

Yang terms happening in Moscow as a crime

ULAN BATOR, Mongolia, Aug 27: Visiting Chinese President Yang Shangkun, in a clear reference to the failed coup in the Soviet Union, was reported as telling Mongolia's leaders that Beijing viewed the events in Moscow as a crime, reports Reuter.

In discussions with Mongolian President Punsalmagyan Ochirbat, Yang said China hoped to develop further relations with the Soviet Union now President Mikhail Gorbachev was back in charge, according to an account of the meeting given to Reuter by a Mongolian official today.

It was the first reported comment by a Chinese leader in response to the tumultuous events in the Soviet Union last week, when a rightwing attempt to topple Gorbachev and seize power was foiled and the conspirators arrested.

China's position from the start was that events in the Soviet Union were an internal Soviet affair, Yang was quoted as saying.

China neither supported nor condemned the coup attempt, though diplomats in Beijing said they were sure Chinese leaders welcomed the prospect of hardliners taking control in Moscow and reversing Gorbachev's reforms.

Beijing's headline communist leaders have not forgiven Gorbachev for allowing eastern Europe to leave the socialist camp, and view his drift toward political pluralism and accommodation with the west as betrayal.

Relations between Beijing and Moscow had become more active, Yang was quoted as saying.

Republics tell Gorbachev central govt finished

MOSCOW, Aug 27: President Mikhail S Gorbachev told legislators he returned from three days of house arrest to find a different country. Then he found out how different as republic leaders told him Monday that his central government had "committed suicide," reports AP.

Leaders of the 15 Soviet republics, especially Russian Federation President Boris N Yeltsin, have taken power into their own hands.

But with that power will come many of the same problems that stymied Gorbachev in his efforts to simultaneously reform and preserve the country. The economy is shackled by 74 years of central control and the nation still is learning the basics of democracy.

Gorbachev resigned Saturday as head of the Communist Party, shattering its power, and on Monday proposed putting his fate in the hands of the people by holding the country's first popular national presidential elections.

But moments after he spoke in the Supreme Soviet legislature, speakers from three of the four largest Soviet republics — Russia, the Ukraine and Kazakhstan — rose to say they were taking matters into their own hands.

"We all think differently today... It's time to stop running after the time that is gone," said Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who after Yeltsin is the most respected among the republic leaders.

Nazarbayev and other republic leaders sketched out steps they are taking to seize control of centrally owned enterprises, and in many cases to turn them over to private control.

The Supreme Soviet voted overwhelmingly to convene its parent body, the Congress of People's Deputies, next Monday. It invited republic leaders to debate the future of the nation and weigh proposals to liquidate the central government.

Neither Gorbachev nor central authorities are capable of defending the interests of the peoples of the USSR," said Yuri Sheherbak of the Ukraine.

"The Supreme Soviet has failed to understand that the whole of the centre has completely outlived itself. It is dead. It committed suicide," said Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian.

Nazarbayev said Gorbachev's proposed Union Treaty to preserve the Soviet Union should be drastically revised. He said there should be no central Cabinet of Ministers or parliament, that the republics should have their own foreign ministries and military forces, and that the central army should limit itself to border defense.

The country, he said, could be run by a "Transitional Inter-Republican Economic Council" to forge not a political federation but an economic market.

Yeltsin's aide, Russian Khasbulatov called for decollectivisation of land, transfer of factories and businesses first to republic and then to private ownership, and sharp cuts in spending by the military and KGB.

The Russian President would act "without hesitation to dismiss" elected and appointed officials in the Russian Federation who "stained themselves through links with the junta," said Khasbulatov.

Yeltsin did not appear in the Soviet legislature, letting Khasbulatov speak in his place. But his authority was clear both in Moscow and around the world.

"Yeltsin is more president of the Soviet Union than Gorbachev," said Latvian lawmaker Nick Neilands, predicting that the Soviet congress would follow Yeltsin's lead in recognizing the Baltic independence.

In Washington, US Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger was asked who was in charge of the Soviet Union. "It's a tough one to answer, but to the degree that we can figure it out it's Mr Yeltsin and Mr Gorbachev." He replied "Yes" when asked whether the power flowed in that order.



MOSCOW: Long lens view of deputy members (unidentified) voting during the late night session of Supreme Soviet in Kremlin in Moscow, August 26. -AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

He learnt it from TV

NEW YORK: A four-year-old New York boy who learned how to load a gun from watching television shot and killed his two-year-old sister, police said, reports Reuter.

Aschi Diaz was shot once in the head by her brother, who had taken their father's 30-30 Winchester rifle from a wall-rack on Saturday and loaded it.

Police said the boy, whose name was not released, had learned to load the weapon "just from watching television."

They said the child found a hidden cache of ammunition, loaded the gun and fired it, mortally wounding his sister as she sat on the floor in a baby seat.

Police said no criminal charges would be pressed.

Soviet law-makers grill each other

MOSCOW: Turmoil, panic and accusation filled the air Monday as the Soviet legislature met for the first time since last week's failed coup, accepted President Mikhail S Gorbachev's bitter reproach, and heaped even more abuse on itself, reports AP.

Most members of the Supreme Soviet appear to have committed only a sin of omission during the coup, leading members of the 542-member body to suffer from a guilty conscience.

"When the president was in captivity and city streets became tank grounds, we waited for commands," Laptev said.

Before the session began, Anatoly Lukyanov resigned as the legislature's chairman because of accusations by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and others that he was behind the junta.

"Lukyanov was the priest and the Supreme Soviet was the parish," said Askar Akayev, president of Kirghizia and a lawmaker.

Lukyanov told reporters that the coup leaders tried to make it look like was with them when he really wasn't.

But Gorbachev's old law school classmate was "unable to explain why, if he opposed the coup, he didn't convene the legislature to do something about it."

Lawmakers cheered a proposal to strip Lukyanov of his parliamentary immunity so he could be prosecuted. There were also calls from the floor for the legislature to dissolve itself, juggle its staff, create an investigatory commission and turn over all coup-related prosecutions to Yeltsin's Russian government.

More Americans postponing marriages

WASHINGTON: The popularity of marriage in the United States fell in the late 1980s to the lowest level in two decades, the national Centre for Health Statistics said in a report released on Monday, reports Reuter.

More Americans are postponing marriage — preferring to pursue careers and further education — and the divorced and widowed are waiting longer to re-marry, said Centre demographer Barbara Foley Wilson.

Figures show 2,395,926 couples married in 1988, the latest year for which data were available, down 0.3 per cent from 1987. It marked the fourth consecutive year in which the rate declined in the United States.

Between 1940 and 1988 the number of marriages rose in 31 of the 48 years and it has never before dropped for more than three years in a row.

"Marriage as an institution isn't faltering, but adjusting with some difficulties to changing times," Wilson said.

"It's possible that everybody will marry: Currently they are taking their time about it, she added. She said marriage rates were highest for men and women in their 20s, dropping away after the age of 30.

Women executives need 450 yrs to reach equality with men

WASHINGTON: Fewer than three per cent of fortune 500 companies in the United States have female senior executives, according to a study by the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF), reports AFP.

The feminist organisation said in a report released Monday that only 175, or 2.6 per cent, of the 6,502 positions of Vice President or higher in fortune 500 companies were held by women last year.

"At the current rate of increase in executive women, it will take until the year 2466 — or over 450 years — to reach equality with executive men," said Eleanor Smeal, a former President of the National Organisation for Women (NOW) and the current head of the FMF.

The report added that women are similarly underrepresented on the Boards of Directors of fortune 500 companies in the United States. It said that only 254 (4.5 per cent) of the 5,384 such posts were held by women in 1990.

Women held 40 per cent of management posts of lesser importance in fortune 500 firms, up from 24 per cent in 1976, the report said.

Soviet CP worth \$ 2.4 b

MOSCOW: The takeover of Soviet Communist Party property will bring in around four billion roubles (2.4 billion dollars) to the state coffers, according to Arkady Volsky, a member of President Mikhail Gorbachev's new economics team, reports AFP.

However he also warned Monday that eliminating party cells from the workplace will make around 150,000 people jobless.

On Saturday, Gorbachev ordered local elected assemblies to take all Communist Party property under their protection until an inquiry into the failed coup was concluded.

The party's main wealth came from buildings, as well as printing plants and publishing houses, said Volsky. In certain republics, especially in central Asia, it's going to be very difficult to take them over, he said.

Volsky is head of the scientific and industrial union, an organisation dedicated to the question of privatising Soviet property.

Security of Soviet N-arsenal in danger due turmoil

MOSCOW, Aug 27: The disclosure that the Soviet coup plotters seized the codes for launching the country's nuclear weapons is raising questions about the security of the vast arsenal in times of turmoil, reports AP.

One major point of concern emerging from the bungled takeover that briefly toppled Mikhail Gorbachev is the fate of tactical nuclear weapons deployed in the Soviet republics now striving for independence.

A Gorbachev aide, Anatoly Chernayev, said Sunday that plotters who approached Gorbachev at his Crimean dacha seized a briefcase containing the launch codes, but apparently could not have used them without the Soviet president's help.

Richard Wolf, editor of the book "Jane's Soviet High Command", published by the respected British defense analyst Jane's Publishing Co Ltd, said he believed the Soviet system for deploying the weapons rendered the coup plotters incapable of using them.

"He would then have had to coordinate the other two points of the triad," Wolf said of those who held the codes. "And I don't think he'd have been able to do this."

"There would have been someone on the General Staff who would have sensed the madness of this and would have pulled the plug," he said.

The new Soviet defense minister, Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, also denied that the coup plotters — some of whom may still be at large — ever had the ability to launch a nuclear strike.

But Wolf, in an interview, said the seizure of the codes constituted a serious breach of security nonetheless.

"There was a very serious possibility of the codes falling into the wrong hands," he said.

BRIEFLY

Leftists kill Italian priest: Maoist guerrillas shot dead an Italian priest, the latest victim of what church officials called "terrorist insanity" against foreign clergy performing social work among Peru's poor, reports Reuter from Lima.

Hooded guerrillas believed to be members of the Shining Path shot Alessandro Dordi Negroni, 60, three times in the face after ordering him and two lay workers out of a van as they returned to Chimbote, 450 km (270 miles) north of Lima.

Dordi was returning after celebrating mass in a nearby town, said Rev. Hector Alvarado, a priest in the Diocese office of the port town of Chimbote.

Dordi, who had run social programmes in the Santa valley for 11 years, died instantly. Guerrillas left his body on the roadside and escaped with his van, he said.

Killer of four arrested: A man has been arrested in the shooting deaths of his estranged wife's parents and a firebombing in which two children were killed and their parents severely burned, police said, reports AP from Honolulu.

Orlando Ganal, 37, also shot and wounded his wife and 14-year-old son and set fire to a laundry where he worked, said police spokeswoman Ms Motoyama. The wife, 34, was in good condition and her son in critical condition, Motoyama said. Police wouldn't release their names.

Ganal had filed for divorce and the case was to have been heard Monday.

Ganal, who was arrested Monday, is suspected of crisscrossing the island of Oahu twice during the rampage that began late Sunday.

Earthquake shakes Japan: A strong earthquake with a preliminary reading of 5.9 on the Richter scale shook Japan's northern island of Hokkaido late Monday night, the Central Meteorological Agency said Tuesday, reports AP from Tokyo.

There were no reports of damage or injuries from the 11:50 pm tremor, the agency said. It said there was no danger of tsunami seismic waves.

The quake's epicentre was 60 kilometres (37 miles) under the sea floor off the coast of Kushiro, about 890 kilometres (560 miles) northeast of Tokyo, the agency said.

The earthquake registered three on the Japanese scale of seven in Kushiro and Hiroo on Hokkaido, and two in Hachinohe, Aomori Prefecture, the northern state on Japan's main island.

A tremor measuring three on the Japanese scale can jiggle windows and cause hanging lamps to sway.

The Richter scale is a measure of the total strength of an earthquake at its epicentre. A quake registering 6 on the scale is considered "severe," capable of widespread damage near the epicentre.

Cuellar sees progress in ME hostage crisis: UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar said on Monday he saw signs of progress in the Middle East hostage crisis and he would meet an Iranian envoy today (Tuesday), reports Reuter from Geneva.

He spoke to reporters after being briefed by his personal representative Giandomenico Picco who returned from a visit to Israel last week.

"I continue my hope that something very important will happen in seeing all the detainees set free," he said. "When I cannot say, but things are moving and moving at a good pace."

He said Iran's envoy might be its ambassador to the United Nations in New York Kamal Kharrazi, with whom he discussed the hostage issue in Geneva two weeks ago.

Aoun allowed to leave for France: Parliament on Monday approved amnesty for rebel Christian Gen Michel Aoun, reports AP from Beirut.

The endorsement came after a heated five-hour debate on the bill proposed by President Elias Hrawi's government.

The administration wanted to resolve the Aoun case that has resulted in a diplomatic strain with France.

Parliament Speaker Hussein said the bill was endorsed by a majority of 72 members present, but declined to give the vote totals.

No date was set for Aoun's departure for the embassy, where he has been holed up for more than nine months.

The bill has to be signed by Hrawi within the next two days and then arrangements must be made to move Aoun and his two top aides from the French Embassy in Christian east Beirut.

Funeral procession in New York: Hundreds of New York mourners, demanding justice and shouting insults at police, marched on Monday in a funeral procession for a black child whose death sparked rioting in a neighbourhood of blacks and Hasidic Jews, reports Reuter from New York.

The child, Gavin Cato, 7, was killed a week ago when a car driven by a Hasidic Jew jumped a kerb in the New York Borough of Brooklyn and struck him.

For four nights, black youths angered by the death rioted through the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, where blacks and Jews of the ultra-orthodox Lubavitch Hasidic sect live in the same neighbourhood.

The rioting was the worst racial unrest New York has seen in recent years.

The five-mile (eight-km) funeral march moved tensely and slowly through Brooklyn from a Baptist church.

Romania hails Baltic freedom: Romania on Monday welcomed the proclamation of state of independence of the Soviet Republics of Lithuania, Letonia and Estonia, which a government spokesman termed as a legitimate act meeting aspirations of liberty, national dignity and democracy of the people of three countries, Rompress reports from Bucharest.

The spokesman pointed out recovering independence by Lithuania, Letonia and Estonia represents an act of reparation of the historical injustice committed through annexation of the three countries by the USSR in 1940, as per a secret understanding of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.

The government spokesman said Romania had friendly relations with these countries in the inter-world period, keeping diplomatic relations till the moment of their incorporation in the Soviet Union.

Romania is ready to recognise the three Baltic states, the spokesman announced.

Manila to allow US troops to use Subic base for 10 more yrs

MANILA, Aug 27: The United States and the Philippines signed a new military base agreement today allowing US forces use of Subic Bay Naval Dockyard for 10 more years, reports Reuter.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus and US Ambassador Frank Wisner signed the treaty after 15 months of tortuous negotiations on the future of the almost century-long American military presence in the former US colony.

The agreement faces a tough ratification process in the Philippine Senate, which must approve the pact with a two-thirds majority before the present lease expires on September 16.

The treaty of friendship, cooperation and security was signed at a ceremony attended by President Corason Aquino at the Malacanang Presidential Palace in Manila.

"It provides a framework for future cooperation... it's a way to celebrate an old friendship and put it on a new and stronger footing," Wisner told reporters after meeting Congress Speaker Ramon Mitra on Monday.

Aquino has been lobbying members of the 23-member Senate to back the accord, which provides 203 million dollars in annual compensation. But Senators say several are opposed to the pact.

Rejection of the treaty would force the United States to withdraw its 8,000 servicemen remaining in the country and close down Subic, its largest ship repair yard and naval ammunition and supply depot in Asia. It is about 50 miles (80 km) northwest of Manila.

Aquino's Executive Secretary Franklin Drilon said in an address at the signing ceremony that the "overwhelming majority" of Filipinos backed ratification of the treaty.

Under the agreement, the United States will hand back control to the Philippines of Clark Air Base. The former headquarters of the US 43rd Air Force was badly damaged by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo volcano in June.

Clark and Subic were the largest American military installations in Asia, employing 80,000 Filipino workers and pumping an estimated one billion dollars a year into the Philippine economy.

Under the new treaty, the Philippines will receive 323 million dollars in the first year and 203 million dollars in succeeding years in security assistance grants.

But if trade concessions, food aid, economic assistance and other items are included, the overall package totals around 800 million dollars in annual support, according to Philippine negotiators.

Aquino says the country, battered by a series of natural disasters, needs the money.

Bodos on rampage, kill former MP

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Tribal rebels shot dead a former MP today in Assam, prompting fears of reprisals by the politician's followers against the separatist group, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports AFP.

All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) guerrillas stormed the home of Samar Brahma Chowdhury in the northeastern state's Kokrajhar district and shot dead the popular politician and his guard after a heavy grenade attack, PTI said.

Chowdhury, former member of the Federal Parliament, was fatally wounded in the attack and died a few hours after the early Tuesday raid, but his guard was riddled with machine gun fire and died on the spot, PTI said.

The slain politician was Chairman of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and championed a cause opposed to ABSU's drive for a separate state within India for the tribes people of oil-rich Assam's upper reaches. The Assam government Tuesday reinforced security in tribal areas fearing retaliatory attacks by PTCA fighters on tribes people, supporting the Bodo rebels, PTI said, adding that a manhunt has been ordered for the killers.

According to official figures, at least 250 people have died since January 1989 in violence linked to the Bodo homeland demand.

Events not finished yet: Solzhenitsyn

NEW YORK, Aug 27: Exiled Soviet author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who spent a lifetime exposing Soviet totalitarianism, declined comment on Monday on the momentous events shaking up his homeland, reports Reuter.

The author's wife, Natalya said in a telephone interview that neither she nor her husband would make any comment at present.

The events are not finished yet. Every hour it changes. There is no sense to make comments in the midst of the process, she said.

Solzhenitsyn, 72, a winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, has spent more than 15 years in virtual isolation at a rural home near Cavendish, Vermont.

He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970 and was forcibly exiled and stripped of his citizenship in 1974 after publishing in the West an expose of Soviet forced labour camps, the Gulag Archipelago.

He has made few public appearances or statements and when he has, it was to criticise both communism and the decadence of the West.

Alex Grant, the Editor of a New York Russian newspaper, Novoye Russkoye Slovo (New Russian Word), said, he's been absolutely incommunicado for many years. "We dropped all attempts two or three years ago to talk to him."

Veronica Steina, a Russian friend of the exiled writer, said she thought the reclusive author's reaction was "normal, as ours is."

Steina said of the writer: "He's immersed in his work. He doesn't like to talk. He's very busy person," she said.

Solzhenitsyn was in the process of finishing his epic work on the formation of Soviet society, the red wheel trilogy.

Former MP, son killed in Assam

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Tribal militants armed with grenades and guns killed a former MP, his son and a bodyguard in the northeastern state of Assam today, prompting fears of bloody reprisals, Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports AFP.

All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) militants stoned the house of Samar Brahma Chowdhury in the town Kokrajhar, lobbed grenades and sprayed bullets, the news agency said.

Chowdhury, Chairman of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and a former member of the federal parliament, died in hospital. His son and bodyguard were killed instantly.

The killing sparked fears of clashes between activists of the militant ABSU, which is fighting for a separate state for the Bodo tribes of Assam, and members of the moderate PTCA, PTI said.

Estonian FM fears another coup in USSR

COPENHAGEN, Aug 27: The Estonian Foreign Minister, Lennart Meri, said late Monday he feared another conservative coup in the Soviet Union and urged all countries to recognize the three Baltic states, reports AFP.

Meri, who arrived here from Iceland with his counterparts Janis Jurkans of Latvia and Algirdas Saudargas of Lithuania, expressed satisfaction that at least 18 countries had announced their intentions to recognize the Baltic states.

But he said he was "worried that there will be another coup in two or three weeks, because of the reactionary forces that are so strong in the Soviet Union."

The three went on the meet with Queen Margarete II before signing early today a document reestablishing diplomatic relations with Denmark, interrupted by the annexation of their countries by the Soviet Union in 1940.

Jurkans said the failure of the coup "has not solved all the problems."

Sino-Burmese cooperation to grow

BANGKOK, Aug 27: Burma and China are to boost economic, military and political cooperation following the visit last week to Beijing by junta leader Saw Maung, the official Radio Rangoon said today, reports AFP.

During talks in Beijing, the two countries agreed to increase military cooperation and commercial exchanges, as well as coordinate efforts to fight narcotics trafficking across their common border, the radio said in a dispatch monitored here.

"For more than 40 years now Burma and China have been in association with each other on the basis of a very profound understanding," the radio quoted Saw Maung as saying during a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Peng.