

Zaire closes border crossing with Rwanda

GOMA, Zaire, Nov 20: Zairean authorities sealed a border crossing to Rwanda and imposed a curfew in this town Sunday as relations worsened between the countries amid disputes over government sponsored terrorism, reports AFP.

Zairean authorities said the crossing from Goma, which houses about 700,000 mainly Rwandan Hutu refugees to Gisenyi in Rwanda was closed because Rwandan Tutsi extremists were leading terrorist attacks in northern Kivu province.

Meanwhile, former US president Jimmy Carter arrived in the Rwandan capital of Kigali on Sunday during a tour through the region which will also include Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania.

He is due in Goma on Tuesday to prepare for a conference of the great lakes nations to discuss regional

problems and was also expected to mediate between Rwanda and Zaire.

Relations between those countries have deteriorated recently, with the two accusing the other of sponsoring terrorist attacks in their territory.

Eastern Zaire is home to nearly one million Rwandan refugees who fled Rwanda after the genocide there in 1994 in which up to one million other people died.

Earlier on Sunday Rwandan Foreign Minister Anastase Gasasa said that Kigali "reports the ... unilateral decision of the Zairean government to close its border with Rwanda a move which will stop the voluntary return of Rwandan refugees."

Aid organisation officials speaking anonymously said UN relief agencies were opting only to feed the refugees rather than get involved in the cross-border politicking.

Sri Lankan elite forces enter Jaffna City limits

COLOMBO, Nov 20: A division of Sri Lanka's elite reserve strike force, taking over from regular troops today, entered the city limits of the rebel bastion of Jaffna, and army spokesman said, reports Reuter.

The state-run Lankapuvath News Agency said the division including commandos, the special forces brigade, rapid deployment force and the special air mobile troops, took over from regular troops as they captured the strategic town of Nallur and entered Jaffna City's municipal limits.

Army officials said the elite troops were cautiously advancing on the city centre, the Tamil rebel stronghold for 10 years, now a booby-trapped fortress sheltering a clutch of guerrillas from an imminent army assault.

The elite troops began moving towards the city centre at dawn amid conflicting reports of casualties in a

fierce battle in suburbs of Jaffna Sunday.

The rebel Voice of Tigers said today the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had killed 50 government troops and destroyed two tanks during Sunday's battle near the Jaffna suburb of Irupial.

The radio, monitored in the government-held front-line town of Vavuniya, said a naval squad of the LTTE had mounted attacks on Sri Lankan Navy boats as they searched for the wreckage of a cargo plane.

The LTTE had shot down the Chinese-built Y-8 plane over the sea as it approached the army's northern Palaly Air Base on Saturday. At least three air force personnel were killed and two were missing. One man was rescued alive.

Newspapers said the army was investigating how the

guerillas had been able to come within firing range of the plane despite heavy patrolling of the sea in the area.

The rebel claim of the army's casualties was at variance with the official toll which put troops losses at 12 in Sunday's fighting.

The radio gave no figures of guerilla losses but the army said 60 rebels were killed in the encounter.

The tanks were still burning on Monday," the radio said. The state radio said on Sunday that troops had advanced to about 800 metres (yards) from the town centre.

The rebel radio spoke of danger to refugees arriving at the Kilinochchi shelters south of the Jaffna war zone from unexploded bombs.

A boy was killed when a shell exploded there as refugees cleared the area to set up tents.

The Tigers said the device was apparently fired there by government troops sometime ago from their neighbouring Elephant Pass Base.

The official toll on both sides was estimated at 160 LTTE rebels and soldiers killed in fighting in the north and east on Sunday.

"Almost every building in the area had been booby-trapped," the state radio said on Sunday. The army lost 12 soldiers in the clash and 84 were wounded, mostly by pressure mines laid by retreating rebel fighters, it added.

But the guerillas struck back with a fierce counter-attack in eastern Sri Lanka, killing 38 government soldiers in the Sunday ambush as the troops patrolled a railway track at Shanthiveli in Batticaloa district.

The army said 50 LTTE guerillas were killed in the attack.

UN power transfer formula for Kabul defective: Ali

ISLAMABAD, Nov 20: Pakistan has described a UN plan for transfer of power in Kabul as defective, a report said on Sunday, as opposition factions in the country also rejected the formula, reports AFP.

"We just hope that a more acceptable plan would be drafted by the UN," Foreign Minister Asef Ahmed Ali told The Muslim newspaper.

The plan was unveiled by special UN envoy Mahmood Mestiri four days ago.

The proposal has also been spurned now by a multi-party anti-Rabbani Alliance, led by the Hezb-I-Islami of former Afghan Premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Junbish Milli Islami of Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostam.

The grouping, known by the name of Supreme Coordination Council of Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan (SCCIRA) said in statement the proposed council was unacceptable because over half the council members were "loyal to the illegal" Kabul regime.

The Pakistani foreign minister said the transition body proposed by Mestiri had "several gaps and flaws." It does not provide a method of transfer of power and there is no provision for demilitarisations of Kabul, he noted.

He also said Mestiri did not consult with Pakistan before charting out his plan.

Meanwhile, Iran supports a UN plan for a transfer of power in Afghanistan as a move toward peace in the war-ravaged country, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Alaeddin Borujerdi said in remarks published on Sunday.

Borujerdi, who has just returned from Afghanistan, told the Tehran Times daily that the implementation of the plan unveiled by UN envoy Mahmood Mestiri four days ago would be "the first step toward a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict."

The Taliban Islamic militia besieging the the Afghan capital Kabul has already turned down the plan.

BRIEFLY

3 Polish ministers may resign:

Three key Polish ministers are likely to resign if their political ally Lech Walesa loses his battle for re-election as president one of the ministers said yesterday. Reuter reports from Warsaw.

Defence Minister Zbigniew Okonski told Polish television he would definitely quit if initial returns showing a victory for ex-Communist Aleksander Kwasniewski at Sunday's election were confirmed. He said he had information that Interior Minister Andrzej Milczanowski and Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski would also go. He gave no details.

New party launched in India:

Eminent Jurist, Ram Jethmalani Sunday, floated a new party called "Pavitra Hindustan Kaazhagam" (PHK) to act as a "watchdog of the national interest" and provide a "clean and credible alternative" to the established political parties. PTI reports from Bombay.

"It is not a one-man party," Jethmalani reiterated and said he was inspired to launch it as "a disciple of the architect of the constitution, Dr B R Ambedkar" who strove for the welfare of the common man and justice to all sections of the people irrespective of caste, creed and community. The Maharashtra BJP leader, Anil Gote has joined the PHK and would be a General Secretary.

Obasanjo gets Indira Gandhi award:

Olusegun Obasanjo, the former Nigerian president serving a 15-year prison sentence, has been awarded the Indira Gandhi International Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 1995. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Obasanjo, a former general, was named the winner of the award on Sunday by an international jury chaired by Indian Vice President K R Narayanan. He was cited for his contribution towards democracy and development in Africa.

Iraqi Speaker dies:

Iraqi Parliamentary Speaker Saadi Mahdi Saleh has died after struggling for several months against an incurable illness, the official news agency INA announced Sunday, AFP reports from Baghdad.

Saleh, in his 50s, was Speaker of the parliament for the last six years and a leader of the Baath Party which has ruled Iraq since 1968.

Jupee postpones meet with Finns PM:

French Prime Minister Alain Jupee said Sunday he has postponed a meeting with the Prime Minister of Finland in protest over Helsinki's anti nuclear stance. AFP reports from Paris.

Arab states, Israel slate blast in Islamabad

AMMAN, Nov 20: Arab states condemned the bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan that killed 15 people and injured dozens of others on Sunday, reports AFP.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Abdel Karim Kabariti strongly denounced this criminal act in a telephone call to his Egyptian counterpart Amr Mussa and reaffirmed Jordan's position of condemning all terrorist acts, an official here said.

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia meanwhile telephoned Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to condemn, this dangerous criminal attack which is contrary to Islamic law the Saudi press agency reported.

The King whose capital was itself the scene of a bomb blast last Monday against US military offices that killed six

people also offered his condolences to the families of the victims.

Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah, sent a message of sympathy to Mubarak as his cabinet expressed its profound condemnation of this criminal act which cost innocent lives.

Another AFP report from Jerusalem says, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres joined Arab countries in sending condolences to Egypt over Sunday's bomb attack on its embassy in Islamabad that killed 15 people and wounded dozens of others.

The only way to combat international terrorism is to pursue the peace process, Peres said in a telegram to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.



Hundreds of protesters sit at the gate near the site of the Proximity Peace talks Sunday at Wright Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, United States: The group of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, now part of Serbia, protested the inclusion of Serbia and its President Slobodan Milosevic's participation in the talks. — AFP/UNB photo

Clinton, Congress reach accord to reopen federal govt

WASHINGTON, Nov 20: The White House and Republican-run Congress have reached a compromise accord to reopen most of the federal government, unblocking the budget impasse Senate majority leader Bob Dole said Sunday, reports AFP.

I think we've preserved a very important principle a balanced budget in seven years Dole said on the Senate floor, referring to ongoing negotiations over the budget impasse with President Bill Clinton's administration.

The stop-gap deal would fund 75 per cent of federal government operations

through December 15. Dole called the agreement a very satisfying conclusion 60 what has been a rather tense situation in the past several days.

This is a tremendous achievement, a more effusive house Speaker Newt Gingrich told reporters gushing that the deal was one of the great historic achievements in modern America.

On the Senate floor Dole outlined a compromise that was close to the language proposed earlier in the day by White House chief of staff Leon Panetta. Dole said the agreement

committed to a balanced budget in seven years based on economic projections mainly from the congressional budget office, rather than the office of management and budget as the president initially hoped.

Tomorrow the government will go back to work and now the debate will be in earnest on how to balance the budget in a way that is consistent with the interests and the values of the American people, Clinton told reporters at the White House shortly after the deal was announced on Capitol Hill.

Taliban jet bombs Kabul, 8 killed

KABUL, Nov 20: At least eight civilians were killed and 16 injured when a Taliban militia jet bombed central Kabul today, hospital and army sources said, reports AFP.

The Taliban aircraft dropped two 500 kilogram (1,100 pound) bombs on the Shahzhenou area of the besieged Afghan capital around midday (0730 GMT), hitting six houses, witnesses and military officials said.

Four children, including a two-year-old boy and his 12-year-old sister, who had been inside their family homes when the raid began, were among the dead, hospital officials said.

"This has destroyed their family," a doctor at the Wazir Akkar Khan Hospital told AFP.

Justice had been done: Yigal Amir

TEL AVIV, Nov 20: The assassin of Yitzhak Rabin told a court today that "justice had been done" when he gunned down the prime minister at a peace rally here, reports AFP.

A smiling Yigal Amir, 25, told the court: "I acted alone, no-one guided me. I was not sent by anyone."

He recalled how he had seen small piles of stones placed as memorials for Rabin in the Tel Aviv Square where he had shot the prime minister when he went back on Thursday to coolly react the murder in a police reconstruction.

"When I saw those stones placed on the ground, it reminded me of the acts carried out by fanatics. This country is full of fanatics. I had the feeling that justice had finally been done."

Hong Kong to get high degree of autonomy: Jjang

HONG KONG, Nov 20: Chinese President Jiang Zemin has reaffirmed that Hong Kong will have a high degree of autonomy when the colony reverts back to Chinese rule in 1997, government radio reported today, says Reuter.

Jiang told Hong Kong's Financial Secretary Donald Tsang that China and its leadership was committed to the policy of "Hong Kong people running Hong Kong," the radio quoted Tsang as saying.

Jiang made the comments to Tsang during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Japan on Sunday.

"I personally felt very assured," Tsang told the radio today in Osaka.



Former communist Aleksander Kwasniewski and his wife acknowledge the applause by supporters in his headquarters in the Polish capital late on Sunday. Kwasniewski pulled ahead of outgoing President Lech Walesa in exit polls following presidential voting in Poland. Kwasniewski had 51.3 per cent of the votes against 48.7 for Walesa, Polish television said. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Migratory herons in danger

NANTES, France: Some 40,000 birds, many of them migrating from Britain and northern Europe, have died in an epidemic of botulism on a lake in western France, officials said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Dry and hot weather over the summer allowed the bacteria to proliferate in the soil around the Vrandieu Lake near Nantes, a key heron habitat, from where the birds have ingested it by eating worms.

The lake is one of the main stopping off points for migratory birds en route from Britain or northern Europe to the Siberian peninsula or north Africa. One third of the birds affected were migratory.

It has one of the largest concentrations of herons in Europe, with some 600-700 couples nesting every year.

The birds hit included mallards, teals, tufted herons, coots, swallows and cormorants and a variety of ducks. The bacteria are harmless to humans but mortal for the birds.

Nature authorities said low water levels in the lake during the summer particularly favoured the botulism bacteria's development.

Daring scheme

BEIJING: Two Chinese girls have spent the first of a planned 12 nights sleeping with 888 snakes in southern Guangdong province to try to set a new world record, the China News Service said Thursday, reports Reuter.

Qian Linping and Ni Junfang were selected after defeating 98 rivals for the daring scheme, it said.

They launched their record attempt, living with 666 cobras and 222 non-venomous snakes, on November 1 in hopes of breaking a previous record of 10 days with 200 snakes set in Singapore in 1987 and recorded by the Guinness Book of Records.

Both challengers were from the Flying Dragon Amusement Park near the provincial capital of Guangzhou. Qian is a daughter of the park's founder while Ni is an employee, it said.

The 110 million dollars snake park, the largest in the world, had proposed the attempt and provided a 200,000 yuan (24,100 dollar) glass showcase as the venue, the People's Daily overseas edition said.

Kwasniewski well ahead of Walesa in Polish polls

WARSAW, Nov 20: Former communist candidate Aleksander Kwasniewski was well ahead in Poland's presidential runoff election with 53.44 per cent of the vote against 46.56 per cent for incumbent President Lech Walesa, the Pap news agency reported today, citing partial results, reports AFP.

The agency said the results from Sunday's poll came from 35 of the country's 49 voivodies or regions.

Meanwhile, the Obop Polling Institute forecast on the basis of exit polls that Kwasniewski would win 51.3 per cent of the vote.

The ex-communist candidate was said to have won 27 voivodies out of the 35 where vote counting was completed overnight.

Voter turnout reached 68.61 per cent, officials said.

A victory for the telegenic Kwasniewski would put both the executive and legislative branches under the control of the former communists, as a coalition led by his Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) has had a majority in parliament since 1993.

It would also mark a defeat for the Catholic Church which had endorsed Walesa, the portly electrician-turned statesman whose Solidarity Labour Movement effectively ended communist rule in Poland in 1989.

Final results were to be announced later today.

As expected, the southeast gave most support to Walesa, who took nearly 70 per cent of the vote in the voivodies of Rzeszow and Tarnow. Kwasniewski did just as well in his power-base in the west.

Japan supports idea to give APEC new dimension

OSAKA, Japan, Nov 20: Japan's Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama expressed conditional support Sunday for the US defence secretary's idea of giving the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum a security dimension, reports AFP.

Murayama said he had no objections to security dialogue at the economic forum if it takes place in the future — but not at present as proposed by William Perry in a Japanese newspaper interview published on Wednesday.

Australia, China, Indonesia and the Philippines have cold shouldered the proposed mechanism

50m girls, women missing from India's population!

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: Up to 50 million girls and women are missing from India's population, the result of systematic sex discrimination extending to the abortion of female fetuses identified by ultrasound, according to a report produced by Unicef officials in India, reports Reuter.

The report, published last week, says that in most countries in the world, there are typically 105 women for every 100 men. In India, it says, there are less than 93 women for every 100 men in the population.

"Only where societies specifically and systematically discriminate against women are fewer of them found to survive," the report, entitled

"The progress of Indian States," says. According to statistics published by Unicef, the United Nations Children's Agency, the problem is getting worse.

It cites census statistics as showing the ratio of women to 100 men has declined from 97.2 in 1901 to 92.7 in 1991.

"There is a widespread and growing use of ultrasound and amniocentesis to detect female fetuses and abort them. The practice is now spreading into the villages," Unicef spokeswoman Gillian Wilcox told Reuters.

"Families who wouldn't normally kill a daughter are now doing it through tech-

nology," she said. Wilcox said that although the Indian government had passed legislation last year to outlaw the practice, the effect of the new law had been simply to drive the operations underground.

Wilcox said the main reason for the widespread female foeticide and the continuing prevalence of female infanticide in parts of India was the dowry system, which although long prohibited by law, continues to play a significant role in Indian society.

Dowries and wedding expenses regularly run to more than a million rupees (35,000 US dollars) in a country where the average

civil servant earns about 100,000 rupees (3,500 US dollars) a year.

Added to this the low status of women in rural India, where they perform the menial tasks of the family such as carrying water and firewood and seeing to feeding the animals, and it is clear where the roots of the discrimination spring.

Unicef says that in India, girl children tend to be taken to health centres less frequently than boys, receive less food than boys and are given less education than boys.

In certain parts of India, such as in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu state and in parts of rural Bihar, female infanticide remains quite

common, Wilcox said.

She said that in Salem, the practice was largely restricted to one caste group, the Gounders, largely low caste agricultural workers, but that it was sufficiently widespread among this group to give the area the lowest ratio of females to males in the country.

The infant girls were normally killed under pressure from the father and mother-in-law. The babies were usually wrapped in a wet towel and left to die, given fertilizer or a rice husk was put down their throat and they were allowed to choke to death, she said.

In Bihar, it is the birth attendants who are given the

No progress in Ross, Peres talks

JERUSALEM, Nov 20: US envoy Denis Ross and Israel's acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres made no apparent progress in talks on Sunday on resuming Israeli Syrian negotiation deadlocked over the future of the Golan Heights, report Reuter.

It is still impossible to renew the talks said Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's Ambassador to Washington and chief negotiator with Syria.

Rabinovich told Israel radio after the Ross-Peres meeting, which lasted three hours, that Syria's position had to be "constructive, fruitful and promising" before negotiations could resume.