

# Indians riot for water in drought-hit Gujarat

BOMBAY, Apr 22: City dwellers in India's drought-hit western state of Gujarat rioted as the municipal water supply slowed to a trickle, officials said today, reports AFP.

Gujarat Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel today appealed for calm after angry residents in the worst affected districts of Jamnagar, Rajkot, Junagadh and Bhavnagar rioted late Friday as they got tap water for just 15-20 minutes a day.

"Gujarat is facing the worst water famine in 100 years," said Patel.

"We cannot provide water the way we did under normal circumstances but we are doing our best. We need calm instead of violence," he said.

State government official Amarendra Nath Rakesh told

AFP by telephone that about 25 million people, out of the state's population of 42 million, were affected by the crisis.

Rakesh said the government was supplying water by tanker trucks every two days to 438 out of the 866 villages which have been officially declared "scarcity affected."

"The situation is expected to worsen in summer. We have appealed for central aid so that we can step up relief work," he said. A resident of Rajkot said private water suppliers were taking advantage of the drought.

"A bucket of water is being sold by private water suppliers for 45 rupees (one US dollar)," said housewife Nidhi Patel. "Water tankers in our neigh-

bourhood have to move around with the help of police protection lest they be looted."

She said people in Rajkot had stoned public property and even damaged state-run buses to protest government apathy.

State irrigation minister Jay Narayan said the drought had destroyed crops in 9,500 villages.

"I have never seen the dams with so little water in the last 10 years," said Narayan.

More than 100 of the 143 dams and reservoirs in Saurashtra, Kutch and north Gujarat are reported to be bone dry and others have water for barely a fortnight. The region only received 45 percent of its average annual rainfall last year.

## Delhi grants Rs 2b to Rajasthan, Gujarat

Reuters adds: India's Federal Government said on Friday it would grant nearly two billion rupees (\$45.81 million) in aid to the drought-affected western states of Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Over half of Gujarat's villages are battling the worst drought in 100 years and large parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are facing an acute water shortage.

It is feared the situation could worsen in coming months with temperatures expected to exceed 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit).

The government said in a statement Gujarat had been granted 874 million rupees and Rajasthan 1.12 billion rupees.

## NATO-led troops arrest war crimes suspect in Bosnia

BRUSSELS, Apr 22: NATO Secretary General George Robertson confirmed today the arrest of Bosnian Serb war crimes suspect Dragan Nikolic, and urged other suspects to turn themselves in, reports AFP.

In a statement, Lord Robertson said Nikolic was under open indictment by the UN's war crimes tribunal in The Hague in connection with a detention camp he commanded in 1992 at Susica, in northeastern Bosnia.

The camp, set up within a month after Bosnian Serb forces seized the town of Vlasenica in April 1992, was run by "military and local MUP," he said. MUP is a Serbo-Croat acronym for interior ministry police.

## US federal agents seize Elian

MIAMI, Apr 22: US federal agents seized six-year-old Cuban castaway Elian Gonzalez early today after storming his Miami relatives' home in a night raid, CNN pictures showed, reports AFP.

The boy was taken from the house in the arms of a female federal agent and driven away in a car. Angry crowds of shouting protesters gathered within minutes around the house.

## 16 supporters of Anwar charged with illegal assembly

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 22: Fifteen supporters of jailed Malaysian ex-deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim were charged today with illegal assembly and another with insulting the police, rights activists said, reports AFP.

"All 16 of them pleaded not guilty," said Lee Siew Hwa, an activist with Suaram, a rights group.

All of them were released after they posted bail ranging from 500 ringgit (132 dollars) to 3,000 ringgit at the magistrate's court, Lee said.

# Sharif to face trial in first corruption case

KARACHI, Apr 22: Deposed Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif will be moved from a Karachi prison within two weeks to face trial in the first corruption case against him, a senior official said today, reports AFP.

He will be tried by an accountability court at the Attock Fort, around 100 km northwest of Islamabad, said chief prosecutor of the National Accountability Bureau, Farooq Adam.

The case involves charges of corruption and relates to the private purchase of a Russian helicopter worth millions of dollars by Sharif in 1993.

Officials say the former prime minister, who was overthrown in a military coup in October, had not shown the purchase of the helicopter in his

income tax returns. Sharif, 52, was convicted by an anti-terrorism court here on April 6 of hijacking and terrorism and sentenced to life imprisonment.

He has filed an appeal in the provincial Sindh High Court here against the verdict.

The court acquitted Sharif's brother and five former senior officials in the case, but they remain in custody on corruption charges.

"We have already sent the helicopter case to the accountability court and he (Sharif) will definitely be shifted for trial to the Attock Fort within two weeks," Adam told AFP.

"There are other cases of corruption against him as well. He will also be investigated for those cases," Adam said, with-

out disclosing the details. Sharif's lawyer Salim Zia said he had no knowledge that the government was planning to move his client from Karachi.

"We have been saying that our client is innocent and has been convicted in a false case and now they are coming up with corruption cases against him," Zia said.

"He is in jail, his brother, nephew and son are in jail. They just want to keep him and his family and associates in jail," Zia said.

Several politicians and former officials are under investigation over corruption allegations. They include Shahbaz and Saif-ur Rehman, who headed an accountability bureau in Sharif's government.

## Koreas open talks to prepare for summit

PANMUNJOM, Korea, Apr 22: North and South Korea today opened talks at this border village to prepare for an historic inter-Korean summit scheduled to be held in June, reports AFP.

The talks opened at 10:00 am (0100 GMT) in a building named "Freedom House" on the southern side of the village that sits inside the demilitarized zone, a four-kilometer-wide (2.5 mile) band dividing the two Koreas.

Each side was represented by three delegates, with Deputy Unification Minister Yang Young-Shik heading the South's delegation and Kim Ryung-Sung, a deputy ministerial-level official on the standing committee of the North's Supreme People's Assembly, leading its delegation.

The talks are aimed at paving the way for the summit in the North's capital Pyongyang between South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il.

# Lanka troops resist rebel offensive, death toll hits 64

COLOMBO, Apr 22: Sri Lanka troops repulsed attempts by Tamil rebels to overrun military positions in the northern peninsula of Jaffna where at least 64 combatants were killed in ferocious fighting, the defence ministry said today, reports AFP.

At least 62 members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed by security forces in the past two days' fighting in the Jaffna peninsula, the defence ministry said in a statement.

It said two government soldiers were killed and another 31 wounded in the fierce battles at the southern end of the peninsula.

There was no immediate reaction from the rebels.

The defence ministry said the government had deployed Mi-24 helicopter gun ships and artillery to pound rebel positions and beat back at least six

boat loads of Tigers who tried to land on the Jaffna coast. On Friday, the government appointed a top army general to take combined leadership of the army, navy and airforce as Tamil Tiger guerrillas threatened to overrun a vital army garrison.

A retired army general, Rohan Daluwatte, was put in charge of combat troops of the three armed forces as well as the police following another field appointment of a major general, officials said.

The appointments came within 24 hours of each other as the LTTE said they intensified attacks in the Jaffna peninsula and were poised to isolate the strategic base at Elephant Pass.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga who is commander in chief of the armed forces is currently abroad undergoing medical treatment for her right eye which was injured in a

Tamil rebel bomb attack here in December.

Defence sources said the military had by Friday evening opened another supply route to the Elephant Pass base located at the entrance to the Jaffna peninsula that the military took from the rebels in December 1995.

However, military officials admitted the Tigers had seized a section of the main A-9 highway that was earlier used by the military to supply Elephant Pass as well as lyakachchi bases.

On Thursday, the military appointed Major General Janaka Perera to be the main field commander and mount counter attacks against rebel forces.

"Very heavy fighting is continuing and Major General Perera will be overall operations commander in the area," a defence official here said Friday.

## Earth Day turns 30

WASHINGTON, Apr 22: Earth Day turns 30 today, and environmentalists are celebrating with a huge demonstration in Washington while activists around the world focus on threats posed by global warming and other ecological dangers, reports AFP.

The largest gathering is set for the Mall in Washington -- the enormous grassy expanse that runs through the city center -- where 25-year-old actor Leonardo DiCaprio will be master of ceremonies at an "Earth-Fair."

Other gatherings are set around world, with major events in Tokyo and Sydney and others in Latin America and Africa.

Immediately following the first Earth Day in 1970, the US environmental movement scored its first important gains, with the Congress passing the Clean Air Act in 1970, followed by the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act in 1972. The US Environmental Protection Agency also was formed in 1970.

## Ethiopia recalls envoy to Berlin

ADDIS ABABA, Apr 22: Ethiopia has recalled its ambassador to Berlin, accusing Germany of spreading negative propaganda over drought and famine-stricken African country, the press reported today, says AFP.

A foreign ministry spokesman was quoted as saying in the government media that the diplomat had been recalled for consultations on Germany's "increasingly negative attitude towards this country."

Germany spreads anti-Ethiopian propaganda in the UN Security Council and claims through its mass media that Ethiopia cannot preserve its sovereignty as it is presently hard hit by severe drought, the spokesman charged.

## Hubble telescope turns 10

WASHINGTON, Apr 22: Ten years ago, on April 24, 1990, the US-European space telescope Hubble was launched to harvest secrets of the universe -- a mission it has accomplished beyond all expectations, sending back spectacular images of black holes, dying stars, and distant galaxies, reports AFP.

"Hubble's rate of discovery is simply unprecedented for any single observatory," says Ed Weiler, the associate administrator for space science at NASA Headquarters in Washington.

In its first 10 years, the Hubble has studied 13,670 objects, has made 271,000 individual observations and sent home billions of bytes of data, the US space agency said.

Information supplied by the Hubble has formed the basis for more than 2,600 published scientific studies thus far.



Schoolchildren hold a placard portraying the need for a clean environment during a rally as a part of a 'clean air campaign' to mark the Earth Day yesterday in New Delhi. The children presented a manifesto to the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee highlighting the issue of air pollution in Indian cities and appealed that effective action should be taken to protect their health.

— AFP photo

## Philippine troops attack hostage hideout

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, Apr 22: Philippine troops today attacked the hideout of Muslim extremists holding 27 hostages in southern Basilan island, a senior military officer and a rebel spokesman said, reports AFP.

Military chief General Angelo Reyes said an attack had been launched against the hideout of the rebel Abu Sayyaf group, which has demanded the release of three terrorists in US jails including the man blamed for the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing.

"The operation is ongoing and it was the decision of the local crisis management committee," he said referring to government negotiators.

Reyes said there were no reports of casualties on either side and did not comment on rebel claims to have killed 200 troops in the exchange.

The Abu Sayyaf, one of the most violent militant groups in the Philippines, on Wednesday

announced they had beheaded two male captives as a gift to President Joseph Estrada after he dismissed their demands.

Reyes said he was unable to provide any details on the condition of the hostages, who were among 54 students, teachers and a priest seized late last month. Others have been released.

A spokesman for the Abu Sayyaf earlier said in a radio interview that government forces had attacked the camp with mortars, helicopter gunships and planes.

"We killed about 200 government soldiers who attacked our camp," said the spokesman, who did not give his name.

The hostages hid in bunkers during the attack, he said, and none of them had been freed in the raid.

Regional military officer Colonel Ernesto de Guzman denied the government had sustained casualties, saying "it must be enemy propaganda."

## 15,000 dead, 50,000 handicapped after Chernobyl explosion

MOSCOW, Apr 22: More than 15,000 people were killed and 50,000 left handicapped in the emergency clean up after the Chernobyl nuclear explosion in 1986 -- a Chernobyl citizens group said Friday, reports AFP.

The number of invalids caused by the radiation disaster has multiplied by 12 since 1991, said Viacheslav Grishin, president of the Chernobyl League, which managed the cleanup at Chernobyl and the surrounding region, Interfax news agency reported.

Chernobyl was the scene of the world's worst civilian nuclear accident on April 26 1986.

Its number four reactor exploded, sending a radioactive cloud across much of Europe.

About 30 people were killed immediately and tens of thousands were evacuated from the region.

Radiation equivalent to 500 times that released by the Atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima was measured in the atmosphere around Chernobyl after the explosion, say specialists.

An exact toll on the number of dead since from radioactivity and associated illnesses has never been given.

Grishin said that 52,000 people out of 91,000 had fled the highly radioactive region.

In all an estimated five million people were exposed to radiation in the Ukraine, Belarus and Russia.

# Neighbours rally round Mugabe

## S African presidents call for donors to fund land redistribution

VICTORIA FALLS, Zimbabwe, Apr 22: Southern African heads of state who met with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe at Victoria Falls rallied around him on land redistribution, but made it clear they were deeply concerned about the stability of the entire region, reports AFP.

Their solution to the often violent occupations of white-owned farms in Zimbabwe was to call on donor countries -- notably Britain, the former colonial power -- to honour old pledges and provide the funds necessary to buy the properties to allow the Harare government to settle landless blacks on them.

Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique and Sam Nujoma of Namibia said after Friday's summit in this resort on the border with Zam-

bia that the land problem had been allowed to fester, and should have been addressed by the donors long ago.

"This problem is not going to go away unless it is addressed," Mbeki told journalists.

Chissano, who chaired the summit, said: "We think the donors, including Great Britain, have to deliver."

In London, Foreign Office Minister Peter Hain reacted by saying the money was available, but only if land reform was "within the rule of law."

Britain said initial redistribution had been tainted by nepotism and corruption and suspended payments with about 70 million dollars handed over.

A Zimbabwean delegation headed by Local Government Minister John Nkomo is due to visit London on Thursday to discuss the issue -- a trip the

presidents hailed as a renewal of dialogue.

Meanwhile, Southern African heads of state called Friday for Britain and other donors to provide funds to resettle landless blacks on white-owned farms in Zimbabwe.

They met as squatters led by veterans of Zimbabwe's independence war occupied hundreds of farms owned by white farmers amid increasing violence which has seen two white farmers and two black opposition activists killed in the past week.

"The central issue in this dispute is the provision of resources which would enable the resettlement process, agreed by everybody, to start," President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa told journalists at the end of a nine-hour summit in the resort town of Victoria Falls on the border with Zambia.

# China wakes to horror of traffic in women, children

BEIJING, Apr 22: China this month launched a massive police operation against trafficking in women and children, pulling back the curtain on a problem it once told its people and the world it had eradicated in the 1950s, reports AFP.

The extent of the crisis, revealed in figures released little by little in the state media this month, is alarming.

Some 1,083 women and 504 children were saved from pimps and people traffickers in southern Guangdong, 1,600 women in southwestern Fujian, 973 women and 59 children in Anhui in the east, 202 women and 25 children in northeastern

Heilongjiang, and 113 women and 23 youngsters in northern Gansu.

With the current police rescue operation scheduled to last three months, this year's national total will be much higher than 7,660 women and 1,814 children the government said were kidnapped and sold last year, which was still 11.4 higher than in 1998.

At the heart of media attention has been 15-year-old Kang Ming'e, whose name has made the covers of popular newspapers with her story, which brings to life the plight of thousands of babies and young girls.

Raised until the age of 12 in

Shanxi province, she moved to northern Hebei with other migrants after becoming an orphan. There she was abducted by a coal miner who she was forced to marry.

These two young girls, like most who share their fate, belong to the official class of Chinese migrants, authorised since the 1980s to roam the country to try to lift themselves from poverty.

In the past, peasants could not move around because of strict restrictions.

Their numbers are growing rapidly and estimates say there are now up to 150 million such migrants.

## Clinton, Gore questioned in campaign finance probe

WASHINGTON, Apr 22: US President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore were interviewed under oath this week by federal investigators looking into alleged abuses in the financing of their 1996 reelection campaign, the Washington Post reported today, says AFP.

A US Justice Department lawyer and four FBI agents questioned the president in his White House residence for four hours Friday afternoon, the daily reported.

White House officials said however that neither Clinton nor Gore is a target of the investigation and that neither was told to expect further interviews.

Administration officials said the president was accompanied by six lawyers and answered all questions, but officials declined to provide details.

Gore reportedly was questioned by the same Justice Department lawyer as well as two FBI agents. Gore told journal-

ists covering his presidential campaign that his interview -- also four hours long -- took place in the dining room of his Washington residence on Tuesday, according to the Post.

The vice president refused to discuss the substance of the interview and said he had not discussed the matter with Clinton.

"I volunteered to cooperate fully, as I have from the beginning," he told journalists Friday.

Friday's interview marked the first time Clinton had been formally questioned on the issue of alleged campaign finance irregularities since 1998, a White House official told the newspaper.

The Justice Department task force had interviewed Clinton twice before, according to a White House official. Gore's office said that the vice president had been interviewed by Justice Department investigators four times before, sometimes on subjects other than campaign finance.



A young woman listens to a man (not in the picture) read out details about himself as other men look on during the 'match-making ceremony' between prospective brides and grooms yesterday in New Delhi, for a forthcoming mass marriage between men and women belonging to the 'Vaishya community', a business community in India. Over 2000 persons are expected to find their life partners during this ongoing mass-marriage programme. — AFP photo

## Los Angeles gang member sentenced to 475-yr jail

SANTA ANA, California, Apr 22: A gang member and repeat criminal offender received a 475-year prison sentence Friday for a series of armed robberies, shootings and an escape attempt, reports AFP.

Efren Alex Garcia, 23, was convicted on 16 charges in December. Police say Garcia is a gang member in Anaheim, California, a suburb south of Los Angeles.

Superior Court Judge Robert Fitzgerald gave Garcia the toughest possible sentence.

Prosecutors charged that Garcia and his 45-year-old father, Dupe Serrano Coronado, went on a crime spree in January 1997, when over the course of a few days they committed four armed robberies and two shootings, according to court papers.

Coronado pleaded guilty to 13 charges in December and received only a 20-year prison sentence.