

"I think there's a consensus between the US government, Pakistan, and independent thinkers that, by invoking Pressler, the US has not succeeded in promoting non-proliferation. It became a veto in Indian hands."

"Pakistan and India have fought three wars together. Pakistan is vulnerable. It must keep up with India."

On the Kashmir problem, she called on India to take the first step toward peace negotiations by a significant reduction of troops, a repeal of the emergency laws in the area, and an end to the daily killing.

"Forty to fifty people are killed there, every day. Holding talks against such a background is very difficult," she said.



A Chechen soldier stands on an APC, guarding the presidential palace on the central square of Grozny on Friday. — AFP photo

Rebel tanks storm Chechen capital

MOSCOW, Nov 26: Opposition tanks rolled into Grozny, capital of Russia's breakaway Chechnya region, and approached the presidential palace on Saturday as artillery battles raged in the city's outskirts, reports AP.

The government of President Dzhokhar Dudayev said it remained in control.

The offensive began at about 7 AM (0400 GMT), government officials told Interfax. A couple of hours later, Mershuvev told Interfax. The situation is completely controlled by government troops."

Opposition forces told the news agency their attack began at about 4 AM after artillery barrages.

ITAR-Tass said television was off the air in Grozny, and radio was playing folk music.

Fighting had intensified Friday with a helicopter attack on government positions on Grozny's northern outskirts.

Good turnout in Karnataka polls

BANGALORE, Nov 26: Millions voted today in southern India in the first phase of state elections considered crucial for the political future of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, officials said, reports AFP.

An estimated 30 per cent of some 14 million eligible voters had cast their ballot over parts of Karnataka state by midday to elect 115 of the 1,188 candidates in the fray for the provincial legislature, the officials said.

The rest of Karnataka's 30 million voters go to the polls December 1 to elect legislators for the remainder of the legislature's 224 seats.

"It is all very peaceful and proceeding smoothly," said an official of the election commission in the Karnataka capital, about 800 kilometers (500 miles) southeast of Bombay.

The turnout is good and we think at least 60 per cent of voters will exercise their franchise before the 10-hour balloting ends at 5:00 PM (11:30 GMT), the official said.

Voters in adjoining Andhra Pradesh, Rao's home state, also have polls on December 1. The final round of voting in Andhra Pradesh, to pick a new 294-seat legislature, will take place on December 5.

Major appears to have overcome rebellion in party

LONDON, Nov 26: British Prime Minister John Major appears to have quashed a parliamentary rebellion in his ruling Conservative Party over a European finance bill, threatening to call a general election if it was defeated, reports Reuters.

Aides to Major said on Friday they were confident the bill would be approved. Defence Minister Malcolm Rifkind, asked whether the government would win on Monday, told a BBC television interviewer, "I think so."

But the price of Major's drastic tactics could be a challenge to his leadership which would deal another damaging blow to his already shaky authority.

Right wing, anti-European Conservative members of parliament had threatened a showdown with Major on Monday, when the House of Commons votes on a bill to boost Britain's payments to the European Union.

On Friday, 18 of the rebels tabled an amendment to the bill. With a slim majority of just 14 in the Commons, Major would have had to rely on a handful of allies from rightist Northern Ireland parties to help him through.

But the rebellion started to crumble as rebels under pressure from Conservative Party headquarters and their local constituencies, shied away from bringing the unpopular government down and with it themselves.

Major's threat was backed up by his cabinet which said it would follow the Prime Minister and quit if the government was defeated on Monday.

Saturday's Daily Express newspaper reported that Queen Elizabeth had agreed to dissolve parliament if Major lost on Monday.

Some rebels had claimed the Queen would refuse an election and instead ask a cabinet minister to form another government.

Meanwhile, AFP says: A staunch supporter of John Major was re-elected to the chairmanship of a powerful committee of back-bench MPs by a majority of only 13, the Daily Mail reported today.

38 days to put out Chinese oil well fire

BEIJING, Nov 26: Firefighters flowing from across China took 38 days to extinguish an oil well fire raging in western Xinjiang province's forbidding Tarim basin, officials media reported today, says Reuter.

The fierce blaze in the Sha number 15 well in the basin's northern Yakela oilfield was snuffed out on November 19 with no reported casualties, the Xinhua Daily Telegraph said.

The fire started on October 12, disrupting production from a well that normally disgorges daily 60 cubic metres (2,120 cu ft) of condensate and 200,000 cubic metres (7.1 million cu ft) of natural gas.

No estimate of the economic losses was given and there was no explanation for the delay in reporting the fire.

The vaccination programme has also saved the government money.

"The lifetime care of a mentally retarded child costs about 10 million markkaa (2 million dollars), so we're not talking small sums here," Heinonen said.

"Our success was largely due to the secondary injection," Heinonen said. "Most other countries only give one injection, but our studies showed that by the age of 6, the antibodies were not as high as they should have been."

In the two decades before the programme began, measles killed an average ten children a year in Finland and caused permanent deafness and mental retardation in hundreds of others. Mumps annually made some 750 men sterile, and rubella damaged about 50 fetuses each year, Heinonen said.

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Off the Record



Melissa Mortensen models a dramatic hair creation by Keith Harris on Friday in London where stylists competed for the title of 'Avant Garde Hairdresser of the Year,' as part of the British Hairdressing Awards 1994. — AFP photo

24 strokes for 'Dr Molester'

SINGAPORE: A man who posed as a doctor and molested more girls than anyone on record in Singapore has been sentenced to 24 strokes of the cane to the buttocks and 13 years in jail, news reports said on Saturday, reports AP.

During the conviction on Friday, the prosecutor told the court that the number of molestation cases in Singapore increased to 905 last year compared to 549 in 1987, a 65 per cent rise.

Koh Chuan Soon, a 42-year-old unemployed man, pleaded guilty to molesting girls between nine and 13 years old, and forcing some of them to perform oral sex on him, the Straits Times newspaper reported.

Police said Koh molested 15 girls, mainly in staircases of public housing buildings, between October 1990 and June this year when he was arrested, the newspaper said.

It was not clear how Koh, nicknamed 'Dr Molester' by the police, trapped his victims. The case was heard behind closed doors to protect the identity of the victims.

Fatal joke

BEIJING: A proud father's joke about his infant son's penis triggered a misunderstanding that destroyed his family, an official Chinese newspaper said, reports Reuter.

Wang Tianbao of Henan province, already the father of two daughters, was fined 3,000 yuan (350 dollars) after his wife had the boy in defiance of China's 'one-child' population control policy, the Guangxi daily said in editions seen yesterday.

Cuddling the boy, Wang joked about the high cost of having male offspring to inherit the family name — an intense desire among rural Chinese families. "A 3,000 yuan fine just for this little penis. We should just cut it off," he said with a laugh.

His six and seven-year-old daughters took him seriously, slicing off the penis with a paring knife and leaving their brother to bleed to death while Wang tended his fields.

"Discovering what happened, Wang clubbed the girls to death with a shovel in a rage and then killed himself by drinking insecticide, the report said.

Wang's wife, Li Lanhua, went into hysterics upon seeing the calamity, running naked through the streets screaming the names of her dead husband and children.

Born with just one eye!

CAIRO: A Egyptian woman has given birth to a baby girl with a single eye planted in the middle of her face, the semi-official daily Al-Ahram said yesterday, reports AFP.

The child has no nose or eyebrows on her large, square face and her eye is sited like a black point in the middle.

Al-Ahram published a photograph of the baby who is on a life support system and in a critical condition after being born to 40-year-old Enaba Ahmed Tamam.

Doctors, who say they have never come across such a case believe the child's disfigurement could have been caused because her mother married her cousin, a practice which is very common in Egypt.

Lankan troops continue attack on LTTE

COLOMBO, Nov 26: Troops continued limited offensives against Tamil guerrillas, killing two militants and attacking two small rebel camps in separate operations in the north-east of Sri Lanka, officials said today, reports AFP.

On Friday troops ambushed and killed two guerrillas from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in coastal Batticaloa district, where rebel activity has intensified in the past week, a military spokesman said.

Another guerilla escaped with gunshot wounds, the spokesman said.

Troops also attacked two small LTTE camps in north-east Mullaitivu district but the rebels fled after a brief firefight, the spokesman said.

"We cannot confirm casualty figures on their side. But there were no casualties to our troops," the spokesman said.

Security forces have stepped up limited offensives in the past week to keep the pressure on LTTE guerrillas who have been celebrating heroes week since last Sunday.

Finns eradicate mumps, measles

HELSEINKI, Nov 26: Finland may have become the first country in the world to virtually eliminate measles, mumps and rubella as a result of a 12-year vaccination programme, researchers said on Friday, reports AP.

The programme, initiated as part of a United Nations effort to eradicate the diseases by 2000, is likely to become a model for other countries for preventing the illnesses, which affected tens of thousands of Finnish children in the 1970s.

"We consider we've been successful in eradicating these diseases," researcher Olli Heinonen, of the University of Helsinki, said on Friday. "I believe we're the first country to have done so."

In a separate report, doctors from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta told of dramatic progress toward eliminating polio in China.

The results of the Finnish vaccination programme were published on Thursday in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Kidnappers free Rao's relative

NEW DELHI, Nov 26: A relative of Indian Premier PV Narasimha Rao kidnapped in the south of India has been freed, and a Maoist group that was blamed has denied involvement, newspapers reported today, says AFP.

Ram Mohan Rao, whose abductors had demanded a ransom of one million rupees (33,000 dollar), walked back to his village in Andhra Pradesh state on Friday.

Maharashtra MPs scuffle over tribesmen's deaths

NAGPUR, Nov 26: Angry state legislators in the central Indian city of Nagpur scuffled with each other yesterday over the deaths of 130 tribal protesters in a stampede earlier this week, reports Reuter.

Opposition legislators have demanded the government of Maharashtra resign to take responsibility for the tragedy, which occurred on Wednesday when police baton-charged 50,000 protesters rallying to demand more jobs.

The ruling Congress Party government has refused to resign.

Debate on the issue broke down as both ruling party and opposition legislators, shouting and waving fists, rushed to the centre of the assembly and began pushing and jostling each other.

The Speaker of the assembly adjourned the house until Monday.

Earlier, opposition leaders had called for a general strike in Maharashtra on Monday in protest against the government's failure to prevent the stampede deaths.

"We are not going to allow this government to function," opposition leader Gopinath Munde told Reuters at the start of the day's assembly session.

He said the home (interior) minister, who is responsible for law and order and controls the police, should have resigned.

Maharashtra is India's most industrialised state with a population of around 60 million.