

Fresh infighting hits Cong(I) as Pawar vows to oust Kesri

NEW DELHI, May 30: India's Congress(I) Party was hit by fresh infighting here today as a top leader vowed to oust party president Sitaran Kesri, who last month almost toppled the country's minority government, reports AFP.

Sharad Pawar, a member of the Congress decision-making body, declared he was determined to defeat Kesri in elections due next month for presidency of the 112-year-old party.

Pawar, 56, asked the party's electoral college to throw out the 77-year-old Kesri saying, "the real need is to project a younger leadership."

"There is a yearning for change within the Congress," Pawar said in a statement.

"A real need is to project a younger leadership which has the experience and capability to undertake the arduous task of rebuilding the Congress," he added.

"Unfortunately, the Congress leadership has not shown any will to revive (the party) nor has any determined effort been made to retrieve lost ground."

"As the nation celebrates the 50th year of independence, it is sad to see the Congress in an enfeebled state. The rank and file is demoralised."

"The mood is one of despondency and frustration."

Pawar is the second Congress leader to come out publicly against Kesri, who became party president in September 1996 after the resignation of former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao, following corruption charges.

A former minister, Rajesh Pilot, this week also decided to contest for the party's top post, saying a new leader was a must in order to rebuild the country's oldest and once dominant party.

Newspapers said Pawar, a former defence minister who is 1991 bid for the premiership, would try to persuade Pilot to withdraw from the contest to ensure that anti-Kesri votes were not divided.

But Pilot was reportedly

firm on challenging Kesri himself, a fourth aspirant for Congress president. Abdul Rahman Antulay, has already withdrawn in favour of Pawar.

Kesri, a former Congress treasurer dubbed "money bag" by critics, expressed confidence that he would be re-elected. His confidants admitted he had not expected Pawar to stand against him.

The Congress, which was voted out last year after suffering its worst election defeat, props up the United Front coalition government led by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral.

On March 30, Kesri withdrew support to the government and agreed to renew cabinet backing only if then prime minister H D Deve Gowda was removed from power.

Gujral, a former foreign minister, then became the new premier after days of political uncertainty.

Sharad Pawar, a former chief minister of Maharashtra state and member of the party's policy-making working group,

said his victory was assured and he would then refurbish the image of the scandal-tainted party.

"Many of those who proposed Kesri's name have contacted me and assured me of their support," he said. "For various reasons they cannot be named."

Pawar's decision to join the battle for the 112-year-old party's leadership means the election will be the third since 1950 with more than one candidate for the top job.

Pawar added: "I am getting a very good response from all the states, there is a crisis of both leadership and credibility."

Kesri's detractors said in the past the charisma of the leader of the Congress was the galvanising force but the 1991 assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had left a vacuum.

A section of the Congress also wants Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi's widow who joined the Congress Party last month, to take over the leadership.

Masood's forces capture Jabul Siraj town from Taliban

ISLAMABAD, May 30: Forces of Afghan opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood today captured the key northern town of Jabul Siraj from the Taliban militia, the Afghan Islamic Press said, reports AFP.

Masood's forces after over-running Jabul Siraj, 77 kilometres (48 miles) north of Kabul were heading towards Charikar, the news agency said.

Taliban and Masood's troops were locked in heavy fighting for control of Charikar, the Pakistan-based private news service said.

No independent confirmation was immediately available.

Charikar, capital of northern Parwan province lies about 65 kilometres (40 miles) from Kabul near the Salang Highway leading to the north.

Analysts said its fall could put the Taliban-controlled Afghan capital in the range of opposition rockets.



Incumbent French Prime Minister Alain Juppe (R) and his predecessor former prime minister Edouard Balladur (L) wave to the crowd on Thursday during the last big centre-right coalition rally ahead of France's second round of legislative elections on Sunday. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

China executes 8 in Xinjiang: Authorities have executed eight people convicted of bus bombings and other crimes in the northwestern Chinese region of Xinjiang, where Muslim ethnic groups have been resisting Chinese rule. AP reports from Beijing.

Clinton returns home: US President Bill Clinton arrived in Washington from London early yesterday after a three-day, three-nation tour of Europe. AFP reports from Washington.

SA to host AIDS confec in 2000: South Africa's east coast port city of Durban has been chosen to host the largest gathering of scientists in Africa in the year 2000 for a global AIDS conference, officials said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Durban.

Russian soldier kills 6 in Far East: A Russian soldier in the Far East killed six people in an exchange of gunfire after fleeing his unit. Radio Russia reported yesterday. Reuter reports from London.

Blast claims 1 in Sydney: An Australian man was killed, his parents injured and up to 40 houses damaged yesterday when a van exploded in a normally quiet Sydney street, police said. Reuter reports from Sydney.

Police official executed in Cambodia: Members of Co-prime Minister Hun Sen's political party were put on alert Friday morning following the execution of a high-ranking police official loyal to the Cambodian strongman. AP reports from Phnom Penh.

'India should appoint ECs thru' constitutional body'

KATHMANDU, May 30: Election Commissioners in India should be appointed through a constitutional body as in vogue in Nepal "to avoid controversies in their appointment," the Chief Election Commissioner of India, M S Gill, has said, reports PTI.

Gill who has come here at the invitation of the Chief Election Commissioner of Nepal, B P Shah, told Indian journalists here on Wednesday that if election commissioners were appointed through a constitutional body, the controversies of their appointments, often arise could be put to rest.

Nepal has a constitutional council formed in accordance with the Constitution of Nepal comprising the prime minister, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the leader of the opposition in the House of Representatives, the chief justice of the country and the chairman

of the National Assembly (upper house).

The council recommends to the King the names of the commissioners to be appointed while in India, the president appoints the commissioners on the recommendations of the Union Cabinet.

Gill who had also visited a number of polling booths, said he was impressed with the strict code of conduct imposed during the civic poll in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

Gill who had met Shah and exchanged views, said he had complimented Nepal in using computer system to convert their voter lists. "I will send some officials to Nepal to study the system here."

It is good to follow some of the methods and also adopt laws from the neighbouring countries to improve our electoral system," Gill said.

6,000 immigrants converge for US citizenship

LOS ANGELES, May 30: Six thousand immigrants from 85 nations swore allegiance to a huge American flag at the Los Angeles Convention Center to become US citizens during two ceremonies Thursday, reports AFP.

The new citizens broke out into loud cheers when they were told they could pick up their naturalization documents at designated desks around the Cavernew Hall.

Mexicans formed the biggest group at the ceremonies, comprising 2,228 or more than 30 per cent of the total. They were followed by Salvadorans (455), Vietnamese (412), Filipinos (366) and Iranians (358), a spokesman for the immigration and naturalization service said.

103 years of age, wheelchair-bound Maximiliano Butrago from Mexico was the oldest person at the ceremony.

Ruling party wins polls in Indonesia

JAKARTA, May 30: Indonesia's ruling Golkar party routed all challengers in tightly controlled elections, initial returns showed Thursday. The victory followed a monthlong campaign wracked by violence that left nearly 300 people dead, reports AP.

Golkar, the party of President Suharto and the military which has won all five elections since 1971, said that it could achieve its highest margin of victory yet. Official results are not expected for at least a week.

With 77.5 per cent of the vote counted, Golkar had 70.6 million votes, or 73.5 per cent of the 96 million ballots tabulated Friday.

The two other parties allowed to run had just a fraction of that: 22.7 million votes or 23.6 per cent for the Muslim-oriented United Development Party and 2.7 million votes or 2.9 per cent for the nationalist-Christian Indonesian Democratic Party.

Golkar officials had predicted they would receive 70.02 per cent of votes cast, up from 68.11 in 1992 elections.

Deadly riots rocked many parts of the world's largest Muslim nation during the month-long election campaign. Among those killed were at least 133 people who perished when rioters set fire to a shopping mall on the island of Borneo.

More reports of violence were trickling in Friday.

In Aceh on the island of Sumatra, a gun battle Thursday between Muslim rebels and soldiers killed one and wounded another at a polling station, the Jakarta Post newspaper reported.

In Sampang, about 700 kilometers (435 miles) east of Jakarta, police said about 3,000 supporters of the United Development Party threw stones at government buildings, damaged parked cars and burned houses.

The protesters accused local officials of rigging votes on polling day.

Analysts warned that further violence could erupt unless the government does more to close the gap between rich and poor, eliminate corruption, and free the tightly controlled political system, which tolerates little dissent.

Several critics of the government were charged with subversion or barred from running for the 425 seats at stake in Parliament. Another 75 seats are filled by military appointees.

A big win for Golkar makes it all but certain that the new legislature and 500 other government appointees will elect Suharto, 75, to a seventh five-term as leader next year.

About 130,000 police and soldiers were deployed to maintain order. Nearly 300 people were killed during the campaign, including an estimated 133 who perished when rioters set fire to a shopping mall on the island of Borneo.

NATO signs security deal with Ukraine

SINTRA, Portugal, May 30: NATO signed a new security agreement with Ukraine before launching into talks to decide which former Soviet bloc countries should be the first allowed to join the alliance, reports AP.

Thursday's NATO-Ukraine accord is along the lines of a deal the alliance signed with Russia two days ago in Paris, and lays the groundwork for closer cooperation in many military and political areas.

Divisions over how many countries to admit to the security organisation immediately emerged with several European nations calling for five new members, but the United States opting for a smaller number.

A final decision on who will be the first invited into the club will be made at a NATO summit

July 8-9 in Madrid.

Thursday's meeting of NATO foreign ministers in a 16th century Jeronimo monastery was the first time since the idea of enlarging NATO was launched in 1994 that governments actually have put their favourites on the table and stated why.

"We must continue to insist that the candidates for membership in NATO meet the highest possible standards before they are invited to join," US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told her 15 NATO counterparts.

She added: "We must make a clear and credible commitment in Madrid to those nations that are not yet ready for membership...that no European democracy will be excluded because of where it sits on the map.

Clinton terms Khatami's victory as interesting

LONDON, May 30: US President Bill Clinton yesterday described the election of a moderate cleric as Iran's new president as interesting and hopeful but said big obstacles lay in the way of a reconciliation between the two countries, reports Reuter.

In his first public comments on the election last Friday of Mohammad Khatami, Clinton called Iran a great nation but said it had to abjure political violence, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction if it wanted to mend fences with Washington.

"It's a very interesting development, and for those of us who don't feel privy to all the details of daily life in that country, it's at least a reaffirmation of the democratic

Off the Record

Larry King on his way to sixth

LOS ANGELES: Larry King has said "I do" five times, but the CNN talk show host says the sixth is meant to be, reports AP.

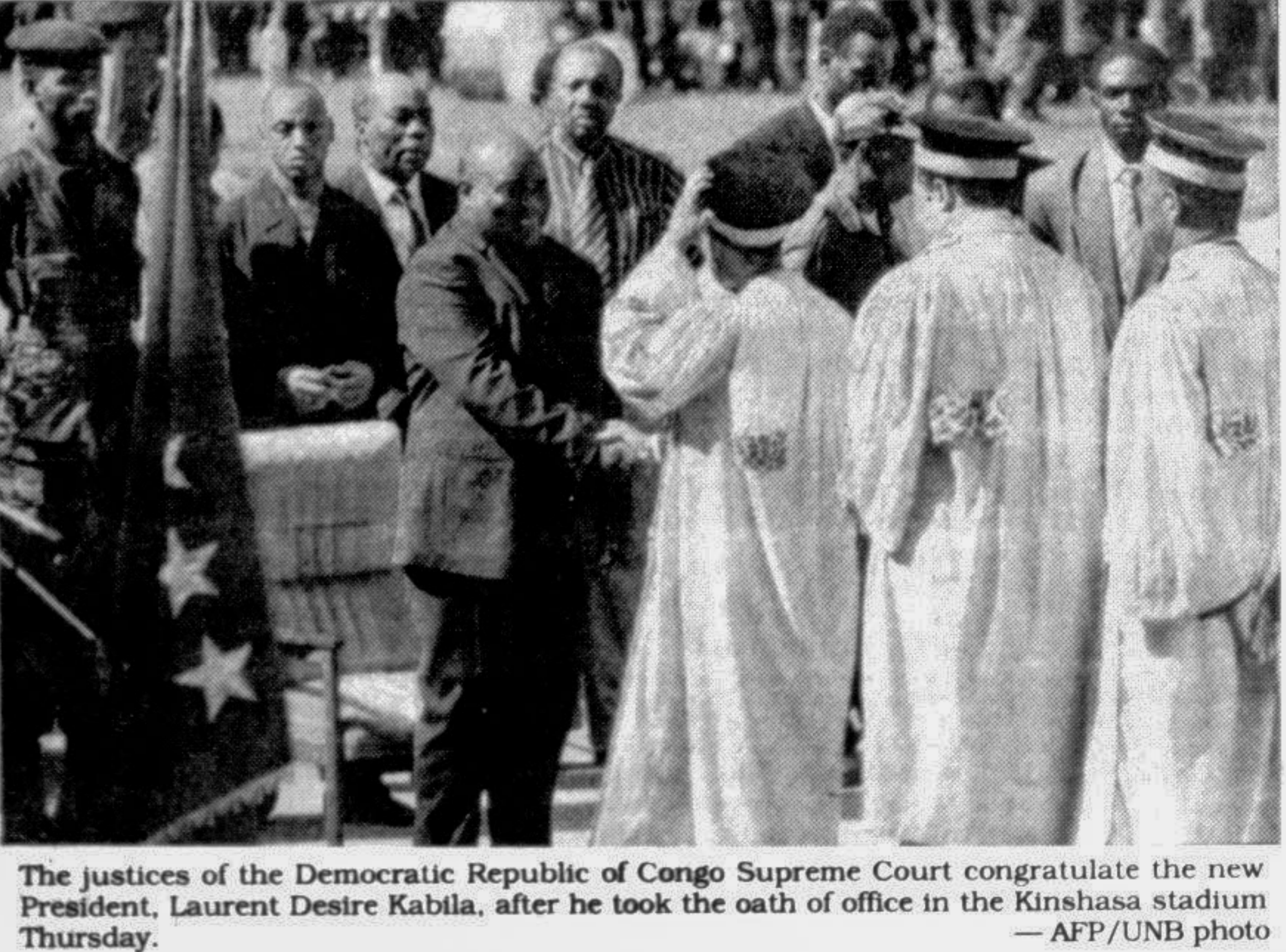
"This is my first besherte," he said Thursday, using the Yiddish word for the one who's truly intended. "When something hits you when you want to spend all your time with her — I never had that before in my life."

King, 63, will marry singer Shawn Southwick, 37, in Los Angeles on September 5. It is her third marriage.

The pair will honeymoon in Paris and continue to commute between Washington and Los Angeles.

The couple met in front of Tiffany's on posh Fifth Avenue in New York City. "We bumped into each other. It just clicked from the start," he said.

King said CNN founder Ted Turner will be best man. Marie Osmond will probably sing — Southwick used to sing backup for her — and actor Al Pacino, who joined them on their first date, will recite a love poem by e.e. cummings.



The justices of the Democratic Republic of Congo Supreme Court congratulate the new President, Laurent Desire Kabila, after he took the oath of office in the Kinshasa stadium Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

Fighting moves into diamond industry in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone, May 30: Mutineers who overthrew Sierra Leone's elected government have sent troops into the interior in a bid to capture the country's lucrative diamond industry. Clashes in the region left at least 21 dead, reports AP.

Fighting in the region came as Nigeria warned it might use force to restore President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, who fled the country Sunday.

The United States and the United Nations on Thursday began to evacuate foreigners — many of whom had fled the diamond mining region — as Sierra Leone endured the fifth day of a coup that has left dozens dead and ravaged the capital.

Early Friday morning, a plane carrying 396 British, Canadians, Australians and other foreign evacuees arrived at London's Gatwick airport.

The Boeing 747 jetliner, chartered by the British Foreign Office, flew out aid workers, business people and missionaries.

Later evacuations, however, were in question after the mutineers ordered all borders closed. Thursday, and banned foreign aircraft from entering the country's air space. Internal flights were also prohibited. It was not immediately clear how the orders, read on national radio, would affect the evacuations.

Earlier, in Washington, the Pentagon announced that 250 American citizens would be flown out of Sierra Leone on Friday because sporadic gunfire in Freetown.

"It's not stable at all," Pentagon spokesman Army Col Richard Bridges said of the situation in the West African nation.

The US embassy has already evacuated all non-essential personnel.

Sunday's coup was the third in five years in Sierra Leone, a

Unstoppable germ

ATLANTA: A staph germ that causes thousands of often deadly infections among hospital patients each year is becoming resistant to medicine's drug of last resort and could soon prove unstoppable, reports AP.

A new strain of staphylococcus aureus bacteria that was discovered in a Japanese infant showed resistance for the first time against vancomycin, which has been around since 1970 and is used when other antibiotics fail.

The 4-month-old child developed a boil while recovering from heart surgery. The bacteria strain had an "intermediate" level of resistance to the antibiotic — one step away from becoming immune, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

Japanese doctors were able to treat the infant's infection using a drug not licensed in the United States in combination with another drug that goes by the name Unasyn in the United States.

"The strain is marching up the ladder of resistance," Dr Fred Tenover, laboratory chief of the CDC's hospital infections branch, warned on Wednesday. "It is not a cause for panic, but it is a cause for concern."

The strain has not yet reached US hospitals, but health experts said it is only a matter of time.

Antibiotic-resistant "super bugs" often show up overseas first, because antibiotics are more commonly used in foreign countries and often are available without a prescription.

In the meantime, the CDC and other experts said, hospitals need to tighten their practices to prevent the spread of germs, and doctors should use antibiotics more sparingly. Pharmaceutical companies are already working on new antibiotics.

Staph bacteria are the No 1 cause of hospital infections. They are blamed for about 13 per cent of the nation's 2 million hospital infections each year, according to the CDC. Overall, these 2 million infections kill 60,000 to 80,000 people.

Chandrika hopeful of pushing her peace proposals thru' parliament

COLOMBO, May 30: The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga yesterday said that she was confident of pushing her package of peace proposals through parliament this year to solve the vexed ethnic problem, even if the opposition United National Party (UNP), refused to extend the support, reports PTI.

In her three-hour-long discussions with the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leaders followed by a meeting with Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) leader, Douglas Devananda, she reportedly said that her government had chalked out a detailed plan of action to push through the package of constitutional reforms granting autonomy to Tamil provinces.

Kabila confronted with ethnic diversity to control Congo

KINSHASA, Congo, May 30: When Laurent Kabila's rebels marched into the capital to complete their overthrow of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, people rushed to the streets to cheer them on, reports AP.

But they quickly realized what has become a major issue in the patchwork politics of Congo — the ragged, weary rebels who didn't smile were foreigners, speaking different languages and coming from different cultures.

Almost two weeks later, those differences are still a source of anti-Kabila protests and concern among residents of the capital that outsiders now run their country.

The vast Congo-Africa's third-largest country, the size of almost half the United States — is home to some 250 tribes speaking dozens of languages and dialects. Barely existent

transportation makes land travel difficult or impossible, meaning most people see little more than their home regions.

"We in the west (of Congo) rarely come into contact with those in the east," said writer Ahmed Wanzo, 30. "We don't speak the same language. We don't have the same traditions or attitudes. To us, they're foreigners."

Politicians in Africa have cleverly and traditionally used ethnicity to divide and conquer the opposition. In Congo, the tall, angular Tutsi minority descended from Arab-influenced people of the east is the usual political scapegoat of darker, shorter majority tribes.

Militant students in Kinshasa target Tutsis as infiltrators from neighbouring Rwanda. The students' supporters of opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi, resent that Kabila's

alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo stands for. Its roots as a small, regional rebel group that joined a fight against efforts to oust Tutsis from eastern territories raised more questions than answers, and Kabila's failure to speak publicly for almost two weeks after claiming power exacerbated the skepticism.

"I don't know these people," complained Sylvester Mbinda, a middle-aged government worker. "They don't speak our language, they don't come from here. I'm afraid they will demand too high a price for helping Kabila win."

Such fears were bolstered by Kabila's swearing in Thursday, when his major foreign backers — the presidents of Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Angola — lined up to embrace him and express their support. For only the first time in the eight-month campaign, he delivered a major speech in French — the common language of most Congolese — instead of Swahili, the dominant language in the east.

Kabila and the Alliance have called for unity and making the most of Congo's ethnic diversity. But some steps by the conquerors failed to help the situation.

A new government named last week included only one Kinshasa official among 13 positions and reserved most of the power for Kabila. That particularly upset Tshisekedi and his followers, who wanted Tshisekedi to be prime minister.

They have staged two protests that were dispersed by soldiers. The backlash was expected by the Alliance, which realized Tshisekedi's popularity in his home city, said new Interior Minister Mwenze Kon-

ROK prosecutors seize assets of 2 ex-presidents

SEOUL, May 30: Prosecutors said Friday they have begun confiscating hidden cash and other assets of two former military-backed presidents sentenced to long prison terms for a coup and great, reports AP.

The Supreme Court sentenced former generals Chun Doo-hwan to life and Roh Tae-woo to 17 years in prison in April on mutiny and treason charges stemming from their 1979 coup.

Chun and Roh also were ordered to pay 250 million dollars and 300 million dollars in fines — the same amounts they were found to have received in bribes from businessmen while in office.

On Friday, prosecutors said they already seized 21 million dollars in bonds belonging to Chun and were looking for more cash and real estate.