

Lanka's election campaign enters final day

COLOMBO, Dec 18 : Sri Lanka's much heated presidential election campaign entered the final day today with the two main contestants holding their last rallies in the capital Colombo, reports Xinhua.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who was seeking reelection, will hold her final rally at the Colombo Town Hall grounds tonight, officials said.

Her main rival Ranil Wickremesinghe of the main opposition United National Party (UNP) will also wind up his campaign with a rally in Colombo Central at Maradana.

The election, to be held 11 months earlier than previously scheduled November next year, is being contested by a record 13 contenders including four independent candidates.

However, it is believed that the main battle will be fought between Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe. Both have expressed confidence of winning the election.

About 11.779 million people are eligible to vote next Tuesday in the island country's fourth presidential election.

BRIEFLY

Afghan killed in Pakistan: An Afghan national was killed and three others were injured when a grenade exploded here overnight, police and residents said Saturday. AFP reports from Karachi.

Police identified the deceased as 60-year-old Haji Azam and suspected the attack in Shireen Jinnah Colony, near the city's seaside, was linked to tribal rivalry.

6 killed in Iranian bakery blast: Six people were killed and 14 injured Friday in an explosion in a military bakery in southwest Iran, state television reported Friday. AFP says from Tehran.

The television, the only media so far to have given the information, said the blast was accidental and due to defective equipment in the bakery at the Omidieh base in Khuzestan province.

12 Pak fishermen killed in sea: Twelve Pakistani fishermen hunting for sharks drowned when their boat capsized in the Arabian sea, some 320 km west of here, their society said Saturday. AFP reports from Karachi.

The Al-Lahooti carrying 13 fishermen sank a week ago off the Gulf state of Muscat, the Pakistani fishermen society said. The wreckage and the bodies have not been found so far.

Arafat-Barak meet today

HEBRON, West Bank, Dec 18 : Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak will meet tomorrow in the Palestinian West Bank town of Jericho, a Palestinian official told AFP today.

Tayeb Abdulrahim, head of Arafat's office, gave no time for the meeting, which he said would be behind closed doors.

Earlier Israeli state radio, which gave the location of the meeting as the Erez crossing point between Israel and the Palestinian-administered Gaza Strip, said Barak and Arafat would try to settle outstanding problems in their peace negotiations.

They would focus on the Israeli withdrawal from parts of the occupied West Bank which should have taken place on November 15, the radio said.

It added that Barak would also seek to reassure Arafat, who has expressed concern that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process would take second place to the launched talks between Israel and Syria.

No immediate confirmation of the report was available from Israeli officials.

Palestinian regional cooperation minister Nabil Shaath told AFP earlier that the two leaders would meet "soon", without giving a date.

"I think Mr Barak will confirm that he will continue to work on the Palestinian track," he said.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer (R&H)
Road Division, Barguna.

Tenders under sealed cover are invited through Bangladesh Form No. 2911

1. Tender Notice No.	BRD 17/1999-2000.				
2. Name of work	Construction of different sizes RCC concealed culvert at different kms of Barguna-Betagi-Bakerganj road under Barguna Road Division during 1999-2000.				
3. Head of expenditure	266 Development.				
4. Estimated cost	-do-				
5. Amount of earnest money	-do-				
6. Prescribed time limit for work	45 (forty-five) days.				
7. Eligibility of contractor	'A' to 'D' special.				
8. Offices where tender to be had at	From the office of the Executive Engineer (R&H), Barisal/Bhola/ Pirojpur/Jhalakathi/Patuakhali/office of the undersigned and office of the Sub-Divisional Engineer under Barguna Road Division during office hours up to 22-12-99.				
9. Offices where tender will be received in sealed condition	1) Superintending Engineer (R&H), Road Circle, Barisal. 2) Executive Engineer (R&H), Road Division, Barisal/Patuakhali and office of the undersigned.				
10. Last date & time of receiving tender in sealed condition	23-12-99/9-9-06 BS up to 12:30 PM.				
11. Date & time of listing tenders in sealed condition	23-12-99/9-9-06BS at 12:45 PM.				
12. Date & time of opening tender	26-12-99/12-9-06BS at 12:30 PM.				
13. Date & time of lottery	5-1-2000/22-9-06 BS at 11:00 AM.				

Gr. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost	Earnest money	Eligibility of contractor	Time limit for work	Head of expenditure
1	36'x5'-0"x5'-0" wide RCC concealed culvert at the 9th km. of Barguna-Betagi-Bakerganj road under Barguna Road Division during 1999-2000.	395308/63	8000/-	'A' to 'D' special	45 days	266 Development
2	36'x5'-0"x5'-0" -do- -do- at the 6th km. -do- -do-	395308/63	8000/-	-do-	-do-	-do-
3	36'x5'-0"x5'-0" -do- -do- at the 5th km. -do- -do-	395308/63	8000/-	-do-	-do-	-do-
4	36'x5'-0"x5'-0" -do- -do- at the 10th km. -do- -do-	395308/63	8000/-	-do-	-do-	-do-
5	10.98m x 1.52m x 1.52m. RCC -do- -do- at the 3rd km. -do- -do-	369177/20	7500/-	-do-	-do-	-do-

Executive Engineer (R&H)
Road Division, Barguna.

International

Russia ignores Western truce demands, attacks rebel bases

MOSCOW, Dec 18 : Russia today ignored renewed US and EU calls for a ceasefire in Chechnya, intensifying attacks against rebels in the southern mountains and tightening its noose on the capital Grozny, reports AFP.

centred on the southeastern village of Vedeno, birthplace of field commander Shamil Basayev whom Moscow holds responsible for organising incursions into neighbouring Dagestan and a wave of deadly bomb attacks on Russian apartment blocks.

Earlier, Moscow had claimed a turning point in the Chechen war when its paratroopers seized control of the Chechen-Georgia border, a key supply route to the rebels.

Russians were also pounding settlements nestled at the foot of the mountains with Grad and Uragan artillery rockets, Sajdayev said.

He reported heavy casualties in the region, adding that the wounded could not be ferried because the region lacked hospitals and clinics while air bombardment had destroyed many of the roads leading to the northern and central planes.

Russia's assault also con-

tinued on the southeastern village of Vedeno, birthplace of field commander Shamil Basayev whom Moscow holds responsible for organising incursions into neighbouring Dagestan and a wave of deadly bomb attacks on Russian apartment blocks.

Asked whether attempts would be made to "liberate" the city by the end of the December, General Vladimir Shamanov, commander of the western front in Chechnya, told the private NTV television station late Friday: "We will try."

Meanwhile in Washington, a brief summit between the United States and the European Union ended with renewed calls for a political dialogue to resolve the Chechen conflict.

"We call for an immediate and lasting ceasefire throughout Chechnya and a political dialogue that can lead to a durable solution to the crisis," the two said in a joint statement issued at the White House.

"The indiscriminate use of force against civilians is unacceptable."

However the joint message's tone was more measured than similar Western pronouncements this month, calls which Russia has bitterly brushed aside as meddling in its internal affairs.

"We should give some benefit of the doubt to the Russian government," said Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen, adding that "the military operation should be over very soon (and) at the end, a political solution is needed."

Putin earlier revealed that Russia had held secret talks with advisors to Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, but the two sides had so far failed to bridge any differences.

Maskhadov this week said he was prepared to offer Russia some concessions, but stressed that Chechnya's right to sovereignty was not up for negotiation.

Putin meanwhile said that no concrete peace talks were possible until Maskhadov handed over to Russian forces Basayev and other rebel leaders whom Moscow regards as "terrorists."



Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio (C) stands under umbrellas sheltering him from the rain as Macau Governor Vasco Rocha Viera (R) stands by during a time-capsule ceremony in Macau yesterday. Macau will revert to Chinese rule at midnight today after four centuries of Portuguese administration.

—AFP photo

Parents lock up daughter for 18 months

NEW DELHI, Dec 18 : Indian police have arrested a couple in New Delhi for imprisoning their 33-year-old daughter for more than 18 months, news reports said today, reports AFP.

The Times of India newspaper said police raided the two-room house of the couple on Friday and found the woman, a divorcee who allegedly had mental problems, locked up in a solitary room in "extremely inhuman conditions."

The woman, it seems, was being forced to use the room as a toilet as well. Its condition was pitiable and (the victim) too was virtually reduced to a skeleton," police official Uday Sahay told the newspaper.

Sahay said the woman's parents claimed that they had to keep her imprisoned because she had consistently refused psychiatric treatment and sometimes became violent.

He said the father claimed that the woman had "sometimes left the house without clothes which was a major embarrassment for them," adding that the raid was conducted after a tip-off from neighbours.

Protest in Baghdad against 'treacherous' UN resolution

BAGHDAD, Dec 18 : Some 10,000 Iraqis poured on to the streets of Baghdad today to protest against a new UN resolution branded as "treacherous" and a US-British "failure" by the capital's newspapers, reports AFP.

The demonstrators brandished banners bearing slogans against the return of arms inspectors to Iraq after more than a year without inspections, following the retreat of the former body, UNSCOM.

It aims at getting a new United Nations arms inspection body, UNMOVIC, into Iraq after more than a year without inspections, following the retreat of the former body, UNSCOM.

It return it offers Baghdad

renewable four-month-long suspensions of the nine-year-old sanctions if it cooperates with UNMOVIC.

But Iraq's newspapers on Saturday slammed the resolution as a "failure" for the United States and Britain because it did not win unanimous backing.

The new resolution aims to speed up the flow of humanitarian aid by lifting the ceiling on oil exports.

Tight security as protesters plan to disrupt Macau handover

MACAU, Dec 18 : Saturday security was thrown across Macau on the eve of its historic handover from Portugal to China today as authorities remained adamant dissident protesters would not disrupt the transfer of Europe's last colonial outpost in Asia reports AFP.

As more checkpoints were set up around the handover venue, with 4,000 policemen patrolling the streets and key sites such as the port and airport, 10,000 Chinese security officers were deployed on the other side of the border.

Part of China's grand scheme of reunification of the "motherland", involving Hong Kong and eventually Taiwan, the tiny casino and sex trade

haven of Macau is being integrated into China at midnight Sunday under the same "one country, two systems" agreement which operates in Hong Kong.

Like its Pearl River Delta neighbour, which was handed over by Britain two and a half years ago, governmental and judicial autonomy has been guaranteed for 50 years.

But unlike Hong Kong, Macau -- which has a 98 percent ethnic Chinese population -- has approached the transfer with little apprehension despite harsh criticism of the outgoing administration for failing to improve the enclave's legal system, amend its economic addiction to gambling and prostitution or overhaul the Portuguese-based

education system.

A crowd of around 20,000 was expected to greet the Chinese People's Liberation Army when it marches over the border on Monday.

But foreign pro-democracy dissidents and protesters from China's outlawed Falungong sect have vowed to use the occasion of President Jiang Zemin's visit to stage a protest before the world's press. Around 2,500 dignitaries, including Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio and former Hong Kong governor Chris Patten, are also attending.

Under local law, only residents can stage protests in the territory. All Chinese passport holders have also been banned from Macau for a week.

Macau, a history strewn with pirates and gold

MACAU, Dec 18 : From pirates and gold smuggling, to safe haven and political refuge, the tiny territory of Macau, perched on the southern tip of China has had a rich and exotic history, closely intertwined with the development of Asia, reports AFP.

Archaeologists believe it was first settled by the Chinese around 1,000 years ago, but it was the arrival of the Portuguese seafarers launched on their global explorations in the 16th century by Henry the Navigator and Vasco de Gama that was to seal Macau's destiny for the next four centuries.

Some say the first Portuguese visitors were little more than pirates plundering other vessels plying the notoriously dangerous South China Seas. But in time they came to settle in Macau where in 1557 they established the first European outpost in Asia.

Over the years Macau became an important gateway for trade between Europe, China and the Far East.

And with the traders came the Catholic Church and the Jesuits who spread the message of Christianity into the far-flung corners of Asia.

For the next few decades,

the Portuguese remained the only European presence in the region, building up highly profitable trading links.

But from the 17th century, the Dutch began to conquer the seas drawn to the rich, remote lands of the Far East awash in gold, precious stones, beautiful silks, exotic spices and foods.

From 1603 Macau came under repeated attack from the Dutch. Each was fended off including the final and most brutal attack in June 1622, still marked here as a public holiday.

For the next two centuries, the Portuguese traded quietly from Macau, paying an annual land rent of 500 taels of silver to the Chinese and fighting off attacks on their galleons from rapacious, ruthless pirates, many who set up hideouts in uninhabited islands in the Pearl River delta.