

## 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 Lyanage.

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 Lyanage. 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 attach 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 Shiite 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 enable 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 mini-parliament 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 "contacts."

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

## 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 Pandanan island, Sulaiman Junaidi, police chief in nearby Semporna town, told The Associated Press.

The spokesman, who identified himself as Gan, said that Pandanan 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 Pandanan 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.



Freed Finnish hostage Risto Vahnen expresses gratitude and bids farewell to Philippine Government Chief Negotiator, Robert Avenajado (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

## Britain ready to send more troops to Sierra Leone

LONDON, Sept 11: British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon warned today that extra troops could be deployed to Sierra Leone to ensure the security of forces already in the west African country, reports AP.

Speaking a day after the dramatic rescue of six British troops captured by rebels, he said there would be a review of security to prevent the same thing happening again.

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 able properly to debrief all the hostages, we will find out precisely why it was that they came to be detained," Hoon told BBC radio.

"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 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.

He admitted, however, that Britain's involvement may last

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

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

They had been held by the renegade West Side Boys until Sunday's operation, in which crack British paratroopers launched a surprise dawn assault on their jungle base.

Around 25 rebels and one paratrooper were killed in the fierce firefight, according to British officials.

"It is important we understand why the hostages were taken, and take steps to make sure it doesn't happen again," 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."

## 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 in a bid to give new impetus to inter-Korean rapprochement, reports AP.

Kim Yong-Sun, the most senior North Korean official to visit the rival South since a historic Korean summit in June, was expected to discuss a historic visit to Seoul by the communist state's leader during his four-day stay.

The South also wants to advance other initiatives to which the North has given no response.

Also in the high-powered seven man delegation was General Pak Jai-Kyung, deputy head of the powerful politburo of the North's Korean People's Army.

They arrived at Seoul Kimpo airport on a jet of the North's Koryo Air which also brought gifts of rare mushrooms and ginseng liqueur.

## Democrats on top in HK elections

HONG KONG, Sept 11: Hong Kong democrats remained the largest group in the territory's legislature today, narrowly lighting off a polls challenge from pro-China parties, official results showed, reports AP.

The Democratic Party clung onto its 12 seats in the 60-seat Legislative Council (LegCo), polling the same result as in the 1998 elections — the first held after the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

But infighting and voter apathy gave a boost to the pro-China Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) which won 11 seats in Sunday's elections, one more than it held before.

Democratic Party Martin Lee, who has championed the cause of democracy in the territory since before it returned to Chinese rule in July 1997, was among those

who won his seat back.

And the scandal-hit former vice-chairman of DAB, Gary Cheng, was also celebrating after hanging onto his seat.

DAB had feared that the scandal, in which Cheng admitted to passing a confidential government memo to a PR client, would deter their supporters.

But the low turnout in Sunday's elections at around 43 per cent, and the fact that the legislature has only limited powers under the executive-led system of government has sparked calls for political reform.

At present, only 24 of the 60 seats in the LegCo are directly elected.

Six members were returned by an 800-member election committee, selected in June from various sectors of the community, which will also vote for the next chief executive in 2002.



South Korean Deputy Unification Minister, Yang Yong-Shik (L) and North Korean Kim Jong-Sun (R), a close aide to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, laugh as they walk out of Kimpo international airport in Seoul yesterday. The special North Korean envoy arrived in Seoul for a four-day visit to discuss Kim Jong-il's historic visit to Seoul and to push forward temporarily stalled inter-Korean talks.

—AFP photo

## India a dumping ground for toxic garbage

NEW DELHI, Sept 11: India has become a dumping ground for hazardous wastes despite a Supreme Court ban on the imports of toxic material, the environmental group Greenpeace said today, reports AP.

"Import data compiled by Greenpeace from Indian government statistics for 1998-1999 indicate that more than 100,887 tons, including hazardous and potentially hazardous wastes, have entered India illegally," the group said.

Greenpeace said the dumping was in direct violation of a Supreme Court order in 1997 completely restricting the import of hazardous wastes.

The environmental group said that wastes such as zinc ash, lead material, used batteries and metal scrap of cadmium, chromium, cobalt, antimony, hafnium and thallium have been exported freely to India.

It said the countries which have exported the materials include Australia, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the United States.

"These imports have occurred without any authorisation or the knowledge of the Indian Ministry of Environment," Greenpeace said in a statement.

"Some of these waste items are also illegal under the laws of European nations and Australia, both of which have banned the exports of hazardous wastes to non-OECD countries."

Greenpeace said the environmental ministry here was responsible for the failure to prevent the dumping of toxic wastes in India.

"Equally to blame are the exporters and exporting country governments which seek to exploit the limitations in the Indian regulatory infrastructure to export their environmental liabilities," it added.

## Fumes leak from parcel at Tokyo post office: 45 hospitalised

TOKYO, Sept 11: Forty-five postal workers were taken to hospital suffering eye pain today after chlorine fumes leaked from a parcel at a Tokyo post office, an official said, reports AP.

"In total, we have sent 45 workers to nearby hospitals," said Koji Matsumoto, spokesman for the Tokyo Fire Department, which also operates ambulances.

"They only received very minor injuries, and none of them needed to stay in hospital."

The package contained three 500-gram (one-pound) bottles of 3-chloropropionyl chloride for Tokyo-based Itochu Techno-Chemical Inc., said company spokesman Toshinari Hidekuma. The chemical, sent from China, was to be used to develop a medical product but could irritate the eyes and nose, he said.

Drops of the liquid leaked out of the parcel and created a white vapour while it was being sorted at Nihombashi Post Office in central Tokyo, said police and fire officials.

The fumes cleared soon after the parcel was removed, said the fire department spokesman.

Itochu Techno-Chemical Inc. is affiliated with Japanese trading house Itochu Corp.

## An encounter with shark

SAINT-DENIS-DE-LA-REUNION, France, Sept 11: A surfer who survived a sustained and frenzied attack by a three metre-long (12 feet) tiger shark in the sea off the Indian Ocean island of Reunion told how the beast came so close "I could have kissed it," reports AP.

According to press reports on Sunday, Karim Maan, 27, needed about twenty stitches to a wound to his arm after the attack, which took place on Friday at a surfing spot known as the Pic du Diable, near the town of Saint Pierre.

Maan explained that he was about to paddle in at dusk when he and his board were suddenly "lifted out of the water" by the shark.

The creature proceeded to launch a series of attacks on the surfer, who tried to defend himself with his surfboard.

"The shark continued to attack and to hit me. I saw its mouth very close, I could have kissed it," he said.

"When I came up for breath, I saw its head coming at me and I heard a crunch as it bit my board and my arm at the same time," he added.

The bite was so powerful it took a chunk out of his surfboard.

The shark then let go, but was soon back on the attack, a common technique with this species, according to the doctor who treated Maan.

The surfer then managed to deliver a blow to the shark's nose, which was enough to send it away.

"I was saying to myself 'It will attack again, I'm finished, I'm finished'," Maan said.

However, he was able to climb back on to his surfboard and catch a wave that took him safely to the shore.

Despite his intimate encounter with the bad-tempered tiger shark, Maan said he has no intention of giving up surfing, which he described as his "destiny".

But he added that he might not return to the Pic du Diable, at least "not yet."

## BRIEFLY



Actress Sela Ward holds her trophy for the "Lead Actress in a Drama Series" category for her role in "Once and Again" during the 52nd Annual Prime Time Emmy Awards at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on Sunday.

—AFP photo

## Indonesian train crash kills 16:

At least 16 people were killed and dozens injured in a train crash on Indonesia's main island of Java, news reports said Monday, AP reports from Jakarta.

A packed passenger train collided head-on with a freight train near Ketanggungan village, about 550 kilometres east of Jakarta on Sunday, the Jakarta Post newspaper said. Local police said at least 16 people were killed and rescue workers were still searching through the tangled wreckage for more victims.

## Floods kill 12 in Italy

ROME, Sept 11: Twelve people were killed and at least four were still missing after flood waters devastated a campsite in Italy's southern Calabria region, rescue workers said today, reports AP.

Workers uncovered the body of the twelfth victim early Monday in the mud that buried the campsite after a nearby river flooded its banks at dawn Sunday.

Eight of those killed had been identified, rescue workers said, adding that some 400 firefighters, rescue workers and volunteers were searching Monday for those missing.

The river adjacent to the campsite, located on the Italian coast between Soverato and Montepaone, had swollen dramatically after three days of heavy rain in the region.

Rescue workers on Sunday were forced to evacuate 70 people from a hotel on Ustica island, north of Sicily, after water flooded the building, which officials feared would collapse.

## Jakarta pledges to disarm militias in West Timor

JAKARTA, Sept 11: The Indonesian government today pledged to disarm militias in West Timor after last week's murders of three UN relief workers, reports AP.

Indonesian officials also said they were seeking to work with the authorities in East Timor in a bid to solve the problems of militias and refugees in West Timor.

"We will use the penal code that in essence allows the confiscation of firearms and other weapons in illegal possession, following the incident in Atambua," the West Timor border town where the three UN workers were killed, police chief General Rusdiharjo said.

The Indonesian armed forces and national police had discussed, both at the central and the regional level, the logistics for disarming the population, including West Timor-based militias, he said.

"Concrete action" would include strengthening troops in

West Timor to restore security and confiscate weapons, Rusdiharjo said, speaking after welcoming back President Abdurrahman Wahid.

Wahid returned from New York where he had been attending the UN Millennium Summit when the savage attack on the UN aid workers took place.

Hundreds of militiamen, armed with machetes and homemade firearms, attacked the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Atambua, a border town in Belu district in West Timor, on Wednesday.

Three foreign UN relief workers were stabbed or slashed to death before their bodies were set on fire.

The attack sparked international calls for the Indonesian government to disarm and clamp down on the militias.

It also led to the evacuation of some 400 foreign and local relief

## Atlantis team starts space walk

HOUSTON, Texas, Sept 11: Two crew members of the space shuttle Atlantis began a critical space walk late Sunday to conduct maintenance work on the International Space Station (ISS), just weeks before astronauts take up regular residence there, reports AP.

Mission specialists Edward Lu, a US astronaut, and the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko exited the space shuttle at 11:55 pm Sunday (10:55 BST), for a six-and-a-half hour space walk.

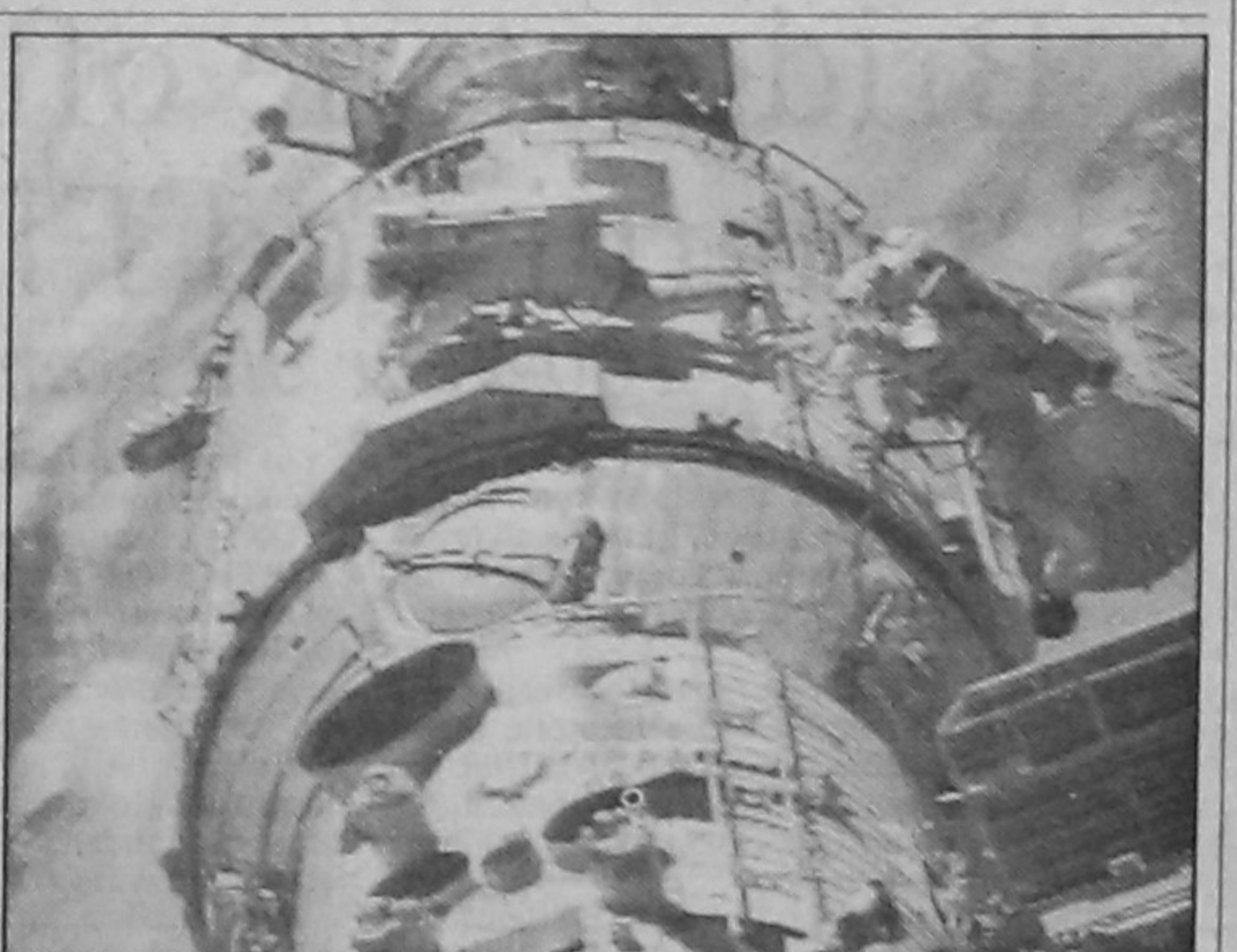
Their tasks include fitting vital cables linking the ISS with American and Russian space modules.

"Their real task is to connect through the electrical lines and the data cables from the Service Module to the rest of the station," explained the commander piloting the Atlantis, Terrence Wilcutt.

Lu said he and his Russian partner will walk through space some 30.58 metres (100 feet) from the Atlantis almost to the edge of the ISS, setting a new distance record for space walks.

"What we're going to do is carry all the equipment and everything we need — the cables, the tools etc — all at once. So we're going to have to pile these things onto the backs of our space suits, and basically be pack mules all the way out there," Lu said.

Lu and Malenchenko will install four types of cable to the ISS during the space walk, as well as a magnetometer on to the exterior of the Zvezda, one of the three modules that make up the station, according to ground control officials at the Johnson Space Centre in Houston.



US Space Shuttle Atlantis crew members — Yuri Malenchenko of Russia and Edward Lu — work on the Zvezda Module of the International Space Station yesterday.

—AFP photo