

Greek-Cypriot election: None gets necessary majority

NICOSIA, Feb 8: President George Vassiliou beat challenger Glafcos Clerides on Sunday in the first round of a Greek-Cypriot election on this divided island but the contest is to go run-off next week, reports AFP.

The vote was seen as a strong show of support for a UN plan to build a federated Cyprus with the Turkish-Cypriots.

Vassiliou won 44.2 per cent of the vote, ahead of Clerides with 36.7 per cent, and Paschalides with 18.6 per cent, according to officials' results from the Interior Ministry.

With no candidate gaining the necessary majority, a run-off will be staged next Sunday between Vassiliou and Clerides, who both support the plan for a federated Cyprus.

The Interior Ministry said 94 per cent of voters turned out at the polls. Voting is mandatory in Cyprus.

OIC plans fact-finding mission to Kashmir Indian forces on alert along line of control

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: Indian security forces have been put on alert along the line of control dividing Pakistan — and Indian-controlled Kashmir after two soldiers died in an ambush by Muslim guerrillas, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported yesterday, says AFP.

A general alert was sounded on the 790-kms (493-mile) line of control after the rebel attack in Poonch district Saturday, the news agency said.

The two soldiers were killed when Muslim militants fighting to secede Kashmir from India fired rockets at an army camp in Balmoti village. The Indians hit back, killing one guerrilla and capturing another.

Security forces have launched a massive operation to capture the other guerrillas

who escaped, officials in Poonch said.

It was the second rocket attack by militants on the army in 20 days. Last month, the guerrillas targeted an ammunition depot near the small frontier town of Medhar, but the rockets missed the dump.

India and Pakistan dispute ownership of Kashmir and have twice gone to war over the Muslim-majority province.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training the separatist guerrillas in Indian-controlled Kashmir. Islamabad denies the accusation, but supports the Muslim campaign, calling it a legitimate struggle for self-determination.

Meanwhile, a Quetta report says: The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) is planning a fact-finding mission to Kashmir to investigate al-

leged human rights violations, Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shaharyar Mohammad Khan said yesterday.

He quoted OIC Secretary General Hamid Al-Ghabid as telling Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Siddique Kanju during a meeting Saturday that the mission would ask New Delhi to travel to the Indian side of the divided state.

Ghabid is in Quetta to observe a two-day ministerial meeting of the economic co-operation organisation, which groups Pakistan and nine other central Asian nations.

Kanju told Ghabid that the OIC mission could tour the Pakistan-controlled northern part of Kashmir "at any time" to hear accounts of "rapes, massacre and arson" allegedly carried out by Indian security forces, Khan said.

Rao pledges to rebuild Babri Mosque

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao said today he was committed to rebuilding the destroyed Babri Mosque in Ayodhya and continuing economic reforms, reports AFP.

The demolished structure will be rebuilt, the 71-year-old Premier told a call on a British Broadcasting Corp (BBC) phone-in programme.

Rao, struggling to improve the image of his government damaged by the December 6 destruction of the 16th century mosque by Hindu zealots, repeated assurances that both a Hindu temple and a mosque would be built in Ayodhya.

Separate trusts will be set up to decide the exact sites of

the two shrines, he said.

Rao, who fielded questions from BBC listeners in several countries, also admitted that economic reforms launched by his Congress (I) Party government had been slowed as our attention has necessarily been diverted to (keeping) internal peace.

The slowdown however had been temporary and the government was making up for lost time, he said.

"We have come out of the worst part of it," he asserted. "We have gone back to our economic agenda."

"I know it (economic reform) will come back to its original speed and urgency."

A London report adds: The

Indian government had been unable for constitutional reasons to do more that it did to prevent the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque on December 6, Narasimha Rao told the British Sunday newspaper The Observer.

He said in an interview: "I've reviewed the matter time and again, but I don't believe the central government could have done more to prevent it. When we did act it was too late, but had we acted earlier it would have been in breach of the Constitution."

Rao went on: "Article 356, under which we might have suspended local authority, is tightly drawn and requires the governor of the state to appeal to the president to intervene

after a dangerous situation has arisen."

"In Uttar Pradesh the governor advised central government to stay out to avoid making matters worse... that made it constitutionally impossible for us to intervene more than we did."

As for banning Hindu or Muslim fundamentalist political movements or parties, the cabinet jointly decided that this would be undemocratic, Rao said.

"For this reason we have not banned the BJP, the Muslim League or Shiv Sena... it is necessary, we may have to review that policy, but that stage has not come," he told the newspaper.

Arab League calls on UN Force Israel to take back deportees

DUBAI, Feb 8: The United Nations should approve whatever steps are necessary to force Israel to take back the 400 Palestinians it expelled, Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Maguid was quoted as saying on Saturday, reports Reuters.

He said if Israel did not submit to a UN resolution demanding reversal of the expulsions "We would have no

choice but to call for the implementation of Chapter Seven of the (United Nations) Charter."

Chapter Seven allows the imposition of sanctions and the possible use of force. Abdel-Maguid was speaking in an interview with the London-based Arabic magazine Al-Wasat, made available to Reuters before it appears on Monday.

Asked how much time the United Nations should allow Israel to reverse the expulsion orders he said: "The matter needs some time. But 'some time' means days, not weeks or months."

The expulsions have jeopardised Middle East peace negotiations, and Palestinians have rejected a US-Israeli proposal for the immediate return of 101 deportees and reduced

terms of exile for the rest.

Asked about relations with Iran, Abdel-Maguid said Arab states wanted friendship with Tehran.

But he said this was not possible if Iran "entered into confrontation with the Arab world and tried to impose its sovereignty, domination and occupation of islands in the Gulf and interfered in internal Arab affairs."

Rabin committed to ME peace process

WASHINGTON, Feb 8: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Sunday he was committed to the success of the Middle East peace process, but said security remained a paramount concern for Jerusalem, reports AFP.

"For the Israeli people, there is no meaning for peace that doesn't give security to the state of Israel and to the individual Israelis in their daily lives," he said in an interview from Jerusalem with ABC Television.

Rabin said that US Secretary of State Warren Christopher's trip to Israel this month after visits to Arab capitals will be an attempt to "create the new realities that will facilitate the continuation of the peace negotiations."

"We will try our best to assist in achieving this goal," Rabin said, but he did not specify what the "new realities" were.

Rabin defended Israel's expulsion of 415 suspected members or sympathisers of the Islamic resistance movement (Hamas) and Islamic Jihad on December 17 after Hamas kidnapped and murdered a border policeman.

Algeria extends emergency

ALGIERS, Feb 8: Algeria's army-backed leadership on Sunday extended the state of emergency imposed 12 months ago amid Muslim fundamentalist unrest and due to expire on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The five-man presidency, meeting under Head of State Ali Kafi, said it had examined the security situation and had decided to extend the emer-

gency. It gave no time limit.

Under the emergency, Interior Minister Mohamed Hardi can set up detention centres, order day or night house searches, ban marches, close public places, dissolve local authorities and order trial by military court.

About 1,000 fundamentalists are reported still held in desert detention centres, down from a peak of around

8,000 last year.

Military courts in the last year passed 48 death sentences, and two men were executed last month.

Hardi said last week "those who are calling for its lifting want to deprive the state of the tools enabling it to fight terrorism and corruption."

Diplomats were expecting the extension after a flurry of reports of violence attributed to the fundamentalists.



AMSTERDAM: A group of Muslim women pushing prams walk on streets as they participate in a Muslim demonstration Saturday. Some 1000 people, mostly Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands protested here against the "monstrous war crimes" committed by Serbian forces on the Muslim people in Bosnia-Herzegovina. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Diana most popular royal

LONDON: The popularity of Britain's heir to the throne, Prince Charles, has fallen sharply in the last 18 months, according to an opinion poll published Monday, reports Reuters.

The Gallup poll commissioned by the Daily Telegraph showed only four per cent of those interviewed named Charles as their favourite member of the royal family.

This was a big drop on the 15 per cent he had in a similar poll in June 1991.

His estranged wife Princess Diana remains the most popular royal, with 22 per cent. The couple formally separated in December.

The latest survey showed 65 per cent of those interviewed wanted the 900-year-old monarchy to be reformed along democratic lines following the recent scandals that have rocked the royal family.

Thirty-eight per cent said they favoured skipping a generation to make Charles and Diana's son, William the next King instead of Charles.

"The British people are deeply dissatisfied with the monarchy in its traditional form," the Daily Telegraph said.

Fifty-five per cent of those surveyed said the royals themselves largely responsible for the troubles besetting the family.

Thirty-five per cent blamed tabloid newspapers, which regularly run detailed stories about the personal lives of the royals.

Nearly 1,000 people were interviewed of the poll.



His trail of destruction makes him hero

SUNDERLAND, England: A 13-year-old car thief, so short that he needs a cushion to see over the steering wheel, is wanted in connection with 200 auto crimes in six months, police said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

The boy, who is under five feet (1.6 metres) tall, was arrested in this northeastern English town and charged with theft last week but escaped the next day.

Although he needs to use the headrest from car seats as a cushion to see over the steering wheel, his trail of destruction — including a rammed police patrol car — has made him a hero among teenage criminals in the area.

Police said in the 24 hours since he was arrested, crime in central Sunderland fell by 50 per cent.

They found themselves unprepared

WASHINGTON: Gay rights groups toiled for years to overturn the military's ban on homosexuals, but when President Clinton took the first step toward lifting it they found themselves unprepared to respond, reports AP.

It took days for gay activists to counter the flood of telephone calls and letters to Congress and the White House launched by conservative religious groups within minutes of Clinton's action.

"It's very difficult to compete with churches who begin political organizing on Sunday, rev up the masses on 1,000 radio stations and own television stations coast to coast," said Tanya Domi, military affairs lobbyist for the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force.

"And then on Monday, they're beating your brains out on the telephones," she said.

Clinton announced January 29 he had ordered the Pentagon to immediately stop asking recruits about their sexual orientation and to draft an executive order within six months formally lifting the 50-year-old ban on homosexuals in the military.

Inspired by televangelists linking homosexuality to Nazism, satanism and hiring quotas, evangelical Christians immediately jammed telephone lines at the Capitol and the White House.

For gay rights activists, it meant the initial message reaching the nation's elected leaders was largely against Clinton's plan to lift the ban in six months.

The suit is for just compensation

MANILA: Filipino women used by Japanese troops as sex slaves during World War Two are to sue the Japanese government for compensation, their spokeswoman said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

The suit will be filed before a court in Japan in April, said Indai Lourdes Sajor, coordinator of the task force on Filipino victims of military sexual slavery by Japan.

"This class suit is very important in formalising the struggle of the Filipino comfort women for just compensation and pressuring the Japanese government to take a position on the matter," Sajor said in a press statement.

She said the task force had confirmed 34 cases of Filipino women forced to become enslaved prostitutes for Japanese soldiers who occupied the Philippines from 1942 to 1945. There were also 20 rape and four torture cases, she said. Sajor said up to 12 cases would be selected for court case filing in Japan in April.



BRIEFLY

Saudi-Pak naval exercise ends:

Saudi Arabian and Pakistan naval forces have concluded a five-day joint exercise in the North Arabian Sea, the naval headquarters said Saturday, AFP reports from Karachi.

Frigates, submarines, helicopters and other aircraft participated in the exercise codenamed "Naseem-Ul-Bahr."

The Pakistan Naval Chief Saeed M Khan was quoted as saying that the exercise promoted better understanding between the two countries.

UNITA frees 21 foreigners:

UNITA rebels on Sunday released 21 foreigners who had been held captive for several weeks after the guerrillas seized the northwestern oil town of Soyo, Angola Radio said, Reuters reports from Luanda.

The state-run radio said the 21 had arrived safely in Libreville after departing from an unspecified place in northern Angola.

The radio gave no more details, only saying that the captives were of "various" nationalities.

Until now, the Belgian oil company Fina Petroleos de Angola reported 17 of its expatriate workers missing — 14 Portuguese, one Argentine, one Italian and one Briton.

Palestinian shot dead:

Masked gunmen on Saturday shot dead a Palestinian accused of collaborating with Israeli authorities, while soldiers shot and wounded 30 others in the occupied Gaza Strip, Arab sources said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Saeed Jumah El-Houl, 22, was killed at point blank range near his house in Shaburah near Rafah by gunmen claiming membership in the "Falcons" of Fatah, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's main group.

According to a new toll, Israeli soldiers shot and wounded 30 Palestinians, one seriously, during a series of clashes in the refugee camps of Jabalia, Sheikh Radwan, Meghazi, Deir El Balah and Shati.

Iran to work for Afghan peace:

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said on Sunday Tehran would work for peace in Afghanistan and welcomed an initiative by Saudi Arabia to halt the fighting, Reuters reports from Pakistan.

Velayati told reporters he and the Afghan and Pakistani foreign ministers had discussed ways of ending factional fighting in the Afghan capital Kabul that had killed hundreds of people in the past three weeks.

"It is our preliminary decision to work on the trilateral meeting once again between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan," he said.

"Also, if the Saudis can help peace and tranquillity in Afghanistan, it would be welcomed."

Miyazawa to visit US:

Japanese Prime Minister Kichi Miyazawa will visit the United States in late March or early April to hold talks with US President Bill Clinton, the Yomiuri Shimbun said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The news paper also said Miyazawa was planning to visit to European countries in late April and early May ahead of a meeting of leaders of the Group of Seven (G-7) industrialized nations scheduled for July in Tokyo.

Government sources told the daily that Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe would arrange Miyazawa's visit to the United States during Watanabe's four-day trip to Washington starting Thursday.

Quake injures 16 in Japan:

At least 16 people were injured when a strong earth tremor rocked wide areas of north and central Japan late on Sunday, a police spokesman said, Reuters reports from Tokyo.

The heaviest damage was reported in Suzu, on the Noto peninsula in Ishikawa prefecture, where roads caved in and a tunnel collapsed, the spokesman said.

One of several landslides swept away a shrine but it was unscathed and no one was hurt, he added.

Local officials said the quake blacked out the town of Toyama for about an hour. No damage occurred at nuclear power plants in the region, a company spokesman said.

Peru violence claims 29:

Twenty three Shining Path rebels and six rural militia members died in a string of clashes in Ayacucho, in eastern Peru last week, the army said Saturday, AFP reports from Lima.

Army authorities in Ayacucho said security forces captured large quantities of firearms, explosives and grenades following three clashes in the remote area, some 570 kilometers (340 miles) east of Lima.

2 police officers shot dead in Medellin

BOGOTA, Feb 8: Gunmen shot dead two off-duty police officers in separate incidents over the weekend in Medellin in what police suspect were paid killings by cocaine King Pablo Escobar's cartel, a police spokesman said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

Early on Sunday, two gunmen riding a motorcycle shot dead a police officer who was walking to work in the north-western suburb known as America. The gunmen also shot a driver passing by in a taxi who later died in hospital from gunshot wounds.

Police arrested one suspect.

Neo-Nazi group thumbs its nose at German govt

FRANKFURT, Feb 8: Despite a ban on its activities, and anti-rightist demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of Germans over the past two months, one neo-Nazi group in thumbing its nose at the government, reports AP.

Late Sunday one of two state television networks broadcast a clip showing "Deutsche Alternative" holding a recent meeting in a hotel near Cottbus in eastern Germany.

With several German police officers in uniform shown sitting in on the meeting — apparently to check on neo-Nazi activities — group leader Frank Hübner boldly grinned as he entered with other known neo-Nazis.

Police made no arrests because the group had changed its name, the report said, but didn't say what their new name was. Hübner admitted recently he would avoid restrictions by reorganizing the group under a different name.

Interior Minister Rudolf Seiters, in a national radio interview Sunday, said there are at least 41,400 radical rightists in Germany, about 6,400 believed to be "violence prone."

There were 2,285 violent radical rightist attacks against foreigners, Jews and leftist Germans last year, resulting in 17 deaths, a 54 per cent increase over 1991, according to official reports.

"Deutsche Alternative", is known for flaunting regulations. For example, the Nazi salute is banned in Germany, but the groups has devised ways of masking the straight-arm gesture while dancing.

Police cannot arrest group members if the members commit no obviously illegal acts.

The programme on ARD television showed the group singing "Deutschland, Deutschland Ueber Alles" ("Germany Everywhere") Nazi Germany's anthem. It also showed ta-

bles covered with neo-Nazi reading material that called for "Germany for the Germans — Foreigners Out."

The group is one of four radical rightist groups banned by the federal interior Ministry in December for propagating hate and inciting the public against foreigners, Jewish citizens and leftists.

The ARD report came one day after Seiters claimed that radical rightist activity since November had subsided, primarily because the government had stepped up its campaign against such groups, and because Germans have taken to the streets by the hundreds of thousands in anti-rightist demonstrations.

In late November, a longtime resident Turkish grandmother, her niece and granddaughter died in a neo-Nazi arson attack in the northern city of Moelln.

Since unification of West and East Germany in 1990, radical rightist activity has increased throughout the country. Many officials have blamed the trend on a huge flood of refugees that is straining the country's social system, creating housing shortages, and other problems.

Some 440,000 refugees, mostly from former Soviet bloc and Third World countries, arrived in Germany last year. The interior Ministry had reported more than 36,000 asylum seekers also arrived in January, and the government is struggling to change the country's liberal asylum laws.

The violence has occurred despite thousands of hours information programme on TV and reports in other media constantly remind Germans of the guilt they bear for deaths of 6 million Jews and hundreds of thousands of Gypsies, handicapped people and others in the Holocaust.

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Major eruption from Mayon still possible

LEGAZPI, Philippines, Feb 8: The exodus from villages near Mount Mayon continued Monday as lava trickled out of the volcano's crater, authorities said, reports AP.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said Mayon remained unstable, with a major eruption still possible within days. At least 68 people died when Mayon had a mild eruption Tuesday after eight years of slumber.

Cedric Daep, administrator of the Disaster Operation Center, said nearly 42,000 people have left their homes near the slopes of the volcano and are housed in government shelters. He estimated that up

to 80,000 people will have to be evacuated.

Officials at the volcanology institute said Mayon recorded just two earth tremors during the past 24 hours but lava and grayish smoke continue to trickle out of its crater.

It added that a "hazardous explosive eruption is still possible within days to weeks or hours to days" and warned people to stay away from a six-kilometre (four-mile) permanent danger zone around the volcano.