

BRIEFLY



Gagged students protest outside the Nigerian Embassy at the death sentence on Nigerian Ogoni rights activist and author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists which was handed down by a military court on Friday. Ken Saro-Wiwa's death sentence has been internationally condemned at this week's Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland. —AFP/UNB photo

Benazir in Tashkent: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto arrived in Tashkent yesterday for a half-day visit to discuss the civil war in Afghanistan with Uzbek leaders, saying a "Power-sharing formula" was that only solution in Kabul, AFP reports from Tashkent.

Pakistan and Uzbekistan have identical views, we believe the people of Afghanistan must determine their own government," Benazir said, adding that war-torn country's opposing factions to rule alone.

"There will have to be a power-sharing formula," she said.

ANC wins two-thirds of seats in polls: Final results for South Africa's first democratic local government elections last week gave the ruling African National Congress (ANC) close to two thirds of the seats, contested organisers said on Friday, Reuter reports from Johannesburg.

The ANC has won 63.78 per cent of the total seats local government elections task group co-chairman Khehla Shubane said. Former President F W De Klerk's National Party, which created apartheid in 1948 and dismantled it nearly 50 years. Later won 15.85 per cent of the votes cast.

10 die as bldg collapses in Egypt: Ten people were killed and 11 injured when a building collapsed after a gas cylinder exploded in a cafe in the mediterranean city of Alexandria on Friday, local newspapers reported yesterday, AFP reports from Cairo.

The government Al-Ahram daily said at least 17 other people, including seven from one family, are feared trapped under the rubble of the five-story building in Al-Hadra area. There were three children among the dead, the paper added.

Kohl to visit Vietnam from Nov 16: German Chancellor Helmut Kohl will pay an official visit to Vietnam from November 16 to 19, announced the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry in Hanoi yesterday Xinhua reports from Hanoi.

Kohl, to be accompanied by a number of his cabinet ministers, parliament members, other politicians and businessmen, will talk with his Vietnamese counterpart Vo Van Kiet, and have meetings with party general secretary Do Mout, state president Le Duc Anh and national assembly chairman Nong Duc Manh.

Quake shakes Japanese islands: A moderate earthquake measuring 4.8 on the Richter scale shook southern Japanese islands yesterday but there was no danger of tidal waves, the Meteorological Agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The quake jolted Miyako and other islands in Okinawa prefecture at 3.37 pm (0637 GMT). The epicentre was 100 kilometres (62 miles) under the East China Sea. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage, the agency said.

Road mishap claims 5 in India: Five persons were killed on the spot and 49 others injured, five of them seriously, in a head-on collision between a Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) bus and a tempo at Shirvade-Fata on the Bombay-Agra national highway near Nasik last night, PTI reports from Nasik.

Police yesterday said the bus was proceeding from Ravalgaon to Nasik and tempo was coming from the opposite direction when the accident occurred.

Philippine NSC to meet MNLF: The Philippine National Security Council (NSC) is to meet for talks on the disputed Spratly Islands and on peace efforts with Muslim guerillas, a statement from President Fidel Ramos said in Manila yesterday, AFP reports from Manila.

The council, which includes cabinet members, congress leaders and two former presidents, will focus on the forthcoming third round of peace talks between the government and the Muslim insurgent Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Romanian leader Coposu dies: Romanian opposition leader Corneliu Coposu died after being hospitalized 10 days ago for a lung infection, Romanian Radio said, AFP reports from Bucharest.

Coposu, 79, was considered by the opposition as the "moral president" of Romania. He had spent 17 years in prison under communism.

BJP blasts govt for bowing to foreign pressure

YASHOBHOMI, (Bombay), Nov 11: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) today criticised the centre for bowing to foreign pressure and entering into an unequal agreement with CNN and allowing a variety of foreign media to represent India from Indian soil, reports PTI.

In the draft political resolution moved on the second day of the conclave here, the party said the "whole thing amounts to informatics imperialism and cultural terrorism."

C'wealth leaders find time for recreation amid crisis

QUEENSTOWN, New Zealand, Nov 11: The Commonwealth may be in crisis, but its leaders still found time on Saturday to shop, play squash and go jet-boating in the Idyllic Mountain Lakelands of New Zealand's South Island, reports Reuter.

No sooner had leaders of the 52-strong grouping of Britain and its former colonies arrived at the plush Millbrook country retreat near here than they plunged into talks to decide how to punish Nigeria for executing nine minority-rights activists.

But after a barbecue lunch

of chicken, salmon steaks and seafood kebabs, washed down with fine New Zealand wines, the heads of government decided to stick to their original time-table and relax for a few hours.

Some went with their wives in the warm sunshine on a tour of nearby gardens. Others took a steamer on Lake Wakatipu, nestled beneath majestic peaks still bearing the last traces of the winter's snows.

But this was too tame for Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who opted for a jet-boat ride across the white waters of rugged shovet canyon.

Mahathir was accompanied by Joan Bolger and Anita Keating, the wives of the New Zealand and Australian Prime Ministers, on the 30-minute trip.

"It was an exciting ride, and the Malaysian gentleman enjoyed it very much," jet-boat pilot Nigel Crow told Reuters.

The river was high, spray was flying and Mahathir was quiet throughout the ride. But, Crow Sware, no one was sick.

The Sultan of Brunei, the world's richest man, also preferred an active

afternoon. He played squash with Gana's President, Jerry Rawlings. No one was saying how much they bet on the game.

There was no sighting of Nigerian Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi who also kept his head down during the buffet lunch. He had his meal sent to his room.

While his wife went power-boating, Jim Bolger went for a walk, passing close to four protesters holding a lonely demonstration against Nigeria's human rights violations.

"We are just ordinary people concerned about other ordinary people," said Renee Muir, who added she and her husband Thomas Muir travelled hundreds of kilometres (miles) to make their protest. Cars driving past honked their horns in support.

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien attend a remembrance service for his country's servicemen in a tiny hilltop cemetery in nearby Arrowtown, the red tunics of Canadian mounties standing out sharply against the green hills behind.

British Prime Minister John Major and his wife

US, Egypt begin biggest joint war games

CAIRO, Nov 11: Egypt and the United States began today their biggest ever joint military manoeuvres with a mock helicopter assault and amphibious landing on Egypt's Mediterranean Coast, a US military official said, reports AFP.

A group of around 2,000 US marines along with French and Egyptian units landed on the north coast.

After the assault by US Sea Cobra and Egypt's US-made Apache helicopters, Captain Steven Branch, a spokesman for the US Air Force, told AFP.

China hits UN for lavishing funds on peacekeeping

BEIJING, Nov 11: China has admonished the United Nations for lavishing poor members' scarce funds on a growing number of ill-managed peacekeeping operations and attacked the United States for refusing to pay its UN dues, reports Reuter.

UN Ambassador Wang Xuexian, addressing the United Nations in New York on Friday, urged all members to pay their dues on time and hit the world body for overspending and poor budgeting and administration, Xinhua news agency said today.

The exceedingly rapid increase in the overall expenditure of the organisation has placed huge financial burdens on member states, particularly the developing countries," he said.

In authorising peacekeeping operations, he said, the UN Security Council must

take members' financial capacity into account — particularly that of the developing ones."

Wang, who represents one of five permanent Security Council members, said spending on peacekeeping operations had ballooned to three billion dollars a year from 600 million dollars in 1990 and is now triple the regular budget.

He called on the United Nations to spend within its means and demanded better administrative and budgetary management, ticking off a list of peacekeeping lapses including loss of cash and gear, overpayment for goods and unnecessary buying.

China is also troubled by political profligacy in the UN general budget, where Wang said human rights spending has "time and again far exceeded the approved budget."

"It is imperative to establish and improve the relevant rules and regulations at an early date, strengthen financial discipline and budget management, put an end to waste and practice stringent economy," he said.

Wang unleashed a broad attack on the United States, citing its withholding of millions of dollars in dues as a main cause of UN financial difficulties and belittling its motives as politically inspired and unjustified.

"A certain major contributor, for political purposes and in total disregard of the UN charter... withholds payment of huge amounts of assessed contributions to force the organisation to reform according to its wish and act at its beck and call," Wang was quoted as saying.

"Moreover, the certain country has unilaterally decided, on the excuse of its

domestic legislation, to establish a ceiling in the scale of assessments for peacekeeping operations to reduce its own rate of assessment and shift its financial obligations onto other member states, including the developing countries," he said.

Wang said protecting US global interests would cost far more if there were no United Nations.

"Obviously, of the 185 member states, the United States has the least justification for withholding payments of huge amounts of its assessed contributions," he said.

On the other hand, China could understand the financial constraints of developing countries which, due to force measure or economic straits, sought to postpone their dues.

Indian troops on high alert in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Nov 11: Troop were put on high alert here today after India's Election Commission rejected the federal government's plans to hold elections next month in strife torn Kashmir, reports AFP.

Troops patrolled markets and business districts to thwart attacks by Muslim separatists, who hailed the panel's verdict as a "victory" for Kashmiris opposed to the elections.

Hawkers were sent packing from the streets by soldiers who moved in convoys of trucks in Srinagar, the hub of a raging Muslim secessionist campaign which has left more than 12,000 people dead in Kashmir since 1989.

"We were expecting a rise in violence," said Kashmir Police Chief Mahinder Sabharwal, of fears that jubilant Muslim militants would intensify attacks following the election commission's verdict late Friday.

Chief Election Commissioner TN Seshan rejected the proposal of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's cabinet, saying the situation in Kashmir was "not consistent with the conduct of a fair and free elections."

Residents said they "heaved a sigh of relief" following the panel's word as they were fearing an outbreak of violence if New Delhi's plans to conduct elections here by mid-December had been endorsed.

"I had decided to stay out of Kashmir in case polls were held," said Farook Bakshi, a businessman. There would be a spurt of violence if elections are ordered in the Kashmir valley."

Several Muslim guerilla leaders said the panel's verdict bailed out the Indian government, adding it could never have conducted polls in Kashmir.

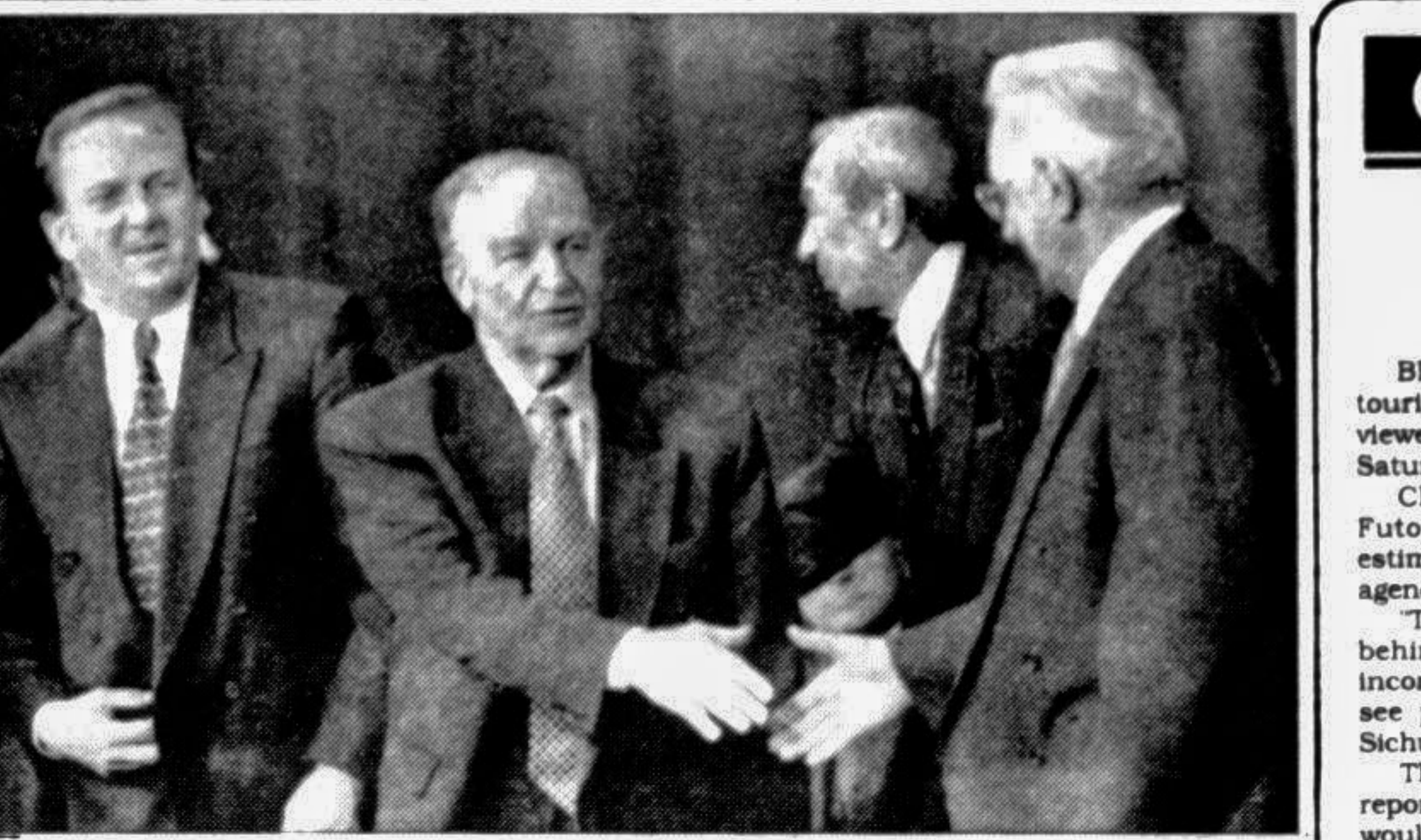
Other Kashmiri politicians welcomed the decision.

Kuwait to support Arab move to help Iraqis

CAIRO, Nov 11: The Emir of Kuwait said his country would support any joint Arab initiative to help relieve the suffering of the embargo-hit Iraqi people, in an interview published here Friday, reports AFP.

"Kuwait approves of any collective Arab initiative to ease the suffering of the Iraqi people," Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah told the Egyptian government daily Al-Ahram.

"The Kuwaiti contribution to this humanitarian initiative would be in the form of food and medical aid rather than money which the Iraqi regime could use to buy new weapons and threaten the people of Kuwait," the Emir said.



Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina President Kresimir Zubak (L) looks on as Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic (2nd-L) and Republic of Croatia President Franjo Tudjman (R) shake hands on Friday at Wright-Patterson AFB near Dayton, Ohio. US Secretary of State Warren Christopher is centre rear. Bosnia and Croatia signed an agreement toward reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia. —AFP/UNB photo

Croat troops move towards Slavonia amid peace talks

ZAGREB, Nov 11: UN and European Union observers said on Friday significant numbers of Croatian troops had moved towards the Serb held eastern Slavonia region as summit talks on peace in ex-Yugoslavia continued in the United States, reports Reuter.

Military analysts said the troops movements did not necessarily mean they were ready to attack, adding that large numbers of troops have been holding positions on both sides of UN ceasefire lines since 1992.

BJP vows to build N-arms if voted to power in '96 polls

BOMBAY, Nov 11: India's main opposition party vowed today to build a nuclear arsenal if voted to office in next year's parliamentary elections, its leader said he wanted to make the country "militarily stronger," reports AFP.

The Hindu-rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP Indian People's Party) kicking off its campaign for the general election said India should build the arsenal as a deterrent against neighbours China and Pakistan.

India successfully exploded a nuclear device in 1974, and has fought three wars with Pakistan and one with China since independence from Britain in 1947.

"We will leave no stones unturned to make India strong, internally and externally," BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi told some 100,000 supporters on the

Jewish plot to attack Palestinians unveiled

JERUSALEM, Nov 11: Israel said investigations into the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had uncovered a conspiracy by Jewish zealots to launch terror attacks against Palestinians, reports Reuter.

"We are talking about two levels of activity. The first was the murder of the prime minister and the second was the organising by extremists to attack Palestinian targets after the implementation of Israeli redeployment in the West Bank," police minister Moshe Shahal said on Friday.

Shahal, speaking on Israel's channel one television hours after police announced the arrest of a sixth suspect in connection with Rabin's assassination last Saturday, did not identify the targets.

Those in custody include confessed killer Yigal Amir, 25.

Shahal said Amir had

Off the Record

To see panda in its natural habitat

BEIJING: China will turn a panda breeding centre into a tourist destination where the endangered animal can be viewed in its natural habitat, the Xinhua news agency said Saturday, reports Reuter.

China Panda World will be built at the foot of mount Futou in southwestern Sichuan province, home of an estimated 1,000 pandas still living in the wild, the official agency said.

The completion of the park will liberate pandas from behind bars in the zoo, while saving tourists from the inconvenience and risks of exploring nature reserves to see pandas," a Panda World official told Xinhua in the Sichuan capital Chengdu.

The park, north of Chengdu, will open by 2020, the report said. It gave no details of how the tourist attraction would be operated.

China has mastered the captive breeding of giant pandas, which are featured attractions in zoos worldwide. But human encroachment on the bamboo forests where the creature evolved has long threatened it with extinction.



Britain's Queen poses with (from left) Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, South African President Nelson Mandela and New Zealand Prime Minister James Bolger late Friday prior to a dinner with Commonwealth heads of government. The Queen hosted the dinner for the CHOOGM heads in Auckland before leaving for home at the end her 10-day royal visit to New Zealand. —AFP-UNB photo

Taliban air raids damage Bagram airbase near Kabul

ISLAMABAD, Nov 11: Military jets of the Taliban Islamic movement, which controls much of Afghanistan, have bombed the Bagram Airbase near Kabul and severely damaged it, a Taliban spokesman said today, reports AFP.

There was no immediate independent confirmation of the claim.

The Bagram Airfield, which is held by forces loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, suffered "extensive damage" in the attack carried out on Friday, said spokesman Abdul Malik.

Three Mig jets flying from Kandahar, the Taliban's headquarters in southern Afghanistan, participated in the raid, said Malik, speaking by telephone from Quetta, a southwestern Pakistani provincial capital where he is based.

Meanwhile, six people including a young girl were killed and 24 injured when two salvos of rockets fired from the Taliban's position south of Kabul slammed into the Afghan capital Friday evening and today, hospital sources said.

At least half-a-dozen rockets landed today in the crowded district housing the Defence Ministry and presidential palace, witnesses said.