

# 318 UN peacekeepers, workers taken hostage in Sierra Leone



Turkey's new president Ahmet Necdet Sezer poses following his election on Friday, at the Parliament in Ankara. Sezer mustered 330 votes in a third-round ballot of the 550-member parliament, well over the required simple majority of 276 votes. He will be sworn in on May 16 for a single seven-year term, taking over from President Suleyman Demirel.

UNITED NATIONS, May 6: In a new and humiliating blow to the UN force in Sierra Leone, rebels there captured 208 Zambian peacekeeping troops and stole 13 UN armoured personnel carriers, the United Nations said Friday, reports AFP.

leader Foday Sankoh to call off his attacks and free the hostages. Eckhard said the estimate of 318 detainees included 92 people previously announced, less the four-man crew and two passengers of a UN helicopter who were released by the RUF on Friday.

north-west of Sierra Leone but were "later released minus their weapons." He said the number of casualties in a week of clashes with the RUF was four missing, presumed dead, and 12 wounded.

Eckhard recalled that "the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone has been authorised by the Security Council to use deadly force if necessary to protect itself, the people and the government."

## Iran reformers claim win in second-round vote

TEHRAN, May 6: Iranian reformers said today they had trounced their conservative rivals in the second round of parliamentary elections and vowed President Mohammad Khatami's reforms were now "irreversible," reports AFP.

# Lanka amends public security law

COLOMBO, May 6: The government amended a controversial law that was brought in as part of measures to fight Tamil Tiger rebels, a state-run newspaper said Saturday, as the military continued to claim victories in the battle for Jaffna, reports AP.

continued on the "offensive" against the rebels, said military spokesman Brig Palitha Fernando. The rebels seem to have run out of steam," Fernando said.

A Russian delegation has also arrived in Sri Lanka. The government has not given a reason for the Russian presence, but Sri Lanka has in the past bought arms and aircraft from the former Soviet Union.

## Musharraf for trilateral talks on Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, May 6: Pakistan army ruler General Pervez Musharraf yesterday proposed trilateral talks between New Delhi, Islamabad and Kashmiri leaders to resolve the Kashmir issue, reports PTL.

# 'Love Bug' virus: Computer experts identify a suspect

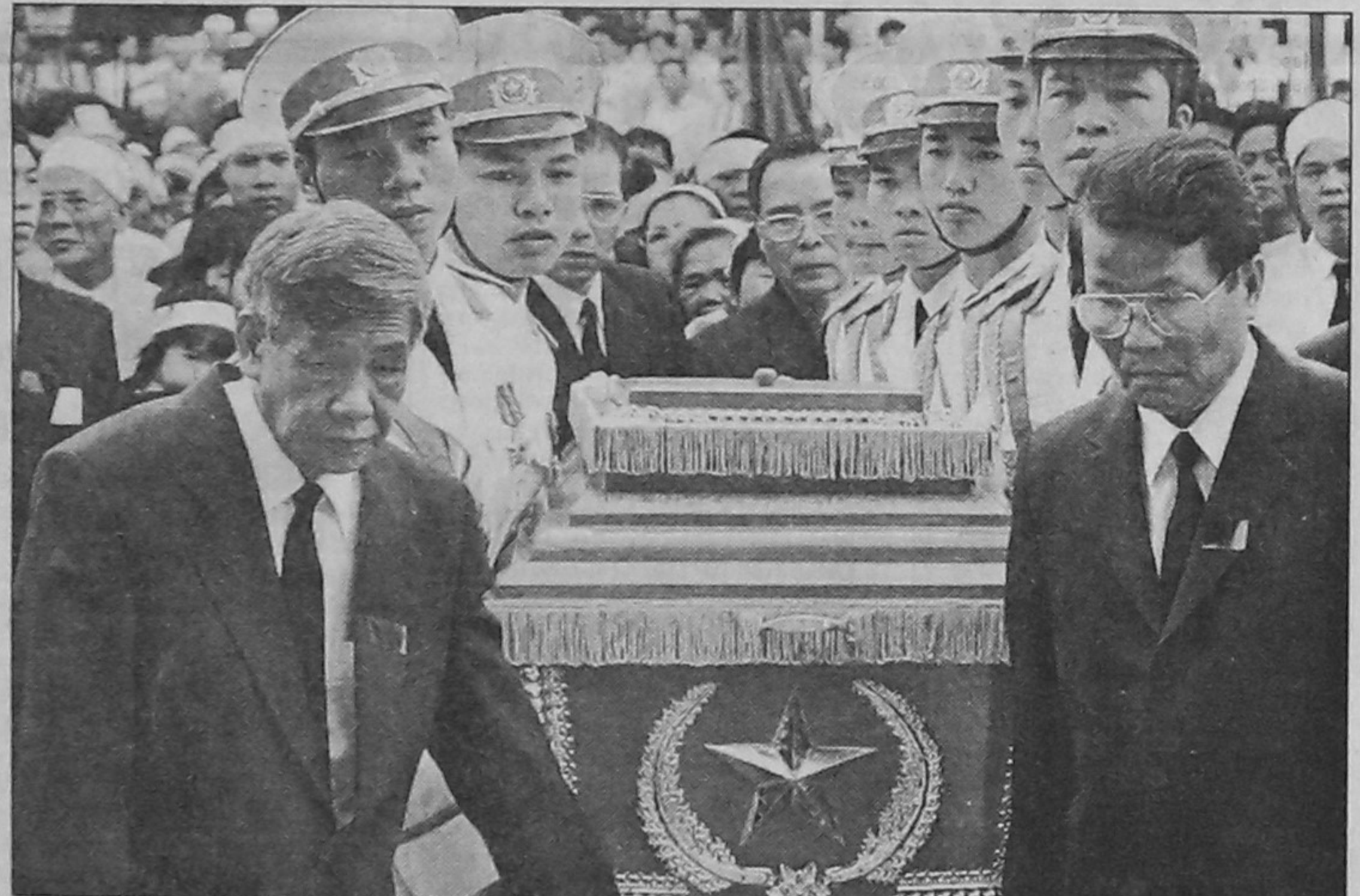
WASHINGTON, May 6: Computer security experts around the world scrambled today to cope with new versions of the "Love Bug" virus, as investigators homed in on the alleged hacker - believed to reside in the Philippines - who authored the voracious e-mail program, reports AFP.

lines and computer terminals, precisely to prevent intrusions by hackers. Defence officials said however, that just one percent of the system was affected.

Friday with new messages, including "Joke," "Very Funny," and the especially destructive "Mother's Day Order Confirmation" e-mail which overwrites the ".bat" and ".ini" files needed to start up a computer.

## Bombs explode in two buses: 6 killed in Philippines

BUTUAN, May 6: Bombs ripped through two passenger buses in the southern Philippines on Saturday, killing six passengers and injuring 35 people, a radio station reported, reports AP.



Vietnamese Communist Party Secretary General Le Kha Phieu (front L), Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong (front R), Prime Minister Phan Van Khai (R, behind soldiers) and National Assembly Chairman Nong Duc Manh (L, behind soldiers) carry the coffin of veteran leader Pham Van Dong during a state funeral in Hanoi yesterday. Dong, the first Prime Minister of Communist-ruled unified Vietnam, died last week at age of 96.

## Free 11 Kashmiri leaders, Amnesty Int'l asks India

NEW DELHI, May 6: Human rights watchdog Amnesty International asked India yesterday to release another 11 Kashmiri secessionist leaders held in federal prisons for months, reports AFP.

# Britain to revive N Ireland's power-sharing govt

BELFAST, May 6: Britain will revive Northern Ireland's power-sharing government within three weeks if feuding Unionists and republicans both back a new formula to break the peace deadlock, Prime Minister Tony Blair said Friday, reports AFP.

reinstating the institutions by May 22," Blair said. "It is now incumbent upon the parties and perhaps in particular the paramilitary organisations to give their response to the proposals that we have made," Blair said.

been working fervently to find a formula that will persuade the IRA to make the necessary commitment on disarmament that will in turn convince the Unionists that it is worth giving the power-sharing institutions another chance.

## Fire kills eight at Taiwan hospital

TAIPEI, May 6: A fire which investigators suspect may have been deliberately started killed eight patients at a hospital for seriously ill senior citizens in northern Taiwan early Saturday, a fire department officer said, reports AFP.

# Israel backs off from new strikes against Lebanon

JERUSALEM, May 6: Israel backed off from further reprisals against Lebanon Friday despite a new Hezbollah rocket strike on the north of the country, amid appeals for restraint from the United Nations, Britain, the United States and France, reports AFP.

Barak, speaking later on private Channel 2 television, nevertheless issued a new warning. "I would not recommend anyone launch rockets attacks on our people living in the north as we will react with harsh strikes against those responsible and those behind them," he said.

Barak also explained why there had been no reprisals by Israel after fresh Hezbollah rocket attacks on the north Friday.

## China stops tourist visas to foreign journalists

HONG KONG, May 6: Chinese authorities have stopped issuing individual tourist visas to foreign journalists in a bid to tighten its control on the press, a newspaper reported Saturday, reports AP.

# Conditions for ceasefire Philippine asks rebels to stop fighting, free hostages

JOLO, Philippines, May 6: The two Muslim separatist groups fighting the government are working together, and if they want a cease-fire, they should lay down their arms and free all their hostages to prove it, Philippines Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado said today, reports AP.

government in 1997, but conflicts have escalated recently. The MILF denies any connections to the two kidnappings riving the nation: A group of 21 hostages taken from a Malaysian resort island, including 10 foreign tourists, on April 23, and another group of eight remaining Filipino hostages out of a larger group taken on March 20.

Abu Sayyaf split off from the main rebel group, the Moro National Liberation Front, in 1991. The MNLF signed a peace treaty with the government in 1996.

## BRIEFLY

**Three killed in Kashmir:** Suspected Muslim separatist rebels gunned down a policeman along with his father and brother on Saturday in the Indian state of Kashmir, a defence official said, AFP reports from Jammu. A spokesman for India's Border Security Force said a group of men staged the attack at the home of 25-year-old constable Nazir Ahmed early Saturday in the village of Gool, some 150 kilometres from the Kashmiri winter capital of Jammu.

**EU-Russia summit May 29:** A summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and high-ranking officials from the European Union is due to take place on May 29, Russian diplomatic sources told the Itar-Tass news agency Friday, AFP reports from Moscow. The EU will be represented by the Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres - whose country currently occupies the union's rotating presidency - European Commission President Romano Prodi, and the EU's chief diplomatic adviser, Javier Solana.

**China's move reverses a decade-old policy of usually allowing foreign journalists to travel freely in the mainland when not working, the English-language daily reported.** For reporting purposes, they must have journalists visas, although Chinese authorities haven't always enforced that rule. The newspaper said the visa restrictions coincide with a Chinese government campaign to urge liberal Chinese academics, restrain foreign correspondents in Beijing, and to warn Hong Kong press against covering news advocating Taiwanese independence.

**Philippine asks rebels to stop fighting, free hostages** The MILF will strike. "We cannot have a situation where residents can't sleep because they don't know when MILF will strike." The government will only consider the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's 48-hour ceasefire offer under those conditions, Mercado said. It was the government's first statement linking the MILF with the much smaller Abu Sayyaf, which is holding a total of 29 hostages. "As far as we are concerned, they are operating with each other," Mercado said. "Our information is, they are moving in and out of each other's territory, they have been helping each other."



Passengers of the last commercial flight out of Jolo island in the southern Philippines. The airport was closed indefinitely due to security concerns.