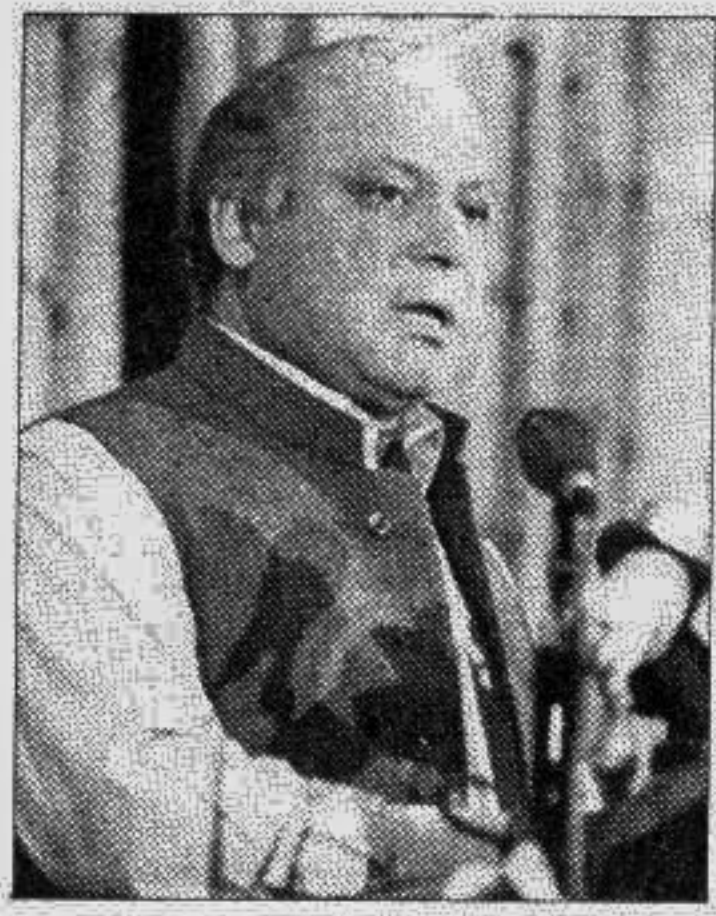


India should respond to Pak peace gestures, says Sharif



ISLAMABAD, June 5: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has called on India to show good faith by responding to Pakistani offer of peace talks to cool the conflict in Kashmir...

India bombs Kashmir guerillas, alleges Pakistani involvement

SRINAGAR, India, June 5: Indian and Pakistani troops fought heavy artillery duels in disputed Kashmir Saturday, as New Delhi presented 'proof' of Pakistani backing to Islamic guerillas in the disputed state...

He said advancing Indian troops had recaptured a ridge atop one mountain, forcing the infiltrators to return to the Line of Control which divides the Kashmir region between the South Asian rivals.

Kashmir... This is clear proof of Pakistani intrusion in our territory," he said. The Indian brigadier also distributed photographs of the dead men as well photocopies of Pakistani military documents allegedly found on them.

The pilot returned to a hero's welcome in India Friday and called on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who said he wanted peace talks which have been proposed by Pakistan to succeed.

But the chief of Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party on Saturday launched a sharp attack on Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, accusing him of pushing the guerillas into Kashmir.

"It is not possible that so many infiltrators could move into Indian territory without the support of the Pakistani army (and) his knowledge," Khababhu Thakre said.

Pakistan says it wants to send Foreign Minister Sartaz Aziz to New Delhi for talks and proposed Monday for the possible dialogue. India said it was studying the proposal.



An Indian army officer checks out photographs of alleged Pakistani soldiers killed during clashes in the Batalik area, some 7 kms within the Line Of Control (LOC), during a press conference yesterday. India is still trying to flush out Islamic guerillas, allegedly backed by Pakistani regulars, after they infiltrated the Indian side of the Line of Control in Kashmir. —AFP photo

NATO, Y'slavia meet at Kosovo border to talk Serb pullout

BLACE, Macedonia, June 5: NATO and Yugoslav military officials met Saturday at the Macedonia-Kosovo border to discuss the withdrawal of Serb forces from the province, reports AFP.

The meeting, in a restaurant 200 metres from the border, had been due to start at 9:00 a.m. (0700 GMT).

But it was delayed after the Yugoslav delegation expressed concerns about the safety of the location, NATO officials said.

British Lieutenant-General Michael Jackson, the head of NATO's military delegation and commander of the future Kosovo peacekeeping force (KFOR), arrived at 11:30 a.m.

The Yugoslav military delegation arrived at 11:50 a.m. In London, British Armed Forces Minister Doug Henderon said the meeting had begun.

The military plans for the entry of the troops into Kosovo will be decided after a meeting today between NATO representatives and the Yugoslav military authorities," he said.

"I am pleased to say that this meeting has now commenced...

and progress is being made," he told a press briefing. General Svoetozar Marjanovic, deputy chief of staff of the Yugoslav army, had been expected to lead the delegation but had not travelled to Blace, a NATO spokesman said.

Instead, Yugoslav Deputy Interior Minister Obrad Stefanovic and a senior army officer, General Blajodi Kovacevic, led the delegation into the restaurant, where Jackson and NATO officials were waiting.

The restaurant was surrounded by some 100 Italian NATO troops, as well as tanks and armoured cars.

NATO has nearly 16,000 troops already in Macedonia who would be the vanguard of a KFOR deployment.

In Brussels, NATO spokesman Jamie Shea, asked to explain the delay in the meeting, said: "My understanding is that they have some concerns of security."

In Blace, NATO spokesman Major Trey Cate told AFP earlier Saturday that Jackson would present the Yugoslav delegation with "a military agree-

ment which details a schedule for the withdrawal." "There will be no negotiations. General Jackson is not in a position to negotiate," he added.

"There will be just discussions on modalities and on minor issues like uniforms," he said, referring to what Yugoslav soldiers would be allowed to wear during the pullout.

The document was presented to the Serbian side Friday and NATO had approved the document, he said, adding that the discussions could last "10 minutes or two days."

NATO carried out reduced bombing overnight, mainly on targets in Kosovo. In Washington, the Pentagon said the air strikes could be suspended as soon as Sunday or early next week if Yugoslavia cooperated with NATO on the withdrawal of its troops.

However, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said air strikes could resume at any time if Belgrade broke the pledges in the Group of Eight (G8) peace deal which it accepted Thursday.

Time names top 20 heroes and icons of century

NEW YORK, June 5: Princess Diana, the Kennedy's Che Guevara, black baseball player Jackie Robinson and kung fu whiz Bruce Lee are among the 20th century figures named to Time magazine's list of heroes and icons of the century, reports AFP.

The list, to be published in the magazine's June 14 edition, is the fifth in a series of six special issues profiling the most influential people of the century.

Other heroes and icons on the list are boxer Muhammad Ali, diarist Anne Frank, preacher Billy Graham, Everest climber Edmund Hillary and his sherpa guide Tensing Norwe, aviator pioneer Charles Lindbergh and soccer phenomenon Pele.

Also listed are US civil rights activist Rosa Parks, Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, Mother Teresa and Bill W, Alcoholics anonymous founder.

The list is accompanied by essays about the chosen ones, with former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger writing on Pele. In December, Time will name its person of the century, asking readers to vote by email. Slain Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin is currently leading, followed by Adolf Hitler.

Polls in Indonesia tomorrow

JAKARTA, June 5: "The election will be fun. Don't forget to vote," shouted out one of thousands of flag-waving opposition party supporters in a parade that choked a downtown street, reports AP.

Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous nation and, if all goes to plan on Monday, it will become its third largest democracy. About 130 million electors living on thousands of islands will be eligible to cast ballots.

The government promises it will be the freest parliamentary election in 44 years, held just 12 months after a wave of riots and protests forced authoritarian President Suharto to quit.

Overall it's been a remarkably peaceful and often euphoric election campaign, involving millions of people accustomed to freedom.

But outbreaks of sporadic violence among supporters of rival parties highlight the risks the sprawling Southeast Asian nation still faces in its unsteady transition to democracy as well as its worst economic crisis in a generation.

On the last day of campaigning in the capital Friday troops fired warning shots at an angry mob who attacked supporters of the ruling Golkar Party and burned campaign flags.

Former US President Jimmy Carter, who will be one of hundreds of foreign observers, says it could be the world's most important ballot held this year.

Electoral officials say more than 91 per cent of voters have registered and predict a high turnout for what promises to be the second only truly democratic poll held in 53 years of independence.

"I think people really want to take part in this historic vote. They want their voices heard," said one western diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

During Suharto's 32-year rule, Indonesia put on tightly controlled elections that he boasted were "festivals of democracy."

But there was nothing festive or democratic about them. Only three officially sanctioned parties were permitted to take part in stage-managed bal-

loting marred by vote-rigging, bribes and intimidation. The old autocrat's ruling Golkar Party always enjoyed overwhelming victories and later always ensured the Parliament dutifully re-endorsed him as president.

Election campaigning was almost always stained by violence and bloodshed fueled by the frustrations of the hamstrung electorate kept in place by military might.

Another report adds: A two-day cooling off period began in Indonesia on Saturday ahead of next week's crucial vote for a new Parliament in the country's freest election in 44 years.

After 17 days of campaigning, which had clogged the streets of Jakarta with millions of people, the city seemed eerily quiet on Saturday, a partial business day in Indonesia.

As the city began pulling down millions of campaign posters and banners from its buildings and streets, hundreds of international monitors prepared for Monday's vote.

Clinton seeks more funds to boost security at US embassies

WASHINGTON, June 5: The White House plans to ask Congress to approve a substantial funding increase to beef up security at US embassies worldwide, the Washington Post reported Saturday, reports AFP.

President Bill Clinton will present lawmakers with a plan next week that would allocate 11.4 billion dollars over 10 years for the construction of embassies and the hiring of security personnel, administration officials told the US daily.

This will be the most comprehensive and ambitious embassy construction program ever put in place, an unnamed senior official is quoted as saying.

After last year's twin bombings of the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, Clinton proposed spending three billion dollars over five years to reinforce security at existing embassies and finance new constructions of diplomatic missions.

But lawmakers and review panels investigating the bombings slammed the plan as woefully inadequate, prompting Clinton to revise the proposal, the Post said.

The new plan will be presented as an amendment to Clinton's budget proposal for the year 2000, the daily said. Additional funding for the security upgrades will come from cutting budgets for other

programs, a senior official told the Post, without specifying which programs would be affected. The official said, however, that State Department funding and foreign aid budgets would not be reduced.

The East Africa bombings left more than 200 people dead and 4,000 injured last August, raising questions about the safety of US diplomatic personnel abroad.

A probe by State Department panels headed by former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral William Crowe found security at Washington's diplomatic compounds overseas to be severely lacking.

2 army officers held for selling arms to criminals

MOSCOW, June 5: Two army officers in charge of arms supplies for a paratroop unit in Omsk region of Siberia, have been arrested on suspicion of trafficking arms to criminal organisations, ITAR-Tass reported Friday, says AFP.

Investigators found an illegal arms cache containing 50 rifles, 100 submachine guns, 278 grenades, 109 detonators and 24,500 bullets.

ITAR-Tass said the arms had been stolen during the repatriation of a former Soviet army unit based in Lithuania.



Indonesian students raise their fists and shout slogans as they hold a pro-reform banner yesterday during a demonstration at the Welcome Monument Statue which has become the capital's main rally point since the start of the electoral campaign. —AFP photo

China detains three more dissidents

BEIJING, June 5: Chinese police detained another three dissidents who were planning a private candlelight vigil to mourn those killed in the crackdown on the Tiananmen Square protests 10 years ago, a human rights group reported Saturday, reports AP.

Police hauled Yang Hai, Than Zhiping and Zhang Jiankang away from Yang's home in the central city of Xi'an on Friday, the 10th anniversary of the military assault, the Hong Kong-based Information Center of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said.

Hundreds died when troops backed by tanks shot their way through Beijing on the night of June 3-4, 1989, to end seven weeks of pro-democracy demonstrations on Tiananmen Square.

As in previous years, the government stepped up security and arrests ahead of the sensitive anniversary of the assault to prevent public commemorations.

Police detained nearly 140 people in the past month and were still holding at least 48 of them, the Information Center said.

Police also detained two men Friday on Tiananmen Square, one middle-aged, the other a youth, who separately tried to mark the anniversary.

Beijing police on Friday also detained Liu Feng, a Protestant who was going to meet friends to pray for those killed in the assault, the Information Center said.

Obasanjo sets up HR probe panel

ABUJA, June 5: Nigeria's New President Olusegun Obasanjo set up a panel on Friday to investigate assassinations and other human rights abuses during the past five years of military rule, reports Reuters.

A statement from Obasanjo's Chief of Staff Abdullahi Mohammed, a retired general, said the panel would determine whether the state or individuals were responsible for human rights abuses since January 1994. Obasanjo was sworn in last Saturday to end 15 years of military rule, less than a year after the death of dictator Sani Abacha made way for the latest attempt at democracy and a drastic improvement in human rights.

Obasanjo, a former military ruler who relinquished power in 1979, was among scores of political prisoners after being sentenced for his part in an alleged coup plot against Abacha.

His deputy during his last spell in office, Shugu Musa Yar'Adua, died under suspicious circumstances in prison for the same alleged plot.

The announcement of the new panel takes place exactly four years after the assassination of Kudrnat Abiola, the most vocal opponent of Abacha at the time and wife of presumed election winner Moshood Abiola, who died in prison last July.

WOMAN KILLED IN N IRELAND BLAST

A woman was killed today in an explosion at her home in the Northern Irish town of Portadown, Sky television reported, Reuter reports from Belfast.

It quoted local residents as saying the blast was caused by a pipe-bomb. A second device went off in a nearby street but there were no reports of casualties in that explosion. Army bomb experts were called in to investigate and the area was evacuated.

Annun lauds S Africa's next leader: UN chief Kofi Annan on Friday praised South Africa's next leader, Thabo Mbeki, and the South African people for the "exemplary" elections there this week, AFP reports from United Nations.

Annun lauds the positive and peaceful atmosphere in which the elections were conducted and the robust participation of South Africans in the democratic process," his spokesman Fred Eckhardt said.

Cholera claims 96 in Cambodia: The death toll from a cholera epidemic in the isolated northeastern Cambodian province of Ratanakiri has reached 96 and could rise further, health officials said today, AFP reports from Phnom Penh.

The epidemic has struck an impoverished area populated mainly by hill-tribe minority groups and recent returnees from refugee camps in Thailand, leaving aid workers fearing the toll could rise further despite an airlift of medical supplies.

Palestinians urge Israel to implement Wye accord

RAMALLAH, West Bank, June 5: The Palestinian cabinet called on Israel Saturday to implement the Wye River peace accord that was suspended by the outgoing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu six months ago, reports AFP.

"We consider implementation of this accord a priority," said a cabinet statement issued after a meeting in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

The Palestinians are demanding that Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak carry out the agreement reached last October under which Israel was to withdraw from 13 percent of the West Bank and release 750 Palestinian prisoners.

Netanyahu, who signed the Wye accord, suspended its implementation in December on the pretext that the Palestinians had not fulfilled their secu-

rity undertakings. Barak, who won a landslide election victory last month, promised during his campaign to implement the accord.

The Palestinians are also looking to Barak to halt Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

"Our aim is to bring an end to Israeli colonisation, which could lead to an explosive situation. It is unacceptable and against all accords," the cabinet said.

It also hailed the withdrawal of the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia from the strategic Jezzine region in southern Lebanon.

"This pullout is the result of the struggle by the Lebanese nation and proves that the occupation of Arab land cannot last forever," the statement said.

Australia detains 108 boat people

SYDNEY, June 5: The flood of illegal immigrants into Australia continued today with the seizure of a boat carrying 108 Chinese, reports AFP.

Authorities intercepted the 40-metre (132-foot) rusty fishing vessel about 10 nautical miles off the New South Wales coast, north of Sydney.

Customs spokesman Leon Bedington said it was carrying 108 people, including five women and four crew.

It docked in Sydney where immigration officers began questioning those on board to establish their status.

They were later transported to the Fort Hedland detention Centre in Western Australia.

Twenty-six boats carrying illegal immigrants have landed on Australian shores since the beginning of the year and about 600 boat people have been detained.

Discovery crew releases mirrored satellite

SPACE CENTER, June 5: Discovery's astronauts packed up the space shuttle Saturday for their return trip home and completed one last task: the release of mirrored satellite to be tracked by students around the world, reports AP.

The shuttle is due back at Florida's Kennedy Space Center early Sunday. It would be only the 11th time in 94 flights that a space shuttle has returned in darkness.

On Saturday morning, the seven astronauts stowed gear and inspected Discovery's systems to ensure everything was in working order for landing.

Canadian astronaut Julie Payette then ejected the Starshine satellite from the shuttle cargo bay. The 19-inch (48-centimeter) sphere, covered with 878 circular mirrors that were polished by schoolchildren, sparked like a disco ball as it shot out of Discovery.

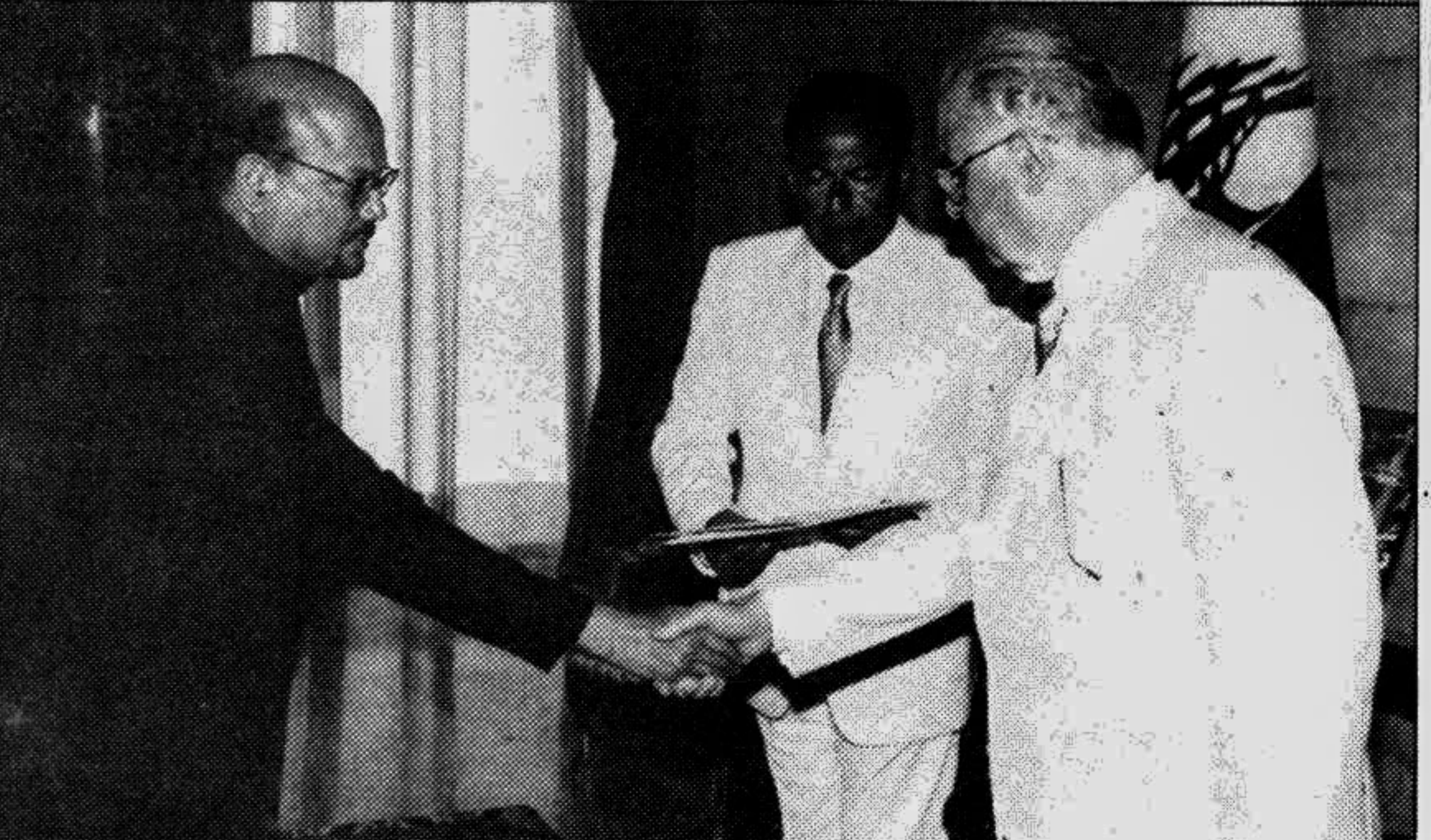
"The first thing we all saw was the flickering of the mirrors," Payette said. "It was glittering, and then the ball just went off. It's beautiful."

Thousands of students from 18 countries will track Starshine over a six-month period, measuring the time it takes to orbit the Earth. By year's end it will plunge through the atmosphere and burn up.

The satellite deployment capped a busy 10-day mission. Discovery and its crew blasted into orbit May 27 and two days later became the first shuttle to dock with the international space station. That night, astronauts Tamara Jernighan and Daniel Barry conducted an eight-hour spacewalk to attach tool bags and cranes to the outside of the outpost.

The crew ventured inside the station the next day to begin unloading 2 tons of supplies for future residents, ranging from water and clothes to laptop computers.

The crew of US space shuttle Discovery pose for a photo on Wednesday in the Unity module of the International Space Station. The Discovery's crew are scheduled to wind up the ten-day mission to the ISS with a landing in Florida early today. —AFP photo



New Bangladesh Ambassador to Lebanon Tufail K Haider recently presented his credentials to President General Emile Lahoud in Beirut. The picture shows the Ambassador shaking hands with Dr Salim El-Hoss, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Lebanon, and President Lahoud in the middle.

US State Department says China must improve its HR record for better ties

WASHINGTON, June 5: China must improve its record on human rights for US-Sino relations to reach their full potential, the State Department said on Friday, the 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, reports Reuters.

"US-China relations will not reach their full potential until China brings its human rights practices into compliance with its obligations under international human rights instruments," State Department spokesman James Rubin said.

A decade ago the Chinese government used tanks and troops to end student-led pro-democracy protests that resulted in bloodshed around Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

"Today marks the 10th anniversary of the tragic events in and around and near Tiananmen Square in Beijing and elsewhere in China," Rubin said.

"Over the past 10 years we have repeatedly urged the Chinese government to make a full accounting of the relatives — to the relatives of those who were killed during the violent crackdown — on demonstrators on June 3 and 4, 1989, and to release all those still serving sentences for their peaceful participation in the demonstrations," he said.

Some human rights activists have said the Clinton administration has not taken a strong enough stance on human rights with China because of its desire to reach trade agreements. "We recall those who spoke out for the values of freedom and democracy and again ask for China to right the wrongs of Tiananmen," Rubin said. "The United States will support, as it has in the past, Chinese citizens' exercise of basic universally protected human rights," he said.



The crew of US space shuttle Discovery pose for a photo on Wednesday in the Unity module of the International Space Station. The Discovery's crew are scheduled to wind up the ten-day mission to the ISS with a landing in Florida early today. —AFP photo