

# Quake shakes Kuomintang's 50-year grip on power

TAIPEI, Sept 27: Taiwan's biggest ever earthquake Monday to have shaken the ruling Kuomintang's 50-year hold on power six months ahead of presidential elections, reports AFP.

The island has experienced an almost unprecedented tide of outspoken anger against the government party for what is widely perceived as slow, badly coordinated and insufficient rescue and relief efforts.

Much popular anger has found expression in Taiwan's domestic media.

On Monday, a survey by cable television station TVBS found 55 percent of those 1,155 ques-

tions were unhappy with the government's rescue and relief efforts.

The day before the China Times headlined its coverage: "We would have starved to death if we'd waited for government aid."

Readers' letters have also been full of vitriol. Professor Yeh Hsin-cheng, whose National Chi-Nan University was badly damaged, wrote of government action moving at a "snail's pace" with "unbelievably low" efficiency in the United Daily News.

On Monday parliamentarians warned the anger might be reflected in March's presiden-

tial elections, which will decide who succeeds President Lee.

"The KMT (Kuomintang) would be dumped if the elections were held today or next week," Lai Shih-pao, a parliamentarian with the opposition right-wing New Party, told AFP.

KMT MP Lee Shang-ren also admitted: "The public might use their ballots to vent their anger if the rehabilitation is not handled carefully in the next few months."

Government ministers, including Lee himself, have faced frequent public harangues from hostile crowds of homeless refugees as they tour disaster areas.

**Resolve river dispute: Vajpayee**

NEW DELHI, Sept 27: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has convened a meeting of officials here on Wednesday to resolve a bitter river dispute between two southern states, officials said Monday, reports AFP.

The meeting is to be attended by the chief ministers of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka states, which are locked in a long-standing row over the waters of the Cauvery river.

Tamil Nadu, a state of some 60 million people in the southern tip of India, is seeking the immediate release of 30 million cubic feet of river water from Karnataka's storage dams. The Tamil Nadu authorities claim that rice crops in the state are withering because of water

shortage.

Karnataka, where Cauvery -- a holy river for millions of Hindus -- has its origins, has refused, saying a shortfall in monsoon rains has led to an acute water shortage for its own farmers.

The wrangling over the river water has embarrassed Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party, which had been claiming a river accord between the two states last year as one of its major achievements.

The Cauvery flows from Karnataka into adjoining Tamil Nadu, and is the prime source of irrigation for Tamil Nadu's sprawling rice-growing areas.

Top officials from both the states held emergency talks last

week to resolve the row, but failed. The premier then said he would take off his election campaign to attend Wednesday's meeting.

Vajpayee's BJP party is allied to the ruling parties in both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and had used the Cauvery accord of last year as a key scoring point ahead of recent elections in the two states.

The river dispute led to rioting in Karnataka in 1991, resulting in police firing which killed 13 demonstrators opposed to sharing its waters with Tamil Nadu.

India's main opposition Congress party said the only answer to the row was to evolve a nationwide river-sharing policy.

East Timor was "still Indonesian sovereign territory" and it had been agreed by the United Nations and international community that Indonesia maintains security responsibility for the province

of Trincomalee, 260 km northeast of here, for repairs.

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Officials said they believed four rebel boats were hit by the navy and at least one guerrilla may have died in the fighting.

The navy spokesman said gunboats had later escorted the Chinese ship to the port of Trincomalee, 260 km northeast of here, for repairs.

Members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked the 14,000-tonne M.V. Yugti early Sunday but the 32-member crew were unhurt and rescued by four navy gunboats sent to the area, officials said.

"At least a dozen boats of the LTTE had approached the ship and they engaged the navy gun boats which went to the rescue," a navy official said, adding that two naval craft were damaged in the exchange of fire.

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