

Mahathir for orderly power transfer

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 30: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad called today for an orderly transfer of power when he steps down and said democracy in Malaysia's ruling party was secondary to national interests, reports AFP.

"UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) strongly upholds democracy but attention should be (more) on the outcome of democracy than on the democratic approach itself," the state Bernama news agency quoted him as saying.

"Democratic practices are meant to bring out the best results and not lead to disintegration," Mahathir said in his Kubang Pasu constituency in the northern state of Kedah.

Mahathir, 74, who says this will be his last term in office, was apparently responding to implicit criticism from his old rival Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Razaleigh has called for all posts in the ruling (UMNO), which holds leadership elections in May, to be contested. Its supreme council headed by Mahathir in January "ad-

vised" local divisions that the premier and his preferred successor, Deputy Premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, should be nominated unopposed as party president and deputy president.

Holders of the two posts are automatically premier and deputy premier.

Out of the 165 divisions nationwide, 138 have so far met and 137 have nominated Abdullah.

Abdullah has 136 nominations while Razaleigh, who says he does not plan to contest the elections, has one for president and two for deputy president.

Under party rules, neither Mahathir nor Abdullah can now be challenged in May because no opponent could gather the required nominations.

Razaleigh has said UMNO should not ban contests "just so as to keep our own positions secure" and predicted the party would become a dinosaur unless it reformed.

Mahathir said a change in the prime ministership was inevitable but should take place in an orderly manner. "No one lasts forever," he said.

Pakistan cannot afford adventures and experiments. Today Pakistan is isolated and the investment climate has been de-

Sharif demands return of democracy

KARACHI, Mar 30: Ousted Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has pleaded for the return of democracy to the country as he awaits the verdict of his hijack trial, reports AFP.

Sharif — who could face the death penalty if he is found guilty of charges including hijacking, kidnapping, attempted murder and terrorism — made his call in notes from his jail cell following the end of his trial late Wednesday.

The ousted leader is on trial with his brother Shahbaz and five senior officials, on charges relating to the night of last year's military coup in Pakistan.

In the notes made available to AFP late Wednesday, Sharif lashed out at Pakistan's military regime, saying he "feared for my country" and democracy in Pakistan.

Sharif is allowed to meet only immediate family members and lawyers while in prison.

His wife Kulsoom Nawaz told AFP it was "painful" to see her husband confined in prison. "It

is always painful to see my innocent husband inside the prison. My heart bleeds as I know that he has not committed any crime," she said.

"He has always served the people of Pakistan and has cared for them. And this is no crime. But I have faith in my God that happy moments will come again and truth will prevail," she said.

On Wednesday, Sharif protested his innocence as his trial ended.

During his trial the prosecution alleged Sharif tried to prevent a commercial airliner carrying Musharraf and 198 other passengers from Sri Lanka from landing in Pakistan on the night of the coup.

The plane landed after the army took over Karachi airport and Musharraf seized power.

The trial has been closely watched by diplomats and journalists. During his visit to Pakistan last week, US President Bill Clinton reportedly asked Musharraf to spare Sharif's life.



Indonesian student protesters use wooden sticks to try to beat back anti-riot forces stopping them from reaching former president Suharto's residence in Jakarta yesterday. Anti-riot forces fired tear-gas shells after students tried to force their way past a security cordon on their way to Suharto's house to demand that he be brought to trial.

— AFP photo

'Britain ready to back US missile defence project'

LONDON, Mar 30: Britain is willing to support the United States in the first stage of its \$50 billion national missile protective shield despite cabinet fears of anti-nuclear protests, the Guardian newspaper reported today, says Reuters.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair has spoken to President Bill Clinton about the missile system and giving assurances of his support, the Guardian said, citing unidentified cabinet sources.

Asked about the report, a Defence Ministry spokesman told Reuters: "No comment."

The Guardian said there were cabinet fears that the project could trigger a revival of mass anti-nuclear protests across Europe.

The first stage of the missile system is designed to give the United States early warning of a nuclear attack by North Korea, the newspaper said.

This required changes to

computer software at an existing US satellite base at Fylingdales in the eastern English county of Yorkshire.

"How can we turn down a request from our closest ally to change its computer software?" an unidentified British cabinet minister was quoted as saying.

The Guardian said the second stage, intended to head off a nuclear attack from Iran, Iraq and rogue Middle East states, would require the massive extension of a US base in Britain.

If the project goes ahead, the United States will then build 200 interceptor missiles to track and destroy incoming nuclear missiles, the paper said.

The Guardian said the French and German governments were opposed to the new generation of weaponry, believing it would breach international treaties and undermine the current balance of deterrence between Russia and the United States.

Clinton invites Syria to offer new peace ideas

WASHINGTON, Mar 30: President Bill Clinton invited Syria on Wednesday to come up with new peace ideas that answer Israel's concerns about Syria's territorial demands, reports Reuters.

In his most detailed explanation yet of the state of play between Israel and Syria, Clinton told a White House news conference that Syrian President Hafez al-Assad should not just sit and wait for the Israelis to meet his territorial demands.

Clinton put Israeli proposals to Assad in Geneva on Sunday, but Syria said they did not meet its requirement that the Israelis withdraw to the border as it stood on the eve of the Middle East war of 1967, when Israel took the Golan Heights.

Israel said on Wednesday that it had done its utmost to make peace. Syria said that it was up to Israel to make the next move.

Clinton, referring to Assad's response to the detailed Israeli proposals that Clinton passed on the Geneva, said: "I don't think it's enough to say: I don't like your position. Come back and see me when I like your position."

If he disagrees with their territorial proposal, which is quite significant, then there should be some other proposal, I think, coming from the Syrians about how (the Israelis') concerns could be handled," he added.

"Once you know what the other side wants and you don't think you can do it, then you ought to come up with some alternative way of trying to respond to the underlying concerns that are behind the position," he said.

Throughout the contacts between Israel and Syria, Syria has been expected to offer security arrangements such as early

warning stations and demilitarized zones to compensate for the strategic advantage Israel loses by leaving the Golan Heights.

Diplomats say the main territorial obstacle at this stage is a dispute over who should control the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Israel's main freshwater reservoir.

The Syrians say it should be theirs, while Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak does not believe that this meets Israel's security concerns or that his government could win a referendum on a peace deal that gives the shore to Syria, the diplomats add.

Syria refuses to return to direct talks until the Israelis give a commitment to full withdrawal. Israel says the extent of withdrawal depends on the security arrangements and on how far and how fast Syria will allow normal relations.

8 die, 72 missing in Pakistan boat capsizes

LAHORE, Pakistan, Mar 30: At least eight people drowned and 72 were missing when a boat capsized on the River Chenab in Pakistan's central province of Punjab on Wednesday, local government officials said, reports Reuters.

Officials in Punjab's Gujarat district, where the boat carrying people to a Muslim religious gathering in the nearby Sialkot district capsized, confirmed eight people had drowned and 72 were missing. But they said the death toll could rise.

There was confusion about the number of people travelling on the boat, APP putting the total at 50 and officials in Gujarat at about 90.

Volcano could erupt at any time in Japan

DATE, Japan, Mar 30: Nearly 10,000 people evacuated from their homes kept a nervous vigil today as a volcano in northern Japan rumbled back to life, setting off a series of powerful earthquakes and threatening to erupt at any time, reports AP.

Experts warned an eruption of Mount Usu on the northern Japan island of Hokkaido was imminent. Observers on a military helicopter found cracks had opened up on the volcano's western slope and near its base.

Officials said the crack on the western slope stretched 100 metres.

For the third day, quakes rocked this normally serene hot springs resort area at the base of the volcano. And with the frequency and intensity of the tremors increasing, nerves were beginning to fray.

Poaching puts tigers in danger

LONDON, Mar 30: New demand across Southeast Asia for the skins, teeth and claws of tigers is endangering much of the species, particularly the Sumatran tiger, according to environmentalists, reports AP.

Traffic, the wildlife trade monitoring programme of the World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Conservation Union, said in a statement Thursday that "illegal trade in tiger skins has reared its ugly head again."

A WWF field report in Indonesia said that at least 66 Sumatran tigers have been killed in the last two years, amounting to nearly 20 per cent of the tiger population. It said 24 were taken from the Bukit Barisan Selatan national park.

"The report revealed that major illegal supplying markets still operate openly in Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam," said Traffic Executive Director Steven Broad.

Russians suffer heavy losses in Chechnya

MOSCOW, Mar 30: Russian government forces suffered heavy casualties Wednesday when a column of 49 troops was surrounded by Chechen guerrillas in the southeastern mountains, Russian news reports said, reports Reuters.

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2 Saturn-sized planets discovered

SAN FRANCISCO, Mar 30: Astronomers searching the skies for distant planets have detected two Saturn-sized worlds orbiting distant suns, the smallest planets found thus far outside our solar system, reports Reuters.

The discovery boosted the likelihood that even smaller planets — perhaps the size of Earth — exist elsewhere in the universe, said professor Steve Vogt of the University of California-Santa Cruz.

Begin five years ago, the research is part of a project to scan some 1,100 stars within 300 light-years of Earth identified as likely candidates to support planetary systems and possibly life.

BCIC International Tender Notice

Managing Director, Khulna Newsprint Mills Ltd., Town Khalishpur, Khulna invites sealed quotation under 2 (two) envelope system against International Tender Enquiry No. KNM/PD(F)-05/2000 dated 09-03-2000 for purchase of 250 KW Induction Motor with Soft Starter on C&F (C) Mongla liner term basis under CASH FOREIGN EXCHANGE. The quotation will be received within 11.00 AM on 10-05-2000 in the office of the Sr. General Manager (Purchase), BCIC, Dhaka and Addl. Chief Manager (Purchase), KNM Ltd., Khulna which shall be opened immediately thereafter. Tender documents shall be available on payment of Tk. 200.00 (two hundred) per set (non-refundable) from 1) KNM Ltd., Khulna 2) BCIC, 30-31, Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka & 3) BCIC Branch Office, 6-Agrabad C/A, Chittagong. Earnest Money is Tk. 1% of the total quoted C&F(C) value. No tender documents shall be sold on the date of opening. The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids without assigning any reason thereof.

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Miran Fazlur Rahman
Addl. Chief Manager (Pur.)
For Managing Director.



— AFP photo

Nobel laureates urge UN to adopt arms code of conduct

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 30: A group of 19 Nobel peace laureates, led by former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, wants the United Nations to adopt an international code of conduct to regulate the global arms trade, reports IPS.

In a letter to secretary-general Kofi Annan, the group says: "Together, we have written an international code of conduct on arms transfers, which, once adopted by all arms-selling nations, will benefit all humanity, nationalities, ethnicities and religions."

The 11-page code stipulates that any country wishing to purchase arms must meet certain criteria, including the promotion of democracy, the protection of human rights and transparency in military spending.

The code prohibits sales to nations that support terrorism and to states that are engaged in aggression against other nations and people. "The international community can no longer ignore the repercussions of irresponsible arms transfers," the letter said.

Besides Arias, the Nobel peace laureates who are signatories to the letter include archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor and the human rights organisation amnesty international.

The former Costa Rican president, one of the strongest advocates of demilitarisation, has already launched a global

campaign against the international arms trade.

Last month amnesty international urged the United Nations to formulate a mandatory code of conduct to curb the flow of small arms into the world's war zones.

Governments have talked about the need to stem the proliferation of small arms," Joost Hiltermann, executive director of the arms division of human rights Watch said. But so far, it has been all talk and no action, he added.

Human rights Watch is not only calling for binding codes on arms transfers but also the es-

tablishment of transparency measures, including annual reporting of arms sales, and the creation of a UN Register for Small arms.

Michel Rodoc, a former French prime minister and head of an eminent persons group, told reporters last month that an international code of conduct could set clear standards for arms transfer eligibility.

The proposed code must also set stringent measures to curtail the black market, and trafficking must be punishable, even if it occurs abroad. Additionally, he said, small arms trafficking should be made a treaty crime before the International Criminal Court.

Addressing the security council Friday, ambassador Bernd Niehaus of Costa Rica said his government would strongly support the proposed code.

If it picks up support, the draft code is expected to go before the UN Committee on Disarmament and international security later this year, and if approved, it will be submitted to the 188-member general assembly for approval. Currently the only major code of conduct governing arms sales is being implemented by the 15-member European Union.

Niehaus said the temptation to use weapons remained latent even in post-conflict situations unless there was disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.



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