

International

Crisis in Delhi casts uncertainty over future of Indo-Pak talks

NEW DELHI, Mar 31: Indian and Pakistani diplomats held a fourth day of talks today aimed at thawing their frosty relations, but a political crisis in New Delhi cast uncertainty over the future of the nascent dialogue, reports Reuter.

Indian Foreign Minister Secretaries Salman Haidar and his Pakistani counterpart Shamshad Ahmad, who held lengthy discussions at Haidar's residence on Sunday, were expected to complete their negotiations later today officials said.

They said the delegations would try to agree on a joint concluding statement that would hold out the prospect of another round of talks, without necessarily setting a date.

The two sides have kept a veil of silence over their talks, the first since a similar dialogue collapsed in acrimony three years ago over the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir.

Zairean rebels ready to talk with Mobutu

GOMA, Zaire, Mar 31: Rebels in Zaire are prepared to negotiate with the government in Kinshasa "as from Thursday," rebel justice minister Kongolo Mwene announced in this eastern Zairean town late Sunday, reports AFP.

He said the rebel alliance led by Laurent-Desire Kabila was "ready to begin genuine negotiations" with the regime of ailing president Mobutu Sese Seko "from Thursday."

But he warned that the rebels would not be there to share power.

These discussions at delegation level, will focus on preparations for a meeting between Kabila and Mobutu, "it would be preferable for it to be in April," he said.

Meanwhile, the HCR, the United Nations refugee agency must not "dictate" the route Rwandan refugees should take to return to their own country, the rebel "finance minister" Mawapanga Mwana Nanga said in Goma Sunday.

It is not up to the HCR (the UN High Commissioner for Refugees) to dictate to us by what route they want to repatriate the refugees.

The rebels and the HCR are currently locked in a dispute over how to repatriate about 100,000 Rwandan refugees stranded near Kisangani which fell to the rebels on March 15.

Mwene said he was speak-

New Delhi," the daily said in an editorial.

"But ... as a result of the congress's volte-face, the crucial talks have suddenly been emptied of political significance."

Jaswant Singh, Deputy leader of India's biggest single parliamentary group, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said the talks were unlikely to achieve results, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported.

PTI quoted him as criticising Deve Gowda for a newspaper interview before the talks in which he offered "minor adjustments" on the ceasefire line dividing Kashmir, of which India controls two thirds and Pakistan the rest.

Singh also slammed Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir, for suggesting that the ceasefire line be recognised as an international border.

These were irresponsible and immature actions of responsible persons," he said, recalling a resolution passed by the Indian parliament declaring that Pakistan's "occupation" of part of Kashmir was the only problem between the two countries.

In Pakistan, the Lahore-based daily The Nation today urged India to lay aside Kashmir's "phony treaty of accession" and allow Kashmiris a genuine vote to decide their own future.

It said the fate of the talks depended on whether both countries recognised that nothing could be settled unilaterally.

"In the final analysis it is not even a question who is right or who is wrong, but what do the people of Kashmir want? Let a neutral Party find out in an internationally recognised way and that would be the end of the matter," The Nation added.

BSP leader shot dead in Lucknow

LUCKNOW, Mar 31: Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Virendra Pratap Shahi was today shot dead in the posh Indira Nagar locality here by unidentified assailants, reports PTI.

Two scooter-borne assailants sprayed bullets on Shahi near the Spring Dale School when he was going to his sister's house on foot.

The alleged mafia don of the eastern Uttar Pradesh, from Gorakhpur, died on the spot, police said.

Senior district and Police officials have rushed to the site of the incident and police have launched a manhunt to nab the killers.

Shahi had unsuccessfully contested the recent assembly by-election from Maniram constituency in Gorakhpur district.

Earlier, in the October assembly elections, he had lost the same seat on a Samajwadi Party ticket, following which he had joined the BSP.

Kesri's decision provokes political confusion

NEW DELHI, Mar 31: The leader of India's Congress Party has taken a political gamble that may topple Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda but leave the ruling coalition in power and economic reforms intact, analysts said today, reports Reuter.

Congress president Sitaram Kesri's surprise decision on Sunday to withdraw support for Deve Gowda's minority government provoked political confusion that sent share prices tumbling.

The Congress move opened a bewildering array of possibilities ranging from a parliamentary vote of confidence in Deve Gowda's 10-month-old government to snap general elections.

President Shankar Dayal Sharma was consulting constitutional experts following Kesri's decision to stake a claim to rule. But analysts predicted the Congress leader undercut by divisions in his own party and reluctant to face the electorate, would be unable to thrust himself into power and

might have to settle for a revamped centre-left coalition.

"It's a blind gamble by Kesri," said Pran Chopra of the Centre for Policy Research, an independent think-tank. "He has propelled himself into a situation from which he is unlikely to derive any benefit."

Political leaders sought to assuage financial markets fears, "political stability and economic reform are not inter-linked," said Jaipal Reddy, spokesman for Deve Gowda's Janata Dal Party. "reforms will go on irrespective of who will be in power."

Kesri, who was thrust to the head of India's oldest party last September after former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao resigned over corruption charges, drew stinging criticism from newspapers which accused him of political expediency.

The decision smacks of a desperation that comes from deep political and personal paranoia," the Indian Express said.

Analysts said the absence of several powerful Congress leaders from a strategy meeting on Sunday indicated Kesri had not mustered undivided support for his move to oust Deve Gowda.

Kesri's timing — with the budget still before parliament and sensitive talks with Pakistan underway in the capital — was shocking, the newspaper said in a front-page editorial.

In a letter to President Sharmas on Sunday, the Congress leader cited lawlessness, a drift in the economy and a growing communal menace for his decision to revoke support.

Analysts said Kesri appeared fed up with the United Front's unwillingness to cooperate in the key northern state of Uttar Pradesh, a former Congress stronghold where the BJP recently succeeded in installing a coalition government.

They said Kesri was also concerned over a spate of corruption investigations into Congress leaders close to him.

Analysts said the absence of several powerful Congress leaders from a strategy meeting on Sunday indicated Kesri had not mustered undivided support for his move to oust Deve Gowda.



Israeli tanks are lined up outside the West Bank city of Nablus Sunday while rioting Palestinians in the town were prevented from reaching the Israeli-controlled Joseph's Tomb. Following 12 days of riots against Israel's decision to build the Jewish Har Homa neighbourhood in Jerusalem, the Palestinians and Israeli Arabs are marking "Land Day," commemorating the 1976 clashes in Galilee over a land confiscation that left several Israeli, — AFP/UNB photo

— AFP/UNB photo

Netanyahu laments virtual collapse of ME peace

Arab FMs for reactivating economic boycott of Israel

CAIRO, Mar 31: A draft resolution circulating at an Arab foreign ministers meeting in Cairo on Sunday recommended Arab states reactivate the Arab economic boycott of Israel, reports Reuter.

It also suggested Arab states stop normalisation with the Jewish state, close Israeli offices and missions and pull out of multilateral talks on aspects of Middle East peace.

The measures are in response to the Israeli government's policy of settling Jews in disputed east Jerusalem, a policy Arab states say is in violation of commitments Israel made in earlier stages of Middle East peace talks.

Meanwhile, Israel branded as absurd an Arab League resolution on Sunday recommending that member countries suspend steps towards normal relations with Israel.

"Normal neighbourly relations and regional co-operation are supposed to be an asset and a common interest for all

countries in this region," Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmer told Reuters.

"It is absurd that they are being deemed as a whip, so to speak, to be used against Israel whenever there is a crisis in the peace process," he said.

In Cairo, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara and Palestinian leader Farouk Kadoumi told reporters that the same resolution, which passed unanimously, also recommended restoring the Arab boycott of Israel.

AP adds: Accusing the Palestinians of unleashing "terrorism as a weapon of the negotiations," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday lamented "a virtual collapse of the peace process."

Meanwhile, Israeli branded as absurd an Arab League resolution on Sunday recommending that member countries suspend steps towards normal relations with Israel.

"Normal neighbourly relations and regional co-operation are supposed to be an asset and a common interest for all

China defends HR records by citing economic progress

BEIJING, Mar 31: Some 200 spectators were injured Sunday when a stadium gallery collapsed in the southern Indian state of Kerala, news agencies said, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India said the stadium gallery, which was packed with people, crashed in the state's Vadakara town minutes before a regional volleyball tournament began.

Angry spectators set fire to the damaged bamboo-and-timber gallery and smashed cars near the stadium in protest, the news agency said.

Rescuers ferried some 200 fans to hospitals and private clinics. The United News of India said and added 10 of them were critically injured.

200 hurt as stadium gallery collapses in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 31: Some 200 spectators were injured Sunday when a stadium gallery collapsed in the southern Indian state of Kerala, news agencies said, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India said the stadium gallery, which was packed with people, crashed in the state's Vadakara town minutes before a regional volleyball tournament began.

Angry spectators set fire to the damaged bamboo-and-timber gallery and smashed cars near the stadium in protest, the news agency said.

Rescuers ferried some 200 fans to hospitals and private clinics. The United News of India said and added 10 of them were critically injured.

Former CMs demand president's rule in Tripura

BISHALGARH, Tripura, Mar 31: Nripen Chakraborty and Samir Ranjan Burman former chief ministers, on Sunday shared the same platform to demand president's rule in Tripura and holding of fresh elections thereafter, reports PTI.

The expelled CPI-politburo member, Nripen Chakraborty told a public meeting organised by the Congress here, that the third left front ministry came to power following president's rule, "there is nothing unjustified in this demand."

The Congress CLP leader Burman said, all extremists out in the state should be banned and the entire state declared disturbed.

Chakraborty and Burman both said that the state government had "failed" on all fronts and especially in curbing growing insurgency.

Mental anguish from the incident caused her to be hospitalised for psychiatric treatment, the report said.

The seven defendants were arrested the following month.

The defendants were found guilty of violating laws on public humiliation, it said.

country "restricted by its historical and realistic conditions."

It did not mention dissidents who trumpeted legal amendments last year to curb police powers of detention that were welcomed by human rights campaigners abroad.

The report coincides with a meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, which Europe and the United States have in the past six years sought to use as a forum for censoring China's rights record.

Both the United States and the European Union have wavered this year on whether to sponsor a resolution against China. China blocked previous efforts to support developing nations in the 53-member commission and has vowed to defeat any similar motions again this year.

China argues that the motions are confrontational and says it prefers discussion. During a visit to Beijing last week, US Vice President Al Gore said found Chinese leaders receptive during talks on human rights.

In its report, the government cited the current crackdown on crime in which thousands have been executed or sentenced to death as part of its efforts to safeguard human rights.

Off the Record

Humiliating kiss

BEIJING: A Chinese court has jailed seven relatives of a man who hanged himself for forcing his wife to kiss the corpse, the People's Court News reported Monday, says AFP.

The man committed suicide after the Shanghai couple quarreled last August. Relatives arriving at their home before the funeral forced the wife to kiss her deceased husband, the Congming county court heard before jailing the relatives for between three and eight months.

Mental anguish from the incident caused her to be hospitalised for psychiatric treatment, the report said.

The seven defendants were arrested the following month.

The defendants were found guilty of violating laws on public humiliation, it said.

Bid to rebuild Red Chapel

LUXOR, Egypt: A team of French and Egyptian archaeologists has begun rebuilding brick by brick the Red Chapel of Queen Hatshepsut, a unique masterpiece of ancient Egyptian architecture and a precursor of the humble prefab, reports AFP.

"This chapel is the only monument of its size made of red quartzite," said project chief Francois Larche of France, who expects the French-Egyptian centre of Karnak, in upper Egypt, to have completed the job by the end of 1997.

"It is also the ancestor of prefab because all the blocks used to build it were designed ahead of time," Larche said.

The Red Chapel — a sanctuary for a sacred boat which carried the dead to the hereafter — was built by Queen Hatshepsut who ruled from 1504-1483 BC. The wife and half-sister of Tuthmosis III who ruled from 1520 to 1504.

Experts have been unable to identify the initial location of the Chapel but agree that Tuthmosis III, who succeeded Hatshepsut, his aunt, after first marrying her, dismantled it as part of his campaign to erase all monuments dedicated to the woman he accused of being a "usurper".

The chapel's 271 quartzite and 44 diorite blocks were found in near-perfect state inside the third pylon of the temple of Karnak in Luxor.

The third pylon was built by Amenhotep III and the blocks were used as part of its foundations.

In 1932 the 315 blocks were placed on raised benches near the temple with other artifacts found in the site.

"In April 1996 we began studying the reconstruction process and within week we should start re-assembling the blocks," Larche said.



Thai Prime Minister Chaovarat Yongchayudh (C) is surrounded by traditionally dressed Vietnamese women Monday after attending a cultural performance during a visit to a Hanoi touristic landmark, the Temple of Literature. — AFP/UNB photo

— AFP/UNB photo