

Sharif begins third day of 'train march'

LAHORE, Pakistan, Sept. 13: Pakistani opposition leader Nawaz Sharif began the third day of his "train march" to topple Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto today after receiving a rousing welcome in his home city of Lahore, reports Reuters.

"Today, I want to tell you I am not doing this for myself," he told tens of thousands of cheering supporters who had waited until the early hours to hear him speak. "I swear to God my steps have risen to save Pakistan and nothing else."

The former Prime Minister said his "caravan of deliverance" would not stop until Bhutto's government was swept away.

Sharif launched his cross-country rail journey after calling last month for Bhutto and President Pervez Musharraf to resign by September 17. They have ignored his deadline.

The president, a political ally of Bhutto, said Sharif's protest would soon run out of steam. "Before long, elements within his party will come and want to end this confrontation," he said.

Supporters of Sharif and his Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party packed the narrow, banner-festooned streets of Lahore as his train pulled in on Monday night from Karachi.

The mood was festive. The crowds threw flowers, let off fireworks and danced to music blaring from loudspeakers.

The welcome was organised and financed mainly by trade and business associations sympathetic to the PML in the industrial city where support for Sharif has traditionally run high.

Sharif, weary but elated, denounced Bhutto's government as corrupt, inefficient and anti-Pakistan, saying his rival's policies had brought the country into international disrepute.

He accused Bhutto of being "soft" on Pakistan's dispute with India over Kashmir and on nuclear and missile issues.

"India talks about its Agni (intermediate-range) missile and when I talked, her jets started shaking, she got angry with me. Instead India should be angry with me," he claimed.

Sonia continues to cast long shadow over Congress

NEW DELHI, Sept. 13: Three years after her husband's assassination, Sonia Gandhi continues to cast a long shadow over India's ruling Congress (I) Party, reports AP.

Although the Italian-born widow holds no official or political post, she is widely counted among the most powerful figures in the country, a celebrity who holds aloft the torch of the illustrious Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

Congress (I) leaders, including Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, regularly call on her at the family's heavily-guarded residence, known popularly by its address "10 Janpath."

Rao, 74, addresses her as "Soniaji", using an Indian honorific, and many foreign leaders visiting India make it a point to meet her.

The 47-year-old dark-haired mother of two is a special invitee at most government functions and a favourite of the Indian media.

In recent times, Sonia Gandhi has caused acute em-

barrassment for Rao, who became Prime Minister three years ago when she declined a request from the Congress to



Sonia Gandhi

became its leader after her husband's May 1991 assassination.

On August 20, hundreds of fervent Congress activists shouted slogans praising Sonia

at a meeting attended by Rao in memory of Rajiv Gandhi, who was premier from 1984 to 1989.

Rao stood by helplessly as slogans of "Sonia Gandhi, run the country" echoed for nearly 10 minutes. Some Gandhi loyalists even booed the prime minister, who could speak only when the widow signalled for calm.

It was the second time in two months that Sonia eclipsed the veteran Rao at a gathering of the Congress, of which she is not even a member.

The same week, tens of thousands of Calcuttans braved pouring rain for a glimpse of Sonia as she attended two public functions in her husband's memory.

The crowd was on its feet as she began speaking haltingly in English, and punctuated every sentence with thunderous applause. Long after she finished, the standing ovation continued.

"It would be a great thing for the Congress if Sonia

Gandhi decides to join politics," said Arjun Singh, a party leader and cabinet minister who is said to nurse Prime Ministerial ambitions.

It is a sentiment shared by many in the Congress, India's oldest political party. But those close to the Prime Minister appear nervous over the increasing pro-Sonia demonstrations.

"She is quite active," said Chandulal Chandra, a Congress spokesman and a Rao loyalist.

Added K K Katyal, a well-informed commentator, "Sonia is not inclined to enter public life... but 10 Janpath is a remarkable factor in Congress (I) affairs. Recent events dispel doubts in this regard."

Sonia, who married into the Gandhi family in 1968, speaks fluent Hindi and is comfortable with Indian dress and customs.

She has always maintained a safe distance from politics and jealously guards her privacy and that of her two children, son Rahul, 24, and daughter Priyanka, 22.

Off the Record



Actors Sela Ward (L) and Dennis Franz pose with their Emmy Awards at the 46th Annual Primetime Emmy Awards on Sunday. Ward won her Emmy as best lead actress in a drama series, the show 'Sisters', and Franz won as best lead actor in a drama series for his role in 'NYPD Blue'. — AFP photo

'Older men, see the urologist'

NEW YORK: The order of the day from retired Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf: Older men, see the urologist, reports AP.

The former Gulf War commander considers himself the poster guy for prostate cancer. His doctors caught it early, and he has fully recovered 3 1/2 months after surgery.

Schwarzkopf urged men over 50 and those over 40 who are at high risk to get tested. "Look the urologist right in the eye and say, 'Bring me to my knees if you have to, but do a thorough exam,' because that way they'll save your life," he said Monday on US television.

Prostate cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer affecting men. It is often fatal.

Hemophiliac Holocaust

WASHINGTON: Hemophiliacs who contracted the AIDS virus from tainted blood products denounced the pharmaceutical industry and federal regulators on Monday, accusing them of creating a "hemophiliac holocaust," reports AP.

One by one, a stream of angry witnesses from across the nation told tales of pain, suffering and death that they said could have been prevented. They testified at a day-long public hearing by the Institute of Medicine in the National Academy of Sciences, an independent organisation that advises the government.

"I want to see some justice," said Lisa Smith of Nevada, whose hemophiliac husband died of AIDS from contaminated blood-clotting concentrate. "I think before this is all said and done, there'll be people behind bars."

About 50 people marched outside the building in a demonstration organised by the Committee of Ten Thousand, a hemophiliac advocacy group.

An estimated 5,000 to 8,000 hemophiliacs in the United States are HIV-positive as a result of taking contaminated clotting factor, a concentrate of blood from thousands of donors that is injected to stem uncontrolled bleeding. Around 2,000 of them have died of AIDS, according to the National Hemophilia Foundation.

14-yr-old driver kills 47

QUITO, Ecuador: A bus driven by a 14-year-old boy who took over from his drunken father collided with a dump truck, killing 47 people and injuring 23 others, police said Monday, reports AP.

The deadly accident happened Sunday evening in Calacali, about eight miles (14 kms) north of the capital, Quito. Police said the teen-age driver of the bus apparently failed to make a curve in the road when the collision occurred.

The 70 bus passengers, many of whom also were drunk, were returning to their homes in a nearby village after attending a festival organised by local church parishes, police said.

The force of the crash pushed the bus into a shallow ravine. Police said the driver of the dump truck fled the scene in his vehicle.

Mitterrand won't resign over scandal

PARIS, Sept. 13: President Francois Mitterrand, looking pale but sounding combative, said Monday he has not considered resigning because of his prostate cancer and would never resign over a growing scandal about his links to Nazi collaborators, reports AP.

If detractors tried to force him out, "I would work even more to stay to the end," the president said.

Mitterrand, 77, spoke in a 90-minute television interview amid a growing scandal over his ties to Nazi collaborators and questions about whether he remains physically fit enough to see his term to its end in May.

The president, the dove of European leaders, has been in office since 1981. Mitterrand admitted he had intervened on several occasions to slow legal proceedings in cases that risked dividing France.

He defended a relationship he maintained until the 1980s with Rene Bousquet, police chief in the collaborationist Vichy regime. But the president did not say whether he acted to slow proceedings against Bousquet for crimes against humanity. Bousquet was murdered in 1993.

A large portion of the interview centered on the chief of state's health.

Crimean MPs re-enter parliament

SIMFEROPOL, Sept. 13: Defiant Crimean lawmakers returned to their parliament building Tuesday morning after a presidential guard that blocked the assembly peacefully melted away overnight, reports AP.

Delighted legislators wandered along parliament corridors and confidence mixed with confusion over how they were allowed back into the building only 48 hours after President Yuri Meshkov disbanded parliament and proclaimed presidential rule.

"The peak of the presidential putsch is over," said the parliament's Deputy Speaker, Viktor Mezhak.

It was not immediately clear whether Meshkov, an impulsive leader of the strategic Black Sea peninsula, gave orders to his guard to remove barricades and disperse as a goodwill measure or if he lost control of events.

Abacha sacks Justice Minister

ABUJA, Sept. 13: Military ruler General Sani Abacha on Monday sacked Justice Minister Olu Onagoruwa, who had publicly disowned government actions he said "sweep away our liberties," reports Reuters.

An official statement said Onagoruwa, a democracy campaigner until he was recruited into government when Abacha seized power last November, was replaced with immediate effect by Michael Aqumuche, a senior lawyer.

Onagoruwa threatened to resign last week, telling a news conference he was not party to new laws giving the military rulers wide powers of arrest in their battle against democracy campaigners and barring any challenge to their actions through the courts.

The decrees became public last Tuesday, the day the government crushed a pro-democracy strike by oil workers.

Liberian factions sign yet another peace pact

AKOSOMBO, Ghana, Sept. 13: Liberia's three main warring factions have signed yet another peace pact, supposed to ensure that they keep to a previous accord to end the nearly five-year-old civil war, reports AP.

The pact, officially an annex to the June 1993 agreement brokered by the United Nations, was signed late Monday on a yacht off Akosombo, a Ghanaian lakeside resort northeast of Accra.

It calls for an immediate cease-fire, elections next year and a five-member joint presidency of representatives of warring factions to govern in the meantime.

US DPRK expert-level talks end

TOKYO, Sept. 13: North Korea and the United States completed four days of expert-level talks on setting up liaison offices in each other's capital today, saying the sessions were held in a "serious and cooperative atmosphere," reports Reuters.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), monitored in Tokyo, said a joint press release was issued on the establishment of liaison offices following the discussions in Pyongyang from September 10 to 13.

"The discussions proceeded in a serious and cooperative atmosphere," KCNA quoted the joint statement as saying.

But the statement gave no details of the outcome of the talks. It said the two sides had agreed to report the outcome of the discussions to their respective governments.

The statement said they discussed detailed technical matters relating to the exchange and establishment of liaison offices in the context of an overall agreement.

Separate expert-level talks resumed in Pyongyang and Berlin on Saturday. The Pyongyang talks focused on technical details of setting up diplomatic liaison offices in each other's capital, while talks in Berlin focused on the nuclear issue.

They will meet again in Geneva for umbrella negotiations on September 23.

In Berlin, North Korea said on Monday that some progress had been made in talks with the United States on switching

its nuclear technology to a new variety which would almost rule out the production of atomic weapons.

It also hinted that it could be pressing for a new German reactor still to enter production and not equipment from South Korea, which insists that it must be closely involved in any final deal between Washington and Pyongyang.

"We have already made some progress," North Korean delegation chief Kim Jong-U told reporters as he arrived at the US mission in eastern Berlin for the second round of discussions, officially described as "technical."

There has been no comment on the talks from the US side, led by State Department official Gary Saymore.



Moroccan King Hassan II meets Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at the Royal Palace in Fez on Monday. Benazir was on a short official visit to Morocco. — AFP photo

Strike paralyses Uttar Pradesh

LUCKNOW, Sept. 13: A strike today over job reservations for low castes virtually closed down Uttar Pradesh, India's biggest state and traditionally the country's key political battleground, reports Reuters.

Officials and witnesses reported numerous minor incidents as the strike, called by the main ruling party to counter opposition to its reservation plan, took a firm grip on a state which is home to 150 million of India's 900 million people.

They said the only exception to the shutdown was the hill region bordering Tibet, where the population is largely upper caste and opposes the plan to reserve 27 per cent of government jobs and educational opportunities for the downtrodden low castes.

Shopkeepers there opened up at the unheard-of hour of 5 am and offered a discount on all goods of 27 per cent in

protest at the quota plan, which has fuelled a drive for the region to break away from Uttar Pradesh and become the state of Uttarakhand.

But in the main Uttar Pradesh cities of Lucknow, the capital, Allahabad and Kanpur, nearly all shops were shut and those that tried to open were forced to close again by pro-reservationists.

There were minor clashes between shopkeepers who wanted to open up and police intent on keeping them closed to head off trouble, witnesses said.

Some vehicles were stoned when drivers tried to go onto the roads and several main-line trains were halted for an hour or two by protesters before being allowed to continue, police said.

Schools had already been ordered closed until Thursday and all buses, a favourite target for stones and firebombs in Indian strikes, were ordered

off the roads.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, who turned down an appeal from Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao to call off a strike with considerable potential for violence, promised firm action against any troublemakers.

Thousands of riot police were deployed across Uttar Pradesh to prevent trouble in a state which has seen some ferocious violence in past years over religion and caste and which has been India's key political battleground.

The quota furor has led to widespread speculation that Yadav's government might be fired by Rao. The opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party is urging him to do this.

Two backers of Yadav's coalition, Rao's Congress Party and the Janata Dal Party, have denounced the quota plan as a bid to divide the state by class.

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17 countries to assist US-led invasion of Haiti

WASHINGTON, Sept. 13: Seventeen countries, including three NATO allies, Israel and far-off Bangladesh, have pledged a combined minimum of 1,500 troops to assist a US-led invasion of Haiti, the State Department said Monday, reports AP.

Meanwhile, Republican leaders said Congress should debate a resolution authorising the commitment of US forces to an invasion.

And Pentagon officials announced that, as part of an on-going buildup, two aircraft carriers are being readied to carry troops and aircraft to Haiti, should an invasion be ordered.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher said the commitments of the 17 countries are

a "strong indication of the resolve of the international community to join in seeking the restoration of democracy in Haiti."

The administration has been pushing hard to recruit troops to join American forces in ousting Haiti's military dictatorship. Current planning calls for the deployment of about 20,000 US troops.

Pentagon officials have said some reservists could be called up for action in Haiti, because the operation would depend to a great extent on military police units to help keep the peace after an initial invasion, but the reservists would not necessarily be part of the initial invasion force.

Officials have said in Pentagon briefings over the

past several weeks that they might rely on volunteers from the reserves rather than activating reservists.

The Washington Post reported in Tuesday's editions that US officials said President Clinton may have to call several hundred reservists to active duty to take part in an invasion of Haiti.

It said the roles played by reservists and other elements of the projected invasion force were part of an interagency "walk-through" planning for the invasion and its aftermath that was conducted Sunday at Fort McNair in Washington. A Pentagon spokesman had no comment on the report.

The 17 countries pledging troops, some of which had been announced previously,

are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Dominica, Guyana, Israel, Jamaica, the Netherlands, Panama, St. Vincent, Trinidad and the United Kingdom.

The non-US personnel would be sent to Haiti after the initial invasion force — virtually all US personnel — establishes a "secure environment."

Other officials said the actual contributions of the 17 probably will exceed 1,500, mostly military forces and police.

Speaking to reporters at the State Department, Christopher said the administration, in seeking to reinstate deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is pursuing the same

goal sought by President Bush. But Republicans, while favouring that goal, generally have opposed the use of American force to achieve it.

On Monday a group of Republican leaders sent a letter to House Speaker Tom Foley and Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, saying there is "ample time" to debate the Haiti invasion question since the United States and its citizens are not immediately threatened.

Signing the letter were Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole, Minority Whip Alan Simpson, House Minority Leader Robert Michel and Minority Whip Newt Gingrich.

Gingrich said Monday a US-led invasion of Haiti will cause "revulsion" among Americans.

Sino-British talks on HK next week

HONG KONG, Sept. 13: China and Britain announced Tuesday that their negotiators will meet next week to discuss the growing backlog of issues surrounding Hong Kong's transfer to Chinese rule in 1997, reports AP.

The Joint Liaison Group, the Chinese British body set up to oversee the sovereignty transfer, will meet Tuesday through Thursday in Beijing, a statement said.

Hong Kong is worried that Britain and China are not progressing fast enough on the mechanics of the handover.

Hong Kong legislators recently voiced strong concern over the hundreds of Hong Kong laws and treaties that must be revised before 1997.

BRIEFLY

Clinton nominates Sheehan:

President Clinton nominated Marine Gen John J Sheehan as the commander-in-chief of the US Atlantic Command and NATO's supreme allied commander in the Atlantic, AP reports from Washington.

Sheehan, upon confirmation by the Senate, will become the first Marine general to fill the slot, which has in the past been held by a Navy admiral. He will succeed Adm Paul Miller in the position.

Yeltsin invites Mandela:

President Boris Yeltsin has invited South African President Nelson Mandela to visit Russia next month and discuss the emerging relations between the two states, officials said Tuesday, AP report from Moscow.

South Africa's Foreign Minister, Alfred Nzo, told the ITAR-Tass news agency that the two presidents will discuss "the entire spectrum" of bilateral relations and specific areas of cooperation.

Fulbright Prize for Carter:

Former President Carter will receive the 1994 J William Fulbright Prize for International Understanding for promoting worldwide democracy and improvement in the quality of life, AP reports from Washington.

He will receive it on October 1, his 70th birthday, during the Fulbright Association's annual conference in Washington.

Thailand to buy US tanks:

Thailand has asked to buy 180 US M-60A3 tanks and associated military equipment for 12 million dollars, the Pentagon said Monday, Reuters reports from Washington.

Congress is expected to approve the proposed sale, which would include heat-seeking sights for the tanks, 6,000 rounds of 105 mm ammunition, M-240 machine guns and night vision goggles. The tanks would come from US army stocks, the defence department said.

Russians kill 2 Chinese:

Two Chinese fishermen were killed after Russian border guards fired on foreign ships suspected of poaching in disputed waters in the Far East, authorities said Tuesday, AP reports from Moscow.

Shots were fired at a number of vessels near the Kuril Islands on Monday, said two boats were seized, said Eduard Saturov, a border guards spokesman in Moscow.

US guards pick up 230 Cubans:

The US coast guard picked up 230 Cubans on 24 rafts Monday, a day before Cuban President Fidel Castro's government was to begin halting the exodus of refugees, AFP reports from Washington.

A coast guard official said the figure was tabulated as of 6:00 PM (2200 GMT). US vessels picked up 1,004 Cubans Sunday.

Liz Taylor's mother dead:

Sara Taylor, the mother of actress Elizabeth Taylor, died at her Southern California desert home, a spokeswoman said Monday. She was 98, AP reports from Palm Springs, California.

Sara Taylor died of natural causes on Sunday, said Chen Sam, publicity for the actress. The funeral will be private.

2 Egyptian cops shot dead:

Suspected Muslim militants shot dead two policemen guarding a tourist route in southern Egypt late Monday, and 23 other people were injured in ensuing accidents, police sources said, AFP reports from Cairo.

The killing happened when unidentified gunmen in a pickup truck opened fire on two policemen at a checkpoint in Melawi, a town in the province of Minya, about 255 kilometres (150 miles) south of Cairo, killing both of them.

Peru's first lady forms party:

Peru's first lady Susana Higuchi announced Monday she had formed a political party to oppose her husband President Alberto Fujimori in next April's presidential election, Reuters reports from Lima.

At a press conference, Higuchi said she was forming a ticket under the name of 'Harmony 21st Century' to combat what she said were the corruption, broken promises and cronyism of her husband's government.

Chinese relief for Rwandans:

China has contributed relief supplies worth US dollar 305,800 to Rwandan refugees, the Xinhua news agency said yesterday, Reuters reports from Beijing.

China's ambassador to Uganda, Xu Yangli, handed over the relief goods to Ugandan representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Kampala.

Quake shakes Java:

An earthquake measuring 5.2 on the Richter scale rocked Indonesia's Java province but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties, the local meteorological and geophysical agency said yesterday, Reuters reports from Jakarta.

The epicentre of the quake on Monday evening was 345 km (215 miles) south of the capital, Jakarta.

UNITA rebels kill 20:

UNITA rebel forces have killed more than 20 people in an ambush on vehicles travelling between the central coastal town of Porto Amboim and the Longa river, Angolan radio reported, Reuters says from London.

The report, mentioned on Monday night by the BBC, said two buses and four other vehicles were set on fire during the attack.