

## International

# Voting not free & fair: EU

## Zimbabwe awaits results

HARARE, June 26 : A tense Zimbabwe awaited parliamentary election results today after President Robert Mugabe's ruling party declared it would retain power whatever the outcome and the European Union said the vote was neither free nor fair, coming after months of election-related violence, reports AFP.

Vote-counting started early Monday in Zimbabwe's most hotly contested vote since independence, but it was unclear when the final tally would come.

EU observer mission chief Pierre Schori condemned "high levels of violence, intimidation and coercion" during the campaign in a late-night press conference and said that although voting was generally calm and peaceful, the process was marred by "serious flaws and irregularities."

Political scientist John Makumbe told AFP "anything could happen" if Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) lost but refused to give up its 20-year stronghold on power.

"They (the electorate) could

be violent, and engage in civil disobedience," Makumbe warned.

ZANU-PF is facing its first real challenge by the newly formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by feisty trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai, 48, which has attracted massive support.

Tsvangirai's campaign appealed for the ouster of a government presiding over an economy in ruins, with spiralling inflation, high unemployment and a critical shortage of foreign exchange, while Mugabe promised to distribute white-owned farms to the landless, and slammed Britain and white Zimbabweans.

Ruling party chairman John Nkomo told reporters Sunday: "ZANU-PF will most definitely form the next government whatever the result of the legislative election."

The declaration seemed to belie a pledge by the president last week that "I will be ready and willing to accept the outcome, whichever way it goes."

Schori estimated that more than 350,000 people -- seven percent of the 5.1 million voters

who had registered -- were turned away because their names were not on the lists.

The elections nevertheless saw a record turnout, with close to 60 percent of those registered having voted by 2:00 p.m. Sunday, five hours before the polls closed.

But the poll took place against a backdrop of what human rights monitors termed a government-orchestrated terror campaign to smash the opposition.

At least 32 people have died since February, and hundreds have been beaten up, with women raped, houses torched, and some people set on fire while often violent squatters led by veterans of Zimbabwe's independence war from Britain have invaded and occupied more than 1,500 white-owned farms.

"The term free and fair is not applicable in these elections," said Schori, a former Swedish aid minister.

"The level of violence and intimidation in the pre-electoral phase makes the term non-ap-

plicable," ZANU-PF "seemed to sanction the use of violence and intimidation against political opponents and contributed significantly to the climate of fear so evident during the election campaign," Schori said in an interim report.

"High levels of violence, intimidation and coercion marred the election campaign," he added, stressing that the political opposition was particularly hampered from operating in rural areas.

State radio carried a long and positive report of Schori's remarks Monday morning, mentioning none of those condemnations.

Neither did it mention his charge that the official media "were used as publicity vehicles" for ZANU-PF.

Mugabe told a group EU observers at a rally on Friday that it was not their responsibility to give legitimacy to the elections.

"Legitimacy comes from the people (of Zimbabwe), the observers don't give us legitimacy," he said.



Members of the election body check the ballot boxes after the end of Zimbabwe's general elections, at Harare yesterday.

— AFP photo

## Int'l democracy confce opens in Warsaw

WARSAW, June 26 : The first-ever international conference on promoting ballot box rule began here Monday with foreign ministers and senior officials from more than 100 countries hearing an appeal from Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi for action and not words in the struggle for democracy, reports AFP.

Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek opened the two-day event dubbed "Towards a Community of Democracies" with a call for more forceful policies in expanding democratic rule and noted the appropriateness of his country as the venue for the gathering.

"Twenty years ago, my country gave the world a new definition of the word 'solidarity' and 11 years ago, thanks to such solidarity, we recovered freedom and democracy," Geremek said.

But such achievements must be built on, he said, urging conference delegates to not rest in the fight to cement past democratic gains and shore up the practice in places where it is faltering with vigorous foreign policy initiatives.

## UN poverty summit begins amid protest

GENEVA, June 26 : Heads of state and government and ministers were due to attend a global conference starting here later today to examine progress towards poverty eradication, a meeting already dogged by protesters, reports AFP.

Thousands of anti-globalisation activists took to the streets here Sunday as the United Nations prepared to open the special world summit on social development.

"Four out of six billion human beings live in poverty, and wealth is becoming more and more concentrated," said one protester in a group carrying effigies of Dracula.

Police said the demonstrators numbered 4,000, while organisers insisted 6,000 gathered at the appeal of the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions to Aid Citizens (ATTAC).

Organised by the United Nations, the five-day Social Summit aims to follow up on 10 commitments made in Copenhagen in 1995 for eradicating poverty, boosting social integration and attaining full employment.

Ahead of the summit, Namibian Minister of Foreign Affairs and UN General Assembly President, Theo-Ben Gurirab, who will preside over the June 26-30 summit, stressed its aim was not to renegotiate the outcome of Copenhagen.

But he said the results since the Denmark summit had been assessed by different parties as "uneven to discouraging to disappointing to disheartening to disastrous to abysmal."

A preparatory committee has been discussing the substance of a declaration to be made at the end of the gathering on the review of the 1995 commitments and new initiatives.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Swiss Social Affairs Minister Ruth Dreifuss were in Geneva on Sunday, to open the forum on the margins of the summit.

Annan said the forum -- to gather 3500 representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), unions and members of the business community -- was aimed at inviting civil contributions to the June 26-30 summit.

# Military ready to rule Fiji alone for next two years

## Hostages appear on TV for first time

SUVA, June 26 : Fiji martial law authorities declared today they were prepared to run the country for the next two years if attempts to set up an interim civilian government failed.

Spokesman Filippo Tarakinikini told local radio they were planning for a military administration following the weekend breakdown of negotiations to reach an accord with the coup plotters.

"We can continue to carry on for the next two years," he said, as martial law commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama met with coup leader George Speight's presidential nominee, former vice president Ratu Josefa Iloilo.

Tarakinikini had said Sunday that talks with the rebels to end the five-week hostage crisis had "come against the wall."

The military had announced on Friday night an agreement had been reached with the rebels to end the five-week coup.

but the accord was never signed as Speight weighed in with a new demand that his group select the president.

A lobby group, Citizens' Constitutional Forum, said Monday the planned accord was not a solution and called for free MPs to administer the country.

Forum director Akula Yabaki said there were 56 free House of Representatives and Senate members who could make up an interim civilian government that would be more acceptable to the world than that proposed by martial law authorities.

"The country cannot afford to have these on-off negotiations drag on too much longer because people are continuing to lose their jobs as businesses retrench or close down," Yabaki said before Tarakinikini's announcement.

"We already have the majority of members of parliament

free and willing to serve this country and the (military) should hand over the executive authority to them to form a government of national unity and stop this farce of kowtowing to every demand that George Speight springs on them."

Speight, a failed businessman, seized Parliament with a band of armed men on May 19. They have held Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 26 members of his government hostage since then. Four women were released early Sunday.

Bainimarama told a Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group which visited Fiji on June 16 that an interim civilian government would take over "shortly," with a return to a multi-racial democracy in two years.

The martial law commander pledged that neither Speight nor any of his followers would be part of the interim government.

Meanwhile schools in Fiji were able to reopen Monday for the first time since the coup.

One school, Sigatoka Methodist Primary which is on disputed indigenous land, was forced to close after an hour because of a bomb threat.

Meanwhile, Fiji television today broadcast the first pictures of ethnic Indian hostages since they were taken captive in parliament during a coup on May 19.

The footage shot Sunday showed four hostages drinking kava with their captors. They were Attorney General Anand Singh, Anup Kumar who has grown a beard in his 40 days of captivity, Vinod Maharaj and Deo Narayan.

Maharaj spoke in Fijian to the people he was drinking with and thanked them for talking to them.

"This is what I want, for Indians and Fijians to unite," he said.



Swiss Federal Councillor Ruth Dreifuss speaks at the official opening ceremony of the Forum Geneva 2000, the Next Step in Social Development, in Geneva Sunday.

— AFP photo

## Pakistan opens new front against drug abuse

ISLAMABAD, June 26 : Military ruler General Pervez Musharraf today said Pakistan had almost won its war against poppy production but now had a new battle against alarming levels of drug addiction, reports AFP.

He said local and international agencies had been effective in reducing opium production and trafficking and Pakistan is "now being quoted as a success story."

Pakistan says it has cut opium production from 700 tonnes in 1979 to around 10 tonnes in 1999, and aims to be poppy free this year.

But it is now among the world's most drug-addicted countries, with cheap opium from neighbouring Afghanistan fuelling the habits of millions of users, mostly among the poorest sections of the community.

"Apart from reducing supply, we have to concentrate on drugs demand from within the country which requires special efforts," Musharraf said in a statement marking the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

The growing number of addicts within the country is a

challenge which has to be tackled in the coming years."

United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) representative Bernard Frahi said Pakistan had to be congratulated on its poppy eradication efforts over the past 25 years. Seizures of opium had risen 212 percent last year.

But he said "drug abuse remains a major concern."

"With an estimated four million drug users, Pakistan has probably the highest number of drug addicts in the world," he said in a statement.

"A particular problem (is) the rising number of injecting heroin abusers," he said, adding this risked "epidemics of blood borne diseases" and viruses such as hepatitis and HIV/AIDS.

The UNDCP and the government this year launched a national survey to get a better picture of drug addiction in Pakistan, an Islamic state where Muslims cannot drink alcohol but heroin, opium and cannabis are easily available.

Frahi said his findings would help the government and aid agencies target those sections of society most at risk of drug dependency.

## India vows to protect democracy

### 25th anniversary of emergency rule

NEW DELHI, June 26 : India on Monday marked the 25th anniversary of the imposition of two years of draconian emergency rule with a pledge that freedom in the world's largest democracy would not be subverted again, reports AFP.

Newspapers carried government-sponsored advertisements with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's portrait, along with a cutting message against former Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi, who unilaterally imposed emergency rule.

"A nation can be independent. The moot point is are its people free? Twenty-five years ago on this day, we were robbed of this freedom."

"We in India, more than ever before, can stand up, hold our heads high and enjoy our independence freely," the statement said.

India's ruling Hindu nationalists have in recent weeks used memories of the emergency to attack the main opposition Congress party, which Gandhi led for some 20 years.

Congress chief Sonia

Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's daughter-in-law, has responded to the tactic with studied silence.

Information Minister Arun Jaitley this week compared Indira Gandhi to Adolf Hitler and said she took the shock decision because she was "in danger of losing... her prime minister-ship" and to secure her family's stranglehold over Indian politics.

"The result was a triumph for the human spirit," it said, adding: "Democracy survives because the ordinary Indian will never tolerate a regime that strips him of his dignity."

The imposition of emergency rule by then premier Gandhi, on the pretext that India was facing grave but unspecified threats to its sovereignty, was the darkest period in the country's history since its 1947 independence from British colonial rule.

Thousands, including Gandhi's political foes, former royal and social activists were jailed on the flimsiest charges. Censorship was rampant and freedom was suppressed.

# Statehood possible within weeks, says Arafat

JERUSALEM, June 26 : Turning up the heat on Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat told thousands of cheering supporters in the West Bank on Sunday that Palestinian statehood could be proclaimed within weeks.

"Palestine is ours, ours, ours!" he declared, reports AP. Barak, meanwhile, accused Palestinians of deliberately placing obstacles in the path of a Camp David-style summit. A US mediator was working to assess prospects for a three-way gathering of Arafat, Barak and US President Bill Clinton in order to try to meet a September 13 deadline for a final peace treaty.

Arafat's speech to a conference of his Fatah faction in the West Bank town of Nablus was full of the type of fiery rhetoric he customarily rolls out for such occasions -- but even so, the timing was sensitive, as the two sides move into what a senior Palestinian official called "the last half-hour" of a push to reach a sweeping accord.

"We have a few weeks left

ahead of us, but they are the most important and critical, because at the end of it we will declare statehood," Arafat told a crowd of about 5,000 supporters. Aides said, however, that the timing of a statehood declaration was still being decided.

In a show of defiance that was cheered wildly by the crowd, Arafat scoffed at an assertion earlier this month by Lt Gen Shaul Mofaz, Israel's army chief of staff, that Israel would use tanks and helicopter gunships if necessary to quell any outbreak of rioting in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"We don't get threatened by tanks and planes -- no one can threaten us," said the 70-year-old Palestinian leader, his voice strong although his hand holding the microphone trembled violently. "Whoever has forgotten, I want to remind him of... seven years of intifadeh (uprising) and I say we are willing to start again."

Arafat also reasserted Palestinian claims to a capital in Jerusalem, over which Israel insists it will retain sovereignty.

"The state will be established with its capital, Jerusalem, and whoever does not like it can go and drink from the Dead Sea," he said, stabbing a finger for emphasis. "Palestine is ours, ours, ours!"

Arafat's comments drew quick criticism from Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy.

"A peace process can't exist with threats," he told reporters in Jerusalem. "If he chooses to go declare statehood... in a unilateral way, then he directly allows Israel to choose the same method."

Israel has indicated in the past that if Arafat declares statehood unilaterally, it in turn will annex chunks of the West Bank.

Barak, meanwhile, conferred with his Cabinet in Jerusalem about the upcoming visit of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

In advance of her visit, the third to the region in a month, US envoy Dennis Ross has been meeting with both sides to try to determine whether a summit should be held under US auspices.

## Gunmen kill 9 in Manipur

IMPHAL, India, June 26 : Unidentified gunmen killed nine people and wounded two late on Sunday when they attacked a vehicle in a remote northeast Indian state, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported, says Reuters.

The assailants sprayed bullets at the vehicle in Lengangpokpi area, 200 km (125 miles) west of Imphal, the capital of Manipur state bordering Myanmar, PTI said today, quoting official sources.

It gave no details on the vehicle, which could be a van or bus.

The vehicle carrying 10 passengers left Imphal in the morning for the border town of Jiribam, about 220 km (132 miles) west of Imphal, it said.

No individual or group has claimed responsibility for the killings and the motive remains unknown, it said.

## '300 refugees cross into Azad Kashmir'

ISLAMABAD, June 26 : Some 300 refugees from Indian-controlled Kashmir have crossed into the Pakistan side of the disputed territory in the past three days, Pakistani officials said today, reports AFP.

Government spokesman Major General Rashid Qureshi said it was unclear what provoked the exodus but he suspected the Indian army might be forcibly relocating Muslim families to the Pakistani side of the unofficial border.

"It started the day before yesterday and initially we thought it was just a few families," he told AFP, adding that they began arriving around the town of Kotli.

## Chinese police detain 1,200 Falungong members

HONG KONG, June 26 : Chinese police detained at least 1,200 members of the banned Falungong spiritual movement after a series of protests around the country last week, a rights group said today, reports AFP.

The Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy also alleged that a Beijing University professor and Falungong member named Zhao Xin was left paralysed after being tortured by police following her arrest.

The Hong Kong-based rights group said the 1,200 were detained between June 18 and June 25 during protests and public demonstrations.

## BRIEFLY

**Fernandes visits Russia:** India's plans to purchase Russian tanks, airplanes and a battleship were expected to top the agenda of Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes' visit to Moscow starting Monday, AP reports from Moscow.

Fernandes was scheduled to discuss contracts for Russian T-90-S tanks and a license to produce SU-30MKI jet fighters for the Indian military, the ITAR-Tass News agency reported. Russia is a traditional supplier of military equipment to India. Indian generals pledged to upgrade the army's capabilities after battles last summer with Islamic militants in the disputed province of Kashmir, but they have been restrained by dimming defense budgets, according to Jane's Defence Weekly.

**7 shot at Chicago park:** Seven people were shot at a south Chicago park on Sunday, police said in Chicago, AFP reports from Chicago.

According to local media reports, four of the shooting victims were in critical condition, reportedly with multiple gunshot wounds. CNN reported that the shooting at Jackson Park occurred near a concert attended by at least 5,000 people. It was not immediately known whether the victims were concertgoers.

**8 die in Vietnam road mishap:** Eight people were killed and nine others were injured, six seriously, when an out-of-control truck crashed into several motorbikes in the southern province of An Giang, a local police officer said Monday, AP reports from Hanoi.

**5 die in Siberia:** Five people died in Siberia and six others were hospitalised in serious condition after consuming a tainted alcoholic drink, the contents of which are unknown, the Itar-Tass agency reported Monday, says AFP from Moscow.

Those hospitalised in the Siberian town Ulan-Ude, near Siberia's southern border with Mongolia, on Saturday were aged between 41 and 66 and included two women, Itar-Tass reported a local emergency committee as saying.



Activists of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML) burn an effigy of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on a collapsed police barricade during a demonstration near parliament on the 25th anniversary of the declaration by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of the emergency. The protesters claimed that Vajpayee, who was on the receiving end of the Congress-imposed emergency 25 years ago, failed to live up to his anti-emergency ideology.

— AFP photo

## Blast in Hyderabad mosque curfew imposed, mobs attack bus

HYDERABAD, June 26 : A bomb exploded in a mosque just after evening prayers Sunday, injuring two people and prompting mob attacks on state buses that injured another five in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, reports AP.

A curfew was imposed to force people to remain inside and extra police were sent Monday to Guntur, where the bomb exploded, and to Hyderabad, the state capital 310 kilometres (190 miles) to the west.

Guntur Police Superintendent Poornachandra Rao said the curfew was imposed until

dawn after the explosion took place about 9 pm (1639 GMT). Worshippers were leaving the mosque after the last prayers of the day.

Rao said bomb was left inside the mosque in a black bag.

The crowd became angry about the explosion and began throwing stones at passing vehicles, then set fire to 25 buses at a bus station.

Deputy Police Superintendent Sudarshan Reddy said two of those injured in the stone-throwing were a television reporter and cameraman.

Guntur is a prosperous tobacco centre where Muslims make up about 40 per cent of the 600,000 population.

The state's highest elected official, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, vowed that anyone behind the explosion would be prosecuted. He planned to visit the town Monday to assess the situation.

There was no claim of responsibility for the bombing. It follows a series of bombings of churches in the state's coastal belt, where the Christian community is concentrated.

## Flood waters receding in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, June 26 : Water levels were receding slightly today in India's northeastern state of Assam, after flash floods that left 30 dead and more than 250,000 people stranded.

"Since Sunday night, there has been no rain and the water level has been receding," a flood control official told AFP.

The Brahmaputra (river) is still flowing above the danger level at many places but the trend is not that frightening. More than 30 people have died in Assam and neighbour-

ing Arunachal Pradesh state since the flooding began two weeks ago.

At least 10 districts of Assam were hit by the floods with an estimated 1,200 villages submerged, leaving thousands homeless and reliant on temporary relief shelter.

"More than 25,000 hectares (62,000 acres) of paddy cultivation have been affected," the official said.

Health officials said teams of experts have been sent to treat flood victims and provide

antidotes for water-borne diseases, resulting from drinking untreated water.

"People are suffering from dysentery and other stomach ailments," said Ashim Kalita, a school teacher in the worst-hit district of Dhemaji in eastern Assam.

"After floods, water-borne diseases are very common and we need to first provide hygienic drinking water to the people to avoid an epidemic," said Syamal Das, a doctor from Jorhat in northeast Assam.