

International

US plans to join NATO peacekeeping force

Deep divisions remain in Kosovo talks

RAMBOUILLET (France), Feb 13: After nearly a week of intense negotiations on Kosovo, deep divisions persist between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians on almost all important issues, international mediators say. reports AP.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was to arrive Saturday at the 14th-century chateau where the talks are being held to assess whether enough progress has been made to extend negotiations into a second week, said chief mediator US envoy Christopher Hill.

Albright was expected in Paris on Saturday and was to visit the talks in Rambouillet, about 50 kilometers from Paris, on Sunday, before flying on to join US President Bill Clinton in Mexico.

Clinton planned to announce Saturday that the United States is prepared to contribute ground troops to a NATO peacekeeping force if a political settlement is reached, a senior administration official said Friday night, speaking on condition of anonymity.

MQM man 'reveals' plan to divide Pakistan

Syed Talat Hussain

ISLAMABAD, Feb 13: A member of the Muttihida Quami Movement (MQM), party of Urdu-speakers based in Urban Sindh, claimed that his party had planned to divide Pakistan into nine parts, including one as a homeland for the Urdu-speaking population.

The confession from the MQM member, Shakil Ahmad Kampoori, came at a press conference which was arranged by the Central Intelligence Agency of Pakistan. He was arrested from Islamabad, capital city of Pakistan, last month and is wanted in 60 cases of heinous

accused said that according to the plan by year 2000 Pakistan was to be divided into nine regions, ending the present state of the federation organised under one flag. Among the nine new states carved out of the body of Pakistan, one was to be Mohajiristan, literally, a home for those who migrated from India to Pakistan during partition.

According to the accused, who is a science graduate and a member of the powerful Organising Committee of the MQM, Altaf Hussain, who is currently in the UK, was to be the head of

the new state which would include Karachi, Pakistan's only port city and the heart of its economy, Hyderabad, an adjoining city heavily populated by Urdu-speakers, and Mirpur Khas. He said that initially the state was named as Jinnahpur, ironically after the name of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who founded Pakistan in 1947. He said that then the intelligence agencies got wind of the Jinnahpur plan and then the party leadership decided to rename the state Mohajiristan.

This is not the first time that the MQM has been associated with conspiracies to divide the country. Under the previous government of Benazir Bhutto a plan allegedly hatched by the MQM top leadership to turn Karachi into a free port city was discovered and was partly the reason for which an operation clean up began against party members.

Nearly 150 were killed in Operation and thousands were arrested. Even now the MQM is accused by the Nawaz Sharif government of running terrorist cells in the city, and its leader, Altaf Hussain, is wanted in many murder cases.

with conspiracies to divide the country. Under the previous government of Benazir Bhutto a plan allegedly hatched by the MQM top leadership to turn Karachi into a free port city was discovered and was partly the reason for which an operation clean up began against party members.

Nearly 150 were killed in Operation and thousands were arrested. Even now the MQM is accused by the Nawaz Sharif government of running terrorist cells in the city, and its leader, Altaf Hussain, is wanted in many murder cases.

The Sanctions Committee is looking at other ways of making it possible, the Netherlands spokesman said, speaking on condition of anonymity. This discussion is not closed yet. We're trying our best to find a solution because the Hajj is important."

The Sanctions Committee monitors the UN oil-for-food programme, which allows Iraq to export limited amounts of oil — 5.2 billion over six months — to buy humanitarian goods for the Iraqi people. Its proposal would use money from the programme to fund the pilgrimage.

Last year, Iraq made the same demand which was rejected by the committee — so only Iraqis who could pay for themselves were able to make the pilgrimage, or Hajj.

With this year's Hajj set to

take place around the third week of March, there is little time remaining to find a solution.

"The Sanctions Committee is looking at other ways of

making it possible, the Netherlands spokesman said, speaking on condition of anonymity. This discussion is not closed yet. We're trying our best to find a solution because the Hajj is important."

The Sanctions Committee monitors the UN oil-for-food programme, which allows Iraq to export limited amounts of oil — 5.2 billion over six months — to buy humanitarian goods for the Iraqi people. Its proposal would use money from the programme to fund the pilgrimage.

5 of a family burnt alive

HYDERABAD, Feb 13: In a grievous incident, five members of a family were burnt alive for allegedly practising sorcery and witchcraft on residents of Dharamaram village in Nizamabad district of Andhra Pradesh yesterday, reports PTI.

Police said Saengham Pedda Pochala, 40, and his wife Sayamma, mother Pochala, 65, and two sons Boomaiah, 10, and Naveen, 12, were burnt to death when a 40-member group, armed with weapons, barged into the house and set ablaze the bedroom in which they were sleeping.

However, Pochala's father Lammaiah managed to escape without any harm, police said.

The assailants were locals, police said adding that tension prevailed in the village following the incident.

President's rule in Bihar for seventh time

PATNA, Feb 13: In 47 years of its parliamentary history, Bihar has been brought under President's rule for the seventh time yesterday, but never before on the ground of breakdown of law and order, reports PTI.

Central rule was imposed for the first time on June 29, 1968 when Bholu Paswan Shastri was the chief minister. Shastri had the dubious distinction of being the lone chief minister to have been dismissed thrice, always because his government was reduced to a minority and nobody was willing to form the government.

Central rule was imposed again during his regime on July 4, 1969 and January 9, 1972.

Bihar came under President's rule yet again on April 30, 1977 when Jagannath Mishra's government, in power during turbulent emergency years, was dismissed after Janata Party government of Morarji Desai assumed power at the centre.

When the Congress, led by Indira Gandhi, stormed back to power, the Bihar government, headed by Ramsunder Das, was sacked on February 17, 1980 for the fifth time.

The state had the shortest ever spell of six days of central rule in 1995 when the term of the state assembly had expired with the span of a fortnight of slaying of 22 persons at Shambhagh in the same district.

During her rule which came to an abrupt end following the Narayapur outrage, was marked by 383 incidents of extremist-related violence which officially claimed at least 219 lives.

The state had the shortest ever spell of six days of central rule in 1995 when the term of the state assembly had expired with the span of a fortnight of slaying of 22 persons at Shambhagh in the same district.

During her rule which came to an abrupt end following the Narayapur outrage, was marked by 383 incidents of extremist-related violence which officially claimed at least 219 lives.

The couples will need to kiss nonstop for more than 29 hours and 57 minutes to make it into the Guinness Book of Records.

The Valentine weekend attempt was organised by a local radio station which advertised for participants to take part on the foreshore at Newcastle.

To break the record, participants must follow strict rules, station spokeswoman Tricia Morris said.

Their lips must be touching at all times, they must be standing, they must not fall asleep, must not leave the venue, mustn't wear any incontinence pads or adult nappies and there are no toilet breaks, Morris said.

We've got surveillance cameras on them and there has to be a witness with them at all times."

Iraq rejects UN proposal on pilgrimage

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 13: For the second year, Baghdad has rejected a UN proposal to allow thousands of Iraqis to make the annual pilgrimage to Muslim holy sites in Saudi Arabia, diplomats said Friday, reports AP.

The UN Iraq Sanctions Committee had proposed disbursing 44 million dollars from Iraq's oil sales — drs 2,000 for each of the 22,000 Iraqis hoping to take part in this year's pilgrimage — either in traveller's checks or vouchers through a third-party.

But in a letter to the committee, the Iraqi government rejected the proposal and reiterated its call to have the money sent directly to the central bank, said a spokesman for the Netherlands' UN Mission, which chairs the committee.

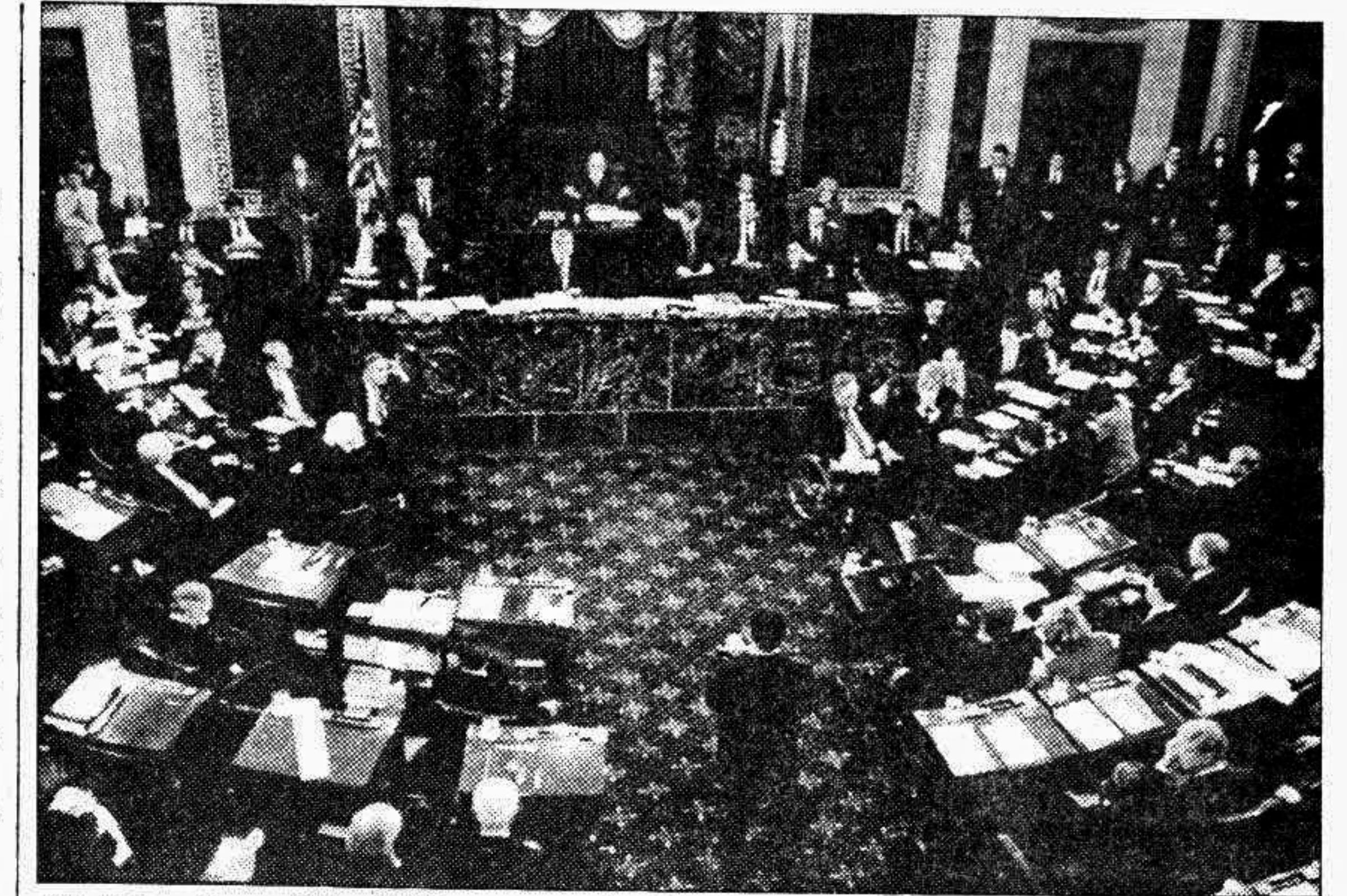
The Sanctions Committee insists that sending money directly to the Iraqi central bank violates UN economic sanctions imposed after Baghdad's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Last year, Iraq made the same demand which was rejected by the committee — so only Iraqis who could pay for themselves were able to make the pilgrimage, or Hajj.

With this year's Hajj set to take place around the third week of March, there is little time remaining to find a solution.

"The Sanctions Committee is looking at other ways of making it possible, the Netherlands spokesman said, speaking on condition of anonymity. This discussion is not closed yet. We're trying our best to find a solution because the Hajj is important."

The Sanctions Committee monitors the UN oil-for-food programme, which allows Iraq to export limited amounts of oil — 5.2 billion over six months — to buy humanitarian goods for the Iraqi people. Its proposal would use money from the programme to fund the pilgrimage.



The proceedings of the US Senate vote in the impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton is pictured in this general view Friday on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Clinton, who escaped being removed from office, declared himself "profoundly sorry" for the year-long ordeal that led to his acquittal in the Senate.

— AFP photo

'Best Valentine's Day gift' for Clinton

Hillary now plans to run for Senate seat

WASHINGTON, Feb 13: Now that her husband's impeachment trial is over, Hillary Rodham Clinton plans to give careful consideration to running in New York state for a US Senate seat in 2000, her aides said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Flattered by all the attention she has received about a possible run, Hillary has done nothing to discourage speculation about what would be an unprecedented political event: a current first lady actively campaigning to win a legislative seat.

"Now that the trial is coming to an end, she'll have a chance to put some thought into this," her spokeswoman, Marsha Berry, said.

"Other people have been very interested in the speculation and have talked to her about it. But it's not the kind of thing that she's really been able to think about at this point," Berry said.

She said it was unclear how soon Hillary would make a decision, adding that the first lady was simply "relieved" that the Senate impeachment trial was over.

The kind of people who have talked to her about it are people she respects, and I'm sure she'll give it very careful consideration," Berry said.

Other aides sought to dampen speculation that Hillary might announce a decision as early as next week.

Close aides, who asked to remain unidentified, said they still doubted that Hillary would take the plunge — particularly so soon after the difficult year she has had dealing with her husband's sex scandal and the resulting strain in her marriage.

But they insisted that she had not made up her mind and would want to talk to her husband and others about running for office.

Palestinians, Israelis held secret talks in 1980s

JERUSALEM, Feb 13: Israeli and Palestinian officials confirmed Friday that they held secret talks in the 1980s under the direction of Israel's then-Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chief Yasser Arafat, reports AP.

The talks were held in various European cities, said Ephraim Sneh, a legislator from the opposition Labor Party, and Hani Hassan, an aide to Arafat and member of the Central Committee of Arafat's Fatah faction. Both participated in the meetings.

The talks were kept secret because Israel at the time did not recognise the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israeli law made contacts with PLO officials illegal.

Sneh and Hassan gave conflicting accounts of the purpose and duration of the meetings.

Sneh said the talks began in 1988, shortly after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The labour legislator said Israel's immediate objective was to end the revolt and the long-term goal was to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The two sides discussed, among other things, possible Israeli recognition of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, he said.

He said the talks ended with November 1988 elections that brought a new government to power in Israel.

Hassan said the meetings began in 1986 and broke down over Rabin's efforts to crush the uprising in which Israeli soldiers armed with assault rifles confronted Palestinian stone throwers.

The dialogue "was a big issue with us because it was the first time Israel was sitting with Palestinian representatives," Hassan said. "The Palestinians did not inform the Americans about the talks," Hassan said.

Sneh said the talks were hampered greatly by Palestinian hard-liners who opposed such meetings.

Then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir knew about the talks and did not try to stop them, Sneh said. At the time, Shamir headed a broad-based coalition of his hard-line Likud Party and the center-left Labor Party.

Americans heave a sigh of relief

CHICAGO, Feb 13: Americans on Friday greeted President Bill Clinton's acquittal in his impeachment trial with a collective sigh of relief and a sense of hope that Congress might return to work on the country's problems, reports AFP.

"I feel a sense of relief," black civil rights leader Jesse Jackson said in Washington, echoing the prevailing mood after the US Senate acquitted the President of perjury and obstruction of justice.

Conviction of a single offense by a two-thirds majority would have meant Clinton's immediate removal from office.

From coast to coast, Americans said it was about time the 13-month ordeal came to an end.

Most said they accepted Clinton's statement of contribution over his affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky and said they were prepared to heed his call for reconciliation and renewal.

But some vowed that Republican lawmakers would be made to pay at the next election for having launched a highly partisan impeachment process.

"I'm happy with the acquittal. I think his behavior was wrong but he did not deserve to be removed from office," 31-year-old Kim Biggs, Executive Director of International Women Associates, said in Chicago.

There was a lot of grandstanding and the whole thing became a much larger issue than it should have," she added.

"I'm glad it's all over with," said Stacey Snipes, a 22-year-old reporter in Jonesboro, Arkansas. "Most people here feel it's been a waste of time and money. And no matter what (Republicans) say, it was a very partisan affair."

In Los Angeles, reactions to the Senate vote ranged from relief to indignation. "I expected that he wouldn't be charged,"

The case was later thrown out, and Jones and Clinton settled for drs 850,000. But the US house impeached Clinton on charges that he obstructed justice and committed perjury in the lawsuit.

Bihar Governor takes charge of state

The rise and fall of Rabri Devi

PATNA, Feb 13: After last night's dismissal of Rabri Devi government, Bihar Governor Sunder Singh Bhandari, her supporters claimed she has come of age" as detractors dubbed her outburst as "transgression of constitution and undermining of constitutional authority."

Leave alone the people of the state, not even the MLAs of Laloo Prasad Yadav's all-powerful RJD had any inkling of what lay in store from them when they were summarily summoned to 1, Anne Marg residence of the Chief Minister on July 25, 1997.

As Yadav, facing an arrest warrant by the special CBI court on August 9, 1997 at Ranchi to mark the third anniversary of creation of the Jharkhand area autonomous council disappeared, the Chief Minister on July 25, 1997.

The initial hesitation and coyness quite evident at her maiden public appearance on August 9, 1997 at Ranchi to mark the third anniversary of creation of the Jharkhand area autonomous council disappeared, the Chief Minister on July 25, 1997.

During her rule which came to an abrupt end following the Narayapur outrage, was marked by 383 incidents of extremist-related violence which officially claimed at least 219 lives.

The state had the shortest ever spell of six days of central rule in 1995 when the term of the state assembly had expired with the span of a fortnight of slaying of 22 persons at Shambhagh in the same district.

During her rule which came to an abrupt end following the Narayapur outrage, was marked by 383 incidents of extremist-related violence which officially claimed at least 219 lives.

The couples will need to kiss nonstop for more than 29 hours and 57 minutes to make it into the Guinness Book of Records.

The Valentine weekend attempt was organised by a local radio station which advertised for participants to take part on the foreshore at Newcastle.

To break the record, participants must follow strict rules, station spokeswoman Tricia Morris said.

Their lips must be touching at all times, they must be standing, they must not fall asleep, must not leave the venue, mustn't wear any incontinence pads or adult nappies and there are no toilet breaks, Morris said.

We've got surveillance cameras on them and there has to be a witness with them at all times."



With uncanny and suspiciously acute timing, two young swans make a heart-shaped display during their courtship ritual at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, near Gloucester in western England Friday — two days ahead of St Valentine's Day.

— AFP photo