

Court refuses to bar former PM from polls

Bid to examine VP Singh's mental soundness fails

NEW DELHI, Apr 25: An Indian court rejected Wednesday a plea to stop former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh from running for parliament on grounds of his mental soundness was in doubt, reports AFP.

Judge S. B. Sapra of the Delhi High Court rejected the request by a local lawyer, OP Saxena, who wanted the court to bar VP Singh from contesting next month's election until he undergoes a psychiatric examination.

Saxena had challenged in the High Court an October 1990 lower court decision to throw out his petition to conduct medical tests to determine the "Mental soundness" of VP Singh.

But Judge Sapra postponed hearings on the petition until May 27, a day after polling closes in general elections.

The petitioner heads an organisation called lawyers' forum for civil liberties, which has used "inconsistent statement" by VP Singh on national issues such as the separatist conflicts in Kashmir and Punjab to question his mental soundness.

It also cited VP Singh's decision to raise job quotas for so-called backward castes, which provoked violent protests that saw about 60 students kill themselves in a suicide wave last year.

The petition also mentioned a 1952 declaration by VP



Singh's wife, Sita Devi, that her husband gave away a large chunk of personal land to charity in a "fit of madness".

Her case for return of the land was thrown out by a court then.

India's 19th century Lunacy Act, under which Saxena is challenging VP Singh, prohibits those medically certified as insane from holding government office, property and estates, and from driving vehicles.

VP Singh, 60, was the Prime Minister when the original petition was dismissed by the New Delhi District and Sessions Court. He stepped down after his government was voted out by parliament November 7.

Iraq's letter on N-weapons inadequate: IAEA

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 25: The International Atomic Energy Agency has given Iraq until Friday to inform it of the location of its weapons-grade nuclear material, reports AP.

A letter to Iraqi Foreign Minister Ahmed Hussein from the IAEA says Baghdad's claim to not have any nuclear weapons is an inadequate answer to the Security Council's demand for a catalogue of its atomic inventory.

Under a Security Council resolution adopted April 3, Iraq must disclose the amount and location of its nuclear fuel and any materials that could be used in a nuclear weapons program.

Last week, Iraq told the IAEA and the Security Council it had no nuclear weapons or program to build them, and had complied with the IAEA's semiannual inspections of its nuclear power plants.

The Associated Press on Wednesday obtained a copy of the letter, signed by Maurizio Zifferero, the IAEA official overseeing the dismantling of

Iraq's nuclear weapons program.

The letter does not hint at any actions that the agency or the Security Council might take if Iraq fails to cooperate.

However, the Security Council's economic embargo is still clamped on Iraq.

Iraq may not sell its oil or any other products, and can only import food and medicines and other humanitarian aid, but has little hard currency to pay for it.

An Iraqi request to be allowed to sell 942.5 million Dollars in oil over four months to raise cash to buy food and other humanitarian supplies is now pending before the Security Council's sanctions committee, which must reach all decisions by consensus of its 15 members.

It is also possible that Iraq could have removed and hidden the enriched uranium, anticipating an attack on its reactors.



UNDERGROUND ILLUSION... A cleaning lady bends down to pick up an empty bottle in front of an advertisement for a fashion shop in a London underground railway station.

A 'dangerous example'

WELLINGTON: A 14-year-old girl has been suspended from school for setting a "dangerous example" by becoming a blonde, reports AP.

Wairarapa College in Masterton, just north of Wellington on New Zealand's North Island, sent Kelly Clarke home April 3, saying she broke school rules by changing her hair colour. Her suspension notice said "she is a dangerous example to other students."

The school's Board of Trustees says it will not withdraw the suspension until she changes back to her original hair color or enrolls at another school. When she turns 15 in August, she can be legally expelled.

Although the Commissioner for Children Ian Hassall opposed the disciplinary action, Board Chairman Ray Seymour said a majority of other authorities supported the school's action.

Kelly's mother, Jill Clarke, supports her daughter, claiming at least a third of the school's students had dyed, streaked or rinsed hair but that action was only taken against Kelly.

Her father, John Clarke, said it was ridiculous that the board could "put in jeopardy a girl's education for something so trivial."

Celebrate it with 88 shots of liquor

TAIPEI: Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui celebrated the passage of democratic reforms by clinking 88 shot glasses of sweet Chinese liquor at a banquet, the China Times newspaper said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

As guests shouted "Long live the Republic" and "Long live the President," Lee made 58 toasts with Shao Hsing rice wine at a Wednesday evening dinner marking the end of a historic National Assembly session, the paper said.

Later, well-wishers descended on the President for 30 more toasts with the small, one ounce (30ml) glasses, it said.

Lee had reason to be happy: The National Assembly this week passing his plans to give the government a more democratic base by passing key constitutional revisions.

Gorbachev won't quit as party chief

Bessmertnykh said Gorbachev, who is also state President, spoke for about 40 minutes.

In his opening remarks to the plenum, he touched on this question (resignation as party leader) briefly and reiterated his well-known principled position, Bessmertnykh said.

Gorbachev's position, repeated in a recent television address, is that at some point in the future there could be a separation between the posts of state President and Communist Party leader but that had not yet been reached.

Sources at the plenum expected to produce fierce criticism of Gorbachev from hardliners over his handling of an eight-week-old miners strike, said there was an attempt to force Gorbachev to account of his policies. This had been blocked easily from the agenda

in a vote.

Central committee members, questioned inside the red brick Kremlin walls before the meeting, said they believed Gorbachev would face attacks over strikes now plaguing the economy.

Several branch organisations, including the influential Krasnodar district, have urged him to resign.

Gorbachev's deputy, Vladimir Ivahko, said the ruling party politburo met earlier in the day and gave full backing to the General Secretary.

"It's our deep conviction there can no talk of Gorbachev's resignation as party General Secretary of from any other post. It is our unanimous position," he said.

An Army General who asked not to be identified said he was optimistic about the plenum.

Cholera claims 100 lives in Ecuador

QUITO, Apr 25: A cholera epidemic spreading through South America has now claimed 100 lives in Ecuador, officials said Wednesday, as a crabmeat exported from this country was blamed for four cholera cases in the United States, reports AFP.

Ecuadorian Health Minister Plutarco Naranjo said a total of 3,051 cases of cholera had been detected in this country since its outbreak here February 26.

He said that thanks to Ecuadorians, efforts to protect themselves from the disease, hospitals were treating fewer new cases per day — 100 daily as opposed to 130 or 140 three weeks ago.

But Naranjo conceded that overall statistics were still sketchy because of the lack of reliable medical information from remote, poverty stricken rural areas.

The epidemic began in late January in the Peruvian port city of Chimbote, and officials in Lima said Wednesday the toll in that nation had risen to 1,148 dead out of more than 160,000 cases.

Saddam promises democracy for Kurds: Talabani

BAGHDAD, Apr 25: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, weakened by the Gulf war defeat, and Kurdish rebel leaders, stricken by the failure of their uprising against him, have agreed in principle to end their decades-old conflict, reports Reuter.

Jalal Talabani, who led three Kurdish chiefs in talks with Saddam and his government, said on Wednesday that the pact, yet to be signed, would give greater autonomy to Kurdistan, whose short-lived rebellion was crushed by the Iraqi army.

"As a principle I can say yes," he told a news conference when asked if the two sides had reached agreement. "We need to have another round of negotiations for details to implement it."

Appealing to Kurds who fled their homes after the collapse of their revolt in the north at the beginning of April, Talabani said: "We want to stay in Iraqi Kurdistan, not leave it. We got promises from President (Saddam) and others that all Iraqi Kurds will be safe."

Fearing reprisals from Saddam's army, hundreds of thousands of Kurds have fled into Turkey or Iran or to border areas of northern Iraq where the United States is setting up safe havens for them.

"Now we are for normalisation, for bringing back the people," said Talabani after a one-hour meeting with Saddam, their first since 1984.

Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), said the agreement in principle covered implementation of a March 11, 1970 autonomy accord between the central government and the Kurds, who form a fifth of Iraq's 18 million population.

The Kurds say the accord was never put fully into practice.

Would the central government keep its word if an agreement were signed?

"We think that democracy will be the main guarantee for the national Kurdish objective," Talabani said.

He said the talks with Saddam and his aides covered democracy and political pluralism, freedom of the press, association of democratic organisations, human rights and normalisation in Iraq.

Revolts in the Kurdish north and the mainly Shi'ite south broke out after the US and its Gulf War Allies routed Saddam's army in Kuwait at the end of February.

The Kurds, a mountain people have been fighting on and off for more than four decades marked by broken promises, failed deals and repression by the powerful governments in the region.

In their conflict with Iraq, Talabani said the Kurds had failed to bring down the central government and the central government had failed to crush the Kurds.



Talabani

TOXIC GAS

Toxic gas kills 5 in India: Five people died and three more were hospitalised after inhaling toxic gas at a pharmaceutical plant in the former French enclave of Pondicherry Wednesday, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said in New Delhi, AFP reports.

The victims were all employees of the drug manufacturing plant in the Kalapet area of Pondicherry, on India's southeast coast.

The gas said to have escaped from a pipe at the plant, the news agency said. No further details were available.

Afghans now can go freely for Haj: Afghans will be allowed for the first time to go to Saudi Arabia for the Islamic pilgrimage of Haj without waiting to be selected by a lottery system, the official Bakhtar News Agency said on Wednesday in Islamabad, reports Reuter.

"For the first time in Afghan history, the Afghans eligible for Haj will go to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, without lots," Bakhtar said.

Previously the authorities drew lots to select pilgrims from Afghanistan, whose population is predominantly Muslim.

Chinese leader to visit Moscow: Chinese Communist Party leader Jiang Zemin will pay an official visit to Moscow from May 15 to May 19, the Soviet News Agency Tass said on Wednesday in Moscow, Reuter reports.

Tass said President Mikhail Gorbachev, who is also head of the Communist Party, had invited Jiang to make the trip, a rare high-level contact between party leaders from the communist superpowers.

Women's rally in Karachi: Hundreds of women rallied in Karachi Wednesday to condemn the breakdown of law and order in southern Pakistan's Sindh province, reports AFP from Karachi.

Sindh women's movement leader Mumtaz Nizami told the rally that police appeared helpless as bandits kidnapped and killed hostages and burned crops in rural Sindh.

The government was arresting innocent people under the cover of operations against the bandits, she charged.

Known here as dacoits, the bandits last month abducted two Japanese students and killed a Swedish consultant.

Germany-Poland friendship treaty: Germany and Poland reached agreement Wednesday on controversial points in a draft friendship treaty, Foreign Office spokesman Hanns Schumacher said in Bonn, reports AP.

The draft now is ready to be approved by the two governments, Schumacher said after the sixth round of talks between delegates from the two countries.

Since the unification of the two Germans last October, quick progress as made in thorny areas of relations between Germany and Poland to ease Polish resentment over Nazi Germany's conquest in World War II.

Palestinians begin hunger strike: Some 900 Palestinians refugees began a hunger strike in 25 Red Cross centres across Denmark on Wednesday in protest at expulsions of Palestinians to Lebanon, Red Cross official Lars Chemnitz said, reports AFP from Copenhagen.

The protesters said they would maintain their fast until the government gave them guarantees that the expulsions would stop.

Until 1989, Palestinians automatically received political asylum status here but since normalisation in Lebanon, Denmark has begun treating Palestinian requests for asylum on a case by case basis and rejecting an increasing number.

Hungary to sign accord with S. Africa: Hungary could become the first eastern bloc country to sign a formal tourism agreement with South Africa, the executive director of the South African Tourism Board, Spencer Thomas said Wednesday, reports AFP from Cape town.

Mr Spencer told state-run radio that the international tourism show here that Hungary was the first eastern bloc country to show interest in formal tourism links with south Africa.

He said Hungary was a prosperous nation whose citizens like to travel and could bring foreign exchange into South Africa.

LTTE kills 4 more troops

COLOMBO, Apr 25: Tamil Separatist guerrillas ambushed a Sri Lankan army vehicle on Wednesday, killing four soldiers, military sources said, reports Reuter.

They said Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam fired at the vehicle in the eastern Trincomalee district. There were no reports of rebel casualties.

Parliament Tuesday extended a 23-month-old state of emergency after one of the worst bouts of separatist violence in northern and eastern areas, where the Tamil rebels are fighting for a homeland.

'Gulf security plan to fail without Iran's involvement'

JEDDAH (Saudi Arabia), Apr 25: Iran says it will seek a role in postwar Gulf security arrangements during talks with Saudi Arabia, which is still wary of Tehran's Islamic fundamentalism despite the resumption of ties a month ago, reports Reuter.

Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, ending a European tour before flying to Jeddah on Thursday, said a regional security system without Iran's participation would fail.

"I think that if we want to be realistic for the future security of the region, all of us should participate in any kind of arrangement, otherwise it fails," he said after talks with Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jacques Poos on Wednesday.

Velayati said the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a loose defence and economic alliance which helped Iraq during its 1980-88 war with Iran, had been useless in preventing Iraq invading Kuwait.

"The main reason for the failure of that arrangement was the absence of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the largest country in the region," he added.

A Saudi Foreign Ministry official said that Iran, the state with the longest Gulf coastline, must have a key role if there was to be lasting peace in the region.

But a regional security arrangement that included Iran would not necessarily be the same as an Arab peace plan approved by Egypt, Syria, and

the six GCC states in Damascus in April. Tehran has criticised the plan.

The Saudi official would not say what Iran's role might be.

Velayati said the GCC members — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman — proposed Iran cooperate with them on economic, trade and cultural relations.

"We are considering this proposal. We are going to respond," he said.

The "six plus one" proposal would be the main topic of his talks in Saudi Arabia on Thursday, he added. Velayati said he would meet King Fahd

and then go on to Syria and Turkey with President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Relations between non-Arab Iran and Saudi Arabia have been troubled since revolutionary Shi'ites took power in Iran in 1979. Saudi Arabia is ruled by conservative Sunni Muslims.

The two countries cut ties three years ago, soon after 400 Haj pilgrims — mainly Iranians — were killed in clashes with Saudi security forces during political rallies in Mecca.

Iran boycotted the pilgrimage to Islam's holiest shrines, which every Muslim must perform once, in subsequent years.

After the resumption of links last month, Riyadh agreed to allow Tehran to increase the number of pilgrims it would send to 110,000 from a previous quota of 45,000.

Still worried that Tehran planned to export its revolutionary brand of Islam, Saudi Arabia said Iranians could hold rallies in designated zones near the holy sites as long as these did not interfere with other pilgrims.

"They can perform whatever rituals they like as long as they don't disturb the peace — we will take precautions to make sure this doesn't happen," a Saudi Foreign Ministry official said.

Saudi Arabia has banned political demonstrations during the Haj. President Rafsanjani, criticised by hardliners for growing ties with Riyadh, presented the concession as a victory for Iran last Sunday.

"Contrary to their wishes, (the Saudis) have consented to the holding of 'antipathy toward infidels' rallies during the Haj," the Iranian News Agency quoted him as saying.

Saudi officials said regional security, the Iraqi refugee problem and bilateral relations would be the main topics for discussion.

Thorny issues surrounding the annual Muslim Haj pilgrimage had already been settled but there were a few loose ends which needed to be tied up, diplomats in Riyadh said.

PLO rejects regional confce

TUNIS, Apr 25: The PLO said it wanted a full scale UN conference on Middle East peace and rejected any "regional" conferences that would not carry the same weight under international law, reports Reuter.

The organisation avoided closing the door on US diplomacy, however, saying guidelines for peace laid down by President Bush in March should be among the principles behind the conference.

The 100-strong Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, after a three-day meeting in Tunis,

Shi'ite rebels kill 43 Iraqi troops

DAMASCUS, Apr 25: Iraqi Shi'ite rebels said their guerrillas killed 43 soldiers, including a Major-General, in six attacks on Saddam Hussein's forces in southern Iraq on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Taqi al-Mudarresi, mentor of several Iraqi Shi'ite opposition groups including the Islamic Action Organisation said 47 soldiers were captured in the attacks in the cities of Basra and Amara.

Iraqi Shi'ite rebels rose up to topple Saddam in March after allied forces led by the United States defeated his army in Kuwait and southern Iraq.

They captured most of the major cities in southern Iraq but were later driven back by government forces.

Copyright deadline hits Tagore's works

CALCUTTA, Apr 25: To be or not to be? This is the million-dollar question with which the Viswa-Bharati University is now faced with, reports PTI.

Will the university be able to preserve a copyright-shackled Rabindranath Tagore or present the Nobel laureate's works freed from the copyright-bondage after December 31, 1991?

The question acquires significance in the light of the expiry date of the copyright. With the 50th death anniversary of the poet in August next year, his works might be published in "any fashion" because: his copyright, now principally the exclusive preserve of Viswa-Bharati and partly of Rabindra-Bharati society, lapses on the last day of this year in accordance with the Indian Copyright Act.

To the Viswa-Bharati authorities, it is a case of concern because the authenticity of the poet's writings and songs might be at stake.

Tagore himself had desired that the money from the copyright of his writings be utilised for the development of Viswa-Bharati. This was meant to be his "personal contribution to my beggar's bowl" (his compositions).

According to the university sources, work had continued in accordance with the poet's desire.

The central government does not interfere in the running of those spheres of the university, the functioning of which depends upon the

earnings from Tagore's publications. Viswa-Bharati Granthana Vibhaga (publishing department) and a large part of Rabindra Bhavana is run in this manner.

The sources expressed the fear that from next year onwards, the residual traces of independence that the university had enjoyed so far, would be lost for ever.

Whether an "unbridled" right to publish Tagore after the expiry of copyright ownership is at all desirable is an issue being debated for sometime by scholars in this field.

Some maintain that such licence will invariably result in distortion of the printed texts of Tagore. Hence it is essential that measures be taken to safeguard the authenticity of Tagore's writings in print. They feel that in the name of distributing cheaply-priced Tagore, the commercial publishing concerns are likely to devalue critical awareness required for standard editing and thus dilute the "authenticity" of Tagore's works.

The Viswa-Bharati authorities cite instances to prove their point.

"One has only to note the prevailing state of anarchy in regard to the publication of works of other writers. Even the works of Bankim Chandra and Saratchandra are no exceptions. Although issued in cheap editions, many of these versions are not genuine, far less complete and at times, not even readable," they say.

UN to send 1,700 peacekeepers to Western Sahara

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 25: The Security Council has agreed in principle to send nearly 1,700 UN peacekeepers to the Western Sahara to oversee an end to the 16-year war between the Polisario guerrillas and Morocco, reports AP.

The formal vote on the resolution was delayed until Monday. It would establish the ninth active UN force around the world.

Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar's 200-million-dollar western Sahara plan calls for sending peacekeepers and hundreds of poll watchers to monitor a cease-fire and referendum for the territory's residents on independence or union with Morocco.