

NATO warplanes begin air exercises Fighting escalates in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Jun 15: Fighting escalated on several Kosovo fronts, with Serbs and ethnic Albanians accusing each other of starting clashes that killed at least five people, reports AP.

Meanwhile, NATO warplanes flew across the skies early Monday outside Kosovo's borders in an effort to intimidate the Serbs into stopping attacks on the ethnic Albanians.

On Sunday, Serb forces launched 500 grenades into villages in the Decani area in western Kosovo, according to the Kosovo Information Centre, which is close to the pro-independence Albanian leadership.

In the provincial capital of Pristina, Serbian police colonel Novica Zdravkovic said ethnic Albanian militants killed two policemen and injured two others in separate incidents in Kosovo's southwestern Djakovica region and the Decani area.

More than 300 people have died since the crisis escalated in March, when Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic launched a crackdown on separatist ethnic Albanians fighting to free the province from Serbia.

Fearing the conflict could spill over into neighbouring Albania and Macedonia, Western nations warned Milosevic last week that he must change his hard-line policy or face the threat of force.

NATO warplanes took off early Monday for simulated air attacks in Albania and Macedonia in an effort to intimidate the Serbs into stopping attacks on the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Albania and Macedonia, countries neighbouring Kosovo, have agreed to let their territory be used for the exercises, which were ordered by allied defence ministers Thursday.

NATO also has called for its

military planners to study options for even tougher action, while insisting that it is only studying its options to be ready for any political decisions.

Outside Belgrade on Sunday, Yugoslavia demonstrated its own air power in an airshow displaying military helicopters and planes, including Russian-made MiG29 jets. The show is an annual event.

The main ethnic Albanian party, the Democratic League of Kosovo, said Serbian military and police forces "began a broad attack" with heavy artillery against three villages in the Djakovica area, near the border with Albania.

The Kosovo Information Centre added that Serb police brought reinforcements of about 40 armoured vehicles and 15 tanks into the region.

The centre also said Serb forces launched grenades against a cluster of villages northwest of Pristina in the

Drenica region, where the government crackdown began earlier this year.

None of the reports could be independently confirmed, since police and ethnic Albanian militants, known as the Kosovo Liberation Army, have set up a maze of blockades in contested areas across the province.

Milosevic revoked Kosovo's broad autonomy in 1989 in an attempt to suppress the Albanian independence movement. But since the crackdown began, the KLA has grown stronger and more popular among ethnic Albanians.

The KLA controls an estimated 40 per cent of the province, where ethnic Albanians outnumber Serbs 9 to 1.

About 50,000 people have fled the fighting, many of them across the border to Albania or Macedonia, or to the province of Montenegro, which together with Serbia forms Yugoslavia.

Lawmaker killed in Bihar

PATNA, Jun 15: A communist lawmaker and two of his supporters were shot and killed by unidentified assailants in India's eastern state of Bihar, the second killing in two days of a state legislator, police said Monday, reports AP.

The assailants riding a motorbike sprayed bullets on Ajit Kumar Sarkar's car on Sunday, killing all three passengers in Patna, a town 1,600 KM east of New Delhi, KA Jacob, the director-general of police said.

About 10,000 people poured into Patna's streets and attacked police with rocks as news of Sarkar's killing spread. Police fired in the air and beat protesters with bamboo sticks.

On Saturday, Brij Bihari Prasad, a former state minister belonging to the governing Rashtriya Janata Party, and his guard were murdered by suspected political rivals.

Bihar has a reputation as India's most lawless state. Many of its legislators are accused of leading criminal gangs and buying their way into local politics.

Butler reaches accord with Baghdad

BAGHDAD, Jun 15: UN chief weapons inspector Richard Butler reached agreement with Iraq Sunday on a plan to complete its disarmament in accordance with Security Council resolutions within two months, raising the possibility of an early lifting of eight-year-old UN sanctions, reports AP.

The agreement was announced jointly by Butler and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz at the end of the three-hour meeting here Sunday, their fourth in just two days.

"I am glad to be able to join with Aziz tonight and say that we have achieved it," said the head of the UN Special Commission on Disarming Iraq (UNSCOM).

Some were searching talks and have agreed upon a schedule of work programme for the next two months on outstanding disarmament issues. "At the end of that two months period, the Deputy Prime Minister and I will meet again to consider where we are up to."

Milosevic heads for Moscow as pressure mounts on him to resolve Kosovo crisis

BELGRADE, Jun 15: Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was heading for Moscow today for talks with his Russian counterpart, Boris Yeltsin as NATO air exercises built up the pressure on him to resolve the Kosovo crisis, reports AP.

Milosevic was due to meet Yeltsin on Tuesday to discuss Kosovo, the southern province of the Yugoslav republic of Serbia where the authorities are accused of carrying out brutal "ethnic cleansing" against the majority Albanian population.

Russia is the closest to Belgrade of the six-nation Contact Group, which has given Milosevic until Monday to end the offensive against the ethnic Albanians, or Kosovans.

The Contact Group which also comprises Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States, urged Milosevic on Friday to permit international monitoring in Kosovo, allow refugees to return home and begin an effective dialogue with moderate ethnic Albanian leaders.

Milosevic is expected to urge Yeltsin against yielding to pressure from the West for outside military intervention in Kosovo.

BRIEFLY

Former CIA chief in Saigon dies

John H. Richardson, a CIA station chief in Saigon in the early 1960s who briefly supported the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem, has died. He was 84. AP reports from New York.

Richardson died June 1 in his home in Zapopan, a suburb of Guadalajara, Mexico. The cause was lung cancer, said his son. As Saigon station chief in 1962 and 1963, Richardson's mission was to influence Ngo Dinh Nhu, a brother of President Diem, Neil Sheehan, an author and authority on Vietnam, told The New York Times.

Manila airport reopens

Manila's airport reopened yesterday nearly 12 hours after a Japan Airlines plane swerved halfway off a wet runway into muddy grass while landing, officials said. AP reports from Manila.

At least 23 passengers were injured while being evacuated from the plane, flight JL 745, after the accident late Sunday night. Two Japanese and a Filipino were hospitalized, officials said.

Rakhimov wins Russian republic polls

Incumbent president Murtaza Rakhimov easily won a second term in the Russian republic of Bashkortostan, according to preliminary results released yesterday. AP says from Moscow.

Rakhimov captured 73 per cent of the votes on Sunday to beat his rival, Timber Minister Rif Kazakulov, who took 9.3 per cent, the regional electoral commission said, according to the Interfax news agency. Overall turnout for the vote in the southern republic was more than 68 per cent, making the election valid.

Yeltsin-Kiriyenko meet postponed

A meeting between President Boris Yeltsin and Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko, scheduled for yesterday, has been postponed due to illness. AP says from Moscow.

15 die in Russia apartment fire

Fifteen people, including five children, were killed when an apartment fire broke out in a southeastern Russian region, news agencies reported yesterday. AP says from Moscow.

Four people were rushed to a hospital near the settlement of Olovyannaya, 250 kilometres south of the southeastern city of Chita with burns of varying degrees after the Sunday fire, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. Some tenants in the aged structure had already moved elsewhere, ITAR-Tass reported.

Ethiopian to be executed in UAE

An Ethiopian woman has been condemned to death for marijuana trafficking in the southern Gulf Emirate of Dubai, newspapers reported yesterday. AFP says from Dubai.

Gulf News said the 30-year-old woman was arrested last June when police seized three kilograms of marijuana she was trying to sell for 20,000 dirhams. The woman, who was not named, had originally been jailed for life, but a Dubai appeals court amended the sentence on Sunday.

China's oldest captive panda dies

One of China's oldest pandas in captivity has died, according to state media reports. AP says from Beijing.

Zhuzhu, who was 31, died June 8 of some respiratory failure in the zoo in Guiyang, capital of southwest Guizhou province, the Xinhua News Agency reported Sunday. Pandas live an average 16 years in the wild and 20 to 25 years in captivity, the report said. The country's oldest panda now is 36-year-old Dudu kept in the zoo in the central industrial city of Wuhan.

'US to take tough stand on HR issues in China, Kosovo'

WASHINGTON, Jun 15: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright vowed Sunday that the White House would hang tough on human rights in two distinct parts of the globe — in China and the breakaway Yugoslav province of Kosovo.

In a taped interview broadcast on Cable News Network, Albright called a government crackdown in Serbia's separatist province Kosovo "unacceptable," saying the world was determined to prevent another Bosnia — where NATO firepower ended three years of ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims and Croats in 1995.

Albright said Contract Group nations — Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United States — were hoping for progress from a meeting between President

Settlement of Kashmir dispute Benazir for US, UNSC's quick intervention

ISLAMABAD, Jun 15: In letters to US president Bill Clinton and members of the United Nations Security Council, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto warned Monday that South Asia was "dangerously close to war", reports AP.

With India and Pakistan — now proven nuclear powers — facing each other across a disputed Kashmir border, regularly lobbing mortars and firing artillery at each other, Benazir Bhutto said the key to peace is a settlement of the Kashmir dispute.

Economic sanctions will only exacerbate an already volatile situation, she warned. The leaders of both Pakistan and India also have rejected as counterproductive economic sanctions recommended last Friday at a meeting in Britain

Tributes to Tagore in New York function

NEW YORK, Jun 15: The many facets of the genius of Rabindranath Tagore, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, were touched upon in a moving and colourful tribute to the Indian poet organised here, reports IANS.

The function was organised jointly by the Tagore Society of New York and the United Nations Women's Guild at the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium at the UN.

The auditorium was packed with people from many lands, many dressed in traditional robes, while others were in evening gowns and suits. A Japanese woman, Akiko, was in a sarari which she was wearing for the first time.

In her opening remarks, Tagore Society president Joan Zinderman playfully noted that the first two letters of Tagore's motto "Unity in Diversity" were UN. She said the event marked the 137th birth anniversary of the poet and the 40th anniversary of the society.

The society sprung a surprise by presenting New York art dealer Bernhard Crystal, a tall and bearded figure hauntingly similar in looks to Tagore, who described the influence on his life of a meeting with Tagore at the age of 14, when he was in a deep crisis, and of his subsequent correspondence with the poet.

"I sought out the council of a rabbi, of a priest, of a minister... but none could give me the comfort I longed for. Then came a poem from the poet that calmed my fevered soul." Crystal's voice broke as he concluded his moving reminiscence. The words of Rabindranath Tagore, — and his hand reaching out to mine — can be said to have saved my life."

Fighting in Guinea-Bissau intensifies

LISBON, Portugal, June 15: Rebel soldiers and government troops in Guinea-Bissau pounded each other's positions in the capital with rockets, mortars and artillery, with several empty embassies reportedly hit and the insurgents denying claims they had been crushed, reports AP.

The intensified fighting in the West African country's capital, Bissau, came as the insurgents' denied government claims that they had been crushed. Guinea-Bissau is a former Portuguese colony.

The US and Swedish embassies, the main hospital and the Finance Ministry took direct hits, Portuguese radio RDP-Africa said. Damage to the Russian and French embassies also was reported.

With the fighting escalating, thousands of people were desperately seeking an escape route.

There was no reliable information on the number of casualties in the fighting.

Fighting between the rebels and government forces, backed by reinforcements from neighbouring Senegal and the Republic of Guinea, has centered on a garrison in the suburb of Bra, where the mutineers have been held up since launching a coup attempt a week ago.

Reuters adds: About 200 people who were fleeing fighting in Guinea-Bissau drowned on Friday when they tried to reach the Bijagos islands off the coast of the West African state, the Portuguese news agency Lusa said on Sunday.

Report on Netanyahu's acceptance of US proposal on troop pullout denied

JERUSALEM, Jun 15: Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman and the White House denied an Israeli television report late Sunday that the Israeli prime minister had agreed to a US proposal to restart peace talks with the Palestinians, reports AP.

Israeli chief television's authoritative chief diplomatic correspondent Dan Samama said Netanyahu had finally accepted the US plan under which Israel will withdraw from 13 per cent more of the West Bank.

Samama quoted unnamed ministers and US officials as saying an agreement with the Palestinians would be signed in Washington next month, and that Netanyahu's acceptance had been conveyed to the Palestinian Authority.

But a spokesman for Netanyahu, who faces fierce oppo-

Hiroshima bomb survivor to launch 'peace campaign'

NEW DELHI, Jun 15: A survivor of Hiroshima's atomic bomb attack will launch a "peace campaign" in India and Pakistan to illustrate the horrors of nuclear war, organisers said today, reports AP.

They said Yadsuhiko Takeda, a 65-year-old Hiroshima bomb survivor would begin the campaign in New Delhi after his arrival here late today and end it in the Pakistani city of Lahore.

India staged five nuclear detonations in early May, 24 years after its first nuclear explosion. Pakistan responded by setting off six nuclear devices. The two neighbours have fought three wars.

Takeda's visit to India is being organised by the Japanese peace group Gensuikin (Japan Congress Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bomb) and the Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament (MIND), which groups intellectuals and defence experts.

MIND said the trip could not be described as a "protest visit," but "rather a peace campaign to open the eyes of everybody here with press conferences, exhibitions of Hiroshima photographs and memorabilia and meetings."

A spokesman said Takeda, who is also scheduled to visit the Indian cities of Jodhpur,



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, left, meets with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo Sunday to discuss the stalled Middle East peace process and the US proposal for an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. — AP/UNB photo

Queen Mother oldest royal in British history

LONDON, Jun 15: The Queen Mother Elizabeth has entered the record books as the oldest royal in British history, reports AP.

The mother of Queen Elizabeth II, she has lived for 97 years and 315 days, and on Sunday passed the longevity record held by Queen Victoria's granddaughter Princess Alice, who died Jan. 3, 1981. She will celebrate her 98th birthday Aug. 4.

"It is difficult to say it categorically but I cannot find any British royal from our records who has lived longer than the Queen Mother," the Express newspaper reported royal expert Harold Brookes-Baker, editor of Burke's Peerage, as saying.

The Queen Mother married into the royal family in 1923 and was 51 when her husband, King George VI, died in 1952. Despite two hip replacement operations in the past two and a half years, she still undertakes public engagements — including unveiling a foundation stone for a hospital accident centre for children 10 days ago.

1000 bodies of cyclone-victims recovered in Gujarat

NEW DELHI, Jun 15: More than 1,000 bodies have been recovered in the western Indian state of Gujarat following last week's cyclone, officials said today, reports AP.

They said medical teams had been deployed across the region to prevent epidemics and waterborne diseases following the disaster.

The Press Trust of India quoted officials putting the official toll at 1,040.

They said more bodies had been recovered from Kutch district, the worst-hit area with 794 deaths.

The cyclone, with winds of up to 150 km an hour and followed by torrential rains and a three-metre tidal wave, smashed into the Gujarat coast Tuesday after brewing in the Arabian sea.

About 45,000 people were affected total damage in the region has been estimated around 385 million dollars.

Leaders of Ethiopia, Eritrea agree to halt air strikes

ASMARA, Eritrea, Jun 15: The leaders of Eritrea and Ethiopia have agreed to immediately stop using air strikes in their border war, according to a US presidential spokesman, reports AP.

US President Bill Clinton spoke by telephone with the leaders of the two countries while flying Sunday from Los Angeles to Washington, deputy press secretary Joe Lockhart said.

While the agreement does not end the border dispute between the Horn of Africa countries, the White House said it "can help restore the mutual confidence necessary to achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict as quickly as possible."

Eritrea welcomed the air-strike ban as a first step towards meeting its call for a total halt to hostilities.

"I think the Ethiopian government is beginning to realise that force is not going to solve this problem," said government spokesman Yemane Gebreab. "We do hope they will not want to fight on the ground anymore either."

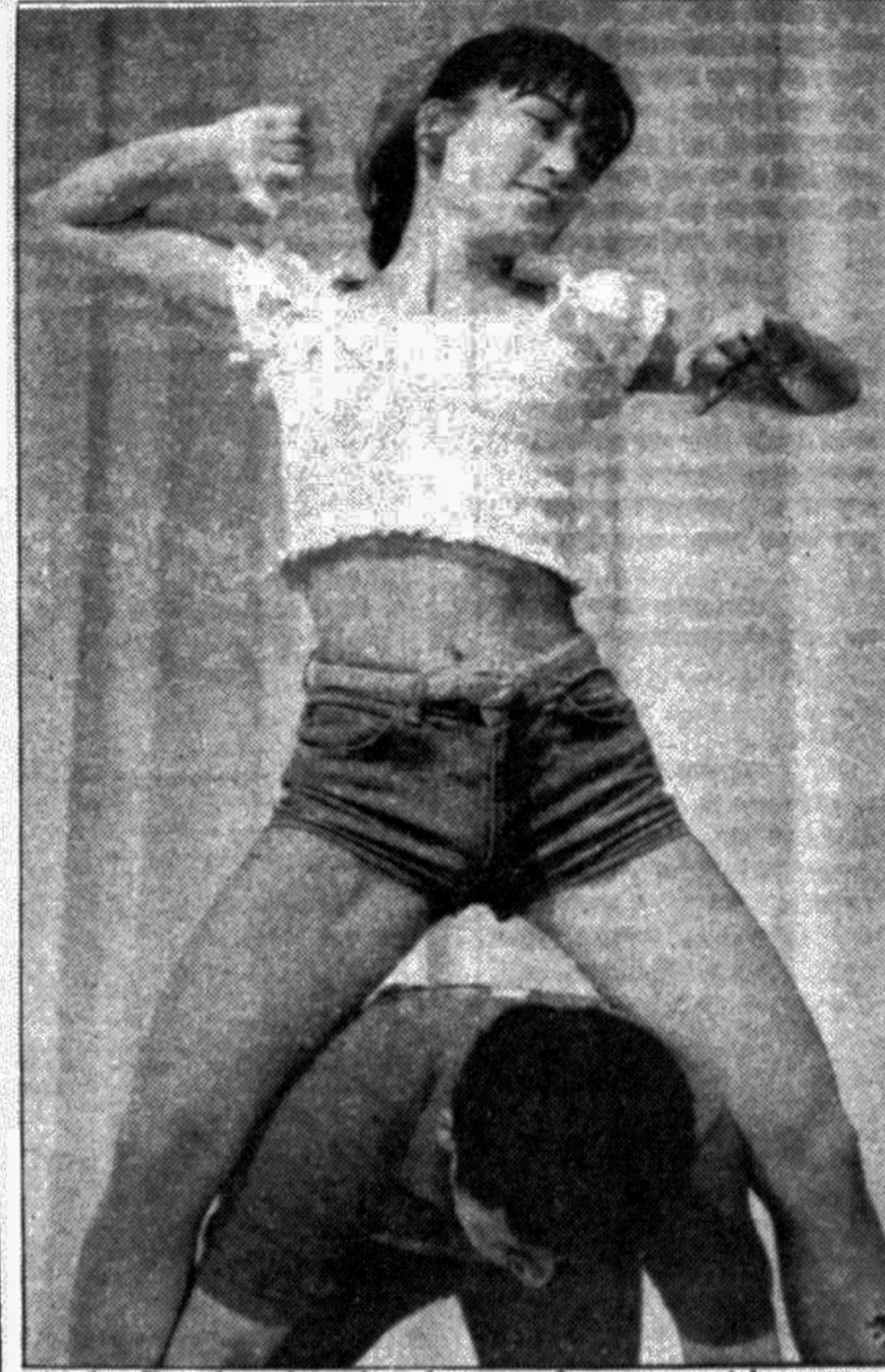
There was no immediate comment from the Ethiopians. Ethiopia and Eritrea, one-time allies who less than a decade ago were part of the same country, have battled since early May over several stretches of their common border with the loss of hundreds of lives. No skirmishes have been reported since Thursday.

Ethiopia has insisted that Eritrea withdraw its troops from more than half a dozen

US cautions its citizens in Gulf

DUBAI, Jun 15: The United States has told Americans in the Gulf to take extra precautions after an exiled Saudi dissident threatened to target all US citizens in his holy war against US forces in the region, reports Reuters.

The US continues to receive information from other sources which indicates planning for an attack against Americans in the Gulf," said an advisory issued by the US Embassy in the Saudi capital Riyadh.



Asako Tanaka gives her best performance with partner Shigehiko Nagai during the Cuban Salsa Dance Contest in Tokyo Saturday to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of Japanese immigration to Cuba. — AFP photo

Delegates gather in Rome to forge int'l criminal court

ROME, Jun 15: They will be fighting over words like "trigger mechanism" and "aggression." But if more than 180 nations succeed in establishing an international criminal court at a five-week UN conference, the consequences will be real for the world's most heinous criminals, reports AP.

Delegates were to start work today after an opening speech by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The road to a world court will be long and hard. The delegates must wrestle with basic issues, such as the powers granted the prosecutor

what will set a prosecution in motion (the "trigger mechanism"), how much influence the UN Security Council and its members will have and what crimes it would cover, including the ill-defined "aggression," generally meaning against another state.

All parties basically agree that the court will target genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Defendants will be individuals, unlike at the existing International Court of Justice at The Hague, where nations lodge complaints against other nations.