

## BRIEFLY



Opposition member of the Palestinian PNC Dr. Haider Abdel Shafi hugs President Yasser Arafat after the vote on the adoption of the modified Palestinian charter during the 21st session of the Palestine National Council meeting in Gaza City on Wednesday. 504 members voted "Yes" for the adoption and 54 against, cancelling anti-Israel clauses. — AFP/UNB photo

**Coup rumours sweep Paraguay:** The Paraguayan armed forces' Chief of Staff Gen. Rafael Noguera, denied rumours sweeping Asuncion late on Wednesday of an imminent army coup and appealed to the people to remain calm. Reuter says from Asuncion.

"Nothing is going on, there is no coup, there won't ever be one, not as long as I command the army," he told reporters. "I would like you to tell the population to stay calm."

**EU aid for Laos flood victims:** The European Union is providing 1.5 million dollars in emergency aid to thousands of victims of floods that ravaged farmlands, transport links and water, sources in Laos, a press release said Thursday. AP reports from Bangkok.

More than 3,000 tons of rice and other basic necessities were being distributed to some of the 400,000 people in five provinces affected by the floods. The EU said it would send a mission to Laos next month to develop a plan to rehabilitate agricultural infrastructure damaged by a series of tropical storms and flooding last year.

**Reuter journalist awarded:** Reuter journalist Susan Cornwell won the Merriman Smith Award for excellence in news reporting of President Bill Clinton in 1995, the White House Correspondents' Association announced on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Washington.

Cornwell won for an exclusive October 17 story headlined "Clinton says he thinks he raised taxes too much." The story was filed under deadline pressure from a Clinton speech in Houston, in which the president appeared to repudiate a major part of his 1993 tax and budget programme.

**Egyptian weekly banned:** The Egyptian government banned a weekly newspaper, on Wednesday, apparently for an article that blamed last week's massacre of 18 Greek tourists on lax security. AP reports from Cairo.

Ibrahim Eissa, editor in chief of the liberal El-Dustour newspaper, said censors did not provide a reason for banning the distribution of the newspaper's 75,000 copies.

**Canadian PM to visit Seoul next yr:** Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien will lead a large economic delegation to South Korea next January to promote trade and investment, the presidential office said Thursday. AP reports from Seoul.

Fight for independence will go on: Yandarbiyev

## Russian choppers attack Chechen rebel positions

Russian helicopter gunships attacked the town of Shali in rebel Chechnya on Thursday, killing and wounding civilians. Interfax news agency quoted new rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev as saying on Wednesday.

The agency did not give a casualty figure for the air attack. But it said seven people were killed when Russian ground forces opened fire on a civilian convoy trying to flee the town, some 40 kms (25 miles) northeast of the regional capital Grozny.

A Shali police official, quoted by Interfax, said the Russian attacks had caused considerable destruction. People have been killed and wounded," he said.

The official said Shali had been sealed off by the Russian troops for six days.

Earlier, Chechen separatists mourned the death of their leader Dzhokhar Dudayev but his successor quickly made clear the fight for independence from Russia will go on without letup.

The Chechen people will not leave the chosen path and

## Iranians chant 'death to Israel' defying Saudi ban

TEHRAN, Apr 25: Iranian state media said today pilgrims chanted slogans against Israel and the United States at Islam's holiest shrine in Saudi Arabia, defying a ban on political activities, reports Reuter.

The Iranian news agency IRNA said large numbers of pilgrims performing evening prayers on Wednesday night chanted "death to Israel" and "death to America" in Arabic and "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest) in the grand mosque of Makkah, Islam's holiest shrine.

It said the worshippers were protesting against the US-supported crimes and atrocities of the Zionist regime (Israel) in Lebanon during the prayer attended by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims.

There was no independent confirmation of the report. Tehran radio said the chants rapidly spread to the whole Mosque.

"According to pilgrims who were at the grand mosque, the

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