

UK election results announced

Conservatives blame each other for rout

LONDON, May 2: After briefly pausing to lose an election, Conservatives resumed their fighting over Europe Friday, blaming each other for a disaster at the polls, reports AP.

"Rank treachery of the Tory Right," said a statement from the Tory Reform Group, a left-wing faction in the party, blaming their internal opponents for the Tory's worst defeat for 50 years.

"The election defeat that the Conservative Party experienced was wholly unnecessary," said the statement, adding the right-wing of the Tory Party ran "a vile campaign of hatred against John Major and his administration almost from the moment of the sensational victory of 1992."

More than 200 Conservative candidates promised to oppose

British participation in a single European currency, defying Major's wait-and-see policy. The dissenters were encouraged by offers of campaign cash from millionaire businessman Paul Sykes.

Labour won an overwhelming majority in the 659-seat House of Commons Friday as Conservative support throughout the country crumbled. Rumors of an immediate Conservative party leadership contest followed.

Right and left factions both believed the Conservative's policy over Europe was to blame for the party's heaviest defeat for 52 years.

The Tory left wanted a pro-European policy, Euroskeptics wanted a more hostile policy than they got. Major sat in the

middle.

"Europe was the issue that kept on rising to the surface but we refused to acknowledge it," said Euroskeptic Teresa Gorman said, a Conservative who held on to her seat.

"This was one of the occasions when our policies were not what the voters wanted," she added.

"It didn't help that MPs had a party line that they could not agree with," said Matthew Carrington, a former Conservative lawmaker who lost his west London constituency of Hammersmith and Fulham Friday morning.

Lawmakers speculated Friday there would speedily be a leadership challenge to John Major's leadership of the Conservative Party.

Some leading Tories are expected to launch their own leadership bids this week, including

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Tony Blair: A profile

LONDON, May 2: Tony Blair's magic carpet ride to power touches down in the prime minister's residence in Downing Street today, less than three years after he emerged from near-obscure to become leader of the Labour Party, reports Reuters.

An Oxford University student when Labour last won an election in 1974, Blair's victory ended 18 years of Conservative rule — the longest period of one-party rule this century — and vindicated his root-and-branch revamp of Labour politics.

win power, allowed Blair to overshadow Major's party and build a huge lead in opinion polls.

A committed Christian, active father and archetypal "new man" in touch with his feelings and proud of his high-powered lawyer wife, 43-year-old Blair is no emotional softie.

He dared take on the entrenched leftist forces in his



Tony Blair

own party, root out vote-losing socialist policies and make Labour electable after 18 years in the cold.

While major is a working-class boy made good at the top of a party built on wealth and privilege, Blair, unlike most Labour men, was groomed for success at a top private school.

Like US President Bill Clinton he went to Oxford University. Like Clinton, he comes from the moderate wing of his party and is distrusted by the old party faithful.

Like Clinton, he married a

woman with strong political views who is more than his equal — Cherie Booth is one of the top lawyers of her generation.

Anthony Charles Lynton Blair was born in Edinburgh in 1953, the son of an aspiring Conservative politician.

He was brought up in the northeast of England and remains the representative at Westminster for his old Sedgfield home.

Aged 11, Blair stood as the Conservative candidate in a mock school election and it was not until university that he showed any inclination towards the left. "I just wasn't interested. I had no thought of going into parliament," he said.

Educated at an exclusive Scottish private school in Edinburgh, he read law at Oxford and went on to become a Barrister in London specialising in trade union law.

At Oxford, Blair's rebellious streak continued as he fronted a Rock 'n' Roll band called "the ugly rumours," grew his hair long and dressed up in garish 1970s fashions.

But his mind was on other things as the man who would be Labour's youngest leader embraced socialism and christianity.

"Blair was essentially a rather sensible young man. Discreet about sex, abstemious about drugs and earnest about Rock 'n' Roll," said John Rentoul, Blair's biographer.

In 1983, Blair won a safe Labour seat and began his speedy rise through the party ranks, speaking as opposition treasury spokesman, formulating party policy on the trade unions and tackling the tricky home affairs portfolio.

At 43, Blair is Britain's youngest prime minister this century and the first to have no experience of World War two. He is also its most inexperienced, having not held ministerial office or an executive post in local or trade union politics.

The last prime minister to be elected without having held ministerial office was Ramsay MacDonald, Labour's first prime minister, who took office in 1924.

Unknown to the vast majority of voters until the sudden death of Labour leader John Smith, Blair has dominated the British political scene since taking over Labour in July 1994 and revamping it in his own moderate image.

He led from the front, forcing left-wingers to acknowledge that four successive election defeats proved old-style socialism was always going to finish second best to Thatcherism, however diluted it was under Conservative Prime Minister John Major.

Force of personality, and a growing 'realisation' among Labour supporters that internal divisions had to be hidden to

UN begins airlifting of Rwandan refugees

KISANGANI, Apr 2: The UN refugee agency rushed to airlift the first big group of refugees home to Rwanda Wednesday, after Zairian rebel forces surprised aid workers by delivering a train-load of 1,000 Rwandan Hutus during the night, reports AP.

Brenda Barton, of the UN World Food Program, said the first 500 refugees were being flown to Kigali as soon as possible. Rebels want all 80,000 refugees to be sent home within 60 days.

In muddy camps south of Kisangani, hungry children squabbled over boxes of cookies from aid workers, and starving, often ill refugees lined up in hopes of getting their first morsel of food in a week.

"I am very happy to be going home," said refugee Sosthen Ntirampaga, looking haggard after seven months on the run or holed up in filthy camps. Last week he had to flee into the jungle when Zairian mobs attacked his camp.

Just three days after rebel leader Laurent Kabila set a tough two-month deadline for the airlift, rebel soldiers were already threatening to start repatriating refugees from the squalid camps on their own.

"If needed, we will fly them to Kigali on our own planes," said Emmanuel Kamanzi, a rebel spokesman in Kisangani. "There will be more refugees coming by train."

After weeks of balking at the United Nation's plans for the biggest refugee airlift ever attempted in Africa, the rebels are now pressing to complete the operation.

Paul Kessler, a UNHCR spokesman in Nairobi, Kenya, said one UN transport plane was available immediately and another might be brought in to continue the airlift.

But the rebels have made it tough for aid workers to even locate and feed the refugees, much less plan a massive air-

lift, he said.

"We're getting increasingly frustrated by the constant changes imposed on us by the local (rebel) authto help the refugees, and by the end of the day it is in tatters."

The rebels said that they were just pitching in to help. The international condemnation of their handling of the refugee crisis is a rare setback in their seven-month drive to depose President Mobutu Sese Seko.

On Tuesday, aid workers were concerned when the rebels first promised to deliver the train-load of refugees to Kisangani and then found out that the train had gone in the opposite direction to Ubundu, 95 kilometers (60 miles) to the south.

Kamanzi, the rebel spokesman, said Wednesday the train was taken to Ubundu, where those too sick or malnourished to travel were unloaded. Those healthy enough for the flights were then taken to Kisangani, he said.

US envoy Bill Richardson, in Zaire to push for immediate talks between Kabila and Mobutu, 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 the deadline for Rwandans to leave 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.

The refugees are among 1 million Rwandan 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 the rebels, who include ethnic Tutsis from eastern Zaire.

Refugees deserted their camps last week, saying Zairian mobs had attacked them with machetes, killing hundreds. With the area sealed off by rebel forces for five days, international officials had accounted for only a few hundred refugees by Monday.

By Tuesday, as many as 10,000 had been spotted. The Rwandans emerged from hiding in the jungle by the thousands Monday and Tuesday, their hunger overcoming their fear.

Tripartite meet to get DPRK to peace talks soon

SEOUL, May 2: American, Japanese and South Korean officials will meet in Tokyo next week to try to find a way to get North Korea to the table for peace talks, the Foreign Ministry said Friday, reports AP.

The meetings, scheduled for Wednesday in Tokyo, will also discuss severe food shortages in the communist North, which is described by UN relief officials as on the brink of catastrophic famine, the ministry said.



US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton reacts to remarks with US President Bill Clinton at the Democratic National Committee Gala at the District of Columbia Armory Thursday in Washington. The Clintons both spoke at the fundraiser. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

**28 newsmen killed in 1996:** At least 28 journalists died in 1996 around the world, down from the previous year but many as a result of rising danger from militant groups and organized crime, a French-based group said Thursday, AP reports from Paris.

The most dangerous country for journalists last year was Algeria, where eight were killed, said the annual report by Reporters Without Borders, a watchdog organization for journalists. Nine more reporters have died since the first of the year, the group said. In addition, 93 journalists remained imprisoned around the world, said the report that was timed for World Press Freedom Day on Saturday.

**1 executed in China:** A managerial level employee at a pottery company in southern Guangdong province has been executed for embezzling 7.934 million yuan (957,057 dlr) according to an official report seen in Beijing Friday, AP reports from Beijing.

Lin Zhentao, a deputy section chief at the Fotao Group Co., was convicted of using the money for gambling and personal travel, said the report in the newspaper Yangcheng Evening News, published Thursday. It said Lin was executed recently after being convicted by the Intermediate Court in Foshan City, 150 kilometers (94 miles) northwest of Hong Kong.

**Ross to return to ME:** American mediator Dennis Ross will return to the Middle East next week in hopes of getting the peace process back on track, the State Department said Thursday, AP reports Washington.

Ross, who was in the region just two weeks ago, will "consult further with the parties on steps they are prepared to take to re-energise the process," spokesman John Dinger said. Dinger added that when Ross returns to Washington, President Clinton will make judgments on how "the United States can best help the parties make progress."

**Blast kills 4 in Vietnam:** A Vietnam War-era artillery shell exploded in central Vietnam, killing four people as they tried to cut it open to salvage the explosives, state-run media reported Friday, AP reports from Hanoi.

A scrap metal dealer and three other people died immediately when the 105-millimeter shell exploded, the Vietnamese-language newspaper Labour reported. Police found and confiscated another 120 old war shells at the metal dealer's home in the central province of Quang Ngai, the newspaper said. Old munitions and ordnance still litter parts of Vietnam more than two decades after the end of the war.

**UN aid for malaria-prone country:** Solomon Islands, the most malaria-prone country in the world, will use a United Nations grant of about a half million dollars to fight the disease over the next two years, the UN said Friday, reports from Suva, Fiji.

The US dlr 548,000 campaign is focused on the South Pacific nation's Western and Choiseul provinces, the UN Development program said. The emphasis will be on community education and distribution of mosquito nets to 80,000 people, it said.

**China ends free university edn:** All of China's 1,032 colleges and universities will begin charging tuition as of this year, ending an era of free higher education, official reports said Friday, AP reports from Beijing.

Each university student will be required to pay 1,500 yuan (dlr 180) per year in tuition, the newspaper China Daily reported. A small number of colleges began charging tuition in 1994. The experiment was expanded to 664 institutions last year and will be made universal this fall, it said. The change is needed to improve the financial state of cash-strapped universities, most of whose teaching staff receive extremely low salaries, and to relieve the economic burden on state coffers.

Yeltsin urges Clinton admin Don't threaten Russia with NATO's planned expansion

MOSCOW, May 2: Russian President Boris Yeltsin urged the Clinton administration Thursday to give "concrete meaning" to pledges not to threaten Russia with NATO's planned eastward expansion, reports AP.

The administration indicated there was still room for bargaining before President Clinton and the leaders of the 15 other NATO countries meet in July and invite Russia's former allies to join the alliance.

Much of the negotiations until then will be centered in Luxembourg, in a meeting next week between Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, true to her prediction, did not close the gaps on a charter between NATO and Russia in 2 1/2 hours of talks here with Primakov, including a 20-minute telephone conversation with Yeltsin, who was at his

Tribal rebels gun down 8 Indian soldiers

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: Tribal rebels gunned down eight Indian soldiers and injure many others in one of the bloodiest ambushes of soldiers in the northeastern state of Manipur, the United News of India (UNI) said, reports AFP.

Fifteen other soldiers were also injured when Kukis rebels ambushed a security patrol and sprayed bullets at the troops in Manipur's Sapherama district, 35 kilometers (22 miles) from state capital Imphal, it said.

A civilian also died in the attack, one of the bloodiest by the Kukis rebels in recent years in Manipur, which borders

Burma, UNI said.

Among the soldiers killed was a senior official, assigned to escort passenger buses on a Manipur highway, the news agency said and added the ambush took place in broad daylight.

Five of the soldiers died instantly when the Kukis opened fire while the remaining three troopers died of their injuries in hospital.

The news agency in an earlier report said an unspecified number of bus passengers were also injured in the attack, adding that the tribals after the ambush ran away with the weapons of the killed troops.