

Kabila begins business of running Zaire

LUBUMBASHI, Zaire, May 19: A day after seizing the presidency of Zaire, Laurent Kabila on Sunday began reshaping his rebel movement into a government, reports AP.

The rebel leader, holed up in his office in this quiet city of broad boulevards, received diplomats and met with his cabinet and military chiefs. He also sent a political delegation to help restore order in Kinshasa, the newly captured capital.

Kabila's main task was to forge a government from a group of longtime revolutionaries, Zairians who have returned from exile, rebel fighters and others with little political experience.

He has promised to release a list on Tuesday.

Reuter adds: Zaire's ousted president, Mobutu Sese Seko, escaped a rebel attack on his home town of Gbadolite after coming under fire as he and members of his entourage fled by cargo plane. Togolese state television reported on Sunday.

It said the plane carrying the veteran leader, who is suffering from cancer, made a technical stop in Togo on Sunday before

flying on, most likely to Morocco.

The report was the first suggestion that rebels had tried to attack Gbadolite, Mobutu's reported destination after he left Zaire's capital, Kinshasa, on Friday just before Laurent Kabila's rebels marched into the city.

The television said a government statement quoted sources close to Mobutu for its account of the circumstances of his departure. It said rebel forces tried to take the airport at Gbadolite, where Mobutu had a jungle palace.

Mystery has surrounded Mobutu's whereabouts with a security official in Morocco saying that he arrived there on Saturday and a family friend in Paris saying he was still in Gbadolite on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the United States has urged rebel leader Laurent Kabila to form an "inclusive" government after his victory in Zaire's civil war, President Clinton's national security adviser said on Sunday.

South Africa said on Sunday it recognised Laurent Kabila as

president of the renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo and that it was fully satisfied with his first steps as national leader.

Deputy President Thabo Mbeki also told reporters at Lubumbashi Airport that Kabila had given him assurances on democratic freedoms during a transitional period and on his government's concern for Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire.

Another AP report says: Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto said Monday Japan is likely to recognise the new government of Zaire launched by rebel leader Laurent Kabila.

Hashimoto told reporters that Kabila and his group will swiftly restore peace so that racial conflict will not intensify.

AFP says: At least 177 people, most of them soldiers, have been killed in Kinshasa since Laurent Kabila's forces entered the city, first estimates from the Zairean Red Cross said Sunday.

A further 52 were wounded, according to the Red Cross, whose employees searched the capital yesterday.



A soldier from Laurent Desire Kabila's the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire flashes a Victory sign as he proceeds along with his comrades to the Tshatshi compound in Kinshasa Sunday where soldiers from Zaire's elite Special Presidential Division were based. Later, they surrendered their weapons to Kabila's forces following the collapse of ousted president Mobutu Sese Seko's regime. — AFP/UNB photo

Abdullah urges Delhi to seek Pak help to stop terrorism in Kashmir

JAMMU, May 19: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Feroz Khan Noon has urged the centre to ask Pakistan to stop terrorism in Kashmir while pursuing meaningful dialogue on bilateral issues, reports PTI.

Addressing a largely attended meeting of Kashmir migrants here Saturday evening the chief minister said that Pakistan continued to push in militants despite talks for normalisation of Indo-Pak relations.

He expressed his pessimism about Pakistan desisting from aiding and abetting militants as that country was not sincere in changing its strategy.

He said every endeavour for normalising relations with Pakistan would be a distant dream unless they stopped sending arms and trained militants to the state.

Reuter adds: Indian police said today that they had detained a senior Kashmiri separatist leader after he violated a ban on public gatherings and led a religious procession through troubled Kashmir's largest city.

They said Abdul Gani Lone, a

senior leader of All Parties Hurriyat (freedom) Conference, was detained along with a dozen supporters after he led a Moharram procession in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir state.

The Hurriyat is an umbrella organisation grouping some 30 leading religious and political groups in Kashmir.

Javid Ahmad Mir, a leader of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, was also detained, police said.

Shia Muslims mourn the slaying of a grandson of Prophet Mohammad (SM) during the first Islamic month of Moharram.

A police spokesman said the procession led by lone had violated orders that ban public gatherings of more than four people on the grounds that they may pose a threat to law and order.

Moharram processions and public gatherings have not been allowed in Kashmir since a bloody rebellion broke out in 1990 as they could lead to law and order problems, officials said.

Subpoena served on Benazir in US fund-raising case

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who is currently visiting America, is being sought by investigators in connection with fund-raising abuses in the U.S. during last year's election, according to the Washington Post.

In a May 17 report, the Post said that Benazir is being sought by the Justice Department task force specifically in connection with allegations of her American lobbyist Mark Siegel that when her government was in power, he was "shaken down" by Rep. Dan Burton to raise campaign contributions for him.

Quoting unnamed government officials, the report said that Benazir, who is on a lecture tour of the country, had been served with a subpoena earlier in the week requiring her to appear before a federal grand jury that is hearing evidence in the fund-raising inquiry.

Ironically, Benazir's lecture tour covers Burton's home state of Indiana, besides Washington state.

The grand jury, which is conducting a broad review of fund-raising practices in the congressional and presidential elections, has already had Siegel depose before it Siegel had claimed he was pressured for campaign contributions by Burton and then threatened by the lawmaker when he failed to deliver thousands of dollars to his campaign coffers.

Burton, an acerbic critic of New Delhi, chairs the Government Oversight Committee that is investigating alleged fund-raising abuses by the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

The White House has denied Siegel's charges and said they are politically motivated because he is a longtime Democrat and a former executive director of the DNC.

Siegel made this claim in a July 25, memo to the Benazir government. The memo, which

Lankan troops kill 250 Tigers, capture 2 towns

COLOMBO, May 19: Sri Lankan security forces have killed some 250 Tamil Tiger rebels and captured two rebel-held northern towns after fierce air and artillery attacks, a military spokesman said yesterday, reports Reuter.

The town of Nedunkeni, on the eastern flank of an army push into guerrilla territory in the northern Wanni region, fell to government troops on Saturday after three days of fierce fighting, Brigadier Tissa Jayatunga said.

Two army divisions were on the move on separate flanks trying to open land supply route linking Vavuniya, 220 km (135 miles) north of the capital Colombo, with Jaffna Peninsula, about 100 km (60 miles) further north, military officials said.

Troops backed by tanks, artillery and air cover on Saturday secured the town of Omanthal, 14 km (nine miles) north of Vavuniya, and are now pushing further north towards the heavily fortified rebel-held town of Puliyanakulam.

"Troops are consolidating their positions in Nedunkeni and north of Omanthal," Jayatunga told Reuters. "Enemy targets are being engaged by artillery and air."

"We estimate about 250 terrorists have been killed in the operation," he added. "Enemy transmissions monitored by the army indicate 316 cadres have been wounded."

The rebels have accused the army of killing Tamil civilians and destroying property under the pretext of opening up a supply route, and of routinely exaggerating rebel casualties.

According to figures released by the army, 42 soldiers have been killed so far in the offensive code-named "Jaya Sikuru," or "sure of victory," launched on Tuesday.

But the Sunday Times newspaper quoted military sources as saying that 70 soldiers, including a few officers, had died. Hospital officials said some 320 soldiers had been wounded.

AFP adds: Tamil Tiger

Clinton sets 10-yr goal to develop AIDS vaccine

BALTIMORE, May 19: President Bill Clinton invoked the legacy of John F. Kennedy's 1960s race to the moon Sunday and set a national target of developing an AIDS vaccine within the next 10 years, reports AP.

"We dare not be complacent" in meeting the challenge of HIV, the AIDS virus, Clinton said in announcing creation of a research centre at the National Institutes of Health to complete the task. Up to 50 researchers will staff the suburban Washington facility, drawn from existing NIH programmes, and no new money was earmarked.

AIDS activist organisations immediately attacked the plan as too little, a warmed-over version of earlier failed policies.

"It is no longer a question of whether we can develop an AIDS vaccine, it is simply a question of when. And it cannot come a day too soon," Clinton said in a commencement address to 850 graduates of Morgan State University.

The president declared that the United States is entering an age of advances in biology and outlined an agenda for ensuring that scientific breakthroughs benefit all people.

"If the 21st century is to be the century of biology, let us make an AIDS vaccine its first great triumph," he said.

A vaccine is urgently needed for prevention, Clinton said, pointing out that 3 million people around the world were infected with HIV last year. He noted the virus now ranks with tuberculosis and malaria as the world's deadliest infectious diseases.

"We dare not be complacent," the president said. "HIV is capable of mutating and becoming resistant to therapies and could well become even more dangerous."

Clinton's call for a vaccine did not satisfy some AIDS activists, who contended it is a significantly watered-down version of his 1992 promise of a sweeping project to seek a cure for AIDS.

"This is a phony announcement," said Wayne Turner, Washington spokesman for the AIDS activist group ACT-UP. "He talks the big talk, but all he's doing is reshuffling a couple dozen employees. He's talking a prevention vaccine."

PLA troops arrive in HK: A second advance party of Chinese troops arrived in Hong Kong yesterday in the runup to the territory's handback to Beijing on July 1, an AFP reporter saw.

A convoy, scheduled to be carrying 66 members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), arrived at Lok Ma Chau, on Hong Kong border with the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen. A first PLA advance party of 40 men was deployed on April 21 after negotiations between Britain and China.

12 die as 2 planes collide in Brazil: A runway collision between two small planes at an airport in southern Brazil killed 12 people aboard both aircraft, airport officials said Sunday, AFP reports from Rio de Janeiro.

A Cessna 310 with nine people aboard was trying to take off when it slammed into a single-engine plane carrying three people that was landing at the Lajes Aeroclub in the state of Santa Catarina. The victims' burned bodies had yet to be identified late Sunday. Both planes were taking part in the celebration marking the airfield's 55th anniversary.

Vietnam marks Ho Chi Minh's birthday: Vietnam on Monday marked the 107th birthday of revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh with tributes, speeches and ceremonies throughout the country, AP reports from Hanoi.

"President Ho Chi Minh was a great cultural icon because he himself was a great cultural activists and inventor," said the English-language Vietnam News in a commentary. The man who drove French colonists from Vietnam and stood up to overwhelming US military might is still worshipped in many parts of the country 28 years after his death.

1 die as balcony collapses in US: A second-floor balcony filled with people seeking a good view of the University of Virginia's graduation ceremonies collapsed, killing one person and injuring about 20, AP reports from Charlottesville.

Bagabandi wins presidential polls in Mongolia

ULAN BATOR, Mongolia, May 19: The leader of a former hard-line communist party won Mongolia's presidential election Monday, according to preliminary official results, giving a setback to the forces that brought democracy to this Central Asian country seven years ago, reports AP.

N. Bagabandi, chairman of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, received 60.79 per cent of the vote Sunday, and President P. Ochirbat received 29.8 per cent, the Election Commission said.

A third candidate, legislator J. Gombojav, received 6.6 per cent.

Ex-ROK official arrested

SEOUL, May 19: A former intelligence agency deputy director was arrested here today on charges of receiving illegal funds on behalf of the jailed son of President Kim Young-Sam, television showed, reports AFP.

Earlier AP says a judge issued an arrest warrant Monday for a former top government security official who was close to the disgraced son of President Kim Young-Sam.

'Fragile nature of Gujral govt may impede breakthrough in ties'

Tariq Butt, writes from Islamabad

Pakistani officials, still analysing the results of the Indo-Pak summit in Male, feel that the fragile nature of the coalition that Prime Minister I.K. Gujral is heading may impede any dramatic breakthrough in bilateral ties.

But official circles are happy that by agreeing on the setting up of the Working Groups, India has finally been persuaded of the existence of the Kashmir dispute.

"Gujral is a well-meaning but politically weak leader and fearful of the collapse of his fragile coalition if he takes any major decision for normalisation of Indo-Pak relations," a senior official, who accompanied Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Maldives, said.

Worrying the Pakistan side is Gujral's weak position and political uncertainty, which they feel may throw a damper on the normalisation process.

"Sharif is a doer, who wants to solve domestic and external problems without any delay. But Gujral's position may not help keep pace with the speed Sharif wants to adopt," the senior official told India Abroad News Service, speaking strictly on conditions of anonymity.

However, a general perception among government officials is that there will be no instant results from the Sharif-Gujral meeting.

The official said that when a Joint Working Group on Kashmir, like similar forums on other issues like easing of visa restrictions, release of civilians and fishermen and Slachen etc. were established, it would show that the core issue of Kashmir has clearly been accepted by India as a dispute.

Khan Abdul Wali Khan's Awami National Party (ANP), which is Sharif's coalition partner, described the Kurumba island meeting as a "move to create cordial atmosphere."

Ananullah Khan, chairman of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), told IANS that the Sharif-Gujral meeting could change the course of history of the Sub-continent if leaders, political parties and media of the two countries demonstrated broad-mindedness, farsightedness, rationality, patience and determination to put an end to the continuous strain between the two states.

Commenting on the Sharif-Gujral meeting, prominent columnist Mir Jamilur Rehman told IANS that a popularly elected leader (Sharif) would under no circumstances choose to act against national interests. "It will be his political death and he will be hounded forever if there was even a suspicion of a sellout. Sharif has no reason to abandon Pakistan's historic stand on Kashmir," he said.

The Pakistani press dealt with the Sharif-Gujral meeting ranging from extreme pessimism to cautious optimism. Some newspapers are of the firm view that Pakistan should not enter into talks with India unless the talks are about Kashmir.

Many others welcomed the meeting hoping that it would break the ice and make it possible to move forward in resolving outstanding issues, including Kashmir.

— India Abroad News Service

Taiwan, Bahamas sever diplomatic ties

TAIPEI, May 19: Taiwan and the Bahamas severed diplomatic relations Sunday because of the Caribbean country's moves to establish ties with rival China, reports AP.

After "honest and deep" discussions with the Bahamian government, Taiwan decided as a "sovereign and dignified nation," to cut ties, said Vice Foreign Minister Chen Chien-je.

Bahamas Foreign Affairs Minister Janet Bostwick said the decision to switch diplomatic relations over to China was made "after careful and deliberate consideration."

Concern that the Bahamas would be forced to close its newly opened 80 million dollar container port — run by the Hong Kong-based Hutchison Whan Po Ltd — was believed to be behind the government's decision to favour China, Hong Kong reverts to Chinese rule on July 1, and all Hong Kong-based companies will come under Chinese jurisdiction.

The move, which ended an eight-year partnership between Taiwan and the Bahamas, was the latest diplomatic setback for the Asian island.

South Africa, the largest and most influential of Taiwan's allies, announced earlier it would set up ties with China by the end of this year.

Beijing refuses to recognise countries that have relations with Taiwan. The Taiwanese foreign ministry said it was cutting ties ahead of an inevitable decision by the Bahamas to form ties with China.

The statement said that over the past year, the Bahamas has "succumbed to Communist China's temptations," and has plans to establish full relations with Beijing "very shortly."

Bahamian Prime Minister Hubert Inghram's courting of Chinese investment in the island's tourism industry prompted the decision to recognize China, Chen said.

The Bahamas government said it hoped to retain economic and cultural ties with Taiwan, but that maintaining diplomatic relations had become "increasingly incompatible with its (the Bahamas) role internationally."

The decision "has been guided by the need to act in the best national interest of the Bahamas," the statement said. It cited as factors the planned expansion of Bahamian economic investment and trade relations in Asia and the return of Hong Kong to China.



Japanese actor Koji Yakusho (L), representing absent director Shohei Imamura, French actress Catherine Deneuve (C) and Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami pose Sunday with their Golden palms for best films. Imamura won the Golden palm for the second time with "The Eel" and Kiarostami won the award for his film "The Taste of the Cherry" at the 50th Cannes Film Festival. — AFP/UNB photo

Arafat urges Clinton to salvage ME peace

JERUSALEM, May 19: Palestinians on Sunday condemned Israeli plans to destroy hundreds of unauthorised Palestinian houses in the West Bank, and a senior Palestinian official said Yasser Arafat has asked President Bill Clinton to intervene to save the peace process, reports AP.

In Tel Aviv, US Ambassador Martin Indyk said the two sides must reverse a breakdown in the "core bargain" of the peace process security for Israelis in exchange for self-government for Palestinians.

Palestinian Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said the planned house demolitions revealed "a racist and systematic policy directed against the Palestinian people... of uprooting Palestinians from their land."

Peter Lerner, spokesman for Israel's military government in the West Bank, said "hundreds" of unauthorised houses remain in areas still under Israeli control.

Lerner said the plan to destroy them is part of an ongoing effort and that 140 unauthorised houses were demolished in 1996.

Israel radio said the army plans to destroy 500 homes. The radio linked the plans to the army's destruction earlier this month of three houses built by Jewish settlers outside the West Bank settlement of Yizhar, near Nablus. Yizhar residents have rebuilt the houses, which the army plans to destroy on Monday.

Settlers have often complained that the government is not doing enough to stop unauthorised Palestinian building, while refusing to allow the settlements to expand.

Israel still controls about 70 per cent of the West Bank, which it captured in the 1967 Middle East War and where the Palestinians want to establish an independent homeland.

Arafat adviser Ahmed Tibi said Palestinians are forced to build illegally because Israeli officials refuse to issue enough permits to keep up with the population growth.

Tibi called the decision to demolish the houses "an attempt to dictate facts" before Israel and the Palestinians reach a final settlement on the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the boundaries of the Palestinian entity there.

"This is one of the most dangerous decisions taken by the government in past months," he said.

Abed Rabbo said the impasse in the peace talks could turn the people against Arafat's Palestinian Authority and spark violence.

Erekat said Arafat asked Clinton in a letter to intervene personally, and complained that last week's mission to the region by US envoy Dennis Ross did not achieve anything.

Ross left the region Friday without any prospects that the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, which have been deadlocked for two months, would resume.

Israel's Yediot Ahronot said Arafat had asked the president to send US secretary of State Madeleine Albright to the region.

The Palestinians were unhappy that Ross did not speak out against Israel's settlement activity, although the United States has condemned it in the past. Arafat even cancelled a scheduled meeting with Ross last week, saying he was too busy talking with Palestinian negotiators.

The Americans are standing firmly behind Ross, however, and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, who is in Washington, said the envoy would be returning shortly to the region.

Parties cancel rallies in Jakarta after violence

JAKARTA, May 19: Indonesia's three officially recognised political parties agreed not to hold outdoor rallies and street marches in Jakarta after a weekend of violence, it was reported Monday, reports AP.

Police said trouble erupted Sunday when thousands of flag-waving members of the ruling Golkar Party left rallies and marched through neighbourhoods, dominated by supporters of the minority, Muslim-based United Development Party, or PPP.

Riot police used tear gas and fired warning shots to quell stone-throwing mobs in five sections of Jakarta, which has a population of 10 million.

No serious injuries or arrests were reported in Sunday's turmoil.

However, one man was reported missing and 10 police officers and political activists were injured in a clash between Golkar and PPP supporters in a Jakarta suburb on Saturday.

Officials of Golkar, the PPP and the opposition Indonesian Democratic Party called for calm in the final days of campaigning for the May 29 parliamentary election.

They also decided to abandon plans for big rallies in Jakarta in favour of smaller indoor gatherings in a bid to limit the potential for violence. The Jakarta Post and other newspapers reported Monday.

Electioneering officially ends on Friday, when a five-day "cooling off" period is scheduled before the polls.

"The increasing vandalism and violence have made people scared," said Baharuddin Lopa, who chairs the government-appointed National Commission on Human Rights.

Home Affairs Minister Yogie Memet, who is supervising the election, described the latest outbreaks as brutal, the Indonesia Times said. He urged party officials to control their supporters.

The Jakarta Post quoted political analysts as describing the violence as the worst since the present tightly-controlled political system was set up in 1971.

During Sunday's violence, rows of officers, carrying shields and clubs, stood between rival mobs. Several cars and houses were damaged. Party banners and flags were burned, witnesses said.

Police said the situation was brought under control by late Sunday night.

A similar clash was reported in Yogyakarta, about 400 kilometres (250 miles) east of Jakarta, on Sunday.

The latest violence came despite warnings from the authorities that troublemakers would not be tolerated.