

Political parties hire thugs in Bihar : one murder every 2 hrs

NALANDA, June 11: In the Indian badlands of Bihar, where a person is murdered every two hours and another is kidnapped every four hours, police are bracing for Wednesday's parliamentary elections, reports AP.

Officials in Patna, Bihar's state capital, say privately that candidates of major and minor parties alike hire their own thugs, who are called "goondas."

"I have told my men to shoot troublemakers on sight. Let the goondas die," said Rajiv Gauba, the chief administrator of Nalanda, once a famed seat of Buddhist teaching and now known for its gunrunning trade and mayhem.

India's firm but sometimes bizarrely demonstrated commitment to democracy has produced, among other phenomena, the practice of "booth-capturing" whereby partisans of one party or another stuff the ballot boxes. And nobody stuffs the ballot boxes like the Bihar goondas.

"In the best of times Nalanda is a pretty bad place to live. Now with the elections upcoming, it has degenerated into a virtual hell," said Kedar Nath Singh, a local journalist.

The front-runner in Bihar, which holds 54 of Parliament's 543 elected seats, is the Janata Dal party of former Prime Minister V P Singh, whose coalition government collapsed last November after 11 months in power and was succeeded by another short-lived minority government.

The Janata-Dal, a centrist party, is expected to win about one-half of Bihar's seats.

The Congress Party, whose leader Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated three weeks ago, is expected to finish second in Bihar, followed by the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party.

Nationally, the Congress Party is expected to come out on top but not necessarily with enough votes to form the government unless it enlists the support of smaller parties, such as the Communists.

Students to defy ban on funeral march in Seoul

SEOUL, June 11: Students and dissidents said Tuesday they would defy a police ban and stage a funeral march in central Seoul for a student killed during an anti-government protest, reports AP.

Police said they would block by force the Wednesday march.

An alliance of 55 student and dissident groups said day-long funeral rites would be staged Wednesday for Kim Kwi-jung, who died May 25 in fighting between protesters and police.

Her funeral comes seven weeks after police fatally beat another student, triggering nationwide protests and leading to the most serious crisis for the government since President Roh Tae-woo took office in 1988.

BRIEFLY

Iraq starts bombing on Shi'ites:

Iraq has started bombing hundreds of thousands of Shi'ite Muslims trapped in marshes near the Iranian border, killing an unknown number of the refugees, an Iraqi opposition spokesman said, Reuters from London reports.

"There are casualties, people are dying," Haider Abas of the Islamic Dawa Party said by telephone in London, but said sources in the area think a major offensive has yet to begin.

"They started bombing about five days ago when the (Iraqi) troops completely encircled the marshes but according to our information it is not the major offensive," said Abas, whose party is one of seven Iraqi opposition groups based in London.

Mandela meets EC President:

Nelson Mandela met European Commission President Jacques Delors and urged the European Community not to lift sanctions yet against South Africa, Commission sources said, Reuters from Brussels reports.

They said Mandela had defended the continued use of sanctions in order to achieve the total suppression of apartheid and to win the release of all political prisoners.

The sources said Delors noted Mandela's analysis while pointing out that EC moves to relax sanctions were intended to further encourage reforms by the authorities.

Movements along Pak border banned:

Indian authorities Monday imposed a two-month ban on nighttime movements along the Pakistani border in the Northwestern Desert State of Rajasthan, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The order covers the Ganganagar, Karanpur and Raisinghnagar areas of Rajasthan and bans any movement along the border, the news agency quoted an official release from the state capital Jaipur as saying.

PTI failed to give a reason for the decision.

India has tightened security along its northern border with Pakistan, accusing it of aiding Sikh and Muslim militants in two other border states, Punjab and Kashmir.

Islamabad denies the allegations.

Court rejects Benazir's claim:

A Pakistani court rejected a claim by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Monday that current President Ghulam Ishaq Khan's leadership was invalid, Reuters from Lahore says.

The one-judge special court, which is trying Bhutto on charges of abuse of power during her 20-month rule as Prime Minister, said Bhutto's accusations against Ishaq Khan were based on a superficial reading of Pakistan's constitution.

Bhutto said that under the constitution Ishaq Khan should have held office only until March 20 last year and was not eligible to order her dismissal on August 6, 1990.

4 killed in Punjab gunbattle:

An exchange of gunfire Monday left three unidentified Sikh militants and a paramilitary trooper dead in the northern Indian state of Punjab, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports AFP from New Delhi.

The trooper killed in the incident, at Tatle Frangipur village in Amritsar district, was identified as Mahabir Singh, state government officials were quoted as saying.

Five rifles, one sten gun and a large quantity of ammunition were found at the scene of fighting, PTI said without giving details.

China executes 10 traders:

The Chinese authorities have smashed one of the country's biggest-ever gang of slave traders and executed its top 10 leaders, The Legal Daily reported Tuesday, says AFP.

The 21 other gang members were given suspended death sentences or prison terms, the official newspaper said.

Between 1988 and 1989, the gang sold 91 women from 10 provinces — raping 22 of them first — to peasants in the countryside of Inner Mongolia and Shanxi provinces, the paper said.

German-Japanese joint exercise:

German and Japanese warships will meet in Dubai this week — their first rendezvous since World War two, Reuters reports from Dubai.

Minesweepers from the two former axis powers are helping clear the Gulf after the war over Kuwait.

"We are operating out of the NATO area for the first time. It is a first for Japan as well," Commander Hartmut Pohlmann, a German Naval Attache in Riyadh, told Reuters by telephone.

5 coal miners killed in India:

At least five coal miners were killed when a tunnel they were digging flooded after heavy monsoon rains in central India, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported on Monday, Reuters says from New Delhi.

PTI quoted a Coal Ministry Official, B K Singh, as saying the five died on Saturday when a two-hour downpour brought down a tunnel in the Singrauli coalfield in Madhya Pradesh state.

PTI reported earlier that the flood waters had trapped 150 miners, while the United News of India (UNI) said 30 to 40 workers were still in the mine.

Earlier attempt on Rajiv's life not ruled out

SRIPERUMBUDUR, June 11: Did former prime minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, survive an assassination attempt just prior to the killing at Sriperumbudur?

The Sriperumbudur town Congress (I) president, Mr Ranganathan, and the AIADMK Sriperumbudur union secretary and the panchayat union chairman, Mr Murthy, believe that the one-woman suicide squad had made an attempt to kill Mr Gandhi about ten minutes earlier near the Indira Gandhi statue at Sriperumbudur.

They told visiting PTI correspondents that when Mr Gandhi made an unscheduled halt near the statue to garland it on the request of local Congress(I) and AIADMK workers, the dark-complexioned woman had tried to break through the police cordon to reach Mr Gandhi.

The woman had tried to get close to Mr Gandhi on the pretext that she wanted to garland him, but she was prevented from doing so by a local policeman who asked her to proceed to the nearby meeting venue and seek permission from officials there to garland him, the local leaders say.

Mr Ranganathan said the woman might have tried to get at Mr Gandhi at the statue spot as there was a power transformer nearby, and a blast at that spot could have caused greater casualties.

The woman's plan must have been to kill Mr Gandhi at the statue site itself as getting

close to him on the date or nearabouts might have been more difficult with top police and security officials being posted at the meeting venue, Mr Ranganathan said.

Mr Kumar, a local Congressman and the clerk of an advocate, told PTI that the halt at the statue was not part of the official programme of the convoy but arrangements had been made by local Congress (I) and AIADMK leaders with the police authorities who had cleared it.

The woman having failed to get near Mr Gandhi at the statue site, might have been responsible for the delay in Mr Gandhi's arrival at the meeting venue, as suddenly a cleaner of a lorry managed to approach Mr Gandhi and speak to him for nearly five minutes. Local Congress (I) and AIADMK men had never seen him before, and he was heard talking to Mr Gandhi in Tamil, Hindi and English on the problems of lorry-drivers in some other parts of the country, Mr Kumar

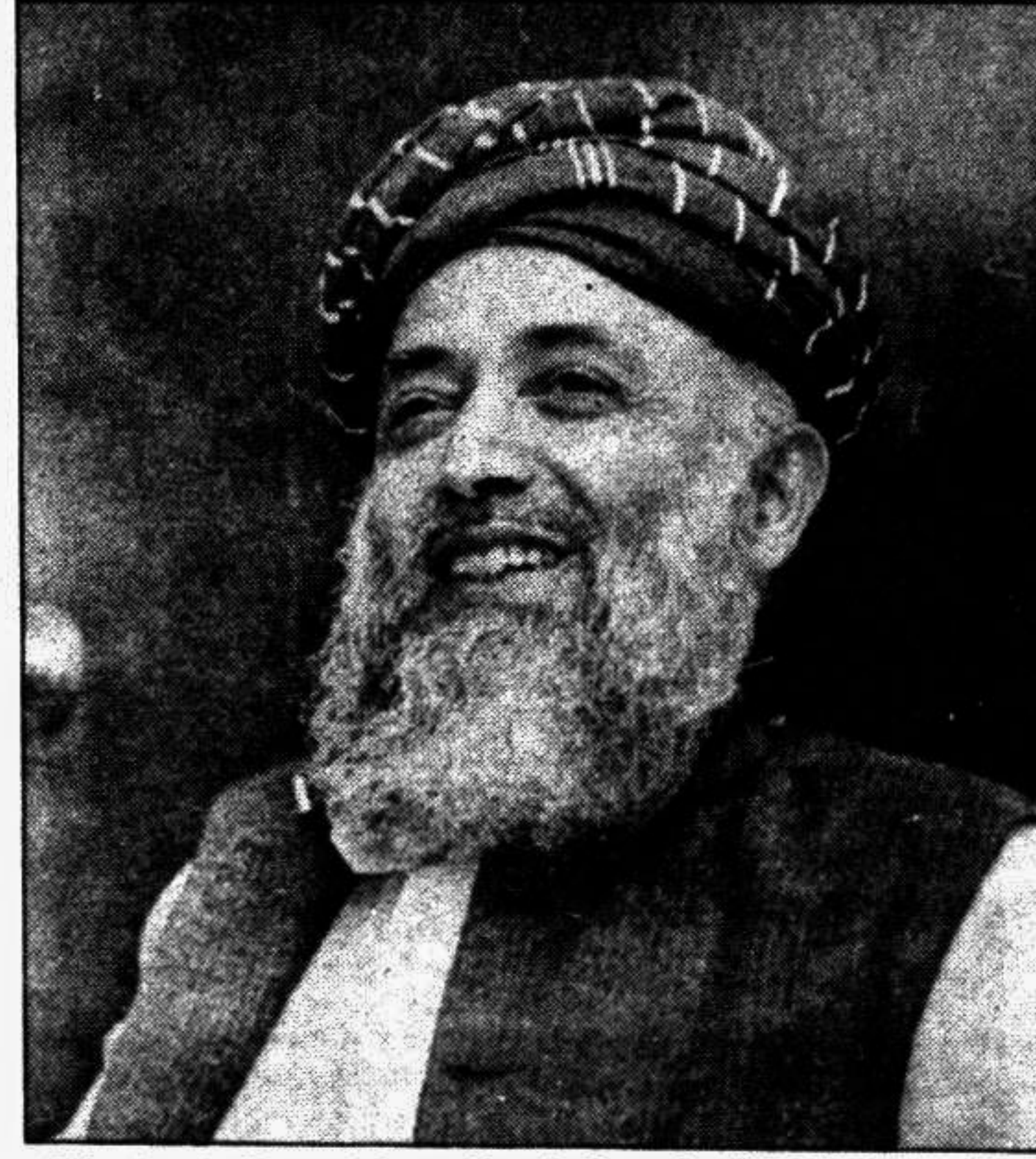
felt this could have been a delaying tactic to enable to woman-assassin to cut across the maidan opposite the statue and get into position near the row cleared by security for garlanding in front of the date by the time Mr Gandhi reached there.

Mr Kumar said that he had seen "the woman" joining the queue for garlanding just a minute or so before Mr Gandhi arrived at the meeting venue.

"I noticed then that she was totally a new face", and wondered how she had managed to join the queue. She was holding a sandal-wood garland in her hands. He had no opportunity to watch her further as Mr Gandhi was nearing them.

A constable, Dharman, pushed him aside to get close to Mr Gandhi as he approached them and that act probably saved Mr Kumar's life.

"There was a loud explosion and a lot of smoke in the air," he said.



ISLAMABAD: Afghan Mujahideen leader Burhanuddin Rabbani, chief of Jamiat-i-Islami speaks to reporters at a press conference June 10. Rabbani told a press conference that Washington agreed with the Mujahideen that Afghan President Najibullah would have to go before there could be any chance of a political solution. —AFP photo

Bandits kill 6 in Pakistan

KARACHI, June 11: Bandits killed six people before ransacking their village in southern Pakistan, police said today, reports Reuters.

The bandits, known as dacoits, attacked Vahani village near Larkana on Monday and fled after stealing cash and jewellery.

Police say more than 325 bandits have been killed and 1,000 arrested in the past five months at banditry has not subsided in Pakistan's Sind province.

Three Japanese and three Chinese were recently released after being abducted in separate incidents. A kidnapped Swedish engineer was killed in a gunbattle between police and bandits.

King Hussein hospitalised

AMMAN, June 11: King Hussein is in hospital where he is being treated for an irregular heartbeat, the official news agency Petra said today, reports Reuters.

The King, 56, entered a local hospital late on Monday, Petra said. It said the palace wanted to reassure the kingdom about the King's condition.

MOSCOW, June 11: When Soviet-American confrontation determined the course world events, it had been an axiom that the worst the political and the economic situation was in the Soviet Union, the better it was for the West but after 1985. This is no longer true, according to IAN.

With the advent of Perestroika — the radical reforms undertaken by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and his followers to discard old political, social and economic priorities and to introduce new ones, more in line with the general course of world development, the international situation changed radically. New political thinking in foreign affairs has made it possible to reject old stereotypes and substitute mutually-beneficial cooperation for rivalry in all fields of human endeavour.

There is no denying that while great gains were scored in international affairs, the internal situation in the Soviet Union remains in a drastic state. This could hardly have been different given the legacy of years of ideological constraints and mismanagement. In his Nobel peace prize lecture the Soviet President revealed that on embarking on Perestroika, no one, even in the highest authority, was aware of the extent of the social and economic crises afflicting society.

Instead of immediately discarding old ways and swiftly moving toward a market-oriented economy, as the Perestroikavites had hoped for, it took six years of arduous work to make the totally indoctrinated society accept such concepts as the privatization of land and industries market incentives, profit motives and so on.

At present, the crisis is coming to a head and under the circumstances existing in the world, the West could gain little by not helping the Soviet

US seeks Pak guarantee against N-bomb for aid

WASHINGTON, June 11: Pakistan must prove it neither has nor is making an atomic bomb before the United States will resume selling it conventional military hardware, according to US officials, reports AP.

Both the US State and Defence Departments reaffirmed those conditions Monday on the eve of meetings here with Pakistani officials to discuss the eight-month cutoff of US aid.

State Department spokesman Margaret Tutwiler told reporters the United States has made no secret of its concern about a potential nuclear arms race in the region.

The delegation led by Pakistan Senate Chairman Wassim Sajjad and acting Foreign Minister Akram Zaki was meeting Reginald Bartholemew, under-secretary of state for international security on Tuesday and

Khmer Rouge massacres 92 Vietnamese

HANDI, June 11: Khmer Rouge guerrillas massacred 92 Vietnamese men working on a logging project in Cambodia last month, local journalists in Ho Chi Minh City said Tuesday, reports Reuters.

One senior journalist, who asked not to be identified, told Reuters by telephone that one of the nine men who survived had told him he hid under a truck when the Khmer Rouge attacked the group on May 31.

Nguyen Doan Tuan Phuong, 21, said the guerrillas rounded up the Vietnamese in Kompong Cham, northeast of Phnom Penh, divided them into groups of about 20, then machinegunned them.

Indefinite curfew in parts of Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, June 11: Security forces today clamped indefinite curfews on parts of eastern Sri Lanka where fighting with Tamil guerillas resumed a year ago today, officials here said, reports AFP.

A military spokesman said curfews went into effect in Eravur and several neighbouring areas in Batticaloa district from late Monday to provide cover for troops conducting anti-guerilla operations.

He provided no details of the operations.

Fighting between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and government forces resumed on June 11 last year, ending 14 months of secret peace talks.

Some 7,022 people have died in the LTTE's struggle during the past year to establish a separate state for Tamils, who are a minority nationwide but the biggest ethnic groups in the island's northeast.

Plan for Palestinian state presented

JERUSALEM, June 11: A group of nearly 200 influential Israeli academicians and senior reserve army officers on Monday presented a new peace plan calling for the formation of an independent Palestinian state, reports AP.

The Council of "Peace in Stages" said its plan has received widespread support from Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The programme envisages a

Off the Record

Haribabu's picture of a lifetime

MADRAS, June 11: Haribabu died young. The 22-year-old, who loved photography, was among those blasted at Sriperumbudur, along with Congress (I) president Mr Rajiv Gandhi, reports PTI.

It was his passion for photography which drew him there, with a borrowed camera and, perhaps, a fierce desire to take just that one extra special shot which could win him fame and fortune.

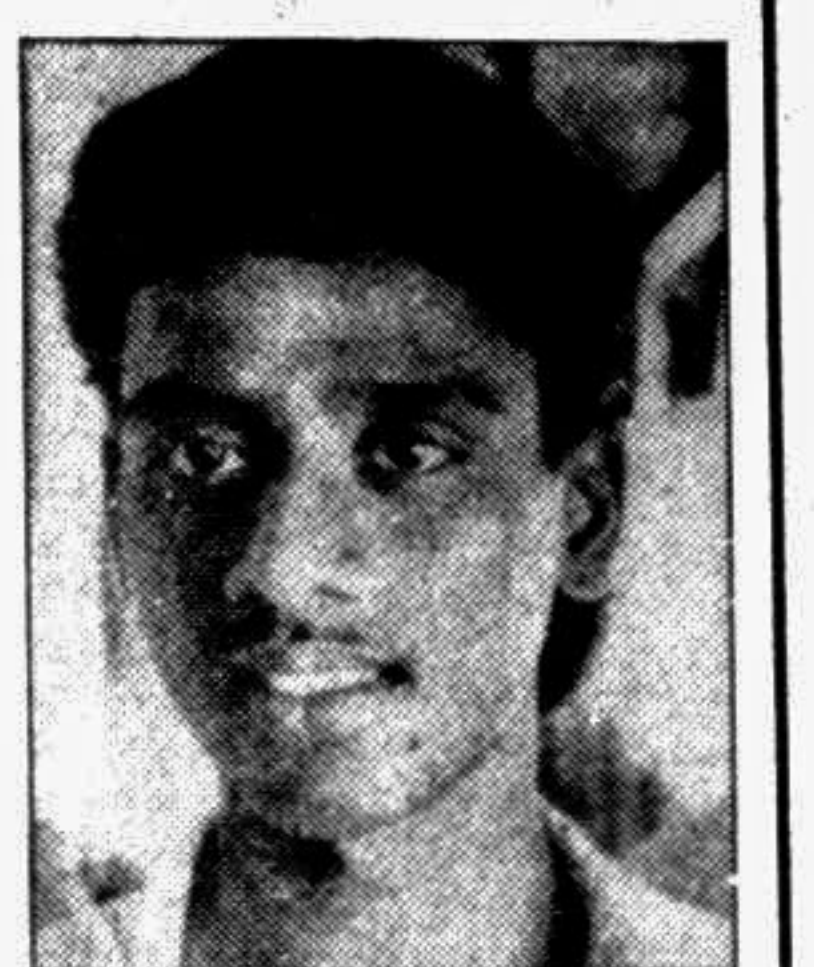
He almost succeeded. Haribabu, apparently asked by someone to record the moment he garlanded Mr Gandhi, was standing very close to the former prime minister, apparently taking photographs upto the moment of the explosion.

His body was found still clutching the camera — a Chinon with a telephoto lens, a wide angle lens, and a small flash.

Haribabu is now being suspected to be an accomplice of Rajiv's assassin.

Ironically, Haribabu, the son of a carpenter, never had the money to buy his own camera. His father, Sundaramani, helped him become a trainee with a city-based news photo agency, Subba News Photo. Just about a year ago, he began freelancing, borrowing equipment, and waiting for a bank loan to buy his own camera.

Today, there are only flashes of memories to console Sundaramani. Two older daughters are married and a younger son is in school. And there was Haribabu, now frozen into a still for all time.



Vladivostok retires

MOSCOW: The aging Soviet missile cruise Vladivostok has been retired from the Pacific fleet and is to be exported as scrap, the independent Interfax news agency said on Monday, reports Reuters.

Interfax said the crew of the 6,100-tonnes ship, which had been in service for 23 years, would be disbanded. It said no more details were available.

The Vladivostok is the third large surface vessel the fleet has sold off for scrap in the last 18 months.

Last year, the cruiser Dmitry Pozharsky was sold to India, while the destroyer Bessledny — which means "without trace" — lived up to its name by disappearing off the Philippine coast.

38 beggars netted in Singapore

SINGAPORE: Singapore's beggars have been rounded up in an islandwide sweep that netted only 38 who had escaped an earlier relentless campaign of spot raids, a government official said, reports Reuters.

A sweep of temples, underpasses and markets on Sunday yielded 13 beggars and 25 vagrants in a dawn-to-dusk operation. Chng Ah Seng, Assistant Director of the Ministry of Community Development said.

Such a low number for a bustling Asian city was attributed to Singapore's vigorous pursuit of a squeaky clean image.

Three-weekly spot raids on regular vagrant haunts by the city's beggar control team have netted 59 beggars and 102 vagrants between January and April this year.

A view from Moscow

'Cold war again if West fails to respond to Soviet crisis'

Union out of its severe economic difficulties, but it could stand to lose a lot.

The worst-case scenario could mean that the still strong conservative forces could regain power by relying on the support of the yet indoctrinated sections of the population which are dissatisfied with the worsening economic situation, the military-industrial complex and the ideological diehards. In that case the Soviet Union would, in all probability, revert to old ways internally and externally cold war attitudes would be revived and the drive to restore old spheres of influence could pose a viable threat to the nations who have gained their independence in Perestroika years.

The other extreme, but a no less undesirable one, is that

the Soviet Union, driven by radical centrifugal forces, would split into a multitude of small states. Economically they might be weaker than they are now, because their economies would no longer be integrated as they are now. They would be left to fend for themselves and it is quite possible that these nations, driven by egocentric ambitions, would bicker among themselves, appealing to the

West for economic as well as military aid and support to advance their individual ambitions.

Thus, the West would be involved in how things progress in this part of the world, whether it likes it or not if it opts to sit on the sidelines and see the conservative forces get the upper hand in the Soviet Union. This could spell the halt to the arms-reduction process and a sharp increase in defence spending, as well as the return to military confrontation on the world arena.

But if the Soviet Union disintegrates, the western nations would be faced with the dilemma of having to bolster the economies of scores of states, which would be immeasurably more costly than to lend aid to one country, or a federated group of republics, integrated economically.

Thus, President Gorbachev was not trying to intimidate the West, as some western observers are insisting, when in his Nobel peace prize lecture he stressed that if Perestroika in the Soviet Union failed, prospects for a peaceful period in history would disappear for the foreseeable future. He was being realistic.

New political thinking in the world has progressed far enough in the past six years, to have made many political leaders discard preconceived notions. But Moscow is still to see whether or not they fully realize that by helping the other side, they were helping themselves, and building a peaceful world in the process.

Limited Israeli military forces would be stationed along the border between Jordan and the new Palestinian state in the first five years.

Jerusalem, Israel's declared eternal capital, would remain under Israeli sovereignty, with separate municipal elections in the annexed eastern part of the city. Israel's new borders would include new Jewish neighborhoods build there since Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war.

Representatives of the main faiths would administer their respective holy sites.



MOSCOW: Supporters of Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin wave banners and flags as they stage a 15,000 strong demonstration in central Moscow June 10. Yeltsin is considered the front-runner in the upcoming elections for the Presidency of the Russian Federation. — AFP photo

Trial for alleged killers of Egypt's Speaker begins

CAIRO, June 11: Prosecutors demanded the death sentence for 18 of the 24 Muslim extremists brought to trial Monday accused of the shooting death of the Speaker of Parliament and five of his aides, reports AP.

The defendants, who were kept in an iron cage and were handcuffed for part of the opening of the trial, repeatedly shouted threats against President Hosni Mubarak and vowed that "Islam is coming."

Prosecutors are demanding that 18 of the accused be hanged and the others sentenced to various prison terms for the Oct. 12 shooting death of Parliament Speaker Rifaat el-Mahgoub.

Only 14 defendants are in custody, and all pleaded innocent at Monday's hearing. Ten remained at large and are being tried in absentia.

"Hosni Mubarak, Hosni Mubarak, Sheik Safwat is out to get you," the defendants chanted.