

# BRIEFLY

**Suu Kyi turns 50 today:** Myanmar's leading opposition figure, Aung San Suu Kyi, turns 50 today with flagging hopes of emerging in the near future from six years of house arrest, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Frail-looking but strong-willed, Aung San Suu Kyi has refused to compromise with the ruling junta and thus looks set to begin her seventh year of house arrest on July 19.

**Landslides kill 22 in Nepal:** At least 22 people have been killed and 14 others are missing in landslides triggered by torrential rain in eastern Nepal, the state RSS news agency said yesterday, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The landslides hit three villages in Khotang district, 225 kilometres (140 miles) east of the Nepalese capital on Saturday, RSS said.

**China frees top dissident:** China released from jail yesterday leading 1989 pro-democracy movement student activist Liu Gang at the end of a six-year jail sentence for "counter-revolutionary" crimes, AFP reports from Beijing.

The 35-year-old dissident, number three on a 1989 most-wanted list of pro-democracy activists, said by telephone from his father's home in northeastern Jilin province that he had been released early Saturday morning.

**Floods claim 61 in Iran:** Sixty-one people have been killed in major floods in western and northern Iran in the past weeks, which also caused millions of dollars' worth of damage, the official news agency Irna reported yesterday, AFP says from Tehran.

The agency, quoting Interior Ministry sources, said flooding had destroyed 112,000 hectares (280,000 acres) of farmland and 9,000 homes, causing 160 billion rials (53 million dollars) of damage.

**Gas explosion kills 5 in China:** A gas explosion in an apartment block Shanghai late Saturday caused the death of five people and injury to six others, news reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Shanghai.

The reports said preliminary investigation showed that the blast in southwestern Minhang district was caused by residents renovating their homes and setting a light some inflammable gas.

**Tremors rock Indonesian island:** Tremors continued to rock Indonesia's Flores Island yesterday after an earthquake injured two people and damaged more than 100 houses, an official said, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

Two major tremors shook the island's main town of Larantuka and neighbouring areas after the first quake on Saturday morning, which measured 5.2 on the open-ended Richter scale, the official in Larantuka told Reuters by telephone.

**3 soldiers killed in S Lebanon:** Muslim guerillas killed three Israeli soldiers in South Lebanon yesterday in their bloodiest attack this year against Israeli occupation forces, pro-Israeli militia sources said, Reuter reports from Marjayoun, Lebanon.

Seven other soldiers were injured, one seriously, when the guerillas ambushed and Israeli patrol with machinegun fire and rockets, the sources with the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) said.

**Screenwriter Bennett dies:** British-born screenwriter Charles Bennett, whose collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock breathed suspense into classics such as "The 39 Steps" and "The Man who Knew Too Much," has died. He was 95, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Bennett died Thursday at a hospital. He was born August 2, 1899, in Shoreham-by-Sea, England, and was a child actor before serving in World War I. After the war, he began writing.

**Pak heat wave toll crosses 130:** The death toll from a heat wave gripping Pakistan since early May has crossed 130, health officials and hospital sources said yesterday, AFP reports from Islamabad.

But the News Daily put the number of dead at 200 over the past three weeks alone. Most fatalities were reported from rural areas, amid temperatures ranging between 45 degrees Celsius and 52 degrees Celsius in a few places.

**Ex-UK minister Ennals dies:** Lord Ennals, a former British Labour Social Services Minister in the James Callaghan government and a champion of the left, has died in his sleep on Saturday at the age of 72 at his London home, his family said, AFP reports from London.

Lord Ennals of Norwich, who had been ill for some time, was Secretary of State for the Department of Social Services between 1976-79, during the notorious "winter of discontent" in 1978 which eventually destroyed the Callaghan government.

**Newsman shot dead in Algeria:** An Algerian journalist was shot dead yesterday in the eastern town of Constantine, the Algerian news agency APS reported, Reuter says from Paris.

It quoted a security services statement as saying that Takouchet Ahmed, alias Hakim, 30, a journalist at the local radio Cirta, was killed on Sunday morning. No group claimed responsibility for the shooting.

**89 writers, newsmen killed:** Eighty-nine writers and journalists have been killed in the past year worldwide and 150 imprisoned for using their right to express themselves, said a Pen Club reports published in Prague on Sunday, AFP says from Prague.

Thirty-seven authors and journalists have died in Rwanda, 26 in Tajikistan and 12 in Algeria including three in the last month, the Pen Club's Writers in Prison Committee said. Four journalists were killed in Colombia and four others reporting on inter-ethnic strife from Georgia's separatist Abkhazia region.

## Baghdad executes 150 rebel troops

NICOSIA, June 18: Iraqi authorities have executed 150 soldiers who took part in an abortive mutiny on the outskirts of Baghdad, reliable Iraqi sources told AFP today.

Hundreds of relatives of the rebel soldiers of the Republican Guards' 14 July battalion have also been arrested, the sources said.

Forces loyal to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein crushed the mutiny led by General Turki Ismail al-Dulaimi a day after it broke out Wednesday in Abu Gharib, west of Baghdad. The Iraqi authorities have denied that any mutiny took place.

The sources said Iraqi intelligence services and security forces were combing the whole Abu Gharib region and Anbar province as far as the borders with Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia in search of fleeing soldiers.

The rebels, who numbered less than 1,000, attacked Radio Baghdad transmitters but failed to seize Abu Gharib jail, where they hoped to release prisoners held since unrest broke out in western Iraq on May 18.

Almost 850 people were rounded up after the May 18 clashes, which erupted following the return to his family of the mutilated body of an executed Dulaimi air force general, according to residents of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province in West Iraq.

# Russia will halt offensive if Chechens free hostages

BUDYONOVSK, June 18: Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin Sunday said Russia was prepared to halt all military actions in Chechnya if rebels holding about 2,000 hostages in a hospital release their captives, reports AP.

"I have one condition, all the hostages must be released," Chernomyrdin said in an early morning telephone conversation with rebel leader Shamil Basayev. "At that very moment, we will stop immediately all military actions."

Chernomyrdin's side of the conversation with Basayev was shown on Russian television.

Earlier, news agencies reported that the two had reached tentative agreement for most hostages' release after four days of standoff.

Chernomyrdin briefly spoke to the rebel leader for a second time later in the morning, but the ITAR-Tass and Interfax news agencies said Basayev requested a delay to let him confer with his fellow rebels on their options.

President Boris Yeltsin, meanwhile, returned to Moscow from the Group of Seven to deal with the crisis.

Interfax said the government was ready to cease military operations in Chechnya in return for the hostages, but had rejected new rebel demands. ITAR-Tass said the tentative pact would let most hostages go free, with some remaining to ensure the rebels' safety.

Saturday's fighting left dozens of people dead and wounded, according to some of the approximately 150 hostages who were later released by the Chechens. Some of the hostages screamed at Russian soldiers, saying they had killed innocents.

Troops backed by helicopters and armored personnel carriers fired machine guns, grenades and rockets at the hospital. Authorities said they freed 227 hostages, although it appeared many were released by the Chechens after the fighting.

ITAR-Tass said Sunday that another 32 hostages had been released overnight.

Basayev and about 50 followers have been holed up in the hospital for four days, threatening to kill hostages unless Russia ends its war in nearby Chechnya. They have refused offers of safe passage out.

An Interior Ministry official, who declined to be identified, told news agencies the government had not ordered the failed raids on the hospital.

But Yeltsin told reporters at the G-7 summit that he and Interior Minister Viktor Yerin had "tentatively agreed" before his Halifax trip to use force.

Yeltsin also told reporters that Chechen rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev asked for and was granted asylum in Turkey. But officials in Turkey and the United States said they were unaware of any such request.

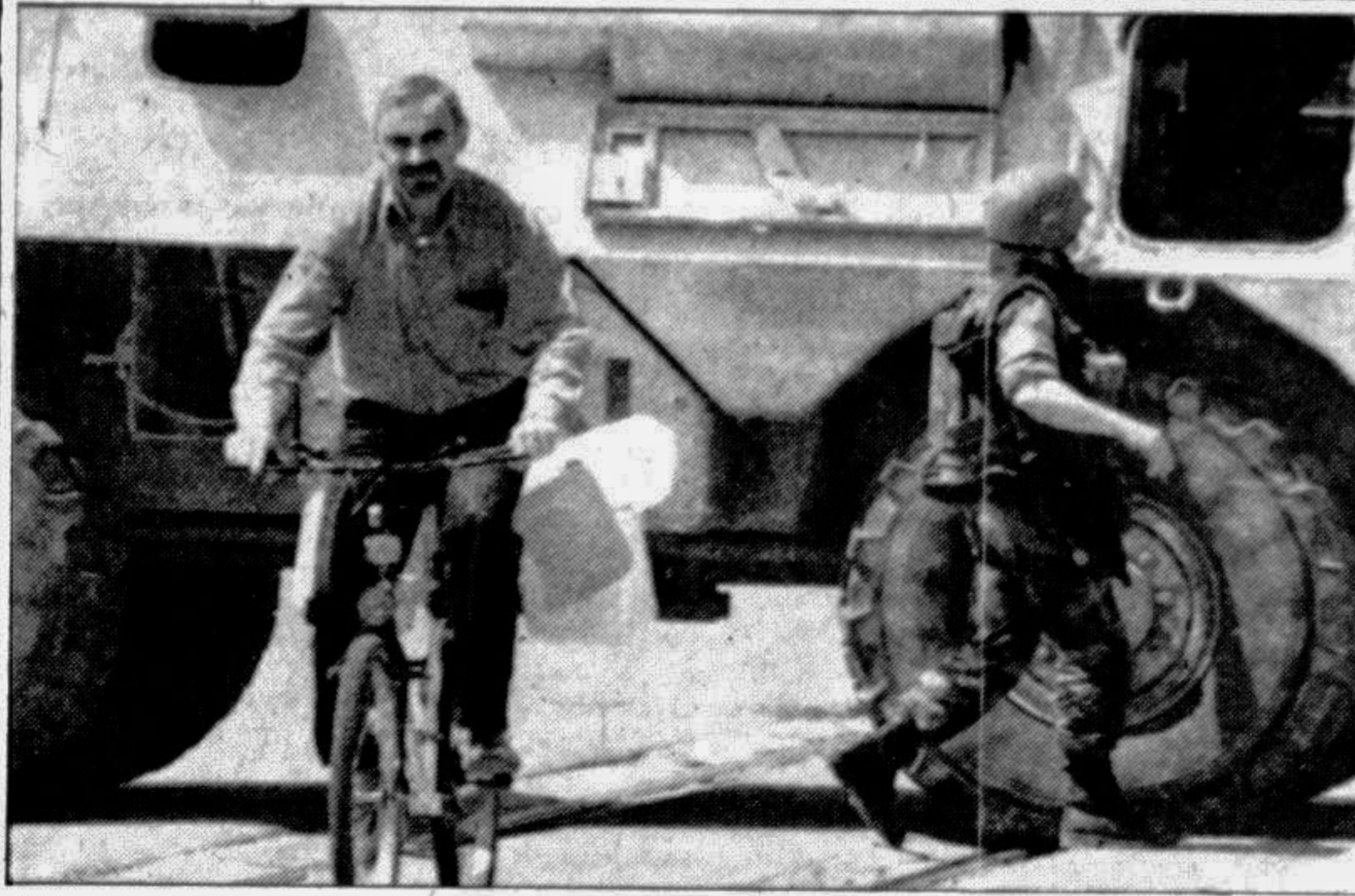
Basayev is a top field commander for Dudayev, who denies he was involved with the raid on Budyonovsk.

## More troops to be deployed in Karachi

KARACHI, June 18: Pakistan Premier Benazir Bhutto has ordered paramilitary reinforcements to bolster a force of 38,000 security personnel in this violence-wracked city as the death toll for the month hit more than 140 today, military sources said, reports AP.

Additional paramilitary troops would be moved from the neighbouring provinces of Punjab and Baluchistan and from the country's northwest regions to reinforce 15,000 military rangers and 23,000 police stationed in the city of 12 million people, the sources said.

The decision was made during a meeting between Benazir, President Farooq Leghari and army chief of staff General Abdul Waheed as 14 more people fell victim to ethnic and sectarian violence on Saturday.



A Sarajevo man, transporting his water supplies with his bicycle, crosses a place in the centre of Sarajevo Saturday as a UN armoured vehicle protects him from possible sniper fire. — AFP/UNB photo

## LTTE ambushes army patrol: 12 killed

COLOMBO, June 18: Tamil Tiger guerillas ambushed an army patrol in eastern Sri Lanka today, killing at least eight soldiers and raised to 12 the death toll within a 12-hour period, the military said, reports AP.

Gunmen from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fired automatic weapons and ambushed the soldiers at the village of Arunapura in the eastern Polonnaruwa district, a military spokesman said.

"We have lost eight men in the ambush, we are awaiting details," the spokesman said.

The latest killings came after a group of Tiger guerillas and the army exchanged fire at a northern military complex overnight Saturday, leaving one soldier and three rebels dead.

## Afghan FM urges UN to help end civil war

TEHRAN, June 18: Afghan Foreign Minister Najibullah Lafrai called on the United Nations here Saturday to play a more active role in helping end the civil war in Afghanistan, reports AP.

"If the United Nations does not act according to the realities in Afghanistan, it will get nowhere," said Lafrai, who was meeting his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Valayati.

The UN representative in Afghanistan, Mahmud Meistri, was forced to withdraw a peace plan put forward in February amid opposition from President Burhanuddin Rabbani's supporters and an army of religious students known as Taliban.

## Sino-US ties at crossroads

BEIJING, June 18: China warned today that Sino-US relations were at a "crossroads," two days after recall of its ambassador in Washington signalled that ties had plunged to their lowest point in 16 years, reports AP.

But despite continuing to vent its fury over the US decision to allow Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's recent "private" visit, Beijing failed to spell out any substantive retaliation beyond the gestures that analysts say pose little far-reaching threat to ties.

In a lengthy commentary entitled "where does US want relations with China to go?" the official Xinhua news agency lambasted the US move, saying Washington had "perfidiously and brazenly" changed its policy under which it pledges to maintain only unofficial ties with Beijing's arch-rival.

Sino-US relations are once again at a crossroads. We will wait and see where the United States actually wants Sino-US relations to go," the commentary said.

The warning followed Beijing's announcement early Saturday that it had recalled its ambassador to the United States Li Daoyu for consultations on the current state of Sino-US relations.

The announcement preceded by a few hours the departure from Beijing of US ambassador J. Stapleton Roy after a four-year stint the two countries are now expected to remain without ambassadors in each other's capitals for weeks if not months.

Earlier, Beijing suspended discussions with Washington on missile control and cancelled official visits to the United States. On Friday it postponed top-level talks with Taipei.

## Charles, Diana agree not to divorce

LONDON, June 18: A British tabloid reported Sunday that Prince Charles and Princess Diana had agreed not to divorce, and that Queen Elizabeth II hopes they will get back together, reports AP.

The Sunday Express, which based its story on unidentified sources, said the queen and the Queen Mother had both been opposed to the couple's 1992 separation announcement.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said, "Anonymous remarks have no more authority than guesswork."

The newspaper said Charles and Diana had reached a private understanding not to divorce, for the sake of their children, and quoted a source as saying the queen had never given up hope of a reconciliation.

Another unidentified source was quoted as saying, "There has certainly been a very definite change of attitude on both sides." There was no elaboration.

# Off the Record

**A rare accident!**

UTRECHT, Netherlands: A white woman gave birth to one white and one mixed-race child after her white husband's sperm was mixed with that of another client during an in vitro fertilisation, reports AP.

"This is an exceptional case, a rare accident," professor Egberth de Velde, who heads the in vitro fertilisation department at Utrecht's Academic Hospital, said Saturday.

The test tube baby blunder, publicised for the first time this week, has stirred up a sensation in the Netherlands, already debating the ethics of scientific assistance to the reproductive process.

The woman gave birth to the twin boys in December, 1993, but contacted the hospital only several months later when the skin of one child had begun to darken.

According to de Velde, the mix-up likely was due to a lab technician mistakenly placing sperm from the woman's husband in a pipette containing sperm from another man.

He would not disclose the identities of the people involved, nor the race of the unintended sperm donor.

**Rickshaws in Oxford!**

LONDON: A British woman is poised to succeed in her bid to introduce Indian rickshaws to Oxford after a three-year battle, the Sunday Telegraph reported, says AFP.

Erica Steinhauer, an Oxford shopkeeper and bread trader who describes herself as a "South African-Jewish unreconstructed hippy," imported her first rickshaw from India three years ago, hoping to put the pedal-powered taxis in operation immediately.

But a battle with local taxi drivers and with Balliol College led to delays that ended when the Oxford City Council finally passed a rickshaw-by-law that goes into effect in two weeks. The new law is expected to be approved by the Department of Transport.

## Benazir plays down US, IMF concerns

ISLAMABAD, June 18: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Saturday played down US and IMF concerns about her government's political and economic policies, reports Reuter.

she told reporters there was no need to "overreact" to a US State Department spokesman who questioned the government's decision to bring high treason charges against opposition leader Nawaz Sharif.

"Relations between Pakistan and America are good and we should not overreact to a statement of a State Department spokesman," she said.

She also said she did not think a structural adjustment accord with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would collapse because Pakistan's budget for fiscal 1995/96 (July/June) did not meet the IMF targets.

A State Department spokesman had said on Wednesday that the action in bringing treason charges against Sharif did not bode well for Pakistan and its judicial institutions.

## Serbs block relief convoys towards Bosnian enclaves

SARAJEVO, June 18: Separatist Serb forces have blocked two UN relief convoys bound for government enclaves in eastern Bosnia, deepening the country's aid crisis, a UN official said today, reports Reuter.

The convoys, one for Srebrenica and the other for Gorazde, were prevented on Saturday from entering Serb-held Bosnia at the border with Serbia, where they remained overnight. Both were expected to try to reach their destinations again on Sunday.

"They had written clearance from Bosnian Serb Authorities to come yesterday but the Bosnian Serb army said no at the border," said Mark Cutts, head of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

UNHCR has had little luck supplying food, fuel or medicine to government enclaves, including Sarajevo, since NATO-bombed a Serb ammunition dump east of that city in late May.

Serb leaders have issued a series of verbal and written permissions for convoys to cross their territory, most of which have been ignored by Serb forces on the ground.

The UN special envoy to former Yugoslavia and the High Commissioner for Refugees sent a letter to Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic last week castigating him of not following through on convoy commitments made personally.

In addition to the hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped in the enclaves several thousands of UN peacekeepers are stranded as well as suffering from a lack of resupply.

UN military convoys have had no better luck reaching their destinations than UN-HCR trucks.

## Israel seeks US help to stop Hezbollah attacks

JERUSALEM, June 18: Israel has called on the United States to intervene with Syria to stop guerilla attacks on northern Galilee, Israeli radio said today, reports AP.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin put the demand to the US Ambassador in Tel Aviv Martin Indyk, saying that Katyusha rockets fired on Israel last Thursday violated agreements struck with Syria and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah in 1993.

Under the unwritten deal Hezbollah pledged to stop its rocket attacks on Israel in return for an end to Israeli shelling of towns and villages in southern Lebanon.

Meanwhile Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told the weekly cabinet meeting that Syria was not doing enough to stop the anti-Israeli violence in South Lebanon, state radio said.

# Death fear grips thousands of Muslims living in Lankan town

KATTANKUDY, Sri Lanka, June 18: Thousands of Muslims in this Sri Lanka town on the east coast are now living in fear after Tamil Tiger guerillas told them to leave by July 1 or face death, reports AP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) made the threats to leaders of the 60,000-strong community to move elsewhere, alleging Muslims were an obstacle to the formation of an independent Tamil homeland.

In a town where the LTTE has been blamed for the massacre of 123 Muslims at two mosques in August 1990, the hand-written statements mailed by the Tigers, group known for its ruthlessness, have cast a dark shadow.

"We are very much afraid of the LTTE," said Abdul Ghafoor, a 27-year-old trader who miraculously survived the late night attack on the town's huge Grand Mosque five years ago.

"Although the situation is peaceful now, nothing can be said about tomorrow," he added. "About the LTTE, you can never be sure. They will be quiet today, suddenly go on the offensive the next day."

On Thursday night, residents cowered in their homes after hearing rapid bursts of gunfire on the town's outskirts, fearing a LTTE attack. But it turned out to be a false alarm.

"The trouble is the security forces meant to protect us are

more afraid of the Tigers than us," complained Mohammed Salim, a handloom merchant. "They will be the first to run if the LTTE attacks."

Hundreds of thousands of Muslims, who also speak Tamil, have lived for generations in peace with the mainly-Hindu Tamils across Sri Lanka's northeast, where the LTTE is fighting for a homeland called Eelam.

In 1990, nearly 100,000 Muslims were suddenly ordered by the LTTE to quit the guerilla-held northern region. They were given just 48 hours to pack up.

Many turned destitute overnight. Thousands still live in refugee camps.

On August 3 that year, suspected LTTE gunmen stormed two mosques here and indiscriminately fired at Muslims kneeling in prayer, killing 103 in one shrine and 20 in another.

Another 100 were massacred in and around a mosque in a neighbouring town a week later. The LTTE denied responsibility for both killings, but the residents claimed to have recognised some of the gunmen.

Dozens of Muslim fishermen have also been killed in the sea.

Tamil sources say the LTTE is peeved by the increasing Muslim claims for autonomy in the sprawling region and has concluded that it would be able to lay claim over the entire northeast only by driving away the community.

## PLO proposes int'l force deployment in West Bank

GAZA, June 18: PLO chairman Yasser Arafat has proposed international forces be stationed in the West Bank when Israeli forces redeploy outside Palestinian areas, a senior PLO official said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The PLO leader also announced that he would go on a hunger strike today in a solidarity with some 6,000 prisoners held by Israel. The PLO is demanding that the prisoners be released.

"All of the detainees are going on a hunger strike and I will be the first to join in the strike with them," Arafat said.

Tayeb Abdel Rahim, General Secretary of the Palestinian authority, said that in negotiations on troop redeployment Israel had presented a plan to patrol with its own forces.

Abdel Rahim quoted Arafat as saying Palestinian forces should control the area but, if Israel disagrees, international forces should be brought in.

"President Arafat said there must be Palestinian police presence in the area which falls between Palestinian populated centres and Jewish settlements in the West Bank in order to maintain law and order during the interim period," Abdel-Rahim told Reuters.

If Israel did not accept Palestinian presence in that area, president Arafat said, we are prepared to accept an international force: American, Canadian, Australian, Turkish, European, Norwegian, Swedish, and Egyptian, in this area in the interim phase," he added.