

International

BRIEFLY



Smithsonian Institute forensic anthropologist Dr. Douglas W. Owsley examines the remains of a body unearthed at the Jamestown Fort site Wednesday as his colleague Malcolm Richardson (L) makes notes. According to archeologists, the skeletal remains are of one of the earliest settlers from the site of Jamestown Fort on Jamestown Island, Virginia. — AFP/UNB photo

Referendum in Morocco held:

Moroccans voted overwhelmingly for constitutional reform in a referendum on Friday to give the country a powerful new upper house of parliament to strengthen regional representation. Reuter reports from Rabat.

Interior Ministry figures early yesterday showed that 99.56 per cent, or 10.16 million people, voted yes, with 45,324 voting no. Turnout was 82.95 per cent of the 12.3 million electorate. There were 31,639 spoilt votes.

HK seizes 18 containers of arms:

Hong Kong customs agents said yesterday they had seized 18 containers of suspected heavy weapons to be shipped to the Middle East. Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

The shipment, impounded on September 12, arrived from North Korea on August 22 and was believed to be en route to a Middle Eastern country, a customs spokesman told Reuters.

He would only describe the goods as "strategic commodities" and declined to describe the specific contents of the shipment or name its destination.

6,000 seeking to contest UP polls:

Nearly 6,000 people are seeking to contest upcoming elections in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Former Chief Ministers Kalyan Singh, Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav are among the 5,841 aspirants who have filed nominations to vie for a place in the 425-member Uttar Pradesh assembly.

2 women burn themselves in Karachi: Two women critically burned after setting themselves on fire were out of danger Saturday but remain in an intensive care unit of a military hospital in Karachi, hospital sources said. AFP reports from Karachi.

Both women sustained deep burns over 70 to 80 per cent of their bodies on Wednesday after pouring petrol on themselves and lighting a match in Hyderabad, some 175 kilometres (108 miles) from here.

Roman Catholic bishop jailed:

A Roman Catholic bishop was sentenced Friday to 2 1/2 years in prison for sex crimes against native Indian women at a boarding school he ran in the 1960s. AP reports from Vancouver.

Hubert O'Connor is the most senior Catholic clergyman in Canada, and one of the highest-ranking anywhere, to be convicted of such offenses. O'Connor, 68, was convicted in July of sexually assaulting two women, who were teens at the time, while he was principal of a school near Williams Lake in central British Columbia.

2 US TV journalists detained:

Two television journalists were detained by police after they were found picking through trash outside a juvenile court to research a story on confidentiality of court records. AP reports from Vernon, USA.

Police confiscated some material from Bob Wilson, a reporter for a local television station, and Elizabeth Collier, the station's special-projects manager, but did not arrest them during the incident late Wednesday night. Prosecutors will determine if any laws were broken, police said.

Narayanan begins Central Asia tour:

The Vice-President, R. Narayanan, left New Delhi yesterday morning on nine-day official visit to Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, PTI reports from New Delhi.

Narayanan is accompanied by wife Usha Narayanan and a high-level delegation comprising Minister of State for Planning, Dr Y K Alagh, members of parliament Sushil Kumar Shinde, Anil Kumar and P C Thomas and senior officials.

Rap music star Shakur dies:

Rap music star Tupac Shakur, whose tumultuous life often resembled a gangster movie, died on Friday six days after his car was sprayed with bullets in a mysterious ambush, a Las Vegas hospital said. Reuter reports from Las Vegas.

Shakur, who was shot four times, died at the University Medical Centre in Las Vegas at 4:03 pm. Pacific time (2303 GMT) on Friday, the hospital said in a short statement. It said the cause of death was "respiratory failure and cardiopulmonary arrest." Shakur, 25, one of the most notorious performers of hardcore "gangsta" rap, had been in critical condition since Saturday night's shooting near the famed Las Vegas strip.

US Siamese twins separated:

Doctors separated Honduran-born Siamese twins joined at the tops of their heads, though the infant girls who had seen each other only in the mirror still face years of surgeries to restore their skulls, AP reports from Salt Lake City.

Doris and Bessy Gonzales were both in stable condition after surgeons at Primary Children's Medical Centre separated the girls' skulls, blood vessels and scar tissue in a 10-hour operation on Friday. "This is an extraordinary procedure," said Ed Clark, the hospital's medical director. "Each person has certain steps that have been worked out. It's a complex ballet."

Tornado claims 7 in Vietnam:

Seven people were killed and three others went missing when a tornado hit central Vietnam, the union newspaper Lao Dong reported yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

The tornado, which struck Thursday and Friday, mainly affected the provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien-Hue, where five fishermen died at sea, the thrice-weekly paper said. Local authorities sent three navy ships to help with rescue work.

Strike cripples Karachi

KARACHI, Sept 14: Pakistan's commercial capital Karachi remained partially paralysed but peaceful today as a strike called by an ethnic party, the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM), got underway, the second in less than a week, reports AFP.

All main commercial centres and markets remained closed this morning and traffic was sparse, witnesses said. Police patrolled the streets and manned check-posts around the city to deter violence.

A few state-owned buses plied the streets but public transport was not available in many areas, especially the MQM strongholds in the central and western districts. Banks, government offices,

US sends another 5000 troops to Kuwait

WASHINGTON, Sept 14: The Clinton administration dispatched another 5,000 Army troops to Kuwait to man scores of tanks and armored vehicles, raising its show of force against Iraq's Saddam Hussain, reports AFP.

The troops were to be airlifted this weekend from Fort Hood, Texas. The airlift, combined with a second aircraft carrier task force already en route to the Persian Gulf, will raise the US presence in the region to about 32,000.

Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said Friday the dispatch of the troops was one part of a package of steps put together days ago by the president's national security team.

Every decision that's been executed this week was made a week ago today and we've just been following through with a

deployment plan to strengthen our deterrent forces in the area," Bacon said in an interview.

The troop deployment was announced hours after Saddam's offer to stop targeting US jets flying over Iraq. The jets are patrolling a no-fly zone expanded last week after Saddam moved forces against his own Kurdish population in the north.

The White House was unimpressed with the Iraqi announcement.

"We'll be looking at actions, not statements, from Baghdad," press secretary Mike McCurry.

The 3rd Brigade of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood — consisting of about 5,000 soldiers — will join 1,200 soldiers that have been exercising in Kuwait since August. They will continue the military

exercise for three months.

The troops, led by Col Eric Olson, will bring out of storage 110 M1-A1 tanks and 125 M2 Bradley fighting vehicles already positioned in Kuwait and will take part in exercise "Intrinsic Action," a desert war game.

This is part of prudent efforts to protect our interests in the Gulf," said Pentagon spokesman Sam Grizz.

Dispatching more troops from the home base of the Army's tank corps is the latest in a series of moves ordered by President Clinton to dissuade Saddam from flexing his military against US and allied forces in the region or at the oil-rich states of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

AFP adds: "Arab foreign ministers held an informal meeting late Friday to discuss the Iraq-US crisis after condemning Washington's military build-up in the Gulf as an 'act of provocation.'

The meeting was held in the absence of Iraq Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al-Saifi, who will however attend the Arab League's plenary sessions on Saturday and Sunday.

Arab League chief Esmat Abdel Meguid condemned the US build-up in the region in preparation for a possible strike against Iraq as an act of provocation against Iraq and Arab countries."

The Arab League condemns any American action against Iraq's sovereignty," Abdel Meguid added.

The Cairo-based League has

condemned a first wave of US missile strikes against Iraq on September 3 and 4.

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"We see the elections as a ray of light at the end of the tunnel," said Islamic mufti Ibrahim Hadzihalilovic after traditional Muslim prayer Friday in a small room that serves as Banja Luka's only mosque.

All 12 mosques in this northwestern Serb city were destroyed by Serb extremists during the 3 and a half years of clashes and ethnic purges. Large pieces of stone from the largest mosque cover the floors and corners of Hadzihalilovic's of-

Polling begins in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Sept 14: Polling stations opened their doors in Sarajevo at 7:00 am (0500 GMT) today for the first post-war general elections in Bosnia aimed at reunifying the divided country, reports AFP.

"But I would exchange peace in this troubled region."

Before the war, about 195,000 people lived in Banja Luka — 54 per cent Serb, 14 per cent Muslim and 14 per cent Croat. Many of the Muslims and Croats fled the country or now live in the Muslim-Croat half of the country; they've been replaced by Serb refugees.

Today only about 4,000 of the 30,000 Muslims remain, said Hadzihalilovic. "And a vast majority of remaining ones live in cellars, garages or in orphanages since they have nowhere to go."

"Maybe elections will change things. Maybe some smart people will be elected and this madness will stop," he said.

"Maybe I'm too optimistic, but we have learned to live with a bit of hope."

Voters will be selecting a three-member presidency and joint legislature and separate governments for the two halves of Bosnia.

Off the Record

Pigeon plot

HANOVER, Germany Two men were arrested after a failed attempt to extort 650,000 marks (drs 433,333) from a supermarket in Sehndor near Hanover, police said Thursday, reports AP.

The 36 and 30-year-old men had threatened to poison food products at the supermarket and had given police several false drop-off points for the money including a town dump were the officers found a wooden case containing 10 carrier pigeons and a letter of instructions.

The letter said police should place 65,000 marks (drs 43,333) in thousand mark bills in specially made satchels to be tied to the carrier pigeons.

Police checked with a local pigeon club to discover the birds could indeed carry the 60 grams of weight.

Instead of placing money in the satchels, the officers filled them with snips of paper and turned the pigeons loose.

With a helicopter ready to follow the birds, police were surprised when the birds climbed to only about 50 metres (yards) altitude and quickly flew some three kilometres (2 miles) to their home perch.

Police said they staked out the home of the two unemployed men and arrested them when they returned in a car they had borrowed from a friend to deliver the pigeons to the town dump.

The friend who loaned them the car was released after questioning because he had no idea of the pigeon plot, police said.

Crucial battle looms at Sarobi

Taliban refuse to join Tehran confce to end war

ISLAMABAD, Sept 14: The Afghan Taliban militia has rejected Iran's invitation to attend a regional conference in Tehran on resolving the factional war in Afghanistan, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said today, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, a crucial battle looms at the Afghan government's stronghold of Sarobi as the Taliban Islamic militia appears poised to advance on it after taking two provinces in four days, Afghan sources said today.

Sarobi, 75 kilometres (47 miles) east of Kabul, was bombed by Taliban jets Friday as the Islamic militia seized Laghman province after earlier capturing eastern Nangarhar's provincial capital Jalalabad on Wednesday.

The 22-month-old militia, which has vowed to topple the Kabul coalition led by Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, but the militia also turned down this offer, telling the visitors that

Chechens blast suspension of troop withdrawal

MOSCOW, Sept 14: The Chechen rebel military commander on Friday blasted the suspension of the Russian troop withdrawal as a "senseless game" which put the whole peace process in Chechnya at risk, reports AFP.

"This is another senseless game which could lead to new victims," Chechen Chief of Staff Aslan Maskhadov told Interfax news agency.

He urged the Russians to avoid "another bloody stupidity."

The commander of Russian troops in Chechnya, Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, said Thursday and repeated Friday that the withdrawals agreed to in a peace accord last month were to be halted until all Russian prisoners had been released.

"As long as the problem of exchanging prisoners of war and detainees remains unsolved, the Russian troops will stay," he told Interfax.

The latest statement directly contradicted the chief Russian negotiator, Alexander Lebed, who had played down Tikhomirov's initial comments

on Thursday as "a little hot-headed."

Tikhomirov denied this point blank, insisting: "I called things by their proper names."

On Saturday, Lebed is expected to deliver a report to the government at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, Interfax quoted government sources as saying.

Meanwhile, Islamic law will be applied throughout Chechnya only after the question of relations with Russia has been resolved, a spokesman for the Chechen leadership said Friday.

The spokesman, Movlud Udgov, was apparently referring to a recent peace agreement under which Russia and mainly Muslim Chechnya agreed to postpone for up to five years a definitive decision on the republic's demands for independence.

Interviewed on Moscow Echo Raito, Udgov said that on Thursday, the president of the rebel Chechen government, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, signed a decree instituting Islamic law.

Indian women to fight for their rightful place in parliament

November.

Mainstream feminist groups such as Mahila Dakshita Samiti, National Federation of Indian Women and All India Democratic Women's organisation warned they would take the background files, reports AFP.

"Our agitation will be intensified ... we will take our messages to the streets and expose those in parliament who claim to be advocates of women's rights," a National Federation of Indian Women's rights.

The groups described Friday's proceedings in parliament as a "deliberate sabotage" by male MPs of women's rights and added they would garner the support of female parliamentarians for their "rightful

struggle."

The protests came after parliament's lower house divided on gender lines during a noisy session which degenerated into a slanging match.

Women deputies — who hold 39 of the 545 seats in the lower house — had called for the bill to be passed without a discussion but were drowned out by their male colleagues.

A vote was due to take place Friday evening but many MPs said they would not be staying because they had to return to their constituencies.

Speaker Sangma adjourned the Lok Sabha or lower house because a quorum of at least half the lower house was needed for the vote to go ahead.

"Let us vote no: They screamed together.

Banerjee and her colleagues had demanded the vote be

pushed through without a debate but male MPs argued the legislation was too important to be rushed through.

"The bill has got technical flaws which have to be thrashed out before being translated into law," said George Fernandes of the Samata (equality) Party, which has 16 women MPs in Lok Sabha.

At one stage women members of parliament left their party seats and sat together in a rare show of female solidarity.

"Banks, government offices,

cere are appeal that this bill should not be defeated. We will not reverse our decision.

It was persuaded by lady MPs yesterday to introduce this bill and I have done so. But I agree no amendment of the constitution can be rushed like this.

One man to side with the women, however, was Atal Bihari Vajpayee prime minister of India for 13 days earlier this year as the head of an ill-fated BJP government.