

## International

**48 die in Russian attack in Chechnya**

GROZNY, Russia, Oct 6: Russia tightened its grip on Chechnya Wednesday, with Grozny admitting it had pulled out of a key northern province while claiming that 48 people had died in a spate of attacks by federal forces.

The retreat had been ordered for "tactical reasons", a member of the crisis unit set up by Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov told AFP. It was the first time Grozny had announced such an important withdrawal.

Russian troops have taken up positions along the Terek River since pouring thousands of men, tanks and armour along the strategic waterway since driving into Chechnya on October 1 to crush Islamic guerrillas operating in the republic.

Attacks by government troops, who control the northern third of Chechnya, had cost almost 50 lives in the 12 hours to midday in three separate incidents, Chechen officials told AFP.

Twenty-eight Chechen civilians died when Russian tanks opened fire on a fleet of buses ferrying refugees from Grozny back to their northeastern village of Sherkovskaya late Tuesday regional prefect Abdulkadir Israfilov said.

The refugees, who had received assurances from Russian troops that they could return to their homes, were fired on as they approached the Russian-controlled village of Cherylyonnaya, Israfilov said.

Of the 40 people, mainly women and children, on board the first bus, 28 were killed, and nine of the 12 survivors were in a serious condition, the Chechen official said.

**London rail crash****One more body found**

LONDON, Oct 6: Emergency services combed the wreckage after a high-speed train crash in London found a further body Wednesday, taking the death toll to 27, but warned the number of victims was likely to mount, reports AFP.

Emergency services resumed work at first light and said one badly-damaged carriage remained to be searched.

Police had worked throughout the night to shore up the debris, after two commuter trains collided Tuesday outside London's Paddington station at the height of the morning rush hour.

Rescue workers were confident late Tuesday that no survivors remained in the wreckage of what was Britain's worst train crash in more than 10 years.

Forty-seven people remained in hospital Wednesday. Twenty-five of them were seriously injured and 14 were in intensive care, a hospital spokesman said.

More than 150 people were taken to hospital Tuesday and scores of others were treated at the scene.

**Shankar Dayal gets Indira Gandhi Award**

NEW DELHI, Oct 6: Former President Shankar Dayal Sharma has been selected for the 1998 Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration (IGANI), reports PTI.

The award, comprising a citation and cash prize of Rs 1.51 lakh, was instituted to uphold the cause of national integration and understanding by Indian National Congress in its centenary year 1985. Rameshwar Thakur, member secretary, advisory committee of IGANI, said yesterday.

It will be given away by Congress President Sonia Gandhi on October 31, the death anniversary of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, he said in a statement.

**Clinton signs \$288b defence budget**

WASHINGTON, Oct 6: President Bill Clinton on Tuesday signed a \$288.8 billion dollar military budget that increases defence spending for the first time since the Cold War ended and gives troops their biggest pay rise in 18 years, reports Reuters.

The fiscal year 2000 national defence authorisation bill signed by Clinton during a special Pentagon visit provides military personnel with a 4.8 per cent salary hike and increases pension benefits beginning next January 1.

The total represents a boost of \$8 billion dollar by the Republican-controlled Congress over what Clinton sought for the year. It also provides extra pay for high-tech personnel, especially in the Air Force, and anticipates further basic military pay increases each year through fiscal 2006.

"It provides for a strong national defence and a better quality of life for our military personnel and their families," Clinton said.

The excellence of our military is the direct product of the excellence of our men and women in uniform. This bill invests in that excellence. It authorises ... a comprehensive programme of pay and retirement improvements that add up to the biggest increase in military compensation in a genera-

**UN urges world to halt 50 yrs of N-tests**

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 6: UN deputy secretary-general Louise Frechette said today that words and intentions were not enough to end 50 years of nuclear testing and at least 2,000 atomic explosions, reports Reuters.

Urging nations to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Frechette said further delay increased the risk that nuclear testing could resume. By initiating the treaty in 1996, she said states showed a determination to end more than 50 years of nuclear testing during which at least 2,000 explosions took place.

"None of this, however, will come to pass until the international community brings the treaty into force and adopts it universally," she told the opening of a review conference of the treaty in Vienna, according to her prepared remarks.

"Words of support and statements of intention are simply not enough," Frechette

said.

The three-day meeting, chaired by Japan, was called to speed up approvals for the treaty, a requirement if the accord failed to go into force three years after it was open to signature. The treaty needs 18 more nations to ratify it.

The Vienna session will also review the extensive monitoring in place and planned to detect atomic tests.

The United States is in the embarrassing position of having been the first to sign the treaty but being unable to get the US senate to ratify it, despite a blitz campaign by President Bill Clinton. This means Washington has observer status rather than being a full-fledged participant in Vienna.

The treaty bans all explosions in the environment, whether in the atmosphere, space or underground, regardless of size. A 1963 treaty barred explosions in the atmosphere

and another one in 1974 set some limits on underground tests.

A total of 154 nations have signed the treaty and 51 of them have deposited instruments of ratification, chief UN spokesman Fred Eckhard said on Tuesday.

But the treaty does not go into effect until 44 nations with nuclear weapons, power stations or other atomic capabilities have both signed and ratified the convention.

Of this group of 44, all but India, Pakistan and North Korea have signed the treaty and 25 have ratified it, the last ones being Switzerland, Romania and Mexico.

India has hinted it would consider signing the treaty after the formation of a new government following recent elections. Pakistan has refused to sign until the United States eases sanctions imposed after its nuclear test last year.

All five declared nuclear

powers — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China — signed the treaty.

The 26 nuclear-capable countries that ratified the treaty are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Bulgaria, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Mexico.

For the treaty to take effect, however, ratification is still needed from 18 nations: Algeria, Bangladesh, Chile, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Vietnam, the United States, India, Pakistan and North Korea.

The United States and Russia are each estimated to deploy more than 7,000 nuclear warheads.



Nobel Peace laureate Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo (L) hugs a supporter upon his return to East Timor yesterday, one month after he fled violence unleashed by pro-Jakarta militia. Belo wanted to stay in East Timor but fled when his home was destroyed by — AFP photo

**Floods kill 64 in Mexico****Disaster areas declared in 4 states**

MEXICO CITY, Oct 6: Mexico declared disaster areas in four states on Tuesday as heavy rains caused some of the worst floods in 40 years, killing at least 64 people and driving tens of thousands from their homes, officials and media said, reports Reuters.

In Tulancingo, a city filled with textile factories in the central state of Hidalgo, the Tulancingo river raged over its banks in the centre of town, dragging trucks and cars and filling some 6,500 homes and buildings with water.

"Practically half of the city is affected to some degree," Hidalgo state Gov. Manuel Angel Nunez told reporters. He said the water was more than a meter (three feet) deep. In parts of Tulancingo, about 70 miles (120 km) northeast of Mexico City.

Also in Hidalgo, the walls of a marble quarry caved in from rains, burying seven workers under tons of mud and rock. Six bodies were recovered from the collapsed mine, said Margarito Hernandez, an official in the town hall of San Salvador.

The Interior Ministry declared emergencies in parts of the states of Puebla, Michoacan and Tabasco and Tabasco as rivers burst their banks. The declaration allows local officials access to federal funds to cope with the natural disasters.

In the Gulf of Mexico state of Tabasco, authorities said rivers were flooding higher than they had in 40 years and two drownings Tuesday brought the death toll to four. More than 58,000 people were forced out of their homes.

In Tabasco's capital Villahermosa, the Carrizal river was flooding huge suburban neighbourhoods.

"I'm about two kilometres from the river, in high area, and the water is up to my knees. It's coming up through the drains. My bed, camera, and microwave are ruined," said resident Manuel Lopez, speaking from a cellular phone as he stood on his roof. "I'm going to stay on the roof tonight with some neighbours to make sure nothing gets stolen."

The rains did not let up in Central America either, where areas barely recovered from the devastation wrought last year by Hurricane Mitch have been pummeled by torrential rains since mid-September.

to release water pent up behind hydroelectric dams.

On Tuesday night Televisa television station reported a total death toll of 39 in the state of Puebla in the past week and 14 in Veracruz, including two buried in mudslides. Southern Chiapas state on the Guatemalan border also reported two deaths.

Mexico's national Meteorological Service said that at 9:00 pm local time (0200 GMT Wednesday) a tropical depression was hovering in the Gulf of Mexico, 75 miles (120 km) northeast of Veracruz port.

"Additional rainfall amounts of 10 to 15 inches (25 to 38 cm), with locally higher amounts in mountainous areas, are possible over portions of eastern Mexico. These rainfalls could cause flash floods and mudslides," the Miami-based US national Hurricane Centre said in a report.

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He attributed his election to the cooperation of the parties following earlier trade-offs, but added no concessions were made in return for their votes.

**Golkar party chief elected House speaker**

JAKARTA, Oct 6: Indonesia's newly-elected lower house announced early Wednesday it had elected the chairman of the ruling Golkar party, Akbar Tanjung, as the House speaker for the next five years, reports AFP.

The election, by a secret vote, followed the failure by a plenary session of the People's Representative Council (DPR) to approve a consensus of the leaders of the 10 parliamentary factions who selected Tanjung to chair the parliament.

Tanjung won 411 of the 491 votes in the ballot, the provisional chairman of the DPR, Abdul Majid said shortly after the vote count at 2:40 a.m. (0140 BST).

The four other candidates for the post were named as deputy chairmen of the DPR, sworn in on Friday as the first post-Suharto parliament.

"I thank the other parties for the trust they have given me, for supporting me to become the chairman of the DPR," Tanjung said after he was elected.

He attributed his election to the cooperation of the parties following earlier trade-offs, but added no concessions were made in return for their votes.

**Devastated E Timor 'worse than hell'****Bishop Belo returns home**

DILI, East Timor, Oct 6: Bishop Carlos Belo on Wednesday described the aftermath of the devastation wrought on East Timor in the last month as "worse than hell", reports AFP.

Speaking on his return to the territory's capital Dili a month after being forced to flee for fear of his life, East Timor's spiritual leader said he was deeply shocked by the scale of the damage inflicted by rampaging militias and the Indonesian military.

"This is worse than hell. We can't see hell yet but this is really hell," he said after a meeting with United Nations officials.

The bishop also said it was too early to talk about reconciliation with Indonesia. "Now we do not talk about reconciliation," he said. "Let us clean up the city first."

He called on the people of East Timor to show "the spirit to rebuild, to reconstruct the country and to look to the future not the past".

After his talks, Belo returned to his charred residence on Dili's waterfront. Some 100 local people were there to greet him.

**JKLF leader Amanullah Khan freed**

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Oct 6: The leader of an attempted march across the border into Indian Kashmir was released Wednesday a day after being arrested, authorities here said. reports AFP.

Amanullah Khan, chairman of Jamia and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was escorted out of Pakistan-administered Kashmir by police and set free, they said.

Hundreds of JKLF marchers, led by Khan, tried to cross the disputed border into the Indian side in Kashmir on Monday but were foiled by security forces.

Several people were injured in clashes with the police.

Administration officials said 10 of about 300 JKLF members arrested since Monday were freed and others would be released gradually.

The JKLF, which advocates a united Kashmir independent of Pakistan and India, attempted the march to attract international attention to the decade-old turmoil in Indian-held Kashmir.

The party said the march was also aimed to show that the people of Kashmir rejected the division of their homeland.

**Shiite shopkeeper killed in Karachi**

KARACHI, Oct 6: Gunmen have shot dead a Shiite Muslim shopkeeper in Karachi, the latest victim in a wave of sectarian violence that has claimed 31 lives over the past week, police said today. reports AFP.

The 25-year-old Syed Haider Abbas was attacked by unidentified assailants late Tuesday when he was closing his shop in the city's central Bufferzone neighbourhood, they said.

The attackers fled the scene as panic residents and relatives gathered at the site, residents said.

"My brother had nothing to do with politics. His only crime was that he was a member of the Shiite community," the victim's wailing brother, Fiyaz Haider, told reporters at a hospital.

The incident followed a spate of sectarian attacks last week.

Twenty-one people have been killed in Karachi, capital of southern Sindh province, since Friday's storming of a Shiite mosque in the city by masked men that left 10 people dead.

Others were gunned down by assailants in central Punjab and North West Frontier Province.

Police in a country-wide crackdown have detained around a 1,000 suspects and activists from radical religious groups including a Sunni Muslim party, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan.

**US blasts Taliban over treatment of women**

LONG BEACH, California, Oct 6: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Tuesday sharply criticised Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia over its treatment of women, reports AFP.

In a speech to the California Governor's Conference for Women here, she condemned the Taliban for being "determined to drag Afghan women back from the dawn of the 21st century to somewhere closer to the 13th".

The only female rights they appear to recognise are the rights to remain silent and uneducated, unheard and unemployed," she said.

A growing movement spearheaded in part by Hollywood celebrities has for some time been trying to highlight the fundamentalist Taliban's treatment of women and girls.

Albright assured her audience that the United States would not ignore their plight, recounting her words to Afghan women refugees when she visited Pakistan two years ago.

"The United States cannot and will not abandon you," she said. "We have made it clear that if the leaders of the Taliban or any other Afghan faction want international acceptance they must treat women not as chattel but as people and they must respect human rights."



Election officers repack electronic voting machines in plastic boxes after the ballots were counted in Calcutta. With the fifth and the last phase of polling as a part of the general elections in India coming to an end, counting of votes began yesterday.

— AFP photo

**BRIEFLY**

**Prodi, Arafat to meet in Nov:** European Commission President Romano Prodi and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will meet in Brussels next month, European commissioner for external relations Chris Patten announced Wednesday. AFP reports from Strasbourg.

The meeting will be dedicated to the "reinforcement of Palestinian institutions," Patten said in a speech before the European Parliament. Patten also announced that the European Union soon will set aside 20 million euros (21.4 million US dollars) in aid for cross-border projects between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

**Dutch PM to visit Pakistan, India:** Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok will visit Pakistan and India next month for talks with leaders in the rival South Asian countries, officials said Tuesday. Kok will have a working visit with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif before travelling to India on November 22-24 for an official visit. Kok will be accompanied by Foreign Minister Joop van Aartsen.

**Israeli air raid in Lebanon:** Israeli warplanes carried out a new air raid against targets in Lebanon at dawn on Wednesday, after six strikes the day before, an army spokesman said. AFP reports from Tel Aviv.