

Mojaddedi announces general amnesty for Afghan troops

ISLAMABAD, Apr 25: Leader of the 51-member Afghan Mujahideen interim council Sibghatullah Mojaddedi last night announced general amnesty for Afghan government troops, soldiers and officers, reports Xinhua.

The council's formation was announced formally in Peshawar, Pakistan late Friday night and the council members will take over power from the Kabul government in two days.

Announcing the General Amnesty at a press conference after the formation of the council, Mojaddedi said he hoped Afghan Mujahideen commanders will observe security in their areas.

Mojaddedi also called on friendly countries to provide food assistance to the Mujahideen as they have experienced severe difficulties and most of the areas are facing a starvation-like situation.

He appealed to the world to support the Afghans in their efforts to restore a peaceful atmosphere in the war-torn country and to reconstruct and rebuild their motherland.

Afghanistan was destroyed and the Afghan people could not reconstruct it, Mojaddedi said.

He also suggested to the United Nations to transfer Afghanistan's seat to the Mujahideen government.

Peace efforts in Bosnia stalled

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Apr 25: The peace efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina appeared stalled Saturday after the United Nations refused to send troops and the European Community warned that talks may be postponed, reports AP.

Sarajevo radio, monitored in London, reported little fighting overnight but shelling in some areas of Sarajevo.

BRRIEFLY

Mandela blasts De Klerk's proposal:

Nelson Mandela says President F W de Klerk is trying to hold on to power even if his governing National Party loses a multiracial election, AP reports from Johannesburg.

In a speech to be delivered Saturday, the African National Congress leader said de Klerk's proposal for an interim government was a "loser takes all" plan that would give minority parties almost the same power as the leading party.

Under de Klerk's proposal, announced Thursday in Parliament, blacks would vote for the first time in national elections to choose an interim government.

The three to five top vote getters in the presidential election would all get seats on a governing Executive Council.

Peruvian jets attack US plane:

A US air force C-130 cargo plane on an anti-drug mission in Peru on Friday was attacked by Peruvian jets, a Pentagon spokesman said here, AFP reports from Washington.

Spokesman Pete Williams said one of the C-130's crew was missing and another two were injured in the incident, which occurred about 100 kilometers (60 miles) off the Peruvian coast.

The drug mission had been approved by both US and Peruvian governments, he said.

CNN television said the missing crew member had apparently ejected from the plane through a door destroyed by gunfire from the Peruvian air force jet.

71 protesters held in USA:

Police on Friday arrested 71 abortion opponents who blocked a gate to a women's clinic while other protesters clashed with abortion-rights supporters, AP reports from Buffalo.

It was the fourth day of demonstrations by the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue, which has been trying to shut down Buffalo-area clinics. Group leader Keith Tucci said the protests would continue at least another weeks.

About an hour before the Buffalo GYN women's services clinic opened Friday, the 71 demonstrators sat down in front of a gate behind the building.

As police began making arrests, about 25 abortion-rights activists chanted "Pray, you'll need it, your cause has been defeated."

Sarajevo frees 200 hostages:

Some 200 children and UN staff held hostage for several hours Friday in the Bosnia-Herzegovina capital, Sarajevo, have been released, a UN official here announced, AFP says from New York.

Two buses with 200 children on board, and two vehicles with the UN peacekeeping force in Yugoslavia had been taken hostage by a Serbian militia in the western quarter of Sarajevo, according to a local television report.

All the children have been released, as well as the three UN officials who were with them, said Nadia Younes, a UN spokeswoman.

Bush to meet Gorbachev:

President George Bush will meet here next month with Mikhail Gorbachev for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a US official said Friday, AFP reports from Washington.

Gorbachev will meet privately with Bush at the White House during a two-week tour of the United States. A tentative date of May 14 has been set for the meeting, said an official who asked not to be named.

The parley will be the first since the last US Soviet summit in Moscow in July 1992, only weeks before the August coup by communist hardliners that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev will arrive in California on May 2 to pay a visit to former US President Ronald Reagan in Santa Barbara, before travelling to Fulton (Missouri), Chicago (Illinois), San Francisco (California), Atlanta (Georgia), New York, Washington and finally Boston (Massachusetts).

Benazir Bhutto off to USA:

Pakistan's former Prime Minister and opposition leader Benazir Bhutto left Karachi Friday on an unannounced visit to the United States, sources in her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) said, AFP reports from Karachi.

Bhutto, 38, will deliver lectures in Honolulu during her week-long visit, the sources said. Her sudden departure two days before a crucial by-election in her home province of Sindh surprised observers here.

Defence services Asia '92 show opens in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 25: The Defence Services Asia '92 show opens here Monday with nearly 500 companies from 28 countries looking to take advantage of the uncertain security scenario as the two superpowers pull out of the region, reports AFP.

Pual Rumball, the show's worldwide marketing agent, said the show was more relevant now than in the past because the stability created by the two super powers balancing each other in the region was being lost with Russia's withdrawal from Cam Ranh bay and the US pullout from the Philippines.

The tiger economies of the region are growing rapidly and they are more prone to problems and political instabilities, Rumball said.

Ghali urged to help stop 'Genocide' in Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, Apr 25: Hundreds of Kashmiris chanting anti-India slogans demonstrated outside the airport here Friday as UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali flew in from New Delhi, reports AFP.

A demonstration was also held by Kashmiris in Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistan-controlled Azad (free) Kashmir, reports said.

The crowd here carried banners with inscriptions urging the UN chief to help save their compatriots from "genocide" in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Witnesses said the limousine carrying Boutros-Ghali paused for a while outside the heavily guarded main gate of the airport and the Secretary General glanced at the nearby demonstrators, who shouted "end the carnage by Indian troops."

At least one tried to rush toward Boutros-Ghali's car —



ISLAMABAD: A policeman prevents a Kashmiri activist from approaching the car of UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali outside Islamabad airport Friday. Ghali arrived here to oversee the UN plan to bring peace to war torn Afghanistan. Several Kashmiri groups demonstrated to press the UN to take firm steps on the Kashmiri issue. — AFP/UNB photo

statedly just to hand over a memorandum — but a policeman grabbed him quickly.

The people had assembled hours before Ghali's arrival, in two separate groups near the airport gates.

The larger group was led by Rashid Turbal, head of the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami in Kashmir, and the other by Ammanullah Khan, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF).

For some time the two sets of demonstrators were engaged in a shouting match with Jamaat men chanting slogans for Kashmir's accession to Pakistan and the others for independence, a goal espoused by the JKLF, until the leaders intervened and united them.

Police said they had made no arrests and that the demonstrators had dispersed peacefully.

Officials here said although the focus of Boutros-Ghali's visit was on Afghanistan, the government would raise the Kashmir issue during discussions with him and draw his attention to "Indian atrocities on Kashmiris."

The UN adopted resolutions after the first Indo-Pakistan war over Kashmir in 1948 which envisage a plebiscite for Kashmiris from both sides to choose between union with India or Pakistan. It has never been held.

UN experts still unclear about Baghdad's nuclear programme

VIENNA, Apr 25: United Nations inspectors who blew up parts of Iraq's nuclear facilities last week said on Friday they were still unclear about the full extent of Baghdad's nuclear programme and its source of materials, reports Reuters.

Officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Iraqi officials were highly cooperative in helping them destroy buildings intended for the manufacture of nuclear bombs.

But it was still not clear if Baghdad would provide a promised comprehensive list of its nuclear facilities or reveal which countries or companies had supplied materials.

There is a very strange situation where the cooperation that they have shown performing this extensive destruction ... contradicts the side of procurement data, which they are still maintaining that they do not want to provide, said Dimitri Perreos, leader of the team which supervised the destruction of a building at Al-Atheer plant.

IAEA officials said they hoped Iraq would volunteer a full and complete report on its facilities next month at talks on long-term monitoring plans in Baghdad.

"This might be the next occasion, but it is in their hands," IAEA official Maurizio Zifferero told a news conference at the agency's Vienna headquarters.

Perreos said the IAEA was particularly interested in finding out how Iraq managed to obtain special steel and carbon-fibre rotors needed to make centrifuges.

"We still want to know who supplied this material," Perreos said.

Fate of CIS doubtful: Gorbachev

MOSCOW, Apr 25: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev predicted on Friday a rapid improvement in relations between Russia and Japan despite a long-running territorial dispute, reports Reuters.

But he was less optimistic about the fate of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which he doubted would survive. "I don't believe in the vital force of this association," he said.

Speaking at a news conference in Moscow after a whirlwind 12-day tour of Japan, Gorbachev said Japanese attitudes towards cooperation with the republics of the former Soviet Union were changing.

"This gives us great hopes for transformations in policies. We believe new approaches towards Russo-Japanese relations are being worked out," he said.

A hardline position is being replaced by a more flexible policy.

Tokyo has refused to sign a formal World War Two peace treaty with Moscow until it gives back four islands off northern Japan seized by Soviet troops in 1945.

But Japanese leaders in recent days have gone out of their way to signal a more conciliatory position.

Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe said last week that Japan was ready to ease its demands and accept a phased return of the islands — the two smallest ones first in return for a promise by Russia to return the larger two later.

Gorbachev, who now runs a Moscow-based think tank, said Watanabe was due to visit Moscow in May or June, ahead of a visit to Tokyo later in the year by Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

"Much has been changed and dialogue has begun. I think there will be very rapid movement, Gorbachev said.

The 61-year-old ex-president, who resigned his post as the Soviet Union broke up last December, said disputes between Russia and Ukraine threatened further fragmentation of the country he had tried to hold together.

"I am very sorry that every-



thing I predicted began to come true within two weeks, he said in reference to worsening inter-ethnic conflict.

"If this continues, there will be increased tension and reactionary forces could exploit the situation and deal a serious blow to the democratic process."

The Commonwealth has been undermined since its formation in December by conflict between Ukraine and Russia over the economic and military legacy of the Soviet state.

Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, hitherto one of the commonwealth's strongest backers, said on Thursday his faith in the new grouping was fading.

On Russian government economic policy, which has led to a sharp drop in living standards for millions, Gorbachev said market-oriented reforms must continue but time was running out.

The government will remain in office. It will have to correct and improve its policies. This is quite normal.

Asked about his own political future, he said he had never quit politics but had no immediate plans to run for a major office. In Tokyo, he hinted at an eventual comeback.

"I have no concrete plans and I do not intend to fight for any post."

Malians elect president today

BAMAKO, Mali, Apr 25: Malians choose their first democratically elected president Sunday, voting in a runoff between favorite Alpha Konare and Tieoule Konate, reports AP.

Konare was a popular minister of art, culture and youth before resigning from Gen. Moussa Traore's military government in 1980. He got almost 45 per cent of the vote in the first round of voting two weeks ago, and his Alliance for Democracy party won a big majority in national assembly elections in March.

Konare, 46, a former history teacher, has said he will bring other parties into his government.

Konate was his nearest challenger with about 15 per cent in the first round. The rest of the vote was split between seven other candidates.

Military leader Traore had ruled since 1968 and was overthrown by an alliance of soldiers and civilians in a March 1991 coup that followed days of rioting after troops fired on unarmed pro-democracy protesters.

A transition government led by the military was set up to run the country until this month's election.

At least 148 civilians were killed by soldiers before the coup.

10 injured in quakes near China-Myanmar border

BEIJING Apr 25: Ten people were injured by two strong earthquakes that hit the China Myanmar border area but there have been no deaths, an official said Saturday, reports AP.

Quakes registering 6.7 and 6.9 on the Richter scale rocked the area in northern Yunnan province Thursday night. Yunnan, in southwest China, shares a long border with Burma, which also was hit by tremors late Thursday night.

Chen Lide, director of the Analysis Department of the Yunnan Seismology Bureau, said the two quakes affected a sparsely populated area 200 kilometers long and 60 kilometers wide.

Off the Record

Patients can learn under anesthesia

ATLANTA: Patients may recover more quickly from surgery if they're given specific suggestions for healing while they're under anesthesia, new studies suggest, reports AP.

Researchers at the second annual Symposium on Memory and Awareness in Anesthesia presented findings Friday from studies that showed patients can absorb information while they're knocked out.

A team from Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, England, studied 51 cardiac patients. One-third of them heard a tape of positive therapeutic suggestions during surgery. Another third heard batches of word associations, while the rest heard nothing.

Patients who were played the suggestion tape — telling them they were doing well, or wouldn't feel much pain — left the hospital, on average, a day and a half earlier than other patients.

"These are still early days to invest in every operating suite buying a tape recorder to play for the patients," said Papworth's Dr Sunil Ghosh. "But this definitely does hold promise for the future."

Sculpture for 'Earth Day' threatens rare birds

SARASOTA: A large sand sculpture built on a beach to celebrate Earth Day may have damaged a nesting ground used by two threatened bird species, environmentalists said, reports AP.

Sarasota County and Audubon Society officials said Wednesday the 750-foot (250-meter)-long sculpture, created a week ago by Todd Brittingham and a group of volunteer artists, will have to be raked over before the snowy plovers and least terns begin laying eggs.

"There are not a great many areas where (these birds) can move to flat sandy beaches. This happens to be a unique spot," said Bob Parker of the Sarasota Audubon Society. "I think they (the artists) were unaware of the species."

Brittingham, who has designed sand sculptures in the area for the past five years, said he never intended to harm the birds.

Freddie is dead?

LONDON: Divers have denied reports of the death of Britain's most popular Dolphin, Freddie, in a fishing net, insisting they swam along side him on Friday, reports AP.

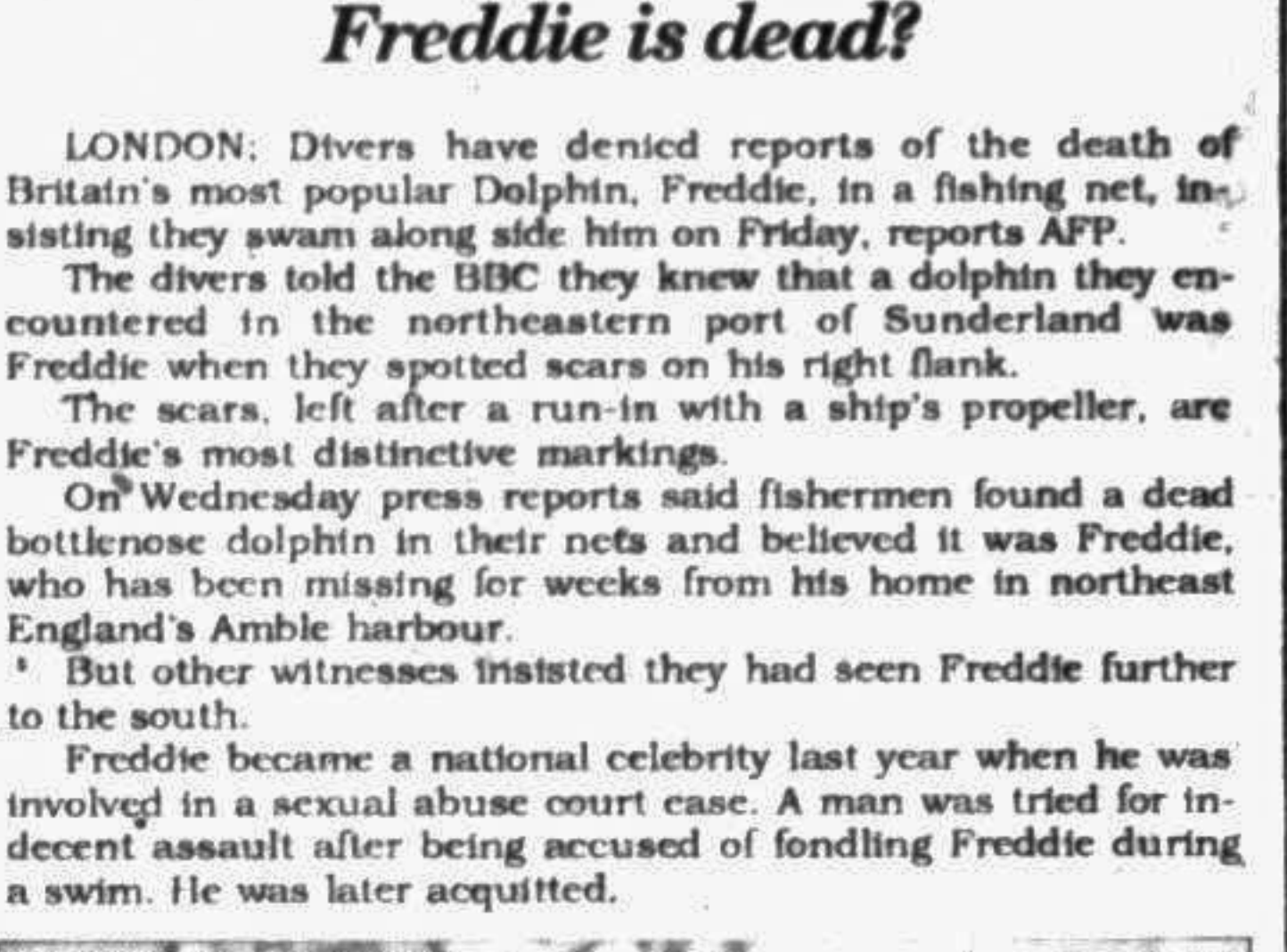
The divers told the BBC they knew that a dolphin they encountered in the northeastern port of Sunderland was Freddie when they spotted scars on his right flank.

The scars, left after a run-in with a ship's propeller, are Freddie's most distinctive markings.

On Wednesday press reports said fishermen found a dead bottlenose dolphin in their nets and believed it was Freddie, who has been missing for weeks from his home in northeast England's Amble harbour.

But other witnesses insisted they had seen Freddie further to the south.

Freddie became a national celebrity last year when he was involved in a sexual abuse court case. A man was tried for indecent assault after being accused of fondling Freddie during a swim. He was later acquitted.



LONDON: Mohammad Alam Channa from Pakistan shakes hands with tourists on a London bus on Friday, after it was announced at an official measurement ceremony that he is the world's tallest man at seven feet six and a half inches (2.3 metres), giving him entry into the Guinness Book of Records. — AFP/UNB photo

Russians in Crimea seek independence from Ukraine

SIMFEROPOL, Ukraine Apr 25: Crimea has ancient Greek ruins, Tatar castles, a stunning Black Sea coast, an important navy base and an angry majority of Russians who want independence from Ukraine, reports AP.

Russians have gathered nearly 250,000 signatures, enough to force a referendum on Crimea's status. Such a vote would likely increase friction between Ukraine and Russia.

"Ukrainians are nationalists," said Alexander Tsitov, a Russian who works in a cooperative in Simferopol, the capital. "They want to introduce their language, and that is no good for us. They want us to be their colony."

"There is a danger the tension here could be transformed into armed conflict."

Before the Soviet Union collapsed last year, Russians in Crimea worried little about being under Ukrainian administration. Now emotions are rising.

Alexander Marin, an unemployed Russian worker, accused Ukraine of taking food grown in the region. "I want Crimea to be free and independent," he declared. "We must leave Ukraine."

"My family has been here for four generations," said Anzhelika Ezboyova, a retired Russian kindergarten teacher. "Under no circumstances do we want to be in Ukraine."

Vitaly Fesenko, leader of the local branch of the Democratic Party of Ukraine, feels the Russians are wrong. He said they "can't understand Ukraine is an independent country and Crimea is in Ukraine."

Russia captured the Crimean Peninsula from Turkey in 1783, culminating its historical quest for a

warm-water port. Crimea's only link to be mainland is north over a narrow isthmus to Ukraine, and a strait separates it from Russia to the east.

The peninsula, about the size of Maryland, was under Russian jurisdiction until Nikita Khrushchev, who made his Communist Party career in Ukraine, signed it over to that Soviet republic in 1954.

Russia now is arguing with Ukraine over how to divide the 300 ships of the Black Sea fleet, pride of the former Soviet navy, based in the Crimean port of Sevastopol.

Russians in Crimea "can't reconcile themselves" to being part of Ukraine, said Pavel Yevgrafov, a lawyer who wrote Crimea's referendum law. "For many, it's not a question of independence, but a desire to return to Russia."

Advisers to Boris Yeltsin, president of Russia, said na-

tionals in the Russian parliament were drafting a resolution to annul to 1954 transfer and that he probably would support the measure.

Its aim would be to make Crimea part of Russia again or make it a nation in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Under that formula, the most important ships of the Black Sea fleet would remain under unified Commonwealth command.

The Ukrainian language seldom is heard in the capital of the Crimean Autonomous Republic, as Crimea is formally called. About 70 per cent of the peninsula's 3 million inhabitants are Russians. The rest are Ukrainians, Tatars, Armenians, Greeks and other nationalities.

Streets are named for such Russian writers as Alexander Pushkin and Maxim Gorky. A

huge statue of Lenin still dominates the square outside the president's office.

It is easy to understand why Russians enjoy Crimea.

In April, as most of Russia waits for spring, yellow forsythia blooms in the Simferopol's gardens. The grass is green, buds appear on fruit and nut trees, and sunlight warms, the golden domes of the large Russian Orthodox church.

Crimea was a playground for both the Czarist nobility and Soviet elite. The nobles built palaces along the coast and the Communist Party provided spas, youth camps and luxurious dachas for its privileged.

By law, the Crimean legislature must set a date for the referendum by the end of August. For it to be valid, more than 50 per cent of the elig-

ible voters must participate.

"Ukraine will certainly protest, but we don't know in what form," said Yevgrafov, the lawyer. "Ukraine will never agree to let Crimea go."

Some Russians are expected to vote for staying with Ukraine.

"You can't dig a canal and separate Crimea from the mainland," said Alexander Kondrakov, a Russian member of the Ukrainian parliament. "We already made one mistake in letting the Soviet Union collapse, and it would be another for Ukraine to go to pieces."

Despite the Russian majority, Ukrainians are confident they will keep Crimea. For them, Russian rule is as much a relic as the Greek columns and Tatar castles.

"History is against the Russians," said Sergei Litvin of the Crimean branch of the Union of Ukrainian Officers.