

BRIEFLY

12 women join Indian Air Force:

The first batch of 12 women cadets joined in Indian Air Force which remained the exclusive domain of males since its inception in 1932, local newspaper Times of India reported Tuesday. Xinhua reports from New Delhi.

Indian Air Chief Marshal N C Suri commissioned the 12 women pioneers in the Technology Intensive Air Service along with 123 male cadets in the Air Force Academy at Dundegal, about 40 km from Hyderabad, a south India city on Monday.

These new women officers had been selected among a staggering 24,000 applicants and received training collectively with male cadets for the technical branches of the Indian Air Force in the academy.

Suri said at the ceremony that the recruitment "is an important milestone for the Indian Air Force and the whole nation."

Troops defuse bomb in Cairo:

Egyptian security forces dismantled a time bomb near a mosque in a Cairo slum, security sources said Monday, Reuters reports from Cairo.

They said the bomb was found on Sunday night in the north Cairo neighbourhood of Shubca, where a bomb killed seven people on Friday night and wounded 15.

The sources said the bomb wrapped in newspapers and a nylon bag, was spotted outside the mosque of Omar Ibn Al-Khattab by a resident who alerted security forces.

They did not say how many points of explosives the bomb contained but said it was a time bomb.

Four bombs have exploded in Cairo since February.

China executes 18 criminals:

Eighteen criminals were executed earlier this month after being sentenced to death at a mass trial of 39 people in the eastern city of Nanjing, a press report said Monday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The condemned men included Jiang Baoquan and Liu Fukeng, found guilty by the intermediary courts of the Jiangsu provincial capital of killing two people and seriously injuring three, the June 15 edition of the Jiangsu Legal News said.

Li Xianagrong, Zhang Yilong and Zhang Yibiao were also sentenced to death for armed robbery, the paper said, without naming the rest of those executed.

The sentence was carried out after the trial, it said.

Kyrgyzstan President in Iran:

Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akayev, on a first visit to Iran since his country's independence, arrived in Tehran Monday with a high-ranking delegation, reports AFP from Tehran.

Akayev, greeted at the airport by his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, told reporters that Tehran and Bishkek would sign several accords to boost political, economic and cultural ties.

Rafsanjani called the visit a 'new chapter' in relations with the former Soviet Republic and said Iran was "ready to cooperate with central Asian states in all fields."

Colombo continues talks LTTE frees 5 of 39 security personnel

COLOMBO, June 22: Sri Lanka's dominant Tamil guerrillas today freed five of the 39 security personnel held by them as Colombo continued to negotiate for the release of the rest, official sources said, reports AFP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) handed over five policemen to the military in northern Jaffna peninsula from where they would be flown to Colombo by the air force later today, the sources said.

The five men would be accompanied by their flight to Colombo by relatives who went to see the prisoners last week through the intervention of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the sources said.

The 39 security personnel were captured on June 13, 1990, two days after the Tigers renewed their separatist war with Colombo following the collapse of 14 months of peace talks.

The release of the five came after three days of negotiations between government representative Brigadier Ananda Weerasekera and LTTE leaders who had introduced last-minute demands for freeing the 38 policemen and a soldier.

The LTTE had on Saturday agreed to free their prisoners unconditionally but suddenly changed its mind and demanded the lifting of an embargo on fuel and battery cells to the war-torn peninsula, military sources said.

This is the second release of policemen this year. In January, the Tigers handed over two constables to the Anglican Bishop of Colombo Kenneth Fernando as a sign of goodwill and wanted Colombo to reciprocate before freeing

Gunmen kidnap two Chinese hydrologists in Baluchistan

QUETTA, (Pakistan), June 22: Gunmen kidnaped two Chinese hydrologists in the southwestern Pakistani province of Baluchistan on Monday, government sources said, reports Reuters.

They said the kidnapers took the Chinese to an unknown destination after seizing them at gunpoint at Bostan, north of the provincial capital Quetta.

There was no immediate information about the motive for the kidnaping.

The Chinese, whose name were not immediately known, were working with Pakistan's state-run Water and Power Development authority and had travelled to advise a resident in Gulsitan on the use of water from his wells, the government sources said.

Plane carrying UN medical team crashes in western Sahara

RABAT, Morocco, June 22: Three members of a UN medical team were killed and another was seriously injured in a plane crash in Aouassard, 500 (300 miles) south east of western Sahara's capital, Laayoun, a UN spokesman said on Monday, reports Reuters.

A light aircraft transporting the medical team on routine duty had technical problems, the spokesman said.

The victims are Australian, Norwegian and Swiss nationals.

The fourth, a Swiss, was badly injured the source added. The identities of the dead and injured were not revealed.

Security forces are like doctors curing patients: Rafsanjani Crackdown on Iranian women for violating dress code

TEHRAN, June 22: The Iranian security forces on Monday arrested hundreds of women here in a crackdown to impose a strict Islamic dress code and closed about 100 boutiques, reports AFP.

Armed policemen in Madar Square, in residential northern Tehran, rounded up several women and forced them to join 20 others in a bus which took them to a police station, witnesses said.

Several women broke down in tears and others resisted but they boarded the bus following the intervention of police women in black chadors.

Witnesses said several other arrests were made in various parts of the Iranian capital, where police and Islamic volunteers early Monday launched a new crackdown against

social corruption."

The police force would also ensure "inappropriately-covered women are denied service" in all public and commercial places.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has justified a crackdown against women accused of violating the Islamic dress code, describing it as a "duty equal in importance to praying and fasting."

Rafsanjani spoke Monday as Iranian security forces rounded up hundreds of women, confiscated cars and closed boutiques as part of a campaign against "social corruption."

"Stopping people from doing what is contrary to Islamic precepts is a duty for Shi'ism equal in importance to praying and the Ramadan fast," said Rafsanjani, who was re-elected



American soldiers take a beach stroll Monday as the USS Wasp helicopter carrier lies off the coast of Somalia with three support ships (unseen in picture), carrying some 4,000 marines. — AFP/UNB photo

UN resumes aid to Angola

LUANDA, June 22: The United Nations yesterday formally resumed emergency humanitarian aid to two million war and drought victims in Angola, reports Xinhua.

Three Antonov-12 planes, each carrying 12 tons of relief goods, left here yesterday respectively for Luena in eastern Angola, Huambo city in central Angola and Saurimo city in north-eastern Angola.

At a ceremony held here yesterday to mark the start of resumption of emergency aid to Angola, U.N. special envoy for Angola Margaret Anstee described the occasion as an important event.

Anstee said that for the first time delivery of relief goods to areas under the control of the Angolan government and the rebel National Union for the Total Independence of Angola started simultaneously.

Major against lifting arms ban on Bosnia

COPENHAGEN, June 22: British Prime Minister John Major said today he could not support easing the arms embargo on Bosnia as it would only prolong the conflict, reports Reuters.

"That's not a policy I favour," Major said of calls from Washington for support to ease the embargo so that Bosnian Muslims could defend themselves. "I want to stop the killing not add to the killing," he said.

"I don't believe that lifting the arms embargo and flooding more arms into the area will do anything other than stop any chance of a negotiated settlement," Major told reporters on his way to the last day of the two-day European Community summit.

Demirel calls for end to arms embargo on Bosnia

LONDON, June 22: Turkish President Suleyman Demirel called today for an end to the arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims, and said he had the backing of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and French President Francois Mitterrand, reports Reuters.

Demirel told Sky Television that the German and French leaders supported the idea during telephone conversations with him from Copenhagen, where they are attending a two-day European Community summit meeting.

"If United Nations lifts the embargo, then these people will get limited amount of arms to protect themselves, for defence. Kohl agrees on that, Mitterrand agrees on that," said Demirel, interviewed in Ankara.

Sky said neither French nor German officials had confirmed the conversations with Demirel.

The Turkish President said the UN Security Council was blocking efforts to lift the embargo. "This is what we are working on... these people should get a chance to defend themselves. This is their humanitarian right."

Several EC foreign ministers turned down a similar plea from Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic when they met him on the fringes of the summit on Monday, saying such a move would only make the fighting worse.

Diplomats at the EC summit said US President Bill Clinton sent a letter to Kohl asking him to support efforts to end the embargo.

Kohl pressed other community leaders but failed to convince them during a heated and tense debate on Monday about the end of the war in Bosnia.

The diplomats said the German leader ran into tough opposition from countries like Britain and France who are worried about the safety of the troops they have sent for serving with the UN humanitarian mission in Bosnia.

Demirel said he opposed a Serb-Croat proposal to divide Bosnia into three ethnically separate areas, saying it would lead to the eventual elimination of the Muslim.



A woman washes her laundry Monday on the banks of the Miljacka river in front of the Bosnian National Library destroyed by Serb shelling. Due to the water shortage, the citizens of the besieged Bosnian capital make good use of the river to satisfy some basic needs. — AFP/UNB photo

Hizbollah rebels rocket SLA post

MARJAYOUN, Lebanon, June 22: Pro-Iranian guerrillas attacked Israel's militia ally in South Lebanon with rockets and mortars today, Israeli and allied artillery hit back, security sources said, reports Reuters.

They said the guerrillas fired anti-tank rockets and mortar bombs at a South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia post in Shoumartyeh Hill on the edge of Israel's self-proclaimed security zone. No one was hurt, the sources added.

Israeli and SLA gunners fired about 30 shells near a village where pro-Iranian Hizbollah (Party of God) guerrillas are active in the north of the zone, which extends some 15 km (nine miles) into Lebanon. There was no immediate report of casualties.

Gorbachev calls for polls to rescue Russia from crisis

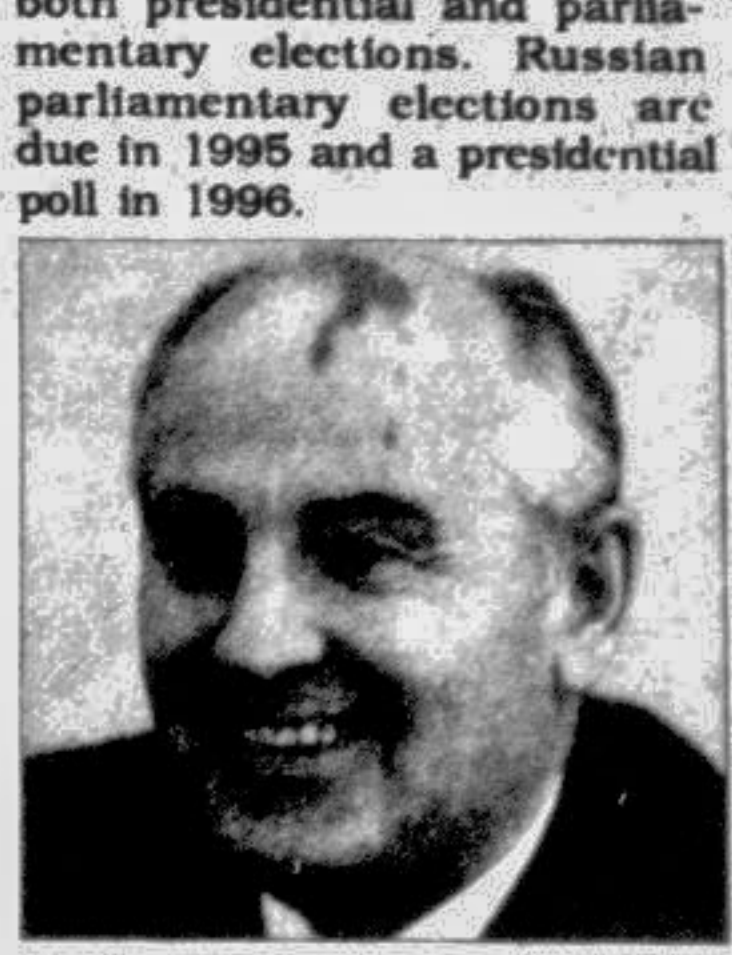
BERNE, June 22: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on Monday called for immediate elections to rescue Russia from a crisis threatening economic and political reform, reports Reuters.

Gorbachev, on a visit to Switzerland, also said the shock therapy intended to modernise Russia's economy was failing and was wiping out savings and causing widespread poverty.

"Living standards are being rolled back 20 years and political circles are now busy blaming each other," Gorbachev told a news conference.

"Therefore, elections must take place today," he said. "To safeguard the reforms, elections must be held as soon as possible."

Gorbachev said he wanted



Mikhail Gorbachev Russian President Boris Yeltsin is seeking to introduce a new constitution that would strengthen his powers.

Off the Record

Awards to honour artists outside Nobel Prize

BERLIN: Russian Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich on Monday won one of the Japan Art Association's Praemium Imperiale prizes set up in 1987 to honour artists whose works fall outside the Nobel Prize scheme, reports Reuters.

Rostropovich, who left the Soviet Union in 1974 saying that communist authorities were stifling his career, won the music category in recognition of his lifelong work, according to an announcement by the association at a ceremony in Berlin.

Rostropovich was eventually stripped of his Soviet citizenship and now lives in the United States.

The other 1993 Praemium Imperiale laureates are American painter Jasper Johns, Swiss sculptor Max Bill, Japanese architect Kenzo Tange and French choreographer Maurice Bejart.

The winners will receive a commemorative medal and a prize some of 15 million yen (3,90,000 dollar) each at an awards ceremony in Tokyo in October, the announcement said.

They will also be received in audience by Emperor Akihito.

Singapore girl on display

SINGAPORE: Singapore Airlines' sexy, ever-smiling Singapore girl in her form-fitting sarong has joined world leaders, heroes and villains on display at Madame Tussaud's wax museum in London, the airline said, reports Reuters.

The museum, one of London's best-known tourist attractions, said a life-size wax figure of a female flight attendant was displayed for the first time on Monday to reflect the popularity of international travel. The airline said in a statement it had spent about US 470 million dollar promoting the image of the Singapore girl in her tight sarong kebaya at airline destinations around the world.

Flight attendant Lim Suet Kwee, 29, was the model.

Mao portrait soiled

BEIJING: The giant portrait of Mao Zedong hanging in Beijing's Tiananmen Square was soiled last week with a brownish substance thrown by someone, witnesses and an official said, reports AFP.

"Yes, that's what happened," a spokesman for the administration of the large central Beijing Square said on the telephone Monday. The incident occurred Friday.

The anonymous spokesman refused to give other explanations, declining to say if there had been arrests.

Witnesses said the portrait of Mao remained stained for more than half an hour in the middle of the afternoon.

Mao's nose and cheeks were spotted with what looked like thrown rotting fruit or vegetables, which trickled over his mouth. Hundreds of curious onlookers immediately massed under the portrait, which hangs over the entrance to the forbidden city, China's former Imperial Palace, at one end of Tiananmen.

Politics, war dominate OAU FMs meet

CAIRO, June 22: Politics and war in southern Africa and Muslim fundamentalist terrorism dominated Monday's opening session of an Organisation of African Unity (OAU) foreign ministers' meeting here, reports AFP.

Laying the groundwork for the annual OAU summit on June 28 and 29, ministers heard a call from Senegal's Moustapha Niassé to "Encourage President Federik De Klerk to pursue the process of democratisation in South Africa".

Niassé also accused Angola's rebel National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) of seeking to sabotage bids to bring peace to the southwest African country, plunged into renewed civil war.

He proposed that the na-

tions of the "black continent" should "work together" to promote the Angolan peace process, which collapsed in Abidjan last month when UNITA rejected an international proposal.

But the hot issue for the meeting's Egyptian hosts, faced with a wave of Muslim fundamentalist violence, was the alleged support of some African nations for terrorism.

Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Sedki said that in some unnamed African states, people were trying to block development and progress violence and terrorism.

Sedki urged all necessary firmness in confronting the threat, "above all when this terrorism and violence enjoy complicity and support inside our continent."

Rebel leader claims supreme authority in Azerbaijan

BAKU, Azerbaijan, June 22: Rebel leader Suret Guseinov claimed power in the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan on Monday as his forces stood poised in the suburbs of the capital Baku, reports Reuters.

Guseinov said it was unacceptable for parliament Chairman Geldar Aliyev to take over the running of the trans-Caucasian state from President Abulfaz Elchibey, who fled the capital last Friday.

"A power vacuum has been created and the reality of today's situation does not allow the Chairman of parliament to take responsibility on himself," he told a news conference in his western stronghold of Gyandzha.

"So I am obliged to take all responsibilities and powers on myself."

Guseinov launched a rebellion in western Azerbaijan on June 4, demanding Elchibey's resignation. In a week his forces have marched all the way to the outskirts of Baku without meeting any resistance from government troops.

The rebel chief told Commonwealth Television his forces were a "people's movement." He blamed Elchibey for clashes between government forces and his supporters in which 70 people were killed at the start of the uprising.

"The President spilled the blood of brothers. He broke the constitution. I support the constitution and I will act in the framework of the constitution," he said.

Elchibey has taken refuge in the southwestern Azeri enclave of Nakhichevan, sandwiched between Armenia, Turkey and Iran. He insists he has not resigned.

The Russian news agency Interfax said Elchibey on Monday appointed first Deputy Prime Minister Vakhid Akhmedov as acting premier to replace Pankah Guseinov, who resigned earlier.

It was Elchibey's first official act since fleeing the capital, but it was not clear whether the new appointee would wield any authority in practice.

Aliyev, an elder statesman who ran Azerbaijan as Communist Party chief for 13 years, announced he was temporarily replacing the president last week.

Although he has pledged to stick to the law and said Elchibey remains president, it

seems doubtful whether the elected leader can reassert his authority.

Aliyev's return was regarded with nostalgic warmth across the country as a symbol of past Soviet era of peace, relative stability and stern discipline imposed from above.

By contrast Elchibey's popularity has evaporated in the year since his election as Azerbaijan suffered heavy military defeats against Armenians over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Aliyev and another legal opposition leader, Itibar Mamedov, were negotiating with Guseinov on how to end the crisis.

Mamedov said on Sunday he had visited Guseinov and obtained a gentlemen's agreement that rebel forces would

parliament only wanted the president back so they could get rid of him formally.

Elchibey's refusal to resign has left Baku with no legal way of replacing him.

"It's quite clear that the aim of inviting the president back is to put pressure on him to resign," Karimov said, "but remember that if Suret Guseinov comes to power, the political life of Azerbaijan would be finished."

On Monday Elchibey, who initially took a conciliatory line towards the rebels and had promised an amnesty to them, strengthened his stand.

"We are confronted here with a military coup which threatens our democracy," he told a news conference in Nakhichevan.

Iraqi opposition leader meets Kuwaiti Emir

KUWAIT CITY, June 22: An Iraqi opposition leader planning the overthrow of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein met on Sunday with Kuwait's Emir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, says AFP.

Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Hakim, head of the Iranian-backed Supreme Assembly of the Islamic revolution in Iraq, also met the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah, the official Kuwait news agency, KUNA said. No details were disclosed.

Hakim arrived in Kuwait on Sunday on a three-day visit after a trip to Syria where he called for Saddam Hussein's overthrow by having the Iraqi people join forces.