

Pinochet would rather die than face trial in Spain

LONDON, Nov 30: Gen Augusto Pinochet has told his family that he would rather die than stand trial in Spain before flying to Spain.

Meanwhile, many remain skeptical about Chilean claims that the former dictator might be tried at home if Britain frees him.

"He would rather kill himself or be killed by his guards than face the humiliation and indignity of being sent to face trial in Spain," Pinochet's nephew Rafael Pinochet Saverio was quoted as saying in Monday editions of the tabloid, *The Mirror*.

The general's wife, Lucia, told the tabloid that Pinochet was "very weak and depressed about his position."

Pinochet, 83, who is sought by Spanish authorities for crimes allegedly committed by his secret police during his 17-year rule, remains under police guard at a London hospital, where he is recovering from back surgery.

Chilean officials have stepped up their lobbying campaign to have Pinochet released to face Justice in his own country. Chilean Foreign Minister

Jose Miguel Insulza, who is currently in London, was expected to meet with Defence Secretary George Robertson on Monday, before flying to Spain.

Fourteen lawsuits brought by families of those disappeared or tortured during Pinochet's reign are pending in Chile. But despite government efforts to highlight these, chances of trying Pinochet remain doubtful, experts said.

Earlier this month, the supreme court turned down a government request to name a more senior judge to handle the case.

Pinochet granted himself immunity while in power, and also has immunity as a senator-for-life. An all-party parliamentary committee of 150 British lawmakers, mostly from Straw's own Labour Party, issued a statement to the home secretary calling a Chilean trial for Pinochet unlikely, the independent newspaper reported in Monday's editions.

"Claims have been made that General Pinochet would face prosecution if he were allowed to return to Chile," the newspaper quoted from the Lawmakers' statement. "These cases stand no chance of success given the constitutional blocks provided by the amnesty laws."

International

Possibility of snap polls dismissed

BJP govt won't quit

NEW DELHI, Nov 30: India's Hindu nationalist-led ruling coalition today said it would not quit despite a stinging rout in key state elections, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) said its debacle in the polls last week was not a mandate against the eight-month-old national government.

"There is no question of resigning," BJP spokesman Krishan Lal Sharma told AFP, after a belligerent opposition insisted that the prime minister step down.

"How can the opposition make such a demand?" asked Sharma. "It has never happened before, these were state elections and the verdict was not against the central government."

But the Hindu nationalists continued to be on the defensive after losing control of New Delhi city and Rajasthan state to the Congress Party and failing to wrest the vast Congress-ruled state of Madhya Pradesh in the country's heart.

The humiliating defeats, which surprised most pundits, overshadowed a Congress defeat

to regional groups in the tiny northeastern state of Mizoram.

Vajpeyi looked despondent at a party meeting Sunday but put up a brave face and vowed to keep his fractious 14-party alliance together.

The opposition was, however, expected to keep up demands for the Vajpeyi government to go when a badly split parliament opens here today for its winter session.

The BJP also dismissed the possibility of snap polls, saying the government would complete its five-year term.

"Neither the Congress nor the others are in a position to provide a viable alternative government," Sharma said.

And no one is prepared for fresh elections.

"Moreover, all our allies have expressed solidarity with the BJP, none has thought of withdrawing support."

Vajpeyi, the most popular Hindu nationalist politician, took office in March at the head of a multi-party coalition which has been wracked by infighting.

The defeat in the November 25 elections for local governments in the traditional Hindu-nationalist bastions of New

Delhi and Rajasthan as well as Madhya Pradesh is seen as a major blow.

The Congress, India's main opposition party led by Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, on Sunday announced it had no intention of toppling Vajpeyi immediately but pledged to keep up pressure on him.

"We are not going to work overtime for the fall of the government," said Congress veteran Arjun Singh after a late Sunday meeting of party leaders.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party was routed by the main opposition Congress Party in elections in three states last week. The Samajwadi Party supports Congress.

The shouting began shortly after the session opened Monday morning when Congress leader Sharad Pawar rose to speak on rising food prices, which have been blamed for the BJP's defeat. The house was adjourned until the afternoon.

Opposition bedlam adjourns Indian parliament

NEW DELHI, Nov 30: Members of a small opposition group kept up such steady chant of anti-government slogans when India's parliament opened for the winter session Monday that the house had to be adjourned for several hours, reports AFP.

"You have no right to rule! You have been wiped out in the elections!" shouted members of the Samajwadi Party who rushed out of their seats and surrounded the speaker's chair.

The party has 17 seats in the 425-strong lower house of parliament.

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Leader of National Conference killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Nov 30: A National Conference leader has been shot dead by militants in Rajori district even as security forces killed four ultras in separate encounters in the Kashmir valley since Saturday, reports PTI.

A group of militants gunned down NC leader Mohammad Shahid at his residence at Palini village of Budhal Tehsil Saturday, reports from Jammu said.

Meanwhile six people, including four ultras, were killed in Kashmir valley, an official spokesman said in Srinagar.

Two foreign mercenaries were killed in exchange of fire with security personnel at Handwara area of Kupwara district in north Kashmir yesterday, he said.

Ultras shot dead a forest official, Ghulam Nasir Sheikh, at Wantapora-Handwara yesterday, he said, adding the motive behind the killing was not known.

Hariri declines to form cabinet

BEIRUT, Nov 30: Prime Minister Rafik Hariri has declined an informal invitation from Lebanon's new president to form the next government, sparking a political crisis in this country as it rebuilds from its devastating civil war, reports AP.

Sources close to the prime minister, whose cabinet has been in caretaker capacity since last Tuesday's swearing in of Emile Lahoud as president, said Hariri turned down the invitation from Lahoud to select a new cabinet.

There has been no formal announcement from Lahoud reappointing Hariri as prime minister.

Although Hariri's move could be a bargaining tactic, since he remains the frontrunner for the premiership, the apparent tension between the two powerful men could affect Lebanon's economic stability as it recovers from the 1975-90 civil war.

13 journalists killed in 1998 worldwide : RSF

WASHINGTON, Nov 30 : Thirteen journalists were killed worldwide in 1998 and nearly 100 others remain in prison in 25 countries because they refused to submit to censorship or reported embarrassing facts, a reporters' group said on Sunday. Reuters says from Washington.

Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), an international group working to defend press freedom worldwide, denounced attacks on journalists and said it would continue to seek the release of journalists who remained imprisoned.

The group said Mexico and Colombia were the most dangerous countries for journalists. For instance, two journalists were assassinated in Mexico within one week just last month.

Africa also lagged behind in the field of press freedom, RSF said, citing 10 countries where press freedoms were repeatedly violated, including Eritrea, Tunisia, Cameroon, Angola and Ethiopia.

Off the Record



Russian couturier Valentin Udashkin, centre, grimaces as he joins his models after the show at the Haute Couture Fashion Week in Moscow on Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

Vietnam's old people too old fashioned

HANOI: Vietnam's war-time generation needs to lighten up on public displays of affection by young couples, an official newspaper said, reports Reuters.

The *Tien Phong* (Vanguard) weekend newspaper in an edition seen today said it was ironic older people were concerned about kissing in public and yet unfazed by the widespread habit among adults of urinating in the streets.

Across Vietnam men and sometimes the occasional woman have no hesitation in using the nearest wall or gutter for convenience.

"It's time for the older people to have more tolerance and less prejudice about the youth. It is ironic that people say it is awful to kiss in public when men are unashamed to urinate in the streets," *Tien Phong* said.

In a country that knew only war and hunger for decades until the late 1980s, many urban teenagers have dumped the traditional conservative values of their parents and embraced consumerism and fun.

Public displays of affection are common with young couples draped over each other as they cruise city streets on motorbikes.

Psycho....in colour

NEW YORK: Director Gus Van Sant is tired of people saying his new film, "Psycho," is just another lame Hollywood remake, reports AP.

"It's an anti-remake film," Van Sant says in the Dec. 7 issue of *Newsweek*, which hits newsstands Monday. "Why do people take films that are really well done and change the dialogue and change the shots and call it the same movie? I don't have much faith in Hollywood's ability to do remakes. There's a remake culture."

Van Sant's "Psycho" is more tribute than remake, since he made the thriller the same as Alfred Hitchcock's original, copying it nearly shot for shot and using mostly the same dialogue. The only thing different is that his is in colour. It opens Friday.

"I wasn't really aware that I had crossed some bounds," Van Sant said. "Why are they asking why? For me there are many, many reasons: The biggest reason of all is that nobody's ever done it."

The famous like British schools for their kids

LONDON: Michael Jackson wants to send his 21-month-old son, Prince, to an expensive British boarding school when he reaches high school age, *The Sunday Telegraph* reported, reports AP.

The pop singer has sent a representative to inspect Stowe and to inquire about booking a place for the boy at the private school in Buckinghamshire, about 80 kilometres northwest of London, the newspaper said.

The best-known past pupil of Stowe — which costs nearly 25,000 a year — is Richard Branson, the flamboyant tycoon.

The school declined to comment. But approval came from another past pupil, Lord McAlpine, whose family made a fortune out of construction and who is a former treasurer of Britain's Conservative Party.

"All (Stowe) old boys are individuals and it's just the place for someone slightly eccentric, as I imagine this boy will be," said McAlpine.

British newspapers reported recently that another American pop superstar, Madonna, is also considering sending her daughter to an English boarding school, Cheltenham Ladies' College.

Gaddafi on Lockerbie suspects

No trial unless UK,US lift their conditions

LONDON, Nov 30 : Libyan leader Colonel Moamer Gaddafi has said the trial of the two Lockerbie plane bombing suspects cannot go ahead unless the United States and Britain lift their conditions, and they drafted the procedure organising this, he alleged.

The two countries drafted a bilateral resolution which they had imposed on the Security Council without consulting Libya, due to their wish not to see the trial held in the first place.

They have undermined the initiative to hold the trial by making conditions, and you know that Libya has paid a price for rejecting these conditions," Gaddafi said.

"We challenge America and Britain not to set preconditions which are bound to be rejected, for holding the Lockerbie trial.

Iraq's bid to build illegal missiles still on, says CNN report

ATLANTA, Nov 30: Despite years of claims it has ended all programmes to build weapons of mass destruction, Iraq made a bid to acquire prohibited missile technology last May, CNN reported, says AP.

In its programme *NewsStand*, produced with *Time* magazine, CNN said Sunday evening that Iraqi missile experts, escorted by Iraqi secret police, went to the Romanian capital Bucharest to negotiate the purchase of guidance equipment for long-range missiles.

Iraq is required to eliminate its long-range missiles and chemical, biological and nuclear weapons under resolutions by the UN Security Council.

According to the programme transcript, the Iraq purchase in

Bucharest was blocked because spy agencies from the United States, Romania and Israel uncovered the potential deal and monitored the Iraq's two-week visit.

"We had the goods on the Iraqis.... We caught them red-handed," Ritter told *NewsStand*.

CNN said Romania's government cooperated in the spying operation.

Iraq refused to comment on the reports until after Sunday's broadcast, CNN said.

NewsStand also noted the UN Security Council, which set up the arms inspection programme, was never officially informed of the spy operation in Bucharest that was approved by Richard Butler, the chief UN arms inspector.

They die amid exciting moments of victory

BHOPAL, Nov 30: Two newly-elected members to the Madhya Pradesh assembly passed away within hours of hearing about their victories, reports PTI.

The nascent MLAs, who died amid the exciting moments of their victory, are Shiv Kumar Singh and Dr Ramesh.

Shiv Kumar won as an independent from Burhanpur in Khandwa district, while Dr Ramesh won on the BJP ticket from Khallari in Raipur district.

Singh, a former Congress MP, died of brain haemorrhage in Burhanpur last morning where he had reached by a train from Khandwa to take his winner's certificate.

Dr Ramesh died last night at Khallari in Raipur district.

With the deaths of these two members, the effective strength of the Madhya Pradesh assembly has been reduced from 320 to 318.

'Allegations of false evidence'

Anwar's trial resumes

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 30: His separate trial on a charge of possessing 125 bullets.

"A man's life — or for that matter his freedom — is not a tool for a prosecution agency to use as a bargaining chip," Nalla's lawyer Manjeet Singh Dillon wrote in a letter to the Attorney General attached to the affidavit.

Manjeet described the alleged moves by the prosecution as "blackmail and extortion of the highest culpability."

Nalla's lawyers last week alleged "bad faith" on the part of the Attorney-General in charging Nalla under the ISA and sought to put the two prosecutors in the witness stand.

Manjeet himself planned to appear as a witness as well but the court decided Friday to postpone the hearing to January 25.

In the affidavit filed Saturday, Anwar said the continued presence of the two prosecutors in his trial was not in the best interests of justice.

Opposition backs LTTE offer of talks with Lankan govt

COLOMBO, Nov 30: Sri Lanka's main opposition party today firmly backed peace talks offered by separatist Tamil rebels and said the government had no alternative to end the bloodshed which has already claimed more than 55,000 lives, reports AFP.

The opposition United National Party (UNP), which holds the balance of power in parliament, described the latest offer by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a significant development.

Former prime minister and opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose support is crucial to implement through parliament any deal to forge peace with the Tigers, said he saw the latest Tiger peace offer as positive.

"I would call this a very significant and a more positive development," Wickremesinghe said referring to a key brokered bi-partisan deal between him and President

Chandrika Kumaratunga.

That agreement, hammered out with the involvement of former British Foreign Office Minister Liam Fox, was to allow talks between the government and the LTTE.

The opposition had to agree that if returned to power they would fully honour any deal the government struck with the rebels. Wickremesinghe said the government had failed to make use of the deal.

Moderate Tamil parties have also urged the government to seize the latest Tiger overtures and open talks without pre-conditions. The Tiger leader, who is also Sri Lanka's most wanted man, made it clear he was making the talks offer from a position of strength.

Rebel radio said for the first time that the separatists had acquired aircraft. Prabhakaran also noted they captured a