

Opposition's 9 options to Yeltsin's choice

Russian president, parliament seek compromise as crisis mounts

MOSCOW, Sept 5: Opposition leaders said Saturday they had as many as nine alternatives to Boris Yeltsin's choice for prime minister, including several top Soviet-era bureaucrats, reports AP.

Zyuganov told The Associated Press on Saturday. "We will state our opinion of the real situation. Because he rarely meets (with lawmakers) he doesn't know the situation. He is not governing."

He has been locked in a standoff with parliament since, while the economy deteriorates daily. The leader of the Communist-allied Agrarian Party said the opposition candidates include Vladimir Gerashchenko, whose favourite response to economic problems as Central bank chairman in the Soviet era was to print more money, and Yuri Maslyukov, former head of the Soviet State Planning agency.

Under the constitution, Yeltsin has three chances to propose a prime ministerial candidate, either the same person or different people. If the Duma votes no three times, the president can disband the legislature and call new elections. Chernomyrdin's position was strengthened Friday when the Federation Council passed a non-binding motion 91-17 expressing confidence in him.

BSF arrests 2 top ranking militants in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Sept 5: In a prize catch, BSF Friday, arrested two top ranking militants of pro-Pakistan militant outfits who were evading arrest for the last nine years, reports PTI. Hilal Ahmad alias Douda, a self styled sector commander of Islamic Front and Imtiyaz Ahmad Khan alias Tariq Hussain and Coka' self styled deputy chief of Al-Umer Commando, were arrested from Karrfalli Mohalla and Khankath Moulla in Srinagar, a BSF spokesman said.



A view of destruction on Friday at the camp, near Khost in Afghanistan. US Forces fired several missiles on August 20 on alleged terrorist camps in Afghanistan claiming those were run by Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden who according to the US was involved in the bombing of its embassies in east Africa. —AP/UNB photo

Former regional leaders propose new forum for Asia

MANILA, Sept 5: Former Philippine President Fidel Ramos, former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke and former Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa held talks in Manila this week and proposed a new Asian forum to help the region solve its problems, reports AP.

A press statement issued Saturday following the meeting by the three former leaders said they had agreed that "it is important to address the need to establish a new regional focal centre."

Mandela denounces US sanctions against Cuba

PAARL, South Africa, Sept 5: President Nelson Mandela denounced US sanctions against Cuba before bestowing South Africa's highest civilian order for foreigners on Cuban President Fidel Castro here Friday, reports AP.

Mandela who has long been at odds with the United States over his friendship with Castro said South Africa, is proud to be amongst the majority of nations who affirm the right of the Cuban people to determine their own destiny.

He added "sanctions which punish them for having decided to do so are anathema to the international order to which we aspire."

Mandela gave Castro, who is on a two-day state visit to South Africa after attending the Non-Aligned Movement summit which ended in Durban on Friday, the Order of Good Hope Class One Grand Class in thanks for Cuba's support for the struggle against apartheid.

Thousands pray for Mother Teresa on her 1st death anniversary

CALCUTTA, Sept 5: Housewives, beggars and schoolchildren were among thousands of people who joined nuns of the Missionaries of Charity to pray for the extraordinary Mother Teresa of Calcutta on her first death anniversary on Saturday, reports AP.

At a special early morning mass at Mother House, the headquarters of Mother Teresa's charity, priests from different churches in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta conducted prayers and read passages from the bible.

Father Francis Gomes from the nearby St. Xavier's church led the mass and offered holy communion to all the nuns and Catholics present.

"Her lovable memory which guided us to the path of god is still fresh in our hearts. Today we all assemble here to commemorate the first anniversary of her death that touched millions of hearts," he said.

Since dawn on Saturday, hundreds of visitors queued at the tomb of Mother Teresa to pay their respects to the nun who, during her lifetime, became famous as 'Saint of the Gutter' for her work among India's poorest people.

Nuns of her charity organisation stood near her tomb, decorated simply with white roses and marigold flowers, as admirers filed by and laid bouquets of flowers at the foot of her grave.

Dozens of Mother Teresa's admirers said her presence could still be felt.

"Today is a great day as mother has gone home to god and she is resting there. She is very powerful with god to intercede for us, pray for us and bless us," Sister Nirmala said to the Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs and members of India's other religious minorities who had gathered there.



The full figure bronze statue of Mother Teresa being off-loaded at the residence of artist Gautam Pal in Salt Lake, Calcutta, Friday. The artist will place the statue in his courtyard to pay homage to mother Teresa on her first death anniversary on Saturday. Earlier, the statue has been scheduled to be erected at a prominent place in Calcutta. It has been postponed mainly under objection of the Missionaries of Charity. —AP/UNB photo

US House leaders will meet to talk impeachment process of Clinton

WASHINGTON, Sept 5: US House of Representatives leaders will meet on Wednesday to make preparations for handling independent counsel Kenneth Starr's report on President Bill Clinton and discuss the process of impeachment, House leadership aides said on Friday, reports Reuters.

House speaker Newt Gingrich, republican of Georgia, his second-in-command majority leader Dick Armye of Texas and house majority leader Richard Gephardt, a Missouri democrat, will be briefed by house judiciary committee chairman Henry Hyde, republican of Illinois, whose panel would be in charge of any impeachment hearings.

As he winds down the seven-month sex and lies investigation, Starr's office is expected to work through the weekend to try to finish the impeachment report. If the final report on the investigation into Clinton's sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky outlines impeachable offences, it will be up to the republican-dominated house to decide whether to trigger impeachment proceedings.

In anticipation of Starr's report, Gephardt told Gingrich of his concerns that the preparations so far by the house to deal with Starr's findings had excluded democrats.

Clinton ends Europe tour

LIMERICK, Ireland, Sept 5: US President Bill Clinton is winding up a six-day European trip with Irish applause ringing in his ears but the lengthening shadow of his relationship with Monica Lewinsky awaiting him back home, reports AP.

Clinton's role in pushing Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland toward a peaceful accommodation has earned him plaudits in Ireland. He missed Friday in a speech at a Gateway computer facility in Dublin that he wished he could get other warring groups to take heed.

"It's a step forward not only for Irish people but for all people divided everywhere who are seeking new ways to think about old problems," he declared.

The president was returning to the theme that peace inspires economic success in a speech here Saturday. Afterward, he was getting a chance to relax by playing golf at Ballybunion before returning to Washington.

Clinton however has a more difficult scenario facing him at home. One of his closest political friends, Sen. Joseph

Blast kills 13 in Dagestan

MAKHACHKALA, Russia, Sept 5: A car bomb probably caused the explosion that killed at least 13 people, including two children, and gouged a five-metre crater in street in the capital of a restive southern Russian region, officials said on Saturday, reports AP.

At least 80 people were injured in the Friday night explosion and more than half remained in hospitals, according to the press office of the regional administration of Dagestan.

The Emergency Situations Ministry initially said the explosion was caused by an artillery shell fired from an eastern suburb of the Dagestan capital of Makhachkala.

But the local administration said on Saturday that shards of glass and metal fragments found in the bodies suggested a car bomb.

Dagestan has been wracked by violence and kidnappings in recent months as various religious and ethnic groups battle for power.

It was a satellite, not missile: DPRK South Korea condemns North's missile capability

SOUL, Sept 5: South Korea said on Saturday it doesn't matter whether North Korea launched a ballistic missile or a satellite, its communist neighbour is a threat either way, reports AP.

After a meeting of the National Security Council, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying Seoul has been unable to confirm North Korea's claim that Monday's launch was a scientific satellite.

US and Japanese officials had described it as a two-stage ballistic missile that soared across northern Japan before dropping into the Pacific Ocean.

But the Russian Service for the Monitoring of Space Objects said it had confirmed that North Korea had launched a satellite, the Itar-Tass news agency reported from Moscow.

Itar-Tass quoted an unidentified official of the service as saying the satellite was circling the earth every two hours and

45 minutes in a high, elliptical orbit.

"Whether it's a satellite or a missile, it shows North Korea has acquired an ability to deliver a missile. This is a serious security threat to the region," Lee Ho-jin said.

Military officials and scientists in the region scrambled on Saturday to try to verify or dismiss the North Korean claim that it used a three-stage rocket to launch a satellite broadcasting patriotic songs.

State-run press slates opposition in Myanmar

YANGON, Sept 5: As one college campus remains closed on Saturday for fear of student unrest, the state-run press accused the pro-democratic opposition of demanding the impossible in a bid to destabilise the country, reports AP.

The commentary, which also took note of Southeast Asia's economic turmoil, comes at a time when the military government is facing increasing challenges.

The World Bank on Friday announced that Myanmar — also known as Burma — would be ineligible for new loans from the international lending body because of a failure to pay old debts. The move doesn't affect any existing World Bank programmes for Myanmar, but it sends a signal around the world that the country is a bad credit risk.

The World Bank's last project in Myanmar closed in 1995, after the agency gave Myanmar its last loan in 1987. After that, the macroeconomic environment became so severe that the bank felt it was unable to operate in Myanmar.

The commentary in Saturday's state-run newspapers said that while economies in Southeast Asia are in turmoil and countries around the world are facing economic crisis, the Myanmar government has tried hard to overcome difficulties within its capacity.



Moshin Shaikh, second from left, displays his painting of Princess Diana in New Delhi Friday. The image on the right is of Diana as a Sister of Charity nun. The anniversary of the death of Mother Teresa, who died within a week of Princess Diana, was observed Saturday. Shaikh said he painted these to remind people of Princess Diana's charitable work. —AP/UNB photo

Israeli planes raid hideouts in Lebanon

Israeli warplanes raided suspected guerrilla hideouts in southern Lebanon on Saturday, Lebanese security officials said. AP reports from Nabatiyeh, Lebanon.

Two fighter jets fired two air-to-surface missiles at the hills of Mazraat Iqmeta and Milta in the Iqlim al Tuffah province, a Hezbollah stronghold that faces an Israeli-occupied border enclave in south Lebanon, the officials said, speaking on customary condition of anonymity.

Black smoke billowed from the targeted area, but there were no immediate reports of casualties. Iqlim al Tuffah, a frequent target of Israeli warplanes, is used by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrilla group as a base for attacks on Israeli troops and their allied Lebanese militiamen in the occupied zone.

Chinese dissident jailed

A court in Shaanxi province has sentenced a democracy activist who tried to run in a local legislative election to prison, a human rights group said yesterday, AP says from Beijing.

The Hanzhong District Intermediate Court in Shaanxi province, in northern China, told Zhao Changming's brother and sister he had been sentenced, but refused to tell them the length of the sentence, when it was handed down or the crime for which he was convicted.

Hanoi, Bangkok to sign visa deal

Vietnam and Thailand are expected to sign an agreement on visa exemptions in October, Saturday's Tuoi Tre newspaper quoted a Thai diplomat as saying, AP reports from Hanoi.

Teerade Kersuwan, counsellor of the Thai Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh city, said the agreement will take effect 30-45 days after it is signed and that Thailand will be the first ASEAN country to exempt visas for Vietnamese visitors.

'Iranian incursion into Afghanistan imminent'

WASHINGTON, Sept 5: US intelligence analysts have warned the Pentagon and the White House that Iran is poised to send thousands of troops and dozens of attack aircraft into Afghanistan and that an incursion is "imminent," the Washington Post reported today, say Reuters.

Quoting senior defence and administration officials, the newspaper said that in the past week under the guise of a military exercise, Iran sent about 35,000 troops, 25 attack aircraft, 80 T-72 tanks, two SA-6 mobile missile batteries, 90 heavy artillery pieces and 60 armoured vehicles to its north-eastern border with Afghanistan.

The troop movement coincides with escalating tensions between the two countries, fuelled by reports that Taliban guards killed 10 diplomats in the Iranian consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif, a city in northern Afghanistan, according to the Post.

Any fighting that breaks out between Iran and Afghanistan could be long and bloody because neither side possesses a definitive military advantage.

DPRK parliament may abolish post of president

SEOUL, Sept 5: North Korea's newly-elected parliament convened Saturday amid signs the communist state may not elect a president, either abolishing the post or leaving it vacant permanently, reports AP.

The Supreme People's Assembly had been widely expected to elect Kim Jong Il, North Korea's undisputed leader for four years, as state president.

The African statesman's reference to the Kashmir issue at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Durban should not be seen as inconsistent with the principles on which the 112 nation forum conducts its business, Gujral insisted.

"I do not think it smacks of advocating any third party intervention. He has only contended that the issue should be sorted out through peaceful negotiation," he said. "Since when have we felt that the word 'Kashmir' should not be mentioned? As a matter of fact, the Home Minister (L.K. Advani) himself has correlated the (nuclear) bomb with Kashmir," Gujral said.

He complained that the government was keeping the opposition in the dark about the on-going New Delhi-Washington nuclear talks. "I notice that (U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Strobe) Talbott and (Indian Prime Minister's special envoy) Jaswant Singh have met four times, but the government has not conveyed the content of the talks to us."

He also thinks the government "overreacted" to South African President Nelson Mandela's remarks on Kashmir and has cautioned against making "hasty" inferences about the state of New Delhi-Pretoria relations.

Gujral denied that Mandela was advocating mediation in the India-Pakistan dispute in urging developing nations to "lend all the strength we have" to finding a solution to the India-Pakistan dispute.

It would be "immature diplomacy if we overreact," said Gujral, pointing out that Mandela's remarks had been pulled out of the context in which they were made. "I have seen the full text of Mandela's speech. I think it has to be read in full. It

is a statement of a very tall statesman of the world who has tried to look at the world situation with compassion and concern for peace," he said.

In his inaugural speech at the opening ceremony of the 12th NAM summit, Mandela said: "All of us remain concerned that the issue of Jammu and Kashmir should be solved through peaceful negotiations and should be willing to lend all the strength we have to the resolution of this matter."

Gujral quoted extensively from Mandela's speech which, he said, showed the African leader's commitment to the "twin issues of peace and development." Mandela referred to these as the "central point" of NAM. As current NAM leader, South Africa "has every reason to hope that the objectives of NAM will be fulfilled," the former prime minister said.

While looking at the world situation, he has identified various areas where the situation is cause for concern, be it Congo, Lesotho, Angola or Sudan. He also talks about Cuba and tension in Korea," Gujral said. It was "in this stride" that Mandela expressed concern about Kashmir, he added.

"India-South Africa relations are very abiding and very valuable. I think it will be a very hasty conclusion to either understate or overstate our friendship with South Africa," he said.

Gujral said he was "encouraged" to learn from news reports from Durban that India and Pakistan had sorted out differences over resuming their dialogue. "It is important for both sides to keep engaged in a dialogue...now that both have nuclear deterrents the question of any armed conflict should be ruled out," he said.

He advised the government to initiate action to "repair the damage" to Sino-Indian ties caused by statements made by government leaders after the nuclear tests. The former prime minister, who was foreign minister during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War, however, praised the initiative taken by the Vajpayee government to restore ties with Baghdad.

Sihanouk opens talks aimed at ending political crisis

SIEM REAP, Cambodia, Sept 5: Talks aimed at ending Cambodia's current political crisis opened on Saturday morning under the aegis of King Norodom Sihanouk at his palace in the northwestern province of Siem Reap, reports AP.

The meeting — held just a short distance from the famous temples of Angkor Wat — is chaired by the king and brings together representatives from three rival political parties, the election committee, and the country's highest appeals body.

The aim of the planned three-day meeting is to help ease political tensions which have been mounting in Phnom Penh since July 26 parliamentary elections, the 75-year-old monarch said in a statement.

Those tensions have edged into violence which it is feared may increase. Cambodian leader Hun Sen's ruling party won a slight ma-

majority in the polls, but not the two-thirds needed to form a government on his own.

The leading opposition party, FUNCINPEC, and its ally the Sam Rainsy Party — which together won 58 of 122 seats in the National Assembly — have accused Hun Sen of cheating to ensure victory at the polls.

They have threatened to boycott the new National Assembly if their allegations of fraud — dismissed as baseless by election authorities loyal to Hun Sen — are not properly investigated.

Sihanouk said Saturday he wants to find out what concessions rival parties are willing to make so that "calm" can return to Phnom Penh, a new National Assembly can convene and a new government can form.