

Govt resolution defeated in Pak parliament

ISLAMABAD, Nov 28: Absences by parliamentary deputies brought Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's coalition government an embarrassing defeat in a vote on Sunday, hours after she began a six-day visit to Britain, report Reuters.

Her one-year-old government dismissed its first such parliamentary defeat as insignificant and challenged the opposition to prove its strength on any important issue.

But a jubilant opposition called on President Farooq Leghari to ask Benazir Bhutto to seek a confidence vote from the 217-seat House. Where the government says it has the backing of more than 125 members against the opposition 76.

Two separate votes were held on the question of the uproar and first fights which erupted during and after an annual presidential address to a joint session of the two-chamber parliament on November 14. The government lost both.

A government sponsored resolution condemning the incident and calling for action against those involved was defeated by 58 votes to 56.

The assembly passed by 59-57 votes an opposition backed resolution that also con-

demned the manhandling of deputies but called for an inquiry by a committee with equal representation from Benazir's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League of Opposition Leader Nawaz Sharif, who was not present in the house.

At least six ruling coalition members have accompanied Benazir on the British tour and about 50 others were absent, government sources said.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Iqbal Haider said the vote should not be taken as a major event. It is not of a highly important nature, he told reporters.



Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto talks to the waiting media on Sunday upon her arrival at London's Heathrow Airport. — AFP photo

Strike partially paralyses Bombay

BOMBAY, Nov 28: India's commercial capital Bombay was partially paralysed today by a general strike called by opposition parties to protest against police action which triggered the deaths of 113 demonstrators in a stampede last week, reports Reuter.

The national airline Air-India cancelled 10 flights originating in Bombay, while several other airlines cancelled or rescheduled flights.

Most taxis and buses were off the roads, schools and shops were closed. Some trains were running.

Security was tightened across Bombay, the capital of the western state of Maharashtra, and armed police stood on street corners to prevent violence.

Police said they had arrested 800 people in Bombay ahead of the strike to prevent trouble.

Officials, reported a few minor incidents across the city of 12 million people, including a scooter-rickshaw which was set on fire.

Opposition parties called the strike in Maharashtra after baton-wielding police charged a tribal demonstration in the dental city of Nagpur on Wednesday, triggering a stampede in which 113 people died and 500 were injured.

The 50,000 tribal demonstrators were demanding concessions on jobs.

BRIEFLY

21 Pakistanis held in S Korea: Twenty-one Pakistani workers have been caught off South Korea's east coast attempting to illegally enter Japan on a fishing boat, police said Monday, AP reports from Seoul.

The illegal aliens, caught shortly after their departure from Pusan port in southern South Korea Sunday, had been working here illegally, they said.

Baath Party man killed in Iraq: A ruling Baath Party official in southern Iraq was kidnapped and killed recently, an Iraqi opposition radio said on Sunday, AFP reports from Nicosia.

Lafta Uweid, secretary of the party section in Basra, 550 kilometers (330 miles) southeast of Baghdad was kidnapped in the city centre with his bodyguards on November 15, the Iraqi Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) said.

Bandits group caught in Beijing: Two undercover police officers have caught a group of bandits in the act of raping a woman on a long-distance bus in west-central China, an official report said Monday, AP reports from Beijing.

The police caught the gang of four young men after a woman who was being attacked by one in the back of the bus screamed for help, the newspaper Guangming Daily said.

14 feared dead in Filipino tornado: At least 14 people were missing and feared dead after a tornado ripped through farming villages in the southern Philippines, authorities said Monday, AP reports from Cotabato City, Philippines.

The tornado struck during a heavy downpour in eight villages of Datu Piang town late Saturday, destroying at least 160 houses and a school, said Unson Dimaguil, a field worker of the Department of Social Work and Development.

Army kill 5 Khmer rebels: The Cambodian army has launched an attack against a Khmer Rouge stronghold in southern Kampot province, killing five rebels and wounding 12, state run radio said yesterday, Reuter reports from Phnom Penh.

The army moved on bases at Damrey Roneal and Koh Slar, one of the last known sanctuaries for fugitive Khmer Rouge commander Noun Pact.

Peres in Brussels: Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres arrived in Brussels yesterday for talks with PLO leader Yasser Arafat and to meet donor states in a bid to speed up international funding of Palestinian self-rule projects, Reuter reports from Brussels.

European diplomats said Peres would meet Arafat to discuss details of Palestinian elections and autonomy plans under the Israeli-PLO peace deal.

Bodies of 17 Thais recovered: Cambodian troops have recovered the bullet-ridden bodies of 17 Thai forest workers killed last week by Khmer Rouge guerrillas in a Cambodian border area, officials said yesterday, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Soldiers found 10 bodies late on Sunday after recovering seven on Saturday. Officials said about 20 workers were killed by the rebels in the jungle area.

22 die in Colombian mishaps: A passenger van collided with another van from the same transport company in southwestern Colombia on Sunday, bring the number of dead in weekend traffic accidents to 22, the RCN radio network reported, Reuter says from Bogota.

The network said the van was on a winding road when it struck the other vehicle head on near the town of Hobo, more than 125 miles (200 km) southwest of Bogota. That crash killed 10 passengers and wounded five others.

On Saturday, a chartered bus drove off a highway and crashed into a barricade just outside Bogota, killing at least 12 people and injuring 18 others.

Edn ministers' confce opens: Pakistan President Farooq Ahmed Leghari opened a four-day Commonwealth education ministers conference in Islamabad on Sunday, calling for tangible steps to promote intra Commonwealth student mobility, AFP reports from Islamabad.

Leghari said in a speech the mobility had been depressed by the "steep rise" in fees since the 1980s.

22 die in Chinese blast: An explosion in a bus in the southern Chinese province of Hunan killed 22 people and injured 15, according to a newspaper received in Beijing yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The Hunan Daily said the bus was travelling on a highway near Yongzhou on November 22 when explosive materials carried by a passenger exploded.

Perry rejects quick pullout from Haiti

WASHINGTON, Nov 28: US Defence Secretary William Perry rejected Republican calls on Sunday for a quick withdrawal of US troops from Haiti, reports Reuter.

But incoming Senate majority leader Bob Dole said the nearly 10,000 US soldiers should come home as soon as possible and he raised the possibility that new Republican Congress could cut off funding for the Haitian operations.

"We're not leaving until we have a security situation established there which includes bringing up a Haitian police force. We are in the process of training that police force today," Perry said on NBC television's "Meet the Press" programme.

Perry said more than a thousand people have been trained for the job.

Bhopal disaster victims still cry for justice

BHOPAL, Nov 28: It is Bhopal's second disaster, reports AP.

Ten years after a cloud of toxic chemicals killed thousands of Indians in the world's worst industrial accident, a half-million people are still seeking compensation and suffering the effects of the gassing.

India's slow-moving courts are overwhelmed with the claims. Corruption riddles the bureaucracy and judiciary. The hospitals are inefficient. Doctors demand bribes for adequate care.

And everyday brings new patients with lung diseases, cancer, cataracts, gynecological disorders, psychiatric problems.

The cocktail of chemicals that leaked from an underground storage tank at a Union Carbide pesticide factory choked about 4,000 people to death in the adjoining shanty town the night of December 2, 1984. Nearly 3,000 more died slowly and painfully from the

Bhopal disaster victims still cry for justice

poison.

Shyam Lal's lungs were permanently scarred. Lal, 80, coughs incessantly, tires if he walks a few feet (a metre) and is often ill.

"Every time I go to the court, it's the same story. The judge has not come or the doctor has not come, or they can't find by records... I will never get justice," he said.

When his wife, Gomti, died, Lal filed a claim for 200,000 rupees, about 6,500 dollars — about six times the yearly pay for a factory worker in Bhopal. But a doctor testified that the death was unrelated to the accident and the judge threw out the case.

"That's because Lal did not bribe anyone," charged Abdul Jabbar, an activist who worked with victims of the gassing. Those who did pay people off got money swiftly, he claims.

Lal appealed the judge's decision and was awarded

50,000 rupees, about 1,600 dollar. Now he is back in court hoping to win compensation for his own ailments.

Once, the tall smokestacks of Union Carbide Corp's Indian subsidiary symbolised opportunity. The plant gave 600 high-paying jobs to the slum residents of the neighbourhood.

Today, the smokestacks are rusty and the metal tank that leaked the deadly methyl isocyanate is smothered with weeds. The Danbury, Connecticut-based company sold off the last of its Indian holdings this summer.

Victims built a monument to remind people of the disaster — a concrete statue of a mother and two children. The government banned the monument, but left it alone after citizens put it unobtrusively on a sidewalk outside the abandoned factory.

In 1989, Union Carbide

paid 470 million dollar — one-twelfth of India's original claim — in an out-of-court settlement that guaranteed immunity from prosecution for Carbide executives.

The government has paid out only 20 million dollar so far and the balance has grown to 316 million dollars.

Two years after the agreement, India's Supreme Court struck down the immunity clause, while allowing the financial settlement to stand. But the money has been locked in banks while bureaucrats and judges sort out the claims.

Eight officials of Union Carbide's Indian subsidiary were charged with manslaughter for alleged negligence, but no cases have been brought to trial.

An Indian court order to try the then-chairman of the parent company, Warren Anderson, has shuffled between various government departments while India's leaders decide

Norwegians set to reject EU membership

OSLO, Nov 28: Norwegians appear set to go it alone and reject membership of the European Union today, despite a late surge in support for a 'yes' vote, reports Reuter.

Opinion polls indicated that the pro-Europe share of the vote was rallying as two days of balloting began on Sunday, but that as in a similar referendum in 1972, a majority of the 3.2 million voters remained opposed to joining the EU.

Polis gave the opponents of membership a lead of between two and eight percentage points.

Half of Norway's 435 communities opened their polling stations on Sunday and electoral official reported an unusually heavy turnout.

Polling booths are open from nine am (0899 GMT) today and close at nine pm (2000 GMT).



Norwegian twins, one asleep holding a poster saying 'Yes', the other saying 'No', sit in their stroller on Sunday in Drammen outside Oslo. — AFP photo

Pak court acquits Christian of blasphemy charge

LAHORE, Nov 28: A Pakistani Christian sentenced to death under a controversial law for blasphemy against Prophet Mohammad SM, was acquitted by a higher court yesterday, reports Reuter.

A two-judge bench of the Lahore court ordered the release of Gul Masih, rejecting the prosecution charge that he had uttered blasphemous remarks against the prophet, lawyer Naem Shakir said.

Masih was sentenced to death by the additional district and sessions judge in the Punjab town of Sargodha in November 1992.

Masih was arrested in December 1991 after a complaint, by another man and charged under section 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code.

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Off the Record



Actor Omar Sharif wraps himself in a blanket against the cold during the performance of Verdi's 'Aida' on Saturday in a 4,000-seat outdoor amphitheatre built especially for this show in Luxor, Egypt. — AFP photo

'Plan to become 'intelligent island'

SINGAPORE: Singapore took the first step Monday toward wiring all its 750,000 homes with cable television as part of a plan to become an "intelligent island," reports AP.

Workers of a monopoly cable TV company began laying optical fibre cables in an eastern Singapore neighbourhood to provide 20 to 30 channels of news, entertainment, sports and other topics. The first customers will get the service by June 1995.

The 345 million dollars project will cover the entire city-state of 3.3 million people by the end of 1998, offering up to 64 channels, said Randall Coleman, president of Singapore CableVision, SCV.

It is run by a consortium comprising three state-controlled companies and Continental Cablevision Inc, the third largest cable operator in the United States.

When the cable TV revolution came to Asia in 1990, it bypassed Singapore, where air waves are strictly controlled by the government. It runs a monopoly television service formerly called SBC.

But SBC's staid fare has starved Singaporeans of quality entertainment and news, and citizens have nicknamed SBC the "so boring channel."

Smokeless, ashless cigarette

RALEIGH (North Carolina) American cigarette manufacturer R J Reynolds Tobacco Co claims to have developed a near smokeless and ashless cigarette thanks to a technique which merely heats up the tobacco rather than burns it, reports AFP.

Company spokesman Maura Ellis claimed here that its prototype cigarette, called "Eclipse", gave off 90 per cent less smoke than an ordinary cigarette and was both odour and stain-free.

Reynolds Tobacco Co tried unsuccessfully six years ago to launch its "Premier" smokeless cigarette.

Filipino govt, Muslim rebels plead for peace

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, Nov 28: Government and Muslim rebel negotiators today pleaded for peace in the troubled southern Philippines after a breakthrough guerrilla group ambushed an army patrol, wounding six soldiers, reports Reuter.

The three-day Zamboanga meeting will discuss the formation of a provisional government in response to rebel demands for autonomy for Muslim communities in the Mindanao region.

"Our long dream for peace in Mindanao is tantamount to nothing without the sincerity and cooperation of both parties," Jumdan Manzur, head of the negotiating panel of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), told the opening session.