

International

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 : A 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 turbulent 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 Acehnese 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 special

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

Malaysian opposition to file lawsuit to halt polls

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 16 : A Malaysian opposition party said today it would file a lawsuit to try to halt the November 29 election in protest at the exclusion of some 680,000 new electors, reports AFP.

Lim Kit Siang, secretary general of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), told AFP the suit would be filed Wednesday against the Election Commission for denying the rights of the new voters.

The plaintiff will be K.S. Jomo, an economics professor at University Malaya, who is one of the new voters, Lim said. "It is unconstitutional to deny the 680,000 people the right to vote and the election Commission must postpone the elections until the new voters are registered," he said.

"The general election is once in five years. The commission

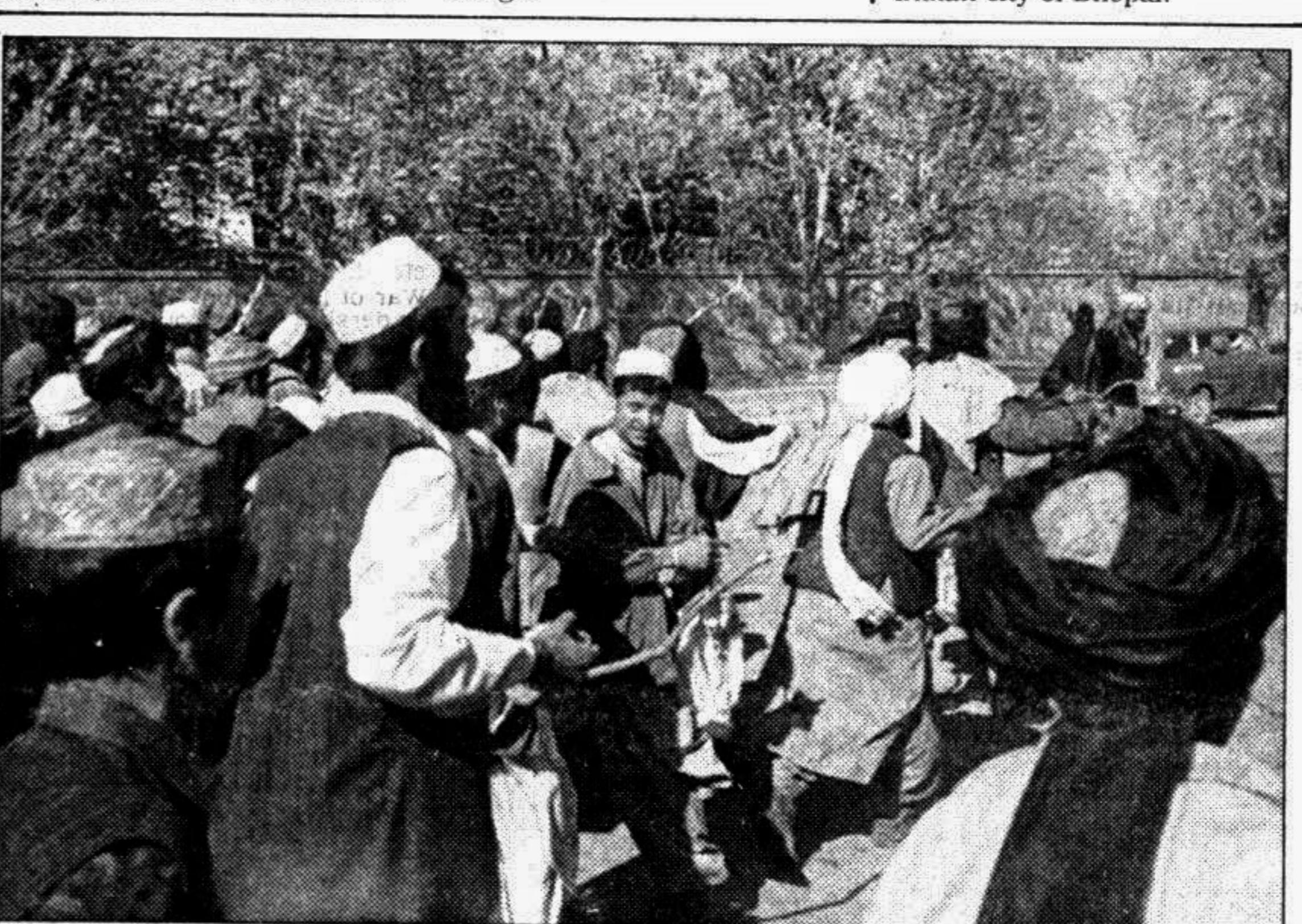
New case against Union Carbide over Bhopal disaster

NEW DELHI, Nov 16 : Survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster in India today welcomed a class-action lawsuit filed in US Federal Court against Union Carbide, reports AFP.

The lawsuit, filed on Monday, claims Union Carbide and its former top officer violated international law and human rights in the gas disaster.

It also seeks unspecified damages and wants the Manhattan Federal Court to take back control of litigation which was moved to India in 1986 for jurisdictional reasons.

"We welcome the development," Alok Pratap Singh, leader of a pressure group of survivors and relatives of the disaster's victims, told AFP by telephone from the central Indian city of Bhopal.



Afghan attackers armed with sticks and stones heading towards the former United States building in Kabul during a protest rally against United Nations sanctions on Sunday. Taliban troops fired in the air as crowd stoned UN offices and US embassy in protest at UN sanctions.

— AFP photo

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.

"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.

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

— AFP photo

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 Farah, 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.

— AFP photo



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

— AFP photo

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.

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

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 Sunday.

"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.

— AFP photo

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, reports AFP.

"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.

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.

— 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 Dogukula, 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 Dogukula 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 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 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 massive 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.

Major 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 victim's 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.

Protestants back compromise to implement peace deal

BELFAST, Nov 16 : David Trimble, leader of Northern Ireland's main Protestant party, today urged still-skeptical 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 accepts an interlocutor to discuss disarmament and, with Sinn Fein, publicly renounces violence.

"If, in our view, a genuine and meaningful response is