

Students of Columbine High School, all wearing T-shirts with the word, Columbine, printed on the back, walk under the flag still at half-mast into Chatfield High School to resume classes for the semester on Monday afternoon in Littleton, Colorado. — AFP photo

US school shooting

One arrested for supplying gun

LITTLETON (Colorado), May 4: A 22-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of supplying the Columbine High School gunmen with a semiautomatic handgun, one of four weapons used in their rampage, reports AP.

The arrest came Monday as Columbine students returned to classes at another school, nearly two weeks after the massacre that left 15 dead.

Three alleged Chinese spies held in Taiwan

TAIPEI, May 4: Three Chinese have been arrested for attempting spy on an air base in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, home of a newly formed F-16 squadron, reports said today, reports AFP.

The three Chinese, who were visiting to see relatives, were taken into custody on April 28 by the military, the United Daily News said, quoting intelligence sources.

The three suspects were likely together information on training and deployment of the US-made F-16 fighters," the paper said.

They were repeatedly discovered taking pictures while illegally working in a construction project at the air base, it said.

As part of its efforts to boost defense against rival China, Taiwan bought 150 F-16s for 5.8 billion US dollars in 1992.

Taiwan and China split in 1949 at the end of a civil war are still technically at war despite the commencement of civil contacts in the late 1980s.

Two civilians killed, 12 injured
US jets attack Iraqi air defence sites

WASHINGTON, May 4: US jets attacked Iraqi air defence sites near the city of Mosul on Monday after being targeted by radar and fired upon by at least two surface-to-air missiles, officials said, reports AP.

In a statement from the air base in Incirlik, Turkey, which is headquarters for the US and British planes enforcing a no-fly zone over northern Iraq, officials said Air Force F-15E and F-16CJ jets fired anti-radiation missiles and precision-guided AGM-130 missiles at several surface-to-air missile sites. Also, F-16s dropped GBU-12 laser-guided bombs on one of the Iraqi missile sites.

No details were provided on the result of the attacks.

The state-run Iraqi News Agency reported that two civilians were killed and 12 injured when "the evil aggressors attacked one of our civilian sites" north of Mosul, which is about 250 miles (400 kilometers) north of Baghdad.

The US statement from Incirlik said one of the surface-to-air missile sites was located in a "civilian town." In a departure from usual practice in describing US air attacks on Iraqi air defence sites, the statement

said the US planes "did not target this site with bombs due to the potential of civilian casualties."

US planes fired missiles at that site, Incirlik spokesman Capt. Manning Brown said. He said he could not discuss what kind of missile was used or identify the "civilian town." The implication was that missiles are less likely than bombs to cause civilian damage.

Later, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said the object targeted by US jets in the civilian area was a radar. He said US planes attacked the radar with HARM, or high-speed anti-radiation missile, weapon.

"I don't think we know at this stage what it hit, but the attack was called off after (the pilots) saw that the radar was in a civilian area," Bacon said.

In saying no bombs were used against the surface-to-air missile site, Manning said, US officials wanted to emphasize that precautions are taken to avoid civilian casualties. This comes in response to assertions by Iraqi authorities last week that US attacks in northern and southern Iraq had killed civilians.

"Casualties can only be ruled

out if Saddam Hussein ceases to target and attack" the US and British planes enforcing the no-fly zones, the Incirlik statement said.

"The Iraqi placement of anti-aircraft guns and surface-to-air missile systems in civilian populated areas increases the probability of civilian casualties," it added.

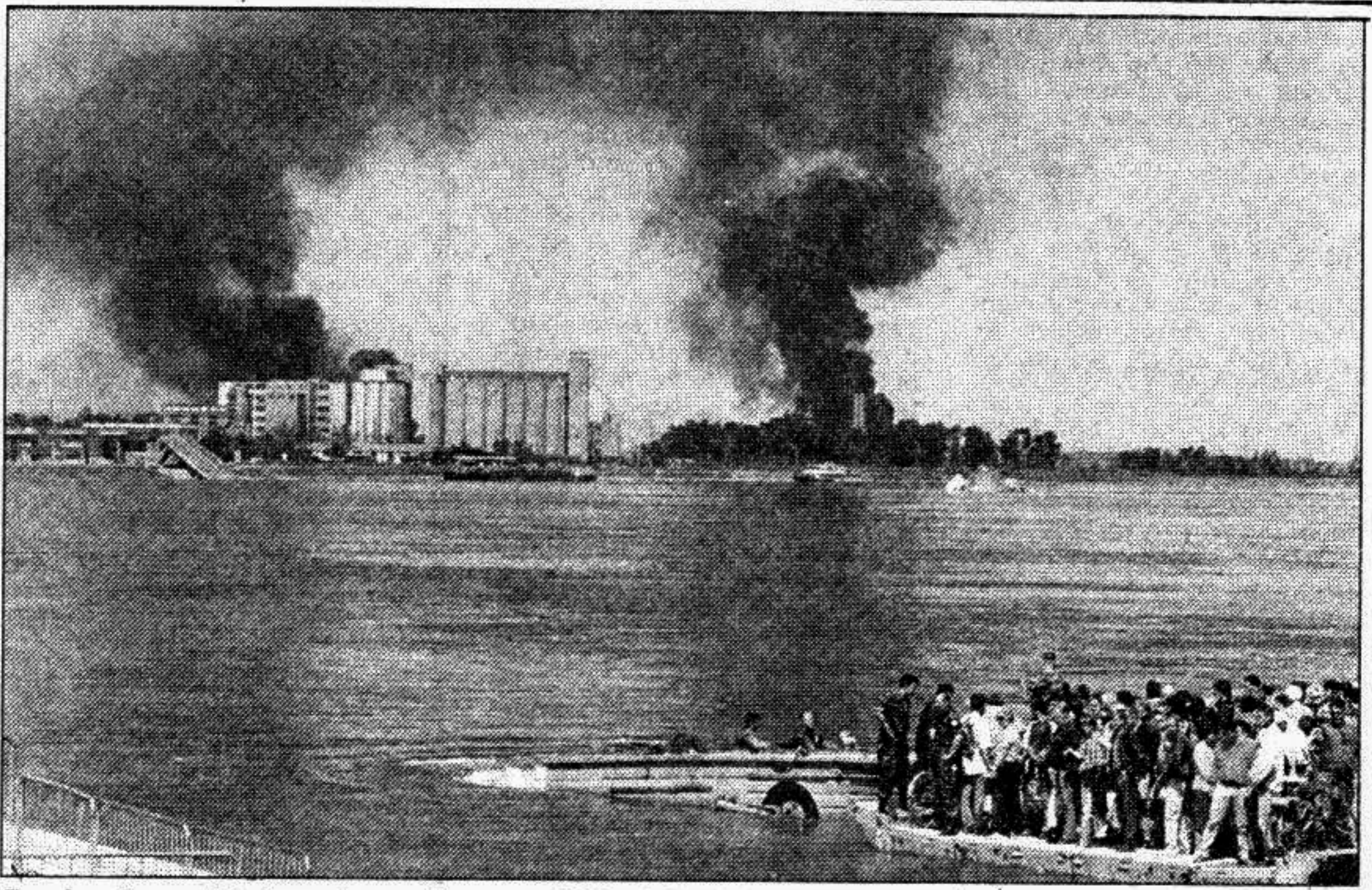
The incidents occurred between 11 am and 2 pm local time (between 0800 GMT and 1100 GMT).

Bacon said it was difficult to explain why Saddam has periodically challenged US and British enforcement of the no-fly zones.

"The reason could be that he's constantly looking for ways to shoot down a US plane and therefore recalibrating his air defense and other systems better to enable him to do that," Bacon said.

He said Saddam appears to be using different tactics.

"One of his tactics now may be to place his air defense systems in civilian neighborhoods, thinking he can challenge us with impunity, because he's done that," the spokesman said. "It's not only a risky strategy for him, but for his civilians."



Smoke from the burning refinery of Novi Sad darkens the sky on Monday behind city residents who are being ferried to the other shore after the refinery again was hit by NATO air raids on Sunday night. NATO also partly destroyed one of the main Yugoslav power stations in Obrenovac late Sunday, some 40 km from Belgrade, and apparently cut electricity to half of Serbia. — AFP photo

Diplomatic moves on Kosovo yield no breakthrough

BRUSSELS, May 4: US President Bill Clinton hinted at a possible pause in NATO's seven-week-old bombing campaign, but there was no indication of a breakthrough emerging from the latest flurry of diplomatic peace-making over Kosovo, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, the bombing went on. On Monday night alliance warplanes hit a television building in northern Serbia and a military airport near Belgrade, but no attacks were reported after midnight (2200 GMT).

Clinton speaking before a meeting with Russia's Balkan envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin, suggested for the first time he might accept a pause in the relentless NATO air offensive, but reiterated Yugoslavia would first have to accept NATO's basic demands on Kosovo.

Chernomyrdin said after his White House meeting with Clinton that they were now closer to a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

But UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who was due to meet Chernomyrdin on Tuesday, cautioned against any quick diplomatic fix to the crisis.

Chernomyrdin's visit to Washington coincided with a

series of unexpected train arrivals in Macedonia that swamped the main border crossing with Kosovo, bringing thousands of ethnic Albanians from an area north of the provincial capital Pristina.

The UNHCR said there were now more than 83,000 refugees crammed into bursting refugee camps and some 93,000 more living with ethnic kin in Macedonia. A total of 24,858 refugees have been airlifted so far.

The last reported NATO attacks on Yugoslav targets were at about 10 pm (2000 GMT) on Monday.

Two rockets struck the television station in Novi Sad, causing extensive damage but no injuries as the building was empty at the time, Serb state television RTS said.

Belgrade residents reported attacks on Monday evening to the west of the city around Batajnica, site of a military airport hit repeatedly by NATO since the start of the bombing.

Other explosions were heard in the Belgrade suburb of Rakovica, while RTS reported that Strazevica hill just outside the capital had been hit and said several projectiles slammed into the Ladjevici area, near Kraljevo, in central Serbia.

Japanese aid for N Korean reactors

TOKYO, May 4: Japan signed a contract to lend \$1 billion to an international consortium building two light-water nuclear reactors in North Korea, the Foreign Ministry said today, reports Reuters.

The aid for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) was delayed for several months as Tokyo considered cutting off its funding for the project last August when North Korea fired a missile over Japanese air space.

The ministry said on Monday that Japan signed a contract to lend the money to KEDO based on a 1994 framework agreement between the United States and North Korea.

North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear programme in return for \$5 billion worth of free fuel and safer nuclear power reactors under the agreement.

Construction was slated to start by June 15 but the actual startup depended on whether the countries slated to provide funds for the work received parliamentary approval for their allotment, the South Korean head of KEDO said earlier this year.

8 Pak tourists drown in Fiji

SUVA, May 4: Eight Pakistani tourists including five members of one family drowned when their boat was swamped by a wave during a picnic trip, Fiji police said today, reports AP.

Another eight people survived after the open punt, which is thought to have been overloaded, was hit on Monday by what police described as an unexpectedly big wave.

The group was returning to a larger day cruiser when their small boat capsized near the mouth of a river at Labasa, the principal town in Fiji's second largest island of Vanua Levu in the north of the group.

A police spokesman said six bodies had been recovered, including those of a couple and three of their four children, but the fourth was still missing along with two others.

Details of the accident remained sketchy today, but the captain of the boat, Nazim Shah, said: "We got into the small boat to return to the bigger boat when the tide started coming in about 3.30 pm."

"I reduced the speed of the engine and because of the load the boat started going under water."

He said fishing boats nearby came to their help and called for police assistance, but it was too late for eight of the tourists.

A search is continuing for the bodies of those still missing, but police indicated they had given up hope of finding any alive.

Mandela pleads for N-free S Asia

ISLAMABAD, May 4: South African President Nelson Mandela on Tuesday used a tribute honouring him as a "hero of freedom", to plead for a nuclear free South Asia, just one year after India and Pakistan declared themselves the world's newest nuclear powers, reports AP.

Mandela asked South Asia's often hostile neighbours, India and Pakistan, to follow South Africa's lead and dismantle its nuclear programme.

"The nuclearisation of South Asia is a big concern," he said. "We call on the countries of the subcontinent to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in the region."

Pakistan and India conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests one year ago, generating fears of a nuclear arms race in a region that has seen three wars in the past 52 years.

A standing ovation greeted Mandela when he stood to speak to an assembly of several hundred legislators, senators and dignitaries.



South African President Nelson Mandela (C) inspects the guard of honour at Pakistan Air Force base in Rawalpindi, some 25 kilometers from Islamabad, yesterday. AFP photo

New EC to take office in Sept

STRASBOURG, May 4: The new European Commission, headed by former Italian prime minister Romano Prodi, will take office in mid-September, European parliamentary sources said here Tuesday, reports AP.

Prodi, who was addressing the European Parliament here, is to present a list of 19 new commissioners proposed by EU member states on July 21, along with the portfolios they will take on.

Elections to the European Parliament take place on June 13 in the 15 EU-member states and the commission must obtain approval from the new parliament.

The decision means the 20 current members of the EU executive, who resigned en masse last month after being threatened with dismissal by the parliament, will continue to carry out their functions until then.

The mass resignation of the EU executive body on March 15 was prompted by a report detailing fraud in its ranks. It is currently acting in a caretaker capacity.

Pakistan unwilling to sign CTBT

ISLAMABAD, May 4: Reeling hard under US-imposed economic sanctions, Pakistan has indicated its unwillingness to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT) by September this year in view of the continuing embargoes, according to media reports here yesterday, reports PTI.

Leading Urdu daily 'Jang' quoted Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz as saying that it would be difficult for Islamabad to adhere to the CTBT in the current atmosphere and continued pressure of economic sanctions imposed against the country in the aftermath of its nuclear tests in May last year.

When his attention was drawn to political developments in India and apprehension that following the fall of the Vajpayee government New Delhi may not be able to sign the CTBT immediately, Aziz told the paper that Islamabad was evaluating Indian stand in this regard.

The newspaper, however, quoting reliable sources in the government, claimed that the Nawaz Sharif government was going to undertake a review of its stand on CTBT this month in view of the "latest developments."

It further said that Sharif would be chairing a crucial meeting in this regard towards month end and after the return of army chief General Pervez Musharraf from his China visit.

Indian premier Atal Behari Vajpayee had expressed doubts recently about New Delhi signing CTBT by September 1999.

The latest Indian position on CTBT has apparently unnerved Pakistani authorities as a large section of people here still believe that Islamabad should not sign the treaty before New Delhi despite the declared Pakistani stand that its signing of the treaty did not have any link with Indian stand on the same.

Off the Record
Python's revenge

BANGKOK: A Thai snakecharmer's luck ran out today when a python he had captured from a neighbour's home coiled itself around his neck and strangled him to death.

Hie Kerchuchua, 55, who was known for his snake catching and charming skills, rushed into a neighbour's house in the northern province of Uttaradit on Monday to catch the python which had intruded the home, police told Reuters on Tuesday.

He put the snake in a sack and was talking home with it when villagers ran into him and asked to see the python.

Hie then took the snake out and put it around his neck.

He started screaming for help when the reptile wrapped itself tightly around his neck and did not let go until he fell down dead, police said.

Pythons kill their prey by squeezing them, constricting their ability to breathe in.

Villagers and policemen in the area then forcibly unwrapped the snake from his neck and took it into captivity.

Burning object from space

NEW DELHI: An airplane commander saw a burning object in space that eyewitnesses say split into two and hit the ground in northern India, a domestic news agency reported Tuesday, says AP.

The object that fell in the central Madhya Pradesh state was "believed to be space debris," Press Trust of India reported. The news agency said no damage or injury was immediately reported on the ground.

Officials in Bhopal, the provincial capital, said they were aware of the reports but police investigators scouring an area 60 miles north of the city had so far found nothing.

"Everybody says they saw it, but so far there's nothing on the ground," Satish Chandra Tripathi, director general of the state police, told The Associated Press by telephone.

The commander of a domestic passenger flight of the government-owned Alliance Air reported sighting the object at 46,000 feet late Monday. Press Trust quoted VK Kalra, senior official of the Airports Authority of India, as saying. The airplane was at an altitude of 27,000 feet, the news agency said.

BRIEFLY

17 Africans arrested in Pakistan: Pakistan's anti-narcotics authorities have arrested 17 African men caught trying to smuggle 1,000 heroin capsules concealed in their rectums, officials said Tuesday. AFP reports from Karachi.

4 soldiers killed in mine blast: Four Zimbabwean soldiers were killed and 32 others were injured in an accidental explosion at a military engineering camp in the capital Harare on Monday, an army spokesman said Tuesday, reports AFP from HARARE.

Lankan troops kill 6 rebels: Sri Lankan soldiers shot dead six Tamil Tiger rebels in three separate attacks in the country's north, a military spokesman said Tuesday. AFP from Colombo.

Four of the rebels were killed in the Wannu area, 250 kilometers north of Colombo. Military spokesman Major Nishantha Wadugodapitiya said troops deployed in Oddussuddan, in Wannu, clashed with a group of rebels Monday and killed two of them. In another attack the same day in nearby Ampakarmam, two more rebels were killed. In a third incident, two rebels were killed in the Tamil-majority town of Paranthan, 300 kilometers north of Colombo, Major Wadugodapitiya said.

SLA militiaman killed in blast: A member of the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia was killed and another wounded in a roadside bombing on Tuesday in Israeli-occupied southern Lebanon, security sources said, reports AFP from MARJAYOUN, Lebanon.

An explosive charge blew up as a car passed by in Dahr al-Ramle, in SLA-controlled Jezzine district, north of the Israeli-occupied "security zone" in southern Lebanon, they said. At least one SLA militiaman was killed and another wounded, they added.



The world's first monkey waitress, Momo, poses with restaurant guests for photo after serving a meal at a restaurant in the "Nasu Monkey Park" in Nasu mountain resort, 150 km north of Tokyo, yesterday. Two-year-old chimpanzee Momo gives a helping hand in the restaurant during busy times as a sideshow of the Monkey Park. — AFP photo

Nepal orders new partial polls as violence leaves five dead

KATHMANDU, May 4: Nepalese authorities ordered new polls in six districts after factional clashes left five dead and nearly 50 injured during the first phase of general elections, officials said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The new vote will be held over the weekend after the polls in 42 polling centres in the six districts were cancelled due to the violence.

The worst hit area was Rautahat district, 190 kilometers (125 miles) south of the capital Kathmandu.

Bloody clashes broke out in four constituencies between activists of ruling Nepali Congress and its partner in the outgoing coalition, the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML), a home ministry spokesman said.

The five dead included a suspected Maoist rebel "shot by the security guards after he tried to throw a powerful grenade at a police station," a police spokesman said.

Election Commission Secretary Purusottam Dhakal said fears of violence had kept voters away in Rolpa and Rukum districts, the two main Maoist flashpoints, where turnout was only between 25 to 30 per cent.

Serious unrest had been avoided due to a heavy presence of security forces, he said, denying reports a sixth person had been killed in Dhading.

More than 40,000 police and army personnel have been mobilized for the polls in the Himalayan kingdom which only embraced democracy in 1990 with the end of the authoritarian rule of the king.

Elsewhere turnout for the first stage of the staggered elections was between 55 to 60 per cent, he added.

The rest of the country's 13.5 million voters will cast their ballots for the 205-member lower house of parliament on May 17.

"We are relieved that the first phase of general election has concluded peacefully without major incidents nor clashes with the Maoists who had threatened to attack the candidates and the voters," a home ministry senior official said.

The Maoists, who model themselves on Peru's Shining Path and want to overturn the constitutional monarchy, had called for a polls boycott.

"Minor skirmishes occur everywhere when general elections are held in our part of the world but we are relieved the first phase of polling concluded peacefully with the cooperation

of the general public and the political parties," the official said.

Commission officials said the ballot boxes have been transferred to district centers under army guard and were under close watch by representatives of various political parties.

Campaigning also started for stalled elections in two constituencies in Kathmandu, postponed after the death of former premier and chairman of the NCP-UML main communist party, Man Mohan Adhikari, last week.

Opinion polls and political observers predict the centrist Nepali Congress led by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala will emerge as the largest single party in parliament, followed by the NCP-UML.

But there is a large question mark over whether the Nepali Congress can secure the minimum 103 seats required for a simple majority.

More than 2,200 candidates from 38 different parties are contesting the election.

The multi-party system was installed after a bloody pro-democracy uprising in 1990, which claimed 500 lives, overturned 30 years of absolute rule by the monarchy.

Anwar goes on trial again

KAULA LUMPUR, May 4: Malaysia's ousted deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, sentenced to six years in jail for corruption last month, will go on trial on June 7 on a fresh charge of sodomy, a High Court judge ruled today, reports AFP.

Justice Abdul Wahab Patail also barred lawyers from talking to the media and ordered all journalists to restrict their reports to the court proceedings.

"No counsel, person or party shall make any comment, statement or interview in relation to the proceedings," he said.

"Only factual evidence or submissions is permitted to be published. Any reporter from any media breaching the order shall be barred from court."

Anwar was fired by Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad in September last year and arrested two a half weeks later as a threat to national security, unleashing the biggest anti-government protests here in decades.

Indonesian troops kill 23 villagers

LHOKSEUMAWA, (Indonesia) May 4: Troops on Tuesday patrolled a town in a northwestern Indonesian province where separatists are active, one day after soldiers shot and killed as many as 23 villagers, reports AP.

The shooting Monday in Pulo Rungkom village was one of the deadliest incidents in recent years in Aceh province, where the military has long been accused of human rights abuses during operations against a small band of pro-independence rebels.

The violence came one month before nationwide parliamentary elections that are viewed as a big test of Indonesia's transition to democracy following the downfall last year of authoritarian President Suharto.

However, separatists who want an Islamic state in Aceh have urged a boycott of the election. Many residents are bitter toward the central government, which is also perceived as a greedy exploiter of the natural resources of the oil-rich province.

In Pulo Rungkom, the trouble started after hundreds of troops arrived to demand that residents release a soldier who had been abducted over the weekend. They were met by thousands of villagers, some of them armed with sticks.

After tense negotiations, the shooting began. Witnesses and local reporters said soldiers fired on unarmed residents, including women and children. "God is great!" protesters shouted as they ran for cover.

In a statement, military spokesman Maj Gen Syamsul Maarif disputed that account, saying civilians in the crowd opened fire first and that troops shot back in self-defence.

Dr Mulya, head of the state hospital in nearby Lhokseumawe City, said on Tuesday that 23 people died and that more than 50 injured people had been treated in his hospital alone.

The military confirmed that 18 people died and 81 were injured.

Some shops in Lhokseumawe, the site of anti-military riots in the past year, were closed as fearful storeowners stayed home. Truckloads of police and soldiers drove through the streets of the city, 1,750 kilometers northwest of Jakarta, the Indonesian capital.