

India to launch GSLV today

AFP, Bangalore

India will have its collective fingers crossed today for the second attempt at launching a new rocket that carries the country's hopes of joining the elite commercial satellite launch club.

The attempt comes just 18 days after the original launch at the Sriharikota site in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh had to be aborted due to an engine failure.

The official countdown began in the early hours of Monday with take-off of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) scheduled for 3:43 pm on Wednesday.

"We are confident this time," Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) spokesman S. Krishnamurthy told AFP.

The three-stage, 49-metre high GSLV -- the most technologically challenging project undertaken by India's space programme -- will carry a 1.54-tonne experimental satellite, GSAT-1, into orbit.

Investigations showed one of the four strap-on booster rockets failed to achieve the required level of thrust, resulting in the failure of the first flight on March 28.

New Year death toll rises to 660 in Thailand

AP, Bangkok

Thailand's New Year death toll rose to 660 yesterday with more holidaymakers falling victim to unprecedented carnage on the nation's crowded roads, the public health ministry said.

Traffic and other accidents had also injured 52,330 people since Thursday and the toll was rising on the last day of the holiday as Thais travelled to Bangkok and other cities after a long weekend.

"That's the data as of late afternoon on Monday. The number increases every five minutes," Somchai Karmanasurt, director of the ministry's accident report centre, told The Associated Press.

About 80 per cent of the deaths were on the roads. Other fatalities were due to drunken brawls, electrocution and other incidents related to the Thai New Year festival, also known as Songkran.

US to press China for prompt return of spy plane

Negotiators arrive in Beijing

AFP, Beijing

A team of US negotiators arrived in Beijing yesterday to press for the return of a US surveillance plane that made an emergency landing in Chinese territory, as Beijing renewed its demand that the US end spy missions near its coast.

The delegation headed by US deputy undersecretary of defence Peter Verga arrived at the US Embassy in Beijing in the afternoon and was slated to hold talks Wednesday with Chinese officials on the April 1 collision between the US plane and a Chinese fighter jet.

No timeframe has been set for the talks, but negotiations are not expected to last for more than two days.

"The US should stop sending airplanes to conduct reconnaissance activities in areas near the Chinese coast and take measures so as to avoid similar incidents in the future," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue told journalists.

Verga's counterpart in the relatively low-level talks would be Lu Shumin,

director general of the foreign ministry's department of North American and Oceania affairs, she said.

Zhang reiterated Beijing's position that the United States was "fully responsible" for the April 1 mid-air collision with the Chinese F-8 fighter, resulting in the death of the Chinese pilot and the "unauthorised" emergency landing of the US plane.

"It is our hope that the US side will take a constructive attitude in negotiations so as to ensure the proper settlement of the question," she said.

Responding to US demands that the high-tech spy plane be returned to the US, Zhang reiterated the right of the Chinese government to hold "full investigations" into the US plane, while indicating the fate of the plane would be decided after the investigations were completed.

Earlier in Washington, the US side said it would "ask tough questions about the manner in which the Chinese have been intercepting our aircraft in the area and also state our position about the EP-3 plane that needs to be returned," said White House spokesman Ari Fleischer.

Manila drops 5 corruption charges against Estrada

AFP, Manila

The Philippine government said yesterday it was dropping five out of eight graft charges filed against ex-president Joseph Estrada to speed up his prosecution on the capital crime of plunder.

Plunder, or large-scale corruption, is punishable by death and does not allow bail. Estrada posted bail bonds for the seven other charges on Monday and faces a May 17 arraignment.

Under the plunder charge, Estrada is accused of abusing his position to illegally amass more than four billion pesos (80 million dollars).

"We will concentrate on plunder which is the crux of the whole case," Ombudsman Aniano Desierto told a news conference after he filed a surprise motion with a special anti-graft court to pare the charges.

The prosecution had "become very apprehensive that technical issues involving duplication of proceedings" would be exploited by Estrada lawyers to delay matters,

Desierto said. Nevertheless, there was "more than adequate factual and legal bases" for the charges and the prosecution could win a conviction, he said.

The move was only temporary and the five charges could still be filed again at a later date, the ombudsman added.

Estrada still faces charges in the Sandiganbayan anti-graft court of plunder, falsification of documents by illegally using an alias and perjury through misdeclaration of his assets.

The former movie star, ousted in a popular uprising in January, was arrested on charges of corruption and perjury on Monday, when he swiftly posted bail to avoid going to jail.

The graft charge for which Estrada was issued an arrest warrant on Monday was among the charges that were dropped.

Chief state prosecutor Jovencito Zuno agreed with Desierto's move, saying, "I am for the idea that we concentrate on the plunder case."

In the latest plunder complaint, Estrada is jointly accused with his spiritual adviser Mariano Velarde of colluding to have the government acquire a property for 1.2 billion pesos, even though it had been purchased just months earlier for 325 million pesos.

Six other plunder cases against the ex-president were being studied, including one where he allegedly sold real estate to the government at an inflated price, said Deputy Ombudsman Margarito Gervacio.

Four of the six would be "ripe for resolution soon," he said.

It was the first time that Velarde, the leader of the "El Shaddai" religious group and popularly known as "Brother Mike," had been dragged into Estrada's legal battle.

President Gloria Arroyo downplayed the economic impact of her predecessor's arrest after a small pro-Estrada protest had greeted his brief detention.

MQM calls strike in Sindh

REUTERS, Karachi

Opposition activists in Pakistan's port city of Karachi said yesterday they had called a one-day strike to protest government clampdown on political activities and its failure to deal with chronic water shortages.

Nasreen Jalil, a senior leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), the biggest political party in Karachi, told Reuters she hoped the strike, called for today, would be widely observed throughout southern Sindh province.

"This is a protest against state excesses against peaceful demonstrations," she said.

"We are meeting various transport bodies and various other organisations to persuade them to close their businesses for the strike tomorrow (Wednesday),"

Police battled protesters in Karachi on Monday with tear gas and batons as people demonstrated against water shortages.

The military government has banned all public rallies and demonstrations and security forces have arrested thousands of political workers over the past month.



Angry demonstrators overturn a government vehicle in Kathmandu on Monday. The six leftist factions including the main opposition Nepal Communist Party-United Marxists and Leninist were involved in a demonstration which attempted to block Prime Minister G.P. Koirala from going to his office. They are demanding Koirala's resignation.

Row over aircraft leasing deal Nepal opposition rejects govt's talks offer

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal's opposition rejected yesterday Prime Minister G.P. Koirala's call for a dialogue to resolve an escalating row over an aircraft leasing deal and vowed to continue fighting for his resignation.

The embattled prime minister asked opposition parties on Monday to take part in a meeting to end the deadlock over alleged irregularities in the deal by state-owned Royal Nepal Airlines Corp to lease a Boeing 767 aircraft from Austria's Luda Air.

"We don't think the government is serious about the talks," leader of the main opposition Communist Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party Madhav Kumar Nepal told the news agency.

"He (Koirala) keeps opposition leaders in detention and calls for talks. We doubt his intention," Nepal said.

Authorities detained Nepal and several other communist members of parliament on Monday as they tried to stop Koirala from entering his office.

Nepal, who was released later on Monday, said the opposition leaders were detained in an "unpolitical, undemocratic and uncultured way" and pledged to continue holding anti-government demonstrations and rallies to press for Koirala's resignation.

Opposition parties have disrupted parliament for nearly two months over the row.

Civil Aviation Minister Garmi Datta Chatauri quit in January over the decision by Royal Nepal Airlines to lease the aircraft from Luda Air without issuing a public tender as required by law.

An independent commission is probing the matter. The carrier said earlier tender calls were unsuccessful and it urgently needed the aircraft for its international expansion.

Koirala, who denies any wrongdoing, says he is ready to quit if charged by a court.

The 78-year-old Koirala came to power in March last year vowing to fight corruption, provide good government and stamp out a bloody Maoist insurgency that has claimed 1,664 lives.

Miami Herald, AP win Pulitzer prizes

REUTERS, New York

The story of Elian Gonzalez, the Cuban boy who became the center of an international custody battle, earned prestigious Pulitzer Prizes on Monday for the Miami newspaper that reported the drama and a photographer who captured it on film.

The Pulitzer Prizes in Journalism, Letters and Drama and Music are awarded annually at Columbia University in New York.

The staff of the Miami Herald won the Pulitzer Prize for breaking news reporting for its coverage of the raid that led to the 6-year-old Cuban child being reunited with his father.

The Pulitzer board cited the newspaper "for its balanced and gripping on-the-scene coverage of the predawn raid."

Herald Managing Editor Mark Seibel said what made the story special was that it took place on the newspaper's home turf.

The Pulitzer for breaking news photography was awarded to Alan Diaz of the Associated Press for his picture of the armed agents who seized the boy from his Miami relatives' home in a dramatic predawn raid on April 22, 2000.

The Security Printing Corporation (Bangladesh) Ltd
Gazipur

Corrigendum
International Tender for Cigarette Tax Label Security Paper

Attention is drawn to all concern regarding the tender notice published in "The Daily Star" on 09.04.2001 on the captioned subject. In the national interest the opening date of the tender is rescheduled on 30.04.2001 instead of 08.05.2001.

All other terms and conditions will, however, remain unchanged.

Md Adam Ali
Manager (FPS)

GD-347

Indian opposition demands probe into bribery scam

Uproar in parliament

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian parliament was stalled again yesterday amid chaotic scenes as opposition members demanded a parliamentary probe into an arms bribery scandal rocking the government.

After a relatively quiet start to the day's business, the end of question time marked the beginning of an increasingly acrimonious war of words across the floor of the house, which finally led the speaker to call an adjournment.

The main opposition Congress party made it clear that it would continue to disrupt proceedings until the government agreed to set up a joint parliamentary committee to probe the bribery scandal.

"The law must be applicable to all citizens and investigations must commence immediately. These are our minimum demands," said Congress deputy leader Madhavrao Scindia.

The scandal concerns a sting operation by an Internet website which caught a number of leading

politicians, bureaucrats and army officers accepting money from journalists posing as arms dealers.

Tuesday was the first full scheduled day of business since parliament returned from a three-week recess.

Before the recess, the Congress-led opposition had paralysed the house for more than a week with demands that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his entire cabinet resign over the scandal.

For the government, the most pressing issue is the pending adoption of the national budget and railway budget.

"When this government came to power it said that its guiding light would be honesty and integrity," Scindia said.

"That is why we now say that this government has no moral right to continue. We were only giving air to the national sentiment of ire, indignation and disgust."

Scindia dismissed the government's decision to set up a judicial inquiry into the arms bribery issue as "totally inadequate" and a "mere

diversionary tactic."

Replying from the government benches amid heavy heckling, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan said the opposition demands could only be met if parliament was allowed to function normally.

"Any kind of inquiry can be ordered only after a discussion in the house," Mahajan said.

Shortly afterwards, opposition MPs stormed the well of the house, shouting slogans in favour of a parliamentary probe. Minutes later the speaker called an adjournment.

Prime Minister Vajpayee on Sunday had challenged the opposition to table a no-confidence motion in his government over the bribery scandal, which has already claimed the scalp of his defence minister and the president of BJP.

But after parliament's adjournment Tuesday, senior Congress leader Kamal Nath said the opposition would not play into the government's hands and would continue to stall the house until its demands were met.

Cincinnati lifts curfew

REUTERS, Cincinnati

Cincinnati officials lifted a curfew on Monday imposed five days ago and announced the formation of a race relations commission, as violence sparked by the fatal shooting of an unarmed black man by a white police officer wound down.

Mayor Charles Luken announced the actions after the city experienced its quietest night since racial violence erupted a week ago. There were about 60 arrests overnight for curfew violations, officials said.

Luken also defended the city's police force in general, saying they were "good people doing a good job."

Still, he admitted he was troubled by an apparently unprovoked police attack over the weekend in which four people, including two children, were injured as police fired non-lethal ammunition at a crowd of peaceful protesters after the funeral of the slain man, Timothy Thomas.

Luken said police involved in that incident may be reassigned pending an investigation, but said they have not been suspended.

Luken also called for a change in the city charter so that future chiefs could be selected from anywhere in the country based on their qualifications and merits.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Department of Environment
Paribesh Bhaban
E-16, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar
Dhaka-1207

Memo No Paribesh/Tech (UNFCCC)-406/2000-840 Dated: 16-4-2001

Subject: Invitation of Proposals for Consultancy (Extension of time)

Proposals were invited for consultancy services under the project "Country Case Study on Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation Assessment in Bangladesh" through advertisement which appeared in The Daily Star (23-3-2001), The Bhorer Kagoj (31-3-2001) and the Daily Ittefaq (1-4-2001)

The deadline, according to the above advertisement, for collecting bid document containing the TOR and that for submission of proposal had been 15 April 2001 and 16 April 2001, respectively. It is now notified for information of all concerned that, keeping the other conditions unaltered, the deadline for collection of the bid containing the TOR and that for submission of proposal has been extended till 23 April 2001 and 24 April 2001, respectively, during the office hours.

DFP-10140-17/4
G-711
Director General
Department of Environment

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Directorate of Films & Publications
192, Circuit House Road, Dhaka

No. 3-3/2000-2001(F/)

Local Tender Notice
No 60(F)/2000-2001

Sealed tenders are invited from established supplier firms for purchase of 1800' /s Magnet Back Coated Tape.

Tender schedule will be available at Tk 400/= (four hundred) only per set from this Directorate's Accounts Section during office hours from 8-4-2001 to 22-4-2001. Tenders will be received up to 11-30 minutes of 23-4-2001 and the tender box will be opened on the same day at 11-35 minutes.

Sardar Md. Aminul Islam
Deputy Director (Films)

DFP-9674-12/4
G-712
Member Secretary, Tender Committee

West African slave ship docks in Benin

AFP, Cotonou

The odyssey of 147 passengers aboard the Eitreno, suspected of transporting child slaves, ended early yesterday when it moored at the port of Cotonou, Benin, but the questions were just beginning.

The ship tied up at the dock at 1:20 am (06:20 BST), an AFP correspondent said. Waiting for it were police officers along with representatives of the United Nations children's fund UNICEF, the relief organisation Terre des Hommes and the Benin Red Cross, along with two government ministers.

The freed but relieved passengers, who included at least 23 children and around 20 adolescents, immediately disembarked to be looked after by relief organisations and the Red Cross.

They had spent two weeks in two big compartments with a few chairs and couches.

"Thank the Lord for bringing us back here this Easter," said one emotional woman.

Elisabeth Ponce, a worker with the humanitarian organisation Terre des Hommes, said: "We're still not sure that we are looking at child slavery. We will take in the 23 children and we'll question them tomorrow, one by one."

Although she did not rule out the slavery possibility, especially in the case of the adolescents on board, she confirmed that some of the children were travelling with their parents.

According to statements made to AFP on board the Eitreno by passengers and crew members, those on board had been held for three days in poor conditions

during a stopover in Libreville, Gabon, in the first days of April. Gabonese police had destroyed passports and other identity papers, they said.

If these statements are confirmed, the task of the Beninois authorities in identifying the passengers, of several nationalities, and assessing their legal situation will be all the harder.

International arrest warrants have been issued against the captain and the crew of the Eitreno, Nigerian-registered but chartered by a Beninois, which set sail March 30 from Cotonou headed for Gabon, where it was refused permission to dock. It was also turned away from Douala, in Cameroon, last Thursday.

Passengers said that the Beninois consul in Douala had gone out of his way to supply them with food.

The ship's Nigerian captain, Lawrence Onome, was not allowed to talk to the press.

Sources said that it looked as though the majority of those on board were clandestine migrants seeking work in Gabon. Gabonese President Omar Bongo had declared on Sunday: "We don't want clandestine immigration into our country."

Given the relatively small number of children on board the Eitreno, mystery remained in view of a statement by the UNICEF representative in Libreville who said last Saturday that a ship with 250 children on board had been turned back from Gabon three days earlier.

This was "speculation," UNICEF's coordinator in Benin Nicolas Pron said Tuesday. "For the moment we have concrete work to do with these passengers and these children whom we are here to help."

Institute of Health Economics University of Dhaka Two-Month Long Short Course on Health Economics

The Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh will organize a two-month long short course on Health Economics. The course will address the following issues: (a) Basic concepts, tools and theories of Health Economics (3 weeks), (b) Management of health services (1 week), (c) Costing and Economic Evaluation (2 weeks), (d) Financing and Regulation (1 week). The last week of the course will be devoted to internship exercises.

Some foreign scholars will join the course as Resource Persons. The training course will be held from May 2 to June 30, 2001 at the Institute of Health Economics, Arts Faculty Building, University of Dhaka. To facilitate participation of inservice personnel, sessions will be held in the evening from 5:00 to 8:30 pm everyday of the week (except holidays). The number of participants will be limited to 30. The course is sponsored by the DFID, and as such no tuition fees will be charged. However, the selected candidates will have to pay a registration fee of Tk 500 (five hundred) only. The course is specially designed for the managers, policy makers, planners and researchers working in the health sector.

Interested participants are requested to apply to Prof S R Howlader, Director, Institute of Health Economics, Arts Faculty Building, University of Dhaka, by April 25, 2001. Interview for selection of the candidates will be held on April 26, 2001. Applications should be made in a prescribed form obtainable from Mr Abdul Haque, Research Officer, Institute of Health Economics, paying a fee of Taka 100/- (one hundred) only.

GD-342

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Chief Engineer
Construction & Maintenance Management Unit (CMMU)
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
105-106, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000

Memo No. MOHFW/CMMU/GOB-Rev/Bid-195/2001/13 Dated: 9-4-2001

Amendment Notice

- The invitation of bids for certain packages of works of Health Facilities under GOB Revenue Budget vide Memo No. MOHFW/CMMU/GOB-Rev/Bid-195/2001/06 dated: 21-3-2001 is amendment as follows:
 - Bidding documents will be available during office hours up to 25-4-2001.
 - Bids will be received up to 14:00 hours on 26-4-2001 & will be opened at 15:30 hours on the same day.
- All other terms and conditions as laid down in the aforesaid bid notice will be remain unchanged.
- This amendment notice will also form a part of the contract and will be bidding upon the bidders.

DFP-9699-12-4
G-706
Colonel Syed Anwar Hussain
Chief Engineer.