

International

# Myanmar junta clamps down on pro-democracy party

## US outraged, Britain warns of retaliation

YANGON, Sept 3: Police and intelligence officers moved against Myanmar's battered opposition party today, ringing the homes of its leaders and effectively shutting down its nerve centre, reports agencies.

The crackdown followed what the opposition said was the forcible end to a nine-day standoff between the military regime and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The 55-year-old Nobel laureate and colleagues of her National League for Democracy were brought back to the capital Saturday after spending nine days on a suburban roadside. Security personnel had stopped her from traveling to the countryside for political work, and she had refused to return to Yangon.

At almost the same time, the headquarters of the NLD in Yangon was raided and senior NLD leaders placed under apparent house arrest.

The government announced

that the standoff had ended "happily" and the Suu Kyi and her party had "arrived home safe and sound," but made no mention of the raid or moves against NLD leaders.

Security personnel were clearly seen Sunday around the NLD headquarters near the famed Shwedagon Pagoda and around the houses of NLD deputy leader Tin Oo and other party officials.

The signboard for the NLD was in place at the headquarters, stilling rumours in the capital that the government had banned the party.

Party sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said NLD headquarters were raided about 1 am Saturday and several documents were seized by police.

British diplomats who tried to visit Suu Kyi and Tin Oo at their homes Saturday were stopped by security personnel, an embassy representative said.

Meanwhile, Britain hinted at

diplomatic retaliation against Myanmar over the military regime's treatment of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the Foreign Office said in London on Saturday.

"We are examining with EU colleagues and other international partners what measures we should take in response once the facts have been clarified," Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said in a statement.

Cook added: "I am deeply concerned by reports that Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD leaders were forcibly returned to Rangoon last night by the Burmese regime and are being held in their homes against their will."

"Initial indications are that the Burmese regime has once again grossly infringed the rights of a legal political party to operate freely. Aung San Suu Kyi was elected with the overwhelming support of the Burmese people."

"I call on the Burmese regime to allow immediate access to

Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD colleagues, and to lift all restrictions forthwith," Cook said in his statement.

In Washington, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on Saturday she was "outraged" by the Myanmar military's crackdown on the pro-democracy opposition party of Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The United States is outraged and strongly condemns the Burmese authorities' treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party members and the violations of their fundamental human rights," Albright said in a statement.

Albright said it appeared that Suu Kyi had been "forcibly returned" and said diplomats who normally have been granted access to Suu Kyi have been turned away.

"At this time, we are unable to confirm her well-being or that of other members of her party," Albright said.



Former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri casts his vote at a polling station in Beirut yesterday. Lebanese voters went to the polls in the second and final stage of parliamentary elections which could see Hariri return to office if his allies succeed as in the first round of elections the previous week. The constitution of Lebanon calls for the president to select the new prime minister after consulting with members of the newly elected parliament.

-AFP photo

### Vajpayee most admired Indian

NEW DELHI, Sept 3: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is the most admired eminent Indian, the only other politician in the lot being Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, according to a nationwide opinion poll on the ten most admired Indians, reports PTI.

Melody queen Lata Mangeshkar is the only artist from the music world to figure on the list while superstar Amitabh Bachchan and former Miss World-turned-actress Aishwarya Rai are the others from the entertainment industry for their good looks and acting ability, according to the survey by the Week magazine recently.

Vajpayee tops the list for being a good administrator, politician, leader, person and not corrupt and Naidu for improving his role in promoting information technology and working for women's progress besides being a good administrator and politician, the poll says.

The others figuring among the most admired personalities are Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly for being good cricketers and uncorrupt and first woman IPS officer Kiran Bedi who was seen as a good cop, courageous and uncorrupt.

A P J Abdul Kalam is admired for his excellence in science and Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen for being a treat economist and working for society's welfare.

### India has no plan to sign CTBT

NEW DELHI, Sept 3: India does not intend to sign a global test ban treaty in the near future, said the country's National Security Adviser just days before Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to the United States, domestic news agencies reported Saturday, reports AP.

Brajesh Mishra, who is also the principle secretary to Vajpayee, reiterated India's position that a decision on signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty would be made only after a political consensus was arrived in India, the United News of India reported.

In an interview with the weekly "Outlook" magazine, to be published Sept 11, Mishra said India had no plans to sign the CTBT "before or after Vajpayee's visit." An advance copy of the interview was made available to UNI.

Developed nations imposed sanctions on India and Pakistan after their rival tests in May 1998 because of fears of a nuclear conflagration in South Asia over the disputed territory of Kashmir. Both nations were urged to sign the CTBT.

India has said it does not plan any more tests, but will not succumb to pressure to sign a treaty that no nuclear power has ratified.



Omani children pose next to hundreds of dead fish in the port of Barka on the Gulf of Oman, 80 km northwest of Muscat, on Saturday. A large number of dead fish have been mysteriously washed up on the coast of Oman, littering the beaches. Experts from environment and fisheries ministries are trying to determine what has caused the ecological disaster.

-AFP photo

### Lankan troops mount fresh anti-Tiger drive

COLOMBO, Sept 3: Government troops launched a fresh offensive today against Tamil Tiger rebels in the northern Jaffna Peninsula, a military spokesman said, reports AP.

"We started an offensive in the Meesalal area of Jaffna," said Brig. Sanath Karunaratne, the spokesman.

Brig Karunaratne declined to give details and the rebel response to the military attack. "I can't tell you because then I will give away the aim of the operation."

This was the second assault on the guerrilla positions since Wednesday.

The Sunday Times reported that the latest thrust against Tiger guerrillas comes at a time when the island nation is preparing for the parliamentary elections on Oct 10. Apparently, the governing alliance hopes to benefit from any battlefield successes.

On Thursday, President Chandrika Kumaratunga said the Mig-27 bombers and multi-barrel rocket launchers attacked the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Thennamaraichehi, a rebel-controlled town 15 kilometers east of Jaffna city.

The renewed thrust by govern-

ment troops broke a four-month lull infighting in the Jaffna Peninsula.

On Wednesday, the rebels fired mortars at government defenses in Meesalal, 20 km east of Jaffna.

A media censorship on reporting the war make reporters dependent on the government statement. No independent confirmation is possible as both sides don't permit journalists into the war zone.

The government imposed media censorship in May after the rebels overrun several military positions in the Jaffna Peninsula. The army halted the guerrilla advance after procuring new fighter planes and weaponry from Israel, Pakistan and some other countries.

The rebels are fighting for an independent homeland in the country's north and east, claiming widespread discrimination in education and jobs by the majority Sinhalese. The government denies the charge.

Meanwhile, 18 political groups, including major parties, and four independents have filed nominations to contest the October 10 elections from troubled Jaffna district, which has nine seats in 225-seat Parliament.

### Clinton urges direct Indo-Pak talks to resolve Kashmir issue

NEW DELHI, Sept 3: The Kashmir dispute can only be resolved through restraint, renunciation of terrorism and "direct discussions" between India and Pakistan, US President Bill Clinton was quoted as saying by the Hindustan Times daily today, reports AFP.

The United States has voiced fears that Kashmir could become the trigger of yet another confrontation between now-nuclearised India and Pakistan.

"I am troubled by the threat to peace posed by the Kashmir dispute," Clinton was quoted as having told the newspaper's Washington correspondent.

"I continue to believe that there

cannot be a solution to the Kashmir issue without direct discussions between India and Pakistan. For such discussions to take place, however, a climate of trust must be created through sincere efforts to end violence."

Clinton, during a landmark trip to India and Pakistan in March, had urged them to show restraint and respect the Line of Control that divides Kashmir.

India has accused Pakistan of encouraging cross-border terrorism. Islamic insurgency in Kashmir has left more than 25,000 people dead since 1989.

Islamabad denies the allegation but offers open support to what it deems the Kashmiri

struggle for self-determination.

The dispute has sparked two wars since 1947.

Clinton meanwhile praised Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for staying open to talks with the Kashmir rebels.

"In recent months, there has been some steps towards addressing the dispute, including the commendable initiative by the Indian government and the regrettably short-lived Hizbul Mujahideen ceasefire," said Clinton.

The collapse of a ceasefire on August 8, offered unilaterally by Kashmir's frontline Hizbul Mujahideen group, has led to a spurt of separatist violence.

### Putin in Tokyo, rules out return of Kurils

TOKYO, Sept 3: Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived here today on a three-day visit, hours after he ruled out a return of the Kuril Islands claimed by Japan, reports AFP.

In a statement on arrival from the Russian far east island of Sakhalin, Putin pledged to promote relations with Japan, using a personal trust he has developed with Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori.

The two leaders have already met twice as the chief executives - last April when Mori toured the capitals of Group-of-Eight (G8) nations and in July when Japan hosted the G8 summit.

Putin said, "In our view, Russia-Japan relations are at a point of development which has not been seen since the end of World War II."

"This is very important to us and we are fully committed to

promoting the relationship between Japan and Russia," he added.

The fact that we are here shows that Russia is prepared to promote relations with its neighbour in all spheres on the basis of the existing accords, especially the declaration of 1998."

Putin went on to say, "A good basis for our work is the very comradely business-like and personal relationship that has developed between the prime minister of Japan and me."

After his special plane touched down at 4:45 p.m. (1345 BST), Putin reviewed a guard of honour and was greeted by Mori and other Japanese leaders.

His talks with Mori are expected to be dominated by the thorny question of the four tiny islands, known as the southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern

Territories in Japan.

The islands were seized by Soviet troops in the closing days of World War II and the territorial row has prevented Moscow and Tokyo from signing a post-war peace treaty and embarking on economic cooperation in full force.

"Who said the Russian government was preparing to return the Kurils? Negotiations are under way," Putin was quoted as saying in the Russian far east by the Interfax news agency.

"It is a question of discussing the problems as such but no more," the president told journalists on Sakhalin.

The Kurils were discovered by the Russians in the 17th century, ceded to Japan in 1875 and then annexed by the Soviet Union in 1945.

## BRIEFLY

### 4 die in Ohio small plane crash:

A small airplane flying to an air show in Cleveland crashed in a wooded area Saturday, killing four people and seriously injuring another, reports AP from Apple Creek.

The Piper Cherokee Six 300 had just taken off from an airport about a mile (kilometer) from the crash site early Saturday morning, said Lt. Joel Smith of the State Highway Patrol. The crash killed the pilot, a father and son, and another boy whose father was in serious condition. The two boys were about 13, Smith said. The area around the airport was foggy, but it is unclear if weather played a role in the crash. The plane was on its way to an air show in Cleveland. Smith said, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of the crash site.

### 13 Serb prisoners escape:

NATO-led peacekeepers and UN police scoured northern Kosovo Sunday to track down Serb prisoners who escaped from a detention centre after overpowering a guard, AP reports from Pristina.

Some 15 men fled from the UN facility in the primarily Serb part of the divided city of Kosovska Mitrovica Saturday evening, said US Major Scott Slaten, a spokesman for the peacekeepers. Two men were caught immediately in the search involving both peacekeepers and UN police, but 13 remained at large, Slaten said. Further details were not immediately available.

### Rains claim 23 more in UP:

Twenty-three people have died in rain-related incidents in parts of Uttar Pradesh during 24 hours ending last night, raising the toll in current fury of monsoon to 267, PTI reports from Lucknow.

The reports said Azamgarh and Udham Singh Nagar districts accounted for the maximum of five deaths each followed by Mainpuri three, Etawah, Etah, Ghazipur, Pithoragarh two each and Sultanpur and Pratapgarh one each in rain related incidents during the period. Meanwhile, the reports from Farrukhabad, Badau, Hardoi and Pratapgarh said incessant rainfalls for the last three days have caused widespread damage to property and crops.

### 37 injured in Australian city:

Thirty-seven people were injured, at least three seriously, when a merry-go-round collapsed at a fun fair Saturday night in the southern Australian city of Adelaide, reports DPA from Adelaide.

Of the victims, 27 were hospitalised and three underwent surgery. Investigators were trying to assess the cause of the accident.

### Health care leaders see AIDS as a security threat

BEIJING, Sept 3: The AIDS epidemic ravaging southern Africa needs to be seen not just as a health issue, but as a security crisis with potentially global implications, health care leaders from around the world said today, report AP.

The disease's devastating effect on families, economies and education in sub-Saharan Africa is destabilising the region and could spread insecurity outward, David Satcher, the US surgeon general, said at the World Federation of Public Health Associations' international congress.

"If we don't deal with it as a security threat, it can, in fact, be the kind of destabilising force that could lead to problems with peace and security," Satcher said.

The health care leaders meeting in Beijing this week hope to fuel the sense of crisis over AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, which has drawn major attention this year from both the United Nations and the Group of Eight world's wealthiest industrialised countries.

Sub-Saharan Africa has 10 per cent of the world's population but 70 per cent of the world's AIDS cases.

The disease kills 6,000 people a day in Africa, has orphaned about 15 per cent of children in the worst-hit cities, and by some estimates will lower life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa from 59 in the early 1990s to 45 by 2015.

In Zambia, 7,300 teachers died in one year alone, Satcher said, illustrating how AIDS kills the most productive members of African societies.

Meanwhile, the 13 million orphans created by AIDS, most of whom live without hope or homes in Africa's cities, could become a significant threat to order, Satcher said.

Health care leaders have called for debt relief for poor African nations so they can pay for AIDS prevention, and urge stepped-up international support for condom distribution, testing kits and essential drugs.

"In order to get the political attention to this problem, classifying it as a large threat to security is not an unrealistic call to action," said Margaret Hillson, a Canadian health care professional and co-chair of the congress.

While sub-Saharan Africa is the current area of chief concern, attention also needs to be devoted to AIDS in India, Cambodia, and other hot spots where ignorance and poverty nurture the disease's spread, said Mohammad Akhter, executive director of the American Public Health Association.



Sierra Leonean soldiers patrol in the village of Four Mile, 40 km from Freetown, on Saturday. Another meeting took place between negotiators and the Sierra Leone militia holding six British soldiers, but there are no developments, according to the British military spokesman.

-AFP photo

### Chechen rebels kill five Russian troops

SLEPTSOVSK, Russia, Sept 3: At least five Russian soldiers died in Grozny early today as Chechen rebels carried out attacks throughout Chechnya, the press service of Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov said, reports AFP.

A truck carrying interior ministry troops was blown up by a grenade in a western suburb of Grozny, killing at least five and wounding others, the press service in Sleptsovsk, Ingushetia, told the news agency.

It claimed there were further victims when Chechen fighters destroyed five freight cars carrying heating fuel and food near the Russian Khankkala base.

At Gudermes 30 kilometers (20 miles) from Grozny, fighters attacked a building of the local Russian administration causing more casualties, the press service said.

Meanwhile, it said Russian interior ministry special forces arrested 10 Chechens during a mopping up operation in a town.

### UN Millennium Summit China's best chance to fight US missile shield

BEIJING, Sept 3: The United Nations three-day Millennium Summit, starting on Wednesday, will be China's best chance in years to voice its views on world politics, analysts said, reports AFP.

President Jiang Zemin will address one of the largest ever gatherings of world leaders and Chinese foreign ministry officials said he will use the opportunity to attack US plans for a National Missile Defence (NMD).

On a broader scale, China sees its own ideas on international politics increasingly at odds with those of the United States, and Jiang will present an alternative world model where Washington does not dominate as the sole superpower.

Jiang Zemin's visit to the UN is good PR for China, a Western diplomat in Beijing commented.

The foreign ministry's remarks came before President Bill Clinton's announcement on Friday that he would leave the decision on whether to go ahead with the NMD to his successor.

Clinton said more information was needed before he could responsibly make a decision to commit the billions of dollars needed to deploy the shield.

China Saturday hailed the decision to delay deployment of the missile defence shield as "rational."

"We hope that the US government will have more contact and discussions with other countries on the matter, so as to make a decision which could serve the interests of countries and peoples all over the world," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said.

A Chinese foreign ministry official contacted on Sunday declined comment on whether Clinton's announcement will affect the content of Jiang's speech to be made at the UN.

According to the Chinese foreign ministry, Jiang will leave Beijing on Monday and is scheduled to meet President Bill Clinton on the summit sidelines.

He will use this opportunity to introduce his audience to a new post-Cold War security outlook in which alliances and one-sided security measures have become obsolete.

Especially since the NATO air campaign in Kosovo last year, China is concerned about what it sees as a US practice of throwing its weight around in the world.

Although burdened with an outdated army and a third world economy, given the trajectory of its economic growth, China is

demanding equal status with the US, said the Western diplomat.

"China doesn't see why it should be barred from having as much economic and military might as the US," he said.

The foreign ministry official added: "Jiang Zemin will stress... that some countries follow a Cold War mentality, strengthening military alliances and intensifying their research and deployment of advanced anti-ballistic systems."

"That will severely undermine the promising trend of disarmament efforts."

China is most worried about how a regional version of the system could include Taiwan and make it more difficult for Beijing to intimidate the island, over which it claims sovereignty.

Jiang is likely to be applauded for criticising the American plans,

also opposed by Russia and in Europe, analysts say.

"That would be a way to globalise it rather than bilateralise it," said David Zweig, a political scientist from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

"China is at a disadvantage in bilateral talks with the US, the biggest power in the world."

But whatever Jiang says will be unlikely to hold much sway over the Americans, observers say.

"China is helpless," said the Western diplomat. "If the Americans have got enough money, and if the technology is there, there is nothing they can do about it."

But on the plans to expand of the Security Council, China may have more influence, given its status as one of the council's five permanent members.

"Only one permanent member

### Wahid leaves for US today

JAKARTA, Sept 3: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid leaves Monday for the United States for a week-long visit that will mix diplomacy and medical treatment, reports AP.

Wahid will join scores of world leaders at the UN-organised Millennium Summit in New York, where he is scheduled to meet several heads of government, including Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

Those talks are expected to be dominated by continuing security concerns in UN-administered East Timor, where pro-Indonesia militiamen have stepped up a campaign of violence.

Wahid has yet to make good his promises to clamp down on the militiamen and to close refugee camps in West Timor, which are being used as bases by gangs.