

Students, workers stay home fearing Tamil attacks

Lanka postpones local polls

COLOMBO, Nov 26: The Sri Lankan government today officially announced the indefinite postponement of local council elections in the island's embattled northern and eastern regions, reports AFP.

A brief statement from President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga's office said the balloting was put off due to request by political parties citing the need for more time to finalise candidates.

Last week, the government announced the election timetable under which polling was due anytime between mid-January and early February next year but several legislators, including those from the ruling party objected.

MPs complained the ongoing Tamil separatist war in the region would hamper campaigning.

The elections were first announced in August and helped Colombo avert a resolution by a United Nations sub-committee on the island's human rights record and the handling of the Tamil separatist war.

Just as the sub-committee dropped the resolution, Colombo cancelled the poll and announced them once again last week only to be put off indefinitely Friday.

"The government accepted the consensus that it was not possible to hold the election in the eastern province and the northern province in the present security climate," a Tamil legislator said.

The local government elections were to be confined to areas that have come under government control in the northeast, official said. Large parts of the north are controlled

by the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Guerrilla.

The on-going war between government troops and the LTTE has prevented elections in the northeast since February 1989 when the parliamentary polls were held.

Reuter adds: Schools closed, some workers stayed home and helmeted troops manned roadblocks in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo today for fear of a Tamil rebels attack to mark their leader's birthday.

The Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam have been fighting since 1983 for a separate state in the north and east for minority Tamil. Today is the 39th birthday of their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

A special committee of military, police and defence ministry representative was appointed to oversee security in Colombo. Military sources said

troops had been alerted to a possible backlash against Tamils by the majority Sinhalese.

"No one want to travel in my taxi. It's like a Sunday," said a taxi driver. "But I have to work because I need to earn a living."

The Tigers are also honouring their dead fighters in what they call "heroes week" which ends today. Residents in the rebels strongholds Jaffna said streets were decorated with banners and pictures of dead fighter garlanded with flower.

Hundred of guerrillas were killed two weeks ago while trying to capture the Pooneryn military base, on the edge of the lagoon separating the northern Jaffna Peninsula from the mainland.

Hundreds of soldiers and sailors also died, in the government's worst setback of the war.



Police check the vehicle of a foreigner outside the main military headquarters Friday in Colombo. Traffic was sparse as security was stepped up in the Sri Lankan capital amid fears of violence on the 39th birthday of Tamil guerilla chief Velupillai Prabhakaran. — AFP photo

Japan's parliament debates reforms bill

TOKYO, Nov 26: The upper house of Japan's parliament Friday began debating controversial reform bills aimed at eliminating corruption from political life, reports AFP.

The debate comes eight days after the lower house approved them following lengthy wrangling between Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa's ruling coalition and the LDP.

Hosokawa, who took office in August promising to clean up Japan's scandal-tainted politics, has threatened to resign if the reform bills do not get parliament's full approval by the end of this year.

The LDP, which lost power to the coalition after a series of corruption scandals involving the party leaders, is in a minority in the upper house but could use delaying tactics to try to delay approval of the bills, political observers said.

Ex-adviser of Bhutan's King gets life-term

NEW DELHI, Nov 26: A former adviser to the King of Bhutan has been sentenced to life imprisonment for leading an insurgency against the monarch of the tiny Himalayan State, reports AFP.

Tek Nath Rizal, a founder of the Bhutan People's Party, was convicted of subversion and sentenced by the High Court on November 16, the state-run newspaper Kuensel reported in an edition received here Friday.

Rizal was accused of various offences under the National Security Act in connection with the insurgency launched four years ago in the south of the country by ethnic Nepalese

villagers.

Rizal was arrested in November 1989. He was previously detained in June 1988, when he was a member of the Royal Advisory Council, but was pardoned the same month by Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuk.

More than 100,000 ethnic Nepal has fled southern Bhutan for neighbouring Nepal since 1989 citing persecution, by the Buddhist-dominated government.

Bhutan claim that the refugee, mostly Hindu of Nepalese descent, are immigrant from India or Nepal.

Parliament defies Shevardnadze

TBILISI, Nov 26: The Georgian parliament on Thursday defied President Eduard Shevardnadze for the first time by refusing to let him rule single handedly for two more months, reports AFP.

The legislators turned down by 78 votes to 63 a presidential request to extend until January 20 the suspension of parliament, which has been out since September.

Shevardnadze had suggested a parliamentary committee could spend the time drawing up a constitution.

The refusal was a blow for the former Soviet foreign minister who in the past had always managed to get his way in the legislature.

However, legislators did agree by 135 votes to eight to a

two-month extension of the state of emergency, which allows Shevardnadze wide-ranging powers to combat rebel supporters of former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and "fight corruption and organised crime."

The legislators' unexpected refusal to be further sidelined appeared to be rooted in growing discontent over the president's rapprochement with Russia and particularly his decision to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Shevardnadze had angered deputies by announcing his decision to join the CIS on October 8, during the suspension of parliamentary sessions.

But the decision still has to be ratified by parliament and is

failure to do so would cause the president acute embarrassment.

At Thursday's sitting, one deputy accused him of "leading the country to dictatorship."

Shevardnadze rose and said he did not have to listen to insults.

"I have already resigned once after insults like this. I came back because I was asked to. This time, I am not going to resign. I will see through to the end what I have undertaken," he said, before storming out.

It was the president's promise to join the CIS, long awaited by Moscow, which led Russian troops to intervene against Gamsakhurdia led rebel forces, helping the government troops to victory.

The entry of government

forces into the western town of Augdidi, which Gamsakhurdia was using as his "capital", was hailed as a major victory for Shevardnadze after months of military setbacks against the rebels and separate in Abkhazia.

But Gamsakhurdia escaped, and continuing skirmishes between partisans and government forces mean that further conflict cannot be ruled out.

At the opening of parliament, Shevardnadze told deputies, "The first stage of the state of emergency is now over, western Georgia has been cleared of supporters of the former president and mercenaries from the northern Caucasus and Abkhazia supporting them."

Off the Record

Woman swallows mouse

BELJING: A woman in eastern China's Jiangsu Province swallowed a mouse in her sleep, according to daily newspaper the Yangtze Evening News, circulated Friday in Beijing, reports AFP.

The mouse remained alive in her stomach for three days, then "mysteriously disappeared," the daily said.

Hong Kouxia, a resident of the village of Guanxiang, awoke screaming on the night of October 25, according to the newspaper published in the Jiangsu provincial capital Nanjing.

Her husband, with the aid of an oil lamp, saw the tail and feet of a mouse stuck in her throat. He tried to pull the mouse out by the tail but the rodent drove into her oesophagus, it said.

The mouse remained alive in her stomach despite the medicine Hong took and injection she received from the village doctor. She said she no longer felt anything in her stomach after three days.

"There are really too many mice in China, and what's more, they are vicious," Hong said, according to the newspaper.

"They must all be exterminated."

Most hated man

TEHRAN: Iran on Friday blasted US President Bill Clinton as the "most hated man" of world Muslim for meeting Salman Rushdie, who has been condemned to death here on charges of blasphemy against Islam, reports AFP.

Clinton has "become the most hated man in the Muslim world" for receiving the British writer, Chief Justice Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi said during the weekly prayer at Tehran University.

"If you had the least political sense, what would be the implication of receiving a man who has insulted the Muslim and Christian prophet?" he asked the president.

Clinton met Rushdie on Wednesday in Washington in a show of support for the author, who was condemned to death by Iran's late spiritual guide, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, for alleged blasphemy in his book "The Satanic Verses."

The Indian-born-author, living in hiding since the sentence was passed in 1989, has stepped up a campaign to urge western leaders to pressure Iran to lift the death threat.

But Iranian leaders have upheld the sentence, arguing it was a religious decree which could not be changed. An Islamic foundation has offered a reward of two million dollar for anyone who kills Rushdie.



BRIEFLY

Tajik rebels derail train, kill 3:

Tajik opposition fighters who infiltrated from Afghanistan blew up a key railroad section inside Tajikistan and killed three people in two separate attacks Thursday, news reports said, according to AP from Moscow.

The opposition unit planted four mines on a railway line between Termez, a city in neighbouring Uzbekistan, and Kurgan Tyube in Tajikistan, said the ITAR-Tas and the Interfax news agencies.

Later Thursday, Interfax reported that three people were killed and one was wounded in a shooting attack on the Termez-Kurgan Tyube highway.

2 Indians to die in Singapore:

Two Indian nationals were sentenced to death by the High Court Friday on charges of trafficking 325 grams (11.4 ounces) of heroin, AP reports from Singapore.

Govindarajulu Murali, 32, an engineer, and Amuruthan Chenchalaiah, 45, a businessman, were arrested in June 1989 when they tried to sell the heroin to Central Narcotics officers for 85,000 Singapore dollars (US \$53,459), court officials said.

The death penalty is mandatory in Singapore for anyone possessing, trafficking or importing more than 15 grams of heroin.

Storm claims 43 in Vietnam:

The toll from a storm that battered Vietnam's central provinces has risen to 43 dead and 67 missing, government officials said Friday, AP reports from Hanoi.

Officials at the typhoon and flood control center said another 166 people were injured and tens of thousands of homes were destroyed or damaged by tropical storm Kyle.

The storm hit Khanh Hoa, Phu Yen and Darlac provinces Tuesday with winds of more than 120 kilometers (67 miles) an hour.

50 hurt in Indian train mishap:

Fifty people were injured when an express train derailed after colliding with wagons from a goods train blocking the track in the western state of Gujarat yesterday, the Press Trust of India reported, AFP says from New Delhi.

The passenger train, on a run between Rajkot in Gujarat and Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh state, ploughed into three wagons from the goods train which were lying on the track after a derailment earlier in the day, the news agency said.

The accident came just two days after 12 people were killed in Madhya Pradesh in a collision between a passenger express and a stationary goods train.

Iran to buy Russian choppers:

Iran plans to buy or lease 30 Russian helicopters, including the giant Mi-26, to ferry passengers and for relief operations, Resalat newspaper announced Thursday, AFP reports from Tehran.

The order includes 10 Mi-26, the world's largest helicopter, it said.

Several Russian helicopters are already used to carry passengers to and from Gulf Islands off southern Iran.

2 held for drug trafficking:

An award-winning school teacher and his wife, a senior health official, were arrested in Thailand on charge of drug trafficking after police said they found an underground drug factory at their home, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Some 272,000 tablets of Amphetamine with a street value of about 2 million dollar were found in the couple's bedroom at their home in Petchaburi, 145 km (90 mile) southeast of Bangkok, police said yesterday.

DPRK to return Tuesday remains of 33 US troops

SEOUL, Nov 26: North Korea said Friday it will return next week the remains of 33 American soldiers killed in the 1950-53 Korean War in what appeared to be a conciliatory gesture toward the United States, reports AP.

A US military spokesman in Seoul confirmed his command was expecting "a large transfer of remains in the near future."

The transfer, scheduled for Tuesday, will be the largest since the end of the Korean War and is considered a gesture to improve ties with the United States.

Churchill knew in advance about attack on Pearl Harbour?

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The documents, which included German police reports obtained by breaking enemy codes, also revealed Britain

22 injured as French students clash with police

PARIS, Nov 26: Clashes between youths and riot police injured 22 people in Bordeaux overnight, officials said Friday, after high school students nationwide protested crowded classrooms and a lack of teachers, reports AP.

The demonstrations Thursday followed similar marches by college students last week and a string of protests by workers angered by the austerity and privatization policies of Premier Edouard Balladur's conservative government.

Riot police in Bordeaux fired teargas late Thursday night when about 200 young people, many of them rowdies unconnected to the protest, lit bonfires and refused to disperse from Palace de la Victoire, a student focal point in the southwestern city.

Youths then pelted police with cobblestones and bottles, torched two cars and pummeled a French photo journalist. Nineteen youths and three police officers injured in clashes that lasted until at least 3 am, officials said.

At least 6,000 students marched peacefully in Paris on Thursday as well as thousands more in at least 18 other cities including Grenoble, Montpellier, Angouleme and Bordeaux.

Angolan talks begin again

LUSAKA, Nov 26: Angolan negotiators met again today to tackle issue threatening a proposed truce to halt a civil war that kills and estimated 1,000 people a day, reports Reuter.

Diplomatic source monitoring the peace talks, which opened in Zambia's capital Lusaka two weeks ago, predicted there could be some "major announcement within 48 hours."

"Judging by the way things are going, there could be a major announcement within 48 hours," a diplomatic source said.

"I can't say what this could be, but at the moment there are signs that some announcement will be made."

Gaddafi orders media to end attacks on Clinton

TUNIS, Nov 26: Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has ordered his country's media to end attacks on US President Bill Clinton, the official news agency Jana said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Jana said the order was the result of an Egyptian appeal that US and Libyan media end a war of words aimed at Gaddafi and Clinton.

"I invite the Libyan media not to treat Clinton as it does (former US presidents) Reagan and Bush," Jana quoted Gaddafi as saying.

"The democratic camp is our friend and we should allow Clinton time so he can implement the independent democratic policy which will inevitably be non-aggressive, Gaddafi added.

In its most recent attack on the US President, Jana said on Tuesday Libya had evidence Clinton rigged the results of his election last year.

The agency said it was responding to a Voice of America commentary which it said treated Gaddafi as an autocrat.

Gaddafi on Wednesday also called for the heads of former US president Ronald Reagan and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher for their role in a 1986 US raid on Tripoli.

20,000 noses buried

SEOUL: The ashes of 20,000 noses carved from their faces by Japanese warriors nearly 400 years ago were buried Friday, a report said, according to AP.

Some 1,500 people gathered for the ceremony at an historic battlefield in Puan, 220 kilometers (136 miles) south of Seoul, according to the national news agency Yonhap.

Historians say Japanese soldiers severed the noses from slain Koreans and cashed them in for rewards. Some 100,000 Koreans are estimated to have been killed during Japan's 1597 invasion attempt.

The remains of the noses were found in a tomb in Okayama Prefecture in Japan in 1983 by a South Korean scholar. They had been preserved in salt, according to historians.

The remains of the noses were brought back to South Korea last year and cremated for preservation until their interment in Puan on Friday.

Teen mother buries baby alive

CLAYTON: A newborn girl survived being buried alive by her 15-year-old mother, authorities say. But they can't find the body of another infant that the teen's 18-year-old sister said she buried, reports AP.

The baby girl was found Monday afternoon buried about a foot (30 cm) deep behind a trailer near Louisville. The mother had told a neighbour that the baby had stopped breathing and she had buried it.

While questioning the sisters about the baby discovered Monday, investigators learned that the 18-year-old had also been pregnant. She told them she also buried her baby, Sheriff's Deputy Danny Bowen said.

Investigators searched for the body Tuesday but could not find it. The search was to continue Wednesday using tracking dogs, Bowen said.

The baby found Monday was in satisfactory condition Wednesday at University Hospital in Birmingham.

No charges had been filed against either of the teenagers as of Wednesday morning, Bowen said the case was still under investigation.



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (L) and Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (R) smile as they enter their meeting Thursday in Oslo. Arafat began a Scandinavian tour in Norway, the country that hosted 14 rounds of secret peace talks between the PLO and Israel. — AFP photo

Nigeria announces new cabinet

LAGOS, Nov 26: Nigeria's new military government on Thursday announced a cabinet including senior politicians from both banned parties as ministers, reports Reuter.

The list included at least five allies of thwarted presidential candidate Moshood Abiola and four members of the previous government, including former oil minister Don Ebiwet and Finance Minister Aminu Saleh.

No portfolios were stated on the list released by David Atta, chief spokesman for military leader General Gani Abacha.

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