

International

Over bribes-for-favour scandal. CPI threatens to quit Gowda's coalition govt

NEW DELHI, June 17: A coalition partner in the new government of Prime Minister Deve Gowda threatened to withdraw support if leaders involved in a bribery scandal were inducted into the cabinet, a newspaper said today, reports AFP.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) said it would not allow any leaders of the United Front charged with corruption in a bribes-for-favour scandal which claimed the scalps of many politicians except the Communists a year ago.

If the government fails, let it fall," said Chaturanand Mishra, a CPI leader told the Asian Age newspaper. "We are opposed to it completely."

The Communist Party of India has 12 MPs in the 545-member Lok Sabha. It has extended support to Deve Gowda's 13-party United Front government which took office on June 1.

Deve Gowda is slated to expand his 12-member two-tier cabinet later this month after he proved his majority in the Lok Sabha on June 12.

"On the issue of corruption we will not budge an inch. Why should we compromise? We may be a weak party but we are a principled party," Mishra said. "If the prime minister goes ahead we will take a principled stand."

The Front leaders who allegedly accepted bribes from a New Delhi businessman and returned favours include Sharad Yadav of the Janata Dal (People's Party), N. D. Tiwari of the Congress (G) and Madhav Rao Scindia a former Congressman.

"We will not change our stand," said Indrajit Gupta, a senior party leader of the CPI. "People who are involved in the matters of corruption should not be included in the ministry," he said.

5 killed in Afghan clan fighting

KABUL, June 17: Five people were killed and three wounded in clan fighting between troops under the orders of two military commanders loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, officials and witnesses said today, reports AFP.

The fighting started three days ago in Guldara district, 30 kilometres (18 miles) north of Kabul, triggered by a "family dispute" between the two commanders, a Defence Ministry spokesman said.

The spokesman, who did not identify the commanders, said the two groups would be "disarmed."

Witnesses said some casualties had been brought to Kabul and clashes were continuing.

Gowda to expand cabinet

NEW DELHI, June 17: Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda today said he would expand his 20-member cabinet to make room for allies from regional parties in the United Front coalition government, reports AFP.

Gowda, who heads a 13-party alliance, said leaders from the Communist Party of India and the regional Asom Gana Parishad Party would find a berth in his government after the expansion of his cabinet on Wednesday.

"The expansion will not be a big one," Gowda told reporters at the headquarters of his centrist Janata Dal (People's Party), which heads the 180-MP United Front Alliance with 46 members in parliament.

Sudan tries to ease differences with Egypt

KHARTOUM, June 17: Referring to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as "my brother," Sudanese leader Omar el-Bashir on Sunday sought to assuage the man who accused Sudan of trying to kill him, reports AP.

El-Bashir said this week's Arab summit would be ideal for resolving the two countries' differences.

"We are attending this conference with an open heart and are ready to review all bilateral differences," El-Bashir said at a press conference.

Relations between Egypt and Sudan soured after El-Bashir staged a 1989 military coup and installed an Islamic government, and deteriorated again after Mubarak accused Sudan of trying to assassinate him in June, 1995.

Egypt has demanded that Sudan turn over three Egyptians wanted in the attack in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, and the UN Security Council has imposed diplomatic sanctions against Sudan for refusing.

US, France sign secret accord to share nuclear weapons data

WASHINGTON, June 17: France and the United States have signed a secret accord to share nuclear weapons data, the Washington Post reported on Monday editions, reports Reuters.

The paper, quoting US and diplomatic officials, said the accord would draw US and French nuclear weapons scientists into a much closer alliance, so that each nation can help the other maintain its nuclear arsenal after an expected international treaty bans all test explosions.

Under the agreement, the United States will share computer data drawn from simulated explosions, information considered so sensitive that it has previously been shared with only one US ally, Britain.

Blast kills 6 in Lebanon

An explosion killed at least six Palestinians and wounded nine in a building next to a refugee camp in South Lebanon yesterday morning, security sources said, Reuters reports from Sidon, Lebanon.

The said the blast occurred in a two-storey residential building housing supporters of the Fatah group of Palestinian Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat just outside Ain El-Hilweh Refugee Camp near the southern city of Sidon. A woman and a child were among the dead, witnesses said. It was not immediately clear what had caused the explosion.

65 die in Yemen flood so far

More than 65 people were believed killed dozens missing and hundreds made homeless in the worst floods to hit the impoverished Arab state of Yemen official sources said on Sunday, Reuters reports from Aden.

The said unprecedented rains on Friday and Saturday in the eastern provinces of Hadramout Marib and Shabwa also caused widespread damage with hundreds of homes and farms affected. The sources said authorities were still working to determine the final number of victims and assess the damage. The rain stopped on Saturday night residents said.

580 Indonesian die during haj in '96

At least 580 Indonesian Muslims died during the haj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia this year, Religious Affairs Minister Tarmidzi Thaher said yesterday, Reuters reports from Jakarta.

"About 0.3 per cent (of 195,000 people who went on the haj) died because of illness during the pilgrimage this year, every year the average incidence of Indonesians dying during the haj is between 0.2 per cent to 0.4 per cent," Thaher said.

Blast kills 2 in Pakistan

Two people, one of them soldier, were killed and nine wounded when a bomb exploded on a bus in Pakistan's Punjab province, the official news agency AFP reported yesterday, Reuters reports from Islamabad.

It said the bomb, planted under a seat near the middle of the bus, went off on Sunday evening near the town of Kharian, 120 km (75 miles) southeast of Islamabad. More than 50 people have been killed and scores wounded in a mysterious series of bomb blasts in Punjab province since April.

50 quakes hit China in '95

Fifty earthquakes measuring more than 5.0 on the Richter Scale hit China in 1995, an 18.5 per cent increase from the year before, the Xinhua News Agency said on Sunday, Reuters reports from Beijing.

Eight of the tremors measured more than 6.0 magnitude on the open-ended Richter Scale and one was higher than 7.0, Xinhua said. They killed 78 people and injured more than 14,000, it quoted a survey as saying. The worst earthquake struck Dingwu in southwestern Yunnan province on December 24, 1995, killing 52 people and leaving 13,815 injured, it said.

Accords with several parties signed Netanyahu close to form new coalition govt

JERUSALEM, June 17: Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu signed coalition agreements with several religious and centrist parties Sunday and appeared close to forming a new Israeli government, reports AP.

Netanyahu told Israel TV he hoped to sign several more agreements late Sunday and be able to present his government to the Knesset for approval Monday.

"We have work to do," he said after signing deals with the religious Shas and National Religious Party and with the Third Way, a group that supports peacemaking with the Palestinians but opposes any compromise with Syria on the Golan Heights.

With those agreements, Netanyahu has the support of 55 out of 120 Knesset mem-

bers. He was still negotiating with the United Torah Judaism Party, which has four seats, and with a party representing Russian-speaking immigrants headed by former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky, which has seven seats.

Sharansky aide Yuli Stern said his party, called Israel with Immigration, was delaying a signature because it wanted freedom to vote against the government on religious issues.

Policy guidelines for the emerging government — which may still change — include several clauses likely to be opposed by many secular Israelis and world Jews — including a monopoly over conversions for the conservative Orthodox stream of Judaism.

Tensions also erupted within Netanyahu's Likud Party

after reports that the prime minister-elect has chosen several apolitical technocrats and personal allies instead of party veterans like Ariel Sharon for key positions.

Although the appointments are not official, Israeli media have reported that Netanyahu tapped Yitzhak Mordechai, a former general who joined Likud seven months ago, as defence minister, and will return David Levy to his former post as foreign minister.

In a surprise move, Netanyahu asked Bank of Israel director Jacob Frenkel, a former top International Monetary Fund official, to be finance minister, Frenkel's office said.

That has apparently angered Ariel Sharon, a combative former defence minister who was instrumental in Netanyahu's campaign.



Visiting Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (L) is welcomed by his Japanese counterpart Ryutaro Hashimoto (R) prior to their talks at Hashimoto's official residence in Tokyo. Hariri is here on a three-day visit to Japan. — AFP/UNB photo

Draft CTBT has met fierce criticism in India

NEW DELHI, June 17: A draft Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) which would outlaw nuclear blasts has met fierce criticism in India even as western powers hail it as cornerstone of arms control, reports Reuters.

Indian strategic analysts said the pact, which the 38-member nation conference of disarmament hopes to conclude by June 28, was flawed and would cap the South Asian nation's nuclear capability without fully eliminating testing.

"These countries and other clapper boys of arms control and non-proliferation will have you believe the CTBT is the greatest invention of mankind since sliced bread," said security affairs analyst C Raja

Mohan. "But there are big loopholes in the treaty through which you can drive a truck." New Delhi has refused to sign the CTBT unless it included a time-table for disarmament by the declared nuclear powers — Britain, France, the United States, China and Russia.

But pressure has mounted on New Delhi since China said on June 6 said it was willing to drop its demand that the treaty allow for "peaceful nuclear explosions."

If the CTBT's aim is the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, then the nuclear weapons states should commit themselves to at least a notional date, even if it is 2005, 2020, whatever.



A family of slumdwellers sit amidst the debris of their demolished house in south Bombay, on Saturday, two days after city authorities pulled down their sidewalk shanty as part of a massive city-wide demolition that left about 100,000 people homeless. — AFP/UNB photo

India wants to include Myanmar, Afghanistan in SAARC bloc

NEW DELHI, June 17: India would like to include Myanmar and Afghanistan in the South Asian regional grouping, Indian Foreign Minister I K Gujral said in an interview published today, reports AFP.

He told the Indian Express that India would suggest bringing Afghanistan and Myanmar (Burma) into the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) block, which also includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

"The difficulties in incorporating both Myanmar and Afghanistan are internal," Gujral said. "But once the South Asian Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) takes off I hope these two nations will overcome the difficulties and cooperate."

The South Asian preferential trading agreement aims to dismantle trade and tariff barriers among SAARC members. "Economic co-operation is vital in the post-Cold War era," Gujral said. "SAARC has travelled some distance but it needs to pursue its objectives with greater vigour."

The Indian Express newspaper said Gujral's mention of Myanmar was significant "in view of the active efforts by Western nations to ostracise the military regime in Yangon." "India has thrown its weight behind the dominant Asian view against the ostracism of Myanmar," the newspaper said.

Gujral said India's final stand on the on-going negotiations in Geneva for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) would represent a national consensus on the issue.

"The ultimate criteria for what we do in Geneva will be national interest," Gujral said. "The nuclear powers are unwilling to go along with India on nuclear disarmament. So we will have to look out for our own security."

The nuclear tests have not stopped even at this stage of CTBT talks. They add to our concern about India's security interests," Gujral said.

India exploded an atomic device in 1974 but insists that its nuclear programme is strictly for peaceful purposes.

'Human activity changing world weather patterns'

FORT LAUDERDALE, Florida, June 17: A panel of international scientists has reached a consensus that human activity is changing world weather patterns, reports AFP.

The intergovernmental panel on climate change, a board of international scientists, this month found "a discernible human influence" on global climate.

After a 10-year study the panel concluded that the planet could be warming because of the greenhouse effect — the buildup of gases released during the burning of fossil fuels. Those gases, some hypothesise, trap the sun's energy.

Scientists have recorded a rise in the earth's average temperature over the past 50 years, accelerating as the use of fossil fuels increased.

"It seems to me the evidence is growing that man has something to do with it," said Julian McCreary, dean of the Oceanographic Centre at Nova Southeastern University. But it's by no means a proven fact.

Global warming could cause more ocean water to evaporate, bringing more rain and snow to some areas, experts said.

Off the Record Singing condom!

BUDAPEST, Hungary: The nation that produced Liszt, Bartok and Kodaly is making a new contribution to the world of music. The serenading condom, reports AP.

The prophylactic works like a musical greeting card, beginning the melody as it is unrolled. Users can choose between two tunes: "Arise, Ye Worker," an old Communist ditty, and another entitled "You Sweet Little Dumbbell."

Ferenc Kovacs, who patented the condom and contracted with a rubber factory to produce 100 samples, said he hadn't decided how much to charge customers.

"I believe it'll be so popular that thanks to the sales volume, I will be able to set a competitive price," he said.

Ray of hopes for millions

WASHINGTON: High dose of saquinavir, an anti-retroviral agent, are effective in blocking reproduction of the HIV virus that causes AIDS and has few side effects, according to a new study, reports AP.

The US Food and Drug Administration, which approves drugs for use, recommends 1,800 milligrams daily but the new study found that considerable higher doses were more effective, according to a study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine on Friday.

This study found that a dose of 7,200 milligrams daily was considerably more effective in raising the rate of CD-4 cells, key to the human immune system, than a dose of 3,800 milligrams, the study found.

The higher dose also reduced the amount of HIV virus in the blood stream.

Researchers also found that the higher dosages had no more or worse side effects than the smaller amount.

Side effects include abdominal discomfort, vomiting, diarrhoea, headache and dizziness.

Turkish official confirms routine movements 'Syrian troop movement were not aimed at Turkey'

ANKARA, June 17: A Turkish army official today confirmed recent movements of Syrian troops along the Turkish border but said they were not aimed at Turkey.

The source also told AFP that there had been Turkish troop movements on the Turkish side of the border, but added: "These are routine movements which have nothing to do with Syria."

It was the first official confirmation of recent press reports of the troop movements along the two countries' common borders.

Sunday the semi-official Anatolia news agency reported that Syria had massed armoured units in areas on the Syrian-Turkish border, but a Syrian official with the Arab League ruled out armed conflict.

Anatolia quoted Syrian and Turkish traders who said they had seen Syrian armoured vehicles advancing towards the Turkish border as well as armoured units posted in several Syrian border areas.

The agency did not identify the provinces where the armoured units were but its report was dated from Nusaybin, close to Mardin near the border.

According to the London-based Saudi daily Al-Hayat on Saturday, Syria "moved around 40,000 soldiers to border areas with Turkey" after reports that Ankara was behind four bomb blasts in the country.

Travellers arriving in Damascus from the Turkish-Syrian border spoke of tension there as well as gunfire from the Turkish side which "seems to be on a permanent state of alert," Al-Hayat said.



The Duke of Edinburgh, The Queen, Princess Michael, unnamed, The Queen Mother, Prince Michael, The Duke of Kent and The Prince of Wales on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, saluting the crowd after Queen's birthday ceremony. — AFP/UNB photo

Manchester blast: Another pressure ploy from Sinn Fein, IRA

BELFAST, Northern Ireland, June 17: Last week the leader of the IRA-allied Sinn Fein party stood outside the locked gates of Northern Ireland's new peace talks, pleading that he came armed only with votes, reports AP.

On Saturday, with a truck bomb in the heart of Manchester, England, the Irish Republican Army reminded the world of what happens when Sinn Fein doesn't get its way.

The bomb, which wounded more than 200 civilians and caused millions of dollars in damage, makes it unlikely that Sinn Fein will be welcome at the negotiating table any time soon.

It is locked out from the talks — mediated by President Clinton's special envoy, former US Sen. George Mitchell — until the IRA restores the ceasefire it ended in February.

The talks aim at finding a way to govern Northern Ireland that is acceptable to the province's pro-British Protestant majority and its Irish Catholic minority, and end violence that has killed 3,200 people since 1969.

With the Manchester bomb, it might seem that the IRA has undercut Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams and that the Sinn Fein-IRA movement is split between trying peace or war to obtain its goal of a united Ireland.

But the timing suggests the opposite.

The IRA though officially back at war with Britain since a February 9 bombing in London that killed two men, had not set off a bomb for

seven weeks.

That quiet time helped Adams build up support among wavering Catholics for the May 30 election in Northern Ireland that determined which 10 parties could participate in the talks. Sinn Fein — campaigning on the slogan "vote for peace" — scored its highest vote share ever, 15.5 per cent.

Sunday's explosion came within a few hours of an embarrassing admission by the IRA that its members had killed an Irish police officer and wounded another in a bungled robbery in Western Ireland June 7. The incident caused profound shock in the Irish Republic and raised questions about whether the IRA was in control of its own people.

"They see human lives in

Manchester as trivia to be used in cynical news management," Irish Prime Minister John Bruton said. "The cynicism is all the more evident when one bears in mind that the all-party talks, so long the proclaimed demand of the (Sinn Fein-IRA) movement, are now already available to them if only the IRA would renounce this sort of atrocity."

From the IRA's point of view, however, big bombs pay dividends.

Britain kept up secret contacts with the IRA despite — or, some would say, because of — enormously destructive bombings in London's financial district in April 1992 and again a year later.

Just 19 days after the 17-month-old IRA ceasefire ended on February 9, the British and

Irish governments announced a date for all-party talks in Northern Ireland, as Sinn Fein had long demanded.

But despite their protests at being barred from the talks, Sinn Fein leaders may be content to stay outside — confident that the talks won't go anywhere and isolated from blame, if they fail.

Adams' leadership appears rock solid. He is the most able politician in Northern Ireland, deflecting criticism with charm and argument. He also emphasises there will be no split — meaning he will not condemn IRA attacks.

The big fear is that IRA violence will eventually provoke the pro-British "loyalist" gunmen on the Protestant side to retaliate, and plunge the province back into the old cycle of death and destruction.

The loyalists' ability to maintain their own ceasefire for 20 months has been arguably the biggest, most welcome surprise of the peace process.

In March, after three IRA bombings in London, the Combined Loyalist Military Command in Belfast said that the IRA could not go on threatening British cities "without a telling response."

Some loyalist leaders, however, have said they will hold their fire so long as the IRA restricts its campaign to England.

So the IRA clings to its wild card, a new ceasefire, until it believes it can wring maximum gratitude and concessions from its opponents.