

BRIEFLY

Blast kills 5 in Kashmir: Five civilians were killed and 12 injured when a landmine suspected to have been planted by a Kashmiri Muslim militant exploded in a crowded downtown district of Srinagar yesterday, police said, AP reports from Srinagar.

Two Indian paramilitary troops were also injured in the landmine blast which rocked a downtown area of this Kashmir summer capital, police said.

US welcomes DPRK's decision: Ambassador Robert Gallucci, chief US negotiator for the agreed framework with North Korea, has welcomed North Korea's decision to accept the US proposal for political level talks. Gallucci responded in a May 2 letter to North Korea, reports USIS.

"We have proposed that the talks begin in mid-May, in Geneva or another mutually acceptable location, and we are awaiting a response from the North Koreans to Ambassador Gallucci's letter," a spokesman said. Gallucci plans to visit Seoul and Tokyo next week "to consult with our allies before these talks take place," he added.

UNSC may renew sanctions on Iraq: The UN Security Council is expected to renew international sanctions against Iraq for the 25th time when it convenes to decide on the matter next week. Western diplomats said on Wednesday. AFP reports from United Nations.

A vote on whether to renew the sanctions slapped on Iraq during its 1990 invasion of Kuwait was set for May 12.

India reopens embassy in Kabul: India reopened its embassy in Kabul on Wednesday after a 16-month closure forced by factional Afghan fighting and diplomats of its arch-rival Pakistan prepared to occupy the embassy they vacated in March. Reuter reports from Kabul.

"Kabul is quite peaceful now and we hope it will last," Indian Charge d'Affaires A S Toor told reporters. "I don't think the move is premature. We know that other countries are planning to come back very quickly."

22 die in China mine blast: An explosion killed 22 miners at China's Xinjiang Dong Feng Coal Mine, the Beijing-backed Ta Kung Pao newspaper reported on Tuesday. Reuter says from Hong Kong.

It said the explosion occurred on Saturday and all 22 workers in the mine were killed instantly. It was the most serious accident at the mine in the Uygur autonomous region of Xinjiang province, it said.

Truck mishap kills 19 Indians: A truck carrying labourers and welding rods overturned in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, killing at least 19 people, the United News of India (UNI) news agency said yesterday. Reuter reports from New Delhi.

It said the accident took place near the town of Dhule 290 km (180 miles) northeast of Bombay and seven children were among the dead.

2 killed in Russian plane crash: An aging Antonov-2 plane crashed and burned in central Russia on Thursday, killing two people and injuring four others aboard, emergency officials said, AP reports from Moscow.

The single-engine, propeller plane went down near the settlement of Sebal, about 1,400 kilometres (870 miles) east of Moscow, said Yekaterina Akinana, a spokeswoman for the Ministry for Emergency Situations.

Quake shakes N Greek peninsula: An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6 shook the northern Greek peninsula of Khalkidhiki early Thursday, following a series of smaller tremors, the Athens Geodynamic Institute said, AP reports from Athens.

There were reports of slight damage to some houses in the area but no injuries. Schools at the nearby town of Ierisso were ordered to remain closed for the day.

Aum chief may be indicted: The police plan to charge with murder the leader of the Aum Supreme Truth cult, and its chemical-unit members in connection with the March 20 lethal gas attack on the Tokyo subway, a major daily said today, reports AFP.

The authorities have started consultations with prosecutors about questioning sect leader Shoko Asahara and the chemical-unit members suspected of producing sarin nerve gas, the mass circulation Yomiuri Shimbun said.

Moderate quake shakes Kobe: A moderate earthquake measuring 3.3 on the Richter scale shook a small area around Kobe, western Japan, on Thursday morning, the Meteorological Agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicentre of the quake, which occurred at 5:53 am. (2053 GMT on Wednesday) was located at a depth of 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) in the southeastern part of Kyogo prefecture, the agency said.

19 die in Turkey bus plunge: Nineteen passengers were killed and 17 other injured when a passenger bus plunged into a ditch in southwestern Turkey on Wednesday, the Anatolian news agency reported. Reuter says from Ankara.

The agency said the accident occurred on a narrow road near Milas town, the tourist resort of Mugla.

Flood, landslide kill 31 in Sumatra: Flood and landslides that followed days of incessant rain have killed at least 31 people while nine others were missing in two regencies in north Sumatra, Indonesian officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Tapanuli Selatan Regency spokesman Soripada Harahap said by telephone from the main town of Padang Sidempuan that 31 people have been killed in the Dolok sub-regency and eight other people were missing.

Israel marks independence day: Israel began celebrating 47 years of independence on Wednesday under the banner of peace, the national theme for 1995, AP reports from Jerusalem.

Shifting swiftly from a day of mourning for the country's fallen soldiers, revelers crowded into Jerusalem's city square to watch the annual ceremony launching a day of celebration.

China, Japan reject US embargo against Iran

BEIJING, May 4: Japan does not favour the US trade embargo against Iran, visiting Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama indicated Thursday. A Chinese government spokesman also rejected the embargo, saying it would not help solve the problems it is intended to solve, reports AP.

Murayama, who left Beijing for Xian after a two-day state visit, told reporters that he believed terrorism should be faced squarely and dealt with properly.

But he suggested that the embargo was not, in Japan's view, a desirable course of action.

In Iran, there are those who support terrorism and those who do not. We have to encourage the moderate forces in Iran. We must keep the domestic political situation in Iran in mind as we formulate our policies," Murayama said.

Nevertheless, Japan had said Tuesday it would postpone a promised 45 billion yen (dollar 542 million) loan to Iran.

Japanese loans are the only major source of foreign credit for Iran, and US officials had pressured Japan for months not to go ahead with the loan, the second in a package of three installments.

Japanese officials added that they have not cancelled

the loan, but are postponing it indefinitely.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman also objected to the embargo announced by President Clinton Sunday to punish Iran for supporting terrorism and pursuing nuclear weapons.

The current practice by the United States is not conducive to the solution of the problem and, instead, will only further strain relations between the United States and Iran," said ministry spokesman Shen Guofang.

China hoped the two countries would resolve their differences through negotiations and dialogue, he said.

American held at Karachi airport with 2kg heroin

KARACHI, May 4: An American was arrested at Karachi's airport after customs agents found two kilograms (4.4 pounds) of heroin in his hand luggage, officials said Thursday, reports AP.

Stavros Petkovits, 24, a resident of New York City, was picked up Tuesday evening as he was preparing to board a Pakistan International Airlines flight to Dubai, customs officials said.

US officials confirmed the arrest but declined to comment on the case.

In an attempt to halt rampant drug smuggling, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government has approved a law that allows judges to impose the death penalty for possessing as little as 100 grams (about four ounces) of heroin.

N-deal with Tehran to go ahead: Kremlin officials

MOSCOW, May 4: Key Kremlin officials have reaffirmed Russia's intent to proceed with the sale of nuclear reactors to Iran, brushing aside mounting pressure from Washington in the runup to next week's Moscow summit, reports AP.

"We will stick to our position," Deputy Foreign Minister Albert Chernyshov told the Interfax news agency on Wednesday. "In this case we are right in every respect."

President Boris Yeltsin's spokesman, Sergei Medvedev, echoed those comments, although he hinted at a possible compromise aimed at easing US fears that the sale would help Iran develop nuclear weapons.

President Clinton has called Russia's planned 1 billion dollars reactor deal "deeply dis-

turbing." It is expected to be a major sore point in his talks with Yeltsin on May 10-11 in Moscow.

Yeltsin is "well aware of US concern about the plans to build a nuclear power plant in Iran," Medvedev told Interfax.

But he said the plan meets provisions of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and regulations of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN agency the monitors compliance.

Medvedev also hinted that Yeltsin could offer a compromise during the summit in an effort to "erase US doubts," but he did not elaborate.

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said last week that the deal would not be cancelled.



UN Human Rights Commissioner Jose Ayala Lasso (L) listens to Maulvi Umer Farooq, Kashmir's chief Muslim cleric on Wednesday in Srinagar, summer capital of the strife-torn northern Indian state. Lasso met with Muslim leaders who alleged rampant rights violations in Kashmir where separatist guerrillas are fighting for an independent homeland.

— AFP/UNB photo

Ultra-leftists stage strike in Nepal: 300 held

KATHMANDU, May 4: Some 300 activists were arrested and at least 15 injured Thursday as the extreme leftist United People's Front (UPF) staged a general strike in Kathmandu Valley, party president Purna Bhusal told AFP.

The strike called to protest against the policies of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP-UML), which affected work in government offices, factories, schools and colleges witnesses said.

Bhusal said police resorted to baton charges and injured more than 15 activists. Seven of the injured were admitted to hospital and three are in serious condition, she said adding that some 300 activists were arrested.

But a central police source said only 60 were held and denied any baton charge by police.

The NCP-UML government deployed police and army personnel to guard hospitals, post offices and telecommunications offices, witnesses said.

More than 80 per cent of shops in major markets were shut.

Most vehicles were kept off the roads to ward off attacks by strikers and miscreants. Only state run buses and trolley buses were plying.

The UPF called the strike in three cities in the Kathmandu Valley — Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur — to press the government to abrogate a 1950 treaty with India, among other things a

party source said.

Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari visited New Delhi last month to discuss the issue and said that India was willing to review it.

The treaty is widely seen here as giving India political leverage over Nepal. It allows nationals of the two countries to seek jobs and cross the border without visas.

The treaty calls for extensive cooperation between the two countries in defence matters but Nepal has complained that New Delhi did not inform Kathmandu of past conflicts with China and Pakistan.

The 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty, which is obsolete now, has forced Nepal to become India's semi-colony, said UPF convener Baburam Bhattarai.

UN, Angola sign accord to deploy peacekeepers

LUANDA, May 4: The United Nations and the Angolan government on Wednesday signed an agreement on the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in Angola to bring an end to two decades of civil war, reports AFP.

The accord, signed by Territorial Administration Minister Jose Anibal Rocha and UN special envoy Alioune Blondin Beye, comes two days ahead of a planned meeting between President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos and his rival Jonas Savimbi.

The government has agreed to provide assistance necessary to the UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III), while the United Nations undertook to respect national sovereignty during the mission of its troops.

Nepal, Bhutan hold talks on refugees

KATHMANDU, May 4: Nepal Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari said that his talks with Bhutanese King Jigme Singhye Wangchuk on Bhutanese refugees were fruitful, official daily The Rising Nepal reported here today, says Xinhua.

The Nepali prime minister and the Bhutanese king talked during the 9th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in New Delhi.

Adhikari called Wangchuk Wednesday afternoon and discussed with him the Bhutanese refugee problem as well as regional issues, the reports said.

Talking to Nepali TV (NTV) soon afterwards, the Nepali prime minister said that the talks were fruitful in the sense that he got good understanding of Bhutan's perspective on the issue of refugees.

Khmers capture Cambodian govt's frontline base

PHNOM PENH, May 4: Khmer Rouge guerrillas have captured a Cambodian government frontline position and pushed government troops back in fighting in the north-west province of Battambang, a Phnom Penh spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

Defence Ministry spokesman Colonel Chum Sambath told Reuters the guerrillas captured Treng district, a government frontline position facing Pailin, the Khmer Rouge headquarters.

The fighting is along national route 10, a dirt road linking the city of Battambang with Pailin about 80 kms (50 miles) to the southwest.

"The Khmer Rouge took over Treng on the 1st of May," Sambath said.

Khmer Rouge radio, monitored in Phnom Penh by Reuters, said the guerrillas had killed 30 government soldiers and captured 20 in the fighting, as well as destroying a tank.

Off the Record

Royal wedding in offing, or just rumours?

PARIS: Is the reformed bad girl of Monaco ready for marriage? Princess Stephanie had her two children baptised last month, paving the way for her to wed their father, live-in boyfriend Daniel Ducruet, according to French press reports says AP.

The principality's press office confirmed Wednesday that Louis, two and a half, and 11-month-old Pauline were baptised April 17 in a private ceremony at Monaco's Church of St. Devote.

Reports of impending marriage were "more rumours, just rumours," the press office said.

The event was a reconciliation of sorts between Stephanie, a rock star-turned-bathing suit designer, and her father, Prince Rainier, who reportedly never approved of his daughter's relationship with Ducruet.

Ducruet met the princess while he was her bodyguard.

Sugar-powered spacecraft!

LONDON: A sugar-powered spacecraft designed by an amateur rocket engineer has been cleared for lift-off for its two-mile flight into the sky in Wales, reports AFP.

Aviation authorities and police gave the go-ahead to 35-year-old laboratory technician Steve Bennett to launch the "Starchaser" rocket he has been working on for years, The Times reported yesterday.

Bennett, from Manchester in northern England, claims the ten foot (three-metre) craft will travel at 900 feet (270 metres) a second and has a range of six miles (ten km).

He plans to launch the rocket later this month in Wales. It is scheduled to fly two and a half miles (four km) before parachuting down to be recovered.

But Bennett has been obliged to take out a hefty insurance policy in case things don't go according to plan, the paper said.

Eating feat

KATHMANDU: A Nepalese man took about seven kilograms of food at a picnic, becoming a glutton known to all, The Kathmandu Post reported Thursday, says Xinhua.

Keshab Prasad Subedi, a peon of the Ramechhap District Development Committee in central Nepal, who was invited at a picnic organised recently by the committee, devoured about 2.5 kilograms of the entire fat of a he-goat about 1.5 kilograms of meat and about 3.5 kilograms of other food including rice.

It took Subedi five hours to complete the eating feat. However, the 42-year-old glutton, who weighs 50 kilograms, was not satisfied with the quantity of the food at the picnic. It is reported that he had the record of eating about four kilograms of rice.

Furthermore, he was not mindful of whether the food was cooked or uncooked. He had chewed and devoured two kilograms of uncooked rice immediately without any digestive problem.

Indian MPs urge govt to deploy Prithvi

NEW DELHI, May 4: An Indian parliamentary panel has urged the government to deploy a short-range missile which has been reportedly inducted into the Indian army despite US warnings, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

A multi-party committee of MPs attached to the Defence Ministry said in a report introduced in parliament on Wednesday that the government should not hesitate to deploy the Prithvi missile, a nuclear capable weapon.

"The committee... recommended that the indigenously developed missile be inducted, and deployed, the Indian Express newspaper said, citing reports that Pakistan had moved nuclear capable missiles along the border with India.

As defence preparedness is the first priority of any government, it has become im-

perative that the government takes a quick decision on the induction and deployment of... Prithvi," the committee said.

An Indian newspaper reported last month that the mobile surface to surface Prithvi, which has a maximum range of 250 kilometres (156 miles) had already been inducted into the Indian army despite US objections.

But the report added that the government, apparently because of US pressure, was dragging its feet on regular production of the Prithvi.

The report by the 43 member parliamentary panel also urged the Defence Ministry to discuss the steady annual fall in defence budget with the Finance Ministry.

Preliminary trials of the Prithvi missile were completed last year.



American singer Sheryl Crow (R) thanks the audience after receiving her trophy from Ringo Starr late on Wednesday at World Music Awards ceremony in Monaco. — AFP/UNB photo

KSA, Yemen to set up jt army units along border

RIYADH, May 4: Saudi Arabia and Yemen have agreed to set up joint military groups in a bid to prevent new clashes along the two countries' disputed border, the Yemeni army's chief of staff said on Wednesday, reports AFP.

The three sub-committees will be tasked with following the situation along the border and making proposals to reduce "the number of troops there. General Abdullah Alieleva told AFP after three days of negotiations in Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia and Yemen have agreed to only deploy "the units needed to stop smuggling or sabotage, dismantle the current military fortifications and prevent the creation of new ones," he said.

Bombings on in Europe despite tough anti-terrorism measures

LONDON, May 4: Britain has the IRA, Italy's home-grown terrorists called themselves the Red Brigades. In Germany, it was the Red Army Faction, reports AP.

With mixed success, European governments have been cracking down on home-grown terrorists for decades.

As US President Clinton pushes for anti-terrorist laws in response to the Oklahoma City bombing, and America confronts domestic terror, civil rights activists and security experts in Europe caution that tougher laws aren't always the best weapon.

"The key to defeating paramilitary groups of any kind in a democracy is to isolate them and to help the communities in which they operate," said Andrew Puddephatt,

leader of the British civil rights group Liberty.

"Introducing a climate of repression into an open society that would be a heavy price to pay for a very uncertain goal."

Security experts say the key to preventing attacks is effective spying, which Clinton envisages in seeking greater than 180 in pub bombings in Birmingham, England.

Facing torrents of public anger, Parliament the following week passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act, giving police powers to interrogate suspects for up to a week without warrant or legal representation.

Eleven people including some of the first arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act — served sentences

up to 16 years in prison before being acquitted on appeal.

While tough measures have crushed some groups, like the Red Brigades in Italy and the Red Army Faction in Germany, groups such as the IRA in Northern Ireland have thrived from governmental overreaction and oppression.

Widespread arrests and searches, and the abolition of jury trials, fueled sympathy and recruits — and exposed Britain to international criticism.

Ireland is a very small place with some fairly identifiable terrorists," said Col Andrew Duncan, an anti-terrorism expert for the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"America, by contrast, is an enormous country with a fairly unidentifiable fringe of

extremists. So it doesn't matter how many FBI agents you deploy. Intelligence is the key," he said.

Spain, which has no specific anti-terrorist laws, undermined support for the Basque separatist group ETA by returning power to local politicians.

Italian authorities locked up thousands of people without trial as part of a successful programme to extinguish the left-wing Red Brigades, but also adopted tactics to sow dissension within terrorist ranks.

After the Red Brigades killed 85 people in Bologna railway station in 1980, police offered reduced sentences or even freedom to Red Brigade turncoats. The same approach is now being used to under-

mine the Sicilian Mafia.

In Germany, authorities long have had powers to outlaw groups and to imprison members for up to 15 years. Such laws have been used against the burgeoning neo-Nazi movement since 1993.

In America, Duncan said, it's too soon for large-scale action against an ill-defined enemy within.

Groups like the Michigan Militia are gun clubs. They're not a recognised government paramilitary group and they're not yet considered terrorists, so it's a difficult situation," said Duncan.

"The more you accuse them of being terrorists and make a fuss of infiltrating them, the more they will become what you accuse them of," he said.

UN accuses DPRK of violating armistice

SEOUL, May 4: The United Nations Command on Thursday denounced North Korea for trying to dismantle the armistice setup that has kept a fragile peace on the peninsula for more than four decades, reports AP.

North Korea shut its doors to UN ceasefire monitors Wednesday by banning them from its side of Panmunjom, a truce village on the demilitarised zone that serves as the only border crossing between the two Koreas.

The North also closed facilities of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), which monitors implementation of the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War.