

# BRIEFLY



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (L) gestures next to Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres (R) during their joint press conference on Thursday. Peres signalled an increased cooperation between his country and Egypt to push for peace with Syria today during his first trip to Cairo since becoming premier. — AFP/UNB photo

**AIDS spreading fast in India:** The AIDS virus, carried by an estimated 1.5 million people in India and spreading rapidly, is costing the country about 13.8 billion dollar a year, a medical expert said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Dr Lalit Nath, Director of the All India Institute of Medical Science in New Delhi, is part of a team trying estimate how much the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is costing in lost economic production. "The productive loss to India in terms of person-years is 32.6 million" Nath told a global conference on AIDS and the law.

**King Fahd leaves hospital:** King Fahd of Saudi Arabia was discharged from a Riyadh hospital late yesterday a week after being admitted for what US official said was a stroke. Reuter reports from Dubai.

King Fahd, 73, left hospital yesterday evening, the royal court said in a statement read on Saudi state television. It did not specify the King's illness but said his "sudden medical condition" was over.

**Noted Russian businessman killed:** Prominent businessman Mikhail Lezhnev, a candidate of the government party Our House-Russia in upcoming legislative elections, was assassinated in the rural town of Chelyabinsk yesterday, regional police said, AFP reports from Moscow.

Itar-Tass quoted sources as saying Lezhnev, 48, was shot in the head outside his home. Lezhnev, who ran a large industrial farm raising poultry and who was running for parliament as a candidate for Our House-Russia led by Russian premier Viktor Chernomyrdin, had been a deputy in the former Supreme Soviet under the Soviet era.

**Castro arrives in Vietnam:** Cuban President Fidel Castro arrives in Vietnam Friday for a rare visit that will celebrate Communist solidarity and give the unrepentant revolutionary a look at the achievements of Vietnam's economic liberalisation, AP reports from Hanoi.

He last came in 1973 while the Vietnam War raged, and showed support for Hanoi against US-aided South Vietnam by visiting a Communist "liberated" zone inside the South. Black-and-white archival film replayed on Vietnamese television this week showed Castro waving the flag of the Communist guerilla movement.

**3300 held in England, Wales:** British police announced Wednesday more than 3,300 people have been arrested in a sweeping raid in England and Wales. Xinhua reports from Monday.

The police raid is code named operation Christmas Cracker aimed at suspected burglars, local press reports said.

**Chopper crash kills 4 in Russia:** Two military helicopters crashed in the southern Russian republic of Ingushetia, killing four crew members and injuring another four, an official said Thursday. AP reports from Moscow.

The crashes apparently occurred just over the border from Chechnya, the breakaway republic where Russian troops continue to skirmish with Chechen rebels.

**Floods claim 6 in Iran:** Six people were killed and several were missing Thursday after massive flooding hit southern Iran, newspapers reported, AFP reports from Tehran.

The country has been suffering a drought in recent months, prompting the Islamic Propagation Organisation to publish an appeal on Sunday urging people to gather in mosques and pray for rain.

**Papandreou's condition stable:** Greek Premier Andreas Papandreou, in hospital with pneumonia for 18 days, was in stable condition on Thursday after undergoing a tracheotomy operation to help his breathing, Reuter reports from Athens.

"The premier's condition is stable one day after the tracheotomy," the latest medical bulletin said. "His breathing is still supported by a respirator but to a lesser degree."

**Mild quake rocks Jerusalem:** Southern Israel was hit by an earthquake yesterday morning but there were no reports of damage or casualties, Israel officials and army radio said, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

"It was 4.9 on the Richter Scale," Avi Shapira of Israel's institute of oil and geophysical research told Israel's army radio.

## Political moves will continue to end war Chandrika announces offensive to secure vital road to Jaffna

COLOMBO, Dec 8: President Chandrika Kumaratunga today announced another offensive to secure a vital road to the former Tamil rebel bastion of Jaffna, but added that she would continue political moves to end the war, reports AFP.

Kumaratunga said security forces would soon secure an important road to the northern Jaffna Peninsula to launch a major rehabilitation programme following the army's spectacular capture of Jaffna town from the separatist rebels.

"We will open a land route to Jaffna Peninsula the same way we took Jaffna Town," Kumaratunga told reporters at

her first press conference after the military's 50-day battle against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Defence officials have warned of more Tamil Tiger revenge attacks around the country, as Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte said the military had already initiated action against the rebels in the island's east.

Kumaratunga ruled out negotiations with the LTTE, which withdrew from six months of talks in April to resume its protracted campaign for an independent Tamil homeland called Eelam, but vowed to implicate political reform.

"We don't want to eliminate

anyone," she said. "But if they don't fall in line, we leave us with no option. We are capable of destroying them if they wish us to."

Kumaratunga declined to say when the new operation would be launched but stressed it was essential to initiate the government's reconstruction effort, at an estimated cost of at least one billion dollars (50 billion rupees).

The LTTE still controls the only highway to the peninsula, although they were driven out of the western part of the peninsula following the army's October 17 offensive which left 2,500 combatants dead on both sides.



Children hold a placard during a rally on Thursday protesting against the Philippine Government's inability to curb violent crimes. Some 140 kidnap victims have paid 3.6 million dollars in ransom to kidnapers this year, a citizens' group said, during a rally in front of a building where President Fidel Ramos was giving a speech. — AFP/UNB photo.

## Accord ratifying attachment of Chechnya to Russia signed

MOSCOW, Dec 8: Russia and pro-Russian Chechen authorities signed an agreement here today ratifying the attachment of the breakaway republic of Chechnya to Russia under "a special status", reports AFP.

The four-page accord, a copy of which was obtained by AFP, was signed by Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, the head of the pro-Russian Chechen administration Doku Zavgayev and President Boris Yeltsin's special representative in Chechnya, Oleg Lobov.

Titled "on the fundamental principles of relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic," the accord "recognises the need for a special status for the Chechen Republic within the Russian Federation as well as the need for the Chechen Republic to adopt the Russian constitution and legislation."

The two sides stressed both "the universally recognised peoples' rights to self-determination" and "the preservation of Russian territorial integrity and economic

space."

Analysts said that with the signing of the accord Russia risked reigniting the Chechnya conflict, which started when troops intervened in 1993 to put down separatists.

Chernomyrdin said Thursday that the accord was similar to previous agreements between the federal authorities and 12 other subjects of the federation, which grant them varying degrees of autonomy from Moscow but not independence — the main demand of Chechen separatists.

## Strike cripples Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Dec 8: A general strike called to condemn alleged human rights abuses by the Indian security forces paralysed the strife-torn Kashmir valley today, witnesses said, reports AFP.

Shops, offices, schools and banks were closed and traffic was off the roads in this Kashmir summer capital and other towns in the Muslim-majority valley, they said.

The general strike was called by the Iqbal Park Coordination Committee, an alliance of four Kashmiri Muslim separatist groups, in advertisements placed in local newspapers.

Indian troops tightened security across this city of some 700,000 people to prevent any violence during the shutdown, officials said.

## ROK prosecutors expand probe of Roh's slush fund

SEOUL, Dec 8: Prosecutors on Friday expanded their probe of former President Roh Tae-woo's slush fund as they began checking whether predecessor Chun Doo-hwan also hoarded a fortune, reports AP.

The move is part of an ongoing effort by President King Young sam, who in 1993 became the first civilian president in 32 years, to sever ties with his military backed predecessors.

Roh was arrested last month for allegedly taking huge bribes during his 1988-93 term. Chun, president in 1980-88, was jailed Sunday in connection with a 1979 coup that led him to power.

The coup was followed by a brutal crackdown on a pro-democracy uprising several months later.

## 28 killed in violence NDP wins parliamentary polls in Egypt

CAIRO, Dec 8: Egypt's ruling party won an overwhelming parliamentary majority in violent elections in which at least 28 people were killed, reports Reuter.

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of President Hosni Mubarak won 416 of the 444 seats after 99 members elected as independents cast in their lot with the winning side.

The opposition parties, with 13 seats between them, said the government had broken promises of free and fair elections by telling the police and local authorities to put the whole weight of the state behind the government's candidates.

At least 28 people were killed and hundreds injured

in clashes between rival candidates or by thugs hired by the candidates to rig the voting in their favour.

Administrative courts have frozen the results from more than 70 seats decided in the first round of voting last week, pending investigations into abuses, but the opposition expects the government to ignore the court rulings.

Mubarak said there had been irregularities but he blamed them on individual candidates.

"I think they (the opposition) know very well who intervened in the elections. The intervention was by candidates and their supporters. The government did not intervene anywhere," he told reports.

## Off the Record

### Tomato lowers risk of prostate cancer

WASHINGTON, Dec 8: A tomato-rich diet lowers the risk of prostate cancer in men, according to a report published Wednesday after a seven-year study, reports AFP.

The study appearing in the journal of the National Cancer Institute found men who eat at least 10 servings a week of tomato foods reduce their risk of prostate cancer by up to 45 per cent.

Harvard University researcher Edward Giovannucci said tomatoes and strawberries were the only foods among 46 fruits and vegetable studied that appeared to have a protective effect.

The researchers believe the anti-oxidant lycopene in tomatoes acted to reduce the growth of cancerous cells. Other substances, including beta-carotene, did not have an impact on cancer.

Cooked tomatoes, in sauces, pizza and other dishes, appeared to have a greater benefit than raw tomatoes or juice, they noted.

### Wonder girl!

MANCHESTER, England: Doctors and teachers here are baffled by the case of a 10-year-old who mysteriously started reading and writing backwards — and then returned to normal after banging her head, reports AFP.

A team of specialists in this northern English city, including a psychologist and brain expert, failed to find an explanation for Vicky Wilmore's "mirror-writing," which started suddenly one morning over a year ago after she complained of a headache.

Although she could read what she wrote, nobody else could and this caused her to cry with frustration and led to classroom gibes. Several experts subjected her to psychological and physiological tests but failed to find a cure.

Then on September 27 while Vicky was watching the Manchester United football team being beaten by the Russian team Rotor Volgograd, she slumped back in her chair in disappointment and cracked her head on a table.

The next day at school she was writing and reading normally again.

"This was an incredible case," said Doctor Isabella Tweedle, a key member of the health team assessing Vicky. "We have never come across anything like it before. Her case, including examples of her schoolwork, is likely to appear in learned medical journals."

"We were all overjoyed," said the girl's mother Brenda Wilmore. "But she had a lump on her head for about five weeks."

Doctors have continued to monitor Vicky since her recovery.

## Troops ready to crush any offensive MILF plans attack on army, civil targets

MANILA, Dec 8: Muslim rebels plan to launch attacks against civilian and military targets in the southern Philippines but the armed forces are ready to crush any offensive, the Philippine defence chief said today, reports Reuter.

Defence Secretary Renato De Villa defended a massive army build-up in the south, saying the government could not stand by and wait for a rebel attack to take place.

"If you are responsible for the protection of your citizenry, would you wait for them to be subjected to attack before you do your thing?" he told Reuters in an interview.

De Villa, a former armed forces chief, said the main

threat came from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"They have taken advantage of our informal ceasefire to build up their trained armed force, to build up their armaments, to recruit and to spread their armed elements outside of their traditional hiding places," he said.

The MILF's military preparations have reached a dangerous level, De Villa said, but added: "If they pursue it to the point of war then we will crush them."

Muslim community leaders say the armed forces' build-up is increasing the risk of renewed fighting. The military strength on the main southern island of Mindanao,



Top models Claudia Schiffer (C) and Eva Herzigova (R) enjoy the party to their honour in palace-Hotel on Tverskaya Street, on Thursday. Both top models arrived in Moscow to take part in the World Fashion Holiday, sponsored by the movement "Our Home-Russia," led by Russian Premier Victory Chernomyrdin. — AFP/UNB photo

## 'Galileo' enters atmosphere of Jupiter

PASADENA, Calif, Dec 8: A probe from the spacecraft Galileo successfully entered the atmosphere of the planet Jupiter on Thursday on an epic journey to the beginning of time, reports Reuter.

The Galileo control room burst into joyful clapping as a technician yelled, "we got it," at 6:12 pm EST (2312 GMT), confirming that Galileo had linked up with the space probe as it entered the jovian atmosphere.

Torrance Johnson, a scientist who has been with the project since it began in 1977, said: "This is a fantastic achievement just in the complexity of the engineering: the probe flying on its own, slamming itself into the atmosphere, protecting itself with its heat shield and then phoning home."

## Clinton asked to keep US forces out of Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Dec 8: More than 180 Republican and Democratic members of the House of Representatives sent a letter Thursday to President Bill Clinton asking him to keep US ground troops out of Bosnia, reports AFP.

Republican representative Barbara Cubin of Wyoming released the letter signed by 171 Republicans and 13 Democrats, close to half the 433 members in the house.

"We urge you not to send ground troops to Bosnia," the letter said.

In a statement, Cubin said: "This peacekeeping mission could quickly turn into a combat mission."

"The increasingly hostile rhetoric coming from armed factions in the region, especially Sarajevo, is disturbing," she added.

## Taliban's main victims are women, not govt soldiers'

HERAT, Dec 8: A host of blue-grey shadows flit across the sun-kissed horizon as evening approaches. Only an occasional flash of sparkling eyes are visible behind the all encompassing pleated veils, hinting of the women they hide, reports IPS.

They are doctors and nurses returning home from a day's work.

But elsewhere in this strategic Afghan town that fell to the Taliban militia last month, there are no women to be seen.

Herat, the capital of western Afghanistan, was already governed by a religious right-wing Amir, Ismail Khan, for close to three years before it fell to the Taliban on Sep 5.

But the soldier-students from seminaries in Pakistan are determined to impose an even stricter Islamic regime.

In a blitzkrieg, the Taliban have overrun a third of the

country within a year, and are now threatening Kabul from its southern outskirts.

But Taliban's first victims have been the women and not government soldiers. Since the fall of Herat, women can no longer work, and the schools have not been reopened for girls.

"We want to form an Islamic government based on the precepts of the Holy Koran and the recommendations of the Prophet. The Book stipulates that women must not mix with men, neither at work nor at school. If they want to study, they can do so at home under the surveillance of their husbands," explains the man in charge of 'foreign affairs' in Herat, Sayed Abdul Malek.

With a large turban perched on his shaven head, a beard neither too short nor too long, and a long shirt and wide baggy trousers, this young man symbolises the

new ideology.

Herat fell almost without firing a shot. Just a few bursts of machine-gun fire and light arms in the middle of the night, and the troops still loyal to Ismail Khan fled towards the Iranian border. The next morning they found refuge, along with their leader, in Mashad, the most important city of eastern Iran.

And in came the new rulers — youthful soldiers without uniforms, all bearded and wearing turbans kalashnikovs slung by their side, crowded onto Toyota pick-up trucks flying white flags bearing the words: "There is no other God than Allah."

Disciplined and calm, these soldiers so far seem to be obeying orders given them by their leaders.

"We have not come here as colonists, but to help our brothers.

For whether we be (ethnic) Pashtuns or Tajiks, we are all sons of Afghanistan. What we wanted was to overthrow Ismail Khan. We have given our men orders not to avenge themselves on civilians," says new vice-governor Mohammed Abbas, who receives visitors in the shadowy precincts of the former Amir's palace.

A hero of the anti-Soviet resistance, Khan was extremely popular after the fall of the Afghan communist government in 1992. But his pursuit of the war against factions hostile to President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government did not permit him to fulfill promises made to the people.

Growing difficulties with Rabbani's commander-in-chief, Ahmad Shah Massoud, also a hero of the resistance, probably hastened his fall. Apparently Massoud had decided to relieve Khan of his

functions on the eve of Herat's capture.

"No one likes the Taliban. It's a shame to see such obscurantists in power at the dawn of the 21st century. And the whole world doesn't give a damn," says Abdoul, a civil servant.

Like many other sophisticated Heratians, he views the Islamic militants as a band of coarse peasants "who can't even express themselves correctly in Persian."

The Taliban have been trying to play peacemakers by interposing themselves between the rival factions of the old anti-Soviet resistance.

If they owe part of their success to the widespread exasperation of the populace with the different factions who have been at each other's throats since the fall of the Soviet-backed government, the Taliban have nevertheless

## Peres vows to probe into killings of Egyptian POWs

CAIRO, Dec 8: Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres promised Thursday to investigate the reported killings of hundreds of Egyptian POWs during the Arab-Israeli wars in an attempt to resolve a longstanding dispute, reports AP.

Peres said at a news conference with President Hosni Mubarak that he would appoint an Israeli general to head the inquiry.

The pledge is a significant concession by Israel, which has until now refused to investigate the reported killings of as many as 1,000 Egyptian POWs in the 1956 and 1967 wars.

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