

BRIEFLY



US President Bill Clinton (R) laughs at a comment made by British Prime Minister John Major during a joint press conference at the White House in Washington on Tuesday. Clinton and Major minimised their past differences over Northern Ireland by praising each other and citing common positions on Bosnia, Iraq and Russia. — AFP/UNB photo

Rafsanjani to visit India Apr 16:

President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani will pay a two-day official visit to India on April 16 to discuss trade and bilateral relations, a morning daily reported, Iran says from Tehran. The daily 'Iran News' quoted a Foreign Ministry official as saying that Rafsanjani plans to meet with Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

Nobel laureate Alfvén dies:

Swedish scientist Hannes Alfvén, winner of the 1970 Nobel Physics Prize and best known for debunking the Big Bang theory, has died at the age of 86, AP reports from Stockholm.

Alfvén died on Sunday in Sweden's capital, Stockholm. During his Nobel lecture, Alfvén raised eyebrows by declaring: "In the beginning was plasma." His play on a familiar phrase from the Bible was an attempt to underscore what he felt was the importance of his research on plasma physics.

Tanzania expelling Hutus:

Tanzanian troops are forcibly expelling hundreds of Burundian Hutu refugees fleeing ethnic attacks, beating and sending them back to northeast Burundi despite a series of massacres, Reuter reports from Bujumbura.

UN officials appealed on Tuesday for Tanzania to reopen its border with Burundi to refugees.

US navy team defuses WW II bombs:

A US navy ordnance team on Wednesday finished destroying several thousand pounds of bombs, mortars and other projectiles left over from World War II on atolls, Reuter reports from Majuro.

Around 50 explosives, including a 750 pound (337 kilogram) bomb, destroyed, navy team leader Christopher Moore said.

Egypt-Israel talks on NPT today:

The Foreign Ministers of Egypt and Israel are to meet in Paris on Thursday, the Foreign Ministry announced in Tel Aviv, for talks that Egyptian sources said would focus on their dispute over the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

The Foreign Ministry statement said Egyptian Foreign Minister Amir Mussa and Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres would "continue the dialogue between the two countries."

Cargo plane crashes in Russia:

A Ukrainian An-26 cargo plane crashed on the edge of a ravine in the Russian Far East, injuring nine people, officials said on Wednesday, AP reports from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

It was the second crash by a Ukrainian plane on the far eastern Kamchatka peninsula in the past month. No one was killed in the latest accident, said a spokesman from the Ministry for Emergency Situations in Moscow.

Saudi envoy meets Hezbollah chief:

Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Lebanon has met for the first time with the head of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, the fundamentalist group said on Tuesday, AFP reports from Beirut.

Diplomat Ahmad Koheymy and Sheikh Nasrallah discussed ways to confront Israeli attacks in south Lebanon at their meeting on Monday, Hezbollah said in a statement.

Five shot dead in Florida:

Two women and three young children were found shot to death on Tuesday in their rural central Florida home. The woman's husband, who is Laotian, was found conscious, with a gunshot wound to his chest, AP reports from Palatka.

Police were called to the secluded home in southeast Putnam County by a neighbour who said a shaken Kingkhamvong "King" Phimmachack, 38, telephoned him with a request he call 911. The neighbour, who is Phimmachack's co-worker, called for help but didn't say what was wrong.

200 Filipino maids to back home:

Two air force planes are to be sent to Singapore in the next two weeks to fetch some 200 Filipino maids who have asked to be brought home, the foreign affairs undersecretary said on Wednesday, AP reports from Manila.

Foreign Undersecretary Federico Macranas said one Hercules to go on April 12. He said the planes were to get the 200 maids who have processed their papers for the flight home.

Shanghai man to die for evading tax:

A court in Shanghai sentenced one man to death and another to life imprisonment for evading tax payments, the Liberation Daily reported on Wednesday. Reuter says from Shanghai.

The two were among 16 people sentenced in the first cases of evading payment of Value Added Tax (VAT) in the city, with the sums involved totalling 170 million yuan (20 million dollars) and with evasion of tax worth 30 million yuan (3.57 million dollars), it said.

S Korea trying to block N-deal, accuses North

SEOUL, Apr 5: North Korea on Wednesday accused rival South Korea of trying to obstruct a nuclear deal by staging a mass military exercise, reports AP.

South Korea's six-day long combined tactical exercise is the largest it has staged in recent years. It comes as worries escalate over the fate of a US-brokered nuclear deal aimed at opening North Korea's secretive nuclear program.

The exercise is a "premeditated military provocation to hinder the implementation of the (North Korea) — US framework agreement," the North's officials Korea Central News Agency said.

Caste system still rules many villages in India

BELAUR, India, Apr 5: India's feudal caste system is so powerful in this farming village that even a militant group fighting it cannot fully resist complying with it, reports AP. Last summer, for the first time anyone could remember in Belaur, a lower caste person challenged the age-old social system, which determines a villager's job and where he is allowed to live, sit, worship and drink water.

This shopkeeper refused to sell cigarettes to an upper-caste teen-ager. The refusal resulted in a brawl with multiple injuries, a kidnapping, five killings and the flight of most lower caste people Belaur. Caste divisions are so strong in the village that even the

Naxalites, a Maoist guerilla group helping landless people and bonded labourers, felt obliged to set up two refugee camps. One isolates Musharas, or "Rat Eaters" a subcaste that even other low-caste people avoid.

Across India, the caste system is being challenged by communist militants and populist political parties and undermined by affirmative action and urban industrialisation. That is allowing some lower caste people to begin fighting their way up the ladder.

But people who challenge the system often face upper-caste revenge, especially in rural areas where, everyone knows his neighbours and their caste. The conflict often ends up preserving the social

hierarchy that has been ingrained in the Indian consciousness for three centuries. In some areas of northern India — the Hindi belt where the caste system remains strong — lower castes are trying to emerge as a political and economic force, challenging age-old injustices.

In Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, an election brought a lower caste coalition to power 14 months ago.

The new government soon enraged upper-caste people by freeing Phoolan Devi, a jailed lower caste woman known as the "Bandit Queen" for leading her comrades across the state on horseback and allegedly gunning down landowners. Encouraged by ambitious

job and education quota systems for lower castes, northern Indians who once were relegated to poverty and humiliation are beginning to acquire property, raise their incomes and move into the nation's swelling middle class.

Economic reforms are helping that slow transition, spurring industrialisation that is creating new job opportunities.

But lower-caste liberation often leads to clashes, especially in major states such as Bihar, where Belaur is located, and in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. For example, there has been an increase in reported rapes and murders of lower-caste women by upper-caste men across northern India.

Caste consciousness is less strong in the cities, but about 70 per cent of India's 900 million people live in villages. In places like Belaur, lower-caste people often have to live in secluded huts and toil for subsistence wages on farms of upper-caste neighbours. They are forbidden to enter the local Hindu temple or drink from wells used by the upper castes.

At mixed-caste gatherings, they sit on the ground. The village headman, usually a member of the upper-caste who often does not face election, has the final word on local disputes.

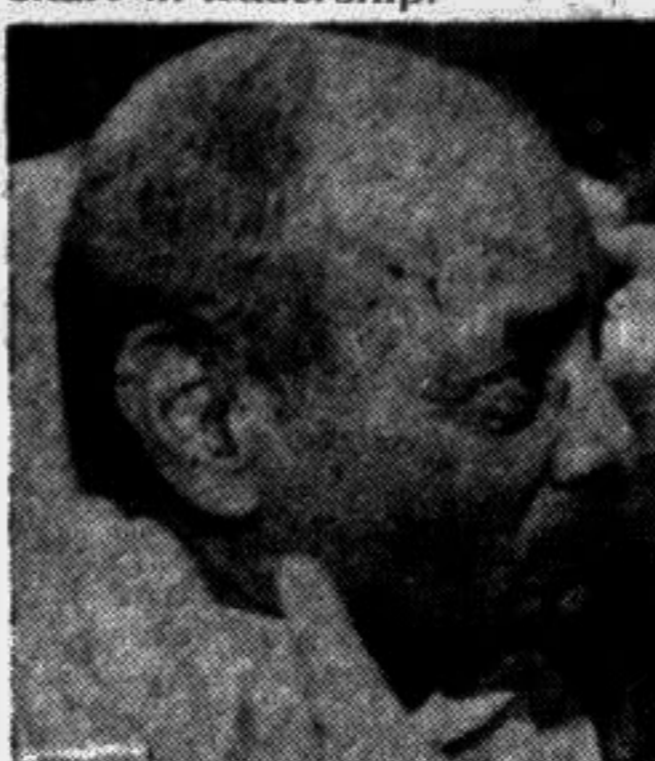
Mohandas Gandhi, who conceived the nonviolent movement that led to independence from Britain, fought

Rao under pressure to shed his unbridled power as party chief

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, accused by senior cabinet ministers of leading the Congress Party to humiliating defeats in regional polls, was under pressure on Tuesday to shed his unbridled powers as the party's president.

Some cabinet ministers close to Rao told Reuters that they would either ask him to step down as president or to appoint a "popular and powerful working president" as an assistant at a two-day party summit meeting starting on Wednesday.

Congress was trounced in recent state elections by rightwing Hindu groups in the major western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. It lost to the socialist Janata Dal in Karnataka and Bihar. A regional liberal group defeated Congress in Rao's home state of Andhra Pradesh.



But there was a difference of opinion on how far the restive leaders could pressure Rao to abbreviate his role in the party after he assumed the

leadership of India's oldest political group following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

"There will be a demand for a member of either a backward caste (Hindu) or a Muslim to be nominated as working president," one minister said.

"The biggest handicap for the Congress is the fact that the backward castes and Muslims are alienated from the party. We need badly to win them back if we are to be back in power next year."

Rao faces general elections by June next year, bereft of the traditional support Congress had among Muslims, India's largest minority group, and the politically crucial lower caste Hindus. Both have flocked to socialist opposition groups.

Some Muslims even voted for the rightwing Hindu

Bharatiya Janata Party in a telling snub to Rao.

A large number of India's 130 million Muslims accuse Rao of not acting to stop a Hindu mob from tearing down a 16th century mosque in northern Ayodhya town in December 1992.

His Congress government in Maharashtra was subsequently accused of jailing many Muslims under India's tough anti-terrorist laws for their alleged involvement in religious riots and a string of bomb blasts in Bombay which followed the mosque's demolition and killed 260 people.

The alienation of the Muslims and lower caste Hindus was a key theme of former Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh. Singh was expelled from Congress for questioning Rao's commitment to Muslims and the poor.

Mahathir dissolves parliament

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 5: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad today announced the dissolution of the Dewan Rakyat, the lower house of parliament, paving the way for a general election six months ahead of schedule, reports AFP.

Mahathir told a packed news conference at his office that Malaysia's King Jaafar Abdul Rahman had consented to the dissolution of the 180-member house.

Mahathir's National Front coalition of mostly racial-based parties goes into the polls with 141 of the 180 seats in parliament.

The mainly ethnic Chinese grouping, the Democratic Action Party has 20 seats, the fundamentalist party Islam or PAS and its ally the Semangau 46 have seven each and the mostly Christian party Berasatu Sabah five.



German President Roman Herzog (R) and host Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto smiles during a meeting at President House in Islamabad on Tuesday. Herzog arrived in Islamabad Tuesday for a five-day official visit, the first by a German head of state since 1962. The two side discussed Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. — AFP/UNB photo

Hillary Clinton meets Lankan slum dwellers

COLOMBO, Apr 5: US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton met Sri Lankan slum dwellers and paid homage to the country's Buddhist tradition today before heading home from an extensive goodwill tour of South Asia, reports Reuter.

Accompanied by daughter Chelsea, 15, the wife of US President Bill Clinton started the last day of her 20,000-mile (32,000 km) trip by visiting the Kelaniya Temple, one of Sri Lanka's most sacred shrines, on the outskirts of Colombo.

There, shaded by an umbrella from a broiling tropical sun, she and Chelsea walked in a procession led by two gaudily decorated elephants to place flowers at a statue of Buddha.

7 more killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, Apr 5: Seven men were shot dead in eastern Karachi in a series of attack linked to an ongoing blood feud between rival political factions, police said on Wednesday, reports AP.

The violence ended a week a relative calm in the southern port city. Police have arrested more than 1,600 suspects in recent weeks in bid to halt the violence, which is driven by political, religious and ethnic conflicts.

In the worst attack, four men were kidnapped late Tuesday night as they left a restaurant. They were taken to a house and shot at around 1 a.m. on Wednesday, police said. Three died, but the fourth man, Aslam Khan, survived multiple bullet wounds and told police the attackers belonged to the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (Altaf faction).

Contact group diplomats will press Bosnia to extend truce

SARAJEVO, Apr 5: Major power diplomats on Tuesday agreed to push Bosnia's government to extend a truce already shot to pieces on the battlefield, reports Reuter.

Senior officials from the five-nation contact group trying to forge a peace settlement in former Yugoslavia failed to unite on a key item at their London meeting, a deal offering Belgrade a gradual end to a UN — trade embargo.

But the officials from the United States, Russia, Britain, Germany and France agreed they would press the Muslim-led government, which has already expressed reluctance to prolong the truce, to agree to an extension, diplomats said. The four-month ceasefire,

due to expire on May 1, has been shattered by fierce fighting in the past two weeks.

Diplomats said the contact group would try to solve its internal differences in the next weeks and hoped to travel to Balkan capitals to present a deal by the end of the month.

Before the meeting, diplomats said the group might approve a French plan to offer rump Yugoslavia a gradual suspension of the sanctions imposed for backing warring Serbs in Bosnia in exchange for moves towards recognising its neighbours.

Officials declined to comment on problems over the proposal but said there were "fairly different viewpoints" in

the group. Russia is known to favour a quick end to sanctions but the United States views Serbia's president Slobodan Milosevic as largely responsible for war in the Balkans and is reluctant to reward him.

The group believes Milosevic's recognition of Bosnia and Croatia would further isolate separatist Bosnian Serbs, and Serbian nationalists' dream of a "greater Serbia" and bolster the Sarajevo government.

But in Sarajevo a UN official said he doubted recognition would push the Bosnian Serbs any closer to agreeing to the contact group peace deal dividing Bosnia proposed last



An old man is arrested by two policemen after showing respect in front of the Monument to the People's Heroes at Tiananmen Square during Qing Ming, the traditional Chinese day for visiting the graves of the loved ones on Wednesday. Tiananmen was under police surveillance to prevent any incidents connected with people wanting to pay respects to the victims in the student's demonstration that took place six years ago. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

"Attractive lady but ... pretty liberal"

WASHINGTON: Do you think Hillary Clinton is pretty? Posing as a publication for Republican teenagers, Spy magazine put that question to new Republican Congress members. Responses ranged from a grudging "not a dog" to a partisan "attractive lady but pretty liberal" to a comment on the size of her hips, reports AP.

"She's not my type," Republicans Sonny Bono told the satirical monthly. "Obviously Bill thinks she's pretty but she wouldn't pass the test ... Nothing personal."

"She's not a dog, but ... she's not gorgeous," said Republican Steve Chabot.

Republicans Sue Kelly offered, "Yeah, Hillary's Ok." Randy Tate said, "Actually, Hillary" Clinton is an attractive lady, but she is pretty liberal.

Is she pretty? Republican George Radanovich hesitated: "Um ... yeah."

Republicans Robert Ney made the comments about hips. "I think she's attractive." Then he giggled: "She has big hips but I can't say that."

Spy's Alex Gregory, who conducted the interviews, said the question about Mrs. Clinton was meant to provoke comments.

"That is the art of the prank to make it sound totally innocent yet it's not," he said.

Dream has gone sour

SIMIRA, West Bank: A Palestinian goatherd who hoped to make a fortune selling his goat's milk as a cure for impotency said on Tuesday the dream had gone sour, reports Reuter.

Mufid Sheikh said he killed the animal after Palestinians from Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction accused him of bilking the public. They told him the hermaphrodite goat must die.

Sheikh had charged 50 dollar per glass of milk and he said he had hundreds of customers. His cottage industry drew the attention of the world press, which flocked to his village in the occupied West Bank to document eager men gulping down the white nectar.

"I regret that I had to kill the goat. I should have butchered a different one and hidden my golden goat," Sheikh told Reuters.

'Sex tourist'

STOCKHOLM: A Swedish man was charged on Tuesday with having sex with a 13-year-old boy in Thailand, a case that became a scandal in both countries, the national news agency TT reported, says AP.

The alleged sexual intercourse with the minor took place in the Thai tourist resort of Pattaya two years ago. The 68-year-old man was caught by police in a hotel room with the naked child in his bed. The Thai police was assisted in the arrest by two Swedish police officers.

The alleged pedophile was arrested, but subsequently released after his passport was confiscated. He applied for new documents at the Swedish embassy in Bangkok, which issued a new passport for him in accordance with Swedish law.

The affair, which was filmed and shown on Swedish television as a documentary, caused a major scandal both in this Nordic country and in Thailand. Where many under-aged boys and girls work as prostitutes selling sex to European men.

Swedish law prohibits sex with children younger than 15. It is the first time that a Swedish "sex tourist" has been charged with an offense he committed abroad.

Emir of the road!

KUWAIT: A sheep survived a stroll across a busy Kuwait City motorway but 24 cars collided trying to avoid the animal, reports Reuter.

The sheep suddenly started to cross the road causing a car to make an abrupt halt to avoid running over it, but the cars behind could not avoid hitting it (the car), Al-Seyassah newspaper reported on Tuesday.

The sheep was later seen wandering amid the wrecked vehicles, it added.

Charles' godson arrested

LONDON: Police cautioned Prince Charles' godson after arresting him for carrying small amounts of Ecstasy and cannabis, it was revealed Tuesday, reports AP.

Tom Parker Bowles, the son of Camilla and Andrew Parker Bowles, was arrested on April Fool's Day after leaving a nightclub in Greenwich, south London, a Greenwich police statement said.

Clinton wants to review ban on aid to Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Apr 5: US President Bill Clinton said on Tuesday Washington should "seriously review" a five-year-old ban on aid to Pakistan, passed out of fear that Islamabad may possess nuclear weapons, reports AP.

The simple question, Clinton told a White House news conference, is whether the policy we have pursued in the last few years is achieving its objectives and whether we would be a stronger force for peace and reconciliation and ultimately for the de-fanging in terms of weapons of mass destruction in the area if we change our policy or if we stay with it.

Speaking one day before Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's scheduled arrival in Washington, Clinton said, "I think we should seriously review the policy" en-

acted in 1990 and known as the Pressler Amendment. "If you look at the number of people in those countries in South Asia, the potential they represent for the future and the powder-keg on which they sit because of their problems, the United States ... has an obligation to do the very best we can to bring about the best result, the most peaceful result, and that's all we're doing, Clinton said.

The Pressler Amendment bars most aid and all bilateral defence cooperation until the president can certify that Pakistan does not possess a nuclear weapon.

Pakistan is suspected of developing nuclear weapons in response to fears that India — the neighbour with which it has fought three wars since gaining independence from British rule in 1947 — has nuclear weapons.

Indian CEC ready to enter politics

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: The Chief Election Commissioner of India T N Seshan, has said that he is prepared to enter politics if people ask him and if it is in the national interest, reports FTI.

Seshan said that he would join politics if he was certain that it was in the national interest and that his personal interest is absolutely unimportant.

Replying a question during an interview by eyewitness as to whether he was waiting for enough people to write and convince him to join politics, Seshan said: "That's right." Whenever the public thinks, "I will be of maximum use to this country, I will act," the Chief Election Commissioner said.