

SDP tells Hata to resign voluntarily

TOKYO, May 26: The head of Japan's Social Democratic Party (SDP) which left the government last month, urged Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata on Thursday to voluntarily step down to make way for a new coalition, possibly with the Socialists, reports AFP.

"I told him a voluntary resignation is one of the possibilities if he wants to form a new coalition government and stabilise his power base," SDP Secretary General Wataru Kubo told reporters following a meeting with Hata.

During the meeting, Kubo reiterated a warning that Hata, managing a minority government, would be easily forced to resign or to call general elections once a no-confidence motion is submitted.

Kubo made the remarks a few days after he and SDP Chairman Tomichi Murayama indicated that their party may be willing to return to the ruling camp if Hata resigned voluntarily.

The SDP angrily walked out of the government last month following infighting, forcing Hata to head the nation's first minority administration in almost four decades.

Hata, declining to clarify his stance over Kubo's remarks, only said, "Kubo just showed one of the possible ideas. I'm not in a position to comment on the resignation of the cabinet."

On Wednesday, Kojo Watanabe, deputy leader of Hata's Renewal Party, an influential group in the coalition, also said that the cabinet could resign in June if the SDP decides to re-join the government.

The SPD, along with the main opposition Liberal Democratic party (LDP) has threatened to submit a motion of no-confidence against the Hata cabinet.

Although both the SDP and the LDP, concerned about continued recession, agreed in principle to pass stalled budget bills by the end of June.



King Birendra of Nepal (L) poses with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at Narayanhity Royal Palace in Kathmandu on May 25. — AFP photo

S Arabia wants UN arms ban on Yemen

UNITED NATIONS, May 26: Saudi Arabia's Washington ambassador is canvassing Security Council members on a resolution calling for a ceasefire in Yemen and an arms embargo imposed on its warring neighbour, reports Reuter.

Diplomats said Prince Bandar Bin Sultan spoke to ambassadors and envoys from the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China Wednesday on "elements" for a resolution.

Members treated the request with caution. But one envoy said there was a "fairly positive reaction" to a resolution or statement calling for a ceasefire and a halt of arms deliveries but not imposing a mandatory arms embargo.

Secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali, at a news conference Wednesday, was a supportive of UN intervention.

In response to a question about what the United Nations had done to stop the civil war he said, "It would be necessary for a state or group of states to ask the Security Council to intervene."

"I hope that some nations will ask the United Nations to do so in order to find a peaceful settlement to that war and to establish peace in that Arab country," he added.

The war broke out May 4 when President Ali Abdullah Saleh launched a military campaign against southern Yemen after almost a year of disputes. North and South Yemen united in 1990 but differences over power sharing emerged last year.

The Arab League, as well as some Arab states, has tried but so far failed to halt the fighting.

The attitude of Saudi Arabia, Yemen's influential neighbour, has been one of the uncertainties in the war.

Diplomats in Sanaa, Yemen's capital, say some members of the Saudi royal family favour instability and a divided Yemen.

Off the Record



New Miss Universe Sushmita Sen arrives at Malacanang Palace on May 23 with her mother Shubhra Sen (L) for a courtesy call to Philippine President Fidel Ramos. Sen, the 18-year-old model from New Delhi and the daughter of a retired air force officer became the first Indian winner of the world's most prestigious beauty pageant. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Arafat to visit Gaza June 12: Israel radio reported Thursday that PLO chief Yasser Arafat plans to visit the Palestinian autonomy zones of Gaza and Jericho for three days, starting June 12. AP reports from Jerusalem.

During his tour of Jericho, the future seat of the autonomy government, Arafat is expected to meet with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, the radio said, citing unidentified Palestinian sources.

Russian PM arrives in China: Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin arrived in Beijing yesterday for a four-day official visit, the Xinhua news agency said. AFP reports from Beijing.

The aim of the visit was to reinforce bilateral economic and trade relations, and a number of accords were to be signed.

Chernomyrdin was scheduled to meet his Chinese counterpart Li Peng as well as the head of state and the Communist Party Jiang Zemin. The Russian premier was also to travel to Dalian in the northeast and to Shanghai before leaving China.

Schwarzkopf undergoes surgery: Norman Schwarzkopf, the retired General who commanded US forces in the Gulf War, had prostate cancer surgery Wednesday in a Washington hospital, AFP reports from Washington.

"All indications are that the cancer was discovered in its early stages and the prospects are for a full recovery," said a statement from the Walter Reed Army Medical Centre.

Benazir meets King Birendra: King Birendra of Nepal granted an audience to Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at the Narayanhity royal palace late Wednesday, state radio said, reports AFP from Kathmandu.

"Initially, his Majesty and the Prime Minister of Pakistan held talks without any aides for about half an hour," the radio said, adding that Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala had later joined their discussion.

After the talks, the King had dinner with Benazir at the palace, along with Queen Aishwarya and Crown Prince Dipendra and other senior officials.

Ghali may seek second term: Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Wednesday he would seek a second five-year term if his health was up to it, reports Reuter from United Nations.

The 71-year old UN chief, who took office in January 1992, told reporters shortly after his election that he was a one-term Secretary General.

But in answer to questions at a news conference, he quipped: "Only stupid people don't change their minds."

"The question will be raised in 1996 and it will depend on my own physical capacities," he said.

"I am feeling in shape, quite honestly. I will say yes. But, on the other hand, if at the end of two and a half years if I don't feel well enough, I won't request a second term."

Sinn Fein offers hope for peace: The leader of the IRA's political ally, Sinn Fein, said Thursday his party will announce its decision on a proposal for peace in Northern Ireland next month, AP reports from London.

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams' pledge restored hope in the search for a formula to give politics precedence over violence in settling the conflict over the future of the British-ruled province.

Novelist John Wain dead: Novelist and poet John Wain, the author of an award-winning biography of Samuel Johnson, died Tuesday at the age of 69, a close friend said, AP reports from London.

Wain died of a brain hemorrhage at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, Graham Taylor said.

"He had a stroke Monday and was found by one of his family. He was taken to hospital and died there Tuesday morning around 2 am," Taylor said.

Photographer dies in boat capsizing: Tragedy struck twice within a short space in the Tungabhadra river, when a photographer drowned after the craft in which he was accompanying Karnataka Chief Minister, M Veerappa Moily, on his visit to the site of Monday's boat capsizing, which claimed 35 lives, also overturned, PTI reports from Hubli.

The boat accompanying the Chief Minister's boat was also carrying the deputy commissioner, and a former MLA, who were able to swim to safety. The photographer's body is yet to be traced.

Later, the Textile Minister, K H Pail, who also visited the spot near Singatur village, about 130 km from Hubli, said a detailed report would be submitted soon to the Chief Minister on the boat tragedy, the victims of which were members of a marriage party.

BBC staff to call off strike

LONDON, May 26: Unions representing thousands of BBC technicians and journalists decided Wednesday to call off a series of 24-hour strikes over pay and hours, officials said, reports AFP.

Union officials agreed to meet BBC Managers today.

After a first 24-hour strike Tuesday, the unions were planning to call an identical stoppage Friday.

Tuesday's strike, the first at the BBC since 1989 was supported by almost all the 11,000 BBC members of the National Union of Journalists and the Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union — almost half of the corporation's staff, it was reported.

European foreign ministers meet in Paris to prevent wars

PARIS, May 26: With ethnic conflicts raging in Yugoslavia and several ex-Soviet Republics, European foreign ministers met today to try to prevent more wars igniting in other potential trouble spots across eastern Europe, reports Reuter.

French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, who initiated the EU-sponsored conference on stability in Europe, called at the opening session for preventive diplomacy to stop border and minority problems turning into another Yugoslavia.

"Ex-Yugoslavia is a real lesson in what we must never again tolerate... the problems we have faced for months,

precisely because violence has already erupted there, are the main justification for the exercise we are launching today," he said.

Some 57 states and organisations are attending the two-day conference at the Paris headquarters of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

It will set a framework for 10 central and east European states which want to join the European Union — Poland, Hungary the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — to negotiate good neighbourly relations accords with each other and with eastern neighbours.

Some east European officials have criticised the drive as patronising and potentially dangerous, since it could exacerbate nationalist politics in their countries.

Czech President Vaclav Havel's chief aide Karl Schwarzenberg referred to the EU states, own problems in an interview with the French daily *Le Figaro*, asking: "Can you imagine a round table organised in the French Basque country to discuss the Basque and Irish problems of France, Spain, Ireland and Britain under the benevolent eye of the Czech and the Americans? No, nor can I."

"I think this conference was dreamed up by well-inten-

tioned bureaucrats with excessively Cartesian minds," he said in a swipe at the French philosophical tradition.

Balladur who proposed a European stability pact in April 1993, linked the future enlargement of the European Union to the conclusion of accords settling outstanding border issues and the rights of ethnic, religious and cultural minorities.

He said he hoped a follow-up conference perhaps as early as next February could adopt a pact bringing together all the bilateral and regional agreements reached between the parties.

The conference will not attempt to deal with conflicts

that have already erupted, such as Bosnia and the Caucasus nor the gathering clouds between Russia and Ukraine over Crimea.

Nor will it discuss the east Europeans' problems with existing EU member states.

Analysts say the conference is aimed at making up for the West's failure to avert the war in former Yugoslavia which it subsequently proved unable to stop.

The idea is for the east Europeans to form regional "tables" to discuss problems in the Baltic area and central Europe.

A complicated graphic issued by the French govern-

Civilians being killed in Myanmar fighting

DOI HAKEU, May 26: Civilians in Myanmar's Shan state are being killed and injured as fighting intensifies between government forces and optimum warlord Khun Sa's guerrilla army, reports Reuter.

Civilian porters, who had been seized by government forces in their hometowns and villages, were forced to carry heavy loads of ammunition to resupply government positions and many were killed or wounded. Some who escaped were treated at this guerrilla position just behind the front-line for wounds.

"Many porters have been killed on the battlefield," said KYA Aung, 45, a government porter who escaped with 15 others and arrived at this guerrilla-held village after a

two-day trek through the forest.

Kya Aung said Myanmar soldiers took him at night from his village along with about 100 others and sent to the war zone where he was given a 40-kg (88-lb) load of mortar bombs and artillery shells and ordered to march to the front.

"Every Myanmar soldier needs two to three porters to carry his supplies," said Jai Swe, an information officer in Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA).

The Yangon junta deployed more than 20,000 troops against Khun Sa's army in southern Shan state late last year.

There has been intermittent fighting at times heavy, since then in different parts of

the state.

MTA officers told Reuters that Khun Sa ordered an all-out offensive at the beginning of this month to drive Myanmar government forces from the area.

"Our troops are currently fighting Myanmar forces in 13 different places. Fighting is the heaviest since the offensive began seven months ago," Jai Swe said.

He said more than 130 Myanmar troops had been killed and 180 wounded over the last seven days in the immediate area. He put MTA losses at eight dead and 17 wounded.

As many as 50,000 civilians have fled across the Thai-Myanmar border to escape the fighting.

Congress (I) MP held for slapping an official

BARODA, May 26: Narainsinh Rathwa, Congress-I MP, representing Chhota-Udepur Lok Sabha constituency, has been arrested by police on the charges of slapping a municipal official, a delayed report said, according to PTI.

The police took the step after Vajesinh Damor Mamladar, an administrator to the Nagarpalika of Chhota-Udepur town in the district, lodged a complaint on Saturday.

Mamladar alleged the MP has slapped Himand threatened to kill him after he failed to provide drinking water supply to the people in the town owing to power failure for several hours.

Rathwa, who was released on bail yesterday, has denied the allegations and termed it as a political conspiracy.

US expels Iraqi diplomat

WASHINGTON, May 26: Iraq's senior diplomat in Washington has been expelled for repeated violations of the agreement that allowed Iraq to maintain a diplomatic presence in the United States, the Washington Post reported in its Thursday editions, says Reuter.

The newspaper said the diplomat, Adnan Malik, had tried to lobby members of Congress and sent out news releases calling for an end to the United Nations economic embargo against his country. He had also hired and fired staff without notifying the State Department, all actions counter to the agreement.

The State Department did not announce his expulsion but confirmed it when queried, the paper said.

50,000-yr old elephant fossil unearthed

ZHENGZHOU: A fossilized elephant of 50,000 years ago was recently unearthed in Luoyang, in central China's Henan province, reports Xinhua.

Builders dug out some fossils 16 meters below ground at a construction site. After a reconstruction of the fossils, archaeologists decided they belong to a kind of elephant living 50,000 years ago.

Experts said that the elephant fossils are quite useful for research on ancient geography, climate and environment in the area.

Candid camera action upsets women

BUFFALO: Scores of women were secretly taped as they sunbathed nude at a salon. And even though the sheriff and prosecutors' daughters were among them, can't find a way of bringing charges, reports AP.

"This is something that has really rocked this community," said Dallas County prosecutor Wayne Rieschel, whose wife and daughter were among the 83 women videotaped. This Ozarks town has about 2,400 residents.

"The ladies that I have talked to are extremely upset. There are some daddies and husbands and brothers out there who are ready to do battle," he said.

Rieschel, the police chief and an officer confiscated the camera and four tapes Monday from Videoland, a video-rental store and tanning salon.

Rieschel said there was a two-way mirror and a camera in the upper corner of a wall.

The store was closed Wednesday and the owner, Daid Paro, could not be located for comment.

No arrests have been made. Rieschel said he had consulted with the attorney general's office but there apparently are no state laws dealing with secret videotaping.

He said he checked to see if any federal laws were violated, but they don't address the situation either. "We're still looking," he said.

The store offered unlimited tanning visits for 25 dollars a month, said Sheriff Jerry Cox, whose daughter and daughter-in-law were among those videotaped.

Only death can separate Arafats

BEIRUT: Suha Tawil, the wife of PLO Chief Yasser Arafat has dismissed rumours she was planning to file for divorce saying the couple could only be separated by death, the Al-Hayat newspaper reported Thursday, says AFP.

Speculation that the couple was heading for divorce swept PLO headquarters in Tunis after Arafat ordered the detention of Tawil's uncle, George Hawa, in an inquiry into a corruption scandal.

Hawa, a businessman based in London, was released on Wednesday after a five-day detention, informed sources in Tunis said.

Tawil dismissed reports of his arrest as "unfounded rumours."

"There is no truth also to the rumours that my husband and I are to divorce (....) Arafat and I are staying together until death," Arafat's wife told Al-Hayat, which is published in several Arab capitals including Beirut.



Most Tokyo residents against rise of foreigners

TOKYO, May 26: Nearly two-thirds of Tokyo residents are against an increase in the number of foreigners, living in the city, according to a survey published on Thursday by the Mainichi Daily, reports AFP.

Questioning 3,000 people, it found that 64 per cent of the respondents were against any rise in the number of foreigners in their neighbourhood, and 28 per cent were in favour.

Only one per cent of the Japanese population are foreigners, but they are often viewed in the popular mind as a source of crime and unrest.