

US, Japan sign accord to streamline Okinawa bases

TOKYO, Dec 2: The United States and Japan today signed an agreement to streamline huge US military bases on Okinawa, settling a row first triggered by the rape of an Okinawan schoolgirl by US servicemen last year, reports Reuter.

The agreement, including plans for a high-tech floating helicopter base, was signed by US Secretary of Defence William Perry, US ambassador to Japan Walter Mondale, Japanese Defence Minister Fumio Kyuma and Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The United States agreed to hand back to Japan part or all of 11 military facilities on Okinawa, or roughly one-fifth of the 58,000 acres (23,500 hectares) occupied by the US military on the subtropical island in the East China Sea.

There were no changes to the 28,000 military personnel, mostly US Marines, stationed on Okinawa. More than 75 per cent of all US military facilities in Japan are on Okinawa.

The agreement includes

plans to build a high-tech offshore heliport for the US Marine Corps somewhere off the east coast of Okinawa, in exchange for vacating the Futema air station located in a heavily built-up area in southern Okinawa.

The agreement followed a year of talks over a row triggered in September 1995 by the rape of an Okinawan schoolgirl by three US servicemen. The three are serving up to 10 years in a Japanese jail.

AP adds: Hoping to improve security ties with one of Washington's most important allies, US Defence Secretary William Perry announced a major package of reforms Monday to make America's nearly 30,000 troops on Okinawa less of a burden.

The package includes the largest reversion of land in 24 years' decades. It would return US Marines' Futema air station, located in a densely populated area, within seven years, and study the possibility of building an offshore platform that would replace most of the station's helicopter operations.

China to help develop Pak N-energy despite US concern

ISLAMABAD, Dec 2: China will not stop helping Pakistan develop nuclear energy, despite US concerns that Beijing is supplying nuclear technology that could be used to make weapons, reports AP.

"China and Pakistan enjoy good cooperation in the utilisation of nuclear energy for peaceful purpose... and our cooperation in this regard will continue," Shen Guofang, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, told reporters Sunday.

A 21-gun salute greeted Chinese President Jiang Zemin's arrival in the capital from neighbouring India earlier on Sunday.

Jiang is to hold trade talks with Pakistan, which is accused by the United States of buying sensitive military and nuclear technology from Beijing.

"This situation does not exist... so there is no need to discuss it," Shen said of the allegations.

China's suspected sale of nuclear technology to Pakistan has been seen as a threat to India and a grave concern to the United States.

This year Washington threatened sanctions against China after it was reported that Beijing sold Pakistan ring magnets, used in the production of nuclear weapons.

Last year, too, Beijing was threatened with sanctions after reports surfaced that China sold Pakistan M-11 missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.

Both Pakistan and China have denied the accusations, but the suspicions linger and continue to be an irritant in relations between the United States and China.

Pakistan has been without US assistance since 1990 when Washington ended all military and humanitarian aid to this impoverished nation over fears that it had acquired a nuclear weapon.

Some defence analysts say South Asia is one of the most volatile regions largely because of the nuclear capabilities of both Pakistan and its rival, India.

The two countries have fought three wars since the Asian subcontinent gained its independence from Britain 49 years ago.

India exploded a nuclear device in 1973 and earlier this year threatened to conduct another nuclear test.

While Pakistan has never exploded a nuclear device, it is widely believed that it acquired an already tested device from China, something both countries deny.

At a dinner for Jiang, Pakistan President Farooq Leghari said Islamabad will not enter into any non-nuclear pacts unless India also signs on.

Also on Sunday, Jiang signed four agreements with Pakistan. They involved cooperation to stop illicit drug trafficking, as well as economic and technical cooperation, promotion of trade between the two countries, and additional power projects.

"Given the situation in the region, Pakistan's security concerns simply do not permit such a luxury," Leghari said.

Pakistan's president also lauded China's no first-strike policy, saying "we deeply respect China's commitment, unique among the nuclear powers, not to be the first to use nuclear weapons and never to threaten to use nuclear arms against non-nuclear powers."

In a brief statement released upon his arrival in Islamabad, Jiang said "peaceful coexistence" has been the hallmark of the relationship between Pakistan and China.

"Pakistan's friendship not only conforms to the fundamental interests of the two countries and people, but also contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability of South Asia and Asia at large," Jiang said.

China is currently building a nuclear power plant in Pakistan. The two countries also operate joint ventures to produce tanks and aircraft.

The two countries also agreed on the establishment of a Pakistani consul-general in Hong Kong after June 1997, when the territory returns to China, Shen said.

OSCE summit begins to map out future for peace

LISBON, Dec 2: Leaders from Europe and North America began a two-day European security summit today to map out a future blueprint for peace but Russia's concerns over NATO expansion threaten to dominate the meeting, reports Reuter.

Heads of state and government from the 54-nation Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are expected to agree a final document that will lay out plans for European security in the 21st century, launch a new round of arms control talks and shore up peace in Bosnia.

Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, standing in for President Boris Yeltsin who is recovering from heart surgery, wasted no time in underscoring Moscow's opposition to NATO plans to take in former members of the now-defunct Warsaw Pact.

Speaking on the eve of the summit, Chernomyrdin repeated the tough line adopted by Russian leaders last week against the Western alliance's eastward expansion, which Moscow says would threaten Russia's security.

Russia is categorically against NATO expanding east-

wards," he told reporters after meeting Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres. "There is no need to rush."

"The fact that Europe is now without blocs is very important, we must work together. We must develop this, strengthen this," he added.

Western diplomats say they would prefer the Lisbon summit which brings together the United States and Canada with European states, to avoid the debate on NATO enlargement.

AP adds: NATO nations hope the summit can help soothe Russian concerns over the alliance's expansion and ease its embrace of some former Warsaw Pact nations formerly under Soviet control. Russia, for its part, seems to favour an expanded role for OSCE at the expense of NATO.

BRIEFLY

Tamil Nadu governor dies: Marri Channa Reddy, governor of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu died Monday of heart failure, his son said. He was 77. AP reports from Hyderabad.

Reddy was taken to a private hospital in Hyderabad, his hometown, after a heart attack early Monday morning. He died soon after, said Shashi Dhar Reddy, his son.

Reddy was visiting Hyderabad from Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu state.

Afghan writer Indries Shah dies: Indries Shah, whose 20 books on Sufism sold 15 million copies worldwide and won praise from lay readers in the west for their clear outline of the Islamic mystical movement, has died, AP reports from London.

He was 72. Born in Simla in northern India, he died on Nov 23 in London, his family reported. He had lived in the British capital since 1955 but traveled widely.

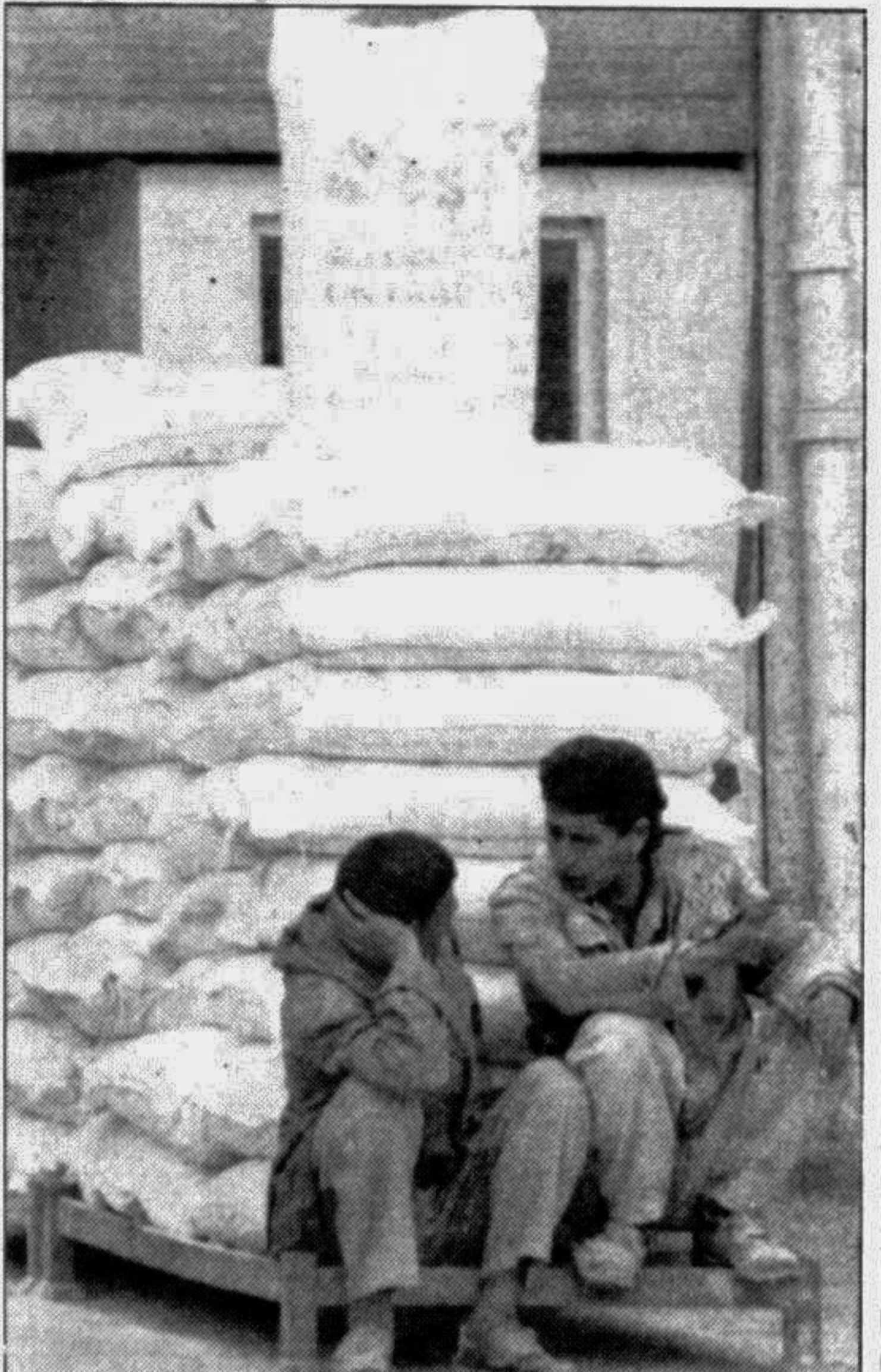
No cause of death was stated but London press reports said he suffered two heart attacks in 1987.

Malaysian king visits Cambodia: Malaysia's King Tuanku Ja'ar yesterday began a state visit to Cambodia, the first by a foreign monarch to the Southeast Asian Nation in more than a quarter century, Reuter reports from Phnom Penh.

King Norodom Sihanouk and top government officials, including Co-Premiers Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen, greeted the Malaysian King and his entourage as they arrived at Phnom Penh's Pochentong Airport aboard a special flight.

2 Qatari spy held in Bahrain: Bahrain said yesterday it had arrested two Qataris on charges of spying, the official Gulf news agency reported, Reuter reports from Manama.

An official source quoted by the agency said a man and a woman had confessed before an investigating judge to spying for Qatar. They were named as Fahad Hamad Abdullah al-Baker and Salwa Jassim Mohammed Fakhri. The source said Baker and Salwa told the judge they were sent to gather information that could harm Bahrain's national security and passed it to Qatari intelligence.



Iraqis sitting Sunday near sacks of flour in Baghdad. Iraq has been authorised to sell oil under the "oil-for-food" deal worked out with the United Nations. — AFP/UNB photo

Truce accord likely in Guatemala

OSLO, Dec 2: Confident that peace was near after Guatemala's 36 years of bloody civil war, opposing sides arrived Sunday in Oslo to put the finishing touches on a ceasefire agreement that is a key element in a planned final peace accord, reports AP.

The sides were to meet Monday and Tuesday to finalize remaining details of the permanent ceasefire in time for a signing set for Wednesday in the Norwegian capital.

"We have two full days of work to do. As for a ceasefire, we have agreed on the substantive issues and have more technical points to settle," said UN mediator Jean Arnault when he arrived at Oslo's Fornebu Airport with.

Social service groups building popular support in Islamic countries

GAZA CITY, Dec 2: Making their way through a trash-strewn lot, 200 poor boys shuffle into a sun-drenched courtyard for another day of computer classes and the Quranic reading, reports AP.

The Islamic Society is running its month-long computer camp, a tradition now in its fifth year.

Under a flag for Palestine and another for Islam, boys raised in the desperation of Gaza's alleys bounce around in ungainly calisthenics. Inside the building, counselors plan the day's extra events: a trip to the sea, maybe, or a visit to a hospital.

Colombians protest kidnapping epidemic

BOGOTA, Colombia, Dec 2: Thousands of people marched to the city's main plaza Sunday in a protest against Colombia's kidnapping rate — the highest in the world, reports AP.

March organisers said there were 931 abductions in the first ten months of 1996 in the nation of 37 million, which is plagued by rebels, drug traffickers and common criminals.

Protesters, some carrying white balloons and national flags, included former kidnapping victims as well as the defence minister, the national police chief and a flock of politicians.

"No more kidnapping; death penalty," read one banner.

Govt hints possible crackdown Protest against Milosevic continues in Belgrade

BELGRADE, Dec 2: Foes of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic are vowing to take their protests to cities throughout Serbia this week despite police and government hints of a possible government crackdown, reports AP.

Up to 100,000 people braved rain and snow Sunday to march through Belgrade on the 14th day of protests in the capital sparked by court decisions annulling opposition victories in local elections.

Once again, they hurled eggs and firecrackers at state TV and the Serbian parliament building. It was unclear how long the

demonstrations could continue to draw crowds as large as Saturday, when 150,000 people were on the streets. But the protests already have been the largest and most sustained ever against the Serbian leader.

Police so far have tolerated the demonstrations, but warned in a statement Sunday that they would no longer allow unauthorised protests. Protesters will bear the responsibility for the results if they break the law, police said.

The speaker of the Serbian parliament also said a crackdown might be in the works against the protests, which he called a "pro-fascist rampage."

Jordan Valley inseparable from Israel: Netanyahu Arab League urges world not to aid Jewish settlement

CAIRO, Dec 2: The Arab League on Sunday urged the world to stop any aid which could be used to fund Jewish settlements in Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights as Israel's hardline prime minister promised yet more expansion on the West Bank, reports AP.

League delegates exhorted Israel to "stop immediately" construction of settlements and urged Arab countries to "back the struggle of Syria and the Palestinian people against colonisation," but they stopped short of backing a Syrian call for a freezing of Arab-Israeli ties.

The appeals were made at an extraordinary session of the 22-member league held at the request of Syria and the Palestinians to discuss Israel's policy of expanding settlements on occupied Arab land.

Delegates "called on all countries to stop any financial aid capable of being used for settlements," Palestinian delegate Mohammed Sobeh said, quoting a statement issued at the end of the meeting.

But Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to further develop settlements in the Jordan Valley of the West Bank, saying the area will stay part of Israel forever, Israeli public radio reported.

"Jordan Valley will be an integral part of Israel whatever the definitive solution with the Palestinians," Netanyahu told members of the regional council of Maale Efrayim, the biggest Israeli settlement in the region.

Council Chairman David Levy said he had obtained from Netanyahu a promise "that 450 new homes will be built in the region and that the road following along the Jordan will be transformed into a central axis route." Levy also quoted Netanyahu

as saying that the Jordan Valley would be classed as a "priority development region."

Meanwhile, Arab League delegates fell short of backing a call by Syria's ambassador to Egypt, Issa Darwish, for a freezing of Arab-Israeli ties in line with a resolution adopted at the June Arab summit held in Cairo.

Levy adds: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, even as the Arab League held an emergency session on his settlement policies, vowed on Sunday that the Jordan Valley area of the occupied West Bank would be part of Israel forever.

The prime minister met today with representatives of the Jordan Valley. In the meeting the prime minister said that the government saw the Jordan Valley as inseparable from the state of Israel in any permanent agreement. Netanyahu's office said in a statement issued to the media.

aggravating anger at corruption and repression endemic to regimes in much of the Third World.

In Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and the Palestinian territories, activists have identified themselves with the poor, providing solace to the disinherited and downtrodden. Their clinics and legal-aid societies, schools and orphanages create a reservoir of good will.

No better example exists than the Palestinian territories, particularly Gaza, where the number of mosques nearly tripled in the 20 years after the 1967 Mideast war.

Financed by up to 120 million dollars a year, largely donated by Palestinians working abroad and supporters in the Persian Gulf, the community work of Hamas overshadows its

Lucinschi wins presidential polls in Moldova

LONDON, Dec 2: Leftist challenger Petru Lucinschi has won Moldova's presidential election, Russia's ITAR-Tass news agency reported today, says Reuter.

Tass, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said the result was announced by Moldova's Central Electoral Commission.

The agency did not give any voting figures but Lucinschi had been heading for victory over Moldova's President Mircea Snegur earlier today with more than three-quarters of the vote counted in the presidential election run off.

After a bitter campaign in the former Soviet republic that pitted the president against the government, parliament chairman Lucinschi led by more than six points with 76 per cent of the ballot counted.

Shi'ite leader gunned down in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 2: A Shi'ite leader was gunned down outside his home in the central Punjab town of Multan, according to news reports Monday, reports AP.

Syed Baqar Zaidi, leader of the Sipah-e-Mohammed or Soldiers of Mohammed, was killed on Sunday by masked gunmen who drove past on a motorcycle, reported the English-language daily newspaper, The Muslim.

No one has taken responsibility for the killing, however in recent months central Punjab province has been wracked by religiously motivated violence.

There have been several incidents involving rival members of militant Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim groups.

Zaidi's Soldiers of Mohammed group is one of the militant Shi'ite group that often clashes with rival Sunnis, belonging to the militant Guardians of the Friends of the Prophet.

Tajik gov't loses control of town to opposition

DUSHANBE, Dec 2: Tajikistan's Islamist opposition said it had taken control of the town of Garm on Sunday after fierce clashes with Tajik government troops.

"Garm came under opposition control in the second half of the day," Jaloledin Makhmudov, an opposition official and a member of a United Nations Ceasefire Commission based in the capital Dushanbe, told Reuters by telephone.

The Tajik government said four of its soldiers had been killed when opposition guerrillas stormed administrative buildings in Garm on Sunday. There was no word on opposition casualties.

"Full responsibility for this lies with the (Tajik) opposition," said a statement by the interior and security ministries issued to journalists.

Itar-Tass news agency said about 100 rebels had attacked administrative buildings in Garm, setting some of them ablaze.

Off the Record

Oh no ... not again
BANGKOK: A policeman whose wife cut off his penis as he slept following an argument over a love affair walked bleeding to a hospital, where the severed organ was re-attached, reports AP.

Police Sgt Maj Sompong Kejkowit, 38, said Monday that he had been drinking heavily before returning home Saturday night and fighting with his wife, Vachirakorn, about his mistress.

"I was so drunk that I did not feel much pain when I woke up in the middle of the night and found my wife had cut my penis off," Sompong said. "I was afraid that I would probably faint before reaching the hospital, as I lost a lot of blood."

The penis was surgically re-attached and Sompong's doctor said it would function normally after two weeks. Since the assault, the policeman's wife has cared for him at the hospital and the couple are working out their differences, Sompong said.

"It is a good lesson for all men who have done something wrong to be aware while they are sleeping," Sompong said.

Such mutilations, known as "feeding the ducks," are not uncommon in Thailand. Local hospitals have developed some of the world's most advanced re-attachment techniques.

Specialists on Thai culture, which places great value on self-control and avoidance of conflict, attribute such attacks to explosions of long-repressed anger and jealousy.

'No' to nudity

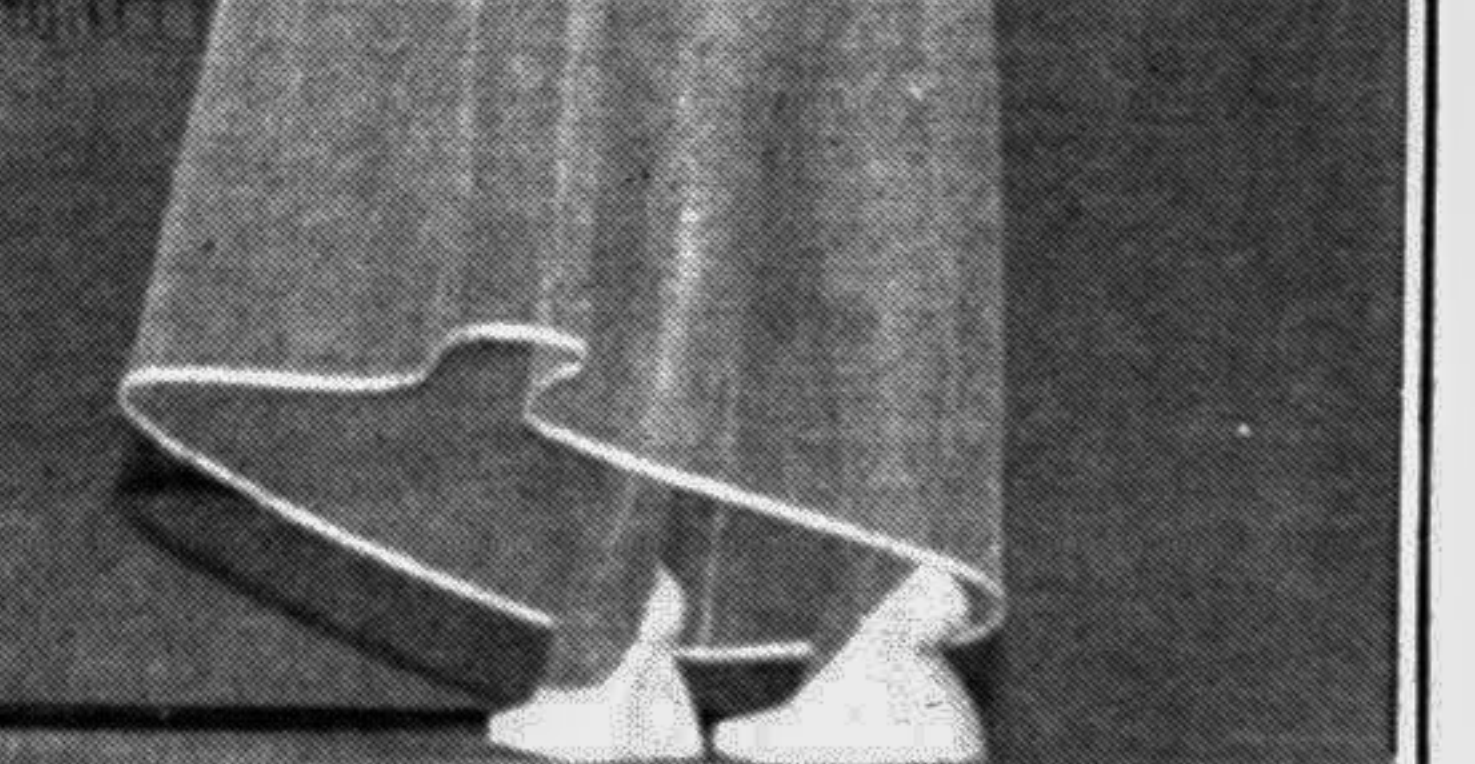
MANILA: The Philippine postmaster-general has rejected four proposed stamps featuring nude paintings by Filipino artists to avoid controversy in the predominantly Roman Catholic country, an official said Monday, reports AP.

November is normally celebrated as national stamp collecting month. But because of the stamps rejection, the month passed without any new issues, said Alfonso Divina, the chief stamp designer.

Divina said his office had recommended designs with nude paintings by four outstanding Filipino painters on the advice of the Arts Association of the Philippines.

But Postmaster-General Irineo Ilina Jr. rejected the designs because they might invite complaints from church leaders who might consider the paintings indecent, Divina said.

"These paintings are works of art that can be viewed in museums but some Filipinos may not be willing to see them on stamps," he said.



An outfit by Russian designer Irina Selitskaya is modelled on the last day of the Moscow international fashion week Sunday. — AFP/UNB photo

Tigers attack Hindu temple: 2 girls killed

COLOMBO, Dec 2: Two Sri Lankan girls were killed and 12 people wounded when Tamil Tiger rebels attacked a Hindu temple in eastern Batticaloa District on Sunday, a military spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

The temple, about 220 km (135 miles) from Colombo, came under rocket and mortar fire from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as the army's area brigade commander and a Tamil parliamentarian addressed residents, he said.

Troops used mortars and armoured vehicles to repulse the attack by the rebels, who are fighting for an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the north and east, he said.