

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 Unian 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 preconditions," 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 sincere 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."

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 which is not recognised by India or other country.

Wangdi said a pressure on China from the international community for the resumption of a dialogue was vital. "India should join other countries because a statement is strategically important for the region," he said.

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 Batangas 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 of a developing country 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 Wellaweli 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

PORT-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

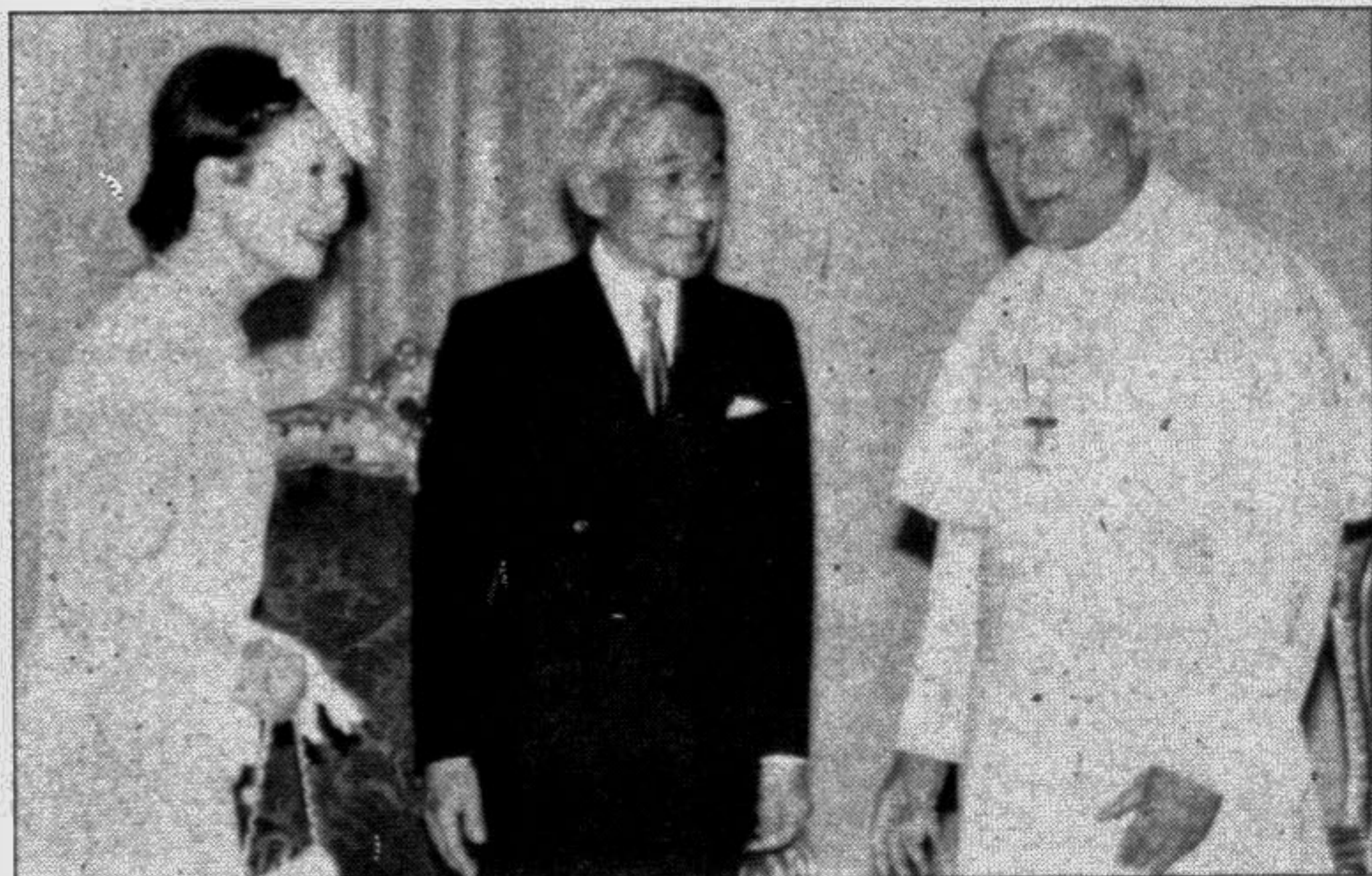
media began hours after the new government took office. Malval issued a communique suspending the normal programming of Radio Nationale, and TV viewers watched a replay of Malval's installation Monday by the exiled Aristide.

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 embezzling 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.



Pope John Paul II welcomes Japanese Emperor Akihito (C) and Empress Michiko at his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo after their arrival in Italy Friday. — AFP photo

Conservatives threaten civil war in S Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 4: A pro-apartheid white group has made its strongest threat against black rule to date, saying there will be civil war if Parliament approves a bill allowing blacks into the government, reports AP.

Black and white negotiators are drafting a bill to set up a Transitional Executive Council, which would include blacks and help run the country until multiracial elections scheduled for April 27.

Parliament is expected to hold a special session in the next two months to approve the bill.

The Conservative Party, the nation's second-largest white group behind President F.W. de Klerk's governing National Party, has always rejected black

rule and previously warned it would fight for whites to govern themselves.

Party leader Ferdi Hartzenberg said Friday night the Conservatives would consider approval of the Transitional Executive Council bill by Parliament "a declaration of war."

"Then, we will become irresponsible," Hartzenberg told a party congress in an apparent reference to resorting to violence.

Hartzenberg said de Klerk would "cross the Rubicon" a euphemism for going too far to turn back — by supporting the bill in Parliament. The National Party controls the dominant white chamber of Parliament, and de Klerk's support would guarantee the bill's passage.

"If he goes over this Rubicon, then there will be civil war on the other side," Hartzenberg said, describing the Transitional Executive Council as "a revolutionary takeover."

"It will be a constitutional revolution because it will be passing authority to non-elected people," he said.

He said the Conservatives would set up their own government, parliament and security forces if a Transitional Executive Council was formed.

The Conservatives represent a large portion of the nation's 3 million Afrikaners, the Dutch-descended settlers of South Africa. They fear the African National Congress, the nation's leading black group, will take over the country and impose a communist system that persecutes whites.

Pope on first visit to former Soviet Union

ROME, Sept 4: Pope John Paul II left Saturday on his first visit of the former Soviet Union, a trip twice blocked by Moscow in the days of the Cold War, reports AP.

The Pope's seven-day swing through the newly independent Baltic states begins in Lithuania, the Roman Catholic stronghold among the ex-Soviet republics.

John Paul had sought to visit Lithuania in 1984 and 1987, the only times the Vatican has ever disclosed that a Papal trip was vetoed.

The end of the Cold War and breakup of the Soviet Union have allowed John Paul to make the trip to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

US pilot killed in Kenya

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 4: An American pilot was shot dead and another American wounded when gunman attacked a UN Children's Fund compound in Kenya on Friday, UNICEF reported, says Reuter.

The pilot, Jeff Butler, 28, was dead on arrival at a Nairobi hospital where he was evacuated after the shooting at Wajir, in northeast Kenya, about 60 miles (100 km) from the Somali border.

Robert McCarthy, a UNICEF staff member, was wounded and reported in stable condition at Nairobi hospital.

No reason was given for the attack on the compound where UNICEF provides food, health care and potable water to the area, inhabited predominantly by nomadic Kenyans of Somali origin who have suffered from the drought and displacement.

Butler worked for Air Serv International, a non-profit air transport service, which is under contract to UNICEF.

Jackson receives cool welcome in Taiwan

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 Luxury 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.

The fans, outnumbered by foreign and local journalists, dispersed as soon as Jackson was out of sight, unlike fans in Thailand and Singapore who waited patiently outside hotels almost all night to catch a glimpse of the singer.

Off the Record

Zealous couple ties knot on bridge

MEXICO CITY: A Mexican-American couple tied the knot on Friday on a bridge linking Mexico and the United States after failing to get the necessary papers to marry in either country, the state news agency Notimex said, reports Reuter.

Mexican citizen Pablo Alvarado Garcia could not travel to the United States as he had no passport, while Rosa Elia Lopez of the United States refused to pay the 480 new peso (160 dollar) fee for a permit to marry in Mexico, the agency said.

"I decided, I'd rather get married in the middle of the bridge," Lopez was quoted as saying.

The ceremony on the bridge Internacional Uno, which links the border towns of Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, in the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon, required only the approval of US immigration authorities.

Two other couples previously exchanged wedding vows on the bridge, in 1991 and in 1988, the agency said.

White House redecorated

WASHINGTON: President Bill Clinton has put his mark on the Oval Office — replacing the subtle shades in the room with striking tones of red, white, blue and gold, reports Reuter.

The White House on Friday offered reporters the first glimpse of the redecorated White House office that has come to symbolise the presidency and the character of each president.

The renovation is part of a White House remodeling project expected to cost about 400,000 dollars, according to Lisa Caputo, Press Secretary for First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

"There was restoration work that needed to be done," said Caputo, noting that "the last one that took place was during the Reagan administration," soon after Ronald Reagan assumed office in January 1981.

The most striking change is a new rug designed with 13 colors, to represent the 13 oriental American colonies. It has a deep blue field emblazoned with a presidential seal encircled with 50 white stars.

Prince Philip accused of committing faux pas

LONDON: Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth, was accused Saturday of committing a faux pas — only serious royalty watchers could spot — wearing the wrong ceremonial sash at the funeral of Belgium's King Baudouin last month, reports Reuter.

The Daily Mail newspaper reported that Philip went equipped with the green, red and white sash of Zaire's order of the leopard instead of the purple order of Leopold — perhaps a verbal slip but doubly embarrassing given the colonial history of the former Belgian Congo.

Buckingham Palace, the Mail said, insisted the sash was of the military division of the order of Leopold, but the newspaper said it could find no record of such an honour.

Gamsakhurdia men raid police posts, seize arms

MOSCOW, Sept 4: Rebels supporting the ousted Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia raided two police stations at dawn today in the western part of the state, Itar-Tass news agency reported here, says AFP.

The rebels seized weapons and wounded a police officer in their raids on the highway police posts in the villages of Dzhepana and Dapnari, the news agency said.

"The latest incidents show that the illegal armed gangs of the ex-president are bent of 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 Poti

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 Poti 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.

Earlier this week Gamsakhurdia supporters met in the western Georgian town of Zugdidi and demanded their leader's return from exile, stressing they would fight on any front.

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.

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.

Millions of Pak tribal, rural women denied voting rights

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.

But in practice, women have been denied this right in successive elections, particularly in the two western provinces where politics is considered an exclusively male preoccupation.

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 activists who observed that no single woman voted in the NWFP constituency she monitored in the 1990 election.

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.

To their dismay, however,

Commissioner Naimuddin, a retired judge, brusquely 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 expected 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.

Rehman, among the 3,500 international observers who monitored the elections in Cambodia in May, declared the denial of voting rights to rural Pakistani women as a "blatant violation of the constitution and fundamental rights... for which the state must own responsibility."

The opposition to women's participation in elections is interestingly not principled. Observers report that women's votes are often abused to manipulate results.

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

about tribal values and ask his supporters to bring their women to the polling station."

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.

Until 1990, 20 seats in the National Assembly were kept aside for women. But the previous government chose not to nominate members just to spite the opposition led by Benazir Bhutto who was briefly Pakistan's first woman prime minister.

US, allies end exercises in Gulf

MANAMA, Sept 4: A US attack 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.