

BRIEFLY



Helen Spott, left, and Janey Walker, editors for the United Kingdom's NVC Arts for Channel 4, pose in New York on Monday with their international Emmy Award for excellence in broadcasting outside the United States. The award, for best Arts Documentary, was given for the show, "Dancing for Dollars: The Bolshoi in Vegas" about the disastrous trip the ballet company, that was once the pride of the Soviet Union, made to Las Vegas in October 1996. — AP/UNB photo

ICRC volunteer killed in Congo: A Red Cross volunteer was killed in an exchange of gunfire between police and renegade militia members in this war-ravaged capital, officials said Monday. AP reports from Brazzaville.

The victim, who was not identified, was killed Saturday as he went to save a civilian who had been wounded in the fighting, said Delphin Kibakidi, a spokesman for the local Red Cross organisation. The new government of Gen. Denis Sassou-Nguesso has vowed to eliminate the private militias — despite the fact that he came to power at the head of one such group, the Cobras. He has said he would create a "true republican army."

Pak national beheaded in KSA: Saudi Arabia yesterday beheaded a Pakistani man for killing a compatriot, raising to 121 the number of people executed in the conservative Islamic kingdom so far this year, Reuters reports from Dubai.

An Interior Ministry statement read on state-run Saudi Television said the man was executed in the holy city of Makkah after an Islamic court found him guilty of killing another Pakistani by hitting him on the head with a hammer.

6 Peruvian soldiers killed: Guerrillas ambushed an army patrol in Peru's northern Amazon jungle, killing six soldiers and wounding seven, the military reported Monday. AP reports from Lima.

One guerrilla died and an undetermined number were injured in the attack Sunday in a remote stretch of jungle in La Polvorita district in the department of San Martin, 465 kilometres (290 miles) northeast of the capital, Lima, according to an armed forces news release. Guerrillas opened fire on the soldiers and, after a gunfight, retreated carrying with them "an appreciable number of wounded," the military statement said. The soldiers were riding in a truck at the time of the attack.

Cabinet dissolved in Niger: The president of Niger announced Monday he was dissolving the year-old government led by Prime Minister Cisse Amadou. AFP reports from Niamey.

"I have decided, counting from yesterday, to discharge the entire government team," General Ibrahim Bare Mainassara said in a radio broadcast. He said he came to his decision after studying the country's problems, which he said ranged from the threat of famine, security problems, classroom unrest, civil servants' pay and the actions of opposition parties.

3 killed in South Lebanon: Israeli troops killed three guerrillas in its South Lebanon occupation zone Monday, the Israeli army said, Reuters reports from Jerusalem. The three were killed in a clash in the western district of the zone a day after Israel said guerrillas killed at least eight Lebanese civilians in fire directed at the Israeli occupied area. It was not immediately clear which guerrilla group the Israelis had engaged.

Violence claims 5 in Colombia: Unknown assailants shot to death five people near the town of Uraio in the northwestern department of Antioquia, police reported late Sunday. AFP reports from Bogota.

Among the dead was Juan Esteban Flores, a Colombian Communist Party member and a member of a local ruling body. Police also said that a government helicopter was fired on Sunday as it conducted a humanitarian mission near the rural community of Anori northeast of Medellin. No one was hurt in that incident.

Student leader jailed in ROK: A provincial court sentenced a radical student leader to six years in prison Tuesday for violating national security laws banning pro-Communist activities. AP reports from Seoul.

Kan Wi-won, 24, headed Hanchongryon, a student group responsible for many violent anti-government, anti-US protests. It was outlawed by the government in 1996 for its pro-North Korean activities.

Russian held for spying: A naval officer in Russia's Pacific Fleet who writes for a military newspaper has been arrested on suspicion of spying for Japan, Russian news agencies reported Monday. AP says from Moscow.

Capt. Grigory Pasko, a correspondent for Boyevaya Vakhita (Combat Vigil), was arrested Sunday in the Far East port of Vladivostok after returning from Japan, ITAR-Tass and Interfax said.

'Russia is open to cooperation in civilian use of atomic energy'

MOSCOW, Nov 25: Russia's atomic energy minister said that his country is open to cooperation in the civilian use of atomic energy with any country that agrees to abide by international accords, Interfax said Monday, reports AP.

Viktor Mikhailov said that "this fully applies to Iran" as well as to any other country which has put its nuclear programme under the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Interfax said citing the transcript of a conversation with US officials.

Mikhailov also dismissed comments made by former security chief Alexander Lebed alleging that security around Russia's nuclear arsenal was insufficient and has resulted in the theft of some nuclear components.

"One of our nuclear weapons or components of nuclear weapons have been lost."

Russia to deliver 2 submarines to Indian Navy

MOSCOW, Nov 25: Russia will deliver the first of two kilo class submarines being acquired by the Indian Navy before the Christmas, Indian diplomatic sources said here.

A 60-member Indian naval crew has arrived at Admiralty Shipyards in St Petersburg to take delivery of the new submarine. Indian embassy sources told PTI.

They, however, offered no further details about the deal.

According to earlier reports, the Indian cabinet has already sanctioned purchase of two modern submarines.

Russia is likely to deliver the second submarine next year. The formal contract for the purchase of submarines is expected to be signed shortly during Indian Defence Secretary Ajit Kumar's Moscow visit sometime later this month or early December when he would be here for co-chairing the Indo-Russian joint working group on defence cooperation.

Aborigines may claim 79 pc of total land mass, says Howard

CANBERRA, Nov 25: Prime Minister John Howard says two High Court rulings give aborigines a claim on more than 79 per cent of Australia's total land mass of almost 3 million square miles (7.7 million sq km), reports AP.

Aboriginal leaders say this is wildly misleading, because the High Court's decision, setting out broad parameters for native title claims, are much more restrictive than that.

The Mabo decision of 1992 applied mainly to unoccupied government land, mostly the red desert interior.

It specifically said that native title claims over "freehold" land, bought-and-sold property of title on which most Australians have their homes and farms, cannot be allowed.

Ranch lands are generally held in Australia on a different kind of title, known as pastoral leases, were not originally thought to have been subject to native title claims.

US develops new gene therapy to avoid insulin

WASHINGTON, Nov 25: US researchers have developed a new gene therapy that could help many diabetics avoid regular insulin injections, according to a new study, reports AP.

The treatment would use certain digestive glands which naturally release proteins in the blood, genetically altering them to produce and release insulin, according to a study due out in Tuesday's edition of the monthly journal *Biotechnology*.

In tests on rats, the therapy allowed the rodents to regulate the sugar in their blood and bring concentrations to near-normal levels, the study found.

"It is well-established that there are fewer long-term medical complications of diabetes when blood-sugar levels are kept normal. But keeping the blood sugar normal by the current methods of using injections or insulin pumps is a difficult task," wrote researcher Ira Goldfine on his work done at the University of California at San Francisco.

Our data suggest that this new approach is a promising alternative."

Churchill's car fetches \$105,000

LONDON, Nov 25: A Swiss historical foundation paid 66,000 pounds (dls 105,000) at auction Monday for a small black Austin saloon car once owned by Britain's World War II prime minister, Winston Churchill, reports AP.

More than 20 bidders competed at auctioneers Sotheby's to buy the Austin Cambridge, which Churchill bought new in 1938 and kept until 1950.

Spectators applauded when the Swiss foundation, which was not identified and bid by phone, finally defeated a English private collector after 15 minutes of furious two-way bidding.

Sotheby's said Churchill regularly used the car to travel from London to his country home, Chartwell Manor in Kent county, south of the capital.

What she cut out, the trip to Agra in particular, would have involved a significant portion of her stay in India, but not the important meetings," the official asserted.

What had to be remembered was that "She did make the trip out there — that she says something — that she is serious about a dialogue (with New Delhi)," the official pointed out, adding that with the fast moving developments in the Gulf region at that time, Albright could well have cancelled her trip.

"The fact that she did go in spite of all the other pressures, even though it had to be shortened unfortunately, does demonstrate that South Asia is an important area for us," the official emphasised.

The official's views were echoed by former diplomat and eminent analyst Dennis Kux, author of the much acclaimed "India and United States: Estranged Democracies."

Kux also noted that "The main thing is that she got there

International
Indian politicians look for way out of impasse

NEW DELHI, Nov 25: India's ruling coalition and its main political backer kept open the possibility of talks to end a week long political stalemate Tuesday, even after Prime Minister I K Gujral formally rejected the Congress Party's demand to drop a governing partner, reports AP.

Gujral took four days to reject the demand to eject the Dravida Progressive Front, which the Congress believes was partly responsible for the 1991 killing of Rajiv Gandhi, its leader and former prime minister. Local news agencies reported Gujral's letter also suggested the two sides discuss ways out of the impasse.

A meeting of the Congress decision-making committee was scheduled Tuesday to decide on future action. The committee also met Monday night to read Gujral's letter, but made no immediate move to follow through on the threat to withdraw crucial support to the United Front coalition, leading those who favour a patch-up to believe that there is a way out of the crisis.

Withdrawal of support in parliament could mean the country would be forced into a mid-term election, the second vote in less than two years.

At their own meeting Monday, United Front leaders decided to wait for Congress chief Sitaram Kesri's response to Gujral's letter before going ahead with any of the options available to them.

As Prime Minister, Gujral could ask the president to dissolve parliament and call for fresh elections. Or he could resign, giving the president the option of inviting another party to form the government.

Despite their differences, the Congress and the United Front want to keep out the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, the largest party in parliament who could be the winner if elections are held.

As many as 45 first-time lawmakers from all parties met President K R Narayanan Monday evening and urged him not to dissolve parliament and explore the possibility of forming an alternative government, newspapers reported Tuesday.

The majority of those who met Narayanan were from the Congress, underlining the difference of opinion within the party on how to proceed.

Narayanan is reported to have told them to use their influence within their parties to arrive at a compromise.

Earlier report says: Feuding politicians who have brought the Indian government to the brink of collapse were in a standoff Monday, each waiting for the other to make a move — and each holding out the possibility of compromise.

The powerful Congress

Party, which sparked the crisis last week by threatening to withdraw support from the United Front government if the coalition refused to drop one of its partners, now says it can do nothing until it receives a formal reply from the front. It pressured the government to respond Monday by creating a stir in Parliament, forcing both houses to adjourn after only a few minutes.

Congress lawmakers shouted they would allow no business to proceed until their demands were met. Similar shouting scenes led to early adjournments in the two parliamentary session scheduled last week.

A disgusted opposition lawmaker, Jaswant Singh, said in the lower house that the government should either resign or Congress should file a non-confidence motion to end the nation's limbo.

"The country is being held to ransom by a theater of the absurd," Singh said. "This is not governance, but a farce."

Front leaders discussed the Congress threat for hours over the weekend, but never sent the formal reply. And at a meeting late Sunday, they reportedly shied from any immediate move to resign and call early elections, though Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said in a speech Monday that early elections were likely.

Amnesty International blasts KSA's judiciary

DUBAI, Nov 25: Amnesty International has sharply criticised Saudi Arabia's judicial system, charging that scores of people are sentenced to flogging, amputation or execution without fair trials, reports AP.

In a report released Tuesday, the London-based group noted that while world media attention focused earlier this year on two British nurses accused of killing a co-worker, "at least 117 people whose cases were shrouded in secrecy were executed during the same period."

Typically, suspects are arrested without a warrant, tortured, denied lawyers and tried in secret, it said. Foreigners are tricked into signing confessions in Arabic after being told they are "release forms," Amnesty added.

It noted that the majority of people executed or subjected to flogging or amputation have been from "vulnerable sectors of society, such as women, foreign workers and the poor."

Besides, "the government spares no effort in concealing its appalling human rights record," the report said, adding that the international community should pressure the kingdom to reform its judicial system.

Lawyers announced in September that the two British nurses were found guilty by a Saudi court of murdering a fellow nurse, Yvonne Gifford, last December. Deborah Parry, 38, was convicted of intentional murder in the case. She will escape execution because Gifford's brother has accepted a monetary payment in exchange for waiving the death penalty.

Lucille McLaughlin, 31, was sentenced to eight years jail and 500 lashes — a penalty that has drawn widespread publicity and condemnation in Britain.

Amnesty said that it recorded at least 560 executions between 1990 and July 1997. Those executed included 204 Saudi nationals and 332 people from African and Asian countries, including 143 Pakistanis. The nationalities of 24 others could not be determined, the report said.

Teachers hold banners and chant anti-government slogans as they hold chalks in hands as a symbol of their profession, during a demonstration on "Turkey's Teachers Day" in downtown Istanbul on Monday. The protest was against the government's anti-democratic education policy and their dissatisfactory income rates.

— AP/UNB photo

France politics
Communists rule out merger with Socialists

PARIS, Nov 25: Despite warm relations, the leader of France's Communist Party on Tuesday ruled out a merger with the rival Socialist Party, reports AP.

Robert Hue, the secretary general of the Communist Party, also told Europe 1 radio the Communists intended to present their own candidate in the next French presidential elections in 2002.

Hue said he was "moved" by the welcome he had received this weekend at a Socialist Party congress in western France.

It was the first time a Communist Party leader had attended a national meeting of its leftist rival since 1920.

The Communist decision to join the government after the left won parliamentary elections this spring is what allowed Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin to form a workable coalition.

In the world of post-Soviet Communism, many of the differences between the Communists and the Socialists have fallen by the wayside and on many issues their views converge.

— AP/UNB photo

5 lakh govt employees in Assam begin strike

GUWAHATI, India, Nov 25: At least 500,000 government workers in the far-eastern Indian state of Assam today began a crippling four-day strike to demand a steep pay rise, officials said, reports AP.

Government offices, schools and colleges and state-run shops were closed across the oil-and-tea-rich state despite a stern warning by the Assam government to the protesters.

Charan Deka, Secretary General of the Union of State Workers leading the strike, said: "We know the hardship caused to the people as a result of out strike, but the authorities are to be blamed."

Deka said government employees in Assam were paid about 35 per cent less on average than their peers in other Indian states.

"We want party," he said adding that government salaries in Assam ranged from 1,760 rupees (dollars 48) a month to 11,000 rupees (dollars 305).

In other states, the highest salary is about 26,000 rupees (dollars 722) which is much more than 35 per cent," he said.

Deka said police were with the strikers in "spirit" but had not stopped work. He said electricity and water services would also not be affected but added that the union would intensify the protest if its demand was not met soon. Deka did not give a deadline.

The Assam government Tuesday ordered strikers to return to work immediately.

"If the order is not complied with, the government shall take serious disciplinary action against all employees," a spokesman said.

No change in US policy towards Cuba likely

HAVANA, Nov 25: US policy towards Cuba is not expected to soften as a result of the death of leading anti-communist Cuban exile leader Jorge Mas Canosa, a senior official of Cuba's parliament said on Monday.

"There is no expectation that the policy might change," Lazaro Barredo Medina, vice president of the International Relations Committee of Cuba's National Assembly, told Reuters.

Mas, who died in Miami on Sunday aged 58 from complications of lung cancer, headed the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), the most powerful and influential of the Cuban exile organisations opposed to Cuban President Fidel Castro and one-party communist rule in Cuba.

Barredo said that although Mas was undoubtedly an influential figure in Cuban exile politics, the anti-Castro lobby in the United States was a wider force, incorporating not just exiles but also members of the US Congress.

The astronauts were relieved to find the Spartan satellite in fairly stable condition Monday evening. Commander Kevin Kregel reported a slight but clearly noticeable rotation as he steered Columbia in for the 175-mile (280-kilometre) high-arch.

NASA's main concern was a collision between the satellite and either the shuttle or a spacewalker, although officials insisted the risk was extremely low.

The satellite had been released from the shuttle to spend two days studying the sun. But for reasons that are still unclear, it malfunctioned within moments. And when Columbia's crew tried to retrieve it with the shuttle robot arm, it started tumbling too quickly to be grabbed safely.

After three days of anxious separation, Columbia was back at Spartan's side a little over one hour into the spacewalk.

Off the Record

Right to cheat!

QUETTA: Students demanding the right to cheat at their exams forced the closure of a university campus at the weekend, officials said, reports Reuters.

They said the students demanded to be allowed to cheat in first, second and third year examinations and went on the rampage when they were told they could not.

Violence erupted and Balochistan reserve police units were brought in to restore order at the Engineering and Technology Faculty at Khuzdar, near this southwestern regional capital.

The examinations started last week and student leaders said they had been told the authorities would look the other way if they cheated to get the best results.

But university authorities said there would be no cheating and students held a rally demanding to be allowed to look at notes and collaborate with colleagues.

'Sunflower' dilemma

AMSTERDAM: Created only to decorate his room, the bright sunflowers painted by Vincent van Gogh caused an international stir when one of the famous works drew a record 39.5 million dollars bid ten years ago, reports AP.

The same painting is at the centre of attention again. This time, the art world wants to know whether the Japanese insurance company that bought the still life in fact paid for a masterful fake.

Van Gogh's first "Sunflowers" painting was created in August 1888 while he was living in Arles, France. Most art experts agree this original masterpiece — 14 flowers set against a pale yellow background — now hangs in London's National Gallery. A near replica that Van Gogh created later is said to be in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

The Yasuda Fire and Marine Insurance Co believes it holds a third "Sunflowers", the work it bought at Christie's auction house in 1987. At the time, the bid was the most ever paid for a painting.

The pilot had spoken to air traffic controllers in the nearby Vavuniya Air Force Base shortly before the crash, saying he was experiencing difficulty controlling the aircraft and was losing altitude, said an air force official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The US-built Bell-212 helicopter was on its way to evacuate wounded government soldiers at Nainamadu in the Vavuniya district from its base in the central city of Anuradhapura. The helicopter crashed in government territory a few minutes after midnight (1800 GMT Monday).

The helicopter crashed near the town of Puliyanakulam, while attempting an emergency landing in the jungle.

US officials term Albright's South Asia trip fruitful

WASHINGTON, Nov 25: Even though US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was preoccupied with the Iraqi crisis during her South Asia trip last week, administration officials and analysts here say that much was achieved during the abbreviated visit, according to India Abroad News Service.

They denied that her drastically shortened itinerary in South Asia, which was cut down to two days, meant that Albright, the first US Secretary of State to visit India after a gap of 14 years, could not hold substantive discussions in Islamabad or New Delhi.

A State Department official denied that Albright's discussions in New Delhi were superficial or cursory because she was distracted by the UN standoff with Baghdad. "She carried out the core appointments on her schedule," the official told IANS.

"She met with the prime minister of India, as well as the officials, parliamentarians.

(to South Asia) and you can draw something from it that the U.S. is serious (about South Asia)."

He recalled how in 1981, then Secretary of State Alexander Haig had cancelled a scheduled trip to South Asia when the crisis in Poland had begun unfolding.

Albright's long-planned South Asia trip was meant to build a new relationship with key South Asian capitals. While trying to keep her schedule intact, she was also scrambling to shore up support in the Security Council and around the Arab world for Washington's stand on the Iraq crisis.

In seven days Albright raced through eight nations, dropped Bangladesh from her trip, scrapped several high-profile appearances in India and Pakistan, and flew through the night three times.

"What you had was a bit of bad luck all the way around. Her worrying about Iraq, you had Nawaz Sharif in a constitutional crisis, you had the government of India collapsing," Kux said.

"So I wouldn't put it just on the American side. For the Americans, while they are trying to pay more attention to South Asia, other things keep cropping up," Kux added.

India and Pakistan are so wrapped up and so caught up in their own domestic problems that it is pretty hard for them, even if they wanted to, to engage with the U.S.," he said.

Kux noted that every time senior US officials travelled to Islamabad or New Delhi, the two capitals were in the throes of some domestic crisis or another.

He noted half facetiously that if Albright had stayed a day longer in either Islamabad or New Delhi, "Then Nawaz would have had to cancel the meeting" and Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral would have been shown up as a puppet at the mercy of Congress Party chief Sitaram Kesri.

All the big newspapers — The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Times — which normally devote an entire page once a week to South Asia, ignored Albright's date with South Asia. There were also no analyses or commentaries subsequently.

The only part of her trip which found some mention was the day she spent in Pakistan. But the report by New York Times correspondent Steve Er-langer, who accompanied her, was datelined Nasir Bagh in Pakistan, 25 miles (40 km) from the Afghan border, where Albright met Afghan refugees and issued her harshest criticism yet of the Taliban and its treatment of women and children.

Only five of the 21 paragraphs in the report mentioned Albright's talks in Islamabad with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Foreign Minister

Gohar Ayub Khan.

In a report from Geneva, where Albright had dashed from New Delhi for a meeting with foreign ministers of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council to deal with the Iraq crisis, Washington Post's diplomatic correspondent Thomas W. Lippman noted that many of Albright's senior aides never even left their hotel during her less than 24-hour stay in New Delhi.

"Rushing out of their hotel in New Delhi to board Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's flight to Geneva, two of her senior aides grumped that it was the first time they had left the building during her entire stay in the Indian capital," Lippman wrote.

"All their time, they said, was spent making phone calls and sending faxes to set up (the Geneva meeting). Up all night, they never even saw the Red Fort of the Moghul emperors, Delhi's most prominent tourist site," Lippman narrated.

4 killed in Lankan Air Force chopper crash

COLOMBO, Nov 25: A Sri Lankan Air Force helicopter crashed in a government-held area in northern Sri Lanka early Tuesday, killing its four-member crew, officials said, reports AP.

The pilot had spoken to air traffic controllers in the nearby Vavuniya Air Force Base shortly before the crash, saying he was experiencing difficulty controlling the aircraft and was losing altitude, said an air force official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The US-built Bell-212 helicopter was on its way to evacuate wounded government soldiers at Nainamadu in the Vavuniya district from its base in the central city of Anuradhapura. The helicopter crashed in government territory a few minutes after midnight (1800 GMT Monday).

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