

Bharat Ratna awarded to Lata Mangeshkar

NEW DELHI, Jan 26: India has conferred its highest civilian honour on "Melody Queen" Lata Mangeshkar, whose music has enthralled audiences in the country for decades, reports AFP.

It also bestowed awards on Indian-born conductor Zubin Mehta and US economist and diplomat John Kenneth Galbraith.

The honours list, declared late Thursday on the eve of the country's Republic Day, additionally gave the highest civilian award of Bharat Ratna (Jewel of India) to Bismillah Khan, a maestro of the "shehnai," a classical Indian wind instrument.

Mangeshkar, 70, whose songs are played at the official Republic Day celebrations every year, was quoted as saying Friday that she was overjoyed.

Speaking to The Times of India daily from London, she said, "I am very happy and grateful to the nation and its people who have showered on me such love and affection."

"Compared to so many big artistes, I am such a small artiste. Ultimately for us the country means everything and for keeping its name and fame high, I will do anything."

The 86-year-old shehnai virtuoso Khan echoed her.

Calling the honour an "Act of God," he said: "I have so much

more to learn, I want to learn but I have no more strength. Age has caught up with me."

India on Friday celebrates its transition to a republic in 1950, three years after gaining freedom from British colonial rule.

The second highest award, the Padma Vibhushan or Special Decoration of the Lotus, went to Bombay-born conductor Mehta, several Indian classical musicians and Galbraith, who served in India.

Galbraith was one of the most popular US envoys to India, who shared a warm rapport with then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

The Padma Bhushan, or Decoration of the Lotus, was conferred upon Indian film legend Amitabh Bachchan, called a "one-man industry" by French director Francois Truffaut, and Arun Netravali, the Indian-born president of Bell Laboratories.

Others honoured include evergreen film actor Dev Anand, who despite being in his seventies still plays swashbuckling heroes, dancer Yamini Krishnamurthy, tennis player Leander Paes and industrialist Rahul Bajaj, owner of the world's biggest scooter manufacturer.

The foreign ministry stressed that most of the 15-year-old craft would burn up in the atmosphere and any parts of the orbiter that survive the descent would fall harmlessly into the Pacific.

Any debris from Mir will splash down "in the open sea, in the southern Pacific and removed from (existing) routes used by ships and airplanes," a foreign ministry statement said.

The largest piece of debris -- whose estimated size was not given -- would crash into the sea about half-way between Australia and Chile, south of the Polynesian islands, said the ministry.

A Progress M1 craft is due to nudge Mir from its current orbit and manoeuvre the craft to a final destination of 47 degrees latitude and 140 degrees longitude, Moscow said.

Several nations, and in particular Japan, have voiced fears that sections of Mir may come tumbling down over their territory when the fault-prone Soviet-era space craft makes its fatal descent around March 6.

Moscow has promised to keep Tokyo informed of minute-by-minute developments once Mir's last plunge is underway.

Mir to splash down safely in south Pacific: Moscow

MOSCOW, Jan 26: Russia announced Friday that the 130-tonne Mir space station would splash down to safety to Earth in the Pacific Ocean in between Australia and Chile in early March, reports AFP.

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The decision to abandon Mir follows several glitches in recent years, including a serious fire and a near-fatal collision with a cargo ship in 1997.

Last month, Russia lost contact with Mir for almost 24 hours, sparking international alarm at the possible security threat if such a communication breakdown occurred while Mir was hurtling towards Earth.

Russia has also found that its commitment to the new International Space Station (ISS) has stretched its budget to breaking point, making it unable to support both space projects.

The ministry statement said most of the once-revolutionary space lab would burn up in the atmosphere some 70 to 90 kilometers (about 40 to 65 miles) above Earth.

"More than 30 minutes will pass from the moment Mir enters the dense layers of the atmosphere until the fragments that do not burn up hit the sea," the ministry said.

The scientist with Russian space control warned last month that no object the size of Mir -- the craft is some 30 meters (yards) long -- has ever been brought down to Earth before.

The scientist speculated that up to 40 tonnes of Mir may survive the fiery re-entrance and hit the sea.

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Joseph Kabilu sworn in as Congo president

KINSHASA, Jan 26: General Joseph Kabilu took the oath of office today to succeed his slain father as president of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a vast, ruined country split by a war which involves the armies of five nearby states, reports AFP.

The general -- just 29 years old, the Supreme Court revealed -- was little known outside military circles before a bodyguard pumped three pistol bullets into president Laurent Kabilu on January 16, and is untested as a politician.

Wearing a dark suit with a blue tie, he declared, in a firm, clear voice before the Supreme Court and members of the provisional parliament: "I, Joseph Kabilu, swear fidelity to the

nation," and went on to vow to protect its independence and territorial integrity.

The audience in Kinshasa's historic Palace of the Nation on the bank of the Congo River erupted in ululation and applause, but a cross-section of people on the streets of Kinshasa told AFP they doubted whether he would have the strength of will to impose himself as an effective leader.

His father, who died of his wounds on January 18, the government said, was buried Tuesday in front of the palace in a mausoleum once topped by a statue of King Leopold II of the Belgians, who ran the territory as a private estate for 23 years.

Taliban offices closed in Pakistan

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Jan 26: Police have sealed a branch office of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia here in line with UN sanctions imposed last week, officials said Friday, reports AFP.

The political office has been shut and its staff shifted to the Afghan consulate in Peshawar, they said.

Taliban ambassador Abdul Salam Zaef, quoted by the private Afghan Islamic Press, said the militia had closed its political offices in Peshawar,

Quetta and Karachi.

The Afghan embassy however continues to function in Islamabad, which has close relations with the fundamentalist Taliban. Pakistan is one of only three countries that recognises the Taliban regime.

In Quetta, capital of south-western Baluchistan province, Afghan counsul general Abdullah Hammad said the militia decided to close its political offices after receiving instructions from the Pakistani government.

Aides of Clinton

From Page 12 asking staffers to report any suspected vandalism, but a spokesman said Thursday he doubts anything will be done with the findings.

"What we are doing is cataloging that which took place," White House press secretary Ari Fleischer said. He refused to say what acts of vandalism had been reported, the extent of any damage or even why the review was being conducted.

The actions were meant to be humorous or expressed the frustration of White House staffers who were losing their jobs, the Democratic officials said.

The Bush administration said they didn't find the alleged vandalism funny and say it will cost taxpayer money to clean up and repair.

Euro Parliament

From Page 1 being made by Bangladesh government to bring Golam Azam and others responsible for war crimes to an international court.

The resolution drew attention to the fact that international companies started exploiting Bangladesh's natural gas reserves and called on European Union to support Bangladesh government in its attempt to exploit these resources.

It also welcomed the Commission's proposal to allow duty-free access for all products from least developed countries, excepting arms, to European markets, which will have a positive effect on imports from Bangladesh into the European Union.

The European Parliament also welcomed the efforts of Bangladesh in recent years to combat child labour.

Members of the Bangladesh Lathial Bahini presenting a traditional Lathi khela at the Pabna Festival yesterday. The two-day long festival has been organised by the Pabna Association in Dhaka to mark its platinum jubilee.

-- Star photo



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DMCH plagued with constraints

From Page 12

more than Tk 40 lakh in a couple of days' notice. Hasina inaugurated the national blood transfusion centre and attended the Millennium Get-together of the college on January 5.

The abducting accused are

Mufti Hannan, Habibullah alias

Mofizur Rahman, Munshi

Ibrahim, Mahmud Azahar alias

Mamunur Rashid, Rashed

driver alias Shimul, Shah Newaj

Ali, Azizul Haque, Lokman,

Yusuf alias Abu Musa, Harun,

Sheikh Mohammad Enamul

Haque, Ismail alias Noor Islam,

Saiful, Hasanuzzaman and

Khokon.

Police recovered 60 KG explosives, two big live bombs, gun powder and some explosive materials from the soap factory of Mufti Hannan and from the residence of Hasmat Ali Kazi on July 23 last year.

Earlier, police submitted a charge sheet against seven persons including Mufti Hannan to the court in connection with a case filed under Arms Act.

Polls observers

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welcome to make observation

on the polls, during the polls

and after the polls to make the

election more transparent.

The observers both from

home and abroad will absolutely

be free to move and observe the

polls. They will be given free

access to the elections," he

said.

Asked about the question of

neutrality of the poll observers,

he said if somebody is biased, if

somebody makes false state-

ment they will be discredited.

"You can't hide truth, it'll come

out," said the CEC.

A Needs Assessment Mission

of the European Commission

will be visiting Bangladesh

January 27-February 6 to deter-

mine the scope and structure of

the EU election monitoring in

the upcoming polls.

The mission of seven people,

including four Commission

officials from Brussels, a repre-

sentative of Swedish EU Presi-

dency and two consultants, will

have two meetings with the CEC

for a preview of the entire gamut

of the election process.

In June 12, 1996 general

elections 189 foreign observers

had been in Bangladesh.

Besides, the diplomatic mis-

sions in Dhaka engaged 81 other

observers to monitor the seventh

parliamentary elections.

"Panic-stricken people came

out of their houses and began to

run for safety," said the report.

According to an Associated

Press (AP) report, an apparent

after-shock of the quake hit

Bangladesh 30 minutes after the

tremor. Hundreds of frightened

residents came out into the

streets in Satkhira, it said.

The police said the quake

had been felt in Pabna, Sylhet

and Comilla.

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