

Seculars woo rightists as Pak power play peaks

AFP, Islamabad

Islamabad was abuzz yesterday with newly elected politicians descending on the Pakistani capital to negotiate alliances with arch-rivals and ideological opponents to create the future government. The alliance of fundamentalist Islamic parties holding the balance of power in the hung parliament after unprecedented gains in last week's elections has been courted by a stream of politicians from secular parties who failed to win a clear majority. Leaders of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of banned ex-premier Benazir Bhutto and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif were the first to knock on the doors of Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed. Ahmed is vice-president of the Muttahidda Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) which groups six Islamic parties including the JI. On Tuesday another key MMA

leader, the pro-Taliban Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam chief Fazlur Rehman, was courted by PPP's rival, the pro-government Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), meeting three of their leaders at his Islamabad residence. Bhutto, in self-imposed exile since 1998, called the MMA "a genie of terrifying proportions" in an interview with AFP Friday, but she told The Guardian newspaper Monday she was ready to cut a deal with them. "We can do business with anybody who reflects the spirit of the constitution," she said, provided the MMA put their opposition to US troops and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents in Pakistan "on the backburner." The head of the PPP's parliamentary wing, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, was the first to call on Ahmed in his plush new Islamabad villa. Ahmed told AFP the MMA's professed opposition to US troops' presence, the cornerstone of their campaign platform, was "negotia-

ble". "We will show flexibility and we will take all the steps in the best national interest," he said. "It's negotiable, yes, negotiable," he replied when asked whether the MMA would compromise on its position on the presence of US troops and FBI presence. US troops from the anti-terrorist coalition are using at least three Pakistani airbases for operations in neighbouring Afghanistan, while up to a dozen FBI agents have been helping hunt al-Qaeda fugitives in Pakistan's border regions and major cities such as Karachi. PML-N chairman Raja Zafarul Haq also held talks with Ahmed. They agreed that the parameters of a PML-N and MMA alliance were "the restoration of the 1973 constitution." PML-N spokesman Siddiqui Farooq told AFP. "We will cooperate with anybody in a coalition or otherwise who is committed and determined to restore the constitution of 1973 as it existed before (the military coup on)

October 12 1999," Farooq said. However he said it was premature to talk about the formation of government. The PPP's Fahim, after meeting the MMA's Ahmed, said an alliance with MMA was possible. "We are interacting on major issues with different political parties, and we will do our homework, before deciding about the future action plan," he told the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan. Rumours are rife of a split within PPP over coalescing with the MMA. The party's acting secretary general, Raza Rabbani, said there were "strong reservations" within PPP to siding with MMA. "Ideologically we are totally different to the MMA, we have absolutely divergent views on foreign policy and on national security matters," he told AFP. The party would be more comfortable to side with them only in voting out constitutional changes introduced by President Pervez Musharraf, Rabbani said.



Three little girls look at the wreaths placed at the memorial for students killed in the collapse of Anuddaipayan building of the Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University on October 15, 1985. Different organisations at the university chalked out programmes to mourn the incident five years back.

Four abducted allegedly by UPDF men in Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Four people were abducted allegedly by the activists of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) from Bhaibunchhara Bazar area under Longdu upazila of the district on Monday. The victims were identified as Purno Bikash Chakma, 24, Shanti Bikash Chakma, 26, Profullah Chakma, 50 and Amrital Chakma, 55 of village Bhaibunchhara under the same upazila. Sources said UPDF activists abducted the four pro-peace activists at gunpoint at around 9-30 am. The abductors later sent a letter to the villagers demanding Tk 4 lakh ransom for release of the four.

US-British jets strike Iraqi air defences

REUTERS, Washington

US and British warplanes attacked an air defense command center southeast of Baghdad yesterday in response to continuing threats against the aircraft policing a "no-fly" zone in southern Iraq, the US military said. The US Central Command, which controls military operations in the Gulf area, said in a statement from its headquarters in Tampa, Florida, that the jets attacked the command and control center near Al Kut, about 100 miles (160 kms) southeast of Baghdad at about 2.15 pm Iraq time. All the warplanes left the area safely and damage to the target from guided weapons was being assessed, the Pentagon said. The strike was the latest in an escalating series in recent months in response to what Washington says are increased attempts to shoot down US and British aircraft enforcing no-fly zones set up in northern and southern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War.

Iraqis take blood vows against Bush

Massive turnout in referendum to renew Saddam regime

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqis voted massively yesterday, some with their blood, in a referendum which ushers in seven more years of President Saddam Hussein's rule and keeps Baghdad on a collision course with the United States. The ruling Baath Party was unrelenting in efforts to ensure as much as a 100 per cent "yes" vote for Saddam and created a party mood in defiance of US plans to topple the regime. "By voting I've fired my gun at the head of Bush and his gang," said 67-year-old Abdul Majid Janabi, referring to the US president. He like many others had queued since dawn at voting centre number

13 in Baghdad's second constituency. Everyone declared they would vote for Saddam and one ballot box even had his photo stuck on it. Any no's? "It's a yes vote, if you want to say no you stay home," one young man told AFP at a centre in Saddam City, a poor Shiite area where a US flag had been laid out in front of the boxes, obliging voters to trample it. A young woman voted with her blood after filling a syringe from her arm. Others followed her example, chanting "with our soul, with our blood we will sacrifice ourselves for you, Saddam." In the northern city of Tikrit, near where Saddam was born 65 years

ago, people pricked their fingers to vote in blood. Voter after voter did the same at the village of Alem, just to the north, where a full-scale party was underway, an AFP reporter said. Blood votes are counted apart to allow the authorities to "compensate" the people, said a returning officer. "We are here to say yes to Saddam but above all to send a huge no to George W. Bush," said 26-year-old Iman Faraj in Tikrit, urging the message to be spread around the world. In Baghdad, the regime's number two Ezzat Ibrahim, head of the committee supervising the referendum, voted and branded the US



Foreign tourists carry their luggage as they arrive at Bali's airport in Denpasar yesterday. Hundreds of injured and traumatised tourists were flown out of the beach resort following Saturday's deadly bomb attack.

War against Iraq will hurt global economy: Stiglitz

AFP, Seoul

A recipient of the 2001 Nobel Prize for Economics, Joseph Stiglitz, warned yesterday that a US war against Iraq would have a "very negative" impact on the global economy. He also accused President George W. Bush of "mismanagement" of the US economy and forcing a global downturn on the

rest of the world. Speaking at the World Knowledge Forum here, Stiglitz said many people hoping for an economic boom from a war on Iraq would be disappointed. They confuse what happened in World War II with what could happen today, he said. World War II helped the world out of global deflation and had a positive impact on the world economy, he said.

"This current war, if it occurs, is likely to have a high probability of having a very negative impact," he told journalists. He said the differences between World War II and a possible war against Iraq was that World War II was a war of total mobilization with huge expenditures. But a war on Iraq was likely to involve fewer people and less expenditure in terms of the global

economic growth. "The benefit in terms of the economics of that stimulus (from a US-Iraq war) is likely to be more than offset by the adverse effect that uncertainty is having on investment, consumption and the possible adverse effects on oil prices," he said. "This is a very different kind of situation from World War II." SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Stabbed JCD activist dies at Rangamati hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A JCD activist, who was stabbed by unidentified miscreants at Kalindipur Puja Mandap here on Monday night, succumbed to his injuries at Rangamati General Hospital yesterday morning. A gang of miscreants called Apu, 23, a ward level JCD leader out of the puja mandap at around 10:30 pm. The gang stabbed Apu in the head and chest and fled the scene immediately. Devotees rushed him to the hospital where he died at 7 am today. Victim's father Subash Mohajan filed a murder case with Kotwali thana. Police arrested two youths named Ibrahim and Sudip Roy from Kalindipur area in connection with the killing yesterday evening.

AL Rajshahi div confce today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

After a period of almost five years, the Rajshahi divisional workers' conference of Awami League will be held at Madrasah maidan in Rajshahi city today. Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the conference at around 10:00 am. Leaders and workers of all the districts, upazilas, unions and wards in Rajshahi division are likely to join the conference. "The conference has been organised to gear up party activists and to make the party more active in the root level," party members informed. A party member informed that about 2000 workers of the Jatiya Party (JP) led by former deputy mayor of Rajshahi City Corporation Selim Sardar and JP's MP candidate from Rajshahi -1 (Tanore-Godagari) Jalal Uddin will join Awami League at the conference.

Low over Bay

UNB, Dhaka

The low over the northwest Bay and adjoining Bangladesh West Bengal coast rapidly concentrated into a well marked low, said a Met Office bulletin yesterday. It is likely to intensify and move in a northeasterly direction. Under the influence of the well-marked low squally weather is likely over north Bay. Maritime Ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to hoist local cautionary signal number 3. All fishing boats and trawlers over the north Bay have been advised to come close to the coast and proceed with caution.

Kashmir coalition talks tip

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Political uncertainty looms over the Indian-administered Kashmir with the Congress and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) at odds over makeup of a coalition. The Congress and the PDP have 36 seats between them and agreed to form a coalition while trying to woo enough independent legislators to give them majority in the 87-strong assembly. Talks between the two have run aground over the dispute as to who would be the chief minister and what would be the nature of dialogue with the militants. With 20 legislators, the Congress has demanded that it is the rightful claimant to the post of chief minister. Ghulam Nabi Azad, they claim, is the obvious choice. On the other hand, the PDP is firm on its demand that Mehbooba Mufti be made the chief minister of the Himalayan state. Intense dialogue over the last

three days has yielded no result and not even two rounds of talks between Congress and PDP president Mufti Mohammed Sayeed in New Delhi. Regional considerations are also coming in consideration. While Congress argues that its state unit chief Azad should be the

three days has yielded no result and not even two rounds of talks between Congress and PDP president Mufti Mohammed Sayeed in New Delhi. Regional considerations are also coming in consideration. While Congress argues that its state unit chief Azad should be the chief minister because the state has never seen a person from Jammu occupying the top post, the PDP wants the tradition of having a chief minister from the Kashmir valley to continue. In that case, the PDP claims, Sayeed is the right choice. There are three regions in the Indian-administered Kashmir: Jammu, Kashmir valley and Ladakh. Regional feelings play a major role in state politics. Azad is from Doda district of Jammu and 15 of its new 20 legisla-

NEWS ANALYSIS

Hardening of the Congress claim to the post of chief minister was underlined when Azad was elected the leader of the party's legislative wing on Monday. Besides, the Congress and the PDP are also unable to sort out their differences on the political agenda in a coalition. The PDP insistence on unconditional dialogue with militants, as outlined in its election manifesto, is diametrically opposite to that of the Congress. The PDP stand on the dialogue with militants is perceived to be close to separatists and it will be difficult for the Congress as a national party to accept that. During her talks with Sayeed at the weekend, Sonia is reported to have said that her party could not support unconditional talks as it has a national perspective and cannot go by different yardsticks in different situations.

Bid to hijack Saudi plane, one held

REUTERS, Riyadh

Saudi Arabian Airlines said yesterday that guards foiled a hijack attempt by a lone Saudi gunman aboard one of its flights from Sudan with 204 passengers and crew on board, adding no one was injured. But Egypt's Middle East News Agency (MENA) quoted Sudanese sources as saying three Saudi hijackers were involved and that there were apparently some passengers hurt. Saudi Arabian Airlines said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency: "A passenger armed with a pistol hijacked the plane... but special forces on board the flight immediately disarmed and arrested him with the help from crew." It said the aircraft returned to Khartoum international airport and landed safely. Sudanese authorities were interrogating the Saudi hijacker. The airline said the gunman had tried to take control of flight 450 from Khartoum to the Saudi city of Jeddah 22 minutes after it took off with 185 passengers and 19 crew on board. The statement gave no motive for the hijack attempt. It said the flight would resume to Saudi Arabia as soon as Sudanese authorities gave permission. MENA agency quoted the Sudanese sources as saying Sudanese security forces arrested three Saudi hijackers on the Airbus 310. "The three youths forced the captain to take off, then after an hour of flying forced him to return to Khartoum," MENA quoted the sources as saying. "Security authorities suppressed the incident. It appears there are some injured among the passengers."

Young man stabbed to death at Thakurgaon

UNB, Thakurgaon

A young man was stabbed to death by a gang of miscreants on station road here on Monday. Witnesses said a gang of five swooped on Heral, 20, near a puja mandap at around 7pm and stabbed him. Heral was rushed to sadar hospital where the attending doctors declared him dead. Soon after the incident Deputy Commission Jalal Ahmed and Police Super Amiruddin visited the spot and talked to the people. Rabiul Islam, uncle of the victim, filed a case with Thakurgaon police accusing nine persons. Following the case, police arrested four of the accused - Rafiqul, Mahub, Sayem and Jalal the same night.

LTTE negotiator in SL

Next round of peace talks in Thailand Oct 31

REUTERS, Colombo

The highest-level Tamil Tiger official in more than a decade to pass through Colombo airport arrived yesterday to meet the rebel leader before sitting down with the government for talks to end two decades of war. Anton Balasingham flew from London to the island's sole international airport attacked just 15 months ago by the Tigers and then was bundled on to a Sri Lankan Air Force helicopter to Wannai, a rebel-controlled area in the north. "He left on the helicopter after a slight delay because of the rain," said one military official. "It is one hour flying time to Wannai," he said. Balasingham, the chief negotia-

tor for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), will meet rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, something the Tigers said had to happen before the next round of talks could begin on October 31 in Thailand. Balasingham is considered Prabhakaran's closest adviser. The last time such a senior LTTE official was in Colombo was in 1990 when Balasingham and other LTTE officials stayed at a five-star hotel for talks dubbed the "Hilton Honeymoon". Balasingham will also meet government officials who will travel to Wannai to discuss demining and the setting up of a joint task force that will identify urgent rehabilitation needs and the agencies that will carry them out. "That also needs to be done

before the next talks (in Thailand)," said one diplomat. Balasingham was accompanied by his Australian-born wife, Adele, the secretary for the Tiger side during the peace talks, but it was not known how long they would stay in Wannai or if they would go directly from Sri Lanka to Thailand for the talks. Both parties ended the first round of talks with an appeal for aid to rebuild areas devastated by the war that killed 64,000 people, displaced hundreds of thousands and ruined the economy. So-called core issues, including Tiger demands for self-determination in the north and east, are unlikely to be discussed in Thailand, with the two sides