

BRIEFLY

Bus mishap claims 10 in India: At least 10 people were killed and 30 injured when a bus slammed into another near the holy Hindu city of Varanasi on Saturday, the Press Trust of India said. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Police said the injured have been admitted to hospital. Some of them are in a critical condition.

Philippine jet blast kills 1: A midair explosion on a Philippine Airlines jet killed one person and injured 10 others on Sunday, and forced the plane to make an emergency landing, Japanese officials said. AP reports from Tokyo.

The plane, Flight 434, was heading for Tokyo from Cebu in the Philippines with 293 people on board when the explosion occurred. Transport Ministry official Akira Miura said. He said the nationalities of the dead and injured were not immediately known. The plane landed safely at Naha airport on Okinawa in southern Japan, and police were searching for clues to the cause of the explosion, he added.

Kirghiz president meets Benazir: Kirghizstan's President Askar Akayev held wide-ranging talks with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto soon after his arrival in Islamabad on Saturday on a state visit, AFP reports from Islamabad.

Officials said the talks centred on bilateral matters and region issues including the conflicts in Afghanistan and Tajikistan as well as the dispute between Pakistan and India over Kashmir.

Strong quake rocks C Mexico: A strong earthquake shook central Mexico on Saturday, sending panicked tourists running from an airport terminal and shaking buildings in the capital. There were no immediate reports of serious injuries, AP reports from Mexico City.

The quake had a magnitude of 6.3 and was centered in the ocean, 165 miles (264 kilometres) southwest of Mexico City, said Russ Needham of the US Geological Earthquake Centre in Golden, Colorado.

Militiaman killed in Lebanon: Iranian-backed guerrillas fired rockets at pro-Israeli militia in southern Lebanon on Saturday, killing one militiaman and wounding another, security sources said, AP reports from Marjayoun.

The Shi'ite Muslim Hezbollah guerrillas fired Katyusha rockets and mortar shells at a South Lebanon army militia position, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

7 bodies from sunken ship found: A second crewman was rescued and at least seven bodies recovered as a desperate race against the elements continued for survivors of a sunken Ukrainian cargo ship, AP reports from Halifax.

Most of the 31 crew members aboard the Salvador Allende, which sank on Friday 1,200 kilometres (750 miles) southeast of Halifax, had been spotted in lifeboats, life rafts or survival suits. But rough North Atlantic seas hampered rescues for a second day on Saturday.

Tokyo trains resume service: Partial train service resumed on Sunday, almost 12 hours after a fire in a transformer station brought trains on several of Tokyo's busiest railroad lines to a halt, AP reports from Tokyo.

Service has been restored to most line, and full service on one of the city's busiest, the Chuo or Central Line, will be restored later Sunday, an official said.

6 hacked to death in Guyana: A man apparently crazed by crack cocaine went berserk and hacked to death his mother, five neighbours and a dog before police fatally shot him, police and news reports said on Saturday, AP reports from Georgetown.

Hubert Headley, 35, nearly decapitated most of his victims in his rampage on Friday in the villages of Buxton and Friendship, about 12 miles (19 kilometres) east of the capital, newspapers reported.

Next Americas meet in Bolivia: Leaders attending the summit of the Americas agreed on Saturday to hold a summit in Bolivia in early 1996 on the issue of sustainable development, a White House official said, Reuter reports from Miami.

2 Cuban escapees found dead: Firefighters recovered on Saturday what appeared to be two bodies among dozens of Cuban rafters missing since a mass escape from US refugee camps during riots last week, AP reports from Panama City.

The first body was taken from the Panama Canal about 300 yards from the Pedro Miguel lock, about six miles (10 kilometres) from New Emperor, one of four for Cuban refugees run by the United States.

Freighter adrift in N Pacific: A freighter was adrift without power on Saturday far out in the stormy north Pacific following a fire, and air force and national guard crews prepared for a possible rescue attempt with land-based helicopters, AP reports from Anchorage, Alaska.

The Greek Cypriot-registered container ship Hyundai Seattle, with a crew of 27, was about 550 miles south of Adak, a navy base in the remote Aleutian island chain, the coast guard said.

Youth shoots 2, kills himself: A 19-year-old shot and wounded his ex-girlfriend and another teenager on Saturday just before a Christmas parade, then killed himself, AP report from Pelham, Georgia.

Charles Earnest Swilley fired a hunting rifle with a scope from behind a hedge about 25 yards from the parade staging area where about 200 people had gathered, police investigator Willie Jacobs said. The 15-year-old girl was hit in the neck with an exploding bullet and fragments struck a 16-year-old boy in the stomach. Swilley then shot himself in the head, Jacobs said.

US author James dies: Daniel James, an author and journalist who specialised in Latin America and helped arrange former President Carter's recent mission to Haiti, is dead at age 80, AP reports from Washington.

He died on Friday at Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Springs, Md., of heart failure. Carter credited James in interviews, although not by name, for helping arrange the mission.

Saudi-Yemeni border dispute continues

DUBAI, Dec 11: Three Yemeni officers were killed in a clash on Wednesday on the disputed and possibly oil-rich border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, a diplomat in the Yemeni capital Sanaa said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Yemen has not reported any clash but on Wednesday night it accused Saudi Arabia of violating its border by erecting observation posts and building roads in frontier areas.

Saudi Arabia reacted by saying "some development" was taking place on the border in Saudi territory and welcomed the setting up of a joint investigation commission.

Both claim sovereignty over the border area.

Cong(I) rejects opposition calls for snap elections

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party, which has suffered a stinging setback in state polls, today rejected opposition calls for snap general elections, reports Reuter.

Congress, which had controlled all four states holding elections, lost its hold on three of them and was neck-and-neck with the opposition in the fourth.

"There is no question of snap polls. Where is the question of snap polls? The verdict is not against the federal government," Congress spokesman V N Gadgil told reporters after a meeting of party leaders that lasted till midnight Saturday to take stock of the defeat.

The party, which has ruled India for all but three years since independence in 1947, was crushed in Rao's home state of Andhra Pradesh as well

as in neighbouring Karnataka, by far the largest electoral prizes.

Congress had held overwhelming majorities in both southern states since the last elections in 1989.

The route raised questions about the pace of Rao's far-reaching free-market reforms and his prospects of surviving until the next general elections, set for May 1996.

"The BJP regards the verdict of these elections as a clear index that the Congress (I) Party has lost the confidence of the people," Lal Krishan Advani, president of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), told a news conference.

Advani demanded that Rao "humbly accept the implications of this verdict, and seek a fresh mandate from the

people." The BJP was also considering a no-confidence motion against Rao, who has a razor-thin majority in parliament.

Ram Vilas Paswan, spokesman of the centrist Janata Dal party that crushed Congress in Karnataka, called on Rao to resign. "He is the worst prime minister for the Congress," Paswan said.

The state elections have no direct impact on the party's parliamentary majority in the capital New Delhi. Pre-poll surveys showed voters were swayed mostly by local issues and generally were not taking aim at Rao.

But the losses were significant because the south has provided Rao with his power base since he took office in 1991 and launched a far-reaching economic liberalisation

programme.

"Congress does not exist in the north and it has been routed in the south," said the chief minister of the eastern state of Orissa, Biju Patnaik, of the centrist Janata Dal Party.

Rao's economic reforms have opened up India's markets, delighting foreign investors but bringing increased competition and hardship to many industries.

Gadgil said the opposition demand for a snap poll did not come up at the meeting.

"The Congress working committee is of the view that it would not be correct to interpret these results as a rejection of the policies and programmes initiated by the Congress government after the last Lok Sabha elections," a resolution adopted at the end of the meeting said.



Two-and-a-half year old Salah, from East Jerusalem, with a headband of Hamas points his toy gun at an Israeli border police officer on Saturday in Jerusalem. He gets away with it this time because of his tender age but the police is not amused and tells the boy's father (L) to leave the street outside Jerusalem's Old City walls. — AFP photo

Kohl signals change in defence policy

ESSEN, Dec 11: Chancellor Helmut Kohl, signalling a cautious shift in German defence policy, has said Bonn might deploy fighter jets over Bosnia if they were needed to help defend retreating United Nations troops there, reports Reuter.

Kohl said on Saturday evening that an appeal for help from Germany's allies with troops in Bosnia might prompt Bonn to consider its first military engagement abroad since the end of World War II.

His carefully worded answer to a ZDF television question came after Bonn went through embarrassing verbal twists last Wednesday to side step a controversial NATO bid to line up

Germany's Tornado fighter jets for a possible mission.

Kohl's new found readiness to consider military action emerged only after a European Union summit in the German city of Essen at which he and other EU leaders swore that weapons could not solve the Bosnian conflict.

But it marked another small step forward in Bonn's gradual progress towards the greater military role that NATO allies have expected of it since German unification in 1990.

"If the soldiers of our friends — the French, English, Spanish or Danes who are there as UN soldiers need to be pulled out and get into a tough situation, then it would

be a new situation and we would have to ask where we could help with our planes," the Chancellor said.

Nervousness about an "hour of truth" swept through Bonn earlier this month when it became known that NATO's military command had asked if Bonn could provide up to eight Tornados to help bomb Bosnian Serb surface-to-air missiles in Bosnia.

Although Germany's Supreme Court ruled last July that Bonn could legally send troops abroad, German leaders from Kohl on down have said Yugoslavia, the scene of wartime Nazi atrocities, would not be the best place to start.



A Cuban woman living in the US is symbolically gagged and tied up with chains and barbed wire to protest the regime of Fidel Castro and denounce the lack of freedom of expression in Cuba on Saturday during a pro-democracy, anti-Castro march through the streets of Little Havana in Miami, Florida. — AFP photo

ME peace talks to resume on Wednesday

OSLO, Dec 11: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and fellow Nobel peace laureate Yasser Arafat of the PLO agreed at a meeting here early today to resume autonomy talks in Cairo on Wednesday ahead of another session between the two leaders, reports AFP.

With the autonomy process deadlocked on the issue of Palestinian elections and an Israeli army deployment on the West Bank, Uri Savir, Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry, told journalists the Cairo negotiations through until Thursday would be "very intensive."

The talks were to pave the way for another Rabin-Arafat meeting, said top PLO autonomy negotiator Nabil Shaath, who was to lead the Cairo delegations together with Savir. But there was no fixed date for the next top level encounter.

Firing by Indian troops cuts off Neelum Valley

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, Dec 11: Cross-border firing by Indian troops over the last 28 days has cut off some 200,000 people in the Neelum Valley on the Pakistan side of Kashmir, an official said on Saturday, reports AFP.

Sardar Gul Khandan, minister for tourism in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, speaking at a news conference, called for an airdrop of food and medical supplies to the affected border area.

He claimed the "incessant firing" by Indian troops had halted traffic between Neelum Valley and other parts of the state, but the number of casualties was low as people were forced to stay indoors.

So far, three villagers had been killed and six injured, he said, adding that Pakistani troops had been retaliating.

Muslim women in the West urged to wear veil

LONDON, Dec 11: Muslim women in Western society were urged to demonstrate their Islamic values in their dress and wear the Islamic veil, at an international conference on the oppression of Muslim women in the West on Saturday, reports AFP.

The conference, organised by the Islamic Culture and Information Bureau (ICIB), which advocates unity between all Muslims, was attended by more than 300 people from European and Middle-Eastern countries.

ICIB head, Dheyauddin Malki, called on Muslim women to "liberate" themselves and their values in Western society and prove it "in their manner of dress, in particular in wearing the veil."

Croatian Serbs to fight alongside Bosnian Serbs

BELGRADE, Dec 11: Rebel Serbs in Croatia on Saturday said they would join their fellow Serbs fighting in Bosnia, threatening to widen the Balkan war, reports AP.

The announcement came a day after Croatian officials confirmed that their troops were helping Bosnian Croats who are allied with Bosnia's Muslim-led government.

Conflict between Croatian Serb and Croatian army forces in Bosnia could reignite warfare in Croatia, where a truce ended Croatia's 1991 war.

Croatian Serb leader Milan Martić said his forces would help Bosnian Serbs repel a Croat offensive on Bosnia's western border with Croatia.

That offensive, toward the western Serb-held town of Grahovo, threatens to cut a key supply link from the Croatian Serb stronghold of Knin through Bosnian Serb-held territory to Serbia proper in the east.

"We must help our brethren in the Bosnian Serb Republic,"

the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug quoted Martić as saying.

Croatian Serbs have already been fighting in Bosnia, backing rebel Muslims and Bosnian Serbs in an offensive around northwestern Bihać. They have denied it, but UN officials have confirmed their involvement.

On Friday, Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granić confirmed that his country's army was helping Bosnian Croats in their offensive near Grahovo, south of the Bihać pocket.

Rebel Serbs captured about one-third of Croatian territory in the 1991 war and want to link their holdings with the 70 per cent of Bosnian territory held by Serbs and Serbia proper.

Martić said the joint attacks of Bosnian Croat and Croatian troops on the western borders of the Bosnian Serb republic are at the same time attacks on the Croatian Serb republic.

"The Croatian Serb army will join the fighting to defend the Grahovo-Glanoc Region"

Off the Record

2 Enterprise captains on 'Star Trek Generations'

NEW YORK: Two captains of the Enterprise prove to be better than one in the hit movie "Star Trek Generations," reports AP.

One reason William Shatner appears as Captain James T. Kirk is that Patrick Stewart lobbied hard to ensure Shatner was included in the latest film.

"I've been passionate about that from the first time that a 'Next Generation' movie had been mentioned," Stewart said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "I didn't want us to sail into the future just as 'The Next Generation' cast."

Stewart starred as captain Jean-Luc Picard in the television series "Star Trek: The Next Generation," which ended US broadcasts in May. Shatner starred in the original "Star Trek" television series, which ran from 1966 through 1969.

"I thought not only would it be absolutely appropriate that there should be some transitional moment in which the baton got passed from Capt. Kirk and the old crew to us, I also felt it would be awfully attractive to the audience as well if they were given the opportunity of seeing the two captains on the same screen," Stewart said.

Women's reluctance to marry worries lawmakers

TAIPEI: Taiwan's government fears that an increasing reluctance of women to marry will hit the island's population levels, local newspapers reported yesterday, reports Reuter.

Figures released by the Cabinet's Statistics Office showed 28.5 per cent of women over the age of 15 have yet to tie the knot, the China Times Express reported.

The statistics office hopes that the appropriate government offices will encourage marriageable young women to wed and have children, in order to preserve a proper rate of growth in the population," the newspaper said.

Taiwan's proportion of unmarried women was higher than in either Japan or Korea, it said.

"Without women gradually winning equality in the work place this is a situation that is likely to become the norm," the newspaper said.

Rally against awarding of Nobel Peace Prize

JERUSALEM, Dec 11: Hundreds of right-wing Israelis marched in Jerusalem on Saturday evening to protest the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, reports Reuter.

In Gaza, thousands of Palestinian opponents of peace also held a rally against the award.

Jewish demonstrators in Jerusalem carried torches and photographs of 101 Israelis they said had been killed by Palestinian "terrorists" since the peace deal reached in Oslo between Israel and the PLO last year.

The 1994 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Rabin, Peres and Arafat in Oslo on Saturday for their deal for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho.

At the Jerusalem demonstration, Israeli police arrested two men shouting "Death to the Arabs," witnesses said. A police spokesman said they were later released. He called the demonstration "quiet."

Protesters, who included Jewish settlers living in the Gaza strip and West Bank, marched under the slogan: "They're with the prize, we're with Hamas."

The Hamas Islamic Resistance Movement, which also opposes the peace deal has claimed responsibility for many of the guerrilla attacks against Israelis since the Oslo accord.

Zvi Brenner, one of the protesters, said they could not accept the peace prize being given to Arafat, a former guerrilla chief they said was responsible for ordering the killing of Israelis.

"Once the Nobel prize was something distinguished and nice. Today the person receiving it (Arafat) is a murderer who is continuing to murder and continuing to support murderers."

"Our leaders are giving him a stamp of approval, celebrating together in Oslo, extending their hands. This man arrived... in military uniform to receive the peace prize."

In Gaza supporters of the Muslim militant groups Islamic Jihad and Hamas joined a 27th anniversary rally of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a rejectionist group within Arafat's PLO.

Asked how he viewed the Nobel Peace Prize being given to Arafat, Rabin and Peres, PFLP spokesman Riyad Al-Malki said: "I think it's a joke. It's kind of disrespectful for the Palestinian struggle and the Palestinian sacrifices for the last four decades."

Sarajevans prepare for their third winter of war

SARAJEVO, Dec 11: Thousands of Sarajevans inched their way Saturday through a darkened tunnel, loaded down with food and firewood to survive their third winter of war, reports AP.

The 800-metre-long (half-mile-long) tunnel, which links Sarajevo with a government-held town outside Bosnian Serb siege lines, is among the reasons that the Bosnian capital's approximately 300,000 residents are somewhat better prepared for survival this year.

The 32-month-old war and the inability of the international community to stop it have also taught ordinary Sarajevans they must be self-reliant.

"I don't know how we will survive," said Saban Muhare-

mović, 38, as he carried his provisions: one bag of sausage, cigarettes, chocolate and a kilo (2 pounds) of cheese. "But I know we must. If we must, we will."

Talk of a possible UN withdrawal and end to humanitarian aid deliveries has added yet another strain to the lives of people who have endured nearly three years of shelling, sniping, death and deprivation.

Since the humanitarian airlift to Sarajevo began in June 1992, about 80 per cent of the UN food and supplies that have sustained the city have come by plane. Last month, however, the airlift was suspended after Bosnian Serbs deployed surface-to-air missiles that could threaten the flight corridor to Sarajevo.

The Bosnian Serbs, whose troops surround the city, have also refused to allow sufficient land convoys to reach the city. Western leaders warn that the entire UN operation may be closed and the 24,000 troops withdrawn if the Serbs continue their hardline tactics.

Even in the best of times, UN aid packages provided each recipient with barely enough for one meagre meal a day until the next handout two weeks later.

That, and the prospect of a long war, prompted Sarajevans and the government to creative approaches to survival. While city residents planted vegetable gardens, government workers converted a culvert running underneath the airport runway into a tunnel link-

ing Sarajevo with a government-held suburb outside siege lines.

The tunnel has enabled Sarajevans to reach the suburb of Hrasnica, where they can buy food and firewood unavailable or too expensive in Sarajevo. The tunnel has been open since late summer 1993, but was used initially mostly by the military.

It factored significantly in the resupply of Sarajevans after the March 1994 accord that ended Bosnian Croat-Muslim fighting and opened supply routes from Croatia, and the Adriatic Coast, to Hrasnica.

Food can now be brought into Sarajevo after the harvest and stockpiled.

Still needing permission to use the tunnel, thousands of

civilians line up each day for the narrow, muddy channel, so low its travellers must walk hunched over.

In Hrasnica, goods are generally three to four times cheaper than in Sarajevo. Items from the rest of Bosnia and neighbouring Croatia arrive via a narrow mountain road, which though covered by Bosnian Serb fire is a lifeline.

"Are you coming from Sarajevo?" asked one Hrasnica fruit vendor, who gave her name only as Edisa. "I can tell, because those who stand for a long time in front of my window looking at the nice yellow color of the lemons, I know they come from Sarajevo."

"The city is better prepared for this winter," Kris Janowski, spokesman for the UN High

Commissioner for Refugees, said.

"People planted gardens last summer, and they've become more resourceful."

The Bosnian government army has also begun rationing food to its troops, who keep their families in the city. Many soldiers are being issued 25 kilos (55 pounds) of potatoes, five kilos (11 pounds) of onions and three liters (quarts) of cooking oil as reserves to last the winter.

Natural gas and electricity, though well below wartime levels, are also more plentiful.

In the past, the Bosnian Serbs used to cut off both utilities from time to time. Now, the government has learned how to switch off utilities to the Serbs, too.

Ethiopian war crimes trials open tomorrow

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia, Dec 11: On Tuesday, Ethiopia opens the most sweeping war crimes trials since the end of World War II, seeking the death penalty for dozens of members of the former military junta on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity.

It has been a long time coming, two decades after the coup that deposed Emperor Haile Selassie and ushered in 17 years of Marxist military dictatorship during which tens of thousands of people died.

Jailed junta members deny any guilt and accuse prosecutors of manufacturing evidence of mass killings.