

Politicians incapable: Burmese Army chief

BANGKOK, Apr 22: Burma's current political parties are totally incapable of government without causing nationwide disruption, the ruling military junta claimed in a broadcast on Rangoon, television monitored here Monday, reports AFP.

Talks on security of small states next month

COLOMBO, Apr 22: A number of small states from all regions of the world will meet in the Maldives early next month to discuss the security of the small states, according to reports reaching here today, reports Xinhua.

The two-day meeting on the protection and security of the small nations will be attended by a number of small states including Brunei, Cambodia, Malta, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Singapore, Solomon Islands and Sri Lanka.

At present we cannot find any organisation that can govern the country in a peaceful and stable manner," he said. He accused the country's 80-odd parties, including the National League of Democracy (NLD) which swept last May's elections, of trying to spread instability.

The majority are working more toward gaining state power and causing instability in the country than toward establishing calm," Maj. Gen. Tin U said.

There have never been any unfair arrests during the period that we are in charge of the state," said Maj.-Gen. Tin U.

15 tourists arrested in Nepal for smuggling

KATHMANDU, Apr 22: Customs officers in Nepal have arrested 15 foreign tourists on charges of attempting to smuggle 45,820 kilos (100 pounds) of gold worth 7,37,500 Dollars on the local market, an official said Sunday, reports AFP.

Chief Customs Officer Surya Bahadur Manandhar said the tourists from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands, were arrested Saturday at the international airport here on arrival from Bangkok.

The group included nine women all in their mid-20s, he said.

A customs officer said it was "the time that 15 foreign tourists" were arrested in one group.

The officer identified the group as Elke Jantschi and Grigite Gries-hner from Austria, Robert Fafleik from Czechoslovakia, Rentoe Bracher from Switzerland, Swede Mon Marlinor Rath, Italian Sara Mironc, Anette B. Pouch, Steglinde Rutsch, Marianne Adeli Rautmann, Marianne Neher, Thomas Buhrlir, Ulrich Franz Gruber, Wolfgang Manfred Tkneisee all from Germany and Bulthuis A. Jantine and Margriet Harittee Kalidien from the Netherlands.

The official said that if convicted they face several years in jail and a fine equal to the amount of gold they smuggled.

Jyoti calls rival Ray 'a poll rigging master'

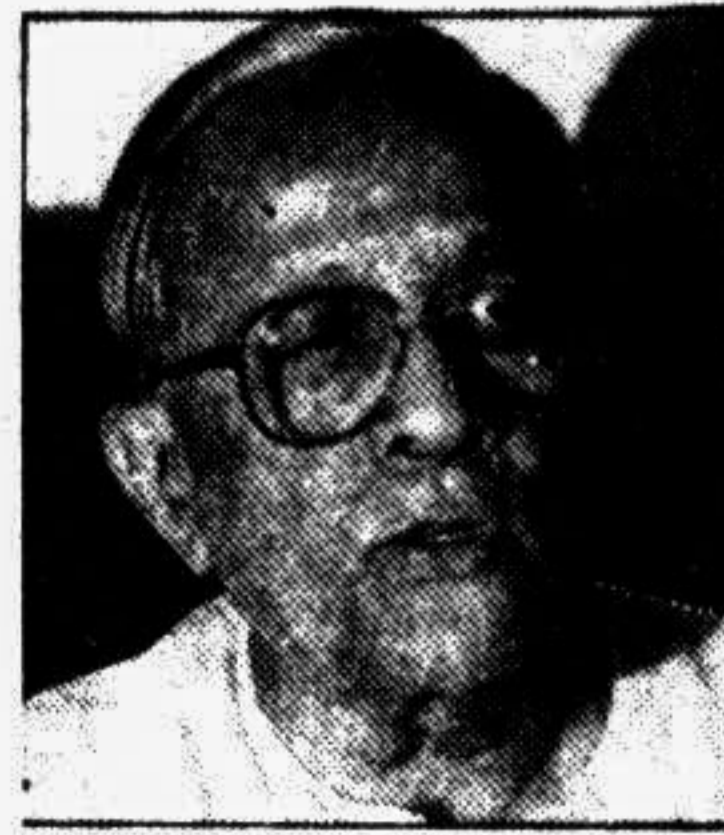
CALCUTTA, Apr 22: They are both over 70, experienced warhorses and old political rivals. After 14 years, West Bangla chief minister Jyoti Basu and state PCC (I) president Siddhartha Shankar Ray are gearing up for what could be their most intense electoral battle, reports UNI.

But there the similarities end. Mr Basu has been chief minister for 14 years, and has the disciplined CPI (M) cadre to back his campaign. Mr Ray was in political wilderness for most of those 14 years, and returns to a divided party, with some leaders clearly resentful of the new PCC (I) president.

His first task would be to unify the party; which makes for good political strategy because traditionally a united Congress (I) has always won more votes than the Left Front.

Not surprisingly, panic buttons were struck and the entire Left machinery revved up to launch a vicious personal attack against the PCC (I) chief. Mr Basu initially joined in the attack, describing Mr Ray as the "rigging master" of the 1972 polls, the evil behind the Emergency excesses in the state and the man responsible for the torture of young extremists in the 1970's. The chief minister, however, has apparently sworn off personal attacks, refraining from commenting on Mr Ray at a recent youth rally at Esplanade East.

Mr Ray's tactics are different. The PCC(I) chief has avoided calling Mr Basu names, opting attack the CPI(M)'s



Jyoti Basu



S. Ray

that 14 years is sufficient time for that tactic to have worn thin.

Instead, it plans to focus on reminding people of life during the Congress(I). As a first step, the CPI(M) daily newspaper, Ganashakti, has started a series detailing Congress(I) atrocities during Mr Ray's regime as chief minister.

Still that shouldn't harm Mr Ray's comeback attempt from his old home constituency of Chowringhee. He will be fighting from Chowringhee, considered a safe seat for the Congress(I), after a gap of 20 years, during which he made futile attempts to fight the CPI(M) at its strongholds, including Bolpur.

Mr Basu will contest the election from Satgachia, the seat where he has been winning from since he lost from his traditional Barangar constituency in 1972. Mr Basu had then lost to the CPI candidate and his one-time election agent, Mr Sivapada Bhattacharyya. However, he blamed his defeat on the then chief minister, Mr Ray.

That gives an added edge to the contest between the rival party leaders. Plus the thought that it could be the last time to take on a familiar political foe: both leaders were reportedly toying with the idea of retirement recently.

That's certainly one idea which has been retired till the Lok Sabha polls are over.

Off the Record

Girlfriend barb boomerangs

PATNA: How do you describe a political rival who succeeds in toppling your government? DMK president Mr. Karunanidhi got more than what he bargained for when he described AIADMK chief Jayalalitha as "Rajiv Gandhi's political girlfriend who aborted my government", reports PTI.

Tempers began rising in Madras after a woman lawyer got the transcript of Mr Karunanidhi's speech in Patna last month.

According to her, the DMK supreme said, "Mr Rajiv Gandhi and his political girlfriend in Tamil Nadu, who have less than 10 years of public life between them, aborted... (pause) my government in Tamil Nadu. Before they could abort the Bihar government, their government at Delhi was aborted."

Offended by the comments, fuming AIADMK workers have combined with angry women's organisations against the former chief minister, accusing him of demeaning not just his political rival but all women.

After a lame attempt to defend his speech by describing it as just a political observation with nothing personal to it failed, Mr Karunanidhi is now under attack from all fronts.

Ms Jayalalitha's protest about the "slandorous" remarks have evoked instant sympathy from women in the state, a survey by a local Tamil daily reveals, and half a dozen women's organisations have rallied around the AIADMK leader.

At the same time, the MGR fans association has embarrassed Mr Karunanidhi by urging the Madras police commissioner to launch criminal proceedings against him for slander.

The association has also taken a snide dig at Mr Karunanidhi. Asking for permission to stage a two-hour dharna outside his residence, association members slipped in a question: as Mr Karunanidhi maintains two residences, which one would he be available at?

In Tamil Nadu it is an open secret that the DMK chief has two wives and divides his routine between the two houses. The association's request is a rather clever way of reminding people of that old adage: People who live in glass houses.

Charles waiting in the wings

LONDON, Apr 22: Britain's media have renewed the debate on whether Queen Elizabeth, who turned 65 on Sunday, should abdicate in favour of her 42-year-old heir, Prince Charles, reports Reuters.

The Sunday Telegraph newspaper concluded that the Queen, who came to the throne aged 25, will honour the coronation oath binding her to the service of the British people until death.

"As far as she is concerned, there will be no choice in the matter, whatever the speculation," it said.

Sky Television carried out a straw poll in which most of those surveyed said they did not want the Queen to retire. The Daily Mirror tackled the issue on Saturday in a report headlined: "Is it time for her to hang up her crown?" and invited readers to take part in a telephone poll on whether she should retire.

The Daily Express asked a similar question earlier in the week. "With Prince Charles waiting in the wings, is it time for her to step down and enjoy a happy and glorious retirement?" it asked.

'Goin' to Katmandu'

DETROIT: Bob Seger talked about it, indeed sang about it: "I think I'm goin' to Katmandu, that's really, really where I'm goin' to, if I ever get outa here, that's what I'm gonna do," reports AP.

More than 15 years after writing "Katmandu," the Michigan-born rock star finally made it to the capital of Nepal.

Seger traveled to the kingdom nestled between India and China in late February to observe the World Special Olympics competition. He paired off with Min Sejuwal, 14, winner of the gold medal in the softball throw.

Seger and Sejuwal will be featured in a segment of an ABC-TV special to air in early August, a few weeks after the International Summer Special Olympic Games in Minneapolis. Sejuwal will compete in that event.

"In all, Katmandu was pretty much what I expected," Seger wrote in Sunday's Detroit Free Press. "It's a very mysterious and beautiful place in a lot of ways, like another planet for me."

"We stayed at — kid you not — the Yak and Yeti Hotel, the only hotel in town that had CNN (Cable News Network)," Seger wrote. "I don't think I ever ate outside the hotel. There was something a lot like fried chicken, which was very good, and a chicken burger which was, shall we say, acceptable."

BRIEFLY

Gulf war not won, Americans say:

A majority of US adults do not think the US-led coalition won the Gulf war because Iraqi President Saddam Hussein remains in power, according to a poll by Newsweek magazine, says Reuter from New York.

The poll found that despite the Allies' overwhelming defeat of Iraq, which forced Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait, 55 per cent of Americans did not believe the Allies won the war.

Two weeks ago only 45 per cent of those polled said they thought the Allies had not won the war, Newsweek reported in its latest edition, made available on Sunday.

In the latest telephone poll, 57 per cent said a ceasefire as called too soon in the war and 51 per cent said they would support US troops resuming military act on against Iraq to topple Saddam.

Mandela praises US policy:

Nelson Mandela told an international conference of journalists Monday that governments should follow the United States lead and consult both South Africa's white government and its black residents in the handling of sanctions, reports AP from Kyoto in Japan.

"While we do appreciate the concerns of foreign government and business people who wish to re-establish relations with South Africa," Mandela said, "we still insist that it would improve matters greatly if the victims of apartheid were consulted before such precipitate steps were taken."

Mandela, leader of the African National Congress, the most powerful black opposition group, lauded "the exemplary attitude displayed by the USA."

He said the United States "has been in regular contact with us from the highest quarters in the administration" and has not "treated the issue of sanctions as if the only people who matter are the South African government."

He made the statements in an address at the opening session of the 40th annual conference of the International Press Institution. About 400 journalists from around the world attended.

Mandela mentioned no other country by name in discussing the sanctions, which are being reviewed by Britain and a number of other countries.

South African President F.W. de Klerk's government has proposed the elimination of all remaining apartheid laws and has been holding talks with the ANC on setting up negotiations to end white minority rule.

Royal welcome to Walesa in UK:

Lech Walesa will get a full royal welcome when he begins his first visit to Britain as Poland's President on Tuesday, says AFP from London.

Mr. Walesa, who won a Nobel peace prize when he led the Solidarity trade union, will stay in Windsor Castle, near London, as the guest of Queen Elizabeth II.

Ironically, the former shipyard electrician will be in a position to give the Queen some professional advice: he will be at the castle at a time its entire electrical system is being redone.

Mr. Walesa and his wife Danuta will arrive at Windsor in one of the Queen's seven state coaches, accompanied by the monarch, her husband the Duke of Edinburgh and several members of the Royal family.

Salvador war to continue:

Peace talks under way here since April 4 between El Salvador's right-wing government and leftist rebels will not stop the war in the Central American nation soon, sources close to the talks said on Sunday, says Reuter from Mexico City.

The issue of a ceasefire has been postponed for other rounds of talks, a diplomatic source told Reuter.

Negotiators had said that the Mexico City talks, if successful, would lead to a May 30 ceasefire in the 11-year war that has killed 75,000 people — most of them civilians.

But government and rebel representatives failed to reach agreement on the terms for an early cessation of hostilities, diplomats said.

The development dealt a setback to the U.N.-sponsored peace talks, which have been dogged by mutual antagonisms and deep distrust on both sides of the negotiating table.

But one diplomat who has monitored the talks here closely said they were expected to produce at least "some agreement on constitutional reforms and other political matters" that could pave the way to an eventual end of the conflict.

Cabinet reshuffle in Canada:

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, facing waning support and deep divisions over the Quebec question, announced a major cabinet reshuffle Sunday of nearly all of the government's main players, reports AFP from Ottawa.

Joe Clark, who held the post of Minister of External Affairs for nearly seven years, was named Minister for Constitutional Affairs, taking up an "internal diplomatic" assignment.

Mr. Clark could become a central figure in the fight to keep Quebec as part of Canada's Federation at a time when Quebec has been renewing efforts to break way, plunging the country into a constitutional crisis.

The June 1990 stalemate on the Meech Lake accord has strengthened a pro-sovereignty political current in the French-speaking province and embittered relations between the federal government and the provinces.

Coup bid in Sudan denied:

The Sudanese authorities denied Sunday a report in the Egyptian press that there had been an aborted coup against the military regime last week and that 20 military officers had been executed, reports AFP from Khartoum.

A Sudanese government spokesman, quoted by the official news agency SUNA, said the reports had been made up by "ill-intentioned" sources.

The Egyptian daily Al-Waadi said Saturday that Sudan had executed the officers last Tuesday after an unsuccessful coup bid.

It said that former Sudanese Interior Minister Feisal Ali Abu Saleh and an unspecified number of other people had been arrested.

1,400 US marines begin building bases in Iraq

ANKARA, Apr 22: Iraqi troops pulled back from the northern town of Zakho Sunday as US marines moved in for setting up a camp for Kurdish refugees, according to reports reaching here, reports Xinhua.

Two Iraqi battalions withdrew from the town they recaptured last month from Kurdish rebels leaving only a group of 200 Iraqi police there, the police evacuated immediately too after the US marines entered the town, reports quoted US Lt. Col. Bob Flocke as saying.

Earlier Sunday US Army Major General Jay M. Garner and an Iraqi general met before the Iraqi battalions retreated to a point 30 kilometers South of Zakho Garner told reporters.

More than 1,400 US marine troops began constructing a 2,000-square-kilometers safe haven on the northeast outskirts of Zakho for refugees who fled government crackdown on the Kurdish insurgency.

Iraq has strongly opposed the dispatch of western troops to northern Iraq in the name of "protecting the Kurdish refugees from being attacked by Iraqi troops."

It lodged protests to the United Nations Security Council, accusing the military move of "violating the international law and interfering in Iraq's internal affairs."

However, the Iraqi government has agreed with the United Nations to establish humanitarian centers for Kurdish refugees to facilitate those who want to return home.

Reuter from Paris adds: The chief of France's Armed Forces said on Sunday he believed between 50,000 and 100,000 Iraqi soldiers and several thousand Iraqi civilians died during the Gulf war.

General Maurice Schmitt told French television that, like the commander of US

forces in the Gulf General Norman Schwarzkopf, he regretted that the allies had not removed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power.

France sent more than 10,000 troops to the Gulf, the third biggest western force after the United States and Britain, to help drive Iraq out of Kuwait.

"I evaluate the number of Iraqi military deaths... at between 50,000 and 100,000 civilian deaths number in the thousands, no more," he said.

Schmitt said 10,000 Iraqi prisoners of War out of an original 80,000 were still being held but they did not want to return to Iraq.

He quoted them as telling their captors: "Why didn't you go to Baghdad?"

Schmitt, who retired from the armed forces on

Wednesday, said he agreed with them. "Yes, yes, yes, I would prefer to see another regime in charge of Iraq."

He denied that the allied bombing of a Baghdad bunker, in which up to 200 civilians died, was a mistake. The Americans were convinced it contained an Iraqi military headquarters," he said.

But Schmitt said a laser-guided bomb attacks on a bridge near the southern town of Nassiriyah had gone wrong. "The bomb malfunctioned, missed the bridge and hit a market in the town, causing deaths."

He said allied forces had not miscalculated the numerical strength of the Iraqi army but had over-estimated its "training, formation and will to fight."

Iranians allowed to hold rallies in Saudi Arabia

NICOSIA, Apr 22: Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said Saudi Arabia had agreed to let Iranians stage anti-western rallies during the annual Haj (Muslim pilgrimage) next June, the Iranian News Agency IRNA reported Sunday, says Reuter.

More than 400 pilgrims, mainly Iranians, were killed in clashes with Saudi security forces trying to prevent political rallies in Islam's holiest shrine in Mecca in 1987.

The incident led Iran to boycott the pilgrimage, which all able Muslims are obliged to perform at least once, until this year.

Last month Iran resumed diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and reached agreement on taking part in the pilgrimage. The terms of the accord made public then did not mention demonstrations.

IRNA, received in Cyprus, quoted Rafsanjani as telling university students during a visit on Saturday to Shiraz, southwest of Tehran, that Iran resumed the ties after Saudi Arabia accepted its terms.

"Now, contrary to their wishes, they (the Saudis) have consented to the holding to 'antipathy toward infidels' rallies during the Haj," IRNA reported him as saying.

Mixed feelings in Palm Beach about Kennedys on rape case

PALM BEACH (Florida), Apr 22: Longtime residents of this island of wealth have mixed feelings about the Kennedys and all the attention the Kennedy rape case has brought to their small town of 12,000, reports AP.

"Except for the ones who are

titillated, the rest are embarrassed," said Kathryn Robinette, editor of Palm Beach Today. The newspaper chronicles charity parties and gallery openings, appearing twice weekly during the thanksgiving-to-Easter social season, weekly the rest of the year.

"It's a terrible thing for Palm Beach," said Esther Elson, who like other longtime residents, worries that publicity surrounding a woman's allegation that she was raped at the Kennedy estate will further change the town.

"It's going to ruin our beautiful town," she said. "We'll be getting a lot of trash here." On the surface, Palm Beach — with its marble mansions surrounded by tall walls and hedges pruned to perfect straightness — seems safely shielded from any change that it doesn't want. Some locals say the latest of many society scandals shouldn't concern their neighbors.

"That's just apprehension on their part," said George M.D. Lewis Jr, a past president of the town's Board of Realtors.

"Henry Flagler used to do a lot worse things than that," he said, referring to the developer who helped founded Palm Beach 80 years ago by extending a railroad to fill his hotels about 112 kilometers (70 miles) north



William Kennedy, nephew of Edward is a key suspect in the rape

fund kids who — as news stories surrounding the Kennedy case have detailed — kill time, fight boredom and look for love or something simpler by hopping from club to club till closing time.

Some deny they keep track of developments in the Kennedy case; others don't pretend to ignore it any more than do the tourists, whose brake lights glow as their cars creep past the Kennedy house.

"It's something to talk about," one longtime local shrugged.

Talking about certain Kennedys can exasperate Ms. Robinette, who has watched the rich and famous close up for 25 years.

"They have money. They have looks. They have brains. They're missing that one ingredient: social integrity," she said. "They drop their jug of molasses every chance they get. And when they do, it spills on everybody."

At the same time, however, there are many signs of

admiration for Joe and Rose Kennedy's glittery family, whose third generation now makes headlines.

Unasked, residents of this Republican stronghold proudly bring out their stories of the late President John F. Kennedy on vacations here.

A modest monument in the town square lists JFK and three other Kennedys among those who served in World War II. A small plaque in the family church, St. Edward's, notes where the former president knelt at Mass.

Contrasting with these markers are other signs around town of how Palm Beach wants to be seen.

Next to public water fountains — decorated with hand-painted Italian-design tile — are ankle-high "dog bars" with basins of identical tile and brass spigots.

In Palm Beach, the spic-and-span gas station last week had not one but two Rolls-Royces for sale.