

## Congress to stand by Gujral govt

## 16 Janata Dal MPs may join Yadav's party

NEW DELHI, July 5: India's fragile coalition was rocked late Friday when the dominant party in the government split as a rebel leader decided to float his own party, reports AFP.

Laloo Prasad Yadav, who refused to stand for re-election as president of Premier Inder Kumar Gujral's Janata Dal (People's Party) after claiming the poll had been rigged against him, said last-minute talks with Gujral to resolve the crisis failed.

"I have decided to go ahead with Saturday's decision to float a new party," Yadav said here after a two-hour meeting with Gujral.

The number of legislators siding with Yadav will only become clear today when his party is announced. Newspapers said at least 16 of the Janata Dal's 46 members of parliament were likely to join Yadav.

I told him about Saturday's decision. But I did not invite him to it. There are no changes in my plan," said Laloo.

A break-up of the Janata Dal will undermine Gujral's authority as prime minister of the minority United Front coalition government although the coalition itself will remain in power for the moment.

Importantly, Gujral won some respite when the Congress (I) Party, which keep the front in power in India's hung parliament, said it would continue to back the multi-party coalition despite the crisis.

Sitaram Kesri, President of the Congress (I), said "the Congress will stand by the Gujral government. Our commitment is to continue support to the government and we shall stand by it."

The Congress (I) chief said the crisis being faced by Janata Dal was "their internal matter... I think they will settle their differences."

The feud between former allies Gujral and Yadav began when the latter was implicated in a massive cattle fodder scandal in the eastern state of Bihar, where he is Chief Minister.

Yadav defied Gujral's order to stand down following the allegations and, fearing he was about to lose his job as Janata Dal president, announced he would form his own political party.

Gujral became prime minister in April after the Congress, the second largest group in the hung parliament after the Hindu nationalists, ousted the previous United Front government in an abortive bid to form its own coalition.

Meanwhile, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), the largest party in India's hung parliament with 180 of the 545 seats, predicted fresh election soon.

BJP spokesman Yashwant Sinha warned Congress would not be able to resist exploiting Gujral's problems by making another attempt to form its own administration.

Sinha said: "The Congress is certainly taking this country towards a general election."



Pathfinder transmits its first images from the red planet, Mars, showing part of the US space probe and the rock-strewn Marsian ground. — AFP/UNB photo

Nepalese PM tells parliament  
24 killed during local council polls in May

KATHMANDU, July 5: The violence-marred May local council elections claimed 24 lives with another 48 people seriously injured, Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand was reported saying today, reports AFP.

"Twenty-four people lost their lives during the local elections held in two phases in May," Chand told the Lower House of parliament.

He was responding to opposition demands in parliament Friday to table a report on the elections held for 187,000 village council posts in more than 4,000 villages, 58 municipalities in 75 districts of the country, the RSS state-run news agency said.

In the polls, the communist emerged victorious taking more than 50 per cent of the total seats.

The ruling left-right coalition, composed of the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML), the right-wing National Democratic Party (NDP) and the

pro-India Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP), was formed on March 8 this year.

In the elections, the NCP-UML won 52 per cent of the total seats, the main opposition Nepali Congress (NC) 30 per cent, the NDP 12 per cent, the NSP one per cent and the rest were won by communist factions and independents.

The NC, which had accused the NCP-UML of gross vote rigging, looting, killings and resorting to violence, has demanded the election commissions to cancel the election results.

Foreign Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani of the NDP resigned to protest at what he called the "rampant election misappropriations by the communists."

Although 37,000 policemen were recruited to assist the military with election security, Chand said that in addition to 24 people being killed 48 persons were seriously injured and 281 received slight injuries.

## BRIEFLY

**Road mishap kills 9 in Indonesia:** At least nine people were killed in a traffic accident involving seven cars and one motorcycle in the southern Sumatra province of Lampung, a news report said Saturday, AP reports from Jakarta.

Two other people were seriously injured in the Friday accident on a descending curve in South Lampung regency, about 240 kilometers (150 miles) northwest of Jakarta, said the daily Kompas. All of the dead were passengers in a minibus, which was badly damaged in the accident along with a truck and passenger bus.

**Earthquake shakes China:** An earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale struck east of Taiwan early last morning, Xinhua said, AFP reports from Beijing.

The quake was recorded at 2:37 am (1837 GMT Friday) off the coast from Taichung, the official news agency said quoting state Seismological Bureau sources. Xinhua did not say if there had reports of damage reported on land. A tremor of similar magnitude was recorded in the same area on May 3.

**Landslide kills 8 in Taiwan:** At least eight people have been killed in a landslide in northern Taiwan, taking the death toll from a week of torrential rain to 14, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Taipei.

**Getty Museum closed for 4 yrs in US:** The Getty Museum, the wealthiest museum in the world, was due to close its doors Sunday for four years of renovation work, AFP says from Malibu.

The museum building a replica of a Roman villa near Naples, will undergo restoration as well as engineering work to prevent earthquake damage. Beginning in 2001, the museum's collections of Graeco-Roman antiquities will be exhibited there.

**3 militants killed in Egypt:** Egyptian police shot dead three suspected militants during a search operation in southern Egypt, security sources said, Reuters reports from Assiut, Egypt.

The sources said police were combing fields on Friday near Abu Qurqas, 250 km (150 miles) south of Cairo, when they were ambushed by suspected militants. Police killed three of the attackers and two police were wounded in the ensuing battle.

The sources also said late on Friday that the three were suspected of belonging to the military wing of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya (Islamic Group), the main Islamist militant group.

**Paris, Bonn adopt English to cut cost:** Paris and Bonn have adopted English as the working language for the Franco-German Tiger Combat Helicopter Project, to save 10 million francs (1.7 million dollars) in translation cost, sources said Friday, AFP reports from Paris.

The project, destined to equip French and German armed forces from 2003, is being run on a tight budget, France and Germany ultimately plan to acquire 215 and 212 helicopters respectively.

Until now all papers relating to the project were translated and circulated in both French and German.

**Americans mark Independence Day:** Hundreds of thousands of completely sober people flocked to Washington's mall on Friday to celebrate US Independence Day and the uniquely American "pursuit of happiness," Reuters reports from Washington.

Unfazed by a crackdown on drunkenness that restricted alcohol consumption to a few designated areas where dollar 3 beers were available, Americans in their capital city found plenty to celebrate on the 221st anniversary of separation from British colonial rule.

"I'm glad that George Washington and all the boys did a great job breaking away from the British to be honest, Wilson Ray Jr., an operations analyst at the Goddard Space Flight Centre in Greenbelt, Maryland said while listening to a gospel music concert.

**PNG peace talks open in NZ:** Talks aimed at ending nine years of secessionist fighting on Papua New Guinea's Bougainville Island formally opened in New Zealand yesterday, Reuters reports from Christchurch.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon, who welcomed the meeting's 50 participants, said he hoped for progress in the preliminary discussions which will involve Bougainville parties only.

Representatives of the three main groups, the PNG-backed Bougainville Transitional Government, the Bougainville Interim Government and its associate the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, were flown into New Zealand early on Saturday.

**Ex-CBI chief offers memoirs for \$1m:** India's top police investigator, who was sacked while heading a series of corruption probes, Friday offered his memoirs for one million dollars, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Joginder Singh, who was fired Monday as director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), told a private television station he had been offered a publishing deal to write about his 11 months in charge of the CBI.

"You will find it quite interesting and my memoirs will be published after my retirement, in October," Singh said.

## LTTE marks 10th anniversary of suicide bombing

COLOMBO, July 5: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas today marked the 10th anniversary of their first suicide bombing as the country remained on maximum alert for commemorative strikes, officials said, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said Hindu religious activities will be staged in areas of the island's north held by them to mark the day.

In a statement from their London office, the LTTE said cultural events and a public meeting had been organised in the northern district of Kilinochchi to mark the first "Black Tiger" attack 10 years ago.

Suicide cadres of the LTTE are called "Black Tigers" and their first bombing was carried out at Nelliyadi in the northern peninsula of Jaffna against a army camp where 39 troopers were killed.

As the Tigers prepared to celebrate Black Tiger Day, security forces and police were kept on red alert for more bomb attacks in the capital and provincial towns.

Constables and soldiers armed with automatic assault rifles intensified random checks on vehicles in and around the capital while provinces were also brought under tight security, police said.

## Gunmen kill 3 in Karachi

KARACHI, Pakistan, July 5: Gunmen killed the Managing Director of Karachi Electric Supply Corporation, his driver and guard in Karachi today, police said, reports Reuters.

They said KESC Managing Director Shahid Hamid's vehicle was attacked by armed men when he was on his way to his office in southern Defence Housing Society area.

Police said the assailants were riding a motorcycle. Hamid and his driver were killed on the spot, while the guard died in hospital.

## SLORC watching Suu Kyi, her party members

YANGON, July 5: One of Myanmar's top generals said the military government has been watching "destructive elements" and would take action against them if they did not mend their ways, official media reported today, says Reuters.

"Crimes committed by the above ground destructive group against the state and the people have been mounting, Lieutenant-General Tin Oo, one of the country's four most powerful generals, was quoted as saying on Friday.

Myanmar's government regularly refers to opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) Party as "above ground destructive elements."

"Some people ask why action has not been taken against them," Tin Oo said to a group of military officers.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) has only been watching magnanimously whether they will mend their ways positively. The SLORC "will prevent any act detrimental to the interests of the state in accordance with the law."

## 7 die in fresh fighting in Philippines

COTABATO, Philippines, July 5: Two civilians and five Muslim rebels were killed, and at least seven people including two soldiers were wounded in renewed fighting in two towns near Cotabato today, the Philippine military reported, says AFP.

The fighting erupted at 5:30 am (2130 GMT Friday) when about 800 guerrillas of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front attacked the towns of Kabacan and Aleson in north Cotabato province, army spokesman captain Noel Detoyato said.

The military's regional southern command in Zamboanga had earlier reported the fighting broke out in the town of Pagsalangan in the nearby province of Maguindanao, where Cotabato is located.

The military has since last month been pursuing a drive against the MILF, most of whom are believed to be behind rampant kidnappings and ransom demands in the Cotabato area.

## 2 Britons held hostage in Chechnya

MOSCOW, July 5: Two Britons have been taken hostage in Russia's breakaway Chechnya region, Interfax news agency reported today, says Reuters.

The agency, quoting Chechen police sources, said the two had been seized in Grozny on Thursday night. It gave no further details.

Interfax said the two Britons were aid workers.

An Italian photographer was among several groups of hostages seized in the war-torn region in recent months. He was freed but several Russian journalists are still being held.

The separatist leaders of Chechnya, who fought a 21-month battle against Russian troops sent to crush their independence bid, have pledged to do all they can to free the captives, who they say were taken by rogue groups of criminals.

## Bosnian Parliament's abortive attempt to unseat president

PALE, Bosnia-Herzegovina, July 5: President Biljana Plavsic survived another day in office, but only after members of the parliament she sought to dissolve tried unsuccessfully to unseat her, reports AP.

Plavsic is involved in a growing conflict with supporters of war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic, who she says has been illegally running the affairs of parliament.

As it opened its session Friday during the most serious Serb leadership crisis since the Bosnian war ended, parliament still was short the deputies needed to make major decisions such as unseating the president.

Plavsic issued the decree dissolving parliament Thursday, but allies of wartime leader Karadzic, who dominate the lawmaking body, refused to recognise the move.

Aleksa Buha, a senior official loyal to Karadzic proposed a referendum on Plavsic's future — apparently another attempt to get rid of her if parliament can't.

Karadzic was forced to step down last year under the US-brokered peace agreement that ended Bosnia's 3 and half year war. Plavsic became president

under internationally monitored elections, but Karadzic still commands wide support.

Dragon Kalinic, the Bosnian Serb parliament speaker and Karadzic ally, said: "We have decided to defend our parliament. We don't want to disappear because it would lead our country into chaos."

But only 49 out of 83 lawmakers were present when Parliament convened near the Karadzic stronghold of Pale — several shy of the two-thirds needed.

The assembly later decided to be in "permanent session" and will stay in Pale until the crisis is resolved.

Interior Minister Dragan Kijac accused Plavsic of working for unidentified foreign powers to weaken the Bosnian Serb mini-state and prepare for Karadzic's arrest. Karadzic has been indicted by a UN war crimes tribunal.

"I know this is a tough charge, but it is based on facts," he said, alleging that his secret service had evidence. He did not provide it.

The leadership crisis erupted over Kijac, whom Plavsic tried to fire last week, accusing him of smuggling items at Karadzic's

behest. She was then detained by Serbian police in Belgrade — signs of Karadzic's power and his close ties to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

## Opposition jet bombards Kabul airport

KABUL, July 5: An opposition warplane dropped a bomb on Kabul airport, hitting a building occupied by fighters of the Taliban militia, airport sources said today, reports Reuters.

Red tracers from anti-aircraft fire criss-crossed the sky on Friday night as Taliban gunners took aim at the lone jet.

"One bomb landed inside the perimeter of the air defence part of the airport and hit a building which was full of Taliban. An unknown number of Taliban were killed or wounded," one source at the airport said in the morning. A Taliban airport official would not comment on casualties, but confirmed that a bomb had hit the air defence section adjacent to the airport.

## 120 Funicpec soldiers surrender to their key rivals in Cambodia

WAT PHNEAD, Cambodia, July 5: About 120 soldiers loyal to Cambodia's royalist Funicpec Party surrendered and turned over their weapons after a firefight here with troops loyal to their main political rivals, officials and witnesses said, reports AFP.

However, a new clash was apparently brewing at Tang Kraasing, a nearby Funicpec military base, where at least five explosions and assault weapons fire were heard.

Unconfirmed reports indicated that fighting had also broken out in the southeastern province of Svay Rieng when police and soldiers affiliated with the former Communist Cambodian People's Party (CPP) attempted to disarm Funicpec troops there.

At Wat Phnead, about 15 kilometres (nine miles) south-east of the capital, scores of CPP troops backed by 10 tanks and one armoured personnel carrier (APC) had surrounded the Buddhist temple to secure the surrender.

The CPP claimed the disarmed soldiers had been moved to the temple without Defence Ministry authorisation.

## Nobel laureate warns of HR abuses in East Timor

JAKARTA, Indonesia, July 5: Carlos Belo, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Catholic bishop of East Timor, has warned that the world faces a common threat of human rights abuses, a report said Saturday, reports AP.

Speaking at the launching of his new book on Friday, the outspoken bishop said that although fascism faded away long ago, human rights were still violated because governments abused their power.

"Those are governments that treat their people not as individuals who deserve respect, but rather as people who depend on the charity of the governments," the Jakarta Post quoted Belo as saying.

Belo launched the Indonesian-language book, titled For Peace and Justice, in a packed hall of a private university in this capital city.

Belo, who often criticizes the Indonesian military for its human rights abuses in the former Portuguese colony, reiterated his support for the people who suffer human rights violations in the troubled territory.

"Respect for human rights is the only way where justice and peace can be brought together," he said.

Following HK handover  
China steps up political offensive against Taiwan

BEIJING, July 5: China has stepped up its political offensive against Taiwan following the Hong Kong handover with a series of seminars on the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," a report said today, reports AFP.

The first of the seminars was held recently in the city of Dongguan, in southern Guangdong province, gathering 70 scholars from the inland areas, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan," the official Xinhua news agency said.

A series of similar meetings will take place over the next few weeks, ahead of the autumn meeting of the 15th communist party congress, according to Chinese sources.

"The homecoming of Hong Kong is an important and historic step in the long journey toward China's reunification and national rejuvenation," said Qian Weichang, Chairman of the China Council for promoting peaceful reunification.

"The Taiwan authorities should follow the trend of development and stop engaging in activities to create two Chinese and one China one Taiwan,"

Qian was quoted as telling the Dongguan conference.

"It is a common aspiration of all Chinese people... to resolve the questions of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan," Qian added, just days after the former British colony's return to Chinese rule.

Since the handover of sovereignty at midnight on Monday, China has stepped up pressure on Taiwan, which it wants to integrate under the same "one country, two systems" formula, which Hong Kong is now ruled by.

Beijing has regarded Taiwan as a rebel province since the end of a civil war in 1949, when Kuomintang forces fled to the island after defeat at the hands of Mao Zedong's communists.

Taipei has pursued a vigorous campaign for international recognition, which Beijing views as a concerted drive towards formal independence.

On Tuesday, Chinese President Jiang Zemin urged Taiwan to take "concrete steps" to reunify with China after presiding over handover ceremonies in Hong Kong.

## Off the Record

## Costly divorce

LONDON: Restaurateur and designer Terence Conran, reeling at one of Britain's biggest divorce settlements, says his former wife doesn't deserve the 10.5 million pound (16 million dollar) payoff, reports AFP.

"The figure is unbelievable, just because she cooked a few meals now and again and wrote a few books," he said after the ruling. "I taught her how to cook."

Conran's seven enormous restaurants across the capital feed an estimated 70,000 people a week. Last month, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his wife Cherie took new buddies President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary to one of his restaurants.

The Divorce Court Judge said Conran's wife of 33 years, Caroline, had made an enormous contribution to his family and business, as he founded the chain store Habitat and began opening a string of restaurants.

Conran is estimated to have amassed a fortune of between 70 and 80 million pounds, according to the press.

The settlement is believed to be the largest ever in a contested divorce. Prince Charles was ordered to pay Diana, Princess of Wales, some 15 million pounds on their divorce last year.

## Driving and chats over cellular can't go together

MANILA: Authorities have banned the use of cellular phones while driving in metropolitan Manila to prevent accidents on the road, reports AP.

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority said Friday the ban took effect last Saturday and violators will be fined 200 pesos (8 dollars).

One may pull over to make calls without being fined and hands-free devices are exempted from the ban, the authority said.

Traffic enforcers have reported that many vehicular accidents have been caused by drivers talking on their cellular phones and not paying attention to road conditions. Cellular phone use has increased dramatically in recent years, particularly in the capital, Manila, as a result of a resurgent Philippine economy and the liberalisation of the telecommunications industry.

The number of cellular phone subscribers leaped from 33,800 subscribers and two cellular phone companies in 1991 to 959,024 subscribers and five companies in 1996.

## Van Gogh in greedy fakers' hand

LONDON: Scholarly studies have found that more than 100 paintings and drawings by Vincent Van Gogh worth millions of pounds (dollars) may be fakes, a leading art journal says, reports AP.

The Art Newspaper, a respected journal, said the alleged fakes include one of the Dutch master's famous Sunflowers series sold by auctioneers Christie's to a Japanese firm in 1987 for 24.7 million pounds (dollars 39.5 million), and two self-portraits.

In its latest edition, out Friday, it said two other works, "The Garden at Auvers" and "The Arlesienne," may also be fakes, along with a portrait of Dr Gachet, the physician who cared for the troubled artist before his suicide in 1890. That work hangs in Paris's Musee d'Orsay.

Another study of the doctor set a world record price for a picture in 1990 when it was sold to a Japanese for 48.8 million pounds (dollars 78 million).

The Art Newspaper said there are no contemporary sales records to help authenticate Van Gogh's works, because he sold virtually nothing during his lifetime. In the decades after his death, the popularity of his works soared.

"By the 1920's the price of his work was already high, and this was actually the period when most of the Van Gogh pictures which have been questioned now emerged and came onto the market," said art writer Martin Bailey, who researched the story for The Art Newspaper.

The journal added that "greedy fakers were helped by the publication of Van Gogh's diaries in which they could read the artist's descriptions of work-in-progress which they could then counterfeit."



Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer (R) unveils the plaque of the new complex of the Australian Embassy in Hanoi as Australian Ambassador to Vietnam Susan Boyd (L) smiles Saturday. Downer is on a four-day official visit aimed at boosting bilateral relations. He will attend Sunday the ground-breaking for My Thuan bridge project financed by Australia, the biggest ever built until now in southern Vietnam's Mekong Delta. — AFP/UNB photo