

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 power 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 of its capacity."

Reactor three was to have reopened on Thursday, but spokesman Alexander Olexeyuk 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, Geunter 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.

The Indian-born Rushdie was the object of a decree by the late Ayatollah Khomeini condemning him to death because the *Satanic Verses* were held to be blasphemous. As a result the author has had to spend much of the last 10 years in hiding for his life.

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 Enyaosu, 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, Enyaosu said.

Yoruba youths had attacked Hausa traders in the two areas, he said, referring to the country's two largest ethnic groups.

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 : 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-cum-administrator not hamstrung by stiff ideological posturing when it comes to handling affairs of the state or in the state?

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.

Kshitij 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 will move together, political moorings notwithstanding.

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 in as the main challenger to the Left Front in successive parliamentary polls in 1998 and 1999, dislodging the Congress.

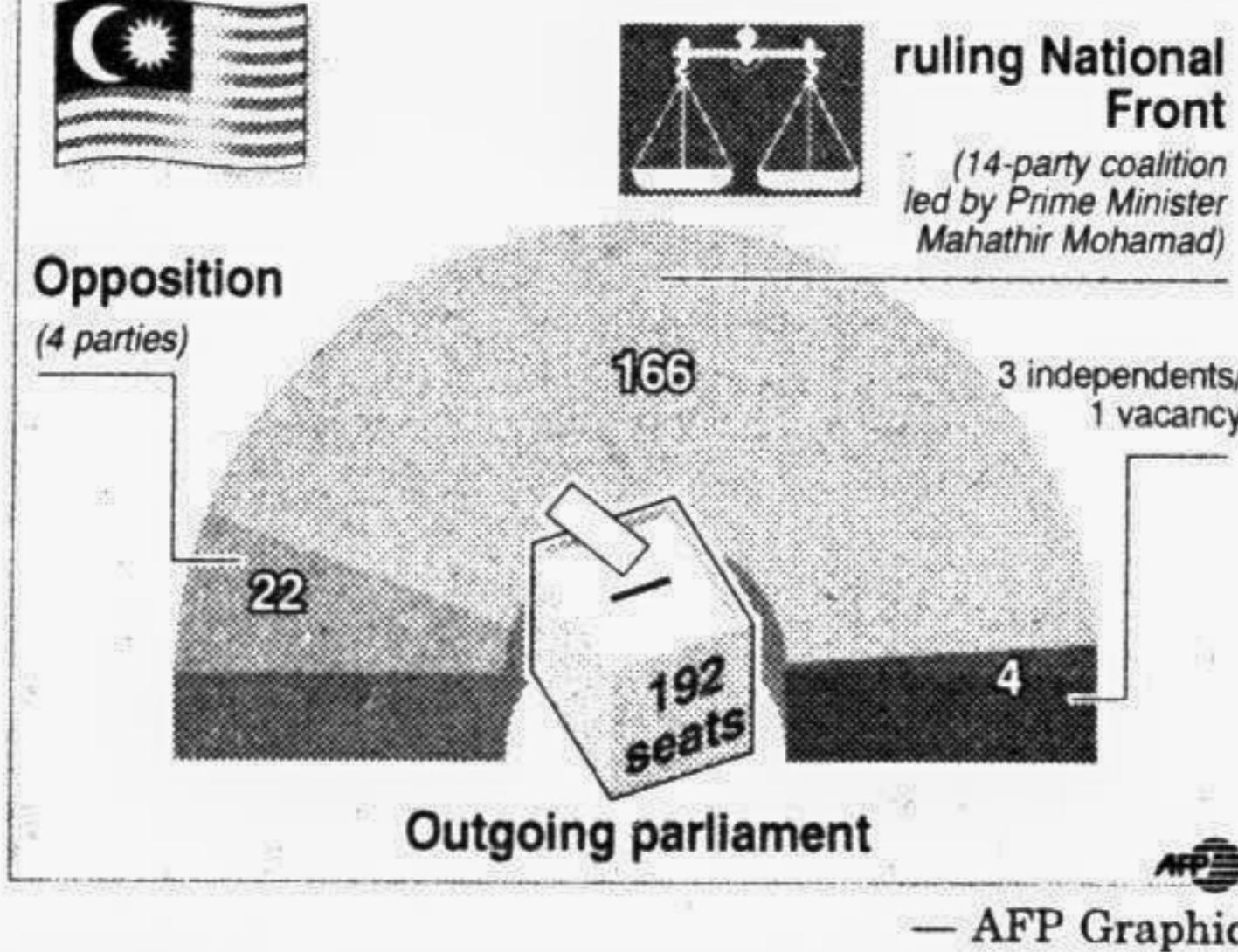
Trinamool leaders are hopeful that the party would be able to repeat its success in Lok Sabha elections in the assembly elections and replace Congress as the main opposition in the West Bengal assembly.



Kulsoom Nawaz (C), wife of deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, along with other family members arrive at Karachi airport from home town Lahore yesterday. Only female members of Sharif's family were allowed to visit Nawaz Sharif and younger brother Shahbaz Sharif, who are in jail. Both the former leaders along with other senior officials were under detention since the army seized power after a military coup on October 12. — AFP photo

Malaysians vote for parliament

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



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.

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 signed letter written from the Sungai Buloh prison.

The intention is to shift focus from major corruption among the leadership, the practice 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 (Malathir) ranting and raving as badly as this before. They must be in a state of alarm," reports AFP.

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.

BJP reacts angrily to Kalyan Singh's criticism of Vajpayee

NEW DELHI, Nov 26 : India's ruling Hindu nationalists reacted angrily today after a party leader, who recently resigned as chief minister of a key state, publicly denounced Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, reports AFP.

Kalyan Singh, a prominent regional leader of Vajpayee's BJP party, said late Thursday that the prime minister had pressured him to resign as chief minister of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh this month.

"It is because of him (Vajpayee) that I have been deprived of the chief ministership," newspapers quoted Singh as saying.

"As long as he is the prime minister, I will not occupy any post in the party."

The BJP, which heads

India's ruling coalition, said it was shocked by the unprecedented attack on Vajpayee by such a senior party figure.

"Kalyan Singh seems to have lost his balance," BJP spokesman J.P. Mathur told AFP. "His statements are most unfortunate. I don't think anyone can tolerate this."

"His activities are not helping the party at all."

Singh quit on November 11 after Vajpayee reportedly held him responsible for the BJP's poor showing in Uttar Pradesh in national elections last month.

The party nominated a political nobody to succeed Singh in what is India's most populous state.

"Even the killer of Mahatma Gandhi was given an opportunity to speak out in his defence but Vajpayee has deprived me even of this opportunity," The Pioneer quoted Singh as saying.

Those who are responsible for the BJP's defeat in Uttar Pradesh are occupying posts in ... Delhi and I have been hanged without a fair trial. I am no longer prepared to suffer humiliation silently."

Kalyan Singh did not say if he intended to quit the BJP, but opposition sources said he was in touch with the main opposition party in Uttar Pradesh and could switch allegiance.

Singh is credited with building up the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, and was its chief minister when Hindu fanatics razed a 16th-century mosque in the state's Ayodhya town in December 1992.

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. Ramachandran, 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.

"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 Zendajan, 40 kilometers (24 miles) from Herat, contained items collected around the city by mujahideen 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 JTA.

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.

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 supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran, who turns 45 today.

The Voice of Tigers said the troopers 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 prisoners were being held.

As 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

most seriously wounded.

"Films 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 Veerapravati 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.

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

Deadly unrest in Ambon



Nov 26: Security forces open fire during Muslim-Christian clashes

— 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