

Gujral govt has no right to remain in office: BJP

NEW DELHI, July 27: Hindu nationalists have predicted the fall of India's government after a chief minister forced to quit over corruption charges, chose his wife as his successor, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) said Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's United Front coalition government had no right to remain in office after the political drama.

Laloo Prasad Yadav, Chief Minister of the eastern state of Bihar resigned on Friday and immediately installed his wife, a mother of nine with no political experience, as the new state leader.

Yadav split from Gujral's Janata Dal (People's Party) this month and formed his own breakaway faction that now governs Bihar, India's second most populous state.

BJP president Lal Krishna Advani said Yadav's action, widely condemned across India, was "An insult to the very system of parliamentary democ-

racy."

The Hindustan Times newspaper quoted Advani as saying Gujral could not escape blame for the episode since he did not take action against Yadav when the latter was charged with embezzling government funds.

"The issue now is why the Gujral government should continue in office in the face of its utter moral bankruptcy," Advani said, adding that the Gujral government was bound to collapse.

M Venkiah Naidu, a general secretary of the BJP, added that Yadav's doings had sullied the government's image and would result in a "tidal wave" in favour of Hindu nationalists in the next elections. Although the next parliamentary elections are due only in 2001, most analysts believe it could take place earlier.

Yadav's wife Rabri Devi has said she would do whatever her husband asked her to do. At her first conference in the Bihar capital Patna, she was mostly silent while Yadav did most of

the talking.

Yadav is among more than 50 politicians and bureaucrats in Bihar accused of stealing 271 million dollars from a cattle fodder fund.

Although he has broken away from Gujral's Janata Dal, three of his supporters who joined his new party remain in the prime minister's coalition government.

Earlier report says, two prominent Indian women politicians who hoped to become the country's vice-president today criticised their male colleagues for picking two men to fight for the post.

"It was an opportunity lost," moaned veteran parliamentarian Najma Heptullah, who had campaigned hard to be a candidate for vice-presidential polls scheduled next month.

Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, however, pledged to pass it within the year and later inducted four women into his Cabinet.

There are just 39 women in the Indian parliament's 545-seat lower house.

has selected Surjit Singh Barnala as their nominee. Kant and Barnala are men.

Heptullah said: "All parties talk of empowerment of women. But their selection shows what they actually feel about it. If they don't want a woman as vice-president, it is for them to decide."

The other woman hopeful, Margaret Alva, also a member of the Congress Party, said she also felt let down. "You should ask the men why they did not want a woman vice-president."

Indian women politicians have been on the warpath since the government was forced in May to defer a legislation reserving a third of seats for women in legislatures following protests from male members of parliament.

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Minister meets Camilla to discuss her future role in Monarchy

LONDON, July 27: The man seen as the behind-the-scenes fixer in the British Labour government has been holding private meetings with Prince Charles' longtime companion Camilla Parker Bowles to discuss her future role in the monarchy, it was reported today, reports AFP.

Peter Mandelson, minister without portfolio and the man credited with masterminding Labour's election landslide on May 1, has met Parker Bowles several times as speculation about the couple marrying increases, the Sunday Times said.

The discussions were arranged by friends of Charles and Parker Bowles who want to make sure the government understands the couple's views, the paper reported.

Kashmir leaders hail Gujral's offer of talks to militants

SRINAGAR, India, July 27: Many Kashmir leaders today hailed the offer of talks to Muslim separatists by Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral.

"It is a healthy sign," said Shabir Ahmed Shah, one of the most influential Muslim leaders in Kashmir, where a bloody separatist drive since 1989 has left around 20,000 people dead.

"Better late than never," Shah told AFP. "India has finally... agreed to talk without any precondition."

Shah, also known as the Nelson Mandela of Kashmir, said his People's Party would discuss the proposal after "knowing the full stand of the Indian government" and then produce a detailed statement.

Abdul Gani Lone, another prominent Muslim separatist leader, declined to comment until his colleagues were released from jail, only then we will put

our heads together and come out with our reaction."

Gujral offered during a visit to Kashmir Saturday to hold unconditional talks with Muslim separatists in Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in Hindu-dominated India.

It was the first offer of its kind by the Indian government to Kashmir militants.

"I am willing to talk to the separatist militants unconditionally to pave the way for lasting peace in Kashmir," Gujral said.

His statement also received support from the Congress (I) Party, which props up his United Front coalition government in New Delhi but is the main opposition in Kashmir.

"The Congress has been pleading that to bring normalcy, a dialogue should be held with militant youth," said

party leader Mehmooba Mufti.

"Gun cannot be a solution to the Kashmir problem," Mohammed Shah Uri, a member of Kashmir's pro-India ruling National Conference Party and a minister in the state government, added. "It is a step in the right direction. It is now for militant leaders and their supporters to react positively. The ball is in their court."

There was no immediate reaction from other mainstream Indian political parties in New Delhi. Hindu nationalists, now holding a leadership conclave, were expected to comment later today.

Muslim militants in Kashmir have in the past rejected offers of talks with New Delhi, saying they would never give up their armed struggle for the independence of the Himalayan state.

BRIEFLY

Typhoon 'Rosie' kills 4 in Japan: Typhoon Rosie headed out to sea yesterday after killing four people and injuring more than three dozen in its weekend hammering of southwestern Japan. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

The typhoon brought winds of up to 144 kph (90 mph) as it moved into the sea of Japan away from southwestern regions of Japan's main island Honshu early yesterday. The storm, described by Japan's meteorological agency as a "medium-sized but powerful" typhoon, was slowly moving northwest over the sea of Japan, the agency said.

Clash leaves 5 dead in Albania: Five people including a policeman were killed and four others wounded Saturday during an exchange of fire at a roadblock in the northern Albanian town of Lezha, the Interior Ministry said, AFP reports from Tirana.

Shooting started when a car carrying three men and a woman refused to stop at the roadblock manned by police from the capital Tirana. The passengers opened fire, killing the policeman and wounding four of his colleagues, police returned fire, killing all four occupants of the vehicle.

3 robbers killed in Peru: Three men suspected of attacking buses to strip passengers naked and rob them were killed in a violent clash with police in the coastal town of Chancay, authorities said Saturday, AFP reports from Lima.

The police said that four men were identified as responsible for up to 11 attacks on buses after a police patrol found a car parked on the side of the Pan-American Highway, three of the four claimed to be waiting for a bus. When police approached to search the car, the men opened fire and a hail of bullets was exchanged.

Bush fire extinguished in France: Exhausted firemen brought under control early yesterday a massive bush fire on the outskirts of France's second city Marseille as a violent wind fanning the flames dropped overnight, AFP reports from Marseille.

Emergency services said 10 Canadian water-bombing planes were being used to extinguish the blaze, and some 400 evacuees from the small village of La Treille had returned to their homes.

2 Italians shot at in Thailand: Two Italian tourists were in critical condition after being shot by a lone gunman who opened fire on their tour group at an international airport in northern Thailand, Bangkok newspapers said Sunday, AP reports from Bangkok.

Albright urges ASEAN leaders to meet Suu Kyi

KUALA LUMPUR, July 27: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has urged ASEAN leaders to meet pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi when they visit Myanmar and give her their support, her spokesman said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Albright, attending her first meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, reasserted the US view in support of isolating Myanmar, whose military rulers she calls among the most repressive on earth, spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

She urged ASEAN, now that Myanmar is a member to use its influence to encourage Yangon's State Law and Order Council (SLORC) to open a dialogue with

Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, he said.

Albright made her comments in talks on Saturday with Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamed and Foreign Minister Abdullah Balawi, Burns said.

"It really is ASEAN's responsibility to convince the SLORC to open up a political dialogue with Suu Kyi's political party," Burns reported Albright as saying.

ASEAN admitted Myanmar despite criticism from Western power led by the United States over Yangon's record on human rights and democracy.

By admitting Myanmar, ASEAN accepted it would have to deal with problems, Albright said in a speech in Los Angeles.

EU warns against arms race in Asia

KUALA LUMPUR, July 27: The European Union (EU) warned here today against an arms race in Asia and urged holdouts to accede to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), reports AFP.

"The EU notes with concern that military spending in the region is rising steadily," Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jacques Poos, whose country holds the EU presidency, said in a statement issued at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

"Worldwide, 48 per cent of all military equipment is being purchased by countries of the region," he said in a statement issued at the one-day forum on security hosted by the Associa-

tion of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with the group's major partners in attendance.

"European countries only represent 18 per cent of world-wide military purchases, a significant drop compared to only a few years ago. The EU hopes that military spending in the Asia-Pacific region can be stabilised if not reversed, in order to avoid a negative effect on the region."

In his statement, Poos called on "all states which have not signed to do so and ratify the CTBT at the earliest possible date."

He stopped short of naming the most notable CTBT holdout, India.

Pol Pot seen at Khmer base

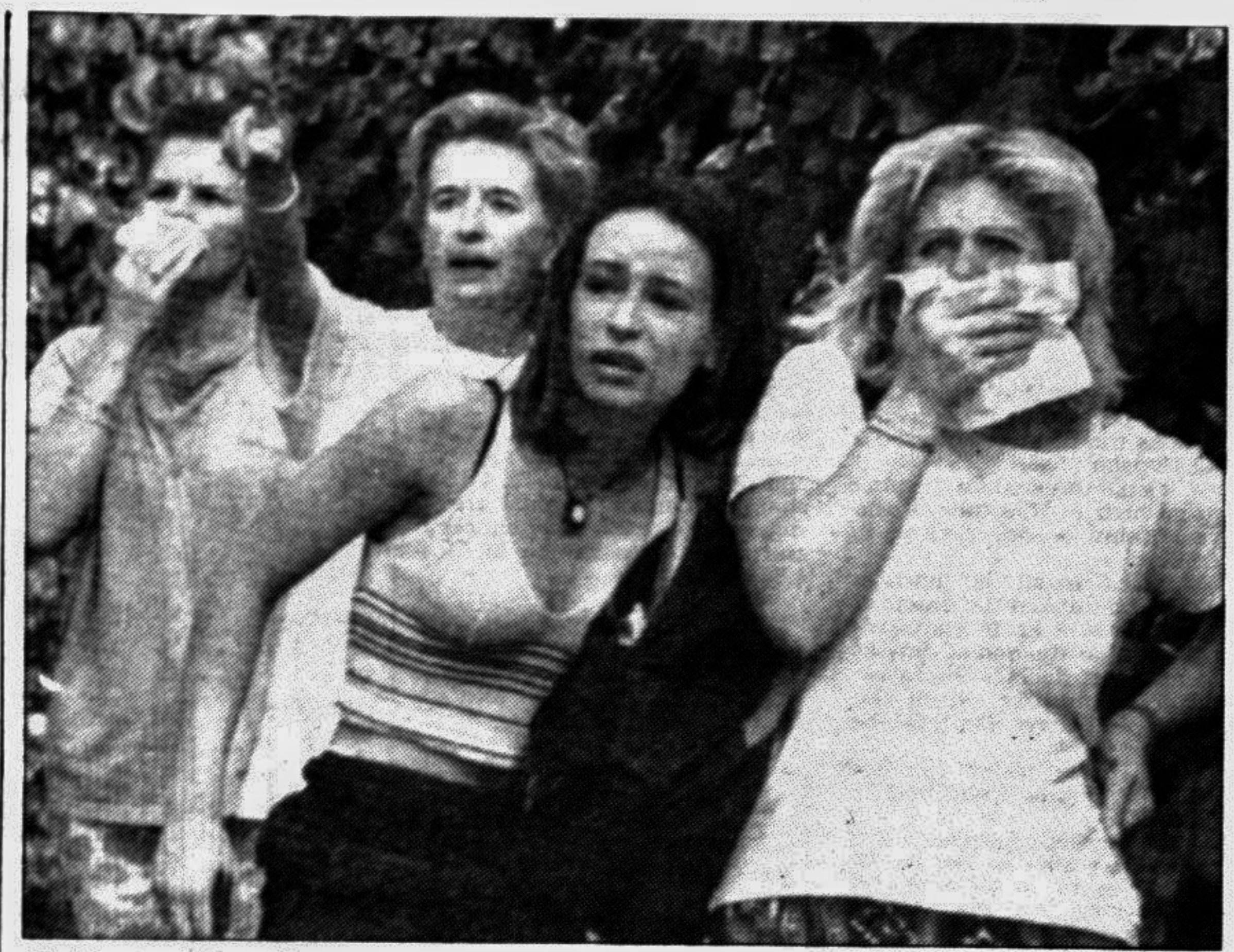
BANGKOK, July 27: The first foreign journalist to see Pol Pot in 18 years slipped into the Cambodian jungle base where the notorious Khmer Rouge leader has reportedly been sentenced to life imprisonment by his onetime followers, a news release said Sunday, reports AP.

Nate Thayer, an American reporter for the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review, returned from Cambodia Saturday after a trip to the guerrilla stronghold of Anlong Veng.

A statement from Dow Jones and Co. which owns the weekly magazine, said Thayer's story would be published in the review's August 7 issue. It said Thayer saw Pol Pot but did not specify whether he talked with him.

Pol Pot had not been interviewed by foreign reporters since a Japanese team met him in 1979 after he fled Phnom Penh in face of a Vietnamese invasion. There had been persistent reports in recent years that Pol Pot had died.

During the mid-1970s, Pol Pot orchestrated one of the bloodiest revolutions in modern times. As many as 2 million Cambodians died of starvation, execution and disease in Khmer Rouge communes.



Residents of the village of Allauch in the northern suburb of Marseille watch in despair as the houses are being destroyed by the fire on Saturday. 1,000 residents from the city's outlying suburbs of Marseille have been evacuated because of huge forest fires. —AP/UNB photo

Mamta meets Sonia, invites her to Aug 9 rally

CALCUTTA, July 27: The rebel Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, MP, on Saturday met Sonia Gandhi and invited her to the proposed rally here on August 9 during the AICC plenary session, reports PTI.

The spokesman of Mamata group, Sudip Bandopadhyay, MLA, who spoke to Mamta over phone, said that she met Sonia at her residence in the evening.

Asked, whether Sonia agreed to be present at the rally, Bandopadhyay said that she did not immediately confirm her participation but told Mamta that she would again talk to her.

Bandopadhyay said that meanwhile the police has given them permission to hold the proposed rally in front of the Gandhi statue.

Asked to comment on press reports that the high command might give them permission if the rally was held under the banner of the Youth Congress, Bandopadhyay said that Mamata had already called the rally in the name of the Congress workers. There would be no change in her stand.

Taliban repulse attacks on 2 fronts around Kabul

KABUL, July 27: Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban militia has fought off rival faction's infantry attacks on two fronts around Kabul, an official broadcast here said today, reports AFP.

Taliban-run Radio Shariat reported repulsing attacks Saturday by the Shi'ite religious faction Hezb-i-Wahdat in southwestern Wardak province, and also by opposition Commander Ahmad Shah Masood north of the capital.

"An offensive by Khalil militia in Stakhak district of Wardak was pushed back yesterday (Saturday). The attackers fled to the nearby mountains leaving behind nine dead bodies," Radio Shariat announced.

Hezb-i-Wahdat leader Karim Khalili has not yet been able to break through the outer district frontlines and advance against

the Taliban-controlled Wardak provincial capital Maidan Shahr.

Maidan Shahr, located 30 kms (18 miles) to the southwest of Kabul, sits on the national highway which runs to the Taliban supreme headquarters in Kandahar City to the far south.

In the second attack against them Saturday, the Taliban claimed to have blocked Masood's forces in Shakardara, a district centre in the lee of the Koh Daman mountains around 25 kms (15 miles) north of the capital.

"An offensive by the forces of evil and corruption and Gilamjam was repulsed in the direction of Shakardara by the Mujahideen of the Islamic Army," declared Radio Shariat.

The so-called "Gilamjam" are — along with Masood and

Khalili — third element of the anti-Taliban alliance, the ethnic Uzbek forces under General Abdul Malik.

In May this year Malik defected to the Muslim militia but turned against them again after a shaky five-day partnership, in a dispute over power-sharing inside the Uzbek fiefdom of the five northern Afghan provinces.

Meanwhile, Taliban fighters launched all available firepower at an anti-Taliban jet overflying Kabul late Saturday.

The third such barrage in a day, witnesses said.

Thumping booms and blinding flashes of outgoing fire echoed over the city, at the end of a week which has seen forces of the anti-Taliban opposition again approaching the battered city in heavy battles.

'Clones are often born abnormally large, die soon'

LONDON, July 27: The scientist who led the team that produced Dolly the sheep, the world's first clone of an adult animal, admitted in interview today that clones are often born abnormally large and die soon after, reports AFP.

Ian Williams, of the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, told the Sunday Times that all attempts to eliminate the problem had failed and it now threatened the commercial viability of the project.

"You do sometimes have an increase in size which is sufficiently great to threaten the well-being of both mother and offspring," said Williams in the paper.

"Obviously you are not going to go on using a technique with those effects," he added that the institute's most recent cloning experiments produced lambs almost twice normal size at around nine kilograms (20 pounds) compared to a typical lamb weight of 4.75.

Ung Huot expelled from FUNCINPEC Party Ranariddh's forces clash with Hun Sen's troops: 4 killed

BANGKOK, July 27: At least four people were killed and eight wounded today when troops loyal to ousted Cambodian premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh clashed with those of strongman Hun Sen, Cambodian and Thai sources said, reports Reuter.

Thai military sources based on the border said a clashes broke out at about 3.30 am today (2030 GMT on Saturday) in the Cambodian border town of Poipet when areas believed occupied by soldiers loyal to Hun Sen were hit by three mortar rounds.

The military sources said they were not sure who fired the initial rounds. The mortar fire was followed by an exchange of small arms gunfire lasting about 10 minutes, they said.

A second round of gunfire was heard near the border two hours later, police based on the frontier said.

Cambodian officials in Poipet rushed wounded people to hospital in the Thai town of Aranyaprathet after the gunfire died down, they said.

A Cambodian soldier from Ranariddh's Royalist FUNCINPEC faction told reporters that three of Hun Sen's soldiers were killed and a civilian also died in the crossfire.

Eight others were wounded in the fighting. Those brought to the Aranyaprathet Hospital included six who were thought to be soldiers loyal to Hun Sen and two civilians.

A Thai military source said the situation in Poipet had become more tense since the

morning clash.

Poipet is regarded as one of the last major towns still under the control of royalist forces, although factions, from both sides had recently reached a ceasefire and power-sharing agreement.

Earlier report from Phnom Penh says, Cambodia's ousted first Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh has expelled from his Royalist FUNCINPEC Party the man nominated to replace him as co-premier.

Ranariddh, who left Cambodia before he was ousted this month, said in a statement re-

leased today that as president of the Royalist FUNCINPEC Party, he was expelling Foreign Minister Ung Huot from the party, temporarily.

"The FUNCINPEC president decides... to expel Ung Huot from FUNCINPEC on a temporary basis," he said.

The statement said the decision took effect on July 26.

Ung Huot was chosen by remnants of Ranariddh's party in Phnom Penh to replace the prince as first prime minister after his July 6 ouster by second Prime Minister Hun Sen. Hun Sen has backed the nomination.

Police stop PDI activists to commemorate riot in Jakarta

JAKARTA, July 27: Hundreds of police and soldiers pushed back followers of pro-democracy leader Megawati Sukarnoputri Sunday as they tried to stage a banned wreath-laying ceremony to mark the first anniversary of anti-government riots, reports AP.

Last year, at least five people were killed and 23 went missing in the violence on July 27, when police stormed the headquarters of the opposition Indonesian Democratic Party, or PDI.

On Sunday, truckloads of armed security force personnel surrounded the site hours before the ceremony had been scheduled to start. About 2,000 protesters gathered for the

commemoration but Megawati, the daughter of Indonesia's late founding President Sukarno, stayed away.

Her lawyer, R O Tambunan, told the Associated Press she had decided not to take part as a precaution against violence.

Police last week banned ceremony because of public safety concerns despite assurances by organisers that the event would be peaceful.

Witnesses said Sunday's confrontation was tense but peaceful after riot police with shields and sticks blocked off a main road outside the building. An unconfirmed report said two people had been arrested. There were no reports of injuries.

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Raul Castro uses Revolution Day speech to blame US for inspiring sabotage

LAS TUNAS, Cuba, July 27: Raul Castro, chief of Cuba's armed forces accused the United States on Saturday of inspiring a campaign of sabotage against his Communist nation, reports AP.

As his older brother Fidel Castro looked on, the no 2 man in government delivered the annual Revolution Day address in unusually harsh language to lash out against the island's northern neighbour.

Raul Castro charged that Washington hopes "to force us to surrender through hunger and illness... as part of a monstrous, fascist plan that included recent hotel bombings and 'internal subversion' by a visiting State Department official."

As in past years, the major address appeared aimed at rallying Cubans against the US economic embargo of the island.

The younger Castro criticised the Helms-Burton Law, which seeks to punish some non-US companies which in-

vest in Cuba.

"This plan has been repudiated by the entire world," he said, addressing 100,000 Communist Party stalwarts, who travelled by bus, train and plane to Las Tunas, 400 miles (644 kms) southeast of Havana.

He charged that while the United States may try to destroy Cuba, the Cuban people will never allow their state to be conquered.

Speaking a little more than one hour, Raul Castro steered away from Cuba's failing economy to focus almost exclusively on political issues.

The hardline political tone comes during recent listlessness in Cuba's economic recovery, including an estimated drop in the crucial sugar harvest from 4.45 million tons (4 million metric tons) in 1996 to 4.2 million tons (3.8 million metric tons).

He referred to the June 12 bombings at two Havana tourist hotels, which has government has blamed on groups based in

the United States.

"In reality that was not an isolated incident," Castro said.

The US government has denied involvement and demanded that Cuba back up its charges with evidence.

Castro also blasted last month's visit here by Michael Ranneberger, coordinator of US State Department Cuban affairs, charging he met with dissidents and "Exhorted those individuals to undertake internal subversion."

During his weeklong stay, Ranneberger met with government and opposition leaders, among others, and said the United States wanted peaceful change that would help spur a democratic transition.

The annual July 26 message has become an important measure of economic progress since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which cost Cuba critical aid and trade with former Communist bloc partners.

In 1994, Raul Castro also gave the speech that commemo-

rates the 1953 rebel attack on the Moncada military barracks in Santiago that launched the Cuban Revolution.

The Revolution Day celebration began Friday night with live music and a carnival in the centre of this rural community. In surrounding neighbourhoods, open fires were built in the middle of the streets to cook big pots of "caldosa," a thick pork stew.

To attract more hard currency, Cuba has been promoting tourism in recent years with expensive package tours and foreign businesses have been investing heavily in luxury hotels on the island.

During his 1996 speech, Castro cited economic figures that showed Cuba's gross domestic product grew 9.6 per cent in the first half of the year — faster than at any time since the Soviet Union's collapse.

Despite the slowdown, the government on Monday projected the tourism would increase by more than 18 per cent this year.

US, China, two Koreas to hold talks in NY today

SEOUL, July 27: The United States, China and the two Koreas will hold a working-level meeting in New York on Monday to discuss procedures for preliminary four-party peace talks, reports said Sunday, reports AFP.

The working-level meeting in New York will be attended by Lee Soo-Hyok, Political Counsellor of the South Korean embassy in Washington, and Ri Kun, Deputy Chief of the North Korean mission at the United Nations, Yonhap news agency said.

Mark Minton, head of the State Department's Korea Desk, will represent the US side, with China sending an envoy from its embassy in Washington, the agency said.



Spectators at the scene after a plane crashed into the ground at an air show Saturday showering debris into a crowd, killing at least 8 people. Interior Minister Johan Vande Lanotte said 38 others were injured in the accident near the Belgian coastal resort of Ostend. The pilot of the single seater plane was reported among the dead. —AP/UNB photo