

International

BRIEFLY

Euro-Parliament president arrives in Tel Aviv

The president of the European parliament Klaus Haensch, arrived here Sunday for official visits to Israel and the Palestinian territories, AFP reports from Tel Aviv.

He is to speak to the Israeli Knesset or parliament yesterday and meet with Israeli President Ezer Weizman, as well as Foreign Minister David Levy. Hensch will travel on Tuesday to the Gaza Strip for a two-day visit to the Palestinian territories.

US Bank reopens new office in Singapore

First Chicago NBD Corp. said Monday it has reopened an office in Singapore to serve as regional marketing headquarters, returning to the city-state after almost 10 years. AP reports from Singapore.

The bank will initially lend up to 150 million Singapore dollars (US \$106 million) to offshore clients under current Singapore regulations. South-east Asian regional chief Paul McGonagle said.

He said the branch will also focus on foreign exchange, trade finance, cash management and other trade-related services.

Mild quake shakes western India

A mild earthquake shook western India overnight but there were no reports of injuries or damage, the Indian meteorological department said yesterday. Reuter reports from New Delhi.

The tremor, which measured 4.5 on the Richter scale, struck the southern part of Gujarat state at 11:43 pm (1813 GMT) on Sunday, a department official said.

The epicentre was near Surat city, about 200 km (120 miles) north of the financial capital Bombay, the official said.

Air force plane crash claims 9 in Brazil

A Brazilian air force plane crashed on Sunday in north-eastern Brazil, killing all nine airmen aboard in the second fatal air force accident in two days, the military said. Reuter reports from Sao Paulo.

Air force spokesman Maj. Francisco Lopes Neto told reporters the craft, a Brazilian-made P-95 bandeirante, was en route to a training exercise when it went down near Caruaru, some 87 miles (140 kms) from Recife, capital of Pernambuco state. "All those who died were air force personnel, officers and enlisted men. Lopes Neto said. No one on the ground was hurt."

9 miners killed in Moscow

Nine miners were killed and six injured by a methane gas explosion Sunday in a coal mine near Cheliabinsk in Russia's Ural region. ITAR-Tass news agency reported. Quoting the mining company, AFP reports from Moscow.

Around 80 miners were underground at the time of the blast but most were working in other galleries, Tass said. Adding that the bodies of the dead had been brought to the surface. The company said an inquiry had been opened as methane gas detectors installed in the pit had not detected any abnormal concentrations of the deadly gas.

Tibetan nun jailed for 9 years more

A 19-year-old Tibetan nun imprisoned for pro-independence activities has been sentenced to an additional nine years for refusing to stand in the presence of an official, a Tibet monitoring group reported on Monday. AP reports from Beijing.

Ngawang Sangdrol also shouted "Free Tibet" while she and other prisoners were forced to stand in the rain as punishment for not cleaning their cells at Draphchi prison in Lhasa, the London-based Tibet Information Network reported. She and three other nuns were beaten after the incident, the monitoring group said, citing a source in Tibet who asked not to be identified.

Power struggle breaks out in Congress(I)

NEW DELHI, Nov 18: A power struggle has broken out in the Congress (I) over who should control the country's oldest political party, sources said today, reports AFP.

Former premier PV Narasimha Rao, who quit as party president after corruption allegations but has refused to abandon control of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP), is on a collision course with new president Sitaram Kesri, they said.

They added Sonia Gandhi, the influential but reclusive Indian-born widow of assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, was also involved in

the battle.

"Congress President Sitaram Kesri is waging a proxy war on behalf of Mrs Gandhi," a Rao loyalist told The Times of India newspaper today, on an alleged move to pressure the 75-year-old leader to relinquish his parliamentary position.

"Instead of asking Rao to step down as CPP leader, the combine will try to get its supporters elected to CPP posts and then build pressure on him to quit."

A common slogan on hoardings across the country is: "bring in Sonia, save India," while many admirers have

consistently asked her to join the party think-tank, the powerful Congress Working Committee (CWC).

"Even if Mrs Gandhi does not join the CWC, as is being talked about in Congress circles, her stamp will be most visible in most congress activities," the official said.

Rao is currently facing trial in three unrelated corruption cases.

Corruption scandals were largely seen as contributing to the congress' electoral defeat in its 11-year-old history during the April-May general elections which ended Rao's five-year tenure as prime minister.

PLO-Israel talks fail

JERICHO, West Bank, Nov 18: Palestinian and Israeli negotiators failed in talks on Sunday in self-ruled Jericho to hammer out a deal on a delayed Israeli troop pullback from the West Bank town of Hebron, officials said, reports Reuter.

"There is not a big change. Israeli chief negotiator Dan Shomron told reporters after the talks at the Palestinian Ministry of Local Government in autonomous Jericho.

The talks are stalemated over Israel's insistence that its troops be allowed to re-enter the 80 per cent of Hebron slated to fall under PLO control if they are chasing suspected guerrillas.

"We hope the Israelis will stop putting obstacles in the

path of progress. We hope they will not try to change anything in signed agreements especially their demand to go freely in Palestinian areas. PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat told reporters.

PLO officials said the Jericho talks were not serious and did not say why negotiating teams would meet again. Shomron said it was possible to reach an agreement soon.

The last bargaining round on Thursday, attended by US diplomats, failed to bring the sides closer together.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has rejected any renegotiation of the Hebron accord, which was signed last year by a left-centre Israeli government ousted in May.

Opposition claims victory in Serbia's municipal polls

BELGRADE, Nov 18: Serbia's opposition claimed its first victory over President Slobodan Milosevic, saying it won municipal elections in Serbian towns that were traditional bastions of Milosevic's ruling Socialists, reports AP.

Four hours after polls closed Sunday, opposition supporters flocked to a boisterous celebration in downtown Belgrade. The capital itself seemed likely to elect an opposition mayor, the first non-Communist to rule the capital since World War II.

Belgrade is a more traditional opposition city.

Canada for continuing aid mission to C Africa
Int'l commitment to send force to help refugees in Zaire wavers

GOMA, Zaire, Nov 18: International commitment to plans to send a 10,000 strong military force to help thousands of refugees in Zaire wavered on Sunday as the dramatic return home of needy refugees to Rwanda continued for a third straight day, reports AFP.

US Defence Secretary William Perry said Washington was monitoring the "dramatically changing" refugee crisis on the Zaire/Rwanda border, but has made no decision on US troop involvement in the region.

The need for humanitarian relief... has not gone away. Perry said on a US television network, but "the nature of the need is changing dramatically" as Rwandan refugees were returning to their home country in large numbers.

Perry's comments seemed to contradict earlier remarks by French officials that Washington was committed to contributing to an intervention force in Zaire, led by a Canadian general.

The decision has been taken. The Americans are in it. French Foreign Ministry spokesman Jacques Rummelhardt said, in anticipation of a meeting called for Wednesday in Stuttgart to discuss the details of deployment.

But Perry insisted he "cannot forecast" whether US troops will go to Zaire, although a US

decision "could happen anytime, certainly in the next few days," and US troops are ready to move "on a day's notice."

The British Defence Ministry echoed Washington's line. "If there is still a humanitarian job to do we'll go. If there is not we're not going to knowingly send them off on a wild goose chase," Armed Forces Minister Nicholas Soames said.

The main countries that had planned as late as last Thursday to send troops to Zaire were Britain, Canada, France, South Africa and the United States.

Reuter adds: Canada on Sunday urged that the multinational humanitarian aid mission to Central Africa continue despite the massive movement of refugees from Zaire back into Rwanda.

Now is not the time to pause and reflect. We still have to have very direct action, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy told Reuters. "We're not saying that it will be exactly as we envisioned it two or three days ago because clearly the refugee movement alters that, but it doesn't mean to say that the international presence or involvement no longer is necessary," he said.

Axworthy said the international commitment to help the estimated 1.2 million refugees that were in Zaire helped spur the flood of refugees back to Rwanda over the last three

days. Canada also said on Sunday that Lt. Gen. Marriace Baril, commander of the multinational force, will leave for Kigali, Rwanda last on Sunday night. Once there, he will assess the changing refugee situation in Zaire and Rwanda.

A contingent of 117 Canadian military reconnaissance personnel left the airbase in Trenton, Ontario at 3:13 pm EST (2013 GMT) on Sunday on an Airbus jet bound for Kigali.

After an estimated 20-hour flight via Ancona, Italy, the contingent would go in a group of 34 Canadian reconnaissance personnel who were given permission by Rwanda earlier on Sunday to leave Kigali airport, where they had been detained for almost a day.

AP says, the latest mass homecoming of refugees in history slowed late Sunday after three days in which at least a half-million Rwandan Hutus returned from 2 and a half years of exile in Zaire.

Wearied by their long walk home, families stopped to camp in clusters along the main road for 25 miles (40 kilometres) east of the Lake Kivu border town of Gisenyi.

Refugees continued to pour across the border Sunday. As night fell, UN High Commissioner for Refugees spokesman Ray Wilkinson said.



Indian women dressed and painted as Hindu demonesses yesterday stage a protest against the Miss World beauty pageant in the southern Indian city of Bangalore where the competition is being held. Many political and feminist groups are protesting against the event maintaining that the contest is vulgar insult to womanhood. — AFP/UNB photo



Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina exchanging views with Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro at Palazzo Quirinale Palace in Rome on Saturday. —PID photo

Another minister of Benazir govt detained

ISLAMABAD, Nov 18: Nawaz Khokar, Science and Technology Minister in the government of ousted Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto, has been taken into custody, official source and reports said today, says AFP.

Khokar, the second Bhutto minister to be detained since the November 5 sacking of Bhutto, was picked up by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Sunday from a hotel in the eastern provincial capital of Lahore.

Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari, who was also her Investment Minister, was detained the day president Farooq Ahmed Leghari dismissed the premier for alleged corruption and misuse.

Participants say
Growing protests taint Miss World contest

BUNGLER, India, Nov 18: Participants of Miss World 1996 say growing protests by Indian feminists, farmers and Communists against the beauty contest have tainted it, reports AP.

But organizers say the show will go on, despite the protest suicide of a 24-year-old tailor in southern India and scores of demonstrations nationwide.

Miss Costa Rica, Natal Caravel Lurenzo, said she would chronicle her experiences of India after returning home.

"I did not expect this in India, which is known for its peace. It is very disturbing," said the 21-year-old Miss Costa Rica who works in a hotel and wants to become a journalist.

"This is the land of Gandhi... how can they take such an extreme step?" Lurenzo asked and said: "Everybody has a right to protest but not in this form."

Miss Costa Rica is one of the 89 contestants of Miss World housed in a fortified luxury hotel as a precaution against attacks.

The contestants were reacting to an overnight attempt by some 4,000 leftists to breach the security and lay siege to the hotel.

Police used batons and beat back the predominantly female marchers who chanted: "Death to Miss World" during Sunday's noisy protest. Kelly Webber, Miss United States, said she too was upset and worried.

Miss United States said she was also angry that the protesters have rejected offers for talks with the contest organizers for a settlement.

Miss Australia, Nicole Smith, said she might not have come for the 19-day competition if she knew Indian protesters would carry out suicide threats.

Miss World International Vice-President Julia Morley said of Sunday's protest: "I am disgusted that women can behave this way. There is nothing bad about what we are doing."

"Protesters have a right to protest, but at the same time," it

is our democratic right to hold the show," Morley said.

Some 9,000 extra troops had been added to Bangalore's 14,000-strong police force to prevent violence during the event. India's first international beauty contest.

32 bodies found so far

Russian PM visits site of bldg blast

MOSCOW, Nov 18: Russia's prime minister flew Sunday to the site of an explosion that killed at least 32 people in a building housing Russian servicemen and their families, reports AP.

As rescuers continued to dig through the rubble, the death toll climbed. By late Sunday, 32 bodies had been found, including those of nine children, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.

Dozens of people were rescued alive, but about 24 people were believed still missing, and rescue work continued into the night, ITAR-Tass said, quoting Emergency Situations Ministry official Vasily Yurchuk, who was on the scene.

The pre-dawn explosion Saturday destroyed at least 41 of the apartments in the building in Kaspysk, a town on the Caspian Sea in Dagestan, a southern Russian republic neighbouring Chechnya.

President Boris Yeltsin sent his condolences to the victims and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin flew to Dagestan on Sunday. "I took the news hard," Yeltsin's message said, according to ITAR-Tass.

Officials have said that one or more bombs planted in the basement likely caused the explosion.

"Witnesses heard two explosions before the building collapsed," Maj Gen Vsevolod Chernov, the military prosecutor for the Caucasian Military District told the Interfax news agency.

Crash of TWA Flight 800
FBI probes into report of Pak co-pilot's seeing 'streak of light' in sky

NEW YORK, Nov 18: The FBI said on Sunday it was investigating a report that the co-pilot of a Pakistani plane saw "something unusual in the sky" on Saturday while on a flight path similar to that taken by TWA Flight 800, which crashed just after take-off last July, reports Reuter.

Pakistan International Airlines Flight 712 had just taken off from John F Kennedy Airport on Saturday evening when the co-pilot reported seeing "a streak of light" coming from the left hand side to the right hand side of the airplane, the pilot of the jet told WCB local radio in a telephone interview.

The pilot himself did not see the streak of light. He told the radio station from Frankfurt, Germany, the plane's destination, that his co-pilot said the light "was about three to four miles (4.8 to 6.4 km) ahead of the aircraft and above the jet."

The pilot radioed back the report to a control tower in Boston, since they had already flown out of range of the New York Tower, and US government agents met the crew upon their arrival in Frankfurt.

Joseph Valiquette, spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation in New York, said on Sunday, "we are aware of the report and the FBI is attempting to determine, what, if anything was observed. As of right now, nothing has been resolved."

He said the Pakistani jetliner was apparently travelling on a path similar to the route taken on the night of July 17 by Paris-bound TWA Flight 800, which crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off Long Island, New York, killing all 230 people aboard.

Vietnam president ill

HANOI, Nov 18: The Vietnamese government on Monday publicly acknowledged that President Le Duc Anh is ill and being treated in a hospital, reports AP.

Responding to inquiries from journalists, the Foreign Ministry said Anh would not be able to meet with his South Korean counterpart when he visits later this week.

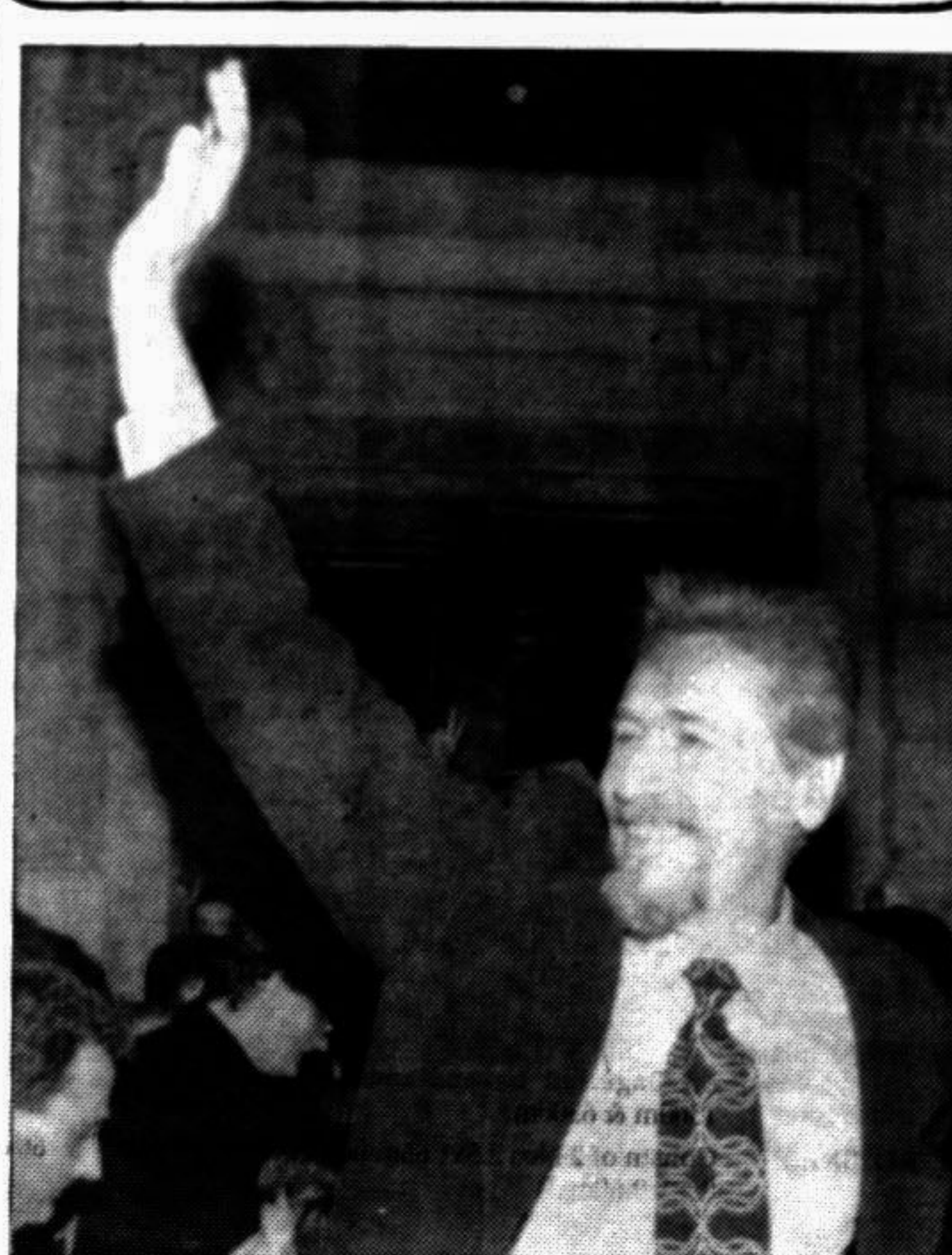
"President Le Duc Anh is not well and as doctors required he needs rest, General Secretary Do Muoi will be in charge of receiving Korean President Kim Young-sam," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

Off the Record
To tie or not to tie that is the question

ROME, The mayor of a small commune near Florence, northern Italy, wants to open municipal apartments so courting couples can take their marriage for a "test drive," the municipality announced Sunday, reports AFP.

Carlo Moscardini, mayor of the Tuscan village of Lastra a Signa, plans to make two flats available in a council-owned block.

Fiances would be able to stay in the accommodation for a test period of up to two months, the municipality said. According to Moscardini, this would be enough time for couples to arrive at a more considered decision on whether to tie the knot — or not.



Romanian Democratic Convention leader Emil Constantinescu, 57, waves to the crowd yesterday after exit polls of the second round of the presidential elections credited Constantinescu with 54 per cent of the vote, comfortably ahead of incumbent Ion Iliescu, 66, a former communist. —AFP/UNB photo

Last 2 bodies of Delhi jet crash recovered

NEW DELHI, Nov 18: The last two bodies of the 349 victims of the world's deadliest mid-air collision have been recovered from the debris of a Saudi jumbo jet, Indian officials said today, reports Reuter.

Two bodies were pulled on Sunday from the wreckage of the Saudi airlines Boeing 747 which crashed with 312 people last Tuesday after colliding with a Kazakh cargo plane.

An official in Charkhi Badri town, 80 km (50 miles) west of New Delhi, said the bodies of two Indian nationals were the last remaining victims from the Saudi aircraft, and that they were being ferried to their hometowns in northern India.

Passports and some personal belongings were found near the bodies, helping emergency workers identify the victims, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

AP adds from Dubai: Relatives of the sole Saudi passenger on the Saudi Arabian airliner involved in last week's mid-air disaster over India have refused to claim the body, saying they do not recognise it, a newspaper reported Sunday.

The wife of Majdi Arkoubi says the body does not have her husband's distinguishing marks, the daily Asharq Al Awsat said.

Indian mortar fire kills five in Kashmir

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan, Nov 18: Indian mortar fire killed five civilians in the Pakistan-controlled portion of Kashmir at the weekend, Pakistani military and government officials said today, reports Reuter.

A Pakistani army spokesman said three people died on Sunday in Athmuqam, 80 km (50 miles) northeast of the Azad (free) Kashmir state capital Muzaffarabad, when a mortar round fired by Indian border forces struck a hotel.

Azad Kashmir's Animal Husbandry Minister, Ghulam Rasool, said a separate mortar attack on Sunday killed two people and wounded 14 in Mirpur village, 35 km (20 miles) northeast of Muzaffarabad.

Rasool said Indian mortar fire continued for more than an hour in various parts of the Neelum valley, which straddles the ceasefire line dividing the Indian and Pakistani portions of Kashmir.

"More than 150,000 inhabitants of the valley have virtually become captives as their movement has been restricted due to frequent Indian shelling," Rasool said.

The main Neelum valley road has been closed since 1994 because of Indian shelling, which also threatens a bypass road built to ensure safe passage for traffic.

"Even the bypass road has been closed for the last eight days," Rasool said.

Scholars on ME studies, Islam to meet in US Nov 21-24

WASHINGTON, Nov 18: Hundreds of scholars and researchers from the United States, Canada, Europe, the Middle East and many other countries will meet late this month in the United States in what is considered to be the world's biggest and most important annual gathering of experts on Middle East studies and on Islam, reports USIS.

The occasion is the 30th annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) formed in 1966 by a group of American and Canadian scholars on the Middle East. The conference will be held in Providence, Rhode Island, November 21-24.

According to Farhad Kazemi professor of politics at New York University, and the current president of MESA, many

of the association's 3000 members are expected to attend the conference. They will discuss a wide range of topics dealing with various aspects of Middle East history: issues relating to Islam, politics, economics, literature, philosophy, issues dealing with individual areas and countries will be discussed.

MESA, Dr. Kazemi said, is an association of scholars and people who teach and write on the subject of the Middle East from various disciplines. The substantial majority of its members, he added, are professors at American universities, librarians, former government officials who have an interest in the Middle East, as well as students. MESA also includes 120 members from Canada and about 500 from the Middle East and Europe.

The association's purpose is to promote high standards of scholarship in the area of Middle East studies, facilitate communication among scholars through meetings and publications, and foster cooperation among persons and organizations specialised in Middle Eastern studies. About 48 educational institutions, including two from Canada and two from England, are members of the association.

Topics to be discussed at the four-day conference will range from "Islam and human rights," "modern Islamic voices and critics," "Islam and democracy," "Western orientalism and liberal Islam," to topics dealing with area or country issues, including "marginal groups and social order in Syria," Yemen in the New World Order," "the po-

litical economy of the Arabian Peninsula," "regional orientations in Turkey's foreign policy," "Jerusalem and the peace process," "Azerbaijan and the world," "Palestinian-Israeli peace process issues," "Images of modern and post-modern Egypt," "women, Islam and power relations in Central Asia," "The Gulf/2000 project: Long-term trends in the Persian Gulf," the "post war Lebanon" and "Algeria: Autopsy of a multidimensional crisis."

According to Dr. Kazemi, more than 100 panels will meet to discuss various aspects of the above mentioned topics and many others.

A book exhibit will also be organised during the conference. It will offer a host of books and software on the Middle East, while an art ex-

hibit will offer an exciting collection of art and textiles on the Middle East. Documentaries and feature films from many countries, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Palestine, Israel, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Canada and Niger will be shown.

As the current president of the association, Professor Kazemi will deliver the conference's presidential address. "I will be talking about the 'inclusion imperatives' he said. "Basically my argument will be that Middle Eastern politics will have to include the other side, and will have to be an inclusive politics."

Professor Kazemi believes that interest in the Middle East among students and scholars in the United States has increased. This, he explained, "is due to is-

suces connected to Islam and Islamic radicalism, to the peace process as well as to the problems the American government had or may have in the Gulf. There is a lot of interest in the Middle East."

Regarding whether MESA is playing any role in promoting a better understanding in the US of the Middle East and Islam, Professor Kazemi said: "MESA is an academic organisation and our job is to educate. But we try not to keep it just purely an academic operation. That is very important for us. And we educate through our students who go to other various institutions... and through our publications. We also try to the secondary schools to help them out... to provide them information and speakers about the Middle East."