

5,000 newly naturalised to lose US citizenship

WASHINGTON, May 24: The US government will move to strip the citizenship of nearly 5,000 people who were wrongly naturalised during last year's citizenship rush, immigration officials said Friday, reports AP.

The Immigration and Naturalisation Service has been under heavy fire for sloppy citizenship procedures that allowed some 180,000 foreigners to become Americans last year without complete criminal background checks.

An audit whose findings were released to Congress on Friday found that 16,400 of the new citizens had at least one felony arrest.

Arrest or conviction, even for a felony, is not an automatic bar to citizenship. But the audit, which is nearly complete, found 4,946 cases in which a criminal arrest should have resulted in a denial of citizenship or where the applicant misrepresented their criminal history.

Republican Rep Lamar Smith of Texas, chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration who has been a persistent "making good progress" in tracking down those who were wrongly naturalised.

"The big question is, 'Is the INS going to be successful in correcting their mistakes, are they going to be successful in

denaturalising these roughly 5,000 individuals who were wrongly made citizens?" he asked.

Of the 4,946 cases, 296 were convicted felons and 2,507 lied about their criminal history and may have had a felony arrest or conviction that would have disqualified them from citizenship.

Ironically, for the remaining 2,143 individuals, INS will initiate citizenship revocation procedures not because of a past arrest but because the applicants lied when asked if they had ever been arrested. Had they answered honestly, their citizenship wouldn't be in question.

"We believe that we are on firm ground in proceeding on administrative revocations where somebody has factually made a misrepresentation on a felony arrest," said Assistant Attorney General Stephen Colgate.

Administration officials stressed that the improper naturalisations represent a tiny fraction of the 1 million people granted citizenship last year.

Smith had little patience for that argument. "One convicted felon who is given the honour of becoming a citizen is one too many," he said.

"People against whom INS initiates citizenship revocation

will have a right to present a defence," said agency general counsel David Martin. Hearings will be before an immigration examiner. Decisions can be appealed to the INS' Administrative Appeals Branch and then to Federal Court.

INS has come under sustained congressional scrutiny — and is now being probed by the Justice Department's inspector general — because of the Citizenship USA programme begun with great fanfare in 1995.

The programme was billed as a way of clearing growing backlogs of naturalisation applications. But Republicans have accused the White House of hijacking the programme in order to naturalise as many immigrants as possible in time for the 1996 elections.

INS Commissioner Doris Meissner in November imposed a series of safeguards designed to ensure the integrity of the citizenship process. But independent auditors concluded last month that INS still has serious flaws in checking applicants' backgrounds. The auditors also faulted INS for confusing and incomplete implementation of the new rules.

A Justice Department troubleshooter has been dispatched to INS by Attorney General Janet Reno to ensure that the citizenship problems are rectified.



Princess Diana holds a Pakistani child suffering from cancer in her arms, at the launching of a new fund-raising campaign for former cricketer hero Imran Khan's charity cancer hospital in Lahore Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

Di raises \$2 lakh for Imran's cancer hospital

LAHORE, Pakistan, May 24: Princess Diana raised an estimated eight million rupees (about 200,000 dollars) in her two-day campaign for former cricketer hero Imran Khan's charity cancer hospital here, sources here said Friday, reports AFP.

"I am proud to participate in this humanitarian cause," Diana said during a visit to the Shaikat Khanam Memorial Hospital built by the cricketer at a cost of 20 million dollars collected from donations in Pakistan and abroad.

"I have told Imran that I will be available to come and help this project," said Diana who flew in by a special plane on Thursday.

She was accompanied by the cricketer-turned politician's wife Jemima, daughter of British tycoon Sir James Goldsmith, and the couple's six-month-old son Sulaiman.

Diana attended a fund-raising lunch here Thursday with philanthropists, announcing donations worth around four million rupees, hospital sources said.

People thronged again when she visited the hospital Friday, accompanied by Shahbaz Sharif, Chief Minister of Punjab Province.

Shahbaz, younger brother of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, assured full government support at a function where people presented cheques and cash worth another four million rupees, witnesses said.

Russia, Belarus sign 'union' accord

MOSCOW, May 24: Presidents Boris Yeltsin of Russia and Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, with their eyes on NATO's coming expansion, signed a charter Friday on integrating their two countries, reports AFP.

The precise nature of the "union" created by the accord, which was signed in a ceremony broadcast live from the Kremlin, remains to be determined, but the two countries will keep their separate institutions and their sovereignty.

The move has been widely seen as a riposte to NATO's plans to expand eastward into former Soviet satellite states. One of the likely candidates for NATO membership is Poland, which lies on Belarus' western border.

In an allusion to that strategy, Lukashenko said: "Belarus is ready to protect Russia and to protect itself to the west against a potential aggressor, but Russia must help us to support our army."

He said he would leave it to Moscow to deal with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on Belarus' behalf, but stressed that Belarus still wanted guarantees from the Western alliance on security.

Around 30,000 people packed a rally in Minsk, the Belarus capital, to show their support for the fusion.

During the meeting a "resolution" was adopted in which those present called on other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which comprises 12 of the 15 former Soviet republics to follow the example of Russia and Belarus.

The leaders of some parties present appealed to the public to confront those opposed to the union.

AP adds: With kisses and applause in the Kremlin, Boris Yeltsin and the president of Belarus have sealed a deal to create an ill-defined union between Russia and its smaller, authoritarian neighbour.

The union charter, initiated Friday by Yeltsin and Alexander Lukashenko, expands on a treaty concluded by the Slavic nations last month.

The two nations plan to coordinate foreign policy, economic reforms and military activities, create joint energy and transport systems and possibly introduce a common currency and citizenship. A Supreme Council of top leaders from both countries is to outline joint policies.

But the practical effect of the move, which some see as Russia's way of countering NATO's push into Eastern Europe, is less than clear.

BRIEFLY

30 miners feared dead in China: As many as 30 miners are feared to have died in a gas explosion which ripped through a coalmine in inner Mongolia earlier this week, according to a local report seen yesterday, AFP says from Beijing.

The explosion at the mine in Bayintaoah country occurred at 5:40 pm (0740 GMT) on May 19, the Inner Mongolia Daily said. As of Wednesday, some 18 bodies had been recovered, the newspaper said, adding that no survivors had been found. Nearly 10,000 miners died in accidents in China last year.

Chopper crash claims 2 in US: A Marine helicopter on its way to its home base in North Carolina crashed and burst into flames near a school in this Dallas suburb. The two people on board were killed, AP reports from Hutchins.

The Cobra AH-1 crashed Friday afternoon in a wooded area near Wilmer-Hutchins High School in Hutchins, about 10 miles (16 kms) southeast of downtown Dallas. Velve Washburn said the helicopter, which seats two, started making strange noises before it went down.

Strong quake shakes Japan: A strong earthquake estimated at 5.3 on the open-ended Richter scale was detected on the main Japanese island of Honshu yesterday, Hong Kong's Royal Observatory said, Reuters reports from Hong Kong.

The epicentre of the quake, detected at 1:56 am Hong Kong time (1756 GMT), was initially located at about 90 km (55.9 miles) east of the city of Nagoya. The observatory gave no further details.

Algerian forces kill 27 rebels: Twenty-seven armed Islamic extremists in Algeria have been killed in recent days by the security forces, the Algerian security services said Friday, AFP reports from Algiers.

They died in clashes in Algiers, Laghouat in the south and Tissemisil in the southeast, the security services said, ahead of Algeria's first legislative elections since war with Islamic militants flared five years ago.

China, Bahamas establish ties

UNITED NATIONS, May 24: China and the Bahamas established diplomatic relations Friday, the latest victory in China's effort to isolate Taiwan internationally, reports AP.

"The two governments recognised each other, establishing diplomatic relations at the ambassador level effective immediately," said Chen Ranfeng, spokesman for China's mission to the United Nations.

The government of the Bahamas recognised that the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government of China and that Taiwan is a province of China, Chen said.

US Senate okays bill to implement chemical arms ban

WASHINGTON, May 24: The US Senate approved without debate Friday a bill implementing provisions of the global Chemical Weapons Convention, which bans development, production, transfer and stockpiling of all chemical weapons, reports AP.

The Senate ratified the treaty on April 25 and it took effect four days later. Legislation was required to govern inspections by foreigners on US soil.

The implementing legislation was approved on a voice vote.

Clash leaves 4 killed Violence marks last day of Indonesia's polls campaign

JAKARTA, May 24: Four people were killed, scores were injured and dozens of shops and offices destroyed on the last day of Indonesia's violence-marred election campaign, reports said today, says AFP.

However, Jakarta military commander Major General Sutiyoso dismissed the unrest as "small in scale, and spontaneous," Kompas daily reported.

"Security personnel were able to handle it," Sutiyoso said.

Four people died in the east Java towns of Bangli and Pasuruan, the state Antara news agency reported, in violence sparked by a supporter of the United Development Party (PPP) allegedly being beaten by police.

The Kompas Daily said more than a dozen people suffered gunshot wounds after security forces tried to quell around 5,000 angry PPP supporters who ran a mob after midday Friday prayers.

The mob damaged three churches, four banks and several police vehicles before security forces restored order.

In Jakarta, there was violence in a number of areas with shops and offices pelted and tyres burned in the middle of at least three avenues until late Friday.

Many businesses and schools were shut Friday in the Indonesian capital in anticipation of the unrest.

The worst troublespot was in the south Jakarta district of Ciputat, where thousands of people, mostly PPP supporters damaged shops and pelted security personnel.

Police and troops fired warning shots with rubber bullets, and used tear gas and water cannon, one man was shot in the foot and at least seven were arrested, witnesses said.

In the west Java towns of Tangerang and Bekasi, west of Jakarta, thousands of people attacked shops, banks, a government district office, and a Roman Catholic junior high school.

In Cirebon, west Java, and Solo, central Java, angry crowds damaged police property including vehicles and police stations, Antara said.

Mass violence also occurred in several other cities in Java, south Sulawesi and south Kalimantan.

There has been repeated violence in Indonesia during the 27-day campaign period which ended Friday.

There is now a five day "cool off" period before the parliamentary elections on May 29 which President Suharto's ruling Golkar Party is virtually certain to win.

Global move to fight mafia-style crime syndicates to take shape soon

by R. Senthilnathan writes from Vienna

A global move to fight mafia-style crime syndicates will soon take shape in the form of an international treaty under the aegis of the United Nations.

An inter-governmental experts group will be established soon to draw up a treaty and bridge existing differences among countries on ways to deal with the problem, sources said.

The differences vary from the fundamental issue of defining the term "organised crime" to international cooperation against criminals, said Dimitros Vlassis, an official with the Vienna-based U.N. Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division.

A resolution calling for the creation of the experts group has already been prepared and just needs to be adopted by the U.N. General Assembly when it meets later this year, Vlassis said. Given the concern countries have been expressing on the issue in the recent past, the group could be formed before the end of this year, he said.

Poland, which has taken a number of initiatives on global action against organised crime, has already submitted a draft international convention, but other proposals can be expected during the group's meeting, he said.

Action to curb mafia-style crime has been speeded up following widespread concern over the expansion of gang operations across continents. Figures vary, but a senior German police official recently claimed the volume of money organised crime groups dealt with in 1991 was a staggering \$5.6 trillion, almost half of it coming from illicit trafficking in drugs.

Traditionally there have been five major mafia groups. The first is the Chinese and Hong Kong-based Triads which reportedly earns \$200 billion annually through extortion, prostitution, drugs and migrants smuggling, a U.N. report on organised crime says. The liberalised economic zones in the Chinese cities of Fujian and Guangdong provinces are favoured areas where the Triads are investing their profits, it said.

The Yakuza of Japan is the second mafia organisation in Asia. The three remaining groups are the well-known Italian mafiosi, Columbia's Cali cartel and the Russian Vory v Zakonye.

Since the end of the Cold War the Russian syndicates have expanded their activities and established a dominant position in Eastern and Western Europe, controlling prostitution and bringing home an estimated 250,000 stolen cars annually.

There are also crime groups, though not considered to adopt a mafia style of operation, in Africa as well, the report says.

Officials say detecting crime is becoming increasingly difficult as the mafia groups use modern technology to the maximum and forge strategic alliances among themselves. For example U.N.'s crime and drugs division officials claimed Italian mafia men tutored their Russian colleagues on money laundering methods at meetings held in Prague in the Czech Republic and Warsaw in Poland.

A serious imbalance has developed, experts say, because while crime groups are going hi-tech and transcending national borders, crime fighting is still old fashioned and mostly confined within national borders.

Apart from having to reach a definition of organised crime, acceptable to all members, the experts panel would have to settle the issue of extradition. Many countries are willing to extradite people from other countries if they are wanted in connection with crime committed in foreign lands, but are unwilling to extradite their own citizens if wanted in crimes committed abroad.

— India Abroad News Service

Junta denies report 192 NLD members detained so far in Myanmar

BANGKOK, May 24: The number of Myanmar opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) members detained by the military government ahead of a planned party meeting has risen to 192, a senior NLD official said today.

Of the total, about 60 were NLD Members of Parliament elected in the 1990 general election which was not recognised by the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), he told Reuters. The rest were party leaders at township and other levels. The government has denied making any arrests.

"Today we received messages that a total of 192 members have been detained at home or confined at specific places all over the country," said the official by telephone from Yangon.

Despite the detentions, other senior NLD members who managed to reach the party head-



Palestinians shout anti-Israeli slogans during a protest march at Erez crossing point north of Gaza Strip Friday. Some 1,000 demonstrators gathered to protest against the Israeli government settlement policy. — AFP/UNB photo

Albright urges Kabila to broaden his cabinet

WASHINGTON, May 24: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed concern on Friday about events in the Democratic Republic of Congo and urged self-proclaimed President Laurent Kabila to broaden his Cabinet, reports Reuters.

Opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi was excluded from the partial Cabinet announced on Thursday night by Kabila, whose forces captured Kinshasa last weekend to take control of the country formerly known as Zaire.

"We are concerned generally about what is going on in the Congo now," Albright told a news conference.

She called Kabila's Cabinet formation a "worked-in-progress" but stressed "the importance of having a Cabinet and a government that is inclusive of others than just his allies."

Albright said Washington wanted to see "that there is a rule of law, that they are moving towards democratic elections, and that there is reconciliation."

Laurent Kabila's new government, under fire for excluding the country's veteran opposition leader, said on Friday that because they had won the rebel war they had the right to decide the future.

After seven months of bush war to oust ailing ex-president Mobutu Sese Seko, Foreign Minister Bizima Karaha called on his to return home with the money he stowed abroad during his 32 year rule.

"We are not ready to take nonsense from anyone for whatever reason, just to make sure people are happy. Liberty yes, but not revolution first," Karaha told a news conference after Etienne Tshisekedi and his supporters demonstrated against the alliance on Friday. Kabila's troops fired in the air to halt a march on Parliament by several hundred Tshisekedi supporters.

AP says: Congo's new leader has appointed his government — and largely speaking, he's it. Laurent Kabila kept the bulk of power for himself, giving only two posts to followers of a popular opposition leader.

Shouting "Dictator!" several hundred outraged supporters of Etienne Tshisekedi marched through the streets of the capital Friday, denouncing Kabila as no better than the corrupt leader he usurped and demanding that Tshisekedi be made prime minister.

It was an abrupt reversal. Just six days ago, residents were hailing Kabila as Congo's liberator for his ouster of president Mobutu Sese Seko in a nine-month sweep across Africa's third-largest nation.

Sonia takes centre stage in Congress party affairs

NEW DELHI, May 24: Breaking six years of self-imposed political seclusion, Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of assassinated former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, this week took the first step to show that she wants to call the shots in the Congress party.

But even as this was likely to speed up reunification of the splintered party, her decision to get formally involved in party affairs would be a damper on the restoration of house democracy in the party which has ruled India most of its 50 years since independence.

Her entry is disturbing mainly for its potential to quash the internal democracy that was just about beginning to take root in the Congress, its outward obsession with consensus notwithstanding, said the influential English language daily, The Times of India.

Mrs Gandhi's refusal to endorse the revolt against Congress president Sarbananda Mukherjee, which Mrs Gandhi had virtually ensured his win in next month's election to the top party post, said political observers.

The president of the Punjab

unit of the Congress, Santokh Singh Randhawa, who quit in a huff over the weekend alleging Kesri supporters had rigged party organisational polls in his state, later withdrew his resignation after a meeting with Mrs Gandhi in the Indian capital.

What is announcing his resignation, the Punjab Congress chief had urged Mrs Gandhi to take over the Congress leadership to save the party, but later declared he had full faith in Kesri.

Randhawa's revolt had given the green signal to influential Kesri rivals in the party, with senior leaders in several states too accusing Kesri to fixing the ongoing party polls in the states to ensure his win in the forthcoming party presidential election.

However, newspapers, quoting unnamed Congress leaders close to Mrs Gandhi, reported that she had turned down the request of Kesri's detractors to unseat him.

Kesri reciprocated the gesture at a Congress rally to mark the sixth death anniversary of Rajiv Gandhi. "The future of the Congress is safe only in the hands of the Nehru-Gandhi family," Kesri said, adding indignantly: "We will always look forward to guidance and advice from Ms Sonia Gandhi."

Mrs Gandhi was said to be governing in 1986 could again prove embarrassing for the Congress at a time when it has begun rallying around the Rajiv widow, expecting her to lead the party out of the political wilderness.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recently submitted its final report on the Bofors probe to the government which provoked sharp protests from the Congress after a national daily claimed having been told by top CBI officials that investigating sleuths have implicated Mrs Gandhi's late husband in the scam.

Another, more recent CBI probe, had divided Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's United Front (UF) minority alliance, which depends on the Congress for survival. The UF was also in serious trouble over a proposed law to reserve a third of seats in parliament and state legislatures for women.

Some analysts expected the trouble of the Congress and the UF to help the main parliamentary opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to move nearer to its goal of forming a government without bending over backwards to accommodate likely coalition allies.

Former senior Congress leader Arun Nehru, now a media political analyst, expects mid-term polls later this year unless the Congress joins the UF government. He sees the BJP improving on its present tally to near the majority mark on the strength of electoral alliances with key regional parties.

All this had undermined the prime minister's authority, said analysts. "The Gujral's approach adopted by Gujral to problems that stare him in the face may have a political logic but it sends wrong signals," said a political commentary in the Indian Express. "It gives the impression of a prime minister being weak and unable to shape the agenda of the government and reinforces an image of a non-governance," the commentary said.

Troops loyal to Dostam flee Badghis province

SAR-I-POL, Afghanistan, May 24: Troops loyal to an anti-Taliban alliance leader, General Abdul Rashid Dostam, fled the western province of Badghis but still control Sari-I-Pol, according to a spokesman from the northern world, reports AFP.

General Yusuf said Friday speaking at Shibarghan, the Dostam headquarters in Afghanistan's far northwest, that the "Taliban have grabbed Badghis province" neighbouring Iran, while a military revolt was on in Faryab, to the north.

The rebellion against Dostam was led by General Abdul Malik, who announced he was joining forces with the Islamic militia that controls more than two-thirds of Afghanistan including Kabul.

But the report says, an anti-Taliban Shi'ite faction, has held off a massive militia offensive aimed at breaking into their central Afghan mountain stronghold, aid sources reported yesterday.

The fierce attack on the Shibar Pass, which guards the entrance to the Hez-e-Wahdat base of Bamian, has left at least 100 of the puritanical militia dead and hundreds more injured, a Western aid worker said.

"The ferocity of the fighting could be heard as far away as Bamian, which is nearly 60 kilometres (37 miles) from the front," a Western aid worker arriving in Kabul reported.

The aid worker said the ethnic-Hazra Shi'ite fighters were in a confident and jubilant mood, reporting wiping out at least 200 mainly Pashtun Taliban soldiers attempting to break their lines.

"From the sound of the fighting it doesn't seem to be an exaggeration," the aid worker added.

Another aid agency based here, which maintains daily contact with Bamian — which is around 120 kilometres (75 miles) northwest of Kabul — confirmed Hez-e-Wahdat had inflicted heavy casualties on the Taliban.

It added the Taliban offensive was launched Tuesday, but after four days of ferocious attacks had failed to break defences on the Shibar Pass.