

### Fight against LTTE France to support Lanka

PARIS, Nov 26: French President Jacques Chirac expressed his support Monday for Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga in her fight against separatist Tamils, calling it a difficult domestic conflict, reports AFP.

Chirac and Kumaratunga also discussed boosting Franco-Sri Lankan economic and diplomatic ties, saying Paris considers Sri Lanka a "gateway" to Indian and Pakistani markets.

"French support for my government's policy of peace on the ethnic problem is already present, and we discussed that at great length," she said after talks over lunch with Chirac at his Elysee palace.

The Colombo government has been fighting a civil war

since 1972 with Tamil militants who want to create an independent state in the north-east of the island nation.

Chirac himself said Kumaratunga's visit was intended to boost both diplomatic and economic ties between the two countries, the Elysee said.

In particular they discussed projects for Sri Lankan import and export controls, and a bid by French firm allocated for a contract to install 162,000 telephone lines.

"I think this meeting is going to strengthen Franco-Sri Lankan relations on the human scale and also on the economic and commercial trade field. It will strengthen it a great deal," said the Sri Lankan head of state afterwards.

# Rwanda rejects int'l force

GOMA, Zaire, Nov 26: The leader of a rebel movement in eastern Zaire and the Rwandan government accused of supporting him both rejected a proposed international humanitarian force Monday, reports AP.

Twenty-five nations met in Germany over the weekend and announced they were considering sending forces to protect humanitarian aid deliveries, but in Central Africa, their help was not wanted.

"We object to their presence in Rwanda," Ephraim Kabajija, an adviser to President Pasteur Bizimungu, said in Kigali, Rwanda's capital.

In Goma, rebel leader Laurent Desire Kabila said that UN aid agency figures on refugees were "totally false" and in-

cluded local Zairians who fled fighting in the region.

"We do not need an international force here," he said, adding that he was preparing for a substantial clash with his foes — Zairian government troops and Rwandan Hutu militias — in Walkale, 90 miles (145 kilometers) west of the border city of Goma.

Last week, Rwanda said that nearly all Rwandan refugees had returned home from eastern Zaire, but Kabajija acknowledged Monday that "about 150,000" refugees remain, apparently moving west into Zaire.

A spokesman for the United Nations, however, insisted Monday that the number of refugees still in Zaire was much higher.

Kabajija said the refugees in Zaire are under the control of Rwandan Hutu militiamen, and the only role the international troops could play was to fight the militiamen and free the refugees.

The nations who met in Germany agreed that at least 250,000 refugees were in eastern Zaire and as many as 300,000 more could be, said Canadian Lt Gen. Maurice Baril, who is to lead the proposed force.

Rebel leaders have refused to let aid workers and journalists enter eastern Zaire, where returning refugees say their hunger and exhausted compatriots are dying.

Aid agency figures indicate that twice as many women as men are coming out of the forests of eastern Zaire. Nothing is known about the men's fate.

Hundreds of Rwandan refugees emerged from the forest Monday, many with gunshot and machete wounds from attacks received while walking toward Rwanda.

"In the forest we saw soldiers, they started to shoot at us, I was shot six times I thought I was going to die," said refugee Emmanuel Nahimana.

Kabila, leader of the uprising against Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko, said Monday that a local militia known as Mai Mai had joined the rebellion and was probably responsible for the attacks on refugees.

Refugees also said the Mai Mai have taken adult male refugees into the forest and that they have since disappeared.

## Off the Record



Irene Skliva from Greece who won the Miss World 1996 title two days ago, addresses a gathering at a welcome party in the Indian capital New Delhi Monday. The pageant was marred by protests from Hindu nationalists. — AFP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY

**Arafat to visit UAE, Qatar:** Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will visit the Gulf nations of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) today to drum up support for the Palestinian stance in negotiations with Israel's senior official said yesterday. AFP reports from Gaza City.

Arafat will visit the UAE to meet its Emir Sheikh Zaid Ibn Sultan al Nahyan, then head to Qatar for talks with its leader Sheikh Hamad Ibn Khalifa al Thani. Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP.

**HIV cases shooting up in Bombay:** HIV infections are shooting up in the suburbs of Bombay, which has a huge sex industry. The Times of India newspaper said yesterday. AFP reports from Bombay.

"Contrary to belief that HIV incidence is primarily a problem of the red light areas, a pattern emerging from the study suggests that HIV has now spread into 'unsuspecting' neighbourhoods and suburbs," it said. Quoting a study of 4,500 suspected HIV cases conducted by the private AIDS Research and Control Centre (ARCC) between 1994 and 1996 in five suburbs it said 52 per cent of the affected did not have "contact" with prostitutes. "They were infected in pre-marital and extra-marital encounters, with sexual partners from within their community," it said.

**Trams to run again in London:** Trams will be running again in London by the end of the century for the first time since 1952, in a scheme designed to reduce traffic congestion, the government announced in London on Monday. AFP reports from London.

Under a project costing 200 million pounds (334 million dollars) work will start now on building a 17-mile (27 kilometre) Croydon tramlink in south London which will link Croydon with Wimbledon, Beckenham and New Addington. The system will run partly along existing railway tracks and partly along or beside the roadway, and trains should be operating by late 1999.

**1 killed in Mexico violence:** Mexicans of different religious and opposition political parties battled with rocks, hoes, machetes, axes and firearms, killing one person and injuring 17, authorities said on Monday. Reuter reports from San Cristobal De Las Casas.

"The confrontation on Sunday was due to agrarian, political and religious causes that in recent months have worsened conflicts between Catholics and evangelicals who belong to different parties," David Gomez, a state official who oversees Indian rights, told Reuters. The clash among Tzeltal Maya Indians took place in the rural southeastern state of Chiapas, pitting Roman Catholics of the leftist opposition Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) against protestant evangelicals of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Gomez said.

**61 kidnappers held in China:** Police in southeastern China have arrested 61 members of a gang that kidnapped and sold women and children, the China news service said yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

Police in Fujian province rescued 79 women and children who were abducted by the gang, the news agency said. Gang members had kidnapped a total of 114 women and children since 1991, the agency said. It did not say what had happened to the other 35.

**China, Russia sign accord:** China and Russia have signed an agreement on joint action against cross-border crime and the drugs trade, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

The agreement was signed in Beijing Monday by Russia's Justice Minister Valentine Kovalyov, who arrived on November 22 for a six day official visit. During a meeting, China's state councillor Luo Gan said he hoped cooperation between the two countries would grow, in particular to combat the drug trade and other crimes across their 4,000 kilometre (about 2,500 mile) border.

## China looking to bolster its fledgling superpower status

BEIJING, Nov 26: Chinese President Jiang Zemin is looking to bolster Beijing's fledgling superpower status with a landmark state tour of South Asia, encompassing potential rival India and old ally Pakistan, reports AP.

"China wants a high profile in the international arena. We have seen growing trip diplomacy to its neighbours in Southeast Asia and now it is tuning its focus to its western borders," said an Asian diplomat based in China's capital.

Taking Pakistan and India together shows a development in its dealings with its neighbours, which is necessary for any attempt at superpower status, he added.

Jiang is set to arrive in New Delhi Thursday for China's first presidential visit to India, after decades of mistrust sparked by a bitter border war in 1962 and China's declared nuclear capacity.

He will then fly on to Pakistan, which separated from India at independence from Britain in 1947 and has enjoyed strong patronage from

Beijing, including the construction of the Taxila heavy mechanical complex which Jiang himself supervised in the mid-seventies.

The final leg will be in Nepal, which shares a long land border with the troubled region of Tibet and, until recent agreements with Beijing, allowed virtual free passage of refugees seeking to reach India and Tibet's government-in-exile in Dharamsala.

"In modern history, China has shown very little interest in the politics of the Indian subcontinent, in the same way that it has shown little interest in the Middle East," said a European diplomat specialising in China's external relations.

"But there has been a gradual melting of the glacier in the triangular China-India-Pakistan relationship as Beijing has come to regard itself as the regional power with interests in maintaining good neighbourly relations with all," he said.

"This is shown clearly in China's efforts to boost trade, so that it can then use economic ties as a political lever," he

added.

China's Trade Ministry called Friday for expanded Sino-India economic cooperation and said Jiang's visit would help boost trade, which at 1.01 billion dollars in the first 10 months of the year made up only 0.4 per cent of China's total foreign trade.

While India is a regional power and potential rival to China, Beijing is currently more concerned with New Delhi's continued acceptance of Tibetan refugees and the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader in exile who fled to India after an abortive uprising against Chinese rule in 1959.

In the last month, Beijing has launched the "final battle" to wipe out all remaining vestiges of the Dalai Lama's authority in Tibet and as numerous diplomats in Beijing were quick to point out, India's position makes China's task harder.

China already has political agreements with Nepal and Bhutan over the return of most Tibetan refugees who leave China without correct papers.

### Move against illegal stalls Calcutta street traders set fire to buses, trams

NEW DELHI, Nov 26: Calcutta street traders set fire to buses and trams with petrol bombs after around 1,700 illegal stalls were destroyed by police bulldozers newspapers reported today. reports AP.

Police armed with batons then charged the crowd to stop a confrontation with local shopowners. The Asian Age said.

The action, dubbed "operation sunshine," was announced in August, giving the traders time to dismantle their shacks which clog up Calcutta's pavements.

The state government, which also wants to ban the eastern city's trademark rickshaws because of increased traffic congestion, said the illegal stalls forced pedestrians into the road, thereby stopping traffic.

The Times of India said the cleared streets looked unrecognisable after the police operation.

### Einstein's private letters fetch \$900,000

NEW YORK A collection of letters from Albert Einstein that show him as both a tender and cruel husband sold at auction Monday for nearly 900,000 dollars, twice as much as a manuscript on relativity, one of the fundamental theories of the universe, reports AP.

"You will expect no affection from me," he wrote to his first wife, Mileva Marie, in 1914. "You must leave my bedroom or study at once without protesting when I ask you to."

That note, sold with two others for 20,700 dollars, was one of more than 400 Einstein letters to family members that, with the scientific manuscript, were auctioned by Christie's.

Only 28 of the 116 lots offered Monday were sold, for a total of 1.28 million dollars, including commissions of 10 per cent to 15 per cent. Presale estimates valued each lot — anywhere from one to 53 letters — at 1,500 dollars to 35,000 dollars, for a total of 2 million dollars.

The highest price, 442,500 dollars from an anonymous bidder, was paid for the 53 love letters Einstein wrote to Marie after they met as students in turn-of-the-century Switzerland. Scholars believe Marie, herself a scientist, was a sounding board for the theory of relativity that established Einstein's genius.

In a short poem from 1900, the 21-year-old physicist, wrote, "while thinking of his Dollie/His pillow catches fire."

But in the 1914 letter, written when his wife and children were about to join him in Berlin, he stipulated: "A. You will see to it (1) that my clothes and linen are kept in order. (2) that I am served three regular meals a day in my room. B. You will renounce all personal relations with me, except when these are required to keep up social appearances."

### Hillary keen to play formal role in US policy reforms

WASHINGTON, Nov 26: Hillary Clinton wife of President Bill Clinton wants to play a formal role in US social policy reform during her husband's second term. Time magazine reported Monday, says AP.

The 49-year old first lady in Asia with her husband was in Australia at the time of the interview, the first since the November 5 elections that earned the president a second term.

She told Time magazine reporters she wanted to be a part of efforts to reform the US social safety net, a large number of programme known here under "the umbrella term 'welfare'."

"I want to travel around and talk to people about what is happening on the ground, she said adding "I intend to speak out about it and write about it."

Hillary Clinton spent her first two years in the white House spearheading the administration's health care reform effort, which collapsed after meeting with congressional rejection.

In Sydney, she voiced some bitterness about the US public's perception of the first lady, saying Americans expected her to have "no opinions or ideas on anything."



Palestinian women hold pictures of family members imprisoned by the Palestinian Authority in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip Monday. They protested asking their release during a visit to Khan Yunis by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. — AFP/UNB photo

### Siamese twins separated

BEIJING, Nov 26: Chinese surgeons have performed the country's first successful separation of Siamese twins, less than one month after birth, a report said on Tuesday. reports AP.

Both baby boys have survived a record 14 days since the operation was performed.

Born nine weeks prematurely the boys were joined from the bottom of their chests to their navels and shared a common liver. The Xinhua news agency said.

A team of surgeons in the southwestern city of Chongqing opened the twins' abdominal cavities and cut apart the joined livers on November 11, 28 days after their birth.

Such a case occurs in every 65,000 births and the survival rate after separation is extremely low.



An expert at the sale rooms of Sotheby's holds the breast star from Napoleon's tunic, Monday, before it goes on sale later this week. The star indicated that he was the recipient of France's highest award, the Legion d'Honneur and was an award founded by Napoleon on 19th May 1802 and conferred by him on anyone who displayed outstanding civil and military merit. It is expected to go under the hammer for over 7000 pounds sterling. — AFP/UNB photo

## UN seeks Saudi funds to dismantle Iraqi arms

RIYADH, Nov 26: UN envoy Rolf Ekeus here Monday asked Saudi officials for funds for the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, reports AP.

Ekeus, the UNSCOM Chairman, said after his talks in Riyadh that the Saudis "clearly are understanding and sympathetic," although his request for funds may be a moot point if the UN oil-for-food deal is implemented.

Under the deal signed in May, Iraq can sell limited quantities of oil to raise money for not only food and medicine but also to defray costs incurred by UNSCOM and other UN agencies.

In New York, the Iraqi ambassador to the United Nations, Nizar Hamdoun, said Monday that Iraq has lifted remaining objections to the oil-for-food plan and agrees with UN terms for implementing the accord.

Hamdoun said "December is the most likely time" when Iraq could resume oil exports

under the deal, but there was no immediate confirmation from the United Nations.

Ekeus said his talks with the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud Al Faisal, were "very constructive and cordial." Saudi Arabia and Kuwait contributed three million dollars each to UNSCOM's 30 million dollar budget last year.

Kuwait has expressed in principle readiness to support UNSCOM financially. Ekeus said, after warning that UNSCOM risked running out of funds by the end of the year and have to close its operations.

UNSCOM's budget helps pay for inspections of suspected weapons sites and a high-tech surveillance system aimed at dismantling Iraq of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons as well as ballistic missiles.

Saudi officials told AFP they "understood" UNSCOM's situation but also recalled there would be no problem if the oil-for-food deal were implemented and expressed hope it would be carried out early next year.

## Sonia potential saviour of Congress (I): Gadgil

NEW DELHI, Nov 26: A power struggle in India's oldest political party is being "keenly observed" by the widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, a party spokesman said here Tuesday, amid speculation she could enter politics, reports AP.

Congress (I) spokesman Vithal Gadgil said the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, widely seen by many Congress members as the party's potential saviour in her role as a member of the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty, "was taking an active interest in party affairs."

He added: "She is keen for party unity. She wants to rejuvenate the Congress."

Gadgil, however, would not confirm speculation that the reclusive, highly respected Sonia Gandhi, universally referred to as "mama," would take an active part in politics.

"She is there all the time behind the scenes," he said. "But I

cannot say whether she will jump into party affairs full time."

Gadgil denied that the new Congress president Sitaram Kesri had launched a war of attrition against his predecessor, former premier PV Narasimha Rao, who quit his post following sweeping allegations of corruption.

"It's not personal... it is a move to reorganise and improve the party's image," he said. "Every Congress president wants to have his own team. Even Rao dropped a few people and inducted a few people in his time."

Kesri, who succeeded Rao as Congress chief in September, sacked three party general secretaries close to the former prime minister on November 22 and also welcomed three bitter critics of Rao after they rejoined the Congress.

Rao loyalists accuse Kesri of plotting to force him to relin-

quish "control of the powerful Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) through new elections."

"Kesri has gone mad," said Rao loyalist Dwivedra Dwivedi, who was axed as party general-secretary. "This move is illegal because he is only interim president."

Former cabinet minister K. Karunakaran, however, a bitter Rao critic, late Monday said Rao should step down from all party posts.

"Rao should resign from the CPP leadership for the same reasons he had stepped down from the party presidency," he said.

Gadgil refused to comment on how Rao — the first Indian prime minister to appear in court on corruption charges and a leader who took the Congress to its worst electoral defeat — would go down in history.

"It is too early for all that," he said.

## 'Expansion of Israeli settlements buries hope for ME peace'

JERUSALEM, Nov 26: The expansion of Israeli settlements will lead Israel and the Palestinians back into confrontation, the top Palestinian negotiator said Monday in a strongly worded letter to his Israeli counterpart, reports AP.

In a letter to Dan Shamron, Saeb Erekat said the decision by the Israeli government to build new homes in West Bank settlements "is not only a violation of the signed agreements, but also buries the hoped-for expectations of peace."

"If this settlement policy continues, it will lead the two peoples — the Palestinians and Israel — back to confrontation," Erekat said.

Erekat said settlement expansion is banned by the existing Israel-Palestinian agreements, which say neither side

should take unilateral steps to change the status quo in the West Bank or Gaza Strip pending negotiations on a final peace settlement.

The Palestinians hope to establish an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza, which Israel captured from Jordan in 1967.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak also said Monday that continued building of Israeli settlements in occupied territories would pose a serious threat to the Middle East peace process.

US State Department spokesman Clyn Davies said Monday such settlement construction is "not helpful."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said he supports "natural growth" of the 144 Jewish settlements in

the West Bank and Gaza, as well as settlements in the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in 1967.

"There is no difference between the Golan Heights and the West Bank and Gaza," he said. "We always said that we will continue in the policy of building in the existing settlements, but a decision on new settlements has not been made."

Earlier Monday, Netanyahu urged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat not to get onto a path of conflict with Israel, warning that provocations by the Palestinian Authority would be a "grave error."

Netanyahu criticised a Palestinian protest Sunday that blockaded the small Netzarim settlement, saying the Palestinians were trying "to heat up the atmosphere" and

warning such a policy "will be met with a vigorous Israeli response."

The Israeli army deployed several armoured personnel carriers near Netzarim on Monday and Israel's southern military commander said the army would intervene if there were any more incidents.

"We have clarified to the other side that we will not allow a situation in which they will disrupt the lives of an Israeli settlement," said Maj. Gen. Shlomo Yanai.

Meanwhile, talks on Israel's eight-month overdue pullout resumed Monday after a four-day hiatus, Israel's Radio reported. The radio report said Erekat was meeting with Netanyahu advisor Yitzhak Molkho.

Negotiators have been trying

to hammer out a new agreement in response to Netanyahu's demand for increased security for the 500 settlers living among Hebron's 130,000 Palestinians. Each side blames the other for the failure to reach agreement.

Palestinian negotiator Hassan Asfour accused the Netanyahu government on Monday of trying to divide Hebron and sabotage the Palestinian autonomy government.

"We are fully prepared to respond to any security interests connected with protecting Israeli or Palestinian citizens," he told Israel Radio's Arabic service. "But... recent developments supported the Palestinian view that it has nothing to do with security, but with politics."

Arafat said Monday that if

the peace process does not move forward, "peace in the whole region will be in danger."

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that "neither side wants to appear to be the one who is walking out of the negotiations, while both know there is no purpose because no progress will be made unless Arafat gives the go-ahead."

In a separate incident Monday, a Palestinian construction worker in the West Bank city of Nablus was hospitalized after a scuffle between Jewish settlers and Palestinian workers. Israeli Radio reported.

An Israeli soldier and an Israeli policeman were slightly injured Monday in two separate stone-throwing incidents near the West Bank town of Ramallah, the army said.