

International

Queen blocking remarriage of Andrew & Fergie

LONDON, Oct 18 : Prince Andrew desperately wants to remarry his former wife Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, but is being prevented from doing so by his mother Queen Elizabeth II, The Sun newspaper reported today. AFP

"It's so unfair," Andrew, the Duke of York, reportedly commented during a reception at Chequers, the country home of British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

"There is no doubt the Duke would like to get remarried but he would only do so with the consent of the Queen. That is not forthcoming, so there will be no marriage. Andrew would not consider going against his mother," a senior royal aide was quoted as saying.

Andrew, 39, and the 40-year-old Duchess, better known by her nickname "Fergie," were divorced in 1996 but live in separate wings of the same house in Sunninghill, a wealthy suburb southwest of London, with their two daughters Beatrice and Eugenie.

Fergie launched the remarriage speculation in The Times Saturday.

Malaysian judge rules Anwar has case to answer on sodomy charge

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 18 : In a new legal setback for Malaysia's sacked deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, a High Court today rejected a defence submission to throw out the sodomy charge against him, reports AFP.

Anwar shook his head when Judge Arifin Jaka ruled that Anwar and his Indonesian adopted brother Sukma Darmanan did have a case to answer on a charge of sodoming Azizan Abu Bakar, Wan Azizah's former driver.

Anwar later hugged his wife and eldest daughter Nurul Izzah and told them: "What is so shocking? You mean you didn't know it (the ruling)?

His wife Wan Azizah told AFP: "It's expected."

Sukma is also charged with abetting the politician in the

BRIEFLY**BDP wins Botswana polls:** The ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) of President Festus Mogae has been declared winner of the general elections, the Independent Electoral Commission announced yesterday. AFP reports from Gaborone.

As leader of the biggest party Mogae, 60, was declared president by Chief Justice Julius Nganu, after the BDP had crossed the threshold of 21 seats in the 40-seat national assembly.

With counting continuing in 11 constituencies early Monday, the BDP held 24 seats, with the opposition Botswana National Front (BNF) led by veteran politician Kenneth Koma taking five.

Cargo plane plunges into sea : A Federal Express cargo plane has plunged into the sea after overshooting a runway at Subic freeport north of the Philippine capital, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Manila.

The two people onboard the aircraft, the pilot Captain Michael Rooney and first officer Cynthia Hubbard, "were able to get out of the plane shortly before it submerged," a report prepared by the Subic management said.

Taliban vow not to hand over Laden to UN

DUBAI, Oct 18 : The leader of the Afghan Taliban movement said in remarks published today that his movement would not hand over Saudi Arabian dissident Osama bin Laden to the United Nations, despite international sanctions, reports Reuters.

But Mullah Mohammad Omar told the London-based Arabic-language *al-Hayat* newspaper that his movement would not allow Bin Laden to stage attacks in Africa.

Taiwan to return to Chinese fold next century: Jiang

LONDON, Oct 18 : Taiwan will return to the Chinese fold in the first half of the next century, China's President Jiang Zemin said in an interview published in The Times newspaper here today, reports AFP.

"By the middle of next century... we will resolve the question of Taiwan and accomplish the great cause of national reunification by adhering to the policy of 'peaceful reunification' and 'one country, two systems,' after the successful return of Hong Kong and Macau," said

China denies aiding Y'slav military

BEIJING, Oct 18 : China today rejected reports that it aided the Yugoslav military in its war against NATO and said the alliance was solely responsible for the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

The so called theory that the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia provided support for the Yugoslav military side is pure fabrication with ulterior motives," a foreign ministry spokesman told AFP.

"No matter what kind of lies the relevant parties fabricated, the US-led NATO cannot shrink from the responsibility they should take for the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia," he said.

US, UK press Musharraf to set early timetable for return to democracy

WASHINGTON, Oct 18 : The United States and Britain pressed Pakistan's new military ruler to set an early timetable for the restoration of democracy, reports AFP.

Statements from the White House and London said a pledge by General Pervez Musharraf to stay in power no longer "than absolutely necessary" was disappointing.

"There is no doubt the Duke would like to get remarried but he would only do so with the consent of the Queen. That is not forthcoming, so there will be no marriage. Andrew would not consider going against his mother," a senior royal aide was quoted as saying.

Andrew, 39, and the 40-year-old Duchess, better known by her nickname "Fergie," were divorced in 1996 but live in separate wings of the same house in Sunninghill, a wealthy suburb southwest of London, with their two daughters Beatrice and Eugenie.

Fergie launched the remarriage speculation in The Times Saturday.

James Rubin.
"We call upon him to do so now."

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook labelled the mere promise of a return to democracy as "insufficient" and said a firm timetable was needed.

"General Musharraf's statement tonight was disappointing in the absence of any end date to military rule," Cook said in a statement.

"A commitment to an eventual return to democracy is insufficient on its own. It needs to be accompanied by a credible and clear timetable."

Cook said he would consult with Britain's partners on the best way to make the Pakistan military authorities understand the "urgent need" to return to democracy.

The Commonwealth is to hold a special meeting in London on Monday to consider the suspension of Pakistan from the organisation and perhaps other financial measures.

If it is confirmed that the

military will remain in power, would expect this regime to be suspended from the Council of the Commonwealth," Emeka Anyaoku, the secretary-general of the body in London, said after the coup.

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A seven-point plan pledged measures to rebuild national confidence and morale, restore national cohesion, revive the economy and ensure swift and across the board accountability.

Cook, while welcoming the "confidence building" promise

to de-escalate military tensions with India, said no country can flourish "under an unelected and unaccountable regime."

While Rubin said it is "critically important for Pakistan to begin to resolve its differences with India, including the conflict over Kashmir."

Fighting between India and Pakistan over the Himalayan region, claimed in part by both countries, escalated between May and July.

The United States welcomed measures "such as the unilateral draw down of military forces along the international border with India that General Musharraf announced," Rubin said.

Indian newspapers also highlighted Musharraf's offer of unconditional peace talks and a "military de-escalation" along the border with India.

But the Indian government's initial reaction was Islamabad would first have to stop backing separatists in Kashmir.

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Cong forms govt in Maharashtra

BOMBAY, Oct 18 : India's Congress Party today took power in the key state of Maharashtra in alliance with a splinter group, ending 10 days of political suspense and five years of Hindu nationalist rule, reports AFP.

Vilasrao Deshmukh was sworn in as the 21st Chief Minister of Maharashtra as leader of a coalition government which also includes for-turned-friend Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

The NCP's Chhagan Bhujbal took the oath as deputy chief minister. Other ministers were to be sworn in later.

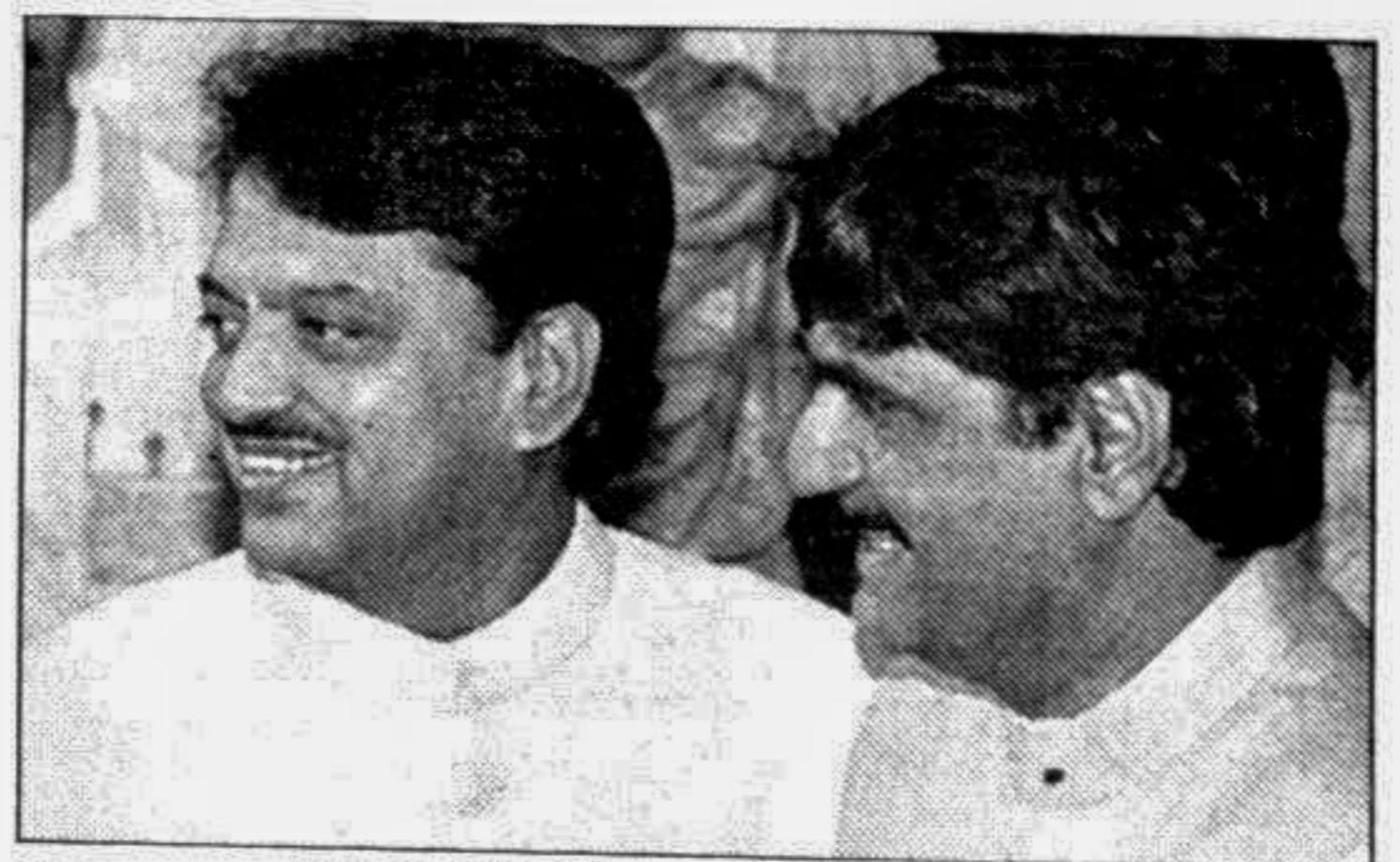
The new government replaces a coalition of Hindu nationalists which had governed Maharashtra since 1995. The nationalists lost the state elections held last month.

The NCP was formed in June by three Congress rebels after challenging the suitability of Congress chief Sonia Gandhi for the prime ministership on account of her Italian origin.

But Congress and NCP leaders said they had buried their differences, when it was clear they would have to join hands if they wanted to provide a government in the state.

Before and during state and national elections in Maharashtra, the Congress and NCP had ruled out an alliance and their top leaders vilified each other during campaigning.

Political expediency has led to a dramatic turnaround.



The new Chief Minister of Maharashtra Vilasrao Deshmukh (L) of the Congress (I) Party with former Chief Minister Gopinath Munde just after the swearing-in ceremony at the Raj Bhavan in Bombay yesterday.

— AFP photo

Elections last month for the 288-member Maharashtra assembly produced a badly hung legislature, with the Congress emerging as the largest party with 75 seats. The NCP won 56.

The Congress-NCP decision followed 10 days of hard bargaining on both sides.



Chechen fighters study the movement of Russian federal troops through the optics of their guns near the western Chechen village of Assinovskaya on Sunday as Russian Generals announced the start of the second phase of their campaign in Chechnya. — AFP photo

Indian media膀es Pak peace offer, officials prudent

NEW DELHI, Oct 18 : Indian newspapers today highlighted the offer of unconditional peace talks by Pakistan's new military ruler, but officials and pundits here had their fingers crossed, reports AFP.

General Pervez Musharraf's announcement Sunday that he would like a "military de-escalation" along the border with India and was ready for negotiations with New Delhi drew banner headlines in the Indian media.

"Pak to pull back troops along border," screamed The Hindustan Times. "Musharraf offers result-oriented talks with Delhi."

The Times of India said:

"Pakistan announced troop reduction along border." The Indian Express added: "Pak forces to pull back from border."

Pakistan's military coup has been frontpage news in India since Musharraf ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif last Tuesday.

India, which has fought three wars with Pakistan, had been keenly looking for Musharraf's views on bilateral relations.

"I take this opportunity to announce a unilateral military de-escalation on our international borders with India," Musharraf said in a nationally televised address.

"I hope this step will serve as a meaningful confidence-building measure."

Musharraf also called for an "unconditional, equitable and result-oriented" dialogue with New Delhi but said Pakistan would continue its "moral, political and diplomatic support" for Muslim separatists in Indian Kashmir.

The Indian government's initial reaction was that Islamabad would first have to stop backing separatists in Kashmir.

"Pakistan must stop cross-border terrorism for meaningful talks to begin," said Brajesh Mishra, national security advisor to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

"Most of the factions have expressed support to let East Timor go," said Erna Witolear, vice chairwoman of the group charged with writing a measure that will be acceptable to the 700-member assembly.

"We tried to be balanced.

Therefore, the draft ... will in-

Indonesian parliament likely to let E Timor go

JAKARTA, Oct 18 : Indonesia's highest legislative body is likely to endorse East Timor's independence referendum, allowing the territory to officially break away, officials said today, reports AFP.

Members of the People's Consultative Assembly have been drafting a decree that is expected to be brought to a vote on Tuesday.

"Most of the factions have expressed support to let East Timor go," said Erna Witolear, vice chairwoman of the group charged with writing a measure that will be acceptable to the 700-member assembly.

"We tried to be balanced.

Therefore, the draft ... will in-

clude an expression of our respect for the rights of East Timor's people while regretting the government decision to offer an independence vote without an endorsement of the (Parliament) house."

She indicated the decree would win approval. Sabam Srait, who chaired the commission, also said he was optimistic that the assembly will let East Timor go.

But there were signs that other separatist movements were finding encouragement in the independence effort, despite the rampage by anti-independence militias that followed East Timor's Aug 30 vote to break away.

Five legislators from Aceh have called for a referendum in their troubled province.

The referendum is a smart, peaceful, civilised and democratic way to create a new and dynamic Aceh," legislator Ghazali Abdusadzan said. Aceh people do not get security and protection in political, economic, legal and cultural life."

The commission agreed to demand that the next government solve Aceh's problems and bring peace to the region.

Rebels belonging to the Free Aceh Movement have been fighting a decade-long battle for independence in the mainly Muslim province 2,000 km northwest of Jakarta.

A leader of anti-treaty senators warned that if President Bill Clinton again tries to have the Senate ratify the treaty, "It will be defeated."

Appearing on CNN, Albright said Wednesday's 51-48 Senate vote against the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty — far below the

67 needed to ratify — "hurt us internationally" and mystified our colleagues around the world.

"What we've lost for the time being is the real international leadership in terms of trying to make others live up to the CTBT," she said.

"But I want to assure all your viewers, around the world, that the United States is going to live up to the conditions of the treaty."

She noted that Clinton was the first world leader to sign the global treaty, which has been signed by 154 nations and ratified by 51, including only 26 of the 44 countries potentially capable of producing nuclear weapons.

The Republicans defeated a major landmark treaty that would really have helped generally in controlling nuclear weapons and our whole non-proliferation agenda," Albright said.

She did not say whether the White House would submit the pact to the Senate for reconsideration its first Treaty rejection since the League of Nations treaty in 1920.

Security stepped up in Jakarta ahead of polls

JAKARTA, Oct 18 : President B.J. Habibie today paid tribute to the military and police as security was stepped up in the Indonesian capital two days ahead of the presidential election, reports AFP.

The firefight erupted overnight Sunday in the forests of southern Jakarta's Puncak district, after Indian troops began combing the area for militants.

The civilians died when they were caught in the crossfire, the officials said. Six other militants, most of them foreigners, managed to escape.

First Palestinian gets permission to use safe passage

EREZ, Gaza Strip, Oct 18 : Ghali Daghmash today became the first Palestinian to receive permission to use the safe passage linking the West Bank and Gaza Strip — despite knowing when the road will open.

"For the first time in my life I will leave the Gaza Strip," 27-year-old Daghmash told AFP outside the Palestinian-Israeli liaison office at the Erez crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel.

"I am very happy that I will be able to get to know new people in the West Bank," he said after receiving a magnetic card giving access to the route.

Habibie, who has upheld the importance of human rights and democracy and to the rights of people in the West Bank, has adopted a reformist agenda, said that "what's best for the people ... is

also best for the armed forces and the national police."

Habibie, who has rejected calls for him to drop out of the three-cornered presidential race, said that soldiers and police also had the right to enjoy human rights because they too "have families and honour."

The national assembly is set to vote Tuesday on Habibie's account of his 17 months at the helm.

A rejection of his report would not automatically knock him out of contention for Wednesday's presidential election but would drastically undermine his bid for a new term.

His own Golkar party has said it could propose a new candidate if he fails the assembly test. But chairman Akbar Tanj