



Nguyen Thi Phuong Mai, 92, is helped to cast her vote at a polling station in Hanoi during Vietnam's national elections Sunday. Voters will elect a new 450-member National Assembly for a five-year term. Out of 663 candidates, only 112 are non-communist party members, and only 11 were self-nominated. — AP/UNB photo

## 40m Vietnamese cast votes in National Assembly polls

HANOI, July 20: Vietnam held elections today for an enlarged 450 seat National Assembly, but little was being left to chance as the country's 40 million voters went to the polls, reports Reuters.

Across Hanoi residents were woken to the sound of stirring music from the city-wide megaphone network and message instructing people on how to fulfil their civil duties.

Outside the city's 1,540 polling stations, middle aged women in traditional silk dress encouraged passers by to participate in the official atmosphere of festivity.

Little was being left to chance in what amounted to elections for a parliament with limited powers and no opposition.

All 663 candidates were officially approved. Most are members of the ruling Communist Party, and 202 are women complying accurately with state directives aimed at ensuring

they occupy around 30 per cent of parliamentary seats.

Nonetheless, Vietnam's Communist Party chief, Do Muoi, told reporters at an early morning voting session that democracy was growing in Vietnam every day. He also brushed aside local news paper claims of official cheating.

"We have conducted so far nine assembly elections, and no cheating has been noticed," he said, adding: "And the candidates do not have to spend money to buy votes."

The total budget for Sunday's nationwide elections and campaigning was about 17,000 dollars amounting to a little over 25 dollars per candidate.

Vietnam's National Assembly elections are held every five years, and are touted as a mechanism aimed at allowing ordinary people a say in the selection of grass-roots parliamentary representatives chosen by the state.

The assembly meets twice

each year, for a month, to discuss government legislation and vote on nominees for Cabinet and top state positions.

It has traditionally been seen as compliant, but in an unusually direct editorial today a Ho Chi Minh City News Journal said changing times in Vietnam required a more mature legislature. And one more in touch with popular opinion.

"As it integrates into the global community, Vietnam cannot feel satisfied with where it is now," the Tuoi Tre newspaper said.

The opinions of National Assembly deputies could be more powerful if new ideas are expressed, and if these are a result of refined wisdom and the initiatives of many people.

The new assembly is scheduled to meet for the first time in September when it will vote on the appointment of successors to President Le Due Anh, 76, and Prime Minister Do Muoi, 74 and approve a new Cabinet.

## Tigers kill Muslim MP, 5 others

COLOMBO, July 20: Tamil Tiger guerrillas opened fire on a jeep in northeastern Sri Lanka today, killing an opposition Muslim legislator and five others, police said, reports AFP.

Opposition United National Party MP, Mohammed Mahroof, 58, was travelling near Uppavali in the district of Trincomalee when gunmen from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked him, police said.

The killing came a day after Tiger gunmen seized 22 boats from Muslim fishermen in the area and demanded a ransom of 5,000 rupees (\$6 dollars) for the release of each craft, police said.

They said the Tigers were still holding 32 Muslim fishermen they captured more than a week ago and are demanding the release of five Tamil rebel suspects from military custody before freeing the Muslim hostages.

## Anti-Taliban jets bomb Kabul Masood's forces claim to have captured Baghram, Charikar

KABUL, July 20: Hours after an opposition jet dropped a cluster bomb on Kabul airport Sunday, opposition forces were claiming to have captured a key air base and town north of the beleaguered capital, reports AP.

In a satellite telephone interview, former military chief Ahmed Shah Massoud told The Associated Press that his troops took control early Sunday morning of Baghram air base and Charikar, both north of Kabul.

The Taliban religious army that rules the Afghan capital and the southern two thirds of the country refused to confirm the opposition claims.

However Taliban troops stopped reporters trying to reach Baghram air base, barely 40 kilometres (24 miles) north of Kabul.

Charikar, largely deserted because of the bitter fighting,

lies about 65 kilometres (39 miles) north of the Afghan capital.

"Early this morning we took Baghram and Charikar," Massoud said. "The Taliban fled leaving behind their heavy weapons."

Before dawn on Sunday an opposition jet dropped a cluster bomb on the combined military and civilian airport. While Taliban guards at the airport refused to let reporters into the walled compound, a commercial jet landed at the airport later Sunday, an indication that the bomb did not damage the runway.

The Taliban religious army has been locked in a ferocious battle with its northern opponents since taking control of Kabul in September 1996.

The northern alliance, led by Massoud and Uzbek warrior, Malik Pahlawan, is demanded

the Taliban turn Kabul over to a neutral force and disarm all the factions in the city.

The Taliban has refused demanding the northern alliance release all the Taliban prisoners it is holding, including several senior people.

If the Taliban has lost both Baghram and Charikar it would put the opposition within easy rocket range of the capital. Until now the northern alliance has been limited to air strikes against Kabul, although it is not clear that Massoud would want to pound the city and alienate the local population.

AFP adds: Anti-Taliban jets attacked the Afghan capital Kabul in the early hours of today dropping at least one bomb in the northeast of the sleeping city.

Alerted by radar, Taliban anti-aircraft units sent a barrage of tracer fire and exploding

cannon shells into the night sky, only minutes before the dull roar of at least one enemy jet was heard at 1:20 am (2050 GMT Saturday).

A bright series of flashes and explosions were seen and heard in the vicinity of the airport, characteristics of a possible cluster bomb attack, at least one jet was heard to have participated in the attack.

Other explosions were heard elsewhere in the city, but the ferocity of the anti-aircraft fire made the task of distinguishing ground fire from possible bomb drops difficult.

There were no immediate reports on the extent of damage or casualties.

The purist Taliban militia seized Kabul in September last year, and are battling their northern rivals for control of the one third of Afghanistan not under their control.

## Pakistan to celebrate its 50yrs of independence next month in festive mood

ISLAMABAD, July 20: Pakistan will make a glittering start to its golden jubilee of independence celebrations next month as millions across the country will light oil lamps and candles on houses and buildings, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will lay a wreath at the Karachi mausoleum of the founding father of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, on August 14, when Pakistan celebrates its 50th Independence Day.

He will also hoist the national flag and address the nation from the tomb in a live broadcast on state-run television and radio.

A special joint session of Pakistan's Senate and National Assembly will be held in Islamabad in the afternoon, and Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad will be invited to deliver the keynote address.

The programme of nationwide festivities was being planned, officials said, but they emphasised it would be a modest affair because Pakistan's economy was ailing.

"All our energies have to be concentrated on rebuilding the economy shattered by reckless policies of the previous government," an official attached to a national celebration committee said.

Sharif, who assumed office in February, has made economic revival his top priority after inheriting what he called an economy brought to the verge of collapse by his predecessor.

Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, sacked in November by President Farooq Ahmed Leghari for alleged misrule, was blamed for ruining the economy, a charge she denied, accusing Leghari of sacking her in a personal vendetta.

## Gujral faces difficulty to fight corruption

NEW DELHI, July 20: Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said today he was finding it difficult to fight the cancer of corruption in the country, reports AFP.

"Corruption, I say with great regret and pain, has seeped into the veins of this nation," Gujral told a domestic television channel here.

"I am not tolerating corruption, but I have not discovered that magic wand where I can say no corruption and there will be no corruption tomorrow," he said.

"It is not only those who are in ministerial positions who are corrupt. Of course they are (corrupt), and something drastic has to be done about them."

"The main problem is people in the street suffer," Gujral said his weekly meetings with members of the public at his residence helped him understand how much corruption had grown in India.

"I feel very hurt when somebody tells me 'I want an electricity connection but they (officials) want money (bribe)'"

## IRA orders its men to observe truce Clinton hails IRA's move to resume ceasefire

WASHINGTON, July 20: President Bill Clinton on Saturday hailed the IRA's decision to resume a ceasefire in northern Ireland and said the United States would work to nurture this "moment of great possibility," reports Reuters.

"This declaration, which we expect to be implemented unequivocally and permanently, can open the door to inclusive negotiations to achieve a just and lasting settlement," Clinton said in a statement issued by the White House.

The Irish Republican Army on Saturday announced a new truce in its 28-year war against British rule in northern Ireland. It was to take effect at midday today (Sunday) and allow its Sinn Fein spokesmen a seat at peace talks.

Clinton, who has been more directly involved than any other US President in trying to end the violence in northern Ireland, publicly and privately has been pressing the IRA to reinstate a 17-month ceasefire

it ended in February 1996.

"This is a moment of great possibility," Clinton said. "As northern Ireland's political leaders begin to shape their future, I urge them to do so on the basis of the principles of fairness and compromise that underpin all democratic systems."

Declaration of a ceasefire paves the way for Sinn Fein to enter full-scale Northern Ireland negotiations that Britain and Ireland say must get under way by mid-September.

Earlier the IRA ordered its guerrillas to observe a truce in their battle against Britain at noon Sunday, improving prospects for a fresh start in Anglo-Irish efforts to end conflict in British Northern Ireland.

In a decision applauded by the United States, Britain and Ireland, the outlawed Irish Republican Army (IRA) disclosed that it had told all its units to implement an "unequivocal restoration" of an August 1994 ceasefire that lasted 18 months.

## No breakthrough yet in peace talks on Congo Republic

LIBREVILLE, July 20: International mediators wrapped up a second day of talks on Saturday with the Congo Republic's warring parties without any breakthrough and without bringing the two sides face to face, reports Reuters.

The talks, held in Libreville, the capital of Gabon, and presided over by Gabon's veteran President, Omar Bongo will resume on Monday, aides to Bongo said.

They said representatives of the two parties — led respectively by President Gasecal Lissouba and his rival and predecessor, former military leader Denis Sassou Nguesso — had still not met face to face.

It was not clear whether there would be a plenary session on Monday or further separate meetings. Lissouba and Sassou have stayed in Congo's capital, Brazzaville.

Each side had met UN and organisation of African Unity special envoy Mohamed Sahnoun, but there was no common ground over what form a transitional government should take in Congo ahead of presidential elections, Bongo's aides said.

However, the two sides had agreed to work to consolidate a ceasefire in place in Brazzaville since Monday.

The capital was reported calm on Saturday. Shooting broke out on Wednesday night but state radio there has reported that rival fighters had since met to bury the hatchet.

The conflict began in the capital of the oil-producing former French colony after soldiers surrounded Sassou's home as part of a crackdown on private militia ahead of a now postponed July 27 presidential election.

## Troops kill 8 Muslim rebels in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, July 20: Indian soldiers shot dead eight Muslim militants in a clash on Saturday in the northern state of Kashmir, the police here said, reports AFP.

They said five Afghans were among those killed the troopers in Kulgam, 75 kilometres (45 miles) north of Srinagar.

Four Indian paramilitary soldiers were also killed and five injured Saturday in a landmine blast carried out by the guerrillas in Kashmir's Sumbal region, a stronghold of Muslim militants.

No militant organisation has so far accepted responsibility for the attack.

More than 20,000 people have died in Kashmir since 1989, when Muslim militants launched a campaign for an end to Indian rule.

NATO stages show of force near Karadzic's home

PALE, Bosnia, July 20: NATO troops staged a show of force with armoured personnel carriers and helicopters near the home of leading war crimes suspect and former Bosnia Serb President Radovan Karadzic on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Eyewitnesses said eight French armoured personnel carriers and Italian vehicles were involved in the action near Karadzic's home in the nationalist stronghold of Pale, outside Sarajevo.

As a NATO helicopter flew overhead, the convoy drove through Pale and parked in front of offices of international police, a couple of kilometres (miles) from Karadzic's house.

The soldiers withdrew after an hour and it was not known whether Karadzic, who is protected by a strong force of body guards, was in the house at the time.

Karadzic and his former army commander General Ratko Malacic are wanted for trial by the UN war crimes tribunal in the Netherlands.



Picture showing the drawing of a stamp, issued by the Republic of San Marino March 22, 1996, depicting Mother Teresa of Calcutta, painted by Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida. The stamp was awarded Saturday as "best stamp issued in 1996" by the German cultural association "San Gabriele."

## Ranariddh calls for int'l isolation of Hun Sen

BANGKOK, July 20: Ousted Cambodian First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh on Saturday called for international isolation of bitter rival Second Prime Minister Hun Sen, reports AFP.

The prince hinted he could agree to the appointment of a replacement first premier, but only in an interim administration, and welcomed US moves to mediate in the latest crisis after Hun Sen's rejection of ASEAN diplomacy.

His campaign also took another step forward with the formation of a new coalition of Cambodian parties to oppose his bitter rival.

"We call upon all nations of the world to suspend all internal assistance to the Phnom Penh illegitimate government

and to channel humanitarian assistance through non-governmental organisations," the prince told reporters.

He called on signatory countries of the 1991 Paris peace accords to withdraw diplomatic contact with Hun Sen, who violently seized control after bitter factional fighting in Phnom Penh earlier this month.

Meanwhile, ousted Cambodian First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh departed today for Singapore to meet MPs from his royalist FUNCINPEC party and officials who have fled Cambodia, aides said.

He flew to Singapore with his wife Princess Marie and daughter Rattana Devi. His agenda in Singapore had not yet been set, they said.

## Sino-Japanese military buildup poses greatest risk of arms race in Asia

TOKYO, July 20: China and Japan, warily eyeing each other's military buildup, pose the greatest risk in Asia of an arms race that could set them on a collision course next century unless it is addressed now, reports Reuters.

A combination of China's growing economic might and Japan's belief that with the end of the Cold War it needs to do more for its own defence has pushed both countries to review their military posture.

Behind the reviews are suspicions by both of the historic rivals in the region that the other wants to become the dominant military power in Asia.

The suspicions have so far been couched in the polite words of diplomatic language but no development in their military passes without comment from either Beijing or Tokyo.

When Tokyo announced last month an interim report on a review of its alliance with the United States, that proposed Tokyo take part in naval blockades and minesweeping in areas "surrounding Japan," China swiftly hit back.

"We hope Japan can take lessons from history by acting cautiously and walking the road of peaceful development," Chinese Foreign Minister spokesman Qiu Qiang said.

"The Japan-US security alliance is a bilateral arrangement formed during the Cold War," he told a news briefing. "With the end of the Cold War, there is no reason for this kind of arrangement to go beyond the scope of the two sides."

Several weeks later it was Japan's turn to put the spotlight on China's military strategy.

In its annual defence white paper, Japan said China should reveal the truth about its military strength and spending.

"The pace of China's military modernisation is expected to be gradual," the report said. "But we must continue to pay attention to the modernisation of its air force, navy and nuclear arms, the expansion of its maritime activity and the situation on the Taiwan Strait."

"Although inflation must be taken into consideration, it may be said that the figure of defence spending made public by China is only a fraction of the actual amount," the paper said.

The Japanese document said China did not include develop-

ment and research funds in reporting military outlays and concealed where it re-invested cash from foreign sales of weapons.

A respected Japanese military analyst said both sides would be to blame if military suspicions spun out of control.

"Japan must be blamed for not clarifying its intentions in the US-Japan security review, and it is true China is reluctant to reveal its military data," Japanese military author and analyst Haruo Fujii said.

He warned that in the long run, an escalating war of words between Japan and China could trigger an arms race if unchecked.

"Both sides should realise they are sowing the seeds of a future conflict and that this could result in futile military

expansion against each other," he told Reuters.

Apart from concern that Japan and China might be heading for their own collision, some military analysts worry that a Beijing-Tokyo rivalry is likely to get in the way of finding a workable regional security framework that could let Asian nations solve their problems alone.

"If you have your two superpowers in Asia — Japan and China — circling each other there is never going to be much progress," a European diplomat said.

There is also the danger of an arms race spreading to other nations in the region as they line up behind either Beijing or Tokyo.

However there are some encouraging signs that both Bei-

jing and Tokyo realise the dangerous path they could go down and in the process take the rest of Asia.

Over the past year, there have been stepped up visits by senior officials of both countries whenever tension has risen between them.

The visits reach a new level next month when Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto goes to Beijing as part of a exchange of visits between leaders of the countries.

Fujii and other analysts applaud the contacts as the best way of heading off a crisis.

"Both are leaders in the region and both sides should calm down and start talking to each other in the search for a tangible regional security arrangement," Fujii said.

## BRIEFLY

### 27 killed in Indian bus plunge:

Twenty-seven people were killed when a bus fell into a river in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the United News of India (UNI) reported yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Nearly 30 others were injured in the accident overnight Saturday in Lalitpur district, the news agency said. The bus was going from Dourisagar to Lalitpur towns when it plunged into Chhapras river. The cause of the accident was not known.

### Floods leave 14 dead in China:

Floods have killed 14 and affected 5.8 million people in the central Chinese province of Hubei, a report seen yesterday said, AFP reports from Beijing.

High waters following prolonged rainfall destroyed 12,330 homes across 45 counties and damaged 288,000 hectares (720,000 acres) of farmland, the Xinmin Evening News reported in its Saturday edition. Water supplies, traffic, electricity and communications in Hubei were seriously disrupted by floodwaters, the newspaper said.

### Shaath to meet Levy in Brussels:

Palestinian International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath said Saturday he will meet Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy on Tuesday in Brussels, AFP reports from Cairo.

The meeting would coincide with a two-day meeting of European Union (EU) Foreign Ministers that continues Wednesday. "So far I am scheduled to represent President Yasser Arafat at the meetings in Brussels, and so it's obvious that Levy and I will meet," Shaath, one of the main Palestinian negotiators with Israel, told reporters Saturday.

### Air crash claims 6 in US:

Two private planes collided over Lake Michigan, smashing into the water within sight of revelers on Chicago's beaches and killing six people on board, AP reports from Chicago.

"They hit each other, pow, then they blew up," said Roderick Binico, who was picnicking along the lakefront Saturday. "They fell fast. He said the planes were coming directly at each other low in the sky when they collided. The search of survivors was called off after rescuers dragged six bodies from the water, three from each plane, Acting Fire Commissioner Ed Altman said. It was unclear whether that meant authorities believed nobody else was on board.

### 20 executed in China:

Chinese authorities have executed 20 drug traffickers and sentenced at least two others to death at a public rally, the official Legal Daily reported Sunday, AP says from Beijing.

Court officials in southwestern Chongqing city ordered the 20 put to death on July 8 after their legal appeals were rejected, the newspaper said. Twenty-five others were also sentenced at the rally.