

Russian DPM says

Invasion of Afghanistan was a 'mad adventure'

NEW DELHI, May 5: The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan was a 'mad adventure' and Russia will not become militarily involved in the new central Asian republics, a senior Russian leader said today, reports Reuter.

"We paid in full our price for our mad adventure in Afghanistan both with deaths of our soldiers and the discredited diplomacy of the So-

viet Union," first Deputy Prime Minister Gennadi Burbulis told a news conference.

"Therefore our position is quite definite. I exclude the possibility of the spread of this military solution to the territories of Asian republics of the former Soviet Union.

"We are interested in the stability in Afghanistan and in the entire area," said Burbulis, who is on a three-day official visit to India.

An estimated 13,000 Soviet troops and over a million Afghans died during the 14-year civil war. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and had up to 115,000 troops stationed there at the height of the occupation in 1984.

Moscow completed withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan in February 1989.

Tigers kill 4 Lankan troopers

COLOMBO, May 5: Tamil guerrillas killed four soldiers and wounded several others during an abortive attempt today to overrun a military bunker in northern Sri Lanka, official sources said, reports AFP.

Iraq seeks UN Council meet on LA riots

UNITED NATIONS, May 5: Iraq has called for a meeting of the UN Security Council to examine "the dangerous situation" in Los Angeles and other US cities following several days of racially-charged riots, a diplomatic source said Monday, reports AFP.

In a letter to Ambassador Peter Hohenfellner of Austria, which currently holds the council's rotating presidency Iraq Charge D'Affairs Samir Al-Nima accused the US government of engaging in segregation based on skin color, the source said.

The US government has championed the cause of human rights around the world but is currently "in the process of using arms against innocent civilians, without concern for the precarious socio-economic

conditions" in which they are living, the source quoted the letter as saying.

Riots erupted in Los Angeles last Wednesday after a jury acquitted four white policemen in the videotaped beating of a black motorist. The rampage left 51 people dead and 2,554 injured, according to officials in Los Angeles. The unrest spread to a dozen other cities around the nation although on a lesser scale.

The Security Council should examine the bloody events that took place and continue to take place in Los Angeles, as well as in other American cities," the Iraqi letter said.

The United States has criticised Baghdad over the alleged repression of Iraq's Kurdish minority



LIMA: Peruvian Army soldiers in armored vehicles patrol the streets of the Peruvian capital Monday shortly after the arrival of a second mission of the Organization of American States (OAS) making a final effort to persuade President Alberto Fujimori to return Peru to democratic rule. Fujimori dissolved congress and suspended the constitution Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo.

31 more killed in Peruvian violence

LIMA, May 5: At least 31 people were killed in guerrilla attacks in Peru over the weekend raising the death toll since president Alberto Fujimori suspended non institutional rule a month ago the more than 100 authorities said yesterday, reports AFP.

Rebels of the Shining Path organization on Saturday attacked a police station and an army base in Oxapampa, some 400 kilometers (240 miles) east of the capital, leaving three police and two soldiers dead. An undetermined number of rebels were killed.

Later that day, police and soldiers pounced on the same rebel column in a stretch of jungle outside Oxapampa, killing 15 guerrillas. Two soldiers died in the clash.

Racial riots spread to Canada

Youths on rampage in Toronto

TORONTO, May 5: The city was calm early Tuesday after a peaceful demonstration protesting the Rodney King verdict and the police killing of a black Toronto man turned into an ugly night of rioting, looting and window-smashing, reports AP.

More than 25 people were arrested on Monday night's violence, police said, and at least seven were reported injured. None was in serious condition.

The rampage through central Toronto by as many as 1,000 people; both black and white, shocked many who regard Canada's second-largest city as safe and largely free of the racial tensions that bedevil many major US cities.

"You have to look at it as sheer hooliganism and vandal-

ism," Police Chief Bill McCormack said in Ottawa, where he was attending a police conference.

He said the rioters were "part of a fringe group of lawless individuals that seized an opportunity."

Groups of young people ran through the streets attacking bystanders, smashing store windows and stealing merchandise, including guns from a gunshop.

"People were smashing everything," said Keith James, 26, a witness, "you had people of all colors. Bricks went through windows and what they took from the stores went through other windows."

About half the shop windows were broken in one 15-

block stretch of Yonge Street, Toronto's main north-south artery.

The rampage stemmed from an afternoon demonstration outside the US Consulate by some 300 to 400 people that was originally planned as a protest of the acquittal of four white Los Angeles police officers in the videotaped beating of motorist Rodney King.

But its focus widened after Raymond Lawrence, 22, was shot early Saturday by an undercover policeman.

Police say Lawrence was a drug dealer and had threatened the officer with a knife. After a long chase through a tough neighborhood, Constable Robert Rice shot Lawrence twice in the chest.

Demonstrators at the rally

waved placards saying "White judge white jury, white justice, from Toronto to LA" and "Stop killer cops."

They chanted slogans as black leaders condemned racism in the United States and in Canada.

The crowd then set off through the streets chanting "No justice, no peace," a cry heard in the streets of Los Angeles during last week's conflagration in the California metropolis.

Eventually, the crowd reached City Hall, where violence broke out.

Police formed a chain to bar the doors of the municipal offices. Officers on horseback moved in and were pelted with rocks, eggs and cans.

Opposition calls general strike in Thailand today

BANGKOK, May 5: About 30 people encouraged by the example of pro-democracy leader Chamlong Srimuang joined a hunger strike Tuesday against the non-elected Prime Minister, reports AP.

Chamlong, the country's most popular politician, said he heard that the government was planning to break up the protest in front of Parliament. He said he would resist.

Chamlong began his fast Monday night after speaking at a protest rally that drew tens of thousands of people. He said he would continue the fast until he died or Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon resigned.

Opposition parties, activists, students and academics oppose Suchinda, a coup leader and former army chief,

because he is not an elected member of Parliament. He was given the top government post by a coalition of pro-military parties after they won the March election.

Suchinda led the coup that ousted a democratically elected government in February 1991. A military-appointed government ruled until the election in March.

Major rallies and a general strike have been called for Wednesday, when the government is to deliver a policy statement in Parliament.

Suchinda has dismissed the protests and said he would not resign.

The hunger strike campaign began April 7, the day Suchinda was appointed. The man who began the strike,

former legislator Chalard Vorachart, collapsed after 23 days. But he left the hospital Tuesday and resumed his fast in front of Parliament.

"Chamlong has political power so it is good that he joined our mission," Chalard said.

"I ask... democratic countries not to support this dictatorship," Chalard said. "Dictatorship is the real cause of poverty and suffering in this country and I think democracy is the only way to solve the nation's problems."

Chamlong, a Buddhist ascetic is widely known for integrity and incorruptibility in politics. He is the charismatic founder and leader of the Palang Dharma (Power of Virtue) Party.

Strikers close Frankfurt airport

FRANKFURT, May 5: The wave of strikes by German public workers escalated Tuesday to close the Frankfurt airport, the busiest airport in continental Europe, reports AP.

Public employees unions broadened their labour walkouts, now in their ninth day, despite a sweetened pay offer by the government. The two sides are scheduled to resume talks on Wednesday.

The closing of the Frankfurt airport will have the biggest international impact in the current wave of strikes. Frankfurt is a major hub for airline passengers and freight from around the globe.

Airport officials said the walkout by airport firefighters forced the cancellation of flights for safety reasons.

On Monday, the strikes caused chaos at a half-dozen other major airports in western Germany.

Peace monitors start pulling out of Bosnia

LONDON, May 5: European Community peace monitors began pulling out of the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina today after fighting intensified, the British Broadcasting Corporation reported, says Reuter.

BBC television, in a report from the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, said 21 members of the EC team began leaving at dawn. "The security of the team is jeopardised at the moment and there is no reason to keep non-essential people around," one monitor, Gaetan Brosseau, told the BBC.

Nine monitors, support staff and a special representative of EC peace negotiator Lord Carrington would remain, the BBC said.

The BBC report said the EC monitors leaving Bosnia would go to the Croatian port of split.

13 FIS activists get death sentence Gunbattle erupts in Algiers

ALGIERS, May 5: A gunbattle erupted in the capital on Monday after a military court sentenced 13 Islamic militants to death in the first major trial of the anti-fundamentalist crackdown, reports AP.

Meanwhile, wall posters appeared around Algiers saying fundamentalists would start a rebellion Tuesday, and fires reportedly were set at universities and department stores in Setif, Constantine and Bida. Cars belonging to civil servants were torched.

The attacks were claimed in a communique by the Committee to Safeguard the People's Choice, a group close to the banned Islamic Salvation Front.

The Islamic Salvation Front, which denies direct links to the armed militants, issued a communique Monday urging

Algerians to "isolate" the government. "Otherwise, Algeria will not know stability," said the communique, signed by Abderrazak Radiem, one of the front's highest-ranking members still at large.

A military court in Quargla, 800 kilometers south of Algiers, sentenced 13 men to death Monday for their roles in a November attack on a border post and ensuing skirmishes that left 30 people dead.

Hours later, unidentified gunmen opened fire on security forces during evening prayers near a mosque in central Algiers.

Police sealed off the area and residents retreated to their homes and bolted the shutters. It wasn't known if there were casualties.

The prosecution and sought death sentences for 15 of the 62 suspects tried over the past week. Seven of the 62, including one of those condemned, were tried in absentia.

Other sentences ranged from five years to life in Prison. Sixteen people were acquitted. Defense lawyers said they would appeal the convictions.

BRIEFLY

Bosnia seeks foreign help: Leaders of strife-torn Bosnia on Monday appealed for foreign military help as shells exploded and fires raged in the embattled capital, sending residents scurrying for shelter. AP reports from Sarajevo.

High-flying jets, some dropping flares to divert heat-seeking anti-aircraft missiles, traversed the sky above Sarajevo.

Bosnian Defence officials claimed federal air force jets attacked city outskirts. Sarajevo radio reported that planes attacked a relay station and two local TV stations went off the air. Those reports could not be independently confirmed.

Meanwhile, the Serb-led federal army Monday ordered its soldiers from Serbia and Montenegro, the only two remaining republics within the new, smaller Yugoslavia, to pull out of Bosnia within 15 days, the Tanjug news agency reported.

13 Israeli troops hurt in blast: Thirteen Israeli soldiers were wounded Monday in an accidental grenade blast during training at a camp in southern Israel, an army spokesman said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

The soldiers of the Guivati brigade were hit by shrapnel from an anti-tank grenade hurled by their instructor. One was in serious condition.

The defence Ministry announced meanwhile that a total of 17,418 Israeli soldiers had been killed since the state was founded in 1948.

New markings on US planes: The US military will place new markings on planes used in South American drug surveillance following the attack last month on an unarmed C-130 off Peru, a congressman said Monday, AP reports from Washington.

Rep John Murtha, who traveled to a US base in Panama over the weekend to investigate the incident, described the April 24 attack that killed one US airman and wounded two others as "an outrageous act." He also asserted that Peru was not cooperating with an investigation.

The attack "certainly will hamper our effort to bring this [drug industry] under control," said Murtha, a Pennsylvania Democrat who chairs the defence appropriations subcommittee. "I can't imagine that they didn't know it was an American airplane."

The Peruvian air force said its jets fired on the plane, which was 50 miles (130 kms) off the coast, because the pilot ignored warnings to land. Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori was quoted as saying the plane "did not exhibit any flag."

Colombian rebels quit consulate: Twenty-five members of a former Colombian guerrilla group left the Venezuelan consulate Monday after a six-hour occupation to protest against government policies and the killing of one of its members, Reuter reports from Bogota.

Authorities said the 25 men and women left the consulate in the border city of Cucuta, 2309 miles (370 km) northeast of the capital Bogota, on Monday evening.

The protesters, who agreed to give up their weapons two years ago when they signed a treaty with the government,

Gorbachev gets Reagan Freedom Award

SIMI VALLEY, California, May 5: Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev became first recipient here Monday of the Ronald Reagan Freedom Award for his efforts to end the cold war, reports AFP.

Gorbachev, who has been visiting Reagan at his ranch in Santa Barbara, said in a ceremony at Reagan's presidential library that in Russia and other former Soviet republics there were "more free people than ever before, people who are committed to the principles of democracy."

The two former adversaries later posed for photographs in front a chunk of the Berlin Wall.

'Massive arms flow into ME boosts chances for another war'

WASHINGTON, May 5: Arms are flowing into the Middle East at an alarming rate and in alarming quantities, increasing the chances for another armed conflict in the region, two experts warned in a forum held Monday on Capitol Hill, reports AP.

Ambassador James E Akins, former US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and Major General (Retd.) Matti Peled, now Head of the Arabic Literature Department of Tel Aviv University and a founder of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestine Peace, discussed the arms race in the Middle East in a forum sponsored by Churches for Middle East Peace.

In order to prevent the

possibility of armed conflict, suppliers must stop selling arms to the region and all countries in the Middle East must participate in a dialogue to control the flow of arms, the experts said.

The region is now "faced with an inundation of arms... never known before" in the Middle East, Peled underscored. Since the end of the recent war with Iraq, "estimated arms exports have doubled" to the Middle East, he said.

"If allowed to continue, sooner or later, we will be involved in an exchange of fire. Once acquired, these weapons are meant to be used in one way or another," he cautioned. Suggesting ways to address the issue, Peled stressed that

"in order to have meaningful dialogue on the limitation of arms in the Middle East, all countries in the region must participate."

Tackling the issue in the multilateral talks between Israel and Arab parties will not work "because Israel and the Arabs have adversaries outside the circle of the Middle East conflict," such as Turkey and Iran, Peled said.

"The whole issue should be taken up at the United Nations," he said, adding that the international organization would be under "less pressure by arms producing firms" than any single arms-producing country.

Ambassador Akins had earlier stated that Western nations could impose an arms

embargo on the Middle East, but that the pressure of arms manufacturers against such a measure is too great.

Akins stated his opposition to a proposed US sale of advanced aircraft to Saudi Arabia. Peled stressed that arms suppliers "should decide to stop supplying even though there is great demand."

He called on Israel to "open up its nuclear establishment and agree to destroy" its nuclear arms, on the condition that the United Nations Security Council undertake efforts to control and inspect nuclear sites throughout the region.

Reducing US military support to Israel is another way of addressing the arms race, Peled suggested.

Peled said that Israel receives \$1.8 billion in annual military support from the United States. This US grant to Israel requires that Israel allocate two dollars for every one dollar allocated by the United States, Peled said. The Israeli defence expenditure is therefore around five to six billion dollars a year, he said.

This figure is "far too big, far too heavy, and far more than it real needs," Peled said of Israel's defense budget.

Reducing the US military grant to Israel would then reduce Israel's own defense expenditures and "alleviate the burden on the Israeli economy," he said.

Off the Record

She remembers meeting Van Gogh

ARLES, France: Jeanne Calment is 117 years old, reports Reuter.

The world's oldest citizen according to the Guinness Book of Records, she can remember meeting the Impressionist painter Vincent Van Gogh when she was a girl.

For her, 80-year-olds are mere spring chickens. She has been widowed for longer than most people are married—more than 30 years—but still enjoys the good things in life like chocolate and the odd glass of port. She even allows herself an occasional cigarette after lunch.

A source of pride in her home town of Arles in the south of France, she is modest, even a little sceptical, about her title as the doyenne of humanity.

"The oldest in Europe, perhaps," she suggested in an interview with Reuter. "I guess that's already pretty good."

Her blue eyes have an Impish expression. Her relatively unlined face is framed by a cloud of snow-white curls.

Though now too frail to walk, she enjoys being wheeled out to sit by the small lake in front of the nursing home where she has lived for five years.

Before that, Jeanne lived in her own apartment above a draper's shop in this ancient provincial town where she was born on February 21, 1875.

Baby born on busy Brooklyn Bridge

NEW YORK: A newborn got an early introduction to commuting Monday: She was born during rush hour on the Brooklyn Bridge, reports AP.

Marabel Almodovar gave birth in a car on the bridge's westbound lane as housing police officers tried to take her from her home in Brooklyn to St. Vincent's Hospital, on the other side of the East River in Manhattan, said hospital spokeswoman Carol Ranaghan.

The officers wanted to take Almodovar to a hospital in Brooklyn, but she insisted on going to St. Vincent's.

When mother and child finally got to the hospital, they were declared in good condition. Ariel Elyssa Delgado weighed in at 3.6 kilograms, Ranaghan said.

Miss Universe title is tall demand

BANGKOK: Preaching for the pinnacle of the beauty queen business by taking the Miss Universe title is a tall demand—especially this year, reports AFP.

To take the crown at next Saturday's final the winner is likely to reach new heights, a point not lost on the organisers. "Visually, they look a lot taller" this year, said Sara Meza, Director of Communications for Miss Universe International Inc.

Miss Venezuela, Carolina Izsak, tops the list at 184 centimeters (six feet 1-1/2 inches), while Miss Belgium, Anke Van Dermeersch is one centimeter (about half an inch) shorter. Several others are close to that.

High heels add another three, four or more inches and leave many of the contestants towering above the crowd.

"All the national pageants are looking for a tall queen now," said Miss Bahamas, Fontella Chipman, who is 183 centimeters (six feet). "Everyone thinks that little height advantage pushes their girl up a little bit."

Even the swim suits the contestants wear are now cut higher up the hip to make their legs look longer, she noted.

"That's what it is all about," she said. "Everyone is looking from that edge."

Thatcher to be offered hereditary Earldom

LONDON: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is to be offered a hereditary Earldom. The Daily Mail newspaper said in its Tuesday edition, reports Reuter.

It said the peerage would be offered by her successor, John Major, in an honour list to be published at the end of May.

Life peerages—when the title disappears on the death of the holder—are common honours in British politics but hereditary peerages are rare.

If Thatcher accepts the title her entrepreneur son Mark would become an Earl when his mother dies.

Thatcher, ousted as party leader by a backbench revolt in November 1990, was Prime Minister for 11 years and took the Conservative Party to three straight election victories.

The mail said countings amongst her close friends suggested that Thatcher, 66, might accept the Earldom which would give her the title of countess.

She campaigned for Major in last month's British general election but stepped down as a member of parliament.

De Klerk shuffles cabinet Blacks boycott commuter trains in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, May 5: Hundreds of thousands of blacks boycotted commuter trains Monday to protest political violence, but police said six people died in continuing clashes, reports AP.

The dead included two African National Congress members killed in a clash with police in eastern Natal province. A police statement said the officers opened fire after a grenade was hurled at them while on patrol.

The train boycott appeared to be successful, based on reports from the Spoornet rail company.

Separately Monday, President F W de Klerk named new ministers of Finance, Defence and Constitutional Affairs in a Cabinet shuffle prompted by a surprise resignation.

Derek Keys, Minister of Trade and Industry, was given the finance portfolio to replace Barend du Plessis, the Finance Minister since 1984, unexpectedly announced April 25 he was leaving politics because of exhaustion.

Constitutional Affairs Minister Gerrit Viljoen, who also has complained of overwork, was replaced by Defence Minister Roelf Meyer.

Meyer, a political moderate, will play a leading role in the government's negotiations with black groups on a new constitution ending apartheid.

The African National Congress and allied groups have called for a six-day train boycott to protest attacks on commuters. Trains have become frequent targets of attack because of passengers' inability to escape.