

## Moscow regrets Chinese nuclear test

MOSCOW, May 23: Russia expressed regret on Friday over a massive Chinese nuclear test, saying it ran counter to international disarmament efforts, reports Reuters.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement it regretted Beijing had conducted the explosion in view of a moratorium by Russia and France and "restraint" on nuclear testing by other atomic powers.

The Chinese move "can seriously complicate the process of revitalising the international situation and rolling back the arms race," the statement said.

China earlier acknowledged that it had conducted an underground nuclear test, but rejected US criticism saying it had carried out fewer such blasts than any of the other nuclear states.

# Russia plans to build armed forces worthy of great power

MOSCOW, May 23: Russia's new defence minister said on Friday his country would build armed forces worthy of a great power and pledged to defend the dignity of Russians in former Soviet republics, reports Reuters.

Pavel Grachev, speaking at a news conference, cited a three-stage plan to create a force of 1.5 million men by the year 2000.

He acknowledged troops faced serious problems in the crossfire of regional conflicts and said he would not brook "bandits and hooligans."

"I will not allow the honour and dignity of Russians to be insulted on the territory of any state," the general said.

Grachev said economic restrictions had meant manoeuvres and practical training had been cut back to a dangerous degree in what had once been one of the world's most feared armies.

"When planes collide, helicopters drop out of the sky and submarines sink — all these facts speak of a considerable fall in efficiency,"

he said.

Grachev, 43, was a paratroop commander a year ago. But he was promoted rapidly after co-operating with Yeltsin in blocking August's failed hardline coup.

Grachev described what some military leaders might have considered a humiliating defeat for one of the world's biggest armies, at the hands of women, children and old men in Moldova.

A crowd of about 15,000 people, he said, broke into a base of the 14th army in Moldova's Slav-dominated breakaway Dnestr republic on Tuesday after the camp had been shelled.

"Despite measures taken by the commander of the 14th army, they (the soldiers) failed to save all the military equipment," he said.

"Vehicles that were outside the camp ... were seized by women and children and taken away from the 14th army," he said.

Grachev said preparations were under way for the withdrawal of Russian forces from the

Transcaucasus area, where the former Soviet army has suffered its heaviest casualties. While they remained, though, they would defend themselves if attacked.

But the armed forces, in the long term, faced a thorough shakeup with improvement of equipment, better training of soldiers and reform of the arms industry. Officers and soldiers would enjoy improved conditions and social security.

"In a word, Russia should have armed forces commensurate with Russia's status as a great power," Grachev said.

The first stage of his reform plan involved building up the apparatus of the Russian Defence Ministry, created by President Boris Yeltsin last month after efforts failed to maintain a fully united commonwealth armed force.

The years 1993-94 would see formal construction of a Russian army from former Soviet forces under Russian jurisdiction. This included some 600,000 men based in Eastern Europe and in other commonwealth republics.

The third, and possibly most powerful stage, would be cutbacks due over four years from 1995 to 1999, slashing numbers by 700,000 to 2.1 million.

Disillusionment is rife in the officer corps over conditions faced by men returning from East Europe. Thousands are living in makeshift accommodation and many more fear for their future under the proposed cuts.

By the year 2000, the force should reach its planned level of about 1.5 million men.

Grachev said Russia would take over control of its nuclear weapons after the pullout of the last nuclear missiles from Ukraine Kazakhstan and Belarus, probably in late 1994. At present the entire arsenal is under joint commonwealth command.

The Russian army will be by far the biggest of the forces to emerge from the former Soviet Union. But Ukraine has seized large amounts of equipment, including tanks, that Russia insists should be transferred to its control.

## Bush to impose sanction on Serbia

LONDON, May 23: In a policy shift the Bush administration is imposing new sanctions on Serbia in a drive to end the bloodshed in the Balkans, reports AP.

Urging the Europeans to follow the US lead, Secretary of State James A. Baker III announced measures after dinner Friday night with British Prime Minister John Major.

"The civilized world really should begin to contemplate what they might be able to do," Baker said.

The secretary was flying Saturday to Lisbon, where a conference on aid to the former Soviet Union is likely to be overshadowed by the ethnic strife in what used to be Yugoslavia and the expected signing of a protocol to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

## BRIEFLY

### Solzhenitsyn to back home: Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, living in exile in the United States since he was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974, will return to Russia, his wife said Friday, reports AFP from Moscow.

Natalia Solzhenitsyn gave no date for her husband's return to his homeland, but said he had already "made the decision to return."

"I thank providence, I have always believed I would return. I am fulfilling my dream of these past 18 years, to return to my homeland," she said.

She was in Moscow to officially register the Russian branch of a fund for prisoners and their families set up by her husband with royalties from his best-selling novel, 'The Gulag Archipelago.'

### US for peaceful Crimea: The United States on Friday urged Russia and Ukraine to resolve their differences over Crimea through peaceful negotiation, AP reports from Washington.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the United States wants to see this dispute settled "in a peaceful, consensual manner."

"We are continuing to encourage Russia and Ukraine to seek negotiated solutions to the bilateral differences and to refrain from disruptive unilateral actions," Boucher said.

Boucher said the matter may come up on Sunday when US Secretary of State James M. Baker III is scheduled to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in Lisbon.

### King Fahd in 'good health': A source close to the ruling Saudi family on Friday dismissed speculation that King Fahd was ill and said the monarch was "in very good health," AFP reports from Riyadh.

"King Fahd met with several members of the ruling family and the government Friday in a camp erected in the desert north of Riyadh, the source said adding that he was "in very good health."

Sources here said it was usual for the monarch to take time off from his busy schedule and get away to the desert to rest at various periods of the year.

Rumors circulating in the sidelines of a ministerial conference of OPEC in Vienna indicated that King Fahd was in poor health.

### Cuban restriction on Haitians: Cuba on Friday joined the United States in imposing new restrictions on Haitian refugees. It said those who land on its shores cannot set sail again for the United States, AP reports from Mexico City.

"The main worry of Cuba is the protection of their lives and to avoid lamentable events," said Cuba's official Prensa Latina news agency, citing a recent sinking off the eastern port of Guantanamo in which 20 people died.

The US Coast Guard earlier began allowing Haitian refugees to sail on toward Florida, offering help only in emergencies rather than rescuing most.

The Cuban agency, monitored in Mexico City, said the Foreign Ministry had contacted the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross "to help with the speedy, voluntary return of the Haitians who arrive in our country."

### Kazakhstan member of UNESCO: The former Soviet central Asian state of Kazakhstan Friday became the 164th member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, Director General Federico Mayor announced, AFP reports from Paris.

After the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia which joined last year, Kazakhstan is the fourth former Soviet state and the first of the Commonwealth of Independent States to be admitted to UNESCO since the break up of the Soviet Union.

Russia has taken over the Soviet Union's seat while Belarus and Ukraine have been UNESCO members since its inception.

### Many Palestinians held: Israeli security forces have arrested an unspecified number of Palestinians believed responsible for the deaths of several other Arabs suspected of collaborating with Israel, an army spokesman said Friday, reports AFP from Jerusalem.

The arrests were made recently in the occupied West Bank town of Yammou, the spokesman said adding those detained belonged to Fatah, the mainstream group of the outlawed Palestine Liberation Organisation.

One of those believed assassinated by the group was identified as Ahmed Nafay Statyie, a 45-year-old doctor who was in charge of medical services for the Israeli military administration, the spokesman said.

### Retrial of LA policeman: A judge ruled on Friday that the retrial of one of four white policemen for the beating of black motorist Rodney King would be held in Los Angeles, where rioting broke out after the officers were acquitted, Reuters reports from Los Angeles.

The original trial was moved from racially mixed Los Angeles to virtually all-white Simi Valley, where many law enforcement officials live.

### Myanmar frees more prisoners

BANGKOK, May 23: Myanmar people authorities released more prisoners under an amnesty declared by the military junta early this month, official Radio Yangon reported Friday, said AFP.

A total of 277 prisoners, who had been convicted of criminal offenses were freed from a jail in the central Myanmar people city of Mandalay on Thursday, the report said in a broadcast monitored here.

### North Korea denies responsibility for Shooting incident

TOKYO, May 23: North Korea angrily denied responsibility today for a shooting incident on the border with South Korea in which Seoul says its soldiers killed three northern infiltrators, reports Reuters.

In its first reaction to Friday's clash, Pyongyang denounced "false reports" from Seoul that three North Korean soldiers died in the demilitarised zone separating the two states.

The North's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the

South Korean reports constituted "a grave provocation seriously getting on our nerves."

It accused South Korean troops of firing "scores of shells and bullet toward a civil police post of our side, gravely endangering the lives of our civil policeman."

KCNA added: "It is entirely thanks to the strong self-restraint of our civil policeman that the gunfiring did not expand to an armed conflict between the sides."

The agency did not confirm the deaths reported from

Seoul, and accused the South Koreans of fabricating the incident.

"We cannot but take a serious view of such false reports spread at a time when confidence is being built between the people in the North and the South and they are aflame with desire for national reunification with the progress of the North-South dialogue," KCNA went on.

"This is a premeditated act of provocation to foil the North-South dialogue which is now developing favourably,

take the edge off the South Korean people's fierce anti-government, anti-fascist struggle for democracy and national reunification and thereby defuse their confused political crisis."

"The South Korean authorities must immediately stop all their intrigues getting on our nerves," KCNA said.

"If they continue resorting to international intrigues by fabricating incidents, despite our repeated warnings, they would be held wholly responsible for all the consequences

arising therefrom," the North Korean agency concluded.

In a separate report, KCNA denounced what it called a joint US-South Korean aerial war exercise from May 19 to 21 "to win air supremacy, and a joint aerial strike exercise aimed at a surprise attack on targets in the strategic in depth area of the northern half of Korea ... in the sky above South Korea."

It said aircraft taking part included "nuclear-capable fighter-bombers, assault and observation planes from overseas bases, and warplanes of



BANGKOK: Thai Parliament Secretary Pisit Pipattanakul (L) holds a list of constitutional amendments demanded by the opposition while talking to leaders of the governing parties (from L to R), Samak Sundaravej, Narong Wongwan and Montri Pongpanich at parliament on May 22. The coalition government has bowed down to pressure and decided through a constitutional amendment to force General Suchinda to step down. — AFP/UNB photo

## India launches 2nd test of Agni next week

NEW DELHI, May 23: India, basking in the satisfaction of a successful satellite launch, will carry out next week a second test-flight of its intermediate-range missile, Agni, press reports said here today, says AFP.

The government has given the go-ahead for the planned flight, which would take place three years after Agni (fire) was first successfully test-flown on May 22, 1989, the newspaper said, but mentioned no date for the new launch.

The Press Trust of India news agency said the test-launch had been set for "any day" between next Wednesday and Saturday from an interim test range in the eastern coastal state of Orissa.

Defence Ministry officials here were unavailable for

comment on the reports.

The second test-flight of the missile, which has a range of up to 2,500 kilometres, was postponed five times, reportedly under pressure from the United States.

The agency said Agni had been modified to make it more efficient, with the missile's tip, which would carry the warhead, and its base redesigned to improve its target bombing accuracy.

A third test-flight is expected within weeks of the second to experiment with increasing Agni's range to more than 3,000 kilometres, the daily said.

Indian in 1989 became the seventh member of an exclusive club of nations of possessing ballistic missile capability, going ahead with Agni's first

launch despite concern expressed by Washington at possible missile proliferation.

Agni's planned second flight next week follows the launch Wednesday of the augmented satellite launch vehicle, whose success after two previous failures served as a morale-booster for Indian scientists.

It comes on the heels of a two-year trade ban slapped by the United States May 11 on the Indian space research organisation for purchasing 200 million dollar worth of Russian rocket technology.

Washington believed the Indo-Russian deal violated the Non-Proliferation Treaty known as the missile technology control regime.

Agni is an indigenously developed component of India's integrated guided missile development programme.

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"We hope and believe that there can be some coordinated action by others in the civilised world who like ourselves will be unwilling to sit back and watch what really is a humanitarian nightmare taking place," Baker said.

He said the two consulates to be closed were in San Francisco and New York.

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## Indonesia won't encourage fundamentalism

JAKARTA, May 23: The resurgence of Islam in Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, will not encourage fundamentalism, a leading Indonesian Cabinet Minister said, reports Reuters.

"Islam, at least in Indonesia, will not be trapped into fundamentalism, so there is nothing to be worried about," the official news agency Antara on Saturday quoted Research and Technology Minister Yusuf Habibie as saying.

President Suharto has actively tried to win over Muslims, an effort which analysts say is an attempt to balance a powerful military in the run-up to next month's state assembly elections and, more importantly, the vote for his own job early next year.

Abdur Rahman Wahid, who heads the country's biggest Islamic organisation, the Nahdlatul Ulama, has said this politicisation of religion could trigger a backlash of violence, especially against the Chinese minority which is mostly Christian.

Ghali urges EC to end Bosnia conflict

LONDON, May 23: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was quoted today as saying the European Community should do more to end the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports Reuters.

"They — the EC — should work at it," Boutros-Ghali told the British newspaper The Guardian in an interview.

The Guardian said the UN chief argued the Europeans should be "banging heads together" to achieve a political solution and underpin their diplomacy with the Western European Union Defence grouping.

"My message, what I am asking, is for the Europeans to be more involved, to pay more attention, to be more there," Boutros-Ghali said.

This included holding lengthy negotiations on a political settlement among the warring parties in the area of conflict itself rather than in EC capitals, he was quoted as saying.

"If the fighting in Sarajevo makes it impossible to talk there, let us have it in Belgrade, or on the borders, between Serbia and Croatia," he said.

US slates China for N-test

WASHINGTON, May 23: The United States on Friday dismissed suggestions it was being hypocritical by criticising China for conducting its largest ever underground nuclear test, reports Reuters.

"I would just say that we're not asking the Chinese to do anything that we don't do ourselves. We're asking them to exercise similar restraint to what we, Russians and others exercise," US State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters.

In discussing China's one-megaton test on Thursday,

## Off the Record

### Rajiv still 'a vampire' for Tamils

MADRAS, India: Suspected Tamil militants hurled pamphlets calling Rajiv Gandhi a fascist and "a vampire" at the site where India's former prime minister was assassinated last year, police said today, reports Reuters.

They said the pamphlets were thrown from a white van which pierced a security cordon around the assassination site in India's southern Tamil Nadu state on Thursday, the anniversary of Gandhi's death.

Gandhi was killed by a woman suicide bomber during an election rally on May 21 last year.

The pamphlets hailed the alleged bomber, Dhanu, as a martyr.

On Wednesday investigators charged the head of Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam guerrillas, Velupillai Prabhakaran, with Gandhi's assassination.

The Tigers, who for the past nine years have fought for their own homeland in Sri Lanka, turned against Gandhi after he sent Indian troops in 1987 to try to end their rebellion.

The Tigers, which India banned earlier this month, accused Indian troops of widespread rape and torture.

The head of the investigating team, D R Karthikeyan, denied newspaper reports that Dhanu was one of the rape victims.

### Professor sacked for ridiculing Islamic culture

NICOSIA: A Tehran University professor has been sacked for ridiculing Islamic culture and propagating "cheap Western values," the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported Saturday, reports AP.

It said students had complained that Zarrin Kelk, a Social Science professor, was corrupt and that he was "advocating premarital sex and cohabitation." Faculty members, disguised as students, attended some of Kelk's classes and verified the claims before he was expelled, said IRNA.

### Victor Erice awarded

CANNES, France: Australian, Spanish, Italian and Belgian films were early prize-winners at the Cannes film festival over the weekend, reports AFP.

The prestigious international critics prize was awarded unanimously Sunday to Victor Erice, the Basque painter, for his documentary "El Sol Del Membrillo" (The Quince Tree Sun) about a painter's preoccupation with light.

### Military duty awards for two Libyan guides

TUNIS: Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat pinned medals on two Libyan guides who found his airplane after it crash landed in the Libyan desert last month, the PLO said, reports AFP.

At a ceremony late Friday at PLO headquarters here, Arafat awarded the two Libyans, Al-Riffi Senussi Abdullah Tuati and Aissa Mohamed Hassan Tubaudi, with "military duty" medals.

He gave the same decorations to PLO guerrilla commander, Khaled Sultane, who leads the 1,000-strong PLO contingent based in the Libyan desert and which participated in search operations after his plane disappeared during a sand storm late April 7.

Arafat was slightly injured when the plane crash landed, killing three crew members.

The Palestinian news agency Wafa, reporting on the ceremony, quoted Arafat as saying he was honouring the three men for their exceptional acts of sacrifice and courage in the service of the Palestinian people.

Ukraine blames CIS army chief

MOSCOW, May 23: Ukraine accused the Commonwealth military leadership on Friday of packing the disputed Black Sea Fleet with non-Ukrainian conscripts, reports Reuters.

Defence Minister Konstantin Morozov told CIS armed forces commander Yevgeny Shaposhnikov in a letter published by Ukrinform news agency that such recruitment should be suspended and Kiev reserved the right to prevent "illegal actions."

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