

BRIEFLY

Blast leaves 4 dead in Assam: At least four persons, including two women and a small boy were killed yesterday and 15 others injured in a bomb blast at Diphu, the headquarter town of Assam's Karbi Anglong district, according to official sources in Guwahati, PTI says from Guwahati.

The bomb planted by unidentified miscreants inside a bus travelling to Doboka exploded at a public bus stand of the town, killing all four persons on the spot.

Christopher arrives in Jordan: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived in Jordan yesterday to attend a Middle East economic conference opening later in the day, Reuter reports from Amman.

The conference of more than 1,000 political and business leaders to discuss investment in the region is a follow-up to last year's Casablanca meeting at which Arabs and Israelis mixed for the first time since 1948.

Gas explosion kills 10 in Manila: Ten people were killed when a gas stove exploded and destroyed a neighbouring restaurant in the Manila suburb of Pasay early yesterday, Philippine police said, Reuter reports from Manila.

Five employees of the restaurant in the Cartimar commercial district escaped from the blaze by jumping out of a window.

7 die as ferry sinks in Manila: At least seven people were killed and four others were missing after a ferry sank as tropical storm Zack struck the central Philippines, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Manila.

The Cebu Diamond, carrying 53 crewmen, sank in the Visayas Sea off Leyte island Saturday as it sought shelter from the storm. Foreign vessels in the area and a boat from Leyte managed to rescue 51 crew members, Jose Roble, owner of the shipping firm that operates, the ferry said.

Road mishap claims 11 in Ankara: Eleven people were killed and several others injured in a traffic accident in Afyon province, western Turkey, the state-run TV reported in Ankara yesterday evening, Xinhua says from Ankara.

The TV report said that the traffic accident occurred Saturday afternoon when a minibus collided with a truck at Derceine district of Sultandagi town in Afyon.

Blast kills 6 in Algeria: A car bomb exploded yesterday killing six people and wounding 83 in the Algerian city of Bouira, Algerian security forces said, quoted by the Algerian news agency APS, Reuter says from Paris.

2,000 Slovaks return home: More than 2,000 Slovaks returned to their homes on Saturday after being evacuated when poison gas belched from a steel mill next to their village, killing 13 people, Reuter says from Kosice Slovakia.

A fleet of buses took home 2,500 inhabitants of the eastern village of Velka Ida who had been evacuated amid scenes of panic in the early hours of Saturday 19 hours after a blast at VSZ Steel Mill ruptured a pipeline, carrying carbon monoxide.

Polls begin in Tanzania: Tanzanians go to the polls yesterday in their first multi party presidential and parliamentary elections after three decades of one party rule, Reuter says from Dar es Salaam.

The nine million voters had in theory to decide which party could best improve the economic prospects of one of Africa's poorest nations.

8 killed in bus mishap in West Bank: Eight people were killed when an Israeli bus in which they were travelling slid off a road and tumbled into a ravine on Saturday night, Israel radio reported, Reuter says from Jerusalem.

The accident occurred east of Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank. The radio said several people were seriously injured in the accident which occurred on a road made slippery by rain. Police could not immediately confirm the report.

Strike paralyses Karachi Gunmen kill 2 college teachers in Lahore

LAHORE, Oct 29: Gunmen killed two college teachers outside the Pakistani town of Lahore on Saturday amid tension between two rival Muslim sects, police said, reports Reuter.

The two teachers were shot by unidentified motorcyclists at a busy road crossing.

The shooting follows the killing last week of a local religious leader of the minority Shi'ite sect, which blamed it on militants from the majority Sunni sect.

A spokesman for the Shi'ite Tehrik-i-Jafaria group said the gunmen involved in Saturday's shooting in the Punjab province capital probably thought one of the two teachers, Aftab Naqvi, was a Shi'ite because of his name.

He said Naqvi and his colleague, Maqbool, were Sunnis.

Violent incidents have increased in Lahore in the past month. A bomb exploded at a bus station in Lahore on Friday night but nobody was hurt.

Two people were killed by a bomb blast in a cinema in the eastern Punjab town of Okara. Nobody claimed responsibility for both blasts.

AFP adds: Pakistan's commercial capital Karachi was paralysed by a strike today following violence which left six people, including a policeman dead, according to police and hospital sources.

The strike the fourth this month, was called by the city's main opposition party, the ethnic-based (MQM).

Among the casualties of the violence, on Saturday and overnight, was an MQM activist, the great-grandson of one of the leaders of the Pakistan independence movement, Nulana Hasrat Mohani.

Good news for heart disease sufferers

LONDON, Oct 29: A British man was given an electric heart last week in an operation that could bring hope to hundreds of heart disease sufferers, the Sunday Times newspaper reported, says Reuter.

Abel Goodman, a 64-year-old retired film producer who suffered from heart failure, received the implant at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford in the first operation of its kind.

The electric heart, developed by scientists at the Texas Heart Institute,

Pakistan rules out improved ties with India

ISLAMABAD, Oct 29: Pakistan today ruled out the possibility of an improvement in relations with neighbouring India while the 48 year old Kashmir dispute remained unresolved, reports AFP.

"Kashmir remains a priority issue for the government," President Farooq Ahmed Leghari said in his annual address at a joint sitting of the country's parliament.

Relations with India cannot improve until the dispute is resolved, and Kashmiris are granted the rights to self-determination, he added.

The opposition, led by former PM Nawaz Sharif, staged a walk-out as the president spoke, pandemonium ensued as House Speaker, Yusuf Reza Gilani, refused permission to opposition deputies to speak for the release of several MPs jailed on various charges.

MPs wearing black arm-bands continued to shout throughout the speech.

Leghari also attacked India's long range missile programme, saying that it posed danger to the entire region.

In an implicit reference to the recent arrests of around 40 army officers, the president said the Pakistan army was a disciplined force.

According to local press reports the officers, including a general and a brigadier, were arrested last month for plotting an Islamic revolution or helping insurgents in India-held Kashmir.

The government has not spelled out the charges against the detained officers and Prime Minister Benazir

Butto has said an investigation was underway.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since their 1947 independence from Britain. Two of their armed conflicts were for the control of Kashmir, claimed by both.

Relations deteriorated further as Muslim militants stepped up a campaign against Indian rule in 1989. More than 12,000 people have died so far in the bloody separatist movement.

India blames Pakistan for training and arming the Kashmiri militants, Pakistan denies the charge. But it vows to continue its political and diplomatic support for Kashmiris calling their movement a "legitimate struggle" for their right to self-determination.

Chandrika risking career with offensive against LTTE

COLOMBO, Oct 29: President Chandrika Kumaratunga is risking her political future with a military campaign which could crush Tamil separatists or plunge Sri Lanka into more chaos, analysts said today, reports AFP.

Kumaratunga, 50, who has enjoyed a meteoric political career since winning a local election in 1993, ordered the country's biggest-ever offensive 13 days ago against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"Now that the war has been thrust upon us, we will conduct it efficiently," Kumaratunga said Friday during a visit to New York as her security forces tightened the noose around the LTTE's stronghold of the Jaffna peninsula in the island's north.

Diplomats here say the success of failure of the latest military offensive will decide whether Kumaratunga, who became president almost a year ago, can run for a second term or whether her government is finished.

Tamil legislator, Dharmalingam Sidhathan, said Kumaratunga was taking a "very very high risk" in trying to resolve the protracted conflict which has claimed over 50,000 lives in the past 23 years.

"She took a big risk by unveiling a (radical) political package (on August 3). With the offensive she is taking a bigger risk because the LTTE being a guerrilla movement can target her," said Sidhathan who leads an anti-LTTE party in parliament.

"If the army is able to dislodge the LTTE and restore civil administration in the north, that will be a tremendous boost to her. The economic prospects after a settlement (of the conflict) are endless," an Asian diplomat said.

On the other hand, if the government is unable to show spectacular results to counter the spate of major LTTE attacks in recent weeks, the government's position will be untenable, diplomats said.

The military has already lost 128 soldiers with more than 500 wounded in the current campaign code-named Rivirasa (sunshine) launched on October 17 and flagged by the military as an offensive to take Jaffna.



Members of Prime Minister Tansu Ciller's DYP party and opposition parliamentarians of the ANAP clash in the Turkish parliament during a debate of a freedom of expression law, Ankara late on Friday evening. Turkey's parliament amended a key article and anti-terrorism law, in a move that was expected to help the country's bid to gain acceptance from the European Union. — AFP/UNB photo

Islamic Jihad vows to take revenge Jihad leader shot dead in Malta

DAMASCUS, Oct 29: Radical Palestinian leader Fathi Shaqaqi, whose group was responsible for attacks in which dozens of Israeli were killed, was assassinated in Malta on Thursday, Palestinian sources said on Saturday.

"I say with great sorrow that brother Shaqaqi was assassinated in Malta," a senior Palestinian official, who asked not to be named, told Reuters.

"All indications we have got so far show that the Israeli secret service Mossad is behind this cowardly action," he added.

Another source said Shaqaqi, secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad organisation which opposes Israeli-PLO peace moves, was shot in his car after arriving from Libya where he had held talks with Colonel Muammer Gaddafi.

"We do not wish to hold the Libyans responsible for brother Shaqaqi's assassination but the security measures they made were not enough to protect him," one source said.

"It looks as though the Libyans are now looking for a way to distance themselves from the incident especially that they gave a Libyan passport to Shaqaqi," another source said.

Palestinian hardline group Islamic Jihad vowed today to take revenge on Israelis for killing its leader Fathi Shaqaqi, blaming Israeli secret services for his death.

Meanwhile, Israel welcomed the news that a leader of Islamic Jihad, a militant group pledged to wrecking its peace deal with the PLO, had been shot dead in Malta but refused to say if it was responsible.

Islamic Jihad sources in the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip said Fathi Shaqaqi, 43, the movement's Damascus-based leader, was killed by Israel's Mossad assassinated him in Malta on his way back from Libya to Damascus," said one source who declined to be identified.

BEIJING, Oct 29: Mao Tse Tung's despised widow and leader of the notorious gang of four, Jiang Qing, was a patient from hell, while patriarch Deng Xiaoping was a model of compliance, according to their former doctor, reports AFP.

The revelations were contained in excerpts, published in Saturday's China Consumer News, of the memoirs of Wang Mingqing, who, beginning in 1955, served as a senior medical officer in the Sumptuous residential complex for China's leaders, Zhongnanhai, off and on for more than 35 years.

But the battle will not be who to vote for but whether to vote at all?

Tribal chiefs in the province have called for a boycott of the elections, saying the poll will undermine their authority. The ANC has shrugged off their call.

People don't listen to the Amakhosi (chiefs), the ANC's chief whip in the provincial legislature Mike Makalika told AFP. "They are not as strong here as they are in Kwazulu-Natal province. As far as we are concerned there is no boycott in any part of the Eastern Cape."

Almost two million of the province's 3.7 million voters live in tribal areas where the congress of traditional leaders of South Africa — a fairly close ally of the ANC during the struggle against apartheid is calling for the stayaway.

Opposition parties including the conservative National Party (NP) of Frederik de Klerk say the boycott call combined with widespread apathy, could lead to a low voter turnout and weaken the ANC's domination in the province.

Ministerial team for early polls in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Oct 29: An Indian ministerial team on Kashmir has called for early legislative elections, preferably in December, in the troubled state, officials said today, reports AFP.

The team suggested at a two-hour meeting here Saturday that the elections be held before the expiry of the current spell of federal rule in Kashmir on January 17, an official spokesman said.

The group of ministers, who had been asked by the prime minister to study the possibility of holding elections in Kashmir, included External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh.

They "felt the situation in the state had turned for the better and conditions were conducive to holding of elections by mid-December," the spokesman said. Saturday's meeting was also attended by intelligence officials.

Indian officials say a final decision on Kashmir elections would be taken by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao.

Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, has been governed directly by New Delhi since January 1990. Muslim militants fighting a bloody war since 1989 against Indian rule over Kashmir have vowed to sabotage any elections.

ICJ to start hearings on N-issue

THE HAGUE, Oct 29: The international Court of Justice (ICJ) will on Monday start a series of hearings on whether using or threatening to use nuclear arms is legally justified, reports AFP.

The world court is being asked to give an opinion — not a ruling — on the issue after hearing depositions over two weeks from a host of countries across the world including nuclear powers Britain, France, Russia and the United States.

It is not being asked to rule on nuclear testing despite the third in a series of tests begun in September by France in the South Pacific late Friday.

The United Nations' supreme authority was asked by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UN General Assembly for an opinion on the legality of nuclear weapons.

Tribal chiefs call for boycotting SA local polls

GRAAFF REINET, South Africa, Oct 29: President Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) faces a showdown with traditional rulers in its Eastern Cape stronghold during Wednesday's local government elections, reports AFP.

But the battle will not be who to vote for but whether to vote at all?

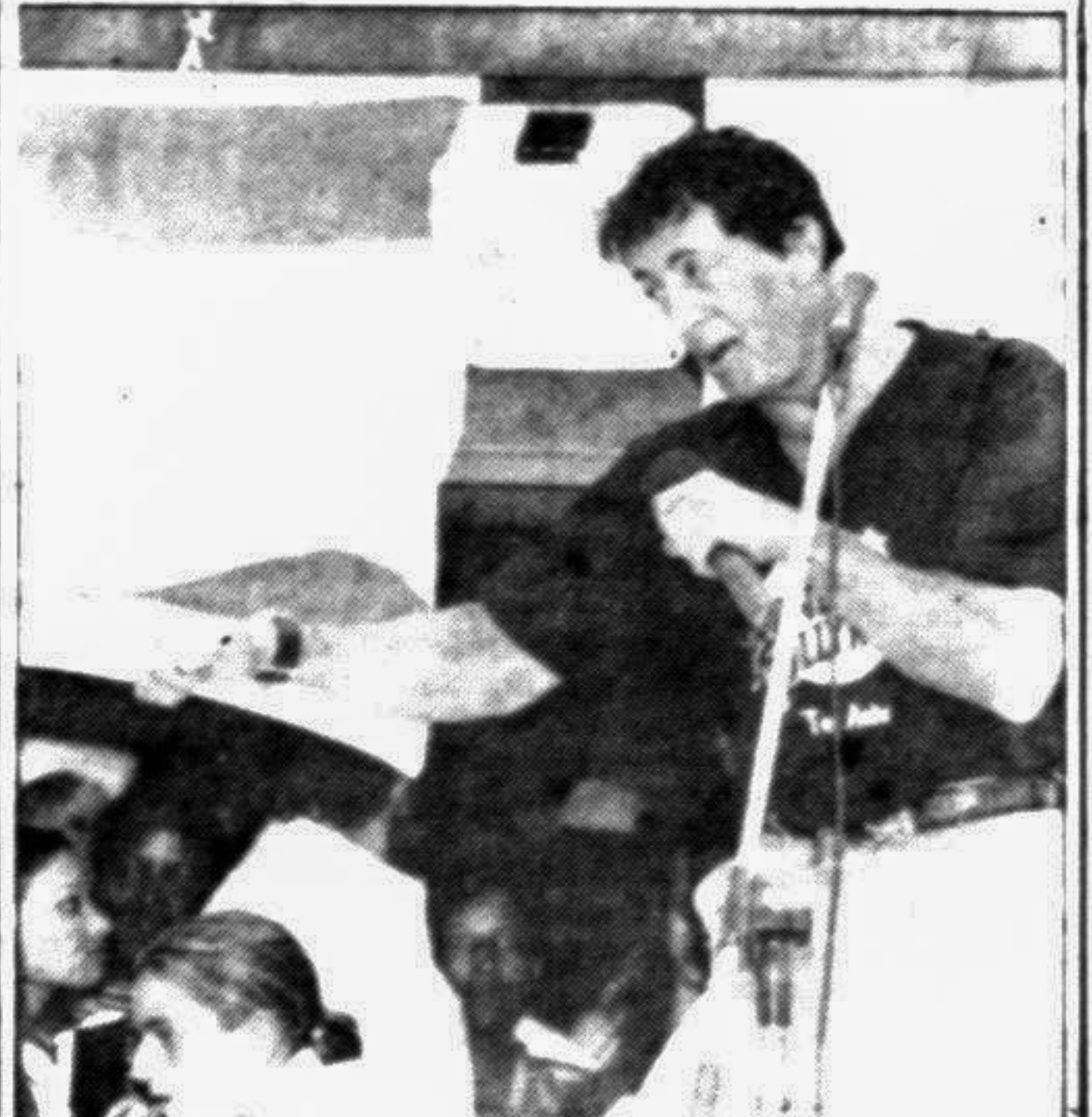
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Off the Record



US movie star Sylvester Stallone makes some shadow boxing to the delight of his fans during a promotion event in Tel Aviv on Saturday, for the Planet Hollywood restaurant chain that will open in Tel Aviv in February 1996. — AFP/UNB photo

There is no hell in Castro's world!

HAVANA: Cuban President Fidel Castro said in remarks published on Saturday he does not want to believe in hell because "it's very tough," and described Jesus Christ as one of mankind's "greatest revolutionaries," reports Reuter.

"I've always considered Christ to be one of the greatest revolutionaries in the history of humanity," said the leader who led the communist revolution to power in 1959.

The remarks, published in the official newspaper Granma, were made by the Cuban leader on Wednesday night in New York when he met a group of mostly Protestant pastors. He had been attending the United Nations 50th anniversary commemoration in New York.

He told the pastors he had studied 12 years at a Roman Catholic school and his Jesuit teachers had sought to impose on him what he called a "dogmatic belief" including the idea of hell.

"I really think the ones who should have gone to hell were those who wanted to make me believe without convincing me. Besides, the truth is ... I don't want to believe in hell, it's very tough," he said.

He later added, provoking a laugh from his listeners: "Today, we would say that they wouldn't agree in the United Nations with this eternal condemnation, that it would be a flagrant violation of human rights."

Castro said he also respected Pope John Paul as "one of the most brilliant personalities of the Catholic church of the last few centuries," although he disagreed with him over some issues.

"We feel he doesn't fully understand the problem of the population explosion in the world, the question of marriage by priests and the absence of women in the churches," he said.

But Castro said he agreed with the Pope's criticism of the consumer society and his views on poverty and social injustice.

He said a situation of "detente and co-existence" currently existed between his government and the Catholic church.

Mayawati's BSP splits again in Uttar Pradesh

NEW DELHI, Oct 29: An Indian party which champions the cause of "untouchables" and governed the country's most populous state until 12 days ago has split for the second time in five months, newspapers reported Sunday, says AFP.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, Majority People's Party) broke up late Saturday in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, sparking clashes between rival factions, the Hindustan Times and other dailies said.

At least 10 of the party's 59 state lawmakers broke away and picked a new leader at a meeting in the Uttar Pradesh capital Lucknow. BSP deputy leader and former state chief minister Mayawati denounced them as "splitters."

Both factions claimed majority support in the BSP's Uttar Pradesh chapter. It was not immediately clear how many lawmakers were still supporting Mayawati, a firebrand woman.

The BSP champions the cause of the millions of low-caste Hindus, known as "untouchables," as well as poor Muslims and Sikhs. It first took power in Uttar Pradesh in November 1993 in a coalition headed by the Socialist Party.

But it withdrew crucial legislative support to the Socialist Party of Mulayam Singh Yadav in June, forcing his resignation. The move led to the first split in BSP when 11 legislators sympathetic to Yadav broke away.

The BSP then formed a government in Uttar Pradesh, a sprawling state of nearly 140 million people, with the backing of its erstwhile foe, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party).

The BSP government headed by Mayawati collapsed on October 17 when the BJP took back its support.

Sudanese expelled from Libya face gruelling desert trek

WAHAT AS-SALAFI, Sudan, Oct 29: Thousands of Sudanese face a gruelling three-day desert trek clinging to bumpy trucks under a relentless sun as they head home after being expelled from Libya, reports AFP.

The expelled workers have little choice if they do not have the 80-dollar bus fare to hand over to the Libyan bus drivers in the Libyan town of Khufrah at the start of the journey.

The only alternative is to clamber on top of one of the heavy-goods lorries trundling the desert route between the two countries.

Squatting on the roofs of the lorries, pinning their luggage beneath, the male passengers face a dusty ride through the desert to the first Sudanese town of Dongola, about 900 kilometres (550 miles) away.

First stop is the border oasis of Wahat As-Salafi 300 kilometres (180 miles) south in Sudan, out still 600 kilometres (370 miles) from Dongola.

Even by jeep, "the queen of the desert," the journey takes 15 hours.

Sudan has swung into action to receive the returning workers, more than 40,000 having been expelled already since August, sources said.

About 300,000 are set to be thrown out of Libya by Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi, according to the head of the Sudanese expatriates office Tajeddin Al-Mahdi. Gaddafi said Tuesday he would press on with the expulsion.

Mahdi travelled to Libya in September and appealed for a delay until the end of the December so an operation to repatriate the workers could be better organised.

A Sudanese officer has been placed in charge of or-

ganising the workers as they arrive at the border oasis, equipped with water and food for the journey. Those with plenty share with those without. "We share everything," one said.

"They need the patience of job to travel in these conditions on this route which has been dubbed by the lorry-drivers 'the road of Anatara' because it is so difficult," he said, referring to a pre-Islamic epic of a legendary warrior poet who undertook a hazardous journey.

He welcomed a convoy of five lorries, sagging under the weight of the passengers and their luggage as it rolled into the oasis throwing up a cloud of choking sand.

As the lorries ground to a halt, the passengers jumped off to fling themselves into the cool waters of the oasis without event taking off their long traditional robes.

"Wherever possible, close to points of water, we have set up aid posts where we check the passing vehicles to bring them help if they get lost in the desert," the officer said.

But their efforts remain crude. There is no medical help. Doctors are expected in Dongola travelling the 650

1 lakh Chinese attacked with HIV

BEIJING, Oct 29: China Health Ministry has admitted that as many as 100,000 people in China could be carrying the deadly Human Immune-Deficiency Virus (HIV) that leads to AIDS, reports AFP.

A ministry circular published in Health News today said China had 2,428 officially registered HIV carriers as of July 1, but ministry experts warned that the real number could be anywhere between 50,000 and 100,000.