

BRIEFLY

Two killed in Pak train mishap: A high-speed passenger train jumped the tracks outside a southern village early Sunday, killing two people and injuring 27 others, health workers said, reports AP from Karachi.

Rescuers flocked to the crash site in Jang Shahi, about 70 kilometres (42 miles) from the port city of Karachi.

The express train was heading toward Pakistan's north-west frontier provincial capital of Peshawar, about 1,736 kilometres (1,076 miles) away, when it tumbled off the tracks.

Late last year, a passenger express rammed a freight train near the Punjab village of Rehti, killing 70 people and injuring scores more.

Investigators chided the government after that accident, saying the railway system was old and poorly maintained.

9 drug traffickers held in Iran: Iranian security forces have smashed an international drug trafficking network, seizing 2,500 kilograms (5,510 pounds) of morphine and arresting nine smugglers, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported Saturday, reports AP from Nicosia.

The agency, monitored in Nicosia, said the bust occurred in a desert region near the central Iranian city of Yazd, but did not say when.

It quoted an unidentified official as saying that in the past three years, authorities have seized 11,325 kilograms (24,967 pounds) of narcotics in the Yazd region and smashed three international drug trafficking gangs.

Iran is a major transit route for drugs going to Europe from Asia. The trade flourished while authorities were preoccupied with 1880-88 war with Iraq.

Ramos in Beijing: Philippine President Fidel Ramos arrived Sunday for a visit expected to focus on deepening economic and trade ties with China, reports AP from Beijing.

Ramos was greeted at the airport by Agriculture Minister Liu Jiang, who is chairman of the Chinese government reception committee. No official meetings were scheduled until Monday, when he was to meet president Jiang Zemin, who also is head of China's 52-million-member Communist Party.

Ramos will ask China to build power generators in the Philippines to help solve the nation's power shortage. He also will raise the two nation's conflicting claims to the Spratly islands in the South China Sea and Filipino workers' welfare in Hong Kong, officials from his office said.

Filipino mayor shot dead: A town mayor was shot dead by a gunman inside a church in the northern Philippines on Sunday, the government-run Philippine News Agency (PNA) said, Reuter from Manila says.

Jose Peraltia was hearing mass when the assassin shot him twice on the head from behind at a catholic church in Balungao town in Pangasinan province, 150 km (90 miles) north of Manila, PNA, quoting a military spokesman said.

The gunman and an accomplice fled on a motorcycle, it said.

Police were seeking a motive for the murder.

10 killed, 50 injured as tornado hits US

TULSA, Okla., Apr 25: A tornado blew cars and trucks off a busy interstate highway and damaged dozens of homes Saturday evening, killing 10 people, injuring at least 50 and leaving hundreds homeless, authorities said, reports AP.

This was not a storm that stayed down and then went back up. It stayed down for several minutes and totaled the area," said Jerry Griffin, an inspector for the Tulsa County Sheriff's Department.

That area was about a mile (1.6 kilometres) wide and two miles (3.2 kilometres) long, from the eastern edge of Tulsa into suburban Catoosa, Griffin said.

Two major truck stops on Interstate 44 were scattered piles of rubble. Warped sheets of metal were wrapped around whatever poles were left standing. Families who escaped from their vehicles at one truck stop walked around dazed, clinging to pillows, blankets and other possessions.

Tornado sirens in Tulsa started going off at 6:45 pm. The tornado hit a few minutes later, overturning mobile homes at a dealership, collapsing the roof of a church in Tulsa, and downing power lines.

Togi Fureborn, the state's director of civil emergency management, confirmed 10 deaths, Griffin said at least 50 people were injured and hundreds were left homeless.

"I think that's very conservative," he said. "I doubt anybody can tell until the sun comes up what happened."

Mayor Susan Savage said she was concerned about possible looting. At her request, Gov. David Walters mobilized a National Guard unit, and he flew to Tulsa to survey the damage.

Roads in and out of Catoosa were closed because of the tornado damage. A television reporter following the storms said at least 30 to 40 houses were damaged. The roof of a school in Catoosa was torn off, Tulsa Police Chief Ron Palmer said.

Nightfall hampered search efforts.

Andrus said three to four bodies had been pulled out of wreckage along a highway east of Tulsa. A seven-mile (11-kilometer) stretch of the highway was closed for about an hour because of the wreckage.

Like other tuckers, Larry Stern of Lake Minnesota, Minn., said the tornado came too quickly to hide.

"There was nowhere to go. No way," said Stern.

4 pc Indian MPs involved in crimes

NEW DELHI, Apr 25: At least four per cent of elected representatives in India today are estimated to be connected or involved with crime and criminals, and this is only the tip of the iceberg, reports IIT.

Politicians have been one of the first to admit that criminals have entered politics, but how much political will would they muster to do away with this malaise?

At a recent seminar in the capital on 'criminalisation of politics,' participants, who included politicians, economists, intellectuals, writers and journalists, agreed almost all political parties and groups today resorted in varying degrees to such methods and tactics.

The participants at the seminar organised by the centre for new perspectives called for a national debate

6 killed in Lankan bus plunge

COLOMBO, Apr 25: A microbus plunged into a river in northwestern Sri Lanka today killing six passengers who were returning home after paying respects to slain opposition leader Alalith Athulathmudali police said, reports AFP.

The vehicle fell into the Maha Oya at the town of Alawwa early Sunday, police said, adding that about a dozen other passengers escaped with injuries.

Among the dead was a woman candidate at the May 17 provincial council election from Athulathmudali's Democratic United National Front (DUNF), police said.

Bosnia negotiating with OIC states for arms

KARACHI, Apr 25: Bosnia is negotiating with Muslim countries to obtain arms for its conflict with Serbia, Foreign Minister Haris Silajdzic said today, reports Reuter.

He criticised the international community, especially Britain, for what he called inaction and failure to lift the arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims.

Silajdzic said he was holding talks with countries attending the 21st Islamic conference of Foreign Ministers in Karachi to try to win military and economic aid.

He did not name the countries he had talked with but said none had yet pledged to supply arms to Bosnia's Muslims.

"We expect military aid, diplomatic aid and financial aid," Silajdzic said in an interview.

"We are having discussions, we are having consultations right now, and I think the resolution (of the conference) will reflect just that."

Foreign Ministers from most of the 51 members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) are holding a five-day meeting in Karachi.

Silajdzic, an observer at the conference, said he wanted Islamic nations to rally to Bosnia's defence.

The conference has scheduled a special session to discuss Bosnia and many delegates have already privately expressed solidarity with Bosnia's Muslims.

In an opening address, Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Balakh Sher Mazari said "this conference must act boldly to save the Bosnian Muslims from genocide to which they are being subjected."

He demanded lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims and called for Serbian heavy weapons to be placed under UN control, and end to arms supplies to Serbia and an effective no-fly zone in Bosnia.

Silajdzic said Britain was the major stumbling block to ending the arms embargo. He hoped to meet British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd soon.

"We don't want Great Britain to act, we want them to abstain, to give us our right (to self-defence), that's all," he said. "By imposing the arms embargo on us they are actually acting on the side of the aggressor. We have to stop it."

Silajdzic said that under the United Nations charter Bosnia had the right to self-defence, adding that Bosnian Muslims faced genocide if they could not defend themselves.

He praised the United States for hardening its position over the past few days.

US President Bill Clinton has said he hopes to announce a new policy on Bosnia in a few days and hopes for European support for the policy, which may include air strikes against Bosnian Serb positions.

The United States, France and Britain are expected to hold talks next week on whether military force should be used in tandem with sanctions.

"We wanted Europe to act on this because this is a European affair, but Europe did not act," Silajdzic said.

"We would like this conference to encourage moves by the United States of America. That is a noble act to try and save humanity."



LAHORE (Pakistan): Asif Ali Zardari, husband of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and a new minister in the caretaker government of Prime Minister Balakh Sher Mazari wave to crowds upon arrival here Saturday.

Benazir's bid for power may lead to ML if it misfires

ISLAMABAD, Apr 25: After three years on the sidelines, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is making another bid for power, reports AP.

In the aftermath of President Ghulam Ishaq Khan's sudden call for elections in July, Ms. Bhutto is dictating terms, jockeying for advantage and placing her people in pivotal roles.

Some see it as a risky game that could lead to martial law if it misfires. But if she succeeds, her return to office would be cheered by the United States, an ally of Pakistan estranged by this country's nuclear policy and alleged support for anti-Indian terrorism.

Ms. Bhutto, the first woman to lead a modern Muslim nation, was dismissed as prime minister by Ishaq Khan in 1990 after 20 months in office.

Although she was accused of corruption and mismanagement, the underlying reasons were her political clashes with the president and army generals.

Earlier this month, Ishaq Khan ousted her successor, Nawaz Sharif, on similar corruption charges and for about the same real reasons. Sharif had threatened legislation to remove some of the president's constitutional powers.

It is a striking turnaround for Bhutto, who had accused Ishaq Khan of committing a "constitutional coup" when he dismissed her, but supported his ouster of Sharif's 30-month-old government.

Commentators say the horse-trading for power further discredits the political system as democracy feels its way free of military dictatorship.

Ishaq Khan appointed a transition government drawn from all major parties, and has scheduled elections for July 14.

One of the new ministers is Ms. Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, who was jailed for two years pending trial on charges of illegal profiteering during his wife's tenure. He was acquitted on nine counts, but still is charged with kidnapping and extortion.

Ms. Bhutto is under indictment on seven counts of corruption, which are widely perceived as being politically inspired.

China-Taiwan talks begin tomorrow

BEIJING, Apr 25: This week's historic talks between China and Taiwan will leave a fundamental question unanswered: is a peaceful unification of the socialist mainland and the capitalist island possible? reports AFP.

The largely symbolic talks, scheduled to begin Tuesday, will focus on practical, non-political issues — there will be no negotiations on the future of the island.

The rival governments in Taipei and Beijing both claim to be the sole legitimate government of all China.

But instead of a debate on that difficult issue, the talks are expected to be presented as a warm reunion of brothers separated by enemy lines, and China is likely to use the occasion as a chance to present a conciliatory image amid its rancorous discussions with Britain over the future of Hong Kong.

LTTE denies killing Athulathmudali

COLOMBO, Apr 25: Tamil Tigers on Sunday denied government accusations that they assassinated opposition leader Lalith Athulathmudali at an election rally two days ago, reports AP.

A statement faxed to Colombo-based news agencies by the London office of the Tigers said the Sri Lankan government's accusation was "unwarranted."

"This is obvious to the people who has masterminded this murder of his political opponent," it said.

A man whose bullet-riddled body was found near the site of attack had died of cyanide poisoning, Medical Officer L B L de Alwis told a court Saturday.

In the past, Tamil Tigers are known to have killed themselves by biting into cyanide capsules when cornered by police.

Police identified the gunman as Appiah Balakrishnan, a Tamil from the rebel-controlled Jaffna province.

Witnesses said a tall, lean man standing near the stage pulled a revolver from beneath his black T-shirt and opened fire.

After hitting Athulathmudali three times, the gunman shot and wounded a bodyguard who fired at him, shot three more bullets and fled the scene, they said.

Opposition parties blamed the government for the assassination, but a senior government minister said the insinuations are foul and baseless.

Athulathmudali's position as a one-time security adviser raised suspicion against Tamil Tiger rebels.



COLOMBO (Sri Lanka): Srimani, the widow of assassinated opposition leader Lalith Athulathmudali places flowers over his body watched by his daughter Sarala and other mourners at Athulathmudali's residence Saturday.

Arafat looks forward to free Palestine in 2 yrs

LONDON, Apr 25: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat called or Israel to make progress at middle East peace talks in Washington this week and said he looked forward to living in an independent Palestinian state within the next two years, reports Reuter.

Arafat told the British Broadcasting Corporation he wanted Israel to "follow up the basis of the peace process" including the exchange of land for peace, withdrawal from the occupied territories and "security for all of us in the region."

He said in a television interview, taped at the PLO's headquarters in Tunis last week and broadcast today that there could be "no peace without the Palestinians ... no stability without the Palestinians."

Asked by interviewer David Frost whether he would live to see and independent Palestinian state, Arafat, 63, replied: "I will invite you to come to visit me there in Palestine ... within not more than between one and a half year and two years."

The Palestine Liberation Organisation leader added: "It is a matter of time, (it may be) sooner or later ... it is one of the Middle East facts and certainties."

On Saturday, Chief Palestinian negotiator Haidar Abdel-Shafi said the ninth round of Arab-Israeli talks, due to start in Washington on Tuesday, might end without progress unless Israel and the United States accepted "innate Palestinian rights."

Palestinian leaders, under heavy pressure from Arab states, agreed last Wednesday to return to the peace talks which had been frozen since Israel expelled 415 Palestinians to South Lebanon on December 17.

Referendum a waste of time: Gorbachev

TOKYO, Apr 25: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev called today's Russian referendum a waste of time, saying the country needed early Presidential and Parliamentary elections to choose new democratic leaders, reports Reuter.

In an eve-of-poll interview with Yomiuri Shimbun, Japan's top-selling daily, Gorbachev also cautioned the US government against throwing American's full weight behind embattled reformist President Boris Yeltsin.

"There is no direct relation between reform and Yeltsin, the visiting former Kremlin leader said in Tokyo.

Gorbachev said the weekend plebiscite on Yeltsin's economic reforms could only exacerbate the Russian crisis.

"The sooner we have elections, the better our results will be," he went on.

"The problem is that Yeltsin cannot decide on any (economic measures). He is a destroyer rather than a builder."

Poverty puts democracy at risk in S Asia

KATHIMANDU, Apr 25: Nearly 440 million people live in "absolute poverty" in South Asia at present, reports PTT.

"It is simply too large a number for any society to carry. It puts democracy at risk," said a report of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation.

The commission as set up by SAARC nations under the Chairmanship of former Nepalese Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

Off the Record

He shocked onlookers by booing the monarch

LONDON: A man who booed Queen Elizabeth during a royal tour may face charges under Britain's Public Order Laws, British tabloid newspapers reported, says Reuter.

Mark Hayward, 59, shocked onlookers when he booed and jeered the monarch as she drove past and then held up a placard carrying the word "boo".

Police who pushed into the crowd to question him and took statements from witnesses have sent a report to the crown prosecution service who will decide whether he should face charges.

Haywood, who works in an antique shop in the cathedral town of Wells in southwestern England, told the Daily Mirror: "I never expected this reaction. It sounds as if I am going to be tarred and feathered or hung, drawn and quartered."

But he said he hoped he would be charged so that he could air his grievance in court.

Kasparov's luggage ransacked, stolen

MOSCOW: The luggage of world chess champion Garry Kasparov has been ransacked at a Moscow Airport and some of his belongings stolen, Itar-Tass news agency said Sunday, reports Reuter.

It quoted a police officer at Sheremetyevo Airport as saying Kasparov's mother had reported the loss of a pair of her son's training shoes, a pullover, two tracksuits and a shirt.

She was meeting Kasparov from a flight from Helsinki, where his wife Maria gave birth to a baby girl.

Luggage theft is common at Sheremetyevo where security is poor in spite of attempts by airport management and police to improve procedures. Tass said police were hunting the thief.

Ordeal of comfort woman

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian women have emerged to give the first accounts of their ordeal as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers during Japan's occupation of Malaysia in World War Two, reports Reuter.

"Captured, beaten and forced to have sex with ten to 20 Japanese soldiers a day — this was the ordeal of the then young Malay Chinese comfort woman in the hands of the Japanese invaders," the Sunday Mail newspaper said in a front-page report.

It said the woman, now 67 years old, is one of the first few Malaysians to come forward to relate their ordeal.

The newspaper, quoting the woman's letter to the youth wing of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party, said young village girls were rounded up and forced to provide sex for Japanese soldiers.

"I was in the kitchen cooking and could not escape," the woman said. "When I tried to resist one of the soldiers kicked me on the head with his boot, causing a wound."

Deaths of Tambo, Hani serious blow to ANC: Mandela

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 25: Oliver Tambo, who helped found the African National Congress and led the anti-apartheid group from exile, died Saturday in another passing of the ANC's old guard. He was 75, reports AP.

ANC leader Nelson Mandela called the nearly back-to-back deaths of Tambo and ANC activist Chris Hani a "serious blow" to the nation's largest black political organisation. He said it increased the urgency for an agreement to end white rule.

Tambo, who held the then-banned ANC together for three decades while he was in exile, died of a stroke early Saturday.

His former president, he had a mostly ceremonial position in the ANC after he returned to South Africa in 1990 following a stroke that left him partially paralyzed.

Hani, a Communist Party leader, was shot to death April 10 by a white gunman. Police have alleged a right-wing conspiracy was responsible for the slaying.

Mandela called the deaths "a very serious blow to the movement" because the two men had long experience fighting apartheid and the ANC currently is in crucial political negotiations with the government and other parties.

But while Hani was seen as a major force within the black opposition, Tambo was purely a figurehead. Mandela's remarks were a tribute to past

services rather than any significant recent contribution.

Political talks resume this week, and the ANC had been pushing for rapid progress on setting a date for South Africa's first elections open to the black majority.

"Time is not on our side and a solution must be found soon," Mandela told a news conference.

Hani was one of the ANC's most popular and militant leaders, and sporadic violence that erupted after his killing left dozens dead. But the backlash by angry blacks was not as widespread or severe as feared.

Although Mandela came to symbolize South Africa's anti-apartheid movement during

his 27-year imprisonment, Tambo is widely regarded as the man who brought the ANC through its toughest times as a struggling liberation movement.

"He was my partner, my comrade, my friend and my colleague," Mandela said somberly. "He succeeded in developing this organisation to become the strongest political force in the country."

Tambo returned to South Africa as president of the ANC in December 1990, 10 months after the group had been legalized and 30 years after he left.

In 1991, the ANC chose Mandela, Tambo's former law partner, to replace him as president and created the post of national chairman for the

alling activist.

Tambo strongly supported the ANC's armed struggle against apartheid when it began in 1961, and organized training for ANC fighters in foreign countries.

But he later was instrumental in drafting the Harare Declaration of 1989, which paved the way for negotiations with the government.

"He held his organisation together during a very difficult period, in exile," Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu said Saturday.

President FW de Klerk praised Tambo for supporting negotiations and a peaceful settlement of South Africa's political conflict.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Saturday in a message to Tambo's widow, Adelaide, that Tambo "not only championed the struggle against apartheid but also made a significant contribution toward the establishment of a democratic, non-racial and united South Africa."

Tambo, Mandela, Walter Sisulu and others founded the ANC Youth League in 1944, preaching civil disobedience and mass action. They eventually took over leadership of the ANC and launched the armed struggle.

Tambo was appointed President of the ANC in 1967, seven years after South Africa banned the group and he fled the country.

Relatives of US Gulf war victims to visit Kuwait

KUWAIT, Apr 25: Relatives of American military personnel killed in the Gulf War arrive Sunday to visit the oil-rich desert emirate where their loved ones died forcing out the Iraqi occupiers two years ago, reports AP.

Organizers said 193 family members from 37 states will arrive Sunday night on the week-long visit, dubbed Desert Peace.

The visitors, whose ages range between 6 and 74, are immediate relatives of 96 Americans who died in Operation Desert Storm, which ended Iraq's seven-month occupation of Kuwait on February 26, 1991.