



British actress Joanna Lumley (C) joins ex-Gurkha and Victoria Cross winner Tul Bahadur Pun (Front L) in a protest by former Nepalese Gurkha soldiers outside the High Court in central London yesterday. Former Nepalese Gurkha soldiers marched on London's High Court on Tuesday to press their campaign for the right to settle in Britain, ahead of a judicial review into their legal challenge.

Nato membership 'wide open' for Georgia

Says alliance chief

AFP, Tbilisi

Nato chief Jaap de Hoop Scheffer yesterday said Georgia's path to Nato membership remained "wide open" despite last month's war and warned Russia against trying to block the alliance's expansion.

De Hoop Scheffer acknowledged doubts among some alliance members following last month's conflict with Russia, but gave a clear commitment to honouring Georgia's bid.

He warned Russia it was isolating itself by its military action and recognition of two rebel Georgian regions as independent.

"While the events of last month may have been a setback, the road to Nato is still wide open to Georgia," De Hoop Scheffer told students in an address at Tbilisi State University.

The address was part of a tour of this pro-Western ex-Soviet state with the 26 Nato ambassadors, with whom he later set out for a frontline city in the conflict, a short drive from where Russian troops are dug in.

"The process of Nato enlargement will continue, with due caution but also with a clear purpose: to help create a stable, undivided Europe."

"No other country will have a veto over that," De Hoop Scheffer said in a clear reference to Russia. "Nor will we allow our strong ties with Georgia to be broken by outside military intervention or pressure."

"Looking at the international isolation Russia has got itself into, Russia is punishing itself," he said, going on to refer to a plunge in the Russian stock market since last month's conflict.

Nato committed itself to even-

tual membership for both Georgia and Ukraine at a summit in April, prior to last month's war over the rebel region of South Ossetia, drawing condemnation from Cold War-era foe Moscow.

This small Caucasus state has already sent troops to Iraq in support of US operations there and on Monday the two sides inaugurated a new cooperation commission.

De Hoop Scheffer stressed Georgia still had to make improvements to the standard of its elections and to allow greater media freedom to satisfy Nato's non-military criteria.

He wrapped up the visit with a tour of the city of Gori just 20 kilometres (12 miles) from positions still occupied by Russian forces in a buffer zone outside South Ossetia. In Gori he was to visit a bombed-out army base and meet refugees.

Zimbabwe unity govt talks postponed

AFP, Harare

Talks to appoint ministers in Zimbabwe's new unity government were postponed to Wednesday due to "unforeseen circumstances", a spokesman for a splinter opposition party said.

"That meeting has been postponed to tomorrow due to unforeseen circumstances. The three principals just agreed to meet tomorrow," Edwin Mushoriwa, spokesman for the opposition faction led by Arthur Mutambara, told AFP.

"I am positive they will meet and finish. I don't think it's a debate that will take long, it's just a matter of allocating ministries."

Sources told AFP that the politburo of the ruling ZANU-PF, the party's highest decision-making body, was meeting on Tuesday afternoon.

The party appeared to be divided on who would be in the new government to be led by President Robert Mugabe who will retain his title and Morgan Tsvangirai in a newly created post as prime minister.

Iran boasts its forces can control the Gulf

France calls for new UN sanctions against Tehran

AFP, Tehran/Paris

Iran has the power to control the Gulf as no vessel can cross the vital seaway without coming in range of its sophisticated weaponry, a top aide to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said yesterday.

The sabre-rattling comments from General Rahim Yahya Safavi came a day after the International Atomic Energy Agency accused Iran of stalling its investigation into the country's nuclear drive.

"Responsibility for defending the Persian Gulf has been handed over to the naval forces of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps," Yahya Safavi was quoted as saying by the official news agency IRNA.

Their missiles can cover the entire width of the Gulf and "no ship can cross it without being within range", the former com-

mander-in-chief of the Guards told IRNA.

"Our armed forces with their defence equipment including missile, air, naval and torpedo capabilities are able to control the Strait of Hormuz."

An estimated 40 percent of the world's oil passes through the narrow channel between Iran and Oman and Iran has warned in the past it could block the waterway if it comes under attack over its nuclear programme.

The Guards are also carrying out air defence war games along with the air force of the regular army, a commander was quoted as saying by IRNA on Monday.

The Revolutionary Guards form the country's ideological army, with their own ground, navy and air forces operating in parallel with the regular armed forces. They are also

responsible for Iran's most significant and advanced ballistic missiles including the Shahab-3, which has Israel and US bases in the Gulf within reach.

"The Islamic republic's armed forces including the Guards and 11 million Basij (Iran's volunteer militia) are in full readiness to defend any invasion," the former commander-in-chief of the Guards told IRNA.

A potential Israeli attack on Iran, Rahim Safavi said: "The Zionist regime does not have the necessary political, economic and social capabilities to wage a great war."

He also warned the US military force in the region saying they would face "serious danger" in case of war, but said he believed Washington "will definitely not get involved in a fourth front after the

Afghanistan, Iraq and Georgia confrontations."

Meanwhile, France joined the United States yesterday in calling for new United Nations sanctions to force Iran to comply with international demands over its contested nuclear programme.

"We have no choice but to work, in the coming days and weeks, on a new sanctions resolution at the Security Council," French foreign ministry spokesman Eric Chevallier told a press conference.

The French warning follows a new report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's atomic watchdog, that said Iran had not frozen uranium enrichment activities as instructed by the UN.

Chevallier described the report as "extremely worrying."

Ukraine's pro-Western coalition collapses

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's governing coalition collapsed yesterday, the parliamentary speaker said, raising the prospect of the country being knocked off its pro-Western course and left leaning more towards Moscow.

"I officially announce the collapse of the coalition of democratic forces," announced parliament speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

Less than four years after President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko united in the "Orange Revolution," their political marriage lies not for the first time in tatters.

Tymoshenko was expected to resign after the announcement and start trying to build a new coalition.

She should continue functioning as prime minister until the formation of a new cabinet, which must happen within 30 days -- by mid-October -- or Yushchenko can call new elections.

It is expected that her party, the Tymoshenko Bloc, will either form an alliance with the pro-Russian opposi-

tion Regions Party or new elections will be held -- experts have mooted December 21 as a possible date.

The political crisis began when Yushchenko pulled his Our Ukraine party out of the coalition on September 3 after Tymoshenko sided with the pro-Moscow opposition to pass new laws.

Yushchenko, who believed the laws would be used to reduce his power and facilitate his possible impeachment, bitterly described the vote against him as a bid by Tymoshenko to establish a "dictatorship" and complained of a parliamentary "coup."

Tymoshenko in turn accused the president of having "destroyed" the governing coalition by pulling out of the alliance with her party.

Tymoshenko and Yushchenko were the icons of the 2004 pro-Western Orange Revolution and have each been considered Western-leaning politicians despite persistent and sharp disagreements on domestic political issues.



A Haitian man moves cattle to dry land after a string of four major storms caused flooding of a lake near Miragoane, Haiti on Monday. The four major storms that struck Haiti over the past four weeks left at least 326 people dead and 50 missing throughout the country.

Anwar insists he has enough MPs' support to form govt

THE STAR/ ANN, Petaling Jaya

Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim insists he has the numbers to form the next government. However, he did not give details of how many ruling Barisan Nasional members will cross over, or their names.

At Pakatan Rakyat's 45th Malaysia Day celebration Monday, Anwar said he had sought a meeting with Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to discuss a smooth transition of power.

"We have handed a letter signed by all Pakatan Rakyat leaders to Pak Lah (PM Abdullah). We will give him one or two days to give his response," he said during his speech at the rally in Kelana Jaya stadium last night.

A group of Pakatan Rakyat MPs had turned up at the Prime Minister's Office earlier in the day to hand over a letter from their leaders to Abdullah.

Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party or PAS secretary-general Kamaruddin Jaafar, in his speech, said the celebration marked "a clear and concrete plan towards the change in the government".

When interviewed later, Kamaruddin claimed that the new government would be formed in the next few days.

Asked why Anwar did not reveal the numbers or the names of the MPs, Kamaruddin replied that it was due to logistical reasons.

"Some of them are still overseas as you know. Some have been told to stay put in Macau," he said.

He said Pakatan had obtained the MPs' word to cross over via signed documents and in other various ways that satisfied the Pakatan leaders of their commitment.

Among the thousands who attended the rally were DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and

Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim.

Kit Siang said that it "did not matter whether the change is 916 (Sept 16), 1016 (Oct 16), 1116 (Nov 16) or 1216 (Dec 16)".

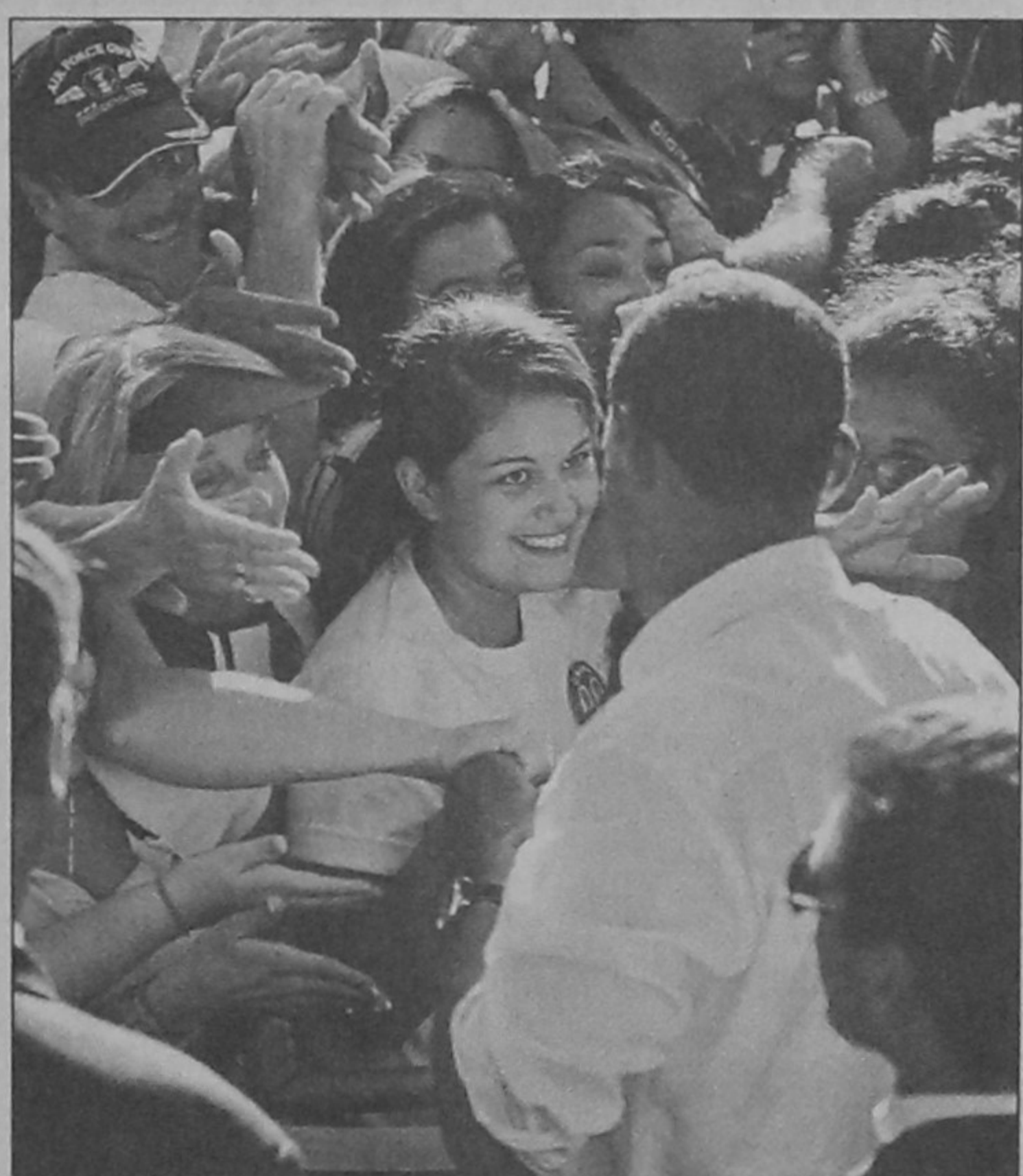
"What is important is for all of us to be united to make the change happen," he said.

Guan Eng in his speech said he was impressed that for the first time, a Cabinet minister (de facto law minister Zaid Ibrahim) had resigned based on his principles.

"I am proud that for the first time a minister has resigned not because of health or scandal, but because of his principle and idealism in opposing the ISA."

"This has never happened in the history of Malaysia," he said.

Guan Eng also called upon the other Cabinet ministers who opposed the ISA to not only "talk" but to follow in Zaid's footsteps and resign.



US Democratic presidential candidate Illinois Senator Barack Obama greets supporters at the end of a rally at Colorado State Fair Grounds in Pueblo, Colorado on Monday.

Thai ruling party claims consensus on PM candidate

AP, Bangkok

Thailand's ruling People's Power Party has reconciled with a renegade faction and agreed to nominate Somchai Wongsawat to become prime minister.

Party spokesman Kuthep Saikrajang said Tuesday a faction of 73 lawmakers dropped their objection to backing Somchai, who became acting prime minister last week after a court forced Samak Sundaravej to step down.

One of the dissidents, Suthin Klangsang, said at a news conference that the breakaway group accepted the party's choice "after a discussion of the party and after listening to Somchai."

The dissidents had claimed picking Somchai would inflame political tensions. Suthin did not explain their change of mind.

Parliament is supposed to vote Wednesday on a new prime minister.

Morales gets regional support, eyes talks with Bolivia foes

AFP, La Paz

Bolivia's leftist government and rebel rightwing governors were readying negotiations yesterday aimed at ending a bitter and enduring political conflict that last week blew up into deadly street violence.

President Evo Morales was expected to engage his foes in the talks after South American presidents holding a crisis summit Monday gave him their "full and firm" support and rejected any break-up of Bolivia.

His vice president and ministers overnight met with one of the five governors demanding autonomy for their eastern states to fix the parameters of the upcoming talks.

The conflict has been bubbling along since Morales, a former coca farmer and union leader, became president in 2006 and set about imposing reforms designed to benefit the indigenous majority he belongs to.

Matters came to a head last month when Morales called a December 7 referendum on a rewritten constitution that would break up big land holdings and redistribute revenues from the country's main resource, natural gas.

Anti-government protests sprang up in the rebel states, where the governors demanded more control over gas fields and militants set up road blocks to separate the economically vital eastern lowlands from the poorer Andean western half of Bolivia.

Government offices and airports were taken over by stone-throwing mobs, and pro- and anti-government clashes occurred in several areas.

In the northern state of Pando, they turned deadly, leaving at least 18 people dead and 100 wounded.

Another 50 people are unaccounted for, and Bolivian farm unions said the final death toll could be over 30.

McCain's adopted Bangladeshi daughter one of the lucky

AFP, Kulaura

When John McCain's adopted Bangladeshi daughter was introduced at the Republican National Convention, Sister Shuporna barely recognised the girl she cared for when she was born.

The 54-year-old nun looked after Bridget, who was born with a cleft palate and abandoned by her unmarried mother, for the first few weeks of her life at the Mother Teresa Home in Dhaka's old town.

Then McCain's wife Cindy visited, and the life of little Bridget -- one of the many children born in this impoverished South Asian nation each year with disfiguring deformities -- changed forever.

"If they hadn't taken her she would still be living at the Mother Teresa home," says the petite nun, who is now based in a convent in rural northeastern Bangladesh, where she provides local children with their only meal of the day.

"With this deformity, it would be very hard to find her a home.



Bridget McCain

No one would have wanted her. She would be living at the home and the nuns would have taught her some skills, like sewing, so she could get a job."

Instead, 17-year-old Bridget is living a modern-day fairy tale, and could soon be America's First Daughter if her Republican White House hopeful father is elected US president in November.

A total of about 200,000 children in Bangladesh are now orphaned or abandoned, living in government-run or privately owned group homes, according

to the country's social welfare department.

Many of them, like Bridget, have deformities that make them pariahs.

But Bridget was one of the lucky few to be treated -- and adopted.

"It's amazing that you can no longer see the deformity. It's as if she never had it," says Sister Shuporna.

Bridget's biological mother, a Christian, lived for a short while before and after the birth at the Mother Teresa home.

In conservative Bangladesh, where 90 percent of the population is Muslim, having a baby out of wedlock is taboo.

"She was always going to give her up because she was not married. We didn't know about the deformity until she was born," says the nun.

Cindy McCain was visiting Dhaka on a charity trip when she saw Bridget and another baby girl, Nikki -- and brought them back to the US, where Bridget had several operations over four years to fix the cleft palate.

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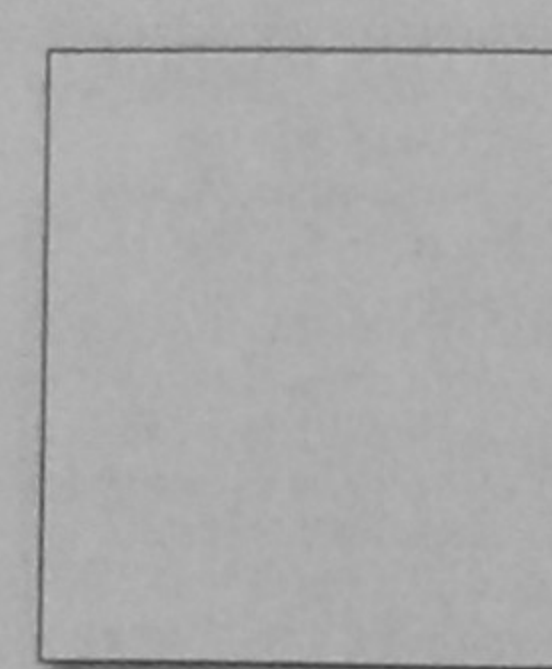
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