

BRIEFLY

Pak-Afghan border closed: Pakistan shut a southwestern border crossing point with Afghanistan temporarily for the second day on Sunday, hoping to force a militia there to free five kidnapped Pakistani policemen, officials said. Reuter reports from Quetta.

No Afghan was allowed to enter Pakistan from the border post of Chaman in Baluchistan province, government officials said in the provincial capital Quetta. The post was kept closed for five hours on Saturday.

Russian rockets kill 3 Afghans: Three civilians were killed and 46 wounded by rockets fired by Russian helicopters at a village in northern Afghanistan's Badkhashan province, the official Kabul radio said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Islamabad.

The rocketing on Saturday from four helicopters also damaged several houses in the Maymay village in Darwaz district, according to the broadcast monitored in Islamabad.

Fire destroys Calcutta shops: A fire destroyed hundreds of shops in a 100-year-old market in the eastern Indian metropolis of Calcutta, a news agency reported Monday. AP reports from New Delhi.

The fire, in Calcutta's Burr Bazaar area, was put out Monday, one day after it began. More than 30 fire trucks and 300 firemen were involved in the operation.

Israel lifts closure on WB, Gaza: The army lifted a 10-day closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip on Monday, and Palestinian labourers returning to work in Israel lined up for searches at roadblocks, AP reports from Erez Crossing, Gaza Strip.

At the Erez crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip, hundreds of Palestinians waited as soldiers searched their belongings, opening even boxes of chocolates. Many waited more than four hours to get into Israel.

Chinese poacher held in Russia: Russian border guards detained a Chinese poacher in the first such illegal crossing since a Russian officer was killed during a shootout two weeks ago, a news agency reported on Monday. AP says from Vladivostok.

The poacher was caught on Sunday night while trying to cross into Russia at the Poltavka post near the city of Vladivostok in the Russian Far East, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.

Floods sweep away 2 in Algeria: Two people were killed when they were swept away by flood waters at M'Chounech near Biskra 300 kilometres (190 miles) south of Algiers, the Algerian Press Service (APS) said on Sunday. AFP reports from Algiers.

The man and woman were carried off when their vehicles were washed away by the flood, which was caused by torrential rain that hit the region on Saturday night.

Moderate quakes shake E Japan: Two moderate quakes registering up to 4.5 on the Richter scale shook eastern Japan on Monday, but there were no reports of damage or injuries, the Meteorological Agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

A quake measuring 4.1 on the Richter scale occurred at 10:13 a.m. (0113 GMT) shaking the Tokyo area, the agency said. The epicenter was located 50 kilometres (31 miles) underground in northwestern Chiba prefecture, east of Tokyo, it said.

20 Brazilians die in bus mishap: A bus in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais fell off a bridge, killing 20 people and injuring 20 others, Globo television reported on Sunday. Reuter says from Rio de Janeiro.

The accident happened near the town of Conceicao do Mato Dentro, some 125 miles (200 kilometres) northeast of the state capital of Belo Horizonte, it added.

Cops kill newsman in Philippines: A radio journalist was fatally shot and his friend critically wounded, and three police officers have been detained in connection with the attack, a report said on Monday. AFP says from Manila.

Benjamin Salcedo, a broadcaster at Dszo radio station in San Fernando town in the northern Philippines, died of six gunshot wounds in last Saturday's attack in the mountain resort of Baguio, the official Philippine News Agency (PNA) said on Monday.

Over 20 die in Vietnamese blast: An explosion on a passenger bus in northwestern Vietnam killed 20 adults and an unknown number of children, an official newspaper reported on Monday. AP says from Hanoi.

There were no survivors of the explosion early Sunday in Lao Cai province near Vietnam's border with China, 260 kilometres (160 miles) northwest of Hanoi. The Communist Party daily Nhan Dan (The People) said the bus was carrying explosives, but it didn't explain what kind they were or what set them off.

8 die in Chinese boat capsized: Eight Taiwanese tourists were killed in a boat accident in China, local media said on Monday. Reuter reports from Taipei.

They said the eight tourists drowned when a sampan taking them across the three gorges of Yangtze river in China's Hubei province suddenly overturned on Sunday afternoon, state television said. Ten other tourists were rescued, it said.

Gunmen kill 5 Colombian workers: Unidentified gunmen shot dead five farm workers on Sunday on a ranch in northern Colombia after entering the grounds and calling out their worker's names from a list, a police spokesman said. Reuter reports from Bogota.

The spokesman said about 20 gunmen, dressed in military garb, were likely members of a right-wing paramilitary group, known to operate in the Northern Cesar province killing suspected Marxist guerrillas sympathisers.

11 die in Indian workers' clash: At least 11 people were killed when workers belonging to rival trade unions in a southern Indian town clashed with knives and guns and police had to fire bullets to separate the mobs, officials said Monday. AP reports from Bangalore.

The fighting occurred on Sunday in Korur village of Karnataka between rival unions of the Gokak Textile Mill. The fight began over a personal dispute between to union leaders who are vying for control over the company's 8,000 workers. The village is about 600 kilometres (375 miles) north of Karnataka's capital, Bangalore. Seven people were killed in the clash between the workers, while four others were killed in police firing, police said.

Mandela hopeful about meeting with Savimbi

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 24: President Nelson Mandela on Monday praised Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi's recent commitment to peace and said he will explore with Savimbi ways to end Africa's longest civil war, reports AP.

Mandela told journalists at a breakfast that he would receive Savimbi in South Africa later Monday or Tuesday to hear his views on the peace process now that 8,000 United Nations peacekeeping troops are coming to Angola to solidify a shaky ceasefire in effect since November.

NICOSIA, Cyprus, Apr 24: When Muslim fundamentalists inspired by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah of Iran, one of their most powerful weapons was the cassette recorder, reports AP.

Sixteen years later, dissidents trying to dethrone another Middle Eastern monarch — King Fahd of Saudi Arabia — are waging their struggle with an updated revolutionary arsenal: fax machines, video cameras, mobile phones and electronic mail.

Many of the dissidents belong to the London-based Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights. The group is considered the best organised in opposing the 72-year-old king, a key US ally in the region.

They are ahead of the gov-

Fax and E-mail — new tools of revolution

ernment in the technology spectrum," said Aziz Abu-Hamad, a former Saudi government lawyer now with Human Rights Watch-Middle East in New York. "The government is concerned."

As the oil-based economy of the desert kingdom sputters with cash-flow problems and rising unemployment, the committee is increasingly spreading strident calls for resistance.

Its faxes purport to expose stories of corruption, misuse and allegedly un-Islamic sex lives of the royal family. The group also has smuggled in videotapes of protest demonstrations not shown on state-run television.

The group's leader, Mohammed al-Mass'ari, said many of his associates are middle-class intellectuals and technocrats who believe in a pristine form of Islam modernised with human values they learned on Western college campuses.

He said the committee does not envision an Islamic system based on Iran's restrictive model — "even marginal groups like Shiites would have their place." It also would jettison the current Saudi version of a religious state and replace it with an elected republican government, he said.

That puts the group at odds with another activist community — conservative young

clergy who are pro-monarchy but want stricter conformity to Islamic codes of life. They have blocked limited attempts by the royal family to adopt Western practices to appease the growing and often foreign-educated middle class, such as allowing women to drive.

Although the committee does not advocate violence, some analysts draw parallels to early 1970s Iran, when smuggled tapes of the exiled Khomeini's fiery sermons primed the masses for the upheaval that ousted the Shah.

"It is 1976-77 all over again. But this time we are in the Arabian Peninsula," said Hans-Heino Kopietz, a Middle East specialist in London.

Perry slates Riyadh Saudis foil US plan to apprehend Arab terrorist

WASHINGTON, Apr 24: Defence Secretary William Perry voiced disapproval at Saudi Arabia Sunday for failing to help US authorities capture suspected Arab terrorist linked to the 1983 bombing of a marine barracks in Beirut, reports AP.

"I cannot express to you how disappointed and how unhappy I am with that result," Perry told a television interview.

"It was an opportunity to capture a very dangerous terrorist," he said.

International

NCP factions blast PM's visit

Adhikari fails to raise major issues with India

KATHMANDU, Apr 24: Nepal's four communist splinter factions issued a joint statement Sunday saying Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari had failed to raise major issues during his recent visit to India, report AFP.

The Nepal Communist Party-Unity Centre (NCP-UC), NCP-flaming torch carriers (NCP-M), NCP-Marsixt, Leninist and Maoist (NCP-MLM) and the Nepal Communist League said the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty, transit through India and a controversial hydro-power and irrigation project were not raised.

Adhikari went to New Delhi on April 10 for a five-day official visit.

due to India's refusal to allow Nepal to export goods other than those made from 50 per cent foreign raw materials, largely Indian, and Nepalese labour.

Nepal wants to review and update the treaty but New Delhi has said it cannot be altered, only scrapped, by notification from each side one year in advance.

The four factions made a similar protest last month calling on the government to immediately repeal the treaty.

In Sunday's statement the four also said the prime minister had failed to address the issue of allowing Nepal a land route through India to the

Bangladesh port of Radhikapur, seen as vital to boost exports.

India currently allows access to Calcutta and Adhikari was able to negotiate for rights to use Bombay, but the factions said these ports were too far away for Nepalese businessmen.

They also attacked him for not dealing with the Tanakpur Water and Electricity Project.

Under an agreement both countries were to benefit from the border project, but the opposition groups have said India would be the only one to gain.

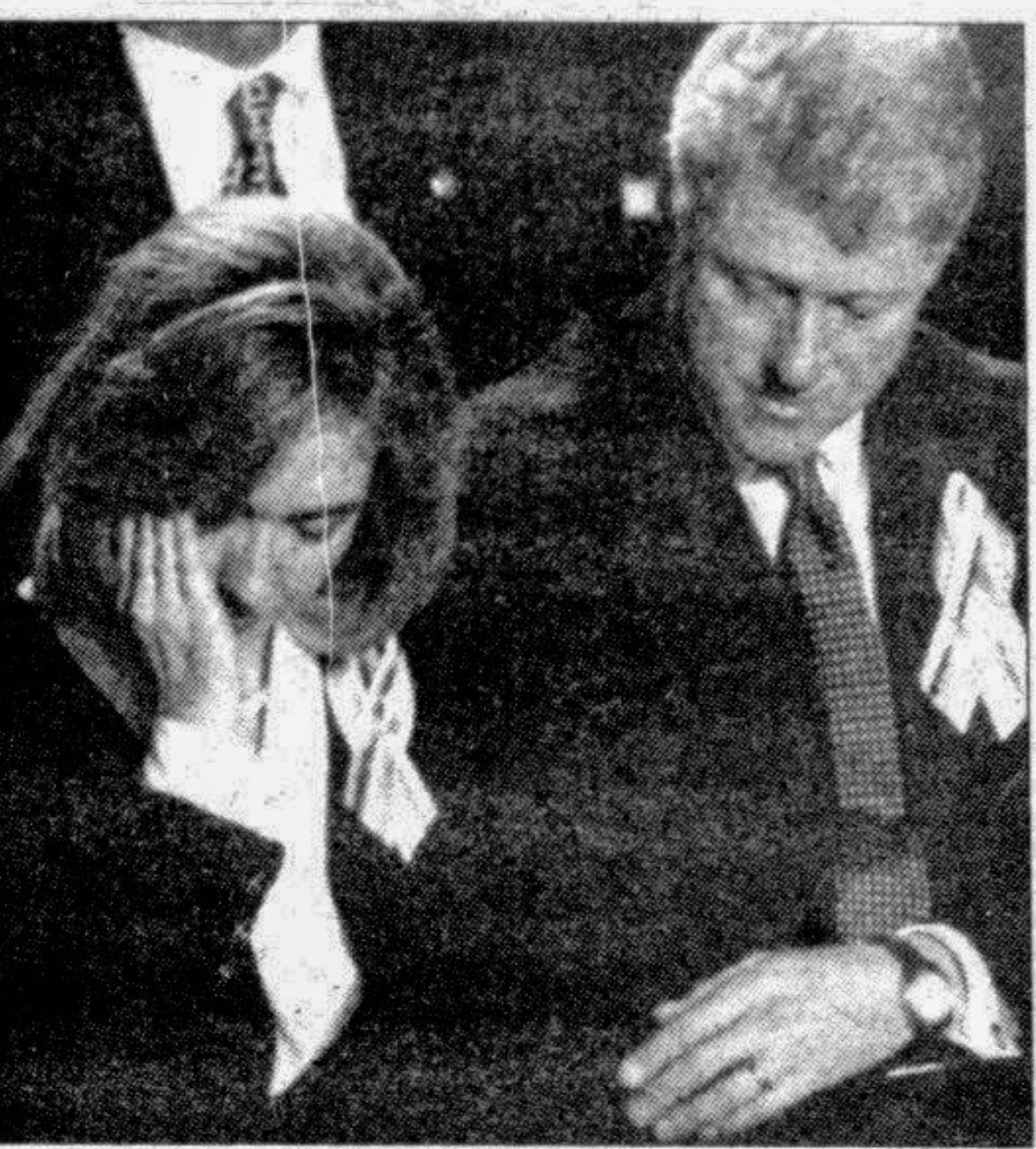
The agreement for the project was signed by the former government.

The 1950 treaty is widely seen here as giving India political leverage over its smaller neighbour.

Groups here have said the right given under the treaty for people to travel without visas and seek jobs in either country has allowed a flood of unskilled Indian labourers into Nepal straining its already fragile social infrastructure.

They also argue that India has not lived up to its obligations under the treaty to allow free access to its markets for Nepalese goods and of informing Kathmandu of defence moves.

Nepal's huge trade deficit, 15.3 billion rupees (306 million dollars) last year, is mainly



US First Lady Hillary Clinton (L) and President Bill Clinton listen to a speech during a prayer service for the families of victims of the April 19 bomb attack yesterday in Oklahoma City. — AFP/UNB photo



At the 14th Hong Kong Film Awards best actress Anita Yuen starring in "He is a Woman, She is a Man" and best actor Tony Leung in "Chungking Express" show off their awards on Sunday. Film-makers are struggling to find fresh themes to appeal to a more sophisticated audience which has tired of such Hong Kong staples as violent gangster sagas extravagant Kung Fu period costume stories. — AFP/UNB photo

Dissidents likely to propose no-confidence against Rao

NEW DELHI, Apr 24: Dissidents in the governing Congress Party have threatened to propose a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao during the five-week session of Parliament that opened on Monday, reports AP.

The Congress Party rebels don't appear to have enough strength in Parliament to bring the government down, but left wing opposition parties have promised to support them.

Rao, who has a narrow legislative majority, faces a lot of

opposition in his Congress Party, which has lost four important state elections and faces a national ballot next year.

Rao loyalists have dismissed the no-confidence motion threat, saying the rebels are a small minority that is frustrated with Rao because they were dismissed or denied positions of power.

No date has been fixed for bringing the motion.

Rao's government has survived three no-confidence motions since he came to power in 1991. The latest threat could be weaker than

the previous ones because it would use a technicality in India's parliamentary rules.

The rules say that if the government loses a vote on the annual budget of any department, it is deemed to have lost the majority to govern. This provision, however, has never been successfully used to unseat a government.

Rangarajan Kumaraman-galam, a former Cabinet minister, has announced that he would ask for this type of no-confidence motion the current legislative session.



A Turkish woman shouts out her anger at the Dutch government during a protest rally in The Hague on Sunday. More than 20,000 Turks from Holland, Belgium and Germany attended a demonstration against Kurds, who held a meeting in Holland to form a parliament-in-exile April 12. — AFP/UNB photo

Pak religious groups call strike

LAHORE, Apr 24: Islamic religious groups in Pakistan called on Sunday for a national general strike on May 27 to oppose Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's plans to change a controversial blasphemy law, reports Reuter.

The decision was taken by a meeting of the newly-formed National Solidarity Council of 21 religious groups, coalition chairman Shah Ahmad Noorani told reporters.

"The strike call is final and no government clarification will be accepted," he said.

Benazir vowed to try to persuade parliament to amend the blasphemy law after a court sentenced two Christians to death for blasphemy against Islam, a charge they denied.

A higher court later acquitted them. But the Islamic prayer leader who had brought the original charge has appealed to the Supreme Court seeking to annul the acquittal.

Ghali demands end to Rwandan atrocities

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 24: Secretary General Boutros-Ghali said Sunday he will dispatch an envoy to Kigali and called for an "immediate end" to the atrocities in Rwanda where some 5,000 ethnic Hutus have been killed, reports AFP.

"The secretary general has learned with shock and horror of the indiscriminate killing of thousands of unarmed civilians including women and children, in a camp for internally displaced persons at Kibeho, Rwanda," a statement by his spokesman Joe Sills said.

"He condemns this action in the strongest terms and demands an immediate end to these atrocities," the statement added.

UN officials have placed the death toll in Rwanda at around 5,000.

11 Indians slain in mob violence

BANGALORE, Apr 24: Eleven people were slain in mob violence and police firing overnight Sunday after a local politician was murdered in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, police said today, reports AFP.

The street violence was triggered after a leader of the state's ruling Janata Dal (People's Party) was killed at Kannur village, nearly 400 kilometres (250 miles) from this state capital, the police said.

Janata Dal supporters blamed the opposition Congress Party of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao for the murder, sparking fierce clashes between the rival supporters which left seven people dead.

Police who opened fire at the rioters killed four more men. Authorities later clamped a curfew in the area.

LTTE still willing to resume peace talks

COLOMBO, Apr 24: Tamil Tiger rebels said on Monday they had not closed the doors to peace talks to end the 11-year-old ethnic war, but demanded that new initiatives must come from the Sri Lankan government, reports AP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) resumed attacks and pulled out of talks on Wednesday claiming the government had failed to meet their demands, including dismantling a military base that blocks access to their stronghold in northern Jaffna.

"In deciding to withdraw from the agreement on cessation of hostilities, the LTTE has not closed its mind, or its doors towards an eventual, durable peace," a statement said.

"Creating the necessary space for peace rests on any new initiatives from the Sri Lankan government," said the statement faxed to news agencies from the rebels' London office.

They accused the govern-

Off the Record

Life is not a circus

MANILA: Fifteen members of a Russian circus troupe and 21 circus animals have been stranded in the southern Philippine city of Davao after their Filipino promoter abandoned them, the official Philippine News Agency (PNA) said, reports AFP.

"We have no money, we have no food for ourselves and our animals to exist normally. We have no documents for the repatriation of our equipment and animals from the Philippines to Russia," PNA quoted troupe leader Boris Fedotov as saying.

The agency said the group was part of a bigger entourage that performed in the central city of Cebu last year but which broke up due to internal disputes.

Fedorov's group went to Davao and agreed to perform for the Twentieth Century Fairs and Amusement Inc, but the promoter has since left the city and stopped providing the daily food allowance for the troupe two weeks ago, it said.

Fedorov said the circus performers and trainers were surviving on a donation from organisers of a recent rock concert.

The promoter took away the Russians passports but when they complained to the Russian Embassy in Manila they were told to pursue their sponsor on their own, PNA said.

The Russians have engaged the services of a Filipino lawyer, who agreed to work for them free of charge, it added.

'Novel' way of making money

LONDON: Writing novels appears to be one of the best ways of making money for British women, according to a survey published on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Four of the top six earners were novelists, headed by Barbara Taylor Bradford who earned 11.93 million pounds (19.12 million dollars) in the past 12 months, a survey in The Mail on Sunday newspaper showed.

Second in the list was actress Angela Lansbury followed by Chinese-born Jung Chang, author of worldwide best-seller, Wild Swans, and Hollywood-based writer Jackie Collins.

The surprise entry in the newspaper's second annual list was Dolores O'Riordan, the 23-year-old singer and songwriter in the Cranberries pop group who has two hit albums under her belt.

Queen Elizabeth, estimated to be worth about five billion pounds (8.02 billion dollars), and other women who inherited wealth were omitted from the 100-strong list which included 45 businessmen, nine actresses and four television presenters.

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