

## International

## About 100 die of starvation in central Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, May 2: About 100 people mostly women and children, are feared to have died of starvation in central Afghanistan's Hazarajat region isolated by a Taliban blockade, the UN food agency said on Friday, reports AFP.

Tens of thousands face starvation in Hazarajat, home to some 1.2 million people living in mountain clinging villages, the World Food Programme (WFP) said in a statement.

The region includes Beniyun province and parts of Ghor, Wardak, Uruzgorn and Ghanzi provinces. It has been isolated to the south, west and east by a blockade imposed by the Taliban last year.

The route from the north, which is controlled by anti-Taliban forces, has been unsafe for food convoys due to factional

fighting and danger of looting and other risks.

The Taliban, who control much of the rest of Afghanistan, have not allowed food supplies to the opposition held Hazarajat because they claim these feed the troops of their enemies.

WFP missions scouring the region have reported pockets of severe hunger, dwindling food supplies, empty marketplaces and as many as 108 unconfirmed deaths by starvation mostly of women and children, the agency said.

The toll includes 45 reported dead in Uruzgorn, where some 3,000 families will be running out of food in a matter of days, it added.

The Taliban delegation has returned home for consultations with the leadership.

## Iraq warns UN of 'grave consequences' if sanctions not lifted

BAGHDAD, May 2: Iraq has warned the UN Security Council of "grave consequences" if it does not lift sanctions, the Iraqi News Agency reported Friday, says AP.

The warning was sent in an open letter to the Security Council. It represented the Iraqi leadership's formal response to the Council's decision Monday to renew for another six months the sweeping trade embargo imposed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The letter came from Iraq's two top decision-making bodies, the Revolutionary Command Council and the Baath Party Command, which met Thursday under the chairmanship of President Saddam Hus-

sein. In the letter, the leadership said Iraq has fulfilled all its obligations in terms of UN resolutions that require the elimination of its weapons of mass destruction. It says this achievement "forces" the Security Council to lift the embargo.

The sanctions have banned all but limited exports of Iraqi oil and have devastated the national economy.

"If there is not a minimum lifting of the sanctions imposed on Iraqi people eight years ago — despite all the sacrifices they (Iraqis) have made to cooperate with the Security Council and the special commission — there will be grave consequences," the

letter said, referring to the commission of UN weapons inspectors charged with overseeing Iraq's disarmament.

"Iraq will wait and see how the Security Council behaves," it said. "The American injustice is still continuing in the crime of embargo."

It is painful for the Iraqis that the Security Council remains the hostage of one member-nation," the letter said in a clear reference to the United States.

The letter recalled statements issued by Iraq shortly before the Security Council's meeting Monday when Baghdad threatened unspecified retaliation if there was no sanctions relief.

Earlier this week, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Shahnaif said the Council's decision was "very disappointing" and accused the United States of manipulating the world body.

UN weapons inspectors have repeatedly reported that Iraq has failed to account for all its mass-destruction armaments, and accused Baghdad of hiding important data.

Council diplomats have said the embargo will not be lifted until Iraq has eliminated such weapons and fulfilled other obligations concerning the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War.

## Israel attacks rebel base in south Lebanon

TYRE, Lebanon, May 2: An Israeli helicopter-gunship blasted a suspected guerrilla base in south Lebanon Friday, hours after a militant attack, Lebanese security officials said, reports AP.

The helicopter fired two missiles at a position on the outskirts of the village of Mansouri, 13 kilometres south of the port of Tyre, at 1400 GMT, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Guerrillas of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah earlier fired mortars and rockets at an outpost of the Israeli-allied south Lebanon Army militia in the Israeli-occupied zone, the officials said.

There was no report of casualties in either attack. Friday's air strike was the second by Israeli helicopters this week.

On Monday, Israeli gunships attacked suspected guerrilla hideouts in south Lebanon after six Israeli soldiers and an Israeli-allied militiaman were wounded in Hezbollah attacks. In another incident Wednesday, five members of the SLA militia were wounded by Hezbollah militants.

## 17 more LTTE rebels killed

COLOMBO, May 2: Government troops ambushed and killed 17 Tamil Tiger guerrillas near a strategic northern town that the military has been besieging for months, officials said Saturday, reports AP.

The rebels were killed in four separate ambushes on Friday by soldiers lying in wait in the jungles near Mankulam, said Col. Ranjith Vitana, a military spokesman.

There were no casualties on the government side in the fighting, 250 kilometres north of the capital, Colombo.

Mankulam is the largest town along a strategic 77-kilometre road that the army has been trying to capture from the rebels for nearly a year in the longest and bloodiest offensive of its 15-year-old civil war.

But heavy casualties in the campaign have exhausted both sides. The military says it has lost more than 1,000 soldiers and has killed more than 3,000 guerrillas. The rebels have not given casualty figures for the entire offensive.

## Fatal liquor kills 32 in India

NEW DELHI, May 2: At least 32 people have died after drinking booting liquor in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today, reports AFP.

The Indian express newspaper said the toll was likely to pass 60 with more and more people being brought to hospital and was the worst such case reported in the state. The deaths took place at Behnolia village on Thursday, the news agency said. Twenty people were taken to hospital immediately afterwards.

State government officials said the victims, including women, bought the illicit liquor from a private store and died after a late night party.

A much larger group of people who is seeking a fifth term, can no longer count on easterners' votes to help put him over the top as they did in 1990 and 1994.

Resentment over the pain of switching to capitalism has exploded, especially among people under 30 who are stuck without work or who fear for their jobs.

Support for the far right has not been limited to shaved-headed neo-Nazi youths known as skinheads, who regularly terrorize neighborhoods, especially in the east.

A much larger group of people has concluded that democracy and capitalism, joyfully welcomed after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, don't work. Polls have shown that only 70 per cent of easterners say it was right to introduce the western political system.

With unemployment at about 21 per cent, the east is fertile ground for extremists. Taking into account government job creation programs, about half the work force in some areas is believed to have no real job.

And economic growth, once roaring with infrastructure projects, is dropping off as

## Press freedoms survey reveals 'Only 20pc global people enjoy free press'

WASHINGTON, May 2: Only 20 percent of the world's people live in countries with a free press, one percent fewer than in 1996, according to a survey of press freedoms released Friday, reports AP.

The study by Freedom House, a nonprofit organization that promotes liberty and democracy throughout the world, also said that Asian countries with the strictest controls on the media have suffered more from the economic crises than those where the press is relatively free.

The survey of 186 countries ranks each country's media as "free," "partly free" or "not free." It found that 1.2 billion people in 67 nations have access to a free press, 54 countries with 2.2 billion people have partly free news media and 65 nations with 2.5 billion people that do not have free press.

Its ratings are based on a series of questions in each of four categories: legal restrictions on news media, the degree of media independence from the interests of government or other political players, economic factors that influence news content and the frequency and severity of violations of press freedom.

The study reported changes in ratings for 1997. Countries downgraded to "not free" include Congo-Brazzaville, Djibouti, Kenya, Lebanon and Zimbabwe. Brazil was downgraded to "partly free."

The Dominican Republic, Hungary, the Philippines and

Sao Tome and Principe rose to "free." Albania, the Central African Republic and Zambia rose to "partly free."

Leonard Sussman, the author of the report, noted that government restraints on the news media contributed to the recent Asian financial crisis.

"Pervasive and institutionalized press controls allowed corruption, cronyism and had economic policy to flourish while the Asian public remained ignorant of and unprepared for the impending collapse," added Sussman.

He noted that Japan and the Philippines, both in the "free" category, show signs of weathering the crisis while Malaysia and Indonesia, in the "not free" category, have suffered the most.

Economist Sam Khan does not agree with that analysis.

"Having freedom of the press, a democratic institution and free flow of information is important in its own right. It's also important for the well-functioning of an economic system," noted Khan.

"But the absence of freedom of the press doesn't automatically mean that you're going to have disasters and its presence doesn't automatically guarantee that no financial or economic problems will occur," he added.

Kahan cited as an example Australia, a democracy that has economic problems, and China, which is not a democracy but which has escaped devastating economic problems.

## India will review culture, sports policy with Pakistan

BOMBAY, May 2: India's government will review whether to allow artists and athletes from rival Pakistan to perform in India, the Prime Minister said Friday, reports AP.

Atal Behari Vajpayee's comment came after activists of the Hindu right-wing Shiv Sena party disrupted a concert by a Pakistani singer last week.

The Shiv Sena, which is a coalition partner of Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party in the western Maharashtra state and in the federal government, are demanding that Pakistanis be banned from performing in the state capital Bombay.

The party said Pakistani artists were not welcome in

Bombay as long as Pakistan supported Muslim militants in India's troubled northern Kashmir state.

"I do not approve of such bans," Vajpayee told reporters.

Pakistani performers do not face such problems in other Indian cities.

"What should be our cultural policy and policy with regard to sports with Pakistan," Vajpayee said. "I will have talks with other political parties and arrive at a consensus decision."

India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir, a territory they both claim.

Vajpayee said India was ready to talk with Pakistan as long as all bilateral issues were discussed and not just Kashmir.



Former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto, right, answers a question during a news conference Friday at the first annual summit of the Council of Women World Leaders at Harvard University's John F Kennedy School of Government in Cambridge, Mass. Kazimiera Pruskiene, left, former prime minister of Lithuania, listens with the help of an unidentified interpreter.

## PA warns of breakdown in ME peace

RAMALLAH, West Bank, May 2: The Palestinian Authority Friday warned that a breakdown in Middle East peace talks in London on Monday could lead to a return of violence to Middle East, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported, says AP.

"Israel should know that a failure in the London meetings will mean a return to violence and chaos in the ensemble of the region," the authority said as it met in Ramallah under the chairmanship of Yasser Arafat.

Earlier Friday in Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said after talks with US Vice President Al Gore that it would take a "considerable stretch" to reach agreement in the London talks on Monday.

Netanyahu and Arafat are due to meet separately with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in London to tackle a US package proposal designed to resolve issues left over from interim peace accords and launch negotiations on a final

peace settlement.

"My optimism says I hope we will have an agreement in London but my realism says that for that to happen there would need to be considerable stretching," Netanyahu said at a joint press conference with Gore.

But Arafat warned that the London talks "aimed at saving the peace process from collapse, must come up with the results required to maintain security, peace and stability in the Middle East because their failure will open the way to a return to chaos and insecurity for all."

The Palestinian government statement quoted by Wafa added that, "Israel must appreciate the gravity of the situation and the current circumstances of the peace process."

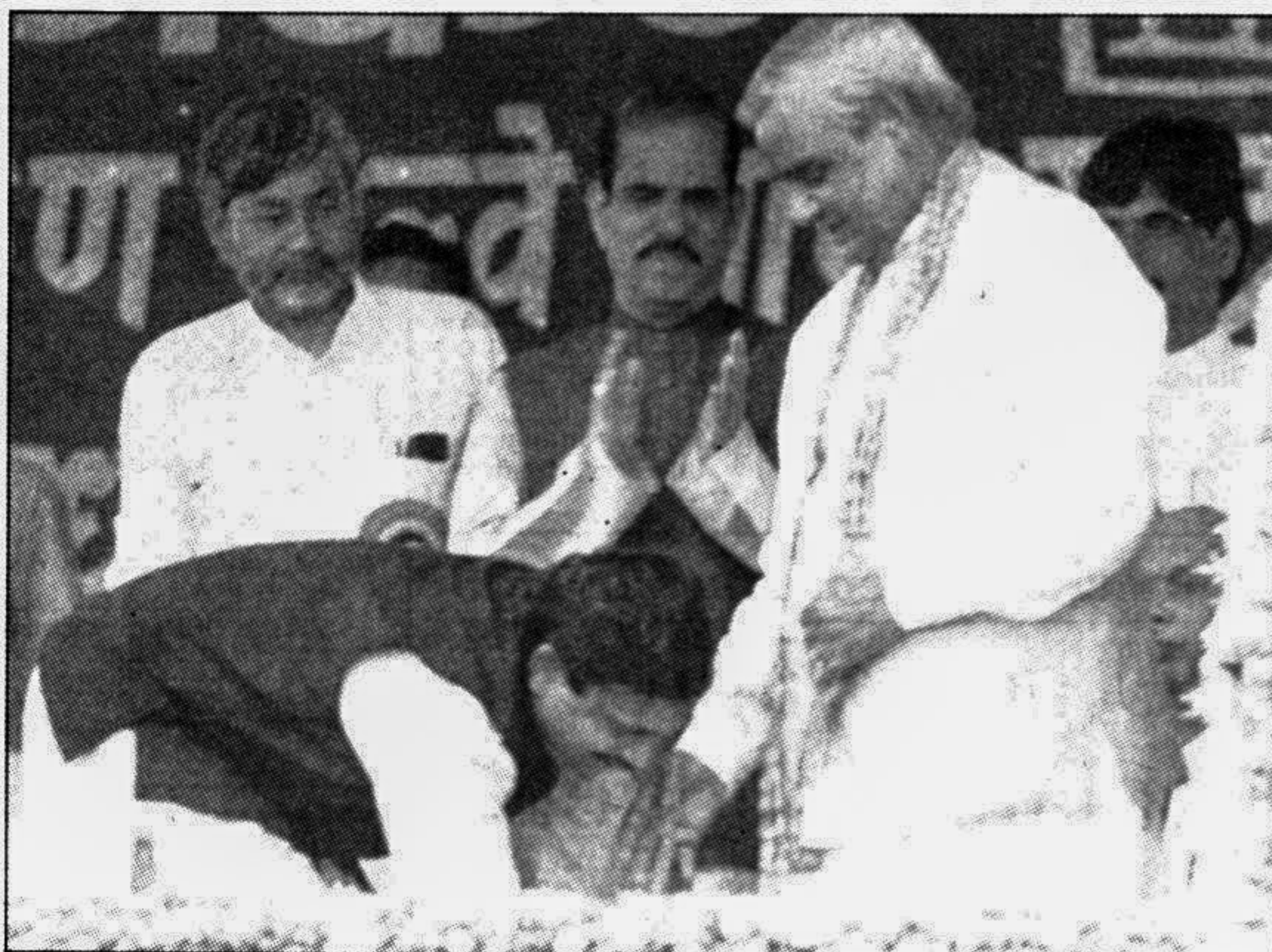
The London talks were a precious opportunity for a real breakthrough in the peace process especially as the international community realises the efforts which the Palestinians have made for these meetings to

be held, at a time when the Israeli government is continuing its policy of obstinacy and provocation, the statement said.

Netanyahu has rejected US proposals for a withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank and he insisted Friday that the Palestinians, who have reluctantly accepted the US compromise although it falls far short of their original demands, must make further concessions.

Not only Israel has to give but both sides have to find ways to address each other's needs if the Palestinians come in with a fixed position, saying Israel should budget, that's not a recipe for success," he said after lengthy talks with Gore.

Netanyahu repeated his position that Israel alone would decide the extent of the withdrawal. "These are complex issues which the US and Israel agree should be left in Israel's hands," he said.



A supporter of the Bharatiya Janata Party pays respects to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at a function to inaugurate a railway line in Ratnagiri, 450 kms from Bombay on Friday. During the function Vajpayee dedicated the 760-km Konkan railway line to the nation. At left is Nitish Kumar, Minister for Railways, and at center is Manohar Joshi, Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

## Economic crisis straining edn system: Suharto

JAKARTA, May 2: As student protesters staged rallies to demand his ouster, President Suharto said Saturday that Indonesia's economic crisis was straining the education system, reports AP.

In a speech marking national education day, the 76-year-old leader urged the Education Ministry to take steps to allow cash-strapped students to continue their studies. Students have complained they cannot afford to buy books or pay tuition.

The monetary crisis has placed a bigger burden on the government and society and educational institutions in particular," Suharto told a gathering of dignitaries at a state palace.

Meanwhile, students gathered at campuses in Jakarta to demonstrate against the government's handling of the financial turmoil, which erupted last year with a plunge in the value of the rupiah.

Trucks of anti-riot police parked outside at least two campuses where rallies were held.

The protests have turned increasingly personal in recent weeks, with students shouting demands for Suharto to step down.

Suharto, a former army general who has been in power for three decades, remains in firm control of the government.

## EU calls for immediate truce in Sudan

LONDON, May 2: The European Union on Friday called for an immediate ceasefire in the Sudan ahead of peace talks, and urged the government to facilitate UN emergency aid to the south of the country where thousands face starvation, reports AP.

The EU is increasingly concerned about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Bahr al-Ghazal in southern Sudan, the EU said in a statement issued by Britain, the current president of the 15-nation group.

## East-West split deepens in Germany

HALLE, Germany, May 2: Home for Hans-Joachim Richter is a decaying communist-era housing project at the edge of town. Not the most appealing place to live, but still, the 52-year-old policeman is ahead of many eastern Germans: He has a job, reports AP.

Even so, he can't shake anger about feeling short-changed in a country that has been united for nearly eight years. "We're not equal citizens," he complains. "They" — he means the federal government far to the west in Bonn — "definitely haven't done enough for the new German states."

But what rankles is not just that the east remains economically behind, with unemployment twice as high as in the west. It's the broken promises of traditional German centrist politics that have led to growing estrangement among easterners.

The "flowering landscapes" that Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his Christian Democrats promised the new citizens of a united Germany haven't materialized. The rival Social Democrats likewise seem to offer little that relieves desper-

ation in the east. Increasingly, it's the extremes that offer comfort.

As a result, mainstream politicians and academics now fear the economic gap is dividing the country politically, too.

Dissatisfied eastern voters have until now turned to the ex-communist Party of Democratic Socialism, a home-grown option for those who feel colonized by the west and cherish what seems like a simpler, more stable time under communism.

But in a shock for Germany's conservative political culture, young easterners are venting their rage by backing extremists on the right whose simple slogans speak to their frustration: "German jobs for Germans" and "Criminal foreigners out."

Many worry that the success of the German People's Union — the party won 13 per cent of the vote in Saxony-Anhalt last weekend — could be repeated in another eastern German state election in September, and that the splintered far right could unite for Sept 27 national elections.

It's already clear that Kohl,

who is seeking a fifth term, can no longer count on easterners' votes to help put him over the top as they did in 1990 and 1994.

Resentment over the pain of switching to capitalism has exploded, especially among people under 30 who are stuck without work or who fear for their jobs.

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With unemployment at about 21 per cent, the east is fertile ground for extremists. Taking into account government job creation programs, about half the work force in some areas is believed to have no real job.

And economic growth, once roaring with infrastructure projects, is dropping off as

western Germany's picks up.

Average wages remain about a quarter below those in the west and working hours are longer. Not many easterners can afford to splurge in the gleaming new car dealerships and shopping malls that are outward signs of progress.

In an area where entire generations remember the full employment that was part of communist ideology, mainstream politicians "from the west are losing credibility."

Even Kohl's Social Democratic challenger, Gerhard Schroeder gained little momentum from the Saxony-Anhalt vote. Promising economic reforms without excessive hardship, neither he nor Kohl seemed to capture people's hearts while campaigning there.

That was left to Gregor Gysi, an ex-communist leader. The east-west split is anchored in people's heads in Bonn," he told an appreciative crowd in the Halle market square.

For western Germans, the votes for the far right have fueled the widely held notion that easterners are self-pitying ingrates and politically naive.

## Local residents worried at probable 'Di Memorial Garden'

LONDON, May 2: Worried that the area around Princess Diana's former Kensington Palace home will become a tourist trap if a memorial garden is built, the local council's leader has called a public protest meeting, reports AP.

Joan Hanham said she has called the May 26 meeting because the government and a committee set up to look at ways of commemorating Diana's life, were ignoring fears that a garden would attract up to five million tourists a year, disrupting the lives of local residents.

"We've been making these complaints for three months now and I think it would be sensible to find out if the proposals we have seen are not going to have a damaging effect on the environment," said Hanham, leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council.

The government set up a memorial committee under the chairmanship of the Treasury chief, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, after Diana was killed in a car crash Aug. 31.

"The committee has been in touch with local residents and will do everything within its power to ensure that the full consultation process continues," said a spokesman for Brown, speaking on terms of customary anonymity.

## Strike on in Denmark

COPENHAGEN, May 2: The top labour leader in Denmark told a May Day rally of 100,000 people that unions must compromise in the five-day-old nationwide general strike, reports AP.

Hans Jensen, who heads the Federation of Trade Unions, said strikers could not expect to succeed in their demand for a sixth week of paid vacation.

It was the first indication of a softening by labour in the strike that has idled more than 550,000 workers and its significance was underscored by Jensen making the day when workers traditionally gather to proclaim their strength and determination.