

Spice Girls top Channel V music awards

NEW DELHI, Oct 19: The Spice Girls, Jon Bon Jovi and Peter Andre shared centre stage here early 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 international music.

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 spicier 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

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

Speaking in his native town in Yoyo, 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 weapons 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.

Gandhi was ready for satyagraha to oppose the partition and RSS had decided to back the father of the nation on that account, Rajjubhaiya, 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, Palawai 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 the plane to watch the Mele.

Sierra Leone junta frees newsman: 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 Bashkiria and a further 18 are critically ill in hospital, ITAR-Tass reported on Saturday, Reuter says from Moscow.

It said the virus caused haemorrhagic fever, and illness the

agency described as "the scourge of Bashkiria." 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 Bashkiria 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.

International

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 Reuter.

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 torn 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.

Government and security of-

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 Pulimoddai late on Saturday.

Security is usually tight in

Colombo and check points

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.

ficials 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 check points 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.

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 organisation.

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 of 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.

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 Reuter.

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," said the Sunday Times.

"I don't want to show that nudity does not have to be pornography or 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 Reuter.

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.

Egypt sees no use in boosting sanctions against Iraq

CAIRO, Oct 19: Egypt said Saturday it is useless to boost sanctions against Iraq for denying UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) arms inspectors access to suspect Iraqi sites, reports AFP.

"Strengthening sanctions isn't the solution to the current situation," Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mussa told reporters.

The United States on Friday postponed a move in the UN Security Council formally pressuring for the imposition of additional sanctions against Iraq.

Western diplomats said the US and British delegations decided to hold further informal consultations, signalling a willingness to compromise after Russia called for more negotiations.

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

Iraq, after fears that the United States would insist on a tough line following a threat from the Iraqi government to sever cooperation.

The council's five permanent members are traditionally split on Iraq policy, with Britain and the United States taking a tough while China, France and Russia favour a softer approach.

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.

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-

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. would 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 Raphaelesque abrasiveness and intrusiveness that marked U.S. dealings in the past.

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

Pickering, often referred to as the