

Independent body to monitor Thai polls

BANGKOK, Nov 28 : Thai Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun is to set up an independent, non-government watchdog group to monitor general elections expected no later than April next year, the government-run Thai News Agency (TNA) reported Wednesday, reports AFP.

Anand said his administration was going to monitor the election closely to ensure it would be free and fair.

The government will give private organisations a major role in controlling and scrutinizing the election to ensure fairness, Anand said.

Anand said it was not certain whether an interior ministry proposal to set up an "official watchdog" group would be acceptable, so an independent monitoring group made up totally of non-gov-

ernment personnel would be formed.

Anand, who last week sided with academics, politicians and pro-democracy students in expressing dismay over alleged undemocratic clauses in the draft constitution, said the Cabinet had on Tuesday "accepted in principle" a new election law submitted by the interior ministry.

Anand, who was appointed by the military, said the election law will be further scrutinised by the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) next week.

The National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC), the name of the ruling junta, appointed General Issarapong Noopakdi, the fourth ranking member of the NPKC, as interior minister after seizing power in a bloodless coup in February.

VP Singh, Ajit part ways Janata Dal splits

NEW DELHI, Nov 28 : A powerful chapter of India's second largest opposition party has split, preparing the ground for a similar parting of ways at the national level, newspapers reported today, reports AFP.

The centrist Janata Dal's (People's Party) Uttar Pradesh state unit split Wednesday into two groups, one swearing allegiance to former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh and the other dissident leader Ajit Singh, the reports said.

The break came after Janata Dal President SR Bommai, a VP Singh supporter, expelled Ajit Singh protégé Kallash Nath Yadav for alleged "anti-party activities". The Times of India and other newspapers said.

Supporters of Yadav — a legislator in Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous state — immediately rallied behind him, bringing into the open nearly five months of factional fighting.

Both VP Singh, who was



Prime Minister for 11 months until November 1990, and Ajit Singh belong to Uttar Pradesh, and the development there would end in a nationwide split in the Janata Dal, news reports and party sources said.

"It is the beginning of the end," a party source said here today. "There is no way this (split) can remain confined to Uttar Pradesh. You will see the fallout everywhere."

The Janata Dal, formed in 1988, has 59 members in the

Federal Parliament and 91 in Uttar Pradesh.

It was not clear how many supporters were with each faction in Uttar Pradesh, but under Indian law a minimum of one third of lawmakers can split a party without them being disqualified from membership of the State Assembly.

The US-educated Ajit Singh, son of former Prime Minister Charan Singh, blasted Bommai's decision to expel Yadav. "Mr. VP Singh called the Janata Dal a silly experiment. Mr. Bommai has reduced it to a farce," he said late Wednesday.

Newspapers said Ajit Singh's supporters were to meet here Thursday, and that their gathering could turn out to be a trial of strength in the Janata Dal.

The Janata Dal fared poorly in the November 16 by-elections, winning only three of 15 seats on offer, all of them in the eastern state of Bihar which it governs.

UN to probe east Timor allegations

MADRID, Spain, Nov 28 : UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar said Wednesday he planned to send a mission to East Timor to investigate the killing of an undetermined number of East Timorese by Indonesian troops this month, reports AP.

The deaths occurred Nov. 12 during a memorial rally in Dili, capital of the disputed territory.

"I have the necessary facilities from the Indonesian government (and) would like to send a totally independent and impartial mission to present me with a report for the bene-

fit of the international community on what happened in East Timor," Perez de Cuellar told reporters.

The Indonesian government says its troops killed 19 people and injured 91 others and blamed the violence on instigators among the demonstrators.

But witnesses, including five foreign journalists, say the soldiers killed between 50 and 100 people when they opened fire on a defenceless crowd.

Indonesian annexed East Timor in 1976, one year after invading what was then still a Portuguese colony. Portugal had planned to grant independence to East Timor.

The United Nations recognises Portugal as the administrative power over the south-west Asian island north of Australia.

Massive crackdown on PPP activists : 580 held

ISLAMABAD, Nov 28 : Police have launched a massive crackdown against leaders and workers of the opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and arrested 580 PPP activists since Tuesday night local press reported today, reports Xinhua.

Local daily, The News said, during the crackdown carried out throughout the southern province of Sindh, a known political base of the PPP, more than 100 PPP leaders and workers were arrested in that district alone.

It said the massive crack-

down resulted in the arrest of over 400 others in Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Sukkur, Nawabshah, Dadu and many other places in the province.

The crackdown came after a statement by Sindh Chief Minister Jam Sadiq Ali that the Al-Zulfikar organisation, an alleged terrorist group, and the PPP were one and the same. He said that he was going to take stern actions.

The crackdown on the PPP came under severe fire. PPP C-Chairperson and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto

said in a statement issued in Karachi Wednesday that by arresting a large number of PPP workers, the Sindh's Jam government had violated the basic human rights of the people.

The opposition leader in the National Assembly further said the arrests were an offence against the democracy and the people of Pakistan, which could not break the will of the workers and their commitment to democracy.

She accused the present government of harassing and victimizing the PPP workers and leaders.

BRIEFLY

22 militants killed in Kashmir : Twenty-two Muslim separatists were killed in Jammu and Kashmir state as Indian troops stepped up campaigns against militants in three states, Indian news agencies said on Wednesday, reports Reuter from New Delhi.

The United News of India, quoting official sources, said 20 militants died in fighting with Indian security forces in an undisclosed region bordering Pakistan while two more were killed elsewhere in the state.

Indian troops were also reported to be intensifying campaigns in Punjab and Assam states.

Two journalists held in Assam : The Indian army has arrested two journalists in the northeastern state of Assam where insurgents are campaigning for independence, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said Wednesday, reports AFP from New Delhi.

Manjit Mahanta, a reporter with the Assamese-language daily Ajit Asom and Rajib Bora a Sub-Editor with the English-language newspaper The Sentinel, were accused of links with the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), PTI said.

The Indian government has deployed the army to combat ULFA, which is spearheading a drive for the creation of an independent Assam.

Six killed in clash in Togo : Six people were killed and around 50 injured on Wednesday in fighting between opponents and supporters of Togo's new transitional government, the government's Health Minister David Ihou said, reports AFP from Togo.

Earlier national radio had given the toll as three dead and 41 wounded.

The Health Minister made his statement at the airport, where he had arrived to brief interim Prime Minister Joseph Kokou Koffigoh on his return from Paris.

Attack on Samphan shocks China : China expressed dismay Thursday about an angry mob's attack in Cambodia on Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan, and urged Cambodians to focus on reconstruction after nearly 13 years of war, reports AP from Beijing.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin told a weekly news conference that China was "shocked to learn of the violent incident."

He said the attack had impeded the peace process and infringed upon the interests of the Cambodian people.

On Wednesday, a mob of people burst into villa in Phnom Penh and beat Khieu Samphan, who had just returned from exile to the Cambodian capital to join reconciliation efforts. Authorities evacuated him to Bangkok.

Panamanian police kills wife, daughters : A Panamanian police sergeant shot and killed six people, including his wife and two of his daughters, before committing suicide at their home in a slum near here, officials said Wednesday, reports AFP from Panama City.

Luis Antonio MacLeod, 45, killed his victims with 58 shots from an M-16 automatic rifle in their home 11 kilometers (seven miles) northeast of the capital, according to Deputy Attorney General Carlos Herrera. The daughters were aged two and seven.

US withdraws N-weapons from S Korea : The United States has begun to withdraw its tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea and will soon inform North Korea of its move, officials were quoted as saying today, reports AFP from Seoul.

Yonhap News Agency quoted them as saying that North Korea's announcement Monday that it was willing to accept outside inspection of its facilities had prompted Washington and Seoul to advance the schedule for removing US weapons deployed here.

The report, which could not be immediately confirmed, said Seoul and Washington had agreed to pull out U tactical weapons from South Korea by the end of the year and to declare that the South was free of weapons during US President George Bush's visit slated for January 5-7.

Armenia, Azerbaijan resume talks : The Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan have agreed to resume talks to end their bloody ethnic conflict, in what was seen as a diplomatic triumph for Soviet President Mikhail S Gorbachev, says AP from Moscow.

"There is a common understanding that halting this 4-year-old conflict between two nations is possible only through constructive political dialogue," Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov told reporters after talks Wednesday.

Mutalibov said he and Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrossian agreed to resume direct talks.

In an interview on Soviet television, Ter-Petrossian said they would arrange a meeting of delegations within a week, and begin personal talks before the end of the year.



PHNOM PENH : Cambodian army armoured personnel carrier sits parked in the gate of the Khmer Rouge villa after the army was called out to rescue Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan after enraged Cambodians stormed his residence in the capital Wednesday, hurling stones and tearing the building apart to get him. — AFP UNB photo

It's a ploy to block peace: PLO US rejects Israeli plea to put off ME talks

WASHINGTON, Nov 28 : The United States Wednesday rejected an Israeli request to unilaterally postpone the next round of Israeli-Arab bilateral talks in Washington from December 4 to December 9, but left the door open to a negotiated solution on the issue, reports AFP.

Earlier in the day, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's office said in an official statement that Israel would attend the Washington talks if the United States agreed that the negotiations start on December 9.

"It would be inappropriate for us to unilaterally change that date," State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said.

But she added, "we do not care if the parties themselves want to change the date and all the parties agreed."

The PLO Wednesday charged that attempts by Israel to delay the scheduled meeting of bilateral talks in Washington were aimed at blocking the Middle East peace process.

Spokesman Amad Abder Rahman was referring to reports from Israel that it accepted a US invitation to attend bilateral talks in Washington on condition they take place December 9 instead of the scheduled date of December 4.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation is keen on seeing the peace process resume without obstacles, Abder Rahman said.

He urged the co-sponsors of the Middle East peace conference, the United States and the Soviet Union, to denounce what he said were Israeli attempts to block the peace process.

"Peace is not only of concern to the Arabs but it is also Israel's concern," Abder Rahman stressed.

He added that the PLO wanted the bilateral talks to deal in depth with the problems... otherwise it will be a waste of time.

Abder Rahman said that Palestinian negotiators have a mandate to discuss in depth the issues which will be on the agenda. He did not elaborate.

The PLO is not directly in-

involved in the peace conference but it has maintained close consultations with the Palestinian team, which participates in the peace conference as part of a joint delegation with Jordan.

Earlier in Jerusalem, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said his country will attend the bilateral talks in Washington and an official source said the government had proposed the negotiations be delayed to December 9.

Syria and the Palestinians have agreed to resume bilateral peace talks with Israel December 4 in Washington, the State Department announced Wednesday.

Law knows no religion

NEW DELHI, Nov 28 : A Muslim petitioner was jailed by India's Supreme Court after he asked the Muslim judge hearing his case why he did not favour members of his community, courts officials said yesterday, reports Reuter.

Mohammed Zahir Khan was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for contempt of court by Justice A M Ahmadi and Justice K Ramaswami on Tuesday, the officials said.

Khan was dissatisfied by a judgement given by the two and turned to Ahmadi, a Muslim, and said: "If

Law knows no religion

Muslims are not going to help Muslims, then what is the point?"

"Such behaviour and utterances cannot be tolerated as they undermine the dignity of this court as well as the atmosphere in which the court functions," the judge said in an order passed almost immediately.

Khan was taken away by police officers to begin his sentence. Under Indian Law, he has no right to appeal.

India's 850 million people are mostly Hindus but at least 12 per cent of the population is Muslim. The country follows secular policies in government and law.

Bombing on in key Croat cities

ZAGREB, Nov 28 : Serb-dominated forces bombarded key Croatian cities as the United Nations paved the way for the peacekeeping mission sought by all sides in the Yugoslav conflict, reports AP.

Shelling was reported Wednesday in Osijek and Vinkovci — two strategic cities in eastern Croatia — but a UN-brokered cease-fire appeared to be holding elsewhere in the separatist republic.

Zagreb radio said 16 people died in attacks by Serbian irregulars and the Serb-dominated federal forces on Osijek. Artillery also was fired on nearby Vinkovci and on the town of Podravska Slatina, 75 miles (120 kilometers) west of Osijek.

Delhi rules out talks with Assam rebels

NEW DELHI, Nov 28 : The Indian government will not hold talks with separatist guerrillas in the north eastern state of Assam until they surrendered unconditionally, a senior minister told Parliament today, reports AFP.

Home Minister S B Chavan said there was to truth in published reports that New Delhi was contemplating peace negotiations with the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

"There is no question of any talks as long as the army operation is there," he said. "Unless they surrender unconditionally and surrender arms, there is no question of any talks."

The Indian army launched a crackdown on the ULFA, which seeks to secede oil-rich tea-rich Assam, in September after the group seized about a dozen hostages and killed two of them.

The ULFA, under pressure following the arrest of more than 1,700 of its members and some leaders, has in recent weeks reportedly sent feelers for peace talks with New Delhi.

Khmers to respect peace treaty

BANGKOK, Nov 28 : The Khmer Rouge, Cambodia's largest guerrilla group, says it remains committed to a UN brokered peace treaty despite the attack by an angry mob that bloodied a Khmer Rouge leader and sent him fleeing from Phnom Penh, reports AP.

"Cambodians of all bents should not quarrel and fight against one another," Khmer Rouge Radio said in its account of the Wednesday attack. "All Cambodians should unite and forget the past which is caused not Cambodians."

Khieu Samphan, president of the Khmer Rouge, was beaten by screaming protesters who broke into his villa just hours after he returned from exile in Thailand to participate in a reconciliation government.

Phnom Penh authorities evacuated him to Bangkok before the mob lynched him. Khieu Samphan was one of leaders of the Khmer Rouge when the group ruled Cambodia in the 1970s and killed hundreds of thousands of Cambodians in labor camps and execution chambers.

The Thai government said Thursday it was considering a request by Prince Norodom Sihanouk that it host a meeting of Cambodia's Supreme National Council, along with the foreign ministers of France and Indonesia.

Sihanouk heads the council, a reconciliation body made up of the leaders of Cambodia's three guerrilla groups and the Phnom Penh government.

There were frequent bursts of laughter during the debates, the loudest coming when Munyoro said he understood the queen's husband, Prince Phillip, had been offered an aphrodisiac during a tour of Harare's market.

Off the Record

Washington after Gaddafi's head

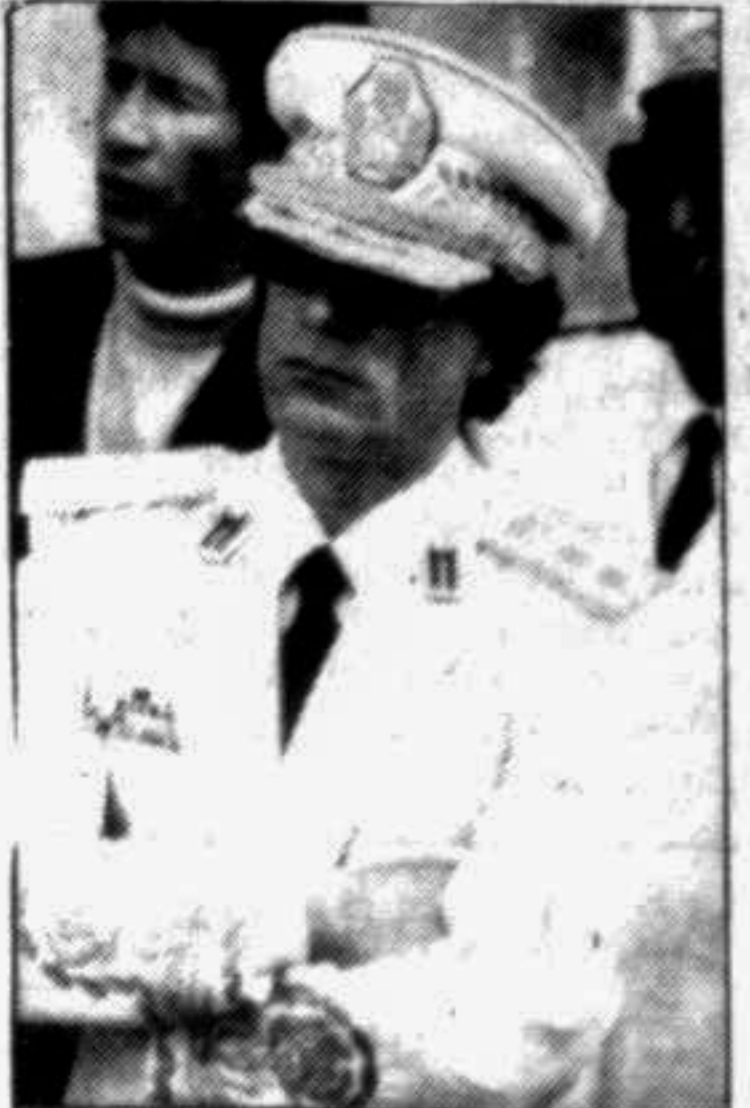
BEIRUT : Libyan Prime Minister Abu Zaid Omar Dourid said on Wednesday Washington is after Muammar Gaddafi's head, reports Reuter.

Dourida, on a Middle East tour to canvass support in Libya latest row with the West over charges it supports terrorism, said Washington still wanted the Libyan leader after failing to kill him when US planes bombed Tripoli in 1986.

The prime target of the United States is Colonel Gaddafi in person and as a regime because he never accepted to bow to its threats and pressures, Dourida told a news conference in Beirut.

He delivered a letter from Gaddafi to President Elias Hrawi about a threat of military action by the United States and Britain, which blame Libya for the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland.

"The Lockerbie issue is only a pretext. The Americans don't want anyone in this nation to say 'no'. American announces to the world the birth of a new order but it seems it means that the world has to obey its orders," Dourida said.



'Noriega greeted drug kingpins with open arms'

MIAMI : A helicopter pilot who says he smuggled fleeing drug kingpins into Panama following the assassination of Colombia's anti-drug justice minister took the stand Wednesday in Manuel Noriega's trial, reports AP.

But the testimony by prosecution witness Nelson Bermudez appeared to undercut government charges that the Panamanian leader welcomed the Medellín cartel leaders with open arms.

Bermudez said he flew cartel chiefs Gustavo Gaviria and Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha from Colombia to isolated landing spots outside Panama City, the same sites he used for clandestine cocaine flights.

Asked by the defense why he "sneaked" into Panama with the cartel leaders, Bermudez said "that is what they agreed — no one should go through the airport."

Prosecutors and previous witnesses have contended the cartel had paid Noriega almost \$10 million for protection in Panama. Other witnesses testified some cartel leaders arrived openly at Panama's international airport, where they were greeted and whisked past customs by top Panamanian military officials working for Noriega.

The flights to Panama occurred in May just after the April 30, 1984, assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in Colombia, Bermudez testified. The Colombian government blamed the cartel for the killing and cracked down on its operations.

Bermudez also appeared to contradict Carlos Lehder's testimony that the cartel had arranged with Noriega to fly drugs directly into Panama City's two major airports. The defense asked why the cartel didn't have Bermudez fly into the airports with his own drug shipments.

Beautiful but short

HARRE : Britains Queen Elizabeth II is "a beautiful woman" but shorter than expected, according to parliamentarians discussing her visit to Zimbabwe last month, reports AFP.

"She is just a beautiful woman. Beauty knows no colour. A man who does not enjoy beauty is not a man at all," said member of Parliament Gibson Munyoro, speaking Tuesday on a motion of appreciation of her visit during the Commonwealth heads of government meeting.

But Micha Bhebe, who said he saw the queen during her first visit here 44 years ago when she was a young Princess, said: "to my surprise, I saw a woman a bit shorter. She seemed to have grown down."

There were frequent bursts of laughter during the debates, the loudest coming when Munyoro said he understood the queen's husband, Prince Phillip, had been offered an aphrodisiac during a tour of Harare's market.



Mummified head found

MELBOURNE, (Australia) : A mummified head and hand found hidden in the home of an Australian world war one veteran may be a souvenir from the battlefield, police said Thursday, reports Reuter.

The head and hand were found when officers from the charity group the Salvation Army inspected a house bequeathed to them by a veteran of the Gallipoli battle in Turkey.

Apparently there was always talk in the family that he had brought home a mummy after the war, detective John Morrish told reporters. He told them it was bad luck if you destroyed it or got rid of it.

The Melbourne city coroner will try to identify the remains, which were hidden in a tin trunk under the house.

Khmer Rouge leaders flee Phnom Penh: peace uncertain

PHNOM, PENH, Nov 28 : Khmer Rouge leaders fled Phnom Penh on Wednesday after an attack by an angry crowd demanding retribution which could raise questions about the future of UN-sponsored Cambodian peace accords signed last month in France, reports Reuter.

Khmer Rouge chief Khieu Samphan spent only seven hours in Phnom Penh before being hustled battered and bloodied on to a flight back to Thailand with his Defence Minister Son Sen.

The Phnom Penh government had pledged in Paris to protect the two Khmer Rouge representatives on a reconciliation body, the Supreme National Council (SNC), when they returned to the capital. It later said it would be difficult to guarantee their safety.

The government of Prime Minister Hun Sen issued a statement regretting that it had been unable to stop the protest. It said it remained

committed to the Paris peace accords.

It was Khieu Samphan's first return to the Cambodian capital since 1979, when the Khmer Rouge regime was overthrown by invading Vietnamese troops which installed the current government. Son Sen had returned 10 days earlier.

On his drive from the airport, Khieu Samphan's motorcade was halted by thousands of student demonstrators.

Soon after he arrived at his central city residence, it was surrounded by large crowds screaming for retribution for family members who died during the Khmer Rouge's three-and-a-half year revolution which lost more than a million lives.

Hundreds of people stormed and sacked the villa, forcing Khieu Samphan and Son Sen to take refuge together in a wardrobe in an upstairs room. Attackers pounded the doors with axes

and wooden staves and strung a wire noose from a ceiling fan.

AFP from Beijing adds: Chinese Media did not report today the mob attack a day earlier in Phnom Penh on Khieu Samphan, leader of the Beijing-backed Cambodian faction the Khmer Rouge.

The government here also had not reacted by mid-morning.

A crowd of more than 10,000 people attacked the Khmer Rouge leader's house and tried to lynch him within hours of his arrival in Phnom Penh from Bangkok. Cambodian troops rescued him and took him to the airport in an armoured personnel carrier, from where he was flown back to the Thai capital.

Beijing's silence reflects the embarrassment of the Chinese government, the main supporter of the Khmer Rouge in their 13-year civil war against the Vietnam-backed Phnom Penh government.