

US citizens warned not to travel to Kashmir

WASHINGTON, June 22: The State Department warned US citizens on Friday not to travel to India's Kashmir valley due to recent terrorist activity and said they should only travel to the state of Punjab if absolutely necessary, reports leaker.

"Although foreigners are not targeted by demonstrators, vehicles, including trains and buses, can be," the department's travel advisory said.

The recent kidnapping of five foreigners by terrorists in Kashmir underscores the warning that Americans should avoid Kashmir until further notice," it said.

Travel to Punjab should be avoided due to increased violence connected with the coming elections, it said.

More than 2,400 people have been killed since militants demanding independence for Kashmir or a merger with Pakistan stepped up their insurgency 18 months ago.

The Department warned travellers to Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Northern Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh to be cautious and said some problems also existed in Agra, Varanasi, Indore, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad.

Rao urged to stop oppression

Xinhua adds: Pakistan-controlled Azad (free) Kashmir President Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan Saturday called upon new Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to immediately stop further oppression in the Indian-controlled Kashmir and accept the fundamental right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people.

In an interview with the official news agency APP Saturday Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan said the new government

in India should also take immediate steps for stopping 'unprovoked firing' on the border population and violation of the ceasefire line.

He said it would not be in the interest of India to carry on an anti-Pakistan policy and resolution to the Kashmir issue was a pre-requisite for establishing cordial relations between India and Pakistan and

Deng is healthy

BEIJING, June 22: Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, last seen in public four months ago, is in fine health and plans to take his annual Seaside holiday for some swimming, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen has said, reports AFP.

State television reported that Mr Qian told North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung during a meeting Wednesday that both Mr Deng, who turns 87 in August, and Chinese President Yang Shangkun, around 84, are healthy.

"Comrade Deng Xiaoping is in very good health," Mr Qian said. "He swims every year at the Beidaihe Seaside."

Beidaihe, on the coast of the Bo Hai Sea, is the summer resort where China's top leaders—Mr Deng included—take vacations each year.

Mr Deng holds no official post but still has the final word on all major decisions taken in China, reliable sources say.

The octogenarian leader was last seen in public February 14 during celebrations in Shanghai for the Chinese New Year.

In the past, he has frequently had long absences from the public eye, speaking speculation about his health. Last year, he did not appear for a six-month period.

to maintain peace in the region, according to APP.

He said the liberation movement in the Indian-controlled Kashmir had entered into a decisive stage and it would not be possible now to subjugate the Kashmiris through use of force.

He hoped that the new government of the Congress (I) would compromise with the prevailing factual conditions and desist from carrying out its rigid policy towards Kashmir.

It was high time for the Indian government to fulfil its international commitment of holding a plebiscite in the disputed territory, he noted.

19 Buddhist charity workers held for looting in Thailand

BANGKOK, June 22: Nineteen workers for a Buddhist charity have been charged with looting the possessions of 223 people killed in the crash of an Austrian airliner in central Thailand last month, reports Reuter.

Four workers for the Por Teck Tueng Foundation were arrested on Thursday and 15 more were charged on Friday night after interrogation, police told reporters.

The workers came under suspicion because of improved life-styles after the crash, police said.

Local villagers had admitted

taking valuables from the crash site and had charged that rescue workers were doing the same.

There was widespread looting after the Lauda-air Boeing 767 crashed into a jungle hillside on May 26 killing all 223 people aboard.

The Por Teck Tueng Foundation is one of two controversial groups that operate in Bangkok collecting the bodies of accident victims.

They are supported by wealthy patrons who are said to win merit because of the spiritually rewarding task of tending to the dead.

US officials, however, bowed to pressure from European allies to keep a military presence nearby to dissuade Saddam from moving against the Kurds, the network said.

US officials, however, bowed to pressure from European allies to keep a military presence nearby to dissuade Saddam from moving against the Kurds, the network said.

Israeli death squads let loose in Gaza

TEL AVIV, June 22: Israel's undercover operations in the occupied territories—denied for years—have suddenly become public knowledge with details revealed on television for the first time, reports Reuter.

Official military sources said on Friday that army units working with the Shin Bet Secret police had been active in the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip.

The statement confirmed what Palestinians have long been saying, and what some journalists have had their Israeli press credentials suspended for disclosing.

But military officials declined to say what prompted the decision to make public details about the secret units, touching off speculation about the intentions of Israel's new Chief of Staff, Ehud Barak.

Palestinians have accused some of the squads of killing perceived organisers of their uprising. The army has denied that it assassinated wanted men.

Interviewed on Israeli television on Friday, members of these units described how they dressed up as Arab men and women to catch Palestinians fighting Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip.

The 15-minute television film showed an undercover agent putting on lipstick and women's clothes. He then strolled out to an unsuspecting Arab in the street pulled out a gun and seized him.

It showed other soldiers donning black and white headresses and false moustaches to pass as Palestinian men.

"The main goal is not to use arms," said one soldier no one here is out to kill people.

The existence of the squads is common knowledge in the refugee camps and villages to the occupied territories, but the Israeli public was largely unaware of the units.

Military sources said activities of these units would be stepped up.

Kuwaitis ignore clemency appeals '29 should be tortured before being hanged'

KUWAIT, June 22: The average Kuwaiti seems unmoved by appeals from abroad for clemency for the 29 people sentenced to death so far by the martial law court trying alleged collaborators with Iraq's occupation army, reports Reuter.

They should be tortured before being hanged so that they would feel how the Iraqis treated the Kuwaitis who resisted their occupation. We don't feel sorry at all, said Mohammad Lazem, a 26-year-old bank employee.

"All those who were sentenced were proven guilty. They deserve their penalties."

His comments reflected a common if not universal rejection by Kuwaiti citizens of

criticism of the trials from human rights organisations and the western allies who helped to drive the Iraqi army out of Kuwait at the end of February.

Eight more people were sentenced to death on Thursday before the trials went into a five-day recess for the Muslim holiday, Eid-ul-Azha, marking the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

Only one of the 29 condemned to death in the first four weeks of the trials is a Kuwaiti, a woman convicted of informing on her husband who was later tortured and killed by the Iraqis.

The rest are mainly Jordanian Palestinians, Iraqis or stateless Arab residents,

Military barracks destroyed in Sri Lanka 51 killed as suicide bombers blast van with explosives

COLOMBO, June 22: At least 51 people were killed when two suicide bombers Friday exploded a van filled with explosives at the military headquarters for government operations against Tamil rebels, military officials said, reports AP.

The government, whose figures are often conservative, said 20 people, mostly soldiers were killed and 50 were injured.

A military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said 35 or 37 soldiers and at least 16 civilians were killed. He said between 120 and 150 people were injured.

The blast devastated a military barracks and blew the roof off the command center's main office across the street.

Walter Fernando, deputy secretary in the Defense Ministry, said two men tried to drive into the command center and detonated the explosives when they were stopped by sentries at the gate.

He said at least 70 kilograms (155 pounds) of plastic explosives were used.

At least six sentries and the two men in the van were killed instantly, he said.

There was no immediate

claim of responsibility, but Fernando said the Tamil Tiger guerrillas were the main suspects. An earlier government statement blamed the attack on "separatist terrorists," the term it uses for the Tamil Tigers.

"However, there are no other Tamil separatist terrorists operating in Sri Lanka at the moment except the Tamil Tigers," said Bradman Weerakoon, foreign affairs ad-

viser to President Ranasinghe Premadasa.

The blast left a crater in the street 6 feet (2 meters) deep and 20 feet (6 meters) in diameter. A military barracks took the brunt of the explosion.

Fernando said initial reports indicated 20 people were killed but added many of the injured are in intensive care with serious injuries.

Great grandmother gives birth to child

BIRMINGHAM, (Britain) June 22: A great-grandmother, a native of Bangladesh, gave birth to her 13th child at the age of 59, a record in Britain, according to a study published by a Birmingham Hospital on Saturday, reports AFP.

The baby, whose oldest brother is 41, joined an extended family that already included the woman's 27 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

The study did not name the woman, but said both mother and baby were doing well.

Floods kill 400 in China

BEIJING, June 22: Flooding caused by nearly a month of heavy rainfall in coastal China has killed more than 400 people, the official China Daily reported Saturday, report AP.

Anhui province has been hit by continuous torrential rainfall since May 18, and two-thirds of the province has recorded more than 300 millimeters (12 inches) of rain, the report said.

The rainfall, which in some areas has exceeded 500 millimeters (20 inches), broke a 70-year-old provincial record, earlier reports said.

Off the Record

Thatcher stabs Major in his back

LONDON: British Prime Minister John Major feels betrayed by his predecessor Margaret Thatcher, a London newspaper said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The Daily Mail, which supports the ruling Conservative Party, splashed a story saying Major considered he had been "stabbed in the back" by Thatcher in speeches she made last week in the United States.

The Mail said Major's friends had complained that Thatcher supporters in the ruling party were "ridiculing his credentials for the job."

Major's office, however, denied a prominent ingredient of the report—that the Prime Minister had watched a video of a speech Thatcher made in New York. This video had prompted his remarks, made to friends, the newspaper said.

Thatcher's hostile comments about the European Community fuelled a row over EC policy in the conservative party. Another conservative ex-Premier, pro-Europe Edward Heath, fanned the flames by saying Thatcher had lied about the EC.



French House doesn't fancy elderly women

PARIS: In barely one month in office, Premier Edith Cresson has raised the hackles of two important trading partners and plucked politicians at home with her penchant for blunt talk, reports AP.

Some of her remarks drew protest from the Japanese government and forced heightened security around French concerns in Tokyo.

Other just-published statements Cresson allegedly made four years ago, suggesting that British men were "not interested in women," were derided this week by Parliament members in London. Cresson says she does not remember making the remarks.

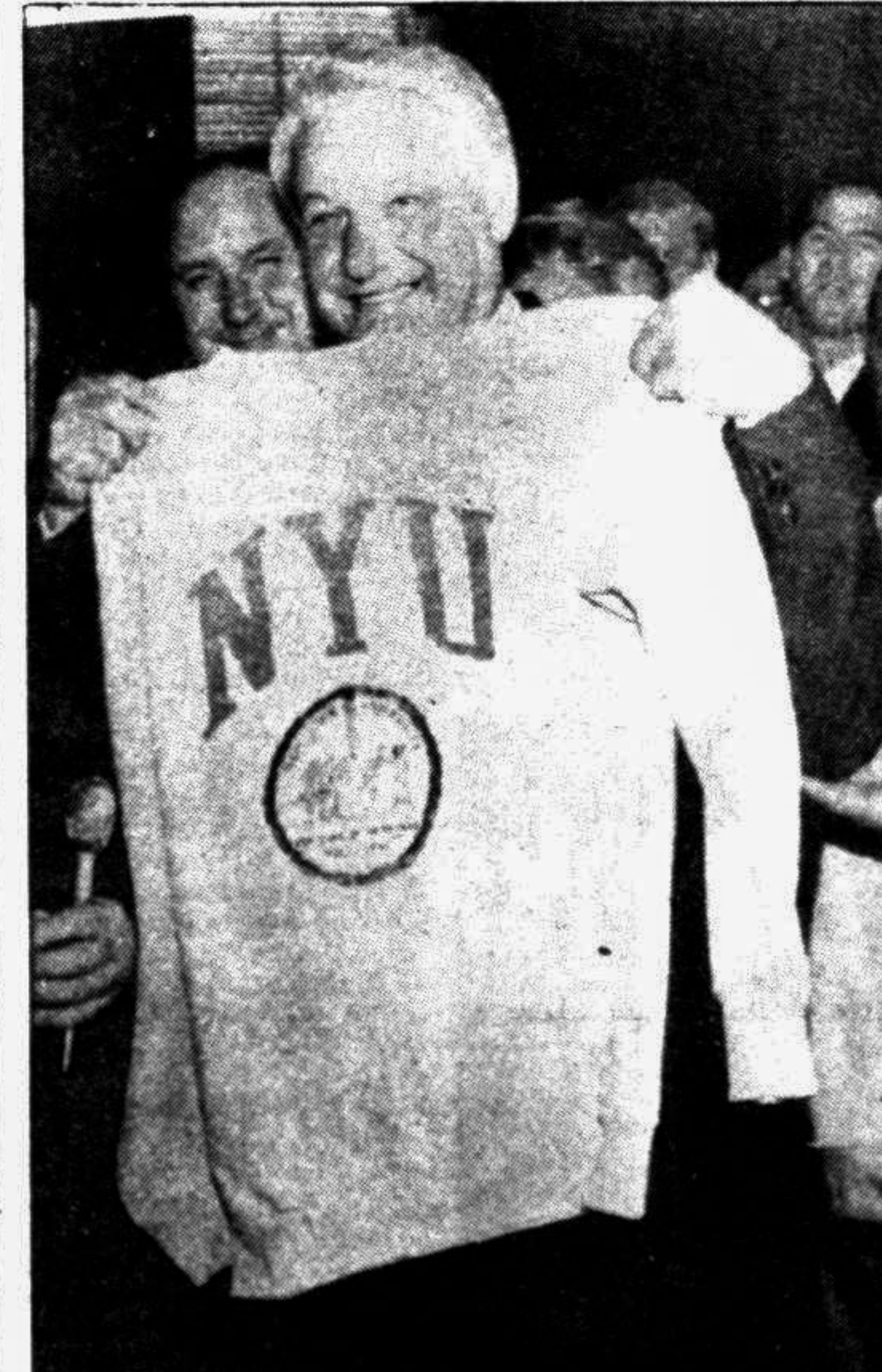
Conservative lawmaker Tony Marlow said he tried but failed to file a motion ruling, "This House does not fancy elderly French women."

Cresson, 57, was appointed May 15 by President Francois Mitterrand as the first woman prime minister to breathe a "new spirit" into a morose France suffering from 9.4 percent unemployment and anxiousness over immigration. She declared her mission: "wage economic war" before European trade barriers fall 1993.

Cresson vowed to put France on a par with Germany, Europe's economic powerhouse, and lambasted Japan as "wildly protectionist" and "hermetically sealed."

A long-time Mitterrand ally, she must reconcile traditional Socialist benevolence in social programmes with belt-tightening fiscal measures.

Cresson said this week that she talks "to make things move," and "If you say nothing, nothing happens."



NEW YORK: Russian Republic President Boris Yeltsin holds up a New York University sweatshirt presented to him by students after his speech June 21 to the school. — AFP/UNB photo

Yeltsin gives go-ahead to democratisation in USSR

MOSCOW, June 22: The first Presidential election in the Russian Federation, the largest republic of the Soviet Union, has ended in a landslide victory by Boris Yeltsin, who won more than 57 of the votes, far more than his main (of the five) rival Nikolai Ryzhkov, who got only about 18 of the votes. What added to Yeltsin's success was the election of Gavril Popov and Anatoly Sobchak, his closest associates, as the Mayors of Moscow and Leningrad, respectively according to IAN.

These developments signal the beginning of a new stage in the process of democratic change in the Soviet Union. Yeltsin's high prestige in not the only factor behind the "triumphant march" of the

democrats. Russian society, having withdrawn its exclusive support for the Communist Party, has demonstrated its readiness for major change.

The crucial question at this juncture is what kind of relationship will develop between the President of the Russian Federation and President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev. When still a candidate, Yeltsin said this on the issue: "I don't think our relations will change unless Gorbachev will himself change. I mean January, February, and March—the time when he turned to the right."

However, Yeltsin's practical moves on the political front, for instance, his role in ending the biggest miners' strike and

strong support for the new treaty of Union point to our narrowing of differences between the two leaders. Now that Yeltsin is President of Russia, a compromise with Gorbachev will be the only chance for both leaders to keep their ground, and the longer they do, the better for them both.

Yeltsin's victory is the only thing which can still enable the central administration to carry out the constructive dialogue with the republics which indicated their interest in the continued existence of the Soviet Union during talks in Gorbachev's suburban retreat at Novo-Ogaryovo.

Any other candidate, if elected Russian President, would not have been able to fit well into the existing political structure. He would have had to do without the support of the Russian Parliament, which would have waged a long-drawn-out war against him with grim prospects for the latter. He would have had to re-establish links with the leaders of other republics, many of which would do business only with the Yeltsin team.

Now that the question marks of the election campaign have been removed, signing the new Union Treaty in the near future seems a workable proposition. According to Yeltsin, in addition to the nine republics which agreed to do so at Novo-Ogaryovo, the vacillating Moldova and Armenia may well accede to it too.

So, the Russian choice of the democratic road provides pre-requisites for consolidating a single economic space in the larger part of the Soviet Union, which is absolutely essential for quickening the pace of reform.

Biggest drug haul in US

SAN FRANCISCO, June 22: Drug agents made the biggest haul of heroin in US history on Friday, grabbing almost as much of the drug as US customs officials seized in all of last year, authorities said, reports Reuter.

Customs Commissioner Carol Hallett said the seizure nearly equalled the total amount seized by customs officials in 1990.

Authorities said it was the second largest verified heroin confiscation in the world. Hallett estimated the street value of the drug at around three billion dollars and other officials said it amounted to a month's supply for every addict in the United States.

Prosecutors charged five people in the case. Investigators originally listed the amount of heroin seized as 578 kg (1,285 pounds), but later lowered the figure to 486 kg (1,080 pounds), customs officials said.

Rebels to free 20 hostages in Colombia

CARACAS (Venezuela), June 22: Colombia's leftist guerrillas offered on Friday to release 20 hostages as a show of good faith in peace talks with the government aimed at ending 30 years of guerrilla war, reports Reuter.

The offer marked the first softening in the rebel position since talks began in the Venezuelan capital on June 3. The government delegation had on immediate comment.

Guerrilla commander Alfonso Cano, of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), said the hostages included two civilians and the rest were military and police officers.

BRIEFLY

Blast kills 8 in Brazil: An explosion at a fireworks factory in Rio De Janeiro state on Friday evening killed at least eight people, Brazilian television reported, Reuter from Rio De Janeiro says.

The Estado news agency said at least another 20 people were seriously injured during the explosion and resulting fire and that firemen at the scene fear even more deaths.

A spokesman for the military police of the city of Niteroi confirmed the explosion had occurred, but could not immediately say if anyone was killed or what caused the blast.

Lenin's statue removed from Tirana: Authorities removed a statue of Lenin from the center of Tirana Friday on the eve of the arrival of US Secretary of State James Baker in Albania, an Albanian journalist reported Friday, AFP from Belgrade says.

The statue was the third monument to the country's communist legacy to have been lifted in the past year. Already gone are statues of Stalin and of Albania's late headline leader Enver Hoxha.

This symbolic gesture marks another step in Albania's attempt to shed its past isolationist anti-western stance.

The visit by Baker is an indication of this new policy, as was the announcement earlier this week that Albania would be admitted as a member of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

Chinese student leader flees to US: One of the most sought-after leaders of the Chinese student democracy movement put down violently by the Red Army in Tiananmen Square has escaped to the United States after two years as a fugitive. AP from Princeton Junction Reuter.

In his first interview since arriving last week, Zhang Bol told The Associated Press on Thursday he eluded capture by fleeing to northern China and disguising himself as a migrant farm laborer. Often he hunted his own food to survive.

Zhang is credited with expanding the democracy movement from the campus of Beijing University to Tiananmen Square. He was editor of the News Herald, the movement's newspaper published during the six-week student occupation of the square. Chinese authorities had placed Zhang, the deputy commander of the student-led Tiananmen Square occupation, on a list of the 21 most-wanted leaders of the democracy movement. Police were ordered to shoot to kill if he resisted arrest.

Last weekend, with the help of the underground network in China and Hong Kong, Zhang joined 23 other prominent Chinese dissidents at Princeton University.

"I was always mentally prepared to go into a labor camp," Zhang said through an interpreter at his new home about a mile (1.6 kilometers) from the university.

US rejects Iraqi envoy's request:

The United States rejected a request by Iraq's Ambassador to the United Nations to travel to Washington to give a news conference, the State Department said Friday, AFP from Washington reports.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said movement of the Iraqi Diplomatic Mission to the UN was limited to the five boroughs of New York, unless they were absolutely forced to leave the area to fulfil their diplomatic duties.

Iraqi Ambassador Abdul Amir al Anbari was invited to hold a new conference at the National Press Club in Washington.

Method to detect AIDS virus:

Canadian researchers said on Friday they have developed a method to detect the AIDS virus in newborns before they are a month old by using a single pinprick of blood, Reuter from Ottawa says.

The test may also help evaluate the effectiveness of new drug therapies to fight the killer virus doctors with the Government Funded Federal Centre for Aids said.

China's anti-smuggling drive:

The Chinese authorities will seize all contraband cigarettes in a nationwide crackdown starting next week, the Official People's Daily reported Friday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The State Tobacco Monopoly Administration, customs and the police announced in a joint order that a "one-month" attack on smuggling would begin Tuesday to clean up the cigarette market, the newspaper said.

All smuggled cigarettes would be confiscated and resold by state-approved merchants, which would only be allowed to sell retail substandard and fake cigarettes would be seized and destroyed, the newspaper said.



THIMPHU (BHUTAN): The Bhutanese people from all walks of life have come forward to help the cyclone victims of Bangladesh. The Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, in an unprecedented move, decided to donate Ngultrum/Rupees five lakhs (equivalent to Taka nine lakhs five thousand) for deposit to the Bangladesh Prime Minister's Relief Fund. A high-level Bhutanese Chamber delegation, headed by its President Dasho Pasang Dorji, called on the Bangladesh Ambassador to Bhutan Syed Muazzem Ali recently and handed over to him the cheque in the above amount.