

BRIEFLY



A Palestinian officer salutes while his colleague hoists the Palestinian flag on the roof of the District Coordination Office of Qalqilya in the West Bank on Tuesday. A convoy of the first 15 Palestinian officers arrived in Qalqilya to prepare for the spread of self-rule and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Qalqilya in two weeks. —AFP/UNB photo

ROK tourism head defects to DPRK: The President of a South Korean tourism company has defected to North Korea, according to a Radio Pyongyang broadcast monitored yesterday in Tokyo. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Pyongyang's official radio named the defector as Kim Won Tek, and quoted him as saying he had been healed in North Korea of an illness. The Tokyo-based monitoring agency Korea News Service said.

Sudan blames Egypt for aiding rebels: Sudan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Salah Al-Din Atabani accused Egypt on Tuesday of sending tanks to help southern Sudanese rebels waging an offensive against government troops. Reuter reports from Khartoum.

Atabani told a news conference that Egypt had also planted mines along the disputed border in the Halaib region between the two countries and surrounded Sudanese armed forces in Halaib, cutting off their food and water supplies.

Anti-violence rally in Brazil: About 100,000 people dressed in white from rich neighbourhoods and hillside shanty towns, marched in the rain Tuesday to appeal for an end to violence. AFP reports from Rio De Janeiro.

There will be no peace without serious reforms of the police and the integration of the favelas (slums) with the rest of the city, said Rubem Cesar Fernandez a march organizer.

Israel hands over body of PLO man: Israel handed over to a Palestinian family on Wednesday the body of a PLO guerrilla killed in a clash with the army 18 years ago, relatives said. Reuter reports from Hebron, West Bank.

Ismail Hassan, of Yatta village near Hebron in the occupied West Bank, was 26 when he died.

Castro arrives in Beijing: Cuban President Fidel Castro arrived in Beijing yesterday for his first visit to China. Reuter reports from Beijing.

Castro, wearing a green military greatcoat, was greeted at a Beijing Airport by Chinese state councillor Chen Jinhua. China rolled out the red carpet for Castro, who flew in aboard a Russian-made Cuban Allyushin-62.

4 executed in Tibet: Four people were executed for robbery and murder in Lhasa, capital of the Himalayan region of Tibet, the Tibet Legal Daily said in an edition seen in Beijing Wednesday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

The Lhasa intermediate court sentenced Xiong Junhui, Zhou Aitong, Dawazhaxi and Nusang to death at a mass meeting in front of 10,000 people, the report said.

Malaysian helicopter missing: A helicopter belonging to Sabah Air is reported missing off the coast of Malaysia's Sabah state since yesterday with eight passengers and two pilots on board, aviation officials said. AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

A spokesman of the Civil Aviation Department (DCA) said the helicopter had taken off from the airport in Kota Kinabalu, the state capital, just before 10:00 am (0200 gm).

UNSC votes to extend UNDOF mandate: The UN Security Council on Tuesday voted unanimously to extend the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) for another period of six months, until May 31, 1996. Xinhua reports from United Nations.

UNDOF, which was established in 1974 to monitor a ceasefire and troop withdrawal agreement that followed the 1973 Middle East war, has been serving as a buffer between the Israeli and Syrian armies on the Golan Heights.

Vietnamese President in Manila: Vietnamese President Le Duc Anh arrived in Manila yesterday to begin a three-day state visit aimed at expanding trade relations between Vietnam and the Philippines. AFP reports from Manila.

Anh was welcomed at the airport by Vice President Joseph Estrada and Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon. Anh, accompanied by his wife and a delegation of Vietnamese officials, will meet President Fidel Ramos at the presidential palace.

Hezbollah men vow to take revenge

JIBSHEET, Lebanon, Nov 29: Thousands of Hezbollah supporters vowed revenge at the funeral in south Lebanon today of a chief of the Iranian-backed group who died in a car-bomb attack blamed on Israel, reports AFP.

As the funeral procession of around 5,000 people wound its way around the streets of Jibsheet, Israeli warplanes buzzed the region and Israeli artillery positioned suspected guerrilla positions around the village.

Tigers' attack feared Security at Lankan parliament tightened further

COLOMBO, Nov 29: Security was further tightened at the heavily guarded Sri Lankan parliament today with the banning of visitors to the assembly amid fears of Tamil rebel attacks, official said, reports AFP.

The public galleries were closed indefinitely and legislators advised not to invite guests to the sprawling parliament complex located on a lake island near here, a spokesman said.

"Only press reports will be allowed in," the parliament officials said. Even ministers have been told to drastically cut down the number of public servants summoned to parliament for consultations.

The unprecedented security measures came as government troops advanced on the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula.

Thousands of soldiers are enforcing a siege of the Jaffna Town where an estimated

1,000 Tiger guerrillas are believed to be holed up and offering stiff resistance to the security forces.

Two months ago, the government grounded all private air lines in the country saying the rebels could hijack a plane from a domestic airport to bomb parliament.

The Tiger rebels have been accused of carrying out several bomb attacks here, and police are looking for up to 30 suicide bombers of the LTTE who have infiltrated the capital.

The LTTE is leading a protracted campaign for an independent homeland for Sri Lanka's two million Tamil minority concentrated in the northern and eastern regions of the country.

More than 50,000 people have died in bitter fighting in the LTTE's homeland struggle in the past 13 years.

Xinhua adds, Sri Lankan forces launched massive air and artillery strikes against

Tamil rebels holding on stubbornly to Jaffna city center, military sources said today.

The military entered Jaffna city limits 13 days ago but have yet been unable to effectively take control of the two and half square mile town which the rebels consider their cultural center.

The forces claim they have successfully encircled the rebels in the city center and have cut off all supply lines. They say the fall of Jaffna is imminent.

The air and artillery strikes, the military claim, have devastated rebels' defences in some areas and infantry troops backed by armored units have overcome stiff enemy resistance in other areas.

Attack aircraft have repeatedly flown against rebels machine gun, mortar fire and other defence positions with pilots reporting direct hits.

In the last two days of fighting, the military lost 14 soldiers while 55 were in-

jured. The rebels lost 68 cadres and over 125 were injured.

AFP from New Delhi adds: Legislators from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu denounced the Sri Lankan government in parliament on Tuesday for waging an offensive war against the Tamil Tiger separatist group.

V Gopalaswamy, an independent MP, said the Sri Lankan military push to take Jaffna, the stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamils Eelam (LTTE), had led to "undecipherable horror" for Tamil civilians.

He called for negotiations and end to what he described as "logistic support" provided to Sri Lanka by the Indian authorities.

G Swaminathan, a MP from Tamil Nadu's ruling AIADMK, said the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka could not be solved by warfare and urged New Delhi to help the island nation peacefully resolve the dispute.

NLD withdraws delegates from constitutional talks

YANGON, Nov 29: Myanmar's national convention committee said today the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Su Kyi has withdrawn from constitutional talks, reports Reuter.

The government plans to continue without them, the national convention convening committee said. The committee which is running the constitutional talks made the statement in a rare news release in English.

The National League for Democracy sent a letter to the chairman of the National Convention Convening Commission on Tuesday saying that its delegates would not continue to attend the

national convention giving the reason mainly that the matter of dialogue wanted by them was not included at all, the statement said.

NLD officials were not available for immediate comment but will hold news conference later today.

The national convention reconvened on Tuesday for the fifth time in nearly three years to draft guidelines of a constitution. The convention comprised 630 delegates mostly handpicked by the military government.

The NLD attended the opening ceremony on Tuesday, it had planned to decide later if it would boycott the talks which it considered undemocratic.

Afghan troops recapture 2 key positions

ISLAMABAD, Nov 29: Afghan government forces recaptured two key positions southeast of Kabul from the rebel Islamic Taliban militia in heavy overnight fighting, the Afghan Islamic press agency said today, reports Reuter.

The agency said forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani had driven Taliban fighters from Pul-i-Charki Prison, three km (two miles) south of the main Jalalabad highway, seized by the Taliban a week ago.

It said they had also recaptured the village of Butkhak and were advancing toward Band-I-Ghazi.

A Taliban spokesman said he had no immediate comment.

Official Kabul radio said on Tuesday that government forces had gained ground against the Taliban southeast of the Afghan capital.

Yeltsin turns down bill passed by parliament

MOSCOW, Nov 29: Russian President Boris Yeltsin yesterday turned down a bill passed by parliament on the Soviet foreign debt inherited by Russia after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the presidential press service said, reports Xinhua.

In a message to Ivan Rybkin, chairman of the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament), Yeltsin stressed that issues relating to legal succession to the Soviet state foreign debt and assets had already been resolved between Russia and other former Soviet republics.

Maharashtra CM blames Pakistan for stirring up tensions

BOMBAY, Nov 28: Maharashtra Chief Minister Manohar Joshi accused Pakistan today of stirring up tensions between upper-and-lower-caste Hindus in this sprawling western Indian state, reports AFP.

Speaking at a news conference in this Maharashtra capital, Joshi said he had received reports that Pakistan was training and sending provocateurs across the border to foment caste tensions and violence in the state.

Lower-caste Hindus in Maharashtra have been vandalising government property in Bombay and other parts of the state during the past few days to protest against the desecration of statues of their leader, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar.

Political parties with support among lower-caste Hindus have also forced shut-

downs in Bombay and held protest marches in the city.

"A couple of months back state police arrested two Muslim youths who were carrying lots of portraits of Dr. Ambedkar with faces that had been blacked out and defaced," Joshi said.

"Under police questioning, these youths said they had been trained and sent across from Pakistan to create tensions here," he said.

Joshi, whose Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena took power in Maharashtra in March in an alliance with another right-wing Hindu party, condemned the desecration of the statues of Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution.

"We will never shield or tolerate such perverse people," he said. "Dr. Ambedkar is one of four national heroes, along with Mahatma Gandhi.

"I appeal for peace and cooperation," he said. "Hot-headedness is not the answer to these acts."

Leaders of lower-caste political parties accused the chief minister of using Pakistan as a smokescreen to shield upper-caste youth who are desecrating the statues as part of an unsurge of upper-caste Hindu fundamentalism.

Pakistan has also been accused by the Indian authorities of masterminding the serial bomb blasts in Bombay on March 12, 1993 that killed more than 300 people and injured more than 1,000.

India also accuses Pakistan of arming and training Muslim militants in Kashmir, a charge denied by Islamabad.

Pakistan for its part blames India for the ethnic violence in the Pakistani port of Karachi which has left scores of people dead.

Off the Record



Chinese film director Ning Ying holds the second prize of the Three Continents film festival for her movie 'Minjing Gush' on Wednesday in the western French city of Nantes. — AFP/UNB photo

1.8m books everyday!

BEIJING: A Chinese publisher has produced on average 1.8 million educational books everyday since it opened on December 1, 1950, the Guangming Daily said yesterday, reports Reuter.

As China's biggest publisher for teaching materials and educational books, the People's Education Publishing Company has published 30 billion books as well as charts, slides and videotapes, it said.

With book-publishing in China loss-making business, the firm pays out more than 1.5 million yuan (1,60,722 dollars) each year to other printing houses to produce educational documents of great value, it said.

Viewing Picasso without security glass

MADRID: The glass protection around Picasso's anti-war masterpiece Guernica is being taken down the Queen Sofia Centre for contemporary art said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Visitors to the gallery will be able to see the painting without its usual 15 millimetre thick (around one eighth of an inch) glass on Thursday, together with the 33 sketches which Picasso used as his guide.

However, admirers will still be unable to come within three metres (nine feet) of the priceless work which hung in the New York Museum of Modern Art until 1981.

China to develop N-ties with Indonesia

JAKARTA, Nov 29: China wants to develop closer nuclear co-operation with Indonesia, according to Jiang Xinxiong, visiting head of China's National Nuclear Corporation (NCNC), reports AFP.

"Nuclear scientists of the two countries have exchanged visits, which are expected to promote and expand the existing cooperation," said Jiang, quoted by Antara news agency today.

Jiang was speaking Tuesday after visiting a nuclear reactor at the National Atomic Energy Agency (Batan) in Serpong, west Java, said Antara.

A one-year contract to export radio-isotopes from Indonesia to China was being drawn up and expected to come into effect in 1996, said reactor centre director Bakri Arbie.

Bakri said China was examining the quality of the isotopes, and if found acceptable, they would be exported.

China along with France has been widely criticised for continuing nuclear testing but Jiang defended his country's nuclear arms programme and said nuclear energy had civil and industrial application as well as military.

"We have abundant coal deposits in northern China, but their exploitation is not so economical in meeting the electricity needs of China's industrial establishments, which are mostly located in the south," Jiang said.

He said this was one reason why China wanted to cooperate with nuclear-capable countries in power development.

Jakarta is to build a 600 megawatt nuclear power plant on the north coast.

Operation of Bosnia peace force NATO, Russia agree on framework for talks

BRUSSELS, Nov 29: NATO and Russia agreed Tuesday on a framework for consultation on the operation of a Bosnia peace force clearing the way for 1,500 Russian troops to take part in the biggest operation in the alliance's history, reports AFP.

Alliance defence ministers and their Russian counterpart Pavel Grachev agreed to set up a non-permanent consultative committee to ensure Moscow is fully informed about the operation of the peace implementation force in Bosnia.

The agreement provides

for regular meetings between NATO ambassadors and their Russian counterpart in Brussels Vitaly Churkin, but US Defence Secretary William Perry said political control of the operation would remain the preserve of NATO.

"Decisions will be made by the North Atlantic Council but Russia will have the opportunity to have a full voice and say in decisions that affect the deployment of their troops," Perry said.

Grachev said the ministers had endorsed an accord worked out in principle between him and Perry.

Britain, Ireland give new momentum to stalled peace process

LONDON, Nov 29: Britain and Ireland gave new momentum to the stalled Northern Ireland peace process on Tuesday just hours before US President Bill Clinton was due to arrive for a three-day visit, reports Reuter.

At a late night news conference British Prime Minister John Major and his Irish counterpart John Bruton unveiled a new initiative fixing February 1996 as the target date for all party talks on the future of the British ruled province.

In the second strand of a twin track process the two

government also agreed to establish an independent international commission to advise how arms held by Northern Ireland's rival guerrilla groups could be taken out of service.

Clinton hailed the new moves and told reporters in Washington just before he set off for London "the United States is proud to support the peacemakers."

The initiative he said "brings the people of Northern Ireland one step closer to the day when the only barriers their children will face are the limits of their dreams."

Clinton arrives in London on Wednesday morning and on Thursday will become the first serving US President visiting northern Ireland. He goes on to Dublin on Friday.

The United States is home to around 40 million people of Irish extraction.

Clinton had voiced hopes earlier this year that all party peace talks would be under way before his visit but persistent differences over guerrilla disarmament have stalled progress.

Major and Bruton said they had not settled their differences over the conditions for the Irish Republican

Army's (IRA) political arm Sinn Fein to join the round table negotiations.

But they said all parties would be invited to preliminary talks and expressed the hope that the twin track strategy would provide a solution to the problem.

Both governments reaffirmed their commitment to securing the early launch of all party negotiations a joint statement said both governments commit themselves to working with others to achieve it.

London and Dublin have been at loggerheads over Britain's demand that before

Sinn Fein can join the talks the IRA must scrap some of the weapons with which it waged a 25-year old war against British rule until it called a truce on August 31, 1994.

Tuesday's late night accord merely fudged the issue.

The British government's position has not changed, Major said. Britain was hot boxing Sinn Fein in, but it had not found an alternative to a handover of IRA weapons that would give Northern Ireland's pro-British Protestant parties enough confidence to sit down and talk with Sinn Fein.



US President Bill Clinton (2nd-R) speaks to Congressional leaders as Vice President Al Gore (2nd-L), Secretary of State Warren Christopher (R), and Sen. Wendell Ford (L), D KY, listen during meetings at the White House on Tuesday. Clinton is trying to gain Congressional support for sending 20,000 US troops to Bosnia in an effort to keep the peace. — AFP/UNB photo

Over 1,000 young fundamentalists held in Egypt

MINYA, Egypt, Nov 29: Security forces arrested more than 1,000 young Muslim fundamentalists in the southern province of Miyya Tuesday evening ahead of Egypt's parliamentary elections, police said Wednesday, reports AFP.

They said 800 arrests were made in the town of Beni Mazar and another 350 in nearby villages on Tuesday night.

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