

International

Sonia's name suggested for PM post
Coalition partner quits govt panel

NEW DELHI, Apr 10: A party considered a crucial partner in India's ruling coalition quit a government panel Friday, in a move seen as a precursor to withdrawing vital legislative support, reports AP.

Gandhi, as a possible contender to be prime minister. Even Communist leaders, longtime opponents of Congress, said Sonia Gandhi's party was in the best position to lead a new coalition government.

Newspapers, however, said the smaller political groups will first have to resolve their differences before giving a verdict on the fate of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's fragile coalition.

Four KLA men killed
Mission fails to secure release of 3 US soldiers

BELGRADE, Apr 10: A NATO envoy is blaming the ongoing NATO bombing campaign for his failure to win release of three US soldiers, saying he had expected Washington to ease off on attacks while his mission was in Yugoslavia, reports AP.

manded the unconditional release of the three servicemen, Staff Sgt. Andrew A Ramirez, 24, of Los Angeles; Staff Sgt. Christopher J Stone, 25, of Smiths Creek, Mich; and Spc Steven M Gonzales, 21, of Huntsville, Texas.

der area near Tropoja and Kamenica, an OSCE spokesman said. The fighting had still been continuing late Friday.

Niger parliament dissolved

NIAMEY, Apr 10: Rebel soldiers who assassinated Niger's President Ibrahim Bare Maïnassara appeared to be in charge in the West African state today, officials said, reports Reuters.

own Presidential Guard. The president had been preparing to fly to the interior on a trip that had not been previously announced.

in Niamey on Friday's events. US ambassador Charles O Cecil told Reuters the prime minister declined to answer questions on details of the attack on Maïnassara such as the fate of the presumed assassin.



A man wearing a military jacket holds a portrait of Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic during a protest rally against NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia in front of TV Belgrade headquarters in downtown Belgrade Friday. — AFP photo

UN warns against fighting in East Timor

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 10: The United Nations warned on Friday it could not organise a ballot on the future of East Timor unless fighting stopped in the former Portuguese colony, reports Reuters.

800,000 people in East Timor, which it invaded in 1975 and annexed a year later in an action not recognised by the United Nations.

Chilean Cardinal Raul Silva dead

Cardinal Raul Silva, Henriquez, an outspoken defender of human rights during Chile's past military dictatorship, died Friday, Roman Catholic church authorities said. He was 91, AP reports from Santiago.

Silva's criticism of militant leftists and rightists made him one of the leading Roman Catholic church figures in Latin America during the late 20th-century. His outspokenness on human rights made the Church a leading opponent of Gen. Augusto Pinochet's military regime which seized power from an elected government in 1973.

Former Tongan PM dies

Former long serving Tongan prime minister Prince Fatafehi Tupilehake died in Auckland yesterday, Royal Palace sources said, AFP reports from Auckland.

The death of Tupilehake, younger brother of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, has not been officially announced in Tonga. He had been severely ill since retiring in 1991 and lived at Atalanga, the royal residency in Essom, Auckland.

US military satellite launched

A Titan IV rocket successfully launched a military satellite on Friday eight months after a similar rocket exploded seconds after take off, the air force said, AFP reports from Washington.

The rocket blasted off from Cape Canaveral carrying a defense support programme satellite which will be integrated into a network that detects missiles, space launches and nuclear explosions. The August 12 explosion of a Titan IV rocket just 41 seconds after liftoff was found to have been caused by an electrical short circuit, the air force said.

6 Malaysian students drown

Six schoolchildren drowned and six more were missing when a passenger boat they were on collided with another boat and capsized, a news report said Saturday, AP says from Kuala Lumpur.

The collision occurred in the eastern Malaysian state of Sarawak, about 300 km from the state capital of Kuching, on Friday evening, Bernama news agency said. Four bodies were fished out of the river in the remote area on Borneo island and two more were found trapped in the boat, police said.

Floods kill 9 in Colombia

At least nine people died in flooding and landslides caused by heavy rains, the government's disasters office reported, AP says from Bogota.

Eight were killed Friday when a ravine gave way and came crashing down on homes in Inza, a town 320 km southwest of Bogota in Cauca state, said disasters chief Monica Yamhure. Dozens of families have evacuated the zone with Red Cross assistance, she said.

Manila ready to resume peace talks with rebels

MANILA, Apr 10: The government said it was prepared to resume peace talks with Communist rebels today, a day after guerrillas released the first of the five military and police officers they are holding captive, reports AP.

President Joseph Estrada suspended the talks and cancelled safety guarantees for rebel negotiators after New People's Army guerrillas abducted army Brig. Gen. Victor Obillo and his aide, Capt. Eduardo Montealton on February 17 in southern Davao City.

Kohl to receive top US award

WASHINGTON, Apr 10: President Bill Clinton will present the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the top US civilian award, to former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on April 20, The White House said on Friday, reports Reuters.

Mass grave found in Jaffna

COLOMBO, Apr 10: The discovery of at least nine skeletons at a sports ground in Sri Lanka's embattled northern town of Jaffna has raised fears of more mass graves in the region, officials said today, reports AP.

Six skeletons were dug out from the Duraiappa stadium in Jaffna on Thursday, a day after three were found at the same place, local officials said by telephone.

Epidemic of viral influenza sweeps parts of Nepal: 820 killed

KATHMANDU, Apr 10: An epidemic of viral influenza and other diseases sweeping parts of Nepal has claimed 820 lives in the past two months, medical authorities were reported saying today, says AFP.

The northwest districts of Kalikot and Jajjala were the worst affected with 483 dead and more than 25,000 requiring treatment, the state-run RSS news agency said quoting the epidemiology and disease control division.

US wants deeper cooperation with Pakistan on counter terrorism

By Syed Talat Hussain

ISLAMABAD, Apr 10: A group of important US officials this week concluded a quiet but significant visit to Pakistan which focused on one of the topmost issues on Washington's policy in South Asia — terrorism.

worry for Washington, but he is not the only worry. This part of the world — Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asian Republics — have become in US point of view, both safe havens and transit camps of terrorists of all types and kinds.

Officials also confirm that Washington wants Pakistan to exercise tighter control over those areas of its territory about which, in US assessments, are being used to impart training to militants.

The group was headed by Permanent Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, E Gibson Lanpher and also included Michael A Sheehan, Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the Department of State who also has served on the National Security Council Staff besides other staff members.

Officials are tight-lipped about what this co-operation means in practical terms. Some do drop broad hints, however, about the scope of co-operation on counter-terrorism with the US to mean "sharing information with Washington on regular basis about the movement of marked men and preventing local groups, essentially religious and sectarian parties, from becoming a smoke screen for internationally wanted terrorists to carry out their operations."

While Pakistan's concerns on the issue of terrorism are less clear and less pronounced, US has a clear view of the nature of threat it perceives from terrorism in this part of the world. Washington does not buy the Taliban's claim that Osama bin Laden has left Afghanistan and insists that it has credible intelligence reports that the Saudi millionaire continues to plot to kill US citizens. Washington also believes that Pakistan does have considerable clout with the Taliban which it has not used to help them deal with Osama bin Laden.

The group members had meetings both at the technical level and at the general policy level with representatives of law enforcement agencies, the interior minister and more importantly with the Punjab Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who has become the Nawaz Sharif government's main man in dealing with the Americans on significant issues.

As part of this co-operation, Pakistani officials say, Washington is willing to give Pakistan technology, necessary know-how and active guidance on how to track down dangerous criminals and terrorists. During the American visitors' meetings with the Pakistani officials and politicians, the increasing sectarian violence in Pakistan was also discussed.

A more broad terrorism concern which US officials express revolves around the Taliban themselves. They have been trying to convince Pakistan that its closeness with the Taliban has no pluses, only negatives. Another US worry centres on smaller religious and militant groups which are the blow-back of the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets.

US official sources describe the visit as part of the "series of periodic consultations with Pakistani officials on questions of regional and international terrorism." Pakistani sources, however, confirm that the discussions with the American visitors focused on specific US terrorism concerns emanating from what Washington's perceives as the vast network of terrorism across the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan with international connections. "This visit was not about Osama bin Laden only".

The alleged attempts on the life of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by sectarian militants were also broached in meetings which saw "considerable unanimity of views" between the two sides, officials say. Officials also confirm that Washington wants Pakistan to exercise tighter control over those areas of its territory about which, in US assessments, are being used to impart training to militants.

Another US worry centres on smaller religious and militant groups which are the blow-back of the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets. Already outfits like Harkatul Ansar and Jaunees ul Furqa are found on the US list of terrorist outfits. Increasingly other sectarian groups too are beginning to catch US attention because of their militancy and for the fear that some of them might hide in their ranks terrorists the US is trying to track down.

The northwest districts of Kalikot and Jajjala were the worst affected with 483 dead and more than 25,000 requiring treatment, the state-run RSS news agency said quoting the epidemiology and disease control division.

The alleged attempts on the life of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by sectarian militants were also broached in meetings which saw "considerable unanimity of views" between the two sides, officials say. Officials also confirm that Washington wants Pakistan to exercise tighter control over those areas of its territory about which, in US assessments, are being used to impart training to militants.

Another US worry centres on smaller religious and militant groups which are the blow-back of the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets. Already outfits like Harkatul Ansar and Jaunees ul Furqa are found on the US list of terrorist outfits. Increasingly other sectarian groups too are beginning to catch US attention because of their militancy and for the fear that some of them might hide in their ranks terrorists the US is trying to track down.

Iraqi rejection of UN report irks Security Council members

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 10: Several Security Council members expressed disappointment on Friday that Iraq had rejected recommendations from UN panels without waiting for the 15-member council to discuss them, reports Reuters.

Iraq, Discussion on the proposals will continue for weeks. But there was no sign the council was moving toward any agreement. Russia, China, France want stringent sanctions against Iraq entirely as an inducement to arms inspectors returning to the country while the United States and Britain oppose this.

but not lifting economic sanctions, imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, by allowing foreign investments in its oil industry and some agriculture export commodities.

Off the Record

The rich getting richer, younger & faster

LONDON: Britain's millionaires are getting younger, richer and quicker at amassing their wealth than ever before, according to an annual survey of the nation's richest 1,000, reports AP.

The Sunday Times newspaper, which has published the list for 11 years, would not release details of the ranking in advance of the report's publication this weekend.

But the newspaper revealed that the combined wealth of Britain's richest 1,000 people has climbed to 114,829 billion pounds (183,726 billion dollars), from 108,525 billion pounds (173,640 billion dollars) in 1998.

"Everyone is getting much richer because of booming stock markets," said Philip Beresford, the report's author. Beresford said there were increasing numbers of younger people who launched successful businesses joining the elite who qualify for the list if they are worth at least 21 million pounds (33.6 million dollars).

A case of mistaken identity

CALCUTTA: An Indian businessman freed by kidnappers said on Friday his prayers had worked miraculously to secure his release. But it also helped that the abductors had got the wrong man, reporter Reuters.

Satyra Brata Ganguly, chief executive of battery maker Exide Industries, showed up at home late on Thursday a week after he was kidnapped.

He told a news conference that his captors said they had kidnapped the wrong person; they apologised and gave him some pocket money and put him on a train to Calcutta.

Earlier, he said, he was kidnapped soon after he went for his usual morning walk in south Calcutta. He said he was beaten up, put in a car and confined to a small room after a long drive. The abductors demanded 20 million rupees, but Ganguly said he could not afford more than 200,000 rupees.

"I did lots of prayers and meditation. And I was praying to guraji (his spiritual master) all the time please save me because I have not done anything in my life for which I should be punished like this."

The prayer was answered the next day. He was blindfolded and taken to "the boss," who said: "Mr Ganguly, I am very, very sorry that we have picked up you instead of somebody else. It is our mistake. We apologise for that. I can assure you that we will not take (any money) from you or your family and I will release you."



Hollywood legend Elizabeth Taylor smiles as she holds a news conference in London Friday, where she is due to be given fellowship of the British Academy for her many years in the film industry. — AFP photo