

'Gap now narrows: Congress to win majority' Rajiv says he lost rapport with Indian electorate

NEW DELHI, Apr 14: Rajiv Gandhi, gearing up for next month's now or never election bid, believes he is rapidly closing a communication gap with Indian voters that he blames for his Congress (I) Party's eclipse, reports AFP.

The 47-year-old former Premier, wooing the electorate with promises of a stable, durable government, feels he lost touch with the pulse of the people sometime during the five years he was in power after a landslide win in 1984.

"The main mistake was this, a lack of communication with the people," Gandhi said here Saturday. "It was both ways—we lost touch with the people and the people lost touch with us and a lot got compounded because of that."

"We have gone through what we did right and what we did wrong," he said during a rare interview on the lawns of his fortress-like residence.

And, he reckoned, he and his party did plenty that was right. The economy strengthened, India's international image improved and thorny communal and caste disputes were contained during his 1984-89 rule, he said.

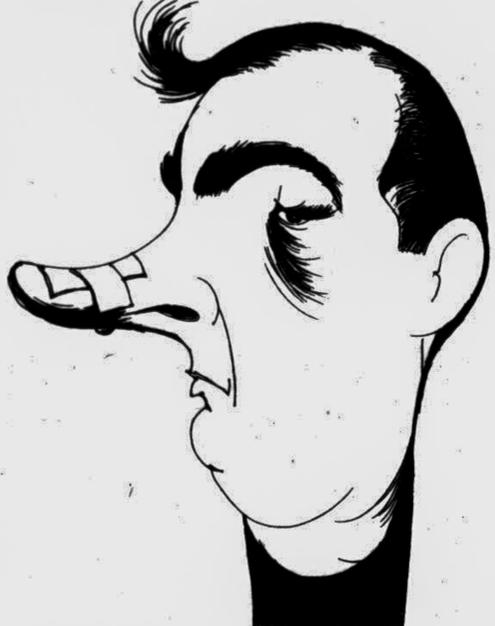
"But we found tremendous anger in the north," he said, citing the Congress (I)'s debacle in the electorally crucial Hindi-speaking heartland of India in 1989. "We couldn't project our achievements because of the communication gap."

That was a mistake Gandhi said his party was trying to reverse, voicing confidence the Congress (I) was getting its promise of stability across to a responsive electorate.

"It looks like the Congress will get a comfortable majority," he said, and refused to answer hypothetical questions on post electoral alliances in case no party won a majority to form a government on its own.

He looked fresh and relaxed, dressed in a spotless white homespun kurta-pyjama outfit, but appeared slightly nervous and at times defensive during the free-wheeling news conference.

The former airline pilot, who gave the Congress (I) its largest ever mandate on a sympathy wave stemming from the October 1984 assassination



BOMBAY — The Congress (I) leader Rajiv Gandhi is a strong contender for power in May 20 polls. A cartoonist here projected him with 1989 bruises.

of his mother Indira Gandhi, said the issues before the electorate this time were stability, prices and violence.

The right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), (Indian People's Party) is banking on the Hindu majority to vote it into power on its crusade to replace a disputed 16th century Muslim shrine in the northern town of Ayodhya with a temple.

The centrist National Front alliance led by Gandhi's successor Vishwanath Pratap Singh is hoping to gain office by wooing India's sizeable backward Hindu castes and its Muslim minority with job quotas and strident opposition to the BJP.

Gandhi said neither was projecting the real issues. "I feel (the real issues are) the prices and the violence — and a stable government that can control prices and violence in the daily life of the

Indian villagers to boycott polls

ALAMPUR (India), Apr 14: People in this Indian village, fed up with sloganeering politicians and their empty promises, have decided to boycott May's general elections, reports Reuter.

"No power, no drinking water, bad roads. That's why we're boycotting the elections," read the signs in Bengali script on many of the stucco and tile-roof building in Alampur, West Bengal state.

India's 521 million voters will be going to the polls for the second time in 18 months on May 20, 23 and 26.

They are not exactly in a festive mood — certainly not in Alampur, population 13,000, where rural electrification is still a dream, wells are drying up and many young men do not have jobs.

Opinion polls suggest this is a national feeling, with about half the electorate still undecided after 18 months of violence and political turmoil in which two minority governments have fallen.

Birendra urges Nepalese to vote peacefully

KATHMANDU, Apr 14: King Birendra, who yielded his absolute powers in face of a popular pro-democracy movement, appealed Sunday to Nepalese to vote peacefully but in large numbers in their first multi-party polls in 30 years, reports Reuter.

"Free and fair elections conducted peacefully are what people want and expect," Birendra said in a broadcast speech marking the Nepali new year — 2048 in its calendar.

"This requires that every individual rise to the occasion to follow democratic values and the norms of socially respecting the rights of others while exercising one's own with due recognition of the greater good of the country," he said.

Dozens of people were killed a year ago in protests against powers Birendra wielded through a partyless system.

people," he said. "The last 15 months have been catastrophic," he said of his party's months out of power.

Inflation has hit double-digit levels and separatist violence has shown a sharp upsurge in the Sikh-majority Punjab and Muslim-dominated Kashmir states.

The pressure on Gandhi to win the election is considerable.

Corruption was the main issue in the 1989 general elections that brought to power V. P. Singh.

1,000 Kurds die a day, Army camp pillaged

NICOSIA, Apr 14: A horde of refugee Kurds, too famished to fear gunfire pillaged a Turkish army camp near the Iraqi border, reports Reuter.

Every day up to 1,000 people have died from hunger or cold as they straggled through mountains to Iraq's border with Iran or found they were too many for the help available.

In an Iraqi town occupied by US troops, civilians saw the final Gulf war ceasefire as a sentence of death. Saddam Hussein's army would kill them when the Americans went.

You must stay, you must stay. How can you withdraw if you pull out, they will kill us all" a resident of the south Iraq town of Rumalla pleaded to a foreign reporter.

US soldiers folding up their checkpoints grimly agreed.

Each of these scenes give a glimpse of nightmare which had gripped Iraq's north, east and southern borders since President Saddam's February defeat in the Gulf war and March victory over post war revolt.

Kurdish groups abroad said on Saturday government forces attacked rebel-held areas and refugees in northern Iraq for the third consecutive day. Fresh fighting was also reported around Basra, main city of the Shi'ite Muslim in south.

US President George Bush delivered a determined defence of non-intervention.

Internal conflicts have been raging in Iraq for many years, Bush said in an air force base in Montgomery, Alabama. "Were going to continue to help these refugees."

"But I do not want one single soldier or airman shoved into a civil war in Iraq. I'm not going to have that."

In the Iranian town Piranshahr, its 32,000 people swamped by nearly 600,000 refugees, governor Ahmed Zayat said.

AP adds from Piranshahr: The graves of fallen Kurds line this snow-swept highway into Iraq. Beside them march the living dead — fleeing an onslaught of the Iraqi army.

About 200,000 Iraqi Kurds — many tattered, limping, spitting blood and crying for bread and milk — have poured through this town of 30,000 in the past two weeks, said the Islamic Republic News Agency.

Thousands more are believed to have died on roads along the way.

The exodus has strained Iran's meager resources. The government has closed several border posts, although it reopened them to refugees later. More than 1 million refugees are expected in Iran over the next few days, and up to 2 million in total, according to IRNA.

In Piranshahr, apple tree orchards have become campgrounds for the Kurds. Refugees, squirming in the near-freezing temperatures to get warm, are packed into tents of plastic sheeting and cinder blocks that dot the orchards at night and the narrow streets of this town near the Iraqi border.

"This is not life," said Zakia Ahmed, a 61-year-old Kurdish woman who spent 10 days walking from her hometown of Erbil, in northern Iraq. "We are like dogs, worse than dogs."

Women and children seem to have born the brunt of the suffering.

Azad Othman, a 25-year-old graduate student of microbiology, aid he helped bury 51 women and children during his 13-day trek from Erbil. "Most people are dying from cold. When we moved through the mountain passes, it snowed for two days."

Unconfirmed estimates say hundreds are dying daily along the way.

Saddam asks Kurds to back home

NICOSIA, Apr 14: President Saddam Hussein visited northern Iraq and urged hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees to return home, saying his government had nothing against them, Iraqi radio reported Sunday, reports AP.

As he visited Erbil on Saturday, Western nations and relief agencies airdropped and trucked tons of relief supplies to an estimated 2 million Iraqi Kurds huddled along the Turkish and Iranian borders or fleeing toward those nations.

The effort to save the Kurds is being led by some 8,000 US medical and transport troops. Turkey has set up refugee camps along its border with Iraq and the White House has warned Saddam to keep his troops from pursuing the Kurds north of the 36th parallel.

Iranian radio on Sunday appealed for assistance for Iraqi refugees there.

"Words cannot express the depth of this disaster. One must go and see how these refugees, who barely survived the war, are now grappling with another struggle of life and death," it said.

Sharif's allies flay Sharia Bill

ISLAMABAD, Apr 14: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's fundamentalist allies have come out in the open to attack what they regard as a weak bill to enforce the Islamic code of Sharia in Pakistan, reports Reuter.

But his opponents, led by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, have refrained from making an immediate denunciation.

The attack on Saturday by a forum of Islamic Religious Parties led by Sharif's allies came two days after the government introduced a Sharia bill in the Parliament's lower house.

The forum was also unhappy with Sharif for delaying the presentation of another promised bill to amend the constitution to facilitate Sharia's enforcement.

The bill, which must be passed by both houses of parliament to become law, declares Sharia to be Pakistan's Supreme Law, but gives few clues how this would work.

A forum resolution denounced the legislation as a slaughtered, tattered bill and called for the adoption of a stronger bill proposed by fundamentalists.

The forum picked on the bill's provision for honouring existing financial contracts and international obligations to accuse Sharif of seeking to retain the system of paying interest for three more years. It says interest is banned by Islam.

On the one hand Sharif is declared the Supreme Law and on the other continuation of interest is being guaranteed, the resolution said.

Continuing the interest-

based economy, according to Quranic injunctions, is a declaration of war against Allah and Allah's Prophet and negates the claim of making (Pakistan) an Islamic Welfare State.

The fundamentalists were instrumental in last year's election victory by Sharif's Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA). The alliance defeated Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which it accused of being anti-Sharia.

After Sharif took office in November, they have been pressing him to fulfil his campaign pledge to enforce Sharia through a harsher bill they proposed.

But Sharif presented a bill of his own, which appears to side step fundamentalist demands for a new Islamic judiciary which could overrule parliament.

Since then, a coalition of opposition groups has demanded the ouster of certain ministers and demanded that Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah set a date for democratic elections.

The Emir went part way toward meeting their demands last week when he announced that parliamentary elections would be held next year at an unspecified date. He also indicated that voting rights may be extended to women.

Western sources said some of the acting Cabinet ministers now appear to be functioning in an uncoordinated fashion, serving their own interests rather than seeking a unified policy.

Dissidents to join Kuwaiti Cabinet

KUWAIT CITY, Apr 13: A new Cabinet will be named within days that will reflect opposition demands and include Kuwaitis who endured Iraq's occupation rather than going into exile, Western diplomats said Saturday, reports AP.

One diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said several key ministers would be replaced. The changes, he said, will "reflect the criticism of the government over the past eight months."

The official said the new Cabinet would include mem-

bers of the Kuwaiti resistance, or ministers who reflect their ideas. Many of those who resigned the seven-month Iraqi occupation have complained of being shunted aside following the return of officials who lived in relatively comfortable exile.

The Cabinet, which accompanied Kuwait's Emir into exile when Iraq invaded last August, resigned en masse on March 19 following widespread criticism of the delays in restoring essential services. The ministers have continued to serve on an acting basis.

Bangladesh no longer prone to famine

From Margaret Laing

LONDON (LPS) : The constant risk of famine in Asia is being reduced as Bangladesh and Pakistan, currently importers of fertilisers, will soon be producing enough of their own both to meet their agricultural needs and to export, according to the British-based Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC).

For the first time the CDC, which operates in about 50 developing countries and dependent territories, has made a commitment to the fertiliser industry through loan and share capital given for projects in these countries.

In Pakistan its involvement will enable the Fauji Fertiliser Company at Goth Machhi to construct a new plant beside the present one and to double to nearly 1.3m tonnes a year its

production of urea. This is especially effective on cereal crops, including rice, and is much safer than ammonium nitrate.

The company's infrastructure is to be increased and its marketing improved. In Bangladesh, the Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company at Chittagong is also being enabled to increase its output considerably.

These new projects will satisfy local agricultural demand for the time being, leaving a surplus for export, said Douglas Keens, a senior engineer with CDC. "Suitable fertilisers bring immediate and dramatic increases in fodder and cereal yields. Famine continues to threaten parts of Asia, and these two projects should make a major contribution to its relief."

53 killed in Peru's quake

LIMA (Peru) Apr 14: The powerful earthquake that shook Peru's northeast Amazon region last week killed 53 people, injured 252 and seriously damaged 8,063 homes, the official El Peruano newspaper said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

It quoted Peru's civil defence chief General Manuel Pancorvo as saying that the number of quake victims totalled 49,375.

He said the final toll was the result of a district by district survey in the towns of Nueva Cajamarca Rioja and Moyabamba and surrounding areas.

Peru received a 650,000-dollar donation for quake victims from the European Economic Community on Friday, El Peruano said. Japan has also donated 287,000 dollars, the United States 25,000 dollars and Canada 30,000 dollars.

At a graveyard on Saturday outside of Piranshahr, 10 Kurdish men sacked at the earth with broken tools.

"My grandmother wanted to be buried in Kurdistan," said Jahar Karen, a 22-year-old Kurd. "But (Iraqi President) Saddam Hussein chased us out. She froze to death on the way."

Karen said he and his comrades had buried three other elderly people Saturday. Thirteen more graves were dug on Friday. At one site, a red plastic bag had been wrapped around a rock in memorial to a dead youth.

Karen said some victims died from exposure, others from napalm attacks by Iraqi troops who have pursued the Kurds fleeing a failed rebellion following the Gulf war.

As the road stretches into

Iraq, it becomes more narrow and flanked with snow drifts, on which refugees rest as far as the eye can see. Many lack shoes, and have cloths too thin to ward off the late winter winds.

All complain of hunger, along those who have made it to Iran say they now have hope of survival. In this town, humanitarian groups such as the Red Crescent Society have begun distributing bread.

Several international medical organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders are treating injured refugees and distributing medicine.

To supplement the aid, many refugees have piled their goods and gold atop rickety vehicles hoping to sell them

Off the Record

Big Macs take bigger bite of Soviet budget

MOSCOW : Big Macs now are taking even a bigger bite out of Soviet budgets: McDonald's restaurant has raised its prices for the second time since opening in the Soviet capital in January 1990, reports AP.

"We don't expect to see much of a decrease" in the number of customers, said Glen Steeves, operations manager for the Canadian-Soviet owned fast food establishment. The restaurant, the largest McDonald's in the world, serves from 45,000 to 50,000 people daily.

The McDonald's in Moscow raised its prices by an average of 35 per cent Monday, six days after the Soviet government boosted the tab on food and other consumer goods by from 250 per cent to 1,000 per cent.

A Big Mac hamburger, which had cost seven rubles 10 kopecks, went up to nine rubles 45 kopecks.

But while patrons were paying more, there was good news for McDonald's employees--the restaurant increased its employees' monthly salaries from 500 rubles (850 dollars at the official exchange rate) to 800 rubles (1,360 dollars). The average Soviet earns 330 rubles a month.

"The cost of living has increased substantially here," Steeves said. "We want to make sure our employees are able to enjoy a comfortable way of living."

All girls in a village

HONG KONG : Nearly all the babies born in a remote village in the southern Chinese province of Fujian in the past 40 years have been girls, the Gong Kong-based China News Service (CNS) said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Of 136 babies born in Gaoyang village since 1950, only 11 have been boys, the Beijing-based CNS said.

Puzzled officials said the villagers had similar lifestyles to those in neighbouring village.

Expert said an environmental factor could be causing the high female birth ratio but further study was necessary. Traditionally Chinese parents have preferred boys to carry on the family name and care for them in their old age, although the Chinese government has carried out education campaigns stressing that girls are just as good as boys.

Distance between 2 Redgraves

NEW YORK : Actress Lynn Redgrave is putting some professional distance between herself and sister Vanessa.

Lynn fears that her sister's political outspokenness may harm her own career, the Ladies' Home Journal reported in its May issue. Lynn said she'll probably change her last name to Redgrave-Clark to avoid any confusion.

Vanessa publicly opposed Western intervention against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, while Lynn supported President George Bush's actions. Vanessa was recently dropped from a US tour of the British comedy "Lettice and Lovage."

"I'm very proud I come from my family," Lynn said. "But Vanessa crossed a line. This is the strongest I've ever had to be in opposition to her."

Lynn, 48, known primarily as a film and television star, lives in Los Angeles, with her husband, John Clark. Vanessa, 54, primarily a stage actress, lives in London.

The sisters had never appeared together professionally until last year. In October, they took to the London stage for a five-month run of Chekhov's "The Three Sisters"; in February, they starred in the TV remake of the horror film "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?"

BRIEFLY

Lenin's statue removed: Independentist authorities in Yerevan, Capital of Armenia on Saturday removed a statue of Russian Revolutionary Leader Vladimir Lenin, the Russian Information Agency announced in Moscow, reports AP.

Municipal authorities said the statue of the man who founded the Soviet Union would be put up in a special place for monuments dedicated to Bolshevik leaders.

It was erected opposite the southern Soviet Republic's Parliament building almost 70 years ago.

Shamir to meet Soviet PM: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said on Saturday he would meet Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov for the first time in London, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Israeli radio said Shamir and Pavlov would discuss restoring full diplomatic relations, now at consular level. Shamir was scheduled to leave for London Sunday but did not say when he would meet Pavlov.

Arafat meets Hassan: Palestine Liberation Organization Chief Yasser Arafat, visiting North African leaders in the wake of Middle East tour by US Secretary of State James Baker met in Rabat Saturday with Morocco's King Hassan II, Moroccan radio reported in Rabat, reports AP. It is believed Arafat's consultations are focuses on the idea of a Regional Arab-Israeli Peace Conference discussed by Baker in his series on meeting with Middle East leaders earlier this week.

The PLO has rejected the idea of such a conference on Friday. PLO Information Department Head Yasser Abed Rabbo said proposals for a regional conference were aimed at separating the problem of a Palestinian homeland from the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

USSR for Japanese help on N-plant: The Soviet Union wants Japan's help to build a nuclear power plant on an island chain partially claimed by both nations, a report said Sunday in Tokyo, reports AP.

The dispute over a few of Kuril Islands—which has prevented the two governments from signing a World War II peace treaty — is expected to top the agenda of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Tokyo beginning Tuesday.

It was not clear, however, whether the Soviets want to build the nuclear power plant on one of the disputed southern islands— seized by the Soviet Union at the end of the war — or elsewhere on the 960-kilometer (600-mile) long archipelago north of Japan.

The Soviet plan was reported in the Yomhuri newspaper. **Czech demo for early polls:** About 4,000 demonstrators called Saturday for early general elections and a purge of Communists who they claimed were still in charge under Czechoslovakia's reformed institutions, AFP reports from Prague.

Protesters marched from the foreign Ministry to Central Venecias Square and passed by President Vaclav Havel's residence and Prime Minister Marian Calfa's office shouting "Calfa resign," dissolve parliament and rather Sladek than Havel," referring to the leader of the Right Wing Republican Party, Miroslav Sladek.

Aziz ends Sudan visit: Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz ended a one-day visit in Khartoum Saturday during which he delivered a message to Sudanese Leader General Omar el Beahir from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein officials said in Khartoum, reports AP.

Before returning home Aziz called for "Joint Arab action based on the interests of the Arab Nation and not dictated by imperialism."

He also reiterated the opposition of the Iraqi government to establishing havens under foreign control for Kurdish refugees in Iraq.

জাতীয় শিল্প ও সমৃদ্ধিতে

★★★★★

দেশের একমাত্র তৈল শোধনাগার

ইস্টার্ন রিফাইনারী লিমিটেড

(বাংলাদেশ পেট্রোলিয়াম কর্পোরেশনের একটি সাবসিডিয়ারী)

উত্তর পতেলা, পোঃ বরু নং-৩৫ চট্টগ্রাম।