



Former Greek prime minister Andreas Papandreu (C) leaves the Onassis hospital in Athens accompanied by his wife Dimitra (L), to continue convalescing at home on Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

US House passes law to combat illegal immigration

WASHINGTON, Mar 22: In the first major congressional action on immigration in a decade, the US House of Representatives passed sweeping legislation to combat illegal immigration, reports AP.

The House on Thursday deleted most provisions that would have restricted legal immigration before approving the bill, 333-87.

The measure would double the US Border Patrol by adding 5,000 new agents, document forgers and illegal aliens who overstay temporary visas; bar members of foreign terrorist organisations and set up a free telephone number in five states that employers could call to check whether job hunters were eligible to work in the United States.

The Senate Judiciary Committee, which is crafting its own legislation, has separated

those provisions affecting illegal immigration from those on legal immigration.

"Eight out of 10 Americans polled say, 'Deal with the problem of illegal immigration before you touch legal immigration,'" said Rep. Howard Berman, who cosponsored the House amendment deleting the restrictions on legal immigrants.

"It is fundamentally wrong to take the justifiable anger about our failure to deal with the issue of illegal immigration and piggyback on top of that anger a drastic ... cut in permanent legal immigration, a cause and a force that has been good for this country," he said.

This year's presidential primary campaign gave a high-profile boost to the drive to shut down illegal immigration. Both California Government

Pete Wilson, before he dropped out of the Republican race, and candidate Pat Buchanan made it integral parts of their campaigns. Buchanan has blamed illegal aliens as among the causes of stagnant wages, inflated welfare costs and rising crime and has called for a five-year moratorium on legal immigration to give those now here time to assimilate.

In reaction to Buchanan's position, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole — who clinched the Republican nomination this week — has said he favors a "modest, temporary, reduction in legal immigration."

Before the House passed the measure Thursday, it voted 242-180 to reject the creation of a 250,000-person guest worker programme sought by agriculture interests. The administration had warned the

provision could prompt a veto. The House also rejected 357-59 a bid to expand the current guest worker programme from 17,000 to 100,000 people.

The Clinton administration has indicated it can accept an immigration bill with some changes to the House version. But White House spokesman Mike McCurry labeled as a "nutty idea" a provision adopted at the urging of Speaker Newt Gingrich to let states deny public schooling to illegal aliens.

They seem to be suggesting that "they're not in school, they'd be better off out on the streets participating in gang activities, doing who knows what, or alternatively, turning teachers and principals into adjunct officers of the Immigration and Naturalization Service," McCurry said.

'CTBT should be firmly linked to time frame for N-disarmament'

GENEVA, Mar 22: India, brushing aside strong resistance from major powers, insisted on Thursday that total Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) should be firmly linked to a time-frame for achieving overall nuclear disarmament, reports Reuters.

The Indian demand, which western diplomats say could sink efforts to complete a CTBT on target by the end of June, won support at the United Nations-sponsored disarmament conference from North Korea but was opposed by Italy and Ukraine.

"We realise that nuclear weapons cannot be eliminated overnight. But surely in today's world conditions exist to begin negotiations on this primary disarmament objective."

Indian foreign secretary Salman Haidar told the confer-

ence. In a barb at the five nuclear powers — the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France — Haidar said unwillingness to move in that direction would raise doubt about the level of commitment to the disarmament agenda. "A CTBT shorn of its disarmament context will be only an arms control treaty designed to perpetuate the reliance on nuclear weapons by those countries who have concluded extensive testing programmes," he declared.

His remarks followed talks in Geneva on Monday between US secretary of state Warren Christopher and both nuclear power and developing country representatives on prospects for finalising a treaty in time to open it for signature in September.

BRIEFLY

Yeltsin to visit Norway: President Boris Yeltsin will pay a state visit to Norway next week and meet with King Harald and Queen Sonja, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Thursday, AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin will also hold talks with Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and meet with members of Norway's business community on Monday and Tuesday, spokesman Grigory Karasin said. He said the king and queen would accompany Yeltsin to a series of official events.

Qatar honours Bush: Former US president George Bush was awarded Thursday Qatar's "Independence Medal" by the Gulf state's Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Qatar news agency said, AFP reports from Doha.

The country's highest honour was bestowed on Bush as a token of "the depth of the friendship between the two countries and to honour his contribution to international affairs," said the agency.

11 gang members killed in Malaysia: Eleven suspected members of a gang classified as armed and dangerous were shot dead in a pre-dawn exchange of fire with Malaysian police on Thursday, a senior police official said, AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Police were now hunting down two of their accomplices who escaped after the 45-minute shoot-out. The 13 men were travelling in three cars along a road to the port of Klang, Central Selangor state.

11 killed in South Africa: At least 11 people were killed, including seven women and children, when gunmen opened fire overnight on several houses in the black township of donnybrook, west of Durban, South Africa police said yesterday, AFP reports from Durban.

The South African Press Agency SAPA also quoted police as saying that the assailants had managed to escape after the massacre in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Police said they found spent AK-47 shells at the site.

Thatcher in Islamabad: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher flew into Islamabad yesterday on a week-long private visit to Pakistan, AFP reports from Islamabad.

During her stay she is expected to meet Pakistani President Farooq Ahmed Leghari and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Her visit is part of the Citibank Asian leadership series in the Asia-Pacific.

6 miners killed in Vietnam: Six miners have died in two separate coal mining incidents in the northeastern province of Quang Ninh, company officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

Four people died and eight were injured on March 20 when an 80-metre (264-feet) deep tunnel collapsed, said an official from the labour union section of Uong Bi Coal Company, which operated the Mao Khe Mine. Workers and equipment were swept 160 metres (528 feet) along the tunnel by water from an adjacent reservoir, he added.

Chechen rebels kill 28 Russian soldiers

MOSCOW, Mar 22: At least 28 Russian soldiers were killed and 86 others wounded in clashes with separatist guerrillas in Chechnya over the 24 hours up to this morning, Interfax news agency said, reports Reuters.

The agency, quoting sources at the headquarters of Russian forces in the rebel territory, said the Russian servicemen had been killed in 24 separate guerrilla attacks on Russian units.

Interfax gave no further information on the incidents which had provoked the high Russian casualty toll although it said 14 of the attacks had taken place in the capital Grozny. It gave no figure for the estimated number of rebels killed.

Russian forces, sent into the North Caucasus territory in December 1994 by President Boris Yeltsin, are now battling to subdue resistance by Chechen rebels in the west of the region.

Yeltsin, anxious to halt the bloodshed before presidential elections in June, said last week that his policy-making Security Council had approved a peace plan.

No details have emerged of the plan but Russian forces have stepped up operations against what they call rebel bases in the west of the separatist region.

AP adds: Russian forces launched air and artillery attacks Thursday on villages in the western Chechnya in an effort to drive out separatist fighters.

Refugees driving cattle and carrying belongings streamed out of the villages and reported civilian casualties.

The villages of Alkharurovo, Komsomolskoye and Gaiskoye were bombed and rocketed, while week-long fighting continued at the town of Samashki, local officials said. The fiercest fighting was reported at Samashki, and civilian casualties were reported.

Lanka plans to recruit 10,000 to boost forces

COLOMBO, Mar 22: The Sri Lankan military Friday announced plans to recruit another 10,000 men to boost its force battling separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas in the island's northern and eastern regions, reports AFP.

Officer-in-Charge of Recruitment, Major General Gemunu Kulatunga, said the enlistment will begin Monday and last for a week. The recruits will be at their training centres by the middle of April, he said.

"We need more men to hold the areas brought under our control in the north," Kulatunga told reporters here referring to the town of Jaffna which was captured from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in December.

The army had taken in similar batch of 10,000 men late last year to replace some 25,000 troops who deserted in the past 15 years.

Over 30m could be contaminated by radioactivity from Chernobyl

LONDON, Mar 22: More than 30 million people could be contaminated by radioactivity sweeping down rivers from the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station, scientists reported on Thursday, reports Reuters.

They said floods were carrying downstream radioactive waste dumped around the reactor 10 years ago when it exploded and caught fire in the world's worst nuclear accident.

The New Scientist magazine reported the findings of a team of 59 scientists from eight countries led by Umberto Ensoni of Italy's Environment Protection Agency.

Their investigation showed the lake most contaminated by radioactivity from Chernobyl was 250 (155 miles) from the site.

Fish in Russia's Lake Kojanovskoe had radiation levels 60 times above European Union safety norms and all fishing should be banned, the scientists said in their report, financed by the European Commission.

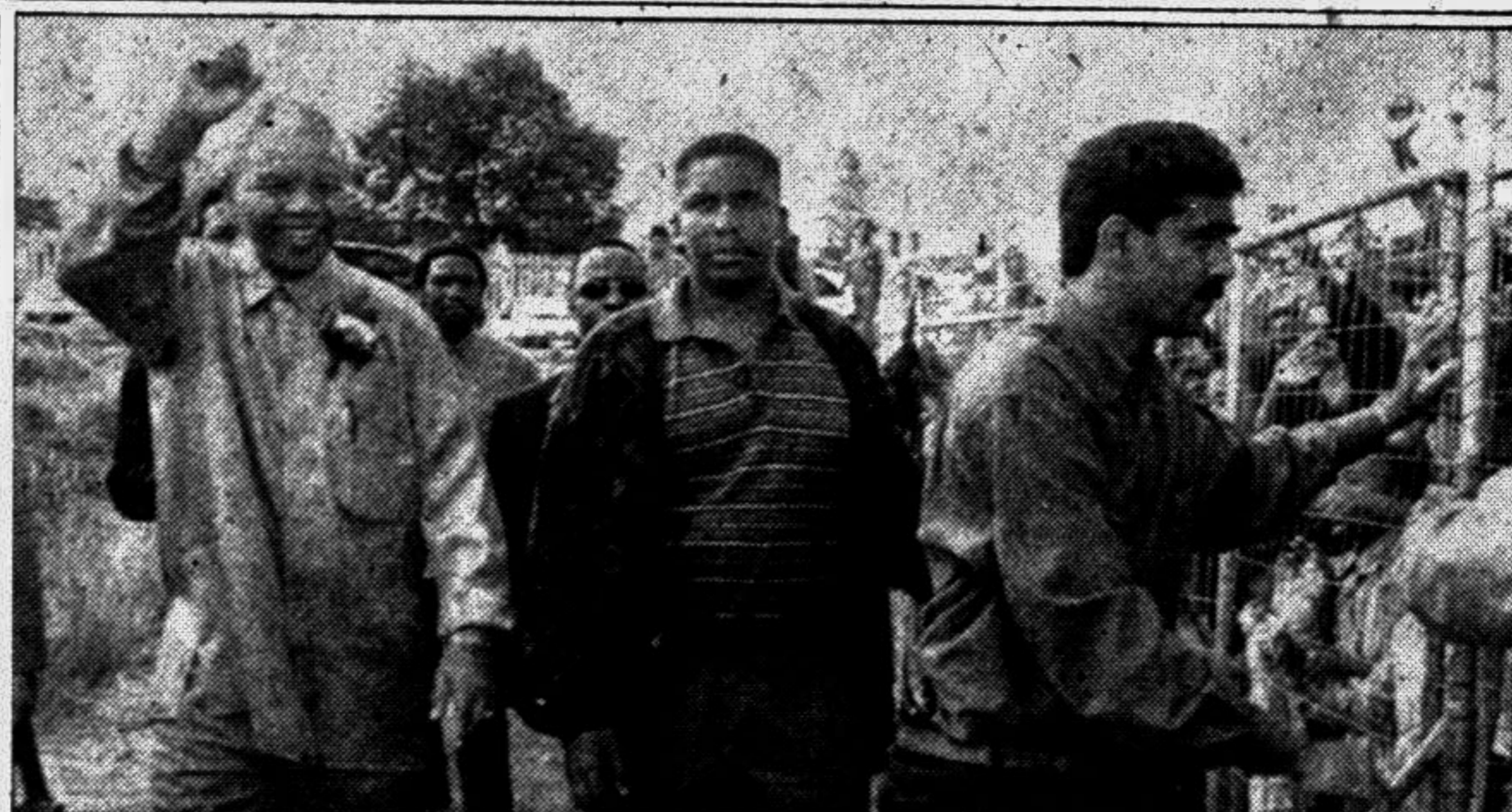
Serbs assault US's UN envoy, stone motorcade

VUKOVAR, Croatia, Mar 22: Angry Serbs cursed out the United States' UN ambassador Thursday as she toured the last Serb-held area of Croatia, then stoned her motorcade when she hastily retreated, reports AP.

The incident happened when Madeleine Albright, whose outspoken approach has led Serbs to consider her their biggest American foe, took a walk in the streets of Vukovar, an embattled Serb-held Croatian town.

"You bitch," Serbs shouted when Albright reached a downtown open-air market. "Your Fascist." "Go back to Croatia."

She quickly returned to her car and the crowd started throwing stones at the motorcade. Two windows were broken in a car accompanying Albright, but no one appeared to be injured.



South African President Nelson Mandela escorted by security members, salutes supporters with a clenched fist upon his arrival at Madadeni township of Newcastle in KwaZulu-Natal on Thursday. Addressing the Human Rights Day rally to commemorate the 1960 massacre of protesters, Mandela said South African police force is being infiltrated by agents of provocateurs planning to oust the country's democratic government. — AFP/UNB photo

Hezbollah vows more suicide bombings against Israel

GAZA CITY, Mar 22: Members of the militant Hamas movement on Thursday announced the formation of a new political party that rejects the Israel-PLO autonomy agreements and aims to establish an Islamic Palestinian state, reports AP.

The party rejects all the unjust accords signed with the Israeli enemy which have been imposed and which do not satisfy the minimum requirements of the Palestinian people," said Ahmed Saati, a spokesman for the new National Salvation Party in Palestine.

Although Saati said the party was not directly linked to Hamas, all 19 founders are known members of the fundamentalist movement whose military wing has staged series of deadly suicide bombings in Israel in an effort to wreck the peacemaking.

The party, which is to run in municipal Palestinian elec-

tions later this year, could be an effort to revive the Hamas-PLO dialogue and end a crackdown in which 800 suspected Islamic militants — including four of the 19 party founders — were arrested by Palestinian police.

Hamas boycotted January's elections in which Arafat was chosen Palestinian leader and his Fatah group won most seats on an 88-member autonomy council that will run the West Bank and Gaza until a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement is reached.

Party officials were evasive about whether they supported Hamas' attacks but said they agreed with its political goal of an Islamic theocracy in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel.

Saati appealed to Arafat to release the Hamas prisoners. "The people in jail are not enemies of the Palestinian Authority," he said.

Ismaiyel Abu-Shanab, who has been named chairman of

the new Islamic party, has been imprisoned in Israel since 1988 for his Hamas activities.

Another report from Beirut adds: Hezbollah vowed Thursday to use its reserves of "human bombs" to launch more suicide attacks to force Israel out of a south Lebanon enclave it occupies.

"There are many brothers in the resistance who are yearning and competing to join the party's human bombs battalion," Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary-general, told a news conference held in a south Beirut underground bunker.

He spoke a day after a suicide bomber from the Iranian-backed guerrilla group charged into Israeli army convoy inside the enclave and blew himself up, killing an officer and wounding seven soldiers, according to security sources in the area.

Off the Record

Who's responsible — poor kangaroo or driver?

SYDNEY: A woman died after the car in which she was a passenger hit a kangaroo and burst into flames in western New South Wales, police said Friday, reports AP.

A Toyota Camry carrying three women was travelling on the Mitchell Highway, 55 miles (88 km) west of Dubbo on Thursday when the accident occurred, police said.

The car apparently hit a kangaroo, causing the driver to lose control and run off the road, she said.

It burst into flames and one of the passengers suffered extensive head injuries before being incinerated in the wreck. She was still to be formally identified.

The other two women in the car, the 34-year-old driver and a 36-year-old passenger, escaped before it caught fire and were treated at the scene before being taken to Trangie Hospital, police.

Not once, but twice

MELBOURNE, Florida: Fifth-graders David Cruz and Ashley Burdick admit it. They kissed. Not once, but twice, in a hallway at Atlantis Elementary last week, reports AP.

Principal Vicki Mace took a dim view of their smooches, suspending the two 11-year-olds for a day.

Now their parents are furious — and contemplating legal action. They notified the American Civil Liberties Union, which has filed a formal complaint with the school.

"They have ruined my daughter's reputation," said Debra Burdick, Ashley's mother. "It was an innocent kiss of love that they absolutely blew out of proportion."

The school learned about the kissing Monday when classmates gossiped about a rendezvous the ill-fated pair planned for later that day.

The encounter never occurred but, during a 45-minute grilling by administrators, the youngsters confessed to their earlier secret smooch sessions while the students were on restroom breaks.

The school handbook, stating "public affection is in poor taste," says violators will first be warned and, if a second offense occurs, suspended.

Asked what constituted willful disobedience, she said the youths should have been knowledgeable about the school handbook.

Another love story

MODENA, Italy: Luciano Pavarotti and his manager-wife, Adua, have agreed to separate after 35 years of marriage.

Her lawyer, Calisto Tanzi, made the announcement Wednesday.

An Italian gossip magazine published photos last month of the 60-year-old tenor and his 26-year-old secretary, Nicoletta Mantovani, walking arm-in-arm and kissing on a Barbados beach.

There was no immediate word on how the separation might affect the couple's business relationship. Mrs Pavarotti serves as her husband's manager.

Nepali opposition tables no-confidence move

KATHMANDU, Mar 22: Nepal's main opposition parties today tabled a no-confidence motion against the government, saying it had failed to improve the economy or curb crime and corruption during its six months in office, state radio reported, says AFP.

The Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) Party tabled the motion against the six-month-old coalition government headed by Nepali Congress (NC) leader Sher Bahadur Deuba in a special session in the house of representatives.

NCP-UML chairman and MP, Man Mohan Adhikari said, "the Deuba government has failed to maintain law and order, protect life and property, curb administrative corruption and implement the development programmes launched by the communist government last year."

Adhikari noted that during the government's six-month tenure aid assistance from Japan had fallen, and he accused the coalition of losing the confidence of donors.

The special session of parliament was convened by King Birendra on Wednesday after more than 25 per cent of the NCP-UML approved a motion asking for a vote of no-confidence against the government.

The debate will continue today and Saturday when the communists will take the floor, followed by pro-government lawmakers. On Sunday the premier will answer the opposition's charges.

Voting is expected either late Sunday afternoon or Monday, a parliamentary source told AFP.

The tri-partite coalition government was formed on September 12 after the ten-month-old NCP-UML government was overthrown by a no-confidence motion.

The coalition partners are the Nepali Congress (NC), the rightist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and the pro-India Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP).

The NCP-UML hopes to topple the government with the help of the extreme rightist lawmakers.

North Koreans eating leaves to survive: UN

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 22: Despite claims that the worst of the North Korean food crisis is over, a UN official said Thursday that the situation remains so bad that some North Koreans are eating leaves to survive, reports AP.

UN spokesman Ahmad Fawzi took issue with comments made Wednesday by another UN official in Geneva that indicated the United Nations considered the humanitarian emergency in North Korea to be over.

"Things have not improved. Fawzi said. Things were extremely serious a few months ago. They are even worse today."

He added: "The situation is so bad that people in some of these provinces are reduced to eating leaves."

Food Programme was putting together another shipment of rice for North Korea to replace the 6,538 tons of rice lost when a freighter sank Tuesday during a storm in the Taiwan Strait.

The new shipment, carrying 8,500 tons of rice, will arrive in North Korea between April 15 and 20.

The sunken ship was carrying enough rice to feed 750,000 people for three weeks. So those three-quarters of a million people would have to go without food until the next consignment reaches the area, Fawzi said.

He said an additional ship would arrive in the area by the end of April. UN and private agencies have warned repeatedly that millions of people will soon be near starvation in North Korea.

UNSC retains sanctions against Libya

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 22: The Security Council after a periodic review, on Thursday retained four-year-old sanctions against Libya for failing to surrender two men wanted in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed 270 people, reports Reuters.

The United States, Britain and France said in a statement they would study ways of ensuring stricter enforcement and took Libya to task for having "shamefully expressed its satisfaction with the terrorist bombings that recently took place in Israel."

The United States, in a statement of its own, said the sanctions should not only be tightened but expanded as well, adding "We will be considering how such pressure can be increased in the key areas of aviation, military equipment and weapons of mass de-

struction." This was an apparent allusion to US claims Libya is producing chemical weapons.

"We also have not excluded the possibility of calling for an oil embargo if Libya does not comply fully," it said.

Council sources said Russia, China, Egypt and Indonesia had urged during the closed-door session that the council take note of what they considered positive actions by Libya including providing Britain with information on its past links with the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

But this was rejected by other members and council President Legwaila Joseph Legwaila of Botswana announced only that there had been a "full-fledged discussion and the sanctions against Libya continue."

Any change in that formula would have required the unanimous agreement of council members. The sanctions, first imposed in 1992 and reviewed every 120 days, include an air embargo, a ban on the sale or transfer of weapons and a downgrading of diplomatic relations.

Additional curbs were enacted in 1993 because of Libya's continuing non-compliance including failure to cooperate with an investigation into the bombing of France's UTA flight 772 over Niger in 1989 that killed all 171 on board.

These involve a freeze on some of Libya's assets abroad and a ban on its import of certain types of equipment for oil transport terminals and refineries. They do not affect Libya's oil exports or its purchase of oil drilling equipment.

Libya refuses to extradite the two alleged intelligence agents for trial in Britain or the United States, where they

have been indicated in the Lockerbie bombing. It has instead offered to let them stand trial before a Scottish judge, under Scottish law, at the Hague. This has been rejected by both London and Washington.

The statement issued by the United States, Britain and France regretted Libya's non-compliance with council resolutions which also demand that it renounce all terrorist activity and assistance to terrorist groups.

LDF set to win Kerala polls

Cong to be single largest party in hung parliament

NEW DELHI, Mar 22: India's ruling Congress (I) Party hinted today that elections scheduled in April and May could result in a hung parliament, reports AFP.

External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, chairman of the party's Campaign Committee, said on his return from Tashkent that Congress hoped to emerge as the largest group in the new parliament.

"The Congress will get a good number of seats and will be the single largest party in the event of a hung parliament," he told reporters.

Mukherjee's admission comes three days after Congress spokesman Vithal Gadgil claimed that the ruling party would get a majority on its own from the staggered hustings despite facing a stiff opposition challenge.

The Congress, headed by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, is widely expected to fare poorly in the first parliamentary polls, voting will be held on April 27, May 2, May 7 and May 12.

Earlier report says, a Communist-led coalition is set to return to power in legislative elections in the southern Indian state of Kerala scheduled on April 27, an election survey published Friday said.

The Left Democratic Front (LDF) would win 80 to 85 seats in the 140-member Kerala assembly and form a government, newspapers quoted the survey by the independent Centre for Media Studies (CMS) as saying.