

'Rwandan capital on verge of falling to rebels'

NAIROBI, May 10: The capital of Rwanda could be on the verge of falling to rebels who are pounding it with heavy artillery fire, a United Nations official said, reports AP.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, made the comment on Monday when the rebels were blasting Kigali, the capital, with heavy artillery and short-range mortar fire. Intense small arms fire indicated the rebels followed the barracks with infantry assaults.

The rebels are mostly members of the minority Tutsi ethnic group. The government is dominated by majority Hutus.

One mortar round exploded inside Kanombe camp, causing an undetermined number of casualties at the base for three battalions of government troops.

Another shell exploded on the airport tarmac on Monday, forcing UN officials to turn

back a relief flight en route from Nairobi and close the airport. UN spokesman Abdul Kabia said in Kigali. The aid flights bring food to thousands of displaced people under UN protection in the capital.

The bombardment shattered a one-day lull in combat that had brought a strange quiet to Kigali after five days of intense fighting in which the rebels made substantial gains.

Fighting also was reported raging near Ruhengeri in northwestern Rwanda and near Bugesera and Kanyanza, about 15 miles (25 kms) southwest of the capital.

Rebels have cut the highway between Kigali and Ruhengeri, 45 miles (65 kms) from the capital, and are advancing on the capital despite stiff resistance from government forces.

The fighting began after the presidents of Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi, both Hutus, died in a suspicious

plane crash at Kigali on April 6.

Since then, an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people have been killed, most of them civilians slaughtered because of their ethnicity, according to the United Nations and aid groups. About 1.3 million people have fled their homes.

Rwanda had an estimated population of 8.5 million people before the fighting. About 90 per cent were Hutu and 9 per cent Tutsi.

The United States said it would airlift 100,000 blankets and 10,000 rolls of plastic sheeting to Tanzania to be used by Rwandan refugees there. The US Defence Department said Monday the items would be flown from storage in Turkey.

Four US Air Force C-141s left from McGuire Air Force Base, N.J., for Incirlik, Turkey, to begin flying the missions, a Pentagon statement said.



PLO leader Yasser Arafat (L) shakes hands with Israeli President Ezer Weizman as South African President Nelson Mandela (C) looks on Monday.

— AFP photo

Opposition in Nepal demands public Indian apology

KATHMANDU, May 10: An opposition party which paralysed Nepal last week with a general strike called on Monday for Indian made film boycott and vehicle blockade to protest against alleged Indian meddling in the country's affairs, reports Reuter.

The United People's Front (UPF), the third biggest party in the Himalayan kingdom, announced a 10-point protest plan to demand a public Indian apology for a March incident when Indian police raided homes in Kathmandu in search of a criminal suspect.

India has apologised to the Nepali government and promised disciplinary action against the policemen who

made the unauthorised raids.

"We will carry out our programmes through persuasion, and through lawful means," UPF official Baburam Bhattarai told reporters.

He said the plan included a boycott from June 15 of Indian-made films, which are extremely popular throughout South Asia and beyond.

Bhattarai said protesters would also block entry of vehicles with Indian licence plates to Nepal from June 5.

Transport industry sources said about 1,000 Indian vehicles cross the border into Nepal everyday with passengers and cargo, but Nepali vehicles do not have the same direct access to India.

Transport operators and

people in the Nepali cinema industry had promised to cooperate, Bhattarai said.

The agitation would only be called off if India made a public apology to the Nepali people for the police raid, and promised it would not happen again, he added.

A general strike called by the UPF in protest at the raid brought normal life to a halt last Wednesday throughout the mountainous country.

The stoppage was also called to protest against the economic liberalisation policies of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, blaming the government for rising prices and shortages of electricity and water in Kathmandu.

Malaysians condemn Serb aggression

KUALA LUMPUR, May 10: More than 30,000 Malaysians, led by Deputy Premier Anwar Ibrahim, attended a rally Monday to condemn Serb aggression in Bosnia and the lack of UN action to stop the carnage in the war-torn country, reports AFP.

The crowd at Merdeka Stadium broke into a thundering roar when embattled Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic's message, recorded especially for the rally, was played over the public address system.

The rally was organised by the Bosnia Action Front, which groups about 30 non-governmental organisations and the Malaysian media.

China wants to mediate Korean N-dispute

SEOUL, May 10: China is pressing ahead with efforts to mediate the nuclear dispute on the Korean Peninsula, South Korean news reports said Tuesday, reports AP.

Local television networks and newspapers said a high-ranking Chinese government official met with South Korean reporters based in Beijing on Tuesday.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Beijing government was making diplomatic efforts to break deadlock by mid-May, a deadline tacitly set by the UN International Atomic Energy Agency.

Palestinian, Israeli officials talk in Gaza

GAZA CITY, occupied Gaza Strip, May 10: Israel's chief autonomy negotiator held emergency talks in Gaza City today with Palestinian police chiefs after a week of delay in the arrival of Arab policemen, a correspondent reported, says AFP.

General Amnon Sahhak, who led the Israelis at self-rule negotiations in Egypt, headed a delegation including Gaza Strip Commander General Doron Al Mong in the meeting at the Palestinian temporary police headquarters.

It was the first time Israeli and Palestinian officials met at the new seaford HQ and came just hours after General Nasr Yusef, the head of the Palestinian force, entered the Gaza Strip under cover of darkness.

The full Israeli-Palestinian liaison committee made up of senior officers from both sides for the handover of authority also attended the talks.

Hata regrets Japan's role in Asia during WW II

TOKYO, May 10: Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata today made a new but subdued apology for the suffering inflicted by Japan on the rest of Asia in World War II, in his first major policy speech since taking office, reports AP.

Hata, bedeviled by the political fallout from remarks over Japan's militarist past by his former justice minister last week, told both houses of parliament that the imperial army's actions had caused 'unbearable suffering'.

The head of Japan's first minority government in 39 years also pledged to draw up emergency plans to cope with

any sudden worsening in the Korean crisis, caused by North Korea's refusal to open its nuclear sites to inspection.

But the speech did little to ease suspicions among the opposition that the nine-month-old ruling coalition is bent on expanding Japan's global role, particularly in the military realm, loosening the country's constitutional binds.

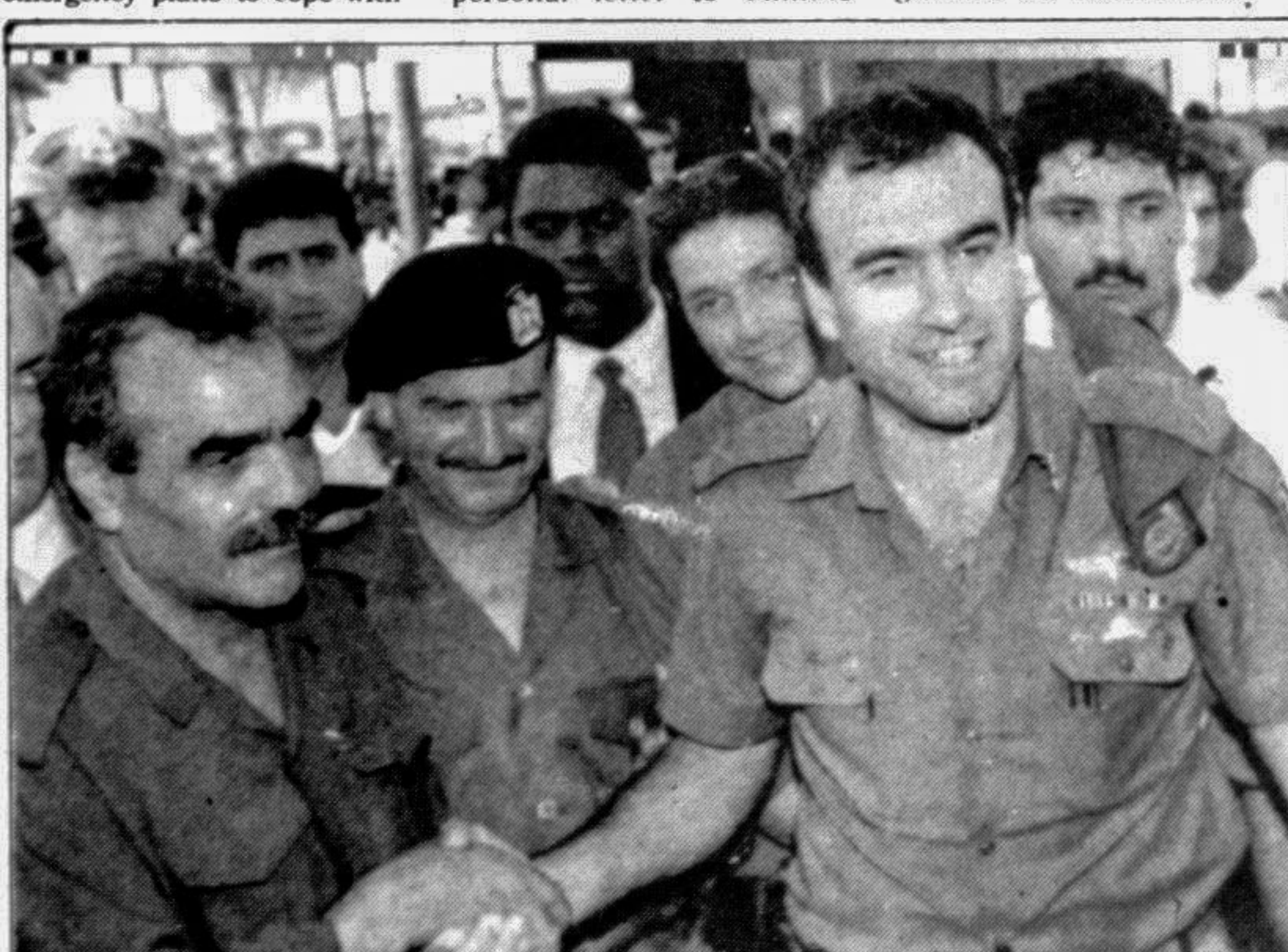
The ruling coalition has suggested new laws to allow Japan greater peacekeeping role, including logistical support for US forces in military action in Korea.

The Premier was to send a personal letter to Chinese

Premier Li Peng and telephone South Korean President Kim Young-Sam to express regret over the affairs. Foreign Minister Koji Kakizawa said.

The expression of regret, however, was seen somewhat restrained, compared with straightforward 'apologies' offered by Hata's predecessor, Morihiro Hosokawa, after he took office in August.

Within the limits of its pacifist constitution, Japan will act closely with the United States and South Korea and follow action by the United Nations in dealing with North Korea's suspected nuclear arms programme, the Premier said.



Israeli Army General Yom Tov Samia (R) shakes hands with Palestinian General Ziad al-Atrash (L) after their press conference held on the Israeli border in Rafah on Monday.

— AFP photo

Off the Record

Dog's medal sold for 18,400 pounds

LONDON: A medal awarded to a dog who saved Britons buried alive in World War II air raids sold for 18,400 pounds (27,500 dollars), auctioneers Sotheby's said on Monday, reports Reuter.

The Dickin medal, one of only 53 animal medals issued in Britain, was awarded to Antis, an Alsatian who flew with his master Czech airman Jan Bozdech in his wartime bomber. The medal had been expected to fetch up to 15,000 pounds (22,430 dollars).

After escaping German-occupied Europe, Bozdech was posted to the North-West English city of Liverpool where he and Antis rescued four air raid survivors buried in a bombed house.

Antis first slipped aboard a British bomber in 1941 after Bozdech joined the royal air force as a gunner. The dog subsequently went on seven sorties.

Antis was put to sleep in 1953. Bozdech died in 1980. The medal was put up for auction by Bozdech's second wife and bought by businessman and conservationist Gary Mainley, who says he intends to use it to raise money for animal charities.

'All attention on the first couple just absurd'

WASHINGTON: President Clinton is urging Americans to defer judgement on questions about his character, contending he is the target of the 'constant politics of diversion and division and destruction,' reports AP.

In different words, his wife is saying the same thing.

"I think I've been subject to more assault than any president," Clinton said Monday night at a 'town-hall meeting' in Rhode Island. "But we'll have an election in 1996, and I wish that we could just all settle down and be Americans for a while and work on our problems, and then evaluate me based on the job I do."

Clinton was responding to a woman who asked if he felt he was being held to a higher standard than previous U.S. presidential families.

The same topic was addressed by Hillary Rodham Clinton in an interview with Vanity Fair magazine. She called all the attention focused on the first couple "just absurd."

Clinton's leadership on foreign affairs is under intense criticism. His problems have been exacerbated with a lawsuit by a former Arkansas state employee alleging sexual harassment and the continuing saga of the real estate investment he made in the Whitewater venture in Arkansas in 1978.

"If you take historical precedent, no president has ever had any of his activities before he became president investigated like this. And a lot of people came into office having made a lot of money," Mrs Clinton said in the interview, which took place last month. "We came in having lost money. We came in with very little in the way of resources."

"We are subjected to a whole new set of standards," she said. "We don't have a vacation house in Maine, we don't have a ranch in California, we don't have a cottage on the shore of Maryland — we don't have any of those things."

Clinton faced questions from a friendly audience on a broad spectrum of topics in the hour-long town-hall meeting in Cranston, R.I.

Work of art vandalised

LONDON: A dead sheep in a glass tank displayed as a work of art in a London gallery was vandalised on Monday, according to police, reports Reuter.

They said an unidentified visitor to the Serpentine Gallery poured black ink into the formaldehyde-filled tank, which had already been sold to a collector for 25,000 pounds (3,380).

Sculptor Damien Hirst, whose exhibits in previous exhibitions have included a rotting cow's head and a pickled shark, was trying to clean the sheep late on Monday, gallery officials said.

The exhibit was part of a controversial show organised by Hirst which has provoked conflicting reactions from critics.



Australian model Shelley Rowson (L) receives a kiss from Australian author Bryce Courtney (R) after being named the 1994 Penthouse Pet of the Year in Sydney on Tuesday. The blonde 25-year old accountant will receive a new 4-wheel drive vehicle and other prizes worth over US 20,000 dollar as well as lucrative modelling contracts.

— AFP photo

US serial killer Gacy executed

JOLIET, May 10: American serial killer John Wayne Gacy was executed early Tuesday, more than a decade after police dug up the makeshift graveyard under his house that shocked the nation and led to 33 murder convictions, reports AP.

Gacy was executed by injection at the maximum-security Stateville Correctional Center at 12:58 am, said corrections department official Howard A. Peters.

The execution was delayed nearly an hour because of difficulty with the injected chemicals flowing into Gacy's body, Peters said.

"There was a jelling or a clogging in the line," he said. Gacy's last words were to the effect that taking his life wouldn't compensate for the lives of his victims, Peters said.

Collapse of communism in Europe creates new world order

NEW YORK, May 10: The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in Europe (both East and West) have created a new historical reality, reports IPS.

Never before has the competition among the world's leading powers been concentrated on economic as opposed to military and ideological realities.

On the world stage today, the competition is essentially driven by economics as Western Europe, North America, China, and South-East Asia approach the turn of the century.

One result of this situation is the widely accepted conclusion that the colossal economic and political failure of communism was due to the perfection of a Reaganesque or Thatcherite version of free-market capitalism. This conclusion is dangerous for two

reasons:

First, it is not true, communism collapsed mainly because of its internal inefficiencies and contradictions once modern communications and technology made it impossible to continue its isolation.

Second, because it leads to the easy and unproven assumption that pure market economies can deal with technologically-driven productivity growth, defence cutbacks, and foreign competition, and that they can simultaneously provide high levels of employment and continue improvement in the standard of living of a large majority of the population.

The danger in these assumptions is already visible in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The expectations raised by these prescriptions, superimposed on archaic systems and psychological mindsets decades

behind the times, were beyond anything that could realistically be expected to come about.

The best that could have been a disappointment. The reality in many cases turned out to be a crushing letdown. Inflation, corruption, insecurity and humiliation have replaced the political fear and relative economic security which characterised communist regimes.

The trade-off, for many, is not self-evident. And again, there are two reasons for these failures.

For one, the perception was wrong. For socialist countries in transition, economic 'shock therapy' combined with immediate democratisation is in most cases a prescription for economic failure and political reaction.

For another, the West, with the most advanced economic and political system in the

world, has yet to prove that free market capitalism can successfully close the triangle of political freedom, the creation of wealth, and the fairness of its distribution.

It may be that this is impossible and that the price of political freedom and the creation of wealth requires the sacrifice of job and income security for significant parts of the population. This is Reaganism and Thatcherism at its purist and, more or less, describes the recent attitude (implicit rather than explicit) of most western government, including the United States.

Liberals have consistently argued for freedom combined with fairness, the result was redistribution of wealth and the modern welfare state. Conservatives argued for freedom and the creation of wealth. The result has too often been significant gaps be-

tween social and economic classes as well as a very weak safety net for those in need of assistance.

Until we resolve this dilemma, economic and political solutions will be in difficulty in all democracies.

It seems that for political stability and democracy to flourish in the world of the 21st century, three objectives have to be met.

The big, developed western democracies — the United States, Canada and Western Europe — together with Japan, have to resolve the problems of structural unemployment and chronic budget deficits. The adequate creation of jobs with a future is the biggest economic and social challenge now facing the West.

As a result of weak economies and flawed fiscal policies, the United States and Germany in particular are now

a drain on the credit markets. They should over time, along with the other OECD countries, become major sources of investment capital for the rest of the world.

The big developing countries — China and India, and those in the former Soviet Union and Latin America — must follow their own individual paths to market economies and sustained economic growth.

Many South-East Asian countries have done so successfully. Cultural and Historical factors may be as important as economic theories in determining the approach individual countries adopt towards the market economy.

Social and political stability together with currency stability are both required to attract the necessary foreign investment and mobilise local savings.

China rules out referendum on Tibet's future

BEIJING, May 10: China reacted angrily Tuesday to suggestions by Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, that he might hold a referendum on Tibet's future if Beijing ignores his moderate approach, reports AFP.

The so-called referendum suggested by the Dalai Lama is yet another trick for his splitting activities, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

The question of holding a referendum on the future of Tibet does not exist," he added. The Dalai Lama raised the possibility of a referendum earlier this week, saying 14 years of talks with the Chinese had made no progress.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman reiterated that Tibet was "an inalienable part of China".