

International

Universities cancel classes

Myanmar junta blames NLD for instigating protests

BANGKOK, Dec 9: Myanmar today accused members of the opposition leaders Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), underground communist activists and student exiles of instigating recent student protests.

"We have evidence that not only some NLD members but also members of the All Burma Student's Democratic Front and underground elements of the Myanmar Communist Party are deeply involved in this unrest," a spokesman for the military government told Reuters by telephone.

Meanwhile two universities at the heart of Myanmar's student protests cancelled classes today, campus sources said, raising speculation the military government would close the schools in an attempt to quell growing student unrest.

Dwindling attendance at the Yangon Institute of Technology (YIT) and the Yangon University following anti-government student protests that

rocked the capital Yangon last week prompted the schools to cancel classes, the sources said. Both schools were closed for about two years shortly after 1988 student pro-democracy uprisings that were crushed by the military, leaving thousands dead or in jail.

Administration officials at the institute and the university said that although the two schools had not been officially closed, they were assisting students who wanted to take leave by arranging air, train and bus tickets.

Rumours circulated today of another gathering of students outside the Institute of Technology, diplomatic sources told Reuters. An institute campus official, however, said there were no demonstrations and described the situation as calm.

Police and soldiers today blocked access to roads leading to the two universities, witnesses said.

SC upholds Milosevic's controls over local govt

BELGRADE, Dec 9: The Serbian Supreme Court on Sunday upheld Slobodan Milosevic's hold on Belgrade's local government despite weeks of protests in the city's streets. The move pushed foes into a more determined effort to drive Milosevic from power, reports AP.

The opposition said eight protesters were arrested in the past two days, making 40 in the past week. One of those arrested this weekend was badly beaten, opposition leaders said.

Although the conflict was deepening, it appeared that Milosevic was more likely to be headed for a long struggle of tactics and politics than turning police loose on demonstrators.

Radomir Lazarevic, the chief of the Belgrade election commission, told reporters that the Supreme Court had rejected appeals that would have reinstated opposition election victories.

tories in Belgrade.

The court did not give reasons for its ruling, Lazarevic said. The Belgrade election commission's appeal dealt only with the capital city, but did not bode well for appeals involving other cities where election victories for the opposition also were taken away.

When the commission appealed to the Supreme Court on Thursday, the opposition had assumed it was a way for Milosevic to defuse the daily protests that regularly bring 100,000 people onto the streets.

They are the largest and most sustained protests against Milosevic, since he came to power in 1987.

Another 100,000 people were on the streets Sunday. Former French culture minister Jack Lang, a member of the European parliament, lent them their first significant Western support.

Barriers from Hebron street removed
GCC leaders accuse Israel of violating peace process

DOHA, Dec 9: Gulf Arab leaders on Sunday drafted a statement denouncing Israeli threats to Middle East peace after shrugging off Bahrain's unprecedented boycott of their annual summit, officials said, reports AP.

Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jasssem Al-Thani said the boycott, which Bahrain staged to protest Qatar's handling of a territorial dispute, would not undermine the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit, although it "affects us personally."

The leaders of GCC members at the summit, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), meanwhile drafted a statement accusing Israel of violating the principles of the peace process, the official Qatari news agency said.

The statement will urge Israel to "abide by its obligations"

outlined in the accords with the Palestinian authority.

These include the withdrawal from Hebron, the release of prisoners, the lifting of the blockade on Palestinian areas, a pullout from east Jerusalem and a halt to building settlements, it said.

It also called for Israel to resume negotiations with Syria and Lebanon as well as withdrawal from the Golan Heights and south Lebanon.

Reuters adds: The Israeli army on Sunday removed cement barriers from a Hebron street closed to Arab traffic two years ago but denied the move was tied to PLO demands the road be opened to Palestinians.

Opening the street in the West Bank city's heart has been a key Palestinian demand in talks on implementing a long delayed handover by Israel of most of Hebron.

Sindh CM accuses Benazir of holding Nusrat hostage

KARACHI, Pakistan, Dec 9: A Pakistan provincial chief minister accused ousted prime minister Benazir Bhutto on Sunday of holding her mother Nusrat hostage for political ends.

"She (Nusrat) is being held hostage by Benazir," Mumtaz Bhutto, a distant cousin and political rival of Benazir told Reuters in an interview in the southern city of Karachi.

President Farooq Leghari, who sacked Benazir Bhutto on November 5 on disputed charges of corruption and misuse, picked Mumtaz Bhutto to the caretaker Chief Minister of Sindh province.

Once a close associate of Benazir's father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Mumtaz Bhutto has spent much time in the political wilderness because of his espousal of Sindh nationalism.

He did not explain how Benazir was holding her Iranian-born mother hostage or what her precise political

aims might be.

A spokesman for the ousted prime minister's Pakistan People's Party denied the charge, saying "she (Nusrat) is free. She was recently elected as supreme leader of the party."

Mumtaz Bhutto said Benazir had a history of exploiting the misfortunes of her family members — her executed father and two brothers who died in disputed circumstances — to win sympathy and advance her own political career.

"Now she is using her ailing mother," he said.

He said Benazir's popularity had slumped after the September 20 killing of her estranged brother, Murtaza, who died in a hail of police bullets in Karachi, a judicial inquiry into the incident is under way.

Nusrat Bhutto, 67, has rarely appeared in public since Benazir's dismissal and is widely believed to be in poor health.

Mumtaz Bhutto accused

Benazir of corruption, incompetence and failure to provide law and order while she was in power.

He said inquiries were under way against her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, who was investment minister in Benazir's Cabinet.

There is evidence and record of malpractices all the way from the top to the bottom," Mumtaz Bhutto said.

He predicted that Benazir's PPP would not get more than a dozen seats in the Sindh Provincial Assembly and half that number in the National Assembly (lower house) in national and provincial assembly elections set for February 3.

He described the political atmosphere in Pakistan as quite calm and said he foresaw no security problems during the polls.

Mumtaz Bhutto said his Sindh National Front Party was ready to coordinate with Murtaza Bhutto's PPP group.

24th FMs' conference begins

'OIC to continue support for Palestinian state'

JAKARTA, Dec 9: The deadlocked Middle East peace process is expected to dominate the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) foreign ministers' meeting which opened here today, reports AP.

President Suharto of Indonesia started the five-day meeting with a speech saying: "In the Middle East we (OIC members) will continue to support the struggle of the Palestinian people for their right of self-determination and the realisation of an independent state on their own land."

But he also called on members of the Muslim nations umbrella group to make itself more efficient in facing its challenges.

"We need to apply more efficient procedures and work

methods in running the organisations... our organisation will remain relevant in amidst the flow of change," Suharto said.

Delegates from 53 member states of the OIC and several international institutions attended the annual foreign ministers' meeting.

Host officials had wanted to shift the focus of discussion towards economic issues.

Xinhua adds: The 24th conference of foreign ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) opened in Jakarta today by Indonesian President Suharto.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said in his chairmanship that Indonesia would like to focus on strengthening mutual investment and trade among Islamic nations.

The OIC ought to spend more time and focus on economic cooperation among member states to enhance the economic welfare of its members," Alatas said earlier.

The meeting will also elect a new OIC secretary general. During the five-day gathering, the ministers will discuss current world problems including the Arab-Israeli conflict and the conflict in Afghanistan and Bosnia.

The conference is the first of its kind hosted by Indonesia since the OIC was established in 1969.

Delegates from 53 OIC member countries, four observer states and representatives from non-OIC nations and international organisations are taking part in the meeting.

Banking scandal

Leghari absolved of any wrongdoing

ISLAMABAD, Dec 9: A judicial inquiry into a banking scandal in Pakistan absolved President Farooq Leghari of any wrongdoing, a report released on Sunday said, reports Reuters.

"It is the confirmed opinion of the commission, based on the evidence before it, that the allegations against the President are unfounded," a five-judge commission found unanimously.

In 1994 then opposition leader Nawaz Sharif accused Leghari of accepting money from Yunus Habib, former chief operating officer of the private Mehran Bank Ltd, via a land transaction involving anonymous buyers and fake accounts.

Leghari has repeatedly denied the charges.

The commission said the President had sold the land but at prices that did not exceed market rates. The transaction was done genuinely through the bank and was in his name.

Tom Cruise of Middle East!

CAIRO, Dec 9: The European Union's special envoy for the Middle East Miguel Angel Moratinos on Sunday described himself as the Tom Cruise of the Middle East because of his "Mission: Impossible" in the region, reports AP.

"I'm often optimistic. My good friends call me Tom Cruise because of my 'Mission: Impossible' so I'm the Tom Cruise of the Middle East," he said in a reference to the start of the recent Hollywood action movie.

"Often I achieve success at the end of my missions," said Moratinos, who was appointed EU envoy in October, despite objections from Israel, in a bid to give a boost to the deadlocked Middle East peace process.

He was speaking to reporters after talks with Nabil Fahmy, policy advisor to Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mousa, which centred on Israel's military blockade of the Palestinian self-rule territories.

Foreign policy goals for Clinton's 2nd term outlined

WASHINGTON, Dec 9: President Clinton's choice as national security adviser for his second term outlined five general foreign policy goals Sunday, chief among them to bring Russia into a democratic and united Europe, reports AP.

Sandy Berger, in his first interview since his appointment Thursday, also told ABC TV's "This Week" the United States will not have a permanent military presence in Bosnia, and US troops will not be involved directly in tracking down suspected war criminals there.

But the result is the same.

Neville Stack writes from London

Fault lines appearing in EU as it moves towards integration

Fault lines are appearing throughout the European Union, the grand design that was planned to unite the continent.

Headline-hogging disharmony in becoming more common than discreet consensus as the 15 players move towards the end game — the inevitable, irrevocable step of economic union, symbolised by the introduction of a common currency. The first commitments have got to be made early next year.

But now the questioning has infected even Germany, whose postwar remorse resulted in nobly permitting itself to be tied economically to France, the ancient enemy.

The first concern of the committed countries is how to achieve the terms of the Maastricht Treaty criteria, which demand strict conformity to the relationships between gross domestic product (GDP) and state debt, so that the currencies can be made to walk in step at a pace determined by the EC's independent financial organisation. Ten of the 15 member states are certain to qualify, but two — Denmark and Britain — though they will

probably meet the criteria, are highly uncertain about whether to exercise their opt-out.

The smaller states, like Holland and Ireland, see this as no problem, since economic and monetary union would be followed inevitably by increasing political union, covering defence and foreign policy, and majority voting, which would give them disproportionate clout.

It is in the parliaments of the Big Four where basic issues are now being anxiously debated, but from very different standpoints.

Bedevilled by political instability, Italy is desperate to stay aboard the EU, which it sees as keeping its own temperance less volatile. France, which only agreed by a photo-finish to deepening the European relationship, seems content to leave the politics to its powerful executive president but whose labour force — typified by the ultra-militant truckers and farmers — are furiously opposing the economic stringency required for monetary union.

The Germans, whose

Chancellor Helmut Kohl is leading the charge towards complete integration, are having second thoughts in a big way. The chancellor is old enough to recall with revulsion the events of fifty-odd years ago, and this informs all his attitudes. But his political opponents are younger and by no means so sensitive to history's lessons.

This is not to say that Britain's role in Europe is destructive. Far from it. No state has a better record of compliance with directives from Brussels headquarters. London leads in all matters of free trade, de-regulation and competition. In many fields, such as finance, electronics and communications, it is indeed the enterprise centre of Europe.

But Euro-scepticism dominates the political and media agenda. If Labour gets elected, the line will become much more co-operative, but Tony Blair, its leader, has his own sceptics too.

But Britain is, and always was, a special case, as is recognised by the heads of state if not by all the 370 million fellow-Europeans. Unlike most of the

other member-countries, it has not suffered invasion since the year 1066. As an island, it feels little dependence on its mainland neighbours, and despite its world-wide diaspora, a certain wary chauvinism is a national characteristic, at least among the unthoughtful classes.

Major is riding a tiger, but he is determined to stay in the saddle until the general election next May. This means that he is being herded constantly into a more sceptical, even non-cooperative stance towards Europe — a far cry from his stated intention to be "at the heart of Europe." Others, including some ministers, see "Europe" as an emotive, populist issue which can be inflated to their political advantage. They lurk and plot in every corner of the House of Commons. It is in their interest to keep the pot permanently on the point of boiling over.

There is, of course, a very respectable intellectual and economic argument to be made against monetary union and European integration, but jibes and negativism and naive jingoism are drowning out the

1 burns himself to death
5,000 held for protesting Jayalalitha's detention

NEW DELHI, Dec 9: A supporter of a jailed politician burned himself to death in a southern state while other party activists smashed buses, local newspapers reported Monday, reports AP.

Police arrested 5,000 people in the state of Tamil Nadu on Sunday, a day after federal tax authorities arrested Jayalalitha Jayaram on charges of receiving kickbacks in buying color television sets.

A 33-year-old man who doused himself with kerosene and set himself on fire in Madras, the state capital, died in the hospital Sunday, newspapers reported. He was protesting Jayalalitha's arrest.

Across the state, police arrested several supporters of Jayalalitha after they blocked traffic and hurled rocks at buses, damaging 75 vehicles.

reports said. Jayalalitha, police said, allegedly was paid kickbacks in the purchase of television sets costing 85 million rupees (2.4 million dollars) for the government at inflated prices.

Since Friday, police have raided her house and vineyards in two cities and seized gold and diamond jewels, the reporters said. They also have seized her house in Madras in connection with violating India's foreign exchange rules.

Known popularly as Jayalalitha, she lost power in May after opposition parties successfully campaigned against alleged corruption during her five-year rule.

Her administration often was ridiculed as the "10 per cent government," because of the bribes people claimed they had to pay to get government contracts.

Off the Record

Problem child

BOGOTA: A Colombian mother has been forced to put her home up for sale after her 12-year-old son ran up a 12,000 dollars phone bill in one month by calling international sex lines, television news said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

The phone company, meanwhile, took steps to make sure there would be no repeat of the sky-high bills and suspended all international calls out of the working-class La Dorada district of Cali, the country's second-largest city, the NTC television news said.

Single mother Ana Maria Martinez said her son, Juan Carlos, called sex talk numbers in Israel, Lebanon and Spain for as long as 30 minutes at a time after seeing advertisements in pornographic magazines.

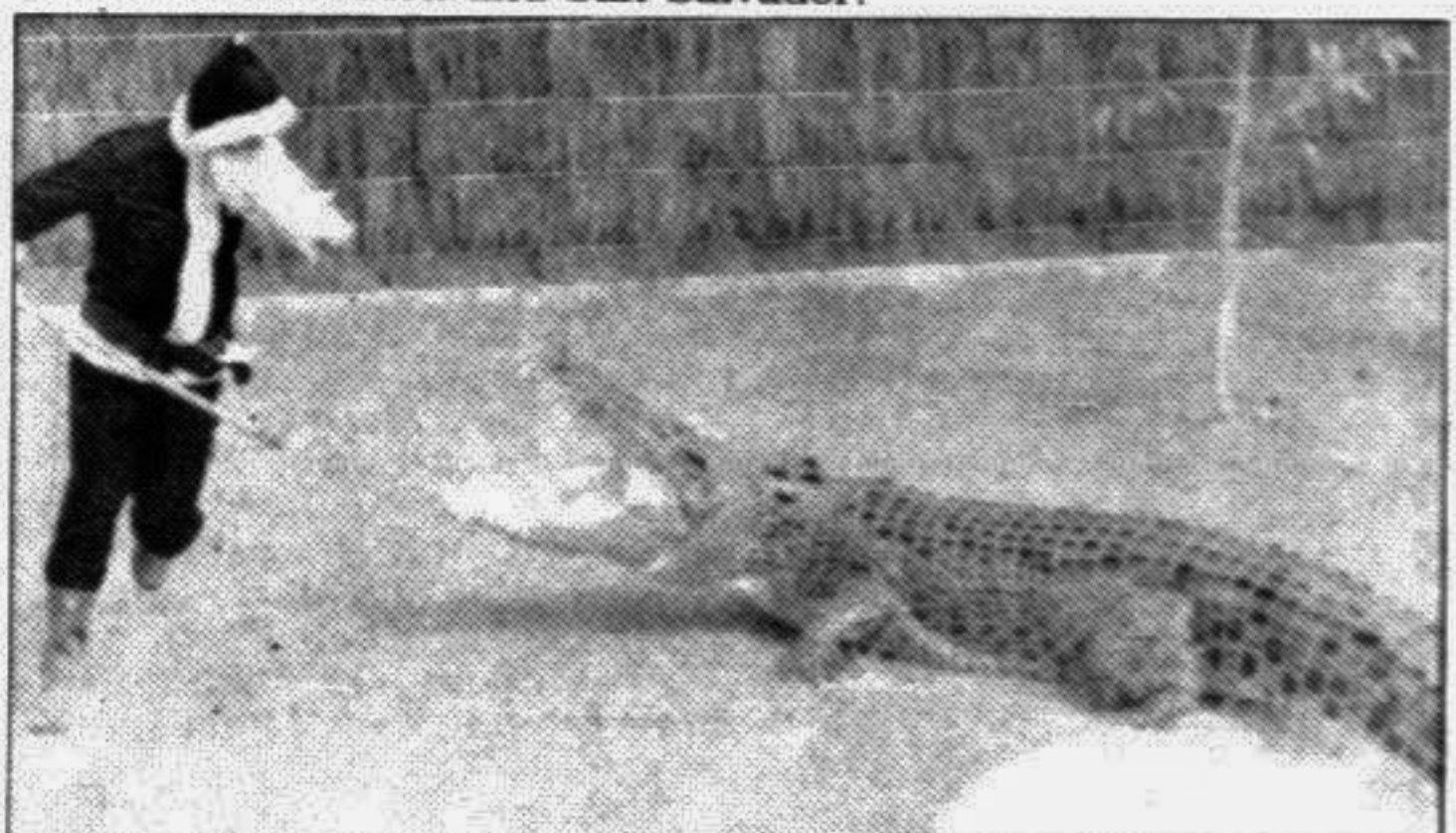
"I don't know what I'm going to do. I am selling our house but even that isn't worth 12 million pesos (12,000 US dollars)," Martinez said.

\$ 100 bonds in exchange for guns!

BOGOTA: Roman Catholic churches in the Colombian capital on Sunday offered 100 dollar bonds and poetry books in exchange for guns in an effort to cut crime in one of the world's most violent cities, reports AP.

Bogota Mayor Antanas Mockus said he hoped residents of the capital would hand over lost of weapons "thereby sacrificing their ability to harm others."

The weapons exchange programme was modelled on similar efforts in New York and San Salvador.



Santa Claus is attacked while trying to feed a chicken to "Eric" a five-metre, man-eating saltwater crocodile during the Christmas holiday season at the Australian Reptile Park near Sydney Sunday. "Eric" ate two people before being captured in 1987 in far northern Australia and was moved to a wildlife farm where he killed another crocodile while mating.

— AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

52 Asians nabbed in Polish border:

Polish border police nabbed 52 Asians on Sunday as they tried to sneak over the country's frontier with Lithuania, on their way to Germany, the domestic PAP News Agency reported, AFP says from Warsaw.

The 43 Indians, seven Pakistanis and two Nepalese were discovered at an empty holiday home near Lipsek, in northeast Poland, and face deportation after police determine the route they followed.

Rolf Ekeus arrives in Iraq: The chief UN weapons inspector arrived in Iraq on Sunday to press for proof that Saddam Hussein's forces had destroyed banned long-range missiles, AP reports from Baghdad.

Rolf Ekeus has claimed that Iraq is playing hide-and-seek with evidence concerning biological and chemical weapons and long-range missiles. The commission he chairs was established to dismantle and to monitor Iraqi programme to build weapons of mass destruction. The commission was established after Iraq's defeat in the 1991 Gulf war.

Teresa feels uncomfortable: Mother Teresa felt a little uncomfortable Monday after her condition deteriorated slightly over the weekend, AP reports from Calcutta.

The 86-year-old nun woke up around 1 a.m. (19:30 GMT Sunday) and was restless for a few minutes, but she immediately went back to sleep, said a medical bulletin issued in the morning at the B.M. Birla Heart Research Center. She felt well enough to have a cup of tea in the morning, the statement said. Her condition remained unchanged since Sunday, the bulletin said.

Bahraini opposition leader jailed: The State Security Court has sentenced a Bahraini opposition activist to three years' prison for joining an illegal organisation, a newspaper reported Sunday AP says from Manama.

The government-guided Akhbar Al-Khaleej newspaper identified the man as Abbas Yusuf Mohammad, 30. The special court that issued its ruling Saturday said the illegal organisation wanted to "overthrow the political, social and economic regime in the state of Bahrain using force, threats and other illegitimate means."

40 killed in China bus plunge: Forty people were killed when a passenger bus plunged into a 40 metre (132 feet) ravine in the southern Chinese province of Guizhou, according to reports reaching Beijing yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The overcrowded bus, which was carrying 80 people, plunged over a precipice in Zhenning county on December 1, killing 40 and injuring 29, the Guizhou Daily reported.

3 Red Cross men freed in Sudan: Three captive Red Cross workers have been released by Sudanese rebels after negotiations with a U.S. Congressman, AP reports from Nairobi.

The three captives, Australian nurse Maree Worthington, American pilot John Early of New Mexico, and Kenyan pilot Mohsin Razam, were in good condition in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, said Nic Sommer, a Red Cross spokesman in Nairobi.