

Diplomatic Derby

UNITED NATIONS, June 18: An American TV commentator put his money this week on Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, the man in charge of UN Refugee Operations in and around Iraq, to become the next UN Chief, reports Reuter.

Next day, a British newspaper reported that former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher would get the job.

Welcome to the diplomatic Derby, where everyone tries to figure the odds on who will be the next United Nations Secretary-General.

The list of candidates, declared and undeclared, is already well above the 30 mark.

They range from former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to former Nigerian President Obasanjo and from Zimbabwe's Finance Minister Bernard Chidzero to Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland.

Some tipsters say don't rule

out the possibility that Javier Perez de Cuellar, the incumbent, might agree to serve at least a year of two longer, if not a full five-year term.

This is the final year of his second term in the 195,000 dollars a year post. If re-elected, the Peruvian career diplomat would celebrate his 72nd birthday shortly after being sworn in again early next January.

Despite a quadruple coronary bypass operation in 1986 and a punishing work load, especially since the start of the Gulf crisis, he is believed to be in good health.

According to Article 97 of the UN Charter, a Secretary-General is "appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council," giving particular clout to the council's five permanent, veto-bearing members — the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, China and France.

Bid to downplay casualties : Rebels Kabul throws bodies of 350 troops in to river

PESHAWAR, (Pakistan), June 18 : The Afghan resistance accused the Kabul government Monday of throwing the bodies of 350 government troops killed in recent fighting into a river to downplay casualties and avoid demoralizing troops, reports AFP.

The 350 bodies were "thrown in the Hari Rud River by the regime in order to avoid demoralization of its troops" and to disguise the number of casualties, the Pakistan based resistance news agency Midia said.

Mujahedeen resistance guerrillas found the bodies Saturday "in the Pashtoon area of Ghurian district" in Herat Province, near the Iranian border, it said.

The government militiamen died in clashes that began in early May in the Ghurian and Zindajan regions, Midia said, quoting the main resistance commander in the area, Ismael Khan.

According to Khan, the Mujahedeen launched a series of attacks Friday on the Zindajan region, forcing government troops to retreat after losing 15 dead and 11 seriously wounded.

Another 15 government militiamen died from snafus along the Hari Rud River, while four were killed by a rocket fired accidentally by their own men, Khan was quoted as saying.

The Mujahedeen Commander last month managed to escape a government dragnet after troops took control of several important resistance positions in the region.

Kabul forces have subjected parts of the region to have bombardments since May 4, forcing 30,000 civilians to take refuge near the Iranian border amid food and water shortages, the sources said.

Another hung parliament likely

Secular parties soften stand towards Cong-I

NEW DELHI, June 18: India's secular parties early Tuesday softened their stand towards helping Congress (I) form a government as latest poll results indicated another hung parliament, reports AFP.

The possible allies, both leftist and centrist, said their support would be issue-based. In an obvious move to keep out the Hindu hardline Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) which was running second.

Hectic discussions continued early Tuesday as the parties indicated their willingness to examine possible alignments and wash away worries of yet another national election.

Latest counts put the Congress(I) in the lead with 205 of the 395 seats declared at 1130 hrs (1st) — still short of a clear majority.

The Congress (I) has also yet to choose a leader to steer the 106-year-old orphaned party of slain former Premier Rajiv Gandhi.

The rival BJP's tally of 91 seats had prompted the Congress (I) to discuss the post-election scenario and the question of possible allies.

"We took stock of the post election situation. After the election process is over, may be later Tuesday, we may decide the entire issue (of leadership and coalitions)", Congress (I) spokesman Ghulam Nabi Azad said in reply to questions.

"There is no dearth of leadership in the party and it will soon decide on the issue," said Congress (I) leader N K P Salve, refuting charges that the May 21 assassination of Gandhi had left it rudderless.

Jyoti Basu, Chief minister of West Bengal, who swept the polls in his Marxist-ruled state for the fourth time in 14 years, said his communist Party of



Jyoti—Throwing lot with Congress?

India (Marxist) had been "contacted by the Congress (I)".

"The Congress (I) is important, the opposition is important... we must have discussions," Basu said. The CPI-M has so far bagged 28 seats.

"We are going to New Delhi and our politburo is meeting," The charismatic Basu, a spry

77, said as his party swept back into the West Bengal State Legislature in simultaneous balloting for its 42 federal seats.

"India is today bankrupt. To get out of this serious situation we, the opposition, and the Congress (I) must sit together".

His party colleague Harkishan Singh Surjit said the CPI-M was sure that President Ramaswamy Venkataraman would ask the Congress (I) to form a government and hinted his party would not balk at extending support.

The slaying of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi won votes for his Congress party, according to an analysis Monday of ballots cast before and after his death.

The timing of the Congress leader's assassination on May 21 offered a unique chance to study its impact on the voter. The first round of the three-stage vote was held the day before his death, and the two subsequent rounds were held three weeks later.

Prannoy Roy, the election analyst of Indian television, said three of India's 25 states went to the polls both before and after the killing.

In Rajasthan, Congress support was 1.6 per cent higher than in the previous election in 1989 in districts that voted on May 20. But it was 14.3 per cent higher than in 1989 in

the western part of the state which voted last week.

In Madhya Pradesh, first-round Congress support grew by 4.8 per cent over 1989. Second-round support was up by 10.5 per cent.

In Uttar Pradesh, where Congress lost heavily, support dropped by 14.5 per cent on the first day, but only by 5.1 per cent in later voting, Roy said.

Political leaders have said they thought Gandhi's assassination prompted many voters to support Congress out of sympathy for the slain leader's colleagues. But Roy said the explanation probably was the turnout, which was 7 to 8 per cent higher in the later voting.

Sikhs kill 24th candidate in Punjab

NEW DELHI, June 18 : A powerful bomb set off by Sikh separatists Tuesday killed the 24th election candidate in the Indian state of Punjab, news reports said, reports AFP.

Shaminder Singh, a nominee of the moderate Sikh Akali Dal Party who was contesting for a seat in Federal Parliament, was killed instantly when a bomb exploded in his house in Muktsar area, PTI said.

Gunmen kill judge trying Asif Zardari in court

KARACHI, June 18: Masked gunmen shot and killed today a senior Pakistani Judge trying the Husband of former Premier Benazir Bhutto, reports Reuter.

Police said Judge Nabi Sher Junejo and two others were killed when gunmen opened fire with assault rifles inside a Karachi court building.

"It was an act of terrorists", a police official said.

The two others killed were identified as Junejo's guard and driver.

Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, who is being held in custody while on trial, was not at the court building where Junejo had gone to meet colleagues.

The special anti-terrorist court which is trying Zardari for conspiracy to kill 30 people last August is in a separate building some distance from the scene of the killing.

Judge Junejo's special court, set up last year to tackle southern Pakistan's rising crime rate, sentenced four young men to death in March for killing a policeman and robbery.

Zardari faces about 10 cases registered Ghulam Ishaq Khan last August on disputed corruption charges.

Bhutto, now Opposition leader, faces nine cases that could result in her being barred from parliament if convicted.

AFP reports: Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto demanded in Parliament Monday



ISLAMABAD: Former premier Benazir Bhutto talks June 12 with colleagues of the People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) about a "white paper" the party released shortly after denouncing frauds in last October's general elections. Bhutto warned the ruling Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI) June 17 in the National Assembly against her public conviction (she has been charged with 8 counts of corruption) and demanded the government's resignation on alleged rigging of the October 1990 polls.

the government's resignation (PDA) was robbed of victory in the polls, she said 70 members of the ruling Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI) were "stranger." They have entered the

BRIEFLY

Iraq releases British engineer: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Monday released a British engineer sentenced to life in prison by an Iraqi court for spying, Britain's news agency Press Association reported, says Reuter from London.

It said Saddam ordered the release of Douglas Brand after the intervention of former British Prime Minister Edward Heath who met the Iraqi President on a peace mission last year before the Gulf war.

"I hope this will be seen as a step forward in resolving the post-war problems between our two countries," Heath told the Press Association.

Volcanic ash reaches Singapore: Volcanic ash from Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines is believed to have reached Singapore, reports AFP from Singapore.

The government radio today said that many people found white spots on their vehicles after it rained Monday afternoon, and that this morning many vehicles were covered with a thin layer of ash.

The meteorological service said it was possible for the volcanic ash to reach Singapore even though the island is now experiencing the southwest monsoon.

Yilmaz new Turkish Premier: President Turgut Ozal on Monday appointed Mesut Yilmaz, the new chairman of the governing Motherland Party, to become premier and form Turkey's next government, reports AP from Ankara.

Yilmaz, 44, a former foreign minister, forced Yildirim Akbulut to resign as premier by defeating him at a party vote Saturday. The change in party leadership was seen as an attempt to reverse the Motherland's sinking fortunes.

The party swept to power in 1983 with a reform programme but has steadily lost popularity because of recurring corruption scandals and high inflation, now running at around 70 per cent.

Peace talks hit snag in Ireland: Landmark peace talks on the future of northern Ireland hit a new snag today when Protestant unionist Ian Paisley asked for more time before agreeing to a chairman for the ground-breaking negotiations, reports Reuter from Belfast.

Just as the historic talks were due to start, Paisley left because he wanted to check further on the qualifications of former Australian governor-general Sir Ninian Stephen, unionist sources said.

The unionists said they were urgently checking with their contacts in Australia before agreeing to the appointment of the former diplomat and high court judge.

US to back Albania to join CSCE: US Secretary of State James Baker said on Monday he would back Albania's application to join the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), reports Reuter from Berlin.

Briefing reporters after arriving for a foreign ministerial meeting of the CSCE, Baker also defended plans to visit Yugoslavia at a politically sensitive time.

He said it would be a mistake if Washington did not make a dramatic gesture to underscore support for Yugoslav unity.

Baker said the United States and most European allies were convinced that only a united Yugoslavia would be able to respect human rights and move to a market economy.

Germany, Poland sign friendship treaty: Germany and Poland signed a treaty of friendship Monday aimed at finally putting behind them the horrors of World War Two and the legacy of bitterness it left, reports Reuter from Bonn.

"We are hereby visibly advancing the work of understanding and reconciliation between our nations and peoples, Chancellor Helmut Kohl said before he and Polish Prime Minister Jan Krzysztof Bielecki signed the accord in Bonn.

Under the treaty on good neighbourliness and friendly co-operation, the two countries pledge never to use force against one another. Germany recognises Poland's post-war borders and Poland agrees to respect the rights of its German-speaking minority.

Off the Record

Liz blasts US stand on entry of AIDS patients

FLORENCE, Italy: Actress Elizabeth Taylor, a long-time campaigner for AIDS victims, said on Monday that US regulations barring entry to AIDS-infected foreigners were like a throw-back to the Nazi era, reports Reuter.

"If you start stamping people's passports you hark back to Nazi Germany," the 59-year-old screen star told a news conference in Florence, where the seventh international AIDS conference is underway.

The United States has been excluding foreigners known to be suffering from AIDS/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome for four years.

"If you start categorising people like this and putting them in concentration camps you might as well put a number on their arms," said Taylor, Founding Chairman of the American Foundation for AIDS Research.

Announcing a new fund-raising initiative, she said she would travel to Indonesia in August to help Asian groups seek western funding for their efforts to help AIDS victims.



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Britain can go to hell: Gaddafi

LONDON : Libyan leader Col Moammar Gaddafi, who last month made overtures to Britain in a bid to restore diplomatic links, said Monday night that Britain can go to hell, Libyan television reported, reports AP.

"To hell with Britain and relations with it until the day of judgement. To hell with America and Britain," Gaddafi said in a speech at a session of the Libyan General People's Congress.

The speech was carried by Libyan television. Parts of a transcript of the broadcast were issued by monitors in Britain.

Britain cut diplomatic links with Libya in 1984 after a policewoman was killed and 11 people injured when gunmen inside the Libyan embassy in London opened fire on Libyan exiles holding an anti-Gaddafi demonstration outside.

The Libyan government extended feelers to Britain last month through British legislator Edward Taylor, who met with Gaddafi during a 10-day visit.

Taylor said he had brought back several secret proposals, plus a letter of regret and check for 250,000 pounds (405,000 dollars) for the killing of the policewoman.

Arsenic stays in body over centuries

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky: If President Zachary Taylor was poisoned with arsenic, researchers will be able to find it in his remains even though he died nearly 1-2 centuries ago, reports AP.

Once a person is poisoned with arsenic, it stays in the body, said Dr Harrell Hurst, associate professor of pharmacology and toxicology at the University of Louisville School of Medicine.

It could be detected in a fingernail, a fragment or bone or other tissue.

Finding it involves the use of chemical procedures that convert the arsenic into compounds that absorb light in different wave lengths, Hurst said.

"There would be some sort of a threshold level of arsenic in each of us, but in poisoning cases it is overwhelmingly large in relation to the normal background levels," said Hurst, who is not a member of the team examining Taylor's remains.

"It's a metal very much like many of the elements that make up the body, but is not one of the normal ones we have," said Hurst.

"It can be converted from one form to another but can't really be destroyed."

Burglars criticise security steps

OSLO : Burglars broke into a military warehouse early Monday and returned ammunition they had stolen a day before. They left a note criticizing security at the depot, reports AP.

"Sorry if there is any damage to the material. You really must improve the security on the door," said a note left on the ammunition.

The note did not say why the five cases of ammunition and four antitank rockets were taken and returned. Security at national ammunition stores have been criticized following a rash of weapons thefts.

Nicholv Olsen of the Strand and Forsand sheriff's office near Stavanger in western Norway said thieves used dynamite Sunday to blast a hole in a secluded warehouse of the Home Guard, a domestic defense organization.

70 Egyptians held in Kuwait

CAIRO, June 18: Kuwait has arrested some 70 Egyptians on charges of illegally entering the Emirate and cooperating with Iraqi Occupation Forces, a senior Kuwaiti official said here, reports AFP.

Kuwait's Interior Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Hamoud Al-Jaber, whose statement was reported Tuesday in the Egyptian press following a visit to Kuwait by Egyptian journalists, said the charges would be legally verified and the names of the defendants conveyed to the Egyptian government.

He denied reports that 300 Egyptians were in Kuwaiti jails.

Last March, the Arab Organization for Human Rights said 300 Egyptian nationals accused of collaborating with the Iraqi occupiers in Kuwait had been arrested.

A Martial law court in Kuwait has been handing down death sentences to convicted

collaborators, most of whom have been foreigners.

The Kuwaiti Interior Minister admitted that some of the defendants had been abused, adding that "all cases are currently in the hands of the law."

Sheikh Ahmad said that Human Rights Organisations were misled by deceptive information in certain newspapers on mistreatment of detainees in Kuwait.

Reiterating that her People's Democratic Alliance



MOSCOW: A dwelling in the town of Taireteli wrecked by the earthquake. — Novosti photo

117,000 Iranian pilgrims fly to Saudi Arabia Hardliners call for anti-US demonstration during Hajj

NICOSIA, June 18 : As Iran completed the task of flying some 117,000 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia for the annual Muslim pilgrimage, a leading Iranian hard-liner called for anti-US demonstrations during the ceremonies, reports AP.

In 1987, Saudi police tried to stop a political demonstration by Iranian pilgrims, leading to clashes and the death of 402 pilgrims, most of them Iranians. Saudi-Iranian relations had only recently been repaired.

Mohammad Mahmoudi Reyshahri denounced the United States as an "arch-Satan", and said if Muslims failed to denounce it they would be shirking their religious duties, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported from Mecca.

The agency, monitored in Nicosia, said Reyshahri was speaking at a seminar on the Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

"All Muslims should participate in the ceremonies marking a declaratory denunciation of the worldly Satans of our time ... and the United States is the arch-Satan of the entirety of all world Satans," IRNA quoted Reyshahri as saying.

Demonstrations are a touchy issue between Tehran and Riyadh.

The Saudis broke diplomatic ties with Tehran after the 1987 Hajj. Iran boycotted the Hajj until relations were restored in March.

The Tehran government, which is steadily trying to improve ties with Riyadh and the rest of the Arab world, would like the Hajj to be trouble-free.

But Reyshahri and other hard-line opponents of President Hashemi Rafsanjani have insisted on the demonstrations.

Riyadh has agreed to let the Iranians stage protests, but only in their living compounds, on the outskirts of Mecca.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, who will perform the Hajj with the Iranian contingent, is seen as a counterweight to Reyshahri's attempts to agitate the pilgrims.

Meanwhile, Saudi officials said Monday that the last pilgrims have reached the kingdom.

Authorities in Saudi Arabia had fixed the 4th of the current Muslim month of Zuhl Hijja, corresponding to June 16, as the final date for the arrival of pilgrims by land, sea and air.

Sami Soliman Maqbul, director general of Jiddah's King Abdul Aziz International Airport, put the total of those who arrived by air at 588,000 pilgrims.

The pilgrims were airlifted by 1,724 flights of various airlines, he said.

The Haj flights from all over the world terminated late Sunday evening. The last flight to arrive was a Saudi flight from Casablanca, Morocco.

The total for those participating in the annual Hajj are announced with the climax of the rituals, set for Friday.

The pilgrimage to Islam's holiest shrines at Mecca and Medina is a once-a-lifetime obligation for able-bodied Muslims.

Another report from Jiddah says, the last Muslim pilgrims from around the world have reached the kingdom to perform Hajj, which climaxes this week, officials announced Monday.