

BRIEFLY

China-US set up N-jt venture:

China and the United States have established a nuclear joint venture, which will perform nuclear services for the commercial nuclear plants operating in China, in Wuhan, capital of Central China's Hubei province, it was announced yesterday. Xinhua reports from Beijing.

Israel-Mauritania pact signed:

Israel and Mauritania signed a mutual recognition pact on Monday, congratulating each other for having had the courage to take one more step towards peace in the Middle East, Reuter reports from Barcelona.

"It is a great pleasure for my country to be able to establish these relations — it reinforces the peace process," Mauritania Foreign Minister Mohammed Salem Oul Lekhal told reporters after the signing ceremony.

3 Khalistanis held in Canada:

The Khalistan activists allegedly involved in the 1981 hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight and diverting it to Lahore, have been arrested by the Canadian immigration authorities, PTI reports from Ottawa.

Of the three, Tejinder Pal Singh (32), arrested in May, was released on bail, the other two — Parminder Singh (32) and Harbhajan Singh (31) — are under detention, officials said.

Lebanese rockets hit N Israel:

Rockets fired from Lebanon slammed into northern Israel yesterday, witnesses said, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

"I saw smoke on a hill near us, where the rockets fell," a resident of the north told Israel radio. Army radio said no one was hurt in the barrage.

27 killed in Ugandan road mishap:

Twenty-seven people were killed instantly when a speeding bus crushed a passenger minibus carrying mourners, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Kampala.

The accident happened on Monday evening. Police said the dead were 14 men, seven women, four children and two babies.

Aristide pledges to step down in Feb:

President Jean Bertrand Aristide renewed his pledge on Monday to leave office when his term ends in February, Haiti's leading Creole language newspapers said, Reuter reports from Port Au Prince.

"I am leaving February 7," the Haitian President told Liberte newspaper in an interview that is to be published on Wednesday, the paper said in a written statement.



US President Bill Clinton poses for photographers before making a television address to the nation from the Oval Office of the White House on Monday. President Clinton said US troops serving on a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia will "bring stability to central Europe, a region of the world that is vital to national interests" of the US. — AFP/UNB photo

Tamil Nadu MPs enquire about safety of Tamils Troops close in on centre of Jaffna Town amid resistance

COLOMBO, Nov 28: Hundreds of Sri Lankan soldiers have penetrated rebel defences and closed in on the centre of the besieged Jaffna Town amid heavy resistance, the military said today, reports AFP.

Elite army commandos brought a Hindu temple within military lines today after a day of heavy hand-to-hand fighting left at least two soldiers dead and 27 wounded, a military spokesman said.

The casualties among the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was not immediately known but an estimated 1,000 guerillas trapped inside the town continued to offer stiff resistance, the spokesman said.

"We have now got closer to the town centre by another 300 metres or so," the spokesman said. "The going is very tough for us because of heavy sniping by the Tigers."

The military is maintaining a siege of the town as army commandos fan out from defence lines and reconnoitered the town centre, defence officials said.

The army had deployed units of engineers to clear mines and booby traps laid by the retreating guerillas, the spokesman said.

PTI from New Delhi adds: Members from Tamil Nadu today urged the government to make a statement in par-

liament elaborating what steps it proposed to take to help protect the lives of innocent Tamils hit by the Sri Lankan military operations in Jaffna.

Raising the matter during zero hour in the Rajya Sabha, V Gopalaswamy, independent, said the Sri Lankan military operations had led to "undecipherable horror and gory violence perpetrated on innocent Tamils, millions of whom had been forced to leave areas where they had settled for long."

He also urged the government to stop forthwith what he claimed was logistic support extended by India to Sri Lanka in the operations.



PLO leader Yasser Arafat (L) hosts Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak, for the first time, as both hold a midnight meeting on Tuesday at the hotel Ray Juan Carlos I in Barcelona where the Euro-Mediterranean Conference is held. — AFP/UNB photo

BJP sweeps UP municipal polls

NEW DELHI, Nov 28: India's main opposition party had made solid gains today after municipal polls in the country's most populous state, positioning itself for a drive for power in general elections next year, reports Reuter.

With votes counted in all 11 municipal corporations where polling took place in Uttar Pradesh, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had won eight.

BJP candidates were also showing a comfortable lead in two thirds of more than 600 town and city boards across the state, according to unofficial reports.

Uttar Pradesh, with a population of 150 million, accounts for 85 of 545 seats in the federal parliament.

The BJP currently holds 52 of the seats in Uttar Pradesh and needs to extend its control of the state, one of its major bases, if it is to

stand any chance of winning power in the general election due by next June.

"This is an indicator of the trend that was bound to come in the coming Lok Sabha general election. The results have shown that people have absolute faith in the BJP," the party's state leader and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan Singh told Reuters.

"We will sweep the next elections and I am confident of forming a government with a comfortable majority at the centre as well as in Uttar Pradesh," he added.

The BJP appeared to be making gains at the expense of the Samajwadi Party (SP) of former chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Hindu nationalists' main threat in the state.

The SP, which this week formed an alliance with the centre-left Janata Dal to fight next year's general election,

topped a BJP government in Uttar Pradesh last year.

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's ruling Congress Party appeared unable to make any gains in the municipal elections in the state which was once its base. It includes the constituencies of the Nehru-Gandhi family that ran the party and ruled India for much of its post-independence history.

Analysts predict a hung parliament after the general election, with the BJP and Congress holding the most seats.

The BJP will draw most of its support from Uttar Pradesh and the states of western India, while Congress is expected to do well in the south.

The largest party is likely to be asked to try to form a government, and some intense horse-trading is expected while it tries to cobble together a coalition.

Israeli air raid kills Hezbollah chief in Lebanon

SIDON, Lebanon, Nov 28: Israeli warplanes today blasted the home of a Hezbollah chief in South Lebanon and killed him, security sources reported, reports AFP.

The raid on the town of Jibsheh targeted the house of Saeed Harb, a leader of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah in South Lebanon, they said.

An unspecified number of other people were also wounded in the attack north of Israel's self-declared "security zone" in South Lebanon, they said citing an initial report.

The raid came after guerillas in Lebanon rocketed northern Israel wounding seven people.

No one claimed responsibility for the rocket attack. Some of the Katyusha rockets were fired from Hezbollah strongholds.

Pakistan to form women elite force to protect VIPs

ISLAMABAD, Nov 28: The Pakistan government is to form team of specially trained women commandos to act as bodyguards for top public personalities, officials said, reports AFP.

The women elite force teams are the latest pro-feminist initiative from the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto who has made women's rights a key campaign issue since coming to power in 1993.

The teams will receive stringent training and be spread across the country, under the authority of provincial governments, to protect VIPs, the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) said today.

Hezbollah today was holding a funeral ceremony for three guerillas killed on Sunday in another Israeli air raid.

Indian SC orders Chandraswamy not to leave country

NEW DELHI, Nov 28: The Supreme Court today directed controversial godman Chandraswamy not to make any attempt to leave the country without the express and prior permission of the court, reports PTI.

The direction was given by a three-judge division bench headed by Justice J S Verma and came on an interim application moved by one Anukul Pradhan in a pending petition seeking arrest and prosecution of the godman.

The court also directed the union government to take necessary steps to ensure full compliance of the court direction to the godman.

Pradhan had contended in his application that a November 24 Delhi High Court order granting permission to the godman to leave the country could frustrate his earlier petition before the apex court seeking his arrest.

Cambodian govt denies AI claim

PHNOM PENH, Nov 28: The Cambodian government today denied a claim by Amnesty International AI that the King's half brother, Prince Norodom Sirivudh, was a political prisoner, reports Reuter.

"Anything involving murder or violence is, for us, a crime — it's not political," Information Minister Leng Mouly said of the Prince, who was formally arrested on November 21 and charged in connection with an alleged plot to kill co-premier Hun Sen.

Leng Mouly said a lawyer acting on behalf of Sirivudh might argue that he was a political prisoner, but he stressed that the government viewed his case as a criminal one.

Off the Record



Ted Sedman (foreground), of St Albans, Herts, who sports the longest moustache in the UK, has it extended to its full extent by an unidentified man Monday for the launch of the 1996 Guinness Book of Records. — AFP/UNB photo

Bid to reconfirm Netaji's death

NEW DELHI: The British home office's Forensic Science Service (FSS) has confirmed that a blood sample from Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's nephew or niece would be suitable for conducting DNA testing which could set at rest the controversy whether or not the chief of the Indian National Army (INA) died in an air crash in Taiwan, reports PTI.

This was disclosed by the FSS in a letter to Ashis Ray of the Cable News Network inc (CNN), following his discussions with the organisation's officials in this regard.

A spectacle, a watch and a gold-plated tooth were handed over by the Taipei authorities to Netaji's close associate, Habeebur Rehman, who according to Ray, kept the tooth in the urn containing the ashes of the great leader. The urn is now kept in the Renkoji Temple in Japan and Indian government proposes to bring it back to the country.

A senior FSS official, Dr K Sullivan, said in the letter that he was able to confirm that a blood sample from either a nephew or niece from his (Netaji's) sister's side of the family would be suitable control for DNA analysis.

Of the remains likely to be available for testing, the gold-plated tooth, rather than the cremated bone fragments, is more likely to yield material of sufficient quality for DNA analysis, Dr Sullivan said.

162.56 cm gold Buddha statue for Bhumibol

BANGKOK: A 120-kilogramme pure gold Buddha image will be moulded in Thailand, the biggest in more than 200 years in the country, reports Xinhua.

The gold Buddha image, worth 2.16 million US dollars, will be presented to King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand on his 68th birthday on December 5.

The 162.56 centimetre tall statue will be 48.24 centimetres wide.

Argentina reasserts claim over Falkland Islands

LONDON, Nov 28: Argentine President Carlos Menem said today a visit to Buenos Aires by Britain's Princess Diana had improved relations between former foes but reasserted Argentina's claim to the Falkland Islands, reports Reuter.

Menem, interviewed by BBC radio after Diana's visit last week, said: "I believe she could be an excellent roving ambassador of goodwill."

"Her visit was aimed at improving relations between the United Kingdom and Argentina and you have been able to see how successful she was in that visit," he added.

In a television interview aired before her trip, Diana admitted adultery and cast doubts on the suitability of her estranged husband, Prince Charles, to become king. She also sought a new role as a roving ambassador for Britain and what she called a "queen of hearts" for the dispossessed of the world.

Menem, who is separated from his wife and says he feels hounded by the media, said they shared common ground.

"I felt we had that in common. She is a woman who has suffered a lot, who has gone through very difficult times and so have I," Menem said.

Britain and Argentina went to war in 1982 over the South Atlantic Falkland Islands, known in Argentina as the Malvinas. Britain sent a task force to the Falklands.

Relations between London and Buenos Aires have improved but Menem reiterated the long-held Argentine position: "This is not something we will give up. The islands belong to us."

Peace with Israel is irrevocable: Arafat

BARCELONA, Nov 28: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Monday said peace with Israel was irrevocable despite attempts by "terrorists" to sabotage a process which had claimed Yitzhak Rabin as its victim, reports Reuter.

"We have arrived at this peace of the breathe which irrevocable and important for this part of the region ... many have tried to sabotage this peace with acts of violence but to no avail, Arafat told Euro Mediterranean conference in Barcelona.

Although terrorism has tried to strike a blow to the peace process and Yitzhak Rabin, our partner, fell victim to it, we have other partners and Israeli Prime Minister Simon Peres, our other partner will continue this peace.

Arafat added.

Appealing for economic aid from the 15 European Union members for his Palestinian self-rule territories Arafat said obstacles to peace were costing his Palestinian authority more than dollar 6 million a day in lost revenue.

"We have not lost hope, we think we will arrive at peace and that the international community will help US Arafat told foreign ministers from the 26 European Union and Mediterranean states.

The Palestinian leader noted that Israel was due to hand over the city of Bethlehem birth place of Jesus Christ, to Palestinian authority before Christmas as part of the second phase of expanding Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank.

US troops must go to Bosnia to secure peace deal: Clinton

SARAJEVO, Nov 28: President Bill Clinton told Americans on Monday US troops must go to Bosnia to secure the peace but would "fight fire with fire, and then some" if attacked, reports Reuter.

Ignoring a scare campaign by hard-line Bosnian Serbs, Clinton said it was vital for the US to take part in the 60,000-strong NATO force being prepared to police the peace accord reached last week in Dayton, Ohio.

"If we're not there, NATO will not be there. The peace will collapse. The war will reignite. The slaughter of innocents will begin again," he said in a televised address.

His speech was aimed at seeking political support from a sceptical Congress for the provision of a third of the NATO force on a potentially

dangerous and open-ended mission.

Clinton said the final NATO plan for the operation is to be sent to him later this week and if it meets his approval he will immediately send it to congress and request its support.

While Congress debates it, Clinton said he will allow a small number of US troops in a NATO advance mission that will establish headquarters and set up communications.

He said risks to the troops would be minimised. They will have the authority to respond immediately, and the training and equipment to respond with overwhelming force — to any threat to their safety or violations of the peace agreement," he said.

But he cautioned that no deployment of US troops is risk-free and that "this one may well involve casualties."

In Barcelona, visiting French Foreign Minister Herve De Charette said on Monday night the peace deal intialled in Dayton between Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia would probably be signed in Paris in the second week of December.

De Charette said he had discussed the timing in a telephone call with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and expected they would agree to set a final date today.

Clinton made no mention of threats of violence by Bosnian Serb hardliners who wanted parts of the Dayton peace deal renegotiated.

Security around Merapi volcano stepped up

JAKARTA, Nov 28: About 50,000 Indonesians living in the immediate vicinity of the Merapi Volcano, central Java, received warnings to get ready to flee at any moment from possible lava flows set off by recent heavy rains in the area, reports Xinhua.

Security around the volcano has been stepped up to a state of maximum alert following persistent volcanic activity over the past five weeks, according to reports reaching here today quoting monitors of observatory stations near the volcano.

More than 1 million cubic meters of volcanic ash has accumulated at the summit.

Malaga to become home of Picasso's master collections

SEVILLE, Spain, Nov 28: The southern Spanish city of Malaga, birthplace of artist Pablo Picasso, is finally to win its proper place in history, reports Reuter.

The city which only has a few of Picasso's works and lost a bitterly fought bid for his war masterpiece "Guernica", will soon be home to an important collection of his work currently owned by the artist's daughter-in-law, regional officials said.

Christine Ruiz-Picasso, widow of the painter's son Paolo, is negotiating terms of the acquisition with the regional government of Andalusia.

"We have reached a solid base for agreement," said

Jose Martin, Andalusia's director of culture, after a meeting earlier this month, adding that details had not yet been finalised.

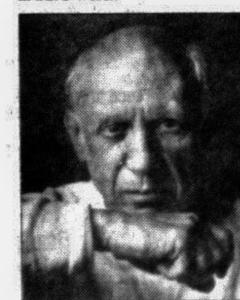
Ruiz-Picasso has refused to comment.

She first began talking about donating works for a museum in Malaga more than a year ago, but got into a row with the regional authorities in June and said they were "sad and petty".

It is not yet clear whether the works would be sold or donated. The exact size of the collection is also in doubt, but Ruiz-Picasso owns at least 200 paintings shown recently at a special exhibition staged in Malaga, Seville and France's Nimes.

The works reflect the

broad range of Picasso's moods, styles and techniques and include drawings of Paolo as a child, which show a tenderness rarely seen in the artist's work.



The Malaga Fine Arts Museum currently owns only a handful of drawings, early oils and ceramic work by the painter.

A new museum will have to be created and a team of experts has already been appointed to study the chances of remodelling existing buildings.

The Picasso family home is open to the public, but is far too small to house the Ruiz-Picasso collection.

The Baroque Palace currently occupied by the fine arts museum and a large, late 19th-century building formerly used as the customs house are the most likely candidates.

People in Malaga are delighted at the prospect of

honouring their city's most famous son.

"It's the wish of everybody in the city to have these works on display in the artist's homeland," Antonio Garrido, cultural delegate for Malaga's city council, said.

Local newspaper journalists are writing excitedly about the possibility of putting a city best known for budget tourism on the cultural map.

A whole area of old Barcelona was revitalised after the opening of the Picasso Museum, there in the 1980s. That museum was built around donations made to the city by the artist's secretary, Jaime Sabartes.

Picasso's family moved from Malaga to Barcelona

when he was nine. He then moved on to Paris, and spent his final years in the south of France, never returning to Spain after the civil war because of his political beliefs.

He painted the large black and white mural "Guernica" for the Paris exhibition of 1937, expressing in apocalyptic images the agony of the tiny Basque port when it was bombed that year by the German air force in the civil war.

Malaga, along with Barcelona, Guernica and Madrid, all laid claim to the painting in a two-year controversy that was finally settled by Picasso's widow Jacqueline who said he wanted it to hang in the Prado Museum.

UNSC asks rebels of Sierra Leone to accept UN offer

UNITED NATIONS Nov 28: The Security Council Monday called for Sierra Leone rebels to accept UN offers for negotiations to end a civil war that has turned nearly half of the country's 4.4 million people into refugees, reports Reuter.

In a policy statement read at a formal meeting, the council welcomed the military government's programme for transition to democratic rule and approved UN assistance for elections scheduled for February 26.

Sierra Leone's civil war began in March 1991 when the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) involved in the fighting in Liberia.