

International

Refugees continue to stream into Thailand

Cambodia claims to have seized last enclave of Khmers in north

PUSING, Thailand, May 3: Refugees, including Khmer Rouge soldiers, continued to stream into Thailand Sunday as Cambodia claimed it had all but wiped out the revolutionary movement that brought three decades of terror, reports AP.

But Thai military officers at the frontier cautioned that the jungle-savvy guerrillas could still slip away from Cambodian government forces and regroup elsewhere.

Sounds of artillery and small arms fire punctuated the scorching, still air as lines of refugees arrived at this temporary camp set up by international aid agencies and Thai officials.

Cambodian leaders Saturday claimed their troops had already seized the last enclave of the Khmer Rouge in northern Cambodia, Hill 200 Astride, the Thai-Cambodian frontier.

"Everything was over yesterday," said Premier Hun Sen on Saturday, adding that government forces were consolidation their positions.

But Thai officers, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Khmer Rouge were still holding some high ground along the frontier and might prove difficult to dislodge.

The English-language Bangkok Post said Sunday that about 30 of the refugees were killed and 20 others wounded when an artillery shell thought to have been fired by Cambodian government forces landed in their midst Friday.

Thai military forces, the report said, fired warning shots into Cambodia after stray shells fell on Thai soil Saturday.

Among the some 20,000 refugees who had arrived or were making their way to the temporary encampment were a sizable number of unarmed

Khmer Rouge soldiers. But it appeared that at least some were merely escorting their families to safety before returning to fight.

"I have brought my wife and children here, and then I'm going back to the battlefield," said one guerilla. Thailand has a policy of allowing the soldiers to temporarily enter the country after disarming them.

The fate of the top Khmer Rouge leaders — Ta Mok, Khieu Samphan and Moun Chea — was uncertain. The leaders took part in a reign of terror during the 1970s in which up to 2 million of their countrymen perished.

Hun Sen dismissed an informal proposal by the United States to set up an international tribunal to try those leaders.

The group's chiefly civilian followers began fleeing the em-

battled area late last week, and the United Nations, International Red Cross and Thai authorities prepared a site near a reservoir five-km inside Thai territory.

On Sunday, new arrivals scrambled to find space and shade on an open field while aid workers put up more blue plastic shelters and distributed water to the parched refugees.

Children, most of them appearing malnourished, were taken to medical tents.

The International Red Cross said it feared a massive outbreak of the measles which could kill up to one in four refugees. Gastric infections were already prevalent.

The medical side will be looked at by different government departments and agencies. One of the main concerns is water," said Chusak Appanuan, a Thai district official.

Pro, anti-Arafat Palestinians scuffle in Baghdad

BAGHDAD, May 3: Scores of Palestinian delegates traded blows and spat at each other during a conference Saturday as Iraq's deputy prime minister and vice-president looked on in amazement, reports AP.

The brawl started as a Palestinian supporter of Yasser Arafat delivered an address. "Get this spy down. Get this spy down," anti-Arafat Palestinians shouted from the floor of conference, which had brought together about 500 trade unionists and politicians from Arab states to show support for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Pro-Arafat delegates responded with chants of "Long live Arafat" and in second members of the rival groups were punching each other.

Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan watched with bewilderment. Spontaneous outbursts of divergent views are extremely rare in Iraq, where public demonstrations are government-sponsored.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin, centre, talks during a meeting of the 12-nation Commonwealth of Independent States in Moscow's Kremlin, Wednesday. Leaders of 12-nation CIS on Wednesday gathered for the long-delayed summit. Russian Prime Minister Sergei Kirienko, left, Boris Berezovsky, right, executive secretary of the CIS. In the background Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, left, and Acting Deputy Prime Minister Ivan Rybkin. — AP/UNB photo

Arafat urged to rejoin armed resistance Israel, Palestinians still have to face toughest issues: Gore

RAMALLAH, West Bank, May 3: Progress has been made in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, but the toughest issues still have to be faced, US Vice-President Al Gore said early Sunday, reports AP.

"As an observer it appears to me that some progress has been made," Gore said after a one-hour talk with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in the West Bank city of Ramallah. "But the most difficult questions are the ones that are left to the last days and hours of the process."

The Palestinians have accepted an American proposal for an Israeli withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank. Israel's best offer until now has been a pullback from 9 per cent of the land.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested after a meeting Friday with Gore that he would meet the Palestinians halfway. Israeli officials have said in the past that Netanyahu was considering an 11 per cent withdrawal.

Under the interim agreement, Israel is to make another withdrawal in the West Bank, but Netanyahu has proposed that this be merged with the negotiations on the final or permanent settlement.

The Palestinians regard this as a violation of the agreement.

After this talk with Gore, Arafat said he appreciates the efforts of the American administration and presidency to put the peace process back on course. "Through honest and precise implementation of the agreements we signed in the White House under the patronage of President Clinton,"

Palestinian Planning Minister Nabil Shaath said Friday the Palestinians "are committed to the American proposal but not one inch less." He said the Palestinians have been assured by the Americans that the proposal would not be watered down by Israeli pressure.

Gore and Netanyahu were to have another meeting at Tel Aviv's airport before Gore's departure for Cairo early Sunday, an American Official said. Gore was to meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

On Monday, Netanyahu and Arafat are to have separate meetings in London with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in an attempt to break the stalemate. Gore urged Israel and the Palestinians to make



Seated under a picture of the Dome of the Rock Mosque of Jerusalem, US Vice President Al Gore, left, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat shake hands during their meeting in the West Bank town of Ramallah Saturday. Vice President Gore, on a four-day trip to the Middle East, came to Israel to participate in its 50th anniversary celebrations, and to meet with the leaders of the area. — AP/UNB photo

"maximum effort to move the peace process forward."

Arafat said "Undoubtedly, from the start we welcomed the American initiative that we hope will succeed, especially in the upcoming meeting in London."

AFP adds: the spiritual leader and founder of the militant Palestinian group Hamas on Saturday urged Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to rejoin the anti-Israeli armed resistance.

"We want unity and I call on Abu Ammar (Arafat's nom de guerre) to rejoin the front in the

fight against Israel because the regime respects nothing."

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin told a press conference in Tehran.

Yassin said that crucial peace talks between Israeli, Palestinian and US leaders next week would achieve nothing.

"Arafat has lost all his cards and he keeps making concessions to Israel," said Yassin. "It is now 50 years that we have been under occupation, so we must strengthen the resistance and put an end to the occupation."

US, China stronger ties likely

WASHINGTON, May 3: US Defence Secretary William Cohen on Saturday said Washington has a very good working relationship with China, with potential for stronger ties in the future, reports AP.

However, Cohen stopped short of calling the relationship "strategic partnership" a characterisation used by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on her visit to China last week.

"Not at this point we don't... but we have I think a very well developed relationship (with Beijing)," Cohen told the Cable News Network.

"It's been progressing in the recent years... I think that we are building a very strong relationship with China," Albright told reporters on her arrival in China Tuesday and added that the United States and China "have moved well down the road towards establishing a strategic partnership."

Relations between the two countries had been icy after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre of pro-democracy activists a landmark visit by Chinese President Jiang Zemin to the United States last October signalled a resumption of ties.

The chief aim of Albright's Beijing trip was to pave the way

for President Bill Clinton's return visit to China in July. Cohen refused to comment on a Washington Times report Friday about a classified CIA report that China has 13 long-range missiles with single nuclear warheads aimed at cities in the United States.

Gayoom in Kathmandu

KATHMANDU, May 3: The Maldives President Maamoon Abdul Gayoom arrived here this morning on a two-day official visit, officials said, reports AP.

Gayoom was received at the airport by King Birendra with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

"Five virgin girls" known as Pancha Kanyas, who are received in Nepal and considered auspicious, welcomed Gayoom by offering him bouquets and garlands.

Gayoom is in Nepal as part of a tour of South Asian capitals in his capacity as Chairman of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The SAARC, formed in 1984 groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

India faces bigger threat from China than Pakistan

NEW DELHI, May 3: Defence Minister George Fernandes today said India faced a bigger threat from China than arch-rival Pakistan, reports AP.

"China is potential threat number one," the outspoken defence minister told the private Home TV network in an interview.

"The potential threat from China is greater than that from Pakistan and any person who is concerned about India's security must agree with that fact," the network quoted Fernandes as saying.

Fernandes's statement came close on the heels of a first-ever visit to India by the chief of a Chinese Army, General Fu Qianwu.

India and China fought a brief but a bitter border war in 1962 which led to a 14-year diplomatic freeze between the two Asian giants.

Tensions between the two nations, however, eased following a series of high-level visits which began in 1988.

India says China still holds 40,000 square kilometres of its

territory at Aksai Chin in Kashmir. China lays claim to a large swathe of Indian territory in the far eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh.

US warns citizens to avoid travel into Pakistan, Algeria

WASHINGTON, May 3: The US State Department has warned US citizens to avoid travel to Algeria and Pakistan because of possible violence, reports AP.

In a statement released Friday, the State Department said that Americans who travel to Algeria despite the warning should "exercise maximum caution."

The State Department recommended-avoiding the use of regularly scheduled commercial flights, an armed guard escort for arrival at or departure from airports and armed protection during overland travel, at work places and accommodation.

UK accused of breaching UN arms ban on Sierra Leone

LONDON, May 3: Britain's Customs and Excise Service is investigating allegations that Foreign Office diplomats were involved in breaching a United Nations weapons ban on Sierra Leone, The Sunday Times reported, says AP.

The newspaper said that officials will also be questioned about colluding in a mercenary-trained operation which helped oust the west African state's military junta.

"We can confirm that the FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) contacted Customs and Excise some two months ago, suggesting there should be such an investigation," a statement from the Foreign Office said.

The investigation is "fully and openly with the investigation." The United Nations imposed sanctions on Sierra Leone in October to push for the return of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, the country's democratically-elected leader, who was ousted and exiled in a May coup led by Lt Col Johnny Paul Koroma.

The newspaper said the investigation centres around Col Michael Spicer, a former British army officer, and Peter Penfold, British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone.

The Sunday Times reported that Penfold has been accused of asking Spicer, director of Sandline, a British company which supplies arms and mercenaries, to help organise a coup to re-instate Kabbah.

The newspaper said Kabbah had paid Sandline 10 million dollars to arm and train a 40,000-strong militia to fight against the junta. Kabbah paid for the operation by mortgaging

12 more killed in clashes UN official in Lanka to study effects of war on children

COLOMBO, May 3: A top United Nations official arrived in Sri Lanka today to study the effects of the country's ongoing Tamil separatist war on children amid UN reports that the rebels were using child soldiers, reports AP.

The Foreign Ministry here said in a statement that Olara Otunnu, the special representative of the UN Secretary General on children and armed conflict, will be in Sri Lanka until Friday.

Otunnu will have talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga and travel to the former Tamil rebel citadel of Jaffna as well as several refugee camps in the north of the country, the ministry said.

It said Otunnu's visit followed appeals by Colombo to bring the plight of conscripted Tamil children in the hands of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to the attention of the international community.

The LTTE which is fighting

for an independent homeland in Sri Lanka's north-east has been accused by security forces of using children as suicide bombers and front-line combatants in do-or-die attacks.

In 1995, the United Nations Children's Fund reported that Tamil Tiger guerrillas were recruiting children above the age of 10 years and the group's dependence on child combatants was rapidly increasing.

Meanwhile, a privately-run weekly paper here Sunday reported that the military was planning a campaign in schools to recruit 15,000 soldiers.

The Sunday Times said the plan was aimed at attracting school leavers to the military, some 19,000 troops had deserted the army and new recruitment was necessary to bridge the shortfall.

AP adds: Five Sri Lankan soldiers were blown up in a powerful landmine explosion as continuing clashes between government soldiers and Tamil rebels claimed seven other lives, the military said Sunday.

The Saturday landmine attack occurred in Kilinochchi, a town 275-km north of the capital Colombo, when soldiers were travelling through the town in a motor tractor, said Col Ranjith Vitana, a military spokesman. One soldier was wounded.

Soldiers later shot dead a rebel in the same area, he added.

In three separate incidents the same day, soldiers killed five rebel-controlled highway. The town is located 245-km north of Colombo, the Sri Lanka capital. Four rebels were wounded.

Up north in the Jaffna Peninsula, a rebel lobbed a hand grenade at government troops, killing a civilian and wounding four soldiers, Vitana said.

Government soldiers have been trying for nearly a year to capture the 77-km highway through rebel-held territory, linking Vavuniya town with Kilinochchi.

Kofi Annan knew about Rwandan genocide plans?

NEW YORK, May 3: Kofi Annan, now UN Secretary-General, knew months in advance about plans by the Rwandan government to exterminate minority Tutsis, but his office ordered UN peacekeepers not to intervene, according to a report appearing in Monday's edition of The New Yorker magazine, reports AP.

Annan was the head of UN peacekeeping operations on Jan. 11, 1994, when the commander of UN forces in Rwanda warned the world body that the Kigali government was planning to slaughter Tutsis.

In a fax sent to UN headquarters in New York, the commander quoted a senior Rwandan security official as saying he had been ordered to register all Tutsis in Kigali for the purpose, he suspected, of "their extermination."

In reply, Annan's office ordered the UN commander, Gen. Romeo Dallaire, not to protect the information or take military action to confiscate arms stockpiles. Annan was aware of the order, said his aide, Iqbal Riza, who signed the response.

"I was responsible," Riza, still Annan's deputy, told The New Yorker when shown a copy of the order. "This is not to say that Mr. Annan was oblivious of what was going on. No Part of my responsibility was to keep him informed."

The Rwandan genocide erupted April 6, 1994, and by the time it was over three months later, Hutu extremists had killed at least 500,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. French, Belgian and US officials have denied they had any warning of a government-orchestrated slaughter.

In a letter to the Belgian government last year, Annan refused to let Dallaire break a non-disclosure agreement and testify before a Belgian panel investigating the events in Rwanda because he did not believe it was "in the interest of the organization."

But a copy of the response sent from UN headquarters and obtained by New Yorker correspondent Philip Gourevitch, showed that Annan was responsible for the decision.

Off the Record

Longest lunch, shortest summit

BRUSSELS: European leaders' appetite for celebrating the launch of their single currency faded after a lunch that went on and on, reports AP.

A bitter war of words over who should run Europe's central bank broke out when lunch started Saturday. European Union protocol meant it could not be settled during the official summit, so lunch went on for 11 hours. Once lunch was out of the way, the summit was wrapped up in 30 minutes.

"It's been the longest lunch ever. It has to go in the Guinness Book of Records," said Belgian Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene, whose girth underscores a vast experience with lunches.

Hope of an agreement swung back and forth. Early evening, Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern said a deal was done. German officials quickly denied that.

That was already long after the leaders finished their salmon and scallop tartare with shrimp sauce, their fillet of lamb with fresh morel mushrooms and even their dark chocolate parfait, whisky-flavored custard and ice cream.



A Tibetan schoolchild cries during the funeral of Thupten Ngodup in Dharmasala 400-km north of New Delhi on Friday. Ngodup, 50, died Wednesday two days after he burned himself in New Delhi because Indian police forcibly ended a six-week hunger strike by other pro-independence Tibetans. — AP/UNB Photo

BRIEFLY

Di's butler loses accommodation: Paul Burrell, butler to the late Diana, Princess of Wales, who called him "my rock," is being forced out of his grace and favour apartment in Kensington Palace, despite a request to the queen to let him stay, AFP reports from London.

Burrell, 39, who is now involved with the princess's memorial fund, had given the high level of London rents as the reason the Queen should let him remain in the three-bedroom flat in Diana's former home.

US citizen beaten up in Moscow: A US national of African origin was beaten up by a gang of right-wing skinheads Saturday in a park in western Moscow, the US embassy here said, AFP reports from Moscow.

Embassy spokesman Richard Hoagland said the victim, whom he did not name, was shopping in the area around the Fli park when the skinheads pounded. In a communique, the embassy urged US citizens, particularly those of African or Asian origin, to take care in areas such as Fli where skinheads are known to be active.

UNESCO DG in Qatar: Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, received UNESCO Director General Federico Mayor Aragosa Saturday, the official QNA news agency said, AFP reports from Doha.

The chief of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation arrived here early Saturday for a two-day visit concerning cooperation between his agency and Qatar on educational and cultural matters.

Sudan govt to join peace talks: Sudan will send a delegation to Nairobi for two days of peace talks starting Monday with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the official Suna news agency said Saturday, AFP says from Khartoum.

The delegation was to leave today, led by first vice president Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, who led the government side in last November's inconclusive round of talks said the agency.

US urged to renew ties with Iran: Saudi Arabia has urged the United States to renew contacts with Iran during a visit to the kingdom by US Vice-President Al Gore, diplomats here said today, AFP reports from Riyadh.

King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah told visiting Gore that Iran's policies have changed since moderate President Mohammad Khatami came to power in August and encouraged Gore to set up contacts with Tehran, a western diplomat said.

Americans admire Hillary for loyalty to Bill Clinton

WASHINGTON, May 3: Most Americans, 62 per cent say they admire first lady Hillary Clinton's loyalty to President Bill Clinton through the white house sex-and-perjury scandal, US news and World report said Saturday, reports AP.

However, 27 per cent question her judgement in so firmly defending Clinton, who is being investigated by a special prosecutor on allegations he lied under oath about an affair with a former White House intern, according to a poll released by the magazine says.

Fifty-one per cent of Americans disagree with Hillary Clinton's contention that her husband's problems stem from a long-running "right-wing conspiracy" to oust him from office. Only 39 per cent of the 1,000 adults polled April 27-30 agree with her assertion, according to the poll.

Singapore running out of graveyards

SINGAPORE, May 3: Singapore is running out of graveyards, with cremation the only possible way of prolonging the lifespan of the island's last cemetery, The Sunday Times daily reported, reports AP.

Based on projections, the only Singapore graveyard left, Choa Chu Kang cemetery, will hang up the "full house" sign 15 years from now, with 232 hectares out of the 318 hectares already occupied.