

US warplanes arrive in Jordan to help enforce 'no fly zone' over Iraq

AMMAN, Apr 13: United States warplanes arrived in Jordan on Friday to help enforce a western imposed 'no fly zone' over southern Iraq, reports Reuters.

Jordan had previously refused to allow allied air forces use of its bases for sorties over Iraq and diplomats said the change reflected a major improvement in US-Jordanian ties, damaged by Amman's support for Baghdad during the 1990-1991 Gulf conflict.

Jordan sensitive to generally anti-western local public opinion which is hostile to any foreign military presence, has so far kept a tight lid on details of the operation.

A Jordanian official confirmed to Reuters all 34 jets involved in the 'Airpower Expeditionary Force' (AEF) had arrived at the main Azraq Base 100 km (60 miles) northeast

of Amman, close to the Iraqi border, from a number of US bases. Prime Minister Abdul Karim Al Kabarti, in an attempt to calm public unease over a possible permanent US military presence, said 1,100 US pilots and support personnel would be staying in tents for a very limited and temporary period.

Kabarti, in his first public comments on the operation, was quoted by the state news agency as saying US troops would also be upgrading Jordanian air bases to allow them to handle the first batch of 16 F-16 aircraft to be delivered in 1997.

He said the sorties would go indirectly through a third Arab country's air space officials privately say it is Saudi Arabia — to southern Iraq and not directly from Jordan.

Chandraswami charged with fraud

NEW DELHI, Apr 13: An Indian holy man close to Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and other government leaders was charged by investigators Friday for allegedly defrauding a businessman of 100,000 dollars eight years ago, reports AP.

The Central Bureau of Investigation said the godman who goes by the name Chandraswami had taken the money from businessman Lakshubal Pathak, promising government contracts for the supply of newsprint and paper pulp.

Chandraswami neither got him the contracts nor returned the money, the CBI said. He was arrested in the case in 1988 and released on bail in the case, but the CBI took nearly eight years to file charges in court.

DPRK criticises Clinton's visit to Seoul

SEOUL, Apr 13: North Korea said Saturday that a planned visit by President Clinton to South Korea will only aggravate tension on the Korean peninsula, reports AP.

North Korea last week declared it would no longer recognise the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War, then sent armed troops into the neutral border village of Panmunjom for three straight nights, highlighting US concerns about security problems in the region.

Clinton was expected to recommitment to the security of South Korea when he meets Tuesday with President Kim Young-sam on the resort island of Cheju.

"As for the South Korea-US cooperation on the lips of the South Korean puppets, it is a sycophantic treachery for inter-Korean confrontation and the aggravation of situation," the North's official Korea Central News Agency said.

Zyuganov firm to win Russian presidential race

MOSCOW, Apr 13: Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, the front-runner in Russia's presidential race, said Friday he was confident of a quick victory in the election, reports AP.

His support was consolidating in Moscow and in the provinces, and estimates showed that about 25 million people were already determined to vote for him on June 16, Zyuganov told a news conference in parliament.

About 7 million to 8 million more votes would give him a victory in the first round, Zyuganov said.

There are approximately 105 million voters in Russia. The turnout in last winter's parliamentary poll was about 65 per cent.

Under Russian law, a candidate has to get more than 50 per cent of the vote to win outright; failing that, the two top vote getters compete in a second round.

Zyuganov dismissed the results of recent public opinion surveys showing that his main rival, President Boris Yeltsin, is gaining on him.

Jyoti terms ban on use of state-owned chopper unjustified

CALCUTTA, Apr 13: The West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, today described as unjustified the Election Commission's blanket ban on the use of state-owned helicopters and aircrafts by chief ministers and political leaders during the election period, reports PTI.

Basu while reacting to the ban order said that he had asked the state chief secretary, N Krishnamurthy, to seek a clarification from the commission.

Talking to newsmen after attending a meeting with district magistrates and superintendents of police here, the chief minister wondered what would happen if a chief minister had to go by helicopter to visit any area affected by natural calamity.

Stating that the 'commission has not done the right thing in imposing such a ban Basu wondered how the election commission changed its view after declaring that the state-owned helicopters could be hired for election campaign. How is it possible?' he asked.



Lebanese Shi'ite families prepare to pass the night on Friday in their cars on the road to the Southern Lebanese village of Mosaileh, near the villa of Lebanese Speaker Nabih Berri, after fleeing the village of Zawtar which was attacked by Israel aviation. — AFP/UNB photo

Israeli attacks raise fear of Syrian involvement Syria, Iran urged to persuade Hezbollah not to hit Israel

WASHINGTON, Apr 13: The United States on Friday urged Syria and Iran to persuade Hezbollah to stop a barrage of new attacks on Israel and defended the Jewish state's retaliatory strikes saying Islamic radicals must feel the "consequences" of their acts, reports Reuters.

"We believe that those who have influence over Hezbollah should use that influence" to end the violence State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns told reporters, citing Syria and Iran specifically.

Like other senior US officials he laid the blame for the cross-border attacks between Israel and Lebanon directly on Hezbollah.

Israeli helicopter gunships and jet fighters blasted Hezbollah Guerrilla Bases in Lebanon for the second-day on Friday. Two soldiers one Syrian and one Lebanese were reported killed and at least 12 soldiers and civilians wounded in the attacks on an anti-aircraft position beside the main road to

Beirut airport and near a Hezbollah mosque. Rather than call for restraint on all sides, including Israel — as the United States has often done, Burns said. "We can't give advice to various Israeli governments as to when they have to act and how they have to act."

"All governments have to decide for themselves how they defend their citizens from attack. The Israeli government this week has had to respond to vicious attacks on civilians. And it has taken actions it feels it must take to protect innocent civilians in Israel, he said.

AP adds from Beirut: With thousands of panic-stricken villagers streaming out of southern Lebanon to escape Israeli air and land attacks, the death of a Syrian soldier raised fears that Israel's most feared enemy would be drawn into the fighting.

Police said 12 people were killed Friday and at least 40 were wounded in the second-day of Israel's offensive against Hezbollah. The Iran-backed group has battled for years to try to drive Israeli troops from a strip of land they hold in southern Lebanon.

Syria, which has 40,000 troops stationed in Lebanon, said one of its soldiers was killed and seven were wounded when an anti-aircraft unit near Beirut's international airport was hit by missiles fired from an Israeli helicopter gunship. Beirut hospital officials said four other Syrians were slightly hurt.

Israeli officials insisted that the Syrians were inadvertently attacked, but Syria sounded unconvinced. The incident provoked fears that Syria, Lebanon's main powerbroker, might be drawn into the escalating confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah.

"We are targeting neither the Lebanese army nor the Syrian army," Israeli government spokesman Uri Dromi said. "Unfortunately, the Syrian army is all over the place."



Republican presidential candidate US Senator Bob Dole is framed in the glitter of an overhead chandelier during a fund-raising reception in Houston, Texas on Friday. Dole is campaigning through Texas and Iowa before the US Senate sessions resume tomorrow. — AFP/UNB photo

Liberian factions agree to immediate ceasefire

LONDON, Apr 13: Militia factions whose clashes have led to chaos in Liberia have agreed to immediate ceasefire after talks with Ghanaian mediators, the BBC teletext service reported here late Friday, reports AP.

"As a result of the negotiations... an immediate ceasefire has been agreed," Ghana's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohamed Ibn Chambas told the BBC.

The talks involved the UN, aid agencies and ECOMOG, the African peacekeeping force in Liberia. But a BBC correspondent said assurances of a ceasefire were being met with scepticism after a similar agreement Thursday broke down.

Thursday night for Monrovia to mediate a political settlement to end the violence which erupted last Saturday. The Ghanaian mission was backed up by representatives of the United Nations, international aid organisations, and the West African peace force ECOMOG.

Ghana currently chairs the economic community of West African states which sent in the predominantly Nigerian peace force.

AP Adds, many of the foreigners escaping Monrovia in the US military evacuation speak of one day returning to the country. Not Joe DeVries. "I've done Liberia. There is nothing left," the aid agency official said after a harrowing journey overland through Liberia's countryside to flee the fighting.

While the civilians in Monrovia would like to get out, DeVries, a 35-year-old American, initially spent two days trying to get in after hearing of the fierce shelling and looting that prompted the United States to begin an airlift from the US Embassy compound.

DeVries, an agricultural specialist, arrived in Liberia in October 1995 to open an office for World Vision, one of the dozens of nongovernmental aid groups operating in the poor West African country.

World Vision is aiding with food distribution and sending some of the thousands of Liberians who have fled to the capital during seven years of civil war back to their villages with seeds and farming tools. On the Wednesday before Easter, he got word that one of the agency's vehicles and two Liberian staffers had disappeared near Tappita, about 180 miles (300 kilometers) northeast of Monrovia.

Clinton vetoes State Dept authorisation bill

WASHINGTON, Apr 13: President Bill Clinton on Friday vetoed the State Department authorisation bill, complaining it would have severely restricted his ability to conduct US foreign policy with China, Vietnam and other countries, reports Reuters.

This legislation contains many unacceptable provisions that would undercut US leadership abroad and damage our ability to assure the future security and prosperity of the American people, Clinton said in a message to Congress.

"It would unacceptably restrict the president's ability to address the complex international challenges and opportunities of the post-Cold War era," he said. Clinton had promised a veto after Congress passed the bill late last month.

The measure stated that the 1979 Taiwan relations act had primacy over the 1982 Shanghai communiqué between the

United States and China and would have required Washington to provide weapons to Taiwan to enable it to defend itself. The communiqué committed the United States to reduce gradually sales of arms to Taiwan.

The 1982 communiqué has been one of the cornerstones of our bipartisan policy toward China for over 13 years, Clinton said.

The urging management of our relations with China is one of the central challenges of United States foreign policy but this bill would complicate, not facilitate, that task, he said.

The bill would have placed tight restrictions on US participation in the United Nations and tied upgrading of the US diplomatic presence in Vietnam to Vietnamese cooperation in accounting for US prisoners of war a missing in action.

UK, France criticised for immigration controls

GENEVA, Apr 13: A special UN investigator has taken Britain to task for its immigration controls but reserved his harshest criticism for a "wave of xenophobia and racism" sweeping France, reports AP.

Maurice Glele-Ahanhanzo praised German measures to combat anti-foreigner attacks, although he said that racism remained a real problem in the country.

Glele-Ahanhanzo, a lawyer from Benin, submitted his reports to the annual session of the 53-nation UN Human Rights Commission. He visited all three countries last fall.

In an annex on Britain issued Friday, Glele-Ahanhanzo criticised laws meant to stem increasing immigration and said the government must take action to "ensure that the United Kingdom is not seen as a country that rejects people from the south, particularly black minorities."

The report said asylum laws were applied too harshly. It voiced concern over conditions for an estimated 9,000 would-be refugees incarcerated each year in detention

centers for fear they might otherwise be deported. Generally, the report said ethnic minorities were at a disadvantage in terms of jobs and housing. They were also more at risk from police brutality than whites.

The government should sharpen up law against racial violence and hatred, it said. However, Glele-Ahanhanzo said "remarkable progress" had been made in the 30 years since racial equality laws were first introduced to try to protect immigrants from the Asian Sub-continent and other former British colonies.

A spokeswoman for the British Home Office said the government was studying the details of the report. Developments in France gave much more cause for concern, the UN expert indicated.

"France is shaken by a wave of xenophobia and racism extremely damaging to its image as the homeland of human rights," Glele-Ahanhanzo said in a separate document issued Thursday.

14 killed in Pak road mishap

A packed bus skidded off a road and tumbled into a ravine in northwestern Pakistan, killing 14 people and injuring 10 others, state-run media reported Saturday, AP reports from Islamabad.

The driver lost control of the bus late Friday night when he swerved to avoid oncoming traffic, Pakistan Television reported. The bus plunged down the steep ravine and caught fire. The bus was travelling along Pakistan's provincial highway from the North-West Frontier provincial capital Peshawar to the federal capital Islamabad when the accident happened.

UNSC lauds African anti-N treaty

The Security Council on Friday praised the anti-nuclear treaty signed in Africa as a significant contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security, AP reports from United Nations.

On Thursday in Cairo, Egypt, more than 40 African nations declared the continent a nuclear-free zone, pledging not to build, test or stockpile nuclear weapons.

The treaty "constitutes an important contribution by the African countries to the maintenance of international peace and security," according to a draft statement by council President Juan Somavia of Chile.

Oyer 200 Vietnamese back home

More than 200 Vietnamese refugees left for Ho Chi Minh City on Friday under the voluntary repatriation programme, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a statement the programme started in 1989. The latest group brings the number of Vietnamese boat people in Malaysia to be repatriated to Vietnam under the programme to 6,329.

13,000 prisoners pardoned in Brazil

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso has granted a pardon that could free some 13,000 prison inmates, the justice ministry said Friday, AP reports from Brasilia.

The pardon, intended to ease overcrowding, applies only to prisoners with terms of six years or less. To qualify, inmates must have served at least one-sixth of their sentence and be on good behaviour.

Republican quits Dole camp

Mary Malin abruptly ended her brief stint as a strategist for Bob Dole's presidential campaign Friday, saying criticism of her marriage to Democratic operative James Carville was a distraction Dole did not deserve, AP reports from Houston.

Malin has signed on just this week and was slated to play a major strategic role in the Dole effort, as she had in the 1988 and 1992 George Bush campaigns. But her 1992 romance and subsequent marriage to Clinton campaign strategist Carville has made her a traitor to some Republicans and several voiced displeasure that she was to join the Dole campaign.

Truck mishap kills 26 in Zimbabwe

A truck loaded with farm workers on Friday plunged into the Musami River in eastern Zimbabwe, killing at least 26 people and leaving 35 injured, AP reports from Mutare.

The official Zimbabwe Inter-African News Agency quoted police in Mutare as saying that about 80 people were aboard the truck to go to work on a nearby farm.

No other details were immediately available.

Jayalalitha may face humiliating defeat in polls

MADRAS, India, Apr 13: A former film actress whose five-year rule over the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu has prompted comparisons with media Marcos faces the prospect of a humiliating defeat in upcoming polls, reports AFP.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jayaram, 48, is accused by critics of institutionalising corruption and running the sprawling province of 55 million people like a police state.

Jayalalitha, as she is popularly known from her movie days, is looked upon by ministers within her AIADMK Party and admirers as a virtual goddess, and has even been portrayed as the Virgin Mary.

Landlords still use bonded labourers rampantly in Sindh Govt plotting to 'silence' Farrakhan

MATLI, Pakistan, Apr 13: A warm breeze washed over Himmo Bhel, his threadbare, stained clothing rippling in the wind, reports AP.

Standing at the edge of a sprawling, lush field, Bhel stared at the green rows of sugar cane. For 30 years he slaved here, often in chains, as a bonded labourer.

He was freed recently, but he'll always wear the scars on his ankles and wrists — reminders of a lifetime in bondage. Bhel and about 140 other Hindu peasants in southern Pakistan were rescued from a life of slavery. For centuries, powerful landlords have relied on bonded labour to bring in their crops.

In modern Pakistan, the use of bonded labour is strictly prohibited, but in the isolated fields of southern Sindh province, where laws mean little, the practice is rampant.

Many poor villagers end up working as bonded labourers when they fail to repay small loans to landlords, who openly defy the law because they know that legal recourse is unlikely.

More than 70 per cent of Sindh's provincial assembly is controlled by feudal landlords. With that kind of political clout, police say there is little that can be done. "We cannot take any action against landlords under the law until we receive a complaint," said Abdul Hussain Qadir, Sindh's provincial police inspector in Sindh's Sanghar district. "Who's going to complain?" The best anti-slavery ac-

tivists can hope for right now are limited raids on farms known to use bonded labour. Over the last year, with the efforts of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, about 1,100 bonded farm workers have been freed. Activists readily admit that is just the tip of the iceberg.

Bhel was freed on April 5, when the independent commission raided a feudal landlord's property in Sindh. The activists found dozens of labourers, the vast majority women and children, working in cane fields while armed guards looked on.

With the help of 50 police officers, they freed Bhel and his wife and about 140 others enslaved by Abdul Rehman Marri, a politically influential landlord.

For the first time in his life, Bhel is free to earn a living as a farm hand. "We can now buy tea and food from this money," he says, waving a new 100 rupee note. It's worth about US\$2.70, but to Bhel, it's a small fortune.

Likewise, Kishan Bhel, a low-caste Hindu living in Islamic Pakistan, is savouring his first taste of freedom. Bhel and his family were sold to Marri 25 years ago. Bhel escaped in March, leaving his wife and five children to continue working Marri's crops until this month's raid.

"I was raped repeatedly and my sons were hung upside down by the armed men," said Bhel's wife, who asked that her name not be used. Battered, tortured, raped and sold like chattel, hundreds of thousands — perhaps millions — of peasants live in fear under the oppressive feudal system in Sindh — Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's home province.

The freed labourers live in a makeshift camp set up by the commissions. Sitting with relatives at the camp, Bhel told of life as a bonded labourer. "We got no money," he said, "just food, barely enough to eat."

A typical day included 18 hours working the fields. Escape usually meant chains for the captured fugitive's wrists and ankles. Rebellion brought swift death from a guard's shotgun.

The political power of Sindh's landed aristocracy means few, if any, landlords will ever face the maximum 15 years in jail for using bonded labour. In fact, they won't face much more than the task of having to replace freed workers.

Most view the practice as their inherited right as landowners with crops to bring in. "I bought them, I paid for them, how can I give them up?" Marri said to authorities at the time of the raid. He has since failed to respond to repeated requests for an interview.

"Every big landlord uses bonded labour," says Shakeel Pathan, an anti-slavery campaigner with the commission. "Which government functionary can dare to take action against these people, who are at the helm of power?"

Farrakhan also told CBS' "60 Minutes" that blacks and whites should separate if they can't reconcile their differences, and that he believes the United States is more corrupt than Nigeria's military dictatorship. "Because I appear to be interfering with America's foreign policy objectives in Africa and the Middle East, they want me silenced or muzzle," Farrakhan said.