

Nobel laureates ask UNHRC to impose sanctions on Myanmar

GENEVA, Feb 23: Six Nobel Peace Prize winners Monday told the UN human rights commission that diplomatic, military and economic sanctions should be imposed against Myanmar in order to put an end to the tyranny of the military regime in Yangon, reports AFP.

In testimony before the commission, the prize winners headed by the former President of Costa Rica Oscar Arias Sanchez said that the regime's campaign of terror was a source of instability in the region and advised that

Myanmar be stripped of its United Nations seat pending the release of political prisoners.

We are horrified at the ease with which the regime can obtain arms to continue the repression of its own people, particularly from China which last year provided military equipment worth 1.2 billion dollars, said Arias.

The laureates asked that the international community recognize the democratic opposition in Myanmar and suspend all but humanitarian aid.

Maharashtra CM fired for inept handling of riots

NEW DELHI, Feb 23: Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao overnight sacked the Chief Minister of a western state for inept handling of last month's rioting in Bombay, officials from India's ruling Congress (I) party said today, reports AFP.

Sudhakar Rao Naik, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, of which Bombay is the capital, turned in his papers after a late Monday night meeting with Rao in New Delhi.

Rao is also President of the Congress (I) which administers several Indian provinces including the western port

state of Maharashtra.

The prime minister asked for it and I gave it," Naik said. Party officials said Rao would name his successor next week to end a revolt brewing in the Congress (I)'s regional chapter in Maharashtra.

The new chief minister would be named after consultations with others," said a party official, referring to the revolt that erupted in the Congress (I) following the sacking by Naik of six of his 31 ministers on February 12.

Some 50 of Maharashtra's 225 lawmakers had called for Naik's resignation for the inept

handling of the rioting, prompting Rao to send a team of Congress (I) troubleshooters to stamp out the feuding in his party's regional wing.

Nearly 700 people died and tens of thousands fled Bombay, India's financial hub, during 10 days of Hindu-Muslim bloodletting which erupted in connection with the razing of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya on December 6 by Hindu zealots.

The Bombay police largely stood by and the state administration virtually collapsed as the Hindu-Muslim riots degenerated into a free-for-all

with gangsters, landlords and politicians settling old feuds in the western metropolises.

Naik, who had been chief minister for 19 months, was forced to quit five days after he demanded the resignation of Defence Minister Sharad Pawar, a Congress (I) heavy-weight and a former Maharashtra Chief Minister.

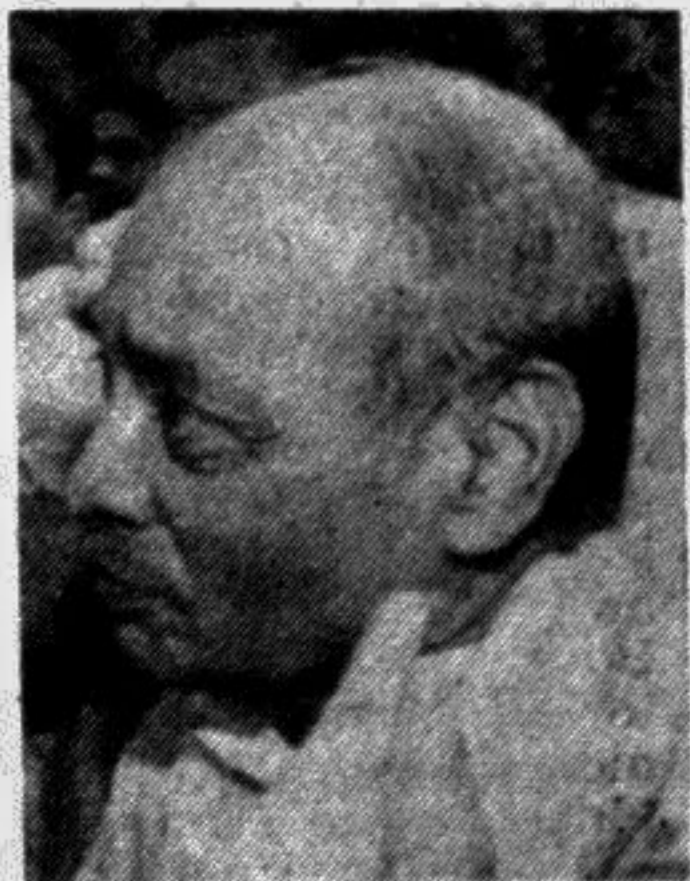
Naik accused Pawar of engineering the revolt in a bid to replace him as chief minister with one of the defence minister's prompting the prime minister to summon the politician to New Delhi.

Off the Record

'I've jumped the short man'

NEW DELHI: "I have jumped the short man," the Prime Minister said amidst laughter in the Rajya Sabha after he missed out the name of Mr Pranab Mukherjee while introducing to the house the ministers who had joined the government in the recent reshuffle, reports PTI.

Rao, who came to the house specially for the introduction of his new colleagues, began with the cabinet ministers and went on to the ministers of state, unwittingly omitting Mukherjee, the Commerce Minister.



As a few members pointed out the slip, a smiling Rao said: "I am sorry, I have jumped the short man." The entire house responded with good-natured laughter in which the diminutive Mukherjee also heartily joined.

Woman loses court fight for embryos

WASHINGTON: A divorced woman lost a Supreme Court appeal Monday in a custody fight with her ex-husband over frozen embryos she wants implanted in her womb, reports AP.

The court let stand a Tennessee Supreme Court ruling that threw out Mary Sue Davis Stowe's case. The state court had ruled that Junior Lewis Davis' right not to become a father outweighed his former wife's right to the embryos.

The seven embryos fertilized by Davis in December 1988 are being preserved in liquid nitrogen at a Knoxville, Tenn. fertility clinic.

The first-of-its-kind case has been watched closely by lawyers and medical and fertility experts across the country.

Mrs. Stowe and Davis went to state court in 1989 to decide who should have custody of the embryos. She wanted to use them to try to become pregnant. He wanted them destroyed.

The couple is divorced and both are remarried.

Davis' lawyer, Lynn Paltrow of the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, said Monday's action meant that unless Mrs. Stowe raised a new claim, a Tennessee trial judge would be told to order the clinic to discard the embryos.

The irony in this case is that we don't even know if they're alive," Paltrow said, adding that the embryos may not have survived the freezing process.

America's bedrooms springing again

NEW YORK: America's bedrooms are jumping again, according to a new study which claims the sexual panic that shook the country on the heels of the AIDS crisis appears to be fading, reports Reuter.

The study, said to be the first in-depth look at US sexual mores since the 1940s Kinsey report, says Americans are more sexually active now than they were three years ago.

"The Janus report on sexual behaviour", a wide-ranging study by the husband-and-wife research team of Samuel and Cynthia Janus, goes on sale today and details changes in sexual attitudes and practices in America in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Based on a countrywide study of almost 8,000 people over a nine-year period, with respondents aged 18 to 80, the research shows old rules governing sex no longer apply.

According to the survey, 62 per cent of US men and 66 per cent of women aged 18 to 26 were having more sex than they were three years ago.

Fresh fighting takes 10 lives in Somalia

MOGADISHU, Feb 23: Backers of rival warlords waged new battles in a southern port and fired on Belgian troops, killing at least 10 Somalis and wounding 20 in fighting that kept US forces from withdrawing, officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

A relief group reported dozens dead in the fighting in Kismayu that first broke out before dawn Monday and continued that evening, the same day US forces planned to hand full command of the area to Belgian troops. The handover was postponed.

The Belgians moved to protect buildings used by relief organizations but were unable to halt the battles scattered around the city about 280 miles (460 kms) south of Mogadishu, military officials said.

American troops had been preparing to leave the area and were not involved, said Col Fred Peck, US military spokesman. No decision was made whether to redeploy troops, he said.

At least three Somalis were killed in the fighting Monday evening between supporters of Mohamed Said Hirsi, known as Gen Morgan, and forces of Col Omar Jess, said Maj Karen Conley, a US military spokeswoman.

Seven others died in the fighting Monday morning. Two were shot by Belgian troops, but it was unclear when they died. At least 20 Somalis were wounded, Ms Conley said.

The relief group Medecins Sans Frontieres said one of its Somali drivers and guards were shot and killed by Belgian troops in a firefight after the two tried to reach a compound being looted Monday morning, according to spokeswoman Joelle Tanguy.

The group estimated that dozens of Somalis died in Monday's fighting.

About 60 Somali fighters shot at Belgian positions on the southern edge of Kismayu's airport Monday evening, and the Belgians fired back, Ms Conley said. There were no reports of casualties.

No new fighting was reported Tuesday, and the US-led coalition forces were trying to arrange a meeting with clan elders supporting Jess.

About 1,000 US troops remain in the port city of Kismayu along with 700 Belgian troops, said Peck. But he said the fighting was scattered and difficult to control in a city of 100,000.

"Those fighters aren't defending any particular position," he said Tuesday.



UNITED NATIONS: US ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright votes Monday in the Security Council meeting to establish war crimes tribunal in Bosnia. —AFP/UNB photo

Kohl against idea of two-speed Europe

SINGAPORE, Feb 23: German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said today he did not favour two speed progress on European unity although European leaders felt that countries failing to ratify the Maastricht Treaty immediately should not hold back by those that did, reports AFP.

"I was never in favour of the idea of establishing a two-speed Europe" said Kohl, who arrived here Monday for a 36-hour visit.

He said that like other European leaders he hoped that Denmark and Britain would ratify the treaty soon.

Kohl was asked to clarify remarks he reportedly made in New Delhi on Monday when he was quoted as saying the European Community's (EC) 10 remaining members would forge ahead with European unity without Denmark and Britain if they failed to ratify the Maastricht Treaty within six months.

British officials in London expressed surprise over Kohl's comments and said they were trying to verify the statement, according to news reports here.

"I didn't say anything different from what I said after the Edinburgh Summit in September last year. I was

never in favour of the idea of establishing a two-speed Europe. This is not what I said in New Delhi," he said.

Kohl said that he, like other EC leaders, wanted all 12 EC members, including Britain and Denmark which is to hold a second referendum on the issue, to ratify the treaty.

But he said that the summit in Edinburgh agreed that if one or two countries failed to ratify the treaty immediately "the European train should not be brought to a halt and should be allowed to continue to travel on with 11 or 10 members on board."

"This position is nothing new and something we have been saying for some time," he said.

Kohl, who earlier, held talks with Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, said East Asian fears that the EC would evolve into a protectionist "fortress" were unfounded.

"I am very confident we will not have a fortress Europe. Neither do I think our French friends would want to see a fortress Europe" he said when asked to comment on a recent reported call by French President Francois Mitterrand that Europe be protected from cheap Asian imports.

Amnesty International report

Morocco, Polisario Front violating human rights in western Sahara

LONDON, Feb 23: Amnesty International said Tuesday that Morocco and its adversary the Polisario Front continue to violate human rights in the disputed Western Sahara despite the presence there of United Nations personnel, reports AP.

The independent London-based group said in a report that human rights guarantees under a 1991 plan agreed by the United Nations, Morocco, the Organization of African Unity and the Polisario Front have not been respected.

"Despite the existence of UN personnel on the ground, hundreds of people of Sahrawi (Western Saharan) origin have reportedly been arrested or otherwise harassed on suspicion of supporting Western

Saharan independence or for participating in peaceful protests," it said.

"Hundreds more Sahrawis, who were arrested by members of the Moroccan security forces between 1975 and 1988 remain 'disappeared', reportedly held in secret detention without charge or trial," it said.

"Abuses by the Polisario Front (include) detention of prisoners of conscience, long-term incommunicado detention, torture and deaths in custody of suspected opponents in the Polisario camps in Tindouf" in western Algeria, it added.

The five-page report said the 1991 plan included a renewed proposal for a UN-supervised referendum to de-

termine the future of the Western Sahara.

The report said Amnesty International takes no position on the conflicting claims to the Western Sahara or on who should be eligible to vote in the referendum.

But it said the organization is concerned that provisions for freedom of expression and the release of political prisoners laid down in the plan have not been respected.

The Western Sahara, formerly the Spanish Sahara, was split between Morocco and Mauritania in 1976 after Spain withdrew from its former colony in December 1975. In 1979, Mauritania renounced its claim to its share of the territory, which was

added by Morocco to its area.

Morocco's annexation is opposed by the Polisario Front guerrillas, who want the territory to become an independent state.

On Aug 30, 1988, Morocco and the Polisario Front accepted an initial UN peace plan. Under that plan, a ceasefire was declared and a referendum was to be held in January 1992 to determine the future of the area.

But the referendum has been repeatedly postponed because the Morocco government and the Polisario Front cannot agree on the referendum terms, and the Polisario Front has threatened to resume hostilities.

UN arms experts leave Iraq

BAGHDAD, Feb 23: UN weapons experts left Iraq today after a one-day surprise visit to check information on "prohibited items" under a UN resolution concerning Iraq's long-range missile programme, team leader Nikita Smidovich said, reports AFP.

A team of ballistic inspectors, who over the weekend extended their stay in Iraq, also left by plane for the Gulf state of Bahrain where the United Nations commission disarming Iraq maintains a co-ordination office.

On Monday, Smidovich arrived in Baghdad at the head of a team of 20 nuclear, biological, ballistic and chemical inspectors who immediately linked up with Frenchman Patrice Palanque's group at an undisclosed site.

Before leaving Smidovich said: "We were checking very specific information related to prohibited items under Resolution 687," of the UN Security Council.

The resolution requires Iraq to list the location and quantity of chemical and biological weapons as well as ballistic missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometers (93 miles). UN officials say Iraq has so far failed to comply.

A senior Iraqi official said

Monday that Palanque's and Smidovich's team, the 50th and 51st mission to Iraq since the end of the Gulf war, had failed to uncover any items banned under Resolution 687.

Hussam Mohammad Amin, who heads the Iraqi escort group that accompanied UN inspectors during the missions, said the UN experts visited three sites outside Baghdad and "did not find (any equipment) prohibited under 687."

Asked whether he would give credit to Iraq, Christopher said credit would be given in line with the "final analysis."

Zhao voted out of parliament

BEIJING, Feb 23: Zhao Ziyang, the disgraced communist party leader, has been voted out of China's parliament, a report showed today, says AFP.

Zhao had remained a deputy of the National People's Congress (NPC) after being removed as party chief in June 1989, but was barred from the three annual sessions that followed the Tiananmen Square crackdown.

A new 2,977-member NPC was elected this year and will meet for the first time starting March 15.



MOSCOW: Miss World 92 Julia Kurochi-kina writes a peace message on a big greeting card in Red Square, Moscow Monday. Cards have been placed in several capitals in the world and after being signed they will be taken to Washington to form a permanent display. —AFP/UNB photo

Russia to export \$2b arms

MOSCOW, Feb 23: The Russian government has signed contracts with military enterprises to export 2 billion dollar worth of arms in 1993, a senior state official said on Monday, reports Reuter.

Itar-Tass news agency quoted the deputy chairman of the state committee on the Military-industrial complex, Gennady Yampolsky as saying state contracts for arms exports had dropped sharply from the 1992 level of 3 billion dollar Russia's arms sales in 1992 were lower than those of the old Soviet Union, which collapsed in late 1991, by 70 per cent, he said.

Russia no longer views any country as enemy: Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Feb 23: President Boris Yeltsin said Tuesday that Russia no longer views any country as its enemy but still needs a strong military, and he appealed to the armed forces for loyalty, reports AP.

His remarks were aimed at the beleaguered Russian military on Defenders of the Fatherland Day, known until 1992 as Soviet Armed Forces Day.

"We do not consider any nation or group of nations, East or West, to be our adversary," Yeltsin said in an interview in Tuesday's edition of the military newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star). Russia needs a leaner and

more mobile army to cope with the growing threat from small-scale, regional conflicts, Yeltsin said. The danger of worldwide conventional or nuclear war has decreased, he said.

Last year, armed forces day was marred by a clash between pro-Communist protesters and club-wielding riot police. Dozens of people were injured.

Despite the violence, Moscow city officials said they would allow hard-line members of the largest pro-Communist group, Russia Labour, to march Tuesday to Manezh Square, next to the Kremlin.

stop political groups from expressing their views," Deputy Mayor Alexander Bragin said Monday.

Yeltsin is expected to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and war veterans are slated to gather outside the Bolshoi Theater.

These are difficult times for Russia's once fearsome military. The army has shrunk by half — to about 2.5 million soldiers — amid budget cuts and rampant draft evasion.

Morale also has fallen as salaries have been eaten up by inflation. The state has failed to provide housing to thousands of officers, including many who have been with-

drawn from eastern Europe.

Yeltsin said the government tripled soldiers' base pay in January, and some officers' salaries were quintupled.

Servicemen also receive preference for state housing, he added.

The future of military budgets and salaries "directly depends on the success of our reforms, on whether we can create an efficient market economy," Yeltsin said.

Russia Labour and other nationalist groups used the holiday last year to accuse Yeltsin of betraying the armed forces.

biggest patriots' and take it upon themselves to decide who is and who is not a patriot."

Yeltsin also sent a telegram Monday to soldiers in war-torn areas of the former Soviet Union praising them for "difficult soldierly labour."

The telegram said the president expected Russian soldiers to "carry out constitutional and civil duties, and maintain peace, stability, and calm in the country."

The man Yeltsin chose to lead Russia's armed forces, Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, came under attack Monday from hard-line officers who urged him to resign.

Israel denies shelling south Lebanon

Jerusalem, Feb 23: Israel said today its forces were not involved in the South Lebanon shelling on Monday that killed a UN peace keeper and a civilian, reports Reuter.

A spokesman for the UN interim force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said a Nepalese peace keeper was killed and another seriously wounded when two mortar bombs fired by Israeli allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia gunners hit their post in Yater village.

"Mortar shells were fired tonight towards the security zone in the central sector of South Lebanon, an Israeli official said.