

Middle East talks resume Apr 27

PLO welcomes US declaration

CAIRO, April 22: The PLO said a declaration by the United States on Wednesday that Palestinians could win self-government was positive...

But the Palestine Liberation Organisation reacted with caution to a statement by Israel pledging no more deportations.

"We appreciate the positive elements in the declaration by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher. It constitutes a proper and substantial ground for the start of serious and continuous negotiations."

Yasser Abed Rabbo, Head of the PLO Information Department told Reuters.

Christopher said: "Through negotiations they (the Palestinians) can see occupa-

tion give way to self-government and a resolution of the final status".

He also reaffirmed that the guiding principle of the negotiations remained the idea of Israel trading occupied land for peace and realising the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people and security for all parties.

On a statement by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin saying Israel had no plans to deport more Palestinians for the time being, radio said.

"Rabin's statement is consistent with the US commitments that the Israeli government made to Washington. We need to see a clear position supported by concrete measures especially concerning the return of a sizable number

of deportees and lifting the siege from the West Bank and Gaza."

Rabbo arrived with PLO Chief Yasser Arafat in Cairo from Damascus where Arabs and the PLO agreed to resume Middle East peace talks in Washington on April 27. Arafat held talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

In Amman, Palestinian peace negotiators said Rabin's statement fell far short of what they had been led to expect after agreeing to resume peace talks.

"This is not enough," said Chief Palestinian delegate Haidar Abdel-Shafi, who had opposed a return to negotiations with Israel without significant movement by the Jewish state.

Hanan Ashrawi, spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation, welcomed Rabin's comment that Israel had no current plans for future deportations but said the Palestinians had expected an announcement of concrete measures to improve human rights.

Rabbo urged Rabin "to take an encouraging political step" in the next round of negotiations that would lead to a solution "to ensure security for both the Palestinians and Israelis."

"We will test their (Israeli) intentions in the coming round of negotiations to see if they really intend to pursue the peace march," Rabbo said.

7 more killed in South African violence

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 22: Six blacks and a white man were shot dead in South African townships on Wednesday, police said, reports Reuters.

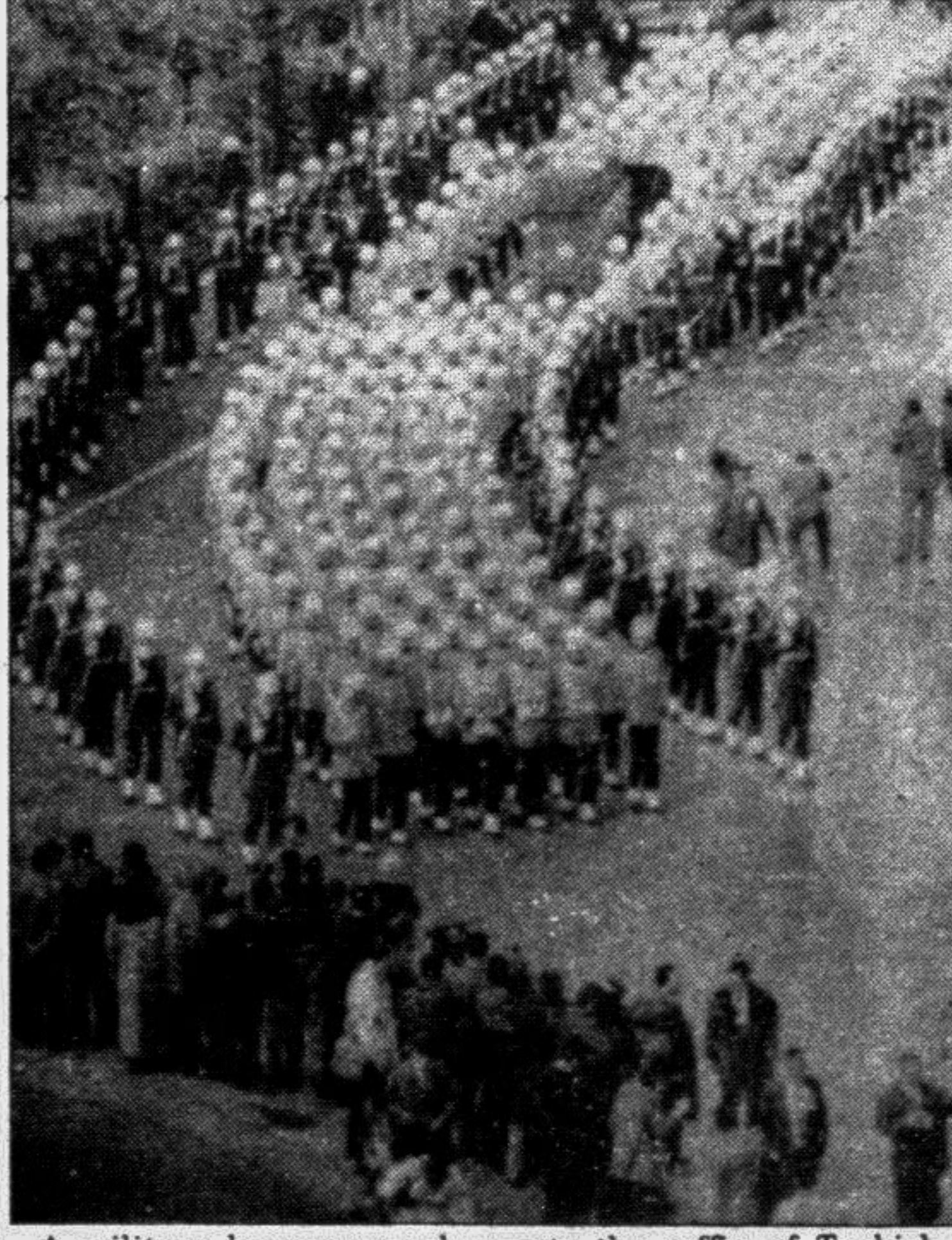
Youths poured petrol over a nun in another township, state radio reported.

Five blacks were found shot dead in a Katschong squatter camp east of Johannesburg. A sixth, an official of the Inkatha Freedom Party, main rival of the African National Congress, was shot dead in a township near Durban in Natal province.

Police had no information on a possible motive but tension has risen in South Africa's townships since the murder of communist leader Chris Hani 11 days ago.

Police said a white man of German origin was shot dead in Daveryton, another black township east of Johannesburg, on Wednesday. They said the man's body was found in his truck.

Youths in a black squatter camp east of Johannesburg poured petrol over a nun and then stole her car, the radio reported.



A military honour guard escorts the coffin of Turkish President Turgut Ozal, placed on a gun carriage, from the Parliament building to the Kocatepe Mosque in Ankara Wednesday. Tens of thousands of people and delegations from 66 countries attended the state funeral.

-AFP/UNB photo

Iran asks UN to lift arms ban on Bosnians

TEHRAN, Apr 22: Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati has asked the United Nations to end a military embargo against Bosnian Muslims, official Tehran Radio reported Wednesday, reports AFP.

It is expected that the United Nations would lift the military embargo against and take steps to create an air and land corridor for sending aid in order to relieve the long suffering of these people, Velayati said in a letter to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

The radio did not say when the letter was sent.

Velayati offered Boutros-Ghali further opportunity for an exchange of views between Iran and the UN to achieve peace and end the Serbian aggression.

Tehran has repeatedly said it would respect UN resolutions regarding the Bosnian conflict.

But Parliamentary Speaker Ali Akbar Nategh-Nuri warned recently that the UN-imposed military embargo on all parties could be violated if the international community did not succeed in halting the Serbian aggression.

Off the Record

Cold bath boosts sexual potency

LONDON: Researchers reported on Wednesday they had proved what British boarding schools preached for generations - cold baths are good for you, reports Reuter.

Regular bathing in cold water boosts sexual potency, helps fight off viruses and stimulates circulation, said Vijay Kakkar of London's Thrombosis Research Institute.

"The beneficial effects to the immune system and circulation are certain," Kakkar told the European newspaper after initial tests of about 200 people over a one-year period.

Cold baths, long associate with Britain's elite private schools, also improved circulation, stimulated the production of sex hormones testosterone in men and oestrogen in women and helped people with fatigue syndromes, the researchers said.

"They discovered a disciplined regimen of cold baths each day raised the number of white cells that fight off viruses by significant amounts," the newspaper said.

"It costs nothing... it can be practised in the comforts of one's own home and potentially can improve our way of life," the newspapers quoted Kakkar as saying.

He was seeking 5,000 volunteers and new funding for more research into the benefits.

'Snow Queen' left men cold and broke

STEVENS POINT, Wisconsin: Police have arrested a woman who won the nickname of "Snow Queen" for coaxing men to undress and rub themselves with snow and then driving off with their clothes and money, reports AFP.

A trial date has not yet been set for Della Dobbs, 31, of Wisconsin rapids, who pleaded on Tuesday to three counts of theft.

Dobbs robbed three men in March, including two she left almost naked in the snow, say prosecutors.

Prosecutors say she went with one victim to a hotel room where she promised to scrub his back if he went into the shower. However, she allegedly left with his pants, 600 dollars and credit cards.

Dobbs met the other two men individually in bars, said authorities, and persuaded them to drive off with her in her truck which she parked in a snow covered area.

She left one victim in the snow with only his underpants and the other in his socks and shirt.

Dobbs faces a maximum sentence of 27 months, if convicted on all three charges.

Michael's sister beaten by husband

NEW YORK: Singer Latoya Jackson's husband has been arrested on charges of hitting her with a dining room chair, causing injuries to her face, legs, arms and back, police said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Jackson, 36, has been estranged from her superstar brother Michael and the rest of the Jackson family since 1991 when she accused her parents of emotional and physical abuse. They denied the charges.

Her husband Jack Gordon, 54, was arrested at the couple's apartment and faced assault and weapons charges, police said.

BRIEFLY

Storms kill 15 in China: Fifteen people were killed in heavy thunderstorms and tornados in southern China's Guangdong province last week, two Beijing-funded newspapers reported Thursday, reports AP from Hong Kong.

The storms, which produced hail stones as heavy as 50 kilograms (110 pounds), also injured more than 100 people and left 3,800 homeless, the Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po reported.

The storms, which caused approximately 100 million yuan (US \$17.5 million) in damage to the largely rural western and northern parts of the province, destroyed more than 4,200 homes.

The reports said the storms peaked on Friday and Saturday, dumping 100 millimeters (4 inches) of rain per hour and triggering tornados packing winds over 100 kilometers (62.5 miles) per hour.

Heavy rains and floods are common in many parts of China during the spring and summer, causing hundreds of deaths nationwide every year. In 1991, China suffered especially heavy flooding that claimed more than 3,000 lives.

Thatcher's husband ill: The husband of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was reported today to be suffering from cancer, reports Reuter from London.

The Sun newspaper said Sir Denis Thatcher, 77, had been receiving radiotherapy treatment for cancer of the colon at a private hospital in London.

The newspaper said the diagnosis was made late last year but doctors believed the disease was in an early stage and had been detected soon enough to avoid surgery.

Britain's Press Association news agency quoted a close friend of Sir Denis as saying he is certainly being treated for something and from what I have heard, I think it is reasonably safe to say it is cancer.

The Thatchers were not immediately available for comment.

Siege of Ohio's prison ends: Rebellious inmates fled out of their captured cellblock as a 10-day siege of Ohio's maximum security prison came to a peaceful end, Ohio prison officials said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Ohio.

Joe Andrews, of the Ohio department of rehabilitation and correction, announced the end of the siege.

A document listing 21 conditions has been signed by the prison warden and representatives of the rebellious inmates.

Live television pictures showed some of the prisoners leaving the cellblock. At least one was carried out on a stretcher and others were seen standing in the grounds with their arms raised above their heads.

Seven inmates and one guard hostage were killed in the uprising that began on April 11, when a third of the 1,819 prisoners took over a cellblock and captured hostages.

4 die as gunpowder explodes in Pune: Four people were killed Wednesday when nearly three tonnes of army gunpowder exploded at the railway station in the Western Indian city of Pune, Reuter reports from Delhi.

The gunpowder blew up when it was being unloaded from the baggage van next to the engine of a passenger train and friction that caused a spark was the most likely explanation, it quoted police as saying.

The explosion blew the roofs off two platforms, it said.

The four dead were not immediately identified but police were quoted as saying they could be the porters who were unloading the gunpowder.

Koresh warned FBI of massive explosion

WASHINGTON, Apr 22: Cult leader David Koresh sent two threatening letters to the Federal Bureau of Investigation warning of a massive explosion, and vowed to use the children in the Texas compound as hostages to protest himself, FBI officials said on Wednesday.

The FBI, facing a storm of criticism and several investigations over its failed raid at Koresh's compound, took the unusual step of making seven top officials available for a lengthy background briefing with reporters.

The officials portrayed Koresh as a violent leader of the cult who had no plans to give up. They said he was the

26 injured in Gujarat blast

NEW DELHI, Apr 22: An explosion at a major railway station in western India today injured at least 26 people, the Press Trust of India reported, reports Reuter.

An object exploded among passengers on the platform of the Surat City Railway Station, it said. It was not immediately clear if it was a bomb. At least 26 people were sent to hospital.

Surat, in the state of Gujarat, is about 250 km (150 miles) north of Bombay, where a series of bomb blasts last month killed at least 250 people and injured at least 1,400.

China, UK open talks on Hong Kong's future

BEIJING, Apr 22: Long-awaited Sino-British talks on Hong Kong's political future adjourned for the day after only a few hours Thursday, a sign that the negotiations are going to be difficult and protracted, reports AP.

Sir Robin McLaren, Britain's ambassador to China, said he would resume talks with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Jiang Enzhu Friday morning. Both sides refused to say whether any progress was made.

"Each side needs time to prepare, and in our case to report to London and Hong Kong," McLaren told reporters when he returned to the British Embassy from the Diplomatic State Guesthouse.

The two sides are trying to work out an acceptable arrangement for elections in Hong Kong in 1994 and 1995.

China rules out military support to Khmer Rouge

BEIJING, Apr 22: Cambodia's radical Khmer Rouge was again warned today by its principal ally, China, that no support would be forthcoming should the Cambodian civil war resume, reports AFP.

"China will not support any of the Cambodian parties in a civil war," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin, implicitly ruling out Chinese military support to the radical faction.

The Khmer Rouge recently pulled out of the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh and has been blamed for number of attacks on UN peacekeepers.

Wu's statements came during his weekly press briefing

7 extremists to die in Egypt

HAEKSTAP, Egypt, Apr 22: An Egyptian military court sentenced seven Muslim extremists to death Thursday and 25 others to prison on conviction of attacking foreign tourists and trying to overthrow the government, report AP.

The three-judge panel acquitted 17 others.

The defendants, mostly bearded and all wearing flowing white robes and carrying copies of the Quran, chanted defiant anti-government slogans after Maj Gen Mohammed Wagdy al-Laithy, the chief judge, read the sentences.

They chanted: "Hosni Mubarak, you are a coward and an American agent."

To ensure speedy trials, President Mubarak started referring Muslim extremist cases to military courts last October after radicals intensified their violent campaign to overthrow the government and turn Egypt into an Iran-like theocracy.

Such trials normally would take years in Egypt's civil courts. Suspected assassins of Rifaat el-Mahgoub, the parliament speaker, are still on trial for the Oct 12, 1990, slaying.

Al-Laithy's military panel finished the trial of 49 extremists, six whom are at large, in 44 days. There is no appeal except for presidential clemency.

Nine defendants were sentenced to hang in three previous trials, but only two of them were in custody.

In Thursday's session, al-Laithy first read the names of defendants acquitted. He then sentenced nine defendants to prison sentences of 3-9 years each; five to 10 years at hard labor; eight to 15 years at hard labor; and three to life imprisonment, which in Egypt is 25 years.

Pro-Yeltsin rally in Moscow

MOSCOW, Apr 22: Thousands of Russians marched through Moscow on Wednesday in a show of support for President Boris Yeltsin four days before a referendum that could decide his and the country's future, reports Reuter.

A group of red-coated bandmen led a procession of about 5,000 people along Tver street towards the Kremlin in the centre of the Russian capital. Numbers looked set to swell as people arrived from work.

A group of uniformed Cossacks in long boots and shaggy fur hats walked close behind carrying two gold icons on long poles. Alongside walked a priest in black robes.

Zaire may sever ties with US, France, Belgium

KINSHASA, Apr 22: Zaire should sever diplomatic ties with the "neo-colonialist, imperialist, racist" United States, France and Belgium, the ruling party led by President Mobutu Sese Seko said here Wednesday, reports AFP.

A statement issued after a meeting of the Revolutionary Popular Movement (MPR) accused of "stoking up hatred, division, destruction and infiltrating mercenaries and terrorists into Zaire to provoke civil war."

US to sign Biodiversity Treaty

WASHINGTON, Apr 22: President Bill Clinton, charting a greener course in environmental policy, said on Wednesday that the United States would sign a treaty to protect plants and animals that president George Bush rejected last year, reports Reuter.

In an Earth Day speech at the botanical gardens, small indoor park near the Capitol building, Clinton also committed to stabilising the levels of so-called greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere.

His policy announcements were a major departure from the course steered by Bush, who created major controversy at last year's Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro by refusing to sign the so-called Biodiversity Treaty and insisting on a watered down plan to address the problem of global warming.

"We cannot walk away from challenges like those presented by the Biodiversity Treaty. We must step up to them," Clinton said in announcing that he will sign the pact, which he said is "critically important" to the future of the world.

Bush said the treaty could have an adverse economic impact on US drug manufacturers and other businesses by restricting their patent rights, but Clinton said his administration had worked with business and environmental groups to assure that it protects both American interest and the world environment.

Gen Garcia sentenced to 30 yrs imprisonment

LA PAZ, Apr 22: Bolivia's Supreme Court on Wednesday sentenced former military dictator General Luis Garcia Meza to 30 years in jail for crimes ranging from mass murder and torture to wholesale fraud against the state, reports Reuter.

The five-hour long judgement was read to a packed courtroom in Sucre, Bolivia's legal capital some 670 km (420 miles) from La Paz and broadcast live on national television and radio.

Crowds outside the Supreme Court cheered as the sentences the maximum allowed under Bolivian law, were announced for the fugitive Garcia Meza, 61, and dozens of his closest aides.

A few hours before the verdict, people across Bolivia observed a minute's silence to commemorate the ruling.



A Philips auctioneer displays the most prized lot, John Lennons distinctive Rickenbacker guitar as Beatles memorabilia goes under the hammer on Wednesday in London. The guitar is valued at around 75,000 pounds sterling.

-AFP/UNB photo