

# US presses Zairean rebels to enter Kinshasa peacefully

LUBUMBASHI, Zaire, May 6: Desperate to prevent an all-out attack on the Zairean capital, a US envoy pressed rebels Monday to enter Kinshasa peacefully, and shuttled around Africa to talk with their leader and the influential men who back him, reports AP.

Bill Richardson, US ambassador to the United Nations, urged restraint during the eight days that rebel leader Laurent Kabila has given President Mobutu Sese Seko to resign or be chased out of Kinshasa.

"He has to choose to relinquish power and he is safeguarded, or he perishes with his power," Kabila said in this southeastern rebel stronghold a day after peace talks with Mobutu.

The rebels said in a statement they would guarantee Mobutu's safety and that of his family if he resigned now.

Kabila's 70,000-strong rebel army has captured more than three-quarters of Zaire in its drive to end Mobutu's nearly 32-year dictatorship. Kabila said the vanguard of his forces was 40 miles (65 kilometers) from Kinshasa's international airport and would be at the out-

skirts of the city of 6 million in a few days.

For weeks, leaflets purportedly from the rebels have told Kinshasa residents that rebel forces were almost there.

Asked what would happen if Mobutu ignored his deadline, Kabila said: "He will be chased from the power, pushed out of Kinshasa in a few days."

Mobutu and Kabila apparently made little progress toward ending the seven-month war in talks Sunday aboard a South African naval ship docked in Pointe Noire, Congo, agreeing only to meet again within 10 days.

Richardson met with Kabila for an hour Monday and said he was encouraged by Kabila's conciliatory tone toward Mobutu. The former New Mexico congressman — who built a reputation for concluding tricky negotiations in North Korea and Sudan — said he delivered an urgent message to Kabila from US President Bill Clinton.

"We stressed our long-standing view that for the benefit of the Zairean people ... there should be a peaceful entry into the capital of Kinshasa — a soft-

landing which avoids violence and chaos," Richardson said.

The United States also wants an "inclusive" transitional government and fair and open elections, he said.

Mobutu, 66, who is seriously ill with prostate cancer, agreed that a transitional authority should be established to organize elections. He said he would hand over power to an elected authority.

Kabila, whose forces control all but Zaire's far north and west, demands Mobutu immediately transfer power to the rebel alliance.

Asked about Kabila on Monday, White House spokesman Mike McCurry said US officials "don't have a thorough assessment of him as a political leader."

The United States and other western powers have troops stationed across the Zaire River in Congo and offshore to evacuate their nationals from Kinshasa, if needed. US officials in Washington expressed growing concern Monday for the roughly 440 Americans in the city, worrying most about violence by Mobutu's forces.

## EC reprimands Congress (I) for ignoring deadline

NEW DELHI, May 6: The Election Commission has reprimanded India's oldest political party for ignoring a deadline to elect its provincial and national leaders, officials said today, reports AFP.

In a warning issued to the Congress (I) Party late Monday the autonomous election panel ordered the party to explain why it had extended the May 31 deadline.

Chief Election Commissioner, MS Gill said the panel's unanimous decision to act against Congress followed the party's total disregard of the Commission's order.

"The decision has been taken in the larger interests of democracy to streamline the functioning of registered and recognised political parties," Gill said.

He said the party was given until May 26 to reply to the warning letter.

"If it fails then the commission will issue such orders as considered appropriate or necessary in the circumstances," Gill said.

The eight-page letter told Congress that the election panel would not allow any communication with the party after the May 31 deadline.

## Message for Pakistanis to donate organs to save lives

KARACHI, May 6: Hundreds of Pakistanis who have had kidney transplants flocked to a playground at the weekend to deliver a message to their countrymen — donate organs to save lives, reports AFP.

Organisers said the event, the first of its kind in the country, marked the start of a nationwide campaign to remove a general "misconception" that kidney donation was hazardous.

Some 3,000 people have received a new lease of life in Pakistan since 1985 when transplantation was introduced in this, one of the world's largest Muslim countries.

"We want to spread awareness that it is safe to donate," said a professor in medicine, Anwer Naqvi, the main sponsor of the social campaign.

Naqvi, who teaches at the Sindh Institutes of Urology and Transplantation (SIUT), said the success rate of transplants here was 87 per cent and donors had been living a normal life.

On Sunday, colourfully attired men and women with transplants competed in various athletic events including jogging and javelin throwing to demonstrate their fitness to an audience of thousands of people.

The organisers plan to send a contingent to the world transplant games scheduled for September in Sydney.

"Naqvi said there were around 12,000 renal failures every year in Pakistan, half of them needing transplants.

"But there are hardly enough donations," he said.

Transplant surgery is carried out at public and private hospitals in Karachi, Rawalpindi and Lahore. The cost is 350,000 rupees (8,750 dollars) at private hospitals and half of that at a public facility.

Naqvi said about 500 of the transplants were done at SIUT and they were all free of charge.

There is strong prejudice, including opposition from the Muslim religious leaders, against cadaveric transplants in Pakistan, for which no law has yet been enacted.

"Only kidneys are donated and that too by relatives only, whereas in cases of liver or heart only cadaveric transplantation is possible," Naqvi said.

"We are hoping to get a legal cover and change in attitude of religious leaders about donating organs after death," local Doctor Murla Lal said.



Lama Zein, a 21 year old Syrian medical student was elected 'Miss Bedouin' late Sunday in the ancient town of Palmira, north east Damascus. Fifty Syrian girls competed in the contest where the traditional conservative Bedouin dress was used instead of the swim suit. — AFP/UNB photo

# Inner strife mars chances of Bangladeshis' representation in British Parliament

Iriza Nasim Ali writes from London

Bangladeshis had been looking forward to having a representative from the community for the first time in the British parliament, but inner strife and rivalry has lost them that chance.

Bengalis at Tower Hamlet in East London, the habitat of Bangladeshi settlers, have failed to put up a candidate for Labour Party in the election. Tower Hamlet is, and has always been, a safe seat for Labour. If the Bangladeshis could have put forward a candidate, it would have meant a Bengali MP in the British Parliament. They failed miserably simply because of squabbles amongst themselves and regionalism — Sylhet vs the others.

All the open strife and rivalry also made the Labour Party rather apprehensive about nominating a Bangladeshi for the Bethnal Green and Bow constituency in East London. They feared that due to the conflict within the Bengali community, the seat may go to someone else. So, in the initial stage, Labour decided to freeze the selection process. Later, to play safe, the party decided against depending on the local body to select their candidate, which is the usual practice. The party itself drew up a list of eleven persons, four of whom were from Bangladesh. The move was criticised by many as being undemocratic. However it was not unconstitutional.

Palla Manjila Uddin, Kumar Murshed, Rajan Uddin Jalal and Jahangir Alam, all Bangladeshis, were in the initial list. The local Bangla press, supportive of a consensus candidate, worked to motivate the people to come up with a single candidate.

Jalal, who is from Sylhet, started his maneuvers. His supporters wanted the others to drop out of the race. However the locals had their reservations about Jalal who does not have a very clean track record. He was once suspended from the Labour Party for three months. So the Bengalis decided that they would wait for the short list to be made after the initial interview of the prospective candidates. Palla and Kumar made it to the next short list, another interview was taken and a list of four was finalised. Palla made it to this final list. The local council was now to decide the candidate.

But, in the local council voting, Palla got a disgraceful 50 votes out of 400 cast, of which nearly 200 were Bangladeshis votes. Bangladeshis shamelessly voted their candidate out.

The whole incident is a most unfortunate one. After all, for the locals of Bethnal Green and Bow, the feeling is that it would not have made any difference if the candidate was black, white, red or green, as long as they're Labour. A Bangladeshi candidate would have enjoyed the same confidence as Oona King, the African Briton who was finally nominated.

Bangladeshis' involvement in the British mainstream politics has been fairly recent, as recent as late 70's. Bangladeshis got united in the face of the racist onslaught by parties like the National Front and the British Nationalist Party in which several people were killed. It started with the process of defending themselves. But they failed to uphold this unity when they needed it the most — during this election.

Bangladeshis have close ties with the Labour Party for quite some time now. In the early eighties, Bengalis enrolling as members of the party. Initially the party was not quite eager to enroll them. However they later had to accommodate because of the demographic structure of the locality.

And now a lot of mud slinging is going on. The hard fact is that the Bangladeshis have failed to emerge as potential voice in British politics.

Some tend to lay the blame on the Labour Party. They say that the party intentionally selected Palla at first, a weak candidate, who failed to unite the Bangladeshis. They claim that the Labour knew that this would be the case. However, Kumar Murshed puts it "Whatever the fact may be, we could not fight our own case."

## House breaks up in protest as BJP demands Yadav's dismissal

NEW DELHI, May 6: Indian parliament broke up in protests yesterday as the main opposition Hindu nationalists demanded the immediate dismissal of a scandal-tainted leader in the coalition government, reports AFP.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) members, shouting slogans against Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, stalled parliamentary proceedings in the upper house for more than 30 minutes.

Later, all the BJP members in the House stated a walkout. Sikander Bakht, a BJP leader, said: "The government has to impose federal rule in Bihar. There is no other option due to the political immorality of the Yadav government. I am therefore demanding his resignation."

Yadav, a prominent leader of the multi-party United Front coalition has been linked to a 271-million-dollar financial scandal along with 54 other politicians and officials in Bihar.

The money disappeared from a state government fund set up to buy cattle feed and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has said it would prosecute Yadav soon.

In the lower house of the parliament, Speaker P N Saha, meanwhile refused to admit a BJP move to adjourn the House.

Jaswant Singh, a BJP member, told Sangma that the House has to be adjourned over what he called the "breakdown of law and order and constitutional machinery in Bihar."

With more than 15,000 non-political murders since 1994, Bihar has earned the dubious distinction of being India's most lawless state — as well as its poorest.

The Communists in the coalition government also slammed Yadav for not resigning from his chief minister's post.

Biplab Das Gupta, a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said Yadav should resign "on moral grounds."

"This is the stand of my party," Gupta said to the cheers of BJP members in the parliament.

Yadav has refused to quit his post and told the governor of Bihar that the constitutional head had no authority to order his prosecution in connection with the scandal.

The state governor is not the appropriate authority to sanction the prosecution of a chief minister, Yadav said.

Yadav is also the president of the centrist Janata Dal (People's Party) which is the largest partner in Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's 13-party coalition government.

## Off the Record

### Little genius

KUALA LUMPUR: One of Chelsea Clinton's classmates at Stanford University in September will be a 14-year-old Malaysian boy who will be one of the schools youngest students ever, a Malaysian newspaper says, reports AP.

Lim Huat Chye, a high school senior at the American International School in Brasilia, Brazil, plans to study computer science, the Sunday Mail reported.

"It will be a challenge," Lim was quoted as saying. "Stanford has one of the top computer science departments in the US."

Lim's parents, Lim Kok Cheong and Chiang Siew Hong, both hold doctorates and are businesspeople in Brasilia. His father is a former UN consultant who has taught economics at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, the Sunday Mail said.

Stanford, one of the most competitive universities in the United States, admitted 1,600 students out of 17,000 applicants for next year's entering class, including the only child of Bill and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The newspaper quoted an unidentified Stanford spokesman as saying Lim would be the 100-year-old school's youngest student in recent years, and possibly its youngest ever.

### Crime in Caracas easy!

CARACAS, Venezuela: A man who admitted stealing a statue from the birthplace of South American independence hero Simon Bolivar said he did it to prove a point: Crime in Caracas is easy, reports AP.

"How is it possible that a man breaks open the door of the liberator's house before 10 o'clock at night ... and walks out with whatever he feels like?" Raul Toro, 43, told Radio Caracas Radio on Monday after turning himself in at the radio station and returning the statue.

Toro said he broke into the popular tourist attraction in downtown Caracas on Sunday night and left with a foot-high (0.3-meter-high), 14-pound (6.4 kilo) bronze statue of Bolivar on horseback.

The statue is a miniature of one erected in New York City's Central Park in 1924.

Toro was being held by police.

### Good news for would-be smoking quitters

WASHINGTON: American smokers trying to kick the habit are getting a new source of help: The Food and Drug Administration approved the first smokeless nicotine inhaler Monday, reports AP.

The Nicotrol Inhaler, to be sold by prescription only, allows smokers to suck nicotine through a plastic tube, letting the chemical be absorbed into the body through membranes in the mouth.

The inhaler, developed by Pharmacia-and-Upjohn Inc. but marketed by McNeil Consumer Products, will be on pharmacy shelves later this year.

Quitters would be quitters can buy nicotine patches or chewing gum, over the counter, or a nicotine nasal spray with a doctor's prescription.

The FDA said clinical trials showed the inhaler worked about as well as these other products. Compared to no help, McNeil said, the Nicotrol Inhaler as much as doubled the likelihood that users would abstain from smoking for a year.

Each puff of the inhaler contains eight to 10 times less nicotine than a puff of a cigarette — and none of the dangerous tar and other toxins cigarettes deliver.

The inhaler also provides a sensation in the back of the throat similar to the feeling of inhaling a cigarette, and the ritual of bringing hand-to-mouth that many smokers report they miss when trying to quit, McNeil said.

Side effects include mouth or throat irritation or cough. The inhaler can be used six to 16 times a day at first, tapering off after the first three months.

About 46 million Americans smoke, and the government says smoking kills 400,000 a year. Surveys indicate three-fourths of smokers want to quit but have failed or are afraid to try.

## BRIEFLY

### Blair celebrates 44th birthday:

Tony Blair, Britain's youngest prime minister since 1812, celebrated his 44th birthday yesterday at the head of a team of minister hoping to transform the country, reports from London.

After leading the Labour Party to the biggest election victory in its history, Blair immediately sent one of his new ministers, Doug Henderson, to Brussels promising a fresh start in relations with the European Union. "Europe, for the new government is an opportunity, not a threat," Henderson said, striking a tone which contrasted sharply with the ousted eurosceptic Conservatives fearful of a federal Europe.

### Blast claims 8 in India:

At least eight people were killed and nine injured when an explosion ripped through an apartment building in the Indian capital, authorities said yesterday, reports from New Delhi.

The blast occurred in the three-story building in east Delhi at 10.15 pm (1645 GMT) on Monday, a policeman said. One of the flats was used for making motorcycle helmets and had chemicals on the premises, United News of India (UNI) said. The police official said eight people were killed in the explosion, but the Press Trust of India (PTI) said 11, including five children, had died.

### Gunmen kill sr cop in Pakistan:

A senior police officer died after being attacked by gunmen in the Pakistani city of Gujranwala in Punjab province yesterday, police said, reports from Lahore.

### 10 die as train derails in Poland:

Ten people died and 15 were seriously injured when several coaches decoupled from a passenger train, left the track and hit a stationary goods train near Szczecin in northwest Poland on Monday, police said, reports from Warsaw. "We have confirmed that there are 10 dead, 15 badly injured and another 15 less badly hurt," Szczecin police deputy spokesman Krzysztof Rusinowicz told the news agency.

### Velayati arrives in Egypt:

Signalling a possible thaw in relations, Iran's foreign minister travelled to Cairo on Monday to invite the Egyptian President to attend an Islamic summit in his country, AP reports from Cairo.

The visit by Ali Akbar Velayati is the first by a senior Iranian official to Egypt in three years. Velayati was in Cairo in 1994 to attend a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement. The three-year absence of high-level contacts between the two Muslim nations reflects the strain in relations since Iran broke off ties after Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979.

## Taliban kill 15 opposition fighters in Kunar

KABUL, May 6: The Taliban militia today claimed to have killed 15 opposition fighters and captured 20 others, including two key commanders, after flushing out rival factions in the eastern Afghan province of Kunar, reports AFP.

The Taliban forces have defeated rival factions in Kunar, the Taliban-controlled radio *Shariat* said.

A Pakistan-based private news service, the Afghan Islamic Press, said Sunday the Islamic militia regained control of Asmar and Shegal districts in the turbulent Afghan province after fierce fighting in which Taliban jets also participated.

The report on the Taliban radio station confirmed the two mountainous districts had been recaptured in the operation.

"Shegal and Asmar districts of Kunar province were perfectly cleaned of the forces of evil and corruption who were disrupting the peaceful life of the locals," the mouthpiece of the Islamic militia announced.

No independent confirmation of the Taliban gains were immediately available.

## Blair's plea to press for his children

LONDON, May 6: Tony Blair called on the press today to allow his children the privacy to lead as normal a life as possible once they have finished moving into their new home, reports AFP.

The plea came in a letter from Downing Street to media editors which also thanked them for their coverage of the family during the election.

On Monday, the Blairs moved into the flat at number 11 Downing Street, traditional residence of the chancellor of the exchequer, because the flat at number 10 is not big enough.

The letter called for the press to respect the privacy of the children — Euan, aged 13, Nicholas 11, and Kathryn, nine. "They are particularly concerned that they should not be troubled at school, or travelling to school.

## Makkah fire was accidental

DUBAI, May 6: The fire which killed 343 Muslim pilgrims and injured more than 1,500 near Makkah last month was an accident, Saudi Arabia's interior minister said, reports Reuters.

The minister, Prince Nayef, said an investigating commission had concluded the blaze was not started deliberately, the official Saudi press agency reported today.

The agency, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said the conclusion was reached on the basis of eyewitness account, forensic tests, reports from security services and other evidence.

Prince Nayef said the fire, which swept through 70,000 tents at Meena, 11 km (seven miles) from Makkah on April 18, started when a pilgrim on the annual Hajj to Islam's holiest site tried to cook a meal on a gas fire inside his tent.

The tent caught fire and, partly due to strong winds, spread to other tents despite efforts by pilgrims, security forces and civil defence forces.



Seen in the picture are Bangladesh Ambassador to Japan Rashed Ahmed (R) showing display of Bangladesh tea and some other products to His Highness Crown Prince Naruhito (C) alongwith Nilufer Ahmed, wife of the Bangladesh Ambassador during the visit of the Crown Prince to Bangladesh Stall at the International Trade Fair which commenced on April 24 '97.

# Maldives set to renew environmental offensive during SAARC summit

COLOMBO, May 6: When Maldives President Maamoon Abdul Gayoom first warned that his tiny nation of coral islands was threatened with extinction due to global warming, the international response was lukewarm, reports AFP.

Ten years later, president Gayoom, the "David" in the battle against rising sea waves, is set to renew his environmental offensive when he hosts the ninth summit of South Asian leaders in his chief island Male next week.

The Maldives drew United Nations' attention in 1987 when Gayoom told the General Assembly that a two-metre (6.6-foot) rise in the sea level will submerge virtually all his 1,192 coral islands scattered across the Equator.

"That would be the death of a nation," Gayoom told the United Nations. "With a mere one metre rise also, a storm surge would be catastrophic, and possibly fatal to the nation."

Diplomats here say the three-day summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will seek to renew world attention about the problem faced by low-lying countries such as Maldives.

"The Male Declaration is certain to make a strong appeal for greater international efforts to protect the environment," a diplomat here said. "How these pronouncements will be translated into action is quite another."

Bangladesh, which is also threatened with losing over a quarter of its land area in the next century, expects the issue of sea level rise to figure during the SAARC deliberations which begin at official level from Thursday.

The rising sea waves are also causing ripples in the larger Indian Ocean island of Sri Lanka where the north-western and southern coastlines have been subjected to severe erosion in recent years.

The Maldives, better known for its tiny coral islands with vast lagoons of crystal clear water and unpolluted white sandy beaches, is clearly the worst affected in South Asia due to environmental problems.

The "greenhouse effect" refers to the build up of gases in the atmosphere that destroys the ozone layer leading to global warming which melts polar icecaps and raises sea levels.

Successive SAARC summits have expressed serious concern about the damage caused to the environment and urged rich nations to pick up the tab for the clean up operation.

"While the protection of the environment is a common imperative for all humankind, the main responsibility in this regard rests on developed countries since most of the emission of pollutants originates in those countries," the SAARC summit in Colombo resolved in 1991.

Although the South Asian grouping which comprises Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka may have done little to collectively address the issue, Gayoom 60, has been going it alone.

After his repeated appeals from virtually every world forum he addressed, the United Nations organised the Earth Summit in Rio and he himself hosted the first "Small states conference on sea level rise" in 1989.

Gayoom said the sea, which provides the livelihood for most of his 225,000 Sunni Muslim people, could become their "eternal grave" in a matter of decades.

He was once annoyed with the United Nations environmental programme for saying that the Maldivians had no option but simply to abandon the Indian Ocean nation and become the world's first environmental refugees.

Reacted Gayoom: "This predicament so casually justified for the Maldives, and therefore for many other similar states of the world, not only reflects insensitivity but also a lack of will to take adequate measures to protect the most vulnerable nations."

The problems for the Maldives were brought home to almost all the inhabitants in the country when in April 1987 massive tidal waves swept across the one-mile long capital island and the island of Hulule causing havoc.

Since then, Japanese aid helped place some 20,000 tetrapods made out of rock and marine cement and weighing three tons to form a breakwater to protect the capital where more than a quarter of the country's people live.

"Tourist brochures and travel advertisements for the Maldives depict us as the last paradise," a senior Maldivian minister said after the 1987 tidal waves. The last paradise is now in danger of being the lost paradise."

## Netanyahu won't join ceremony for slain schoolgirls in Jordan

JERUSALEM, May 6: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pulled out of a ceremony at a Jordanian tourist site today after a disagreement between the countries over a water accord, officials said, reports AFP.

Following Amman's rejection of an Israeli offer in the water agreement, Jordan denied Monday that Crown Prince Hassan would attend the memorial ceremony at the "Island of Peace" for seven Israeli girls gunned down by a Jordanian soldier.

Sunday an Israeli official had said Hassan and Netanyahu would both participate in the ceremony at the site where the schoolgirls were killed on March 13.

Israeli National Infrastructures Minister Ariel Sharon, who had been slated to visit Jordan secretly on Monday, said the Jordanians had in recent days made new demands that Israel turn over more water than it had planned.

"Water is a very, very serious subject," Sharon told Israel radio. "I don't know what the background is for the crisis... a diplomatic meeting should not be affected by this."

The crisis blew up after a secret meeting in Tell Aviv on Sunday between Sharon and Muntar Hadadin, the head of the Jordanian delegation on water and the environment.

Jordan rejected an Israeli proposal to immediately supply 50 million cubic metres of water. Sharon said, a third of the amount Israel is pledged to provide under an agreement between the two countries.