

BRIEFLY

No-confidence motion against Rao in parliament today

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: The Indian opposition will table a no-confidence motion aimed at unseating Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao over a raging bribery scandal when parliament opens its budget session Monday, reports AFP.

A regional opposition party said Sunday it will try to vote out Rao's nearly five-year-old government over the country's worst scandal, and the other opposition parties said they might back the ouster move.

Opposition leaders said they expected the two-week session, the last before parliamentary polls expected in April, to be stormy as they would go all out to nail Rao over the scandal and a variety of other issues.

Although Rao's Congress (I) party has a slight majority in parliament, the opposition hopes disaffection in the ruling group triggered by the scandal may induce some of its MPs to abstain during the no-trust move.

"The government faces a serious credibility crisis," Krishna Lal Sharma, spokesman for the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), told the news agency. "It will be a very stormy session."

He said MPs from BJP, the second largest group in parliament after the Congress, would decide Sunday or Monday whether it should back the Telugu Desam Party's motion or initiate own anti-Rao strategy.

There is a strong possibility that some members from the ruling party can vote against the government," Sharma said. "In the case the government will be facing a very serious situation." The Telugu Desam's no-trust vote is expected to get the support of communists and the centrist Janata Dal (People's Party).

Indian politics has been in turmoil since federal elections last month against powerful politicians over the scandal in which a New Delhi businessman paid huge bribes over the years in return for favours.

The bribe takers include leaders of almost every political party with the exception of the communists. The businessman maintained details of the payments in coded diaries which have been seized.

The scandal has led to the resignations of seven ministers from Rao's government, fuelling serious discontent in the Congress ahead of elections that are expected to result in a hung parliament.

Congress sources said some of the former ministers who quit under pressure from Rao, the 74-year-old party president, had turned against him, several more party leaders face prosecution in the case.

BJP president Lal Krishna Advani has resigned from parliament while the party's chief minister of New Delhi city, Madan Lal Khurana quit last week after being named in the scandal.

The Congress is, however, confident of overcoming the opposition challenge.

The Prime Minister is sufficiently strong to meet any threat," said party spokesman Vithal Gadgil. "There is no danger to the government."

The Indian parliament meets every February to pass the country's federal budget. But this year Finance Minister Manmohan Singh will only present a limited budget because of the impending elections.

Opposition leaders said the session, which will end on March 12, will also see acrimonious debates over mounting corruption, Kashmir and issues related to national security, including Pakistan's support to Indian insurgents.

"The PM is himself to blame for all his troubles," said the BJP's Sharma. Ramvilas Paswan of the centrist Janata Dal said: "The scandal's reverberations will be certainly felt in parliament."

Off the Record

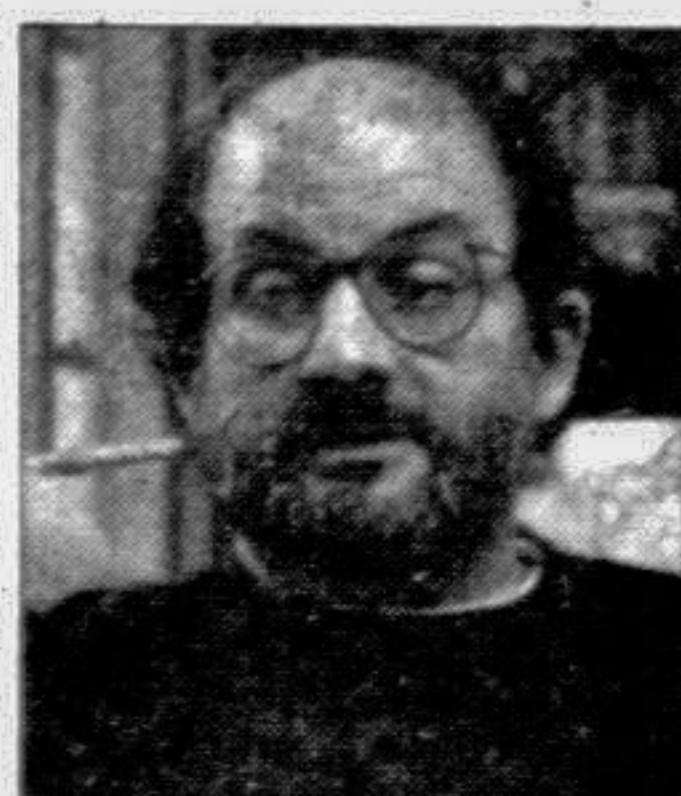
Ready to celebrate 7 yrs of deadly fatwa

NEW YORK: Author Salman Rushdie is ready to "warily celebrate" another anniversary: Seven years of living under a death sentence imposed by the Iranian government over his book, "The Satanic Verses," reports AP.

"I have tried to emerge from the shadows to which I was, for a time, confined," Rushdie writes in the March 11 issue of The Nation magazine. "To go on writing and live more openly are my ways of showing that I have not been intimidated."

In February 1989, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini announced the fatwa against Rushdie, claiming "The Satanic Verses" was blasphemous. A multi-million-dollar bounty was placed on Rushdie's head, and the author dropped out of sight.

But in recent months, Rushdie says, he has visited a dozen countries. At each stop, he found "an atmosphere of wary celebration." And he thanked people along the way for their support in dodging the fatwa.



1453 Kashmiri militants in jails Indo-Pak troops trade gunfire on Kashmir border

JAMMU (India), Feb 25: Indian and Pakistani troops traded heavy gunfire on their disputed Kashmir border overnight after a 48-hour lull, but no one was injured, defence officials said today, reports AFP.

Pakistani soldiers opened fire at two Indian posts in the R S Pura sector, 25 kms from this summer capital of Kashmir state, the officials said here.

The Pakistanis used medium and light machine guns, an official said. "They fired more than 3,000 rounds. We retaliated with equal force."

The gun battle lasted an hour, sources in the border security force said. No one was injured in the firing. Indian officials said the Pakistani troops began shooting

after suspecting that Indian authorities were laying a fence along the winding frontier of Kashmir, a Himalayan state whose ownership is disputed by both countries.

Skirmishes between Indian and Pakistani troops on the Kashmir frontier are common and often last for days.

IT adds: The Jammu and Kashmir government has alleged the apprehensions that a large number of Kashmiri militants were languishing in different jails and interrogation centres within and outside the state.

An official spokesman told PTI that only 1453 Kashmiri militants were presently lodged in jails and other interrogation centres, while 28,064 have been released during last six years.

Malaysia opposes expansion of Asia-Euro summit

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 25: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia opposes the expansion of the Asia-Euro summit to include Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan or other nations, reports AP.

"If it becomes too big and confusing, there will be many conflicting interests and we cannot have a real dialogue. It will become confused and nothing will be achieved," The Sunday Star quoted Mahathir as saying Saturday night.

Mahathir was commenting on British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind's reported statement that the European Union wanted the second summit to be opened to Australia, India, Pakistan and New Zealand.

Mahathir, who will be attending the first summit in Bangkok, Thailand on March 1 and 2, said there must be some criteria, otherwise other countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal would also want to join.

Lee invites China to hold peace talks

TAIPEI, Feb 25: Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui today invited China to hold peace talks with the nationalist island, saying nations in the Asia Pacific region and throughout the world are concerned about precarious relations across the Taiwan Strait, reports AP.

"After the end of the Cold War, it is a world trend to replace confrontation with negotiation," Lee said in a television campaign forum here. In the past six years, we have followed this trend by devoting ourselves to maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait and promoting peaceful exchanges with the mainland.

"Peace in the Taiwan Strait deeply affects the stability and prosperity of the Asia Pacific region as well as international political and economic development in the 21st century," he added.

Thousands protest British immigration bill

LONDON, Feb 25: About 4,000 people marched through London on Saturday to protest the government's plans to crackdown on asylum seekers in Britain, reports AP.

They gathered at Trafalgar square for speeches condemning the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is designed to stem the tide of asylum-seekers.

Asylum applications to Britain have grown from 4,000 in 1986 to an estimated 40,000 this year. Nearly half are from Africa, mainly from the military regimes in Algeria and Nigeria.

Neville Nagler, chief executive of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, said the bill would worsen race relations in Britain and bring misery to thousands of genuine asylum-seekers.



South Korean President Kim Young Sam (C) is greeted by Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao (R) and Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma (L) on Saturday at Rashtrapati Bhavan (Presidential Palace) in New Delhi. Guards of the Presidential Palace are picture in background.

Bosnian Serbs may help people fleeing Vojvodina Croatia accuses Bosnian army of uncontrolled weapons buildup

ZAGREB, Feb 25: The Croatian defence minister accused the Muslim-led Bosnian army of an uncontrolled weapons buildup, warning on Saturday that Croatia would, if necessary, take steps to protect Bosnian Croats, reports AP.

The comments from Gojko Susak, the Bosnian Croats' chief supporter in Croatia, underscored the fragility of the Muslim-Croat federation that is to control half of Bosnia under the Dayton peace accord. If the federation does not work, the peace in Bosnia is doomed.

His tough speech came the same day that Gen. Maj. Zivko Budimir, chief of the Bosnian Croat forces and Gen. Rasim Delic, commander of the Bosnian government army, left Bosnia for the United States, which is helping to equip and train the Bosnian army as part of the NATO led peace mission.

They were invited by the US Army and accompanied by several associates, the Croatian news agency HINA reported. The two commanders were to tour US Army bases and military schools.

The Dayton agreement calls for a Muslim Croat federation army of 50,000 equipped and trained by the NATO led force, but such an army would be created only once the federation itself is viable.

Bosnian Muslims and Croats fought for a year in 1993-94, particularly in the divided city of Mostar, before they formed the federation under US pressure in March 1994 in an attempt to counterbalance the Bosnian Serbs.

But the lack of a united federal army and Bosnian Croats' objections to reunification of Mostar show that ethnic rivalries are far from overcome.

Outgunned by the Serbs and Croats during nearly four years

of war, the Muslim-led government has turned to Western governments and the Muslim world to obtain heavy weapons and ammunition.

But recently, Washington has warned that its promises to equip and train Bosnian government forces could be jeopardized by recent discoveries of foreign soldiers and military advisers — some from Iran — in Bosnia.

Meanwhile Bosnian Serb military trucks can help the terrified people fleeing Vojvodina and other Serb suburbs, and NATO will protect the refugees, the overall commander of the peacekeeping mission said.

"I think if we provide them with escorts... it will make things nice and clean," US Adm. Leighton Smith said Saturday of the Serb exodus from Sarajevo, a capital that prided itself on its multiethnicity before nearly four years of war.



Hundreds of demonstrators march along London's Embankment on Saturday in protest to the Government's proposed Asylum and Immigration Bill.

Anti-terrorist chief warns of more IRA attacks in UK

LONDON, Feb 25: Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist chief said Saturday the IRA is imminently planning further attacks, after police found bomb making equipment at the home of an IRA man killed carrying a bomb on a London bus, reports AP.

Commander John Grieve issued the warning as explosives experts examined the cache found buried at the London home of Edward O'Brien, a member of the Irish Republican Army.

"Following the discovery of significant quantities of bomb-making material and detailed documentation... we are warning of the possibility of imminent attacks by the provisional IRA on the mainland," Grieve said.

The IRA ended its 17-month truce by bombing London's Docklands on February

9, killing two people. An IRA bomb on a London bus killed O'Brien and wounded nine on February 18.

Sinn Fein said Saturday it is prepared to ask the IRA to call a new ceasefire if the British government sets up all-party peace negotiations.

"What people are screaming out for is peace negotiations now, not in three months' time," Martin McGuinness, deputy leader of the IRA-allied party, said in a BBC radio interview.

McGuinness added he other Sinn Fein leaders are prepared to ask the IRA to call off its renewed bombing campaign if a date for talks is set.

But Prime Minister John Major condemned the IRA for breaking the ceasefire, and said he would not let it determine the way forward.

US President Bill Clinton hugs eighth grader Melissa Machit after she introduced him on Saturday at the Jackie Robinson Academy in Long Beach, California. Clinton spoke to students and educators and reaffirmed his support for school uniforms.

— AFP/UNB photo

24 killed in Pak bus plunge: An overcrowded passenger bus plunged into a canal south of the Pakistani capital, killing as many as 24 people, a newspaper reported Sunday. AP reports from Islamabad.

The accident happened late Saturday when the bus driver lost control of his vehicle while swerving to avoid an oncoming car, the English-language newspaper, The News reported. Rescue workers said they saved 40 people, but were able to recover the bodies of only three victims.

Indian bus mishap death toll now 30: A passenger bus collided with a truck and burst into flames Saturday, killing 30 people and critically injuring 25 others in a southern Indian town, a news report said. AP reports from New Delhi.

Fire engines took more than three hours to put out the blaze after the vehicles collided on a narrow road bridge near Sulur town, 2,400 kilometers (1,500 miles) south of New Delhi, United News of India news agency said. The bus went up in flames so quickly that few people could jump out of the vehicle safely, it said.

Farrakhan returns home: Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan has returned to Chicago after an 18-nation trip during which he made statements angering US officials. AP reports from Chicago.

Farrakhan arrived at O'Hare International Airport on a chartered flight Saturday morning. He did not talk to reporters, who were kept more than one-quarter a mile away and behind a fence. He got into a limousine and left; his large entourage boarded other vehicles. Farrakhan was scheduled to speak Sunday about his trip to supporters and journalists at a Nation of Islam convention.

Filipinos observe 10 yrs of democracy: Filipinos celebrated 10 years of democracy Sunday, but with deepening divisions instead of unity and protests instead of joy. AP reports from Manila.

The four days of church-supported peaceful "people power" demonstrations which forced the late President Ferdinand Marcos into exile on Feb 25, 1986, became a model for pro-democracy movements around the world. Corazon Aquino, the widow of an assassinated opposition leader, was catapulted into the presidency and restored democratic institutions.

7 Christians shot dead in Egypt: Suspected Muslim militants shot dead seven Christians in an ambush on a farm in southern Egypt late on Saturday, security sources said. Reuters reports from Assiut, Egypt.

They said the attack took place on a farm called Ezbet El-Aqbat in Bedari village in Assiut province, about 380 kms (236 miles) south of Cairo. Two other Christians were hurt in the attack, the sources said. Security officials in Assiut believe the gunmen were members of the militant Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya (Islamic group), which has targeted Egyptian Christians, policemen and foreign tourists as part of an anti-government campaign aimed at installing a strict Islamic state in Egypt.

Hussein to undergo ear surgery: King Hussein said Saturday he will undergo surgery on his right ear drum, a malady that has kept him from his favourite hobby: piloting his private jet. AP reports from Amman.

Hussein, 60, made the announcement to Jordanians in an emotional letter read by an announcer over state-run Jordan Television. He provided no other details, but his private physician, Maj Gen Samir Farraj, said the monarch will undergo surgery for the perforation of the ear drum, a case whose medical name is Tympano Plasty.

Quakes hit northeast of Tokyo: A pair of moderate earthquakes hit an area northeast of Tokyo Sunday, but there were no reports of injuries or damage. AP reports from Tokyo.

A 3.8-magnitude quake centered in the Pacific Ocean off Ibaraki prefecture (state), struck at 5:58 am (2058 GMT). The Central Meteorological Agency said. It was followed at 6:38 am (2138 GMT) by a 4.3-magnitude quake, also centered in the Pacific off Ibaraki, the agency said.

1 killed as US Navy jet crashes: A Navy jet crashed into the ocean during a carrier exercise, killing one crew member and injuring two others, the Navy said. A fourth crew member was missing. AP reports from San Diego.

Palestinian legislative council opens on March 7

GAZA, Feb 25: The Palestinian legislative council will be inaugurated on March 7, seven weeks after historic Palestinian elections, a Palestinian official said on Saturday, reports Reuters.

"President Yasser Arafat will call the elected council to convene on March 7 and a number of world and Arab notables are invited to attend the inauguration of the council," said Marwan Kanafani, former Arafat spokesman and elected council member.

Arafat was sworn in as Palestinian President earlier this month, after his landslide victory in the first Palestinian elections on January 20 for the head of an interim government.

"Saddam's sons-in-law victims of cruelty of Iraqi leadership"

DUBAI, Feb 25: From poison to mystery car accidents and daylight shootings, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has honed violence and cruelty into a ruthless weapon to crush opposition and keep an iron-fisted grip on power, reports AP.

The Iraqi opposition believes Saddam's two sons-in-law General Hussein Kamel Hassan and Colonel Saddam Kamel were just the latest in a long line of people to fall victim to a regime which stands accused of widescale massacres and executions.

The official Iraqi version is that the brothers were killed on Friday in a shootout by other clan members who wanted to restore the family's honour after the two returned from a six month defection to Jordan.

But the story does not wash

with many who have fled themselves from the repression of the Iraqi leadership.

"According to our information 250 people have been poisoned with lithium, of whom 103 have died. Others have been mown down by cars or thrown out of the windows of their apartments," said Ghanem Jawad, the head of the Human Rights Office within the opposition Iraqi National Congress (INC).

Even before Saddam became president in 1979, he was Iraq's strongman after his Pan-Arab Baath Party seized power in 1968 and set his sights on those who represented any possible threat — from Kurds seeking autonomy to political opponents.

A year later Baath resigned for "health reasons." He died at the start of the 1980s and according to Hussein Kamel, Saddam's brother, he had been killed by Saddam.

tortured, said Mohammed Abdel Jabbar, another leader from the INC, an opposition umbrella group.

In May 1970 Saddam tried to assassinate Kurdish leader Mustapha Brazani in a failed booby-trapped car attack.

From 1978 hundreds of communists were eliminated after the party was persuaded to come out into the open leaving its militants suddenly exposed.

Saddam's henchmen were responsible in 1978 for pushing the car of Mohammed, the son of the then president Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr, into the Tigris River where he drowned. Jawad said.

A year later Baath resigned for "health reasons." He died at the start of the 1980s and according to Hussein Kamel, Saddam's brother, he had been killed by Saddam.

As Saddam took power in 1979 he unleashed a purge of the Baath Party where a deputy prime minister and three ministers were executed by other members of the government.

Saddam reportedly filmed the execution.

The same year a former foreign minister was gunned down in broad daylight as he was paying his water bill.

In 1980 in the run-up to the Iraq-Iran war, the Ayatollah Mohammad Bager Al-Sadr, the most influential of the Shiite Muslim clerics, died under torture just a few hours after a meeting with Saddam.

In 1983 the whole family of the Shiite opposition figure Mohammad Bager Al-Hakim who lived in Iran was arrested and threatened with death one by one if they did not stop his activities. Some 16 people including if of his brothers were executed.

There was international outrage in 1988 when 5,000 Kurdish villagers in Halabja in northern Iraq were massacred in a chemical attack.

Between 1987 and 1990, the Iraqi armed swept through Kurdistan, razing hundreds of villages and gassing others in a bid to force Kurds to leave their home.

The Iraqi leadership has also been blamed of trying to squeeze thousands of Shites out of their homelands in the marshes in southeastern Iraq. After the eight-year war with Iran, former defence

minister Adnan Khairallah was killed in a helicopter "accident" in 1989. A cousin of the president and brother of his first wife Sajida, he made the mistake of saying he orchestrated the victory over Iran.

In 1988, in the middle of a cabinet meeting, Saddam himself killed a minister who had opposed the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds.

Saddam's grip even extends abroad where opposition figures have been hunted down by Iraqi secret services and assassinated during exile in Europe and other Arab countries.

Last year a former chairman of Iraq's Medical Association, Doctor Rafi Takriti, a man in his seventies who had been living in Amman, returned to Baghdad on the president's request.

LTTE mounts fresh attack on army camp: 1 killed

COLOMBO, Feb 25: Tamil Tiger guerrillas mounted a fresh attack against an army camp in eastern Sri Lanka today, killing one soldier and wounding at least six others, officials said, reports AP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched a pre-dawn assault against the Kinniyadi Camp which had come under a similar raid three days ago.

The LTTE in a statement from its London office said 14 of their fighters were killed in the earlier attack, but officials put the death toll at 20 and said there were no casualties among the security forces because they were well prepared.