



## CBI finds 'stolen' Tagore treasures

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, Santiniketan

A silver-mounted bamboo casket, a bronze medal from Japan and one from Yale University, which were listed as stolen after the burglary at Rabindra Bhavan, have now been found in the museum.

The three items were found when the CBI carried out a "physical verification" of stocks in the museum a few days ago. Earlier, a broken ivory piece, which too was reported stolen, was found in the museum.

Visva-Bharati registrar Mr Sunil Kumar Sarkar said: "Nobody from the university touched anything in the museum after the burglary. A list of stolen items was made without touching anything. As many of the items were not found in their proper places, they were included in the list.

"When the CBI searched the museum a few days ago, these items were found buried under other memorabilia, probably a reason why they weren't found after the burglary."

PHOTO: AFP

Speaker of India's Lok Sabha, or lower house of parliament, Somnath Chatterjee (R), President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (C) and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (L) arrive at the parliament in New Delhi yesterday. India's President Abdul Kalam, unveiling the programme of the new left-leaning government, said its goal is to make "Indian people smile" through economic reforms.

# Iraq, US to coordinate military operations

New draft resolution to be introduced at UN

AP, United Nations

Iraq and the United States pledged to coordinate military operations and work together to help safeguard the country's security after the transfer of sovereignty to the new interim Iraqi government on June 30, according to letters obtained Sunday by The Associated Press.

The exchange of letters between Iraq's new Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and US Secretary of State Colin Powell broadly outlines the relationship between Iraqi and US-led multinational forces after the occupation of Iraq ends.

The letters will be included as annexes to a US-British draft resolution under debate in the Security

Council that will endorse the hand-over of sovereignty and authorise the multinational force to remain in Iraq to help provide security.

Allawi told the UN Security Council that his government will retain sole control of the country's armed forces and work in "full partnership" with the multinational force to coordinate joint military operations and security policy through a variety of new bodies. Powell said US-led troops "will coordinate with Iraqi security forces at all levels."

Both Allawi and Powell stressed the importance of the US-led force in helping to fight those opposed to Iraq's political transition.

US Ambassador John Negroponte said after a council

meeting late Sunday to discuss the letters that a revised draft the fourth in two weeks will be introduced late Monday morning. The council will meet Monday afternoon to hear a briefing by the UN envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, who helped assemble the interim government.

Negroponte said discussion of the draft will continue "with the idea of voting on it on Tuesday afternoon or Tuesday evening."

But France, Germany, Algeria and other council members said they want a significant addition to the text: a reference to the new government's relationship with the multinational force that would give the Iraqis a veto over "sensitive offensive operations."

# Sharon faces battle to keep coalition afloat

Cabinet endorses Gaza pullout plan

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was facing a battle yesterday to keep his coalition from fracturing and maintain his majority in parliament after winning qualified cabinet approval for his Gaza pull-out plan.

The cabinet voted 14 to seven late Sunday for a revised version of the premier's so-called disengagement plan which envisages a phased evacuation of all 21 of the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and four others in the northern West Bank.

But under the terms of a compromise solution, no withdrawals will take place until March next year at the earliest while each phase will be subject to separate votes in cabinet.

Sharon put a brave face on the compromise in a speech after the vote, declaring that "the disengagement process has begun" and underlining his intention to "relocate" the settlements by the end of next year.

But his victory in cabinet has come at a price. After sacking two members of the hard-right National Union, he now enjoys the theoretical support of just 62 MPs in the 120-seat parliament.

And another coalition partner, the National Religious Party (NRP), could also bolt the government after expressing its fury at Sunday's decision.

NRP leader and housing minister Efi Eitam called it "one of the blackest decisions ever taken by the Israeli government".

"The NRP will not put its hand to this programme nor to any government which accepts such a terrible decision. The terrible vision that means the Gaza Strip will be clean of Jews... will not happen," he said.

Army radio reported that the NRP's six deputies were meeting on Monday to decide whether to remain in the government.

Some deputies of the premier's Likud party are also furious that he is pushing ahead with the Gaza plan after it was overwhelmingly rejected in a ballot of party mem-

bers five weeks ago.

But while their loyalty in parliament can no longer be taken for granted, any attempt to unseat Sharon looks likely to be hampered by a failure to agree on an alternative.

Speculation is rising that Sharon may turn to the main opposition Labour party to keep his government afloat.

Labour withdrew a no confidence motion which was due to be debated in parliament with one leading deputy, Haim Ramon, saying that "the government has made a historic decision which we should back."

Labour's parliamentary group was to meet later Monday to decide how to vote on censure motions submitted by other minor opposition parties.

Party leader Shimon Peres also sought to dampen speculation of a deal with Sharon by cancelling his monthly meeting with the premier.

The White House on Sunday welcomed the Israeli cabinet's decision to back Sharon's revised

plan, again calling the scheme a "courageous and historic step".

"As we have said, we view the prime minister's plan to withdraw all settlements in Gaza and certain settlements in the West Bank as a courageous and historic step," it said in a statement.

"We urge that practical preparatory work to implement the plan now proceed as rapidly as possible in Israel."

President George W. Bush infuriated the Palestinians in April by accompanying his endorsement of the Sharon plan with declarations that it was "unrealistic" to expect Israel to pull out of large West Bank settlement blocs and implicitly ruling out the right of Palestinian refugees to return to land lost when Israel was created in 1948.

Palestinian negotiations minister Saeb Erakat voiced dismay at the prospect of a further delay to the Gaza pullout Monday, adding that he wanted to see "action rather than words" from the Sharon government.

## 38 Pak pilgrims killed as truck plunges into ravine

AFP, Islamabad

At least 38 Muslim pilgrims from the same village were killed and eight others injured when a truck carrying them plunged into a ravine near the northwestern Pakistani town of Abbotabad, police said yesterday.

Senior superintendent of Abbotabad police Feroz Shah said brake failure appeared to be behind the accident Sunday at Nathiagali, about 80km northwest of the capital Islamabad.

"The truck plunged into an 800 feet (242 meters) deep gorge," Shah told AFP, adding that the accident happened at about 10.15 pm (1715 GMT).

"We faced lot of difficulty due to the night. Only the police team could reach the area," said Shah.

He said 32 people had died on the spot, including the truck driver, and that rescuers had not been able to fully evacuate casualties and the bodies of victims until after day-break on Monday.

## New UK visa restrictions branded racist

ANI, London

Black and anti-racist groups have reacted vehemently to the Tony Blair government's move to introduce what they termed "racist restrictions" in the country's current visa procedures.

According to the Independent, the new visa laws are likely to affect thousands of Africans and Asians. Quotas are to be introduced on the number of visitors entering Britain under its working holiday scheme from countries such as Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kenya.

The restrictions were announced after Home Office officials found that the present system was being abused and was being used as a back door route for permanent settlement.

"There are people, who see the scheme as a way of staying here for longer," Home Secretary David Blunkett's spokesman was quoted as saying.

The present system is popular with Australian, South African and Canadian backpackers, as it allows people aged under 30 from Commonwealth countries to spend up to two years in Britain, subsidizing their holiday with casual work. It was extended two years ago to include more countries, predominantly in Africa and Asia.

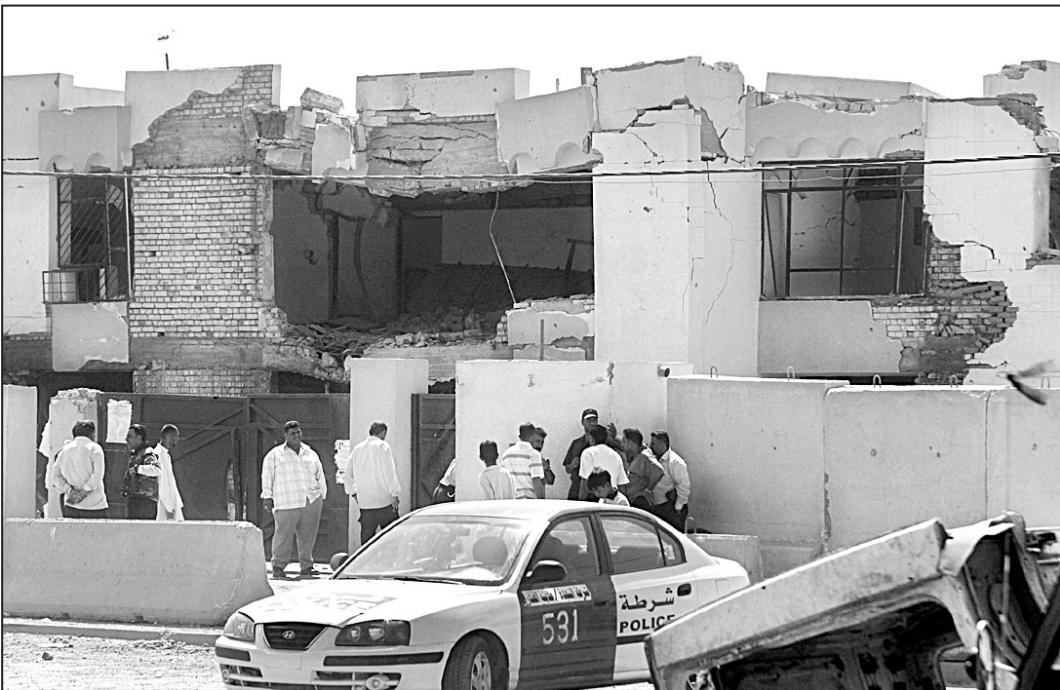


PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi police car is seen outside the destroyed Karama police station in the poor neighborhood of Sadr City in Baghdad yesterday. The police station which was occupied by US soldiers was destroyed Sunday evening by militia-men loyal to radical Shia Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr.

# US to pullout 12,500 troops from S Korea

AFP, Seoul

The United States plans to withdraw 12,500 troops from South Korea by the end of next year, slashing by one third its forces aligned against North Korea, a senior South Korean official announced yesterday.

US officials maintain that the troop cut will not result in a weakening of its ability to deter the Stalinist member of President George W. Bush's "axis of evil."

"The United states informed us of its plan to pull out 12,500 troops by the end of December 2005. That figure includes 3,600 to be sent to Iraq," said Kim Sook, the head of the foreign ministry's North American affairs bureau.

Kim said that South Korea had a counter-proposal to present to the United States, which would be delivered after consultations between related government agencies.

Washington currently stations more than 37,000 troops in South Korea under a five-decade-old mutual defence pact.

"US troops will eventually be reduced to 25,000," Kim added at a televised press conference here.

The announcement comes amid lingering uncertainty over the unresolved 20-month standoff over North Korea's nuclear weapons drive and amid growing concern about the health of the US-South Korean military alliance.

Kim said the US plan was disclosed at talks late Sunday with Richard Lawless, the US deputy assistant secretary of defence.

He said Lawless had explained that the troop realignment was part of Washington's ongoing Global Defence Posture Review (GPR) and would be pursued in such a way as to avoid weakening the capability of US and South Korean forces to deter a nuclear-armed North Korea.

## Tigers in push for self-rule

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels announced Sunday plans to use their proxies in parliament to press for self-rule in the island's embattled regions amid failure by peace broker Norway to revive negotiations.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they asked their 22 legislators to work towards winning an interim political administration for the war-ravaged regions before starting negotiations on a final peace deal.

The LTTE's political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan met lawmakers of the Tamil National Alliance in the rebel-held town of Kilinochchi Saturday to focus on its "Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA)" proposal, the Tigers said.

The self-governing plan which envisages political and financial autonomy for the Tigers was rejected by President Chandrika Kumaratunga as a stepping stone for a separate state when the Tigers unveiled it on October 31, 2003.

# Aid agencies suspend Pakistan operations

BBC ONLINE

Several international aid organisations have suspended their operations in the Pakistani province of Balochistan, following threats of suicide attacks.

A number of foreign aid workers have taken shelter in hotels, police said.

Groups which have temporarily halted work include the United Nations refugee agency and the aid organisation, Medicines Sans Frontieres.

Militants are believed to be hiding in border areas of Pakistan since being driven from Afghanistan in 2001.

A Pakistani government agency responsible for security at refugee camps alerted the aid agencies to the threat of possible attacks.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said it was

taking the threat seriously.

"We have suspended our operation and shifted about a dozen foreign staff members to hotels or other safer places," spokesman Babar Baluch told AFP news agency.

Provincial police chief Yaqub Chaudhry said security had been increased in the city of Quetta and other parts of the province.

Forces have been deployed at the offices used by the aid agencies, and foreign aid workers have been asked to inform the police about their movements.

An official of the aid agency, Medicines Sans Frontieres (MSF) said that they have closed their offices and would meet on Wednesday to decide the future strategy.

MSF has suspended operations in Afghanistan after five of its workers were killed in an ambush on Wednesday.

## SC to hear EC's plea for vacation of Rajya Sabha polls June 9

PTI, New Delhi

The Supreme Court will hear on Wednesday an application by the Election Commission seeking vacation of the stay on the election of 65 members to the Rajya Sabha.

The application by the Commission will be listed for hearing before a vacation Bench on June 9, the apex Court Registry sources said.

The Commission had on Saturday challenged the order staying the process for Rajya Sabha elections saying the jurisdiction of courts to interfere in the poll process is legally barred.

The Commission, which sought vacation of the stay, stated that as it had already issued the notification for the Rajya Sabha election on Friday morning, the jurisdiction of the courts to interfere in the election process is legally barred.

# Security zones around foreign missions

Pak minister to quit after 'Bloody May' in Karachi

AFP, Karachi

Authorities yesterday declared "high security zones" around foreign missions in violence-hit Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, after 51 people were killed in a month of bloodshed and three days of riots.

"We have decided to bring certain areas which remained under constant threat from the terrorists like the US consulate and other foreign missions under high security zones," Karachi police chief Tariq Jamil told AFP.

Crack police commandos would be deployed and emergency centres would be established in the zones, in which roads could easily be closed in case of any threat, he said.

"These areas will have special status as far as security is concerned," Jamil said.

"The decision has been taken as in the past two years there have been suicide bombings and terrorist attacks, besides constant threats," he said.

Areas around the local headquarters of army, police and paramilitary rangers, the Karachi port and the government headquarters will also be classed high security, he said.

Meanwhile, the chief minister in Pakistan's southern Sindh province is to resign after a month of bloodshed in Karachi claimed 51 lives and sparked three days of riots, the government said yesterday.

"The decision on the new chief minister is due today. I can't confirm the name, but (chief minister Ali Mohammad) Maher is going," Information Minister Sheikh Rashid told AFP.

## Afghanistan hit by wave of attacks

AFP, Kabul

Violent weekend attacks against UN workers and government officials have renewed fears for Afghanistan's landmark democratic polls this year, as voter registration sites were open across the whole country for the first time yesterday.

The latest violence comes as US-led coalition soldiers fight an escalating insurgency in the south and southeast, mountainous regions believed to be hosting a permanent Taliban presence.

UN staff working on the elections survived a bold attack in southeastern Paktia province on Sunday when militants attempted to ambush their four-vehicle convoy with two landmines and followed up with small-arms fire.

The 15 international and Afghan staff, who were being escorted by armed police, were unharmed.



PHOTO: AFP

Jennifer Varnell, with her children Kenny, 7, and Christina, 5, leave flowers at a memorial for the late US president Ronald Reagan at the entrance to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California Sunday. Reagan died on June 5 at the age of 93.

## State funeral for Reagan

AFP, Washington

The remains of former US president Ronald Reagan was moved to his library in Simi Valley, California, Monday, for beginning a grand but sombre five-day farewell that will culminate in a state funeral on Friday.

Reagan, a former Hollywood matinee idol who became one of the dominant figures of the late 20th century, will receive the first full state funeral in Washington since Lyndon Johnson died 31 years ago.

He will then be buried in a private sunset ceremony on a hilltop at his presidential library in California.

A spokeswoman announced the funeral arrangements a day after the charismatic former Republican president died at the age of 93 after a decade-long struggle with Alzheimer's disease.

"Mrs. Reagan and her family are deeply touched by the outpouring of sympathy from across the country and around the world," family spokeswoman Joanne Drake said.