

International

**BRIEFLY**



Indonesian students, wearing masks depicting former President Suharto, right, and a special forces (KOPASSUS) soldier, left, take part in a "happening art" anti-government protest in Jakarta Thursday. Students have been stepping up protests in the weeks leading up to the special session of parliament which will decide guidelines for next year's elections. — AP/UNB photo

**Fire guts Ottoman palace in Cairo:** A fire gutted a gem of Muslim architecture, the Palace of Musafirkhana, in Old Cairo on Thursday. AP reports from Cairo.

The blaze began when residents set fire to piles of trash in front of the 18th-century Ottoman palace, police said. The wooden gate caught fire and the flames quickly spread to the palace. It took firefighters five hours to put out the blaze, which devoured the rich woodwork of the palace and left only the walls standing. Four neighbouring apartments were also destroyed.

**Chinese dissident gets 7 yrs:** A veteran Chinese dissident held for five months without access to his family or a lawyer has been sentenced in secret to seven years in prison for joining an underground opposition party, exiled democracy activists said Friday. AP reports from Beijing.

Chen Zengqiang, from the eastern port city of Qingdao, was detained May 23 after he told police during questioning that he had joined the dissident Chinese Democracy and Justice Party, the party said.

**Floods claim 16 in Vietnam:** Floods in the central regions of Vietnam have claimed 16 lives over the past five days, provincial officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

Sixteen people have drowned and several others have been reported missing in heavy downpours in the central provinces of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan and Quang Nam since October 19, officials from the provincial anti-flood committees said. Heavier than normal seasonal rainfall coming after the provinces' worst drought had made conditions particularly dangerous for flooding, they added.

**S'pore, S Africa sign defence deal:** South Africa and Singapore signed a defence agreement Friday allowing the deployment of military personnel from the South-east Asian city-state for training purposes. AP reports from Singapore.

A statement from Singapore's Ministry of Defence said the agreement, which was signed in Pretoria, South Africa, was the two countries' second such defence arrangement and a "milestone in the warm bilateral defense ties" between the two countries.

**8 die in Indian road accident:** Eight people were killed and 11 injured when the bus in which they were travelling hit a stationary lorry in Karnataka's Haveri district in the early hours yesterday, police said. PTI reports from Bangalore.

According to police, the bus was carrying some students, who had assembled at Hubli from various parts, to a sports event at Shimoga. The mishap occurred around 0200 am on the Kumarpatina-Ranbenah highway near Makanur Cross.

**69 Kurdish rebels killed in Turkey:** Turkish troops killed 69 Kurdish rebels in eastern Turkey in clashes that also left 10 soldiers dead, officials said Friday. AP reports from Diyarbakir, Turkey.

Fighting started Wednesday in the regions of Van, Siirt and Sirnak, which border Iraq and Iran. Kurdish rebels, fighting for autonomy in Turkey's southeast, often wage cross-border operations from camps in Iraq, Iran and Syria.

**Israeli serial stabber held:** Israeli police arrested an alleged Israeli serial stabber of Palestinians, one of whom died, Radio Israel reported Thursday. AFP says from Petah Tikva.

Police are investigating Jonathan Zion Dadovitz, 32, in connection with seven attacks in an ultra-orthodox Jewish neighbourhood in Jerusalem. Radio Israel and army radio said. He is alleged to have committed the attacks that began in November 1997 on nationalist grounds.

**Indian filmstar Ajit buried:** Popular Hindi filmstar of yesteryears Ajit, who died on Wednesday, was laid to rest at Golkonda graveyard in Hyderabad Thursday. PTI reports from Hyderabad.

Close family members including his wife and three sons were present at the funeral. Ajit, 76, whose real name was Hamid Ali Khan, had acted in more than 100 films.

**Vietnam to free 2,630 prisoners:** Vietnam is freeing 2,630 prison inmates under a presidential amnesty, the second big release in less than two months, a government source said Friday. AP reports from Hanoi.

The amnesty, signed Tuesday by President Tran Duc Luong, was to be officially announced at prisons throughout the country Friday. The release then could take several days.



A Vegetarian Festival follower, his face pierced with a stalk of bamboo, walks during a parade with a helper Friday in Phuket, Thailand. The annual festival calls on followers to abstain from eating, sex and alcohol during a nine-day period. — AP/UNB photo

**Salman Khan deposits passport with court**

JODHPUR, Oct 23: Film actor Salman Khan, granted bail in cases of poaching black bucks and chinkaras last week, has deposited his passport with a local court here, reports PTI.

The lawyers of the actor presented the passport to judicial magistrate Prabhodh Vashishtha yesterday, who ordered safe custody of the same till the disposal of the case against the accused.

District and Sessions Judge DN Joshi while granting bail to Salman Khan on October 17 had ordered him to surrender his passport within a week.

Meanwhile, a police team has been despatched to Mumbai to arrest comedian Satish Shah and Dinesh, private assistant of Salman Khan, who have been named co-accused in one of the poaching cases.

Shah and four other co-accused have moved anticipatory bail applications in different courts here.

Three cases of poaching protected wild animals were registered against Salman Khan and eight others including actor Saif Ali and actresses Tabu, Sonali Bendre and Neelam earlier this month.

**Lanka govt, LTTE for third party mediation to end conflict**

COLOMBO, Oct 23: Sri Lankan government and LTTE militants have expressed desire for a third party mediator to put an end to years of ethnic conflict in the island nation, reports PTI.

Reacting to an LTTE spokesman's comment that the rebels organisation was not averse to a third party facilitator as suggested by Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister GL Peris told reporters here yesterday that the government has no rigid objection for such a move.

He however, said talks should begin at an appropriate time but refused to elaborate.

The government maintained it was willing to resume negotiations with the LTTE under certain conditions.

**Iranians vote in key assembly election**

TEHRAN, Oct 23: Iranians voted Friday in nationwide elections for a key assembly that is expected to be dominated by hardline clergy men who favour unhindered powers for the country's supreme leader, reports AP.

Few voters were seen in the first hour after polling began at 8 am (0430 GMT) in 33,312 polling stations in the country's 28 provinces. The streets of Tehran were largely empty and security personnel — among 100,000 deployed nationwide — chatted on street corners.

Among the first to vote was supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the successor of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who led the 1979 Islamic Revolution to instal the rule of Shi'ite clergy in Iran.

A total of 161 candidates — about 130 of them conservative clerics — are contesting for 86 seats in the Assembly of Experts, whose job is to oversee the work of the supreme leader.

**Fresh fighting in Guinea Bissau: Over 100 killed**

DAKAR, Oct 23: The death toll in fighting between mutinous troops in Guinea Bissau and loyalist forces backed by Senegal and Guinea passed 100 as the outcome hung in the balance today, reports AFP.

A Senegalese army communiqué said late Thursday that some 40 rebels and six Senegalese troops were killed Tuesday and Wednesday to add to the 63 rebels, and eight Senegalese reported to have died Monday when the fighting flared again.

In addition, the Portuguese agency Lusa reported that 200 Guinean troops were missing after the country's second city of Bafata fell into the hands of the mutineers.

The Senegalese communiqué, which claimed that separatist rebels from Senegal's southern region of Casamance bordering Guinea Bissau were among the casualties in Bissau, said that "our forces continue to ensure the security of the city and control every access."

**Corruption charges against Sharif Opposition demands Senate investigation**

ISLAMABAD, Oct 23: Pakistani opposition has demanded a Senate investigation into corruption allegations against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, parliamentary source said today, reports AFP.

The demand, signed by 22 opposition senators, was submitted Tuesday, they said adding that the chairman of the 87-member house is required to call the session within a fortnight.

The opposition call followed the publication of a report by London's independent daily that a senior Pakistani politician used a British family to channel millions of pounds into offshore accounts for Sharif and close relatives.

According to the report, bank accounts were set up in the name of a British family and used to raise millions of pounds in loans.

It based its claims on documents prepared for court actions five years ago against several close relatives of the premier.

The FIA was asked in 1993 to investigate corruption and money laundering allegation against Sharif after his dismissal as premier, but charges were dropped when he returned to power in 1997.

Officials have said the allegations against Sharif were part of a smear campaign sponsored by his arch rival, former premier Benazir Bhutto, who was sacked in November 1996 for misuse and corruption.

Bhutto has been charged with corruption in a number of cases initiated by the government's anti-corruption accountability bureau, she has accused Sharif of political victimisation.

Senator Reza Rabbani, a key opposition figure in the Senate, said the corruption charges against Sharif warranted a debate in the house.

He called for a high-level independent probe into the allegations.

Both reports came after Rehman Malik, the former number two in Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), which wrote an unofficial account of its probe into Sharif businesses.

The government strongly denounced the Observer report as "incorrect ... and a figment of the imagination" of Malik, calling him a fugitive from the law.

It lodged a complaint with the British Press Complaints Commission and said the newspaper could be used if it was not satisfied by commission's decision.

Malik is hiding in London after being suspended from his job, charged with corruption and imprisonment without trial for a year.



President Clinton talks with Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, centre right, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, right, and Gamal Halel, PLO delegate, left, at the Wye River Conference Centre, Maryland, Thursday. — AP/UNB photo

**Thousands hold rally defying police ban in Kuala Lumpur**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23: Thousands of anti-government demonstrators braved the threat of arrest Friday to gather at the national mosque for a rally demanding political reforms, reports AP.

Waving their fists and shouting "Reformasi" or "reform" in the Malaysian language, passing cars honked four times to punctuate the opposition rally.

Hundreds hopped on motorcycles, their helmets over their white caps donned for Friday afternoon prayers, and headed toward Parliament, where Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was set to unveil the 1999 budget.

Dozens of riot police with rattan canes and tear-gas canisters looked on, preparing to disperse the crowd.

Police had warned those who

joined the anti-government march could face arrest under the dreaded Internal Security Act, which allows for indefinite detention without trial.

The demonstrators are supporters of jailed dissident Anwar Ibrahim, ousted as deputy prime minister and finance minister on Sept 2.

Police have declared illegal all demonstrations in support of Anwar, who is awaiting trial on charges of graft and sexual misconduct. So far, authorities have detained 262 people who have attended anti-government rallies, releasing them on bail pending trial.

City police chief Kamaruddin Ali said that no one had applied for permit to hold Friday's demonstration, as required by law in this Southeast Asian country.

"We charged ... people on

Wednesday for illegal assembly and will not hesitate to do the same again," Kamaruddin was quoted as saying in Friday editions of The Star. On Wednesday, a local court ordered the trial of 127 people who were arrested for participating in a demonstration that demanded Mahathir's resignation.

The political scandal and apparent police brutality against Anwar have soured political relations with other nations. The presidents of Indonesia and the Philippines threatened to boycott the upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Kuala Lumpur next month.

US President Bill Clinton won't meet with Mahathir during the APEC summit because of US concerns over the handling of Anwar, administration sources said Thursday.

**Yeltsin calls for better ties with adversaries**

MOSCOW, Oct 23: Boris Yeltsin said Friday that Russia was starting to "crawl out" of its economic crisis and he called for better relations with lawmakers who have often quarrelled with the president, reports AP.

Yeltsin, who has spent most of the past two weeks at a country residence recovering from a respiratory infection, was in the Kremlin on Friday for talks with Yegor Stroyev, the chairman of parliament's upper house, the Federation Council.

The situation is difficult, but we are starting to crawl out a bit," Yeltsin was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies.

The Russian economy is not experiencing the daily shocks that it suffered when the crisis hit with full force in August, but the economic prognosis is still grim.

Already high prices continue to rise, millions of Russians are out of work and millions more get paid months late. Yeltsin has made only occasional comments on the crisis and the new government led by Prime

Minister Yevgeny Primakov has focused only on stop-gap measures to stabilise the economy and has not produced a long-term recovery plan.

Meanwhile, Yeltsin's latest illness has prompted his many critics to again question his fitness to govern. Yeltsin, 67, has suffered health problems for years, including heart bypass surgery in 1996.

The president has fought constantly with the lower house of parliament, the State Duma, where Communists make up the largest faction.

The president has had far better relations with the upper house, which usually supports Yeltsin. However, nearly half the Federation Council supported a non-binding resolution last week that called on the president to resign.

But Yeltsin said he was still on good terms with Stroyev. "I like working with him," Yeltsin told reporters before the meeting with Stroyev. "We work in a friendly way."

"There is always a need to meet with you," Yeltsin told Stroyev.

**Newspaper reports say Pinochet may be freed**

LONDON, Oct 23: Amid growing controversy over the arrest of former Chilean dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet, British newspapers reported Friday that the government has hinted that Pinochet could escape extradition and be free "on compassionate grounds," reports AP.

Aides at Prime Minister Tony Blair's official Downing Street office highlighted the powers of Britain's home secretary to overrule the request of a Spanish magistrate who is seeking to extradite him to face charges of genocide, torture and terrorism, the Daily Telegraph reported.

Pinochet was arrested in his London hospital bed on Oct 16 at the request of Spanish magistrate Baltasar Garzon. He remains under police guard in the London Clinic, where he was recovering from back surgery when he was arrested.

The signal from the government came hours after Britain's top cleric, Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, had appealed for compassion in the matter, the Telegraph said.

Meanwhile, lawyers for Pinochet launched a legal bid for freedom from police custody in court Thursday, saying his arrest was illegal. A hearing was set for Monday.

Earlier, an appeal by Margaret Thatcher for the release of Pinochet angered left-wing lawmakers and underlined a political dilemma for the Labour Party government.

In Spain, a delegation of Chilean legislators lobbying against the possible extradition warned that Chile was on the brink of political turmoil because of the arrest and that the issue was damaging relations among the three countries.

Pinochet, 82, suffers from diabetes and has carried a pacemaker for several years.

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The Congolese rebels — ethnic Tutu, disenfranchised members of Kabila's army and opposition politicians — accuse Kabila of corruption, mismanagement and promoting tribalism.

The Security Council expressed support for efforts by the Organisation of African Unity and regional organisations to arrange a ceasefire and welcomed a meeting in the Zambian capital, Lusaka, on Oct. 26 of foreign and defence ministers from a number of countries to try to resolve the crisis.

Council members urged all parties involved in the Congo conflict to attend the talks

**UNSC for immediate end to offensives in Congo**

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 23: The UN Security Council called for an immediate end to military offensives in the Congo Thursday as forces from three southern African nations prepared to attack rebels in the country's eastern jungles, reports AP.

Allies of embattled Congolese President Laurent Kabila — Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola — decided Wednesday to help him oust rebel forces entrenched in the eastern Congo. Forces from the three nations have been concentrated in western Congo, where they fended off a rebel advance in August.

After a briefing from Undersecretary General Sir Kieran Prendergast, the Security Council called for all troops in the country to remain where they are and stop fighting.

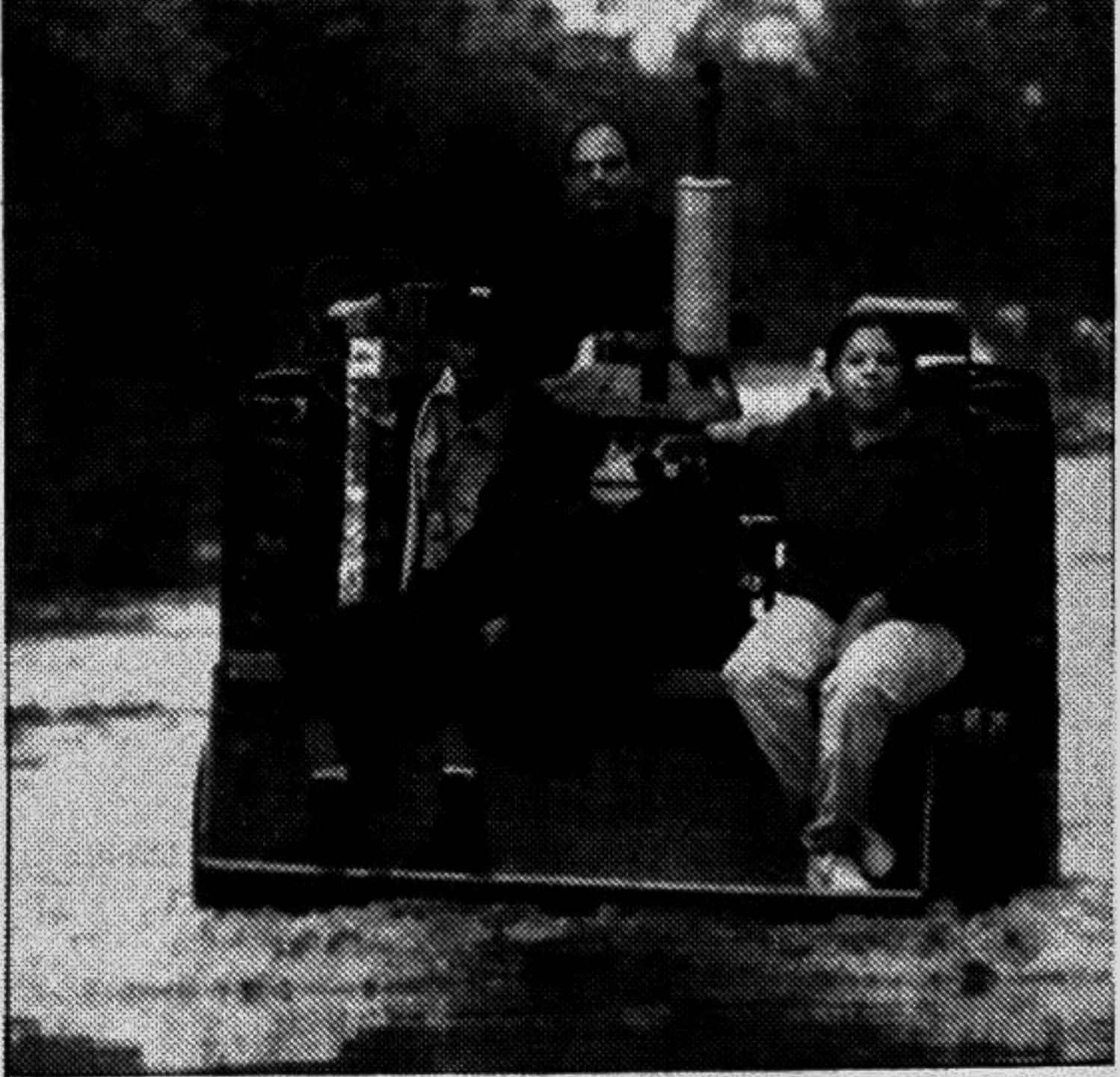
Council members also urged all parties involved not to take

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Thurman Morton, centre, uses a farm tractor to drive Anthony Aldridge, left, and Demetria Frazier from their flooded neighbourhood Thursday in Wharton, Texas. — AP/UNB photo

**Complete map of human genes likely by 2003**

WASHINGTON, Oct 23: A complete map of the human genetic pattern can be finished by 2003, two years ahead of schedule, reports AP.

That's the plan of officials running the Human Genome Project, a federal programme to sequence all of the 60,000 to 80,000 genes that are present in human DNA, according to a statement to be published Friday in the journal Science.

Francis S. Collins, director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, was first author of the statement.

"Recent technological developments and experience with large-scale sequencing provide increasing confidence that it will be possible to complete and accurate, high-quality sequence

of the human genome by the end of 2003, two years sooner than previously predicted," the statement said.

About 70 per cent of the work will be accomplished by agencies of the Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health, with the rest of the sequencing to come from international partners and the Sanger Centre, a research group financed by the Wellcome Trust, the statement said.

As an indication of the progress, Science also published a physical map of 30,181 human genes. The new map is twice as big as a previously published map and is two to three times more accurate, researchers say.

The map contains almost half of all the human genes, ex-

perts say.

In another study, researchers announced that they have sequenced the entire gene structure for Chlamydia trachomatis, an organism that is the cause of the most common sexually transmitted bacterial disease in the United States. The bacteria also is linked to trachoma, a major cause of blindness in Asia and Africa.

Dr Richard Stephens of the University of California, Berkeley, lead author of the study, said sequencing the gene structure of Chlamydia trachomatis will help scientists develop a vaccine and better ways of diagnosing the disease.

Chlamydia infections are most common among sexually active teens between the ages of 14 and 19.

**Off the Record**

*Because it insults the monarchy...*

BANGKOK: Thailand's Film Board has recommended against allowing 20th Century Fox to shoot a new non-musical version of the "King and I" in the country because it insults the monarchy, the Nation newspaper reported on Friday, says AP.

The new film, starring Jodie Foster and Chow Yun Fat and called "Anna and the King" is a remake of the 1956 Hollywood musical. Yul Brynner won an Academy Award for best actor for his portrayal of King Mongkut in the movie.

The film was banned in Thailand, however, because Thais consider the depiction of the fourth king of the country's Chakri Dynasty to be inaccurate and insulting.

A Thai coordinator for the new film told The Nation the script had been adapted to highlight King Mongkut's ingenuity, but the board said the portrayal differed little from the original film and therefore violated Thailand's strict lese majeste laws. Criticising or insulting the royal family can result in a prison sentence.