

BRIEFLY



Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey (L) and Bosnian press attaché Ali Lejlic (R) walk towards a press conference at a Fairborn, Ohio, hotel, on Saturday to formally announce Sacirbey's resignation. Sacirbey said he was resigning in order to add a Bosnian Croat to the Muslim-led government. — AFP/UNB photo

Indira's birthday observed: A grateful nation yesterday remembered former prime minister Indira Gandhi on her 78th birth anniversary with the president, the vice-president and the prime minister offering floral tributes at her Samadhi Shakti Shthal on the banks of Yamuna. PTI reports from New Delhi.

The 90-minute solemn ceremony began at the crack of dawn as the soft winter sun appeared over the horizon on the river banks.

Bosnian justice minister resigns: Bosnian Justice Minister Mate Tadic resigned Saturday to protest peace proposals for Bosnia-Herzegovina being forged at talks in Dayton, Ohio. The Bosnian news agency reported, AFP reports from Sarajevo.

The move by Tadic, a Bosnian Croat, comes after Kresimir Zubak, also a Croat, threatened to resign Friday as head of Bosnia's Muslim-Croat federation created in March 1994.

Indo-Nepali officials hold talks: Foreign Secretaries of Nepal and India held talks in Kathmandu Saturday discussing various bilateral issues, a press release of the Nepali Foreign Ministry said. Xinhua reports from Kathmandu.

Nepali Foreign Secretary Keda Shrestha discussed with his visiting Indian counterpart Saliman Haider issues including water resources, trade, transit, joint ventures and civil aviation between the two neighbouring countries, according to the ministry.

Storm claims 8 in Scandinavia: Blinding snow storms moving through southern Scandinavia have caused at least eight deaths and brought much of the region to a temporary standstill, police and hospital sources said Saturday. AFP reports from Copenhagen.

More snow was forecast for yesterday as a new cold front moves in from the west.

Rebels free 2 Italians in Bogota: Colombian leftist guerrillas have released two Italians they had held captive for months in the country's northeast, the Director of the Das secret police announced on Saturday. Reuter reports from Bogota.

Syria supports Peres' call to reopen peace talks

DAMASCUS, Nov 19: Syria expressed support on Saturday for acting Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' call to reopen stalled peace talks between the two countries, reports AFP.

The official government daily Tishrin highlighted Peres' statement that "peace is more important than elections," referring to Israeli parliamentary elections in November 1996.

It said Israel Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, assassinated on November 4, "fell under the pressure of the right and radical (Jewish) settlers and asked the US administration to delay its mediation until next spring."

"But Peres, who has been chosen to form a new government, has expressed his desire to restart negotiations and declared that peace is

more important than elections," the newspaper said in an editorial.

"The United States has not hidden its concern about the Syrian-Israeli track and believes that an overall peace in the Middle East is linked to progress on this track," it said.

The paper reaffirmed Syria's long-standing position that it "will not accept to give up one grain of its soil" and that "peace is therefore linked to Israel's complete withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the applications of the principle of the exchange of land for peace."

Reuter adds: Israel is investigating whether an explosion that rocked the West Bank town of Tulikarm on Saturday was an accident or sabotage, security officials said.

LTTE claims responsibility for downing jet

COLOMBO, Nov 19: Tamil Tiger guerrillas today claimed shooting down a Sri Lankan air force transport plane and said they were fiercely resisting an army advance on the rebel citadel of Jaffna, reports AFP.

The military said the aircraft, carrying barbed wire and fencing, was hit just three kilometres (1.6 miles) north of the airfield and crashed into the Indian Ocean, killing five crew members. The sixth crewman survived.

The LTTE said it was fiercely resisting the army's advance on Jaffna and claimed the security forces were bogged down about a kilometre (0.6 miles) outside the town limits of Jaffna.

Prabhakaran fading fast as last symbol of Eelam

COLOMBO, Nov 19: Sri Lankan Tamil guerrilla chief Velupillai Prabhakaran — the island nation's most wanted man — was a shy young man when he drifted to militancy almost 25 years ago, reports AFP.

Born on November 26, 1954 in Jaffna, Prabhakaran, the fourth and youngest child of a Tamil civil servant, formed a tiny group called the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) in 1972 in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna Peninsula, now facing a massive military onslaught.

He was unknown to the world then, had virtually no weapons, and was among the slowly increasing number of Tamils in Jaffna weaving dreams of seceding from Sri Lanka.

Mulroney to file libel suit against Canadian govt

MONTREAL, Nov 19: Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney is suing the Canadian government for 50 million dollars (37 million US) in damages for alleging he took bribes to secure Air Canada's purchase of 30 Airbus contracts, reports AFP.

The former Conservative leader's attorneys told a news conference they would make a case against the federal government, the royal Canadian mounted police, and government officials in a suit to be filed in Quebec superior court tomorrow.

The attorneys said the lawsuit came "in response to false and reckless allegations that he received illegal payments to influence Air Canada's acquisition of Airbus aircraft."

Balkan rivals on verge of deal

DAYTON, Ohio, Nov 19: Bosnian peace negotiators made progress last night and several sources close to the talks said the Balkan rivals were on the verge of a deal that could be initialled as early as tomorrow, reports Reuter.

"Things are coming to an end. They are being wrapped up as we speak one Balkan source said. But a US State Department spokesman dismissed the reports as rumours and said the arduous negotiations have made little progress during the evening."

A Western diplomat close to the talks confirmed the deal was nearing close. "I am predicting that by tomorrow night this time, we will be there. I easily see Sunday being a whole day of work."

The diplomat said that although three issues remained to be resolved, he expected the deal to be clinched on Sunday night and

initialled by the leaders of Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia the next day.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns on Saturday cautioned against undue optimism, saying the situation was as he outlined earlier in the day — much more work had to be done before a deal could be struck.

The leaders of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia have been meeting at an air force base here for the past 18 days in the most serious effort yet to end the four-year long war that has claimed 250,000 lives and made almost two million people homeless.

Meanwhile, Bosnian government radio predicted on Saturday evening that peace talks in Dayton, Ohio would conclude within 12 hours, saying chances were "50-50" that the negotiations would produce an agreement.

"The outcome of the peace negotiations will be decided

upon within the next 12 hours, we have learned from sources close to the Bosnia-Herzegovina delegation," the radio reported in a broadcast from Sarajevo.

The radio said it had obtained details of a proposed territorial partition of Bosnia between separatist Serbs and a Muslim-Croat federation that would require a major compromise on the part of the Bosnian government.

"Whatever happens. When you wake up tomorrow morning you will know the result, which will be pretty bitter in either case — the peace negotiations ending in failure or in a signed peace agreement."

"The odds stand at 50-50," said the radio.

The radio's correspondent in the United States said her sources quoted Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic as saying that the capital of Sarajevo would be "free, one

way or another."

Sarajevo, surrounded by separatist Serb forces since the war erupted in April 1992, would be divided into nine.

Municipalities, and linked by a corridor to the eastern Bosnian enclave Gorazde.

"Gorazde will get a territorial link with Sarajevo. The question is how wide the corridor will be and how much security can be achieved on its surrounding territory," it said.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister John Major telephoned Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic at the Balkan peace talks in Dayton, Ohio on Saturday and offered his encouragement and help.

Earlier, Washington officials said peace negotiations held at a US air force base in Dayton, Ohio, had reached a critical phase.

Afghan groups reject UN envoy's proposal

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Nov 19: Opposition groups said on Saturday they could not accept a list of names put forward by a UN envoy as members of a transitional council that would take over power in war-torn Afghanistan, reports Reuter.

United Nations special envoy Mahmoud Mestiri has been trying to arrange a peaceful transfer of power from President Burhanuddin Rabbani to avoid what he says could be a bloody frontal assault on the capital, Kabul.

Mestiri says Rabbani has agreed to hand over power to a 28-man representative council proposed by the United Nations.

Living on apples & snails for 130 days

SARAJEVO, Nov 19: Eight Muslims who escaped when the Serbs overran the eastern Srebrenica enclave earlier this year have been found after hiding in a forest for 130 days and living on apples and snails, Bosnian government television reported on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The television gave few details but said the Muslims had taken refuge in the Podrinjska forest between Srebrenica and Tuzla and were found by government forces.

As many as 6,000 Muslims who went missing after the Serbs seized the United Nations-designated "safe area" of Srebrenica are still unaccounted for.

A UN war crimes tribunal this week charged Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander General Tatko with orchestrating the mass slaughter of 6,000 Muslims after the enclave fell to Serb forces.



Miss World 1995 Jacqueline Aguilera Marcano from Venezuela flanked by her first princess Aninca Martinovic (R) from Croatia and second princess Michelle Khan from Trinidad and Tobago, pose together at Sun City, north west of Johannesburg on Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

Rao's security tightened Search on for suicide bomber

NEW DELHI, Nov 19: Indian police were continuing a search for a woman suicide bomber, suspected to be Sri Lankan Tamil rebel, who entered India on a mission to assassinate Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

Newspapers said police and federal detective were continuing search operations in the southern town of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh state and neighbouring Kerala province to arrest the suspected Tamil separatist.

"Sources said the travel documents of over 16,000 people, especially Sri Lankans had been verified," the Asian Age daily said.

Rao returned here from Puttaparthi late Saturday

after a two-day visit to southern India. He spent the last leg of his two-day tour in Puttaparthi, the headquarters of Sal Baba, a Hindu Guru revered by millions the world over.

Intelligence sources in the Indian capital said Rao had been kept under tight security in Puttaparthi and in the Kerala capital, Thiruvananthapuram, following a tip-off from Sri Lankan authorities about the suicide bomber.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike is scheduled to visit the Kerala town of Kottakal, a centre of the indigenous Ayurveda system of medicine, for treatment on Monday.

The suspected bomber was identified as Kandhamani Paskaran, a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebel group, they said, adding that she was in her early thirties.

Paskaran reportedly entered India a month ago.

Former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was killed by a woman suicide bomber on May 21, 1991 in the southern town of Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu province while on an election rally. Rajiv was poised to return to power.

Indian authorities blame the LTTE for the audacious assassination but the group, which is campaigning for a Tamil homeland in northern Sri Lanka, has denied the charge.

Fresh Republican proposal to end US govt shutdown

WASHINGTON, Nov 19: Congressional Republicans prepared on Sunday to present to the White House a new proposal for ending the US government shutdown as President Bill Clinton vowed to do his best to get federal employees back to work on Monday, reports Reuter.

The possible break in the bitter row between the Republicans and Clinton was announced in the Senate by Republican leader Bob Dole shortly after the president suggested in a television interview there was reason for "some hope."

Dole said the Senate would meet in extraordinary session today to be on hand if required to vote on an agreement to end the five-day partial closure of government operations. The House of Representatives, which recessed on Saturday, could be back in session

within hours. Clinton told NBC television on Saturday night he was examining every opportunity to get federal employees back to work on Monday. Earlier in the day Clinton had said any chance of reopening the government might be slipping away.

But Dole cautioned against premature optimism. Asked if he thought Democrats would accept the plan he told several reporters: "I doubt it."

He said the Republican chairmen of the Congressional Budget Committee, Senator Pete Domenici and Representative John Kasich, were expected to present the offer to White House chief of staff Leon Panetta.

"I hope we can resolve this matter soon," Dole said. The language of the offer gives Clinton some additional flexibility in his dispute.

Off the Record

Homesick Di
LONDON, Nov 19: The Princess of Wales rejects a divorce from her estranged husband Prince Charles and says she would never live abroad in a controversial BBC interview to be screened Monday, press reports said Sunday, reports AFP.

According to the Sunday Telegraph, quoting television insiders associated with the production, "Princess Diana told her interviewer when asked directly if she meant to divorce, 'no... there are two children involved here.'"

And in reply to another question on whether she wanted to bring down the British royal family, she reportedly said: "Why should I wish to destroy my children's future?"

The princess also referred to her two sons William and Harry, second and third in line to the throne after their father, when she said she would never leave Britain, the Telegraph said.

"I'm not going to let the country down. I'm not going to run away my children's future is here," the paper quoted her as saying.

On her own future, Diana reportedly said: "I don't want pity, I have more dignity than that. I'm strong here to serve and happy to do supporting Britain round the world."

Harking back to her separation from the prince of Wales nearly three years ago the princess said: "It is sad when a marriage breaks up, but there it is. This things happens."

New method to predict prostate cancer

LONDON: Prostate cancer, the second commonest cause of death in men, can be predicted far in advance by measuring a protein in the blood, medical researchers said Friday, reports Reuter.

The researchers, writing in the British medical journal, said they took 49,000 blood samples from men over a period of 20 years, then followed up to see who developed prostate cancer.

The men who developed prostate cancer were found to have a high concentration of prostate specific antigen or PSA, which was already known to be raised in men with prostate cancer.

PSA levels were raised up to 10 years before the cancer developed, the study found. "If you have a very high protein concentration in your blood, you have a high probability of developing clinical prostate cancer in the next few years," said Professor Nicholas Wald of Saint Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

"This study shows that prostate cancer can be predicted efficiently: if early treatment is effective." Prostate cancer screening could save many lives, Wald said.

Chechnya again closer to conflict on holding polls

MOSCOW, Nov 19: Russia's rebel Chechnya region inched closer to a potentially explosive conflict on Saturday as the Moscow-backed parliament vowed to go ahead with elections that separatists have promised to disrupt, reports Reuter.

"The December 17 elections are a rubicond which we must cross, regardless of any threats," Ruslan Martagov, press spokesman for the Chechen leadership, told Interfax news agency.

The region's Supreme Soviet voted earlier to elect a new government leader on December 17. ITAR-Tass news agency said.

Chechen rebels, who see Russia as a foreign occupational power, condemned the decision as illegal and provocative.

Polls to the State Duma

lower house of parliament in Moscow are scheduled to be held on the same day.

Rebel field commanders issued a statement on Friday vowing to treat anyone who helped organise elections to Russian backed institutions as traitors.

Gunman with automatic weapons killed a Russian soldier as he guarded the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe mission in Grozny on Saturday, Interfax news agency said.

The report could not be independently confirmed, and it was not clear how close the post was to the OSCE building.

Interfax quoted Martagov as saying intensive negotiations were being held with supporters of rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin (R) and United States Vice-President Al Gore meet on Saturday. The US vice-president explained to President Jiang why US President Bill Clinton could not attend the APEC meetings. — AFP/UNB photo

Supporters for Sonia's entry into politics

NEW DELHI, Nov 19: In a dramatic show of support, loyalists of Sonia Gandhi today raised slogans calling upon her to come to mainstream politics, reports PTI.

Immediately after the function at Shakti Shthal on the birth anniversary of former prime minister Indira Gandhi, scores of supporters shouted "Sonia ji ke waste khali karo raste."

They followed her as she briskly walked towards the car accompanied by her daughter Priyanka, giving anxious moments to the security personnel.

The supporters shouted "Sonia Gandhi zindabad Rajiv Gandhi zindabad."

