

7 Tamil Tigers, 7 soldiers killed in fresh fighting

COLOMBO, July 11: Security forces today fanned deep into jungles of northeastern Sri Lanka and killed at least seven Tamil Tiger rebels as the guerrillas killed seven security personnel elsewhere, officials here said, reports AFP.

Troops backed by the air force advanced towards jungle bases of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to pursue the rebels who had escalated attacks in the districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa, officials said.

"This is a limited offensive but there had been several small scale confrontations," a military source said. "We have recovered the bodies of seven terrorists and at least three of our soldiers were seriously wounded."

The offensive code-named "Sada Pahara" or "Tidal Wave," was aimed at flushing out Tiger guerrillas responsible for a

fresh wave of attacks in the north-eastern region, officials said.

Even as troops were conducting their latest offensive, Tigers killed two elite police commandos in the eastern Kumana region within hours of killing three more policemen elsewhere in the eastern province.

Two soldiers were also shot dead in the northern Peninsula of Jaffna Thursday and eight more security personnel were wounded when Tiger gunmen attacked their vehicle, officials said.

Tigers are leading a protracted campaign for independence in the island's northern and eastern regions where the two million Tamil minority is concentrated. More than 50,000 people have died in bitter fighting.



King Hassan II of Morocco receives Palestinian President Yasser Arafat (L) at the Royal Palace at Rabat, on Wednesday, for talks on the future of the peace process.— AFP/UNB photo

Izetbegovic blasts Tudjman, Milosevic Croatia, Serbia bent upon crushing Bosnia

SARAJEVO, July 11: Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic says he believes neighbouring Croatia and Serbia are bent upon crushing his country, but that he is nonetheless optimistic about Bosnia's survival, reports AP.

In a wide-ranging television interview Wednesday, Izetbegovic launched his most direct attacks on Croatian leader Franjo Tudjman and Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic since last year's Dayton accords ended war in his land.

"This is an everyday battle, to keep Bosnia undivided," he told Bosnian state television. "Dayton has not excluded the option of including the option of the disintegration of Bosnia-Herzegovina."

He suggested Milosevic still harbored ambitions of creating

a "greater Serbia" by incorporating the breakaway Bosnian Serb territory into Serbia.

But he said that those ambitions — which helped spark the Bosnian war four years ago — had been battered by international sanctions against Serbia and against the Bosnian Serb self-declared republic.

"I see a relatively weak Serbia in the long term, unable to perform a greater Serbia concept" here, Izetbegovic said.

For his part, Milosevic has indicated to world leaders he would help out the nationalist Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, who is pushing for the merger with Serbia. But Milosevic has not delivered on his assurances.

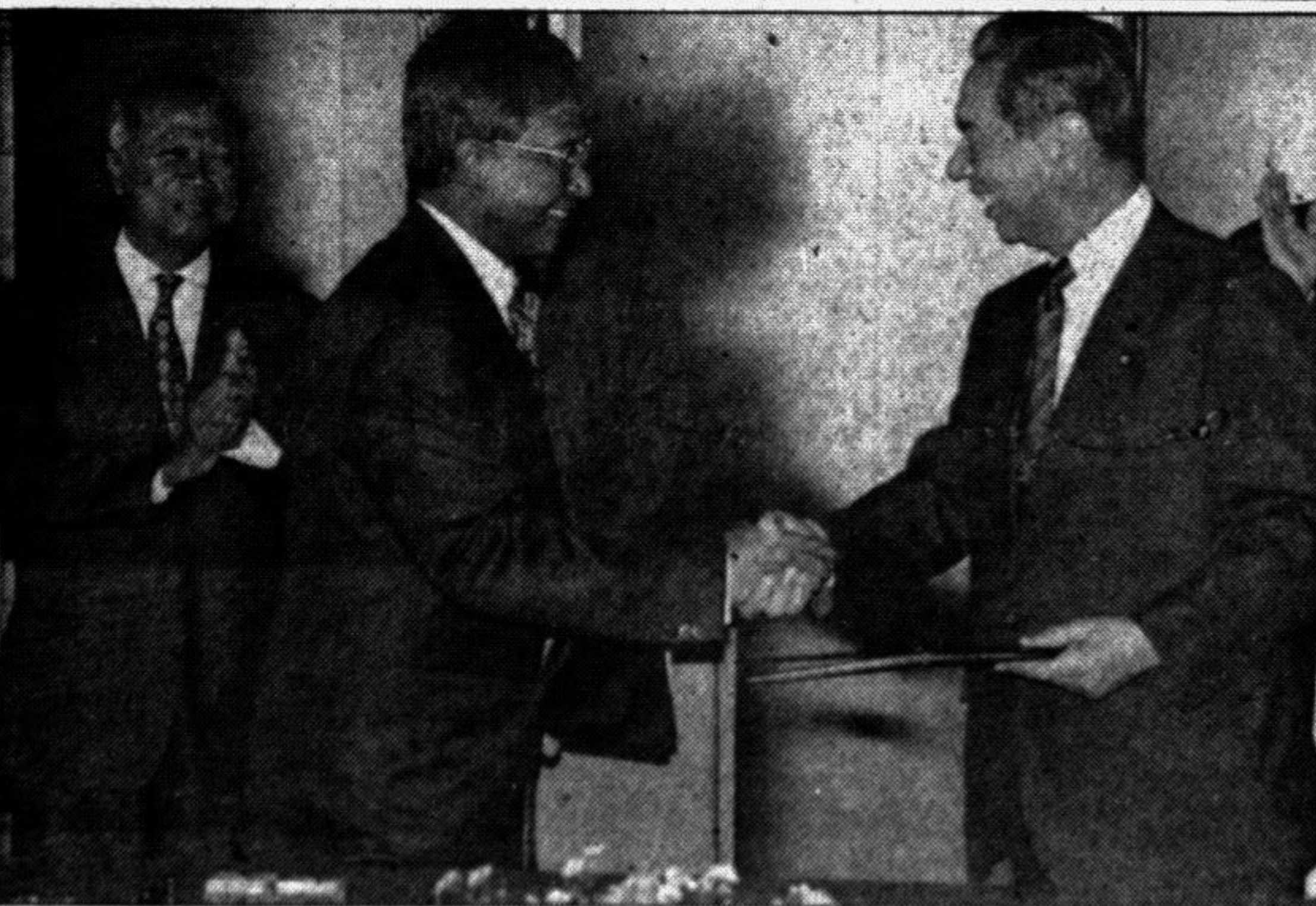
On the Croatian side, Izetbegovic said that Tudjman's

administration was "brutally interfering in Bosnian matters. We see this, we are not blind."

He cited leaders of Tudjman's party in Bosnia, the Croatian Democratic Union, declaring their own separate republic in a move widely seen as a prelude for absorbing lands they control into a greater Croatia.

CDU officials have said they were simply trying to protect Bosnian Croat interest until the national elections later this year.

Another report from London says, the five-nation contact group trying to bring peace to Bosnia agreed Wednesday that Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic must be removed from power and influence and brought to trial on war crimes charges.



Cambodian Foreign Minister Ung Huot (C) shakes hands with his Japanese counterpart Yukihiko Ikeda (R) while Cambodian first Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh (L) claps his hands during a signing ceremony of 2 billion yen (18 million US dollar) grant-in-aid for Cambodia at the Likura Guesthouse in Tokyo on Thursday. Japan pledged the largest single donation of aid to Cambodia out of 16 countries and five international institutions.— AFP/UNB photo

Suu Kyi against Myanmar's inclusion into ASEAN US issues new threat to use trade ban against SLORC

BANGKOK, July 11: US National Security Advisor Anthony Lake today issued a new threat to use trade sanctions against Myanmar's military rulers, but also stressed the need for a dialogue between the junta and its opponents, reports AFP.

Sanctions are a "useful tool to have in our pockets," Lake told reporters here, but insisted any decision on their use would have to await the outcome of discussions in Congress.

He said that Myanmar and a democratically-elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been prevented from filling the role she deserved in Burmese society.

Lake added, however, the United States supported efforts to promote dialogue be-

tween Aung San Suu Kyi and the ruling government in Myanmar.

The NLD advocates international sanctions against Myanmar, to stop foreign investment that it believes only serves to prop up the military and bring economic benefits to the ruling elite and its supporters.

Two weeks ago US Commerce Secretary Mickey Kantor speaking to reporters in Bangkok expressed Washington's deep concern about the situation in Myanmar and said sanctions could be an appropriate response to the junta's clampdown against its opponents.

Earlier report says, Myanmar's entrance into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) would not contribute to stability in the prosperous region, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was quoted as saying today.

Aung San Suu Kyi, in an interview with the Bangkok Post, said that the lack of stability, rule of law and justice in Myanmar would be problematic for the grouping in which Yangon is hoping to become a full member by 1999.

"I think they (ASEAN countries) should be careful about how far the government is capable of achieving peace and stability. It cannot do the region any good at all," she said.

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ROK priest wins Magsaysay for public service

MANILA, July 11: South Korean Catholic priest John Oh Woong-jin, founder of a home of Korea's poor, disabled and elderly was awarded this year's Ramon Magsaysay award for public service, the award foundation announced today, reports AFP.

Oh was cited for "arousing in modern Korea a compassion for the poor by personifying the scriptural injunction to 'love thy neighbour,'" the foundation said.

Oh, a 50-year-old secular priest, founded and built Khotongne in 1983, a refuge for 3,000 orphans, abandoned children, the disable and elderly, using donations from 700,000 individuals instead of big donors so that many could "experience the happiness of helping others."

Oh derived inspiration for his work from the experience of a 70-year-old man who begged food for others too weak to beg and rescued the homeless from the cold, the citation said.

The priest will receive a 50,000-dollar cash prize and a medal, along with four other awards in other categories in ceremonies on August 31.

Jet crash claims 6 in Himachal Pradesh

NEW DELHI, July 11: An aircraft belonging to India's private Archana Airways crashed in the northern Himachal Pradesh state today killing all six passengers, three of them Japanese, and three crew members, airline officials said.

An airline spokeswoman told Reuters the 17-seater L-410 aircraft, was on its way to Kullu, a popular tourist spot in the Himalayan state, from state capital Shimla when it lost contact with the air control office in Kullu at about 9 am (0330 GMT).

She said the flight originated from New Delhi and made a stop at Shimla. The three dead Japanese were Hidakazu Omi, his wife Kiyoko Omi and C Yamamoto, the spokeswoman said. Their ages, occupations and home towns were not immediately known, she added.

Lee calls for meet with Jiang

TAIPEI, July 11: Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui called today for a meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin in the island's latest drive to break the deadlock between the two arch rivals, reports Reuter.

"To start a new era in communications and cooperation across the Taiwan Strait and ensure the stability and prosperity in the Asia Pacific region, Teng-hui would like to meet Communist China's top leader to exchange opinions," Lee said in a keynote address to the National Assembly.

"Our efforts and sincerity will win support from people across the strait. We hope Communist China's authority can also get rid of old thinking ... and jointly create a new opportunity for future peaceful reunification," Lee said.

Taiwan and China have been rivals since a civil war separated them in 1949. Both governments say they want reunification but under very different terms.

DPRK exported 370 missiles to ME since '87

SEOUL, July 11: North Korea has exported about 370 missiles to the Middle East since 1987, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported today, says Reuter.

Yonhap quoted an unnamed military source as saying the missiles exported by the hard-line Stalinist North included about 100 Scud-B missiles to Iran between July 1987 and February 1988. The missiles have a range of 300-km (180 miles).

Since 1991, North Korea has shipped Scud-C missiles, which have a range of 600-km (360 miles), to Iraq, Syria, Libya and Iran, the source was quoted as saying.

Scud-B and Scud-C missiles are upgraded versions of the Soviet-made Scud-B missile Pyongyang first bought from Egypt in 1974, Yonhap said.

Top Russian army general killed in Chechnya

MOSCOW, July 11: A top Russian army general was killed in Chechnya today when the armoured vehicle in which he was travelling drove over a mine, Interfax news agency said, reports Reuter.

It said Major General Nikolai Skripnik, deputy commander of Russian Interior Ministry troops in the north Caucasus, died of his wounds shortly after the mine blast, which happened at about six am (0200 GMT) near the village of Gekhi, which Russian troops have been pounding for two days.

Skripnik, 52, was one of the most senior Russian soldiers to die in the Chechen conflict, which flared up this week after a six-week lull preceding President Boris Yeltsin's re-election. His death is likely to further anger the military, which criticised the Kremlin's pre-election peace

deal with rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev.

The deputy commander of federal forces in Chechnya, Major General Vladimir Sham- anov, confirmed on Thursday that troops were bombarding Yandarbiyev's headquarters in Mekhety, southern Chechnya.

Asked if they were trying to kill Yandarbiyev, Interfax quoted him as saying: "A ruthless struggle is being waged against the armed bandits and naturally no-one is insured against the consequences of powerful artillery and air strikes."

Meanwhile, five Russian soldiers were killed and 23 were injured in clashes in Chechnya in the past 24 hours.

Earlier report says, international mediators in Chechnya are worried that a new outbreak of fighting could spread across the rebel Russian region.

BRIEFLY

Pope's holiday in Italy begins:

Pope John Paul, pronouncing himself in real need of a rest, began a two-week private holiday in the Dolomite mountains of northern Italy on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Lorenzago di Cadore.

The 76-year-old pontiff will reside in a secluded mountain hamlet owned by the local Roman Catholic church in the town of Lorenzago di Cadore, north of Venice near the Austrian border. He was greeted on his arrival by local churchmen and politicians, one of whom told him: "Try to have a good rest." "I really need it," the Pope replied. "It's cooler here than in Rome."

Afghan executed in KSA:

Saudi Arabia on Wednesday executed an Afghan man convicted of murdering a compatriot in a dispute over money, Saudi television reported, Reuter reports from Dubai.

It brings to 11 the number of people the kingdom has executed this year in its enforcement of Islamic law for murder, drug smuggling and other crimes. In 1995, it executed 192 people.

HK deports 123 Vietnamese:

Hong Kong repatriated 123 Vietnamese Thursday in the second deportation in as many days, taking the total number of asylum-seekers forcibly returned since 1991 to just over 4,000, AP reports from Hong Kong.

The 56 men, 28 women and 39 children from north Vietnam, most of whom arrived in Hong Kong in 1989, were flown to the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, the government said. The government is speeding up deportations to try to clear the 15,000 Vietnamese left in its detention camps before Hong Kong reverts from British to Chinese rule on July 1 next year.

DPRK worker defects to ROK:

A North Korean worker swam down a river along the tense border and defected to South Korea Thursday, the Defence Ministry said, AP reports from Seoul.

Choi Sung Chan, 29, arrived at Kanghwa Island near the western border before dawn and was discovered by two South Korean soldiers, it said.

Perot to run for presidency:

Texas billionaire and former independent presidential candidate Ross Perot said Wednesday he will run for president again this year if chosen by his Reform Party, AFP reports from Washington.

Asked in a CNN interview whether he would run if his party nominates him, he said: "Certainly I will and I think that's obvious to anybody when you see this is all I have done for the last five years."

Hall to head UN Afghan mission:

Norbert Heinrich Hall, a German foreign service officer, was named officially on Wednesday as the new head of the UN Mission to Afghanistan, Reuter reports from United Nations.

Hall, director of the South Asia division in the German foreign office, is familiar with Afghanistan and has travelled frequently to the region in his current post. He replaces Mahamoud Mestiri, a former Tunisian Foreign Minister, who resigned in May for health reasons.

Floods kill 15 villagers in Iran:

Torrential rains have triggered floods which killed at least 15 villagers and inflicted more than 8 million dollar in damage in northwestern Iran since Friday, the official news agency IRNA said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Tehran.

The floods also killed 1,788 cattle, destroyed 300 houses and damaged farmlands and roads in east Azerbaijan province, causing 24.6 million rials (8.2 million dollar) in damage, it said.

Fighters holding 300 Liberians hostage to attract food aid

ABIDJAN, July 11: Faction fighters in Liberia have been holding hostage more than 300 civilians, mostly women and children and starving them to force aid groups to hand over food, aid workers said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

A humanitarian assessment team even listed 154 sick people including 43 severely malnourished children under five, from a camp where gun- men had been holding them since late June near Suehn, 30 km (18.5 miles) north of the capital Monrovia, they added.

Aid workers, who blamed gunmen loyal to Alhaji Kromah, one of two vice-chairman on Liberia's ruling state council, planned to return to secure the release of the remaining hostages.

"The civilians were starving and no food was available," aid group action centre La Fam said in a statement released in Ivory Coast's commercial capital Abidjan. "Apparently the faction wants to attract humanitarian assistance, food aid in particular by starving the detainees."

Medecins Sans Frontieres and the UN Department for Humanitarian Affairs are also involved in the rescue effort.

"This is not the first demonstration of the warring factions' strategy to abuse the humanitarian aid being brought into the country," the statement said.

More than 150,000 people have been killed in over six years of civil war in Liberia which was set up by freed American slaves in 1847.

China expresses support for Ghali's bid for second term

BEIJING, July 11: China has expressed indirect support for Boutros Boutros Ghali in his bid for re-election as Secretary-General of the United Nations, the People's Daily said today, reports Reuter.

It quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying that China supported a declaration by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit conference that Boutros Boutros Ghali should be re-elected.

The OAU, at its annual assembly in Yaounde, Cameroon, said in a declaration Monday that it "recommended the candidature of Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali for a second term as Secretary-General of the UN."

The United States opposes his re-election and has lobbied African states not to endorse him.

Canadians to boycott Florida protesting US policy against Cuba

TORONTO, July 11: The US-Canadian dispute over Cuba policy is escalating into outright confrontation, including a call for Canadian tourists to boycott Florida and a Toronto company's vow to remain active in Cuba even if its executives are banned from the United States, reports AP.

The developments on Wednesday signalled that Canada — one of the biggest trading partners of both Cuba and the United States — is prepared to risk a nasty showdown as it helps lead international opposition to US legislation seeking to drive foreign investment out of Cuba.

The Canadian government, though not endorsing the boycott call, expressed understanding of the initiative launched by a coalition of church labour and relief groups.

"It's the kind of signal that I hope the United States authorities take carefully — that there are a lot of people who will resort to this kind of voluntary unilateral citizen-style action," said Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy.

"There is a real anger about this," he said. "I think they are sadly underestimated just how strongly we as Canadians feel."

Florida is the No. 1 tourist destination for Canadians — about 2 million of them travel there each year, spending about 1.3 billion US dollars.

Axworthy's ministry, which has urged Canadian firms to defy the Helms-Burton act, also expressed deep disappointment that the State Department was taking punitive action against Sherritt International, a Toronto-based company which operates mines in Cuba.

The State Department has notified nine top Sherritt officers and shareholders that they and their families will be denied entry into the United States.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said offending companies should recognise that there will be a high personal price to pay for investments in stolen American property.

The action, which becomes effective in six weeks, was taken under terms of the Helms-Burton act seeking to punish firms which invest in property in Cuba that was confiscated from Americans.

The six-week grace period is designed to allow Sherritt to reconsider its investments in Cuba. However, the company said it has no intention of leaving Cuba despite the US action.

offensive to Canadians," said Sherritt spokeswoman Patrice Merrin-Best. "We do business legally in Canada, legally in Cuba, legally in every jurisdiction where we operate. We do not operate in the United States."

Sherritt is said to be using facilities owned by Freeport-McMoRan Co. of New Orleans.

Canada and other countries believe the United States has no right to apply American law beyond US shores. Trade Minister Art Eggleton called the move against Sherritt outrageous and said Canada will decide next week whether to file a challenge saying provisions of Helms-Burton violate the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The boycott of Florida was proposed by a coalition of 20 groups, including Canada's Anglican, United and Presbyte-

rian churches, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, and the Jesuit Center for Social Faith and Justice. The three churches have more than 6 million members.

"How can we vacation in a place that votes for illegal legislation that bullies its neighbours and harms poor people in Cuba?" Marion Dewar, head of the relief group OXFAM-Canada, asked at a news conference in Ottawa.

Florida was selected as the boycott target because many of the most fervent backers of US sanctions are members of the Cuban-American community in Miami.

About 30 Canadian firms have investments in Cuba, and opinion polls suggest about 70 per cent of Canadians support continued trade with the Communist-ruled island.

Ms. Dewar said the boycott threat would be dropped if President Clinton waives a key section of Helms-Burton allowing Americans to sue foreign companies that "traffic in nationalised property formerly owned by US citizens in Cuba. Clinton's deadline for deciding on a six-month waiver is Tuesday.

Ms. Dewar acknowledged that many Canadians would go to Florida under any circumstances, but she said there could be a marked impact on Florida's economy even if the boycott were only modestly successful.

"You'd be surprised," she said. "Canadians are quiet about our sense of values, but we feel very strongly about them."

The boycott advocates are contacting government and tourism-industry officials in Florida, suggesting they urge Clinton to approve the waiver.

US warns Americans in KSA of possible bomb attacks

WASHINGTON, July 11: The United States on Wednesday warned Americans in Saudi Arabia of possible new attacks following last month's truck bombing that killed 19 servicemen, reports Reuter.

"The US Embassy continues to receive reports that suggest that there could be further attacks upon officials and unofficial US facilities," the State Department said in an announcement.

The US statement also said that "individual American and companies in Saudi Arabia have received calls threatening further attacks."

"Some of these reports may have no basis or be only harassment. But it is likely that some of these reports reflect planning for attacks," it said.

Off the Record

Topless to put on tops for a few days only

CANNES, France: The French Riviera resort of Cannes is to hand out tops to the topless in a drive to stop tourists wandering its streets naked to the waist, reports Reuter.

Home of a celebrated annual film festival, Cannes is famous for topless starlets on its beach. But the local council is determined to confine toplessness to the beach for the sake of the town's image.

From Friday until August 31, it plans to distribute T-shirts in the town's colours to anyone caught with a bare torso in the streets.

A local by-law forbids people from walking in the town "in a bathing suit, bare-chested or indecently dressed."

Rare rhinos in search of suitable partners

PITTSBURGH: A rare white rhinoceros won't mate with her half-brother, so Pittsburgh Zoo officials are sending both animals to China to find suitable partners, reports AP.

"They do much better in a herd situation," said Lee Nesler, Pittsburgh's head curator. "In their social setup, there need to be multiple females for one male, who will spar with other males to establish dominance."

The San Diego Zoo asked Pittsburgh to participate in the mating trip because China was trying to diversify its herd's genes. The animals will travel in special crates to the Chengdu Zoo, San Diego's sister zoo, in the Sichuan province of south-central China.

An internationally administered Species Survival Programme regulates matings to maintain genetic diversity in rare animals, said Randy Riceche, curator of mammals for the San Diego Wild Animal Park. The park has bred 111 rhinos of different species.

Chengdu's climate is similar to Pittsburgh's, and the zoo provides excellent care in a spacious compound, Nesler said.

The white rhino species is native to southern Africa, but only about 4,000 remain in the wild. Their horns are popular with poachers, who can sell them to be carved into dagger handles or ground into medicines.

The Pittsburgh pair were born in captivity 18 years ago and have lived in a compound at the zoo for most of their lives.

Captive rhinos can survive into their 40s and females in their 30s can bear young. Gestation lasts 17 months and typically produces a 150-pound (68 kilograms) baby.



Paco Rabanne shows a space tutu (R) and a space sheath with star spangles (L) in silver metal and PVC for the autumn-winter 1996-1997 high-fashion collection presented in Paris on Wednesday.— AFP/UNB photo