

## Longest-serving Myanmar prisoner freed

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta yesterday released its longest-serving political prisoner as part of an amnesty for more than 9,000 inmates, but he immediately vowed to continue to fight the ruling generals.

Win Tin, a 79-year-old journalist and prominent dissident, had been behind the bars of Yangon's feared Insein prison since 1989. He was one of just a handful of jailed dissidents freed as part of the amnesty.

"I will continue with politics as I am a politician," he told reporters at a friend's house after his release, still dressed in a blue prison-issue outfit.

"What kind of politics? To finish military rule," he added.

State media announced Tuesday the 9,002 prisoners would be freed so they could take part in elections promised by the ruling generals for 2010, while the move also comes on the year anniversary of massive anti-junta protests.

## US vows long fight on extremism after Pak bombing

AFP, Washington

The United States vowed Monday to step up efforts to help Pakistan in a long fight against South Asian extremism following a massive hotel bombing in Islamabad that killed scores of people.

"This is a long-term process... to root out extremism in this part of the world. It's going to take time, but we're going to be persistent in our efforts," State Department spokesman Robert Wood said.

"We've pledged our cooperation to Pakistan and to the government of Afghanistan to do what we can to help," he said.

"We are going to redouble our efforts to try to counter this extremism that threatens stability in the

region."

At least 60 people were killed, including two Americans, the Czech ambassador and a Vietnamese woman, on Saturday when a suicide bomber rammed a truck packed with explosives into the security gates of the Marriott Hotel in the Pakistani capital Islamabad. More than 260 people were wounded.

A contractor for the US State Department was unaccounted for following the hotel bombing, Wood said, but he was unable to provide details as to the missing contractor's nationality.

"If you look at what happened on Saturday, this is an example of why we, the Pakistanis, the Afghans, need to work and redou-

ble our efforts to counter extremism in this region," Wood said.

"We'll continue to work with the Pakistanis on trying to deal with the Taliban and al-Qaeda threat, not only in the tribal areas, but over in Afghanistan," he told reporters.

Calling the hotel bombing Pakistan's 9/11, Wood insisted that Washington was not rethinking its relationship with Islamabad or questioning the Pakistani government's commitment to fight terrorism in the volatile south Asia region.

"The Pakistanis have told us that they are committed to this fight, and it's clearly in our national interest to help the Pakistanis pursue the Taliban and al-Qaeda extremists," Wood said.



Pakistani workers repair telephone cables in front of the devastated Marriott Hotel in Islamabad yesterday, three days after a suicide attack. British Airways has cancelled all flights to the Pakistani capital Islamabad for an indefinite period amid security concerns after the bombing of the Marriott hotel, the airline said.

## Livni gets approval to form Israeli govt

AP, Jerusalem

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni yesterday received formal approval to form a new Israeli government, starting the clock on a 42-day period for putting together a new team and resuming Middle East peace negotiations.

Livni, 50, once an agent of the Mossad spy agency, has pledged to pursue peace with the Palestinians and Syria, following up negotiations started by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. She would be Israel's first female premier since 1974.

Even before President Shimon Peres gave her the official title of prime minister-designate on Monday evening, Livni was already conducting intensive talks with party leaders over their terms to join a coalition.

But nothing is automatic in Israel's unruly political arena, and other parties may decide to take their chances with a snap election.



Police secures the area near a school in Kauhajoki, western Finland yesterday where nine people were killed when a gunman went on a shooting rampage.

## 10 killed as gunman opens fire at school in Finland

AFP, Helsinki

A young trainee chef went on a shooting rampage at a Finnish vocational school yesterday, mowing down at least 10 people before turning a weapon fatally on himself, police said.

Witnesses at the school in Kauhajoki in southwestern Finland described scenes of panic as the man, thought to be in his early 20s, prowled the corridors letting off round after round at helpless students.

"I heard the sound of shooting and hysterical girls' voices. Then two girls came towards my room and said a weird man was shooting," Jukka Forsberg, the janitor of the school, told AFP.

"I went to see and saw a guy leaving a big black bag in the corridor and going into classroom number three and closing the door."

"I looked through the window and he immediately shot at me. Then I called the emergency number," he said, adding, "Thank God I was not hit! He fired at me but I was running zigzag. I ran for my life."

Forsberg said he heard "horrible

screams of pain" as he raced out of the building.

The shooter -- identified by police as a second-year culinary arts student Matti Juhani Saari -- was clad in black clothes and a ski mask as he stalked the school looking for victims.

After his shooting spree, the attacker turned a gun on himself and was taken to a local hospital with head injuries. He later died of those wounds, police told AFP.

"Now the number of dead is 10 and the shooter has died. That means 11 people have died," police chief Urpo Lintala told AFP.

Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen held a crisis meeting of the Finnish government following the shooting.

Police believe all the dead were students at the school, the STT news agency reported.

Threats had been issued on Tuesday against the regional chain of schools to which the Kauhajoki institute belonged, prompting officials to evacuate more than 2,750 students from the 12 schools.

## Stamping out corruption can save lives

### Says graft watchdog TI

AFP, Berlin

Stopping practices such as cronyism and embezzlement can save lives in poor countries, a graft watchdog said yesterday as Somalia, Iraq and Myanmar again came bottom in its global corruption rankings.

"In the poorest countries, corruption levels can mean the difference between life and death, when money for hospitals or clean water is in play," Transparency International (TI) said.

"The continuing high levels of corruption and poverty plaguing many of the world's societies amount to an ongoing humanitarian disaster and cannot be tolerated," the non-governmental organisation's head Huguette Labelle said.

Rampant corruption in low-

income countries also jeopardises the global fight against poverty and threatens to derail the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the report published in Berlin said.

This "calls for a more focused and coordinated approach by the global donor community to ensure development assistance is designed to strengthen institutions of governance and oversight in recipient countries, and that aid flows themselves are fortified against abuse and graft," TI said.

It estimates that unchecked levels of corruption would add 50 billion dollars -- or nearly half of annual global aid outlays -- to the cost of achieving the MDGs on water and sanitation.

The African Union has estimated that corruption costs the

continent 148 billion dollars annually, equal to the gross domestic product of Kenya, Tanzania and Cameroon combined, TI said.

According to TI's latest Corruption Perceptions Index, the countries worst hit by problems such as back-handers and bribery in 2008 remained Somalia, Myanmar and Iraq.

Somalia, the east African nation without a functioning government since 1991, scored just 1.0 point on TI's range of between zero, which is highly corrupt, and 10, which is very clean.

Myanmar, which received international condemnation for its heavy-handed crackdown on protests in September 2007, was on 1.3 points, as was Iraq, five years after a US-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein. Haiti was on 1.4.

## Pak-Afghan coalition force proposed

### UN extends force mandate

AFP, Washington

Afghanistan's defence minister proposed Monday creating a joint force of Afghan, Pakistan and coalition troops to operate against insurgents on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak said the idea was broached about a month and a half ago at a meeting of senior US, Afghan and Pakistani military officials.

The Pakistanis "said they are looking at it," Wardak told reporters during a visit to the Pentagon.

"A terrorist does not recognise any boundaries," Wardak said.

"So to fight them we have to eventually come up with some arrangement together with our neighbour Pakistan that we should have a combined and joint taskforce of coalition Afghan and

Pakistani forces to be able to operate on both sides of the border."

Pentagon officials said the idea of forming a joint force to operate in the border area was not a new one, but in the past had been rebuffed by the Pakistanis because of concerns for their sovereignty.

The United States has focused instead on creating centres manned by Afghan, Pakistani and coalition personnel to coordinate operations along the border, a defence official said.

One border coordination centre has been established, another is under construction and plans call for six more, the official said.

At the same time, though, US forces appear to be stepping up missile strikes on insurgent targets on the Pakistani side of the border. Reports of a cross border raid by US special operations forces earlier this

month infuriated Pakistani leaders.

The Pentagon has neither confirmed nor denied the reports.

"With respect to Pakistan, the only thing that I will say is that we have the tools and we have the authorities to protect our soldiers," US Defence Secretary Robert Gates told reporters in London Friday.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council on Monday extended for one year the mandate of Nato-led multinational forces battling extremists in Afghanistan, but voiced concern about the high number of civilian casualties.

The 15-member council unanimously adopted Resolution 1833 that extended the authorization of the International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) for a period of 12 months beyond October 13, 2008.

## 'I will marry soon,' says Rahul

PTI, Bathinda

"I will get married soon," said Rahul Gandhi, the 38-year-old scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family.

He was replying to a question at a roadshow in Bathinda on Tuesday on whether he has any plans to tie the knot.

Rahul Gandhi, without giving any details, just said "I will get married soon."

The Congress General Secretary, who is on a three-day visit to the state, met families of at least ten persons either killed or injured during the Punjab Panchayat polls in May.

He listened to the family members and assured them of "maximum help" after he returned to Delhi.

The young MP also heard grievances of people who complained of "atrocities" during the present Akali Dal-BJP rule.

Congress workers in Bathinda told him about the alleged political vendetta against them unleashed by the ruling combine in the state, party sources said here.

Rahul Gandhi also met inmates of a local drug de-addiction centre run by the Red Cross society.

During his interaction with people the young Congress leader sought to woo the youth to join the party.

## UN agency seeks \$17m for Pakistan

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations refugee agency said Tuesday it was seeking 17.2 million dollars (11.6 million euros) to help more than 300,000 people forced from their homes in Pakistan by floods and fighting.

"There are now an estimated 90,000 internally displaced people in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP) due to the ongoing fighting in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan," UN High Commissioner for Refugees spokesman William Spindler told journalists.

"Another 90,000 are believed to be displaced in Swat in northern NWFP, based on a recent government assessment. In addition, some 84,000 people were displaced by floods in August," he said.

Around 28,000 internally displaced people are living in nine official government camps in the province but the majority are staying with host families.



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (C), President of Iran arrives with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (R) on Monday for a meeting at UN headquarters in New York, ahead of the annual General Assembly session.

## India accuses Pakistan of 'serious' truce violation

AFP, Srinagar

The Indian army accused Pakistan of a "serious" ceasefire violation along the de facto border dividing Kashmir between the two nations after a gun battle left two soldiers dead.

One died Sunday and another on Monday during a marathon gun battle with Muslim militants along the Line of Control (LoC), army spokesman SD Goswami told AFP.

"We have foiled an infiltration attempt by the militants over the past two days," he said.

"Pakistani troops tried to facilitate the infiltration by providing covering fire to the militants," he said, terming it "yet another serious ceasefire violation" by Pakistan.

He said they have lodged a "strong protest with Islamabad."

There was no immediate comment from Pakistan.

Local reports said four militants died during the battle, but the army could not confirm the deaths.

and pushing them across the heavily militarised LoC into the Indian zone of Kashmir, where a deadly revolt has been under way against New Delhi's rule since 1989.

Islamabad rejects the accusations.

The latest incident comes before a meeting between Indian Premier Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari in New York later this week, their first discussions since Zardari replaced Pervez Musharraf.

Tensions have escalated along the border since last July when New Delhi accused "elements" in Pakistan of involvement in a suicide car-bomb attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul that left at least 41 people dead.

The latest violence came amid a lull in protests against Indian rule in Kashmir. In the past few months, Kashmir has witnessed the biggest pro-independence demonstrations since the insurgency erupted.

A Hindu-Muslim land row triggered the protests, which prompted a tough crackdown

by security forces. Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir since their independence in 1947.

Meanwhile, a Pakistan-based Islamist militant group said Sunday it was not involved in a series of orchestrated bombings across India, angrily denying allegations by investigators.

Lashkar-e-Taiba said it only wanted to kill Indian troops in Kashmir, and not to kill civilians in Indian cities.

The denial came after Indian police said Lashkar-e-Taiba was backing the previously unknown Indian Mujahideen, which claimed responsibility for serial blasts in several cities including attacks in New Delhi on September 13.

Serial bombings in Indian cities claimed by Indian Mujahideen have left more than 140 people dead and hundreds more injured in recent months.

"It is a propaganda to discredit us," Lashkar-e-Taiba spokesman Abdullah Ghaznavi told AFP.

## Sacked Indian workers kill boss

AFP, New Delhi

Sacked workers in India beat to death the boss of an Italian company that had laid them off, police said Tuesday.

Scores of former employees at car parts maker Graziano Transmission attacked local chief executive Lalit Kishore Chaudhary, 47, when a meeting to discuss a long-running labour dispute turned violent, police said.

"Twenty-three people are still in hospital," superintendent of police Babu Ram told AFP.

Police said the company sacked more than 100 workers three months ago but arranged a meeting on Monday to work out a possible reinstatement deal.

"Only a few people were called inside. About 150 people were waiting outside when they heard someone from inside shout for help. They rushed in and the two sides clashed," Ram said.

Chaudhary, a father with one son, was hit on the head with either a stick or an iron rod and was declared dead on arrival at hospital, police said.

"The company staff were heavily outnumbered," Ram said.

## Orissa flood situation turns grim

PTI, Bhubaneswar

As gushing water from breaches in Orissa's Mahanadi delta engulfed fresh areas, more naval and paramilitary men today joined relief work for the marooned people in the flood which affected 38 lakh people and claimed at least 31 lives.

Though the water level in Mahanadi and other rivers subsided considerably, surging waters from about 80 breaches in embankments in the Mahanadi system continued to submerge fresh areas, worsening the plight of the people in the flood ravaged villages, official sources said.

Two naval teams from 1 N S Chhika had been pressed into service for rescue and relief yesterday, while more personnel were being sent to the flood affected areas to intensify the operation, they said.

Javans of Central Industrial Security Force have also joined the relief operation, which had remained tardy in the absence of adequate manpower and boats at the disposal of the state government, sources said.

## The methane time bomb

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

The first evidence that millions of tons of a greenhouse gas 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide is being released into the atmosphere from beneath the Arctic seabed has been discovered by scientists.

The Independent has been passed details of preliminary findings suggesting that massive deposits of sub-sea methane are bubbling to the surface as the Arctic region becomes warmer and its ice retreats.

Underground stores of methane are important because scientists believe their sudden release has in the past been responsible for rapid increases in global temperatures, dramatic changes to the climate, and even the mass extinction of species. Scientists aboard a research ship that has sailed the entire length of Russia's northern coast have discovered intense concentrations of methane sometimes at up to 100 times background levels over several areas covering thousands of square miles of the Siberian continental shelf.

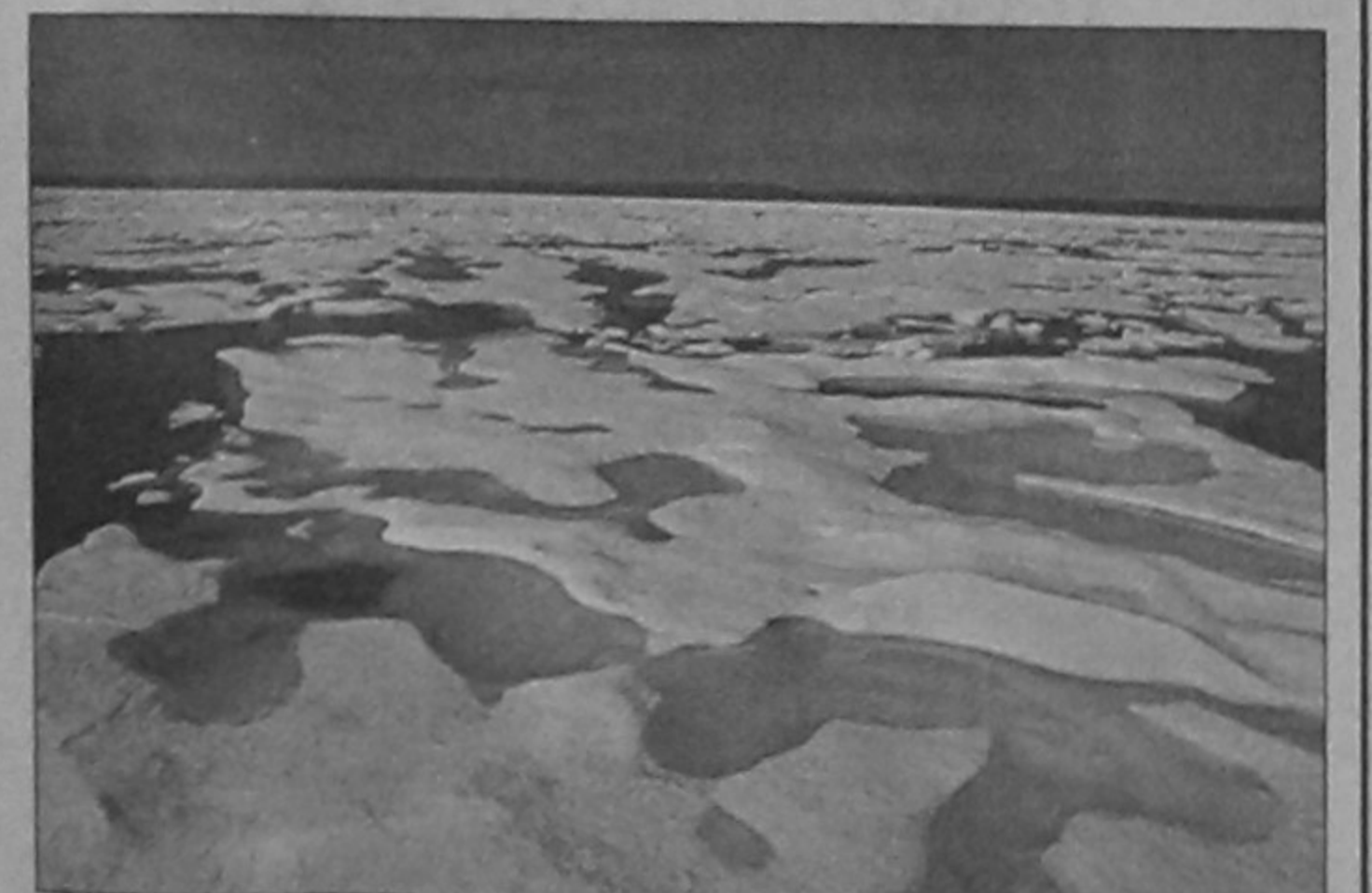
In the past few days, the researchers have seen areas of sea foaming with gas bubbling up

through "methane chimneys" rising from the sea floor. They believe that the sub-sea layer of permafrost, which has acted like a "lid" to prevent the gas from escaping, has melted away to allow methane to rise from underground deposits formed before the last ice age.

They have warned that this is likely to be linked with the rapid warming that the region has

experienced in recent years.

Methane is about 20 times more powerful as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide and many scientists fear that its release could accelerate global warming in a giant positive feedback where more atmospheric methane causes higher temperatures, leading to further permafrost melting and the release of yet more methane.



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