

BRIEFLY

Chinese FM to visit Britain: China's foreign minister Qian Qichen has accepted an invitation to visit Britain, the Foreign Office said Friday, AP reports from London.

Dates are being discussed but nothing has been finalized, a spokesman said, requesting customary anonymity. News of the visit was a sign of improving relations between China and Britain, which have been strained by Britain's attempts to broaden Hong Kong's democratic system before China recovers the colony in 1997.

Explosion rocks Sarajevo: A huge explosion rocked central Sarajevo Friday after what witnesses described as a rocket attack near Bosnian government headquarters, Reuters reporters says from Sarajevo.

The blast sent a column of smoke spiralling above the city and scattered debris across a wide area. A Reuters photographer at the scene said there were an unknown number of casualties.

2 die in Ukrainian jet crash: A MiG-29 fighter belonging to Ukraine's airforce crashed in the west of the country, killing both pilots and injuring a woman on the ground, a Defence Ministry official said Friday, AP reports from Kiev.

The two-engine jet went down during a training flight Thursday, ministry spokesman Dmitry Shkurko said. It fell into a small river near the village of Bovshin, about 480 kilometres (300 miles) west of Kiev, he said. The debris slightly injured a local woman and damaged several buildings.

Nigerian policewomen for UN: Plans have reached an advanced state for 10 Nigerian policewomen to leave for UN peace keeping operations, Rachael Iyamabor, the Assistant Inspector-General of Police in charge of Training, said in Lagos Thursday, Xinhua reports from Lagos.

Speaking to newsmen, Iyamabor said that this was the first time that the UN had requested Nigerian policewomen for a mission.

'NZ troops should quit Bosnia': New Zealand should pull its 250 troops out of Bosnia in protest of plans to resume French nuclear testing in the south Pacific, the former deputy leader of the British Labour Party, Bryan Gould said yesterday, AFP reports from Wellington.

Now chancellor of Waikato University in Hamilton, north of Wellington, he questioned why New Zealand should show itself to be "a good world citizen" in the face of contempt from the major powers.

Jakarta cuts army seats in House: Indonesia's House of Representatives passed a bill reducing the number of seats reserved for the military from 100 to 75 starting in 1997, a House spokeswoman said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The bill was supported by all four factions at a parliamentary hearing on Thursday and was sent to President Suharto for signing, which should be concluded "within a week or so," according to Tami, the House spokeswoman.

China executes 6 more: China has executed six men and jailed another 21 for dealing illegally in thousands of dollars worth of tax invoices, Xinhua news agency said yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

Gao Changli, vice-president of the Supreme People's Court, explaining the severity of the sentences, said value-added tax (VAT) invoices were an important part of China's tax system reform. Criminal activity that involved them must be severely punished, Xinhua quoted Gao as saying.

Greece quake toll rises to 16: A Swiss rescue team worked early Friday the rubble of a collapsed apartment building to reach survivors of a deadly earthquake that toppled walls and buildings in southwestern port town of Egion, AP reports from Egion.

At least 16 people were killed and hundreds of others were left homeless by the quake which struck at 3:15 am Thursday when townspeople were asleep.

50 Karen guerillas surrender: Nearly 50 guerillas from the last major ethnic group fighting the Myanmar junta have surrendered to government troops, a state-owned newspaper reported Friday, AP reports from Yangon.

The New Light of Myanmar said the guerillas were part of the Karen National Union, which has been fighting for autonomy from the government in Rangoon since 1948. They surrendered with their weapons at a military camp June 11 in Tarlay, in Karen State, near the border with Thailand, it said.

4 killed in shootout in Egypt: Three suspected Muslim extremists and a policeman were killed Thursday in a shootout during a police search in southern Egypt, security officials said, AP reports from Cairo.

The officials said police were searching a farm in the village of El-Idara when they encountered the militants, who opened fire and killed and policemen Hassan Mohammed. Police returned fire and killed the three men.

Blast in Bogota: A small bomb exploded 150 meters (yards) from the presidential palace Thursday. No deaths were reported, but radio stations said at least two people were injured, AP says from Bogota.

Police and soldiers rushed to the scene, and sirens blared in Bogota's government district. Both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, located nearby, were in session when the bomb went off.

Irish guitarist Gallagher dead: Irish blues and rock guitarist Rory Gallagher has died at a London hospital of medical complications following a successful liver transplant, his publicists reported Thursday, AP reports from London.

He was 46. He died Wednesday at King's College Hospital, the company Poole Edwards Publicity said in a statement. It said the musician had been admitted to London's Cromwell Hospital eight weeks ago following a short illness and was diagnosed as having liver failure.

6 more killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, June 16: Six more people were killed overnight in violence in Karachi with the city's top official denouncing the urban guerilla war he says is being conducted by "hooligans," reports AFP.

The official's remarks came during a new wave of terror in Pakistan's economic capital, which has seen more than 700 people killed this year and more than 100 in this month alone.

Hospital sources said six people were killed in isolated incidents overnight.

International
Russian offers of money, plane refused

Chechens threaten to blow up Budennovsk Hospital

BUDENNOVSK, Russia, June 16: Chechen rebels, who seized about 1,000 hostages in the Budennovsk Hospital and are threatening to blow the hospital up, have refused Russian offers of money and a plane, officials said today, reports AFP.

At least 111 people have been killed in the violence, which began Wednesday when about 60 heavily armed Chechen fighters grabbed an estimated 1,000 hostages and holed themselves up in the hospital of this southern town, Russian deputy prosecutor General Oleg Gaidanov said.

Earlier eyewitness and official estimates of the number of hostages had ranged from 800 to 1,500.

Talks in the southern Russian city between officials and the gunmen, who are demanding an end to the six-month war in Chechnya and withdrawal of Russian troops, have been fruitless, said Russian Vice Premier Nikolai Yegorov.

"We have offered to give them a plane so that they could leave anywhere they want, we've offered them any sum of money want, but they refused," he said, addressing a crowd in Budennovsk's main square.

"We have brought their families from Chechnya to talk to them, but that has not worked," he said.

An offer to withdraw 1,000 Russian troops from Chechnya for every 1,000

Chechen fighters who disarmed was also rejected, he said. Chechen guerilla forces only number a few thousand against tens of thousands of Russian troops.

There was still no decision on whether to try and storm the hospital, Yegorov said.

"I have sufficient means to demolish the whole town and if the Russians launch an attack, I will blow up the hospital," Basayev, rebel leaders told journalists allowed into the hospital late Thursday.

Considerable supplies of heavy-calibre automatic weapons and shoulder-held anti-tank rockets could be seen in the hospital. There were about 60 Chechen guerillas in the hospital, while other groups were re-

portedly trying to get back to Chechnya.

Basayev said five captured Russian officers - four Interior Ministry officers and a pilot - had been executed because it was believed they had participated in the war in Chechnya.

Yegorov underlined the potential for a bloodbath if an attack was launched. "There are 18 tanks of oxygen in the basement of the hospital, plus petrol. You understand perfectly what would happen if we attack," he told the crowd in the centre of the once sleepy provincial city, 120 kilometres (70 miles) northwest of the Chechen border.

"All the hostages would perish," Yegorov said.

NC will launch protest against mid-term polls

KATHMANDU, June 16: Terming the announcement of mid-term polls as a "conspiracy" the Nepali Congress (NC), the main opposition in the dissolved house, decided to launch nationwide protests against it, reports Xinhua.

The former main opposition claimed that the dissolution of the house was a breach of the spirit of the constitution and an insult to the parliament and sovereign people as well, according to local press reports today.

At the recommendation of Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari of the minority CPN-UML government, King Birendra had dissolved the lower house on June 13 and announced a fresh mid-term elections to be held on November 23.

China postpones top-level talks with Taiwan

TAIPEI, June 16: China has postponed top-level talks with Taiwan scheduled to be held in Beijing in late July over what it termed an "unfriendly gesture" by this nationalist island, an official here said, reports AFP.

The postponement of the talks - on civilian issues such as the repatriation of hijackers and on boosting economic ties - comes just a day after Taiwanese premier Lien Chan left on a private visit to Europe and four days after President Lee Teng Hui returned from a controversial trip to the United States.

Lee's visit infuriated China, which tries to limit Taiwan's diplomatic links as it regards the island as a renegade province.

Encephalitis breaks out in Bihar: 150 die

NEW DELHI, June 16: An outbreak of encephalitis in the impoverished eastern Indian state of Bihar has left 150 people, mostly children, dead in the past week, the Press Trust of India (PTI) and newspapers reported today, says AFP.

Hindkeshari Yadav, an MP from the opposition Janata Dal party in the Bihar state assembly, was quoted by PTI as saying that hospital wards in the state's Muzaffarpur district were crowded with dying patients.

Most of them were children, he said. Many were lying on the floor because of a shortage of beds and were not receiving any treatment.



Britain's Princess of Wales talks backstage with some of the young ballerinas who entertained her on Thursday evening at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. Lady Diana arrived in the Russian capital earlier in the day for a 24-hour visit. —AFP/UNB photo

US accused of interfering Pak internal affairs

ISLAMABAD, June 16: Pakistan complained on Thursday of US interference in its internal affairs after Washington voiced concern over high treason charges brought by the Pakistani government against opposition leader Nawaz Sharif, reports Reuter.

A government statement quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman describing as "unwarranted and an interference in Pakistan's internal affairs" a statement by a US State Department spokesman on Wednesday that Pakistan's move "does not bode well" for the country and its judicial institutions.

The Pakistani spokesman said friendly relations between the two countries were based on respect for each other's sovereignty and "comments from official spokesmen on such matters would not be acceptable from any country, no matter how friendly."

He said Pakistan's views on this subject had been communicated to the United States.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns told reporters in Washington on Wednesday: "While it would certainly not be appropriate for the US government to comment on the specifics of the case against Nawaz Sharif, we are surprised at this decision, and we are concerned that such a precedent does not bode well for Pakistan and judicial institutions."

Pakistani Interior Minister Naseerullah Babar said on Tuesday he had authorised the Punjab provincial government to bring high treason charges against Sharif and some of his associates.

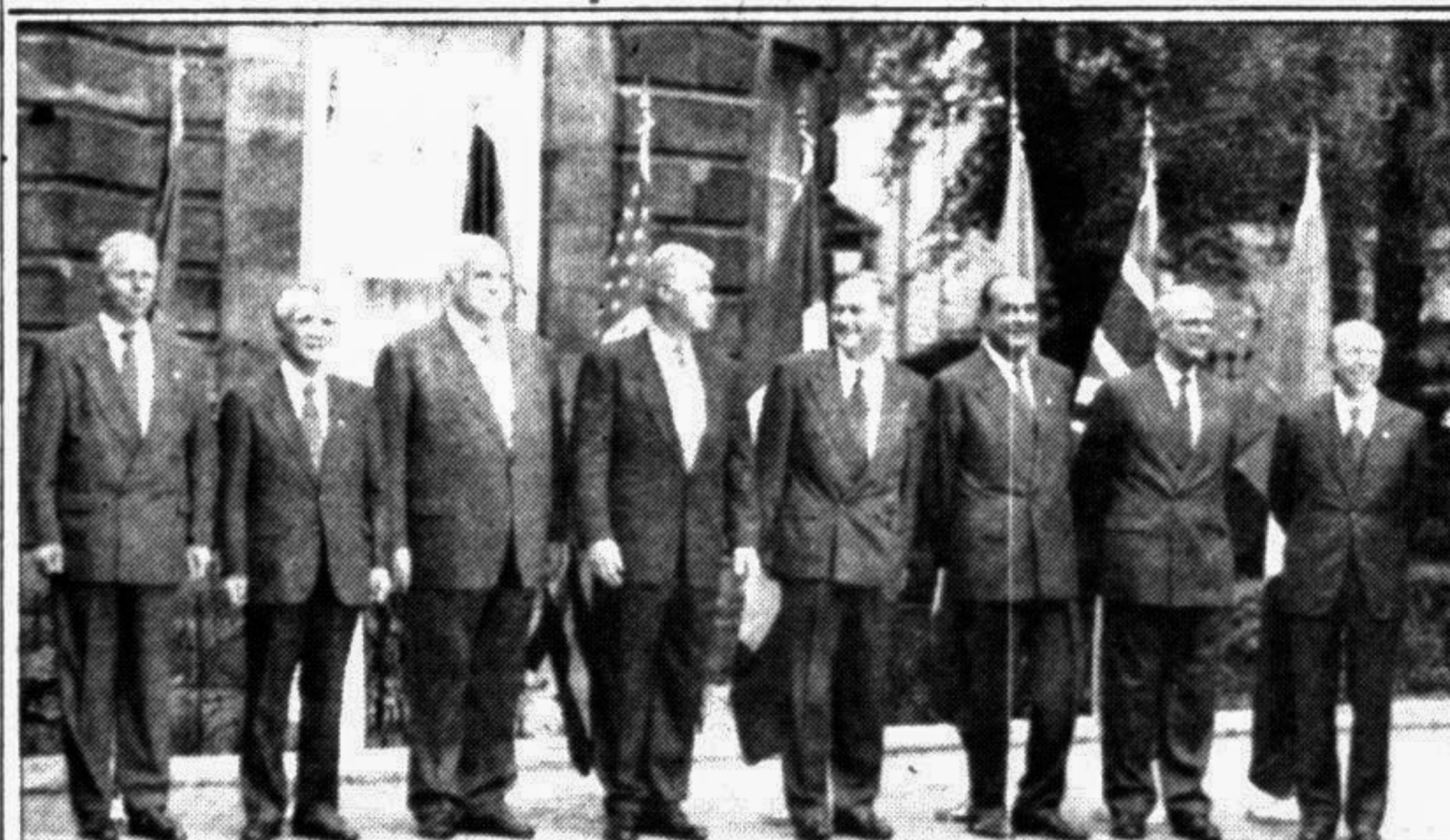
He said he had acted be-

cause of an alleged attempt by Sharif to oust the elected Punjab government when he was prime minister in 1993 by means of a presidential proclamation that had not been signed by then President Ghulam Ishaq Khan.

A spokesman for Sharif described the allegations as concocted and trumped up.

Burns said the Benazir government's move "does not bode well because we think that the emphasis in the continued relations between the opposition and government should be on political dialogue and not charges of this type."

Islamabad has been keen to improve ties with Washington, strained over Pakistan's nuclear programme. Benazir's visit to Washington in April advanced that goal.



Leaders of the G-7 countries pose Thursday for the traditional group photo at the Government House in Halifax. (L-R) European Commission President Jacques Santer, Japan PM Tomichi Murayama, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, President Bill Clinton, Canadian PM Jean Chretien, French President Jacques Chirac, British PM John Major and Italian President Catterino Dini. —AFP/UNB photo

G-7 summit appeals for an end to Bosnian fighting

HALIFAX, Nova Scotia, June 16: The Group of Seven summit cast aside its economic agenda on Thursday to make a dramatic late night appeal for a halt to all fighting in Bosnia, reports Reuter.

Worried that the massing of tens of thousands of Bosnian government troops north of Sarajevo could lead to the bloodiest conflict of the war, the rich nations' club spent most of its first working session hammering out a statement read by Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien. "At a time when all infor-

mation indicates that there is a danger of renewed intensification of fighting in Bosnia, in particular in Sarajevo, we send out to all the parties a strong call for the greatest restraint," Chretien said.

"We appeal to the Bosnian Serbs and to the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina to establish an immediate moratorium on military operations in order to allow political negotiations to resume as soon as possible," he added.

Even as Chretien spoke, reports came in from Sarajevo of heavy small arms, machine-

gun and mortar fire in the city, gripped by days of rumours of an impending government assault to lift the 38-month-long Serb siege of the city.

The summit had not been expected to get to Bosnia until today when Russia's President Boris Yeltsin will arrive.

Instead a working dinner of venison in wine sauce and frozen soufflé at Halifax's Oranienburg government house was turned in a mini-foreign office with printers and computers installed and foreign ministers racing in and out of the dining

room.

A Canadian government official said France's new President Jacques Chirac had suggested that the meeting start with a discussion of the worsening situation in Bosnia and that the leaders of France, Italy, Germany, the United States, Japan, Britain and Canada issue an immediate statement.

"Something that you thought had gone from bad to worse, went from bad to worse to terrible... we seem to be coming to a moment of truth," a Canadian official

said.

A fuller discussion of the Bosnian issue will be held today when Yeltsin arrives with his foreign minister.

But despite the strong wording of the G-7 statement, it appeared unlikely to have any real effect on the conflict.

Officials indicated the main concern of the leaders was to rush out a statement on Bosnia because of the worsening situation there.

Troops launch lightning offensive against LTTE

COLOMBO, June 16: Sri Lanka government troops today launched a lightning offensive to capture northern town from Tamil rebels, military officials said, reports AFP.

Military spokesman Sarath Munasinghe said troops from the Palaly military base in the Jaffna Peninsula of northern Sri Lanka were "clearing Atchuvelly town area" which had been held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"So far troops have found two terrorist bodies," the spokesman added.

LTTE transmissions monitored by the military indicated that rebels have suffered 20 wounded, Munasinghe said in a statement issued here. There was no word of casualties to security forces.

"The terrorists have also informed their leaders over the radio that they cannot

hold on and therefore are withdrawing. Civilians in Atchuvelly area seem to have vacated the area on setting the advancing troops," Munasinghe said.

The operation condemned "Lightning Strike" was launched to "draw and kill maximum possible terrorist," Munasinghe said.

It was not immediately clear if the offensive was limited to only securing LTTE-held areas close to the Palaly base, which has been frequently targeted by LTTE gunners in Atchuvelly.

Previously operations by troops at Palaly have been limited to capturing LTTE-held areas close by.

Today's offensive came amid mounting speculation here of a large military assault against the LTTE on the Jaffna Peninsula, the rebel's main stronghold.

Off the Record

If Hitler won the war...

LONDON: German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler planned to transfer Nelson's Column - central London's famous landmark - to Berlin if he won the war, according to a new book published here, reports AFP.

He believed removing the column from Trafalgar Square and erecting it in Berlin would deprive Britain of its most potent symbol of naval strength and underline Germany's dominance.

The plot to steal the column as a war trophy was disclosed in "the Nelson companion", published by the Royal Naval Museum to mark the start of the "Nelson decade" leading up to the battle of Trafalgar bicentenary in 2005.

Hitler is said to have made the plans in 1940 in the run-up to operation Sea Lion, the Nazi plan to invade Britain during World War II, according to an essay in the book by Flora Fraser, biographer of Admiral Horatio Nelson's mistress Emma Hamilton.

C-vit as life saver!

LONDON: Eating an orange a day can help keep you alive during the cold, dark winter months, British doctors reported Friday, says Reuter.

Two separate reports in the British medical journal showed that vitamin C was especially helpful in keeping older people alive. Not only does it protect from strokes, but it improves the functioning of the body's immune system, they said.

Kay-tee Khaw of Cambridge University's clinical gerontology unit and colleagues found that older people who ate more fruit and vegetables containing vitamin C had lower death rates.

They tested 96 men and women aged 65 to 74 living in Cambridge, checking their blood and breathing and asking them what they ate and drank.

Those who had the highest levels of vitamin C were less likely to die, they wrote. "Vitamin C may protect against cardiovascular disease," they concluded.

Warning for 'rich people'

BEIJING: High blood pressure and diabetes are becoming widespread in China because of the fast rising standard of living, Xinhua reported Sunday, says AFP.

About 90 million Chinese now suffer from high blood pressure or hypertension, which has become the leading chronic fatal disease in the country, according to a recent study at the Beijing centre for the treatment of heart and lung disease.

Hypertension, which affects 3.5 million Chinese annually, is increasingly common among the young and in rural areas, according to the study, Xinhua added.

Experts attribute the upsurge to a high intake of alcohol and salt and to lack of exercise.

China is estimated to have 25 million diabetics, a four-fold increase since 1979, according to Xinhua, quoting the conclusions of a recent symposium.

Palestinian polls likely in Oct or Nov

GAZA CITY, June 16: Palestinian elections could be held in October or November once Israel and the PLO reach a deal on extending self-rule, Israeli Environment Minister Yossi Sarid said here Thursday, reports AFP.

He said a deal was possible in the coming weeks and "it will be a part of the agreement that the elections be held in either October or November."

"This will be a critical point of no return to establish a new reality," Sarid told reporters.

He said after meeting PLO leader Yasser Arafat for more than an hour that "even though officially speaking there is not going to be a

Palestinian state, but for all practical purposes it is going to be a Palestinian state."

Both sides had to show "responsibility and flexibility," he added.

Before the meeting, the minister said the PLO had to accept a partial deal on an Israeli army redeployment on the West Bank if it wanted to meet a July 1 target date for an accord on the next phase of self-rule.

"If we want to reach a total accord, wrapped up with all the details and all the specifications, then July 1 is not a realistic date," Sarid told state radio.

PLO chief negotiator Nabil Shaath said everything was still up for discussion.

Mahdi dismisses Aided's claim

MOGADISHU, June 16: Somali faction leader Ali Mahdi Mohamed has dismissed claims here on Thursday that his arch rival Mohamed Farah Aided had been elected "interim president" of Somalia, reports AFP.

Addressing reporters, Mahdi, whose Somali Salvation Alliance (SSA) faction controls northern Mogadishu, described the government of Aided, announced by supporters here on Thursday, as "a comedy and day-time dream," and pledged that he will never recognise a government

revamping the United Nations and the world's financial institutions.

Murayama appealed to Clinton to abandon the sanctions, but said Japan would not recognise them as valid if they were put into effect.

Several other prickly issues could threaten the well-scripted summit agenda.

France's partners are upset at its decision to resume nuclear weapons testing after a three-year moratorium and Britain and Germany are arguing over a controversial plan to bury a polluted oil rig at sea.