

# UF prepares to fight polls as single entity

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: India's 15 party United Front, whose minority government fell late last month when the Congress Party withdrew its support, prepared today to fight the spring election as a single entity, reports Reuters.

The fractious coalition banding Communists, free-marketisers and regional groups was seen as positioning itself between the Congress and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the third alternative for a sullen electorate.

"We are determined to fight our way back as a United Front and with a majority of our own," said A B Bardhan, general secretary of the Communist Party of India's a coalition member.

The United Front was formed after the 1996 national elections failed to give a majority to either the centrist Congress or the rightist BJP in the 545-seat Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament.

"But this time we will cam-

paign as one, after all we have a government, we have to ask the people to give us a chance to govern the country again," Bardhan said.

Front leaders were scheduled to meet at 4:30 pm (1100 GMT) today to finalise campaign plans.

"The United Front is a functioning group for the first time," said Mahesh Rangarajan, a political expert at the Centre for Political Studies.

Congress toppled the United Front on November 28 after it refused to drop a regional party named by an independent probe into the assassination of former premier and popular Congress leader Rajiv Gandhi.

No party was subsequently able to cobble together a new coalition with majority support in parliament forcing the calling of new elections early next year. The dates are to be announced in January.

But political parties already have begun mapping strategies for the election. Congress and the BJP were looking for allies

over the week-end.

"Political leaders have made a mockery of the people's verdict, even before we have had a chance to deliver the goods to our constituency, another election has been forced," said Bhikta Charan Das a lawmaker who campaigned against early polls.

Analysts have predicted the election still will not give India political stability.

"I do not foresee any party or group of parties getting a clear majority, we are into an era of coalitions and alliances," said Rangarajan.

Some United Front members were keeping the door open to a limited electoral alliance with Congress to keep out the Hindu nationalists.

The BJP is perceived by rivals to be biased against India's Muslim minority.

"We welcome a fight between the BJP on one side and the rest on the other. This presents a clear choice before the country," said BJP general secretary Venkaiah Naidu.



The wife, centre, and mother, bottom left, of Lt Col Nilantha Sirimanne weep Sunday as his remains are cremated according to Buddhist custom. Sirimanne was killed when the Sri Lankan military and Tamil Tiger rebels clashed in northern Sri Lanka Thursday. The Tamil rebels claimed 300 soldiers were killed in the battle, 111 bodies were handed over to the ICRC.

## India may again become safe haven for Tigers as govt fails to mend ties

COLOMBO, Dec 8: Sri Lanka's main opposition today said the government had failed to improve relations with India which it warned could again become a safe haven for Tamil separatists, reports AFP.

The opposition United National Party (UNP) legislators accused President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government of keeping India's new High Commissioner (ambassador) designate waiting since November 24 to present his credentials.

The former junior foreign minister, John Amararatunga, told Parliament that there was a danger that the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, home to more than 55 million ethnic Tamils, could provide a safe haven to Sri Lankan Tamil rebels.

Amararatunga said keeping ambassador designate, Shivashankar Menon, waiting could be seen as a reaction to the welcome given to opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe during his recent Indian visit.

"We do not know whether this important High Commis-

sioner is treated like this and deliberately delayed just to spite the Indian government for giving red carpet treatment to our leader," Amararatunga said.

Junior Foreign Minister Lakshman Kiriella said that Wickremesinghe, a former prime minister, was also extended all courtesies by the Sri Lankan mission in Delhi because he held the rank of a Cabinet minister.

The opposition urged the government to strengthen the country's diplomatic missions in India to counter the threat from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), especially in Tamil Nadu.

The South Indian state is known to have provided material and moral support to the LTTE and several other Tamil militant groups in the mid 1990s.

Sri Lanka's LTTE was at the centre of a political crisis in India in which Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral was resigned after failing to ditch a coalition partner allegedly linked with the murder of former prime minister Rajiv

## Over 20m Africans don't know they have AIDS virus

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Dec 8: Most of the more than 20 million people in sub-Saharan Africa who carry the virus that causes AIDS don't even know they have it, an expert on the disease told an international conference Sunday, reports AP.

"The situation in this region is unprecedented," said Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, or UNAIDS. Piot was addressing the opening session of the 10th International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Africa, a five-day gathering bringing together hundreds of researchers who will discuss methods for stemming the disease's spread on the continent.

French President Jacques Chirac, also addressing the group, noted the heavy toll that AIDS has taken in Africa.

"The evil struck your land of Africa earlier and more rapidly than the rest of the world, wreaking death and destruction far more devastatingly," he said.

A UNAIDS report released two weeks ago estimated 30.6 million have HIV or AIDS across the world, two-thirds of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

# US sees possibility of a BJP-led govt in India

WASHINGTON, Dec 8: The United States has been preparing to deal with a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in India as it feels that the party could come to power after next year's elections, according to India Abroad News Service.

A senior Clinton administration official told IANS: "We are aware that there's a very real possibility that the BJP could come to power" at the election set for early next year.

"We have disputes among ourselves actually as to what a BJP government would mean," the official said, "not so much in terms of economic policy, which we hope would continue, but real disagreement among ourselves about what it would mean in terms of its attitude toward maintaining a dialogue with Pakistan."

"This is the foreign policy fallout we are most concerned with," the official said.

According to background interviews with senior administration officials in both the State Department and the National Security Council, this preparation had taken on a new urgency in the past few months as the United Front coalition

government hobbled from one crisis to another and finally fell to the machinations of the Congress Party.

In the South Asian division of the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research as well as in the Policy Planning Council there has been much brainstorming and discussion as well as circulation of policy briefs about what the advent of a BJP or BJP-led government in New Delhi could envisage.

The South Asia division is headed by Walter Anderson, co-author of the book "Brotherhood of Saffron," who is considered an authority on the BJP, and the Policy Planning Council by Gregory B. Craig.

These discussions have also extended to the White House National Security Council South Asia division headed by Bruce Reidel and apparently what concerns Washington the most is how the BJP will deal with Pakistan - whether it will continue with the Gujral Doctrine of seeking a rapprochement with Islamabad or be hostile to it.

The official said that a BJP government that would have to pull together coalition-part-

ners, "if it must play to the right wing, the right end of the political spectrum, the nationalistic one, it will be very difficult for it to maintain the dialogue and to make concessions to try and resolve some of the longstanding problems with Pakistan."

Another official, concurring with these views, said as far as India-U.S. relations are concerned, "I think we are less concerned. We believe that basic changes have taken place in Indian public opinion, that there is a fairly broad agreement on improved Indo-U.S. relations and on the benefits of liberalisation if it's done correctly."

"Of course, since there is so much support within the business community for continuing reforms, which will be the catalyst for further improved Indo-U.S. relations, we are not really concerned about there being any reversal on this score," the official told India Abroad News Service.

However, "we would like to see continued movement of the Indo-Pak dialogue and of course that means trying to resolve the Kashmir problem," the official emphasised.

## Chirac appeals for global effort to combat AIDS

ABIDJAN, Dec 8: French President Jacques Chirac appealed Sunday for a "Global coordinated effort" to combat the scourge of AIDS at an international conference on the disease in Africa, reports AFP.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 10th International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Disease in Africa (CISMA), Chirac called for France's partners, notably Europeans, to urgently create a fund of therapeutic solidarity.

He denounced the risk of a "two speed epidemic" whereby the spread of AIDS is slowing in northern countries but fuelled in the south by problems of prevention and the cost of health-care.

"We don't have the right to fight the epidemic on two fronts," he said, arguing that it was unacceptable to concentrate on providing expensive drugs to treat the sick in the rich north but limit action in the south to prevention.

Some 1,300 speeches will be presented between today and tomorrow to the conference held under the theme of AIDS and development and to which around 4,000 people are taking part.

David Chipanka, the Kenyan President of the African net-

work of people living with HIV called for a minute's silence in honour of the victims of the pandemic. He deplored the contraband and stigma suffered by carriers of the virus in Africa.

Pierre m'Pele, a Congolese professor and President of the African Society against AIDS called on delegates to "act to prevent and relieve Africa's pain," because, he said AIDS is: "A disease of poverty and exclusion and is eating away at the foundations of our society."

Luc Montagnier, the professor who discovered the HIV virus, speaking on behalf of UNESCO Director Federico Mayor, said AIDS "will be conquered everywhere or not at all."

Several people with the HIV virus in the conference hall displayed placards bearing slogans such as "silence kills" and "Africa: 90 per cent of (all the world's) people with AIDS, zero per cent of the treatment."

AIDS is spreading in Africa faster than anywhere else in the world.

Two-thirds of the world's 30 million people infected with the HIV virus live in Sub-Saharan Africa, where more than seven per cent of the population aged between 15 and 49 are HIV positive.



Vice President Al Gore, centre, chats with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, right, as Japanese Foreign Minister Keizo Ouchi looks on prior to their talks in Kyoto, western Japan, Monday. The leaders are to deliver a speech at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change later the day.

## BRIEFLY

**72 Chinese detained in Japan:** The coast guard stopped a fishing boat off Japan's southwest coast and arrested 72 Chinese suspected of trying to enter the country illegally, maritime officials said Monday, AP reports from Tokyo.

The boat was stopped Sunday night off Amami-Oshima, 1,300 kilometres (780 miles) southwest of Tokyo, said Shinichiro Yanagida of the Maritime Safety Agency. The occupants of the boat — 61 men and 11 women — were arrested Monday on suspicion of violating immigration law by not carrying any passports or maritime identification.

**Air crash leaves 4 dead in Canada:** Two small Cessna airplanes, each carrying two people, collided some 70 metres (231 feet) above an airport outside Montreal Sunday, killing all four on board, local police said, AFP reports from Montreal.

The accident occurred as the two aircraft prepared to land at Mascouche airport, 30 kilometres (19 miles) northeast of here around 2:30 pm (1930 GMT).

**Former Labour MP Lord Wyatt dies:** Woodrow Wyatt, maverick lawmaker for the left-wing Labour Party who championed Margaret Thatcher's conservative reforms as a newspaper columnist in the 1980s, died on Sunday, his family said. Lord Wyatt was 79, AP says from London.

Wyatt died in hospital after earlier suffering a burst stomach artery at his home in northwest London.

**3 skydivers killed over South Pole:** The first attempt to skydive at the South Pole ended in tragedy Sunday as three jumpers plunged to their deaths when their parachutes failed to open, AP says from Sydney.

They were among six skydivers on the jump organised by Adventure Network International, a private company that has been flying tourists to the South Pole since 1988.

## Commission formed to analyse factors causing sectarian unrest in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 8: The government has formed a commission to analyse factors contributing to growth of Muslim sectarianism in Pakistan and initiate remedial steps, a minister was quoted today as saying, reports AFP.

Headed by Religious Affairs Minister Raja Zafarullah Haq, the commission will bring together scholars from different schools of religious thought on one platform, Interior Minister Shujaat Hussain told the officials APP news agency.

## Red Cross from both Koreas to resume talks on food aid

SEOUL, Dec 8: South Korea's Red Cross proposed to its North Korean counterpart Monday that they meet in Beijing on December 22 to discuss additional food aid to the famine-stricken North, reports AP.

The South Korean Red Cross made the proposal in response to a North Korean suggestion in November that both sides meet in Beijing "as soon as possible" to discuss new aid.

## 'Cambodia had to ensure return of all politicians to get US electoral aid'

PHNOM PENH, Dec 8: Senior US human rights official John Shattuck said today Cambodia had to ensure the safe return of all politicians, including ousted co-premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh, to qualify for US electoral aid next year, reports Reuters.

Shattuck, the Assistant Secretary of State for democracy, human rights and labour, said he has also told the government it must improve its security climate, punish human rights violators and implement a ceasefire to help guarantee free and fair elections.

"Our position — and we expressed it very clearly to all I met — is that all political leaders should be able to come back and participate in this election, and that certainly includes Prince Ranariddh," Shattuck told reporters at the end of his three-day trip to Phnom Penh.

He said he had delivered that message to co-premier Hun Sen, who deposed Ranariddh on July 6, as well as King Norodom Sihamoni and other senior government officials.

Shattuck declined to comment on the amount of US electoral aid at stake, but said: "We hope we can get to a point where some additional assistance could be provided to the electoral process."

The US government would not lift its ban on direct assistance to the Cambodian government, he said.

The United States suspended all aid except for humanitarian and democracy-building programmes in Cambodia in the wake of Hun Sen's coup and has been pressuring his government to hold free elections next year.

**Khmers must stay out of politics:** AP adds: With Cambodian elections less than six months away, visiting US diplomat said Monday that leaders of the radical Marxist Khmer Rouge must be barred from politics.

"I urged leaders of all parties not to allow a political role for past or present senior Khmer Rouge leaders," Shattuck said.

During his two-day visit, Shattuck met with Second Prime Minister Hun Sen, co-interior Minister Sar Kheng and Chea Sim, president of the National Assembly.

## Gore offers 'flexibility' to fight global warming

KYOTO, Japan, Dec 8: Vice President Al Gore, faced with European demands for more, offered new US "flexibility" Monday on cutting back gas emissions tied to global warming, reports AP.

But Gore, addressing the 150-nation climate negotiations, said the United States would not "promise what we cannot do."

The vice president's remarks, nonetheless, set a conciliatory tone for the remaining two days of the talks.

After consulting by telephone with President Clinton early Monday, Gore said, "I have instructed our delegation to show increased negotiating flexibility" — as long as basic principles of the US position are preserved.

In his public address, however, he offered no detailed changes in the US proposal.

Gore reminded delegates Kyoto is only a first step in protecting the atmosphere. "If we get off to the right start here, we can quickly build momentum as we learn together how to meet this challenge," he said.

European governments, environmentalists and others had

been looking for a more ambitious US offer on reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. "The United States can do much more," said Ritt Bjerregaard, the European Union environmental commissioner.

Japan's Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, preceding Gore to the podium, said only "high level political decisiveness" will produce "an agreement which can be handed down to future generations with pride."

Differences between Europe and America over cutback targets stood as a major obstacle to completion of the Kyoto Protocol, an unprecedented global agreement to control energy use in the 21st century.

Gore and the environment ministers of scores of other countries address the historic conference Monday and Tuesday as the pace picks up toward a Wednesday conclusion.

The US vice president, on a lightning one-day visit to the talks, landed in Japan before dawn Monday and headed to a breakfast meeting with the US delegation to discuss the state of the negotiations. Afterward, he

said he hoped in Kyoto "to generate some momentum for successful resolution."

Behind the scenes in the complex, highly technical talks, negotiators were juggling a bagful of adjustable features — timetables, reduction levels, the gases to be covered — in an effort to find a US-European compromise.

"The differences are not enormous. They're capable of being overcome in the next few days," said US Sen. Joseph Lieberman, an observer at the talks.

But the Connecticut Democrat was less optimistic about another dispute, the US effort to win concessions from developing nations on emission reductions, a feature the Senate demands for eventual ratification in Washington.

The 10-day conference wraps up two years of negotiations to strengthen the 1992 Climate Change Treaty, by setting legally binding limits on 34 industrial nations' emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, mostly byproducts from fossil fuel burning, that tap heat in the atmosphere.



Pope John Paul II touches a woman during his visit at the St. Domenico Savio Parish Church, in the outskirts of Rome, Sunday.

## US may use N-arms if attacked with biological weapons: Clinton

WASHINGTON, Dec 8: Turning US nuclear policy toward an emerging threat, President Bill Clinton has decided the United States will consider using nuclear weapons against attackers who hit American forces with chemical or biological weapons, reports AP.

The policy, made explicit in a classified presidential directive, marks the administration's first instruction to the Pentagon shaping a nuclear strategy against the increasingly worrisome possibility that nations such as Iraq might turn chemical or biological weapons against US troops.

A senior Clinton administration adviser said Sunday the policy conforms with two decades of White House statements on the possible "first use" of nuclear weapons. But it adds presidential weight to the emerging concern about "rogue states" that has replaced the nuclear terror of the Cold War.

Approved last month by Clinton, Principal elements of the "Presidential Decision Directive," or PDD, were reported Sunday by The Washington Post. In many respects, the directive follows long-standing

policy on nuclear weapons, including continued support for the nuclear triad — bombers, land-based missiles and missile submarines — and basic reliance on nuclear weapons as a mainstay of national security.

The document breaks new ground by abandoning the concept that the United States should plan for a protracted nuclear war that it could "win" and by allowing nuclear targets to expand the list of potential targets that could be struck in China in the unlikely event of war with that nation.

"We felt that the concept of protracted nuclear war never had a great deal of credibility," Robert Bell, a senior member of Clinton's National Security Council staff, said Sunday in response to reporters' questions. Such a possibility was outlined in a 1981 Reagan administration directive. "There was an anomaly," Bell said. "The president's own guidance to the Strategic Command ... was unrealistic."

Senior military officers have been warning that arms reduction agreements no longer make such a conflict even feasible, let alone winnable. As a

result, Clinton ordered his reassessment last February.

Worries about all-out nuclear war have been replaced by concerns that an adversary such as Iraq might use chemical or biological weapons against US forces. As a result, Bell said, the presidential directive discusses in far greater detail than in past directives responses the United States should have available.

"The PDD requires a wide range of nuclear retaliatory options, from a limited strike to a more general nuclear exchange," Bell said.

President Jimmy Carter said in 1978 the United States would not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states unless those states fought in concert with a nuclear power or defied the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iraq's suspected defiance of the NPT allowed President George Bush's administration to threaten Saddam Hussein with massive retaliation if the Iraqi president ordered chemical or biological weapons in the Gulf War.

"That was something that many people took to be a clear nuclear threat," Bell said.

In April 1993, early in Clinton's presidency, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a document called JP-3-12, "Joint Doctrine for Nuclear Operations," which described the use of nuclear weapons in response to attacks involving "weapons of mass destruction," which could include chemical or biological weapons. The document is available on a Web site maintained by the Federation of American Scientists, an arms control advocacy group.

US nuclear capabilities must confront an enemy with risks of unacceptable damage and disproportionate loss should the enemy choose to introduce (weapons of mass destruction) in a conflict," the 1993 doctrine stated.

In 1995, the United States — along with Britain, China, Russia and France, the other major nuclear powers — reiterated the Carter administration's pledge against nuclear strikes on non-nuclear countries. The pledge retained loopholes that could allow the United States to strike back.

"We needed to be very clear in what we were instructing," Bell said.

## Shipley takes over as NZ's first woman PM

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, Dec 8: The nation that first gave women the right to vote got its first woman prime minister on Monday, when Jenny Shipley took over the top position from the long-serving Jim Bolger, reports AP.

Shipley ousted Bolger in a National Party coup a month ago. Bolger agreed to stand down when it became clear he would lose a planned leadership challenge.

Shipley named a revamped Cabinet last Friday, promoting a group of economic hard liners to key posts, including the health, welfare, education and commerce ministries.

Governor-General Sir Michael Hardie Boys, the British Queen's representative in this Commonwealth nation, signed Shipley's warrant of office in a short ceremony at Government House Monday.

Sir Michael said the accession of its first woman prime minister was a special occasion for the country. New Zealand became the first self-governing nation in the world where women had the right to vote after Parliament passed the Electoral Bill in 1893, according to official parliamentary record.