

International

Lanka police ban election meeting on main roads

COLOMBO, Sept 11: Police will not allow political rallies to be held on the main streets of Sri Lanka's capital in the run up to the October 10 elections because of security threats, police said today, reports AP.

"No meetings will be allowed on main roads," said Deputy Inspector General of Police Bodhi Liyanage.

Political gatherings can however be held on side streets, he said.

Police on Friday increased security for several government ministers after uncovering plans by Tamil Tiger rebels to assassinate them during the election campaign.

Rebels visited neighbourhoods where the ministers live to monitor their movements, said Liyanage. He gave no details about how the information was obtained.

Rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have assassinated government minister and key politicians in the past. Huge crowds gathered at political rallies are ideal targets for the rebels who are fighting to establish a separate homeland for the Sri Lanka's Tamil minority in the north and the east.

In June, a rebel suicide bombing killed Industrial Development Minister CV Gooneratne. Opposition presidential contender Gamini Dissanayake was killed in a similar explosion in 1994.

A rebel suicide bomber killed President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in December during her presidential election campaign. Her right eye was blinded in a suicide bombing that killed 25 people and wounded nearly 90.

More than 62,400 people have been killed since the war broke out in 1983.

Heartburn can increase risk of cancer

MUNICH, Sept 11: Heartburn can have serious consequences if it occurs regularly over a longer period of time and continuous attacks by stomach acid can lead in some circumstances to inflammation of the gut and eventually even to ulcers and cancer, reports DPA.

Experts from the European Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ESGE) in the southern German city of Munich have noticed that sufferers generally fail to attack very much importance to what they believe is simply an uncomfortable complaint. Almost one German in ten suffers heartburn on a daily basis while one in seven complains of heartburn at least once a week.

Anyone who suffers from heartburn on a regular basis should seek medical advice straight away. In most cases, help can be provided by medication which absorbs the excess acid. In serious cases, medication is prescribed which restrict the production of gastric acid.

Sufferers should take certain steps to keep their heartburn under control: Avoid obesity and restrict their consumption of alcohol, coffee and cigarettes. Meals should be smaller and low in fat and fizzy, carbonated drinks should be avoided. The same goes for food or snacks shortly before going to bed.

Saddam urges army to defeat Western planes

BAGHDAD, Sept 11: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has urged his armed forces to vanquish US and British warplanes patrolling Western-imposed no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq, reports Reuters.

"Defeat them quickly... and make them flee quickly because it is ten years now since they have been here," Iraqi newspapers today quoted Saddam as saying during a meeting with the Iraqi Atomic Energy Organisation late on Sunday night.

"They will be defeated when they suffer losses greater than what they are intending to gain," he added.

Baghdad is eager to keep US and British warplanes from patrolling the zones, which the West set up soon after the 1991 Gulf War to protect a Kurdish enclave in the north and Shi'ite Muslims in south from possible attacks by Baghdad troops.

Iraqi anti-aircraft defences have routinely challenged Western planes flying in Iraqi space since December 1998 when the United States and Britain carried out an extensive, four-day bombing campaign.

Iraq has said in several occasions that it has hit or shot down US or British aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones, but the reports have always been denied.

Saddam has on several occasions praised military researchers for work to upgrade Iraq's anti-aircraft defences.

On Sunday, he also lashed out at the rulers of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for allowing Western planes to use their air bases to patrol the no-fly zone in southern Iraq.

"Those who allow foreign troops to base themselves in the Muslim holy lands are not believers in God."

Palestinians accuse Israel of holding up fresh talks

Declaration of statehood put off for 2 months

GAZA CITY, Sept 11: The Palestinians said today they were awaiting a response from Israel to set meetings to resume a resumption of peace negotiations, and accused Israel of wasting time, reports AFP.

"We are waiting for a reply from Israel this afternoon about setting the time for the negotiations," senior negotiator Saeb Erakat told reporters.

He did not provide further details about when the talks would begin, although a Palestinian official had said on Sunday that they would begin in the region Monday.

Prospects for peace were given a boost on Sunday when the PLO Central Council or ministers voted to put off a

declaration of statehood, initially planned for September 13, for at least two months.

However, the Israeli side has yet to confirm any resumption of the peace talks and Prime Minister Ehud Barak said only in New York that there would be "concrete."

Barak is to return to Israel Monday evening from New York, where US President Bill Clinton failed in his bid to break the deadlock particularly over the status of Jerusalem.

The two sides are almost certain to miss a September 13 deadline for a comprehensive peace deal that was laid down in an interim accord signed a year ago in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

"There is no set time until now and Israel is still delaying and are not ready because Barak has been busy in Washington," said Palestinian cabinet minister and negotiator Hassan Asfour.

"Barak wrongly thinks that he can put pressure on the Palestinians to make concessions. We reject any postponement of the principle issues or that they be addressed separately," he told Voice of Palestine Radio.

"The position of the leadership is based on reaching a full agreement, or there will be complete destruction," Asfour warned.

The Palestinians have said the negotiations would last from four to five weeks.



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak speaks during a town hall meeting at the UJA-Federation of New York on Sunday. Israel welcomed the PLO council decision to postpone a statehood declaration as Israel and Palestine head into new peace talks.

-- AFP photo



Freed Finnish hostage Risto Vahanen expresses gratitude and bids farewell to Philippine Government Chief Negotiator, Robert Aventajado (left), at Mactan Air Base yesterday as he and three other freed hostages leave for Tripoli, Libya, where they will be handed over to their respective country representatives and relatives.

-- AFP photo

Gunmen kidnap 3 from Malaysian resort island

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 11: Four heavily armed gunmen kidnapped three Malaysians from a resort island off Borneo and fled in a speedboat toward the southern Philippines, Malaysia's deputy prime minister said today, reports AP.

The attack occurred Sunday night near another Malaysian resort island where Abu Sayyaf separatist rebels from the Philippines had kidnapped 21 people, including foreign tourists, four months ago and took them to Jolo Island in the southern Philippines. Nearly all those hostages have since been freed, but authorities had feared that the Abu Sayyaf rebels, who received millions of dollars from hostage negotiators, might return to Malaysian waters to kidnap again.

On Monday, Malaysian helicopters and naval vessels searched the waters surrounding northeastern Borneo for the armed men who stormed remote Pandan Island, Sulaiman Junaldi, police chief in nearby Semporna town, told The Associated Press.

The spokesman, who identified himself as Gan, said that Pandan was only about half an hour from the nearest Philippine island by speedboat. Sipadan is an hour away, he said.

In Kuala Lumpur, Tian Chua, vice president of the opposition National Justice Party, said the attack in Pandan was "a shabby reflection of Malaysia's commitment to national security." He said, "Malaysia has only itself to blame for this latest event, even if the attackers turn out to be from the Philippines."

Relations between Kuala Lumpur and Manila have been strained since the Abu Sayyaf rebels captured the tourists in Sipadan in April.

Top N Korean envoy in Seoul

SEOUL, Sept 11: A top envoy of North Korea's supreme leader, Kim Jong-Il, arrived in Seoul today to give new impetus to inter-Korean rapprochement.

Meanwhile, the rescued British soldiers were to be questioned Monday about how they had been captured just over two weeks ago

just another six weeks, the estimated time of the final training task.

Asked if that could mean deploying more British troops, he added: "If that is the judgment we reach, then, certainly, the safety and security of British forces in Sierra Leone is paramount."

He refused to give a date for the completion of the British mission, saying the continuation of their work was reassessed on a six-weekly basis.

"We do not take long-term decisions," he went on. "We review carefully the work being done there six weeks at a time. There is no indefinite commitment."

British troops have so far been asked to undertake three "support training missions" for government soldiers. Two are finished, said Hoon, and the third was about to get underway.

If, as a result of that, we need to take a different approach to ensuring the safety and security

of British troops in Sierra Leone let me make it quite clear we will do that."

Asked if that could mean deploying more British troops, he added: "If that is the judgment we reach, then, certainly, the safety and security of British forces in Sierra Leone is paramount."

He also insisted there was "no question" of withdrawing British forces from Sierra Leone, although their job there -- training government soldiers -- may come to an end in six weeks anyway.

"Once we have been asked properly to debrief all the hostages, we will find out precisely why it was that they came to be detained," Hoon told BBC television earlier.

"When the soldiers come back we will hope to establish what they were doing there. We have a partial picture but we want to know why."

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why the hostages were taken, and take steps to make sure it doesn't happen again," Hoon told BBC television earlier.

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