

Cholera breaks out in Kurdish refugee camp

PARIS, May 4: A hundred Kurds at the Turkish refugee camp of Cukurca have been treated for cholera in the past week, an international medical charity said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) doctor Philippe Biberon said samples analysed in Paris had confirmed the presence of cholera, and doctors in the mountain camp were also treating several patients for suspected typhoid. "Inevitably we're going to see cases of typhoid. There's the whole spectrum of intestinal infections at Cukurca," he said.

AIDS cases rise by 14,000 in April

GENEVA, May 4: Officially-reported cases of the fatal disease AIDS rose by nearly 14,000 in April, reaching a global total of 359,271 cases in 162 countries, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Friday, reports Reuter. Uganda signalled the biggest individual rise with 4,297 new cases raising its total to 21,719, the highest in Africa. The jump reflected reports delayed since Uganda's last previous notification in June last year, WHO said the new tally covered the period up to the end of 1990.

Cases registered in the United States increased by 4,073 to total 171,876. Europe reported 2,967 new cases, with France accounting for 1,304, raising its tally to 14,449, the highest on the continent.

Pledge to protect Muslims, end communal violence

Desperate Congress bid to neutralise Imam Bukhari

NEW DELHI, May 4: The Congress (I) Friday reaffirmed its commitment to the welfare of minorities and inclusion of socially and educationally backward among them in the list of backward classes, reports PTL.

The Congress (I) reiteration came within hours of Imam Bukhari pledging support to the Janata Dal and the left parties in the coming elections.

An AICC-I release promised to give statutory status to the Minorities Commission review of the Waqf Act of 1954, raise a composite rapid action force to quell communal riots, operate special courts to try communal offences and identify riot-prone areas.

Another reports says Scorpions will not crawl nor serpents slither across newspaper pages this time round. The mood of fierce aggressiveness that had characterised the Congress (I)'s 1989 election campaign is diluted, palpably, to one of hesitancy. A mood of tentativeness has gripped the party. And caution is the keyword.

The difference is evident. The confidence of 1989 has given way to confusion. In fact, the Congress (I) is yet to find an answer to the electorally-lethal Mandal and Mandir missiles. Even Congress (I) leaders admit these two issues have penetrated deep into the popular psyche. "We are not against Mandal," hedges party General Secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad. "Our state gov-

ernments in the south ensured 60 per cent reservations." He adds defiantly: "The custodian of the backwards is not V P Singh but the Congress (I)." For all the bluster, however, it is too late in the day for the Congress (I) to cash in on the reservation issue.

The party's stand on the Mandir issue is equally ambivalent. It is not quite sure on which side of the Ayodhya shrine it should sit. With the Muslims still alienated from the Congress (I), Rajiv is not confident of taking the BJP bull by its horns if that means distancing upper caste Hindus as well. Thus, already in the thick of electioneering, Rajiv is still unsure about the efficacy of the issues he is raising.

In the midst of this dilemma, the only feasible electoral plank left for party strategist is stability. They are projecting Rajiv as the "only choice". And the party president himself emphasises that after the Janata Dal fiasco, it is only the Congress (I) monolith under him that can provide stability. To his credit, he has proved that even without the trappings of power, he has retained his crowd-pulling ability. He has already addressed huge rallies in half-a-dozen states.

But fresh trouble is cropping up for him. Banst Lal's expulsion from the party and his subsequent alignment with the National Front have made all 10 Haryana seats unsafe for the Congress (I). In Gujrat, the BJP is making political capital of M J Akbar's controversial remarks about Sardar Patel in a recent book. Says a senior Congress (I) leader: "Local sentiments are being aroused on the plea that the Congress (I) has failed to condemn Patel's humiliation."

Clearly, it's not going to be plain sailing for the Congress (I). The party is considering modifying its stand on the crucial issue of reservations in its election manifesto. The manifesto — much slimmer than the last time's unwieldy 64



pages — will highlight four major points: stability, employment, price rise and India's diminishing prestige in the international arena. It is, however, doubtful whether any of these issues will prove powerful enough to counter the BJP's Hindu nationalism or VP Singh's caste-based reservations.

That Rajiv is finding the going tough is apparent from his move to woo both Mulayam Singh Yadav and Chimanbhai Patel. Had he been reasonably

certain of popular support in Uttar Pradesh, he would not have gone out of his way to befriend Yadav in the face of stiff opposition from senior party leaders.

One positive outcome of this sense of emervation is that Rajiv is depending more on seasoned party hands instead of on personal friends. This time, there is no Mani Shankar Aiyer fixing his itinerary. It's political secretary, Jeetendra Prasad, who is preparing his tour programme, based on

suggestions by state party leaders. Former finance minister, Pranab Mukherjee, apart from being involved in drafting the manifesto, is also advising Rajiv on economic issues. And AICC (I) general secretaries are holding talks with state leaders about candidate selection.

The party's decision to decentralise the entire publicity business has also curbed the influence of Rajiv groupies like Visvajit Prithvijit Singh and SS Ahluwalia.

6 lakh Iraqi Shi'ites heading for Iran

UNITED NATIONS, May 4: A UN report said Friday that as many as 600,000 Iraqi Shi'ite Muslims may be moving into Iraq where more than 1 million Iraqi refugees already have fled, reports AP.

A report by the UN Disaster Relief Organization, UNDRO, said that as of April 29 there were 1,042,969 Iraqi refugees inside Iran. But it said the UN is planning to deal with 1,300,000 because lines of refugees were waiting to enter Iran.

In addition, it said UNDRO may have to increase its capacity even further "if the indications of a possible influx of 600,000 internally displaced Shi'a into Khuzistan from southern Iraq are confirmed." It said the United Nations is running 64 refugee camps inside Iran.

The Shi'ites have been fleeing into Iran, a predominantly Shi'ite Muslim country, after Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein crushed their revolt in southern Iraq.

Shi'ites in the south and Kurds in the north rebelled against Saddam following Iraq's crushing defeat in the Gulf War, but Baghdad has been

able to suppress the rebellions, forcing hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee to Iran and Turkey.

Reuter from Nicosia says: Iran, swamped by over one million Iraqi refugees, said on Friday foreign countries had sent just six tonnes of food — five grammes per refugee — in response to its appeals for help.

Some of the food was rotten and had to be destroyed and Iran was compiling a list of countries who had sent such aid and used items, for which the world should be ashamed.

Health officials quoted by the Iranian news agency Irna said tinned wheat bran sent by Germany for the refugees smelled sour and was not usable.

One thousand five hundred cans of fish with a production date of February 1984, sent by an unspecified western country, were destroyed, they said.

"Despite widespread propaganda, foreign countries have provided the refugees with little help," Irna quoted Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri as saying "the world ought to be ashamed of its insignificant assistance of the Iraqi refugees."

Tory setback may hasten elections

LONDON, May 4: Stunning opposition victories Friday in local elections shook the Conservative Party's 12-year grip on power and dashed the likelihood of early parliamentary elections, reports AP.

Battered Conservatives blamed their trouncing in local elections on the recession and on the so-called poll tax imposed under Margaret Thatcher's government.

Prime Minister John Major, who hastily disowned the tax after the party dumped Mrs. Thatcher in November, said the results were "quite disappointing."

"But I think there's a great deal to look forward to. ... We are on an upswing and they have peaked," he said in a television interview, referring to the main opposition Labour Party.

At stake in the Thursday polling were seats in 369 local councils. Labour gained control of 17 new councils, for a total of 127. The Conservatives lost control of 42 councils and gained control of three others, leaving them with 80 councils.

The Liberal Democrats also won control of 17 councils. The rest of the councils do not have a majority of seats held by

any party. Overall, the Conservatives lost 17 per cent of their seats, while Labour showed a 15-per cent gain and the Liberal Democrats had a 31-per cent gain.

The opposition drive into Conservative strongholds included the genteel coastal town of Eastbourne, which went to the Liberal Democrats, and the naval base of Plymouth, which swung socialist after 25 years of Tory control.

In the industrial belt of central England, droves of skilled blue-collar workers who voted Conservative in the Thatcher decade of the 80s turned back to Labour. The Socialist Party's prize there included the city of Nottingham.

The results of the voting appeared to stymie any hopes major had of following Mrs. Thatcher's practice of calling a general election every four years — a year before the deadline — and winning.

Observers believe he will now likely wait until the autumn when inflation is expected to fall by half to 4 per cent and mortgage rates, painfully increased as part of an anti-inflationary squeeze, will be down.

BRIEFLY

Cholera kills 7 in Colombia

Cholera killed seven people in Colombia and another 434 have been infected with the disease that first appeared in Colombia two months ago in the Pacific town of Lumaco, the Health Ministry reported Friday in Bogota, says AFP. Doctors who visited Lumaco speculated that because of the region's poor sanitation facilities the epidemic would soon reach Buenaventura, Colombia's principal port about 400 kilometres (250 miles) away and about the same distance from Bogota. The team of doctors also predicted that despite the efforts of the Colombian government to prevent the outbreak of cholera in Lumaco on March 11 from taking root, it will become an epidemic.

4 members of MSF wounded in Lanka

Four members of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) were shot and wounded in northern Sri Lanka on Friday, the International Medical Charity said in a statement, Reuter reports from Paris. The Paris based organisation said the four were driving between Mannar and Vavuniya in a clearly marked car at the time of the attack. The wounded were taken to the capital Colombo and will be flown to Paris this weekend. No further details of the incident were immediately available.

Hurd in Saudi Arabia

British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd arrived in this western Saudi Port City late Friday on the last leg of a regional tour for discussions on the Middle East peace process and post-Gulf War era, AFP reports from Jeddah. Hurd, who flew in from Kuwait previously visited Egypt and Jordan.

16 killed in S. Africa violence

At least 16 people were killed in Soweto Black township near Johannesburg Friday in continuing clashes between rival black factions, police said, AFP reports from Johannesburg. Police found five bodies on Friday afternoon near a male migrant workers hostel in Soweto's Dube district, one of the main flashpoints in clashes that began on May 1, police spokesman Captain Joseph Ngobeni said. Capt Ngobeni said late Friday that the situation in Soweto was calm but tense. The death toll in Soweto after three days of fighting, mainly between supporters of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) and the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party has now risen to 39, police said.

Texas A-and-M to get Bush papers

George Bush will establish his presidential library on the campus of Texas A-and-M University at College Station, Texas, the White House announced Friday, AP reports from Washington. Spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said library will be financed entirely by non-federal funds raised by the university. Selection of Texas A-and-M follows "an extensive review of various library proposals by the archivist of the United States, Don W. Wilson," said the White House statement. Fitzwater told reporters Bush intends to take part in the activities of the library and will maintain offices there after he leaves the presidency.

Cheney to visit Gulf States

Defence Secretary Dick Cheney will visit Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States next week for high level talks on post-war security in the region, the Pentagon announced on Friday, Reuter reports from Washington. The four-day visit beginning on Monday will be Cheney's first to the Gulf since the war ended and his fifth trip to the area since Iraq invaded Kuwait last August 2. He will also go to Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar. The purpose of the trip is to discuss post-war security arrangements with governments in the region, the defence department said in a brief statement.

Former Guatemalan Air Force Head shot dead

The former head of the Guatemalan Air Force was shot dead by unknown assailants outside a relative's house on Thursday night, authorities said, Reuter reports from Guatemala City. A military communique said the killing of retired General Anacleto Maza, 53, was a common crime and not politically motivated. Press reports said the assailants stole the victim's car after shooting him.



HOLLYWOOD: Larry Hagman as J. R. Ewing (second from left) performs the final scene from the long-running hit series, "Dallas" aired May 3. In a scene reminiscent of Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life," Hagman stands before his "angel," Joel Grey (L) while looking at Patrik Duffy, (R) who plays his brother Bobby, and Kim Ulrich. — AFP/UNB photo.

Madonna can't sing, says Michael Jackson

NEW YORK, May 4: Singer Michael Jackson is the latest celebrity to get the unauthorised biography treatment, with a 625-page book that details the alleged bad blood between the gloved one and superstars Prince and Madonna, reports AP. "Michael Jackson: The Magic and the Madness" deals with the acclaimed performer's life from his birth, touching on his surgeries (six nose jobs, a cleft chin) and his sex life (not much of one).

Author J. Randy Taraborrelli, whose last biography targeted Diana Ross, focuses on her Motown protégé instead this time around. The author conducted more than 400 interviews, including three with Jackson, for the book. Jackson may have accompanied Madonna to the recent Academy Awards ceremony, but Taraborrelli writes that he has little regard for her abilities. "She just isn't that good. Let's face it, she can't sing and she's just an OK dancer," Jackson is quoted as saying in the book. "What does she do best? She knows how to market herself. That's it."

Jackson was also jealous at the acclaim Madonna received as "artist of the decade" in 1989, and arranged for MTV to present him with his own artist of the '80s award. "That'll teach the heifer," Jackson reportedly said. He also used the bovine insult against interviewer Barbara Walters, who mentioned Jackson's plastic surgery in a television report. "She's got her nerve. Look at all the surgery she's had," Jackson is quoted as saying.



Madonna

Venkataraman gives blanket protection to security forces

NEW DELHI, May 4: India's President has given blanket protection from prosecution by state authorities to security forces accused of committing human rights abuses in areas facing nationalist rebellions, reports AP.

President Ramaswami Venkataraman promulgated an ordinance Thursday requiring approval by federal authorities before any disciplinary action is taken against a public servant when an area is under federal rule.

The ordinance was intended to protect police and paramilitary forces in the troubled states of Punjab, Assam and Jammu-Kashmir who fear retribution once new state governments are elected to replace federal authority.

Punjab and Assam are due to hold election in June, following national elections for a new Parliament, while federal rule will remain in effect in Kashmir.

Punjab, where Sikh extremists have been campaigning to secede from India, has been under federal rule since 1987. The local government in Assam was suspended earlier this year when the army was sent to the far eastern state to suppress an ethnic Assamese rebellion.

The ordinance covers any public servant "while acting or purporting to act in the discharge of his official duty."

Bush, Gorbachev to meet before middle of this yr

HELSENKI, May 4: US President George Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev may meet before the middle of this year, a senior Soviet official said Friday, reports Reuter.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Vitaly Churkin said their meeting planned for earlier this had been postponed, not cancelled.

Whenever the two Presidents decide they will meet they will do so, he said at an informal news conference, suggesting they might get together in the first half of this year.

He said an understanding that Bush should not be absent from the United States during the Gulf War had been one reason for the postponement of the meeting.

Off the Record

"I'm not articulate," says Bush

WASHINGTON: President George Bush has not read a new book about his handling of the Gulf crisis, but he did sign a copy of it on Friday, reports Reuter.

Bush returning on Friday from a speech making trip to St Louis Missouri, was given a copy of the book by Washington Post editor Bob Woodward to sign for a reporter.

He walked behind a tree and wrote this inscription "Don't believe the quotes attributed to me, I'm not that articulate."

The author, who gained fame with his reports on "Watergate" that led to the resignation of former President Richard Nixon, alleges in the commanders, that some of Bush's top aides preferred economic sanctions to war against Iraq but that Bush overruled them.

180 pounds ovarian cyst

BALTIMORE: Doctors at Johns Hopkins Hospital removed a 180-pound (81-kilogram) ovarian cyst from a 40-year-old West Virginia woman, a hospital spokeswoman said, reports AP.

The patient was in guarded but stable condition Friday, said hospital spokeswoman Meg Kabis. Thursday's 10-hour operation was led by Dr. John Currie, director of gynecologic oncology at Hopkins.

"That is abnormally, abnormally abnormal," said Dr. Raymond Kaufman, chairman of the obstetrics-gynecology department of Baylor College of Medicine in Madison, Texas. "That's rarity."

There are different types of ovarian cysts, but unless the patient is extremely obese, most can be detected with a pelvic exam when they are 3 or 4 centimeters in diameter and "a couple of grams" in weight, he said.

Experts scramble for Lincoln's hair

WASHINGTON: A panel of experts endorsed on Thursday an effort to clone genetic material from fragments of Abraham Lincoln's hair, blood and skull dating back to his assassination 126 years ago, reports Reuter.

Scientists want to clone some of Lincoln's cells to determine whether the former President suffered from an inherited disease called Marfan's Syndrome.

But the experiment could set a precedent for molecular studies on historical figures that could determine their susceptibility to inherited disease and, ultimately, personality traits that may have influenced their decisions.

The Lincoln material is appropriate, "Dr Victor McKusick, the panel's Chairman, told reporters. The fragments of Lincoln's hair, blood and skull are now stored in the National Museum of Health and Medicine here. The final decision on whether to begin the experiment will be up to the Board of Governors of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, chaired by Dr Enrique Mendez, Assistant Secretary of Defence for Health Affairs. The National Museum is a component of the Institute.