

Socialists protest Balladur's move to tighten asylum law

PARIS, Sept 24: Leftist lawmakers and an anti-racist group blasted plans by the conservative government, backed by a top legal panel, to tighten an asylum law by changing the constitution, reports AFP.

An opinion Thursday night by lawyers on the Council of State gave Prime Minister Edouard Balladur the green light to amend the constitution, which immediately drew a human chain of protesters outside Balladur's official residence.

Socialist deputy Julien Dray on Friday called it "the revision of shame" and "the use of force".

Japanese FM to meet Russian counterpart in NY

TOKYO, Sept 24: Japan's Foreign Minister will meet with his Russian counterpart in New York on Saturday, the Foreign Ministry said Friday, reports AP.

Ministry officials said Tsumoto Hata would meet Andrei Kozyrev in advance of the opening of the UN General Assembly next week. The two are expected to discuss prospects for a visit by Boris Yeltsin to Japan in light of the ongoing turmoil in Russia.

A visit to Japan by Yeltsin had been planned for mid-October, but no date had been set. Yeltsin has cancelled two previous visits.

Yeltsin on Tuesday said he was dissolving parliament and calling early elections. Western leaders have expressed support for him and his political reforms.

BRIEFLY

Sikhs kill 3 Cong-I men: Sikhs militants killed at least three activists of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's Congress Party in an ambush in India's northern Punjab state, police said Friday, reports Reuter from Ludhiana.

They said about a dozen people were seriously injured in Thursday's attack on a group of Youth Congress activists travelling to an election rally in New Delhi to be addressed by Rao.

The ambush near Ludhiana was the second Sikh attack on the youth wing of the ruling party this month.

Turkish troops kill 24 Kurds: Turkish security forces killed 24 Kurdish rebels on Thursday and suffered 12 casualties in fighting in the southeast, officials said. AP reports from Ankara.

Turkish troops killed 17 Kurdish separatist guerrillas trying to sneak into Turkey from northern Iraq near the border towns of Silopi and Cukurca, the regional governor's office announced.

Seven other Kurdish rebels were killed in three other clashes in Sirnak, Mardin and Bingol provinces, the announcement added.

Three soldiers were killed in the fighting and nine security officials died when their vehicle hit a land mine planted by Kurdish rebels, the Anatolia news agency said.

Rebels kill 7 Colombian troops: Leftist guerrillas ambushed a military convoy in the north of the country on Thursday killing seven government troops and wounding three, the Defence Ministry said, Reuter reports from Bogota.

The attack took place in a rural area near the town of Cienaga, 300 miles north of the capital Bogota.

The Colombian guerrillas' latest campaign, which they call "Black September", has included attacks on military and economic targets such as oil pipelines. So far 42 members of the armed forces have died in six ambushes.

Arafat arrives in Jakarta: Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat arrived here Friday from Beijing for a two-day official visit to brief President Suharto on the agreement with Israel on Palestinian autonomy, AP reports from Jakarta.

Arafat was greeted by Defence Minister Edi Sudrajat at the airport and was driven to the presidential palace.

Christian doc killed in Egypt: A Christian physician was gunned down Thursday by suspected Muslim militants in the southern region of Assut, the third victim of extremist violence in three days despite increased security measures, AP reports from Assut.

Police sources said Col Nabil Khalil Gayyed, chief physician of Assut prison hospital, was killed by an unknown number of gunmen Thursday evening in the town of Manafout, about 175 miles (270 km) south of Cairo. The attackers escaped.

Gayyed was the second Coptic Christian killed in three days. On Tuesday, suspected Muslim militants shot dead a Coptic Christian school administrator and a police officer in two separate ambuses in Assut. The assailants got away.

Joulwan to be made NATO chief: President Bill Clinton is expected to nominate US army General Alfred Joulwan as the new commander of NATO alliance military forces, administration officials said on Thursday, Reuter reports from Washington.

Joulwan, 53, currently heads American forces in Latin America and would replace US army General John Shalikashvili as supreme allied commander of NATO forces in Europe (Saceur) based in Mons, Belgium, according to the officials, who asked not to be identified.

If Joulwan is approved by the other allies as expected, he would become the latest in an unbroken string of US commanders of NATO forces since the post was set up in 1950, a year after the alliance was founded to counter Soviet power.

6 hurt in Belfast blast: A bomb exploded on a west Belfast road as a security force patrol passed Friday, wounding a soldier and six civilians and shattering windows, reports AP from Belfast.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but the Irish Republican Army has frequently targeted security forces in its campaign to end British rule in Northern Ireland.

The bomb, planted at roadside, went off between two army and two police vehicles driven by Royal Ulster Constabulary spokesman said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

One of the army vehicles took the main force of the blast, and a soldier riding inside was hurt but not seriously, the spokesman said. Six civilians were admitted to a hospital for treatment of minor injuries and shock, he said.

Yeltsin's negative process must be halted: Gorbachev

ROME, Sept 24: Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev renewed his criticism of Russian President Boris Yeltsin today as he boarded a plane here cutting short a visit to Italy in order to return to Moscow, reports AFP.

He told reporters that the negative process launched by Yeltsin had to be halted.

On Wednesday, announcing that he would leave Italy after six days instead of the eight programmed, he described Yeltsin's decision the day before to dissolve the Russian parliament on the grounds of obstructionism as "senseless and unconstitutional."

Yeltsin promised last month to try again, on Wednesday proposing new legislation limiting marriages of convenience and allowing detention of suspected illegal immigrants.

He also sought the Council of State's opinion on whether the constitution needed change to allow France to put its asylum laws in line with European Community rules.

"Only a constitutional law could exempt France" from examining asylum requests rejected by other EC members, the council said on Thursday.

That rule was agreed to by France and eight other EC nations under the so-called Schengen agreement to allow freer passage between borders.

Georges Sarre, a Paris deputy and secretary for the Citizens' Movement, on Friday called such reform "useless and dangerous."

He accused the government, "for electoral reasons," of not hesitating "to dismantle national sovereignty."

Constitutional reform can come in two ways — by referendum or by a three-fifths vote by both houses of Parliament.

Meetings with Pope John Paul II and Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro scheduled for today were moved forward to Thursday.

He warned then, "I am very worried about what is happening in Russia, because instead of moving forward towards democracy, we are in the middle of setting a dangerous and negative precedent, in which we can toss aside the constitution any time we like."

Accompanied by his wife Raisa, the former Communist Party leader is due to arrive in Moscow at 5:00 PM local time.

AFP adds: Russia's Justice Ministry backed President Boris

Yeltsin today, ruling that his dissolution of the legislature was in the spirit of the constitution although beyond his formal powers, the Itar-Tass agency said.

He warned then, "I am very worried about what is happening in Russia, because instead of moving forward towards democracy, we are in the middle of setting a dangerous and negative precedent, in which we can toss aside the constitution any time we like."

In a statement outlining the legal basis for Tuesday's decree, which has brought ahead a power struggle between the Executive and the legislature, the ministry said Yeltsin had acted to safeguard the rights of Russian citizens, the agency reported in a dispatch by the BBC.

By remaining the sole keeper of the constitution, parliament had been given a lever

to exert political pressure on all other state bodies, the ministry said.

The President, meanwhile, had no legal way of influencing parliament.

The purpose of the decree had been to "eliminate the protracted and nationally damaging confrontation between the legislature and the executive, a confrontation which leads to disaster," the statement said.

By dissolving parliament Yeltsin acted in accordance with the constitutional principles of safeguarding Russia's security and the rights of the people, the ministry said.

6th Tokyo Int'l Film Festival opens

TOKYO, Sept 24: Japan's fledgling film festival opened Friday with a screening of Sylvester Stallone's new thriller, "Cliffhanger," reports AP.

The film's director, Renny Harlin, was among a handful of guests to open the 6th Tokyo International Film Festival. Harlin's other credits include "Die Hard."

Organisers say they hope the festival, which became an annual event last year, will become an internationally acclaimed event, but few expect it ever to rival its more prestigious counterparts in Cannes or Venice.

German director Wim Wenders, whose films include "Wings of Desire" and "Paris, Texas," will chair the jury for the Young Cinema Competition, which will distribute three prizes worth a total of 35 million yen (333,000 dollars).

ANC welcomes passage of TEC bill

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 24: Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) late Thursday welcome the passing by the South African Parliament of a bill that opens the doors to democracy in the country, reports AFP.

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