

# Cambodia's bid for full membership Hun Sen terms ASEAN decision a 'big mistake'

PHNOM PENH, July 24: ASEAN's decision not to accept Cambodia as a full member was "a big mistake" because it may force the country to look beyond its immediate neighbours for support and investment, Second Prime Minister Hun Sen said today, reports AFP.

"I told them that the ball is at their feet," Hun Sen said referring to the recent visit here of three foreign ministers from members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"Whether ASEAN plays that ball or passes it to others to play (is your own decision)," he said in a Khmer-language interview with Radio France International re-broadcast on Cambodian Radio.

"We have to know whether ASEAN needs us or whether we need another."

On Wednesday, ASEAN rejected Cambodia's bid for full membership in the regional grouping following Hun Sen's ouster of first prime minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh earlier this month.

In May, ASEAN foreign ministers decided to admit Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos as full members of the grouping this week to fulfill its goal of uniting all 10 Southeast Asian countries in one economic and trading bloc.

But the decision to admit Cambodia was reversed at a specially convened meeting on July 10, four days after fierce

factional fighting between troops loyal to Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh subsided in the capital.

Hun Sen said the July 10 decision had been made too soon and, chiding the foreign ministers for their haste, said Cambodia might soon be in a position to reject ASEAN.

"ASEAN has made big mistake," he said, noting that "four days is not even enough to understand a girlfriend or boyfriend."

"Right now, I think that we need ASEAN but in the future, ASEAN will need us because they will probably not want Cambodia to be alone (in the region)."

# Lanka to head for new constitution Tigers on final run as troops advancing in north

COLOMBO, July 24: Sri Lanka said today Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels were on the run as troops advanced in a bid to capture a strategic northern highway, reports Reuter.

"The LTTE are on the final run," military spokesman Sarath Munasinghe told a news conference in Colombo. "They will keep on running and we will keep pushing them northwards."

Sri Lankan troops launched a major offensive against the rebels in the northern Wanni region in May to open a strategic highway to link Jaffna Peninsula with the rest of the island.

The offensive slowed after rebels launched two fierce counter-attacks on the troops in June.

"There is nothing left there

(in the Wanni) except that road and, once we take it, there is no place for them to run but to the east and jump into the sea," Munasinghe said.

He said troops had confronted LTTE rebels near the northeastern town of Nedunkeni on Wednesday and killed 15 separatists in a battle that lasted three hours.

Nedunkeni is some 40 km (25 miles) northeast of the government-held town of Vavuniya, which lies some 220 km (135 miles) north of the capital, Colombo.

Munasinghe said 25 rebels were also wounded in the fighting.

Four soldiers were killed and 11, including an officer, were wounded, he added.

AFP adds: Sri Lanka today announced it was withdrawing plans to cut the number of legis-

lators but said it will push ahead with a new constitution aimed at ending the country's drawn out Tamil separatist war.

Justice Minister GL Peiris said a proposal to take away 27 seats from the present 225-member assembly was opposed by political parties and other interested groups and the government had agreed to retain the status quo.

"We will keep the 225 seats at it is," Peiris told reporters here after the weekly Cabinet meeting.

"We are now proposing a system under which 126 members will be elected on first past the post basis and another 95 on a proportional representation system and give another four seats to minor parties," he added.

# Arafat meets Israeli Labour leader for talks

BEIT HANUN, Gaza Strip, July 24: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat met with the head of Israel's opposition Labour Party, Ehud Barak, today for talks on the enduring freeze in the peace process, reports AFP.

The meeting is the first between the two men since Barak became Labour leader in early June, replacing Arafat's previous "partner in peace," former prime minister Shimon Peres.

The meeting with Arafat is the last in a tour by Barak to meet neighbouring Arab leaders. Barak has met twice with Jordan's King Hussein in Amman and once with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak since taking his post.

# Delegates to N Ireland peace talks reject Anglo-Irish plan

BELFAST, July 24: Delegates to multi-party Northern Ireland peace talks here Wednesday voted down an Anglo-Irish plan for guerrilla disarmament, dealing a setback to British Prime Minister Tony Blair's peace efforts, delegates of two of the parties said, reports AFP.

The reverend Ian Paisley, fiery leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Stormed out of the voting session saying his party was out of the talks for good.

"These talks have now been taken over by gunmen," he snapped to reporters. There is nothing in this process for the union and the Unionist people, we have now officially left."



Russian teenagers shout slogans and raise video tapes during a rally organised by the first Russian TV channel in Moscow late Wednesday. The channel began to hand out legal video tapes in exchange for illegal copies in order to fight pirate videos on the black markets.

# Mahasweta Devi wins Magsaysay

MANILA, July 24: Indian novelist Mahasweta Devi was named this year's recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for journalism, literature and creative communication arts for her writings on India's indigenous communities, the award body said today, reports AFP.

Devi, 71, was recognised for her "Compassionate crusade through art and activism to claim for tribal people as just and honourable place in India's national life," the Manila-based award foundation said.

A writer for more than 40 years, Devi has shifted between journalism and literature, basing her writings on experiences gained from her visits to impoverished districts and the local culture.

She published her first book in 1956 and has since written novels, children's stories, textbooks and translations of foreign work in her native Bengali.

In these writings, Devi "cleverly fused indigenous oral histories with contemporary events to explore the bitter and often bloody relationship between tribal communities and India's domineering classes and systems," the award body said.

# Nanda, Aruna get Bharat Ratna award

NEW DELHI, July 24: Gulzar Lal Nanda, the centennial former acting prime minister and the country's oldest living public figure, and late Aruna Asaf Ali of the 'Quit India' fame were today chosen for the nation's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, reports PTI.

While the award is being given to Nanda in his 100th year of life, it is a posthumous honour for Aruna Asaf Ali, who as a young freedom fighter hoisted the tricolour on the historic 'Quit India' day of August 9, 1942 in Mumbai defying the mighty British empire. She died in July last year at the age of 88 after a eventful life in public life spanning over six decades.

The award for the two announced in a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique, in a last such decision by outgoing President Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma, who demits office tomorrow.

# Gunbattle leaves 8 Kashmiri militants dead

SRINAGAR, India, July 24: Eight separatist guerrillas were killed yesterday in a six-hour gunbattle with Indian army soldiers in the troubled Jammu and Kashmir state, an army spokesman said.

Army troops, acting on specific information, laid siege to a forest near Nagri Malpur in Kupwara yesterday morning and started search operations, the spokesman told Reuters.

"The hiding militants opened fire and in the ensuing six-hour encounter eight militants including two foreign mercenaries were killed," he said, "the search operation is still on progress," he added.

# Chopra to offer meditation courses in India

NEW DELHI, July 24: Indian-born Guru Deepak Chopra, who preaches that being rich is politically correct, will offer meditation and stress management courses at a new five-star resort in western India, a daily said today, reports AFP.

The Economic Times said US-based Chopra, whose "Feel-Good" bestsellers have been translated into 25 languages, will help cure the bodies and minds of members of India's rising affluent middle class in the coastal state of Goa.

Chopra, who has appeared on the front cover of Time magazine, is scheduled to conduct yoga and meditation classes, the newspaper said.

Chopra, who went to study in the United States in the 1960s, is now an acclaimed author, offering advice on managing one's money, body and soul.

San Diego-based Chopra's books include "Ageless Body Timeless Mind," "Perfect Weight," "Restful Sleep" and "Creating Affluence."

# Gunmen kill 5 in Pak Punjab

MULTAN, Pakistan, July 24: Gunmen killed five people in two separate attacks on Shiite Muslim activists in the central Pakistani Province of Punjab yesterday, police said, reports Reuter.

They said a Shiite activist, Chaudhury Mukhtair Ghalo, and three friends were killed by two men shooting from a motorcycle near the southern Punjab town of Mallis, 80 km (50 miles) southeast of the main southern town of Multan.

Ghalo was the only survivor from a massacre of 18 Shites in a religious congregation near his home last August.

A Shiite activist, Manzoor Hussain, earlier died instantly at his herbal medicine shop in the eastern Punjab town of Sheikhpura when a man on the back of a motorcycle fired several bullets at him with an automatic weapon, the police said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for either of the shootings, which the police said seemed to be the latest in a series of tit-for-tat killings between rival militants from the majority Sunni and the minority Shiite sects of Islam.

# Gujral accused of failing to tackle corruption scam

NEW DELHI, July 24: Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and his minority coalition government were today accused by the country's main opposition leader of failing to tackle a massive corruption scandal, reports AFP.

Hindu nationalist leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee tabled a parliamentary motion attacking the "passive attitude" of the United Front coalition over the scandal in the eastern state of Bihar. He said the state government should be sacked.

Gujral is to reply to the motion later today.

The Bihar crisis blew up when Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, accused of embezzling millions of dollars, defected from Gujral's party and the coalition earlier this month and set up his own party.

Gujral, accused by the opposition and members of his own government of failing to force Yadav to resign over the allegations, said today that his government was not protecting "A blue-eyed boy."

The affair, along with another row over recent riots in the western state of Maharashtra, led to the upper house of parliament being adjourned for the second straight day.

Gujral, who was forced to leave parliament by opposition hecklers on Wednesday, said his government was firmly against corruption but refused again to name Yadav.

He also said his coalition had failed to arrive at a consensus over whether the state governments of Bihar and Maha-

rashtra should be removed and replaced by federal rule.

Yadav's defection has caused major divisions within Gujral's multi-party centre-left coalition, leaving the prime minister with little room for manoeuvre.

Communists within the government have called for Yadav to be sacked. While some regional parties within the coalition want the rebel leader and his new party, made up of 16 MPs including three of Gujral's ministers, to be allowed back into the United Front.

Gujral's attempts to keep everybody happy — by condemning corruption but refusing to discuss Yadav by name — has ended with dissatisfaction on all sides.

Yadav stands accused of em-

bezzling money from a Bihar cattle fodder fund. Around 55 other politicians face similar charges after 271 million dollars disappeared from the fund over two decades.

The Maharashtra crisis, meanwhile, came after police shot dead a dozen slum dwellers earlier this month during street protests over the desecration of a statue of a lower-caste Hindu leader. The killings sparked a two-day general strike in Bombay.

Members of the Congress (I) party, which keeps Gujral's coalition in power with its parliamentary backing, today renewed demands for the dismissal of the Hindu nationalist state government over the affair.



Thousands of members of Brazil's military and civil police march Wednesday on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. Police in at least five states are on strike demanding better salaries, forcing state authorities to request help from the army to keep order.

# Speaker threatens to resign amid pandemonium in Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI, July 24: The Lok Sabha Speaker, P A Sangma, yesterday threatened to resign as agitated members from Congress, Rashtriya Janata Dal, BJP, Shiv Sena and Samata Party stormed the well of the House to press for their demands for dismissal of Bihar and Maharashtra governments, reports PTI.

After quietly sitting through the din for nearly 55 minutes, a visible angry Speaker came down heavily on them, saying "I will resign my post... I cannot preside over such a House... you are demoralising the nation by your behaviour."

Observing that the highest legislative body had been converted into "a street," Sangma regretted that what they were doing was "shameful."

"There is a limit to every-

thing... there is a way to express one's feelings," Sangma said.

"I will not adjourn the House and I will sit here all day and night. People of this country have a lot of faith in parliamentary democracy. Please do not destroy it... we have a lot of responsibilities," Sangma told the members.

Earlier report says, the Lok Sabha Speaker, P A Sangma, yesterday admitted an adjournment motion seeking imposition of president's rule in Bihar and a motion under Rule 184 to discuss atrocities on Dalits in Maharashtra after an hour-long pandemonium in the House.

The two issues plunged both houses into turmoil on the opening day of the monsoon session with members from

Congress, BJP, Samata, Shiv Sena and Rashtriya Janata Dal storming the well demanding dismissal of the Laloo government in Bihar for its alleged involvement in fodder scam and removal of Joshi government in Maharashtra for growing atrocities on Dalits.

Sangma reprimanded the slogan-shouting members from Congress, Rashtriya Janata Dal, BJP, Shiv Sena and Samata Party standing in the well and gave the ruling after they resumed their seats.

A similar scene re-erupted in the Rajya Sabha where the deputy chairperson, Najma Heptulla, adjourned the House for the day within 20 minutes of its sitting, as members from all sides trooped into the well shouting slogans.

# Ex-chief of SLORC dies

YANGON, July 24: Former chief of the Myanmar ruling junta, senior General Saw Maung died of a heart attack at his Yangon home early today, a government information sheet said, reports AFP.

"Senior General Saw Maung, the former chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) passed away at 7:15 am (0045 GMT) at his residence in Yangon of a heart attack," the announcement said.

According to close family friends, Saw Maung, 69, suffered the heart attack as he was strolling his garden.

Saw Maung, who was the founding leader of the SLORC — the official name for the ruling junta — retired as chairman in 1991, "due to health reasons," the short official announcement said.

It gave no further details.

# Mass weddings in Iran

TEHRAN, July 24: A total of 6,600 cash-strapped Iranian couples tied the knot on Wednesday in a series of mass weddings in 15 provinces around the country, the government Daily Iran reported today, reports AFP.

The wedding ceremonies were financed by the Imam Khomeini Assistance Committee, a welfare organisation set up after the 1979 Islamic revolution, and timed to coincide with Shiite Muslim celebrations of the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Mohammad (SM).

The official news agency IRNA said 2,200 weddings took place in the central province of Esfahan alone. Each couple received two million rials (650 dollars) in presents to equip their new homes.

Mass weddings, which do not involve dowries or high costs, are encouraged by the Islamic clergy here and have become increasingly popular since the 1979 revolution.

# Group of 20 expatriate aid workers leave Kabul

KABUL, July 24: A group of 20 expatriate aid workers pulled out of the Afghan capital Wednesday in the face of a continuing anti-Taliban assault and intensified fighting north of Kabul.

A spokesman for opposition forces told AFP that troops loyal to ex-government strongman Ahmed Shah Massoud have advanced to the village of Hossein Kot, Abdullah claimed in a satellite telephone interview.

However, the claims were disputed by civilian evacuees from the affected area, who told reporters they had fled the district centre of Hir Bacha Kot, north of Hossein Kot.

The travellers said the frontlines were by late Wednesday situated between Kalakan

# Gowda, VP Singh ask for scaling down their spl security cover

NEW DELHI, July 24: Former Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda and VP Singh have asked for their high-profile security cover to be scaled down because of high costs, a newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

The Asian Age said Gowda, who was ousted in April after 10 months as India's leader, and Singh, prime minister in 1989-90, had handed in the request to the Home Ministry for their commando bodyguards to be withdrawn.

It said the ministry was likely to draw up new security arrangements for the two former leaders.

# US, UK, France launch effort to build up peace force for Africa

WASHINGTON, July 24: The United States Britain and France — rivals for influence in Africa — have launched a collaborative effort to build up peacekeeping capabilities in the troubled continent, US officials said Wednesday, reports AFP.

While the three countries are independently pursuing training of African military units their diplomats are trying to put together an international forum where African countries and prospective donors can air ideas on peacekeeping.

British, French and US representatives met in New York Friday to discuss when where and at what level to convene the first meeting of the so-called African peacekeeping support group a State Department official said.

They hope that strategies for coping with crises in Africa — from prevention to peacekeeping — will emerge from regular meetings of the group and that a smaller coordinating group can be formed to put them into practice.

"We don't want to dictate how this is going to be done it has to include Africans so it does not appear that we are imposing it on them," the official said, speaking on condition he not be identified.

Upheavals have rolled through Africa in waves since the end of the Cold War, leaving hundreds of thousands of people dead and societies devastated by warfare, massacre and famine, as the international community looked on.

A concerted western response to the region's problems was stymied by US reluctance to get involved, rivalries among Africa's former colonial powers and suspicion in Paris of Washington's motives.

French and South African criticism of a US proposal last fall to train a 10,000 member African crisis response force prompted Washington to adopt a more inclusive approach according to US officials.

On May 22, just days after Mobutu Sese Seko's regime collapsed in Zaire, US French and British officials meeting in Paris agreed on principles for a joint effort to enhance peacekeeping capabilities in the region.

They agreed to make a long-term commitment to work with the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity and not at cross purposes with them, to include all African countries except those under UN sanctions and to be open about what each country was doing.

The State Department official said there was no discussion of dividing their efforts along colonial-era spheres of influence.

"We're trying to get over this traditional anglo-francophone split," he said. The age of spheres of influence is really gone the officials said. It is an arrogant attitude to take toward Africans.

Each country continues to pursue its bilateral military relationships in Africa, which letting the other countries know what they are doing to avoid duplicative efforts according to the official.

About 120 US army 'green berets' arrived this week in Senegal and Uganda to train local troops in basic skills needed for peacekeeping operations. They also are providing

communications gear so they can work together in a crisis.

Seven African countries so far have agreed to take part in the US training programme which aims to train eight to 10 battalions for peacekeeping duties. US officials say, the next training will be in Malawi in September, the State Department official said.

US officials stress the goal is not to create a standing force, and that individual governments will retain control over their troops.

While the US military emphasises training from the base, the British separately have pursued training African military leaders, British military training teams are working in western and southern Africa, including South Africa.

Additionally, they provide instructors and funding for command and staff colleges in Accra and Harare.

The British were deeply involved in Africa's first multinational peacekeeping exercise hosted in April by Zimbabwe, which brought together 10 African countries including South Africa.