

The Liberal Democrat's on Tuesday launched their campaign proper at its first daily news conference by putting on a Punch and Judy show set in a cardboard Westminster, featuring John Major dressed in blue and Tony Blair as a red jester beating each other seafrontstyle with a stick. The aim was to back the party's message that people had had enough of the confrontational style of politics between the two main parties. Britain goes to the polls May 1. - AFP/UNB photo

Labour Party's lead over Conservatives narrows

BRIFFIY

Gingrich arrives in Taiwan: US House

Speaker Newt Gingrich arrived in Taipei on Wednesday, a day after China rebuked him for pledging the United States would

defend Taiwan if it was attacked by China, AP reports from

Washington broke diplomatic relations in 1979, arrived on a

US Air Force plane, accompanied by 11 members of congress.

After a brief chat with Taiwanese Foreign Minister John Chang

at the airport, he sped off for a meeting with President Lee Teng-

Apartment fire claims 3 in US: Fire

swept through a three-story apartment building before dawn,

collapsing the top two floors and leaving three residents

unaccounted for and believed dead. AP reports from Earlington.

Nearby rail service was halted out of fear that the three walls

left standing might collapse from the vibration. "A heavy wind

Gujral postpones planned US visit:
India Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral has postponed a
planned visit to the United States because of India's political

crisis, the State Department said on Tuesday, Reuter reports

week for talks with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. "Because of the constitutional crisis, he will remain in Delhi for

the vote of confidence on the government. We hope to reschedule that visit, of course, as soon as we can," said State Department

Gujral was to have come to Washington at the end of next

could come along and cause it to tumble," coroner John Walters

Gingrich, the first house speaker to visit Taiwan since

LONDON. Apr 2: Britain's ruling Conservatives narrowed Labour's lead according to the latest opinion polls, but the opposition party was still 14 points ahead, the Guardian newspaper said today, reports Reuter.

The ICM survey put Labour at 46 points, down two from last month, the Conservatives at 32 (up two) and the Liberal Democrats at 17 (up one), one month before the May 1 elec-

"The swing to the Conservatives was mirrored in the monthly unadjusted opinion poll findings, which take no account of relative reluctance to admit to voting Tory," the Guardian said

The poll, taken over the Easter weekend, showed that the latest series of sleaze allegations against the Conservatives had not damaged the party as much as many people had expected. And that strong economic figures were giving the party a boost.

But it also revealed that public opinion wants the Conservatives implicated in the "cash for questions" scandal to quit as election candidates.

said Tuesday.

from Washington.

spokesman Nicholas Burns.

Ten Conservative MPs are

under investigation by a parliamentary committee over allegations that they accepted hefty undeclared cash sums in exchange for asking questions in the House of Commons (lower house).

Neil Hamilton, who is accused of accepting money from the owner of Harrods luxury department store, Mohammedal-Fayed, resisted calls by senior officials to resign.

Another Conservative MP implicated in the "cash for questions" row resigned last week while two stood down in reaction to accusations of involvement in sexual scandals.

Eighty-one per cent of the 1,200 people questioned for the poll said the MPs in the sleaze row should quit and only 14 per cent said they should stand for election again.

A poll in the daily paper the Scotsman showed the Conservatives gaining three points. supporting the ICM survey findings, it put the Conservatives at 20 points while Labour remained steady at 47 and the

Scottish National Party at 23. "Labour's position remains far stronger than at the equivalent stage in the 1992 campaign," the Guardian said.

Arabs call for emergency UNGA session to deal with Israeli move

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 2: Arab countries, angered by US refusals to condemn Israel's new settlements, asked Tuesday for an emergency session of the UN General Assembly to deal with "illegal Israeli measures." reports AFP.

Four Palestinians were killed Tuesday in a flare up of violence that left Israeli and Palestinian officials trading accusations of terrorism and decit over the collapse of the peace process.

The 22 Arab nations are seeking the session under a UN resolution devised by Washington during the Korean war to circumvent the Soviet Union's vetoes in the UN Security Coun-

"We believe that the illegal Israeli measures represent a threat to international peace and security," wrote group chairman, Qatar Ambassador Nasser Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. In a letter to UN Secretary-Gen-

Netanyahu decides

to visit US

Prime Minister Benjamin Ne-

lanyahu has decided to go ahead

with a US visit beginning Mon-

day, an Israeli diplomat said

condition he not be named, said

the Israeli leader will attend a

conference organised by a pro-

Israel lobby group and meet

expected to meet with Ne-

tanyahu although Israeli

diplomats here said it remained

unclear whether the Prime

Minister could leave the coun-

Pessimism grips

hostage crisis

in Peru

LIMA, Apr 2: A new pes-simism griped Peru's 105-day

hostage standoff on Tuesday

after a key mediator said the

country's "heart is completely

broken" by the siege with no

new peace talks in sight, reports

appealed for patience in ending

the siege in a phone conversa-

tion with Bolivian President

Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada.

whose ambassador to Peru is

among the 72 hostages held un-

be a rapid solution to the cri-

sis." Sanchez de Lozada said on

Monday, referring to Fujimori,

adding that "new disagree-

ments" had appeared in efforts

to end the siege, according to

A government palace

spokesman said Fujimori plans

to travel to Bolivia, a neigh-

bouring Andean country on

note came from archbishop

Juan Luis Cipriani, member of

a three-man mediation team

known as the guarantors'

commission, who had no

progress to report after meet-

ings with Fujimori and his

Multinational

force likely in

Albania within

10 days

strong multinational force to

secure aid channels in Albania

could be deployed within 10

days, Italy's Defence Minister

Benjamino Andreatta an-

nounced Tuesday, reports AFP.

proved by the UN Security

Council on Friday, "could be in action within the first 10 days

for the force to be put together,"

he told journalists on the side-

lines of a ministerial meeting.

"It's a risky mission," he added.

lani, currently chief of the Ital-

ian army's third corps based in

Milan, will command the force,

military sources said.

Italian General Luciano For-

"We need an adequate period

of April." Andreatta said.

The Italian-led mission, ap-

ROME, Apr 2: The 5,000-

An even more discouraging

news reports in Lima.

Saturday.

chief negotiator.

"He doesn't believe there will

der the guns of Marxist rebels.

President Alberto Fujimori

Reuter.

try at a time of crisis.

Clinton said earlier that he

with President Bill Clinton.

The diplomat, who spoke on

Tuesday, reports AFP.

WASHINGTON, Apr 2: Israeli

eral Kofi Annan. The request for the meeting was promoted by "the dangerous situation resulting from the illegal Israeli actions in the occupied Palestinian territory. including Jerusalem," accord-ing to an unofficial translation

The council, it said, had failed in its primary mission of

of the letter.

maintaining peace. "In light of Israeli's continuation of such actions and in light of the failure of the Security Council to exercise its primary responsibility under the UN Charter. The General Assembly should meet in an emergency session, he wrote in the letter, an unofficial translation of which was obtained by AFP.

Reuter adds, spiralling violence between Israelis and Palestinians has jeopardised peacemaking and promoted a pledge from President Bill Clinton to get involved personally.

Four Palestinians were killed on Tuesday in the bloodiest single day since peace moves hit a snag last month when Israel started building a new Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem.

Israeli officials said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would meet Clinton in Washington early next week for the first time since the violence

"We've got to try to keep the lid on things over there.. it is not going to be easy, "Clinton said after meeting Jordan's king Hussein in the White

House.
"I'm prepared personally to
do anything I can to get this process back on track and move it forward, but I think the less I say about it the more likely I am to have some success in doing, that," Clinton told re-

Another AFP report says, a Palestinian deputy admitted

Wednesday that Islamic militants were implicated in two suicide-bomb attacks aimed at Jewish settlers in the Gaza

Strip on Tuesday.
"The people who committed this act effectively belonged to a Palestinian group and consequently, measures have been taken", Isham Abdel Razek told Israeli radio in answer to a question about the possible involvement of Islamic Jihad in the operation.

The Palestinian Authority is taking steps to prevent acts which undermine its authority and to preserve security," said Razek who is a member of the Palestinian Legislative Coun-

On Tuesday, the Palestinian news agency Wafa had accused the Israeli secret service of being behind two bomb attacks perpetrated Tuesday morning near two Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Parties barred from taking foreign funds during May 29 polls in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Apr 2: Indonesia has banned political parties contesting the May 29 general elections from obtaining foreign aid. The Media Indonesia newspaper reported on today. says Reuter.

"It is against the law for the parties to ask for foreign funds even though they feel that the (government) election funding is insufficient," the newspaper quoted, HSA Yusacc, a spokesman for the Interior Ministry, as saying on Tuesday. Ministry officials were not

available for comment on Wednesday. The two minority parties

complained on Monday that the 500 million rupiah (208.333) given them by the government for the forthcoming general election was not enough.

Ismail Hasan Metareum. head of the Muslim-oriented United Development Party (PPP), said the government funding, which makes up most of the minority parties income. was too small.

Surjadi, leader of the government-backed faction of the divided Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), said the 500 million rupiah would not pay for the four-week campaign, which begins officially on April

27 and ends on May 23. Yusacc was quoted by Media Indonesia as saying the government could freeze the activities of political parties that received foreign funding. It gave no more details.

The minority parties have long complained that the ruling Golkar, whose leaders are drawn from senior government figures and leading business people has no problems funding its extensive activities.

Even before the official campaign period, central Java province is awash in yellow Golkar flags with members of the party hosting pop music concerts.

Tough US immigration law takes effect

WASHINGTON, Apr 2: A controversial tough new immigra tion law - which will make it harder to seek asylum at US borders - took effect Tuesday despite legal challenges, reports

Under the new procedures, immigration officers are to tell would-be immigrants they may seek asylum only after a border official determines that they face a well-founded fear of persecution - rather than automatically informing them of their right to seek asylum.

Immigrants' rights advocates asked a federal judge Tuesday to halt the new procedures, saying they will force would-be asylum-seekers back to certain persecution and tor-

US District Judge Emmett Sullivan scheduled arguments for Friday on whether he should order the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) to reverse the change.

The new procedure took effect Tuesday as part of a broad crackdown on illegal immigration contained in the illegal

immigration reform and immigrant responsibility act of 1998 On Monday, Sullivan had ordered enforcement of the new law delayed until Saturday in a bid to prevent panic among illegal aliens. But early Tuesday an appeals court here reversed Sullivan's order. Clearing the way for the new law to take ef-

Robert Rubin, a lawyer with the San Francisco-based Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, argued that the new border procedure risks "immediate and irreparable harm" to foreign nationals fleeing persecution and torture.

Justice Department lawyer Linda Wentlandt countered that such claims were "all speculative, since there is no concrete evidence of people being harmed. The Lawyers' Committee for

Civil Rights, American Civil Liberties Union, and several other plaintiffs will ask Sullivan on Friday to temporarily reverse the new procedure pending a substantive legal chal-

Tshisekedi chosen as PM by opposition

Thirty-one Bosnian orphans, who spent over four years in Germany as war refugees, arrive

at the Sarajevo airport Tuesday with their German caretakers, who are to spend on month

in the Bosnian capital to help them adjust to their new environment. - AFP/UNB photo

Zairean army resistance to rebel advance crumbling

LUBUMBASHI, Zaire, Apr 2 Zairean army resistance to a rebel advance that is threatening to topple President Mobutu Sese Seko's regime is crumbling in the country's second biggest city and capital of mineral-rich

Shaba province, reports AFP. Two towns north of Lubumbashi - Kasenga in the northeast and Kamina in the northwest - fell to laurent desire Kabila's forces over the past few days without Zaire's armed

forces putting up a fight. Mobutu's men, indisciplined and unruly, fled before the rebel onslaught but for once did not loot the towns they abandoned, according to sources in both localities.

Few shots have been fired in this six month old conflict which has seen Kabila's rebels selze virtually unopposed more than one quarter of Zairean territory in the east.

Mobutu's soldiers did try to mount a counter-attack on Kasenga on Monday but this fizzled out, rather like a muchheralded counter-offensive promised by Mobutu two months ago which never materialised.

AP adds: Etienne Tshisekedi has been in this position before. Under Zaire's transitional constitution, opposition parties in parliament have the right to select the country's prime min-

Twice before, they turned to Tshisekedi to direct the government. And twice before he ran afoul of President Mobutu Sese Seko and was forced to step

But this time the opposition sees Mobutu as vulnerable

enough to allow his longtime foe to succeed.

Mobutu, for 31 years dictator of the country, exercises great influence over Zairean politics. but he has prostate cancer and has spent much of the last several months being treated in Europe. His illness and a continuing war with rebels had made it all the more crucial for parliament to settle on a prime minister.

Mobutu was expected to confirm Tshisekedi's appointment Wednesday.

"He has no choice," said Maurice Tshimanga, an oppoThe opposition chose

spect the constitution."

sition lawmaker. "Now we re-

Tshisekedi Tuesday after a week of closed-door negotiations over who should replace Mooutu's hand-picked prime

Mobutu last week accepted parliament's vote of no-confidence in Leon Kengo wa Dondo, who had been blamed for mishandling the war against the rebels, who have captured much of eastern Zaire over the past seven months.



An Iraqi woman carries food at a Baghdad market Tuesday. Iraq announced Monday that it would start distributing extra rations of wheat flour later in April, while the increased rations of other goods would start being handed out in May. - AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Monkey as partner in crime!

NEW DELHI: A monkey trained to burgle houses has given Indian police the slip after they arrested his master, the Asian Age reported on Friday, reports AFP.

Rajesh Chorge used his pet monkey to keep watch "and alert him of danger." the daily said while robbing homes in Bombay and nearby cities. "He had also trained the monkey to rob," it

A police spokesman said they seized electronic equipment including personal computers, a television and video recorders worth nearly 20,500 dollars but conceded the monkey had got

The Age said Chorge got the idea of using the monkey as a partner in crime from a Hindi movie.

Clinton's April fools' joke

WASHINGTON: President Bill Clinton made a surprise appearance at the White House press room on Tuesday and, in an April fools' joke, said spokesman Mike McCurry had hurt his knee and would be replaced by a 25-year-old aide, reports

"I came here today because I thought I should personally deliver some disturbing news," a sombre-faced Clinton told reporters, several of whom scurried into the room. "Mike McCurry has just made a fool of himself by taking an

unfortunate fall on dimly lit steps here at the White House. We believe he may have torn a tendon in his upper right thigh, which could give him a six-inch (15 cm) incision," he

"Until we can bring him back to full health, Kris Engskov is going to do the daily briefing," Clinton said, prompting applause and cheers for the popular aide, who is responsible for shepherding the "pool" of reporters that follows the president whenever he leaves the White House.

Clinton, who is recovering from surgery to repair a tendon he tore in his right knee last month, hobbled into the press room on his crutches for the announcement. The remarks almost exactly mirrored the briefings McCurry gave after an accident in Florida on March 14 when the president tripped on a step and hurt his knee, but Clinton gave a humorous twist to his answers.

Divided families hope for improved Indo-Pak relations

Strong quake hits Chile, Peru: An earthquake measuring up to 6.2 on the Richter Scale hit KARACHI, Apr 2: Families northern Chile and southern Peru on Tuesday, causing landslides and startling residents but there were no reported injuries, officials said, Reuter reports from Sentiago. "People were frightened and telephone service was interrupted but we have not received any reports of any damage," said Emilio Lorca, head of the Seismology Department at the

Universidad de Chile. Local radio also reported that the tremor had caused brief power cuts in several towns. Egyptian man hanged in Lebanon: An Egyptian man was hanged in Beirut yesterday for killing an elderly couple while robbing their house five years ago, judicial

sources said, AFP reports from Beirut. Hassan Jamal Atiyeh, 41, was executed at dawn at the Rumieh central prison on the outskirts of Beirut, they said. Atiyeh, who had been living in Lebanon for ten years before committing the double crime on February 3, 1992, was convicted of killing Nassib Eliaz Maalouf and his wife Linda. both in their eighties.

1st US female ambassador dies: Eugenie Anderson, the country's first female ambassador and an organiser of Minnesota's Democratic-Farmer-Labour Party has died. She was 87, AP reports from Washington.

Anderson, who was ambassador to Denmark from 1949 to 1953, was popular with the Danish people and proved that women could be serious diplomats, historians say. She later became the first woman to serve as chief of mission to an Eastern European country when President Kennedy sent her to Bulgaria in 1962.

here divided by the partition of the Subcontinent in 1947 are hoping an improvement in relations between Pakistan and India will allow them to share their lives with relatives across the border, reports AFP. " I could not meet my only

brother," said 80-year-old Saeeda Khatoon. "I did not attend the weddings of my nephews. But now I wish to see my grandsons and

granddaughters and want to narrate stories to them." Millions of Muslims migrated to Pakistan after the country came into being 50 years ago at the end of British

colonial rule over the Subcon-

tinent.

Khatoon was among the migrants but her parents and other relatives remained in their hometown of Rajputana, what remained in India.

"Who will be happy more than me if the talks now started between the two countries continue and reach a successful conclusion," she said, referring

to a March 28 to 31 meeting in New Delhi between Pakistani and Indian officials.

"They (the leaders) would agree if they were ever able to understand our feelings. We have our memories of the land and our friends and relatives there."

The split families hope they will find it easier to get travel visas once tension between the two countries, which have fought three wars since independence, gives way to improved ties.

feelings in happy and sad moments with our distant dear ones," said Shehla Liaquat, who could not go to the funeral of her uncle and two cousins after they died in accidents in New Delhi. "I cried and wailed but could

"We will be able to share our

not do much about it. So the tears dried up. Now I hope the process just initiated will bring consolation to many in future. Teacher Mirza Abid Abbas added: "I wish to see myself go-

ing across the border as I saw

my friend crossing the borders from America to Canada without a visa. That milestone might not be achieved for many decades but the problem of divided families seeking visas can be easily solved." Abbas has visited India sev-

eral times to meet his relatives. "The talks definitely would improve the relations because the tense relations are unrealistic. There are divided families who have relations on both sides. The songs, musical notes, culture and language are the same so they have to come close to each other," he said.

Lal Chand, a Hindu resident of the Pakistani Thar Desert, said: "We should forget the bitter past and we hope both the governments would forget the past too and make a new begin-

Uneza Akhter, a journalist who moved from India to Pakistan in the 1980s following her marriage, was also hopeful. "I would be happy to see good

relations," she said.

"Geographical borders should not hamper people-topeople contacts.

Uneza regularly visits her brother, an Indian poet and lyricist Javed Akhter, and sister-in-law Shabana Azmi, a well-known Indian actress, in Bombay.

"There has been an uneasy feeling even writing letters. I shouldn't be so. We should look ahead as things are going to get better," she added. Many just do not want to re-

call bitter memories of the bloodshed in the post independence period.

"It is still like a horror dream. I have seen my family merabers killed in Hindu-Muslim riots. I have seen wailing women over dead bodies. I remember how rioters would raise slogans and attack," said 65-year-old Mohammad Munawwar.

"There should be happy journeys ... both ways, unlike the tragic ones in 1947," he added.

Basayev named top deputy to Chechen president choices have already been ap-MOSCOW, Apr 2: Chechnya's

new president changed his Cabinet line-up late Tuesday, naming Shamil Basayev - a notorious field commander and his chief political rival — as his top deputy, a Russian news agency reported, says AP.

Basayev, who led a bloody hostage-taking raid on the southern Russian city of Budyonnovsk, was named first deputy prime minister and designated as the primary replacement for Aslan Maskhadov as prime minister. Russia's Interfax news agency

reported. Maskhadov, who serves both as the secessionist republic's president and prime minister. defeated Basayev in presiden tial elections earlier this year. Russia backed Maskhadov over Basayev, whom Moscow views as a terrorist for the Budyonnovsk raid, which lasted sev-

eral days and left dozens dead. Previously, Maskhadov had said he would name two of Basayev's associates to his Cabinet, but did not indicate that Basavev himself was a candi-

Maskhadov's Cabinet

proved by his advisory council; it was not clear whether Basayev's appointment needs further confirmation. Basavev will be responsible

for industrial policy, Interfax

Maskhadov also named two other first deputy prime ministers: Movladi Udugov, who will

be in charge of state policy, and

Musa Doshukayev, who will have responsibility for economic policy, according to Interfax. Udugov has been acting as Maskhadov's deputy in recent weeks, serving as the republic's top negotiator in economic talks with Russia. Doshukayev

served as Chechnya's vice premier under the administration of former President Dzhokhar Dudayev, who declared independence from Russia in 1991. That declaration led to war with Russia three years later.

which ended last year with a peasefire and an agreement to delay a decision on Chechnya's political status for five years. Chechnya considers itself an

independent state; Russia considers it part of Russia.