

BRIEFLY

Rao goes to Moscow June 14: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao will visit Moscow June 14-15, the Interfax news agency said Tuesday. AFP reports from Moscow.

It quoted Russian diplomatic sources as saying Rao would meet with President Boris Yeltsin for talks on trade and military cooperation.

Yeltsin made an official visit to India in January 1993.

China denounces BBC report: China on Wednesday denounced as "sheer fabrication" British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports on prison labour, the second time in six months it has responded furiously to a BBC programme, AP reports from Beijing.

China was incensed in December when BBC television aired a documentary that portrayed revolutionary leader Mao Tse-tung as paranoid and fond of young girls.

German tourist slain in US: They were German tourists taking in one of California's prettiest features. Then they encountered one of its ugliest. Now she is dead and he was fighting for his life Tuesday. AP reports from Idyllwild, California.

Detectives searched for clues to identify whoever killed the woman, wounded her husband and apparently took their wallets at a panoramic turnout on a highway winding through towering pines in the San Jacinto Mountains.

The 64-year-old woman died despite desperate efforts by her 62-year-old husband to save her. After surgery on shoulder and mouth wounds, he was in extremely critical condition and on life support at Desert Hospital.

500 Lankans stranded in Yemen: Over 500 Sri Lankans stranded in war-torn Yemen are expected to arrive in Bombay at the end of this week. Foreign Ministry sources said yesterday. Xinhua reports from Colombo.

A survey conducted by the Foreign Ministry following the war between North and South Yemeni forces revealed that there are over 500 Lankan national stranded in Sanaa, the capital of Yemen.

The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry which sought the help of the Indian government to bring back the Sri Lankan received a favourable response from New Delhi, according to the sources.

UN soldier killed in Gorazde: A Ukrainian soldier guarding a United Nations post was shot dead on Tuesday night near the eastern Bosnian town Gorazde, a UN military spokesman said. Reuters reports from Sarajevo.

The Ukrainian was shot by an unknown intruder, south of Gorazde town, spokesman Eric Chairperson said.

Blast at IBM HQ in Athens: A bomb blast damaged the headquarters of the US computer firm IBM in central Athens early yesterday but no one was hurt, police said. Reuters reports from Athens.

They said the bomb went off in the third floor of the IBM building, smashing windows in nearby houses and panicking residents.

The company's offices were closed at the time of the explosion.

Sino-Hungary ties to improve: Hungary is willing to expand cooperation with China in economy and military projects, Hungarian President Arpad Goncz told Zhang Wannian, Chief of the General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, on Tuesday. Xinhua reports from Budapest.

During a meeting with General Zhang, Goncz said Hungary is ready to deepen its cooperation with China, which has witnessed phenomenal economic growth in recent years.



Bakili Muluzi, president of Malawi's United Democratic Front party votes Tuesday in Ntaja, his home village 180 km northeast of Blantyre, in Malawi's general election that could bring the end of President Banda's 30 year autocratic rule. Muluzi is tipped to become the next president.

— AFP photo

US to press Rao for a cap on N-arms production

WASHINGTON, May 18: US officials plan to use the first visit of an Indian prime minister in seven years to press for a cap on nuclear weapons production in South Asia, reports AP.

The government of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and the Pakistani government have resisted the Clinton administration's initiatives, which would require a new trust between the two long-time foes.

Nuclear weaponry is only one item on the agenda for what US officials are billing as a chance to build a new, positive relationship with India.

Frank Wisner, President Clinton's designated ambassador to India, told a Senate committee Tuesday that "a new Indo-US partnership" is in the offing.

Rao, the first Indian prime minister to visit Washington since Rajiv Gandhi in 1987, on Wednesday was to address a joint meeting of the US Congress, as did Gandhi.

He will meet with Clinton on Thursday, with both sides hoping to improve political ties that have been tenuous for several years.

The address to Congress, the first by a foreign leader during the Clinton presidency, also underscores congressional desires to patch up relations with the world's most-populous democracy.

Administration officials have highlighted the nuclear issue as critical for international security, stating concerns that tensions between India and neighbouring Pakistan could erupt into war with the prospect of a nuclear exchange.

Both states have active nuclear weapons programmes and could, the State Department says, assemble a limited number of nuclear bombs in a short time.

Administration officials say they have had trouble interesting either nation in limiting their nuclear programmes, despite the offer of US incentives.



Narasimha Rao

"They're not going to do it just for the incentive," said one State Department official who spoke on condition of anonymity. "They have to come to the conclusion that this is in their security interest."

Polis show overwhelming support in both countries for keeping the nuclear programmes going.

India worries about letting down its own nuclear guard because of potential threats from China.

But Rao did not want his trip to center on proliferation talks, and US officials said trade and economic ties also will be highlighted.

Wisner on Tuesday told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee there is a "virtual explosion in US business interest in India," and said he expects Rao and Clinton to build "a new Indo-US partnership."

Wisner made the comments as the Senate committee began the long-awaited confirmation hearings on his nomination to be ambassador to India. The 16-month vacancy has increased tensions between the United States and India.

Police deployed around Saudi embassy in Iran

TEHRAN, May 18: More than 50 armed riot police were deployed around the Saudi embassy in Tehran today amid a row between the two countries over a ban on an anti-US rally in Makkah, an AFP correspondent reported.

A police officer at the scene told AFP that the move was taken at the request of Saudi authorities to protect the embassy amid mounting tension between the two countries.

The police took up positions around the embassy and set up road blocks on streets leading to the building.

Iran called off an anti-US and anti-Israel demonstration, planned to be held by Iranian pilgrims in Makkah on Tuesday, under the threat of force from the Saudis.

Special body to probe Premadasa killing soon

COLOMBO, May 18: Sri Lanka is likely to set up a special commission to probe the murder of former President Ranasinghe Premadasa, who was killed a year ago in a bomb blast, a ruling United National Party (UNP) official said, reports Reuters.

UNP General Secretary Dr Gamini Wijeyesekera said President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga was in favour of the commission, sought by Premadasa's widow Hema.

Premadasa and several others died at the UNP's May 1, 1993, rally in central Colombo in an explosion blamed on Tamil rebels fighting for independence in the country's north and the east.

Solzhenitsyn returns home by monthend

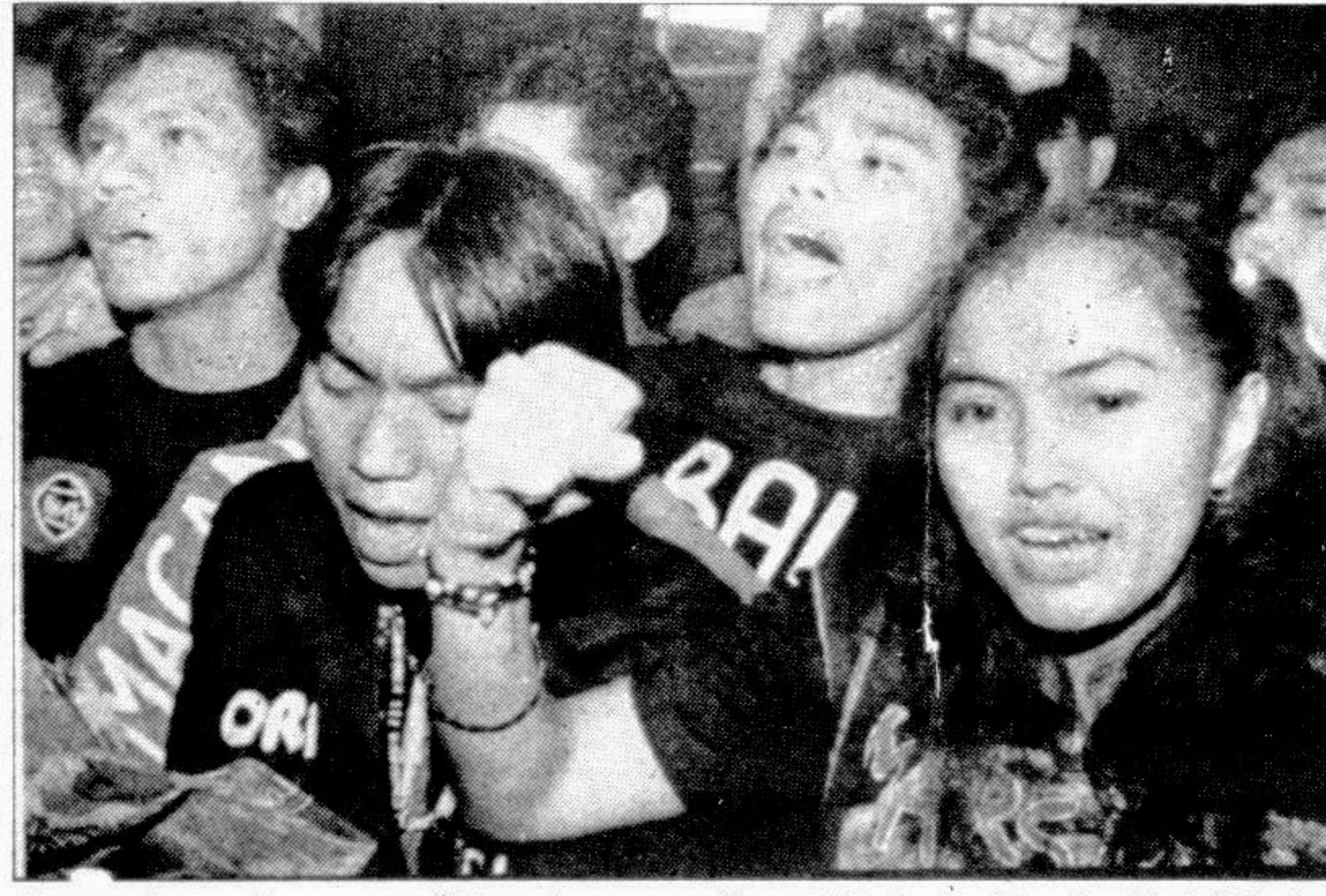
MOSCOW, May 18: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the celebrated Russian dissident writer expelled by the old Soviet regime, will return home by the end of the month after 20 years in exile, his wife said in an interview published Wednesday, reports AFP.

"We have always known that we would come back one day or another. The fate of Alexander Solzhenitsyn must and on Russian soil," his wife Natalya Svetlova told the Russian paper Ivestia.

She refused to state the exact day, saying her husband wanted to avoid journalists and return quietly.

Solzhenitsyn, 75, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970, was stripped of his Soviet nationality and expelled from Russia on February 13, 1974, handcuffed and surrounded by KGB agents.

He will return from his home in exile in Vermont in the United States with a Russian passport and settle in a big home in the Moscow suburbs.



Four students, who are part of 21 students currently on trials for insulting President Suharto, chant a slogan shortly after the guilty verdict was handed down in Jakarta yesterday. Each was given six-month jail term. About 150 students took part in a demonstration outside parliament last year, calling MPs to 'drag Suharto to an extraordinary session of the highest body of the People's Consultative Assembly.'

— AFP photo

Yemeni fighting continues for third week

ADEN, May 18: Rival armies pounded each other with heavy guns and rockets today as Yemen's civil war entered a third week with no quick victory in sight for either side, reports Reuters.

Troops loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh have been trying to advance on Aden, bastion of Vice-President Ali Salem Al-Baidh and his Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) since civil war broke out between Yemen's two halves on May 4.

Southern troops sent air-power and militias to help in a bid to confine their northern enemies to the mountain passes they are using on their

advance on the southern Aden stronghold.

Military experts said northerners risked being bogged down in difficult hilly terrain and that their lengthening supply lines could become vulnerable in hostile territory.

Southern commanders said they had blocked an attempt by northerners to enter the key Al-Anad army base that controls a main road to the strategic port 60 km (40 miles) to the south.

Other southern officers said they had stopped the elite northern Amalika Brigade advancing on the strategic port city from Zingbar town 55 km

(34 miles) to the northeast. They also said they were inflicting casualties on northerners bogged down in the Dhalea region 130 km (80 miles) north of Aden.

Arab League mediators who returned to Cairo from the northern capital Sanaa on Tuesday said Saleh had rejected their call for a ceasefire and demanded that the South surrender.

A senior Gulf-based diplomat said Saudi Arabia had started building refugee camps along its Yemen border as a precaution against a possible flood of refugees caused by the fighting.

'100 Myanmar troops killed in a week'

BANGKOK, May 18: Guerrillas loyal to opium warlord Khun Sa killed more than 100 Myanmar government troops in fierce fighting over the last week, a guerrilla source said today, reports Reuters.

Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA) overran two government bases, forcing more than 600 Myanmar troops to retreat to the north, guerrilla official Keunsai Chaiyen told Reuters in a telephone interview.

Keunsai said more than 100 Myanmar soldiers were killed during the fighting, which died down last Sunday. He said 18 guerrillas were killed.

The government positions overran were at Mong Kyaw and Hingkong in northeastern Myanmar's Shan state and government troops were forced to retreat to the town of Mongton, he said.

Government forces began an offensive against Khun Sa's stronghold in southern Shan state late last year and there has been intermittent fighting, at times heavy, since then.

Myanmar's state-run television, in a broadcast monitored in Bangkok late on Tuesday, said government troops and MTA guerrillas clashed in Loi Lan township in southern Shan state last Friday.

The broadcast made no mention of casualties but said government troops seized 3,330 litres (880 gallons) of acetic anhydride acid, chemical used to refine opium into heroin.

The chemical was being sent to an opium refining camp of Khun Sa on the Thai-Myanmar border, the television report said.

Leghari may meet with Christopher

WASHINGTON, May 18: Pakistani President Farooq Ahmed Leghari may meet with Secretary of State Warren Christopher on a private visit here next week, as the United States tries to urge Pakistan to cap its nuclear weapons programme, reports AFP.

The Pakistani President's US visit is "strictly private," and is essentially to attend his son Awaiz's graduation from the University of Rochester, New York, at the weekend, a Pakistani embassy spokesman said Tuesday.

But Leghari is expected to meet with US officials during his stay in Washington May 23 to 25.

Leghari will be in Washington a week after Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, who is to meet President Bill Clinton on Thursday.

Off the Record

Prostate operation may cause impotence

DALLAS: Men who have their prostate gland taken out because of early signs of cancer run a much higher than expected risk of losing both urinary control and their ability to have sex, a study concludes, reports AP.

The study, conducted at Harvard-affiliated hospitals, found that the side effects of this common operation are much more frequent than surgeons usually acknowledge.

The report is the latest contribution to the controversy over how — and even if — prostate cancer should be diagnosed and treated.

The PSA blood test — short for prostate-specific antigen — allows doctors to find cancer at its very early stages. An estimated 200,000 cases, 80 per cent of them at early stages, will be diagnosed this year in the United States.

Urologists, who are surgical specialists, often recommend that the cancerous gland be removed. This operation will be performed on 80,000 to 90,000 men this year. However, critics of the procedure contend there is no clear evidence that the surgery actually prolongs lives.

The reason is that prostate tumours grow slowly. Even though such tumours kill thousands of men annually, many more die of other causes before the cancer ever causes a problem.

The potential benefits of prostate removal, if any, are likely to be years in the future. But the side effects are immediate. They are typically loss of bladder control and inability to get an erection.

Lingerie thief caught

RIO DE JANEIRO: Police arrested a hospital janitor in northeastern Brazil and charged him with theft after discovering 44 pairs of women's panties in his locker, the Agencia Estado news agency reported Tuesday, says Reuter.

Cesar De Jesus Oliveira, 20, told police in the city of Salvador that he was attracted to women's lingerie, which he stole from doctors, nurses and other hospital workers.

He said he hid under a bed in the hospital staff room while female employees changed their clothes and swiped the underwear when they were not looking.

The employees began reporting the missing panties and Oliveira was caught in the act Monday.

Police chief Manoel Amado Bahia said Oliveira did not appear to be dangerous. "It's more a case for the doctors than for the police," he said.

Man clambers jet to evade police

MANILA: A man believed to be mentally deranged passed by tight security at Manila Airport before dawn Wednesday and clambered on top of a parked passenger jet. Philippine aviation officials said, reports AFP.

Airport police gave chase after they spotted Nestor Escaran, 20, on the ramp area of the domestic airport. The man then ran up the rear stairway of a parked Philippine airlines Airbus and managed to climb atop the plane, they said.

He was finally convinced to climb down after five minutes, and is now under police custody, airport officials said no flights were disrupted as a result of the stunt.

Groom smarts under fat bill for royal grooming

LONDON: A disgruntled Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, has been landed with a 160,000 pounds (240,000 dollars) annual bill for his estranged wife Diana's "Grooming," the Daily Mail said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The 3,000 pounds a week account is believed to cover some of Princess Diana's clothing, casual wear for her sons, her alternative therapy treatments, make-up, hair-dressing and some gifts.

Costs of her private holiday travel arrangements are also included.

A Kensington Palace source told the Mail: "She has made it pretty clear around here that it will never be allowed to get that high again. Staff have been urged to advise on areas where cuts can be made, and they are already in place."



Egyptian lawyers' rally teargassed

CARIO, May 18: Egyptian riot police Tuesday fired tear gas at thousands of lawyers protesting the death of a colleague in police detention, wounding two people and making 39 arrests, the Interior Ministry said, reports AFP.

About 6,000 people were gathered at the Bar Association's headquarters in central Cairo when baton-wielding riot police intervened with tear gas as the demonstrators neared the gates to march on the presidential palace.

The association, which is dominated by Muslim fundamentalists, said it had tried several times to secure authorisation for the march in protest at the alleged torturing to death of Abdelhareth Madani.

It had given assurances the demonstration would be peaceful.

But the Interior Ministry said the association was backed by extremists out to stir trouble in the streets and had stoned the police and shouted slogans against government.

Two people were slightly wounded and 39 others arrested, 27 of them lawyers.

Most of Egypt's 180,000 lawyers went out on protest strike Sunday against Madani's death on April 27, a day after he was detained on charges of acting as a go-between for jailed Muslim extremists and contacts abroad.

He was a defence lawyer for Muslim fundamentalists spiritual leader Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and other members of Islamic groups.

Russian Pacific Fleet C-in-C dismissed

MOSCOW, May 18: The Commander-in-Chief of Russia's Pacific Fleet was dismissed Tuesday for "serious deficiencies" in his management of the fleet following an explosion at a military depot in the far east, the Russian Defence Ministry said, reports AFP.

Admiral Georgy Gurinov's removal followed an explosion Saturday of a bomb depot in the region of the far eastern port of Vladivostok, which left no casualties but caused considerable damage.

Israel has quit Gaza's jail but dread of torture still remains

GAZA CITY, May 18: Israel has quit Gaza City's central prison but Palestinian tears and their dread of torture still haunt its empty rooms, reports AFP.

Shaken with emotion, Farid Najm, 34, kicked the iron door of the cell where he had spent three years.

"Quiet, you bastards," he yelled, his voice echoing through the prison, hours after Israeli troops pulled out on Monday. "The Israelis used to shout that every day."

The only thing that has gone is the smell of people being

tortured, it was terrible, unbearable," said Najm, resting his head in his hands.

Several former inmates, who bumped into each other in the corridors on a tour, remarked that the Israeli army had white-washed the walls before pulling out.

Before, the walls were black or stained with blood, they said, showing white spatters of paint on the floor to prove that the painting was a rushed job.

The walls that used to divide the cells have also been removed, and their base filled with cement. "We could barely sit," Najm recalled.

Tashin Taleb, a 30-year-old student, followed the footsteps he took on his arrest three years ago.

Whenever he came across another former inmate, they congratulated each other with a tap on the shoulder, a laugh, or a firm handshake.

"On the first floor, the waiting room, a masked man would pretend to strangle you, another would punch you in the stomach and let you collapse on the floor," he said.

And then, the corridor, where he had been forced to stay on his feet for 10 long days, and then crouching down for another 17 days, between two interrogation sessions.

The interrogation rooms are now empty, neon lights left drooping the tables and closets gone with only their marks left behind on the floor.

Next, "the refrigerator room," where cold air came in from holes in the ceiling, and then the "butcher's room," where prisoners would be hung from their arms like meat.

On another floor, cells with iron beds had drawings or inscription on the walls, one showed a mosque.

Another names of the prisoners who passed through. "Today, May 5, 1994, those who support the peace process have been freed, but we are simply moving to another jail inside Israel. It's a disgrace," wrote a member of the Islamic Jihad, which opposes the PLO-Israeli autonomy deal.

French FM defends issuing visa to Libyan FM

PARIS, May 18: French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe defended Tuesday the controversial issuing of a transit visa to his Libyan counterpart, as the Libyan embassy said that Minister Omar El Muntasser had passed through Paris twice, reports AFP.

Speaking on RTL radio Tuesday, Juppe said that Muntasser was the Foreign Minister of a country with which France has not broken off diplomatic relations.