

International

'Benazir may resettle in UK if defeated in polls'

LONDON, Feb 2: Pakistani former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto may resettle in Britain if she is defeated in upcoming elections, under a 'deal' envisaged by the Pakistani government, the Sunday Times reports, says AFP.

Quoting government sources in Islamabad, the paper said that under the arrangement Benazir would ask for asylum in Britain where she is believed to have already acquired a manor house in a rural part of Surrey.

The paper said that if Benazir agreed to go, the government had undertaken not to bring any corruption charges against her or against her husband Asif Ali Zardari. The paper said the Pakistani authorities saw the 'deal' as a way of averting violence between pro- and anti-Benazir elements which a trial could provoke.

The Sunday Times said the offer would be put to Benazir if her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) loses legislative polls on Monday as seems likely.

The paper said Benazir who studied at Oxford University was believed to have already bought a property for herself and her family, using a front company.



Benazir, 43, was dismissed as prime minister in November by President Farooq Ahmed Leghari who accused her and her government of corruption and nepotism.

Her husband is currently in prison accused of conspiracy in the murder last September of his brother-in-law Murtaza Bhutto. Benazir Bhutto in turn has accused Leghari of being indirectly involved in the killing and of protecting the murderers. The Sunday Times did not

say what arrangement was being considered for Zardari.

Earlier report from Lahore says, top Pakistani politicians converged here Saturday for a last minute battle of wits as a nationwide month-long election campaign neared a mid-night close.

Former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, in a race against time, addressed a string of rallies in this capital city of Pakistan's largest and politically most important province of Punjab.

Witnesses said thousands of people turned out to hear the two arch foes. Both blamed the past for a perpetual policy of confrontation that largely contributed to four dissolutions of the National Assembly in eight years.

The campaign closed without overcoming the disenchantment of voters weary of political and administrative corruption that has become a major election issue.

On Wednesday Pakistan's Supreme Court turned down Benazir's petition against her dismissal upholding charges of corruption and bad governance levelled by President Farooq Ahmed Leghari.

Imran goes to court to block Benazir from seeking reelection

ISLAMABAD, Feb 2: Cricket star candidate Imran Khan went to court Sunday to try to block ousted Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto from seeking reelection, a spokesman said, reports AP.

Nasim Zehra, the spokeswoman for Khan's Justice Party, acknowledged the move probably came too late to affect Monday's voting. But Zehra said the suit could result in Benazir's who lost power on corruption charges last November, being barred from taking office if she wins.

Shahid Hamid, the Interim justice Minister, said it was unlikely the transfer of power, set for February 15, would be postponed. He said the National Assembly could legally go into session even if "one or two" seats were in dispute.

Ballots were being distributed across the country Sunday in preparation for voting Monday. All 217 seats in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, are being contested, as well as seats in Pakistan's four provincial legislatures.

The head of the party that

wins control of the National Assembly, whether alone or with coalition partners, will be prime minister.

Khan argues Benazir should be disqualified as a candidate because the Supreme Court last Thursday upheld her November 5 dismissal from power on charges of corruption and economic mismanagement. Khan awaited the Supreme Court decision before deciding to go ahead with his own suit, his spokesman said.

Khan is running for prime minister as head of his new Justice Party. He is trailing in the polls behind Benazir Pakistan People's Party and Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League.

An interim government appointed in November to oversee Monday's election had promised to disqualify corrupt candidates. But officials later said they could not prove charges against anyone, not even Benazir.

President Leghari, the man who fired Benazir, has said disqualifying her might have led to charges the election was unfair.



A view of An Egyptian Sphinx and a Lion statue which were uncovered Friday at Tamssos, the site of an ancient kingdom 20 kilometres (12 miles), southwest of the capital Nicosia. Four other well-preserved Egyptian Sphinx and Lion statues dating from the sixth century B.C. were also uncovered by archeologists in the same site.

— AFP/UNB photo

Bulgarian ruling party to go ahead with plan to form new govt

SOFIA, Feb 2: Bulgaria's ruling Socialist, spurning 27 days of opposition's street demonstrations to demand elections, said they would go ahead with plans to form a new government, reports Reuters.

Students and the main opposition Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) vowed to intensify their protests, and disrupt road and rail links further, if the former communist Socialists did hold on to power instead of opting for immediate elections.

Socialist Party leader Georgi Parvanov said in a television interview on Saturday: "I'm sure next week Bulgaria will

have a new government but it is hard to predict what the future of this government will be."

He said Nikolai Dobrev, who has a mandate to form the next government, would become prime minister the 240-seat parliament approved his cabinet.

Bulgaria has had a caretaker government, unable to take action in the face of a deep economic crisis, since December. Parvanov said the Socialists could count on 122 votes in parliament, an absolute majority which meant that they could win the required confidence vote.

31 more slain in Algeria

PARIS, Feb 2: Algeria's independent newspaper *El Watan* said today that 31 people had been killed in the Algerian town of Medea, with their throats cut and heads severed, reports Reuters.

"More than 30 people had their throats cut this night, the paper, normally well informed on security matters quoted a resident as saying late on Saturday."

AP adds, rocked by a wave of car bombings, Algiers officials on Sunday banned parking on the capital's main boulevards. The decision, to take effect Wednesday, widens an existing parking ban that affected embassies and public buildings protected by concrete blocks.

Blast kills 4 in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Feb 2: Four people, two of them militants, were killed and six, including two securitymen, wounded in Kashmir where ultras triggered a bomb blast on January 31, reports PTI.

A militant was apprehended and another laid down arms while unidentified people hijacked a vehicle during the period, an official spokesman said.

He said two Hizbul Mujahideen militants, Abdul Rashid and Shakeel Ahmad, were killed in an encounter with special operations group of Jammu and Kashmir police in Bijbehara area in Anantnag district yesterday. Two AK assault rifles and some ammunition were recovered from their possession.

Five people, two of them

army jawans, were wounded when militants detonated an improvised explosive device in Sumbal area in Baramulla district. A security vehicle was also damaged in the blast.

Militants gunned down one Ghulam Mohi-ud-din Wani in his house in frontier district of Kupwara where police picked up the body of a person last morning.

The spokesman said a house and cowshed were gutted in an explosion at Dooni Wari-Lolab Kupwara. No one was, however, hurt.

Anal-Jehad ultra surrendered before security forces in Baramulla district yesterday. The arms laid down by him included a rifle and 30 rounds of ammunition. A militant was apprehended in Kupwara district.

30 killed in fighting as LTTE attacks 3 army camps

COLOMBO, Feb 2: At least 30 people were killed in separate clashes between Tamil Tiger rebels and government forces in Sri Lanka's north and east over the weekend, military officials said today, reports Reuters.

A large group of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels overran the Mavadi-vembu camp in Batticaloa district, 200 km (125 miles) from Colombo, just after midnight on Saturday, killing 13 soldiers, including a lieutenant, they said.

Seven soldiers of the army's 6th Gajaba Regiment were wounded in the assault while five were missing after the raid,

in which the rebels captured weapons and burned down the camp, they said.

The camp was base for about 60 soldiers but one platoon of 30 was out on patrol when the rebels attacked, they said.

Rebel casualties were not immediately known. The rebels are fighting for an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the north and east of this mainly Sinhalese Indian Ocean island.

Three civilians in the area were killed by a rebel mortar while a soldier was killed and three wounded in a rebel attack on nearby Sittandi army camp around the same time.

Earlier AFP says, Tamil Tiger guerillas attack three army camps in eastern Sri Lanka today killing at least 24 soldiers and wounding another 22, officials said.

A large force of gunmen from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) pounded the Mavadi-vembu army detachment in the coastal district of Batticaloa, killing 13 soldiers and wounding 15, officials said.

While the attack was going on, the rebels fired mortar bombs at the nearby Sittandi army camp killing one soldier and wounding at least three others, officials said.

BRIEFLY

Clashes leave 3 killed in India:

Three persons were killed and nine others, including four policemen, were injured in sporadic violence in parts of Tamil Nadu that followed the murder of Palani Baba's Muslim fundamentalist, at Palani in Coimbatore district on Jan 29, PTI reports from Coimbatore.

While a timber shop owner was burnt to death in Keezhakkarai in Ramnathapuram district, an RSS organiser, Ramachandran was stabbed to death in Tambaram on the outskirts of Chennai.

Dengue fever kills 24 in Indonesia:

At least 24 people have died from Dengue fever since last November in eastern Java, a report said Sunday, AP report from Jakarta. Another 379 people have become infected with the disease in the Sumenep regency in Madura, East Java since the outbreak began in November, the officials Antara news agency quoted local official Mohammad Roesland as saying. Roesland said all health centers in the area had been asked to set up 24-hour emergency posts to provide services to people infected with the disease. Last year the disease hit 9,936 villages in all 27 provinces in Indonesia, killing at least 599 people and afflicting a total of 23,465 people.

3 Albanians killed in Kosovo:

Three ethnic Albanians have died and three Serbian policemen were wounded in a shootout in separatist Kosovo province, police said Saturday, AP reports from Pristina, Yugoslavia.

Nearly 200 people have died since Serbia's President Slobodan Milosevic revoked Kosovo's broad autonomy in 1989 and deployed police to prevent secession. About 90 per cent of Kosovo's 1.9 million people are ethnic Albanians. Police fired on the Albanians' car Friday near the town of Vucitrin, 155 miles (250 kilometres) south of the capital, Belgrade. Police say the three were wanted member of the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army and fired first.

Chopper crash claims 4 in Macedonia:

All four people on board were killed yesterday when a UN helicopter exploded and crashed into Lake Mavrovo in Macedonia, a UN spokeswoman was quoted as saying by reports reaching in Tirana, Xinhua reports from Tirana.

Claire Grimes, the spokeswoman from the UN Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, said the victims included three Finnish soldiers and a Canadian civilian pilot. An investigation into the crash is underway. Grimes said, adding that the incident had something to do with the weather according to preliminary investigation.

Netanyahu to visit Jordan:

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will visit Jordan on Wednesday for talks with King Hussein, the state-run news agency said Saturday, AP reports from Amman.

Quoting a government official source, the Petra news agency said that the two leaders focus on peace-making in the region during the one-day visit. The agency gave no details. Netanyahu's visit will be the first to Jordan following Israeli army redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron on January 17 after Hussein helped solve a deadlock on Hebron between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

India begins production of new generation small arms

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: Production of new generation Indian Small Arms System (INSAS) 5.56mm automatic rifle to replace the ageing 7.62 semi-automatic weapon has begun and the armed forces are being equipped with the highly effective rifles as per schedule after the clearance of initial hitches on the question of design, reports PTI.

There was 'some delay' in the serial production of the 5.56 mm rifles mainly due to changes and improvements in design and drawing to meet the quality perceptions of the users, according to the Defence Ministry.

However, with the establishment and optimisation of design, the annual targets have been achieved and the target for the next two years is also expected to be met.



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat surrounded by newsmen and minders upon his arrival to Davos Saturday for a dinner date with the Israeli and Egyptian heads of state.

— AFP/UNB photo

War in Liberia is over: Perry

MONROVIA, Feb 2: After seven years of a war that has claimed more than 150,000 lives, Liberia has never seemed closer to peace after the weekend completion of a "massive" disarmament operation, reports AFP.

"I have the personal feeling the war is over," Ruth Perry, Liberia's head of state, told AFP on Saturday.

"All we have now is hope," tempered a Liberian journalist, who recalled at least a dozen peace accords which had been signed and broken since the conflict ignited in December 1989.

But this latest peace process, the fruit of an accord signed by faction leaders in Abuja in August 1995 and revised a year later, is irreversible, argue diplomats and officials.

Taliban capture Shekali dist of Parwan province

KABUL, Feb 2: Afghanistan's Taliban militia captured a district from rival Shiite Muslim forces west of Kabul today, a Pakistan-based Afghan News Service said, reports Reuters.

The Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said the Taliban had seized the Shekali district of Parwan province, 80 km (50 miles) northwest of Kabul from the Hezb-i-Wahdat Party led by Karim Khalili.

It said Taliban warriors, adherents of rival Sunni Islam, also captured the district of Sorkhi Parsa in the same province on Saturday night after meeting little resistance from the Shiite militia.

Khalili's faction is part of an anti-Taliban alliance led by Ahmed Shah Masood, military

chief of the previous government ousted by the Taliban, and northern General Abdul Rashid Dostum.

AIP said Taliban forces were now advancing towards Shobar, on the border of the central province of Bamayan, Khalili's main stronghold.

The Taliban's Voice of Shariat Radio said on Saturday that people in the Shiite-populated districts of Tagab and Behsoud, in Wardak province west of Kabul, had revolted against Khalili.

"People of Behsoud and Tagab have risen against Khalili's militia and tens of this fighters have been disarmed," it said.

Protest against Milosevic shows no sign of losing momentum

BELGRADE, Feb 2: Serbia's marathon mass protests against President Slobodan Milosevic showed no sign of losing momentum as violence in the communal powder keg of Kosovo province threw up a new challenge to his isolated government, reports Reuters.

Tens of thousands of opposition supporters and students mounted separate protests in Belgrade on Saturday, both in carnival mood and both demanding for a 77th day that Milosevic must recognise opposition wins in November's local polls.

At the same time, the killing of three ethnic Albanians by Serbian police in Kosovo was a sharp reminder of the sectarian tensions that threaten to undo international peacemaking efforts across the Balkans.

Americans urged not to travel to Algeria

WASHINGTON, Feb 2: The US State Department has urged Americans not to travel to Algeria as violence has been increasing there since last November, reports Xinhua.

In a travel advisory issued on Friday, the State Department said the US embassy in Algiers specifically identifies ports and airline terminals as terrorist targets, and said embassy personnel have stopped using regularly scheduled commercial transport. The advisory also urged American citizens who remain in Algeria to exercise maximum caution and use substantial armed protection.

A spate of bombings and massacres have taken place in Algeria since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on January 10. It was said at least 280 people have been killed and 600 wounded.

Off the Record

Monroe in porn film

VILA-SECA, Spain: A six-minute pornographic film purportedly starring Marilyn Monroe was shown publicly for the first time in two decades at a collectors fair in northeastern Spain, reports AP.

Viewers of the film on Saturday said the woman bore a resemblance to Monroe but they weren't certain it her. Spanish state TV broadcast four still frames from the film last month, showing a bare-breasted woman alleged to be 21-year-old Norma Jean Baker.

A Spanish film buff who bought the black-and-white film in Paris 20 years ago thought he recognised the young woman making love on a sofa, and contacted the Spanish promoters.

The woman appears to be younger and chubbier than the actress who would change her name to Marilyn Monroe and become one of Hollywood's most enduring icons. Monroe died of an overdose of sleeping pills in 1962 at 36.

'Nudes are threat to good living'

PHNOM PENH: Bars and clubs featuring nude dancers have been ordered closed by municipal authorities as a threat to Cambodian culture, the government announced Sunday, reports AP.

Though carvings of topless dancers grace the stone walls of Cambodia's ancient Angkor temples, Phnom Penh authorities said nude dancers are a threat to "good living".

Such clubs have proliferated in recent years following the end of rigid communist rule.

"Elimination of such businesses will enhance our national tradition and culture which, intoxicated by evil influence, harms good living and the education of the young," a statement by the information ministry said.

Mayor's idea for teens

BOGOTA: Bogota's mayor has an idea for teens who don't know how to drink moderately and responsibly — teach them how to, in class field trips to bars, reports AP.

Mayor Antanas Mockus' hands-on alcohol-education proposal has met a surprisingly positive reception from parents and alcohol rehabilitation groups in Bogota, a city plagued by drunken driving and alcoholism.

Taking 11th and 12th graders to pubs as part of health classes would let them learn how to drink with restraint, and see what happens when people don't argue.

"It can be a lot more seductive to only hear alcohol talked about," Mockus said. "We want to take students to learn from their own experience, to talk about it and learn its positive and negative sides."

Under teachers' supervision, students who want to have a drink during a field trip would be permitted to do so. The legal drinking age is 18, but the law is not strictly enforced.

A former philosophy professor, Mockus has made a practice of amusing, alarming and provoking residents of the capital since his 1994 election.

His stunts include parading around as "Super Citizen" in red tights and blue cape and sending mimes into the streets to chide the city's notoriously discourteous drivers.

Peruvian president offers fresh talks to end hostage crisis

TORONTO, Feb 2: President Alberto Fujimori of Peru has offered to start a new round of talks with rebels holding 72 hostages in Lima, but rejects their key demand — the release of jailed guerillas, reports AP.

After meeting in Toronto with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, Fujimori said Saturday he was willing to open a "preliminary dialogue" with the rebels to produce a "realistic" agenda for formal negotiations.

His government already has been exchanging messages with the rebels through intermediaries, notably Juan Luis Cipriani, the Roman Catholic bishop of Ayacucho.

There will be absolutely no release of MRTA prisoners," Fujimori said, referring to the rebel group. "We would not like to go back to the past."

Nestor Cerpa, the leader of the Tupac Amaru guerillas, re-

sponded that the rebels wouldn't compromise.

"We remain at a deadlock, because this is our principal demand, and we are not going to renounce it," Cerpa told journalists in Lima by two-way radio.

Japan has been pressuring Fujimori to avoid confrontation with the rebels, who took their hostages in a raid on gala cocktail party at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima on December 17.

Fujimori requested the summit after Hashimoto expressed concern that recent provocative actions by Peruvian security forces might endanger the hostages, many of them Japanese.

In one incident, commandos gestured obscenely at the compound, drawing rebel gunfire.

Fujimori said his security forces would be ordered to avoid provocative actions. He said

they would remain deployed in strength around the compound, but would not storm it unless the hostages were harmed.

The two-hour summit was the first face-to-face meeting for the leaders since the hostage crisis began. Fujimori, the son of Japanese immigrants, has close ties with Japan, one of Peru's largest trade partners. He needs Japanese cooperation to wear down the rebels.

In a joint statement, the leaders indicated any friction between the two governments had been eased.

"Prime Minister Hashimoto reaffirmed his full confidence in the Peruvian government's handling of this incident," the statement said.

Japan also will gain a more direct role any negotiations. The leaders agreed that Japanese diplomat Terusuke Terada would join a mediation commission that includes

Cipriani, Vincent, and Red Cross representative Michel Minrig.

The rebels initially took 500 hostages. Those still held included Fujimori's brother, top government officials, two ambassadors and Japanese businessmen.

Toronto was selected as the summit venue because neither Hashimoto nor Fujimori wanted to travel to the other's capital and because Canada's ambassador to Peru, Anthony Vincent, has helped mediate talks with the guerillas in Lima since his release as a hostage.

Late Saturday, Fujimori flew to Washington and met privately for more than a half hour with Jeffrey Davidow, assistant US secretary of state for inter-American affairs.

He was to speak Sunday at an international small-business conference, and hold a news conference in Washington on Monday.



Canada's Prime Minister Jean Chretien (L) shakes hands with Japan's Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto (R) as Peru's President Alberto Fujimori looks on Saturday in Toronto. Hashimoto and Fujimori met in Toronto to discuss the hostage situation in Lima.

— AFP/UNB photo