

International

Sharif says in televised address

India's acceptance of Kashmiris' right may result in fruitful talks

ISLAMABAD, June 12: Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said today the ongoing normalisation dialogue with India could succeed only if India accepted the "right" of Kashmiris to self-determination, reports AFP.

"The talks can lead to results only when Kashmiris' right to self-determination is recognised," Sharif said during a televised address to the nation.

Tensions with India was the only external issue touched on by Sharif in his hour-long address which focused on his four-month-old government's efforts to revive the economy and rid society of social and administrative ills.

Sharif said he had received a "positive response" from Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral when he met with him in the Maldives during a South Asian summit last month.

The two countries can resolve all outstanding issues, including the dispute over Kashmir, through negotiations, he said, adding neither had gained anything from conflict and confrontation over the past 50 years.

But Kashmiris' right to determine their future is the "fundamental" point which has to be accepted in order to move forward, he said.

"Our stand is just and based on principle," the Pakistani leader said.

Sharif called on India to withdraw its troops from Kashmir and end "repression" against the people in the state.

Pakistan holds the northern third of the disputed Himalayan region and India the rest of the territory. The two countries have two of their three wars since independence in 1947 over Kashmir.

The foreign secretaries of the two countries are due to hold a second round of talks in Islamabad later this month. The first session in more than three years was held in New Delhi in March.

AP adds: A gunbattle between Pakistan and Indian security forces deployed along the tense border between Pakistan and India, left a Pakistani army major dead and several Indian border guards injured, the state-run news agency said Wednesday.

The fire fight occurred overnight Wednesday along the border that divides the Punjab province between Pakistan and India, the Associated Press of Pakistan said.

Quoting an army spokesman, the APP said Indian border guards opened fire on Pakistani civilians in the area of Harpal, a Punjabi village on

the border with India.

Pakistan Maj Mohammed Jamil went to help the civilians when the Indian border guards opened fire on his regiment. They returned fire "inflicting casualties on the Indian Border Security Force," the APP said.

The army spokesman said Pakistan has lodged a complaint with the United Nations.

Pakistan and India have fought three wars since the Asian subcontinent gained its independence from Britain 50 years ago.

Two of the three wars were fought over the disputed state of Kashmir, which was divided between the two countries when Pakistan was created as a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent.

It's not clear what sparked the gunbattle along the Punjab provincial border with India.

Onslaught by LTTE

Lankan troops death toll rises to 97

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, June 12: Government troops recovering from a Tamil rebel attack found more bodies Thursday on the onslaught, raising the death toll to 97, the defence ministry said, reports AP.

The toll could rise even further because body parts remained strewn around the battle field in northern Sri Lanka, the ministry said.

Rebel forces snuck behind government lines and attacked the military base in Thandikulam. Both the government and rebels claimed victory in Tuesday's fighting, which killed more than 313 people.

It was the most serious fighting in a month-long government offensive to open a road link to the Jaffna Peninsula, which is now accessible only by air and sea.

The Sri Lankan army is now totally exposed and "vulnerable," said Anton Rajah, London-based spokesman for the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam.

In a telephone interview, Rajah

warned the military could expect "major disasters in the coming weeks and months."

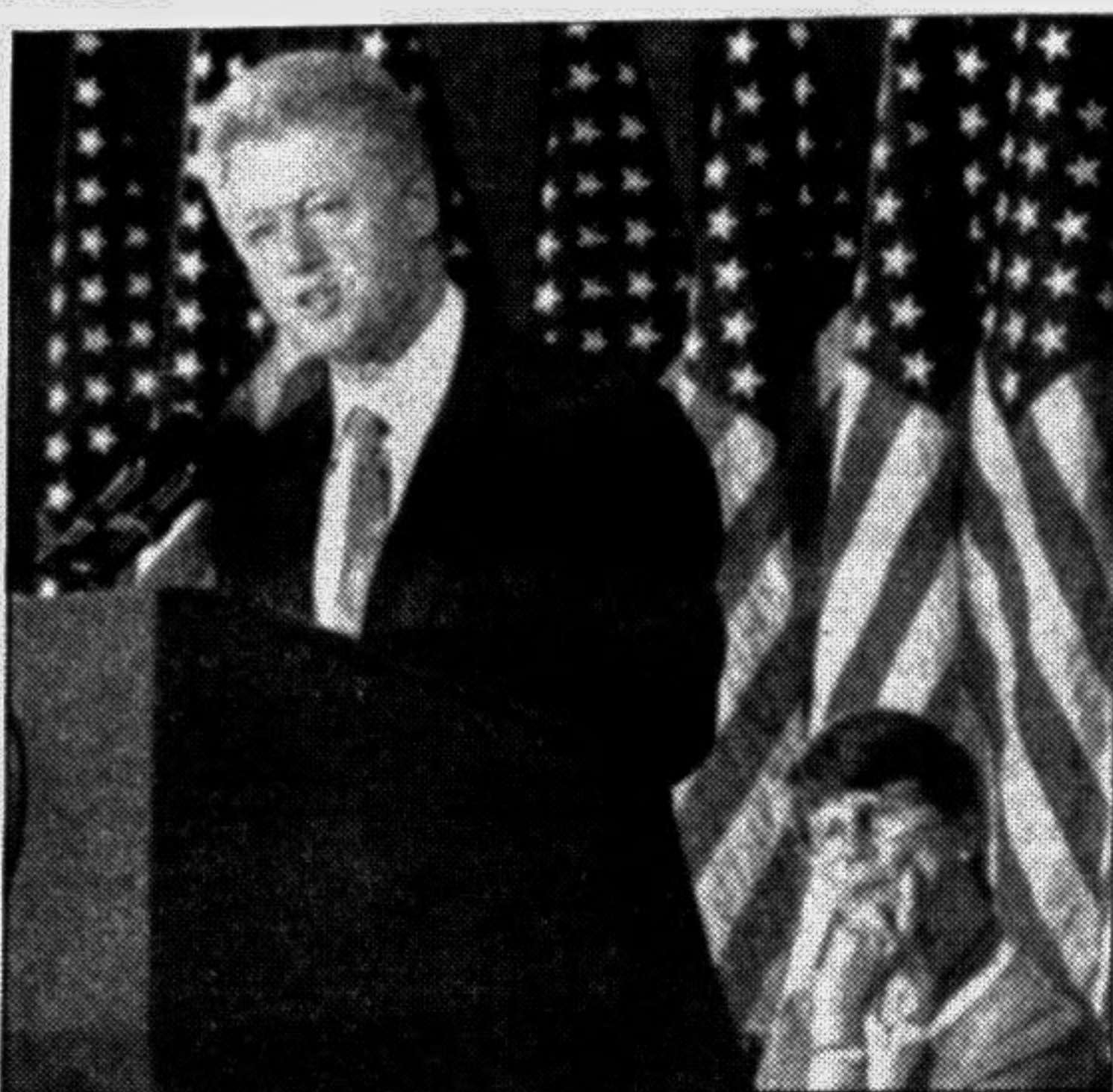
"Over a thousand terrorists had taken part in the abortive attack. Troops defending their positions held on and fought back repulsing terrorist attempts causing very heavy casualties," said defence ministry spokesman Maj INK Dewage.

Government troops rebuilt defenses around the town on Wednesday and re-established supply lines to other bases.

An ammunition dump and a bridge were destroyed in the attack. The damaged bridge had been repaired on Wednesday, officials said.

Rebels attacked soldiers in two places 10 miles (16 kms) south of the government front line.

They were firing from all sides," said a wounded soldier, Cpl. Jays Wickremasinghe, who spoke to reporters from his Colombo hospital bed. He was wounded in the legs by mortar fire.



US President Bill Clinton (L) speaks to an audience attending the Juvenile Justice Conference Wednesday at Georgetown University in Washington DC as US Attorney General Janet Reno (R) looks on. Aiming at disarming teen gangs, Clinton ordered new regulations forcing licensed gun dealers to post signs and give warnings against passing off firearms to minors. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Fujimori to visit Japan in July: Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori will visit Tokyo in July to strengthen ties, his first visit to Japan since the hostage crisis at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima. AP reports from Tokyo.

During his July 2-7 visit, Fujimori will meet with Emperor Akihito, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and several other top Cabinet members, a Foreign Ministry official said Thursday. No other schedule details were immediately available. Several Japanese Foreign Ministry officials have been admonished for the crisis. Tupac Amaru rebels the mansion on Dec. 17, and held 72 people, including Japanese diplomats and businessmen, captive for about four months.

ROK to build refugee camp by '98: South Korea said Thursday it will build a large refugee camp by late next year to house North Koreans escaping widespread hunger in their homeland, AP says from Seoul.

South Korea fears that looming famine might trigger a mass exodus of refugees out of its exclusive communist neighbour. Seoul announced last year it had plans to build a refugee camp, but released no details, afraid it would further strain relations with the North. Pyongyang already has denounced the South's plan as an "undisguised challenge."

Thailand to get 107 US tanks: The United States plans to sell 107 tanks to Thailand as part of a 100-million-dollar deal that also includes personnel training and other equipment, the defense department said Wednesday, AFP reports from Washington.

The Pentagon notified Congress of the proposed sale of M60A3 tanks that will come from US army excess inventory, saying that it will not affect the military balance in the region.

Land dispute claims 6 in Mexico: Six people were killed when a land dispute erupted into a shootout between peasants and paramilitary supporters of a local political boss in the southern state of Chiapas, officials said on Wednesday, Reuters reports from Tuxtla Gutierrez.

The gunfight flared on Sunday when peasant supporters of the leftist party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) tried to claim land near Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan, 55 miles (90 km) north of this state capital. News of the battle reached state officials late on Tuesday. The peasants arrived on the morning of June 8 armed with AR-15 rifles and were greeted with gunfire from white guard (Paramilitary) gunmen hired by a local landowner, Pueblo Nuevo Mayor Carlos Rojas told Reuters.

Belgium to cooperate with Congo: Belgium Defence Minister Jean-Pol Poncelet said on Wednesday he could envisage resuming military cooperation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire, Reuters reports from Brussels.

"In the perspective of a resumption of official (Belgian) cooperation with the Congo, according to the conditions fixed by the (Belgian) government, I am disposed to respond favourably to an eventual request for cooperation coming from the new Congolese authorities," the Belgian news agency Belga quoted Poncelet as saying. He was speaking to an Association of Graduates of Belgium's Royal Military School.

Columbia to rerun space mission: The US Space Shuttle Columbia was moved to its launch pad on Wednesday for a rerun of a mission cut short in April by mechanical trouble, Reuters reports from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

A giant tracked transporter hauled Columbia the 3.4 miles (5.4 km) from its assembly building to the launch pad on Wednesday morning in preparation for the planned July 1 blast off. The Shuttle and its crew of seven astronauts were to repeat a mission curtailed after only five days because of trouble with an electrical generation.

Abortion pill marketing to be delayed: Marketing of the abortion pill in the United States will be delayed because of a dispute between the European manufacturer and the organisation in charge in US distribution, the distributor said Wednesday, AFP reports from Washington.

"We have a serious dispute with this European company," said Sandra Waldman, spokeswoman for the nonprofit Population Council. "Our counsels are still negotiating," the spokeswoman for the New York-based group said by telephone.

Yeltsin orders evacuation of Russians
Congolese ex-president seeks ceasefire

BRAZZAVILLE, June 12: Congolese ex-president General Denis Sassou Nguesso went on the radio late Wednesday to call for a ceasefire after seven days of fighting between his supporters and government forces in the capital, reports AFP.

He called for "arms to fall silent" and expressed the hope that "the other side will keep its word this time at least."

Earlier Wednesday President Pascal Lissouba ordered his own troops to observe an immediate ceasefire, though heavy weapons fire continued round the airport where hundreds of French troops drafted into the capital have set up their command centre.

Reuter adds, mortar blasts and grenade explosions echoed around some areas near the Brazzaville airport early Thursday despite a ceasefire called to end a week of fighting between forces of dissident Congolese militia leader Denis Sassou Nguesso and the army of President Pascal Lissouba.

The city saw a few hours of quiet after Lissouba ordered his troops to stop firing on Wednesday afternoon and Sassou Nguesso urged his supporters to

observe the ceasefire. But sporadic shooting broke out close to a French base at the airport overnight and by dawn fairly heavy grenade and mortar fire could be heard from some areas near the airport, witnesses said.

"There was some firing but it was the quietest night we have had here for several days," one French officer said.

AP adds: President Boris Yeltsin on Wednesday ordered the evacuation of Russian citizens from the Republic of Congo, joining other nationalities hastily leaving the Central African nation.

Russia's Foreign Ministry already had begun reducing its diplomatic staff there because of a week-old feud between forces loyal to the president and the armed opposition. French troops have assisted in the evacuation.

On Wednesday, Russian authorities flew an Il-76 transport plane from Cairo to Libreville, Gabon, to prepare to evacuate some of the estimated 475 Russian citizens remaining in the Republic of Congo, the Interfax news agency reported.

Border clash in
Kashmir : 5 killed

JAMMU, India, June 12: Five guerrillas — three from Afghanistan and two from Pakistan — were killed in shootouts with Indian troops along the border dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan, Indian army officials said Thursday, reports AP.

A civilian was killed in the cross-fire, said the officials, who could not be named under army briefing rules. No Indian soldiers were reported dead.

The fighting took place Wednesday night about 800 kilometres (500 miles) north-west of New Delhi.

India has repeatedly accused Islamic countries in the region, particularly Pakistan, of arming and training Muslims in India's Jammu-Kashmir state who are fighting for independence. Pakistan says it provides only diplomatic support.

India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir since the Asian subcontinent gained its independence from Britain 50 years ago. Kashmir was divided between the two countries when Pakistan was created as a homeland for Muslims of the subcontinent.

India's portion of Kashmir is the only predominantly Muslim state in this overwhelmingly Hindu country.

Pakistani and Indian politicians recently renewed high-level talks aimed at improving their relationship, but sporadic fighting along the border continues.

UK Parliament votes to ban
pvt possession
of handguns

LONDON, June 12: The House of Commons voted overwhelmingly Wednesday to ban all private possession of handguns in a move that would extend what is already one of the world's strictest handgun laws, reports AP.

The Firearms Bill drawn up in the wake of a primary school massacre in the Scottish town of Dunblane last year, was backed with a majority of 203.

The vote came after Prime Minister Tony Blair voiced his personal support for an extension of the current law which bans all handguns but single-shot 22 calibre target pistols to include smaller calibre weapons as well.

"I think we do owe a moral responsibility to the victims of Dunblane and their families. That is the reason why we have sought to bring forward this legislation," Blair said earlier Wednesday.

The move comes after a long campaign by the families of those killed by gunman Thomas Hamilton, who shot dead 16 children and their teacher in the gymnasium at the Dunblane. Victims welcomed the proposed new ban.



French President Jacques Chirac (L) greets British Prime Minister Tony Blair Wednesday at the Elysee palace before their bilateral meeting and a dinner hosted by the French President.

Kyrgyzstan ready to host
int'l confce on Afghanistan

ALMATY, Kazakhstan, June 12: Kyrgyzstan is ready to host an international conference on Afghanistan, the presidency said from Bishkek to Kyrgyz capital on Wednesday, reports AP.

"Kyrgyzstan is prepared to host at any time, a peace conference on Afghanistan, grouping the various Afghan factions," presidential spokesman Sergei Dedukhin told AFP here by telephone.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati who was in Bishkek on Tuesday and Wednesday voiced support for such a conference.

Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev is keen to launch a peace process as soon as possible in Afghanistan, his spokesman said.

"We made great efforts to launch peace in Tajikistan and we must do the same in Afghanistan, he was quoted as saying.

Kyrgyzstan has always remained neutral in both the Tajikistan and the Afghan conflicts and has sided with no particular faction. Its neutrality would strengthen its credibility as an honest broker, diplomats said.

"Interference by other countries in the internal affairs on Afghanistan makes it harder to reach a settlement to

the Afghan conflict," Velayati said in Bishkek.

Iran has long accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban radical Islamic militia which now controls more than two thirds of Afghanistan.

Velayati also gave the Kyrgyz leader an invitation to attend the next summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference which takes place in December in Tehran.

Earlier report from London adds: While Ahmad Shah Masood fights to keep northeast Afghanistan from the Islamic militia, his youngest brother Ahmad Wali Masood faces his own Taliban offensive on the other side of the world.

Speaking in this far flung outpost of Afghanistan, with curtains drawn at midday, the 32-year-old Charge d'Affaires in his country's London Embassy, ponders Taliban's latest outflanking manoeuvres under the light of a chandelier.

"There are these people who want to threaten the embassy and take over," he says. "They have threatened my staff to evacuate. Last week they went to see the foreign office. I am surprised the foreign office accepted them, but they did, and I do not know what they discussed."

The ousted government now controls just two to three provinces in Afghanistan and six embassies around the world.

The Taliban control most of the country and are establishing diplomatic offices in the three countries which have formally recognised their rule, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

US, France stop
talking about
dispute over
NATO command

BRUSSELS, June 12: The United States and France have stopped talking about their dispute over NATO's southern command, the US Defence Secretary said today, reports AP.

"It is settled from my perspective," Defence Secretary William Cohen told reporters traveling with him to a NATO meeting, "AF South — that's a US command."

US and French officials had held high level talks on the Naples-based Allied Forces South (AF South) command, but Cohen said there have been no further discussions.

US slowing down on non-proliferation regime?

Aziz Haniffa writes from Washington

The United States appears to have given up efforts to impose a nuclear nonproliferation regime in the short-term on South Asia, if the remarks of a key White House official are anything to go by.

James Steinberg, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, said in Washington Tuesday that "in South Asia, India and Pakistan have acquired nuclear and missile capabilities and continue to expand their programmes, although each side has avoided acknowledging its capabilities and deploying such weapons."

However, in a significant departure from earlier U.S. policy statements, Steinberg, who delivered the keynote address at the annual Nuclear Nonproliferation Conference organized by the Carnegie Endowment's Nuclear Nonproliferation Project, asserted that "a near term political solution to proliferation in South Asia is unlikely."

Steinberg expressed optimism that "there are hopeful signs that the new governments in Delhi and Islamabad are genuinely interested in pursuing dialogue and improving bilateral relations, which may reinforce the de facto restraints that both sides are observing."

Consequently, he said, "the United States will continue to encourage India and Pakistan to settle their differences at the negotiating table." He said Washington would also "continue to urge both sides to move in the right direction on CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) and the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, and to freeze and eventually eliminate their nuclear and missile arsenals."

Steinberg said that President Clinton would submit the CTBT for Senate ratification in the very near future "and we are committed to trying to achieve the Treaty's envisioned entry into force by September 1998."

Although making clear that Washington had no intention at present of imposing any nuclear nonproliferation strategy on South Asia, Steinberg was not above taking a hefty swipe at India for not signing the CTBT.

"No matter how attractive in theory, linkage to a timebound, comprehensive nuclear disarmament scheme simply isn't practical," he said in reference to India's rationale for not joining the CTBT.

"And the stake are too high to allow the perfect to become

the enemy of the good," he added.

Steinberg said Clinton's call for negotiating a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty was especially significant in regions like South Asia where "where destabilising arms races are jeopardising security and drawing resources away from social needs."

Another senior administration official acknowledged that India's opposition to the CTBT because of the entry-into-force provision could very well torpedo U.S. Senate approval of the treaty.

Robert Bell, Special Assistant to the President for Defence Policy and Arms Control, said the first practical step towards the ultimate goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons, was to get the CTBT ratified in the Senate "and that's not one we take for granted."

He acknowledged that the Republicans, who control the Congress, had made it clear in their party manifesto that they would support ratification of the CTBT, and noted, "If the Senate wants an excuse for inaction, it can use India's not entering into the entry-into-

force as a reason not to do anything. So I don't take anything for granted."

Leonard Spector, Director of the Carnegie's Nuclear Nonproliferation Project and one of the leading nuclear experts in the country, said among the threshold states, "Pakistan is continuing its freeze on the production of fissile material although Israel and India are apparently adding to their plutonium stockpiles."

Spector also said one of the downsides of an otherwise good year where nonproliferation news is concerned was that "there have been reports that India has begun to deploy its short-range, nuclear-capable Prithvi missile near the Pakistani border—a development that could lead to a rapid acceleration of the undeclared nuclear and missile competition between India and Pakistan."

He said this would have "unpredictable, but potentially very dangerous consequences." Spector also bemoaned that "on the Pakistani side, reports that a plutonium production reactor is nearly operational are also cause for concern."

— India Abroad News Service

Australia defends bid to
slash immigration

SYDNEY, June 12: Australia's Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock today used new figures showing migrant unemployment to be higher than overall unemployment to defend his government's decision to slash its immigration intake, reports AP.

An Australian Bureau of Statistics report showed that while the overall unemployment rate among migrants was 9.9 per cent, or 1.2 per cent above the national average, the rate among Lebanese migrants was 38.9 per cent.

Unemployment was also high among migrants from the Middle East and North Africa (20.9 per cent) and from Vietnam (19.4 per cent).

The figures, from November last year, detail the employment status of almost 1.5 million adult migrants who arrived in Australia since 1970.

Australia's conservative government announced last month it had cut the immigration intake for 1997-98 to the lowest levels for nearly 20 years. In a move welcomed by anti-Asia MP Pauline Hanson.

Ruddock said the decision to cut the intake for the year to June 1998 by nearly 6,000 to 68,000, was not a response to Hanson, who has demanded an end to immigration and warned Australian risked being "swamped" by Asians. Because

many unskilled migrants failed to find work.

Ruddock said the new figures underlined the importance of the government's move to take in more skilled migrants and fewer family reunion settlers.

"They report shows that migrants who arrived with a high level of skill tend to have a lower unemployment rate," he said in a statement.

5000 Rwandan
children
repatriated
from Congo

NAIROBI, June 12: Relief workers have repatriated more than 5,000 unaccompanied Rwandan children from the former Zaire since the end of April, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported Wednesday, says AP.

"It said in a newsletter that 2,620 family reunions had been arranged since the beginning of May."

"In the areas where security is a concern," it said, "the ICRC has implemented a system of outposts, whereby local staff operated out of their home communities to trace families and arrange their transportation to larger centres for the reunion with the children."

New treatment to help heroin
addicts worldwide

UNITED NATIONS, June 12: A revolutionary new drugs treatment tested successfully in Vietnam could eventually help heroin addicts worldwide, the UN doctor involved in the project, reports AP.

Doctor Lutz Baehr of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) cautions that the project is still "in its early stages" and needed to be verified by clinical research outside Vietnam. Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, is currently involved in the project.

The UNDP expects the preparatory work to lay the foundations for a major global drugs initiative in January 1998.

Baehr said that addicts in Vietnam were being cured of heroin addiction in as little as three to five days after taking a herbal medicine comprised of 13 different ingredients which are found in abundance in the South East Asian country.

In Vietnam a total 4,000 patients have been treated with

the drug, named 'heantos', "practically all successfully," Baehr told AFP.

Baehr said that heantos detoxified patients, eliminated withdrawal symptoms and also prevented relapses into drug abuse.

But further scientific evidence needed to be presented concerning the claim that heantos prevents relapses, requiring patients to be followed for longer periods "in a place where they have access to drugs."

In Vietnam, 100 former Vietnam war veterans in a state-run programme were given heantos in order to cure them of an opium addiction.

"After one year, only about 30 returned," Baehr said.

Scandinavian countries and China have shown an interest in the product since the UNDP first publicised the results of its tests last month. Heantos is not yet sold commercially in any country.