

International Intelligence

Indian Congress Party sweeps state elections

The Congress Party swept the state assembly elections in Delhi and Rajasthan, and got an absolute majority in Madhya Pradesh on Nov. 25. In the tiny northeast state of Mizoram, the Congress lost badly to a local united front. In the city-state of Delhi, the national capital, Congress won 51 seats out of 70, and has taken control of the state. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with 15 seats, will be the leading opposition.

In 1993, Congress got only 14 seats and the BJP 49 seats. Also, in the 1996 and 1998 Parliamentary elections, the BJP had won hands down, but the overall mismanagement, breakdown of law and order, increased pollution, huge shortages of water and power, growth of poverty, and recent rise in vegetable prices, had indicated the BJP would do much worse. Prices of vegetables had shot up—the cost of onions, a staple of the Indian diet, up 700%, potatoes up 300%, and tomatoes up 500%—and stayed up for two months. However, this big reversal to the Congress had not been expected.

In Rajasthan, where the BJP won 95 seats in 1993, it was routed this election, getting only 33 seats. Congress almost doubled its seats, to 150, in a record victory. In Madhya Pradesh, geographically the biggest state in India, Congress had won 174 of 320 seats in 1993, but in the two Parliamentary elections since, BJP had done much better than the Congress. It had been assumed that the BJP would win Madhya Pradesh again, but instead, Congress won 173 seats, 12 more than needed for an absolute majority, and the BJP just 120.

Swiss voters turn down drug legalization

Swiss voters heavily rejected a ballot initiative to legalize narcotics on Nov. 29. An exit poll by state broadcaster DRS found that Swiss voters were against the plan by three to one, and the proposal was not passed in a single canton. The plan would have made Switzerland the only country in the world where anyone 18 or older could buy narcot-

ics, from marijuana to heroin, at state-run outlets or pharmacies after consultation with a physician. While organizers of the initiative did not necessarily expect it to pass, they had wanted to get more than 35% of the votes, in order to proclaim a mandate for liberalizing drug laws, beginning with cannabis.

Earlier experimentation in some Swiss cities with needle exchanges and free heroin left it with an estimated 30,000 addicts out of a population of 7 million.

Next door, the socialist-green government of Germany is legalizing stupefying drugs, under cover of transferring the office of Federal Drug Administrator from the Interior Ministry to the Health Ministry, i.e., treating drug use as a domestic “social,” rather than an international criminal, problem.

Kabila meets with Pope to end Great Lakes wars

On Nov. 25 in Rome, Congo President Laurent Kabila met with Pope John Paul II, as well as leaders of Rome’s Sant’Egidio lay community, which specializes in bringing together warring factions. Kabila released statements after both meetings. *Corriere della Sera* also reports a statement by the Pope, without identifying whether it was issued before or after the visit.

John Paul II called for a peaceful solution in the Congo, “safeguarding the principles of territorial integrity and of national sovereignty, in the respect of the rights of every person and social group.” *Corriere* notes that a similar statement had been released recently by Congo’s Catholic bishops. “The Pope and I had a very good understanding,” Kabila stated. “In the Vatican, they are very familiar with the situation in the Great Lakes region, and they agree with us that territorial integrity and sovereignty must be respected.” After the meeting with the Sant’Egidio leaders, Kabila promised that “new elections will express the new Congo.”

Meanwhile, the British Empire companies, such as Anglo American Corp., which had hoped to grab mining concessions, are upset that Kabila is signing deals with his

new military allies, according to the Nov. 25 *Wall Street Journal*. Kabila “is signing away substantial interests in some of his mineral-rich country’s juiciest assets to businessmen from Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia,” wails the *Journal*. These three countries, which are militarily supporting Kabila against the invaders, Uganda’s Museveni and Rwanda’s Kagame, “have secured or are negotiating deals for copper and cobalt mining regions, diamond concessions, and Congo’s oil sector.”

Cambodia works out new form of government

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Prince Norodom Ranariddh have finally agreed on the new form of government for the country, nearly four months after 90% of the eligible voters went to the polls. Opposition figure (and puppet of the U.S.-based International Republican Institute) Sam Rainsy has been effectively left out. Hun Sen will be the one and only Prime Minister. Ranariddh will become president of the National Assembly, but will no longer serve as acting head of state during King Norodom Sihanouk’s frequent trips to Beijing. This function will be assumed by the head of a new Senate, led by current Speaker of Parliament Chea Sim, from Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party (CPP).

Parliament convened on Nov. 25. Two CPP members will become the vice presidents of Parliament, while two members of Ranariddh’s Funcinpec party will be vice presidents in the Senate. The CPP and Funcinpec will each chair four parliamentary committees; Rainsy’s party will head one.

A crucial role in the settlement was played by Japanese State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nobukata Machimura, who spent four days in Phnom Penh in late October. He offered Japanese assistance in negotiating an agreement. Machimura also attended a conference on land mines held in November in Phnom Penh, which Japan financed. Some 250 representatives attended from Afghanistan, Laos, and Bosnia, among other nations. Japan has also agreed to a 16,000-ton food grant to avert the mounting food crisis in Cambodia.