

Galazov elected North Ossetia president

MOSCOW, Jan 17: The troubled province of North Ossetia in southern Russia elected parliamentary chairman Akhmed Galazov as its first president in a weekend poll, Inter-Tass news agency said today, reports Reuter.

Tass reported from the regional capital Vladikavkaz that Galazov, a former local communist party chief with good connections in Moscow, had polled over 60 per cent of Sunday's vote. Turnout was around 55 per cent.

North Ossetia, which is in the volatile Caucasus region, hit the headlines in late 1992 when around 200 people were killed in fighting with neighbouring Ingushetia over territory.

The conflict has its roots in a decision by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin to exile Ingushetia to Central Asia during World War II. Ossetians took over much of their land.

President Boris Yeltsin flew down to the fractious region in early December in a bid to end the conflict.

BRIEFLY

Chara Char selected for festival:

'Chara Char' (Shelter of the Wings), the latest film by noted film

maker Buddhadeb Dasgupta, has been selected for the

competitive section of the Berlin film festival slated for next

month, PTI reports from Calcutta.

Official sources in Calcutta said that the last Indian film

shown in the same section was 'Phera' (the Return) in 1987 also

made by Dasgupta.

'Chara Char' deals with a man's relationship with birds.

13 die in Colombia accident:

Thirteen people died and eight were injured in a head-on

collision Sunday between two buses in northwestern Colombia,

police said. AFP reports from Medellin.

One of the vehicles was carrying tourists returning to

Medellin, the capital of Antioquia Department, from the

Caribbean coast. All the occupants of that vehicle died.

A witness said the driver of the tour bus crossed the median

line and collided with another bus carrying passengers from

Medellin to Caucasus.

Fire kills 24 in Morocco:

Fire sweeping through a sauna killed 24 people in the north Moroccan city of Tetuan, the national press agency Map said on Sunday.

Reuter reports from Rabat.

Another 15 were treated in hospital after inhaling smoke

during the Saturday night blaze believed to have been caused

by an electrical fault. Map added.

The sauna in the town centre was built on two storeys, one

reserved for women and the other for men.

Actor Aldridge dead:

Michael Aldridge, a versatile actor popular with American television audiences in the 1980s in British productions like "Chariots and Caldicott," has died at age 73, AP reports from London.

His family said he died January 10 at his home at Greenwich in southeast London. No cause of death was

stated.

Aldridge, whose father was a doctor, determined to be an actor while still a schoolboy and made his stage debut with a repertory company in 1939 in Terence Rattigan's "French Without Tears."

UN food aid for Kenya:

The United Nations said on Sunday it would supply some 82,500 tonnes of food aid to Kenya over the next six months to meet shortages caused by a severe drought, Reuter reports from Nairobi.

The World Food Programme (WFP), food arm of the United Nations, said the food would help 410,000 drought victims and 580,000 hit by a combination of drought and socio-economic problems.

A severe drought has hit most parts of Africa, the world's poorest continent, seriously depleting food stocks and forcing most countries to look outside for help.

7 die in S African violence:

At least seven people were reported killed early yesterday as Zulus intent on marching on the union buildings in Pretoria, the seat of government, clashed with blacks trying to get to work, police and peace monitors said. AFP reports from Johannesburg.

Police reported widespread unrest as Zulus based in migrant workers hostels in Johannesburg's satellite black townships torched some buses, cars and minibus taxis and hijacked others.

Italians go to polls Mar 27

ROME, Jan 17: Italy embarked on an uncertain road to general elections under a complicated new voting system on March 27 after President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro finally dissolved the country's scandal-tainted parliament, reports Reuter.

About a third of the members of the outgoing legislature are being investigated for corruption in ever-widening inquiries which have destroyed the credibility of the parties which had dominated political life since World War II. Scalfaro said in a letter to

the speakers of the two chambers that parliament was no longer representative of the people. "The world now passes to the voters," he said.

State radio said the curtain had fallen "on the shortest and most tormented legislature in the history of the republic."

The path for early elections was clear when Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi submitted his resignation last Thursday after a parliamentary debate exposed deep divisions over the timing of the long-awaited polls.

"We must use the thought of

Deng Xiaoping to guide the party, armed forces, the people and the nation," said Jiang in a speech last November but only published Monday.

"Our party needs an ideologically correct line," he said in the speech, which was delivered at the end of the third plenum of the party's 14th Congress.

The Congress, from November 11-14, saw the adoption of a 50-point ruling on the second phase of economic reforms launched by Deng in the early 1980s.

The speech contained nothing factually new, and its publication Monday came after two other recent major speeches by Jiang, considered the front-runner to succeed Deng, now 80.

The frequency of his speeches, which all stress the need to pursue economic reforms and strengthen the political system while calling the communists to order, underline the concern of China's leaders about what will happen without Deng, political analysts said.

PBS supporters have alleged that the corruption charge against Pairin, a native Kadazan, was politically-motivated to disrupt the state government.

Analysts said if Pairin bows out, the oil and timber-rich state on Borneo, dubbed Malaysia's "wild east," will be thrown into confusion.

The 32-year-old Princess, who is officially separated from her husband, heir-to-the-throne Prince Charles, announced late last year that she was temporarily withdrawing from her public life away from the media spotlight.

The Sun quoted a former senior policeman as saying: "She is setting herself up to be attacked by terrorists, kidnappers and cranks."

Departure of Western forces from Somalia worries Pakistanis

MOGADISHU, Somalia, Jan 17: After the Americans, French, Italians, Germans and nearly everyone else bail out of Somalia in the coming months, most of the faces under the blue UN helmets will be Pakistanis, reports AP.

Neither the Pakistanis nor the Somalis relish the prospect.

Somalis often call the Pakistanis "Shigal," after an especially weak local clan. The Americans accuse the Pakistanis of withholding fire for fear of provoking the Somalis.

The Pakistanis say they are doing their job with care and that the Americans may be taking too many risks when they open fire. Pakistani officers also point out that they are the ones who are staying.

"We did our very best to help the Somalis, whom we

view as brother Muslims," said Col. Tariq Salim Malik, the longest serving Pakistani battalion commander in Somalia.

"We have given our blood and our sweat. We have done our share," said Tariq, whose 6th Punjab Regiment arrived two years ago and is going home this month.

There is no question that the Pakistanis have made great sacrifices.

They were the first to send soldiers — 500 even before the huge UN force arrived 13 months ago — and they've lost 34 of their 5,000 men since the United Nations took charge of the operation in May, more than any other national contingent.

Twenty-four Pakistanis were killed June 5 in ambushes that started months of fighting between the peacekeepers and many Pakistanis.

The trip follows an invitation from Chinese Premier Li Peng.

Speculation is rife that the government will be seeking to bolster its military arsenal before a possible dry-season offensive against Khmer Rouge

forces.

Over the weekend, the Pakistanis pulled out of two key posts in southern Mogadishu, including the soccer stadium, which was the site of fierce fighting between Aldeed's forces and the UN troops. Heavily armed militiamen, some apparently as young as 12 or 13 years old, immediately occupied the stadium and set up machine-guns along the Pakistani sand-bagged emplacements.

"I think this is a sinking ship," said Capt Khalid Jadoon, assigned to Pakistani force headquarters. "The Americans are leaving, everyone's leaving. Pretty soon we'll leave, too. I don't think there's any solution to this country's problems."

Clashes between UN and militia forces escalated over the next few months, until a fierce battle October 3 in which 18 American soldiers and many

Somalis were killed. That provoked the US decision to withdraw and announcements by other countries that they would do the same.

But while the West was saying it had had enough, the Pakistanis, Indians and a few others offered to do more.

Hofstros Boutros-Ghali, the UN Secretary-General has recommended that the international force be reduced from its current 33,000 to about 16,000, with most of the soldiers stationed outside volatile Mogadishu.

That means the Pakistanis would be covering more turf in the capital with less UN support, and none of the US attack helicopters and communications technology that are so critical. The notion worries many Pakistanis.

Instead of helicopters, the Pakistanis expect about 1,500 more combat troops and some

tanks to supplement their armoured personnel carriers and American pickup trucks armed with machine guns.

"With these things we can ensure our own security, but we can't bring peace to the entire area," said Tariq, the battalion commander.

If the people of south Mogadishu do not agree to having UN troops here, that means the UN troops will be doing nothing other than defending themselves. In that case, there's no point in our staying."

Even now, with American helicopters and other Western forces to back them up, Pakistani patrols stick to safe streets and neighbourhoods where their relations with the Somalis are warmest.

Ankara made it known that they would like to sign the accord during the visit of Cetin and submitted a 'draft text'.

Cambodian PMs, cabinet members leave for China

PHNOM PENH, Jan 17: Cambodia's two prime ministers and most of their cabinet members left today for a four-day visit to China, reports Reuter.

First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh and second Prime Minister Hun Sen were accompanied by joint Defence Ministers General Tean Banh and Tea Chantran and the Foreign, Information, Industry, Commerce, Planning, Agriculture, Public Works and Transport ministers.

The trip follows an invitation from Chinese Premier Li Peng.

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Tension mounts in Maharashtra

Shiv Sena stages arson attacks

BOMBAY, Jan 17: Tension shot up today in the Indian state of Maharashtra as Hindu militants staged arson attacks in response to the renaming of a university after Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the hero of the untouchable community, reports AFP.

Maharashtra police braced for violence as they prepared to block a visit today by Hindu fundamentalist leader Bal Thackeray to the city of Aurangabad, the restive site of the renamed university in western Maharashtra.

Thackeray is the leader of the Shiv Sena, whose members have been at the forefront of the violent protests by upper-caste Hindus which erupted late Friday.

Police in Bombay, the Maharashtra capital, said they had erected checkpoints at all points of entry into Aurangabad to ensure Thackeray does not enter the city. They have banned the visit amid fears it would spark large-scale unrest.

Shiv Sena militants torched a government veterinary hospital and schools in Jalna district and attacked trucks travelling on highways in the region, police said.

A Harijan slum and an irrigation department office were set on fire in the district of Parbhani.

Forty Harijan homes were set on fire Sunday in the vil-

lage of Sakshall Pimpri where the administration imposed a collective fine of 200,000 rupees on residents to raise funds for compensation, the police said.

No casualties were reported in the attacks.

No trains or buses have plied in the region since Saturday following attacks which forced transport services to be cancelled.

Nishikant Bhale Rao, editor of Marathwada newspaper, told AFP by telephone from Aurangabad that Harijans in rural areas were gripped by terror.

"They will flee and come to the cities in search of safety," he said.

Bhale Rao said Harijans were paying reverential homage at the gates of the university which sports a board with its new name.

The outbreak of inter-caste violence in India's worst since 1940, when then prime minister V P Singh hiked job quotas for the lower castes.

Such activity cannot achieve real national reconciliation because it is not a real unification of national forces but an attempt to catch and put the DK Party (Democratic Kampuchea or Khmer Rouge) in an iron cage which the "youth" communists have arranged since its aggression in Cambodia. By doing this the DK Party will commit suicide," said Khieu Samphan.

Khmers reject demobilisation of forces

PHNOM PENH, Jan 17: Cambodia's Maoist Khmer Rouge has rejected the demobilisation of its guerrilla forces, branding a government peace offer as nothing more than a trap to destroy the organisation, reports Reuter.

The move opens the way for both sides to use the current dry season to settle their differences on the battlefield.