

BRIEFLY

Storm claims 150 in China: A freak storm that lashed the northern Chinese province of Shandong has left as many as 150 people dead and 320 injured, the China daily said yesterday.

So far 31 people have been confirmed dead in the storm, which hit more than 40 countries and cities in the province last week, while 121 have been labelled as missing presumed dead.

Clinton-Zemin meet cancelled:

The meeting between US President Bill Clinton and his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin has been cancelled, an indirect result of a bitter domestic budget battle, the White House said Tuesday.

Because of the political dispute at home, Clinton was forced to shorten his scheduled trip to Japan for a meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation group, during which he was to meet with Jiang and other leaders.

Rafsanjani to visit S Africa:

Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani will visit South Africa briefly next month, Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad said on Tuesday.

The Iranian President is due to visit the region in December, Pahad told reporters adding that Rafsanjani would spend a day in South Africa on his way to Namibia.

Car bomb kills 3 in Algeria:

A car bomb exploded Tuesday outside a police station in the Kabylie region of Algeria killing three people and wounding seven with presidential elections just two days off witnesses said, AFP reports from Algiers.

The bomb went off early in the morning in the town of Souk El Tenine near the main city in the region Tizi Uzou, the witnesses said. There was no official confirmation of the bombing.

62 students held in Cairo:

Police have arrested 62 students accused of leading demonstrations calling for the overthrow of the Egyptian government, a judicial said Tuesday, AFP reports from Cairo.

"These demonstrations are part of actions by the banned Muslim brotherhood aiming to incite the masses and overthrow the government in power," the source said.

ICRC's call to save Afghan civilians:

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) yesterday called for all sides in the Afghan conflict to protect civilians in Kabul, at least 40 of whom have been killed in rocket attacks in the past four days, AFP reports from Kabul.

The humanitarian organisation said in a statement in Kabul that another 70 people had been injured in the rocket and artillery barrages which pounded the city Saturday and Monday.

Iran denies involvement in Afghan conflict

KABUL, Nov 15: Iran has denied Islamic Taliban militia claims that it is involved in the Afghan conflict, but reiterated its recognition of the beleaguered Kabul administration, reports AFP.

Visiting Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Allaeddin Borujerdi said here late Tuesday Tehran wanted to help find a negotiated solution to the fighting here, but dismissed accusation of Iranian interference in Afghan affairs.

"Our view about the Afghan conflict is clear: We condemn any outside interference. We are a pro-peace country and would not commit such an act ourselves."

"Iranian weapons exist in Afghanistan, but these have

survived from the time when we cooperated with the Mujahideen during the Jihad (guerrilla war against the occupying Soviet forces), but this is not our current policy," Borujerdi told reporters at the Iranian Embassy here.

The denial came after the Taliban religious students movement claimed in September that Tehran was supplying arms and vehicles to government forces and allowing them to use bases inside Iran to strike at the Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan.

The Taliban presented Iranian-made weapons to Tehran's consulate in the western city of Herat, claiming they were proof of current Iranian military support,

Budget crisis hits US diplomatic missions in Pakistan, Philippines

MANILA, Nov 15: The United States budget crisis has affected the operations of Washington's diplomatic missions in the Philippines and Pakistan, officials said today, reports Reuters.

The United States Embassy in the Philippines, one of Washington's biggest diplomatic missions, sent some of its staff home today and shut down two major services as the US budget crisis hit its operations.

"Everybody is kind of puzzled, it's a strange situation... but we're trying to make the best of the situation," US embassy public affairs counsellor Philip Harley said.

In Pakistan, the US sus-

ended visa services. "We have suspended normal consular services and no visas, whether immigrant or non-immigrant, are being issued for the timebeing," an embassy spokesman in Islamabad said.

The spokesman said all Pakistani employees at the US embassy, consulates and information offices were working as usual, but about 20 per cent of American staff were staying at home.

Failure by the White House and republican leaders in the US Congress to reach a budget deal forced the closure in Manila of the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Centre patronised by thousands of Filipinos.

Nigeria snubs threats from Commonwealth

LAGOS, Nov 15: The Nigerian government has snubbed threats from the Commonwealth over the execution last week of nine human rights activists and declared that it will not put up with criticism, press reports said today, reports AFP.

"Nigeria is not a houseboy of the Commonwealth," General Jeremiah Useni, a member of the military junta, on Tuesday told a news conference in the federal capital Abuja. The country will "brook criticism from foreign and domestic interests no more," he said.

Last Friday's execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other members of his movement for the survival of the Ogoni people (mosop) roused a storm of protest worldwide.

Peres shows ability to steer the shaking Labour ship

JERUSALEM, Nov 15: Israeli Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres has shown his ability to steer the shaking Labour ship on a steady course following Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, reports Xinhua.

Peres, who was appointed acting Prime Minister at the cabinet session shortly after Rabin was gunned down in Tel Aviv on the evening of November 4, declared there and then that he would carry on Rabin's legacy, namely, policy of peace with Arabs, and it appears that the 72-year-old shrewd politician knows very well how to start with.

With a view to keeping house in the first place, Peres has attacked great importance to closing ranks of the whole Labour Party, declaring that he himself belongs to the Rabin camp. After being formerly

US to oppose UNSC reform if Bonn, Tokyo not given permanent seats

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 15: The United States said on Tuesday it would not agree to expand the 15-member Security Council if Germany and Japan were not given permanent seats, reports Reuter.

But New Zealand said it was useless to insist on two new permanent members only and that the 185-member General Assembly should consider stopping its debate on Security Council reform perhaps for 10 or 20 years.

The assembly is discussing enlarging the Security Council with the United Nations' Third World majority wanting more permanent seats for developing nations. Some want to curb or abolish the Veto power of the council's permanent members.

A two year old committee will continue the debate in 1996. The United States, France, Britain, Russia and China, Second World War victors hold the council's permanent seats with Veto power. Another 10 states rotate for two-year-terms on the council whose decision on peace and security are binding on all UN members.

US delegate Karl Inderfurth said, "The United States could not agree to a council enlargement that did not result in their (Japan and Germany) permanent membership." He also advocated that the permanent members keep all their powers which presumably includes Veto rights.

Economic power houses Germany and Japan were excluded from the founding of the United Nations at the end of the Second World War as "enemy states" and now both want seats.

But it is unlikely they will become permanent members unless some developing nations share the same status.

There is little agreement on who these developing states should be. Brazil wants to represent Latin America but Argentina has said it is opposed to this. India wants to represent Asia but Pakistan will fight that.

With the United Nations running short of funds, the United States is said to be particularly eager to have German and Japan contribute

more to peacekeeping as required by the permanent members.

Many other Europeans agree but Italy has made it clear it will oppose German membership and has offered alternative plans of "guais permanent" members.

New Zealand's ambassador Colin Keating indirectly told supporters of Germany and Japan to forget it.

"We know that the quick fix package of two new permanent members is unachievable," he said, adding that they would not receive a two thirds vote.

He also said that developing countries were unrealistic in thinking they could get agreement on as many as five new permanent members.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (R) organises his documents while the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev (L) watches him during their meeting in the Central Clinic Hospital, Tuesday. Kazakh President visited Boris Yeltsin on his way to Paris to discuss the bilateral relations. This was Yeltsin's first official meeting with a foreign head of state since being hospitalised.

Bosnian peace talks deadlocked

DAYTON, Ohio, Nov 15: The Bosnian peace talks remained stalemated today despite a 12-hour intervention by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher that "narrowed some differences" but left the major issues unresolved, reports Reuter.

Christopher held nine separate meetings on Tuesday with the leaders of Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia before flying off to Osaka, Japan for an Asian economic meeting.

But his spokesman Nicholas Burns, said the intervention did not produce the breakthrough needed to get the two-week-long negotiations headed toward a successful conclusion.

He also hinted that one of the key participants in the talks, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, would head

home today, leaving behind the two players with the most issues still to be resolved, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic and Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic.

"At the end of the day, parties still need to make more progress. They are not at the point when they can declare... that they have resolved all their problems," Burns told reporters.

"All the major issues that we have come to resolve here today remain at the table."

He was referring to the status of the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, the map dividing Bosnia into almost equal entities, other territorial issues and the questions of what a new constitution should look like.

Christopher, 70, arrived early Tuesday and held nine

separate meetings spread over 12 hours with the Balkan leaders who have been at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base here since November 1.

There are differences among the parties on all the major issues. They are going to have to work harder," Burns said.

Another report says: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his army commander General Ratko Mladic will stay in power despite international pressure on them to quit, the Bosnian Serb news Agency (SRNA) said on Tuesday.

Quoting a source in the Bosnian Serb "cabinet" SRNA said Karadzic and Mladic would not be excluded from political life once the 42 month old Bosnian conflict ended.

1,300 prisoners stage revolt in Greece

ATHENS, Nov 15: More than 1,300 inmates at Greece's main prison staged a revolt Tuesday evening, taking eight guards and medical employees hostage and spilling out into the prison yard with sticks and iron bars, police said, reports AFP.

The reasons for the revolt were not immediately known, although it came one day after a prisoner died of a drug overdose at the Korydalos prison near Athens.

Police said more than 1,300 inmates - practically the entire adult population of the facility - out of a total of 2,000 prisoners were taking part, which continued into Wednesday morning.

Inmates burned sheets and tires and then fanned out across the courtyard of the jail, brandishing bars and sticks they got by ripping up beds.

Israel hands over Farah prison to Palestinians

NABLUS, West Bank, Nov 15: The Israeli army has handed over the Farah prison close to Nablus to the Palestinian authority, military officials said, reports AFP.

The handover on Tuesday went ahead without any problem. Witnesses also told how soldiers loaded military equipment from their Nablus headquarters into trucks amid preparations for the official start of a troop withdrawal.

Nablus, with 100,000 residents, is one of six Palestinian towns to be evacuated under the September 28 deal signed between Israel and the PLO.

6 Russian troops killed in clashes with Chechen rebels

MOSCOW, Nov 15: Six Russian servicemen were killed and nine wounded in clashes with Chechen rebels, military officials told Russian news agencies early today, reports Reuter.

The death toll for the previous 24 hours is one of the heaviest in recent weeks in the breakaway north Caucasus region. Itar-Tass agency said there had been 21 fire-fights eight of them in the Chechen capital Grozny.

Three soldiers were killed when their checkpoint at the southern settlement of Alkhan-Yurt came under fire, Interfax News Agency said. Two paramilitary police were killed in an attack on the railway station at Gudermes, it said.

The agencies gave no details of the sixth fatality or the other casualties.

Off the Record



Indian entertainer Amitabh Bachchan (L) poses for photographers with Jerry Enzerelo, Sun City International chief executive officer, at a cocktail party on Tuesday, four days ahead of Miss World finals. Bachchan is among the celebrities who are in South Africa to judge Miss World finals. — AFP/UNB photo

Diana to disclose secrets of her marriage break-up!

LONDON: Buckingham Palace's fury at a television interview in which Princess Diana is expected to disclose secrets of her marriage break-up with Prince Charles grabbed front-page headlines Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The hour-long interview, filmed in secret and due to be screened by the BBC on Monday, was widely seen as an act of revenge on her estranged husband, the heir to the British throne, who admitted 18 months ago he had been unfaithful to her.

With tabloids such as the Daily Mirror asking whether Diana had gone mad, more serious-minded newspapers such as the Guardian and the Independent, which traditionally shuns stories on the royals, gave it front-page treatment.

Focusing on how Diana broke protocol by arranging the interview without consulting Buckingham Palace, the Daily Telegraph headlined its editorial "behind the queen's beck."

The Sun reported on Buckingham Palace's rage as the glamorous princess ignited "Dynamite" under the highly flammable house of winds or with her no-holds-barred interview.

"Royal family at war" Wednesday announced on its front page. The Mirror even accused Diana of verging on treason, which is still punishable by death in Britain.

"Deceitful and underhand?" asked the Daily Mail. "Charles' friends hit bitterly after the princess stages her extraordinary secret TV interview coup."

In short, Britain could talk of nothing else but the secrets Diana was likely to reveal in the programme taped at apartments in Kensington Palace.

Charles himself spoke openly about his troubled life in his television documentary last year, a risky bid to win public approval in which he admitted committing adultery once his marriage failed.

News of Diana's interview, conducted in highly controversial fashion without Buckingham Palace consent, was released with calculated timing on Tuesday as Prince Charles celebrated his 47th birthday.

The timing appeared to prove her desire to hit back at the balding, middle-aged man who friends say has made her life a misery.

Charles and Diana have broken many royal rules since their fairytale wedding, seen around the world, shrivelled into a loveless marriage that officially broke up in late 1992.

Much is at stake for 34-year-old Diana, who is increasingly portrayed as a flighty young woman while Charles has chiselled out a life as a serious, if quirky, king-in-waiting.

The two now keep separate courts, even though they come together occasionally for the sake of their two sons.

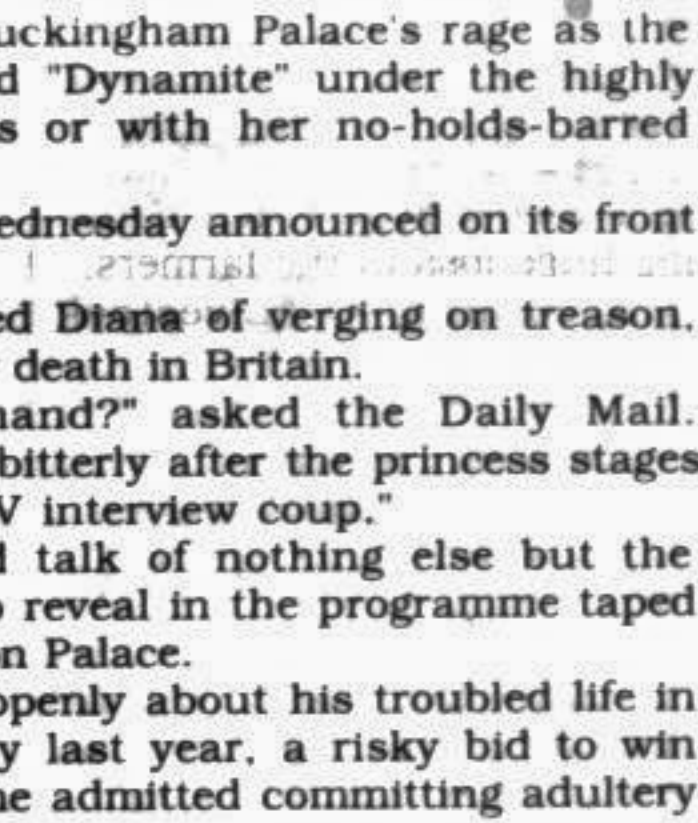
The BBC said the interview with Panorama, a respected current affairs show, would delve into all the murky corners of her life "including her family, her separation and her future plans". It is expected to draw millions of viewers.

The queen, for one, will not be watching, said the palace. Despite stringent security at the BBC, The Sun said it had learnt of the programme's contents and that Diana would answer many of the royal watchers' burning questions.

"I am not desperate or pushing for a divorce," The Sun quoted Diana as saying in the interview.

Both royals have been linked with other partners — Diana has forged a string of friendships with married men while Charles has been tied to old flame Camilla Parker Bowles — but nobody knows if the couple plan to formalise their separation.

As for herself, Diana is quoted as saying her controversial friendship with England Rugby Union Captain Will Carling was "innocent" despite claims it killed his marriage.



A heavily-armed hooded Gendarme stands guard at a roadblock set up in Kouba, Algiers suburbs, early on Wednesday to prevent attacks from Muslims rebels on the eve of Algeria's first multi-party presidential elections since independence in 1962. The government has deployed security forces to try to reassure 15 million voters caught in the confrontation with the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). — AFP/UNB photo

Local council polls postponed in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Nov 15: Sri Lanka today postponed local council elections in the embattled northern and eastern regions where security forces are fighting Tamil Tiger guerrillas, reports AFP.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga's office announced postponing the polls by up to a year in the two regions where there had been no elections since 1989 to provincial councils which are the highest level of government.

The continuing fighting between Tamil Tiger separatists and security forces have prevented holding elections since the then President Ranasinghe Premadasa dismissed the northeast provincial administration in 1990.

Successive governments in Colombo have since up of the local polls.