

BRIEFLY



United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, right, shakes hand with Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq Tariq Aziz during a meeting on Wednesday at the UN. — AP/UNB photo

2 die as train derails in India: A high speed train jumped its tracks on a busy southern Indian railroad route on Thursday, killing two people and injuring 11 others, officials said, AP reports from Hyderabad.

Ten cars of the train hurtled off the track in the Guntur region as the train travelled before dawn from Secunderabad to Narsapur towns in the Andhra Pradesh state, railroad department officials said.

The accident paralysed railroad services in the area, 1,375 km south of New Delhi. Another train with doctors, officials and rescue volunteers was rushed to the site of the accident, the officials said.

Annun will visit ROK to receive award: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan will visit South Korea later this month to receive the 200,000 dls Seoul Peace Prize, the Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister said on Thursday, AP reports from Seoul.

Annun was chosen as the recipient of this year's prize for his contribution to world peace through international diplomatic and humanitarian endeavours.

The biennial prize was set up in 1990 to commemorate the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Past recipients include International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch, former US Secretary of State George Shultz and the international relief organisation, Doctors Without Borders.

8,000 get amnesty in Turkmenistan: Some 8,000 convicted and arrested criminals were granted amnesty on Wednesday in Turkmenistan, marking the second mass liberation in the country this year, Interfax reported, AFP says from Moscow.

The prisoners, who include 300 women and 180 minors, are to be set free by President Saparmurad Niyazov, who has in the past been accused by Western leaders of large-scale human rights violations in the Central Asian Republic.

The presidential decree was announced on Monday as the country mourned the 50th anniversary of a devastating earthquake in the capital Ashgabat that killed more than four-fifths of the city's residents.

Ecuador-Peru's border talks fail: Ecuador and Peru failed to make headway in talks over their century-old border dispute on Wednesday, but Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso expressed confidence the conflict could be solved within weeks, Reuters reports from Brasilia.

"We are still meeting and we are going to be talking for some time. The differences in opinion between Ecuador and Peru have diminished, but there are still some problems," Cardoso said after talks with the two Andean leaders in Brasilia.

President Jamil Mahuad of Ecuador and Alberto Fujimori of Peru arrived in the Brazilian capital on Wednesday for discussions on their border dispute, which led to a brief but bloody war in 1995.

140 bars closed in Naples: Local authorities in Naples ordered on Tuesday the closure of more than 140 bars, private clubs and gambling rooms known to be frequented by members of the city's mafia, the Camorra, AFP reports from Naples.

A statement from the Naples governor's office said other similar measure could follow in a crackdown on gang warfare following a car bomb attack.

The bomb exploded on Friday outside a club in Naples, injuring 13 people. The following day a rocket was fired at the suburban home of a Camorra member's brother, causing no casualties.

No sign of missing jet in Bolivia: Searchers have failed to locate a single-engine plane 'Wings of Peace' carrying a missionary family from Innesota that disappeared ten days ago in Bolivian rain forests, AP reports from La Paz.

Several planes and helicopters have been combing a vast, densely forested region in the middle of the country in search of the missing plane, officials of the World Gospel Mission said on Wednesday.

Church officials, based in Marion, Indiana, were hoping that sightings by farmers and reports by area residents of a low flying plane near the Amoro National Park would lead them to the plane.

Fears of N-arms race in Indian subcontinent ruled out

MELBOURNE, Oct 8: Fears of a nuclear arms race on the Indian subcontinent are far-fetched, with the five underground tests in May a stabilizing element in the region, India's ambassador said Thursday, reports AP.

Gopalaswami Parthasarathy strongly defended India's nuclear weapons programme, saying it was prompted in part by the hypocrisy of the Western nuclear club.

"Since it became clear to us that disarmament was not going to be achieved by platitudes, we came to the conclusion that we had a nuclear option... and that option had to be exercised," he said.

Parthasarathy told the Australian Institute of International Affairs that despite a ruling of the world court that nuclear powers move toward disarmament, the United States and others were moving in a direction that aimed to "perpetuate their hegemony."

"Which meant they would perpetually retain nuclear weapons. They would retain the right to threaten anyone else with nuclear weapons."

The sole aim of the Clinton administration's nuclear policy was to "cap, roll back and eliminate India's nuclear programme," he said.

Parthasarathy also said nuclear power was the answer to India's economic aspirations. The economy was expected to grow about 6 per cent this year, and the government was aiming for 8 per cent growth.

Western leaders face hard choices as talks end in stalemate with Milosevic
NATO amasses air armada of 430 warplanes to bomb Yugoslavia

OVER THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, Oct 8: NATO has amassed an air armada of some 430 warplanes to bomb Yugoslavia if it does not meet UN demands to defuse the crisis in its Kosovo province, UN Defence Secretary William Cohen said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Cohen told reporters accompanying him on a trip to the Gulf that about 60 per cent of the planes — around 260 — would be American, with the rest coming from other members of the 16-nation, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

US defence officials said NATO could issue an "activation order" — authorising the alliance commander for Europe, Gen. Wesley Clark, to start military action at the time of his choosing — as early as this weekend.

They said they expected the order, which would not entail automatic use of force, to come after German Chancellor-elect Gerhard Schroeder visits Washington on Friday for talks with US President Bill Clinton.

This would be the final step in NATO's military preparations aimed at forcing Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to end his crackdown on independence-seeking ethnic Albanians who form 90 per cent of Kosovo's population.

"Fifty thousand people are facing freezing and starvation this winter because the same person who caused the problems in Bosnia, Milosevic, refuses to abide by UN resolutions," Clinton told democratic supporters at a fund-raising dinner on Wednesday.

"So I'm trying to get the support not only of both parties in our Congress, but also of our allies in NATO, to take aggressive action to protect these people's lives," he added.

The West wants Milosevic to declare a ceasefire, withdraw forces from Kosovo, allow hu-

manitarian aid and the return of refugees forced from their homes by the violence, and start talks with ethnic Albanian leaders on autonomy for Kosovo.

Although Milosevic has shown little sign of giving ground in talks this week with US envoy Richard Holbrooke, Cohen and other officials made clear they still hoped for a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

"Our hope is that Milosevic will see the wisdom of simply abiding by the Security Council resolutions rather than forcing a military action," Cohen said. "We're hoping that won't be necessary, but the choice is going to be his."

Cohen said that if NATO started military action in Kosovo, he would interrupt his week-long Gulf visit, turn the plane around and head back to Washington.

Another report from Brussels adds: Western leaders face hard choices yesterday over Kosovo after the latest crisis talks with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic ended in stalemate despite the threat of punitive NATO air strikes.

Veteran US Balkans envoy Richard Holbrooke flew to Brussels late on Wednesday from Belgrade but gave no indication of what message he would pass on to United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who arrived in the Belgian capital early yesterday after a Middle East peace mission.

Holbrooke will brief Albright, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana and NATO ambassadors.

US officials said Albright would leave Brussels late Thursday afternoon for London where she would brief a meeting of the big power contact group comprising Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United States. It was not certain who would attend this briefing, the officials said.

AFP says from Washington: President Bill Clinton urged NATO Thursday to be prepared for military action in Kosovo as reluctant US lawmakers demanded that they authorize any American involvement.

Clinton said it was "absolutely imperative" that there be a ceasefire in the majority Albanian province, a withdrawal of troops, access for relief organisations and peace negotiations as called for in UN resolutions.

"But it will not be necessary if Milosevic does meet them," he said, referring to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic whose troops have been crushing a separatist revolt in the province.

The call for NATO action — the second in as many days — reinforced efforts by US envoy Richard Holbrooke in Belgrade to persuade Milosevic to agree to the peace measures.

F-16 purchase deal Pakistan will go to US court to get money back

ISLAMABAD, Oct 8: Pakistan has finally decided to go to the US court for the refund of 658 million dollars which it paid to the United States for purchase of 28 F-16 fighter planes, reports Xinhua.

Pakistan government has engaged a US law firm, Patton Boggs, for initiating legal proceedings against the US government on charges of breach of contract and for recovery of the paid money, reports the Dawn.

Pakistan's Law Minister Khalid Anwar is reported to have had meetings with six US law firms in July before Patton Boggs was finally selected.

Reports said that Pakistan signed a contract for the purchase of 28 F-16 fighters on September 27, 1989 at the cost of 1.2 billion dollars.

The US government, however, banned arms supply to Pakistan after the Congress passed the Pressler Amendment in October 1990.

Pakistan continued quarterly payment in the hope that sanctions against it would be lifted and stopped the payments only after US refused to deliver the planes.

Vajpayee holds talks with Naga leaders in Paris

NEW DELHI, Oct 8: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had a meeting with top leaders of National Socialist Council of Nagaland in Paris during his recent visit to France, the Home ministry said on Wednesday, reports PTI.

An official release said Vajpayee and the NSCN leadership had a meeting in which various aspects of peace negotiations were discussed, but did not mention the venue and date of the meeting.

Ministry sources, however, said the 20-minute meeting took place in Paris when the prime minister was there for two days on September 29 and 30 en route to Delhi from New York where he spent a week.

The brief release said it was agreed to carry forward the peace process by holding discussions on substantive issues to explore ways and means to arrive at a mutually acceptable political solution.

The sources said the meeting, which was attended by NSCN president Isak Chishi Swu and general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah, decided to continue discussions at the level of the ceasefire monitoring committee headed by former governor Swaraj Kaushal, which has been nominated as the principal negotiator for the Naga peace process.

BJP worried at reports on Bin Laden

NEW DELHI, Oct 8: The BJP on Wednesday expressed concern over reports that Saudi exile Osama Bin Laden had acquired nuclear weapons from certain erstwhile Soviet Republics and asked the centre to maintain a keen watch over developments in Jammu and Kashmir, reports PTI.

Referring to reports that Bin Laden had acquired nuclear weapons from its sources in certain central Asian countries and waiting to push in battle-hardened mercenaries into the state, party leader KL Sharma said it was a matter of concern if the reports were true.

He said the government should take no chance in matters having a direct bearing on the Kashmir situation.

Calling for fool-proof security arrangements in the state, Sharma said militants who were under tremendous pressure could undertake some desperate action and all such attempts should be foiled and frustrated.

Reacting to a recent statement by the US administration officials that Kashmir was not an issue to be sorted out by India and Pakistan alone, Sharma said New Delhi had time and again maintained it to be a bilateral issue and wanted no third party intervention.

140 buried alive by landslide in PNG

PORT MORESBY, Oct 8: As many as 140 people were killed after being buried alive by a massive landslide in a remote part of the Papua New Guinea highlands, reports said today, says AFP.

At least 30 members of a church congregation are confirmed dead, ABC Radio in Sydney reported, although the National newspaper, based in Port Moresby, said the toll could rise to 140.

The only known survivor was a nine-year-old girl. Eight bodies had been recovered and were buried in a mass grave.

An official from the isolated mountainous Maramuni are in Enga province northwest of Port Moresby, said 32 people were confirmed dead in the landslide which happened last Friday.

"We've got a report that 32 people have been buried alive in a big landslide. We have had a big rainy season in our province and we couldn't drive out there any earlier," and official from the area told the ABC.

Maramuni councillor Reuben Kiri told the National the victims were sleeping in the bush after attending a prayer session, called 'holy spirit movement,' when the disaster struck.

He said the nine-year-old girl escaped and alerted authorities.

US president to be personally involved in ensuing ME talks

WASHINGTON, Oct 8: President Bill Clinton said on Wednesday he would be personally involved in next week's Mideast peace talks between Israel and Syria in late 1995 and early 1996, the White House said.

The president said he had asked Arafat and Netanyahu to clear their schedules for "a couple of days" to work on wrapping up the deal and paving the way for "final status" talks on Palestinian self-rule.

Clinton was expected to meet with the two leaders at Wye Plantation on the first day of the summit and return there as needed, a White House official said.

"It is my expectation that the president is willing to do what it takes to narrow the gaps, including travel to the summit site if deemed appropriate," said White House spokesman David Leavy.

Another White House official said late on Wednesday that Clinton had decided to cancel a trip to New Haven, Conn., on Oct. 17 to attend his 25th Yale Law School reunion so as to be free to lend a hand in the talks if need be.

However, Clinton's plans to travel to Chicago and St. Louis on Oct. 16 to raise money for fellow democrats remain intact.

The president said he was encouraged by prospects for the meeting.

"I'm encouraged by the attitude and sense of openness I felt from Prime Minister Netanyahu and Arafat the last time they were here," he said.

'New partnership' pact signed Japan apologises to ROK for its 35-yrs of colonial rule

TOKYO, Oct 8: Pledging to move beyond the past, Japan offered its fullest apology yet for its 35-year colonisation of South Korea in a pact Thursday heralding a new partnership between the two countries, reports AP.

The agreement, signed by Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, outlined fresh areas of cooperation, from the Asian financial crisis to stability in North Korea.

"It is my conviction that this joint declaration will be a new start," Obuchi told reporters after a morning meeting and signing ceremony with Kim.

Before looking to the future, Japan and South Korea addressed some of the unpleasant past: Japan's harsh 1910-1945 rule over the Korean Peninsula — a period still deeply resented in South Korea.

The apology offered Thursday differed little in wording from past Japanese statements of remorse, which have been considered in South Korea as lacking in sincerity.

The difference this time, however, was that phrasing of the apology was negotiated between the two sides, written in a document and signed, putting down Japan's recognition of past misdeeds in black and white.

"I feel acute remorse and offer an apology from my heart," Obuchi said. He added later, "I have made our country's position clear."

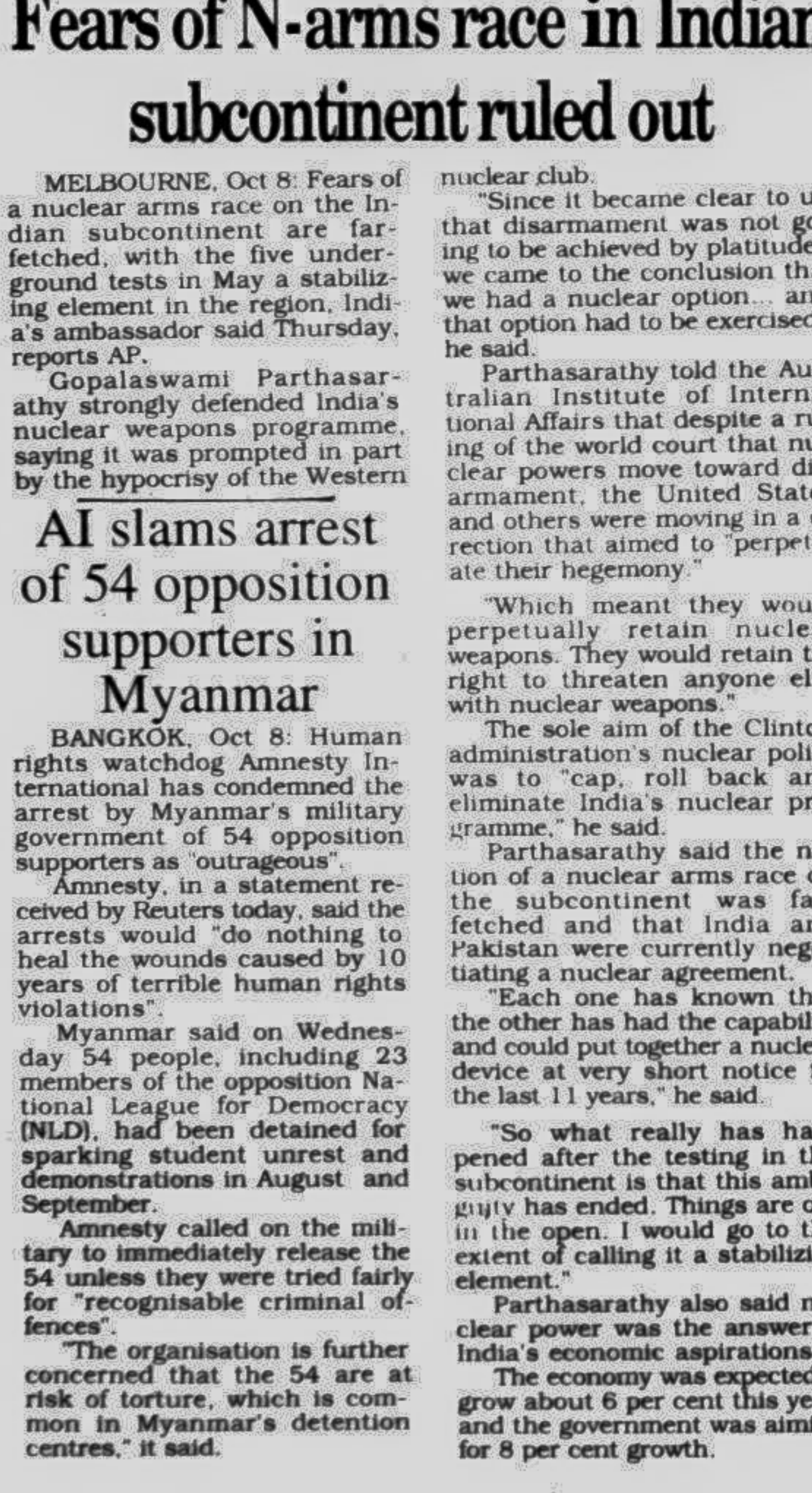
Kim said he was satisfied with the sincerity of the Japanese statement, adding that the "form and feeling" of the apology was different from in the past.

"We must settle the accounts of the 21st century," Kim said.

The Obuchi statement followed a speech on Wednesday night in which Emperor Akihito reiterated a previous apology, acknowledging that "Japan brought great suffering on the people of the Korean Peninsula."

The signing came a day after Kim arrived in Tokyo for a four-day visit, his first since becoming president. He met the emperor on Wednesday and spoke at a gala banquet at the Imperial Palace. Later Thursday, he was to address Parliament.

Despite the Japanese apology, the two sides clearly stressed the economic and cooperative aspects of the summit. The two sides need to work together on Asia's economic problems, and they will also co-host the 2002 World Cup soccer tournament.



South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, right, smiles as he shakes hands with Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi before their talks at Akasaka state guesthouse in Tokyo on Thursday. — AP/UNB photo

Delhi should hold unconditional talk with Kashmir militants: Mufti

SRINAGAR, Oct 8: Congress leader and former home minister Mufti Mohammad Syed on Wednesday suggested the centre should hold talks with militants in Kashmir without pre-conditions, reports PTI.

On the centre's suggestion that the talks would be held only within the framework of the Indian Constitution, he told reporters why ask the other side to surrender before inviting them for talks. What is the scope for talks when you ask them to surrender first?

Stating that the present situation in Kashmir was a political problem and it should be tackled politically, he said no breakthrough could be achieved without dialogue.

Off the Record

Whale alarm

GOLD COAST, Australia: A new acoustic alarm system will be installed along the Gold Coast to drive humpback whales away from shark nets, in which they can get tangled and drown, the programme's manager said on Thursday, reports AP.

The battery-operated alarm, to be placed on shark nets that protect swimming and surfing beaches, uses sound at a frequency that is supposed to drive whales away from the nets.

"The problem we have is that there are more humpback whales now than there were ever, and the animals themselves are coming close and nearer to shark nets," said Baden Lane, Queensland state's shark control programme manager.

"What we want to do is try and keep the whales away from the nets," he said.

The alarm, which cannot be heard by other marine animals, was developed and manufactured by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and BASA Technical Services in Brisbane.

Lane said the alarms were an improvement on similar overseas technology. He said the Australian design was more robust, smaller and less expensive.

Primary Industries Minister Henry Palaszczuk said the performance of the alarms would be assessed in the future.

"This type of alarm has been used very successfully in commercial fisheries overseas, he added.



A model wearing a transparent Oxford shirt tucked into a white wrap skirt matches the two-toned catwalk at Krizia's Spring-Summer collection unveiled in Milan on Wednesday. — AP/UNB photo