

Ukrainian President says No decision yet on future of Black Sea Fleet

LONDON, Sept 4: Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk said late Friday that no decision had been taken on the future of the Black Sea Fleet during his talks earlier in the day with Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Yalta, the Ukrainian news agency Union reported, according to AFP.

The agency, monitored here by the BBC, said Kravchuk told journalists on his return to Kiev that Ukraine "may accept" Russia's offer to buy Ukraine's share of the fleet, but "no decision was taken."

"First we must determine how many and which class of

ships Ukraine needs, as well as estimate the value of the Black Sea fleet."

"We must think of the whole of Ukraine and not just the Black Sea fleet," he said.

Kravchuk said the only issue on which final agreement had been reached with the Russian leadership "was that of Ukrainian nuclear arms."

Earlier Friday Yeltsin said the Ukrainian share of the Black Sea fleet would be given by Kiev to Moscow to compensate for the energy debt.

"We decided that the fleet will be Russian," Yeltsin said.

Dalai Lama renews appeal to China for dialogue

NEW DELHI, Sept 4: The Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, renewed an appeal to China today for a dialogue to resolve the Tibetan issue and accused Beijing of blocking a settlement by issuing "confusing" statements, reports AFP.

"Call upon the Chinese government to start negotiations without delay and without pre-conditions," the Nobel Peace laureate said in a statement released through his followers here.

The Dalai Lama, who is presently in Chicago, said: "My position over the years has been consistent."

"But Chinese government statements create confusion by suggesting that the Chinese

government is always open to negotiations but that Tibetans are not," he added.

The reference was to a Chinese statement last month which invited the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet, but rejected any negotiations on the question of Tibetan independence.

The Tibetan spiritual leader also released letters he has written to the Chinese leadership since the early 1980s demanding autonomy for his homeland.

The Dalai Lama said his letters to the Chinese leadership were "amply proof" that his demand for limited autonomy, with China retaining control over defence and foreign affairs, had been consistent.

"My return is not the issue.

The issue is the survival and welfare of the six million Tibetans and the preservation of our culture and civilization, he said.

The Dalai Lama said the talks must focus on the transfer of Chinese settlers in Tibet and the preservation of Tibetan culture.

If the Chinese government is since about negotiating a solution to the question of Tibet, it must unequivocally reverse the settlement of Chinese in Tibet, not only in word, but in practice," he said.

The Dalai Lama's statement was released just two days ahead of Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's first official visit to China beginning Monday.

"We appeal to the Indian premier to take up the Tibetan issue with the Chinese government," said Tashi Wangdi, information minister of a Tibetan government in exile.

The Tibetan spiritual leader has gone to Tibet, but rejected any negotiations on the question of Tibetan independence.

The Tibetan spiritual leader also released letters he has written to the Chinese leadership since the early 1980s demanding autonomy for his homeland.

The Dalai Lama said his letters to the Chinese leadership were "amply proof" that his demand for limited autonomy, with China retaining control over defence and foreign affairs, had been consistent.

"My return is not the issue.

The issue is the survival and welfare of the six million Tibetans and the preservation of our culture and civilization, he said.

The Dalai Lama said the talks must focus on the transfer of Chinese settlers in Tibet and the preservation of Tibetan culture.

If the Chinese government is since about negotiating a solution to the question of Tibet, it must unequivocally reverse the settlement of Chinese in Tibet, not only in word, but in practice," he said.

The Dalai Lama's statement was released just two days ahead of Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's first official visit to China beginning Monday.

Frosty relations between the two Asian giants, who fought a bitter border skirmish in 1962, have thawed in recent years.

Imelda declares Marcos a genuine hero

BATAC (Philippines), Sept 4: Former Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos declared her late husband a genuine hero today and attacked senators for handing the honour instead to his assassinated arch-rival, says Reuter.

"Heroes are born and not legislated," Marcos told reporters after arriving in the Batac home town of Ferdinand Marcos to supervise arrangements for next week's funeral of the former President.

Despite plans for an elaborate homecoming for Marcos, four years after he died in Hawaii, she said the family has no intention of turning the funeral into a circus.

Asked if her disgraced husband deserved to be called a hero more than late opposition leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, she said, "Oh definitely."

Here is an unprecedented

story of a leader of a nation who has gone to the most awesome battles in modern times, she said.



Imelda Marcos

Aquino was shot dead in 1983 on returning from three years exile in the United States.

The murder was widely blamed by Filipinos on Marcos who was already in failing health.

BRIEFLY

Tigers kill 3 policemen: Tamil Tiger guerrillas launched an overnight attack on police outpost in eastern Sri Lanka, killing three constables, military officials here said today, reports AFP from Colombo.

Gunmen from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) removed three automatic guns and a radio communication set from the victims after storming the Wellawell police post, a military spokesman said.

"We rushed army reinforcements but Tigers fled without confronting our troops," the spokesman said.

15 killed in Indian bus mishap: Fifteen people were killed early yesterday when a bus plunged into a mountain ravine near Nainital 240 km (150 miles) northeast of Delhi, United News of India reported. Reuter says from New Delhi.

China's dam burst toll now 257: The death toll from a burst dam in remote northwestern China has gone up to 257, with dozens of other people still missing, a disaster relief official said Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

The more than 2 million cubic meters (70 million cubic feet) of water that poured from Gouhou Reservoir in Qinghai province on August 27 destroyed 2,932 homes, 39 enterprises and 13 villages, said Zhou Jianguo, head of the Department of Disaster Relief of the Ministry of Civil Affairs in Beijing.

Number of US troops drops: The number of men and women on active duty in the US, armed forces fell to 1,717,664 in July, a decline of 133,600 from a year earlier, the defence Department said Friday, AP reports from Washington.

The decline reflects a continuing shrinkage of the military since the end of the Cold War. President Clinton administration's this week reaffirmed that it intends to cut the active-duty military to about 1.4 million by the end of 1999.

At the end of the Gulf War in 1991, the number of people in military uniform was slightly more than 2 million. The Pentagon gave this breakdown for July, 1993: Army, 579,224; Navy, 511,913; Marine Corps, 179,529; Air Force, 446,998.

ICRC resumes operation in Lanka: A relief agency supplying food to war-torn northern Sri Lanka resumed its operation Saturday after a six-day suspension prompted by rebel attacks on ships, AP reports from Colombo.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is playing a vital role by helping to provide food at a pier in an area of the country controlled by rebels but cut off from the mainland.

On Sunday, the ICRC, which brings supplies into the area aboard a ship, suspended its operation after Tamil rebels attacked a nearby Sri Lankan Navy vessel. In the attack, the rebels rammed an explosive-laden boat into a Navy craft, killing 12 sailors.

Tamil rebel attacks on the Navy during the past week have claimed at least 21 lives.

New Haitian govt to overhaul state media

PONT-AU-PRINCE (Haiti), Sept 4: The new democratic government began dismantling the military's propaganda operation Friday, halting all local television productions and suspending regular programming on state radio, reports AP.

The new information minister promised to overhaul the state media, which had been controlled by officials loyal to capital Police Chief Joseph Michel Francois, one of the leaders of a September 1991 military coup.

"Beginning Sunday, you are going to see and hear a hell of a difference!" promised Herve Denis, sworn in Thursday with the rest of Prime Minister Robert Malval's Cabinet.

The new government is managing the transition between military-backed rule and ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who is to return in less than two months under a UN peace plan.

Change in the state run

media began hours after the new government took office. Malval issued a communiqué suspending the normal programming of Radio Nationale, and TV viewers watched a replay of Malval's installation Monday by the exiled Aristide.

Aristide had not been heard uncensored on state media since his overthrow, and his supporters were excluded from state media.

State airwaves had accused international human rights monitors of instigating disorder, the observers chief of embezelling and the upcoming UN police training mission of being a full-fledged upcoming UN police training mission of being a full-fledged foreign occupation.

The xenophobic misinterpretation has done a disservice to the country," President Clinton's special envoy to Haiti, Lawrence Pezzullo, told a news conference Thursday.

As local TV productions were

canceled until Sunday.

Uzbekistan to adopt Latin alphabet

MOSCOW, Sept 4: Uzbekistan has decided to adopt the Latin alphabet instead of its present Cyrillic characters, it was announced in Tashkent Friday, reports AFP.

The Uzbekistan parliament voted by 400 votes to six, with 21 abstentions, to progressively introduce the Turkish form of the Latin alphabet over the next seven years.

The change "will bring Uzbekistan closer to European culture and facilitate its entry into the world market," president Islam Karimov said in proposing the bill in parliament.

It will also help Uzbeks, who speak a dialect of Turkish, learn European languages, Karimov said.

ISLAMABAD, Sept 4: Millions of women in Pakistan will again be confined to their homes while their men troop to voting centres to elect a new government in mid-term polls in October, women activists here say, reports IPS.

Though an Islamic republic, Pakistan's constitution guarantees a woman's right to vote and contest elections.

According to official estimates, only 45 per cent of women voters exercised their franchise in the last elections.

The Women's Action Forum (WAF), an umbrella organisation of various groups in Pakistan, recently urged the Chief Election Commissioner in Islamabad to ensure greater participation of rural and tribal women in the political process.

In Pakistan's still-feudal North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan where women in far-flung villages and towns are treated like cattle and have no rights, tribal leaders

decide if they will participate or stay away from the electoral process.

"Usually, tribal chieftains

reach an informal understanding that no women will be allowed to vote," says a right activist who observed that no single woman voted in the NWFP constituency she monitored in the 1990 election.

Plenty, says the WAF, which has been campaigning for equal rights for women in Pakistan where for political gains governments have tampered with the country's liberal laws to satisfy orthodox opinion.

The previous Nawaz Sharif government had in 1991 opted to Islamise Pakistan's legal code to ensure support from the right.

Women's group want

Naimuddin to declare as "illegal" the social pressure exerted on women to vote. The

Commissioner Naimuddin, a retired judge, briskly informed the WAF delegation he can do nothing.

"In my opinion, a woman must obey her husband. It's her duty. What can we do about this?" he said.

Plenty, says the WAF, which has been campaigning for equal rights for women in Pakistan where for political gains governments have tampered with the country's liberal laws to satisfy orthodox opinion.

The previous Nawaz Sharif government had in 1991 opted to Islamise Pakistan's legal code to ensure support from the right.

Women's group want Naimuddin to declare as "illegal" the social pressure exerted on women to vote. The

WAF says the commissioner has the power to "authorise action against husbands found blocking their wives' way to polling stations".

But Naimuddin insists it is a social problem. "We cannot challenge the tribal social system," he says.

Dismissing the matter as a "domestic issue", Seethes Naureen Azhar, a well known activist who represented Pakistani human rights groups at the world conference in Vienna in June said, "We expect him to be a democrat in spirit."

IA Rehman, Director of Pakistan's Human Rights Commission, has also taken strong exception to the Chief Election Commissioner's remarks on women. "Whatever

justice Naimuddin has talked of is insulting for women," he said.

Politics is monopolised by men in Pakistan. The Lower House of Parliament that was dissolved by a presidential decree in July had only two female members even though 49 per cent of the country's roughly 125 million people are women.

The WAF is demanding that the government reserve 30 per cent of seats in Parliament for women.

A WAF activist who monitored the voting in NWFP in the last election says: "When a candidate feels his defeat is certain, he can forget everything

which they are blockading.

On Wednesday Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze said the time had come to "take all necessary measures" to stop the rebel offensive as all negotiations had failed.

He warned that the Potti blockade could cause famine as nearly 120,000 tonnes of cereal as well as medical supplies are transported from the port to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The latest incidents show that the illegal armed gangs of the ex-president are bent on provoking civil war," the Georgian Defence Ministry said in a statement in Tbilisi.

The attacks followed a call from Gamsakhurdia earlier this week for his supporters to mobilise in western Georgia.

The former president has been in neighbouring Chechnya since his overthrow in January 1992.

The rebels reportedly control nearly all southwestern Georgia, except the port of Potti.

Observers say

Gamsakhurdia, who has urged the overthrow of Shevardnadze, is seeking to exploit public discontent with the Georgian leadership for its failure to control armed gangs roaming the country.

US allies end

exercises

in Gulf

MANAMA, Sept 4: A US at-

tack submarine and allied warships have completed exercises

aimed at hunting and destroying Iranian submarines in the Gulf, the US navy's top officer in the Middle East said today, reports AFP.

The fast-attack submarine

Pasadena conducted maneuvers

with US, British and French warships in the Gulf from Wednesday to Friday. Vice

Admiral Douglas Katz said in a statement from US naval forces central command.

Iran has taken delivery of

two Kilo-class submarines from Russia, one in November last year and another in August, and is to acquire a third soon.

PLAUN, Germany: Set to enter the Guinness Book of Records, and probably influenced by the long time cult movie "Harold and Maude" 28-year-old Lothar Schiller (L) and his new bride Wally Hoehne, 88, leave for their honeymoon after the wedding ceremony in this former East German town August 31.

TAIPEI, Sept 4: US superstar Michael Jackson, troubled by physical illness and allegations of sex abuse, received a relatively cool welcome after he arrived in Taiwan Friday with movie actress Elizabeth Taylor, reports AFP.

The 35-year-old singer waved to a small crowd of no more than 30 fans from his 19th-floor presidential suite after checking in at the Luxor Grand Formosa Regent Hotel.

Fans from Japan and Britain, who unfurled a banner reading: "Welcome to Michael Jackson, the King of Pop" outside the hotel, screamed as Jackson lifted up a corner of the curtain to wave briefly at them.