

Road accident in Egypt, at least 29 die

REUTERS, Cairo

Twenty-nine Egyptians died and 25 were injured when the bus they were travelling on crashed into a lorry on a desert highway outside Cairo on Wednesday, police sources said.

The bus, filled with workers returning from the Sinai resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, ran into a truck transporting gravel which was trying to perform a U-turn on the road, 62 km, east of the capital.

Egypt has one of the worst traffic accident rates in the world, due largely to speeding, reckless driving and bad road conditions.

Son kills mother in Jordan as "honour crime"

AFP, Amman

A teenage boy allegedly stabbed to death his divorced mother to punish her for "immoral" behaviour in what is seen as an "honour" killing, the Jordan Times said Wednesday. Police detained the 16-year-old boy for questioning in Monday's killing in the town of Zarqa, northeast of Amman, the newspaper said, quoting official sources.

The teenager told police he killed his mother "to defend his family's honour because she had a bad reputation," one official sourced told the newspaper.

The boy and his 37-year-old mother, who had been divorced for the past decade, were not named in the report.

An autopsy conducted on Tuesday showed that the woman was killed by 40 stab wounds to different parts of her body allegedly inflicted by her son, when she went to visit him and a younger daughter who live with relatives.

According to the Jordan Times, she was the 18th woman to be killed in the kingdom in 13 "honour crimes" since the beginning of the year.

In December 2001, the Jordanian cabinet modified the law on "honour crimes," which had stipulated that those accused of killing a female relative "caught in the act of adultery," or even in a situation deemed "immoral," could be exempted from heavy sentences, such as death.

Twelve dead in French Express train fire

REUTERS, Nancy

Twelve people died from smoke poisoning in a fire on the Paris-Vienna express train near the eastern French city of Nancy early Wednesday, local officials said.

The victims, apparently foreigners, were travelling in two German railways sleeper cars hit by the fire, which Nancy railway staff said they noticed as the train rumbled through on its way from Paris toward Strasbourg.

Nine people were injured in the fire, which occurred about 2:15 a.m. (0015 GMT) and appeared to have been caused by a short circuit in the heating system, staff added.

There were about 150 people on the train, which normally does not stop in Nancy. Railway staff who noticed the smoke had the power switched off, stopping the train about a half mile outside Nancy station.

Local police said six men, five women and a child died in the fire.

Nancy city officials opened a local gymnasium to receive the rest of the passengers from the train while they waited for other transport to continue on their way.

Netanyahu elected as Israel's new foreign minister

Launches bid to unseat Sharon



AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli parliament on Wednesday ratified the nomination of former premier Benjamin Netanyahu as foreign minister, replacing Shimon Peres, the Labour party dove who quit the national unity government last week with the rest of his party. Netanyahu's nomination, made by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, was passed by 61 votes for and 31 against, with five abstentions in the 120-member house.

Reuters adds, Mr Netanyahu wasted no time in launching a campaign to lead Israel with a get-tough policy toward the Palestinians.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called an early general election Tuesday after the centre-left Labour Party, including Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, quit his coalition in a row over funding for Jewish settlements on occupied land.

Settlements have often been targeted by Palestinian militants during the uprising for statehood. Wednesday a Hamas militant

sneaked into a settlement in the Gaza Strip and killed two settlers before a security guard shot him dead.

Netanyahu, 53, revealed his hawkish credentials on national television Tuesday in the run-up to a Likud Party vote which will decide whether he or Sharon, 74, leads the party list in a general election expected on January 28.

By taking up the foreign portfolio in Sharon's minority government, Netanyahu returns to a political stage he largely abandoned after Labour's Ehud Barak ousted him as prime minister in a 1999 election.

Palestinian officials and European Union diplomats voiced concern that Sharon's decision to hold elections nine months ahead of schedule would stir more turmoil in the Middle East at a time when Washington is threatening war with Iraq.

"This puts off any serious peace effort before the elections...Israeli political infighting, both between the parties and within each of the parties, will make progress impossible for now," the EU diplomat said.

A parliamentary committee was to set the election date on Wednesday -- with January 28 the likeliest choice.

Avi Pazner, a Sharon adviser, said the political transition would not distract authorities from ensuring security. "We are a democracy and we will know how to run a democratic election campaign and to defend ourselves," he told Reuters.

Before the nationwide vote, Israel's two main parties -- Sharon's right-wing Likud and Labour -- will hold leadership elections. Netanyahu said he would challenge Sharon for the Likud leadership in a party primary expected within a month.

Netanyahu seeks to counter Sharon's appeal to voters with a tougher platform on the Palestinians and proposed economic changes to rouse the economy out of recession.

In any case, polls Wednesday showed Likud would become Israel's largest party in the vote, buoyed by a shift to the right in Israel in response to Palestinian suicide bombings.

Germany to cut defence budget despite pressure

AFP, Berlin

Germany plans to cut its defence budget for 2003, the daily Bild reported Wednesday, despite repeated calls from NATO and the United States for Berlin to beef up its military.

Bild cited government sources saying that the cash-strapped German government planned to trim 140 million euros from the planned 24.4 billion euro budget for next year as part of Finance Minister Hans Eichel's austerity plan.

Based on planned expenses for 2003, this will still leave Defence Minister Peter Struck with a budget deficit of 570 million euros, up from the 430 million euros originally forecast.

A defence ministry spokeswoman called the report "specula-

tion" and noted that the final budgetary allocations would not be hashed out until a series of meetings this week.

The news comes amid continued calls from the US government and NATO chief George Robertson in the run-up to this month's NATO summit in Prague for European countries, and Germany in particular, to pull more of their weight in the military alliance.

But Germany is also facing a squeeze due to its obligation within the 12-nation euro zone to keep its public deficit below three percent.

Eichel has been forced to admit that the deficit will be well above three percent this year and says Germany will have to struggle to bring its budgetary house in order by next year or face sanctions.

At least 17 killed in Luxembourg plane crash

AFP, Luxembourg

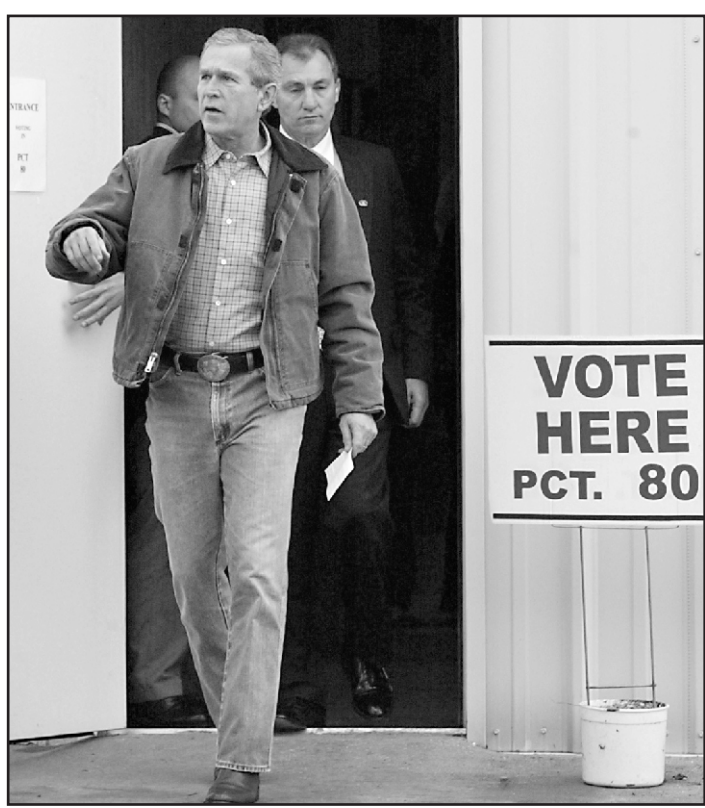
At least 17 people died when a Luxair Fokker plane with 22 aboard crashed while approaching Luxembourg airport in heavy fog on Wednesday, officials said.

Some of the survivors, including the pilot, remained in critical condition after the turboprop crashed on the edge of a field as it approached on a flight from Berlin.

Most of the passengers were German businessmen, said a spokesman for the Luxembourg transport ministry.

Emergency workers tried to treat those injured, and to extract the pilot from the cockpit, after the accident. No one was injured on the ground.

There were 19 passengers and three crew aboard the plane, which crashed at 10:15 a.m. (0915 GMT), said Luxembourg government spokesman Guy Schuller. He added that the fog appeared to have contributed to the cause of the crash.



US President George W. Bush walks back to his motorcade after voting at the Crawford Fire Department Wednesday in Crawford, Texas.

Musharraf allegedly trying to delay parliament

AFP, Islamabad

Fears mounted among opposition parties Tuesday that President Pervez Musharraf would delay the convening of Pakistan's new parliament, after Islamists and secularists joined forces against him.

The government had announced that it would summon the national assembly on Friday, to set in process a partial transfer of power from Musharraf's military regime to the first civilian government in three years.

Under controversial constitutional changes by the army chief-turned-president, the parliament would be under the thumb of Musharraf and other military chiefs who would be empowered through a planned National Security Council, to dissolve it.

However the parliament's inauguration has not been officially notified in the government gazette, and no member-elect has received official notification or invitation. Members-elect are normally given around four days' prior notification.

"We have not yet issued notification for the November 8 session and we are waiting for government instructions," an official at the national assembly secretariat told AFP.

The Islamists' candidate for prime minister, Maulana Fazlur

Rehman, told reporters the session would not go ahead.

"The session is not being held because we have neither received any invitation nor has it been notified by the government," Rehman said.

Deposed premier Nawaz Sharif's party expressed alarm at the lack of notification, which is normally given at least four days before parliament sits. Tehmina Daultana, a member-elect from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) said, "The country's going through a very critical situation and it's at a standstill. Everybody's waiting for the session to be convened and the government to be formed."

The PML-N is a key member of the opposition Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy, which struck a deal with the Islamic party alliance Monday to back a joint candidate to lead the future government and curtail Musharraf's powers.

ARD chief Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan said any delay would be "aimed at prolonging the military rule."

"This drama is being manoeuvred because...Musharraf cannot get parliamentary endorsement of changes he has made in the constitution."

Blow to Kennedy clan in US governors races

AFP, Washington

Kathleen Kennedy Townsend's hopes of bringing her famous political name to the Maryland governor's mansion failed early Wednesday in a major upset for the Democratic party.

In spite of the defeat, however, Democrats seemed poised to erase the Republicans' 27-21 advantage in state governorships after scoring key gains in large states such as Pennsylvania, Illinois and Michigan. Townsend lost to Robert Ehrlich, a Republican US representative who fought hard to appeal to moderate voters in the mostly Democratic state.

With 99 percent of the vote reported early Wednesday, Ehrlich had 52 percent to 48 percent for Townsend.

Townsend, Maryland's current

lieutenant governor, is the daughter of Robert F. Kennedy, the assassinated former US senator and attorney general, and a niece of assassinated President John F. Kennedy.

Many observers thought Townsend had run a poor campaign, including alienating black voters with her choice of a white former Republican as running mate.

Townsend's loss contrasted with a win for America's other big political dynasty in Florida, where Republican Governor Jeb Bush easily bested Democrat Bill McBride.

The younger brother of US President George W. Bush and son of former president George Bush benefited from intense campaigning by his family after being targeted by Democrats for defeat.

Crusading "Terminator" will be back

AFP, Los Angeles

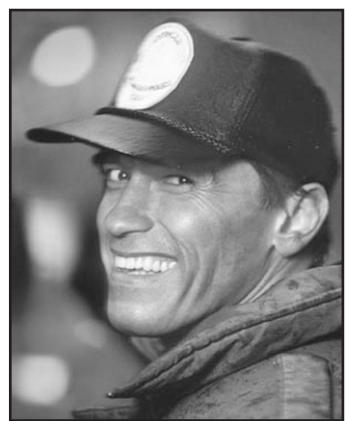
"Terminator" movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger has scored his first political victory when a scheme he championed to keep children off the streets was adopted by California voters.

Initial results from Tuesday's vote showed the Austrian-born actor's local proposition had won the blessing of 55 percent of the state's voters against 45 percent opposed to the 455-million-dollar-a-year after-school care scheme.

"Its time for action," the muscle-bound actor, former professional

bodybuilder and Republican party activist said after voters endorsed his cause.

"I'm the action hero in the mov-



ies and I want to be in real life. I want to create action for the children rather than talk from here to eternity about these things."

Schwarzenegger, who promoted the measure with a wealth of advertisements and public appearances, said the project would slash juvenile crime, gang violence, teenage pregnancy and keep youths out of jail.

But when asked if he intended to use his first successful foray into politics as a springboard towards a bid to run for governor of California in 2006, the "Terminator" would only say that he wanted to focus on his program.

There have been persistent rumours in Hollywood that he intends to follow in the steps of another film actor, Ronald Reagan, and become governor of the state.

N Korea sees 1994 pact 'hanging by a thread'

REUTERS, Seoul

A senior North Korean official told former US Ambassador to Seoul Donald Gregg that Pyongyang saw its landmark 1994 nuclear pact with the United States as "hanging by a thread" but not null and void.

Gregg told reporters Wednesday that during his private trip to Pyongyang he asked North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Sokju what the status of the 1994 Agreed Framework was in the wake of the North's admission it was running a nuclear program.

"Kang's response was it is hanging by a thread," Gregg said at a news conference in Seoul.

Gregg said he took Kang's remarks to mean that Pyongyang "still supported" the agreement, under which it froze a suspected nuclear arms program in exchange for fuel and safer atomic reactors funded and built by Washington and its allies.

Kang was one of the senior North Korean officials who admitted to a visiting U.S. official on October 4 that Pyongyang had a covert arms program in violation of the Agreed Framework that has been the corner-

stone of U.S.-North Korean ties.

Gregg said that in more than nine hours of talks with senior communist officials during his November 2-5 stay in Pyongyang, his hosts made it clear that "they truly fear a U.S. attack" in the wake of tough rhetoric from Washington.

The North Koreans were coy about details of the highly enriched uranium program for weapons that was disclosed last month, specifically on when they started the scheme and whether they actually had nuclear bombs, Gregg said.

"The North Korean said they adopted an NCND -- neither confirm nor deny -- policy toward the highly enriched uranium issue, although some comments that we heard were very close to admission that they had such a program under way," he said.

Gregg said the North Koreans repeatedly referred to their October 25 statement demanding that the United States sign a non-aggression treaty and guarantee the sovereignty of the North in order to resolve the dispute.

UN expert paints contrasting picture of Asian cities

AFP, Singapore

Beyond the gleaming skyscrapers and pricey residential areas, many Asian cities are "sick" because of poor governance, violence and pollution, a UN advisor on urban development said Wednesday.

Anwar Fazal, senior regional advisor of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kuala Lumpur, painted a contrasting picture of Asian cities ranging from urban blight to towering office buildings and posh residential enclaves.

"The Asian urban landscape is one of immense contrast -- of ostentatious plenty and abject poverty, of great beauty and terrible ugliness, of vast opportunity and yet rampant oppression," he said in a paper presented at a conference on urbanisation here.

On the one hand, Asia is host to the world's tallest office building -- the Petronas Towers in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur --

and some of the priciest addresses for expatriates in Tokyo and Hong Kong.

But the region is also home to 13 cities with the worst air pollution and legions of the world's urban poor, he said.

Many cities in Asia are seeing a "horrifying explosion" of people due to a population boom, while experiencing a "deafening implosion" manifested in urban violence.

The pressure of urban living has also led to the breaking up of families and indigenous values, he said, adding governments are focussing more resources on defence at the expense of basic infrastructure like clean water, sanitation and nutrition.

"We see the mindless proliferation of armaments of all kinds. We see them side by side with problems requiring, but not getting, the simple technologies that will give clean water, adequate nutrition, basic literacy," he said.

Voters thumb down the Hollywood 'divorce'

AFP, Los Angeles

US voters shot down Hollywood's bid to declare independence from Los Angeles, thwarting the Tinseltown divorce of the century and the break-up of the United States' second largest city. Early referendum results showed that residents the city were overwhelmingly opposed to the movie capital of the world's attempt to secede from the already balkanized metropolis.

Unofficial results from the measure that was voted Tuesday on the fringes of the US mid-term Congressional polls indicated that 67 percent of Hollywood residents opposed the move, against just 33 percent in favour.

Those who live in the rest of Los Angeles were even more categoric: 74 percent were against granting Hollywood a divorce, while just 26 percent were in favour.

To win its independence, the prospective city needed the support of a majority of their own residents as well as a majority of voters in the rest of the city.

And just over the hills behind the famous H-O-L-L-Y-W-O-O-D sign, an identical secession gambit by the San Fernando Valley met a similar fate with voters rejecting the move

out of hand.

Los Angeles Mayor Jim Hahn, who has fought fiercely against the break-up of the city, cautiously claimed victory over the secession movement which waged a fiery campaign for freedom.

"We are very happy tonight that we were able to keep the city together," he said, pledging however that the city would become more responsive to the needs of disgruntled residents of Hollywood and the Valley.

"I think everybody would have been very sad if the city of Los Angeles had broken apart," he added.

But even as opponents of the ultimate Tinseltown split celebrated, secessionists were not prepared to concede defeat.

"You can't put down the spirit of Hollywood," said Hollywood secession leader Gene La Pietra. "We are confident that before the night is over Hollywood will be an independent city."

"We haven't discussed defeat around here," he said as thousands of his supporters whooped in up at an enormous party, adding that more results were needed to determine the final outcome of the poll.