

# Cong campaign material solely focusing on Sonia

NEW DELHI, Jan 10: India's ailing Congress Party has focused solely on Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born wife of assassinated former premier Rajiv Gandhi, in publicity material for upcoming polls, a daily said today, reports AFP.

The Pioneer newspaper said posters, video films and slogans compared the 51-year-old widow to Lakshmi, the Hindu Goddess of wealth, and paid homage to the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty.

Sonia Gandhi, who has no political experience, will start her campaign for the February-March elections on Sunday at the site of her husband's murder, in Sripurumbudur, Tamil Nadu.

She has so far remained silent on whether she will be a candidate.

The Pioneer said one advertising agency hired by the congress had packaged the entire Gandhi Family as India's saviours, calling Indira Gandhi a tender mother, Rajiv Gandhi a loving leader and finally Sonia, the "Goddess Lakshmi who will

light a lamp in every home."

The traditional lamp symbolises happiness and wealth in India.

Another poster described the hitherto reclusive Sonia Gandhi, who lives amid tight security in the heart of New Delhi, as the new icon of India.

The slogan said: "She will bring a fresh wave of joy, the new Gandhi of a new era."

Sonia Gandhi has shed her reclusive image and opened the gates of her bungalow at 10, Janpath, one of India's best-known addresses, to the public three days ago, the move has sparked an overwhelming response with milling crowds from far away villages.

Witnesses said Sonia Gandhi has been more attentive to villagers and the poor in the public audience and constantly speaking in Hindi, a language in which she is fluent.

The spotlight on the widow has sparked suggestions that there was a "cold war" between Sitaram Kesri, the octogenarian Congress president and Sonia Gandhi for the party's leader-

ship.

Kesri on Friday angrily denied any animosity saying Sonia Gandhi was the "undisputed leader" of the Congress and that he was ready to quit his post the moment she wanted to take over.

Sources in the Congress said Kesri had been totally ignored in an election video.

A member of the Congress Election Committee said it was "amazing" how the nine advertising agencies hired by the party had by them selves ignored Kesri.

"Only one agency has come up with a poster of Kesri," he said.

The election material will be formally approved by the party's campaign committee later.

The Congress was voted out of office in 1996 in the worst electoral defeat in its 112-year history. The party was dominated for much of this century by the Gandhi-Nehru family including Indira Gandhi's father Jawaharlal Nehru and her grandfather Motilal Nehru.

## Tribesmen clash with troops in Pakistan: 8 killed

ISLAMABAD, Jan 10: Tribesmen battled paramilitary soldiers in a remote corner of northwestern Pakistan, killing as many as eight people and injuring dozens more, news reports said Saturday, says AP.

Official sources, however, put the death toll at one in a clash Friday between tribesmen protesting repeated electrical shortages and officers of Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Corps.

Tribesmen began as a peaceful demonstration spun out of control when the soldiers opened fire, according to some reports. Tribesmen, who apparently were unarmed at the time, went home to get their weapons and returned to the site and opened fire.

Both sides used heavy weapons including rocket launchers, according to some witnesses. The duel went on for several hours.

Energy-poor Pakistan routinely experiences power outages. In some areas the electricity is cut for hours causing local demonstrations.



President Clinton delivers an address on education reform during an event at Mission High School in Mission, Texas, Friday. A statue of the school mascot, an eagle, can be seen behind.

— AP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY

### Top Baath Party gen executed:

Iraq has executed a senior official of the ruling Baath Party, General Taleb al-Saadun, after accusing him of "conspiring with the exiled opposition," an exiled opposition member told Friday, AP reports from Dubai.

"General Saadun, a Sunni Muslim, aged 54, was executed two weeks ago on the orders of the dictator Iraqi President Saddam Hussein," said former military intelligence chief Wafiq Samarrai in a statement issued from London. Samarrai defected in December 1994. "General Saadun was accused of collaborating with Iraqi opposition parties in preparing an uprising," said Samarrai, citing "informed sources in Iraq."

### Fire at bldg hurts 49 in Taiwan:

Fire swept through a 22-story building that houses theatres, video parlors and restaurants early Saturday, injuring 49 people, police said, AP reports from Taipei.

The injured included a dozen people who jumped from sixth and seventh floor windows and landed on a third-floor balcony with broken arms or legs. Four of them were listed in critical condition, police said. The fire began at a fifth floor video parlor and quickly engulfed much of the building, trapping some 200 people inside, they said. The blaze which erupted at 1 am (1700 GMT Friday), was extinguished in three hours. Many people were rescued from a top-floor restaurant by helicopters or ladders.

### UN weapons chief to visit Iraq:

The chief UN weapons inspector will renew UN demands for unrestricted access to Iraqi presidential palaces and other sensitive sites when he visits Baghdad this month, a UN official said Friday, AP reports from United Nations.

Richard Butler, executive chairman of the UN Special Commission, will hold talks on the Iraqi capital January 19-21, his spokesman Ewen Buchanan said. Buchanan said access would be the only issue discussed during the talks. The Security Council has demanded that Iraq allow UN inspectors unrestricted access to any site they wish to visit in order to determine whether Baghdad has complied with UN orders to destroy all long-range missiles and mass destruction weapons.

## Opposition regrouped to unseat Hashimoto

TOKYO, Jan 10: When the granite pyramid that houses Japan's legislature opens its doors Monday, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto will be facing one of the broadest opposition alliances in years, reports AP.

And for that, he might well consider himself lucky.

Hoping to regain dwindling voter support, Japan's scattered and increasingly marginalised opposition forces have regrouped into a six-party alliance that includes the biggest party outside Hashimoto's current ruling coalition.

While the new opposition bloc — harbouring political elements from across the ideological spectrum — will control a considerable chunk of seats in the parliament, analysts say it may be too disjointed to topple the status quo.

"It's easy to see how the new alliance members could get tripped up over its ambiguous identity," said Susumu Takahashi, a political science professor at Tokyo University.

The coming five-month session of parliament will offer lots of chances for heated debate.

Hashimoto, who celebrates his second anniversary as prime minister Sunday, has a full agenda planned — including bills aimed at boosting Japan's ailing economy, a controversial revision of Japan's military alliance with the United

States and a sweeping reorganisation of the central bureaucracy.

The nascent alliance is trying to focus attention on tax cuts.

Shortly after taking shape late Tuesday, the group called for 46.2 billion dollars in tax relief, tweaking Hashimoto's famed fiscal prudence.

They also criticised a government-sponsored, 231 billion dollars rescue effort for banks struggling under a huge load of bad loans.

While the alliance has been quick to attack Hashimoto's proposals, its own policies remain sketchy.

Members, who chose to keep their parties intact within an umbrella grouping, even had trouble agreeing on a name. After a noisy and embarrassing debate, they settled on "Minyuren," an abbreviation of all their party names strung together.

The alliance came together after the collapse of the New Frontier Party, which was once viewed as a vanguard for political reform but fell apart last month amid incessant fighting over the tactics of Ichiro Ozawa, its outspoken leader.

Ozawa's behind-the-scenes overtures to elements within the governing Liberal Democratic Party upset some of his allies and blurred the New Frontier's distinction as an opposition force.

## Council of Europe opens to sign accord banning human cloning

STRASBOURG, France, Jan 10: The Council of Europe opened Monday for the signing of the only international accord strictly banning human cloning, amid an outcry over a US researcher's scheme to clone people, reports AP.

Seventeen European countries have already announced they will sign the legally binding protocol that rules out any exceptions to a strict ban on creating a human being genetically identical to another, living or dead, whatever the technique.

The prohibition on cloning, under the terms of the protocol, cannot be circumvented for any reason, even for public safety, protecting public health or protecting rights and freedoms for all.

The signing ceremony will take place at the French Foreign Ministry in Paris the presence of French Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou, French European Affairs Minister Pierre Moscovici, and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Daniel Tarscys of Sweden.

It will be preceded by a European conference on national ethical committees that will be

inaugurated Monday morning by French President Jacques Chirac.

Countries that have said they will sign the human cloning protocol, which will take effect once five countries have ratified the text, include Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.

Several other countries in eastern Europe, including the Baltic states, Romania and Slovakia, are also expected to sign.

Only countries who have already signed the European convention on human rights and biomedicine can sign the protocol on cloning. This is the reason why Germany — though it supports the cloning protocol — will not be able to sign on Monday.

The German Federal Health Ministry however has hailed the European initiative.

This week German Research Minister Jurgen Ruetgers called US physicist Richard Seed, whose announcement has created the latest storm over cloning, "an ethically deranged soul."

The German Federal Health Ministry however has hailed the European initiative.

This week German Research Minister Jurgen Ruetgers called US physicist Richard Seed, whose announcement has created the latest storm over cloning, "an ethically deranged soul."

Gujral said he was disappointed at not being able to fulfil his domestic and foreign policy agendas and he was particularly unhappy that US President Bill Clinton could not visit India because of the uncertain political situation here caused by the fall of his government.

He said there had been a "new surge" in ties with the US and the number of visits from Washington to New Delhi in the last few months were something unprecedented in the history of bilateral ties. He said these visits would have been "crowned" by Clinton's visit here, but the elections put a brake on the momentum generated in bilateral ties.

However, he said it was heartening to see so many European leaders keeping their date with India at this time because all these countries recognised the economic importance of India. He said foreign and economic policies could not be divorced from each other as "both were sleeping in the same bed."

Thus, he said, the United Front government's economic policies were unlikely to be radically altered by a successor government as "You cannot change the general trend (prevailing the world over)" and "it is not in India's interest to change them."

Referring to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Atal Behari Vajpayee's comment in a newspaper interview that if his party

## Three Serbian war crimes suspects asked to surrender

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, Jan 10: Three senior Serbian war crimes suspects should turn themselves in now or possibly lose the right to cross-examine prosecution witnesses if they ever stand trial, the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal said Friday, reports AP.

The suspects, among the tribunal's most-wanted, are accused of organising a 1991 massacre of non-Serbs near the Croatian city of Vukovar. Belgrade authorities have ignored orders to arrest the men.

The tribunal has ordered Belgrade authorities to pass on the appeal to the three former officers — Mile Mrksic, Miroslav Radic and Veselin Sljivancanin — so they can be tried together with a fourth Serb suspect who goes on trial on January 19.

The three former officers in the Yugoslav army (JNA) allegedly masterminded the massacre in November 1991. Slavko Dokmanovic, a former Serb leader in Vukovar who is in custody, is accused of complicity in the killing. He has denied the charges.

The victims were herded out of a hospital by Serb troops and shot to a farm near Vukovar where they were beaten, shot and dumped in a mass grave.

Prosecutors warn that witnesses who testify in Dokmanovic's trial may not be called again at a second trial — denying the officers the chance to cross-examine them.

## Indo-Pak troops waging daily artillery duels along Kashmir border

ISLAMABAD, Jan 10: Pakistani and Indian soldiers have been waging daily artillery duels along the disputed Kashmir border for the past two weeks, an army spokesman in Pakistan said on Saturday, reports AP.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training militants, a charge Islamabad denies.

However, Pakistan says it gives moral and political support to secessionists and has demanded Kashmiris be allowed to vote on their future to decide whether a united Kashmir should be with Pakistan or India.

On Saturday newspapers claimed that Pakistani troops destroyed 25 Indian posts on the border but the army spokesman said it was impossible to know the extent of the damage on the enemy side.

"When you are firing artillery at each other's positions you don't know what damage they are sustaining," he said. "It's not as if we are firing in the air. We are firing at their positions, but we don't know how many are destroyed."

The victims were herded out of a hospital by Serb troops and shot to a farm near Vukovar where they were beaten, shot and dumped in a mass grave.

The two often-hostile neighbours fought a third war in 1971 over Bangladesh, or what was then East Pakistan.

Since 1989 Muslim secessionists in Indian-held Kashmir said.

## 2 Muslim schools to get state funds in UK for first time

WASHINGTON, Jan 10: The United States called on Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia and other factions to ensure the safety of aid workers Friday following bombings that took place near a relief mission, reports AP.

In a statement, the State Department also expressed concern that "specific ethnic groups are increasingly being targeted in the conflict" and cited Taliban actions against the country's Hazara and Shia populations.

"We call on the Taliban and all other Afghan factions to guarantee the safety of all humanitarian relief workers and to facilitate the free flow of relief supplies to all Afghan civilians in need," State Department spokesman James Rubin said in the statement.

## 2 Muslim schools to get state funds in UK for first time

CAPE TOWN, Jan 10: An egg with mottled brown ridges that appear to spell out "Allah is great" in Arabic will go on display in a mosque, reports AP.

The egg was bought Monday from a farmer by a group of Muslims holding religious classes at Maccas, 60 kilometres (40 miles) from Cape Town.

One of the men, Faizel Eksteen, 45, said Friday that the wording on the egg was a sign that God exists.

"If I see an atheist now, I will show him proof," said Eksteen.

The egg has been handed over to a mosque in Cape Town's Woodstock suburb and will be displayed there, Eksteen said.

The decision resolves a long-standing grievance in Britain's 1.5 million Muslim community that its parents are not offered the same choice of religious education as that available to other faiths.

2 US global balloonists land in cactus field

YACHTS, New Mexico, Jan 10: Two balloonists parachuted into a cactus-studded pasture after a tear doomed their round-the-world quest just an hour after launch. The balloon, laden with explosive fuel, floated off over Texas at 110 mph (176 kmph), reports AP.

The Federal Aviation Administration ordered all aircraft to stay clear of the 170-foot (50 metre) balloon, which was drifting east at 35,000 feet (10,500 metres) during the afternoon. The military ordered chase planes to keep watch on it.

Dick Rutan and Dave Melton, who parachuted in 45 mph (72 kmph) winds, landed a quarter-mile (0.4-kilometre) apart about 13 miles (21 kilometres) southeast of the town of Vaughn. Rutan hit cactus and suffered bloody puncture wounds all over his nose and cheeks. Melton hit the only wire fence in the wide-open area.

"He was curled up on the ground. He was in pain," said Vaughn Police Chief JR Romo, who saw the pair parachute.

## Successor govt unlikely to change foreign policy: Gujral

ON BOARD AIR FORCE ONE, Jan. 10: Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral feels a successor government is unlikely to make radical changes in his government's foreign policy, particularly improving ties with neighbours, since the policy has received warm appreciation from world leaders, reports India Abroad News Service.

Asserting that his Gujral Doctrine had resulted in "melting" barriers between India and Pakistan, Gujral said "no party in India can gain from giving relations with Pakistan a setback."

"No government can be myopic in regard to foreign policy," Gujral told India Abroad News Service in an interview Thursday night on board his Indian Air Force special aircraft while returning from Chennai where he had gone to inaugurate the Partnership Summit of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

"My policies were developed, enlightened and far-sighted and were in India's interest. They (the Gujral Doctrine of good neighbourly relations) got a lot of mileage abroad and were praised by several world leaders," he said.

Gujral, who spoke at length on ties with Pakistan, said while he foresaw a "difficult period" in ties politically because of domestic compulsions of both countries, he saw prospects of improvement in other areas via the "SAARC route," because economic compulsions would override political and ideological antagonisms.

He said his visit to Dhaka next week to attend the trilateral business summit between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh was to