

Quake shakes Kuomintang's 50-year grip on power

TAIPEI, Sept 27: Taiwan's biggest ever earthquake appeared 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-

tioned 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-

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

Hearing on Pinochet's extradition begins

LONDON, Sept 27: Extradition proceedings against the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet began Monday in London on charges of torture during his military rule, reports AFP.

The 83-year-old, who is under house arrest, was not at Bow Street court in central London for the start of hearings, which are expected to last for five days.

Pinochet faces extradition to Spain on charges of torture during the last two years of his dictatorship, which lasted from when he took power in a coup in 1973 to handing over to a civilian government in 1990.

Blast in fireworks storehouse kills 56 in Mexico

CELAYA, Mexico Sept 27: At least 56 people were killed and another 348 injured Sunday in a series of blasts that started at an illegal fireworks storehouse in Celaya, 300 km north of the Mexican capital, officials said, reports AFP.

The death toll was likely to rise further as people were feared trapped below the rubble, said Francisco Aguilar, a spokesman for the state of Guanajuato.

Even as rescuers were arriving on the scene within 15 minutes of the explosion, a fire triggered by the blast caused another major explosion, as a gas tank blew up at a nearby building, turning the neighbourhood into a fiery inferno.

The first explosion took place at 11:30 a.m. (10:30 p.m. BST) at an illegal fireworks storehouse in the backroom of a candy store located on a busy street opposite a bus stop. The blast destroyed 25 food stalls.

Mubarak wins 94 per cent of vote: Minister

CAIRO, Sept 27: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak won 93.79 per cent of valid votes cast in a referendum to give him another six years in power, Interior Minister Habib al-Adli told state television today, reports Reuters.

Adli, speaking after visiting Mubarak to tell him the result of Sunday's poll, said he would announce detailed results later.

State-owned Al-Ahram newspaper reported earlier that more than 90 per cent of the country's 24 million voters had turned out to endorse Mubarak, the only candidate.

Brazil trembles after 1,100 kids flee packed jails

SAO PAULO, Sept 27: Hundreds of juvenile delinquents have escaped from detention centres in Sao Paulo over the past 15 days, unleashing a wave of violent crime that has frightened residents of Brazil's industrial heartland, reports Reuters.

In just over two weeks, 1,100 youths have escaped from two notoriously violent detention centres in the city, and as of Sunday fewer than 500 had been captured, authorities said.

Police in Sao Paulo, South America's biggest city, are beefing up troops to grapple with what has been described as the biggest series of youth jailbreaks in history.

"Crime is increasing. The police are on 24-hour alert and riot troops near the prison have been reinforced," police spokes-

man Paulo Panaotes said.

"These adolescents are robbing cars, supermarkets. They are kidnapping people to get money ... They have also killed," he added.

One 16-year-old identified by the initials E.J.A.L. fled a detention centre last week and allegedly killed a man in front of his six children and a teenage girl while on a rampage to find those who helped lock him up, authorities said.

Lawmakers and public defenders say the rash of breakouts and violence was a predictable result of torture and inhumane treatment at the detention centres, which have been accused of turning petty thieves into hardened criminals.

Weeks before the mass

International Peacekeepers take control of E Timor

DILI, East Timor, Sept 27: International peacekeepers assumed control of East Timor Monday as the Indonesian army beat an ignominious retreat after failing to prevent a wave of violence following the territory's vote for independence, reports AFP.

But the two sides presented conflicting accounts of the current security status in the former Portuguese territory invaded by Indonesia in 1975.

Indonesian martial law commander Major General Kiki Syahnakri said he had passed control of security to Major General Peter Cosgrove, commander of the International Force in East Timor (Interfet) shortly after 9:15 a.m. (7:15 am BST).

"This morning the ceremony was held for the formal handover of security control from TNI (Indonesian armed forces) to Interfet," Syahnakri told a news conference.

Syahnakri said he expected to leave the territory later Monday, as would an Indonesian naval ship loaded with departing troops.

But Cosgrove later denied Indonesia had handed over total security control.

"Indonesia retains security control for the province," he told reporters.

Indonesian troops have largely withdrawn but there remains, as there should remain, a security presence," Cosgrove said.

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

until at some stage, I guess, the MPR will make a decision and a new arrangement will be entered into."

He was referring to the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) which is due to meet in November to ratify the four-to-one vote in favour of independence in the August 30 UN-sponsored ballot.

The Indonesian army has left behind two battalions, or about 1,500 men, who will retain some security responsibilities until the vote is ratified.

Interfet said among the facilities still under Indonesian control were government departments, the airport and telecommunications.

Asked how he felt about leaving, a departure marking the withdrawal of the occupying force that invaded East Timor, Syahnakri replied: "Of course as a soldier personally I'm a little bit disappointed."

"But I have loyalty, obedience and discipline to these decisions made by the international community and the Indonesian government. I further expect that the resolution of the problems in East Timor will be running smoothly, peacefully and democratically."

The withdrawal of Indonesia's forces has been anything but peaceful. They have burned their barracks and other buildings behind them as they pulled out, and attempted to provoke Interfet troops by firing shots into the air as they sped out of Dili.

Sections of the Indonesian armed forces backed the anti-independence militias who laid waste to East Timor and scattered its 800,000 people into the interior and into Indonesian

West Timor.

The United States Sunday insisted Indonesia end the collaboration between the army and militias.

HR groups, exiles demand inquiry into abuses

Exiles and pressure groups accused the United Nations of wasting valuable time Monday over setting up a probe into atrocities in East Timor as evidence mounted of widespread human rights abuses.

East Timor resistance leaders and Amnesty International said the UN should immediately form a commission to look into crimes against humanity blamed on pro-Jakarta militias and Indonesian troops in the former Portuguese enclave.

Militias remain defiant in W Timor refugee camps

Obviously at home, if not in control, armed pro-Jakarta militiamen in the makeshift refugee centres in this West Timor town bordering East Timor remain defiant.

They say they are ready to return to fight to reclaim their homeland from independence supporters and "foreign" forces, and are just awaiting the order.

"I am not afraid to go to war against the UN forces, I am now awaiting a command to reclaim East Timor," Leopoldo Pinto, a member of the feared Besi Merah Putih (Red and White Iron) militia from the East Timorese town of Liquisa.

Speaking to visiting journalists at the Tenubuto camp near Atambua, Pinto said the order he was waiting for should come from the commander of the pro-Indonesian militias, Joao Tavares.



The scorched remains where huts once stood dot the landscape in the Ermera district of East Timor, 50 km south of the capital Dili Monday after pro-Jakarta militia razed the area recently. A group of European Community Humanitarian Organisation (ECHO) observers flew in a helicopter over the devastated region, to find many deserted villages and towns destroyed by fire.—AFP photo

LTTE attacks Chinese ship off Lanka

COLOMBO, Sept 27: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger tried to seize a Chinese cargo vessel off the northeastern coast after opening fire but fled following a battle with navy gunboats, military officials here said Monday, reports AFP.

Members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked the 14,000-tonne M.V. Yugi 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 gunboats which went to the rescue," a navy official said, adding that two naval craft were damaged in the exchange of fire.

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.

The vessel carrying fertiliser to a South Indian port was taking in water after being hit by rocket propelled grenades fired by the Tigers, the navy said.

In July, the Tiger rebels were accused of using a suicide bomber to destroy a passenger ferry, Newco Endeavour, berthed at a port of Trincomalee, killing one crewman.

In September 1997, the LTTE claimed the sinking of another Chinese ship, the MV Cordiality, after killing 15 Sri Lankan soldiers who were guarding it near Pulmoddai, north of Trincomalee.

The Tiger guerrillas have repeatedly warned that merchant shipping operating in waters

Taliban lodge protest with UN over Afghan seat

KABUL, Sept 27: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Monday lodged a strong protest with the United Nations over the world body's continued recognition of the ousted government of former president Burhanuddin Rabbani, officials said, reports AFP.

The Taliban's foreign ministry summoned a senior UN official, Jolyon Leslie, and handed over the protest note, they said.

The note, released here officially, accused the UN of adopting a "double-faced policy" about the recognition of the Afghan government.

Calling for the ousted regime to vacate the Afghan seat, it urged the UN to "recognise the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as a legal government."

The foreign ministry also

blamed some "enemy countries" for trying to isolate the Taliban government. It did not name the countries.

The militia controlling most of Afghanistan has so far only been recognised by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Rabbani, who was ousted by the Taliban from Kabul three years ago, still holds Afghanistan's UN seat and his representatives were also running a number of Afghan diplomatic missions abroad.

A representative of the ousted government is currently attending the UN General Assembly sessions in New York.

The foreign ministry alleged that during Rabbani's rule, the country had been divided into 16 individual "kingdoms".

Palestinians accuse Israeli army of confiscating huge WB area

HEBRON, West Bank, Sept 27: Palestinians in the south of the West Bank said on Sunday that they had received orders from the Israeli army confiscating massive areas of land for a military training area, reports AFP.

Isa Awad, the mayor of Iznat village which lies between Hebron and the Green Line that divides Israel from the West Bank, said the army had issued orders confiscating some 1,000 hectares (2,470 acres) belonging to members of his village on September 5 — just after the

Sharm el-Sheikh peace deal was signed.

The Israeli army said in response to AFP's inquiry into the matter that the orders issued were a direct result of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement and that they do not affect the land rights of Palestinian inhabitants.

"There is nothing in these orders that affects the land rights of Palestinian inhabitants, the purpose of the orders is to limit access to areas where the army is conducting training with live ammunition," an

army spokesman said.

"All the orders that were issued are in area C," the army said referring to the area that under the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian Oslo accord and the 1998 Wye agreement is to remain under Israeli control.

Some 95 hectares (235 acres) of the land falls within that part of the West Bank over which Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority exercises civilian control, he added.

Villagers from nearby Beit Awla had also received orders

Movie stars light up a dull Indian polls

NEW DELHI, Sept 27: A glittering array of film and television actors, former movie stars and screen villains have added some shine to the lacklustre Indian elections, which enter their fourth and final week Monday, reports AFP.

Some notable names from India's "Bollywood" film industry actually contested seats, while others were simply roped in as campaign crowd pullers for local candidates.

For a weary electorate facing its third election in little more than three years, the stars brought some much-needed glamour to a drab campaign and a marathon voting process, staggered over an entire month.

India's film industry is the largest in the world, churning out more than 300 feature films a year, and its stars enjoy a level of adulation only rivalled by that heaped on the national cricket team.

In the current elections, the divide between the screen and reality has, in certain cases, been somewhat blurred.

Nitish Bhardwaj, famous for his role as the Hindu god of creation, Krishna, in the television epic Mahabharat, stood as a candidate for the Hindu nationalist BJP party in India's largest state, Madhya Pradesh.

Bhardwaj spent most of his campaign roaming his constituency dressed as Krishna, holding a flute in his hand and weighing himself on giant scales against pots of butter — for which Krishna had a great weakness.

BJP spokesman J.P. Mathur admits that Bhardwaj is trading on his television persona, but sees no cause for complaint.

Other former film stars running in the election include Sunil Dutt — an opposition Congress party candidate in the centre of the Hindi film industry, Bombay — and Shatrughan Sinha, a BJP candidate in the eastern state of Bihar.

Many stars — or more often starlets — are simply drafted in by parties to attract the crowds at election rallies.

Dilip Kumar, a film veteran of four decades' standing, addressed Congress rallies in New Delhi, while actresses Pooja Bhatt and Deepika Bhatnagar have let their glamour rub off on several BJP candidates.

10,000 Chechens flee as raid on in Grozny

GROZNY, Russia, Sept 27: Russian warplanes returned to the skies over Grozny on Monday to bomb the capital of the breakaway Chechen republic for the fifth straight day, amid a burgeoning refugee problem, reports AFP.

Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev said after a meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin that the air assault would continue until "the last bandit is destroyed" in Chechnya, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

He made no mention of a widely-reported plan for a Russian ground invasion of a republic that was the site of a bloody 1994-96 war which killed 80,000 people and left Chechnya with de facto independence.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin made a relatively rare

appearance in his Kremlin office on Monday to consult with Putin over the crisis. The Kremlin press service refused to divulge any details of that meeting.

Media reports and eyewitnesses said the bombings have prompted a flood of Chechens to drop their belongings and flee into portions of southern Russia.

Tens of thousands of Chechen refugees are amassed at the rebel republic's border with southern Russia, a situation that authorities said had turned into a "humanitarian catastrophe," NTV television reported on Monday.

Reports said that more than 10,000 Chechens had fled the targeted areas and were now pouring into the neighbouring Russian republic of Ingushetia.

'Einstein had illegitimate daughter'

NEW YORK, Sept 27: A new book claims that Albert Einstein's illegitimate daughter was born severely retarded, possibly with Down syndrome, and died at 21 months after a bout with Scarlet fever, reports AP.

When the first volume of Einstein's collected papers was released in 1987, it showed that he had had an affair while at university with a fellow student named Mileva Maric, who later became pregnant and gave birth to a child at her parent's home in rural Serbia.

The baby, a daughter named Lieserl, was born severely retarded, possibly with Down syndrome, according to a new book, "Einstein's Daughter: The Search for Lieserl," by Michelle Zackheim. Time magazine reported in its current issue.



Russian soldiers try to extinguish the fire after the crash of military transport helicopter with shells, cartridges and other ammunition in the Botlikh region in Dagestan Sunday. No one was injured in the accident. — AFP photo

Up to 500 killed in Basra revolt: Iraqi opposition

DUBAI, Sept 27: Up to 500 people died during an anti-government revolt in the southern Iraqi city of Basra in March, including dozens of civilians who were executed by firing squad, an opposition group said Monday, reports AFP.

The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), in a statement received here, said it compiled the death toll for the March 17-20 unrest and the repression which followed from "reliable sources in Basra."

Dozens of Basra residents were executed at the end of March and buried in a mass grave in the Zubair area, some 20 km from Basra, said the ICP, which is based in Kurdish-held northern Iraq.

It said the victims, mostly young, were executed for their suspected involvement in the

unrest, in the presence of President Saddam Hussein's cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid, the south's military commander.

"Family members of security men killed in the heroic revolt were brought to the scene. Each was handed a machine gun, and they were told to avenge their dead by firing at the youths and men lined up before them."

The ICP, listing 21 of those it said had been executed, said their homes were demolished and their families, including women and children, rounded up. "The fate of these innocent detainees is still unknown," it said.

An Iraqi official acknowledged in May that unrest broke out in the mainly Shiite Moslem port city of Basra in mid-March and accused Iran of instigating the troubles.