

BRIEFLY



Some 3,500 bikers gather outside the Justice Palace after a protest ride from La Louviere (Chareleroi) to Brussels in support of the parents of the Belgian paedophile Marc Dutroux victims Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

Newsman killed in Colombia: A Colombian journalist was killed by gunmen as he returned home from an evening with friends, the radio station he worked at said, AP reports from Bogota.

Two gunmen on a motorcycle shot Norway Diaz Cardona on Friday night outside his home in Girardot, 60 miles (95 kilometres) southwest of the capital, Bogota, said Patricia Gomez, an editor at Todelar radio, where Diaz worked. The motive for the attack was not clear and authorities had no suspects. Gomez said Saturday the station has no idea who might have wanted to kill Diaz, who hosted a show about local politics.

Plane missing in Peru: The Peruvian air force hunted on Saturday for a light plane used by US oil company Anadarko Petroleum Corp that has been missing since Friday with one US and two Canadian men aboard. Reuter reports from Lima.

An air force plane and helicopter were searching for the twin-engine Cessna G-404 in the district of San Roman near the town of Pucallpa in the Amazon jungle close to Peru's border with Brazil. "This is where we think it disappeared, but there is no sign of anything yet," air force spokesman Oscar Salvador said.

Plane hijacker held in Indonesia: An Indonesian military officer was arrested for trying to hijack a small commercial aircraft to neighbouring Papua New Guinea, a report said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Sergeant Major Kamudi was arrested at Nabire airport in the easternmost province of Irian Jaya after the attempted hijacking on Thursday, the Republika daily said, quoting a military spokesman. The reason for the attempted hijack was not known but the spokesman said Kamudi was "under heavy stress."

Flash floods kill 34 in India: At least 34 people were killed and thousands left homeless in southern India after heavy rains triggered flash floods, newspapers reported yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Twenty-four of the deaths took place in the worst-hit coastal state of Andhra Pradesh, where army helicopters dropped food packets to those marooned in flooded villages, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. Rail and road transport was seriously affected across both Andhra Pradesh and in the adjoining state of Tamil Nadu, where at least 10 people died. Most victims died by drowning.

Russian soldier killed in Dushanbe: A Russian officer serving on the Tajik-Afghan border was killed in an outlying region of the Tajik capital, the Interior Ministry said yesterday. AFP reports from Dushanbe.

The soldier, 47-year-old Nikolai Puchik, was killed Saturday evening at about 8:00 pm as he returned home from work. Police say that Puchik, who was dressed in his uniform, was shot in the head with a Makarov pistol, the Russian service weapon. Puchik is the second Russian soldier to be killed in Dushanbe over the past three days.

19 to face trial in Egypt: The government will try 19 Muslims on charges of killing a policeman, attacking tourists and trying to bomb two downtown Cairo cinemas, police said Saturday. AP reports from Cairo.

The 17 men and two teen-agers are suspected of belonging to al-Gamaa al-Islamiya — the Islamic Group — which has claimed responsibility for attacks aimed at replacing Egypt's secular government with their version of strict Islamic rule. They are also charged with attempting to overthrow the government, belonging to an illegal group and illegal possession of weapons. Prosecutors have not said what sentence they will seek.



Ecuadoran President Abdala Bucaram (L) sings a song to Lorena Bobbitt (R) at a baptism party for the daughter of Silvana and Gustavo Pacheco in Guayaquil, Ecuador on Saturday. Lorena Bobbitt gained notoriety for cutting off her husband John Wayne Bobbitt's penis in a domestic dispute in June 1993. Bucaram and Bobbitt were named god parents of Pacheco's daughter. — AFP/UNB photo

International

Several rockets hit Afghan capital

Masood forces reach within 6 km of Kabul city

JABAL OS-SARAJ, Oct 20: Troops of the ousted Afghan government have advanced to within six km (four miles) of the city limits of Kabul, a spokesman for the former government said today, reports Reuter.

"We are six kilometres from Kabul on the old road (from the Salang Pass)," spokesman Mirabbuddin Astana told reporters.

He said government troops were still 30 km (18 miles) out on the new road which leads north out of the city but had captured important high ground along that road and the way was clear for them to advance.

He said the military commander of the former government forces, Ahmad Shah Masood, had gone forward from Jabal Os-Saraj to inspect the new front-line positions.

No independent confirmation of the advance was immediately available.

AP says, in wresting control of an air base from Taliban fighters, government troops

have put themselves within striking distance of the capital they lost last month.

The capture of the strategic Baghram air base, centered in a vast plain 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Kabul, was the former government's most significant victory since the Taliban chased its troops out of Kabul.

Taliban fighter jets screamed in low over the air field Saturday afternoon, dropping bombs that witnesses said landed near surrounding homes, killing several civilians.

Radio Kabul said the Taliban sent reinforcements to the front line. The broadcast said 500 fresh troops arrived in the capital and were sent northward.

At the air base, Masood's soldiers dug in, positioning anti-aircraft artillery and other heavy weapons. Several tanks and armoured personnel carriers rumbled into the airport.

The runways were lined with the charred hulks of fighter jets

and gunships. The dead bodies of two Taliban soldiers lay on the tarmac where they fell.

Soldiers at the air base said a helicopter gunship with Taliban fighters on board was shot down as it tried to take off from the besieged air base.

They said Taliban soldiers had ordered them to evacuate their homes. They packed what they could carry into bags and walked throughout the night to reach the capital.

On the outskirts of Kabul, reporters trying to reach Baghram were stopped at checkpoints manned by Taliban soldiers who appeared nervous.

The loss of Baghram is a major blow for the Taliban.

An AFP reports says, forces loyal to former Afghan defence minister Ahmed Shah Masood clashed today with Taliban troops only 25 kilometers north of Kabul and vowed to retake the capital they lost late last month.

"It was an easy clash and tomorrow we will take Kabul if the Taliban have not left the

city," said Moulana Hassakheid, a commander with the former government's forces.

He said 40 'aliban troops and just one of Masood's fighters had died in the fighting.

An AFP correspondent who witnessed the fighting in this village said artillery combat took place on the road linking Kabul and northern Afghanistan. The sound of cannons, mortar and rocket launchers could be heard amid intermittent machine gun fire.

Trucks ferrying troops could be seen playing the road from Jabul-Saraj, where Masood has established a base, 77 kilometres from Kabul.

Former government troops said Masood had visited the front line today and asked his men to be 'ready to fight the Taliban if they do not leave Kabul.'

Masood forces Saturday pushed south of the key Baghram military airbase, now under their control.

The Taliban, who began their quest to establish an Islamic regime in Afghanistan

two years ago, captured Kabul on September 27 and now control most of the country. But the former government troops have been mounting a strong fight-back during the past two weeks.

Several rockets hit Kabul today as the forces of ousted government military chief Ahmad Shah Masood neared the Afghan capital, witnesses said.

It was not immediately clear where the rockets landed or what damage or casualties they caused.

The rockets were the first to hit Kabul since the purist Islamic Taliban militia pushed Masood out of the capital three weeks ago.

Masood, advancing on the city after launching a major counter-attack with the backing of northern Uzbek chief Abdul Rashid Dostum was within 6 km (4 miles) of the city this morning.

Reporters with his advance units said they had taken the village of Hussein Kot and were being hit by Taliban mortar, artillery and rocket fire.

Voting ends in Japan amid low turnout

TOKYO, Oct 20: Polls closed in Japan's general election today amid signs of a record low turnout, officials said, reports AP.

Two hours before polling ended at 6:00 pm (0900 GMT), turnout was just 46.81 per cent, down 8.47 percentage points from the first nine hours in the last election in 1993 when turnout fell to an all-time low of 67.26 per cent.

Many experts have said the number taking part in Sunday's election would be even worse than 1993.

AP adds, Japanese turned out to vote Sunday in an election dominated by politicians' calls to take power away from bureaucrats — and by voters' skepticism that any of them will be able to pull it off.

Three hours after polls had opened, turnout was a meagre 14.89 per cent.

That was 2.27 percentage points lower than it had been at the same point in the last election, according to national broadcaster NHK.

The conservative Liberal Democratic Party of Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto was favoured to succeed in the ballot for the powerful lower house of Parliament. The prime minister tried to portray his party as a force for change, promising to reform a government structure that has long given bureaucrats more power than elected officials.

Chirac for European co-sponsorship of ME peace
Assad's 'no' to peace with Israel without return of Golan Heights

DAMASCUS, Oct 20: Questioning Israel's commitment to peace, President Hafez Assad said he wasn't interested in a settlement with the Jewish state that did not include the return of the Golan Heights, reports AP.

Speaking at a state banquet Saturday night in honour of visiting French President Jacques Chirac, Assad said:

"What is the interest of Syria and the Arab parties in a peace that does not restore the land and rights to their owners?"

The Golan Heights were captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war. Syria, in five years of on-and-off peace talks with Israel, has insisted it should have the strategic plateau back. Israel says the plateau is vital to its security.

Talks between the two sides were suspended when suicide bombings in Israel killed scores of people in February and March.

Assad, in his banquet speech, accused the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ben-

jamin Netanyahu of taking a "rejectionist" position on Middle East peace efforts.

"The current Israeli government is maneuvering ... it is talking about peace, but what is the peace it is talking about when it publicly announces that it will not withdraw from the Golan Heights ...," said the Syrian leader.

He also repeated calls for a bigger European role in the search for peace in the region, saying he saw no contradiction between such a role and the one played by the United States.

Reuter adds: Israel rejected today a demand by French President Jacques Chirac that Europe co-sponsor Middle East peace negotiations.

"A mediator entering into the conflict — or into the negotiations — is inconceivable," Foreign Minister David Levy told Israel Radio. "I told President Chirac the same thing when I visited France."

Meanwhile, in a dinner speech in Damascus at the start

of a six-day Middle East tour, Chirac told Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad: "Today Mr. President, we must work together to get the peace process back on track and let it succeed."

"France and Europe must stand by the parties as sources of friendship and proposals, and not as mere partners for reconstruction. It is time for Europe to co-sponsor this process as well, he said."

Assad supported him accusing Israel's hardline government of completely undermining the peace process and saying there was no contradiction between a European role and US peace efforts.

Chirac did not once mention the United States, the dominant power in the region. But he said there was a need to improve the framework and method of the US-brokered negotiations, reduced to an ill-tempered crawl by Israel's new hardline government.

"The peace process is in danger," he declared.



Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad (R) gives an Omayyah National Medal to French President Jacques Chirac in the presidential palace in Damascus Saturday. Chirac, given a hero's welcome in Syria. — AFP/UNB photo

Dole brands Democrats as 'artist of money laundering'

DENVER, Oct 20: Bob Dole intensified his criticism of President Clinton's ethics on Friday, accusing him of Watergate-style "abuse of power" and branding the Democrats as artists of money laundering, reports AP.

"Come clean, Mr President," the Republican challenger said in a day of campaign rallies in three states.

Trailing Clinton in every region of the country with only 18 days left before the November 5 election, Dole pressed his search for a late-hour political miracle.

He stepped up the effort, begun five days ago, to the Clinton to questionable campaign contributions to Democrats from Asian business interests.

The Clinton camp responded Friday by accusing Dole of hypocrisy and asserting that Dole has accepted "the same kind of money" as the Democrats from foreigners with US residence.

Clinton advisers, confident of victory, were meeting over the weekend to craft an endgame boosting emphasis on traditionally Republican states and helping Democrats in close Congressional races.

Some White House aides fret-

ted about the prospect of low turnout in Democratic strongholds and were reluctant to see Clinton spend too much time away from his core states.

But the president hoped to restore Democratic control of Congress to help him achieve legislative goals in a second term — and make it easier to contain any Republican-demanded investigations of his administration.

"They take money-laundering to an art form in this administration," Dole said Friday in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "Here's a president who often talks about a bridge to the future, but more often it seems it's a bridge to wealthy political donors."

Later, addressing supporters in a school auditorium in Denver, Dole said, "We will not sell access to the White House ... It's time to blow the whistle."

Clinton supporters fired back citing three separate investigations of allegation of improper donations to Dole's campaign this year.

In one case, a Massachusetts businessman agreed to pay a 6 million dollar fine for illegally reimbursing employees for contributions to Dole. In the others, companies in Pennsylvania

and Nevada are being investigated to determine if officials there also gave employees money and told them to contribute it to Dole. Dole and senior aides have denied any knowledge of improper contributions.

Bob Dole likes to give these speeches but maybe he ought to be more worried about cleaning up his own campaign," said Clinton campaign spokesman Joe Lockhart.

Dole campaigned in two Western states where Clinton holds comfortable leads, New Mexico and Colorado, and headed later Friday for one of his few strongholds, his home state of Kansas, to campaign in Wichita for the Republican Congressman running for the Senate seat Dole resigned in June, Sam Brownback.

In the same breath, Dole tried to portray Clinton as both a George McGovern liberal and a Richard Nixon figure, evoking images of money-laundering and other scandalous activity that took place in the Watergate affair that brought Nixon's resignation in 1974.

Every day we have a new scandal involving the foreign corruption of America," Dole said.

KDP making progress in new offensive, retakes Ranay

ARBIL, Iraq, Oct 20: An Iraqi Kurdish faction that allied itself with Baghdad in late August to try to drive a rival Kurdish group out of northern Iraq said it was making progress in a new offensive, reports Reuter.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) said its fighters had retaken the town of Ranay and would move south to capture Sulaimaniya, the stronghold of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) near the Iranian border.

The KDP after losing some ground earlier, appears now to be regaining the initiative. PUK claims that Iraqi forces have again intervened to assist its adversary were denied by the group and could not be confirmed.

"We took the town of Ranay early this morning, we went to Ranay along three routes ... flushing the PUK out as we went," said Zaid Ali, a local KDP commander, on Saturday.

Once we clean up our Iranian border we will move our forces towards Sulaimaniya, he told Reuters in Arbil, one time seat of a joint PUK-KDP administration that collapsed in 1994 when fighting broke out between the two groups.

The KDP took control of Ar-

bil last month with the help from Baghdad's forces and forced the PUK to abandon Sulaimaniya. But the PUK struck back this month, winning back Sulaimaniya and other towns on the route to Arbil.

An official at KDP headquarters in the town of Salahuddin said the capture of Ranay was part of a strategy to assault a series of positions near the Iranian border to cut off the PUK from what the KDP says are its Iranian allies.

Russian defence minister admits trouble in army

MOSCOW, Oct 20: Russian Defence Minister Igor Rodionov admitted on Saturday the financially-strapped armed forces were in trouble but attacked critics who have suggested some units might mutiny, reports Reuter.

Although he did not mention anyone by name, it seemed clear Rodionov's words were aimed at former security supremo Alexander Lebed, who on Thursday said problems in the military would lead to a

KDP leader Massoud Barzani was on his way to Ranay and fighters were moving their heavy weapons towards the town.

The KDP officials said its forces were attacking the PUK on two other fronts — at Chuman close to the border with Iran and the towns of Khalakan and Kani Watan near the Oukan Oam, which supplies power to most of the area round Arbil.

Russian defence minister admits trouble in army

"hot autumn." "The situation in the armed forces is rather complicated, first of all because of lack of normal financing. But regardless of this, the situation is fully under control and manageable," Rodionov told Russian television.

He called on the country's politicians to pull together to preserve order in the armed forces and criticised those who he said were speaking out of turn.

Canadian bid to integrate Western medicine with Asian therapies

VANCOUVER, British Columbia, Oct 20: To the dismay of some of its doctors, the biggest hospital in this Pacific-oriented province is plunging into an ambitious project: Integrating Western medicine with the traditional therapies of Asia, reports AP.

Acupuncture for headaches, herbal remedies for cancer pain, Chinese-style massage for Parkinson's disease sufferers. These will be among treatments provided and scrutinised at the Tzu Chi Institute for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, which opens Monday at Vancouver Hospital.

The popularity of such treatments is rising across North America, but major hospitals have been reluctant to put their prestige and resources on the line on behalf of alternative medicine.

However, in Vancouver — where nearly one-third of the population is of Asian descent — the initiative made sense to the professionals running the hospital complex.

"The mainstream health care system can't hide in a hole and pretend these alternatives don't exist," said Vancouver Hospital's president, Murray Martin. "Alternative medicine is everywhere."

He said the institute will be a pioneer in two respects — offering a variety of traditional healers work space at a major Western-style hospital and subjecting their work to rigorous, Western-style research to verify or disprove its value.

The institute was conceived by a prominent Vancouver-based pediatrician of Chinese descent, Dr. Wah Jun Tze. His medical training is entirely Western, including postgraduate work at Harvard Medical School, but he became fascinated by traditional Chinese medicine during more than 60 trips there since 1985.

"There are 1.2 billion people with very limited resources, and yet they are able to maintain good health and good life expectancy, due in part to traditional medicine," Tze said.

"There are a lot of things we need to explore. Even though some practices are 2,000 years old, they've never been accepted by the Western world because of lack of proper scientific evaluation."

Tze says he understands why a vocal minority of Vancouver Hospital's doctors opposes the institute.

"Complementary medicine has a bad name," Tze said. "It's not regulated; there's no quality control. Many practitioners have no proper education, and the good ones are mixed with some snake-oil salesmen."

It wasn't just the issue of quackery that roused opposition. Many doctors felt an institute focusing on unproven therapies was a misplaced priority in an era where funds for any new health project are tight.

But after sometimes bitter debate, a majority of the hospital's doctors and nurses gave approval to the institute, with the understanding that it would strive to set standards for alternative therapies.

46000 Burundian refugees flee violence in Zaire

BUJUMBURA, Burundi, Oct 20: More than 46,000 refugees have fled their camps in eastern Zaire because of a flare-up in fighting between Zairian troops and an ethnic Tutsi group, reports AP.

The Zairian army and the Tutsi group, known as Banyamulenge, clashed Saturday near the Luvungi refugee camp, 30 miles (50 kilometres) north of Uvira, Zaire, said Paul Stromberg, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

No details or independent confirmation of the fighting were available.

Zairian troops have told foreign aid workers to stay away from the refugee camps because of continuing violence, Stromberg said.

These incidents are proliferating and making the whole area inaccessible, so we cannot get up there to gather information," Stromberg said. "Our staff are not leaving their homes because there are (anti-Banyamulenge) demonstrations going on in town. They have heard some gunfire."

Ethnic tensions between minority Tutsis and majority Hutus have risen in eastern Zaire as more than 1.5 million Rwandan and Burundian refugees, mostly Hutus, fled to the region to escape ethnic fighting in their countries.

The Banyamulenge, immigrated to eastern Zaire from Rwanda beginning in the 18th century. The Zairian government has attempted to revoke their citizenship and recently ordered 250,000 to leave, prompting some of the Banyamulenge to take up arms.

The latest clashes have centered around three refugee camps north of Uvira. The 46,000 refugees from two of those camps have fled into the countryside, Stromberg said.

Burundian residents near the border with Zaire say the Tutsi-dominated armies of Rwanda and Burundi have sent troops and arms into Zaire to help the Banyamulenge. They said the recent flare-up began when Zairian troops intercepted 2,000 armed infiltrators from Burundi.