

Voter apathy marks Pak elections

LAHORE, Feb 3: Polling boxes, ballots and soldiers were in place for Monday's parliamentary elections in Pakistan. The only thing that may be missing is the voters, reports AP.

Few emerged in the first hour after polls opened at 7 am (0200 GMT). President Farooq Leghari pleaded with Pakistanis to vote, but acknowledged in a nationally televised address late Sunday that they would be presented with tainted candidates. Among those running was Benazir Bhutto, the prime minister Leghari fired three months ago on corruption charges.

The constitution requires elections within 90 days of the fall of a government. Leghari said the interim government he appointed to oversee the vote lacked time root out corrupt candidates.

"Got alone knows that if this had been possible within the parameters of the constitution, I would have done it without hesitation," he president said. "Who wants dishonest people to lord over Pakistan?"

An anti-corruption committee set up by the interim government could still move against dishonest politicians after the vote and out any who win office.

"Tomorrow, you, the people of Pakistan, must redeem your pledge to democracy by casting your vote," Leghari said. "And in the days and months to come, the new parliament, Cabinet and prime minister must demonstrate that they were worthy recipients of the trust, faith and hope bestowed upon them."

Polling stations were set up over the weekend, and 150,000

soldiers were deployed to provide security during the vote. The army has been given the power to jail anyone believed to be engaged in election fraud.

Seats in the 217-member National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, are being contested, as well as those in Pakistan's four provincial legislatures. Three National Assembly races were postponed after candidates died.

The head of the party that wins control of the National Assembly, alone or with coalition partners, will be prime minister and expected to serve a five-year term.

Nearly 60 million voters were registered. A recent poll predicted turnout would be as low as 20 per cent, down from 40 per cent during the last election in 1993. Voters were believed to be discouraged because

there are no new choices, and ready to give up on politics after seeing three governments dismissed on corruption charges since democracy replaced a military dictatorship in 1985.

Criticism by the candidates themselves may have reinforced voter apathy. Sunday, prime minister candidate Imran Khan went to court to try to block Benazir from seeking re-election.

The move by Imran Khan, a former cricket star making his first foray into politics, probably came too late to affect Monday's voting. But the lawsuit could result in Benazir being barred from taking office if she wins, said Nasim Zehra, the spokeswoman for Khan's Justice Party.

Benazir, arriving Sunday afternoon in her hometown of Lakarna, 500 miles (800 kilometers) south of Islamabad,

told reporters she had identified 63 voting districts where she believed attempts would be made to tamper with ballots.

Among them was the district in which her mother was running against her sister-in-law, Benazir's mother is a member of her Pakistan People's Party. Her sister-in-law took over a rival party headed by Benazir's brother, who was murdered last year.

Benazir has accused the interim government of planning to rig ballots in rival Nawaz Sharif's favour, and threatened to reject the results if she wins fewer than 90 seats in the National Assembly.

Polls show Benazir could be edged in the prime minister's race by Sharif, head of the Pakistan Muslim League and himself a former prime minister once accused of corruption.



Women ride a horse & buggy past a large poster of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto Sunday in Lahore one day before the country votes in the national and provincial elections. — AFP/UNB photo

Sharif—The 21st century man?

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

All the opinion polls clearly indicate that Mian Nawaz Sharif and his PML(N) is heading for a clear victory. Of the 195 NA seats contested yesterday (other than the 8 FATA, 10 Minority seats and some postponed because of the death of candidates), the PATHFINDER POLL taken before the Supreme Court (SC) decision on Jan 29, 1997 indicated that PML(N) would get 88 NA seats and ANP 6 i.e. a total of 94 or slightly less than half. However, in this total there were at least 9 seats which were closely contested but were all given to PPP in the POLL on the premise that it is better to err on the side of caution.

After the stinging rebuke to the last PPP government rendered by the learned judges of the SC in their verdict for dissolution, it is an even bet that most of the marginal races too close to call will now go to PML(N). If there was any doubt about the outcome, the relaxed but forceful performance of the PML(N) leader in Election Hour on Pakistan TV was a sheer contrast to the defiant but evasive Ms. Benazir who excelled in remaining scornful and sarcastic of her opponents as is her wont. With a plethora of conspiracy theories to bank on instead of explanations or even apologies for her conduct, she is the broad mass of the intelligentsia and the public to be taken in by her act of innocence. The lady insults their intelligence, the people may be fooled by her act some of the time but not all the time. Unfortunately for those of her party locked in close electoral races, her TV performance was the final nail in their political coffin, at least for the foreseeable future. A combination of the factors aforementioned should bring the Mian Nawaz Sharif tally up by another 6, bringing the PML(N) total along with ANP to 100, clearly more than 50% of the NA seats being contested i.e. a simple majority without counting the FATA, Minorities and Independents (at least 18 of them expected to win) most of whom traditionally opt to join the winning team. PML(N) will not need the crutch of a coalition in the Centre as they should have a comfortable simple majority, enough to make a stable and secure government not subject to intermittent political blackmail as Benazir was by her various uncles, Nawabzadas

and Maulanas. The Punjab Assembly is clearly on a landslide for Mian Nawaz Sharif, the PATHFINDER POLL indicates 141 seats, it may well be nearer 160 seats because of the events of the past few days. Similarly the Sarhad Assembly has the ANP, a PML(N) ally to whom PML(N) ceded many constituencies as a token of their sincerity in the alliance, having 30 seats in the PATHFINDER POLL. With PML(N)'s 14 projected winners this becomes 44 in a House of 80. This may even climb closer to 50 because of the reasons aforesaid. The Baluchistan Assembly will be fragmented as usual as there can be no clear winner, whoever will be the

into rural Sindh and putting paid to the Sindh card once and for all. Without this created confusion in the PML(N) ranks, PPP was almost on the rocks, even then it will have its work cut out to get its projected PATHFINDER result of 42 seats, 30-35 range will be more realistic.

For Mian Nawaz Sharif, governments in the Centre, in Punjab and NWFP are a certainty. Maybe it would make sense to remain a junior partner in a coalition in Sindh or even let PPP try its hand at a minority coalition. With the PML(N) in the Centre and the MQM in the major cities of Sindh, it should be quite a sandwich. Every man will be for himself in Baluchistan, whoever wins out will play ball with the Centre. The break journey of 1400 days since April 1993 is almost over for Mian Nawaz Sharif. It is time to get on with our destiny or the march of time will leave us far behind in this technological age. The nation will choose Mian Sahib to lead us into the 21st century, is he upto being the 21st century Man for Pakistan?

News Analysis

leader of the House will get there after quite some degree of manipulation but will always be subject to being "uneasy wearing the crown". The most interesting contest will be in Sindh, essentially a four-way contest between the PPP, MQM, PML(N) and PPP(SB). The PATHFINDER POLL taken before the SC verdict showed PPP favourite to win in 42 seats in the Sindh Assembly (almost all rural) while MQM was favoured in 29 (all urban). PML(N) was expected to lead in 8 while PPP(SB) and Independents were projected in 6 each. With the smell of defeat clear in the air, it is to be expected that PPP faithful will further desert Benazir for the obvious winner overall, PML(N), with Ghinwa Bhattu's PPP(SB) and the Independents also becoming beneficiaries. Some of the protest vote is slated to go to Imran Khan's TI (Movement for Justice). However, Syed Ghous Ali Shah, Pir Pagaro's Trojan Horse in the PML(N) camp, has come out with the golden nugget that while Mian Nawaz Sharif should be the President of PML(N), Ghous's mentor, master political manipulator Pir Pagaro, armed with the one or maybe two seats, should be, "organiser of the PML as his leadership qualities are well known". Mian Sahib should consign this corrupt, unscrupulous nobody to rigorous hanging for, citing restrictions on Palestinians who want to work in Israel that cost them dirr 7 million a day. "Sixty-five per cent of Palestinian families live below the poverty line."

Security strengthened in Colombo

COLOMBO, Feb 3: A Tamil lawmaker Monday accused the military of killing three civilians in "indiscriminate shelling" during a rebel attack on a military camp in eastern Sri Lanka, reports AP.

Lawmaker Joseph Pararajasingham in a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunga said: "Indiscriminate shelling from army camps has become a routine practice." He alleged that 10 civilians have been killed and 30 injured in military attacks in recent months.

AFP adds: Police and security forces further strengthened security in the heavily garbed Sri Lankan capital Colombo ahead of the independence anniversary on Tuesday, officials said.

More armed personnel were deployed in the around the city after a day of heavy fighting in the island's embattled northern and eastern regions left at least 71 people dead on Sunday, officials said.

On resettling in UK Benazir terms report baseless

LARKANA, Pakistan, Feb 3: Deposed Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto termed as "baseless" a British newspaper report that she would settle in Britain if defeated in parliamentary elections today, reports AFP.

"How can Benazir think of resettling in Britain I have lived all my life with people of this country. This is absolutely out of question that I would live somewhere else," Benazir told AFP.

She accused her political rivals of "feeding baseless stories" about her in the media. "They know that I am very popular, very powerful and I am going to win the elections," she said, terming it a campaign of disinformation.

The Sunday Times said Benazir might resettle in Britain if she is defeated in elections, under a "deal" envisaged by the Pakistani government. Quoting government sources in Islamabad, the paper said that under the arrangement, Benazir would ask for asylum in Britain.

Karadzic warns of new war in Bosnia

ATHENS, Feb 3: Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic warned of a new war in Bosnia if the disputed town of Brcko is not ceded to the Serbs, a Greek daily paper reported Sunday, says AFP.

"If the question of Brcko is not resolved, we will go to war again," Karadzic was quoted by the Belthoros Typos newspaper as saying in an interview conducted in Bosnia.

Karadzic's comments were made in the presence of a visiting neo-nationalist Greek Euro-MP, Nikitas Naklamanis, the paper said. They were his first recorded comments since July last year, when he was forced to step down as Serb leader under US diplomatic pressure.

Brcko, a strategic town on the northern border of Bosnia is currently controlled by the Bosnian Serbs but is subject to arbitration under which it could go to either the Serbs or the Muslim-Croat federation.

400,000 refugees face food crisis in eastern Zaire

KISANGANI, Zaire, Feb 3: Up to 400,000 refugees in war-torn eastern Zaire lack of food, the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Emma Bonino, said Sunday during a 24-hour visit to the region, reports AFP.

After visiting one of the three refugee camps still set up in eastern Zaire, Bonino said there was a district "lack of food." She added that the aid warehouses in Kisangani, the main base for humanitarian aid agencies trying to supply the refugees, were "empty."

As part of their military efforts to retake the two rebel controlled eastern provinces the Zairean authorities have recently obstructed the work of the aid agencies.

Bonino said that besides the estimated 200,000 people in three camps close to Kisangani, another 200,000 people, "if they are still alive" were in the surrounding forests.

Off the Record

Curfew on teenagers!

TAIPEI: Taipei is to impose a curfew on teenagers under 18 years old from midnight Sunday, the mayor of Taiwan's capital city, Chen Shiu-Bian, announced Sunday, reports AFP.

When warned proprietors, of movie theaters, karaoke bars, coffee shops, night clubs, bowling allies and other recreation venues their business licences would be revoked if they served patrons under 18 during the curfew hours of midnight and 5:00 am.

He said enterprises should share with parents and the government the responsibility of protecting young people.

Youths found on the streets or at recreation centres without an adult escort between midnight and 5:00 am would be "persuaded" by police not to break the curfew, Chen said.

They would be held at police stations until their parents took them back, he said.

The curfew would be lifted on the day before a holiday, he said, but not during summer and winter vacations.

Students in Taiwan started a three-week winter action Saturday.

Bad news for Anne

LONDON: Mark Phillips, the former husband of princess Anne, married US Olympic equestrian Sandy Pfeuger at a sunset ceremony at her father's beachfront home in Honolulu, according to London news reports Monday, reports AP.

The bride's father, James Pfeuger, a former-racing driver, is a multi-millionaire businessman who runs two lucrative car dealerships.

About 100 guests attended the black-tie reception Saturday at the home along Kalaanaloa Highway, according to The Times and The Daily Mail.

Most were reportedly equestrian friends from Britain and Australia, as well as members of the US equestrian team, which Phillips, a horse trainer, managers, The Times said.

The new Mrs Phillips, 47, is a rider and selector for the US team and was a member of the US Olympics squad at the 1984 Games in Los Angeles.

The bride, who obtained British citizenship last year, has been based in Britain for 22 years. She was previously briefly married to Briton Stephen Clarke, an equestrian events judge.

Phillips, 48, a former British Army officer, and Princess Anne, the daughter of Queen Elizabeth II, were divorced in 1992 after 18 years of marriage.

The princess was a member of the British equestrian team at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal and Phillips was a reserve member of that team.

Deaf hero

AUGUSTA, Georgia: A 10-year-old deaf boy cried "Fl Yahl!" and used sign language Thursday to alert others to a house fire, helping to save a man inside the burning home, reports AP.

Carlos Manor was riding on a school bus when he saw the flames shooting from the windows of a house shortly before 7 am.

He nudged a classmate and used sign language to say, "Tell them, fire, fire!" His cries also alerted the driver, Dot Benson, who stopped the bus and saw the fire.

The driver's assistant, Judy Lively, jumped off and raced into the burning home while Carlos and three other special education students stayed on the bus.

Lively's shouts alerted Alfred Hardwick, 85, who was rescued unharmed by firefighters. Moments later, the windows exploded.

"The fire was awful. It was a hard fire and the glass blew up and went everywhere," Carlos said through teacher Beverly Turbyfill, who translated his sign language. "The glass almost came on the bus."

An electrical short in a bedroom appliance caused the blaze, fire Capt. Tommy Cox said. The home did not have smoke detectors, he said.

Kuwait to adopt measures against any Iraqi attack

KUWAIT, Feb 3: Kuwait said Sunday it was taking "preventive measures" to head off any military threat from Iraq, following reports of Iraqi troop movements near the border, reports AFP.

The official KUNA news agency said the Kuwaiti government had discussed at its weekly cabinet meeting, "press reports concerning the menace of a new Iraqi invasion of Kuwait."

The government had stated its determination to "verify" its reports and to "consult friendly and brother nations and adopt measures ... to strengthen the security and stability of Kuwait," KUNA said, quoting the Minister of State for Government Affairs, Abdel Aziz al-Dakhil.

"The Iraqi regime is deceitful and has no credibility and this calls for vigilance on our part," Dakhil told the press.

However, he said that "for the moment there is nothing to be afraid of."

Dakhil declined to say whether Kuwait had asked the United States for aid, though he recalled that Kuwait had signed defence agreements with each of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council — Britain, the United States, Russia, China and France — after Iraqi troops were driven out of Kuwait in February, 1991.

"These accords are still valid and apply to current developments, he said.

BRIEFLY

Mild quake rocks N Nepal:

Northern Nepal was rocked yet again by a tremor measuring 4.6 on the Richter scale early yesterday morning around 6:28 am (0648 BST), state-run radio announced, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The earthquake struck Rasuwa district, 65 kilometres (40 miles) north of Kathmandu, which was also rocked on Saturday, but no reports of casualties had been received from the remote area, radio reports said. The epicentre of the latest quake was near Sarsing in Rasuwa. Just two days earlier, residents in Kathmandu were rudely awoken when a tremor of 5.8 magnitude hit them around 1:45 am (1900 GMT).

Stampede claims 5 in Iran:

Crowds of worshippers stampeded at the entrance to a mosque in western Iran, trampling to death five people and injuring 44, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported, AP reports from Cairo.

Among the dead was a 7-year-old girl, the agency, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corp, reported Sunday. The incident took place Saturday night as people gathered at the entrance to a mosque in Bakhtaran to break their Ramadan fast, IRNA said. Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.

Taiwanese troops kill Chinese:

Taiwanese soldiers stationed within sight of the east China coast shot and killed a Chinese fisherman out fishing with his younger brother and a friend, an official newspaper said Monday, AP reports from Beijing.

Lin Juecheng, 46, was shot in both legs last Wednesday by troops stationed near the Taiwanese-held island of Matsu and died on the way back to his hometown of Huangqi, the China Daily said. Huangqi, in east China's Fujian province, and Matsu are separated by a strip of water just 8 kilometres (5 miles) wide at its narrowest points, the newspaper said.

Blast in Paris university:

A bomb exploded outside a dormitory for American students before dawn Monday, shattering the glass entrance and windows but causing no injuries, police said, AP reports from Paris.

The gas canister, weighing 13 kilos (28 pounds), exploded at 4:25 am (0325 GMT) outside the American Pavilion at the Cite Universitaire in southern Paris, a police spokesman said.

5 US F-16 jets make forced landing:

Five US F-16 fighters were forced to make emergency landings at a civilian airport in northern Japan yesterday after their home base was shut down to heavy snow, defence agency officials said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The officials said the emergency landings at Aomori airport did not disrupt civilian flights. The five fighters had been scheduled to return to a US airbase in nearby Misawa. Both the US base and an airbase run by the Japanese navy in Hanchinohe were closed because of the snow, the officials said.

Mishap kills 1 Indian in 9 minutes:

One Indian dies in every nine minutes in road accidents in India while more than 300,000 people were injured in crashes last year, an automobile organisation said Sunday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The Federation of Automobile Associations also said in a statement that a road accident takes place every two minutes and added that during 1996, 60,000 people died on India roads.

Rebels kill soldier in Colombia:

Hundreds of guerrillas attacked an army base near Bogota and showered gunfire on helicopters arriving with reinforcements, the military said Sunday, AP reports from Bogota.

One soldier was killed and three were injured when their helicopter was hit near the base at San Juanito, 28 miles (45 kilometres) south of the capital.

Row over East Timor issue Indonesia threatens to boycott Asia-Europe meet

SINGAPORE, Feb 3: Indonesia has threatened to walk out of regional meetings with European officials if they bring up East Timor, which Jakarta has forcibly occupied since 1975, officials said Monday, reports AP.

The ministers are, however, expected to discuss Myanmar whose military rulers have suppressed democratic forces led by Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, said a Singapore Foreign Ministry official.

Indonesia is extremely sensitive about discussions of the status of East Timor, a former Portuguese colony that it has annexed as a province and

where Indonesian troops are accused of human rights abuses. Portugal, which is negotiating the territory's future with Indonesia, has not promised to avoid the topic at the February 13-14 meeting in Singapore of Southeast Asian and European foreign ministers, the official told reporters.

"I am sure the whole relationship (between Southeast Asia and Europe) will be seriously affected if there is discussion on East Timor."

Other officials said East Timor and Myanmar are unlikely to overshadow talks on trade at the meeting between the European Union and the seven-ASEAN members.

Bid to break up anti-govt movement

Police use water cannon, beat protesters in Belgrade

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, Feb 3: Riot police beat pro-democracy protesters and fired tear gas and water cannons to break up a large group of anti-government activists trying to march to downtown Belgrade, reports AP.

First aid officials said at least 40 people were injured. Independent radio stations said police were among the injured, hit by stones thrown by protesters.

The crackdown late Sunday allowed a four-hour standoff at a Belgrade bridge and seriously escalated tensions in the Serbian capital. The move indicated that autocratic President Slobodan Milosevic may be moving to end 2 and a half months of protests that have shaken his government.

Early Monday, police were still beating protesters at the central Republic Square. Witnesses also said club-wielding police chased screaming protesters throughout downtown Belgrade and also used tear gas.

An Associated Press reporter was clubbed on the back, and cameramen for APTV Reuters TV and CNN were also beaten. The standoff began when riot police prevented opposition

leader Vuk Draskovic from leading thousands of his supporters to the daily pro-democracy rally in downtown Belgrade.

Draskovic, speaking live on an independent radio station, urged Belgrade citizens to confront the police, but not to be provoked into clashes.

"Come out, citizens of Belgrade," Draskovic appealed on the 75th straight day of protests.

Riot police prevented Draskovic and his supporters from marching to downtown Belgrade by blocking a bridge across the Sava River.

Clinton admn seeks help from Republicans to face domestic challenges

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: The Democratic White House is reaching out to predominantly Republican state governors for meeting foreign and domestic challenges facing America, reports AP.

Competing against Europe and Japan for lucrative high technology jobs in the global economy will demand bipartisanship and local-federal cooperation to cut deficits while investing in training and research, said Erskine B. Bowles, President Bill Clinton's chief of staff.

"If we learned nothing else during the last four years, it is that we can only achieve our goals by working together, by working across party lines and at every level of government," he said in a speech Sunday to the National Governors' Association.

"The president is absolutely committed to working with you governors in the states to meet our challenges... ours will be a relationship based on mutual respect and openness," Bowles said.

Of the 50 state governors, 32 are Republican, 17 Democrats and one independent.

They applauded when Bowles declared that "balancing the (federal) budget is the key to future economic growth ... and I promise we are absolutely committed to working with Congress in a bipartisan effort," to end billion-dollar deficits.

Next to budget-balancing, Clinton's second priority is to invest in education, so youngsters are prepared to enter school ready to learn, and "... our people going to have skills."

Talks with Mubarak, Arafat create new attitude in ME peace: Netanyahu

DAVOS, Switzerland, Feb 3: Israel's prime minister said talks with the Egyptian and Palestinian leaders have helped create "a new attitude, maybe a new beginning" in Mideast peacemaking, reports AP.

Speaking in the Swiss Alpine resort of Davos, Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel and the Palestinians would resume talks on Thursday with "a great feeling of hope."

Netanyahu said his meetings with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the World Economic Forum went well.

Netanyahu also said he was looking for a way to get Syrian President Hafez Assad to resume talks with Israel. Talks broke down a year ago after bombings in Israel by Islamic militants.

"Is this a just peace?" asked Arafat, citing restrictions on Palestinians who want to work in Israel that cost them dirr 7 million a day. "Sixty-five per cent of Palestinian families live below the poverty line."

Netanyahu, who spoke after Arafat at the conference, said Israelis have suffered from Palestinian terror attacks.

"Peace without security cannot last," Netanyahu said.

After meeting Arafat, he cited "a great feeling of hope." "Hope doesn't mean that there aren't any problems," he said. "I'm confident as a result of today's meetings and for other reasons as well that we

will overcome the obstacles and indeed achieve peace."

Netanyahu and Mubarak held their first face-to-face meeting in six months. The two men, standing side by side and looking relaxed and pleased, said the hour-long session had been "very good."

"We see eye-to-eye on the need for the expansion of peace and economic relations," Netanyahu said.

He said he had accepted an invitation from Mubarak to visit Egypt and would probably go there in two months with "a very large business delegation."

Mubarak said he told Netanyahu that Israeli negotiations with Syria and Lebanon "must be resumed without delay" on the basis of land for peace.

The implementation of the Hebron agreement in good faith will help a lot" and will "make



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (L) and Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu face the press Sunday after their talks in Davos. — AFP/UNB photo