

Yeltsin urges opponents to confirm his nominee as PM

MOSCOW, Apr 13: President Boris Yeltsin kept up the pressure on his opponents in parliament Monday, urging them to confirm his nominee for prime minister or face "further steps" such as new elections, reports AP.

Yeltsin dismissed suggestions that a new candidate be named to replace Sergei Kiriyenko, a 35-year-old former banker and fuel minister. "I want to repeat once again: I have no other candidate. I shall not nominate another candidate," Yeltsin told reporters in the Kremlin shortly before a meeting with Kiriyenko.

Yeltsin said he would meet Duma speaker Gennady Seleznyov, a Communist, on Tuesday. However, he stressed that he wouldn't guarantee the opposition any Cabinet seats or other concessions. The president has ruled out a coalition government as a way to break the impasse.



Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, left, shakes hand with Indonesian President Suharto during a courtesy call in Jakarta on Monday at Presidential office in Jakarta. — AP/UNB photo

165 die of Dengue fever in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Apr 13: At least 165 people have died of Dengue fever in several areas of Indonesia this year, according to news reports on Monday, reports AP.

Eighteen people have died in Dili, the capital of the half-island territory of East Timor. More than 200 people are being treated at local hospitals.

The disease is transmitted by a small parasite contained in the saliva of the Aedes Aegypti mosquito. There is no vaccine for the virus, which can cause fever, joint pains, chills and hemorrhaging.

Police said residents in parts of Peterborough, eastern England, should prepare to evacuate their homes.

Heavy rains, which started on Thursday and peaked on Friday, had taken a heavy toll.

Iraqi newspaper terms UN report a 'silly lie'

BAGHDAD, Apr 13: A UN human rights report that Iraq executed more than 1,500 people in the past year is a "silly lie" that serves American propaganda, an Iraqi newspaper said Monday, reports AP.

It is really funny that the American administration can imagine that it can mislead the whole world by moving some of its puppets," the newspaper said in an editorial.

'Extremist elements may sabotage May referendum on peace deal'

LONDON, Apr 13: British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Chairman of Northern Ireland's peace talks on Sunday expressed concern that extremist elements could try to sabotage a May referendum on Friday's peace deal.

The agreement, which seeks to end three decades of sectarian strife by altering constitutional arrangements for the British-ruled province, must be approved by separate referendums in northern Ireland and Ireland.

But extremist Protestant and catholic groups oppose the deal and elements from both sides detonated bombs in the run-up to the talks, which ended on Friday.

"There will be people who don't want to make the changes necessary, who are going to try to do everything they can to try to stop this agreement, and we've got to have the people of vision triumph over that," Blair told reporters in Spain, where he is on a short holiday.

Talks Chairman George Mitchell, a former US Senator, echoed the tone of Blair's comments in an interview with ABC Television.

"There are people on both sides who want to disrupt this process, who are committed to the way of violence and I expect they will step up their activities between now and the date of the referendum and thereafter," he said.

"But it's been going on a long time and people recognise it for what it is, so my hope is that it won't destabilise the process."

For the British and Irish governments, the crucial task now is to ensure a "yes" vote in the two referendums on May 22.

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Koirala refuses to be sworn in on inauspicious day

KATHMANDU, Apr 13: Nepal's new Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, refused to be sworn in on Monday, the last day of the Nepalese calendar, considered inauspicious by astrologers, reports AP.

Koirala, 72, was appointed Prime Minister on Sunday by King Birendra to head a minority government after no political party managed to form a partnership in Nepal's split parliament.

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Missile talks may figure prominently during Richardson's India visit

NEW DELHI, Apr 13: A war of words between India and Pakistan over missile testing "may come up" when US Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson arrives here, a US embassy official, said here today, reports AP.

Richardson's visit on Tuesday and Wednesday is designed to pave the way for a visit by US President Bill Clinton due in September.

The official said the visit would also include a meeting with India's newly-elected Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Vajpayee heads the Hindu Nationalist Party, regarded as right wing by its rival but an unknown quantity in power.

The embassy official said the US was keen for a direct "insight" to understand the nationalist policies.

"The issue of the missile test may come up during the talks with the prime minister but the focus will be on the visit of Bill Clinton due in September."

Last week Pakistan announced it had successfully tested a surface-to-surface missile capable of hitting most Indian cities.

That led to Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes to say that India had missile capable of hitting any target in Pakistan.

Brazil to extradite foreign convicts

RIO DE JANEIRO, Apr 13: Brazil will extradite nine foreigners convicted of the 1989 kidnapping of a business magnate, a move announced one day before they were to start an indefinite hunger strike, Globo TV News said on Sunday, reports AP.

The extraditions will be carried out under treaties being negotiated with the prisoners' home countries, a government official indicated.

Sexual harassment case Paula to decide on possible appeal this week

WASHINGTON, Apr 13: Paula Jones, who's been in seclusion since a federal judge dismissed her sexual harassment lawsuit against President Bill Clinton on April 1, is planning to emerge this week to announce whether she will appeal the decision, reports AP.

Mrs Jones will likely reveal her decision on Thursday, spokeswoman Susan Carpenter McMillan said Sunday.

Carpenter McMillan declined to say whether she would appeal. Mrs Jones was expected to announce the decision herself, either in the Los Angeles area, where she lives, or in Dallas, where her attorneys are located.

This would be Mrs Jones' first public comments on the case since Judge Susan Webber Wright threw out all three sexual harassment charges against Clinton.

Mrs Jones, claimed that Clinton propositioned her in a Arkansas hotel room in 1991 when she was a state worker.

Clinton maintains he doesn't recall ever meeting her and has firmly denied anything improper happened.

In her ruling, Wright said that whatever went on in the Arkansas hotel room between Mrs Jones and Clinton, who was then governor, she had failed to prove she was harmed emotionally or in her career as she contended.

Mrs Jones' legal team and advisers described her as disappointed, shocked and tearful after the dismissal, which halted the lawsuit she set in motion four years ago and which prompted similar allegations against Clinton from other women.

But Mrs Jones has remained silent, pent up in the Long Beach, California, apartment she shares with her husband.

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Italian president arrives in Tokyo

Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro arrived in Tokyo yesterday for a week-long visit to Japan aimed at strengthening economic ties between the two countries, officials said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Scalfaro is due to meet Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko late on Monday at the Imperial Palace and will hold talks with Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on Wednesday.

China launches military drill for PLA: China has launched "comprehensive military drills" aimed at preparing the People's Liberation Army to fight high-technology regional wars, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The nationwide drills involve all branches of the Armed Forces, Xinhua quoted unnamed sources as saying.

"The training intends to acquaint PLA officers and soldiers with the means and ways to win regional wars employing high-technology," Xinhua said.

Shanghai airport reopens: Shanghai's airport reopened today after a Thai Airways jet overshoot the runway on Sunday, forcing a halt to air traffic, officials said, Reuter reports from Shanghai.

The Thai Airways International MD-11 was said by local media to have been carrying about 300 passengers from Bangkok when it skidded onto the grass beside the airport runway at about 4:00 pm on Sunday. No one was hurt. As a result more than 160 flights were cancelled, stranding thousands of passengers.

Flood situation worsens in England

LONDON, Apr 13: British authorities on Sunday warned of further flooding and urged residents to evacuate their homes, in the wake of storms which have left up to five people dead and caused damage estimated at millions of pounds, reports AP.

As Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott on Sunday visited towns deluged in the English Midlands, authorities reported that river levels in the east of the country were dangerously high.

Police said residents in parts of Peterborough, eastern England, should prepare to evacuate their homes.

Heavy rains, which started on Thursday and peaked on Friday, had taken a heavy toll.

Iraqi newspaper terms UN report a 'silly lie'

BAGHDAD, Apr 13: A UN human rights report that Iraq executed more than 1,500 people in the past year is a "silly lie" that serves American propaganda, an Iraqi newspaper said Monday, reports AP.

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Foreign missions start to evacuate staff to escape haze in Brunei

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Brunei, Apr 13: The US Embassy in Brunei has requested permission from Washington to evacuate its staff from the smog-choked capital to temporarily escape hazardous air pollution, the US Ambassador said Monday, reports AP.

As the haze in this oil-rich kingdom on northern Borneo island remains at critical levels, foreign embassies have filed travel alerts and begun to grant staff "rest and relaxation" on a rotating basis, embassy officials said.

"We're waiting for State Department approval," said US Ambassador Glen Robert Reese, to fly staff to Australia or the United States.

Reese said other embassies were doing likewise.

In mid-March, the US Embassy filed a travel alert, advising some 200 Americans in Brunei not to go outside and to wear protective masks if they must go outdoors.

The statement cautioned travelers to Brunei to be aware of the "hazardous" air pollution levels.

The international airport has often been forced to shut down. All incoming flights and short, outgoing flights were canceled Monday morning.

Three million worshippers flock to Hardwar

HARDWAR, India, Apr 13: An estimated three million worshippers flocked to the holy Indian city of Hardwar today, forcing security to be stepped up for a Hindu pilgrimage which is expected to attract millions more, reports AP.

Officials said 25,000 police had been deployed for the spectacular Mahakumbh festival on the bank of the river Ganges, which authorities boast is the largest of its kind in the world.

The Press Trust of India said up to eight million people were expected to wash away their sins in the Ganges' holy waters on Tuesday when the festival reaches its climax.

The event, held every 12 years and rotated between four pilgrimage centres, has been plagued by stampedes.

When it was last held in Hardwar in 1986 about 30 people died.

In 1954, hundreds were killed in a stampede at the northern town of Allahabad.

Rivalries between various religious groups, often over who should be granted the honour of bathing first at the crossed riverside, have in the past sparked violence.

Off the Record

Fergie 'amused, if a little hurt'

LONDON: Sophie Rhyas-Jones, the girlfriend of Prince Edward, 'astonished' the Duchess of York when she asked her to make a public appearance being sprayed with water in an empty swimming pool, the Daily Telegraph reported, today, says AFP.

The Duchess, who is the former wife of Prince Edward's brother, Prince Andrew, was said to be 'amused, if a little hurt,' according to one of her friends, quoted by The Telegraph.

There is no prospect of the Duchess accepting the invitation from Rhyas-Jones who has been hired to do public relations work for a London health club, the newspaper added.

In exchange for being soaked in front of the cameras, the Duchess was reportedly to have received an appearance fee and life membership of the club.

The Duchess, who notoriously has various debts to clear, has undertaken many commercial engagements, but she is said to have a policy for restricting her lucrative activities to foreign countries to minimise embarrassment to the royal family.

Rhyas-Jones was reported to be unavailable for comment.



An unidentified girl from the Biblical town of Nazareth is held high above the crowd of Easter Sunday worshippers by her father to enable her to view the proceedings on Sunday at the Church of the Annunciation, where according to Christian tradition, the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary the incarnation of Christ. — AP/UNB photo

Peace needed nowhere as desperately as in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Apr 13: After the last bomb to hit Sri Lanka's capital killed more than 40 people, counselors offered to meet with the wounded, widowed or simply frightened. No one was interested, reports AP.

Two years ago, following one of the first deadly rebel bombings in Colombo, dozens of people came to the group therapy sessions organized by the National Council on Mental Health. But today, council director Dr. Narne F. Wickremesinghe said, people have grown used to living with violence, fear and distrust.

"What we can look forward to, I don't know," said Wickremesinghe, who is Sinhalese. "The amount of trust I have in my Tamil friends, I know the next generation won't have. How are you going to overcome it? I have no idea. It's gone on too long."

Even though the front is far to the north, what is universally known as simply "this situation" is part of the rhythm of daily life in Colombo. Doctors and nurses at the main hospital have perfected a bomb response drill. The view from the city's luxurious beach front hotels sweeps in a fleet of warships off the coast at the spot where a team of guerrilla divers with bombs strapped to their chests once tried to sneak ashore.

It's an early rising town, even on Sundays, when maroons in white saris troop to their weekly Buddhist religious classes. On weekdays, seamstresses start their shifts at clothing factories before the tropical heat reaches its stickiest. Office workers coping with rush hour can never be sure which roads on their route will be closed for a security check.

Every time 21-year-old Tamil business student Sanjitha Satyamoorthy approaches one of the police checkpoints that dot downtown, she braces herself.

Her Sinhalese friends are waved on after producing national identity cards. But once officers see her Tamil name — Sinhalese names are more sibilant, but equally treacherous for Western tongues — she's usually asked for proof she has a reason to be in Colombo, in the form of an affidavit from her local police station.

"Okay, fine, I carry my police report everywhere. Asked to produce it, I produce it," she said, her words clipped and bare of emotion. She has grown used to the constant suspicion, she said.

Extremists say the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese majority can't live together on this tropical Indian Ocean island of 18 million people, though the two ethnic groups have done just that for centuries. They speak different languages and pray to different gods. Tamils are Hindu and Sinhalese are Buddhist, a religion that grew out of Hinduism. The two peoples are so similar even most Sri Lankans can't tell a Tamil from a Sinhalese when they pass each other on the street.

Seeds of division were planted by the British, who appointed Tamils who had benefited from missionary education to posts in the colonial civil service at much higher rates than Sinhalese. At independence in 1948, Tamils were best prepared to step into leadership.

Politicians exploited resentment among Sinhalese, especially the poor, by promoting the Sinhala language over the English at which Tamils were so adept, as well as over the Tamil language. Civil service jobs and university slots were set aside for Sinhalese, and it was the Tamils turn for bitterness.

"I feel that Sri Lanka is my country, but we are treated as third-class citizens," said 68-year-old Poonampalam Panachadaram, a retired civil servant living with his daughter and son-in-law, a Hindu astrologer, in a scruffy Tamil neighborhood in Colombo.

Pol Pot's whereabouts remains a mystery: Cambodian army

SIEM REAP, Cambodia, Apr 13: The Cambodian military said Monday that the whereabouts of notorious Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot remains a mystery, but that pro-government forces were on the lookout for the last few hundred guerrillas and their leadership, reports AP.

Gen. Meas Sophea, deputy army chief of staff, said that no one had been able to confirm a rumour that he floated Sunday that Pol Pot and other leaders had been captured in neighbouring Thailand by renegade guerrillas in their own faction.

"We are not really clear about that," Meas Sophea said. "We've asked our network to get all information. They are not in Anlong Veng, that is sure."

The Thai military has denied the reports. Thai television stations, whom Meas Sophea cited as the source of the report, said they had broadcast no such news.

Thai army officers speculated that the Cambodian army was spreading disinformation to convince die-hard guerrillas their cause was hopeless and to defect.

Meanwhile, a helicopter flew reporters to a site about 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) from Anlong Veng, main base of the last Khmer Rouge faction still fighting the government before a mutiny three weeks ago.

'Israel may still make peace with Palestine'

WASHINGTON, Apr 13: Israel may still make peace with its Palestinian neighbours, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, adding that he hoped it would come soon, reports AP.