

International

100,000 Rwandans missing

Zairean rebels advance closer to capital amid new peace efforts

KINSHASA, Apr 26: Efforts to set up peace talks between President Mobutu Sese Seko and rebels advancing closer to the capital were revived Friday, reports AP.

Mobutu's beleaguered government, meanwhile, said it was sending fresh troops to defend the city of Kinshasa, the next major target in the path of the rebel army marching westward toward the capital Kinshasa.

In neighbouring Gabon, President Omar Bongo released a statement saying Mobutu had agreed to meet rebel leader Laurent Kabila in the Gabonese capital Libreville. Bongo said they were talking with the rebels to get Kabila to the table and put an end to the seven-month civil war.

Bonza Karaha, foreign affairs minister of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire was in Libreville Thursday to meet with Bongo.

Mobutu assured President Bongo of his complete availability and told him that he was

ready to meet Kabila, leader of the ADFL, in Gabon at any time," said a statement read on Africa No. 1 radio in Libreville.

The statement said the meeting would take place under the chairmanship of South African president Nelson Mandela.

Mobutu spokesman Kabuya Lumuna confirmed Mobutu was willing to meet Kabila in Gabon and was awaiting the rebel response.

Kabila, whose forces now control more than half of Zaire, has insisted such talks must lead to Mobutu agreeing to end his nearly 32-year dictatorship.

Attempts to bring the Zairian rivals together stalled this week, due in part to disagreement over the venue. A spokesman for Mobutu, who is suffering from prostate cancer, said earlier this week that his doctors would not allow him to travel to South Africa.

Kikwit, 400 kilometres (250 miles) east of Kinshasa, was reported tense, with citizens fleeing into the countryside.

"The town is calm, but it's a precarious calm," said Kamitatu Massamba, a veteran politician from Kikwit. "Many people are fleeing into the surrounding villages because they are afraid of the soldiers."

Kamitatu spoke in Kinshasa, but said he was in daily telephone contact with Kikwit. The city of 250,000 made international headlines in 1995 as the centre of an outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus.

Kamitatu said Kikwit's Roman Catholic Bishop Mununu Kasiala was turned up after fleeing the rebel advance. The troops have looted other cities before they fell into rebel hands.

Government officials confirmed reports that the army had sent reinforcements to Kikwit, including units of Mobutu's presidential guards.

Meanwhile, one hundred thousand Rwandan refugees are missing in eastern Zaire.

Billowing smoke wafted up from refugee camps Friday, but UN aid workers peering into the

jungle from an airplane spotted only three groups of about 100 refugees each.

"They are scattered. We found nobody," said Carlos Haddad of the UN World Food Program, who was on the first UN flight over the area in five days.

A few people who claimed to have fled the area's biggest camp said villagers drove them into the forest with machetes.

Rwandan refugees have abandoned camps in eastern Zaire before usually when Zairian rebels approached and chased them away. But always they have left behind hundreds or thousands of people too weak to walk.

These camps, which days ago held 100,000 people — among them thousands sick with malaria and cholera — appeared to be empty.

In Washington, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said the situation in eastern Zaire "is bordering on humanitarian catastrophe."

DC orders probe into alleged rape Strike cripples Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Apr 26: Shops, schools and offices remained closed in a part of the northern Indian state of Jammu-Kashmir Saturday in response to a strike called to protest the alleged rape of nine women by soldiers during a search operation, reports AP.

The strike was called two days after residents of Vawoosa Rangredh, a suburb of Srinagar, complained that a group of 13 soldiers had raided several homes, and raped women after ordering the menfolk out.

The strike, called by the Shur-e-Jihad, an umbrella organisation of seven separatist groups, also kept public transport off the roads in Srinagar, the state's summer capital, and nearby towns in Kashmir valley.

The army denied the incident, saying that the residents had tried to block a search operation of homes on the late April 22 and early next day for separatist rebels the soldiers believed were hiding there.

"When we talked to the residents, we found a lot of contradictions in their versions," said Major D. Puroshuttam, an army spokesman. "There is no basis."

But residents forced the state's civil administration to

record a police complain and on Friday the head of local administration, Divisional Commissioner S L Butt, ordered an inquiry into the allegations and asked for a medical examination of the women who alleged they were raped.

"I was asked to leave the house along with my son, while the soldiers went inside to search," Abdul Ahad Mir, 58, a resident of Vawoosa Rangredh, told reporters. He alleged that some members of his family were raped, but did not want to give details.

"The soldiers then went to neighbouring homes and repeated the same thing," Mir said.

PTI adds: The Jammu and Kashmir government on Friday ordered an inquiry into alleged rape and molestation of 15 women by army personnel at Vawoosa-Rangredh on the outskirts of Srinagar on Thursday.

The Divisional Commissioner (Kashmir), S L Bhat, ordered the probe after a high-level team of police and army officers visited the area where locals held widespread demonstrations during the past 24 hours, an official spokesman said.



Iraqi Muslims pray Friday before boarding the first Iraqi helicopter that flew in violation of US-patrolled exclusion zones to the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. Earlier this week Iraq sent nine helicopters to the south, already in violation of the 'no-fly-zone' to wait for Iraqis returning from the pilgrimage to Makkah in Saudi Arabia. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Rabindra Memorial Awards declared: Kumar Prasad Mukhopadhyay and Rabin Bol have been selected for this year's Rabindra Memorial Awards, instituted by the West Bengal government, PTI reports from Calcutta.

While Mukhopadhyay will receive the award for his "Kudrat Rangibrangi" book, Bol will be awarded for his "Bangla Bhasay Vigyan Charcha" (cultivation of science in Bengali language). The Rabindra Memorial Awards will be given on Tagore's birthday on May eight at a function at the Rabindra Sadan.

Albright plans to meet Chinese FM: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright plans to meet for some three hours with Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen next week, the State Department said Friday, AFP reports from Washington.

The lengthy meeting on Monday will be followed by a working dinner between the two top diplomats, spokesman Nicholas Burns said. Burns indicated that Albright will not raise during her meeting with Qian the latest allegations that China's top leaders approved a plan to try to influence the outcome of US elections.

Violence claims 6 in Mexico: Six kidnappers and their hostage died in a dawn shoot-out with police in the northern Mexican city of Torreón, police reported Friday, AFP reports from Mexico.

The shoot-out was sparked by an attempt by state police officers to free Jose Antonio Garcia, an employee of a family of farmers, officials reported. Local news reports indicate the kidnappers belong to a regional gang known as "the Villalobos", police have not identified the kidnappers.

Cholera claims 100 in Zaire: Cholera and other diseases are gripping Zaire with around 1000 people struck and some 100 lives taken by cholera by the end of mid-April, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Friday, Xinhua reports from Geneva.

In Kasese refugee camp in Kisangani, the cumulative number of cholera cases reached 550 at the end of the week of April 19, with 67 deaths. Three cholera cases, including two deaths, have also been recorded among the local population in Biaro, 40 kilometres from Kisangani. In Mbandaka, on the Zaire river a cholera epidemic continues and has already caused 302 cases and 19 deaths.

Mubarak leaves for Saudi Arabia: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak flew to Saudi Arabia Saturday for talks with King Fahd on the stalemated Middle East peace process, AP reports from Cairo.

Airport officials said Mubarak was accompanied by several ministers and aides. The visit had not been announced in advance, but Egyptian papers earlier in the week said Mubarak planned to consult with the Saudi monarch on ways to get the peace process going again. The visit follows this year's annual pilgrimage, or hajj, which saw more than 2.2 million Muslim converge on Saudi Arabia's holy sites of Makkah and Madina.

Palestinian gets 20 yrs in US: A Palestinian man faces 20 years in a US prison for air piracy after a jury found him guilty on Friday of using a fake bomb and a makeshift knife to divert a Havana-bound Spanish airliner to Miami last July, Reuter reports from Miami.

The 12-member panel deliberated for about four hours before delivering a guilty verdict against Saad o' Mohammed Ibrahim Intissar, 28. A sentencing hearing was set for Aug. 11. Ibrahim's Attorney, Joaquin Mandez, had argued that Ibrahim diverted Iberia flight 6621 on July 26 because he desperately wanted to avoid going to Cuba for military training and had no choice but to hijack the plane.

962 pardoned in Iran: Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on Friday pardoned 962 prisoners to mark a Shiite Muslim feast, state-run Tehran radio reported, AP reports from Tehran.

It said those pardoned were serving sentences following convictions before revolutionary and military courts. It did not elaborate. Pardons marking religious holidays are not uncommon in Muslim countries. In Iran, they often are applied to prisoners convicted of minor offenses.

3 get death sentence in China: China has sentenced three people to death and 27 to prison for their role in bloody riots in the Muslim region of Xinjiang in February, local television said in a report monitored by the BBC yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The three men were condemned to death in a public rally on Thursday for the crimes of malicious wounding, arson and hooliganism during riots in Yining near the Kazakh border that killed at least nine people and injured 198, the report said. Local officials could not immediately be reached for comment. One man was condemned to life in prison for hooliganism and the other 26 were given jail terms ranging from seven to 18 years, the report said.

Successful bilateral lung transplantation

CHENNAI, Apr 26: History was created in the medical field in the country in a private hospital here with the successful bilateral lung transplantation on a 28-year-old man from Sri Lanka yesterday, reports PTI.

The nine and a half hour long surgery was performed at the private sector Madras Medical Mission Hospital by a team of doctors led by well-known cardiac surgeon, Dr K M Cheirani.

Simultaneously, the doctors also performed a complex cardiac surgery on the patient, who had his heart on the right side, a rare phenomenon.

Hospital sources told PTI that the lungs of a 28-year-old accident victim, who was referred to the hospital by the Madras Institute of Orthopedics and Traumatology was transplanted on the Sri Lankan. The highly complex condition of the recipient made the task a challenging one and the team performed it successfully, the sources claimed.

Gandhi honoured in S Africa with posthumous award

DURBAN, South Africa, Apr 26: President Nelson Mandela on Friday honoured India's independence leader Mahatma Gandhi with a posthumous award marking his peaceful campaign for racial equality in South Africa, reports Reuter.

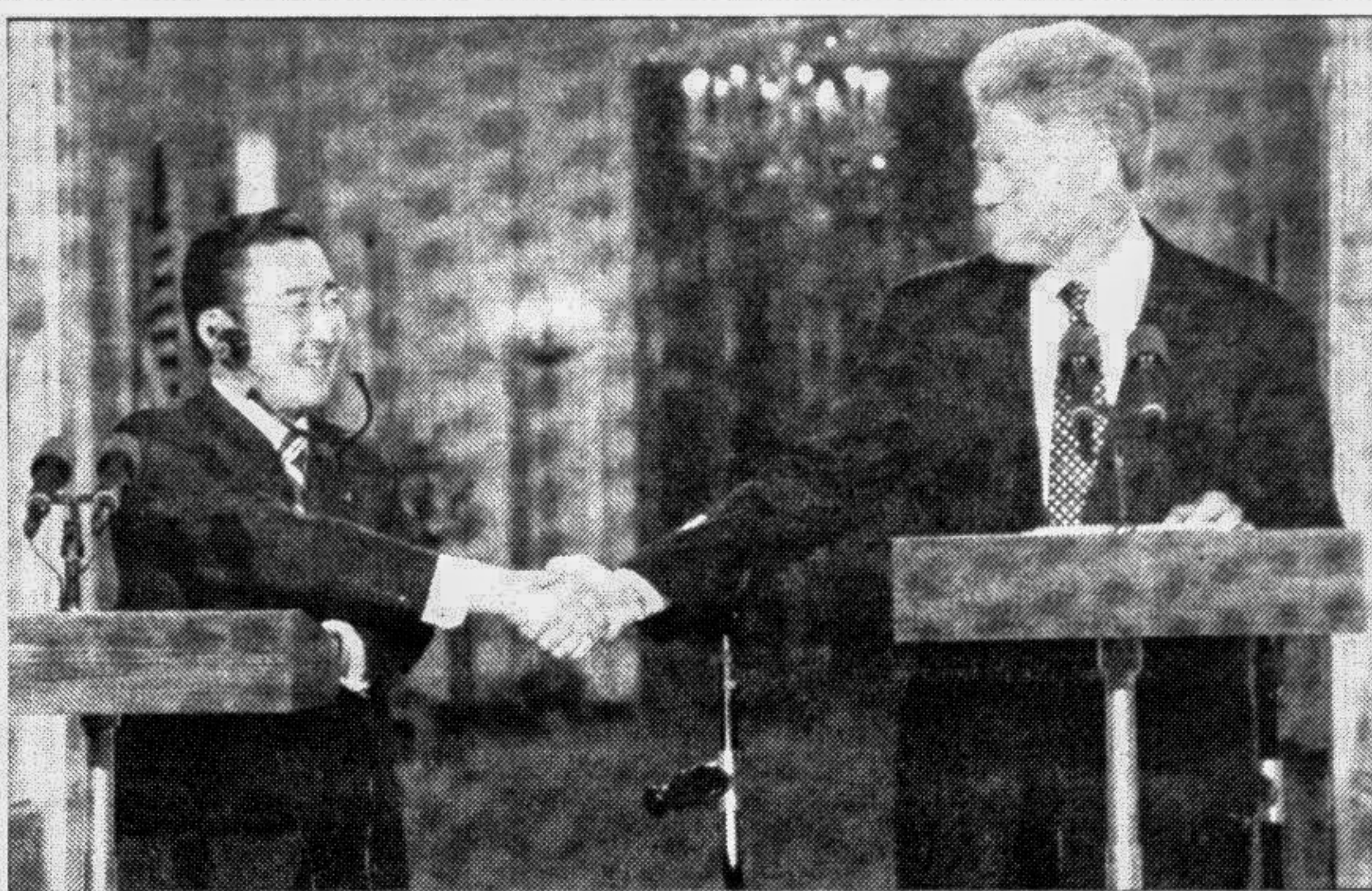
"Today we are righting a century-old wrong," Mandela said in a prepared speech to mark the award for the freedom of the city of Pietermaritzburg on Gandhi, which was accepted by Indian High Commissioner Gopal Krishna Gandhi on behalf of his grandfather.

"It is a token of our appreciation of Mahatma Gandhi's enormous contribution to the birth of the new South Africa. It is a token of our gratitude to the people of India who stood by us during the darkest moments in our history," Mandela added.

Nobel laureates to get nearly \$1m this yr

STOCKHOLM, Apr 26: Nobel laureates this year will get a record 7.5 million kronor (nearly one million dollars) each, an increase of 1.6 per cent from last year, the Nobel Foundation in Stockholm said Friday, reports AFP.

The increase is due to better returns from the Nobel Foundation's assets, including stocks, bonds, real estate and other investments which last year totalled 2.52 billion kronor (330 million dollars). Nobel prizes are given out every December 10 — the anniversary of the 1896 death of scientist Alfred Nobel — for literature, medicine, physics, chemistry, economics and peace.



US President Bill Clinton (R) shakes hands with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto at the end of a press conference at the White House in Washington, DC, Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

UN report blasts Centre for Human Settlements in Nairobi

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 26: In the latest finding of inefficiency in the United Nations, the UN inspector general reports "significant shortcomings" in the management of an operation aimed at improving housing in developing countries, reports AP.

The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, in a report released Friday, said management at the UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in Nairobi, Kenya, was so bad that to allow it to continue "would be reprehensible."

Among other things, the report found inadequate financial controls, assigning personnel to tasks which they did

not actually perform, keeping outside consultants on the payroll too long, and exaggerating job descriptions to justify promotions.

"The team noted that the authority to disburse funds is delegated to 12 certifying officers without any apparent system of central overall control to monitor the situation," the report said.

According to the report, the head of the Center, Wally N'Dow, spent so much time trying to organize last year's Conference on Human Settlements in Turkey that the daily running of the Nairobi headquarters was delegated to two subordinates.

"The delegation was worded in broad terms and did not delineate the boundaries of the respective responsibilities, authorities and accountability of the two officials concerned," the report said.

"In the absence of leadership, significant shortcomings developed in the management of the programs and resources of the Center, both human and financial," the report added.

It said the Center had established small offices in Europe, Latin America and Asia, but "there is no evidence that the process came about as part of an overall policy strategy."

DPRK urged to accept peace talks Security issues dominate US-Japanese summit

WASHINGTON, Apr 26: Security issues dominated the US-Japanese summit Friday, with both sides urging North Korea to join peace talks and President Bill Clinton reassuring Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on US bases in Okinawa, reports AP.

"The United States is very aware that our presence... has imposed burdens on the people of Okinawa," Clinton said in a joint press conference.

"We have been very sensitive to it," he added, noting that Washington and Tokyo were working to minimise tensions between the US troops and residents of southern Japanese prefecture.

Clinton also thanked Hashimoto for winning passage in the Japanese legislature of a bill allowing the US military to keep using land in Okinawa despite opposition from local landowners and their support-

ers.

After the 1995 rape of a 12-year-old child by three American servicemen, some locals called for the complete withdrawal of US troops by 2015.

Okinawa houses more than half of the 47,000 American troops in Japan and accounts for about 75 per cent of US military facilities on the entire archipelago.

Both Clinton and Hashimoto urged North Korea to accept a plan for historic four-party peace talks for the Korean peninsula.

White House officials had downplayed the role trade would play in Friday's meeting, saying that economic relations had significantly improved.

But Clinton and Hashimoto did agree on the need to avert another major increase in Tokyo's trade surplus and to intensify talks on deregulating the Japanese economy.

'Sino-Russia accord no threat to Asia-Pacific'

WASHINGTON, Apr 26: President Bill Clinton said on Friday a new cooperation accord between China and Russia posed no threat to the Asia-Pacific region, reports Reuter.

"I think it's a very positive thing that they're talking and working together," Clinton said. "As long as they are not making an agreement that is designed to somehow undermine the security or the prosperity or the integrity and freedom of any of their neighbours, I think it is a positive thing."

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin signed a treaty on Thursday in Moscow on troop reductions along the former Sino-Soviet border. The presi-

dents of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also participated.

On Wednesday, Yeltsin and Jiang issued a declaration outlining their vision of the post-cold war world and voicing opposition to claims by any country for world leadership.

The leaders said in their declaration that "no country should seek hegemony, practice power politics or monopolise international affairs."

Moscow and Beijing see both the treaty and the declaration as part of their new relationship of "partnership aimed at strategic cooperation in the 21st century," but both sides ruled out any closer union.

Fujimori denies report of troops executing rebels

LIMA, Apr 26: President Alberto Fujimori has denied that Peruvian commandos intentionally executed Tupac Amaru rebels who allegedly tried to surrender during a military raid to free 72 hostages, reports AP.

"That's not true," he said in an interview with The Associated Press Friday night at the government palace.

Fujimori said he didn't believe newspaper reports that some of the slain rebels had thrown up their hands and expressed a desire to surrender. But he said that in such raids commandos assume that everybody is armed and dangerous regardless of their expressed intentions.

"The target was to release all the hostages, and action was so fast that during the operation there was no time to see any kind of reflection," he said, speaking in English.

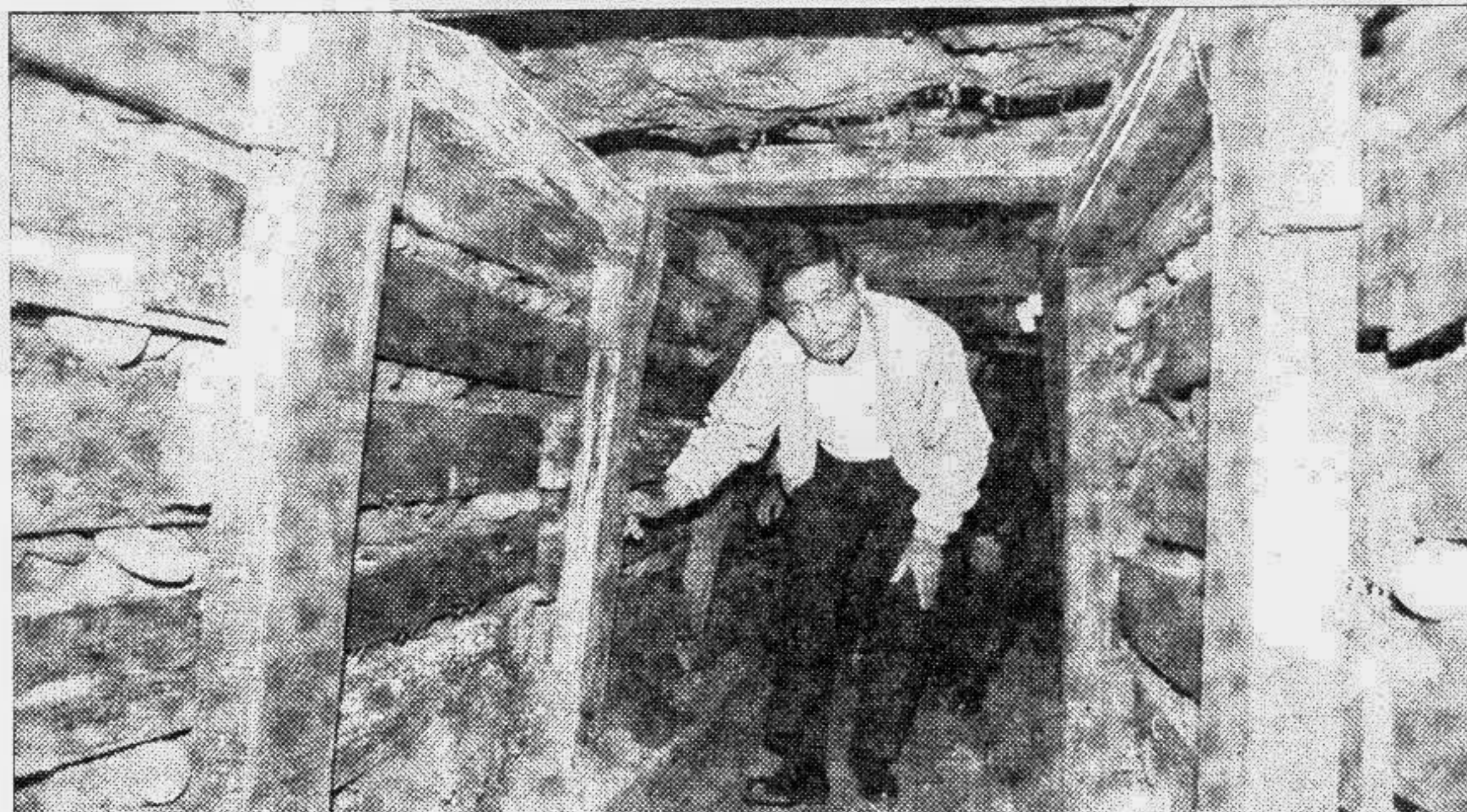
Peruvian commandos blew their way into the heavily fortified Japanese ambassador's residence Tuesday afternoon and freed 71 of the 72 hostages. One hostage died of a heart attack after being wounded.

All 14 rebels were killed, as were two of the 140 special forces commandos.

The opposition daily La Republica reported this week that two young women among the rebels screamed "We surrender, we surrender," as commandos burst into the mansion after detonating explosives under the floor where several guerrillas were playing a game of soccer.

The women's pleas were picked up by listening devices heard by intelligence agent monitoring the compound, the newspaper said.

Fujimori said Friday that it would be "absurd to have execution of the terrorists as an objective"



Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori walks Friday through one of the tunnels constructed by Peruvian commandos to recapture the Japanese ambassador's residence last Tuesday in Lima, Peru. Five tunnels were dug to rescue the 72 hostages from the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) which stormed the residence December 17. — AFP/UNB photo

US against admitting Myanmar into ASEAN

WASHINGTON, Apr 26: The United States said on Friday it had "very strong concerns" about proposals to admit Myanmar to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), reports Reuter.

"We don't believe that ASEAN should take this step," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

ASEAN comprises Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, it is expected to admit Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos this year.

"The United States has very strong concerns about the proposal by ASEAN to bring in Myanmar," Burns told a news briefing.

Netanyahu escapes indictment, but scandal likely to hurt Israel

JERUSALEM, Apr 26: For several days, a small but steady trickle of Israelis has headed to the parliament building with a simple message: "The country's latest political scandal is not over," reports AP.

Filing into a white tent in a garden outside the Knesset, these protesters — most of them young leftists — have been signing a petition calling for an official inquiry into the influence-trading scandal that reached the highest levels of government.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu escaped indictment. But as this simple garden protest has shown, the scandal could likely hurt the government and the country for a long time.

Already the scandal has exacerbated long-simmering tensions between Israel's Sephardi

Jews, of North African and Middle Eastern descent, and the Ashkenazis, of European descent.

It also has destabilized Netanyahu's governing coalition, with at least two parties threatening to bolt in the coming weeks.

An already nasty relationship between Netanyahu and the media has turned nastier. And perhaps most importantly, it has weakened the already faint possibility for progress anytime soon in peace talks with the Palestinians.

The Sephardi-Ashkenazi tensions burst onto the surface at a raucous rally Wednesday on behalf of Arieh Deri, the Moroccan-born leader of the religious Shas party, and the only politician expected to be charged in the affair.

The scandal revolved around

Netanyahu's appointment in January of a political crony as attorney general. In a story reported by Israel TV, Deri demanded the appointment in return for political support: The crony would end Deri's ongoing trial on corruption charges, and Netanyahu would get crucial Cabinet votes for a troop withdrawal from the West Bank city of Hebron.

The attorney general, overwhelmingly seen as unqualified, resigned after one day in office. Last Sunday, his replacement announced that while there wasn't enough evidence to indict Netanyahu or his justice minister, there was enough to indict Deri for blackmail.

Deri and his backers responded angrily that he was being singled out for ethnic and religious reasons. "How long,

for God's sake, will the Sephardi Jews suffer?" asked Rabbi David Yosef, son of Shas' spiritual leader, Ovadia Yosef, at Wednesday's rally of 10,000 supporters.

The tensions were enough to spur a plea from Israel's president, Ezer Weizman, who asked Shas leaders Wednesday "not to let the ethnic genie out of the bottle," a day later, attorney general Elyakim Rubinstein insisted he and his prosecutors "do our job without any ethnic or religious bias."

Netanyahu faced more trouble as the week ended. Pressure has mounted on him to replace his justice minister, Tsachi Hanegbi, also implicated in the scandal.

Trade Minister Natan Sharansky, the former Soviet dissident and a good friend of Netanyahu's, threatened to with-

draw his Russian immigrant party from the coalition if there are no major changes in the way government officials are appointed. Shas also threatened to bolt.

Netanyahu also faced a Supreme Court hearing in coming days on opposition appeals of the decision not to indict him. Although the court isn't expected to overturn the decision, some said that wasn't a certainty.

The court hearing is also likely to yield more embarrassing details of the scandal.

In the meantime, Netanyahu, once the darling of journalists for his good looks and snappy sound bites, has become engaged in a bitter battle with the media.

Netanyahu has blamed Israel TV's Channel 1, which broke the scandal, for his trou-

bles, saying it was part of a liberal plot to topple him.

Some journalists, he said, were "not ready yet to resign themselves to the decision of the voter in the last elections, and almost every evening they are trying to question the legitimacy of the government."

The Israeli Journalists Association, in turn, accused Netanyahu of fomenting anger that led to two recent mob attacks on TV crews.

Finally, many fear the political chaos will stultify peace talks with the Palestinians, already virtually dead before the scandal began.

The affair effectively ended the possibility that opposition leader Shimon Peres would bring his Labour Party into the government, which would have been a boon for peace talks.

Big planet like Jupiter discovered

WASHINGTON, Apr 26: A huge, hot planet about the size of Jupiter has been discovered orbiting a star far from Earth, bolstering the notion that other planets like ours exist, scientists reported on Friday, reports Reuter.

The big planet was spotted orbiting Rho Coronae Borealis, a star in the constellation northern crown, about 50 light-years — 300 trillion miles (480 trillion km) — from Earth, according to the scientists.

The orbiting body is much closer to its star than Earth is to the sun, and this implies that its temperature would be more than 500 degrees F (about 260 degrees C), much too hot for liquid water to exist and therefore not a likely place for life to form, the researchers said.