

International

Opposition blasts Rao for not mentioning corruption in speech

'Pledge to save secularism an electoral battlecry'

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's combative independence day call for a head-on fight against Hindu revivalists has drawn the battle lines for crucial state polls due in three months.

Rao virtually hit the campaign trail with Sunday's speech, pledging to save secularism, delink religion and politics and rebuild the destroyed Babri Mosque and warning Pakistan not to meddle in Kashmir, analysts said today.

The 72-year-old Premier also gave away about 600 million dollars in concessions to his ruling Congress (I) Party's traditional vote banks — women, the minorities and other disadvantaged sections.

Congress (I) spokesman Vithal Gadgil said Rao had outlined the party's agenda and in a sense spelled out its manifesto for elections expected in November in four states of the crucial core belt.

He has re-emphasised the party's commitment to secularism and tried to remove a sense of alienation in the (Muslim) minority community. Gadgil told AFP. He also announced concrete schemes on which action will follow.

Rao's main target was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the largest opposition block in parliament, which led an emotive Hindu campaign that culminated in the December 6 destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.

New Delhi sacked BJP gov-

ernments ruling the populous and politically crucial states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh after the razing of the shrine sparked widespread Hindu-Muslim violence.

The polls there in November would be the Congress (I)'s biggest popularity test since it took office in mid-1991 and serve as a barometer of the electorate's mood. It would also be a virtual referendum on the BJP's campaign for a temple on the disputed site of the mosque, which Hindu fanatics say was built by Moghul rulers on the birthplace of their God Rama.

Rao's critics including Congress dissidents have accused him of being indecisive, lacking the will to battle the aggressive BJP and of alienating the 100-million-strong Muslim community from the ruling party.

His unusually combative address to the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort party answered such criticism and refurbished his image.

"No political party has a right to divide the nation along religious lines to grab votes," he said, pledging to bring legislation disallowing politicians from making an appeal to voters from a religious plank.

"Secularism has been our lifebreath, without it we will die. I urge the hundreds of millions of Indians to unite to save," said Rao, whose main success has been a sweeping economic re-

form drive. The speech was greeted by the Times of India today as a "sound and sensible articulation of the republican goals set out in the constitution."

It said the address indicated "a confident, firm and clear-headed Prime Minister." "All in all, Rao emerges with his authority enhanced... in the bargain, he has also projected himself as a leader who is eager to wage the forthcoming electoral battle on the strength of past achievements and present policies."

Mutually hostile opposition parties also saw the speech as an electoral battlecry but had no words of praise. "He clearly had eye on the November elections," said Devdas Apte, a spokesman for the BJP. "But he did not once mention corruption, which is a burning issue."

'Killing of Hindus by Kashmiris anti-Islamic'

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: Three Muslim members of the Rajya Sabha, Mohd Afzal, Maulana Obaiddullah Azmi and Mohd Khaled-ur-Rehman today described as 'anti-Islamic act' the brutal killings of 15 Hindus by Kashmiri militants near Kishtwar and demanded that the government take prompt action to nab the culprits, reports PTI.

The issue was raised during zero hour, by Mohd Afzal (JD) who said by this inhuman act, the Kashmiri militants had blackened the face of India's 20 crore Muslims. He condemned the act as 'inhuman' and demanded that the government should act to trace the killers at the earliest.

Supporting him Maulana Obaiddullah Azmi (UD) and Mohd Khaled-ur-Rehman (TDP) said the killings, had definitely been inspired by Pakistan.

BRIEFLY

5 Filipinos die in truck mishap: At least four people were killed and one was seriously injured yesterday when a truck plowed through a row of makeshift stalls on a sidewalk near the presidential palace, police and radio reports said from Manila.

Police said the 10-wheeler truck loaded with steel bars careened off the street after its breaks failed on a bridge.

Police officer Roseliter Ugaddan said four people had been killed, but live radio reports from the scene said the dead included five vendors and a street sweeper.

One killed in US plane collision: Two small planes collided over an airport Sunday, and one person was killed. Three people were injured including two in a car that was hit by falling debris, AP reports from New Jersey.

The planes were in a traffic pattern over Lincoln Park Airport when they collided, but it wasn't immediately clear if they were taking off or landing, said Duncan Pardue, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration.

"Each aircraft had only the pilot on board," he said. One of the pilots, who wasn't identified, was killed, authorities said. The other was injured but the extent of the injuries wasn't immediately known.

32 Vietnamese arrive in Japan: Thirty-two Vietnamese boat people have been spotted in a small wooden boat near Fukue Island in southern Japan's Nagasaki prefecture, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The boat people, including two children, who were found on Sunday, told police they had left Haiphong, east of Hanoi, on July 15 and arrived in Japan after passing by Macao, Taiwan and Shanghai.

Fire kills 13 in Santo Domingo: A fire inside a juvenile detention centre killed 13 teenagers and injured two officials said Sunday, AP reports from Santo Domingo.

Twenty-six other youths escape during the confusion, police said.

Officials said one of the inmates may have set the fire Saturday night as part of a plan to escape Casa Alberque, which held 41 prisoners. The blaze raged for 30 minutes before being brought under control, and the 13 teenagers died of asphyxiation and burns, authorities said.

Two teenagers were listed in serious condition at the Armed Forces Central Hospital. All but one of the others, ranging in age from 15 to 17, escaped, authorities said.

Thai PM to visit China: Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai will make a 10-day official visit to China later this month at the invitation of his counterpart Li Peng, the Foreign Ministry announced yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The Thai leader will arrive on August 25 and leave September 3, the official Xinhua News agency quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying.

Road mishap claims 13 in China: Thirteen people were killed and 15 others injured in a collision between a bus and a truck in China's westernmost Xinjiang region, a report said yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Two of the 15 injured were said to be in critical condition after the accident on the highway between Ussu and Kayutan in the Muslim populated region on Saturday, the Hong Kong China News Service was quoted as saying.

The accident happened after a mini-bus forced a bus into a ditch while trying to overtake it. The bus collided with a truck travelling in the opposite direction carrying coal, the report said.

Quake shakes western Japan: An earthquake measuring 4.3 on the Richter scale shook western Japan yesterday. There were no reports of damage or injuries, the meteorological agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The agency said the tremor occurred at 6:44 am (2144 GMT Sunday).

The tremor's epicenter was located 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) under the seabed in the Kit-Suido waterway between Wakayama of Wakayama prefecture on Honshu, Japan's main island, and Tokushima of Tokushima prefecture on Shikoku island, the agency said.



INDIA: Muslim militants of the Hizb-Ul Mujahideen burn Indian flags in the Kashmiri summer capital Srinagar to protest against Indian rule on August 15, India's Independence Day. — AFP photo

Khmer Rouge kills 2, kidnaps 11 ethnic Vietnamese

PHNOM PENH, Aug 16: Suspected Khmer Rouge guerrillas kidnapped 11 ethnic Vietnamese, eight of them children, and then shot dead a woman in the group, UN sources said today, reports Reuters.

UN spokesman Eric Falt confirmed the kidnapping by Cambodian gunmen on Friday from a village in central Kompong Chhnang province, the site of two Khmer Rouge massacres.

"One person was later released, he told reporters, adding that a ransom demand had been made. He said observers with the UN transitional authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) on Sunday found the body of one of the hostages, a woman, who had been shot in the back of the head.

The latest violence occurred in the fishing village of Chnok Tru at the mouth of Cambodia's Tonle Sap (great lake).

About 30 gunmen attacked the village after landing in several wooden boats mounted with machine guns, Falat said.

"They robbed the villagers, mostly ethnic Vietnamese, and shot one of them in the chest at point blank," he said. The victim later died.

He said the gunmen returned and abducted the 11 Vietnamese settlers later on Friday evening.

According to official UN statistics, 104 ethnic Vietnamese have been murdered and 51 injured during nine major attacks since July 1992.

An earlier AFP report said: Cambodia's radical Khmer Rouge killed two ethnic Vietnamese civilians and abducted a number of children in the latest incident in their campaign against Vietnamese settlers in the country, a UN official said today.

The chief of the UN peace-

Sino-British talks on democracy in HK continue

BEIJING, Aug 16: Chinese and British negotiators ended the first day of talks here today on expanding democracy in Hong Kong after a brief summer break during which both sides said they had worked hard making preparations, reports AFP.

Britain's chief negotiator ambassador Robin McLaren said the talks were held in a 'perfectly normal atmosphere'. The talks are to resume tomorrow.

The two-day round is the ninth in a series of negotiations that began in April to try to settle a bitter dispute over Hong Kong governor Chris Patten's plans to broaden the franchise in the last elections in the British colony before it reverts to China in 1997.

"I don't want to talk in terms of progress," he said, adding "There will be several more rounds before the meeting between the foreign ministers in September. I can't tell you how many."

Foreign minister Qian Qichen and his British counterpart Douglas Hurd, who agreed here in early July to speed up the negotiations, are scheduled to meet again at the UN general assembly in New York in September.

Kurdish rebels abduct 3 tourists

DUSSELDORF, Germany, Aug 16: Kurdish rebels kidnapped three tourists — two Germans and a New Zealander — in eastern Turkey on Sunday, the Kurd-ha news agency said here, reporting the third such abduction in two months, reports AP.

The agency, which is close to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels, named the tourists as Albrecht Christoph Lehman and Henry Butler — both German — and Paul Tompson.

The three were abducted in the Serhat region for travelling without PKK permits, Kurd-ha said, quoting its Lebanon bureau.

The three men were in good health and were being "treated like guests," the agency added.

There was no immediate confirmation of the abduction from the Turkish authorities. The German foreign ministry said late Sunday it had not been informed of the kidnapping.

Last week the PKK, which celebrated the ninth anniversary of its separatist rebellion Sunday, released six tourists — four Frenchmen, a Briton and an Australian woman — seized last month in two separate abductions near Tatvan, eastern Turkey.

Off the Record

Koreans eat dog stew to enhance sexual prowess

SEOUL, South Korea: Dog stew remains popular in South Korea, and more than one-third of adult Koreans questioned in a recent survey had eaten some within the last year, an independent research group said Monday, reports AP.

Koreans consider dog stew a health food best eaten in the summer to beat the heat and enhance sexual prowess. Canine meat is available only in specialty restaurants or markets, and is more expensive than pork or beef.

In a random telephone sampling of 1,000 Koreans over age 18 on food choices, 37 per cent said they had eaten dog stew in the 12 months ended July 31, the Kuk-dong Research Institute reported.

The figure was 53 per cent for men and 21 per cent for women, it added. But 53.4 per cent of the women surveyed did not like dog meat, reign visitors, the government closed down restaurants specializing in dog stew during the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, but the restaurants went back into business soon after the Games.

Foreign groups for the protection of animals have protested the practice of beating dogs to make the meat more tender before killing them. Government officials say this practice is outlawed.

It's a token of love

MEMPHIS: Elvis left the building 16 years ago Monday, but fans kept showing up on the anniversary of his death to pay homage to the king of rock 'n' roll, reports AP.

Up to 7,000 faithful began a candlelight procession past Presley's grave late Sunday evening, many leaving flowers or other gifts.

"It's just like you would do at your mom's or dad's grave. It's a token of love," said fan Linda Cashion, 42, of Knoxville. "It shows we care."

Police estimated the crowd filling the street in front of Graceland, Presley's former residence, at 6,000 to 7,000 as the procession began.

The vigil capped a week of fan-club parties, concerts and other festivities to mark the anniversary of Presley's death at Graceland on August 16, 1977.

It's was common at Presley's concert for fans to hang around hoping for one more glimpse of his until they heard the announcement, "Elvis has left the building."

Graceland, where Presley is buried in a small garden beside the swimming pool draws 650,000 visitors annually.

"I feel like if I didn't come, I might be letting him down," said Esther Crain, 55, of Springfield.

Sabrina Witzel, 27, of Germany was taking part in her third candlelight vigil "to share the love of Elvis with others. There's a bond of friendship and common understanding that's here."



Bittersweet ceremony

MONROVIA: Women in brightly coloured dresses, danced to drumbeats to mark the reopening Sunday of St Peter's Church, where 600 refugees were slaughtered three years ago, reports AP.

More than 1,000 people gathered for the bittersweet ceremony. Nine mass graves filled with the bones of babies, pregnant women and elderly people now surround the renovated Lutheran cathedral.

"I hope there will be a day set aside as a memorial to remember all those who died in a war which was waged only to destroy our country," said Lutheran Bishop Ronald Diggs.

On July 29, 1990, government soldiers loyal to then-President Samuel Doe butchered hundreds of people who had taken refuge in the church to escape ethnic killings.

Some survivors, including 60-year-old Jane Wanda, says Doe was present at the massacre and ordered the killings.

Wanda, who hid in the rafters during the killings, said Doe ordered one of his death squad leaders to use swords after the troops had exhausted their ammunition. Many were beheaded.

Wanda said he recognized some of the people who took part in the massacre at the church rededication. Diggs also wondered whether killers were present and said, "We ask God to forgive them."

Newsman sues China's police

BEIJING, Aug 16: A Chinese journalist has sued the police department in a southern city for allegedly detaining him illegally and obstructing his work, the official newspaper China Daily said Monday, reports AP.

The newspaper said it was the first lawsuit of its kind in the country.

The journalist, Zhu Xubin of the magazine Democracy and Law (Minzhu Yu Fazhi), said in the lawsuit that he was interviewing villagers last month in a suburb of Shantou in Guangdong province when a village leader intervened. Zhu was trying to find out about alleged embezzlement of public funds and election fraud by the village authorities.

The authorities took him to a police station, where he was forced to surrender film from his camera and hand over his official journalist's identity card. "We are allowed to report without such a card."

The next day, police went to Zhu's hotel room and took him to another police station for five hours of questioning.

Kohl wants an East German as next president

BONN, Aug 16: Chancellor Helmut Kohl said on Sunday that Germany's next President should be an East German to symbolise the country's unification three years ago, reports Reuters.

But Finance Minister Theo Waigel said it was about time that his Bavarian-based Christian Social Union (CSU) filled the prestige post when President Richard von Weizsäcker retires next May after serving the maximum two five-year terms.

Waigel, who is Chairman of the CSU, sister party to Kohl's Christian Democrat (CDU), dismissed speculation that he wanted to run for President himself.

Kohl told German ZDF television the search for a popular candidate for the ceremonial but highly influential presidency had to start in the next few months.

The President will be elected next May 23 by the Federal Assembly, made up of delegates from both houses of Parliament.

"Because of the situation in Germany I regard it as extraordinarily important... that a personality from East Germany takes over this office," the Chancellor said according to a transcript of the interview to be aired in the evening.

He said electing an East German as President would not in itself solve the problems of the former communist region, hit by mass unemployment after unification in 1990.

But he said there was a point in getting a President whose life "almost embodies 40 years of division of Germany."

He named no favourites but is known to be having problems finding a suitable candidate in his own party to succeed Weizsäcker, a CDU member who has emerged as the moral

Biggest-ever peace rally in S Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Aug 16: More than 40,000 people, including African National Congress President Nelson Mandela, crammed into Wanderers Cricket Stadium here Sunday for what was billed as South Africa's biggest-ever peace rally, reports AP.

Organised by church leaders, the rally was also attended by Correctional Services Minister Adrian Vlok, Manpower Minister Leon Weesels and a sprinkling of leaders from a number of political parties.

The mainly-White Christian audience, led by American gospel singer Carman, sang gospel songs and committed themselves to peace in South Africa.

Speakers blamed "satan" for the violence tearing black communities apart and claimed that the Christian message would be enough to bring peace to South Africa.

Monitors of violence claim that around five people a day are killed in political violence countrywide.

SOUTH AFRICA: A resident wails as she finds her house blazing after being set alight by unknown attackers, in Thokozwa township east of Johannesburg on August 11. At a nearby field the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) leader Mangosuthu Buthe addressed supporters and rejected the ANC proposal of a multi-party peace keeping forces to look into violence, saying that it could worsen tension as ANC military wing will also be serving.

