

Kashmiri separatist leader under house arrest

AFP, Srinagar

Police in Indian-administered Kashmir Sunday placed separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani under house arrest to prevent him from participating in an anti-government demonstration.

"I had planned to visit Nawhatta and share my sympathies with the people whose houses and shops were burnt down," Geelani, a member of the All Party Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference, told AFP by telephone.

"But I have been placed under house arrest. Even my house has been locked from outside," he said.

Geelani and his supporters had been planning to protest at the site of a plastic bomb blast in Nawhatta in downtown Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital, last Wednesday that injured at least eight people and damaged dozens of houses and some shops.

Mori plans early party polls to select his successor

AFP, Tokyo



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, bowing to pressure by powerbrokers, said on Saturday he would bring forward elections for a new party president, a face-saving gesture that could ease him out of the premiership as early as next month.

But Mori and the five heavyweights from his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) stopped short of saying exactly when the elections would be held.

"He will bring forward the party's presidency elections," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda told the national television network NHK, following a one-hour closed-door meeting at the prime minister's residence.

The move effectively puts an end to Mori's 11 months in the top job as the 63-year-old embattled leader is unlikely to seek re-election, with his public support at an all-time low of six percent.

Whoever replaces Mori as head of the LDP, the largest single party in parliament, automatically becomes Japan's prime minister.

The party elections are widely expected to be held before an all-important upper house election in July in which the LDP is feared to lose badly unless there is a new face at the helm.

The most likely date is April after the ruling block pushes the budget through parliament, a crucial item to lure voters and illustrate its efforts to turn around the struggling economy.

The LDP presidential election would be held in early April Kyodo News Service quoted unnamed party members as saying.

"Passing the budget will be equal to fulfilling our responsibility to the people," Fukuda stressed. "Even a moment of political vacuum should not be allowed, and we will steadily tackle domestic and foreign tasks."

In a typically opaque Japanese political trade-off, however, the premier's right-hand man insisted Mori was not yet ready to quit.

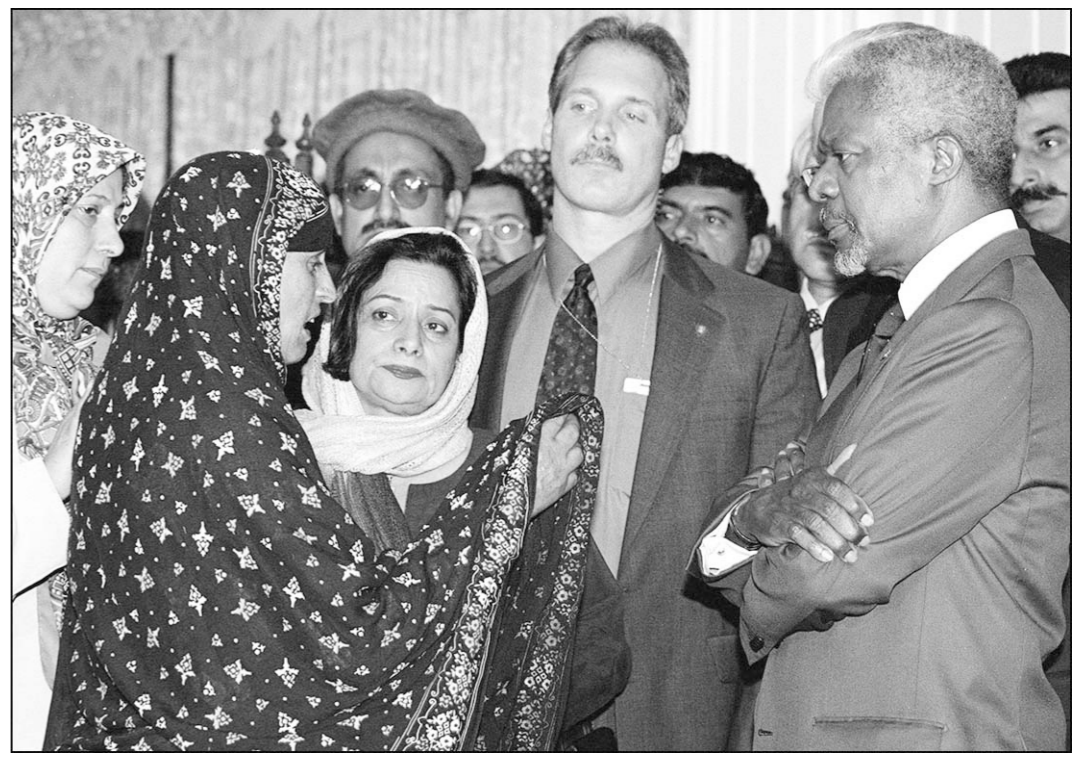
"It is not his expression to resign," he replied to reporters. "He has to steadily clear tasks that he faces."

Their vagueness appears largely due to a scheduled summit with US President George W. Bush on March 19, announced Friday, followed by a long-awaited meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 25.

Further adding to the government's dilemma is the threat by opposition parties to boycott budget deliberations in parliament if Mori voices his clear intention to leave office. The opposition argue a lame-duck government should not be in a position to push the budget through parliament.

Despite cosmetic efforts to make it look as though Mori's position is secure, a barrage of news reports have paved the way for his resignation.

Mori's most likely successor is former LDP secretary-general Hiromu Nonaka, nicknamed the "shadow shogun" for his behind-the-scenes manoeuvring. Other possibilities include former welfare minister Junichiro Koizumi and Justice Minister Masahiko Komura.



A Kashmiri refugee woman (2nd L) bursts into tears as she tells her story to the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (R) about alleged Indian atrocities in Kashmir yesterday. Annan discussed the Kashmir issue with Pakistani high officials during his talks in the foreign office in Islamabad.

Dalai Lama to visit Taiwan March 31

AFP, Taipei

The Dalai Lama will visit Taiwan on March 31 despite possible protests from Beijing, it was reported Sunday.

"Dalai Lama will not cancel his trip because of pressure from China," an official of the Tibet Religious Foundation, the Taipei office of the exiled Tibetan government, was quoted as saying by the United Daily News.

"Protests from China are unavoidable no matter when the visit will take place," the official told the newspaper.

But politics would not stop the 1989 Nobel Prize winner's visit, which has been postponed since late 2000, the paper said.

'Diana could have been saved if ...'

REUTERS, London

A leading heart surgeon has said that Britain's Princess Diana could have been saved if she had been rushed to hospital quicker.

Christiaan Barnard, who was a friend of the Princess of Wales, writes in a new book that she could have been saved if she had reached hospital within 10 minutes of the 1997 high-speed car crash in Paris, The Sunday Telegraph said.

"My opinion is that they made a mistake not rushing her to hospital quicker because her bleeding could only be stopped by surgery," said pioneering surgeon Barnard in his book "50 Ways To A Healthy Heart," which is to be published in May.

"I understand they spent up to an hour at the scene of the accident," he said.

Barnard, based in South Africa, said according to the autopsy Diana died of internal bleeding as the result of injury to the pulmonary vein. He said such an injury would not lead to rapid loss of blood.

"What I want to say here is, that, if Princess Diana had been brought to hospital within 10 minutes of the accident something which should easily have been possible and once there, had been cared for properly, she could have survived."

Diana's companion Dodi Al Fayed and their driver Henri Paul also died in the crash, Bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones survived.

The Telegraph quoted a French doctor, who arrived quickly on the scene as he had been travelling in the opposite direction at the time of the crash, as saying Diana was in the best shape of the four.

Frederic Maillez said Diana had "looked pretty fine ... I thought this woman had a chance."

Norway's peace bid in Lanka hits new snags

AFP, Colombo

Norway's attempt to broker peace in Sri Lanka has come up against new obstacles with neighbouring India raising concerns over foreign intervention in its backyard, a press report here said Sunday.

Oslo was invited by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to help bring separatist Tamil Tiger rebels to the negotiating table, but India was unhappy over a "mediator role" for an outside power, the Sunday Leader said.

The newspaper said India's concerns were conveyed to President Kumaratunga when she visited New Delhi late last month for a frank exchange of views on the island's peace process.

"Although India did not consider Norway as a threat, it was concerned about the powerful forces behind the Scandinavian nation," the Sunday Leader said.

There was no immediate reaction either from the government or the Indian High Commission here to the newspaper report.

But New Delhi had earlier denied it opposed the inclusion of Japan and Britain in a possible ceasefire monitoring team assembled by Norway as part of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to be signed by both sides.

"India had asserted its objections to any precedent being set in the South Asian region that would encourage external involvement in internal issues."

"It was felt that Norway had exceeded its facilitator role and transgressed into a mediator capacity by drafting the MOU," the report said.

Officials here said President Kumaratunga who begins a lengthy European tour Monday may discuss her peace process during her visits which will take her to

Germany, Netherlands and Belgium.

The visit follows Britain's ban on the Tamil Tiger guerrillas as a foreign terrorist group and efforts by Colombo to get other European nations too to outlaw the Tigers.

The Leader newspaper said the Sri Lankan government is now "planning to adopt a new approach," retaining Oslo's special envoy Erik Solheim as facilitator but rejecting the proposed agreement.

When President Kumaratunga met with Indian premier Atal Behari Vajpayee and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh last month, they reportedly told her that "third parties have their own agendas."

The newspaper report said Colombo was now considering having Sri Lankan monitors chosen from among religious leaders and other impartial people with the International Committee of the Red Cross to help.

US, Philippines to swap prisoners

XINHUA, Manila

The Philippines and the United States still have to agree to swap convicted prisoners, Justice Secretary Hernando Perez said Saturday.

Under the proposed exchange, Americans jailed in the Philippines would be swapped for Filipinos jailed in the US, with prisoners finishing their sentences in their respective countries, the Philippine Star reported Sunday.

Perez said the issue was raised in a meeting with US Embassy officials led by charge d'affaires Michael Malinowski on Friday.

However, Perez said that the details still have to be threshed out, remarking that while the US Embassy had a complete list of Americans jailed in the Philippines, Manila had no list of Filipinos jailed in the United States.

US demands arrest of Milosevic

REUTERS, Washington

The United States has told the Belgrade government it should arrest and imprison former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic by the end of March if it expects American aid to continue, The New York Times reported on Saturday.

The demand for Milosevic's arrest was included in a three-page list of demands delivered last week by the US ambassador to Belgrade, William Montgomery, to Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica, Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic of Serbia and other senior officials, the newspaper said.

Belgrade was also asked to assist in transferring at least one person indicted on war crimes charges to the international tribunal in The Hague and to cooperate with the tribunal on "international charges against Milosevic," according to the report.

The State Department declined to confirm that the Bush administra-

tion had asked Belgrade to take action against Milosevic.

"We are looking at all aspects of Belgrade's cooperation with the Hague tribunal, as well as other issues relating to democracy and human rights in Serbia," a State Department official said.

The US Congress had already set a deadline of March 31 for Yugoslavia's new democratic government to show a clear sign of cooperating over Milosevic, who is under indictment by the tribunal in The Hague for war crimes, if it is to receive the balance of \$100 million in US aid. About half of that aid has not yet been disbursed.

The latest demands ratchet up the pressure on Belgrade to act swiftly against Milosevic to avoid a suspension of aid.

President George W. Bush must certify to Congress by the March 31 deadline that Yugoslavia is cooperating with the UN tribunal on international war crimes in the former Yugoslavia.

Gunmen kill seven in Pakistan

AP, Peshawar

Gunmen riddled a passenger bus with gunfire in a remote corner of northwest Pakistan killing at least seven people, all Sunni Muslims, police said Sunday.

The attack Saturday near Parachinar, some 150 kilometers (90 miles) southwest of Peshawar, was the latest in a bitter and bloody feud between rival Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

The gunmen, who took up positions on mountain tops, ambushed the passenger bus, police said.

The attack followed a battle Friday between rival members of the two Islamic sects over control of a mountain top. Four Shiite Muslims were wounded, they said.

Paramilitary troops patrolled the area Sunday to try to prevent fresh violence. The area is part of Pakistan's lawless tribal belt where tribal leaders rule and tribal law is in effect.



Albanian guerillas deploy in a forest near the Serbian village of Dobrasin on Saturday. The guerillas continue to mount attacks in southern Serbia from Dobrasin, four kilometres from Bujanovac.

5 killed in Malaysian racial clashes

AFP, Kampung Medan, Malaysia

Ethnic Indian residents of this squatter village said Sunday they were living in fear after four days of clashes with ethnic Malays in which five people have been killed.

Another 37 people have been injured and 153 arrested during the battles here and in other racially-mixed districts in the town of Petaling Jaya near Kuala Lumpur.

Hundreds of police -- paramilitaries carrying M-16 rifles, helmeted riot squads and regular officers -- were patrolling areas around Jalan Klang Lama.

Two police helicopters watched for trouble spots and at least one water cannon was parked in the area. Reinforcements were brought in from two other states.

Authorities said the situation was under control Sunday after the battles, which one opposition leader described as the worst ethnic clashes since the 1969 riots.

Ethnic clashes are very rare in the multiracial nation. It was not clear which community sparked off the clashes.

Police said they have seized almost 100 weapons including eight home-made bombs, machetes, knives, samurai swords, catapults, chains, steel pipes, batons and axes.

"The situation is under control and calm now," said deputy national police chief Mohamad Jamil Johari, quoted by Bernama news agency.

The Kampung Medan district, one of the trouble-hit areas, was quiet but very tense Sunday afternoon, an AFP photographer reported.

Ethnic Indians, some armed with sticks, were on the streets. A rumour of Malay gangs entering the village sparked a brief panic.

"So far today we are peaceful but we could not sleep at all last night," one resident, Dorai Raju, told AFP.

"We were scared Malays might enter our houses and attack us."

Doria said one close neighbour was attacked and killed in the street Friday morning. He complained that police had done too little to stop the battles.

"Before, this district was so peaceful," he said. "Now we can see blood on the streets."

Some residents interviewed by Bernama in Kampung Medan also said the authorities did too little to avert clashes.

P. Munusamy, 57, a retired clerk, said these clashes were the worst since the squatter settlement emerged more than 20 years ago.

"The situation has become bad lately but no action was taken...now we have lost five lives and we sincerely hope the authorities will do something to bring about peace for us to get on with our lives," he said.

Ishak Hitam, 67, a retired government servant, said: "More should be done to calm the situation...We want some peace to prevail."

Cloning humans to have high abnormality rates, says Aussie expert

AFP, Melbourne

Attempts to clone humans were likely to result in unacceptably high rates of abnormality, an Australian in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) expert said Sunday.

"Given the abnormality rate for animals, the rate for human cloning would probably be unacceptably high for humans," the director of surgery at the Royal Womens' Hospital here, John McBain, told journalists.

"Looking at work in sheep, there were lots of early starts and rejects before success."

"I question the ethics of allowing that level of experimental work. The abnormality rate of in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) is the same as for a pregnancy in the bedroom ... we fear the abnormality rate for cloning is unacceptably high."

The rate of failure during attempts to clone a normal sheep meant that emulating that programme with a human subject was almost certain to fail anyway, McBain said.

"Technically, it is unlikely to work, given the large number of experiments which had to be conducted before a normal sheep was produced," he said.

"Human reproductive cloning is not ethically sustainable and the technology as it exists now is not sufficient to give a reasonable chance of success."

Italy's Professor Severino Antinori, who helped the world's oldest mother fall pregnant, is driving the effort to create the first human clone.

One-night curfew for men

AFP, Bogota

The streets of Bogota were women-only zones into the early hours of Saturday, after the city's flamboyant mayor declared a one-night curfew for men -- as an "educational exercise."

More than half a million women took to the streets late Friday, in a show of unity against domestic and urban violence. Men were asked to stay at home to babysit or do the housework.

The city hall scheduled special events for the women during the curfew ordered by Bogota Mayor Antanas Mockus.

Mockus was seeking to give the capital's men pause to reflect on the fact that of the 21,000 violent deaths in Bogota over the past five years, with men responsible for some 18,500 of them.

The aim was also to throw the spotlight on domestic violence. In a recently released survey, four in 10 women reported having been struck in the past year by a boyfriend or husband.

On Saturday, Mockus, who has been mayor since January, declared that the women-only night had been a success.

In many areas of the city "equilibrium" had reigned, with women representing about 50 percent of those out-and-about.

But, Mockus told reporters: "We managed to have an overwhelming majority of women in other areas."

The atmosphere was generally of high spirits, although the start of the 7:30 pm curfew was heralded by traffic jams as district officials suspended regulations that normally prevent private cars circulating at peak hours, as people rushed to get home.

And as women gathered to enjoy exclusive use of the streets, any man foolhardy enough to venture out risked being roundly scolded, having his bottom pinched or being hit by a bag of flour.

Women of various ages, crowded onto restaurant terraces in high spirits, shouted "Go home to sleep. Men are for the bed!" to male passers-by.

"Men are not our enemies, but we want to show that we women are less aggressive," one merrymaker, giving her name as Diana, told an AFP reporter.

Even the police, fire fighters and rescue personnel on duty throughout the capital were all female through 1:00 am Saturday when the experimental curfew drew to a close.

The 48-year-old Mockus, who has the appearance of a 1960s student radical, is a mathematician with utopian leanings who for a time was rector of Colombia's National University.

"It is an atypical night," Marcela, a college student told AFP. "The one thing for certain is that it is a great opportunity to determine if we miss (our men) or not."