

# Delhi gave Tamils huge quantities of plastic explosives : LTTE

NEW DELHI, May 29: An envoy of Sri Lanka's dominant Tamil guerrilla group met Rajiv Gandhi before his assassination and so the rebels had no reason to kill the former Indian Premier, a rebel spokesman was quoted as saying yesterday, reports AFP.

Sathasvram Krishnakumar of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said the March 5 meeting between Gandhi and envoy Kasi Anandan had led to a good relationship between New Delhi and the Tigers, the Hindu newspaper reported.

Therefore, the LTTE had no reason to kill him, Krishnakumar told the Madras-based newspaper in a telephone interview from his London home.

The LTTE is seen as one of the key suspects in the assassination of Gandhi by a powerful explosive carried by a woman suspected of being a Sri Lankan, the LTTE has denied killing Gandhi.

Krishnakumar, without

blaming anyone else for the May 21 murder, also implicitly linked rival Tamil rebel groups and Colombo with Gandhi's slaying in Sriperumpudur town in India's Tamil Nadu state.

The Sri Lankan government was anxious about the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement being revived if Rajiv Gandhi were to return to power in general elections now postponed to June, the daily quoted him as saying.

He added that the Indian government had previously supplied large quantities of plastic explosives to all Sri Lankan Tamil groups and that other groups did not get an opportunity to use them in the battlefield.

New Delhi is known to have trained and harboured Sir Lankan Tamil militant groups until July 1987 when it signed a pact with Colombo under which thousands of Indian troops were sent to the island to crush Tamil separatism.

The troops fought a bloody bush war with the Tigers for over two years, and the accord died a virtual death after the LTTE disowned it and Colombo asked New Delhi to

## Priyanka invited to join Youth Congress

KOTTAYAM, May 29: Priyanka Gandhi, daughter of the assassinated former Prime Minister and the Congress (I) President, Rajiv Gandhi, has been invited to join the Indian National Youth Congress, reports PTI.

Talking to journalists here, the Youth Congress (I) President, Ramesh Chennithala, said he had already written a letter to Ms Priyanka requesting her to join the party.

Asked whether she would also decline to accept the offer as her mother who refused to take over the mantle of the party leadership after her husband's assassination, Chennithala said he did not think so.

He said he was hopeful that she would accept the offer and join the youth movement at the earlier.

take back its soldiers. The last of the troops, known as the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) returned home in March 1990, four months after Gandhi lost power in general elections.

Krishnakumar said Gandhi had told Anandan at their 45-minute meeting that he would do whatever was possible to mitigate the hardships of Sri Lanka's minority Tamil community.

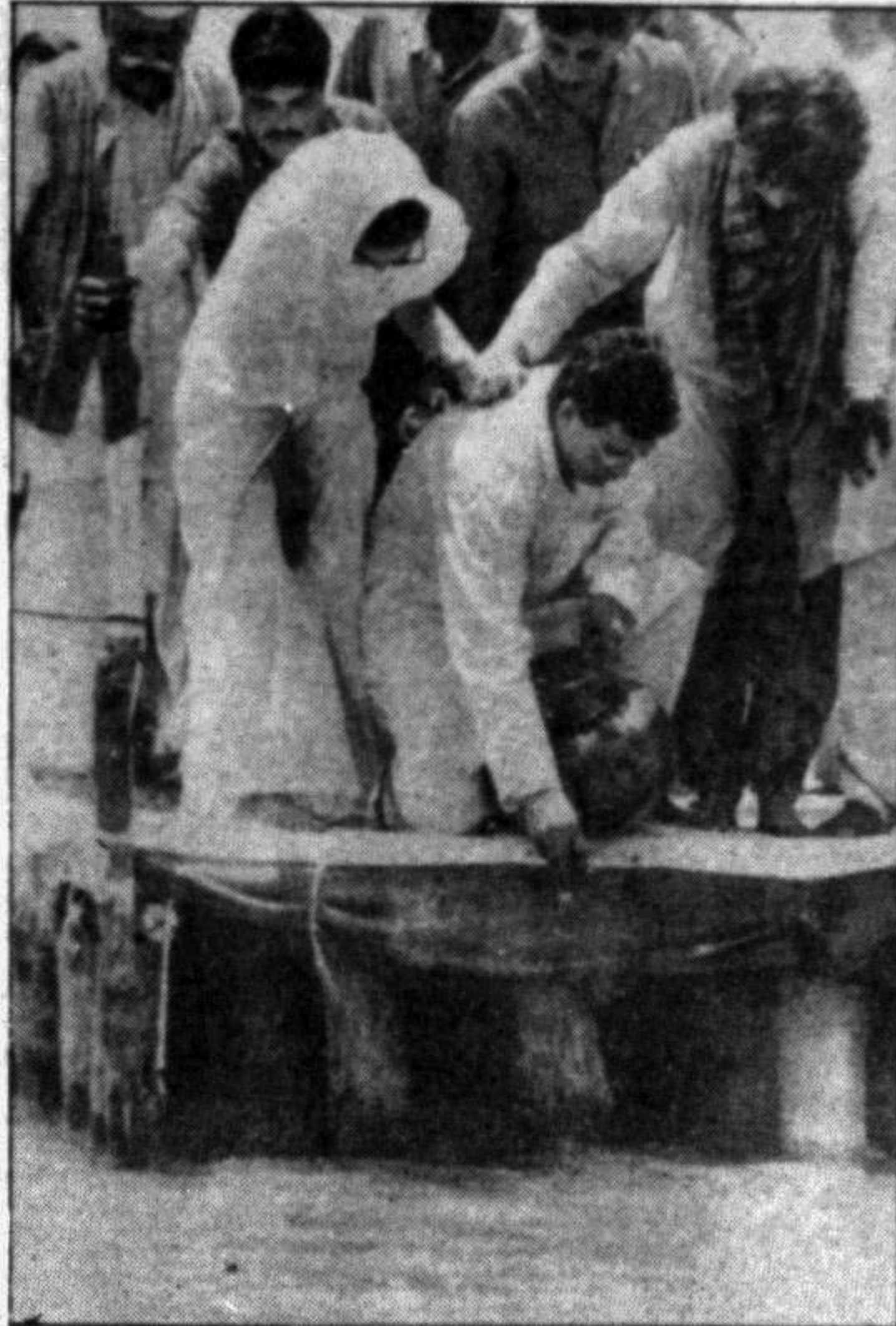
He added that the meeting, which remained unpublicised until the assassination, had the blessings of LTTE Velupillai Prabhakaran, who is directing the Tamil homeland campaign in Sri Lanka.

As far as the LTTE is concerned, there is no justification for the LTTE to have inimical feelings towards Rajiv Gandhi, he added. The LTTE has never interfered in the local politics of India.

So there was no room for ... Rajiv Gandhi to entertain any inimical feelings towards the LTTE and vice versa. After the withdrawal of the IPKF, the relationship between Rajiv Gandhi and the LTTE was built step by step.

Therefore, there cannot be any connection between the LTTE and this murder", he added, in the most exhaustive denial of the guerrilla group's links with the assassinations.

Krishnakumar, who lost a leg in a grenade attack in March 1987, told The Hindu that anyone could have killed Gandhi.



ALLAHABAD (India): Rahul Gandhi, son of slain Rajiv Gandhi, immerses the ashes of his father at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, the two rivers holiest to religious Hindus at the northern Indian city of Allahabad May 28. Italian-born mother Sonia Gandhi (L) and Sister Priyanka (R) are helping in the ritual.

—AFP photo

## They're living in fools' paradise : Azad

# Congress hands stability plan to BJP on a platter : Advani

NEW DELHI, May 29: Indians returned their attention Tuesday to electoral politics suspended for a week by Rajiv Gandhi's shock assassination, as the main contenders for power warmed up for a renewed campaign, reports AFP.

The two main rivals of Gandhi's Congress (I) appealed to the nation to reject his orphaned party which was grouping in search of an acceptable successor to its slain leader.

The Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People Party), regarded as the Congress (I)'s main opponent said it was the sole guarantor of stability and national unity left after Mr Gandhi's slaying.

BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani said the Congress (I) had handed the stability plan to the BJP on a platter, because of its inept and clumsy handling of the succession issue.

He ruled out prospects of the Congress (I) benefitting in the second and third rounds of balloting, set for June 12 and 15, because of the voters sympathy for Gandhi.

Sympathy is not transferable to a party, Advani said adding that following Gandhi's death the Congress (I) was on the verge of breaking up.

Congress (I) General Secretary Gulam NABI Azad said the BJP and the National Front-Left were "living in a fool's paradise" if they hoped Gandhi's death would cause his

party to break up. He said the Congress (I)'s leadership issue would be resolved at the meeting of its highest decision making body, the working committee, here today.

Senior Congress (I) leader and former Foreign Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao has emerged as the most probable candidate for party President in case Mrs. Gandhi refused to be persuaded to fill her husband's shoes.

Rao, who will be 70 next month, is a veteran politician and was a close associate of both Mr Gandhi and his mother and predecessor Indira who was killed by two Sikh bodyguards in 1984.

Indians are to elect 114 MPs on June 12 and 189 on June 15.

## Zardari acquitted of land scam charge

KARACHI, May 29: The husband of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was acquitted today of involvement in a land scam, but remains in jail on other charges, reports Reuter.

Asif Ali Zardari was charged with abetting Syed Qaim Ali Shah, Chief Minister of Sindh province during Bhutto's rule, to sell 37 acres at a loss to the government of 220 million rupees (10 million dollars). He pleaded not guilty.

Sessions Judge Ghouse Bux said the prosecution could not make a case against Zardari.

Bhutto supporters outside the court greeted the acquittal with applause. Earlier this month another court acquitted Zardari and others of fixing unsecured loans worth 6.4 million dollars while Bhutto was Prime Minister.

## Tamil Tigers involved in killing : Swamy

LONDON, May 29: India's Law and Justice Minister said on Tuesday the government was sure the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were involved in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, reports Reuter.

"There is no doubt in our minds that all leads point in one direction — that it is members of the LTTE in cooperation with some groups in Tamil Nadu," Subramaniam Swamy told Britain's channel four television news.

Gandhi was killed by a bomb on May 21 as he was garlanded with flowers at an election rally in Sriperampudur, 40 km (25 miles) from Madras, the state capital of Tamil Nadu.

"The only question is whether the actual order came from the LTTE supreme or any of his commanders or (if) it is some of the rogue elements in the LTTE who are now more or less on their own", Swamy

The Tigers are the main rebel group fighting for a separate Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. As Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi sent troops to Sri Lanka on an abortive peace-keeping mission in 1987. They ended up fighting Tiger guerrillas.

The Minister said it now appeared that a number of people were involved in the killing. "There were not less than five or six people who were in one way or the other connected with this assassin", he said.

The government of Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar dismissed the elected government in Tamil Nadu state in February and put it under central rule. Shekhar accused the government of supporting the Tigers, who operate from bases in the state, separated from Sri Lanka by the narrow Palk Strait.

# Rajiv's woman assassin still mysterious to investigators

MADRAS, May 29: A week after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, investigators know in detail how the killing was carried out and even have the assassin's picture.

But they have little else, reports AP.

They have yet to identify the young woman who detonated explosives attached to her waist, killing Gandhi and 16 other people. Nor have they made progress in finding any accomplices.

"Our work is going to carry on a long time," said one officer.

Gandhi was killed at a May 21 election rally in Sriperampudur, a small town 40 kilometers (25 miles) southwest of the southern city of Madras in Tamil Nadu state.

A photograph of the woman, taken from the film of an amateur video photographer, was published in a local newspaper last week. She was short, had the dark complexion and features of an ethnic Tamil, and wore steel-rimmed eyeglasses.

She wore an orange and green salwar-kameez, a loose trouser and shirt outfit. Police discovered it was bought two days before the killing in the town of Ponnammallee, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from Sriperampudur.

The shopkeeper remembered selling the dress because the woman who bought it was at least a size larger. The purchaser told him the dress was for a friend arriving from Sri Lanka, said officers who spoke on condition they were not identified.

Witnesses said the suicide bomber visited Sriperampudur at least five hours before

Gandhi arrived, along with a man and a teen-aged girl.

Police also are looking for a man who posed as a journalist at the rally. They suspect he may have been part of a backup team if the primary plan went wrong.

The man had hired a photographer, a Madras-based free-lancer, to cover the rally. The blast killed the photographer, who police say was known to have done propaganda work for Sri Lankan rebels in the past.

Police speculated about other connections with the

rebels of that island nation off India's southern coast, which has been wracked by civil war since 1983. Sri Lankan Tamils came centuries ago to Tamil Nadu state, where most of India's 60 million Tamils live.

The type of explosives used is in the arsenal of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the militia fighting for a Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka.

The Tigers, battle-hardened guerrillas, are the only militiamen in the region with the weapons sophistication matching the bomb that killed Gandhi, the investigators said.

## Off the Record

### VP's mansion nearly firetrap: Marilyn

WASHINGTON: Marilyn Quayle said Tuesday the vice presidential mansion is a great place to live, but is showing its age and borders on being a firetrap, reports AP.

"We've had a few fires," Mrs. Quayle said in an interview on CNN.

"We redid the third floor so that our children could have bedrooms," she said. "And when they took the light fixtures down and the plaster down where our daughter had been sleeping, it was all charred around her lights and the timbers were all warm to the touch."

"Are you living in a firetrap?" asked interviewer Frank Sesno.

"Well, I have a feeling we are," responded Mrs. Quayle, laughing.

Despite its problems, the vice president's wife said the century-old mansion on the grounds of the Naval Observatory is "a great house. It's a beautiful old house. It's charming. It's very much an American home."

But, she added, "There are some things that need to be taken care of as they have to with all older homes."

The Quayles also have wondered whether the water supply in their official home could have any link to the fact both President George Bush and his wife, Barbara, suffer from Graves' disease, a thyroid ailment. The Bushes lived in the vice presidential mansion for eight years.

Although Graves' disease isn't contagious, some experts suggest that germs or other environmental factors may trigger such auto-immune disorders among those who are genetically susceptible.

Mrs Quayle said the White House physician ordered the water supply tested and also has ordered "all sorts of tests on not just our water supply, but we do have asbestos in the house, and they're going to test, my understanding is, all our air conditioning and heating."

### A bonus for Liz

NEW YORK: A supermarket tabloid has apologised to actress Elizabeth Taylor and given her a cash settlement for reporting that she was suicidal, had a deadly disease and drank alcohol while at a hospital, Taylor's spokeswoman said on Tuesday, Reuter reports.

Spokeswoman Chen Sam said the parties had agreed that the terms of the settlement which ends a 20-million-dollar lawsuit brought against the National Enquirer by Taylor would remain confidential.

An Enquirer spokesman was not immediately available for comment.

The New York Post quoted sources as saying the amount Taylor would receive was one of the largest libel settlements "in memory."

Taylor sued the paper nine months ago saying that an article it published in June 1990 reported erroneously on her condition and activities at a Los Angeles hospital.

According to Chen Sam, the Enquirer published its article in good faith but discovered it was inaccurate after gaining access to Taylor's medical records.

Taylor said in a statement, "I feel completely vindicated."

### An missed opportunity: former Sen Fulbright

ATESVILLE (Arkansas): Former US Sen. J. William Fulbright says the United States missed an opportunity to defeat Iraq economically while getting Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. That could have been done, he says, with an international economic embargo instead of force, reports AP.

Fulbright was one of the early opponents of the Vietnam War.

"It's the first time I can imagine in history that it could have worked," the former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee says. "It would take a while, six months, maybe a year, but we wouldn't have destroyed so much."

Fulbright, in town last weekend to receive an honorary doctorate of law from Arkansas College, said the United States will have to pay to rebuild Iraq and will be held responsible for the deaths of thousands of Iraqis.

"They're going to expect us to do a lot, because we're a big country and we did it," he said.

## BRIEFLY

**Hunger strike for Sonia :** An Indian politician Tuesday said he planned to launch a limited hunger strike to demand that Sonia Gandhi succeed her slain husband as President of the Congress (I) party, reports AFP from New Delhi.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted Era Anbarasu as saying he would begin a daily dawn-to-dusk fast Wednesday in Madras, capital of Tamil Nadu state, where Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in a bomb blast a week ago.

Anbarasu, a former MP, said the Italian-born Gandhi should assume charge of the Congress (I) "in the interest of the nation as well as to protect the party's unity."

"Mrs Gandhi alone could fill the vacuum created by the heinous killing of Gandhi," he said in a statement, and urged the 44-year-old widow to lead the Congress Party at this critical juncture."

### 4 new AIDS patients in Japan :

Four new AIDS patients and 17 new carriers were diagnosed in Japan in March and April, raising the number of known AIDS patients to 378 and carriers to 1,656. Health and Welfare Ministry officials said Wednesday, AFP from Tokyo report.

Of the 17 new carriers of the HIV virus nine were women including seven Thais in their 20s who worked in the entertainment industry, they said.

One Japanese man died of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) during the two-month period, a total of 171 people have died of the fatal disease since Japan's first AIDS patient was diagnosed in March 1985, they said.

### New talks on Mozambique conflict:

The government of Mozambique and rebels fighting a 14-year-long civil war have taken a step forward in peace talks by beginning to discuss terms of a full political and military settlement, mediators said Tuesday, reports AP from Rome.

Negotiators for both sides signed an agreement on the agenda, then met privately for about an hour to begin the political and military talks.

Mediators said the negotiations were expected to resume Wednesday morning.

The talks have been held sporadically since last July and the mediators recently warned that the negotiations were in danger of stalling.

Both sides agreed to discuss proposals to achieve a ceasefire, guarantees of free elections and a plan for the return of more than 1 million refugees.

### Yemen to house 4,000 Ethiopians:

Yemen has begun setting up camps to house up to 4,000 Ethiopian sailors who have sought refuge in the country since fleeing Ethiopia at the weekend official sources said in Sanaa Tuesday, reports AFP.

A total of 11 warships including frigates and vessels equipped with missile launchers, arrived at the Yemeni port of Mukha, on the Red Sea, on Sunday, Foreign Minister Abdelkarim al-Iriani said.

Meanwhile 600 French troops returning to France have been diverted to Djibouti to join the 4,000 troops already helping the authorities there to cope with an influx of around 12,000 Ethiopian refugees.

### Y'slavians fail to appoint President :

Yugoslavia's leaders failed in their latest bid to appoint a President on Tuesday when crisis talks collapsed because four members of the eight-man state presidency refused to attend, reports Reuter from Belgrade.

Kosovov province summoned the other seven presidency members to a meeting to try to fill a power vacuum that has paralysed the presidency the highest state body and left Yugoslavia without a president or head of its army for almost two weeks.

# Rebels tighten grip on Addis Ababa, assume power

LONDON, May 29: Ethiopia main rebel group assumed interim power after US brokered peace talks in London and promised democratic elections within one year, reports Reuter.

The leader of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Meles Zenawi pledged to talk to other rebels no later than July 1 to try to form a provisional government.

US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

Herman Conhen announced the accord in London on Tuesday warning that American aid depended on a transition to democracy in Ethiopia.

No democracy, no cooperation, he told reporters who asked about the Marxist leanings of some of the Ethiopian rebels.

Rebel tanks blasted their way into Addis Ababa at dawn on Tuesday, toppling the remnants of a Marxist government whose 17 year rule brought

Ethiopia war and famine.

Rebels effectively control the country but officials in neighbouring Djibouti said thousands of Ethiopian troops who fled there after Asab Fort fell to rebels last Saturday were moving back to Ethiopia to regroup in the east of the country.

Meles, 36, said ousted rulers who had committed war crimes would face trial and famine relief would get top priority.

The EPRDF is a regional-

based alliance which has not shaken off all its Marxist-Leninist ideology. But it says it wants a multi-party transitional government leading to free elections.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), fighting since the 1970s for independence for the Red Sea province of Eritrea, and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which is seeking autonomy, were also at the London talks.

But the shape of any future Ethiopian government after Tuesday's meeting was far from clear.

## Expulsion of US envoy to Pakistan demanded

ISLAMABAD, May 29: A former cabinet minister on Tuesday called for the expulsion from Pakistan of US Ambassador Robert Oakley, accusing him of interfering in domestic affairs because of comments he made to business leaders, reports AP.

The statement was made last Thursday at a Chamber of Commerce meeting in Pakistan's ancient eastern city of Lahore.

"You must join with your government in telling members of the National Assembly not to play politics with Pakistan's future," Oakley told chamber members.

His statement caused a furor in Pakistan. One newspaper editorial, titled "Vice-Regal Tradition", compared US ambassadors in Pakistan to British colonial rulers.

Zahid Sarfraz, who was in the cabinet last years said Oakley was interfering in domestic affairs and demanded the government to expel him, according to several newspaper reports.



ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) rebels parade through downtown Addis Ababa May 28 on top of a captured Ethiopian Army tank following their offensive against government troops in the Ethiopian capital.

—AFP photo