

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' elations 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.

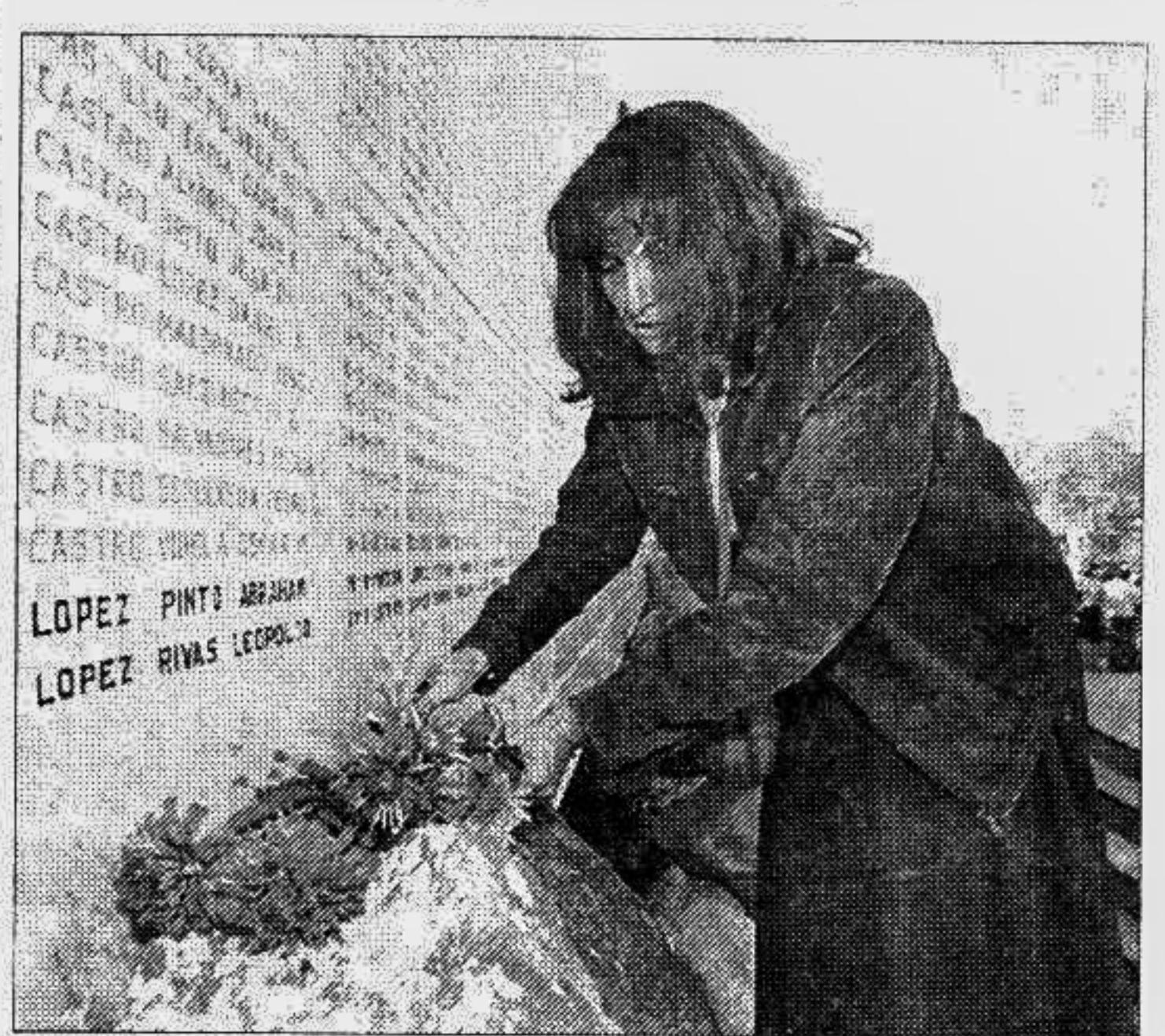
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A Yugoslav Army soldier passes by the ruins of the main Post office in Uzice (some 200 kms south-west of Belgrade) on Sunday, which was reportedly destroyed during night's NATO attacks on the town. More than 25,000 telephone connections were cut, local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

— AFP photo

## 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.

Guinuan believed to be member of the extremist Abu Sayyaf group ambushed a truck in Sumisip town in Baislan 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 finance'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 Pedroso, 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

## 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 Shivar 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 well as by early documentary proof.

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

The Maputo conference 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 Otonnu, 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.

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