

## Lanka to invite foreign polls monitors

COLOMBO, Nov 26: Sri Lanka's Elections Commission has decided to invite foreign observers to monitor next month's presidential elections, political sources here said today, reports AFP.

Elections chief T.M. Dassanayake has announced his decision to invite foreign monitors but who and how many is yet to be decided, the sources said.

They said a decision on local poll monitors was also expected shortly.

The ruling People's Alliance (PA) party had earlier objected to foreign monitoring, accusing of the previous observers of biased reporting at local elections.

The private Centre for Monitoring Election Violence reported that the January local council election which the PA won was the most fraudulent poll in Sri Lanka since independence from Britain in 1948.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga last month called a snap election some 10 months ahead of schedule. Voting is set for December 21.

## Chernobyl N-reactor reopens

KIEV, Nov 26: The only operational reactor at the Chernobyl power plant, scene of the world's worst nuclear disaster, reopened today at 5:22 a.m. (8:22 am BST) after five months of repairs, duty engineer Mykola Suvorov said, reports AFP.

The reactor has to reach its nominal power of 1,000 megawatts on Sunday, said Suvorov. "Now it is working at five percent its capacity."

Reactor three was to have reopened on Thursday, but spokesman Olexander Oleksyuk told AFP: "A dysfunction in the safety system forced us to postpone the resumption from Thursday evening till Friday."

The restart, originally planned for November 9, had been repeatedly postponed due to lack of funds and the scale of repairs needed.

## Rushdie awarded honorary degree in Berlin

BERLIN, Nov 26: Salman Rushdie, the British author condemned to death by the Iranian religious authorities for his book *The Satanic Verses*, was Thursday awarded an honorary degree by the Free University of Berlin in a ceremony held amid strict security, reports AFP.

Rushdie was made doctor of philosophy "for his outstanding service as novelist, cultural critic and as defender of free expression of the word and imagination," according to the citation.

The current Nobel literature prize laureate, Gunter Grass of Germany, and the 1994 Nobel literature laureate, Kenzaburo Oe of Japan, who is currently a visiting professor at the Free University, were among those who attended the ceremony.

## More clashes erupt in Lagos: 27 killed

LAGOS, Nov 26: New clashes erupted in Lagos in the early hours today, the day after an ethnic riot which left at least 27 people dead, a police spokesman said, reports AFP.

"There have been clashes, skirmishes, again this morning. We are doing what we can to bring the thing under control," said Fabulous Enyiasou, spokesman for the Lagos State police command.

"Some people are warming up for a battle but we are trying to damp it down," he told AFP. The confrontations, apparently between Yoruba and Hausa traders, took place in the Onipanu and Ikorodu districts in the early hours, Enyiasou said.

Yoruba youths had attacked Hausa traders in the two areas, he said, referring to the country's two largest ethnic groups. A mile 12, a major food market that was the scene of the riot Thursday, was "still very tense," the police spokesman said.

"The situation there is still very tense. The road is still blocked. There are barricades. There is rubbish across the roads, buildings burning," he added by telephone from police headquarters.

## 26 E Timorese found in W Timor mass graves

JAKARTA, Nov 26: Indonesian investigators have dug up three mass graves in West Timor finding the bodies of 26 East Timorese killed during a militia and military attack on a church in September, an official told AFP today.

"A total of 26 bodies -- including three Catholic priests -- have been found in mass graves in West Timor," said H.S. Dillon, a member of the Commission for the Investigation of Human Rights Abuses in East Timor.

"Autopsies are currently being performed, and we are now talking to the International Committee of the Red Cross in order to bring the bodies of the three priests back to Dili," Dillon said, speaking by telephone from the West Timor town of Atambua.

# Basu, Mamata share same dais, discuss development projects

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Nov 26: Is Trinamool Congress chief and Indian Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee set to rise above the image of a rabble-rouser?

Is she readying herself to present as a mature politician-administrator not hamstrung by stiff ideological posturing when it comes to handling affairs of the state or the country?

Even the strongest critics of Miss Banerjee would not perhaps be averse to give an affirmative answer to these questions, if her recent behaviour with her arch political rivals -- ruling Left Front in West Bengal -- is anything to go by.

Mamata Banerjee recently shared the dais with West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu discussing development projects in the state.

It was followed by a meeting

between her and a delegation of senior Left leaders from West Bengal during which both sides agreed to help clear pending railway projects in the state.

Senior CPI (M) leader and West Bengal Transport Minister Subhash Chakrabarty has showered praises on Miss Banerjee even though it may have caused some embarrassment to his party leadership in the state.

Kshiti Goswami, another Left Front minister belonging to RSP, attended, along with the Trinamool leader, a ceremony for laying foundation for a bridge near Calcutta.

All these were unthinkable as late as the recent parliamentary elections during which exchanges of vituperative attacks and mudslinging between CPI (M), lead partner in Left Front, and Trinamool Congress, had become a regular feature.

There is some sort of warming-up of relations between Trinamool Congress and the Left Front with both Miss Banerjee and Front leaders asserting that development of West Bengal and politics should not be mixed.

Mamata made it clear that this warming-up of ties does not in any way envisage a change in her party's political stand towards Left Front saying "We will go all out to expose the Front government's anti-people policies."

"But when it comes to West Bengal's developments politics should not come in the way and we will move together, political moorings notwithstanding," she said.

Trinamool Congress sources say Mamata Banerjee has, as Railway Minister, to prove that she is keen to mature into an effective administrator and not

remain only a good agitationist leader. This, the sources said, could help her party a lot in the fresh assembly elections in West Bengal which are just two years away.

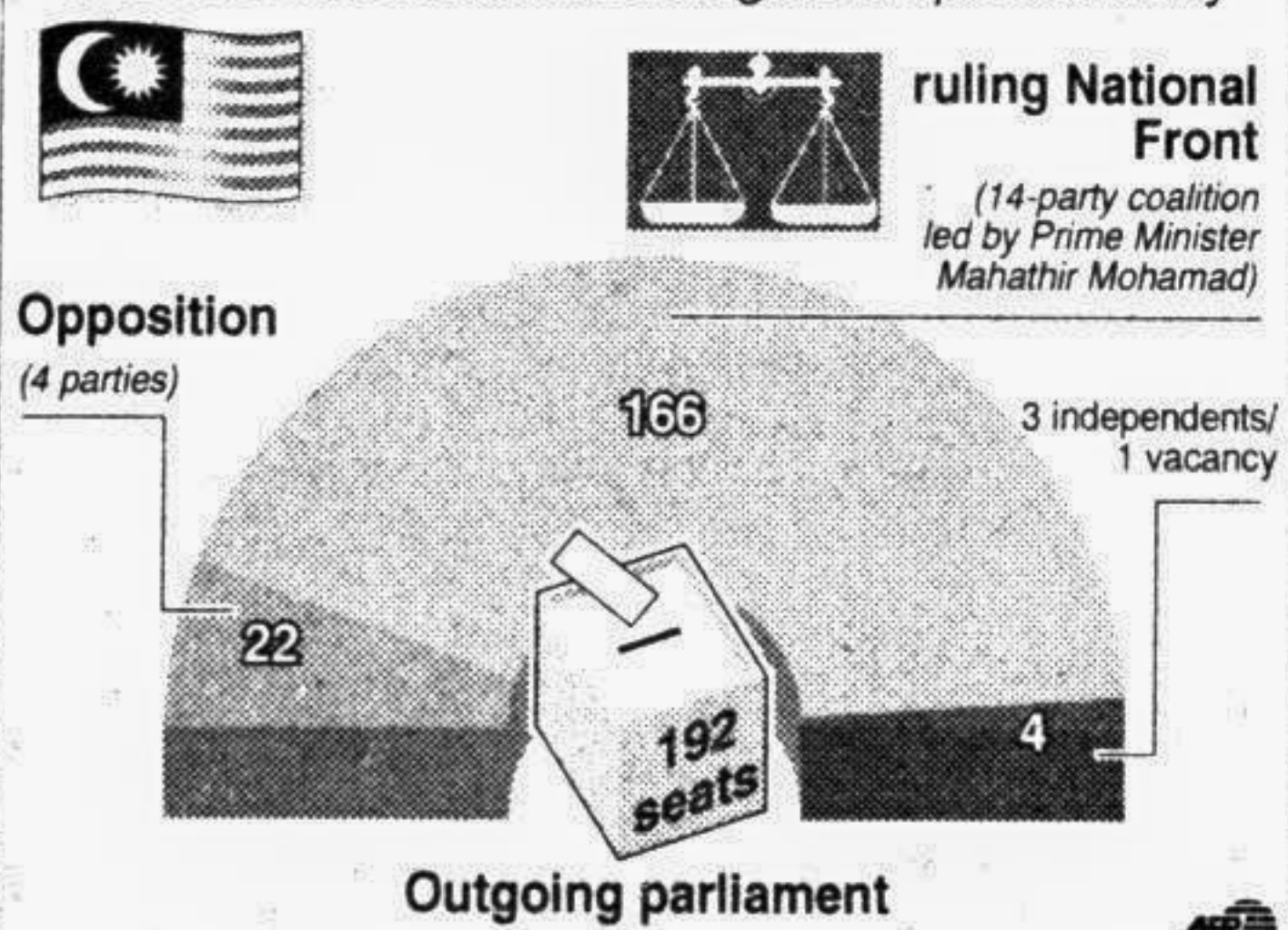
Trinamool Congress leaders are upbeat that Mamata Banerjee as Railway Minister can emerge as the "real benefactor" of West Bengal and reap a rich harvest in the coming assembly polls.

The party has already come to the fore as the main challenger to the Left Front in successive parliamentary polls in 1998 and 1999, dislodging the Congress.

Trinamool leaders are hopeful that the party would be able to repeat its success in Lok Sabha elections in the assembly elections and replace Congress as the main opposition in the West Bengal assembly.

## Malaysians vote for parliament

Mahathir's coalition hopes to retain its two-thirds majority when about 9.56 million voters go to the polls Monday



— AFP Graphics

## Anwar appeals for Chinese, Indian support in polls

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26: Jailed Malaysian ex-deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim today urged Chinese and Indian voters to reject the ruling party's "culture of fear" and support the opposition in Monday's polls, reports AFP.

In a letter read by his wife Wan Azizah at a press conference, Anwar said the National Front coalition had raised the possibility of riots by the opposition and security threats to create a "culture of fear."

"Those are all slanders made without any basis, just like all the other allegations that they have created," he said in a six-page letter written from the Sungai Buloh prison.

"The intention is to shift focus from major corruption among the leadership, the practise of nepotism and cronyism as well as wastage amid the

mega-projects," Anwar said.

"I believe that the people would not be easily cheated and deceived. I have never seen (Mahathir) ranting and raving as badly as this before. They must be in a state of alarm."

Anwar, 52, was sacked by Mahathir in September 1998 and jailed in April for six years for abusing his powers to quash allegations of sexual misconduct. He is now on trial for sodomy.

The ruling National Front has launched an advertising blitz focusing on street disturbances sparked by the jailing and prison treatment this year of Anwar.

He is the candidate for premier of the Alternative Front alliance, which includes the National Justice Party (Keadilan) headed by his wife.

# 'Offensive against Chechnya to be completed by year end'

MOSCOW, Nov 26: A top Russian general today said federal forces would complete the main portion of their offensive against the rebel republic of Chechnya by the end of the year, reports AFP.

Deputy chief of staff, General Valery Manilov, also announced that President Boris Yeltsin would submit a draft law to parliament offering amnesty to Chechen rebels who had not committed "serious crimes" against Russia.

Manilov announced that the so-called second phase of Russia's military operation was now complete and that a third phase, in which federal forces will attack rebel positions in the southern mountains, had begun.

"The main part of the third

phase should end before the end of the year," Manilov told a press conference.

Manilov also repeated that Russia had no plans to storm the rebel capital Grozny, but vowed to take the city under federal control nonetheless.

"The liberation of Grozny will be conducted according to plan. We do not plan a frontal assault, but Grozny will be freed of bandits," he said.

Russia plans to issue partial amnesty to rebel fighters who are not listed on Moscow's most-wanted lists -- such as field commanders blamed for organizing a wave of apartment block bombings in Russia.

"President Yeltsin has given an order to send the Duma a draft law issuing an amnesty to

rebels who had not committed serious crimes," Manilov said.

Such amnesty plans have previously been mentioned by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and State Duma lower house speaker Gennady Seleznev.

## Settlement possible after destruction of terrorism: Putin

Meanwhile, a full political settlement in Chechnya is only possible after the complete destruction of "terrorist centres" on Chechen territory, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Vek newspaper today.

"It is equally important to eliminate reasons for turning Chechnya into a den of international terrorism," said the premier.

## FBI involved in EgyptAir probe

WASHINGTON, Nov 26: The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is actively involved in the crash probe of EgyptAir Flight 990 both here and in Egypt, The Washington Post said today, reports AFP.

The lead investigator is still the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), federal law enforcement officials told the daily, but hundreds of FBI officials here, in Cairo and elsewhere are working closely with board and Egyptian officials to understand more about the October 31 crash.

"The titular head of this investigation (NTSB) ... really has no impact at all on the work that (FBI) agents are doing in the field," FBI spokesman Jim Davis told the daily.

"The interviews are being conducted, the evidence is being reviewed and we have got agents working with the Egyptian authorities," he added.

## Deadly unrest in Ambon



— AFP Graphics

## Indonesian troops kill 16 during clashes in Ambon

JAKARTA, Nov 26: Security forces opened fire during fresh battles between Muslims and Christians in the strife-torn Indonesian city of Ambon today leaving at least 16 dead and more than 100 wounded, residents said, reports AFP.

Ten Muslims, including an army soldier, were killed and 50 wounded by shots fired by police mobile brigade troops, said Malik Selang an official at the Muslim Al-Fatah mosque.

"They (the Christians) burned empty houses and accused us of being the perpetrators," Selang told AFP by telephone.

The bodies and the injured Muslims were taken to the Al-Fatah hospital in Ambon, he said.

A local journalist said soldiers also deployed in the city shot and killed at least six Christians.

"All of the victims, those killed and wounded, were shot by troops," the journalist said.

A woman manning an aid post at the Maranatha Protestant church said 60 Christians were wounded by gunshots. They were being treated at a local Christian

hospital.

Selang said Christians from the Maranatha area threw gasoline bombs at empty houses belonging to other Christians to create the impression that Muslims were setting the fires.

But the woman at Maranatha said the Muslims launched the first attack against Christian residences in the morning, helped by soldiers armed with grenades.

Hani Laetemia, a male nurse at the Maluku Protestant Church Hospital said 11 victims were brought to the hospital but they had been transferred to the state Dr. Haulussy hospital.

The state hospital could not be reached by telephone.

"One of the victims died here," he said, adding he could still hear shots being fired in the city.

The city was gripped by tension as gunfire echoed through the streets, into the late afternoon, the journalist said.

Scores of elderly women, whose houses were gutted in the violence, went to the headquarters of the provincial military command to protest the military's failure to protect their property, he said.

## Cyber-savvy politician is India's new role model

NEW DELHI, Nov 26: A month after sweeping local and national elections, the cyber-savvy Chief Minister of southern India's Andhra Pradesh state, Nara Chandrababu Naidu, has emerged as a role model for a new breed of politicians, reports AFP.

Combining free market reforms with pragmatic populism, Naidu has introduced policies attractive to foreign investors, while maintaining broad-based support in his own state.

In the process, the 50-year-old economics post-graduate has broken the mould of Indian chief ministers, whose parochial political outlook typically produced short-term policies aimed at appeasing vote banks in their respective states.

"He has succeeded because he is able to convince the people that whatever he is doing is good for them, and they should accept and support his policies," said C. Ramachandrababu, spokesman for Naidu's regional TDP party.

## Deminers destroy ordnance museum in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Nov 26: A UN-funded deminers group has destroyed the exhibits in what it called the world's most dangerous museum, a display of unexploded ordnance in western Afghanistan, UN officials said today, reports AFP.

"We have defused and destroyed some 455 items including dozens of 500-kilogram (1,100-pound) aircraft bombs, mortars and artillery pieces," said Peter Le Soeur, who led the team of explosive experts.

The unusual museum of live explosives was set up by Ismail Khan, a former governor of Herat province and a key commander during the 1979-89 anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan.

The museum in Zandajan, 40 kilometers (24 miles) from Herat, contained items collected around the city by mujahedeen groups, the fighters who resisted the Soviets.

## Tigers to free soldiers to mark heroes' week

COLOMBO, Nov 26: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels said today they will release through the International Red Cross seven government soldiers held as prisoners to mark an annual remembrance week, reports AFP.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said over the clandestine Voice of Tigers radio that the seven would be freed Saturday at the height of their "heroes' week" celebrations.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) confirmed the guerrillas had approached them about the release of the soldiers to government authorities.

The Voice of Tigers said the troops were among a group who surrendered during fighting earlier this month.

The LTTE radio, monitored in the northern town of Vavuniya, 260 km north of here, did not say how many more prisoners were being held.

The fighting escalated earlier this month, the ICRC reminded the government and the LTTE to spare those who have laid down their weapons and treat those

who are wounded.

"Past fighting in the country has unfortunately often left many dead and few prisoners," the ICRC said two weeks ago while expressing concern for the safety of wounded combatants and those captured during the ongoing fighting.

The rebel radio said LTTE areas were decorated with the movement's red and orange flags and coloured posters of Tiger supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran, who turns 45 today.

Sri Lankan troops have increased already tight security arrangements fearing fresh attacks during the Tiger commemoration period, officials here said. Road blocks and check points in the capital have been beefed up.

The rebels usually marks heroes' week with religious services to invoke blessings on their fighters killed in action but the military accuses the guerrillas of also staging attacks.

There is a high state of alert in Colombo as well as in the suburbs," a police spokesman said.

## Asian moviemakers find new partners at film festival

BANGKOK, Nov 26: Film makers from across Asia hope to break into untapped markets after forming new partnerships at the 44th Asia-Pacific Film Festival here, reports AFP.

Directors, producers and actors from 14 countries took part in the five-day film festival, aimed at encouraging the region's struggling movie industry.

"It was a great opportunity to meet fellow film makers and now we are talking about new co-productions," said Filipino director Francis "Jun" Posadas.

"I have met actors and producers from Indonesia and Malaysia and now we plan to join together to make movies in each other's countries," said Posadas, whose movie "Virgin of the Eater Wonder" was among the festival's 68 feature films, documentaries, short and animated films.

Posadas, who began his film career twenty years ago as an extra in a local Philippines production, said finding backers to fund new ventures was the

most serious challenge facing film makers today.

"Film festivals like these help us find ways to break into markets in other countries in the region, but we still suffer from a lack of funding," Posadas said.

"Governments need to increase support for their local film industry and they also need to limit the number of Hollywood films which are allowed into the country, like we have done in the Philippines," he said.

Asian film makers are battling the effects of the region's worst ever economic crisis, along with competition from big budget Hollywood blockbusters and strict censorship in several nations.

Festival deputy Chairman Nakorn Veerapavati agreed that funding was a major problem hampering the Asian film industry, but was confident the region's movie makers could be a success in international markets.

## SPECIAL JOINT MINISTERIAL MEETING

26 November 1999  
Manila, Philippines



(L-R) Philippine Economic Minister Jose Pardo, Foreign Minister Domingo Siazon and Finance Minister Edgardo Esperitu chair a special ASEAN Joint Ministerial Meeting in Manila yesterday. The meeting was the first ever bringing together the three ministries of the 10-country ASEAN grouping designed to coordinate security, political and economic policies.

— AFP photo