

BRIEFLY

Bosnian army holds 4 UN men:

The Bosnian army late Tuesday said it had arrested four local UN employees accused of working for the Bosnian Serbs involvement in theft and black marketing. AFP reports from Sarajevo.

The Bosnian army Press Centre said it had arrested Tomislav Bencun, Predrag Nisic, Ljiljana Miletic and Naser Heldov, who were reported missing by the United Nations last week. The UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) said last Friday that the four were missing and accused the Bosnian government of being highly uncooperative in its inquiries.

Israel marks Remembrance Day:

Sirens brought the Jewish state to a standstill for one minute on Tuesday as Israel marked its annual Memorial Day for soldiers. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Israelis stood in silence as the siren wailed throughout the country at 9 p. m. (1700 GMT) sounding the start of Remembrance Day.

Press freedom declines in '94:

Press freedom declined in 31 countries in 1994 and 143 journalists were murdered in the past 15 months, according to a survey released on Tuesday by the New York based human rights group Freedom House. Reuter reports from Washington.

More than half the murders took place in Rwanda, Algeria and Russia. Setbacks to press freedom in many countries, a mounting death toll of journalists, as well as a troubling antagonism towards the press by West European government bureaucrats, bode ill for the media in the years ahead, Adrian Karatnycky, president of Freedom House, said in a statement.

Palestinian cop to die in Gaza:

Palestinian police shouted "Long live justice!" on Tuesday after a court sentenced a Palestinian policeman to die by firing squad for killing a fellow officer. AP reports from Gaza City.

It was the first death sentence returned in the year since Palestinians took control of Gaza. The three-member Palestinian panel that sentenced Sgt. Taher Fares, 28, told him he has two weeks to appeal. The sentence was handed down by a special court that tries members of Palestine Liberation Organisation chief Yasser Arafat's security forces. Palestinian officials made a point of inviting the media to the trial.

Nepal to abolish death penalty:

Nepal's communist rulers plan to abolish the death penalty in the Himalayan Kingdom. Law Ministry officials said on Tuesday. Reuter reports from Kathmandu.

"Necessary steps are being taken to form a Human Rights Commission and sign the covenant aiming at abolishing the death penalty," Nepali Law and Justice Minister Subash Chandra Nemwang earlier told a meeting of human rights activists.

Bus mishap claims 12 in China:

A bus carrying nearly 50 factory employees to work plunged into a river after a head-on collision with a lorry in the mountainous southwestern Chinese of Chongqing, killing at least 12 people, it was reported yesterday. AFP says from Hong Kong.

Several workers were still unaccounted for after the accident early Tuesday, which sent the bus into the fast-moving Jialingjiang river, the semi-official China News Service said.

14 hurt in German parcel blast:

At least 14 people were injured when a package exploded in the main parcel sorting office in Frankfurt, the German city's fire brigade said. Reuter reports from Frankfurt.

"A parcel exploded on the ground floor of the sorting office," a fire brigade spokesman said, adding it was not clear if the blast was accidental or the result of an attack.

5 killed in Karachi violence:

Five people were killed in three incidents of violence in Karachi overnight and a private humanitarian service centre came under attack, officials and hospital sources said yesterday. AFP reports from Karachi.

Four people were killed in Pak colony residential area in a gun battle between two factions of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), the party representing Urdu-speaking settlers, police said.

A police constable was shot dead in another part of the city by fleeing bandits after their robbery attempt was foiled, a police official said.

1 more to die in China:

A former top executive of a Shanghai listed company has been sentenced to death, suspended for two years, in Shanghai's biggest stock market corruption case, the Shanghai Securities News said on Tuesday. Reuter reports from Shanghai.

Zhu Jianping, former deputy general manager of Shanghai Rubber Bell Co. Ltd was found guilty of pocketing 6.10,000 yuan (96,428 dollar) earned from illegal share transactions.

Mahathir forms new cabinet:

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad yesterday unveiled his new 25-member cabinet, retaining most ministers, with Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim keeping the coveted finance portfolio. AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The announcement of the federal cabinet line-up came eight days after Mahathir's 14-member national front coalition won a landslide at the ninth general election.

Mahathir also created a new ministry to promote entrepreneurial development.

Major arrives in Belfast:

British Prime Minister John Major arrived in Belfast Tuesday for a series of meetings with senior Churchmen and top industrialists yesterday. AFP reports from Belfast.

"Northern Ireland's hope of a new future free of violence will built on economic prosperity," he said at Hillsborough Castle, near Belfast, where the first of the talk sessions are due to take place.

During the one-day visit Major is to meet leaders of the four main churches in Ireland, anti-intimidation campaigners, trade unionists and members of the confederation of British industry, who invited him.

Israeli forces kill 4 guerillas:

Israeli forces killed at least four guerillas during an army operation in southern Lebanon on Tuesday, a military spokesman announced yesterday. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

"Several others were wounded during an operation led by paratroopers in the security zone over the last 24 hours," the spokesman said.

"All Israeli soldiers returned to base safely after a firefight," he added.

US denounces attacks on civilians

Croatia declares offensive against Serb rebels

ZAGREB, May 3: Croatia declared its offensive against Serb rebels over Tuesday, after its forces captured a strategic town and bombed a bridge linking Serbs to their allies. Hours earlier, Serb rockets slammed into the Croatian capital, killing five people downtown and wounding 121, reports AP.

One of the rocket-propelled cluster bombs landed in a schoolyard. Two girls and a teacher were seriously injured, including a 12-year old who had shrapnel in her spine. All schools were closed.

The bridge is the last remaining link between Croatian and Bosnian Serb territory.

The government army sent panicked Serb troops and civilians fleeing toward Serb-held parts of Bosnia after entering the town of Okucani southeast of Zagreb.

In a surprise offensive Monday, government soldiers retook some of the one-third of Croatia that rebel Serbs captured in the 1991 civil war that followed the country's secession from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia.

The fighting was the fiercest in Croatia since a truce took effect in January 1992, and it threatened to merge with the war in Bosnia, where ethnic Serbs have captured 70 per cent of the republic. That danger was underscored Monday when Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic threatened to send help to Serbs in Croatia.

Escalated violence in the Balkans was predicted following the official expiration Monday of a four-month truce in Bosnia and Croatia's demands to scale back the U.N. peacekeeping mission there. The main thrust of the

Croat government offensive was to wrest control of a section of the highway running east from Zagreb to Belgrade, the Yugoslav capital. President Franjo Tudjman's office pronounced the offensive ended Tuesday afternoon, shortly after the capture of Okucani, 110 kilometers (65 miles) southeast of Zagreb, a Serb stronghold on the highway.

Croatian Serb forces stopped giving organized resistance, the statement said. Following negotiations with their commander, some 600 rebel Serb soldiers surrounded at nearby Pakarac surrendered. U.N. and Croatian officials said.

Tudjman's office statement did not say the stretch of road had been retaken. But the Transport Ministry said the highway would reopen Wednesday, indicating that the

area was under Croatian control.

Croatian authorities said Zagreb and its outskirts were hit earlier Tuesday by 11 rocket-propelled cluster bombs fired by Serb forces located close to the city's southern outskirts. Six rockets hit downtown streets filled with shoppers and a park.

Meanwhile, the United States urged Croatia on Tuesday restore U.N. authority in a Serb-controlled area of the country and launched a joint diplomatic effort with Russia to lower tensions in the former Yugoslav republic.

The State Department also accused Krajina Serbs of firing missiles with cluster bombs at civilians in Zagreb, the capital. "It is contrary to everything that's decent," spokesman Nicholas Burns said. "So therefore we condemn that kind of attack."



Japanese Premier Tomiichi Murayama (L) and his Chinese counterpart Li Peng stand at attention for the national anthems during the welcoming ceremony on Wednesday in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

— AFP/UNB photo

Israel plans to quit 6 Palestinian towns

JERUSALEM, May 3: The Israeli army has drawn up a plan to withdraw its troops from six Palestinian towns on the occupied West Bank starting from November, the Daily Haaretz said on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Under the plan Israeli soldiers would pull back from all the main towns except Hebron where 400 settlers live among 120,000 Palestinians.

First would be Jenin in the north of the West Bank then Nablus, Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Ramallah and the southern town of Bethlehem.

The redeployment would take more than a year because after withdrawing from each town the army would wait two months before ordering the next pull-back.

The plan has been dubbed Rainbow 11, taking up the code name adopted for the army redeployment on the Gaza Strip ahead of the launch of Palestinian self rule three in May 1994.

According to military sources quoted by Haaretz, the plan has already won the backing of the deputy chief of staff General Matan Vilnai.

But military spokesman refused to comment on Tuesday.

Before such a plan can be put into operation it has to be approved by the government.

A senior Israeli military commander General Ilan Biran on Friday set out a series of conditions including an end to anti-Israeli attacks before there could be any redeployment on the West Bank.

When all the security conditions have been met we will start our redeployment by withdrawing first from Jenin Biran, the general in command of Israeli units in the West Bank said.

Under the 1993 declaration of principles which led to Palestinian autonomy, Israel had been due to redeploy its troops ahead of elections to a self rule council set for last July.

But Israel has stalled demanding that PLO leader Yasser Arafat's Palestinian authority rein in militant attacks.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin announced on Wednesday that the army is to close three training camps on the West Bank gradually in the first sign of a redeployment.

HR group criticises police 'excesses' in Karachi

ISLAMABAD, May 3: A government crackdown has led to a notable decline in violence in Karachi, but it has also enmeshed police and paramilitary rangers in allegations of brutality from human rights groups, reports AFP.

In a statement last week-end, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPI) criticised the "indiscriminate detention" of people, especially of relatives sought by the authorities.

"Excesses included" people being blind folded and kept

and tortured in unauthorised places, the statement said.

The privately-run organisation lashed the "condemnable practices" as a "natural corollary" of the government's decision to regard the discontent in the city as a terrorist phenomenon.

"The key to resolution of the crisis in Karachi lies only in political dialogue," the HRCPI said, urging the government to seek a "civilised political course before the situation further worsens."

The human rights group

said the army's two-year deployment in the country's industrial hub, which lasted until last November, had "proved a failure" in restoring peace and order.

The violence in Karachi — which stems from a complex mix of racial, economic, social and sectarian frictions — centres largely on the numerically dominant Mohajir community in the city of more than 10 million people.

More than 1,400 people have been killed since January, 1994.



PLO leader Yasser Arafat opening Tuesday the Jabalia district election office, the first of four to be established in the Gaza Strip. Israelis and Palestinians are due to begin meetings in Tel Aviv on Friday for a preparatory session of talks on long-delayed elections.

— AFP/UNB photo

Turkey won't join US ban on Iran

ANKARA, May 3: Turkey will not join a U.S. trade ban on Iran and does not think Washington expects it to do so, a senior Turkish official was quoted today saying, reports Reuter.

"A Turkish embargo on Iran is out of the question without a U.N. Security Council resolution, Ozdem Sanberk, undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry, told the Hurriyet daily newspaper."

Sanberk said Washington would not want to disrupt Turkish-Iranian ties because that would upset regional balances.

"I doubt the Americans would expect Turkey to join the embargo," another senior diplomat told Reuters. "They would understand Turkey's position."

Turkey is hosting Iranian oil minister Gholmreza Aghazade for talks on a joint natural gas pipeline from Iran.

Myanmar rebels kill 3 Thai cops

MAE SOT, Thailand, May 3: Three Thai policemen were shot and killed when a group of 40 heavily armed members of a Myanmar rebel splinter faction attacked their checkpoint in northwestern Thailand, police said today, reports Reuter.

Police said members of the Myanmar-government backed Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) were responsible for the attack late on Tuesday night.

The fleet has shrunk the policy called cooperative engagement this month also devote seven ships and 1,800 sailors and marines to be available for joint naval exercises with Southeast Asian nations over the next year.

"It's a way of maintaining our presence and bilateral relationships in the area," a US naval source told Reuters.

Cooperation has become increasingly important for the United States, which has slashed its Pacific fleet by 24 per cent since 1990 but remains the Asia-Pacific region's top military power.

Moscow may reconsider centrifuge sale to Iran

WASHINGTON, May 3: Russia has agreed to rethink its proposed sale to Iran of gas centrifuge equipment that US officials say could be used in nuclear weapons programme, the State Department said Tuesday, reports AP.

The review raises the possibility that President Boris Yeltsin will announce cancellation of the deal when he meets in Moscow with President Clinton next week, spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

There was no indication, however, that Russia was also reconsidering the projected sale of two nuclear reactors as part of a 1 billion dollars deal to help construct a nuclear power complex near the Gulf.

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said last week the deal would not be canceled. He likened it to the US agreement last October with North Korea to help provide nuclear reactors for civilian energy production.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher tried to convince Kozyrev otherwise in three meetings with him here last week, the last on the tennis court Saturday.

Clinton on Sunday called both deals "profoundly disturbing" and announced he would ban all American trade with Iran, ending purchases of Iranian oil by American firms and sale of 326 million dollars in drilling equipment and other American goods to Tehran.

Christopher on Monday urged other nations to take similar steps against an "outlaw state" he said spends hundreds of million of dollars a year on international terrorism.

"The immediate response was mixed. Burns said Japan had postponed a 542 billion dollars loan and that several nations in the Middle East had backed the move.

On the other hand, Germany argued diplomacy would be more effective in discouraging Iran from building atomic weapons and the European Union, which includes Germany among its 15 members, decided against the embargo for now. The EU wants to maintain a "critical political dialogue" with Iran, EU spokesman Josep Coll I Carbo said in Brussels.

Off the Record

Americans don't know

NEW YORK: Who's the president of Mexico? What's the name of Canada's prime minister? They may be prominent neighbours, but most Americans apparently don't know their names, reports AP.

Just 2 per cent of respondents to a survey released Wednesday by the New York-based Louis Harris and Associates polling firm could name the Mexican president, Ernesto Zedillo.

Only 1 per cent knew that the Canadian premier is Jean Chretien.

Among Americans with post-graduate degrees, the name recognition improved, but just slightly 14 per cent correctly named Zedillo and 5 per cent named Chretien.

The poll of 1,225 adults was conducted by telephone between April 14 and 20. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The findings emerged in a broader survey that aimed to determine whether American attitudes have changed over NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Thirty-nine per cent of Americans now say they oppose the trade pact, which has linked the United States, Canada and Mexico since Jan 1, 1994, the poll found. Forty-five per cent had said they opposed NAFTA just before the US Congress approved it in 1993.

The poll also revealed widespread discontent with the US government's \$20 billion in loan guarantees to help the Mexican economy after the collapse of the peso. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents said they felt the aid package was wrong; 40 per cent said they supported the move.

They believed in life after death

NEW DELHI: Archaeologists, who unearthed a treasure trove from a remote village in Kerala's Kollam district, have said food grains and iron implements in the pots showed the people who lived there some 3500 years ago, believed in life after death, reports PTI.

"The rich materials and organic remains from the Aripa cist burial, point to the fact that the Megalithic people had strong belief in life after death," said Prajendran of Department of History, Kerala University and G L Dadam of Deccan College in the latest issue of "current science".

This observation goes well with evidences received from the burials that belonged to the second and third millennium BC excavated from other parts of the country, they observed.

The excavations carried out in May-June 1993 resulted in the discovery of several pottery items, iron implements, ornaments of gold and copper, skeletal remains of humans and animals, a stone tool and food materials, the article said.

One important aspect of this excavation was the presence of a highly-decomposed skull of a small child.

The occurrence of iron tools, ceramic utensils and ornaments further confirmed their belief that the soul of the dead might be offered most of their belongings, a belief whose prototype is still existing in most of our societies, the archaeologists said.

Doctor indeed!

NEW DELHI: A man and a woman committed suicide with their 10-year-old son after doctors failed to cure him of an illness that left him spastic, a news agency reported Wednesday, says AP.

The family drank acid and the bodies were found Tuesday in Kalyani, a town in West Bengal state, United News of India said.

In a suicide note found in their home, Dr Nirmal Bhowmick, 45, and his wife, 35-year-old Manasi Bhowmick, said they couldn't bear the agony after learning that their only son was incurable.

The report did not say whether Dr Bhowmick had participated in the treatment his son received.

Another pyramid found in Egypt

CAIRO: A new pyramid has been discovered in Egypt, the official Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported on Tuesday, says Xinhua.

It said that a French expedition, in collaboration with Egypt's supreme council of antiquities, has discovered the new pyramid in Sakkara area, some 30 kilometres South of Cairo.

There are more than 100 pyramids found so far in the country, with the most prominent three standing in the Giza Plateau in the outskirts of the capital. The pyramids are considered as one of the seven wonders in the world, attracting numerous visitors to the country that boasts a brilliant ancient civilization.

Indian SC issues show cause on Thackeray

NEW DELHI, May 3: The Supreme Court today issued notices to the Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray to show cause why contempt proceedings not be initiated against him for making "derogatory" remarks against the Chief Justice of India and another sitting judge, reports PTI.

Thackeray's statements had been carried by two Marathi dailies Samna and Lok Satta. The Shiv Sena, whose supreme is himself editor, Samna.

'Asia's growing military merely reflects economic progress'

SYDNEY, May 3: The commander of the world's biggest naval command, the US Pacific fleet, dismissed the idea of an Asian arms race and said the region's growing military might merely reflect economic progress, reports Reuter.

Admiral Ronald Zlotopfer said on a visit to Australia that he did not think the growing military might of Asian nations pointed to a huge build-up of arms.

"I don't believe we see a mass build-up in the region," he told Reuters in Sydney.

grow, they also tend to strengthen and update and upgrade their military."

Zlotopfer's comments follow expert forecast of a major boost to the military strength of Asian nations, with China emerging as the most potent new force in the region's strategic affairs.

China's nuclear strike capabilities will span all of Asia and reach the US east coast by 2010, according to a recent assessment published in Jane's Intelligence Review Magazine.

Zlotopfer, whose command spans the Pacific and Indian Oceans, acknowledged US

concern about Asian trouble spots such as the oil-rich Spratly Islands and the two Koreas, but he also noted signs of military cooperation.

The expanding web of bilateral and multilateral defence ties in the Asia-Pacific region could, given the political will even from the basis for a Gulf-war style joint defence strategy to deal with regional crises, he said.

"When you are exercising with other countries you've got to know each other's capabilities and you can communicate and operate together," said Zlotopfer, who

served in the US-led alliance in the 1911 Gulf War.

"So if the event arises that calls for a coalition, it's much easier to get to work with people with whom you have trained in the past," he said, adding political leaders must first decide that a "shared vital interest" is at stake.

Military ties in the Asia-Pacific have been quietly boosted in recent years, with top-level Chinese military contacts and Indonesian troops invited for the first time to join Australian war games this year.

The US navy, pursuing a

policy called cooperative engagement this month also devote seven ships and 1,800 sailors and marines to be available for joint naval exercises with Southeast Asian nations over the next year.

"It's a way of maintaining our presence and bilateral relationships in the area," a US naval source told Reuters.

Cooperation has become increasingly important for the United States, which has slashed its Pacific fleet by 24 per cent since 1990 but remains the Asia-Pacific region's top military power.

The fleet has shrunk the

past five years from 259 to 197 ships under defenced cuts after the Soviet Union's demise.

But Zlotopfer said the US naval presence in Asia had actually risen over the past three years because a bigger proportion of the fleet was being deployed in Asian waters, leaving "a lot of empty piers" on the US West Coast.

"I don't believe the United States desires to be the world's policeman, but I believe we also realise we have a very strong interest in peace and security especially in this region," he said.

Chandrika blames LTTE for killing Rajiv Gandhi

NEW DELHI, May 3: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has for the first time publicly blamed the separatist Tamil Tigers for killing former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in "cold blood" in 1989, reports Reuter.

Rajiv Gandhi, who signed an accord with Sri Lanka in 1987 to send Indian troops to the island to help quell the rebels, was killed by a woman suicide bomber at an election rally near the southern city of Madras.