

Indian media differ on how to solve political crisis

NEW DELHI, Apr 12: The Indian media savaged its "small time" politicians today in the aftermath of Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's fall from power but failed to agree on how to solve the country's political crisis, reports AFP.

Some newspapers called for new elections, others for a new coalition, but all shared the sense of outrage over the events leading up to the United Front coalition's defeat in Friday's confidence vote.

The Pioneer daily led the call for fresh polls under the headline: "Needed: A moral mandate."

It argued the hung Lok Sabha was "a debilitated house" and said that a new coalition would "be doused with the stench of illegitimacy," and not survive long.

More majority does not constitute a mandate," it said, adding that the Indian president should dissolve the house.

Its call for a "total renewal" of India's political morality to get rid of "the politics of conspiracies, of backroom wheels and deals, of stacks of currency notes" was taken up by several other papers.

The Tribune said "the people will never forgive the major political players for having

pushed them into the throes of a parliamentary and constitutional crisis," arguing the country was plagued by "small time operators and big-sized manipulators."

It blamed the Congress Party for the debacle for its withdrawal of parliamentary support from the United Front, saying the decision had been born of "petty calculations."

The Indian Express went further, saying: "Never in the history of India's grand old party has there been an instance of such crass, unthinking irresponsibility."

It bemoaned "the inability of the Indian politician to come to terms with the kind of give-and-take and sharing of responsibility coalitions necessitate."

While the Hindustan Times said "The nation would dearly hope that the current Lok Sabha would not be dissolved, paving the way for another general election in the coming months."

The Express was non-committal.

Gowda did better than expected

AP adds: Not much was expected of India's new government when it took office 10

months ago. An impromptu and motley coalition led by an uninspiring ex-farmer, it was predicted to be short-lived and achieve little.

In the end, though, it left a larger mark than many people thought it would. Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda, virtually unknown nationally before he was picked as the compromise leader of a 13-party alliance, resigned Friday after losing a confidence vote in Parliament.

But that had more to do with power politics than the success or failure of the government.

Gowda was sworn in June 1, 1996 after a general election left the political scene fractured and in disarray.

Gowda's United Front alliance had been patched together a few days earlier from an assortment of parties representing communists, free traders, low-caste Hindus and regional parties.

Its coming to office in itself was a dramatic change for India. It indicated a shift in power from monolithic national parties to smaller regional parties, from the wealthy and middle classes to the poor, from upper-caste Hindus to the lower castes who traditionally have been disenfranchised.

Although it floundered for

months, the government took crucial decisions on nuclear policy, foreign affairs and the economy.

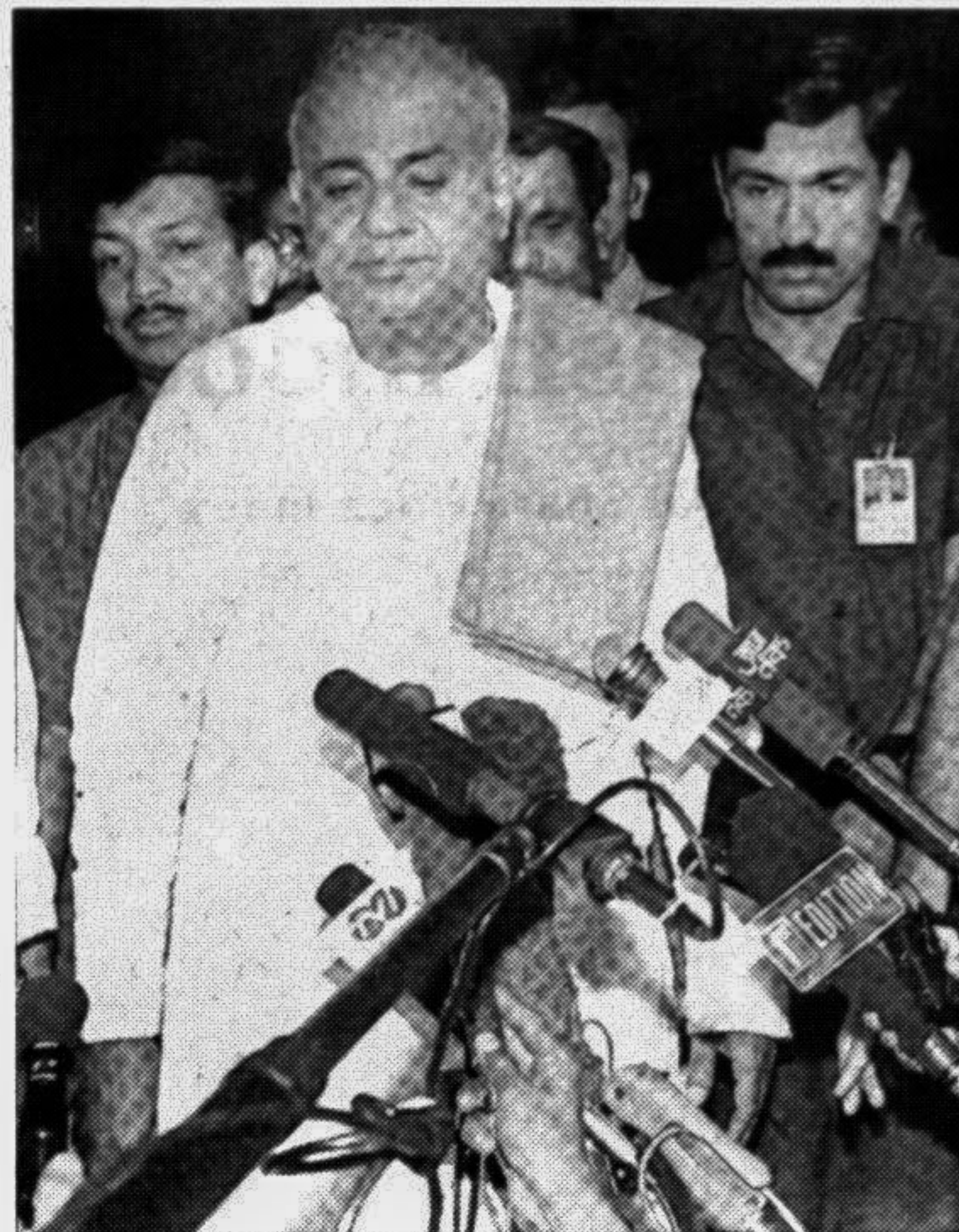
Gowda himself was a lack-luster leader. People who dealt with him said he was indecisive. He had trouble grasping complicated issues, and relied heavily on his experts. A poor public speaker, he was renowned for falling asleep during functions.

But he chose a strong and practiced Foreign Minister, Inder Kumar Gujral, a 78-year-old veteran whose soft-spoken manner belied toughness.

Gujral defied world opinion by blocking a consensus on a nuclear test ban treaty because it did not require those countries that already have atomic weapons to disarm them.

Under Gujral, India also repaired ties with its distrustful smaller neighbours. It signed a 30-year water treaty with Bangladesh, resolving a problem that had bedeviled relations for years.

And it resumed a dialogue that had been moribund for three years with its hostile neighbour, Pakistan. Last week, Gujral was the first Indian foreign minister to meet his Pakistani counterpart in seven years.



Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda faces the media after handing in his resignation to President Shankar Dayal Sharma Saturday in New Delhi following the defeat of his United Front coalition government in a parliamentary vote of confidence. — AFP/UNB photo

Netanyahu considering unity govt with Labour Party

JERUSALEM, Apr 12: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may bring the dovish opposition Labour Party into his government as a way to keep his right-wing coalition partners from sinking the peace process, reports AP.

Speaking from Rome, the prime minister told Israeli broadcasters Friday that he is seeking "national consensus" ahead of negotiations on a permanent peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu hinted that his current coalition government, made up mostly of small right-wing and religious parties, may not give him the support he needs to reach a peace settlement. He said he would make a decision within days.

"We are talking about the most fateful negotiations in the history of the state," he told Channel 2. "Though it may have public support, it doesn't mean that it will gain support in the Knesset (parliament), and that question is what's guiding me."

Netanyahu said he already spoke with his Cabinet minis-

ters about a government with Labour, which oversaw the first Israeli-Palestinian peace accords when it was in power in the early 1990s.

In the West Bank town of Hebron, Yasser Arafat's security forces struggled Friday to keep Palestinian rioters away from Israeli troops, indicating that they were heading a US-backed effort to resume security cooperation between the two sides. Two Palestinians and three Israeli soldiers were injured.

Palestinians broke off joint security efforts last month to protest Israeli construction on a Jewish neighbourhood in disputed east Jerusalem, which Palestinians want as a capital for a future state. Israeli home-building there touched off almost daily riots in the West Bank.

Israeli army radio reported that US peace envoy Dennis Ross was planning to return to the region next week to help restore Israeli-Palestinian relations before talks on a final settlement start in May.

It was not known if Labour

would agree to join Netanyahu's coalition.

"If he goes with peace, we will support him, but he must stop taking unilateral decisions," said Yossi Belin, a candidate for Labour Party leader and an architect of the peace accords.

"He is representing a minority and he is not representing the will of the vast majority of Israelis who support Oslo (the peace accord) with all its difficulties,"

Reuter adds from Rabat: King Hassan of Morocco, who is the president at the Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Committee, called on the Muslim world on Friday to give financial support to Jerusalem and its Palestinians citizens.

In a statement issued by the official MAP news agency, the king called for solidarity with this holy city.

He said political efforts of Islamic countries should necessarily be accompanied by a material and financial effort to preserve Jerusalem's identity, defend its integrity and protect its monuments.

Iranians protest outside German embassy in Tehran

TEHRAN, Apr 12: Iranians marched by the thousands to the German Embassy on Friday chanting "Death to fascist Germany," and Iran's president vowed that a Berlin judge's conclusion that Tehran was behind the assassination of dissidents "will not remain unanswered," reports AP.

In a sign of the deepening rift between Iran and the West, all European Union nations except Greece recalled their ambassadors, and Iran recalled its ambassador to Germany. Iran also demanded an official German explanation of the verdict.

German judges convicted four men Thursday in the September 1992 assassination of Iranian-Kurdish leader Sadig Sarafkandi and three colleagues. They said Iranian leaders were behind the killings. Iran has denied involvement.

The United States praised the decision and asked European government to join the US boycott of Iran. That appeared unlikely.

Canada recalled its ambassador to Iran on Friday. Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said his government was carefully reviewing the verdict and has been consulting with the European Union.

"It is not acceptable that Iran or any other country attack an opponent on foreign soil," Axworthy said in a statement.

The French Foreign Ministry spokesman, Jacques

Rummelhardt, said an embargo "doesn't seem the appropriate disposition."

And in Moscow, Russian President Boris Yeltsin — who is eager for more trade with Iran — welcomed Iran's parliament chairman and said relations between the countries would "develop and strengthen further."

Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani told thousands of Iranians gathered at Tehran University for Friday prayers that "the verdict has broken the hearts of millions of Iranians and world Muslims, but it will not be forgotten so easily and will not remain unanswered."

German prosecutors contended that Rafsanjani and Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, ordered the 1992 assassinations.

Some protesters beat their chests, a sign of grief among Iran's overwhelmingly Shiite Muslims, while others recited verses from the Quran, Islam's holy book.

They said they "will do what we have not done yet" to Germany if it did not apologise to the Iranian government by Monday.

Nevertheless, Iranian police seemed to be trying to prevent the protest from getting out of hand. Riot police stood four deep in front of the embassy and reinforcements were used in.

Shroud of Turin rescued from burning cathedral in Italy

TURIN, Italy, Apr 12: Firefighters rescued the Shroud of Turin from a burning cathedral early Saturday, salvaging the linen revered by some Christians as the burial cloth of Jesus Christ, reports AP.

Dozens of Turin residents applauded firefighters as they took the silver-and-glass reliquary holding the linen out of the Duomo in downtown Turin, the Italian news agency ANSA reported. Others wept at the sight of the badly damaged cathedral dome.

"The linen is intact. It's a miracle," said Turin Archbishop Giovanni Saldarini, who keeps the shroud on behalf of the pope and the Vatican.

To reach the reliquary, firefighter Mario Trematore used a large hammer to break through four layers of bulletproof glass. Other firefighters poured water on the reliquary to keep it cool during his 15-minute effort.

He collapsed as he rushed outside.

"God gave me the strength to break the glass," he said.

About 200 firefighters took more than four hours to extin-

guish the fire.

The cause of the fire, which broke out late Friday night, was unknown. Police said there were no injuries.

The Italian television network RAI reported that the fire apparently started in the cathedral's 314-year-old wooden dome, which was scaffolded for restoration work.

The blaze also reached the upper floor of the historic Royal Palace neighbouring the cathedral. A palace party attended by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Italian officials had ended shortly before the fire started.

"We smelled smoke, and then we saw the flames raging from the dome," said Giuseppe Ivano, a palace custodian.

There was extensive damage inside the cathedral and the palace, which is home to antique furniture and valuable paintings. But authorities gave no details about what may have been destroyed.

"The situation inside the cathedral is dramatic," said a police officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

BRIEFLY

Over 200 aftershocks rock China: More than 200 aftershocks have rocked northwest China in the 20 hours since it was struck by a strong earthquake measuring 6.6 on the Richter Scale local officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

"Since the big earthquake Friday, we have been hit with more than 200 aftershocks and the most serious registered 5.0 on the Richter Scale, said an official charged with emergency rescue in remote Jiashi county in northwest Xinjiang. "The death toll still stands at nine, but we expect that to rise and we fear further shocks," he told AFP by telephone.

Hanoi appoints 1st ambassador to US: Vietnam has appointed Le Van Bang as Hanoi's first Ambassador to the United States and he will take up his post as soon as his nomination is accepted by the United States, a ministry spokesman said yesterday. AFP report from Hanoi.

"We are waiting to hear from the American side. As soon as he is accepted he will be able to take up his post," a spokesman from Vietnam's Foreign Ministry said. The official did not specify a date when Bang would arrive in Washington, neither did he say whether it would coincide with the day on which US Ambassador designate Douglas "Pete" Peterson will arrive in Hanoi.

Huge heroin seized in Cambodia: Anti-drug police have arrested a high-ranking military officer's wife with 4.4 kilograms (9.7 pounds) of heroin worth an estimated 1.2 million dollars, a senior police official said Saturday. AP reports from Phnom Penh.

The woman, whom police declined to identify, was arrested Friday night after police found the heroin in her home, said Heng Pao, chief of the municipal anti-drug police. He added that police had been investigating her for one year. The woman reported that she got the heroin from a military general who had long been involved in the drug business," Heng Pao said.

6 robbers executed in China: China has executed six highway robbers after a rare public rally in the capital, the Beijing Daily reported yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

Organised by the Beijing No. 1 intermediate people's court in the suburb of Tongxian, the rally detailed the crimes of the six — including the holding up of more than 30 cars and the murder of two drivers. They were then driven to Tongxian's public execution ground and shot with a bullet in the back of the head, the newspaper said.

Fire claims 4 in Philippines: A mother and her three children were killed in a fire which hit their house in Manila at dawn yesterday, Xinhua reports from Manila.

The fire broke out at the house of the victims in Tahanan village, Manila, at 01:55 (GMT 12:00 Friday), and the four, who were trapped inside their houses, were believed to have died from suffocation, investigators said. The mother was identified as Jing Tala and her children, were Marly, Mylene and Einstein.

15,000 firearms melted down in China: More than 15,000 firearms have been melted down at Beijing's Capital Iron and Steel Complex as part of the nation's drive to crack down on ownership of illegal weapons and other crimes, AP reports from Beijing.

Workers looked on as police dumped the guns into a huge melting pot at the steel factory, the state-run newspaper China Daily reported Saturday.

"Destroying these guns ... marks the beginning of an even more tightened control on firearms," it quoted Yu Hongyuan, a police official, as saying.

Uprising in Canadian jail: Inmates set fires and trashed their cellblock during a six-hour riot at a medium-security prison, AP reports from Kingston.

The uprising ended quietly Friday, and there were no reports of injuries. "Staff didn't have to use force," said Therese Gascon, spokeswoman for Collins Bay prison. The uprising involving 120 inmates began in the gym area of the medium security prison Friday afternoon after prisoners smashed through a concrete wall to get into an office. They trashed a washroom and set fires.

NLD MP jailed for 4 years in Myanmar

BANGKOK, Apr 12: An elected MP of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) has been sentenced to four years in prison for alleged medical malpractice, a senior party official said today, reports AP.

Doctor Than Aung, an MP for a Yangon township, was sentenced Friday after trial for running an unlicensed clinic and causing the death of a patient through negligence. He has been sent to the capital's notorious Insein prison.

Speaking by telephone from Yangon, NLD joint vice-chairman Tin Oo said the negligence charge was "fabricated" and noted that Aung had been a practising doctor for 25 years.

UN slams killing of street children in Colombia

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 12: The United Nations on Friday condemned the killing of street children in Colombia and the failure of authorities to stop the trafficking of women for prostitution in the Portuguese colony of Macao, reports AP.

The UN Human Rights Committee reports also criticised Lebanon for allowing Syrian security services to operate without fear of punishment in Lebanese territory.

The 18-member panel urged Colombian authorities to take steps against what it called a "high level" of political and criminal violence and "gross and massive human rights violations" in that country.

PEN Award '97 announced

NEW YORK, Apr 12: A woman who defeated a corporation's attempt to silence her, a jailed Nigerian journalist and Turkey's only woman publishing director were among the winners of the 1997 PEN Awards, reports AP.

The PEN American Centre announced Friday that Nancy Hsu Fleming, who fought a corporation over her right to speak out against possibly contaminated groundwater in her Rhode Island community, won the PEN/ Newman's Own First Amendment award.

"I am hopeful that this award will send a message to the public to persevere in public discourse and to fight any attempts to stifle public participation," Fleming said in a statement.

US fails to convince UNSC to condemn Iraqi air violations

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 12: In a diplomatic setback, the United States failed to convince fellow Security Council members that Iraq violated UN sanctions by flying a planeload of Muslim pilgrims to Saudi Arabia, reports AP.

The council will meet again Monday to discuss the incident, which took place Wednesday. But China steadfastly opposed any statement condemning Iraq for the Wednesday flight.

US Ambassador Bill Richardson insisted Friday that the United States was "making progress." But France and Russia also appeared unenthusiastic about making an issue of the flight. Council statements must be adopted unanimously.

"It is our very strong view that an incident like this should not be repeated," Richardson said. "We remain behind the view that this was a violation."

But he noted that there "are other points of view that are being taken into account."

"We want to make sure that incidents like this are not repeated again, and I think that's the view of a lot of members of the council," he added.

Asked whether the council had assurances that there would not be further flights before Monday, Richardson replied, "I wouldn't count on it."

The Iraqi Airways jet landed Wednesday without incident in Jeddah with 104 Islamic pilgrims. The Saudi interior minister said two fighter jets were sent to intercept the Iraqi plane but allowed it to proceed once it became clear the passengers were making a hajj — the pilgrimage to the Saudi cities of Makkah and Medina.

Iraq must give up arms for lifting UN sanctions

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 12: Iraq must abandon "once and for all" any plans to keep or acquire weapons of mass destruction if it expects to convince the United Nations that it has met the conditions for the lifting of sanctions, the chief UN weapons inspector said Friday, reports AP.

In a report to the Security Council Rolf Ekeus said his inspectors were still not ready to certify that Iraq has complied with the terms of sanctions imposed in 1995 after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

The council refuses to lift the sanctions until UN inspectors are convinced that Iraq has destroyed all such weapons and provided a full accounting.

the language of the resolution cited by the Americans was not as clearcut as Washington maintains.

The resolution, approved after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, declares that UN member states "shall deny permission to any aircraft to take off from its territory" to or from Iraq.

It also requires countries to deny permission for any plane to overfly its territory en route to Iraq. Several diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that under a strict interpretation, Saudi Arabia violated the resolution by allowing the Iraqi plane to return to Baghdad.

But Saudi Arabia is a close ally of the United States, and it was unlikely Washington would go along with any language critical of the kingdom.

Last Wednesday, Richardson said the United States would insist on strong council condemnation of Iraq.

But after two days of consultations, the Americans circulated a mildly worded draft statement Friday, in which the council would have simply noted the flight "with concern."

The statement would have also insisted that member states seek council permission for any more flights between their territories and Iraq. But even that failed to win unanimous approval.



Muslim Palestinians attend the Jumma prayers at Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa) on Friday where the Israeli government started building a new settlement. The building project triggered violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories leaving 8 Palestinians (including three bombers) and 3 Israelis dead and hundreds of injured. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Secret of Gingrich's family assets

WASHINGTON: Even if US House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich wanted to use his own money to pay a 300,000 dollars penalty for ethics violations, the state of his current assets would make it difficult. Most of the holdings are in his wife's name, reports AP.

And that could be a problem, since Marianne Gingrich is known to be cool to payment from the family's personal funds. Many of the couple's assets, including a new home in Cobb County, Georgia were transferred to Mrs Gingrich or placed in her name. Those decisions were made long before the House ethics committee came up with the penalty idea last year.

Since such a penalty had never been imposed before, there was no way the speaker could have anticipated the sanction and maneuvered to shield his money.

Gingrich and a small group of advisers have been discussing several options for paying the penalty, including: personal funds, using his campaign account, asking House Republicans to chip in from their campaign accounts, using a legal defense fund, or a combination of these.

Breech delivery

PITTSBURGH: A woman in labour, waiting at home for her husband to take her to the hospital, delivered the baby herself after her contractions progressed quickly and she realized it was a breech delivery, reports AP.

The details of Wednesday's birth of a healthy boy were a little sketchy for Kim Rowe, whose pregnancy had been uneventful for the rest of its 8 and half months.

When her contractions took on 20-minute intervals, she called her husband, Steve. As he drove to their house in Wexford from his office 8 miles (13 kilometers) away, the contractions speeded up.

Rowe, 35, was in her bathroom. She said she reached down and felt a tiny leg. She knew it was too late to do anything but push.

"I couldn't get to the phone," she said Thursday. "We live on a private road, so I wasn't sure an ambulance could even find me," she said.

Suharto warns against violence ahead of polls

JAKARTA, Apr 12: Indonesian President Suharto today warned the country to guard against rumors which could spark unrest following a wave of mass violence ahead of general elections here, reports AP.

"I always call on people and religious communities to control themselves when hearing rumors which could divide the unity of our nation," Suharto said in the Lampong province in southern Sumatra.

The president, speaking at a Hindu celebration in Lampong, said the rumors had been "spread on purpose to incite suspicion amongst us," the state-run Antara news agency said.

Suharto did not elaborate. Supporters of the Muslim led United Development Party (PPP) and the ruling Golkar party have clashed in at least five towns in densely populated central Java province over the last three weeks, leaving a trail of injured people and destruction.

In the latest violence on Wednesday, at least 12 people

were injured in clashes between supporters of the two parties in Wonosobo district. PPP executives there said.

Central Java police Tuesday questioned a popular Ulema — or Muslim religious leader — Affudin Musyitari, who has been accused of inciting unrest in the province's town of Pekalongan.

Central Java's chief police detective, Colonel Ansyad Mbal, said Mustari may be arrested on charges of allegedly inciting unrest and "insulting a certain segment of the society."

The country's three official political parties — Golkar, PPP and the Indonesian Democracy Party — are vying for 425 parliamentary seats in the May 29 general elections.

Golkar has been widely criticised for using government facilities and officials to gain support in general elections.

The country's six million civil servants are ordered to vote for Golkar, with pressure also applied on their wives, husbands and children to vote for the ruling party.