

BRIEFLY

Ethiopia closes Somali embassy:

Ethiopia closed its embassy in Mogadishu on Monday, a day after kidnapers released its charge d'affaires unharmed after 21 days in captivity. AP reports from Mogadishu.

The Ethiopian government made no official statement, but Ambassador Lisane Yohanes, Yamani and the embassy's only other Ethiopian employee left Monday for their capital, Addis Ababa, and sources said they would not return. The embassy's furnishings and equipment already had been packed for shipment.

Clash marks May Day in Germany:

At least 72 policemen were injured, one seriously and 2,000 left-wing anarchists celebrating their own "revolutionary May Day" clashed overnight in Berlin with security forces, police said on Monday. AFP reports from Berlin.

Six hundred policemen were mobilised to contain the clashes which have erupted regularly on May Day in past years. The demonstrators built barricades and threw stones at the police in unrest which began at 22.30 PM (2030 GMT) on Sunday and went on until 04:00 am (0200 GMT) Monday.

Ugandan rebels kill 28 troops:

Fundamentalist Christian rebels killed 28 government troops in an attack on a military post near the northern town of Gulu, the army said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Kampala.

Rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which says it wants to govern Uganda by the rules of the Bible's 10 commandments, attacked a military unit at Alero, 55 km (34 miles) north of Gulu on Thursday evening, a spokesman said.

Pak defence team in China:

Chinese state councillor and Minister of National Defence Chi Haotian met with air chief Marshal Muhammad Abbas Khattak, chief of staff of the Air Force of Pakistan, and his party in Fuzhou on Sunday. Xinhua reports from Fuzhou, China.

The six-member Pakistan delegation arrived in Beijing on Thursday to start an official goodwill visit to China at the invitation of the air force of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Russia detains 3 US citizens:

Russian authorities detained three US citizens near the Chinese border for suspected espionage, the federal Border Guards Service said on Monday. AP reports from Moscow.

The official ITAR-Tass news agency quoted the service as saying the Americans were detained on Sunday near Khasan, a town on the Sea of Japan that also sits on Russia's tiny border with North Korea. Their names were not disclosed.

Oklahoma blast toll now 138:

The death toll in the April 19 carbombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City climbed to 138 on Monday, authorities said. AFP reports from Oklahoma City.

Thirty-nine people were still missing said Dean Cushman, a spokesman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Late Sunday Governor Frank Keating said the state soon would use heavy machinery to clear the site of the blast as hope dims for finding survivors.

Japanese PM off to China:

Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama left Tuesday for a five-day visit to China, his first China trip since he took office last June. AP reports from Tokyo.

Murayama plans to meet President Jiang Zemin, Premier Li Peng and other Government leaders while in Beijing. He also will tour Xian and Shanghai. Prior to his departure, Murayama told reporters he hopes the suspended US-North Korea talks will be resumed soon to end the stalemate over the North's suspected nuclear weapons development.

8 die in Canadian jets collision:

Two small planes slammed into each other over northwestern Ontario and crashed on Monday, killing eight people. AP reports from Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

A twin-engine Bearskin Airlines plane carrying three people and a twin-engine Air Sandy craft carrying five people collided at about 1830 GMT. Jim Harris of the Transportation Safety Board of Canada said there were no survivors. He said the planes were flying in opposite directions at about 1,300 metres (4,000 feet) and the weather was good.

Crackdown on crime in Georgia:

Georgian soldiers and Interior Ministry troops arrested more than 200 people and confiscated piles of weapons in a weekend crackdown on crime. Reuter reports from Tbilisi.

An Interior Ministry spokesman said on Monday 219 people were arrested, including 32 wanted criminals, as several hundred police and soldiers backed by more than 50 armoured vehicles took to the streets on Friday. More than 40 automatic weapons, 9,000 rounds of ammunition, 263 grenades, several machine guns and a light tank were confiscated, the spokesman said.

Richardson found dead in HK:

Financial pundit Leon Richardson, who survived kidnapping in Guatemala, an atomic bomb test and Hollywood, was found dead at his home in Hong Kong Monday. He was 77. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Richardson, an American-born Australian known in Hong Kong for his radical financial advice had long suffered from heart trouble. Richardson had predicted that the US dollar would take a drastic fall because of government mismanagement of the US economy.

Irish poet Coffey dies:

Irish-born poet Brian Coffey, a modernist in his absorption with experimental writing in a career spanning 65 years but a harsh critic of the dehumanisation of modern life, has died, AP reports from London.

He was 89. He died at home at the naval port city of Southampton, 60 miles (95 km) southwest of London on April 14, his family reported. No cause of death was stated and no details of his funeral were announced.

Mafia godfather faces trial:

Mafia godfather Salvatore Riina went on trial yesterday accused of ordering the bombing that killed Italy's most famous anti-Mafia judge. Reuter reports from Sicily.

Riina and 11 other reputed mafiosi charged with the May 1992 murder of magistrate Giovanni Falcone were caged in cells that lined the maximum-security courtroom. Riina, nicknamed "the beast," was placed in a cell by himself.

Train mishap claims 2 in France:

A passenger train on Tuesday crashed into a tractor-trailer truck at a railroad crossing, killing the engineer and his assistant and injuring 13 others, officials said. AP reports from Morcenx, France.

The 8:30 am accident occurred just outside this small town in the Landes region of southwest France.

Fire claims 5 in Italy:

Fire swept through a luxury hotel during the night, killing at least five people and injuring 17 others, news reports said. AP reports from Caserta, Italy.

The victims, all Italians, were apparently trapped as they slept by the flames and heavy smoke that poured through the four-story Reggia Palace Hotel, a modern convention complex 30 kilometers (20 miles) north of Naples.

Cong (I) leader Swami dies:

Veteran Congress (I) leader and a former member of Parliament N R M Swamy, died in the early hours in Madras on Tuesday after a prolonged illness. PTI reports from Madras.

He was 89 and is survived by four sons. Swamy was a member of the Lok Sabha from 1952-62 and a member of the Rajya Sabha from 1966-1972. Swamy was first elected to the Lok Sabha from Vandavasi constituency in North Arcot-Annedkar district as an independent and was elected again in 1957 from Vellore as a Congress (I) nominee.

International

Curfew imposed in Grozny

Fighting flares in Chechnya defying ceasefire

ACHKHOI-MARTAN, Russia, May 2: Moscow's one-sided ceasefire in Chechnya was in tatters today as Russian forces imposed a curfew in the capital Grozny after reporting heavy fighting with separatist rebels, says Reuter.

Russian commanders clamped the dusk-to-dawn curfew on Grozny on Monday evening, in a clear acknowledgement that fighting in the rebel North Caucasus region was far from over.

Interfax news agency quoted a command spokesman, named only as General Kalinin, as saying Russian and Chechen forces fought a fierce battle in the shattered city on Sunday night.

"There was a heavy battle in Grozny between Russian units and Chechen fighters," Kalinin was quoted as saying.

The fighting in Grozny, which appeared to be the heaviest since Russian forces took the city in February, dealt another blow to an already stumbling 14-day ceasefire introduced unilaterally by President Boris Yeltsin four days ago.

Yeltsin hoped to avoid fighting in the mainly Muslim region during the May 9 visit to Moscow of almost 50 world leaders for the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

But France rapped Russia on Monday for its renewal of fighting in Chechnya despite the ceasefire.

The manner in which the Russians are carrying out this moratorium, which consists of interrupting -- in reality, not even interrupting -- the hostilities during the time of the festivities is something that merits a reaction from the international powers including France," Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said during an interview on French television.

Many world leaders have criticised the four-month-long Chechen campaign in which thousands of people have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced.

Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev has rejected the truce and his forces appear to be increasing the military pressure with the aim of causing Yeltsin maximum political embarrassment before his guests.

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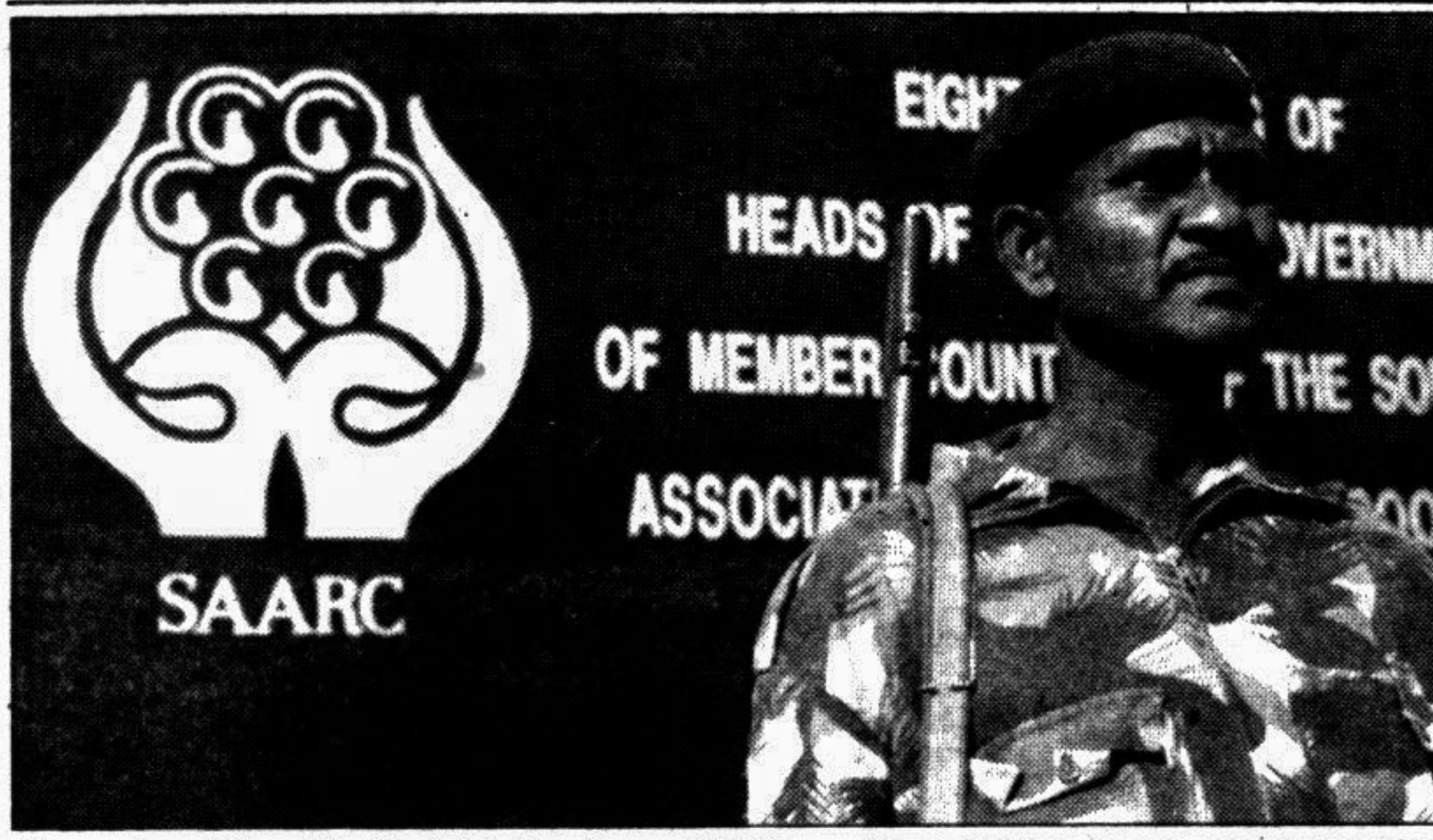
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A member of the elite Rapid Action Force (RAF) is positioned before a sign announcing the upcoming summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation outside Vigyan Bhavan on Monday in New Delhi. — AFP/UNB photo

ROK opposition boycotts parliament

SEOUL, May 2: South Korean opposition parties boycotted parliament today as thousands of jittery residents reacted to gas leak scares today as a result of last week's disastrous gas explosion that killed some 100 people, reports AFP.

The opposition walkout, accompanied by calls for the resignation of Prime Minister Lee Hong-Koo, came after the ruling camp rejected a special interpellation about the tragic explosion in the Southern City of Taegu.

The parliamentary deadlock came amid widespread public fears of fractured gas mains — some false alarms — triggered by last week's explosion which ripped through a subway construction site.

Thousands of people in a western residential neighbourhood in Seoul were too worried to sleep after a crack was reported Monday in the safety valve of a nearby underground gas main, according to residents and television reports.

The leakage was quickly contained, but other minor gas leakages triggered panic in Seoul and elsewhere today, sending frightened residents fleeing their homes and calling emergency phone numbers.

The explosion in Taegu has also triggered a booming sales of gas safety equipment.

Today, the National Assembly was adjourned for the second straight day after the opposition legislators walked out, calling for a special five-day session to handle the country's worst peacetime blast in Taegu.

The ruling Democratic Liberal Party (DLP) has rejected the demand.

Hindu Shiv Sena sets up units in Nepal

BOMBAY, May 2: The Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena Party, which took power in Bombay last month in an alliance with another right-wing Hindu group, has set up units in Nepal, the party's newspaper reported here today, reports AFP.

Samna, the party press organ, said that a delegation of Shiv Sena members from Nepal met with Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray here on Monday and informed him that two units of the party had been set up in the Himalayan kingdom.

"It is your task to let the world know that Nepal is a Hindu nation," Thackeray was quoted as telling the Nepal Shiv Sena delegation.



US President Clinton (L) is greeted by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (R) after his speech at a gathering of 6,000 Holocaust survivors in New York on Sunday. The event was organised by the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organisation and marks the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps. — AFP/UNB photo

HIV infects 6,000 each day, says WHO

GENEVA, May 2: The World Health Organisation (WHO) said today that the Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV) is infecting some 6,000 people worldwide each day and the total of the infected could reach 30 to 40 million by the year 2000, reports Xinhua.

According to a WHO report published Thursday more than 13 million adults were infected worldwide in 1994.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the most seriously-hit region, some 8 million people were infected by the virus, the report said.

LTTE gets Stinger missiles from Afghan rebels

COLOMBO, May 2: The Stinger missiles used by the rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in northern Sri Lanka were supplied by the Afghan Mujahideen guerrillas, it is reported here today, says Xinhua.

The report said that these missiles were given to Afghan guerrillas by the Americans many years ago for fighting against Russians.

The report quoted informed sources as saying that an Afghan guerrilla who tried to sell a Stinger missile secretly was nabbed in Peshawar, Pakistan and some members of the LTTE went abroad recently to purchase these missiles.

The LTTE last week shot down two military planes of the Sri Lankan Air Force by using heat seeking anti-aircraft missiles.

This was the first time that the LTTE used missiles.

Blasts in mosque, Sikh temple in Jammu-Kashmir

JAMMU, May 2: A hand grenade thrown into a Muslim mosque injured six people in Jammu-Kashmir state early Tuesday, and another explosion rocked a Sikh temple, police said, reports AP.

No one immediately claimed responsibility, but police blamed militant groups fighting for independence in the state.

The mosque is located in the centre of Jammu city, and the grenade exploded as about 10 people were preparing to pray there.

Lankan army begins fresh recruitment

COLOMBO, May 2: The military began a recruitment drive Tuesday to have 6,000 more soldiers as civil war escalated in Sri Lanka, military officials said, reports AP.

The walk-in recruitment at 15 centres across the island saw young men lining up several hours before the enlistment began to boost 100,000-strong military, officials said.

The Tamil rebels unilaterally called off a truce and pulled out of peace talks with the government two weeks ago.

Heat-seeking missiles used by the rebels downed two air Force planes Friday and Saturday, killing 90 people and threatening supply lines to six isolated government bases in the rebel-held north.

More than 230 people have been killed in the last two weeks since a truce collapsed with rebels fighting for a Tamil homeland.

"I am joining the army because we have to defend the country," said Hiranga Peiris, a 21-year-old whose brother was killed fighting the rebels two years ago.

The military put up posters in the streets and radio and newspapers advertisements for fresh recruitment.

Nearly 6,000 government troops have been killed in the 12-year-old ethnic war. Another 26,000 have deserted.

The military says 16,000 rebels have been killed.

Caught under equipped by the sudden resumption of war, the military is shopping for arms.

An air force team is in Russia to purchase four Antonov transport planes and six Mi-17 transport helicopters.



A model displays a rare Jadeite bangle during Hong Kong spring 1995 Christie's auctions Monday. The item was sold for 11 million Hong Kong dollars (1.41 million US dollar), the most expensive item to be bought during the auction. — AFP/UNB photo

Churchill was a songwriter!

LONDON: One in three children in a British school survey did not know who World War Two leader Winston Churchill was, reports Reuter.

The survey, conducted in the run-up to the 50th anniversary of the war's end, showed that some children thought he was an American president, an insurance salesman or a songwriter.

Nazi leader Adolf Hitler fared little better in the survey of 11-14 year-olds — a quarter of them failed to identify him.

Almost 90 per cent were unable to name Field Marshal Montgomery as the British commander of the 1944 D-Day Allied landings in France.

Eminent historian Lord Blake, reacting to the survey published in The Sunday Times, said: "A country that cuts itself off from its history is cutting itself off from its national identity."

Classroom terror

MIAMI: A man abducted a woman and her child Monday and took them to a suburban high school classroom, where he threatened to shoot the hostages unless the female students took off their clothes, police said. One girl was sexually assaulted, reports AP.

A janitor and a teacher who walked into the room wrestled the man to the ground and held him for police, said investigators and officials at Miami Springs Senior High.

"He threatened to kill the woman and child, pointing the gun at the child unless the girls disrobed," said police spokesman Juan Del Castillo.

Some of the 12 ninth-grade students started to comply. He selected one student and assaulted her.

High-tech for cheating!!

LONDON: More than half of all British students have cheated in exams and now use high-technology gadgets like remote-control radio pens to outwit examiners, a survey has shown, reports Reuter.

The two-year study by Professor Stephen Newstead, president of the British Psychological Society, revealed cheating methods that ranged from old-fashioned crib sheets to students seducing or bribing their tutors.

"But high technology is definitely growing," Newstead told the Sunday Times.

Students have used personal organisers to swap information across an exam hall by infra-red beam as well as transmitter pens linked to accomplices outside who read back the answers.

Jail instead of big payoff

BELJING: A poacher who trapped and killed a rare giant panda for its pelt, hoping for a big payoff, has instead gotten an 18-year jail sentence, it was reported Tuesday, says AP.

The Guanyuan City Intermediate Court in southwestern Sichuan province sentenced farmer Yan Daorong to 18 years in prison after convicting him of setting a trap inside a nature reserve and killing an adult male giant panda, the newspaper Economic Information Daily reported.

Yao skinned the panda on the spot and gave the pelt to a gang of poachers, who were arrested after trying to sell it in nearby cities, the report said.

Yao also was fined 1,000 yuan (dirt 120), and the members of the gang also received prison sentences, it said without providing further details.

The giant panda, whose natural habitat is the bamboo forests of mountain slopes of western and southwestern China, is an endangered and protected species. Only about 1,000 such pandas survive in the wild in China.