

# Venezuelan president may face trial today

CARACAS, May 26: The trial of suspended President Carlos Andres Perez on embezzlement charges may start Thursday, Venezuela's Supreme Court announced Tuesday, reports AP.



Carlos Andres Perez

Although local reports said the court would open the trial Tuesday, the justices did only reviewed the Senate's authorization to try the president. The case will be the first trial of a sitting president in Venezuela's 35 years of

democracy. The session came as Venezuelan politicians watched developments in Guatemala where President Jorge Serrano suspended constitutional guarantees and closed the Congress and Supreme Court.

"This repeats the coup of Alberto Fujimori in Peru," Acting President Octavio Lepage told reporters. Venezuela broke relations with Peru after Fujimori, backed by Peru's military, suspended the country's Constitution and closed its Congress last April. Dissidents within Venezuela's military staged two coup attempts against Perez last year.

Meanwhile, the ruling political party and the two major opposition parties asked Lepage, formerly the Congress president, not to serve more than 30 days.

Party leaders said they want Congress to name an interim president as soon as possible.

The Constitution says once the President is suspended to face trial, the Congress president takes over while the Congress picks an interim president to serve during the trial.

# Attacks not meant to rekindle war: Iran Baghdad vows revenge for cross-border air raids

BAGHDAD, May 26: Iraq vowed revenge today for Iran's cross-border air raids on the Shiite Mujahideen Khalq, reports Reuter.

"Iraq is capable of giving them (Iranians) new lessons at the right time," declared the government newspaper Al-Jumhuriyah in a front-page editorial.

"They will not escape punishment," said Al-Iraq, a newspaper published by small pro-government Kurdish factions.

Iran sent warplanes on Tuesday to bomb two bases in Iraq used by its guerrilla opponents.

The air raids were the first for more than a year, apparently in response to a recent wave of Mujahideen sabotage inside Iran.

The Foreign Ministry called in Iran's Charge d'Affaires on Tuesday and told him that Baghdad would do "anything it considers appropriate to defend the integrity of its

airspace, the sovereignty of its land and the security of its people."

The raids inflicted little damage on the two bases, Al-Ashraf, 90 km (50 miles) from the Iranian borders and Anzali close to the small Iraqi town of Jalula, 35 km (20 miles) from the international borders.

Jumhuriyah said Iran's actions were typical of "bankrupt cowards" who would never have dared to strike without encouragement from Washington.

The Baath Party newspaper Al-Thawra said Iran, which fought a ruinous war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988, was refusing to learn from the past.

"We warn the rulers of Iran of the consequences of playing with the fire of war," the newspaper said. "Iraq is still strong and able to foil their schemes and dispel their vicious dreams."

"Iranis ruled by sick and rotten minds," said Babel, a

newspaper published by President Saddam Hussein's son Uday. "They are like dogs licking their wounds."

The Mujahideen fought on Baghdad's side against the Islamic government in Tehran during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

It maintains large, well-equipped and well-funded forces in Iraq. Its statements and publications speak hopefully of some future day when it will drive the "criminal mulahs of the Khomeini regime," from Tehran.

The Mujahideen recently stepped up sabotage raids inside Iran in the run-up to a presidential election set for June 11.

Iran blames the attacks on infiltrators from Iraq but the Mujahideen insist they are mounted from bases within Iran.

Reuter from Nicosia adds: Iran today defended its air attack on rebel bases in Iraq as

legitimate defence and said the strike was not meant to rekindle the two countries 1980-88 war.

A day after sending fighter-bombers to hit Mujahideen Khalq camps in Iraq, Iranian officials in Tehran and New York said they were not renouncing the UN brokered ceasefire with Iraq and wanted trouble-free relations with Baghdad.

Deputy Speaker of parliament Hassan Rowhani said the raid was a "decisive response" to a spate of Mujahideen cross-border sabotage attacks, Tehran Radio reported.

"The Islamic republic of Iran will never have the slightest doubt in defending the country and cutting off the hand of the aggressor," he told the assembly.

"The Iraqi regime should know that only peaceful coexistence is in the interest of the nations in the region," Rowhani added.

# Off the Record

## 'They wanted big family'

INDIANAPOLIS: A woman gave birth Tuesday to six babies, who were reported in good condition, says AP. Becki Dilley, 27, delivered the four girls and two boys by Caesarean section, said Dianne McCabe, spokeswoman for the Women's Hospital. They were about nine weeks premature, not unusual with multiple births. The doctor had anticipated quintuplets, "so baby number six was a surprise," McCabe said. She said the delivery lasted three minutes and went smoothly.

"All six are stable and doing very well," she said. It was the first pregnancy for Mrs Dilley and her husband, Keith. She had been at the hospital for several weeks as a precaution.

"They've been trying for seven years because they wanted a big family. They got it all at once," McCabe said.

McCabe said she was unsure if Mrs Dilley had been taking any fertility drugs, as is common before multiple births. The hospital planned a news conference Wednesday to release more details.

Mrs Dilley was resting and "dad is doing surprisingly well, too," McCabe said.

Last Thursday, a 29-year-old woman in Leeds, England, who had been treated with fertility drugs for five years gave birth to sextuplets. And on Saturday, a 28-year-old woman in Buenos Aires, Argentina, gave birth to sextuplets.

## Fate of his moustache rests with a judge

BOSTON: The fate of Massachusetts state police Sgt Ralph Weaver's moustache rests with a judge, reports AP. Weaver went to court Monday, seeking to overturn a regulation that would force him to choose by July 1 between his moustache of 23 years and his badge.

"I don't think anyone has the right to judge the way I look after I've been a police officer for 23 years," Weaver said.

Weaver said he understands some bans on facial hair, such as prohibiting firemen from having beards. But a neatly cropped moustache?

A US District Court trial over his lawsuit lasted less than a half hour and no witnesses were called. Lawyers in the case had agreed on the facts and the decision will be made by Judge Rya Zobel. She did not say when she would rule.

Weaver's attorney, Kathleen McCarthy, argued the ban was arbitrary.

But Assistant Attorney General Rosemarie Gale, representing the state police, said the no-moustache rule was meant to promote "esprit de corps".

## NY steals Grammy Awards back from LA

NEW YORK: New York has stolen the Grammy Awards back from Los Angeles, and Mayor David Dinkins cited one determining factor Tuesday for the relocation: attitude, reports AP.

"My good friends in LA, they're wonderful people, but they're sort of blasé," Dinkins said about his West Coast competition for the 36th annual awards next year. "They say 'Oh, well...' But not us. We really love it."

The Grammys will return to Radio City Music Hall for the third time in four years. During the '80s, Los Angeles routinely was host of the awards; the 1988 Radio City show was New York's first in seven years.

Los Angeles, the host of this year's awards, has failed to deliver the same cooperation that is standard in New York City, said Michael Greene, president of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences.

## Police patrol Lhasa to prevent fresh rioting

BEIJING, May 26: Thousands of police patrolled Lhasa on Wednesday to prevent renewed turmoil by Tibetans who protested for two days against Chinese rule, reports AP.

Employees who answered the telephones at two hotels in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, said there were no new disturbances.

One said that 2,000 to 3,000 police were patrolling the streets of Lhasa and that most residents were staying indoors.

"All the people are frightened," said the employee. The phone line deteriorated before he could identify himself.

He said shops remained closed for the third straight day.

The protests began Monday when thousands of Tibetans marched through the streets and staged a peaceful sit-in outside a government compound. After security forces broke up the protest with tear gas and bursts of gunfire into the air, Tibetans roamed the city, stoning shops owned by ethnic Chinese and a police station.

Tibetans gathered at the city center again Tuesday, chanting pro-independence slogans and denouncing newly raised prices and rents. China's official media have not reported the unrest.

## US blasts undemocratic moves in Guatemala

WASHINGTON, May 26: The Clinton administration on Tuesday condemned the suspension of democratic rule in Guatemala and tried to persuade Guatemalan authorities to reverse their decision, reports AP.

"This illegitimate course of action threatens to place Guatemala outside the democratic community of nations," a White House statement said.

"We strongly condemn such efforts to resolve Guatemala's problems through non-democratic means."

Assistant Secretary for

## Clinton's approval rating drops

WASHINGTON, May 26: Polls show that fewer than half of Americans approve of the way President Clinton is doing his job, and public support for his economic plan has declined, reports AP.

A USA Today-CNN Gallup Poll over the weekend showed 44 per cent of Americans approve of Clinton's performance overall, while 46 per cent give him a negative rating.

That compares with a 58 per cent approval rating shortly after he took office in January and 20 per cent disapproving.

An ABC News poll found his approval rating dropped sharply in the last month — from 59 per cent in late April to 46 per cent in a weekend poll. His disapproval rating rose to 50 per cent, from 39 per cent in late April. The polls also showed growing hostility toward Clinton's economic plan.

# BRIEFLY

**Lankan troops kill 3 Tigers:** Three Shri Lankan Tamil rebels were killed when troops ambushed guerrillas in the east, a military spokesman said on Wednesday, reports Reuter from Colombo.

Government troops attacked the rebels in the Welioya district on Tuesday, he said.

When they were returning to base, one soldier was killed when he stepped on an anti-personnel mine outside the army camp, the spokesman said.

He said it was an army mine and not one laid by the guerrillas.

Three soldiers were slightly wounded in the incident.

**US troops in Somalia to get medal:** All US military forces who served in Somalia as part of the humanitarian relief effort Operation Restore Hope will receive a special Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Pentagon announced Tuesday, reports AP from Washington.

US Marines went ashore at Mogadishu on December 9, 1992, to begin the operation. The effort was transferred to United Nations peacekeepers on May 4 after US and allied forces restored enough order in the East African nation to permit the transport of food and medical supplies to starving Somalis.

At its peak in January, Operation Restore Hope totalled about 25,800 US soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines.

In a related development, the Pentagon announced that Marine Corps Lt. Gen Robert B Johnston, who commanded all US forces in Somalia, has been assigned as deputy chief of staff for manpower and reserve affairs at Marine Corps headquarters in Washington.

**Storm hits Iran:** A storm with hailstones weighing 150 grammes (5.3 ounces) caused 15 million dollars of damage to fields and orchards in eastern Iran, Tehran radio said on Tuesday, reports Reuter from Nicosia.

The storm was the worst in eight years. It damaged 2,200 hectares (5,400 acres) near Neyshabur, 680 km (420 miles) east of Tehran, on Monday, the radio said.

**Ishaq honours Chinese air chief:** President Ghulam Ishaq Khan conferred Pakistan's highest military award on visiting Chinese Air Force Chief Lieutenant-General Cao Shuangming in Islamabad Tuesday, reports AFP from Islamabad.

The award was in recognition of his services in promoting closer ties between the two countries, an official statement said.

Before the ceremony at the presidency, the Air Force Chief had a meeting with the President to discuss regional and bilateral matters.

The General arrived in Pakistan Thursday as the head of a delegation for an eight-day official visit.

**Rebels kill 6 in Tripura:** Tribal guerrillas gunned down four policemen and two government employees Tuesday after ambushing their vehicle in India's Tripura state, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says AFP from New Delhi.

Four others were injured in the attack by the All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) in the tiny far-eastern state, PTI said.

The ATTF is seeking Tripura's secession from India. The policemen were escorting a rubber board official who was returning after distributing wages to his employees.

**9 Filipinos flee jail:** Nine Filipino prisoners escaped from jail Wednesday by sawing off the bars of a cell window and jumping into a waiting boat on a nearby river, police said, reports Reuter from Manila.

Police have launched a search for the prisoners, aged 21 to 40, who had been detained on charges ranging from illegal possession of firearms and drugs to murder and robbery.

The nine were in a cell with 14 other prisoners in a prison jail in the Manila district of Navotas.

## Police protection for Lankan politicians

COLOMBO, May 26: Shri Lankan party leaders and other politicians who have complained of threats to their lives by unidentified persons are to be provided with police protection, reports Xinhua.

The government directive to the Defence Ministry on the issue will be effective from Tuesday, officials sources here said today.

The sources said that the Defence Ministry has already instructed the police department to take appropriate steps to ensure that full protection is given to all party leaders and politicians.

This move by the government would help the security authorities to arrest those who possess and carry arms illegally for personal protection, they added.



Two women of the Muslim-controlled district of Mostar, which is cut off from water supplies, push a wheelbarrow with cans of water Tuesday. —AFP/UNB photo

## Violence takes 47 lives so far Police swoop on PAC affects S African multiparty talks

JOHANNESBURG, May 26: A countrywide swoop by police on the black militant Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) has thrown South African democracy talks into temporary disarray but not completely off track, political analysts said, reports Reuter.

They said the PAC's decision on Tuesday to suspend its participation in the 26-party negotiations was a setback but the democratic process had reached a point of no return.

The PAC stopped short of pulling out of the negotiations completely after Tuesday's

pre-dawn arrests of at least 49 members of the group and its APLA (Azanian People's Liberation Army) guerrilla wing.

But PAC leaders demanded the detainees' immediate release, saying it could not participate in talks, which it joined just two months ago, while its people were in jail.

The analysts said the white-ruled government and Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) — the country's two main political players — had too much to lose to let momentum slip away just as progress was being made on a

transition to black majority rule.

"I don't think the negotiations will falter in any serious way — too much is riding on them," said Mervyn Frost, a political scientist.

"Both the (ruling) National Party and the ANC have very pressing reasons to keep the negotiations going," he told Reuters.

Meanwhile the death toll in four days of violence in Johannesburg's volatile townships rose to at least 47 on Tuesday with the discovery of 20 more bodies, police said.

## Hekmatyar wants truce to last

KABUL, May 26: Prime Minister-designate Gulbuddin Hekmatyar vowed on Tuesday to bring lasting peace to Afghanistan and to make his long-delayed entry into Kabul soon from his fortified base on the outskirts of the capital.

"We want this ceasefire to last and the fighting to be finished for ever," he told Reuters at his heavily defended headquarters at Charasyab, 20 km (12 miles) south of Kabul.

The shaky truce held for a second day in Kabul where bitter fighting between government forces and Hekmatyar's radical Hezb-I-

Islami and its Shi'ite Hezb-I-Wahdat allies have killed more than 1,000 people and injured 5,500 the past two weeks.

Altogether some 6,000 people have died in brutal battles between rival guerrilla factions since they took power from the fallen communist government in April 1992, and more than a third of Kabul's 1.5 million residents have fled the city.

Hekmatyar has not entered Kabul in the past 13 months for security reasons but said he would do so within days to hold the first meeting of his new cabinet, announced last

## Cong-I loses Patna seat in bye-polls

NEW DELHI, May 26: India's ruling Congress (I) Party suffered a humiliating election defeat on Tuesday, losing a parliament seat to a centrist grouping in the country's east, reports AFP.

The Janata Dal (People's Party) bagged the prestigious Patna constituency, defeating the Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (India People's Party) by more than 150,000 votes, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

The Janata Dal nominee won 338,000 votes against 62,000 for the Congress (I) in the keenly-fought battle, according to PTI.

Patna was among two parliamentary and 16 provincial states which went to the polls on May 19. The Congress (I) won the other parliamentary constituency, but lost in as many as 12 state assembly seats.

Three people were killed and several others injured in violence during voting in Patna, and the election commission ordered a re-poll in some parts of the city, which is the capital of Janata Dal-ruled Bihar state.

The election debacle has sparked fresh disaffection in the Congress (I) against Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, who is now in tour in central Asia. The Congress (I) took power in new Delhi in June 1991.

## Election historic defeat for Khmer Rouge: Sihanouk

PHNOM PENH, May 26: Head of State Prince Norodom Sihanouk said today the huge turnout of voters in UN run national elections meant the Khmer Rouge guerrilla faction could play no role in the future of Cambodia, reports Reuter.

The Prince told a visiting French parliamentary delegation the success of the polls was a historic rejection of the Khmer Rouge, who repudiated a 1991 peace agreement and told citizens they would be regarded as traitors if they cast ballots.

More than four million people, or 85 per cent of registered voters, had cast their ballots by Tuesday night, the third day of the six-day poll, UN organisers said.

"Remember what I say if you remember one thing from our meeting, this election is a historic defeat for the Khmer Rouge and they will be wiped out of history in the future," a member of the delegation quoted the Prince as saying.

## China's democracy activist freed after 12 years

BEIJING, May 26: One of China's longest held democracy activists, Xu Wenli, was released from a Beijing prison Wednesday after serving all but three years of a 15-year sentence, reports AP.

"I want to thank... people from countries all over the world for their more than 10 years of concern, help and support," Xu told foreign reporters who surrounded him after he arrived at his Beijing home from the city's Prison No 1.

Appearing in high spirits, he denied that he had committed any crime, saying what he did "was for my country and my people."

Xu, 49, was arrested in 1981 during Deng Xiaoping's first crackdown on dissent after ascending to top power. Xu was convicted the next year of political crimes for publishing a pro-democracy magazine, and kept in solitary confinement for the next 11 years.

Western governments and international human rights groups have long appealed for his release.

His wife, Kang Tong, has said he is in poor health from malnutrition and inadequate exercise. He appeared thin, with a gaunt face, receding hairline and big gaps where teeth have fallen out.

Xu said his missing teeth were not related to his imprisonment and said he had gained a few pounds while in captivity.

Joking and laughing with reporters, he steered clear of

making any political statements. Asked if he planned to resume his pro-democracy activities, he said he needed time to study the situation.

Asked what he thinks now of the democracy movement he was involved in, Xu said, "History will have to evaluate this movement. It's not for me to say."

He declined to speculate on the reason for his release. When told that the official reason was that he had shown a good attitude, he laughed and said, "What good attitude?"

Xu was not told of his release until 9am Wednesday. He left the prison about two hours later. He said authorities did not put any conditions on his release or say that his activities would be restricted.



Xu Wenli with his 20-year-old daughter Xu Jing in Beijing Wednesday after his release from prison. —Star TV photo