

International



French President Jacques Chirac, left, shakes hands with NATO chief Javier Solana after they meet for talks at the Elysee Palace, Monday. Solana said the alliance had begun air surveillance of Kosovo to prevent fresh violence, following the deaths of three Serbian policemen this weekend. — AP/UNB photo

Sharon, Arafat ignore each other in US talks

JERUSALEM, Oct 20: Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon has refused, despite US encouragement to back down and shake the hand of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat during US-brokered peace talks, reports AP.

Sharon and Arafat ignored each other when the headline Israeli politician entered the room where Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Bill Clinton were meeting, Israel Radio said Tuesday.

"General Sharon has arrived," Netanyahu said, in announcing Sharon's entrance, but Arafat did not even look in the direction of the minister, who has labeled the Palestinian leader a "terrorist," the radio said.

The US organisers tried to break the ice between the two by seating them across from each other in the meeting. But Sharon and Arafat did not shake hands or acknowledge each other's presence, the radio said.

20 military officers, soldiers executed in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Oct 20: A firing squad in Sierra Leone on Monday publicly executed 24 military officers and soldiers, including a woman sergeant, all of whom were convicted of treason, a senior police officer said, reports AFP.

The execution took place at Goderich Beach near a military base several kilometers southwest of the capital Freetown, the officer, who witnessed the shooting, told AFP.

They were among 34 people sentenced to death by a military court on October 12 after being found guilty of treason for having collaborated with the military junta that was ousted in February this year.

The other 10 were granted amnesty by a presidential decree and now face life in prison, the Justice Ministry said.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Monday urged a stay of execution against the military officers and soldiers, but his appeal was published after the executions took place.

Britain reacted to the executions with "regret" after the fact. Those executed included former chiefs of staff, General Hassan Konteh and generals Amuel Koroma, brother of former junta leader Johnny Paul Koroma, who is still in hiding along with some 40 other rebels.

Female sergeant Kula Sam-bus was also executed.

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Clinton cancels trip to keep ME talks on track

QUEENSTOWN (Maryland), Oct 20: President Bill Clinton cancelled a political fund-raising trip to California Tuesday so he could return to the Chesapeake Bay retreat where he has pushed Israeli and Palestinian leaders into a sixth day of bargaining over a West Bank peace deal, reports AP.

The talks, which began last Thursday, were complicated by a terrorist attack Monday in which a Palestinian hurled two grenades into a crowded bus stop in Beersheba, south of Jerusalem. Sixty-four Israelis were wounded.

Even so, the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators pressed ahead in the wooded seclusion of the Wye River conference centre on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Aides kept to their practice of not commenting on the substance of the talks, but described them as "workmanlike."

Clinton, who has invested some 44 hours of his time in the marathon negotiations so far, stayed with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat until nearly midnight, then flew back to the White House. He was returning to Wye Tuesday and left open the possibility of continuing the nego-

tiations on Wednesday. "Given the importance of the issues at hand, the president Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat believe it is appropriate to stay and continue to work on these important issues," White House press secretary Joe Lockhart said.

The last-minute decision to scrap the two-day California trip, in which Clinton was to raise money for the campaigns of Sen. Barbara Boxer and other Democratic congressional candidates, came as the president settled into a long night of talks Monday with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. After a two and a half hours meeting, Clinton, Netanyahu and Arafat and top aides sat down to a dinner of lamb and fish. Lockhart described the atmosphere at the late-night meal as cordial.

"It's not a waste of time," State Department spokesman James P Rubin said Monday evening of Clinton's decision to scrap his California fund-raising trip to keep the Wye talks going. Secretary of state Madeleine Albright, who has not left the 1,100-acre (440-hectare) Wye River compound since the talks began, was staying overnight again, Rubin said.

The talks originally were to have ended by Sunday.

The key sticking point has been Israel's demand for stronger Palestinian assurances to crack down on terrorist attacks on Israelis as part of a deal in which Israel would withdraw from a further 13 per cent of the West Bank that Israel has held since the 1967 Middle East War.

Among other issues are a proposed Palestinian airport, ways to provide easy and safe passage for Palestinians between Gaza and the West Bank and economic development in the area.

The Wye talks are a crucial juncture in the long-stalled Mideast peace talks because of the political capital Clinton has invested in their success and because the parties face a May 4, 1999 deadline: if there is no West Bank deal by then, Arafat says he will unilaterally declare a Palestinian state — a move of potentially explosive consequences for the region.

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Eliana Zukova, left, and Paola Contreras work at the Baron Rojo, or Red Baron coffee shop in Santiago, Chile, Sept. 18, 1998. While statuesque waitresses in tight uniforms and high heels has long been accepted in Santiago, even producing the nickname, "Coffee with legs," public concern is growing as the uniforms are shrinking. — AP/UNB photo

WHO launches campaign to reduce cancer cases

LONDON, Oct 20: The World Health Organisation (WHO) Monday launched a global campaign that aims to reduce the global cancer cases by five million a year by 2020, reports Xinhua.

The WHO, announcing the campaign at an international conference in London, said it also plan to cut the death toll from 10 million to six million a year.

The campaign aims to "considerably reduce" cancer at a low cost, said Professor Karol Sikora, the chief of the WHO cancer programme.

It is predicted that, by the year 2020, there will be 20 million new cancer patients each year, with 70 per cent of them living in the developing countries and having less than five per cent of the treatment resources.

The soaring cases of cancer

around the world is due to rapidly aging populations in most countries, the WHO said.

The strategies of the WHO's cancer programme are aimed to call on governments to negotiate with private firms to set up national cancer programmes with clear priorities for care.

The priorities could include tobacco control, infection control and promotion of healthy eating, they could also ensure the availability of basic cancer surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy as well as specialist nurse education.

"We could potentially prevent a quarter of all cancer simply by applying existing knowledge," said Professor Sikora.

He added that a third of current cancer cases are curable with modern technology and this could rise to a half over the next 25 years if action is taken now.

Don't trust US news network: Mahathir

TOKYO, Oct 20: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad today insisted his country was calm despite the jailing of his ex-deputy and told people to distrust US news networks CNN and CNBC, reports AFP.

"Although there is some political problem arising from the dismissal of the deputy prime minister and his being charged in court for a number of offences, the country is generally calm," he told a seminar in Tokyo.

"The attempt by the followers of the former deputy prime minister to resort to mob rule to achieve his release is not working," Mahathir said.

"The people still adhere to the rule of law and to democracy. They reject mob rule totally."

They alleged mistreatment by police of ousted deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim since his arrest in September has drawn widespread condemnation. Anwar denies charges of cor-

ruption and sodomy.

In what has become a weekly affair, some 10,000 of Anwar's supporters gathered in central Kuala Lumpur Saturday calling on Mahathir to resign.

But Mahathir said things were not so bad.

"I would like to invite Japanese journalists to come to Malaysia and see things for themselves," he said. "Do not trust CNN or CNBC. They have a different agenda and they tell lies in order to promote their agenda."

The US media showed "bias" whenever they reported on Mahathir, he said.

Mahathir argued there was "no political problem" between him and Anwar and said police were "still investigating" his alleged mistreatment in prison.

"I'm sorry for him," he said, adding "It is unusual for police to beat up prisoners."

Anwar would get fair trial, he insisted. "The court in Malaysia is independent."

Govt recalling retired policemen to fight LTTE

COLOMBO, Oct 20: The government is recalling 15,000 policemen from retirement to reinforce military forces which lost hundreds of troops last month fighting Tamil separatist rebels, a police spokesman said Tuesday, reports AP.

"The idea is to deploy the recalled men in the operational areas to aid the regular troops," said police spokesman Rency Perera.

Policemen in Sri Lanka retire at age 55. Under the new scheme, any retired policemen who is medically fit will be reemployed for three more

years on condition he is deployed in the battle zones in the north and the east.

Militants among the country's 3.3 million Tamils are fighting a 15-year-old war for an independent Tamil homeland, saying that they face systematic discrimination in Sinhalese-majority Sri Lanka.

These policemen who respond to the call will get a special "operational" allowance — a danger bonus — over and above their last drawn salary. On average, a normal salary is 6,000-10,000 rupees (90-166 dollar).

BRIEFLY

3 killed in train accident in India: At least three people were killed and 12 others injured when a passenger train jumped the rails near the eastern Indian city of Patna on Monday, the Press Trust of India said. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Six of those injured were hospitalised in critical state. Twelve carriages of the Delhi-bound Magadh Express derailed outside a military cantonment near Patna, railway officials said.

Jiang Zemin to visit Japan Nov: Chinese President Jiang Zemin will make an unprecedented official visit to Japan on November 25, foreign minister Masahiko Komura confirmed yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

"The purpose of President Jiang's visit is to deepen friendly relations" on the 20th anniversary of the August 12 signing of the 1978 Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty, Komura told a news conference.

Gaddafi in Tunisia: Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi arrived in Tunisia on Monday to convene from a hip operation in July and to hold political talks with Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, officials said, AFP reports from Tunis.

Gaddafi will spend "several days" in Tunisia, after Ben Ali extended an invitation during a brief visit to Tripoli on August 17, Libyan sources said.

7 die in road mishap in Turkey: A bus carrying British holiday-makers collided with a car early Tuesday near this Aegean port, killing at least seven people and injuring 35 others, the Anatolia news agency reported, AP reports from Izmir, Turkey.

The tourists were travelling to Izmir's airport from Kusadasi, and were on their way home to Britain from the resort. According to Anatolia, the bus collided with a car at 2:20 am (2220 GMT) killing all five passengers in the car and two Britons on the bus.

Interpol to discuss its strategy: Members of the International Criminal Police Commission (Interpol) will convene in Cairo Thursday to discuss the organisation's strategy for the coming century, Xinhua reports from Cairo.

The Paris-based Interpol is an international grouping of criminal police aimed at developing a system to prevent and prohibit crimes within its 188 member states.

82 kgs of heroin seized in Thailand: Police investigating a truck crash in southern Thailand seized nearly 82 kilograms (172 pounds) of heroin stashed under the floor of the wrecked vehicle, officers said yesterday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

The truck travelling from Bangkok to Songkhla province in the south of the country crashed with another vehicle, overturning and causing the heroin to leak onto the road.

Jordanian minister in Iraq: Jordanian energy minister Hani Al-Mulqi arrived in Baghdad Monday for talks with Iraqi officials on a planned 350 million dollar pipeline to carry Iraqi oil to Jordan, AFP reports from Baghdad.

The discussions will centre on "preliminary steps for a pipeline project to carry crude to Jordan as well as Iraqi oil exports to Amman in accordance with the agreement between the two countries," the official news agency INA said.

Japan's empress celebrates 64th birthday: Empress Michiko marked her 64th birthday Tuesday, vowing to continue praying for peace and expressing concern over Japan's prolonged recession, AP reports from Tokyo.

Celebrations for Michiko's birthday were held at the Imperial Palace, with visits scheduled by the prime minister, other political figures and imperial family members.

In interview with CNN Cuba has placed spies in US, admits Castro

MIAMI, Oct 20: Cuban leader Fidel Castro has admitted in a television interview to sending people to the United States to spy on anti-Castro political groups but denied there was an attempt to gather military information, reports AP.

Ten alleged Cuban spies were arrested in Florida last month in what authorities say is the largest Cuban spy ring uncovered in the United States since Castro came to power in 1959.

They were charged with trying to penetrate US military bases, infiltrate anti-Castro exile groups and manipulate US media and political organizations.

In an exclusive interview to be broadcast Tuesday on CNN's WorldView, Castro responded to a question about the arrests, acknowledging that Cuban leader has made such an admission.

Yes, we have sometimes dispatched Cuban citizens to the United States to infiltrate counter-revolutionary organizations, to inform us about activities that are of great interest to us," Castro said from the Ibero-American Summit in Portugal. CNN provided The Associated Press with an advance copy

of the interview. Castro defended what he said was an effort solely to learn about the terrorist activities against Cuba.

Fernando Rojas, spokesman for the Cuban American National Foundation, an anti-Castro lobbying group based in Miami, said the interview with Castro was further evidence the Cuban leader continues to be a threat to US national security.

"He's now admitting to the fact he's exporting violence here to the shores of the United States," Rojas said.

Three of the 10 arrested on espionage charges have pleaded guilty to being an agent of a foreign government without notifying the US Attorney General. The charge is punishable by a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison and a fine of 250,000 dollars.

In the CNN interview, Castro denied sending spies to collect information on the US military.

"We aren't interested in strategic matters, nor are we interested in information about military bases," Castro said. A press officer with the State Department had no comment Monday night.



Palestinians in the centre of Gaza City hold pictures of relatives who are prisoners in Israeli jails, Monday. The Palestinian Authority has pushed prisoner releases to the forefront of its demands in negotiations with Israel at Wye Plantation. — AP/UNB photo

UN monitoring team heads for Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Oct 20: Following ethnic Albanian attacks on Serb police, the government has moved tanks and troops into central Kosovo, raising fears for the future of the US-brokered agreement to end the violence in the province, reports AP.

NATO commander Gen. Wesley Clark visits Belgrade on Tuesday to discuss how far Yugoslav authorities still have to go to meet the alliance's October 27 deadline to pull troops out of Kosovo or face airstrikes.

Also Tuesday, a 20-member UN team is heading for Kosovo to serve as the "eyes and ears" of Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the province. The team, led by Staffan de Mistura of Sweden, is expected to stay until Friday and gather information on efforts to halt the fighting.

The visits were set amid increased signs of battle preparedness in parts of Kosovo, a predominantly ethnic Albanian province of Serbia, Yugoslavia's dominant republic.

More Yugoslav army troops were positioned southwest of Pristina, the Kosovo capital, after a surge of weekend violence that left three Serb policemen dead and led to mutual accusations between authorities and radical Albanians over who started the bloodshed.

US State Department spokesman James Rubin said Monday the skirmishing was unacceptable, regardless of which side opened fire first.

Hundreds of people have been killed since Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic launched a crackdown Feb. 28 on separatists, and hundreds of thousands more have fled their homes to escape the violence. As winter approaches, officials fear a humanitarian disaster if the refugees are not allowed to return home.

Many Kosovo Albanians who support secession from Yugoslavia were distressed about the agreement Holbrooke reached last week with President Slobodan Milosevic. The agreement held off NATO airstrikes against Serb forces for the time being, disappointing ethnic Albanians who want outright independence.

During a meeting with Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, Yeltsin reiterated that he had no intention of running for a third presidential term in 2000. "I have said so many times that I will not run in 2000," Yeltsin, was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

Western officials, concerned about the skirmishes, indicated that ethnic Albanian rebels as well as Serb forces were to blame.

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Yeltsin reaffirms he won't seek re-election

MOSCOW, Oct 20: President Boris Yeltsin, who is still recovering from a respiratory infection, returned to the Kremlin on Tuesday and reaffirmed he would not seek re-election, reports AP.

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Indian govt considering moves to help senior citizens live with dignity

NEW DELHI, Oct 20: The Indian government, worried about the rapid graying of its population and the increasing rejection of the aged, is considering moves to help senior citizens live with dignity, reports AP.

The Social Justice Ministry has recommended tax benefits, concessions on medical expenses and preferential allotment of government housing for couples who keep aged parents and in-laws with them.

The government proposals also exhort women, who are traditionally expected only to look after their spouses' family, not to forsake their own parents.

The draft of the first-ever policy guidelines on old people is awaiting cabinet approval and comes amid grim projections.

Official estimates say that due to higher life expectancy, the number of people over 60 will increase from 70 million-100 million — or from seven to eight per cent of the total population — by 2016.

India only provides for subsidised medical treatment and railway and plane fares for senior citizens, who do not receive state pensions.

The ageing of the population is coupled with a change in attitude towards the elderly.

While in traditional Indian society, the aged were revered and accorded a near god-like status, today they are being sent to old people's homes or left to fend for themselves.

For Hari Shourie, 86, a former bureaucrat who in retirement founded common cause — one of India's best-known consumer rights forums, the current situation is mainly linked to economics.

"The buying power of people is rapidly shrinking and so is accommodation. When you have a two-room flat with one bathroom and you have children, you feel there is no space for anybody else."

Shourie said the population boom had exacerbated the problem.

"When I first came to Delhi about 80 years ago, the population was not more than 200,000. Now it is 10 million and the city has not expanded in a similar fashion."

Jayasri Sen, a prominent social worker in Calcutta who oversees the running of an old people's home, said the elderly were now a "burden" for their offspring.

"There was a young well-to-do executive who put his mother in one of our homes although he had a three-bedroom flat," she said. "Initially they visited once

a month and then they stopped coming or sending money."

"When she died, he did not pay for the cremation expenses. Shourie said although the government proposals were well-meaning, they would not usher in a wider social change.

"One problem is that the mother-in-law is supposed to be a terror for us, someone who is supposed to make life miserable for her son's wife, this is serious. It is not like the mother-in-law jokes of the west."

"That is why most young women today make it clear they don't want to stay with their in-laws," he said.

Sheelu Srinivasan, editor of Dignity Dialogue, a magazine devoted to the problems of the old, said another serious handicap was that old age was stigmatised at every turn.

She said mental ageing could be stalled by keeping active but added that in India there was an absence of opportunities.

Srinivasan recounted the plight of a Bombay pensioner, EA Abraham, who wanted to learn Sanskrit but was denied admission everywhere on account of his age.



A model sports a see-through brown laced dress for Japanese fashion designer Hanae Mori