INTERNATIONAL

Violence mars Indian state election

AFP, Raipur

Indian troops battled Maoist rebels in the east of the country yesteday as violence marred the start of a string of key state elections seen as a popularity test for the ruling

Leftwing guerrillas in Chhattisgarh state fought more than two dozen gun battles, which left a trooper dead. They also ran away with electronic voting machines from 21 poll centres, a police spokesman said.

An Indian airforce engineer was killed when Maoists fired on a lowflying helicopter over the insurgency-riven Jagdalpur district, he

There also has been several said in state capital Raipur.

minds of people so that they will southern India, as the biggest not come to vote," said another threat to the country's security. police official, who asked not to be

Officials in Raipur said 40,000 the state, has made the Maoist police and soldiers guarded the insurgency its main election issue. polling stations.

New Delhi said 55 percent of the 6.3 million registered voters exercised their franchise in the first leg of the two-phase balloting in the Maoist ranks," said Congress

Large parts of the denselyforested south of Chhattisgarh are under rebel control and around half the 8,879 booths were designated "sensitive" or "hyper-

Premier Manmohan Singh has cases of abductions of officials," he described the Maoists, centred on

"The aim is create fear in the rural areas across eastern and

His ruling Congress party, currently the opposition grouping in

"Law and order is a major prob-India's election commission in lem. It is an extension of the state being unable to harness youth energies fully. It is the unemployed youth who are major recruits into spokesman Tom Vadakkan.

Incumbent Chief Minister Raman Singh, of the opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been luring voters with the promise of cheap rice for government over high inflation.

tions starting with Chhattisgarh is Five more states -- Madhya two-fold," said political columnist Pradesh in the centre, revolt-hit Chhattisgarh but also active in Kashmir, the capital Delhi, NeerjaChoudhury.

approves longer presidential terms AFP, Moscow

Russian parliament

Russia's parliament yesterday approved constitutional changes extending the length of presidential terms, a move opponents said could lead to the return of Vladimir Putin to the presidency.

The State Duma approved the extension of presidential mandates from four years to six in a first reading, with 388 votes in favour and 58 against.

The changes "fully accord with international practice" and will "increase the period in which state institutions work most fruitfully," said Vladimir Pligin, head of the Duma's constitutional affairs committee.

The changes, the first ever to Russia's 1993 constitution, were announced earlier by President Dmitry Medvedev and were expected easily to win approval from the overwhelmingly pro-Kremlin parliament.

They will also increase parliamentary terms from four years to five.



Traffic moves along a snow-covered street in Srinagar yesterday. Authorities in Indian Kashmir deployed thousands of troops to prevent a rally by Muslim separatists opposed to New Delhi's rule over a part of the Himalayan region.

UN tank makes its way down the main road near a UN mission in DR Congo (MONUC) base in the town of Kiwanja, about 80km north of Goma, the main city of eastern DR Congo's restive Nord-Kivy region, on Nov 13.

UNHCR to move 60,000 DR Congo refugees for their safety

AFP, Geneva

Around 60,000 people displaced by fighting in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are to be moved out of a camp near the city of Goma because of safety fears, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ian population. (UNHCR) said yesterday.

Mizoram in the northeast and the

western state of Rajasthan -- will

backdrop of rising prices and con-

cerns over the impact of the global

financial crisis on India's economy --

with exports and manufacturing

slowing, GDP growth forecasts cut

referendum ahead of national

elections, which have to be held by

The BJP governs in three of the

states voting but analysts say anti-

incumbency sentiment may be

offset by anger with the federal

"The importance of these elec-

They are also seen as a mini-

and job losses expected.

May 2009.

The string of polls comes against a

vote before the end of the year.

"Given the continuing security threat, provincial authorities, UNHCR and its partners have decided to transfer the more than 60,000 people in the two Kibati camps (near Goma)... as soon as possible, in few days," said spokesman Ron Redmond.

Fighting between government tions at the town. forces and followers of renegade Tutsi ex-general Laurent Nkunda has killed at least 100 civilians since September and displaced more than 250,000, according to the United Nations and humanitarian groups vanour and av Day John Line

Nkunda's troops have surrounded Nord-Kivu's capital Goma, eastern DR Congo's main city, for the past two weeks, forcing UN peacekeepers to send reinforcements to protect the city and its estimated 500,000-strong civil-

The rebel leader's forces on Thursday also swept to the outskirts of a strategic crossroads town, Kanyabayonga, 100 kilometres (62 miles) north of Goma.

Peacekeepers with the UN Mission in the DR Congo (MONUC) and FARDC government forces had reinforced their posi-

Around 2,000 people have also fled into Uganda since Tuesday, bringing to 12,000 the number of people who have taken refuge in the neighbouring country since fighting erupted in late August, according to UNHCR

Nine monks jailed for Myanmar protests

AFP, Yangon

Nine Buddhist monks and 28 prodemocracy activists have been jailed in Mynamar for involvement in last year's massive protests against the military junta, an opposition spokesman said yesterday.

punishments, courts handed down sentences of between six and eight years for the monks and two to 16 years for members of Nobel Peace Prizewinner Aung San Suu Kyi's party.

Rights groups say military-ruled Myanmar has intensified efforts to curb dissent ahead of elections in 2010 by cracking down on activists who took part in the demonstrations in August and September 2007.

"Four monks were sentenced to eight years imprisonment each" at court hearings on Thursday, Nyan Win, a spokesman for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for by Buddhist monks that posed the

Democracy (NLD) party, told AFP.

Also on Thursday, 11 NLD members from the commercial hub of Yangon were jailed for seven-anda-half years each and another three were given sentences of four to 10 years, he said.

A further 14 activists from the groups say. In the latest in a string of recent NLD were sentenced on Friday at different courts in Yangon for 64 the number of activists jailed in between two to 16 years, all in Myanmar this week in a major relation to last year's protests, Nyan Win added later.

He said five other monks numbers remain unclear. arrested in September last year from Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery in Yangon were sentenced to six-anda-half years each on Tuesday at the about junta leader Senior General notorious Insein prison on the Than Shwe. outskirts of the city.

small rallies in August 2007 against the rising cost of living but escalated into huge demonstrations led

biggest challenge to junta rule in nearly two decades.

At least 31 people were killed when security forces cracked down on the protesters, according to the United Nations. Hundreds more activists remain in jail, rights

crackdown, although without any official announcements the exact Those imprisoned include a

The sentences bring to around

prominent blogger and a leading poet who wrote a coded message

The five monks sentenced on The Myanmar protests began as Tuesday were included in the numbers earlier announced by relatives and opposition figures, although it was not known until Friday, that they were monks

British troops to quit Iraq by end of 2009

Says Iraqi official, but UK insists 'no timetable' on pullout

AFP, Baghdad

All British troops will be out of Iraq by the end of next year, Iraq's national security advisor said yesterday, days before Baghdad was expected to vote on a controversial US military pact.

will be no British troops in Iraq. By the end of 2009," Muwafaq al-Rubaie said, adding that negotiabegun two weeks ago.

response that Britain has "no timetable" for the withdrawal of its vast majority of which are based in Forces Agreement (SOFA), a wide-timetable for their withdrawal.

the southern Iraqi city of Basra.

timetable," the spokesman told

"We are hopefully making progress, we have made progress in Basra, and we are on course to meet the (British) prime minister's "By the end of next year there fundamental change of mission in 2009," the spokesman said, reiterating previously-stated plans.

Baghdad has been racing to tions between London and secure separate agreements with Baghdad on the pull-out had both Britain and the United States next year there would be a "drato replace the UN mandate cur-A British defence ministry rently governing the presence of spokesman in London said in foreign troops in the country, which expires December 31.

"At the minute, we have no

Saturday or Sunday. The two sides have been wrangling over the document for months. Rubaie insisted however that

the agreement Iraq sought with the British was simpler and would not take as much time to complete. "It will be a much shorter agreement with the UK," Rubaie said.

> "And it progresses quite nicely. It's much shorter and much simpler." He added that by the middle of

ranging US military pact, either

matic" reduction of British troops.

In July British Prime Minister Gordon Brown indicated he wanted to cut the number of Iraq's cabinet was expected to Britain's troop in the violenceroughly 4,000 troops in Iraq, the vote on the so-called Status of wracked country but ruled out a

Prince Charles

for throne

line to become king.

decides to step down.

AP, London

turns 60 waiting

Talk about an apprentice. By the

time he turns 60 yesterday, Prince

Charles will have spent a lifetime in

That's put him in quite a bind.

The longest-waiting heir in British

history only ascends to the throne

when his beloved mother dies or

Queen Elizabeth II was hosting

a birthday party for her son

Thursday at Buckingham Palace.

Israel to try troops over Palestinian abuse video

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli army is to try several soldiers suspected of posting a video on YouTube that shows them humiliating a bound and blindfolded Palestinian, a statement said yesterday.

The clip posted last week showed soldiers from the crack Golani Brigade forcing a prisoner to repeat degrading remarks in Hebrew while they looked on and laughed.

"The inquiry regarding the issue is in its final stages, and it has been found that the event occurred fifteen months ago in the area of the Gaza Strip," the statement from the military said.

"Some of the soldiers involved are still in active service. At the end of the inquiry, these soldiers will be arse."

charged in a disciplinary trial. "The Israel Defence Force con-

siders this to be a grave incident and a serious infraction, and is treating it as such. Furthermore, the IDF is taking additional action in order to prevent such incidents in the future."

The Golani Brigade is one of the Israeli army's most highly decorated units, having taken part in operations including the storming of a hijacked aircraft in Entebbe, Uganda in 1976 and the capture of Mount Hermon in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

The footage sparked outrage among commanders. In once section of the clip, the detainee repeats fearfully in Hebrew: "Golani will bring you a log up the

India's rich lose 60pct of their fortune

AFP, Mumbai

The fortunes of India's wealthiest have been cut by more than 60 percent due to the global financial crisis, which has sharply pulled down stock markets, according to a new rich list.

Forbes magazine put Mukesh Ambani, chairman of India's largest private sector firm Reliance Industries, as the country's wealthiest man, with a net worth of 20.8 billion dollars after losing 28.2 billion dollars in the past year.

He overtakes London-based steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal who topped the list for the past four years. His net worth was 20.5 billion dollars after dropping 30.5 billion dollars on plunging steel magazine said. prices.





In this combination of pictures created on Friday, Indian industrialists (L/R) Lakshmi Mittal, Anil Ambani, Mukesh Ambani and Sunil Mittal address press conferences in New Delhi. The fortunes of India's wealthiest have been cut by more than 60 percent due to the global financial crisis, which has sharply pulled down stock markets, according to a new rich list.

40 individuals on the list fell 60.3

Mukesh's younger brother 32.5 billion dollars.

The combined net worth of all Anil, who heads Reliance's telecom, power utilities and percent to 139 billion dollars financial services businesses, was from 351 billion dollars, the third on the list with total wealth of 12.5 billion dollars after losing

প্রকাশনায় : চলচ্চিত্র ও প্রকাশনা অধিদপ্তর

Fornalhaut b Planet

This visible-light image from the Hubble released on Nov 13 shows the newly discovered planet, Fomalhaut b, orbiting its parent star. After an eight-year quest for images, a US astronomer using a camera aboard the Hubble space telescope has snapped the first picture of a planet outside

our solar system. Alien planets outside our solar system

AP, Washington

Earth seems to have its first fuzzy the possibility of others more photos of alien planets outside hospitable. our solar system, images captured by two teams of astronomers. The pictures show four likely planets that appear as specks of white, nearly indecipherable except to the most one of the two teams of photograeagle-eyed experts. All are tril- phers lions of miles away three of them orbiting the same star, and the fourth circling a different star. None of the four giant gaseous life out there," he said.

planets are remotely habitable or

remotely like Earth. But they raise

It's only a matter of time before

"we get a dot that's blue and

Earthlike," said astronomer Bruce

Macintosh of the Lawrence

Livermore National Lab. He led

understand if there are other

planets like Earth and potentially

"It is a step on that road to

The Philharmonia Orchestra, of which the prince is patron, is due to play for invited members of the extended royal family and assorted society figures. Charles' wife Camilla was throwing a more private bash on Saturday at the prince's rural estate, complete with a performance by sexagenarian rocker Rod Stewart.

But the queen won't be giving Charles the present many believe he craves most the crown. The queen has indicated informally that she plans to keep the job for life and some people think the 82year-old monarch intends to live forever, or at least as long as her mother, who died at 101.

Andrew Roberts. "Most of us can look forward to our new jobs, but the circumstances under which her reign comes to an end means that he can't, emotionally and psychologically.

Bin Laden is isolated, Qaeda resilient: CIA

AFP, Washington

Osama bin Laden, deeply isolated and likely near the rugged Afghanistan-Pakistan border, has been forced to devote much of his energy to his own security while his al-Qaeda terror network remains resilient, CIA Director Michael Hayden said Thursday.

"He is putting a lot of energy into his own survival, a lot of energy appears to be largely isolated from threat posed by al-Qaeda, Hayden the day-to-day operations of the organisation he nominally heads," Hayden said in a speech, referring to al-Qaeda. The CIA chief suggested that bin Laden was hiding faced.' somewhere in the remote Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, where he said al-Qaeda has regrouped and bolstered its organisation.

challenge of surveying every square mile of that inhospitable and dangerous region," and said "part of the explanation for his worked to avoid detection."

Laden remains a high priority for "It can't be easy," said historian | the Central Intelligence Agency. "Although there has been press unnecessary war in Iraq.

speculation to the contrary, I can assure you that the hunt for bin Laden is very much at the top of CIA's priority list."

Saudi-born bin Laden would deal a severe blow to the terror group blamed for the attacks of September 11, 2001. "Because of his iconic stature,

his death or capture clearly would

have a significant impact on the

confidence of his followers, both core al-Qaeda and these unaffiliated extremists ... throughout the In a speech before the Atlantic into his own security. In fact, he Council think tank examining the said the network had "suffered serious setbacks, but it remains a

Hayden, appointed in May 2006 by President George W. Bush, may soon be stepping down as CIA chief amid media speculation that president-elect Barack Obama may Hayden described "the sheer choose to replace him and National Intelligence director Mike McConnell when he takes office on

determined, adaptive enemy,

unlike any our nation has ever

During the campaign Obama survival lies in the fact that he has vowed to hunt down bin Laden, accusing Bush of diverting But he said hunting down bin resources from the war in Afghanistan and the hunt for bin Laden to fight what he has called an

January 20.

In his speech, Hayden described the tribal areas of Pakistan as an al-Qaeda "safe haven" that is linked to every major terrorist threat against He said killing or capturing the the United States.

Biden meets Cheney

AFP, Washington

Vice President Dick Cheney welcomed his successor, vice president-elect Joseph Biden, to his official residence Thursday, shrugging off his visitor's

stinging campaign trail attacks. Biden arrived at the vice president's official Naval Observatory residence in northwest Washington with his wife Jill, and posed for photographs with Cheney and his wife

During the 50-minute visit, the couples held a private meeting and the Cheneys gave their guests a tour of the ornate residence, said the vice president's spokeswoman, Megan

UN food distribution in Gaza grinds

AFP, Gaza City

to a halt

UN food distribution to half of Gaza's 1.5 million population ground to a halt on Friday as Israel maintained a total lockdown of the impoverished Palestinian territory amid continuing violence.

"We have no food," said Chris Gunness, a spokesman for the UN Works and Relief Agency which usually distributes emergency rations to about 750,000 people in the Gaza Strip, an overcrowded sliver of land crippled by a block ade Israel says aims at making militants stop their attacks.

