

BJP prepared for mid-term polls over Babri Mosque issue

NEW DELHI, Oct 7: Indian's main opposition party said on Tuesday it was ready for a mid-term election over the issue of a 16th century mosque which the Hindu majority say its built on the birthplace of their God Lord Rama, reports Reuter.

K R Malkai, spokesman of the rightwing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said the party was prepared for what would amount to a referendum on the issue.

AFP adds: Indian security forces shot dead five tribal militants in the far-eastern state of Tripura, two days after the rebels gunned down four policemen, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today.

Four security personnel and six guerrillas of the All Tripura Tribal Forces (ATTF) were also injured in the gunbattle in which five died overnight Tuesday the frontier state's Khowai region, the news agency said.

The fighting erupted when ATTF militants armed with home-made guns ambushed members of the Tripura State Rifles (TSR), a police unit. Police recovered four guns and some ammunition after the battle.

The ATTF, a small group seeking the secession of Tripura, had killed four policemen on Sunday.

PTI from Chandigarh says: Five militants were among six people killed while a tragedy was averted with timely detection of a bomb on a railway line in Punjab since last night.

Police sources here said a possible train tragedy was averted when a police party detected a time bomb on the Jalandhar-Pathankot railway line near village Allahbakhsh in Hoshiarpur district last night.

We can see all sorts of skeletons coming out of the JPC (Joint Parliamentary Committee) probe. All these things will favour us in a mid-term, he said.

UN Council votes to probe war crimes in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 7: The Security Council has voted unanimously to investigate war crimes in Bosnia, hoping the threat of Nuremberg-style trials will persuade Serbs, Muslims and Croats to end atrocities, reports AP.

The council resolution passed Tuesday sets up a commission to look into reports of massacres, 'ethnic cleansing' and other crimes against civilians or military personnel in all former Yugoslav republics.

Former Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki of Poland, the UN Human Rights Commission's special envoy, is to travel to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and other areas beginning Monday and report back to the commission.

Lawrence Eagleburger, the acting Secretary of State, said Tuesday night that he hoped the resolution would be 'a warning to those in Yugoslavia who have been committing

acts, that they had better watch out from now on because there will be people watching.'

Despite the unity on the issue of war crimes, the Security Council continues to struggle over whether to declare a 'no-fly' zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina, effectively barring Bosnian Serb warplanes.

In a bid to head off a ban, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic offered Tuesday to ground his warplanes if troops loyal to the Muslim-led Sarajevo government refrain from attacks.

Eagleburger, a former US ambassador to Yugoslavia, said he did not put much credence in the offer, especially considering its conditionality.

The 'no-fly zone' issue has gained steam since the weekend, when President Bush overruled reluctant US military commanders and promised that Washington would provide warplanes for enforcement, as it is doing to protect Shiite rebels from attack in southern Iraq.

Another report adds: The United States is concerned about killing of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina and is pressing allies to enforce a ban on military flights there, Eagleburger says.

'We are very sensitive to the Muslim world's view that the West is permitting killing of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina while acting differently in Iraq,' where no-fly zones have been declared, Eagleburger said Tuesday.

A 'no-fly' zone would halt Serbian or Bosnian Serbian air attacks against UN humanitarian flights in the war-torn former Yugoslav republic. Bosnia has no combat planes.

Eagleburger said the United States wants to show the Muslim world its concern about the slaughter of Bosnian Muslim victims of Serbian so-called 'ethnic cleansing,' the policy of forcibly relocating the Muslims from regions claimed by Serbs.

Myanmar frees 52 political prisoners

YANGON, Oct 7: Altogether 52 political prisoners serving their sentences have been released in Myanmar since September 30, according to official reports here, reports Xinhua.

Up to October 6, a total of 586 political prisoners, have been released since April 24 this year. When the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) issued the Declaration No 11/1992 stating that, of persons arrested and detained politically, those for whom there are no reasons to endanger the security of the state, will be released.

Among those released were former Prime Minister U Nu and some leaders of former political parties.

The declaration followed the change in the leadership of SLORC on April 23 when General Than Shwe took the posts of the SLORC chairman, commander-in-chief of the defence services and the prime minister.

Off the Record



GAINESVILLE, Florida: Democratic Presidential Candidate Bill Clinton (2nd L) talks with Vice Presidential running mate Al Gore (L) on Tuesday as the pair jogged near the University of Florida. —AFP/UNB photo

This is unforgivable!

TOKYO: Female employees at major Tokyo brokerage chose an unusual way to protest after some male co-workers spied on them while they were bathing during a recent company outing, reports AP.

Instead of stock prices, workers at Yamachi Securities Co found their computer screens carrying an angry message from the women, a Yamachi official said Wednesday.

'Dear colleagues at all the branches: ... Ten (male employees) stood with their faces pressed against the window, naked, and peeped inside when we female employees were taking a bath. This is unforgivable, the official at Yamachi, the nation's fourth-largest brokerage, quoted the message as saying.

The case was typical of the behaviour many Japanese women face in this male-dominated society. Shots of men bursting in on all-female communal baths are a staple of low-brow Japanese television.

The unusual protest, reported in the national newspaper Asahi, reflects a growing awareness of sexual harassment and a willingness among female workers to fight back against sexual advances and other demeaning treatment.

Farewell to Marx-Engels

BUDAPEST: About 400 left-wing sympathizers bid farewell Tuesday to a huge statue of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the fathers of Marxist philosophy, and protested plans to remove it this week, reports AP.

'When the statues are all gone, will people be next?' read one banner in the crowd.

'All over Europe there are statues of Marx and streets named after him. Why does this have to go?' asked Pal Szalai, a writer and social democrat.

The massive granite statue by Gyorgy Segesdi depicts Marx and Engels standing together. It was erected in 1971, beside the former Communist Party Central Committee building, now home to offices of Hungary's democratically elected parliament.

Malkani was speaking after newspaper reports said Prime Minister Narasimha Rao was pondering calling mid-term elections if some BJP-led Hindu groups persisted with demands that the Muslim shrine in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh state, be demolished.

Rao's government has completed just over one fifth of its five-year term.

While the temple issue would remain the BJP's key objective in future campaigns, the party had gathered enough ammunition to attack Rao on other fronts, mainly over the Bombay Bourse scandal, Malkai added.

— UNB photo



Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev (L) talks with journalists in front of his office building in Moscow on Tuesday. The Russian constitution court, discussing currently the legality of President Yeltsin's ban of the Communist Party, has banned Gorbachev to leave Russia wanting him to testify in that case. — UNB photo

Gorbachev fails to testify

MOSCOW, Oct 7: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev failed to appear today before Russia's constitutional court, which is conducting hearings on the banned Communist party, the court president reported, said AFP.

Valeky Zorkin said he had been informed of Gorbachev's decision in a telephone call from a "representative" of the former party general secretary, who since may has refused to attend the sessions on grounds that the court procedure is aimed at discrediting him.

Gorbachev had been summoned to testify on Wednesday and has been banned by Russian authorities from leaving the country.

'His reasons (for not honouring the summons) remain the same,' Zorkin said, adding that the court would examine Gorbachev's refusal after in the day.

Gorbachev on Tuesday said he would be prepared to meet informally with members of the court but reiterated his refusal to testify.

Parliament rejects Suchinda's decree

BANGKOK, Oct 7: Parliament on Wednesday unanimously rejected a decree by ousted Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon granting amnesty to himself and soldiers who killed pro-democracy demonstrators in May, reports AP.

But legal experts were divided over the effect of the vote in the House of Representatives, during which 11 of the 360 lawmakers were absent.

Some say it means those involved in the May demonstrations — both protesters and security forces — could face arrest. For the new pro-democracy coalition of Prime

Minister Chuan Leekpai, that could pose the potentially explosive task of punishing former top government and military officials.

Other experts says Parliament's vote would have no effect on the amnesty already granted.

The decision rests with the Constitution Tribunal.

Suchinda, a former army chief, issued the decree on May 23 just before resigning as prime minister. The decree absolves everyone involved in the May 17-20 massive street rallies, during which top officers ordered troops to shoot demonstrators opposing Suchinda and military inter-

ference in politics. More than 40 people were killed and a large number remain missing.

After Suchinda resigned, the interim government of Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun organize the September 3 election in which the parties that backed the demonstrators in May narrowly defeated the pro-military parties.

Many Thais opposed the amnesty, saying the soldiers must be brought to justice for murder. Some relatives of demonstrators who were killed have said they plan lawsuits against Suchinda and top security and military officers. On Tuesday, members of the

Student Federation of Thailand held up banners and laid a black wreath in front of Suchinda's residence to dramatize their opposition to the decree.

In Wednesday's Parliament session, even members of parties that had backed Suchinda in May did not vote in support of the decree.

Sutham Saengprathum of the ruling coalition's Palang Dharma Party noted that some people have said the May events should be forgotten.

How can the people whose relatives were killed or injured forget the May events? he asked.

BRIEFLY

Communists blast Ramos: A left-wing church group Wednesday accused President Fidel Ramos of escalating a war against Communist rebels and described peace overtures during his first 100 days in office as public relations posturing, AP reports from Manila.

But the mainstream national press, marking Ramos 100th day Thursday, largely applauded his performance since he took over from his patron, Corazon Aquino, on June 30.

Ramos, a former military chief of staff and defence secretary, organizations a crime, released a few prominent rebels, and offered peace talks.

The Ecumenical Forum for Church Response, however, said the moves were not really aimed at ending the rebels 23-year insurgency.

US concerned at UNITA decision: The United States voiced concern Tuesday over the decision by Angolan rebels to suspend participation in a new national army to protest election results, AFP reports from Washington.

'We see this as an unfortunate step, said State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher in response to Monday's action by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which is contesting election results that show the government leading.

UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi has charged fraud in the legislative and presidential elections last week which give Marxist Peoples' Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA) a clear lead.

Election supervisors have suspended releasing vote totals to investigate the charges.

Fire in London hospital: About 120 patients and 20 staff were evacuated when fire swept through one wing of a London hospital early Wednesday, London fire brigade reported, AP says from London.

Some local residents were also evacuated from their homes to a school for several hours because of the danger. The fire brigade said in a statement that about 85 per cent of the three-storey wing at St George's Hospital at Tooting, southwest London, was alight at the height of the blaze, which started about 2.30 am (0130 GMT).

The evacuated patients were taken to another part of the hospital unaffected by the fire. No one was reported injured.

Oslo expels Russian diplomat: An Oslo-based Russian diplomat has been declared persona non grata and asked to leave Norway as soon as possible, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Tuesday, AFP reports from Oslo.

He said the Russian Ambassador, Anatoly Tishchenko, was summoned to the ministry early Tuesday and told why third secretary Viktor Fedik was being expelled.

The spokesman, however, refused to give more details on the expulsion.

But the head of Norwegian Domestic Intelligence, Jan Grofndahl, said Fedik was an officer of the GRU, Russia's military intelligence, who tried to recruit Norwegians for information on foreigners studying in Norway.

Bomb blasts in London: A small bomb hidden in a litter bin in a side street in central London exploded early Wednesday morning and the ambulance service said a woman passer-by suffered slight back injuries and was taken to hospital, AP reports from London.

Two men suffering from shock were also hospitalized, the ambulance service said in a statement.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the blast, which police said occurred at 1.45 am (0045 GMT).

Scotland Yard said in a statement that its anti-terrorist branch were investigating.

Opposition wins Kuwaiti polls

KUWAIT, Oct 7: Government critics woke up to something of a shock Tuesday—a landslide victory in Kuwait's first parliamentary elections in seven years, reports AP.

Seven loosely allied opposition groups and independent candidates captured 35 of the 50 Parliament seats. Most of the 15 solid seats for the government came from the ruling al-Sabah family's traditional supporters in tribal areas.

But it was unclear how much power the opposition will be allowed to wield.

The Parliament is expected to be called into session within two weeks.

There was no immediate reaction from the government of the al-Sabah princes, who were barred from voting.

Insert 'and women with all men are by nature free and equal'

DES MOINES, Iowa, Oct 7: The fight over an Equal Rights Amendment for women is on again in Iowa, reigniting flames smoldering for a decade, reports AP.

Dusting off sharp language not heard in years, opponents accuse each other of 'witchcraft' and waging 'war on women.'

They're enlisting people like feminist Eleanor Smeal, and conservative phyllis Schlafly, whose Eagle Forum group is helping bankroll the anti-ERA cause. The two women are to face off in a televised debate later this month.

While the question for voters on November 3 is whether Iowa becomes the 17th state to adopt an Equal Rights Amendment, shadowing the campaign is the chance to revive the failed 10-year campaign to write one into the US Constitution.

Backers of the referendum say they learned their lessons, while opponents promise an unprecedented grass-roots effort to kill the measure and bury it.

Marlene Elwell of the Iowa Committee to Stop ERA, on Tuesday evoked fears driving her side. 'The issue isn't even Iowa,' she said. 'It's part of a national agenda. The media has not presented a balanced argument, it's been biased, and we have to counter that.'

The battle is so fierce, it's sending some Republican politicians running for cover.

Gov Terry Branstad won't disclose his position, nor will US Sen. Charles Grassley. Grassley's Democratic opponent, state Sen. Jean Lloyd-Jones, favours the measure and Chides Grassley for not taking a stand though he, accepted a donation from the Stop ERA Political Action Committee.

The polls may explain their reticence. Surveys show nearly 70 per cent of the public favours the Iowa measure.

It asks voters to make a simple change in the Iowa Constitution's declaration of rights, inserting "and women" with "all men are by nature free and equal."

For emphasis, it would add: 'Neither the state nor any of its political subdivisions shall, on the basis of gender, deny or restrict the equality of rights under the law.'

The campaign has been debated from the pulpit and the campaign trail. As in the past, proponents argue the amendment's impact would be limited, mainly bolstering women's efforts to receive equal pay and opportunity in the workplace, and guarantee access to colleges and athletics.

In the national debate of the past, opponents warned an ERA would permit homosexual marriages and unisex public toilets and force women into military service.

Today's critics in Iowa charge it would broaden access to abortion and bolster gay rights. Most damning to date,

ANC calls off tomorrow's march

JOHANNESBURG, Oct 7: The African National Congress on Wednesday called off its march on the Bophuthatswana black homeland but said it intended to protest there in the future, reports AP.

The march, planned for Friday, and another at an undetermined date on the KwaZulu homeland had increased political tension in South Africa.

President FW de Klerk said Tuesday the government would halt planned marches by the ANC that could cause violence. He also criticized the ANC as 'arrogant' and accused it of reneging on a pledge to reconsider its protest campaign aimed at forcing political changes.

Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu leaders had said they would resist the ANC marchers.



TOKYO: North and South American beauties pose for photographers during the photo session of the Miss International beauty pageant '92 at a hotel in Tokyo on Tuesday. The pageant will be held on October 18 in Nagasaki, western Japan. L-R upper: Colombian Lina Marin Diaz, Bolivian Ana Mercado and Mexican Maria Lopez. L-R bottom: Venezuelan Maria Rodriguez Noguera, US Sandra Allen and Puerto Rican Dayanara Torres. —AFP/UNB photo

129 bandits killed in Sindh

ISLAMABAD, Oct 7: Some 129 bandits have been killed and another 335 arrested during an ongoing anti-crime army operation in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, a federal minister said today, reports AFP.

Interior Minister Shujaat Husain told the National Assembly that the operation helped curb incidents of kidnapping, robbery and murder which had been rampant before the troops were deployed in June for six months.

But, he said, the government had taken no decision as yet on whether to withdraw the troops.