

International

Ruling ex-communists may lose power in Poland

WARSAW, Sept 22: Poland's ruling ex-communists look likely to lose power to a right-centre coalition government of two parties rooted in the pre-1989 opposition to the old regime, reports Reuters.

The most viable new coalition after Sunday's parliamentary elections would consist of the Solidarity Election Action (AWS), a bloc of nearly 40 small right-wing parties clustered around the solidarity trade union, and the centrist Liberal Freedom Union (LW).

Exit polls said the AWS won about 35 per cent of the vote and the Freedom Union more than 15 per cent, giving them a comfortable majority over the ex-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) with less than 27 per cent.

The era of post-communist rule is ending. Poles have denied confidence in the coalition that has ruled to date and have created an opportunity for the solidarity camp to take power," said Bronislaw Geremek, an UW leader.

Any coalition deal looks sure to be preceded by weeks of difficult negotiations as solidarity, buoyed by its apparent triumph at tough conditions for a prospective cabinet partner.

"We tell all groupings: Solidarity's programme will have to be the axis for a new coalition," solidarity leader Marian Krzaklewski said after the exit poll results were announced.

"We will quietly conduct negotiations. I will appoint teams to contact groups that could potentially make up a coalition. We have plenty of time to reach the best solutions."

By law, a new government can be sworn in only after the first session of the new parliament, due on October 20.

According to the exit polls, only a coalition with the Freedom Union would ensure a parliamentary majority for a Solidarity-led government, since other small parties did badly.

The ex-communists would have 157 seats and their partner in the outgoing government, the Peasant Party (PSL), only 32, making it a fringe player.

The only other parties likely to gain the minimum five per cent of the vote needed to enter parliament were the rightist movement for the reconstruction of Poland (ROP) and leftist Union of Labour (UP), both were projected to have five seats.

The ex-communists have tried to woo the Freedom Union into a coalition, stressing similarities in economic programmes and hinting that the smaller party could get the prime minister's post.

**Serbian polls
Milosevic's party claims victory**

BELGRADE, Sept 22: Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party claimed victory in Serbian elections as an opposition boycott apparently failed, reports AP.

"It is obvious that our party has a substantial lead in both the presidential and parliamentary elections," party spokesman Ivica Dacic said. Preliminary results were expected Monday afternoon.

Milosevic, who controls the state media, was expected from the beginning to see his party triumph in Sunday's vote.

Constitutionally barred from running for a third term as president of the Serb Republic, Milosevic this summer engineered his appointment as president of Yugoslavia and has maintained his sweeping control of Serbia and of the election.

In protest, an alliance of pro-democracy parties urged Serbs to boycott, hoping that at least 51 per cent of the 7 million registered voters would help make the vote invalid by not participating.

By Monday morning, it appeared their effort had failed.

Milosevic's portage, Zoran Djindjic, looked certain to take the presidency, or at least face a run-off in two weeks against either ultranationalist Vojislav Seselj or opposition candidate Vuk Draskovic.

A Lillie victory would complete a deft job swap Milosevic engineered this summer. Lillie was Yugoslav president until July, when Parliament elected Milosevic to the job of leading the country, which consists of Serbia and tiny Montenegro.

The elections were expected to leave the 250-seat Serbian Parliament dominated by a coalition of Socialists and a leftist party headed by Milosevic's wife, Mirjana Markovic.

Although turnout was slow Sunday afternoon, the boycott — called by two of the republic's three main opposition leaders — looked unlikely to be strong enough to invalidate the vote.

Electoral officials said the exact turnout would be announced Monday, but they added that more than 51 per cent of the electorate had voted.

Milosevic, the only East European leader to have survived the anti-Communist revolutions of 1989 and the post-Communist upheaval, voted Sunday in Belgrade's Dedinje district with his wife and son, Marko.

"Serbia needs to maintain its peace and stability, to continue on the road of recovery and economic development and maintain the course of reforms," a confident-looking Milosevic said. "I hope these elections will confirm this."

The elections also could seal the demise of the opposition coalition that undermined Milosevic last winter with several local election victories. Milosevic annulled the results, setting off three months of daily protests. Combined with international pressure, Milosevic was forced to accept the opposition victories.

But the three coalition leaders disagreed about whether to participate in Sunday's vote, dividing their once-united followers.

Momcilo Pavic, who supported the boycott, was distributing leaflets with the sarcastic message: "I'm going to vote because I believe there will be no electoral theft."

"It's only the fools and those who are naive who are voting today," Pavic said.

International monitors were watching Sunday's election, unlike during the November local elections. However, those calling for a boycott say the 170 foreigners from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe were too few to prevent vote rigging at the 9,827 polling stations across Serbia.

Belgrade mayor Zoran Djindjic, leader of the Democratic Party, and opposition leader Vesna Pestic had led the boycott call.

ROK prosecutors seek 7-yr jail for Kim's son

SEOUL, Sept 22: Prosecutors sought a seven-year prison sentence Monday for a son of President Kim Young-sam charge with taking millions of dollars in bribes and evading taxes, reports AP.

Prosecutors also requested that Kim Hyun-chul, 37, be fined a total of dirrs 5.8 million, roughly the amount he is accused of taking in bribes and evading in taxes.

"The defendant should be given stern punishment as a warning to corruption," senior prosecutor Park Sun-yong told the judges considering Hyun-chul's fate.

South Korea has no jury system. Under Korean law, the court will consider the prosecutors' demands and make its ruling at a later date.

Kim, the second son of the president, was arrested in May on charges of taking 6.6 billion won (dirrs 7.3 million) in bribes from six businessmen seeking government favours. Kim was also charged with evading dirrs 1.5 million in taxes.



President Clinton walks with Deputy White House Chief of Staff John Podesta on the White House grounds as the President prepares to travel to New York, Sunday. On Saturday the Justice Department revealed it has opened a 30-day review of President Clinton's involvement in campaign money-raising irregularities during the 1996 presidential campaign. — AP/UNB photo

40 feared dead as boat capsizes in India

NEW DELHI, Sept 22: At least 40 people, mostly women and children, were feared drowned after a boat capsized in the river Ganges in the northeast state of Bihar on Sunday, the Indian news agency PTI reported, says Reuters.

District Magistrate Gorelal Yadav told the agency the boat, which was carrying more than 55 people, capsized when it hit a pontoon bridge in Bihar's Vaishali district.

PTI said unconfirmed eyewitness reports put the number of people on the boat at 75 and the death toll at more than 60.

Teachers, monks mostly responsible for child abuse in Thailand

BANGKOK, Sept 22: A recent study by a children's advocacy group in Thailand found that teachers and Buddhist monks are responsible for the majority of cases of child sexual abuse, the Bangkok Post reported Monday, reports AP.

The study by the Child Protection Foundation said that of the 200 child sexual assault cases which it had studied, 93 were committed by teachers or monks and novice-monks.

In addition, 64 were perpetrated by fathers and relatives, while stepfathers and strangers were responsible for the remaining 43.

Children are regarded as property by many Thai families.

The United Nations Children's Fund has estimated that there are 300,000 children enslaved in Thai brothels.

Teachers and monks are authority figures and because of the long hours spent with children, have the most opportunity to abuse them, the report said.

The study said 90 per cent of the suspects were never punished for the abuse because they were frequently protected by colleagues or family members who wanted to avoid any stigma placed on their organisation or family.

US immigration officials favour doubling citizenship fee

WASHINGTON, Sept 22: The cost of becoming a U.S. citizen could more than double if the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) has its way, but its proposal has run into stiff opposition from immigrant advocacy groups and some members of Congress, according to India Aboard News Service.

Under a draft proposal based on a study of the costs of providing various services, the fee for applying to become a U.S. citizen would increase from the current \$95 to more than \$200.

Under the proposal submitted by the INS to the Justice Department, the charge for the required fingerprint check would also double to \$30. In all, the INS proposes to raise about 30 of the 40 fees it charges for filing various applications.

The Justice Department, of which the INS is an appendage, has yet to approve the proposal. If it does, the department would then invite public comment on the proposed changes for a 60-day period and could revise them before putting them into effect.

The INS says it expects the process of raising the fees to take at least six months.

Immigrant groups and lawmakers like Democratic Rep. Luis V. Guterrez, who is chairman of the immigration task force of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, have denounced the proposed fee hikes, especially the idea of doubling the naturalisation application fee.

Guterrez said the immigration service had no business increasing fees paid by the public when agency backlogs were causing some applicants to wait two or more years to become citizens.

The criticism then, particularly from the Republicans who charged that the INS made the proposal on the orders of the White House so that naturalised people could vote Democrat — an allegation the agency denied — led however to a slowdown in citizenship processing.

Guterrez and 11 other members of the Hispanic Caucus complained in a letter to INS Commissioner Doris M. Meissner that prospective citizens routinely have to "wait nearly two years for their applications to be processed."

Starvation, cholera death toll rises to 251 in New Guinea

JAKARTA, Sept 22: At least 251 people have died of starvation and cholera in a remote drought-stricken corner of New Guinea, the official Antara news agency reported Monday, reports AP.

Officials in Yawawijaya, in Irian Jaya province, said thick smoke from drought-related forest fires had grounded many relief flights carrying medicine, food supplies and doctors.

While the exact number of victims was unknown, officials feared the death toll would increase because desperate villagers continued to drink contaminated water.

Cholera is an acute infectious, and often fatal, disease that is spread by water or food contaminated by human waste.

Crops have withered in the drought, which many regard as the most serious to afflict Indonesia in about 50 years.

The worst hit villages were Sillimo, Pasema, Tangua, Siru, Soba, Kurupu, Mapenduma and Mbusa in Yawawijaya, a mountainous region in the east of Irian Jaya province, where contact with the outside world relies on aircraft operated by Christian missionaries.

Irian Jaya, about 3,320 kilometers (2,000 miles) east of Jakarta, is the western half of New Guinea island, a former Dutch colony governed by Indonesia since 1963.

Meteorologists blame the prolonged lack of rain across Indonesia on El Nino, a weather pattern in the Pacific Ocean, and warn that seasonal monsoons could be delayed for weeks.

Harvests of rice and other crops have failed in many areas, leading to fears of possible food shortages early next year. Forest and scrub fires have been burning out of control for weeks.

The government has accused 176 timber and plantation companies of deliberately starting the blazes of clear land, particularly on the islands of Sumatra, Borneo, Java and Sulawesi.

As much as 300,000 hectares (740,000 acres) have been blackened despite a government ban.



Rescue workers carry a badly injured train passenger, Reynante Almario, after his left leg was amputated to free him from the wreckage of a passenger train which collided with another train early Monday in Muntinlupa, south of Manila. At least six passengers were killed and 141 others were injured when three coaches of a Manila-bound train separated from its engine and rolled backward into the path of another train. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

9 German tourists die in Egypt: Two brothers accused of firebombing a tourist bus, killing nine German holidaymakers, and four alleged accomplices appeared before an Egyptian military court Sunday, judicial sources said, AFP reports from Cairo.

Saber Abu el-Ola and his brother Mahmoud were followed by three other people accused of supplying them with weapons and a fourth with technical assistance to make an incendiary device. The two brothers were accused by the state prosecutor of "voluntary homicide, premeditated murder with terrorist intentions and possession of weapons and ammunition."

Japanese minister steps down: Seeking to end nearly two weeks of public outrage, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on Monday accepted the resignation of a Cabinet member once convicted of taking bribes, AP reports from Tokyo.

Koko Sato had been the target of widespread criticism since Hashimoto reshuffled his Cabinet Sept. 11. Hashimoto made the veteran lawmaker head of the Management and Coordination Agency, in charge of administrative reform. Sato was convicted of taking 2 million yen (dirrs 17,000) in bribes from All Nippon Airways in the Lockheed payoff scandal while serving as a parliamentary vice minister for the Transport Ministry in the 1970s.

Filipino train mishap kills 6: Two overloaded commuter trains bound for Manila collided Monday after one separated from its engine and rolled backward more than two kilometers (one mile) into the path of the second train, officials said, AP reports from Manila.

At least six people were killed and 141 injured in one of the country's worst train accidents, the officials said. Many were crushed in a stampede as passengers tried to escape after the crash, witnesses said. They said some people were riding on the roof of the second train and were injured when they jumped off moments before the collision.

Nepal appoints 3 new ministers: King Birendra of Nepal appointed three new cabinet ministers yesterday, strengthening the government against opposition moves to topple the coalition administration, state radio and analysts said, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The new ministers include independent MPs Moti Prasad Pahari and Palten Gurung who had been backing the main opposition Nepali Congress (NC) Party. Analysts said the promotion of Pahari and Palten Gurung would weaken the plans of NC leader Girija Prasad Koirala who has been working to oust the six-month-old tri-partite coalition government by tabling a no-confidence motion.

Mir's computer goes down again: The Mir's central computer went down again on Monday, an old problem that's potentially more serious this time because the US Space Shuttle Atlantis is to dock with the Russian space station later this week, AP reports from Moscow.

The two Russians and one American on the Mir were not in any danger, space officials said. Monday's computer breakdown was the third time in three weeks that it has malfunctioned, and the fifth time since July. In the past, it has taken one to two days to fix the problem and get most systems back up and running. The computer went down at 5:23 am (0123 GMT), the ITAR-Tass news agency said, citing Russian space officials.

Kohl's party scores 2nd place in polls: German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats, hurt by internal strife and sagging public support, scored a solid second place in elections in the left-wing bastion of Hamburg on Sunday to give him a sorely needed lift. Reuters reports from Hamburg.

Staving off a feared defeat after a long summer of inner party squabbling, Kohl's conservative CDU emerged from the opening round of Germany's gruelling election year with a respectable result that was certain to strengthen his hand.

Taiwan to give jets to Paraguay: Taiwan's top military leader confirmed for the first time yesterday that the island will give jet fighters to Paraguay in what is believed to be a move to help the nationalist government consolidate ties with the South American country. AFP reports from Taipei.

Gujral exudes optimism on the eve of meeting with Clinton

Suman Guha Mozumder writes from New York

On the eve of his first ever meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton, Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral hoped it would have a positive outcome and help improve relations between the two countries.

"I hope our talks tomorrow will help improve relations and continue our friendship," Mr. Gujral said while speaking at a reception here yesterday evening organised by the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA) in cooperation with the National Federation of Indian Associations (NFIA). "The friendship between India and the U.S. can be greatly beneficial," he said.

The Indian Prime Minister arrived here September 20 for a four-day visit, during which he will address the U.N. General Assembly, session and meet Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as well.

Although no formal agenda has been fixed for the summit meeting between the two, Mr. Gujral exuded optimism about the meeting which comes a day before the meeting with the Pakistani Prime Minister.

Ahead of the meeting, Mr. Gujral and his wife Sheila met briefly with Mr. Clinton and wife Hillary at a reception organised by the U.S. President for the visiting heads of delegations to the United Nations. It was not known if anything transpired between the two beyond the usual exchange of pleasantries.

In his remarks at receptions organised by the huge Indian American community here, Mr. Gujral said that India is big and powerful and "we are always willing to go more than half a mile for good relations with our neighbours." And once the neighbours get together in the region, "it's going to be the largest market in the world," Mr. Gujral said.

The Prime Minister also predicted that India will emerge as one of the key powers in the world by the turn of the next century. "India is standing on the threshold," he said, saying in the last 50 years the country had come up in all spheres. There had been a seven per cent growth rate and the country was capable of absorbing ten billion dollars of direct investment.

The Prime Minister said that the future of India lies in making equitable distribution of wealth and spreading of education. "That is the future," he declared.

"Our goal is to make India completely literate in the next five years," he said.

India Abroad News Service

160,000 sign Condolence books closed at Kensington Palace

LONDON, Sept 22: The condolence books at Kensington Palace, Princess Diana's home, were closed Sunday after collecting messages and signatures from about 160,000 people, reports AP.

The palace was closed to the public at about 8 pm (1900 GMT) Sunday, bringing an end to one of the most visible signs of public mourning for the princess.

Long lines had formed at the palace and at St. James' Palace following Diana's death on Aug. 31, as people waited up to 12 hours to sign condolence books.

Some 130,000 people signed at St. James' Palace, where the coffin rested in the Chapel Royal before the funeral.

The books, in loose-leaf form, will be collected and taken to Buckingham Palace, said the Royal Palaces agency.



Chinese Finance Minister Zhu Rongji, left, is welcomed by Michel Camdessus, right, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, as Driss Jettou, 2nd from left, Moroccan Finance Minister, and World Bank President James Wolfensohn, 2nd from right, smile at the start of the Development Committee meeting at the Hong Kong Convention Centre Monday. Zhu is scheduled to make a keynote speech to the IMF-World Bank annual conference later the day. — AFP/UNB photo

Kim becomes DPRK's ruling Workers Party chief

TOKYO, Sept 22: In the first formal step towards Communism's first dynastic succession, local representatives of North Korea's ruling Workers Party recommended that de facto leader Kim Jong-Il become the party chief, reports Reuters.

Official North Korean media said on Monday that the recommendation was made and adopted at a south Phyongan provincial conference of the ruling party, held in Phyongsong City on Sunday.

"The conference adopted with unanimous approval a resolution on recommending comrade Kim Jong-Il as General Secretary of the WPK (Workers Party of Korea), reflecting the will and desire of the party members and other people in the province," said the official Korean Central News agency (KCNA), monitored in Tokyo.

Succession to the post of party chief would be the first step toward Kim's formal installment as North Korea's supreme ruler following the death of his father, Kim Il-Sung, in 1994.

In July, North Korea declared an end to a three-year mourning period for the elder Kim, known as the "great leader, setting off speculation that his eldest son and heir Kim Jong-Il would soon take over key state and party posts.

50 volunteers to be injected with live HIV for research

CHICAGO, Sept 22: A group of doctors and public health advocates say AIDS research is so important that they are willing to risk their lives by being the first humans to be injected with a vaccine consisting of a live, though weakened, strain of HIV, reports AP.

The International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care, based in Chicago, wants to conduct the test involving about 50 volunteers. The group intends to talk with National Institutes of Health officials about the idea.

Gordon Nary, executive director of the Chicago group and one of the trial's volunteers, said the risk of being in the study are diminished by what can be learned from it.

AIDS vaccine development is a slow process because of the safety measures and rigorous animal testing needed before injecting humans with a trial vaccine.

"Vaccine development has really dragged on because there is an assumption by conservative scientists that people won't step up and do this," Nary said.

AIDS research efforts have focused on vaccines that do not involve a live virus because of fear that even a weakened, live human immunodeficiency virus strain might be capable of causing AIDS or other problems.

"I'm not suicidal," Nary said. "There are 1,000 HIV-infected babies born daily. If there is a risk of HIV infection (during vaccine trials) — which I don't think is significant — it's overwhelmingly outbalanced by the fact that there isn't anyone who has worked with these babies who isn't going to do it."

Dr. Mark Grabowsky of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases is skeptical of the proposed study and says it's premature to talk about injecting healthy people with a live vaccine.

Nonetheless, Grabowsky said: "I admire them. That kind of activism can't help but be inspiring. But the scientific questions still remain."

Grabowsky said he has invited the group to discuss the project with him and other scientists next week at the National Institutes of Health offices in Rockville, Maryland.

The Chicago group wants approval from the Food and Drug Administration but promises to go on even if they don't receive an OK from the FDA, said Dr. Charles Farthing, the study's leader and medical director of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation in Los Angeles.

The group can proceed with its trial without FDA approval by containing its study to one state or conducting it in Europe.

Meanwhile on Saturday, prominent AIDS researcher David Ho told the 2,500 people gathered in Miami Beach, Florida, for the US Conference on AIDS that researchers are developing protease drugs that would be taken once a day — instead of the current regimen of dozens of pills several times a day.