

BRIEFLY



Sarah Balabagan's father, Karim Balabagan (centre R) poses with Faraj al-Balushi (centre L), the son of Mohammad Al-Balushi, whom the young Filipina maid stabbed to death last year, on Monday in front of the court appeal of Al-Ain. The court jailed Sarah for one year and ordered her whipped 100 times for killing her employer, after revoking a death penalty.

15 die in Mizoram bus plunge: At least 15 people were killed and 22 injured, most of them critically, when a bus they were travelling in rolled into a ditch in the northeastern Indian state of Mizoram, United Nations of India (UNI) said, yesterday. Reuter reports from New Delhi.

The news agency said the crash took place on Monday on a spot on the Aizawl-Silchar road where 34 people died in an accident in 1981.

Fire claims 12 in Taipei: At least 12 people died in a pre-dawn fire which swept through a commercial building in the southern city of Chiayi Tuesday, police said, AFP reports from Taipei.

The blaze erupted about 3:00 am (1900 GMT) in the middle part of the 14-storey building, which housed department stores, bookstores, restaurants and a hotel, a Chiayi police officer said.

10m Indians suffer from blindness: More than 10 million Indians are suffering from blindness, official sources said in New Delhi on Monday, Xinhua reports from New Delhi.

Fourteen out of every 1,000 people in India are without eyesight. Cataract is the main eye disease in India as 80 out of 100 patients suffered from this ailment.

Mcnamara to visit Vietnam: Robert McNamara, former US Secretary of Defence who played a major role in the Vietnam war, is to pay his first visit to Vietnam next week to help arrange a conference on the Vietnam War, a news report said yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

He will also have a meeting with Vietnam's legendary figure, General Vo Nguyen Giap, on November 8 at the Institute of World Affairs in Hanoi, the Saigon Times Daily said.

Demirel okays coalition govt: Turkish President Suleyman Demirel on Monday approved a new right-left coalition government led by caretaker Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, paving the way for December general elections, Reuter reports from Ankara.

Ciller had earlier agreed a coalition with the republican People's Party (CHP), her former partner headed by Deniz Baykal, to lead the country until the early polls on December 24.

Diana to visit Argentina in Nov: Princess Diana, estranged wife of heir to the British throne Prince Charles, will pay her first official visit to Argentina next month, Buckingham Palace announced on Monday, Reuter reports from London.

**Shifting of missions to Jerusalem
KSA urges world states not to bow to Israeli pressure**

DUBAI, Oct 31: Saudi Arabia on Monday called on countries with diplomatic ties with Israel not to bow to pressure to move embassies to the disputed city of Jerusalem, reports Reuter.

The weekly Saudi Cabinet meeting expressed the conservative kingdom's "concern" over efforts to move diplomatic missions to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv which it said were in violation of several United Nations resolutions.

Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah, who chaired the meeting, urged world states not to respond favourably to Israeli pressure to transfer their embassies to Jerusalem, stressing that the

city was an Arab and Islamic one under occupation, a cabinet statement said.

He also highlighted US President Bill Clinton's objection to such a move, added the statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

The statement did not make a direct reference to a decision last week by the US Congress to move the American embassy to Jerusalem by 1999.

Saudi Arabia supports the Middle East peace process but says it will not normalise ties with Israel or lift the direct economic boycott of the Jewish state before peace deals are reached with Syria and Lebanon.

Ruling party leading in Tanzanian polls

DAR ES SALAAM, Oct 31: Early results in Tanzania's partially completed elections gave a solid lead today to the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM-revolutionary) Party, reports AFP.

But the results were too sparse and localised to indicate any trend, analysts warned.

The results of 12 of the 232 constituencies in these first multi-party elections showed CCM presidential candidate Benjamin Mkpa with 63.6 per cent of the vote to 26 per cent for Ibrahim Lipumba of the Civic United Front (CUF), 9.2 per cent for Augustine Mrema of the National Convention for Construction and Reform (NCCR-Mageuzi) and 1.2 per cent for John Cheyo of the United Democratic Party (UDP).

Sino-US ties neither worsening nor improving rapidly

BEIJING, Oct 31: Their presidents have held summits, trade is booming and investment is surging, but none of this signals a real thaw in frosty relations between China and the United States, officials and analysts say, reports Reuter.

"Sino-US relations seem to have settled into an endless series of ups and downs, taken one at a time, show a relationship that is neither steadily deteriorating nor rapidly improving," said one Western diplomat.

A senior Chinese official agreed. "I don't expect that you will see relations plunge but on the other hand there is little chance of a real warming from the current position."

The pinnacle of what can be achieved appeared to have been reached last week when Chinese President Jiang Zemin and US President Bill

**LTTE declares 'war emergency' in north
Tigers fleeing Jaffna en masse**

COLOMBO, Oct 31: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas have panicked and were fleeing en masse from their Jaffna Town stronghold today as the government's armed forces approached, relief workers said, reports Reuter.

The roads out of Jaffna are full, jam-packed with vehicles heading east for Chavakachcheri, on the north side of the Jaffna lagoon, the workers said in Colombo, citing reports from the northern rebel-held peninsula.

Tamil Tiger radio was telling citizens to evacuate, the workers said.

The armed forces, engaged in their biggest offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), were fighting within a few miles (km) of Jaffna town today, the military said.

Clashes were reported from the strategic Neerveli

junction, near the Uppu Aru Lagoon six miles northeast of the Jaffna Peninsula but only about four miles from the outer suburbs.

"There's fighting at Neerveli junction right now," a military spokesman told Reuters. "We can say the junction is with us now."

Jaffna Town is the stronghold of the LTTE, fighting for a homeland in the north east, and is believed to be the objective of the armed forces' operation Rotosra (Sunshine), an offensive launched on October 17.

AFP adds: Tamil Tigers today declared a "War emergency" in northern Sri Lanka and appealed for volunteers to prevent government forces capturing Jaffna, their main stronghold.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in a

statement from its London office, said Tamils in the Jaffna Peninsula faced the "most critical situation in their long history."

It said Tamil Chelvan, head of the Tiger's political section, appealed to youths to enlist "to prevent the Sri Lankan army from attaining its objective of capturing Jaffna, and to wrest back territory conquered by the invading army."

"The LTTE has placed Tamil Eelam on a war footing from Monday. The LTTE has called upon the people to unite and rally behind it to stave off impending danger," the statement said.

The Sri Lankan military said Monday that the Tigers had imposed curfews and declared a "state of emergency" in their de facto state in the north of the island as the

army advanced on their positions.

"By declaring an emergency and curfews in Jaffna it is very clear that the LTTE intends to restrict the movement of civilians so that they can be forcibly armed to fire at advancing troops," the military said.

On Monday government forces captured the key Tiger-held town of Neerveli, eight kilometres (five miles) from the Jaffna, capital of the peninsula and symbol of Tamil separatism.

The military put its casualties as 69 killed and 130 wounded in a two-day battle for the town. It claimed 92 Tigers were killed and another 350 wounded.

But the LTTE statement said Tigers, put up a "ferocious counter attack" at Neerveli and killed more than 100 soldiers

PLO reacts to Peres' comments over Jerusalem

AMMAN, Oct 31: The PLO responded angrily on Monday to comments by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres that Jerusalem had never been the capital of the Palestinian people, reports Reuter.

PLO chairman Yasser Arafat's spokesman Marwan Kanafani said Peres was using an economic summit in Amman as an election platform to show the Jewish people that Israel would not compromise on Jerusalem, occupied in 1967.

Israeli general elections are scheduled to be held by November next year.

"Jerusalem religious and spiritual capital of the Palestinian people," Kanafani said.

Kiev puts 80 ICBMs out of service

KIEV, Oct 31: A Ukrainian military spokesman has said that Ukraine has put 80 CC-19 Inter-continental Ballistic Missiles ICBM out of service and dismantled 40 rocket launchers, reports Xinhua.

Alexander Serdiuk, director of Ukraine's control centre for strategic forces, told a press briefing yesterday that the missiles, whose energy has been reduced, will be shifted to another place to have all their energy removed.

It is the first time that the Ukrainian military made public the progress the country has achieved in nuclear disarmament since a joint communique was signed by Ukraine, Russia and the United States in January 1994.

Serdiuk said Ukraine is fulfilling its obligations to a total destruction of nuclear weapons in his country.

5 get Int'l Press Freedom Award

NEW YORK, Oct 31: Five journalists from Russia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Ireland and Zambia will receive the International Press Freedom Awards from the Committee to Protect Journalists, the organisation said on Monday, reports Reuter.

The CPJ, a New York-based non-profit group that monitors abuses against the press and promotes press freedom internationally said the five had risked "political persecution and personal hardship to defy official and unofficial attacks on the independent press in their countries."

The journalists, who will be awarded the honours at a dinner in New York on December 6, are: Ygeny Kiselev, Ahmad Taufik, Jose Ruben, Veronica Geurin, and Fred M'Membe.



Bosnian Serb women search for leftovers in the garbage dump used by the UN French battalion 2 in the Sarajevo suburb of Dobrinja, near the capital's airport on Monday.

— AFP/UNB photo

Clinton, Congress on collision course over troops for Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Oct 31: President Bill Clinton and the US Congress are on a collision course over sending US troops into Bosnia, as three Balkan presidents prepare for indirect peace talks to end the 42-month-old civil war, reports AFP.

The US House of Representatives voted by 315 to 103 Monday on a non-binding resolution opposing the deployment of US ground troops in Bosnia without congressional approval.

Clinton has promised democratic lawmakers to seek Congress' endorsement for the deployment at an appropriate time, while reserving his constitutional right as

commander-in-chief to send troops without it.

The Republican-controlled Congress can create enormous obstacles to funding the force, however, and administration officials have acknowledged that they will require supplemental appropriations by Congress to foot the estimated 1.5 billion dollar bill.

The administration is committed to sending some 20,000 troops as part of a 60,000-strong NATO-led force to police a peace between Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia.

Presidents Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia, Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia and Franjo Tudjman of Croatia

begin US-mediated, indirect peace talks Wednesday at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio.

"It is not helpful for any effort," said White House spokeswoman Ginny Terzano said of Monday's house vote.

Before the vote, the US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, who brought the Balkan parties in the conflict together, said the resolution "grievously interferes with the negotiating processes of peace."

Holbrooke added that "any member of the Congress who supports that kind of resolution on the eve of an historic and important negotiation is doing grave damage to the national interests."



A group of men pray in a mosque on Monday as Azerbaijan holds a national day of mourning as it buried its dead from the metro train inferno in Baku that killed almost 300 people, the worst subway accident in history. A total of 286 people, including 28 children, were killed and 269 injured when their crowded metro train burst into flames deep underground late 28 October.

— AFP/UNB photo

Pakistan, France begin talks on arms sales

ISLAMABAD, Oct 31: French and Pakistani experts started talks here today on arms sales between the two countries, and in particular Pakistan's possible acquisition of the French Mirage 2000 jet, official sources said, reports AFP.

The military experts are here as part of a team that since 1993 has met annually to discuss technical follow-ups to weapons contracts between the two countries.

The talks come a few days after Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto stopped in Paris to meet her French President Jacques Chirac, who according to Pakistani sources gave the Mirage sale a green light on political grounds.

Pakistani officials have confirmed the Mirage deal is on the agenda, as is the technical follow up to France's September 1994 sale of three Agosta class

submarines to Pakistan, a contract worth a billion dollars.

The two sides are also expected to talk about the delivery of three French minesweepers to Pakistan, a contract signed in January 1992.

Much of Pakistan's air force uses French equipment, notably the Mirage III and IV jets and Puma and Lama helicopters. Pakistan's submarines, Agosta and Daphne are also all from France.

Negotiations for delivery of the Mirage 2000 began four years ago but problems over financing have prevented agreement so far.

The meetings coincide with the visit to Pakistan by General Marc-Amedee Montchal, Head of the French army, and follow that of Abdul Waheed, Pakistani Armed Forces Chief, who was in France this summer.

300 Sikh marchers held near federal parliament

NEW DELHI, Oct 31: Some 300 Sikhs were arrested trying to march on India's Supreme Court today to demand punishment for the killers of their relatives, who died in a pogrom following the 1984 assassination of former prime minister Indira Gandhi, reports AFP.

Witnesses said police arrested all 300 near the federal parliament, as they broke through barricades erected to stop them. The demonstrators were taken to a police station.

The slogan-shouting crowd, mainly made up of widows and children, accused the government of inaction and said the community was being discriminated against.

"When the doors of justice have been shut upon us, when our misery has been

ignored and grievances not redressed during the past 11 years, we are left with no choice but to knock on your doors," a statement addressed to the Chief Justice of India said.

"No serious investigation has been held against those involved in the death of more than 5,000 innocent Sikhs," it said. "The Sikhs are losing confidence in the judiciary... We are being treated as second class citizens"

In 1984 Hindu gangs launched murderous attacks on Sikhs throughout the Indian capital — killing about 2,733 men, women and children in just 72 hours after Gandhi was shot dead by two Sikh gunmen on October 31 that year.

Off the Record

Religious or irreligious?

NEW DELHI: A Hindu priest in a famous south Indian temple has angered feminists by asking the government to only appoint men as the area's administrative head, a daily said today, reports AFP.

The Times of India said a priest in the Sabarimala Temple in the southern state of Kerala made the demand, sparking widespread outrage in the state, which traditionally had a matriarchal system.

The demand follows controversy last year when the woman district collector, or local administrative head, of Pathanamthitta district where the temple is located visited the shrine to review facilities for pilgrims.

The shrine, dedicated to the Hindu God Ayappa, attracts millions of visitors every year but only admits girls under 12. Women who have attained puberty are not allowed inside the complex.

Kamla Das, a well-known writer and feminist from Kerala said the order was ludicrous.

"How can a priest order the government? We should not allow such impudence from a priest?"

Poetess and social worker Sugatha Kumari was equally critical.

"What of the men who visit the temple in a drunken state?" she said. "What of the thefts, the ecological rape men conduct in the sacred Sabarimala?" It is a matter of shame for the women of Kerala that they are sought to be debared."

Gandhi's knowledge of truth to be sold at auction

LONDON: Indian independence crusader Mahatma Gandhi's personal copy of "the Bhagavadgita," the sacred Hindu text that he regarded as a major influence on his life, is to be sold at auction in Britain, reports Reuter.

Phillips Auction House said on Monday the book would be sold on November 9, when it is expected to fetch 4,000 to 8,000 pounds (6,300 to 12,600 dollars).

Phillips said in a statement that Gandhi, who was assassinated in 1948, had once described the work as "the supreme book for the knowledge of the truth."

Gandhi's copy is an English edition from 1898. Autographed and inscribed. It is marked up in pencil by Gandhi throughout.

The Bhagavadgita — an episode in the epic "Mahabharata" is believed to date from the fifth to second centuries BC and is still regarded as one of India's great religious works.

Gandhi was introduced to the book in the 1890s when studying law in London.

"He had many translations of the same book but this wasn't one he just kept on the shelf. From the annotations, he clearly used it as a working copy and actually studied from it," a spokeswoman for Phillips said.

Pak troops foil bid to smuggle in drugs, arms

QUETTA, Pakistan, Oct 31: Pakistani border troops foiled an attempt by drug traffickers to smuggle in opium and arms from Afghanistan, a security official here said today, reports AFP.

The traffickers, thought to be Afghans were trying to cross into Pakistan late Sunday with 645 kilograms (1,419 pounds) of opium and two machine guns.

They were challenged by troops in a remote border village near Chaman town, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) northwest of this provincial capital. Major Javed Khan said.

He said the smugglers fled after a brief exchange of fire, leaving behind the opium and two heavy machine guns with several rounds of ammunition.

US investment is eager to penetrate China, and Chinese officials and diplomats said the fact that ties were effectively on hold would do little to deter enthusiasm for the China market.

US investment in China in 1994 was about 2.5 billion dollars and interest remains keen.

General Motors Corp is on track to win a fierce bidding war with US arch rival Ford Motor Co to form a billion-dollar joint venture to build mid-sized cars in Shanghai and Boeing is a major supplier to China's rapidly growing airlines.

"What happens in Sino-US relations is not going to affect trade or investment," said the Chinese official. "China picks its partners on economic merit."