

BRIEFLY

US newsman killed in Bogota: An American journalist who wrote for Time Magazine and United Press International during a two-decade career in Colombia died early Sunday in a car crash, reports from Bogota.

Tom Quinn, 53, and his wife were driving in the capital, Bogota, when their car plunged about 20 metres (65 feet) off a bridge onto a highway below. Quinn died instantly. His Colombian wife, Zulma, was in a coma after surgery at a Bogota hospital. The cause of the accident was not immediately known. It was raining when the 2:30 am accident occurred.

5 shot dead in Mexico: A family of five was found shot to death Sunday in a tourist town in the western state of Michoacan, AP reports from Mexico city.

The bodies of Efrain Rojas Garcia and Candelaria Garcia Velazquez and their children, ages 3, 4 and 6, were found in an orchard in the town of Santa Clara del Cobre, 170 miles (270 kilometres) west of Mexico City, the government news agency Notimex reported. Authorities said the children died of shotgun wounds while the parents were shot with semi-automatic rifles. No arrests were made.

Civilian hurt in Lebanon bombing: A Lebanese civilian was wounded Sunday in a roadside bombing in an Israeli-controlled region of southern Lebanon security sources said, AP reports from Marjayoun. The bomb exploded as a civilian vehicle passed on a road near the mountain town of Kfar Falous, on the northern edge of Israel's self-proclaimed "security zone" in the south. The security sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the man suffered moderate injuries in the morning attack. They had no other details. There was no claim of responsibility for the attack, which carried the hallmarks of Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrillas.

Toddler killed in US shooting: What began with a father's finger gesture at the car that swerved into his lane ended seconds later when a bullet crashed through his rear window and killed his 2-year-old son, AP reports from Nashville, Tennessee.

Donald Cherry Jr. died in a hospital Saturday from the gunshot wound he suffered as he sat in his child safety seat. A group of teen-agers in a white sedan were being sought in the killing. "You don't think about your kids getting shot," said father Donald Cherry Sr. "There are no words to describe what happened."

German foreign minister in Beijing: German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel arrived in Beijing yesterday for a long-delayed visit to put bilateral ties back on track after a row over Tibet, Reuter reports from Beijing.

Kinkel had originally been scheduled to visit China earlier this year but the plans were postponed due to friction over Beijing's policies towards Tibet.

9 killed in bus accident in China: A bus plowed into a truck on an expressway in southern China, killing nine people and injuring five others, it was reported Monday, AP reports from Beijing.

Local police blamed the accident, and another that killed nine people and injured 27 others in August, on inadequate signs and safety barriers and a disregard for traffic rules, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported.

Zerouale on visit to Vietnam: Algerian President Liamine Zerouale arrived Monday in Hanoi to begin a three-day state visit to Vietnam, AP reports from Hanoi.

Zerouale was welcomed by Vietnamese President Le Duc Anh, who was accompanied by an honor guard at the Presidential Palace. After the brief ceremony, the two leaders met for private talks.

Malaysian FM visits Myanmar: The foreign minister of Malaysia, a strong backer of Myanmar's military regime, has arrived for a goodwill visit and is expected to discuss Myanmar's entry into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), according to official sources, AP reports from Yangon.

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, accompanied by a delegation, arrived Sunday at the invitation of his Burmese counterpart Ohn Gyaw.

Clashes on Tajik-Afghan border kills 5: Russian border guards killed five Islamic rebels in weekend clashes along Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, a Russian military spokesman said Monday, AP reports from Dushanbe.

A group of seven armed rebels had crossed the Panj River into Tajikistan when they were intercepted Sunday by the Russian guards, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. The report said two of the rebels were killed, two captured and the rest escaped back to Afghanistan. One Russian border guard was reported wounded.

Plane mishap claims 8 in Canada: Eight people died when a twin engine plane crashed on Sunday in the eastern province of New Brunswick, police said. AFP reports from Canada.

The pilot headed for the US state of Maine from the Quebec island of Anticosti reported mechanical problems before going down, killing all eight people on board, police said.

The pilot asked to land at the Charlo, New Brunswick, airport after reporting mechanical difficulties but crashed into a field a few kilometres (miles) from the airfield, bursting into flames, according to police.

GCC annual summit in Dec in Qatar: Gulf Arab states are to open their annual summit on December 7 in Qatar, the head of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) announced on Sunday, AP reports from Muscat.

Jamil Hujailina quoted by the Omani News Agency (ONA) declined to specify if Bahrain would take part. "Efforts are underway to protect solidarity within the GCC," he said.

Chechnya blames Russia for stalling peace process

OREKHOVO, Russia, Oct 21: Chechen rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev accused Russia on Sunday of stalling on the peace process and on economic reconstruction in the shattered breakaway republic, reports AFP.

The Russians are preparing to pay nothing," Yandarbiyev told a meeting with elders in this southwestern Chechen town. "They'll say that they have no money and will not pay anything."

A joint commission, which is to oversee the peace process Chechnya until elections are held, "talks a lot, but does nothing" the separatists leader said.

Yandarbiyev also confirmed he had signed a decree appoint-



Algerian director Merzak Allouache shows his trophy during prize giving ceremony at the biennial Carthage festival of Arab and African cinema in Tunis Sunday. Allouache was awarded the festival's top prize, the Golden Tanit, worth 8,000 dollars, for his film "Salut cousin" ("Hello cousin"), which describes the dilemma of Algerians fleeing the civil war in their own country, but unable to integrate in France. — AFP/UNB photo

International

Hashimoto hopes to assume Premiership

Top 3 parties discuss forming coalition



Prime Minister and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leader Ryutaro Hashimoto (L) is congratulated by LDP Secretary General Koichi Kato Monday at party headquarters after the LDP boosted its strength in the general elections and achieved its election target of 235 seats in the 500-seat lower house fell short of a majority.

— AFP/UNB photo

TOKYO, Oct 21: Top officials of three political parties gathered today to discuss forming a coalition government one day after conservatives fell just short of a majority in a parliamentary election, reports AP.

The prime minister's party dominated Sunday's election on promises to overhaul the bureaucracy that dominates Japanese policymaking. But even as the results of the election were coming in, Ryutaro Hashimoto was vague on just how those promises would be carried out.

Top party officials from the Liberal Democrats, Sakigake and Social Democrats met in a Tokyo hotel today to discuss a possible coalition partnership like the previous one that supported Hashimoto before the election. The results of the election mean all but certain re-election for Hashimoto as prime minister and comeback for the Liberal Democratic Party, which governed Japan alone from 1955 to 1993 before falling amid a series of corruption scandals.

Hashimoto's conservative party captured almost half the seats in Japan's lower house of Parliament Sunday to secure a dominant place in government.

AFP adds: Hashimoto said today he wanted to stay as head of the government.

"I have always said that the position of prime minister should be assumed by the top party," he told a news conference.

"We have been given the opportunity of the biggest party and it was by a big margin and in that sense I will be allowed to continue assuming responsibility," Hashimoto said.

Asked about a future coalition, Hashimoto said: "I'm not refusing cooperation with anybody."

He added: "I think we should not emphasise differences in policies."

If future policy directions are the same, we should naturally seek alliances no matter whether they be with individuals or groups."

Following are the final results with number of seats in old parliament in brackets:

Liberal Democratic Party: 239 seats (211 seats), New Frontier Party: 156 (160), Democratic Party: 52 (52), Communist Party: 26 (15), Social Democratic Party: 15 (30), New Party Sakigake: 2 (9), Democratic Reform Party: 1 (2), Liberal League: 0 (2), New Socialist Party: 0 (2), Independents: 9 (10). (The house of representatives has been reduced from 511 seats to 500. There were 18 vacancies when the lower house was dissolved.)

Blast kills 7 in Kanpur

NEW DELHI, Oct 21: Seven people were killed on Sunday in a blast at a firecracker factory in the northern Indian industrial town of Kanpur, the Press Trust of India said, reports AFP.

Some 100 children, normally employed at the illegal factory in a residential area, were saved as they were at another house watching television, Kanpur police official Arun Kumar said.

The news agency said the victims, members of one family, were burnt to death when the crackers accidentally caught fire from a cooking stove.

Kumar said the ages of the dead ranged between two and 50. The owners were making crackers for the Hindu festival Diwali, due early next month.

Qatar settles dispute with ousted Emir

DOHA, Oct 21: Qatar announced Sunday that it has settled a dispute with its ousted Emir over billions of dollars in missing state funds, reports AFP.

Qatar has agreed to stop legal action against Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani, who was overthrown by his son Sheikh Hamad in a bloodless palace coup last year, in return for settling the accounts, the Justice Ministry said.

UN evacuating aid staff from eastern Zaire

KIGALI, Oct 21: The United Nations has started to evacuate humanitarian staff from eastern Zaire, where government troops are battling Banyamulenge ethnic Tutsis, the head of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Rwanda said.

Omar Bakhet told Reuters the evacuation operation which commenced late on Sunday had already moved 20 humanitarian staff out of the war zone. Bakhet could not say whether the operation, which is still continuing, would also involve UN staff.

Ethnic warfare involving the Banyamulenge Tutsis who came to Zaire from Rwanda at the end of the 18th century, has intensified in and around the eastern Zairian town of Uvira, aid workers said.

Off the Record

Monkeys' reign of terror!

NEW DELHI: A 12-year-old boy jumped to his death from the terrace of a two-storey house here after he was attacked by seven monkeys, the police said Sunday, reports AFP.

The victim, identified as Kalu, was seriously injured after the fall at Kharai Boli district on Saturday and died in hospital on Sunday, reports AFP.

The boy was sleeping when he was attacked.

The Hindustan Times newspaper quoted residents as saying monkeys had spread terror in Kharai Boli region "and people are afraid to come out of their houses."

Hordes of monkeys frequently invade residential districts in the Indian capital.

Lesbian pursues legal fight

BRISBANE: In a case believed to be the first of its kind in Australia, a lesbian is fighting in the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Tribunal for the right to have access to donor sperm clinics, reports AP.

The woman, who cannot be named under court order, alleges discrimination by two infertility specialists, their clinic and the state government.

Testifying before the tribunal Monday, the woman, in her mid-20s, said that since moving to Queensland with her partner almost three years ago she had spoken to many lesbian women who, like her, were desperate to become pregnant and had learned that no clinic in the state would treat them.

She said she was fighting for all lesbians who were turned away from clinics and had to arrange their own private donors, risking AIDS contamination.

Back in Yangon, his old schoolmates have families of their own. Aung Thu Nyein, who was in his last year of medical school in 1988, does not. Nor do the other rebel leaders.

Their hardest moments may lie ahead. Their main ally, the Karen National Union, appears to be on the ropes. That is the main force of ethnic Karen rebels and has been the strongest military opponent of the junta.

The Karen, who have been fighting the central government in Yangon since 1948, lost their "capital" of Manerplaw in 1994 to a Burmese army assault. The military, which has greatly increased its strength in manpower and equipment since 1988, appears to be preparing a major offensive for the impending dry season.

Ross meets Arafat amid signs of progress in Hebron talks

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, Oct 21: US mediator Dennis Ross travelled to Gaza for an unscheduled late-night meeting with Yasser Arafat amid indications that a breakthrough is near on an Israeli pullout from the West Bank town of Hebron, reports AP.

"We are very close to wrapping up an agreement," Brig Gen Zakariye Baloushe, the Palestinian intelligence chief, told The Associated Press Sunday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he hoped for "speedy resolution" but would not predict when it might come.

Israel was supposed to pull out of Hebron, the last West Bank town it controls, in March. But Shimon Peres, who was then prime minister, delayed the pullout after a series of terrorist attacks by Islamic militants in Israel.

Netanyahu, who won May elections, delayed the pullout further, demanding tougher security arrangements for the 450 Jewish settlers who live in the city of 94,000 Arabs. Netanyahu, who as opposition leader had fought his predecessors peacemaking with Arafat, also refused initially to meet the Palestinian leader.

Netanyahu and Arafat finally met on September 4 and agreed to begin talks on Hebron. But the issue dragged on, and three weeks ago Palestinian frustration exploded in riots in which 79 people were killed and Israeli and Palestinian troops traded deadly fire.

Ross, who has been mediating throughout the past two weeks of talks aimed at saving the peace process, arrived unexpectedly at Arafat's Gaza office after midnight. Arafat greeted him and the two did not speak to reporters. Also present were most of Arafat's top aides, including his deputy Mahmoud Abbas and the chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat.

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