

BRIEFLY

Arab League to mediate Yemen war: The Arab League will send a delegation soon to mediate between the warring parties in Yemen and stop the current hostilities, a League official said on Sunday, Xinhua reports from Cairo.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the Arab League Assistant Secretary-General for Military Affairs said the situation in Yemen is grave but he remained optimistic about the new mediation attempt.

He added that solving the Yemen crisis is an Arab common responsibility, highlighting the Arab League resolution adopted at the emergency session in Cairo Saturday.

US to reverse policy on Haitians: President Bill Clinton announced Sunday the United States would reverse its policy toward Haitian refugees and allow them to be screened for political asylum before they are repatriated, AFP reports from Washington.

Clinton also said Washington was stepping up diplomatic efforts to end the political standoff sparked by the September 1991 army ouster of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first diplomatically elected President.

The US president said he was naming Bill Gray, a former Pennsylvania Congressman, as his special envoy for Haiti.

Christopher in Mexico City: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived in Mexico City Sunday evening on his first official visit to Latin America and said US-Mexican relations are at an historic high point, AP reports from Mexico City.

Citing the recently enacted North American Free Trade Agreement, Christopher said the US-Mexican relationship is "stronger and better than it's ever been."

Christopher is here for a meeting of the US-Mexico Binational Commission, a Cabinet-level grouping that examines a broad range of cross-border issues each year.

Cuban pilot seeks asylum in US:

A Cuba commercial airline pilot diverted a Bahamian-bound plane carrying about 16 passengers, including Britons and Canadians, to Miami, where the pilot asked for political asylum Sunday, federal agents said. Reuter reports from Miami.

The plane landed about 5:15 pm (2115 GMT) at Miami International Airport, where federal agents were still interviewing those on board. Investigators said most of the passengers would probably be placed on another Nassau-bound flight, possibly late Sunday.

Many of the 16 or 17 people abroad the plane were vacationing British and Canadian citizens, who were on their way from Havana to Nassau, Bahama, the agents said.

Storms kill 165 Chinese: Tornadoes and torrential rains killed at least 165 people in eastern China this month, including six farmers battered to death by hailstones as big as grapefruit, the official China daily said.

The storms, which swept across Jiangxi and Fujian provinces from May 1-3, displaced hundreds of thousands of people and caused an estimated 1.4 billion yuan (160 million dollar) in economic losses, it said.

"Twenty-two farmers were struck dead by lightning working in their fields. Six others were killed directly by hail, 15 centimetres (six inches) in diameter," the paper said.

5 more Tamil rebels killed: Government troops killed five Tamil guerrillas in an ambush in Northeast Sri Lanka, a military spokesman said yesterday, AFP reports from Colombo.

Troops surprised the five guerrillas from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Kattalparichan, Trincomalee district, late Sunday, the spokesman said. There were no casualties among troops in the brief firefight. Two automatic weapons were seized from the guerrillas.

The army ambush came a day after LTTE rebels killed seven security personnel in two separate attacks in the island's north which is largely controlled by the Tiger rebels.

2 French killed in Algeria: Gunmen killed two French nationals on Sunday in an Algiers marketplace, security services said. AFP reports from Algiers.

They were identified as Henri Vergez, 64 and Paul Heleve Raymond, 67. The security services said they worked as librarians. Islamic fundamentalists late last year warned foreigners to leave Algeria or face death.

The country has been torn by political violence since the army intervened in January 1992 to cancel second-round elections that the now-banned Islamic Salvation Front was poised to win.

Karens end fighting

YANGON, May 9: The Karen National People's Liberation Front, an ethnic minority group, gave up their fight against the government in a formal ceremony Monday, the government news agency said, reports AP.

The front had about 1,800 fighters operating in Kayah State, which borders Thailand in the east. The news agency said more than 300 rebel officers attended the ceremony in Loikaw, the state capital 220 miles (350 kilometres) northeast of Yangon, where top officers of the ruling junta received them.

The report said the front's leader, Tun Kyaw, shook hands with government military commanders, then sat down with junta officer Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt to plan how the two sides would jointly develop the area.

The front is the 11th rebel group to give up fighting, allowing the junta to solidify its control of the country. The junta came to power after crushing pro-democracy

demonstrations in 1988.

One of the most powerful groups, the Kachins, made peace with the government in February. Two smaller ethnic minority rebel groups, the Mons and another Karen group, are engaged in peace talks with the government.

Yangon to attend ASEAN meet

YANGON, May 9: Myanmar has accepted an invitation to attend the ASEAN foreign ministers meeting for the first time, diplomatic sources said Monday, reports AP.

The invitation leader was handed over in April by Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri, chairman of the ASEAN standing committee. Myanmar's Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw is expected to attend the ASEAN meeting to be held in July in Bangkok, Thailand. Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore make up the association of Southeast Asian Nations.

300 arrested in Karachi raids

ISLAMABAD, May 9: Some 300 persons were arrested in Saturday night raids in Karachi, a southern port city in Pakistan, following the recent turnmoil which claimed dozens of lives, according to local press reports today, says Xinhua.

Police and other law enforcement agencies conducted raids on the offices of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), a strong political party, which is responsible for the recent violence.

In some areas, the army and the police conducted house-to-house search, the reports said. Official sources claimed that they had arrested only those persons who were involved in the recent incidents of violence and disturbance in the city.

Meanwhile, about 35 youngsters were also arrested in Hyderabad.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (L) shares a laugh with Defence Minister Pavel Grachev (C) after laying a wreath on Monday at the tomb of the unknown soldier next to the Kremlin in Moscow. On the right, wearing a general's uniform, is Alexander Korzhakov, chief of the presidential security.

— AFP photo

Police on high alert in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, May 9: Police

were on high alert Monday to prevent attacks by Arab extremists as thousands of Jews thronged Jerusalem, celebrating the 27 years Israel has ruled the entire city, reports AP.

"I see Jerusalem united and as Israel's capital and under Israeli sovereignty for as long as one can see," Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said at the opening of Jerusalem Day celebrations Sunday night.

Rabin reaffirmed Israel's claim to Jerusalem as its "eternal capital." Israelis marked the capture of the eastern part of the city — including the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism — in the 1967 Mideast war.

The celebrations came as Palestinian police prepared to enter the Gaza Strip and Jeri-

cho in the West Bank as the first step in the Israel-PLO self-rule accord.

Palestinians hope the accord will to their own state, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Over 2,000 police and paramilitary border police took up posts throughout Jerusalem to protect the crowds visiting the predominantly Arab eastern half, police spokeswoman said.

At the Western Wall, Jewish seminar students danced "hora" circle dances and waved blue and white Israeli flags. Some slept on the ground, cradling assault rifles in their arms after night or dancing and prayer.

"Standing here I said to myself, 'could they give this back?' They could never do it because there would be such

an outcry," said Ahinoam Levinson, a 17-year student from Kefar Pines in central Israel.

Thousands of Jewish settlers are scheduled to march along the city's main Jaffa Road to the Western Wall later Monday for a fireworks celebration.

Arab merchants kept their

shops shut as Palestinians held a general strike to mark the monthly anniversary of the start of their revolt against Israeli rule in the occupied territories. It began December 9, 1987.

Israel and the Palestinians have left Jerusalem as among the last issues to be negotiated in their peace talks.

The Palestinians say east Jerusalem is their cultural and religious capital, noting it includes the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third

holiest site in Islam.

Rabin has said before that Jerusalem is not negotiable, but in recent months opposition critics have slammed the government for allowing the Palestinians to set up political institutions in the city.

The police kept worshippers from praying at the Western Wall on several occasions to prevent violent attacks on Jews following the February 25 Hebron mosque massacre, in which Jewish settler massacred 30 Palestinian worshippers.

Palestinians have com-

plained that closure in effect

since wave of attacks on Is-

raelis last month has cut West

Bank and Gaza residents off

from Jerusalem's religious

sites, schools, political institu-

tions and hospitals.

Businessman with past ties to Noriega wins Panama polls

PANAMA CITY, May 9: A millionaire businessman with

past ties to Gen. Manuel Noriega declared victory Sunday in Panama's first presidential elections since the US invasion, reports AP.

It was the first time Panamanians had voted so freely and peacefully. The military, which ruled Panama for more than two decades before the United States invaded in 1989 to depose Noriega, had influenced outcomes through electoral fraud and threats of coups.

Ernesto Perez Balladares, known as "Toro" or Bull for his beefy build, was leading with 33.35 per cent of the vote late Sunday with 64.6 per cent of the vote counted, the independent Electoral Tribunal

said.

"Now we begin to construct together, regardless of our different political groups, the future of the nation," Perez Balladares said after declaring victory.

Under Panamanian law, as absolute majority is not required for victory: Whoever gets the most votes wins.

Perez Balladares ran the 1989 campaign of Noriega's handpicked candidate but gained popularity in the current election by invoking the memory of the populist military dictator, Gen. Omar Torrijos.

Perez Balladares has said he opposes a return to militarism and has tried to distance himself from Noriega.

Each of the other three candidates garnered less than 2 per cent.

Mireya Moscoso of the rul-

ing Arnulfista Party was in second place with 28 per cent, the tribunal said. She is the widow of the late Arnulfo Arias de la Madrid, a popular president elected three times and thrown out every time by coups.

Salsa singer-actor Ruben Blades, who campaigned by holding concerts featuring his popular music and calling for a break with past politics and parties, was in third with 18.1 per cent of the vote. He said he would not concede until final numbers were in.

Ruben Dario Carles, a former government comptroller, was in fourth place with 16.7 per cent of the vote.

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