

Pakistan permits operation of FC accounts of politicians

KARACHI, Nov 3: Pakistan's central bank yesterday allowed operation of foreign currency accounts by politicians whose bank accounts were frozen after a military coup last month, officials said, reports AFP.

However, the state bank of Pakistan said the affected politicians could withdraw money only in local currency.

The amounts withdrawn by politicians would be converted in to Pakistan rupees at the prevailing inter-bank exchange rate, it said.

The parity for yesterday was fixed at 51.88 rupees to dollars.

The bank accounts of some 500 politicians and their spouses were frozen three days after the October 12 ouster of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Government in a bid to avert flight of capital.

The bank last week allowed restricted withdrawal of money by politicians from their local currency accounts to pay utility bills. Government taxes or outstanding loan liabilities to banks and other financial institutions.

India snubs Musharraf's remarks on Indo-Pak ties

NEW DELHI, Nov 3: In a clear snub to Pakistani military ruler Pervez Musharraf for his remarks on Indo-Pak relations, India Tuesday asserted that while it did not wish to match any stridency of language, it was for Islamabad to facilitate a restoration of trust by abandoning its state-sponsored cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in the country, reports PTI.

Without attempting to match any stridency of language, there is need to draw attention to India's abiding desire to build a relationship of peace and friendship with Pakistan based on principles, an external affairs ministry spokesman told reporters.

He was responding to questions on Musharraf's remarks at a press conference in Islamabad that hostility will be met with hostility and peace with peace. If India agrees to talk, we will take one step ahead.

India, the spokesman said, harbours no enmity towards the people of Pakistan and added New Delhi had always taken the initiative towards improving relations as it did last year by putting in place the composite dialogue process to build confidence and trust, establish a stable structure of cooperation and address all outstanding issues.

Editor jailed in Tehran

TEHRAN, Nov 3: A leading reformist and editor of the banned Neshat daily, Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, was jailed on Tuesday pending trial following his arrest on the orders of the capital's press court, his lawyer told AFP.

"His trial has been set for Monday, November 8," Nemaat Ahmadi said.

"Mr. Shamsolvaezin was taken from the press court to the Evin prison," in northern Tehran, Ahmadi said.

He said press court judge Said Mortazavi set bail of 500 million rials, or 166,666 dollars at the official exchange rate of 3000 rials to the dollar.

"But Shamsolvaezin refused to pay the bail," his lawyer said, "so he was taken to prison."

"The court issued the arrest warrant and jailed Shamsolvaezin in his capacity as the editor-in-chief of the Neshat daily," he said.

Top guerilla commander arrested in Philippines

MANILA, Nov 3: A Philippine communist guerilla field commander who masterminded the kidnapping of a general and his aide last February has been captured, the army said today, reports AFP.

The military said Leonardo Pitao, alias Commander Parao, was arrested by army operatives on Tuesday in the district of Talomo outside Davao City, said military intelligence chief Lieutenant General Jose Calimlim.

Military officials have accused Pitao of planning and carrying out the capture of Brigadier General Victor Obillo and his aide Captain Eduardo Montealto.

The two officers were held in the jungles for almost two months before they were released to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Obillo was the highest military officer to be captured in the 30-year insurgency waged by the underground Communist Party of the Philippines and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA).

Calimlim said Pitao admitted on questioning to be the commanding officer of the NPA's main regional guerilla unit in and around the Davao area.

A 45 calibre pistol, several rounds of ammunition, a cellular phone and a family photo album were among possessions seized from the captured rebel commander.

Millions of cyclone victims still stranded in Orissa

BHUBANESHWAR, India, Nov 3: Relief workers in eastern India were racing against time today to reach millions of cyclone victims facing the growing threat of epidemics, reports AFP.

Five days after a high-intensity cyclone devastated the coastal state of Orissa, millions of survivors were still stranded without access to shelter, food and clean drinking water.

With the prospect of diarrhoea and respiratory disease epidemics becoming more likely by the day, efforts to bring some relief to the worst-affected areas has assumed an almost desperate urgency.

While the official body count is still only in the hundreds, other estimates suggest that anywhere between 5,000 and 10,000 people were killed in the storm that hit Orissa on Friday.

And the toll is likely to rise further if emergency humanitarian aid is not able to reach

stranded survivors, crammed into cyclone shelters along submerged areas of coastline.

"Things will be grim if these communities are cut off any longer," said Julian Francis of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

With most roads still impassable, airdrops are still the only lifeline for many areas. But with only a dozen helicopters flying regular sorties, many people are receiving nothing at all.

A duty officer at the Cyclone Control Room in the Orissa state capital, Bhubaneswar said more than 350 bodies had been recovered from eight districts, where medical teams were actually operating.

"But we have no means of accessing the districts of Jagatsinghpur and Jajpur, which were clearly devastated, and so some of us are afraid

that the toll in these two districts could be unimaginably high," the duty officer said.

"There are no epidemics in the eight districts where medical teams are in place, but that is not to say they haven't broken out elsewhere."

The army, which has deployed an extra 5,000 troops in the region, said it would take a week to restore even a semblance of normalcy in the state.

"Our priority is to reach the remote areas with the objective of clearing roads, to rescue the marooned and injured in boats (and) treat them and distribute food packets," Brigadier Rajinder Singh Rawat said.

The Orissa state government has requested eighty boats -- half of them in intransitable -- which Rawat said should be flown in later Wednesday.

The brigadier also confirmed that soldiers had been detailed to guard food convoys after

some trucks were looted by desperate cyclone victims.

Francis said the attacks were of "serious concern" to relief agencies.

"The problem is that when people see a Red Cross vehicle, they expect it to bring food and medicine. If it doesn't, they get angry."

The Federation of the Red Cross has already started bringing in some basic relief materials, such as tarpaulin and blankets for shelter, as well as food and kitchen utensils.

The Geneva-based federation has already launched an international appeal for 2.5 million dollars, as donations from foreign governments have also started to trickle in.

The United States pledged two million dollars worth of food and 100,000 dollars worth of tents and plastic sheeting, while the Japanese government donated 25,000 dollars to an Orissa relief fund.

Heavy fighting in Lanka as Tigers take 2 army bases

COLOMBO, Nov 3: Heavy fighting raged in Sri Lanka as Tiger rebels overran another military base today, a day after capturing a strategic town from government forces amid thousands of casualties on both sides, reports AFP.

Military sources said separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas mounted a pre-dawn assault on Nedunkerni base hot on the heels of their success in capturing nearby Oddusudan town on Tuesday.

There is heavy fighting going on, but we have not received any details," a military spokesman here said, adding that initial reports suggested that government troops and

Tiger rebels had suffered heavily.

Unconfirmed reports said that both sides had suffered more than 1,000 combatants killed or wounded.

Details were sketchy due to communication problems but the guerrillas appeared to have captured Nedunkerni and were mounting pressure on other military bases in the northern region, the sources said.

Both Oddusudan and Nedunkerni are strategically located to the western flank of the LTTE's main stronghold of Mullaitivu located on the north-eastern coast of the island.

Government forces took Oddusudan from the LTTE in December after calling off the

military's biggest ground offensive aimed at capturing a strategic highway in the north of the country.

The latest losses were seen by many analysts here as a double blow to the government.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga is campaigning for re-election in polls to be held on December 21 and heavy casualties among government troops could affect her votes, analysts said.

Military sources said that after Wednesday's confrontations, both sides were expected to count their dead and wounded by the hundreds, but the latest fighting Wednesday may raise the figure even higher.



International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) forensic experts examine human remains exhumed from a shallow grave in Dili yesterday. Nearly one hundred bodies have been recovered so far around East Timor and none of them have been identified yet. —AFP photo

US envoy pledges support for E Timor

DILI, East Timor, Nov 3: US ambassador-designate to Indonesia Robert Gelbard held talks on Wednesday with independence leader Xanana Gusmao and promised support for the development of East Timor, reports AFP.

"We had a very good discussion about future development and American support for the future of East Timor," Gelbard told AFP at Dili's Comoro airport after flying back from the meeting in the town of Bacau.

Gelbard said he gave Gusmao several bags of coffee produced by a cooperative financed by USAID during the hour-long talks and pledged support for similar projects as well as job training.

"It was a very good meeting, it went on longer than originally scheduled. We had a lot to talk about," said Gelbard.

He said the pair discussed the importance of East Timorese taking an active role in the rebuilding process.

"We are working with local NGOs which we supported even before and one of the issues we discussed with Gusmao is the need to bring local NGOs into the process."

Chinese FM to visit ROK

SEOUL, Nov 3: Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan will visit Seoul next month to discuss relations and regional security, South Korean officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Tang's visit follows his trip to North Korea on Oct 5-9. China, a long-time ally of communist North Korea, opened formal diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lee Kwang-ho said that Beijing and Seoul have agreed to arrange Tang's visit to South Korea in December but the exact date has yet to be decided.



US President Bill Clinton (C), Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak (L) and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (R) shake hands before a meeting in the residence of the US ambassador to Norway on Tuesday to discuss the future of the peace process in the Middle East. — AFP photo

Barak rules out freeze in settlements

JERUSALEM, Nov 3: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak ruled out a freeze in Jewish settlements despite Palestinian demands at the Oslo summit with US President Bill Clinton, according to media reports here today, says AFP.

Barak rejected an explicit request by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for a halt in construction of settlements on occupied land during their negotiations aimed at reaching a final peace deal in September 2000, according to a senior Israeli official quoted by the press.

"Barak explained that as long as there is no permanent agreement that determines the future of the settlements, the government will continue to act according to Israeli law," the re-

spected Hebrew newspaper Haaretz said.

The statement came despite Clinton's announcement in Oslo that both sides agreed to avoid public comments or actions which would cause "enormous difficulty" for the other side as they work towards a framework peace agreement to be drawn up by February.

The Palestinians consider Jewish settlement activity in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the key obstacle to a peace agreement, and the United States has also warned of its effect on the negotiations.

"I think it is everyone's position that (the Jewish settlements) are illegal and destructive to the peace process," Arafat said on Monday before

meeting Clinton.

But Barak said tenders published by the housing ministry in recent weeks for 1,798 apartments should not influence the negotiations, since most were in old settlements over which there was no dispute in Israel, the Israeli official said.

"Even if someone wins the tender now, they will need two years to build a small neighbourhood within a settlement and therefore it has no practical meaning during the framework agreement," he said, according to the Haaretz.

There are currently around 140 settlements in land occupied by Israel in the 1967 war, excluding around 40 unauthorised outposts set up in the West Bank over the past year.

BJP unfolds sectarian agenda

NEW DELHI, Nov 3: Barely two weeks after being sworn in as part of India's new coalition government, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has begun to unfold its Hindu sectarian agenda, reports IPS.

Education Minister Murli Manohar Joshi, a known Hindu hardliner, is proceeding to radically restructure apex institutions, rewrite curricula and make major personnel changes in a wholly partisan and anti-consensual fashion.

His latest target is Marxism, which is one of five ideologies included in the sub-section of the Political Science course for the final year of secondary school. The official education board has suddenly dropped Marxism from the curriculum, which now only comprises Fascism, Liberalism, Gandhism and Socialism.

No explanation has been offered. The rationale cannot possibly be that Marxism has few followers left after the end of the cold war. For that criterion would mean excluding

Gandhism. That ideology is dead and has hardly any follower in the land of the Mahatma's birth, although it continues to pay lip service to him.

It is known that the BJP is especially allergic to Marxism. Many of its political ideologues have been staunch admirers of Fascism and doctrines of "racial purity."

This change suggests an alarmingly narrow-minded, censorship-oriented mindset which is dismissive of an important part of humanity's intellectual heritage, and which had a major impact on India's freedom movement and the formation of its intelligentsia.

The BJP is committed — and Minister Joshi has reiterated this — to rewriting school textbooks so that they reflect the "glory and greatness" of ancient Hindu civilisation and present Hindus as victims of repeated "invasion" by hostile aliens.

BJP-VHP-RSS leaders have always made extravagant and unsupported claims about the achievements of ancient India

— from calculus to nuclear physics and from advanced chemistry to aeronautics. History is their special obsession.

Says distinguished historian Sumit Sarkar: "The basic thrust of the BJP is to construct and enemy. Rhetorically, they might have succeeded in achieving this, but it also needs to be concretized. For this, rewriting history, especially school textbooks, becomes very important. The BJP's main fight is more with history than with political parties."

To accomplish this mission, which has been called the BJP's "Long March Through the Institutions," Joshi has stuffed them with BJP or RSS sympathizers and activists.

These include the University Grants Commission, the secondary school board, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, and only last week, the councils of social sciences and historical research, which run virtually all of India's specialized social science research institutes outside the university system.

Russia vows to free Grozny of 'terrorists'

MOSCOW, Nov 3: Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev on Wednesday issued the clearest signal yet that federal forces may soon storm Grozny by vowing to free the Chechen capital of "terrorists," Interfax reported, says AFP.

Russia "plans to liberate not only Grozny of the terrorists, but also the whole of Chechnya," the news agency quoted Sergeev as saying.

"That is the assignment that we have been issued with," Sergeev added. "The assignment must be fulfilled, and we have the backing of the president."

Sergeev said Russian forces now control nine of the greater Grozny region's 31 districts. Federal troops also held seven

of 22 districts in Chechnya's second city Gudermes, he added.

"I think today, or at worst tomorrow, (local volunteers) and our forces together will handle the remainder of the bandits and clear out Gudermes," Sergeev said.

Russian forces have steadily approached Grozny since invading Chechnya on October 1 for the first time since the two sides' 1994-96 war.

Generals have since issued mixed signals about whether they intend to storm Grozny, an operation that carried huge losses during the first war.

President Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly interrupted his vacation and returned to Moscow on Wednesday to consult his gov-

ernment on the new North Caucasus crisis.

Russia on Tuesday came under heavy pressure from US President Bill Clinton to scale down its Chechen offensive and concentrate on the humanitarian costs of the war.

Russian media reports meanwhile reported that fighting in Chechnya continued overnight.

Federal forces flew nearly 70 sorties over the rebel republic in a 24-hour period. Some 100 Chechen gunmen were reported killed and four bridges destroyed, news agencies said.

The reports could not be immediately confirmed with sources in Chechnya.

Laden likely to stay in Afghanistan

KABUL, Nov 3: Osama bin Laden will likely remain in Afghanistan after the United States rejected an offer by the suspected terrorist to leave for a secret destination, a spokesman for the ruling Taliban militia says, reports AP.

The proposal to resolve the dispute was one of several that are apparently unacceptable to Washington, which is demanding bin Laden be handed over to the United States or a third country for trial on charges that he masterminded last year's twin bombings of US embassies in Africa.

Saudi Arabia's defense minister backed the US demands Tuesday, saying that bin Laden, a Saudi exile, should be turned over to stand trial for terrorism.

Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz said bin Laden, who has been stripped of his Saudi citizenship, is considered a traitor to his country and to Islam.

The Taliban hands him over to justice, whether in the United States or anywhere else, we believe then justice should take its way," Sultan said in Washington at a news conference with Defence Secretary William Cohen.

The United States has banned trade with or investment in the war-shattered Muslim country, which also faces UN sanctions if it does not deliver bin Laden by Nov 14.

The Taliban, wanting to avoid sanctions and shed their pariah state status, have tried to open official lines of communication with Washington.

7 killed in Hawaii shooting rampage

HONOLULU, Hawaii, Nov 3: A quiet, reclusive Xerox technician shot dead seven of his co-workers and later surrendered to police on Tuesday after a five-hour standoff, bringing a peaceful end to the bloodiest shooting rampage in Hawaii's history, police said, reports Reuters.

The 40-year-old technician, identified by officials as Bryan Uyesugi, was about to be fired from his job after 15 years when he burst into a Xerox parts warehouse and opened fire with a 9 mm pistol, killing seven of his workmates, police said.

He then fled in a green company van and was cornered by police at the Hawaii Nature Centre, a hiking area popular with school children near the scene of the shooting.

He remained there for five hours, surrounded by dozens of heavily armed police until he was convinced to get out of the van with his hands up and fall to his knees in surrender.

The shooting, the worst such incident in Hawaii's history, was the latest in a series of gun rampages in US workplaces, schools and churches this year, despite overall declines in the US homicide rate. The previous worst shooting incident in Hawaii left five people dead in 1991.

About 100 children from two nearby schools were on field trips at the Nature Centre when Uyesugi arrived. Police and school officials said the children all were safe.

Uyesugi was described by neighbours and co-workers as mild-mannered and reclusive.



Suspected Xerox gunman Bryan Uyesugi (C) is brought into the receiving desk of the Honolulu Police Department on Tuesday following a six-hour standoff in a Honolulu park. Uyesugi is suspected of the shooting and killing seven Xerox employees. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Iran missile hits base in Iraq:

Five fighters were killed and several injured in an Iranian missile attack on a base of Iran's main armed opposition group in southern Iraq, the opposition People's Mujahadeen said Wednesday, reports from Baghdad.

Mujahadeen spokesman Farid Soleimani told AFP that Scud missiles crashed late Tuesday into the group's Habib base, 45 kilometres from the southern port city of Basra, and pinned the blame on Iran. The base lies some 35 kilometres from the Iranian border.

Russian fighter plane crashes:

A Russian MiG-29 fighter plane has crashed near an airport in a Moscow suburb, a Russian air force spokesman said Wednesday, quoted by Interfax. AFP reports from Moscow.

The pilot was able to safely eject from the plane before it came down near an airport runway. No one was injured. An inquiry has been opened into the crash.

Rebels kill 3 policemen in Assam:

Separatist rebels ambushed a judge's convoy and shot dead three policemen Tuesday night in the far eastern state of Assam, officials said Wednesday, AFP reports from Guwahati.

Guerrillas belonging to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) attacked the convoy overnight Tuesday at a remote village in the Barpeta district, about 180 kilometres west of the state capital of Guwahati. The judge survived the attack, the officials said.

EgyptAir crash: Mechanical flaw emerges as possible cause

WASHINGTON, Nov 3: With salvage efforts of EgyptAir Flight 990 suspended today due to stormy seas, investigators focused on a malfunctioning thrust reverser as the possible cause of the crash, reports AFP.

A crew member of the Boeing 767 which crashed into the Atlantic Ocean Sunday, killing all 217 people on board, had warned of a problem with one of the plane's thrust reversers, investigators said.

The crew member raised the issue before the plane took off from Los Angeles on Saturday bound for New York. National Transportation Safety Board chief Jim Hall told a press conference Tuesday.

Hall said that federal regulations allow airplanes to fly with one thrust reverser not working because the equipment is considered optional. Thrust reversers help slow a plane for landing.

The Egyptian airliner en route for Cairo plunged into the sea some 30 minutes after taking off from New York's John F. Kennedy airport on Sunday.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which oversees US air travel, said Tuesday it would issue a warning on thrust reversers on Boeing 767s.

The FAA was concerned about the danger of accidental deployment of the devices during flight, with possible fatal consequences.

On 767s, large cones of metal move in front of the jet's exhaust, forcing the engine into reverse rather than providing forward momentum.

A Lauda Air Boeing 767, which came off the production line in 1989 just after the doomed Egyptian airliner crashed in Thailand in 1991 when the thrust reverser on one of its two engines accidentally deployed. Searchers will know more

about what caused the crash when they retrieve the two "black boxes" -- the flight data and cockpit voice recorders -- which could yield invaluable information on what sent the plane into a dizzying dive.

The Mohawk, a Navy vessel and the Whiting, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration vessel, working in tandem in the debris field, located pingers or radio signals thought to come from the boxes, Graham said.

However, bad weather, which is expected to linger in the area for up to two days, forced both ships back to port.

So far, rescuers had recovered just one body from sea in the vicinity of where the plane crashed near Nantucket Island, northeast of New York City.

On Monday, Coast Guard crews combing the area also found a "significant piece" of the twin-engine aircraft, large enough to require a crane.