

International

Belgrade reinforcing troops in Kosovo

NATO to send more forces to end Balkan conflict swiftly

LONDON, May 24: British Defence Secretary George Robertson on Monday reiterated that more NATO troops could be sent to the Balkans in a bid to bring the Kosovo conflict to a swift end, reports AFP.

"I would anticipate that more troops will start moving into the area quite soon in order to build up the numbers that will be appropriate for the job that will have to be done," Robertson told BBC radio.

His comments echoed statements made over the weekend by Foreign Secretary Robin Cook that alliance forces should be ready to go into Kosovo with or without the agreement of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

But Robertson refused to confirm reports that NATO was preparing a 40,000-member force on the borders of the Ser-

bian province.

He said that original estimates were that around 25,000 troops were needed in a "completely permissive environment."

"If we had to look at something that is less ordered, then the numbers will have to be greater than that," he said.

Cook said NATO had been asked to bolster its forces in the Balkans to about 40,000 troops.

Meanwhile, Belgrade is reinforcing its troops in Kosovo less than two weeks after announcing it was reducing its forces there, The New York Times said Monday.

The Yugoslav military is sending fresh troops into Kosovo to reinforce positions near the border with Albania, it quoted NATO officials as saying.

"We have no signs of with-

drawal," the Times quoted NATO military spokesman Major General Walter Jertz as saying.

Some 40,000 Serb military and police are estimated to be in Kosovo.

The Washington Post, meanwhile, quoted a NATO commander in Italy as saying he expected Serb forces would be forced out of Kosovo within two months.

Another report says, NATO bombed power stations in Serbia for the third night running, leaving much of the country without electricity Monday, the Serbian media reported.

On its 61st night of air strikes, NATO hit installations of the Serbian electricity authority in Novi Sad, Kostolac and Nis, EPS said, cited by the private Studio B radio.

The raids left many towns

and cities without power, including parts of the capital Belgrade, EPS said.

Repeated power cuts over the past three days have severely reduced water supplies, notably in Belgrade and the northern city of Novi Sad, the independent news agency Beta said.

Meanwhile, the diplomatic push to end the conflict was expected to gather pace this week. Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, the European Union's Kosovo envoy, and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott were expected in Moscow Tuesday to resume talks with Russian leaders.

Earlier talks failed to make a breakthrough, but Ahtisaari said that "on the main issues, we see eye to eye."

On the humanitarian front, refugees continued to flood out of Kosovo.

The raids left many towns

Belgian film wins Golden Palm at Cannes

CANNES, May 24: Awards given Sunday at the 52nd Cannes Film Festival, voted by a 10-member jury led by Canadian director David Cronenberg.

Golden Palm: "Rosetta," Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Belgium, reports AP.

Grand Prize: "Humanity," Bruno Dumont, France.

Jury Prize: "The Letter," Manoel de Oliveira, Portugal.

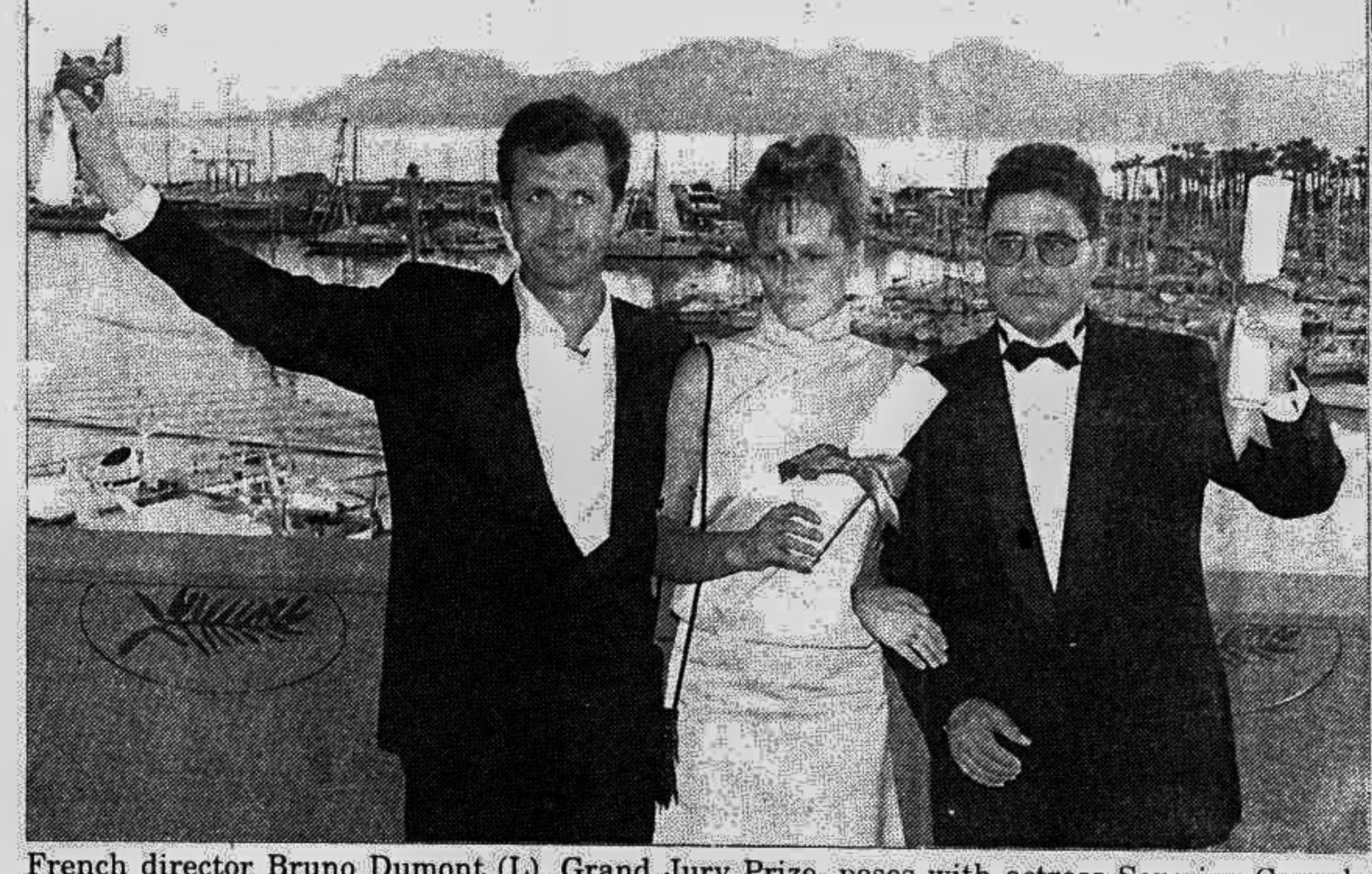
Best Director: Pedro Almodovar, "All About My Mother," Spain.

Best Actor: Emmanuel Schotte, "Humanity," France.

Best Actress: Severine Caneele, "Humanity," France and Emilie Dequenne, "Rosetta," Belgium.

Best Screenplay: "Moloch," Youri Arabov and Marina Korenova, Germany and Russia.

Golden Camera (first-time director): "Marana Simhasanam," Murali Nair, India.



French director Bruno Dumont (L), Grand Jury Prize, poses with actress Severine Caneele (C), Best Actress, and Emmanuel Schotte, Best Actor, for photographers after they received their prizes for the movie "L'Humanite", during the 52nd Cannes Film Festival Sunday in Cannes.

AP Photo

Off the Record

Miracle still happens

BEIJING: A newborn Chinese baby who dropped through the squat toilet of a high-speed train was alive and well after landing on the tracks, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

The mother, a nine months pregnant migrant worker, had squatted down to relieve herself but gave birth instead.

Panicked, she ripped off the umbilical cord with her bare hands and tumbled the baby boy and let him slip through the toilet hole and onto the tracks below.

Just as three railway workers spotted the infant another train hurtled over his body, Xinhua said in an overnight report Monday.

When that train passed and the three approached the rails they could hardly believe their eyes: The baby was still alive with his hands and legs quivering, Xinhua reported.

The 2.7 kg (5.9 lb) baby suffered slight bruising and a small cut on the head, which required three stitches. Mother and baby were in hospitals in the southern city of Guangzhou.

Child bank robbers!

PERTH: Two girls aged 11 and 7 were found hiding under a desk after smashing their way into a bank, rummaging through drawers looking for money and trying to break into a vault, reports AP.

Acting Police Sgt Don Campbell of Armadale, south of Perth, said the 11-year-old was the "ringleader" but had tried to put the blame on her 7-year-old cousin.

Neither would face criminal charges, police said.

The pair broke into the Commonwealth Bank branch in Armadale about 7:30 pm Sunday by smashing a back window with concrete chunks.

Silent alarms were set off but the girls searched teller areas and drawers for money for 25 minutes before security guards and police arrived, Campbell said.

"They flossed through the bank and it appears they have tampered with the digital combination control on the bank vault as any curious 11-year-old would," Campbell said.

"But, of course they never would have got inside the vault."

"Thinking it's a bank, in the mind of an 11-year-old, they probably thought money was there to be taken," he said.

Campbell said the 11-year-old had been handed over to the care of Family and Children's Services.

Indian Navy searching for 250 missing fishermen

AHMEDABAD, India, May 24: Indian Navy is searching for more than two hundred fishermen reported missing since a severe cyclonic storm developed in the Arabian Sea, a government official said today.

We are trying to locate 48 boats carrying some 250 fishermen who went to the sea from the Gujarat coast before a cyclone warning was issued," Vidyasinh Parmar, Gujarat state's Relief Commissioner, told Reuters.

Five helicopters have been deployed to search between Naliya and Porbandar near the Gulf of Kutch to locate the fishermen, Parmar said.

Fishermen normally remain at sea for 10 to 15 days, and these boats ventured into the ocean a few days before a cyclone warning was issued," he added.

The Meteorological Department warned of the cyclone last Tuesday.

Parmar said navy helicopters rescued 14 personnel of India's paramilitary Border Security Force from Bhuj in Kutch.

Pawar declines to divulge about likely alliance

MUMBAI, May 24: Expelled Congress leader Sharad Pawar today declined to divulge anything about the likely alliances his proposed political outfit would have with other like-minded political parties, reports PTI.

"We will announce with whom we will have alliances at an appropriate time. At this moment it is not alright for any individual to make any comments on the issue," Pawar said at a press conference here when asked whether the proposed political party, being floated by him and other expelled Congress leaders would have either a direct or indirect alliance with BNP and allies.

"Our party will follow the ideology of the old Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru," he said, adding that "social justice" would be the main plank of the party, name for which would be decided after consultations with election commission.

Suharto never lies, says Habibie

JAKARTA, May 24: Indonesian President BJ Habibie said in an interview aired today his disgraced predecessor Suharto, who has repeatedly denied allegations he amassed a billion-dollar fortune through corruption, never tells lies, reports Reuter.

Asked about Suharto's insistence that he does not have a fortune stashed abroad, Habibie told CNN: "He never lies. He keeps something quiet maybe because he is not allowed to say, if he doesn't want to tell you, he quietly smiles."

With Indonesia's June 7 elections approaching, Habibie's comments will provide fresh ammunition for opposition parties who accuse Habibie's government of stalling on an investigation into allegations of corruption by Suharto during his 32-year rule.

Libya calls Sunday Times report 'blatant lies'

CAIRO, May 24: Libya has dismissed as a "pack of lies" a London newspaper report that Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi ordered the Lockerbie bombing, reports AP.

The new deliberate and disgraceful attempt at distortion... forces us to warn international public opinion that what has been published is an attempt to politicise the case once again," an unidentified Foreign Ministry official told Libya's official news agency late Monday.

Last month, Libya bowed to international pressure and surrendered for trial in the West two Libyans suspected of blowing up Pan Am flight 103 over the Scottish village of Lockerbie in 1988. The explosion killed 270 people on board and on the ground, most of them American or British.

Bomb goes off in Pak town: 12 killed

LAHORE, Pakistan, May 24: At least 12 people were killed and 30 injured Monday when a bomb planted on a cycle exploded in a town in Pakistan's Punjab province, police said.

The explosion occurred at Daska, a country town in the district of Sialkot which is near the border with India.

The bomb went off in a crowded area of the town which is 150 kilometers (93 miles) south of the provincial capital Lahore. At least two of the injured were said to be in critical condition.

The bomb went off in an area where labourers usually gather in search of daily work.

"It was a terrible scene, with victims lying in pools of blood and severed limbs scattered around," a witness said.

A senior police official in Lahore said the blast, in which a timing device was used, was

suspected to be the work of India's intelligence agency RAW (Research and Analysis Wing).

"We believe it is a continuation of RAW-sponsored activities in border areas in the Sialkot district," said the official, who declined to be identified.

Pakistani and Indian authorities have often blamed each other's intelligence services for cross-border sabotage.

Police in the Sialkot district said several bombs had been found and defused in different places in recent months.

The explosion coincided with new border tensions between Pakistani and Indian troops in the disputed Himalayan state of Kashmir, where artillery duels have occurred for the past two weeks.

The Sialkot district is near the Indian-controlled zone of Kashmir.

Barak begins talks to form govt

HERZLIYA, Israel, May 24: Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak of Israel's Labor Party opened preliminary negotiations Monday with other political groups on forming a broad coalition government a week after his election victory, reports AFP.

Barak entered the coalition talks strengthened by his overwhelming defeat on May 17 of the right-wing incumbent prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but he faces a tough task trying to form the broadest party in parliament with 10 seats, refused to serve in any government alongside Shas.

Meretz leader Yossi Sarid said Shas should be disqualified from government as long as it is led by Rabbi Arieh Deri, a long-time political powerbroker who was sentenced to four years in prison last month for corruption.

Meretz, which served in the last Labor government between 1992 and 1996 "not to try to hinder our effort to form the broadest possible coalition," Sarid said after the meeting with Libai.

Libai responded by warning Meretz, which served in the last Labor government between 1992 and 1996 "not to try to hinder our effort to form the broadest possible coalition."

During Monday's talks, Meretz submitted a 20-point list of demands including a total freeze in Jewish settlement building in Palestinian areas and an immediate resumption of peace efforts with the Palestinians and Arab states.

Barak has made no public statements regarding his coalition plans or ministerial appointments and according to Israeli press reports has made no firm promises to anyone, including his own top associates.

Under Israeli law, Barak has 45 days from Tuesday to form his government. During the period, Netanyahu remains prime minister.

The big question mark Monday was whether Likud would seek to bring Likud into his coalition following Netanyahu's resignation as the party's chief.

Netanyahu's hardline foreign minister, Ariel Sharon, is serving as Likud's interim leader and reportedly backs joining a Barak-led government.

But Barak told a victory rally



Kim Quiambao, who is representing Philippines at the 1999 Miss Universe competition, walks across the stage during pre-taping of the National Costume portion of the competition Sunday in Chaguaramas, Trinidad and Tobago. Eighty-five contestants are competing for the title of Miss Universe 1999, and the winner will be crowned on May 26.

Handy spy all time at home!

SINGAPORE: Watch out in Singapore, because big brother — or your boss, or your parents — might be watching you every move with tiny spy cameras hidden at home and at work, the Straits Times reported Monday.

Demand has soared for secret surveillance devices to watch over premises and spy on employees, as well as children and maids at home, the paper said.

It quoted one security company official as saying his firm had enjoyed a 300 percent jump in demand over the past year for the small surveillance cameras that are often disguised as wall sockets or smoke detectors.

A wide range of people in Singapore who want to be in control buy the devices, which cost about \$8400-\$81,200 (US \$2300-\$6900) each and can be ordered from abroad and through the Internet, it said.

Some people want to make sure that domestic maids — thousands of whom are employed in Singapore — are hard at work on household chores while their employers are at the office.

Watch dog Christy Tan, who has installed a camera at home, told the newspaper: "Once I saw my maid sitting on the couch watching television."

"Cameras are a great help, especially when you are stuck in the office, not knowing what's happening at home," she was quoted as saying.

Private investigator Harmon Singh told the newspaper that parents also wanted to keep tabs on their children.

"Some parents want to know what their children are doing when left alone in the house. Others want to know if their children are watching television or taking a swim when they are supposed to be studying," he was quoted as saying.

"Some people just don't trust the friends their children bring into the homes," he added.