

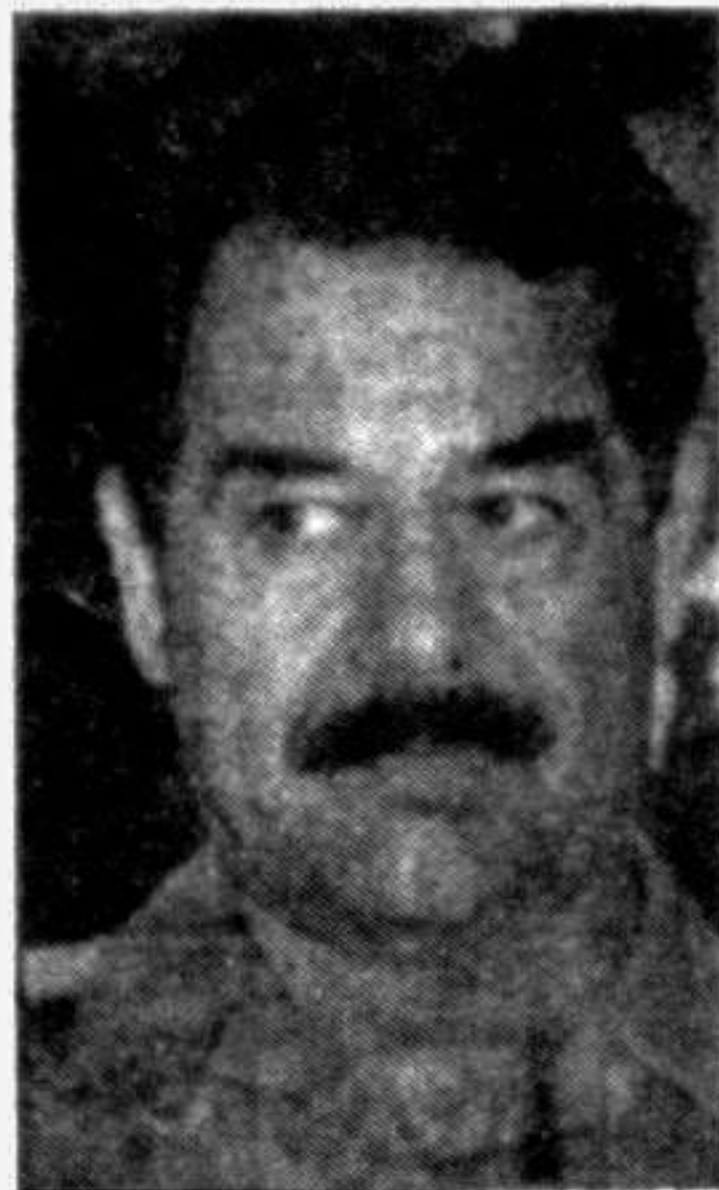
Multi-party polls in six months

Iraq to abolish Revolutionary Command Council: Talabani

LONDON, May 2: Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani said on Wednesday Iraqi officials had agreed to abolish the ruling Revolutionary Command Council and hold multi-party elections within six months, reports Reuter.

Talabani, a member of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front who held talks in Baghdad last week on autonomy for the Kurds, told BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) television negotiations were still continuing.

"The Iraqi delegation agreed to free elections for all parties and for multi-party life in Iraq. A new freely-elected parliament will function instead of all other bodies," Talabani told BBC's newsmight programme.



Saddam



Talabani

A message from Zakho (Iraq) adds: US and Allied forces, expanding their 'safe haven' for Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq, have now barred President Saddam Hussein's troops from a border zone about 120 km (80 miles) long and 60 km (40 miles) deep.

They will build a new refugee camp near Amadiya, 65 km (40 miles) east from the blue and white tents of their first camp at Zakho, American Commander

Lieutenant-General John Shalkashvili announced at his headquarters in Turkey.

The Allies hope the expanding zone will attract hundreds of thousands of refugees, mainly Kurds, from squalid mountain camps along the Turkish border where babies are still dying every day.

Refugees are already streaming down to Zakho but the numbers are in the thousands, a fraction of the huge exodus that took place in

March. Many in the camps remain afraid of Iraqi government reprisals for the failed revolt that followed Saddam's defeat in the Gulf war.

Baghdad has said foreign interference and proposals for a United Nations police force can only delay the return of refugees to their homes.

Kurds will suffer most if western proposals for a UN police force wreck an auton-

omy deal with Kurdish rebel leaders. Foreign Minister Ahmed Hussein Khudayer told the official Iraqi news agency on Wednesday.

Kurdish leaders disclosed on Wednesday that in addition to autonomy for their own people their understandings with Saddam's government include promises of democratic reforms covering the whole of Iraq and of amnesty for rebels in the Shiite south as well as the Kurdish north.

500 killed in Nigeria violence

LOOOS, May 2: The governor of Nigeria's northeastern Bauchi state has lifted a dusk-to-dawn curfew after an explosion of religious violence last week that may have left as many as 500 dead, reports AFP.

The Governor, Colonel Abu Ali, lifted the curfew Tuesday as life returned to normal, the official news agency NAN reported Wednesday.

Rampaging Muslims headed Christians last week, burned down churches and attacked shops and houses.

The agency said storekeepers had started to reopen their shops after a week hiding from the rioters in army and police barracks.

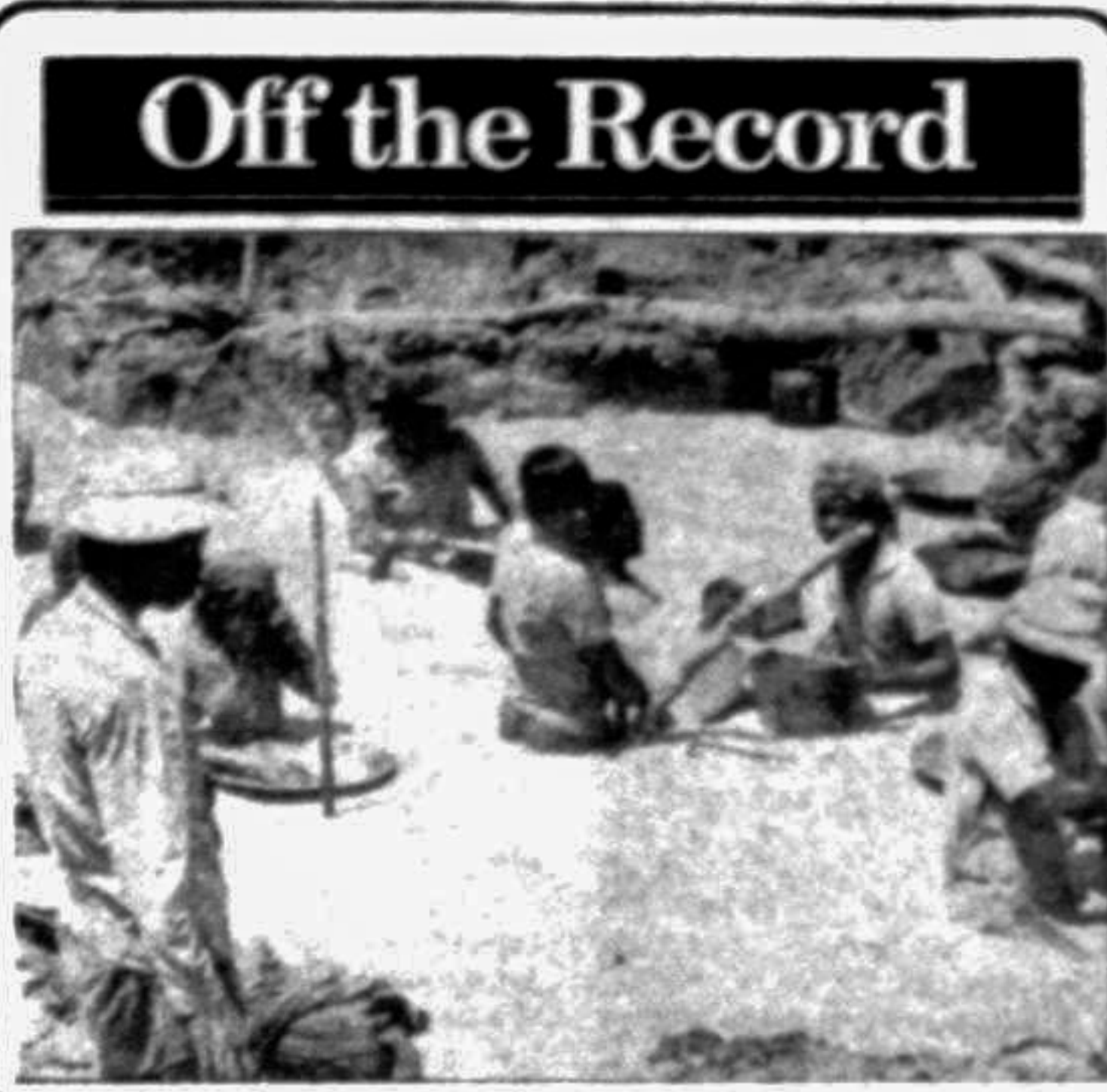
The governor appointed a special commission to make an official count of victims and to assess damage to churches and other property.

"Every community or nation needs another for its survival and sustenance," said Col Ali.

22 killed in S. Africa

JOHANNESBURG, May 2: At least 22 people were killed overnight in the township of Soweto most in battles between supporters of rival black South African groups, a police spokesman said Thursday, reports Reuter.

Police Colonel Tienie Halgryn said violence had erupted all over Soweto outside Johannesburg, but was concentrated in one district where clashes between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) began on Monday.



MEMOT (Cambodia): Gold diggers pan April 30 in eastern Cambodia near Vietnam's border where a gold rush has been going on since 1987. Starting this week, Cambodia's government is opening the richest areas to prospectors with intentions of taxing them 40 per cent of their findings, compared to 10 to 20 per cent in less fertile areas. The Vietnamese government wants to use the deposits to fund its war efforts against guerrillas backed by the US and China. — AFP Photo.

McCartney's birth certificate

HOUSTON: If Paul McCartney wants his birth certificate, he'll have to visit Brian Taylor -- and bring his checkbook, reports AP.

Taylor, 26, of Washington, paid 18,000 dollars at an auction Sunday for the former Beatle's birth certificate, sold to a US investor by the rock star's stepmother, Angela Williams.

Taylor said he hoped McCartney would contact him about it, but Taylor's investment would not be handed over lightly. "Sure, I'll sell it to him," he said. "I would have to talk about (the price) to Mr McCartney himself."

McCartney was born in Liverpool, England, on June 18, 1942.

"I'm just a Beatles freak and I had to have it," said Taylor. "It's a hobby that's gone a little too far."

A misplaced award

LOS ANGELES: The discredited front men for Milli Vanilli will forfeit the best new artist Grammy they won last year and hope it is given to the real singers on their hit album, reports AP.

Rob Pilatus and Fabrice Morvan said at a news conference Tuesday they would give up the Grammy.

They said they hoped the Grammy would be given to vocalists Johnny Davis, Charles Shaw and Brad Howell, who reportedly sang on the duo's only album, "Girl You Know It's True," which sold 7 million copies.

The lip-sync controversy erupted last week when Milli Vanilli's German producer, Frank Farjan, disclosed that Pilatus and Morvan did not sing on the album.

The awards committee of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, which hands out the Grammys, is to meet Dec 5 in New York to decide whether Milli Vanilli should be stripped of the honor.

A Ron greeting

PALATKA, (Florida): Carrie White, listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest living person, thoroughly enjoyed her six-tiered cake and even received a call from Ronald Reagan on her 116th birthday, reports AP.

Mrs White had been unhappy all day Sunday, according to a nurse's aide, because she had to wait until the party for a piece of the cake. But once the cake was cut, she livened up.

Mrs White was born in Florida on Nov 18, 1874. She has been listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's oldest person since last year.

She spent 75 years behind the walls of Florida State Hospital at Chattahoochee, having been committed there in 1909 for "post-typoid psychosis," a term doctors don't recognize today. She was released in 1984, at the age of 110.

Youngest student in British university

LONDON: An 11-year-old boy whose parents come from Sri Lanka was hailed on Monday as the youngest student in a British university, reports AP.

Ganesh Sittapalam is at school in Wimbledon, south London, with boys of his own age, studying the usual range of subjects, but for mathematics he goes to Surrey University in Guildford. He is managing a year's work in one day a week there among students nearly twice his age.

"You can't help liking him," fellow student Jon Lewis, 20, said. "He sits here blowing bubblegum while solving incredibly complicated problems."

Ganesh's parents are both mathematicians and his father, Arjuna Sittapalam, is an investment banker in London's city financial district.

Sharif angers bureaucrats

ISLAMABAD, May 2: Hurt by the Gulf war and a US aid cut-off, Pakistan's businessman Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has gambled on a stupendous privatisation plan to give his country's sputtering economy a kick-start.

Mr Sharif, who came to power after defeating Benazir Bhutto in elections four months ago, wants to privatise one-third of the country's 150 state-owned companies and sell \$ 30 billion worth of their stocks within one year.

Many of the public sector corporations, including banks, heavy machinery mills and food processing firms are white elephants and would probably be more efficiently run as private companies.

But the state sector employs nearly 1.5 million workers, and rapid de-nationalisation could mean that many people stand to lose their jobs.

Pakistan's vocal Trade Union movement is already up in arms, saying 'de-nationalisation is anti-national.' Some leaders of labour groups of state-owned banks have been arrested.

The All-Pakistan Trade Unions Organisation has been holding demonstrations against the sacking of employees from various industrial units in the southern port city of Karachi.

Mr Sharif's shock-treatment to revive the economy has also angered the country's powerful bureaucracy which has used plum state-sector jobs to reward its members and spread its tentacles of patronage over the administration.

Pakistan has been in a precarious position for over a year now, with a yawning balance of payments deficit equivalent to seven percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The country's economic growth has not been keeping pace with the whopping 3.1 percent per year growth in its present 112 million population.

The loss of revenue from the estimated 140,000 Pakistani workers in Kuwait and Iraq. And a sharp increase in its oil import bill worsened prospects for an economic turnaround.

Mr. Sharif, a millionaire businessman from Lahore, is firm believer in the free market system and hopes that private ownership

British soldiers assault Turkish provincial governor

ANKARA, May 2: Turkey on Wednesday ordered a group of British soldiers who allegedly "insulted and manhandled" a Provincial Governor inspecting a Kurdish refugee camp to leave the country immediately, Turkish state-run radio said, reports Reuter.

Foreign Ministry Under-Secretary Tugay Ozeri told the British Charge D'Affaires in Ankara all soldiers involved in the incident this week must leave. The number involved was unknown.

The incident occurred when British soldiers prevented Erdogan Ulker, Governor of Semdinli town in Hakkari province near the

Iranian border, from inspecting a refugee camp in Yesilova, the radio said.

One British soldier drew his gun as others pushed and shoved Ulker away from a spot where relief supplies were being handed out to the Kurdish refugees, the semi-official Anatolian news agency said in an earlier report.

Turkish soldiers at the camp intervened to protect the Governor, the agency said.

It was the worst incident so far involving Turkish soldiers or officials and the western Allied forces who have been working at the refugee camps along the Turkish-Iraqi border. There was no immediate

comment from British authorities.

Turkey strongly denied a British Press report saying Turkish soldiers had looted supplies intended for refugees from Iraq.

In London, Britain's Ministry of Defence said it was unaware that Turkey had ordered out the British soldiers.

A spokeswoman said the Ministry believed an incident in which a Turkish official was escorted out of a refugee food tent by a British marine "had been resolved in good terms."

"An unauthorised, unknown person marched in and he was marched out again," she said, adding that no arms or force were used.

"He was ejected by a Royal marine but it was no more than an incident which was quickly resolved and the group left in good terms," she said.

Two sr. army officers among 8 killed in Lanka

COLOMBO, May 2: Tamil tiger guerrillas shot dead two senior army officers and six soldiers and lost 20 of their own men during a fierce gun-battle in Northeastern Sri Lanka, a military spokesman here said Thursday, reports AFP.

Gunmen from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) killed a Major and a Captain leading an anti-guerrilla offensive in the jungles of Trincomalee Port district Wednesday, the spokesman said.

"We can now confirm that 20 terrorists were killed. Several weapons and ammunition have been recovered. We have lost two officers and six soldiers," the spokesman said.

He said four more LTTE men were killed in a confrontation in eastern Batticaloa district, also Wednesday.

Bush visits US top secret spy agency

FORT MEADE (Maryland), May 2: President George Bush visited the United States's most secret spy agency on Wednesday to honour the Gulf war contributions of "unsung heroes" who often refuse to admit their agency exists, reports Reuter.

Bush, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, made his first visit as President to the National Security Agency (NSA). The NSA is shrouded in more secrecy than the CIA, even though the Defence Department operation has more employees than its better-known counterpart.

"In this part of Maryland, the NSA is known as 'No Such Agency,'" said Vice-Admiral William Studeman, Director of the Intelligence Agency, during brief remarks outdoors.

"We occasionally come out of our shells. And this is one such occasion," he said at the start of ceremonies that were quickly moved indoors and closed to outsiders.

Before being ushered inside a building covered with reflective glass that made it impossible to peer into, Bush acknowledged "this visit is a bit of a departure from the routine here at NSA."

"This isn't exactly the kind of place where you can pull off a surprise party," he said. Bush, addressing employees gathered in a parking lot ringed with fences topped by barbed wire, said their undisclosed efforts had played a crucial role in routing Iraq's forces from Kuwait.

Rama Rao's film embarrasses party BJP accused of using religious issues in election campaign

NEW DELHI, May 2: A powerful revivalist Hindu party was accused of using sensitive religious issues in electioneering and India's autonomous Election Commission said Wednesday it would examine the allegations, reports AFP.

A senior leader from former premier Rajiv Gandhi's opposition Congress (I) party was quoted by the Press Trust of India (PTI) as saying that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Indian People's Party) was guilty of misusing religious issues in campaigning for the national polls to be held later this month.

Chief Election Commissioner TN Seshan promised at a press briefing here to look into the allegations.

"We will study and react at

the appropriate time. We have to do things carefully. It is not a question of just reading the BJP (Poll) manifesto but also other party manifestos," said Seshan, who has overall responsibility for conduct of India's May 20-26 polls.

He was asked by reporters about the BJP manifesto released Tuesday which promised voters that if it came to power it would build a temple for the Hindu God Rama and bring in "the kingdom of Rama".

The BJP's promise to build a Rama temple at a holy site where a mosque is standing in the northern Indian township of Ayodhya has been a subject of a fierce controversy which has degenerated into Hindu-Muslim violence in the past

four years. Hundreds have died in religious violence since 1986.

Seshan said the allegations had to be examined in the light of the Indian Penal Code (Criminal Laws), representation of people's act governing legislative election and campaign codes for political parties announced by the election commission.

Meanwhile, Arjun Singh, a senior Congress (I) leader, accused the BJP, the third largest seat-holder in the outgoing Lok Sabha, or elected lower house of parliament, of misusing religion to seek Hindu votes in the elections.

A Hyderabad report says: "Brahmarishi Vishwamitra" finally exploded on cinema screens across Andhra Pradesh

and it is difficult to decide whether it is worse as political propaganda or as cinema.

The much-hyped movie of National Front chairman and Telugu Desam leader N.T. Rama Rao, which created an extraordinary political rumpus when it was launched nearly two years ago, has little to recommend it and plenty to cavil at. Loud, garish and crude, the three-hour film is a tedious exercise in self-advertisement with a far from coherent political philosophy to put across.

The message Rama Rao tries to convey as champion of the down-trodden is drowned out by a jarring soundtrack and obfuscated by vulgar dance sequences and cheap studio sets. As a corpulent and floridly made up sage, Rama Rao shows barely a trace of the great mythological thespain he was before he plunged into politics. Sadly, the screen god who was metamorphosed into a real life saviour of his people in 1984 is in 'Brahmarishi Vishwamitra', reduced to a caricature of the actor and leader.

The ruling Congress (I) in the state which has been awaiting the release of the film with some trepidation is perhaps breathing easier now. Between 1987 and 1989 partymen had filed several writ petitions against the making of the film by the then chief minister but had failed to get a stay order from the courts. More recently it had complained to the Chief Election Commissioner that the film violated the election code of conduct and the chief electoral officer of the state has been asked to view the film and report on its political content to the CEC.

Rama Rao however insists 'Brahmarishi Vishwamitra' has nothing to do with politics or the elections. Its release at this time was nothing but a coincidence. But few have forgotten the gala launch of the film in June 1989 when a battery of National Front leaders had descended on his Nachram studios for the Muhurat shot.



A VOTE-CATCHING TACTIC: "Vishwamitra" Rama Rao with "Menaka" Meenakshi Sheshadri in the Telugu film "Brahmarishi Vishwamitra"

ANGOLA, rebels agree on peace:

Angola's Leftist government intialled a peace agreement with the US-backed rebel movement Unita on Wednesday night to end 16 years of civil war, Reuter reports from Estoril, Portugal.

The agreement, which will lead to a ceasefire after it has been formally signed later this month, provides for multi-party elections in the second half of 1992.

It was intialled by the government's chief negotiator, Lopo Do Nascimento, and Unita Vice-President Jeremias Chitunda at a ceremony in Estoril, a Lisbon seaside suburb, after a final round of Portuguese-mediated peace talks.

Bush, Baker talk on ME: President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker discussed Wednesday the future of US peace efforts in the Middle East after three trips by Baker to the region produced slim results, reports AFP from Washington.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said following the 30-minute talk between Bush and Baker at the White House that the U. government had made no decision on future peace efforts.

"We have nothing to announce at this point. They're still reviewing the situation and the options," Fitzwater said.

Turkey hands back Soviet copter: Turkey on Wednesday handed back a helicopter which a Soviet pilot had used to defect to Turkey a week ago, making a surprise landing at the Erzurum air base, AFP reports from Ankara.

But a source close to the Turkish Foreign Ministry said the pilot had not and "will not be" handed over to the Soviet authorities as they had demanded.

The pilot, Lieutenant Irek Gimatov, has asked for political asylum in the United States, but it was not known whether he had been given a favourable response.

Bush to meet Perez: President Bush will meet at the White House May 9 with UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar for talks on the Iraqi refugee crisis and other issues stemming from the Gulf War, the White House said in Washington reports Reuter.

The President and the UN Secretary General can be expected to address a wide range of international issues, including the Iraqi refugee situation and other post-Gulf crisis issues," spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said in a statement.

'Afghanistan forgotten': The international community has forgotten Afghanistan, and a United Nations plan to revive the war-ravaged land is short of funds, a senior UN official said on Wednesday, in Geneva, reports Reuter.

Benon Sevan, Coordinator of UN Assistance to Afghanistan, told a news conference only 133 million dollars had been contributed so far towards a 1991 budget of 232.4 million dollars of economic and humanitarian aid.

Soviet minister to visit Israel: Israel said on Wednesday that Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh will visit the Jewish State on May 10, the highest Soviet official to come since Moscow severed diplomatic ties in 1967, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Israel has said it would allow the Soviet Union to co-sponsor a Middle East peace conference with the United States if it restored full relations.

"As a result of consultations between Foreign Minister David Levy and the Soviets, it was established that Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh will visit Israel on May 10," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.