

Vajpayee opens talks with Gayoom

AFP, Male
Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee opened official talks with Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom here Monday, a day after starting a four-day official visit, officials said.

Details of the talks were not immediately available, but officials here said they were expected to discuss wide-ranging issues, including joint cooperation in tourism development in the region.

Vajpayee arrived here Sunday accompanied by his minister of state for health, A. Rajah and minister of state for tourism, Vinod Khanna.

A civic reception has been scheduled later Monday in honour of the visiting Indian premier at the Dharubaruge, the main convention centre here.

Firecrackers, not bomb, killed 16 in India

AFP, New Delhi

Forensic experts investigating a blast which killed 16 people in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh said Monday the explosion was caused by firecrackers rather than a bomb.

"It is a case of an accident where a cracker dealer, Mohammed Aftab, was carrying crackers in a three wheeler which exploded," deputy inspector general of police Arun Kumar said, ruling out the possibility of sabotage or a militant attack.

Sixteen people were killed Sunday - 14 on the spot - when a powerful explosion destroyed a passenger van as it approached a railway crossing near the carpet-weaving town of Hardoi, some 100 kilometres (62 miles) from the state capital of Lucknow.

German minister in Bush-Hitler row stands down

AFP, Berlin

The German minister who compared US President George W. Bush's methods on Iraq to those of Hitler is standing down from government, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said Monday.

He told a news conference after his governing coalition was returned to power that Justice Minister Herta and Pauline Däubler-Gmelin had written to him saying that she would not be seeking a post in the new cabinet.

Schroeder said her decision not to upset the rhythm of the new government was to be "respected," as well as being "personally decent and unbelievably politically logical."

Däubler-Gmelin was reported to have said during a campaign meeting last week that Bush wanted to divert attention from domestic political problems by his calls for a regime change in Iraq.

Bomb attacks on govt offices in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

One person was injured Monday after two separate bomb attacks on government offices in Nepal, police said.

One device exploded at the district education office in Lalitpur, on the outskirts of the capital Kathmandu, injuring one person.

The other blast was at an education office in Kathmandu, near the headquarters of the Armed Police Force. No injuries were reported from the second blast.

Police said they suspected Maoist rebels had planted the bombs.

Morocco scraps talks with Spain over island row

AFP, Rabat

The already tense relations between Morocco and Spain worsened Monday as Rabat called off bilateral talks scheduled in Madrid after a Spanish helicopter landed on a disputed Mediterranean islet.

Morocco denounced the landing of the helicopter Sunday on the uninhabited island off the Moroccan coast, known to Spaniards as Perejil and to Moroccans as Leila.

"A Spanish army helicopter landed today, in the early afternoon, on the Moroccan Island of Tourah (Leila/Perejil)" the Moroccan foreign ministry said in a statement. This was "an unacceptable act by which Spain has violated, once again, national air space and territory".

There was no official reaction from the Spanish side on Sunday.

Moroccan Foreign Minister Mohamed Benaisa had contacted his Spanish counterpart Ana Palacio to call off their talks planned for Monday, the statement added.



A soldier of the Border Security Force (BSF) gets off a Shikara on Srinagar's Dal Lake on Monday. Srinagar residents will go to the polls in the second round of voting today in month-long staggered elections in Kashmir that have cost the lives of over 30 party workers so far.

Kashmir ready for another round of election

5 more militants killed in fighting

AFP, Srinagar

Indian troops shot dead five Islamic rebels Monday a day ahead of assembly voting in the insurgency-racked Kashmir valley, in polls which New Delhi hopes will strengthen its rule in the disputed province.

In a fierce gunbattle overnight, the Indian army and counter-insurgency police gunned down the militants near the de facto border with Pakistan in the northwestern district of Baramulla, police said.

A police spokesman identified three of the slain rebels as Abu Naseer, Abu Umer and Abu Nasir

but said it was not immediately clear with which rebel group they were affiliated.

A number of militant outfits have vowed to disrupt the polls for the 87-member state assembly, rejecting New Delhi's rule in the Himalayan state that is at the centre of a 10-month military standoff between India and Pakistan.

More than 480 people have been killed in separatist violence since the dates of the four-phase election were announced August 2, including 33 activists from parties contesting the polls.

But India has been heartened by the more than 47 percent turnout in

the first round on September 16, which passed with only sporadic violence during the voting.

Even though the first phase turnout was 14 percentage points less than in the same districts at the last polls in 1996, India said participation was higher than intelligence inputs had indicated and called it a rebuff to Pakistan, which has derided the election as a "farce."

Voting Tuesday, however, will include the summer capital Srinagar, a hotbed of anti-India sentiment. The district registered 25 percent turnout in 1996.

US to mobilise sufficient force to beat Iraq: Rice

Baghdad urges world to oppose new UN resolution

AFP, London

Washington will mobilise "sufficient force to win" a war against Iraq and will then dedicate itself to rebuilding the country into a unified, democratic state, US national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said in a newspaper interview published here on Monday.

Rice, talking to the Financial Times, laid out Washington's post-Cold War geopolitical doctrine saying "the United States would want to be thought of as liberators" dedicated to the "democratisation or the march of freedom in the Muslim world".

US media reports over the weekend, citing Pentagon sources, said that Washington's battle plan calls for focused attacks on Iraq's ruling clique and its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, rather than Iraq's broader infrastructure.

Without speaking of war plans, Rice said that the international community "can't afford to make the mistake of the past 11 years and let him (Saddam) slip out again."

She stressed that US President George W. Bush wanted "a Security Council resolution that has effective measures".

"He would not have gone down the road if he did not want this road

to succeed. We have nonetheless to be clear that we really do mean effective, not halfway measures."

"If the Security Council - and we respect people's different views - if the Security Council cannot come to terms with strong action, the United States, with whom ever else would like to join us, will have to take care of the problem," she said.

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States "clarified a lot about the kinds of threats that you face in the post-cold-war era," Rice continued.

"Post 9/11, you have to look at the number of threats that are not deterable. We had no warning on September 11.

"We worry a good deal more."

She said the United States wanted to support "reformist elements" within Islam, mentioning Qatar, Bahrain and "to a certain extent" Jordan.

Meanwhile, Iraq's ruling Baath party called on the international community on Monday to oppose any new UN resolution on disarmament that Washington wants to push through as a prelude to war.

"The international community should reject and oppose treacherous US efforts" to make the UN Security Council adopt a new resolution, said the party's mouthpiece, Ath-Thawra newspaper.

Nepali PM registers new party

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepalese caretaker prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba Monday formed a new party after the ruling party split into two factions, officials said.

"Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on Monday registered a new party at the Election Commission (EC) to contest the forthcoming snap polls scheduled for November 13," an EC official said.

"The new party has been named the Nepali Congress Democratic (NDC) and it was registered by Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka on behalf of the prime minister," the official said.

Israel aims to force Arafat out

AFP, Jerusalem

The aim of Israel's siege of Yasser Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank town of Ramallah is to force out the Palestinian leader, Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Weizman Shiri said Sunday.

"We have no intention of physically eliminating Arafat or to forcefully occupy the Muwatalli (Arafat's HQ) but to push him to decide to where he will leave," he said on the Arab-language service of Israel's public television.

It was the first time an Israeli official said the aim of the army's operation launched on Thursday was to drive out Arafat.

Shiri, the righthand man of Defence Minister Binyamin ben Eliezer, also discounted the protests by thousands of Palestinian that

erupted across the West Bank and Gaza Strip early Sunday morning in support of Arafat.

He claimed many Palestinians wanted to get rid of the veteran Palestinian leader, whom both Israel and Washington accuse of corruption and sponsoring political violence.

His comments came as Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told CNN Israel "did not want" to expel Arafat from the Palestinian territories.

Top Arafat advisor Nabil Abu Rudeina, who was trapped inside the compound with his boss, denounced Shiri's remarks to AFP.

He accused Israel of "waging an attack on president Arafat" and trying to "destroy the Palestinian Authority."

Meanwhile, Arab and European

leaders voiced concern for the safety of Yasser Arafat and demanded that Israel lift its block-ade after the Palestinian leader sent out an SOS call from his besieged West Bank headquarters Sunday.

Arafat expressed fears for his life in a telephone conversation with Turkish Foreign Minister Sukru Sina Gurel, a Turkish diplomat said.

The Palestinian leader urged Turkey to seek Washington's help in pressuring Israel to lift the siege of his headquarters, Anatolia news agency reported.

Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit condemned the blockade which Israel imposed Thursday after two suicide bombings, and which has reduced much of the Ramallah compound to rubble.

Germany hands Schroeder weak govt to tackle reform

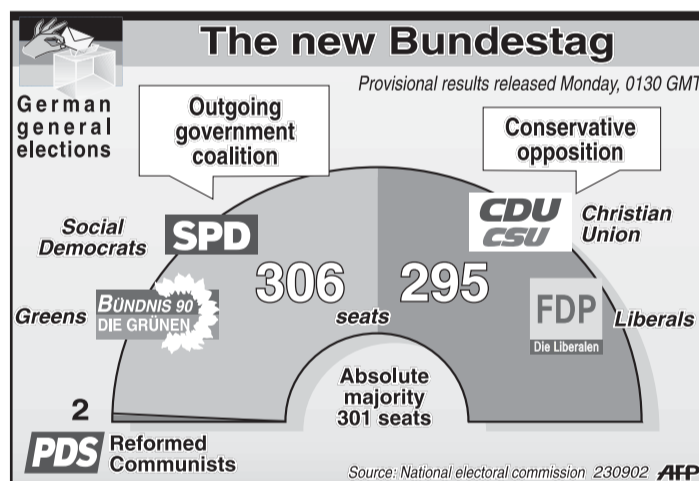
REUTERS, Berlin

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder faces the task of reforming Europe's largest economy with a sharply reduced majority after he and his Greens coalition partners narrowly won Sunday's general election.

"We have difficult times ahead," a visibly merry Schroeder called to his jubilant Social Democrat (SPD) supporters early on Monday after voters cut his majority over the combined opposition parties to nine from 21 at the last election.

The centre-left government may be too fragile to reform a highly taxed, highly regulated economy, the world's third largest, seen in danger of becoming as stagnant as Japan's.

"Shaky victory for Red-Green," said the top-selling Bild newspaper. "Never before has a governing party



suffered such losses after only four years."

The main parties were due to

hold meetings Monday to discuss the result. The Social Democrats and the Greens will need to agree

on an economic policy for the next four years and settle a new cabinet likely to involve a number of changes.

"In three weeks the government will be stable," Social Democrat General Secretary Franz Muntefering told German radio. He said labour market reform would be the most important task.

Schroeder must also move fast to repair relations with the United States, damaged by his opposition to a U.S.-led war on Iraq and by reports that his justice minister compared President Bush's methods to Hitler's.

Speculation is mounting that Herta Däubler-Gmelin, whose reported remarks caused outrage in Washington, will not be included in Schroeder's next cabinet -- a possible first step toward mending fences.

US senators warn of possible 'Arab-Israel' war over Iraq

REUTERS, Washington

Prominent members of the US Congress warned on Sunday that a unilateral US attack on Iraq could draw in Israel and lead to a wider Middle East war.

Sen. Joseph Biden, a Delaware Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said if the Israelis became involved "it becomes an Arab-Israeli war."

Biden and others appearing on

Sunday television talk shows responded to a report in The New York Times that said Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had told the Bush administration he would retaliate if Iraq attacks Israel.

On CNN's "Late Edition," Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres would not say what Israel would do in the event of an Iraqi attack, but made it clear his country would coordinate its response with the United States.

"We are not the ones to tell the

United States what to do," Peres said. "We understand there is not going to be two wars and there are not going to be two supreme commands. So whatever will be, if it will be, should be coordinated."

Biden, appearing on CBS's "Face the Nation," said if Israel responded to an attack on Muslim nation, including such critical allies as Saudi Arabia and Turkey, could support the U.S. effort against Iraq, even behind the scenes.

"And you would find probably

every embassy in the Middle East burned to the ground before it went too far," Biden warned.

Sen. Richard Shelby, ranking Republican on the Senate intelligence committee, said any retaliation by the Israelis could mean "a widespread war in the Middle East."

"And also we'd be perceived, we'd be fighting side-by-side with the Israelis against all the Arab interests, and the war could spread," the Alabama senator said on "Face the Nation."

Wild elephants storm police post in Lanka

AFP, Colombo

Six people were injured when wild elephants stormed a police station in Sri Lanka, officials said Monday.

The elephants damaged walls of the building at an outpost in the north-central Anuradhapura district on Saturday, a regional police official said.

He said four constables and two civilians were wounded as they tried to escape the rampaging animals.

"The rumpus had upset horns and most of the victims had been stung very badly and are now in hospital," he said.

C'wealth meets to slap sanction on Zimbabwe

AFP, Abuja

Zimbabwe faced the prospect of greater international isolation Monday as three Commonwealth leaders met to discuss turning up the pressure on President Robert Mugabe's pariah regime.

Mugabe himself angrily boycotted the meeting of the Commonwealth "troika" on Zimbabwe, made up of Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki and Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

The 57-nation body suspended Zimbabwe's membership of its

diplomatic committees in March after Mugabe was re-elected in a disputed poll which the Commonwealth said "did not reflect the will of the Zimbabwean people."

The Zimbabwean opposition has said it still faces oppression and violence, and an often violent campaign to forcibly evict white farmers and seize their land for redistribution to black settlers has continued and even gathered pace, despite international criticism.

At the weekend, in a further sign of defiance, Mugabe made an 11th-hour decision to snub the three leaders, whose invitation to the Abuja meeting he had previously accepted.



Cast members from "Friends," which won Outstanding Comedy, series pose for photographer at the 54th Annual Emmy Awards at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on Sunday. From L to R are David Schwimmer, Lisa Kudrow, Mathew Perry, Courtney Cox Arquette, Jennifer Aniston and Matt LeBlanc.

'Friends', 'West Wing' win big at Emmys

Reuters, Los Angeles

The Emmy awards played it safe on Sunday night, honouring an array of veteran shows, including "Friends" and "The West Wing," and effectively snubbing the season's hot new contender, "Six Feet Under."

"The West Wing" won its third consecutive award for best drama series, while "Friends," television's top-rated program, finally took the prize for best comedy series after five tries. The award came as the NBC sitcom headed into its presumed ninth and final season.

Sept. 11 was on the minds of many Academy voters who named the four-network telethon "America: A Tribute to Heroes" the year's best musical and variety special. The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences also paid special tribute to the networks -- ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox -- for their unprecedented simulcast of the concert special, which raised hundreds of millions of dollars for the survivors of the attacks.

The NBC hit political drama "The West Wing" won its third consecutive Emmy Award as best drama, beating out the season's hot new show "Six Feet Under," in a victory that took "West Wing" creator Aaron Sorkin by surprise.

"We are just as surprised as you are," Sorkin told a black-tie audience at the 54th annual Primetime Emmys, television's top awards. Backstage, he told reporters he thought "Six Feet Under" would win. "God knows they and all the other shows in the category deserved this as much as we."

Allison Janney, who plays the White House press secretary on the show, won the award for best actress in a drama series, and two other cast members, John Spencer and Stockard Channing, won awards for best supporting actor and actress.

Rob Lowe, who announced earlier this year he was leaving the show over a salary dispute, saluted its producers and his co-stars and the child fathered by Ross, played by

David Schwimmer.

"What started out as a night of irreverent comedy and jokes by host Conan O'Brien trading bleeps with the Osbournes, soon took a serious turn as "America: A Tribute to Heroes" won."

The show's producer, Joel Gallen, said, "This honor really does belong to the hundreds of people who put this show together in a matter of weeks." The telethon, which featured such performers as Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen, raised millions for victims' families and survivors.

"The Gathering Storm," the tale of how Winston Churchill rose to power to fight Adolf Hitler, was named the best made-for-television movie. Another HBO series about World War II, "Band of Brothers," produced by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, was named best mini-series. "We didn't just win this, the men of Easy Company did," Spielberg said.

"Friends" star Jennifer Aniston was named best actress in a comedy series for her role as Rachel Green. It was the first Emmy claimed by Aniston.

Aniston was kissed by husband Brad Pitt as she rose to accept the prize. She won for her performance in last season's finale episode, in which her character gives birth to the child fathered by Ross, played by