

Spice Girls top Channel V music awards

NEW DELHI, Oct 19: The Spice Girls, Jon Bon Jovi and Peter Andre shared centre stage here today in what organisers claimed was "Asia's biggest music awards ceremony," reports AFP.

The awards gala of the Hong Kong-based Channel V television network, which started here late Saturday and carried into early today, was overshadowed by the Spice Girls, who held their first performance in India.

The group also walked away with two top prizes — for the best international single, "Wannabe," and best album, "Spice."

The British sensations, dressed in either saris or Indian style pyjamas set off by skimpy blouses, came on stage on New Delhi's trademark scooter rickshaws.

Victoria Adams, better known as Posh, kicked off the concert with a traditional Indian greeting, "Kaise Ho?" (Hindi for "How're you doing?").

Indian video jockey Javed Jaffrey said the group needed no introduction because, he quipped, "Who knows spices better than Indians?"

The Spice Girls, or "masalas" as the 10,000-plus crowd called them, then burst into "Wannabe."

"I saw her hair first," 11-

Civil war claims 10,000 in Congo

OYO, Congo, Oct 19: Congo's 19 bloody weeks of civil war has left 10,000 dead, making it a veritable genocide. The victim, General Denis Sassou Nguesso told Agence France-Presse in an interview Saturday, reports AFP.

Speaking in his native town in Oyo, 400 kilometres (250 miles) north of the shattered capital Brazzaville, the former strongman now returned to power laid the blame for the carnage on the ousted President Pascal Lissouba.

The Congolese people cannot forgive the genocidal Lissouba, responsible for 10,000 deaths, he said.

Previous official estimates of the death toll early in the war had put it at 3,000. Most of the casualties were the result of heavy-weapon exchanges in Brazzaville.

Fighting stopped Thursday when the victorious "Cobras" swept through the city.

Sassou Nguesso also said Lissouba had been preparing to use mustard gas on the population. However, he said, his men would not be seeking vengeance against Lissouba's supporters.

His forces halted outside the southern towns of Dolisie and Loudima to allow Lissouba's last militiamen to lay down their arms to avoid further bloodshed, his aides said.

Nehru responsible for Kashmir problem: RSS

MUMBAI, Oct 19: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Prof Rajendra Singh today alleged that Jawaharlal Nehru was solely responsible for the vexed issue of Jammu and Kashmir, reports PTI.

He said India had to face the trauma of partition because leader like Nehru went myopic when independence was in sight.

Nehru only created problems for the country, Prof Singh said yesterday, evening while speaking on the occasion of golden jubilee celebrations of the weekly, "Vivek", which propagates the Sangh ideology.

While Mahatma Gandhi was very much opposed to the partition, it was Nehru and other leaders, clearly eyeing on power, who went for it, Prof Singh alleged.

Gandhiji was ready for satyagraha to oppose the partition and RSS had decided to back the father of the nation on that account, Rajubhaiya, as Singh is popularly known, said.

Main island of S'pore protected from offshore oil slick

SINGAPORE, Oct 19: Favourable winds and a growing team of pollution fighters protected the main island of Singapore Sunday from a massive offshore oil slick, reports AP.

Most of the seven million gallons of fuel that spilled into Singapore Strait after two ships collided remained to the south and southwest of the main island and the tourist islands of Sentosa and Kusu.

The Maritime and Port Authority said only the islands of Senang, Palwai and Sudong have been hit. They are used for gunnery practice by the Singapore Air Force.

Almost 50 boats were involved in the cleanup, some spraying chemical dispersants, others skimming up oil or positioning floating containment booms.

British envoy lodges protest to India govt

LONDON, Oct 19: The British High Commissioner in New Delhi has protested to Indian authorities after an incident that broke out Saturday as Queen Elizabeth II was leaving after an official visit to India, the Mail on Sunday newspaper said, reports AFP.

As the Queen was preparing to board her plane, Indian police allowed local journalists to approach but held British journalists and members of the Queen's own delegation at Bay.

When they protested, some were treated roughly, including the Queen's press secretary, Geoffrey Crawford, and Jane Wildsah, an official of the Queen's visit, was pushed and shoved by police and appeared, journalists said, "on the verge of tears".

The incident caught the attention of the Queen, who, with her husband... the Duke of Edinburgh, stopped en route to her plane to watch the melee.

Lanka draws up new plan to secure Colombo against terrorist attacks

COLOMBO, Oct 19: Sri Lanka is drawing up a new plan to secure the capital city against terrorist attacks after a bomb blast last week that killed 18 and destroyed parts of the business district, newspapers reported today, says Reuters.

The government had set up a high-level committee to suggest ways to prevent future terrorist attacks in Colombo and the new contingency plan will come into effect shortly, the reports said.

"Under the new plan all vehicles entering Colombo City will be checked using metal detectors and sniffer dogs," the Sunday leader said.

The blast last Wednesday also wounded more than 100 people and tore through two top hotels, the Finance Ministry and the prestigious 39-storey twin tower World Trade Centre, which was officially inaugurated by President Chandrika Kumaratunga only two days earlier.

The Sunday Times quoted government sources as saying that it was likely that Colombo's security would be handed

over to a special command headed by an army major general.

100 Tigers killed in clash with Lankan Navy

COLOMBO, Oct 19: At least 100 Tamil Tiger rebels were believed to have been killed in battles with Sri Lanka's navy off the country's eastern coast, naval officials said today.

"We estimate at least 100 LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) died in the battle," a navy spokesman told Reuters.

Naval official earlier said two navy personnel died and several others were missing after a five-hour gun battle with LTTE rebels in which 10 guerrilla boats and a navy Dvora-class fast attack craft sank.

Naval officials in the east said a convoy of rebel boats attacked the Dvora, which was on patrol near Pulmoddai late on Saturday.

Officials were not immediately available for comment.

Security agencies are still investigating how the truck carrying 400 kg of explosive made its way to the car park of the Galadari Hotel avoiding several military checkpoints on its way.

Heavy vehicles are not allowed in the downtown business district on weekdays. But Wednesday, the day the bomb exploded, was a Buddhist religious holiday.

The government has blamed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels for the blast, but the guerrillas have denied responsibility.

Security is usually tight in Colombo and checkpoints common, especially after a huge blast at the central bank last year killed 100 people and injured more than 1,000.

The LTTE are fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east. The government says more than 50,000 people have been killed in the war that started in 1983.

LTTE says the toll is higher.

US justifies sending commandos to Lanka

WASHINGTON, Oct 19: The U.S. has justified sending its elite anti-terrorist commandos to train the Sri Lankan security forces and designating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) a terrorist organisation, reports India Abroad News Service.

Almost immediately after the LTTE was listed as a terrorist organization, a batch of Green Berets, the elite American commandos, arrived in Sri Lanka under a training programme codenamed "Operation Balanced Style."

While earlier this training was being undertaken rather surreptitiously, the Pentagon sources said that following the LTTE being designated a terrorist organisation, the U.S. would not be hamstrung by Congress in sending such elite squads to train the Sri Lankan forces.

They explained that now it would be considered a legitimate endeavour to help a friendly country to root out terrorism, without it being construed as interference in the internal matters of a particular country, especially when such assistance was sought.

The State Department, although acknowledging that "no group has claimed responsibility" for the October 15 terrorist

attack in Colombo which killed 15 and injured at least 100 people, said: "If the LTTE was responsible for this 'indiscriminate' attack, it's a further demonstration of the threat caused by the LTTE to the security of American nationals."

Consequently, the State Department statement said this threat was a "justification for their being designated by the Secretary [of State Madeleine Albright] as a terrorist organization."

Privately, Administration officials acknowledged that they had no doubts that the attack in Colombo was carried out by the LTTE, and some sources noted that it was perhaps to show that they didn't care any more about international opinion or if foreigners, including Americans, were hurt or killed in the process.

The sources also noted that it seemed clear that the attack was aimed at hurting the country's economy, particularly its burgeoning tourist industry.

On October 8 the U.S. proscribed the LTTE, thus making fund-raising on its behalf in the U.S. a crime. The LTTE denied responsibility for the attack, but the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry said it was clear the group was behind it.

BRIEFLY



"Cobra" rebels loyal to former President Denis Sassou-Nguesso push a stolen car full of looted goods in Brazzaville, Congo Saturday. After four months of civil war Sassou-Nguesso's troops have taken the capital city from the government and, fighters and civilians return to the city to celebrate and loot. AP/UNB photo

Torrential storms kill 5 in Israel

Torrential storms in Israel killed five people and pounded the West Bank town of Jericho, wrecking 74 homes and causing millions of dollars in damage, AFP reports from Jericho.

Israel Radio said three people died when their car fell into a ravine at Ein Gedi in Israeli territory at the Dead Sea, after the road collapsed. A fourth person was killed when her car was swept away by floods in the Negev Desert in southern Israel.

And an Israeli woman drowned in a flash flood that occurred while she was walking in Adry River bed near the Dead Sea.

France to send medical team to Congo

France will send a field hospital to the Central African state of Congo today to aid victims of a four-month civil war, the Foreign Ministry said on Saturday, Reuters reports from Paris.

The unit includes 30 personnel and will take along 20 tonnes of equipment, the ministry said. The decision to send the unit, including a team of surgeons from the country's Civilian National Rescue Service, was announced hours after President Jacques Chirac called on authorities to aid the former French colony.

19 workers poisoned in China

Nineteen workers were poisoned after eating kidney beans prepared by a cook who mistook sulphurous acid as salt in southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, it was reported yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Eight of the construction workers were still in hospital after consuming the food at the construction site in Haizhu district on Friday, the Chinese-language Ming Pao Daily said. They had been found in coma, with faces blackened. It was not known whether the cook was arrested.

Blast claims 1 in India

One person died and at least 21 others were injured on Saturday when two homemade bombs exploded within minutes of each other in a market in the Indian capital, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency said, Reuters reports from New Delhi.

It quoted police as saying the bombs exploded in the crowded Rani Bagh neighbourhood of New Delhi at about 7:30 pm (1400 GMT). PTI said a caller claiming to represent an organisation called the Shahid Khalsa Force had telephoned the news agency and said: "We have formed a secret organisation and we will form Khalistan at any cost."

Sierra Leone junta frees newsmen

A newspaper editor and human rights activist was freed after being detained by the military junta that seized power in a May coup, AP reports from Freetown.

Paul Kamara, editor of the daily For Di People, was the ninth Sierra Leonean journalist to be arrested since the May 25 overthrow of the west African country's elected government. He was released late Friday, about 24 hours after his arrest, and ordered to report to police daily. Kamara said he had been accused of passing secret information about the military junta's activities to the clandestine radio station set up by the ousted government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. The radio station broadcasts messages urging civilians to support Kabbah's return to power and oppose the rule of the coup leader, Maj Johnny Paul Koroma.

Virus claims 20 in Russia

A virus spread by voles has killed 20 people in the Russian region of Bashkria and a further 18 are critically ill in hospital, ITAR-Tass reported on Saturday, Reuters says from Moscow.

It said the virus caused haemorrhagic fever, and illness the agency described as the "scourge of Bashkria." Regional officials had set up an emergency centre to combat the virus. "Orders to start extensive anti-rodent measures have been circulated," Tass reported from Ufa, capital of the autonomous Republic of Bashkria on the edge of the Urals in Central Russia.

5 miners die in Indonesia: Five workers of an Indonesian state-owned gold mine in West Java died and two others were injured after the tunnel they were working in collapsed, reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The tunnel at the Pongkor gold mine operated by PT Aneka Tambang, caved in early on Saturday and buried the five late night shiftworkers while the two others escaped with light injuries as they were closer to the entrance, the Kompas daily said. Police are investigating the incident but speculate vibrations from the drilling instruments might have prompted the collapse.

700 foreigners held in China: Chinese authorities in southern Guangdong province have arrested some 700 foreigners for crimes including drug trafficking, selling fake currencies and passports, it was reported yesterday, AFP says from Hong Kong.

The 674 foreigners were rounded up in the first seven months this year for their role in 171 crimes, the Chinese-language Sing Tao daily said.



US Vice President Al Gore (R), his wife Tipper (C) and retired Air Force Brigadier Gen Wilma Vaught hold hands following a ribbon cutting ceremony at the dedication of a memorial to women in the armed forces Saturday at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, USA. — AP/UNB photo

UP govt faces collapse as BSP withdraws support

LUCKNOW, India, Oct 19: The government of India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh faced collapse today after one of two parties in the ruling alliance withdrew support, reports Reuters.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) vice-president Mayawati told reporters her group would pull out of the alliance with the rightwing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) because of policy differences over the treatment of lower-caste Hindus, called Dalits.

The decision threw the future of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh into uncertainty. The BJP's Singh took office only four weeks ago under an uneasy power-sharing agreement with Mayawati's low caste party.

"I am doing it because Kalyan Singh's actions have proved him and his party to be anti-Dalit," Mayawati told reporters as she handed state Governor Romesh Bhandari a letter withdrawing support.

Mayawati, 40, stepped down on September 21 after ruling for six months with the BJP's support in a hung state legislature. The two parties were to switch

chief minister every six months under a deal struck in March.

The coalition was rocked by controversies from the day Kalyan Singh took over as the chief minister.

Within two days of handing power to Kalyan Singh, Mayawati lashed out at his government, criticising a new order issued by the BJP government.

The order directed all district magistrates to check misuse of a law intended to protect low-castes Hindus.

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Italian Unions' members haul a fake coffin where they ironically wrote "Here, the democracy may rest in peace," during an anti-government demonstration in downtown Rome Saturday. Some 50,000 people protested against the government provisional budget for 1998. — AP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Headless frog embryo grown

LONDON: British scientists have created a frog embryo without a head, a technique that may lead to the production of headless human clones to grow organs and tissue for transplant, The Sunday Times reported, says AP.

None of the embryos grown by scientists at Bath University were allowed to live longer than a week, the newspaper reported in its early edition Saturday.

But the scientists believe the technique could be adapted to grow human organs such as hearts, kidneys, and livers in an embryonic sac living in an artificial womb.

Many scientists believe human cloning is inevitable following the birth of the sheep Dolly, the world's first cloned mammal, at a laboratory in Scotland. Scientists at The Roslin Institute in Edinburgh created Dolly using cells from the udder of a dead sheep.

The Sunday Times said the two techniques could be combined so that people needing transplants could have organs "grown to order" from their own cloned cells.

The genetic composition of grown organs would exactly match those of the patient, eliminating the threat of rejection. It would also ease the shortage of organs for transplant.

Nude wedding!

TAIPEI: A stripper and former politician in Taiwan launched another bid yesterday to garner publicity by getting married in the nude, reports Reuters.

Hsu Shao-Tan and her new husband Wu Jung-Chang exchanged nuptial vows in southern Kaohsiung city in a public ceremony preceded by a "body-performance featuring naked dancers covered in paint," reports AP.

"I want to show that nudity does not have to be pornography, nudity can be art," Hsu said before her wedding.

Hsu, who twice failed to win parliamentary seats with campaigns that featured stripping and sexually suggestive slogans, said her wedding was like the Garden of Eden and the couple were representing Adam and Eve.

Good sources of organs for transplants?

HONG KONG: Chinese convicts on death row could provide bodily organs to wealthy Hong Kong patients, a Hong Kong newspaper reported yesterday, says Reuters.

Patients in the territory could soon be travelling to China for kidney transplants, the Sunday Hong Kong Standard quoted an official of the Hong Kong Kidney Donation Society as saying.

"There are more kidneys available in China because of the death penalty," treasurer Robert Yiu said.

"If the bodies of executed prisoners are not claimed by family members, their kidneys can be donated," Yiu said, adding he has been in touch with authorities in the mainland about getting kidneys for transplant.

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UNSCOM chief Richard Butler and International Atomic Energy Agency head Hans Blix submitted a report to the Security Council the numerous uncertainties in the areas of Iraqi chemical and biological weapons but said progress had been made in eliminating the country's nuclear and ballistic weapons.

The UN embargo against Iraq remains in place until UNSCOM verifies that Iraq has eliminated its weapons of mass destruction.

The move highlighted the 15-member council's attempt to forge a United Front regarding

with India and Pakistan would no longer be a zero-sum game where ties with one would be at the expense of the other. Nor would it be centered on the perceptions of a third state. He said the U.S. wanted to have strong relationships with both India and Pakistan and relations with one would be independent of ties with the other.

Pickering, often referred to as the "complete diplomat" for the finesse and subtlety he has brought to bear on his various jobs as America's emissary, had all the right soundbites for the Indian media. He expounded on the meaning of "strategic dialogue", saying it was much more than restricted to a narrow military focus and ran the

gamut of issues from economy to environment. He said the dialogue was oriented to a vision of the future rather than being tied down to the past.

Asked predictably about the U.S. view on Kashmir, especially against the background of a media furor created by British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's meddling approach, Pickering spoke slowly keeping in mind Indian sensitivities. "We did not relate our approach to the approach of others. We have view on the subject and we expressed our longstanding concern to Indian officials on the hostage issue, especially since American citizens are involved, and appreciated Indian cooperation."

India, US begin first phase of strategic dialogue

NEW DELHI, Oct 19: India and the U.S. began the first phase of a strategic dialogue which a top American official characterised as the beginning of a process that will establish a "good foundation" for a changed outlook on South Asia, reports from India Abroad News Service.

Thomas Pickering, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, acknowledged that there had been a change in the way the U.S. looked at South Asia, particularly India. He said that change had been brought about by several post-Cold War situations, principal among them being shared values of democracy, the opening of the Indian economy and a re-

alisation that "Relations with India is not what it could be."

Pickering's visit kicks off a series of high-level visits to the subcontinent in the next few months that will culminate in the visit by President Bill Clinton, most probably in March.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is expected here in the middle of November on her maiden visit to this region.

Her visit would be followed by that of Commerce Secretary William Daley, Health Secretary Donna Shalala and Transportation Secretary Federico Pena. Undersecretary for Global Affairs Tim Wirth and Undersecretary for Economic Affairs Stuart Eizenstadt are also in line before Clinton

comes.

Pickering, who met Prime Minister I K Gujral yesterday, held extended sessions with Indian Foreign Secretary K Raghunath and other top Indian officials to lay the groundwork for the presidential visit.

Pickering said that the "U.S. needed to pay more attention to South Asia and India to take bilateral relations away from problems..... and to give it a positive, forward-looking and broader character."

The buzzword for Pickering was "change" - a change he said that was needed to move bilateral relations away from past neglect, languidness and remaining a prisoner of differences.

Indian officials, who true to form remained more circumspect in their characterisation of the dialogue in sharp contrast to the forward-looking disposition of American officials, acknowledged that Pickering was a "far cry" from the Rapprochement abrasiveness and intrusiveness that marked U.S. dealings in the past.

The reference was to Robin Raphel, previous Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, during whose tenure bilateral relations dipped to its lowest ebb in years.

Pickering, at a news conference just before boarding a train for Amritsar from where he travelled by road to Lahore, Pakistan, stressed that ties

with India and Pakistan would no longer be a zero-sum game where ties with one would be at the expense of the other. Nor would it be centered on the perceptions of a third state. He said the U.S. wanted to have strong relationships with both India and Pakistan and relations with one would be independent of ties with the other.

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