

China admits N-test

BEIJING, May 22: China confirmed Friday that it had conducted an underground nuclear test, which Western experts described as the detonation of one of the most powerful nuclear bombs ever in underground testing, reports AP.

"China did conduct an underground nuclear test recently," an unidentified Foreign Ministry spokesman said, reading a statement to reporters.

It was the first official comment on the nuclear test, but he did not give any details. Norwegian and Swedish seismologists at state and private institutes said Thursday the bomb was detonated at 0500 GMT in the far north-west region of Xinjiang.

Their Richter scale readings ranged from 6.9 to 7.3.

The experts estimated the bomb was 1,000 kilotons, which corresponds to about 70 nuclear bombs of the size dropped over Hiroshima during World War II.

The United States and the former Soviet Union have

agreed to limit their nuclear tests to 150-kiloton explosions, but China is not a signatory.

"In conformity with its basic position for complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons, China has exercised restraint in its nuclear testing," the spokesman said.

China conducted 13 underground nuclear tests from 1971 to 1990, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute said in its yearbook.

There were two tests in 1990. The first, a hydrogen bomb test in May, had a yield of 15 to 65 kilotons, SIPRI said. The second one, in August, was estimated at 150 kilotons.

The ministry spokesman said the number of tests China has conducted was the smallest among the five nuclear powers.

"China is in favour of the complete prohibition of nuclear tests within the framework of effective nuclear disarmament and will continue to work to this end," he said.

UN peacekeeping operation in Croatia at stake

UNITED NATIONS, May 22: The Security Council on Thursday warned the Serb-dominated Belgrade government that the UN peacekeeping operation in Croatia was in jeopardy, reports AP.

The warning was delivered on the eve of the expected admission Friday of three former Yugoslav republics — Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia — to the United Nations, raising the world body's membership to 178.

Security Council President Peter Hohenfeller, the Austrian ambassador warned the Yugoslav envoy that the peacekeeping operation in Croatia was threatened because the UN troops were not being allowed to deploy in previously agreed-upon Serb enclaves.

Hohenfeller told reporters "these developments could jeopardize (peacekeepers) ability to carry out the mandate given by the council."

Hohenfeller said he told the acting Yugoslav ambassador, Dragomir Djokic, that the council was demanding

that Belgrade authorities ensure that the Serb-dominated Yugoslav federal army and other Serb forces cooperate fully with the peacekeepers and halt cease-fire violations and civilian expulsions.

He said the previous Yugoslav government and Serbian authorities had agreed to cooperate with UN peacekeepers, but that accord appeared to be unraveling.

A report by Undersecretary Marrack Goulding, meanwhile, said the 92 UN personnel still in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, have been "deliberately targeted" by mortar and small arms.

Goulding, the top UN peacekeeper, reported after his recent visit to the region that the situation was becoming "intolerable."

Because of the violence, he said, the 92 UN personnel were forced to suspend their operations in Sarajevo on Wednesday. They are the remnants of the headquarters personnel for the peacekeeping

operation in neighbouring Croatia. Other UN staffers had been evacuated from Sarajevo earlier.

Portions of the written report to the secretary-general were seen by the Associated Press.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has ruled out a peacekeeping operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, saying it is too dangerous because of the ethnic violence pitting Croats and Serbs against each other.

Hohenfeller spoke to reporters after issuing what he called "an urgent demarche" on the problems in Croatia to Djokic, who represents the new reduced Yugoslavia consisting of Serbia and Montenegro.

Hohenfeller said the council found Goulding's report "disquieting."

The council members are very upset about degradation of the situation," he said. "First, the rapid deterioration in Bosnia-Herzegovina and sec-

ond, new obstacles to deployment of (UN) forces in protected areas (in Croatia) and harassment of the civilian population."

The 14,000-troop UN peacekeeping force is trying to deploy in Serb-dominated UN protected areas within Croatia where Serbs and Croats had fought a six-month war which claimed at least 10,000 lives. A UN-brokered ceasefire took effect in January in Croatia.

However, Hohenfeller said Thursday, that the deployment in the Serb areas has halted because of persistent violence, the expulsion of non-Serb civilians, and problems in demobilizing the federal army and local forces.

Admission to the world body requires the recommendation of the Security Council and a two-thirds vote in the General Assembly. Admission is expected to be by acclamation. The new Belgrade government does not oppose the admission of the three former Yugoslav republics.

Off the Record

You cannot abort babies past 12 weeks

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico: Striking the death knell for pro-choice activists, the Senate passed unanimously a bill Thursday restricting abortions to the first three months of pregnancy, reports AP.

The bill was part of a series of amendments to Puerto Rico's Penal Code. The bill passed Thursday bars abortion past the 12th week of pregnancy unless the life of the mother is in danger.

The Puerto Rico Penal Code bans abortions except when performed by a duly authorized physician in the interest of preserving the life and health of the mother.

But the code's abortion statute is superseded by the US Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*, which gives women the right to an abortion with medical supervision in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy. In the third trimester the health or life of the woman must be in danger before a legal abortion can be performed.

Thursday's Senate action conforms Puerto Rico law with the 1989 US Supreme Court decision of *Webster v. Planned Parenthood* which allows states or territories to restrict abortions after the 12th week.

On Tuesday, a Senate Special Committee on Crime, which sent the bill to the floor, also declined attempts to decriminalize private sexual conduct by doing away with the crimes of sodomy, prostitution and adultery.

The bill must now go to the House for approval.

Man who entertained America for 30 yrs signs off

BURBANK, Calif.: It took two minutes 15 seconds and countless pleadings for the crowd to sit down and stop cheering as comedian Johnny Carson taped his final show before a public audience Thursday, reports AP.

"Come on, now really. I don't think I can stand any more of this" a clearly embarrassed Carson said during what should have been the opening minutes of his trademark monologue.

But Thursday night was the end, as America knows it, of "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson."

When the comedian who has entertained America for 30 years signs off Friday night, he'll go solo before an invitation-only audience. Fans slept on the sidewalk to get tickets for Thursday's taping.

Robin Williams and Bette Midler were Carson's final visitors and each unleashed their own brands of frenetic bawdiness.

And Carson, blinking back tears, allowed himself an uncharacteristic indulgence: Seated behind the desk known to millions, he and Midler sang an impromptu duet of "Here's that Rindy Day," one of his favorite songs.

Before his guests' arrivals, Carson fulfilled his nightly duty of delivering his monologue — a little late, though.

"I'm going to have to be very honest with you," Carson told the audience. "I don't know if I can take another day of this."

They peel the skin off live snake to sell

NEW DELHI: Airport authorities have arrested a Swedish citizen carrying snake skins worth \$34,480 concealed in his bag, news reports said Friday, reports AP.

The man was arrested Thursday leaving for Istanbul after customs officers found 1,848 skins of pythons, cabras, vipers and rate snakes under the clothing in a bulging bag, the *Hindustan Times* newspaper said.

Police identified him as Jiri Rychlik but gave no further details. A Swedish Embassy official said the mission had no information and could not confirm the identity.

Customs officers became suspicious of Rychlik because he paid \$240 in excess baggage and behaved nervously when officials questioned him, the report quoted a customs officer. R K Sharan, as saying.

Rychlik will be prosecuted under the Wildlife Protection Act, the report said. If convicted, he could be sentenced to a maximum of one year in prison.

India is a member of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which has 114 member-countries worldwide.

Snake skins are procured by nailing the head of a live snake to a tree, making an incision in the skin near the head and then peeling the skin off.

BRIEFLY

Uttar Pradesh bans PWG: India's southern state of Andhra Pradesh on Thursday banned a Maoist guerilla group for having links with separatist Sri Lankan Tamil militants, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported, says Reuter.

PTI quoted State's Chief Minister N Janardhan Reddy as saying the People's War Group (PWG) was banned because of its links with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), accused of killing former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi a year ago.

Reddy said police had established a link between the two groups on the basis on PWG's operations, and equipment used by its cadres for detonating explosives.

The PWG says violence is the only way to liberate the poor from the clutches of capitalism.

The ban came a day after India named LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran as the mastermind behind Gandhi's assassination.

1.2 lakh Iranians to perform Hajj: The leader of Iranian pilgrims left for Saudi Arabia on Thursday, saying about 120,000 Iranians would go to the "glorious" Hajj ceremony next month, Tehran Radio said, reports Reuter from Nicosia.

"We are ready to send 120,000 pilgrims and preparations are progressing better than last year in view of our agreements with the Saudi government," it quoted Mohammad Mohammadi Reyshahri as saying before boarding a plane for Jeddah.

Iran sent 117,000 pilgrims to Mecca last year, ending a three-year boycott of the annual ritual following bloodshed during an Iranian demonstration in the 1987 ceremony.

Peru clashes leave 40 dead: About 40 people were killed Thursday when Shining Path rebels ambushed a military convoy of five trucks and an inter-city bus in Peru's Amazon basin region, an army spokesman said, reports AFP from Lima.

The convoy was ambushed on a highway near Tinga Maria, 650 kilometers (400 miles) northeast of Lima.

The army said that the death toll included five soldiers, five civilians on the bus and some 30 Shining Path rebels.

12 killed in Israeli shell: Israel shelled guerilla positions in Lebanon overnight after the most intensive air and artillery assault this year killed at least 12 people, reports Reuter from Jerusalem.

"Shelling of terrorist targets is continuing through the night," an army spokesman told Reuters on Thursday night.

The latest Israeli air strikes followed an attack on Tuesday on an outpost of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA).

Israel Radio said the armed forces were alarmed at the success of the Hizbollah assault, which killed one SLA soldier and captured four others.

Ethnic turmoil in Y'slavia worsens: Yugoslavia's ethnic turmoil worsened as Serb commanders ordered patriots to enlist for battle in Bosnia and the Yugoslav army stalled a pullout from east Croatia, reports Reuter from Belgrade.

Antagonists in the Balkan conflagration appeared to dig in their heels on Thursday as European and US officials agreed emergency food and medicines had to be expedited to thousands of Bosnian refugees threatened by starvation and disease.

Over 8,200 people have been killed and 1.3 million uprooted from their homes in savage inter-communal war that wracked Croatia after it seceded from the Yugoslav Federation last year and then spread to Bosnia when it separated in March.

One killed in Petersburg blast: One person was killed and nine were injured in an explosion at a St Petersburg railway station on Thursday, a local journalist quoted the city's mayor's office as saying, reports Reuter from Moscow.

ITAR-Tass news agency said the explosion was thought to have occurred after a passers-by threw a package into a litter bin. Another theory was that an explosive device in the briefcase of one of the victims went off.

Police were investigating.

Appeal to send UN force to Kosovo

BELGRADE, May 22: Albanian President Sali Berisha on Thursday appealed to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to send a UN force to the Serbian region of Kosovo, mainly inhabited by ethnic Albanians, reports AFP.

Albanian television, in a report monitored here by Tanjug news agency, quoted Berisha as saying the forces were needed to "prevent possible violence" in Kosovo on the occasion of locally-organised elections on Sunday which Serbian authorities have declared illegal.

In his letter to Boutros-Ghali, Berisha stressed that the elections could contribute to a peaceful solution of the conflict in Kosovo, and help resolve "the tragic situation" elsewhere in what was formerly Yugoslavia.

Journalists and media analysts say this case is just the tip of the iceberg. They accuse the government of using a range of manipulation techniques and intimidation to get journalists to censor themselves or risk losing their job.

The government invented a doublespeak, a

Israeli politicians accused of manipulating media

JERUSALEM, May 22: Israeli politicians have been accused of "sanitising" television news and entertainment programmes, manipulating the media and endangering freedom of speech, reports Reuter.

The charge comes from Israeli journalists and media analysts. They are incensed at what they call blatant interference in the broadcast media by a government facing a stiff challenge in next month's general election.

A row erupted after the state-owned Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA) switched a popular TV news magazine from its Prime-Time Friday evening slot thereby halving its audience.

Ministers said the programme had sabotaged the ruling Likud Party's election chances through its reports. They concerned alleged corruption in Ariel Sharon's Housing Ministry and what the programme called cold-blooded killing of Palestinians by undercover army units.

Journalists and media analysts say this case is just the tip of the iceberg. They accuse the government of using a range of manipulation techniques and intimidation to get journalists to censor themselves or risk losing their job.

The government invented a doublespeak, a

special white-washed language, to hide, reality, said author and former newsman David Grossman. "Worse is the temptation to self-censorship."

Dan Caspi, communications lecturer at Israel's open university, says many issues critical to Israel's future are consistently not presented in full.

"For example, through subtle mechanisms the political establishment reduced the flow of information about what happens in the (occupied) territories. No censor was needed," he said.

Israel views itself as a western-style democracy, but it is believed to be the only one to have a full-time military censor vetting security-related reports by local and foreign journalists.

The authorities say military censorship is essential because Israel is still officially at war with all its neighbours except Egypt.

Journalists point to the IBA, which rules all electronic media except army radio, as a prime example of politicisation.

The IBA is modelled on the British Broadcasting Corporation but with some crucial differences. Besides a seven-member board

of directors it has a 31-member plenary body. The members of both bodies are chosen according to party.

"It's a kind of mini-Knesset (parliament)," said Eilihu Katar, professor of Communications and Sociology at Hebrew University.

The IBA sometimes orders television and radio editors to adjust news presentation to fit the ruling party line, journalists say.

For example, Likud is committed to holding all land captured in the 1967 Middle East war, so editors were told that Arabic place names should be replaced by Hebrew ones.

Journalists also censor themselves. Grossman bucked self-censorship and was fired from Israel Radio in 1988 when he insisted on leading his newscast with the Palestine Liberation Organisation's declaration of an independent state.

He was reinstated by order of the attorney general but soon quit. "I did not want to work in such a system," he said.

A young radio journalist who requested anonymity tells of advice from senior reporters. Never say "Israel's security zone" in southern Lebanon, just say "security zone," never say the last three words of the popular front for

the liberation of Palestine or the Democratic front for the liberation of Palestine, never say the army "clamped" a curfew rather than "imposed one," the reporter said.

He said no one had to tell him never to use the terms "West Bank" and "occupied territories," the radio favours "Judea and Samaria" and "the administered territories."

"People were informally approaching me. It involves the big guys form putting it on paper. That's the worst," he said.

At the start of the Palestinian revolt in the occupied territories in 1987, the IBA banned, protest songs about it by Israeli pop stars Si Himan, Nurit Galron and Hava Alberstein. The ban was overturned, but the songs are still not broadcast.

"Israeli radio doesn't put that song on the air. They chose a very political way out," said Si Himan.

Likud IBA member Shlomo Kor denied political censorship at the IBA. He accused television of being leftist.

"The television has to learn it is the television of the state of Israel and not an arm of Arab propaganda," Kor said.

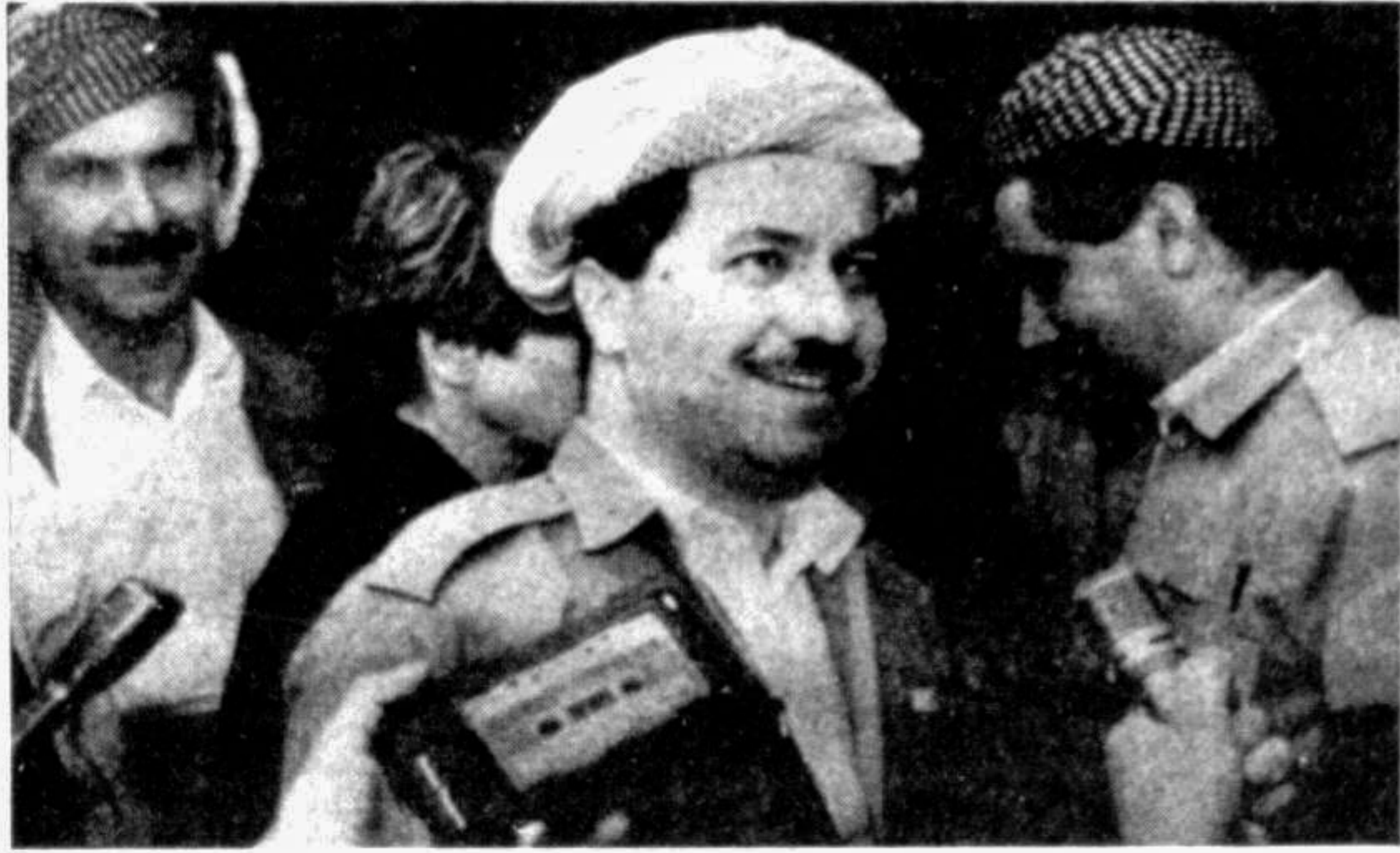
16 Muslims killed in UP bus mishap

NEW DELHI, May 22: A bus packed with Muslim pilgrims collided head-on with a truck Friday, killing 16 passengers, news reports said, reports AP.

Twenty-five people were injured in the accident in Ghazalabad district in the northern Uttar Pradesh state, United News of India news agency reported.

Twelve passengers were killed at the site of the accident, about 35 kilometers east of New Delhi. United News quoted police as saying. Four others died in hospital.

Most of the passengers in the government-owned bus were Muslims going for Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the news report said.



IRAQ: Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK) leader Mahmud Barzani speaks to reporters May 21 as he exits a meeting with Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Jalal Talabani to discuss the formation of a new government coalition. — AFP/UNB photo

Franco-German corps nucleus of future European army

LA ROCHELLE, France, May 22: France and Germany, undaunted by sniping from the United States and NATO officials, will launch a joint army corps today destined to be the nucleus of a future European army, reports Reuter.

President Francois Mitterrand and Chancellor Helmut Kohl will announce the establishment of a corps headquarters in Strasbourg, on France's eastern border, where officers from the two former foes will plan the 35,000-man corps.

The Euro-corps, to become operational in 1995, will be mandated to take part in joint

allied defence in Europe, peace-keeping and law-enforcement missions beyond NATO's borders and humanitarian actions.

The United States, while urging the Europeans to do more for their own defence, has voiced disquiet at the possibility that the corps might draw forces away from NATO or act without coordination with the allies.

US Ambassador to NATO William Taft highlighted these fears on Thursday when he told a Brussels seminar: "Undermining the alliance's integrated military structure in the uncertain process of de-

China will oppose faster democratic changes in HK

HONG KONG, May 22: China will oppose any British request for faster democratic changes in Hong Kong, a senior Chinese official was quoted as saying by government-owned radio Friday, reports AP.

Lu Ping, China's top official on Hong Kong affairs, was quoted by Radio Hong Kong as saying that China was opposed to any increase in the number of directly elected legislative seats in Hong Kong's 1995 elections.

Speaking at a news conference in Macau, Lu was reported to have said that any

changes would require an amendment of the Basic Law.

That document will become Hong Kong's constitution after 1997, the year this British colony reverts to Chinese communist rule.

Lu also was quoted as saying that he didn't see a need to amend the Basic Law.

Lu's comments followed a statement earlier Friday by a top British official that Britain planned to hold talks with China soon on speeding up democracy in Hong Kong.

Alistair Goodlad, the newly appointed minister with re-

sponsibility for Hong Kong, told Radio Hong Kong that London was interested in increasing the number of directly elected seats in the territory's legislature prior to 1997.

He declined to elaborate. But the statement coincides with a changing of the guard in Hong Kong, one of the last jewels in Britain's colonial crown.

The new governor, former Conservative party chairman Chris Patten, is expected to replace Lord Wilson in July.

there was any linkage between the creation of the Franco-German corps and an apparent French concession to allow NATO a wider role in carrying out peace-keeping and humanitarian missions for the 52-nation conference on security and cooperation in Europe.

The agreement, announced by NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner, appeared to be the first time the alliance had accepted in principle taking part in operations outside the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation area. France has previously opposed any extension of the alliance's role.

The French official

UN fact-finding mission in Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenia), May 22: A UN fact-finding mission arrived in Armenia's capital Friday en route to Nakhichevan, the latest hot-spot in Armenian-Azerbaijani fighting. Azerbaijan threatened to ask Turkey, Armenia's historic enemy, to intervene in the 4-year-old war, reports AP.

Turkey and Russia also showed signs of being drawn into the conflict.

The UN mission now in Armenia was asked only to prepare a first-hand report on the escalating fighting for UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

N-tests harm half million Kazakhs

UNITED NATIONS, May 22: The President of the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan said on Thursday half a million of his people were suffering the ill-effects of nuclear testing, reports Reuter.

"Kazakhstan, in 1949, was the scene of nuclear testing, and for 14 years the explosions went on, in the atmosphere and on the ground," President Nursultan Nazarbayev told a news conference at the United Nations.

Referring to tests carried out when Kazakhstan, a Central Asian Republic with more than 16 million people, was part of the Soviet Union, he said: "Only since 1988 have we been able to penetrate the secrecy surrounding this, and now we know that a crime was committed against our people."

There was no monitoring of the radioactive harm caused to the population, but he added:

"Today we know that the descendants of those who were affected at that time, half a million people, are suffering."

He also said Kazakhstan would soon join the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and that a dispute with Washington over his country's nuclear arsenal had been resolved.

Repeating pledges he made to President George Bush in Washington on Tuesday, Nazarbayev also said Kazakhstan will soon sign the International Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty.

"We have entirely overcome these problems in our relationship with the United States. This problem does not exist any more," Nazarbayev told reporters at a separate news conference in a New York hotel.