

12 killed in Ivory Coast as fighting continues

AFP, Bouake, Ivory Coast

At least 12 people have died and 58 were wounded in fighting between government forces and rebels holding the Ivory Coast city of Bouake, an AFP journalist reported Tuesday.

Bouake, the second city of Ivory Coast, which lies some 300 kilometres northwest of the west African nation's main city, Abidjan, has been the scene of some of the bloodiest clashes so far since the start of an army rebellion in the former French colony on September 19.

Since the start of the offensive to retake Bouake on Sunday, an AFP journalist counted eight bodies — an alleged thief executed by rebels, three burnt corpses, the bodies of two civilians and two men in uniform.

But hospital sources said 62 people had been admitted with injuries after two days of fighting on Sunday and Monday. Four of them had died — two military men and two civilians — bringing the latest known toll to 12.

Ten more countries to join EU by 2004

AFP, Brussels

The European Commission formally recommended yesterday the entry of 10 countries into the European Union by 2004, in a historic expansion of the 15-member bloc through central Europe and the Mediterranean.

Thirteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the EU's executive arm gave the green light for a reshaping of political Europe that will now also include a country of long troubled former Yugoslavia.

Barring last-minute hitches — including a Irish referendum later this month which in theory could derail the whole project, the new members will join in time for European parliament elections in 2004.

"The historical and political arguments in favour of enlargement are compelling," said a commission report, according to the final draft seen by AFP.

The 20-member commission approved the report, which gives detailed assessments of 13 candidate states, ahead of its presentation to the European parliament, an EU source said.

The report noted that two poorer Balkan countries, Romania and Bulgaria, hope to join the EU in 2007, but failed to give Turkey a start date for negotiations.

The 10 countries approved for EU membership are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The commission's proposals will form the basis for a political decision on EU enlargement expected by the end of the year.

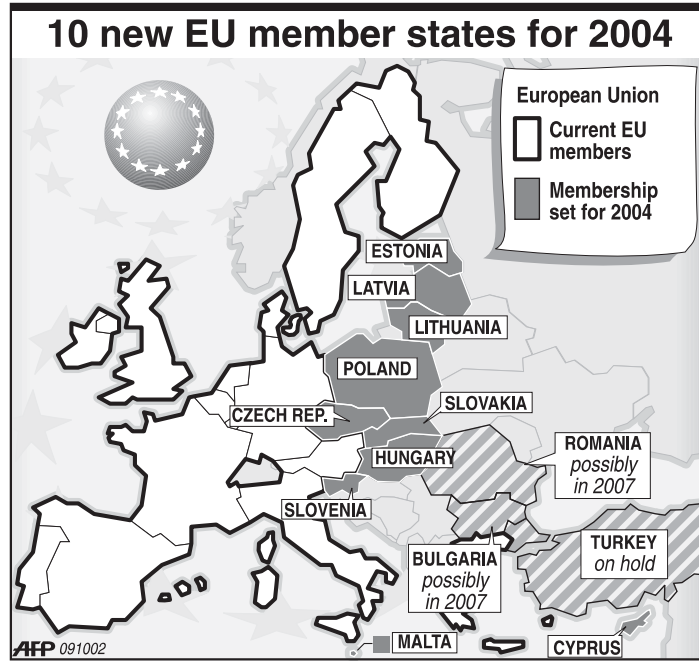
EU leaders will meet in Brussels on October 24-25 to discuss the recommendations, setting the stage for a December 12-13 summit in Copenhagen at which formal invitations will be extended.

But obstacles still remain even on the final straight of the EU candidate states' long and winding path towards joining the bloc.

These include notably the new Irish referendum on October 19 on the 2000 Nice Treaty, which is crucial for EU enlargement to go ahead in 2004.

Ireland sent shock waves through Europe in June last year when, in a first referendum, the 2000 Nice treaty on enlargement was rejected by 54 per cent of voters.

"There's no plan B" if Ireland snubs the treaty again, admitted Commission spokesman Jonathan Faull on yesterday, adding that an Irish



no vote would "create a situation of uncertainty, disarray".

"But I do not want to predict the unpredictable," he said.

The EU has pressed ahead with enlargement despite a number of nagging worries over the ability of the new countries to cope with EU standards — notably for lack of funds.

The cost of enlargement is a massive 40 billion euros (dollars) between 2004 and 2006, according to the commission.

Much of that cost will be channelled into overcoming major disparities between the economies of current members and the newcomers. In 2001 the average gross domestic product per head of population in the candidate countries was only half that of the current EU average.

Of all the costs of expansion, the financing of agriculture has posed the biggest problem for the EU.

The bloc is already struggling to reform its own farming subsidy system, and negotiations on the issue are likely to continue down to the wire with a number of heavily agricultural candidate states.

The 10 candidates given the green light will no doubt welcome the commission's reports.

Turkey is unlikely to be so pleased.

The Commission praises Ankara's recent reforms, including giving more rights to ethnic Kurds and abolishing the death penalty.

But while pledging to double EU financial aid to Turkey by 2006, it said: "Considerable further efforts are needed."

Turkish Foreign Minister Sukru Sina Gurel said last weekend that ties between his country and the European Union would suffer if EU leaders refuse this year to give a date for the start of talks.

The commission report cards on individual countries were globally positive, but included a number of black marks, notably on the issue of corruption.

The EU's executive underlined that it would continue to monitor the candidates' progress up to and beyond the signature of an Accession Treaty, expected early next year.

Malaysia to send US terrorist back home

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's High Court ruled yesterday that an American student wanted back home on terrorism charges should be deported to the United States.

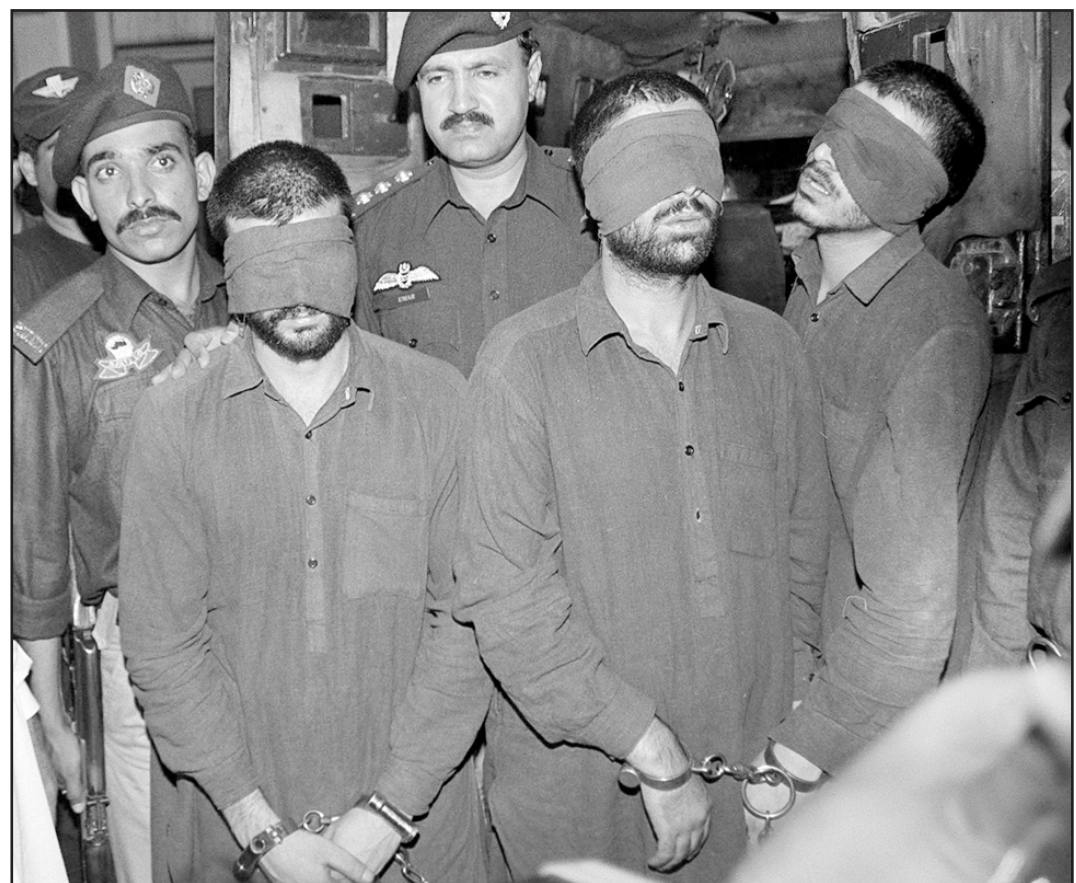
The court said Ahmed Ibrahim Bilal, 24, had "no right of appeal" against deportation because his passport had been revoked by the US government and he was therefore considered an illegal immigrant.

Lawyers said they expected him to be deported almost immediately.

"I shall not allow a stay. Once a passport issued has been revoked, once the visa expired, the law empowers the director general of immigration to issue a removal order," said Judge Augustine Paul.

"Under no circumstances will I order him to be released. I cannot grant any further stay."

Washington does not have an extradition treaty with Kuala Lumpur, but Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia was prepared to deport Bilal as his passport had been revoked and he was now considered an illegal immigrant.



Three arrested suspected Indian terrorists are shown to the press during a media conference at a police station in Rawalpindi on Tuesday. Police said, three men have been arrested with weapons and explosives in Pakistan, suspected of entering the country from India to carry out attacks on election day.

Acid test for Musharraf's democracy experiment

AFP, Islamabad

Three years ago this Saturday, General Pervez Musharraf, a star commando and chief of Pakistan's powerful army, overthrew an elected government and launched the 55-year-old country's fourth military dictatorship.

He sacked the parliament, suspended the constitution and eventually named himself president.

But he has always dismissed comparisons with dictators before him, pledging that he had come to rescue Pakistan from the looting and plundering of civilian politicians, and laid out a roadmap for reform of its institutions, economy and political culture.

His goal, he pledged repeatedly, was to build "genuine democracy," and the general has promised throughout his reign to restore parliament through the elections that will take place today.

"Let's have new faces, new

leadership emerging in Pakistan and better politics, better democracy," he told AFP in an August interview.

At the weekend Musharraf, 59, told a final cabinet meeting he was confident that through Thursday's vote "a new political culture of tolerance, accommodation and responsibility will emerge, replacing the culture of complete political polarisation and conflict as we witnessed in the past decade".

Parties are bitterly divided into pro- and anti-Musharraf camps, and even the independent Human Rights Commission has charged his administration with "unprecedented" manipulation of the polls.

Disqualifying his chief rivals, blackmailing politicians into joining a pro-government party, and harassing opposition candidates are among the accusations.

Musharraf's pronounced anti-corruption drive has been tarnished by his regime's cultivation of politicians who are accused of ripping off

banks in massive loan scandals.

Critics say he has used a National Accountability Bureau to selectively threaten opponents with corruption cases. Loyalists of the prime minister he deposed, Nawaz Sharif, claim soldiers have tortured them to force them to join a pro-government party.

Yet surveys of ordinary Pakistanis paint a different picture.

A poll of almost 3,000 adults by Gallup-Pakistan last month found a 58 per cent approval rating for Musharraf, and only 13 per cent in opposition. Forty-nine per cent supported his move to give himself power to sack any future government and 43 per cent believed Thursday's vote would be "very or somewhat fair".

A 45 per cent approval rating was recorded in a similar-sized survey for the BBC's Urdu website.

Musharraf has carefully crafted an image of himself as a soft military ruler guiding the country to reform with the quiet gratitude of a silent

majority fed up with corrupt and greedy leaders.

The most scathing criticism is of his 29 unilateral changes to the country's 1973 constitution, which by law can only be changed by two-thirds of the parliament.

Most controversial are the decision to give himself the power to sack the parliament and the creation of a civilian-military National Security Council charged with overseeing the government.

Opponents call the package a gross mutilation of the constitution and a naked power grab.

He was flying back from Sri Lanka on the night of October 12, 1999 when then prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who had made him army chief the year before, tried to sack him.

Musharraf was still in the air when he ordered the army to arrest Sharif and half his cabinet.

Three years on, he shows little sign of ever letting another prime minister order him around.

7 Indian cops killed in mine blast

AFP, Ranchi, India

At least seven policemen were killed and two others critically injured yesterday in a landmine blast triggered by suspected communist insurgents in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand, police said.

A police party driving in a minitruck to deliver salaries for security forces hit a landmine at Kandaghati in the Palamau district, 170 kilometres northwest of the state capital Ranchi, police said.

Six of the state policemen died on the spot while another died en route to the hospital, said Rajeev Ranjan Prasad, Jharkhand's director general of police.

He said the blast was suspected to have been set off by the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), a far-left movement fighting in caste-polarised pockets of eastern India.

US increases pressure on Israel over Gaza raid

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon faced a rising barometer of US pressure yesterday over his bloody raids into the Gaza Strip, where Palestinian officials have appealed for an end to deadly infighting between police and the powerful Islamist Hamas group.

Sharon shrugged off US rebukes over Monday's raid which killed 16 Palestinians, provoking renewed criticism from US President George W Bush, Israel's main backer, who is trying to calm regional tensions as he musters support against Iraq.

The White House said Bush is "deeply concerned" over reports that the increasingly frequent Israeli raids in Gaza have killed civilians and wants Israel to "minimise" such casualties.

"While the Administration supports Israel's right to self-defence, it is critical that Israeli forces make every effort to avoid harm to civilians in exercising that right,"

spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

Sharon had earlier said his raids would continue, qualifying Monday's pre-dawn operation as a "success" in hitting militants from the radical Islamic group Hamas in their bastion in the southern Gaza town of Khan Yunis.

Palestinians, who say most of Monday's dead were civilians, see the frequent raids as a prelude to full-scale invasion, however.

Inside Gaza, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) bluntly called Tuesday on people "not to kill each other" following deadly clashes sparked by the gangland-style slaying of a police commander in the Gaza Strip.

The 11 groups making the PLO also condemned in their statement "all attempted to sow discord" among Palestinians, after two days of sporadic street fighting between Islamists and police that claimed the lives of four people.

The troubled flared when a renegade Hamas cell abducted and murdered the head of the

Palestinian riot police on Monday in revenge for the deaths of two demonstrators killed in anti-US riots last October.

The Hamas cell was headed by the brother of one of the slain youths, and the Islamic group said the killing was a family vendetta, a common occurrence in Gaza's clan-based society.

As two days of Hamas and police clashes cooled in Gaza City, in Rafah to the south Israeli gunfire killed a 12-year-old Palestinian girl.

Military sources said troops stationed at a base on the outskirts of Rafah, along the town's border with Egypt, were attacked by a number of Palestinians and had returned fire, but said they did not know whether there were any casualties.

As violence smouldered in the narrow densely populated Gaza Strip, the Israeli army moved to demolish unauthorised outposts built by Jewish settlers in the West Bank.



South Korean soldiers look at anti-tank mines, during work on the inter-Korean railroad at the south side of the demilitarised zone yesterday. The project to clear landmines to open the path for a key inter-Korean railway is likely to be completed by the end of this month as scheduled.

Kuwait makes arrests in killing of US Marine

REUTERS, Kuwait

Kuwait said yesterday it had arrested a number of people suspected of aiding two Kuwaitis who killed a US Marine and wounded another this week in what the Gulf state called a terrorist attack.

"The numbers are changing by the minute," Kuwaiti Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed al-Salem al-Sabah said. "There are numerous (people under arrest), some only for questioning and others will be held for a longer period of time pending clarifications."

Two Kuwaitis approached the Marines in a pick-up truck on Tuesday, stepped out of the vehicle and opened fire on troops during a military exercise on a Kuwaiti island in the Gulf.

Marines killed the two assailants after they had sped away in the truck, in which investigators found three AK-47 assault rifles and

ammunition.

Kuwait has named the dead attackers as Anas Ahmad Ibrahim Abdel-Rehim al-Kandari, born in 1981, and Jassem Hamad Mubarak Salem al-Hajri, born in 1976.

Kuwaiti writer Mohammad al-Mulafi told Reuters he knew the men who attacked the Marines and believed they were motivated by opposition to a new US law requiring government documents to state that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.

Mulafi said one of the attackers called him after President Bush signed the law this month and said: "I believe that fighting the Americans is more of a priority than fighting the Israelis."

The Kuwaiti attackers had fought with Afghan Mujahideen in Afghanistan, Mulafi said.

Scores of Kuwaitis participated in the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Others then went on to aid Muslims fighting in other parts of the world.

The attack has raised concern in Kuwait, home to 1.4 million foreigners. Westerners in Kuwait were already on heightened alert for fear of an Iraqi chemical weapons attack if the United States leads a military campaign against Baghdad.

"This is a premeditated attack and also appears to be a vendetta attack which makes things more difficult for Westerners here," one diplomat in Kuwait said.

In Washington, a Pentagon spokesman said the Marines left the island after the shooting but that exercises would resume on yesterday.

Defence sources told Reuters that at the time of the attack the Marines were firing blanks as part of the exercise in the Gulf Arab state while Bush sought international backing for a possible attack on Iraq which has raised tensions in the region.

US expert in Beirut as river row rages on

AFP, Beirut

A US State Department water expert returned to Beirut late Tuesday to continue seeking a compromise in Lebanon's water dispute with Israel, whose prime minister Ariel Sharon maintained a warlike stance over the issue, a diplomatic source said yesterday.

Charles Lawson, who first visited Lebanon and Israel last month, would stay a week, until the official October 16 inauguration of the scheme to pump water from the Wazzani river to south Lebanese villages.

He could also make a short trip to Israel, the source said.

Sharon has threatened war over the plan to tap the Wazzani, which indirectly feeds the Sea of Galilee, Israel's main fresh water source.

"We are deploying maximum efforts to keep our water resources and Israel always has and always will do whatever it takes to protect its

vital resources," Sharon told public radio on Tuesday.

His defence minister, Binyamin Ben Eliezer, said Monday the United States had asked Israel to delay any action against Lebanon while it prepares a compromise solution.

The compromise would limit the amount of water that Lebanon could pump from the Wazzani, Ben Eliezer was quoted as saying by state radio.

Carol Kalin, the deputy chief of the US embassy in Lebanon, told reporters Tuesday that "the US wants to resolve the matter through diplomatic channels. We want to recognise the legitimate needs of both sides."

A government source told AFP that a report to the United Nations putting Lebanon's case would be completed "within 24 hours" by a special committee formed last month by Beirut to defend Lebanon's right to exploit its water sources.

Nepal awaits deadline for end to king's rule

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal was hoping Wednesday for an end to five days of political crisis as King Gyanendra's self-imposed deadline loomed to relinquish power and appoint an interim government.

The constitutional monarch Friday declared premier Sher Bahadur Deuba "incompetent" and assumed power in what he called a temporary move.

He said he would put in place an administration by midnight today to govern the troubled kingdom until fresh elections could be held.

But observers said the announcement could be delayed, as political leaders as of early Wednesday had not submitted to the king names of potential ministers in the new government.

The politicians are waiting to

have an audience with the king to discuss the interim government. A meeting Tuesday was abruptly cancelled amid confusion over whether Gyanendra would meet the leaders as a group or individually, political sources said.

In the meantime, the leaders sent the king a letter asking that he appoint ministers only from the six parties represented in the 205-member parliament dissolved in May.

The request would in effect exclude sacked prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who formed his own party last month. He had been expelled from the long ruling Nepali Congress for advising the king to disband the assembly and call new elections.

The letter said a government made of the party members "would

ensure the continuity of parliamentary democracy."

Gyanendra could, however, choose to appoint ministers of his own choice, setting the stage for more confrontation with political leaders.

"We will not accept the interim government if His Majesty selects only his own people," said Bharat Mohan Adhikari, a leader of the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML), the main opposition party in the dissolved parliament.

Some 3,000 NCP-UML supporters held a demonstration Tuesday in Kathmandu against the sacking of parliament, fearing the move signalled an end to the gains of massive 1990 pro-democracy protests, which ended 30 years of absolute royal rule.



US Navy men set out in a dinghy from amphibious transport ship USS Denver on Tuesday during the Eager Mace 2002 amphibious exercise in the Gulf off the coast of Kuwait. One US Marine was killed and another injured when two Kuwaitis attacked them.