

International

BRIEFLY

Chinese dissident awarded: Jailed Chinese dissident Gao Yu was awarded the International Federation of Newspaper Publisher's Golden Pen of Freedom in her absence on Monday at a ceremony shunned by the French government...

Lebanese minister dies: Lebanon's Minister of Environment Joseph Moughaizel died after suffering a heart attack on Monday four days after being named as minister...

EU offers help to Russia: The European Union on Monday offered emergency help to Russia after an earthquake which was feared to have killed at least 2,000 people in Russia's far east...

Russian Border Guards kill two: Russian border guards killed two Muslim militants who tried to shoot down a reconnaissance helicopter near the Afghanistan border...

Ebola virus toll now 153: In a sharp upward revision of its figures, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said Tuesday that 153 people had died of the Ebola virus in Zaire...

Asian nations, EU to hold summit: Asian Nations and the European Union are expected to hold a summit in Thailand in the first half of 1996...

Strike threatened in Kashmir: Government employees in the strife-torn state of Kashmir yesterday said they would launch an indefinite strike to protest the suspension of 22 colleagues...

Fire claims 3 in Philippines: Three persons died in a fire at a suburban condominium early Tuesday after strong winds from the propeller of a rescue helicopter fanned the flames...

Mubarak meets Kuwaiti Emir: Kuwait's Emir, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, and President Hosni Mubarak met in Cairo Monday to discuss the Middle East peace process...

Train mishap claims 15 in Cairo: A passenger train skidded off the tracks on the fringe of Cairo on Monday, and police said at least 15 people were killed and 20 injured as four cars overturned...

Charles to visit Ireland today: Opponents of a planned visit to Ireland by Britain's Prince Charles said on Monday they would protest peacefully wherever he goes on official engagements in Dublin and outside the capital...

4 children die in Iranian blast: A teenager and three children were killed when a grenade they were playing with blew up in western Iran...

Republican Sen Chase Smith dies: Margaret Chase Smith, the first woman to serve in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, died Monday from complications from a stroke...

Opposition wins Mexican polls: Mexico's leading opposition force, the Conservative National Action Party, swept Sunday's gubernatorial vote in Guanajuato state...

Ruling-rival Congs' battle for having 'outstretched palm': The Congress, headed by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, is trying to impress upon the Election Commission that the 'outstretched palm' symbol...

150 Filipino women sold as sex slaves: MANILA, May 30: About 150 Filipinos have been smuggled into Nigeria and other west African countries and sold as sex slaves...

Karadzic dismisses all UNSC resolutions, NATO deadline

PALE. Bosnia-Herzegovina, May 30: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic late Monday dismissed all UN resolutions, NATO ultimatums and all agreements reached between the Serbs and the United Nations as "null," reports AFP...



Foreign ministers of the five-country 'Contact Group' on Bosnia, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd (R), US Secretary of State Warren Christopher (third from left), gather for a crisis meeting in The Hague late on Monday as Serb forces still hold nearly 400 peacekeepers hostage.

space and banned unauthorized flights. The statement added that the decisions had been taken early Monday at a meeting of the Serb Supreme Defence Council, chaired by Karadzic...

But foreign ministers from the five-nation Contact Group agreed at crisis talks in The Hague to press ahead with diplomatic efforts as the only way to end the conflict.

Western and Russian diplomats faced difficult choices after Bosnian Serbs surrounded or detained nearly 400 UN soldiers and unarmed military observers in response to NATO air raids on Serb ammunition dumps around Sarajevo last week.

The Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) has demanded guarantees of no more NATO air strikes and vowed to hold the peacekeepers until the UN backs down. The Bosnian Serbs denied they had hostages. The UN personnel were 'prisoners of war.'

Outraged Western governments called it 'terrorism' but called for diplomacy rather than military action to defuse the confrontation, fearing further reprisals against vulnerable peacekeepers.

Bosnian state radio said Muslim-led government troops captured high ground and villages near Vozuca over the weekend.

Kashmiris vow to sabotage

India firm to hold elections

NEW DELHI, May 30: The Indian government remains determined to hold legislative elections in strife-torn Kashmir this year despite its decision to extend federal rule over the Himalayan state...

The Times of India quoted official sources as saying the government hoped to have an elected state assembly in place by September or October, when the harsh Himalayan winter begins to set in.

The chief election commissioner said he has conveyed his assessment of the situation in Kashmir to the Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, with the conclusion that it was 'impractical' and 'impossible' to have free and fair elections in that state before July 18.

But Kashmiri Muslim separatist groups are vehemently opposed to the election plan and have vowed to sabotage the polls saying they would settle

Extremist group threatens to plant mine in Colombo

COLOMBO, May 30: A shadowy extremist group accused the military on Tuesday of using Tamil civilians as human shields in the civil war and threatened to plant mines in Colombo, reports AP.

Even when the security forces are on foot patrols, they ask Tamil civilians to clear the anti-personnel mines or walk over the mines, which were planted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Tamil Eelam Force said in a statement.

If the government doesn't stop this, we will take stern action through planting booby-trap mines in Sinhala areas, including Colombo, said the statement, which was mailed to the Associated Press in Colombo on Tuesday.

Congress sweeps state by-polls

NEW DELHI, May 30: India's ruling Congress (I) party was today leading in by-elections across 13 states, in polls seen as a final test of popularity from Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao before parliamentary polls, reports AFP.

Congress candidates had won six of the 11 declared results, by far outstripping the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) which claimed two seats, the Press Trust of India said.

Pakistan warns India against missile deployment

ISLAMABAD, May 30: Pakistan's President warned India against deploying missiles that could carry nuclear weapons, and said Tuesday, that Pakistan was being pushed into a regional arms race it didn't want to enter, reports AP.

This missile race that they (India) are starting on the sub-continent could be expensive and dangerous, President Farooq Leghari told foreign journalists. He called it a tension multiplier.

The South Asian rivals have fought three wars since they gained independence in 1947. Both countries are now capable of making nuclear weapons, and there are fears that a fourth war could quickly escalate into a nuclear conflict.

The President described the Prithvi as a 'highly mobile system' and said its limited range meant the weapon had been designed specifically for use against Pakistan.

India is pushing us into a missile race we don't want to enter, Leghari said.

Leghari visited India last month to take part in a South Asian regional summit, but his comments made clear that the trip did little to improve poor relations.



Greenpeace members protest Monday outside the Dublin Castle at the start of the 47th annual International Whaling Conference. The conference is to assess the results of the creation of the whales sanctuary in Antarctica.

Juppe denies press report

PARIS, May 30: Prime Minister Alain Juppe denied a report in the French newspaper Liberation Today that his name appeared in a judge's investigation into a kickback paid by a construction firm allegedly to the Gaullist RPR party, reports Reuter.

Alain Juppe is in no way concerned by the allegations of the newspaper Liberation in its May 30 edition, the Premier's office said in a statement issued at 4.45 am (0245 GMT).

He reserves the right to take legal action against publications that accuse him.

Juppe was secretary-general of the RPR at the time. The party was led by Jacques Chirac, elected President this month.

The newspaper said the judge might ask to question Juppe as a witness.

Off the Record

For duty's sake!

COLOMBO: Twenty eight Sri Lankan soldiers left their brides disappointed on the altar as they were recalled just before their wedding to fight against Tamil guerrillas, the Independent Island newspaper said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The soldiers, deployed in the island's east, were to have wed last Thursday — an auspicious day in the Sri Lankan calendar. Instead, they were recalled for duty.

The Tamil rebels, fighting for a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east, have stepped up attacks recently.

Dracula trade!

BORGO PASS, Romania: The vampire is back — with Balkan labour and Western cash, and no hotel rooms for visitors, reports AP.

Five years into capitalism, Romania's dollar-hungry state tourism industry is going all-out for the Dracula trade. As part of that effort, the world's first Dracula congress ended in this country last week completed with a ghostly tour about the ghastly blood-sucking Count.

About 50 Dracula buffs from all over the world rounded off the three day, government-sponsored congress and tour with a pilgrimage to the literary home of their hero in northern Romania, 320 kilometres (200 miles) from the capital Bucharest.

During a banquet before the ball, the spirit of Dracula came to the fore. Masks and satin capes were donned. Some women began to howl and one placed a sheep skull on the table.

For the Jews there is the holy land, for Muslims there is Mecca and for the dracula fans there is Transylvania, said Clive Leatherdale, a British publisher of Dracula reading matter.

Many might miss him

HONG KONG: Chinese foodstall owner, well known for his snake delicacies, was killed by two snakes he had just been headed on south China's Hainan island, it was reported on Tuesday, reports AP.

The stall owner in Dengwan county, identified only as Yang, died of poisonous bites on his hand while trying to pick up the heads he had severed a few minutes previously, the Hong Kong branch of China News Service said.

No quick solution to crisis: Leghari

Fresh violence in Karachi leaves 13 dead

KARACHI, May 30: At least 13 people were killed in a fresh outbreak of violence in Karachi, and opposition groups threatened additional protests Tuesday against Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's rule, reports AP.

Benazir's administration and the police have been ineffectual in halting the Karachi violence, much of it linked to a bitter feud between the government and the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), a militant opposition force.

Eight people were gunned down Monday night, including a policeman, and five more people were shot dead Tuesday morning in attacks throughout the sprawling port city.

The violence has intensified in the past two weeks, leaving more than 100 dead. The death toll for the year is now approaching 600 and the unrest has disrupted commerce in the country's business capital.

President Farooq Leghari, speaking in the capital of Islamabad, conceded there was no quick solution to Karachi's crisis.

I think the killings will continue, Leghari said during a meeting with foreign journalists, including The Associated Press. Karachi is a complex

Pullout from Golan

Syria wants actions, not just words from Israel

DAMASCUS, May 30: Syria said Monday it wanted actions and not just words from Israel on a pullout from the Golan Heights, after Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres acknowledged the territory belonged to Damascus, reports AFP.

Israel must prove its good faith because the statement of Peres recognising that the Golan is Syrian territory is not enough, said state-run Damascus radio.

The Israelis must find practical measures to return this land to its owners so that the peace process is launched for real, it said.

The foreign minister admitted in an interview with an Israeli newspaper published on Sunday that, 'the Golan plateau is Syrian land and we have settled on Syrian land.'

But the radio criticised Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for renewing a pledge on Monday to hold a referendum on a peace treaty with Syria, before 'even the slightest withdrawal.'

A referendum is organised in principle on internal questions, it said. Israel captured the strategic Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed it 14 years later. Syria wants a total withdrawal in return for a peace deal.

Syrian-Israeli negotiations are to resume by the end of June in Washington at the level of military chiefs.

Opposition wins Mexican polls

MEXICO CITY, May 30: Mexico's leading opposition force, the Conservative National Action Party, swept Sunday's gubernatorial vote in Guanajuato state, while the ruling party held on in Yucatan, reports AFP.

The elections were widely seen as the first major political test to President Ernesto Zedillo's efforts to halt the country's plunge into economic chaos, and the results an embarrassing, if split, decision for his party.

The outcome of the pitched battles between the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the conservative PAN underscored the downward trend in the influence of the ruling party.

Ruling-rival Congs' battle for having 'outstretched palm'

NEW DELHI, May 30: India's ruling Congress (I) Party and a breakaway faction, both claiming to be the inheritors of a 110-year-old political legacy, are battling over an election symbol familiar to millions, reports AFP.

The Congress, headed by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, is trying to impress upon the Election Commission that the 'outstretched palm' symbol, commonly known as the 'hand,' should remain its possession.

The faction headed by Rao's rival Narain Dutt Tiwari is equally determined to prove that it is the 'real Congress' and is arguing that it should be allotted the symbol introduced in 1978 by former Premier

Indira Gandhi. 'We are the real Congress created by thousands and thousands of activists (on May 19)' said Sheila Dixit, spokeswoman for the breakaway group that, like Rao's party, calls itself the Indian National Congress.

'We are the legitimate owners of the hand symbol and want it,' she added. The new Congress has petitioned the Election Commission, which will sue a variety of yardsticks to decide who should be allotted the 'hand' or whether it should be suspended from using by both sides.

Rao's Congress, while retaining the support of the bulk of party legislators in the fed-

eral Parliament and states, is worried. It has begun a signature campaign among MPs and state legislators to prove that an overwhelming majority of Congress lawmakers consider Rao, the party president.

'We don't think the Election Commission will do anything in the matter because the support for the breakaway faction is insignificant,' asserted Vithal Gadgil, the ruling party spokesman. 'However, we have to be prepared.'

In a country where most people are illiterate, all political parties use symbols which are printed on campaign posters and also on ballot papers. The symbols serve as a

political trademark. The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) has a 'lotus' as its symbol, the Communist Party a 'hammer, sickle and star,' and the centrist Janata Dal (People's Party) a 'wheel with six spokes.'

Other parties have their own symbols, ranging from household items such as fans, ladders and telephones to birds, animals, planes, ships, flowers, leaves and a rising sun.

Some candidates go to tremendous lengths to popularise their symbols. Contestants assigned the 'elephant' symbol have mounted elephants in the

midst of election cacophony. Others have carried fans or tied pigeons to their hands while appealing for votes.

'An election symbol is very important in a country like ours,' said Dixit of the rival Congress.

The hand, for example, has been known throughout the country for almost two decades now, she added. 'Obviously, whoever gets it will be in an advantageous position vis-a-vis the coming general elections.'

Added a Congress MP: 'Now that we lack leaders with the charisma of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, an election symbol already well-recognised will play a key role.'