

Dissidents, opposition blast autocratic methods

# Rao under pressure to share power ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, May 9: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao is under attack from ruling party dissidents and opposition parties gear up for general elections the government has said. It wants to hold before next April.

Rao has shown no interest in diluting his authority. But there was speculation that once parliament adjourns early next month, he would make a move by revamping Congress leadership without stepping down and perhaps naming new ministers.

Rao came under fire on Monday in Parliament when, during a debate on the defence budget, Jaswant Singh of opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took the Prime Minister to task for keeping the defence portfolio to himself for two years.

"The defence minister's service is not a part-time job. How can a Prime Minister function as his own defence minister?"

Singh said Rao failed to follow up on a promise to set up

a National Security Council, adding that military preparedness suffered from a lack of attention to the ministry.

In addition to being defence minister, Rao heads the ministries of industry, science and technology, space, ocean development, electronics, atomic energy, rural development, personnel and public grievances, law, justice and company affairs and non-conventional energy.

Rao took to the floor of Parliament to respond to Singh's attack. "The time has come when the prime minister must continue as the defence minister," he retorted.

"These are matters in which the discretion is left entirely with the prime minister," Rao said. "These decisions are not taken accidentally but deliberately."

With a touch of irony, Speaker Shivraj Patil, a Congress member, asked: "Can we have a better defence minister than the Prime Minister?"

Rao said he would follow up on a promise to set up

a National Security Council, adding that military preparedness suffered from a lack of attention to the ministry.

In addition to being defence minister, Rao heads the ministries of industry, science and technology, space, ocean development, electronics, atomic energy, rural development, personnel and public grievances, law, justice and company affairs and non-conventional energy.

Rao took to the floor of Parliament to respond to Singh's attack. "The time has come when the prime minister must continue as the defence minister," he retorted.

"These are matters in which the discretion is left entirely with the prime minister," Rao said. "These decisions are not taken accidentally but deliberately."

With a touch of irony, Speaker Shivraj Patil, a Congress member, asked: "Can we have a better defence minister than the Prime Minister?"

Rao said he would follow up on a promise to set up

a National Security Council, adding that military preparedness suffered from a lack of attention to the ministry.

In addition to being defence minister, Rao heads the ministries of industry, science and technology, space, ocean development, electronics, atomic energy, rural development, personnel and public grievances, law, justice and company affairs and non-conventional energy.

Rao took to the floor of Parliament to respond to Singh's attack. "The time has come when the prime minister must continue as the defence minister," he retorted.

"These are matters in which the discretion is left entirely with the prime minister," Rao said. "These decisions are not taken accidentally but deliberately."

With a touch of irony, Speaker Shivraj Patil, a Congress member, asked: "Can we have a better defence minister than the Prime Minister?"

Rao said he would follow up on a promise to set up

# BRIEFLY

**Rwandan massacre probe begins:** The international commission investigating last month's killing of displaced Hutus by government troops at a southwest Rwanda refugee camp planned a visit to the site on Tuesday, AP reports from Kigali.

The panel, which includes nine Rwandan government officials and nine representatives of foreign countries and international organisations, is trying to determine the reasons and extent of the killings. The delegates planned to depart for the Kibeho camp in UN helicopters Tuesday morning.

**Govt troops kill five Tigers:** Government troops ambushed and killed five Tamil guerrillas in eastern Sri Lanka hours after the rebels had gunned down 19 elite police commandos in the region, military officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Colombo.

Security forces killed the five guerrillas from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in coastal Batticaloa district, a military spokesman said. Monday's attack on the rebels came just after the militants had surprised a group of police special task force commandos in jungles in neighbouring Ampara district, killing 19 of them.

**400 Serb troops killed last week:** At least 400 Serb soldiers were killed and 1,000 wounded during Croatia's offensive against Serb-held territory last week, the Croatian Defence Ministry said on Monday, AFP reports from Zagreb.

It said 33 Croatian soldiers died and 128 were wounded in the fighting to take a key Serb-held enclave in an area called western Slavonia. The Croatian army estimated that before the offensive, the number of Serb forces in the region amounted to 4,500, a thousand of which came from Bosnia and Krna, capital of the self-declared Serb Republic of Krajina in Croatia.

**Swiss govt apologises:** The Swiss government Sunday apologised for the country's turning away thousands of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany during World War Two, in which the country was neutral. Xinhua reports from Geneva.

**100 homes gutted in Kashmir:** More than 100 homes were gutted when a fire broke out overnight in the Kashmiri town of Charar Sharief which has been under siege by the Indian security forces for nearly two months police said, AFP reports from Srinagar.

Muslim militants holed up in the town accused Indian troops of setting the blaze while the security forces said the fire was started by the guerrillas.

**Ferry crashes in northern Japan:** A ferry crashed into a pier while docking at the port of Kesennuma in northern Japan yesterday, injuring 128 people police said, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

A local police spokesman said 128 of the 206 passengers on board the 140-tonne Kurosaki were taken to hospital after the accident, which occurred about 450 km (280 miles) north of Tokyo.

**Colombian rebels kidnap 5:** Leftist guerrillas have kidnapped two journalists and three government officials in southeastern Colombia police said, AP reports from Bogota.

The kidnappings took place on Monday in Riofrio, a town 290 kilometers (180 miles) southeast of the capital, Bogota. The five are members of a regional peace commission that had gone to the area to receive a rebel statement.

**US tornado toll rises to 21:** Tornadoes and violent storms on Monday battered southern Oklahoma and northern Texas, where fierce weather over the weekend killed 21 people in the region and injured more than 400 others in Texas alone, Reuter reports from Dallas.

A man and two women were killed on Sunday when a tornado ripped through their homes in Eastman, Oklahoma, officials said. And a man was reportedly killed in the Texas panhandle town of Canyon when he stepped onto his porch to get a better look at a funnel cloud on Sunday.

**10 die in S African violence:** At least 10 people were killed in political violence in South Africa's troubled KwaZulu-Natal province at the weekend, police said on Monday, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

Most of those killed were shot or stabbed in black-townships in and around Durban, KwaZulu-Natal's main Indian Ocean port, a police statement said.

**Fire claims 13 more in HK:** Thirteen people were killed and eight others were injured in a hotel fire in southeastern coastal China's Jinjiang city the latest of a series of fires that rayaged entertainment halls, it was reported yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The fire, which broke out at the Anhai Hotel dance hall in Jinjiang May 3, was caused by an electrical short circuit in one of the rooms, the Hong Kong branch of China News Service reported.

**Clinton congratulates Chirac:** President Bill Clinton on Monday telephoned his congratulations to newly-elected French President Jacques Chirac and said he hoped they would meet soon, Reuter reports from Washington.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters accompanying Clinton aboard Air Force One on a visit to Russia that Clinton's telephone followed up a written message he sent Chirac on Sunday.

**Rare Picasso in auction:** A rare Picasso from his blue period — and the artist's most important work to be auctioned since 1989 — will be offered for sale on Monday night at Sotheby's, AP reports from New York.

The brooding portrait, "Angel Fernandez de Soto," dated 1903, depicts de Soto, Pablo Picasso's friend and long-jawed fellow artist, seated in a Barcelona cafe. There is a nearly-empty glass before him and a cloud of tobacco smoke shrouding the table.

**Economist Haberler dies:** Gottfried Haberler, a prominent economist who championed free trade and free markets as a member of the Harvard University faculty and scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, died on Saturday, at his Washington home. He was 94 and suffered from Parkinson's disease, AP reports from Washington.

# Govt forces gain lands in fighting against Taliban

KABUL, May 9: Afghan government forces bombarded the opposition Islamic Taliban student militia, west of the capital Kabul on Monday and also reported gains against it in the central province of Ghor, reports Reuter.

Forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani launched an artillery and air bombardment on Taliban positions around the Wardak province capital of Maidan Shahr, 20 km (12 miles) from Kabul, shortly after dawn, a Defence Ministry spokesman said.

Artillery units opened fire with rocket and cannon salvoes soon afterwards in a duel that lasted three hours, the spokesman, General Najib (eds: one name), told reporters.

The fighting eased by noon, though reports visiting the frontline heard machine-gun fire echoing around the hills, and watched puffs of smoke and dust erupt from tank rounds that exploded on Taliban-controlled ridges.

The government forces gained areas from Taliban during a continuing "clean up operation" in Ghor province, official Kabul radio said.

There was no independent confirmation of the broadcast, monitored in Islamabad, which also said government forces killed six Taliban fighters, wounded others and captured large quantities of weapons.

Frontline government fighters near Maidan Shahr said they made small gains on ridges to the east of the main road linking Kabul with the town and the southern provinces controlled by the emergent student militia.

But they also said few infantrymen were involved in the fighting, making major advances difficult.

The fact that the infantry had been held back from the fight suggested Monday's assault was not a serious attempt to overrun Maidan Shahr and appeared aimed more at wearing down Taliban resources and morale, military analysts said.

Taliban's local commander, Mullah Masher, had expected as major government assault to drive his force out of the strategically important town, to which Taliban had retreated in March on being pushed back from Kabul's outskirts after a string of spectacular successes.

**Philippine violence death toll 44:** MANILA, May 9: The death toll from election-related violence in the Philippines rose to 44 today with reports of an ambush in the north and grenade and mortar attacks in the south claiming eight lives and injuring five people, officials said, reports AFP.

A jeep owned by the Vice Mayor of Buguey was waylaid in the northern town three hours after polling closed there, killing all seven people aboard, Teresita di-Liaco, an official of the State Commission on Elections (COMELEC) told a news conference.

**2 Lankan officers for suicide squads to fight Tigers:** COLOMBO, May 9: As the military struggles against Tamil rebel attacks, a policeman and an army officer have volunteered to join a suicide squad "if the government will set up one to give the guerrillas a dose of their own medicine, reports AP.

Rebel suicide bombers have been blamed for blowing up military installations or assassinating politicians in Sri Lanka during the 12-year-old war for a Tamil homeland.

Both officers did not indicate the role of suicide squads in the fight against the rebels.

In a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunga, army Maj K T Karunaratne urged the government to call for volunteers to join such a squad.

**'ROK opposition MPs stage rally:** SEOUL, May 9: About 120 opposition politicians, including 70 lawmakers, demonstrated on Tuesday against the government's handling of a recent gas explosion that killed more than 100 people, reports AP.

About 300 riot police blocked the protesters as they tried to march into the streets after a rally at Pagoda Park in the center of Seoul. No arrests or injuries were reported in the 30-minute protest.

"Don't avoid a parliamentary investigation" the opposition members shouted as they marched out of the park, holding signs with slogans denouncing what they called the government's incompetent handling of the country's worst peacetime disaster.

Protesters were also carrying sashes over their shoulders accusing the government of rejecting an opposition demand for a parliamentary probe of the mishap.

# Confiscation of land in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, May 9: Jordan has warned Israel it will take action affecting bilateral relations if the Jewish state goes ahead with plans to confiscate land in Arab east Jerusalem, an Israeli Foreign Ministry official said, reports Reuter.

Jordanian Ambassador to Israel Marwan Muasher requested an urgent meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Belin on Monday to deliver the message personally, said the official, who asked not be identified.

Israel's plan to seize 53 hectares (131 acres) of land in the city's eastern sector has sparked international furor and complicated already troubled Israeli Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) peace talks.

The ambassador did not say specifically what protest action Jordan was intending, but he told (Berlin) Jordan cannot simply sit back and do nothing with respect to the issue," the official said.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin later played down fears that Jordan or Morocco—which has also strongly protested about the land seizure — might break off diplomatic ties with Israel.

"If PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat said he would not halt the peace talks, why should they be more extreme than he is?" Rabin told Israeli reporters during his current US visit.

Israeli television said Jordan might recall Muasher, who assumed his duties as its first envoy to Israel last month or freeze talks on further implementation of the October peace treaty that ended a 46-year state of war between the countries.

Moroccan media said last week that King Hassan sent Rabin a message strongly protesting at the land confiscation and calling the decision a "bombshell" that could have "serious repercussions" for the entire Middle East.

Belin's spokesman confirmed that Muasher met the deputy minister on Monday afternoon, but declined to discuss details.

The row has dominated two days of Israeli-PLO talks in Cairo. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres announced a series of gestures to ease the plight of West Bank and Gaza Arabs, including the release of 250 Palestinian prisoners on Monday.

The PLO said the measures, coinciding with the Muslim feast of Eid-ul Azha which begins on Wednesday, were too little and too late to stop the campaign against land seizure.

Palestinian negotiator Faisal Al-Husseini will meet Israeli Police Minister Moshe Shahal in Jerusalem on Tuesday and give him documents backing Palestinian claims to ownership of the piece of disputed land, PLO officials said.

Arafat Spokesman Nabil Abu Rdeineh said late on Monday the meeting would not alter "in any way" the decision Palestinian self rule authority to bring the matter for debate before the United Nations Security Council.

An Arab League meeting agreed on Saturday to seek an urgent Security Council meeting to try to stop Israel from seizing the land for Jewish housing and a police headquarters.

# Drug abuse on rise in China

BEIJING, May 9: Drug abuse is on the rise in China, and the country does not have enough rehabilitation centers to treat addicts, an official was quoted as saying Tuesday, reports AP.

China has 250 drug treatment centres and 75 camps where drug addicts are forced to undergo treatment, but these cannot meet current needs, Tao Siju, the minister of public security, said in a report to the standing committee of the National People's Congress, which is meeting in Beijing.

As smugglers transport drugs from Southeast Asia through China to other parts of the world, China is suffering from its own drug problem, Tao said, according to a report by the Xinhua News Agency. It did not give an estimate of the number of addicts.



Vying for votes, (L-R) Tun Neesa Abdullah—Singapore, Nikoleta Meszarosova—Slovak Republic, Augustine Masilela—South Africa and Maria Reyers—Spain during the final rehearsal on Monday for the Miss Universe pageant at the Windhoek Country Club. The final takes place in Namibia May 13.

# Jordan warns of action against Israel if it goes ahead with plan

JERUSALEM, May 9: Jordan has warned Israel it will take action affecting bilateral relations if the Jewish state goes ahead with plans to confiscate land in Arab east Jerusalem, an Israeli Foreign Ministry official said, reports Reuter.

Jordanian Ambassador to Israel Marwan Muasher requested an urgent meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Belin on Monday to deliver the message personally, said the official, who asked not be identified.

Israel's plan to seize 53 hectares (131 acres) of land in the city's eastern sector has sparked international furor and complicated already troubled Israeli Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) peace talks.

The ambassador did not say specifically what protest action Jordan was intending, but he told (Berlin) Jordan cannot simply sit back and do nothing with respect to the issue," the official said.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin later played down fears that Jordan or Morocco—which has also strongly protested about the land seizure — might break off diplomatic ties with Israel.

"If PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat said he would not halt the peace talks, why should they be more extreme than he is?" Rabin told Israeli reporters during his current US visit.

Israeli television said Jordan might recall Muasher, who assumed his duties as its first envoy to Israel last month or freeze talks on further implementation of the October peace treaty that ended a 46-year state of war between the countries.

Moroccan media said last week that King Hassan sent Rabin a message strongly protesting at the land confiscation and calling the decision a "bombshell" that could have "serious repercussions" for the entire Middle East.

Belin's spokesman confirmed that Muasher met the deputy minister on Monday afternoon, but declined to discuss details.

The row has dominated two days of Israeli-PLO talks in Cairo. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres announced a series of gestures to ease the plight of West Bank and Gaza Arabs, including the release of 250 Palestinian prisoners on Monday.

The PLO said the measures, coinciding with the Muslim feast of Eid-ul Azha which begins on Wednesday, were too little and too late to stop the campaign against land seizure.

Palestinian negotiator Faisal Al-Husseini will meet Israeli Police Minister Moshe Shahal in Jerusalem on Tuesday and give him documents backing Palestinian claims to ownership of the piece of disputed land, PLO officials said.

Arafat Spokesman Nabil Abu Rdeineh said late on Monday the meeting would not alter "in any way" the decision Palestinian self rule authority to bring the matter for debate before the United Nations Security Council.

An Arab League meeting agreed on Saturday to seek an urgent Security Council meeting to try to stop Israel from seizing the land for Jewish housing and a police headquarters.

# UN rejects NATO airstrike against Serb

UNITED NATIONS, May 9: UN officials on Monday rejected a request for NATO airstrikes against Bosnian Serb positions ringing Sarajevo, US officials said, reports AP.

The request, from the UN commander in Bosnia, came one day after a Bosnian Serb mortar attack killed 10 people in a Sarajevo suburb.

"I have to say that I fail to understand the logic behind turning down such a request given the kinds of activities that have been taking place in and around Sarajevo," said US Ambassador Madeline Albright.

Albright said she planned to meet with senior peacekeeping officials at the United Nations.

# US reaffirms support for South Korean N-reactor

SEOUL, May 9: The United States on Tuesday reaffirmed support for a central South Korean role in building replacement nuclear reactors in North Korea, despite Pyongyang's objections, officials said, reports AP.

Robert Gallucci, the chief US negotiator in nuclear talks with North Korea, restated Washington's position when he met with Foreign Minister Gong Ro-myung and other senior South Korean leaders, said the South Korean officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

On Wednesday, Gallucci was to meet South Korean and Japanese officials to coordinate strategy, they said.

The contacts precede talks between Gallucci and North Korea's top negotiator, Kang Sok Ju, tentatively scheduled for next week. The exact date and place for the talks remain undecided.

South Korean officials said North Korea wants to hold the Gallucci-Kang meeting in its capital, Pyongyang, but the United States insists on a third country.

The Gallucci-Kang talks were arranged after lower-level contacts broke down April 21 in Berlin over who should supply two new nuclear reactors to North Korea under a deal signed last October.

The accord is being endangered by North Korea's refusal to receive the reactors from rival South Korea. The North cited safety reasons, but the real reason is believed to be national pride.

The United States maintains there is no alternative because South Korea is the only country willing to pay most of the 4 billion dollars cost.

The reactors, in addition to diplomatic and economic benefits, are to be provided in return for North Korea freezing and eventually dismantling its current nuclear programme suspected of developing weapons.

Mutual distrust runs deep between the communist North and the capitalist South, divided since 1945. They fought a bloody war in 1950-53.



US Ambassador Robert Gallucci (L) shakes hands with his counterpart, South Korean Ambassador Choi Dong-Jin (R) before US-South Korea talks on the stalled deal to halt North Korea's suspect nuclear programme at Seoul's Foreign Ministry yesterday. Japan is scheduled to join the talks Wednesday to seek a way to overcome the North's objections to taking light water reactors from its bitterest foe, South Korea.

# Off the Record

**In search of Yuanmu man**

KUNMING, Archeologists from many countries came up to an international symposium of palaeoanthropology here with proposals on how to conduct research on fossilized remains of Yuanmu man, who lived about 1.7 million years ago in Yuanmu, or today's Yunnan province in southwest China, reports Xinhua.

Chinese and foreign archeologists at the symposium propose to co-operate in research of the origins of human beings through the study of the Yuanmu man.

The fossilized remains of Yuanmu man were found in 1965. The symposium is held to mark the 30th anniversary of that discovery.

Yunnan province has an abundance of remains of ancient animals, plants, and human beings. The fossils of Ramapithecus and Sivapithecus, early apes that are important in research into the change from apes to man, have also been found in the province.

Kordos Laszlo, a Hungarian professor, said that he was interested in co-operating with Chinese as research on the origin of man in the work of the whole world, rather than that of one country.

A professor from Japan, Motoji Ikeya, expressed the hope that he can help date the fossilized remains of Yuanmu man by using new technology.

China approved a regulation concerning archaeological excavations co-operating with other countries in 1992 which allows Sino-foreign co-operation in the field.

**Lennon's letter lands fan in fortune**

NEW DELHI: He once tried to touch John Lennon for money to see the world, but the Beatles singer instead suggested transcendental meditation, reports AP.

S.D Bhalla, from the northern city of Chandigarh, is a happy man. Lennon's note turning down his request for money could fetch Bhalla what he wanted 26 years ago.

Bhalla is trying to sell Lennon's note for at least 100,000 rupees (3,300 dollars), United News of India news agency reported.

Lennon, who was studying with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in India, replied to Bhalla that he should to practise meditation "through which all things are possible."

**Little bald eagles help friend get rid of cancer**

SAN DIEGO: Thirteen boys who shaved their heads to support a classmate undergoing cancer treatment can grow their hair back: They found out Wednesday their friend is getting better, reports AP.

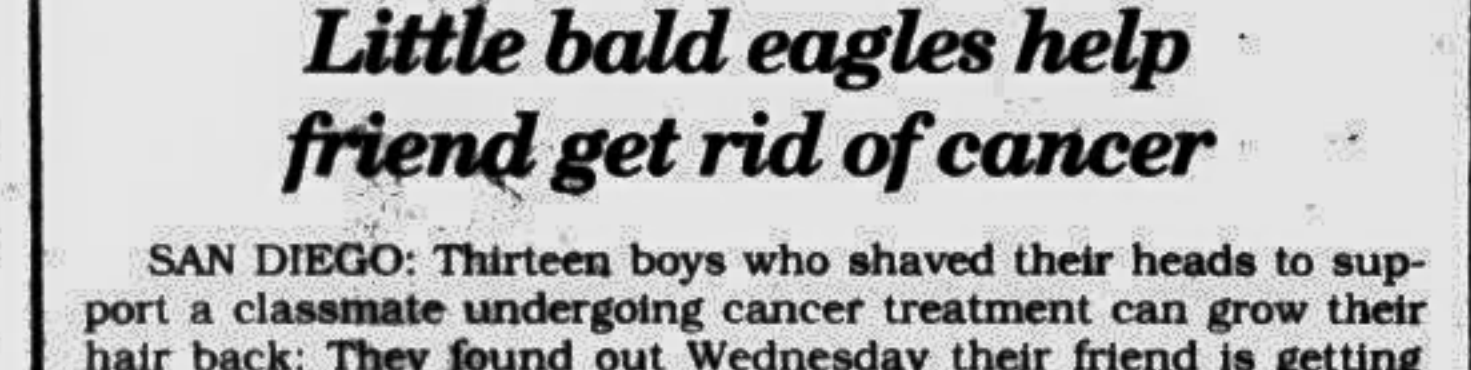
"I'm rid of the cancer!" 11-year-old Ian O'Gorman told five of his friends who were playing hide-and-seek outside his house.

On the spot, the boys broke into a rap song they'd been composing:

"We're the bald eagles, and we're here to say that we get to grow our hair back today," they chanted.

Doctors won't say Ian is cured, but test results that came back Wednesday showed that his lymphoma is in remission. Ian had eight weeks of chemotherapy after doctors removed a malignant tumor from his small intestine.

Ian wanted to get his head shaved before his hair fell out in clumps. So the other boys from Lake Elementary School in Oceanside, a San Diego suburb, shaved their heads so Ian wouldn't feel out of place.



11-year-old Ian O'Gorman, who has been cured of cancer, is surrounded by his friends who shaved their heads to support him.

**UN rejects NATO airstrike against Serb**

UNITED NATIONS, May 9: UN officials on Monday rejected a request for NATO airstrikes against Bosnian Serb positions ringing Sarajevo, US officials said, reports AP.

The request, from the UN commander in Bosnia, came one day after a Bosnian Serb mortar attack killed 10 people in a Sarajevo suburb.

"I have to say that I fail to understand the logic behind turning down such a request given the kinds of activities that have been taking place in and around Sarajevo," said US Ambassador Madeline Albright.

Albright said she planned to meet with senior peacekeeping officials at the United Nations.

US Ambassador Madeline Albright (L) shakes hands with UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (R) after the UN Security Council meeting on Monday.