

# BRIEFLY

## Myanmar frees NLD dissidents:

Myanmar military authorities released a leading pro-democracy politician a week after detaining him and several other elderly dissidents, sources close to his family said yesterday. Reuter reports from Yangon.

Kyi Maung, 74, a senior member of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), was arrested in Yangon last Friday soon after he met the British ambassador. He was released on Thursday, the sources said.

## Assad invited to visit Jerusalem:

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Thursday invited Syrian President Hafez Al Assad to visit Jerusalem to discuss a peace agreement, Reuter reports from Washington.

"I invite now, President Assad to come to Jerusalem" and to speak with me, with the parliament, with whoever he wants to speak in Israel and in the territories among the Palestinians," Rabin said on CNN's Larry King Live programme.

## Ebola toll rises to 202 in Zaire:

A total of 202 people have been killed by the Ebola virus out of 245 suspected or confirmed sufferers of the deadly disease, a new toll drawn up by the Crisis Committee fighting the spread of the epidemic said on Thursday, AFP reports from Kinshasa.

The new figures, produced from the stricken Kikwit area by the committee set up by the Zairean authorities to battle the disease, showed three new deaths since Monday, when the official toll stood at 199.

## Libya seizes Japanese trawler:

The Libyan navy seized a Japanese tuna trawler off the coast of Tripoli and detained 22 crew members on June 5, a Japanese government official said yesterday, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

The 400-tonne Yahata Maru No 78 trawler was towed into Tripoli port by Alibyan submarine, a Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman said. It had 15 Japanese and seven Indonesian crew members. Libya said it was holding the boat on suspicion of violating territorial waters.

## Lee gets red carpet welcome in NY:

President Lee Teng-hui got a red carpet welcome Thursday on arriving in New York for a visit billed by officials as private but by Taiwan's supporters as a diplomatic breakthrough, AFP reports from Syracuse, New York.

"This visit is long overdue," said Alaska Senator Frank Murkowski, who authored the Senate resolution to grant Lee's visa.

## LTTE kills 5 Tamil civilians:

Tamil Tiger guerrillas killed five civilians accused of collaborating with Sri Lankan security forces in the embattled north, Tamil sources said yesterday, AFP reports from Colombo.

The five civilians, all Tamils from northern Omanthal, were killed Thursday by a firing squad set up for the purpose by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Tamil sources said.

## UP bans political activities:

The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati, Thursday ordered the administration to impose a ban on public demonstration, procession, Dharmas and meeting of political parties, except religious congregations, in the state with immediate effect, PTI reports from Lucknow.

Reviewing the law and order situation in the state in context of Moharrum, at a meeting of senior officers here, Mayawati said the step in this regard was taken in view of "the confirmed" reports of entry of criminals and terrorists in the state.

## UK stance on Europe criticised:

Britain's former Foreign Affairs Minister, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Thursday roundly criticised the British stance on Europe, saying his country risks being marginalised if it continues to "drape itself in the Union Jack," AP reports from Paris.

Howe, addressing a conference at the National Assembly, praised the French stance, saying it was "mid-way" between that of Britain and that of Germany, both "indivisible".

## Russia test fires ICBM:

Russian strategic rocket forces fired an 18-year-old R-18 inter-continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) on Thursday and its warhead landed exactly on target, ITAR-Tass news agency said, Reuter reports from Moscow.

The rocket, on standby ever since it was built in 1976, was launched from the Baikonur testing range in Kazakhstan.

## 8 die in Tamil Nadu road mishap:

Eight persons including a woman, were killed, seven on the spot, and nearly a dozen injured when a lorry and a tempo collided at a village near Krishnagiri in Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu late Thursday evening, PTI reports from Madras.

The dead included the tempo driver. While on of the injured died in hospital, seven others are in a serious condition.

## 24-hour flood vigil in China:

China's flood-control offices have been placed on 24-hour red alert for the duration of the summer rainy season that has already claimed more than 100 lives, reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The state flood control and drought relief headquarters began its round-the-clock vigil after forecasting "major flooding" and a "possibly dire situation" in areas around the Yangtze, yellow and Huaihe rivers, the Xinhua news agency said.

## Serbs hand over slain FM's body:

The body of the slain Bosnian foreign minister, who was killed when rebel Serbs shot down his helicopter May 28, has been handed over to the Bosnian government, a UN spokesman said Thursday, AP reports from Sarajevo.

Irfan Ljubljankic was on a helicopter flight from his native Bihać, a besieged government town in northwestern Bosnia, when he was shot down. Rebel Serbs in neighbouring Croatia claimed responsibility for the attack, in which four other government officials and the two-man helicopter crew also died.

## Singapore executes 4 more:

Singapore yesterday hanged four men — two Malaysians and two Singaporeans — for drug trafficking, a statement from the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) said, Reuter reports from Singapore.

Singapore has now hanged 121 people since its strict drug laws were passed in 1975.

## LTTE assures ICRC of safety

COLOMBO, June 9: Tamil Tiger rebels have promised not to endanger International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) protected vessels, following the sinking of a Red Cross chartered ship earlier this week, apparently by a guerrilla sea-mine, reports AP.

"It is with deep regret that we learned of the unfortunate incident... I wish to assure you that we learned of the unfortunate incident... I wish to assure you that we will abide by our mutual agreement with regard to ICRC-protected vessels," said Velupillai Prabhakaran: the rebel chief, in a letter to the ICRC head in Sri Lanka, Marco Altner.

The ICRC has examined the incident and is convinced that it was not a deliberate attack," said Paul Fruh, deputy head of the ICRC in Sri Lanka.

# US lawmakers vote for lifting arms embargo on Bosnia

WASHINGTON, June 9: US lawmakers voted Thursday for a unilateral lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia to allow Bosnian government troops to better defend themselves against the Serbs, reports AFP.

The vote in the House of Representatives came despite efforts by the administration to counter the move by arguing that lifting the arms embargo would benefit Iran, a main arms supplier to the Muslim troops.

The Republican-controlled house voted 318 to 99 for the binding measure which called on the United States to lift the embargo without seeking approval from the United Nations.

"There have to be consequences of aggression," said Democratic representative Albert Russell Wynne.

The administration has in the past disregarded previous

votes from Congress on lifting the arms embargo.

White House spokesman Michael McCurry said European governments agreed with the administration in its assessment that allowing weapons to flow freely into Bosnia would lead to an escalation in the fighting.

"They think this would be dreadfully wrong," he said.

McCurry criticised Senate majority leader and presidential contender Robert Dole for his plan to introduce a measure that set lifting the arms embargo as a condition for sending US troops to Bosnia to help evacuate UN peacekeepers.

"So I guess he would prefer to see Iran establish a closer military relationship with the Bosnian Muslims," McCurry said.

Dole said Wednesday that Iran had benefited from the

arms embargo and that other countries such as Turkey, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Pakistan had decided to sidestep the embargo and arm the Bosnians.

McCurry challenged his rationale, saying that Europe and the United States felt that lifting the arms embargo would encourage Iran to beef up its military ties to the Bosnian Muslims.

Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Siladzic was holding talks on Capitol Hill Thursday to lobby for unilateral lifting of the embargo.

Earlier, hardline Republican Senator Jesse Helms argued that arming the Bosnian Muslim troops would restore the military imbalance between the government forces and the Bosnian Serbs.

Helms said US ground troops should not be sent into Bosnia and "do what the Bosni-

ans themselves are willing to do.... fight the ground war for the liberation of their country."

The Bosnian troops are severely outgunned by the Bosnian Serbs who inherited much of the arsenal from the former Yugoslav National Army.

The house vote came amid euphoria over the rescue of downed air force pilot Captain Scott O'Grady and criticism of President Bill Clinton's Balkans policy during separate hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

A senior administration official told the committee that lifting the arms embargo would undercut US goals of containing the war.

"It would lead to a wider and bloodier conflict with a very uncertain outcome, for which the US would have ultimate responsibility," said Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff.

Attack on Turkey's ruling party office: 2 killed

ISTANBUL, June 9: Three suspected militants opened fire on the Istanbul offices of Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller's ruling party today, police said. One woman attacker and a policeman died in a shoot-out, reports Reuter.

Ciller, chairman of the True Path Party (DYP) which is the senior partner of the ruling coalition, was in Istanbul at the time of the attack on the DYP headquarters but not in the premises, Anatolian news agency said.

She later flew to Ankara from Istanbul where she had attended a dinner on Thursday night.

Police said three assailants opened fire on the building at 7.15 am (0415 GMT), killing one officer and wounding another keeping guard before the premises.

Rao to expand cabinet

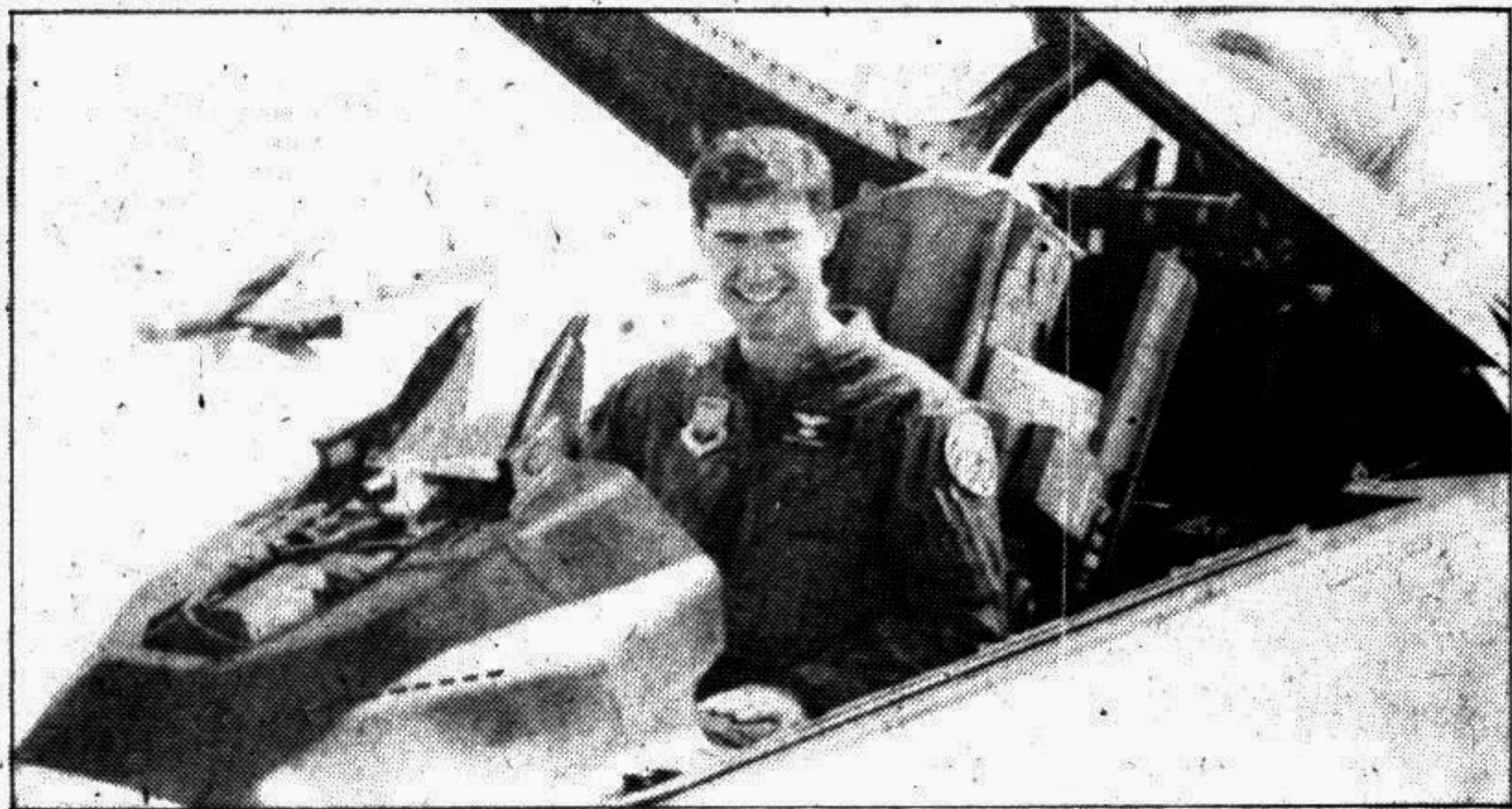
NEW DELHI, June 9: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao will expand his cabinet by naming several new government ministers, a senior official in President Shankar Dayal Sharma's office said today, reports Reuter.

He said Sharma was expected to swear in the ministers on Saturday evening after returning to the Indian capital from a two-week foreign tour.

United News of India (UNI) said the Prime Minister would add five new ministers and might also reshuffle the portfolios of some current cabinet members.

The cabinet changes, to be announced before Rao leaves on Sunday on a four-day visit to France, would aim to shore up the government ahead of general elections due in early 1996.

Rao last expanded his cabinet on February 9 when he added six new ministers and promoted two junior ministers to cabinet rank.



This file photo provided by the O'Grady family on Thursday shows US Captain Scott F O'Grady sitting in an F-16 jet similar to the one he was shot down in. O'Grady, shot down in his F-16 C on June 2 by rebel Serbs in Bosnia, was rescued in hostile Serb territory by a NATO mission that included 40 attack jets, rescue helicopters and support planes. — AFP/UNB photo

# Jerusalem would remain as Israel's capital: Rabin

WASHINGTON, June 9: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin insisted Thursday that Jerusalem would remain undivided under Israeli sovereignty as the capital of the Jewish state, reports AFP.

The emotional question of Jerusalem provoked a pointed exchange between Rabin and Palestinian Liberation Organisation chief Yasser Arafat as the two were interviewed along with Jordan's King Hussein on a CNN talk show.

The 73-year-old Rabin, speaking earnestly and in personal terms, said he was the first Israeli prime minister to be born in Jerusalem, considered a holy city by the Jews, Muslims and Christians.

"For me Jerusalem was united, will be under Israel sovereignty, will be the capital of Israel and the heart of the Jewish people," Rabin told Talk Show host Larry King

from Tel Aviv.

"Our position is very clear. Jerusalem is united, will be never be divided again. I don't believe that in the name of the holiness of the city you have to put barbed-wire, machine-gun nests, mine fields," he said.

Rabin reiterated his pledge to allow Muslims and Christians free access to their holy sites and said the future of Jerusalem was "not a major question" in the Middle East equation.

"I would like Israel to be a Jewish state and therefore not to annex over two million Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which will make Israel a binational state against the will of the Palestinians," Rabin said.

"I recognise that there is a Palestinian people, and next to Israel should be a Palestinian entity but I don't want to define it now," he said, adding that talks with Arafat were

aimed at achieving co-existence.

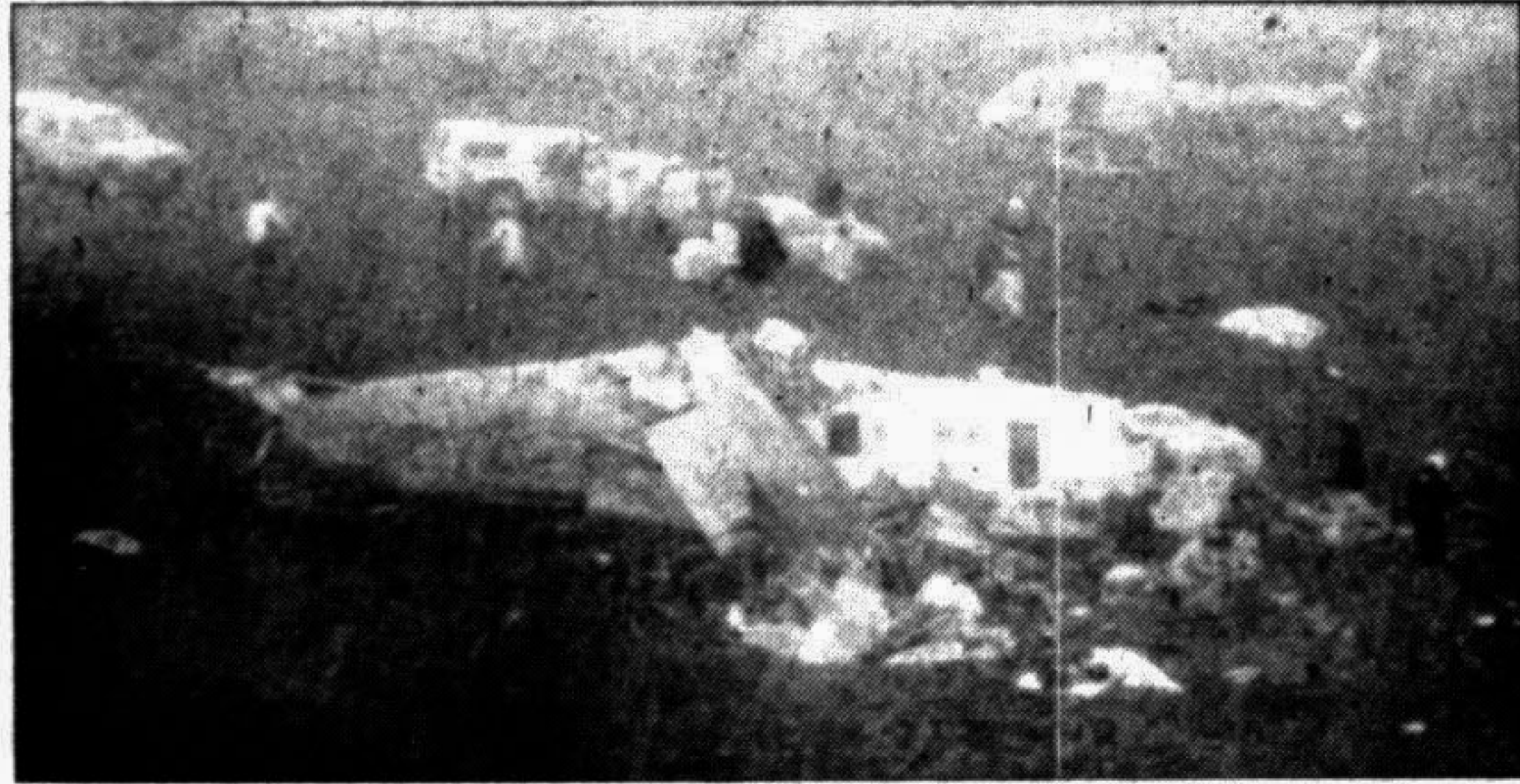
Arafat, speaking from the West Bank town of Jericho, responded with a barb at Rabin, who was born when Jerusalem was under British mandate.

"First of all, I would like to remind everybody that not only one person has been born in Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been born in Jerusalem."

"When he was born in Jerusalem, Rabin, his nationality was a Palestinian. He was a Palestinian, yes," Arafat said, as Rabin shook his head no.

Arafat said of Jerusalem: "It is our jurisdiction and at the same time we don't want to divide the people. Why not to have one capital for two states."

King Hussein expressed optimism that the two sides could work out their differences over Jerusalem.



Rescue workers search the wreckage of an Ansett New Zealand Boeing Dash-8 aircraft which crashed in heavy rain with 21 people aboard while approaching Palmerstone North airport on Friday. At least three people have been confirmed dead with several others seriously hurt. — AFP/UNB photo

# S Pacific Forum warns France against N-test

SUVA, June 9: South Pacific nations have warned that relations with France will be damaged if it resumes nuclear testing in the region, officials said today, reports AFP.

French Defence Minister Charles Millon said Tuesday that military experts had recommended resuming testing, suspended in 1992, although aides to President Jacques Chirac later said no decision was imminent.

Jeremia Tabai, Secretary General of the 15-nation South Pacific Forum, sent a letter to the French embassy here Thursday warning of a "major setback in relations" with the forum's members if testing is resumed, an official said.

# Karadzic may accept RRF deployment in Bosnia

WASHINGTON, June 9: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic said Thursday that he would consider allowing in a United Nations multinational Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) if it were not hostile, reports AFP.

"If they are not hostile against us we may consider to give consent," Karadzic said in a CBS television interview from Pale when asked whether Bosnian Serbs would allow in the proposed force to protect UN peacekeepers.

"Nobody should come here without our consent," Karadzic said, adding, "we do think they don't need to send any more troops if the UN stay with the mandate" for humanitarian

missions.

In the wake of mass hostage-takings of UN peacekeepers by the Bosnian Serbs, Britain and France have been urging dispatching 10,000 quick-reaction troops to help protect their forces.

Karadzic stressed that "if UN troops turn against one of the sides, then they may need more and more troops and 10,000 will not be enough." He said Bosnian Serb forces would fire on NATO aircraft deemed hostile.

CBS also asked Karadzic about conflicting reports over whether Bosnian Serb troops were told to stop a rescue mission Thursday of US pilot Scott O'Grady.

# LTTE assures ICRC of safety

# Venkataswamy achieves 100 pc success rate in cataract surgery

MADURAI, India, June 9: G Venkataswamy is perhaps best described as a visionary. The 76-year-old Indian eye doctor is determined to see cataract blindness eliminated in his lifetime and has set up a model hospital in this southern town to perform the relatively simple operation which can restore sight, reports AFP.

White-haired man of tremendous vitality, "My dream, before I die, I see that no one remain blind due to cataracts."

There are 12 million people suffering from cataract blindness in India, two-thirds of the world total, according to the World Health Organisation.

Cataracts, in which the lens of the eye becomes clouded, mostly occur in people over the age of 50. The cause is not known.

Cataract surgery, the world's most common operation, takes only 10 minutes and has a success rate of close to 100 per cent. A plastic lens inserted into the eye restores normal vision.

Venkataswamy's Aravind Eye Hospital performed more than 65,000 cataract operations last year, and he hopes to greatly expand that number by bringing "McDonalds-like efficiency and quality to eye surgery."

"We need to apply factory-like principles if we are going to overcome this problem," he told AFP during a recent visit to the hospital in Madurai, the largest town in a district of 3.5 million people in Tamil Nadu state.

The World Bank is funding a programme designed to clear most of the backlog of

cataract cases in India within seven years. It calls for 11.1 million cataract operations to be carried out in seven states by the year 2001.

Because of its impressive performance, the Aravind Eye Hospital has been given World Bank funding to train state Health Department doctors.

Aravind's 35 surgeons each performed an average of 1,864 cataract surgeries last year — eclipsing the national average of 237 per ophthalmologist — with a post-operation infection rate of just one in 1,000 patients.

Venkataswamy launched his private crusade against needless blindness in 1976 after three decades with the Tamil Nadu state Health Department during which he pioneered the establishment of mobile eye camps.

After retiring, he used his life savings of 5,000 dollars to convert a house into a 10-bed hospital.

"Two decades later, he presides over the Aravind Eye Hospital, two satellite hospitals, a lens manufacturing plant called Aurolab and a children's hospital set up in 1984 specialising in malnutrition-related blindness."

Venkataswamy still holds free eye camps across Tamil Nadu encouraging cataract sufferers, many of whom are not aware they can be cured, to come in for surgery.

His non-profit organisation has received help over the years from the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind, now known as Sight Savers, and other groups but most of what Venkataswamy has achieved has been on his own.

"Our philosophy is to be self-supporting in all our ventures," said Aravind administrator RD Thulasiraj. "You could call us a social organisation running along business lines."

"We have been able to prove that in a developing country we can provide high-quality eye care at a price people can afford," added Venkataswamy.

Forty per cent of the 65,249 cataract operations performed by Aravind last year were free and 55 per cent of the patients received the intraocular lenses, or IOLs, which provide normal vision.

Those who can afford, pay 3,000 rupees (100 dollars) while the poor are charged 500 rupees (16 dollars), the cost of the IOLs. People who undergo surgery but do not receive the lenses can see again but may need glasses.

Venkataswamy says manufacturing his own IOLs was a breakthrough.

Before Aurolab went on stream in 1992, he used to buy the lenses from an American company for 50 dollars a piece — a prohibitive price in a country where per capita income is just 300 dollars a year.

Aurolab now produces high-quality IOLs for a fraction of the price and exports them to more than 40 countries.

In an effort to further reduce costs and perform more operations, Venkataswamy is looking into manufacturing the tiny needle used to stitch the lens into the eye.

"Each one of these small needles costs us eight dollars," he said. "Now if we can make it for 20 cents..."

# Accord on Black Sea fleet signed

MOSCOW, June 9: Russian and Ukrainian presidents Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kuchma signed an accord today on the future of the disputed Black Sea Fleet under which the Russian part of the fleet will remain at its current base in Ukraine, Interfax news agency reported, reports AFP.

The Russian demand to remain based in the port of Sevastopol had been one of the main sticking points in the dispute over the future of the Soviet-era fleet.

The main base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and its headquarters are in Sevastopol, the agreement reads, Interfax said.

The unexpected ground-breaking agreement was signed during a summit held in the Black Sea port of Sochi in southern Russia.