

Third World population grows at record rates

WASHINGTON, May 3: Only three of every 100 babies being added to the world's population is born in a developed country, as Third World population grows at record rates, reports AP.

The latest worldwide data released Monday by the private Population Reference Bureau indicates that the spread of family planning has had little impact on worldwide trends.

When balanced with deaths, the world population clock shows the number of people growing at the rate of nearly 90 million people a year, 7.5 million a month, 1.7 million a week, 245,000 a day, 10,000 an hour, or 170 a minute, according to the bureau. Of those 170, only six are in developed countries.

Based on United Nations and country-supplied statistics, world population stands at 5.6 billion — 4.4 billion in developing countries and 1.2 billion in the industrialised world.

Third World birth rates are still far from the two child family level that is needed to

ultimately stabilise world population size, said Haub, who prepared the annual report with fellow demographer Machiko Yanagishita.

The bureau's 1994 World Population Data Sheet includes population, birth rate, death rate, and projection data on 197 countries.

The most rapid population growth is in Africa, where women average five to eight children each. If those rates continue, the continent's population is projected to double every 24 years.

Other reports have pointed to increased use of birth control in many Third World countries. Birth rates have been falling to some, particularly in Asia and Latin America. Surveys have also found a wide desire for increased availability of family planning services in poorer countries.

While it appears that increased emphasis on population problems may yet stem the tide, prospects for population growth in the Third World remain essentially unchanged, said Haub and Yanagishita.

International

Israel reneges on 24 points

Accord to launch Palestinian self-rule may be delayed

CAIRO, May 3: The signing of a final agreement to launch Palestinian self-rule, due on Wednesday, could be delayed because Israel has triggered a last-minute crisis, PLO delegates warned here today, reports AFP.

They charged Israel had reneged on several points of the deal for the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

The climate of the negotiations is not satisfactory because the Israeli side has gone back on several points," one of the delegates, Jamil Tarifi, said.

Another delegate warned that the PLO would "not give in under pressure, even if that means that the accord will not be signed tomorrow."

Israel is trying to squeeze last-minute concessions out of the Palestinians because the signing has already been scheduled for Wednesday, he explained, declining to be

named. "The Israelis have retracted on 24 points, including some of the promises made last week by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres such as the right of the Palestinians to issue stamps for (letters sent) abroad," he said.

Delegates charged that Israel had also changed its stand on Palestinian authority in Mawassi, next to the Jewish settlements of Gush Katif in the Southern Gaza Strip.

Amid the reports of a crisis, the PLO chief negotiator on security issues, General Abdel Razzak Al-Yehya, went for consultations with officials at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat were to hold talks here later Tuesday.

Their task was to resolve final differences over the size of an autonomous Jericho, and the symbolic presence of a

Palestinian policeman on the Allenby Bridge linking Jordan to the West Bank.

The signing ceremony set for Wednesday is to be attended by dozens of foreign ministers and more than 2,000 guests.

It was being seen as a personal triumph for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who has toiled to keep the autonomy deal on track through months of tortuous negotiations, mostly in Cairo.

Meanwhile, the redeployment of Israeli forces moved up a gear Tuesday as equipment was pulled out from bases across the Gaza Strip, correspondents and witnesses reported.

Five senior PLO officers were due to arrive from Egypt Tuesday to draw up a list of the Israeli bases, barracks and police stations due to be handed over to the Palestinians in the coming days.

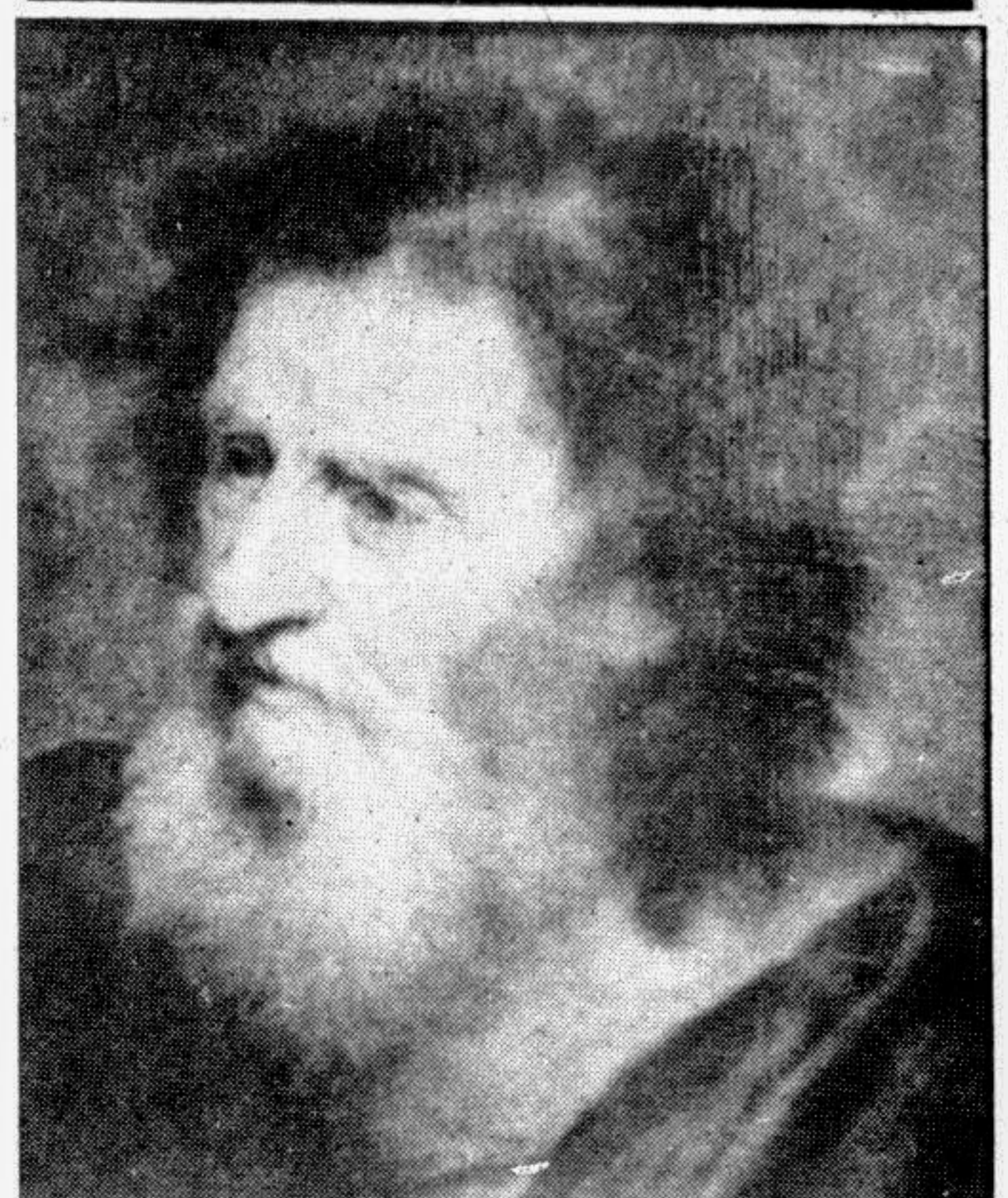
They intend to take control of army buildings in the towns of Rafah and Khan Yunes as early as Tuesday, an official with the mainstream PLO movement Fatah told AFP.

"The pullout is very clear now," said Attar Abu Kharish, a senior member of Fatah. "We have seen a lot of movement in the past week," he said noting that Israel was carrying out the withdrawal in line with its commitments.

The Israelis were removing an observation point at Jabalia refugee camp Tuesday and equipment was seen being taken out of several military installations in Gaza city, as well as from the main army base at Nasserat refugee camp and border police station in the Bureij area.

The Israelis are to redeploy to three zones to protect the settlements in the Gaza Strip, according to the September peace accord.

Off the Record



This painting entitled "Lo Studio Di Testa" (The Head Study) painted by Van Dyck in 1617 was recovered by Italian police May 2 in Rome after it was stolen from the Santa Maria Delle Grazie church in Comiso June 22, 1981. The painting's value is estimated some 1.3 billion lira (about \$16,000 US dollars). — AFP photo

Satellites may help measure length of Great Wall

BEIJING, May 3: Scientists hope satellites will answer one of China's most intriguing questions — the exact length of the Great Wall, an official newspaper said Tuesday, reports AP.

The Wall, stretching from China's east coast to its western border, is a huge tourist attraction, but is too long and inaccessible in parts to be satisfactorily surveyed on foot, the China Daily said.

Experts from China's State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping hope to use satellites to find out about the Wall's history, condition and length, as well as to pinpoint sections needing restoration, the newspaper said.

It did not give details about when the survey would take place but said a two-year satellite survey of a middle section of the Wall in Ningxia Province, north China, was being used as a blueprint for studying the whole Wall.

The Wall is more than 1,500 miles long (2,400 kilometres). It was built to repel invaders between 246 and 209 BC.

Hillary goes grocery shopping

WASHINGTON: Hillary Rodham Clinton did some grocery shopping Monday, spending 15.50 dollars on a basket of staples and treats, including low-fat sour cream, tuna fish, and an exotic Mexican root, reports AP.

"I'm just delighted to be in a store," the first lady said at a supermarket where she made a plea for health reform. "Even when my husband was governor, I'd go to the store and I felt like a normal person and my daughter and I would go up and down the aisles and we'd buy things and we'd take it home and cook it," she said.

Cessna lands on city street

ORLANDO, Fla: The pilot of a single-engine plane that lost power successfully threaded it through a maze of power lines and trees to land on a city street Monday, reports AP.

Neither the pilot, who is a flight instructor, nor her student was injured and the Cessna 172 was only slightly damaged, police said. No one on the ground was hurt.

"Most of it was just luck," pilot Mary Jane Wood said. "There's only a certain amount of skill that you can have, and the rest of it was luck."

Wood said the engine lost power while she was preparing to land at Orlando Executive Airport. She brought the plane down on Rio Grande Avenue, a commercial-residential street a few miles from downtown.

Police and fire-rescue officials closed nearby streets while workers removed the plane's wings so they could load it onto a truck for the trip to the airport.

From Russia with love...

COLUMBUS, Ohio: Five hundred years later, Christopher Columbus is still trying to find his way to the New World, reports AP.

It's not the Italian explorer who sailed the ocean blue in 1492, though. This time, it's a statue.

A statue that is 9 feet (three metres) taller than the Statue of Liberty.

A statue so big that if you placed the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria on top of each other, bow to stern — something nobody ever thought of doing in the 15th century — the bronze Columbus would be seven storeys taller.

Columbus, the largest city in the world named after the explorer, would seem to be a perfect setting for the statue, a gift from the governments of Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and Kazakhstan. But most of it remains at a foundry in St Petersburg, Russia. The head's in a warehouse in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Something — logistics, money, complaints that the thing is ugly — keeps getting in the way.

"It should be something easy to do, but it's not," sighed Jane Butler, chairwoman of the New World Monument Foundation, which is trying to bring the statue to this central Ohio city of 643,000.

First, there is the problem of getting it here. Plans to ship parts of the 500-ton bronze monument were postponed recently after designer Zurab Tsereteli balked at a piecemeal move, Mrs Butler said.

Right now, backers of the project are trying to work out the easiest route from Russia to Columbus, without falling off the edge of the Earth.

Gunbattles on in Karachi: 6 more killed

KARACHI, Pakistan, May 3: Gunbattles raged after Pakistani troops moved into troubled areas of Karachi during the night to try to halt four days of street violence in which 26 people have been killed, reports Reuters.

Police said today that six people died and dozens of others, including three soldiers, were wounded in the gunbattles after troops were ordered in.

Officials said the government decided to redeploy the army in four violence-hit districts of the southern industrial city after police failed to control rioting that killed 20 people and injured a number of others.

Heavy firing raged into the early hours of the morning after the army reinforcements entered the districts.

Mahathir to meet Clinton Friday

KUALA LUMPUR, May 3: Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad will meet President Bill Clinton this week, the US Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Winston Lord said today, reports Reuters.

"The White House today (Tuesday) passed an invitation to Prime Minister Mahathir to meet President Clinton later this week," Lord told a Worldnet dialogue by satellite with journalists and officials from Southeast Asia.

The US embassy said the unofficial talks were scheduled for Friday afternoon.

Mahathir will also visit Bloomington, Indiana, where his wife Siti Hasmah will receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Indiana, on his four-day visit to the United States beginning on Thursday.

China, Japan sign accord on N-safety

BEIJING, May 3: China and Japan signed cooperation arrangements on nuclear safety here today, making Japan China's seventh partner in the endeavour for nuclear safety following the United States, France, Germany and some other industrialized countries, reports Xinhua.

The agreement was signed by Huang Qitao, vice-minister of China's State Science and Technology Commission and director general of the National Nuclear Safety Administration (NNSA), and Yuki Kawata, director general of the Agency of Natural Resources and Energy under the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

anonymity said fighting in western Battambang sent many fleeing along Route 10 toward the provincial capital, also called Battambang.

Route 10 connects the Battambang capital with Pailin, near the Thai border. Some of the heaviest reported fighting has been for Treng, a strategic commune roughly two-thirds of the way toward Pailin from the Battambang capital.

Fighting in Banteay Meanchey, north of Battambang, has sent people fleeing toward the provincial capital, Siem Reap. At least several hundred took refuge in a compound that originally was built to house Cambodians repatriated from Thailand in 1992 and

1993 as part of the peace accord.

In Banteay Meanchey, the Khmer Rouge was reported trying to sever Route 5, which links Siem Reap with the market town of Poipet along the Thai border.

Other people have fled clashes along Route 69, which runs from Siem Reap north to the strategic town of Thmar Puok.

As fighting nears, most international relief workers have fled Siem Reap for the Battambang capital, and some family members and other "non-essential personnel" are going all the way back to Phnom Penh.

30 fundamentalists killed in Algeria

TUNIS, May 3: Algerian security forces killed 30 Muslim fundamentalists on Sunday and Monday in eight areas of Algeria, the official news agency APS said, reports Reuters.

Three were killed after they shot dead a policeman inside a mosque in Tipaza area, 60 km (40 miles) west of Algiers, said the agency, received in Tunis. One of the killers was armed with a gun taken from another policeman, killed two months ago.

Among the 30 shot dead, eight were slain in the eastern town of Constantine and seven in the capital, Algiers.

BRIEFLY

Quake rocks Sumatra: An earthquake measuring 5.6 on the open-ended Richter scale rocked Indonesia's west Sumatra Province early yesterday, the local Meteorological and Geophysical Agency said, Reuters reports from Jakarta.

An agency official, who said there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, said the quake was felt in the west Sumatran cities of Padang and Padangpanjang.

The quake was centred in the Indian Ocean about 300 km (190 miles) west of Padang and occurred at 0013 local time (1713 GMT).

Fresh fighting in Kabul, 3 die: At least three people were killed and over 100 people injured in the Afghan capital Kabul since heavy fighting broke out again Sunday night, reports from Kabul said, Xinhua says from Islamabad.

President Burhanuddin Rabbani's men blamed the latest round of fighting on soldiers loyal to Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who has been trying to oust Rabbani for the last four months.

However, Hekmatyar's forces claimed President Rabbani's troops attacked many parts of the south and east of the city with rockets and shells. Heavy fighting continued on Monday morning, the reports said.

Blast kills 12 miners in Ukraine: An explosion of methane gas killed 12 miners Monday in a pit in southeastern Ukraine, the Itar-Tass news agency reported, AFP says from Moscow.

An inquiry was opened into the accident in the Soviet Skoye pit in the Donbass Basin, with a government team headed by Deputy Premier Vassili Yevtukhov on the scene, the agency said.

Explosions of methane gas are common occurrences in the Donbass Basin. Thirteen miners were killed and eight seriously hurt in a similar blast in March.

ACWF receives UNICEF award: The All-China Women Federation (ACWF) today received the Maurice Pate Award from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) for its excellent job in promoting the welfare of Chinese women and children, Xinhua reports from United Nations.

ACWF Chairman Chen Muhua, who is on her special trip to the UN headquarters, attended the award-presenting ceremony and received the award presented by Ann Makinda, Chairwoman of the UNICEF board.

In her speech during the ceremony, Makinda highly praised ACWF for its work.

Egypt hangs 5 militants: Egypt hanged five Muslim militants yesterday for trying to kill Prime Minister Atef Sedki last November, security sources said. The five men were hanged one after another in a Cairo prison, Reuters reports from Cairo.

Sedki narrowly escaped death when a group of suspected militants blew up a car as his motorcade was passing. A school girl was killed and at least 18 people injured.

Rwandan rebels shell govt positions in Kigali

NAIROBI, May 3: Rwandan rebels shelled government positions in the capital Kigali today as peace talks to end the latest bout of ethnic carnage were to open in the Tanzanian town of Arusha, reports AFP.

Guerillas of the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) fired mortars from the hills around Kigali, said relief workers contacted by telephone in the capital.

An international official there said the rebels, surrounding Kigali, could take the city any time they want.

UN troops meanwhile began evacuating about 300 terrified Rwandan civilians from a hotel where they had been pinned down for weeks by fighting, a

UN official said. Abdul Kabia, Executive Director of the UN assistance mission in Rwanda, speaking by telephone from Kigali, said they were being taken to "secure zones of their choice in Kigali."

UN soldiers also evacuated 11 expatriates from Kigali to the Kenyan capital Nairobi on Monday, he told AFP.

"We were surprised to find them because we thought we had evacuated all the foreigners already," said Kabia, who was unable to specify their nationalities.

He said 14 civilians had been killed and another 113 wounded Sunday when two mortars hit a Kigali church.

South Korea tells North

No treaty to replace armistice unless N-problem resolved

SEOUL, May 3: South Korea will not respond to North Korea's call for a peace treaty to replace the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War until it resolves suspicions about its nuclear programme, an official said Tuesday, reports AP.

"With the nuclear problem at a crucial point, the time is not right," Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hong-ku said in a joint interview with South Korea's three broadcasting companies.

In a separate statement issued Tuesday, the government's National Unification Board, which Lee heads, accused the North's Communist government of scheming to divert attention from its suspected nuclear weapons programme.

Last week, the North demanded that the 41-year-old Korean cease-fire be replaced with a peace treaty to be signed by it and the United States. It also threatened to pull out of the 1953 truce agreement.

The demand has intensified already high tensions on the Korean Peninsula over the North's refusal to allow full nuclear inspections.

Also Tuesday, Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo said the North's demand for a peace treaty is an attempt to exclude South Korea in talks that could determine the future of the Korean Peninsula.

He warned that the North's insistence on a peace treaty could adversely affect expected US-North Korean talks aimed

at verifying Pyongyang's claim that it is not making nuclear weapons.

North Korea is seeking to reopen high-level talks with the United States on improving relations and resolving the nuclear issue. Two previous meetings ended without progress.

Unconfirmed reports said such US-North Korean talks might convene later this month.

The US-North Korea talks, where economic assistance is expected to be discussed, are contingent upon Pyongyang accepting full UN inspections of its suspected nuclear sites.

Western intelligence officials believe that the hard-line Communist North might have extracted enough plutonium to make one nuclear bomb.



US President Bill Clinton (R) looks on as Secretary of the Treasury Lloyd Bentsen (L) holds up what is known as a "street sweeper" during an address on assault weapons in Washington May 2. The Assault Weapons Ban Bill has made it out of the House Judiciary Committee and is scheduled to go before the full US House of Representatives May 5. — AFP photo

EU to be expanded

STRASBOURG (France), May 3: The European parliament on Monday cleared two crucial hurdles on the path toward expanding the European Union to 16 nations, reports AP.

The assembly's foreign affairs committee voted overwhelmingly in favour of EU membership for Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden, leading the way for full parliamentary approval of the enlargement.

Without the committee vote, deputies would not have been able to proceed with a full house assent.

Thousands flee homes as Khmers step up attacks on govt-held areas

BANGKOK, May 3: Some 55,000 people have fled their homes in western Cambodia as Khmer Rouge guerrillas intensified attacks on government-held areas in recent days, international aid officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

It is by far the largest refugee flight since the United Nations organised elections in May 1993 to help end civil war in Cambodia. Communist Khmer Rouge guerrillas boycotted the election and have continued fighting.

Guerrillas have stepped up attacks in the adjoining western provinces of Battambang and Banteay Meanchey since recapturing their headquarters at Pailin in Battambang on

April 19. By evening, however, no major fighting was reported Tuesday.

Thousands of people have taken refuge in homes of relatives, along roads, in temples and in the provincial capitals, said international aid officials. Some villagers sleep in the fields at night and return to their villages in the daytime. Groups of a few hundred people each have crossed into Thailand.

"May communes have totally evacuated," said Scott Leiper, head of the UN World Food Programme in Phnom Penh, where he was reached by telephone from Bangkok. "Many fled as a precaution because they felt it would get a lot

worse than it is now."

Virtually the entire population of Battambang's Rattanak Mondol district — 27,000 people — fled before the guerrillas seized it late last week, Leiper said.

Those people included at least 5,000 who had gone there seeking economic opportunities after returning from Thai refugee camps even though UN officials warned them land mines made the area unsafe. They also included thousands of other people who had been living in temporary settlements after having fled fighting a couple of years earlier. These settlements were burned down during the Khmer Rouge advance, aid

officials said.

Leiper said many people who had been living in permanent settlements were able to take plenty of food with them and were not in dire need.

But conditions are miserable for many of those in Rattanak Mondol and elsewhere who had only temporary settlements, he said. The World Food Programme is focusing aid on some 10,000 who need shelter, food and water.

Leiper said a total of about 45,000 people may have been displaced in Battambang and another 10,000 to 15,000 in Banteay Meanchey.

Other aid officials who spoke on condition of