

## Aid workers managed to get 150 children out of camps Zairean rebels barring evacuation of Rwandan refugees

BIARO, Zaire, Apr 30: UN workers struggling to airlift Rwandan refugees out of Zaire have managed to get 150 children out of squalid camps, but Zairean rebels were barring further evacuations, report AP.

The rebels Tuesday also forced 1,500 refugees south at gunpoint, away from the camp and the UN help available there. A Rwandan woman clutching a baby stumbled and plunged into the mud as a rebel soldier yelled at her to move on.

UN workers said they feared for the safety of those refugees, and despaired of returning any of the approximately 80,000 refugees in rebel-held territory to their homeland.

"We're getting increasingly frustrated by the constant changes imposed on us by the local (rebel) authorities," said Pam O'Toole, a spokesman for the UN agency in Geneva. "Each day we start with a plan to help the refugees, and by the end of the day it is in tatters."

US envoy Bill Richardson, in Zaire to urge immediate peace talks between rebel leader Laurent Kabila and President Mobutu Sese Seko, said he had

urged the rebels not to interfere with aid workers' attempts to send the Rwandans home.

Richardson said Kabila assured him that any rebel soldiers involved in human rights violations would be punished and that he would be flexible on a 60-day deadline he set Sunday for all the Rwandans to be out of Zaire.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees had called the deadline unrealistic, because of the large number of refugees and because so many of them are ill from malnutrition and diseases such as cholera and malaria.

Despite their leader's professed urgency to have the refugees out, rebels have repeatedly blocked a planned UN airlift — and did so again Tuesday.

The refugees are among 1 million Hutus who fled into Zaire to escape retaliation for the Hutu government-led slaughter of a half-million Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994.

Most of the Rwandans have since returned home; those who remain are increasingly in danger from resentful Zairian

people and Zaire's rebels, who include ethnic Tutsis.

Refugees deserted their camps last week, saying Zairian mobs had attacked them with machetes, killing hundreds. The Rwandans emerged from hiding in the jungle by the thousands Monday and Tuesday, their hunger overcoming their fear.

"There's nothing to eat in the forest," said Felix Uzamugura, 21, after reaching the Biaro refugee camp, 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Kisangani. "Now, all we want is to go home."

In the mud and filth of Biaro, children swarmed the UN food center Tuesday, fighting for a place in line for the first UN food aid delivery in a week.

Until Monday, international officials had accounted for only a few hundred refugees. By Tuesday, as many as 10,000 had been spotted.

Despite rebels' promise of full access to the refugees, rebel troops prowled the camps Tuesday and closed the road south of Biaro, citing security concerns.

## Opposition leaders focus on corruption scandal in Indian parliament

NEW DELHI, Apr 30: Opposition politicians focused on a corruption scandal hanging over the governing coalition Wednesday as a parliament session meant to address the budget opened in New Delhi, reports AP.

Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral was likely to face repeated questions about his party boss's alleged involvement in a scheme to defraud a state treasury during his first full session of parliament, expected to last two weeks.

The scandal was already straining Gujral's centre-left Janata Dal, which has 45 of the 178 seats held by the governing United Front's partners in the 545-member lower house of parliament.

Newspapers reported Wednesday that Janata Dal president Laloo Prasad Yadav, who has denied wrongdoing, was resisting calls from within the party for his resignation. Gujral reportedly agreed to put off any decision until federal police followed through on a weekend announcement that they would charge Yadav with corruption.

Gujral, with Yadav's crucial

backing, assumed office just last week after a 21-day squabble for leadership.

"It appears if we do not take steps to end corruption in our political system, then the very base of our democracy will come under serious threat," Atal Behari Vajpayee, head of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata party, said on the floor of the lower house of parliament.

Lawmaker Natish Kumar, whose Samata Party is a BJP ally, called on Yadav to step down as chief minister of Bihar state.

"It will be a black day for our democracy if Laloo Prasad Yadav is not removed, Kumar said. The Central Bureau of Investigation, similar to the FBI, over the weekend said it was preparing to charge Yadav in the theft of government animal welfare funds in Bihar. Other top politicians also were implicated.

Under the constitution, the CBI must first get the permission of Bihar's governor before it can charge Yadav. It may take two to three weeks for the CBI to complete that formality.

## All appears to be over for Major in today's polls

Sanjay Suri writes from London

It seems all is over for British Prime Minister John Major, even though the expected Labour Party victory in Thursday's election is unlikely to be as dramatic as the opinion polls suggest, according to India Abroad News Service.

The latest Gallup poll for The Daily Telegraph newspaper on Tuesday indicated rapidly growing support for Labour in the last stages of campaigning. It showed 51 per cent of the electorate backing Labour and 29 per cent the Conservatives. That would give Labour a 265-seat majority, a lead that the party itself does not expect.

"This is not a landslide country," Labour leader Tony Blair said. "The only poll that counts is on election day."

John Major tried to block a Labour landslide with heavy campaigning in the last stages. He visited Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and northwest England in a single day on Monday, travelling more than Mr Blair and Liberal Demo-

cratic leader Paddy Ashdown put together. But it seemed too late.

"In the next few days the only thing that will be taking off for the Conservatives is John Major's plane," Labour shadow chancellor Gordon Brown said. The opinion polls seemed to back that view.

Opinion polls have been wrong before; in the 1992 election they predicted a Labour win, but the Conservatives came through comfortably to form a government. This time they would have to be wildly off target for a Conservative win, which Major's party itself has stopped expecting.

In the last stages of campaigning, Major pleaded strongly for the unity of Britain. Labour has promised a separate parliament for Scotland and is to consider a separate parliament for Wales, even though Blair said recently that curbs would be placed on devolution to these parliaments.

Major, clocking about 1,000 miles (1,600 km) a day during

the last days of the election campaign, has warned that Labour will break Britain up into "bite-sized bits." He said a Conservative win was now the "last chance to save the Union, to make sure that the system of government that has prevailed in this country for a very long time is protected and enshrined."

But if the opinion polls are a fair indication, most people in England seemed unconcerned if Britain were to lose Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Labour leaders were trying to match the whirlwind tours of Major during the last stages of the campaign. Deputy Labour leader John Prescott has travelled more than 10,000 miles (16,000 km) on the election tour. The Labour headquarters in London said Prescott has personally met 38,500 voters in 97 constituencies — a massive number in a country with an average of 70,000 voters to a constituency.



Iranian Foreign Minister Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki and other officials attended the National Day reception hosted by Bangladesh Ambassador Syed Muazzem Ali in Tehran recently. The Iranian Foreign Minister is seen cutting the ceremonial cake.

## Israel to lift closure of West Bank, Gaza Strip

JERUSALEM, Apr 30: Israel is to lift the closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip which has kept thousands of Palestinians out of work for more than a month, Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai announced Tuesday, reports AFP.

"The Palestinians of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and the Gaza Strip will go back to their normal lives from today," Mordechai told Israel radio.

An Israeli army spokesman said 28,000 Palestinian workers from the West Bank and 27,000 others from the Gaza Strip would be allowed to go back to their jobs inside Israel.

The workers are all married and older than 30, a category believed by the Israeli army to be low-risk in terms of militant attacks against Jewish targets.

However, Palestinian officials said it would take more than an end to the closure to improve frosty relations between the two sides.

Israel sealed its borders to

virtually all West Bank and Gaza Palestinians on March 21 after an Islamic militant killed three Israelis and himself in a Tel Aviv bombing.

Another report says: A senior Israeli foreign ministry official told a high-level meeting this week that the peace process was "dead" and the Jewish state more isolated than ever, public radio reported today.

"Israel is isolated, without any partners in the Arab world or among western states, even including the United States," David Afek, head of the ministry's political research department, was quoted as saying by a participant at the meeting.

The peace process is dead and Israel's international standing "continues to slide," he said.

Afek said the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "must go on the political offensive to explain to the world what direction it plans to take or the country's diplomatic situation can only get worse."

## Tajik president escapes assassination attempt

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Apr 30: President Emonali Rakhmonov was wounded Wednesday morning in a grenade attack on his car, but his injuries were not life threatening, a Russian news agency reported, reports AP.

The attacker tossed the grenade at the president during a visit to the northern city of Khodzhen, 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital Dushanbe, the Interfax news agency, citing presidential spokesman Zafar Saidov.

He said a "large number of people" were injured, but did not give any figures.

A suspect, identified as Firdavs Dustoboboyev, about 21 years old, was taken into custody, Interfax said.

Anti-government riots broke out last year in Khodzhen after local residents complained that they were not adequately represented in the government.

## Battle not yet over, insists Major

LONDON, Apr 30: Prime Minister John Major on Tuesday refused to repeat an assertion — made 48 hours before his last election victory in 1992 — that he was "stone cold certain" his Conservative Party would win Thursday's vote, reports AP.

He insisted however that the battle was not yet over.

"There are a lot of people who are undecided and there are also a lot of people who are undecided, at least to the opinion polls," he said in an interview with BBC television.

Earlier in the day, Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine said that voters were "sleepwalking" into the "nightmare" of a Labour government.

His warning contrasted sharply with his previous confident predictions of a 60-seat Conservative win.

The latest opinion polls showed the opposition Labour Party with comfortable leads of 18 and 20 percentage points over the Conservatives.

Meanwhile, opposition Labour leader Tony Blair said Tuesday he would be working "flat out" for every last vote and insisted that a Labour victory in Thursday's general election was not a foregone conclusion.

The latest opinion poll released late Tuesday by Channel 4 television news showed Labour's lead over the ruling Tories down one point on a week ago but still at 18 per cent.

"The media may think the result is a foregone conclusion. I don't," said Blair in an election address in this southwestern English city.

He also hit back at Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine's claim earlier in the day that the British people were sleepwalking into a disaster if they elected a Labour government.

"I'll tell you the disaster is a fifth Tory term and the British people aren't sleeping. They have woken up to it and that's why they are turning to today's Labour Party," said Blair.

## BRIEFLY

**Lebanon to allow visitors:** Lebanon has decided to allow visitors from 22 countries including the United States, Japan and European states into the country without an advance request for a visa, AFP reports from Beirut.

According to a statement from security officials late Monday, visitors will be able to obtain a visa on the spot at their point of entry into Lebanon. The countries concerned are: The United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea, France, Britain, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, Switzerland, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Finland and Portugal.

**Armenia ratifies treaty with Moscow:** The Armenian Parliament on Tuesday ratified a treaty with Moscow that will allow Russia to run a military base in Armenia for the next 25 years, AFP reports from Yervan.

Legislators voted 118-4 in favour of the treaty, with seven abstentions. Presidents Boris Yeltsin of Russia and Levon Ter-Petrossian of Armenia had signed the treaty in March 1995 on the future of what used to be a Soviet military base intended to protect Armenia's borders with Turkey and Iraq.

**Vietnam marks day of Saigon's fall:** Tourists filed past the tank that crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace 22 years ago and banners lined the streets Wednesday to mark the anniversary of the fall of Saigon, AP reports from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

It was April 30, 1975, when the city later renamed Ho Chi Minh City fell to advancing North Vietnamese soldiers. Throughout most of the country, the anniversary was marked quietly — a day off work, a few ceremonies to remember fallen soldiers and an old war movie or two on state-run television.

**Blasts kill 8 miners in China:** Two gas explosions at a coal mine in southeastern China killed eight people, according to an official report seen in Beijing Wednesday, AP reports from Beijing.

The explosions shook the Weihe mine in Sichuan province on April 21, the newspaper Yangcheng Evening News reported Tuesday. Thousands of miners are killed in China every year in accidents.

**Israeli forces kill Palestinian:** Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian at a roadblock Wednesday, a day after a Palestinian policeman was shot at a similar checkpoint, police said, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The shooting occurred as Israel lifted month-long restrictions barring tens of thousands of Palestinian labourers from the Jewish state.

## Teenager jailed for attack on newsmen in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Apr 30: An Indonesian court in East Timor has sentenced a teenager to one year's probation for taking part in a violent attack on a journalist there in 1995, a report said here Wednesday, reports AFP.

The court in Dili, the capital of East Timor, Tuesday found Liban Cavin Soares, 15, guilty of being involved in the violent attack on Guadensius Mau, a correspondent for the Jakarta-based Tiras weekly magazine, in November 1995, the Antara news agency said.

Soares would face a four-month jail sentence if he violated the terms of his probation, the court ruled.

## Chinese police kill 7 highway robbers, arrest 71 others

HONG KONG, Apr 30: Chinese police have killed seven highway men in a shoot-out and arrested 71 others on suspicion of robbing drivers and visitors from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, it was reported today, says AFP.

The arrests came after a month-long crackdown on robberies along the Guangzhou-Shenzhen Expressway in Southern China's Guangdong province, the China-backed Wen Wei Po said, quoting the Public Security Bureau in Shenzhen which borders with Hong Kong.

The suspects were said to have been involved in at least 45 cases of armed robberies on the highway in past years.

## Pentagon planning to turn toward high-tech arms

WASHINGTON, Apr 30: The Pentagon is planning to turn toward high-tech arms and recruiting highly qualified troops as it converts to a post-Cold War world, Defence Secretary William Cohen said Tuesday, reports AP.

In his annual report on the state of the military released Tuesday, Cohen noted that part of the work was already done.

"The drawdown of US military forces in response to the end of the Cold War is virtually complete, the US force structure is roughly two-thirds of its size when the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989," he said.

"The massive reduction in force structure following the end of the Cold War allowed US to terminate or defer a multitude of programs within acceptable risks, but the time has come to reverse this trend," he added.

The Defence Department also cut weapons purchases without affecting battlefield readiness, wrote Cohen in his

report, calling for additional arms purchases to be scrutinised.

"To ensure military readiness in the long term, the department must modernise US forces with new systems and upgrades to existing systems in order to maintain America's technological and qualitative superiority on the battlefield, he added.

"The department also must achieve its projected savings from infrastructure reductions, more importantly base closings and from acquisition reform," he wrote.

Cohen welcomed a 40 per cent increase in acquisitions between the 1998 fiscal year which begins October 1, and fiscal 2002, stressing repeatedly the importance of modernising the forces.

Cohen's annual report was as avidly expected as the release in May of the Quadriennial Defence Review, a massive analysis on the military's strategic needs between now and 2010.

## Yeltsin looking to India, China to prevent NATO's eastward expansion

Arun Mohanty writes from Moscow

The end of the Russia-US honeymoon has forced President Boris Yeltsin to look to India and China to prevent the eastward expansion of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), according to India Abroad News Service.

"NATO's expansion is leaving us with no other option but to turn to the east," says Mikhail Titorenko, director of the Institute of Far East Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

"India, like Russia and China, is opposed to NATO's expansion and stands against dominance of a single super power in world affairs," Professor Yurlov of Moscow's Institute of Oriental Studies said.

"India's relations with China have largely improved over the years," he noted. "And now that there is a break-through in relations between Russia and China, if relations between these three giants are cemented, it can successfully combat American hegemony in world affairs."

Having exhausted all means to persuade the Western powers to abandon expansion, Yeltsin, during whose tenure Indo-Russian ties touched rock bottom, first looked to India for "strategic" political support.

"We pay special attention to ties with India, with whom our friendship has stood the test of time. We have agreed to upgrade our relations to the level of a

strategic partnership," Yeltsin said during former prime minister H D Deve Gowda's Moscow visit in March.

"On the one hand, we witness ever greater desire for regional and global cooperation in areas of promotion of peace and security, cooperation in the field of economy and culture, humanitarian areas and environmental protection. On the other, we witness manifestations of expansionism," he said, clearly referring to the NATO expansion.

Yeltsin appeared vehement in his opposition to dominance of a group of countries in world affairs, saying that such a situation was "extremely dangerous and inadmissible." In this connection he preferred to quote India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who had said, "Truth is multifaceted and is not a monopoly of any group or nation."

Then Chinese President Jiang Zemin came to Moscow on a five-day state visit to up-lift bilateral ties. Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, just back from his tour of Prague, rushed to welcome Jiang in the hope the "China factor" could be a counterbalance to Western moves.

Yeltsin, who had been on vacation at Black Sea health resort of Sochi, returned to Moscow for the "pathbreaking" summit with Jiang.

## 4 rebel groups in Sudan agree to fight out insurgency

KHARTOUM, Apr 30: Four splinter rebel groups have agreed to unite under one command and fight Sudan's largest insurgency, helping the Islamic government in its 14-year war against its main rival in the south, reports AP.

The rebels announced the creation of the Southern Sudan Defence Forces under the command of Riak Machar, leader of one of the four factions that signed a peace treaty with the government on April 21.

In a statement Tuesday, the rebel groups said the unified force was a step toward "realising the aspirations of our people who have been suffering from disunity for years." It gave no other details.

Southern rebels have fought successive Khartoum governments since 1983 to win a greater say for the south in the running of the country and a bigger share of the national wealth. More than 1.3 million have died in the war and related famines.

Meanwhile, Vice President Lt. Gen. Zubair Mohamed Saleh urged the government's main armed rival to enter into unconditional peace talks to try to end bloodshed.

The Sudan People's Liberation Army of John Garang has recently made significant gains in areas along Sudan's borders with Uganda and Zaire, and did not sign the April peace pact.

## Heavy rainfall mars global weather patterns in '96

GENEVA, Apr 30: Weather in many parts of the world last year was marked by unusually heavy rainfall that caused great death and destruction, according to the World Meteorological Organisation, reports AP.

Last year also was the eighth warmest on record since 1860, the UN weather agency said in its annual report. It was the second consecutive year with above-normal hurricane activity, making a near-record two-year total.

The heavy precipitation was partially explained by a continuation of the so-called "La Nina" effect — colder-than-normal water in the Pacific Ocean west of Peru and Ecuador that began in 1995. La Nina caused above-normal rainfall in the Indian and Australian monsoons, the report said.

China last year experienced its worst spring and summer floods in 50 years, which caused more than 1,000 deaths and property damage affecting 20 million people.

Despite the trend of heavy rainfall, 1996 was extremely dry from Britain across central Europe to Russia.

## Russian PM vows to sign peace treaty with Chechnya

LONDON, Apr 30: Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin vowed Tuesday that Moscow would sign a peace treaty with Chechnya, despite a bomb which killed two people at a railway station in southern Russia this week, reports AP.

Chernomyrdin, speaking during a visit to Slovakia, said he condemned the bomb attack in Pyatigorsk on Monday but accepted assertions by the Chechen leadership that they had nothing to do with it.

"As far as our attitude towards the treaty, which is being prepared, is concerned we will be a party of this treaty, irrespective of anything," he said in a report on Russian television monitored here by the BBC.

"The Chechen leadership has already stated that it has nothing to do with this (the attack) and we believe in the statement issued by the Chechen leadership... we will be a part of the treaty," Chernomyrdin said.

Earlier, Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov said he continued to back the peace process

with Russia and believed that he and president Boris Yeltsin should sign a peace treaty as soon as possible, Itar-Tass news agency reported.

"The Russian and Chechen presidents alone can stop the madness of the situation which has now arisen," Maskhadov was quoted as saying by Chechen Deputy Prime Minister Movladi Udugov.

Udugov said that Maskhadov had urged him to take personal control of the situation surrounding the conducting of talks with Moscow.

Yeltsin, who is on holiday in the southern resort of Sochi, met the governor of Stavropol territory, Aleksandr Chernogorov, on Tuesday to discuss ways of tightening security in southern Russia, Itar-Tass news agency reported.

Yeltsin's Press Secretary Sergey Yastrzhembskiy told Itar-Tass that a decree to stabilize the situation in Stavropol territory was currently being drafted.



Actress Juliette Binoche holds her BAFTA award for best performance by an actress in a supporting role in Anthony Minghella's 'The English Patient' at the Royal Albert Hall, in London on Tuesday during the British Academy of Film and Arts (BAFTA) award ceremony. — AFP/UNB photo



At the countdown to the future ceremony, which concluded the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton (L), former president George Bush and his wife, Barbara (C), and retired general Colin Powell (R), the chairman of the summit, discuss the remarks of Felton Booker, a teenager from South Central Los Angeles, who opened the event held in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia on Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo