

### Only a week left for multi-party polls

## Nepali Congress set to thrive on feuding rivals

KATHMANDU, May 5: With a general election in Nepal merely a week away, both the Nepali Congress and the Nepal Communist Party (united Marxist-Leninist faction) have stepped up their campaigns, reports AFP.

More than 25,000 supporters attended the Nepali Congress rallies Friday and Saturday in the Nepalese capital, chanting their appeal to voters to "vote for the tree symbol."

Nepal, like other South Asian countries, prints party logos on ballots to enable illiterate citizens to take part in the election process.

The NCP (UML) held similar rallies on Thursday, drawing crowds of over 10,000 witnesses said.

The Nepali Congress is facing strong opposition from the NCP (UML) and also rightist factions, dominated by former activists of the autocratic panchayat system of government that was overturned last year following massive pro-democracy demonstrations.

However, political analysts say the factional nature of those parties on the left and right, which in some cases has resulted in multiple nominations to the same electoral seat, can only benefit the

### Nepali Congress

The Nepali Congress has an advantageous position over the leftist and the rightist camps..... as the Nepal Communist Party is divided into nine groups while the right is divided into two factions, one political analyst said.

"If the Nepal Communist Party candidates contest unitedly with a slogan of one leftist in one constituency, it would emerge unchallenged to sweep the election with a majority of votes," he added.

Leftist factional in fighting in districts such as Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur would give the Nepali Congress "a good chance to sweep the voters in all three cities," the analyst said.

The Nepali Congress enjoys the support of western countries which are Nepal's major aid donors and many intellectuals here fear a western retreat from fresh economic commitment if the NCP (UML) emerges victorious from the May 12 polls.

Anti-western slogans have been a noticeable feature of the NCP (UML)'s election campaign.

"If the NCP (UML) comes to the power, it would emerge as a dictator like the panchayat

rulers and administrative corruption would be rampant making our life more difficult," said university lecturer Mohammed Habibullah.

Nepalese in the lower income bracket also fear an NCP (UML) victory may anger India and result in New Delhi reviving the economic blockade of Nepal which lasted 15 months in 1989-90.

"If the essential goods and the petroleum and oil products do not regularly flow from India it will cause a great hardship for us who have to survive with a daily wage earning," said Shanta Nakarmi, a motor mechanic.

The Nepali Congress has filed the largest number of candidates for the election with 204, while the NCP (UML) is close behind with 177 nominees.

Party politics aside, many analysts have emphasised the important role Nepal's climate may play in determining the outcome of the election.

"If the weather is bad with rain and thunder showers then vote casting may be tremendously low and discourage those in hilly regions" from turning out, one analyst said.

"This could on the whole benefit the NCP (UML) and other leftist camps."

People in the hilly regions seem to favour the Nepali Congress, but in bad weather analysts predict only the communists will turn out to vote along ideological lines.

Meteorologists have predicted heavy rains on polling day.

## 'We don't pay taxes to get teargassed'

SEOUL, May 5: Some 16,000 protesters battled riot police on Saturday in Seoul's most violent protests this year, sparked by the police killing of a student, reports Reuter.

The clashes lasted more than 10 hours and came to a climax with an ugly confrontation at the city's main railway station during which hundreds of innocent passengers were teargassed and thrown into panic by police baton charges.

"We don't pay taxes to get teargassed, one neatly dressed commuter shouted at police, shaking his fist.

Roads were littered with spent gas canisters and leaflets calling for the ousting of President Roh Tae-Woo.

State radio said 30,000 people demonstrated in Seoul Alone, and Sunday morning newspapers estimated that 70,000 to 100,000 protested nationwide.

"Overthrow Roh Tae-Woo," students chanted as they confronted lines of riot police in Seoul. Many passers-by applauded them and a few joined the demonstrations.

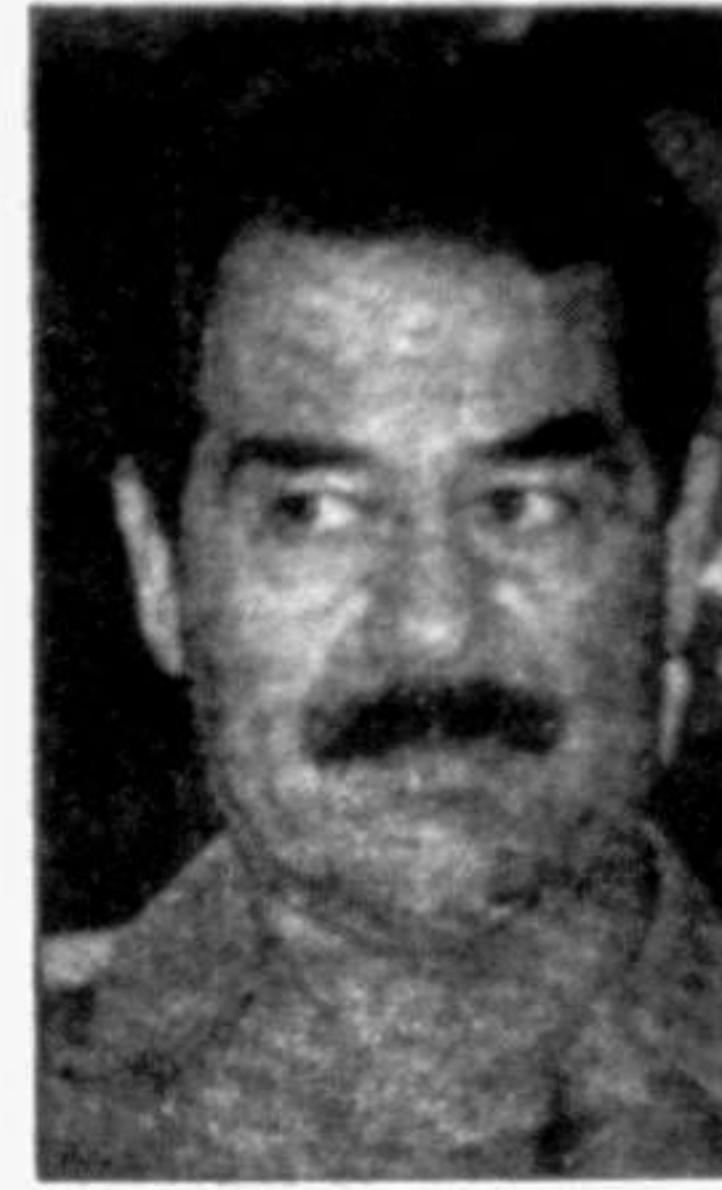
Students marched through the centre of the capital to the station but were swiftly dispersed with volleys of teargass canisters, some of which landed inside the station. Rail passengers cursed the riot police and children screamed in terror.

A student assault with rocks and firebombs against a nearby police station was also reported.

Earlier in the evening, a police vehicle was set on fire outside the Bank of Korea, the central bank, and teargass sent crowds of shoppers scurrying for cover.

## US firm to protect Kurds : Bush

# Events in Iraq a profound lesson for Iraqis : Saddam



Saddam

Conditions packaged owed to the Allies by Baghdad for the invasion of Kuwait.

Asked about the news report aboard the plane taking him to a speaking engagement here, the President said, "It's certainly not official (US) policy."

"I've always said that we're not interested in a dismembered or fractured Iraq," Mr. Bush said, "I've made that so very clear from the beginning."

## US troops in Iraq to move further south

ZAKHO (Iraq), May 5: Iraqi troops have abandoned military positions most of the way to the Kurdish town of Dohuk, about 40 km (25 miles) south of the first "safe haven" set up by allied forces for Kurdish refugees, witnesses said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The evacuation clears the way for allied troops to extend southwards from their forward position, which in the past-week has already advanced 10 km (six miles).

Armoured vehicles and jeeps with tow-anti-tank weapons reinforced US Marines at the checkpoint deepest into Iraq on Saturday and one marine said they planned to go further.

Marines at the roadblock, a fortress of sandbags, steel stakes and barbed wire on the crest of a ridge overlooking the Dohuk plain, said a renegade group of Iraqi soldiers somewhere to the south was refusing to budge.

The allies have told the Iraqis to withdraw from within a 30 km (18 miles) radius of Zakho.

that there shouldn't be any question about that one."

But he added that "certainly we want these people's lives to be protected against the violence that has been brought upon them for many many years. It's been going on forever and it's terrible."

"We do insist on our journalists' right to report on the matters they have seen and we protest at the expulsion of one and the banning of others."

He said the paper would welcome the opportunity to continue to report on the refugees and to talk to Ankara in the hope the ban would be lifted.

## Father of modern Arab music dead

CAIRO, May 5: Muhammad Abdel-Wahab, considered the father of modern Arab music, died of heart failure early Saturday at the age of 90, the Egyptian media reported, reports Reuter.

The singer-composer moulded the traditional quarter-tone themes of classical Middle Eastern music with Western forms to turn out hundreds of romantic songs whose popularity remain unrivalled throughout the Arab world.

Newspapers and broadcasters said Abdel-Wahab complained of fatigue at around midnight on Friday. His wife, Nahla, called for an ambulance but by the time it arrived he had died.

His funeral will be held after the Muslim noon prayer on Sunday at the Omar Makram Mosque in the centre of Cairo.

## Turkish army denies seizing relief supplies

ANKARA, May 5: The Turkish army denied on Saturday its troops looted international relief supplies sent for Kurdish refugees, and issued a warning to foreign troops and foreign reporters operating on its soil, reports Reuter.

"The armed forces have never been involved in seizing any relief supplies distributed to the refugees," said a statement by General Husni Tolun, Secretary-General of the General Staff.

He said reporters to the contrary were "false, illusory and excessive" and had been investigated and found to be untrue.

Turkey on Friday ordered the expulsion of a British journalist, Robert Fisk of the Independent newspaper in London, because of a report in which he alleged Turkish troops looted supplies at the southeastern Yasilova refugee camp last Sunday.

The semi-official Anatolian news agency said on Saturday no visiting reporters from the Independent would be accredited in future because of an "untrue story about Turkish soldiers" the paper's permanent reporters in Turkey could stay, it added.

The newspaper's foreign editor Godfrey Hodgson said in a statement in London: "We naturally regret the Turkish government's decision."

## Off the Record

### Bush still keeps up humour in hospital

WASHINGTON: US President George Bush projected a chipper demeanour while hospitalized Saturday, watching a televised White House briefing on his condition and telephoning in to coach his spokesman through it, reports AP.

He earlier had told an aide to make sure his briefcase was put on Marine One, the helicopter flying him to the hospital, so he could work.

Bush's press secretary, Marlene Fitzwater, said he did not have the answer when a reporter asked how long Bush had been jogging before suffering the shortness of breath an irregular heartbeat.

A few minutes later, while still on camera, he was handed a note at the White House podium and announced:

"The president just called in to say that he was running or walking for about 35 to 40 minutes. Fitzwater added, laughing, "This doesn't mean you can all ask questions of the president and he'll call up and give you an answer."

Immediately after briefing reporters, Fitzwater was in his office taking another call from Bush.

"He said, Marlin, see if you can get me a two-week vacation out of this," Fitzwater quoted the president as joking.

He said the president told him, "I'm feeling great."

Fitzwater said Bush "was always alert and talking" throughout the incident.

Earlier, Bush was making jokes with the staff about trying to get back to jogging and hadn't finished his game.... the spokesman told reporters.

Press aide John Herrick, who was with Bush at the presidential retreat at Camp David when he fell ill, said Bush had instructed him to be sure and put the briefcase on the chopper because "he wanted to work on the helicopter."

Asked if the president had been feeling anxiety that might have brought on the condition, known as a trial fibrillation, Fitzwater equipped. "The president is calm, cool and collected, and never been anxious in his life."

## Trouble with a beard

COLOMBO: A Shia Muslim student, barred from school for wearing a beard, is now allowed to attend class following the settlement in court of a fundamental rights application, a press report said Saturday, reports AFP.

The state-run 'Daily News' reported that Khuzaima Hussain is permitted to attend Colombo International School with his beard after school authorities told the supreme court that a beard did not disqualify him from classes.

In a fundamental rights application filed by the boy's father, the petitioners said they belonged to the Shia Isma'ileya Dawoodi Sect and that Khuzaima Hussain began growing a beard as required by Sharia (Islamic) law.

The school told the student he could not attend classes wearing a beard, the newspaper said.

## Now Woody Allen's turn

ROME: Peter Falk had his chance in the produce aisle. Now it's Woody Allen's turn, reports AP.

Allen has signed a contract to make five commercials, said Tamara Palombi, communications director for the nationwide Coop chain of supermarkets.

Italian newspapers Saturday reported that Allen signed the contract via telefax Friday. Palombi said Allen will write and direct the spots but won't appear in them. The actors will be Americans with Italian-looking faces, she said.

The news reports said the contract is worth from 1.8 million dollars to 2.7 million dollars.

The cooperative chain once put Falk, in the rumpled raincoat he wears to play television's Lt. Colombo, in a popular of series of commercials. In them, he squeezed citrus fruit and asked shoppers for advice.

## BRIEFLY

**11 killed in Colombia:** Two soldiers and nine Leftist guerrillas were killed during different attacks in Colombia, an army spokesman said on Saturday, Reuter reports from Bogota.

The soldiers were killed by members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in Los Panchos, in the country's north west Friday, the spokesman said. He did not elaborate about how they were killed.

Nine rebels, belonging to the Simon Bolivar Guerilla Coordinate, were also killed on Friday during army anti-guerrilla operations in Meta, Putumayo Norte De Santander and Cesar provinces.

## PLO insists independent peace talk group:

A senior PLO official Saturday said his organization insists on appointing an independent Palestinian delegation to any Arab-Israeli peace talks, AP reports from Amman.

The statement could hamper the efforts of US Secretary of State James A. Baker, who is trying to lure Israel and the Arabs into talks.

US and Western officials have suggested that a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to talks might overcome Israel's refusal to talk with the Palestine Liberation Organization, which it considers a guerilla organization.

Israelis and Arabs also differ over how many outside powers should sponsor talks and what right they should have to intervene.

## PLO lifts arms from Beirut:

A radical Palestinian guerilla group said Saturday it had begun withdrawing its weapons from Beirut and north Lebanon in compliance with Lebanese government planes, Reuter reports from Damascus.

The popular front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, led by Ahmed Jibril, said in a statement it started removing weapons on Friday night. The Lebanese government, implementing an Arab-brokered peace plan to end 16 years of civil war, is deploying army units in place of militias which were disbanded under the plan.

## 5 killed in Latvia:

A gunman on Saturday shot and wounded the head of an elite Soviet police unit which killed five people in the Latvian Capital Riga in January, Tass news agency said. Reuter reports from Moscow.

The officer Cheslav Mlyshnik was shot through the right side of his chest. A hospital doctor, quoted by Tass said he was on a life-support system but was out of danger.

## Independent banned in Turkey:

A respected British newspaper said Sunday that its reporters have been banned from Turkey amid allegations they systematically distorted the truth, AP reports from London.

Turkish authorities expelled The Independent's award-winning Middle East correspondent, Robert Fisk, Friday. Authorities also told two of Fisk's colleagues and a freelance photographer working for The Independent that they were unwelcome.

This newspaper has systematically been writing stories against Turkey, distorting and twisting; reported that Turkish soldiers were pilfering Kurdish refugee aid. Peaking during a visit to Singapore, the Turkish president, Turgut Ozal, said Fisk's reports were untrue.

The Independent said it stood by the story and has asked the Foreign Office to take up the matter.

## 100 Soviet troops in Armenia:

Hundreds of Soviet army paratroopers arrived in the Armenian Capital Yerevan Saturday as Moscow warned Armenian leaders it would not tolerate escalating violence in the Republic, the Russian news agency RIA said, AFP reports from Moscow.

Reinforcements estimated at between 400 and 700 men arrived aboard 15 helicopters, the agency said, adding that they might be stationed at communist party buildings, including the central committee.

In Moscow, the Soviet Interior and Defence Ministries issued a joint statement warning that all necessary measures will be taken to avoid an escalation of violence, stop extremist action against the military and other officials and protect them against criminal attempts on their lives, and dignity.

The warning was addressed to Armenian extremists and leaders of Armenia.

## Toxic cloud in Mexico:

A series of explosions at chemical plant in Veracruz state released a toxic cloud that sickened at least 500 people and contaminated the local water supply, Red Cross officials said Saturday, AP reports from Mexico City.

Another 1,500 were evacuated from the densely populated area around the plant in Cordoba, 60 miles (95 kilometers) from the Gulf Coast port city of Veracruz, according to Victor Hugo Lopez, head of the local Red Cross.

He said a huge cloud of toxic gas hovered over the area after a final blast rocked the plant shortly after 1 am (0700 GMT) Saturday. The first explosion was 12 hours earlier, he said.



Iraq: A Kurdish family waits atop a pick-up truck upon their arrival at the Zhako refugee camp, northern Iraq from the Isiskevan camp, southern Turkey May 4, as refugees are relocated inside Iraq. — AFP photo

## Assam voters worried over Army presence

# Shekhar apprehends riots : 3 CPI campaigners killed

NEW DELHI, May 4: Gunmen killed three Communist Party workers and wounded 10 other people in violence ahead of this month's Indian general election, newspapers reported yesterday, reports Reuter.

They said the gunmen sprayed bullets at a jeep carrying Communist Party of India (CPI) campaigners near Ghazipur town, 300 km (185 miles) southeast of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh state on Friday.

Meanwhile, Indian news agencies quoted Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar as saying he feared Hindu-Muslim riots might break out ahead of the May 20, 23 and 26 polls.

The agencies said Shekhar accused the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of fanning religious passions in its maiden bid for power in India, where three quarters of the 850 million people are Hindu and 120 million are Muslim.

"If the BJP's communal trend persists, the country is doomed," Shekhar was quoted as telling reporters in Baghdad, in the far North of West Bengal state.

"In the event of communal violence breaking out just before the elections, the whole atmosphere will be vitiated," he was quoted as saying.

More than 2,000 people have died in the past 18 months in riots sparked by a BJP-backed campaign to claim the site of a mosque at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP says 16th century Muslim invaders razed a temple marking the birthplace of Hindu god-king Lord Rama to build the mosque. So far it has not played up the issue again in its electioneering.

Another report from Guwahati says: The delayed announcement of elections in

Assam, though described as desirable by almost all the political parties, found all of them in different stages of disarray in the face of the threat from the extremists. Even the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was no exception thanks to the inter-caste feud that has been eating into the vitals of the party for years and recently culminated in the formation of the reconstituted AGP.

The delay in the Centre's decision to hold the elections can be attributed to two principal reasons. Firstly, it was expecting an early military solution to the problem of extremism in the state which has not occurred. Two days after Operation Bajrang was launched and before his jaws could fire a single shot, at a press conference in the Raj Bhavan here, the GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, Lt Gen. K S Brar, assured newsmen that he was in possession of an unflinching intelligence resource base on the ULFA and "now rounding them all up was only

a question of time". This led to their total lack of confidence in the existing agencies which had been serving the state for decades.

But people in the state are very uncomfortable with the presence of the army in their midst. Frequent judicial interruptions with regard to allegations of atrocities on innocent citizens have also proved a stumbling block for the security forces, a problem they had not anticipated. Consequently, when in a fit of desperation, they launched Operation Sher-e-Dil in two Upper Assam districts in the second week of March, despite the ULFA ceasefire, and subsequently stage-managed a 'surrender ceremony' in Lakhimpur on the last day of the month, both proved counter-productive for the administration.

The alienation of the people was almost complete after these two abortive exercises and the Centre belatedly came to the conclusion that the extremists' popular support base was virtually indestructible by mere force and that the malaise could be remedied only by the people themselves.

Here again it was prevented from taking a decision by the attitude of most of the political parties. In their official statements they continued to urge early elections, albeit with a number of buts and ifs, so that peace and normalcy could be restored in the state, but, on the other hand, they did everything they could to stall the elections.

The Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, having the least at stake in Assam for his party, was able to make a more pragmatic assessment of the state's needs after interacting with different segments of the politically unattached population, in addition to the politicians during his six-hour visit to Guwahati on April 2.



Mahanta to sweep polls in Assam?