

International

FIS calls for boycott of June 5 polls in Algeria

BRUSSELS, Apr 3: Exiled leaders of Algeria's banned Islamic Salvation Front called here Wednesday for a boycott of legislative elections scheduled in Algeria for June 5, but at the same time appealed for an "end to the bloodshed" in which at least 60,000 people have died since 1992, reports AFP.

The FIS leadership, at what was its first press conference in Belgium, appealed for a "negotiated political settlement" with the secular government in Algeria to "restore peace".

The FIS, which was dissolved in March 1992, has already said it will not be fielding any candidates in the polls.

Abdelkrim Ould-Adda, spokesman for the FIS Executive Bureau in exile, said the FIS had decided not to let its members be candidates on the lists of other opposition parties with which it signed a "national contract" in Rome in January 1995.

Ould-Adda said the legislative elections "cannot yield a settlement" to the Algerian crisis. He said the outcome was "rigged in advance" so as to ensure the victory of the pro-presidential Democratic National Rally (RND) set up a few weeks ago.

The FIS, whose founding member Abassi Madani and Ali Belhadj are detained at a secret location, called unsuccessfully for a boycott of the November 1995 presidential election organised and won by President Liamine Zeroual.

This time however, virtually all the opposition parties are taking part in the election, apparently fearing that if they do not, they will be totally marginalised.

Ould-Adda said the FIS "respected" the "freedom of parties to make the choices they deemed appropriate".

Gowda wins critical support from UF coalition

NEW DELHI, Apr 3: Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's coalition is refusing to buckle to demands to replace him to rescue the government from losing a confidence vote next week, reports AP.

Gowda won critical support from the 14 parties comprising his United Front coalition, which said they'd rather face elections than dump their leader, newspapers reported Thursday.

Congress withdrew support from the coalition Sunday, accusing the government of economic drift, breakdown of law and order and supporting the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

Kesari came under increasing criticism in his own party for not consulting them before withdrawing support from the Front. Privately, many of them have been demanding that Kesari explain how he intends to win enough allies to form a government.

Kesari initially said Congress must from the next government, but he later softened his demands, saying that his problem was with Gowda's leadership, not with the United Front.

Parliament will convene April 11 for a confidence vote in Gowda, who is in office barely 10 months. To survive, he needs the support of Congress.

No party, including Congress, has enough seats for a majority in the 545-member lower house of Parliament. The United Front and the Congress need each other to keep out their common foe, the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Congress Party chief Sitaram Kesari has demanded Gowda's resignation.

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two problems: No other party is willing to support their bid for power; none of them wants to face elections if the government falls.

Capitalising on this fear, the Front has said it will ask President Shankar Dayal Sharma to call general elections if Gowda falls.

The expense of another election and Congress' recent record of declining electoral performances have prompted Congress leaders search for face-saving alternatives. Several have suggested a joint committee to break the deadlock.

Industrial groups are lobbying for an end to the crisis that is threatening investment and growth. Still pending is the federal budget introduced February 28, calling for radical cuts in personal and corporate taxes.

Israel seeks to block UNGA on ME

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 3: Israel sought Wednesday to block another UN General Assembly session on the Middle East, saying such a meeting would lead to "further polarisation" between the Jewish state and its Arab neighbours, reports AP.

The Arabs have asked for a special session of the 185-member body in the wake of a second US veto of a Security Council resolution criticising Israel for plans to construct a Jewish neighbourhood in east Jerusalem.

That decision and the Arab reaction to it have produced a crisis in the Middle East peace process.

"We definitely feel that another session can only prove sterile," acting Israeli Ambassador David Peleg told reporters.

"Not only would an emergency special session not advance mutual understanding but it would become a further polarisation."

Indo-Pak FMs to meet in New Delhi

ISLAMABAD, Apr 3: The Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and India will meet in New Delhi at the end of this week's Non-Aligned Movement conference in the Indian capital, a Pakistani foreign office spokesman said today, reports AFP.

The meeting at the end of the movement's five-day conference, which begins Friday, was proposed by Indian Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral in an invitation to his Pakistani counterpart Gohar Ayub Khan, he said.

"On our side we are ready to discuss all issues," the spokesman told a press briefing, adding that Pakistan did not know what effect the current political uncertainty in India would have on the meeting.

The Indian government led by Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda has been plunged into a crisis after the sudden withdrawal of support by the Congress (I) Party last week.

Pakistan and India resumed bilateral talks a week ago after more than three years in a bid to reduce mutual animosity marked by three wars between them since their independence in 1947.

Their foreign secretaries met in New Delhi March 28-31 following conciliatory exchanges between Gowda and Pakistan's new Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

A joint statement after the meeting said the Foreign Secretaries would continue their discussions in Islamabad on dates to be mutually decided.

Pakistan is keen to see progress towards a solution to the dispute with India over Kashmir, saying it is the "core" issue and root cause of tension blocking economic, trade and cultural contacts between the two states.

The aim of the Foreign Secretary level talks is to prepare ground for a "meaningful" prime ministerial meeting, the spokesman said.

Fire engulfs Vietnam's vast forest land

HANOI, Apr 3: At least 30 hectares (75 acres) of Vietnam's already dwindling forest land have been destroyed by a raging fire in southern Vietnam, a government official said Thursday, reports AP.

More than 300 firefighters, volunteers, and local officials have been battling the fire, which was still burning Thursday but had been brought under control.

The fire was close to the farming community of Ca Mau near in the Vietnam's southern-most province.

A farmer was burning an area of his cropfield and thought he had put the fire out and left," said Le Thanh Phong chairman of Ca Mau's People's Committee.

Smoldering embers from the farmer's field rekindled the fire which spread to surrounding forest land.

"Firefighters dug large ditches to enclose the fire," Phong said.

Most of the destroyed trees belonged to a local timber farm. Woodlands are becoming a scarce, but valuable resource as

uncontrolled and illegal logging has wiped out many forests. Vietnam is determined to protect forests, but has had little success in promoting environmental education among farmers and loggers.

The trees destroyed in the latest forest fire were at least 15-year-old cajuputs, a tree popular for its durable wood used in construction.

Iraq's fresh appeal to UNSC to lift sanctions

BAGHDAD, Apr 3: Iraq appealed again to the UN Security Council Wednesday to lift the sanctions against it, on the eve of a visit here by the head of the UN Special Commission on Disarming the Country (UNSCOM), reports AFP.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Said al-Sahhaf said in a message to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan: "The embargo was imposed and is kept in place to serve US policy goals, not any legal consideration."



Iraqi women hold on Wednesday flour rations bought at give-away prices from a government agent. Iraqis began receiving extra flour rations after the government released its strategic stock with the arrival of the first wheat shipments under the oil-for-food deal with the United Nations.

Jordanian soldier to get 'fair trial' for killing 7 Israeli schoolgirls

AMMAN, Apr 3: Jordan vowed Wednesday that the Jordanian soldier who massacred seven Israeli schoolgirls in the north last month would get a "fair trial", reports AFP.

A military spokesman in Amman said Ahmad Moussa Dakamseh "will have a public and fair trial".

The statement was a reaction to a protest from the president of the country's Bar Association, Hussein Majalli who said Dakamseh had been "subjected to such pressure (during his interrogation) that his confession cannot be used against him."

Majalli also protested against the authorities' refusal to allow him any contract with the presumed killer.

The Jordanian military prosecutor agreed on March 27 to let a lawyer represent the soldier, who is accused of opening fire on March 13 in the border town of Bakura on a party of Israeli schoolgirls on a sightseeing trip.

Seven girls were killed and five others and a teacher were injured in the attack.

Argentina seeks formal ties with NATO

WASHINGTON, Apr 3: Argentina is seeking a formal association with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to "improve its participation in world peacekeeping efforts, the country's foreign minister said Wednesday, reports AP.

Foreign Minister Guido di Tella, said he had discussed the NATO issue with Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright in order to "tune up" relations between the two countries before President Clinton's Oct 15-16 visit to Buenos Aires. Di Tella met Albright Tuesday night.

"Argentina and NATO members have a common approach to world problems," Di Tella said. "We have just started a complex process which will require long negotiations."

Lankan police recover 220 illegal guns

COLOMBO, Apr 3: Sri Lankan police have recovered more than 220 illegal guns since an amnesty to surrender unlicensed firearms ended last month, a newspaper said today, quoting police officials, reports Reuter.

The state-owned observer said the operation was suspended ahead of last month's local government elections, but was resumed later, netting 228 different kinds of guns from across the island.

Deputy inspector-general of the police, crime branch, Mohammed Nizam, told Reuters last month that 1,500 illegal weapons were handed in to police during the amnesty that ended on March 15.

The government is formulating new laws under the country's emergency regulations to crack down on users, mostly politicians and political activists, of illegal firearms.

Off the Record Most US scientists do not believe in god!

LONDON: Most US scientists do not believe in a god, but 40 per cent do — the same percentage as did in 1916, researchers reported on Wednesday, says Reuter.

The findings show that better and more widespread education has not destroyed the need to believe, according to Edward Larson, a historian at the University of Georgia and a member of Seattle's Discovery Institute and co-author Larry Witham of Burtonsville, Maryland.

In 1916, researcher James Leuba shocked the nation with his survey that found only 40 per cent of scientists believed in a supreme being. He predicted such ungodliness would spread as education improved.

To test that belief, we replicated Leuba's survey as exactly as possible," Larson and Witham wrote in a commentary for the science journal Nature.

The result, about 40 per cent of scientists still believe in a personal god and an afterlife. In both surveys, roughly 45 per cent disbelieved and 15 per cent were doubters (agnostic).

They surveyed 1,000 randomly chosen scientists listed in the reference book "American Men and Women of Science," a later version of the 1910 work Leuba used.

Then we asked whether they believed in a god who would answer prayers, whether they believed in human immortality and whether they wished for an afterlife of some sort.

"Today, even more than in 1916, most scientists have no use for god or an afterlife," they found.

"But to the extent that both surveys are accurate readings, traditional western theism has not lost its place among US scientists, despite their intellectual preoccupation with material reality," they wrote. "Americans will doubtless be pleased to know that as many as 40 per cent of scientists agree with them about god and an afterlife," there were notable differences among the disciplines.

The 1996 survey showed that mathematicians are most inclined to believe in god (44.6 per cent), they wrote.

Scientists identify natural brain chemicals

NEW YORK: Scientists have identified natural brain chemicals that act like morphine, possibly providing a lead to developing new painkillers and therapies for drug abuse, reports AP.

Morphine and its chemical cousin heroin act by binding to specific sites in the brain called mu receptors. The new work found two brain chemicals that also bind to these sites, and that block pain in mice.

The work is reported in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature by scientists led by James Zadina of Tulane University and the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in New Orleans.

The researchers named the newfound substances endomorphin-1 and endomorphin-2.

Since the two newfound substances zero in on the mu receptor while ignoring other, similar receptors, they may have fewer side effects than morphine, Zadina said.

Current medical therapies for heroin addiction, like methadone, are aimed at the mu receptor, Zadina said. So the newfound substances may provide a lead to better ones, he said.



Singaporean designer, Yeo Chung Sun shows the new Ericsson GF 788 cellular phone which he designed using Ericsson latest technology on Thursday. The cellular phone weighing 135 gram and 10 centimeters thick will be marketed next week with the price ranging from US\$857 to US\$1,000 dollars each. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

James Baker to visit Western Sahara: Former Secretary of State James Baker, the newly designated special UN envoy on Western Sahara, said Wednesday he will travel soon to North Africa to explore ways of resolving the decades-old territorial dispute, AP reports from United Nations.

Elephants kill 3 in Indonesia: Elephants rampaging through cultivated land in the Indonesian province of Lampung have killed three people, the official Antara News Agency reported yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

3 hurt as quake rocks Japan: Three people were injured when an earthquake measuring 5.5 on the Richter Scale rocked Japan's southern island of Kyushu early yesterday, police said, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

US secret service chief resigns: The head of the secret service, which protects the president and US diplomats, has resigned, the White House said Wednesday, AFP reports from Washington.

Journalist found dead in Russia: The body of a journalist for a major Russian newspaper was found near train tracks in the Tver region northwest of Moscow, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported Wednesday, citing sources in the local prosecutor's office, AP reports from Moscow.

Frenchman killed in Cambodia: A Frenchman was shot to death in front of the popular restaurant he owned, officials said Thursday, AP reports from Phnom Penh.

Noted Japanese producer Tanaka dies: Tomoyuki Tanaka, a prolific movie producer who shaped Japan's post-Hiroshima nightmare into a fearsome giant lizard that the world came to know as Godzilla, has died. He was 86, AP reports from Tokyo.

Israel's settlement expansion plan may outrage PA further

JELAZOUN, West Bank, Apr 3: Israel's decision to approve expansion of Jewish settlements appears likely to further outrage Palestinians already angry about Israeli construction in disputed east Jerusalem, reports AP.

Israel acknowledged the settlement plans on Wednesday, adding to tensions on a day of new violence and anger between Israelis and Palestinians.

A firebomb smashed into an Israeli army truck in the West Bank, sending it tumbling down a slope near the Jelazoun refugee camp and injuring 13 soldiers. In a nearby village, Israeli motorists beat a Palestinian they accused of stoning their car.

The United States stepped up its attempts at mediation Wednesday, with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright speaking twice by telephone with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Marwan Kanafani, a spokesman for the Palestinian leader, said the United States was trying to arrange an American-Israeli-Palestinian meeting, but he refused to give any other details. Israeli news media said the United States was working to set up a three-way summit.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accepted president Clinton's request that he come to Washington next

week to discuss the crisis, prompted by Israel's decision to break ground on a new neighbourhood in east Jerusalem last month.

At least eight Palestinians and Israelis have died in violence since then.

Netanyahu will tell Clinton that Arafat must commit to stopping Palestinian violence and terrorism before peace talks can resume, the Israeli ambassador to the United States said in Washington.

If Arafat agrees, Israel is willing to speed up previously scheduled talks on a permanent peace agreement between the two sides, Israeli Ambassador Elahu Ben-Elissar said.

Labours increase commanding lead over Tories

LONDON, Apr 3: Britain's opposition Labour Party has increased its commanding lead over the ruling Conservatives ahead of the May 1 general election, according to an opinion poll in today's edition of The Times newspaper, reports Reuter.

The mori poll gives Labour 55 per cent support, up five points from a week ago, with the Conservatives on 28 per cent down one point, and the minority Centrist Liberal Democrats on 11 per cent, down three points.

The poll appeared to undermine Conservative hopes that they had started to narrow Labour's lead as the election approaches, suggesting that the ruling party had been damaged by president reports of alleged sex and money scandals.

Mori interviewed 1,118 adults at 84 sampling points on a face-to-face basis on Tuesday.

Uncertainty prevails over Dhahran bomb suspect case

NEW YORK, Apr 3: The Clinton administration does not appear to have enough evidence to prove that a Saudi arrested in Canada played a key role in a bombing last year that killed 19 Americans in Saudi Arabia, The New York Times reported, reports AP.

The administration is even uncertain whether there is enough evidence to make it worthwhile to bring the man, Hani Abdel Rahim al-Sayegh, 28, to the United States, the Times reported Thursday, quoting senior officials it did not identify.

The uncertainty is complicating the US legal strategy about whether to allow the Canadian government to deport him to the United States, either as a material witness or a suspect in the bombing, Canadian officials told the Times that their government has rebuffed a

request by the FBI to interview Sayegh.

Canada will make a decision only after it decides whether Sayegh should be deported as a threat to national security.

"American authorities expressed a desire to interview Mr. Sayegh and this matter is currently being discussed," Gaetan Blais, spokesman for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, said. "But you also have to understand that his case is still before the court and I would suggest that the final decision will be made after the court proceedings are completed."

A federal judge in Ottawa is to begin hearings on Sayegh's deportation on April 28. Even if Canada allows the United States to have access to Sayegh, he is under no legal obligation to agree to be questioned by American authorities.



US President Bill Clinton (R) emphasises a point as California school teacher Carmen Cortez (L) looks on during a round table discussion of several CEOs of high tech US industries and California educators in Washington, DC on Wednesday. The event is part of Clinton's plan for standardised testing in reading and mathematics for US school children. — AFP/UNB photo

US puts tight restrictions on commercial shark fishing

WASHINGTON, Apr 3: The US government put tight restrictions Wednesday on commercial and recreational shark fishing, saying that overfishing is putting the survival of some species into jeopardy, reports AP.

"Atlantic shark populations are at a precarious state and fishing pressure needs to be reduced," said Rebecca Lent, a senior official of the National Marine Fisheries Service, which imposed the new fishing quotas.

The restrictions go into effect immediately in waters stretching from the North Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico. Most shark are found in southern waters from the Carolinas to Louisiana.

The agency, in a move that had been expected among fishermen and environmentalists, directed that commercial fishermen cut in half their annual

catch of large coastal shark to no more than 1,275 metric tons a year.

It also placed tighter limits on how many shark recreational fishermen can catch, imposed new limits on fishing for small coastal sharks and banned all fishing for five species of shark considered particularly vulnerable, including the white shark made famous in movies.

The move was applauded by conservation groups, although environmentalists said a long-range shark management plan will be needed if the fish — in great demand by both commercial and recreational fishermen — are to be protected.

"Unfortunately the serious depletion of these magnificent but vulnerable fish will take decades to repair," said Sonja Fordham, a shark specialist at the private Centre for Marine Conservation. She said the new restrictions, which go into ef-

fect immediately, are long overdue.

All variety of sharks — there are some 400 species — have been a hot commodity for both commercial and recreational fishermen since the 1980s with millions of pounds hauled in annually for restaurants as well as trophy cases.

Their carcasses are prized not only for their meat, but also fins, teeth and various parts that are used as a lubricant or in cosmetics and vitamins.

The large coastal sharks have been such a popular target of commercial fishermen that some species have declined by as much as 80 per cent, according to conservationists. Although a good count of the shark population has been hard to come by.

The agency also said it would convene a panel of scientists, fishermen and environmentalists to develop a long-term shark management plan.