

Soviet Generals in polls race

MOSCOW, June 12: Two generals and a colonel are running in the Russian Federation presidential and vice presidential election Wednesday, testimony to the persistence of the military in Soviet politics, reports AP.

Generals have led other nations to affluence and can do the same for Russia, argues Col Gen Albert Makashov, a hard-line Communist running for president on a platform of law, order and prosperity.

US President Dwight Eisenhower was a general, Makashov noted in a campaign speech. "South Korea as well as Taiwan have managed to escape their crises under the leadership of generals."

Recent polls show Makashov, 53, winning only a small percentage of the vote, indicating Soviets don't generally approve of his brand of reform.

But those few votes may help deny front-runner Boris Yeltsin the simple majority he needs to win a first ballot victory in the coast-to-coast voting. If none of the six presidential candidates wins a majority, the two front-runners will face off two weeks.

To bolster his chances, and garner military support,

Yeltsin chose as his running mate Col Alexander Rutskoi, 43, a decorated hero of the Soviet war in Afghanistan and an emerging reformist within the Communist Party.

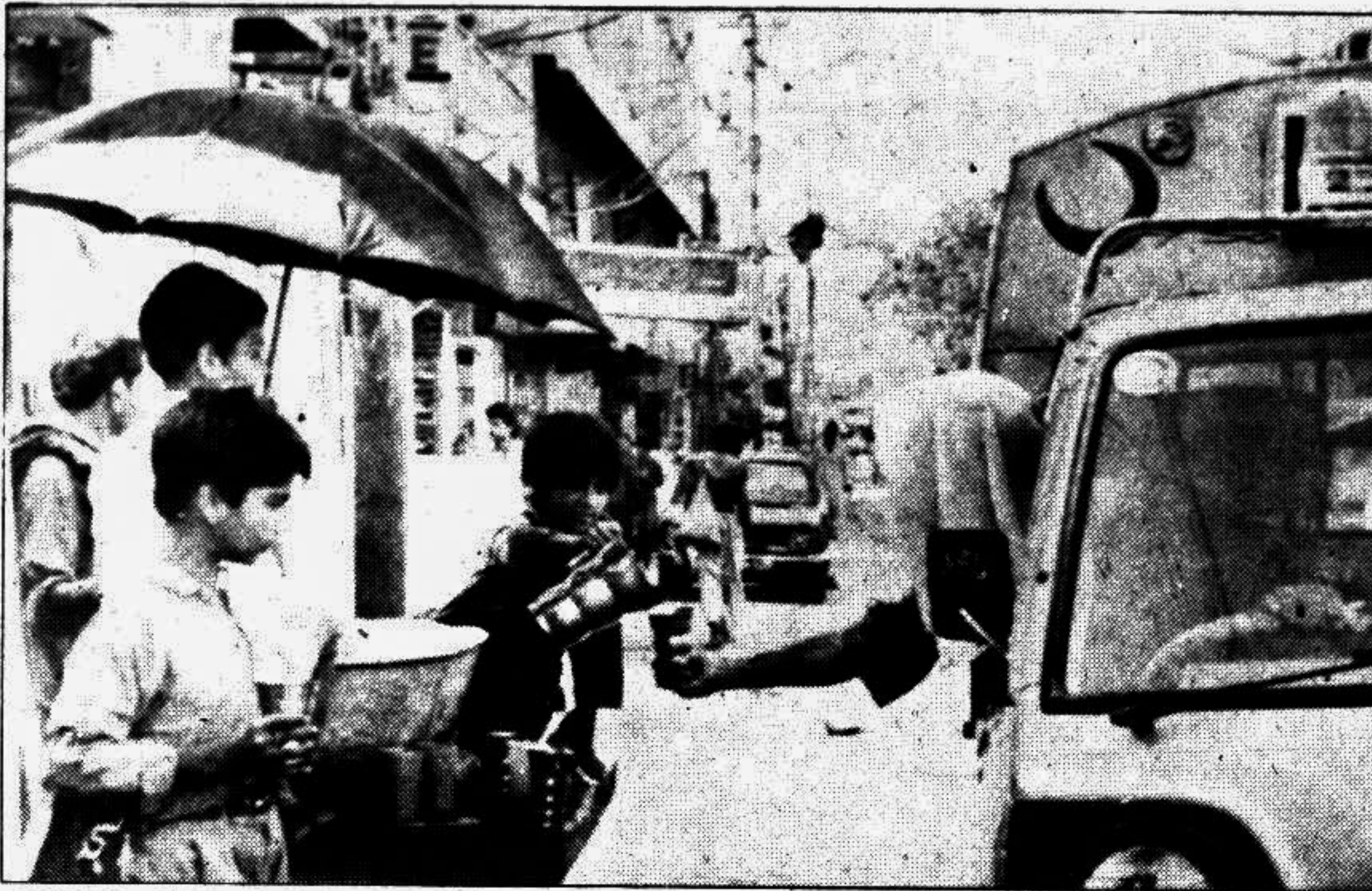
Yeltsin's closest rival, former Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, also named a famous officer as his vice presidential candidate, Col Gen Boris Gromov, 48, the last commander of Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

Soviet military officers long have played a major political role as members of the Communist Party Central Committee and of national, regional and local legislatures.

The Russian presidential election is significant not only in the number of officers taking part, but because they are turning to the ballot box rather than tanks.

The picture was different six months ago.

In December, the so-called "black colonels," Viktor Alksnis and Nikolai Petrusenko, were considered responsible for forcing reformist Foreign Minister Eduard A Shevardnadze to resign.



HYDERABAD (Pakistan): Volunteering school children serve water to a passing driver June 11, in an effort to help bear the ongoing heatwave in this severely hit area. More than 300 people have died in the past 12 days in this region alone. —AFP photo

Iraq ready to destroy chemical arms under UN supervision

NEW YORK (United Nations), June 12: Iraq has offered to handle the destruction of its chemical weapons under United Nations supervision but is not prepared to shoulder the cost of the operation, reports AP.

Meanwhile, the Security Council made no move to lift the trade embargo against Iraq after meeting to discuss the issue, largely because Baghdad has so far failed to comply with all the conditions set down by the ceasefire resolution.

At the same time, Iran has asked the United Nations to take all necessary measures to stop Baghdad from attacking

Shi'ite refugees in the south of the country, close to the Iranian border.

Iran's UN Ambassador, Kamal Kharazi, said Tuesday: "The Iraqi regime is preparing to attack Shi'ites in the south. We have to warn the international community about massacres of Shi'ite people, which would be a genocide."

"The United Nations has to adopt measures to stop the Iraqi government from attacking its own people."

Iraq however, denied Tuesday that it was planning any such attacks.

And, in a letter to UN Secretary-General Javier Perez

de Cuellar released Tuesday, Iraqi Charge d'Affaires Samir Al-Nima wrote that Iraq "has at its disposal the necessary expertise and technical facilities to do so in a way that will achieve the desired objective under supervision and to the satisfaction of the UN experts."

He added that his government with UN experts and to undertake tests quickly.

"Participating in this way will reduce the cost of destruction and the period of time required for implementation of the destruction plan."

Plot to kill Nicaraguan President's aides

MANAGUA, June 12: Authorities are investigating an alleged plot to assassinate the nation's military chief and two top officials in President Violeta Chamorro's administration, the Interior Minister said Tuesday, reports AP.

Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado, who is in charge of internal security, said he was one of the targets along with Antonio Lacayo, the Secretary of the Presidency, and Gen. Humberto Ortega, Commander of the Armed Forces.

"The investigation continues," Hurtado said, adding that it has been going on since the beginning of May. He spoke to reporters briefly but gave no details.

On Saturday, Lacayo said that "extremist groups" opposed to Chamorro's efforts to

reconcile the opposition leftist Sandinistas and former Contra rebels were involved in the plot.

That same day, radio stations said at least one person was arrested Thursday night for allegedly firing shots at Lacayo's residence, but none of the officials involved commented on the report.

However, police and other security forces deployed in force at about that time Thursday night, patrolling Managua streets in search of weapons and suspects.

Last month, unidentified assailants fired several shots at a Managua hotel where Chamorro was attending a wedding. No one was hurt and no arrests were reported, but several officials blamed the former Contra rebels for the attack.

Both Lacayo and Ortega recently accused Vice President Virgilio Godoy and Managua's mayor, Arnold Aleman, of encouraging former rebels in northern Nicaragua to rearm.

The two are ultra-conservatives who sympathise with some of the rebels disgruntled because they claim the Chamorro administration has not given them land as promised when they dem-

onstrated. Godoy is so at odds with Chamorro that he is virtually ignored and has not even been given his own office by the administration.

Chamorro, leading a maverick coalition, defeated the leftist Sandinistas by a landslide in elections held in February 1990. The US-supported Contras, who fought the Sandinistas during the decade they were in power, turned in their weapons shortly before Chamorro took office in April 1990.

Despite the change, Chamorro allowed Sandinista officers to stay in command of top and middle ranks in the army and police forces.

Shevardnadze urges opposition to unite

VIENNA, June 12: Former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze urged the Soviet Union's democratic opposition parties to unite in a single movement to better challenge the Communist Party, reports AP.

BRIEFLY

5 lakh pilgrims in S Arabia :

Close to half a million people from various parts of the world have so far arrived in Saudi Arabia for the annual Hajj, or Muslim pilgrimage, officials announced Tuesday, AP from Jeddah says.

The Saudi Press Agency, quoting Director General of Passports Major Gen. Fahd al-Shaif, said a total of 467,005 pilgrims had arrived in Saudi Arabia by Monday.

He said 407,650 pilgrims flew into the kingdom by air, 38,911 pilgrims arrived by land and 20,444 pilgrims arrived by sea.

The Hajj to Islam's holiest shrines at Mecca and Medina culminates this year around June 23. By that time, an estimated 1 million people from abroad, plus an equal number from within the kingdom, are expected to have congregated at the shrines.

The pilgrims coming from around the world, are gathered at certain terminals known as Hajj cities at Jeddah and various entry points into the country.

32 killed in Indian violence : A total of 32 people were killed in a gunfight between Muslim militants and security forces in Kashmir on Tuesday after eight people died in related violence elsewhere in the northern region, reports said, AFP from New Delhi reports.

An unspecified number of Muslim gunmen ambushed a contingent of security forces in downtown Srinagar, summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir state, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

The incident led to a gunfight between the two sides, leaving 32 people dead and three seriously injured, state government officials in Srinagar were quoted as saying.

PTI said the casualties were mostly of militants, adding that the officials did not say if there was any loss on the security forces' side.

PLO participation in ME talks sought :

The PLO on Tuesday officially demanded Palestinian participation in an international Middle East peace conference — on an equal footing with other parties — and said delegates must come from both inside and outside the Israeli-occupied territories, AFP reports from Tunis.

The demand came in a statement issued here from the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization after the PLO Executive Committee met Sunday and Monday to discuss the latest peace moves in the region.

The statement, carried by the Palestinian news agency Wafa, expressed the PLO's commitment "to the national rights of our people, consistent with International Law, as well as its right to participate in all stages of the peace process through a balanced delegation on the basis of equality (with other parties)."

12 die in China flood :

At least 12 people died after heavy rainstorms caused floods and landslides around Beijing this week, the Beijing Daily Newspaper said Wednesday, Reuter reports.

It said five more people were missing in the flooding, which destroyed 653 houses and submerged nearly 1,140 hectares (2,800 acres) of cropland just as farmers were preparing to bring in the spring harvest.

Flooding, while common in some parts of China, is rare around the capital.

Kabul endorses UN plan :

President Najibullah's ruling Watan (homeland) Party has endorsed a UN plan to end the 12-year-old civil war in Afghanistan, Kabul Radio said on Tuesday, Reuter from Islamabad reports.

The five-point plan proposed by UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar last month has already been accepted by Najibullah's Soviet-backed government as well as Pakistan and Iran, who back the Afghan rebels.

The broadcast, monitored in Islamabad, said an extraordinary session of the Watan Central Council supported the proposal on Tuesday and expressed readiness to work for its implementation.

Albanian govt formed :

Negotiators from the opposition and the Communist Party that ruled alone for almost 47 years have agreed on Albania's first coalition government since 1944, informed sources said Tuesday, AP from Tirana reports.

The new premier, Communist technocrat Ylli Buqi, was named last week after a general strike that lasted almost a month brought down the all-Communist government. That government was chosen after the Communists won multiparty elections in mid-spring.

The sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Gramoz Pashko, one of the two leaders of the main opposition Democratic Party, would be first deputy premier and minister of economics.

The Democratic Party also will nominate the defense minister, while the Communists will name the foreign and interior ministers, the sources said.

Greece to expel 6 PLO officials :

Greece will expel six Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) officials and 14 Palestinian students in connection with a bomb blast in April which killed seven people, government sources said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Athens.

The Public Order Ministry sources said the expulsions would start Wednesday and the Palestinians would be deported to a number of countries in the Middle East and Africa.

The head of the PLO Diplomatic Mission in Athens, Abdullah, told Reuters he was unaware of any expulsions and that he only knew that a former PLO diplomat had been arrested.

British response to Lankan expulsion of its envoy likely

COLOMBO, June 12: Britain is furious over Colombo's expulsion of its chief envoy in Sri Lanka, Colombo thought it will probably not retaliate, officials and analysts said today, reports Reuter.

Colombo still can only guess at what Britain will do 13 days after the government declared British High Commissioner David Gladstone persona non grata for alleged interference in local government elections.

"Britain must see something over the issue but they are unlikely to send back Sri Lanka's High Commissioner (Ambassador), though many think this may happen," one analyst said.

"We feel the British government is unlikely to resort to reciprocal action. Yet we expect a response from there and it is anybody's guess as to what it would be," a Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry official said.

Britain could delay appointment of a new High Commissioner, the official said.

Colombo said on May 30 Gladstone had violated election laws by entering a polling centre during elections on May 11. He had also complained to police about election irregularities.

London rejected the charge and said there were no grounds for the expulsion. An appropriate response was being considered, it said.

The British Foreign Office cancelled a visit this month to Colombo by a Junior Minister.

Gladstone left Sri Lanka on Sunday and reporters at the airport said he appeared saddened to leave a country that had been his home for the past four years.

Diplomats, including several from the European Commu-

nity, said they were concerned Gladstone may have been expelled because of his frequent outbursts on human rights issues.

"The government is at pains in trying to show that the expulsion was based on the May 11 incident and not on Gladstone's past record. But we feel it was (because of) the human rights angle," one diplomat said.

The incident could sour relations and might prompt Britain to cut aid to Sri Lanka, one economist said. Britain is one of Sri Lanka's biggest donors, giving 30 million dollars last year.

Human rights activists say at least 60,000 young people have died or disappeared since 1987 in a military crackdown against a left-wing rebel movement that tried to overthrow the government.

The revolt was crushed and pro-government vigilantes killed thousands of men and women suspected of supporting the rebels.

Many Sri Lankans, while agreeing that the government was justified in taking some kind of action against Gladstone, said they felt his expulsion was too harsh.

"Does the punishment fit the crime? The government should have at least summoned him to the Foreign Office and called for his explanation, which was not done," a local political commentator said.

Kennedy flouts Senate rules

WASHINGTON, June 12: A conservative political group Tuesday filed an ethics complaint against US Senator Edward M Kennedy, alleging that he violated Senate rules by his actions related to an investigation of a rape charge against his nephew, reports AP.

The sworn complaint, which also asserted that Kennedy had failed to assist the purported victim as she screamed outside the family's Florida home, was lodged with the Senate Ethics Committee by the Conservative Campaign Fund.

If the committee determines the complaint meets technical requirements, the panel must notify the Senator that an initial review will be conducted and invite him to respond.

Paul Donovan, spokesman for the Massachusetts Democrat, said Kennedy had no immediate comment.

Kennedy nephew William Kennedy Smith, 30, faces trial August 5 on charges of second-degree sexual battery — meaning rape — and misdemeanor battery against a 29-year-old woman from Jupiter, Florida. The assault allegedly occurred at the Kennedy family estate in Palm Beach, Florida, on March 30, Smith has pleaded innocent.

Kennedy's popularity rises to 50 pc

TOKYO, June 12: Almost half the Japanese people want Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu to step down in October when his two-year term as President of the ruling liberal Party expires, an opinion poll published Wednesday said, reports AP.

The poll conducted by the leading newspaper 'Asahi Shimbun' however showed that Kaifu's popularity had risen to 50 per cent from 47 per cent in the previous survey conducted in February.

It also put the support rate of the LDP at 64 per cent, the highest since the party was founded in 1955.

Heatwave kills 50 more in Pakistan

KARACHI, June 12: Pakistan's heatwave killed more than 50 people on Tuesday, raising the death toll from nearly two weeks of high temperatures to 475, doctors said, reports Reuter.

At least 13 people died in Karachi, capital of southern Sindh province, 11 in Hyderabad and 33 in the province's interior. Most died of dehydration. Temperatures have topped 50 degrees c several times in Sindh since the pre-monsoon heatwave began on June 1.

Sindh Chief Minister Jam Sadiq Ali told reporters he had ordered a survey to assess crop damage from the heat.

35 pc Indians want Sonia as PM

NEW DELHI, June 12: Many Indians still wish Rajiv Gandhi's Italian-born widow Sonia, who has twice turned down the leadership of his Congress Party, could be their Prime Minister, according to a survey published Wednesday, reports Reuter.

As the world's most populous, democracy resumed a general election which was disrupted by Gandhi's assassination, the Times of India said 34 per cent of voters wanted Sonia Gandhi, (44) to lead the country — twice as many as her nearest rival.

Rajiv Gandhi, killed by a woman suicide bomber on May 21, followed his assassinated mother Indira Gandhi and her father Jawaharlal Nehru in a dynasty which had ruled India for all but five of the years

since independence from Britain in 1947.

Today's survey suggested that Congress leaders gauged the public mood accurately when they pleaded with Gandhi's politically inexperienced widow to maintain the tradition.

Of the 10,000 voters questioned, 61 per cent thought Congress was right to ask Sonia Gandhi to lead the party. But exactly the same percentage said she was right to refuse.

Vishwanath Pratap Singh, who defeated Gandhi in 1989 polls, was second choice for Prime Minister with 17 per cent support.

Narasimha Rao, the veteran Gandhi loyalist eventually chosen to lead Congress, was in third place with 14 per cent.

Off the Record



BASLE (Switzerland): American actress Elizabeth Taylor gestures during a press conference of the 'Art against AIDS' organisation in Basle prior the start of the art exhibition and fair 'Art 91'. Liz Taylor is the honorary President of the organisation. —AFP photo

Bob Hawke booked

BRISBANE, June 12: Australian police booked Prime Minister Bob Hawke on Wednesday for not wearing a car seatbelt after he was shown on television conducting an interview from the back of his Limousine, reports Reuter.

The Channel Nine network's switchboard was jammed with more than 1,000 complaints after Hawke's unbelted car trip through the Queensland capital on Tuesday during a meet-the-people tour.

"He expressed regret for his momentary lapse and asked to be treated like any other citizen," Queensland Police Commissioner Noel Newnham told reporters.

The labour leader will have to pay a 100 dollar (75 US) fine for his indiscretion.

"He always wears a seatbelt when he sits in his normal position in the car, which is in the front," a spokesman for Hawke said.

Police said the reporter and cameraman travelling with Hawke might be charged with similar breaches of Queensland's Traffic Laws.

In 1971 Australia became the first country in the world to make the wearing seatbelts compulsory. Last year 2,332 people were killed in road accidents across the country, which has a population of 17 million.

Book on Rajiv's assassination

NEW DELHI: A book on the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi detailing the tragic happening and the following events has been brought out, reports PTI.

The book, co-authored by a mother and daughter, Mrs Shashi Ahluwalia and her daughter Meenakshi Ahluwalia, covers the traumatic events of May 21 and vividly brings out the conflicting reports on the assassination and also traces the background of the crime, according to the authors.

The authors have also described the last journey of Rajiv from Teenmurti House to Shakitisthal.

The book also contains the tributes paid by national and international leaders to Gandhi's statesmanship.

Lynn Redgrave battles food addiction for 48 yrs

TORONTO: Actress Lynn Redgrave says she has battled food addiction most of her 48 years, reports AP.

"Food and its control over me was absolutely intertwined until seven or eight years ago," said Redgrave, who was in town Monday to promote her autobiography, 'This is Living: How I Found Health And Happiness.'

Redgrave lost 35 pounds (16 kilograms) with Weight Watchers in the early 1980s and went on to become the company's TV spokeswoman.

Redgrave received an Oscar nomination in 1966 for "Georgy Girl." Her other films include "Sunday Lovers," "Tom Jones," "Girl with the Green Eyes," "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex" and "The Happy Hooker."