

South African police admit killing Biko

Black activist was "handled robustly," but police say they did not intend to kill.

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — After 20 years of denials, five white former police officers have admitted killing black activist Steve Biko.

The five plan to seek amnesty for the 1977 killing, which galvanized apartheid's opponents and exposed to the world the brutality of the white-led government.

The officers will petition South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the panel led by retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and charged with investigating apartheid-era crimes.

Reports that five men planned to file an am-

nesty petition were published Monday in The Port Elizabeth Herald. Truth Commission spokeswoman Christelle Terreblanche confirmed that the panel was expecting amnesty applications related to Biko's death.

A source close to the five men, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Associated Press that the amnesty applications would assert that Biko was "handled robustly," but there never was any intention to kill him.

The Herald identified the former officers as Col. Harold Snyman, who led the team that interrogated Biko; Lt. Col. Gideon Niewoudt, a detective sergeant at the time; Ruben Marx, a warrant officer; Daantjie Siebert, a captain; and Johan Beneke, a warrant officer.

Biko, 30, died on Sept. 12, 1977. He had been arrested and apparently beaten in Port Elizabeth on the Indian Ocean coast. Denied medical attention, he was driven in the back of

a police van nearly 700 miles to Pretoria, where he died in prison. At the time, police denied beating him.

Urged black pride

The charismatic black leader developed a wide following during the early 1970s, urging South African blacks to take pride in their culture and to fight for control of their country.

The white government labeled him a terrorist.

At his funeral, pictures of his battered body were widely distributed and later published around the world. He came to symbolize the victims of apartheid brutality.

"He was very broad-minded and working to unify all the black organizations," said Donald Woods, a white former newspaper editor whose

friendship with Biko was depicted in the 1987 British film "Cry Freedom."

The Truth Commission will investigate the death and decide whether to grant amnesty to the former police officers. The panel was given the power to grant amnesty in order to promote reconciliation after decades of white-minority rule, which ended with the country's first all-race elections in 1994.

Widow wants justice

Biko's widow, however, wants justice for her husband's death. Last year, she and the families of two other apartheid victims went to South Africa's highest court to challenge the commission's right to forgive certain crimes.

The court rejected their application, saying amnesty was essential to learning the full truth about apartheid.

Chechnya votes

Residents see full independence coming, but Russia vows never to allow secession.

GROZNY, Russia (AP) — Barely two years after Russia poured troops into this tiny Muslim republic, Chechens voted triumphantly Monday in elections dominated by the separatist leaders Moscow tried so hard to subdue.

The separatists have been running the southern republic since the war ended in August. Many residents saw the presidential and parliamentary elections as laying the groundwork for full independence from Moscow.

But Russia has vowed to prevent Chechnya from seceding. The two sides appear headed for renewed confrontation if the Chechens move to cut all ties with Moscow, as they are almost certain to do.

After the disastrous military campaign, Russia has no appetite for more fighting. But it will try to put political, economic and diplomatic pressure on Chechnya to keep it in line.

Chechens were in a buoyant mood as they headed to the polls in snow-covered towns and villages.

"This election is about our freedom," said Hassan Khalidov, a former businessman who served as a rebel fighter in Chechnya's war against Russia. "The Chechen people have waited hundreds of years for this."

Turnout was heavy at 450 polling stations across the republic, with lines of people forming well before some stations opened. Polls were kept open an extra two hours to handle the crush before closing late Monday night.

Preliminary results from the presidential race were expected today.

Security was tight as soldiers with automatic rifles guarded the polling stations and told young men with guns to leave their weapons outside. But the atmosphere was relaxed and there were no reports of trouble.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and other top officials insist that Chechnya will not be permitted to secede, fearing that other ethnic groups in Russia might try to follow its example.

The Clinton administration reaffirmed its stand against secession. While the State Department said Monday the election was a necessary step toward reconciliation, spokesman Nicholas Burns added, "We adhere to a long-held principle that Chechnya is part of Russia."

New toys bite back at germs

A doctor wonders if the products are necessary, or just play on parents' fears.

PAWTUCKET, R.I. (AP) — Parents who worry that their children suck up germs when they suck on their toys have a new weapon against evil microbes.

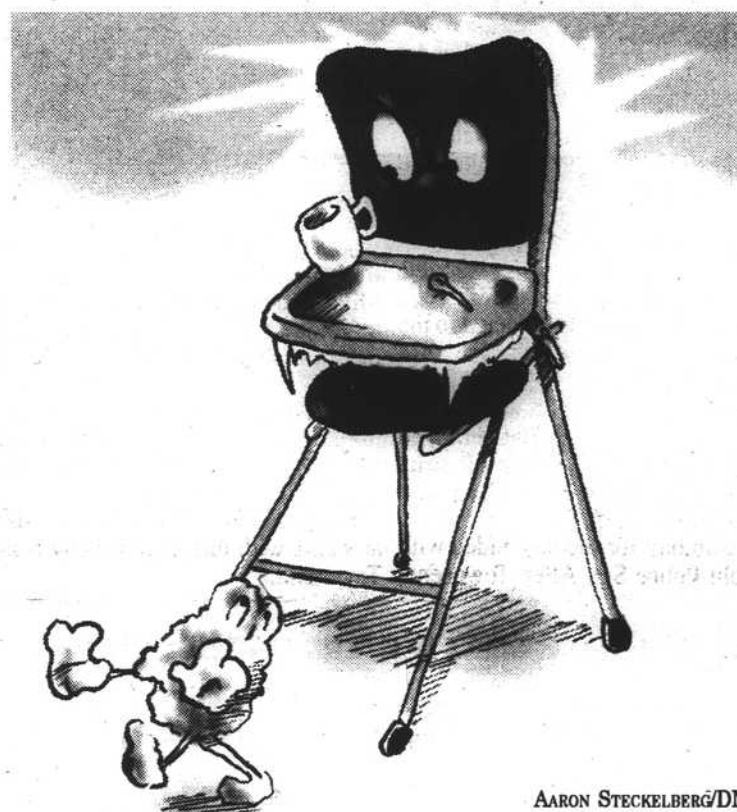
Hasbro's Playskool division introduced 15 anti-bacterial toys Monday. The toys are covered with an anti-microbial agent used for years in hospitals.

"Toys are hugged, they're loved, they're chewed on and drooled on," said Anna Dooley, vice president of marketing for Playskool. "But they also roll all over the floor. The dog may take an interest in them. They get passed from one child to another."

The company said it was encouraged by the reaction to the anti-bacterial 1-2-3 High Chair it introduced last May. The tray is treated with a process called Microban, which permanently bonds germ-killing pellets to plastic or fiber.

Hasbro officials said it stops mold, mildew, fungi and a range of bacteria that can cause sore throats, skin infections and stomach ailments.

Treated toys include the Roll 'n Rattle Ball, Busy Band Walker and an activity toy shaped like a cellular telephone.



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

A doctor who questions the need for anti-bacterial toys said they may tap unfounded parental fears.

"People may think it's a great idea, but I haven't seen anything in the medical literature that says we should be doing this," said Dr. David Carter. Carter practices in Pawtucket, where Hasbro is based.

Hospitals have used Microban products for more than a decade on things like surgical drapes, mat-

tresses and pillow covers.

The anti-bacterial toys won't eliminate all germs but provide extra protection, according to Glenn Cueman, president and chief executive officer of Microban Products Co. of Huntersville, N.C.

"If a toy is covered with gunk, it has to be wiped off — it's common sense," Ms. Dooley said. "We're just providing an additional tool for parents to help protect their family."

Nation/World

from The Associated Press

Swiss ambassador resigns over offensive document

BERN, Switzerland — Switzerland's ambassador to the United States resigned Monday because of a leaked document in which he likened handling the Nazi gold crisis to waging a war.

In the report, Carlo Jagmetti described the barrage of allegations against Switzerland as a "war" that the country "must fight and win on two fronts: foreign and domestic." He also wrote of opponents who "cannot be trusted."

Jagmetti did not name those opponents, but the newspaper that printed the leaked document quoted him as saying Jewish groups and Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, R-N.Y., "must be quickly satisfied."

Jewish groups have claimed that Swiss banks hold up to \$7 billion in savings belonging to Jews who died in the Holocaust. Swiss banks say the real amount is a tiny fraction of that.

Nelson appoints Stephan to state Supreme Court

OMAHA — Gov. Ben Nelson appointed Lincoln attorney Kenneth C. Stephan on Monday to fill one of the two vacancies on the state's highest court.

Stephan, 50, works for the Lincoln firm of Knudsen, Berkheimer, Richardson, Endacott and Routh where he focuses on labor and employment law.

Nelson now has appointed four of the seven members of the state's highest court, with the expected appointment of a fifth coming soon.

Stephan beat out five other opponents for the position representing the Lincoln district. Among the other nominees was Sharon Lindgren, a former assistant state attorney general. Had she been chosen, Lindgren would have been the first woman on the court.

Nebraska is one of three states — Wyoming and New Hampshire are the others — that has never seated a woman on its highest court, according to the National Center for State Courts in Williamsburg, Va.

Stephan replaces retiring Judge Dale Fahrbruch of Lincoln. The other vacancy was left by Judge David Lanphier, who was ousted last November by voters.

Cosby admits having affair

NEW YORK (AP) — Bill Cosby admitted in a television interview Monday night that he had an affair with the mother of a 22-year-old who claims to be his illegitimate daughter.

Cosby denied to Dan Rather on "The CBS Evening News" that he is the father of the young woman, Autumn Jackson. But in a portion to air Sunday on "60 Minutes," Rather asked if there was a possibility he could be.

"There is a possibility," Cosby said in a transcript. "If you said, 'Did you make love to the woman?' the answer is yes. 'Are you the father?' No."

"On the birth certificate, it's not my name," Cosby said in part of the interview aired Monday night. "I had not spoken to the mother during her pregnancy nor her delivery nor some 14 months until we finally spoke."

"Never — she never called me and then one day when I called her for a second rendezvous, she came and she made the announcement."

Cosby, who has been married to his wife Camille for 33 years, went back to work Monday on his CBS show "Cosby" for the first time since the Jan. 16 slaying of his 27-year-old son Ennis. He entered the Queens studio by a back

door and made no comment.

Federal prosecutors charge that on the day Ennis Cosby was shot to death changing a flat tire in Los Angeles, Jackson and Jose Medina, 51, sent a fax to Cosby's representative demanding money. She and Medina were arrested in Cosby's lawyer's office after allegedly trying to negotiate a \$24 million payoff.

In his first interview since Ennis Cosby was slain, Cosby told Rather his life must return to normal.

"I think it's time for me to tell the people that we have to laugh — we've got to laugh," Cosby said.

"But I just want the people to know — those who watch me, those who are with me — it's over for looking at me to do anything but go back to that which I am."

Outside the studio in Queens, a Bronx teacher, Lonnie Tait, said that despite Cosby's admission he had an affair, he is still "a great role model for black children." She delivered a large, hand-decorated sympathy card from 12 children enrolled in an after-school program.

One child wrote: "You're our hero."

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