

International

BRIEFLY



An ethnic Albanian boy wipes tears during funeral of nine compatriots in the village of Herec, some 80 km southwest of Pristina Monday. Nine villagers were killed by Yugoslav army on the Yugoslav-Albanian border last Thursday during an attempt to smuggle weapons and ammunition across the border. — AP/UNB photo

**10 die in train mishap in India:** At least 10 people died and more than 30 were injured yesterday when an express train jumped rails in eastern India, the Press Trust of India reported. AFP says from New Delhi.

The news agency said five carriages of the passenger train derailed some 20 kilometres from the city of Patna. Fifteen of the injured have been hospitalised in critical condition. The accident occurred near a rail station, disrupting traffic in the region.

**Myanmar student leader jailed:** A Myanmar student leader has been jailed for 15 years for a range of crimes including involvement in an alleged terrorist plot, Myanmar's military Junta said on Monday. AFP reports from Bangkok.

A Junta spokesman said the sentence reflected the severity of the student's crimes and denied reports that he had been jailed because he was writing a history of the student movement in the country.

**Afghan floods kill 35:** Flash floods in north-eastern Afghanistan killed 35 people, destroyed hundreds of homes and devastated acres of agricultural land, the Taliban run radio reported Tuesday. AP says from Kabul.

The flooding in Kunar province inundated villages in the Asmar Valley of Kunar, several hundred kilometres northeast of the Afghan capital of Kabul. Radio Shariat reported. Scores of people have died and hundreds of homes destroyed in southern and northern Afghanistan as rivers overflowed their banks and roared across homes made of sun-baked mud.

**Road mishap claims 19 in Jakarta:** A bus collided with a truck on Indonesia's Java island, killing 19 people and injuring 28 others, the official Antara news agency reported Tuesday. AP says from Jakarta.

The head-on collision occurred Monday night in Tuban, 620 kilometres east of Jakarta, the capital. Witnesses told Antara that both vehicles were traveling very fast. Police were investigating.

**30 die in Tajik landslides:** At least 30 people have died and about 100 others were still missing in landslides triggered by torrential rains in this Central Asian nation, officials said Tuesday. AP reports from Tajikistan.

The Tajik Interior Ministry had previously put the death toll at 19 and said thousands were left homeless by the weekend flooding and landslides.

About 100 more villagers were unaccounted for, he said, according to the ITAR-Tass news agency. The floods and landslides, described as the worst in 30 years, hit the Garm and the southern Khatlon regions, affecting huge areas of farmland, washing away bridges, destroying roads and power lines and damaging homes in scores of villages.

**Blast in Lankan phone exchange:** A powerful blast damaged a telephone exchange in southern Sri Lanka yesterday, cutting off thousands of phones in the region, officials said. AFP reports from Colombo.

The explosion in the transmission room of the Kalutara telephone exchange damaged equipment but there were no casualties officials said.

**Russian soldiers kill 3 comrades:** Two young soldiers killed three of their comrades at a border guard unit in the Russian Far East, ITAR-Tass said yesterday, citing a spokesman of Russia's Federal Border Guard Service. AFP reports from Moscow.

Tass said that in the early hours of Tuesday, the two were caught stealing weapons from their unit's armoury in the village of Lenninsk. When other soldiers tried to detain them, the pair opened fire, killing at least three people. One of the assailants was killed in the shootout while the others escaped.

**US, Japan sign accord for logistics support**

TOKYO, Apr 28: The United States and Japan today signed an agreement to give each other's armed forces logistics support, officials said, reports AFP.

The deal is part of the new Japan-US defence guidelines updated in September 1997 and comes during a visit here by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

The United States and Japan signed an amendment to the existing agreement governing reciprocal provisions of logistics support, supplies and services between their two armed forces, a US government statement said.

It means there will be close cooperation between the two forces, particularly through such things as food, transport and fuel, and will help UN international peacekeeping efforts.

The agreement was "an important element" in implementing new guidelines on defence

**JKLF leader hurt, 100 arrested in Pak-held Kashmir**

ISLAMABAD, Apr 28: Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Amanullah Khan and 20 of his followers were injured and more than 100 arrested today when security forces resorted to lathi charge on a demonstration in Gilgit area in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, reports PTI.

Dr Amanullah was seriously injured and admitted to a local hospital when the Pakistani occupying forces ambushed the demonstration by JKLF, party secretary general Haider Hijazi told PTI over phone from his Gilgit hideout.

He (Khan) suffered injuries due to lathi charge and fainted because of heavy firing of tear gas, he said.

Khan was leading a demonstration against the imposition of prohibitory orders in view of JKLF's public rally scheduled for tomorrow to protest the Karachi agreement of 1949 under which the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan were acceded to Pakistan.

The purpose of yesterday's rally was to show the authorities that JKLF and can defy the prohibitory order in the area, Hijazi said.

JKLF is fearing a crackdown by the security agencies and that is why Dr Amanullah has been taken to an unknown hospital while other top JKLF leaders have gone under ground to avoid arrest, Hijazi said.

**Lankan troops kill 20 more Tigers**

COLOMBO, Apr 28: Sri Lankan troops fighting separatists in the northern jungles said Tuesday they have killed 20 Tamil tiger rebels during a push to take control of a strategic town, reports AP.

There was no independent confirmation of the report, but a military official said they came to know of rebel fatalities by intercepting clandestine Tamil Tiger radio. The fatalities occurred Sunday, the official said on condition of anonymity.

The troops fought the rebels around Mankulam, 250 kilometres north of the capital, Colombo. Mankulam is heavily fortified with mines, underground bunkers, razor wire and booby traps and is being held by the rebels.

It is the largest town along a 77-kilometres road the army has been trying to capture since last May in the longest and bloodiest offensive of its 15-year-old civil war.

So far, government troops have captured about two thirds of the highway.

The road links Jaffna, a former rebel stronghold captured by the army two years ago, with the rest of the country. Since the army takeover, Jaffna's half million people have had to rely on air and sea deliveries for food and other supplies.

The rebels want a separate homeland, accusing the Sinhalese majority of oppressing the Tamil minority. Tamils make up 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 18 million people and have a language, religion and culture distinct from that of the Sinhalese.

**Students allowed to leave campus in Indonesia**

MEDAN, Indonesia, Apr 28: Indonesian troops lifted a blockade of a university campus in the north Sumatra town of Medan early today, allowing several thousand students to leave after an off tense protest against President Suharto, reports Reuters.

Residents around the sprawling University of North Sumatra on the outskirts of Medan said the troops, who had blocked all its exits after dragging the students back in with water cannon on Monday, finally pulled out around 2100 GMT Monday.

One student said about 100 of his colleagues were driven away in three military buses, but there was no immediate confirmation.

The campus was quiet this morning, a national holiday, but students said their action committee would meet in the afternoon to decide their next move in what has become the most intense of campus protests against Suharto around Indonesia.

**40 killed in latest Algerian massacre**

ALGIERS, Apr 28: Attackers slaughtered 40 people in the town of Chouardja, about 100 kilometres south of the Algerian capital, the Algerian security services said Tuesday, reports AP.

The massacre took place under cover of darkness early Tuesday, the communiqué said. Security forces were immediately dispatched to investigate. No other details were provided.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred in an area where the Armed Islamic Group, a violent anti-government organisation, is known to be active.

There has been an upsurge in violence across Algeria over the past two weeks.

At least 75,000 people have died as a result of an Islamic insurgency that erupted in 1992 after the military-backed regime canceled parliamentary elections an Islamic party was set to win.

**Concessions to break deadlock in ME peace process Clinton praises Arafat**

JERUSALEM, Apr 28: US President Bill Clinton praised Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat for making concessions to break the deadlock in the peace process and hinted strongly that it was now Israel's turn to do the same, according to an interview published today, reports AFP.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Clinton as saying Arafat had notably lowered his expectations over a long-delayed Israeli troop pullback from the West Bank which is required under interim peace agreements.

"Chairman Arafat has certain territorial aspirations and he's clearly realigned them. They're clearly willing to go forward," Clinton said.

Clinton also praised action taken by Arafat's Palestinian Authority against the radical Islamic movement Hamas in recent weeks, clearly indicating he thought this helped meet Israeli conditions for carrying out the troops withdrawal.

In a veiled criticism of Israel's reluctance to go ahead with the kind of troop withdrawal Washington says is needed to rescue the peace talks, Clinton noted that the last peace accord implemented by Israel was its withdrawal in January 1997 from most of the West Bank city of Hebron.

"It's been a long time since the Hebron agreement. It's been a long time since anything happened," he said.

Clinton's special Mideast envoy, Dennis Ross, has been in Israel since Saturday trying to convince Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept US proposals to revive the peace process and draw Palestinians and Israelis into overdue negotiations on a permanent peace agreement.

The US plan reportedly cen-

tered on requiring Israel to withdraw from an additional 13 per cent of the West Bank in tandem with Palestinian steps against armed anti-Israeli militants.

Arafat has agreed to the US proposals even though they fall far short of the 30 per cent of the West Bank Palestinians say Israel is required to cede to them at this stage.

Netanyahu has rejected the 13 per cent figure, saying a withdrawal of this scope would jeopardize "vital Israeli interests," and he has repeatedly warned Washington not to pressure his government on the matter.

Ross' mission is to pave the way for separate talks in London on May 4 between Netanyahu, Arafat and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Israel's Maariv newspaper reported today that given the lack of progress during Ross' visit, there were doubts the London meeting would be held. Netanyahu's office said any decision to cancel the talks would be taken by Washington.

AP adds: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flew to Egypt Tuesday to meet with President Hosni Mubarak, who has expressed frustration at Israel's lack of progress in negotiations with Palestinians.

Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal el-Ganzoury met Netanyahu at the airport and left immediately for the president's Unity Palace.

The talks follow a day of sharp rhetoric that offered little hope of success for next week's London meetings between Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa expressed impatience with Israel's slow pace in negotiations. "It is time for precise words, promises to be respected and agreements to be

enacted," he told Egypt's Middle East News Agency.

Speaking Monday on US television, Mubarak said the peace negotiations were "really frozen."

"The freezing of the peace process is creating a very bad atmosphere, day after day," Mubarak added.

Asked if Netanyahu was sincere about wanting peace, Mubarak said he was ready to help him, but that Netanyahu should also cooperate "for the Palestinians, for the Syrians, for the Lebanese."

Progress in the peace talks came to a halt in March 1997 after Israel announced plans to build a Jewish neighborhood in east Jerusalem, an area Palestinians want as the capital of an independent state.

Another report adds: Israel will place a closure on the West Bank and Gaza over Independence day weekend, barring thousands of Palestinians from entering the Jewish state, the army announced.

The closure will go into effect Tuesday night, as Israel begins its 24-hour commemoration of remembrance day for fallen soldiers. It will last until the end of celebrations Saturday night for the country's 50th anniversary.

The army said that the provisions for the holiday closure — including a list of those exempted from the ban, such as a number of medical personnel and all diplomats — were agreed upon with the Palestinians in the interim agreements.

Jerusalem Police Chief Yair Vitzhaki told Israel radio that thousands of additional policemen would be stationed in Jerusalem over the holiday, as part of the heightened alert for possible terror attacks.



United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, right, with Indian President K.R. Narayanan at the UN Monday. — AP/UNB photo

**Leftist rebels reject govt's offer to talk peace in Nepal**

KATHMANDU, Apr 28: The chances of a let-up in a radical left insurgency which has claimed over 140 lives in Nepal in the past two years have dimmed with the rebels rejecting the government's latest offer to talk peace, reports IANS.

However, some political observers say the government is as much to blame for its failure to persuade the Maoist rebels to come to the negotiating table.

Although the Maoists have not specified their stand, observers said they were put off by the tabling of an anti-terrorism bill in Parliament. If enacted, the law will facilitate the arrest of any person on doubt. Human rights organisations have been campaigning against the proposed bill which they argue would infringe the fundamental rights of citizens.

"The rebels should be assured by the government that the proposed anti-terrorism bill will not be a barrier between the government and the Maoists," wrote the Nepali language Shanghai weekly.

Both the rebels and the government are involved in propaganda for public consumption and do not seem serious," said the Bimarsha weekly.

The English language daily, The Kathmandu Post, said, "The government does not seem serious about resolving the Maoist problem."

The outlawed group, which has been waging a guerilla war against security forces since 1996 to press its demand for doing away with the monarchy in the Himalayan kingdom, said that they did not trust the government and charged it with not creating conditions conducive for holding talks.

"We discussed the proposal at the highest levels of our party and concluded that we have not found the government trying to build a favourable environment," government mediator and lawmaker Padma Ratna Tuladhar quoted the Maoists as saying. "Therefore, we have decided that the situation is not right to hold talks."

The Maoist's stand was communicated to Tuladhar, a Communist Party of Nepal — Marxist Leninist (ML) lawmaker and member of the parliamentary committee for foreign affairs and human rights, who has been asked by the government to establish contact with the rebels.

The Maoists, however, have

not ruled out the possibility of future talks with the government, Tuladhar said. "Our decision does not mean that talks cannot be held in the future. We reiterate that we are not against holding talks in principle," the Maoist told Tuladhar in their letter.

Their rejection was prompted Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to renew the offer. Speaking in Parliament, Koirala called the rebels for talk on unconditional basis.

Some political observers were cynical of the government's sincerity to end the crisis. Tribhuvan University Professor T.N. Jaisawal says, "How can a government negotiate on Maoist's demand for a republican state?" The whole hue and cry seems to be for public consumption," he added.

But others think that the rebels may have been emboldened by their recent successes. The Maoist insurgency has claimed more than 144 lives, including rebels, policemen and innocent villagers, according to human rights groups. Started in two remote districts in 1996, Maoists insurgency has now spread to almost half of the country.

**UNSC prolongs sanctions against Iraq**

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 28: The UN Security Council (UNSC) prolonged Iraqi sanctions late on Monday as the United States acknowledged for the first time that Baghdad had made progress on nuclear weapons compliance, reports Reuters.

Council President Hisashi Owada of Japan told reporters "there was no consensus to modify the sanctions regime" following day-long meetings behind closed doors at which each member spoke, as well as Iraq's Foreign Minister Mohammed al-Shahaf and chief arms inspector Richard Butler.

"The international community has said there will be no lifting of sanctions because Iraq has failed to comply with

relevant Security Council resolutions," US Ambassador Bill Richardson said.

The retention of sanctions was expected at the review, usually held every 60 days, but suspended last June after Iraq disrupted weapons inspections.

A main issue at the meetings was how to acknowledge Iraqi progress on scrapping nuclear weapons programme. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has reported Iraq had met all requirements, but it would continue to monitor its nuclear weapons capability.

Russia has drafted a resolution to this effect, which China and France support. China also said that a majority of members backed action on atomic

weapons.

But both the United States and Britain said that questions still remained on nuclear weapons and they would support a statement saying Iraq had made some progress in this area.

"We, the United States acknowledge progress in the areas of access to presidential and sensitive sites," as negotiated by Secretary General Kofi Annan on Feb 23. "There appears to be some progress in the nuclear file. However, we believe it is premature to close the nuclear file," Richardson said.

China, Russia and France, all permanent council members, want movement towards the lifting of sanctions, but none called for that to happen,

**Indian missile programme US worried about Russian assistance**

WASHINGTON, Apr 28: The US government said Monday it has held "very high-level conversations" with Russia about reported Russian assistance to India in building a sea-launched ballistic missile that could reach deep into Pakistan, reports AP.

White House press secretary Mike McCurry said the United States was watching the situation "extraordinarily carefully". He added, "We have made no determination at this point that any cooperation that we've detected is a violation" of Missile Technology Control Regime guidelines, designed to restrict the spread of missiles.

The New York Times reported Monday that the United States fears the project could heighten tensions in the region and has asked Russia to stop providing aid.

Pakistan has a missile that could hit targets throughout India.

McCurry noted that violations of the Missile Technology Control Regime guidelines could trigger US sanctions, but said, "We've not made that determination or finding, nor have we imposed any sanctions."

"We have had very high-level conversations with the Russian Federation, reflecting a broad range of our proliferation concerns, and this matter in particular has been discussed," McCurry said.

An Indian official denied the newspaper's story.

India does not have any project like this," Defence Ministry spokesman S Ghosh told The Associated Press.

In Russia, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said only that the ministry "has no information on this issue."

Pakistan and India have fought three wars since their independence from Britain in 1947, and the two are in a nuclear arms race.

The Times said the missile is meant to be launched from submerged submarines and is said to have a range of 320 kilometres. This month, Pakistan tested its own nuclear missile that could strike anywhere in India.

US officials told the Times that Russia's precise role in the project was not clear, but that they became concerned in 1995.

Russian officials have told US officials that their role in the project is limited and that restricted technology was not being used, the Times said.

**Afghan talks: No breakthrough yet**

ISLAMABAD, Apr 28: Afghan peace talks, aimed at ending two decades of war, were to resume Tuesday after warring factions became bogged down over the definition of religious scholar, reports AP.

Talks stalled on Monday when neither side could agree on who qualifies as a religious scholar — a critical question for the warring factions, who have agreed to let a commission of religious scholars rule their war-ravaged homeland.

However both sides have been critical of the other's choice of religious scholar.

The co-sponsors of the talks, the United Nations and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, sent the two sides back to their respective leaders for a definition of religious scholar.

They were expected to return to the talks later on Tuesday.

**India for 'principled, negotiated' end to Sri Lanka's conflict**

NEW DELHI, Apr 28: India said Monday it stood for a "principled and negotiated" end to Sri Lanka's protracted and bloody ethnic conflict, reports AFP.

An External Affairs Ministry spokesman said India's new Hindu nationalist government was keen to develop a "friendly, cordial and cooperative" relationship with Sri Lanka.

"The government remained committed to a peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict," he said.

The spokesman's comments followed angry criticism in Sri Lanka after a former Indian diplomat said in Colombo last week that New Delhi might start expressing "friendly concern" over the ethnic conflict.

Nagendra Nath Jha, who heads the foreign affairs committee of India's ruling

Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party), however ruled out any military help to Colombo to fight the Tamil Tiger guerrillas.

Jha's comments drew protests from Sri Lanka newspapers and academics. The government in Colombo, however did not react.

New Delhi had in the 1980s covertly armed and trained Tamil separatist guerrillas in Sri Lanka, which is separated from India by a narrow strip of sea.

India signed a peace pact Sri Lanka in 1987 to disarm the rebels. Indian troops deployed in Sri Lanka's north and east later fought a two-year war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The Indian army returned home in March 1990 after losing nearly 1,200 men, since then.

**Off the Record**

**Good news for smokers**

LONDON: British scientists announced yesterday that they had identified a single gene that could protect smokers from developing lung cancer, opening up the possibility of developing new cancer-prevention drugs, reports AFP.

"This is a very exciting finding. It's long been known that our bodies contain factors which determine our sensitivity to cancer-causing chemicals," said prof Roland Wolf, who led the team of Scottish scientists who carried out the research.

According to the scientists, experiments on mice have demonstrated that the gene provides vital defence against the toxic chemicals found in tobacco smoke. Laboratory mice from which the gene was removed quickly developed tumours when tobacco smoke chemicals were applied to their skin.

A very similar gene was found in humans, and was particularly important in the lungs and bladder — two places where cancer is strongly linked to smoking.

According to Prof Wolf, a member of a molecular pharmacology unit at Ninewell's Hospital in Dundee, the gene could be one reason why some heavy smokers escape lung cancer and live to a ripe old age, while others die young.

**Brain cells of cloned cattle cure for Parkinson's?**

WASHINGTON: Researchers said on Monday they had created a possible new source for treating Parkinson's patients — the brain cells of cloned cattle, reports Reuters.

Brain cells from cattle fetuses were genetically engineered, then cloned and injected into rats with Parkinson's disease. The treatment seemed to reduce the symptoms in the rats, the researchers reported in the journal, Nature Medicine.

They said they hoped the technique could one day be used in people.

The scientists' approach combined three new and controversial technologies — cloning, genetic engineering, and the use of fetal brain cells to treat Parkinson's.



US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, right, shakes hands with Japanese Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi after signing an agreement of bilateral defence cooperation in Tokyo Tuesday. — AP/UNB photo