

BRIEFLY

Land mine kills 7 cops in Hyderabad : A land mine explosion in southern India Monday killed at least seven policemen, police said. AP reports from Hyderabad. Another three policemen were seriously injured in the attack blamed on leftist rebels of the People's War Group. The injured were hospitalized in Mulugu town in Andhra Pradesh state, said C. Ramaswamy, state inspector general of police. The People's War Group, which began attacks on police and other government targets in 1980, accuses the state and federal governments of not doing enough for the poor. At least 2,000 deaths have been blamed on the group by the police in the last 16 years.

197 NLD activists still in jail : Myanmar said yesterday that 197 people were still being held after a crackdown in late September on supporters of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) Party. Reuters from Yangon. Myanmar authorities had detained 573 people in the crackdown to thwart a planned NLD party congress. They later released most of them. The official media said today the remaining detainees were being held at government guest houses and police stations.

Pope to undergo appendix surgery: Walking slowly and wading to well-wishers, Pope John Paul II entered the hospital Sunday for surgery to remove an inflamed appendix that the Vatican insists is the main cause of his recent health problems. The 76-year-old pontiff, wearing a white cassock, arrived at Gemelli Polyclinic hospital in Rome hours after leading a long beatification ceremony at the Vatican that put his stamina to the test. The operation — the pope's sixth at Gemelli — is planned for Tuesday morning, said hospital spokesman Giuseppe Pallanch. AP reports from Vatican City.

Flood kills 21 in Vietnam : The death toll from flooding in the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam has risen to at least 21, most of them children, since the start of October, press reports said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi. Eighteen children were among the 21 people drowned in an Giang and Dong Thap provinces where floodwaters inundated nearly 200,000 houses, the Quan Doi Nhan Dan reported. More than 12,000 people had to leave their homes and many more are likely to be evacuated as the Mekong river continues to rise.

4 die as bldg collapses in Delhi: Four labourers were crushed to death in their sleep when a building under construction collapsed in the Indian capital, the police said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi. The builder was arrested after the tragedy. A police officer said a concrete platform collapsed onto the men, adding that poor quality materials were being blamed for the deaths.

Avalanche claims 2 in Nepal: Two climbers from the United States died after an avalanche hit them while they were attempting to scale Annapurna IV peak in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal a US embassy official said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Kathmandu. The official told Reuters that the two climbers were identified as Debbie Marshall, 32, a forester from Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and Richard Davidson, 46, a computer engineer from New Mexico. An official from Nepal's Tourism Ministry said the two were among three climbers reported missing on Friday after the avalanche hit them at 4,900 metres (16,072 feet) up the 7,525 metre (24,682 feet) Annapurna IV peak.

Strong quake shakes Canada: A powerful 6.5-magnitude earthquake shook parts of Canada's Vancouver Island on Sunday, but there were no reports of damage or injuries, the Alaska Tsunami Warning Centre said. AP reports from Palmer, Alaska. The quake had a preliminary magnitude of 6.0 and was centred in the Pacific Ocean about 70 miles (110 kilometers) southwest of Port Alice, British Columbia, on the north end of Vancouver Island, said Paul Whitmore, a geophysicist at the centre. The quake happened at 1:13 pm PDT (2013 GMT). Whitmore said. He said no significant aftershocks were recorded, and there was no danger of a tsunami, an earthquake-caused sea wave.

50 nations to back ban on land mine : Fifty countries agreed to support drafting a global ban on anti-personnel land mines, wrapping up a three day conference aimed at ultimately halting their production, trade and use, AP reports from Ottawa. The conference, attended by representatives of more than 60 countries and dozens of non-governmental groups, ended Saturday with the adoption of the so-called Ottawa Declaration.



A Bosnian-Muslim woman talks outside her tent near the village of Jusici, close to the Serbian border in north-eastern Bosnia, on Sunday. Following the withdrawal of 300 returned Muslims from their ethnically-cleaned village by IFOR, which feared clashes with Serbs, 117 Muslims reaffirmed their Dayton return right during a three-day delay brokered with UNHCR. So far the UN has allowed 57 to go back to rebuild their destroyed homes in what is just one of hundreds of ghost villages from which Serbian forces drove residents during the Bosnian war. — AFP/UNB photo

'Defending president wins presidential debate'
Clinton, Dole clash over govt's role in first debate



President candidate Bob Dole (L) and US President Bill Clinton smile on Sunday at the start of the Presidential debate in Hartford, CT. — AFP/UNB photo

HARTFORD, Connecticut, Oct 7: President Clinton and Bob Dole clashed vigorously over the role of the US government in the world and at home Sunday night in a debate of who should be trusted to lead America into the 21st century, reports AP. "I think the best thing going for Bob Dole is that Bob Dole keeps his word," the Republican challenger said in the 90-minute debate critical to his hopes of launching an October comeback. "It is not midnight in America, senator. We are better off than we were four years ago," Clinton said in making his case for a second term. Standing just a few feet apart on a red-carpeted stage, Clinton and Dole challenged each other again during a showdown that ushered in the final month of the campaign for the White House. They'll stage one more such debate in 10 days. The fast-paced exchanges ranged from the causes of rising teen drug use to the role of the American military at the dawn of the 21st century. "I trust the people, the president trusts the government," Dole said in trying to cast the Democratic incumbent as a liberal hiding behind conservative rhetoric. Clinton offered a vigorous defense of his record — and of what he said was carefully targeted government activism. As examples, he cited banning certain assault weapons and making it harder for cigarette companies to target children. "We are better off than we were four years ago — let's keep it going," Clinton said in taking credit for 10 million new jobs and making his case for a second term. Reuter adds: President Bill Clinton won Sunday night's presidential debate with Republican Bob Dole, according to three polls conducted immediately after the 90-minute encounter in Hartford, Connecticut. A Gallup poll conducted for CNN found that 51 per cent of Americans believed Clinton won the debate, compared to 32 per cent who were more impressed with Dole's performance. But seventy four per cent of the people polled said Dole did better than they expected. A CBS News snap poll gave Clinton 50 per cent to Dole's 28 per cent with 17 per cent calling the debate a tie. Results in an ABC News poll were similar with 50 per cent calling the debate a triumph for Clinton compared to 29 per cent for Dole. Nineteen per cent said it was a tie.

India seals off border between UP, Nepal

LUCKNOW, India, Oct 7: Indian security forces sealed off the land border between the state of Uttar Pradesh and Nepal today as the third phase of crucial assembly polls got underway. "The Nepal border is often used by anti-social elements," a state government official told Reuters. "We have taken this temporary step to enable peaceful polling in the border areas."

State officials said tens of thousands of paramilitary forces were deployed to monitor 124 contests in India's most populous state in what was due to be the last phase of polling for the state assembly's 425 seats. Voting in five constituencies was put back to October 9. The delay in at least three cases was due to violence, including Hindu-Muslim clashes in the state capital Lucknow. With 140 million people, sprawling Uttar Pradesh is larger than France and more populous than Japan or Pakistan. The state shares a porous 700-km (420-mile) border with land-locked Nepal. Indian officials say the border with the Himalayan kingdom is also used by smugglers and fugitives. Uttar Pradesh has a smaller border with Tibet which was opened recently for modest cross-border trade with China.

28 Indians die after drinking illicit liquor

MADRAS, India, Oct 7: At least 28 people died and more than 40 were admitted to hospital in India's southern Tamil Nadu state after drinking illicit liquor, a police spokesman said today, reports Reuter. An estimated 68 people drank the liquor on Saturday night in Pudukkottai district, 350 km (220 miles) from the state capital Madras, the spokesman for Tamil Nadu state police said. He said illicit liquor tragedies occur frequently in Tamil Nadu because unscrupulous bootleggers and dangerous drugs or potentially poisonous substances to the brew to impart the "kick" their clients seek.

Christopher seeks to relaunch peace talks

EU wants partnership with US in resolving ME problems

GAZA, Oct 7: The European Union wants a partnership with the United States in resolving the problems of the Middle East, Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring said today after talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, reports AFP. Arafat meanwhile said the Palestinians wanted active European participation in the talks with the Israelis which began Sunday at the Erez crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The Irish foreign minister, whose country now holds the EU presidency, was sent to the Middle East by the European Union summit, held Saturday in Dublin, to give EU input to the vital talks which opened late Sunday. But US Secretary of State Warren Christopher has ruled out an EU presence at the talks, which he said were bilateral. He justified US Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross being there by saying "the United States has a history of assisting the parties."

"We want to work in partnership with the US in this region," Spring said. "We believe we have both a constructive role to play." Arafat added: "We do not only want Europe to put pressure but to participate and to be completely involved in our discussions with the Israelis." The Irish diplomat's mission comes as negotiators try to put the Middle East peace process back on track after last month's Israeli-Palestinian violence which left 83 people dead. At the first round of talks they agreed to reactivate a number of committees and form a new group to study the agreed redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank town of Hebron.

Reuter adds: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher sought to relaunch Israeli-Palestinian peace talks by warning that accord was impossible if one side won and the other side lost. He disputed any assessment that a two-day crisis summit in Washington last week was a success for hard-line Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a disappointment, if not an outright failure, for Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Christopher, on a follow-up visit to Israel, said the media had misread the summit's results and US officials stressed that any agreement must meet both Israeli and Palestinian requirements. Any perception of Israel gaining more under a US-led peace process would further undermine already difficult negotiations, which resumed on Sunday night at a Erez on the Israel-Gaza border, as well as US credibility in the Arab world generally.

Russia to cut ties with countries recognising rebel Chechnya

MOSCOW, Oct 7: Russia threatened on Sunday to sever diplomatic relations with seven countries recognising rebel Chechnya or holding separate talks with its leaders, reports Reuter. Sergei Stepashin, the head of the government's Administrative Department, told NTV television that Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov had issued the threat during talks with several ambassadors in Moscow. "Primakov told several ambassadors in Moscow that if their countries hold separate talks or recognise Chechnya's independence, Russia can raise the question of severing diplomatic links with these countries," he said. Stepashin said ambassadors of the three Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, where support for Chechen separatists is strong, had been among those addressed. He also said President Boris Yeltsin had issued fresh instructions to the Russian team negotiating with the Chechen separatists reaffirming his opposition to granting full independence to Chechnya. Moscow agreed with the rebels in August to withdraw its troops, sent into quell Chechnya's independence bid in December 1994, and to defer a decision on Chechnya's future political status for five years. However the two sides later

gave conflicting interpretations of the peace deal. Rebel leaders have made it clear they see the deferral as a breathing space to allow Russia to come up with a face-saving way of letting Chechnya go independent. Moscow officials have in-

sisted that Chechnya can hope only for a large measure of autonomy, but not full independence. AFP adds, Chechen military commander Aslan Maskhadov insisted Sunday that the rebels had not given up their claims for independence despite a peace accord which has put off the thorny issue for five years. "You will not find a single Chechen to sign a document saying Chechnya is in the heart of Russia," he told Russian ORT state television from Nazran, in the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia.



The Taliban administration's acting foreign minister Mullah Mohammad Ghaus addresses a press conference at the foreign ministry in Kabul, on Sunday. Ghaus issued a warning to northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostam to cooperate or face attack, and not to seek the help of neighbouring countries. — AFP/UNB photo

Taliban seek modern diplomatic ties with world community

KABUL, Oct 7: The Islamic Taliban militia have called for the world community to establish modern diplomatic ties with Afghanistan, but appear to be imposing a "medieval" social system at home, analysts say, reports AFP. "The Taliban administration is desperately seeking the political recognition and financial support of the West, while at the same time they are trying to stick to the tenets of their policy and religion," a western based analyst here said. "They realise, perhaps for the first time, the importance of world opinion for their future as a government, which in some ways flies on the face of what they have always believed in and espoused," he added. He said the result was that while applying "medieval or eighth century," social restrictions and rules on the people, the Taliban were simultaneously making efforts to publicly dilute any position which westerners regard as abuses of civil liberties to woo world opinion. The comments came 10 days after the Islamic fighters overran the Afghan capital, Kabul, after a stunning sweep through eastern Afghanistan which radically changed the political and military balance in this war-torn country. The militia set up a six-man

interim council which began imposing the strict Taliban version of Islamic law in Kabul, as they have in the other two-thirds of the country which they have seized over the past two years. Reuter adds, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said prospects for peace in Afghanistan were poor without a broad-based government in Kabul, captured by the radical Islamic Taliban movement. "Any government, any new government in Afghanistan should be a broad-based government. No ethnic group can run that country without an active contribution from the other ethnic groups. And no religious group can run the country without a contribution from the others," Velayati said. "We are not very optimistic about the future of Afghanistan if this trend continues," he added. His comments were broadcast on Sunday night on Iranian television monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation. "So we have to think about a comprehensive peaceful settlement for Afghanistan. We do hope that the people of Afghanistan can decide about their own destiny without any foreign intervention," Velayati said. Very few of them can even read the Quran," she added. One analyst, however, pointed out that in most poor rural areas, life under the Taliban will result in few changes. "For the people, and in particular the women who live in the poor rural areas of Afghanistan, life under the Taliban will not lead to a massive change in their lifestyle," he said. "Few women ever had education, and television ownership is impossible for the majority with no electricity. That it is mainly Kabulis who are fleeing Taliban rule, reflects the irreconcilable divisions that years of war have brought the country."

Residents of Jalalabad welcome Taliban rule with Sharia law

JALALABAD, Afghanistan, Oct 7: Residents of the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad have welcomed Taliban rule, despite the imposition of strict Islamic law which has outraged the people of the capital Kabul, reports AFP. The punishments can be grisly and include a warning to barbers that they face the amputation of two fingers if they cut people's beards, according to local men who have visited barbers hoping for a trim. But many residents believe this to be an "acceptable price to pay" for increased security, in sharp contrast to the resentment prevailing in the capital, Kabul captured by the Taliban 10 days ago, three weeks after

they seized Jalalabad. "There is no doubt that it is far safer here since the Taliban seized the city," said Thomas Berhane, an aid worker running an artificial limb clinic supporting the area's many land mine victims. "What many Afghans want most is peace, and here the Taliban have delivered it," he added. Since seizing Jalalabad, the Taliban have ordered women to stop work and to wear "proper Islamic dress," and all schools have been closed. Privately owned guns are being collected, and details of punishments have been broadcast on the streets. Televisions and music have

also been banned, and buses are forced to exchange their collections of music cassettes for tapes of religious sermons. Most Taliban check posts are proudly decorated with strands of music and video tape destroyed by the militia. But despite the restrictions, most residents in this bustling town seem content with the change of government. While Jalalabad was relatively stable before the Taliban takeover, the massive influx of refugees from Kabul, and the enormous wealth of the former ruling council through smuggling led to increased violent crime and extortion in the city, residents said. "They take cassettes, but

there are no more thieves on the road," said bus driver Mohammed Jan who works on the Kabul-Jalalabad road, a journey from which stories of extortion, theft and beatings at Mujahideen checkpoints used to be common. "And I still have these," he added, pointing to his stock of Indian and Pakistani pop music he hides under his seat. But although the Taliban takeover on September 11 has so far pleased most Jalalabad residents, Afghans from more freshly conquered areas could not come to terms with the religious fighters' strict brand of Islamic law. "I left Kabul because a Taliban said I was not a good Muslim if I

did not have a beard. But I am a good Muslim without a beard," refugee Bashir Ahmed told AFP. My wife was also hit and told to wear a Burqa," he added, referring to the cone-shaped dress which covers the entire body and through which women can see only through a small piece of mesh over the eyes. "Unlike Jalalabad, Kabul is a liberal city, and Taliban rule will prove hard to swallow. Residents will not want to pay for peace with their freedom," a Western development worker said. "The Taliban are enforcing strict ethnic Pashtun law, Islam and the experience of years in impoverished refugee camps.

Off the Record

Love-crazed Lebanese Romeo

BEIRUT: A love-crazed Lebanese Romeo killed himself by swallowing poison 24 hours after his Juliet committed suicide, Lebanese television reported Sunday, reports AFP. In his suicide note, Najj Elias al-Ghazili said he loved his girlfriend more than life itself. "I am not a fan of hard rock or of drugs. I simply love her until death." An autopsy on his body, found in the mountainous area of Kasrawan northeast of Beirut, confirmed that Ghazili died of poisoning, the television, said. It did not say when the body was found or how his sweetheart, who was not identified, killed herself.

Heroic dog

WEST DENNIS, Massachusetts: Lexi, a 2-year-old golden retriever, saved three people from a burning house early Sunday when the animal roused one of the sleeping occupants by licking his face, reports AP. "If it weren't for him, they'd be in a lot different condition," said fire Capt Richard Farrenkopf. "There was a smoke detector downstairs, but no battery in it." The fire spread from a faulty, second-floor fireplace into the attic of the wood-frame house where the owner, Allan Gordon, friend Bob Colberg and a companion were staying for a fishing weekend. Lexi roused Colberg, who had fallen asleep on a couch by the fireplace, by licking his face. He woke to heavy smoke, but in time to get everyone out safely, said Gordon's wife, Terri, who was not at the house.

Mother indeed

LONDON: The women who this week lost eight babies she had insisted on trying to carry to term, does not regret her decision, and is planning more children, a tabloid reported Sunday, reports AP. Reporters from News of the World, which bought Mandy Allwood's story for an undisclosed sum, said she wept continuously as she described the pain of losing eight babies. "But she added, 'I gave them (the babies) my all and now I can rest with my conscience even though I know I will have to deal with the 'old you so brigade,' the News of the World said. "Just looking at them tells me I made the right decision. They are so beautiful," said Miss Allwood, who held each of the dead babies. The interview was held in Allwood's hospital room soon after she lost the last of her fetuses on Wednesday, and all eight corpses — wrapped in pink and blue shawls — still lay in a cot next to Allwood. Miss Allwood, 32, who became pregnant after taking fertility drugs, disregarded doctor's advice to abort some of the fetuses to give the others a better chance. She gave birth prematurely to the first three babies, all boys, on Monday, in the 19th week of pregnancy. She lost the remaining five, including two girls, on Wednesday. The newspaper said Miss Allwood and the babies' father, 37-year-old Paul Hudson will bury the eight babies in the same coffin this week. "I have promised Mandy that we may still have eight babies one day — but not all at once this time," the newspaper quoted Hudson as saying. He denied the couple pressed ahead with the pregnancy because of the offer of large sums from the News of the World. "If someone could bring back our babies, we would hand back every single penny we have ever received," he was quoted as saying. "I feel so empty and scared. I keep holding my stomach as the swelling goes down and it is a reminder that I am left with nothing," the newspaper quoted Miss Allwood as saying.