

BRIEFLY



US President Bill Clinton (R) points to a book presented to him by Lech Walesa (L), former president of Poland, during a visit to the White House in Washington on Monday. Clinton carried the book, entitled "Lech Walesa," as the two men walked through the White House's Ross Garden. —AFP/UNB photo

AI likely to visit Kashmir: Amnesty International is expected to visit the strife-torn Indian state of Kashmir later this year, the chairman of India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The Times of India and other newspapers quoted NHRC Chairman Ranganath Mishra as saying in the town of Shimla on Monday that the London-based human rights organisation was likely to visit Kashmir in July or August. Mishra said the previous government of former premier P V Narasimha Rao had agreed to allow amnesty to tour the troubled Himalayan region at the invitation of the NHRC.

New S Korean speaker named: South Korean President Kim Young Sam yesterday named career politician Kim Soo-han as Speaker of the newly-elected National Assembly despite a threatened opposition boycott of parliament, a presidential spokesman said, AFP reports from Seoul.

The appointment of Kim Soo-han, 68, came after the ruling Korea Party (NKP) said it would unilaterally push for the opening of the assembly on Wednesday despite the boycott threat. The main opposition National Congress for New Politics (NCNP) and the second opposition United Liberal Democrats (ULD) are protesting the NKP's masterminding a narrow parliamentary majority by wooing opposition and independent lawmakers elect.

Angolan cabinet sacked: Angolan Prime Minister Jose Marcelino Carlos Moco and his entire cabinet were sacked Monday, according to a presidential decree, AFP reports from Luanda.

It said President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos was replacing Moco with Fernando Jose De Franca Dias Vandunem, the current Speaker of Parliament. Another decree gave Van Dunem up to five days to form a new government.

Syrian, Egyptian FM's in KSA: The Syrian and Egyptian Foreign Ministers Monday arrived in Riyadh on a surprise visit to Saudi Arabia for talks with their Saudi counterpart Prince Saud al-Faisal, AFP reports from Riyadh.

The visit, reported by the official agency SPA, of Syria's Faruq al-Shara and his Egyptian counterpart Amr Mousa came only hours after talks between Egyptian and Syrian leaders in Cairo. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his Syrian counterpart Hafez al-Assad both voiced pessimism at the future of the peace process and urged Arabs to work together in face of the victory by Israel's rightwing leader Benjamin Netanyahu in Wednesday's elections.

Swedish PM in Latvia: Sweden supports Latvia's desire to join NATO and the European Union, Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson said Monday, AP reports from Riga.

"Each country has to set its security procedures," Persson said at a news conference during his one-day visit to the former Soviet republic. "Now we know that Latvia wants to become a NATO member," the Baltic News Service quoted him as saying. "We respect it, and we have to do all possible to back Latvia in this process."

Dengue fever kills 117 in Indonesia: Dengue fever has infected 5,373 people in Indonesia so far this year, killing 117 of them, a press report said in Jakarta yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The fever, transmitted by mosquitoes, has struck in 11 of Indonesia's 27 provinces. Director General for the Eradication of Contagious Diseases, Hadi Abednego, was quoted by the Antara News Agency as saying, "Abednego said the fever has caused the highest casualties in east Java, infecting 2,484 people, and killing 57 of them. Jakarta took second place with 1,880 people infected and 28 fatalities."

24 more executed in China: Twenty-four people have been executed as part of China's campaign against crime, adding to hundreds already carried out, according to Chinese press reports received in Beijing yesterday, AFP says from Beijing.

Rabbani ready to renegotiate power sharing deal with Hekmatyar

KABUL, June 4: Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani Monday said he was ready to renegotiate the recently concluded power sharing deal with former premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar if his key rivals decide to join the government, reports AFP.

"Everything can be negotiated," the embattled president who signed a political and military pact with Hekmatyar on May 24, told a news conference here.

He renewed his offer to the Taliban Islamic militia and the northern warlord general Abdul Rashid Dostam and urged them to join the intra-Afghan dialogue aimed at broadening the base of government.

Rabbani said he had already dispatched a "goodwill" delegation to Dostam's headquarters in Mazar-i-Sharif and another government team would be sent to southwestern Kandahar also for talks with the Taliban leadership.

"We hope the Taliban, mindful of the consequences of war, will follow the path of understanding and negotiations," he said.

The Taliban, besieging Kabul for more than eight months, have so far refused to hold talks with Rabbani, dubbing his administration as "corrupt and un-Islamic."

Dostam, whose national movement controls several northern provinces, has also rejected similar offers in the past.

"Our call to all Afghan groups is a message of peace, an invitation to peace and an appeal for peace," Rabbani said, stressing that the accord with Hezb-i-Islami of Hekmatyar was not against any other party.

Under the accord Hekmatyar will become prime minister of the war ravaged country while defence and finance ministry portfolios will also go to the Hezb faction.

'BJP to usher in equality if voted back to power'

BOMBAY, June 4: Former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said Monday that his ousted Hindu nationalist party would usher in "equality" if voted back to power, reports AFP.

"Our goal is a Hindu swaraj (Hindu self-rule)," Vajpayee told several thousand party workers at a rally here.

"Hindu swaraj means equality to all people and appeasement to none," Vajpayee said, adding, "That is our ultimate goal."

The tenure of Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) government was abruptly ended on May 28 when leftist and centrist parties with more than 300 MPs in the 545-seat Lower House joined together to seek power.

Vajpayee, 69, a respected politician, said his 13-day government was formed without any love for power but for the welfare of the people.

'IRA ceasefire extremely remote'

LONDON, June 4: The BBC on Tuesday quoted an unidentified senior IRA source as saying prospects for a renewed IRA ceasefire before round-table talks start next week are extremely remote, reports AP.

The British government has insisted that the Irish Republican Army's political ally, the Sinn Fein party, will not be allowed to take part in the talks on the future of Northern Ireland due to start Monday without such a ceasefire.

The IRA ended a 17-month ceasefire on February 9 with a truck bomb in London's Docklands business district that killed two people.

Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams says his party has a mandate to take part in the talks after it won 15.5 per cent of the vote in a special Northern Ireland election on Thursday.

Europe must look to its own defence, says EU chief

CANBERRA, June 4: Europe must take more responsibility for its defence, European Commission vice-president Sir Leon Brittan said Tuesday, reports AP.

In the post-cold war world the United States is entitled to demand that others take on their fair share of protecting the free world," Brittan said in a speech at the Australian national university.

"Europe must now take more responsibility for its own defence."

"This does not mean that European co-operation need conflict with or undermine our obligations to NATO," Brittan said.

"On the contrary, European defence co-operation could actually strengthen NATO."

"It would do so by allowing Europe to act together outside the strict NATO framework, but under NATO auspices, when the United States did not want to be involved, using NATO logistics and materials, as has already been agreed within NATO," he said.

UN confce pledges bold steps to curb misery caused by migration to big cities

ISTANBUL, Turkey, June 4: Across town from Istanbul's teeming slums, delegates opened a UN conference on urban problems by promising bold steps to curb the misery caused by migration to the world's big cities, reports AP.

Crime, squalor, homelessness and crumbling roads and bridges were among the issues raised Monday at the Conference on Human Settlements, held some 5 miles (8 kilometers) from Istanbul's slums in a plush new conference centre.

Advocates for the poor were not impressed by the promises.

"It's just words," said Brazilian slum activist Jamie Silva. "I want to believe the UN will make a difference, but the problems are too big. Their speeches are just spit in the wind."

The urgency was amplified by UN predictions cited by the speakers. More than half the world's population will be city dwellers by the end of the century. By 2025, the number

International
NLD may face ban if it drafts alternative constitution

YANGON, June 4: Hinting at a fresh crackdown, Myanmar's state-controlled press said Tuesday that pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party could be banned if it goes through with plans to draft an alternative constitution, reports AP.

The suggestion follows others that the government crackdown on public gatherings held each weekend outside the home of Suu Kyi, the 1991 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and leader of Myanmar's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The military regime so far has failed to heed the calls. But the press is the regime's indirect voice, and the articles clearly imply that Suu Kyi's movement operates only at the indulgence of the authorities.

Suu Kyi staged a party congress last week despite the mass arrest of delegates, scoring her biggest political triumph since being released last

July from six years of house arrest.

The 18 delegates who eluded arrest adopted resolutions urging the military to quit power, and said the pro-democracy party would draft an alternative constitution to one being considered by a government-stacked panel.

Myanmar newspapers carried articles Tuesday stating: "If a single party writes a constitution to its own liking and threatens the stability of the country by pressure and coercion, it could be declared an unlawful association."

A separate constitution — even if unenforceable — could provide Burmese with a written contrast between a form of government stressing democracy and human rights against one weighted toward a paramount military.

Myanmar has been without a constitution since 1988, when the military violently suppressed pro-democracy demonstrations, killing hun-

dreds. Suu Kyi's supporters overwhelmingly won parliamentary elections in 1990 but were not allowed to take power.

The so-called National Convention picked by the military has been labouring since 1993 on guidelines for new charter. Articles agreed on so far would ban Suu Kyi from an executive position and ensure the military a significant political role. Her party walked out of the convention last November, calling it "undemocratic."

Since last week's party congress, Suu Kyi and her colleagues have been attacked daily in the media. The government has organized mass rallies describing them as "stooges" of a US-led conspiracy to colonize Burma.

Nearly half of the 262 people detained in the roundups remain unheard from, despite the regime's announcement Friday that they were being released.



Palestinian leader President Yasser Arafat and British Prime Minister John Major pose for photographers outside 10 Downing Street on Monday. Arafat is in London on a two-day official visit, the first since becoming President. —AFP/UNB photo.

Israel has no right to backtrack on peace deal: Arafat
Netanyahu govt plans to remove most forces from Hebron

HEBRON, West Bank, June 4: In an apparent reversal of a campaign promise by Israel's new ruling party, a senior legislator Monday said the new government plans to remove most forces from the tense West Bank city of Hebron, reports AP.

"We have no interest in controlling the Arab part of Hebron," senior Likud party legislator Moshe Katzav told Israel television.

Instead, he said, the small Jewish settlement in Hebron will be made contiguous with the neighbour Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba, and the Israeli army will redeploy to that area.

Katzav said that he had just learned of the plans from Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu. They closely re-

semble the plans of the outgoing government led by Shimon Peres.

Katzav did not say when the redeployment was planned, but the timing of his statement suggested Netanyahu intended to implement the move soon.

Netanyahu, leader of the Likud Party, had campaigned on a promise that he would postpone a planned pullout of Israeli troops from the volatile town for several years. But since his election last week, he has not mentioned Hebron.

Outgoing Prime Minister Shimon Peres had pledged to pull soldiers out of most of Hebron.

Earlier, Israeli troops had been pelted with stones and bottles after they stopped and searched an unmarked Palestinian police car in

Hebron, the last West Bank town still under Israeli occupation.

Meanwhile, Yasser Arafat declared that Israel has no right to backtrack on its peace deals with the Palestinians, and Israel's new leader affirmed his commitment to moving peace ahead — once he sets his strategy.

Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday began the delicate process of building a governing coalition that will help determine his policy toward the Palestinians and Israel's Arab neighbours.

Syria's president, Hafez Assad, said Monday that only when Netanyahu's position is clear can peace talks resume.



Foreign ministers of 16 NATO states meet at Berlin's Hotel Intercontinental on Monday for the official opening of the two-day Spring meeting of NATO foreign ministers. —AFP/UNB photo

Bahrain accuses Iran of coup plot, 29 held

MANAMA, Bahrain, June 4: Bahrain has arrested 29 militants that the government says were trained by Iran to topple the ruling Al Khalifa family and install a Shi'ite Muslim government modeled on Iran, reports AP.

Bahrain's information minister, Mohammed al-Muttawa, said Monday that the detainees confessed last month and detailed their links to Iran. He did not disclose when the arrests took place.

Iran denied the accusations Monday, calling them "totally baseless."

Al-Muttawa said caches of light weapons were seized from the alleged plotters, who were trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

A slight majority to Bahrain's 500,000 people are Shi'ites, many of Iranian origin, but the ruling family belongs to the mainstream Sunni Muslim sect.

The accusations are certain to worsen the already uneasy

relationship between Bahrain and Iran, its giant neighbour across the Gulf. Bahrain repeatedly has accused Tehran of being behind a Shi'ite-led wave of unrest that began 18 months ago in which 28 people have reportedly been killed.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman called the accusations "a result of instigations by outsiders," the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

Iran "advises the Bahraini government against being influenced by the conspirators of the enemies of the Islamic community," spokesman Mohamad Mohammadi said.

The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. John Shalikavili, suggested last week that Iran was involved in the continuing unrest.

"We support Bahrain's efforts to ensure its stability and we continue to accuse Iran as a threat to the stability of the region," Shalikavili said.

Off the Record
He does not regard it as marriage

WASHINGTON: House Speaker Newt Gingrich said Sunday he would refuse to attend the wedding if his lesbian half-sister were to marry another woman, reports AP.

"I wouldn't regard it as a marriage. I think a marriage is between a man and a woman," the Georgia Republican said on NBC's "Meet The Press."

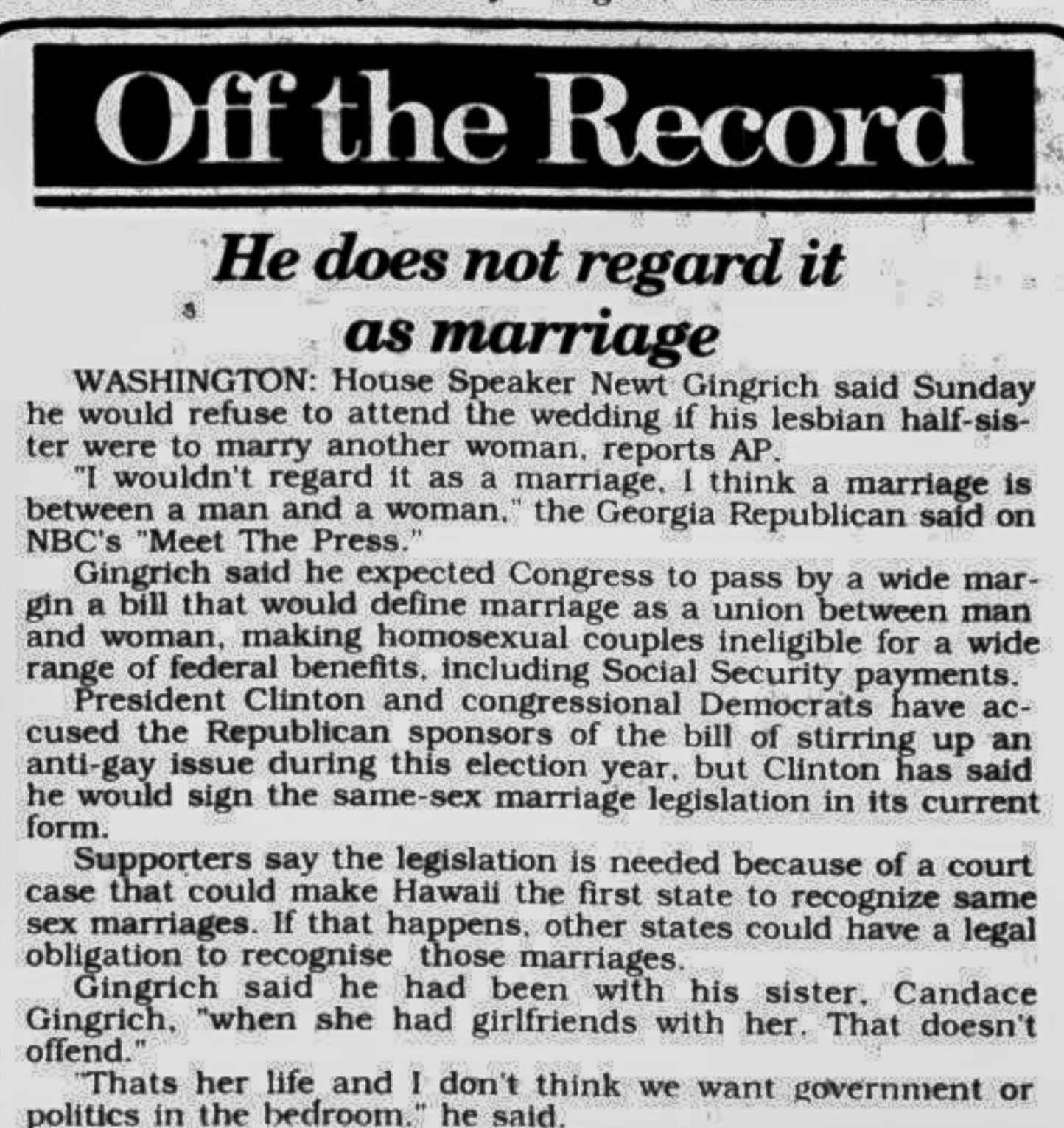
Gingrich said he expected Congress to pass by a wide margin a bill that would define marriage as a union between man and woman, making homosexual couples ineligible for a wide range of federal benefits, including Social Security payments.

President Clinton and congressional Democrats have accused the Republican sponsors of the bill of stirring up an anti-gay issue during this election year, but Clinton has said he would sign the same-sex marriage legislation in its current form.

Supporters say the legislation is needed because of a court case that could make Hawaii the first state to recognize same sex marriages. If that happens, other states could have a legal obligation to recognise those marriages.

Gingrich said he had been with his sister, Candace Gingrich, "when she had girlfriends with her. That doesn't offend."

"That's her life and I don't think we want government or politics in the bedroom," he said.



A model appears to have been strangled in the latest edition of youth magazine "Juice" distributed in Sydney on Tuesday which has caused a public outcry. The controversial six-page fashion spread entitled "Live Fast... Fashion To Die For" features photographs with strangulation, drowning, beating, suffocation, drug overdose and coronary seizure listed as the causes of "death". —AFP/UNB photo

Benazir's appeal to Gowda to begin peace talks

ISLAMABAD, June 4: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has appealed to India's new Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda to begin peace talks to stabilise the sub-continent, reports Reuter.

"For the sake of our people and as civilised nations, let us sit across the table for a search for lasting peace," she said in a letter to her Indian counterpart that was carried by the official APP news agency late on Monday.

"As responsible leaders of South Asia, let us seize this opportunity by opening a new chapter in our relations by laying down the foundations of a peaceful South Asia based on equitable conflict-resolution and reconciliation," Benazir said.

"Let the world witness our two great countries putting their acrimones behind them for the sake of their peoples."

She said her government in creating an environment conducive to peace, security and development.

Benazir reiterated Islamabad's offer of talks aimed at settling the core issue of Kashmir and other bilateral disputes.

"Given mutual respect, there is no reason why we cannot resolve our differences," she said in her letter.

India says the state of Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of its territory. Pakistan says its status is unresolved.

Rebels agree to hold fresh talks
Russian planes bomb Chechen villages

MOSCOW, June 4: Russian planes bombed several villages in southeast Chechnya late Monday, causing extensive damage, a Chechen separatist spokesman said, reports AP.

If the bombing raids, reported to have started at 9:45 p.m. (1745 GMT) and lasted 25 minutes, are confirmed, it would be the first major violation of a ceasefire accord signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chechen rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev a week ago.

"At the moment we do not know if there have been any victims, or how many," Muslim Yelikhanov, spokesman for the independent Chechen news agency, told AFP by telephone from Istanbul.

He said Tim Guldemann, head of the Chechnya mission of the organisation for security and cooperation in Europe, witnessed the bombing.

Yelikhanov, speaking for the separatists, "protests at these violations of the peace process and notes that the Russian army is not obeying Yeltsin."

UN confce pledges bold steps to curb misery caused by migration to big cities

could rise to almost two-thirds, most of them in developing nations, including the enormous megalopolises of Asia and Latin America.

"We have little time to act," said Fabio Giraldo, Colombia's vice minister of economic development.

The World Bank proposed tripling investment in urban areas to \$15 billion during the next five years. Others spoke of rehabilitating shantytowns and connecting them to water and sewage lines, but there were few specifics.

"The crises of urban development are crises of all states, rich and poor," said the UN secretary-general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his speech to open the 12-day meeting.

"There can be no isolation," he added. "In a rapidly globalising world, we all have a stake in the management of growth and development."

At a time of quick, easy commerce and communication, there is little nations can do to protect themselves from urban poverty problems,

ety need to tackle the problem.

"I'm not here to create a new right, but I don't want to talk housing rights in the abstract when there are governments that are not doing much at all in the housing area but are supporting housing rights," said Michael Stegman, assistant secretary for policy development at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Some activists mocked the altruistic pronouncements heard at the conference.

"The people at the top have to look too far down to see the problems," said a Brazilian aid worker, Miguel Alfonso, from the favela slums of Sao Paulo. "When babies are crying, can they hear them?"

"We believe in the bottom helping the bottom, not the top helping the bottom. That doesn't work," said Carlos Guerrero, project manager for London-based Homeless International, a non-profit aid group.

AP adds, Chechen rebel leaders agreed Monday to meet Russian officials for a new round of talks aimed at bringing peace to the breakaway republic as a ceasefire accord appeared in danger of collapse.

Both sides confirmed they would attend talks Tuesday in Nagran.

Ongoing clashes and delays in resuming negotiations have threatened a week-old ceasefire accord and could potentially embarrass President Boris Yeltsin, campaigning hard for re-election June 16.

Yeltsin, who reached the truce with separatist Chechen leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, badly wants to be able to point to progress toward ending the unpopular, nearly 18-month-old war in Chechnya.

A Russian envoy to the region from the Council of Europe, Nikilai Fyodorov, said in Grozny on Monday that the agreement remains only on paper, and that rebels are ignoring the cease-fire, which began Saturday.