

International

CIA director says

India's SC lifts ban on Jamaat-e-Islami Hind

NEW DELHI, Mar 19: India's Supreme Court (SC) has struck down a ban on the nation's biggest Islamic group which was outlawed after Hindu-Muslim riots in 1992, newspapers reported Saturday, says AP.

The government had failed to justify the ban on the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Justices P B Sawant and S Mohan said in their order Friday.

The ban violated constitutional guarantees to political action. The Times of India newspaper quoted the judges as saying.

Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's government outlawed the Muslim group along with three Hindu radical organisations on December 10, 1992, four days after Hindu militants destroyed an ancient mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya.

The destruction enraged Muslims nationwide and Hindus and Muslims belonging to many of the radical groups rioted for more than two months leaving about 2,000 people dead.

The ban on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bajrang Dal, two extremist Hindu organisations, was rescinded on June 4 1993 by a government-appointed review commissioner. Hindu group, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, is still outlawed. Activists of the three groups were suspected to have incited communal hatred or participated in destroying the mosque.

Muslims, who form 12 per cent of India's 880 million people, are the largest religious minority in the predominantly Hindu nation.

US policy towards Haiti racist: Aristide

MIAMI, Mar 19: Two days before President Clinton was to arrive in south Florida, deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide denounced US policy toward Haiti as criminal and racist, reports AP.

Aristide criticized the Clinton administration's policy of repatriating Haitians caught on the high seas fleeing their troubled Caribbean island.

"Because we are black, when we are refugees fleeing political repression, they may send us back to the killers," he told a panel at a Congressional Black Caucus Foundation meeting Friday. "The US is just using a policy that is a racist policy against Haiti."

He also called on Clinton to expand the US trade embargo against Haiti to a "total embargo."

Clinton is scheduled to arrive in Miami on Sunday and attend a rally Monday in Deerfield Beach on his healthcare reform proposals.

State Department spokeswoman Josie Shumake said she couldn't comment on Aristide's remarks without knowing the entire context of his speech.

Muslims, who form 12 per

DPRK developing new long range ballistic missiles



US Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright votes March 18 in favour of a UN resolution condemning the massacre of 53 Palestinians on the West Bank.

— AFP photo

WASHINGTON, Mar 19: The CIA believes North Korea is developing two new, longer-range ballistic missiles that, if exported to the Middle East, could threaten Europe, reports AP.

"These new missiles have yet to be flown, and we will monitor their development, including any attempts to export them," CIA Director R James Woolsey told an intelligence conference at agency headquarters Thursday night.

Meanwhile, Rep Lee Hamilton, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, urged a resumption of US military maneuvers in South Korea on Friday to "ratchet that pressure up" on North Korea. President Clinton said he's considering the option, along with sending Patriot missiles to South Korea.

The South Korean government in Seoul, in a turnaround, said it was ready to accept the missiles if Washington wants to send them.

Clinton told reporters he still hopes that North Korea will permit international inspectors to finish a check on nuclear facilities, resume talks with the South on nuclear issues, and end its isolation from the world community.

"If North Koreans decide that they do not wish to pursue that goal, then we'll have to consider what our other options are," Clinton said in an interview. "The ball is in their court."

Asked about resuming joint military maneuvers with South Korea and sending Patriot missiles to Seoul, Clinton said: "Both of those options are under consideration."

Clinton's top national security aides were to meet on Saturday to discuss the situation in North Korea, where international inspectors this week were blocked from completing their work, and South Korea should go ahead with this year's Team Spirit joint military maneuvers.

The South Koreans earlier had balked at accepting Patriots out of concern that it would upset the nuclear talks with North Korea. But Friday, Seoul officials said they were ready to propose going ahead both with the Patriot deployment and reinstating the Team Spirit exercise.

In his remarks Thursday night to a CIA-sponsored conference on the origins of the agency, Woolsey said the chief concern regarding North Korea is its suspected nuclear programme.

A second worry is that it will build ballistic missiles capable of threatening Japan and other nations in East Asia. He noted also that while North Korea has not yet exported the Nodong ballistic missile with a range of 1,000 kilometres (620 miles), Iran and perhaps other Middle Eastern nations want to buy it.

AI criticises Britain

LONDON, Mar 19: The human rights group Amnesty International (AI) criticised Britain on Friday for its policy on detaining asylum-seekers.

"We here today proclaim before the world our freedom and sovereignty and our unwavering will to defend it at all costs," the king told a rally attended by thousands of followers.

Swelithini and Buthelezi plan to boycott the election unless they get guarantees that Natal will be a virtually autonomous Zulu state under South Africa's new dispensation.

President F W de Klerk, at the news conference where Goldstone's report was presented, said action had to be taken immediately to avoid disruption ahead of the poll. "We dare not allow this dark cloud to hang over the elections," he said.

Russia differs with US over Iraq issue

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 19: Russia differs with the United States openly yesterday over the Iraq issue saying that Iraq has made some progress on arms destruction and Russia is considering lifting oil embargo against it, reports Xinhua.

Russian UN Ambassador Vorontsov July said in a statement, Russia "noted that there had lately been certain positive elements in the actions of Iraq."

Addressing a regular 60-day review meeting of the Security Council over the sanctions against Iraq, the Ambassador said that the position of Iraq should be encouraged.

He added that if a thorough and comprehensive compliance of Iraq with its obligations is confirmed, Russia would be ready to consider lifting the oil embargo in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

Off the Record

Fergie has no plans of divorcing Andrew

LONDON: Sarah Ferguson, the lively duchess who fell out with Britain's royal family, has hinted she has no plans to divorce her estranged husband Prince Andrew despite being legally free to do so from Saturday, reports Reuter.



Buckingham Palace tersely announced two years ago on Saturday that the red-headed Duchess of York's marriage to the second son of Queen Elizabeth had failed and the couple were separating.

But "Fergie" still wearing her ruby engagement ring and gold wedding band, was shown on television on Friday scolding an interviewer who addressed her as Sarah Ferguson and said firmly: "I'm married — I'm the Duchess of York."

Under British law, a spouse can get a no-fuss divorce after two years of separation but friends say the duke and duchess are still on good terms despite the collapse of their 1986 marriage, which had followed a romance that captivated British royalists.

They said the couple were keen to stay together for the sake of their daughters Beatrice, now five, and Eugenie, who will be four on March 23 — but reconciliation was not on the cards.

He has kept his silence since the separation while his wife, a few months his elder, has admitted to making "huge mistakes" and said she had felt stifled in the rule-bound royal court.

The prince was said to be devastated by the departure of his wife who has described him as a loveable man who was just unable to understand her unhappiness.

Three people survive for 5 days by eating only snow

BEIJING: Three people survived for five days by eating snow after their minibus was swept off the road and buried by an avalanche in China's far western province of Xinjiang, the People's Daily said Saturday.

The survivors, and 14 passengers who died in the crash, were found on March 15 after rescue workers cleared the 15-metre (50-foot) snowdrift that buried the mountain road at Guozikou, near the border with Kazakhstan.

"They were dug out and three people had depended entirely on eating snow to survive," the official newspaper said.

The avalanche occurred on March 10. Some 50 police and local herdsmen were brought in to clear the snowbank, which stretched for about 60 metres (197 feet). On the morning of March 15 they uncovered the minibus, the corpses and finally the survivors.

The People's Daily did not give any more details of the episode.

"According to our understanding, this was the largest avalanche ever to hit this section of the highway," the newspaper said.

New variety tulip to be named after Hillary



WASHINGTON: Ah, the little extras that come with life in the White House. The embassy of the Netherlands announced Friday that it would name a new tulip variety after first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, reports AP.

Mrs Clinton will "christen the new 'Hillary Clinton' tulip at a special ceremony at the Netherlands Residence" on Tuesday, the embassy said in a statement.

"It sounds like a lot of fun and an honour," said Neel Lattimore, a spokesman for the first lady.

The ceremony is part of festivities marking the 400th anniversary of the first flowering tulips in the Netherlands. More than 11,000 tulips will be on display at the residence.

French champagne surprisingly well after 141 yrs in shipwreck

MELBOURNE: It was a little salty and the bubbles were long gone, but the French champagne survived 141 years in a shipwreck surprisingly well, reports AP.

Four top Australian and French palates tried to discover last week the origins of antique wines that spent almost a century and a half at the bottom of Port Phillip Bay and another dozen years on shore.

The Victoria Archaeological Survey knocked the tops off a few bottles that were raised from the depths of the bay 12 years ago.

The wine was found in 1982 by divers exploring the William Salthouse shipwreck at the head of the treacherous bay.

The William Salthouse, a 251-ton brig sailing from Montreal to Melbourne, was carrying flour, beef, pork, building materials and a consignment of luxury wine when it ran aground in 1841.

Remarkably, the contents of most bottles salvaged from the wreck were still intact. The bottles had been carefully packed in their crates, bedded in straw and surrounded by wicker baskets.

Dalai Lama to visit Israel this weekend

NEW DELHI, Mar 19: Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, will travel to Israel this weekend on his first visit to the Middle East, a spokesman for his government-in-exile said today, reports AFP.

The spokesman, Tashi Wangdi, said the five-day trip, starting tomorrow, was "basically a pilgrimage."

"He has always wanted to visit Jerusalem and he never had the opportunity before," Wangdi said.

The spokesman said no meetings were planned between the Dalai Lama and Israeli leaders but the Nobel laureate will deliver lectures on the Tibetan issue at Israeli universities.

The Dalai Lama has lived in exile in the Northern Indian town of Dharamsala since fleeing Tibet following an abortive anti-Chinese uprising in 1959.

Rutskoi will contest next presidential polls

TOKYO, Mar 19: Former Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, a key leader in the October uprising against President Boris Yeltsin, said he was ready to run in the next presidential election. It was reported from Tokyo, says AFP.

Japan's Kyodo news agency quoted Rutskoi as saying that he would run for the presidency if the country "objectively" needed him as a leader. Charged with inciting mass disorder, he was arrested and released from prison last month.

"I have enough force and experience to conduct an election campaign and to be at the head of the state," Rutskoi said in a written interview with Kyodo.

He added he was confident of himself because Yeltsin gave him a lesson.

BERKELEY, California, Mar 19: When jubilant demonstrators scaled the Berlin Wall in the autumn of 1989, even the most jaded observers briefly believed that it represented a sort of ultimate triumph of freedom, reports IPS.

Just over four years later, that fond hope now seems like a cruel illusion.

Freedom House, a human rights watchdog group based in New York, recently reported that after a spectacular surge of liberating revolutions at the turn of the decade, the tide is retreating at an alarming rate.

We may all have placed too much hope in the collapse of communism those nations liberated in heady 1989 revolutions are now discovering that freedom is far harder to sustain over time than to celebrate in a weekend of delirious abandon.

Domestic circumstances vary from one country to another, but the general pattern, epitomized by the Soviet Union, is distressingly similar: A precipitous collapse of the old order followed by a devastation of the economy, a fragmentation of political authority, a rise in social unrest, and a dramatic increase in extremes of wealth and poverty.

Risking their lives and relinquishing their meagre standard of living, Russians and eastern Europeans waited with legendary patience acquired through centuries of oppression for the United States and western Europe to follow through on their generous pledges of material assistance.

But they have only come up empty-handed with western leaders, strapped for cash and wedded to rigid free-market principles, finding ways to weasel out of their commitments of freedom in Russia

House from the old guard's attempted coup in August 1991 have been supplanted by an embittered public scavenging for food outside a parliament dominated by freely elected fascists and former communists.

Between these two starkly opposing scenes lie three brief years of pivotal importance, when opportunities not seen in half a century or more were sabotaged by forces both internal and external to the revolutionary nations.

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