

This week in history: April 13-19

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago

12 April 2026

25 years ago: Ethiopian Special Forces massacre 41 university students

On April 18, 2001, Ethiopian Special Forces remorselessly massacred 41 university students and unemployed young people at Addis Ababa University (AAU). Several hundred students sustained appalling injuries. Nearby homes of workers were ransacked, with police bludgeoning women and children. Those fortunate enough to escape were hunted down in churches and mosques and dragged into military vehicles. Police imprisoned many thousands of students at a police training building in the village of Sendafa, 38 kilometres (25 miles) northeast of the capital Addis Ababa. Distressed parents travelled to the village seeking life and death answers, but government officials stonewalled any discussion.

Two days before the bloodbath, student leaders met with Genet Zewdie, the Minister of Education and president of the University Senate. Zewdie set an ultimatum, either return to classes by noon on the April 18 or face an act of “voluntary withdrawal” from the university and outright banning. Peaceful demonstrations grew and spread throughout the city to additional universities, drawing in unemployed young people. Police and university officials responded with brute force, foreshadowing mass repression and killing.

The central point of contention was the democratic rights of university students. AAU administration had outlawed the student council and proscribed its newspaper. In response to this blatant act of censorship, students organized boycotts, demanding freedom of association, the removal of armed police stationed throughout the campus, the reinstatement of the student council and the right to publish the student newspaper.

The suppression of dissent at AAU mirrored a much broader political attack on oppositional parties and organizations, and even poor people. Ethiopia’s ruling coalition government of the Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the dominant Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) scoured the streets of Addis Ababa for homeless people to lock up. Around 15,000 political opponents of the regime were rounded up and put behind bars. Heavily criticized by the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) for human rights violations, TPLF forged ahead with more repression, accusing EHRCO of “promoting anarchy” and laying the foundation for silencing any criticism of the regime’s political crackdown.

Social unrest and political repression were symptoms of a two-year

war with neighbouring Eritrea that left over 100,000 dead, devastated the economy and pauperized the Ethiopian masses. The country ranked 171 out of 174 in the Human Development Index with one in ten of the population needing food assistance to survive and 6.2 million people labeled food insecure.

When the government reopened AAU, only allowing two days for course registration, students courageously refused to reenter until the police freed their comrades from jail cells and detention camps.

India and China announce restoration of diplomatic relations

On April 15, 1976, the Indian government announced the restoration of full diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China. This move ended a 15-year period of hostilities during which neither of the two most populous nations in the world had maintained an ambassador in the other’s capital.

In a statement to the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian Parliament), External Affairs Minister Y.B. Chavan announced the appointment of K.R. Narayanan as the new Ambassador to Beijing. Addressing the chamber, Chavan explained that the decision to elevate India’s representation back to the ambassadorial level was rooted in the government’s broader security and economic interests in normalizing relations with its neighbors and easing regional tensions.

The Chinese government reciprocated the move shortly thereafter. A spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Beijing welcomed the development, noting that the exchange of ambassadors was “a positive step toward the improvement of relations between the two countries.”

The Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union viewed the move with apprehension, fearing a weakening of the Indo-Soviet treaty agreements. Immediately after the announcement, a high-level Soviet delegation was sent to New Delhi carrying an urgent invitation for Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to visit Moscow later that summer to reaffirm the pact between the two countries.

Following the victory of the Chinese Revolution, the new Maoist-led People’s Republic of China (PRC) and recently independent India initially sought to establish friendly relations. India was among the first outside the Eastern Bloc countries to recognize the PRC in 1950, and the two nations sought to build an anti-colonial alliance under the

slogan of “Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai” (India and China are brothers).

However, by 1960 these relations had already broken down as the Indian ruling elite shifted to align with the United States and accepted billions of dollars in economic aid, while maintaining its military ties to the Soviet Union, at odds with China in what became the Sino-Soviet split. The Indian government allowed the CIA to stage operations against China from within India, including, most notably, orchestrating and supplying arms to the failed 1959 Tibetan Uprising.

Long-standing disagreements over the 2,000-mile India-China border began to militarize. In October 1962, Chinese forces launched a series of offensives across the disputed territories, decisively overrunning Indian positions. Although China declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew to its 1959 lines of control, India responded by ending formal relations.

By 1976, the world political situation had again dramatically changed. The US defeat in Vietnam and recent agreements with Beijing opened the door for India to follow in normalizing relations. India, facing a massive internal crisis and ruling through “emergency” dictatorial powers to suppress working class opposition, was eager to find an agreement with China that could help add some stability to bourgeois rule.

For China’s part, the reestablishment of relations signaled that the Maoists in the Chinese Communist Party approved the suppression of the Indian working class. They had long abandoned a program of internationalism and instead looked for any arrangement that would advance the position of their own bureaucratic apparatus.

75 years ago: European Coal and Steel Community founded with the Treaty of Paris

On April 18, 1951, the Treaty of Paris was signed to form the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), an early precursor to the European Union. The six countries that formed the ECSC and which signed the Treaty were France, West Germany, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

In addition to the ECSC, the Treaty of Paris established key executive and legislative bodies including the High Authority and the European Parliamentary Assembly. These institutions would later be reorganized into the European Commission and the European Parliament, respectively, of the present-day European Union.

The ECSC emerged from the Schuman Plan, proposed almost a year earlier by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman to organize free movement of coal and steel between France and West Germany by placing their production under the control of a single body. The plan, later expanded to include the other four countries which signed the Paris Treaty, was part of the post-war reconstruction of European capitalism, in an attempt by the ruling class to sustain economic development without leading to another imperialist war between the major powers.

The United States supported this initiative at the time, funneling billions of dollars in aid via the Marshall Plan to rebuild the European economies which had been devastated by war. Besides ensuring that American capitalism had a European market to receive its exports, the US also supported European integration for the purpose of creating a political bloc against the Soviet Union.

While the ECSC was officially in force for 50 years, it was

superseded by the European Economic Community in 1957, and later by the European Union (EU) in 1993. Despite the rhetoric of peace and international cooperation, the EU has functioned as an enforcer of austerity and war ever since its formation two years after the dissolution of the USSR.

100 years ago: Martha Graham premieres first dance pieces in New York

On April 18, 1926, choreographer Martha Graham’s first independently produced modern dance pieces, *Novelette* and *Chorale*, set the music of César Franck and Robert Schumann respectively, premiered at the 48th Street Theater in New York City.

These early works represent Graham in a state of artistic transition. She was beginning to shed the decorative, exotic style of her mentors in the Denishawn school of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shaw but hadn’t yet fully realized the stark modernism that would later define her work.

Reviews were favorable. The New York *Herald Tribune* noted: “Miss Graham gave a successful performance, showing ability to present a mood or a picture, with the assets of grace, agility, effective poses and well-chosen costumes.”

Denishawn performances were spectacles that used elaborate costumes (sometimes including silk and jewels) with heavy lighting effects, incense and intricate sets. They projected dance as a religious expression.

The starker Martha Graham that was fully to emerge in a few years would reflect, as she saw it, the harshness of the American landscape, and the inner world of fear, grief, rage or sorrow.

Graham developed a mode of dance in which the center of the body was the pelvis and the gut, moved by contraction, a sharp exhalation that curves the spine, that looks like a gasp of pain, followed by a release, an inhalation that expands the body. Her angular, weighted dance became a hallmark of modernism.

Earlier that month Graham founded the Martha Graham School of Dance at a small studio in Carnegie Hall where she worked and lived, an accommodation with no kitchen and no bathroom.

While she was not known as a political activist, like much of the American artistic intelligentsia, she opposed fascism. She is famous for her refusal to dance at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games on the invitation of Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda.

Graham’s statement of refusal read: “I would find it impossible to dance in Germany at the present time. So many artists whom I respect and admire have been persecuted... that I should consider it impossible to identify myself... with the regime that has made such things possible.”



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