



Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating casts his vote in the Federal elections on Saturday. The opinion polls show the incumbent Labour Party trailing behind the conservative opposition in its bid to retain power. — AFP/UNB photo

Hawala scandal CBI must proceed against Rao, demands opposition

NEW DELHI, Mar 2: Indian opposition leaders today said a Supreme Court order taking away Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's control over a federal agency probing a bribery scandal proved he was not above suspicion, reports AP.

"It amounts to the opinion that the prime minister's involvement in the case needs to be investigated and that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) must proceed against him," said Jaswant Singh, a leader of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP).

Ram Vilas Paswan, secretary-general of the centrist Janata Dal (People's Party) said the "stricture" indicated the court's "doubts about the impartiality of the prime minister under whom the CBI functions."

"Not only in the corruption case but for all time to come the CBI should be free from executive control," he added.

The Supreme Court on Friday ordered the CBI not to take instructions from Rao, who oversees the organisation, or disclose details of the case to any other body.

The CBI shall take no instructions or furnish any particulars of the case to any authority interested or likely to be affected by the outcome of the probe," officials quoted a three-judge panel as saying.

Judges JS Verma, SP Bharucha and SC Sen while

hearing a petition on the scandal liberated the CBI from "overall administrative control" of Rao, who holds the key department among some 13 portfolios.

This step is to eliminate any impression of bias and avoid erosion of credibility of the investigations by the CBI, and also any reasonable impression of lack of fairness and

Pak troops open fire on Kashmir border villages

JAMMU (India), Mar 2: Pakistani troops opened fire on frontier villages in the Indian state of Kashmir during a visit by the state's governor today but there were no casualties, border officials said here, reports AP.

A spokesman for the border security force said Pakistani troops "resorted to unprovoked and intermittent firing" on villages in the Rambir Singh Pura frontier area, some 35 kms from this state winter capital.

The said Kashmir Governor KV Krishna Rao was unprovoked by the firing and "stuck to his schedule, discussing the latest border situation with villagers."

India and Pakistan hold parts of the disputed state and frequently accuse each other of opening fire on each other

objectivity on the part of the CBI.

The main accused in the 21-million-dollar scandal, New Delhi-based businessman Surendra Jain has alleged paying Rao about 35 million rupees — a charge the prime minister and his Congress(I) Party deny.

Rao late Friday denied any interference in the investigation and said implicated Congressmen would be allowed to contest upcoming polls since charges alone did not prove their guilt.

"We have no business to interfere in the course of law... we have not deviated from this one millimetre at any time anywhere," he said.

Jain is accused of paying 115 top bureaucrats and politicians between 1988 and 1991. The scandal erupted four years ago when a raid on Jain's plush country retreat near Delhi unearthed two diaries listing the payments in code.

Civil rights activist Vinet Narain, one of the main petitioners demanding a speedy and fair investigation said the CBI had always been subject to government pressure.

Co-petitioner and veteran journalist Rajinder Puri said Friday's ruling proved that "Rao had obviously impinged on the case since things started moving only at the prodding of the Supreme Court."

Israel, Syria wrap up detailed peace talks

WASHINGTON, Mar 2: Israel and Syria wrapped up three days of detailed, practical and constructive US-mediated peace talks on Friday and will resume their negotiations on Monday, the US State Department said, reports Reuter.

During the talks, which focussed on security arrangements, "both sides have elaborated on the issues discussed during the previous rounds and explored serious ways to overcome differences," deputy spokesman Glyn Davies told reporters.

"The negotiations were detailed, practical and constructive," he added.

Other than the fact that the two sides and their American interlocutors are likely to have informal "contacts" over the weekend, he provided no further details.

The talks are conducted under a virtual news blackout at the secluded Wye Plantation Conference Centre in eastern Maryland an hour's drive from the US capital.

Chun returns to jail for treason trial

SEOUL, Mar 2: Former President Chun Doo-hwan, hospitalised after a long hunger strike, was returned to prison Saturday to face trial for treason over his role in a bloody coup 16 years ago, reports AP.

The 65-year-old former general goes on trial with military buddy and presidential successor Roh Tae-woo on March 11 in connection with a 1979 coup that brought them to power, and a subsequent military crackdown.

Chun staged a 26-day hunger strike in December soon after he was jailed for mutiny and treason charges stemming from the coup and the military's May 1980 crackdown in the southern city of Kwangju that killed at least 240 pre-democracy protesters.

Chun was transferred to a Seoul police hospital after he became so weak that he could not even take water. He has been recuperating there for 74 days.

Angolan govt, UNITA agree to form 'unity govt'

LIBREVILLE, Mar 2: The Angolan government and its UNITA rebel forces agreed on Friday to form a unity government and merge their forces into a new national army by July, reports Reuter.

The formation of a National Angolan Army will be completed by June 1996 and between June and July 1996 we will have completed a government of national unity and reconciliation," said a joint statement after talks between President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos and UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in Gabon.

Savimbi said the president had officially invited UNITA to take up the vice-presidency under the unity government.

"President Dos Santos has invited UNITA to take up the vice-presidency and the response will be sent to him in a letter," he told a news conference.



Rescue workers stand at the scene of the crash of the Boeing 737 on Friday in Arequipa, Peru, 620 miles south of Lima. Some 123 people were killed when the Peruvian Faucett's airliner crashed into a mountain during a thunderstorm as it was trying to land. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Princess Shams Pahlavi dead:

Princess Shams Pahlavi, sister of the late Shah of Iran, has died in exile at age 77, AP reports from Santa Barbara.

Pahlavi, whose family was removed from power by the revolution that swept Iran in the late 1970s, died Thursday with her husband and three children by her side, the Los Angeles law firm Baker and Hostetler said in a statement Friday.

Family attorney Byron Hayes Jr. said Pahlavi died in an undisclosed Santa Barbara hospital after surgery on her spleen, but he did not know the specific cause of death.

ROK to return DPRK sailors:

In a swift conciliatory gesture, South Korea on Saturday said it would return two North Korean sailors rescued after their freighter went down in the Sea of Japan, AP reports from Seoul.

The South Korean action came only hours after arch rival North Korea asked it to repatriate the sailors and two bodies recovered along with them. The crewmen are now recuperating in South Korean hospital.

"We will return the sailors and the two bodies as soon as possible on humanitarian grounds," the South's National Red Cross Society told its Northern counterpart.

US warships sails into Manila Bay:

Two US warships, the Aircraft Carrier Independence and the Cruiser Bunker Hill, sailed into Manila Bay on Saturday for a port call, officials said, Reuter reports from Manila.

Anti-nuclear groups denounced the arrival of the US ships as a violation of a provision in the Philippine constitution barring the presence of nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed ships or planes in the country.

Mandela hints health problem:

After repeated denials of any health problems, President Nelson Mandela hinted for the first time Friday that something may be wrong, AP reports from Pretoria.

He told reporters after a day of talks in neighboring Swaziland that he visited a cardiologist Friday morning and would undergo further tests. "Before they give me a clean bill of health, they still want to do some further tests," said Mandela, who turns 78 in July. He said the tests would take place sometime after his three-day trip to Mali and Togo in West Africa that begins Saturday, and results would be announced publicly.

AI concerned at Cuban repression

LONDON, Mar 2: Escalating tensions between Cuba and the United States after the downing of two US planes could lead to more repression in Cuba, Amnesty International said Friday, reports AP.

The February 24 incident in which four pilots died, could be used to obscure what is happening inside Cuba — "arrests of opposition members over the past two weeks still continue," the human rights organisation said.

"Judging from past experience at similar moments of high tension, the possibility of violent reprisals against known government opponents by pro-government mobs cannot be ruled out," it said.

Amnesty called on all parties to cooperate with the International Civil Aviation Authority's investigation of the shooting down of the planes of Florida-based Cuban exile group Brothers to the Rescue. The group says its planes were attacked outside Cuban airspace. Cuba claims the planes were inside its airspace.

Ten days before the shooting, Amnesty said, Cuban authorities began to round up members of Concilio Cubano, a new coalition of about 140 non-governmental groups including political opposition groups, human rights groups, journalists, lawyers and traded unionists.

King Hussein firm to change Iraq situation

OXFORD, England, Mar 2: King Hussein of Jordan said Friday he would do everything he could to change the situation in Iraq, reports AP.

"I see (the Iraqi people) encircled from without and oppressed from within. People who have suffered beyond anyone's imagination," the king told a capacity crowd at the Oxford University Union.

"We will do everything we can to end the nightmare that is Iraq today," he said.

It was the closest the king has come to saying he supported moves to unseat Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

King Hussein met in London with Iraqi opposition

Off the Record

No need to forgo smiles

LONDON: Thousands of people who lose a tooth in accidents each year need not forgo their smiles if they follow the latest advice from dentists and simply push the tooth back into its socket, reports Reuter.

Dentists writing in the British medical journal said on Friday that the main reason adult teeth cannot be reimplanted is that cells on the root have been allowed to dry out. If it is placed back in the gum the right way round it has a good chance of surviving, said consultant Anthony S Blinckhorn and Ian C Mackie.

Anyone too nervous to attempt to reinsert a knocked-out tooth should keep the tooth moist and seek dental treatment straight away.

But they warned against attempting to reimplant a child's milk teeth, because this could damage adults teeth developing in the gum.

Lawmaker of God Squad finally regrets his act

TALLAHASSEE, Florida: A week after being caught in a sex act with a prostitute in a shopping center parking lot, a conservative Republican Florida lawmaker resigned his office Friday, reports AP.

"I am broken and truly remorseful for my actions and the hurt that I have caused," said state Rep Marvin Couch, whose record in office had earned a perfect rating from the Christian Coalition of Florida.

Deputies said Couch and a prostitute were caught in the act after he paid 22 dollars for oral sex around noon on February 22. He was arrested on three misdemeanor charges, and also admitted paying prostitutes for sex in the past.

Couch, 42, is married and has six children. A painting contractor from Oviedo, he was elected in 1992 and regularly attended prayer meetings in the Capitol with other lawmakers who call themselves the "God Squad."

"I am truly regretful for the embarrassment and shame this incident has brought to the high calling of public service," Couch wrote in his resignation letter. "My priorities are now clearly placed upon the restoration of my marriage and my family."

'Russia may collapse if army fail to crush Chechen rebels'

MOSCOW, Mar 2: Defence Minister Pavel Grachev said on Friday Russia could disintegrate if the Kremlin failed to show enough toughness in quelling separatist rebels in Chechnya, reports Reuter.

"Chechnya is a trial balloon. If the army doesn't carry out its tasks — then the collapse of the country will begin," ITAR-Tass news agency quoted Grachev as saying.

"If it does carry them out, all the separatists will fall silent," Grachev told a tank division based in Boguchar, near Voronezh, southeast of Moscow.

President Boris Yeltsin has said a progress in solving the 14-month conflict, which badly damaged his political image, was crucial to his plans to seek a second term in Russia's presidential election on June 16.

Yeltsin has set up two competing groups led by political analyst Emil Palfin and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin to work out a plan to restore peace in Chechnya.

A spokesman for Yeltsin's Security Council said on Friday that the president was considering proposals put forward by one of the two groups.

The Paris Commission proposals contain some new elements which the president wants to study carefully before taking a decision," spokesman Vladimir Misycuchenko said.

He said Yeltsin decided to put off for a few days the council's meeting at which the peace plan for Chechnya was to be discussed.

Yeltsin hinted two weeks ago that a partial troop withdrawal could be on the cards. But he later changed his mind, saying withdrawal would lead to "carnage".

Misycuchenko said the council, which has debated all key decisions on Chechnya since Yeltsin launched a military campaign there in December 1994, could meet next week.



US actress Sharon Stone turns to view the cover of Russian edition of the magazine Harper's Bazaar on Friday during the presentation of the magazine at the Radisson-Harper's Bazaar hotel in Moscow. Stone came to visit Russia as a representative of the magazine. — AFP/UNB photo

Ghali regrets for closing UN mission in Rwanda

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 2: Secretary-General Boutros Ghali on Friday said he regretted closing UN military and political operations in Rwanda, saying their presence might have encouraged 1.7 million refugees to return home, reports Reuter.

In a report to the Security Council, he said the United Nations had failed in persuading Rwanda to accept even a small number of troops, military observers or political officers to promote reconciliation or help the judicial system.

"I regret, therefore, that there appears to be no alternative in the present circumstances to the complete withdrawal of all the civilian and military components of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) after March 8," he said.

No signs of peace for Charles or Diana

LONDON, Mar 2: Prince Charles' divorce from Princess Diana is getting off to a bad start, reports AP.

The first round of talks ended in a public dispute, and now her former lover is reportedly offering to tell all about their romantic affair on television.

Charles flew to Switzerland Friday night, leaving his lawyers to handle a nasty wrangle with Diana over what the couple agreed about the terms of their divorce.

A dispirited Diana skipped her gym session and remained at home in Kensington Palace.

"The princess has nothing planned but may see friends or talk to friends on the telephone," said her spokeswoman Jane Atkinson. "She is fine in the circumstances and is hoping to pick up on her public engagements next week."

Diana wasn't seen Friday, disappointing the pack of photographers waiting hopefully outside the gym. Their vigil was not-in vain, however: a gunfight broke out at an old warehouse nearby between police and five men suspected of hijacking a security van. No one was injured, and the five were arrested.

Diana faced main trouble on a second front, following reports that a TV team is hawking a tell-all interview with former lover James Hewitt, ex-riding instructor and current social outcast.

The Sun newspaper said Hewitt and Anna Pasternak, who wrote a book about the affair in 1994, hope to negotiate a broadcast deal.

The man Diana said she "adored" answers Ms Pasternak's questions "on every aspect of the affair," The Sun said.

"Mr Hewitt is very frank, honest and candid about their physical relationship in the same way as the princess was" in her television interview, Mr Pasternak was quoted as saying.

Her motive was not money, she said when the book was published, but: "It was too beautiful a love to remain a secret."

Sky Television said it was aware of the Hewitt TV interview "but has rejected the programme and will not be screening it any shape or form," said news chief Ian Cook.

It was bad journalistic practice, he said, to pay producers for an interview in which the subject doesn't face "independent, rigorous questioning."

But Nick Ferrari, head of programme at Live TV, a London cable channel, said he was ready to offer a six-figure sum.

"We are not moral guardians or censors — our job is to entertain and inform," Ferrari said.

"When Diana announced Wednesday that she had accepted a divorce, Diana's office said it had been agreed that her future title would be Diana, Princess of Wales, that she could keep her Kensington Palace apartment and offices at St James's Palace, and continue to be fully involved in the upbringing of their sons, William, 13, and Harry, 11.

Queen Elizabeth II was "interested" to hear Diana's decision, Buckingham Palace said, but it insisted that, apart from an agreement to divorce, nothing had been settled.

Diana's lawyer Anthony Julius fired off a tough letter to Charles' legal representatives Thursday: "If we cannot rely on agreements that have been made, it would be unsafe to continue negotiations."

Charles' lawyer, Fiona Shackleton, sent a reply Friday evening, but no details emerged, as both sides appeared to heed Queen Elizabeth II's request that the divorce negotiations be carried out in private.

Reporter Richard Kiley, a Daily Mail reporter in whom Diana has confided before, wrote Friday that Diana told him the palace statement had amounted to an accusation that she was lying.

"I have given them everything they wanted and they are still not satisfied. I did not want this divorce but I have agreed to it. Now they are playing ping-pong with me," he quoted her as saying.

The way the princess decided to relinquish that style Her Royal Highness is another point of dispute.

Diana's spokeswoman Jane Atkinson said Wednesday, "She agreed to give it up as part of the discussions."

The queen's press secretary, Charles Anson, said Thursday: "The decision to drop the title is the princess and the princess alone. It is wrong that the queen or the prince asked her, I'm saying categorically that is not true."

NATO to take up new membership issue next year

WASHINGTON, Mar 2: NATO leaders will take up sometime next year the controversial question of which eastern or Central European nations to bring into the alliance, and when, Defence Secretary William Perry said Friday, reports AP.

Perry made the remark at a signing ceremony in the Pentagon with Vilem Holan, defence minister of the Czech Republic, widely viewed as a leading candidate for membership in the 16-nation North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Other likely candidates are Poland and Hungary.

NATO foreign ministers meet in December to lay ground work for adding members, Perry said. The next step, deciding who should be admitted and when, will follow in 1997, he said.