

Latvians start voting

RIGA (Latvia), June 5: Ethnic Russians held street protests but Latvians were jubilant Saturday as this Baltic nation held its first parliamentary elections since independence from the Soviet Union, reports AP.

One-third of Latvia's 1.8 million adult residents are ineligible to vote because of strict citizenship requirements that Latvians call "national renewal."

Maroon and white national flags fluttered from buildings on a cool sunny day as the former Soviet republic began two days of voting.

Twenty-three political parties are competing for 100 seats in Latvia's Seimas, or parliament. To ensure a high turnout, the polls were to be open from 8 am to 8 pm.

Preliminary results were not expected until Monday.

Nepalese PM cancels French visit

Lefts boycott by-elections

KATHMANDU, June 5: Five Nepalese left parties including the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the main opposition in the parliament, have jointly called for postponement of the upper house by-election, reports Xinhua.

Nepal will hold its first by-election of one third members of the 60-member upper house (National Council) on June 22 and 27.

Local leading English newspaper "The Rising Nepal" reported today that the UML, the Communist Party of Nepal (United), the Nepal Labour Peasants Party, the Nepal Sodbhavana Party and the Samyukta Janamorchha de-

clared that they are boycotting the coming by-election as "it is being in contravention of the existing constitutional provision of single transferable votes based on the principle of proportional representation."

Meanwhile, preparations for the election including fixing the dates for candidates to file their nominations have started in some places, according to the election committee.

AFP adds: Nepalese Prime Minister Gijrja Prasad Koirala, Friday cancelled a planned visit to France, for "Technical reasons" citing a double-booking for foreign travel in mid-June.

Koirala, who was due to

meet French President Francois Mitterrand mid-month, told a crowded press conference at his residence, that he would visit Vienna to attend the international conference there instead and pay an official visit to Israel on his way back home.

Koirala recalled that his late brother, former Prime Minister Bisweshwar Prasad Koirala, was one of the first government heads to recognize the Israeli government in the late 1950s.

He said he was therefore keen to visit Israel and observe agricultural and rural development projects there.

He said Nepal would not raise the issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal at the Vienna human rights conference, preferring to solve the problem bilaterally.

Over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees of Nepalese descent are sheltering in camps of far eastern Nepal run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other non-governmental organisations.

Koirala said Nepal's reputation abroad was rising gradually as the government bolstered law and order and improved the economy through bilateral trade and industrial policies.

DURBAN (South Africa), June 5: One hundred years after Mahatma Gandhi was thrown off a segregated train in South Africa, he will be honoured by the city that humiliated him and sparked his philosophy of passive resistance.

A larger-than-life statue of Gandhi will be unveiled by African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela in the Natal provincial capital Pietermaritzburg on Sunday.

"It was in South Africa that he discovered himself as a political leader and now seems to be the appropriate time to honour him," Gandhi biographer and Indian historian B R Nandu told Reuters.

Earlier this week democracy negotiators moved South Africa closer to the end of 350 years of white rule, proposing April 27 as the date for its first all-race elections.

"If things go for the best (in South Africa), it will be a realisation of his dream," Nandu said.

It's appropriate time to honour Gandhi

Gandhi's philosophies inspired countless ANC-backed peaceful mass action campaigns against the apartheid policies of successive white-minority governments, political analysts said.

He spent 21 years in South Africa, from 1893 to 1914, using non-violent methods to fight racial discrimination. For much of that time, he worked as a lawyer in the eastern Natal province.

Gandhi established a commune in Phoenix, near Durban, where he preached his philosophy.

Using non-violent mass action, he won assurances from the South African government in 1914 of fair treatment for the country's Indian population -- promises which many Indians believe the administration failed to live up to.

Today, Gandhi's settlement at Phoenix is destroyed.

Political slogans extolling the use of violence in a brutal turf war in Natal between the ANC and the rival, mainly-Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party, are daubed against the one remaining wall.

Following clashes between blacks and Indians in 1985 near the settlement, most Indian families fled the area and black squatters moved in, said police spokesman Bala Naidoo. "There is nothing left there," Naidoo said.

Black rural areas and townships around Durban have seen much of the feuding between supporters of the ANC and Inkatha.

Since the fighting flared eight years ago, more than 8,000 people have been killed in the province.

"Maybe we failed to carry the message of Gandhi to the people," said T S Rukmani, a professor of oriental studies at the University of Durban-Westville.

BRIEFLY

AIDS confce opens tomorrow:

The ninth international conference on AIDS opens here Monday in subdued mood, the optimism of the early fight against the deadly disease long dissipated, reports AFP from Berlin.

In the 12 years since Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome was first identified, researchers have had to learn patience and humility, realizing the more they learn about the human Immuno-Deficiency Virus (HIV) which causes AIDS, the more they have to discover.

As the scientific work piles up, leads that once looked promising and which were sometimes prematurely publicized with unwarranted fanfare, have dried up, while experimental new drugs have had to be shelved after rising false hopes.

Those directly concerned -- people infected with the virus -- are venting their frustration through increasingly militant support organizations or associations.

29 Palestinians killed in May:

Twenty-nine Palestinian nationals were shot dead and 1,198 others were injured by Israeli forces during May, Palestinian news agency (Wafa) quoted human rights centres in the Gaza Strip as saying Saturday, Xinhua reports from Tunis.

The dead included five children under 15 years of age and one 50-year-old woman. Among the injured, 523 were shot with live bullets, 24 with rubber bullets, 603 by beating, 40 with tear-gas bombs, and eight hit by military vehicles, according to the figures released by Gaza hospitals.

The figures also showed two Israelis were killed, 12 Israeli soldiers were injured in May. Seven hand grenades and eight explosives and 28 incendiary bottles were hurled at Israeli military targets, and 13 Palestinian bullet attacks were committed against Israelis.

Wafa reported that the month of May has witnessed marked increase in the number of Palestinian martyrs and in violations of human rights to which Palestinian nationals were exposed.

13 die in Pak car mishap:

A cable car fell hundreds of feet (metres) onto a road bridge in northern Pakistan after the cable snapped, killing 13 members of the same family, government officials said on Saturday, Reuters reports from Islamabad.

They said 10 women were among those killed in the accident on Thursday in the remote Batkhela area of the North West Frontier Province.

A three-year-old boy was the only survivor from the party, which had come to the area to enjoy a ride in the cable car on the Eid-ul-Azha festival, one official said.

He said overloading of the cable car could have caused the accident.

Peruvian bus mishap claims 16:

Sixteen people were killed and 17 injured when packed bus plunged into an abyss near Cusco, Peru, police said Friday, reports AFP from Cusco.

The bus was carrying delegates from the peasants federation on their way to a convention when it drove off the precipice.

Fire makes 1000 homeless:

More than 1,000 residents in Nairobi were left homeless on Thursday after a sudden blaze ruined their houses, the local newspaper "The Standard" reported Saturday, says Xinhua from Nairobi.

The fire, believed to be caused by a cooking stove, started at about 2:30 pm of local time. It spread rapidly and the Fire Brigade failed to get easy access to the burning site because of narrow paths.

Velasquez replaces Carlos:

Venezuela's Congress elected former cabinet Minister Ramon Jose Velasquez Mujica as the country's interim President Saturday to replace President Carlos Andres Perez while he stands trial for corruption, reports Reuters from Caracas.

Velasquez, a 76-year-old journalist and historian, was elected after the ruling Democratic Action Party and leading opposition party Copei had agreed he was the best choice to lead the oil-exporting nation out of crisis.

He was scheduled to be sworn in later Saturday and will rule until the government's term ends next February, unless Perez is acquitted on the charges of embezzlement and misuse of public funds.

250 Mozambicans return June 12:

A programme to repatriate Mozambican war refugees will begin June 12, the United Nations said Saturday, reports AP from Harare.

A first batch of 250 people will leave Nyangombe refugee camp in northeastern Zimbabwe, bound for their home district of Barwe in Mozambique, said Samuel Mhiribidi, an official of the UN High Commission for Refugees in Harare.

The timing of the further repatriation of 140,000 Mozambicans in Zimbabwe will depend on logistical arrangements, Mhiribidi said in a statement.

More than 1 million Mozambicans fled to neighbouring countries during the 16-year civil war in their homeland that ended with a cease fire signed October 4 by the government and Mozambique National Resistance rebels.

Guatemala set to elect president



Guatemalan Vice-President Gustavo Espina Salguero talking to the journalists in the parliament building. — Star TV photo

GUATEMALA CITY, June 5: Congress was set to elect a new president Saturday, after the vice president's claim on the post was opposed by demonstrators in the streets the Constitutional Court, and the powerful military, reports AP.

The court ruled late Friday, that Vice President Gustavo Espina Salguero had been a 'co-participant' in ousted president Jorge Serrano's power grab. Serrano had dissolved the Supreme Court and Congress, ruling by decree for eight days before the military toppled him Tuesday.

With Espina thus constitutionally disqualified, the court gave Congress 24 hours to find Serrano's successor. Jose Lobo Dubon, president of Congress, called for the 116-seat legislature to convene before midday Saturday to vote on nominations for the presidency.

Espina, apparently with military backing, had declared

he was assuming the presidency on Wednesday, the day Serrano fled into exile. But Congress blocked his swearing-in.

The rebellious Congress was backed by thousands of demonstrators and Nobel peace prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, Guatemala's most prominent human rights activist. Menchu, had said Espina's bid was 'a military coup with a civilian face.'

The military continues to have great influence after ruling for decades. When Serrano took office in 1991, he was the first elected civilian president to succeed another in more than 150 years of Guatemalan history.

It remained uncertain whether the legislature could assemble the 79 members, or necessary two-thirds vote, to choose a new interim president to serve out Serrano's term, which ends in January 1996.

US helps dissidents for sabotage in Iran?

TEHRAN, June 5: Captured Iranian dissidents said the United States had helped Mujahideen rebels' anti-government campaign by providing them with intelligence for acts of sabotage in Iran, an English-language newspaper reported Thursday, says Xinhua.

Members of the Mujahideen Khalq, Iran's largest dissident group, had been captured while trying to plant a bomb in southern Iran, the English-language "Tehran Times" said in an editorial titled "US runs out of resources".

The captives confessed that "in the past two months the American forces in the Persian Gulf had meetings with the (Mujahideen) leaders, and have put at their disposal the necessary guidance and information on centres in Iran where

bombs could be planted," said the daily.

The Americans even provided the terrorists with food supplies to last them for 15 days," the paper said.

The editorial said the sabotage was part of a new US strategy to contain Iran's Islamic revolution.

"Thus, it would seem to be quite fair to ask the question: Who supports the terrorists?"

The United States and Egypt have been accusing Iran of sponsoring subversive terrorist acts in other countries in order to replace other governments with Iranian-like theocracy, but Iran denied the charges.

"America's blatant animosity with the Islamic republic since its inception in February 1979 is an indisputable fact. America never forgave Iran for having

gained independence, and during the past 14 years Washington used all of its resources to strike Iran," said the paper.

The United States and Iran cut off their diplomatic ties in 1979 after hundreds of radical students seized the American embassy staff in Tehran and held them for 444 days.

Iran admitted last month that the Mujahideen was responsible for a series of attacks on military barracks and civilian facilities in late April and early May, which includes the bombing of pipelines at the huge Abadan oil refinery in southwestern Iran.

The government retaliated by bombarding two Mujahideen bases inside Iraq, but no casualties were reported.

Massive sweep in Kashmir for 2 intelligence men

NEW DELHI, June 5: Indian security forces Friday continued a massive sweep in Kashmir for two intelligence agents abducted by Muslim guerrillas, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says AFP.

The two agents were seized Wednesday from a high security zone in Srinagar city, the summer capital of Kashmir state, the news agency said. No rebel group has claimed responsibility for the kidnappings.

"Search operations .. have yielded no positive result so far," PTI quoted official sources as saying in Srinagar, the urban hub of the Muslim campaign for Kashmir independence from India. No further details were available.

Muslim rebels also abducted an Indian army soldier in Srinagar Wednesday. He was later killed.

Thousands have died in the four-year-old separatist campaign in Kashmir.

Hema to launch new party

COLOMBO, June 5: The widow of Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa is planning to form a new political party to carry out the populist programmes of her late husband, a newspaper reported on Friday, says Reuters.

Ravaya, a Sinhalese-language independent weekly, said Hema Premadasa would launch her Sucharitha Purawasi Peramuna (citizens front) on August 1, three months after the president's assassination.

Premadasa was killed by a suspected Tamil suicide bomber at a May Day parade in Colombo. Tamil rebels have denied involvement.

The newspaper said a large group of pro-Premadasa supporters of the ruling United National Party (UNP) were expected to join the new front.

Among them are two ministers and some parliamentarians.

Hema first offered herself as a possible political heir at her husband's funeral.

"You are not alone. I am here. With your support we'll go ahead," she told mourners tearfully.

She promised to carry out her husband's policies and lead his followers but has since remained silent in accordance with local tradition. Widows are rarely seen in public for a three-month period which in Hema's case ends on August 1.

Hema was not available for comment on the report.

Premadasa undertook many welfare programmes to help the poor, spending billion of rupees on projects that eased inflation and drew widespread criticism.

Prime Minister Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, who took over as president, has promised to continue the same policies but with little fanfare and at less cost.



Hema Premadasa

Killing of five Turks mourned

TASOVA, Turkey, June 5: Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, addressing mourners of five Turks killed in a Neo-Nazi arson attack in Germany, urged the people of Turkey on Friday to be calm and avoid provocation, reports Reuters.

Demirel, whose remarks followed pre-funeral protests by hundreds of angry Turks chanting "down with Neo-Nazi bastards", said Turkey and Germany needed one another's friendship.

"It is wrong to blame the German government or German people for the incident," he told a crowd of 5,000 mourners shortly before the funeral service began in this northern Turkish town.

"We should all be calm. I am calling on all the Turkish people to be calm and not to get provoked."

Off the Record

A lingering kiss . . .

LONDON: A lingering kiss between Britain's Prince Andrew and his estranged wife Sarah "Fergie" Ferguson fanned hopes today of a royal reconciliation, reports Reuters.

The couple, who went their separate ways a year ago were pictured saying a long goodbye after a holiday with their two daughters on the royal estate of Balmoral, Scotland.

"It was a full kiss, affectionate rather than passionate. But you would never imagine they were apparently heading for divorce. They looked like the best of friends -- at the very least," said one photographer watching through a telephoto lens.

Andrew, 33, and flame-haired Fergie appeared doomed as a couple after pictures of her frolicking topless with an American businessman were published around the world last summer.

But they have been pictured dining together recently and chatting happily, sparking rumours that their seven-year marriage might yet be saved.

Stowaway survives sub-zero temperatures

MIAMI (Florida): A Colombian boy hid Friday in the wheel well of cargo jet and survived sub-zero temperatures during a three-hour flight from Bogota to Miami, Florida, reports AFP.

Miami Airport employees found an unconscious 13-year Guillermo Rosales when he fell out of the Colombian DC-8 after the 1,600 kilometer (1,000 miles) flight.

They said he was rolled up in a ball and covered with frost after the flight in sub-freezing temperatures.

"He should have died. The wheel coming up could have crushed him, there's lack of oxygen at that altitude," said airplane mechanic Richard Ungerer.

But the boy was fine after a checkup at Pan American Hospital, said George Waldroup, a spokesman for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which is holding the boy.

Waldroup said Rosales survived because the plane's wheel well was pressurized.

Several years ago a Colombian stowaway was found dead after a similar attempt.

He was just imitating

BANGKOK: A 13-year-old imitating a cartoon battle on television accidentally shot dead his cousin in the rural central Thai province of Phitsanulok, The Nation newspaper said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The boy, whose name was withheld by police, was watching a Japanese cartoon called "Dragon Ball" when he ran to get his father's shotgun, the paper quoted him as telling police.

He pointed it at his cousin and younger brother, both eight. Nothing happened the first time he pulled the trigger but the second time, the gun went off and his cousin fell dead.

To avoid public criticism

TOKYO: The family of Masako Owada, who next month marries Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito, refused to accept delivery of three gold-plated chests made by an over-zealous furniture maker, Kyodo News Agency reported on Tuesday, says Reuters.

The Owadas ordered a set of chests made of plain paulownia wood, but the maker decided to plate them in gold as a wedding present, Kyodo said.

The chests form part of a Japanese traditional gift from the father to the bride to keep her kimonos. Each gold-plated chest is worth about 10 million yen (dollar 94,000).

A photograph of the chests was printed in Japanese newspapers on Tuesday. The Owada family apparently decided not to accept them for fear of a public outcry against extravagance.



Sarah 'Fergie' Ferguson

Marcos body to be repatriated next month

MANILA, June 5: Imelda Marcos said Saturday that the body of Ferdinand Marcos would be brought from Hawaii for burial in the Philippines next month, but did not specifically pledge to abide by government conditions, reports AP.

The development is the latest in a long-running wrangle over the final resting place of the late president, who died in exile in Hawaii in September 1989. His body has been kept since in a temporary refrigerated crypt outside Honolulu.

The government has said it will allow repatriation of the president's remains.

Tehri Dam project may cause 'unimaginable calamities'

NEW DELHI, June 5: One of India's leading environmentalists said on Saturday that a huge dam project in the Himalayan foothills could cause "unimaginable calamities" because of its location in an earthquake-prone area, reports Reuters.

Planners of the Tehri Dam project in Uttar Pradesh state "completely ignored the long-term economic, social, cultural and ecological impact", Sunderlal Bahuguna, a well-known activist, wrote in an article published in Indian newspapers to mark World Environment Day.

They have closed their eyes

to the obvious natural hazards which can destroy these structures and bring unimaginable calamities to people living downstream," he said.

Bahuguna has long been opposed to the 1.4 billion US dollar Tehri Dam, one of India's most ambitious hydroelectric projects.

His article appeared amid intense controversy in India over the social cost of huge irrigation projects, sparked by the decision of the government to end World Bank financing for a massive dam system in western India.

The World Bank had agreed to provide 530 million dollars in

grants and loans to build 30 large, 135 medium-sized and 3,000 small dams on the Narmada, India's fifth-largest river.

The government said in March that it would forgo the final 180 million dollar after accusing the World Bank of dithering about the financing.

The World Bank was to review the project in April because of widespread criticism that the project was an ecological disaster.

The Tehri Dam, which will block the Bhagirathi river, a tributary of the Ganges, is scheduled for completion in

1997. It is expected to provide 2,400 megawatts of power to electricity-starved villages in the northern Indian plains.

Construction was briefly halted in 1991 after a devastating earthquake ripped apart hillsides just north of Tehri, killing at least 1,400 people.

But the government allowed work on the project to continue after checking that the quake had not damaged the subsidiary dam or the diversion tunnels already built.

"After the earthquake, the hills have cracked and there are huge landslides," Bahuguna said. He said the landslides blocked the Bhagirathi at sev-

eral places.

The project has also come in for sharp criticism because it will displace tens of thousands of people. The town of Tehri, which has a population of 12,000 will be at the bottom of a 320-metre-long (1,050-foot) reservoir when the project is completed.

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) estimates that 85,600 people in the town and surrounding villages will be displaced by the Tehri Dam.

"Mass displacement of the hill people and forcing them to live in an alien environment is

the most heinous crime towards humanity," Bahuguna wrote. He said people ousted from their homes by earlier dams built by the government not been rehabilitated.

Water Resources Minister Vidya Charan Shukla said on Friday that he would set up a committee to monitor ecological safeguards and the displacement of people in all his ministry's major projects.

But he added that India needed to harness all its water resources, indicating that the government was not likely to call off the two irrigation projects on environmental grounds.

Hong Kong people observe June 4 massacre

HONG KONG, June 5: Thousands of people joined a candlelight vigil in a Hong Kong park to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the June 4 massacre of democracy demonstrators in Beijing, reports Reuters.

Chanting pro-democracy slogans, the crowd turned Hong Kong's Victoria Park into a sea of light as they watched newsreel of the massacre on a giant video screen.

The rally attracted more than 12,000 protesters who heard speakers call for the release of all jailed dissidents in China.