

BRIEFLY



Nobel Peace Prize winner Jody Williams, coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, meets United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan at the UN Wednesday. Williams' organisation is the winner of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. — AP/UNB Photo

9 die as boats sink in India: At least nine persons died and 59 were missing when two country boats carrying them capsized in river Bhagirathi near Amuaghat under Suti police station of Murshidabad district Wednesday evening, the DIG, Headquarters, Prasan Mukherjee said yesterday. PTT reports from Calcutta.

He said that the mishap occurred when the two boats, tied together and carrying about 150 people, sank together. About 82 people swam ashore and nine bodies were recovered. Search for the missing persons were on.

2 quakes shake Taiwan: Two earthquakes shook southern and eastern Taiwan but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties, officials said yesterday. Reuters reports from Taipei.

A Central weather Bureau statement said the first quake occurred late on Wednesday and measured 5.3 on Richter Scale. Its epicentre was 45 kms (28 miles) due north of Taiwan's south-eastern offshore island of Lanyu and was centred 9.4 kms (5.9 miles) beneath the Earth's surface.

WFP truck attacked in Rwanda, 8 die: An attack on a truck belonging to the UN World Food Programme (WFP) left the driver, two civilians and five assailants dead in western Rwanda, officials said Wednesday. AFP reports from Kigali.

Paul Simkin, WFP's spokesman in Kigali, said the truck was part of a convoy transporting food aid to Kibuye prefecture on Monday when it was forced to pull off the road because of mechanical difficulties.

2 killed in US jet collision: A US Air Force jet trainer crashed Wednesday, killing its two crew members, after colliding with an F-16 fighter at Edwards Air Force Base in California, the Air Force said, AFP reports from Washington.

The dead were identified as Flight Leader Leigh Alexander Fox of the British Royal Air Force and Lieutenant William Nusz. The T-38 trainer and the F-16 were photographing a B-1B bomber conducting a bombing run.

Iraq, Sudan to reinforce ties: Iraq and Sudan Wednesday said they were determined to reinforce bilateral economic, industrial and agricultural cooperation, the Iraqi agency INA said, AFP reports from Baghdad.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Salah Eddine Mohammed Ahmed Karrar, heading a high-level Sudanese ministerial delegation to talks here, brought a message from President Omar Al-Bashir to Iraq's counterpart Saddam Hussein calling for stronger bilateral relations, in said.

Noted Indian newsmen dead: Veteran journalist and writer Praful Roy Chowdhury died in Calcutta Wednesday night following a heart attack, family sources said. PTT reports from Calcutta.

Roy Chowdhury, 74, is survived by his wife. He had served as special correspondent of Patriot, Delhi in Moscow and was also attached with Pointer, Lucknow for several years. He had also a senior position in the news section of the CPI mouthpiece 'Swadhinata' during 1951-63.

Chopper crash kills 6 in Russia: Six officers were feared dead after a Russian military helicopter crashed northwest of Moscow, Interfax news agency said yesterday. Reuters reports from Moscow.

A Defence Ministry spokesman confirmed by telephone that a Ka-27 helicopter had come down on Wednesday near Tver, about 150 kms (90 miles) northwest of the capital, but declined to say if there were any casualties. Interfax said preliminary information showed the helicopter had suffered a systems failure at a height of 120 metres (400 feet). It quoted an unnamed ministry official as saying the six officers on board were from a military training centre.

US newsmen wins IAPA award: US Journalist and Professor Elie Abel on Wednesday received the Inter-American Press Association's grand prize for press freedom, AFP says from Guadalajara.

Abel is former Dean of the Columbia University School of Journalism and the Stanford University Communication department.

Fijian PM apologises to Queen: Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka of Fiji has officially apologised to Queen Elizabeth II for the military coup that transformed the Pacific Island group into a republic, AP reports from London.

Quake rocks Indonesian islands: A magnitude 5.8 earthquake rocked eastern Indonesia including the tourist islands of Bali and Lombok Thursday, government seismologists said, AP reports from Jakarta.

There were no reports of casualties or major damage.

2 Hungarians seized in Chechnya: Two Hungarians belonging to a religious aid group have been kidnapped in the breakaway Caucasus republic of Chechnya, the Russian Orthodox Church told Interfax yesterday, AFP reports from Moscow.

Lankan army claims war nearing final stage Parliament opens debate on power-sharing today

COLOMBO, Oct 23: A power-sharing plan aimed at ending Sri Lanka's 14-year-old civil war will be presented in Parliament on Friday, a government minister said Thursday, reports AP.

"All of us must understand that the very survival of the country is at stake," Lakshman Peiris, the constitutional affairs minister, told reporters.

Peiris said debate will start on Friday but no date has been fixed for voting on the plan, which is part of a proposed new constitution.

The draft constitution promising wide autonomy to provinces is being opposed by both Tamil and Sinhalese groups on this small island country off the southern tip of India. A Tamil separatist war has killed more than 50,000 Sri Lankans since 1983.

A section of the majority Sinhalese community favour defeating the rebels militarily before offering any concessions to minority Tamils. The guerrillas say they won't settle for anything less than a separate homeland.

On Thursday, Peiris said the government strategy was to weaken the Tamil rebels militarily and bring the moderate

Tamils to the negotiating table. Everyone must understand that war alone is not the solution. We have to offer a political alternative as well, and this is exactly what we are trying to do," he said.

Tamils, who constitute 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 18 million people and have a language and culture distinct from that of the Sinhalese, claim they are discriminated against by the majority. The war began in earnest after 1983 ethnic riots in Colombo in which hundreds of Tamil civilians were killed by Sinhalese nationalists.

Though not all Tamils embrace the rebels' extreme solution, many feel they are denied opportunity by the Sinhalese. The Sinhalese dominate the government and military, key areas for advancement in an economy just emerging from socialist-style policies.

Another AP report adds: The Sri Lanka military is on the verge of defeating Tamil rebels after a bloody, drawn-out battle in the north, the defence ministry claimed Thursday.

Brig. Sarath Munasinghe, the defence ministry spokesman, said the army was

preparing to launch the 'final stage' of its offensive to open a road link between the Tamil-dominated north and the rest of Sri Lanka.

"This is our immediate aim and when we secure the road, we will not take much time to finally crush the terrorists," Munasinghe said.

The Sri Lankan government bars reporters from the front line, making it difficult to obtain independent assessments of claims from either side.

The battle for the 76-kilometre (47-mile) highway, launched on May 13, has resulted in the deaths of more than 2,000 soldiers and rebels, according to government figures. The military met fierce rebel resistance, and has so far cleared about 30 kilometres (19 miles) of the highway.

The road through rebel-held jungle links southern Sri Lanka to northern Jaffna peninsula, which the army seized from Tamil rebels in 1995. Without control of the road, the military has had to use risky sea and costly air transport to supply thousands of soldiers and nearly half a million Tamil civilians in Jaffna.

Pol Pot refuses to apologise for deaths of 2m Cambodians

PHNOM PENH, Oct 23: Pol Pot refuses to apologise for causing the deaths of as many as 2 million of his countrymen, but he admits that 'mistakes' were made during his brutal regime, reports AP.

The former Cambodian leader's musings near the probable end of his blood-stained life were published Thursday in the Far Eastern Economic Review magazine.

The interview with American journalist Nate Thayer was the first of the Khmer Rouge leader in 18 years.

Pol Pot said his "conscience is clear" about leading the Khmer Rouge regime that came to power in 1975 and turned Cambodia into a vast, Maoist-inspired labor camp. One Cambodian in five died of starvation, overwork, illness or systematic executions.

Pol Pot acknowledged "mistakes" but suggested that the mountains of skulls that symbolize the brutality of his rule were actually a montage created by Vietnam — Cambodia's historic enemy, which invaded and toppled the Khmer Rouge in 1979 — to discredit him.

"There are documents talking about someone who did research on the skeletons of the people," Pol Pot told Thayer. "They said when you look

closely at the skulls, they are smaller than the skull of the Khmer people."

Pol Pot showed no remorse and shed little light on the Khmer Rouge government. Instead, he seemed more concerned with talking about his personal suffering, and detailing his medical problems.

"You don't know what I have suffered," Pol Pot told Thayer. He spoke at a Khmer Rouge base in northern Cambodia, where he has been under house arrest by his ex-comrades following a show trial for betrayal.

Pol Pot needed help to walk

China invites US officials to visit Tibet

BEIJING, Oct 23: China on Thursday criticized US plans to appoint a diplomat to coordinate policies on Tibet as a coordinator on Tibet as interference in internal domestic affairs, reports AP.

The criticism, leveled by the Foreign Ministry, was however accompanied by an invitation to US officials to visit the Himalayan region and gauge its development.

the 25 meters (yards) to the outdoor pavilion where he was interviewed. He complained that he is confined to a mosquito-ridden hut with his second wife and 12-year-old daughter where he is bed-ridden most of the time and sometimes on oxygen. He described an apparent stroke in 1995 that left his left side partly paralyzed and left eye blind.

Pol Pot, whose real name is Saloth Sar, he said he was born in January of 1925, ending years of debate over his birthday. He said he lied in documents that became the basis of dispute to keep a scholarship to study in France from 1949 to 1952.

After the Khmer Rouge were overthrown, Pol Pot led his men into the jungle. They fought against the Vietnamese-backed regime of the 1980s, then the coalition installed in 1993 by UN-organized elections.

"I want you to know that everything I did for my country," he told Thayer.

Current Cambodian strongman Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge official who is hated by his former comrades for leading a Vietnam supported government in the 1980s, was asked by reporters Thursday for his reaction to the interview.



Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of the radical Islamic group Hamas speaks to students at the Islamic University in Gaza City Wednesday. Sheik Yassin told his audience Wednesday: "We have one aim and one enemy and we will continue our holy war against the enemy". — AP/UNB photo

US announces plan to stabilise greenhouse gases from 2008

BONN, Germany, Oct 23: UN diplomats struggling to agree on a global warming treaty looked toward the United States on Wednesday to spur progress with its long-awaited proposal for fighting so-called greenhouse gases, reports AP.

The 10-day United Nations meeting, which opened Wednesday, is the last attempt by some 150 countries to draft a pact on limiting the emissions of gases such as carbon dioxide believed to be heating up the earth.

The treaty is to be signed in Kyoto, Japan, in December.

Hours after the Bonn talks ended, President Bill Clinton in Washington announced his expected plan for stabilising greenhouse gases over five years, beginning in 2008, followed by a reduction, probably 5 per cent, over another five-year period, ending in 2017.

While some diplomats had anticipated Clinton's proposal as "the missing piece of the puzzle" for reaching an agreement, some EU officials have criticised the US plan as too little too late.

The EU is pushing for stricter rules that will stabilise greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by 2000 followed by cuts of 7.5 per cent by 2005. By 2010, the 15 EU nations want such emissions to be 15 per cent lower than 1990 levels.

Reacting to an outline of Clinton's expected remarks earlier Wednesday, EU officials in Brussels said the plan does not go far enough.

"Something much more substantial will need to come out of the White House if the United States is to face up to its global responsibilities," said Peter Jorgensen, environment spokesman for the European Commission.

The United States has called the EU goals "unrealistic."

But Luxembourg delegate

Henri Haine, speaking for the 15-nation European Union, told the opening session in Bonn that EU targets were "technically possible and economically manageable, provided other countries take comparable action to reduce emissions."

Meanwhile, a senior UN official has warned about the consequences of failure to halt the earth's rising temperature.

The warning was made as government leaders gathered in Bonn for a final round of negotiations on global warming before they head for Kyoto, Japan to finalise a new pact.

Climate change might cause some islands to be wiped off the geographic map, said Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), early this week.

She was speaking in Istanbul at the opening of the 12th

general assembly of the World Tourism Organisation.

"Imagine your holiday brochure picturing beaches submerged, shore lines eroded, and ocean views not only through windows but in your basement as well," she told the Congress.

Dowdeswell said that some of today's island destinations might not just disappear from the tourist map, "but from geographic map altogether."

Scientists believe that global warming, caused by emissions of 'greenhouse gases', especially carbon dioxide, is raising the sea level, threatening coastal regions with massive flooding. Fossil fuels such as oil and coal are the principal source of carbon dioxide.

Small island nations will be severely affected by global warming, Bangladesh and Maldives will be among those to feel the heat.

Congress won't withdraw support to Gujral govt

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: The Congress today termed as "unfortunate" the union cabinet's reversal of its decision to dismiss Kalayan Singh ministry in Uttar Pradesh but indicated that there was no immediate move to withdraw support to the United Front government, reports PTL.

"There is nothing like that," the party spokesman, VN Gadgil, said when asked specifically whether the party would consider withdrawing support to the six-month old Gujral government in the wake of the union cabinet reversing its recommendation for president's rule in Uttar Pradesh and dissolution of the state assembly.

The Congress president, Sitaram Kesri, had demanded imposition of president's rule in Uttar Pradesh alleging that the Kalayan Singh government had managed to secure a trust vote by "fraudulent means".

Meanwhile, the rebel Congress MP, Mamata Banerjee, today said that the United Front government, which reversed its decision to recommend president's rule in UP, had lost credibility and the Prime Minister, IK Gujral must resign.

4 rebels killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, Oct 23: Soldiers shot and killed four suspected guerrillas early Thursday in the northern state of Kashmir, army sources said, reports AP.

The sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said soldiers had surrounded a house after receiving a tip it was a hideout for militants fighting for Kashmir's secession from India. The house was in Katarimal, a village about 180 kilometers (about 100 miles) northwest of Jammu, the state's winter capital.

The militants were killed in a gunbattle that lasted for nearly two hours, the sources said. The house was damaged by fire, apparently sparked when explosives stored inside were accidentally set off.

Suu Kyi makes political trip outside Yangon

YANGON, Oct 23: Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi this week travelled on her first political trip outside the capital since being released from house arrest two years ago, opposition sources said today, reports Reuters.

A division-level official of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party said the 1991 Nobel Peace laureate went to a town on the outskirts of Yangon on Tuesday to organise the youth NLD wing and speak to supporters.

"Aung San Suu Kyi, accompanied by NLD Chairman U Tin Oo, central executive committee member U Soe Myint and some elected NLD representatives, went to Thakata township on Tuesday morning," the official told Reuters.

He said Suu Kyi's trip went off without any interference from authorities.

\$ 2.583 b UN budget announced

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 23: Secretary General Kofi Annan unveiled a slimmed-down budget of 2.583 billion dollar for the two-year period 1998-99 but said it still included additional money for economic and social development, reports Reuters.

Presenting his first budget yesterday since taking office last January, Annan told the general assembly's administrative and budgetary committee it represented a reduction in real terms of 124 million dollar.

But it had still been possible to increase resources available for economic and social development by about 56 million dollar, compared with the 1996-97 budget, he said.

Annan's budget-trimming is only one aspect of a package of reforms designed to reinvent the United Nations but which are being closely scrutinised by various UN bodies jealous of their own prerogatives.

Mandela calls for end to UN sanctions against Libya

CAIRO, Oct 23: South African President Nelson Mandela, hailed as a saint by Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi, called for an end to UN sanctions as he visited Libya despite US objections, reports AP.

Mandela arrived in the North African nation on Wednesday to a hero's welcome by thousands of Libyans, including tribesmen on decorated horses and schoolchildren who showered him with rose petals.

Mandela drove from neighbouring Tunisia to the Libyan border in a limousine and transferred to an air-conditioned bus for the drive to the Libyan capital, Tripoli, where he was greeted with huge and kisses by Gaddafi.

The 79-year-old Mandela had to go by road to avoid violating sanctions imposed by the United Nations in 1992, banning flights in or out of Libya.

Libya sees Mandela's visit as a moral victory and a slap at Washington, which has said that it would be disappointed if the South African leader went to Libya. The United States says Libya sponsors terrorism and should remain an international pariah.

The state-run Libyan television, monitored in Cairo, declared Mandela's visit "an expression of solidarity with Libya against the conspiracy it is facing."

The sanctions, which include a ban on arms sales, are aimed at forcing Libya to hand over two men suspected of bombing a Pan Am jetliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing 270 people.

At a banquet Wednesday, Mandela urged an end to the sanctions, saying "we cannot be unmoved by the plight of our African brothers and sisters."

In his speech, Gaddafi described Mandela as a "saint." He "is not only South African but he is also a symbol for the peoples of the entire world," Gaddafi said.

Gaddafi repeated his longstanding offer to try the two Pan Am bombing suspects either in Libya or in a third country, a proposal Britain and the United States have rejected, insisting that their courts try the suspects.

Earlier, as Mandela's motorcade arrived in Tripoli, thousands of people chanted "Mandela! Mandela!"

The Libyan television broadcast showed Gaddafi and Mandela walking together with their fists in the air before listening to each country's anthem.



South African President Nelson Mandela, left, with his Libyan counterpart Col. Moammar Gaddafi on his arrival in Tripoli Wednesday. In the background is Gaddafi's house which was attacked by US fighters on April 15, 1986. — AP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Gorillas to the rescue!

YAOUNDE: A pack of about 60 gorillas took an African village in Cameroon by storm to rescue a young gorilla captured alive by a local hunter, the weekly paper, L'Action, reported Wednesday, reports AFP.

The government-owned paper said the gorillas invaded Olamze on the border with Equatorial Guinea last week looking for the infant gorilla, who had been taken away earlier in the day by the reputed local hunter Ntsama Ondo.

Shortly before midnight, the gorillas entered the village in single file, ignoring the gunshots fired by villagers to scare them away, before retiring.

The next night they came back, and this time, according to L'Action, they angrily beat on the doors and windows of the dwellings.

Faced with the determination of the gorillas to recover the captive youngster, and learning who was responsible for the pack's anger, the village chief ordered Ntsama Ondo to release his prey.

Building-on-wheels

DETROIT: In a record-breaking performance, an old theatre was being moved on wheels five blocks through downtown Detroit, USA, on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

The 2,750-ton Gem Theatre 20th Century Club will enter the record books as the heaviest building ever moved on wheels once workers complete its 564 metre-journey to a new location.

Working since mid-September, crews have raised the building 3m — in the air and placed it on 72 dollies — each equipped with a 50-ton jack and eight pneumatic tires. Six bulldozers and excavators and 610m of cable are being used pull the 30.5m structure to a new home.

'Laws needed to combat discrimination against Muslims in Britain'

LONDON, Oct 23: Discrimination against Britain's 1.5 million Muslims is growing and new laws are needed to combat it, a report to the government said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"Islamophobia is a real phenomenon in our society. It's a rather ugly world, but I think it describes an ugly reality," Gordon Conway of the Runnymede Trust told BBC radio.

"It's getting more explicit. It's getting more extreme. It's getting more dangerous," he warned.

The report, which was presented to Home Secretary Jack Straw, challenges the view that relations between native Britons and Muslims coming chiefly from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, are relatively harmonious.

Many Muslims "live in poor housing, they have poor education. There's very high level of unemployment. Over 50 per

cent of British Muslims in inner cities are unemployed — much higher than the white male population," Conway said.

The trust's report called for urgent and "substantial measures" to confront the problem.

But Straw immediately ruled out legislation. He said he had given careful consideration to what he called a "difficult and sensitive" issue but had no plans to legislate.

"Race legislation is not the answer to the particular problem of the Muslim community and religious legislation may not be the answer either."

His view was challenged by the deputy leader of Britain's self-appointed Muslim Parliament, Jahangir Mohammed.

"Laws actually do change attitudes." It sets the tone for society on what is acceptable behaviour. At the moment with religious discrimination, it's a field day. Any one can have a go at Muslims," he said.

US Congress extends immigration provision by 2 weeks

WASHINGTON, Oct 23: The US House of Representatives on Wednesday approved a two-week extension of a temporary provision allowing undocumented foreigners to continue to live and work in the United States, reports AFP.

By a voice vote, the house voted to extend the measure, passed by Congress in 1994, which allows illegal aliens to remain in the United States while taking steps to normalise their residency status here, after paying a fine of 1,000 dollars.

The provision, initially approved for a period of three years, also puts in motion the application process for the coveted "green card" or US residency permit.

Some 345,000 immigrants have benefited from the measure in the last two years.

The prospect that the law

could expire has provoked a wave of panic among the immigrant community.

Hundreds of thousands of undocumented residents could face deportation, which would split up families with some members who are illegal immigrants and others who are legal.

The panic is even greater thanks to a new law in place since the end of September, designed to encourage would-be immigrants to apply in their country of origins for US residency status.

Under that legislation, anyone who has spent more than six months illegally in the United States must leave and not return for three years, an illegal stay here of more than a year merits a 10-year ban.

It is virtually certain that many of those sent back would not be allowed to return for several years.