



President Clinton applauds Leah Rabin, wife of the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House Friday, where the president received the first Rabin-Peres Peace Prize. The Prize is awarded by the Rabin Foundation, established by Leah Rabin, and the Shimon Peres Foundation, established by former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. — AP/UNB photo

Constitutional crisis Pakistan looks to army for lasting solution

ISLAMABAD, Nov 22: Pakistan is looking to the army to broker a lasting solution to a constitutional crisis after its initial intervention eased bitter tensions, observers said today, reports AFP.

The country heaved a sigh of relief when last-minute intervention by Army Chief General Jehangir Karamat on Thursday averted a move by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's party to impeach President Farooq Ahmed Leghari.

Behind-the-scenes efforts with the help of the army are now under way to restore working relations between the two top leaders, sources and reports said.

"They army has to broker a permanent peace after the temporary ceasefire," said commentator Aslam Sheikh, emphasising the need to repair the damage to relations between the two pillars of the state.

The general has played a "positive role," said another commentator, Waseem Ahmed Shah, adding the national interest demands the power centres do not overstep their areas of jurisdiction.

tent that the army chief had to step in.

"It is a supreme irony that the army's mediation helped to save 'democracy,'" the news commented editorially.

But this "has earned the military leadership much credit," it said, calling for "checks and balances" in the interests of democracy.

The mass-circulation daily Jang said a meeting between Sharif and Leghari could be arranged soon as part of the reconciliation drive. It said there was a proposal to form a consultative body like the National Security Council which was created by Leghari before the elections in February but rejected by Sharif after assuming office.

The council, grouping the president, prime minister, services chiefs and some key ministers, had been formed to advise the government on vital national issues.

"As a result of general frustration caused by the upheaval people are looking to the army to guide things onto the right path," a politician and former provincial governor, Ghulam Mustafa Khan, said.

The showdown three days ago loomed as Leghari resisted pressure to sign a law hurriedly

passed by parliament in an apparent bid to give Sharif right of appeal if it is convicted by the Supreme Court in a contempt case.

Such an appeal would put any conviction in advance, saving him from possible disqualification from parliament and the collapse of his nine-month old government.

Sharif and several of his colleagues were formally charged with contempt on Wednesday for allegedly ridiculing the judiciary in a sequel to an earlier row with the chief justice over appointments of judges.

The dispute over the appointment was resolved on October 31 when Sharif backed off and implemented Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah's demand to elevate five High Court judges to the Supreme Court.

As the crisis cooled down, a five-judge Supreme Court bench headed by Shah adjourned the crucial contempt proceedings for a week.

Much now depends on the outcome of the case, observers said. Sharif has personally appeared to assure the court of his high regard for the judiciary and expressing sorrow over any remarks deemed to be a contempt.

DPRK agrees to four-way talks

NEW YORK, Nov 22: New hope for peace in the troubled Korean peninsula came with a major breakthrough in preliminary talks aimed at reducing tension in the world's last Cold War flash point, reports AP.

North Korea, the communist half of a divided country that remains technically at war after 44 years, has agreed to attend a four-nation peace conference starting December 9 in Geneva.

Representatives of the United States, China, North Korea and South Korea made the announcement Friday, at the third round of preliminary negotiations held at Columbia University in New York.

The December meeting in Geneva will probably be brief, the first of many, a US official said, and the peace negotiations are expected to go on for at least a few years. The ultimate goal is to reunify the two Koreas.

Hashimoto to seek 10 pc cut in number of bureaucrats

TOKYO, Nov 22: Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto said today he would seek more than 10 per cent cut in the number of bureaucrats as part of his reforms to streamline the administration, reports AP.

"I hope to achieve a cut of at least more than 10 per cent in the number in the first 10 years from 2001, when the reform is to take effect, the premier said at a news conference.

Hashimoto met the press after concluding four-day of intensive debate by the ruling coalition on the administrative reform.

He also said the number of cabinet ministers would be reduced from 20 to 15-17, with the 22 ministries and agencies being cut to 13 by 2001.

French hostages alive & well, says Tajik official

DUSHANBE, Nov 22: The two French aid workers suspected to be held by a maverick Tajik guerrilla "group" are alive and well, the country's top prosecutor said Saturday, reports AP.

Prosecutor-General Salomdin Sharopov said Tajikistan's law-enforcement institutions have unspecified information "that might assist in contacting the kidnappers."

Sharopov spoke in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe following a meeting of a special coordination headquarters formed under President Emomali Rahmonov to deal with the kidnappers.

Fine for damaging wife's hearing

LONDON, Nov 22: A man who screamed in his wife's ears so loudly that she suffered permanent damage to her hearing Friday was fined 450 pounds (£747 dollars) plus 750 pounds (£1,240 dollars) costs and ordered to carry out 150 hours community service, reports AP.

Peter Pryor, 58, was convicted at Exeter crown court in the west of England of assault causing actual bodily harm to his wife Christine.

The jury heard that Pryor, who suffered from tinnitus, a ringing in the ear, told his 54-year-old wife: "I am going to make you suffer like I do."

Christine Pryor said on several occasions that he held her arms by her sides, put his mouth close to her ears and started yelling at the top of his voice.

The injuries were so bad that she saw a hospital specialist who gave her a hearing aid.

Environmental law violated in Vietnam

HANOI, Nov 22: Almost 50 per cent of 9,384 factories inspected commonly violated environmental protection laws and have been fined or shut down, an official report said Saturday, reports AP.

More than 4,400 Vietnamese and foreign-controlled factories were fined for violating the Law on Environmental Protection, while another 115 were closed due to mass pollution, the official Vietnam News Agency reported.

Industries ranging from mining to tourism were affected by the ongoing inspection. Hotels were fined, factory supervisors dismissed and heavy industry processing plants shut down.

In the combinations they can prescribe. The fourth prostate inhibitor, Hoffman-La Roche Inc's Fortovase, was approved this month. A Glaxo Wellcome drug now in the final stages of testing could bring the total to five.

Another closely watched drug in early development is an AIDS vaccine to be marketed by Wyeth-Ayerst called Genexav.

The new drugs are increasingly taking the place of new therapies, AZT, for instance, still has 27.5 per cent of the market for so-called reverse transcriptase inhibitors, but Bristol-Myers Squibb and Co's competing drug, Zidovudine, approved in 1984, is rapidly catching up, with 22 per cent.

Voting for new Serb parliament begins

BANJA LUKA, Nov 22: Polling stations opened today in Bosnia's Serb territory for parliamentary elections which western governments hope will weaken the grip of hardline nationalists, reports Reuters.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which is supervising the two-day elections, said voting began as scheduled in the Serb republic. NATO-led peace-keeping troops patrolled the region to prevent possible violence.

AP adds, the struggle between the Bosnian Serb president and war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic entered a new and critical phase Saturday with voting for a new Serb parliament.

International officials had hoped the two-day elections starting Saturday in the Serb-ruled half of Bosnia would help galvanize popular support for President Biljana Plavsic and cut into the hard-line Karadzic supporters' grip on parliament.

Yet they seemed likely instead to deepen the already yawning divide among the Bosnian Serbs.

If no side gains a clear majority in the 83-seat parliament a long period of negotiations over building coalitions is likely — leaving Bosnia Serb politics a muddle and international officials still grouping for ways to cut Karadzic out of the political scene and boost Plavsic.

Voting was brisk after polls opened at 8 am local time (0700 GMT) in Plavsic's northwest Bosnian stronghold, Banja Luka. At least a dozen people were lined up at one central polling location 15 minutes before the polls opened.

Traffic at the polling stations was constant. Several potential voters said they couldn't vote because their names were not on the rolls, but it was too early to tell if that was a minor organisational problem, or a sign of deeper flaws.

Bosiljka Banjac, a 50-year resident of Banja Luka, said she voted for the Socialist Party, which she described as "people who want to take us into Europe" and want no more war in Bosnia.

Political activists in Banja Luka said they expected four major parties to roughly split most of the vote, with Plavsic's party and the Socialists on one side, and the pro-Karadzic Democratic Party allied with the nationalists Radical Party on the other side. The balance of power in that case, could be held by minor parties and Muslims registered to vote on Serb territory.

Off the Record

Russia's only talk show about sex

MOSCOW: The call went out to the studio audience: Would anyone be willing to venture on stage for a televised lashing from a woman wielding a large whip? reports AP.

Plenty of people were, as it turned out, and a selected volunteer eagerly underwent a beating from the leather-clad guest.

All in a late night's work for Russia's first and only TV talk show about sex.

The incident, one of the wilder moments in the three-month history of "About That," helps explain why the programme has drawn jeers from parliament, picketers and the press. But it also symbolises Russians' surprising willingness to participate in — or at least watch — the popular new show.

Broadcast to much of the nation by the independent NTV network, "About That" has turned into a risqué weekly confessional that millions of people tune in late on Saturday nights.

The show's creator, Leonid Parfyonov, had a hunch that viewers might be receptive to the idea of a sex-related programme after decades when the topic was strictly taboo.

But even he is shocked by the ease with which people in this once-Soviet country will talk — and talk — about sexual fantasies, losing their virginity or, as in the recent show, the pains and pleasures of sadomasochism.

The map was carved into a 96-cm-long, 48-cm wide and 0.8-cm thick copper plate and includes a drawing of the royal mausoleums of Wang Chu (344-313 BC), the Fifth King of Zhongshan Kingdom, one of dozens of principalities in the epoch of warring states (475-221 BC).

It is not only the oldest map ever found in China but the oldest map noted with numerals in the world, said DU Naisong, a researcher with the Place Museum located in Beijing's forbidden city.

The map, known as "Zhao Yu Tu" in Chinese, has been identified by connoisseurs of cultural artifacts led by DU as national treasure.

DU is leading a group from China's major museums doing appraisal work on cultural relics in Tibet. They believe Zhao Yu Tu is important in the study of historic maps of China and the world.

Nepal facing desertification

KATHMANDU, Nov 22: Thoughtless logging and overgrazing are converting an average of 10,000 hectares of land in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal every year into unproductive desert, environmentalists have warned, reports India Abroad News Service.

Desertification, soil erosion and decline in the productivity of land due to overutilisation of natural resources are among the major environmental problems Nepal is presently facing. Statistics show that the country is losing over 240 million cubic metres of top soil annually.

Major rivers are altering their courses as a result of the increased sedimentation in the southern plains of the Terai region, and the damage to a significant area of fertile land in the past few years is cause for much alarm, environmentalists say.

Environmental expert Navin Acharya says "the Kosi river (in the eastern part of the country which flows into India) has shifted about 110 km from east to west in the last 232 years (1731-1963) destroying about 1,300 sq.km. of productive land." The river bed in Nepal's Terai is estimated to be rising annually by 10 to 30 cm due to sediment deposits.

The alarming statistics have forced Nepal's government into action. Recently, the Ministry of Population and Environment organised a seminar in collaboration with the secretariat of the U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) to identify the causes of the problem and solutions to it.

The hill kingdom is now making a call for all South Asian nations to combat environmental problems in concert. "Since environmental impacts in Nepal will have a direct bearing in other countries of South Asia as well, environmental conservation should be made common concern of all the countries of the region," Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation Hridayesh Tripathi emphasised.

Land degradation has also significantly reduced agricultural productivity in this country. Narendra Khadka, ecologist and lecturer at Tribhuvan University, said that "35.2 per cent of the Shivaliks — a highly geologically vulnerable area — and 21.8 per cent of the mid-hills, where about 48 per cent of the total population of some 20 million reside, are degraded."

These problems are further aggravated by the growing population and the shrinking size of land holdings and pose a threat to forest resources.

Clinton demands Saddam to be stripped of all capability to make weapons

WASHINGTON, Nov 22: President Bill Clinton demanded that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein be stripped of all capability to make nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the administration hardened its conditions for lifting economic sanctions against Iraq, reports AP.

As UN weapons inspectors returned to Baghdad with fewer Americans, the State Department said Iraq must pay reparations from the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf and free Kuwaiti prisoners.

The first priority of the UN inspectors, whose return Saddam permitted under massive US military pressure, was to look for weapons stocks Iraq may have hidden while the inspectors were out of the country.

But Clinton, at a White House ceremony on Friday, set out a much more ambitious programme. "They must be able to proceed with their work without interference, to find, to destroy, to prevent Iraq from rebuilding nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the missiles to carry them," he said.

"Let there be no mistake, we must be constantly vigilant and resolute and, with our friends and partners, we must be especially determined to prevent Saddam's ability to reconstitute his weapons of mass destruction programmes," Clinton declared as he received a Mideast peace award.

When the UN weapons inspectors returned to Baghdad and to anti-American banners and graffiti, there were four Americans among the 75 monitors. Six Americans were in the group that was expelled. The chief inspector attributed the reduction to normal rotation.

It's a sensitive point, though. Saddam had demanded the exclusion of all Americans.

Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, in helping to persuade the Iraqi leader to relent, promised to try to "improve" monitoring arrangements.

"There's been no deal, whatsoever," James Foley, the deputy State Department spokesman, said, "Iraq has welcomed the return of the inspectors unconditionally."

Foley said, "The 64,000 question is: Are they able to do their job?"

He called Iraq's pledge to co-operate fully with the UN inspectors "a novel achievement, if implemented."

Saddam's incentive in revoking his expulsion of US monitors is to persuade the UN Security Council to remove sanctions that have damaged Iraq's economy, reports AP.

Foley said, "however, that more than co-operation with inspectors was required. 'It's the view of the United States that all relevant UN Security Council resolutions apply as we look towards our relationship with Saddam Hussein and his regime over the long run,'" the State Department official said.

Reuter adds, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on Friday that Americans must continue to make up a significant part of the UN weapons inspection team in Iraq and appeared to rule out any softening of some economic sanctions against Baghdad.

Earlier, the official Iraqi news agency INA said six UN monitoring teams had resumed their work today and that Iraqi authorities in the sites have provided all facilities in order to enable the teams to carry on their work properly.



Activists kick the burning effigies of a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam terrorist, former prime minister Narasimha Rao, and godman Chandraswami, at a demonstration organised to demand punishment for the conspirators who allegedly plotted the death of former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, Friday. The 14-party coalition government has been threatened withdrawal of support by Congress, unless they dump one of the coalition constituents, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Cholera breaks out in Lanka: Sri Lankan health officials reported 240 cases of cholera in the last three months, prompting President Chandrika Kumaratunga to appoint a task force to come up with ways to combat the disease, news reports said Saturday, AP reports from Colombo.

The state-run Daily News called it a "cholera epidemic" and said the Health Ministry has been asked by Candrika Kumaratunga to take urgent actions and report to her in three days.

What is worrying health officials is that cholera cases first reported in Chilaw, about 70 kilometres (43 miles) north of Colombo, are now being reported in the tourist town of Negambo, 35 kilometres (22 miles) north of Colombo. Negambo is also close to Colombo's international airport.

Muslim cleric killed in Lahore: A Shi'ite Muslim cleric was gunned down Friday in the eastern Punjab capital, the state-run news agency reported, AP says from Lahore.

No one took responsibility for the killing, but the authorities fear it was carried out by rival Sunni Muslim militants. A Shi'ite Muslim organisation, Tehrik-e-Jafria or Shi'ite Movement, called the killing "an act of terrorism." Officials said two men on a motorcycle drove up beside Rafiq Zahid, a cleric at a Lahore mosque, and shot him.

Mishap claims 13 in India: A truck, skidded and rolled down a hill in northern India, killing 13 people and injuring others, the state-run news agency reported, today, AP reports from New Delhi.

The truck carrying 28 people was negotiating a blind curve when it rolled down a 300-feet (89 metre) deep gorge Thursday night, killing 12 passengers on the spot. One person died later in the hospital, officials said. Poor Indians often crowd into the beds of trucks to travel in the absence of affordable public transportation.

50 buildings gutted in Srinagar: An early morning fire in a northern India town Saturday gutted nearly 50 buildings but caused no injuries, police said, AP reports from Srinagar.

The fire, believed caused by an electrical short, destroyed 30 shops, 15 houses, one mosque and one bank building before firefighters could bring it under control. The fire occurred at Banihal, 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of the Kashmir state capital of Srinagar.

17 killed in fire in Hong Kong: Seventeen workers were killed in a fire which engulfed a shoe factory in eastern coastal China's Zhejiang province, local press report said yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The 17 workers were asleep in a third-floor dormitory when the electrical fire broke out on the ground floor of the factory in Wenling city on Thursday. Another worker was seriously injured after jumping from the three-storey building.

Quake rocks Calcutta city: An earthquake of moderate intensity measuring 5.9 on the Richter scale rocked the Calcutta city and the districts at 1654 hours Friday, PTI reports from Calcutta.

The quake, lasting two seconds, had its epicentre 381 km away from Calcutta, met office sources told PTI. The tremor was also felt in Gangtok and its surrounding areas. No loss of life or property has been reported so far.

Jiang to begin Canada tour Nov 26: Chinese President Jiang Zemin will pay an official visit to Canada from November 26-29 after the meeting of APEC leaders in Vancouver. Prime Minister Jean Chretien confirmed Friday, AFP reports from Ottawa.

Jiang first will head to Calgary, where he will be welcomed by Governor General Romeo LeBlanc, representative of head of State Queen Elizabeth. "The focus will be on the strengthening economic ties between China and Alberta, particularly within the oil and gas sector," Chretien said. "It is an excellent opportunity to advance the special relationship that exists between Canada and China and the important commercial ties we share."

14 killed in hamlet near Bogota: At least 14 people were killed Friday in a hamlet near Bogota in an apparent massacre by suspected right-wing paramilitaries, police said. Villagers who resisted killed one of the assailants, AP reports from Bogota.

The shootout began after some 15 heavily armed men in military fatigues entered a store in La Horqueta, 50 kilometres (30 miles) southwest of the capital, and asked for three men by name. The three stepped forward and were shot and killed, Arango said, citing testimony of a wounded female survivor. Companions of the slain peasants then produced weapons and began firing at the men in fatigues, he said in a radio interview.

Drug makers developing new medicines to combat AIDS virus

NEW YORK, Nov 22: Drug makers are working on an unprecedented array of new medicines to combat the AIDS virus, enough to triple the number of drugs and vaccines on the market today, according to an industry survey released Friday, reports AP.

Drug makers are now testing 124 new treatments on patients, according to the survey of major drug companies by the Pharmaceutical Research Manufacturers of America. The Food and Drug Administration has approved a total of 50 AIDS-related drugs, including eight this year.

With AIDS drugs leading to the first-ever drop in the number of new AIDS cases in the United States last year, drug

makers have come a long way since the first AIDS drug, Glaxo Wellcome's AZT, was approved in 1987, said Dr John Siegfried, a Washington physician who treats AIDS patients and the industry group's head of medical affairs.

"Here we are ten years later, just a decade, and now there are 50 drugs either for the disease or for associated conditions," he said. "That's an unprecedented development."

The treatments under development include:

- 40 anti-viral medicines and protease inhibitors, which have proven effective in reducing the amount of the virus in some patients.
- 23 drugs to fight AIDS-related cancers, such as Kaposi's

sarcoma, 11 anti-infective medicines to fight opportunistic diseases, including a type of pneumonia that afflicts 8 out of 10 AIDS patients.

— 5 gene therapies designed to genetically alter patients' cells to make them more resistant.

— 12 vaccines, including the first DNA-based preventive vaccine. DNA is the principal carrier of genetic information in cells.

The federal Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said the drop in AIDS deaths and new diagnoses last year shows that powerful new drugs seem to be slowing down the virus that causes the disease.

In 1996, an estimated 56,730 people were diagnosed with AIDS, down 6 per cent from the 60,620 new cases in 1995, according to the CDC. AIDS deaths also dropped 23 per cent, from an estimated 50,140 in 1995 to about 38,780 in 1996. About 235,470 people were living with AIDS in 1996.

The CDC said powerful drugs such as protease inhibitors are apparently preventing HIV infection from progressing to full-blown AIDS, especially in patients who start taking the medicine early.

Many AIDS activists agree that pharmaceutical company scientists have made AIDS drugs a priority, but give drug makers a mixed overall review.

"I would give them an A' for advances in the science and an 'F' for fairness in pricing," said Daniel Zingale, executive director of AIDS Action in Washington.

Patients pay as much as 15,000 dollars a year for the three-drug cocktails usually used to treat AIDS and other drugs to tackle opportunistic infections and other related problems.

Doctors who treat AIDS patients have eagerly called for more drugs, if only for variety. Because mutations in the virus reduce the effectiveness of drugs, doctors switch them, usually two or three at a time. But because only four protease inhibitors have been approved by the FDA, doctors are limited

Netanyahu stands by his peace making policies

JERUSALEM, Nov 22: A defiant Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday he stood by his policies regarding the Palestinians and would not be deterred by criticism by the United States and other countries, reports AP.

Asked in a television interview whether he had lost the trust of world leaders, the Israeli leader acknowledged that there was a certain tarnishing of his image in the international community.

"Internationally the attacks (on me) are clear — that I don't give the Arab side, the Palestinian side, what it wants and so there is shouting and pressure," Netanyahu told Israel

TV's Channel Two in an interview. "This does not bring popularity, not in Washington, not in Paris and not in London but I think we have to stand up for what is ours."

Netanyahu's comments came several days after his return from the United States where US President Bill Clinton would not meet with him, apparently angered over the Prime Minister's refusal to freeze Jewish settlements buildings and advance the peace process.

Netanyahu acknowledged in the interview that Israel was going through "a difficult time," both internationally and at home.