

BRIEFLY

Blast kills two in China: A massive explosion at China's Xichang launch facility killing at least two people, injured more than 20 and destroyed 75 million dollars advanced weather satellite, Newsweek Magazine reported Sunday, says Reuter from New York.

It quoted western diplomats as saying the April 9 blast, which was probably caused by a lead in the on-board fuel system of the Fengyun 2 satellite, also leveled a key test lab at the launch facility 1,250 miles (2,000 km) southwest of Beijing.

Iran to send observers to S Africa: Iran will send four diplomats as election monitors to South Africa this week upon an invitation by the United Nations, an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said yesterday, Xinhua reports from Tehran.

Mahmoud Mohammadi said that the elections in South Africa, scheduled for April 26-28, would be held under the supervision of regional non-governmental organisations and a number of other countries.

An independent election commission has been formed in South Africa and international and regional organisations, including the UN Organisation of African Unity and Amnesty International, would monitor the process of the elections, he said.

Algerian troops kill 4 militants:

Algerian security forces said on Sunday they killed four Islamic militants during a two-day sweep of Muslim fundamentalist strongholds, the official Algerian APS news agency reported, Reuter says from Tunis.

APS, received in Tunis, said soldiers also arrested 61 people suspected of belonging to or supporting armed Islamic groups.

Algerian radio said a large cement factory, which was badly damaged by two bombs on Friday, will be out of commission for three months. It said 10 Islamic militants were involved in the attack on the plant at Meftah, 20 km (12 miles) southeast of Algiers.

Drug seized in Mexico, 20 held:

Police arrested 20 suspected drug smugglers and seized marijuana valued at 15 million dollars in operations carried out in nine different states over the weekend, the Mexican Attorney General's office said, Reuter reports from Mexico City.

IRA gunmen kill 2 Protestants:

IRA gunmen killed two Protestants as they chatted through the windows of their parked cars in a quiet northern Ireland town late on Sunday, Reuter reports from Londonderry, N Ireland.

Police said up to 30 shots were fired by the attackers whose own car was found later a short distance from Garvagh, a market town 25 miles (40 km) from Londonderry, Northern Ireland's second city.

Congressmen for immediate action against Serbs

US takes wait-and-see attitude toward air strikes

WASHINGTON, Apr 25: The Clinton administration took a wait-and-see attitude toward air strikes as Bosnian Serbs grudgingly began to withdraw from Gorazde, but members of the US Congress urged immediate action to punish the Serbs, reports AP.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said the Serbs are "trying to comply" with an elapsed deadline for them to pull back from the besieged enclave and it was "prudent... to give them an opportunity to complete the withdrawal."

Christopher was in London on Monday for talks on Bosnia with British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. He also was to meet French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe and in Geneva on Tuesday with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.

Christopher said on television Sunday he was encouraging reports that the Serbs appeared to be withdrawing from a two-mile radius around Gorazde as ordered, although mortar attacks and small arms fire continued. He said that if the fighting there can be ended, "I think there's a chance for a negotiated peace."

Christopher warned, however, that the NATO ultimatum remains in effect and "there will be action taken if there are violations."

The United Nations rejected an initial NATO request for authorization to bomb the Serbs around Gorazde, saying such bombing would endanger UN troops trying to move between the Serbs and Muslims. Christopher said more than 600 UN forces would be in Gorazde by the end of Sunday.

However, critics said the

failure to strike quickly after the Serbs failed to fully comply with the Saturday night deadline was another sign of weakness on the part of the UN and the United States.

"The facts are the facts and it isn't a rosy scenario. Everybody is standing by waiting for some miracle to kick in," Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole said in an interview.

Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan said NATO air strikes should be carried to Serbia, main supporter of the Bosnian Serb land grab in Bosnia. "I would not have a bridge left on the Danube," Moynihan said, adding that he also would shut down Serbian airports but not bomb Belgrade, the Serbian capital.

Moynihan, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, joined Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn, who last week said Serbia should become a target in an expanded NATO air operation.

Dole also indicated that Serbia should not go unpunished. "The Serbs have to understand what pain is all about. They like to inflict it but they don't like to receive it," he said, adding that any attacks should be directed at the Belgrade government and not the Serbian people.

The administration says it has not ruled out attacks on Serbia, but that the focus now should be forcing the Bosnian Serbs to end their aggression and return to the peace table.

Moynihan and Dole also urged the administration to unilaterally end the UN-imposed arms embargo on Bosnia so the Muslims can better defend themselves.



Nine year-old Mediha Djaranovic, who was injured in the head by a Bosnian Serb gunman is being carried on a stretcher at Sarajevo's olympic stadium after her evacuation by UN helicopter from the besieged town of Gorazde April 24.

—AFP photo

Situation along Tibetan border normal: India

NEW DELHI, Apr 25: India has not observed large-scale movements of Chinese troops into Tibet and the situation along the Indo-Tibetan frontier is "absolutely normal," a Defence Ministry spokesman said here today, reports AFP.

The Indian spokesman dismissed assertions by Tibetan sources that up to 30,000 Chinese soldiers had moved into Tibet during the past three weeks and that many of them had deployed along Tibet's border with India.

"We don't have any information like that," the Defence Ministry spokesman said. "The situation (along the border) is absolutely normal."

Nothing that Indian and Chinese officials held a round of talks on border questions in Beijing last week, the spokesman said "this is the time when these troop numbers should go down."

"And we are making quite smooth progress in that regard," he added.

The London-based Tibet information network, citing sources in the Tibetan government-in-exile based in the Indian hill town of Dharamsala, reported Sunday that China had sent some 30,000 additional troops into Tibet.

"The troops movements, the largest reported from the area since martial law was lifted from the Tibetan capital in 1990, appear to be concentrated around the Tibetan border with India," the network said.

Tibetan sources here contacted by AFP said three divisions of People's Liberation Army soldiers had entered Tibet in the last week of March and first week of April.

They said many of the troops had moved to the Tibetan region bordering the far northeastern Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

The Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader, has been based in India with some 100,000 of his following since fleeing his homeland following a failed anti-Chinese uprising in 1959.

Indian and Chinese officials meet regularly to discuss ways to keep the peace on the border, subject of a dispute that took the two countries to a brief but bitter war in 1962.

China greets Tsutomu Hata

BEIJING, Apr 25: China warmly congratulated Tsutomu Hata today on his election as Japan's new Prime Minister, praising his "zeal and vision" in promoting Sino-Japanese relations, reports AFP.

"We would like to express our heartfelt congratulations to Tsutomu Hata on his election to Prime Minister of the new government at both House of Representatives and House of Councillors of the Diet this afternoon," Xinhua quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying.

"Hata is a statesman well known to the Chinese people. We appreciate the zeal and vision he has shown for closer Sino-Japanese friendship and cooperation and the tremendous useful efforts he has made toward this end," the spokesman said.

Hata served as Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in the administration of Morihiro Hosokawa, who announced his resignation on April 8 amid questions about his financial transactions.

Hata visited China in January, two months ahead of a trip here by Hosokawa.

"We are confident that during his tenure in office, Sino-Japanese relations will surely develop further on the present basis," he said.

China supports Jordan's stand on ME issue

AMMAN, Apr 25: Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel Salam Majali yesterday met with Wang Zhaoguo, Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on the ongoing Middle East peace process, reports Xinhua.

Wang, who arrived here yesterday with a 10-member CPPCC delegation on a four-day visit to the kingdom, reiterated China's support for Jordan's position for a peaceful solution to the Middle East problem.

"The Chinese government has consistently advocated a peaceful solution to the Middle East issue on the basis of relevant UN resolutions," he said.

Wang said that as one of the UN Security Council members, China will continue to make efforts for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict so as to realise peace in the region as early as possible.

For the difficulties Jordan is facing, Wang said, China expressed its understanding and sympathy. China supports Jordan's rational demands, he added.

Wang, who came here at the invitation of Ahmed Al Lawzi, Speaker of Jordan's senate, also introduced to the hosts the achievements China has gained in the reform and economic construction over the past 15 years.

Off the Record

Carter's daughter & her fiancé put off May 28 wedding

ATLANTA: The daughter of former President Carter and her fiancé postponed their May 28 wedding, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported Saturday, says AP.

Carter, 26, and Michael Antonucci, 27, gave no reason for the decision, the newspaper said.

The couple met when they were students at Brown University in Providence, RI. They had planned to marry at an outdoor ceremony at the National Ornamental Metal Museum in Memphis.

Antonucci wouldn't comment Friday. Carter has repeatedly declined to be interviewed and couldn't be reached.

Carter graduated from Memphis College of Art in 1991 and the two moved to Atlanta. She is completing work on a master's degree at Georgia State University.

Three beatified by Pope

VATICAN CITY: An African man and two Italian mothers were beatified Sunday by Pope John Paul II, who described them as "heroes of faith", who endured deep physical and emotional pain, reports AP.

Beatification is the last step before possible sainthood. The beatification of Isidore Bakanja, who was beaten and died in 1909 in what is now Zaire, was accompanied by Zairean dancers and attended by many bishops taking part in a Vatican synod of Africa.

The others beatified were Elizabeth Canori Mora, and Gianna Beretta, who dedicated their lives to charitable works and family life.

Bakanja was an example of the persecution that Roman Catholic missionaries have faced in Africa, the Pope said.

Bakanja was born in the late 1890s in the former Belgian Congo and preached among villagers. He worked as a house boy for the agent of a rubber plantation company, but many of the European businessmen opposed the church for supporting native rights.

Bakanja refused to give up wearing religious garb and was severely flogged with elephant hide whips studded with nails. He died six months later in August 1909.

The two Italian women were "models of Christian perfection" because of their continued faith in the church despite personal crises.

Funerary cart of Liao Dynasty found

HONG KONG: An approximately 1,000-year old imperial funerary cart from a group that lived in ancient China has been discovered in a tomb in inner Mongolia, the official Xinhua news agency reported Sunday.

The 8.12-metre-long (27-foot-long) wooden cart, decorated with pictures of plants and flowers and bedecked with copper bells, was found in an imperial family tomb of the Qidan people, a group that lived in the area at the time of the Liao Dynasty (916-1125), said Xinhua, monitored here.

A set of iron tools was also found, it said. Archaeologists said that the cart conforms to illustrations in historical record, Xinhua added.

Coup bid in Burundi

BUJUMBURA, Apr 25: Burundi authorities foiled a coup attempt by a small group of army soldiers Sunday and arrested six or seven of the plotters, diplomats and military officials said here today, reports AFP.

In Brussels, the Belgian radio RTBF earlier also reported that the Burundi army had regained control of the situation in the former Belgian colony overnight and that the plotters, identified as a small group of mainly Tutsi paratroopers, had been arrested.

The officials here said four officers said two or three men were arrested and four other soldiers had managed to escape. The officers were said to be from the higher institute of military cadres and to be undergoing interrogation.

A diplomat said the situation in Bujumbura seemed to be quite normal.

The Burundi army high command said the coup bid was mounted by a very small group which was immediately neutralised and failed to rally other soldiers to their plan.

Burundi, like its civil-war-stricken neighbour Rwanda, has a majority Hutu population and a Tutsi minority.

The Tutsi paratroopers who led the coup had failed to convince other elements in the army to follow them, RTBF also said.

The coup attempt came amid lingering tension following the plane crash death of President Cyprien Ntaryamira on April 6 which triggered a bloodbath of ethnic fighting in neighbouring Rwanda.

Troops massacre 150 patients in Rwandan hospital

NAIROBI, Apr 25: Troops and gunmen killed up to 150 patients, as well as nurses and drivers, from a hospital in southern Rwanda because they were members of Rwanda's minority Tutsi tribe, witnesses said today, reports Reuter.

Dr Rony Zacharias of the medical charity Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) told Reuters the killings took place over three days at the central hospital in the southern city of Butare, 25 miles (40 km) from the border with Burundi.

"For patients, anything between 100 and 150 disappeared. We saw the bodies of some. Others disappeared. I

am certain they were killed," he said from the Burundian capital Bujumbura by telephone.

"We saw the bodies of two Rwandese MSF drivers who were killed and a nurse who was beaten to death everything is out of control in Rwanda. It is a complete state of anarchy," he added.

"The killings at the hospital took place over the past three days... they were carried out by people in military uniform and armed civilians who took part in the massacres."

His was the latest account of massacres in Rwanda since the killing of President Juvenal Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart when the

plane in which they were travelling was shot down on April 6.

Zacharias, who evacuated all MSF international staff to Burundi from Butare on Sunday, said the troops and militiamen killed Tutsis lying wounded in the hospital and others when they left after receiving treatment for their injuries.

"The killings were in the hospital and also in the refugee camps nearby. Tutsi members of staff were separated and killed and others disappeared. Anyone who is a Tutsi and is found on the street is absolutely certain to be killed," he said.

Ex-CM of NWFP to fight against his ouster

ISLAMABAD, Apr 25: Former chief minister of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Sabir Shah has vowed to fight a legal battle against his ouster, reports Xinhua.

Addressing a press conference on Sunday in Peshawar, capital of NWFP, Sabir Shah of the opposition Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz Group) claimed that his government was ousted through "illegal and unconstitutional" means by the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party.

In an assembly session summoned by NWFP Governor, Aftab Shehrazad, the PPP provincial leader, defeated a resolution of vote of confidence on Sabir Shah by 42 votes in a house of 83, and he was later sworn in as new chief minister.

Sabir Shah and other members of PML (Nawaz Group) along with its coalition Awami National Party (ANP) boycotted Sunday's session, summoned by the governor asking Sabir Shah to seek a vote of confidence.

Ramos for execution of convicted drug traffickers

MANILA, Apr 25: Philippine President Fidel Ramos said here today he supported the execution of convicted drug traffickers because the penalty would deter other offenders, reports AFP.

In a speech to an anti-narcotics conference of members of the Association Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Ramos said the recent reimposition of the death penalty would help the country's fight against illegal drugs.



(From L to R) British actor Ralph Fiennes, who won the award for Best Supporting Actor in Schindler's List, director Steven Spielberg, who received the Best Film award and the David Lean award for Best direction for Schindler's List and actor Ben Kingsley pose at the BAFTA Award ceremony in London April 24.

—AFP photo

Rutskoi returning to politics, hopes to unite Yeltsin's opponents

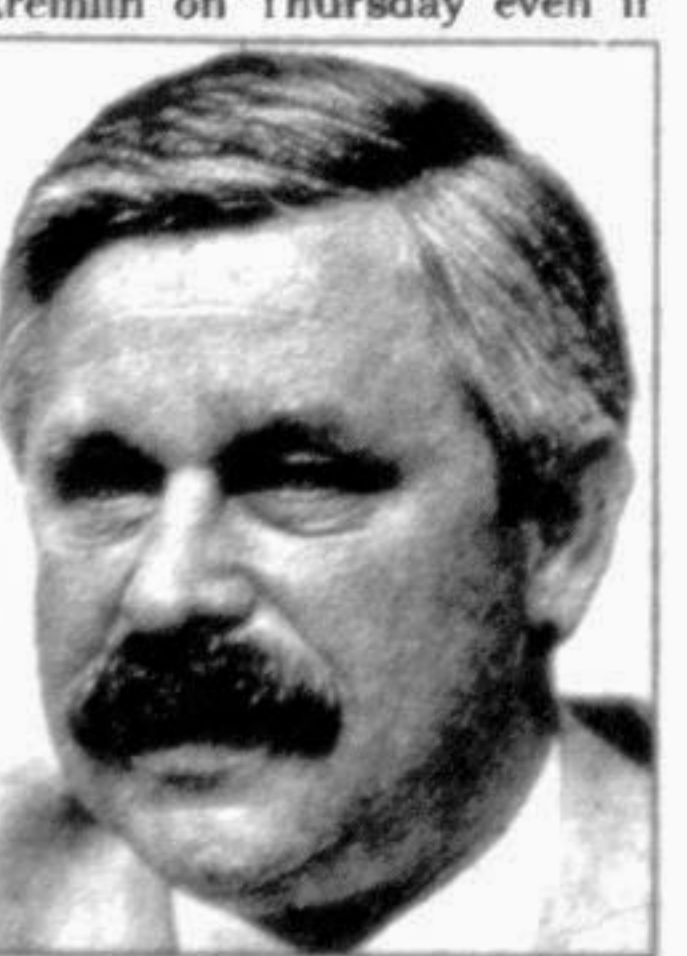
MOSCOW, Apr 25: After four months in jail and two months of self-imposed silence, former Vice President Alexander Rutskoi says he is returning to politics and hopes to unite all opponents of President Boris Yeltsin, reports AP.

Rutskoi made the announcement Sunday night on one of Russia's most heavily watched television shows, the weekly "Itogi" (summary) newscast on the independent NTV network.

It came at a critical moment, just four days before Yeltsin is scheduled to sign a political truce with his opponents and a week before die-hard Communist take to the streets for May Day, traditionally their biggest rally of the year.

The upper house of Russia's new parliament agreed Monday to sign the political truce, but the lower house was deeply divided over the pro-

posal. Yeltsin plans to sign the so-called Civic Accord in the ornate St. George's Hall of the Kremlin on Thursday even if



Alexander Rutskoi

his opponents refuse to show up. He has attached great significance to the document, aimed at a preventing a repeti-

tion of the political violence that took more than 140 lives last October.

Critics, however, say the nine-page accord is a meaningless declaration that would not hold in a crisis.

Rutskoi was jailed Oct. 4, the day Yeltsin sent tanks and troops to blast his armed opponents out of the Russian White House. The 46-year-old former fighter pilot and Afghanistan war hero was released in February, along with other bitter Yeltsin opponents, under a parliamentary amnesty.

Since then he has shaved the heavy beard he grew in jail, put on weight and kept a low profile. On Sunday, he told TV interviewer Yevgeny Kiselyov that he was ready to unite all opposition groups "who will not let themselves be muzzled" by the Civic Accord.

Rutskoi is widely viewed as a potential candidate in 1996

Thailand to send back 1000 Cambodians

TAPHRAYA (Thailand), Apr 25: Nearly 1,000 Cambodians who fled into Thailand as Khmer Rouge guerrillas attacked Cambodian forces will be repatriated now that their village is considered safe, authorities said today, reports Reuter.

The 996 refugees at this border town, half of them children, have been living in blue plastic tents and eating rice and canned fish provided by the United Nations since fleeing Boeung Trakuan last Thursday.

They will be repatriated tomorrow morning, Cambodian and Thai officials said.

"We will send 'all of them back tomorrow because their commanders at Boeung Trakuan say the village is safe now,"

said a Thai army colonel supervising the site, who asked not to be named.

Cambodian Major Kuan Swin, 35, confirmed he was preparing to take his compatriots home.

At least two people were killed when the Maoist Khmer Rouge faction, which is waging a guerrilla war against the elected government in Phnom Penh, overran a government army base at Boeung Trakuan in Cambodia's far northwest.

The dawn raid came two days after the guerrillas recaptured their former headquarters at Pailin 125 kms (75 miles) to the south.

Refugees told Reuters today they were eager to return to Cambodia.

"I don't care whether it's safe or not, I just want to go home," said Su Wut, 24.

Khmer Rouge soldiers appeared in his home with guns and forced his family out, warning them not to take any of their belongings or they would be killed, he said.

He said he visited his village, which is just over the Thai border, on Sunday and found it burned to the ground.

He said he believed the attack was aimed at frightening the populace, not killing them.

"If they wanted to kill people, all of us, including me, would be dead now," he said.

The Khmer Rouge, responsible for the deaths of one million people during its 1975-78 reign, rejected the UN-supervised peace process that led to May elections, and have kept up attacks on the new coalition government.

The refugees were the first to return to this stretch of the border since the United Nations last year completed a repatriation programme for the hundreds of thousands of Cambodians who had poured into Thailand over years of strife and warfare.

100 Palestinians get Israeli ID cards in WB

JERUSALEM, Apr 25: Israel has started to grant nationality to 100 Palestinian collaborators and their families ahead of the launch of self-rule in Gaza and Jericho, military officials said today, reports AFP.

About 20 collaborators and their relatives in Fakhmeh village in the north of the occupied West Bank received Israeli identity cards last week.

Eighty families of collaborators have sought refuge in the village.

Two of the collaborators, interviewed on Israeli television Sunday with their faces concealed, said they would move to Israel proper for fear of PLO reprisals.

In the occupied Gaza Strip, 800 collaborators and their families live in Dehinyeh, a village set up in 1974.

The PLO has rejected Israeli demands for a general amnesty for collaborators.

However, the armed wing of PLO's mainstream Fatah faction, the Hawks, signed a deal Friday with Ezzedin al-Kassam, armed wing of Hamas.