



Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, right, is greeted by Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga Tuesday, in Colombo, Sri Lanka before the South Asian (SAARC) summit. — AP/UNB photo.



Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif arrives Tuesday in Colombo, Sri Lanka to participate in the South Asian (SAARC) summit. — AP/UNB photo

Narayanan defends India's nuclear test

NEW DELHI, July 29: Indian President KR Narayanan on Tuesday defended the country's nuclear tests and said they were not aimed at "blasting" New Delhi into the nuclear club, reports AFP.

Narayanan told a conference of scientists in the southern city of Bangalore that India's May nuclear explosion would further the cause of eliminating weapons of mass destruction.

The nuclear tests were not aimed to blast our way into the nuclear club.

"It is my belief that India's nuclear weapon capability will act as a catalytic agent in the international efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of the earth Narayanan was quoted by the Press Trust of India as saying.

Narayanan said India had not conducted nuclear tests for years in the hope there would be substantial progress in nuclear disarmament by "great powers."

"But our pleadings went unheeded and these powers were only refining the destructive capacity of their vast nuclear weapons arsenals instead of making genuine efforts to reduce and eliminate these weapons, he said.

India conducted its first nuclear tests in 1974 and followed it with five more tests on May 11 and 13, that sparked off tit-for-tat blasts by arch-rivals Pakistan.

Those tests provoked global condemnations and sanctions.

The five declared nuclear powers — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States have refused to recognise India as nuclear power as it has not signed the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Narayanan said India had "consistently" pleaded for disarmament and elimination of nuclear weapons.

"India had declared its nuclear option by implication even before it became independent and the peaceful objective of its scientific development had been declared time and again.

Obuchi almost certain to win Japan's new PM to be elected today

TOKYO, July 29: Humiliated by a stunning defeat in Parliamentary elections and bleeding from an internal battle to find a new leader, Japan's ruling party heads towards this week's vote for a new premier looking hobbled and divided, reports AP.

Parliament on Thursday convenes to vote for Japan's new prime minister and the ruling party's choice of colourless Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi is almost certain to win because the party controls the legislature's powerful lower house.

But if things are bad for the ruling Liberal Democrats, they need only to look at the opposition camp for solace.

Although it is riding high on a wave of voter anger against the ruling party's mismanagement of the sour economy, Japan's main opposition Democratic Party has yet to shake off its image as a ragtag bunch of legislators united only in their desire to oust the LDP from power.

The Democratic Party's charismatic leader, Naoto Kan — Japan's most popular politi-

cian — is trying to portray his group as broad cathedral open to members with diverse views.

But many analysts see the party in a different light.

"The Democratic Party is like an inn filled with little bosses from a wide variety of groups," said Takashi Inoguchi, a professor of politics at prestigious Tokyo University. "They eat together but don't really agree on anything."

The Democrats only registered formally as a political party in April, and they consist of splinter groups from defunct political parties, whose members range from conservative hawks to left-leaning liberals.

Many of them entertain closer ties to politicians outside of their party than within it, Inoguchi says.

The Democratic Party's main hold on public hearts is their leader Kan, who became a national hero as health minister in 1996 by taking on his own bureaucracy and exposing its role in allowing the marketing of HIV-tainted blood products.

But the Democrats' inability to offer policies that distinguish them from the LDP could truncate the political honeymoon they've been enjoying in the wake of their major gains in elections for the upper house of Parliament on July 12.

In spite of its record low-popularity, analysts say the LDP will have little trouble forging an alliance with the opposition Komei party, which will allow it to pass crucial economic recovery legislation in Parliament's upper house, where it has a minority of seats.

That means the Democrats will have to rely on more than just voter dissatisfaction and the personal appeal of its leader to have any hope of maintaining its current high approval ratings.

Much of the problem for the opposition is that there is only one big issue obsessing the Japanese public — the economy — and almost everyone seems to agree now on the what has to be done.

Hun Sen threatens to stay in power

PHNOM PENH, July 29: Strongman Hun Sen raised the stakes in Cambodia's post-election turmoil Wednesday, saying that if his opponents refuse to work with him, the current government he dominates will stay in power indefinitely, reports AP.

Should his rivals carry out threats to boycott the National Assembly, denying the two-thirds attendance needed to meet and confirm a new government, Hun Sen said he will amend the constitution to lower the minimum to 50 per cent plus one, possibly giving his party sole control.

Hun Sen, ending public silence since Sunday's vote, indicated in an interview on Cambodian television that he wants to divide a newly formed opposition alliance and suggested one leader, Sam Rainsy, could join him in a coalition.

The threats amount to brandishing a constitutional coup following the bloody power grab Hun Sen staged last year to depose Prince Norodom Ranariddh as co-prime minister in fighting that devastated parts of the capital. The new disputes threaten to again plunge Cambodia into crisis af-

ter 30 years of civil war and the Khmer Rouge genocide of the 1970s.

Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy have complained of fraud in the parliamentary elections and demand a recount and reballoting in some areas.

The ruling Cambodian People's Party claims a landslide victory, but those claims are being undermined by independent counts.

"I wish to call on all political parties to honour the determination of our people," Hun Sen said.

"Winning or losing is normal as far as democracy is concerned. No one wins all the time."

Hun Sen said he could keep co-premier Ung Huot, whom he picked to replace Ranariddh after last year's coup. Ung Huot, a former member of Ranariddh's party, failed to win a seat Sunday.

Hun Sen said that he would not allow Ranariddh or Sam Rainsy to block the National Assembly from meeting to confirm a new government.

"The constitution may have to be amended to 50 per cent plus one to allow the new government to be formed," Hun Sen said.

Hun Sen was to travel Wednesday to the northern town of Siem Reap of talks with King Norodom Sihanouk, the prince's father. The king's acceptance of any power arrangement could be vital for Hun Sen to win international legitimacy and aid.

Earlier, partial election results released by Cambodia's top independent monitoring group confirmed that Hun Sen's party had staked a lead over its rivals, but less than the boasted landslide.

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The world waits to hear what Lewinsky has to say

LOS ANGELES, July 29: Six months after her private life became grist for the world's gossip mills and made her the woman most hounded by the media since Princess Diana, Monica Lewinsky is ready to talk, reports Reuters.

And what the 25-year-old has to say before a grand jury about her relationship with President Bill Clinton became an immediate subject of frenzied speculation.

With prosecutors agreement to give Lewinsky full immunity for her testimony before the grand jury investigating the alleged White House sex and cover-up scandal, the end game of an extraordinary episode in American politics seems near.

For six months ever since allegations surfaced that she had an affair with Clinton and became subject of independent counsel Kenneth Starr's snail paced, unrelenting grand jury probe, Lewinsky has been a silent figure.

The full figured brunette given to wearing hats from black berets to flower bedecked straw chapeaus has been talked about publicly by everyone but herself.

She is the subject of nightly tabloid TV talks shows, intense media scrutiny and bawdy fodder for comedians who have broken all the barriers of good taste to tell 10,000 or more

the papers. One night another famous former Brentwood resident OJ Simpson, made headlines for simply driving by.

While she remained mum, others spewed forth volumes. An ex-lover confessed an affair at a news conference with his wife by his side.

The person who has talked the most about Lewinsky is her one time friend and Pentagon co-worker Linda Tripp, who taped her talking about her alleged affair and then gave the tapes to Starr's office while letting selected media hear snippets.

Lewinsky's first lawyer, the gabby LA medical malpractice specialist William Ginsburg, made a host of contradictory comments about her appearing one Sunday on all five major TV talks shows. At times he seemed more of a threat to Clinton or this client than the Tripp tapes.

AP adds from Washington: From the start, when Monica Lewinsky hired her new lawyers longtime Washington insiders Plato Cacheris and Jacob Stein, the buzz among other lawyers was this: These guys strike deals and settle cases.

"Hiring them means she is looking for a deal," one defence attorney said at the time. "It is good news for the independent counsel, and it is not good news for the White House."

BRIEFLY

Rebels kill 2 in Philippines: Muslim rebels have killed two men and wounded four others who strayed into an insurgent-controlled area while chasing wild game in the southern Philippines, a survivor said yesterday, AP reports from Illigan, Philippines.

Arnel Libre, who suffered gunshot wounds in the arms and legs, said Muslim rebels shot them while they were chasing a wounded wild boar Tuesday in Maguing in Lanao del Sur province.

Police officer jailed in Vietnam: A court in the central province of Khanh Hoa has sentenced a police officer to 10 years in prison for beating a man to death, a court official said yesterday, AP says from Hanoi.

The court handed down the sentence Tuesday to Police Captain Nguyen Thai Dung, 30, for beating Nguyen Quoc Quoc, 18 to death in January, the official said.

2 killed in Colombia air crash: A small plane used by US authorities to train pilots in combating drug trafficking crashed in northeastern Colombia, killing the two Americans aboard, the US embassy said here Tuesday, AFP reports from Bogota.

The Turbo Thrush crashed during a training flight late Monday, 20 km from San Jose del Guaviare, where the Colombian police has an air base. Police pilots who flew over the site said the plane was completely destroyed.

Rain sets Yeltsin back to Moscow: Disappointed by 10 days of rainy weather in northwestern Russia, President Boris Yeltsin is flying back to Moscow on yesterday to continue his vacation elsewhere, AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin has been vacationing since July 18 at the government lakeside resort of Shuiskaya Chupa in the region of Karelia, near the border with Finland. But he's been stuck indoors the entire time as rains have lashed the region without interruption, Russian news agencies reported.

CNN apologises to Nixon family: The chairman of CNN has apologised to former President Nixon's family for the network's retracted report alleging the US military used nerve gas on Vietnam-era defectors, AP says from New York.

A copy of the letter sent by CNN Chairman Tom Johnson was distributed Tuesday by the Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation in Yorba Linda, California. The CNN report alleged that then-President Nixon had approved the use of sarin gas during the 1970 Operation Tailwind mission in Laos. Nixon died in 1994.

18 Hindus killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, July 29: Muslim militants massacred 18 Hindu civilians as they slept in the troubled state of Kashmir on Tuesday in two pre dawn attacks, Indian police said, reports AFP.

A manhunt has been launched after eight people were shot dead in a village in the southern district of Doda, 200 kilometres from the city of Jammu, when Muslim rebels broke into their home. Three others received bullet wounds.

Ten people died during an attack on a village eight kilometres northwest of the district, five people were reported missing.

A police spokesman said a curfew had been slapped on the two districts to prevent further violence.

Junta refuses to allow diplomats of Japan, US to meet Suu Kyi

MANILA, July 29: The military government of Myanmar has refused to allow US and Japanese diplomats to see opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose health was reportedly deteriorating as she spent a fifth day at a police roadblock Wednesday, reports AP.

"At this juncture the meeting is not urgently needed," Myanmar's foreign minister, Ohn Gya, told a news conference at the end of a week of meetings with other Southeast Asian nations and world powers.

Seven foreign ministers met with Ohn Gya on Tuesday to press concerns about human rights and to ask that the Japanese ambassador and the US charges d'affaires in Myanmar be allowed to visit Suu Kyi. She was stopped last Friday as she traveled by car to meet with members of her party, the National League for Democracy.

"Our proposal was quite a moderate one. This response is not satisfactory, that is clear," the European Union representative, Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schuessel of Austria, said after Ohn Gya's remarks.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer told reporters that another attempt would be made Wednesday to get permission for Western diplomats to see Suu Kyi, who he said was ill.

"I'm not very hopeful that we will be able to meet with her," Downer said. "Her doctor said her blood pressure is falling, and she's not so well."

Foreign ministers from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Japan, South Korea, the European Union, and the United States held a special meeting with Ohn Gya on Tuesday asking him to relay a request to his government that the impasse be resolved and the diplomats be allowed access to Suu Kyi on the highway outside the capital.

Another AP report says, Aung San Suu Kyi's doctors said the Nobel laureate was showing signs of dehydration as she entered a sixth day Wednesday

under siege on a rural highway, with Myanmar's military refusing to let her travel outside Yangon.

Two of Suu Kyi's personal physicians examined her on Tuesday in her white Toyota Mark II sedan, 32 kilometers (19 miles) west of the capital.

Members of her party have said her food is running out and they are concerned about her health.

Death sentence for rapist proposed in India

NEW DELHI, July 29: Rapists should be sentenced to death, India's federal interior minister has suggested, newspapers reported Wednesday, says AP.

The maximum punishment under Indian law for rape is 10 years hard labour in jail, which is not a sufficient deterrent, Interior Minister Lal Krishna Advani told parliament during a debate Tuesday on rising crime against women.

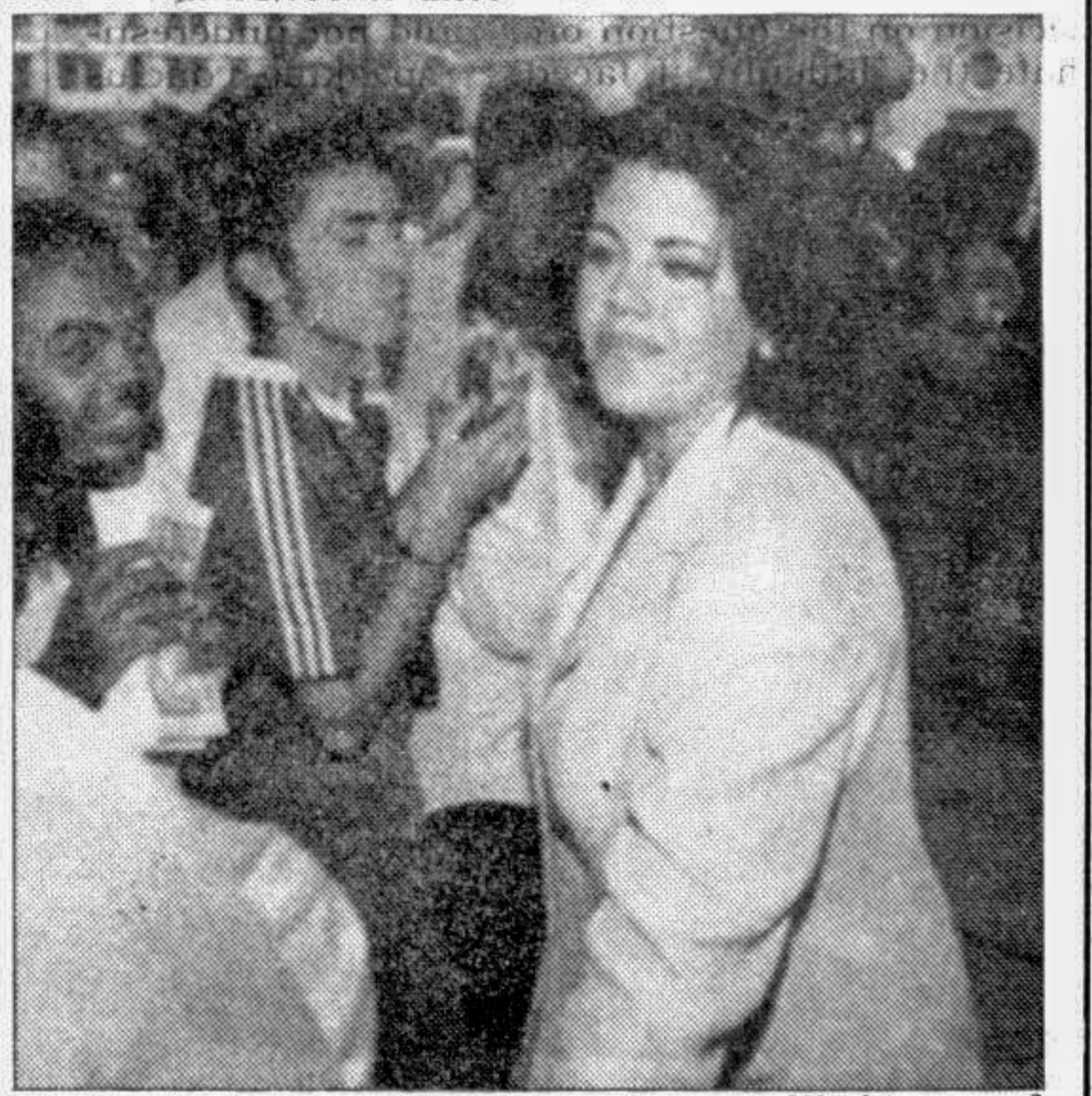
Advani said he will consult the legislatures of India's 31 states and federally administered territories regarding the proposed change.

Annan urges India, Pakistan to lessen tensions

UNITED NATIONS, July 29: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Tuesday urged India and Pakistan to lessen tensions in the region at a forthcoming meeting and to sign up to a global nuclear test ban pact, reports AP.

In a statement issued here, Annan hailed a meeting between Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sahrif and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on the sidelines of the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as an "excellent opportunity."

Annan hoped that when the two leaders meet in Colombo, they would "take this opportunity to lessen tensions in the region and resume a political dialogue in which to address all their differences."



Monica Lewinsky arrives at her attorney's Washington office Tuesday. Lewinsky has been given blanket immunity in exchange for testimony in Kenneth Starr's six-month investigation of her relationship with President Clinton. — AP/UNB photo

France, Egypt agree to create working group

PARIS, July 29: France and Egypt agreed on Tuesday to create a working group to promote their proposal for an international conference to try and restart the Middle East peace process, diplomats said, reports Reuters.

Direct participants in the conflict — Israel, the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon — would be excluded from initial stages but invited to join the conference once it laid solid groundwork for progress towards peace accords, the diplomats told reporters.

They spoke after Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa met President Jacques Chirac and Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine.

"I can now say that this proposal has been transformed from an idea into a plan," Vedrine told reporters.

"There is a real crisis, a paralysis of the peace process,"

Moussa added. Therefore we will have to move ahead to do whatever we can or whatever we should do as an international community to face the crisis."

European Union envoy Miguel Angel Moratinos, who is touring the region to present the initiative, said he had received "cautious" Syrian endorsement of the proposal.

I found in Syria a better understanding of what has been the idea of the conference," Moratinos, who is the EU's Middle East peace envoy, told reporters in Beirut.

Earlier on Tuesday Moratinos, who will visit Israel on the third and final leg of his tour, met Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara in Damascus. Asked if he had Syrian approval to prepare a conference he replied.

"I have okay in principle to start to prepare seriously the conference. But I mean they are still cautious."

The starving are still dying in Sudan despite food aid

AJIEP, Sudan, July 29: Another baby dies, and another mother cries out in the steamy night. For Chok Abiei Kueth, the screams are all in a day's work, reports AP.

He buries the dead for a living, a busy job in southern Sudan, devastated by war and famine. He used to trade tea, when there was still a market for such goods.

Relief food is pouring into southern Sudan in multimillion-dollar air drops — the world's largest relief operation. But starving Sudanese, in conditions so desperate that mothers stare at their skeletal children in horrified disbelief, are still dying by the thousands.

Why is the food aid not helping? Why did it take so long to get there? And why is nothing being done to stop the 15-year civil war that has created yet another famine in Africa's largest country?

An estimated 1.5 million people have died in the civil war, and the arable land lies

fallow. Ongoing violence keeps farmers from their fields.

The United Nations and individual governments condemn the endless killing and call for emergency food relief for an estimated 2.6 million people in rebel — and government-held areas of Sudan. But those with influence don't seem able or willing to enforce war.

Aid agencies can only deal with the war's effects.

The UN World Food Programme is air-dropping 9,500 tons of food per month — at a cost of \$130 million — into southern Sudan in the world's largest aid operation.

Earlier this month, WFP director Catherine Bertini urged the international community to stop the Sudan war. On Wednesday, she will address the issue again before a US congressional committee.

"We recognise we have an advocacy responsibility on behalf of people... to blow the bells and whistles to alert others to respond," said Michael Sackett,

WFP's eastern Africa regional manager.

"In the meantime we do the best possible job, short-term and Band-Aid though it is."

The United States, which tacitly supports the Sudan People's Liberation Army in its fight against Sudan's Islamic government, is the largest donor, with \$75 million in contributions this year.

Late last year, WFP estimated 250,000 people in southern Sudan would need food aid by spring because of poor harvests.

But in January, a failed attack by SPLA forces on Wau, the government-held capital of Bahr el-Ghazal province, resulted in widespread looting of food stocks and a government ban on further relief flights into the area.

An estimated 100,000 people fled Wau, abandoning fields that could have provided food.

It took two months of behind-the-scenes negotiations

before relief flights could resume. By then, famine had set in.

"Why do governments support the SPLA for years and not respond to a humanitarian crisis?" Lamented WFP spokeswoman Michele Quintaglio.

At a feeding centre in Ajiep, about 60 miles (100 kms) north of Wau, flooded with 70,000 people fleeing the wretchedness of war and hunger, death is never far away.

People so thin their bodies already appear mummified lie naked on mats in the compound, files swarming above them. Mothers curl their long narrow frames around infants who reach painfully for sagging, empty breasts.

Relief food seems to be fueling the war. And while everyone is ready to point a finger, few seem ready to take responsibility.

The SPLA, whose top officials live comfortably in neighbouring Kenya or elsewhere,

deny claims by relief agencies that they divert relief food for their troops.

A rebel spokesman this week accused the Kenya-based Operation Lifeline Sudan, the umbrella group for UN and other aid agencies, of corruption and inefficiency. UNICEF said the charge should be investigated.

Government forces often loot or burn food stocks if they fear rebels will get them.

The Sudanese government does not allow military transport aircraft, which have the largest capacity for aid drops, to fly into southern Sudan for fear they could be carrying arms for the rebels.

And the United Nations is criticised for cooperating with both the government — by not pushing hard enough against the flight ban — and the rebels.

Southern Sudan lacks roads, airstrips and other basic infrastructure. So the WFP is doubtful that a three-month cease-fire to allow humanitarian access to Bahr el-Ghazal

can help.

Doctors Without Borders is working frantically to double the capacity of the Ajiep feeding centre, the only one within six days walking distance, to about 5,000 people and cut down on the estimated 120 deaths a day.

Even dropping food from the air won't solve the problem. When a civilian C-130 transport plane dropped 16 tons of corn on Ajiep recently, hundreds of people stood along the edges was collected by local and workers, who are paid in food to keep them healthy enough to distribute the aid.

Old men, women and children scrambled in on their hands and knees to pluck every last kernel of corn from sacks that had burst upon impact. A handful could mean the difference between life and death.

"Our children are dying," said Lual Madut Lual, an old man who watched the mayhem. "Tell the world to come and ask why our people are dying."