

Troops destroy eight LTTE boats

# Chandrika hopes to end ethnic war in next six months

COLOMBO, May 2: President Chandrika Kumaratunga hopes to end the 12-year ethnic war in the next six months, a news report said Thursday.

The return of Tamil civilians to areas recaptured by government forces from the rebels is the beginning of the defeat of Tamil Tigers, Kumaratunga said at a workers' rally in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital, on Wednesday.

But Lt Gen. Rohan Daluwatte, Sri Lanka's new army commander, declined to set a time frame for ending the conflict that has claimed over 42,000 lives.

The military has come a long way in defeating the rebels, Daluwatte told reporters.

His strategy will be to drive the rebels into the jungles and reduce the level of violence, Lt Gen. Daluwatte assumed office on Wednesday.

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The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are fighting for an independent state in northeastern Sri Lanka, said in a communique Monday that Switzerland should use its good offices to try to arrange a truce in the conflict which has claimed thousands of lives in nearly 25 years of on-off fighting.

However a Sri Lankan government spokesman immediately rejected the proposal as "irrelevant."

Earlier Reuter says, Sri Lankan helicopter gunships destroyed eight boats operated by Tamil Tiger as they blocked off a vital seaway in the Jaffna lagoon used by the rebels, the Defence Ministry said Monday.

A military statement said air force Mi-24 helicopters fired at a flotilla of rebel boats making a last-minute escape as troops moved to seal off the rebels' northern peninsula stronghold.

Troops on Friday afternoon captured the Kilaly boat crossing which had been used by Tamil guerrillas, who are fighting a 13-year war for an independent minority Tamil homeland, to travel between the peninsula and the mainland, the statement said.

The capture of Kilaly lagoon by the security forces is a significant event in the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), it said.

# Benazir vows to wipe out terrorism Bus bombing kills 52 in Pak Punjab

ISLAMABAD, May 2: Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto Sunday expressed her resolve to wipe out terrorism in her country, following a bus bombing that killed at least 52 people and injured 28, reports AFP.

The government will not compromise with terrorists and will fight until the last of them is brought to book, she said in a statement.

Denouncing the explosion on a crowded bus near Bhai Phero in Punjab Province, which followed a series of such attacks at different places in recent months, Bhutto said "every right-thinking person must condemn the cowardly act."

The fact that the terrorists chose the festival of Eid-ul-Azha, the occasion of religious sacrifice of animals, Bhutto said "shows that they had no respect even for the most auspicious occasion."

Pakistan later implicitly accused India of engineering the bus blast.

Earlier on Saturday a powerful bomb ripped through an Indian bus, killing 12 people and seriously injuring 20, officials said.

Troops kill 27 Kurds in Turkey

ANKARA, May 2: Turkish troops have killed 27 rebels from the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Southeast Anatolia, said public television TRT today, reports AFP.

The station reported that armed clashes took place in the province of Bitlis, of Sirnak at the border with Syria and Iraq, and of Hakkari at the border with Iraq and Iran.

TRT did not specify any dates nor whether there were any army losses.

# BRIEFLY

**Governor of Kerala resigns:** A governor of a Southern Indian state resigned his post on Wednesday after federal detectives implicated him and a colleague in an unprecedented bribery scandal, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Another governor, also implicated in the huge scandal, refused to step down saying he had been framed in the corruption case by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). P. Shiv Shankar quit his governor's post in the southern state of Kerala after the CBI said it had enough evidence to slap charges against the official, a senior leader of India's ruling Congress (I) Party.

**Top Chinese military team in Yangon:** A high-level Chinese military delegation had talks in Yangon Monday with the head of the Myanmar military junta, state-run radio Yangon said in a dispatch monitored in Bangkok. AFP reports from Bangkok.

The delegation led by General Zhang Wannian, Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission called on General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council — the official name Myanmar's military regime. Than Shwe is also Defence Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.

**Howard visits mass shooting site:** Australian Prime Minister John Howard laid a wreath on Wednesday at the site of a weekend shooting rampage by a long gunman which left 35 people dead, saying the tragedy rocked the soul of Australia. Reuter reports from Port Arthur.

I can't begin to comprehend the anguish and pain these people must be feeling Hoard said after placing the wreath on the steps of a cafe where 20 people were killed as they ate lunch on Sunday.

**Suharto's wife dies:** Indonesia was plunged into national mourning Sunday after the wife of long-ruling President Suharto died suddenly of a heart attack, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

The death of Siti Hartinah Suharto, 72, known widely as Tien Suharto, will hit the president hard and leave him bereft of his closest friend and one of his most valued political advisers. State Secretary Mardiono told reporters at Suharto's residence that the president was in tears when he spoke to him but added that he was "resolute" despite the loss.

She died at 5:10 a.m. (2210 GMT Saturday) in the Gatot Subroto Military Hospital in central Jakarta, a spokesman for the president said.

**Ghali meets Peres:** UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to lend United Nations support for the ceasefire in Lebanon when their visits to the French capital coincided Wednesday. AFP reports from Paris.

Boutros-Ghali, describing the talks with Peres as "extremely constructive," said he had stressed the importance of maintaining the Middle East peace process. Both men were in Paris to take part in a ceremony at the UNESCO (UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) headquarters, and for separate talks with President Jacques Chirac.

**31 killed in Pak road mishaps:** At least 31 people including 16 members of a military volleyball team were killed in two separate road accidents in northern Pakistan on Monday, a report in Islamabad said Wednesday. AFP reports from Islamabad. Also among the dead in the accidents, which came during the Eid-ul-Azha festival, was one Japanese national, the Associated Press of Pakistan said.

Twenty-six passengers died when their bus plunged into the river Indus near the town of Sazeen, about 350 kilometres (220 miles) north of Islamabad, while en route from nearby Rawalpindi city to Gilgit.

**Russian PM's personal doctor killed:** The personal doctor to Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin was shot dead Saturday with two bullets to the head, Interfax news agency said. Reuter reports from Moscow.

The agency gave no motive for the shooting, which took place in a fashionable district of southwest Moscow at around 2 am (2200 GMT) Friday. It said it learned of the killing from "informed sources" but that Chernomyrdin's office had confirmed that the doctor, Dmitry Nechayev, was dead.

**ROK grants asylum to DPRK defector:** South Korea has granted asylum to a North Korean on humanitarian grounds, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Seoul.

An official at the ministry said Chung Jae-Kwang arrived in Seoul on Tuesday from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) after escaping from the communist north. Further details were not available.

**Undersea quake hits east Japan:** A moderate undersea earthquake struck part of eastern Japan early Thursday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. AP reports from Tokyo.

The temblor registered a preliminary magnitude of 4.8 and was centred at a depth of 40 kilometres (25 miles) in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Ibaraki prefecture (state), north of Tokyo, the Central Meteorological Agency said. The quake occurred at 2:50 am (1750 GMT Wednesday), the agency said. There were no reports of damages or injuries in the prefecture as a result of the quake, which was felt in Mito, according to Ibaraki Prefectural Police.



A South Korean Buddhist monk, flanked by a foreign activist, holds a banner that reads: "Revise the US-South Korean agreement, which violates Korea's sovereignty" in front of the main gate of the US embassy in Seoul on Thursday, as a protester hands over a written protest to an embassy official. Demonstrators were demanding an end to US military training in their farmland near the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) in Tongtuchon, some 50 km north from Seoul, blaming artillery practice for causing a fire which killed 7 firefighters. — AFP/UNB photo

# Clinton-Peres sign anti-terrorism deal US gives red carpet treatment to Arafat

WASHINGTON, May 2: President Bill Clinton gave red carpet treatment to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Wednesday to thank him for the Palestinian leadership decision to drop a longstanding call for Israel's destruction, reports Reuter.

The real significance of this meeting is that it took place, that the extraordinary has become the routine in our work on the Middle East peace process, said a White House spokesman David Johnson.

In a speech afterward at the National Press Club, Arafat voiced frustration at the slow arrival of the aid, saying only a small fraction of amounts promised had been delivered.

This will reflect negatively on the whole population, I am sorry to say we are paying the price of peace, he said.

AFP adds, US President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres signed an agreement at the White House Tuesday aimed at strengthening the two countries' fight against terrorism.

The agreement calls notably for the United States to supply Israel with advanced equipment for bomb detection.

# Attack on UN refugee camp Thousands attend mass funeral in Lebanon

CANA, May 2: Thousands of mourners gathered Tuesday for the mass funeral of more than 100 people killed by an Israeli artillery attack on a UN refugee compound in this southern Lebanese village, reports AFP.

Church bells tolled, Islamic prayers were read out over Mosque loudspeakers and Lebanese and black flags fluttered in the breeze in Cana and in nearby Tyre, where a formal ceremony and prayers were held ahead of the burials.

The leader of the Lebanese Shiite Muslim community Sheikh Mohammad Mehdi Shamseddin was to lead the prayers for the dead — 101 civilians, most of them women and children, killed by Israeli shells on April 18 in a massacre which drew international condemnation.

All of the victims were Muslims except for one Christian woman, 52-year-old housewife Georgette Hajj. They were to be laid to rest in Cana a special cemetery built on municipal land and a nearby plot provided by a wealthy Lebanese expatriate who lives in Africa.

More than 100 graves have been dug to accommodate the mutilated bodies of victims, many of which have not been identified, and the remains of at least two other unidentified corpses found nearby.

Iran hardening missile sites along Gulf

WASHINGTON, May 2: Iran is hardening missile sites along The Gulf by digging tunnels, apparently to store and protect missiles and missile equipment, a US military official said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The tunnels were the latest step in an Iranian military modernisation programme that has included the acquisition of Chinese anti-ship missiles, patrol craft to launch them and Kilo-Cass Submarines.

This is another scratch we have to put on the wall of (Iranian) capabilities that are of concern to US, said Colonel John Smith, a spokesman for the US central command based in Tampa, Florida.

**Policeman sentenced to 309 yrs in jail**

RIO DE JANEIRO, May 2: A Brazilian policeman was sentenced to 309 years in jail on Tuesday for his part in the killing of eight street children that caused a worldwide outcry nearly three years ago, officials said, reports Reuter.

Marcus Vinicius Emmanuel, the first person to go on trial for the killings, was found guilty on six counts of murder, five of attempted murder, two of grievous bodily harm followed by murder and one of causing grievous bodily harm.

Under Brazilian law the 29-year old Emmanuel can serve a maximum of only 30 years and legal sources said he also had a good chance of being granted a retrial. His lawyer said she had appealed for a retrial on his behalf.

# Imam cautions Hajj pilgrims Western culture invading through satellite TV

MAKKAH, May 2: The Imam of the Grand Mosque of Makkah on Sunday last marked the end of the annual Muslim pilgrimage with veiled criticism of Iran and a jab at western culture, reports AFP.

It is not possible to bring people to Allah through partisan rallies, Sheikh Adbelrahman al Sudeiss told two million Hajj pilgrims in an apparent rebuke of an Iranian demonstration.

The Iranian pilgrims held the traditional 'disavowal of the pagans' ceremony inside their camp on Mount Arafat on Saturday to avoid clashes with

the Saudi authorities who had banned political rallies.

Sheikh Sudeiss also denounced "the cultural, intellectual and moral invasion" through satellite television, which is received in Muslim countries.

He condemned usury as well as the "increase in divorce" and urged worshippers to return to Islam, a source of strength and pride, in order to overcome divisions and plots against Muslims.

The Imam later led prayers marking the sacrifice of Abraham before Muslims began the three-day Eid-ul-Azha.

Men and women turned their heads in prayer as they walked around the Kaaba, a cube-shaped building at the heart of the Grand Mosque housing the venerated black stone.

The Grand Mosque, covering an area of 328,000 square feet, as well as the main roads leading to it were packed with men wearing white cloth and women in conservative dress, sometimes all in black.

After the prayers, pilgrims took turns throwing pebbles at steles representing the devil in Mina.

# Delhi denounces Pak envoy's remarks on Kashmir polls

NEW DELHI, May 2: The Indian government and leading political parties united Monday to denounce Pakistan's envoy, accusing him of interfering in general elections by saying planned polls in Kashmir were a fraud, reports Reuter.

Pakistan's High Commissioner Riaz Khokhar told India's Foreign Ministry that next month's parliamentary elections in Jammu and Kashmir state were a "complete fraud, a farce, a 'shame' and meaningless."

The news agency quoted the envoy as saying all elections (in Kashmir) in the past

have been rigged, the present elections will be rigged and all future elections will be rigged.

We take the strongest exception to the substance and the tone of the remarks which are not in keeping with the status of foreign representatives in India, the foreign ministry said.

Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar summoned Khokhar to express India's outrage, the Press Trust of India said.

Police used water cannon Tuesday to disperse some 200 protesters demanding the expulsion of the Pakistani envoy.

The Indian National Forum from entering the Pakistan High Commission to lodge a protest against the anti-India statement witnesses said.

Jammu and Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in mostly Hindu India, votes in parliamentary elections on May 7, 23 and 30, the last three of six polling dates.

Meanwhile a member of the ruling party in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh was killed by activists of a rival faction Tuesday a day after poll-related violence left four other people dead, reports said.

# Iran, Syria call Lebanon ceasefire a triumph for Hezbollah

DAMASCUS, Syria, May 2: Syria and Iran on Saturday hailed a US-brokered ceasefire that halted Israel's aerial, naval and artillery blitz in southern Lebanon as a triumph for Shiite Muslim militants, reports AP.

Elsewhere in the Arab world, there was relief that the 16-day war — which killed nearly 160 people and threatened to derail Middle East peacemaking efforts — is over.

Esmat Abdel-Meguid, secretary-general of the 22-member Arab League, flew to Beirut to assess the damage and discuss possible Arab aid.

The main objective of the case-fire agreement was to halt attacks by both sides on civilian targets. However, it was not likely to end Hezbollah's guerrilla campaign to oust Israeli forces from an occupied border enclave in south Lebanon.

Christopher had excluded Iran, Hezbollah's mentor and financial backer, from his consultations. But Velayati, who spent nine days in the region while the US mediation was under way, was in constant contact with Syrian, French and Lebanese officials and Hezbollah's leaders.

The truce ordered Israel and Hezbollah to refrain from attacking civilians but did not provide a solution to the conflict in south Lebanon.

Velayati interpreted the agreement as a green light for the guerrillas to keep up their attacks on Israeli troops in south Lebanon.

The Syrian government newspaper said the truce was a triumph for Lebanon and the resistance. It called the Israeli offensive an "aborted aggression" because it failed to crush Hezbollah.

Syria has 40,000 of its troops deployed on Lebanese soil.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said in Cairo that the cease-fire would curtail "the aggressive and violent actions" and help restart Mideast peace talks.

Egypt welcomes this agreement, which will make possible the return by the parties to substantive negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, Moussa said.

Jordan also welcomed the truce. Its information minister, Marwan Mousher, said Jordan hoped the agreement "will lay the foundation for resuming dialogue and peace negotiations to achieve a final settlement."

Abraham Ghosheh, a spokesman for the Palestinian Muslim fundamentalist group Hamas, said the new agreement was no different from a 1993 accord, which did not hold for long.

This makes one believe that aggressive operations by the Zionists and Katyusha attacks may resume anytime, he said in Amman, Jordan.

Hamas and Hezbollah are allies. They both oppose the Mideast peacemaking efforts.

Saudi Arabia's King Fahd said he was "relieved" that the bloodshed in Lebanon had stopped. He ordered 20 ambulances dispatched to Lebanon and conferred by telephone with Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on other possible aid.

Libya, however, said the truce had imposed "humiliating concessions" on the Arabs.

# Off the Record

## To cut abortion rate

NEW ZEALAND: Free oral contraceptives are being offered to all New Zealand women under a government plan to cut the country's abortion rate, reports AP.

In some cases, poor women will have the costs of doctor consultations for contraceptive pill prescriptions waived.

Other women will pay just US 2 dollars (3 NZ dollars) for each prescription for the pills, which will be supplied free under a government subsidy scheme.

One brand of each form of oral contraceptive pill will be fully taxpayer-subsidised.

Announcing the measure, Health Minister Jenny Shipley said Thursday it was part of a strategy aimed at cutting the rate of abortion and unwanted pregnancy.

This political tactic seems to have disarmed the usual critics of birth-control programme. Although the proposal has been working its way toward adoption for weeks as part of the government's new budget, not even the Roman Catholic Church has spoken out against the concept.

It is expected to go into effect in a few weeks, when the budget is adopted.

But Shipley delayed plans to allow pharmacies to supply "morning after" pills for the counter without medical oversight while she seeks further medical advice. But the move is still expected to be adopted within six months.

Some 13,000 pregnancy terminations are carried out in New Zealand each year, a country with 3.6 million people.

There are 221 abortions for every 1,000 live births, up from 202 a year ago.

Nearly 40 per cent of all children are born to unmarried women, and some legislators blame social welfare support system for these trends.

# Donkey for feast!

CAIRO: A butcher in southern Egypt has been charged with slaughtering donkeys and trying to sell their meat during an annual Muslim holiday, reports AP.

The butcher and his two sons were collecting sick donkeys from nearby villages under the pretence of sending them to the zoo in Cairo, security sources said Friday.

The butcher was seen slaughtering the donkeys to cope with the demand for meat during the holiday, known as the Feast of Sacrifice, which begins Sunday, the sources said.

During the feast, observed by an estimated 1 billion Muslims worldwide, believers slaughter sheep, goats, cows or camels in commemoration of the prophet Abraham's readiness to offer his son's life to God. They distribute the meat to the poor.