

**Dog gets \$21 monthly salary as reward!**

BANGKOK, Dec 29: A year-old dog that took a litter of puppies under his care after their mother died will receive a 1,000 baht (21 dollars) monthly salary as a reward, reports AP.

The dog, Jong, has achieved public stardom in press reports highlighting his selfless behavior in contrast to the human greed many regard as to blame for Thailand's current economic crisis.

The salary will be paid by the Public Welfare Council, a state body, to compensate Jong's owner for feeding him and, by extension, the motherless pups, the newspaper The Nation reported Monday.

Somporn Thepsitta, a senator who heads the council, was quoted as saying that the dog had a heart as beautiful as a human's.

The dog should be known as Amazing Dog to mark the Amazing Thailand campaign so people will know that Thai dogs can do good deeds.

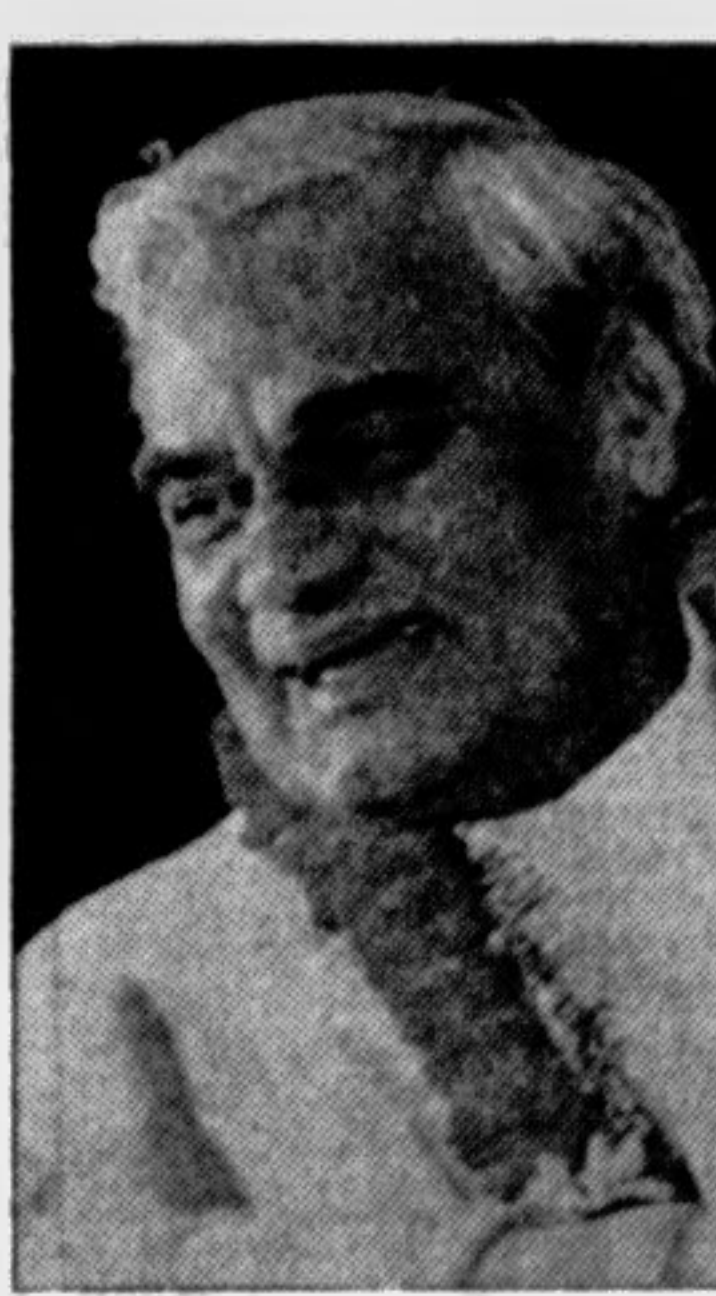
# Vajpayee calls for power decentralisation

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: A leading candidate to become India's next prime minister has called for greater decentralisation to keep the world's largest democracy together, it was reported today, reports AFP.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the leader of the Hindu Nationalists tipped to win most seats in the February-March general elections, said he favoured constitutional changes to "suit the changing needs of the present," the Hindustan Times daily reported.

"The younger generation is losing faith in the system. The present climate of despondency has to end," he said.

Vajpayee, a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian people's party who topped a pre-election opinion poll of candidates to become prime minister, said he backed greater decentralisation of economic and political power because of India's diversity.



Vajpayee

"More power can be decentralised to the states, even at the levels of villages, particularly in the area of economic development.

India is a coalition of diverse traditions and value structures, ethnicities and social systems. We have to strengthen this diversity.

India's 25 states boast 960 million people speaking more than 1,000 languages and dialects.

Several separatist movements across the country are demanding greater regional autonomy or independence and have resorted to violence in such areas as the Kashmir and some north-eastern states.

The current form of government, where most power are held in New Delhi, has sparked appeals for a loose federal structure with greater regional autonomy in financial and administrative affairs.

# Former SC judge takes over as CEC in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 29: A former Supreme Court judge took over on Monday as Pakistan's Chief Election Commissioner, replacing Mukhtar Ahmed Junejo who had rejected the nomination papers of the ruling party's presidential candidate, official sources said, reports AFP.

Abdul Qadeer Chaudhury was sworn in by chief Justice Ajmal Mian in a simple ceremony lasting only three minutes, the sources said.

Chaudhury who retired as Supreme Court judge in 1994, takes over only two days before the presidential election.

Junejo rejected the candidacy of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's nominee Muhammad Rafiq Tarar on December 18 following accusations that Tarar had ridiculed the judiciary.

But the Lahore High Court overturned the disqualification the next day and allowed Tarar to contest the election, which was triggered by the December 2 resignation of President Farooq Ahmed Leghari following differences with Sharif.

Junejo was appointed to the post by Leghari in November amid a bitter tussle between Sharif and the judiciary, then headed by Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah.

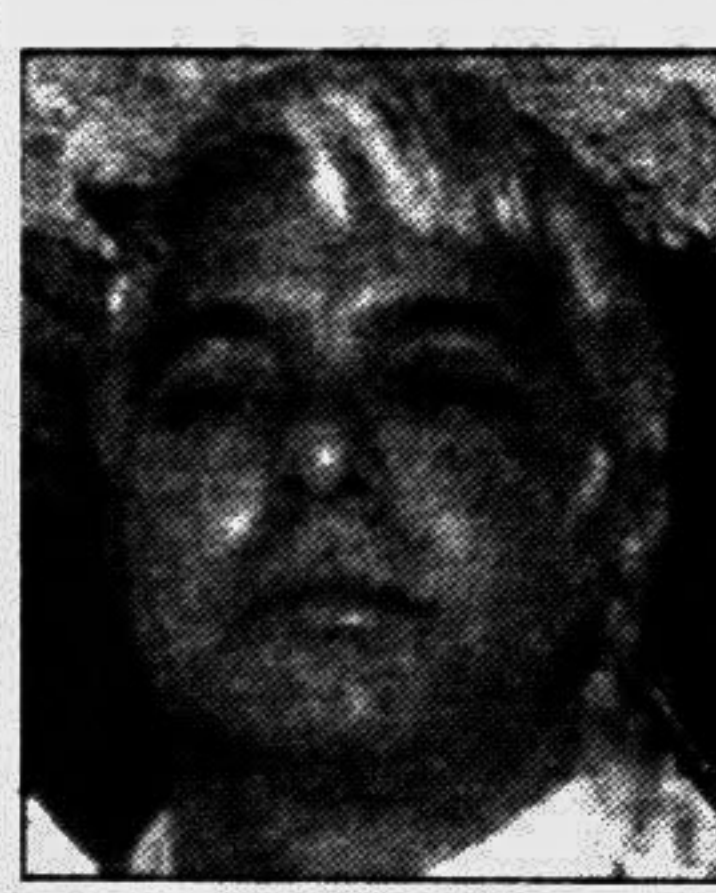
A 10-judge Supreme Court this month removed Justice Shah, declaring that his 1994 elevation violated seniority rules.

Junejo had disqualified Tarar because of his remarks in an interview published by an Urdu-language monthly in June in which he criticised the judiciary and conduct of judges and called one unnamed judge a "judicial terrorist."

Besides Tarar six people, including former defence minister Aftab Shaaban Mirani of the main opposition Pakistan People's Party, are contesting the election.

The president will be chosen by an electoral college of members of the federal parliament and four provincial assemblies.

# Laloo training fifty pigeons to help him back to power



day, reports AFP.

Laloo Prasad Yadav, who installed his wife as chief minister of the state of Bihar earlier this year after he was forced to stand down following corruption charges said the birds would be used to drop election pamphlets.

The colourful politician who commands mass grassroots support, used parrots to chant his party's slogan in the 1996 elections. Yadav, a former president of caretaker Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's party, was released from Jail on Bail in December.

He is accused of siphoning off millions of dollars of state agricultural subsidies.

India is due to go to the polls in February-March after Gujral's minority coalition collapsed in November.



Actress Teresa Wright, shown in Francis Ford Coppola's "The Rainmaker," warms the hearts of long-time moviegoers. Wright, 69, won an Academy nomination as supporting actress in 1941 for her first movie, "The Little Foxes," and the following year won the supporting actress Oscar for "Mrs. Miniver."

— AP/UNB photo

# Khatami's Turkmenistan trip may reshape power politics in Central Asia

ASHGABAT, Dec 29: Iran's Mohammad Khatami, on his first overseas trip since becoming president last summer, arrived in Turkmenistan on Sunday for a landmark visit that could help reshape the balance of power in Central Asia, reports Reuters.

Khatami, a moderate cleric, held talks with Turkmenistan's strongman ruler Saparmurat Niyazov.

No details of the talks were immediately available and no press briefing was planned for Sunday.

The two leaders will attend the opening on Monday of the first pipeline to pump natural gas to Iran from the former Soviet republic.

Iran is not alone in wanting to forge closer ties with Turkmenistan, an impoverished but energy-rich desert state of just four million people.

Earlier on Sunday energy ministers of Iran, Turkey and Turkmenistan gave the go-ahead to oil giant royal Dutch shell to draw up plans for a 1.6 billion dollar natural gas pipeline across their territory.

The ministers signed a letter authorising the feasibility study at a ceremony in Ashgabat attended by Niyazov and visiting Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz who later left for Azerbaijan.

gas to Iran from the former Soviet republic.

Iran is not alone in wanting to forge closer ties with Turkmenistan, an impoverished but energy-rich desert state of just four million people.

Earlier on Sunday energy ministers of Iran, Turkey and Turkmenistan gave the go-ahead to oil giant royal Dutch shell to draw up plans for a 1.6 billion dollar natural gas pipeline across their territory.

The ministers signed a letter authorising the feasibility study at a ceremony in Ashgabat attended by Niyazov and visiting Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz who later left for Azerbaijan.

# Zardari arrives in Islamabad to take oath as senator

ISLAMABAD, Dec 29: An armoured personnel carrier took the husband of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto from his cell in southern Karachi to the airport on Monday where he was flown to the federal capital to take his oath of office as Senator, nine months after being elected, reports AP.

Asif Zardari, who has been in jail since his wife's government was dismissed last year, was whisked away from the Islamabad International Airport in a convoy of police vehicles.

Zardari is charged with murder in connection with the shooting death of Bhutto's estranged brother, Murtaza, who died in a hail of police bullets outside his home in Karachi, just two months before her government's dismissal.

# 39 civilians killed in Algerian village

ALGIERS, Dec 29: Thirty-nine civilians were killed in a renewed surge of violence in Algeria blamed on Islamic extremists, newspapers here reported today, reports AFP.

The papers said 25 villagers, including two women and six children, had their throats cut at Salsaf, a village near Mascara, around 400 kilometres (240 miles) southwest of the capital.

According to the reports, an Islamic commando attack the mosque during evening prayers and hacked 14 worshippers to death, also seriously injuring the imam.

They then set upon homes in the villages, breaking down the doors and killing 11 more.

Nine died at Oued-sly near Chlef, 200 kilometres southwest of Algiers, as well as a woman and her two children at Hassi Bahbah, 200 kilometres south of the capital.

Meanwhile two people were killed in a bomb blast at Sabra near Tlemcen, in the far west of the country.

All the attacks took place overnight Saturday.

In one piece of good news however, the press reported that six shepherders abducted near Tlemcen by an extremist group last week had been released and were well. Media reports had given them up for dead.

doors and killing 11 more.

Nine died at Oued-sly near Chlef, 200 kilometres southwest of Algiers, as well as a woman and her two children at Hassi Bahbah, 200 kilometres south of the capital.

Meanwhile two people were killed in a bomb blast at Sabra near Tlemcen, in the far west of the country.

All the attacks took place overnight Saturday.

In one piece of good news however, the press reported that six shepherders abducted near Tlemcen by an extremist group last week had been released and were well. Media reports had given them up for dead.

# China isolating Taiwan by making ties with SA

CAPE TOWN, Dec 29: China's foreign minister began a visit to South Africa on Sunday to establish diplomatic relations — and score a major victory in his country's efforts to isolate Taiwan, reports AP.

South Africa has substantially downgraded its ties with Taiwan in order to formalise relations with China, a major trading partner.

China refuses to recognise those nations maintaining ties with what it regards as a break-away province — so Taiwan loses the largest and most influential country of the 30 that maintained relations.

"The Chinese people rejoice at the birth of the new South Africa and stand ready to continue to support the South African people in their effort to build up the nation and develop the economy," Qian Qichen said at Cape Town airport.

Qian, who is also China's vice premier, was met at Cape

Town airport by South Africa's foreign minister, Alfred Nzo. He is to meet President Nelson Mandela on Monday and visit Robben Island, where Mandela spent many of his 27 years imprisoned by the former apartheid regime.

Taiwan and the apartheid-era government maintained close ties as they both became increasingly isolated, and China supported Mandela's African National Congress during the struggle. The ANC has governed the country since 1994's first all-race elections.

"The Chinese people forged a profound friendship of comrades in arms with the South African people during their protracted and arduous struggle for racial equality," Qian said.

Qian and Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo are to sign an agreement establishing diplomatic relations on Tuesday in Pretoria.

# Mexico massacre Indian refugees flee homes fearing fresh onslaught

POLHO, Mexico, Dec 29: Several thousand Indian refugees fled their homes and huddled around this southern Mexican village on Sunday, fearing fresh attacks from armed paramilitaries, reports Reuters.

Frightened Tzotzil Indians from the heart of southern Chiapas state, often barefoot and in traditional dress, have been running en masse from their villages since gunmen massacred 45 unarmed refugees on Monday.

"The paramilitaries are still armed in our communities, we left because we are afraid that they will kill us like they did the others," said Manuel Perez, a 28-year-old refugee who fled his village with his wife and three children.

# US blamed for shortfall Iraq to reduce food rations next month

BAGHDAD, Dec 29: Iraq announced on Sunday it was cutting food rations to its people, saying it had not received sufficient supplies under its oil deal with the United Nations and blaming Washington for the shortfall, reports Reuters.

Rations for rice, wheat, flour, sugar will be kept unchanged but the amount of other essentials such as baby milk, cooking oil, tea and detergents handed out to Iraqis at give-away prices will be below quantities the government had earlier distributed under the oil deal.

The Iraqi news agency INA said the cut in milk powder was because the American representative at the UN sanctions committee refused to register a contract with a Tunisian company to bring baby milk to Iraq.

Foodstuffs are in short supply in Iraq since UN trade sanctions imposed on Baghdad for invading Kuwait in 1990 blocked oil exports, its main source of foreign currency.

Baghdad started exporting oil in December last year under the oil-for-food agreement, but while the oil exports have gone on smoothly, food and medicine have not been reaching the country on time.

INA said each Iraqi child would receive 1,800 grams (four lb) of powdered milk a month, instead of the 2,700-gram (six-lb) ration of the recent months.

AP adds: In Washington, White House spokesman PJ Crowley said he was unaware of Iraq's specific complaint. But noted the United States was the original sponsor of the oil-sales programme.

# Off the Record

**English by birth, but Irish at heart**

NEW YORK: Oscar winner Daniel Day-Lewis isn't truly an Irishman, he just plays one on screen — again and again and again, reports AP.

Day-Lewis, who has starred as Irish characters in "My Left Foot" and "In the Name of the Father," plays a former Irish Republican Army soldier seeking peace in "The Boxer," due out in the United States this week.

"I am English and I was raised in England, but I'm very proud of whatever part of me is Irish," Day-Lewis says in Sunday's New York Post.

The actor who won an Academy Award as best actor for "My Left Foot" actually lives in Ireland part-time, maintaining homes in Dublin and New York.

"People who are Anglo-Irish and English, people living in Ireland over the years, have become acutely aware of the role the British have played and want to do something to redress the balance," Day-Lewis said.

That's one reason he played an IRA sympathiser in his latest film and "In the Name of the Father."

"Ireland's history with Britain is not taught in the British educational system, and when I learned it I was astonished and so ashamed," Day-Lewis said.

# The Sphinx is free after 7 years

CAIRO: The Sphinx is finally free of the scaffolding that caged the 4,600-year-old limestone monument during seven years of painstaking restoration work, reports AP.

The restoration work which started in 1990 ended on December 12 and two days ago the scaffolding came down. Ahmad al-Haggag, director of antiquities for the pyramids region on the outskirts of Cairo, said on Saturday.

One hundred thousand stones were used between 1990 and 1997 to restore the Sphinx. Haggag said, adding that experts left the damaged face of the half-lion half-man colossus untouched.

A star-studded ceremony is planned for early 1998 to celebrate the end of the restoration work ahead of the statue's 4,600th birthday in March, he said.

Known in Arabic as Abu al-Hol (the father of terror), Egypt's most famous monument along with the three pyramids of Giza which it guards was cut in limestone and stands 20 metres tall and 57 metres long.

Restoration of the Sphinx, which has suffered from erosion and damage through underground water, was carried out by Egyptian experts in line with recommendations by the California-based Paul Getty Institute.

The Sphinx, erected during the fourth dynasty from 2620-2500 BC, represents King Khephren and originally wore a royal headpiece bearing a cobra and a false beard, a sign of virility among the pharaohs and gods.

Two legends have grown up around the disappearance of the features.

According to one, Napoleon Bonaparte ordered his army to bombard the imposing statue which he regarded as a challenge to his might during a French expedition to Egypt from 1798 to 1801.

Bonaparte succeeded in destroying the nose and beard, and legend has it his subsequent downfall was due to the curse of the Sphinx.

The other story claims that a Muslim in the Fatimid era of 969-1071 believed the Sphinx represented a pagan cult denounced by Islam and attacked the nose and beard with an axe.



# BRIEFLY

**Kenyans vote for new president:** President Daniel Arap Moi is counting on Kenyans' fear of the violence that has swept through neighbouring countries as he seeks a fifth, five-year term in elections, AP reports from Nairobi.

In a final campaign message, the 73-year-old urged voters to go to the polls Monday "with sober reflection that will ensure continued peace and stability for our country." Apart from tribal ties that are crucial in most African elections, the ruling Kenya African National Union was expected to attract support through Moi's campaign themes of stability and continuity in a region plagued by civil wars and genocide.

**Zhirinovskiy meets Gaddafi:** Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of Russia's extreme-right Liberal Democratic Party met Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi in Tripoli Sunday. Libyan television reported, AFP says from Tripoli.

Zhirinovskiy praised Gaddafi who greeted him in a tent in the Libyan desert, according to television pictures. State-controlled television said the two had discussed "ways of developing relations between Libya and Russia" adding that the Russian ultranationalist had expressed his party's "solidarity with and support for Libya against all the challenges it meets."

**Climber feared dead in Himalayas:** A Nepalese army re-cue helicopter searched the 8,091-metre Mt. Annapurna in the Himalayas on Monday for a well known Russian mountaineer who was buried and presumed killed on Christmas Day by an avalanche, AP reports from Kathmandu.

Nepal's Tourism Ministry said Sunday that Anatoly Bukreyev, 39, a professional mountain guide living in Kazakhstan, was ascending the peak with an Italian climber when the avalanche struck. "Anatoly Bukreyev is lost on the mountain and feared dead," the ministry said. The Italian climber, Simone Moro, who survived the avalanche which struck at 5,900 metres, joined the helicopter pilot in the search for Bukreyev. Moro was treated for unspecified injuries in a Kathmandu hospital for two days.

**US actor Denver Pyle dead:** Actor Denver Pyle has died after a protracted battle with cancer, according to press reports Sunday, AFP says from Los Angeles.

The Colorado-born actor, who died after a Burbank hospital Thursday was a fixture on US television with his most noted role in the appearing dramatic series "Dukes of Hazzard" from 1979-1985. Pyle also appeared in numerous movies, including "Alamo" in 1960, "Bonnie and Clyde" in 1967 and "Maverick" in 1994. He is survived by his wife Tippy and two sons.

**2 killed in Brazil jail riot:** A prisoner and a hostage died in one of two riots at high-security prisons in southeast Brazil Sunday, bringing to ten the death toll in recent unrest in the country's prisons, AFP reports from Brasilia.

One inmate and a visitor who had been taken hostage were killed during a revolt in the courtyard of the high-security Sorocaba prison near Sao Paulo, officials said.

**4 drug smugglers held in UK:** Three Turks and a Czech were arrested Sunday after the seizure of 70 kilos (154 pounds) of heroin in a Czech-registered van, British customs officials said, AFP reports from London.

The drugs, with an estimated street value of 5.5 million pounds (nine million dollars), were seized after the van arrived in London from Turkey via the channel port of Ramsgate.



Taliban fighters with their multiple rocket launcher on the front-line north of Kabul on Sunday, as the first snow of the season falls. The front-line was quiet Sunday, with no fighting reported between the Taliban and their opposition.

— AP/UNB photo

# Egyptian court upholds ban on female circumcision

CAIRO, Dec 29: An Egyptian appeals court on Sunday upheld a regulation preventing government-certified doctors and health workers from performing female circumcisions, reports AP.

The decision ends a long battle between Islamic fundamentalists who support circumcision — known by opponents as genital mutilation — and human rights and women's groups.

The Supreme Administrative Court said it upheld the ban because Islam does not demand the operation, thus making its performance subject to Egyptian law.

"With this ruling it has become prohibited for all to perform the operation of female circumcision, even with the consent of the girl or her guardians," the court said.

# She won't do that

NEW YORK: French actress Julie Delpy is a loner rebelling against what she calls "a couple's world," reports AP.

"Too many women throw themselves into romance because they're afraid of being single, then start making compromises and losing their identity," Delpy says in the Sunday New York Post. "I won't do that."

The definitely single blond beauty began her film career at age 14, working with famed French director Jean-Luc Godard in "Detective." Subsequent credits include "Killing Zoe," "Europa, Europa," "Voyager" and "Before Sunrise."

She can be seen now in the horror movie "An American Werewolf in Paris," a new genre for the actress more used to art movies and love stories.

"I also refuse to be put in a corner," Delpy said. "I'd never done a scary movie and decided to give it a try."

# Democratic exercise in India a big threat to environment

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: The world's largest democratic exercise is also a big environmental threat, reports India Abroad News Service.

Come elections, Indian cities and villages are splashed and littered with posters and flyers as politicians criss-cross the nation in smoke-spewing vehicles wooing people for votes.

Paper and plastic sales go up substantially in an election year. Walls are defaced with political graffiti and posters while raucous politicians shatter decibel limits with their impassioned speeches.

Next year's election is not generally welcome. Being dubbed by the Press as an "election that nobody wants," but paper and plastic manufacturers won't be caught complaining.

Though things are not as rosy for them as they used to be before the days of former Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan, who imposed strict re-

strictions on election expenditure, an additional demand for about 20,000 tonnes of paper is expected next year. That means added earnings of about Rs. 640 million (\$16.8 million) for the paper industry.

While the government spends money on ballot papers, which in some places are larger than broadsheet newspapers to accommodate hundreds of candidates with their election symbols, politicians spend millions of rupees on publicity material.

The government of the western state of Gujarat has already placed an order for 300 tonnes of paper with the Indian Paper Makers' Association. Going by that, the association expects a nationwide government demand of about 10,000 tonnes, N.C. Gupta, general manager operations of the J.K. Corp. told India Abroad News Service.

Politicians, the association expects, will create a demand for another 10,000 tonnes for

their personal campaigns and in all the earnings for the paper industry would be in the range of Rs. 40 million. But Gupta, whose firm is a member of the paper makers' association, said that 20,000 tonnes of paper "is peanuts, it is nothing." He said political parties have become more "cautious" in their election spending in the post-Seshan period.

He conceded that about six years ago the extra demand created by elections was a substantial 10 to 12 per cent as the usual national consumption was about 40,000-45,000 tonnes per annum. "That as a percentage meant something for the industry," Gupta said. But now India uses an average of three million tonnes of paper annually and 20,000 tonnes is not that large a chunk.

The Election Commission has now proposed that the limit of Rs. 450,000 (about \$11,000) for each contestant's campaign

be raised as there were widespread complaints that the stipulation was "impractical." The new limit has not yet been announced.

But the paper industry does not expect a steep rise in demand. Though a raise in expenditure might lead to more paper being bought, the Commission has also said that it would strive to eliminate "non-serious candidates." In last year's general election voters in Tamil Nadu's Modakuruchi constituency were handed a thick booklet as there were some 1,000 candidates in the fray after farmers in the area contested en masse to protest non-implementation of irrigation projects.

Environmental activist Iqbal Malik, who heads the non-governmental agency Vatavaran (environment), said last year's election led to the use of 800,000 tonnes of paper and 400,000 tonnes of plastic, practically all of which contributed

to swelling garbage instead of being sent for recycling. So the election created 1.2 million tonnes of garbage, according to a study by Malik.

The consequences of such widespread use of paper — that too the non-recycled variety — become evident from the fact that 250 trees are cut to make one tonne of paper, she told IANS.

About 50 per cent of the plastic used — in the shape of publicity buttons, food packaging, spoons and glasses for the thousands of political workers — was collected by ragpickers, many of them known to wash disposed plastic plates and glasses and sell them to small food vendors, the study found.

Some 50,000 vehicles, most of which have inefficient diesel-driven engines, are pressed into service for electioneering these days, Malik said. This means that interior regions, not usually polluted, become polluted during elec-

tions," she said.

The Election Commission had last year decreed that megaphones and loudspeakers could be used only between 6.00 a.m. and 10.00 p.m., but noise levels were not considerably reduced. In urban areas, which have "no buffer zones in the shape of trees or open spaces," there was "an almost constant" sound level of about 90 decibels while in the villages it was about 60-75 decibels, Malik said. The internationally acceptable level ranges from 45-50 decibels.

So, as the wheels for the next election are set in motion, activists are hoping that politicians would give the environment a thought. As Malik put it: "I am not saying that elections should not be held. What I am saying is that the Election Commission and politicians should think about more judicious use of paper, plastics and polluting vehicles."