

BRIEFLY

Perot ahead of Bush, Clinton :

Texas billionaire Ross Perot has pulled ahead of both President George Bush and likely Democratic candidate Bill Clinton in the race for president, according to a poll released Saturday, reports AFP from New York.

A time Magazine CNN survey showed Perot garnering support from 33 per cent of registered voters, while Bush took 28 per cent and Clinton 24 per cent.

Perot, who has yet to declare his candidacy, has promised to enter the race as an independent if supporters manage to get his name on ballots in all 50 states for the November election.

Bush and Clinton lose almost an equal number of votes to Perot in a three way race, the poll showed, with 25 per cent of the President's supporters and 27 per cent of Clinton's backers switching to Perot.

N-physicist tortured in Iraq :

An Iraqi nuclear physicist claims he was tortured in Baghdad 13 years ago for refusing to build an atomic bomb for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the British weekly, The Observer, says in Sunday's edition, reports AFP from London.

The paper quotes Hussein Shahrastan, now in exile in Iran, as saying he was given electric shocks, whipped and hung by the wrists in a house in Baghdad after his arrest in December 1979 at his office in the Iraqi atomic energy commission.

He said one of his interrogators was Barzan Takriti, a half-brother of the Iraqi president, who is currently Iraq's ambassador to Switzerland.

The physicist, trained in Britain and Canada, said he opposed nuclear arms, and believed he was working towards peaceful uses for nuclear power in Iraq.

Douglas Hurd in Cairo :

British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd arrived in Cairo overnight for a brief visit and talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the Foreign Ministry announced Sunday, reports AFP.

Hurd is also to meet his Egyptian counterpart AMR Mousa during the visit, which is expected to be of only a few hours.

The Foreign Secretary came from Saudi Arabia, where he met with King Fahd and his Defence Minister Sultan bin Abdul Aziz during a short visit to Riyadh late Saturday, Saudi television reported.

There were no details on his talks in Riyadh, but diplomatic sources had said they were to be on regional and bilateral issues.

3 Irish cops hurt in blast :

A bomb severely damaged an armoured police patrol car in northern Ireland and slightly injured three officers, police said May 17, reports Reuter from London.

The attack happened in Dungannon, Co Tyrone, just before midnight on Saturday when a blast jar filled with high explosive was thrown at their vehicle in the town centre.

Police said the three officers were treated in hospital and later discharged.

Afghan leader dies of poisoning :

A prominent Afghan guerrilla commander has died of poisoning in neighbouring Pakistan, hospital sources said on Saturday, reports Reuter from Quetta.

They said Commander Maulvi Nagibullah died on Thursday. The commander, who belonged to the Jamiat-e-Islami Party of President-Designate Burhanuddin Rabbani, was brought to Pakistan for treatment after suffering from poisoning in the Afghan city of Kandahar last week.

US envoy leaves Belgrade :

The United States Ambassador to Yugoslavia left Belgrade on Saturday, accusing Serbia and the Yugoslav army of stockpiling the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports Reuter from Belgrade.

Ambassador Warren Zimmerman said Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and the leader of Serbs in Bosnia, Radovan Karadzic, must after their policies towards Bosnia if there was to be any chance of peace.

Fighting erupted in Bosnia three months ago after its majority Muslims and Croats voted for independence from Yugoslavia. About 1,300 people have been killed.

Suharto to contest again:

One of Indonesia's most powerful ministers hinted that President Suharto, one of Asia's longest-serving rulers, would stand again when his current term expires in March next year, reports Reuter from Jakarta.

Secretary of State Mardiana, at a campaign rally on Friday for the ruling Golkar Party for June 9's state assembly elections, avoided directly naming Suharto.

The 70-year-old Suharto, who rose to power in southeast Asia's biggest country in 1965, is widely expected to run again but has yet to publicly declare his intentions. He cannot formally be nominated until next March.

Lithuanian PM to resign :

Lithuanian Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius announced Saturday he will resign on May 28 because parliament opposes his plans for economic reform, a Lithuanian newscast reported, AP says from Vilnius.

Vagnorius, 34, had called unsuccessfully for early parliamentary elections in September to replace the Supreme Council, which he said was blocking reforms. He also sought special powers to allow his government to conduct economic transformations without interference from lawmakers.

The resignation was announced a week before a referendum scheduled in Lithuania on whether to strengthen the powers of the presidency to ease the impasse between the legislative and executive branches of government.

Last week, parliament overturned a decree by Vagnorius giving him the right to dismiss up to 50 per cent of the state work force.

Cyclone claims 5 in W Bengal :

A cyclone ripped through the eastern coastal state of West Bengal on Saturday, leaving at least five people dead and 10 more injured, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The storm, lasting about an hour, also caused extensive damage to property in West Bengal's Birbhum district, state government officials were quoted as saying.

A number of houses were damaged and trees and electric poles uprooted in the district's 100-odd villages, the officials said in Calcutta, capital of West Bengal.

Spain, France abolish border :

Spain and France abolished a border post on Saturday for the first time in line with the European Community's agreement in Maastricht last December for closer cooperation on border controls, Reuter reports from Mollo.

The mayors of Mollo in the northeast corner of Spain and Prats de Mollo in France held a public party and children carrying a European blue flag with 12 golden stars crossed the border to mark the event.



WASHINGTON : Civil Rights leader Jesse Jackson (C) holds actress Daisy Eagon on his shoulders during the 'save our cities! save our children!' march sponsored by the US conference of mayors May 16. With Jackson are (L-R), Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke, Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson, New York Mayor David Dinkins, Former New York Mayor Ed Koch, Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn and unidentified. — AFP/UNB photo

Iraq rejects UN drawn Kuwaiti border

BAGHDAD, May 17: An Iraqi minister said on Saturday Iraqis would never accept the border with Kuwait as demarcated by the United Nations and the UN Security Council would turn the region into a powder keg if it ratified the new boundary, reports Reuter.

Mohammad Saeed Al-Sahaf, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, told a special session of the Iraqi parliament that the UN Commission which drew the border in April was unjust, subject to western pressure and partial to the Kuwaiti side.

The Commission recommended in April that the border be moved northwards, giving Kuwait most of Iraq's main

naval base at UMM QASR and a larger share in the Rumailah oilfield.

Sahaf said Security Council ratification of the Commission's ruling would constitute "a really grave precedent."

"The Council would not be contributing to the establishment of stability but would turn the region into a nucleus for explosion," he said.

Even if the government was forced to accept the new boundary, "the Iraqi people can never be convinced. They realise their rights have been violated," he added.

The minister read a lengthy

letter he said the Iraqi Foreign Ministry had prepared to send to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to explain Iraq's position on what he called this "really dangerous issue."

He noted that the UN border commission, set up under a UN Security Council Resolution in April 1991, had based its work on the basis of a 1963 boundary which Iraq disputes.

"The 1963 boundary (agreement) did not go through the necessary legislative stages and was not signed by the president of the republic," he said.

Suu Kyi won't leave Myanmar

BANGKOK, May 17: Her spirit unbroken after nearly three years under house arrest, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi intends to remain in military-ruled Myanmar until the political crisis is resolved, her husband said Sunday, reports AP.

Michael Aris, who left Myanmar Saturday after a two-week reunion with his wife, said Suu Kyi has refused even to discuss the possibility of leaving Myanmar with authorities.

Myanmar military junta, which placed her under house arrest in July 1989, has offered to free Suu Kyi if she re-

nounces politics and leaves the country.

"She is seeing it all through come what may," Aris told reporters, describing her spirit as "indomitable."

Aris, who had not seen his wife in more than two years, was allowed the visit as part of recent liberalization measures by the junta.

Suu Kyi, who turns 47 next month, led a nationwide pro-democracy uprising in 1988 which was brutally repressed by the Myanmar military. The junta allowed general elections in 1990 which her National League for Democracy won by a landslide.

But instead of turning over power to a civilian government, the military placed her under house arrest and tried to root out all opposition. Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Prize last year.

Since junta leader Gen. Saw Maung retired April 23, the military has released some prisoners and promised to free all who do not pose a threat to national security. Saw Maung was replaced by his deputy, army commander Gen. Than Shwe.

She is not quite certain that this is the beginning of genuine reform.



KABUL: A soldier in ousted communist regime uniform, walks past a man sleeping on street May 16 beneath huge painting of Mohammed Usman, an Afghan hero in the first war against colonial Great Britain over a hundred years ago. — AFP/UNB photo

Mediation team verdict soon Hekmatyar pledges to respect truce

KABUL, May 17: Hardline Mujahideen Leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has authorised a group of Afghan elders and commanders to mediate between him and his rival, Defence Minister Ahmed Shah Masood, Mujahideen and diplomatic sources said Saturday, Reports AFP.

Hekmatyar, chief of Hezb-i-Islami, has also promised to respect the on going ceasefire till mediation team gave its verdict, the sources said.

The assurance came when a 31-member team headed by Pashtun Commander Jalaluddin Haqqani met Hekmatyar at his base in eastern Sarowbi district Saturday.

Haqqani, known for over-running the important garrison city of Khost in March last year, has been appointed Justice Minister in the Mujahideen interim government which assume power April 28.

Sources said he had met Masood before leading a "Jirga," or traditional tribal delegation, to Sarowbi.

Hekmatyar assured Haqqani that he would abide by the verdict of the mediation mission, Haqqani was quoted as telling an Asian diplomat here.

"This is very encouraging move," said the diplomat, who is close to Mujahideen factions.

Fighting intensifies in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, May 17: Serbian tanks blasted the centre of Sarajevo as fighting intensified in Bosnia and about 200 United Nations peacekeepers pulled out of the Bosnian capital, reports Reuter.

Confronted by Serb and Muslim forces' repeated disregard of ceasefires, the UN troops left Saturday and were due to be followed by more, including UN Commander Satish Nambiar, on Sunday.

Serb forces focused tank fire on the centre of Sarajevo on Saturday night in a bid to slice the Bosnian capital in two.

There was also sporadic shelling from southern districts over UN headquarters to the north of the city.

Sikh high priest support independence

CHANDIGARH, May 16: For the first time since the Sikh rebellion broke out in the northwestern state of Punjab more than ten years ago, an apex body managing Sikh shrines has asked New Delhi to let Punjab become an independent state, reports AP.

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee chief Gurcharan Singh Tohra told journalists Saturday the Indian government was incapable of solving the Punjab dispute.

The committee decided to endorse the call for a separate nation following "public pressure," Tohra said. It has until now been indifferent to the demand for a separate homeland.

47 killed as Kurds clash with troops

ISTANBUL, May 17: twenty-seven soldiers and 20 separatist rebel Kurds were killed in day-long fighting near the Turkish-Iraqi border, Turkish television said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

It said fighting raged on Friday after Marxist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas attacked a gendarme post in southeastern Uludere township with rockets and automatic rifles.

The television report said rebels who escaped into Iraq after the fighting were believed to have taken bodies of other PKK guerrillas.

Off the Record

Daughters help mend the rope together

WINDSOR, England: The Duke and Duchess of York appeared in public together Saturday for the first time since they formally separated in March after more than five years of marriage, reports AP.

Prince Andrew and the former Sarah Ferguson, both 32, went with their daughters, Beatrice and Eugenie, to the Royal Windsor Horse Show.

Their arrival at the show — where the duke joined his father-in-law, Major Ronald Ferguson, to judge an event — delighted spectators.

The couple's trip to the horse show was their first high-profile appearance since Buckingham Palace announced on March 19 that the Duchess was seeking a separation.

The palace would say nothing Saturday night about the couple's marital situation, except to refer to the announcement of the separation which made clear nothing would be said until lawyers' discussions were complete.

"In the meantime we are not commenting on any aspect of their relationship," a spokesman said, requesting customary anonymity.

The spokesman also refused to comment on British media reports that the Duchess planned to move out of the couple's Sunninghill Park estate, near Windsor, into a nearby six-bedroom mock Tudor mansion.



Benefits only for gays

LOS ANGELES: Entertainment giant MCA Inc has agreed to extend health benefits to employees' homosexual partners. It's the first large company in its industry to do so, gay advocates said, reports AP.

MCA said Friday that employees with same-sex partners can apply for family-style health benefits if they can demonstrate a long-term commitment to their partner.

MCA did not say how many of its 16,000 employees qualified or how much the programme would cost. Unmarried couples of the opposite sex are not included.

Civil rights attorney Gloria R Allred said the policy is a step forward but is unfair to heterosexual couples who "also have serious commitments but have good reasons for not marrying."

Sid Sheinberg, MCA's president, said, "We obviously do not think it's discriminatory or we wouldn't have done it."

Rich Jennings, of Hollywood Supports, an advocacy group of homosexuals and AIDS patients, said the policy is the first for a large entertainment company and is needed because gays can't marry.

Movie and TV conglomerate MCA is a subsidiary of Matsushita Electric Industrial Co, Japan's largest consumer electronics company. Universal Pictures, an MCA subsidiary, is one of the seven major US movie distributors. MCA film properties included "ET the Extra-Terrestrial," "Jaws" and "Back to the Future." The company also produced hit records and television shows.

Sonia to reveal Indira's insight into character

LONDON: Sonia Gandhi, who next week comes out of mourning for her assassinated husband Rajiv, has promised to reveal new insights into the character of her "much misunderstood" mother-in-law, Indira Gandhi, reports Reuter.

In an interview with Britain's independent newspaper published on Saturday, the Italian-born Sonia said unpublished letters between Indira Gandhi, assassinated in 1984, and her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, cast new light on Indira.

"After my mother-in-law's assassination, I read through a large collection of her papers. I found that a considerable correspondence between her and her father had remained unrevealed," Sonia Gandhi said.

"I thought it would be a good idea to publish these letters. They are of historical importance and disclose a great deal about the character and temperament of my mother-in-law."

She added: "my mother-in-law was much misunderstood. She was a courageous woman who lived and died for the country. She was perceived as aloof and autocratic, particularly by her political opponents."

"I knew her as an extremely sensitive and warm human being."

Where AIDS patients left alone to die

TOKYO: The spread of AIDS in Japan, where the threat of the disease was long ignored, is causing hypochondria and panic, with doctors abandoning AIDS hospitals and patients left alone in small single-bed rooms to die, reports Reuter.

"AIDS patients are being ostracised. It is a human rights problem," said Tsuyoshi Yamaguchi, a leading AIDS expert at the Tokyo metropolitan Komagome hospital.

Many people, including families and friends, turn away from AIDS victims for fear they could contract the disease. In turn, most sufferers keep the secret to themselves, he said.

Ignorance about AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is preventing the Japanese public from associating with AIDS patients, Yamaguchi said in an interview.

The situation is such that AIDS patients tend to confine themselves to their small rooms, refusing even to eat, he said.

"AIDS patients go into depression at the thought of having an incurable disease, they become weaker and weaker at a faster speed than necessary because they stop eating."

At a time when they desperately need the best medical care and attention, patients risk being turned away from hospitals.

"There are cases of hospitals rejecting AIDS patients, especially in rural areas," Yamaguchi said.



Mamedov acting president of Azerbaijan

MOSCOW, May 17: Azerbaijan's National Council on Saturday ousted President Ayaz Muttalibov two days after he was reinstated by parliament, a news agency reported, reports AP.

Legislative Chairman Yagub Mamedov was named acting president, said Mikhman Aliev, head of the Turan news agency speaking by telephone from the Azerbaijani capital.

Mamedov, a former Communist, was elected chairman of the parliament following Muttalibov's March resignation.

NATO and its former adversaries face renewed uncertainties

BANFF, CANADA, May 17: Legislators from the 16 NATO allies and 11 former adversaries, meeting in the heart of Canada's Rocky mountains Saturday, found that instead of celebrating the end of the cold war, they faced renewed uncertainties, reports AFP.

The participation of delegations from six former Soviet republics and four former WARSAW Pact member states for the first time at a meeting of the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA) had been billed as a friendship and unity meeting by organizers who saw it as a first step towards possible expansion of the NATO alliance.

The NAA is the parliamentary wing of the Brussels-based North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

But, instead of concentrating on a new-found unity, many delegates were openly concerned about a possible break-up of NATO and renewed threats of US isolationism.

British Labour MP Bruce George, in a report on behalf of the assembly's political committee, warned that an announced Canadian withdrawal of its troops from Germany, to be completed in 1994, could "embolden those voices in Washington urging reductions far below the 150,000 force level planned for fiscal 1995".

In addition, George warned, there is growing sentiment in the United States, especially with an election campaign under way, for the US military commitment to Europe to be linked to a successful conclusion of stalemate world trade liberalization negotiations.

Those negotiations — which should have been completed by the end of 1990 — have

been blocked primarily over US demands that the 12 nation European Community (EC) substantially cut and eventually eliminate farm export subsidies.

George warned that Europe was not yet ready for any large-scale US withdrawal from Europe.

"An independent European defense," warned George, "remains far in the distance and its future effectiveness, if any (is) hardly settled."

He maintained "all the outstanding issues" — such as the precise nature of forces in a Pan-European operation, their ability to operate outside the European theater, and their relationship with NATO as such — "remain unanswered."

Yet there were still strong threats to the US commitment to the alliance.

George quoted US Republican Senator William Roth as saying that NATO's "general failure to address itself to a radically changed global security environment has rendered the rationale for an ongoing US commitment to NATO more and more open to question."

This prompted Roth to tell the meeting that he believed "NATO is just as vital now, if not more so, than it was during the cold war" because of continued regional instability.

But he warned that NATO would have to adapt if it hoped to meet such challenges of the 1990s as Yugoslavia and the Middle East.

He did concede that many members of the US congress would make some linkage between the US role in NATO and any failure of the trade liberalization talks being carried out within the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

10 more killed in S African violence

JOHANNESBURG, May 17: Ten people, four of them shot dead in a gunbattle, were killed in violence on the first day of a key session of South African reform talks, police said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

One of the dead was local Inkatha Freedom Party chairman Simon Nkomo. He died in Johannesburg's Alexandra township clinic after being shot from behind as he walked to work on Friday.