

BRIEFLY



A Bosnia girl carries her baby sister up a dirt road toward their house in Pozarnica village in the zone of separation on Sunday. Refugee villagers were beginning to return from Tuzla camps to their homes, mostly destroyed, in this former frontline area now held by the Croatian-Muslim federation. — AFP/UNB photo

4 cops killed in South Africa: Four police officers were killed in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa at the weekend, police said Sunday. AFP reports from Durban. A police officer was shot Saturday, in Isipingo, a Durban suburb, as he left a police station. Three others were killed Sunday in shooting at Pietermaritzburg during a routine patrol, police, cited by the SAPA news agency said.

Swedish Prime Minister resigns: Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson yesterday handed in his resignation to the Speaker of parliament Birgitta Dahl, cementing his retirement from politics at the age of 61. AFP reports from Stockholm.

Dahl accepted the resignation and asked him to oversee current affairs until parliament names his successor on Thursday.

"Braveheart" wins "Eddie" award: Mel Gibson's "braveheart" has been named best edited film of 1995 by the American Cinema Editors. AP reports from Beverly Hills.

The film about a 13th-century Scottish freedom fighter was edited by Steven Rosenblum, who also was nominated for an Academy Award. "Braveheart" received 10 Oscar nominations, including best picture and one for Gibson as best director. (The Oscars will be presented March 25).

The 46th annual "Eddie" awards for cinema editing on Saturday honoured outstanding achievement in television, film and documentaries.

Bush meets Omani Sultan: Former US President George Bush met with Omani leader Sultan Qaboos on Sunday on the second leg of a tour of Arab States which joined the US-led coalition to drive Iraqi troops out of Kuwait five years ago. AFP reports from Muscat.

The pair met in Sultan's hometown of Salala and discussed a number of issues of joint interest before banqueting together, the official Omani news agency said.

Kabbah wins Sierra Leone polls: Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) defeated John Karefa-smart of the United National People's party in Sierra Leone's presidential election. The Chairman of the Electoral Commission James Jonah announced Sunday. AFP reports from Freetown.

The second round of the election, called to end four years of military rule, took place on Friday.

Fire kills 8 in North Carolina: A smoky fire at a rest home killed eight men and injured two others, authorities said, AP reports from North Carolina. The fire broke out just after 10 pm Sunday at the Scotch Meadows Rest Home, where at least 30 people lived, and sheriff Wayne Bryant said it originated in the all-male west wing of the brick home.

Indian EC announces polls dates today

NEW DELHI, Mar 18: India's autonomous Election Commission will announce dates on Tuesday for the first nationwide parliamentary polls in five years, an official of the ruling Congress (I) Party said today, reports AFP.

"Unless there is a last-minute hitch, the announcement will be done tomorrow," said the official, two days after a one-to-one meeting between Chief Election Commissioner TN Seshan and Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao.

The official, who requested anonymity, said the balloting to the 545-seat Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, would most probably be held in three phases between April 25 and May 7.

The Election Commission is scheduled to have a final meeting of its three top officials, including Seshan, here on Tuesday to finalise the polling dates. An announcement of the dates is likely to be made later.

Election Commissioner GVG Krishnamurthy declined to say if the election time-table would be announced on Tuesday. "Let's see," he said, adding that the announcement would come soon.

14 Lankan troops killed in mine blast

COLOMBO, Mar 18: At least 14 soldiers were killed when their vehicle hit a mine planted by Tamil Tiger guerrillas in northern Sri Lanka today, the defence ministry said, reports AFP.

The tractor-trailer in which the troopers were travelling was blown up when it went over a mine at Malakam in the northern peninsula of Jaffna, a defence ministry statement said.

It said 14 soldiers were killed in the attack blamed on the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

4 Maoist rebels killed in Andhra Pradesh

NEW DELHI, Mar 18: At least four Maoist guerrillas were killed and four injured today in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh when a hand grenade they were carrying exploded accidentally, the Press Trust of India said, reports AFP.

Police said the incident occurred in the Nizamabad district where members of the outlawed People's War Group (PWG) were holding a meeting about a regional general strike to protest corruption in high places.

Indian politics has recently been rocked by an unprecipitated bribery scandal involving at least 115 top politicians and bureaucrats. The chief suspect has alleged paying kickbacks to Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao.

Rao, a native of Andhra Pradesh, has denied the charge. The PWG has been waging a decades-old campaign in Andhra Pradesh to fight for the rights of oppressed farmers and rural poor.

Arab League urges UN not to toughen sanctions on Libya

CAIRO, March 18: The Arab League urged the United Nations on Sunday to avoid toughening sanctions against Libya when it reviews the four year old embargo later this month, reports AFP.

League Secretary General Esmat Abdel Meguid told journalists when he met French Ambassador to Cairo Patrick Leclercq to discuss the Lockerbie crisis and "the Arab European dialogue."

Meguid underlined the "importance of considering Libya's flexible position during the discussions by the UN Security Council of the sanctions at its March 31 session," league sources said.

The league head urged the council "not to step up sanctions against Libya," which has been under an air embargo since 1992, after the 1988 bombing of a US jet over Lockerbie, Scotland which left 270 dead, the sources said.

Meguid underlined "the need to review" a Libyan proposal backed by the league for handing over two Libyans suspected in the bombing.

Jesse Jackson blasts Academy Awards for blacks' absence

LOS ANGELES, Mar 18: The Rev. Jesse Jackson is organising a protest of this year's Academy Awards because of a nearly total absence of black nominees, reports AP.

"It doesn't stand to reason that if you are forced to the back of the bus, you will go to the bus company's annual picnic and act like you're happy," Jackson said, Saturday from Chicago.

The only black nominee at the March 25 Oscars is in the category of best live action short film.

Jackson said he will meet this week with several advocacy groups and community leaders to discuss a protest against the Oscar presentations at the film studios. He did not know yet what kind of protest would be held.

Executives of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences pointed out that this year's show is being produced by music mogul Quincy Jones and hosted by actress Whoopi Goldberg, who are both black.

4 Arab states term Egypt summit as 'catastrophe' for Arab world

TRIPOLI, March 18: Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi spoke Sunday with the presidents of Syria, Sudan and Yemen on the "catastrophic" results of last week's Middle East peace summit in Egypt, Libyan state television reported, says AFP.

The four leaders, who spoke by telephone, agreed that "the summit was a catastrophe for the sovereignty and dignity of the Arab world," the television said.

Gaddafi and Sudanese President Omar Al-Beshir were not invited to Wednesday's summit in Sharm El-Sheikh while Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad boycotted it on the grounds it would serve only Israel's interests.

Yemen and Egypt after a wave of Palestinian militant suicide bombings in Israel plunged the Middle East peace process into crisis.

The 21 world leaders at the summit pledged to launch a global campaign against terrorism and work to save the peace process.

Taiwan asks its forces to boost defensive posture

TAEIPEI, Mar 18: Taiwan today instructed its forces on outer islands near China's new exercise zone in the northern Taiwan Strait to boost their defensive posture, government officials said, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Lien Chan "ordered troops in the outer islands to strengthen combat readiness and adopt all possible means to guard against any possible action from China."

Lien made the remarks at a briefing in which Deputy Chief of General Staff General Tang Fei said bad weather had affected operations by the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

The PLA announced Friday it would begin week-long air sea land exercises in a box shaped zone in the northern Taiwan Strait that lies just 10 nautical miles from the small Taiwanese held islands of Tungchu, Hsichu and Wuchiu.

An air-sea drill is already unfolding in the southern part of the strait, in a zone that lies just 53 kilometres (33 miles) south of the Taiwanese fortress island of Kinmen (Quemoy).

Meanwhile, Taiwan said China's air force and navy had been unable to launch new exercises in the northern Taiwan Strait today because of bad weather.

"We have not detected any naval or air operations, and this is because of bad weather in the exercise zone," the Taiwanese Defence Ministry said in a statement.

It made no references to land forces, the third branch of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) taking part in the week-long exercises.

Earlier Reuter says: Taiwan Strait islanders fled their homes today ahead of China's intimidatory war games in the area.

The sea, air and ground exercises, due to start today and last until March 25, are to be conducted around the Chinese island of Pingtan in the northern neck of the Taiwan Strait.

Alongside these are other exercises in the south of the Strait due to last until March 20.

Just 10 miles away from the exercise area, about 100 residents of the tiny island of Tung Chu stuffed their belongings into bags and crammed into launches bound for the slightly bigger island of Matsu and from there to Taiwan.

"We are leaving for Taiwan to escape disaster," a schoolgirl said on television upon arrival at Matsu.

Meanwhile, China has ordered residents of dozens of tiny islands in its Taiwan Straits war games zone to evacuate to the mainland by this afternoon, a local state broadcaster said by telephone.

"The government has ordered that people on islands in the test area or on the coast evacuated to the mainland before 4:00 pm (0800 GMT) today," said an official of the state radio station of Pingtan Island, a command post for the exercises.

The order was issued today by the radio station at the request of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and government authorities.



Thousands queue for British National Overseas passports (BNO) outside the Immigration Department in Hong Kong on Monday. The queues are getting even longer as the cut-off deadline at the end of March approaches. — AFP/UNB photo

'Socio-political struggles in 21st century to be about water'

WASHINGTON, Mar 18: Many parts of the world face water shortage crisis by 2010 that could be catalysts for conflicts and wars if major steps are not taken to use the resource more efficiently, the United Nations said in a report on Sunday, reports Reuter.

"We believe by 2010, if massive improvement does not happen in providing water, managing it, saving it, we're going to have a monumental crisis," Wally Ndow, Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, said in an interview.

"While the wars of the last century were primarily about oil, we are firmly convinced that many of the struggles — political and social — of the

21st century will be about water," said Ndow, who is spearheading a global conference in June in Istanbul to discuss the looming crisis.

Some 20,000 participants are expected at the conference, the United Nations said, to discuss ways to treat water as an economic commodity to discourage waste, generating investment in water systems through private-public partnerships and enlisting more community effort to stem pollution and use water more efficiently.

Already there are 80 countries with inadequate water supplies and almost 40 per cent of the world's population must struggle daily to try to meet water needs.

"This shortage is threatening health, threatening industries and therefore economies, and threatening agriculture. So the human cost is very high," Ndow said.

While a burgeoning world population must meet its need with a finite amount of water, pollution from industries and sewage, waste through leaking pipe systems, and human greed, are reducing unusable supplies.

Only two per cent of sewage in the developing world is treated before being dumped back into waterways, and 50 per cent of drinkable water in the developing world is wasted or lost through leaking water systems, illegal hookups and vandalism, the UN report said.

Christopher to press for move on N-test ban treaty

GENEVA, Mar 18: US secretary of State Warren Christopher hopes to persuade Russian, Chinese and Indian negotiators Monday to break an impasse holding up a treaty for a global ban on testing nuclear weapons, reports AP.

Christopher said Sunday that he came to Geneva "at a sensitive point" in the talks in the 38-nation Conference on Disarmament.

He said he will try "to lift the negotiation and remained the parties about the enormous stakes involved and the immense goals they have" of reaching accord this year.

He noted that last year he made a similar visit to New York in the final stages of negotiations for an indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty.

In winning approval from non-nuclear powers for the extension, the five powers that acknowledged having the weapons — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — agreed to work for agreement this year on a test ban treaty.

Negotiators resumed work on the draft accord in January, but they still have some 1,200 points of contention. Diplomats have been warning that

hopes of reaching agreement this year are fading. Christopher scheduled a series of meetings with negotiators Monday before convening leaders from former Yugoslavia to boost efforts at fulfilling the Dayton peace accords.

After breakfast with representatives of the declared nuclear powers, Christopher scheduled a separate meeting with the Chinese ambassador "as China will play a crucial role in whether we can get this or not this year," he said. "I hope the Chinese will recognise their responsibilities."

Christopher then planned a session with representatives from India and other key Third World countries.

France, Britain and the United States are pushing for a treaty that will halt all testing, even small laboratory explosions, and Russia appears to be close to agreement.

But China is alone in calling for "peaceful nuclear explosions" for civilian uses such as massive excavation projects.

Other negotiators reject China's position because it is impossible to separate military from non-military explosions.

Pak FM underlines linkage between N-issue, Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, Mar 18: Pakistani Foreign Minister Asef Ahmed Ali on Sunday underlined a linkage between the nuclear issue and the Kashmir dispute in South Asia, saying his country seeks simultaneous resolutions of both, reports AFP.

Addressing members of the state legislative assembly in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, Ali said the United States would have to play an effective role for a Kashmir settlement in order to realise its non-proliferation goal.

In the speech, reported by the official Associated Press of Pakistan news agency, Ali predicted "remarkable" movement toward a solution of the Kashmir dispute after elections in India and the United States.

"As the main issues of Middle East and Bosnian, which have engaged world attention, are heading towards resolution, the nuclear issue in South

Asia will receive 'due importance'.

Ali, referring to the recent testing of medium range Prithvi missile by India, accused New Delhi of trying to intimidate Pakistan through a "show of military muscle."

He repeated Pakistani suspicion that India was preparing for a nuclear test.

Pakistan would not be intimidated and would maintain its "moral and political" support for Kashmiris, Ali said.

India accuses Pakistan of fuelling a Muslim revolt in the Indian-controlled southern two thirds of Kashmir, which has claimed more than 12,000 lives over the past seven years.

PTI adds from Chandigarh: The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and National Conference leader, Farooq Abdullah, today expressed "unhappiness" over talks between the home minister and some militant group leaders in Delhi.

Off the Record

Tomatoes — the unusual weapons of junta

BANGKOK, Thailand: Burmese Nobel Peace Prize winner and democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi said her followers escaped a peltung with tomatoes last month when the young men hired to do the job refused to carry it out, Suu Kyi said Monday, reports AP.

The incident took place at a memorial ceremony for former Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, Suu Kyi wrote in her weekly column in the Mainichi Daily News of Japan, seen in Bangkok on Monday.

Suu Kyi said Myanmar authorities had hired the young men to hurl the tomatoes at the public ceremony marking the first anniversary of U Nu's death on February 14.

Suu Kyi has always advocated nonviolence. She said that some of the young men hired to pelt her with tomatoes informed her of the plan, which Suu Kyi said was orchestrated by leaders of the Union Solidarity and Development Association.

The USDA is ostensibly a government-sponsored social welfare organisation.

Dudayev vows to fight on Chechens kill 12 Russian servicemen in Grozny

MOSCOW, Mar 18: Chechen separatist fighters killed 12 servicemen and wounded 29 others in attacks on Russian troops in the rebel region in the 24 hours up to this morning, a Russian military spokesman in the region said, reports Reuter.

Interfax news agency quoted the spokesman as saying that the rebels carried out at least 14 attacks on the troops from Sunday morning, most of them in the regional capital Grozny.

The rebels launched a major attack on Grozny and took control of a big part of the city for three days earlier this month. The Russian military have said some guerrilla groups were still operating in Grozny.

In the past few days Russian troops have been mainly fighting in western Chechnya, trying to drive rebels out of strongholds in Bamut and shelling the outskirts of the village of Samashki where they believe guerrillas are hiding out.

President Boris Yeltsin said last week that he had prepared a plan to end the 15-month conflict, in which at least 25,000 people have died.

AP adds from Southern Chechnya: Pledging to step up the fight for Chechnya's independence, the leader of the breakaway republic said Sunday in a rare interview that he won't negotiate with Boris Yeltsin.

Dzhokhar Dudayev, speaking to reporters who were brought to a secret location in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains, said he hopes the Russian President loses the June 16 election.

"Anything is better than the criminal regime which exterminates by people," he said, when asked how he would view a victory by Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov.

Yeltsin is under increasing pressure to end the fighting in Chechnya, now in its 16th month. Yeltsin says he has a plan to end the war but has so far refused to reveal it.

Dudayev said negotiating with Yeltsin is pointless. "I am prepared to meet anyone in Russia who is able to carry out what they promise. But at present there is no one, least of all Yeltsin," Dudayev said.

Communists unveil campaign for restoring Soviet Union

MOSCOW, Mar 18: The Communist Party unveiled a campaign platform on Sunday calling for the restoration of the Soviet Union, but its leaders said the reunion should be voluntary, reports AP.

"Communists do not strive to reunite former Soviet republics by force," party's leader and presidential candidate Gennady Zyuganov said at a party congress.

The campaign platform was a blueprint for bringing back what many nostalgic Russians now see as the good old days. In addition to a Soviet re-union, it promises govern-

ment-guaranteed medical care, vacations, jobs and pensions, calls for more state control of the economy and more subsidies for heavy industry and the military-industrial complex. It would ban the private ownership of land.

"Russia's armed forces will have all they need to ensure national security," Zyuganov told delegates, according to the ITAR-Tass news agency.

He said the party wants to cancel the 1991 agreement that dissolved the Soviet Union, but "that does not mean that tomorrow someone will

forcibly annex anyone's territory or encroach on anyone's sovereignty."

On Friday, Russia's Communist-led lower house of parliament calling for the restoration of the Soviet Union.

President Boris Yeltsin called the vote, which carried no legal force, "scandalous" and the leaders of former Soviet republics dismissed it as Communist campaign propaganda.

Sunday was the anniversary of a referendum asking the Soviet people if they wanted to preserve the USSR and there were several pro-Soviet rallies in Moscow.

Although the referendum passed overwhelmingly, the Soviet Union crumbled nine months later as a result of secret pact by Yeltsin and the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus.

Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said Sunday the Communists may be trying to provoke Yeltsin into some sort of rash reaction with their calls for a new Soviet Union.

The breakup cost Gorbachev his job as the leader of a superpower and made him once of the country's most unpopular public figures.

Gorbachev said the Communists could be dangerous if they win the June 16 presidential election. Unlike Communist parties in Eastern Europe, the Russian party is unreformed. Some members, he warned, "want revenge."

Earlier this week, Communists hard-liner Valentin Varnernikov, a Soviet general who took part in the 1991 coup attempt against Gorbachev,

created a sensation by publicly declaring the party platform a smoke-screen designed to lull voters. He claimed the party has a "secret" programme that is far more hard-line.

Itogi also presented the latest results of two pre-election public opinion polls. They both showed Zyuganov leading, with Yeltsin trailing by around ten percentage points and reform-minded economist Grigory Yavlinsky not far behind in third place. Gorbachev, who says he'll announce next week whether he'll run or not, was at the bottom with around 1 per cent.

Mass grave discovered in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, March 18: A mass grave believed to contain the remains of 500 people who died during communist rule in Afghanistan has been discovered in the country's eastern region, an Afghan information agency said Sunday, reports AFP.

The Islamic Press Agency (IPA) said the grave — 120 meters long and three metres wide — is located about six kilometres (4 miles) south of Ningarhar Province's capital, Jalalabad, near the Pakistani border.