

BRIEFLY

US military aid to Kenya to remain frozen : The United States will continue to freeze military aid to Kenya until it sees irreversible improvement in the human rights situation in the African country, a state department official said, reports Reuter from Washington.

The United States originally halted 10 million dollars in 1990 military aid to register disapproval of its human rights practices.

It released half of that amount when Kenya took steps to improve its human rights record, and was helpful in U. S. Embassy evacuations from Somalia and the Sudan and aided Libya Sin Chand who had opposed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Algeria not keen on N-bomb : Algeria's nuclear research programme is not aimed at developing an atom bomb, Prime Minister Mouloud Hamrouche was quoted on Thursday as saying, reports Reuter from Paris.

A country can be developed economically, socially and culturally without having the atom bomb. That is my concept and that of all those who make decisions in Algeria, Hamrouche said in an interview published by the Paris daily Le Monde.

Last month, the Washington Post said US intelligence had established that a nuclear reactor Algeria was constructing in cooperation with China would eventually be capable of producing fuel for nuclear weapons.

Gorbachev bans strike : Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev issued a decree on Thursday banning strikes in key sectors of the economy and introducing a range of incentives to revive the country's sagging industrial production, reports Reuter from Moscow.

The decree, read on state television, said anyone organising work stoppages in the energy, chemical and metallurgical industries could face criminal prosecution.

It also gave basic industries greater control over production revenue, allowing them to retain 10 per cent for their own use.

Bush invites Jordan to ME confce : President George Bush invited Jordan's King Hussein to join a Middle East Peace Conference but received no response, the White House announced Thursday, reports AFP from Washington.

Bush called the King Wednesday, when the two leaders talked for the first time since their meeting in Kennebunkport, Maine, last August, relations had soured over Jordan's support for Iraq during the Gulf War.

The President, who was to be briefed today by Secretary of State James Baker on his return from Middle East, wanted to assure the King "that we were committed to the peace process in the Middle East and hopeful they would be equally committed and would support the peace conference proposal," spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said.

Strike in Polish copper mines : A strike in Poland's copper mines continued for a third day on Thursday after talks on demands for a 100 per cent pay increase collapsed, an official of the state copper industry said, reports Reuter from Warsaw.

Henryk Karas, manager of the Rudna mine where the strike began on Tuesday, said the strikers rejected a management call to resume work after a delegation returned empty-handed, on Wednesday from talks with Industry Ministry officials in Warsaw.

He said the strikers wanted to take over management of the four state-owned mines until the end of the strike but the demand was rejected.

Kuwait to try 200 'collaborators' : A court in Kuwait city is to begin hearing evidence Sunday against the first of an estimated 200 people accused of having collaborated with the Iraqis during the occupation of Kuwait, Justice ministry sources said Thursday, reports AFP from Kuwait.

But they said the trials which were to have begun Saturday, could also start with some of the several hundred other defendants charged with non-political criminal offenses under the occupation.

Those accused of actively conspiring with the Iraqis are to be tried under martial law regulations, which have been in effect since the liberation of Kuwait February 28.

Sudanese rebels call for talks : Rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) called Thursday on the Sudanese government to join in peace talks in a neutral country to settle the current civil war, reports AFP from Nairobi.

In a surprise offer in an address over radio SPLA, monitored here Thursday, SPLA leader John Garang said: "we would be ready to talk peace with the Junta on neutral ground like other rebel groups have done in Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia and Mozambique."

"Whatever obstacles the Junta lays on the road to peace, our quest for a peaceful solution to Sudan's problems remain unchanged," Colonel Garang said in the address, making the eight anniversary of the founding of the SPLA, when the rebels took up arms to fight against the domination of the mainly Christian and animist south by the Muslim-dominated Arab north.

Strike paralyses Albania : A general strike staged by Albania's independent trade unions to press economic and political demands brought factories and public transport to a standstill across Albania on Thursday, reports Reuter from Vienna.

Albanian journalists quoted radio reports as saying the strike received 50 per cent support in enterprises in the capital Tirana and total support in the northern town of Shkoder and the western towns of Kavaje and Durres. All three are strongholds of opposition to the ruling Communist Party.

Earlier union officials said at least 250,000 workers had joined the action to demand wage rises of between 50 and 100 per cent for most workers and an investigation into the killing of four opposition activists during anti-Communist unrest in Shkoder on April 2.

Amended Sharia law passed

Parliament okays Sharif's bid to Islamize Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, May 17 : Pakistan's National Assembly (lower house) adopted Thursday a government bill to enforce Sharia or Islamic law, dividing fundamentalists and drawing flak from the opposition, reports AFP.

The bill, which declares the Quran and Sunnah the supreme law of this predominantly Muslim country of 110 million people, must now be adopted by the Senate (upper house) before becoming law.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif described the passage of the bill as a "historic day" for the country and noted that it had emerged from democracy instead of revolution.

He said this bill would not bring a change overnight but "provided a direction" for the country to follow.

The Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulama Pakistan, two prominent fundamentalist

groups, supported the bill but another influential radical party, the Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam spurned it as not far-reaching enough.

The 20-clause bill was passed on a voice vote by the 217-member House as deputies from former Premier Benazir Bhutto's People's Democratic Alliance refused to give their approval.

Ms. Bhutto, who was not in the House at the time, has

Soviet defence spending cut by 6 p.c.

WASHINGTON, May 17 : Soviet defence spending dropped six per cent in real terms in both 1989 and 1990, a US intelligence report published Thursday said, reports AFP.

NEW DELHI, May 17 : In 1989 Vishwanath Pratap Singh delighted the Indian electorate by doing the seemingly impossible — uniting irreconcilable political forces and topping the all-powerful Congress Raj, reports AFP.

Now 17 months later he is one of three ex-prime ministers battling in the ruins of his own short-lived government and the one that followed for the change to prove he's not just a power-buster but the best man to build a new India.

"Now we are entering un-paved roads, the area of the Janata Dal's (People's Party) strength," the 50-year-old adopted son of an Indian Prince told the Times of India while stumping rural backroads Wednesday at the wheel of his car.

He was referring to his new image not as protector but fighting leader of the poor, the lower castes and the minorities.

The 'Raja' is also out to prove that his David and Goliath act with Rajiv Gandhi, which left Mr. Gandhi's Congress (I) muddled and dispirited, had broken the party's monolithic hold over New Delhi once and for all.

But the V P Singh facing the wilful, politics-weary crowds in this election is a far cry from the somewhat-awkward, bespectacled knight in shining armour who was carried high by leftists and rightists over the body of the Congress (I) in 1989.

The rightists have long since deserted him, never to return, and have for the first time unfurled new saffron banners of Hindu nationalism which they believe they can raise over India, partly by stealing a chunk of Mr V P Singh's lower caste vote bank.

Another report adds : It's early in the day and Mansur Ali Khan, the Nawab of Pataudi, has walked down the curved staircase of his shambly white bungalow known as Flagstaff House, to face a posse of nitpicking reporters. His voice is low and deep, his Urdu excellent and his profile as imposing as Marcus Aurelius in tinted sunglasses. Naturally, the local press is thrown a little off balance by the concen-

'Wife helping me, but not as Sharmila Tagore'

'Raja' out again to humble Rajiv : Pataudi now 'fielding'



The Raja — V.P. Singh

trated glare of so much star quality. It's like facing a one-man demolition squad.

First reporter: Will you bring in Bombay movie stars to campaign for you?

Answer: No, this is not a film nite, it's a serious election.

Second reporter (spitting): But you're married to a film star, won't she help?

Answer: I didn't marry a film star, I married a person. She will help me as my wife, not as Sharmila Tagore.

First reporter: Who asked you to stand for election?

A: Rajiv requested me. He is a family friend, I was only partly inclined. I first said I would work for the party but not fight. But I was tired of being critical of government in drawing rooms. So, if I now fail, you can't say I didn't make an effort.

And so the questioning of 'Tiger' Pataudi grinds on, with the political candidate disappearing under the yoke of

working himself up to it. The truth is that as a Muslim he's been very disheartened by recent events. And also by other despairs : the lack of leadership, sanity, honesty and credibility in current politics. He felt he had to plunge in before it was too late for him and for others."

He is 50 this year and though his inheritance lies in Haryana (the town of Pataudi is just beyond Gurgaon) his maternal home is Bhopal (his mother is the second daughter of the last Nawab). He was born there, has property and relations there, and though shipped off early to school and college in England, has been visiting "at least twice a month for the last eight years to sort out all sorts of personal hassles". But he never eyed the place as a potential constituency, two thirds of which is rural and about a quarter of its 11 lakh-electorate is Muslim.

It is one reason that despite formidable opponents (former chief secretary S.C. Verma who has been renominated by BJP and Swami Agnivesh for the Janata Dal), he's deliberately decided on a low-key campaign style. No banners, no large meetings and no cavalcade. He's also low on funds and firmly believes that "any show is waste of money". With typically Tigerish, deep-throated langour he says he's "just walking around and collecting a few boys". As for Masjed and Mandir he won't mention the words. "As far as I am concerned it's a non-issue."

KGB wanted to kill Pope, says Agca

ROME, May 17 : Metmet Ali Agca, the Turk who shot Pope John Paul II 10 years ago, said in a newspaper interview Thursday that the Soviet KGB and the Bulgarian government were behind the assassination attempt, reports Reuter.

"I knew that the KGB wanted to kill the Pope," the jailed gunman said in written answers to questions by Milan's Corriere Della Sera Newspaper.

"The Bulgarians wanted the death of Pope John Paul II because they were prisoners of (late Soviet leader Leonid) Brezhnev's doctrine of limited sovereignty," he said.

Reinstatement of Kuwaiti parliament demanded

KUWAIT, May 17 : Seven opposition groups have accused the Kuwaiti government of widespread torture and other human rights violations and demanded the immediate reinstatement of the country's parliament, which was dissolved by decree five years ago, reports AFP.

The seven movements signed a common communiqué. They included the Kuwaiti democratic platform, which is liberal, and the constitutional Islamic movement.

The text accused the government of Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah of "executions, arbitrary arrests, kidnappings and torture, against Kuwaitis and foreigners."

Queen Elizabeth praises US role in Gulf war

WASHINGTON, May 17 : Queen Elizabeth, in the first speech to congress by a British Monarch praised the US role in the Gulf war on Thursday, but said the true Allied objective of lasting peace in the region had not yet been achieved, reports Reuter.

I salute the outstanding leadership of you President and the courage and progress of the armed forces of the United States, the Queen said in an address to members of both Houses of Congress in the chamber of the House of Representatives.

Unfortunately, experience shows that great enterprises seldom end with a tidy and satisfactory flourish, together we are doing our best to re-establish peace and civil order in the region, and to help those members of ethnic and religious minorities who continue to suffer through no fault of their own.

If we succeed, our military success will have achieved its true objective, she said. Quoting President's Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roo-

sevelt to underscore her points, Queen Elizabeth stressed the similarities between Britain and the United States notably a shared belief in individual freedom.

In a wide ranging speech that discussed Britain's role in a united Europe and the challenges facing Africa and Asia, the Queen said this was to time to be isolationist.

We must not allow ourselves to be enticed into a form of continental insularity, she added, on the third day off a state visit to Washington.

I believe this is particularly important now, at a time of major social environmental and economic changes in your continent and in Asia and Africa. We must make sure those changes do not become convulsions.

She said the United Nations was the essential instrument for global peace and cooperation.

The Queen quoted American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson as saying that when the going gets tough England "sees a little better on a cloudy day."

US grants asylum to 350 Libyan troops

WASHINGTON, May 17 : The United States has granted asylum to 350 Libyan troops captured in the conflict between Libya and Chad and switched sides, US officials speaking on condition of anonymity said Thursday, reports AFP.

The 350 Libyans were set to arrive in New York Thursday from Nairobi, where they had been flown by the United States after Colonel Idris Deby toppled the regime of former Chadian President Hisssein Habre in December.

Officially, Washington has no comment. Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams said he was unaware of the Libyans' departure for New York, which diplomatic sources had announced in Nairobi.

The departure of the Libyans from Chad was attended by intelligence officials from the United States and France. Informed sources said the Libyans had agreed to be trained to carry out operations against Libyan leader Colonel Moammar Gaddafi.

Off the Record

Best friendship still in death

ROUND LAKE BEACH, Illinois : Two teen-agers, best friends for years, wrote a suicide note together, sat down on the railroad tracks and were run over by a train, reports AP.

Susan Zingales and Julie Pallach, both 14, were killed instantly late Tuesday by a commuter train travelling from Chicago to suburban Fox Lake, police said.

The girls, who attended the same school and played on the same basketball team, left a joint suicide note.

"The note basically said, 'this is the only way out. We have a stressful life. Love always,'" Round Lake Police Sgt. Mike Kemmerer said. "Then they both signed it."

He said police didn't know what prompted the girls' unhappiness, but their school principal said Wednesday that Pallach had been depressed since her father died of cancer in December 1989.

The girls lived in the same neighbourhood and had been best friends for years. They were to graduate from eighth grade next month.

The girls killed themselves blocks from their school. Police said they crouched on the tracks with their backs to the train, ignoring its whistle and the shouts of several passersby.

Billions of dollars go up into the sky!

WASHINGTON : Billions of funneled into the "Star Wars" programme to build an anti-missile defense system in space have gone to waste paying for unneeded research on nonexistent systems, Congressional auditors told Congress Thursday, reports AFP.

Officials of the General Accounting Office (GAO) told a House Spending Committee that about one billion dollars were spent on the boost surveillance and tracking system : A programme that has been scratched from the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), the space-based defense system known as Star Wars.

Some 400 million dollars were spent on another surveillance and tracking system which does not exist, they said.

There have been too few dollars chasing too many systems, said auditor Frank Conahan.

A talking hat

WASHINGTON : Queen Elizabeth on Thursday brought the House down with her very first words to the US Congress — a royal stinger making light of an embarrassing protocol gaffe on her Washington visit, reports Reuter.

"I do hope you can see me today from where you are," Her Majesty ad-libbed at the outset of a speech to a joint meeting of Congress the first ever by a British monarch.

The House of Representatives rocked with laughter and applause as the entire audience rose in appreciation.

On Tuesday, the diminutive Queen had virtually disappeared behind a high lectern set up for President George Bush's tall frame during White House arrival ceremonies, prompting joke headlines about a talking hat.

On Thursday, the House lectern was set to reach just above the royal midriff.



CANNES, France: US singer and actress Madonna smiles to the press as she arrives at the "Palais des Festivals" of Cannes to attend the screening of the film "Jungle Fever" by Spike Lee May 16

—AFP/UNB Photo