

International

UNP accuses Chandrika of inciting violence

COLOMBO, Sept 22 : Escalating political killings in Sri Lanka have dimmed hopes of hammering out a national consensus to end the country's dragging Tamil separatist war, political analysts here said today, reports AFP.

Pro-government gunmen have killed six members of the main opposition United Nations Party (UNP) since Friday.

UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has accused President Chandrika Kumaratunga of inciting his supporters to violence.

He said the attacks made it more difficult for his party to support the government in finding a solution to the separatist war.

The president has not only condemned the violence, she has actually incited the gunmen to unleash more terror," Wickremesinghe told AFP. "What we are seeing now is the effects of her recent remarks."

Last week Kumaratunga at-

tempted to justify an attack on a Roman Catholic Church, in which two people died, while the UNP was staging a service to mark the party's 50th anniversary.

The president said UNP members had killed a supporter of her ruling party and government supporters were reacting to the killing by breaking up church service.

"We did not encourage anyone," Kumaratunga said. "If they (the attackers) had guns, then it is all right to shoot back or even chop them to pieces."

"My party is not afraid. I am not afraid and my constituents know it."

Wickremesinghe said Kumaratunga's statements angered many UNP legislators who were bringing pressure on the party leadership not to co-operate with the government.

Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) has slender one seat majority in the 225-member National Parliament and re-

quires the support of the UNP to push through radical reforms aimed at ending the war.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is leading a protracted guerrilla war to press its demand for separation, and more than 50,000 people have died in bitter fighting in the past 23 years.

Tamil politicians said the widening rift between the two main Sinhalese parties, the PA and the UNP, was a death blow to a political reform package being discussed by a parliamentary panel.

"With this kind of violence, we can't expect the UNP to support the package," Tamil MP Dharmalingam Sidharthan said.

"If the situation continues like this, I think the package will come to end very soon."

British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind earlier this month underlined the need for national consensus on the Tamil separatist issue.



Women attempt to console the mother of a youth arrested by Indian government security forces (background) during a protest against state assembly elections taking place Saturday in northern Kashmir. The crucial polls were disrupted by a series of grenade attacks by separatist guerrillas who have been waging a bloody secessionist campaign in Kashmir since 1989.

— AFP/UNB photo

Race for Cong(I) leadership begins

NEW DELHI, Sept 22 : A race for the leadership of India's oldest political party began today, a day after former premier PV Narasimha Rao resigned as Congress (I) chief after being named in a 100,000-dollar fraud case, reports AFP.

Senior leaders of the 111-year-old party rushed to New Delhi to elect a successor to Rao, who was scheduled to formally hand over his resignation on Monday to the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's think tank.

Sources said the shortest of successors included A K Antony, a former member of Rao's cabinet who enjoys a reputation for honesty, party treasurer Sitaram Kesri and former defence minister Sharad Pawar.

The 19-member CWC will choose a new president to lead the Congress until fresh party elections are held later this year, said Congress spokesman Vithal Narahari Gadgil.

Gadgil for the first time squarely blamed Rao, who is facing a plethora of corruption charges, for refusing to relinquish the Congress leadership earlier despite repeated calls to

resign.

"The resignation will change our image for the better," he said. "Rao should have resigned a long time ago ... I think it was done under pressure as it followed the court judgement," he said.

Antony, who was scheduled to fly into New Delhi late today, told AFP by telephone from the southern city of Thiruvananthapuram that he would not "comment on hypotheses" or comments by other people.

"The only thing I can say now is that we have been so many ups and downs that we will be able to overcome this," he said. "The Congress has to fight for resurrection by tackling corruption and moral decay which have surfaced in the last few years."

London-based Indian businessman Lakhshmi Pathak had accused Rao and controversial Hindu mystic Chandraswami of defrauding him of 100,000 dollars, promising lucrative newsprint and paper contracts which never materialised.

He said, however, retained his membership of the Congress parliamentary party.

Critics say Kesri's prospects

Normalcy returns in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 22 : Life returned to normal in Kashmir today, a day after police-related violence killed four people and injured scores as the first state elections since 1987 moved into separatist rebel strongholds, reports AFP.

Shops reopened and traffic returned to the streets of this state summer capital after a two-day general strike, called by Muslim separatists to denounce the elections, which ended on September 30.

There were overnight attacks on the home of a prominent local politician and on the office of the powerful all parties Freedom Conference group of Muslim rebel and political organisations here, but no casualties, police said.

"Life is normal again but we do not know for how long," said a houseboat owner on Srinagar's scenic Dal Lake, where a grenade blast fuelled panic among civilians earlier today.

2 US soldiers held in Okinawa

Police in the southern Japanese island of Okinawa have arrested two US soldiers who allegedly assaulted a Japanese man in a pub brawl, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Michael Nail, 23, and Benjamin Becker, 20, both from the US air force stationed in Okinawa, were arrested as they ran from a pub in Okinawa City, north of the prefectural capital of Naha, they said.

Blast kills woman in Armenia: A

woman was killed and eight other people were wounded Saturday when a bomb exploded in southern Armenia, near the border with Georgia, the government said, AFP reports from Yerevan, Armenia.

The explosion in the border village of Bagratashen occurred close to a bridge linking the two former Soviet republics, according to the government's press service.

60,000 Kurds attend peace festival: More than 60,000 people turned out Saturday for a day of music, dance and political speeches at a "Peace Festival for Kurdistan" at a Cologne stadium, police said, AP reports from Cologne.

Police reported no problems during the event, which was advertised with the motto "For the ending of the war and a political solution in Kurdistan." More than 21,000 people have died since Kurdish rebels began fighting for autonomy in Turkey's southeast in 1984.

Presidential vote begins in Armenia: Armenians vote Sunday in a tight presidential race to elect a new leader for the former Soviet republic plagued by economic woes, AP reports from Yerevan, Armenia.

Four candidates are running, including Armenia's incumbent President Levon Ter-Petrosian, who the opposition faults for failing to resolve the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia and Azerbaijan have been at war since 1988 over the territory, which is in Azerbaijan but populated mainly by ethnic Armenians. A cease-fire has largely held for two years.

Polling begins in Greece: Greeks began voting in general elections yesterday in what was forecast to be a tight left-right contest between Prime Minister Costas Simitis's Pan Hellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) and the opposition New Democracy (ND) party of Miltiades Evert, AFP reports from Athens.

The capital wore a relaxed and holiday air, with more than half a million citizens having left for their home towns and villages where they were registered to vote. For the first time in more than 50 years bars and clubs were open for business on election day, the government having scrapped an old ban on drinking alcohol in public during the vote.

HC judge to probe into killing Another showdown between police, Murtaza men averted

LARKANA, Sept 22 : Another showdown between police and supporters of the slain Murtaza Bhutto was averted this morning when police retreated after Murtaza's men attacked them, reports AFP.

Police had taken up positions at Murtaza's house ahead of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's visit to meet her mother Nasrat, which has apparently been postponed.

Murtaza's supporters started punching policemen and pushing them out of the house, at which point some policemen raised their guns. A showdown was narrowly averted as a senior police officer rushed forward and told his men to retreat, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

Earlier AFP report from Karachi says, the government has ordered a judicial inquiry into Friday's killing of Murtaza Bhutto, estranged brother of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Police maintain that Murtaza's security guards opened fire on the policemen forcing them to take defensive action.

Settlement expansion leads Jews, Arabs towards confrontation

GAZA, Sept 22 : Senior Palestinian officials warned Israel today that its expansion of Jewish settlements was leading Jews and Arabs towards confrontation and disaster, reports Reuter.

"The continuation of settlements buries any hope for the peace process," chief Palestinian peace negotiator Saeb Erekat said after a weekly Palestinian cabinet meeting.

"They (Israel) should keep in mind that the continuation of such policies is taking both people, Israelis and Palestinians, back to the circle of confrontation and disaster," Erekat told reporters in self-ruled Gaza.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat convened his cabinet to discuss Jewish settlement expansion at the end of a

week in which news emerged that Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai had approved 1,800 new homes for Jews in the West Bank and that plans for 2,000 more homes were in the pipeline for Mordechai's approval.

"We made a clear decision for the complete replacement of expansion and thickening of settlements which the Israel government is taking," said Palestinian Minister of Public Works Azzam Al-Ahmed.

Erekat said he had sent a letter to his Israeli counterpart, Dan Shomron, asking Israel to revoke recent orders to build new Jewish homes in West Bank lands that Israel occupied in the 1967 Middle East war.

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In Cairo, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa condemned right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's settlement policies as "rejection and obstinacy."

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak told the German news magazine Der Spiegel in an interview released ahead of publication on Monday that Jewish settlement expansion would lead to a renewed Palestinian uprising.

"Planting time bombs such as the unfettered construction of Jewish settlements on the West Bank and ignoring treaties will lead to a new Intifada sooner or later," Mubarak said.

"And this time it won't be limited to throwing stones."

Pro-govt fighters urged to defect

Taliban take control of Kunar province

ISLAMABAD, Sept 22 : The Taliban Islamic militia has taken the eastern Afghanistan province of Kunar from pro-government fighters to defect to its side and promised them amnesty, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported today, says AP.

The militia entered the province late Saturday almost without any resistance, the Private Information Service said.

But five people were killed during fighting in Khewa, the agency said. Unnamed Taliban officials here quoted as saying that a pro-government commander, identified as Shher Alzai, was one of the dead at Khewa.

The Taliban took the key eastern city of Jalalabad on September 10 and since then has claimed major gains in neighbouring provinces, including Laghman and Kunar.

The militia has vowed to rid the country of the rival mujahideen factions and set up an Islamic state.

Taliban forces, which now control more than half of Afghanistan, captured two eastern provinces in a quick sweep last week.

But fighting has continued in some parts of the two provinces, Nangarhar and Laghman.

Off the Record



Twenty-year old student Agnieszka Zielinska from Poznan acknowledges the applause after being elected Miss Poland 1996 in Warsaw Saturday.

More than 30 times the annual salary of

BEIJING: Kevin Costner, the Duchess of York and Michael Caine appeared Saturday at the opening of a Beijing club with a membership fee more than 30 times the annual salary of the typical Chinese worker, reports AP.

Sarah Ferguson and Costner visited the Great Wall before attending the club opening.

"It's a big mystery here."

Hong Kong businessman David Tang formed the China Club in a huge mansion that was renovated at a cost of dollars 8 million.

The club's membership fee is 15,000 dollars with a 100 dollars monthly charge. The average income for city people in China was around 470 dollars last year.

3rd wave of US troops lands in Kuwait for war games

KUWAIT CITY, Sept 22 : A third wave of US troops landed in Kuwait Saturday for war games near the Iraqi border, while an Iraqi opposition group charged that Baghdad launched an attack in southern Iraq, reports AFP.

About 300 US soldiers arrived in this oil-rich emirate Saturday afternoon. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Nickerson said.

Another 100 US soldiers were brought in earlier Saturday aboard two small planes. US Army Captain Timothy Raymond said, bringing the total to 1,500 troop reinforcements.

But while US troops prepared for manoeuvres in the desert at Udder, about 50 kms from the Iraqi border, in the marshes of southern Iraq, Baghdad's military has launched a massive attack on the Shi'ite Muslim population, according to the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, an Iraqi opposition group based in Iran.

AP adds : US warplanes roared off the deck of the Enterprise to patrol the skies over Iraq on Saturday, fully loaded to retaliate if they're fired on.

Commander of the aircraft carrier's squadron of F-14 Tomcat jet fighters, said pilots were scouting out potential targets in case Iraq fires at US planes again or takes other offensive action.

Thousands stage rally against Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Sept 22 : One thousand demonstrators marched Saturday to denounce Russian President Boris Yeltsin on the third anniversary of the struggle between the head of state and the former parliament which ended in a bloodbath, reports AFP.

"We have come to stand up for the law," declared one protestor, clad in a Cossack uniform, who in 1993 was among the "defenders" holed up in the building of the former parliament.

"Nobody knows how many died. They speak of at least 1,000, some say even 1,500 or 2,000," she added.

On September 21, 1993, Yeltsin decided to end months of constant struggle with the Russian parliament inherited from Soviet times by ordering its suspension.

The parliament immediately denounced the decision as unconstitutional.

versations between foreign ministers, led by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, is expected to be the fate of Boutros-Ghali.

Washington, which questions Boutros-Ghali's commitment to reform, has vowed to veto a second term for the 73-year-old Egyptian diplomat who is seeking reelection when his current mandate expires on December 31.

The General Assembly, whose session runs until December 17, appoints the UN chief on recommendation of the Security Council.

"Let's not go for a bloodbath. Let's finish this early," he told AFP. "We've got to bring the United States back to the United Nations."

Alternative candidates are also beginning to surface, but none emerging at this stage are considered to be serious contenders.

But diplomats say that the

Election of new UN chief tops agenda of UNGA session

measures to combat terrorism.

The total lifting of UN sanctions against former Yugoslavia is also expected to be decided this week, following the September 14 elections in Bosnia which produced a three-headed presidency into force by Alija Izetbegovic, a Muslim.

On the agenda in ministerial bilateral talks will be a territorial dispute between Japan, China and Taiwan, the incursion of a North Korean submarine into South Korea, and the crisis with Iraq triggered by Baghdad's offensive into Kurdish areas last month.

EU ministers and Iran could meanwhile reach a final agreement next Tuesday on lifting the six-year old death sentence proclaimed by Tehran

against British writer Salman Rushdie for allegedly blaspheming against Islam in his book "The Satanic Verses," diplomats said in Brussels.

And all eyes will be on Colombian President Ernesto Samper, who is due in New York after nearly four kilos (8.1 pounds) of heroin were discovered in the presidential plane that was to bring him here.

Samper, forced to take a