

## Chechnya to be granted special status

MOSCOW, Dec 4: Chechnya will be granted a special status within the Russian Federation under a draft accord currently being drawn up for the Caucasus republic, Moscow's special envoy to the region told Russian television Sunday, reports AFP.

Presidential envoy Oleg Lobov said the draft settlement would give Chechen authorities direct rule over affairs of state as well as developing a large degree of power over trade relations to the republic.

Moscow would, however, maintain control over the war-ravaged republic's monetary system, its army and its borders, Lobov said.

Chechen separatists, who declared independence from Moscow four years ago, have demanded the republic be allowed to secede from the Russian Federation, but Russia, whose troops poured into the republic a year ago to crush the independence drive, will only countenance a certain degree of autonomy.

The draft settlement would give Chechnya a similar constitutional status to that already enjoyed by Tatarstan following an accord signed in early 1994 which appeared to satisfy the demands of separatist Tatars.

In another conciliatory sign, the head of Chechnya's pro-Moscow government, Doku Zavgayev, said earlier Sunday Chechen independence fighters could obtain an amnesty if they hand in their weapons and report to a new commission set up by Russian President.

Separatists have repeatedly stated they will only surrender their arms in exchange for an unconditional amnesty.

## Search for 4 Tamil suicide bombers on in Colombo

# Leaders flee Jaffna leaving LTTE cadres to face manhunt

COLOMBO, Dec 4: Tamil Tiger leaders have fled Jaffna, leaving their inexperienced young cadres to face a house-to-house search today by victorious government troops in the recaptured rebel stronghold, a military leader said, reports AFP.

Fighting had died down in Jaffna and the rest of northern Sri Lanka, as the soldiers began the difficult house-to-house hunt for surviving Tamil Tiger guerrillas and explosives, the military said.

"It is all quiet after a long time," a military official said today, two days after the Sri Lankan army captured the former rebel stronghold of Jaffna on the 47th day of the country's biggest military offensive.

Meanwhile, a military commander said, in remarks published here today, that leaders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had fled Jaffna Town and left behind only "inexperienced young cadres."

"The LTTE leaders have fled", Major General Rohan Daluwatte told the island newspaper, the LTTE had retreated and the remaining inexperienced cadres "have been cornered by the Sri Lankan troops."

"We are now consolidating our positions," he added. Military officials here said

soldiers were going through buildings in the practically deserted, but heavily-built, town looking for surviving or wounded LTTE fighters and hidden explosives and weapons.

The town is fully under our control," an official said.

"Clearing of Jaffna city centres on," and official statement added.

On Sunday, the army raised the Sri Lankan flag at the former Dutch-built Jaffna Fort for the first time since the LTTE took over the sprawling region in 1990 to form a de facto state in the country's north.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan police have stepped up a massive hunt for four Tamil Tiger suicide bombers who are believed to have sneaked into the capital to assassinate top politicians officials say.

Photographs of the four young members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been distributed to police stations across the country, where suicide attackers have claimed the lives of key politicians.

The police say all four, a woman and three men are from the LTTE stronghold of Jaffna which was captured by the troops Saturday on the 47th day of the country's biggest military offensive yet against the LTTE.

## Kabul forces gain more ground from Taliban

KABUL, Dec 4: Forces supporting Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani have gained more ground from the Islamic Taliban militia in fighting southeast of Kabul, a Defence Ministry spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

The spokesman named Amrullah said pro-Rabbani troops had captured the mountainous district of Qalal Sharallah, in Logar province, about 40 km (25 miles) south of Kabul in an overnight assault.

"This is very significant," Amrullah said. "It means our southeastern flank is now secure because we have high ground overlooking Taliban positions and we are in a strong position to attack them."

He said the assault had begun around midnight. Troops seized the district after several hours of fierce fighting which had forced the Taliban to flee without collecting their dead.

"We killed 10 of their men. But I don't know what the government's losses were," he said.

No comment from the Taliban was immediately available and there was no independent account of the fighting.

Afghan government forces pushed Taliban fighters back 20 km (13 miles) on a front southeast of Kabul last week, but the Taliban still hold hills south and southwest of the capital.

The Taliban militia has sworn to oust Rabbani and install a strict Islamic order throughout Afghanistan to replace Mujahideen guerrilla factions that have fought for power since defeating a communist regime in April 1992.

## BRIEFLY

### Rutskoi to run for presidency:

Alexander Rutskoi, leader of a bloody revolt against President Boris Yeltsin in 1993, confirmed on Sunday he planned to run for president next year, Reuter reports from Moscow.

"Today Russia needs not a strong hand but an intelligent mind," Rutskoi told Interfax news agency in an interview in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk.

### 12 die as crane falls in China:

A crane fell at a power station in Hubei province killing 12 people and injuring 25, the China Daily reported yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

Workers were dismantling the crane last Wednesday at the Qingshan station in the city of Wuhan when three sections weighing more than 100 tonnes fell. The report added that some power station equipment was also damaged.

### Canadian author Davies dies:

Robertson Davies, one of Canada's most respected authors, has died after suffering a brain haemorrhage, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation said on Sunday, Reuter reports from Toronto.

Davies, who wrote more than 30 novels as well as plays and essays, was 82 years old. He died on Saturday evening in Orangeville, about 43 miles (70 kms) north of Toronto, the CBC said.

### Strong quake rocks Japan:

An earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale rocked the Kuril islands off Japan's northern island of Hokkaido yesterday but there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage public NHK television said. But a tidal wave alert was sounded for several hours along the Pacific Ocean coast of the Japanese archipelago after the quake hit at 3.01 a.m. (1801 GMT Sunday) it added, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The Japanese Meteorological Agency lifted the state of alert just after 6:00 am (2100 GMT Sunday) adding that it did not know whether there had been any casualties or damage.

### Brazilian plane crash kills 8:

Eight people died when their single engine Cessana aircraft crashed some 450 kilometres (260 miles) north of Sao Paulo late Saturday, reports said in Sao Paulo, AFP says.

All seven Brazilian tourists and a pilot on board were killed when the plane hit power cables some 300 metres (yards) from a highway near the city of Aldair according to air force investigation.

## Baku to give autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh

PARIS, Dec 4: Azerbaijan's President Geidar Aliyev said on Sunday his country was prepared to give the region of Nagorno-Karabakh political autonomy in return for Armenian concessions over the hotly disputed enclave.

In an interview with AFP — the visiting Azeri President said Baku was prepared to offer further concessions including that of political autonomy, to Karabakh in bid to resolve a seven year deadlock over the enclave which is situated in Azerbaijan but populated mostly by ethnic Armenians.

We proposed granting a special autonomous political status to Nagorno-Karabakh in return for Armenia's recognition of our sovereignty over this region, which Armenia has refused thus far to grant, Aliyev said.

The issue has bitterly divided Armenians and Azeris since Karabakh, Armenians backed by Yerevan, launched a secession begin in 1988, setting off a six-year war that has left more than 20,000 dead and 500,000 displaced.

Thus far despite continued Armenian military control over much of Karabakh, Azerbaijan has insisted it will cede only cultural autonomy to the mountainous region in western Azerbaijan.

Sunday, Aliyev indicated Baku's willingness to go further with full political autonomy but only if Armenia showed that it too committed to peace and would withdraw from the Lachin province, in southern Nagorno-Karabakh.

If we want to move towards peace Armenia must withdraw from this part of the country, Aliyev said 'Armenia wants to maintain control over the province of Lachin..... which goes against international law'.

Several rounds of talks on the disputed province have been held under the aegis of the Minsk Group Co chaired by Finland and Russian which was charged in 1992 with finding a solution to the conflict by OSCE



South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu (R) meets former Beirut hostage Terry Waite (L) and Dr Owens Wiwa (C), brother of Ken Saro Wiwa, the Nigerian environmentalist who was executed recently for campaigning against Shell in Ogoniland, Nigeria, at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, on Sunday. They paid tribute to Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni militants executed with him. — AFP/UNB photo

## Israel to develop anti-missile systems, spy sat for defence

JERUSALEM, Dec 4: Israel will push on with the development of anti-missile systems and spy satellites to counter the "growing" threat from Iraq and Iran, a report said on Sunday, says AFP.

The programme called "plan 2000" is to be presented to Prime Minister Shimon Peres before the end of the month, according to the Israeli daily Haaretz.

The plan covers the years from 1996 to 2000 and takes into consideration the "growing" threat from countries not along Israel's border, such as Iran and Iraq.

It is based on fears that Iran will have developed nuclear weapons in coming years.

The army's planning department, which is directing the programme, said military disussion must always be based on "Israel's image as a nuclear power in the region, as well as having missiles and aircraft that are capable of long-range attacks."

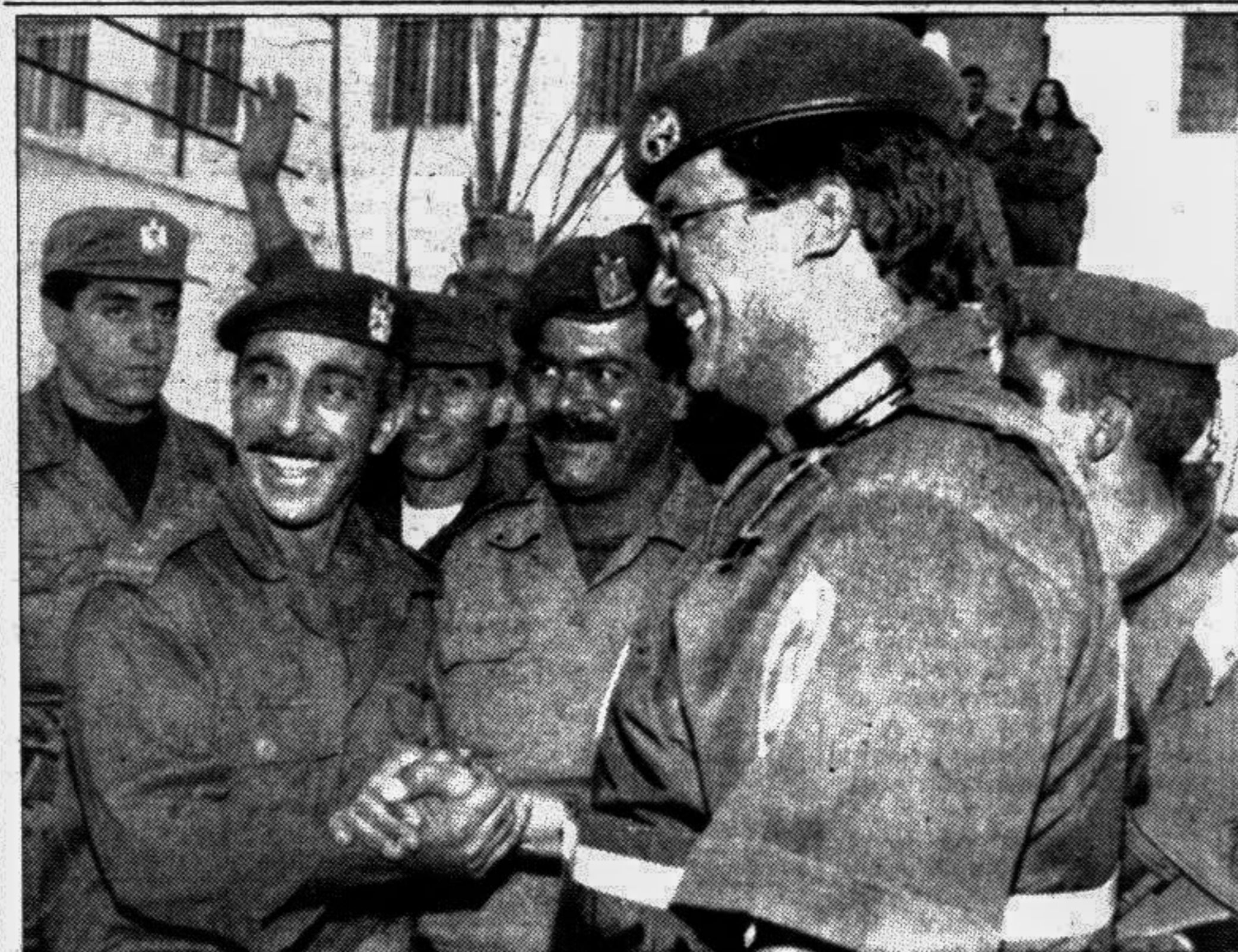
Israel has never admitted to having nuclear weapons and has repeated over the last 30 years that it would not be the first country to introduce them into the Middle East.

But according to foreign

weapons experts, Israel has an arsenal of 100 to 200 nuclear warheads as well as the Jericho missile, which has a range of 1,500 kilometres (930 miles).

The plan also proposes an "active defence," based on the development of the "Hetz" anti-missile system. The United States is financing most of the project and has pledged 200 million dollars over the next five years.

As part of its "strategic disussion," Israel will continue its "Ofek" spy satellite programme. One satellite was launched in April and is still operational.



Israeli and Palestinian police shake hands as the Palestinians move into an Israeli military compound in Beit Jalla near Bethlehem on Sunday. From there the two sides will operate the DCO (District Coordination Office) as the Bethlehem area will be handed over in the control of the Palestinian Authority within the next few weeks. — AFP/UNB photo

## Detained Chun denies charges of army rebellion

SEOUL, Dec 4: Arrested South Korean ex-president Chun Doo Hwan has denied charges of military rebellion stemming from a 1979 coup that led to the Kwangu massacre, state media said today, reports Reuter.

Chun, a former general, was arrested before dawn on Sunday in his home town of Hapcheon, 144 miles (240 km) south of Seoul, and then whisked to Anyang Prison on the capital's outskirts.

State media reported that during more than 10 hours of interrogation in his cell on Sunday, Chun denied a military coup had taken place in 1979. He said he had acted according to law.

Chun also denied responsibility for the May 1980 Kwangu massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators, saying he was in no position to deploy forces during that time, the television said.

## Izetbegovic to ask Mujahideen to leave Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Dec 4: Muslim fighters from abroad who backed government troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina will be asked by Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic to leave the top US military commander said on Sunday, reports AFP.

General John Shalikashvili chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, said there were several hundred Mujahideen in Bosnia but that their departure had been decided as part of the peace agreement reached near Dayton, Ohio on November 21.

President Izetbegovic has agreed. They (Bosnian government officials) assure US that they will make sure these forces leave, Shalikashvili said in a television interview.

## ASEAN to okay N-free zone treaty at summit

JAKARTA, Dec 4: ASEAN nations have all approved to treaty to be signed at their summit this month creating a nuclear free zone in South-east Asia, officials said today, reports AFP.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretary General Dato Ajit Singh said "the treaty is ready for signature in Bangkok." The seven nation group are to hold their leaders summit in Thailand from December 14.

Singh told a press conference the world's five nuclear powers — United States, Russia, France, Britain and China — were consulted over the treaty.

The treaty could annoy France which has been at the centre of an international controversy over its nuclear tests. China has also pursued testing in the face of international opposition.

## Off the Record

### Strange candidate

TAIPEI: A Taiwan candidate who won an overwhelming victory in Saturday's parliamentary elections burst into tears today, blaming herself for getting too many votes, reports Reuter.

Distraught Chou Chuang of the opposition New Party explained that her huge haul of votes may have deprived two colleagues from also winning in the northern constituency of Taipei county.

The New Party fielded five candidates in Taipei county and campaigned hard to get voters to spread their votes between all five to ensure an all-round victory. But only three won seats.

"I feel I have let down the New Party. All five candidates could have been elected. It did not want this to happen," Chou told journalists as she wiped away tears outside a New Party news conference.

"I want to take the responsibility for the New Party," she added.

In order to spread votes evenly in multi-candidate constituencies, the New Party had asked voters to support candidates according to their birth dates.

Voters born in the spring would therefore vote for the first New Party candidate listed on the ballot, those born in the summer would vote for the next, and so on.

The tactic appears to have worked well, overall with the party tripling its representation in the 164-seat legislative Yuan to 21.

But some New Party members accused Chou, who got the third most votes in her constituency, of contributing to the failure of the other two. Chou offered to resign her position as the New Party whip in the legislature.

### First birthday behind bars

SEOUL: Disgraced former South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo marked his first birthday behind bars today — but not in his usual style, reports Reuter.

The domestic Yonhap News Agency reported that Roh, who has been detained in a cell in the Seoul detention house on bribery charges, had an unhappy morning.

It said the former army general, who turned 63, ate a breakfast of bean paste soup, cabbage and rice.

Yonhap quoted prison officials as saying that Roh gloomily recalled his days as leader of South Korea when hundreds of congratulatory messages would flood the presidential Blue House on his birthday.

Roh's son visited the jail early today to wish his father, the agency added.

On Tuesday prosecutors will formally indict Roh in connection with a 654 million dollars slush fund he amassed during his 1988-93 term in office.

## Fire breaks out in Afghan presidential palace

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Dec 4: Fire broke out in the presidential palace in central Kabul today and was still raging more than five hours later, a witness said, reports Reuter.

The witness, contacted from the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar, said smoke and flames were seen pouring from President Burhanuddin Rabbani's palace at about 4.30 am (0000 GMT). The fire was still blazing at 10.00 am (0530 GMT).

No explosions were heard at the palace, a frequent target for gunners of the Islamic Taliban militia entrenched south of Kabul, and the cause of the blaze was not immediately known.

There was no word on casualties or damage and it was not clear if Rabbani had been in the palace when the fire began.

The Taliban militia has sworn to oust Rabbani and install a strict Islamic order throughout Afghanistan to

replace Mujahideen guerrilla factions that have fought for power since defeating a communist regime in April 1992.

Afghan government forces pushed Taliban fighters back 20 km (13 miles) on a front southeast of Kabul last week, but the Taliban still hold hills south and southwest of the capital.

Government jets bombed Taliban-held areas on Saturday and the Taliban said five civilians had been killed and eight hurt in the town of Charasiyab, 15 km (nine miles) south of Kabul.

A Defence Ministry spokesman said the aircraft had attacked military targets in nearby hills, not civilian areas.

The government raid followed several recent air and rocket strikes on Kabul, blamed by the government on the Taliban, in which dozens of civilians were killed.

## Lee slams China for trying to isolate Taiwan

TAIPEI, Dec 4: Taiwan President Lee Teng-Hui, his nationalist party bruised in key elections, slammed rival China on today for trying to isolate this island from the rest of the world, reports Reuter.

"Communist China's aim to suppress and even plot to isolate the Republic of China (Taiwan's official name) is impossible to be reached," a presidential office statement quoted Lee as saying.

Politicians and analysts said that repeated threats by China to attack this island if it embraces independence boosted opposition party support in Saturday's parliamentary elections.

# 'Newspaper industry going through revolution'

SINGAPORE, Dec 4: Asian newspaper magnates began a three-day meeting here today on the problems and prospects of an industry lifted by rising regional affluence and literacy and troubled by growing costs and competition, reports AFP.

"Like all other industries, the newspaper industry is also going through a revolution," Singapore's Information Minister, George Yeo, told the Inaugural Asian Newspaper Publishers' Conference and Exhibition.

"The newspaper industry is being submerged into a large and less structured multi-media industry," Yeo said in a keynote speech to an audience of 350 newspaper owners and executives from 22 countries.

"The electronic media will increasingly compete with the print media. Broadcasting will give way to narrowcasting," Yeo said.

Yeo called on news organizations to take a "think globally and act locally" approach to survive and prosper in the face of competition, noting how demands on newspapers changed from country to country.

"Every city has its own quirks, its own tastes, its own sense of humour and its own taboos," the Singapore Minister said.

"In Thailand, you cannot show disrespect to the monarchy. In Malaysia, you must be mindful of what Islam disallows. The newspapers and television stations which succeed are those which are closest to local audiences and readers," he added.

Media baron Rupert Murdoch's Far-Flung Press empire had succeeded because its different parts were able to "localise," he said, stressing the importance of commercial viability in the news business.

When the Chinese voiced displeasure with BBC World Vision, Murdoch took it off the Star TV Network, Yeo said.

"In Hong Kong, as happened in Malaysia and Singapore independence, media owners are already adjusting to a new political reality after 1997," Yeo said. "To expect otherwise is naive."

Journalists would like to be independent and portray what they wish but in the end "it is the economic reality which is fundamental," the Singapore Information Minister said.

The delegates are due to discuss the opportunities and challenges presented by the global computer network, the Internet, which is increasingly dissolving national barriers.

Illustrating the impact of the Internet, Yeo cited the recent rape of a young Okinawan girl by three American which he said had led many to wonder whether the attackers were "white, black, brown or yellow."

"The newspapers provided

no clue, television pictures gave no indication. In the end, one had to log into Internet to find out. Increasingly, Internet and the proliferation of small media will break up the cartel control of ideas by big newspapers and big TV stations," he said.

Singapore does not disguise its dislike for western-style free wheeling and has won costly libel suits against foreign publications.

Peter Kann, chairman of Dow Jones and Company Inc, lectured the convention on the failings of American journalism.

He said the lines between journalism and entertainment and news and opinion were being blurred, and the media suffered from a short attention span.

"There are too many instant celebrities and too many two-day crises," he said, citing opinion polls that rated the press "rather below politicians" in credibility.

The delegates will discuss new opportunities for the newspaper industry presented by Asia's breakneck economic growth and rising literacy, with every percentage point rise in literacy estimated to add 20 million potential new readers.

The world's biggest newsprint suppliers are also at the convention. The cost of paper has soared worldwide, in part because of huge demand in emerging Asian markets.

## Police breaks up Cong's rally in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Police used water-cannons to break up a rally here today by activists of India's ruling Congress (I) Party against the exhibition of beef products at a recently concluded international trade fair, reports AFP.

Witnesses said the police also fired teargas and used batons to prevent the Congress activists from storming New Delhi's old secretariat complex, where the city government is situated.

No one was injured during the rally, led by two Congress MPs, against the display of cow products at a stall during the trade fair here, the police said.