

# Portugal Faces Paralysis

**LISBON, Portugal, Dec. 12**--Portugal, which is struggling to revive its economy, was facing months of paralysis Sunday following the swift resignation of its center-right government in reaction to the president's decision to dissolve

instability threatened to continue, with serious harm to the country," Sampaio said in a televised address to the nation.

If the government had stayed in power until the early vote, it would still have the power to enact



Portuguese Prime Minister Pedro Santana Lopes (c) surrounded by his cabinet announces his decision to resign in Lisbon, Dec. 11. (AFP Photo)

parliament and call an early vote, AFP said.

Prime Minister Pedro Santana Lopes, in office for just under five months, announced he and his cabinet were quitting late Saturday in a surprise move which deepened the nation's political crisis.

Santana Lopes is the third consecutive Portuguese prime minister to resign since 2002.

His decision came one day after President Jorge Sampaio, a socialist, said he was dissolving parliament and calling snap elections because Santana Lopes' government had lost credibility.

To back his argument, the president referred to a series of mismanaged efforts and contradictory statements made by cabinet ministers since the government came to power in July.

"It became clear that the

legislation that has already been passed by parliament.

But under the terms of Portugal's constitution, a caretaker government only has the power to legislate on "necessary and urgent" matters needed to maintain the daily running of the country.

In announcing the government's resignation, Santana Lopes indicated he would take a limited interpretation of the role of a caretaker government as he cancelled a summit with France scheduled for Monday in the French town of Angouleme.

## Malaysia Urged to Free Terror Suspects

**KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, Dec. 12**--Malaysia's National Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM) called

Malaysia is holding more than 80 alleged Islamic militants under the Internal Security Act (ISA), which allows indefinite detention without trial.

Sunday for terror suspects being held without trial at a key detention camp to be charged or released following a prison clash that left some 30 people injured.

According to AFP, Commissioner Hamdan Adnan, who led a four-member team Saturday to probe allegations of assault against alleged Muslim militants at the Kamunting detention camp in northern Perak state, said tension was high in the camp.

On Wednesday 12 inmates and 18 guards were injured in a scuffle sparked by detainees trying to prevent a spot check which turned up a cache of home-made weapons.

"Most of them are alleged terrorists and some have been there for more than three years. They are very resentful because they have not been charged and they claim to be innocent. They want their freedom," Hamdan told AFP.

"What is important is to charge them in court or to release them."

# Israel Will Release Jailed Palestinians

**BEIT-UL-MOQADDAS, Dec. 12**--Israel's cabinet agreed on Sunday to free dozens of Palestinian prisoners in a move meant to show goodwill ahead of elections to replace Yasser Arafat, Reuters quoted officials as saying.

Israeli concessions before the vote are seen as boosting the chances of Mohammed Abbas, a former prime minister seen as a

moderate, amid hopes that Arafat's death could revive chances for a Middle East peace settlement.

The freeing of Palestinian prisoners had also been expected as a gesture to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who released convicted Israeli spy Azzam Azzam last week.

The cabinet did not say when the Palestinian prisoners would be freed or who

would be on the list.

Palestinians demand the release of all 6,000 detainees arrested in Israeli sweeps for suspected militants during a 4-year-old uprising. Some are being held without trial. Israel has said it would only release prisoners "without blood on their hands"--those who have not plotted or carried out attacks that killed Israelis.

## Afghan Militias to Be Disarmed

**KABUL, Afghanistan, Dec. 12**--Afghanistan's defense ministry Sunday pledged to disarm tens of thousands of its former militiamen before the war-battered country's parliamentary polls next year.

Defense ministry spokesman, General Abdul Zahir Azimi warned local militia commanders who helped the US-led forces in their campaign to topple the Taliban in late 2001 to lay down their weapons before June 2005 or face tough treatment by the government, AFP said.

Afghanistan's parliamentary elections are set to be held before May next year in order to elect a legislature to counterbalance the power of recently elected President Hamid Karzai.

There are an estimated 40,000 to 60,000 militia fighters in Afghanistan. Former fighters receive an initial \$250 to start a business and a further 450 dollars to invest in the business a month and a half later, according to the UN officials.

Azimi told reporters in Kabul. "We are sure that this will take place," he said.

"Those, reluctant to give up their arms, their units will be dissolved and will be denied advantages that are being given to the disarmed soldiers," Azimi said, referring to a UN aid package given to disarmed fighters.

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Afghan militia wait to hand over their weapons in Kabul on Sept. 29 during a disarmament program called "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration" backed by the United Nations. (Reuters File Photo)

Azimi said that the program had sped up across the country since the October 9 presidential election with more than 30,000 militiamen already disarmed.

In a related move, disarmament officials have collected almost all tanks and other heavy weapons used by local military strongmen to fight each other since the fall of the

Taliban. "Heavy weapons collection is nearly complete--some 95 percent of it (heavy weapons) has been collected so far," Azimi said.

## 13 Killed in Filipino Market Blast

**MANILA, Philippines, Dec. 12**--A huge explosion rocked the southern Philippine city of General Santos on Sunday, killing 13 people and injuring at least 60 at a public market, Reuters quoted police and witnesses as saying.

Shoppers and merchants fled the market in panic after the explosion and police cordoned off the area.

"It could be a bomb," said one policeman at the scene. "We're waiting for the experts."

"The earth shook," said one dazed woman. "It was a loud explosion."

Three people died at the scene and 10 in three different hospitals, said Chief Superintendent Antonio Billiones, the region's police chief.

"We are still investigating to determine the type and make of the explosive device used in the attack," he told reporters.

Police noted recent reports of threats by

Muslim rebels from the Abu Sayyaf, a hometown group linked to the regional militant network Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). But the mayor of General Santos said the blast could have been caused by feuding merchants.

Billiones said police has been getting intelligence reports, as early as September, on alleged plans by the Abu Sayyaf to bomb the city.

"I don't want to speculate, at this point, on any group that could be behind the attack because there are so many rebel groups operating in the city," he told reporters.

"It's too premature to pin the blame the attack on any particular group at this time."

But city mayor Pedro Acharon dismissed talk that the attack was the handiwork of terrorist groups, saying he had received reports that two groups of stall owners were fighting for control of the public market.

## Saudi Youths Say Social Needs Clash With Conservative Culture

**RIYADH, Saudi Arabia, Dec. 12**--A "dialogue" on youth issues held in Saudi Arabia this week recommended boosting the participation of young Saudis in public life, but some doubt the kingdom's ultra-conservative culture can accommodate their needs.

"Everything we want clashes with Saudi culture... Why do you think we enjoy traveling abroad?" said 21-year-old Nora, who spoke to AFP with a group of "liberal" friends about their "ignored needs" in a country where women still have to cover up from head to toe.

"I tear off my abaya (loose black cloak) as I board the plane and I never feel any regret," echoed 16-year-old Samira, wearing make-up and dressed in jeans and a short-sleeved shirt, protected by the high wall of a private garden.

Blal, a 17-year-old male friend in Western attire, said he supported the right of women not to wear the abaya because "it is a matter of personal freedom."

The failure to mention women's dress code during either the debate, which ended on Thursday, or its concluding recommendations confirmed Nora's belief that the issue is not up for public discussion in the ultra-conservative Muslim kingdom.

Women also want access to theatres and concerts that "are open only to men," she said.

Constraints on women's movement are not confined to a ban on driving, but extend to stifling social restraints, said 16-year-old Aziz who was once scolded by a religious policeman because he had a fashionable haircut.

He complained about a ban on men entering shopping centers alone, and quoted a police officer telling him once that he can enter on his own only in the mornings.

"How am I supposed to go shopping in the morning when I am expected to be at school?," he wondered.

Walid, 17, protested at aspects of the educational system, which he and other members of the group described as an insult to their intelligence.

"The teacher of religion at school insists that the sun rotates around the earth," he said.

## China-Taiwan Strains Easing

**TAIPEI, Taiwan, Dec. 12**--The pro-independence party of Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian suffered a surprise defeat in weekend legislative elections that could ease tensions with China but paralyze government on the democratic island, Reuters said.

Without a clear mandate in parliament, Chen will find it hard to push through his plan to write a new constitution and thus enshrine his ambitions to transform the status of the island that China claims as a renegade province.

"Taiwan voters have clearly chosen to put the brakes on the pan-green camp," the China Times said in a Sunday editorial, referring to the color of Chen's Democratic Progressive Party.

"Rather than saying most voters voted for pan-blue, we should say they opted to maintain stability," it said. The opposition Nationalists, or Kuomintang, fought the election under a blue flag and on a manifesto more conciliatory toward Beijing.

The party of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, that fled the mainland in 1949 and is committed to some form of reunification emerged the biggest winner, taking 79 seats, up from 68 in 2001. Overall, the opposition alliance took 114 of the 225 seats.

The DPP remained the single largest party but gained only two seats for a total of 89. Along with its hard-line pro-independence ally, the Taiwan Solidarity Union, they control just

101 seats.

Any form of French-style cohabitation is unlikely because the two have long been bitterly opposed and their leaders are barely on speaking terms. The deadlock is likely to frustrate Chen's political aims and slow the drive to independence.

"China and the United States will be breathing a sigh of temporary relief," said Zhu Feng, head of the international security program at Peking University.

## N. Korea: No Peace Until Seoul Explains Atomic Tests

**SEOUL, South Korea, Dec. 12**--North Korea will not dismantle its nuclear programs or improve ties with South Korea until questions about the South's nuclear experiments are clearly answered, Reuters quoted Pyongyang as saying on Sunday.

The UN nuclear agency said in November that South Korean scientists had enriched uranium in 2000 to a level close to what would be needed for an atomic bomb and had

also extracted a small amount of weapons-grade plutonium in 1982.

"If the South Korean authorities are truly interested in the de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula and a peaceful unification of the country, they should explain the truth about the criminal nuclear activities and immediately stop nuclear weapons development activities," said Rodong Simnun, the North's official newspaper.

"Without them, we cannot think about the de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula, an improvement in the relations between the North and the South, or regional peace," Rodong Simnun said in an editorial carried by the state's KCNA news agency.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors rebuked the South but did not refer the case to the UN Security Council, saying Seoul had cooperated well with agency inspections and it was unlikely

that the experiments had continued.

Pyongyang has refused to take part in a planned fourth round of six-country talks aimed at dismantling its nuclear programs since September, citing the South Korean experiments and what it calls a US hostile policy against it.

The North had attended three rounds of talks with South Korea, the United States, Japan, Russia and China, but little progress was achieved.

### WORLD News In Brief Last Constitution Day

**MOSCOW--Russia** marked its annual Constitution Day holiday for the 10th and last time Sunday as parliament prepared to scrap the celebration of basic law in the country and combine it with a June 12 national fete that ITAR-TASS news agency said has "virtually the same meaning."

### Convincing Majority

**M A P U T O** -- Mozambique's ruling party presidential candidate Armando Guebuza has won a convincing majority in the Frelimo stronghold of Maputo following elections in early December, preliminary results showed on Sunday.

### Kidnap Attempt

**BAMAKO--A** heavily armed gang attempted to kidnap a Qatar emir in Mali on Sunday, and took hostage two members of his entourage and demanded a ransom, police said.

### Dangerously Small

**LONDON--The** former head of Britain's armed forces has warned against planned cuts in the standing army, saying they would leave it "dangerously small and over-committed," in comments published Sunday.