

Russia plans to open talks with Armenia

MOSCOW, May 21 : After a warning by the commonwealth military chief against outside intervention in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, Russia is planning to open talks about the territory at the center of the fighting, reports AP.

Although Nagorno-Karabakh lies within Azerbaijan, it is populated mainly by Armenians, who want independence or alliance with Armenia.

Turkey—which shares with Azerbaijan the Islamic faith, a similar language and ancient animosity for the Christian Armenians Nagorno-Karabakh.

Commonwealth of Independent States commander Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov warned at a news conference Wednesday that outside interference could be catastrophic.

If there is military interference by another party, that will obviously place us on the verge of a Third World War and that cannot be allowed," he said.

Russia announced that talks would be held Thursday in the Armenian capital, Yerevan, between Russia's new Defence Minister Pavel Grachev and Armenian officials, the Itar-Tass news agency said.

Russia has proposed the

United Nations team up with European and Commonwealth forces to keep the peace. But Azerbaijan has said it does not want peacekeepers because it considers Nagorno-Karabakh its territory.

Azerbaijani has pressured Turkey to intervene in the four-year war over Nagorno-Karabakh after suffering two major military defeats and continued political chaos in the republic.

Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian, seeking to head off Turkish intervention, has condemned Turkish government statements criticizing his country for trying to take control of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The fall of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia could have repercussions in Nakhichevan, an enclave inside Armenia populated mainly by Azerbaijanis. For 12 kilometers, the area marks the only common border between Azerbaijan and Turkey and could be a flashpoint for expansion of the war.

Ter-Petrosian accused Azerbaijan of trying to "destabilize" the situation in Nakhichevan to encourage third-party intervention and said he was ready to cooperate with Nakhichevan to ensure stability in the area.

US suspends landing rights to Yugoslav planes

WASHINGTON, May 21: The United States suspended landing rights for Yugoslavia's national airline Wednesday to retaliate for Serbia's refusal to give safe passage to relief convoys in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports AP.

The measure becomes "effective today," said State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler, adding that the three weekly flights between Belgrade, New York and Chicago represent 80 per cent of the airline's revenues.

Suspending landing rights to Jat was a move that the United States took alone, Tutwiler said.

But she said the United States was working in strict cooperation with its European allies in considering further measures in response to "continued Serbian aggression."

Washington last week recalled US Ambassador Warren Zimmerman from Belgrade 24 hours after the European Community (EC) took the same step as the international community became increasingly frustrated with Serbia's vio-

lence.

The United States and the EC believe Serbian militants and the Yugoslav army are responsible for the violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina that since April has left some 2,000 people dead and hundreds of thousands homeless.

The Serbs, she said, had been warned that Jat's US landing rights would be immediately terminated if they did not allow relief convoys free passage to Sarajevo and reopen the airport there to humanitarian flights.

She said the Serbs had been informed by Zimmerman Saturday that two convoys—one from Belgrade and the other from Zagreb of 47 trucks had been delayed and would arrive in Sarajevo Friday.

Belgrade: Britain, meanwhile, asked the other four permanent members of the UN Security Council to consider sanctions that might include revocation of airline links, other trade measures and eventually an oil embargo if needed, diplomats said.

The US and British initiatives could signal a hard-nosed new international drive to restore peace in Bosnia after weeks of indecision and flopped mediation efforts.

Two months of fighting between minority Serbs, who opposed Bosnia's independence, against a majority alliance of Muslims and Croats has killed 2,225 people—almost double the prior estimate, state health authorities said on Wednesday.

They said 2,555 were missing, 7,660 wounded and 930,000 people homeless, according to the Yugoslav press agency Tanjug in a report from the Serb-besieged Bosnian capital Sarajevo.

republic abandoned the Yugoslav fold last year, has confronted Europe with its worst refugee crisis since World War Two.

French peace-keepers set out on Wednesday to help negotiate a release of the women and children refugees help in Serb-occupied territory outside Sarajevo, but were turned back by Serb gunmen at a roadblock.

A mortar shell thudded next to the convoy moments later.

There were two armoured UN vehicles. A mortar shell landed between them. They took some sharpnel," a senior UN official, who asked not to be identified, told reporters.

Opposition MPs stage sit-in in Lanka

COLOMBO, May 21 : The single largest opposition party in Parliament, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, will boycott an official committee to solve the island's nine-year-old Tamil ethnic conflict, Opposition Lawmaker Anura Bandaranaike said Thursday, reports AP.

Bandaranaike made the comment during a peaceful sit-in by 45 Opposition lawmakers in front of the Parliament to protest the government's handling of affairs in the House.

In the past two days, the government has rushed through a number of finance bills, ignoring Opposition protests.

On Tuesday, the government refused to answer questions from the Opposition, including one on the government's position on banning the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main Tamil rebel group fighting for an independent nation in the north and the east.

"We have decided not to participate in the select committee meetings until this problem is resolved," said

Bandaranaike, a leading Freedom Party member. Bandaranaike's party has 11 lawmakers in the 45-member committee.

"Dissolve Parliament, where there is no freedom of speech," read a sign held by an Opposition lawmaker. The protesters sat in front of the Parliament building for 40 minutes before the House was to meet.

When Parliament met, Opposition lawmakers resumed their protest, thumping tables and making speeches.

Acting leader of the House Wijayapala Mendis moved a breach of privilege resolution naming four Opposition lawmakers for misbehavior. Speaker Mohamed Haniffa Mohamed referred the resolution to the privilege committee.

The ruling United National Party holds 125 of the 225 seats in Parliament.

The select committee, appointed in August 1991 on a motion moved by Freedom Party member Mangala Moonasinghe, will seek a political solution to the island's ethnic conflict, which has claimed more than 17,000 lives since 1983.

BRIEFLY

Pretoria warns ANC: The South African government has warned the African National Congress against using strikes and demonstrations to quicken reform talks, Reuters reports from Johannesburg.

The government said it would not be intimidated by "revolutionary activities."

Referring to a coalition of anti-apartheid groups led by Nelson Mandela's black opposition movement, Constitutional Development Minister Roelf Meyer told parliament on Wednesday: "Parties trying to determine the rate of change through mass action and revolutionary activities will not intimidate this government."

40,000 killed by Habre's men: Agents of ousted President Hissene Habre tortured more than 200,000 detainees, and about 40,000 were killed, a government commission charged on Wednesday, reports AP from Ndjamena.

It said the killers should be tried and urged Chad's new government to dismiss alleged torturers still employed by the security service.

It recommended that President Idriss Deby accelerate the country's promised democratic reforms to keep Chad from "descending again into the horrors and injustices of the past." Habre ruled for eight years before fleeing into exile in Senegal after Deby and his rebels seized Ndjamena, the capital, in December 1990.

Deby, too, has been accused of summary executions, arbitrary detentions, disappearances and torture.

Tigers kill 5 soldiers: Tamil guerrillas Thursday killed at least five soldiers who had been preparing an ambush for the rebels in northern Sri Lanka, military sources said, reports AP from Colombo.

They said that heavily armed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas attacked a small army patrol that was returning to camp in Nannathan in coastal Mannar district.

The soldiers had spent Wednesday night in a vain stake-out for LTTE guerrillas who then waylaid them on their way back to base, the sources said. The rebels also suffered casualties when troops opened fire, they added.

Maoists kill 20 in Peru: Maoist guerrillas killed 20 members of peasant militias after "popular trials" in two remote Andean highland towns, officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuters from Huanuco.

In Lima, guerrillas exploded a truck bomb behind a military barracks in a residential district of the capital early on Wednesday, causing property damage but no injuries, police said.

About 150 Shining Path guerrillas entered the towns of Ullcamayo and Quilcapata, some 200 kms (120 miles) northeast of Lima, rounded up local residents and held "a popular trial" in the town's squares on Monday.

Egypt steps up support of Bosnia: Egypt stepped up its support of Bosnia-Herzegovina on Wednesday, urging UN membership for the breakaway republic and attacking Yugoslavia for "mass killing," reports Reuters from Cairo.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa urged UN action to compel Yugoslav forces and Serbian militias to withdraw from Bosnia.

The Egyptian people have started to question the responsibility of the international community and the United Nations in keeping silent on this mass killing of Bosnian citizens, both Muslims and non-Muslims," Moussa said in the open letter.

Sonia places wreath at Rajiv's cremation site

NEW DELHI, May 21: Rajiv Ghandi's Italian-born widow Sonia today offered rose petals and prayers at a riverside grassy knoll in Delhi where the remains of her assassinated husband were cremated a year ago, reports Reuters.

Sonia, 45, accompanied by her daughter Priyanka, 18 and son Rahul, 21, appeared grim but composed in the traditional white sari of Hindu widows.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao joined the family as they sat on the Dewy Grass, meditating to Hindu prayer chants and a melody by veteran classical singer Mallikarjun Mansur.

Imelda appears at court

MANILA, May 21: Former Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos appeared at a lower court here today on charges of violating currency laws, but refused to enter a plea in protest at her loss in the presidential polls.

Trial judge Teresita Flores said that as the widow of deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos would not enter any plea, a plea of "not guilty" would be automatically entered for her.

Marcos had said she would boycott all legal proceedings against her to protest the government allegedly cheating her of victory in last week's presidential elections.

Sikhs claim responsibility for abduction of Manchanda

NEW DELHI, May 21: Sikh separatists have claimed responsibility for the abduction of a senior Indian state-run radio official, and issued a new set of broadcasting directives, newspapers reported today, reports AP.

The Babbar Khalsa International said M L Manchanda of All India Radio (AIR), who was seized on Monday, would be killed if the government rejected the directives, the times of India and other dailies said.

The Babbar Khalsa, which issued the directives in statements to newspapers in Punjab delivered Wednesday, did not set any deadline for Manchanda's execution. It is the first time a media official has been kidnapped in Punjab.



NAGORNY-KARABAKH : Armenian soldiers fire on Azeri positions near the village of Hanatag in Nagorno-Karabakh Tuesday after a series of successful attacks. — AFP/UNB photo

Kabul yet to figure out war casualties

KABUL, May 21: "God bless the dead. May the communists who did this be punished," reports Reuters.

Six Mujahideen guerrillas prayed hurriedly over the remains of an unknown victim unearthed from a former government killing field outside the Afghan capital.

One sign of how commonplace violent death has become during the 14-year Afghan conflict is that the country's new authorities have not yet found the time to begin excavating the mass graves said by

local people to lie below the former tank training ground at Pol-i-gon.

Most of the few corpses discovered at the site so far have been unearthed instead by foreign journalists in search of story.

Local residents say bound and blindfolded victims were shot in groups before bulldozers covered them with earth, often under the supervision of Soviet officers.

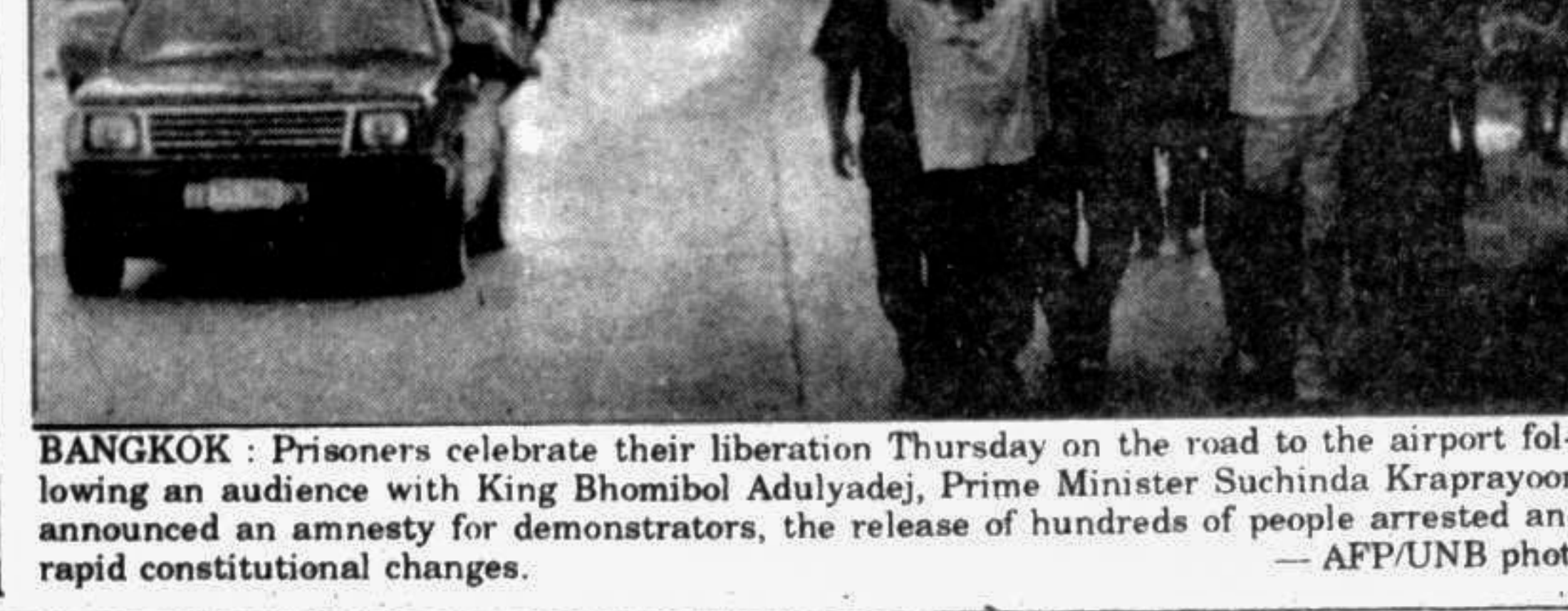
The killings in the 1980s at Pol-i-gon would in most countries be an unparalleled atrocity.

In Afghanistan, they are just one horror among many.

The scale of killing in the Afghan war, as a proportion of the country's population of fewer than 20 million dwarfs that of most other 20th century conflicts.

It far exceeds the casualties of the Vietnam or Korean wars or the Soviet Union's massive losses at the hands of the Nazis in the second world war.

The United Nations special envoy to Afghanistan, Benon Sevan, spoke recently of up to two million dead.



BANGKOK : Prisoners celebrate their liberation Thursday on the road to the airport following an audience with King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon announced an amnesty for demonstrators, the release of hundreds of people arrested and rapid constitutional changes. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Can I eat my wife's ?

NEW YORK : Ants, worms and crickets on the table are usually enough to ruin a dinner. At the first Bug Banquet, they were dinner, reports AP.

"Live caviar!" Robert Boyle, a member of the New York Entomological Society, said Wednesday night, crushing an ant in his mouth. He moved for another but was stopped by Raymond A Mendez, a Museum of Natural History employee.

"One each. Only one each," Mendez chided.

"Can I eat my wife's?" Boyle asked.

The banquet, held by the entomological society to celebrate its 100th anniversary, was so successful that the group said it will make it a profit-making endeavor with more exotic dishes in the future.

The scientists decided to hold the feast after choosing Gene Defoliart, a retired University of Wisconsin professor with expertise on edible bugs, as a guest speaker for their anniversary meeting.

Defoliart said he became interested in bugs as food in the mid-1970s while researching insects as a high-protein food for poultry. Insects are considered delicacies in many countries, he said.

Schools closed due to paper shortage

MANILA : The blizzard of posters, pamphlets and other advertising for presidential and nationwide elections has caused a paper shortage that will force the government to open schools a week late, reports AP.

Schools were scheduled to resume classes June 8 but will now do so on June 15, Press Secretary Horacio Paredes announced Thursday.

Paredes said there wasn't enough paper for notebooks and other educational materials.

The school break in this tropical island nation begins in April with the onset of the dry season and the hottest time of the year.

More than 87,700 candidates ran for more than 17,000 offices during the May 11 election and flooded the country with campaign propaganda.

Kennedy JR refuses to watch JFK

NEW YORK: John F Kennedy JR says he will not see Oliver Stone's controversial film "JFK" about his father's assassination and wonders whether the senior Kennedy would go into politics today "given the tenor of the times," reports Reuters.

Speaking publicly for the first time about his father, the 31-year-old lawyer said in an interview with ABC television's "prime time live," to be broadcast in the United States on Thursday, that he won't see Stone's film "because that's not entertainment for me."

Interviewer Jay Schadler asked Kennedy about the stories that have appeared about his father since his death, saying, "do you think that had been dealt with by the press... it would have tarnished the image we have of him?"

Kennedy, who appeared on the programme with his sister Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, answered saying, "I think the real question is whether or not given the tenor of the times, my father would have gone into politics at this point."

Schadler was referring to stories about the late president's private life.

Vasectomy much more preferable

BOSTON : Having a vasectomy, a simple and effective birth control choice made by one in seven American men over the age of 40, does not appear to increase the risk of heart disease or cancer, a definitive study has found, reports Reuters.

The study of nearly 30,000 men found no ill effects for 20 years after doctors cut the tiny tubes that carry sperm. But researchers said there was a possibility that after 20 years a vasectomy may increase the risk of some cancers, particularly lung cancer, which appeared to be unrelated to smoking.

The overall rate of cancer among men who had vasectomies was still lower than for those who had not but the researchers said more study was needed to determine if the increase after 20 years was cause for concern or merely a statistical fluke.

Yodoyman new PM of Chad

JAMENA, May 21 : Joseph Yodoyman, an administrative officer, was named Prime Minister of Chad by President Idriss Deby in a government reshuffle here Wednesday.

Under constitutional changes approved Tuesday, Yodoyman, who replaces Jean Alingue Bawoyeu, will become the head of government, a position that had previously been held by the head of state.

Shortly before the appointment was announced, Deby said in a broadcast speech that he saw the need for a "government of consensus."

Deby admitted that social tension was becoming "a matter of concern with economic stagnation and in an unfavourable international environment."

'CIA failed to predict sudden collapse of Soviet Union'

NEW YORK, May 21: The cold war may be over but CIA director Robert Gates fought a new battle on Wednesday to clear his agency of charges that it failed to forecast the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, reports Reuters.

Seeking to close the books on the Central Intelligence Agency's alleged poor intelligence about the last days of the former Soviet empire, Gates said in a speech the agency was reporting from 1989 onwards that the superpower was collapsing and that a coup was imminent and could fail if staged.

But the CIA director said the agency had made mistakes, especially in its analysis of Soviet economic strength and in underestimating the drain to the Soviet economy of its massive military spending.

Saying he wanted "to set the record straight," Gates, in a speech to the foreign policy association, listed CIA mistakes about Soviet power but said that overall the agency had done an excellent job.

He said the CIA had made assessment mistakes and that its statistical analysis, "while the best available east or west" ... described a stronger Soviet economy than in fact existed.

He also noted wrongly that CIA statistics were considered so good that even former Soviet Communist Leader Yuri Andropov said he relied on them.

But he added, "from a personal standpoint, I would contend also that our quantitative analysis always considerably underestimated the real burden economically of the Soviet military."

Answering questions after his speech, he said the CIA has seen little change in "the level of KGB activity in the United States since August 1991 (when the coup attempt failed). The United States is still their primary target, especially American technology. It might not be clear to the Russian leadership that this is taking place."

Gates, a Soviet specialist, has come under intense fire from critics for allegedly misleading congress and presidents over Soviet power and for approving assessments that led to the expensive US arms race with the Russians.

New York Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said: "The CIA can tell you everything you want to know about the Soviet Union except that it was collapsing."

In his speech Gates rejected such criticism, saying, obviously there were deficiencies in the CIA's work on the Soviet Union — things we did not know and areas where we were wrong. But the body of information, analysis and warnings provided to policy-makers and to congress were of extraordinarily high quality.

To claim that US intelligence in general and the CIA in particular failed to inform policy-makers of the growing crisis or failed to warn of impending collapse of the old order is not consistent with the facts."

Gates, who in a 1988 speech warned that "a long competition and struggle with the Soviet Union lies before us," said that from 1989 onwards the CIA was warning repeatedly of a

deepening Soviet crisis and the growing likelihood of a Soviet collapse and coup attempt.

He said these warnings culminated in a May 1991 report on Mikhail Gorbachev's future "that noted that his domination of the Soviet political scene had ended and will not be restored". That paper warned that a coup was possible and if one was not staged that power would shift to the republics.

Although the CIA did not know in advance of last year's failed coup against Gorbachev, it warned the night before in a report given to senior policy-makers that "the danger is growing that hard-liners will precipitate large scale violence."

Fierce weather claims 91 in China

BEIJING, May 21: Torrential rain, hailstorms and vicious winds killed 91 people in three Chinese provinces this month, bringing to 169 the death toll from four weeks of fierce weather, report says AP.

The authorities have dispatched rescue crews and emergency assistance to the disaster areas, the semi-official China News Service (CNS) reported.

Worst hit was the poor inland Gansu province, where 37 people died in landslides and mountain torrents, CNS quoted civil affairs ministry information as saying.