

International

Poachers kill tiger in Indian zoo

HYDERABAD, India, Oct 7: Poachers broke into a zoo in southern India and slit the throat of an endangered Royal Bengal Tiger before skinning it and making off with the pelt, officials said, reports Reuters.

The one-year-old female tiger, named Sukhi, was found dead in a moat on Thursday, said B. Vinodh Rao, curator of the Nehru Zoological Park in Hyderabad in the coastal state of Andhra Pradesh.

The poachers had broken into the zoo's Tiger Safari Park at night. Rao told a news conference late on Friday.

Some staff members must have helped the poachers. Sedation or poisoning of the tiger cannot be ruled out, Rao said.

He said the body had been sent for a post-mortem and four zoo workers had been suspended.

India's tiger population has fallen to about 3,500 from 4,300 just 11 years ago, largely because of the loss of habitat and poaching.

Although trafficking of wildlife, products is banned in India, poaching of tigers for their skin, bones and body parts, which are used in Chinese medicine, has exacerbated the problem.

Conservationists estimate 200 to 300 tigers are killed every year.

Earlier this year, 13 Royal Bengal tigers died at Nandan Kanam Zoological Park in the eastern province of Orissa of suspected trypanosomiasis, a parasitic infection.

Benazir's relative killed

QUETTA, Pakistan, Oct 7: A relative of self-exiled former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was found on Friday murdered after being missing for three weeks, police said, reports Reuters.

The police in Quetta, capital of the southwestern province of Baluchistan, said they had arrested a man who confessed that he and three other men had murdered Sardar Wahid Bakhsh Bhutto, a cousin of the ex-prime minister and head of the Bhutto tribe.

Wahid Bhutto's body was recovered from a grave in his home district of Larkana in the southern province of Sindh on information from the arrested man, Farrukh Ali Qadri, the police said.

Benazir Bhutto wrote a letter to military ruler General Pervez Musharraf on Thursday complaining of what she called an "ugly chain of events" of murders and disappearances of her political supporters and calling for the missing man's recovery.

"This has led to the suspicion that these are politically motivated actions having the backing of powerful forces," said the letter, which was published in Friday's local newspaper.

The Quetta police said Qadri was arrested while trying to escape via neighbouring Iran and that he had confessed that Wahid Bhutto was murdered at the behest of a still unspecified "influential person".

Y'slavia returns to int'l fold

World hails end of Milosevic era, promises to lift sanctions

BELGRADE, Oct 7: Yugoslavia begins the road back from international pariah status today, but Slobodan Milosevic's vow to return to power remained a concern to those hoping to see him brought to justice, reports AFP.

The United States and the European Union made encouraging noises Friday about the swift lifting of sanctions after it became clear that Milosevic's iron-fisted rule had finally come to an end.

"I congratulate Kostunica on the electoral victory and I wish all citizens of Yugoslavia much success in the coming mandate of the new president," Milosevic said on television, bringing to an end his 13 years in power and nearly two weeks of a building showdown between his regime and the popularly backed opposition.

Thousands of people poured into the streets of Belgrade within minutes of Milosevic's televised capitulation joining tens of thousands of opposition supporters who had gathered earlier as victory became assured for opposition leader, now president-elect, Vojislav Kostunica.

"The situation is progressively returning to normal, I think that the crisis is behind us," Kostunica declared.

"The people have won." Before dawn Saturday most of the crowds had dispersed happily and peacefully.

The same crowds had precipitated Milosevic's capitulation by storming the parliament building

and the state television station on Thursday.

The last nail in Milosevic's political coffin was hammered in when Russia -- Belgrade's last major ally -- publicly recognised Kostunica as the new leader.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov met both Kostunica and Milosevic here Friday.

The road back to international acceptance was set to start with the arrival in the Yugoslav capital later Saturday of Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou.

A Greek foreign ministry spokesman said Friday that Papandreou "was at the EU's disposal".

A Greek government spokesman declared that the fate of Milosevic was "being negotiated".

EU security and foreign policy chief Javier Solana said on CNN that "if things go in the right direction", EU foreign ministers would meet on Monday "and one of the decisions that we would like to take is lifting all the sanctions, lifting the oil embargo."

First to go from the sanctions list will be an embargo on oil deliveries to Serbia and a flight ban that has kept Yugoslavia's JAT airlines out of western Europe, EU officials and diplomats said.

President Jacques Chirac of France, which holds the rotating presidency of the EU, said that Kostunica, the largely unknown opposition figure who defeated Milosevic in September 24 elections, would be invited to an EU

summit October 13-14 in Biarritz to discuss future relations.

Tony Blair, Britain's prime minister, even hinted that post-Milosevic Serbia could look forward to membership in the European Union.

US President Bill Clinton called Yugoslavia's massive popular uprising against Milosevic an "extraordinary victory" for the Serbian people, adding that it had greatly improved security prospects in the Balkans.

White House spokesman Jake Siewert said Washington would work to remove sanctions against Yugoslavia "once it's clear that Milosevic is gone and that the democratic transition is complete."

"We'll be moving quickly to reach out and gauge the government, but we will need to do a little more work to ensure that Milosevic has relinquished power and that the democratically elected leader of Serbia has assumed all the reins of the government there, before we begin that," Siewert said.

However, amid all the jubilation on the streets of Belgrade and the encouragement from abroad, the postscript to Milosevic's farewell speech was alarming news to those hoping the ousted Yugoslav president will be brought to justice for crimes committed during his bloody reign.

In the televised address Friday night in which he finally admitted defeat in the elections, Milosevic

said he planned to enjoy a brief period of "rest" and then "continue to reinforce my party" -- the Socialist Party of Serbia.

The Socialists, he said, would "be a very strong opposition" and together with the Yugoslav Left party led by his wife Mira Markovic, "will be strengthened so as to convincingly win the next elections."

International leaders, while welcoming Milosevic's ouster, were swift to rule out any future political role for the man decried in the West as the "Balkans Butcher".

"Milosevic, we can not forget, is a war criminal. He can not play any role in politics in a democratic country," Solana said.

Clinton warned against leaving Milosevic loose on the Yugoslav political scene, saying it would be "a terrible mistake".

"This is not what the people voted for," he said. "And I believe that we cannot ignore the action of the war crimes tribunal."

Chirac echoed most European leaders in insisting that Milosevic be pursued to appear before the UN tribunal in The Hague, which has indicted him for crimes against humanity in Kosovo.

Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a letter of support to Kostunica, hoping he would be able to pull Yugoslavia out of its current political crisis.

At the same time, backing for Kostunica poured in from European countries, the US and China, and from NATO.



Supporters of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) wave a Serbian flag during the celebration meeting in front of Yugoslav Parliament building in Belgrade on Friday where they were waiting for Yugoslav President-elect Vojislav Kostunica. --AFP photo

'Sharif may agree to quit politics for restoration of democracy'

ISLAMABAD, Oct 7: Ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif may agree to stay away from politics for sometime if such a gesture leads to the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, his wife Begum Kulsoom Nawaz has said, reports PTI.

Sharif holds the interest of the country dearer than everything else and if a way could be paved for the restoration of democracy with the Pakistan Muslim League President (Nawaz Sharif) removing himself from the political scene for sometime, he might agree to the proposal, she said in remarks published yesterday.

But, Begum Kulsoom believed such a step would not resolve the crisis facing the country since the ouster of the PML government about a year ago.

The best way, she said, was the restoration of the situation as it existed on October 12 last year revival of assemblies and re-statement of Sharif as Prime Minister. Gen Pervez Musharraf could be allowed to continue as army chief, she added.

This, she said, meant that the army should go back to the barracks and defend the national frontiers and power should be handed over to politicians. This is the only way to save the country, she asserted.

She proposed that all sides should ignore the mistakes committed by others and make a new beginning.

Twenty trees proclaimed as national monuments

ROME, Oct 7: Italian Culture Minister Giovanna Melandri announced on Friday that 20 trees, more than 100 years old, will become "national monuments", reports L'Espresso.

Under the "Save the Trees Decree," the people who cause any damage to the trees will be forced to pay a fine of 20 million lire (about 10,000 US dollars) and could face up to two years in jail as well as restoration duties, the same punishments as those for damages to monuments.

The minister stressed that the decree was made possible thanks to the interpretation of a single text which recognises the historic and cultural value, even in natural elements.

"The decrees will be ready in December, but the obligation to respect them will begin immediately," Melandri said, adding that "these monuments will be handled in the same manner as other ones".

The superintendents in charge of the decrees' respect will be responsible for the care of the monumental trees.

The World Wild Federation (WWF) had also previously organised a signature collection via internet in an attempt to save the trees.

"There was a mass response, even though there are still many in Italy who are not used to 'chatting', WWF President Fulco Pratesi said.

Palestinians swarm WB hotspot after Israeli army pullout

UNSC adjourns vote condemning Israel for excessive use of force

NABLUS, West Bank, Oct 7: Firing automatic rifles in the air and waving flags, thousands of jubilant Palestinians today swarmed into a Jewish shrine in the northern West Bank after the Israeli army pulled out of what was a flashpoint, reports AFP.

Using iron bars, stones and hammers, the crowds attacked the building over the site revered by Jews as Joseph's tomb, and youths removed abandoned books and furniture, setting them ablaze.

"Today was the first step to liberate the Al Aqsa (mosque)," Amin Maqbul, an official from Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's group, Fatah, told the crowds.

He was referring to the Jerusalem mosque site that is at the centre of the deadly violence that has rocked the Palestinian territories for more than a week.

The Israeli army vacated Joseph's Tomb, one of the hottest local points of the violence and which lies in an Israeli-controlled enclave of the Palestinian-ruled town of Nablus at dawn Saturday, handing control over to Palestinian police.

Israeli forces who had been patrolling the site were withdrawn, taking with them their equipment and religious artefacts, and the Palestinian

police moved in.

"The Israelis will not ever return to this place," said Naji, an official from the Palestinian National Security service, told AFP as Fatah gunmen fired automatic rifles in the air.

The army had described the pullout as a temporary measure, adding that the Palestinian Authority had committed itself to "respecting the integrity of the building and preventing the Palestinian population from entering."

But the approximately 100 Palestinian police at the scene stood by as a continuous stream of cars, many honking their horns, brought thousands of Palestinians from Nablus and nearby Arab towns poured into the site, now draped in Palestinian flags, located in the northern part of the city.

Eventually, the governor of Nablus, Mahmud Al-Aloul, arrived at the scene calling on the demonstrators to leave.

"It is an Islamic place and holy for us," he said. "Muslims built this place, so it belongs to us. Israel will not return to this place."

Six Palestinians and an Israeli border guard have been killed in fierce gunbattles and clashes at Joseph's tomb since the violence

was unleashed by a visit last Thursday by hawkish Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council adjourned a second late-night session early today

after again failing to agree on a resolution condemning Israeli "excessive use of force" against Palestinian civilians.

During nine hours of on-and-off consultations, diplomats said, the United States threatened to use its veto power to defeat a draft text.

The talks adjourned just after 2:00 a.m. (12:00 BST) and were scheduled to resume at 1:00 p.m. (23:00 BST).

US ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke told reporters he had requested the "brief additional delay" on the instructions of President Bill Clinton.

"There are still some problems with it (the draft resolution) from our point of view," Holbrooke said.

The draft resolution said the Council "condemns these acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force" but did not specifically cite the Israeli security forces in that context.



Palestinian protesters burn a US flag during a demonstration in Gaza City on Friday. Israeli police, who took over the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound after dispersing the remaining demonstrators who had been there since the morning, opened fire on the protesters. Ten Palestinians died in separate incidents in Jerusalem's Old City and some parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. --AFP photo

Lankan troops kill 35 rebels in fresh attacks

COLOMBO, Oct 7: Sri Lankan troops have killed at least 35 Tamil Tiger rebels in a counter attack in the northern peninsula of Jaffna, the government said here today, reports AFP.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) mounted the latest offensive at Nagarkovil, killing eight soldiers on Thursday, before troops retaliated, the government's Special Media Information Centre (SMIC) said.

"Monitored terrorist transmissions have confirmed that over 30 cadres have been killed from their Thursday's abortive attack at Nagarkovil," the SMIC said in a statement.

The SMIC said another five Tiger rebels and two more government soldiers were also killed in fighting on Friday.

Truck spills 10 tonnes of cyanide into Chinese river

BEIJING, Oct 7: A tributary of China's main waterway, the Yangtze river, was fouled with 10 tonnes of toxic sodium cyanide after a chemical truck plunged into the water, the Daily reported today, says Reuters.

The official newspaper said emergency measures prevented deaths from the toxic spill last week in the Han river at Danfeng county in the north-central province of Shaanxi.

The report gave no details on damage to fish and wildlife and did not say whether the chemical had reached the Yangtze.

The spill occurred when a truck carrying the sodium cyanide from Jinjiu Chemical Factory in the central province in Hubei to neighbouring Shaanxi overturned on September 29, it said.

The official Xinhua news agency reported on Tuesday that 5.2 tonnes of cyanide had spilled into the Wuguan River, which feeds the Han.

'US ready to drop N Korea from terrorism list'

SEOUL, Oct 7: North Korea said today the United States had expressed willingness to take the communist state off a list of nations supporting terrorism following a joint anti-terrorism statement, reports AFP.

The state news agency said the United States had "unreasonably" linked the North with terrorism but that the joint statement which was released in Washington on Friday would boost attempts to strengthen relations.

"In particular, the US side in the statement expressed its willingness to delist the DPRK (North Korea) as a 'state sponsor of terrorism', the leftover of the Cold War era," said the North's Korean Central News Agency.

US officials said the joint statement did not signify that the conditions had been met to be taken off the terrorism list.

The statement made clear however that when the Stalinist regime in Pyongyang "satisfactorily addresses" those requirements, the US government would work to remove its name from the

list. But KCNA added: "This proves that the US policy, whereby it has unreasonably linked the DPRK with terrorism, does not work any longer."

"This position will have a positive impact on terminating the confrontation between the DPRK and the US and building the bilateral relations in the 21st century."

The joint statement was released just ahead of a key visit by Jo Myong-Rok, who is considered the second most important figure in the North Korean regime.

He will be the most important North Korean official to visit Washington and will see President Bill Clinton and other top US officials.

In the joint statement, North Korea and the United States agreed that terrorism "poses an unacceptable threat to global security and peace."

North Korea concurred that "it was the responsibility of every UN member state to refrain from

organising, instigating, facilitating, financing, encouraging or tolerating terrorist activities," the statement said.

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said that although the declaration was a "step forward" it did not signify the conditions for being taken off the US terrorism list had been met.

Under US law, a country must prove there has been a "fundamental change" in its leadership and policies and it no longer supports international terrorism.

Inclusion on the terrorism list compels the US government to oppose requests from designated countries for loans from international lending organisations and bars US export-import credits.

US officials have made clear that deporting Japanese army members granted asylum in North Korea after a 1970s hijacking would be an important step toward removing Pyongyang from the list, which also includes Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Syria.

Bush, Gore intensify efforts to woo voters

WASHINGTON, Oct 7: With exactly one month to go before the November 7 US presidential elections, Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore are intensifying their efforts to woo undecided voters, particularly in the handful of toss-up states, reports AFP.

After their respective running mates, Dick Cheney and Joe Lieberman, went head to head in a televised debate late Thursday, Texas Governor Bush and Vice President Gore hit the campaign trail, pursuing key states in the Midwest and the South.

The scenario isn't likely to change in the coming weeks, either, with pit stops forecast in other regions, including California.

"We don't discuss our internal polling," said Karen Hughes, communications director for the Bush campaign. "But I think if you look at the places we're going at this point in the campaign, we're taking the governor where we think he has an opportunity to make an impact."

As the presidential campaign enters the home stretch, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, and Florida are emerging as the US crucial states for each candidate to woo in order to push the election in his direction, according to experts and polls.

The candidates must also make a strong push to win over the many undecided voters. A candidate needs a majority of 270 electoral votes from the 538-member electoral college in order to be elected commander in chief.

Al Gore maintains a comfortable lead in California, which represents a whopping 54 electoral votes, as well as in New York, which has 33 electoral votes.

If Gore carries Florida, his supporters predict that he will have the election in his pocket, as he is expected to claim more electoral votes than his rival.

Bush, on the other hand, can rely on his fiefdom, Texas, and its 32 electoral votes, as well as the states around the Rocky Mountains and in the Deep South, including Georgia.

Mexican plane crashes into homes: 6 killed

MEXICO CITY, Oct 7: An Aeromexico plane carrying 88 people skidded out of control as it was landing in heavy rain in northern Mexico, slamming into cars and through houses and killing at least six people in its path, including three young children, reports AP.

An airline spokeswoman, Alejandra Gonzalez, said the pilot was braking but the DC-91 plane did not stop on the wet runway in the border town of Reynosa. In an earlier statement, Aeromexico said the crew received approval to land from the control tower, but "the climatic conditions prevented the plane from braking."

The passengers and crew, who climbed out of the crumpled plane that laid to rest in a ditch, escaped with only scrapes and bruises.

"The people were crying and shaking," said Paul Ponce, director of emergency services for the Red Cross in Reynosa, who was at the scene.

At least 60 passengers and four crew were treated for minor injuries at hospitals in Reynosa, just across the border from McAllen, Texas, Red Cross officials said. All of the 83 passengers and five crew members aboard are Mexican citizens.

Aeromexico Flight 250 was landing in stormy weather shortly at 4:55 pm (0355 BST) when it smashed into at least two cars and three homes just beyond the runway, striking and killing a 39-year-old woman and her three children, ages 1, 3 and 5, in their home, Rigoberto Cruz Garcia, coordinator of operations for the Red Cross, told AP.



Six people died and 40 were injured on Friday as an Aeromexico airliner plane skidded off the runway in Reynosa, in storm-battered northeastern Mexico. The DC-9 plane, upon landing in heavy rain crashed into a shanty home that abuts on the runway, killing three children and three adults who lived there. --AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Russian FM visits Algeria: Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov left Moscow Saturday for a two-day visit to Algiers for meetings with his Algerian counterpart Abdelaziz Belkaid, Itar-Tass reported, AFP says from Moscow.

Their talks will be on bilateral relations and the Middle East situation. Ivanov will travel from Algiers to Cyprus, where he will meet Greek Cypriot President Glafos Clerides and foreign minister Yiannakis Cassoulides as well as the leader of Cyprus's powerful Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Chrysostomos.

US actor commits suicide: Veteran actor Richard Farnsworth, 80, whose performance in the movie "The Straight Story" earned him an Oscar nomination last year, has died -- apparently the victim of suicide, authorities said Saturday, AFP reports from Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Farnsworth, who lived in the town of Lincoln, some 400 km southeast of here, died late Friday, according to Lincoln County Sheriff Tom Sullivan. "Richard Farnsworth died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at his home in Lincoln, New Mexico," Sullivan said in a statement. According to media reports, he was suffering from cancer at the time of his death. At 79, Farnsworth was the oldest man ever to receive an Oscar nomination for best actor.

21 killed in Irian Jaya: Clashes between security forces and independence activists armed with bows and arrows in Indonesia's remote Irian Jaya province have escalated leaving at least 21 people dead, Indonesian media reported on Saturday, AP reports from Jakarta.

Hospital officials in the town of Wamena said two of the victims were young children who died in their houses when they were set on fire, the official Antara news agency reported. The report said at least 45 people had been injured in the clashes, many of them shot by police or hit by rebel arrows.

Argentine vice president resigns: Argentine Vice President Carlos Alvarez resigned on Friday in protest at the government's handling of a bribes for votes scandal but said he would not break the ruling Alliance coalition, Reuters reports from Buenos Aires.

"I am presenting my irrevocable resignation as vice president. I do so to be able to say freely what I think and at the same time not to cause trouble for the president," a story-fact Alvarez told a crowd of emotional supporters who roared his name in a packed Buenos Aires hotel. The popular 51-year-old politician heads the left-leaning Frente Popular, which is junior partner to President Fernando de la Rúa's centrist Radical Party in the 10-month old Alliance coalition government.

Paraguay, Cuba to restore ties: Paraguay and Cuba will reestablish full diplomatic relations starting October 20, following a 40-year split, spokesmen from Paraguay's foreign ministry said Friday, AFP reports from Asuncion.

At that time, 51-year-old diplomat Antonio Miguel Pardo Sanchez, now serving as Cuba's commercial attaché, will be installed as Cuban ambassador here. He presented his credentials to Foreign Minister Juan Esteban Aguero on Thursday in return, the government of Paraguay will convert its consular office in Havana into a full-fledged embassy. Paraguay and Cuba began consular relations in 1902 and established diplomatic ties in 1911, but their relations were suspended on December 5, 1960, almost two years after Castro's rise to power. The two nations renewed consular relations on August 1, 1996.