

BRIEFLY

Myanmar junta frees 81 NLD members

YANGON, June 1: Myanmar's military government has released almost one-third of the 261 National League Democracy (NLD) members it arrested last month in a sweeping crackdown on the pro-democracy camp, opposition sources said today.

"Up to now they have released 81," an NLD source told Reuters. "Eighty of those are elected members of the NLD." He said he hoped more would be released soon.

NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi said the military had arrested a 261 party members in an effort to scuttle a meeting of elected NLD representatives held May 26-29.

The government denied arresting the politicians, saying it had only detained for questioning some NLD members who had planned to attend the meeting. It did not say how many had been detained.

Today, the government made a small announcement in official media.

Sinn Fein can join talks after IRA reinstates truce

BELFAST, June 1: Britain insisted that Sinn Fein, despite a strong showing in Northern Ireland elections to choose peace negotiators, could not take part in the talks unless its IRA allies reinstated their ceasefire, reports Reuters.

"I hope the IRA will now heed this democratic vote for peace by declaring an unequivocal ceasefire. This is opening the way for Sinn Fein's representatives to take part in the negotiations with the other parties, British Prime Minister John Major said.

Sinn Fein, the political arm of the Irish Republican Army, won 15 per cent of the vote, its biggest showing yet in the British-ruled province, in the elections for a 110-member forum to debate Northern Ireland's political future.

Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams brushed aside calls for a new IRA ceasefire.

Netanyahu assures Mubarak of promoting ME peace process

CAIRO, June 1: Newly-elected Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Friday and said he was committed to promoting the peace process, Egyptian state television said, reports Reuters.

Netanyahu said he hoped to meet Mubarak, president of the first Arab country to make peace with Israel and an important mediator between Israel and its other neighbours, in the next few weeks after he formed a government.

Mubarak replied that Netanyahu was welcome to visit Egypt "to discuss comprehensive peace in the Middle East."

"During the conversation Netanyahu affirmed his commitment to promote the peace process," the television said.

He said he was keen to meet the president... to exchange ideas on the future of the peace process and to clarify his ideas, far from the statements which accompa-

nied the election campaign and which were misinterpreted," the Egyptian government newspaper Al-Ahram added.

The newspaper also quoted Mubarak as saying Egypt would allow Netanyahu time to settle into office.

"It is a duty to give the New Israeli government a chance to clarify its ideas and intentions toward the peace process, without hurrying," he said.

Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sent cables on Friday to both the winner and the loser in Israel's election for prime minister, hoping the peace process would continue.

"His cable to Benjamin Netanyahu is congratulating him on his electoral victory, and his cable to Shimon Peres is a cable of friendship," chief spokeswoman Sylvana Foa said.

AFP adds from Washington: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Friday he had

no plans to return to the Middle East but would brief Israel's prime minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu soon on the peace process.

"I don't have any present plans to go back to the Middle East," Christopher told reporters, adding that the United States would brief Netanyahu when he visits the United States after he forms a government.

He said Netanyahu's visit to Washington would provide an opportunity for US officials to have "good and candid" discussion with him on the peace process.

Meanwhile, Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Bweiz said Friday he hoped Israeli Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu would be realistic in Middle East peace talks.

"We hope that Netanyahu will be realistic in away not to destroy the hopes of the peace in the Middle East," Bweiz told reporters at the Beirut airport.

Off the Record

Skinny models discourage young women to eat!

LONDON: You can't, some say, be too rich or too thin. Not so, says watchmaker Omega. The Swiss-owned company protested to Vogue magazine over pictures in the June issue of two top American models who are slim, svelte, skinny or well, skeletal, reports AP.

It all depends on how you see what you can see of Trish Goff, as 5-foot-9 (1.73 metre) waif-like blonde, who appears in the fashion magazine modelling sportswear, and Annie Morton, same height and just a shade broader, featured in underwear.

"It was irresponsible for a leading magazine, which should be setting an example, to select models of anorexic proportions," said Giles Rees, Omega's British marketing manager.

He wrote to Vogue complaining that the sight of "skeletal" models would encourage eating disorders in young women, and said Omega would withdraw its advertising.

But Omega's chairman Nicolas Hayek overrode Rees' decision. The company agreed to continue advertising with Vogue, Rees said, largely because of Hayek's belief "that it is not in anybody's interest to manipulate the editorial position of any given media."

Doctor's error

BOSTON: Doctors mistakenly removed the wrong kidney from a cancer patient, leaving the elderly woman with just one diseased kidney, embarrassed officials at Quincy Hospital said, reports AP.

The 76-year-old Boston woman, who was not identified, remained in the hospital Friday in good condition despite losing her only good kidney on May 20.

Quincy Hospital said it had put the doctors involved on probation and was investigating the mistake.

The case also is being investigated by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, the industry-funded agency that rates about 80 per cent of the nation's hospitals.

Ralph Dipisa, the hospital's chief executive, said Dr William Helfrich Jr. and the assisting surgeon, Dr Tomas Divinagracia, realised during the surgery they had mistakenly removed the wrong kidney, and a hospital official immediately called the patient's family.

"They said, 'We took out something we shouldn't have. We took out a healthy organ,' a relative of the woman told the Patriot Ledger of Quincy, which reported on the case Friday. "They said, 'We don't know why it happened.'"

Helfrich is chairman of the surgery department at South Shore Hospital. He requested, and was granted, an unspecified leave of absence on Friday, South Shore Hospital spokesman Scott Pickard said.

Divinagracia is a board-certified surgeon who has been licensed in Massachusetts since 1971.

Neither doctor returned telephone calls Friday.

Dipisa said the two would be supervised and their past surgeries reviewed by the hospital's quality assurance panel. The committee also will review hospital policies.



Mute thirteen-year-old Holly Potter (R) holds the lap-top computer, which converts to speech any text stored or keyed in by her, outside the BT docklands Earth Station, in London Saturday. Holly lost her voice through complications following a severe attack of croup at the age of three and uses the computer to recreate her voice using tonal patterns and components taken from actual human speech, in this case provided by Charlotte Breen (L), daughter of Dr Anday Breen, the British Telecom scientist who designed the system. — AFP/UNB photo

1 more dissident held in China

Police have detained a veteran Chinese dissident, apparently to muzzle him during the seventh anniversary of the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement, his wife said Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

Wang Xizhe is at least the third dissident to be detained ahead of the June 4 anniversary. Although the number is far lower than in previous years, many of those arrested in last year's sweep have yet to be released. Ten police in plainclothes approached Wang and his wife Friday afternoon while they ate lunch in a restaurant in the southern city of Nanhai, his wife, Su Jiang said.

Polls observer kidnapped in Managua

An American who is part of a group of international election observers was kidnapped Friday in a northern province by armed bandits, a government official said, AP reports from Managua.

Cynthia Garzon, 40, of the US Agency for International Development, was accredited Thursday to monitor the process leading to Oct. 20 presidential elections. A spokesman for the government's Supreme Electoral Council, Manuel Espinoza Rivera, told The Associated Press that Garzon was kidnapped in the mountainous region of Wiwili in the Jinotega province.

German FM talks with Nazarbayev

Kazakhstan and Germany yesterday agreed to make full use of their potential for furthering their all-round cooperation, Xinhua reports from Alam Ata.

Visiting German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel held talks with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev yesterday on how to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation and provide assistance to ethnic Germans living in Kazakhstan.

Violence claims 7 in Haiti

Haitians enraged by the slaying of their mayor stormed a rural police station and killed seven men inside, a capital radio station reported Friday, AP reports from Port-au-Prince.

Mayor Eric Francois was shot dead before dawn Thursday in Port-au-Prince as she waited at a bus stop for a ride home. Francois, 32, was mayor of Chansolme, a town 160 miles (260 kilometres) north of the capital. The motive behind her slaying was unknown, but it appeared to be a robbery.

Former Italian leftist leader dies

Luciano Lama, a former resistance fighter who later championed workers' causes as leader of Italy's biggest labour federation, died Friday in Rome of cancer, union officials said. Lama was 74, AP reports from Rome.

As secretary-general of CGIL, the Communist-affiliated union group, from 1970-86, Lama provided leadership during a period which saw unions flex their muscles and frequently call paralyzing strikes. The late '80s and early years of this decade, however, saw union power somewhat eroded, as the government moved to rein in costly pension and automatic wage hike systems.

US, Germany, Italy sign accord

The United States, Germany and Italy have signed an agreement to jointly develop a battlefield missile defence system even though France has decided to drop out, the Pentagon said Friday, AP reports from Washington.

The memorandum of understanding was signed May 28, renewing the three countries' commitment to the Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEAD) programme, the Pentagon said. However, the financing of the initial phase of programme was still being negotiated in the wake of France's decision earlier this month to withdraw, Pentagon officials said.

Elevator crash kills 7 in Russia

A construction elevator broke and crashed 100 metres (yards) to the ground on Friday, killing seven workers, an official said, AP reports from Krasnoyarsk.

The workers were taking the makeshift elevator to the top of a factory chimney in Krasnoyarsk, a Siberian city about 3,400 kilometres (2,100 miles) east of Moscow, to do repairs. The elevator was 20 metres (yards) from the top of the 120-metre (yard) chimney when it broke, a duty officer in the local office of the Emergency Situations Ministry told the ITAR-Tass news agency.

Tigers attack police patrol: 6 killed

COLOMBO, June 1: Tamil Tiger rebels ambushed a police patrol in eastern Sri Lanka, killing five policemen, a military official said Saturday, reports AP.

Police fought back but rebel casualties were not immediately known in the fighting near Kalawanchikudi town in Batticaloa district on Friday, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

In another incident on Friday, rebels shot and killed a soldier who was driving a military ambulance in Kopay town in the northern Jaffna peninsula, the official said.

The guerrillas also set fire to eight buses at a bus depot in Batticaloa district on Friday, said the official.

The rebels are fighting for a homeland in the north and east for minority Tamils. They say Tamils are discriminated against by the majority Sinhalese, who control the government and military. More than 42,000 people have been killed since the war began in 1983.

Curfew lifted from some areas in Calcutta

CALCUTTA, June 1: With the situation limping back to normal, curfew which has clamped at Garden Reach, South Port and Metiabruze police station areas since Wednesday last following violence, was lifted from 0600 hours today, reports PTI.

Curfew was however lifted from 0800 hours today at Ekabipore police station area, scene of yesterday's violence and police firing in which one person was killed.

Official sources here said shops and bazars were opened and buses and other vehicular traffic were plying in the areas. Altogether five persons were killed and thirty others, including several policemen were injured in group clashes and police firing after violence erupted in those areas over taking out of Taza procession.

The sources said the situation was normal and no fresh incidents were reported from any of the areas.

Nationwide blackout enters 4th day

Chandrika orders arrests of striking power workers

COLOMBO, June 1: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga ordered mass arrests yesterday to break a strike and reactivate a power station, vowing to use any means "short of killing" to end a drawn out blackout, officials said, reports AFP.

Two diesel-powered generators were started at a power station near the capital Colombo for the first time since some 14,000 electricity employees went on strike Wednesday, a government spokesman said.

"We are hopeful of restoring supplies at least to the capital by early Saturday," a government spokesman said.

Portable generators have been sent to re-activate the water supply to the city. Earlier in the day, President Kumaratunga said she ordered the arrests to end the unprecedented trade union action and threatened to sack and confiscate the property of strikers but workers said they were undeterred by her tough

stand. Kumaratunga said the strike was part of a "conspiracy" to overthrow her and accused the main opposition United National Party (UNP) of trying to instigate workers in other public utilities to stage a general strike on Monday.

Meanwhile AP adds: A nationwide blackout entered its fourth day Saturday, with power workers vowing to continue their strike and appealing to railway, bank and phone company workers to join them.

Police rounded up 125 of the 14,000 workers of the Ceylon Electricity Board and fired up a small 20 megawatt station to restore power to hospitals and about 10 per cent of the capital city.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga vowed on Friday to do everything "short of killing people" to end the strike.

But trade union leaders ignored her threat and appealed to other unions to join their action against the government's plan to privatise utility

ties. There were no immediate indication that workers at other state institutions, most of which are closed due to the blackout, would join the strike.

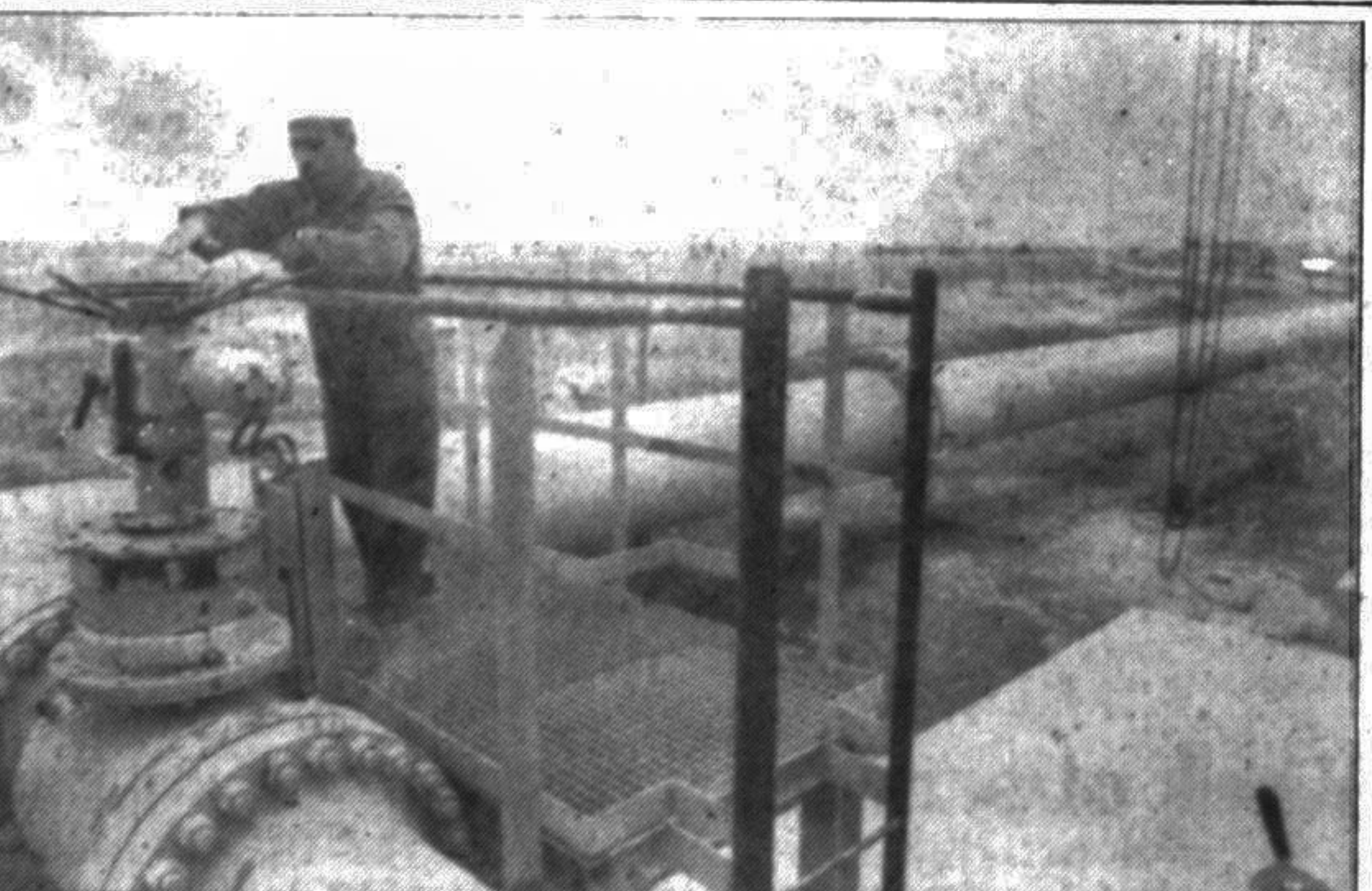
A union official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the government tactic won't work. They will have to force at least 8,000 workers back to work before the country can have electricity," he said.

Union leaders remained in hiding and called on workers not to co-operate even at gunpoint.

Two larger power stations which had been started up could not be immediately used, since the electricity distribution system had been sabotaged.

The government is likely to declare state-owned Sri Lanka Telecom an "essential service" to prevent a strike, said a Telecom official, who asked not to be identified.

Telecom is already relaying on overloaded standby generators.



An Iraqi technician works on the Turkis-Iraqi pipeline which starts in Kirkouk, some 300 kilometers (180 miles), North of Baghdad, on Friday. The pipeline was closed for six years due to the oil embargo but it will reopen within two days to resume transportation of Iraqi oil. — AFP/UNB photo

Gowda — the right man at the right time?

NEW DELHI, June 1: H D Deve Gowda may not have been first choice for the job, but many consider him the right man at the right time, reports Reuters.

India's prime minister-designate won the job almost by default after a long-time communist leader was tripped up by his own party and a right-wing Hindu nationalist fell short of a parliamentary majority.

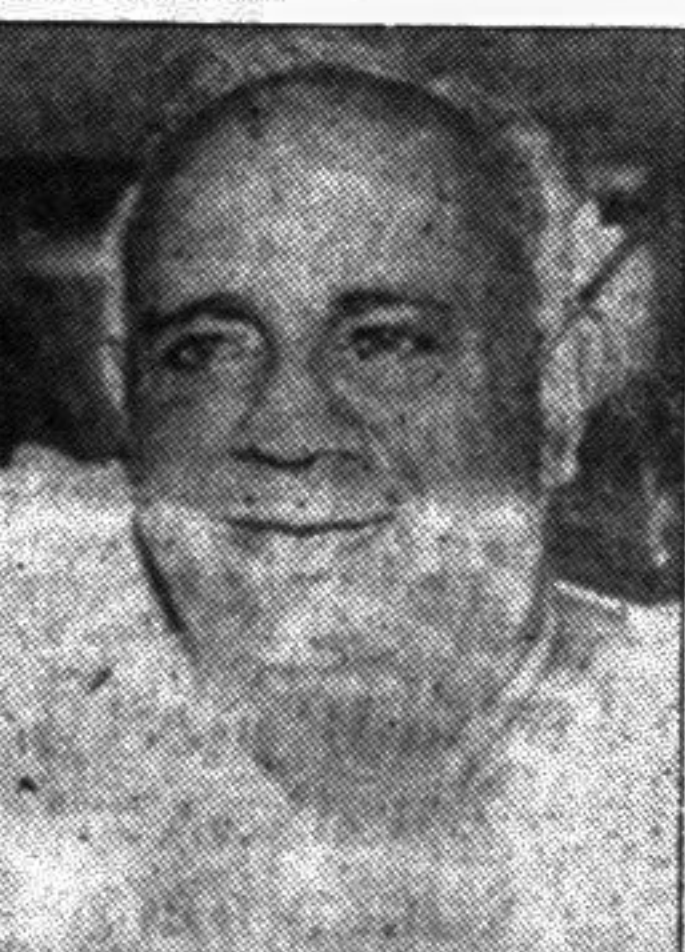
He will become India's third prime minister in a month when he is sworn in on Saturday at 12:30 pm (0700 GMT).

His rural roots distinguish him from his predecessors, and his emergence reflects India's rapidly changing political culture, in which regional interests and lower castes are flexing their muscles.

A southern leader, Deve Gowda contrasts with the northern, urban, upper-caste Brahmins who have dominated Indian politics since independence in 1947.

He has never held office in the federal capital New Delhi, and speaks little Hindi, the dominant language in the

north. "He is a very representative product of the previously marginalised India which is now in the majority," said Ashis Nandy, of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. "I find him very refreshing." Haradanahalli Doddegowda Deve Gowda's father tilled a modest one-acre plot of land in the southern section of Karnataka state.



Chechens release 8 Russian POWs Fresh fighting erupts in Chechen town of Shali

MOSCOW, June 1: A Russian commander said that unless all separatist rebels in the Chechen town of Shali lay down their weapons he would attack the town Saturday despite the scheduled start of a cease-fire, reports AP.

The cease-fire reached by President Boris Yeltsin and the rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev was to take effect at 12:01 am (4:01 pm EDT Friday).

Fighting broke out Friday after Russian troops claimed rebel fighters had entered Shali, 15 miles (24 kilometres) southeast of the Chechen capital, Russian Television said. A Russian soldier and a rebel commander were killed.

Russian commander Maj Gen Vladimir Shamanov threatened to attack Shali on Saturday unless all rebel fighters in the town lay down their arms.

Any operation Saturday would violate the ceasefire. Saturday's negotiations were expected to focus on a plan for the withdrawal of federal troops and rebel disarmament. But Chechen negotiators said Friday they were unable to attend talks the next day in the neighbouring republic of Dagestan, Russian news agencies reported.

AFP adds: Chechen separatists released eight Russian prisoners in exchange for the release of an unspecified number of rebel fighters, Russian official Sergei Osipov announced Friday.

According to Interfax news agency Osipov, the secretary of a Russian presidential commission responsible for liberating prisoners, said the organisation estimated that separatists held some 400 Russian military and some 200 Russian civilians.

US may impose further sanctions on Myanmar

WASHINGTON, June 1: The State Department said Friday it is consulting with Congress on the possibility of imposing sanctions on the military regime in Myanmar, reports AP.

"We retain the option to consider further sanctions, should the situation there warrant it, and if we decide that is the proper way for us to try to influence the Myanmar authorities," spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

He said about 60 of the more than 200 pro-democracy activists have been released since detentions were carried out several days ago.

Palestinians frustrated over future of peace efforts

SHATI REFUGEE CAMP, Gaza Strip, June 1: With the right-wing victory in Israel's prime minister race now official, gloom has settled over this refugee camp, where barber Ehab Dababish and his friends spend their days sipping tea and waiting for better times, reports AP.

A government led by Benjamin Netanyahu will destroy any hopes the Palestinians had for an independent homeland, say the mostly unemployed young men sitting in plastic chairs on the potholed street outside the barber shop.

"No peace no state, no Jerusalem. It's a complete failure for peace," 23-year-old

tailor Samih Fasih said Friday. For many Palestinians, the frustration was especially acute since they thought they had had a real shot at statehood for the first time in their bitter history marked by occupation and exile.

Talks on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza began in May, and Prime Minister Shimon Peres appeared ready to consider independence, although he said he favoured a confederation between a Palestinian entity and Jordan.

Peres lost to Netanyahu by the slimmest of margins in Wednesday's election. Final results were announced Friday.

In a joint statement Saturday, the Palestinian Cabinet and PLO Executive Committee urged Netanyahu to continue efforts toward peace and to adhere to "everything that has been agreed upon, including the beginning of talks on the final status" of Jerusalem as a possible shared capital.

In the weeks leading up to the election, Arafat had done his best to help Peres win a tight race in which personal security was the key issue following suicide bombings by Palestinian militants.

Arafat rounded up hundreds of suspected militants, and three weeks before the vote rammed a decision through the Palestine National Council

to revoke sections of the PLO charter calling for Israel's destruction. The move, demanded by Peres, was meant to assure Israelis that Arafat was a sincere peace partner.

"But in the end, it wasn't good enough. Israelis believed Netanyahu when he said Arafat wasn't trustworthy and that only Israeli troops could be counted on to stop the violence."

Netanyahu said initially he would never meet with Arafat, whom he denounced as an arch-terrorist. In the final days of the campaign, hoping to win the support of middle-of-the-road voters, Netanyahu said he would meet Arafat if it was

essential for Israel's security. Marwan Kanfani, a member of the Palestinians' legislative council, said he expected Netanyahu to be pragmatic.

"If we look at the whole matter rationally, I think that direct contact should take place within hours," he said. "There is a necessity that both leaders should meet."

In the streets of Shati, many residents blamed the Islamic militant group Hamas for their troubles.

Hamas commissioned suicide bombings in February and March in hopes of wrecking peacemaking. The group wants to destroy Israel and set up an

Islamic state in all of the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River.

In response to the bombings, Peres sealed off the West Bank and Gaza. The three-month long blockade, has devastated the Palestinian economy, and sent unemployment soaring to 70 per cent in Gaza.

Hamas destroyed our economic life and now the political situation," said Hathan Fasih, a 22-year-old carpenter, now unemployed. The Gaza City chair factory where he worked had to shut down because of the border closure.

"Netanyahu will only give us expanded self-rule. This is the maximum we can get," he said.

Capital of Ghor province falls to Taliban

KABUL, June 1: Afghan government officials today confirmed the fall of a provincial capital city in Afghanistan's central Ghor region to Taliban forces while new fighting erupted between the rivals near Kabul, reports AP.

Chaghcharan was taken over by the Taliban on Thursday after a military commander of forces of an Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani defected to the Islamic militia a military official here said.

But he said pro-Rabbani forces were still entrenched around the fallen city and some other districts in Ghor.