

**BRIEFLY**



Palestinians carry the coffin of Abdelrazek Shakra on Monday during his janaza (funeral) in Ramallah. Shakra, a 23-year-old Palestinian prisoner, was found dead October 7 at the Kitziot prison, an Israeli military detention centre in Israel's Nagev desert, with signs of violence in his body. — AFP/UNB photo

**SA vice president in Paris:** South African Vice President Thabo Mbeki arrived in Paris Monday on an official three-day visit to France during which he will hold talks with President Jacques Chirac. AFP reports from Paris.

He was greeted at Paris Orly airport by Justice Minister Jacques Toubon. Mbeki, who arrived following a 10-day visit to Britain, will also meet French industrialists.

**Rao to meet Hosni Mubarak:** Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao is to arrive in Egypt later this week for an official visit that will include meetings with President Hosni Mubarak, state television announced Monday. AFP reports from Cairo.

Rao, who is to arrive Sunday will discuss with Mubarak ways to boost bilateral relations as well as common interest in regional and international issues, the television said.

**Floods claim 11 in Nicaragua:** Flooding caused by several days of heavy rains in Nicaragua has left 11 people dead and forced some 2,000 families to be evacuated, Social Affairs Minister William Baez said Monday. AFP reports from Managua.

The victims mostly in the countryside in the western part of the country, drowned when flood waters from rivers devastated villages in the area where meteorologists say rain was expected to continue for the next four days.

**Mexico quake toll rises to 61:** Sixty one people were killed and more than 100 injured Monday in a powerful earthquake that jolted western Mexico, from small towns to tourist resorts, officials said. AFP reports from Mexico City.

Officials in the western coastal state of Jalisco said 46 people were killed there and officials in the neighbouring state of Colima put the death toll there at 15 people.

**Kamchatsky volcano quiets down:** A volcano in the Russian Far East has quieted down a few days after it came to life and spewed ash high into the atmosphere, a report said Tuesday. AP says from Petropavlovsk Kamchatsky.

Russia's Institute of Volcanic Geology and Geochemistry is reporting only weak seismic signals from the Bezymyanny volcano, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.

**14 killed in Thai road mishap:** Fourteen people were killed and one seriously injured when their minivan and a truck collided head-on in northeastern Thailand, police said yesterday. Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Police in Si Sa Ket province, about 600 km (370 miles) northeast of Bangkok, said the minivan had been taking an ill man and his relatives to a provincial hospital when the accident occurred late on Monday in Praibung district.

**Filipino gen (rtd) defected:** A retired Philippine army general has defected to the communist guerrillas he fought during his military career, the armed forces said yesterday. AFP reports from Manila.

The defection to the New People's Army (NPA) of retired Brigadier General Raymundo Jarque, 57, should have no effect on the morale of the military which has never been higher vice chief of staff Lieutenant General Alfredo Filler said over radio station DZXL in Manila.

**Floods kill 101 in Vietnam:** Floods throughout Vietnam have killed at least 101 people since heavy seasonal rains began soaking the country in August, official reports said Tuesday. AP reports from Hanoi.

The latest reported death came in central Quang Tri province, but a severe, month-long flood in the Southern Mekong River delta has claimed the largest number of lives — 88 so far, the state run Vietnam News reported.

**Attack on pro-govt Tamil MP's house  
Lankan troops to capitalise gains to capture Jaffna**

COLOMBO, Oct 10: Sri Lanka's army chief today said his troops would capitalise on recent gains in the coming weeks to capture the rebel-held northern Jaffna Peninsula, reports Reuter.

"Nothing is going to stop us," Lieutenant General Gerry De Silva told reporters after addressing troops at the army's 47th anniversary celebrations in Colombo.

De Silva said the army's latest offensive, condemned "Operation Thunder Strike," had put government troops in a strong position for a final attack on Jaffna town.

"We feel (the Tigers have suffered) around 300 killed and a similar number wounded and more than half of them seriously wounded," De Silva said.

"For a terrorist organisation of that size, this is a severe setback," he added.

De Silva said the army's aim was to bring the LTTE back to the negotiating table,

"but at a better bargaining position for us."

De Silva said an all-out attack to take Jaffna was on the cards but he did not give a timeframe. Military analysts said the offensive may have to be delayed because essential supplies were still being loaded at Colombo Port.

"The LTTE will try to protect Jaffna at all cost. We know they will not give up without a fight," De Silva said.

"If and when we taken Jaffna, the LTTE will realise they have been thrown out of their stronghold and out of their heartland."

The army chief appealed to the rebels not to target civilian areas following an LTTE mortar attack on an old people's home.

AFP adds: Unidentified gunmen hurled grenades and opened fire at the residence of a pro-government Tamil politician in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo

Monday killing at least four of his bodyguards, police said.

The gunmen exchange fire with bodyguards of Tamil legislator Douglas Devananda leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and escaped after killing the four, police said.

Meanwhile, a key Tamil politician who lost four bodyguards in a gunbattle in Colombo today he suspected the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was responsible for the attack.

"I think it is the LTTE which is trying to get me, they feel that we are emerging as the alter Tamil leadership. They had also attacked me in their recent newspaper articles," Douglas Devananda, leader of the pro-government Eelam People's Democratic Party, (EPDP) told AFP.

Devananda said in the attack on Monday night his house was raked with machine-gun fire and hand

grenades were lobbed through the windows. He said gunmen also fired a 40 millimeter mortar bomb at his house.

"After fighting for about 20 minutes, I withdrew with some of my comrades. There were about five men involved in the attack," Devananda said, adding that President Chandrika Kumaratunga had expressed her concern about the incident, which left him with only an injured hand.

Devananda's party has been supporting the Colombo government in its drive against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Tigers have been waging a 20 year separatist war against Sri Lankan security forces.

Devananda is on the hit list of the LTTE which has accused him of being a traitor to the cause of a separate Tamil homeland in the island's northern and eastern regions.



Cuban leader Fidel Castro (R) greets Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng (L) on Monday at the Jose Marti International Airport in Havana, Cuba. Li Peng made a short stopover in Cuba on his way to Peru, had a one-hour meeting with Castro at the airport. — AFP/UNB photo

**Delhi urged to modernise Manipur police**

IMPHAL, Oct 10: The Manipur Chief Minister Rishang Keishing, today said that he had urged the centre to modernise the state police by providing them with sophisticated weapons to fight against insurgents, reports PTI.

Talking to newsmen Keishing, who returned here yesterday from Delhi, said he had called on the prime minister and the union home minister and discussed several issues confronting the state.

The chief minister said the Union Home Minister, S B Chavan had agreed to look into the issue of shifting of Assam Rifles from Kangla in the heart of Imphal town and added that he had also informed the Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao about it.

**Israel releases 100 Palestinians**

NABLUS, West Bank, Oct 10: Israel released 100 Palestinians from jail in the occupied West Bank town of Nablus today under the September 28 autonomy accord with the PLO, military officials said, reports AFP.

They said another 500 prisoners would be freed later the same day, after the first releases who were non political detainees.

Palestinian prisoners sign anti terrorism pledges as a condition for their release.

Under the West Bank accord signed in Washington last month, Israel is to free a total of 1,100 to 1,200 out of the 6,000 Palestinians it holds.

**Tehran, Manila blast terrorism**

MANILA, Oct 10: Iran and the Philippines today condemned all forms of terrorism that affected peoples throughout the world, reports IRNA.

Visiting Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Filipino President Fidel Ramos, in a joint communique released here, condemned violation of human rights and deemed it necessary to respect cultural and religious values of all countries.

They referred to the friendly ties between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Iran.

**Gunmen kill 4 MQM activists in Karachi police custody**

KARACHI, Oct 10: Gunmen shot and killed four prominent militants accused of terrorism Tuesday while they were leading police to a gang hideout in strife-torn Karachi, authorities said, reports AP.

The four men — including one of Pakistan's most wanted alleged criminals known only as Fahim Commando — had agreed to lead authorities to a hideout when they were cut down in a hail of gunfire.

"They were killed by intense firing carried out by gunmen hiding in a house," said police spokesman Afzal Ahmad.

Police officers escorting the men were unhurt in the

attack, which took place in Karachi's central Nazimabad district.

Officials said the men were killed by militants from the opposition Mohajir Qaumi Movement in a bid to silence them.

This is the third time in two weeks that police suspects have been killed while in custody.

Last month the MQM temporarily suspended peace talks with the government, alleging that three of its members had been killed by police after they had been arrested.

Karachi's police and paramilitary forces have also come under intense scrutiny from international human

rights organisations for alleged extra-judicial and retaliatory killings.

Elsewhere in Karachi, five people were killed overnight and two more were shot to death Tuesday in the city's ongoing ethnic violence.

The bullet riddled bodies of two men were found in western Orangi district, one of the city's worst hit areas.

The murders were the latest in Karachi, where seemingly random shootings and bomb attacks have claimed more than 1,500 lives so far this year.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack although police blamed extremist members of the largest faction of the MQM.

**5 Muslim rebels killed in Kashmir**

SRINAGAR, Oct 10: Five Kashmiri Muslim separatist militants were killed in a fierce gunbattle with Indian troops in a town north of here overnight, police said today, reports AFP.

Police said the firefight erupted after Indian army troops raided a hideout in the town of Sopore used by the pro-Pakistan Muslim separatist group Harkat-ul-Ansar, which has a number of Afghan mercenaries in its

ranks.

The fighting in Sopore, a former militant stronghold, lasted more than six hours and left at least five guerrillas dead. No casualties were reported among the army.

Police said AK-47 assault rifles were recovered from the slain militants.

The Indian authorities accuse the Harkat-ul-Ansar of holding five western tourist kidnapped more than three months ago although the abductions have been claimed

by another group, Al-Faran.

One of the captives, Norwegian Hans-Christian Ostro, was killed in August by the kidnappers, who are demanding the release of 15 Muslim rebels.

PTI adds: Peer Hafeezullah Makhdoomi, a top leader of the Multi-Party Hurriyat Conference today said that holding of elections in Jammu and Kashmir at this juncture would be a "provocative act".



Muslim women hold placards outside the United Arab Emirates (UAE) consulate in suburban Manila Monday. They were among 250 protestors calling for the acquittal of condemned Filipina maid Sarah Balabagan, who was sentenced to death by an Islamic court in the UAE for killing her Emirati employer. A UAE court is set to hear her appeal Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

**Off the Record**

**Habit of being in the right place at the right time**

PHILADELPHIA: A toddler who crawled out of a third-floor window was caught by a passerby who says he makes a habit of being in the right place at the right time, reports AP.

Michael Springer, 45, broke Dante Barkley's fall seconds after turning a street corner Saturday and looking up to see the 17-month-old toddler dangling from the window, whimpering. The boy fell into Springer's arms.

"It was all marbie steps beneath the window. I can't imagine what would have happened to him," Springer said.

Police say Dante scaled the 12 steps to the third floor of his parents' house and climbed from a bed out an open, unscreened window. Dante's parents, Evaina, 23, and David, 25, were home at the time. Each thought the other was watching the baby.

"We had just gone downstairs to watch television," said David Barkley. "Then I heard someone hollering right outside our front door. He was hollering, 'Baby, what are you doing? Baby, don't'."

"I thought it was someone arguing with someone else or having a lovers' quarrel."

Dante was examined at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, but doctors could not find a mark on him.

Springer said he has come through as a good Samaritan before. In 1980, he comforted a man who was shot inside a pool hall until paramedics arrived. In 1989, he said he ran to a shooting victim's aid and held the man until an ambulance arrived.

**Newspaper made from silk fabric**

HUZHOU, Oct 10: A newspaper made from silk fabric, the first ever in China, made its debut Saturday in this city in East China's Zhejiang province, reports Xinhua.

The first batch of 400 copies was printed to mark the 40th anniversary of the founding of the 'Huzhou Daily' the main local newspaper. Other copies of the daily were printed in the normal way that day.

The material is a silk fabric resembling satin but thinner, as Huzhou is famous for its manufacture of silks and satins. And some silk fabrics are used in calligraphic pieces and paintings.

**UN warns Taliban of decreasing aid**

GENEVA, Oct 10: The United Nations Monday warned the Taliban Islamic militia who control large parts of Afghanistan that they could expect a cut in international aid if they discriminated against women, reports AFP.

A lot of support would not be forthcoming if donor countries felt women and girls were not being given an equal chance, particularly in education, UN Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Peter Hansen said.

Hansen, who had just returned from a three day trip to Afghanistan including meetings with Taliban officials was speaking after issuing an appeal for 124 million dollars for the coming year to representatives of 25 donor countries.

He said he was optimistic after the initial reactions, and in the light of the 75 per cent response to last year appeal for 106 million dollars.

A total of 35.1 million US dollars was needed for repatriating refugees, 19.1 million for demining, 18.7 million for food aid, 12.2 million on health care, 11.2 million on agriculture and 8.6 million for water purification.

He said he had talks with Mohammad Hassan, governor of the southwestern city of Kandahar controlled by the Taliban and with other officials concerned with education and foreign affairs.

He had told that many schools had been closed because of fighting against government forces but the officials denied that girls schools had suffered more.

Hansen said that during his one day stay in Kandahar he had seen girls schools and a women's medical college functioning.

**Bodo rebels kill eight**

GAUHATI, India, Oct 10: Tribal separatist guerrillas stormed a village in north-eastern India and sprayed bullets from machine guns, killing eight people, including two young girls, police said Tuesday, reports AP.

Rebels from the Bodo tribe in Assam state raided a village of immigrants from the neighbouring state of West Bengal and indiscriminately killed the people on Monday night, said Assam's Inspector General of Police Bipul Kalita.

Bodo Security Force rebels launch such attacks to terrify the settlers into fleeing the region where they want to create their own nation. Immigration into Bodo-dominated areas threatens their ancient culture and heritage, rebels say.

**About 5m Indians to be infected with HIV by 2000**

NEW DELHI, Oct 10: India will overtake Thailand and Myanmar Asia's AIDS capital with between four and five million cases of the disease by the turn of the century, experts say, reports AFP.

A UNDP report says 3,900 of every 100,000 adults will be HIV-positive and 820 will suffer from full-blown AIDS by 2000, against 1,170 HIV and 460 AIDS cases in Thailand and 805 HIV and 160 AIDS patients in Myanmar.

According to official estimates, a mere 2.6 million of India's 900 million people had been tested for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) by August of whom 19,390 tested Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV)-positive, which can lead to AIDS. This figure

represents the tip of the iceberg according to Non-Governmental Organisations.

"If the transmission of HIV continues at the same pace, by the year 2000 about five million persons would have been infected and the number of AIDS cases would exceed one million," the state-run National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) said.

NACO, India's premier anti-AIDS body run by the health ministry, says the main stumbling block is not a lack of funds but their poor utilisation as well as ignorance and a tendency by politicians to sweep the disease under the carpet.

"The government has not woken up to the problem," said Durgadas Sengupta, a NACO consultant. "Politicians think it can be wished away

while others, more ignorant, claim it is a decadent western disease."

A S Pantal, a former chief of the state-run Indian Council of Medical Research, created waves by suggesting mandatory AIDS tests for all foreign tourists, claiming the threat came from overseas.

"It is too ridiculous for comment," Sengupta said.

"The real problem is under-utilisation of funds for projects in the states. The centre has no control because health is a state subject and there is poor co-ordination."

"Only 30 to 40 per cent of the 100 million dollars AIDS budget has been utilised," he said. "The World Bank had released 85 million dollars for use till 1997 but funding may stop if we cannot use the money."

"Doctors, especially in rural areas, need training. Many of them are totally ignorant and treat AIDS patients for tuberculosis," Sengupta said.

For Shankar Chowdhury, who heads a Non-governmental Organisation called AIDS cell, the traditional Indian squeamishness about sex is a major impediment to prevention.

"Sex has always been in the closet in India, but there is a lot of sex going on out there," he said. "Nobody admits it and AIDS monitoring is totally lacking."

"We are funding direct AIDS-awareness programmes and our literacy programmes are different," he said. "When teaching the alphabet, we say a for 'AIDS', b for 'blood' instead of 'apple' and book."

Chowdhury said the high-risk groups in India were

neither homosexuals or drug users but low-paid workers and troops, truckers and prostitutes.

"Most of them come from villages where awareness levels are low and live in towns to earn a living. They live away from their wives and visit prostitutes frequently, often without a condom," he said.

A UNDP-sponsored study forecast a devastating economic impact from AIDS.

"Among the 700 industrial employees interviewed, 75 per cent were not aware that condom usage could prevent AIDS and 20 per cent were using condoms in a haphazard and improper manner," it said.

"Absenteeism in industry is likely to rise by over 50 per cent and the medical cost to be borne by the private sector due to AIDS-related illnesses will be 50,000 rupees (1,562 dollars) per person," the study warned.

Shankar Ghosh, head of a committee organised by the corporate sector to spread AIDS awareness in industry, said the 100,000-dollar project is aimed at evolving a Multi-pronged approach to educate workers.

"Nobody is safe — from the chief executive officer downwards," he said. "We cannot identify a segment as being more risk-prone. We aim to come out with an educational package that will suit all sorts of companies in every sector."

AIDS awareness campaigners say textiles, tourism, catering and transport-related industries will be heavily affected by the disease.

**Probe panel over Rajiv killing seeks files on Guru**

NEW DELHI, Oct 10: A panel probing the 1991 slaying of former premier Rajiv Gandhi on Monday ordered Indian intelligence agencies to provide files they have on a Hindu mystic who says kings and presidents are among his acolytes, reports AFP.

Chief Judge Mahesh Chandra Jain called for the secret files on Chandra Swami after the Guru evaded questions of lawyers in connection with Rajiv Gandhi's assassination by a suicide bomber four years ago, officials said.

Jain ordered Indian external secret services to report back on Tuesday with the files they may have on the jet-setting priest, who claims to have leaders from 120 nations among his religious following.