

**BRIEFLY**

**9 die in Central America storms**

Widespread storms have caused the worst flooding in 42 years in parts of Central America, killing at least nine people and driving tens of thousands from their homes. AP reports from Tegucigalpa.

In Honduras, where seven people died due to storms over the past nine days, officials on Wednesday reported the worst flooding since 1954. The rains have stopped, but they left their marks on the national geography. Permanent Emergency Committee spokesman Jorge Aldana said, referring to damage caused by swollen rivers.

**Gunmen kills 2 in Taiwan**

Two gunmen broke into a Taiwan county official's home and opened fire yesterday, killing five people and critically wounding four, police said. Reuter reports from Taipei.

Liu Pang-Yun, magistrate of northern Taoyuan county, was shot in the head and was listed in hospital in very critical condition, a Taoyuan police spokesman told the news agency.

**Strong quake rocks Philippines**

A strong earthquake was recorded north of Manila early this morning, the Royal Hong Kong Observatory said. Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

The quake, estimated to be 5.6 on the Richter Scale, happened at 2 am (1800 GMT). The epicentre was initially pinpointed on the main Philippine island of Luzon about 210 kms (130 miles) north of the capital at 16.5 120.7 e, the Observatory said.

**London theatre bans 'Crash'**

'Crash,' a controversial movie linking sexual arousal and car crashes that won honour at the Cannes Film Festival, was banned Wednesday from London's West End theatre district, AP reports from London.

Westminster City Council, the borough which includes the West End, said after a private viewing for councilors that impressive people might try to emulate the scenes. The council will reconsider its decision after the British Board of Film Classification, which has the final say rules on the movie, licensing committee chairman John Bull said. No date has been set for a ruling by the board.

**Blast kills 2 in Russia**

A Cossack General and his deputy were killed in a bomb attack Wednesday in the Siberian city of Tyumen. ITAR-TASS news agency reported. AFP says from Moscow.

Leonid Sidorov, director of a building and public works company, and his deputy whose identity was not given were on the way to their office when the apparently remote-controlled device exploded. The motives behind the attack were not immediately clear. Cossacks are a military community who served Russian Czars but were banned under the communist regime. They have made a comeback after the fall of communism.

**Israeli minister hopes for accord on Hebron soon**

LONDON, Nov 21: Israel's defence minister said Wednesday he hopes agreement will be reached on Israel's long-delayed withdrawal from the West Bank town of Hebron in a very short time, reports AP.

Speaking to reporters after meeting British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind, Yitzhak Mordechai said an agreement would enable Israel to move forward with the Middle East peace process.

He invited Syrian president Hafez Assad to come back to the negotiating table, in any country, "to discuss all problems and to find solutions."

His invitation came as US Sen. Arlen Specter, a Pennsylvania Republican, shuttled between the Israeli and Syrian capitals in an apparent effort to revive peace talks frozen since February.

**Pvt airliner grounded in Nigeria**

ABUJA, Nigeria, Nov 21: The government Aviation Ministry on Wednesday grounded aircraft of the company whose Boeing 727 crashed 10 days ago, killing all 143 people on board, reports AP.

The private Aviation Development Corp has yet to determine why its aircraft plunged into a lagoon near the commercial capital of Lagos on November 8.

This measure has become necessary in order to allow proper investigation into the crash, unhindered by continuous operations of the airline, said Aviation Minister Ita Udo-Iweh.

**BJP forces adjournment of Indian Parliament**

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: India's right-wing Hindu opposition party forced the adjournment of parliament for the second consecutive day today with a noisy protest over the political impasse in the country's most populous state, reports Reuter.

Both upper and lower houses of parliament were adjourned for the day after irate members of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) demanded immediate debate on the Logjam in Uttar Pradesh (UP).

"Democracy has been murdered in UP," BJP leader MM Joshi shouted in the lower house, or Lok Sabha, which was adjourned until Friday after protesting BJP members prevented any business from being transacted.

The BJP emerged as the biggest single party in recent state assembly elections but fell short of an outright majority.

Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's United Front coalition came in second, and the Congress Party, allied with a regional party representing the lowest Hindu castes, came in third.

Congress, which is providing critical support to Deve Gowda's coalition in the federal parliament but has not joined the government, had demanded that the United Front support its candidate for the position of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister.

But the United Front declined, stoking tension with Congress. Then last month, President Shankar Dayal Sharma imposed federal rule over the state after the sparring parties were unable to form a local government.

"This is a conspiracy at the national level not to allow the BJP to form the government in UP," BJP deputy Pramod Mahajan said on the floor of the Lok Sabha.

The BJP has promised to continue to disrupt parliament during its month-long winter session, which began on Wednesday, unless it is given a chance to form a government in Uttar Pradesh, home to some 140 million people.

What we are doing is to try to find out more of the facts, Smith said.

The meeting was the first of three to be held this week to develop a new approach to the humanitarian crisis in eastern Zaire that now appears to be abating as hundreds of thousands of refugees return home to Rwanda.

Canada has offered to lead a 10,000 strong multinational force to provide relief to eastern Zaire but the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees to Rwanda has called into question the scale and mandate of the operation.

The United States which initially said it was prepared to contribute up to 5,000 troops is now considering dispatching less than 1,000 troops most of whom would be support and logistic units rather than combat troops.

The talks at the United Nations laid the groundwork for a meeting Friday in Stuttgart of military planners and for talks Saturday in Geneva on humanitarian relief efforts in Rwanda.

In Stuttgart, military officials will develop several options including a "zero option." In the event that troops were not needed to help deliver food

and medicine and ensure the safe return of refugees, Smith said.

The purpose here is to avoid delays so that when the decision is taking, the military plans will be drawn up, he added.

Reuter adds from Kigali: The head of the United Nations food aid organisation said on Wednesday there were still 700,000 Rwandan refugees unaccounted for in Zaire.

Catherine Bertini, executive director of the World Food Programme, told a news conference that two years of supplying nutrition to Hutu refugee camps led them to believe that last week's mass exodus of Hutus to Rwanda "was not the full story."

"We have been feeding in the camps for a long time and providing food for 1.2 million refugees," she said. "These figures have been consistent for two years and we have no reason to doubt them."

Bertini said the fate of those remaining in eastern Zaire where a rebel rout of government troops sparked last week's march of 500,000 Rwandan Hutus back to their homeland — meant the need for an intervention force was still urgent.

There are 700,000 still unaccounted for. Their safety and ability to eat is still a need," she said.

WASHINGTON, Nov 21: The United States will begin delivering a delayed arms shipment to Bosnia following the ousting of two defence officials in the country's Muslim-Croat federation, the State Department said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Spokesman Glyn Davies said the ship American condor, which has been at anchor in the Adriatic for several weeks, would now dock at the Croatian port of Ploce and begin off-loading nearly 100 million US dollar worth of hardware destined for Bosnia.

He said this could happen as soon as Thursday.

Washington had been holding up the delivery, which includes tanks, helicopters and howitzers, to back its demand for the sacking of the federation's Deputy Defence Minister, Hasan Cengic.

US officials alleged that Cengic, a Muslim, had close ties with Iran and was likely to obstruct the US sponsored "train and equip" programme for the federation's armed forces, of which the arms delivery is a key component.

Davies told reporters that federation President Kresimir Zubak had agreed to replace Cengic as of Wednesday and also accepted the resignation of Defence Minister Vladimir Sollic.

"We now have in hand copies of the written orders making these changes from Zubak's office, and we have also received assurances from Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic that Cengic is no longer serving as deputy minister," he said.

The State Department has never detailed its objections to Sollic. Cengic, he resigned on Tuesday amid rumours that he would be forced to step down along with Cengic as part of a package deal which would be billed as a reorganisation.

AFP adds, leaders of the opposition coalition together and its 66 deputies launched a hunger strike Wednesday here accusing the ruling party of President Slobodan Milosevic of trying to change election results.

The hunger strike was lunched as thousands of supporters gathered outside the parliament to denounce moves by Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party (SPS) to annual result from Sunday's polls in several towns.

Earlier opposition leader Vuk Draskovic, head of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) which forms part of a three party coalition urged candidates who believed they had won the polls to resist the moves.

CAIRO, Nov 21: Two Egyptian lawyers are suing US President Bill Clinton over the veto of a second term for UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a judiciary source here said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Mustafa Raslan filed a lawsuit with the emergency affairs court in Beheira province in northern Egypt against Clinton and the United States for their "racist position" vis a vis Boutros-Ghali.

The lawyer said "the United States rejected democracy despite being a self-proclaimed defender of it."

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**Imran's son named**

**Sulaiman Isa**

LONDON, Nov 21: Pakistani sports hero and aspiring politician Imran Khan and his wife Jemima have given their newborn son a popular Muslim name with religious connotations, reports AP.

A family spokesman said Wednesday the boy, born Sunday at London's Portland Hospital, will be called Sulaiman Isa.

He gave no explanation for the choice, although Sulaiman is a common Muslim name. It is the Arabic form of Solomon, the wise king of the Bible, who is revered by Muslims. Isa is the Arabic for Jesus.

Jemima converted to Islam and moved to Lahore, Pakistan, to support her husband's political career and raise funds for the cancer hospital he founded in memory of his mother.

**'Sino-US ties improving'**

BEIJING, Nov 21: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher agreed with Chinese leaders that US-China relations are improving, despite lingering disputes over Taiwan and human rights, reports AP.

In many respects, Christopher appeared on Wednesday to have achieved what his aides said was a basic goal: to discuss the wide range of concerns, including human rights and weapons sales, that affect US-China relations without letting any one issue hold relations hostage.

Notably, Christopher said he and Chinese leaders had "probably the most coming-to-grips discussion that we've had of human rights issues for some time, maybe the most of all."

That contrasted markedly with Christopher's last visit 2 and half years ago, when police rounded up dissidents before his arrival and Chinese leaders lectured him not to meddle in their domestic affairs when he pressed for progress on human rights.

But major differences remained. Before their meetings Wednesday, Qian Qichen, Christopher's counterpart, warned that US support for Taiwan, especially arms sales, threatens to undo recent improvements in relations.

US policy toward Taiwan must change for "disruptions" to be avoided, Qian said. He insisted Washington abide by a 1982 agreement to reduce and

eventually stop weapons sales to Taiwan, saying "we can only be reassured when this promise turns into a reality."

In a speech on Thursday in Shanghai, Christopher called on China and Taiwan to resume talks.

He also defended US concern over China's human rights record, saying protection of individual freedom and the rule of law enhance stability and prosperity.

CAPE TOWN, Nov 21: At least 600 penguins were on Wednesday drenched in oil which probably leaked from a Panamanian cargo ship that sank off South Africa's east coast last week, officials said, reports AFP.

Norbert Klages, a marine biologist at the eastern Cape province Port Elizabeth Museum, said at least 600 and as many as 1,000 birds had been threatened by oil on Bird Island.

A total of about 89,000 penguins on two islands — Bird and St Croix — off the eastern Cape make up about 60 per cent of the world's dwindling African penguin (also called jackass penguin) population.

**Create single global C'wealth: Mahathir**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 21: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad today called for a joint venture between Asia and the United States and other countries to create a "Single global Commonwealth", reports AP.

"Imagine the productive consequences of such a new economic reality," Mahathir said when opening the two-day third Pacific dialogue.

The Prime Minister called for the downplaying of the Asian century idea and instead focus on bringing the world together "to build greater prosperity not only for Asians but for all mankind."

Mahathir said such a joint venture would transform the whole political, strategic and psychological make-up of the world and "we would indeed have a new world."

He told the 50 delegates from 12 countries attending the meeting that such a global commonwealth was not possible during the greatage of colonialism when the world was



Thousands of clergymen and theological students from seminaries demonstrate on Wednesday in the city of Qom against accusations of terrorism by German prosecutors against Iranian leaders. They threatened a *Fatwa* against German prosecutors, who accused Iranian leaders of approving the murder of four Kurdish opposition leaders in a Berlin restaurant in 1992. Banner reads "We are children of the holy war, ready to become martyrs for our leader" — a reference to Iran's late leader Ayatollah Khamenei. — AFP/UNB photo

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**Off the Record**

**Clinton's day out!**

SYDNEY, Nov 21: US President Bill Clinton and wife Hillary took time out today to go shopping in Sydney's historic harbourside rocks area, buying aboriginal artwork and a traditional Australian bush hat, reports Reuter.

Clinton told reporters after a 75-minute shopping stop that he had bought an akubra bush hat to replace an "old friend."

"For 10 or 12 years I've had a great old Indiana Jones hat that I've just about worn out," he said.

The Clintons spent almost an hour at an aboriginal arts shop, where they bought boomerangs, weavings and pottery.

Asked by reporters on the way back to his limousine if he had helped Australia's tackle its multi-billion dollar trade deficit with the United States, Clinton joked: "I've done my part today."

**Tourist submarine**

WUHAN, China: A 40-seat, 125-ton submarine built for tourist travel has been launched in this capital in central China's Hubei province, reports Xinhua.

The tourist submarine will navigate in the coral reef areas in Sanya in the southern province of Hainan within this year, according to the "Wen Hui Daily".

The vessel can dive as deep as 3.8 metres. It is China's first submarine specialised for tourist purposes.

More such passenger subs are expected to appear in the future, the paper said. The largest will have 48 seats and the smallest will be a two-seater.

**Duchess of York apologises**

LONDON: The Duchess of York on Wednesday apologised for claiming she was still entitled to be addressed as her royal highness (HRH) despite being stripped of the title after her divorce from Prince Andrew, reports AP.

Sarah Ferguson — popularly known as "Fergie" — had said in a BBC television interview with irreverent comedienne Ruby Wax on Sunday that she simply chose not to use the style "HRH".

But in a press statement on Wednesday, a spokeswoman for the royal divorcee said her lawyers informed her on Monday that the title had been withdrawn and she apologises for conveying the wrong impression, which she is now keen to correct.

The statement came after the media drew attention to a communique issued by Queen Elizabeth II and published on August 30 in the London Gazette.

It said the queen "has been pleased by letters patent under the great seal of the realm dated 21st August 1996, to declare that a former wife (other than a widow until she shall remarry) of a son of sovereign of these realms... shall not be entitled to hold and enjoy the style, title or attribute of royal highness."

**Protests against Miss World beauty contest**

**Indian newspapers puzzled**

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Bitter protests against the Miss World beauty contest in "the land of the Kama Sutra" left Indian newspapers puzzled today, reports AP.

The Times of India's editorial, under the headline "Beauty and the bench," said a court ruling allowing the event to go ahead in Bangalore so long as there was no obscenity, nudity or alcohol was perplexing.

It said: "there is no known instance of a beauty pageant of this kind turning into a forum for nudity. Body beautiful, yes. But nudity, no."

"On to obscenity. Who defines obscenity in the land of the Kama Sutra?"

The daily added: surely, Indians are not so faint-hearted as to faint at the sight of a row of beauties parading in colour-

ful, if somewhat abbreviated, costumes?

The event, which ends in the southern city of Bangalore at the weekend, was given legal permission to continue after protesters argued in court today that the pageant was obscene and a threat to Indian culture.

Ticket sales slow

AP adds: Miss World organisers have promised a gala show for the pageant finals this weekend, but that hasn't been enough to lure potential ticket buyers who fear the event will attract violent protests.

Only half the 9,000 lower cost tickets, priced at 1,900 and 2,900 rupees (dhs 54 and 83 dhs) had been sold by Wednesday, said Manjunath Hegde, spokesperson for the marketing company in charge of ticket sales.



Miss World contestants Rachel Warner of the United Kingdom (L) is pictured with Kelly Webber of the United States (R) during a photo call at the beauty pageant on Wednesday in Bangalore. Several political groups have staged protests against the event being held in tradition-bound India. — AFP/UNB photo



Newt Gingrich, R-GA, (C), the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, speaks to reporters as House Majority Leader Richard Armitage, R-TX (R) and Rep Susan Molinari, R-NY (2ndR), look on during a press conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC on Wednesday. Gingrich was renominated to serve a second two-year term as Speaker. — AFP/UNB photo

**Belarus president, MPs fail to compromise on referendum**

MINSK, Belarus, Nov 21: Prospects for a compromise in a bitter power struggle between the parliament and president of this former Soviet republic dimmed after lawmakers canceled a meeting with him and he snubbed Russian mediators, reports AP.

President Alexander Lukashenko and his political opponents are feuding over a national referendum he proposed which is scheduled for Sunday. The referendum proposes to extend Lukashenko's term to 2001 and expand his already sweeping powers.

Legislative opponents are trying to impeach Lukashenko.

Russian president Boris Yeltsin, concerned about the political tension in neighbouring Belarus, telephoned Lukashenko and the parliament speaker in an attempt to mediate.

Lukashenko refused, however, to meet with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and the leaders of

Russia's parliament on Wednesday in Smolensk, on the Russian side of their common border.

"The president has a full schedule," said his deputy chief of ideology, Vladimir Zametalin. He said Lukashenko would not go.

Yeltsin was obviously terribly misinformed about the situation in Belarus," Lukashenko said.

Opposition parliament speaker Semyon Sharetzky headed for Smolensk to meet with the speakers of the both chambers of the Russian parliament. Earlier in the day, he called off a planned meeting with Lukashenko after the president broke up a parliamentary session by calling his supporters in the legislature into his office.

Several hundred presidential supporters, some of them waving Soviet-era Communist flags, gathered in the square outside parliament.

**Int'l assistance for emerging democracies on the rise**

WASHINGTON, Nov 21: International assistance to political parties in emerging democracies has increased markedly in recent years and is having a positive effect on democratic development, according to experts involved in assistance programmes, reports USIS.

Speaking November 18 at a conference on political parties sponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, chairman of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, founded in England in 1992, said the "enormous growth" in special democracy-building foundations has occurred in small countries as well as large.

In addition to the United States, Germany and England, countries as small as Sweden and the Netherlands now have organisations whose objective is to assist political parties in emerging democracies, Pinto-Duschinsky noted.

"The assistance being provided, however, is 'fundamentally different' than that given during the Cold War, when 'much of the aid originated in intelligence organisations and was used for ideological purposes,'" Pinto-Duschinsky said.

"Now the assistance goes to all kinds of political parties with a myriad of viewpoints, he said, adding that it also is much more varied and focused on

non-monetary aid, such as equipment and facilities and training and development, as well as direct cash assistance.

Lorne Kramer, president of the International Republican Institute (IRI), said his organisation currently has programmes in 29 emerging democracies. "The focus of most of our work is on political party building that can most hasten democratic development," he remarked.

"We concentrate on those countries where we can make a difference," Kramer continued — from South Africa to Bosnia. He stressed that "a cookie-cutter approach does not work," that programmes must be tailored to

particular circumstances in each country. In some countries, assistance is provided to all non-authoritarian political parties, in others to particular parties opposed to the governing party, which may have had a long-standing organisational edge, he explained.

Kramer also noted that IRI is "working to build political parties that are based more on issues and less on personalities." In addition, it is important to assist with grass-roots party organisation and not just with the central party apparatus.

Ken Wollack, president of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), said "vibrant political parties are essential to

democracy, and that is why NDI provides assistance.

To those who say foreign assistance to political parties is interventionism, Wollack said, "non-intervention is, in fact, intervention because it gives an edge to authoritarian forces."

Wollack stressed that assistance should not primarily be aimed at campaigns and elections, but instead at a wide variety of issues that can determine the overall health of political parties, such as: Membership recruitment; public opinion and policy research; regional operations; coalition building; ethics; and outreach to women, youth and minorities.

**China plans to march 6000 troops into HK**

HONG KONG, Nov 21: China plans to march 6,000 soldiers across the border into Hong Kong as it takes control of the territory at midnight on June 30, 1997, a newspaper report said today, says Reuter.

The Financial Times said in a report from London, that China informed British officials of its plans.

It said the show of military force, which will also include air and naval forces, is designed to emphasise China's sovereignty over Hong Kong after 150 years of British rule.