

Lankan govt vows to end presidential system

COLOMBO, Oct 17: Sri Lanka's People's Alliance (PA) government has pledged to abolish the country's executive presidential system by July 15, 1995, it was reported here.



Chandrika Kumaratunga

today, says Xinhua. The pledge was held out by Constitutional Affairs and Justice Minister G L Peris who noted that the PA's decision to contest the executive presidency to be held on November 9 was motivated by its urge to obtain a popular mandate to end the system.

"By trying to win the presidential election we do not intend to continue with the system which we opposed but to seek an overall popular mandate to abolish that," he told newsmen here on Sunday.

The abolishing of the executive presidency introduced by the previous United National Party (UNP) government in 1988 was a main pledge given by the PA at the August 16 general election in which it emerged as the biggest party in parliament heading a coalition government but short of an absolute majority of its own.

US troops to remain in Kuwait until total Iraqi pullout

WASHINGTON, Oct 17: Having won UN backing for its tough stance on Iraqi aggression, the Clinton administration is warning Saddam Hussein that US troops will remain in Kuwait until he ends his threat to the nation he invaded four years ago, reports AP.

US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine K. Albright gave the Iraqi leader only days to finish his troop pull-back from the Kuwaiti border area, and Secretary of State Warren Christopher warned that next time the United States will not wait to retaliate if Iraq threatens its neighbour.

The administration delivered its tough message to Iraq on Sunday, a day after pushing through a unanimous UN Security Council vote demanding that Iraq end all "hostile or provocative" actions against Kuwait.

"The message is clear: Iraq must complete its withdrawal. It must not threaten its neighbours in the future," President Clinton said at a White House ceremony honouring the US delegation that accompanied Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on his return to power Saturday.

"The troops, ships and attack aircraft I have ordered to the Gulf area will continue to remain there until the crisis passes," Clinton said.

More than 10,000 US troops are currently in Kuwait or on the way, with 18,000 more ready to move to the region.

Albright, speaking on ABC's "This Week With David Brinkley," said that the administration was "mildly optimistic" that Saddam would remove the last major area of concern, two brigades of elite

Iraqi forces remaining near Nasiriyah, about 150 kilometres (90 miles) from Kuwait.

But Christopher reminded Saddam that he faces quick punishment if he repeats his threats against Iraq that precipitated the current US military buildup in the area.

"Next time we'll probably not wait," Christopher said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "We will take action, strong action, against him."

He stressed that the United States has the authority under existing UN resolutions to take military action even if Iraq doesn't cross the border into Kuwait.

Albright added: "We recognize this area as vital to US national interests and we will behave, with others, multilaterally when we can and unilaterally when we must."

Russia, which has been try-

ing to negotiate an end to the current crisis, went along only reluctantly with the UN resolution Saturday and insisted that it contain no threat of the use of force if Iraq fails to comply.

Russia also asked the United Nations to consider Saddam's pledge to Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev that he would recognize Kuwait, one condition for the lifting of economic sanctions imposed after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Russia can't begin collecting the billions of dollars Iraq owes it until sanctions are lifted.

But the US officials were adamant that sanctions cannot be lifted until Saddam and his government formally recognize Kuwait and Baghdad meets other conditions, including respecting minorities, releasing Kuwaiti prisoners captured during the war and acceding to weapons inspections.

Off the Record



Library picture dated July 29, 1981 shows the Princess and the Prince of Wales on their wedding day in London. Prince Charles was pressured by his father into marrying Diana, whom he never loved, according to a new book on the heir to the British throne. — AFP photo

Charles' revelations numb Diana

LONDON: Princess Diana was reported Monday to be numbed by Prince Charles' revelations in an authorised biography that he'd never loved her and was forced into the marriage by his father, reports AP.

The Daily Mirror quoted an unnamed friend of the princess as saying: "Numb is the word to describe Diana's feelings. She is devastated. She can hardly believe what her husband has done to her. On the advice of her friends and presumably her lawyers she is keeping her head down and saying nothing."

In a stunning departure from royal tradition, Charles, 45, bared his soul in the biography, serialisation of which began in The Sunday Times newspaper on Sunday.

"How could I have got it all so wrong?" Charles laments in 1986, five years after his marriage, in one quoted letter Diana, 33, and Charles, who have two sons, separated in December 1992.

Many observers saw authorisation of the book as a huge gamble by the queen's eldest son and heir — an apparent attempt to revive acceptance for him as the future king by being unusually frank.

Buckingham Palace said on Sunday that Charles has no regrets about cooperating for the biography that describes him as bullied and mocked as a child, and trapped in a nightmare marriage with a bored, bumptious, self-absorbed and obsessively jealous young wife.

Charles' father Prince Philip, 73, was tight-lipped when asked about the book in an interview in The Daily Telegraph on Monday. It quoted Philip as saying, "I've never discussed private matters."

The Prince of Wales, to be published Nov. 3, depicts Philip as a domineering father who forced Charles into a loveless marriage. The interview was timed to coincide with the departure on Monday of the queen and Philip for a state visit to Russia. But The Daily Telegraph said the book threatened to overshadow that.

It said that when asked about the timing of the serialisation, Philip replied, "I'd rather not get involved in it. I've never made any comment about any member of the family in 40 years and I'm not going to start now."

Miracle mutation

LOS ANGELES: Cristoforo Putnam and Rosa Giovannelli had a son in 1780 in their small town in Italy, never knowing they bequeathed a genetic legacy that offers hope for reversing heart disease two centuries later, reports AP.

The boys' descendants in Limone, Italy, inherited a genetic defect that protects them from the scourge of western living — fatty deposits that clog the arteries.

The 38 lucky carriers have a simple mutation in a protein of so-called good cholesterol that lets them eat red meat, sausage and butter without artery-clogging deposits.

They range in age from the teens to nearly 90. And they have never worried about strokes or heart attacks since longevity runs in the family.

"They are almost all smokers. They eat like hell, the worst diet," said the University of Milan's Dr Cesare Sirtori, who screened residents of Limone for the miracle mutation.

Ever since Sirtori discovered the mutation, called Apolipoprotein A-1 Milano for the university where he is a pharmacology professor, doctors have wondered about harnessing its power to eliminate coronary artery disease.

"Eventually it is not inconceivable that the gene could be transferred to the liver or other organs of very high-risk people who could then end up manufacturing it on their own," said Dr Prediman K Shah, director of the cardiac care unit at Cedars-Sinai Medical Centre in Los Angeles.

Most favoured punishment for wayward kids

PARIS: Banning television for wayward children is a favourite punishment in French homes while a slap in the face is the least popular of common sanctions, an opinion poll showed on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The survey, published in Le Journal de Dimanche on Sunday, also showed that more parents preferred to spank their children on the behind than make them go without dessert at the end of a meal.

Banning television topped the poll of possible punishments, with 73 per cent saying they were "rather in favour" of stopping children going out with friends trailed with 61 per cent, ahead of spanking (47), no dessert (24) and a slap in the face (14).

BRIEFLY

11 killed in SA clash: Eleven people were killed and at least 12 injured when shooting broke out at a meeting between rival taxi groups in Khayelitsha black township near Cape Town late yesterday, police said, AFP reports from Cape Town.

A crowd of around 1,000 had gathered at a sports stadium in the township for the meeting, called in a bid to halt bitter feuding between the rival organisations, a police spokesman said.

5 found dead in UK bar: Five people were found shot to death inside a bar on Sunday, police said, AP reports from Birmingham.

The two women and three men were discovered just before noon after a worried relative flagged down a police car outside the bar, said Birmingham Police spokesman Lt LaFaree King-Walker.

4 die in Russian plane crash: A sport plane on a training flight crashed into reservoir in the Urals Mountains region, killing all four people aboard, officials said Monday, AP reports from Moscow.

The Yak-18T plane was flying near the city of Miass, 1,500 kilometres (920 miles) east of Moscow, when it crashed on Sunday, said Vasily Yurchuk, a spokesman for Russia's ministry for Emergency Situations.

Measles claims 11 in Indonesia: An outbreak of measles has killed at least 11 children in the eastern Indonesian island of Flores, a press report said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The Suara Pamburuan afternoon daily said that the outbreak that has spread to four villages at the eastern tip of Flores island has killed 11 children since mid-September and dozens more were "being treated for the disease."

7 exiles captured in Cuba: Seven Cuban exiles who landed in their homeland in a motorboat and killed a fisherman where engaging in a "blatant act of terrorism," Cuban officials say, AP reports from Miami.

The men, believed to be members of a Florida-based paramilitary group, were captured after a gunfight with authorities, the Cuban government said Sunday.

Chinese dissident Liu freed: Chinese dissident Liu Nianchu, who was detained by police May 26, was freed yesterday, his wife said, reports AP from Beijing.

"My husband returned home this afternoon. He seemed to be in good health but is very tired and thinner," said Chu Hailian by telephone.

"He was held in a hotel in Haidian, western Beijing," she said, adding that police had been placed in front of their house.

Iran to send back 5 lakh Afghan refugees next yr

TEHRAN, Oct 17: Some 500,000 Afghan refugees will be repatriated during next Iranian fiscal year (to start March 1995), a senior Iranian official announced today, reports Xinhua.

Ahmad Hussein, director general in charge of foreign national affairs at the Interior Ministry, said that the repatriation was decided in Geneva by the tripartite commission of representatives from Iran, Afghanistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the state-run television reported.

He rejected the Western media reports that Iran forced

the Afghan refugees to leave the country, saying that the refugees voluntarily returned to their homeland.

During the past three months, Hussein said, more than 300,000 Afghan refugees voluntarily returned home under the supervision of the UNHCR representatives at the border points.

In August, the Iranian official had said that 640,000 Afghan refugees would be repatriated by the end of the current Iranian year (to be ended March, 1995).

Hussein put the total figure of Afghan refugees in Iran at about 1,798,000.



Indian Muslims chant anti-US slogans and burn effigies of President Bill Clinton at a rally attended by some 400 people to show support for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP photo

Israel lifts closure of Gaza

Arafat frees 60 Hamas activists

GAZA CITY, Oct 17: PLO chief Yasser Arafat Monday released scores of Muslim militants who had been detained after the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier. Israel lifted the week-long closure of the Gaza Strip, reports AP.

The Israeli move permitted some 30,000 Palestinians to return to their jobs in Israel on Monday. Palestinian officials had denounced the closure as collective punishment and said it violated the spirit of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accord.

Israel-PLO negotiations on expanding Palestinian self-rule were to resume on Tuesday in Cairo, another sign that rela-

tions are returning to normal after being badly shaken by the abduction.

Sgt Nachshon Waxman, 19, was abducted a week ago by members of the Muslim militant group Hamas. The affair ended Friday night when his captors murdered Waxman just as Israeli commandos were storming their safehouse north of Jerusalem. A commando and three kidnappers were also killed.

In response to the kidnapping, Palestinian police rounded up 210 Hamas followers in hopes of finding the captors.

Sixty detainees had been

released by this morning, Gaza police chief, Ghazi Jabali said on Monday, adding that all detainees would be freed within a few days.

The releases signalled that Arafat's self-rule government is pulling away from a showdown with Hamas, its chief rival which aims to block the peace process. Hamas supporters have staged mass demonstrations over the past two days to press for the detainees' freedom.

On Sunday, Palestinian troops blocked the centre of Gaza City to prevent Hamas riots, then joined Israeli soldiers to defuse protests by hundreds

of Hamas followers near an isolated Jewish settlement.

Jabali said a political dialogue with Hamas would resume soon in hopes of persuading the faction to take part in autonomy. Hamas opposes the autonomy accord, but has not ruled out participating in Palestinian general elections under certain conditions.

Meanwhile, Palestinian police will soon begin confiscating unregistered weapons, Jabali said. The campaign appeared aimed mainly at

izzedine al-Qassam, the armed wing of Hamas, which claimed responsibility for Waxman's kidnapping.

Japanese MPs to lobby for Suu Kyi's release

TOKYO, Oct 17: About 20 Japanese members of parliament plan to form a league to lobby for the release of Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, now under house arrest, a daily said on Sunday, reports AP.

The Japanese group, to be formed by ruling and opposition party legislators from both houses of parliament, will include Lower House Speaker Takako Doi and former Transport Minister Kawa Okuda, the Yomiuri Shimbun said.

A legislator was quoted as saying: "Guaranteeing the freedom of activities by political leaders is a step toward democracy" in Myanmar.

57 pc Finns support joining EU

HELSINKI, Oct 17: Finns strongly supported joining the European Union in a crucial referendum that political leaders hope will help sway neighbour Sweden and Norway to follow suit, reports AP.

Fifty-seven per cent of Finland's voters said "yes" on Sunday to the government's EU application and 43 per cent were opposed. Turnout was 74 per cent among 4 million eligible voters in the nation of 5 million.

Leaders of Sweden and Norway hailed the results and predicted their voters also will approve membership next month.

"This is a step forward for European cooperation," said Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar

Carlsson.

His predecessor, Carl Bildt, who helped hammer out the membership plans before being voted out of office, said EU membership for the three countries would strengthen "Nordic influence in Europe."

The Finnish referendum was non-binding, and the parliament now must make a final decision. Most of the 200 legislators have said they will respect the referendum outcome.

"A clear majority wants our country to join the European Union," said Martti Ahtisaari, Finland's president. "We are not stepping into the unknown. Rather, we are joining with similar countries in the decision-making process that

dictates our continent's future development."

The EU, successor to the 37-year-old European Economic Community, unites its members politically and economically with preferential trade and customs laws.

With the Nordic nations and Austria — which approved membership in a referendum earlier this year — the EU would grow to 16 members with an economy worth dollars 7 trillion a year.

Voters in Sweden and Norway are more divided than were voters in Finland, according to opinion polls and Sweden's ballot on November 13 and Norway's on November 27 are expected to be close.

Suharto's trial postponed

JAKARTA, Indonesia, Oct 17: President Suharto on Monday forced the postponement of his trial in a landmark suit charging him with diverting state funds meant for preservation of Indonesia's rain forests, reports AP.

As no presidential lawyer turned up for the hearing on the opening day of the trial, Judge Benjamin Mangikudilaga of Jakarta's State Administrative Court said he had no option but to put it off until Oct 31.

Suharto is not expected to testify in the trial, the first time he has been taken to court in his three decades of power.

The suit, filed by six environmental groups in August, accuses Suharto of ignoring ecological concerns by diverting 183 million dollars in state forestry funds as an interest-free loan to the state-owned Indonesian Aircraft Industry for a project to develop a passenger plane.

Diehards opt for Kohl again

BONN, Oct 17: Veteran Chancellor Helmut Kohl scraped to victory with a greatly reduced majority in Germany's general election as voters tired of his rule but opted for continuity rather than change, reports Reuter.

Germans who have known only Kohl leadership for the past 12 years gave him the chance to become the country's longest serving post-war leader, but tempered his triumph on Sunday by handing his centre-right coalition only a narrow win.

A close result has one advantage — it imposes more discipline, Kohl said after claiming victory in the cliff-hanger vote. It will be difficult but that's life.

Provisional official results released today showed Kohl's Christian Democrats (CDU), their Bavarian CSU sister party and the Liberal Free Democrats (FDP) won 341 seats in the 672 seat lower house.

The combined opposition of the Social Democrats (SPD), radical Greens and reform Communists took 331 seats. Final results, effectively a formality, are expected later this week.

In far east trading, dealers said the mark rallied against the dollar as fears Kohl might stumble evaporated.

But economists said markets could be troubled by Kohl's thin margin of victory and government bonds were expected to fall on profit-taking when trading resumed today.

"I don't think that the market will be too happy," said Guenther Thumann, a Salomon brothers economist in Frankfurt.

Kohl displayed his consummate survival instinct in the election. The optimistic 64-year-old hauled himself onto safety teetering at the edge of a political abyss. But he also benefited from quirks in Germany's complex electoral

system. His CDU got 12 of the 16 extra seats in the new, 672-seat lower house Bundestag awarded to any party whose constituency candidates outscore the party's overall result on state lists.

Provisional figures showed the CDU-led coalition had 48.4 per cent of the vote, down from 54.8 per cent in Germany's first post-unification election four years ago.

The main opposition parties scored a combined 48.1 per cent, turnout was 79.1 per cent compared with 77.8 four years ago.

It was a bittersweet night for SPD challenger Rudolf Scharping, who early in the campaign looked almost certain to unseat Kohl as Germany swallowed an economic recession.

The SPD gained in both west and east Germany to boost its share of the vote nearly three points from the 33.5 it scored in 1990.



The wife of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Hannelore (L) watches her husband being congratulated by Baden-Wuerttemberg Premier Erwin Teufel (R) on Oct 15 in Bonn after early election results confirmed a win for Kohl's centre-right coalition. — AFP photo

Willy Claes takes over as NATO chief

BRUSSELS, Oct 17: Belgium's Willy Claes took over as NATO's new Secretary-General today, saying his first goal was to widen the military alliance to eastern Europe without isolating Russia, reports Reuter.

Claes, who succeeds the late Manfred Woerner of Germany in the top post, said in his opening speech he would ensure NATO's expansion did not lead to new divisions or block co-operation with other partners.

"We recognise Russia's weight and international role. It is an indispensable partner if the alliance is to fulfil its vision of a lasting and secure order of peace in Europe," said Claes, a former socialist minister in the Belgian government.

NATO is forging closer ties with its former cold war foes with the partnership for peace (PPP) plan launched last January, which entails joint exercises and other military cooperation.