

Indian Muslim League on the verge of split

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: India's oldest Muslim party was on the verge of a split today after veteran MP Sulaiman Sait, its president for 21 years, was unceremoniously replaced by a rival, party sources said, reports AP.

A majority of the leaders of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUM) picked GM Banatwala as the new president of the 45-year-old party here on Sunday in place of Sait, who had held the post since 1972.

Sait and his supporters walked out of the meeting in a huff, and the former president refused to accept the post of chief patron offered to him by Banatwala.

Party sources said the unexpected development was bound to split the IUM, a member of the United Democratic Front (UDF) gov-

ernment in the southern state of Kerala headed by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) party.

Sait holds Rao responsible for the razing of the Babri Mosque by Hindu fanatics in the northern town of Ayodhya in December 1992, and had been pressing for the IUM to quit the UDF ministry.

He repeated the demand on Sunday.

"The Prime Minister is solely responsible for the demolition of the Babri mosque and the subsequent communal riots throughout the country (in which some 2,000 Hindus and Muslims were killed)," he said.

Banatwala, like Sait, also wants the 16th century mosque to be rebuilt, but is opposed to the withdrawal of crucial legislative support to the UDF government in Kerala.



Czech President Vaclav Havel (L) is greeted by Indian Premier P V Narasimha Rao in New Delhi where Havel begins a five-day official visit on Monday. At centre is Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma. — AFP photo

Czech president in India

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: Czech President Vaclav Havel arrived on a six-day visit for his meetings with India's leaders since Czechoslovakia was split into two countries, reports AP.

Havel was received by Foreign Ministry officials Sunday night and was given a red carpet ceremonial welcome Monday.

India and the Czechoslovakia had close ties during the cold war era. But after the end of Communist rule in Prague, there has been little contact.

The Czechs traditionally have sold heavy machinery and engineering goods to India, and bought soya beans, coffee, tea and cotton yarn.

Indian newspapers welcomed the 58-year-old philosopher-writer as a hero from the land of Franz Kafka. Havel's novels such as "Letters to Olga" and his plays are popular among English-speaking Indian readers.

UN ban on DPRK appears inevitable

SEOUL, Feb 7: UN sanctions against North Korea for refusing nuclear inspections appear inevitable despite a new promise by its leader not to develop atomic bombs, South Korean officials said Monday, reports AP.

South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo said UN sanctions against the Communist North appeared unavoidable if no progress is made in the nuclear issue within two weeks.

"The International Atomic Energy Agency director-general is expected to declare safeguards broken in North Korea if no break through is made by... February," Han told a meeting with opposition legislators.

"In such a case, it is inevitable that North Korea's nuclear issue would be re-

ferred to the UN Security Council," he said.

The International Atomic Energy Agency is a UN agency monitoring the spread of nuclear weapons.

North Korea says its nuclear programme is peaceful but its refusal to accept mandatory international inspections has deepened suspicions that it might be developing nuclear weapons.

In a verbal message sent to President Clinton through US evangelist Billy Graham last week, North Korean President Kim Il Sung promised anew that his country would not develop nuclear weapons and hoped for improved ties with Washington, Seoul officials said.

Graham stopped over in Hong Kong on his way home from the North Korean trip.

BRIEFLY

Filipino gunmen abduct 2

abducted the wife of a real estate developer and her 7-year-old son as they were on their way to the boy's school Monday, police said, AP reports from Manila.

Police Sgt Antonio Paule said a car carrying the gunmen forced the van of Evangelina Alejandro to a stop near her son Bryan's school in suburban Paranaque.

Two men, armed with an M-16 rifle and an automatic pistol, pulled Mrs Alejandro and her son out of the van after smashing its windows, the family's driver, Reynaldo Bansagan told police.

DPRK able to assemble Mig 29

North Korea has acquired the technology to assemble Mig-29 fighter planes, a South Korean newspaper said on Monday, AFP reports from Seoul.

Pyeongyang succeeded in assembling at least two Mig-29s in 1992 by using components from Russia, the Chosun Ilbo, a major Seoul newspaper quoted southern intelligence sources as saying.

This shows North Korea's air combat capability has been strengthened considerably following its independent development of medium-range missiles, the newspaper said.

Shooting in NY salon

An off-duty police officer, caught in a gun battle with three robbers in a hair salon, got lucky when one of the robbers put a gun to her head and it misfired — twice, AP reports from New York.

Police said Officer Arlene Beckles, an instructor at the Police Academy, was getting her hair done Saturday afternoon when three men entered the Salon La Mode in downtown Brooklyn, forced the patrons against a wall and emptied the cash register.

Beckles drew her .38-caliber revolver and exchanged shots with the men, hitting all three, said Officer Andrew McInnis, a police spokesman.

US actor Cotten dead

Joseph Cotten, a veteran actor who gained fame for his role in the film "Citizen Kane," died Sunday after a bout of pneumonia, his publicist said, Reuters reports from Los Angeles.

Cotten was 88 years old. Cotten died at his home in the Westwood section of Los Angeles, said publicist Dick Gutman. In the rough-and-tumble acting world that was Hollywood in the 1940s there were tough guys, romantic heroes, aristocrats and rogues, but Cotten was considered a southern gentleman to the core.

Smith popular among Labours

Britain's Labour Party leader John Smith is rated higher than any other Labour chief in opposition for more than 20 years, according to an opinion poll published on Monday, Reuters reports from London.

The findings suggested that Labour, out of power since 1979, may have finally shed its "loony left" image and will prove a serious threat to the ruling Conservatives at the next general election in about three years time.

Some 81 per cent of voters interviewed by Gallup for the Daily Telegraph newspapers believe Smith is caring, while 74 per cent found him likeable and 68 per cent decisive.

Pakistan to introduce death penalty for drug trafficking

ISLAMABAD, Feb 7: A new law providing the death penalty for trafficking and manufacture of illegal drugs will soon be introduced, Pakistani Interior Minister Naseerullah Babar said Sunday, reports AP.

"The draft is ready," and will be submitted to parliament against drug dealers irrespective of their position or status," the minister said. New penalties would include confiscation of property, the death penalty and life imprisonment.

For the first time the law will be extended to the country's semi-autonomous tribal

regions, he said.

The tribal areas, which border Afghanistan and Iran, have so far been exempted from implementing federal laws. The region, known for unchecked opium cultivation, also houses heroin-manufacturing laboratories run by tribal leaders.

The minister said the government had extradited six people wanted in the United States for alleged involvement in drug trafficking.

The former government of interim Prime Minister Moeen Qureshi received a list of 15 people last year and extradited five. Another person was ex-

tradited by the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto voted into power in October.

The remaining cases were being processed, Babar said, but provided no extradition date.

He said the government's anti-narcotics campaign was not being carried out under western pressure. "We are making these efforts because of an alarming rise in addiction," he added.

He said the number of drug addicts in Pakistan had gone up to three million, including 1.5 million are heroin addicts, he said.

Nepalese vote for 2 parliamentary seats

KATHMANDU, Nepal, Feb 7: Voters queued up to elect two representatives to Parliament Monday to replace top Communist members who were killed in a road accident, reports AP.

In the capital Kathmandu, former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, president of the ruling Nepali Congress, was pitted against Vidya Bhandari, widow of one of the Communist leaders killed in May 1993.

The other contest for the lower house is in the eastern district of Jhapa. Results are expected on Wednesday.

The Nepali Congress controls 113 seats in the 205-member house.

Italian UN officer killed in Somalia

ROME, Feb 7: An Italian UN officer was killed in an attack Sunday on troops escorting a food aid convoy on a road north of the capital Mogadishu, the Italian Defence Ministry announced Sunday, reports AP.

Another soldier was seriously wounded in the attack on the main road northwards to Belet Huen, between the towns of Balad, 40 kilometres (25 miles) and Bullo Burti, 200 kilometres (125 miles) from the capital.

Lieutenant Giulio Ruzzi, 28, was the ninth Italian soldier to meet his death in the strife-torn horn of African nation since Italian forces joined that UN operation in Somalia in December 1993.

Italy is among the western countries, led by the United States, which have announced plans to withdraw its contingent from Somalia in coming months, with Rome planning a full pullout by the end of June.

Somalia plunged into clan warfare and famine after the January 1991 ouster of strongman Mohamed Siad Barre.

Attack on Charles

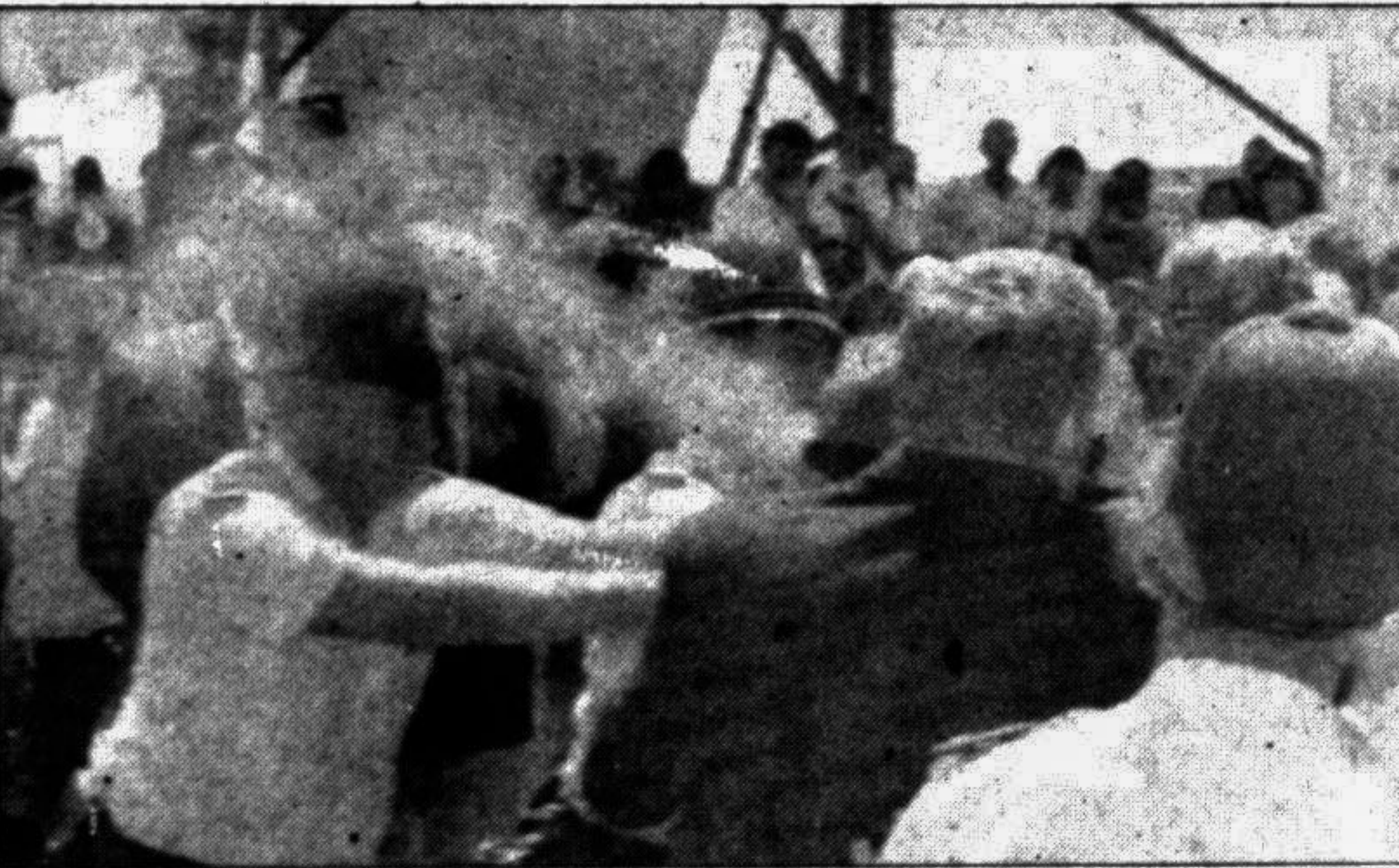
AUCKLAND (New Zealand), Feb 7: A man was arrested by New Zealand police today after trying to attack Britain's Prince Charles, eyewitnesses said, reports Reuters.

Reuter photographer Paul Escourt said a man burst through crowds near Auckland's port and tried to spray the visiting heir to the British throne with an aerosol. It was not known what the aerosol contained.

Prince Charles was unhurt. Prince Charles was visiting yachts involved in the Whitbread round the world race when the attack happened.

The balding man, wearing shorts, got within 10 feet (three metres) of Prince Charles before about a dozen policemen leapt on him.

He was wrestled to the ground, where he struggled and shouted before being frogmarched away by police.



Police restrain a Croatian anti-monarchist attacker (obscured) on Monday as he attempts to spray toilet air-freshener in the direction of Britain's Prince Charles. The attacker was brought to the ground by a young rookie cop six weeks out of police college. — AFP photo

48 killed in Angolan fighting

LUANDA, Feb 6: At least 48 people were killed and 62 wounded in fighting in the war-shattered central Angolan town of Cuito on Sunday, state radio reported today, says Reuters.

The radio said UNITA rebels had also shelled government-held areas in the city. There were no further details and no independent confirmation was available.

The upsurge of fighting came a few days after Angola's state-controlled media said peace talks with UNITA were making progress. But the Jornal de Angola warned peace was still some way off.

Angola's UN peace mediator Aloune Blondin Beye said last

week he was confident the hardest problems had been resolved in negotiations between the government and UNITA which have been under way since November in the Zambian capital Lusaka.

The two sides agreed in principle on a ceasefire, and the formation of a unified army in December, but fighting continues on the ground while they thrash out a full political settlement at the UN-mediated talks.

Sources in the northern oil-rich enclave of Cabinda told Reuters on Sunday government forces had been conducting search and destroy operations against separatist FLEC rebels over the past three weeks.

Costa Rica's ruling party concedes defeat

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, Feb 7: Ruling party candidate Miguel Angel Rodriguez admitted defeat Sunday in Costa Rica's presidential election, reports Reuters.

"The people have spoken and we have to accept their decision, so with joy and affection I have come to accept the decision of the people and wish opposition candidate Jose Maria Figueres success," Rodriguez, of the governing Social Christian Unity Party, said in remarks broadcast on national television.

He spoke after early official results showed Figueres, the candidate of the Centre-Left National Liberation Party, was strongly ahead in the vote count.

Japan gradually shifts policy towards dispute with Russia

TOKYO, Feb 7: For decades, "Northern Territories Day" has been an occasion for thousands of Japanese, from the Prime Minister on down, to wave their fists and demand Russia return several tiny, frigid islands it captured at the end of World War II, reports AP.

But this year, the official message to Moscow was decidedly polite. "Let's be friends," said one banner, in both Russian and Japanese, at the anniversary's biggest rally on Monday. "Let's Talk," said another.

The lighter tone reflects a gradual shift in Tokyo's policy toward the dispute, which has kept relations between Japan and Russia chilly and blocked efforts toward signing a peace treaty to formally end their

World War II hostilities.

"We can't just keep repeating our demand the islands be returned anymore," said Fumio Kitayama, a labour leader who visited three of the islands last fall, a trip made possible by an agreement two years ago ending visa requirements. "Stubbornness won't get us anywhere."

The disputed islands, at the southern end of the Kuril chain between Russia's Far East and Japan's Hokkaido island, were seized by the Soviet Red Army after Japan's surrender to the allies in 1945.

Thousands of Japanese who lived on the islands — Kunashiri, Etorofu, Shikotan and the Habomai islets — were forced to leave.

Today about 50,000 Rus-

ans, including several thousand military troops, call the southern Kurils home.

Japan claims the islands are rightfully its own because of a treaty signed with Russia on February 7, 1855, that placed them within Japan's border. The Soviet rulers refused to recognise that treaty.

In the icier years of the Cold War, Japan forbade private visits to the islands out of fear such contact might be seen as recognition of Soviet control.

That policy began to ease with the rise of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who many Japanese hoped would be more willing to negotiate than his predecessors. Ties have continued to ex-

pand under Russian President Boris Yeltsin. But, like Gorbachev, Yeltsin faces considerable opposition at home



Morihiro Hosokawa

to the idea of giving up territory and has shown little interest in turning over the islands in the foreseeable future. Instead, Yeltsin has urged closer cultural and business exchanges.

"It is truly regrettable that the islands — our territory — have yet to be returned," prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa said at Monday's rally, which was attended by representatives of all of Japan's major political parties and about 1,500 others.

Hosokawa added, however, that his talks with Yeltsin last October created "a firm basis for future negotiations" and expressed optimism that "more balanced" relations can be achieved.

US uses subs to obtain military intelligence

NEW YORK, Feb 7: The United States has used a fleet of navy submarines for decades to obtain military intelligence, the New York Times reported today, says Reuters.

Quoting naval warfare experts, the newspaper said that the submarines were the navy's counterpart to reconnaissance satellites, but were better in that they could not only examine objects on the distant ocean floor, but sometimes could retrieve or manipulate them.

Such objects as lost ships, submarines, planes, weapons, rockets, spacecraft and nuclear warheads, as well as other countries' undersea cables and listening devices were made accessible by the submarines, the newspaper said.

The experts said the disclosure of the submarines' existence could have repercussions for military budgets and international diplomacy, and added that foreign governments might take military or political steps to try to counter the US capability.

One example of the submarines' spying technique was recently given to Congress by a former senior navy official, the Times said.

The submarine Halibut examined a sunken Soviet submarine in the Pacific in 1968. The Halibut was the first in a series of such submarines, which were made to lower gear-laden cables for deep reconnaissance, recovery or manipulation.

Thatcher slates US for giving visa to Adams

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher attacked the US administration Sunday for its decision to allow Gerry Adams, leader of the political wing of the IRA to visit the United States last week, reports AP.

"No democracy should have any truck with terrorism," Thatcher said on ABC television.

Thatcher echoed the criticism heard across Britain last week when President Bill Clinton reversed a 20-year-old ban against Adams by granting him a visa to visit New York on Wednesday and Thursday to attend a conference on Northern Ireland.