

BRIEFLY



Miss Thailand, Suangsuda Rodprasert (L), and Donald J. Trump (R), executive producer of the Miss Universe pageant, pose for photographs Friday in Miami Beach, Florida prior to the final competition where one delegate will be crowned Miss Universe 1997. The pageant is scheduled for May 16 in Miami Beach, Florida.

— AFP/UNB photo

9 killed in Lankan clashes:

At least nine people were killed when government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels clashed in two separate incidents, the military said Sunday. AP reports from Colombo.

Government troops attacked a Tamil rebel group in northern Sri Lanka Saturday, killing at least five of them, said Capt. L S Palihawadeniya, a military spokesman. One soldier was killed.

In another attack, in the northwestern Mannar district, soldiers shot dead one guerilla. Two other rebels committed suicide by swallowing cyanide to avoid being captured, Palihawadeniya said. There were no fatalities among government troops, however.

Offer for new MRTA leader's arrest:

Peru's police on Saturday offered a 75,000 dollar reward for information leading to the capture of the man they believe could be the Tupac Amaru rebels' new leader after last month's bloody end to the group's hostage taking, Reuters reports from Lima.

A full-page advertisement in the pro-government daily *El Comercio* announced the offer would even include a pardon for anyone providing information that led to the capture of the group's former international spokesman, Hugo Avellaneda.

President Alberto Fujimori tipped Avellaneda — the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement's (MRTA) best known member still at large — as the rebel most likely to take control of the group after commandos killed leader Nestor Cerna in a hostage rescue.

PWG kills villager in India:

The People's War Group (PWG) naxalites, who gunned down CH Sreenu, brother of Anakapalle MP Aayana Patrudu on Friday, murdered a villager at Kantaram village near Koyyur in Visakhapatnam district while fleeing from the scene, PTI reports from Hyderabad.

Police said the assailants who boarded a bus after murdering Sreenu, on spotting the villager, Kanna Babu dragged him out of the vehicle and shot at him alleging that he was a police informer.

France hails archbishop Monsengwo:

France on Saturday welcomed archbishop Laurent Monsengwo's election as Speaker of Zaire's transition parliament, saying it could help an orderly transfer of power in Kinshasa, Reuters reports from Paris.

"We rejoice in archbishop Monsengwo's election and extend our deepest wishes for the success of his mission," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. His election appeared to facilitate "an orderly transition in Zaire within an institutional and legal framework."

Israel probes into land dealer's killing:

Israeli police said on Saturday they were investigating the killing of a Palestinian accused of selling land to Jews, an activity the Palestinian Authority has said is punishable by death, Reuters reports from Jerusalem.

Police spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby said Palestinian security forces on Saturday handed the body of east Jerusalem land dealer Farid Bashiti to Israeli authorities for forensic test. Bashiti, 70, was found dead in PLO-ruled Ramallah on Friday.

Chechens seize 3 journalists:

A television crew of three Russians has been seized by masked Chechen gunmen in the latest in a rash of kidnappings of journalists in the breakaway republic, Russian news reports said Sunday, AP says from Moscow.

Six unidentified gunmen seized the crew from NTV independent television Saturday afternoon near the village of Samashki in western Chechnya, NTV reported. The captors did not immediately announce any demands.

The television station said the journalists — Special correspondent Yelena Masnyuk, cameraman Ilya Morduykov and sound engineer Dmitry Uchev — were kidnapped after filming a rally of field commander Salman Raduyev's supporters in the Chechen capital Grozny.

ICE-cream shop owners jailed in Kabul:

Two ice-cream shop owners have been imprisoned by the purist-Muslim Taliban militia for serving women not wearing the required head-to-toe covering, state-run radio announced today, AFP reports from Kabul.

"The owners of two ice-cream shops who had allowed improperly covered women to enter their shops were given two days of punitive imprisonment," the Taliban-mouthpiece said.

"This shops were closed for three days and the women were given necessary moral advice," the report said.

Thai police seize arms belonging to Karens

BANGKOK, May 11: Thai Border Patrol Police have seized a hidden cache of weapons they believe belong to ethnic Karen rebels fighting Myanmar's military government, the Bangkok Post reported Sunday, says AP.

Police found 30 AK-47 rifles, a heavy machine gun, four rocket-propelled grenade launchers and assorted mortar ammunition buried at a hill near the Thai-Myanmar border in Tak province, 370 kilometres (230 miles) northwest of Bangkok.

They believe the weapons belong to the Karen National

Union, which has been fighting the government in Yangon for autonomy since 1949.

This was the second cache of weapons border patrol police found this week, and they said they would continue searching for others.

Karen troops frequently cross into Thailand to buy weapons on the black market.

The Burmese army launched a massive offensive against the KNU in February that captured most of their strongholds inside Myanmar and pushed many guerrillas over the border into Thailand.

Sharma summons meet of governors, CMs to talk political situation

NEW DELHI, May 11: For the first time, President Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma is convening a meeting of governors, chief ministers and leaders of political parties to discuss how to deal with a situation where no single political party has a clear majority in elections, reports PTI.

The two-day conference to be held from June two will discuss the role of constitutional heads in such a situation "as they have to take a decision on their own," official sources said.

The issue to be discussed at the conference would be the role of constitutional heads after elections, particularly when no single party appears to have a clear majority.

The idea of holding such a conference is to have a reference point for future if no single party gets a majority and what alternative there for the president or the governor, the sources said.

In 1989, after the parliamentary elections, the then president R Venkataraman had first invited Rajiv Gandhi before asking VP Singh, who was supported by the left and the BJP from outside.

The initiative has been taken by the President Sharma in view of the political developments at the centre and in states like Uttar Pradesh where no single party had emerged with a clear majority.

Apart from the governors, it is important for political parties also to be involved in such interaction as they are the "main actors in such a scenario where no party has a clear majority," the sources said.

Whatever emerges from such a meeting will be used as a base for dealing with any constitutional crisis that may arise in the future, they said.

They recalled the situation in Uttar Pradesh where governor Romesh Bhandari did not

adhere to the practice followed at the centre by Dr Sharma last year who had invited the BJP to form the government at the centre.

Even though the BJP government headed by Atal Behari Vajpayee remained in office for only 13 days, the practice of calling the single largest party (SLP) was set in motion, the sources said.

"Political leaders have also been invited for the conference as they are the main facilitators and the president is the only constitutional head to provide a forum where the governors and political leaders can discuss such issues," the sources said.

The meeting will "mark a watershed in the constitutional and political history of the country, specially in the light of the 50th year of the country's independence being celebrated this year."

Pakistan undermines quick breakthrough in Indo-Pak peace talks

BANDOS, Maldives, May 11: Pakistan today played down the prospects of a quick breakthrough in peace talks with arch-foe India, saying there could be setbacks and negotiations would take a long time, reports Reuters.

"Expectations should not be built up because unless the groundwork is there, there could be disappointments," Pakistani Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan told reporters on the margins of a meeting of foreign ministers of the South Asian region.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart, Inder Kumar Gujral, were scheduled to hold their first face-to-face talks today at a resort on this Indian Ocean island state.

Sharif was named prime minister in February and Gujral took office three weeks ago. They have exchanged letters expressing their hope that the two long-time rivals could ease tensions.

"Let's hope that something positive comes out, but one has to be very cautious on it. It will be a long, drawn-out negotiation. There will be no quick fix," said Khan, adding that a half-century-old quarrel over Kashmir was Pakistan's core issue.

"Let's hope there are no more wars on Kashmir, but we'll have to negotiate with patience."

The talks between the two leaders today were to take place on the fringes of a summit of

the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in the Maldives.

The two nations launched bilateral negotiations in March after a three-year hiatus marked by tension over the

105 killed in China floods

BEIJING, May 11: Flooding from heavy rains has killed at least 105 people in China's southern province of Guangdong and caused damage estimated at 675 million yuan (dollar 81 million), state-run media reported, reports AP.

Some 500 government workers had begun providing emergency food, clothing and shelter after the floods burst dikes, destroyed buildings and cut off water, electricity and phone services, the official newspaper *Yangcheng Evening News* said in a Saturday report seen Sunday in Beijing.

More than 360,000 people had been affected by floods and landslides triggered by the heavy rains, with more than 400 left homeless, it said.

Many of the 105 people killed lived on the outskirts of the provincial capital, Guangzhou. There, flooding killed 91 people and left 75,000 stranded, the report said.

About 400 millimetres (15 3/4 inches) of rain fell on the region in 10 hours.

Himalayan region of Kashmir, where police and hospital officials say more than 20,000 people have died in a separatist insurgency.

The two nations' foreign secretaries — the top civil servants in the foreign ministries — met in late March, followed by talks last month between Khan and Gujral, who was foreign minister before being elevated to prime minister.

Gujral has kept the Foreign Ministry portfolio to himself in his centre-left government.

Last week, Pakistan's High Commissioner to India, Ashraf Jehangir Gazi, said New Delhi would have to agree to discuss the future of divided Kashmir if the two nations wanted to build closer ties in areas such as trade.

Mostly Hindu-India controls two thirds of Kashmir, while Islamic Pakistan rules over the rest.

"Pakistan's position is, very well known. The core issue is Kashmir," Khan said.

"Let's wait to see how this informal meeting goes between the two prime ministers and what the two prime ministers give for the foreign secretaries' meeting in Islamabad, which is expected maybe next month," he said.

"Because we have to have some understanding, some groundwork and the groundwork is not there yet, and we have reached right up to the prime minister's level."



Portraits of the seven leaders from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are pictured on the side of a building Sunday in Male. The May 12-14 SAARC summit is being hosted by the Maldives. From left are: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga; Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif; Nepali Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand; Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; India Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral; Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuck; Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed.

'Prolonged' army presence in Bosnia to help preserve Balkan peace'

WASHINGTON, May 11: Two new congressional reports predict the need for a prolonged military presence in Bosnia to preserve the shaky Balkan peace, reports AP.

The separate reports by the Congressional Research Service and General Accounting Office came Friday a day after the Senate approved a nonbinding measure opposing any funds for the Bosnia troop presence beyond June 1998. The reports and the Senate action signal a collision course in which the Clinton administration will be faced with international pressure to stay in Bosnia against domestic pressure to get out.

The four-year civil war ended in a shaky truce two

years ago after the United States brokered a peace agreement among Bosnian Muslim, Serb and Croatian factions at Dayton, Ohio. When a yearlong peace mission ended last December seemed insufficient, NATO allies agreed to a new deployment that would last to June 1998.

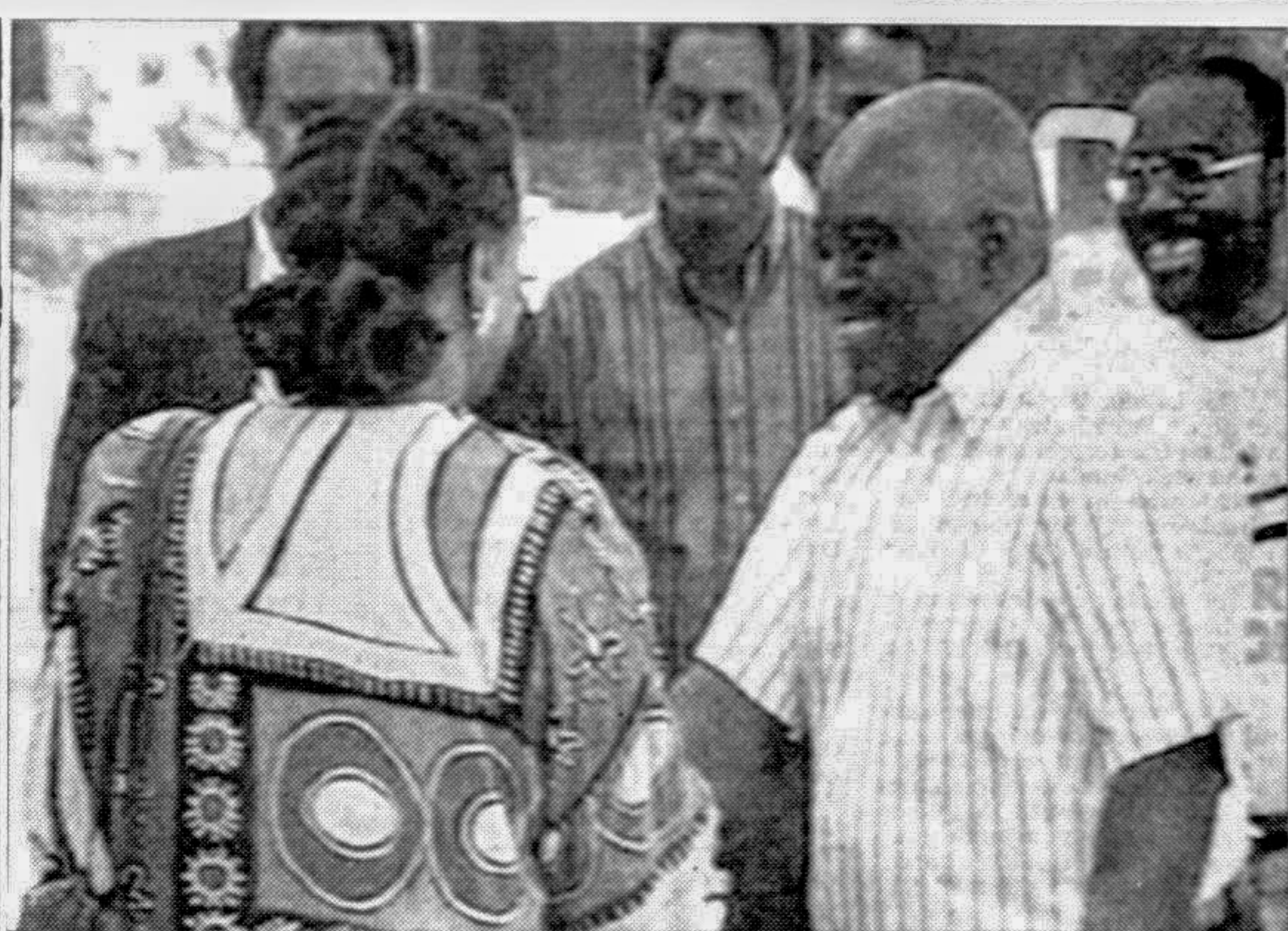
In the CRS report, international security specialist Stanley Sloan wrote that the 30,000-member NATO Stabilisation Force, or SFOR, which includes 8,500 US troops, has stopped the Bosnian civil war, but not established peace.

"Already it is apparent that NATO faces a potential decision-making crisis concerning

what will be done to stabilize Bosnia after SFOR's mandate runs out," Sloan wrote in the CRS report. "It is difficult to find US allied or NATO civilian or military officials who believe that the current objectives of the Dayton Peace Agreement can be met without an external military presence to help enforce the peace beyond June 1998."

Defence Secretary William Cohen has said repeatedly that US ground troops will leave Bosnia. But NATO allies such as Britain, France and Germany have said that if the United States pulls out its troops, their forces will leave as well.

The GAO report, a 127-page study of the Bosnia mission,



Zairean rebel leader Laurent Kabila (R) shakes hands with US Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney at Lumbumbashi Saturday. Kabila, who announced Saturday that his troops were only 50 kilometres from the capital Kinshasa, said he wanted "to resolve things by peaceful dialogue."

— AFP/UNB photo

Muslim rebels kill 3 Hindus in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, May 11: Muslim separatist guerrillas shot dead three teenaged Hindus after abducting them in Kashmir, the police said here today, reports AP.

The bullet-ridden bodies of the abducted boys were found Saturday night in the forests of Doda, a mountainous district in Kashmir's southern region, the police said.

They were abducted earlier Saturday by unidentified militants in Doda.

The murders came a day after three more Hindus were shot dead by their abductors in the region.

Cong (I) ex-MP commits suicide in India

NEW DELHI, May 11: A former Member of Parliament from India's Congress (I) Party allegedly shot himself dead Saturday in his home in the northern town of Gonda, the Press Trust of India said, reports AP.

It said police registered a case of suicide after Mahant Dep Narayanbun, 62, was found with his chest riddled with bullets.

Bun was elected three times to the Uttar Pradesh State Assembly in 1969, 1974 and 1980, four years later he found a federal parliament berth as a Congress member.

Peaceful end to Afghan conflict sought

DUSHANBE, May 11: The Presidents of Iran and Tajikistan and ousted Afghan leader Burhanuddin Rabbani are still seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, Tajikistan's foreign minister said on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Talbak Nazarov issues in their volatile region when they met in the Tajik capital Dushanbe.

"They agreed they should get all parties in the conflict to find a peaceful solution," he said.

The meeting was originally scheduled for Friday, but it was postponed after Rabbani's arrival was delayed. The Afghan president was forced out of Kabul last September by the purist Islamic Taliban militia.

Iran ready to cooperate with Russia: Rafsanjani

DUSHANBE, May 11: Iranian President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani said on Saturday Iran was ready to cooperate with Russia to restore stability in Tajikistan and end a civil war in neighbouring Afghanistan, reports Reuters.

"Iran and Russia share a common goal, including the settlement of the Tajik conflict," Rafsanjani told a news conference in the Tajik capital Dushanbe.

He said Iran would develop cooperation with Russia further, including in the extraction of oil and gas.

Mobutu back home, agrees to meet Kabila again

KINSHASA, May 11: Zaire's ailing President Mobutu Sese Seko came home to Kinshasa on Saturday where Parliament filled the vacant post of his constitutional successor, reports Reuters.

At a meeting in Gabon with South Africa's Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, Mobutu agreed Wednesday to talks on board a south African ship with rebel leader Laurent Kabila, whose fighters are no the approaches to the capital.

"Both of them have agreed to meet on Wednesday on the boat," Mbeki told reporters in Gabon's capital Libreville on the latest step of a hectic diplomatic shuttle in the region.

A first ship-borne session between the civil war foes hosted by south Africa's Nelson Mandela ended inconclusively last weekend in Congo.

Zairean lawmakers voted Roman Catholic Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo to the position of Speaker — who under the

transitional constitution takes over from the president in the event of his death or incapacity.

"He is not an alternative to either President Mobutu or Kabila, Christopher Lutundula, Second Deputy Speaker of Parliament said.

"We are hoping he will play a role as a national mediator and will persuade all sides to agree on a way of safeguarding the democratic process in Zaire."

AP adds from Paris: France Saturday hailed the election of the archbishop of Kisangani to head Zaire's parliament, saying the move will aid the planned second meeting between the nation's beleaguered president and the rebel leader trying to oust him.

The election, hours earlier, of Monsignor Laurent Monsengwo Pasenya to parliamentary president could also aid "an ordered transition within a legal framework and within the law," the French Foreign Ministry said.

Gaddafi violates UN air ban for 3rd time in 3 days

TRIPOLI, May 11: Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi on Saturday violated a UN air embargo against Libya for the third time in three days when he flew home from a state visit to Nigeria, officials said, reports AP.

Libyan television showed pictures of Gaddafi's Libyan Arab Airlines jet touching down in Tripoli to a hero's welcome from a crowd of cheering and chanting supporters gathered on the tarmac.

Gaddafi first broke the UN flight ban this week on Thursday when a jet belonging to the Libyan national carrier flew him to Niger Thursday for talks with president Ibrahim Bare Maïnassara.

The Libyan leader again ignored the UN ban on Friday when the Libyan jet flew him

from Niger to the northern Nigerian town of Kano.

Libya has been under an international air embargo since 1992 for its refusal to extradite to Britain or the United States two suspects in the bombing of a Pan Am aircraft over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, which killed 270 people.

The US State Department said Thursday it was investigating the reports of Gaddafi's embargo violation.

"If they are accurate, this would be a serious violation of United Nations Security Council resolution 748, which prohibits Libyan aircraft from engaging in international flights," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

The State Department said it planned to raise the matter at the UN Security Council.

Tories at odds to find successor to Major

LONDON, May 11: In the midst of a six-way battle to find a successor to John Major the Tories face a growing rebellion among its rank and file, unhappy that only the 164 elected deputies can choose a leader, reports AP.

A Times survey of 80 Tory constituency associations published Saturday, found almost unanimous support for an overhaul of the ground rules to give them a direct say in the choice of leader.

None of the six candidates for the leadership have declared themselves in favour of change, however, current frontrunner William Hague, Stephen Dorrell, Kenneth Clarke, Peter Lilley and Michael Howard have remained silent on the issue.

John Redwood the other candidate who according to the Guardian newspaper Saturday has the backing of former prime minister Margaret Thatcher, said only that it would be unsuitable for a candidate to try to change the rules in the middle of the game.

Former party chairman, blockbuster novelist Lord (Jeffrey) Archer, was first to raise the issue on Thursday if they don't change we will be in

the wilderness for year," he said.

On Friday, Robin Hodgson, head of the National Union which is responsible for the voluntary wing of the party, went further, he proposed a change to the election rules which would give local constituencies a 20 per cent share of the vote in leadership contests.

His proposals were backed by another former party chairman Sir Norman Fowler.

Hodgson said that the changes could be introduced by the powerful backbench 1922 committee in time for the election.

The election of a chairman and officers of the 1922 committee is on May 21. They will then organise the leadership election for mid-June.

The party's historian, Lord Blake, told the Times Saturday that the "time for change is long overdue." The National Union was set up in the time of Benjamin Disraeli, "who was prime minister in 1867."

"While the members are consulted, they have never had a direct say in the selection of their leader."

harder to extricate itself."

Opponents of the funding restriction said that even a non-binding measure would show allies and foes alike that the United States was unwilling to ensure success of its vast investment in Bosnia.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, a Democrat, said that cutting off Bosnia funding would be "to walk away, in my opinion, before the job is done."

Democratic Sen. Carl Levin, who also opposed the funding cutoff, said the United States should do more to pressure European allies to establish a peace force that could remain in Bosnia with US logistical support, but not ground troops.

than half the annual US foreign aid and military assistance budget for the entire world.

The emergency supplemental budget passed Thursday by the Senate and now awaiting House action contains a non-binding action, approved by voice vote, to prohibit spending on the Bosnia mission after June 1998.

Democratic Sen. Russell Feingold, coauthor of the amendment with Republican Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, said President Clinton's support of an extended Bosnia mission "signaled that the United States would continue to be drawn deeper into a situation from which it has become harder and

reached similar conclusions and said that the pessimism about SFOR's ability to establish a lasting peace extends to US officials.

"Some State and Defence Department officials said... that based on current conditions, they believe some type of international military force will likely be required after SFOR's mission ends," the GAO concluded.

In addition, the GAO detailed dramatic cost increases to the US mission in Bosnia. The latest estimate is that the operation will cost 7.7 billion dollars more than double the original Clinton administration figure. That amount represents more