

International

Move to boost Yeltsin's chances in runoff election

Lebed named head of security council, Grachev fired

MOSCOW, June 18: Boris Yeltsin named Alexander Lebed head of the powerful Security Council on Tuesday and won a vital endorsement from the former general before the final round of the Russian presidential election, reports AP.

Yeltsin also fired Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, a longtime rival of Lebed's who has been repeatedly criticised for his abysmal handling of Russian military affairs.

Yeltsin signed a decree announcing that Lebed, who came in strong third in the first round of the presidential election, would head the Security Council, which oversees the Russian military and police forces.

Following a brief meeting in the Kremlin, Lebed issued the direct endorsement Yeltsin had been seeking, saying the agreement would serve not only as the unification of politicians, but of the forces serving them.

Lebed replaced Oleg Lobov, who is recovering from heart disease. Rumours that Yeltsin would oust Lobov and Grachev had circulated for months.

The move is intended to boost Yeltsin's chances in the runoff election against Communist candidate Gennady Zyuganov. Lebed is admired by

millions of Russian for his tough, inflexible calls to crack down on Russia's endemic crime and corruption; a top concern of many voters.

Yeltsin made a clear pitch to the 11 million Russians who voted for Lebed, saying the appointment unified "two political programmes" and pledging to address military reform and corruption — Lebed's main campaign issues.

Whether voter who backed Lebed in the first round will now switch to Yeltsin will be a key issue. The Communists had warned Lebed he would suffer if he backed Yeltsin, claiming his voters would not support the president.

Lebed, a gruff non-nonsense commander, who became a public hero for his performance in ending a war in the breakaway Trans-Dniester region, had said he would not back the Communists because their ideology had broken Russia.

Lebed is a fervent nationalist, who has repeatedly called for rebuilding the demoralized Russian military as a first step to restore Russia as a great power.

He was bitterly critical of Grachev for impeding military reform, allowing corruption in the army, and the army's miserable performance in

Chechnya — a war Lebed opposed from the very start. Grachev was a Yeltsin close ally, but he was under constant attack for his poor performance and had become a growing liability for the president.

Yeltsin named Gen Mikhail Kolesnikov, chief of the general staff, as acting defence minister.

Meanwhile, the vote tally from the first round was nearly complete Tuesday, with Yeltsin and Zyuganov headed into a runoff with 35.2 per cent and 31.95 per cent, respectively. Only 1 per cent of the ballots, mostly from war-torn Chechnya — remained uncoun-

Lebed had 14.7 per cent, liberal economist Grigory Yavlinsky 7.4 per cent and ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy a less-than-expected 5.8 per cent.

Two factors loomed as critical for Yeltsin in trying to preserve his presidency and Russia's reforms: a high turnout to overcome the Communists' rain-or-shine voters, and support from those who backed Lebed.

Yeltsin already has launched an offensive on turnout. Election law stipulates that the runoff be held on a non-working day, and election offi-

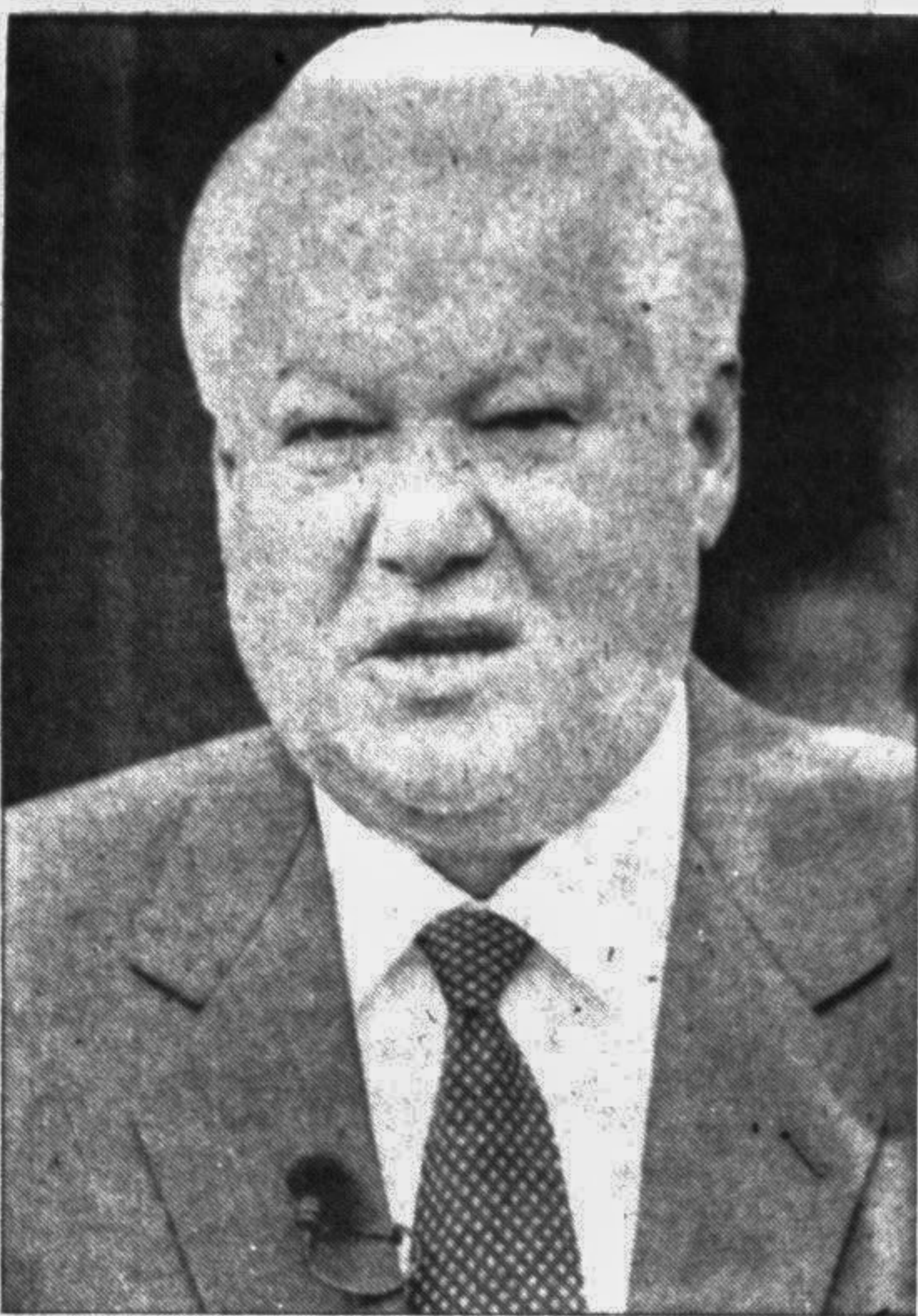
cials have proposed to schedule it on Sunday, June 30. But the president, believing the turnout would be higher on a week day, has prepared a draft law to declare Wednesday, July 3, a holiday.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said Yeltsin's team would try to push the bill through parliament Tuesday — a day before the runoff date is expected to be set.

About 70 per cent of Russia's 106 million voters cast ballots Sunday — a number the Yeltsin campaign says cannot drop if the president is to beat Zyuganov.

The Communists, the leading force in parliament's lower house, did not immediately comment on the proposal to hold the second round July 3. They were mum on their runoff strategy going into a meeting Tuesday.

The Communist candidate claimed Yeltsin was a spent force. "Yeltsin already has given all he had before the first round — decrees, awards, prizes, rock concerts," Zyuganov said Monday. "If he had paid back wages instead of spending huge sums on rock concerts, he would have achieved a better result."



Russian President Boris Yeltsin speaks from the Kremlin yard in a broadcast address to the nation on Russian TV, on Monday. Boris Yeltsin said that the main thing is that democratic presidential elections exist and thanked all people for support. — AFP/UNB photo

Bangladesh gets new membership

World's arms negotiating forum expanded

GENEVA, June 18: The conference on disarmament, the world's principal negotiating body for arms-control treaties, agreed Monday to expand its membership to 61 members, including weapons renegade Iraq, reports AP.

The breakthrough in the expansion move after more than three years of negotiation came after South Africa worked out a formula that ended US objections to the inclusion of Iraq.

The 23 countries added to the 38 already participating include "some very geopolitically significant countries, as well as a number of other important countries," said Ambassador Stephen J Ledogar, head of the US delegation.

The new members include Austria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Finland, Iraq, Israel, New Zealand, North Korea, Norway, Senegal, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

The expansion "will indeed make this forum more representative," said Pakistani Ambassador Munir Akram, president of the conference.

Expanding "just as we are entering the final phase" of negotiations for a global ban on nuclear weapons tests "augurs well for the future," Akram said.

Dutch Ambassador Jaap Ramaker, who chairs the panel

negotiating the test ban, said the expansion would not affect the talks.

Ramaker said he remains optimistic that the treaty will be finished on time to be signed at next fall's UN General Assembly.

The United States had blocked the expansion, tentatively approved last September, because it objected to Iraq being given the veto powers associated with membership.

UK Parliament passes quick divorce bill

LONDON, June 18: A bitterly contested bill ending quick divorces which threatened to weaken Prime Minister John Major's shaky hold on power even further, passed through Parliament with a large government majority late today, reports Reuter.

At present a couple may be granted a divorce after 12 months only if one party admits fault.

Under the new bill, no fault divorces will be allowed after a period of 18 months, "separated couples will also be encouraged to go for marriage counselling and mediation."

Divorces will still be granted after one year for couples who have no children under 16.

BRIEFLY

Floods death toll in Yemen 100: Floods caused by heavy rains have killed more than 100 people in eastern Yemen, destroyed at least 165 homes and damaged oil-production equipment, state-run television said, AP reports from Yemen.

The Monday night report also said that thousands of heads of cattle were drowned in the flooding, which affected the provinces of Shabwah, Marib, Jawf and Hadramaut over the past few days. No further details were available.

2 Pakistanis held in Sri Lanka: Two Pakistani nationals were arrested at Colombo's international airport for smuggling heroin concealed in their shoes, an official said Tuesday, AP reports from Colombo.

They flew in from Singapore on Sunday night by an Air Lanka flight, said Mali Piyasena, a customs official. The two face death penalty or life imprisonment. They were identified as Mohammed Afzal, 49, and Mohammed Sarvar, 40, and each carried 500 grams (one pound) of heroin valued at one million rupees (US\$ 18,000) in Sri Lanka. But it costs 10 times more in London.

8 jailed for arson in Bahrain: A special court jailed eight people convicted of arson and sabotage during an 18-month wave of unrest that has swept the Gulf island nation of Bahrain, newspapers reported Tuesday, AP says from Manama.

The government-guided Gulf Daily News and several other newspapers said the State Security Court convicted and sentenced the men on Monday to terms ranging from one to 10 years in prison.

The court was set up earlier this year to handle cases arising from the anti-government unrest.

Ex RSS chief Balasaheb dies: The former chief of a powerful rightwing Hindu group that was blamed for tearing down an ancient mosque and triggering Hindu-Muslim riots, died in a western Indian city on Monday of a heart attack, news reports said, AP reports from New Delhi.

Madhukar Dattatreya Deoras, 80, popularly known to millions of his fans as Balasaheb Deoras, died in a private hospital in Pune, near Bombay, news agencies reported. Deoras, a bachelor, was once chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist group widely regarded as the think tank of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the main opposition party in India's parliament.

15 more executed in China: China has sentenced 15 more people to death for murder and robbery in northeastern Jilin province as part of its nationwide "strike hard" crackdown on crime, the Xinhua News Agency said yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

Four of the criminals killed a man after they robbed him of 68,000 yuan (8,200) and dumped his body on a railway line, the agency said quoting court documents. The Jilin court sentenced to death another criminal who used sleeping pills to drug drivers and steal cars.

Christopher may visit ME next week: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher is expected to visit the Middle East next week on his first trip to the region since hardliner Benjamin Netanyahu was elected Israeli Prime Minister, diplomatic sources said on Monday, Reuter reports from Washington.

He will come to Israel sometime next week. We believe before the meeting in Europe," an Israeli source told Reuters, referring to the Group of Seven summit in France.

US sources said Christopher was also expected to visit Egypt and Jordan. Whether he would stop in Syria was unclear.

Arafat due in Vietnam today: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat is due to make a brief official visit to Vietnam today, the Foreign Ministry in Hanoi said yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

The veteran Palestine Liberation Organisation leader will be arriving from China. Arafat is the only senior level foreign personality to visit Vietnam in recent weeks, Vietnam, where officials are busy preparing for the ruling Communist Party's eighth Congress opening next week, has long been a supporter of the Palestinian cause.

Ex Tory MP Maclean dies: Fitzroy Maclean the former diplomat, writer, soldier Tory Member of Parliament and reputed model for the fictional secret agent James Bond has died at the age of 85. His family said Monday, AFP reports from Strachur, Maclean collapsed after taking a swim while visiting friends in southern England his family in this western Scottish town. Sal, He is perhaps best remembered for going behind the lines in Yugoslavia during World War II to link up with Tito's partisans after advising British wartime leader Winston Churchill that the Communist leader would make a better ally than the rival Chetniks.

2 get life term for treason in Peru: The top military court on Monday sentenced two navy officers to life in prison for treason after being convicted of selling sensitive military information to Ecuador, which fought a brief war with Peru last year, AFP reports from Lima.

The Supreme Council of Military Justice voted three to five to condemn Santos Agustín Cruz Dioses and Holger Herman Moran Cruz to life in prison. The dissenting votes called for the death penalty according to a statement from the council.

Strong quake hits Japan: A fairly strong earthquake struck deep beneath the Pacific ocean about 400 kilometres (250 miles) southwest of Tokyo early Tuesday. There were no reports of damage or injuries, and no tsunami alert was issued, AP reports from Tokyo.

The quake registered a preliminary magnitude 5.7 and was centered at a depth of approximately 460 kilometres (285 miles) beneath the ocean floor, the Central Meteorological Agency said. The quake, which struck at 2:08 a.m. (1708 GMT), swayed some buildings as far away as Tokyo and Yokohama, the agency said. Tsunamis are giant waves triggered by undersea disturbances.

Chechen fighters to refrain from armed action

SOUTHERN CHECHNYA, Russia, June 19: Independence fighters in Chechnya have decided to refrain from any armed action until the second round of the Russian presidential election, Chief of Staff Aslan Maskhadov said on Monday, reports AFP.

"We have decided to wait so as not to risk a resumption of hostilities and threaten the accord," signed on June 10 between pro-independence guerrillas and Russia, Maskhadov told journalists in his stronghold in southern Chechnya.

That agreement covered the setting up of a ceasefire which had come into effect on June 1.

Maskhadov recalled that his fighters had done nothing to disrupt the local and presidential elections held in Chechnya from Thursday through Sunday in order.



Elderly Chechen women holding portraits of late Chechen President Dzhokar Dudayev shout anti-government and anti-election slogans and dance their national dance "Zikr" in the Chechen village of Avtury on Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

Hundreds flee Myanmar to escape forced relocation

BANGKOK, June 18: About 600 Karenni refugees have recently fled eastern Myanmar to Thailand to escape forced relocation by the Myanmar military, exiled Myanmar dissidents reported Tuesday, reports AP.

The All Burma Students' Democratic Front, based in the Thai border town of Mae Sot, said that the Burmese army has burned three of seven villages between the Salween River and Pun Creek as they were abandoned by their inhabitants.

The ethnic Karenni were ordered to leave their home villages.

Victims of war crimes can sue Karadzic in US federal court

WASHINGTON, June 18: The US Supreme Court on Monday ruled that victims of war crimes in the former Yugoslavia could sue Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic in US federal courts, reports AP.

In a unanimous decision, the nine justices rejected Karadzic's appeal of a lower court ruling which in 1995 upheld the right of a group of women to file suits against him in this country.

The New York federal appeals court based its decision on two US laws that allow sur-

vivors of human rights abuses to seek retribution in the United States regardless of where the violations occurred.

Karadzic appealed the decision to the Supreme Court. The high court's ruling Monday is a significant victory for the drive to hold human rights abusers accountable for their actions, Beth Stephens a lawyer for the women said in a statement.

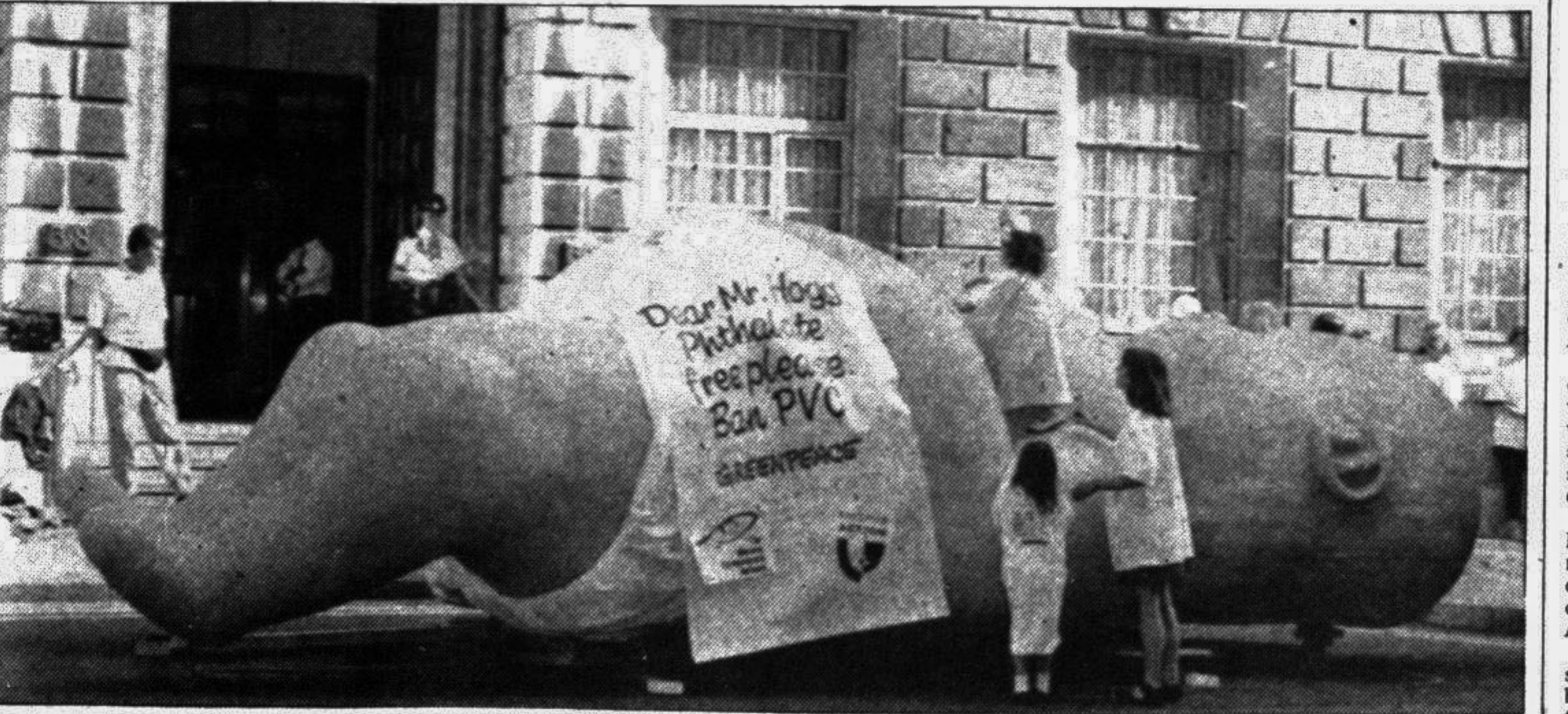
Karadzic is literally getting away with murder and genocide, including sexual violence against women. These cases may be the only means by

which the victims and survivors of his crimes can hold him accountable, she said.

The suits will be handled by the New York federal court of judge Peter Leisure.

Karadzic has been indicted on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague, but a warrant for his arrest has yet to be issued.

Karadzic had argued that he cannot be sued for alleged crimes against humanity because he is a private citizen, not a government official.



A giant baby, 7-metres long and weighing 750 kilos is delivered courtesy of Greenpeace to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on Monday in London. The delivery formed part of their campaign to force the British Government to ban PVC plastics. Chemicals called phthalates are used to make PVC soft and these chemicals are suspected of being disruptive to the hormone system once they enter the food system, leading to food scares such as the recent one involving baby milk powders. — AFP/UNB photo

Most of Indian atomic power plants unsafe

BOMBAY, June 18: A former chief of India's nuclear-regulatory body today warned that a majority of the country's atomic power stations were unsafe and posed "potential radiation hazards," reports AP.

"India's nuclear regulatory process is a total farce. I have documentary evidence to prove this," said A Gopalkrishnan, chairman of Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), who was ordered to resign on Saturday.

The former AERB chief, who has a doctorate in nuclear engineering from the University of California, said India did not have an independent regulator to supervise nuclear safety.

The AERB is subordinate to the government's Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), he said.

He also accused the DAE of covering up potential hazards from India's nuclear installations.

"The DAE wants the country to believe all is well with our nuclear-power projects. This is not so," the nuclear expert said in an interview to AFP.

India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, has invested tens of millions of dollars in its ambitious nuclear programme, setting up its first power plant in 1969 on the outskirts of this populous city.

It has so far installed seven nuclear-power plants with a daily generation capacity of more than 2,000 megawatts (mw), meeting 2.5 per cent of the country's electricity demands.

India also has two nuclear fuel reprocessing-plants near Bombay and a third has come up in the southern state

Gowda's govt may fall, says Congress general secy

NEW DELHI, June 18: India's historically-dominant Congress (I) Party, the main supporter of Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's United Front government, said today the ruling coalition could collapse, reports AP.

"Deve Gowda's government may fall in spite of us, but not because of us," Congress General-Secretary Devendra Dwivedi told reporters in the central Indian city of Bhopal.

The 13-party coalition government came to power June 1 after 140 Congress MPs extended legislative support to Gowda's centrist Janata Dal (People's Party)-led alliance.

"Politics is a game of numbers and the Congress strength in parliament is such no one can remain in power without its support," Dwivedi said of the 545-seat House where no party could secure a majority in the April-May polls.

Dwivedi said all the partners in the Gowda coalition administration had come together under the banner of an "anti-Congress" campaign decades back.

"Now the constituents of the United Front have given up their stance of blind Congressism," Dwivedi said. "They had earlier criticised Congress's policies but have now adopted them in their common programme."

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US, Russia may share nuclear safety data

WASHINGTON, June 18: The Clinton administration is discussing with Russia arrangements to share nuclear safety data after an expected international treaty to ban all nuclear weapons tests, a US official said Monday, reports AP.

There are already more comprehensive arrangements with Britain and France, providing for the sharing of classified weapons information, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The agreements with Britain and France were first reached in the 1960s, and the one with France is being updated, the official told The Associated Press.

He said the data that may be shared with Russia would not be classified material and that there are no similar discussions with China.

The sharing with Britain is more extensive than with France, but the approach to dealing with both is that they are US allies, the official said.

The aim is to maintain the stability and reliability of the weapons since a treaty would ban tests that help keep nuclear weapons arsenals secure.

The Washington Post reported Monday that France and the United States had signed a secret agreement that calls for sharing with France for the first time a vast amount of computer data drawn from simulated explosions of atomic bombs.

The official described the account as essentially factual but said the agreement to share data with France dated back to the 1960s and has been updated since.

Spurgeon Kenny, a former deputy director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, commented: "This issue has been around a long time."

There have been extensive exchanges with Britain since the late 1950s, and more restricted exchanges with France," said Kenny.

AI blames Asian govts for HR violations in '95

LONDON, June 18: Amnesty International, pointing an accusing finger at China, said today that despite Asia's image of economic dynamism, its governments were responsible for torturing, unfairly jailing and executing citizens, reports Reuter.

The human rights group detailed abuses in countries ranging from Afghanistan to Australia and China to Colombia in its annual report for 1995.

According to the lengthy report which was broken down into 146 countries, at least 3,110 death sentences and 2,190 executions were

recorded in China last year. "Many people were imprisoned after blatantly unfair trials, including the prominent dissident Wei Jingsheng, who was given a 14-year sentence despite international condemnation," it said.

Amnesty said deaths in custody were another cause of concern throughout the Asia-Pacific region. At least 100 people died while jailed in Mongolia, some due to starvation.

Australia was singled out for its high disproportionate rate of suspicious Aboriginal deaths. "Twenty-one Aboriginal people died in custody or dur-

ing police operations in Australia — the highest number since records started being kept in 1980 — and police reportedly continued to harass relatives who were unwilling to accept official explanations and called for further investigations," the report said.

Amnesty also accused the international of ignoring the war in Afghanistan where more than a 1,000 women and children have been killed by armed opposition groups.

It criticised the slaughter of 42 villagers who were shot dead by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, increasing human rights abuses in Burundi and Rwanda exacerbated ethnic tensions in Central Africa and swelled the number of refugees on the continent to more than 8.5 million, Amnesty International said today.

"Civil wars or political tensions led to an increase in politically motivated killings, disappearances and other human rights abuses by armies and different armed groups," Amnesty said in its annual report.

"Widespread impunity and the fact that people responsible for extrajudicial execu-

tions were rarely brought to justice encouraged the continuing human rights violations," it added.

Amnesty spokesman Mark Ogle said the refugee flows following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the continuing massacres by the government and armed groups in Burundi were among Amnesty's top concerns and Africa.

The group also highlighted human rights violations in Nigeria and particularly the execution of writer and political activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni dissidents after "an unfair and politically motivated trial."

"Although a few government critics in Nigeria were released at the very end of 1995, leading members of the human rights community were reported to still be targeted, held in detention with charge or trial, or imprisoned following unfair trials last year," the 360-page report said.

The human rights group also singled out Liberia, where a civil war has been raging since December 1989, and Sierra Leone where women were raped, mutilated or beheaded by rebels and about 100 schoolchildren were kidnapped, as other nations to cause concern.