

NATO against troops cut in Bosnia

BRUSSELS, Apr 24: NATO's top generals have recommended that peacekeeping troops in Bosnia be kept at their present level until elections this autumn, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff said Tuesday, reports AP.

Gen John Shalikashvili, in Brussels for a meeting of the NATO Military Committee, the 16-nation organization's supreme military body, said there was no discussion of extending the one-year mandate of the 60,000-strong NATO-led force in Bosnia, but that the committee felt there should be no troop reductions during the current phase of the peacekeeping operation.

Tuesday's meeting also marked the historic return of France, which had not attended a Military Committee meeting since President Charles de Gaulle withdrew his country from the integrated military command in 1966.

France is ready to participate in a "new military structure," said Gen Jean-Philippe Duvion, the French chief of general staff.

"The notion of an integrated military structure no longer exists," the French general told reporters. "From now on we will speak of the new structure of the future."

Under the Dayton peace agreement, elections are scheduled to be held in Bosnia in September.

It was felt that at the time of the elections we need all the troops we have now," Shalikashvili said.

Many military and civilian officials in Bosnia doubt it will be possible to finish the job of bringing peace to Bosnia, electing a new government and getting a good start on reconstruction within the NATO-led force's one-year mandate.

Nevertheless, NATO members did not want to address the possibility of extending the mandate yet.

Britain to campaign for global ban on land mines

LONDON, Apr 24: Britain, which long defended the use of land mines as a legitimate weapon, announced Tuesday it will campaign for a global ban, reports AP.

Foreign Office Minister David Davis said Britain will destroy 44 per cent of its stockpile immediately and will give up its remaining mines when there is an international ban.

Until then, the said, the Ministry of Defense will proceed with plans to replace existing mines with mines that eventually self-destruct, a decision which drew strong protests from the opposition Labour Party.

Davis said Britain will try to develop alternatives to anti-personnel mines "as a matter of priority."

Britain joins 30 other countries, most recently Australia, Germany, New Zealand and on Tuesday, Lichtenstein, that have signed up for a ban on anti-personnel mines.

But the vast majority of countries maintain that mines are a legitimate part of self defense. China, India, Pakistan, and Russia—which rely heavily on mines to protect their long borders—have led opposition to stringent controls.

The British announcement came on the second day of a two-week conference in Geneva to tighten restrictions on land mines, which kill about 10,000 people and maim 20,000 others every year.

Conference chairman Johan Molander of Sweden said Tuesday it was essential to reach a compromise now. If a decision is postponed, he warned, the political scope for a compromise late is nonexistent.

US reimbursing Pakistan for not supplying F-16 jets

WASHINGTON, Apr 24: Nearly six years after federal sanctions froze the sale of F-16 aircraft to Pakistan, the United States on Tuesday began reimbursing Islamabad what it paid for the banned fighter jets, reports AP.

The US defence security assistance agency presented two cheques worth a total of 124 million dollars to Pakistani ambassador Maleeha Lodhi at a ceremony here early Tuesday. US and Pakistani officials said.

The money represents a first tranche of the 658 million dollars Pakistan paid to the United States for 28 F-16 aircraft, whose delivery was frozen by non-proliferation sanctions in October 1990, they said.

Pakistan embassy spokesman Syed Rifaat Hussain welcomed the move as "a major step toward rectifying the inequity and unfairness toward Pakistan under the Pressler law."

The frozen deal has long been a point of contention between Pakistan and the United States.

Relations between the two Cold War allies have grown increasingly strained since the collapse of the Soviet Union, notably because of US concerns about a worsening arms race between Pakistan and arch-rival India.

A State Department official said the 124 million dollar reimbursement came from the sale of aircraft components left over after Islamabad reduced its initial F-16 purchase agreement in the hope that sanctions could be avoided.

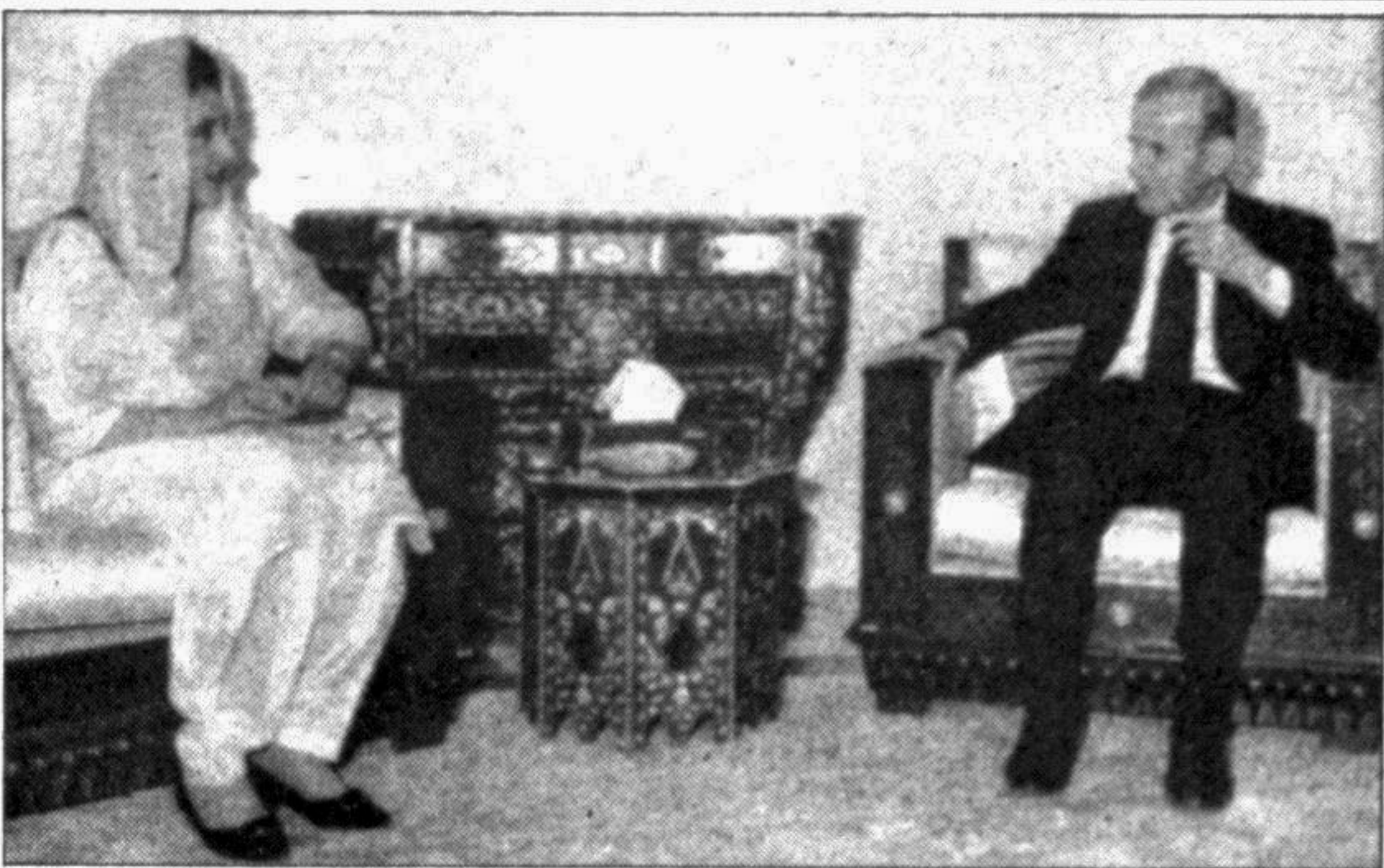
Pakistan had bought 40 F-16 fighter jets by the mid-1980s and was paying for 28 more planes when Washington decided to sanction Islamabad because of suspicions that it was developing nuclear weapons, the US official said.

The official, who asked not to be named, described the reimbursement as "an enormous accounting problem, if nothing else," citing complex purchasing and financing arrangements for the fighter jets.

Pakistan expects a second tranche of reimbursement money in the next few months, but neither the US nor the Pakistani side was able to say exactly how much it would be or when precisely it would be handed over.

President Bill Clinton's administration pledged a year ago that it would reimburse Pakistan for the F-16s if it could find an alternative buyer for them.

The United States has meanwhile begun taking steps to release 386 million dollars in embargoed military equipment under a one-time exemption to the Pressler non-proliferation sanctions.



Syrian President Hafez al-Assad (R) receives Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Tuesday. Benazir is on an official visit to Syria to discuss international and regional developments and bilateral economic cooperation. — AFP/UNB photo

US doesn't have bombs to destroy Libyan chemical arms plants

WASHINGTON, Apr 24: The United States said on Tuesday it did not yet have conventional bombs capable of destroying an underground chemical arms facility in Libya but it did not threaten a nuclear attack against the site, reports Reuters.

Senior defence officials said the plant at Tarhuna, 40 miles (65 km) from Tripoli, would not be completely destroyed at least a year and the Pentagon is developing conventional arms that might be used to stop it if public pressure fails.

Libya has denied that the facility is a chemical weapons plant and has accused Washington of trying to bully it.

"We could not take it (Tarhuna) out of commission using strictly conventional weapons," Harold Smith told defence reporters at a breakfast. Smith is in charge of chemical, nuclear and biological arms programmes at the Pentagon.

But neither Smith nor Defence Department spokesman Ken Bacon, who answered questions from reporters later, threatened that a nuclear attack might be launched on the deeply buried desert site even as a last resort.

'Iran-Croatia signed secret military agreement'

NEW YORK, Apr 24: Iran and Croatia signed a secret military cooperation agreement last December that included an Iranian proposal to deliver surface-to-surface missiles to Sarajevo and Zagreb, the New York Times reported on Wednesday, says Reuters.

The newspaper, quoting senior Croatian officials and western diplomats, said the two countries also agreed on a plan to exchange Croatian and Iranian military personnel.

The agreement, signed after the Bosnia peace accord was reached in Dayton, Ohio, was never made public by either the Croats or the Americans.

The pact, viewed by diplomats as part of Tehran's efforts to deepen ties with Bosnia and Croatia, was blocked when Washington learned of it in December, the Times said.

For much of the war, Croatia allowed Iran to smuggle weapons through Croatian territory to the Muslim-led government in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was strangled by the arms embargo on the area.

N-plant shut down in northern Japan

TOKYO, Apr 24: Operators shut down a nuclear power plant in northern Japan on Wednesday after pressure in the container vessel jumped to twice its normal level, reports AP.

No radiation leaked from the plant at Onagawa, 340 kilometres (213 miles) northwest of Tokyo, said Kazushi Otaka, spokesman for plant operator Tohoku Electric Power Co.

Company officials believe the trouble was probably caused by the rupture of a pipe supplying nitrogen into the vessel of the No 1 reactor, Otaka said. An investigation was planned.

Otaka said it took seven hours to shut down the boiling water-type reactor, with a generating capacity of 524,000 kilowatts.

The shut-down began Wednesday morning when an alarm signaled that pressure inside the container vessel had risen to 0.06 kilogram per one square centimetre (0.16 square inch), double the normal level, Otaka said.

The No 1 reactor has had minor problems since it started operations in 1984, but this would be the first time a nitrogen-supply pipe was in trouble, Otaka said.

Farrakhan wants to host black political convention

WASHINGTON, Apr 24: Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan said Tuesday he wants to host a black political convention prior to the two major parties' conventions this summer, reports AP.

He told admirers gathered at a Baptist church that the meeting should be held in Washington and that blacks should try to form alliances with Hispanics and Arab groups.

"Let's hold the gun of our unity on them," Farrakhan said. He said the "political convention of the oppressed" would seek to influence the platforms of the Republican, Democratic and even Ross Perot's reform party. "Make them all come before us and address our agenda," he said.

In a 3 and half hours address, Farrakhan, also defended his recent international tour, which included visits to Libya and Iran, asked "what really happened" to the late commerce secretary Ron Brown's plane and warned that US arrogance in foreign policy would lead to the nation's demise.

C'wealth ministers agree on Nigeria arms embargo

LONDON, Apr 24: Commonwealth ministers agreed Tuesday to embargo arms sales to Nigeria following the military junta's refusal to allow a delegation to visit Lagos to discuss human rights and moves toward democracy, reports AP.

The Commonwealth, the 53-nation association of Britain and its former colonies, had suspended Nigeria's membership following the November 10 executions of nine Nigerian dissidents including playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa.

The arms embargo, part of an eight-point package of measures agreed by ministers, demonstrates "that Commonwealth countries are prepared to take action against Nigeria over its worsening human rights record," Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's Foreign Minister, said Tuesday night.

It is a good beginning," Earlier this year, a Commonwealth deputation was refused permission to go to Lagos.

Foreign ministers from the Commonwealth's eight-nation action group on Nigeria meeting in London Tuesday said that abuses are increasing in Africa's most populous nation.

In addition to the arms embargo, the ministers agreed to withdraw military attaches, cease military training, downgrade cultural links and diplomatic missions and cut sporting contacts. They also will restrict visas for members of the Nigerian regime and their families and deny them access to educational facilities.

Officials said that British Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, persuaded others against adopting a series of hard-hitting economic sanctions, including an oil embargo, that would badly damage Nigeria's most important industry.

"We realize an oil embargo was totally impractical," said New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon. "We are trying to target members of the regime and not hurt 100 million Nigerians."

Amendment to PLO charter Arafat urges parliament to hasten crucial vote

GAZA, Apr 24: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat urged the PLO's parliament-in-exile on Tuesday to hasten a crucial vote on amending the PLO charter that calls for Israel's destruction, reports Reuters.

"This is very important and I hope we will not miss voting on it on Wednesday," Arafat told the Palestine National Council (PNC) in Gaza.

Israel has said it will not pursue peace with Arafat until the 32 years old founding charter of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation is changed.

Arafat's aides have been pushing the 669-member PNC to amend the charter which was to have been debated at a special meeting later this week. But Arafat insisted it be brought forward.

Nabil Shaath, an Arafat adviser, said most PNC members supported changes but debate raged over how to introduce them.

The differences are over the method to be used in the amendment. Shaath told Voice of Palestine Radio on Tuesday, Shaath said some members want to amend clauses about Israel, others suggested replacing the entire charter with the 1988 Palestinian declaration of independence. A third group wants a new charter based on the declaration of independence that would not contravene the 1993 Oslo peace accord.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres welcomed Arafat's call for change on Monday at the PNC meeting its first on Palestinian soil since its inauguration in Jordanians ruled East Jerusalem in 1964.

His (Arafat's) speech in front of the PNC contains brave parts.



Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, raises his hand with others members of the Palestine National Council (PNC) as they vote on the agenda of the meeting, including the point of the adaptation of the charter, during the PNC meeting in Gaza City on Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Problem child

NOTTINGHAM, England: Teachers of a disruptive 13-year-old boy threatened Tuesday to go on strike rather than give him lessons, reports AP.

Richard Wilding was expelled from Glaisdale School in Nottingham, central England, after a history of violent incidents that led four times to temporary exclusion.

But his parents appealed to a local education authority, which overturned the expulsion and ordered that he should be returned to the school.

That prompted a strike vote by 20 members of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, who claimed the boy was unteachable, a threat to them and to other pupils.

Nottinghamshire education authority on Tuesday acknowledged that the boy's parents had the right to have him educated at Glaisdale School, but hoped to avert a strike by arranging a teaching schedule that will effectively segregate Richard within the school.

"It's still in the balance. But it doesn't look promising in terms of avoiding a strike," said Nigel de Gruchy, head of the teachers' union.

Richard's parents agreed Tuesday to a plan whereby Richard would be taught by none of Glaisdale's teachers and share a classroom with none of the pupils.

Instead, Richard would spend one day at home with a special tutor, and one day at school taught by the principal.

For another day and a half, he would be taught in school by a teacher from a special referral unit for disruptive children. He would spend the remaining day and a half at the referral unit.

Nottinghamshire's education chairman Fred Riddell said the proposals discharged the school's legal responsibility.

"It is hoped that Richard will respond positively to this range of measures and that he will be fully reintegrated into mainstream classes at Glaisdale School in time," Riddell said.

Teachers meet Wednesday to discuss the arrangement. Richard's father, Philip Wilding, 56, said the family was happy with the deal.

Cosby, Rashad reuniting as husband and wife

NEW YORK: Bill Cosby and Phyllicia Rashad are reuniting as television husband and wife on a new television show based on a British one, reports AP.

Rashad, who played Cosby's wife, Claire Huxtable, on the long-running television hit "The Cosby Show," will play Cosby's wife, Ruth, in the series loosely based on the British comedy "One Foot in the Grave." She replaces Telma Hopkins, who was originally cast as Ruth, producer Marcy Carsey said Monday.

The producers also have cast Madeline Kahn for the series, which will be shot in New York City.

BRIEFLY

Asahara's trial begins: The trial of Japanese doomsday cult guru Shoko Asahara opened yesterday at the Tokyo district court, court officials said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The founder of Aum supreme truth is charged with masterminding 17 crimes including last year's nerve-gas attack on Tokyo subway which left 11 people dead and thousands injured. He is also charged with several other murders, including the killing of an anti-Aum lawyer along with his wife and baby son.

Confce on terrorism held in Lima: Representatives of the Organisation of American States met Tuesday in Lima for a semi-private conference on terrorism, AP reports from Lima.

The conference includes government ministers from around Latin America and experts on the theme of terrorism and is designed to adopt regional approaches to the problem. Only a few years ago such a conference would have been impossible in Lima, where until the September 1992 capture of guerrilla leader Abimael Guzman, founder of the Maoist Shining Path movement, car bombs were a common occurrence.

2 US navy jets collide: Two US Navy fighter jets were heavily damaged in a collision during a mock dogfight over the Atlantic Ocean on Tuesday, but their pilots managed to fly the battered jets safely back to their base, AP reports from Virginia.

The pilots escaped with just minor cuts after their FA-18A Hornets collided at about 15,000 feet (4,500 meters), 35 miles (56 kilometres) off the North Carolina coast said Cmdr. Kevin Wensing, a Navy spokesman. "They both did an outstanding job of recovering their aircraft and returning," said Wensing. He declined to identify the pilots, who are assigned to a Naval Air Reserve squadron at Oceana Naval Air Station.

Rwandan Commission to continue: In a bid to maintain influence in Africa's volatile Great Lakes region, the Security Council voted unanimously Tuesday to continue the commission formed to curb illegal arms traffic to extremists blamed for committing genocide in Rwanda, AP reports from United Nations.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali requested a final report from the commission last February because of lack of cooperation from Zaire, Rwanda and other countries in the Great Lakes region. But council members said the work of the commission was essential to curb weapons traffic and avoid a new explosion of ethnic violence between rival Hutus and Tutsis, who form the populations of both Rwanda and Burundi.

Blast kills 6 Thai children: Six Thai children died and five remain in hospital after a grenade they found in a field exploded, police said Tuesday, Reuters reports from Bangkok.

Four children, aged between five and nine years, were killed on Monday when the M-26 grenade they found near their village temple exploded as they were playing with it, police in Roi-Et province, about 700 km (425 miles) from Bangkok, said.

Russian relief force for Bosnia: A battalion of paratroopers will be sent to Bosnia at the end of April to relieve the first contingent of Russian soldiers deployed as peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia, military officials said Tuesday, AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin's China visit — a step towards closer ties with East

BEIJING, Apr 24: Russian President Boris Yeltsin is cultivating closer ties with the East, China's odds with the United States, in nurturing its connections to Europe and Russia, reports AP.

Small wonder that Yeltsin arrived Wednesday to what may be the warmest welcome ever accorded a Russian leader in China.

Even during the Cold War, ideological differences and border disputes kept China and the Soviet Union at arm's length. Now, the two nations are discovering reasons why they ought to be pursuing closer relations.

Yeltsin's three-day state trip is the third Sino-Russian summit and the second visit by a Russian head of state to China in five years.

Yeltsin and his wife, Naina, were met at Beijing's airport by Labour Minister Li Boyong.

The Russian leader did not make a statement before he was whisked off the tarmac by limousine.

Since his last visit in 1992, dealings between Russia and China have been taken to "a new level of mutual understanding, confidence and co-operation," Yeltsin told China's state-run Xinhua News Agency before leaving Moscow.

"Today, there are no problems of political nature between Russia and China," Yeltsin said Tuesday.

Chinese officials said they believed his visit would infuse ties with new vitality.

During Yeltsin's visit, the two countries are expected to sign 14 agreements, including one setting up a hot-line between Moscow and Beijing — the first such link between Beijing and a foreign capital, according to Russian reports.

In Shanghai, Yeltsin will sign a treaty on confidence-building measures in the areas where China borders Russia and the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The leaders of all five countries will attend the ceremony.

China plans two state dinners in Yeltsin's honour. That is a far cry from 1958, when Mao Tse-tung rudely received Nikita Khrushchev clad only in swimming trunks and invited the Soviet leader, who did not know how to swim, to join him for a dip.

On the economic front, China sees Russia as a supplier of vast untapped natural resources as well as sophisticated arms, submarines and aircraft.

For Russia, China offers a huge market and a plentiful supply of consumer items churned out by its cheap, abundant labor force.

Plans for a Sino-Siberian natural gas pipeline and for Russian cooperation on the Three Gorges dam, the world's largest hydroelectric project, also are drawing the two nations closer together.

Over the next five years, Russia will deliver 5 billion dollars worth of equipment, the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS reported Wednesday.

The most promising spheres of cooperation, it said, are the aviation, electronics and the fuel-and-energy industries.

China is the third largest source of investment in Russia, after the United States and Germany, the news agency said.

Beijing and Moscow split in the 1950s over ideological differences, and in 1960, the Soviet Union withdrew its advisers from Chinese factories and weapons plants. The two sides fought along their border for several decades.

Relations were not restored until 1989. Even then, Russia's democratic revolution and the collapse of the Soviet empire alarmed Chinese leaders worried about pro-democracy and separatist movements inside their own borders.

The key irritant remains the 4,000-kilometer (2,500-mile) Russo-Chinese frontier.

Agreements have settled disputes over most of the border, and the area is peaceful. But smuggling, poaching and illegal Chinese migration across the Far Eastern frontier have angered officials there.

Before leaving for Beijing early Wednesday, Yeltsin made a symbolic visit to the site where a bridge is being built across the river Amur — near where troops from the two sides clashed intermittently for several decades.



Great Britain's Prince Charles (R) stands with Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien (L) and his wife Aline (C) on Tuesday prior to a meeting at Chretien's residence in Ottawa. Prince Charles is on a six day visit to Canada. — AFP/UNB photo