



US President Bill Clinton reacts to children singing Wednesday during a "Thank You America" rally in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe after World War II. Clinton attended another ceremony earlier Wednesday in The Hague to also celebrate the anniversary. — AFP/UNB photo

Yadav files nomination for upcoming party polls

NEW DELHI, May 29: A beleaguered Indian leader today made a desperate bid to continue as chief of Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's party despite mounting pressure to quit over a 271-million-dollar fraud case, reports AFP.

Laloo Prasad Yadav, the current president of the centrist Janata Dal (People's Party) filed his nomination for the upcoming party elections, due next month, officials said.

Yadav, who rules the eastern state of Bihar, and 53 others are in the dock for allegedly siphoning off money from a cattle fodder fund run by the state government.

The tarred leader also made a bid to stage the elections in Bihar, his bastion, after another party heavyweight Sharad Yadav, who also espouses the cause of lower-caste Hindus, filed his nomination in New Delhi.

Yadav said his proposal was justified because the party had

been in power in Bihar "for nearly 10 years" and had "gradually spread in influence to several neighbouring sister states."

"Why should the polls be held in the national capital alone when the party draws strength from the grassroots (in Bihar)," he told reporters here.

The "fodder" scandal has caused dissension within India's multi-party alliance with communists demanding Yadav's ouster as the chief suspect. Another prominent leader implicated in the case is a federal minister from Bihar.

The earthy Yadav, who is alleged to have embezzled 14 million dollars, has denied any wrongdoing and described the charge as politically motivated.

The conspirators know they can't dislodge me through the ballot so they ganged up against me," he said in an interview.

Federal detectives have asked the Bihar governor for permission to prosecute Yadav

Nigerian troops dock in Sierra Leone to back ousted govt's battle

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone, May 29: Several hundred armed Nigerian troops docked in Sierra Leone on Wednesday to support the ousted government's battle to regain control from mutinous soldiers. The UN tried to organise an evacuation of diplomats and aid workers, reports AP.

The arrival of the troops in this impoverished West African nation signalled that Nigeria — the region's biggest military power — was reserving a military option to try to restore President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah to power if diplomatic pressure failed.

Mutineers standing on shore taunted the troops sent by Nigeria's leader, Gen. Sani Abacha, when they left their ships and headed for barracks outside the capital where they were to bolster other Nigerians stationed here since 1994.

Those troops were unable to prevent junior army officers from taking over the capital

and overthrowing Kabbah's civilian government in a bloody coup Sunday that left at least 20 people dead.

Earlier Wednesday, the coup leaders scrapped the constitution and banned political parties but promised a return to "proper democracy" down the road.

Acknowledging that the concept of democracy "is a vogue in the modern world," Maj. Johnny Paul Koroma of the ruling Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) said a new government of national unity and a schedule for elections would be unveiled soon.

"The AFRC is not here to antagonise anyone," Koroma said one national radio.

His words appeared to do little to assure residents of the capital, which suffered heavy damage in fighting. The normally congested streets were nearly deserted except for patrols by heavily armed AFRC

soldiers. A call for people to return to work was ignored.

Meanwhile, the rebel chief whose insurgency has kept Sierra Leone at war since 1991, claimed he had joined forces with the renegade troops. "The two armies have come together," Revolutionary United Front leader Foday Sankoh told The Associated Press.

Sankoh spoke from a hotel room in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, where he has been held on gun-running charges since March. He appealed to Abacha, who backs Kabbah, to drop what he called "trumped-up" charges.

The French foreign ministry urged its nationals to leave and UN officials said they were meeting with the AFRC to work out safe passage for aid agency and embassies staff. They said the evacuation would likely start Wednesday aboard a UN boat that docked in Freetown. The American warship USS

Kearsarge was sailing toward Sierra Leone from Congo in case the estimated 400 US citizens in Freetown needed to be evacuated. The State Department ordered all nonessential personnel from the US Embassy to leave the country.

Sunday's coup was the third in five years in Sierra Leone, a mineral-rich country left in poverty by decades of political turmoil, war, and corrupt rule.

Kabbah's election in February 1996 ended several years of army rule and was seen as an example of how democracy had overcome strife in Africa. His signing of a ceasefire agreement with Sankoh last November appeared to finally put the country on the path toward recovery.

But fighting in the country since recent months left the peace accord on the verge of collapse. Coup leaders blamed Kabbah for the problems, accusing him of promoting tribalism and regional divisiveness.

Netanyahu plans to offer Palestinians less than 40pc of WB : Report says

JERUSALEM, May 29: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to offer the Palestinians less than 40 per cent of the West Bank in talks on a permanent peace agreement, an Israeli daily said Thursday. Netanyahu denied the reports, reports AP.

The Haaretz newspaper published a front-page map of what it said the West Bank would look like under Netanyahu's plan.

Palestinians would control much of the West Bank's heartland, but have no territorial continuity between the northern and southern West Bank.

Israel would keep a wide swath of land in the West Bank's Jordan Valley along the Jordanian border and around Jerusalem. Most of the Jewish settlements would be in territory under Israeli control, but some would be in areas given to the Palestinians.

Netanyahu denied the Haaretz report Thursday. "There is no basis to that report because I did not show to anyone (a map) nor did I draw a map," he told Israeli radio. Asked whether he had a map, he said: "We have a map in our head. Who hasn't?"

On Wednesday, the Israeli Cabinet began discussing proposals for a permanent peace agreement with the Palestinians in a closed-door session.

Palestinians reacted angrily to the reported Israeli negotiating position. The Palestinians want to establish an independent state in all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with east Jerusalem as its capital.

"This is not acceptable," Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian peace negotiator, told The Associated Press. "He is negotiating with himself, or rather with himself and other extremists in his government."

Polls begin in Indonesia : 260 die in violence so far

JAKARTA, May 29: The polls opened in Indonesia's legislative elections today amid tight security, with voters in the eastern province of Irian Jaya among the first to cast their ballots, reports AFP.

The elections follow the most violent election campaign in decades which left about 260 dead, and which led to a security alert being declared across the archipelago of more than 17,000 islands.

Military chiefs said 25,000 troops would be deployed in the capital Jakarta, and many business planned to stay shut after being rocked by sporadic violence throughout the month-long campaign.

Voters in Jakarta, which is two time zones west of Irian Jaya, were to begin voting slightly later at 8:00 am (0100 GMT).

There are already people gathering to vote at the polling station right in front of our

convent," a Church source in Jayapura, the main town of Irian Jaya told AFP by telephone.

Dispute erupts in US for control of Afghan Embassy

WASHINGTON, May 29: A dispute for control of Afghanistan's Embassy here erupted Wednesday when the Taliban's white flag was raised over the building and a diplomat proclaimed himself the Islamic militia's new envoy to the United States, reports AFP.

Officers from the State Department's diplomatic security section were dispatched to the embassy earlier and promptly replaced the flag with the green-white-and-black striped flag of the former regime, according to Afghan Charge d'Affaires Yar Mohammad Mohabbat and US officials.

Indonesians in the resort island of Bali and the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, both in the central Indonesia Time Zone began voting at 08:00 am (0000 GMT).

Some 124 million Indonesians have registered to vote in the parliamentary elections in this world's fourth largest country, the sixth such elections held under Indonesian President Suharto's government since 1971.

Suharto's ruling Golkar Party has won a landslide victory in all the previous elections, prompting widespread criticism and abroad that the elections are merely a sham to boost his grip on power.

US-based human rights Watch-Asia, said in a statement from New York Wednesday that whatever the outcome of the vote, the right of Indonesians to have a government based on the will of the people had been violated.

ASEAN FM's meet to decide admission of Myanmar

KUALA LUMPUR, May 29: ASEAN foreign ministers meet here Saturday to decide when to admit Myanmar into the regional grouping, casting aside intense Western pressure not to open the door to the military-ruled nation, reports AFP.

Despite the US-led opposition to Myanmar because of the military junta's human rights record, Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) say the question is when, and not if, Myanmar is admitted.

The seven foreign ministers have the choice of inducting Myanmar, together with Cambodia and Laos, at ASEAN's annual meeting in July or wait until an informal summit scheduled for December.

Signals are pointing to a December date when ASEAN leaders will gather in Kuala Lumpur, current chair of the grouping of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Clinton, Blair hope to revive spl relationship

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, May 29: There is some business to conduct, but President Bill Clinton's visit to London on Thursday is more like a reunion of two political look-alikes bent on reviving the "special relationship" between the United States and Britain, reports AP.

Clinton is bound to offer Prime Minister Tony Blair help in his effort to bring peace to Northern Ireland, where 3,200 people have been killed in three decades of sectarian conflict.

The joint aim is a cease-fire and of means in all-party talks. Clinton's security advisers are pleased with how Blair has moved in less than a month on the job to revive negotiations and to reach out to the rival Protestant majority and Roman Catholic minority.

Double delight for Jackson

SANTA MARIA, California, May 29: Former employees at Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch who unsuccessfully sued the pop star have been ordered to pay 1.4 million dollars in attorney fees and cost, reports AP.

The ex-employees sued Jackson and five staffers, claiming they were forced out for cooperating in a child molestation probe, among other reasons. One plaintiff also claimed sex harassment by a staff member.

In March, a jury rejected the former employees' lawsuit and awarded Jackson 60,000 dollars in damages in a countersuit.

Wednesday, Superior Court Judge Zel Canter ordered the plaintiffs to pay 1,290,278 dollars in attorney fees and more than 182,000 dollars for costs including filings, jury fees, depositions, witnesses and transcripts.

Jackson's attorneys said the award was based on an agreement signed by all Ranch employees that provides for awarding fees to the prevailing party if there is litigation.

Attorneys Robert Sanger and Steve Cochran said the outcome of the case would deter the use of frivolous lawsuits to try to extort celebrities.

Prosecutors investigated child molestation allegations against Jackson in 1993. No charges were brought.



Croatian President Franjo Tudjman gestures victoriously in front members of his party in Zagreb Wednesday as he proclaims himself in public as candidate for the presidential elections in Croatia to be held June 15. — AFP/UNB photo

17 Tamil refugees feared drowned as boat capsizes

COLOMBO, May 29: At least 17 Tamil refugees were feared drowned when their boat sank in rough seas in northwestern Sri Lanka, Tamil residents said Thursday, reports AP.

The fishing boat, crowded with 22 refugees, was sailing to the government-controlled northern Jaffna Peninsula on Wednesday night from Nachikkuda village.

Five people were picked up by the rescuers, said the residents of northern Vavuniya town when reached by telephone. They didn't want to be identified.

The boat capsized 255 kilometres (160 miles) north of Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital, in a rebel-controlled area.

Over the past few months, thousands of Tamils had sailed to Jaffna to avoid fighting between the rebels and government forces. On Wednesday, 49 Tamils reached Gurnagar Jetty in Jaffna, the military said.

The rebels are fighting for a homeland for minority Tamils, who account for 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 18 million people.

21 countries to ask Kabila to respect human rights

UNITED NATIONS, May 29: Alarmed over reports of widespread killings in eastern Congo, governments of more than 20 countries plan a joint appeal to Congolese leader Laurent Kabila to respect human rights, reports AP.

Ambassadors from the United States, the European Union, Latin America and African countries met Wednesday at UN headquarters in New York to discuss the initiative, which was expected to be undertaken by foreign diplomats based in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa.

Diplomats said the ambassadors of at least 21 governments would probably ask to meet Kabila as a group before he leaves this weekend for a summit of the Organisation of African Unity in Harare, Zimbabwe.

If Kabila agrees to the meeting, the envoys would urge him to allow the United Nations to investigate allegations of widespread massacres of Rwandan Hutu refugees in the east of his country.

They would also stress that

the international community will not tolerate repression and human rights abuse in Congo, formerly Zaire.

That message is expected to be reinforced by African leaders during the Harare summit, UN officials said.

The United Nations tried earlier this year to investigate allegations of massacres of refugees. But Congo's new leaders refused to permit them access to areas under their control.

In Kinshasa, Interior Minister Mwenze Kongolo said Tuesday that Congo has launched its own investigation into reports that government soldiers are killing the refugees.

In Brussels, Belgium, the European Union's top official for Africa said Wednesday that the EU would send soon send millions of dollars in aid to Congo.

But Joao de Deus Pinheiro, EU commissioner for relations with African countries, warned that the funds would only be made available if substantial progress was made toward human rights and democratisation.

BRIEFLY

US for including 3 states in NATO: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright went into NATO talks yesterday representing a US position in favour of inviting three rather than five or more former Warsaw pact states as new members of the Western alliance, US officials say, Reuters reports from Sintra, Portugal.

Although some officials do not rule out political maneuvering that could alter that view, the Clinton administration consensus favours extending membership this year to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic while holding a decision on other potential candidates — such as Romania and Slovenia — for a later date.

US, DPRK experts to meet: North Korean experts and a US-led consortium supplying light-water nuclear plants to the Stalinist state are to meet from Saturday for technical talks ahead of site preparation, the consortium said Wednesday, AFP reports from New York.

The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) said in a statement that the meeting would take place from May 31-June 6 in the Kumho area near Sinpo, north-eastern north Korea. A first round of discussions was held in the north Korean town of Majon.

Election begins in Indonesia: Polls opened in Jakarta Thursday morning with President Suharto and members of his family among the first voters in the Indonesian capital to cast their ballots, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Suharto and several of his children cast their ballots at a polling station erected just a few metres (yards) away from the President's residence in the posh district of Menteng in central Jakarta.

Rebels swarm thru' village in Peru: More than a score of heavily armed Peruvian guerrillas swarmed through an isolated village in the northern Andes and attacked public buildings with explosives, police said on Wednesday, Reuters reports from Lima.

The rebels caused damage to the village hall, the local governor's house and a small clinic but did not injure anybody at Bulibuyo in the region of La Libertad, regional police told Reuters by telephone.

Blast ruins Colombian office: A bomb exploded in an office block in Cartagena on Wednesday, causing damage but no injuries on the eve of a World Bank meeting in the city, police said, Reuters reports from Bogota.

The blast, on the sixth floor, shattered windows and destroyed furniture. There was no immediate word on the size of the device or any indication of the motive for the attack, a police spokesman said. Government ministers and key policy makers from Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay and Mexico and scheduled to attend the two-day World Bank conference in Cartagena beginning.

1 killed in US fighter jet crash: A US-A-10 fighter jet crashed over Arizona on a training mission, killing its pilot, the Air Force said Wednesday, AFP reports from Washington.

Defence Secretary William Cohen has expressed his condolences to the family of the pilot, Amy Svoboda of the 534th fighter squadron, whose jet went down late Tuesday, officials said. An investigation was underway into the cause of the mishap. The training flight was out of Davis-Monthan Air Force base in Arizona.

Millions of women die due to lack of access to family planning

UNITED NATIONS, May 29: Lack of access to family planning services and health care is the cause of death, serious illness, or disability for millions of women each year, especially in developing countries, a new UN report says, reports AP.

According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) report "The State of World Population," released May 28, between 120 and 150 million women who want to prevent another pregnancy or space their next child's birth do not use family planning services largely because they lack information or access to these services in their communities. Altogether 350 million couples do not have information about contraceptive services.

The report, subtitled "The Right to Choose: Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health," documents global efforts to ensure reproductive rights. It also recommends increased funding for health care, especially family planning, and stepped-up efforts to promote women's equality and individual rights.

At a press conference releasing the report, its principal author Stan Bernstein, said reproductive rights "is a summary term for different kinds of rights" that include the right to choose family planning methods, to decide all matters of pregnancy including the spacing of children, when to marry, and the right to sexuality free of

violence or coercion.

"The rights we are talking about are well established in United Nations and international agreements dating back from the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the various human rights treaties... and the series of international conferences particularly those of this decade, including the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and the Women's Conference in Beijing (1995)," Bernstein said.

The report documents what the effects are globally of failure to respect and fulfill the reproductive rights recognised by

the international community," he said. "There are about 585,000 deaths every year — that's about one a minute — due to maternal mortality, causes related to pregnancy," Bernstein said.

Of those deaths, 200,000 could have been avoided if there were effective use of and access to family planning services, he said.

There are 333 million new cases of curable sexually transmitted diseases every year, he said. "Those could be addressed by having information and prevention campaigns in place to meet the reproductive health needs of people around the world."

Bernstein pointed out that

"120 million women have already had their lives affected, frequently crippled, by female genital mutilation and an additional 2 million women and girls are put at risk of this procedure each year."

One million women and infants die every year from reproductive tract infections, he said.

The 76-page report details the heavy and largely avoidable consequences of poor health suffered by poor women in developing countries. They include malnutrition, complications of pregnancy, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Complications of pregnancy

are found everywhere, but nearly all maternal deaths are in developing countries, the report said. "An African woman is 500 times more likely to die of pregnancy related causes than her counterpart in one of the Scandinavian countries."

New HIV infections now run at 8,500 every day and 29.4 million are estimated to have been infected, the report said. "It threatens to create a generation of orphans — children of the whirlwind now sweeping through Africa, Asia, and Latin America... in fact it is estimated that in some central African countries death rates would be 25 per cent lower without AIDS."



Indonesian President Suharto (R) and his daughter Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana (Tutut) cast their ballots during national-wide general elections Thursday. Tutut, who is vice-chairman of the ruling Golkar Party, is tipped as a likely candidate for the post of vice-president. Some 124 million Indonesians will select a new Parliament for the next five years. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Pharaohs and their pets united for eternity

CAIRO: Prince Tutmosis' cat Mit sits forever before a table piled high with loaves of bread, a duck and a few beef ribs topped with lotus flowers, reports AP.

Another ancient Egyptian nobleman Ptahmosis, holds the wooden scepters of office while a monkey tethered beneath his chair kicks up a foot in delight and plucks a grape from a bunch it is holding.

The scenes are from tomb carvings in which the ancients immortalised not only sacred animals but also their pets. A few pets were even mummified and buried after death.

"Pets were very common," said Salima Ikram, an Egyptologist leading a drive to create a room at the Egyptian Museum to house some 150 mummified cats, crocodiles, falcons, dogs, fish, snakes and baboons. The animals were mostly offerings to the gods.

The museum has accepted the idea, but Ikram will have to find private financing for the project, which could cost up to 678,000 Egyptian pounds (200,000 dollars). She has lectured in Egypt and in the United States to press for donations, and she plans to approach American and European pet food companies.

Ikram said ancient Egypt was "an economically stable society that could afford to have pets."

Noblemen raised cats, monkeys and dogs, while pharaohs kept hunting dogs and lions, with which they are sometimes pictured in fierce scenes from the hunt.

"We don't have cuddly Pharaohs," Ikram said. "We have Pharaohs smiting and hunting and being blessed by the gods."

Hunting dogs were not unusual in the Old Kingdom, which began some 4,500 years ago. Cats were first domesticated around 2000 BC and were apparently used at first to chase rodents.

"I would imagine it started because the animals were useful, but gradually the role became more varied," said Jaromir Malek of Oxford University in England and the author of "The Cat in Ancient Egypt."

"We certainly know that there were a large number of pets in the richer households," he said.

Khou, a nobleman from Assiut, was painted on the side of his wooden coffin holding a long white leash and walking a big white dog with black spots similar to a Saluki. The dog's name, Meni-pou — ancient Egyptian for "he is a shepherd" — is written in hieroglyphics above its image.

Clues of our golden past

BHOPAL: Archaeologists have found a 2500-year-old seal vestiges of 2100-year-old temple and a brick wall of Gupta era besides many artifacts dating back to the 6th century BC, at Nimnaur village in Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh, reports PTI.

The recently concluded excavation carried out at a huge mound on the bank of Narmada, has revealed the existence of five different dynasties — Maurya, Sunga, Gupta, Parmar and Mughal — from different layers, the co-director excavations, Dr D K Mathur told PTI.

The excavations include a coin dated to the 6th century BC, a 2500-year-old seal Brahma and other inscriptions, earthenware, toys of terracotta, jewellery, weapons, instruments, precious stones and the foundation of a 2100-year-old temple of Sunga era, he added.

"The brick-wall, with rare uniformity and stone made floor of Gupta period, unearthed in layer four and five from Rench-2, may give vital clues to the housing plans of that time," Dr Mathur said, further adding that "some experts even opine that full-fledge ancient houses may be lying buried here."

"We propose to carry out a horizontal excavation at the site next year to explore such a possibility," he said.

The 6th century BC punch mark coin with an elephant and inscription in Brahmi on one side and Swastika and Ujjayini signs and tree on the reverse, coins of Mughal era and a supposedly royal terracotta seal of Maurya period showing the moon on a mountain's were also found at Nimnaur, Dr Mathur added.