

BRIEFLY

Yeltsin leaves Shanghai: Russian President Boris Yeltsin flew out of Shanghai yesterday at the end of a three-day visit to China, on his way to the Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan. Chinese officials said, Reuters reports from Shanghai.

Iraq to free 3 Filipino prisoners: President Saddam Hussein on Friday ordered the release of three Filipinos held in Baghdad prison, the official Iraqi News Agency reported. AP reports from Baghdad.

Saddam announced the release of the three after meeting with Philippines House Speaker Jose de Venecia, the agency said. Venecia came to Baghdad to report from Manila on Philippines President Fidel Ramos for clemency for the workers, jailed 10 years ago on theft and robbery charges.

Argentina-Chile sign accord: President Carlos Menem of Argentina and Eduardo Frei of Chile signed agreements Friday to integrate border control procedures and facilitate regional free trade. AP reports from Buenos Aires.

"There exists no possibility of border problems with Chile from now on," Menem told a joint press conference announcing the agreement, which came at the end of a three-day summit between the two leaders. The pact is expected to simplify and accelerate customs, immigration, health and transport controls along the shared 5,000 kilometre (3,100 mile) border. Agreements to cooperate in public health, security, and the travel of minors were also signed.

Cholera claims 84 in Monrovia: A cholera epidemic in the strife-torn Liberian capital has killed 84 people and left 73 hospitalised, a senior Monrovia doctor said Friday. AFP reports from Monrovia.

Seventy people died of the disease inside the Barclay Training Centre (BTC), the barracks at the centre of two weeks of factional fighting. Moses Massaquoi, the chief physician in the city's Swedrelief Hospital, told AFP. Twelve others died at the Greystone Diplomatic Residential Compound, to where thousands of Monroviens fled after violence broke out April 6.

Chopper mishap in C Japan kills 6: Two helicopters carrying television crews collided in mid-air in central Japan yesterday killing all six people on board. Kyodo News Agency reported. Reuters reports from Nagano. Kyodo said the helicopters were hired by two rival television networks. It did not identify the networks or give details of the story they were covering. Japanese networks widely use helicopters for news coverage in their battle for ratings in the country's highly competitive television market.

Mexico's population exceeds 91m: Mexico's population has passed 91 million despite a steady decline in rate of growth, AP reports from Mexico City.

According to a major mid-decade census report Mexico, the world's 11th most-populous country, gained almost 10 million people from 1990 to 1995. But the rate of growth slowed to 1.8 per cent a year from 2 per cent in 1990.

Prisoners riot at Canadian jail: Rioting inmates seized control of Manitoba's largest jail and severely beat fellow prisoners, including one who lost several fingers, police said, AP reports from Winnipeg, Manitoba. Police said Friday that they were unable to confirm reports from prison guards that one inmate had been killed and others burned or castrated at the medium-security Hedingley provincial jail.

Week-long ceasefire in Liberia shaken

MONROVIA, Apr 27: Thousands of armed supporters of a fugitive warlord paraded through parts of the capital Friday, shouting war chants and shaking a week-long ceasefire, reports AP.

Roswell Johnson, an ousted government minister and archrival of government member Charles Taylor, had agreed to pull his troops out of the city on Wednesday. But by Friday, his rebels had seized control of a major highway by-pass and the military barracks where a two-week standoff between Johnson and Taylor forces provoked the bloody warfare that has taken hundreds of lives.

The flexing of muscles comes one day after the departure of a team of UN officials who came to Monrovia to pledge US assistance to the African peacekeeping forces in Liberia. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William Twadell said Wednesday he had received pledges by both Taylor and Johnson to stand by the ceasefire and withdraw their soldiers from the city.

But on Friday, Johnson's Ulimo-J forces, teamed with fighters of the rebel Liberian Peace Council, set up checkpoints at a strategic junction that connects the city centre and the eastern Sinkor and Jallah Town suburbs. Seven civilians were killed in Jallah Town in factional fighting on Wednesday.

Thousands of Ulimo-J and Liberian Peace Council fighters drove through the eastern neighbourhoods brandishing machetes and knives and chanting war slogans. Civilians attempting to pass through the checkpoints were stripped of their valuables.

Meanwhile, a joint team of workers from the World Health Organisation and International Committee of the Red Cross collected corpses Friday.

It also demands that Sudan desist from "assisting, supporting and facilitating terrorist activities" and from giving shelter and sanctuary to "terrorist elements". Sudan has been accused by neighbouring countries, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda, of backing rebel groups.

The resolution gives Sudan a two week period, until May 10. All states are then required to "significantly reduce the number and level of the staff" at Sudan's diplomatic and consular posts and to restrict movements of remaining staff. States must also restrict entry into or through their territory of members of Sudan's government or armed forces.

American envoy Edward Ghem in a toughly worded speech, said the present council resolution was inadequate in failing to impose more meaningful sanctions against Sudan, we risk further insecurity and instability for the people of Eastern Africa.

DPRK blasts ROK-US peace proposal

WASHINGTON, Apr 27: An official North Korean commentary criticised on Friday a joint US-South Korean proposal for reducing tensions on the peninsula, but the State Department brushed aside the statement as inconclusive, reports AP.

The proposal, unveiled 10 days ago by President Clinton and South Korean President Kim Young-sam, calls for North and South Korean peace talks, with the United States and China playing mediator roles.

The Korean Central News Agency commentary repeated the North's old position that the rival South has no part in any peace talks on the divided peninsula.

53 Tigers killed in fighting Troops capture major LTTE supply route in Jaffna

COLOMBO, Apr 27: In a furious battle with Tamil separatists, soldiers captured a town the rebels used as a major supply line in northern Sri Lanka, the military said Saturday, reports AP.

At least 53 rebels died in Friday's fighting in Kilali town near a lagoon that separates the mainland from Jaffna Peninsula in northern Sri Lanka. No military fatalities were reported.

The capture of Kilali is a significant event in the war.

The security forces are now in complete control of the entire lagoon, the military said in a statement.

In December, the military launched a major offensive and captured Jaffna city, the rebels' headquarters and administrative center of their self-proclaimed government.

That forced the guerrillas to withdraw their main fighting force from Jaffna Peninsula, cross the lagoon at Kilali and take up positions in nearby jungles on the Sri Lankan

mainland.

The military launched a new offensive in the north nine days ago, and on Friday it captured Kilali, a town on the Jaffna Peninsula side of the lagoon where the guerrillas used hundreds of motorboats to ferry men and supplies across the lagoon.

Details on the fighting were not immediately available. The battle rose the rebel death toll in the latest offensive to 200, the military said. Six soldiers also have died.

Without Kilali, the rebels won't be able to supply the undetermined number of guerrillas who remained in the peninsula. The military controls all land supply routes.

Independent accounts of the fighting are not available since the government has barred journalists from the battle area.

On Saturday, government troops were hunting for rebel stragglers in the Kilali area.

The government says 250,000 Tamil refugees, with bags piled high on carts and bicycles, have defied rebel orders and returned to Jaffna city since the military captured it in December.

Soldiers were sheltering the people in camps and sending most of them back to their homes after searching and questioning them to make sure they weren't Tamil rebels.

The return of Jaffna's citizens to their homes could be a crucial factor in the war if it signals a disenchantment by the civilians with the Tigers and their battle for independence.

The rebels believe a homeland is the only way to escape what they regard as discrimination against the Tamil minority by the majority Sinhalese, who control the government and the military. More than 42,000 people have been killed in the fighting.

Reuters adds, troops were now in a position to halt the flow of hundreds of Tamil civilians fleeing the peninsula at the Kilali boat crossing across the Jaffna lagoon to the mainland.

Troops recommenced their advance at first light today and by about 9.30 in the morning they had killed 53 terrorists, the military spokesman told Reuters.

On Thursday the rebels, fighting for a homeland for minority Tamils in the island's north and east, attacked troops with mortars and machine guns, a Defence Ministry statement said.

Jiang extends olive branch to Taiwan

BEIJING, Apr 27: China's President Jiang Zemin has extended an olive branch to arch rival Taiwan, saying Beijing respects the desire of its people to unite themselves and would not post a single soldier there after reunification, reports Reuter.

But Jiang, who is also Communist Party chief, reminded the island which Beijing regards as a renegade province, that any move to declare independence would force China to invade.

Jiang's remarks his most conciliatory since he offered an eight point reunification proposal in January, 1995, came in a meeting this week with former parliament Speaker Liang Su-yung, now a senior adviser to Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui, the China, news service reported.

"We fully respect the style of life of the people of Taiwan and their desire to be their own masters, and we guarantee the proper rights of our Taiwan compatriots the news service quoted Jiang as saying. 1,000 Chechens flee Shali

7 Russian soldiers killed in Grozny

MOSCOW, Apr 27: Seven Russian Interior Ministry soldiers have been killed and five wounded in new rebel attacks in the Chechen capital Grozny, ITAR-Tass news agency said today, reports Reuter.

Tass, quoting a pro-Moscow Chechen official, said six soldiers were killed when their armoured personnel carrier hit a mine in a Grozny suburb. It did not say how the seven soldiers died.

Russian positions in Grozny came under fire from the rebels nine times in a 24-hour period, Tass said.

More than 1,000 Chechen women and children fled Shali on Friday after a helicopter attack a day earlier sparked fears that encircling troops would storm the southeastern Chechen town, reports AFP.

The women carrying their children and sacks of belongings, had to walk about 12 kilometres (seven miles),



SINGAPORE: ASEAN trade ministers hold hands yesterday after signing new investment cooperation pact for the region. From left to right Indonesian Tunkey Arwibowo, Malaysian Rafidah Aziz, Philippines Rizalino Navarro; Singapore Yeo Cheow Tong, Bruneian Pehin Dato Abdul Rahman Taib, Thailand Amnuoy Virawan, Vietnam Le Van Triet and ASEAN secretariat Roslan Rahman. —AFP photo

Indians begin voting in general election

NEW DELHI, Apr 27: Indians began voting Saturday in a general election that was expected to defeat a centrist party that has held this diverse country together for decades, reports AP.

Many polls published before the parliamentary election predicted that the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party would finish ahead of the governing Congress Party.

But the surveys also said that no party would win a majority, meaning that the president would have to invite the first-place finisher to form a coalition government with smaller parties.

Voting took place Saturday in the states of Assam, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab; the union territories of New Delhi and Pondicherry and two chains of islands in the south.

As the temperature soared to 38 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit), long lines formed outside polling stations, located in schools and

public buildings in cities and everything from sheds to stables cleared of animals in villages.

Nearly half of India's 590 million voters are illiterate, so each ballot contained the name of the candidates and symbols alongside them such as a

Language row heating up in Quebec

MONTREAL, Apr 27: Quebec's long-running language row is heating up again, with the hardline wing of the ruling Parti quebecois (PQ) demanding the scrapping of a law that allows English to be used on commercial signs, reports AFP.

This weekend, the government of separatist Premier Lucien Bouchard will suggest a one-year moratorium to assess the extent of the threat to the French language before engaging in a full-scale debate on the issue.

banana, whistle, baby, or a sun. Indelible ink was placed on the left forefinger of the voters to prevent them from casting a second ballot.

As voting began at 7 am many of the people lining up outside them in East New Delhi said they would vote for the BJP, even though they aren't sure what it would do in power.

Nineteen people were killed in pre-election violence, far less than in previous years, thanks to heavy security and new rules that heavily reduced the campaign funds of the candidates.

Scattered violence also occurred Saturday. In Andhra Pradesh state, police fired in the air to disperse a mob of people that exploded small bombs near a polling booth in a high school. The United News of India reported. No people were injured there or in two other polling stations where miscreants snatched ballot papers from the boxes and ran away.



The wreckage of a privately-owned Bell Jet Ranger helicopter lies near a basketball court just outside Manila on Saturday. Two people were killed and two others injured when the helicopter crashed while on a test flight. —AFP/UNB photo

US Cong against plan to extend troops' stay in Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Apr 27: Reports that the Clinton administration plans to keep American troops in Bosnia past the December conclusion of the NATO-led peace mission drew a strong reaction Friday from the Republican chairman of a key committee in the US House of Representatives, reports AP.

Representative Benjamin Gilman said he was upset at news reports Wednesday and Thursday quoting Perry and his spokesman, Kenneth Bacon, as saying most of the approximately 18,000 US troops in Bosnia won't get out until January 1997 or later. The Bosnia mission is still scheduled to end in December. Gilman said his House In-

ternational Relations Committee was told by senior officials of the State and Defense Departments in sworn testimony Tuesday that the original plan for getting the troops out by December was still intact.

Either the committee members were deliberately misled or the officials who testified were not fully informed about planning for the withdrawal of the force, Gilman wrote in letters to Defense Secretary William Perry and Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Gilman's office released copies of the letters.

"In either event, the administration has jeopardised its credibility with the Congress on a vital foreign policy matter," Gilman wrote.

Off the Record

Harry's week-long stay with monkeys

CUDJOE KEY, Florida: It took an eight-kilometre swim through stormy seas and a week on a monkey island, but Coconut Harry made it home, reports Reuter.

The 4-year-old golden retriever disappeared from the boat of his owner, Naomi Simonelli, during rough weather on April 14. "I immediately knew that he probably tried to get to the bow of the boat... and a wave knocked him off," she said on Friday.

Despite calls for help to the US coast guard and other authorities, the dog appeared gone for good.

Eight days later, after Simonelli took out a newspaper advertisement and plastered the area with "lost dog" posters, Harry was finally located on tiny key loe — known as "monkey island" because its only inhabitants are hundreds of monkeys raised there for sale to research laboratories.

Harry lived on the island sharing food with the monkeys for about a week before island workers found him, and one recognised the dog from Simonelli's posters.

"He was in real good shape, except he was very tired," his happy owner said.

Should men fulfil it to become real?

COPENHAGEN: Real men are protective and attentive of women, and also a bit child-like, Denmark's Prince Joachim says, reports AFP.

Speaking to Eurman magazine, he said a real man "should fulfill his role towards women and make decision without being authoritarian."

But while paying attention to the women in their lives, the prince also felt it is necessary for men "to keep a child-like side" to themselves.

"In a marriage, there must be room for childishness," said the son of Queen Margrethe who last year wedded Princess Alexandra, a Eurasian from Hong Kong.

"I prefer to be a child, because it is more fun. If we forget that side of ourselves, then life becomes sad and unbearable," the prince said.

He also revealed that he still likes hanging out with his mates — with or without Alexandra.

"We spend evenings, sometimes between men, watching three videos in a row — one violent and funny American films — until our eyes can't take it any more," he said.

If I gave up these evenings because I'm married, I would suppress something in myself, and that's unhealthy," he said.



Nurse Denise Williams cradles the Nalule Siamese twins from Uganda at the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town Friday. The baby girls are joined at the chest and abdomen and are undergoing tests prior to an operation to separate them. Their 16-year-old mother died from post-delivery hemorrhaging after a caesarean delivery. —AFP/UNB photo

Calm restored after ceasefire takes hold in Lebanon

BEIRUT, Apr 27: A US-brokered ceasefire halted Israel's 17-day war with Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon early Saturday, reports AP.

The ceasefire said the guns fell silent at 4 am (0100 GMT), the deadline set for the cessation of hostilities, which have claimed more than 150 lives.

The last round in the latest Middle East war was fired at almost exactly one minute before the deadline, when a Katyusha rocket hit a building in the northern Israel town of Kiryat Shmona.

The stone slugs were reduced to rubble but there were no apparent injuries.

"Here we thought we were just coming towards the end of this and we were expecting things to be quite," a neighbour said, pointing to the damage. "And then this."

About half an hour earlier, Israeli gunners based in an occupied enclave in the south opened up on suspected Hezbollah positions facing the zone, security sources said.

Six guerrilla Katyusha rockets fired toward Israel fell short in the Mediterranean off the Lebanese border town of Naqoura, command headquarters of a UN peacekeeping force that polices part of embattled South Lebanon.

Israel's artillery batteries responded with 14 156mm shells on suspected guerrilla positions, said the UN officers.

The sources and the officers spoke on condition of anonymity.

No casualties were reported from the last exchanges of Is-

rael's Operation Grapes of Wrath to end Hezbollah guerrilla rocket attacks on its north.

Late Friday, Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas exchanged fire after the ceasefire was called.

The final and permanent solution is to see Israel leave our territory," Prime Minister Rafik Hariri said Friday in announcing the ceasefire.

Hezbollah promised to honour the agreement, although it lobbed a fresh round of Katyusha rockets at northern Israel even as the announcement was being made. And Israeli warplanes carried out more bombing raids and naval gunboats continued firing on the coastal highway linking the south with the rest of the country, security sources said.

"What has been reached is very good," Hezbollah Secretary-General Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said Friday night in Damascus, Syria. "We have committed ourselves to abide by it."

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said in Jerusalem, "We have achieved the goal of our mission, which was to achieve an agreement to save lives and end the suffering of people on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border."

"I want to make it clear to the leaders of Lebanon — we have no territorial desires on Lebanon," Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Friday in Jerusalem. "We have no bad intentions."

Lebanon's government urged half a million refugees who fled

the Israeli air, naval and artillery onslaught to prepare to return home to the south after the truce takes effect.

Hariri said that under a written "understanding" reached with US, Syrian and French help, Israel and Lebanon also would pledge to spare civilians on both sides of the border.

"We will do our best to make sure that this will be respected," he told reporters. "This understanding will lead to long-term stability and the protection of civilians."

Hariri said a monitoring committee comprising the United States, France, Israel, Syria and Lebanon will be formed "to assure that nobody will violate this understanding."

Meanwhile, Nasrallah, the

Hezbollah leader, said the accord preserved the right of his fighters to battle Israel forces inside the Israeli-occupied enclave in south Lebanon.

Ceasefire negotiations stalled earlier when Syria and Lebanon objected to the UN Security Council resolution demanding Israel withdraw to the internationally recognized border.

Israel's troops have since carved out a self-styled "security zone" in Southern Lebanon, which Hezbollah is seeking to drive it out of.

The overall toll from the onslaught is at least 152 dead, mostly Lebanese civilians, and 339 wounded. In addition to the Lebanese refugees, some 20,000 Israelis have been displaced from northern towns.

IRA won't be allowed to bomb their way to peace table: UK

LONDON, Apr 27: Britain told IRA guerrillas on Friday they would not be allowed to bomb their way to the peace table after anti-terrorist police investigating IRA attacks in London arrested several people in early morning raids, reports Reuter.

Michael Ancram, a junior minister at Britain's northern Ireland office, issued the warning after police found two powerful bombs under a bridge over the River Thames in south west London on Wednesday.

"There is no way that they are going to, through bombs and bullets, achieve a path into the democratic process, nor is the democratic process going to be diverted by this type of action," Ancram told Reuters in Belfast.