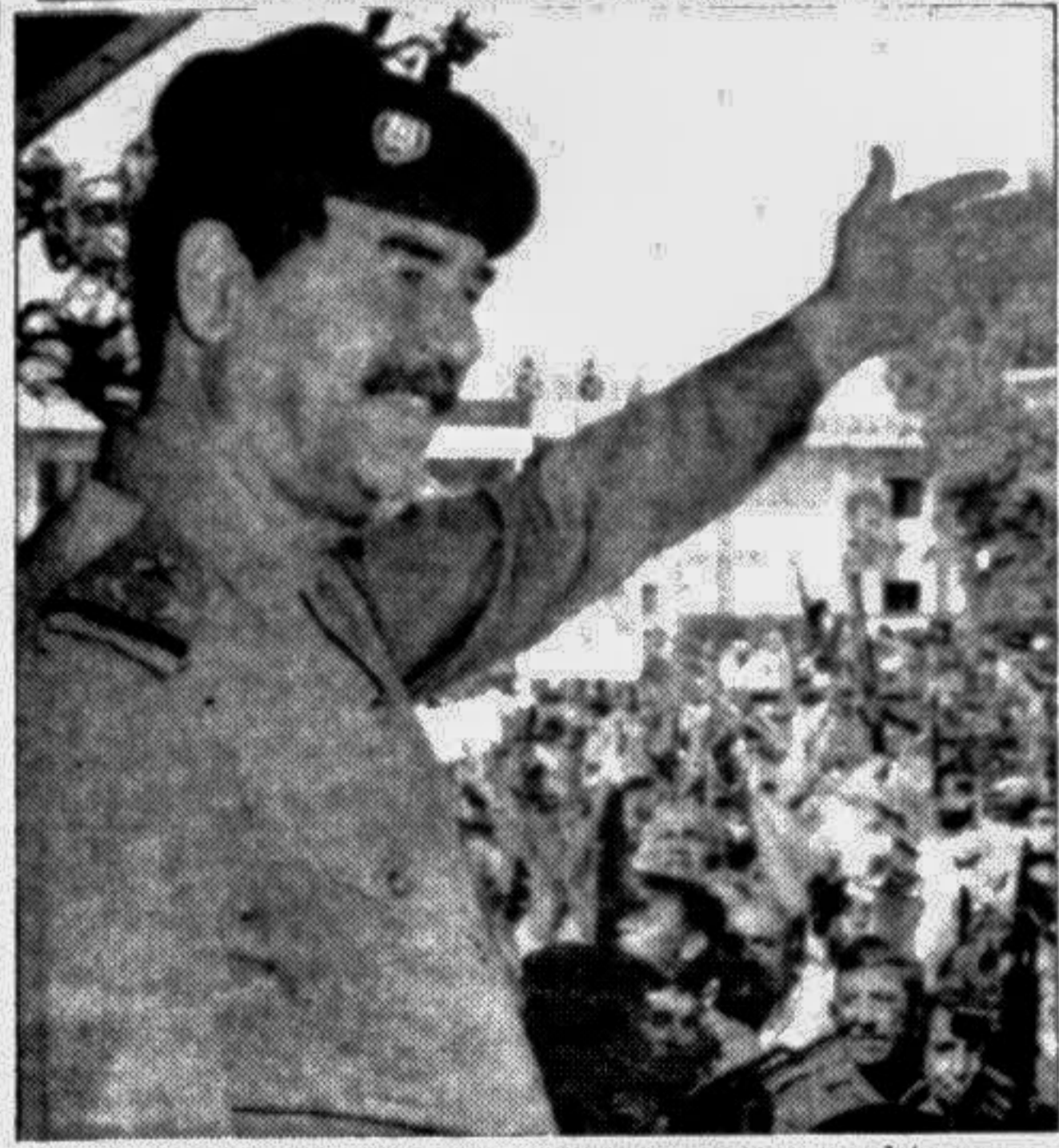


BRIEFLY



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein waves to his supporters in his first public appearance in Baghdad on Wednesday since he was reelected as President for seven years in a referendum with 99.96 per cent of the votes. — AFP/UNB photo

Major, Menem meet Monday: British Prime Minister John Major and Argentine president Carlos Menem will meet in New York next Monday on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. Downing Street said yesterday. AFP reports from London.

A spokesman said it would be the first face-to-face meeting between a British and Argentine leader since the Falkland Islands war in 1982.

13 die of cholera in Vietnam: At least 13 people have died in an outbreak of Cholera in central Vietnam after flooding caused diseases to spread through the area, an official said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

Another 68 people have been infected with the disease in Ba To district of Quang Ngai province in the centre of the country after recent floods, the official from the provincial health care office said.

Britain to sign S Pacific NFZ treaty: Britain's senior envoy to Australia confirmed yesterday that London would sign the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone treaty. Reuter reports from Sydney.

"This confirms Britain's belief that an end to nuclear testing is in sight," said British High Commissioner Sir Roger Carrick.

Kozyrev will remain in office: Russian President Boris Yeltsin said in Moscow yesterday that Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev would remain in office. AFP reports from Moscow.

"What Kozyrev needs is a man (deputy) who will take care of the workings of the ministry. We need to find him a deputy," Yeltsin said before leaving Moscow for Paris.

Clinton to visit Japan in Nov: President Bill Clinton will visit Japan from November 16 to 21 for an annual meeting of Asia-Pacific leaders and a state visit, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said Friday. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

During his state visit, Clinton will meet Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as hold talks with Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama.

Blast hurts 5 in Vietnam: Five people, including three policemen, were injured when a parcel bomb exploded in the central Vietnamese resort of Dalat, the city police said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

The gift-wrapped bomb had been sent to the office of Lam Dong province's Water Resources Management Co. But the director refused to accept it because it had no return address.

Rabin, CIA director hold talks: US CIA Director John Deutch and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin held talks on Thursday. Israeli security sources said. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Spokesman for the US embassy in Tel Aviv and the Israeli Defence Ministry declined comment.

Quake shakes Japanese island: Minor quakes continued shaking southern Japanese islands early yesterday following a strong jolt of a magnitude 6.7 on the Richter scale the previous day, the meteorological agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Twelve quakes were felt by residents on Japan's Amami islands in the east China sea from 0:01 am to 8:00 am (1500 GMT to 2300 GMT Thursday).

Japanese painter Iri Maruki dies: Japanese painter Iri Maruki, who won world renown for his panels depicting the aftermath of the US bombing of Hiroshima died of heart attack on Thursday. He was 94. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

With his wife, Toshi, Maruki devoted his life to painting the 'Hiroshima panels' for which the couple received the International Peace Cultural Award in 1952.

'Marlboro Man' David McLean dead: David McLean, a rugged actor who for many years portrayed the 'Marlboro Man' in television cigarette commercials, has died at the age of 73 from lung cancer, a mortuary spokeswoman said on Tuesday. Reuter says from Los Angeles.

The spokeswoman said McLean, who also appeared in movies and in television western, died on October 12 at the University of California, Los Angeles, Medical Centre. A memorial service was held on Wednesday.

France asks Japan to cancel meeting between Chirac, Murayama

TOKYO, Oct 20: France has asked Japan to cancel a meeting between Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama and President Jacques Chirac scheduled for Sunday in New York, a foreign ministry official said today, reports AFP.

The two had been due to meet while attending ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.

Chirac's busy schedule was given as the reason for the French request, said the spokesman, who stressed that the Japanese government would have liked the meeting to have gone ahead.

Russia won't join peace force in Bosnia under NATO command

PARIS, Oct 20: Russian President Boris Yeltsin arrived in Paris today for a 36-hour stopover during which he will hold talks with President Jacques Chirac, reports AFP.

Yeltsin arrived accompanied by Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. He was due to hold talks with Chirac Friday afternoon at Rambouillet west of Paris, and further discussions at the Elysee Palace on Saturday.

Reuter adds from Moscow: Yeltsin, in interviews with journalists on the eve of his departure, also said he would make it clear Russia would not join any peace force in Bosnia that was under NATO command.

The 64-year-old President was leaving behind him a political house seething with speculation after he signalled he was ready to dump pro-western Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and raised questions over the future of

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Yeltsin, on his first foreign tour since suffering a mild heart attack in July, will travel first to Paris.

He was then to head on to New York on Saturday for ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the United Nations and to keep a summit date with US leader Bill Clinton on Monday.

In separate interviews with journalists he made clear that he would have a similar message for both Chirac and Clinton on Bosnia and NATO's plans to expand eastwards.

He told reporters in the Kremlin on Thursday that he would resist any NATO plans to post nuclear arms close to Russia's borders, but that he still hoped he and Clinton would be able to keep Russian-US ties on track at their summit.

"We propose a European

Security System which would exclude the expansion of NATO and the presence of Nuclear weapons in to the countries of eastern and central Europe," said Yeltsin, looking robust and in fighting mood.

"This (the presence of nuclear weapons) is impermissible, there would again be two blocs.

But striking a more optimistic note, she added: "I am sure that after the meeting with Bill Clinton, we will find a way to agree on this."

He said creation of an international peace-keeping force for Bosnia would be a key subject at the summit.

He reiterated that Russia hoped to take part but could not do so under NATO command. Moscow wants a joint or rotating command and says it cannot afford to contribute many troops.

In a move likely to cause concern in western capitals, Yeltsin signalled that

Kozyrev, foreign minister for five years, would be dismissed although no replacement had been named.

The 44-year-old career diplomat was appointed in 1990 and helped to build up ties with the west. But Yeltsin has come under strong pressure to dump him from opposition politicians who say he has let Russia be sidelined in policy-making particularly over Bosnia.

There was no immediate comment available from Kozyrev who was due to accompany Yeltsin to Paris on Friday.

In Washington, US officials said Kozyrev may yet survive despite Yeltsin's statement.

Kozyrev "has more than nine lives and he hasn't used them all up yet... he's political liability (for Yeltsin) but I don't think Yeltsin's statement is a guarantee that he's going to leave office, one official told Reuter.



Women express relief and gratitude in the back seat of a car after being evacuated from their homes on the front line on Thursday near Bini Hissar where Afghan government troops are battling the Taliban militia. The Taliban militia has vowed to take the Afghan capital Kabul presently being governed by President Burhanuddin Rabbani. — AFP/UNB Photo

Rabbani accuses Islamic states of apathy towards his country

ISLAMABAD, Oct 20: Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani accused Islamic and neighbouring countries on Thursday of apathy toward his war-shattered country despite urgings to play an active role, the official Kabul Radio reported, says Reuter.

The broadcast, monitored in Islamabad, said the embattled President made the complaint while addressing lawyers and judges in the capital Kabul - now threatened by the Islamic Taliban militia, a resurgent faction.

He said his government did not want bloodshed and had repeatedly asked the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to play an important role to solve Afghanistan's problems.

Pakistan denies helping Taliban and says it has no favourites among the warring Afghan factions, whom it supported during a 14-year war against a Soviet-backed government, which collapsed in early 1992.

Pakistan expelled six more Afghan diplomats and 11 other Afghan nationals on Tuesday in a move reflecting a new law in relations between Islamabad and Kabul.

It expelled 13 Afghan diplomats last month and an Islamabad-based envoy of Rabbani early this month as relations began to nosedive after thousands of Afghan protesters ransacked and burned the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul on September 6, killing one employee and beating other staff, including the ambassador.

The President's remarks followed a speech on Wednesday when Kabul Radio quoted him as accusing Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of dividing Muslims and using force to suppress dissent at home as well.

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Bosnia sets up diplomatic ties with 7 states

CARTAGENA, Colombia, Oct 20: Bosnia established diplomatic relations with seven countries on Thursday. Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey said.

"We have established relations with Colombia, it is one of seven nations with which we have established relations today," Sacirbey told Reuters.

Colombia is the new Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement. Sacirbey, who is attending the movement summit, said the others included Namibia, Yemen and Costa Rica but did not specify the remaining three countries.

Sacirbey is in Cartagena, the venue of the 11th Non-Aligned Summit, to press for Bosnia's bid to become a full member of the movement.

SC notices issued to arrest Chandraswamy

NEW DELHI, Oct 20: The Supreme Court today issued notices to the central government and others on petitions seeking directions to the CBI for the immediate arrest of controversial godman Chandraswamy for his alleged links with the notorious criminal Babloo Srivastava, reports PTI.

A division bench of the court comprising Justice J S Verma and Justice K Venkataswamy issued the notices on public interest litigation petitions filed by Anukul Chandra Pradhan and society for protection of human rights.

The petitioners had also sought impounding of Chandraswamy's passport submitting that he had connections with the underworld Don Dowood Ibrahim who had masterminded the serial bomb blasts in March, 1993.

Malaysia to seek UNSC seat

CARTAGENA, Colombia, Oct 20: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad promised late Thursday his country would be among the Non-Aligned seeking a seat on an expanded UN Security Council, reports AFP.

"We are prepared of course to put ourselves up as a candidate, but of course we will abide by the majority," Mahathir told reporters.

With UN 50th anniversary events set for next week in New York, reforming in their favour the most powerful UN decision-making body tops of the wish list of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

NAM members make up almost two thirds of all the world's countries, with a majority in the UN General Assembly.

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Senate votes to tighten US embargo on Cuba

WASHINGTON, Oct 20: The Senate voted overwhelmingly Thursday to tighten the US embargo on Cuba despite concerns that it could increase trade tensions with other countries in the Americas and Europe, reports AFP.

The Senate's 74-24 vote, following passage of a similar bill last month in the House of Representatives, virtually assures Congress will deliver a veto-proof bill to President Bill Clinton.

Congress' move to slap more sanctions against Cuba achieved critical mass two days before Cuban President Fidel Castro was to arrive in New York to attend the United Nations' 50th anniversary events.

Senators voted to strengthen the 33-year-old economic embargo in a bill stripped the day before of a controversial provision dealing with US lawsuits over confiscated property.

Last month the House of Representatives passed the original version of the Bill 294 to 130, including the provision that critics charge would inundate courts with lawsuits and antagonise US trading partners.

The provision would have allowed US citizens, effectively Cuban-Americans, whose property was confiscated by the government of Cuban President Fidel Castro to sue foreign corporations that now traffic in these properties.

In the face of fierce administration opposition, backed by many Senate Democrats and a few Republicans, the bill's chief sponsor, Senator Jesse Helms, agreed Wednesday to drop the controversial provision.

The Senate and house versions will be sent to conference between leaders of the two chambers to hammer out differences, and the compromise must be voted on by each body. The process could take several weeks.

Off the Record

Shakespeare died of eye cancer!

BONN: A German professor said on Thursday she had proved a death mask of William Shakespeare was genuine, giving the world its first accurate portrait of the playwright and indicating he may have died of eye cancer, reports Reuter.

Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel, a professor of English literature at Mainz University, said forensic tests on the 17th century plaster of Paris mask in a castle south of Frankfurt matched it closely to portraits of the bard.

"I feel marvellous, its very exciting," said Hammerschmidt-Hummel, whose discovery was part of 10 years of research into artistic representations of Shakespeare.

The few existing portraits of Shakespeare are highly stylised, and the professor said the mask would provide the first true likeness of the playwright.

However, many scholars have cast doubt on whether even the portraits are accurate enough to be a valid basis for authenticating the mask.

The plaster cast is stored in a castle which doubles as a library in the town of Darmstadt, and is not on public display.

"It would be nice if people could see the mask soon," the professor said, adding it would be displayed next year.

She recruited German criminal investigators who used computer-aided techniques to find the similarity between the mask and the portraits.

Hammerschmidt-Hummel also noticed a swelling above the left eye in the mask and the portraits, and asked an optical specialist to investigate. He diagnosed mikulicz syndrome, a potentially fatal tumour which affects the tear glands.

Other experts were reserving judgement on the mask's authenticity.

"As far as I know, it was very rare for a death mask of literary figures to be made in Shakespeare's era," said professor Stanley Wells, head of the Shakespeare Institute in the playwright's English home town of Stratford-Upon-Avon.

Still apparent after 70 years

BEIJING: When the Forbidden City was first opened up 70 years ago, signs of the emperor's flight were still apparent a box of opened biscuits, an unmade bed, reports AP.

The palace, closed to the public through two dynasties, was opened on October 10, 1925. Zhu Jiajin, 81, an authority on the Qing dynasty who has worked in the museum for 50 years, was there.

"There was so much joy because the Forbidden City had been off limits for 500 years," the China Daily on Wednesday quoted Zhu as saying. He recalled in an interview for the newspaper the luxury he discovered, as well as the disorder.

Taiwan test-fires Sky Bow II missiles

TAIPEI, Oct 20: Taiwan had successfully test-fired its self-designed Sky Bow II (Ten Kung II) medium-range missiles, Defence Minister Chiang Chung-Ling said today, reports AFP.

"Sky Bow II medium-range missiles were developed by our Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology ... and I confirm that tests were successful ... directly hitting the targets," Chiang told parliament.

Chiang's statement followed reports by the China Times that the armed forces had secretly test-fired its surface-to-air Sky Bow II missiles between late September and early this month at an

eastern military base. All five missiles, randomly selected from the 12 provided by the institute, hit the targets over 120 kilometers (70 miles) away, the daily said.

Mass production of the missiles would soon begin and they would be deployed in offshore islands, the paper said.

The Chungshan Institute under the Defence Ministry launched Sky Bow projects in 1982 to strengthen Taiwan's air defence capability.

Sky Bow I missiles were commissioned into the military in 1989 and development of Sky Bow II started 10 years ago.

France asks Japan to cancel meeting between Chirac, Murayama

TOKYO, Oct 20: France has asked Japan to cancel a meeting between Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama and President Jacques Chirac scheduled for Sunday in New York, a foreign ministry official said today, reports AFP.

The two had been due to meet while attending ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.

Chirac's busy schedule was given as the reason for the French request, said the spokesman, who stressed that the Japanese government would have liked the meeting to have gone ahead.

China speeding up 'quiet revolution' towards democracy

HONG KONG, Oct 20: Foreign media still churn out steady reports on the suppression of dissidents who call for more democracy in Beijing, Shanghai and other Chinese cities, but China says it is speeding up a 'quiet revolution' toward more democracy in rural areas, reports IPS.

Indeed, they point to secret ballot that have been around since the late 1980s in rural areas, for villagers to elect their own top official. And village democracy had been spreading to that all but four province now hold elections.

At the end of this year, half a million village committees in 16 provinces will be directly elected by secret ballot.

The commitment to a fair ballot appears to be genuine, say Hong Kong-based analysts, although the fairness of the polls appears to vary from village to village.

Officials from China's Civil Affairs Ministry will be visiting the United States to learn how to organise elections, and election officials are already being trained by the International Republican Institute in Washington.

The move to promote grassroots democracy may seem as an odd paradox in a state that suppresses freedom of speech, but village elections are part of a party campaign to bolster a grassroots organisation in rural areas where community party control has been crumbling.

Many rural party branches have actually ceased to function after 15 years of economic reform, according to an internal party circular released earlier this year.

Meanwhile, discontent is growing among many peasants who feel they have not benefited from economic reforms. Analysts said fear of unrest in the countryside is behind the government's push for democracy. Said one Hong Kong-based analyst: "Democracy is better than anarchy which could easily get out of hand."

The party leadership has also expressed concern over the growth of "traditional clan" organisations that have been filling the vacuum in village government.

Analysts said the fear that clan organisations were becoming a law unto themselves has in part prompted the government's push to spread village democracy.

"Elected leaders are often younger, better qualified, understand economics and have integrity," said Tang Jinsu of China's Ministry of Civil Affairs during a recent seminar in Hong Kong on legal reform in China.

Corruption is rampant among village leaders. This is because they receive shares of the profits in well-off villages that have their own enterprises, an arrangement that also makes it easier for them to become entrenched in their positions while doing nothing for the good of the village.

In nearly half of China's villages, peasants have thrown out inept and corrupt Communist Party officials, electing non-party officials into their place. These non-

Russian helicopter gunships raid Chechen villages

MOSCOW, Oct 20: Russian helicopter gunships raided two Chechen villages south-east of the capital Grozny causing civilian casualties, a Chechen separatist spokesman said today, reports AFP.

Movladi Udugov, Information Minister in the break-away Chechen government, told Moscow Echo Radio that up to eight helicopters backed by artillery and tanks late Thursday attacked the villages of Serzhen Yurt and Beni Khutor.

Meanwhile, the Russian military command in Chechnya, quoted by Interfax news agency, said separatists attacked a Russian military convoy in Serzhen Yurt, killing one soldier and wounding another.

But democracy has a habit of begetting more democracy. In most villages, it is only the village chief and other members of the village council who stand for election, with the party secretary appointed by district or country-level party officials.

But analysts note that despite the secret polls, democracy remains relatively limited in China. Important decisions are made at the top with few checks and balances to curb their power. Village committees can easily be overridden by the party apparatus at the country level.