

International

Dostum's forces capture Bagram airbase, Qarabagh town

BRIEFLY

Clinton meets Hariri

Taking a brief rest from his re-election campaign, President Bill Clinton met Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri on Friday but sidestepped the question of giving Lebanon the military hardware it seeks. Reuter reports from Washington.

Clinton told reporters before the White House meeting that he would discuss Lebanon's request for military equipment including helicopters, armoured personnel carriers and communications gear and make the appropriate decision. Asked after the meeting what Clinton had said about the request, Hariri told reporters "I didn't get any answer about that."

Yeltsin greets Hashimoto

Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent greetings to Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on Friday on the 40th anniversary of restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries. AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin lauded the improvement in relations over the past four decades. "Certainly the way toward each other was not simple," said his message, which was carried by the ITAR-Tass news agency. "The load of the past and the Cold War atmosphere put an imprint on the search for understanding."

Gunmen kill 9 in Philippines

Armed men barged into a house in a remote southern village and shot to death nine persons, including two babies, police and survivors said yesterday. AFP reports from Cotabato.

Three other people were injured in the attack which took place before dawn Friday in the rice farming village of Dado, north Cotabato province, in what police said could be the result of land dispute. A police report identified the dead as members of two Muslim families living in the house.

Menem sues former minister

President Carlos Menem filed a slander suit Friday against a former interior minister who accused him of having ties to organised crime. AP reports from Buenos Aires.

Gustavo Beliz, in comments published this week by the left-leaning Buenos Aires newspaper Pagina 12, said Menem was the head of a "mafia group" which he said operates freely in the country. Pagina 12 cited Beliz, who also worked in the past as Menem's speech writer, as saying the president "doesn't believe in the president's pledges to crack down on alleged organised crime and corruption within the government. Menem also will sue Pagina 12, his lawyer, Ricardo Klass said.

5 cops jailed in China

Five police officers in China's Central Sichuan province have been arrested or jailed for various abuses of power, the official China daily reported yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

One Public Security Bureau (PSB) officer in Renshou county Li Bosong, was taken into custody after beating a thief suspect to death. It said, adding that the suspect was later found to be innocent. Two other PSB officers in the same county have been arrested for taking bribes from vehicles theft suspects, the paper said.

School bus mishap claims 6 in Brazil

A school bus carrying a group of eighth graders on a class trip ran off a cliff in southern Brazil Friday killing six people and injuring 36, police said. AP reports from Rio de Janeiro.

The driver, a professor and four students died in the accident. Another 10 students are in critical condition. The driver apparently lost control at a curve and ran off the road.

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan, Oct 19: Ousted government forces backed by artillery commanded by Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum captured Bagram airbase, Bagram junction and the town of Qarabagh north of Kabul overnight, witnesses said, reports Reuter.

Reporters who travelled to the areas about 60 km (40 miles) north of the capital found that Taliban forces had vacated all three places and that troops and tanks commanded by former military chief Ahmad Shah Masood were in firm control.

Sources from the ousted government had announced that the airbase was captured after a fierce artillery barrage by Masood and Dostum forces at about 8 pm local time on Friday.

Soldiers at the junction said it fell a short-time later and that Qarabagh had been taken early this morning.

Earlier report says, the ousted Afghan government said it captured the rest of the Bagram military airbase north of Kabul yesterday in a joint attack with its new found ethnic Uzbek allies from northern Afghanistan.

"Now we have control of all of the airport at Bagram, the main part of the Taliban force has retreated along the new road back towards Kabul," a senior official at the headquarters of government military commander Ahmad Shah Masood told reporters.

Masood's men previously controlled about half the airbase, 60 km north of Kabul, with the Taliban Islamic militia, which seized the Afghan capital last month, holding the other half.

The official, Mirahbuddin Astana, said Masood's men fought side-by-side with fighters from Uzbek military commander Abdul Rashid Dostum's forces, using tanks, artillery and mortars.

"They were operating together in mixed units. They attacked from the north and northeast," he said.

Reporters say an intensive hour-long barrage against Taliban forces holding the important Bagram road junction nearby, "we don't know about the junction. We have been firing heavy weapons into that area and we have just sent our infantry in to see if the Taliban are still there," Astana said.

Xinhua says, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said yesterday in Hamburg that he opposed sending UN peacekeeping troops to Afghanistan.

The visiting secretary general said that the Afghan conflict "must be settled through diplomatic channels" and the UN could not afford to send blue helmets to Afghanistan at the present time.

He said that as long as all factions concerned in Afghanistan agreed, a peaceful settlement could always be possible.

The UN must concentrate itself on devoting to humanitarian aid, he added.

A UN special envoy has been mediating among the fighting factions in Afghanistan.

Boutros-Ghali arrived in Germany on Wednesday for a four-day visit to this country. He presided over a swear-in ceremony of 21 Judges for a World Maritime Tribunal in the German port of Hamburg yesterday.

Powerful Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum on Thursday sent a dozen tanks and hundreds of troops to frontlines where the Taliban Islamic militia confronts the army of the government it ousted from the Afghan capital three weeks ago.

Afghan watchers regard Dostum as heading perhaps the most powerful single fighting force in Afghanistan. His troops deployed on the plains without joining he fighting.

overhaul of Japan's bureaucracy.

Naoto Kan, 50: Health minister and co-leader of the Democratic Party, a new liberal-leaning group. A patent lawyer and consumer activist, his bureaucracy-busting credentials are sterling. He exposed the Health Ministry's failure to prevent HIV-tainted blood products from infecting thousands of hemophiliacs. But his party consists largely of reform-resistant ex-Socialists. He says he won't take a central role in the new government.

Takako Doi, 67: Leader of the Socialist Party from 1986 to 1991, she returned to her old post last month — in the renamed Social Democratic Party. The party reversed its old leftist policies — such as opposition to the US-Japan security alliance — in 1994, but now Doi seems to be returning to them. The party still controls a substantial share of the upper house. That could make Doi a key figure in the next government.

Chirac in Damascus

DAMASCUS, Oct 19: French President Jacques Chirac arrived here today at the start of a six-day tour of the Middle East aimed at carving out a greater role for French diplomacy in the region, reports AP.

Chirac, who was welcomed at Damascus airport by Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad, is the first French head of state to visit Syria in 12 years.

He will hold talks with Assad on the troubled Arab-Israeli peace process during his three-day stop, before travelling on to Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt.



An Afghan girl (L) helps her brother by collecting bricks from the rubble for the construction of a small shop at Kar Tesi, south Kabul, in Afghanistan on Friday. The Kar Tesi area has been completely destroyed due to heavy fighting between the Afghan factions. — AFP/UNB photo

An int'l confce complex to be used as court to try Rao

NEW DELHI, India, Oct 19: An international conference complex will be used as a court to try former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao in cases of forgery and cheating, reports AP.

Ryutaro Hashimoto, 59: Prime minister and head of the ruling coalition's dominant Liberal Democratic Party. Known as a tough, relatively forthright leader, he dined with US Trade Representative Mickey Kantor at auto trade talks in June 1995 and made the US side back down from demands for a guaranteed share of Japan's car market. Long an ally of Japan's powerful bureaucracy, he now says he wants to cut the number of ministries in half, reports AP.

Ichiro Ozawa, 54: Head of the main opposition New Frontier Party. A former Liberal Democratic kingpin, he combines calls for radical reform of Japan's economy and political system with old-style big-money campaign tactics. US officials admire his calls for an

Some key players in Japan's election race

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LTTE's latest innovation—suicide boats

COLOMBO, Oct 19: After successfully experimenting with the deadly human suicide bombers, which ultimately turned out to be its biggest striking weapon in the guerrilla war against the Sri Lankan army, LTTE reportedly has come out with yet another chilling innovation, the suicide boats, reports PTI.

The LTTE's latest addition to its armoury has come to light with the capture of an engine powered boat with its nose packed with explosive from the Kollupitiya area in the city yesterday, soon police launched search operations to locate more such boats feared to have been hidden around the city.

Police sources said the boats used by the LTTE were small and narrow. The explosives charges were fixed right in the tip of the nose. Driven by a high speed petrol engine they ram into naval vessels with considerable speed and explode causing a lot of devastation.

Govt bows to Republican pressure Probe into contributions to party fund ordered

WASHINGTON, Oct 19: US President Bill Clinton seeking to defuse a potentially damaging row over campaign funding, bowed to Republican pressure Friday to open an investigation into Asian-linked contributions to the Democratic Party, reports AP.

Speaking at the White House, Clinton said his Chief of Staff Leon Panetta had already ordered the Democratic National committee (DNC) to investigate a number of allegations concerning millions of dollars in funding for the party.

Panetta has asked the DNC to review all the contributions to make sure they were appropriate. Clinton told journalists as he opened a meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri.

Earlier Friday, vitriolic Bob Dole, the 73-year-old Republican challenger to Clinton in the November 5 presidential election, demanded that Clinton come clean on allegations of funding irregularities.

On the stump in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Dole jumped on questionable contributions especially those linked to Indonesia and South Korea.

"Every day we have a new scandal involving the foreign corruption of America he said referring to the latest row over a 140,000 dollar Democratic fund-raiser at a Buddhist temple owned by a Taiwanese sect in California in April.

"Our elections are not for sale to some foreign influence," he said.

"Come on Mr President, come clean Mr President. This is really unbelievable," he added.

Tax-exempt religious organisations like temples are generally prohibited from holding political fund-raisers.

Off the Record

Ex-husband of Sarah Netanyahu drops plan to write kiss-and-tell book

JERUSALEM: Sarah Netanyahu's first husband has dropped plans to write a kiss-and-tell book about their failed marriage, a friend said Thursday, reports AP.

The ex-husband, Doron Neuberger, told members of Kibbutz Gaash, the communal farm where he lives, that he had changed his mind and would not write the book, kibbutz secretary Danny Kait said.

Israel radio said Neuberger announced the decision after being told he could not stay in the kibbutz if he wrote about his seven years of marriage to Mrs. Netanyahu, now wife of Israel's prime minister.

Kait denied Thursday that Neuberger was given an ultimatum.

Neuberger, 37, never discussed his book plans in public, but Israeli media had reported that he decided to write the memoir because he was "horrified" at reports suggesting his former wife had a say in sensitive government affairs.

Liberian factions deploying child soldiers to fight rivals: Ghali

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 19: More than 15,000 children are being deployed in combat by rival factions in war-torn Liberia and many are sexually abused, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Friday, reports AP.

In a report to the UN Security Council, the UN chief said: "The children, who are under the age of 17, both male and female are compelled to witness, and sometimes commit human rights atrocities. They are also subjected to sexual and drug abuse."

He said the number of child soldiers in the West African country was estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000.

He said that according to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), which was addressing the problem of child soldiers in Liberia, all the factions had recruited and deployed children for direct combat, often under duress and sometimes through peer pressure or manipulation.



Former US Secretary of State Jim Baker (L), former Ecuadoran President Osvaldo Hurtado and former US president Jimmy Carter (R) confer on Friday during a press conference at the Intercontinental Hotel in Managua, Nicaragua. The three former officials are in Nicaragua along with 32 other international delegates of the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government to assist in monitoring Nicaragua's October 20 general elections. — AFP/UNB photo

Fida Hussain unlikely to return home

MUMBAI, Oct 19: Renowned artist, MF Hussain, who is in the centre of a controversy over his alleged nude paintings of Indian goddesses, is unlikely to return home in the near future, reports PTI.

"My father who is in London will soon travel to New York and has no immediate plans to return home", Shafaat Hussain, son of the painter, told PTI during a demonstration by city-based artists this evening to condemn the burning of several Hussain works at a gallery in Ahmedabad by Bajrang Dal activities.

The demonstration held in front of Jehangir Art Gallery amidst heavy police protection, was challenged by an elderly citizen who claimed to be a common man representing thousands of people whose religious sentiments were hurt by the Hussain paintings. "We have not taken objection to paintings portraying common people and dancing oparas in the nude. But when it concerns goddesses the connotations are different, he observed.

Top model after 3 days in coma leaves hospital

SAO PAULO, Oct 19: Claudia Liz, a Brazilian actress and top model who slipped into a coma caused by complications from an operation to remove fat from her abdomen, went home Friday, Sao Paulo's Albert Einstein Hospital said, reports AP.

The 27-year-old Liz was being anesthetised at the Sante Clinic for a liposuction procedure on Oct. 10 when she suffered from cerebral hypoxia — a reduction of oxygen to the brain.

She was rushed to the Albert Einstein hospital, considered one of the best in South America, and placed in the intensive care unit.

She came out of the coma last Saturday.

Liz started her career at 15 and has worked as a model in Brazil, Italy, Spain, Paris, New York and Japan. In the 1990s she worked as an actress, appearing in TV ads and locally produced soap operas and films.

Seshan wonders why Miss World event being made an issue

COIMBATORE, Oct 19: The Chief Election Commissioner, TN Seshan, today disagreed with the din and bustle being raised over the conduct of "Miss World" event at Bangalore in November and wondered why it was being made such an issue, reports PTI.

"Why are you so concerned about it if anyone likes it, let them take part, if someone does not like it, let them keep away from it," he said, replying to a question on the campaign against the mega event raised by a girl during an open session at a youth festival here.

"What bothers you if one who sees it derives pleasure," he asked the questioner.

When the girl objected to women being used as "toys of passion," he said "Go not allow such things."

Firing of Lebed mirrors start of Yeltsin's rocky rise to power

MOSCOW, Oct 19: A booming-voiced maverick crusades for a crackdown on corruption. His outspokenness gets him fired by the Kremlin leader who recruited him. Emerging as a public darling and political martyr, he supplants his rival as president, reports AP.

The original story was that of Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev. But a new version is being played out now, in which Alexander Lebed is the up-and-comer threatening Yeltsin's hold on power.

Nine years after the start of the political feud that ignited Yeltsin's tumultuous rise to power, Russian history may be repeating itself.

Lebed declared immediately after his sacking as the ailing Yeltsin's security chief Thursday that he was ready to campaign openly for "possible presidential elections in the near future."

The 46-year-old Lebed could do worse than to emulate Yeltsin, who rebounded from Kremlin ousting in 1987 to popular ruler four years later.

Like Lebed, the barrel-chested Yeltsin came to Moscow as a no-nonsense "muzhik," or man of the people — a decisive politician who loved action and crises, hated bureaucracy and liked to railate caucuses.

And, as in the rocky four-

month marriage of political convenience between Yeltsin and Lebed, the younger Yeltsin lost his job in a personality clash when he challenged authority one time too many.

The blowup that ultimately cost Yeltsin his posts on the Politburo and as Communist Party boss in Moscow came after a party plenum on October 21, 1987, in which he dared to assail the leadership for impeding perestroika.

Top party official Anatoly Lukyanov told Gorbachev that he had created a monster — a prediction that came all too true for the embattled Soviet ruler.

Iraq must account for 85 missiles, says Ekeus

MANAMA, Oct 19: Iraq must account for some 85 long-range missiles it claims it has destroyed, the top UN weapons inspector said Friday, reports AP.

Rolf Ekeus spoke in Bahrain, the regional headquarters for his inspectors, during a stopover on his way to Baghdad, where he will meet with Iraqi officials Saturday.

Ekeus, a Swedish diplomat, said the aim of his mission was to discuss a recent UN report in which he said Iraq may still be hiding information about its weapons programme.

In a briefing to the Security Council, Ekeus said Iraq could still be holding up to 85 long-range missiles.



A Cuban woman with her mother and son walk along the highway to the city of Matanzas in northern Cuba with some of their belonging looking for refuge from Hurricane Lili one Friday. Lili, with high winds and heavy rains, ran across the Matanzas province destroying some 70 homes and battering crops. No casualties have been reported. — AFP/UNB photo

Hectic lobbying for votes to elect five UNSC temporary members

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 19: With ethnic food and offers of trips to far-off countries, diplomats are lobbying for votes as the General Assembly prepares to elect five temporary members to the UN Security Council, reports AP.

The 185-member assembly will select five countries Monday to two-year terms on the council, which is effectively the UN board of directors. The new members will assume their seats January 1.

Membership on the 15-nation council gives countries the opportunity to shape and influence international policies along with the five permanent members: the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France.

The council has the exclusive right to approve legally binding resolutions, impose sanctions on errant states and dispatch peacekeepers to trouble spots.

Even though the five permanent members have exclusive veto power, council membership means that countries no matter how small and weak are consulted by the heavyweight states on major international issues.

So when the opportunity arises, countries pull out the stops to influence others to support their candidacy.

Non-permanent seats are set aside for the various regions of the world in order to make the council more representative.

The Africans have agreed to nominate Kenya as their representative to replace Botswana.

But the other four seats, which will become vacant December 31, are being contested.

Costa Rica and Bolivia are competing for the Latin American seat. Portugal, Australia and Sweden are seeking the two

seats set aside for Europe and "others": Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The winners will succeed Germany and Italy. Japan and India are fighting for the seat to be vacated by Indonesia.

Campaigning for council seats may not involve placards, TV ads and stump speeches. But it is no less intense.

UN diplomats say it is no coincidence that the main UN restaurant is featuring a Portuguese food festival.

Others are making sure they pay the UN back dues to be able to vote, such as the former Portuguese colony of Sao Tome and Principe. The island nation paid enough of its arrears to be able to vote, presumably for Portugal, a few days before the election.

In recent months, Japan has invited diplomats and foreign ministers from Asian and African countries to visit

Tokyo for "goodwill" visits and to discuss development projects.

Australia is banking on the prestige gained by successfully promoting the recently approved global nuclear test ban treaty to promote its candidacy. India lost points by vigorously opposing the treaty despite overwhelming international support.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer visited the United Nations for the treaty signing last month and made the rounds of receptions and meetings to promote Canberra's candidacy.

Sweden enjoys a favorable image among Third World countries. But UN diplomats believe its chances may have suffered because Swedish Prime Minister Goeran Persson canceled a planned visit to the United Nations last month because of an illness.

Peace envoys meet defiant Burundian president

BUJUMBURA, Burundi, Oct 19: Burundi's Tutsi-led military ruler told peace envoys on Friday that he will not negotiate with Hutu rebels until neighbouring countries lift economic sanctions, reports AP.

The delegation has been given a very strong statement from President Pierre Buyoya to give to the leaders of neighbouring countries, said Burundian Foreign Minister Luc Rukingama.

The Burundian government is asking neighbouring countries to allow the Burundian government the means of dialogue with the rebels by lifting sanctions," Rukingama said.

Regional leaders imposed the trade and transportation blockade within a week of the military coup on July 25 to force Buyoya to restore democratic rule and to make peace with Hutu rebels.

The sanctions have cost the economy of the tiny, landlocked country more than 162 dollars million.

The delegation, which was in Bujumbura for just five hours, made no comment on the sanctions.

Political and ethnic violence between minority Tutsis and majority Hutus claimed more than 150,000 lives since 1993.

The delegation of foreign officials, formed October 12 at a summit of African leaders, arrived Friday after initially cancelling the trip because Buyoya reneged on a promise to open unconditional talks with Hutu rebels.

Buyoya, a Tutsi and a retired army major, did not soften his message in a meeting with the delegation.

"We had very good discussions, very encouraging discussions. We think there will be movement forward," said Tanzanian Foreign Minister Jakaya Kikwete, who led the delegation.

The group cancelled meetings with Hutu Speaker of the National Assembly Leonce Ngendakumana and other politicians but did not say why.