

## Kulsoom Nawaz rules out plans to join politics

ISLAMABAD, Feb 13: Kulsoom Nawaz, wife of deposed premier Nawaz Sharif, yesterday ruled out plans to enter politics but ruing the silence of leaders and workers of Pakistan Muslim League, when their leader was in jail, urged them to launch a mass contact programme, reports PTI.

Kulsoom said she had stepped out of the house because her husband was fighting for revival of the constitution and parliament. She was addressing party workers at the house of a local leader at Rawalpindi, private news agency NNI said.

Kulsoom said she would return to her house the day her husband came out of jail. For me it is a sacred struggle and it will continue until it meets objectives.

Exhorting workers to come out for democracy she said I regret the silence of leader and workers. My husband is fighting for the revival of the constitution and parliament. If PML workers do not come out and start a mass contact campaign, the party will be finished. PML is the biggest party of Pakistan, its head is in jail, but its leader and workers are strangely quiet.

She said she feared the day when the people of Pakistan would take on the army and said she wanted the return of democracy before that happened.

Stressing the urgent need for launching a mass campaign, Kulsoom said we have to tell the people that what happened on October 12 (the day Sharif was deposed in a coup) was illegal and dangerous for the country. History never sides with military dictators.

## Indian state minister quits over sex scandal

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: A minister in an Indian state government has resigned following allegations by a top woman bureaucrat he harassed her sexually, newspapers reported today, reports AFP.

Forest and Transport Minister Neelalohithadasan Nadar quit office in the southern state of Kerala late Saturday, The Asian Age and other dailies said.

Nadar was a member of a small centrist party which is a partner in Kerala's communist-led coalition government.

Nalini Netto, an official at the transport ministry, accused Nadar of sexual harassment.

"I explained to the authority to whom I submitted my complaint the trauma I had been undergoing," Netto said after the resignation.

"I am happy that they understood my problem. I was confident I would not be denied justice."

## Endeavour starts 3-D mapping of Earth

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, Feb 13: The six astronauts orbiting Earth aboard the space shuttle Endeavour activated the spacecraft's antennas Saturday and began creating a three-dimensional map of the planet using sophisticated radar equipment, NASA officials said, reports AFP.

For this 11-day mission, the Endeavour is sporting two powerful radar antennae, one installed in its underbelly and the other at the end of a 60-metre-long telescope that sticks out from the shuttle's body like the mast of a ship.

Gathering light waves reflected off the Earth, the antennae are to record in detail the variations in altitude along the planet's surface.

The radar operations began at 12:31 a.m. here (1131 BST), slightly ahead of schedule, as the shuttle flew over Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives Islands, according to controllers at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Johnson Space Centre in Houston, Texas.

The six astronauts will be taking turns in teams of three, every 12 hours, to monitor the equipment and replace its tape recording bands.

## Militants kill 17 civilians in Algeria

ALGIER, Feb 13: Three separate attacks launched by Islamic insurgents in Algeria killed seventeen people last week, local newspaper reports said on Saturday, reports Xinhua.

Of the total, seven were killed on Thursday near Berrouaghia, 70 kilometers south of capital Algiers, when a group of militants sprayed bullets at a queue of vehicles according to the Le Martin newspaper.

Another seven people, including three security guards, died on Wednesday in an ambush in Tissemsilt, 350 kilometers west of Algiers, La Tribune newspaper reported.

Also on Wednesday, three people were killed at a small holiday resort in Tipaza, 70 kilometers west of the capital, said the Liberté daily.

The fatalities occurred as government forces for the last three weeks have been enforcing a crackdown on radical militants who refused to lay down their arms in exchange for amnesty.

Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika had promised to pardon Islamic militants who surrendered their arms by January 13, for a national reconciliation.

# Wahid backs down over resignation demand

Fresh probe against Wiranto ordered

JAKARTA, Feb 13: President Abdurrahman Wahid appeared to back down Sunday from his repeated demands that Gen Wiranto, Indonesia's powerful security minister, step down immediately over his alleged involvement in the bloodshed in East Timor, reports AP.

Cabinet secretary Marsilam Simanjuntak said the president had ordered the attorney general to mount an investigation of Wiranto's role in the violence that shook the former Indonesian province last September.

"Wiranto will remain at his present position until the president makes a decision after reviewing the report of the team," Simanjuntak told reporters at the presidential palace.

Wiranto met with Wahid at the palace just hours after the president returned from a 16-day tour of the Middle East, Europe and Asia. The trip was

largely overshadowed by his long-distance public row with Wiranto, accused by Indonesian and United Nations human rights panels of overseeing violence in East Timor in his former role as armed forces commander.

Also present at Sunday's meeting were Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri, Attorney General Marzuki Darusman and Lt Gen Arie Kumaat, who heads the national intelligence agency.

"The president agreed today to let the attorney general form a special team to investigate Gen Wiranto's case," said Simanjuntak at the meeting was ending.

"The president will not take any decision about Wiranto before the team reports the results of the investigations to the president," he said, adding that the probe would likely be completed within a month.

Speaking on Saturday in Thailand, Wahid said Wiranto would either resign or be sacked from the Cabinet for his role in last year's bloodshed, which racked the former Indonesian province following an overwhelming vote for independence.

"If he does not resign, I will change the Cabinet anyway, without him," Wahid said.

The issue dominated Wahid's trip and sparked fears of a possible military coup in Jakarta. The original goal of the tour — to encourage investment in Indonesia's moribund economy — was largely forgotten as the media focused on the public row.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who met briefly on Saturday with Wahid on the sidelines of a UN trade conference in Bangkok, said he was following "very closely" the discussions between Wahid and Wiranto.

# 110 countries threatened by desertification

DUBAI, Feb 13: Dozens of international experts on Sunday examined the latest methods to combat the threat of desertification which hangs over more than 110 countries, at a conference hosted by this desert Gulf emirate, reports AFP.

Seventy per cent of arable land in the countries most at risk is threatened by desertification, warned Mohammad bin Fahad, chairman of the organising committee of the five-day conference.

Klaus Toepfer, executive director of the UN Environment Programme, said the UNEP has

launched four full-scale projects costing more than 40 million dollars as well as 11 medium-sized projects to fight desertification.

Almost 150 experts are taking part in the Dubai conference co-organised by UN agencies on "better management of arid and semi-arid lands in the 21st century" that opened on Saturday.

The organisers also invited around 60 ministers for the forum which is to discuss 120 fresh studies on the causes and effects of desertification as well as remedies.

The UN Convention to Com-

bate Desertification (UNCCD) is "one of the concrete results of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development" held in Rio de Janeiro, said Hama Arba Diallo, the UNCCD executive secretary.

To date, the UNCCD has been ratified by 161 countries, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), he said.

"This large number of ratifications represents a worldwide consensus of the importance of desertification to both affected countries and those not affected," said Diallo.

# Indian states calm after violence-hit elections

PATNA, India, Feb 13: The Indian states of Bihar and Manipur were quiet today, one day after widespread violence during local elections left 26 people dead and dozens injured, officials said, reports AFP.

Twenty people were killed across the eastern state of Bihar, while six others died in the small far-eastern state of Manipur, during and in the run-up to the polls on Saturday.

"There is no tension anywhere in Bihar," director general of police K A Jacob told AFP in this state capital.

"Now everything is quiet. The police and paramilitary troops have been withdrawn from most places."

Manipur officials also reported calm today.

The violence in Bihar, which claimed the lives of 14 security personnel and six others, began even before polling booths opened, with a landmine blast overnight Friday which killed eight paramilitary troops.

Police blamed most of the attacks across Bihar, dubbed by critics as India's most lawless state, on outlawed Maoist rebels who had threatened violence against anyone ignoring its election boycott calls.

Election officials and newspapers reported at least 200 violent incidents across the state, including clashes between rival political groups and attacks on

polling stations by armed gangs.

The three-stage elections — on Saturday, Thursday and on February 22 — were called to elect state assemblies in Bihar, Manipur, Jharkhand in the north and Orissa in the east.

The elections are seen as an acid test for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist-led coalition which returned to power in national elections four months ago.

Separate exit polls by a private network and India's national television predicted after Saturday's polling that Vajpayee's alliance would pick up more than 60 of the 108 Bihar seats.



A Japanese "Moonie" holding a portrait of his bride, who couldn't join in the mass wedding event, is overwhelmed during the ceremony given by the founder of Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, at a mass wedding ceremony at the Olympic Stadium in Seoul yesterday. Some 30,000 "Moonie" couples, believers who came from all over the world, got married on the occasion.

— AFP photo

## 'Peanuts' creator Schulz dead

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 13: Charles M Schulz, the cartoonist who delighted the world with the adventures and adversities of Charlie Brown, his friends and a dog named Snoopy, died on Saturday. He was 77, reports AP.

Schulz, who was diagnosed with colon cancer and suffered a series of small strokes during emergency abdominal surgery in November, died in his sleep Saturday evening, his son Craig Schulz said.

His wildly popular comic strip, "Peanuts," made its debut on Oct 2, 1950, and Schulz announced his retirement from the strip a few weeks after undergoing surgery in November.

The travails of the "little round-headed kid" and his pals eventually ran in more than 2,400 newspapers, reaching millions of readers in 68 countries.

His death came on the eve of the publication of the last strip he drew, showing Snoopy at his typewriter and other Peanuts regulars along with a "Dear Friends" letter thanking his readers for their support.

Over the years, the Peanuts gang became a part of American popular culture, delivering gentle humor spiked with a child's-eye view of human foibles.

"Why do musicians compose symphonies and poets write poems?" he once said. "They do it because life wouldn't have any meaning for them if they didn't. That's why I draw cartoons. It's my life."



Indian sitar maestro Pundit Ravi Shankar (C) receives France's highest civilian award, the Commander of the Legion of Honour from the French Ambassador to India, Claude Blanchemaizon (L), on Saturday. The 79-year-old sitar wizard was honoured in New Delhi for his contribution to global culture and is the second Indian recipient after filmmaker Satyajit Ray.

## Pak troops leave for E Timor

ISLAMABAD, Feb 13: Around 800 Pakistani troops left here Saturday for Dili to join the United Nations peacekeeping mission in East Timor, reports Xinhua.

The troops will participate in repair, reconstruction and rehabilitation projects which are conducted by the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), according to the local press.

Since its independence in 1947, Pakistan has been one of the major contributors in UN efforts for global peace. The

Pakistani Army has contributed more than 17,000 troops for UN peacekeeping assignments in many countries and regions.

## Clinton may propose Indo-Pak summit

ISLAMABAD, Feb 13: Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar has claimed US President Bill Clinton is considering a proposal to call a summit between India and Pakistan to defuse tension in South Asia, a newspaper reported yesterday, reports PTI.

The US president may convey his proposal in this regard to the Indian leadership during his visit to New Delhi next month, Sattar told the 'Jung' Urdu daily.

All issues can be discussed during the meeting, Pakistan will accept the summit proposal if the US agrees to host such a meeting, he was quoted by the

paper as saying.

English daily 'The News' reported that Sattar recalled Pakistan and India are bound to hold talks under a resolution passed by the UN security council, which clearly said that both countries should hold talks to end tension.

Last year, the leaders of India and Pakistan had agreed they would start a dialogue to resolve all issues, including Kashmir, the daily quoted the foreign minister as saying.

He claimed there was a realization in the international community that Pakistan's leadership wants to resolve the (Kashmir) issue peacefully.

# Taliban warns Britain against encouraging terrorism

KANDAHAR, Feb 13: Afghanistan's Taliban rulers warned Britain Sunday that to grant refuge to the Afghan asylum seekers that were hostage on a hijacked Ariana Airlines plane would encourage terrorism, reports AP.

If asylum is granted it will encourage other, would be hijackers to use this method to flee to the West, the Taliban's Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil told a news conference at the Kandahar Airport, where those wanting to return to Afghanistan will be brought from Britain.

They are expected to arrive within the next 24 hours on a chartered flight.

"We have to differentiate between political and economic asylum seekers," he said. "With the return of the passengers to Afghanistan, terrorism will be discouraged."

An Ariana Airlines Boeing 727 jet was hijacked on Feb 6 during what should have been a short domestic flight from the Afghan capital of Kabul to the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. But the plane was taken to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Russia and finally London by the hijackers.

Seventy-four passengers have applied for asylum, and police are questioning 22 others, who are suspected of involvement in the hijacking.

AFP adds: Britain denied reports today that it wanted to send hostages freed from a hijacked Afghan plane to a third country such as Pakistan, after scores of former hostages were moved to a temporary immigration centre.

However the Foreign Office admitted London had been in contact with several countries near Afghanistan over the hijacking, which ended peacefully at Stansted airport near London early Thursday.

The Home Office said Saturday that only 37 of the passengers had so far indicated they would be willing to return to their strife-torn homeland.

# Clinton's upcoming S Asia visit US weighing wisdom of stopover in Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Feb 13: To stopover in Pakistan or not to stop over: That is the question rolling the top echelons of US foreign policy officials, reports IPS.

With President Bill Clinton scheduled to travel to India and Bangladesh during the week of March 20, top policy-makers are pre-occupied with the possible consequences of skipping Pakistan, Washington's closest Cold War ally in south Asia.

Most senior officials, including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, believe those consequences could be very negative for US interests in the region, particularly for containing the spread of Islamic radicalism and reducing rising tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi.

At the same time, however, they worry that a meeting between Clinton and Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who ousted the elected government of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a military coup d'etat last October, would send the wrong message.

After the coup, Washington ruled out "business as usual" with Islamabad until Musharraf at least committed himself

to an early return to civilian rule, a step that the general so far has steadfastly declined to take.

"We obviously were disturbed by the way that Gen. Musharraf took over and have been working to try to get him to understand the importance of having a civilian democratic rule, and have laid out with him some of the steps that need to be taken," Albright said this week.

## News analysis

But Washington has little to show for its efforts on restoring democratic rule or on any other key demands, including severing alleged ties between elements of the Pakistani military and terrorist groups in Kashmir and Afghanistan.

On the latter problem "there has been some cooperation at some levels, but not as much as we would like," Albright told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee this week.

US officials say they are looking for some "concrete gesture" by Musharraf that would allow Clinton to "reward" the Pakistani leader with a visit even if it is confined to an air-

port chat while the plane refuses. Most favour a commitment by Clinton to make a separate trip to Pakistan later this year.

Clinton's trip to India, where he is scheduled to stay five days, will be the first by a sitting US president since Jimmy Carter travelled there in 1978. Despite the close alliance between Islamabad and Washington over Afghanistan during the 1980s, Richard Nixon was the last US president to visit Pakistan, some 30 years ago.

Since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, ties between the US and Pakistan have been rocky. Washington suspended military aid and sales to Islamabad in 1990 in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and amid overwhelming evidence that Pakistan had obtained everything it needed to build a nuclear bomb.

In more recent years, Washington also became alarmed about Pakistani backing for the Taliban government in Afghanistan, which has harboured radical anti-Western Islamists such as Saudi Osama bin Laden, who Washington considers International Public Enemy Number one.

## Russia decides to shut down military nuclear reactors

WASHINGTON, Feb 13: The Russian government has told US officials it wants to abandon a joint project to convert military atomic reactors to civilian use and shut them down instead. The Washington Post reported in its Sunday editions, reports AP.

An agreement reached in 1997 committed Russia to halting production of weapons-grade plutonium by the end of this year, removing enough material for nearly 4000 new nuclear weapons each year.

The United States was to help pay for the project, estimated to cost about 80 million dollars.

But the Post said Russian officials informed a US delegation last week that cost overruns and warnings of a possible Chernobyl-type catastrophe had prompted them to shut down the remaining military reactors rather than convert them to civilian use.

Energy needs for cities where the reactors are located would be provided by conventional sources for about 230 million dollars, most of which the Russians want paid by the United States.

The Post said the Clinton administration is studying the new proposal, although it has expressed skepticism about the projected cost.

Independent US experts welcomed the shift, however, largely because of problems and delay with the conversion programme, the newspaper said.

## US team due in China soon

BEIJING, Feb 13: A team of top US officials is due in China this week to clear the air ahead of presidential elections in Taiwan and to jump-start talks on strategic issues, reports Reuters.

Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and senior White House and military officials are scheduled to arrive in Beijing on Wednesday after a two-day visit to Japan.

Western diplomats said Washington was seeking to avoid a repeat of its standoff with Beijing in 1996, when China conducted military drills and lobbed missiles into Taiwan waters in the run-up to the island's first presidential election.

That display of military might by China, which considers reunification with Taiwan its most sacred goal, was meant as a warning to pro-independence candidates and voters.

Washington sent in two aircraft carrier battle groups to show support for the fledgling democracy.

Talbott's visit offered Washington a chance to urge restraint before the March 18 election in hopes of averting a similar episode in the Taiwan Strait, a Western diplomat said.

## Over 8000 Iraqi civilians killed in Gulf War

BAGHDAD, Feb 13: More than 8,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in US-led air and missile strikes during the 1991 Gulf War over Kuwait, Iraq's ruling Baath party said today, reports AFP.

The party's daily, Ath-Thawra, said US and British air raids on civilian targets during the six-week conflict killed 8,243 civilians, including 2,000 women and 520 children under the age of four.

The death toll was published on the anniversary of a US strike on Al-Amriya bomb shelter in Baghdad that Iraqi authorities said killed 403 civilians in February 1991.

Iraqi leaders' wreaths at a Baghdad martyrs' monument as a 21-gun salute sounded in the capital and other cities around the country.

"The continuation of US raids on civilian targets shows that the United States is carrying on its aggression against Iraq nine years after the end of the war," said Al-Jumhuriya, another official daily.

According to an AFP toll compiled from official Iraqi reports, a total of 159 people have died since December 1998 in US and British attacks in no-fly zones over southern and northern Iraq.

Another 2,440 civilians have been killed and 7,032 injured in accidental explosions of bombs dating back to the Gulf War, when Iraqi occupation forces were driven out of Kuwait, an Iraqi weekly reported in January.

# BRIEFLY

**5 arrested for hunting animals:** A senior bureaucrat and four others have been arrested in far-eastern India on charges of killing five rare monkeys and eight birds at a wildlife resort, officials said Sunday, AFP reports from Guwahati.

Vihili Sekhose, a member of the elite Indian Administrative Service (IAS), was arrested Saturday at the Deopahar Reserve Forest in Assam state. B S Bonal, a senior wildlife official, said Sekhose was caught after he had killed the monkeys and eight birds, including kingfishers, heron and owls, with hunting rifles. Others who were arrested included his family members and guards. If convicted, the officer faces up to six years in prison for killing endangered species.

**Crackdown on immigrants:** Police are arresting increasing numbers of illegal immigrants working in restaurants, bars and gambling dens as part of a crackdown by the Australian government, officials said Sunday, AFP reports from Sydney.

In a raid by police and immigration officers in Sydney's Chinatown on Friday night, 24 suspects were arrested, including some who jumped from a second-floor window in a desperate bid to escape. A police spokesman said 28 suspected illegals had been arrested in Sydney during the previous three nights in the latest phase of a crackdown known as Operation Pirbright.

# Cyanide spill spreads to Yugoslavia

Widespread destruction of aquatic life

BELGRADE, Feb 13: A cyanide spill that has already contaminated two other countries has moved into Yugoslavia, where local officials are reporting widespread destruction of life in one of the region's major rivers, reports AP.

The spill originated in Romania, where a dam at the Baia Mare gold mine overflowed Jan. 30 sending deadly cyanide poisoning into streams. From there, the pollutants flowed west into the Tisa river, first in Hungary and now Yugoslavia.

"The Tisa is a dead river," Istvan Backulin, the mayor of a town in the area, told The Associated Press by telephone Saturday. "All life in it, from algae to trout, has been destroyed. The spill is leaving nothing alive."

The private Beta news agency quoted local ecologists as saying that it could take years before the marine life appears in the river again.

"Enormous quantities of dead fish are floating on the surface and the spill continues to spread," the mayor of northern town of Senta, Attila Juhász said.

Juhas and officials from several other towns in northern Yugoslavia met Saturday in Senta to try deal with what some authorities are calling Europe's worst environmental disaster since Chernobyl.

Local mayors have mobilized volunteers to collect the dead fish in efforts to reduce levels of the pollution which continued to spread southward.

Yugoslavia's Tanjug news agency reported that by Saturday noon, the concentration of cyanide in the water, at the point where Tisa enters Yugoslavia from Hungary, was 0.07 milligrams per liter, down from 0.13 milligrams several hours earlier.

But the worst-polluted part of the flow was moving south and more serious damage was expected later when the Tisa joins the Danube river, probably early Sunday. The spill is moving about 4 kilometres per hour.

Restaurants in that part of the country have already removed fish from their menus and the alarm has already spread south, including capital Belgrade which lies on the

Danube river some 130 kilometres to the south.

Juhas said that drinking water was not in danger since supplies come wells far enough from the river. Wildlife, however, in the area near the river is in serious danger, he said.

In Hungary, the environmental minister, Pal Pepo, said only quick action from well-organized catastrophe-prevention work had prevented damage to human health.

Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, has called for the appointment of a government commissioner to coordinate damage assessment, international legal steps, and cleanup projects.

On Thursday, the European Union's transport and energy

commissioner, Loyola de Palacio, met in Budapest with Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi and other officials to assess the crisis, which she termed a "European-dimension catastrophe."

In Yugoslavia, the cyanide spill adds to the strain from already high pollution levels caused by NATO bombing last year that targeted oil refineries and factories, and lack of proper ecological care.

While the official news agency, Tanjug, reported that the authorities were taking "adequate measures" along the affected waterway, Juhas said that nobody from the government from capital Belgrade showed up for the meeting in Senta or provided assistance.