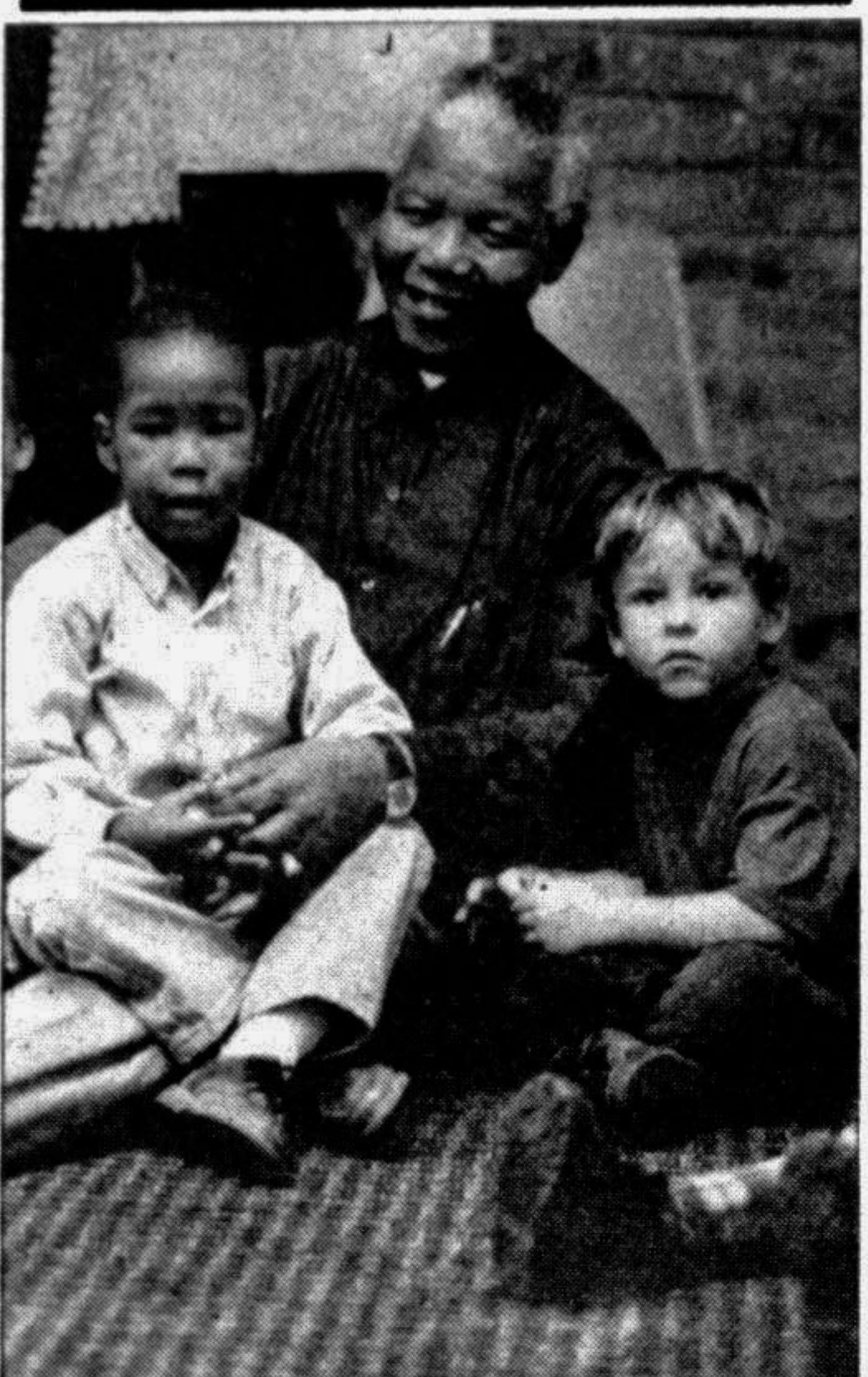


BRIEFLY



President Mandela joins his grandson Mbiso who celebrated his four years in Johannesburg with a friend at Lower Houghton Nursery School on Thursday. The 77-year-old President Mandela opted for children's play mat instead of red plastic chair during his visit on Children's Day.

— AFP/UNB photo

Lanka has highest rate of suicide: Sri Lanka has the highest suicide rate in the world, a university professor was quoted yesterday as saying. Reuter reports from Colombo.

The rate was 56.5 per 100,000 in 1992, Tudor de Silva was quoted by the Daily News as saying. "In Lanka, the motive appears to be problems in the domain of love," he said, adding that part of the problem may be the shift from arranged weddings to marriages of choice and the "resultant frustrations and stressful social settlement."

1 Palestinian killed in Gaza City: At least one Palestinian died yesterday when Israeli troops besieged a house in Hebron where three wanted Muslim fundamentalists were holed up. Voice of Palestine Radio announced. AFP reports from Gaza City.

The station said Hamed Yaghmur was killed as the army fired seven anti-tank rockets into the building. A bulldozer was later brought into raze the house from which three militants from the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas had exchanged fire with soldiers after dawn.

US-DPRK N-talks continue: Despite the gulf of differences between the United States and North Korea in their nuclear dispute, some progress is being made, the head US delegate said Friday. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

His comments came a day after the longest session between the two sides since they began meeting in Kuala Lumpur May 20, and amid hopes they are a step closer to concluding the stalled talks.

Ebola death toll now 164: The death toll from the Ebola virus stands at 164 out of 211 confirmed or suspected cases but the prospects of a further spread of the disease appear small, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said Thursday. AFP reports from Geneva.

The WHO said that for three days no new cases had been recorded in the hospital at Kikwit, the Zairean town where the outbreak first surfaced in January.

Explosion kills 6 in China: An explosion of chemicals in a perfume factory in the northern port city of Tianjin killed six people and injured six, the Wen Hui newspaper said yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

The blast late on the evening of May 22 occurred in a workshop for processing chemicals for producing musk, the newspaper said.

Toy car blast kills child in Vietnam: A toy car fitted with explosives and a battery-powered detonator killed a child and seriously injured his father in a mysterious attack in southern Vietnam, reports said Friday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

The Chinese-made toy car was left outside the house of Duong Van Huyen, the director of a medical supplies company in Dong Nai province near Hochi Minh City, with a note apologising for missing his son's fifth birthday.

9 die by inhaling toxic gas in India: Nine people died after inhaling toxic gas which leaked from a water treatment plant in northern India, it was reported yesterday, says AFP from Delhi.

The leak occurred overnight Thursday at the plant, located in an industrial area in the town of Pali, some 500 kilometres (312 miles) southwest of New Delhi, the Times of India and other dailies said. No further details were available.

8 coal miners burned in Vietnam: Eight men working down an illegal coal shaft were seriously burned in an explosion of gas at the mine in Cam Pha in the northeastern coal mining area of Vietnam, a report said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

One of the eight miners injured in the explosion was in a serious condition and not expected to survive, the Vietnam News said.

Shark kills diver in HK: A diver has been killed in a shark attack in Hong Kong, triggering fears that a giant fish that ate two swimmers in 1993 has returned to the territory's waters, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Tso Kam-Sun, 44, a physical education teacher, was killed in the same spot as the attacks two years ago, off the fishing village of Sai Kung on the eastern coast of the Kowloon peninsula.

6 pupils drown in the Yangtze: Six secondary-school children from Wuhan, central China, drowned in the Yangtze River last month when their bamboo raft overturned, the Hubel Daily, received in Beijing yesterday said. AFP reports from Beijing.

The raft, which was carrying 10 pupils, tipped over whilst the children were painting pictures of the local countryside, it said.

25 more executed in China: Twenty-five Chinese charged with various crimes, including murder and rape, were sentenced to death and executed Monday in the central city of Wuhan, the Hubel Daily, received in Beijing yesterday said. AFP reports from Beijing.

The death penalty is increasingly used in China, where authorities are battling a crime wave.

International

UK rejects idea of multinational force

Serbs agree to free all UN peacekeepers: ICRC

SARAJEVO, June 2: Bosnian Serbs have promised to free all of the nearly 380 UN peacekeepers held hostage, the international Red Cross said Friday, reports AP.

Ljiljana Sternthal, deputy chief of the Red Cross mission in Pale, the Bosnian Serb stronghold, said "from the highest authority in Pale, we have been informed that either today or by tomorrow all UNPROFOR personnel would be released."

UNPROFOR is the name of the UN mission in Bosnia.

Some 120 UN peacekeepers were to be bused to Yugoslavia via Zvornik, on the Bosnian border, later Friday, other sources in Pale said, on condition they not be named.

The Bosnian Serbs had demanded promises of no new NATO airstrikes in return for

the hostages, but the West had remained steadfast in its refusal to negotiate their release. Instead, Britain began dispatching the first of a threatened 6,000 new troops to Bosnia, while France and the United States positioned crack military units in the Adriatic in a show of force.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic went on local television Thursday night to warn the West not to try a rescue. But his deputy, Nikola Koljevic, was reportedly in Belgrade having talks with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

Milosevic has been having intense talks with a US envoy on resolving the hostage crisis and the overall Bosnian war.

Koljevic told the International Committee of the Red Cross Friday that the hostage

peacekeepers "might be released very soon," ICRC spokeswoman Nina Winquist said in Sarajevo.

Earlier Friday, UN officials in Sarajevo announced that Bosnian Serbs had kidnapped three more UN peacekeepers from their observation post in Gorazde, southeast of the Bosnian capital.

The three Ukrainian peacekeepers were taken sometime during the night Thursday, after having been surrounded at their post by Serbs for several days, said Lt Col Gary Coward, a UN military spokesman.

The latest detentions brought to 377 the number of UN peacekeepers held hostage or blockaded throughout Bosnia, Coward said.

Another UN spokesman, Alexander Ivanko, accused the

Serbs of continuing "to function outside the law."

"We demand the unconditional release of the hostages," Ivanko added.

A UN civilian official, a Swedish national, was released after being held briefly by Serb rebels in northern Bosnia, the Swedish Foreign Ministry said Friday.

Goran Stigmer, a 46-year-old UN Civil Affairs officer in Baja Luka, was handed over to UN authorities in neighbouring Serb-held Croatia, the ministry said. UN officials said his detention did not appear to be directly linked to the other UN hostage-taking.

AFP from London adds: Britain's Ambassador to the United Nations Sir David Hannay rejected today the idea of a new multinational peacekeeping force for Bosnia.

Benazir offers talks with MQM

ISLAMABAD, June 2: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has made conditional offer to open dialogue with Karachi's ethnic Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), calling on them to give up their arms, press reports said today, says AFP.

"My doors are open for dialogue with MQM, but my pre-conditions are that they lay down arms and surrender wanted criminals," newspapers quoted her as telling reporters late Thursday.

She was speaking following two bomb blasts and the rocketing of two police stations in Karachi earlier Thursday.

Two police were seriously hurt in the attacks, which co-

incided with a reported demand by MQM that Benazir apologise for remarks she made last week interpreted by the party as an insult to Urdu-speaking settlers.

MQM represents Urdu-speaking Mohajirs, people who migrated from India after the division of the sub-continent in 1947. Most settled in Karachi and some other urban centres in Benazir's southern home province of Sindh.

A running feud between the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the MQM over its political demands and allegations of persecution of Mohajirs is seen as a destabilising factor in the complex Karachi turmoil.

Referring to reported threats to the country's leaders by the newly-surfaced Mohajir Rights Front, Benazir said "If Indira Gandhi (former Indian premier) can sacrifice her life to save her country, I can also do so for Pakistan."

Nearly 600 people have

been killed in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, which is also the country's financial hub, this year in violence linked to ethnic, political, factional and sectarian problems.

Benazir on Thursday said she was sorry if her remarks hurt anybody's feelings, but added "I don't regret to those who have killed my police, my (paramilitary) rangers and my Mohajirs and worked against Pakistan."

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Now if has even gone so far as to allow Lee Teng-Hui to visit the United States," he added. "This has gravely infringed upon China's sovereignty."

The US administration has taken one measure after another to upgrade US-Taiwan relations," Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian, was quoted by the official Xinhua news agency as saying.

"Now if has even gone so far as to allow Lee Teng-Hui to visit the United States," he added. "This has gravely infringed upon China's sovereignty."

The Man of Steel has been a curse of sorts for actors who donned cape and "S" before him.

George Reeves, who starred in the 1951 movie "Superman and the Mole Men" and did 104 episodes of TV's "The Adventures of Superman" from 1951 to 1957, died of a gunshot wound to the head in 1959 in what police said was a suicide.

There were reports at the time that the actor was depressed about the end of his "Superman" run.

A detective hired by Reeves' mother believed he was murdered. The mystery was never solved.

Kirk Alyn was the first live-action Superman, in movie serials from 1948 to 1950. In 1987, he bitterly complained that he had been typecast and couldn't get another movie role. Now 84, he has Alzheimer's disease and lives in Texas.

Reeve took over the fight for truth, justice and the American way in 1978 in the movie "Superman." Three sequels followed.

Superman was bad luck almost from the start: Artist Joe Shuster and writer Jerry Siegel sold their idea for the nearly invincible superhero to DC Comics in 1938. They were paid 130 dollars and lost out on millions when Superman took off.

'Emperor's new clothes'

TAIPEI: A 20-member dance troupe from Armenia is stranded in Taiwan as its local sponsor failed to make full payment following a two-and-a-half month performance tour, a press report said Friday, says AFP.

The troupe members did not rule out staging the "emperor's new clothes," meaning a naked protest, in front of the presidential office if the sponsor failed to pay up before their visas expired next week, group leader Guevorgian Stoppa said.

The group was invited by Chang Kuei-Yueh, secretary-general of the Taiwan Provincial Leisure Tours Association, the report said.

When their tour ended on April 26, they only got 25,000 US dollars instead of the promised 70,000 dollars, it said.

Jen Li-You, chairman of the association, said the group was invited by Chang in his personal capacity.

However, Jen said he would raise the money to help Chang pay the group "in order not to create an international dispute."

Moralists' immoral act

LOS ANGELES: Two Hasidic Jewish rabbis from New York who went to Australia to lecture on morality were charged on Thursday with sexual offences over allegedly fondling a 15-year-old girl on a plane taking them home, reports Reuter.

Rabbi Israel Grunwald, 44, was charged with abusive sexual conduct and his assistant Rabbi Yehuda Friedlander, also 44, was charged with sexual abuse a more serious charge.

The two religious leaders were arrested by Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents on Wednesday after their plane from Melbourne, Australia, landed at Los Angeles International Airport.

Grunwald, an orthodox Hasidic Jew from New York City, was released on 10,000 dollar bail. He faces up to two years in prison and a 25,000 dollar fine if convicted.

Friedlander was being held while investigators look into his 1991 guilty plea to a sexual abuse charge. He faces up to 15 years in prison and a 250,000 dollar fine if convicted.

UP govt on verge of collapse

NEW DELHI, June 2: The socialist government in India's most populous state was on the verge of collapse today after a coalition partner pulled out and sought to form a cabinet with the backing of a former foe, reports AFP.

But Mulayam Singh Yadav, chief minister of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), refused to resign and said he would prove he still enjoyed majority support in the legislature, newspapers reported.

Yadav's defiance late Thursday came after the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, Majority Society) pulled out of the two-party coalition which has ruled the state of some 140 million people since November 1993.

Quoting Japanese Defence Agency sources, the Sankalp Shimbum said China's ICBM test took place earlier this week from a launching site near Shanxi province, in north-western China.

problems, said his party had decided to end the alliance in protest against alleged attacks on his supporters by members of Yadav's dominant Socialist Party (SP).

He said the last straw came when an SP leader abducted a woman member of the BSP last month to prevent her from contesting local elections.

The BSP decision reduces the Uttar Pradesh government to a minority.

Yadav's Socialist Party has 131 lawmakers in the 425 strong provincial assembly while the BSP has 69.

Ram, whose party champions the cause of Hindu lower castes, has claimed the right to form a government, saying he has the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, India People's Party), the main opposition in Uttar Pradesh.

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