



NEW YORK: Former US President Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy are at the centre of controversy following publication of the ex-First Lady's 'Unauthorised Autobiography'. Reagan has termed the book as flagrant.

Book selling like hot cake

UNDATED, Apr 9: Bookstores couldn't unpack the new biography of Nancy Reagan fast enough Monday as buyers crowded stores to get their hands on the book, which tells about the former First Lady's affair with Frank Sinatra and her penchant for recycling gifts, reports AP.

"I sold 50 since I got them in a half-hour ago and I haven't even had time to take them out of the box," said Perry Haberman, owner of the Madison Avenue Bookshop in New York City.

C.C. McClure, store manager at the Downtown Book and Toy in Jefferson City, Missouri, said she was fending off calls for Kitty Kelley's 'Nancy Reagan, the Unauthorized Biography' while waiting for a shipment.

"It doesn't necessarily mean everyone wants to buy it, but

they all want to look at it for sure," she said.

"Just about every other call is for Nancy Reagan," said Carol Allin, owner of Capitol Bookstore in Little Rock, Arkansas. "I'm afraid I didn't order enough. I didn't expect this kind of turnout."

At a Barnes and Noble store in mid-Manhattan, 300 copies of Kelley's book arrived in early afternoon; 200 were gone within a few hours. The book sells for about 25 Dollars.

"I've never seen anything like it is my publishing career," said Jack McKeown, vice president of Simon and Schuster, the book's publishers. "Since 9 a.m., we have already picked up 100,000 copy orders."

That's in addition to the 600,000 copies Simon and Schuster already had in or en route to book stores around the country.



WASHINGTON: Author Kitty Kelley (R) poses next to a life-size poster of former first lady Nancy Reagan during a publication party 8 April for her new book 'Nancy Reagan, the Unauthorized Biography'. The new Nancy Reagan biography has stirred controversy due to allegations about the former first lady. —AFP photo

Disclosures termed flagrant, absurd

'Nancy was US President for 8 yrs: Reagan seduced actress'

NEW YORK, Apr 9: Former President Ronald Reagan said on Monday that a startling biography of his wife, Nancy, contains flagrant and absurd falsehoods, but scandal-loving Americans headed to their local book shop regardless, reports Reuter.

Copies of 'Nancy Reagan, the Unauthorized Biography' were snapped up by the thousand demand fuelled by widespread reports of the its claims that the former First Lady ran the country during her husband's presidency, had an affair with Frank Sinatra

and once smoked marijuana. Author Kitty Kelley, who specialises in celebrity-shock biographies, said Mrs Reagan was the most powerful woman the United States has ever known.

"She was indeed our President for eight years," Kelley told Reuter. "She ran the country. We should be very grateful to Mrs Reagan because she was a good President."

Ronald Reagan, however, said Kelley's claims "clearly exceed the bound of decency." "They are patently untrue — everything from the allega-

tion of marijuana use to marital infidelity to my failure to be present at the birth of my daughter, Patti," Reagan said in a statement.

The book claims that the former president continued to see one of his longtime girl friends after he married Nancy Reagan and charged that he was with her when Patti, now estranged from her family, was born.

"While I am accustomed to reports that stray from the truth, the flagrant and absurd falsehoods cited in a recently-published book clearly exceed the bounds of decency," Reagan said.

The allegations of a Nancy-Sinatra affair were splashed over the front pages of New York's tabloids while pages of inside stories recounted Kelley's allegations of Ronald Reagan's promiscuity in his early Hollywood days. Even New York Times played the charges on page one.

In an interview with Reuter's Kelley, 48, said she stood by her claims based on more than 1,000 interviews over four years with estranged family members, alienated former staff members as well as friends of the Re-

agans. Kelley said Mrs Reagan's most significant act in the White House was pushing her husband into a dialogue with the Soviet Union, which eventually led to the end of the Cold War.

Kelley also said Nancy Reagan hated George Bush and had nicknamed Reagan's former vice president "whiny."

The First Lady never forgave Bush for running against Reagan in the 1980 Republican primary and disparaged him behind his back as weak and spineless, she said.

Kelley, who earned a 3.5 million dollar advance from publisher Simon Andschuster for the book on Mrs Reagan, wrote in earlier biographies that Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis underwent shock treatment, that former President John F. Kennedy's retarded sister, Rosemary, had a lobotomy, and that Sinatra's mother was an abortionist.

Kelley also unleashes a host of charges on Reagan's alleged adultery.

She reported that he had an affair with actress Christine Larson during his first year of marriage to Nancy. She wrote that Reagan's only other philandering during his marriage was in 1968 when he allegedly seduced

an 18-year-old girl while Governor of California. Kelley also quoted starlet Selene Walters as saying that a week before he announced his engagement to Nancy Davis in February 1952, Reagan forced her to have sex with him.

The former President said in his statement that many of his friends had urged him to issue a point-by-point denial of the book's charges.

But, "to do so would, I feel, provide a legitimacy to a book that has no basis in fact and serves no decent purpose," he said.

BRIEFLY

Pindi to go for Islamic reforms: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will announce major Islamic reforms in an address to the parliament Wednesday, official sources in Islamabad said, reports AFP.

The measures are designed to transform Pakistan into an Islamic Welfare State, they said.

The move comes in the wake of demands by fundamentalist groups for the enforcement of Islamic Law, or Shariah, in the country.

US plan not acceptable: PLO: A Palestinian delegation will tell US Secretary of State James Baker Tuesday that plans for a regional conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict are completely unacceptable, a senior PLO official said on Monday in Tunis, reports Reuter.

The official told Reuters at Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) headquarters in Tunis that the PLO had advance notice from Arab and other sources that Baker had come to the region with detailed plans for such a conference.

The US plan proposes that Israel, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States should meet, firstly to sort out Arab-Israeli relations, he said.

900 die in Peru: More than 900 people have died in a Cholera epidemic sweeping Peru, and 48,000 have been hospitalised since the disease broke out two months ago, the Health Ministry reported on Monday in Lima, reports Reuter.

Doctors said the epidemic had worsened in the past month due to the public's disregard for Health Ministry warnings on hygiene.

A ministry spokeswoman said the latest statistics showed 911 deaths and 131,257 cases of the disease so far, with 48,003 people sent to hospital since the disease broke out in late January.

Iraq will be Pariah: EC: The leaders of the 12 European Community States, in the clearest statement yet of their desire to see Saddam Hussein go, say Iraq will be an international Pariah as long as he is President, Reuter reports from Luxembourg.

The heads of government, setting out on a collision course with Baghdad, also agreed in their summit on Monday to push for an enclave in northern Iraq where the millions of Kurds fleeing Saddam's army would be safe under United Nations control.

The European Council (summit) cannot conceive how Iraq can rejoin the community of civilised nations for as long as Saddam Hussein remains in power," said Luxembourg Prime Minister Jacques Santer, whose country holds the EC's rotating presidency.

Israel to free 1,000 Palestinians: Israel said on Monday it would free more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners but denied the gesture was connected with the second peace mission in a month by US Secretary of State James Baker, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

The Defence Ministry said it would release the Palestinians who have served most of their terms, next week to mark the Eid-ul-Fitr feast. Israel also promised to encourage economic development in the occupied Gaza Strip.

The government traditionally frees a few hundred Arab prisoners for the Muslim festival.

Anti-communist rally in Sofia: Some 35,000 cheering, flag-waving anti-communists demonstrated in the centre of Sofia on Monday to demand Bulgarian parliamentary elections in June, Reuter reports from Sofia.

Parliament is holding up reform, said Georgi Markov, Vice-President of the Democratic Party, one of the 20 non-communist parties grouped in the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF).

"Is this possible — a parliament with a communist majority which is resisting important laws to adopt a new, democratic constitution for Bulgaria?" UDF leader Filip Dimitrov said.

17 Colombians massacred: Seventeen Colombian peasant coffee workers were dragged off a bus and massacred by leftist guerrillas, an army officer said on Monday in Bogota, reports Reuter.

Over 2m Iraqis pouring into border with Iran, Turkey

UN enclave in Iraq possible: Perez

NEW YORK (United Nations), Apr 9: UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar said Monday that a Turkish proposal for a UN enclave inside Iraq for Kurdish refugees was "complicated" but not impossible, reports AFP.

The idea was first publicized in a television interview Sunday by Turkey's President Turgut Ozal, who accused Iraq of emptying its northern regions of Kurds.

"I don't think it's impossible," Perez de Cuellar said of Ozal's idea. "But of course it would be in Iraqi territory which would raise the problem of sovereignty and I don't know if we can impose on Iraq a special area that would be complicated."

The UN Secretary General said that in light of the exodus of Kurds from northern Iraq, he would be sending a special envoy to the region to investigate and report back on the situation.

"It is not only an economic but also a social problem for those countries. Imagine if in the US you had all of a sudden 500,000 Mexicans or Canadians coming in," he said. "It would be tremendous."

More than two million Iraqis fleeing northern Iraq are pouring into the region along Iraq's border with Iran and Turkey, according to French Secretary of State for Humanitarian Action, Bernard Kouchner.

On another matter, Perez de Cuellar said the United Nations was ready to send an

observer force "almost immediately" to the Iraq-Kuwaiti border under the terms of Security Council Resolution 687, which set conditions for a formal ceasefire.

Perez de Cuellar also announced that he would propose that troops from the five permanent Security Council members nations — the United States, Britain, France, the Soviet Union and China — form part of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait

Observer Mission (UNIKOM).

He emphasized that a decision on the matter would be up to the Security Council, "but the impression I have is that the five permanent members will be part of the team plus other countries from different regional areas."

Iraqi authorities have said nothing about the observer force so far, Perez de Cuellar said, noting that the Ceasefire Resolution calls for consultation with the Iraqis but not for their approval.

Kashmiris' threat to kill Swedish engineers

JAMMU, India, Apr 9: Muslim militants holding two Swedish engineers in Kashmir warned Monday they would kill them both unless India allowed a London-based Amnesty International team to visit the northern state, reports AFP.

The abductors also demanded a separate visit to the region by a United Nations observer team to assess the situation in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state torn by a three-year-old secessionist campaign.

The outlawed Muslim Janabaz Force (MJF), which has claimed responsibility for the March 31 abduction of Johan Jansson and Olle Loman, fixed on April 13 deadline for the federal Government to con-

cede its demands.

The MJF would be forced to take the "extreme step" in case New Delhi rejected its demand, the abductors said in a statement in Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital and the urban hub of Muslim secessionism.

The federally controlled state administration said efforts were still under way to trace the two engineers, who were working at a hydroelectric construction site in the northern frontier region of Uri.

Security forces have arrested 40 suspected Kashmiri militants while searching for Jansson and Loman, a government spokesman said in Jammu, the state's winter capital.

Soviet concern over Kurdish situation

MOSCOW, Apr 9: The Soviet Union is "very concerned" at the situation of the Kurdish refugees fleeing to Turkey and Iran, Foreign Ministry spokesman Yuri Gremytskikh said Monday, reports AFP.

In view of the "hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees" fleeing Iraqi government forces loyal to President Saddam Hussein, the UN Security Council resolution condemning Baghdad's repression of civilians "is in no way an interference" in Iraq's internal affairs, Gremytskikh said.

The Kurdish issue "Doubly" concerned the Soviet Union, he said, firstly because of the poor people, the refugees, who need humanitarian aid, but secondly because of the people (of Kurdish origin) who live inside the Soviet Union."

Rally demands polls in Bulgaria in June

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Parliament is holding up reform, said Georgi Markov, Vice-President of the democratic party, one of the 20 non-communist parties grouped in the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF).

"Is this possible — a parliament with a communist majority which is resisting important laws to adopt a new democratic constitution for Bulgaria?" UDF leader Filip Dimitrov said.

Bulgarian television said later the UDF coordinating council decided that its 145 parliamentarians would walk out of the 400-seat parliament on April 19 if elections were not set for June.

7 killed in Soviet copter crash

MOSCOW, Apr 9: Seven people were killed in the Caucasus mountains when a helicopter crashed after going to the rescue of stranded tourists, the Soviet Defence Ministry said Monday, reports Reuter.

The military helicopter picked up a group of Finnish and German tourists on Thursday from the slopes of Mount Elbrus, the highest mountain in Europe, but it crashed during a second attempt.

The official Soviet News Agency Tass quoted the defence ministry as saying those killed included three military crew members and four civilians.

Off the Record

Raisa keen to meet Kurosawa

TOKYO: While her husband discusses the new world order with Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, Raisa Gorbachev will visit a fish market, watch Kabuki actors and practise flower arrangement, a Japanese protocol official said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The Gorbachevs are due to arrive in Tokyo on April 16 for a four-day visit, the first to Japan by a Soviet head of state.

The official said Raisa's schedule was extremely tight, since she had to attend many events with her husband, including his address to parliament and a meeting with the Emperor and Empress. Details had not yet been completed.

But it will include a visit to the main Tokyo fish market, watching Kabuki — traditional theatre with colourful costumes, exaggerated make-up and musical accompaniment — and doing Ikebana, or Japanese flower arrangement.

The official said there would be no time for shopping in the glittering Ginza district but it might be possible to slot in a lunch of tempura — fish and vegetables fried in butter.

She had asked to meet Japan's premier film director, Akira Kurosawa, 80, but the protocol official said a private meeting was impossible because of his age. They might however meet at a large reception planned at a Tokyo hotel.

In the 1970s the Soviet government provided financing for Kurosawa when Japanese firms refused to do so.

Filipino opposition to accept money from Imelda

MANILA, Apr 9: The Philippine opposition is willing to accept money from exiled former First Lady Imelda Marcos for next year's elections despite charges that it was stolen, Vice President Salvador Laurel said here Monday, reports AFP.

Mr. Laurel, who broke away from President Corazon Aquino in 1987 to lead the opposition and is expected to run for President, likened the May 1992 polls to a war in which one accepts "bullets" from allies without asking where they came from.

"The important thing is there are no preconditions", he said at a Press conference, adding that the widow of deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos had not made any direct offer of support to him.

Mr. Laurel, who had railed against corruption during the Marcos regime, refused to comment when asked whether he believed the Marcoses stole their money, saying the issue was already before the courts.

Mr. Laurel insisted that a "war of the widows" was still possible, charging that Mrs. Aquino denied 33 times that she wanted to succeed Mr. Marcos when they were still fighting the martial law ruler in 1985.

"A woman can always change her mind," he said. Mr. Laurel said Mr. Marcos offered on his deathbed to "give 90 per cent of all his earthly possessions" to the Philippines through a private foundation he formed, but Mrs. Aquino's refusal to hear the proposal doomed the idea.

But he said he didn't know exactly how much Mr. Marcos admitted owning when he visited the ailing former ruler in Hawaii in February 1989, seven months before he died.

Barnard plans to leave South Africa

JOHANNESBURG (South Africa): Dr. Christian Barnard, who performed the world's first heart transplant, plans to leave South Africa because of growing political unrest, a newspaper reported Monday, reports AP.

The Star newspaper said Barnard was making plans to move to Switzerland because he believed South Africa was headed for chaos despite efforts to end apartheid and share political power with the black majority. He was leaving to ensure the future of his 2-year-old son, Armin, it said.



IRAQ: US soldiers Melissa Cowklin (L) from Pennsylvania and Donald Wilmoth (R) from Ohio try to coax a smile from a small refugee child at a check point some 120 kms from the Kuwait-Iraq border in US-occupied territory. —AFP photo