

Protests end: PM will be elected

# Thai govt bows to opposition

BANGKOK, May 11: Tens of thousands of protesters ended a week of anti-government demonstrations in Thailand today after ruling parties promised to amend the constitution to make the next Prime Minister an elected member of parliament, reports Reuters.

A last protest involving upto 40,000 people dispersed minutes before a 0500 AM (220 GMT) deadline agreed upon by security forces and opposition leaders.

"We will continue harder, tougher, better" if the amendment deal collapses," said Chamlong Srimuang, a former governor of Bangkok whose six-day hunger strike spurred the largest demonstrations in Thailand since the 1970s. He

ended his fast on Saturday. Crowds of 100,000 in recent days had called for the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon who stepped down a supreme military commander to become Prime Minister last month despite not holding a parliamentary seat.

All of the demonstrations were peaceful.

Opposition sources said Chamlong, known as Clean in a political system noted for corruption, was the last holdout against compromise among the politicians, social activists and student leaders who had sponsored the demonstrations.

Officials said the ruling constitution so that Prime Minister must be chosen from

among elected members of parliament.

The current constitution contains no such restriction. It was adopted last year by a military-named legislature following a February, 1991 Suchinda-engineered coup that overthrew the last democratically elected government of Thailand.

Air Chief Marshal Kaset Rojananil, who succeeded Suchinda as head of the armed forces said the timing of any amendment to the constitution would depend on parliament.

Kaset said Suchinda would accept any constitutional amendment but it was unclear if the general would view such an amendment as retroactive and step down.

"This [the amendment] should be implemented with one or two weeks, otherwise the protests will begin again," Major-General Sanan Kajornasat, a leader of the Democrat Party, told the crowd this morning.

Chamlong told the protesters, some of whom shouted their opposition to compromise, that a follow-up rally would be staged on May 17, till we meet again," he said.

The atmosphere at the demonstration was tense throughout Sunday, as security forces were reinforced at razor-wire barricades.

The barricades were removed minutes after the demonstrators dispersed.

## BRIEFLY

**US, Bahrain begin jt maneuvers:** US and Bahraini forces are carrying out joint maneuvers in Bahrain, a Bahraini military spokesman disclosed in Manama Sunday, reports AFP.

He said the exercises had begun on Saturday but provided no details on the numbers of participants.

The maneuvers are the first to be officially announced since the conclusion of a defence cooperation agreement between the United States and Bahrain last October.

US forces have also staged several maneuvers with Kuwaiti troops under a similar accord signed in September.

**Tamils kill 8 soldiers:** Eight Sinhalese soldiers were killed when Tamil Tiger rebels attempted to penetrate an army camp in northern Sri Lanka Monday, the military said, AP reports from Colombo.

The rebels fired heavy machine guns and rocket propelled grenades on the forward defence lines of the Elephant Pass camp, the Joint Operations Command in Colombo said.

Troops retaliated with automatic weapons and mortars during the 45-minute confrontation, it said. Three soldiers were also wounded in the fighting.

A number of rebels were believed killed, but the military said casualties could not be confirmed immediately.

**2 Ramos men shot dead:** Two armed followers of presidential candidate Fidel Ramos were shot dead by police in his own province before national polls opened today, the official Philippine News Agency (PNA) said, AFP reports from Manila.

The killings were the first reported on election day, and brought to 68 the total deaths since the campaign began in February.

Police were checking out reports of armed men terrorising voters in Urdaneta town in Pangasinan province after midnight Sunday when they encountered a group of Ramos followers, who opened fire with automatic weapons, PNA said.

Two of the attackers were killed and two wounded after the police fired back, it reported.

**Iran, Iraq resume POW exchange:** Iran and Iraq on Sunday resumed an exchange of prisoners captured during their 1980-1988 war, Iranian television reported, says AFP from Tehran.

It said prisoners were exchanged under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) at Khosravi in western Iran but did not specify how many.

The report added that the bodies of several Iranian and Iraqi soldiers killed in the conflict were also repatriated.

The ICRC on April 30 announced that Iran and Iraq, having failed to resume their POW exchange in mid-March, had agreed to try again in May.

**Fire claims 19 in Taiwan:** At least nineteen people were killed Monday when a fire raced through a bowling alley in the Taipei suburb of Chungho, police reported, says AP from Taiwan.

Police said 18 bodies, some on chairs, were found in the third floor bowling alley, which operates 24 hours a day. Another body was found on the staircase to the rooftop.

Firemen blamed the high casualty toll on the building's wrap in metal without windows. That gave trapped people little chance to escape.

**DPRK allowed to visit US base:** North Korea demanded yesterday that US and South Korean authorities agree to allow inspection of US bases in the South at the same time as Pyongyang opens its own nuclear facilities to outside scrutiny, reports Reuters from Tokyo.

The call came in a Foreign Ministry Statement issued as Hans Blix, Director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, was due to arrive in Pyongyang for a visit.

South Korean press reports have said that during his May 11-17 trip, Blix was to inspect the Yongbyon facility north of Pyongyang where western governments allege the North Koreans are covertly developing a nuclear bomb.

**11 miners found dead:** Grtmy rescue workers pressed on Monday with their search for miners buried 1,000 feet (300 meters) underground in an explosion. Eleven miners have been found dead and hope for the remaining 15 was all but gone, AP reports from Plymouth.

The bodies were found Sunday, more than 30 hours after a blast ripped through the Westray mine about 75 miles (120 kilometers) northeast of Halifax, hurling twisted steel from the shaft and rattling windows a half mile (a kilometer) away.

"Based on preliminary reports from the main rescue crews, it appears these men died instantly as the result of an explosion," said Colin Bennet, a spokesman for Oustragh Resources, the mine's owner.

"I think we've seen the first real pains of this thing—and it's going to go on for quite awhile yet," said Bruce Stephen, whose brother-in-law was caught in the blast.

**Heavy fighting in Sarajevo:** Heavy fighting and shelling in Sarajevo killed at least four people on Monday as Serb forces tightened the noose around this embattled city of 600,000 that once stood as a symbol of ethnic harmony, AP reports from Sarajevo.

Belgrade's Independent Borba daily accused Serbian militiamen of 'systematically murdering Sarajevo' by indiscriminately shelling the city day and night.

It said Serbian authorities were forcing all Serbs in Serb-held parts of the city to join the militia and terrorize Muslim and Croat neighbors.

More than 1,300 people have died in 45 days' of ethnic warfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina since its Muslims and Croats almost two-thirds of the 4.3 million inhabitants, voted for the state's independence February 29, Serbs, about one-third of the population, fiercely oppose any separation from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia.

**Armenians, Azeris reach truce:** Armenians and Azeris reached a ceasefire on Sunday in Nakhichevan, a secondary flashpoint between the two former Soviet states, an Azeri leader was reported as saying, Reuters reports from Moscow.

Gaidar Altyev, chairman of Nakhichevan's parliament, was quoted by the Turkish Anatolia news agency as saying all was quiet in the Azeri enclave wedged between Armenia, Iran and Turkey.

Reported clashes in Nakhichevan have been a side-show in the conflict over Nagorny-Karabakh, a disputed region populated mainly by ethnic Armenians but ruled by Azerbaijan. Fighting continued in Nagorny-Karabakh on Sunday over the key strategic centre of Shusha. Armenia said the fortress town was in Armenian hands, Azerbaijan said it was still disputed.

**Storm claims 38 in China:** A steamboat traveling on a river in China's southern province of Anhui sand during a storm, killing 38 people, an official newspaper reported Monday, AP says from Beijing.

The Liberation Daily (Jiefang Ribao) said the vessel was travelling upstream on Luoxi river on May 5 when the storm hit in mid-afternoon. Three people were rescued, the newspaper said.

It said the boat belonged to the city of Anqing, in Anhui province.

**Jail clash kills 30 in Peru:** Thirty people were killed and 20 were seriously injured in Saturday's police raid to retake a prison cellblock held by inmates belonging to the shining path guerrilla army, the government said Sunday, AFP reports from Lima.

Twenty-eight of those killed were prisoners — 22 men and six women — and the other two were policemen, the government said.

The Interior Ministry said the uprising ended Saturday when police stormed the cell-block and the estimated 450 inmates surrendered.

The trouble began Wednesday after police tried to transfer 183 female inmates to another prison as part of President Alberto Fujimori's crackdown on shining path.



Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao (L) hands over a torch on Sunday to his ruling party Congress (I) supporters prior to their departure for Sriperumpudur where Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated May 21, 1991. — AFP/UNB photo.

# Truce extended in Afghanistan

KABUL, May 11: Rival guerrilla groups have extended a cease-fire, possibly for another 10 days, officials have said, reports AP.

But fighters on both sides made preparations for more combat.

Also Sunday, the new Islamic government announced that there would be no new national laws or a constitution until a permanent government was in place. That could take as long as two years.

A decree by interim President Sibghatullah Mojaddidi read on state-run television said Islamic law, or Sharia, would be used to judge all criminals.

Meanwhile, life was slowly returning to normal in the battered Afghan capital. School

re-opened over the weekend, and supplies of electricity and water were almost normal. Food prices plummeted to their lowest point in months.

Flour fell to one-sixth of its price over the winter, to about 10 cents a pound, or 80 Afghanis. Tomatoes, which were an unaffordable luxury two months ago, are now about 15 cents a pound, or 75 Afghanis.

Children were out playing in large numbers for the first time since last month's collapse of the Soviet-installed government. Groups of dozens of young boys cavorted through a park in the center of the capital. One band organized a soccer game on a dead-end street.

During the past two weeks,

fighters loyal to renegade Muslim fundamentalist leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar had clashed with forces led by guerrilla leader turned defense minister Ahmed Shah Masood. The battles left scores dead and hundreds wounded in the capital.

Deputy Foreign Minister Hamid Karzai said forces loyal to the interim government and troops backing Hekmatyar have reached a 'broad understanding about the cease-fire.'

One government source said the truce that was due to expire Monday was extended for another 10 days, but Karzai said he could not confirm that report.

Karzai said in an interview that talks were continuing between Hekmatyar's represen-

tatives and the government over his demands that the Dostum militia, comprised of northern Afghans, leave the capital.

The Dostum militia provided the backbone for the rebels to overrun the capital and force the communist government to surrender power last month.

Without Dostum, military experts believe Hekmatyar's and Nasood's forces would be equal.

Few officials, however, were optimistic that a lasting agreement could be reached. On the southern outskirts of the city, near Hekmatyar's lines, government troops were reinforcing their positions with tanks and Soviet-made Katyusha rockets.

# Coalition govt in Tajikistan soon

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, May 11: Muslim leaders and the x-communist president of Tajikistan agreed early Monday to form a coalition government, but differences remained over its composition, reports AP.

A radical group had refused to negotiate after security troops fired on unarmed demonstrators on Sunday, killing at least six.

The agreement gave new hope for a resolution of the power struggle between President Rakhman Nabyev and the increasingly powerful pro-Islam opposition in Tajikistan, a country of 5.1 million bordering China and Afghanistan.

Blood was still smeared on the tree-lined streets where the attack occurred, but the city was quiet Monday morning and protesters had returned to their tent city in front of the president's palace.

According to the deputy chairman of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, Rakhim Musulmanyom, the two sides agreed to create a new government to include members of the opposition.

Agreement had been jeopardized after the shootings Sunday when the Islamic Revival Party refused to attend the talks. But Musulmanyom

said the party relented overnight and endorsed the agreement.

The shooting Sunday occurred as talks were being held on forming the new government. The main sticking point had been Nabyev's role in the government.

Nabyev, an old-style Communist who rose to prominence under former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, had taken refuge in the former KGB building which now

houses the Tajik security forces during talks on the future of his government.

Tanks and armored personnel carriers roared through the streets and two Soviet-made military helicopters circled overhead after the incident, witnesses said.

Shouting "God is Great!" the crowd advanced to within 100 meters (about 300 feet) of Nabyev's refuge and elite interior ministry troops.

Troops fired into the air to disperse the crowd. But Tajik security guardsmen on the roof of the building were seen firing rounds from Kalashnikov assault rifles into the crowd, a European journalist said. Many people fell to the ground, he said.

Opposition leaders immediately appealed for help after the incident to the governments of Iran and Afghanistan, the commonwealth television news program Itogi reported.

Opposition leaders agreed last week to share power with the government and to accept Vice President Akbar Mirzayev as head of a transitional government.

Nabyev's opponents have demanded greater religious freedom and multiparty elections since he came to power as president after the August 1991 Soviet coup

# 253 more freed in Yangon

BANGKOK, May 11: Burma's military government keen to improve its image abroad, freed 253 prisoners on Sunday, official Radio Yangon reported, says Reuters.

They were apparently convicts who had acted as porters to carry military supplies for troops fighting Karen ethnic rebels in eastern Yangon.

Diplomats said the government, which seized power after crushing a pro-democracy uprising in 1988, was trying to improve its international standing by freeing political prisoners and others.

The Junta has said it will release all jailed dissidents not deemed a threat to national security, but Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, is still under house arrest.

The Radio Yangon broadcast, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said prisoners "who have worked hand-in-hand with the members of the defence services" were released from Insein jail.

The government said on Friday it had freed 221 convicts who served as porters in the army campaign against the Karen. It earlier commuted the sentences of 259 porter prisoners.

# Lebanese govt's resignation accepted

BEIRUT, May 11: President Elias Hrawi on Sunday officially accepted the government's resignation, which was tendered last week amid the country's worst economic crisis in 48 years of independence, reports AP.

The president asked Prime Minister Omar Karami's 30-man Cabinet stay on as caretakers until a new government is formed, a spokesman for the presidential palace said.

The statement was released after Hrawi's return from two days of talks with Syrian President Hafez Assad on ways to avert a power vacuum.

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# Gorbachev still committed to socialism

ATLANTA, May 11: Ex-president Mikhail Gorbachev said on Sunday night that soldiers and intellectuals want unity among the former Soviet republics despite serious question on the future of the Commonwealth of Independent States, reports Reuters.

Declaring himself still "committed to the socialist ideal," the former Soviet leader said his top priority is "continuation of democratic reform in all of our republics" and added their woes can only be solved with "political and economic freedom."

"I think in some way they (the republics) will always be together and they will find a new form of co-operation. They will be together," Gorbachev told a news conference before a private meeting with former US president Jimmy Carter.

Speaking through a translator,

Gorbachev said there is no question that Russia and other former Soviet republics seek to become separate states.

But if you listen to the people who are actually working in all of those republics — in the economy, culture, artists, scientists, the military — they all would like to preserve our country as a vast world to itself as it was for centuries.

"I am sure the day will come when the politicians too, will understand that," he added.

His comments came as the Russian news agency Tass reported that senior officials from only six of the 11 CIS states were represented at a meeting on Sunday to lay the groundwork for next Friday's crucial Commonwealth summit at which member states will seek to resolve economic disputes di-

viding them.

Gorbachev, on his first US tour since resigning as Soviet president last December, did not answer a question from a television reporter based in Atlanta who asked if he saw a future political role for himself.

But he told another questioner he had "not abandoned our role in public affairs" and "I am sure many great deeds can be done not only in government positions but in other roles as well."

A major goal of the tour with his wife Raisa is to seek support for his Moscow think tank and its new affiliate the Gorbachev Foundation/USA, which aims at greater co-operation among nations in building a post-cold war world order.

Gorbachev said prospects are "very

good" for joint work with institutions set up by ex-presidents Carter and Ronald Reagan, various academic institutions and the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations.

He said he had been in touch 'continuously' with Carter, who lost the White House to Regan in 1980 but later created a new role for himself as a globe-trotting 'elder statesman.'

Gorbachev dismissed as "simplistic" a US reporter's suggestion that he and Carter had "both left office due to lack of popularity."

Gorbachev and his wife on Sunday night also attended a reception with some 300 business and corporate leaders sponsored by Emory University where the former Soviet leader is due to give the commencement speech and get an honorary doctorate on Monday morning.

## Off the Record

In exchange of one had to pay 100

LONDON: A former American soldier who "borrowed" a bicycle while stationed in England during World War Two then found it has been stolen before he could return it, has repaid his debt 100-fold, reports Reuters.

Ex-GI Roger Johnson donated 100 bicycles to children living in four villages in Northamptonshire, where his regiment was based.

"For almost 50 years I have regretted taking that bike. It is only now that I have come up with a plan that will ease my conscience to some extent," said Johnson, quoted in Sunday's Observer newspaper.

'She could have danced all night' dead

NEW YORK: Singer Sylvia Syms, whose 1956 record of 'I could have danced all night' sold over a million copies, collapsed and died on stage early Sunday during an encore. She was 73, reports AFP.

Syms was in the middle of a song that she dedicated to Broadway (composer Cy Coleman who was in the audience when she "put her hand on a table and collapsed," said her publicist Keith Sherman).

The cause of death was not known but she had complained about her allergies several times on Saturday, he said.

Crooner Frank Sinatra has dubbed her the "world's greatest saloon singer." She was to perform at the Algonquin hotel through May in a show titled "Sylvia Syms sings Sinatra," a tribute to the singer whom she first met nearly 50 years ago.

15 films compete to snatch gold prize

FRANCE: Tokyo International Film Festival Director Yasuyoshi Tokuma said Sunday he hoped to see representatives from Vietnam, Cambodia and North Korea at the event's fifth edition next September, reports AFP.

The festival, now held annually, is inaugurating a film market in response to requests from other countries in Asia where the film industry is growing, he said.

Participants at the festival, sited in the Shibuya area of Tokyo, would come from Europe, the United States, and "as far away as Africa."

The initial prediction of 40 sales companies attending the market had been revised upwards, with more than 60 companies already confirmed, he said.

An international selection of 15 films will compete for prizes, the gold prize carrying a cash grant of 20 million yen (148,000 dollars).

Details of entries to the competition and the names of jury members would be announced by the end of next month, he said.

Great effort to cure malignant tumor

SHANGHAI: Shanghai, China's most populous city, has made great efforts to set up health network for prevention and cure of malignant tumors, reports Xinhua.

According to information from the sixth working conference on prevention and cure of malignant tumors, Shanghai has had the highest number of incidences of cancer. Each year, about 17,000 people are diagnosed as cancer sufferers.

To address this alarming problem, the annual funds the municipal government has allocated for prevention and cure of cancers in the recent years were more than ten times that in the early 1980s. Meanwhile, the municipal government has decided to convene a specialized conference on cancer every year.

Besides, the department of public health under the municipal government has drawn up a plan to increase the five-year surviving rate of the cancer patients in the city from the present 20 per cent to 30 per cent in next 15 years.

# Massive crackdown on foreign workers in Taiwan

TAIPEI May 11: Taiwan launched a massive crackdown on illegal foreign workers and their employers as new employment laws took effect today, officials said, reports AFP.

The crackdown followed a 10-day grace period during which some 3,000 illegal alien workers had turned themselves into the police, the officials with the Cabinet-Level

Council of Labour Affairs (COLA) said.

But the officials added the number was far short of the 30,000 to 40,000 illegal foreign workers on the island as estimated by the national police administration.

The workers who turned themselves in were mainly from the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Brunei. They are allowed to stay until July 15 before repatriation, and can apply to work here through legal channels in the future.

Under the new employment laws, illegal foreign workers face deportation and a fine of up to 1200 US dollars and their employers can be jailed for a maximum three years of fined 12,000 US dollars.

In a four-month grace period ending March 31 of last year, some 22,600 illegal foreign workers turned themselves in and were sent back home. Another 10,000 arrested by police before the enactment of the new laws.

Taiwan, facing an acute labour shortage, last year allowed construction and some labour-intensive industries to hire workers from abroad.

North Korea to repatriate remains of 30 US servicemen

SEOUL, May 11: North Korea will repatriate what it said were the remains of 30 US servicemen killed in action during the Korean war, the US-led-United Nations Command (UNC) announced here today, reports AFP.

Some 15 sets of remains will be repatriated at the border truce village of Panmunjom on Wednesday, the UNC said, adding the rest will be returned at a time to be announced later.

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20 hurt as students clash in Nepal

KATHMANDU, May 11: More than 20 students and 20 policemen were injured in the clash between two rival student groups in downtown Kathmandu yesterday, according to local press reports, says Xinhua.

The clash between the All Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNFSU) and the Nepal Students Union (NSU) started at Amrit science campus and expanded to Trichandra campus when an ANNSU procession was passing through it.

Various weapons, such as knives, iron rods, bricks and sticks, were used

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