

Space mission Lithuania declaration not valid, says Gorbachev

WASHINGTON: The U.S. has agreed to grant one of the last wishes of the late Soviet physicist Andrei Sakharov and join with the Soviet Union in a space mission to study comets believed to be at the core of infant galaxies. The Soviets plan to launch a 10-meter radio telescope into earth orbit in 1992. It will be linked with U.S. ground-based telescopes to produce images from deep space of unprecedented resolution, a White House announcement said. — IFA

Troop withdrawal

HAIJASKER (Hungary): Soviet soldiers boarded a train out of Hungary on Monday to a send-off from a brass band and a banner telling them: "go home as quick as you came." The 139 men and 27 armoured personnel carriers began the three-day journey back to the Soviet Union 48 hours after Moscow and Budapest signed an accord to remove the 50,000 Soviet troops from Hungary by June 30, 1991. — Reuter

Soviet denial

WASHINGTON: The Soviet Embassy in Washington has denied a statement implicating the KGB in the attempt on Pope John Paul II's life and the killing of the former Pakistani President, Zia Ul Haq, and called the account a slanderous and wild fiction. It accused the CIA of putting the allegations in the defector Mr. Victor Sheymov's mouth to disrupt improving U.S.-Soviet ties.

Taiwan plan

TAIPEI (Taiwan): The Taiwan Government on Tuesday announced plans to relax travel restrictions to China for businessmen, Government officials and civilian groups. A Government spokesman said the new regulations were recommended by the Government Cabinet's mainland affairs task force, which formulates policy changes toward China. — AP

Missile test

WASHINGTON: A U.S. Navy Trident II test missile was fired from a submerged submarine on a demonstration and shakedown cruise off the coast of Florida on Monday night, the Defense Department announced on Tuesday. — AP

Aquino honoured

MANILA: A U.N. agency furthering women's causes has chosen the Philippines President, Mrs. Corason Aquino as one of the first four women to receive its Noel award for political leadership, the agency's representative announced on Monday. Mrs. Aquino will receive the award along with Prime Ministers Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway, Ms. Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan and Mrs. Margaret Thatcher of Britain. — Kyodo

Surgical wonder

PARIS: Surgeons transplanted a man's foot severed when he fell in front of an underground train, onto his arm, officials of Rothschild Hospital of Paris said, adding that the man's foot was attached to his wrist so that it could be sewn back onto his leg later. — Reuter

MOSCOW, March 13: The Soviet President, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, today declared as illegitimate and invalid the Lithuanian proclamation of independence and ruled out talks with it as well as two other Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia on the question of secession.

There was no question of negotiations on this issue, he said and announced that the Supreme Soviet (the country's inner parliament) would meet in an emergency session tomorrow to make a juridical and political evaluation of Lithuania's decision.

Mr. Gorbachev's strong reaction to Lithuania's appeal to recognise the independence proclamation and start talks came at the Congress of Peoples Deputies on the second day of its extraordinary session.

Mr. Gorbachev sought to pre-empt the two other Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia from following the Lithuanian example. There won't be any talks on independence with Lithuania as well as Latvia and Estonia, he said.

Until the entire situation is cleared up by the Supreme Soviet (the country's inner parliament), the Council of Nationalities (one of its chambers) and the Government "we will continue to work as we have," Mr. Gorbachev said, adding, "We welcome the fact that deputies from all republics, including Lithuania, are in attendance at the session."

It was not immediately clear how many deputies from Lithuania are attending today's session. All the Lithuanian deputies belonging to the pro-independence Sajudis' movement had boycotted the opening session yesterday. Majority of the deputies to the Congress from Lithuania belong to the Sajudis or won with its support.

U.S. interfering: The Soviets have termed as interference in the internal affairs the U.S. administration's statement on Lithuania's decision to declare independence.

"If other countries start teaching us what is to be done, it can only be described as interference in the internal affairs of the USSR," Mr. Gennady Gerasimov, Foreign Ministry spokesman, said at a briefing on Monday.

He was responding to questions on the U.S. administration's statement counselling Moscow to treat with understanding the Lithuanian aspirations.

A close aide of Mr. Gorbachev said military force should not be used to solve the problem created by Lithuania's decision.

Radio Moscow quoted Mr. Georgy Shekhnazarov, an assistant secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, as saying that he did not know what the reaction of the Soviet leadership would be to the decision taken by the Lithuanian Parliament. However, he said, political means and not military force were the way to solve the problem. He described the Lithuanian decision as hasty.

The new non-Communist dominated Supreme Council (Parliament) of Lithuania voted on an ap-

peal to Mr. Gorbachev to recognise the new independent Lithuania.

The Lithuanian Parliament also appealed to the world community calling for international solidarity for the Baltic republic after it declared itself independent.

In a separate address to the Prime Minister, Mr. Nikolai Ryzkov, the Parliament proposed maintaining present economic relations and mutual commitments until new bilateral treaties are signed between Lithuania and the Soviet Union.

The Parliament declared null and void the USSR laws on obligatory military service and corresponding articles in the Lithuanian criminal and administrative codes laying down the responsibility for violations of law on military duty.

Recognition by France: According to a Tansung report from Paris, France has recognised the decision of Lithuania to declare independence. It quoted the French Foreign Ministry as saying that France had officially never recognised the Soviet annexation of the Baltic republic. — PTI

U.S. stand: R. Chakrapani reports from Washington: The U.S. has no plans to complicate its warming relations with the Soviet Union by according diplomatic "recognition" to Lithuania following the Baltic republic declaring itself independent on Sunday.

The State Department spokesperson, Mrs. Margaret Tutwiler said: "we recognised the independent State of Lithuania in 1922, and the United States' practice has been to establish formal relations with the lawful Government of any State — once that Government is in effective control of its territory and capable of entering into, and fulfilling international obligations. When we are satisfied that the Lithuanian Government can meet these requirements, we will establish formal diplomatic relations."

Some officials of the administration said the U.S. would not get involved directly in the issue unless it was called upon to do so by both.

The Bush administration had reacted cautiously to the independence declaration by the Lithuanian Parliament by calling upon Moscow to respect the Lithuanian move and at the same time advising the leaders of the Baltic state that only through negotiation they could achieve their goals and not by unilateral action.

The reason for the administration's wariness is that it would not like to create internal difficulties for the Soviet leader, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, whom it sees as the man behind the changes in Eastern Europe and that if his Conservative opponents succeed in removing him, the policy of *perestroika* and *glasnost* would run the risk of being totally reversed.

The general feeling in Washington is that by ruling out the use of force in Lithuania, Mr. Gorbachev had indicated his inclination to let it free eventually, but strictly on terms to be negotiated and not by unilateral declarations made by the Lithuanian leaders.

Human testing of AIDS vaccine cleared in U.S.

WASHINGTON, March 13: The U.S. Government regulators on Monday cleared the way for human testing of an experimental AIDS vaccine developed by Dr. Jonas Salk, the creator of the polio vaccine.

While most AIDS researchers predict it will be years before an effective vaccine is available against the deadly disease, the Salk vaccine is the third to be approved in the U.S. for testing in humans.

The purpose of the experiment is to find out if, by injecting people with small amounts of the AIDS virus, their bodies will build up natural antibodies to the disease.

AIDS kills by robbing the body of its immune response, leaving it prey to disease that would not normally be fatal. — Reuter

Iranian dissidents kill three Pak. officials

ISLAMABAD, March 13: Iranian dissidents on Monday killed three Pakistani officials in a gunbattle in southwestern Pakistan, the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) news agency has reported.

Five Pakistani border security members were injured in the incident outside Mullah Chach village, close to Pakistan-Iran border, the news agency said, quoting officials sources.

The Iranians had stored arms in the area which they planned to use to carry out acts of sabotage inside Iran on the eve of Iranian new year "nauroz" (March 21), the agency said.

Casualties on the side of the Iranians, believed to number up to 100, were not known.

Pakistan's Balochistan province bordering Iran has been used as a refuge and base by Iranian dissidents opposed to the Tehran Government. — DPA

Arab League headquarters to be back in Cairo

ATHENS, March 13: The Arab Foreign Ministers on Sunday agreed in principle to transfer back the Arab League headquarters to Cairo from Tunis, less than a year after the return of Egypt to the 20-member league.

The Arab League had suspended Egypt's membership and transferred its seat to Tunis nearly 11 years ago when Cairo signed the U.S.-backed Camp David accord with Israel. Most Arab States severed their ties with Cairo as a reaction to the treaty.

The ministerial council of the Arab League at its session in Tunis on Monday called for convening an Arab summit as soon as possible to discuss the Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union.

Democrat killed: A Palestinian refugee shot by Israeli soldiers during stone-throwing clashes near the West Bank town of Jericho died on Monday, hospital officials said.

Jamal Muhammed Khalifeh (18), was the fifth Palestinian killed by security forces in the past week, Arab sources said. — Irna, AP, Reuter

Bangkok is sinking

BANGKOK, March 13: The Bangkok metropolis is sinking at a rate of more than 10 cm per annum, or a centimetre a day, according to a study conducted by the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) *The Bangkok Post* said.

The study, "uncontrolled and patternless expansion of industrial and residential estates in the outskirts of Bangkok is magnifying the city's land subsidence problem."

It blamed the alarming rate of subsidence on the number of deep wells being sunk into the water-bearing (aquifer) layer underneath the sprawling metropolis formerly known as the Venice of the East for its canal system now covered by roads.

More than 10,000 wells have been sunk over the past 20 years, and currently 1.2 million cubic metres of ground water is being extracted daily, said the AIT study.

The slow sink has accelerated in recent years as Bangkok witnessed a construction boom spurred on by the fast-paced economy, rising incomes, tourism and new foreign investments. Bangkok's population has increased three-fold since 1960, reaching 7.9 million at present, while the suburban area has extended to cover more than 4,500 sq km.

"A major consequence of this growth is the need for a huge amount of water for supply to domestic and industrial users," the study recommended a more systematic use of surface water, strict control of ground water use and artificial recharging of aquifers as suitable remedies to the city's sinking. — DPA

Avril in Florida

WASHINGTON, March 13: The U.S. has confirmed that the former Haitian dictator, Lt. Gen. Avril, landed at Homestead Air Force Base in Florida on Monday with his wife and two children aboard a U.S. Air Force transport aircraft, saying his final destination "is up to him."

The State Department spokesperson, Mrs. Margaret Tutwiler, said the U.S. "took the decision to facilitate the General's and Mrs. Avril's departure in the interest of assisting the democratic transfer of power to a provisional civilian Government in Haiti." — PTI

Govt., Opposition agree on reforms in Bulgaria

SOFIA, March 13: The Government and Opposition leaders agreed to introduce a multi-party system in Bulgaria and organise free elections as round-table talks resumed here on Monday after a month-long break.

They also agreed to separate the Communist Party and the State, and end political influence in the army, militia radio and television.

Three agreements signed by the participants covered Bulgaria's political system, the status of the round-table talks, and ways to move peacefully from communist rule to democracy. — AFP

Britain, France back Poland's demand

BONN, March 13: Britain has joined France in backing Poland's demand to take part in talks on German reunification affecting its current border with East Germany, the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Douglas Hurd, said here on Monday.

Mr. Hurd told journalists after meetings with the West German Chancellor, Mr. Helmut Kohl, and the Foreign Minister, Mr. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, that Poland was entitled to "join fully any discussion that touches on the frontiers of Poland." — AFP

Endara on fast

NEW YORK, March 13: The President of Panama, Mr. Guillermo Endara, is using Gandhian method to draw attention to the plight of his country in absence of the promised U.S. aid even three months after his Government was installed — he has gone on an indefinite hunger strike.

However, there is a vital difference — he plans to "suspend the fast" when he can no longer, continue with his Government chores and feels debilitated.

Reporting his fast, the *New York Times* said on Monday that Mr. Endara spends most of his time in a rocking chair in a corner of a cathedral, a large fan on his side and a cot on which he sleeps.

He is consuming only liquids and though he appeared pale and somewhat slimmer after the fast which he began on February 28, he is in good spirits and presides over the cabinet meetings, the paper added.

This is second time Mr. Endara has gone on hunger strike. — PTI

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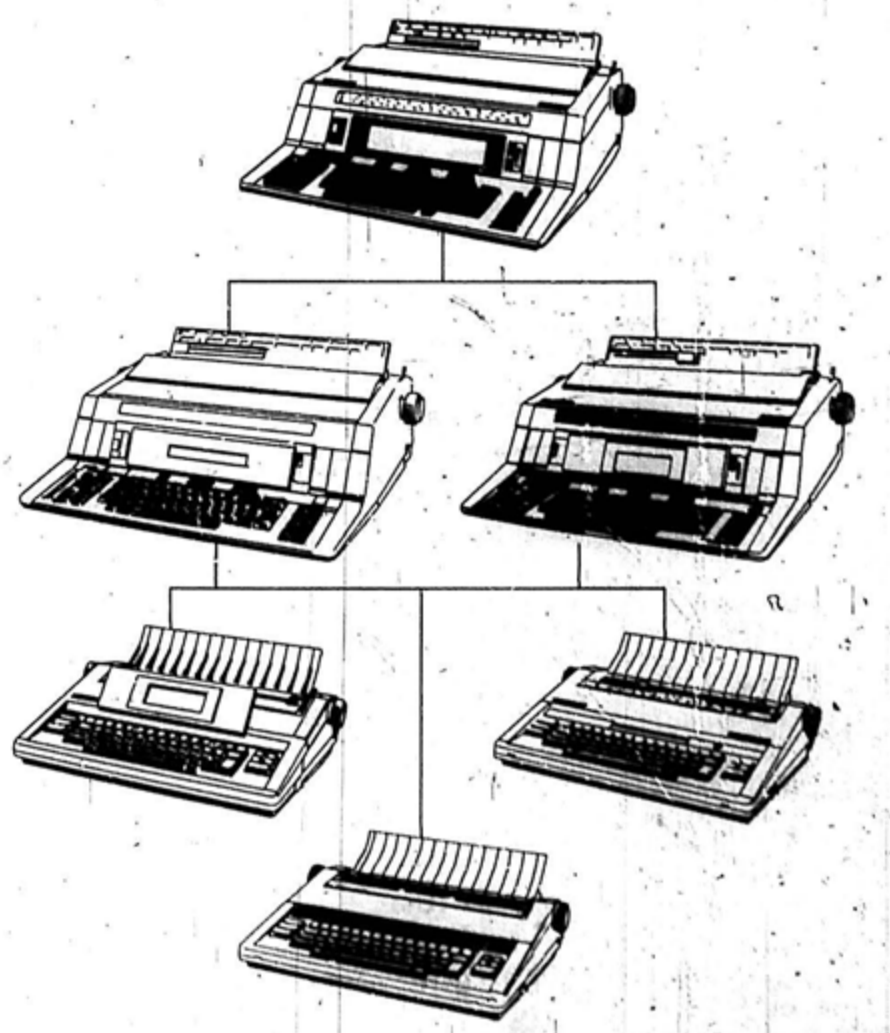
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