

India to go ahead with polls in Kashmir despite threat

NEW DELHI, Oct 13: India will go ahead with elections in the troubled northern state of Kashmir despite threats by Muslim separatists to sabotage them, Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan said in remarks published today, reports AFP.

Chavan said in the southern city of Bangalore on Thursday that the legislative polls would be held even though "stray incidents of violence were bound to occur." The Hindu newspaper quoted him saying, "No force can stop us."

Chavan told the local branch of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) party in an apparent reference to neighbouring Pakistan.

India's neighbour has been accused here of backing a

bloody Muslim separatist campaign raging since 1989 in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state.

However, Islamabad denies Indian claims that it arms and trains the guerillas.

Chavan said there were "countries which did not want India to succeed in establishing a democratic government" in the northern state, but did not specify when the elections to the Kashmir legislature would be held.

Officials have suggested they could take place before the current period of direct rule by the federal authorities expires in January.

The last state assembly elections were held in Kashmir in 1987 but were marred by widespread allegations of fraud. It has been ruled directly by New Delhi

since January 1990.

PTI from United Nations adds: Chairman of the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), Mirwaiz Umar Farooq has said the elections which the centre plans to hold in Jammu and Kashmir are not acceptable to the people of Kashmir, who he claimed, want polls to be held under a neutral authority or the United Nations.

Addressing a press conference at the United Nations headquarters on Thursday, Farooq said troops of both India and Pakistan would have to be out of the whole of Kashmir, including Pakistan-occupied area, when the Kashmiris vote to decide their future.

He said the elected representatives thus chosen would then talk to India and Pakistan to find a final solution to

the Kashmir issue.

He said Kashmiris should be associated with any talks on the future of the state and a plebiscite should be monitored by United Nations troops, as happens elsewhere in the world.

APHC feels that bilateral talks between India and Pakistan should continue but they are not in a position to solve the issue. The discussions have to be tripartite between representatives of India and Pakistan and leaders of entire Jammu and Kashmir, including POK, he said.

He did not rule out independence as an option but said it would have to be decided by the representatives of the people of Jammu and Kashmir from both areas controlled by India and Pakistan. All options would be on the table when they talk.



Thierry Mugler gathers the waist with a rose in chiffon on a one-piece shorts-tunic with stole for evenings in the Spring-Summer 1996 ready-to-wear collection presented at his studio in Paris on Thursday.



A woman wearing a headress from the pre-Hispanic period as she and another 1,000 Mexicans of Indian descent rally through the streets of downtown Mexico City to protest the discovery of America and demand improved Indian rights.

Castro not invited to UN anniversary festivities

NEW YORK, Oct 13: Cuban President Fidel Castro is not invited to festivities organised by the city of New York to mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, the mayor's office said Thursday, reports AFP.

Castro was not on the guest list of a luncheon offered by city leaders at the Metropolitan Museum of Art nor of a concert organised by New York's philharmonic orchestra on October 23, according to the mayor's press service.

Six other countries were also omitted from the guest list: Iran, Libya, Iraq, North Korea, Somalia and Serbia, the press spokesperson said.



Two residents of Mexico City watch for swaying buildings Thursday a few minutes after a strong aftershock measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale rocked the Mexican capital. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties from the quake.

BRIEFLY

Film on Mao's first wife: A film on Yang Kaihui, the first wife of late chairman Mao Zedong, had its first showing in Beijing recently. Xinhua reports from Beijing.

Born in central China's Hunan province in 1901, Yang Kaihui, became Mao's wife in 1919. She did a lot to help her husband, who was a student of her father. Yang and Mao had three children.

Egypt's minister to visit USA: Egypt's defence minister Mohamed Hussein Tantawi will visit the United States' within days to promote military cooperation between the two countries, Xinhua reports from Cairo.

According to the Middle East news agency Thursday, US defence Secretary William Perry extended the invitation to Tantawi to visit Washington when he came to Cairo last January.

Hezbollahs kill 2 Israeli troops: At least two Israeli soldiers were killed and four others wounded late Thursday in an attack by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah in the Israeli-occupied "security zone" in south Lebanon, Lebanese security officials announced, AFP reports from Lebanon.

Pro-Israeli militias from the south Lebanon army earlier said six Israeli soldiers had been wounded by an explosive device at 10.00 pm (2000 GMT), following clashes in the central sector of the security zone.

Lebanese PM back home: Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri returned to his country Thursday after winding up a three-day official visit of Germany, Xinhua reports from Beirut.

It was the first visit of a Lebanese prime minister to Germany. During his visit, Hariri held talks with German chancellor Helmut Kohl, deputy chancellor and foreign minister Klaus Kinkel.

1910 treaty wasn't signed on equal footing: Murayama

TOKYO, Oct 13: Japan's Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama acknowledged today that the 1910 treaty that formalised Japan's annexation of Korea was not signed on an equal footing, reports AFP.

"The Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was agreed and concluded as a matter of form, but I don't think both sides were on an equal footing when it was signed," he told a Lower House budget committee.

Murayama appeared to be backing away from controversial remarks he made last week he told the Upper House that the 1910 treaty under which Japan took over the Korean Peninsula until 1945 was "legally effective."

He said "I think my comment on the issue was an incomplete explanation."

Govt doctors on strike in Lanka

COLOMBO, Oct 13: Government doctors went on strike in Sri Lanka today bringing 700 hospitals across the country to a standstill, reports AFP.

The Government Medical Officer Association (GMOA) said 3,200 doctors were participating in the one-day strike to demand, among other things, the cancellation of the transfer of a doctor.

Health Minister A H M Fowzie said he ordered the removal of Doctor Ajit Mendis because his inefficiency prevented the registration of suppliers who offered drugs at more competitive prices.

Fowzie vowed he would not give in and was prepared to go on for one month with the work stoppage.

Major prepares to rouse Tory for polls

BLACKPOOL, England, Oct 13: British Prime Minister John Major prepared today to rouse his Conservative Party for the election fight ahead with a pledge to cut taxes and crack down on crime, reports Reuters.

Major needs to send supporters home from the ruling party's annual conference confident that they can claw back the opposition Labour Party's 30-point opinion poll lead before the next general election, which must be held by May 1997.

Excerpts of Major's closing speech circulated by his aides, make clear that tax and spending cuts are central to the Conservatives' strategy of winning a fifth consecutive term in office.

"High spending and high taxes are no longer an option. The state spends too much of our national wealth. We must get that share down below 40 per cent - and keep it there," Major intends to say.

Trial of Japanese girl's rape case to begin Nov 7

TOKYO, Oct 13: The trial of three US servicemen accused of abducting and raping a 12-year-old girl in Okinawa last month will open November 7, Naha District Court officials said today, reports AFP.

The accused are US Navy Seaman Marcus Gill, 22, and two US marines, Kendrick Ledet, 20, and Rodrico Harp, 21. They are being held at Naha detention center, in Okinawa's capital.

They face a maximum jail sentence of life on conviction. Abduction and confinement carries a jail term of between three months and five years.

Delhi to raise defence spending if Islamabad gets US arms

NEW DELHI, Oct 13: India will be forced to increase defence spending if Pakistan receives military equipment from the United States, but the sale will not harm Indo-US ties, Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee said today, reports AFP.

"We will have to step up our defence expenditure so that we can get the necessary equipment to meet the threat perception from Pakistan," the foreign minister told the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency.

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gestions that New Delhi's concern over the proposed 370-million-dollar arms deal was "exaggerated."

"Our threat perception following the arms transfer is real and it is not true to suggest that it is over-exaggerated," he said.

While expressing concern over the sale of US weaponry to arch rival Pakistan, Mukherjee said he did not believe the deal would harm growing relations between India and the United States.

"I don't think it is going to affect Indo-US relations adversely," he said. "However, it does not look nice in the context of growing and expanding relations between

India and the United States."

India and Pakistan, both of which are believed to possess nuclear weapons, have fought three wars since independence from British colonial rule in 1947, two of them over the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training Muslim separatist militants battling to end Indian rule over Kashmir, the country's only Muslim-majority state. Pakistan denies the charges.

"We consider Pakistan as a terrorist state like any other fundamentalist state which is sponsoring terrorism and fundamentalism," Mukherjee said.



Residents of the Croatian capital walk past a huge election poster Thursday pasted by the Social Democratic Party (former Communists) as the pre-election campaign was launched a few days ago. Croatia's general elections will be held on October 29.

Off the Record

Too late to be reattached!

NEW YORK: A man whose penis was severed has recanted his claim that he was attacked by an enraged prostitute and now says he injured himself by accident, police said Wednesday, reports AP.

The missing member was recovered Tuesday in a plastic food container in the man's kitchen, too late to be reattached, said police Detective Frank Grecco.

Domingo Morales, 67, told police on Monday he had sex with a prostitute in his apartment and that she attacked him after he told her he had no money.

The retired truck driver later told investigators he made up the story out of fear that he'd be committed to a mental institution, Grecco said.

"He state that he makes guitars in his apartment and that he had the neck of a guitar between his legs while he was working on it with a knife. The knife slipped off the guitar and severed part of his penis," Grecco said.

Morales said he became so agitated after the accident that he doesn't remember putting the severed section in the container, Grecco said.

Titanic poster fetches \$ 12,000

LONDON: A poster pitching passage on the doomed Titanic was sold in London on Thursday for over 12,000 dirrs, reports AP.

Chris Lowe, a collector of novelties, was the highest bidder at a Christie's auction, paying 7,650 pounds (12,200 dirrs) for the 1912 poster.

It advertises voyages to New York and Boston on the White Star liners Olympic and Titanic, both 45,000 tons and billed as "the largest steamers in the world."

The Titanic sunk on its maiden voyage, on the night of April 14-15, 1912, after hitting an iceberg in the North Atlantic. More than 1,500 of 2,200 passengers and crew perished.

Christie's did not name the seller, who wished to remain anonymous. The poster had been found wrapped in a trunk belonging to an uncle of the seller.

1000 trapped in border with Egypt Libya stops food, water supply to Palestinians

LIBYA-EGYPT BORDER, Oct 13: Libya has stopped providing food and water to 1,000 Palestinians trapped on the border with Egypt after being expelled by Tripoli, some of the Palestinians said here late Thursday, reports AFP.

They said the supplies, which had been arriving daily since the beginning of this month in the temporary camp in the desert no-man's land here, had been halted on Wednesday.

"Today we collected 25 Libyan dinars (some 70 dollars) from each family and sent someone from the camp to Tobruk, in eastern Libya, to buy what we needed," a Palestinian said.

Since last Saturday the Libyans had started taking back blankets and sheets they had given, another camp dweller said, adding: "We are sleeping on cardboard now."

Libyan leader Moammer Gaddafi began expelling the some 30,000 Palestinians living in Libya to try to swamp the Palestinian autonomous areas of the Gaza Strip and West Bank with refugees to highlight the "failure" of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords.

Egypt prevented the group of 1,000 entering its territory, saying they do not have the correct papers allowing them to travel on to Gaza or Jordan.

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Iraqi children worst sufferers of UN sanctions

BAGHDAD, Oct 13: UN sanctions imposed after President Saddam Hussein sent his troops into Kuwait have had a devastating effect on the Iraqi people, and none have suffered more than the country's children, reports AFP.

The five years of the embargo have seen increasing numbers of them suffer from malnutrition and many others leave school to find work or beg in the streets.

UN officials estimate that about 2,000 boys and girls are now begging in Baghdad, a city of 4.5 million people.

Ragged children can be seen tapping on car windows and asking drivers for help. "Please sir, I'm hungry. Give me some money. God save you and protect you," one

dirty-faced street child of about nine asked.

Sometimes the children have something to sell, like cheap chocolate or cigarettes, and sometimes their mothers can be seen sitting on the sidewalk urging them on.

Any hopes of an early end to sanctions were dashed Wednesday when the UN Special Commission disarming Iraq under Gulf War ceasefire resolutions issued a critical report to the Security Council.

The state has been careful to drive home its argument that the United States, which led the coalition which ended the occupation of Kuwait in February 1991, is to blame for the continued misery.

Millions of children in school on Wednesday endorsed Saddam Hussein as president for seven more years, in a symbolic show of hands ahead of the nation's first presidential referendum on Sunday.

"We're voting for Saddam in spite of the stubborn Americans," students at one school chanted.

The United Nations said in a report released here last month that four million of Iraq's 18.5 million people lived in a "precarious" situation and described the health problem as a "nightmare."

It also estimated that between 20 per cent and 29 per cent of the country's children were undernourished, with some regions worse than others.

Food rations distributed by

the government only meet 60 per cent of the caloric needs of the Iraqi people, according to UN officials.

Health Minister Umid Medhat Mubarak said Monday that more than 11,000 Iraqi children were dying every month, because of lack of food or medicine due to the embargo.

Under an exemption to UN sanctions, Iraq is allowed to import food and medicine but Iraqi officials said that the lack of hard currency makes this difficult.

Security Council resolutions would allow Iraq to export some of its oil to pay for food and medicine, but Baghdad has rejected it as an infringement of its sovereignty and has held out for a full lifting of the embargo.

Despite the sanctions and

growing poverty, Iraq has been resourceful in keeping the country afloat and rebuilding after the 1991 war, diplomats said.

"Iraq is crumbling under the embargo, but it has also shown a great capacity to fight on and adapt," a western diplomat said.

The authorities have rebuilt bombed out bridges and buildings and embarked on large public works projects, including setting up irrigation networks in arid parts of the south.

Businessmen from Britain, France, Spain and Italy visited Baghdad in the last year to jockey for position for the day sanctions are lifted.

In March, Iraq asked 100 international oil companies to consider a 25-billion dollar

investment plan to rebuild the country's oil production capacity.

The sanctions have hit Iraq hard by depriving it of the oil exports, which used to account for almost all of its income.

Before the invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi dinar was worth 3.2 dollars. An Iraqi must now exchange 2,000 dinars for one dollar on the black market and 600 dinars at the official rate in the state-run banks.

To stop the depreciation of its currency and slow the rise in inflation, Baghdad has taken harsh measures to block the flight of hard currency and launched a battle against smuggling. Iraqis have also resorted to selling off their furniture and find second or third jobs.

Hamas won't take part in polls

NICOSIA, Oct 13: The radical Muslim fundamentalist group Hamas on Thursday turned down an invitation from PLO leader Yasser Arafat to take part in the Palestinians' first general elections due next year, reports AFP.

"The movement still refuses to take part in Palestinian elections because its position has not budged," Hamas spokesman Ibrahim Ghoshe told Radio Monte Carlo.

"These elections are the result of the Oslo (autonomy) accord, which has given nothing to the Palestinian people," he said.

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) will also call on the Palestinian people to boycott these elections, which do not meet their demands," Ghoshe added.