Israel to ease further closure of West Bank, Gaza Strip

JERUSALEM, Apr 6: Israel announced Saturday it is further easing its closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip imposed after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed three Israelis in a Tel Aviv cafe March 21, reports AFP.

The new step to partially lift the border closure will go into effect Sunday at dawn, a military spokesman said.

Palestinian residents of the West Bank stranded in Gaza will be allowed to go home, as will Gaza residents stuck in the West Bank.

Palestinians living in disputed east Jerusalem, whose residency permits have been terminated, will be allowed to visit Israel if they have family members who possess residency

cards. Twenty-six ambulances and 100 tourism-sector employees will be able to enter Israeli ter-

The first easing of the border closing came March 26 when 480 doctors and nurses from the Palestinian areas were allowed

to go to Israel. The closure was also lifted then for Palestinian ambulances incases of emergency and for the families and lawyers of Palestinians defendants brought before Israeli

Reuter adds: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu leaves on Sunday for talks with US President Bill Clinton on how to revive the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

"Netanyahu is going to Washington to try to put peace talks back on track," said David bar-illan, the Prime Minister's communication director.

Clinton was expected to put Netanyahu under heavy pressure at a White House meeting on Monday to make a conciliatory gesture towards the Palestinians that would allow negotiations to resume.

The talks were halted after Israel began work last month on a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, sparking daily clashes between Palestinians and Israeli troops.

Palestinian officials warned that Israeli policies were in danger of provoking an "explosion" which could lead to more confrontations.

Another AFP reports says, Europe must play a more effective and influential role in the Middle East, Arab League and European Union (EU) representative here said Saturday at the end of their three-day conference on the peace process.

In recommendations to the leaders of Arab and European countries, the League and EU representatives said that "this stronger EU role has become a joint Arab-European demand and can only be positive, constructive and complimentary to those of the two co-sponsors of the peace process," Russia and the United States.

They also expressed their "deep concern regarding the difficulties the peace process has run into because of Israeli obstinacy in setting up settlements in occupied Arab territory, including east Jerusalem.

During the conference, Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdel Meguid laid the entire blame for the blocked Middle East peace process on the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.



Children demonstrate on Saturday in the streets of Nablus during "Palestinian children day," to support peace and protest the construction of a new Jewish settlement in east Jerusalem. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat are decided to meet US President Bill Clinton for "a new Camp David" to hammer out a final peace settlement.

- AFP/UNB photo US intends to keep one lakh troops

HONOLULU, Hawaii, Apr 6: retary William Cohen said Sat-

Cohen stopped here on the first leg of an Asia-Pacific trip designed to highlight the Clinton administration's commitment to maintaining a large troop-presence in the region. He was to receive private briefings Sunday from commanders of the US Pacific Command, based at Camp HM Smith near Pearl

He was to spend two days each in Japan and South Korea to meet with government and military officials and to pay visits to American forces in the field. On Tuesday, he was scheduled to go to Yokosuka Naval Base outside Tokyo, where a US Navy sailor is under investigation for allegedly assaulting a Japanese

Cohen said he did not expect

Hi believe our relationship with Japan really does transcend this particular incident," he told reporters flying with him en route from Washington. This will be Cohen's second trip abroad as defence secretary

visited frequently during his 18 years as a Republican senator from Maine. He said he hoped to travel to China before the end of this year in search of ways to establish more regular US-Chinese military contacts.

fication of the Korean penin-

Turkish troops kill 30 Kurdish rebels

army troops killed 30 separatist Kurdish rebels and lost five members in fighting in the trouble southeastern region, the government said Saturday, re-

Twenty-six rebels from the Kurdistan workers Party (PKK) and five soldiers were killed in a clash in a mountainous area

Iraqi border in Sirnak province

Fighting in the last two weeks marked an upsurge in clashes between the two sides following a relatively quiet winter with severe weather conditions.

changes to the level of American military commitments in the region.

Although a Korean peace treaty to replace the armistice signed at the end of the Korean War in 1953 is far from certain, North Korea is considering a US-South Korean proposal for peace talks. Both sides hope this eventually leads to some form of reunification of the communist North and capitalist South.

"We will still have to main-

There now are about 37,000 US troops in South Korea,

Cohen said he intended to discuss a wide range of security issues in both Tokyo and Sepul. Among these is a US objection to South Korea's interest in buying and deploying Russianmade SA-12 air defence missiles instead of US-made Patriot missiles.

No pressure on Leghari to step down: Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Apr 6: Pak-istani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has dismissed suggestions his party wanted President Farooq Ahmed Leghari to resign in the wake of a bill slashing presidential powers.

report AFP. "There is no pressure on the president to step down," Sharif told reporters in hometown Lahore late Saturday, following report Leghari was being urged quitely to quit.

The parliament on Tuesday

Arafat due in India today

NEW DELHI, Apr 6; Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will arrive here on Monday to attend a ministerial conference of the Non-Aligned Movement. diplomats said today, reports Arafat is to address a special

session of the conference on Palestinian affairs and his Palestinian Authority and hold talks with Indian leaders. Palestinian Ambassador Khalid El-Sheikh said. He will be in India for one day. It will be Arafat's first visit

to New Delhi since 1992.

unanimously annulled sweep ing presidential powers, including a discretionary authority to dissolve the National Assembly, used four times by successive presidents since 1985.

Leghari promptly signed the bill into law Thursday, amid wide acclamation that the landmark decision restored parliament's supremacy and played the way to for political

stability in Pakistan. A spokesman for Leghari said the 'baseless' reports were planted by "vested interests" who wished to create misunderstanding between the two leaders.

The relations between the two remain "extremely cordial" because there were no differences between them on the repeal of constitutional clauses related to presidential powers, the spokesman said.

"President Leghari was under no pressure of any sort to resign and intended to continue playing constitutional role for the full length of his term." until November 1998, he added.

Attempts to "sow suspicion or misunderstanding between them" would not "succeed," the spokesman said.

BRIFFEY

Madrid Film Festival opens:
The inaugural Madrid Film Festival opened this weekend with a promising lineup of movies but an embarrassing absence of stars. AP reports from Madrid.

The paltry show of tinsel-town glitter prompted the daily newspaper La Vanguardia to write that the festival began more on a "mood of desolation than happiness."

The festival is an attempt by Madrid film makers to capitalise on the international popularity of annual movie gatherings in San Sebastian and Barcelona. But opening night Friday had little of the fanfare and excitement that has come to typify Spain's better known film festivals.

French minister to visit China: French Defence Minister Charles Millon will formally begin an official visit in Beijing on Monday in a highly significant gesture from Paris that it wants to turn the page on ties with Beijing after the Tiananmen Square massacre, AFP reports from Beijing.

Millon, who will tour both the Chinese capital and the east ern city of Shanghai until April 10, is the first French Defence Minister to visit China since Paris and Beijing opened diplomatic ties in 1964.

3 die as bldg collapses in France: An explosion probably due to a gas leak caused a three-steorey apartment building to collapse Saturday, killing three people and wounding at least 13, police said. AP reports from Sarreguemines.

The evening explosion in the centre of this eastern French town was strong enough to shatter windows of nearby buildings. Two of the injured were in serious condition, and 10 had already been released from the hospital by late in the evening, police said. Rescuers were still looking for anyone who might be trapped in the building. The tenants of the building were mostly students, and the dead and injured were primarily young people Not all were residents of the building.

4 Azeri, 6 Armenian POWs freed: Armenia and Azerbaijan on Saturday released 10 prisoners captured during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and repatriated them to Baku and Yerevan respectively, the ICRC said, AFP reports from Geneva.

Armenia handed over four Azerbaijani soldiers in a unilateral move supervised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Azerbaijani authorities freed six Armenians. The soldiers, arrested nine months ago after they crossed the border by mistake, were flown from Yerevan to Baku on a Red Cross plane.

10m Indonesians carrying HBV: About 10 million Indonesians, or five per cent of the population, are carrying the hepatitis B virus (HBV) the state Antara news agency reported yesterday. AFP reports from

Health Minister Suyudi said on Saturday in Bago, west Java, that the high number of hepatitis B infections was an incentive for the government to offer free immunisation services to the

The free immunisation service will start in April nationwide, Suyudi said, expressing hope that it would lead to the eradication of the virus in Indonesia by 2019.

Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, in Bolivia for crisis talks with Bolivian leader Sanchez de Lozada, on Saturday ruled out again the use of force to free the 72 VIPs held hostage by Marxist rebels, Reuter reports from Santa Cruz.

"The use of force is a move which would become the last (resource), in case of an incontrollable emergency which we hope will not come about," he told a joint news conference after talks with Sanchez de Lozada.

The Bolivian leader said his government could not bow to Tupac-Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) rebels demands for freedom for their four comrades in Bolivia, echoing Fujimori's own stand on the 450 MRTA prisoners in Peruvian jails.

American teenager held in ROK: An American teenager was arrested Sunday on charges of stabbing to death a South Korean man during a fight inside a

fast-food restaurant, police said, AP reports from Seoul. Because his father works for the US military, Arthur Patterson, 17, of Colorado Springs, Colorado, was handed over to the South Korean police by US military authorities, police said.

Church against move to extend Ramos's term

MANILA, Apr 6: The Philippines' powerful Roman Catholic church today attacked moves to extend President Fidel Ramos's term in office, warning it could provoke street demonstrations, endanger the economy and destabilise the nation, reports

Reuter. In a letter read in churches nationwide, the country's more than 100 Catholic bishops opposed the calling of a plebiscite to allow Ramos to run for reelection, and said an extended Ramos term had raised popular fears of a return of authoritarian rule.

"Have we become so poor and so dependent on one man that we can no longer continue with our progress unless he remains as president?" asked the letter issued by the Catholic bishops conference of the Philippines.

Rebels murder 80 civilians in Algeria

ALGIERS, Apr 6: More than 80 civilians have been murdered by suspected Islamic guerillas. including some who were beheaded with a chainsaw, in the worst such massacres in six months, news paper said today.

reports AFP. Most of the victims had their throats slit in the attacks while others, including children and women were decapitated with a chainsaw, according to witnesses cited by the papers.

It was impossible to independently confirm the reports and the government has remained silent on the subject.

The attacks were carried a number of areas around the country on Thursday and Friday, the papers said.

Two die, 11 hurt in Punjab bomb explosion

AMRITSAR, India, Apr 6: A bomb went off Sunday in a bus coming from the northern state of Jammu-Kashmir, killing two passengers and injuring 11 others, police said, reports AP.

Five persons were hospitalised in critical condition in hospitals in Pathankot town in Punjab state. The bomb went off as the vehicle left the bus station in Pathankot, 140 kilometres (85 miles) north of Amritsar city.

The rear portion of the bus was torn apart by the blast, according to police officer Gaurav Yadav. Many bodies were flung several vards (metres) from the bus, he said. No one immediately claimed

responsibility for the blast, but Yadav suspected Kashmiri separatists.

in Asia, says defence secy and his first to Asia, a region he sula would not bring major

The United States intends to keep about 100,000 troops in Asia — mainly in Japan and South Korea - even if a permanent peace is established on the Korean peninsula, Defence Securday, reports AP.

Harbor.

woman.

the Yokosuka incident to disrupt his visit.

Cohen said a peaceful reuni-

ANKARA, Apr 6: Turkish

ports AFP.

in Bingol province on Friday, the southeast's regional governorship said in a statement. Four PKK members were killed in another clash near the

the same day, it said.

"We intend to remain in Korea, assuming there's a unification, into the indefinite future, he said.

tain a significant presence in the region, (and) we would still remain a strong presence in Korea," Cohen said.

whose border area with the North is the most heavily armed in the world. There are about 45,000 US troops in

Off the Record

Forecast for the coming century

NEW YORK: A major earthquake in Manhattan. Cures for cancer and AIDS. Wedding bells for Princess Diana. Don't expect the 21st century to be dull, reports AP.

That's the forecast for the coming century offered by a bevy of psychics, astrologers and numerologists who met at a Manhattan restaurant Friday to mark the 1,001st day before the year "It's going to be the past and the future coming together to cre-

ate what everyone's calling the New Age," predicted New York psychic Tracy Williams. "It's going to be a hard time, all around the world, everybody's going to go through a lot of changes." Technically, the new millennium won't begin until January 1, 2001, but most of those who earn a living off turn-of-the-

century jitters can't resist the magic of the number 2000. And most don't mind making pre-millennial predictions. Williams was one of about 20 self-proclaimed seers who used tarot cards, astrology charts and crystal balls to peek toward 2000 and beyond.

"So many changes are taking place. You don't have to be sensitive to feel it," said Frank Andrews, a psychic who writes a weekly column for the New York Post. Specifics for the next millennium?

Andrews expects to see both cancer and AIDS eradicated in the early part of the 21st century. Williams agreed, but she fears that a new, more contagious

virus may appear after AIDS is conquered. Kathy De Koeyer, a clairvoyant based in Northford, Connecticut, forecasts a big shake-up for New York City in 1999 or 2000.

She expects a major earthquake to hit Manhattan. More cheerful news came from "love psychic" Kim Allen, a tarot card reader who makes frequent radio appearances and

does weekly romantic forecasts in cyberspace. Allen sees another baby in Madonna's future, another marriage for Diana, and a shift from the physical to the emotional part of love for the rest of us.

"We're gonna get mord into knowing a person inside and out before we get into the sex thing," Allen said. "Marriage is definitely in, long-term engagements are definitely in."

Allen things Madonna will enjoy motherhood.

Rebels agree to repatriate Rwandan refugees Zairean opposition backs out support from new PM KINSHASA. Apr 6: The Zairean opposition on Saturday The Alliance of Democratic confirmed it had withdrawn Forces (ADFL) approved a repasupport from newly appointed Prime Minister Etienne Tshisekedi, reports AFP.

The radical opposition, which has traditionally supported Tshisekedi, and parties supporting President Mobutu Sese Seko issued a statement officially declaring their withdrawal of support.

Earlier on Saturday the radical opposition said it was no longer backing Tshisekedi, who now appears certain to be fired next week when parliament meets. He has now been disavowed

by both of Zaire's main political groupings. Tshisekedi was chosen by the opposition as Prime Minister and ratified by Mobutu last

Tuesday and Wednesday. Under the Zairean constitution, the prime minister has to come from the ranks of the op-

position. Meanwhile, Zairean rebel forces have agreed to the repatriation by air of Rwandan refugees from eastern Zaire, the

UN refugee agency said Satur-

triation plan drawn up by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for particularly vulnerable refugees in camps near rebel held Kisangani, the agency said.

US urges ROK not to buy Russian missiles HONOLULU, Apr 6: US De-

fence Secretary William Cohen on Saturday urged South Korea not to buy Russian SA-12 antiaircraft missile, suggesting they might accidentaly threaten friendly US jets in the confusion of any new Korean war, reports Reuter. Cohen warned at the start of

a week-long trip that will take him to Japan and South Korea that it would be a political and military mistake for US ally Seoul to accept Russia's offer of SA-12s instead of buying American Patriot air defence missile.

Bomb scare leaves thousands stranded in Liverpool

Thousands of people sought overnight shelter in this central English city after bomb threats pinned on the Irish Republican Army cancelled Britain's premier horse race,

reports AP. Some 60,000 people were forced to leave the Grand National grounds, site of the world's most famous steeplechase, on Saturday while police and soldiers searched abandoned bags. 20,000 cars and hundreds of buses for explosives. None were found.

Separated from their vehicles, thousands of fans were forced to find lodgings in Liverpool, about nine kilometres (six miles) away. "We have had a whole vari-

ety of people seeking shelter —

from a horse owner trying to find a chartered plane to other who cannot afford a bed and breakfast for the night," said the Rev Roger Driver of the Emmnuel Church. There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but Prime Minister John Major

and others blamed the Irish Re-

publican Army, which set off

two bombs last week and

Thursday. The threats demonstrated the IRA's "disregard for the lives and interests of ordinary people," Major said. "The IRA's campaign is cynical and de-

extremely difficult for us," assistant chief constable Paul Stephenson said. Those led away from the Aintree racetrack included

Some 400 million people

around the world had been expected to tune in to television coverage of the Grand National, and about 75 million pounds (120 million dollars) had been wagered on the 38 horses. No new date was set for the 4.5 -mile race, which had a 400,000 dollars purse.

last week, which were also near Liverpool. For the first time in the race's 158-year-old history, armed police were on duty.

"We just came for an enjoyable day out and now this has happened," said John Walker, 52, of London, who couldn't find a hotel room in Liverpool and was trying in Manchester, about 50 kms (30 miles) east.

opened eight parish halls.

publican movement stopped to think how their action at Aintree will make Irish people all over the world feel this evening?" Irish Prime Minister John Bruton said in London.

Russia accused of continuing war against Chechnya

by means of an economic blockade and he would not demobilise his guerilla army until Moscow signed a lasting peace treaty.

Moscow.

Yeltsin pulled Russian troops out of Chechnya after Maskhadov's several thousandstrong guerilla force recaptured the capital Grozny last August after 20 months of fighting.

elected president in January, said last week that months of talks on a lasting peace and economic compensation for the mainly Muslim Chechens had Maskhadov has insisted on

full sovereignty for Chechnya,

Moscow is prepared to grant

only autonomy within Russia. "They are holding us to ransom. First Cossacks, then checkpoints, now a blockade, this too is war," Maskhadov told ORT, saying the proposing a treaty defining relations on the basis of the cease-fire reached last August.

The finalists from among three hundred Chinese girls parade before the judges at a na-

tional model competition Saturday in Beijing, in the hope to win the chance to walk

out on foreign catwalks. The judges made up from US, Italian and French designers must

select the girls who could one day be called to grace the catwalks of Paris, Milan or New

gions say they have stepped up controls on passage in and out of Chechnya. Russian media said more than 100 Chechen pilgrims on their way to Makkah had been turned back at the border with the Dagestan region on Friday because of passport problems.

mations, estimated by some local leaders at around 5,000 men, Maskhadov said: "They will be disbanded if we dot the "I"s on the treaty, that the war is over, I can't do it for now. Because they aren't dotted yet."

The Chechen leader renewed burgh meeting. his accusation that Russian special forces may be behind a recent series of kidnappings of Russian and foreign journalists

Canadian experts say

Charisma to be key deciding factor in Britain's May 1 polls

LONDON. Apr 6: Charisma, or lack of it, will be a big deciding factor in Britain's May 1 general election, Canadian experts said today, reports Reuter. Britons value charisma in

- AFP/UNB photo

their politicians much more than Canadians or Americans do, researchers from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, told a meeting of the British Psychological Society. This meant things looked

bad for Prime Minister John Major, already trailing opposition Labour leader Tony Blair by at least 20 points in opinion polls, said psychologist Mark Pancer, who worked with two political science experts on the study.

"Major was pretty low in terms of charisma," Pancer said in an interview before he presented his findings to the Edin-Pancer's group surveyed voters at universities in Britain.

of stated political preference. · Each was asked to rate three national or local celebrities. they were given a list of 40 standard personality traits to

when Blair took over. Americans were asked about President Bill Clinton and for-

mer President George Bush while Canadians were questioned about ex-prime minister Brian Mulroney and Prime Minister Jean Chretien. International leaders included Clinton, Thatcher and

Prince Charles were among the celebrities. Pancer said people tended to rate their own politicians lower

in low regard, while Americans and Canadians admired her. Nevertheless he was sur-

prised how low Major rated. "In the British sample, his ratings were lower than any ratings in any sample," Pancer said. "He got a moderate rating in competence, a moderate rating in integrity, and a somewhat low rating in terms of strength."

charismatic. Voters everywhere valued integrity first in their assessment

of politicians. "That included traits like honesty, straight forwardness, trustworthiness and were they

charismatic traits like charm, energy, likeability and looks. Canadians preferred their politicians to be competent and

looked for capability and hard work, while Americans concentrated on integrity over competence.

LIVERPOOL, England, Apr 6: planted two others found half-hour before the race was to

There were two coded telephone warnings typical of the IRA's operating style, police said. "The messages indicated there could be a bomb within Aintree but no specific location was mentioned which made it

Princess Anne and American actor Gregory Peck, who was celebrating his 81st birthday. A single stable boy was left in charge of the prized horses.

The evacuation began only a

start and went smoothly with no injuries, although in their haste many fans abandoned shoulder and shopping bags. The race itself was canceled just as it was about to begin. Security already was tight because of the two bombings

Taxi companies were inundated with calls and extra buses were marshaled to take people into Liverpool. Makeshift accommodations were set up in local schools and sports centres, and the Church of England

"Have the leaders of the re-

MOSCOW, Apr 6: The president of Chechnya said Russia was continuing its "war" against the breakaway region

In an interview screened on Saturday by ORT television. Aslan Maskhadov said he was pressing Russian President Boris Yeltsin to conclude a peace treaty that would clearly set out relations between the secessionist administration and

The two sides agreed a ceasefire but Maskhadov, who was run into a dead end.

Security forces and ethnic Cossacks in neighbouring re-

Of Chechnya's guerilla for-

Canada and the United States for the study - a total of 700 students aged between 22 and and insisted he had full control 25. They were representative of over the region's many armed the general population in terms

politicians from their own country, three from other countries, and then three inter-

Britons were asked to rate former prime minister Margaret Thatcher, Major and the late Labour Party leader John Smith. The surveys were done before Smith's death in 1994.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin, while Madonna and

than those in other countries. British students held Thatcher

Thatcher scored high in terms of strength and competence in all three samples. while Clinton was voted most

approachable." Pancer said. The British students valued