

## International

## Israel refuses to let Leila Khaled cross into WB

JERICHO, West Bank, Apr 15: Israel refused to let former Palestinian revolutionary Leila Khaled cross into the Palestinian self-rule areas from Jordan today, citing technical problems, reports AFP.

Leila was seeking to return for a scheduled meeting next week of the PLO parliament, the Palestine National Council (PNC), called to debate Yasser Arafat's commitment to remove anti-Israel clauses from the PLO Charter.

Israeli officials said the formal reason for refusing to let Leila cross the Allenby Bridge into Israel was that she had failed to submit a formal application for entry 10 days prior to her arrival.

## UN probe into mass graves in Bosnia ends

KARAKAJ, Bosnia, Apr 15: UN war crimes investigators on Saturday wrapped up a two-week probe into alleged mass graves in eastern Bosnia by studying a suspected massacre site, reports AFP.

They went to an earthen dam near here and picked up fragments of human bone and tattered remnants of cloth lying on the stony surface among dozens of spent bullet cartridges.

According to accounts from two survivors, scores of men were taken to the site in groups, stripped to the waist and with their hands tied, then lined up and executed by Bosnian Serbs.

The two said they escaped playing dead and hiding in a drainage ditch as the Serb soldiers went to get more prisoners.

## US, Japan announce closure of 6 more bases in Okinawa

TOKYO, Apr 15: Japan and the United States announced today the closure of six more US military facilities on the southern Japanese island of Okinawa, reducing the amount of land occupied by American forces there by a fifth, reports Reuters.

A statement issued at the end of talks between US Defense Secretary William Perry and Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda said that, in addition, the size of four other US military facilities would be substantially reduced on the island, where there have been calls for all US bases to shut.

The total acreage of US facilities and areas in Okinawa is estimated to decrease by approximately 20 per cent, the statement said.

## Africans struck by meningitis barred from performing Hajj

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Apr 15: Saudi authorities on Sunday imposed a partial ban on Muslims of African countries struck by meningitis from taking part in this year's pilgrimage to Makkah, reports AFP.

The ban covers natives and foreigners living in meningitis contaminated areas of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. According to a statement carried on the official news agency SPA.

Saudi Arabia on Thursday suspended air links with Nigeria, as some 30,000 pilgrims were preparing to head for the pilgrimage to Islam's holiest sites in Makkah west of the Saudi kingdom, in the last week of April.

The Saudi statement said the curbs on African states were imposed to protect the pilgrimage, which each year attracts some two million Muslims from around the world.

## 4 Tigers, one soldier killed

COLOMBO, Apr 15: Security forces shot dead at least four Tamil Tiger guerrillas and lost one trooper in an ambush in north-eastern Sri Lanka today, officials said, reports AFP.

Troops ambushed guerrillas from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam at Thampalagam in the district of Trincomalee, triggering a brief but a fierce fire fight, officials said.

"We have killed four Tigers and recovered two automatic weapons from them," a local official said adding that one soldier was killed and another wounded in the confrontation.

## Forces storm mosque in Srinagar

## 8 Afghan fighters killed in Kashmir gunbattle

SRINAGAR, Apr 15: Indian troops shot dead 10 Muslim guerillas including eight Afghan fighters on Sunday in a gunbattle which erupted in the militant stronghold of Doda in Kashmir, police said, reports AFP.

Three others, including a Muslim cleric, died and eight were injured in separate clashes elsewhere in the strife-torn northern Indian state, the police added.

A Border Security Force (BSF) spokesman identified eight of the dead guerillas as members of the Harkat-ul-Ansar, dominated by war veterans from Afghanistan, and said the remaining two were Kashmir militants.

Two paramilitary soldiers were also injured in the clash which erupted earlier Sunday in the Grundi sector of mountainous Doda, 190 kilometres (114 miles) north of the Kashmir winter capital of Jammu, the BSF spokesman said.

The Indian government accuses Harkat-ul-Ansar of being the parent body of the shadowy Al-Faraj separatist organisation which is holding two Britons, an American and a German in captivity for more than nine months in Kashmir.

Kashmir police, meanwhile, said a civilian died when troops fired in retaliation after a grenade attack left four soldiers injured Sunday near the Dasgeer Sahib Mosque, one of Kashmir's holiest shrines situated in Srinagar.

"One civilian was killed and six others, including four security personnel, were critically injured in the attack," a police spokesman said in the state's summer capital of Srinagar.

Syed Masood-ul-Hassan, chief priest of Dasgeer Sahib said Indian troops stormed the shrine and drove out devotees who were inside the complex, adding that several of them were also beaten up.

The police here denied the allegation.

AP says, Indian police and separatist guerillas fought a pitched battle Sunday in a village in the northern state of Jammu-Kashmir and at least 10 rebels were killed in the fighting, police said.

The fighting started when policemen reached Krandi village to raid a suspected rebel hideout. Police surrounded a building and asked the guerillas inside to surrender, but their call was answered by a hail of bullets, a police official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Four policemen were injured in the fighting, he said.

The fighting occurred as the state prepared for its first parliamentary election in nine years. Previous attempts to hold elections have been put off for fear of widespread violence by rebels who have vowed to block voting.



A woman is helped by two US airborne infantry towards a helicopter to be evacuated from the US embassy compound in Monrovia on Sunday. Thousands of Liberians are camped in the relative security of a US housing compound close to the embassy.

— AFP/UNB photo

## BJP confident of striking alliances, forming govt

NEW DELHI, Apr 15: India's main opposition party is confident of striking alliances with smaller groups and forming government, the right-wing party's prime ministerial candidate said in an interview reported on Sunday, says AP.

"We have alliances and there are other parties also who are keen to extend their support in the post-election scenario," Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party said in an interview to Press Trust of India news agency.

Opinion polls are predicting a hung parliament after the voting that begins on April 27. They indicate that the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata are running neck and neck in popularity and will have to depend on smaller groups to form a coalition.

Voting will be spaced over five days ending May 30. Results will begin coming in on May 10.

"I do enjoy and excellent rapport with leaders of various political parties," Vajpayee said.

He did not name which groups he expects to support the party that was widely blamed for backing fundamentalists who tore down an ancient mosque in a northern city that triggered nationwide Hindu-Muslim riots and left more than 2,000 people dead.

The Bharatiya Janata has an alliance with another Hindu group, the Shiv Sena, but socialists and communists, who have 79 seats in the 545-member lower house of Parliament, have said they will not support the party. The Congress Party controls 253 seats and the Bharatiya Janata 114.

The Bharatiya Janata is, however, hoping to benefit from the infighting within the ruling party triggered off by Rao's refusal to allow senior leaders, including eight government ministers, accused in a bribery scandal, to contest elections. Most of them have left the party and are campaigning against Rao.

At least 26 politicians from many parties and 21 bureaucrats have been charged with accepting kickbacks from a business family for doling out lucrative government contracts. And most of those charged have denied any wrongdoing.

## Washington urges rebels to halt attacks

## Hezbollah threatens to hurl suicide bombers at US, Israel

BEIRUT, Apr 15: Hezbollah threatened to hurl dozens of suicide bombers at the United States and Israel after pounding northern Israel on Sunday with the heaviest Katyusha bombardment in three years, reports Reuters.

On the fourth day of Israel's massive air and artillery blitz on Lebanon, Hezbollah's Al-Manar television showed about 70 camouflage-clad volunteers at a swearing-in ceremony for suicide bombers.

Their commander ceremonially inserted fuses into explosive packs strapped to their bodies.

"We swear by the blood and severed bodies of our children and the struggles of our detainees that we will respond to the call and will detonate our bodies and shake the ground under the feet of our enemies, America and Israel," the militants declared.

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, secretary-general of the pro-Iranian Shi'ite Muslim Movement, has declared a general mobilisation of Hezbollah (Party of God) and its suicide bombers to counter the Israeli blitz.

Fighting intensified on Sunday as Hezbollah stepped up its rocket attacks on Israel and its leaders said its fighting capabilities were unimpaired by Israel's offensive.

Israel's forces also intensified their bombardment, firing thousands of shells into South Lebanon and unleashing more than 30 air raids in a bid to force the government of billionaire Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri to rein in Hezbollah.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled South Lebanon to escape the blitz.

Rocket-firing helicopters

also attacked Shi'ite Muslim Beirut suburbs for the third time, setting two shops ablaze and crippling an electricity substation outside Beirut, causing power cuts nearby. They also hit a Hezbollah radio transmission antenna near the Syria border.

AP adds: The United States urged Shi'ite Muslim guerillas Sunday to halt their attacks on Israel, as ambassadors from Israel and Lebanon appealed for a political solution to their latest border conflict.

A four-day-old Israeli offensive against guerrilla strongholds in Lebanon escalated Sunday as warplanes knocked out a power station near Beirut. Israel also threatened separate airstrikes on the city of Tyre, prompting thousands of residents to flee.



Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda (R) and US Ambassador in Japan, Walter Mondale (C) exchange documents yesterday on the agreement to reduce the heavy concentration of US bases in Okinawa. The US Secretary of Defense William Perry (L) is in Tokyo until today on a two day visit to discuss the future of the US military in Okinawa.

— AFP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY

## Clinton begins tour to 3 countries:

President Bill Clinton left the United States on Sunday night for a one week trip that will take him to South Korea, Japan and Russia. Reuters reports from Washington.

Clinton arrives on Tuesday in Cheju-Do, South Korea, where he meets President Kim Young-sam before leaving the same day for Tokyo.

## 6 Maoist rebels killed in Bihar:

Six Maoist guerillas were killed and six policemen injured in a fierce shootout in the Indian state of Bihar, the United News of India (UNI) reported yesterday. Reuters reports from New Delhi.

Eleven other guerillas were arrested after the three-hour firefight Sunday in the eastern state's Palamau district, the news agency said.

## 16 killed in Indonesia shooting:

Sixteen people, including Indonesian soldiers, were killed yesterday during a shooting incident at Timika airport in Indonesia's remote Irian Jaya province, business sources close to the airport said. Reuters reports from Jakarta.

The count as of now is 16 dead, including five civilians. The rest were soldiers, including some officers, one source, in contact with the airport and local hospitals, told Reuters in Jakarta.

## 1m Chinese couples divorced in '95:

More than one million couples divorced in China in 1995, breaking the one million mark for the first time, the official Xinhua news agency said. Reuters reports from Beijing.

A record 1,055,000 couples in China divorced last year, 74,000 more than in 1994, Xinhua said late on Sunday, citing the latest statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Nearly two-thirds of divorcing couples resorted to court hearings in 1995, it said.

## Hutus kill 50 Tutsis in Burundi:

More than 50 people, mostly Tutsis, were killed in recent attacks by rebel Hutus in southern and central Burundi, radio reports said yesterday. AFP says from Bujumbura.

Military sources said a battalion commander was among the dead in clashes Sunday at Bukirasazi in the central Gitega region.

They said the same rebel group killed about 50 people Thursday and Friday in fighting at Gitanga and Buraza in southern Burundi.

## 40 Thais die during new yr holiday:

Thai police said 40 people were killed during the traditional new year holiday weekend, most of them in traffic accidents, and urged people driving back to Bangkok yesterday to take special care. Reuters reports from Bangkok.

The traditional new year is Thailand's main holiday of the year and hundreds of thousands of people left the capital late last week to visit their families in the provinces.

## Looting continues unabated in Liberia

MONROVIA, Apr 15: Armed looters in stolen cars roamed the streets of the Liberian capital of Monrovia after a truce halted a week of fighting in the city centre, reports Reuters.

As night fell on Sunday, militias threw up roadblocks around the territory they controlled. Shooting and shelling died down after the truce was declared on Friday night but looting continued unabated.

A political standoff centred on the Barclay Training Centre Barracks, where Krahn gunmen were holding hundreds of people, including 50 Lebanese and 22 soldiers from the West African ECOMOG peacekeeping force, as hostages.

The fighting erupted after the transitional government tried to arrest Krahn militia leader Roosevelt Johnson, whom it sacked from the cabinet last month, on murder charges.

The Monrovia battles derailed the most comprehensive

accord yet reached to try to end six years of civil war in Liberia, a West African state founded in 1847 by freed American slaves.

Most international aid agencies evacuated their terrified foreign workers as the warfare and looting widened.

Johnson said he would agree to a truce if militias withdrew from around the barracks. ECOMOG troops deployed throughout the city and mediators re-examined arrangements for the transitional government which dismissed him.

Charles Taylor, leader of the biggest militia and a vice-president on the ruling Council of State, said Johnson should surrender to the government and would not negotiate with him.

Taylor said he and other militia leaders would pull their forces off the streets once ECOMOG peacekeepers were deployed around the barracks.

## Chechens down Russian chopper, kill 4 troops

MOSCOW, Apr 15: Chechen rebels have shot down a Russian military helicopter in the breakaway southern region, killing four servicemen on board, Interfax news agency said today, reports Reuters.

The Mi-8 transport helicopter came under fire on Sunday evening in a normally peaceful area near the village of Vinogradnoye, about 20 km (12 miles) north of the regional capital Grozny, it said, quoting a Russian military spokesman.

Three members of the crew and one serviceman accompanying a cargo were killed, he said.

## Security issue to top agenda of Clinton's round-the-world trip

WASHINGTON, Apr 15: President Clinton travelled to Japan three years ago as a tough-talking trade warrior. He returns to Asia this week in a markedly different role: America's reassuring commander-in-chief, reports AP.

Security problems — not trade disputes — lead the president's agenda on his week-long, round-the-world journey.

Departing Washington late Sunday, he will stop briefly in South Korea before a three-day state visit to Japan. Then he will fly on to Russia for a summit dealing with threats to nuclear safety.

The president will confront some of the oldest and newest challenges to the security of our nation, from the last

unresolved problem of the Cold War — stability on the Korean peninsula — to one of the most urgent new threats we face — nuclear smuggling," Secretary of State Warren Christopher said.

It is a trip designed to fill an election-year scrapbook with photos of Bill Clinton being president, showing off his leadership skills.

The intended message is one of Clinton skillfully dealing with world leaders on vital security issues, not squabbling over divisive trade matters.

Reinforcing the administration's theme, the trip comes amid troubling tensions on the Korean peninsula and just weeks after China's menacing missile tests off the coast of

Taiwan.

"Americans will see him representing the United States in important parts of the world," said Brookings Institution political scientist Thomas Mann. "It's more a matter of them feeling more comfortable with him as a foreign-policy president as opposed to any specific diplomatic achievements."

Many analysts say Clinton has improved his foreign policy performance after shaky start in the first two years of his presidency. Even now, however, his foreign policy approval rating is weaker than his overall ratings.

Battling for re-election, Clinton has to share the foreign policy limelight with Sen-

ate Majority Leader Bob Dole, his Republican rival.

"Dole has years of experience in this area as well as his war record," Mann said. "Americans feel comfortable with Dole as a foreign policy leader, perhaps more so than with Clinton."

Clinton's failure to serve in Vietnam created doubts about his leadership. Dole, on the other hand, would come to the job with a resume noting that he was grievously wounded as a US soldier in Italy exactly 51 years ago Sunday.

Highlighting the security thrust of Clinton's trip, Christopher said the president already has made strong headway on trade and opening markets in Japan.

"It's a good time to emphasise the security and political aspects of our relationship, to show that all the legs of the stool are of great importance," Christopher said.

On the South Korean resort island of Cheju, Clinton will reaffirm America's strong commitment to Seoul's security and peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

In Tokyo, the president will sign an agreement with Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto reaffirming the US-Japan security alliance and America's commitment to maintain its military presence in Asia.

Smoothing the way for Clinton's visit, the United States agreed Friday to return an American airfield on Okinawa

to local landowners, meeting a key demand of Okinawans angry about the US military presence.

Even so, the current authorised level of US troops in Japan is to remain at 47,000.

On trade, despite upbeat statements from the White House, the United States still has a 59 billion dollars deficit with Tokyo. But unlike his aggressive stand of the last three years, Clinton is soft-pedaling the problem now.

These are still contentious issues but they're going to be downplayed during the president's trip," said Larry Chimerine, chief economist of the Economic Strategy Institute, a Washington think tank specializing in trade.

## Diana expresses concern Blast kills 6 in Imran Khan's cancer hospital

LAHORE, Apr 15: Six people died and more than 30 were wounded when a powerful bomb went off on Sunday at a cancer hospital built by former Pakistan cricket captain Imran Khan, police and hospital sources said, reports Reuters.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto blamed unspecified "terrorists" for the blast at the outpatient department of the Shaoukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre outside Lahore, capital of the central province of Punjab.

Benazir visited the hospital and later told reporters: "We condemn whoever has done this act of terrorism," adding: "No mercy will be shown to those engaged in violence."

Officials of a bomb disposal squad later said they had yet to determine whether a bomb or something else caused the

12.30 pm (0730 GMT) blast apparently in an air conditioning duct.

But Imran told reporters it was a bomb attack aimed at frightening him into giving up his social welfare aims but declined to say who could have done it.

"I want to tell those who want to scare me that neither I will be scared nor I will turn back," he said. "I will move forward with greater determination."

The blast occurred only a day after Imran, a critic of Benazir government, said he was consulting close aides about launching a new political party.

AP from London adds: Princess Diana called her friend Imran Khan on Sunday to express her concern after a powerful bomb ripped through the outpatient department of a crowded hospital in central Pakistan.

## 'Truth Commission' holds public hearings in SA

EAST LONDON, South Africa, Apr 15: Dirty secrets from three decades of race war are likely to come tumbling out today when South Africa's "Truth Commission" holds its first public hearings into apartheid's human rights abuses, reports Reuters.

The hearings, chaired by Nobel Peace laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, will go ahead despite a last-minute attempt to block testimony that Tutu and his deputy, Alex Boraine, told reporters that perpetrators "likely" had asked them to postpone testimony by some of the 28 witnesses due to appear over four days in the eastern cape port of East London.