

BRIEFLY



Nigerian Foreign Minister Chief Tomi Ikimi condemns his nation's "unfair and unjustified" suspension from the Commonwealth at a press conference in Auckland yesterday. When questioned by the media, Chief Ikimi refused to confirm the execution of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists and insisted that the CHOGM leaders had acted on media reports alone. — AFP/UNB photo

Japanese minister Eto resigns: Japanese State Minister Takami Eto announced yesterday he was resigning over defending Japan's colonial rule of the Korean peninsula, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Koken Nosaka, Chief cabinet secretary, said Eto's successor would be named early Tuesday. Eto, the head of the management and coordination agency, had angered the Koreans by saying that Japan did "some good things" during the occupation period between 1910 and 1945.

25 frozen to death in Moscow: At least 25 people frozen to death and over 100 have been taken to hospital with frostbite in the Russian capital since the start of November, Interfax news agency quoted Moscow health officials as saying yesterday. Reuter reports from Moscow.

A spokesman for the Municipal Health Department said the victims, who keeled over in night time temperatures around minus 15 Celsius (five Fahrenheit), were all drunk.

3 militants killed in Egypt: Egyptian police have killed three men suspected to be Muslim militants in the south of the country in the past two days, security sources said on Sunday, Reuter reports from Cairo.

Abdelkarim Abul-Fadi Ahmed, 31, was killed on Sunday morning after a raid on his hideout in a mountain area on the border between the provinces of Fayoum and Benj Suf 100 km (60 miles) south of Cairo, an interior ministry statement said.

FBI arrests 3 in Oklahoma: The FBI arrested three people suspected of preparing a large fertilizer bomb in Oklahoma state where a similar home made explosive killed 168 people in April, authorities said Sunday, AFP reports from Washington.

The arrests were made Saturday and a large quantity of fertilizer was discovered, McIntosh county sheriff Bob Gray told AFP.

15 Chechen rebels killed: Fifteen Chechen rebels have died in firefights with Russian troops in two villages near the capital Grozny since Saturday, the Russian commander in the breakthrough Russian republic said Sunday, AFP reports from Moscow.

Shots were fired three times in the towns of Bamut and Orekhovo but no Russians died in the incidents, said General Anatoly Shkirko. There was no Chechen confirmation of this on Sunday.

Clash leaves 1 dead in Mexico: One man was killed and several people were injured in a clash between rival parties in the southern state of Oaxaca as millions of Mexicans voted on Sunday in state and local elections across the country, Reuter reports from Moralia, Mexico.

A man identified as Elias Garcia Ortega was shot to death and three people were injured in a clash between supporters of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the leftist Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) in the remote Oaxaca village of Mazatlan De Villa De Flores, according to radio reports and the government news agency Notimex.

Yeltsin resumes normal work: President Boris Yeltsin who is still in hospital after a mild heart attack, resumed his normal work schedule yesterday and plans a series of meetings with top officials, Russian news agencies said yesterday, Reuter reports from Moscow.

"Starting from yesterday Russian President Boris Yeltsin's routine working schedule will be the same as if he were in the Kremlin," Itar-Tass News Agency quoted Yeltsin's chief spokesman Sergei Medvedev as saying.

Iran for an end to Afghan fighting

TEHRAN, Nov 13: Iran on Sunday called for an immediate halt to the fighting in Afghanistan and urged the warring Afghan factions to exercise restraint, the official Iranian News Agency IRNA, said, reports AFP.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmud Mohammadi said Iran was especially concerned about the death of a large number of people from missile attacks on the Afghan capital Kabul by the Taliban militia.

"The fighting will benefit none of the belligerent parties and is not a solution to Afghanistan's internal problems," he said, calling for restraint and negotiations toward a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Thirty-six civilians were killed and 52 injured on Saturday in the deadliest shelling of Kabul.

Rocket attack on police Hqs in Karachi

KARACHI, Nov 13: The police headquarters in Pakistan's troubled city of Karachi was attacked with rocket propelled grenades today, killing at least one person and injuring 10 others, police said, reports AFP.

Ten grenades were fired at the main headquarters building and police barracks in the southern Ranchore area of the violence-plagued city, a police official said.

The man killed in the attack was a civilian while most of the injured were policemen, the official said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility and police only said the grenade were fired by unidentified men.

An attack on the provincial government building here last month, which left six people injured, was blamed by officials on the ethnic Mohajir Qaumi Movement, the city's main opposition group, which denied involvement.

Fishermen witness a harrowing sight

PURI, Nov 13: Six fishermen, survivors of the recent cyclonic storm in the Bay of Bengal after their trawler sank, were witness to the harrowing sight of one of their colleagues being devoured by a shark, reports PTI.

The fishermen, who had left Visakhapatnam on a routine trip, were caught in the cyclone and had to jump into the sea when their trawler capsized. We saw a shark pounce on one of us and was feasting on him as we tried to swim away from the place, they said after managing to reach the coast here alive.

Zemin in Seoul in first visit

SEOUL, Nov 13: Chinese President Jiang Zemin was given a red carpet welcome today as he arrived for an historic first visit to South Korea, expected to focus on stability in the tense, divided Korean peninsula, reports AFP.

Jiang, accompanied by Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and Foreign Trade Minister Wu Yi, was greeted at Seoul Military Airport by Foreign Minister Gong Ro-myung and other government officials.

Chinese Embassy officials were also on hand as Jiang, in a brief ceremony, received flowers from Korean children and reviewed a military honor guard.

C'wealth appoints 8 FMs to monitor democracy, HR

AUCKLAND, Nov 13: Eight foreign ministers have been appointed to a Commonwealth committee to monitor democracy and human rights in member nations, New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon said today, reports Reuter.

McKinnon said it had yet to be decided how the committee would operate, but that it would put Nigeria and the Gambia "at the top of the list."

McKinnon and foreign ministers from South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Canada, Malaysia, Jamaica and Britain were appointed to the Propup.

"I think it is something that could develop considerable clout and strength," McKinnon told reporters.

Palestinian police takes control of Jenin

JENIN, West Bank, Nov 13: Palestinian police took control of the West Bank town of Jenin today, the first community to be evacuated by Israeli troops under accord to extend self-rule ending 28 years of Israel's occupation, reports AFP.

Cheering crowds watched as 13 Israeli military vehicles pulled out of the Israeli military administration buildings and left the town.

Palestinians fired rifle rounds in the air. And as the streets filled with hundreds of people, the Palestinian flag was hoisted above the military buildings, which had come to symbolise the occupation.

Israeli forces captured Jenin and the rest of the West Bank in the 1967 Middle East War.

Palestinian officials said 350 policemen were expected in the town of 35,000 residents by the end of the day. And a total of 1,000 police are due to be deployed there by tomorrow.

The streets were hung with Palestinian flags along with pictures of Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Subhi Moustapha, 35, a Jenin farmer, said: "I am very, very happy. It is so nice after all these years to see Palestinian soldiers coming in and the soldiers of the occupation leaving."

And labourer Hassan Mohammed, 20, from the nearby village of Arabuna said he had not gone to work in order to welcome the police. "It is time for us to have a feeling of security and stability," he added.

The Palestinian head of the joint Israeli-PLO liaison committee, Ziad Atrache, said: "We should have 1,000 policemen by tomorrow. Tomorrow we will be in Jenin villages."

"This is a beautiful dream but I don't want it to end," he added that he was "optimistic" about the Israeli



Chinese Premier Li Peng (L) accompanies German Chancellor Helmut Kohl as he reviews the honour guard during the welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People yesterday. Kohl arrived Sunday for a five-day official visit, expected to focus on boosting economic ties and relaunching military cooperation that was suspended after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. — AFP/UNB photo

Rs 5m offer for Prabhakaran's capture renewed

COLOMBO, Nov 13: A female Sri Lankan Tamil guerrilla wanted for the 1991 assassination of former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi has been killed by advancing troops in the island's north, the rebels announced today, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said the guerrilla, known by her Nom de Guerre Akila and who headed the rebel group's women's wing, was slain two weeks ago in Jaffna Peninsula.

"Lt. Colonel Akila attained martyrdom... during the defence of Jaffna," said a LTTE statement faxed here from its London office. It did not say why the death was not announced earlier.

The statement said Akila joined the LTTE in 1987 and fought Indian troops deployed in Sri Lanka's northeast that year under an accord with Colombo. The Indian army returned home in March 1990 after suffering nearly 1,200 dead.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan police today renewed an offer of five million rupees (100,000 dollars) for the capture of Tamil Tiger guerrilla chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, a state-run newspaper reported.

Inspector General of Police W B Rajaguru said the money would be "given to any person supplying information leading to the arrest" of Prabhakaran, the commander of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).



Newly crowned 1995 Miss Asia Pacific, Yoon Mi Jung (C) of South Korea, is flanked by first runner up Ruchitria Malhotra (R) of India and second runner up Hsiao Ping Chen of Taiwan. Yoon, 21, won over 26 other contestants during the pageant ceremony in Baguio City, Philippines. — AFP/UNB photo

Nigerian junta firm to restore democracy

LONDON, Nov 13: Nigeria's military rulers are committed to restoring the country to democracy, a spokesman for head of state General Sanf Abacha said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

"We need your cooperation, not your condemnation," spokesman David Attah told BBC radio after international outrage over the hanging of nine human rights activists.

He was speaking as the Commonwealth, which groups Britain and its former colonies, set a two-year deadline for Abacha to restore democracy. The Commonwealth has suspended Nigeria over the hangings.

Defending the African state's military government, Attah said: "It is fully committed to the restoration of democracy in Nigeria."

He said the military government's drive towards democracy halted after the 1993 election was annulled, had been "impeccable."

"We are inviting you to come and help us. Do not condemn us. Come and assist us and encourage us. Give us credit for the current efforts that are being made to come to terms with our problem," he told BBC radio in a telephone interview.

Meanwhile, Nigerian Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi said on Monday the Commonwealth's decision to suspend his country placed the organisation's very existence under threat.

The impact of this decision on Nigeria will be far reaching. There is no question that the Commonwealth has taken a big gamble, Ikimi told a news conference.

Speaking in Auckland, where Commonwealth leaders were ending a summit meeting he said the suspension was discriminatory, unjust and "threatened the very existence of the Commonwealth."

The leaders took the unprecedented step on Saturday of suspending Nigeria after it hanged writer Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other minority rights activists found guilty of murder.

Off the Record

No music, no fun

COLOMBO: War rages in the north of Sri Lanka but the band won't play on. The Sri Lanka Philharmonic Players' Society has downed instruments and cancelled the rest of the season, a newspaper said Saturday, reports Reuter.

The government has urged middle class Sri Lankans to cut down on parties, banquets and general having fun while soldiers die battling Tamil separatists in the north.

The orchestra called it quits "due to prevailing situation in the country with a view of showing solidarity with the efforts of our armed forces," the island newspaper said.

The season's four remaining concerts would be rescheduled, it added.

Jews are misers — or a Nazi propaganda!

PARIS: A French publishing house on Friday withdrew a prize-winning dictionary which had caused protests for likening Jews to misers, reports Reuter.

The respected Robert Dictionary of synonyms listed French words for 'Jew, Yid, Kike' as equivalents of 'miser'.

Faced with protests from Jewish community leaders that such a comparison recalled Nazi propaganda, the company said it was withdrawing the book from bookshops.

"We admit our mistake," a company spokeswoman said. "A correction had been requested and it was not made."

The dictionary had won a French Academy Award.

Because it was pro-terrorist

STRASBOURG: A 19-year-old French national, Mohammed Bouayad, was given a six-month suspended jail sentence on Monday for painting pro-terrorist slogans on a school wall, a judicial official said, reports AFP.

Last week, he painted a gas cylinder on the walls of a school, accompanied by the slogan "Gia, bomb the French and long live Kelkal." He was given a suspended sentence for "vindication of terrorist acts" and ordered to do 160 hours of public service work.

France has been hit by a wave of terrorist attacks since this summer. Most of the eight attacks — which killed seven people and left some 180 injured — have used the same type of bomb, a gas cylinder packed with explosives, nails and bolts.

40 pc of electorates cast vote in Guatemala polls

GUATEMALA CITY, Nov 13: Guatemalans voted on Sunday in presidential elections endorsed for the first time in decades by both government and opposition forces but turnout appeared to be low, reports Reuter.

Although left wing guerrillas stuck to a ceasefire and army chiefs confined their troops to barracks, radio reports said only 40 per cent of the electorate bothered to vote.

Polls closed at 6 pm local time (2400 gmt) and the supreme electoral tribunal said first official results would come in around four hours later.

Officials from around the country said there were no reports of violence although polling day was marred by a shooting incident at the offices of the United Nations late on Saturday.

The race for president pitted the right wing National Advancement Party (PAN) and its candidate Alvaro Arzu against Alfonso Portillo of the Populist Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG). Also up for grabs were 80 congress seats and 300 local councils.

Arzu, a blond and blue eyed oligarch of Russian extraction led opinion polls going into Sunday's vote but needs to win more than 50 per cent of the vote to avoid a January 7 run off.

Portillo is the FRG's stand-in candidate, called up when former military dictator General Efraim Rios Montt was banned from standing because of his role in leading a 1982 military coup.

Pre-election polls showed the PAN with around 40 per cent support and Portillo trailing second with 15-25 per cent.

India in dilemma of dynasty politics versus democracy

NEW DELHI, Nov 13: A company's sagging fortunes, a CEO that writes novels and takes advice from a Hindu godman, the widow of a murdered prince, reports IPS.

It all sounds like the convoluted plot of a soap opera. But replace company with the Congress Party, CEO with Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and the widow Sonia Gandhi and you have in a nutshell the present dilemma of dynasty politics versus democracy in India.

Sonia Ghandi is the Italian born widow of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the reluctant politician who was murdered in 1991.

To understand her rise in Indian politics today needs swift recap of recent Indian history in which the Congress Party has been in power for 43 of the 49 years since independence.

For most of that period, at the helm of the party, and the nation, have been members of a the Nehru-Gandhi Dynasty. First Jawaharlal Nehru, then his daughter Indira Gandhi and then her son Rajiv Gandhi. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by Sikh militants and her son by a suspected Sri Lankan Tamil Tiger suicide bomber.

Rao succeeded Rajiv Gandhi as prime minister and immediately launched India's economic liberalisation programme. But reforms have taken time to bite and three years later, hundreds of millions of India's poor seem to be getting impatient.

The Congress has slumped in popularity polls and has lost many of its state government to opposition parties. Congress dissidents, led by the expelled former number two in premier Rao's cabinet, Arjun Singh, have tried to play the Sonia Gandhi card to gain influence both within the party and outside.

Privately, Congress insiders close to Rao accuse Sonia Gandhi of trying to revive dynasty politics and "power without responsibility."

Sources say Rao recently offered the party presidency to Sonia Gandhi and not just as a figurehead: If the party under her leadership won next year's elections she would be prime minister.

Sonia refused, and this may be related to her reluctance to assume open political responsibility. Her critics accuse Sonia Gandhi, however, of not being averse to playing behind the scene politics to uphold the interests of her "dynasty."

Nevertheless, Arjun Singh and his faction of the Congress has been trying to rebuild the "Rajiv Gandhi memory" and use the Nehru Gandhi vote catching Charisma to take it past the winning post in the general election due next year. For this, they need Sonia Gandhi on their side.

Sonia Gandhi, the unlikely guardian of the fading fortunes of the dynasty has thus become the focus of unremitting attention here and abroad. This is the same Sonia who protested strongly when her husband was first pushed into politics by his ambitious mother, Indira Gandhi.

In mid-May Sonia broke her silence and gave a speech at the traditional family constituency of Amethi. She expressed anguish over the slow pace of progress in solving her husband's assassination case and said she was concerned about the compromises with the principles and vision of the Nehru Gandhi Dynasty.

"I have the honour to be a member of the family which dedicated its life to the service of this country. Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had certain principles and a vision with which they never compromised. The principles for which they sacrificed their lives are under test today," she said, in what most Congress-watchers called an attack on premier Rao's government.

After that brief outburst, the reclusive widow has relapsed into her old enigmatic silence. Yet, the rich and the powerful court her, the coffers of the Rajiv Gandhi foundation she heads are full and the intellectual and social elite jostle for patronage.

The most elusive element of the current political shadow play is the Nehru Gandhi Dynasty, in a recent book, Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Rajmohan Gandhi traces its origins, contemplatively, to Mahatma Gandhi encouraging the passing of the Congress "crown" from Motilal Nehru to his son Jawaharlal Nehru on 1929.

Rajmohan Gandhi says Jawaharlal Nehru was "over generous" in elevating his daughter Indira to the post of Congress presidency in 1958 at a time when "her talents were unproven and her experience limited."

Now India's opposition parties and senior leaders of the mainstream Congress are hoping the party will "not be stamped" into backing Sonia for Congress presidency.

Abdel Rahim was in the West Bank town of Jenin as the Israeli army withdrew and was replaced by Palestinian police, after 28 years of Israeli occupation.

Hamas won't take part in polls

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, Nov 13: A senior Hamas official today dismissed a report from the Palestinian authority that the radical Islamic fundamentalist group had decided to take part in self-rule elections.

"I do not believe we will participate in the elections. We have not issued any statement on the subject and there has not been the least comment from us on this," Ahmad Bahr told AFP.

He was reacting to a statement earlier the same day from the secretary general of the self-rule authority, Tayeh Abdel Rahim, who said "Hamas told me personally yesterday that they will participate."

Abdel Rahim was in the West Bank town of Jenin as the Israeli army withdrew and was replaced by Palestinian police, after 28 years of Israeli occupation.