

BRIEFLY

Spain's PM takes oath: Spain's new Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar yesterday took the oath of office before King Juan Carlos at the Zarzuela Palace. AFP reports from Madrid.

The 43-year-old leader of the Popular Party on Saturday was sworn in as premier, ending 13 years of socialist rule and making him Spain's first Conservative leader since the country emerged from the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco in 1975.

6 die as boat capsizes in Philippines: Six people were confirmed dead after a motorboat, carrying a cargo of seaweed, capsized in a freak storm off the waters of nearby Culasi Town, the coast guard said yesterday. AFP reports from Cebu, Philippines.

The wooden-hulled boat was carrying 15 passengers and a load of seaweed, which is grown commercially in the central Philippines, when a freak storm broke out on May 3, causing the vessel to capsize.

Six bodies have been recovered, so far while nine survivors were picked up by rescuers, the coast guard said in a report.

Polls in Algeria by June '97: Algerian President Liamine Zeroual said yesterday that legislative elections would be held by June 1997. AFP reports from Algiers.

He told a press conference that the ballot would be preceded by national conference this summer grouping "all the forces of the nation" and a referendum on amending the constitution, the official APS news agency reported.

UN-Iraq talks resume today: Negotiations between Iraq and the United Nations on implementing an oil for food deal resumes today in New York. Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz said Sunday. AFP reports from Baghdad.

We have given instructions for our delegation to go to New York to resume the negotiations today following an agreement with UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali. Aziz told the official Iraqi news agency INA.

9 Emmy winner Bill Byers dead: Emmy-winning arranger and musician Bill Byers, who worked with such greats as Duke Ellington, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and Barbra Streisand, died of cancer on Wednesday, on his 69th birthday. AP reports from Malibu, California.

Byers, who won nine Emmys for his work on TV programmes, began playing piano at age 6 and trombone shortly after with the Hollywood Canteen Kids Band. He was scoring films by the time he was 14. He played in jazz bands and the Benny Goodman Orchestra and began his long association with television as arranger for Sid Caesar's "Your Show of Shows."

16th century Indian pottery found: A team of Argentine archaeologists has discovered 16th century Indian pottery in the basement of one of Buenos Aires' oldest buildings, the scientists said Saturday. AFP reports from Buenos Aires.

Ceramics of the Guarani tribe were found in the basement of a restaurant in the colourful and folkloric neighbourhood of San Telmo. "History forgets that in the beginning, the population of Buenos Aires was 30 per cent Indian and 40 per cent black," said Daniel Shavezon, Director of the Centre for Urban Archaeology of the University of Buenos Aires.

Inner Mongolia quake toll now 18: The death toll from a major earthquake Friday in the industrial city of Baotou, Inner Mongolia has climbed to 18, but life was beginning to return to normal, state television reported Sunday. AP says from Beijing.

The region Sunday was jolted by an aftershock with a 4.3 preliminary magnitude. China Central Television reported, the largest of the more than 400 aftershocks since Friday's 6.4 magnitude quake.

Blast kills 2 in Algiers: A bomb exploded in a bus outside the capital, killing two people in the latest violence in Muslim militants' 4-year drive to overthrow the government, AP reports from Algiers.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Saturday's attack in Tizi Ouzou, a key city in the Kabylie region outside the capital, Algiers. Europe 1 radio reported.

Bulgarian minister resigns: Bulgarian Interior Minister Lubomir Nachev has resigned in the wake of the murder of three policemen, Prime Minister Jean Videnov announced Saturday. AFP reports from Sofia.

Videnov said on state radio that he would be asking parliament next week to name the current Chairman of the Parliamentary National Security Commission, Nikolai Dobrev, to succeed Nachev. Videnov called Friday's killing "an insolent challenge to the whole of society, whose heavy responsibility must be shouldered."

PKK to gear up its activity: The leader of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Ocalan, has said his organisation would intensify its activity in Turkey, but he pledged it would carry out suicide attacks in Germany, AFP reports from Bonn.

Ocalan was speaking in an interview with German Television Network, ZDF, recorded in his headquarters in the Middle East and scheduled to be broadcast yesterday.

Major attempting to rally Tories for general polls

LONDON, May 5: British Prime Minister John Major, trying to put a humiliating defeat in local polls behind him, is now attempting to rally his demoralised Conservative Party for the real battle to come — the general election, reports Reuter.

With his party deeply unpopular and bitterly divided over Europe, Major launched what amounted to his campaign for the general election, due within the next 12 months, in which the Conservatives will be bidding for a fifth consecutive victory.

He acknowledged in an interview with the Sunday Times that he must try to win back disaffected Conservatives now awaiting the right kind of clarion call.

"There are millions and millions of people out there sitting back, suspending their judgement, wanting the Conservative government to be re-elected and wanting to be persuaded that this is the right thing for them and the right thing for the country," Major said.

"I am in the business of being a persuader to that point of view and I expect every member of the party to join me in that."

In last Thursday's Town Hall elections, the Conservatives came close to being wiped off the local government map, with many traditional supporters not bothering to vote.

Other newspapers reported that the Conservative Party was planning a massive poster campaign, which would acknowledge for the first time that life had been hard under the economic measures adopted by the Major government.

In his interview, Major gave some hope to the Eurosceptics in his party who have made life so difficult for him as a string of by-election defeats reduced his parliamentary majority to just one seat.

He made clear that Britain would not re-enter any new European currency exchange rate mechanism and would not lose its identity in Europe.

ANC warned of fresh bloodshed in Kwazulu-Natal

DURBAN, South Africa, May 5: South Africa's ruling ANC warned of fresh bloodshed in volatile Kwazulu-Natal province after eight people including three policemen, were shot and wounded during a Zulu protest march, reports Reuter.

"We need the serious intervention of the national government in this province. We are definitely seeing the province going to ashes, provincial African National Congress (ANC) spokesman Behki Cele told state radio.

Police said three policemen and five Zulu protesters were wounded in clashes on Saturday during a march of 7,000 Zulus protesting against a ban by President Nelson Mandela's government on the

International

Pak PM urges Indians to elect 'a man of courage and vision'

ISLAMABAD, May 5: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said on Saturday she would like India to elect "a man of courage and vision" who could solve the bitter dispute between the two rival neighbours over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, reports Reuter.

She told foreign reporters she had no favourites among parties contesting India's general election, adding her country would do business with whoever formed the next government in New Delhi.

But she said Pakistan was concerned about the possibility of the elections producing a weak coalition government that would lack the will to defuse tension between the two countries.

"Unfortunately, none of the leaders in India has come up with such a statement so far," she said.

Benazir acknowledged that the Kashmir dispute — the cause of two of the three wars between the two countries since their independence from Britain in 1947 — could not be solved overnight.

But she said Pakistan wanted the issue to be put as

she would like to win the elections.

But she added: "If you ask me who is my favourite, I would say a man of courage and vision who would have the strength to sit down and say that if there could be a solution to apartheid in South Africa and ... to the bitter Israeli-Palestinian feud in the Middle East, there could be a solution to the Kashmir dispute."

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But she said Pakistan wanted the issue to be put as

separate item on the agenda future India-Pakistan peace talks.

"I am sure that progress will slowly but surely be made if only the Indians will recognise that it is a dispute that needs to be resolved and will not go away."

But Benazir rejected a suggestion that Pakistan take unilateral steps such as offering a no-war pact to the next Indian government or sign the comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty without the condition that India must do the same.

"I think any unilateral measure will send a wrong signal to India and it will embolden India further," she said, accusing New Delhi of aggression against Pakistan in all the three wars between the two countries.

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Rocket attack damages Iranian embassy in Kabul

NICOSIA, Cyprus, May 5: A rocket attack heavily damaged the Iranian Embassy in Kabul and slightly wounded two staff members during fighting between government and rebel forces, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported, says AP.

The state-run agency, monitored in Cyprus, said late Saturday that the two wounded employees were in "satisfactory" condition following the attack earlier in the day.

The agency attributed its report to Iranian Ambassador Gholamreza Haddadi, who also was quoted as condemning any attacks on residential neighbourhoods.

Despite rekindled hopes for peace talks in Afghanistan, government jets Saturday pounded rebel positions south of Kabul. The rebels responded with a series of rocket attacks on the capital, one of which damaged the embassy.

Tigers attack army road block, kill one

COLOMBO, May 5: Tamil Tiger guerrillas attacked an army road block in northern Sri Lanka, killing one soldier and wounding two others, the defence ministry here said today, reports AFP.

Gunmen from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) carried out the attack at Kodikamam in the Jaffna peninsula Saturday after sneaking into the area the army captured from them last month, the ministry said.

It said troops retaliated causing casualties among the guerrillas but no details were given.

The attack came hours after Tamil Tiger guerrillas blasted power pylons in north-eastern Sri Lanka, cutting off electricity and stepped up attacks in the region.

The LTTE used explosives to bring down two pylons at Thamapalangam in the district of Trincomalee where they also shot dead two policemen, officials said.

Shark livers may help fight brain tumours

WASHINGTON, May 5: A substance in shark livers may help fight certain brain tumours, John Hopkins University scientists has reported, says Reuter.

The substance, squalamine, slowly slows the growth of new blood vessels that nourish solid brain tumours. Without the blood vessels, tumours cannot grow or spread.

Squalamine, a hormone-like chemical found in the liver of the dogfish shark, may find a role in chemotherapy, radiation and surgery in treating brain and possibly other solid tumours.

The tests were performed on cells from human, rabbit and rat solid brain tumours, but the substance has not been tested yet on any live animals, the researchers said.

Preliminary clinical trials could start next year on malignant gliomas, the most common and deadly brain tumours, said Dr Michael Zasloff, executive vice president of Magainin Pharmaceuticals, which funded the studies.

Fighting on in Liberia

MONROVIA, Liberia, May 5: Liberia's rebels, many of them teen-agers armed with machine guns, fought furious street battles as hopes for peace faded despite the evacuation of warlord Johnson, reports AP.

The fresh violence came one day after US Marines air-lifted Johnson to Ghana for peace talks. But archivist Charles Taylor vowed not to abandon his forces to attend the talks. And Johnson's men continued to fight without him.

The warfare was the worst since a 10-day ceasefire crumbled on Monday. Two main bridges leading into the West African city were under heavy fire. Taylor's forces repeatedly shelled the military barracks that Johnson had seized and occupied for the last month.

Taylor said he had no intention of joining Johnson in Accra, Ghana, for talks to begin Wednesday on ending the six-year old Liberian war. "I welcome the process to have General Johnson evacuated and hope that the electoral process will go on as planned in August this year," he said.

Women march for restrooms

TAIPEI: Women marched into men's rooms at a train station Saturday, protesting what they said was a shortage of women's restrooms in public buildings, reports AP.

The 30 demonstrators, mostly college students, startled the men in the men's rooms at bustling Taipei Railway Station.

They cited an Education Ministry survey of elementary schools that found that for every 100 students, boys have access to 9.75 toilets, while girls have 8.31 toilets.

The protesters put up signs on the doors of the women's washrooms that said, "When women's restrooms are full, go to the men's."

Organisers complained that some consider it shameful even to talk about women's using restrooms.

"Women never dare to speak aloud of their basic needs," Sun Rei-shui, a march organiser, wrote in the China Times.

Benazir for resumption of talks with MQM

"I think the gulf between the government and the Alavi group is not that great as it was, say, two years ago," she said.

Benazir said the rate of violence in Karachi had slowed in recent months and the authorities had also shown restraint against the militants.

"There has been some slow but tangible progress," she said.

The government blames the MQM for much of the ethnic and political strife in Karachi, where at least 2,000 people have been killed this year and more than 2,000 last year.

The MQM wants greater political and economic rights for the Mohajirs Muslims who migrated from other parts of former British India at partition in 1947, and their descendants.



Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic (R) shakes hands with residents of Gorazde on Saturday as he visits this Bosnian enclave for the first time after four years. Gorazde was cut from the outside world for years and experienced one of the worst fighting in the four-year long war.

— AFP/UNB photo

Times of India opinion poll shows Cong (I) may get 169, BJP 165 seats in Lok Sabha polls

NEW DELHI, May 5: An 11-hour opinion poll Sunday gave India's ruling Congress (I) a surprise edge in parliamentary elections as the nationwide campaign entered the final and crucial lap, reports AP.

News agencies said campaigning reached a feverish pitch across 183 federal constituencies in 12 states which will go to the hustings on Tuesday, including troubled Kashmir where elections are being held for the first time since 1989.

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on Sunday touted the 111-year-old party as India's only possible saviour, the United News of India said.

"An unstable government will only be preoccupied with day-to-day survival and not spare any time on development aimed at improving the socio-economic condition of

the people," Rao said on the campaign trail in the eastern state of Orissa.

Rao was later Sunday scheduled to visit the trouble state of Kashmir to muster support for his party in the first elections in the province in seven years. Muslim rebels have vowed to sabotage the Kashmir polls ending May 30.

An opinion poll published by the Times of India daily on Sunday gave the Congress 169 seats in the 545-seat Lok Sabha, or upper house of parliament. The figures would make the Congress the single largest party but not allow it to independently claim a majority.

The poll said the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP) would bag 165 seats while the National Front, an amalgam of centrist and left parties would get 145 seats.

The Times of India daily today published a poll, based on two nationwide surveys involving 5,000 voters in 25 constituencies.

A string of opinion polls have predicted that the elections to India's 11th parliament would result in a fractured House, with the BJP emerging as the single largest party but not with enough seats to form a government by itself.

The latest Times of India poll now gives the Congress a slight edge in a neck-and-neck race but without a clear majority to claim an independent stake for power.

The Times survey was a shot in the arm from the 111-year-old Congress, which has fared badly in opinion polls in the wake of a giant corruption scandal, factionalism and a leadership challenge to Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao.

The tests were performed on cells from human, rabbit and rat solid brain tumours, but the substance has not been tested yet on any live animals, the researchers said.

Preliminary clinical trials could start next year on malignant gliomas, the most common and deadly brain tumours, said Dr Michael Zasloff, executive vice president of Magainin Pharmaceuticals, which funded the studies.

Two girls participate in a demonstration called by the "Appel d'air" (Air Call) organisation during the first National Day against air pollution on Saturday in Paris. Some 5,000 demonstrators marched through the streets of the Paris on foot, bicycle or roller skates. Placard reads: "Let's limit cars so the city can breathe."

— AFP/UNB photo

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