

BRIEFLY

27 rebels killed in Chechnya: Russian troops killed 27 separatist rebels in clashes in Chechnya in the past 24 hours, a Russian military spokesman told Interfax news agency yesterday. AFP reports from Moscow.

Three Russian soldiers died in the fighting around the villages of Orekhovo, Bamut and Serzhen-Yur. The spokesman said Chechen field commanders still had not responded to a call from Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin Friday for talks without preconditions to end the bitter conflict.

Japanese FM to visit Croatia: Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshie Kono will visit Croatia and Hungary from Friday to May 2 for talks with government leaders and UN officials stationed in the former Yugoslavia, the ministry said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

In Croatia, Kono will have talks with President Franjo Tudjman, Prime Minister Nickica Valentic and Foreign Minister Mate Granic, stressing the need for further international efforts to achieve peace in the region, ministry officials said. He will also meet Yasushi Akashi, head of UN peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia.

20 die in Kerala road mishap: A truck carrying Hindu devotees to a temple in southern India crashed into a water tank on Tuesday killing at least 20 people, a news agency said. AP reports from New Delhi.

Seventeen people were injured in the accident that occurred near Vellakoil village in the southern coastal state of Kerala. Press Trust of India said. Navy divers recovered bodies from the 60-feet (18 meter) deep tank adjacent to the highway. The agency did not say how the accident occurred.

Jordan's prince to visit Japan: Jordan Crown Prince Hassan Bin Talal and Crown Princess Sarath El-Hassan will visit Japan for five days from May 21, the Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The prince and princess will meet Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko and Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama during the visit. They will also attend a series of events to be held in Tokyo during "Jordan Week" from May 22, including a symposium and exhibition.

NATO nominated for Nobel prize: NATO has been nominated for the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize for maintaining peace in Europe during the Cold War, two Norwegian parliamentarians of the Conservative Party said on Monday. Reuter reports from Oslo.

"We believe NATO's role as peacekeeper for 46 years has been vital," said Bjorn Hernaes, who, together with Ingvald Godal, proposed NATO as candidate for the prestigious award.

5 die in US chopper crash: An army helicopter exploded in flight on Monday, crashing in a rural area and killing all five people on board, authorities said. AFP reports from Florence Texas.

Army investigators were looking into the cause of the crash, which occurred early in the day outside this town near Austin.

Former Chinese athlete jailed: A former Chinese athlete who set a world high jump record in 1970 has been sentenced to eight years in prison for receiving bribes, a Chinese news agency said yesterday. AP reports from Hong Kong.

Ni Zhigun, 53, was convicted of receiving 57,000 yuan (US \$6,800 dollars) in bribes from a leather company when he was deputy chief of the Fujian provincial sports committee in 1991, the official China News Service said.

12 judges selected for Rwanda: The Security Council nominated 12 candidates on Monday to become judges on the Rwanda war crimes tribunal, set up to try suspects in last year's ethnic slaughter. AP reports from United Nations.

The six-member panel, based in Arusha, Tanzania, will be chosen by the General Assembly. No date has been set for that vote.

Maharashtra to ban lottery: Lottery will be banned in Maharashtra, the State Deputy Chief Minister Gopinath Munde declared yesterday. PTI reports from Pune.

Speaking at a press conference here, he said the ban would apply to all state lotteries and would be enforced within three months. He announced that 'matka', an illegal gambling trade, would also be banned.

Polish gas blast toll now 22: Rescuers on Monday found the remains of a 22nd victim of a gas explosion that destroyed a 11-storey apartment building in the Baltic port city of Gdansk a week ago. AP reports from Warsaw.

The remains of a woman, identified later by genetic code analysis, were found among the building's ruins that were transported out of the city during last week's rescue action, the Polish news agency PAP said.

Package bomb claims 1 in US: A package bomb exploded at the offices of the California Forestry Association in Sacramento on Monday, killing one person, police said. AFP reports from Sacramento.

Police spokesman Michael Heenan said an employee had picked up a package outside the office just blocks from the state capital, and that when another employee opened it, it exploded. It was not immediately known if there were any additional injuries.

US official visits Rwanda: US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs George Moose arrived in Kigali late Monday, two days after a new massacre in Rwanda. AFP reports from Kigali.

Moose flew in from Brussels for a visit of unspecified length aboard the same plane as Rwanda Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu.

Yugoslav dissident buried: Milovan Djilas, Communist Europe's first prominent dissident, was buried on Monday under a wooden plank, the Communist substitute for a cross paying homage to an ideology he once revered but ultimately rejected. AP reports from Podgorica, Yugoslavia.

Several hundred people — including his only son, Aleksa — attended the modest ceremony in Djilas' native village, 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Montenegro's capital, Podgorica.

Militant dies in Israeli custody: An Islamic militant died Tuesday after an interrogation by Israeli security agents, and human rights organisations and relatives contend he was tortured to death. AP reports from Jerusalem.

Abdel-Samad Hassan Harizat, 30, was detained by Israeli Shin Bet security agents on Friday and taken to Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital on Saturday, his family said.

Kurds free 2 journalists: An AFP reporter and a Reuters photographer were released by Kurdish separatists in southeastern Turkey where they were seized on March 31. AFP reports from Cologne, Germany.

Kadri Gursel, 34, and Fatih Saribas, 38, were released Monday in a mountainous region close to Turkey's border with Syria and Iraq, the agency said quoting the press office of Arak, the military wing of the Kurdistan Workers Party.

Diploma forger gets 6 years: A Chinese printer was sentenced to six years in jail for selling forged university diplomas, a newspaper reported AFP reports from Shanghai.

The Wen Hui Daily reported that Wu Guanglin, who had been running a private printing business since 1989, was convicted of making and selling at least 300 copies of Zhengzhou University Adult Education College diplomas.

Russia favours indefinite extension of NPT

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 25: Lining up squarely with the United States, Russia urged the world's nations Monday to approve an unlimited, no-strings renewal of the treaty to block the spread of nuclear weapons, reports AP.

To do otherwise, said Russian Foreign Minister Andrei V. Kozyrev, would mean "demolishing the foundation of international security."

Kozyrev spoke as a second week of debate opened in a historic, monthlong conference on the future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Some in the Third World want to attach conditions to extending the 25-year-old pact, making it contingent on moves by the big powers toward complete nuclear disarmament.

In response to such demands, Kozyrev told conference delegates that his government is committed to eventual abolition of nuclear arms, but he offered some "realistic" words: "It is impossible to get rid of nuclear weapons overnight. Elimination... is a costly process requiring a fulfillment of monu-

mental technical and financial tasks.

Earlier Monday, the chief delegate from Iraq, the world's best-known nuclear "cheat," sought to shift the focus to Israel, which is known to possess nuclear weapons but, he complained, "continues strongly to refute the very idea of acceding to the Non-Proliferation Treaty."

The treaty recognises five nuclear powers — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China — and obligates its 173 other signatories to forever give up the possibility of nuclear arms.

In exchange, the nuclear powers are pledged to work towards total elimination of such weapons.

When it came into force in 1970, the treaty stipulated it would last 25 years, after which its member states would have to decide to extend it indefinitely, or for a fixed period or periods.

Despite the preference of some third World nations for limited extensions, tied to arms control progress, the United States and other nu-

clear powers appear to have assembled a narrow majority in favour of indefinite, unconditional extension. A vote will take place at the conference's end, in mid-May.

Trying to enlarge that majority, Kozyrev — as US Vice President Al Gore did last week — sought to defuse complaints from the non-weapons states about the treaty's "inequalities."

"I would like to especially underline that the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty is not a mandate for an indefinite possession by the nuclear powers of their nuclear arsenals," the Russian foreign minister said.

He also cited recent accomplishments in US-Russian arms control: elimination of short and intermediate-range nuclear arms; reductions of nuclear arsenals under the START I treaty, and progress toward a comprehensive nuclear test ban.

The nuclear arms race has been stopped and put in reverse," he said.

Washington has counted on Russia's support for an indefinite, unconditional treaty ex-

ension.

Meanwhile, Reuter adds from Bandung: Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said today that members of the 111-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) would try to seek a common position on the NPT.

"If we do not get a full-fledged common position, at least a far-reaching common perception on the issues, like the review mechanism, will be sought," Alatas told a news conference during a NAM ministerial meeting in the west Java town of Bandung.

He said many NAM members had yet to determine their positions on whether to support an indefinite extension of the treaty, now being reviewed in New York.

"But a large majority of the non-aligned and non-nuclear countries do not believe that an indefinite extension without any condition is the right choice in order to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," he said.

"That also happens to be Indonesia's point of view," he added.



An Australian UN soldier on Monday carries a Hutu orphan child, whose mother was killed at the Kibeho camp in southwestern Rwanda. UN Zambian and Australian soldiers are in the camp to evacuate survivors of the April 22 massacre. — AFP/UNB photo



Pakistan's opposition leader Nawaz Sharif (L) met Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in Islamabad yesterday. — AFP/UNB photo

Rao opponents gain AIADMK's support

NEW DELHI, Apr 25: Dissidents in the governing Congress Party who want to unseat Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao in a vote in Parliament have won the support of another group, reports AP.

On Monday night, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam regional party joined other opposition groups that believe the Congress Party's free-market reforms are hurting poor people.

Although the AIADMK group only has 11 seats in the 528-member Parliament and Rao's party has a narrow majority, large opposition groups also plan to challenge Rao in a vote in the legislature.

During the five-week parliamentary session that began Monday the lawmakers will debate the Congress Party's new budget.

Under parliamentary rules, if the government loses a vote on the annual budget of any department — known as a cut motion — it is deemed to have lost the majority to govern.

Rangarajan Kumaraman-galam, a former Cabinet minister of the Congress Party, started the cut motion campaign.

Crackdown on Tigers continues Lankan jets attack rebel positions: 12 killed

COLOMBO, Apr 25: Sri Lankan air force warplanes attacked suspected Tamil rebel positions as fighting raged on the ground in northeastern Sri Lanka. At least 12 people, including six civilians were killed, local residents and military officials said on Tuesday, reports AP.

Three Tamil children and an old woman were killed in the air attack in Vidataltivu, 230 kilometers (140 miles) north of Colombo on Monday, residents in northern Sri Lanka reached on phone from Colombo said.

The attack came shortly after rebels blew up a bridge linking Mannar island to the mainland in the same area on Monday night, they said.

The other two civilians killed were Sinhalese in the jungles at Janakapura, 220 kilometers (135 miles) northeast of the capital on Sunday, the military said.

At least four rebels were killed as troops searched for rebel positions in the northern Jaffna Peninsula on Monday, military officials said. One soldier was also killed in the fighting.

51 die as fire engulfs leisure centre in China

BEIJING, Apr 25: A fire in an entertainment district has killed 51 people and injured an unconfirmed number of others in the northwestern Chinese city of Urumqi, a local official said Tuesday, reports AP.

The fire broke out early Monday at a karaoke club in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang province, said an official at the provincial foreign affairs office.

A report in the newspaper Legal Daily quoted police and fire officials as saying the exits from the karaoke hall were blocked and too narrow, preventing the victims from escaping. The club furnishings also had not been made flame retardant, it said.

The fire was the latest in a series that have ravaged dance halls, cinemas and other public gathering places, leading the government to announce a fire prevention campaign.

The rising toll from fires has become something of an embarrassment: last year, a record 2,748 people died and 4,277 people were injured in nearly 40,000 fires.

Last Friday, authorities had ordered the club closed because its manager, Huang Lixin, had not obtained official permission to open a business there.

Indian troops besiege Kashmiri rebel position

SRINAGAR, Apr 25: Indian troops have closed in on a sacred town in Kashmir where Muslim guerrillas have been holed up for more than a month, police said, reports Reuter.

Soldiers and militants exchanged fire at the weekend after government forces entered the outskirts of Charer-e-Sharif, 30 miles (50 km) from Srinagar, summer capital of India's Jammu and Kashmir state, they said late on Monday.

A policeman was killed as edgy troops fired inadvertently on a police bus coming out of Charer-e-Sharif late on Sunday, officials said.

Earlier militants attacked the troops in neighbouring Panzan village. Police forces as well as army and paramilitary troops are fighting a five-year-old separatist rebellion which has killed more than 17,000 people.

Government forces surrounded the holy town in early March after learning a large number of militants, both Kashmiris and foreigners, were there.

The town is revered for its mausoleum of Kashmir's patron saint, Sheikh Nooruddin Wali.

Separatists have accused the government forces of besieging the town in an attempt to flush out militants, belonging mainly to two hardline secessionist groups — Hezb-ul-Mujahideen and Harkat-ul-Ansar.

But government authorities say the troops have kept their distance and conducted routine checks of people entering and leaving the area.

The rebels have refused to accept an Indian offer of safe passage to Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

Off the Record

Mother Teresa a 'magician'?

NEW DELHI: A Hindu nun known for her fundamentalist views has been arrested in central India for calling Mother Teresa a "magician" and a secular Hindu politician a "man-eater," newspapers reported yesterday, says AFP.

Sadhvi Ritambara, a fiery leader of the militant Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or World Hindu Council, attacked Mother Teresa during a speech in which she denounced Christian missionaries for allegedly converting Hindus.

"Mother Teresa is a magician. The Pioneer and other newspapers quoted her as saying in Indore, a commercial city in Madhya Pradesh state, "Even if a single Hindu is converted, Christians will be wiped out [in India]."

Ritambara delivered the provocative speech at a district where a Catholic nun was murdered on February 25 by three men, including an alleged leader of the Hindu-revivalist Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) or Indian People's Party).

Ritambara also dubbed Mulayam Singh Yadav, chief minister of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, "a man-eater" for his sympathetic views on Muslims, the country's largest religious minority, the newspapers said.

Blame it on politics

MANILA: A Filipino campaign leader hacked his pregnant wife to death because she refused to vote for the political candidates he was backing, a newspaper reported here on Tuesday, says AFP.

The Manila Times newspaper said the 26-year-old husband, who was campaigning for congressional and mayoral candidates in the tiny island of San Miguel, became enraged when his 22-year-old wife told him she was voting for rival candidates from President Fidel Ramos's ruling coalition.

After quarrelling with his wife on their divergent choices on Sunday, the angry husband then pulled out his machete and hacked her to death, the report said. He immediately fled after the killing.

Ship carrying N-waste arrives in Japan

ROKKASHO, Japan, Apr 25: A local official who stymied the arrival of Japan's first nuclear-waste shipment relented Tuesday after getting government assurances that he won't be stuck with it forever, reports AP.

Morio Kimura, governor of Aomori prefecture, said he would allow the Pacific Pintail to dock Wednesday morning at the northern port of Rokkasho and unload its 14-ton shipment of highly radioactive material for temporary storage.

Earlier in the day, he had turned the ship away, shocking central government officials who thought they had eliminated all snags.

Following a two-month trip during which it was banned from the territorial waters of several countries, the British-registered ship found itself briefly in limbo with the end of its voyage in sight. It was to spend the night about 30-40 kilometers (20-25 miles) offshore.

Royal spending under fire

LONDON: The vast sums of public money spent on Britain's royal palaces and the veil of secrecy over funding came under fire from British legislators on Monday, reports Reuter.

Under questioning from a parliamentary committee, a top official in Britain's National Heritage Department and a senior official of Queen Elizabeth's household defended the policies and said spending was not lavish.

Haydon Phillips, Permanent Secretary of the Department of National Heritage, said the government had strict accounting.

"It's not as if we hand over a large sum of money and then say, go ahead and spend it as you like."

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee's probe was sparked by a report last year over how 20 million pounds (32 million dollars) of public money a year was spent on the royal palaces.

The report from the government spending watchdog The National Audit Office, said nearly two thirds of royal staff and courtiers were living rent-free in some of the 285 so-called "grace and favour residences" in and around the palaces.

Alan Williams, an opposition Labour party member of the committee, said parliament was entitled to know about public funds paid to the household. He said his efforts to understand royal finances had been hampered by "confusing, evasive and inaccurate" replies from palace officials.

He questioned 819,000 pounds (1.3 million dollars) spent on furnishings and fixtures for the apartments of four senior royal staff. The sum of money was provided to do necessary, basic work," Phillips said.



Jennifer Flowers, who claims to have carried on a 12-year relationship with Bill Clinton, answers questions about her book 'Passion and Betrayal' during a press conference on Monday. The book, due out in bookstores later this week, chronicles her life and her relationship with Bill Clinton. — AFP/UNB photo