

# BRIEFLY

**Dalai Lama meets Clinton:** President Bill Clinton met briefly Tuesday with Tibet's Dalai Lama, who thanked the US leader for supporting human rights in China, the White House said, reports AP from Washington.

The unplanned five-minute meeting occurred as Clinton dropped in on a meeting between the Tibetan spiritual leader and Vice President Al Gore, said White House spokesman George Stephanopoulos.

They had a discussion over human rights concerns in China and Tibet, the spokesman said of the meeting: "Don't think he [the Dalai Lama] asked for anything. He thanked him for his support for human rights in China."

The President just greeted him, but I don't think they had much of a discussion."

**Lankan troops kill 20 rebels:** Government soldiers shot and killed at least 20 Tamil guerrillas in the jungles of eastern Sri Lanka, where the rebels are fighting for independence, reports AP from Colombo.

The rebels were ambushed Tuesday when they came to recover the bodies of eight guerrillas killed the day before in Batticaloa district, according to a military spokesman.

One soldier was killed and another injured in the ambush, the spokesman at the Joint Operations Command said Wednesday on condition of anonymity. The command plans and coordinates military operations against Tamil rebels.

More than 18,000 people have been killed since 1983 when rebels from the minority Tamil community started a violent campaign for an independent homeland in the north and east.

**ASEAN meet in Singapore May 20-21:** The six member nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will meet in Singapore May 20-21 to discuss regional security issues, an official said Wednesday, reports AP from Kuala Lumpur.

The ASEAN nations hope to gauge the new Clinton Administration's stand on regional security at the meeting, as worries grow about a possible reduced US military role in Asia after the Cold War, foreign ministry officials said.

Secretary General of the Malaysian Foreign Ministry Ahmed Jaafar Kamil said he would lead the Malaysian delegation at the meeting, where the situations in Cambodia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as global economic cooperation, will also be discussed.

The ASEAN countries are Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Brunei and Thailand. The seven other attending nations are ASEAN's dialogue partners — the United States, the European Community, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan and South Korea.

The foreign ministers of ASEAN and its dialogue partners meet annually for talks on economic cooperation, but the May meeting will be the first full-scale discussion on security, officials said.

**Azeri-Armenian clash kills 2:** Armenian troops backed by tanks launched an offensive in the Agdam region of western Azerbaijan but were repelled by Azeri forces, the Azerbaijan Defence Ministry said Tuesday, reports AP from Moscow.

Two Azeri soldiers were killed and five wounded in the attack, while the Armenians suffered an unknown number of casualties, the Assa-Irada news agency quoted the ministry as saying.

The Armenian forces also targeted villages near Zangelan in southwest Azerbaijan near the border with Armenia, according to Baku.

The new fighting in the five-year-old conflict ended a lull of several days as the two sides observed an informal truce during a visit to the region by a delegation from the conference on security and cooperation in Europe.

**Boat with 245 held in Bahamas:** The US coast guard on Tuesday boarded a boat in the Bahamas that was carrying 245 suspected illegal immigrants from China and Korea, reports Reuter from Miami.

The coast guard said it stopped the Honduran freighter Mermaid 01 near Mayaguana island in the Bahamas. The boat was carrying 237 suspected Chinese migrants and eight Korean nationals.

A plane spotted the suspicious ship, with more than 100 people on deck, several days ago. But the captain initially refused to allow the coast guard to board and interrupt what he said was a tuna fishing trip.

The coast guard is providing food, water and medical treatment while immigration and naturalisation officials determine the passengers' fate.

## Christopher tells negotiators Direct talks only way to achieve peace in ME

WASHINGTON, Apr 28: Secretary of State Warren M Christopher, clarifying the American role in renewed Arab-Israeli peace talks, says the United States will not introduce proposals for a Middle East settlement, reports AP.

"Direct negotiations is the only way to achieve peace," Christopher said Tuesday as talks resumed after a four-month recess.

Christopher, in an unprecedented meeting with Arab and Israeli negotiators

Tuesday, urged them to set aside procedural discussions and get to the heart of their 45-year dispute.

But the Palestinians, reluctant to return to the table in the first place, accused Israel of escalating violence in the occupied territories, especially in Gaza, and raised the specter of an early walkout.

"We cannot really be engaged in a negotiating process that continues without any result, and we cannot assume such responsibility," Haidar Abdel Shafi said.

## Troops kill 3 prisoners as riot breaks out in Kashmir jail

JAMMU, India, Apr 28: Indian security forces shot dead three prisoners after a riot broke out on Tuesday at a jail in northern Jammu and Kashmir state, the United News of India (UNI) said, reports Reuter.

The news agency quoted police chief S S Wazir as saying the paramilitary Indo-Tibetan border police shot the prisoners after several inmates tried to break out of the high-security jail near the state's winter capital of Jammu.

Wazir said some militants and "hardcore criminals" had broken open the inner gate and marched to the main door of the jail, where they fought with members of the border police who had been called into quell the unrest.

Two prisoners were seriously injured when the security forces opened fire.

# Costa Rican gunmen want safe conduct to a S American state

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, Apr 28: Gunmen who stormed the Supreme Court and seized 19 magistrates freed one Tuesday, but another hostage told a reporter that the assailants had wired their captives with explosives, reports AP.

Costa Rican and Colombian officials indicated the kidnappers who rushed the building Monday belong to Colombia's Medellin cocaine cartel and are seeking the release of four cartel members arrested in September.

President Rafael Angel Calderon, meanwhile, announced he had set up an interim Supreme Court so the country's justice system could continue operating.

"The situation is difficult, but our top priority is to safeguard the physical integrity of the hostages," Calderon said.

The four gunmen, who called themselves "The Commando of Death," seized 19 of the 22 justices, and five assistants.

# Indian troops disarm 3000 policemen in Srinagar

SRINAGAR, India, Apr 28: Indian soldiers stormed police headquarters early Wednesday to end a week-old strike by policemen who accuse the army of killing one of their colleagues, reports AP.

The soldiers quickly disarmed the 3,000 striking policemen in the building, and no shots were fired. The army took the policemen into custody for interrogation.

"We will screen the policemen and then take action against them wherever necessary," said police chief BS Bedi. Once the 10 strike leaders have been identified, they will be discharged, he said in an interview.

The army imposed a daytime curfew on Srinagar. Troops in armored vehicles patrolled areas of the city

where rebels often take shelter.

The police force, which is dominated by Kashmiri Muslims, and the predominantly Hindu army have been fighting together against an Islamic separatist movement in Jammu-Kashmir state since late 1989.

But the army, which doesn't trust the policemen, rarely allows them to play a major role in its battle with the rebels. Many of the state's Muslim civilians resent the police for trying to put down their pro-independence insurgency.

Since Thursday, when the strike began, 5,000 policemen have openly demonstrated against the army, marching through Srinagar, the state's summer capital. Many of the policemen waved their guns

and rifles at soldiers guarding the city in bunkers.

The army began to move in on the police Tuesday night when soldiers armed with automatic weapons and wearing bulletproof vests took over buildings adjacent to the Police Control Room.

The soldiers disarmed about 100 policemen and seized all the weapons in their armory on Tuesday.

When the army attacked the Police Control Room at 4:30 a.m. Wednesday (2300 GMT Tuesday), the policemen dropped their guns.

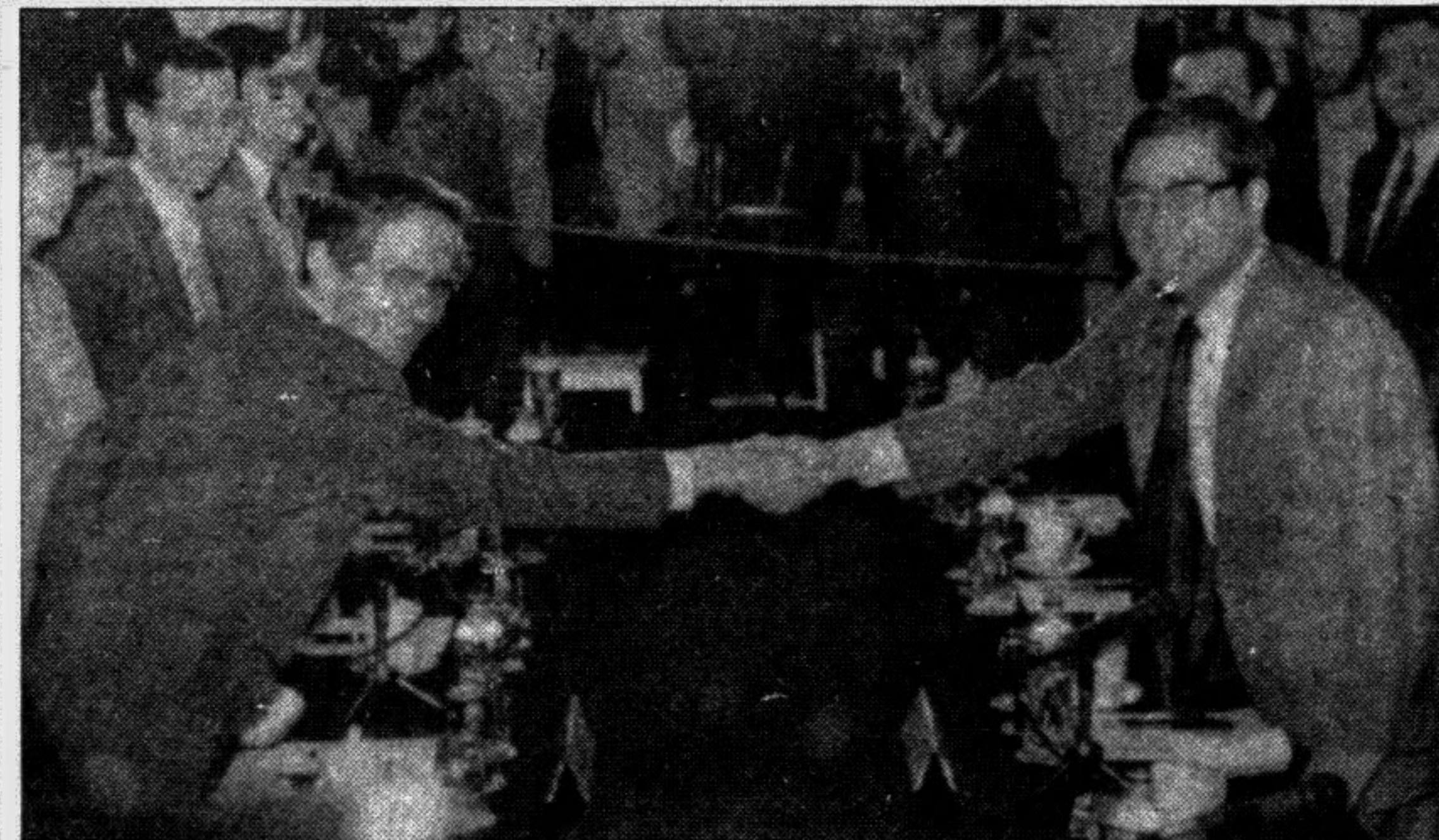
But when the strikers were brought out into the courtyard, they shouted slogans such as "We are one!" "We want justice!" and "We aren't traitors!"

On April 21, constable Riaz Ahmed, who was in civilian

clothes and off duty that day, was arrested by the army during a routine search operation. The next day, his bullet-ridden body was found in the alley of Srinagar along with two other corpses.

The government says Ahmed was killed in a cross-fire between militants and soldiers, but the police force doesn't believe that. Many human rights reports have accused the army and guerrillas of torturing and killing people in custody.

More than 6,000 people have been killed since the insurgency flared up in December 1989 in Jammu-Kashmir, India's only Muslim-dominated state. Nationwide, Muslims comprise about 12 per cent of India's 875 million people.



Team leader of the British delegation, Sir Robin McLaren (L) and his Chinese counterpart, Jiang Enzhu (R), shake hands yesterday before the start of the second round of the Sino-British talks on Hong Kong's political future in Beijing. — AFP/UNB photo

## Second round of Sino-British talks opens

BEIJING, Apr 28: Chinese and British negotiators met Wednesday for their second round of talks in two weeks expressing hopes of resolving their dispute over Hong Kong's electoral system, reports AP.

"We had a little rain last night, and as you know, rain in Hong Kong is always regarded as a good portent," Sir Robin McLaren, the British ambassador to China, said before beginning the meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

After the session ended in early afternoon, McLaren said it had run longer than scheduled "because we've got a lot of work to do." He agreed with Jiang's description that the talks were proceeding normally.

## Iran stages war games in Gulf

NICOSIA, Apr 28: Iran's armed forces on Tuesday staged war games in the Gulf that included submarines, Tehran radio reported, says AP.

The broadcast, monitored in Nicosia, said 36,000 men took part in joint maneuvers involving ground, naval and air forces of the armed forces and the Revolutionary Guards Corps.

Two hundred ships and high speed boats, plus helicopters and submarines, are engaged in the six-stage maneuvers, the radio said.

It quoted Rear Adm Ali Shamkhani, commander of the navy, as saying the maneuvers demonstrated "the defensive capabilities of the armed forces in this region of our nation."

## US will ask UN to set up war crimes commission on Iraq

WASHINGTON, Apr 28: Secretary of State Christopher said Tuesday that the United States will urge the establishment of a United Nations commission to investigate Iraqi war crimes and human rights abuses committed by the Baghdad regime, reports USIS.

He made the comment before meeting in Washington with representatives of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), which represents Iraqi opposition groups.

Christopher emphasized again that the "goal of the United States is to ensure that the present government of Iraq lives up to and follows all the United Nations resolutions."

## US to order air combat role for women

WASHINGTON, Apr 28: Defence Secretary Les Aspin will order the armed services to put women in combat aircraft and helicopters and ask Congress to repeal a law banning them from warships, Pentagon sources said Tuesday, reports AP.

The directive to be announced Thursday.

The action means Air Force and Navy women could be in fighter cockpits within months, but female pilots in the Army will have to undergo special training before flying front-line Apache fighter choppers, officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Because the Marines have no women in training in any aviation unit, changes will take longer in that service.

# Russia still a great power: Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Apr 28: President Boris Yeltsin signed an order on Tuesday confirming that he was in overall charge of foreign policy and stating that Russia remains a great world power, reports Reuter.

In the new system of international relations, Russia remains one of the great powers by virtue of its potential and its influence on the course of world affairs, the agency quoted the document as saying.

It bears responsibility not only for the new world order taking shape after the collapse of the socialist camp, but especially for the building of a new system of positive relations between the states of the former USSR.

The order said the President and his Security Council, in conjunction with Parliament and in line with the Constitution, were responsible for drawing up foreign policy.

The Security Council is an inner circle of top officials which formulates political strategy.

The full text of the order was not published, and presidential spokesmen were not available to comment.

Its signing coincided with a tough Yeltsin statement warning Bosnian Serbs they could expect no support from Russia if they continued to defy international pressure to sign a peace settlement. Both moves

indicated new assertiveness on Yeltsin's part after a weekend referendum in which he won a clear vote of confidence from Russia's voters.

Yeltsin's conservative foes have strongly attacked his government's foreign policy in recent months, accusing liberal Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev of betraying traditional allies like Serbia and Iraq.

Another reports adds: Russia's conservative parliament signaled on Tuesday that it was unimpressed by the support Boris Yeltsin won in Sunday's referendum by suspending a Presidential decree.

Itar-Tass news agency said the Parliament suspended a de-

creed the Russian President issued earlier this month supporting the President of Mordovia, an ethnic republic within Russia.

The Mordovian Parliament had voted to abolish the regional Presidency, but Yeltsin, concerned by parallels with his power struggle with the Russian Parliament, overruled it and insisted that the incumbent should stay in his job pending a court ruling.

On Tuesday the national Parliament, led by Yeltsin's rival Russian Khasbulatov, voted that it was the Presidential decree which should be suspended until the constitutional court ruled on the case.

# Off the Record



A woman lays flowers at the new memorial to victims of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant explosion at Mitino cemetery in Moscow on Tuesday. The memorial was opened on Monday to mark the 7th anniversary of Chernobyl tragedy. — AFP/UNB photo

## He was caught shoplifting during official visit

WELLINGTON: A Russian government official was caught shoplifting during an official visit to New Zealand by Vice President Alexander Rutskoi last month, police said today, reports Reuter.

Chief Inspector Whiro Ratahi of New Zealand National Police Headquarters said the junior official had been freed because of complications involved in charging him.

"Because he was due to fly out of the country the next day, we decided it was not appropriate to put him before the courts and for the taxpayer to have to meet the significant costs of deportation," Ratahi said in statement.

The junior official, who police declined to name, was caught stealing goods worth about New Zealand 1,000 (550 dollar) in shops in Auckland during Rutskoi's three-day visit.

He was caught stealing five compact discs, and when interviewed admitted taking about NZ 950 dollars (500 dollars) of other goods, police said.

## Poisoned drink for suicide kills friend

SEOUL: A man died Wednesday after drinking liquor that his friend had poisoned allegedly for a suicide attempt, police said, reports AP.

Yang Suk-bong died in Lee Young-il's room during Lee's 20th birthday party.

Lee said he had poisoned the liquor to commit suicide because of problems with his girlfriend, but Yang, 20, took the drink instead, according to police.

Police are now investigating why Lee did not prevent Yang from drinking the poison.

## They were barred from making water for an hour

CAPE CANAVERAL: Space shuttle Columbia's seven astronauts were barred from using the shuttle urinal for about an hour Tuesday because of a problem with the waste water tank, reports AP.

Engineers believe an expandable, accordion-like device in the tank became stuck. The device, or bellows, uses nitrogen to pressurize waste water and force it overboard through a nozzle.

"The concern is that we're over-pressurizing the waste water tank," Mission Control's Sam Gernard told the crew. "Unt, Uce 'Tom' Henricks could hook up a backup system that recycles the liquid from the toilet to one of two large, rubber-lined, storage bags, Gernard said the astronauts — all men — could use it only for fecal waste."

"Our whole toilet is back in normal operations," National Aeronautics and Space Administration spokesman James Haatsfield said about an hour later. "The only thing in it's going to a different septic tank."

Mission Control spokeswoman Kari Fluegel said the problem would not cut short the nine-day German science mission, which began Monday. It also was not expected to affect the collection of urine samples for scientific analysis.

## US says Iran exporting terrorism to ME

WASHINGTON, Apr 28: The United States is considering putting Sudan on its list of terrorist countries and is hoping to block international loans to Iran for its terrorist activities, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Tuesday, reports AP.

"Iran is exporting terrorism. They are radiating out like spokes of a pitchfork, and one of the places where they are going is in the direction of the Sudan," Christopher told a senate subcommittee.

He said the principal problem with Iran was the spread of terrorism activities in the Middle East and noted there

was mounting support in the West to stop granting Tehran credit as the World Bank recently did.

"I think there is some growing recognition among our allies and friends in Europe that Iran is conducting itself in a way that would not warrant future support in international financial institutions of the kind that was given there," he said.

The Secretary added that the United States was considering adding Sudan to its list of countries which actively support terrorism, a move which could mean the end of US foreign aid to that country.

## Vote rigging in Yemen's polls alleged

SANAA, April 28: A heavy turnout and charges of voting irregularities marked Yemen's first general elections on Tuesday, reports AP.

The government deployed 37,000 police and soldiers to keep order after an election campaign in which at least eight people, including two candidates, were reported to have been killed.

A series of incidents, described as "minor" by the authorities, broke out in several areas.

Gunshots were heard in a voting district in the southern city of Aden as well as in eastern Hadramaut. There were no reports of casualties.

"This is not surprising in a country where almost all the men are traditionally armed," a Western diplomat said.

The Islamic movement Al-Islah spoke of several voting irregularities and said that armed men burst into two voting centers in Aden, threatening people there.



Costa Rican security forces guard the Supreme Court in San Jose Tuesday where 24 people including 18 justices are being held by an armed group calling themselves "The Death." — AFP/UNB photo