

## Rebels win big gains over Myanmar forces

TACHILEK, Myanmar, May 28: Reports that opium warlord Khun Sa's guerrillas are advancing on Tachilek after winning big gains over Myanmar government forces have brought the usually bustling town to a standstill, reports Reuters.

Normally thousands of tourists and traders cross a small border bridge linking the town to the Thai town of Mae Sai but on Friday just a trickle of people made the journey.

A Myanmar customs official in Tachilek said he had been told by army officers that 33 government soldiers were killed in fighting nearby on Thursday.

Residents have begun stockpiling food and other goods in preparation for an expected border closure, the official said.

A Myanmar porter who fled the battlefield and arrived in the town on Friday told Reuters Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA) had taken control of the strategic Doi Kong M mountain, 20 km (12.5 miles) to the southwest, and was advancing towards Tachilek.

"MTA artillery and mortar bombs were landing right in the middle of the Myanmar positions, everyone ran for his life and porters took the opportunity to escape," said Sam Kae, 35.

Sam Kae said he and sixteen others escaped but only three reached Tachilek. He did not know the fate of the others.

Thousands of Myanmar government troops have been battling MTA guerrillas in 13 different places across a broad front in northeastern Myanmar's Shan state since the middle of May.

The heaviest fighting is around Dol Kog M and the town of Mong Kwayat, 120 km (75 miles) to the southwest of Tachilek, guerrilla officers said.

One guerrilla officer told Reuters on Friday that 150 Myanmar troops had been killed and 80 wounded over the past week. He put MTA losses at 17 killed and 39 wounded.

The Yangon junta deployed more than 20,000 troops against Khun Sa's army in southern Shan state late last year.

## Hundreds of political activists in Pak jail without charge

ISLAMABAD, May 28: Benazir Bhutto's government has jailed hundreds of political activists without charge, employing the same harsh measures once used against her when she was an opposition figure, reports AP.

Following fierce street battles in the southern city of Karachi in April, police went door-to-door arresting members of a militant opposition group, the Mohajir Quomi Movement, or People's Refugee Movement. Only a handful, most of the MQM leaders, have been charged with crimes since they were detained a month ago.

The government claims that there are no political prisoners. The fact is, there are," said the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. "It is a pity (Benazir's) government should not be adopting the same tactics it legitimately complained against while it was in the opposition."

Most MQM supporters are being held in the overcrowded Karachi Central Jail. Few have

been brought before a court or had access to a lawyer. Neither the government nor the police has said how many people are being detained, but estimates range from 300 to 500.

"This has been a rather heavy-handed crackdown," said IA Rehman, director of the Human Rights Commission. "We certainly expected greater respect for human rights."

Benazir has been widely viewed as a champion of human rights in Pakistan.

Abdullah Shah, the chief minister of the southern province of Sindh and a member of Benazir's party, acknowledged that some innocent people were picked up in the raids on working-class neighbourhoods that are MQM strongholds.

"We have released many of those who were found innocent," Shah said. "But we will not spare the terrorists and criminals."

The army's "Operation Clean Up" began in 1992 as an attempt to halt spiralling crime, kidnappings, violence

and political unrest in Karachi, the country's business capital and its largest city with some 10 million residents.

The MQM represents Muslims who came to Muslim Pakistan from Hindu India when the Asian subcontinent was divided into two nations in 1947. The party is the strongest political force in Karachi.

The MQM flexes its muscles with regular strikes in Karachi, enforced through intimidation and sometimes violence. Benazir has called the MQM a "terrorist" group, and many believe the MQM leadership is linked to acts of violence.

MQM leaders deny this and claim police simply fabricate charges against them.

Dr. Farooq Sattar, an MQM leader and a former mayor of Karachi, has been charged with 85 crimes, including murder and kidnapping.

The army's field investigation team interrogated me for several days. We went through enormous mental torture," Dr. Sattar said during a break this week at his court

hearing. He said his interrogators wanted him to join Benazir's government.

"On my refusal, I was charged with all possible crimes," he said.

Human rights groups, including London-based Amnesty International, say unlawful killings by the security forces and torture in police jails remain commonplace.

Pakistan's Human Rights Commission said police killed four suspects "in cold blood" on May 3 during unrest in Sukker, 220 miles (356 kms) north of Karachi.

Police said the young men, aged 19 to 23, were fatally shot in what they describe as a two-hour shootout with "dangerous criminals."

But the commission said the men were arrested, had their hands tied behind their backs and were taken to the nearby home of a policeman. Officers then carried out "an execution-style killing," the commission said after interviewing witnesses.

## Off the Record

### Major's war on the beggars!

LONDON: Beggars are "offensive" and should be reported to the police, British Prime Minister John Major was quoted as saying in an interview published on Friday, reports Reuter.

"It is an offensive thing to beg," Major told the Bristol Evening Post. "It is unnecessary."

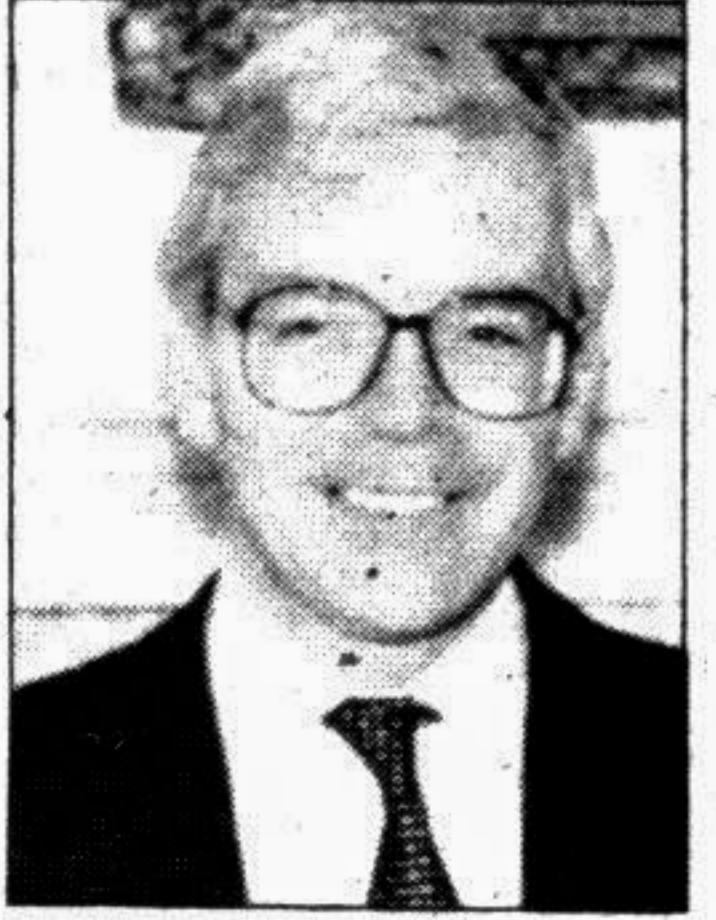
Begging is a problem in most large British cities. Bristol, in southwest England, is host to a homeless group known as "Crusties".

"It is not acceptable to be on the street. There is no justification for it these days," Major is quoted as saying in the front page interview headlined "Major's war on the beggars!"

He said beggars were bad for tourism.

"This problem about begging is as old as the hills. It is very offensive to many people," Major said. Asked if he believed beggars should be reported to the police he said, "Yes, certainly. Most certainly... penalties are in place to deal with it and I think people should be rigorous over this issue."

Major's office declined to comment on the interview.



### Simple way to stop early birth

LONDON: British researchers said on Friday they had found a simple way using chemical skin patches to stop mothers giving birth too early, one of the biggest causes of infant mortality, reports Reuter.

Writing in Britain's Lancet Medical Journal, a team from a London hospital described how patches normally used to treat Angina chest pain were able to suppress women's uterine contractions by delivering a muscle-relaxant compound.

In a pilot study of 13 women admitted to hospital showing signs of premature labour, the researchers found that patches applied to the abdomen halted the contractions and prolonged pregnancy by an average of 28 days.

The therapy caused no obvious adverse effects in the eight babies born so far in the trial and the mothers suffered nothing worse than headaches and skin irritation in a few cases, wrote Dr Christoph Less of King's College Hospital School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Premature birth is one of the major causes of death and serious handicap in newborn babies. In Britain, up to 40,000 babies are born before the full 37-week gestation, around five per cent of all births.

### First White House wedding in 23 yrs

WASHINGTON: The first White House wedding in 23 years takes place Saturday when Tony Rodham, the brother of the first lady, and Nicole Boxer, daughter of a senator, exchange vows in the Rose Garden, reports Reuter.

The ceremony, set for 6 pm (2300 GMT) will be private. Some 250 guests have been invited to attend the wedding and dinner in the state room of the White House.

Rodham, 39, is the youngest brother of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Boxer, 26, is the daughter of Democratic California Senator Barbara Boxer.

The last marriage ceremony at the White House was the 1971 wedding of Tricia Nixon and Edward Cox, who also were married in the Rose Garden.

### By-elections in India: Vote counting begins

NEW DELHI, May 28: Counting started today of the millions of ballots in this week's by-elections seen as mild test of strength for Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party, reports AFP.

The vote-count was launched under tight security in five federal parliamentary and 10 state assembly constituencies, two days after the balloting that covered 12 states, the Press Trust of India said.

The count started was delayed in the Vaishali and Kurnool parliamentary constituencies following complaints of rigging.

Head-to-head battles between Congress candidates and the representatives of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) are the most closely-watched races in the by-elections.

### Bid to smuggle arms into Kashmir foiled

NEW DELHI, May 28: Security forces in the India controlled Kashmir yesterday foiled an attempt to smuggle arms into the valley by militants, reports Xinhua.

Reports quoting a Defence Ministry spokesman said yesterday that an army patrol seized a large quantity of mines and ammunition in the curfew-bound border belt.

The seizure included 16 boxes of assault rifle ammunition containing 12,000 rounds, eleven claymore mines and 52 cases of rifles, the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, massive hunt has been launched by the security forces to track down abductors who kidnapped a retired deputy superintendent of police last night.

Two militants were killed in an encounter during search operation to rescue the former policeman.

According to reports from Srinagar, the capital city of the India controlled Kashmir, a total of 13 people were killed in the valley during the last 24 hours.

Situation in the valley has deteriorated in the last several months, deaths of militants and policemen in clashes between the security forces and local Muslim militants have been reported almost every day.



The Princess of Wales (C) speaks to the Chairman of the Red Cross Advisory Commission, Darryl Jones (R) during a meeting at the International Red Cross in Geneva on Friday. The Princess was in attendance for the first meeting of the new advisory commission. — AFP photo

## DPRK speeds up fuel rods removal from N-reactor

WASHINGTON, May 28: Key inspections of North Korea's nuclear capabilities could be jeopardised because fuel rods are being quickly removed from the country's nuclear reactor, the head of a United Nations watchdog agency says, reports AP.

In a letter to the UN Security Council, Hans Blix, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said North Korea's removal of fuel was occurring "at a very fast pace."

And he said that if this rate continues, the IAEA would lose "within days" the ability to accurately measure the amount of plutonium, a key component of nuclear weapons, produced by the reactor.

Representatives of the United States and other permanent members of the Security Council met Friday night to discuss the letter. Russian representative Yuliy Vorontsov called the matter "grave" and said sanctions might be considered if the North Koreans cannot reach an agreement with the IAEA to slow down the fuel removal.

Council members decided to continue informal talks over the weekend and reconvene as a group on Tuesday.

Despite North Korea's lack of cooperation with nuclear in-

spectors, a senior Clinton administration official said earlier Friday that the United States remains willing to resume its own high-level diplomatic talks with North Korea.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the United States this week proposed a specific date for resuming US-North Korean talks that broke off last summer, but the Pyongyang government did not accept it.

A new round of US-North Korean talks would be "a difficult and complicated one because we will have to resolve in that dialogue the nuclear issues as well as holding out the prospect of having more normal relations," Secretary of State Warren Christopher said after addressing the Asia Society in New York on Friday.

If North Korea rejects the negotiations, the United States will be in a better position to garner international support for UN economic sanctions, which would condemn North Korea to "pariah status," Christopher said in the speech.

In Seoul, South Korean officials expressed concern over the North's speeded-up unloading of spent fuel rods. Foreign minister Han Sung-joo convened a special meeting of senior ministry officials to discuss the situation.

Ministry officials said they expected an officials IAEA statement from Vienna later Saturday.

The Korean Central News Agency, the north's official media monitored in Tokyo, defended the removal of the fuel rods on Saturday. The statement was attributed to an analyst in a state-run newspaper, but did not appear to be a direct response to the IAEA letter.

At a briefing on President Clinton's decision to delink human rights from China trade yesterday, Lake expressed disappointment over the absence of a dialogue between the Chinese and the Dalai Lama.

### US to continue contact with Dalai Lama

WASHINGTON, May 28: The US will continue its contacts with the Dalai Lama of Tibet even after the delinking of human rights from the China trade, the National Security Adviser to the President, Anthony Lake, has said, reports PTI.

At a briefing on President Clinton's decision to delink human rights from China trade yesterday, Lake expressed disappointment over the absence of a dialogue between the Chinese and the Dalai Lama.

Magadan was an unofficial capital of a huge network of camps, known around the world by a name given by Solzhenitsyn — the "Gulag Archipelago."

"I know that I am returning to a Russia tortured, stunned, altered beyond recognition, convulsively searching for itself, for its own true identity," he told thousands of people in central Vladivostok.

## BRIEFLY

**France urged to keep troops:** US President Bill Clinton has urged France to keep its troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina until all possibilities for peace in the former Yugoslav republic have been exhausted, AFP reports from Paris.

Clinton, in a radio interview broadcast early Saturday by France Inter and France Info, acknowledged that the French government might not want to maintain forces in Bosnia if they were to become targets in the fighting.

But according to a French translation of his remarks, he said he hoped French troops would be able to "stay at least until he have exhausted all possibilities for reaching a peace settlement."

**Pope Paul leaves hospital:** Pope John Paul left hospital on Friday, four weeks after he had surgery to repair a broken right thigh bone, witnesses said, Reuter reports from Rome.

The 74-year-old pontiff walked out of Rome's Gemelli Hospital without the aid of a cane and was applauded by staff and patients crowded on balconies on upper floors and around the exit. The Pope was being driven home to the Vatican.

**Iraq surprised:** Iraq on Friday condemned the expulsion of its top diplomat in Washington, describing it as "unjustified" and based on "political and psychological" motives, AFP reports from Nicosia.

An Iraqi Foreign Ministry spokesman quoted by the official agency INA, monitored in Cyprus, said Iraq had been "extremely surprised" by the move.

Contrary to US explanations for expelling Adnan Malik, the diplomat had not "taken part in any activity against the most elementary principles of diplomatic work," he added.

**Mugabe blasts whites:** President Robert Mugabe said Friday that his political opponents were letting themselves be used by whites, turning again to the race car as elections approach, AP reports from Harare.

Mugabe, speaking to about 6,000 members of the youth wing of his Zanu party, said the Zimbabwe Unity Movement, led by his former guerrilla lieutenant Edgar Tekere, and the Forim party, led by retired Chief Justice Enoch Dumbushena, were "put forward by white men" seeking a return to the power they enjoyed before Rhodesia became Zimbabwe at independence in 1980.

**119 foreigners held in Kazakhstan:** Kazakhstan confiscated a total of 119,000 tons of narcotics and detained 119 foreigners involved in drug-trafficking last year, Interior Minister Vladimir Shumov revealed on Friday, Xinhua reports from Alma Ata.

Speaking at a joint press conference with visiting UN Undersecretary-General Giorgio Giacomelli, Shumov said that Kazakhstan has not only become a base for drug production but also a major supplier to the Commonwealth of Independent States and a transfer point between Asia and Europe.

**2 killed in US court shooting:** A man involved in a lawsuit opened fire in a court reporter's office Friday, police said. A pregnant lawyer on a man giving a deposition were killed and another man critically wounded before the 15-shot pistol jammed, AP reports from Fort Lauderdale.

The shooting suspect was identified as Julio Mora. He was chased down and held for authorities by the owner of the court-reporting firm where the shooting occurred.

**Former US envoy to UN dies:** George W. Ball, the US lawyer, economist and diplomat who counselled Presidents Kennedy and Johnson against escalation of the Vietnam War, is dead at age 84, AP reports from New York.

Ball, who resided in Princeton, N.J., checked into New York Hospital for tests and die Thursday, said his son John.

Ball held the No. 2 and 3 positions in the State Department for nearly six years and later served a year as US ambassador to the United Nations under Johnson.

### Meet on Rwanda June 6

NAIROBI, May 28: The presidents of Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Zaire will meet on June 6 to find ways of ending the bloodbath in Rwanda, Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi said, reports Reuter.

Speaking at a rally on Friday in Kangema, 150 km north of the capital Nairobi, Moi said Rwanda's neighbours could not sit back and watch "innocent Rwanda civilian lives wasted."

He did not say where the meeting would be held but Foreign Ministry officials said it might be in Tanzania, either in the capital Dar Es Salaam or the town of Arusha.

An estimated half a million people have perished in seven weeks of violence in Rwanda triggered by the killing of President Juvenal Habyarimana on April 6 in an rocket attack on his plane. President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi also died in the attack.

## Solzhenitsyn prepares to outline his future plans

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia, May 28: Writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, after an emotional return from 20 years in exile, prepared to outline his future plans today before embarking on a long journey across Russia, reports Reuter.

The 75-year-old Nobel Literature Prize winner, expelled by the KGB secret police from the Soviet Union in 1974, was due to hold his first news conference (around 0500 GMT) since setting foot on Russian soil on Friday.

He planned his comeback carefully as private affair. But he was welcomed in a blaze of publicity amid speculation over what role he might play in Russian politics and society.

Solzhenitsyn rejected a specially-prepared residence in favour of a Soviet era hotel in the centre of the Pacific Port of Vladivostok. Even in the hotel he made clear that he would not accept any special treatment.

He has repeatedly said he would not seek an official position. But this did not exclude the possibility that he would emerge as a spiritual leader of something of great importance in Russia.

Most top officials in Vladivostok, including local bishop Veniamin and Deputy Regional Governor Igor Lebedinets, gathered at the airport to greet Solzhenitsyn.

Some 150 reporters, cameramen, sound crew and photographers struggled on the tarmac to capture images of the man who became an icon of defiance by his resistance to communist rule.

From Vladivostok, he planned to travel overland to Moscow, getting to know his homeland slowly after 20 years in the West. It was not known when he would start the journey.

"I bow to the earth of Kolyma where many hundreds

of thousands if not millions, of our executed fellow-countrymen are buried," he said during a refuelling stop in the bleak and remote far eastern town of Magadan, centre of Kolyma region.

Solzhenitsyn became famous inside and outside Russia for his portrayal of the huge system of repression built up largely by dictator Josef Stalin, under which the communists jailed, exiled and shot millions of real or imagined political opponents.

Magadan was an unofficial capital of a huge network of camps, known around the world by a name given by Solzhenitsyn — the "Gulag Archipelago."

"I know that I am returning to a Russia tortured, stunned, altered beyond recognition, convulsively searching for itself, for its own true identity," he told thousands of people in central Vladivostok.



Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn raises his fists in the air as he speaks on patriotic subjects during a press conference held in Vladivostok in Russia yesterday. — AFP photo

### Explosion at US chemical plant: One killed

BELPRE, Ohio, May 28: An explosion at a chemical plant sent flames shooting up to 600 feet (180 metres) into the air Friday and produced a mass of thick, black smoke that forced 1,700 people to flee. At least one worker was killed, reports AP.

One of the three employees who were in the Shell Chemical Co. plant at the time was killed and the other two were missing late Friday and presumed dead, a Shell statement said. Plant manager Arnie Dittmar would not immediately identify the three.

Late Friday afternoon the fire was brought under control and people were allowed to return to their homes. No injuries were reported.

Fifty to 75 of the factory's 480 employees were working at the time of the explosion spokesman Mike White said.