

## African states call for ceasefire in Zaire

NAIROBI, Mar 20: African heads of state meeting in Nairobi called Wednesday for an immediate ceasefire in Zaire and the creation of the necessary environment to facilitate a negotiated settlement of the civil war there, reports AFP.

The six-nation conference called for urgent implementation of a five-point peace plan drawn up by Mohamed Sahnoun, the special envoy of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity to the Great Lake region. But made no new proposals to end the turmoil in the giant central African nation.

A final communiqué said the leaders "urged all parties to do their utmost to facilitate access for humanitarian assistance and invited all UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations to provide this assistance."

Attending the summit, which lasted just over four

hours, were Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi, Zairean Prime Minister Kengo wa Dondo, sacked Tuesday by Zaire's transitional parliament in a vote his supporters have rejected as unconstitutional, Presidents Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Pascal Lissouba of Congo, Vice President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge of Cameroon.

The communiqué said they expressed grave concern at the rapidly deteriorating situation in eastern Zaire, in particular the continued loss of lives suffering of refugees, displaced persons and other victims of the conflict as well as destruction of property and infrastructure.

Moi did not invite Zairean rebel leader Laurent Desiré Kabila to the summit because he is not a head of state, and the communiqué avoided naming Kabila or his rebel alliance.

## Helsinki summit begins Clinton, Yeltsin voice common commitment to peace in Europe

HELSINKI, Finland, Mar 20: Leaving behind problems at home, President Clinton and Russian leader Boris Yeltsin came together Thursday voicing a common commitment to peace in Europe but deeply divided on how to ensure it, reports AP.

The main point of contention on their summit agenda: Clinton wants to expand NATO's security blanket eastward to cover former Warsaw pact members; Yeltsin says that would isolate Russia and mark a return to Cold War divisiveness in Europe.

Whatever the outcome of the two-day summit, and both sides played down expectations of a breakthrough, NATO enlargement appeared inevitable.

Clinton, before departing Washington on Wednesday night, promised to pursue a robust partnership between NATO and Russia, a relationship that makes Russia a true partner of the alliance.

"NATO is not an aggressive organization trying to limit, restrict or undermine anyone who wants to treat their neighbours with respect," he said.

Yeltsin, facing enormous opposition at home to any expansion of the 16-member alliance, appeared determined to talk tough to the end and extract as many concessions as possible.

On the eve of the summit, his spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, did not rule out "gradual progress," but complained the

expansion plan "already has undermined the mutual trust" between Russia and the West, particularly the United States.

The achievement of a formal agreement is not foreseen, Yastrzhembsky told reporters in Helsinki.

Clinton and Yeltsin plan to take up a US-proposed charter to give Russia a larger role in NATO deliberations, but no veto over alliance military actions.

NATO is preparing to invite former Soviet allies from Central and Eastern Europe to join the alliance in 1998 at a summit in Madrid this July. Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic are leading candidates.

The two leaders came together on neutral turf for their 11th meeting in four years.

They meet Thursday night with Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari and again Friday at the sprawling Finnish presidential palace on the seacoast outside central Helsinki.

Despite a chilling wind from the north and a dusting of snow, the city was anxious to show a warm welcome.

"We'll take good care of you here so that you'll be able to make good decisions for Europe and mankind," Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen promised.

On a more tangible level, Finland's vodka put out a special summit label, street sweepers worked around the clock, and summit organizers fed details to a global audience on the Internet.

## Hindu nationalists, low-caste decide to form coalition govt in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 20: Right-wing Hindu nationalists and a party representing low-caste Hindus Wednesday decided to form a coalition government in India's biggest state to end a six-month political impasse, reports AP.

The two parties will have rotating state chief ministers for six months each — the first such experiment in India.

The coalition partners will meet Ramesh Bhandari, the state governor, in Lucknow, the state capital, on Thursday and stake their claim to form the government, said L K Advani and Kanshi Ram, leaders of Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party respectively, at a joint news conference in New Delhi.

The BJP had won the most votes in an indecisive state elections in September but it could not win enough support from other parties to form a government.

In the 425-member state assembly, the BJP and its allies won 176 seats and the BSP 67.

The BSP had allied itself with the Congress Party in the last elections but decided to end the cooperation and join hands with the BJP.

Federal authorities have been directly ruling Uttar Pradesh state in the absence of an elected government.

The United Front, which won from 134 voting districts, in the state, says a BJP-dominated government would fan religious tension in the state. The BJP controlled Uttar Pradesh in 1992, when bloody riots broke out after Hindu zealots destroyed an ancient Muslim mosque near the state capital.

## Clinton decides to nominate George Tenet as CIA chief

WASHINGTON, Mar 20: President Bill Clinton has decided to nominate acting CIA Director George Tenet to be permanent chief of the spy agency and director of the whole US intelligence community, senior administration officials said Wednesday, reports Reuters.

"The president believes Tenet is well qualified for the post," said one senior White House official. "He's more than satisfied."

The nomination of Tenet, 44, who was Deputy CIA Director before his interim appointment as acting director last December, replaces that of Anthony Lake, who withdrew from consideration on Monday after harsh Senate confirmation hearings.

Tenet, a close friend of Lake's, was unlikely to encounter similar stiff opposition in winning Senate confirmation.

## BRIEFLY

**Mobutu leaves hospital:** President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, whose health has been the subject of rumors for days, left a Monaco hospital Wednesday evening and was expected to fly home to a war-torn and rudderless Zaire by Saturday, AP reports from Monaco.

Moments after Mobutu's departure for his nearby French Riviera villa, the huge security presence that had accompanied him at the Princess Grace hospital — including police from France and Monaco and Zairian security guards — had vanished. "He with his family and pleased to be at the villa," said Nzanga Mobutu, the president's son and chief spokesman.

**Blast kills 1 in Greece:** One person was killed and six others were injured, one seriously, Wednesday in a gas explosion at Athens central renti fruit and vegetable market, firemen and medical sources said, AFP reports from Athens.

The blast which caused a fire and damaged a building and surrounding shops occurred in a banana processing plant. Investigators said it was probably caused by an acetylene leak.

**4,617 cops killed in Colombia since '90:** A total of 4,617 policemen have been killed since 1990 in Colombia. The most anywhere in the world, a senior police official said Wednesday, Reuters reports from Bogotá.

Gen. Ismael Trujillo, head of the judicial police or Dijn, said the number of police fatalities and the fact that 81 of every 100,000 Colombians was a victim of homicide or murder, underscored the "crime epidemic" that has been tearing Colombia apart for years.

"We're killing each other for the most futile and elementary things," Trujillo said, adding that rampant corruption and a weak judicial system also meant that at least 90 per cent of all crimes in Colombia went unpunished.

**Top Nigerian journalist held:** Police in Lagos on Wednesday arrested a top journalist on the Lagos-based evening newspaper Today's News yesterday, the paper said in a statement, AFP reports from Lagos.

News Editor Tokunboh Oloruntimehin was arrested in his office in place of the newspaper's editor, Owele Lakemfa, and crime correspondent. In a letter, police had earlier invited Lakemfa and the crime reporter to "a chat" at the local police station in connection with an alleged "wrongful publication," the statement said.

**Mishap claims 9 in Mongolia:** An unexpected thaw in arctic conditions sent nine Mongolians to their death when their bus fell through ice into a deep river, Xinhua reported yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The nine, comprising six adults and three children, were driving on the frozen Selenge river in northern Mongolia on March 18 when disaster struck, the news agency said. The thick ice cracked, plunge the bus into the three-metre-deep (10-foot) river, and all nine drowned almost immediately.

**Taliban free 2 French workers:** Two French aid workers released by Afghanistan's Taliban militia after intervention by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) arrived in the Pakistani capital late Wednesday, AFP reports from Islamabad.

Frederic Michel, 28, and Jose Daniel Llorente, 30, had earlier been sentenced to one month in jail on charges of violating Islamic law — they had already served 26 days — and were then expelled from Afghanistan. The two men arrived in Islamabad in good physical condition on board an aircraft of the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), reporters witnessed, having been handed over to OIC deputy head Ibrahim al-Bakr.

**16 executed in China:** Authorities in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou have executed 16 criminals, a Hong Kong newspaper reported yesterday, Reuters reports from Hong Kong.

The 16, who were all convicted of violent crimes ranging from armed robbery to kidnapping, were executed on Wednesday shortly after their sentences were announced in a Guangzhou court, the independent daily Ming Pao said. No further details were available. China earlier this week announced the launch of the spring session of its "strike hard" campaign, the nation's biggest crackdown on crime. Thousands are believed to have been executed since the campaign began last April.

**Strike paralyses Haiti:** Cap-Haitien, the second largest town in Haiti and 260 kilometers (162 miles) north of Port-au-Prince the capital, was paralysed by a general strike Wednesday Haitian officials said, AFP reports from Port-au-Prince. The strike was called by local grass-roots organisations, the officials added. Barricades were thrown up at the entry points to the town, and demonstrators hurled stones at cars, witnesses said.

## Peace march thru' former Khmers' strongholds begins in Cambodia

BATTAMBANG, Cambodia, Mar 20: Hundreds of peace marchers led by Cambodia's supreme Buddhist monk set out Thursday on a pilgrimage across mine-littered territory that until eight months ago was a war zone controlled by Khmer Rouge guerrillas, reports AP.

The annual pilgrimage led by Maha Ghosonanda in his quest for peace is this year more than just symbolic — it dramatically shows how far this war-wrecked nation has moved toward peace since the vast majority of Khmer Rouge started laying down arms last August.

Maha Ghosonanda, 73, a three-time nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize, clasped his hands and murmured prayers for peace as he led about 400 people, mostly monks and nuns, out of this northwestern city at dawn on the first nine-kilometer (five mile) leg.

The 24-day, 338-kilometre (210-mile) journey will eventually reach the former Khmer Rouge strongholds of Pailin and Phnom Malai.

Residents of Battambang stood before their homes with candles and incense to welcome the marchers and held out bowls of water to refresh them.

Two Japanese monks, one beating a drum, joined the march.

Before the pilgrimage is finished, thousands of other people are expected to join — including the highly controversial long Sary, a deputy prime minister of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime who broke ranks with his long-time comrades last year and led the first defections of war-weary guerrillas to the government.

The Maoist-inspired Khmer Rouge, led by long Sary's brother-in-law, the notorious Pol Pot, caused the deaths of an estimated 2 million people when they ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. The guerrillas have battled successive central governments since.

long Sary has walked from the dark place into the light place," said Maha Ghosonanda. "I wish other Khmer Rouge will do the same."

An estimated 10,000 guerrillas have defected since long Sary made his peace. About 400 to 3,000 hardliners are still holding out around the northern town of Anlong Veng, but the marchers expressed hope peace will soon come.

Government peace negotia-

abducted there as they tried to persuade Ta Mok, a ruthless Khmer Rouge general, to lead his men out of battle. Pol Pot, whose rumored death last year has never been confirmed, may also be in Anlong Veng.

"We wish Pol Pot, Ta Mok and other hardliners would stop war and make peace with us," said nun Then Sim, 62, who lost three children under the Khmer Rouge. "But I promise if they make peace, I will harbor no desire for revenge against them at all."

A Khmer Rouge defector from Pailin, Duong Dy Sovann, 37, said residents of the gem-rich town were preparing a large ceremony to welcome the marchers next Wednesday.

Pailin was the destination of Maha Ghosonanda's pilgrimage in 1994 when the marchers were caught in a cross-fire. A Buddhist nun and monk were killed and four people wounded.

Duong Dy Sovann expressed concern about mines around the Pailin area, which he said earlier this month killed three Khmer Rouge defectors. A demining official said the marchers had been warned not to stray from the intended path.

## Pak forces step up security in Islamabad for OIC summit

VIENNA, Austria, Mar 20: The heavily-guarded Islamabad International Airport.

The airport will be closed to all commercial domestic and international flights on March 22 and 24. Airport sources said flights had already been

rescheduled.

The government suspended issuance of visas to foreigners by Pakistani missions worldwide. The restriction will be lifted after March 26, officials said.

Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani will be among the top heads of state converging on Islamabad on a guest list which also includes Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

King Hassan of Morocco is also expected along with the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Ahmed Al-Sabah and Turkish President Suleman Demirel.

Jordan will be represented by Crown Prince Hassan Ibn Talal if King Hussein himself cannot make it to Islamabad, Pakistani officials said.

Police sources said entry into and exit of all vehicles from Islamabad would be subject to strict checks at all points by special teams deployed for the purpose.

The 15-kilometre (nine miles) route from the airport and all other sensitive roads around the convention centre and villas where the dignitaries will stay will be guarded by troops. Connecting roads will be fenced off with barbed wire.

Before the special summit the heads of delegations will join Pakistani leaders at a grand hour-long military parade commemorating the 50th independence anniversary of the world's second largest Muslim country after Indonesia.

Komura told reporters his role was to "ask Cuba to accept rebels with utmost courtesy."

— AFP/UNB photo



Seven-year-old Mark Rayer of Fairfax, VA protests child pornography on the Internet Wednesday outside of the US Supreme Court Building in Washington. In a historic case about free-speech rights in cyberspace, the court will hear arguments involving a new law which severely restricts indecent material on the Internet computer network.

— AFP/UNB photo

## Off the Record



Diana Princess of Wales leaves the Savoy Hotel in London Wednesday where she attended the Daily Star Gold Awards 1996. — AFP/UNB photo

## Royal terrier in attacking mood

LONDON: Two housemaids at Buckingham Palace have quit after they were attacked by Prince Andrew's pet dog, a press report said here on Thursday, reports AFP.

Charlotte Briggs, 23, who was bitten on the leg, and a second maid have left after maulings by Bendicks, a Jack Russell terrier. The Sun newspaper claimed.

The paper claimed the dog fiercely guards Andrew's rooms at the palace in London and had attacked two other members of the royal staff last year.

"Andrew doesn't care and thinks it's a bit of a laugh," a "royal insider" was quoted as saying.

## Good news for older women

CHICAGO: If older women take estrogen they may avoid dry skin and wrinkling, according to a new report published in the latest issue of the American Medical Association's Archives of Dermatology, reports AFP.

University of California researchers found that non-contraceptive use of estrogen appears to help prevent some of the skin problems associated with aging.

The study, which focused on 3,875 women ages 40 to 74, found that after adjusting for age, body mass and exposure to sunlight, estrogen use among all women was associated with a decrease in the likelihood of dry skin.

The odds of wrinkling also were substantially lower among estrogen users.

## Myanmar army keeps up pressure on Karens

BANGKOK, Mar 20: The Myanmar army pounded an ethnic Karen area inside Myanmar with mortar fire Thursday, continuing an attack against the rebel Karen National Union that has sent about 3,500 people fleeing toward Thailand, reports AP.

Karen sources along the border said the refugees, scattered in pockets over several kilometres (miles) along the frontier, were being denied entry by Thai troops into Thailand's Ratchaburi province unless the fighting gets closer.

A spokesman for Thailand's 9th Army Division, which controls the border area, has confirmed that Karen refugees were "being asked" to stay on the Myanmar side unless their safety is in imminent danger.

Relief workers believe the refugees are within range of artillery and mortars and are imperiled by continual Myanmar Army advances. They accuse the Thai Army of applying overly strict definitions of en-

dangerment.

Thailand came under criticism from the United States, the European Union and human rights groups last month for denying entry to fighting-age Karen males fleeing the fighting and for forcibly sending hundreds of women, children and others back into Myanmar.

Government officials have expressed outrage at the criticism, noting Thailand has sheltered some 100,000 people fleeing Myanmar's conflicts over the past decade, including perhaps 20,000 from the most recent offensive. Government and army officials have given conflicting statements.

The Myanmar bombardment, unleashed Tuesday, was hitting areas about 10 kilometres (six miles) from the border, said Karen sources speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Myanmar Army has consolidated its positions as it has advanced and is on the verge of taking control of the frontier for the first time.

## Albanian rebels rule out force in toppling Berisha

TIRANA, Albania, Mar 20: Albanian rebels backed away from threats of further violence on Wednesday, increasing the chances that weeks of turmoil could soon end and be replaced by the semblance of normalcy, reports AP.

Ruling out force for the first time in their bid to oust President Sali Berisha, the southern rebels led by Xhevat Kociu said they would still work to force Berisha out but "we are planning to do this in a democratic fashion."

Kociu's comments came in the final hours of an ultimatum imposed by his rebels for Berisha to resign.

The former general told Associated Press Television in the southern town of Saranda that Albania's 12 rebel-controlled districts of the south would meet Friday to chart their next moves.

Kociu's comments followed signs of support for Berisha both from the government led by Prime Minister Bashkim Fino and from a newly established vigilante force calling itself the Committee of National Salvation.

Warning efforts to negotiate with the rebels on Berisha's resignation, the organisation said in a statement that it would

mobilise thousands of armed men to punish those who incited mayhem "according to the laws of war, as traitors to the Albanian nation."

It said it was "determined to protect under any circumstances all the democratic institutions of the country, property and the freedom of citizens from a possible military attack."

The committee, which said it is based in Tirana, said it would "use all its force" to challenge "groups paid by the historical enemies of Albania," it did not elaborate.

Fino, who already had rejected the southern rebels' demand that Berisha resign immediately, urged the people on Wednesday to support police and army efforts to establish order.

"The government will have no mercy and will use all the power of the law against organised crime, the gangs that are terrorising the Albanian people, and will intensify its efforts to eliminate them," he warned.

Still, the country will need weeks to begin to recover from the turmoil that began after hundreds of thousands lost money in shady investment schemes and turned to armed

insurrection.

At least three people were reported killed in the southern city of Korca, and Europe tried to contain the turmoil that has rocked Albania for the past 2 and half weeks, with Italy returning about 300 would-be refugees who have landed on its shores. Albania suspended the joint operation after Italy returned more than the agreed number of 200, some of whom did not meet the criterion of having a prior criminal record in Italy.

Former prisoners contributed to the anarchy, Albania's 1,700 prisoners — 700 of whom are considered hardcore criminals — have been freed, most court houses have been burned or otherwise damaged and all judicial files have been burned, said Justice Minister Spartak Ngjela.

A delegation from the European Union also stressed the need to re-establish security before massive aid shipments could start. Jan Graf de Maréhand of Ansemy, the head of the 11-member delegation, told reporters: "We won't be able to do anything by way of humanitarian help or for economic improvement of the situation if the security part is not completely covered."