

Megawati takes centre stage as new Cabinet sworn in

JAKARTA, Aug 26: Members of Indonesia's much-maligned new Cabinet today pledged to work closely with their newly-empowered vice president to tackle the country's many problems, as President Abdurrahman Wahid retreated from centre stage, reports AFP.

The vice president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the country's founding president Sukarno and leader of the party with most seats in parliament, was entrusted last week by Wahid with running the day-to-day affairs of state.

And on Saturday she presided over the swearing-in of the controversial new 26-member cabinet at the state palace, as Wahid stood on the sidelines.

"The ministers are ready to assist the vice president in doing her jobs," Law and Legislation Minister Yusril Isha Mahendra told journalists after the ceremony.

Mahendra also said Megawati, 53, who for 10 months held a largely ceremonial position, had told him she was happy with the change.

"She told me she accepted the draft of the presidential decree on her new powers one day before it was signed by the president," Mahendra said.

"I think she's happy about that... but she said to me 'don't give me too much authority,'" he said.

Reservations have been expressed over Megawati's untested administrative skills, but Mahendra said the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), which she heads, had set up a team to help her.

Adding to her burden is the harsh reaction the new cabinet received when it was announced on Wednesday, with the press dubbing it a team of "Wahid cronies" and the markets plummeting in reaction to the president's choice of economic

ministers. Ryaas Rasyid, the new minister for the empowerment of state apparatus, said Megawati had told him her new tasks seemed a bit too much -- but that he had assured her of the cabinet's support for her.

She was prepared to be president last year why can't she accept some of the presidential authority. I think (she has) no problem with that," he added.

The PDI-P won last year's elections and has the largest bloc of seats in parliament, but Megawati was defeated by Wahid in the presidential race in October, largely because of her inability to forge alliances with other parties.

Under the new work arrangement she formulates the cabinet agenda and priorities of the government, chairs cabinet meetings and evaluates the ministers' performance.

Megawati is empowered to sign decrees on government policies -- but only after they have already been approved by the president.

Wahid, 60 and hampered by blindness and his inability to move without assistance -- the legacy of two strokes -- made the change and brought in the new Cabinet in response to a chorus of criticism from the country's highest legislative body.

The People's Consultative Assembly had charged that his 10-month-old government had failed to live up to expectations, and that he was spending his time travelling abroad instead of attending to urgent domestic problems including the bloody sectarian crisis in the Maluku and the economic crisis.

He has said that responsibility for decisions would rest jointly with four people -- the president, the vice president and two coordinating ministers.



Indonesian Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri (R, front), stands beside President Abdurrahman Wahid (L, front) before a group photo after the new Cabinet's swearing-in ceremony at the Merdeka state palace, Jakarta yesterday. — AFP photo

3 Maoists, 2 Nepalese cops killed in gunbattle

KATHMANDU, Aug 26: Two policemen and three Maoist rebels were killed in a six-hour gunbattle at Jarayokot village, 392 km northwest of here, police said today, reports AFP.

Three policemen and two children were also injured in the confrontation on Wednesday, police said. The police seized an ammunition cache after the rebels fled.

Meanwhile, three Nepal Communist Party-Maoist (NCP-M) activists, including a 15-year-old girl, surrendered to police in the remote northwestern district of Bajura, police said Saturday.

The Maoists surrendered because of intimidation by their seniors, whom they accused of acting like "Hitler" and leading a comfortable life while the local people did not have enough to eat.

Family reunions Seoul proposes Red Cross talks on Sept 5

SEOUL, Aug 26: South Korea today proposed inter-Korean Red Cross talks on September 5 to discuss ways of continuing the reunions of families separated by the decades-old division of Korea, reports AFP.

"I propose the second inter-Korean Red Cross talks to take place on September 5" at the border town of Panmunjom, South Korea's Red Cross head Jang Choong-Shik said in a message telephoned to his Northern counterpart, Jang Jae-On.

South Korea suggested the two sides send five-member delegations to the talks.

The two Koreas successfully exchanged visits by 200 members of separated families earlier this month.

Clinton in Nigeria to encourage revival of democracy

ABUJA, Aug 26: US President Bill Clinton arrived here today for a two-day visit during which he is expected to encourage Nigeria's democratic revival and hear new appeals over the country's massive debt burden, reports AFP.

The US leader, accompanied by his daughter Chelsea and a 1,000-strong delegation, was greeted on arrival by his Nigerian counterpart Olusegun Obasanjo.

The president was given a 21-cannon salute. He and Obasanjo inspected a guard of honour. Traditional Nigerian singers and dancers took part in the welcoming ceremony.

Clinton's two-day visit is seen as a possible economic watershed for Nigeria, which is staggering under 30 billion

dollars of debt, only four per cent of which however is owed directly to the United States.

Since coming to power in May 1999 following democratic elections, Obasanjo has led a vociferous campaign for relief on the country's debt payments, either through a write-off or a rescheduling of its debts.

With its first civilian government in more than 15 years, Nigeria, home to one in four sub-Saharan Africans, has begun seeking international respectability and the help it needs to resuscitate an economy that ground practically to a halt under military rule.

Despite a wealth of natural resources including oil reserves of some 25 billion barrels, more than half of Nigeria's people live in abject poverty.

Arafat in Egypt for talks Palestinians lash Israeli 'public relations exercise'

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt, Aug 26: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived here today from Gaza for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the peace process with Israel, Egypt's MENA news agency reported, says AFP.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mussa said Friday that Arafat's consultations with Mubarak are aimed at "narrowing the gaps (with Israel) in a balanced and just way."

The Palestinian leader was expected to brief Mubarak on his recent talks with US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, Jordan's King Abdullah II and Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorbjørn Jagland.

Arafat was accompanied by

his advisor Nabil Rudeina. Palestinian number two Mahmud Abbas, information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo and negotiator Saeb Erekat.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership last Friday hit out at what it called an Israeli "public relations exercise" aimed at releasing Israel from its obligations.

"Israel is carrying out a public relations exercise to cover up its intransigent attitude and its refusal to apply accords reached (with the Palestinians) as well as international resolutions" concerning the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, said a statement released after the leadership's weekly meeting here.

Pakistan expels Indian embassy staffer

ISLAMABAD, Aug 26: Pakistan today ordered the expulsion of an Indian embassy staffer on spying charges in an apparent tit-for-tat move, reports AFP.

"The government of Pakistan has decided to ask for the recall of PC Dey, an official of the Indian High Commission (embassy) in Islamabad," a foreign office statement said.

He has been found to be engaged in activities incompatible with his official status," it said.

On Thursday India expelled a Pakistani embassy staffer Malik Mohammad Rafiq on similar charges.

Pakistan rejected the Indian charges as "baseless."

Islamabad said Saturday that Indian Deputy High Commissioner Sudir Vyas was summoned to the foreign office to receive the government's decision and that Dey had been asked to leave Pakistan within a week.

Egyptian Gulf Air victims' bodies arrive in Cairo

CAIRO, Aug 26: The bodies of 56 Egyptians who died in the Gulf Air crash off Bahrain arrived back in Egypt Saturday on a special flight, accompanied by 164 grieving relatives, witnesses said, reports AFP.

One woman screamed as she walked down the steps of the Gulf Air plane onto the tarmac while airport employees began removing the coffins and placing them in waiting ambulances and hearses.

A total of 64 Egyptians were among the 143 people who died Wednesday when the plane, coming from Cairo, crashed into the sea just before it was due to land.

Another seven bodies have been kept in Bahrain because of doubts over their identities and will be flown home later.

Junta preventing food, water from reaching Suu Kyi

US deplores Myanmar's treatment of opposition leader

YANGON, Aug 26: Myanmar's junta is preventing food and water from reaching opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as her showdown with the authorities outside Yangon enters a third day, her party said today, reports AFP.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) said Aung San Suu Kyi and her entourage were fast running out of supplies and they appealed for help from the local people in the township where the group was halted Thursday.

"We demand that the blockade be immediately removed and the NLD leaders be allowed to proceed to their desired destination," the NLD's central executive committee said in a letter of complaint sent to the regime.

If the health of those being

blocked be impaired by lack of food and water... this is the entire responsibility of those who have stopped them."

Aung San Suu Kyi sparked the stand-off Thursday when she travelled outside Yangon in defiance of a ban which confines her to the capital.

It was her first attempt to travel outside Yangon since a dramatic 13-day confrontation on a bridge north-west of the capital in August 1998 which ended amid fears for her health.

The Myanmar government said the Nobel laureate was travelling without proper security precautions and had been stopped for her own safety.

Every effort was being made to "ensure the comfort and safety" of the party, it said in a statement.

"Until safety conditions im-

Asian countries to help pvt sector eliminate AIDS, malaria, TB

KATHMANDU, Aug 26: Health Ministers from 10 Asian countries have agreed to cooperate with the private sector to eliminate HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, state radio said today, reports AFP.

Nepal's Health Minister Dr Ram Baran Yadav said inter-country cooperation for the fight against "perilous diseases" in the region was necessary.

"Health is an issue for everyone's concern, so people need to take the initiative," Rafei said after a three-day ministerial meeting of World Health Organisation (WHO) member countries here Friday.

The meeting has directed Nepal to develop a prevention for kala-azar, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and encephalitis in collaboration with WHO, Minister Yadav said.

British man alive after 'dying' in hospital

LONDON, Aug 26: A British hospital has been left red-faced after announcing the death of a patient from lung cancer, only to inform grieving relatives that the patient had recovered from pneumonia, reports AFP.

Christine Long said her 85-year-old father William Dooley was hospitalised in the central city of Birmingham on August 8, and learned he was stricken by cancer and had just nine months to live.

The same evening she went to the hospital and was informed of her father's death. The hospital later called her back with the happier news that her father was in fact on the mend after a bout of pneumonia.

The director of operations at Birmingham city hospital, Clive Walsh, confirmed the incident and explained that hospital personnel had confused the very-much-alive William Dooley with another patient with a similar name.

India rules out strikes on Kashmir guerrilla camps in Pakistan

NEW DELHI, Aug 26: Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes today rejected demands for cross-border strikes on Kashmiri guerrilla camps in Pakistan saying such attacks would lead to heavy civilian casualties, reports AFP.

"Terrorist camps in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir and other areas across the Line-of-Control (LoC) are not exclusive zones but are located in civilian enclaves," Fernandes told reporters in New Delhi.

"Any action to attack and destroy these camps will invariably cause collateral damage resulting in deaths of innocent men, women and children and, therefore, would be against the humanitarian principles India has always stood for."

A headline section within Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's ruling Hindu na-

tionalist BJP party advocate cross-border raids to eliminate Muslim rebels who cross the LoC from Pakistan to stage attacks in Indian Kashmir.

The control line partitions the two zones of divided Kashmir, the subject of two of the three wars fought between India and Pakistan since 1947.

Fernandes said although New Delhi was concerned by the "infiltration of terrorists" by Islamabad into Kashmir, India will not opt for the policy of hot-pursuit.

Even our supersonic aircraft that went into action did not fly across the LoC," he said, referring to a 10-week battle last summer in Kashmir which took India and Pakistan dangerously close to a fourth war.

"New Delhi is determined to defeat the Pakistan-backed proxy war" in Kashmir,

Fernandes said of the Muslim secessionist drive which has left more than 25,000 people dead in the Indian zone of Kashmir since 1989.

The defence minister also said up to 70 per cent of the Muslim guerrillas in Kashmir were "foreigners," who are "equipped with most modern weapons and means of communications."

He said 894 militants were killed by Indian troops between June and August 24 in the Himalayan territory.

The defence minister's statement came two days after a major clash between Indian and Pakistani troops occurred at a frontier zone of Kashmir.

Fernandes said between 12 and 14 intruders were killed and several wounded by Indian troops when Pakistani soldiers tried to seize an Indian post in

the southern Kashmiri district of Poonch on Thursday.

A Pakistani military statement on Friday accused Indian troops of launching an "unprovoked attack" across the LoC.

Late last month India accused Pakistani troops of intruding into Indian Kashmir, killing one porter and abducting six people including two soldiers.

Indian military officials argue that Pakistan was engineering fresh clashes along the LoC in order to keep global attention focused on the two countries' long-standing dispute over Kashmir.

Prime minister Vajpayee is due to visit the United States next month where Kashmir is likely to figure in his bilateral talks with US President Bill Clinton.

Floodwaters receding Death toll rises to 122 in Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD, India, Aug 26: The death toll has risen to at least 122 after the worst floods in decades in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, officials said today, reports AFP.

More bodies were being recovered as floodwaters began to recede Saturday, with 24 victims found in the state capital Hyderabad, India's newest city.

"A total of 122 bodies have been found so far," said a spokesman for the state relief department.

He said 6,700 hectares (16,750 acres) of crops and 600 villages had been damaged by the floods, triggered by the highest rainfall recorded in Andhra Pradesh in 46 years.

The government has opened 200 camps to provide temporary shelter to the thousands who have been rendered homeless."

Andhra Pradesh Relief Commissioner Bhaskar Prasad

said. Army helicopters were involved in continuing sorties to rescue people and drop emergency stores to marooned victims, he said.

A federal team of experts arrived in Hyderabad Saturday to assess the damage caused by the floods, which prompted the evacuation of thousands of residents.

"We will not leave any stone unturned in helping the state government in relief and rehabilitation works," said Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar, who is heading the team.

The floods have wrecked parts of Hyderabad, where 35,000 people have been moved to temporary shelters after the torrential rains flattened their homes in 110 submerged residential districts.

"We do not want a hi-tech city. We just need basic amenities," a resident said at one of

the relief camps.

The sewer and drainage networks of Hyderabad, touted by state Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu as India's newest cybercity, have collapsed.

Communications too have been badly hit by the floods.

Naidu has said his government was given no opportunity to prepare for the cyclonic rains produced by a depression which formed about 100 km off the coast over the Bay of Bengal.

The chief minister's TDP party, a key ally of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's ruling coalition, on Saturday asked for three billion rupees (67 million dollars) in aid from New Delhi.

Residents said the city did not have the infrastructure needed to shield them from rains or floods.

"Naidu should divert some of the revenue this state is earning through the software boom and give us some basic comforts,"

British man alive after 'dying' in hospital

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Abu Sayyaf threatens to behead two hostages Charges against kidnappers filed

MANILA, Aug 26: Abu Sayyaf gunmen holding 29 hostages, including a dozen foreigners, in the southern Philippines have threatened to behead two of their captives, a local newspaper reported today, says AFP.

It said the beheadings would take place unless suspected members of the Muslim extremist group arrested with alleged ransom money on Thursday are freed.

However an aide of chief negotiator Roberto Avenajado, said he was not informed of the alleged threat when Abu Sayyaf leader Khalid Andang called Avenajado on a satellite telephone on Friday.

Avenajado's aide said Andang never raised the issue of the arrest of the two suspected Abu Sayyaf members.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer, quoting a source, said Andang, also known as

Commander Robot, made the threat at a meeting of the gunmen in their mountain lair in Jolo island.

Police arrested the pair while they were trying to change 240,000 dollars into pesos in a bank in southern Zamboanga city.

The Inquirer quoted Chief Inspector Bayani Guela, spokesman of the unit that arrested the two, as saying that they admitted they had been instructed by Andang to convert the currency to pesos.

Police sources said they believed the cash was part of ransom money delivered to the Abu Sayyaf for hostages they released earlier.

Meanwhile, Philippine police have charged two suspected Muslim extremist kidnappers captured trying to change 240,000 dollars into pesos in a bank, a police source said today.



Vicente Fox (L), president-elect of Mexico, receives a cowboy hat as a gift from Texas Governor and Republican Governor George W. Bush during their meeting at the University of Texas on Friday in Dallas. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Liberia frees 4 foreign newsmen: Liberia on Friday released four foreign journalists arrested last week on charges of espionage, Xinhua reports from Lagos.

Addressing a press conference in the capital Monrovia, Liberian Justice Minister Eddington Varma, who is also Attorney-General, said that the decision was made "on humanitarian grounds" following consultation with President Charles Taylor.

Salat Hassan new Somali president: Somalia's transitional parliament early Saturday elected Abdulkassim Salat Hassan as the new president, but he faces a tough task ending anarchy in a country that has been lawless since 1991. AFP reports from Portland.

Somalia has lacked a central government since the 1991 overthrow of president Mohamed Siad Barre, under whom Salat Hassan served as interior minister. Since then, the nation has been ruled by rival warlords.

Donald Duck cartoonist dies: Carl Barks, the gifted cartoonist who shaped Donald Duck, the Disney character beloved by generations of children, died Friday in a southern Oregon hospice, his family said. He was 99, AFP reports from Portland.

Barks, a farm boy who got his big break when he joined Disney studios in 1935, drew Donald Duck and other cartoon characters for more than 25 years.

BCIC International Tender Notice

Managing Director, Chhatak Cement Co Ltd, Chhatak, Sunamganj, hereby invites sealed quotation on C&F (C) Chittagong basis for supply of 16000 Pcs High Alumina Bricks against Tender Enquiry No PD/F/CCCL/6/2001-2002 Dt 7.8.2000. The tenders accompanied with 1% (one per cent) earnest money/bid bond and also money receipt evidencing purchase of tender documents will be received upto 10:00 am on 2.10.2000 and be opened immediately thereafter the same day both the places i.e. in Purchase Division, BCIC Head Office, Dhaka & at Purchase Deptt, Chhatak Cement Co Ltd, on payment of Tk 750.00 in cash (non-refundable) the tender documents will be available from the office of the (1) the Controller of Accounts, BCIC Head Office, 30-31, Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka, (2) BCIC Branch Office, 6-Agrabad C/A, Chittagong and (3) Chhatak Cement Co Ltd except the opening day of the tender.

BCIC-731-17/8/2000
DFF-20308-21/8
G-1502

AR Laskar
Dy Manager (Purchase)
For Managing Director

Biman Bangladesh Airlines

ZIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, KURMITOLA, DHAKA. PHONES: 8914771-9, 8914730-4, CABLE: AIRBANGLA, TEL: 642649 DARGH

Tender Notice for Hiring of Tractors

Ref: DACKB/001/2000/1168 Dated 19.07.2000

Biman Bangladesh Airlines invites tender for hiring of 05 (five) tractors for use in the apron areas of Zia International Airport, Dhaka to carry incoming and outgoing cargo of different flights. The tender schedules will be available at Tk 300/= (three hundred) only (non-refundable) from the office of Manager Cash & Banking, Biman "Balaka Bhaban", ZIA, Dhaka and from Accounts Officer, Cash Payment Unit, Admin Building, ZIA, Dhaka up to 18th of September 2000. The tender may be dropped on 19th September 2000 between 09:00 hrs to 12:00 hrs, Biman Management reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason.

Md Aminul Islam
Manager-GSE
Biman/ZIA

GD-794

Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation

73, Motijheel Commercial Area, Dhaka

'Amended Tender Notice for Felling and Selling of Old Rubber Trees'

This is for information of all concerned that the time limit for selling of tender as mentioned in the re-tender for "felling and selling of old rubber trees" which was published in a number of Bangla newspapers including Bangladesh Observer on 05-7-2000 and 06-7-2000 respectively has been extended till 03-9-2000 due to unavoidable circumstances. Tenders will be received/opened on 04-9-2000 instead of 21-8-2000 in the scheduled time. Other description and terms and conditions will remain unchanged.

FIDCOR: 27/2000-001
DFF-20360-21/8
G-1503

Golam Mostofa
Deputy General Manager (Rubber)