

NATO bombing on Chinese mission fuels unease among US allies in Asia

Beijing suspends military, other contacts with Washington

BEIJING, May 10: China suspended high-level military contacts with the United States as well as talks on human rights and other issues Monday to protest NATO's bombing of its embassy in Yugoslavia, reports AP.

The decision marked one of the biggest crises in US-China relations since ties were established in 1979.

Even at the height of tensions over Taiwan in 1995 and 1996, China refrained from formally announcing that it was suspending aspects of its relationship with the United States.

But with public emotions inflamed by Friday's bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, Chinese leaders' relations improving without stronger apologies from Washington.

"Regret is not enough," said Jin Canrong at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Many Chinese believe the embassy was deliberately targeted. NATO said it was an accident.

Zhu Bangzao, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, said consultations with the United States of human rights, arms control, international security and arms proliferation were also being postponed, along with high-level military contacts, the official Xinhua News Agency said. Xinhua did not say when the contacts might resume. The suspension followed an angry statement Saturday of condemnation in which the government reserved the right to take further action over the attack on its embassy.

Military contacts, which the United States froze after the Chinese army crushed pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, were resumed in late 1993, and have since gradually expanded, despite some ups-and-downs. Talks on human rights had

resumed in January after a four-year hiatus. They, and negotiations on arms proliferation and other issues of concern to the United States, had frequently been cited by Clinton administration officials as proof that their policy of engaging China was bearing fruit.

AFP adds from Hong Kong: NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade sparked protests yesterday and unease even among America's closest Asian allies.

There were demonstrations in Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. Japan meanwhile told NATO to take more care in its bombing campaign and described the accidental attack as a serious incident which had harmed Chinese dignity.

"An embassy is a country's sovereign territory. It is a serious matter that (NATO) has harmed the dignity of China, a

sovereign nation," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka told a Tokyo news conference.

"Japan has lodged a request through its embassies in the United States and Belgium strongly urging NATO to act with extra prudence to avert further civilian casualties and property damage."

Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi made it clear Japan still backed the air campaign but some of the press questioned the entire NATO strategy in unusually forthright terms.

The influential Asahi newspaper said the campaign had become nothing more than an unstoppable operation of destruction and violence that has claimed many lives in the name of 'humanity, justice' and 'national integrity'.

It said the bombing of the Chinese embassy, which killed three people including Chinese journalist, was a case in point.



A Yugoslav Army soldier passes by the ruins of the main Post office in Uzice (some 200 kms south-west of Belgrade) on Sunday, which was reportedly destroyed during NATO attacks on the town. More than 25,000 telephone connections were cut, local sources said.

Vieira granted asylum in Portugal

LISBON, May 10: Ousted Guinea-Bissau President Joao "Nino" Bernardo Vieira asked for and was granted asylum in Portugal on Sunday but it was not clear whether military rebels would let him leave the West African state, reports Reuters.

Some rebel leaders want Vieira, who took refuge in the Portuguese embassy in Bissau after his forces surrendered on Friday, to stand trial for alleged crimes, Portuguese news media reported from Bissau.

The Military Junta, which now controls the tiny Atlantic seaboard state, summoned a meeting of parliamentary leaders to discuss what steps to take, Portugal's Lusa agency said.

Earlier, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres had announced in Greece, where he is on a visit, that Portugal, the former colonial power, had received a request from the 60-year-old Vieira for political asylum which had been accepted.

Bissau's Prime Minister Francisco Fadul, the civilian face of the new military authorities, had said that Vieira would be allowed to leave if he wanted.

Zardari appeals against conviction

ISLAMABAD, May 10: Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto's husband filed an appeal in Pakistan's top court today against his conviction for corruption last month, an opposition party statement said, reports Reuters.

It said Asif Ali Zardari's lawyers filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the conviction by the Ehtesab (accountability) Bench of the Lahore High Court on April 15.

Bhutto, who is in the Dubai, was also convicted by the same court and Pakistan Peoples Party officials said she was expected to file a separate appeal later this week.

The two were sentenced to five years in jail, fined \$ 8.6 million and disqualified from holding public office. Their properties were also ordered confiscated.

Pakistan's top election official is due to start proceedings to unseat the two from their parliamentary seats next week.

New polls show Barak widens lead over Netanyahu

JERUSALEM, May 10: Labour party leader Ehud Barak widened his lead over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to 12 percentage points in an opinion poll released today, one week before the first round of Israel's general election, reports Reuters.

The poll of 2,000 Israelis for Channel 20 Television gave Barak 47 per cent of the vote to 35 per cent for Netanyahu.

Previous Israeli surveys have given Barak an eight-point lead in the first round. With a five-way race under way, neither leading candidate is expected to win the 50 per cent of votes needed for outright victory on May 17.

Violence continues in E Timor

DILI, East Timor, May 10: Factional violence erupted in the East Timorese capital for the second consecutive day Monday as pro-Indonesian militias attacked pro-independence activists, leaving at least two dead and an unknown number injured, reports AFP.

The pro-independence supporters barricaded themselves in their neighbourhoods, attempting to ward off attacks by hundreds of militia men armed with rifles and machetes.

Two people were confirmed dead by mid-afternoon in two separate areas in Dili, one of them near the site of the notorious 1991 Santa Cruz massacre, police said.

Villagers from the area spoke of six dead, but the report could not be confirmed.

At around 1:00 pm (0500 GMT), an Australian journalist who had been in the area of the

Santa Cruz cemetery said some 200 armed militia were heading towards a village at the back of the cemetery where pro-independence residents had barricaded themselves.

The journalist said there were military personnel with the militia but they appeared to be doing nothing to stop them and that she had left because the situation looked "extremely dangerous."

Three truckloads of a police

Habibie appoints two ministers

JAKARTA, May 10: Indonesian President BJ Habibie said today he had appointed two existing ministers to take over cabinet posts left vacant by the resignation of two other ministers, reports AFP.

special unit, all clad in black flak jackets, were seen rushing in the direction of the Santa Cruz cemetery about one hour later.

The violence, which paralyzed the city, followed clashes between the two camps on Sunday which left one man shot dead and three others injured.

Members of a 12-man UN team here to prepare a UN-monitored vote on autonomy or independence on August 8, have told journalists here that the main body of the police will not start arriving for several weeks, but have given no firm date.

The team said Monday that it had arranged for the public radio station to repeatedly broadcast that UN civilian police were not arriving in Dili Monday.

"We realise how much that rumor was affecting people," one of the UN officials told AFP.



Angry pro-independence supporters burn tyres and block a road in Dili, East Timor on Monday to protect their neighbourhood from pro-Indonesian militia who prowl the streets of the East Timor capital. Factional violence erupted in the East Timor capital Monday for the second consecutive day, as pro-Indonesia militia attacked independence activists, leaving at least two people dead and an unknown number injured.

Fossil remains of mammal discovered in Pakistan

KARACHI, May 10: The fossil remains of an enormous rhinoceros — like mammal have been discovered in Pakistan and the French palaeontologists who found them believe they're the largest fossil remains of a land mammal in the world, reports Reuters.

The almost complete remains of the mammal were discovered last month in the eastern part of Baluchistan province, team leader Jean-Loup Welcomme told Reuters at the weekend as he passed through Karachi on his way back to France.

"It is the largest fossil of a land mammal discovered," said Welcomme, a palaeontologist who studies the migrations of mammals at the Museum of Natural History in Paris and

the University of Montpellier in southern France.

Welcomme, who has been working in the Dera Bugti hills 500 km north of Karachi off and on for the last five years, said the remains show an animal that stood about 5-metres high and was seven metres long.

The name for the mammal is baluchitherium, Welcomme said. It was named by English palaeontologist C. Forster Cooper, who collected some fossil remains in the area in 1910.

"We think it weighed about 15 to 20 tonnes and it looks like a rhinoceros without the horns," Welcomme said.

"This family is linked to the family of the rhinoceros, like a cousin of the ancestor of the rhinoceros," he said.

Female workers demand right to work late hours in India

BOMBAY, May 10: Female bar and hotel workers in the western Indian city of Bombay are demanding changes to 50-year-old legislation that prevents them working late hours, reports today, reports AFP.

The Indian Express newspaper said the Bombay High Court was hearing a petition from the Indian Hotel and Restaurant Association (AHAR) and the Maharashtra Hotel and Restaurant Ladies Employees Union, demanding women be allowed to work beyond 8:30 pm.

Currently, the Bombay Shops and Establishment Act which was drawn up in 1948, bans women from working late hours in shops, restaurants and similar establishments.

Women employees protested in the streets of Bombay a few months ago demanding the law be amended to allow women in

the entertainment sector to work as late as their counterparts in other jobs.

While the law was barely enforced in the past, the situation changed dramatically in 1995 when the Hindu fundamentalist Shiv Sena came to power in Maharashtra state, of which Bombay is the capital.

Hotel and restaurant owners said that in recent years they have faced much harassment from police and other government officials trying to implement the late-night restrictions.

AHAR secretary Shivram Shetty said it was economically unviable to offer jobs to female bar employees if they were not allowed to work late hours.

Shetty argued that in many cases women bartenders were the sole earners for their families.

UN, int'l groups' campaign to ban child soldiers

MAPUTO, May 10: The United Nations and international children's groups have noted a surge in the use of children as soldiers despite global campaigns, initiated in 1919 by the British-based charity Save the Children, to ban the practice, reports Reuters.

Save the Children International and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, are mobilising international public opinion and political will to raise the legal age of fighters to 18 from 15 and outlaw the use of children as combatants.

They say the present international cut off of 15 facilitates the recruitment of younger children as in many cases age is determined by appearance as few carry documentary proof.

Setting 18 as the minimum age for recruitment would give more effective protection to children in their early teens.

The Maputo conference was the first of four regional conferences to be held in 1999 to raise awareness of the problem and

mobilise regional support for the planned international legislation.

The remaining conferences will address the situation of child soldiers in Latin America in July, Europe in November and Asia in October.

These will culminate in a global conference in 2000 to mobilise political will to end the use of child soldiers.

The Maputo meeting urged the international community to stop supplying arms and military training aid to governments or armed opposition groups using children under 18 as combatants.

Olara Otunnu, UN special envoy for children caught up in conflicts, says he is talking to rebel groups to secure commitments from them to stop using child soldiers.

He has already won pledges from governments and rebel leaders in Burundi, Rwanda and Sudan to protect children in war-torn areas and to curb the recruitment of child soldiers.

Pakistan accuses BBC of bias

ISLAMABAD, May 10: The Pakistani government accused the British Broadcasting Corporation on Sunday of systematically showing it in a negative light, and of deception, reports Reuters.

The charge was made in a letter to the BBC by Information Minister Mushahid Hussain after a week of controversy over the media and a planned BBC documentary on allegations of corruption in Pakistan, which is to be aired in June.

In London, a BBC spokeswoman said the corporation had not received the letter and would not make any comment until it had done so.

Hussain accused a BBC documentary team of getting visas to enter Pakistan under false pretences by saying they were to produce a film on "socio-economic conditions in the country."

It transpires that it is actu-

ally making a documentary that is motivated by a political agenda," the minister said.

He said it appeared that a key contributor to the documentary would be former top policeman Rehman Malik, who has been in the past accused Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of corruption.

Hussain said in a letter distributed by the official APP news agency that people so far interviewed by the BBC included people biased against the government.

"Going by the pattern of interviews so far recorded, the team's purpose seems to be to present a one-sided, and, therefore, unfair depiction of the situation," the letter said.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists protested last week that three journalists interviewed by the BBC in Pakistan had been arrested, threatened or harassed.

It transpires that it is actu-

Famine killed hundreds of thousands, admits North Korea

KOMUSAN, North Korea, May 10: Ever since North Korea's famine began four years ago, its government has disputed Western estimates of the staggering death toll, without releasing its own figures. But that approach to the crisis by North Korea's reclusive communist government appears to be changing, reports AP.

Jon In Chan, an official with the state food Damage Rehabilitation Committee, has released new figures showing a 37 per cent increase in deaths between 1995 and 1998. That would mean the famine has killed about 220,000 North Koreans during that time.

"I think this (information) is made public for the first time for the donor mission," Jon said over the weekend in Komusan.

The northeastern town, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the Chinese border, is located in one of the hardest-hit regions of the country. A visit to its regional hospital showed that about 50 per cent of its patients were suffering from malnutrition.

Jon released the new statis-

tics to representatives of US, Australian and European aid groups who were touring North Korea to assess the famine and the World Food Programme's distribution of food donated by many other countries, including the United States.

A World Food Programme official called the figure significant, and said the mortality

rate was to enter the country. But it granted access to a Western reporter for the aid groups' weeklong tour, and the reporter provided information for this report.

Last year, a US congressional delegation estimated that 2 million North Koreans have died from starvation or hunger-related illnesses during the famine. South Korean intelligence officials say North Korea's population as fallen from 25 million to 22 million.

Jon said his government still disputes these figures as too high.

Floods, drought and other natural disasters have devastated North Korea's collective agriculture since 1995. The nation's economy was already crippled by mismanagement and loss of the crucial Soviet bloc trading partners. Without food and imported fuel, North Korea's centrally planned economy has largely broken down.

Without its food stocks, millions of people have been forced to survive by eating grasses, corn stalks or whatever else they can forage, according to the World Food Programme.

Beatles' last single

LONDON, May 10: A final Beatles single will be released this year after the three surviving members of the group unearthed a song lost during studio sessions in 1968, the top-selling Sun tabloid reported today, reports Reuters.

The so far untitled track featured the late John Lennon on vocals and would be the centrepiece of a Beatles' revival in the run-up to the millennium, it said.

The Sun said the three surviving Beatles — Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr — had decided it would be released in its original form.

Off the Record

Survival in the Internet jungle

LONDON: Four British volunteers embarked on a challenge yesterday to see if they can survive by using the Internet, locked up with only a computer and a credit card for company, says AFP.

The two men and two women have been shut in separate secure rooms in a central London location, with the aim of surviving for 100 hours by using the Net to clothe, feed and entertain themselves. Their only contact with the real world on the net will be via e-mails and online user groups, which act like message boards.

The human guinea pigs, who can spend up to 500 pounds (820 dollars), will be monitored to see how they behave and whether the wealth of Internet services really work.

They will start the experiment, organised by Microsoft's Internet arm, in a bath-robe and will be expected to fend for themselves electronically. They can order food via the Internet -- and it will be delivered to their room.

The women are Emma Gibson, 30, an actress from west London, and Robin Katz, 46, an American writer now living in north London. The men are Glyn Thomas, 45, a freelance book-editor from west London, and Martin Kennedy, a 67-year-old Scotsman, a retired fireman now living in Bedfordshire, north of the British capital.

All four volunteered after spotting an advert in The Guardian newspaper.

Millennium biscuit

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's enthusiasm over being first to see in the new millennium took a new twist on Monday when a bakery launched a "first biscuit" competition, says Reuters.

Snack fans can win NZ\$10,000 (\$5,600) cash and will have their name printed on every pack if they come up with the winning creation.

The successful entrant's biscuit will start production on the stroke of midnight, December 31, 1999.

The company suggested entrants think of ideas like a kiwifruit cookie, a sheep-shaped shortbread or a mochi-hacco mallowpuff.

New Zealand's closeness to the international dateline means it is the first nation to see the dawn of each new year.

Castor Marbles return home after 100 years

ANKARA: The Castor Marbles were returned to Turkey on Sunday, more than a century after the Dutch smuggled out the seven figures that date from Roman times, the Anatolia news agency reported, says AP.

The figures, including a bust of Venus and Marcus Aurelius, lay for over 100 years on the seabed of the English Channel before being retrieved by British divers in 1995.

Britain agreed to return the marbles to Turkey in July after Turkish authorities proved ownership.

Dutch vice consul Alfred Van Lennep removed the marbles from Izmir in 1894, but the Dutch ship Castor sank in the English Channel as it carried them home to the Netherlands.

The marbles will be displayed at the Museum of Anatolian Civilization in Ankara, which is one of Turkey's most prestigious museums, a culture ministry official told the agency.

BRIEFLY



A Santiago resident deposits flowers at the memorial for the detained and disappeared on Sunday in remembrance of the mothers, victims of the regime of Gen Augusto (1973-90). Dozens of people came to the memorial as Chileans celebrated Mother's Day. — AFP photo

US bus crash claims 21:

A bus chartered by a gambling club for the elderly flipped over in New Orleans on Sunday, killing 21 people and injuring 15, according to officials who said the death toll could go higher, Reuters says from New Orleans.

At least nine people were hospitalised in critical condition, while six remained hospitalised with less serious injuries after the accident route to a Mississippi Gulf Coast casino, New Orleans police spokesman David Bowser said.

6 perish in Honolulu landslide:

A large landslide at Sacred Falls State Park reportedly killed six people and sent about 20 other people to the hospital, AP says from Honolulu.

Police and the city medical examiner's office weren't immediately able to confirm the death toll reported by television station KHON. The landslide in the popular hiking area occurred around 2:30 pm Sunday near the pool at the base of the waterfall in the Koolau Mountains, about 50 km north of Honolulu on the northeast side of the island of Oahu.

3 killed in S Philippines:

Three people have been killed and two seriously wounded in separate weekend attacks by suspected Muslim extremists in the southern Philippines, military reports said yesterday, AFP says from Zamboanga.

Gunmen believed to be member of the extremist Abu Sayyaf group ambushed a truck in Sumisip town in Basilan province, killing two people and wounding another, military reports said.

5 die in US plane accident:

Five skydivers and the pilot of their plane died when the aircraft crashed into a field, authorities said, AP reports from Ohio.

The accident happened about 5:30 pm Sunday, south of Celina at Montezuma Lake Field Airport, according to the State Highway Patrol. Initial reports said the plane crashed into a field after experiencing engine trouble, the patrol said. The six occupants were dead at the scene, the patrol said.

'Different Strokes' star dead:

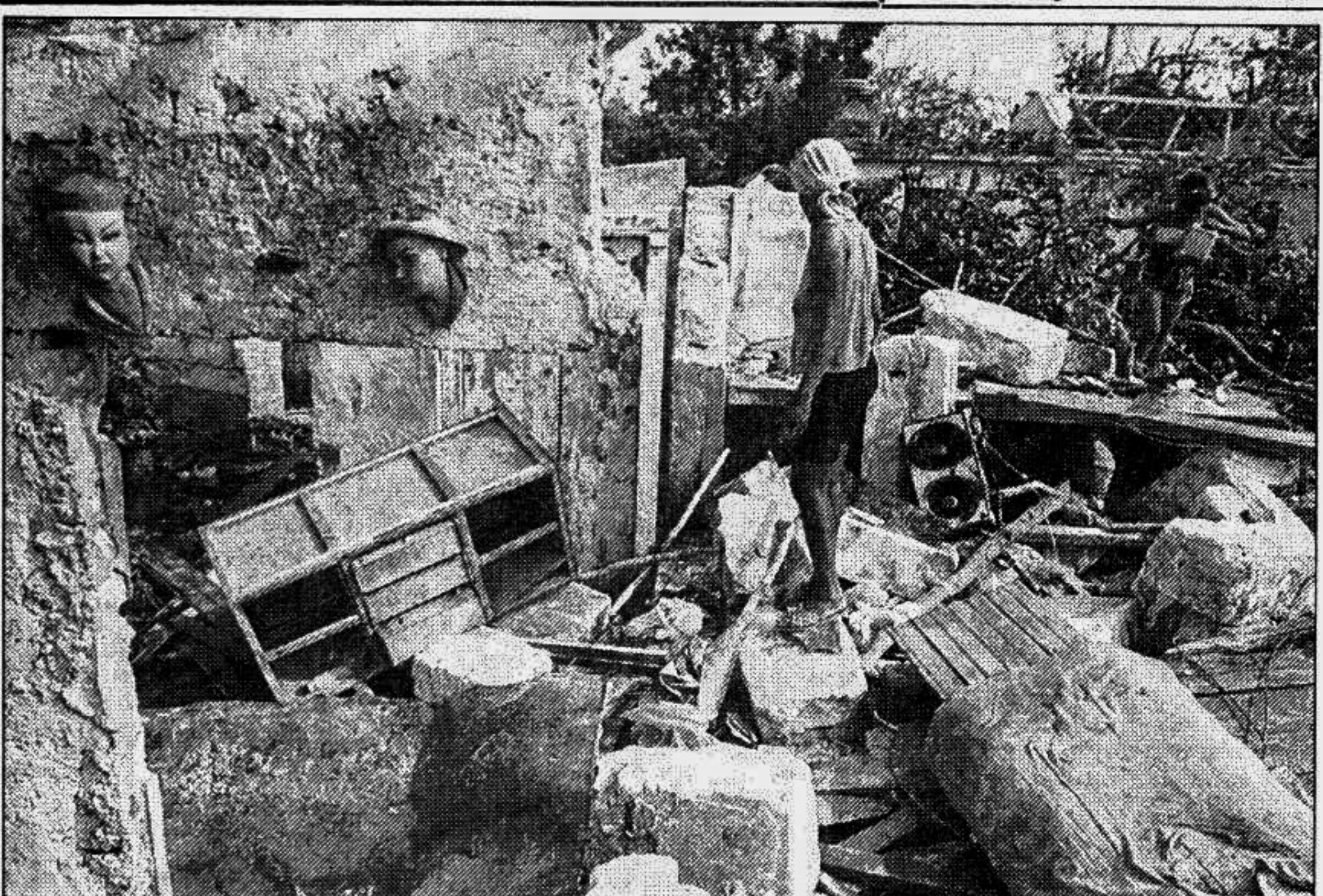
Actress Dana Plato, an actress who experienced legal troubles since her hit sitcom "Different Strokes" was canceled in the mid-1980s, has died of a drug overdose, AP reports from Oklahoma.

Plato, 34, apparently took the painkiller Loritab along with Valium on Saturday while visiting the home of her fiancé's parents. Plato played Kimberly Drummond on the sitcom, which ran on the NBC television network in the United States from 1978 to 1984.

Bus accident claims 17 in India:

Some 17 Indians died and 30 others were injured Sunday when a passenger bus hit a tree while travelling to the western Indian city of Nagpur, the United News of India said, reports AFP.

Fourteen of the injured were hospitalised in critical state, it said, adding that the vehicle was carrying passengers from the holy Hindu city of Allahabad in northern India.



Marianela Montecón (C) and her sister Yulia (R) look through the rubble of their house in Pedros, in the Cuban province of Matanzas on Sunday after a tornado ripped through the town Saturday, killing at least three and injuring 30. About 100 homes were also seriously damaged and 610 people had to be evacuated in the wake of the tornado, which was accompanied by hail and lightning. — AFP photo