

# BRIEFLY

## Efforts to end Liberian war fail:

West African leaders gave up late Friday in yet another attempt to end Liberia's brutal civil war, but said the various parties would meet again to discuss a number of recommendations put forward, AFP reports from Abuja.

"Only Liberians can generate a viable solution to their problems," said Guinean Foreign Minister Kozo Zaoumanigui at the end of three days of difficult negotiations with the various Liberian factions.

## Blast claims 3 in Philippines:

Three people were killed and five others wounded when a drunk who was denied service in a restaurant, pulled out a grenade which accidentally went off, police in this southern city said yesterday, AFP reports from Zamboanga, Philippines.

## 310 Indonesians die during Hajj:

The annual Saudi Hajj pilgrimage has claimed the lives of 310 Indonesian Muslims, the official Antara news agency reported yesterday, Reuter reports Jakarta.

## Ghali meets Perry:

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and US Defence Secretary William Perry met Friday to discuss proposed changes in the role of UN forces in Bosnia, a spokesman for Boutros-Ghali said, AFP reports from United Nations.

## Japan to aid Zaire's ebola victims:

Japan will offer 150,000 dollars in official aid to Zaire to help it support victims of the lethal ebola virus, government officials said Friday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

## Singapore to vie for UNSC seat:

Singapore will be a candidate for a seat on the United Nations Security Council for the period 2001-2002, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Saturday, AP reports from Singapore.

## UN HR envoy to visit Chechnya:

A UN human rights envoy is going to Chechnya to investigate reports of abuses in the breakaway Russian republic, the United Nations said Friday, AP reports from United Nations.

## Pope in Prague:

Pope John Paul II arrived Saturday in the Czech Republic on the first stop of a three-day tour that will also take him to his native Poland, AP reports from Prague.

## 2 die in US plane crash:

A small plane attempting to land crashed into a rural house, killing a mother and child aboard the plane and causing a fire that destroyed the home, AP reports from Kent, Washington.

## Moderate quake jolts Japan:

A moderate earthquake, jolted Tokyo and neighbouring Chiba prefecture (state) early Saturday, AP reports from Tokyo.

## Blasts in Istanbul:

A bomb exploded at a car garage and another at a bank branch in Istanbul early Saturday, causing damage but no injuries, police said, AP reports from Istanbul.

## Suharto urges to use Bahasa:

Indonesia's President Suharto on Saturday urged his people to use their national language, Bahasa Indonesia, properly and to boost national discipline, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

## Lanka to back ROK bid for UNSC seat:

Sri Lanka has cleared the way for South Korea to become a member of the United Nations Security Council by dropping out of the two-way race for a rotating seat, Foreign Ministry officials said Saturday, AP reports from Seoul.

## Fire on US space shuttle:

Static electricity on a technician's protective suit and human error caused a fire on space shuttle Endeavour earlier this month, NASA said Friday, AP reports from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

## China-Taiwan talks in July:

China and Taiwan have agreed to hold a second round of top-level, semi-official talks in July in Beijing, preceded by three rounds of preliminary discussions, a report said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

## Russian arms sale declines

MOSCOW, May 20: A Russian military policy expert said on Friday that Russia faces a serious challenge in the world arms market as its arms sales continue to decline, reports Xinhua.

## Large section of Congress, fed up with Rao, wants Sonia

NEW DELHI, May 20: "Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi," the names of two dead leaders and a secretive widow resounded on Friday at a rally of ruling party rebels trying to topple Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and restore a dynasty, reports Reuter.

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# Karadzic threatens to take UN peacekeepers hostage

BONN, May 20: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic threatened to take UN peacekeepers hostage if the international community intervenes militarily in the three-year war, in an interview in the German weekly Der Spiegel to appear Monday, reports AFP.

"If our positions are attacked by NATO bombs, Blue Helmets will be taken over," Karadzic said in an interview with the weekly, the text of which was distributed today.

Karadzic, who said he would welcome the withdrawal of UN troops from Bosnia-Herzegovina, added that "if Muslim forces are not disarmed in UN safe areas, we will take them all (the safe areas) including Sarajevo."

The pressure on Karadzic and the Bosnian Serbs has increased over the past weeks. With signals from Belgrade, that Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic may consider recognising Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In addition, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia said earlier this week it would be taking over investigations into Karadzic's role in atrocities committed by Bosnian Serbs.

Karadzic attacked the tribunal in the interview with Der Spiegel, saying it was stupid to try and make him a scapegoat for all the evils committed in the war.

"Find me 100 children brought into the world because of rape and I will admit my guilt," he said.

Karadzic also said five national contact groups on Bosnia, comprising Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, had proven ineffectual, and blamed Germany for the group's paralysis.

"The Germans should be excluded from it," Karadzic said.

Meanwhile: A convoy of food and medical aid arrived in the Muslim enclave of Bihać, north-western Bosnia, Friday, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said in a press release here.

Seven ICRC vehicles, loaded with 140 tonnes (155 tons) of aid supplies left Zagreb early Friday and arrived in Bihać the same day, after crossing Croatian territory controlled by

separatist Serbs.

"This is an encouraging sign for the future," said Alex Breunwalder, head of the ICRC in Zagreb.

Last week, the ICRC managed to get aid through to the enclave for the first time in a month.

Friday's aid supplies include 60 tonnes of medical materials supplied by the World Health Organisation, and food for canteens which have been distributing more than 4,500 meals a day since March.

"It is vital to continue to get food supplies through to the pocket on a regular basis," Braudewalder said.

During the past two years of war in Bosnia, some 200,000 civilians have been living in extremely precarious conditions in the Bihać region.

## Arab mini-summit to decide action over Jerusalem

CAIRO, May 20: Arab leaders will hold a mini-summit in Morocco at the end of May to decide on alternative action after Washington vetoed UN attempts to force Israel into cancelling land seizures in East Jerusalem, reports AFP.

The summit, which will be attended by seven Arab heads of state and the PLO in the largest gathering of the region's leaders since the Gulf War, will probably take place on May 27, the Arab League said Friday.

King Hassan II of Morocco will host the meeting which will also be attended by Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Palestinians.

## PLO police arrests 2 Hamas activists from wedding party

GAZA CITY, May 20: Palestinian police raided a wedding and arrested the groom and a guest, both members of Hamas' military wing, Hamas sources said on Saturday, reports AP.

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said security forces seized Yousef Mallahi, 22, at his home in southern town of Rafah on Friday night as he celebrated his wedding. They said the police also took one of the guests, Usama Abu Taha, 23.

Both men are members of Hamas' military wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigade, wanted by Israel in connection with hit-and-run attacks on Israeli troops.

Over 60 Israelis have been killed in attacks, most of them suicide-bombings, that have killed over 60 Israelis since Israel and the PLO signed a peace accord in September 1993.

Under Israeli pressure, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat began a crackdown on the militants after back-to-back suicide bombings in the Gaza Strip on April 9 that killed seven Israelis and an American college student.

## Security around White House tightened

WASHINGTON, May 20: President Clinton decided to close Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House on recommendation of his security advisers alarmed by increased violence around one of the most prominent symbols of democracy, an administration official said Saturday, reports AP.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the six-lane avenue will be closed Saturday. Work to turn it into a pedestrian mall will begin immediately.

"Once the decision was made, we felt — for security reasons — we had to move immediately to close it," the official said.

Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, whose department includes the Secret Service, which is responsible for presidential security, was signing an order closing the street.



Two suspected Kashmiri Muslim militants are roped together and escorted at an Indian army camp following their arrest Thursday in northern Kashmir. Security forces broke up scattered demonstrations during curfew in the Kashmir Valley Friday to protest last week's destruction of an Islamic shrine. —AFP/UNB photo

# Australia may make fresh mediation offer to Lanka

COLOMBO, May 20: Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, who brokered peace for Cambodia, is likely to repeat his offer to help solve the Tamil Tiger crisis when he arrives in Sri Lanka on Monday, Canberra's high commissioner said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Evans is visiting ostensibly to discuss Indian Ocean regional issues and to promote Australia's 'look West' strategy of developing dialogue and co-operation.

"But he will want and update on what is going on and what it would take to get back to talking" between the Sri Lankan government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Australian High Commissioner Bill Tweddell said.

"Australia has supported peace efforts in Sri Lanka over

a long period of time," Evans said in March. "We remain available (to help) if circumstances make it a useful option."

Tweddell said Evans, who helped develop and broker the UN peace plan for Cambodia

which led to elections in May 1993, would likely reiterate Canberra's offer.

Australia was one of the first countries to condemn the LTTE for its suicide "Sea Tiger" bomb attack on two naval vessels last month which killed 12 sailors and broke a truce with the government in force from the beginning of the year.

In 1990, Australia offered to play a "good offices" role for the Commonwealth in peace settlement talks and has renewed the offer to successive Sri Lankan governments.

"It's been on the table in the past, but hasn't led to responses," Tweddell said.

Since the truce was broken, more than 400 people have died and the capital Colombo has been under alert for a week for possible attacks by "Black Tiger" suicide squads.

## China launches strike against dissidents

BEIJING, May 20: The Chinese authorities have launched a preemptive strike against dissidents ahead of the June anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, rounding up several activists in Beijing, sources said today, reports AFP.

Three dissidents, Wang Xizhe, Huang Xiteng and Liu Xiaobo, have all been picked up in the past three days.

# Off the Record

## Sacred herb!

JOHANNESBURG: Testing South Africa's new climate of individual rights with billows of marijuana smoke, some 400 Rastafarians marched Saturday to demand legalisation of their so-called "sacred herb," reports AP.

Under laws dating from the former apartheid regime, possession of marijuana, or the local hashish called dagga, brings multi-year jail sentences despite widespread use by both blacks and whites.

The Rastafarians, a sect holds the late Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie sacred and uses marijuana in its rituals, view the laws as limiting freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution that accompanied President Nelson Mandela's election last year.

Hundreds of Rastafarians smoked marijuana at a park Saturday in view of police before parading to the provincial legislature with a petition demanding decriminalisation of cannabis and the release of "prisoners of conscience" jailed for possession.

Police, who had reached an agreement earlier with the Rastafari Unity Movement Alliance to limit marijuana smoking during the March, adopted a lenient approach. No arrests were reported.

## 'Sonia medical store'

BOMBAY: A cartoon in India's leading financial newspaper yesterday shows two rival Congress party workers queuing up at a pharmacy called the "Sonia Medical Store," reports AP.

"Life saving drugs, please," they demand in chorus from the sphinx-like Sonia Gandhi, sitting behind the counter, wearing dark glasses.

Four years after former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated during an election campaign by a Tamil suicide bomber, his Italian-born widow Sonia Gandhi remains pivotal in Indian politics.

She has been thrust into the limelight again this week over the latest split in the century-old party, telephoning Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao to urge him to prevent a rival faction breaking away after delegations from both sides went to consult her.

## As a woman, as a man!

LONDON, May 20: Britons undergoing a sex change are to be provided with two identity cards on London underground trains — one dressed as a woman, one dressed as a man, reports Reuter.

After lobbying from transsexuals, London transport agreed to the novel travel cards to help out confused ticket collectors.

"Applications have to be endorsed by a doctor or psychiatrist as it is part of a medical condition. This system does not apply for transvestites," a London transport spokeswoman said on Friday.

The need for the dual cards across as many transsexuals preparing for the operation go to work as men in the morning and then go out at night dressed as women, the spokeswoman said.

## You may get Rushdie at London Plaza Hotel?

LONDON: Novelist Salman Rushdie, who has lived in hiding under a death threat since 1989, made a surprise appearance on Friday's "Late Show with David Letterman," reports AP.

Rushdie, introduced by Letterman as a man who doesn't get out very often, delivered the evening's Top Ten List ("Top Ten Bobby Pet Peeves"). The programme, taped earlier Friday, was the last of a weeklong series from London. The show is based in New York.

After handing over the list, Rushdie joked to Letterman, "If you need me, I'll be at the London Plaza Hotel."

His appearance became a running joke. "He just gets restless in his room and decides to be on a TV show," cracked Letterman.

Letterman also asked guest Meg Ryan, "Do you want to do something later, you, me and Salman? Go back to the room and pull the blinds down and hide under the bed?"

Later, Letterman's mother, Dorothy, was seen talking with Rushdie in the hallway of the London Studios — "exchanging recipes," Letterman quipped.

Rushdie received a "fatwa," the equivalent of a death sentence under Islamic law, for writing the novel "The Satanic Verses." The religious decree, issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini before his death, alleged Rushdie had blasphemed Islam in his novel.

## Suicide cocktail!

NEW DELHI: Three men ended their lives in a suicide pact in which they toasted one another with poison laced drinks at a cocktail party, the Press Trust of India said on Friday, reports AFP.

The three men, aged between 22 and 24 years, hosted the cocktail in the city of Surat in western India on Wednesday and guzzled liquor they had spiked with poison, the News Agency quoted delayed police reports as saying.

The police attributed the deaths to a suicide pact, but did not say why the three men decided to end their lives.

## LTTE campaigning to prepare people for war

COLOMBO, May 20: Tamil Tiger guerrillas have placed the inhabitants of their northern Jaffna Peninsula stronghold on a war footing following stepped up military attacks on rebels in the region, Tamil sources said Friday, reports AFP.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has urged the people in Jaffna to defend themselves against attacks from government troops but said it had not considered conscription for the time being, the sources said.



Charlie Chaplin's grand-daughters (from left) Dolores, Kathleen and Carmen, walk on the Cannes beach on Friday in France, where they attend the 48th Cannes International Film Festival. —AFP/UNB photo

# Large section of Congress, fed up with Rao, wants Sonia

NEW DELHI, May 20: "Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi," the names of two dead leaders and a secretive widow resounded on Friday at a rally of ruling party rebels trying to topple Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and restore a dynasty, reports Reuter.

Like ghosts of leaders past, huge wooden cutouts of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi greeted thousands of Congress Party dissidents.

Party workers clad in tradi-

itional cotton kurta pyjamas hoisted posters with a picture of youthful Rajiv and his wife, Sonia, taken before the former prime minister was slain.

Sonia, the Italian-born inheritor of the Nehru-Gandhi mantle was absent but her name was on almost everyone's lips.

"Rao must be removed from power," said Mohiuddin, a party worker from Tamil Nadu. "We want Sonia," he said. "We want a strong Congress President like Sonia Gandhi," said Rajendra Roy, former Chairman of the

Bihar State Congress Committee. "In India, every home believes in the Nehru family."

The party rank and file sat cross-legged under colourful tents, occasionally wiping brows in 40 degree Celsius (104 degree Fahrenheit) weather.

The only violence came when a thirsty bunch stormed a soft drink stockpile and was beaten back by blue-helmeted paramilitary forces wielding sticks.

Bare-chested holy men clad in vermilion sat next to grizzled men in white cotton dhotis and Nehru caps. Some party members who travelled huge distances dozed with their heads on suitcases.

Sprawling bunting in the green, white and saffron of India's tricolour were a reminder that Congress is intimately tied to the nation's victorious struggle for independence.

Jawaharlal Nehru was India's first prime minister after independence in 1947. His daughter Indira was premier until she was killed by Sikh bodyguards in 1984. Her

son Rajiv was campaigning to recapture power when he was killed by a suicide bomber in 1991.

Now Congress, which has ruled India for all but three years since independence, has lost a string of state polls and the party rank and file worry about general elections next year.

A large section of Congress, fed up with Rao, wants Sonia to leave her drawing room where, Sphinx-like, she greets visitors, and step into party politics.

"Sonia might not want to come," said Govind Dhingra of Madhya Pradesh state. "But she could control the party."

The names of the dissidents' leaders, Marain Dutt Tiwari and Arjun Singh, were also chanted. Still, even they have said they would bow to Sonia's wishes if she cast her die.

But she has made no move. Unwilling to embarrass her, dissidents were forced earlier this week to retract a statement saying she had been invited to the rally.

Another report says: The European Parliament has called for a ban on weapons sales to Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas and condemned the rebels for renewing its separatist war, it was announced here on Friday.

The resolution adopted by the European Parliament condemned the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for withdrawing from peace talks and urged the European Union (EU) and its member states to prevent arms reaching the LTTE.

A copy of the resolution released here by the Foreign Ministry says that EU and member states have been urged to "tighten controls over the sale of arms and to prevent arms from reaching the LTTE" and similar groups.