

BRIEFLY



Congress Party supporters shout slogans in favour of Sonia Gandhi, and hold posters of the widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, in New Delhi Saturday. Sonia has started campaigning to boost the party image in the forthcoming elections. — AP/UNB photo

Dengue fever cases rising in Malaysia: The Malaysian government started a campaign in the state of Borned Sunday to curtail the spread of dengue fever that has killed one person, the national news agency Bernama reported, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

This year, 64 cases of the mosquito-born infection — characterised by the joint aches, rash and fever — have already been reported in Sibu, 1030 kilometres (64 miles) southeast of Kuala Lumpur in Sarawak state, Bernama said.

16 students killed in China: Sixteen students returning home for Lunar New Year celebrations were killed when their overloaded bus crashed down a ravine in southern China, the Life Times reported yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

The bus, which was carrying 64 passengers instead of the legal limit of 47, slid on ice in heavy fog and crashed down a 10-metre (30 foot) ravine in southern Guizhou province.

India to set up Netaji Foundation: The national committee for the birth centenary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose yesterday decided to set up a Netaji Foundation to perpetuate his ideals, PTI says from New Delhi.

The committee, which met under the chairmanship of Prime Minister I K Gujral also decided to hold public function on January 23 at Red Fort to conclude the celebrations.

Rebels kidnap 6 in Philippines: Philippine Muslim rebels raided a village and abducted six people in the southern Philippines late last week, reports reaching Manila said yesterday. AFP reports from Manila.

The rebels, described as a lost command of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) released their hostage unharmed Thursday afternoon as police and military moved in on them, a police report said.

Romanian PM to face no-confidence: Romanian President Emil Constantinescu announced Saturday that Prime Minister Victor Ciorbea's government would face a confidence vote in parliament on Wednesday, AFP reports from Bucharest.

In a speech broadcast on television, Constantinescu said Ciorbea would submit his proposed reforms to parliament and his government would have to resign if a vote of no-confidence was passed against these proposals.

17 die in Chinese factory blast: Seventeen people were killed in an explosion in a makeshift Chinese fireworks factory. The Life Times reported yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

The illegal factory, in a four-roomed house in Sutong county in eastern Andhui province, was in full operation producing explosives for the upcoming Lunar New Year when a spark ignited a pile of crackers on January 11. All 17 people in the building were killed.

'Border' gets best film award: The film, "Border", won the best film award at the "Screen-Videocam Awards 1997" ceremony at the Andheri Sports Complex in Mumbai Saturday night, reports PTI from Mumbai.

Director of "Border", JP Dutta, won the award for the best director. The best actor award was bagged by Anil Kapoor for the film "Virasat", while the best actress award went to Madhuri Dixit for the film "Mrityudand."

Blast kills 1 miner in Russia: An explosion at a Russian coal mine in the arctic Vorkuta region killed at least one and injured five miners, officials said Sunday, AP reports from Moscow.

The blast occurred early Sunday when 49 miners were working inside the Tsentralnaya mine, the Emergency Situations Ministry reported. It said 22 miners, five of them injured, managed to reach the surface and brought out the body of one dead worker. Twenty-six other were trapped inside the mine.

Bosnian Serb lawmakers elect new premier

BIJELJINA: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jan 18: A bare majority of Bosnian Serb lawmakers elected a new, moderate premier early Sunday after hard-liners declared an end to a tumultuous legislative session and walked out, reports AP.

The Western-backed president, Biljana Plavsic, have been battling supporters of war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic over the premiership for weeks, prompting top international peace envoy Carlos Westendorp to declare a Saturday deadline to elect a Cabinet.

The election of a new premier was to have helped solve the crisis paralysing the Bosnian Serb-ruled half of Bosnia, yet Sunday's election by a rump assembly was certain to further polarise the situation.

Around midnight, the hard-line Speaker of Parliament, Dragan Kalinic, ended the session and called for the Parliament to reconvene in seven days.

Plavsic and her supporters, who had 43 of the Parliament's 83 seats, stayed while the opposing camp left. Forty-two voted for her candidate, Milorad Dodik, who did not have the right to take part in the vote.

"I have to congratulate the assembly because they have

taken a democratic decision," Westendorp said after the vote. "They have appointed a government with a majority and this government has promised to cooperate to solve the problems of Republika Srpska."

He said Dodik had promised to comply with the Dayton peace accord ending the war in the former Yugoslavia. "And the international community is ready to help him and the people of the Serb-ruled half of the country."

Plavsic nominated Dodik just hours before yesterday's parliamentary session started in the northeastern town of Bijeljina.

The hard-liners had rejected her previous candidate for premier.

The Karadzic loyalists did their best to prevent the vote, with deputies lining up to deliver diatribes against Plavsic.

Westendorp had the right to name a premier himself. But it was not clear whether any internally imposed premier could work without support from all the Serb parties.

Dodik, a 39-year-old businessman and opposition leader from Plavsic's stronghold of Banja Luka, has been involved in Bosnian politics since 1992.

International

Sanctions to remain in place : US

Saddam orders mobilisation of volunteers to fight for Iraq

BAGHDAD, Jan 18: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ordered the "mobilisation" of volunteers to prepare Iraq for a possible confrontation with the United States Saturday after threatening to give UN arms inspectors a six-month ultimatum to leave Baghdad, reports AFP.

Iraq should "recruit as many people for training as possible" in an operation to cover "the whole of Iraq and be led by the ruling Baath Party," Saddam said.

The training would be organised on an "entirely voluntary basis and would involve no compulsion," he told a meeting of the Baath Party leadership which was also attended by Defence Minister Sultan Hashem Ahmed.

He said the move had been made necessary by "the fact that our enemies... America and Zionism continue to act on the path of evil and to seek the slightest pretext to achieve the vile objectives of their sick minds."

"It is desirable to have at our disposal under the banner of

the Baath Party as many volunteers as possible," he said.

The move followed a defiant address to the Iraqi people broadcast by Iraqi television earlier in the day in which Saddam scoffed at US warnings of a military strike and threatened to give UN arms inspectors a six-month ultimatum to leave Baghdad, reports AFP.

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including the video recorder which served to record one of his speeches and a radio on which he listened to world reports on the war.

He saw too the military uniform he wore and the kitchen utensils he used to prepare meals, INA said.

The house contained an oil lamp used by Saddam and a table on which he wrote a presidential decree ordering the words Allah Akbar to be added to the Iraqi flag.

Meanwhile, AP from Washington adds: Responding to new threats by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the Clinton administration pledged Saturday that sanctions will remain in place against Iraq until Baghdad fully complies with UN resolutions.

The only way that sanctions can be lifted is if Saddam Hussein ensures that his government cooperates with the UN under the terms the UN has set out and with the people the UN thinks are necessary," State Department spokesman James P. Rubin said.

"It's not up to Iraq to dictate those terms," Rubin told The Associated Press. "If Saddam doesn't comply, he only has himself to blame for the continuation of the sanctions."

It is near the end of a "zooey day" for Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and a team of Middle East experts is waiting outside her office. Ahead is a period of both crisis and opportunity, and for the moment Albright's attention is fixed on the dangerous stalemate between Iraq and UN weapons inspectors.

"They must have been close to something on whether biological or chemical weapons were used on prisoners," Albright told The Associated Press in a wide-ranging interview marking the end of her first year on the job.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is "tightening the noose around himself," she said, personalising the conflict. "By not letting this inspection team go forward, in almost a strange way it's almost as if he has come close to saying, 'OK, you caught me.'

'Sonia's concern over Babri Masjid demolition is sheer opportunism'

HYDERABAD, Jan 18: United Front convenor N Chandrababu Naidu today said Sonia Gandhi's concern over demolition of Babri Masjid was a "sheer opportunism" as the then Congress government at the centre was a mere spectre to December 6 incident at Ayodhya, reports PTI.

The Congress had failed to react to the demolition for 48 hours then and Sonia Gandhi expressing deep concern over the incident six-year later is ridiculous, Naidu told reporters here today.

Sonia Gandhi's silence all these years on the issue and now championing the cause of secularism, is nothing short of political opportunism, Naidu said adding that Congress, which was in power during the demolition, was now raising a hue and cry against fundamentalism and its commitment towards secularism. It speaks of their dubious credentials, he said.

Terming United Front as the sole champion of secular politics, Naidu expressed hope that they would defeat the communal BJP and the corrupt Congress in the ensuing elections.

The entry of Sonia into politics would hardly affect the chances of United Front at the

hustings, Naidu claimed and asserted that the Front would get a workable majority over virtue of its performance alone.

When asked why the United Front government could not make the Bofors documents public, Naidu said it was in process and his party was committed to expose the guilty.

Parties urged not to put up candidates with criminal record

Meanwhile, former Lok Sabha Speaker Rabindra Ray today appealed to all political parties not to put up candidates with criminal record in the ensuing parliamentary elections.

Claiming that as many as 40 members of the dissolved Lok Sabha and 700 members in different state legislatures had criminal background, Ray said there was no law to debar these members from entering into the democratic institutions.

That was why a conference of all political parties should be convened within the next one week to debate on the issue. Prime Minister I K Gujral should himself take the initiative to convene such a conference, Ray said here.

Off the Record

It was Diana's trademark

ONDON: It was Diana's trademark, but Princess Anne says it is just not her style, reports AP.

The very idea that all children want to be cuddled by a complete stranger I find utterly amazing, especially in front of the press, Anne, 47, was quoted as saying in London's Daily Telegraph on Saturday.

Diana, 36, broke with tradition by shaking hands with AIDS patients, kissing children, and touching the stumps of land mine victims. She became the most popular and famous royal, and her death August 31 prompted an outpouring of national grief.

"It is just that different people work in different ways to get the message across," Anne said.

Jackson breathes sign of relief

LOS ANGELES: An Italian singer lost a copyright infringement case that claimed Michael Jackson's hit song "Will You Be There" was stolen, reports AP.

The case was submitted to a three-judge panel in Rome on November 20 and official notice of their decision in favour of Jackson and Sony Music was received by Jackson lawyer Eve Wagner late last week.

Michael Jackson has once again been vindicated, and we are delighted that justice has been served, Wagner said Friday.

Italian signer Al Bano, who sued in 1992, was ordered by the Rome panel to pay Jackson's and Sony's legal expenses, Wagner said.

Jackson testified in Rome on February 4 that he did not plagiarise the Italian song "I Cigni di Balaka" (The Swans of Balaka) by Bano when he composed "Will You Be There", which was on his 1991 "Dangerous" album.

There is some similarity, but it's completely coincidental, Jackson testified.



Paula Jones and her husband Stephen Jones arrive at the office of President Clinton's personal attorney, Robert Bennett, Saturday, in Washington. Clinton and Jones were meeting as the president faced unprecedented questioning by her lawyers, under oath, about her accusation that he asked her for sex seven years ago.

— AP/UNB photo

Israelis, Palestinians show no signs of drawing closer to dialogue

JERUSALEM, Jan 18: Israelis and Palestinians, separated by a gulf of mistrust, show no signs of drawing closer to toward dialogue on the eve of their leaders' meetings in Washington with US President Bill Clinton, reports AFP.

A military spokesman said Hekmat Al-Hejji, a senior diplomat, was assassinated in a "cowardly" act, the official INA news agency reported.

He called on the Jordanian authorities to immediately open an inquiry and identify those behind the attack.

The plan envisioned a law-making assembly in Belfast that would send representatives to a cross-border council. The council would promote joint decision-making between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

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