- AFP photo

Off the Record

MOSCOW: Picture released May 24 by Tass showing Soviet

President Mikhail Gorbachev's bodyguards. It is the first

time in Soviet history that photographers are allowed to

take pictures of the KGB secret service bodyguards taking

Who's Gorby?

into a peasant family and started working at the age of 15 as a machine-operator at a tractor station? That he has two higher

education diplomas: one in agriculture and the other in law? That Raisa Gorbachev lectured at colleges for 20 years and

defended a thesis to become a Candidate of Philosophical Studies (equal to Ph. D. in the West)? That the Gorbachevs

daughter Irina and her husband Anatoli are both doctors and

bachev and his close relatives along with other facts in the

summit. President Bush made a play on the name of the vil-

lage where M. Gorbachev was born - Privolnoye. Conveying

the meaning of this word in English as "free," he added that

nowadays it is associated with new winds of freedom blowing

through Europe and all over the globe. But if journalists

wanted to find this Russian toponym in the latest edition of

the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia and check its spelling, they

would search in vain for an article about Gorbachev in volume

7 (entries from Gogol to debit, in Russian alphabetical order)

has a short reference about the Soviet leader in its supple-

ment. It says that Gorbachev was born on the 2nd of March.

1931, in the village of Privolnoye of the Krasnogvardeisky

Region, Stavropol Territory (Northern Caucasus). In 1946-

1950 he worked as a combine-operator's assistant. In 1955

he graduated from Moscow University (law faculty) and in

1967 - from the Stavropol Agricultural Institute. From 1956

he held office in the Young Communist League (YCL) and

since 1966 in the Party. Member of the CPSU Central Com-

mittee since 1971, Secretary of the CPSU CC since 1978.

Only volume 30 of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (1978)

reference book "Who Is Who in World Politics," reports IAN.

You can find this and other information about Mikhail Gor-

In one of his speeches during the recent Soviet-American

MOSCOW: Did you know that Mikhail Gorbachev was born

care of the Soviet leaders, Tass said.

have two children?

which came out in 1972

Cheney starts foreign tour

WASHINGTON, May 25: US Defense Secretary Dick Chency will departed Washington Saturday for a 10-day foreign tour which will take him to France, Belgium, Israel and Egypt, the Pentagon announced Thursday, reports

Defense Department spokesman Pete Willams said Cheney would be received by French President Francois Mitterrand and meet with new French Prime Minister Edith Creasson.

The US Defense Secretary also is scheduled to meet with his French counterpart Pierre Joxe, with whom he held talks recently in the United States. and with French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas.

After visiting France, Chenev will travel to Brussels May 28 for a meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) Defense Planning Committee Nuclear Planning Group.

Cheney then will go on to Tel Aviv

The last stop on the US Defense Secretary's swing will be Cairo.

Alleged Tamil killer arrested

Rajiv had a secret meeting with LTTE representative

NEW DELHI, May 25: The slain former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi recently had a secret meeting with a Tamil guerilla organisation now suspected in his assassination, a respected newspaper reported Saturday, report AP.

An unidentified representa-, tive of the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam sought the meeting in a bid for reconciliation with the man considered one of the group's worst enemies, said The Hindu, a national daily based in the southern city of Madras.

The paper said the Tigers. expecting Gandhi to return to office in elections now under way, were looking to him as "the only leader who could do something effective for the Tamil issue."

· The Hindu, known to have good sources with the Tiger's supporters in India, said Gandhi met the guerilla representative on March 5 at his New Delhi home.

The Congress Party spokesman was not immediately available to comment on the report. A spokesman for the Tigers in London did not answer his telephone.

The paper gave few details of the meeting, but said both sides appeared satisfied with the renewed contact. Gandhi sent greetings to the Tigers' elusive commander, Velupilnai Prabhakaran.

About 200,000 Tamtls have fled Sri Lanka to southern India, home to India's own 60 million Tamils. Many Tigers are suspected to be among the

India's national government dismissed the state government of Tamil Nadu last January, reportedly under pressure from Gandhi, for failing to control Tamil militants.

motive for his murder. Police said Gandhi was killed by a woman with Tamil features who denoted plastic explosives strapped around her waist. She has not been identified.

Gandhi's supposed interven-

tion was cited as a possible

AFP adds: Police have detained a Sri Lankan Tamil militant in India's, Tamil Nadu state on suspicion of being linked to former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, newspapers reported to-

The suspect was identified as a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ecclam (LTTE). Sri Lanka most powerful separatist group, which is believed to have carried out the suicide bombing that killed Gandhi Tuesday night.

The Times of India and other newspapers said police were interrogating the militant, who had 10,000 rupees (500 dollars) and a cyanide capsule on him, for possible links with Gandhi's slaying in the Tamil Nadu town of Sriperumpudur.

LTTE guerillas campaigning for an independent homeland in Sri Lanka's northeast ern province are known to carry cyanide, which they often take to avoid capture.

The newspapers said the

unnamed militarit was ranglit near Vedaranyam, coastal town in Tamil Nadu, which is separated from Sri Lanka by a nar row strip of sea called the Palk

No further details were

Gandhi, 47, died instantly at Sripermpudur, near Tamil Nadu's capital Madras where he had gone to address an election rally, when a concealed plastic explosive reportedly carried by an unidentified woman went off.

At least one Indian Federal Minister has blamed the LTTE for the murder but the group has denied the charge.

Gandhi ordered thousands of Indian troops in to Sri Lanka in 1987 to crush Tamil separatism. The Indians fought a bush war against the LTTE for about two years in which thousands were reportedly killed.

Film stars pay homage to Rajiv

NEW DELHI, May 25: Large number of film stars were among those who came to pay their homage to the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, reports PTI.

Amitabh Bachchan a friend of Gandhi was seen helping in making various arrangements for smooth flow of visitors in the VIP room at the Teen Murti Bhaban.

The Congress(I) candidate from New Delhi constituency Rajesh Khanna, and Sanjay Khan, maker of the "Sword of Tipu Sultan" Teleserial, were among those who came to pay their respect to Gandhi.

US watching developments in India

WASHINGTON, May 25: The United States is watching with great interest political developments in India in the wake of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and anticipants expanded wide-ranging cooperation with New Delhi, the State Department said Friday, reports AFP.

We are watching with great interest as the time-tested process of Indian democracy rights itself from this senseless blow and continues on the path to free and open elections to determine who will lead India, said spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler.

We anticipate US Indian relations based on shared democratic values, trade ties nearly 300 years old and growing scientific and technological cooperation will continue to improve and expand, she told a press briefing.

from both left and right, had

been expected to be the

biggest party but without a ma-

Sonia Gandhi its leader in an

overt attempt to use her as a

magnet for sympathy votes in

the remaining 60 per cent of

voting, postponed to June 12

politics, Sonia Gandhi said no.

she is highly unlikely to

change her mind, despite ap-

peals for her to reconsider.

Those who know her say

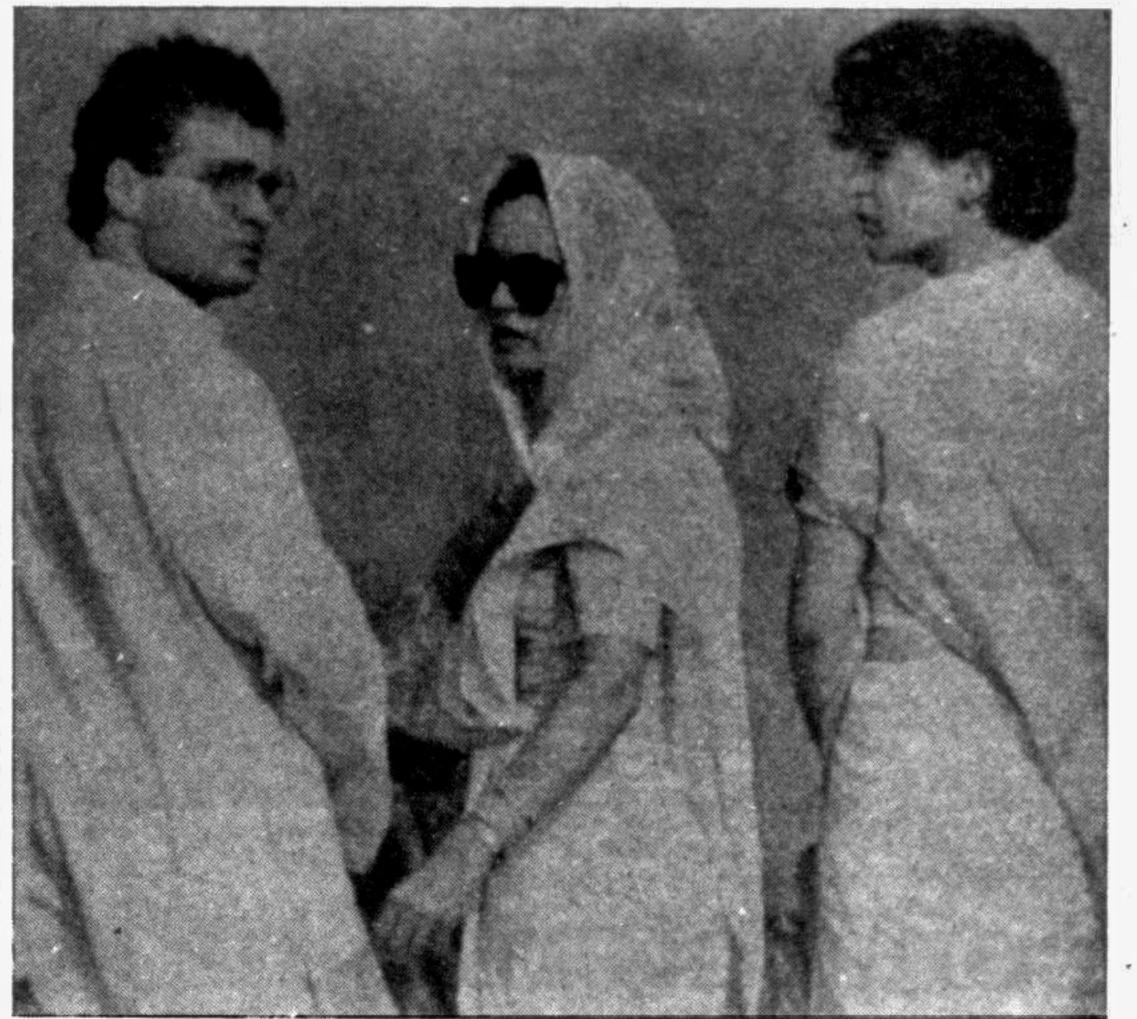
This leaves Congress grop-

politely, but firmly.

Known for her dislike of

and 15.

Congress promptly elected



NEW DHLHI: Son Rahul (R), widow Sonia (C) and daughter Priyanka (R) turn to chanting mourners during the funeral of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi May 24 at Shakti Sthal on the banks of the holy Yamuna River in the Indian capital. - AFP photo

Another kind of Operation Desert Storm BUBAI: The Gulf emirate of Dubai has begun storming

buildings in search of rats, which they say have increased to a level that threatens public health, reports AFP.

The new Desert Storm is part of a two-month operation to "flush out the rodents from residential areas and destroy their concentrations, an official at the emirate's Health Department

The operation, backed by strong pesticides has killed around 2,000 rats and another 2,000 mice since it was mounted last week.

The figures include only those collected. Many others died in their holes, said John Balfour who directs the pest control section at the Health Department.

It is the emirate's second such campaign against rodents. which find an ideal habitat in the hot desert conditions. Last year, an anti-rodent drive killed more than 18,000 rats and

14,000 mice. Apart from causing disease, rats have been blamed for

many electrical accidents after gnawing at power cables.

Poor Japanese bachelors

TOKYO: Japanese bachelors are choosing the single life because the few women they meet want rich and successful men, a recent survey said, reports Reuter.

Four out of five single men surveyed said they did not expect to marry despite intense social pressure to do so, a researcher at the Altmann Research Institute said on Friday.

Most of the 500 bachelors who responded to the survey said prospects for marriage were poor because they had few chances to meet a spouse and insufficient time to socialise. the researcher said.

Those surveyed also said women expected to do much in a suitor, such as money and a good career.

Japanese women's magazines carry regular reports that the marriage market is wide-open for women.

Government statistics show that there about the same number of eligible Japanese men and women.

orities have charged two men with conspiring to kill Thailand's queen, a former prime minister and a former army

Vitit Jandawong, 52, Karn Koonmee, 38, were charged Friday in Bangkok Military Court with attempted murder, conspiracy, possession of explosives and criminal associa-

The prosecution charged they and 43 others plotted between February and October get the missile launcher into 1982 to assassinate Queen

Prem Tinsulanonda and thenarmy chief Gen. Athit Kamlang-The other alleged plotters,

including the reputed ringleader, Maj. Gen. Manoon Roopkajorn, remain at large. According to charges filed

with the court, the group met on Sept. 29, 1982 to plan the assassinations. Court records charge the group intended to kill the three on Oct. 20 at the Queen's Cup soccer championship at the National Sports

They planned to load two pushcarts with an antitank missile launcher, four M72 missiles, 16 hand grenades

stadium after the closing ceremony, the group planned to fire the missiles into the queen's procession, which would have included Prem and Athit. Then they would finish the job with the hand grenades and use the smoke grenades to create confusion and help their escape, prosecutors charged.

But the plan was never carried out for several reasons, prosecutors charged.

The plotters were unable to the pushcarts and had to leave their main weapon behind, they alleged. Security was tighter than expected, the crowd began leaving at the same time as the queen, and after the dignitaries left the stadium the plotters were uncertain which car they were

taries. News reports speculated it was because the queen was a strong supporter of Prem and Athit, who were unpopular among some elements

But when the military seized

4 mourners burn themselves to death

NEW DELHI, May 25: Four mourners burned themselves to death Friday in the state where former Premier Rajiv Gandhi was killed, as related violence left at least seven others dead, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports AFP.

The four self-immolations took place in the southern state of Tamil Nadu where Gandhi was campaigning when he was killed in a bomb attack late Tuesday.

The four unnamed persons poured kerosene over their clothes and set themselves ablaze in incidents reported from three districts of the coastal state of 55 million people state government officials were quoted as saying.

They took the suicide deaths by mourners in Tamil Nadu to six, with two similar incidents reported in the last

two days. PTI said five people were killed in incidents of violence by mourners elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, where nine people had died in rival group fights in the last two days.

In the northeastern state of Tripura, Gandhi's Congress (I) party activists Friday fought with supporters of the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI-M) in Udaypur town, PTI reported.

Two people were killed and four more suffered stab wounds, police were quoted. as saying.

Perez visiting Africa, Europe: UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar left Friday on a three-week tour of Africa and Europe, AFP reports from New

His spokesmen, Francios Giuliani, said the UN Chief would meet Saturday in Marrakech with King Hassan of Morocco to discuss a planned, UN-sponsored referendum in the Western Sahara.

After stopping off in Algiers Sunday, Perez de Cuellar will head to Portugal for the signing on May 31 of agreements between the Angolan Government and US-backed rebels of the union for the total independence of Angola.

Collaborator stabbed to death: A 48-year-old Palestinian man who had been accused by his fellow-Arabs of collaborating with the Israeli occupation forces was found stabbed to death in a Gaza Strip camp on

Friday, Palestinian sources said, AFP reports from Jerusalem. They said the body of Ali el Alloul had been found near his home in the Jabalia Refugee Camp. Alloul had been kidnapped in the camp two days earlier.

He was the 328th Palestinian to die as an alleged collaborator since the current uprising began in the occupied territories in December 1987, according to an official toll.

20 Iraqi hospitals damaged: More than 20 Iraqi hospitals suffered serious damage during the Gulf War, with losses to all health facilities amounting to more than 425 million dollars, the Iraqi News Agency reported Friday, AFP says from Nicosia.

Total damage was estimated at 141.902 million dinars (425 million dollars), according to the agency, INA, monitored in Cyprus. "Damage to buildings was estimated at 25.6 million dinars,

while the value of (lost) equipment and medicine is of the order of 116.302 dinars." a top health ministry official quoted by INA said. US asks Burma to implement poll results

The US State Department Friday urged Burma to implement last year's election results and release all political prisoners, AFP reports from Washington. "Despite its promises, the military regime has taken no

steps to transfer power to a civilian government", said department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler. She said many Burmese, including leaders of the winning party in last May's election, remain imprisoned "for political

reasons".

US reserves judgement on Lebanon-Syria accord: The US State Department reserved judgment Friday on a treaty that establishes a special relationship between Syria

and Labanon, reports AP from Washington. The judgment will depend partly on whether the treaty signed in Damascus on Wednesday supports Lebanon's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, spokeswoman

Margaret D. Tutwiler said. "It's my understanding that Lebanon and Syrian have been working on such a type of agreement, I believe, for six or

seven years, she said. The treaty was signed by Syrian President Hafez Assad and Lebanese President Elias Hrawi, whose government is backed by Syria. It provides for the creation of joint government institutions for cooperation in defense security, foreign policy and the economy.

Rebels capture Eritrea's capital: A rebel spokesman Friday said fighters of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front have captured long-embattled Asmara, capital of the Ethiopian province of Eritrea, AP reports from London.

"Asmara is under our total control. The day the Eritrean people have been waiting for has finally come," said Yemane Ghebremeske "We have total confirmation. We have our own means of communication, and it is confirmed." He declined to elaborate on his sources of information, and

had no details on when Ethiopian forces surrendered. The Foreign Office said it could not confirm the report. Arafat warns of renewed stir: Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat Saturday warned of an escalation of violence in the occupied territories and renewed hijackings of aircraft if no progress

was made on the Palestinian issue, reports AFP from Vienna. "If we do not move towards a solution of the Palestinian problem, I can not say how long I will be able to keep them from hijacking airplanes," the PLO leader told the Austrian newspaper Die Presse, referring to his fellow-Palestinians.

Congress now tasting fallout of Indira's dictatorship Monday. Congress, challenged

NEW DELHI, May 25: With slain Indian leader Rajiv Gandhi cremated in an atmosphere of national gloom and despair, his fractious Congress Party turned attention to an uncertain future today, reports

Reuter. Top Congress officials arranged to meet to decide who should lead them into the remaining phases of a general clection, having failed to persuade Gandhi's Italian-born widow Sonia to take on the

Without a member of the Nehru dynasty at its head. Congress has no nationallyknown figure to lead it at a moment of serious crisis for India, deepened by a woman suicide bomber who blew up Gandhi at an election rally on Tuesday.

India's ills — insurgencies caste violence, religious divisions, its bloodiest election campaign and a major economic crisis - were largely put aside for a few hours on Friday as Gandhi was given a state funeral.

The mood was more sad than angry with no repetition of the mayhem that followed the 1984 assassination of Gandhi's mother and predecessor, Indira Gandhi, by Sikh bodyguards.

Then, at least 3,000 Sikhs were killed in revenge.

A memorial will be built to Rajiv Gandhi where he was cremated on the banks of the Jamuna, a tributary of the

Ganges river sacred to Hindus. It will stand alongside others to his mother and nonviolence advocate Mahatma Gandhi, who was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic shortly after leading India to independence from Britain in 1947.

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's.

first Prime Minister, father of Indira Gandhi and grandfather to Rajiv Gandhi is also remembered there. Between them, the Nehru

dynasty had ruled India for all but five years since independence. Rajty Gandhi's assassination

eliminated all previous predictions on the outcome of the election, already hard to call. Polling had started on

Pakistan won't cut defence budget

ISLAMABAD, May 25: Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz was on Friday quoted as saying Pakistan would not cut its defence budget despite financial constraints because of a perceived threat from neighbouring India, reports Reuter.

In remarks published by local newspapers, he said Pakistan could not risk reducing defence spending.

On Thursday Aziz is to announce the national budget for the financial year beginning on July 1 which he said was likely to have a huge deficit. Pakistan has always cited its

rivalry with India for a contin-

uous increase in defence

This was a reference to the assassination this week of former Indian Prime Minister Raftv Gandhi and tension between the two countries over a Muslim revolt in Indian-ruled

Kashmir.

"We can not give second priority to our defence under the prevailing geo-political conditions in the region," he



Embassy May 24 as Indian Ambassador, Abid Hussain looks on. Bush paid his respects at the embassy in memory of assassinated former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and called for - AFP photo calm in the troubled country.

ing for a leader as it confronts spending, and Aziz said the surging right-wing. Hindu-"dangers to Pakistan's security revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party have increased because of the and the left-leaning National situation across the border be-Front alliance that has eaten coming uncertain and instainto traditional Congress support among Muslims and low In India, say "Rajiv" and it

could only mean Gandhi, even in the remotest village. Congress has no one left so widely known.

That was largely the fault of Indira Gandhi. She systematically undermined any potential challenger, many of whom quit and are now in the non-BJP opposition.

Those who stayed are either regional party bosses reluctant to let each other take over or those with standing in the party but no political base Most of the betting is on

Narasimha Rao, one of those with no political base. Analysts say it would make sense to appoint him interim leader to get the party through elections. He has been in poor

health and is the main com-

promise candidate.

former Foreign Minister P.V

But he is not a dynamo and there are still questions about whether Congress can garner a sympathy vote. Some analysts think Gandhi's killing might usher votes towards the BJP. with its image of discipline. competence and stern line on law and order.

Gandhi's death not only ends the Nehru hold on power It could herald the demise of the Congress Party and radically change India's future.

Plot to kill Thai Queen: Two charged BANGKOK, May 25: Auth-

chief of staff, reports AP.

Sirikit, then-Prime Minister

and nine smoke grenades, the records allege.

As the dignitaries left the

No reason was given in the charges as to why the plotters wanted to kill the three digni

of the powerful Thai military. Authorities did not say why it took more than eight years to bring charges in the case.

power last Feb. 23.