

Islamic scholar appointed to Pak advisory council

ISLAMABAD, Nov 16: Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf today added a prominent Islamic scholar to his top advisory council, reports AFP.

The National Security Council, which now has eight members including Musharraf himself, is intended to advise the general on policy.

Mehmood Ghazi, a judge and religious scholar, was sworn in by President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar in a simple ceremony at the presidential palace.

Ghazi, a judge on the Sharia, or Islamic law, bench of the Supreme Court, said his appointment signalled the military regime wanted to implement Islam in everyday life.

He said the government would make Pakistan a progressive Islamic welfare state.

This will be our desire that Pakistan may serve as a model in the Islamic world," he told the official Associated Press of Pakistan.

The council now has five civilian members as well as the heads of the navy and air force, and is led by Musharraf, who was head of the army before he seized power in a coup last month.

Musharraf has also set up a 10-strong cabinet of technocrats to formulate policy.

Strike paralyses life in Kathmandu

KATHMANDU, Nov 16: Police detained at least 150 supporters of a communist party who were enforcing a general strike on Tuesday to protest increase in fuel prices, organisers said, reports AP.

The Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Nepal, the second largest leftist group in Nepal, called for the strike in Kathmandu Valley to protest the government's decision to hike diesel and kerosene prices last month.

The party's central committee member Yamal Kadel said at least 150 of their supporters were arrested by police while taking out demonstrations in Kathmandu.

Police even forced into our office and arrested some of our supporters," Kadel said. Police did not comment on the report.

Schools and businesses remained closed in Kathmandu, the Nepalese capital and most vehicles and public transport remained off the road. Government offices, however, were open.

'Human error' caused Tokaimura N-disaster

VIENNA, Nov 16: Japan's worst nuclear accident was caused by a combination of human error and serious breaches of safety principles but did not result in major radioactive contamination, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Monday, reports AP.

The agency's conclusions were contained in a preliminary report on the September 30 nuclear accident at Tokaimura that left three Japanese nuclear plant workers severely injured and at least 66 other people exposed to significant radiation from the uncontrolled chain reaction accident. Thousands of people were forced indoors or evacuated.

The reaction was not brought under control for 17 hours, but radiation levels away from the plant building remained extremely small — significantly lower than originally feared.

Referendum in Aceh in 7 months: Wahid

TOKYO, Nov 16: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid said today he plans to have a referendum on the future status of the turmoil-struck province of Aceh in seven months, reports AFP.

"In general, the plan now is to have the referendum in Aceh six months after the ending of the current situation and that will take one month," he told a news conference.

"So all in all (the referendum will be held) seven months from now," the president said, adding that it was important to allow the people of Aceh to express their own beliefs.

Demands for self-determination in Aceh have mounted since the fall of former president Suharto who ruled with an iron fist for 32 years until he resigned in May last year.

But whether the referendum would be on independence or some form of autonomy was uncertain.

"As for the referendum of Aceh, I think that you know the decision on the type of referendum will have to wait for the... people themselves, not the government," said Wahid at the end

of a two-day visit to Japan.

Aceh, a staunchly Muslim region of some four million people, has been wracked by violence involving soldiers, civilians, and separatist rebels in the past months.

The discontent has led to the rising calls for a referendum and some one million people held a massive rally in the Aceh capital of Banda Aceh last week to press for an self-determination ballot.

But "despite all the protests, the statements made on the international press, I don't care about that because they don't have any voice in Aceh," said Wahid.

While the media said two million people demonstrated, in fact there were only 500,000, the president said, and some were "induced by fear to endorse the idea of the referendum."

"This is mad. How can you establish democracy by being undemocratic?"

Aceh referendum activist Muhammad Nazar this week rejected three options for a referendum put forward by Wahid — total autonomy, a three to one share of local revenues or a spe-

cial status.

The option of independence was imperative and could not be bargained away, he said.

Indonesian soldiers have been accused of widespread human rights violations during a decade of harsh anti-rebel military operations in the province that ended last year.

Aceh rebels want independence, not referendum

The separatist movement in the restive Indonesian province of Aceh said today it wanted independence not a referendum offered by Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid.

"Referendum is not our business. Our only goal is independence," Abu Hadi, a spokesman for the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) told AFP by phone from Pidie district's main town of Sigli.

"We don't believe in the government of Java. We don't want to deal with them," Hadi said, commenting on a statement by Wahid in Tokyo earlier Tuesday saying he hoped to hold a self-determination vote in Aceh in seven months.



Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga (2nd L) is mobbed by supporters in Colombo yesterday shortly after handing in her nominations to contest the December 21 presidential elections. Kumaratunga said she was seeking re-election to establish peace in the country. — AFP photo

Indian state minister sacked for being 'under age'

NEW DELHI, Nov 16: A minister in the eastern Indian state of Bihar was sacked today for allegedly lying about his age when he bagged the job six months ago, the United News of India (UNI) reported, says AFP.

Bihar Governor Suraj Bhan dismissed Horticulture minister Samrat Chaudhary, saying he was not 25 years of age — the legal requirement for becoming a minister in India.

The governor said Chaudhary had produced a fake birth certificate when he was made a minister.

Chaudhary produced his horoscope to claim he was 31 years of age after the local election commission began investigating charges that he was barely 20 years of age.

Three days ago, the minister threatened to go to court if he was sacked.

Tuesday was Chaudhary's birthday, and he had invited the governor to a birthday party. But the governor sacked him instead.

Clinton visits quake-hit areas in Turkey

IZMIT, Turkey, Nov 16: US President Bill Clinton travelled to northwestern Turkey today to visit a makeshift village of tents set up by US rescue workers after a massive earthquake ravaged area in August, reports AFP.

Clinton, accompanied by First Lady Hillary Clinton and their daughter Chelsea, was to visit the camp at Dogukisla, near Izmit, which was devastated in August by a violent quake that killed nearly 20,000 people.

Last week, another quake, measuring 7.2 on the open-ended Richter scale, jolted northwestern Turkey again — in the area around Bolu — and has so far claimed more than 500 lives, the government said.

Exceptional security measures were put in place around Dogukisla for the US leader's visit, with more than 1,500 police officers from neighboring provinces mobilized, Anatolia news agency reported.

The camp's several hundred tents house some 6,000 quake survivors. US emergency workers built about 400 of them.

Clinton arrived late Sunday in Ankara for a three-day state visit to Turkey.

He was to head Thursday to Istanbul, where he will join other world leaders at a two-day summit of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Pakistan calls for \$20 m Islamic science fund

ISLAMABAD, Nov 16: Pakistan on Monday launched a formal appeal to the Islamic world to set up a 20-million-dollar fund to help Muslim countries develop science and technology, reports AFP.

The idea was mooted last year and Pakistan has already contributed one million dollars but the response from the member states of the 56-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) "has not been encouraging," Pakistan's President Mohammed Rafiq Tarar said.

'Jonas Savimbi killed or captured'

LUANDA, Nov 16: Angola's army chief has said die-hard rebel leader Jonas Savimbi has been located inside the war-torn southern African nation and could be captured, or killed, the government press reported today, reports AFP.

"We know very well where he is," army chief of staff General Joao Baptista de Matos said, according to reports. "We've got him under surveillance and we're harassing him. We're going to capture him or liquidate him."

The Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) on September 14 launched a mass offensive against Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), 10 months after the failure of the last UN-mediated peace pact.

Nurse sentenced to 360 years in jail for killing six patients

BRAZIL, Indiana, Nov 16: Former male nurse Orville Lynn Majors was sentenced to 360 years in prison Monday for the "evil" and "diabolical" murders of six hospital patients, reports AFP.

"It's the judgement of this court that the maximum sentence is the minimum sentence in this case," said Judge Ernest Yelton.

Relatives of the victims sobbed as the judge finished reading out the sentence, the maximum the court could give.

"May God have mercy on you when it comes your time to die," said Kathryn Maxwell, widow of victim Derek Maxwell.

Majors showed no emotion as Yelton handed down six consecutive 40-year sentences for each of the lethal injection deaths, plus 20 more years on each count for aggravating circumstances such as his victims' frailty.

The 38-year-old former nurse was convicted in October of six of seven counts of murdering patients by lethal injection at Vermillion County Hospital between 1993 and 1995.

Lankan presidential race off to violent start

COLOMBO, Nov 16: Gunmen opened fire at an opposition office in the Sri Lankan capital today shortly before a record 13 candidates signed up for next month's presidential elections with pleas for a peaceful vote, reports AFP.

The attackers wounded three activists at a branch of the opposition United National Party (UNP), a short distance away from the tightly-guarded Election Commissioner's office where nominations were handed in, police said.

"Forty two rounds were fired at our office," UNP legislator Ravi Karunanayake said, while accusing the ruling People's Alliance (PA) of carrying out the pre-dawn attack.

Elections chief T.M. Dassanayake urged candidates

to back efforts to ensure peaceful polling. "I seek the cooperation of all parties to conduct the election successfully," Dassanayake said.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is seeking re-election on a PA ticket, also called for peace as did by her main rival, Ranil Wickremesinghe who leads the UNP.

"We want to complete the work we have started... we want to establish peace," Kumaratunga said after handing in her nomination papers. "We ask everyone to support the government to hold a peaceful election."

Wickremesinghe expressed confidence of winning the December 21 poll and demanded the government ensure it was conducted without violence.

"On the 21st of December I will take this country to the 21st century," Wickremesinghe said. "We have seen enough violence. It is time to say enough is enough. We appeal to all for a peaceful election."

Wickremesinghe's posters and huge cardboard cut-outs were defaced and torn down and many of his supporters threatened while decorating streets with the green flags of the UNP, party activists said.

A government minister, Alavi Moulana, said his supporters too had been beaten up by opposition supporters over the weekend.

Heavily armed police guarded the elections office while the main approach roads to the venue were closed to traffic.

UN team in Kabul to seek safety pledges

KABUL, Nov 16: A senior United Nations delegation arrived in Kabul today to secure safety guarantees from the ruling Taliban regime after attacks on the organisation's offices in several days of demonstrations, reports AFP.

Erick de Mul, UN coordinator for Afghanistan, said he would meet senior figures in the Taliban, the Islamic fundamentalists who control most of the country.

"I have come to establish contacts with the authorities," he told AFP at Kabul airport.

"We hope that things will calm down now," he said, before he was driven away, escorted by armed Taliban soldiers.

Several UN buildings across Afghanistan have been pelted with stones and one office in Fahir, in the south, was torched by angry crowds on Monday.

Thousands of protesters have been demonstrating against UN sanctions imposed on Sunday because the Taliban refused to hand over indicted terrorist Osama bin Laden.



An Indian schoolgirl displays a placard during an anti-feticide demonstration at New Delhi's India Gate yesterday. — AFP photo

Strike cripples Tripura

GUWAHATI, India, Nov 16: A strike to protest the massacre of 18 people by suspected tribal guerrillas crippled the far-eastern Indian state of Tripura today, reports AFP.

The shutdown was called by both Tripura's ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) as well as the opposition following the killings on Sunday.

A police spokesman in the state capital Agartala told AFP by telephone that all shops, businesses, schools and financial establishments remained closed, with no traffic on the roads.

"The strike is total, and it's as if Tripura were cut off from the rest of India," the spokesman said.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar told AFP that the state authorities needed more federal help in dealing with separatist insurgents in the region.

Russia accuses West of hypocrisy over Chechnya

LONDON, Nov 16: Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov warned in an article published today that pressure from the West over Moscow's war in the breakaway republic of Chechnya could undermine this week's OSCE summit in Istanbul, reports AFP.

"In the light of the campaign launched in the NATO states, people in Moscow are starting to doubt whether NATO is really prepared to comply with the documents that are to be signed in Istanbul," Ivanov said in an opinion piece published in the Financial Times.

The summit Thursday and Friday of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe is due to examine a new security charter for the 21st century and sign a revised version of the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty.

But the issue of Chechnya, where Moscow has been waging a bloody military campaign since September aimed at wiping out Islamic rebels, is expected to dominate much of the summit debate.

"If some of our partners are not prepared to take into account Russia's opinion on those problems that are of vital importance to us, then perhaps it would be better to take one's time and wait, as we say in Russia, for better times," he wrote.

Ivanov accused NATO states of using Russia's attempts to stifle "terrorists" in Chechnya to artificially inflame the atmosphere surrounding the Istanbul summit.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin also lashed out at the West on Monday.

Ex-SS officer gets life term: A military tribunal in the northern Italian city of Turin on Monday sentenced a 90-year-old former German SS officer to life in prison for war crimes, reports AFP.

Siegfried Engel, who lives in the northern German city of Hamburg, was tried in absentia.

He was accused of responsibility for the unlawful killing of partisans and political prisoners in northern Italy during World War II. The prosecution said Engel was responsible for the execution of 147 prisoners captured in April 1944, and the massacre of 59 political prisoners in May, 1944.

Thai FM to visit Myanmar: Thailand's Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan said Tuesday he would visit Myanmar within a week to try to soothe strained relations before the ASEAN summit in Manila, AFP reports from Bangkok.

"I have confirmed with the Myanmar ambassador that I will definitely go to Myanmar and it is likely that it will be before November 25," he told reporters. Surin hinted that Thailand would ask military rulers in Yangon to reopen border checkpoints clamped shut after a siege at Myanmar's embassy in Bangkok on October 1.

Protestants back compromise to implement peace deal

BELFAST, Nov 16: David Trimble, leader of Northern Ireland's main Protestant party, today urged still-sceptical party members to back a compromise to implement the peace deal, reports AFP.

In a public statement, he said "there is now a chance to create a genuine partnership between unionists and nationalists in a 'novel' form of government."

Trimble, who leads the Ulster Unionists (UUP), said the way was clear for establishing a devolved government if the Irish Republican Army appoints an interlocutor to discuss disarmament and, with Sinn Fein, publicly renounces violence.

"In our view, a genuine and meaningful response is forthcoming to Monday's statement from the Independent International Commis-

Cong, White House reach deal on paying UN dues

WASHINGTON, Nov 16: The US Congress and the White House on Monday reached a "tentative agreement" on paying more than one billion dollars in back dues to the United Nations, reports AFP.

But the deal could force President Bill Clinton into making a difficult compromise on abortion.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced the agreement Monday while accompanying Clinton on a visit to Turkey.

The United States is the largest contributor to the United Nations but also its largest debtor, owing 1.7 billion dollars, according to UN figures. Washington puts the amount at closer to one billion dollars.

Albright cautioned that at this point "final agreement has not yet been reached."

"It is essential that fully adequate provisions be included for international debt relief, and that the payment of our UN obligations not be subjected to unreasonable conditions," she said.

The deal, agreed to late Sunday and still being hashed out, would resolve a long-standing impasse over UN funding of international groups that provide abortions or lobby for abortion rights.

While Clinton supports abortion programs, Republicans in Congress overwhelmingly oppose them.

In Congress, Republican Representative Richard Armey cautioned that "nothing is settled." The Republicans continue to review the matter, he said.

Democrats in Congress were also wary about any agreement.

Cuban govt, dissidents both seek focus at Ibero-American summit

HAVANA, Nov 16: President Fidel Castro and Spain's King Juan Carlos have set the tone for a summit here, with one raising his glass to Cuba's struggle against US aggression and the other toasting democracy, reports AFP.

The biggest giant human eyes have ever seen has not been able to defeat (the Cuban people) through dirty wars, mercenary invasions, embargoes or massive measures to spread calamities and lies," Castro said Monday in a reference to the United States.

The bearded communist leader, clad in a sober grey suit rather than his trademark military uniform, made the remarks at a dinner he hosted for participants in Tuesday's summit that brings together the leaders of Spain, Portugal and

Europe to enjoy shower of shooting stars

PARIS, Nov 16: Europe will get a spectacular display of shooting stars this week as the Earth passes through the tail of a comet, transforming its dusty wake into a fiery shower of meteorites that will streak across the sky, reports AFP.

The meteorites, an annual event eagerly awaited by amateur astronomers, are called Leonids, as they seemed to ancient astronomers to radiate from the constellation of Leo.

Europe, North Africa and western Asia are best placed for enjoying the show, which will peak Wednesday night for several hours from about 0200 GMT, astronomers say.

"It's marginal as to whether the meteor activity will reach

storm level in 1999, but however strong it turns out to be, European longitudes are ideally placed for observing the outburst," said David Asher of Britain's Armagh observatory.

The Leonids are caused when the Earth passes through dust and small pebbles in the wake of the Comet Tempel-Tuttle, which has an orbital period of 33 years and last swung close to the Sun in February 1998.

At peak times, several thousand meteors per hour may be seen, without the need for telescopes or binoculars.

The Leonids are considered the fastest of all meteors, plunging into the atmosphere at 71 km per second — 40 times the speed of a bullet.

The particles are small — mostly no larger than a grain of sand — and cause no risk to people on earth.

But the high speed means that they have the ability to damage a spacecraft or satellite or knock it out of alignment.

A small collision can also trigger a cloud of ionised gas that can cause short circuits. This is believed to have been the case in 1993, when a European Space Agency (ESA) satellite called Olympus suddenly spun out of control.

The statistical risk for satellites is even greater today, given that there are more satellites in orbit than ever before.