

2 new political parties emerge in Soviet Union

MOSCOW, July 18: Two new political groups have emerged in the Soviet Union, sensing a long-awaited opening to power through a possible split in the once all-powerful Soviet Communist Party, reports Reuter.

The groups, one led by Eduard Shevardnadze, a co-architect of President Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika reforms, say they can evade the fate suffered by countless other parties founded over the last year — political oblivion.

The time is now right," said Valery Khomyakov, founding activist of the Liberal United Democratic Party (UDP) formed on Tuesday to rival the Communist and, probably, Shevardnadze's own Democratic Reform Movement (DRM).

The UDP embraces the

Russian Democratic Party (RDP), biggest of the new parties with 30,000 members and similar weaker groupings in other Soviet republics.

As a body spanning the entire union, the UDP has the right to challenge the Communists at countrywide polls, including a future presidential election.

But its leadership includes figures with strong personal political ambitions, such as former communist Nikolai Travkin, who remains head of the RDP, and millionaire eye doctor Svyatoslav Fyodorov.

"When the Communist Party splits, our numerical strength will increase considerably," Khomyakov said. "I think that split will take place at the plenum."



LONDON: British Premier John Major (C) 'dives' in between some of his Group of Seven counterparts in an informal moment before the photo making the end of the London economic summit July 17. From left, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Canadian Premier Brian Mulroney, Major and US President George Bush. — AFP photo

71 girls violated in Kenya

NAIROBI, July 18: Nineteen girls were killed in a 71 raped in a weekend attack by male students at a Roman Catholic boarding school, a newspaper reported Wednesday, says AP.

Most of the 306 male students at St. Kizito Mixed Secondary School participated in the attack on the girls' dormitory Saturday night, the Daily Nation newspaper said.

The boys were reportedly angry because the 283 girls refused to join in a protest against the headmaster over the payment of student activity fees.

President Daniel arap Moi

visited the school Tuesday, called the incident "disgusting and beastly" and said he would appoint a committee to look into the problem of discipline in Kenya's schools.

The dead girls either suffocated or were trampled to death in the melee. Their bodies were found in one small room of the dormitory, where they apparently had fled in terror.

The school is on the outskirts of Meru, a central Kenya town about 170 kilometers (105 miles) northeast of Nairobi. Most students are the sons and daughters of area farmers.

Israeli blitz on Lebanese bases, many feared killed

BEIRUT, July 18: Israeli warplanes blasted Lebanese guerrilla bases and villages in southern Lebanon and the Israeli army chief said the blitz would continue, reports Reuter.

Waves of Israeli planes hit bases of the pro-Iranian Hizbollah (party of God) on Wednesday after the guerrillas attacked the Jewish state's forces and their allies killing three Israeli soldiers near the town of Jezzine.

The casualty toll was the heaviest for the Israeli army in Lebanon since five soldiers were killed to a clash with Palestinian guerrillas last November.

Security sources said the Israeli planes struck at bases in or near the villages of Abu Rashed, Jabbour, Toumat Niba, Louwetzeh and Maydoun, all on Mountain slopes east of the town of Jezzine, held by Israeli and its military allies, known as the South Lebanon Army (SLA).

Four guerrillas were reported wounded.

Israeli and SLA artillerymen also opened up their howitzers and slammed some 150 shells into Hizbollah held villages in the area, the sources said.

Israeli army chief Chud Barak, speaking to border troops, said attacks on Hizbollah would continue.

Israeli defence forces prefer to fight the terrorists at their existing bases than at the borders of Israeli northern settlements he was quoted by the Jerusalem media as saying.

The Israeli attacks took

place after Hizbollah fighters ambushed an Israeli patrol on Tuesday night near the village of Kfar Hounch, 23 km (15 miles) north of Israeli and outside Israel's self-declared security zone along the Ghe border.

One Guerilla and three Israeli servicemen including two officers, were killed and five militants wounded.

Another Hizbollah squad battled SLA militiamen near the village of Majdel Zoun to the south, the guerrillas said at least five of their men were killed and another four wounded.

Security sources said the guerrillas who hold that the Jewish state should be wiped out, had been put on alert and the Jewish state had sent in reinforcements to Jezzine.

They said that the fundamentalists feared that Israeli forces might push into Hizbollah-held territory in Jabal Safi or Ain al-Tineh, east and west of Jezzine to hunt down guerrillas.

Despite the attacks a defiant Hizbollah leader, Abbas Musawi, said "we have a divine duty to escalate Jihad (holy war) on Israel. Israel will only withdraw under the pressure of holy war operations."

Tuesday's events were a blow to Beirut's Syrian backed government which had hoped its troops would be able to block guerrillas raids on Israeli forces to the United States would press Israel to withdraw from Lebanon.

The Lebanese army routed Palestine Liberation Organisation guerrillas in south Lebanon earlier this month and forced them to hand over their heavy and medium weapons.

But Hizbollah, which is the last Lebanese or Palestinian guerrilla group to maintain bases facing the security zone, has refused to hand over its weapons.

Musawi, speaking on Tuesday, said Lebanon's policy of relying on diplomacy to force Israel to leave South Lebanon was unreasonable and unacceptable.

The American promise to pressure Israel are designed to drag the Lebanese regime back into internal conflicts. If we want Israel to leave, we should escalate our attacks, he told reporters.

USSR may offer latest fighter to India

NEW DELHI, July 18: The Soviet Union is proposing to offer India its latest vertical, short take-off and landing fighter for a role in the navy, The Hindustan Times, reported today, says Xinhua.

The aircraft named Yak-141 is being developed as per the Soviet specifications and is expected to be ready for delivery in 1995.

According to the paper, it is for the first time that the Soviet Union is proposing to offer its latest fighter aircraft in the development stage to a country like India.

Indian investigators allege that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting for an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka, planned Rajiv Gandhi's murder by a woman suicide bomber in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu on May 21.

The LTTE has denied involvement.

Officials believe the LTTE had not forgiven Gandhi for sending Indian troops into Sri Lanka on an abortive peace-keeping mission when he was Prime Minister in 1987. The troops ended up fighting the Tigers and were withdrawn in 1990.

Authorities have arrested 13 people in connection with the killing. All are Tamils, most of them from Sri Lanka and the rest from Tamil Nadu, whose coast is close to the island.

Another AFP report says: Some 70 Sikh militants were killed in a special drive launched this month by security forces in the separatist-disturbed northern state of Punjab's two districts, police said Wednesday.

70 Sikh militants killed in Punjab

NEW DELHI, July 18: Investigators received Wednesday a videotape showing a dry run made by the assassins of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports AFP.

The dry run staged at an election rally in Madras addressed by another former Premier, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, appeared to be aimed at testing how close the assassins could get to a political leader by penetrating security.

PTI said the clip clearly showed Sivarasan, the prime suspect and a man thought by investigators to be a Sri Lankan Tamil militant leader, standing only about five metres (17 feet) from the speaker's dais.

The successful dry run took place May 8, 13 days before Gandhi was killed by a powerful bomb as he arrived to address an election rally in Sriperumpudur town, some 50 kilometres (31 miles) from Madras.

Sivarasan, said to be a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) intelligence officer and described in the Indian press as "one-eyed Jack," has still not been found

although about a dozen arrests have been made so far.

The videotape, from local private television station in Madras, was handed over to special investigators by a Madras-based magazine editor, PTI said.

Reuters adds: Indian authorities have stepped up security at New Delhi's International Airport in their hunt for the assassins of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the United News of India (UNI) agency said on Wednesday.

Police have yet to trace the alleged mastermind of the murder, a one-eyed Sri Lankan Tamil rebel called Sivarasan, or a woman suspect called Subha.

UNI said officials believed the two, whose photographs were shown on state-run television on Wednesday night in an appeal for public help, were in Delhi and seeking to leave by air.

It said extra security police were patrolling the capital's Indira Gandhi International Airport, named for Gandhi's mother, who was assassinated in 1984. She was then Prime Minister.

Videotape of dry run on Rajiv's killing recovered

NEW DELHI, July 18: UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar said he favoured lifting some of the sanctions against Iraq "under clearly defined conditions" in order to help pay for disarming the country, AFP from New York says.

The proposal came as part of a report to the Security Council made public Wednesday in which the UN Chief laid out plans for funding the operation to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

The report suggested putting a portion of Iraq's oil profits toward the cost and urged the council to adopt the same criteria used in figuring the percentage of Iraqi oil revenue to be distributed for war preparations. Those criteria took into account the need of Iraq's civilian population.

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Italian avalanche kills 7

Seven young Italians were killed and four injured in the Dolomite Mountains Wednesday when an avalanche struck a church group of 38 teenage hikers, reports AFP from Italy.

Police said the avalanche of snowy mud and stones struck the hikers as they were moving along a mountain trail (2,000 feet) up Mount Brenta near here.

The group from a church club in the northern town of Piacenza had been on vacation in the region for two days, they ranged in age from 12 to 15 years old.

Five bodies were recovered, and six injured were rescued, but two of the injured died soon after.

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Indian navy to search Soviet's body

The Indian navy will search rivers in Assam state for the body of a Soviet Adviser whom Maoist guerrillas say they kidnapped and killed, officials in Assam's commercial centre Guwahati said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from New Delhi.

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) said last week that its guerrillas had killed Soviet mining expert Sergei Gritchenko after he tried to escape from them.

ULFA's announcement strained relations between India and the Soviet Union, its main arms supplier. Soviet envoys protested at the authorities failure to confirm the killing or find the body.

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Many injured in Bulgaria violence

Violent clashes broke out between thousands of anti-communist demonstrators and police in Sofia late Wednesday, leaving an undetermined number of people injured, eyewitnesses said, AFP reports.

President Jello Jeleu appealed for calm in a nationwide address broadcast on television and radio, and accused members of the anti-communist Union of Democratic Force (UDF) of trying to "throw the country into chaos".

Police arrested at least seven people after the fighting. Clashes erupted after about 5,000 supporters of the UDF, Bulgaria's main anti-communist group, turned up to protest against a demonstration by a similar number of backers from the Bulgarian Socialist Party, formerly the communist party.

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Gorbachev pledges major reforms, says Bush

LONDON, July 18: US President George Bush said on Wednesday Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was irrevocably committed to major reform, and he hailed achievements at the Group of Seven summit as "a good day," reports Reuter.

Bush said he was convinced Gorbachev was embarked on an "irreversible" course of economic and political change in the Soviet Union, but faced a long, uphill struggle.

He said that he was heartened by Gorbachev's pledge to create a free-market economic system after seven decades of communism and by a US-Soviet agreement on a treaty making the first-ever reductions in long-range nuclear missiles.

"It's been a good day," he said.

Hours earlier, Gorbachev outlined his plans for moving the shattered Soviet economy away from central planning, a feature of oldstyle communism.

The Soviet chief met Bush and other leaders of the world's seven largest industrial nations, the so-called Group of Seven, after their London summit.

"It's not going to be quick or easy to implement change in the Soviet Union, but we believe that President Gorbachev has made an irrevocable commitment and I would like to think that this course he has embarked on is irreversible," Bush told reports.

He said Gorbachev did not present the G-7 capitalist powers "with a big demand for money" to fuel and overhaul of the shattered Soviet economy.

"He really was trying to explain that was going on inside the Soviet Union, what the pressures were, what he was up against in terms of history, if you will," Bush said.

"He really stopped short of what some predicted might be on his agenda."

Communist conservatives, who accuse Gorbachev of selling out to capitalism, and radical reformers join battle over the future of the party at a plenum of its central committee on July 25.

Gorbachev, who fought off a challenge to his party leadership at the last plenum, said in a speech published this month the party was doomed if hard-line attacks continued.

The hardline communist Soyuz parliamentary faction, for one, seems unlikely to yield for the sake of party unity.

Rocket with 7 satellites launched

LOS ANGELES, July 18: A Pegasus rocket carried seven tiny military communications satellites toward space Wednesday after the winged booster was launched from a B-52 bomber flying over the Pacific Ocean, reports AP.

The 18 million dollars experimental mission by the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency was the second launch of a Pegasus rocket. It reflects a trend toward use of numerous small, inexpensive satellites, which may prove more useful to battlefield commanders and more reliable than single, large satellites.

US Senate okays \$291b defence bill

WASHINGTON, July 18: The Senate armed services committee approved a 291-billion-dollar defence bill on Wednesday providing for construction of an anti-missile site by 1996 to defend the entire continental United States from a limited missile attack, reports Reuter.

The bill also calls for US-Soviet negotiations to revise their 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty by 1996 to allow construction of more anti-missile sites.

The committee approved the new anti-missile defence system 16-4 and then approved a 291-billion-dollar authorisation bill for all US defence programmes next year unanimously.

The bill specifies that if US-Soviet negotiations failed to revise the ABM treaty by 1996 to allow more ground-based anti-missile sites, President George Bush and Congress should consider abrogating the treaty.

The House of Representatives version of the defence bill has already been approved. A conference of Senators and house members will have to work out a compromise bill for Congress's final approval in the fall.

Indian tank now in Gohar Ayub's disposal

ISLAMABAD, July 18: Pakistan's Army Wednesday placed an Indian Centurion tank captured in the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war at the disposal of National Assembly Speaker Gohar Ayub Khan, reports AFP.

An official announcement said the tank would be mounted at Hairpur, the hometown of the late Field Marshal and President, Mohammad Ayub Khan, to commemorate his "invaluable service" in the conflict.

Mr Gohar is the late President's eldest son.

The two countries fought the 1965 war over Kashmir, a constant bone of contention and still a main cause of mutual hostility.

Exercise reduces risk of adult diabetes

BOSTON, July 18: Middle-aged men who exercise regularly in their spare time have a dramatically lower risk of adult diabetes, a disease that afflicts an estimated 10 million Americans, according to a study, reports AP.

Researchers found that men reduce their risk by 6 per cent with every 500 calories they burn up each week playing sports and getting other kinds of exercise.

"It seems that the evidence is quite clear that energy expenditure in leisure time has a very strong association with risk of developing adult-onset diabetes," said Dr Ralph S Paffenbarger Jr of Stanford University, senior author of the study.

Paffenbarger said that while the researchers studied only men, the findings probably apply to women.

Off the Record

Barbara torn about Bush's second term

LONDON: Barbara Bush said today she is torn about the prospect of her husband's seeking re-election, "but the truth is I think he has to run," reports AP.

The first lady said she thinks her husband would not run in 1992 if she asked him to quit.

Discussing the possibility of four more years in the White House or a return to private life, she said: "The honest truth is, I'm torn."

"It's such a privilege to be the wife of the President of the United States," Mrs Bush said. "I adore my life. I wouldn't change it for anything — except I would love to be a private citizen again."

In an interview with four reporters in the Gold Room at the US Ambassador's residence in Regent's Park, Mrs. Bush said she is already looking forward to her trip to Moscow in two weeks.

She learned the superpower summit was on in a whispered aside today from Secretary of State James A Baker III shortly before Bush and Soviet President Mikhail S Gorbachev announced it.

"I've only been to funerals (in Moscow) so anything is up," she said with a smile.

Asked what Gorbachev told her during a brief conversation before his news conference with Bush, she quipped, "Barbara, I want to take you to all the nightclubs."

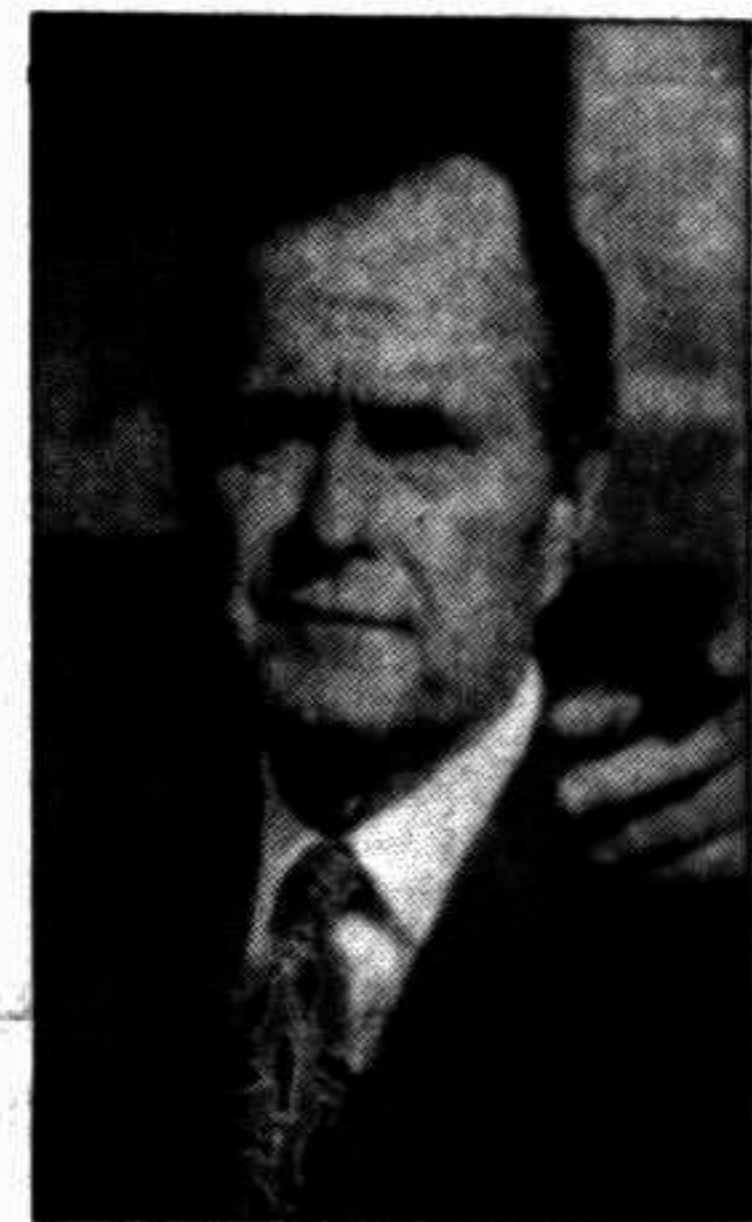
Mrs Bush said her ambivalence about four more years in the White House does not stem from any doubts about Bush's health.

The President and his wife both suffer from Graves' Disease, a thyroid condition that sent Bush to the hospital in May with an erratic heartbeat and has impaired Mrs Bush's vision. Both take synthetic thyroid hormones and Mrs Bush remains on heart medication.

Mrs Bush, 66, said she's resigned to her red eyes, but insisted "everything else about me is great."

Asked about a report this week saying the 67-year-old president looked tired and unwell, Mrs Bush retorted: "To me, he still looks like a 19-year-old boy."

Bush, who has not yet declared his candidacy, said recently that he would weight the concerns of his children and his strong-willed wife in making that decision.



Raisa cuddles rabbit

LONDON: While her husband wooed world leaders on Wednesday, Raisa Gorbachev cuddled a large grey rabbit and chatted to a clutch of sick children, reports AP.

Mrs Gorbachev spent a little over an hour at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital, the city's leading treatment centre for ill youngsters.

Princess Diana, the daughter-in-law of Queen Elizabeth II, is a patron of the hospital. The princess was engaged elsewhere Wednesday morning, taking Barbara Bush on a visit to AIDS patients at Middlesex Hospital.

Wearing a block-print dress in earth tones with a rust coat, Mrs Gorbachev declared herself impressed by the facilities. "This is a very good hospital," she told reporters during a visit to an outdoor play centre.

"It is difficult to say that you like a hospital because you can't like to see sick children. But there are wonderful nurses and it is very attractive," Mrs Gorbachev said.

She sat on a child-size plastic chair with her arm around Ricky Murray in the play centre and talked through an interpreter to the children, some in bathrobes and slippers.

When presented with the grey rabbit, she happily held it as she posed for pictures.

Mrs Gorbachev presented the hospital with half a dozen books, all in English, including a Russian fairy tale and one by Russian poet Alexander Pushkin.

She questioned surgeon Dr Jada Stark closely about working hours at the hospital and the average number of days children stay there.

As she was leaving, Mrs Gorbachev said she was most impressed that the hospital provided facilities for mothers to stay with their children. She said that is something Russians would like to introduce in their hospitals.

Later, she changed into a forest green suit for lunch.

Judy Hurl, the hostess for the lunch and wife of British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, posed for pictures with Mrs Gorbachev and another guest, Princess Alexandra, a cousin of Queen Elizabeth II.

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Macbeth re-enacted

LONDON: The curse of Macbeth struck during a London production of the dark Shakespearean tragedy — known in theatre circles as the "Unlucky Play" — when a woman in the audience was hit in the face by a flying sword, reports Reuter.

The woman scene came loose and flew into the front row, the play's producers said on Wednesday. She was treated in hospital for facial cuts.

Superstition surrounds Macbeth because of its association with witchcraft and the many accidents that have befallen people involved with the play. Actors refuse to say its name, referring to it only as "the Scottish play" for fear of inviting bad luck.



The touched up pictures of one-eyed Sivarasan and Subha, wanted in connection with Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, released by the Special Investigation Team in Madras.