

International

Gujral defends his coalition govt

Cong (I) asks UF govt to form panel to promote coordination

NEW DELHI, Nov 10: India's Congress Party has reaffirmed its support for Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's 15-party coalition but urged the alliance to form a panel to promote coordination, party officials said today, reports Reuter.

oust the 12-day-old government of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the largest in parliament. A coordination panel proposed then has yet to be established. Congress, India's oldest party, is under pressure to put its house in order. The BJP said it would welcome Congress defectors and in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, more than 20 Congress lawmakers defected to the BJP government.

compromise on secularism. "Whether I remain the president or not, there will be no compromise with the BJP," it quoted him as saying. Meanwhile, news on assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 has put pressure on the party leadership to ensure that people indicted by the panel face stern action.

to genuinely complete its task in the time available to it," it said. AP adds: India's federal coalition is what the people want, Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said in defence of his embattled government Monday.

Lankan helicopter gunship crashes into sea

COLOMBO, Nov 10: A Sri Lankan government helicopter gunship crashed off the north-eastern coast Monday and the air force fears it was shot down by ethnic Tamil guerrillas, military officials say, reports AP. The Ukrainian-built MI-24 helicopter, known as the Hind to NATO forces, was searching for rebel boats in the Indian Ocean when it went missing at noon (0600 GMT) after taking off from a nearby air base, said air force officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity.



New Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai is led through a crowd of supporters and members of parliament following ceremonies Sunday at Democratic Party headquarters in Bangkok. Chuan takes on the job of leading Thailand back to economic prosperity. — AP/UNB photo

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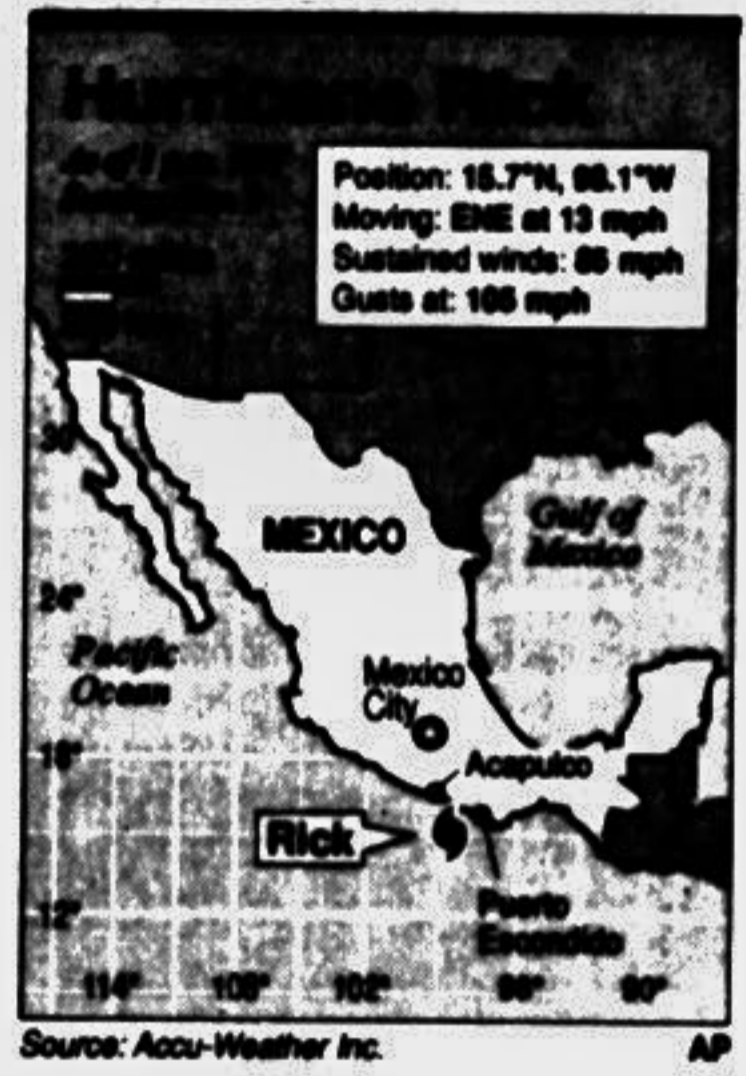
Violence claims 1 in Karachi: Members of rival ethnic groups clashed on the streets of southern Karachi Monday, leaving one 16-year-old boy dead and 11 injured, police said, AP reports from Karachi.

Hillary's jet forced to turn back: A plane carrying Hillary Rodham Clinton and heading to Central Asia was forced to dump fuel and return to Andrews Air Force Base after experiencing "technical problems." No injuries were reported, AP reports from Washington.

Hun Sen's 5-day Japan trip ends: Cambodia's strongman Hun Sen left Japan early Monday, ending a five-day visit that included a meeting with Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto to discuss the aftermath of the bloody coup in Cambodia, AP reports from Tokyo.

9 Russian pilots freed in Congo: Nine Russian pilots freed from captivity in the Republic of Congo left for Moscow on Sunday, along with 24 Russian, Ukrainian and Polish women who asked to be evacuated, Russian news agencies reported, AP reports from Moscow.

11 die as bus plunges in Thailand: A truck plunged off a winding hilly road in northern Thailand killing 11 people and injuring 16, police said yesterday, Reuter reports from Bangkok.



Hurricane Rick hits Mexico

OAXACA, Mexico, Nov 10: Hurricane Rick drove thousands of Mexicans from their homes Monday as it assaulted fishing villages and tourist resorts still wounded by an earlier Pacific storm, reports AP. High seas, pounding rains and 75-mph (120-kph) winds cut highways, damaged bridges and forced hundreds to flee their homes along the famed stretch of beaches that includes tourist resorts such as Huatulco, Puerto Escondido and Puerto Angel. Rick hit the coast Saturday evening west-northwest of Puerto Escondido — a region where many had lost homes to Hurricane Pauline only a month earlier — and began to move inland, where forecasters said it would slowly weaken. Storms swirling in from the sea on the hurricane's southeast forced Mexican officials to declare a hurricane warning as far south as the Guatemala border, though it canceled an alert for Acapulco to the northwest. All seaports in the area were closed, as were airports at Huatulco and Puerto Escondido, which lost electric power.

New Thai PM negotiates with coalition partners over forming cabinet

BANGKOK, Nov 10: Newly named Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai prepared to meet with Thailand's king Monday and negotiated with coalition partners over a new Cabinet lineup to tackle the beleaguered economy, reports AP. Chuan received a royal appointment letter on Sunday, naming him Thailand's 23rd prime minister, but the process is not considered complete until he has met face to face with King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the constitutional monarch, in the afternoon.

power between the partners in his coalition. "This new coalition will be more stable because the Democrats are so much larger than the second largest party in it," said Suchit Boonbongkarn, dean of the political science department at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Chuan, who has reputation as an honest but slow-moving administrator, has promised to take quick and resolute action to cure Thailand's economic ills. Analysts said that Chuan's Democracy-led coalition would probably be more stable than the New Aspiration Party-led coalition it replaced. Chavalit Yongchaiyudt resigned as prime minister last week. Infighting between coalition partners, a reputation for crani-ums and corruption and an inability to attract top technocrats doomed the Chavalit coalition in its attempts to win investor confidence and turn around the Thai economy. Already stumbling because of a drop in exports and mounting debt, the economy went into a free fall last July after Chavalit floated the currency, sending it plunging by more than 40 per cent in value, and necessitating a \$7.2 billion bailout package supervised by the International Monetary Fund. Chavalit was unable to implement some of the tough conditions imposed by the IMF because of constant battles for

private position is the same as the public one, then Annan will have to tell the council that UN diplomacy is at a dead-end. Iraq wants Americans removed from the team, saying they are spies. Diplomats say Iraq also wants a timetable for an end to the inspections, which are the key to lifting crippling economic sanctions imposed seven years ago. Annan conferred Sunday night with the three envoys he sent to Baghdad last week on an unsuccessful mission to persuade Saddam to back down. "The Iraqis have to come to the one conclusion to rescind their decision and comply by Security Council resolutions," said one of the envoys, Swedish diplomat Jan Eliasson. "It would be in their enlightened self-interest to do so." Annan will circulate the envoys' report to the United States and other council members Monday. US and British diplomats will also spend the morning conferring with council colleagues to see how far they are willing to go in punishing Iraq. Options include banning Iraqi officials who obstruct UN inspections from traveling abroad, restricting imports of equipment that can be used for both civilian and military purposes and canceling periodic reviews of the sanctions programme.

Animation film on love story of Qutub Shah

HAYDERABAD, Nov 10: India's first full-length eight crore animation film would capture the 16th century legendary love story involving the founder of Hyderabad, Prince Qutub Shah and a commoner Bhagmati, reports PTI. The ambitious eight crore rupees bilingual film, being produced by Zed Institute of Creative Arts (ZICA), using a blend of creative animation work and advanced computer expertise, would be ready for release in domestic and international markets by end of next year, the director of the film, Ashok Kaul, told PTI here. Titled 'Bhagmati', in Hindi and 'Queen of Fortunes', in English, the two-and-half hour cinematic film would be a unique work, Kaul, who bagged the national award for his film 'Param Vir Chakra', said. A team of over 100 animation artists were busy creating the ambience of the period in the city's history, which epitomised communal harmony and intense love that transcended the barriers of religion and caste.

UNSC prepares for strongest possible action US spy plane working for UN resumes flight over Iraq

WASHINGTON, Nov 10: U-2 aircraft have resumed their spy flights over Iraq in service of the United Nations, defying a threat by Baghdad to shoot down the US piloted spy planes, CNN reported early today, says Reuter. CNN said administration officials briefed lawmakers on Capitol Hill that the flights had resumed. Defence Department officials were not immediately available for comment, and the White House declined comment on the report. CNN said fighter planes were flying an escort near the U-2 aircraft, incase Iraq made good on its threat. Washington has threatened to retaliate if any of its planes are shot down.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Sunday characterised the dispute with Baghdad as "serious" and urged Iraq to rescind its order to expel American arms inspectors. Richard Butler, the chief arms inspector, said he would send teams that included Americans into the field again today, despite Baghdad's refusal for the past seven days to allow them to operate. AP adds, the United States will be seeking the "strongest possible action" against Iraq when the Security Council discusses Baghdad's refusal to cooperate with UN arms inspections that include Americans. The 15-member Security Council takes up the issue Monday afternoon, following a last-ditch effort by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to resolve the crisis diplomatically. Annan will meet Monday morning with Iraq Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz. UN officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that if Aziz's

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An Iraqi woman holds an oxygen mask over the face of her sick baby daughter in the Saddam Hospital for children in Baghdad Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

"Iraqis to choose between sacrifice or slavery" Meanwhile, President Saddam Hussein suggested that a confrontation over UN arms inspections might be inevitable, saying the Iraqi people had "to choose between sacrifice or slavery." His strident comments came hours before an American U-2 spy plane flying for the United Nations resumed flights high over Iraq early Monday, congressional officials in Washington reported. There was no immediate confirmation of the overflights by the official Iraqi News Agency but Iraq has threatened to shoot down the spy plane, something the United States has sternly warned the Iraqis against. On Sunday, Iraq barred UN weapons inspection teams that included Americans for a seventh day and sent its deputy prime minister to argue its case before the UN Security Council.

'China wants closer ties with Russia, but no alliance'

BEIJING, Nov 10: President Jiang Zemin said Monday that China wants a "strategic partnership" of closer economic and political ties with Russia but will not revive their formal alliance of the 1950s, reports AP. Jiang and visiting Russian President Boris Yeltsin, meeting in a friendly atmosphere for their third summit, planned to settle a decades-old border dispute and work on ways to increase trade. Jiang, at a joint news conference, described their relationship as a "strategic partnership," echoing the statement he issued with President Clinton after their summit two weeks ago promising closer Sino-US ties. "But he rejected suggestions that Beijing and Moscow are banding together to offset growing US global influence. "We will not form an alliance, and this kind of long-term friendly relations is not

directed against another country," the Chinese leader said. The Communist fraternalism shared by China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s gave way to rivalry for the allegiance of the socialist world. Beijing and Washington forged diplomatic ties in the 1970s out of suspicion of Moscow. Now Beijing and Moscow are interested in finding counterbalances to Washington's power. Yeltsin, who arrived in Beijing on Sunday night, said the two leaders had developed a "relationship of trust." He noted that Jiang studied in Russia during the 1950s and speaks Russian. "It's very important for us to improve this kind of relationship between the two governments," Yeltsin said. Trade is a key goal of the summit. The two sides have set a target of annual trade of 20 billion dollars by 2000, but this year it may not even reach the

lackluster 1996 level of 7 billion dollars. Russia blames China for the trade woes. The Russian news agency ITAR-Tass on Sunday quoted Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov as citing Chinese trade rules that keep out Russian planes, fertiliser and ferrous metals. The border agreement, six years in the making, is being held up as proof of their new cooperation. It lays out the long eastern frontier, from Mongolia to the Tumen River near the Sea of Japan and includes territory the two fought over as recently as 1969. The shorter western border is still being negotiated. Jiang and Yeltsin signed a joint statement on their meeting, the official Chinese news agency Xinhua said without giving details. Xinhua quoted Jiang as saying the two had discussed possible new areas for future cooperation.

Genetic engineering successfully used in human beings

ORLANDO, Florida, Nov 10: Scientists reported on Sunday that genetic engineering had been used successfully for the first time in human beings as part of two projects designed to treat blocked arteries, reports Reuter. One research team said DNA injected into 10 patients caused eight of them to grow new arteries bypassing blockages, while a second team used genetic engineering to keep heart bypass grafts from getting clogged up. "This is the first time that gene therapy has been proven to work," Dr Jeffrey Isner of St Elizabeth Medical Centre and Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, who worked on the study involving new artery growth, told Reuters. "In all the previous 200 attempts at genetic engineering, it has never been shown to have

any lasting effect on the body and many people thought genetic engineering was just pie in the sky," he added. "We have answered that." Isner, who presented his findings to the American Heart Association, said the eight volunteers who showed improvement in all had arteries in their legs blocked by atherosclerosis — the same plaque that causes coronary artery disease. "Since this gene therapy works in the leg, it should work in the heart," he said. He predicted the new therapy could become as common as heart bypass operations and angioplasty. "The ability to grow new blood vessels, whether in patients' legs or in their hearts, will become another therapeutic option," he said.

Catholics, police clash over land rights in Vietnam

HANOI, Nov 10: Thousands of Catholics and police clashed in southern Vietnam following protests over land rights and alleged corruption, officials and residents said today, reports Reuter. They reported a number of injuries following the weekend's violence in Dong Nai province and said authorities had asked church officials to help restore calm. A resident, who declined to be identified, said the troubles began on Friday when several hundred women began protesting outside the local government offices in Thong Nhat district, some 60 km (40 miles) northeast of Ho Chi Minh City. Some of them were said to have stripped in protest. Others held banners saying "Down with people who steal land from farmers." They were joined by thousands of other residents on Saturday, prompting riot police to intervene, she said.

Off the Record

Too big to be in jail WELLINGTON: A New Zealand man who weighs 305 kg (670 pounds) has been sentenced to house arrest because he is too big for prison, reports Reuter. William Dickie, 43, was sentenced on Monday to 12 months supervision and four months' periodic detention on fraud and theft charges in the south island town of Ashburton. Judge Chris Somerville said Dickie was too big for prison clothing or a prison bed and had problems in confined places like a shower. Dickie's lawyer Stuart Dolg said police were unsure how they would have transported Dickie to prison if he had received a jail sentence. "My view is he's just a thief who happens to be fat."

Pizza onslaught CRYSTAL RIVER, Florida: Would you like a box for that? A Florida school's order for 400 slices of pizza recently was mistakenly translated into an order for 400 pizzas — at 10 slices a pie, reports AP. When the third wave of pizzas arrived at Crystal River High School, school officials realised there was something amiss. The pizza onslaught was stopped at 233 pies from Hungry Howie's. Shirley Poe, school district food service director, had put the order in on Thursday because kitchen equipment was being moved to a new cafeteria. "Shirley Poe was talking servings and I was talking pizzas. I don't talk in servings," Hungry Howie's owner David Amen said.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, centre, with her grandchildren Princess Anne, right, and Prince Edward, watch from a balcony in London's Whitehall, during the Remembrance Day service Sunday in commemoration of the nation's war dead. The 97-year-old Queen Mother missed the last two Remembrance Day services because of ill health. — AP/UNB photo

EU ready to compromise on global warming deal

TOKYO, Nov 10: The European Union is ready to compromise on its target for cutting 'greenhouse gas' emissions to forge an agreement in the battle against global warming, the top EU negotiator said today, reports AP. Jorgen Henningsen, EU chief negotiator and director for environment quality and natural resources, said Europe was sticking to its proposal for a 15 per cent cut in emissions from 1990 levels by 2010. But all parties had to be ready to compromise, he told a news conference following two days of informal ministerial talks before the December 1 UN Kyoto conference on climate change. The EU has not moved away from its position that it believes industrialised countries should show their willingness to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 15 per cent by the year 2010, he said. "There is no doubt about that." But participants with "The most ambitious targets in the

negotiations... will never be able to push, go through, unless they can pull the others with them," he added. "It would be unrealistic to believe that we could strike a compromise with others if we would just sit on our high horse and insist, and that 15 per cent could make us sign at the end." Taking 1990 greenhouse gas emissions as a base, Europe is calling for a 15 per cent cut by 2010, Japan for a five per cent cut by 2008 to 2012 and the United States for no change by 2008 to 2012. But each of the three offers has different bases. The United States says its proposal for example, includes six 'greenhouse gases' blamed for trapping the Earth's heat while Europe and Japan's include only three. "Off course, we are all in the process where we have to look for compromises," Henningsen said, adding that the weekend's talks in Tokyo succeeded in clarifying some of the thinking behind the figures.

Street battles in Mazar-I-Sharif Fighting erupts as Dostam tries to disarm Malik's men

KABUL, Nov 10: Street battles have broken out in the northern city stronghold of Afghanistan's anti-Taliban alliance between two powerful rival warlords, independent sources here reported Sunday, reports AP. Sources said heavy fighting erupted in Mazar-I-Sharif when troops loyal to ethnic-Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam attempted to disarm soldiers loyal to his bitter rival Abdul Malik. "Heavy street fighting broke out on Saturday morning and again on Sunday morning leaving several dead and injured, but now it appears to have died down," a Western source said. Another source in the city said the clashes came after an attempt by Dostam, who is backed by the powerful Hazbi-Wahdat Shiite faction, to regain control over the city. "Mazar airport is back with Dostam and with his allies he

seems to control most of the city again having pushed out the remaining Malik loyalists," the source added. No further details of the clashes were immediately available. In May, Malik joined with the Taliban to oust his boss and ex-communist general Dostam, before switching back to the alliance and ending the Taliban's five-day stay in the northern capital. But in the midst of a major but unsuccessful Taliban assault on the alliance city last month, Dostam made a dramatic comeback from exile and immediately set about consolidating his position in the northern field. The battles are the third set reported between the two powerful figures in the northern alliance since Dostam returned from exile to regain his lost position.

In the first set of battles, Dostam succeeded in regaining most of his control in the provinces of Balkh and his native Jowzjan, and last week saw the ex-communist warlord push further west into Malik's Faryab stronghold. Mazar-I-Sharif, situated around 300 kilometers (186 miles) north of Kabul, is the largest city held by the anti-Taliban alliance which currently controls around one-third of Afghanistan. With Dostam and Malik in the fractured alliance are two rival Shiite Muslim factions and the ousted Kabul government of deposed president Burhanuddin Rabbani and military chief Ahmad Shah Massoud. The Taliban control around two-thirds of Afghanistan including the capital Kabul, and have vowed to impose a pure Islamic state on a country gripped by nearly 18 years of civil war.