

24 hours strike in West Bengal today

CALCUTTA, June 6: The Marxist government of India's West Bengal vowed today to crush a strike called by opposition parties over violence that followed village and municipal elections in the eastern state, reports Reuters.

The nationally ruling Congress Party and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) called separate 24-hour strikes, starting at dawn on Monday, to protest against what they called violence perpetrated by the leftist rulers.

Since the elections, at the end of May, 46 people have been killed. According to party officials, 21 belonged to the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), which rules West Bengal, and 25 were Congress members.

Strikes in West Bengal frequently result in violence and the prospect was for more on Monday.

The government will ensure normal life on Monday. If anyone tries to stop movement of public transport, the law will take its own course," Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, the state's Information Minister, told reporters.

Buses are a favourite target of Indian agitation. They are frequently stoned and set afire.

CPM officials added to the fear of violence.

"Our workers will be out on the streets to ensure that the strike is foiled," said Sailen Dasgupta, a senior CPM official.

"If anyone tries to forcibly prevent people from coming to offices, our workers will certainly intervene and if it leads to a clash it will be inevitable," he said.

Congress and the BJP have exempted essential services from the strike call.

Most ministers stay away from Hekmatyar's cabinet meet

KABUL, June 6: Afghan Prime Minister-designate Gulbuddin Hekmatyar held the first meeting of his cabinet in his fortified base south of Kabul today, although most ministers stayed away, a spokesman said, reports Reuters.

Hekmatyar had originally scheduled the meeting for Saturday but postponed it after only two ministers turned up at the headquarters of his radical Hezb-I-Islami Party in Charasyab, 20 km (12 miles) from the war-devastated capital.

Hezb spokesman Qarib-ur-Rehman Sayeed said eight ministers, including Hekmatyar, out of the 21-member cabinet took part in Sunday's meeting.

Some ministers are abroad and others have not yet re-

turned from their home towns after celebrating the Muslim Eid-ul-Azha festival last week, Sayeed said.

Political sources said most ministers were absent because of a lack of security or objections to holding the meeting outside the capital at Charasyab, from where Hekmatyar's forces have pounded the city with artillery fire for months.

Cabinet discussions focused on where to hold the next cabinet meeting, Sayeed said.

President Burhanuddin Rabbani sent a delegation to Charasyab today to ask Hekmatyar to hold the meeting in Kabul, presidential spokesman Abdul Aziz Morad said.

Morad said the Prime Minister and his cabinet, an-



Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

ounced by the Islamic coalition government on May 20 to try to end bitter internal differences, should first take the oath of office in Kabul before holding a meeting.

Hekmatyar said the cabinet should meet first to decide where he should be based.

After the cabinet was announced, Hekmatyar said he would enter Kabul "within days." He has not set foot in the capital since the guerrillas took power from the fallen communist government 13 months ago for security reasons.

More than 6,000 people have been killed and a third of Kabul's 1.5 million residents have fled in the past 13 months of fratricidal battles among the rival Mujahideen parties, allies in the 14-year insurgency against the former Soviet-installed government.

Guatemala returns to democracy

GUATEMALA CITY, June 6: Congress elected Guatemala's human rights prosecutor as president late Saturday, proclaiming a return to democratic rule as it replaced Jorge Serrano, who was ousted for imposing one-man rule, reports AP.

Cheering erupted as Ramiro de Leon Carpio, the government-appointed attorney general for human rights, was chosen after his only significant challenger withdrew.

The vote count was 107 for de Leon Carpio, six abstentions and two votes for other nominees.

"My mission at this time is to save the nation of Guatemala," said de Leon Carpio, 51.

He pledged to unite a country convulsed by Serrano's seizure of near-dictatorial powers May 25 and subsequent

ouster after eight days of emergency rule.

"I am a democrat who will fight for liberty, but more than anything I will not tolerate violence or injustice," said de Leon Carpio, whose office was suspended under emergency rule.

Hundreds of people cheered outside the Congress building and set off firecrackers in celebration. There were shouts of "Ramiro Ramiro!"

De Leon Carpio led an earlier congressional ballot for president late Saturday, but failed to win enough votes to become president. But his candidacy was strengthened after the only significant challenger withdrew from the race.

Arturo Herbruger Asturias, the 81-year-old president of the country's Supreme Election Tribunal, said on television that he felt de Leon Carpio was the best choice.

David Koresh buried

TYLER (Texas), June 6: Branch Davidian Cult leaders David Koresh was buried in an unmarked grave during a quiet ceremony attended by only four relatives on May 27, a relative of Koresh said on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Koresh was buried in the Morial Park Cemetery, about 193 kilometres (120 miles) northwest of Waco, Texas, the family member said. He died in the April 19 fire that killed at least 70 members, including children, at the Cult's compound near Waco.

The Houston Chronicle reported on Saturday that four family members attended the ceremony, prayed quietly and read Biblical passages at the grave side of Koresh.

No clergy attended the funeral, Koresh's mother Bonnie Haldeman told the newspaper.

"There were no clergy there," Haldeman said. "David would

not have wanted a traditional funeral."

Other relatives who attended the ceremony included Haldeman's husband Roy, Koresh's brother Roger Howell of Waco, and his maternal grandmother Erlene Clark of Chandler, Texas.

Clark would only confirm that Koresh, who believed he was Jesus Christ and led the off-shot of the seventh-day adventists, had been buried but declined further comment.

Authorities said Koresh died of a gunshot wound to the head sometime during the blaze that engulfed the Cult compound to end the 51-day standoff with federal authorities.

The blaze started a few hours after the FBI began coming the compound with tanks and injecting tear gas inside.

Authorities have not yet ruled whether Koresh committed suicide.



Some 3,000 peaceful marchers, Germans and foreigners living in Germany, join a rally against Xenophobia in central Hamburg Saturday, which was called by the Alliance of Turkish Immigrants and the German Unions Alliance.

Narayanan calls off Lanka visit

COLOMBO, June 6: Indian Vice-President K R Narayanan has called off a scheduled visit to Sri Lanka later this month as Colombo scaled down a ceremony he was to attend, diplomatic sources here said today, reports AFP.

Narayanan was to substitute President Shankar Dayal Sharma who had earlier accepted an invitation by his slain Sri Lankan counterpart Ranasinghe Premadasa to be the chief guest at a ceremony coinciding with his birthday on June 23.

"The Indians decided to call off the visit altogether because Colombo was planning to very low key ceremony to mark the Gam Udana (or village reawakening) anniversary," an official source said.

Shri Lanka's new president Dingiri Banda Wijetunga has already banned the celebrations.

Freedom of political parties in Iran demanded

TEHRAN, June 6: A candidate running in Iran's June 11 presidential election called Saturday for freedom of political parties that are not officially banned by authorities, reports AFP.

Abdollah Jasbi, the Chancellor of the Islamic Open University who is running against three other candidates, including incumbent President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said "freedom of political organization" would help prevent the creation of "political gangs" in Iran.

Opposition parties in Iran, such as the Liberation Movement of Iran of former Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and the Iranian People's Party, are tolerated by the government but not authorized. They have called for a boycott of the election.

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Hutchison's victory a tough blow to Clinton

AUSTIN (Texas), June 6: Texas voters Saturday elected Kay Bailey Hutchison as their state's first woman member of the US Senate, reports AFP.

She will serve out the remaining 1-1/2 years of Democrat Lloyd Bentsen's term. President Bill Clinton tapped Bentsen for Treasury Secretary.

Hutchison's victory in the runoff election over interim Democratic senator Bob Krueger means that both of the state's Senate seats will be held by Republicans for the first time since 1875.

Her victory also boosts the number of women in the US Senate to a historic high of seven out of 100 — five Democrats and two

Republicans.

A pleased Republican Texas Senator Phil Gramm called Hutchison's win a tough blow to Clinton and Democratic Texas Governor Ann Richards.

"If Bill Clinton and Ann Richards can put a pretty fare on this devastating defeat, they ought to be morticians instead of politicians," Gramm said.

Hutchison, currently Texas state treasurer, will narrow the Democrats' majority in the Senate to 56-44.

With 29 per cent of voting precincts reporting, Hutchison led Krueger 66.5 per cent to 33.5 per cent.

Reuter adds: The people of Texas have spoken. Hutchison said in her acceptance speech to about 1,000 supporters.

Hutchison had promised if elected to vote against Clinton's deficit reduction package, in part due to the 71 billion dollar energy tax.

She told supporters that her election was a "death knell" for the energy tax and said she will push to be sworn into office in time to vote on Clinton's economic plan.

Clinton did not carry Texas in the November presidential election and is unpopular in the state because of the energy tax and social policies perceived as liberal.

Hutchison, 49, will take office after Ann Richards approves the election results, which must be completed under state law within seven days of the elections.

Royal rehearsal

TOKYO: Thousands of police took to Tokyo streets Sunday to rehearse tight security measures ordered to avert extremist violence during Wednesday's wedding of Japan's Crown Prince to Masako Owada, reports Reuter.

After the formal ceremony at the imperial palace shrine, Prince Naruhito, 33, and diplomat Owada, 29, are scheduled to travel four km (2.5 miles) through city streets by open car to their new home at the Akasaka Palace.

Last weekend, radical leftist groups opposed to Japan's imperial system threatened an armed attack on the procession.

At Sunday's dress rehearsal, a motorcade of black cars flanked by white motorcycles slowly cruised the route to be taken by the royal couple.

Despite a light drizzle, policemen lined the roadside every four metres (13 feet).

Police searched for possible explosives in the muddy waters of the imperial palace moat, which runs along much of the procession's route.

About 30,000 police officers, many bussed in from other parts of Japan, will be in the streets on the big day to guard against incidents.

Off the Record

The woman who has cervical ectopy may spread AIDS

BERLIN: Woman infected with the virus that causes AIDS may be more likely to infect their partner if they become pregnant or take oral contraceptives, according to research published in the journal of the American Medical Association, reports Reuter.

The study, released on Saturday at an American medical association briefing ahead of the ninth international conference on AIDS, also found that if a woman had cervical ectopy she may also infect her baby during childbirth.

Ectopy, a normal condition, causes the thin surface layer of the cervix to become more exposed and vulnerable. It also may be associated with conditions that cause greater shedding of cells containing HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

David Clemenson, of the University of Washington, Seattle at the time of the study, and colleagues did research in Kenya, using vaginal and cervical samples from 97 HIV-infected women.

The women were recruited at the Nairobi City Commission special treatment clinic between May 1988 and April 1990. The women were HIV-positive but none had developed full-blown AIDS.

Use of oral contraceptive pills, pregnancy and cervical ectopy were all found to be linked with HIV shedding either in the cervix or vagina.

The highest level of shedding was found in pregnant women, followed by those taking the pill and then those with cervical ectopy.



MONTPELIER: The Episcopal Church on Saturday elected the first woman in the United States to the post of diocesan bishop, reports AP.

"I'm speechless," said the Rev. Mary Adelia McLeod after she was selected as bishop of Vermont in balloting by the clergy and lay delegates of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont.

McLeod, rector of St John's Church in Charleston, W. Va., said the election of a woman is important.

"But more, I think the Diocese of Vermont, in great prayer and consideration and thought, were led by the Holy Spirit to elect me. I think that because I just happen to be a woman is incidental," she added.

According to the diocese, two women are suffragan — or assistant — bishops. They are the Rt Rev Barbara Harris of Massachusetts, and the Rt Rev Jane Dtxon of Washington.

McLeod will be only the second female diocesan bishop worldwide. The Vermont diocese said Bishop Penelope Jamieson of New Zealand is the first woman to head a diocese.

The Bishop's position has been vacant since February, when the Rt Rev Daniel Lee Swenson retired.

BSF hunt for Veerappan

BANGALORE (India), June 6: Some 600 paramilitary troops headed into the southern jungles on Saturday in pursuit of India's most notorious outlaw, who has been able to slip through the country's largest police dragnet, reports Reuter.

The men of the Border Security Force (BSF) were brought in after Koose Muniwamy Veerappan, an ivory poacher turned sandalwood smuggler, killed six policemen in an ambush last month.

The ambush, by landmine and small arms in the jungles that stretch across Karnataka state and into neighbouring Tamil Nadu, copied one that killed 22 policemen earlier this year.

In all, Veerappan's ruthless gang, which includes a younger brother, has killed 35 policemen over the past three years.

Hundreds of police have pursued a man who boasted recently in his first media interview that he could never be captured and that he kept the

head of one victim as a souvenir.

The May ambush brought in to take over the hunt. Some wives of policemen even threatened self-immolation unless the army was summoned to catch the most-wanted man in India.

The Karnataka state government was reluctant to make such a move but it did ask for men from the BSF. The force's formal job is guarding India's frontiers but it spends much of its time fighting insurgencies in places like Kashmir, Punjab and Assam.

This is the first time the paramilitary has been asked to catch an outlaw.

Veerappan operates in the Malemahadeshwar, a hill near the Karnataka city of Mysore, where support in jungle villages has enabled him to elude capture despite a huge price on his head.

There is a reward for four million rupees (13,000 US dollars) for Veerappan's capture.

Police action on anti-Walesa rally

WARSAW, June 6: The interior minister Saturday defended the use of force by police at a right-wing protest against President Lech Walesa and warned he would not permit law-breaking during the upcoming campaign for parliament, reports AP.

On Friday, riot police used batons and detained 14 people after protesters assembled illegally in Castle Square in the centre of Warsaw, rather than at another plaza authorized by city officials.

Police also scuffled with some of the 3,000 people as they marched on president's residence shouting "Down with Walesa," "Thieves, thieves" and some anti-Semitic slogans.

The protest was organized by four small right-wing parties a week after Walesa dissolved the frequently deadlocked parliament and called early elections for September 19.

March organizers later complained that their constitutional rights of freedom of speech and assembly had been violated.

Mushahid made second special assistant to Nawaz Sharif

ISLAMABAD, June 6: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has appointed a freelance journalist as his second special assistant with the rank of a federal minister, a spokesman for the Prime Minister said yesterday, reports Reuter.

Mushahid Hussain Sayed will deal with special assignments in political and foreign affairs and the media, the spokesman said.

Sayed is a former editor of Islamabad's independent English-language daily The Muslim and has been a freelance writer for the past few years.

Petroleum and Natural Resources Minister Nisar Ali Khan also holds the additional office of a special assistant to the Prime Minister, whose government was restored by the Supreme Court 10 days ago, 39 days after it was sacked by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan on disputed charges of misuse.

CM claims normalcy in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, June 6: Restoration of a democratically elected state government and local bodies in Punjab has led to the restoration of complete normalcy in the state within one year, the state Chief Minister Beant Singh has said.

He said the grit and the quest for peace shown by the people of Punjab had helped his government in defeating the evil designs of Pakistan in destroying Punjab.

In a recent interview to PTI after the Jalandhar Lok Sabha by-elections, Beant Singh said the elections clearly indicated that the people had rejected the practices based on separatist religious fundamentalism.

Plan to turn moon into a power station for earth

NEW DELHI, June 6: Scientists plan to harvest solar energy on the lunar surface and beam it to earth in a fantastic proposal aimed at turning the moon into a giant power station for earth, reports PTI.

Under the proposal, thousands of solar cells will capture solar energy uninterrupted on the moon and beam it to receiving antennas on earth where the energy will be fed into power distribution systems.

A group of scientists in the US have set up a Lunar Solar Power (LSP) coalition to promote LSP-related studies, a report in the Space Research Journal, "Earth-

Space Review" said.

Power consumption on earth is set to double from 10,000 gigawatts in 1980 to 20,000 gigawatts by the year 2050.

LSP offers a maximum power level five times higher — 100,000 gigawatts, the report said.

Some scientists believe only Lunar Solar Power can provide the required amount of energy in an affordable manner while avoiding the environmental and ecological damage of existing power schemes.

The LSP concept has several advantages over existing energy options, including bioresources, nuclear power, conventional fossil

fuels and terrestrial solar energy, according to the "Earth-Space Review" report.

Solar energy can be provided efficiently and safely at low cost from solar power bases on the moon, according to the report written by space and aeronautics experts David Crisswell and Philip Harris.

"It could establish a two-planet economy between the earth and the moon, solve earth's impending natural energy resources shortage, and act as a stepping stone for more extensive space exploration," they said.

The goal of LSP would be to establish 20,000 gigawatts

capacity by the year 2040. Scientists believe a technological venture of this magnitude is likely to benefit through international participation.

The majority of the project investment will be for the construction and maintenance of the antennas on earth that will capture the lunar-transmitted solar energy and convert them into electric power.

The antennas are expected to cost only 10 per cent per unit capacity of a similarly sized coal-fired electric plant, Crisswell and Harris said in their report.

Crisswell, Director of the Institute of Space Systems

Operations at the University of Houston, is one of the developers of the LSP concept. Harris is Associate Fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

Analyses reveal that LSP requires far less resources and land than arrays on earth where solar radiation is irregular, interrupted by clouds, seasons, and atmosphere.

Lunar Solar Power Systems use lunar resources to construct large arrays of solar collectors on the surface of the moon. The project might require establishing a lunar base housing up to 4000 inhabitants.

A Lunar Power System coalition set up three years ago by scientists and engineers is now drawing up research proposals for LSP-related research studies and sponsors and collaborators are being sought.

The LSP bases will be constructed in Pairs on the opposite sides of the moon. Each consists of thousands of plots covered by vast arrays of solar cells collecting solar energy.

The solar energy will be converted into low intensity microwave means that will be brought to earth via a network of reflector antennas on the moon and receiving antennas on earth.

Spain goes to election

MADRID, June 6: Up to 30 million Spaniards began voting this morning in general elections that could end a decade of socialist government, reports Reuter.

Polling stations opened at 0700 GMT and close at 1800 GMT. The first official results are due at 2030 GMT although exit polls are expected at least an hour earlier.

Opinion polls have put Felipe Gonzalez's Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) neck and neck with the right-wing Popular Party (PP) country's economic crisis has deepened.

Around 17 per cent of the electorate were still undecided, when the last surveys were published a week ago.