

BRIEFLY



A group of Mapuche Indians participate in a march marking Columbus Day, carrying a map of South America in which the territory belonging to their nation before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors is highlighted, in Santiago, Chile, Monday. — AP/UNB photo

Torrential rains claim 22 in Kerala: Torrential rains claimed at least 22 lives in Kerala in the last five days as the state witnessed one of the worst flood havoc in recent times, PTI says from Thiruvananthapuram, India.

The unseasonal rains continued to cause heavy damage to property and crops worth crores of rupees even as weathermen predicted no let up during the next two days.

Two non-tribals kidnapped in Tripura: Two non-tribals were kidnapped by militants from village Bandhua in south Tripura district during Monday's 24-hour Tripura *Bandh*, called by ruling CPI-M and opposition Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party, police said on Tuesday. PTI reports from Agartala.

The two Sanjit Sen and his younger brother Sushil Sen, were abducted by militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) at gun-point on Monday night, police said. The ultras also torched two houses of the village.

DPRK national held in Japan: Japanese police yesterday arrested a North Korean national for exporting restricted diving equipment parts, which can be converted to military use, to his home country, a spokesman said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Nobuo Lee, a 44-year-old executive at a Tokyo-based trading company, was arrested on suspicion of illegally exporting restricted products, a Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department spokesman said. Police are also questioning another executive, 58-year-old Kenichi Lee, in connection with the charge, while they search the firm's office in Tokyo's downtown Shibuya district, he said.

Sierra Leone sentences 34 to death: Brushing aside international calls for clemency, a military court on Monday condemned 34 officers to death by firing squad for taking part in a bloody coup that toppled Sierra Leone's president last year, AP says from Freetown, Sierra Leone.

The 34 were found guilty of treason, murder and other crimes committed by the junta, which held sway for 10 months until a Nigerian-led West African intervention force restored President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah to power in March.

Gas emission sickens 50 in India: At least 50 persons were taken ill, three of them seriously, after inhaling chlorine gas emitted by a paper mill at Amal, about 30 km from Shahdol, PTI reports from Shahdol.

Police said some of the sick persons were taken to government hospital at Dharampuri for treatment while others were admitted to the Orient Paper Mills Hospital at Amal. Meanwhile, workers gheraoed the mill in protest against the emission of the poisonous gas.

Blast kills 5 in Russia: An explosion in a Saint Petersburg shipyard on Monday killed at least five people, ITAR-Tass news agency reported, AFP says from Moscow.

Rescuers continued their search for possible other victims at the Admiral Teistvo Shipyard late Monday. Investigators said they suspected a gas used in welding had caused the blast.

106 Afghan refugees arrive in Prague: A group of 106 Afghan refugees, including 31 children, arrived on Monday in Prague aboard an aircraft of Moldavian Airlines, Czech television reported, AFP says from Prague.

The refugees who had no identity papers, were unaware in what country they had landed and initially refused to leave the Tupolev TU-134 aircraft in which they had flown here from Chisinau, the capital of Moldova. After six hours of negotiations with Czech police the refugees disembarked and asked for political asylum in the Czech Republic.

Acid rain appears in Mekong Delta: The frequency and seriousness of acid rain have increased rapidly in recent years in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam's rice bowl, a meteorology expert said on Tuesday, AP reports from Hanoi.

Nguyen Kim Lan, of the Southern Hydrography and Meteorology centre based in Ho Chi Minh City, cited a 1993-97 survey by the centre, the first it has undertaken. The survey showed that 78 per cent of the rains in Can Tho province during last year's May-October rainy season had a PH rate of 5.6 to 4.5. The figure was 66 per cent in neighbouring Ca Mau province, Lan said.

Croatian defence minister resigns: Croatian Defence Minister Andrija Hebrang resigned on Monday, Xinhua reports from Zagreb.

Hebrang told President Franjo Tudjman in his resignation letter that his decision was irreversible. He said loss of Tudjman's trust and different opinions with the president on both working methods and personal relationships were the reasons for his resignation.

Kashmiris dismiss resumption of Indo-Pak talks

SRINAGAR, India, Oct 13: Separatist leaders in the divided Indian state of Kashmir have dismissed the resumption on Thursday of peace talks between India and Pakistan as a futile exercise doomed to failure, reports AFP.

The Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries will restart a bilateral dialogue in Islamabad on October 15 after a one-year break.

The territorial dispute over Kashmir, which has dogged bilateral relations for 50 years, will dominate the talks. But Kashmiri separatists say their exclusion will render the negotiations meaningless.

"India, Pakistan and Kashmiri representatives should all participate in the talks to find an amicable solution under the guarantee of the United Nations or a friendly third country," said Ali Shah Geelani, chairman of the All Party Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference.

The conference is an umbrella group comprising around 30 separatist organisations in Kashmir.

"The United Nations should intervene, to force both countries to come forward and solve the Kashmir issue, and save the precious lives of Kashmiris who, through no fault of their own, are being killed everyday."

Sharif appoints new ISI chief

ISLAMABAD, Oct 13: In another major reshuffle in the hierarchy of Pakistan's powerful military, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif appointed a new chief of the state's elite intelligence agency, an army spokesman said Tuesday, reports AP.

Gen Ziauddin, who uses only one name, takes over as new head of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), the states premier spy agency.

The move followed last week's surprise resignation of Army Chief Gen Jehangir Karamat, who was critical of Sharif's political and economic policies.

Two other senior generals also resigned after Karamat. They resigned after being passed over for promotion when Sharif appointed Gen Pervez Mushraf as new army chief.

Sharif's critics say he is orchestrating the reshuffle of the army to gain control of the military, which has ruled Pakistan for 25 of its 51-year history.

Annan asks Syria, Turkey to show restraint

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 13: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged Syria and Turkey on Monday to show restraint in their conflict over the armed rebellion of separatist Turkish Kurds, his spokesman said, reports AP.

"He calls on Turkey and Syria to show restraint and settle their differences through negotiations," spokesman Fred Eckhardt said.

His comments follow Turkish threats to take military action against Syria if it does not withdraw its support for the separatist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK).

Annan met Monday with ambassadors from Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco and an Arab League representative, who expressed concern at the tension between Syria and Turkey in a meeting with Annan.

China-Taiwan talks start today

TAIPEI, Oct 13: On the eve of new talks between China and Taiwan, a top Taiwanese official said Tuesday they could be a success if China acknowledges its separation from the island, reports AP.

The talks, the first official meeting between China and its neighbour in three years, begin on Wednesday in Shanghai, involving senior statesmen Koo Chen-fu of Taiwan and Wang Daohan of China.

Koo and his wife also plan to meet with Chinese President Jiang Zemin on Sunday in Beijing.

Both sides appear to believe that a key goal is for China and the island to consider a renegade province to agree to meet with each another on a regular basis for formal talks.

Clinton to exert all efforts to finalise ME peace deal

JERUSALEM, Oct 13: President Bill Clinton told Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat on Monday he would do everything he could to help Israelis and Palestinians reach a peace deal in the United States this week, an Arafat aide said, reports Reuters.

Clinton spoke by telephone to Arafat and to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to gauge prospects for progress in closed-door talks to begin on Thursday at Wye Plantation outside Washington.

"President Clinton told President Arafat he was going to exert all his efforts and that he will dedicate himself for the sake of the peace process," Abu Rdainah said in a statement published by the Wafa Palestine News agency.

He said Clinton had told Arafat the talks must succeed in order to "preserve hope" among the Palestinian people.

PLO officials said the summit was scheduled to open with a three-day meeting between Clinton, Netanyahu and Arafat. Netanyahu's communications adviser David Bar-Illan

confirmed that Clinton and Netanyahu had spoken by phone but would not disclose details of the conversation.

White House spokesman Jon Lokhart said Clinton spoke to the leaders for half hour each and had reiterated that the summit's objective is to conclude the interim agreement and move to the final status talks.

AP adds: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will reject an attempt by hard-liners in his Cabinet to restrict his freedom to negotiate at a US summit this week, an Israeli official said Monday.

He will be meeting President Bill Clinton and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat Thursday at Wye Plantation, Maryland, to discuss an American plan calling for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from 13 per cent of the West Bank.

Right-wing ministers Yitzhak Levy and Shaul Yahalom oppose the 13 per cent withdrawal and intend to urge the cabinet Tuesday to forbid Netanyahu to agree to the withdrawal unless the Palestinians

clamp down on Islamic militants and fulfill other conditions.

However an Israeli official said Netanyahu will certainly reject the right-wing move. "No negotiator would agree to his freedom being circumscribed in such a way before the talks," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Netanyahu will, however, stress the need for the Palestinians to fulfill their security commitments, the official said. Earlier a senior Palestinian negotiator said the success of the summit depends on a clear-cut "yes" from Netanyahu to the American initiative.

"It is time to deliver," Saeb Erekat told reporters Sunday night after a meeting of the Palestinian Cabinet.

Monday was a Jewish holiday and there was no immediate Israeli comment on summit prospects. However, the Israeli newspaper Yediot Ahronot said over the weekend that Netanyahu's hard-line Cabinet, due meet Tuesday, was balking at agreeing to the American plan.



Sonia Gandhi, president of the Congress Party and the widow of former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, accepts a flower from a small girl at a Congress workers' conference held in Rohtak, northern India, Monday. — AP/UNB photo

Bangladesh calls for time-bound nuclear disarmament programme

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 13 - Bangladesh has called on the international community to negotiate a time-bound nuclear disarmament programme, reports IANS.

Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Bangladesh's Permanent Representative, told the U.N.'s First Committee that despite the fact that the goal of general and complete disarmament was unequivocal, the international community today remained unable to agree on a time-bound elimination of nuclear weapons.

"Substantive negotiations on total and comprehensive nuclear disarmament should commence immediately in the Conference on Disarmament," he said.

Secretary General Kofi Annan reiterated his call for global nuclear disarmament while expressing concern over the tests by India and Pakistan at the opening of the First Committee which deals with disarmament and security.

Stressing that disarmament lay at "the heart" of the U.N.'s efforts to maintain international peace, Annan called on the Committee to "take the lead" in working to rid the world of the threat posed by various types of weapons.

Annan said as long as states have such weapons at their disposal, there will always be risk of nations resorting to their use. There will also be the ever-present danger that the weapons will escape from the control of states and fall into the hands of terrorists, he added.

Because of this, efforts should be intensified to expand the membership of the Chemi-

cal and Biological Weapons Conventions and to make compliance with them more verifiable, he said. "That is why we must be concerned about the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan this year," he said.

"Of course, I warmly welcome the declarations of intent to adhere to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) made here in the General Assembly by the prime ministers of the two states," Annan added.

The Secretary General said all must work to ensure that the treaty enters into force as soon as possible. "But we must also work to finish the job of promoting universal adherence to all the key treaties on weapons of mass destruction, including the treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Nuclear

Non-Proliferation Treaty - NPT)," he said.

The Committee also heard calls for disarmament from the representatives of Fiji, Myanmar, Malaysia and Colombia.

Without naming India and Pakistan, Hasmy Agam, the Malaysian representative, said the process of nuclear disarmament has suffered a further setback following the series of nuclear tests carried out in South Asia. "The tests should serve as a wake-up call to the international community that the proliferation of all weapons should be immediately stopped," he said.

U.N. Undersecretary General for Disarmament Affairs Jayantha Dhanapala meanwhile deplored what he described as the emerging "gun culture".

Congolese rebels claim to have captured Kindu air base

KALIMA, Congo, Oct 13: Congolese rebels and their Rwandan allies said on Monday they had captured the strategic, government-held air base of Kindu in eastern Congo, reports AP.

After eight days of fighting, a rebel commander said 9,000 rebel fighters entered the town and its air base, 80 km south-east of Kalima, late Monday.

"The whole town and the airport are in our hands," said Arthur Mulunda, a rebel battalion commander.

The claim could not immediately be confirmed. If true, Kindu would be the rebels' biggest prize in their two-month campaign to topple President Laurent Kabila.

Kabila had turned Kindu into a launching pad for a counter-offensive against rebel eastern strongholds.

Mulunda said his men had captured many government prisoners. Bob N'goy, another rebel commander, said 1,377 government troops had surrendered on Monday and that 17 rebel fighters had been killed in earlier fighting.

In Kalima, a rear base for the rebel attack, soldiers sang and fired weapons in celebration.

Mulunda said his men had captured many government prisoners but did not give a figure. In Kalima, a rear base for the rebel attack, soldiers sang and fired weapons in celebration.

Taliban free 10 Iranians ahead of UN envoy's visit

ISLAMABAD, Oct 13: The Taliban today freed 10 Iranian drivers from more than two months in captivity as a UN special envoy pressed on with a mission to reduce tensions between the militia and Iran, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported, says AFP.

The Iranians, who were taken prisoner in Mazar-e-Sharif when the Islamic militia captured the former opposition stronghold on August 8, were handed over to a Palestinian delegation which mediated their release, the report said.

The Palestinians will deliver them to Iranian diplomats and a plane from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will fly them from the southern Taliban base of Kandahar to Iran, the Pakistan-based Information Service said.

The Taliban released 10 Iranians from Kandahar in September after mediation by Pakistan, which has close diplomatic links with the hardline Islamic movement.

The release comes a day before a visit by UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi to Kandahar to meet with Taliban officials. Brahimi has been authorised by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to visit Kandahar

"in view of the dangerous level of tensions," between the Taliban and Iran, his spokesman Fred Eckhardt said at the UN on Monday.

Brahimi has already met twice, in Islamabad, with representatives of the militant fundamentalist group that controls much of Afghanistan.

But crisis-level tensions have not been resolved. The UN envoy had earlier refused to visit Taliban headquarters in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar for security reasons after all UN personnel were withdrawn on August 22, following the murder of an Italian UN officer in Kabul.

But Eckhardt said the Taliban had given assurances to Brahimi both on security matters and on the continuing investigation into the Italian officer's murder.

Taliban official Wakil Ahmad Mehamud said Brahimi on Monday in Islamabad for the third time in 24 hours to persuade the UN envoy to visit Kandahar, where he is now scheduled to meet with the Taliban's supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar.

The visit is aimed at ending Iran-Afghan tension triggered by the killing of eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist.

DPRK stands by its demand Withdrawal of US troops from ROK must be top agenda

SEOUL, Oct 13: North Korea says withdrawing US troops from South Korea and signing a peace treaty with the United States should form the main agenda of upcoming Korean peace talks, reports AP.

Both Korea, along with the United States and China, are to resume talks in Geneva next Tuesday to work out a durable peace on the divided Korean Peninsula.

Two previous rounds of the four-party talks, also held in Geneva in November and April, broke down over the same North Korean demands.

"The DPRK (North Korea) will not bargain away matters of principle related to the issue of Korea's reunification which is vital to the Korean nation," a spokesman for the North's Foreign Ministry said.

In a report carried by the Korean Central News Agency late Monday night, the unidentified spokesman said the two issues are "the key to eliminating the root cause of the acute political and military confrontation on

the Korean Peninsula." US and South Korean officials had indicated that the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea can be an agenda item but made clear that they would not agree to discuss the signing of a peace treaty between Washington and Pyongyang.

The topic of US troops may be discussed under the general agenda of tension-reduced measures, not as the head of the discussions," Foreign Minister Hong Soon-young told foreign journalists on Tuesday.

The conclusion of a peace treaty with the United States excluding rival South Korea is a longstanding North Korean demand. Washington maintains that any Korean peace treaty should be signed between the two Koreas.

A resumption of the four-party Korean peace talks is part of a package deal struck between the United States and North Korea in a series of negotiations in New York last month.

Malaysia won't accept foreign interference in Anwar's trial

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 13: An angry Malaysia has described as "unacceptable" what it describes as attempts by foreign nations to interfere in the trial of former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, newspapers reported on Tuesday, says AP.

"This is one example of interference we cannot accept," said Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi in comments to local reporters on Monday evening.

He was referring to a report that a man claiming to be a US senator had called Justice Augustine Paul last week, the High Court judge conducting Anwar's trial, New Straits Times newspaper said.

The caller told the judge that justice must be seen to be done, the daily said. After the phone call the judge made a police report.

Such phone calls were "tantamount to interference as

though we do not understand the law and are unable to enforce the law well," Abdullah said.

There were no other details available about the reported phone call.

Malaysia has repeated assurances that Anwar, who challenged Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's 17-year reign, will be given a fair trial.

Anwar, a former heir-apparent to Mahathir, was fired on September 2, accused of being morally unfit to lead. The two had differed over economic policy and Anwar has said Mahathir feared the deputy was a threat to his office.

The court has set November 2 as the date for Anwar's trial on four counts of corruption. He will be tried separately for one more count of corruption and five counts of illegal homosexual acts.

Japan will apologise to China for wartime brutalities

TOKYO, Oct 13: Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura said today that Japan was likely to apologise to China for its wartime actions when Chinese President Jiang Zemin visit Japan later this year, reports Reuters.

"If possible, we would like to make this (apology) in writing," Komura told a regular news conference.

Komura's comments confirmed those of a foreign ministry official who said last week that China would receive the same kind of apology as had South Korea.

During South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's state visit to Japan last week, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi issued Toky-

o's most thorough apology to any individual nation for its brutal wartime actions in a joint declaration with Kim.

Jiang is expected to visit Japan sometime after a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Kuala Lumpur on November 17 and 18.

Komura said Tokyo and Beijing were currently trying to finalise the timing of the visit, which was originally scheduled for September but was postponed due to flooding in China.

In last week's statement, Obuchi expressed "deep remorse and extended a heartfelt apology to the people of South Korea."

Pakistan in no hurry to commit itself to Delhi talks

ISLAMABAD, Oct 13: Pakistan will wait for the outcome of the foreign secretary-level talks with India here this week before deciding on joining the second phase of the dialogue in New Delhi, the Foreign Office has indicated, reports IANS.

"Let's see the outcome of the Islamabad round first," Foreign Office spokesman Tariq Altaf said when asked about the schedule of the second part of the staggered talks which has been announced by New Delhi.

When pressed if Pakistani officials would travel to New Delhi next month according to the schedule announced by New Delhi, Altaf told IANS: "I say, let's see the outcome of this round. We are preparing for this (round of talks). Let's hope the forthcoming talks would pave the way for concrete progress on the longstanding Kashmir dispute."

There would be "substantial talks" on Kashmir in the Islamabad round, he said, but added that Pakistan does not

expect much progress. Pointing out that there had been no progress in earlier rounds, Altaf said this is why "we repeatedly called for third party mediation."

"We expect no quick fixes this time either. This being so, our aim nevertheless is to sincerely attempt to find a just settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute," he added.

Despite Altaf's somewhat pessimistic pronouncements, some observers see a positive atmosphere for the talks. This is seen to have been created with the agreement to set up a hotline between the two prime ministers, cessation of firing across the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir, relaxation of visa rules, direct bus and train links and more cultural exchanges.

But, a section of former top foreign policy decision makers are sceptical and say that the "ambiguous and imprecise" comments from India's External Affairs Ministry about the

talks would vitiate the atmosphere.

The Indian team led by Foreign Secretary K. Raghunath arrives in Islamabad on Thursday. Raghunath will begin formal talks with his Pakistani counterpart Shamshad Ahmed the next day which will continue till October 18. Raghunath will also meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz.

According to the official agenda, the foreign secretaries will discuss peace and security, including confidence building measures, and Jammu and Kashmir. These are the first two of eight issues identified by the foreign secretaries at their talks in Islamabad in June 1997.

The remaining six issues are to be taken up in New Delhi. However, Islamabad is still to announce its approval of the schedule unveiled by New Delhi for the second phase.

"The success or any progress during these talks mainly de-

pends on the amount of purposefulness the Indian side addresses to the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir," said former foreign minister Agha Shahi.

No miracle is expected from the coming talks, he said. Shahi maintained that in order to continue the peace process in the region, New Delhi would have to explicitly demonstrate its seriousness about resolving outstanding issues with Islamabad.

Former foreign secretary Niaz A. Naik agreed with him. Both told IANS that the Indians, even after agreeing to take up Kashmir first on Pakistan's demand, continue to emphasise that the sequencing of the dialogue does not mean giving priority to this issue.

Pakistan, they claimed, had repeatedly made its position known to the world that unless Kashmir is resolved amicably, its relations with India would not be normalised.



Rebels of the National Liberation Army (ELN) wave to a helicopter carrying government representatives who met earlier with rebel leaders in San Francisco, a mountainous region in northern Colombia Monday. Two rebel leaders, who are jailed on rebellion charges, received weekend passes from the government to attend a meeting with representatives and announced the call for a national forum to meet in February to discuss peace prospects. — AP/UNB photo



Students at the Markaz-Uloom-e-Islamia religious school in Peshawar, Pakistan raise their hands when asked who is ready to fight a jihad, or holy war, against Israel and its allies, Aug 27, 1998. About 150 students, ranging in age between 10-40, study a core curriculum of Arabic, Islam, and the memorisation of the Quran. — AP/UNB photo