

'Tamil Nadu is now too hot for continued presence'

Prabhakaran orders LTTE men to quit India immediately

NEW DELHI, Sept 15: Tamil rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran has ordered fellow Sri Lankan militants to quit India immediately to avoid capture by police probing Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, news reports said Saturday, reports AFP.

The Sri Lankan guerrilla chief sent a radio message to members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the southern Indian coastal state of Tamil Nadu four days ago, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

The news agency quoted official sources as saying in Tamil Nadu capital's Madras that the message was intercepted by government agencies. No independent confirmation of the report was immediately available.

The sources said Prabhakaran, whose LTTE is fighting for an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka, had asked his supporters to return home by the sea as Tamil Nadu was now "too hot for their continued presence."

Indian authorities have launched a major crackdown on the LTTE following Gandhi's May 21 assassination at an election meeting in the Tamil Nadu town of

Sriperumpudur by a young woman.

The woman, suspected to be from the LTTE's suicide squad, detonated an explosive strapped on her while pretending to touch Gandhi's feet, killing the former Premier instantly.

Since the assassination, more than a dozen LTTE activists have committed suicide in southern India to avoid arrest, while most of those caught by police are known to be linked to the rebel group.

PTI said the Indian Navy had been informed of Prabhakaran's flat and a close watch was being kept on the movement of boats and men along the coast in Tamil Nadu, which is separated from Sri Lanka by a narrow strip of sea.

Tamil Nadu, to some 55 million Indian Tamils, has previously been a sanctuary for Tamil guerrillas in Sri Lanka. The rebels were known to regularly smuggle explosives, fuel and medicines from India.

Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalitha Saturday branded the LTTE as an "evil force" and aid her three-month-old government will expose to the world the "bloodthirsty character" of Prabhakaran.

PTI also quoted her as saying in a statement in Madras that the support extended to the LTTE by fringe political groups in Tamil Nadu was "regrettable, undesirable and highly condemnable."

The LTTE, which once enjoyed New Delhi's patronage, fought Indian troops despatched to Sri Lanka by Gandhi from October 1987 until March 1990. The group has repeatedly denied killing Gandhi.

Prabhakaran lived in Tamil Nadu from mid-1983 until early 1987.

671 children die of malaria in Iraq

BAGHDAD, Sept 15: A total of 671 children under five have died in Iraq and 936 people have been stricken with malaria over the past few months because of a 13-month old trade embargo, Iraqi officials said Saturday, reports AFP.

Sabah Hassan Director of the Health Ministry in the southwestern province of Al-Qadisiyah said the children died as a result of "malnutrition and because of a shortage of medicine."

He told the official Iraqi News Agency (INA) that 33 out-patient clinics, which offered free services before the Gulf crisis, had been destroyed

Soviet Tank Division chief fired

MOSCOW, Sept 15: The chief of the tank division involved in the deaths of three protesters during last month's coup was fired Saturday minutes after meeting a visiting French delegation, a report said, reports AP.

Maj. Gen. Valery Marchenkov had finished displaying his equipment and had bid farewell to French officials when he was handed Defense Minister Yevgeny Shaposhnikov's order relieving him of his duties, the Russian government's news agency said.

Premadasa may scrap parliament

COLOMBO, Sept 15: President Ranasinghe Premadasa may scrap Sri Lanka's parliament in a bid to block an unprecedented move by a majority of legislators to impeach him, ruling party dissidents said here Sunday, reports AFP.

Lalith Athulthududali, a former minister now leading a powerful anti-Premadasa campaign, told reporters that the president was "desperate" to prevent an inquiry against him and may dismiss parliament any moment.

The dissidents rejected a statement by Premadasa's office late Saturday that the impeachment resolution had lapsed with the suspension of parliament last month and he had regained powers to dissolve the legislature.

The President is dragging this crisis deeper and deeper. He is stretching the constitution beyond its elasticity. If he dissolves parliament, we will take both political and legal action against it, Athulthududali said.

Premadasa's statement asserting his right to dissolve the legislature based on advice from the Attorney General is widely seen here by political analysts as a prelude to a snap general election.

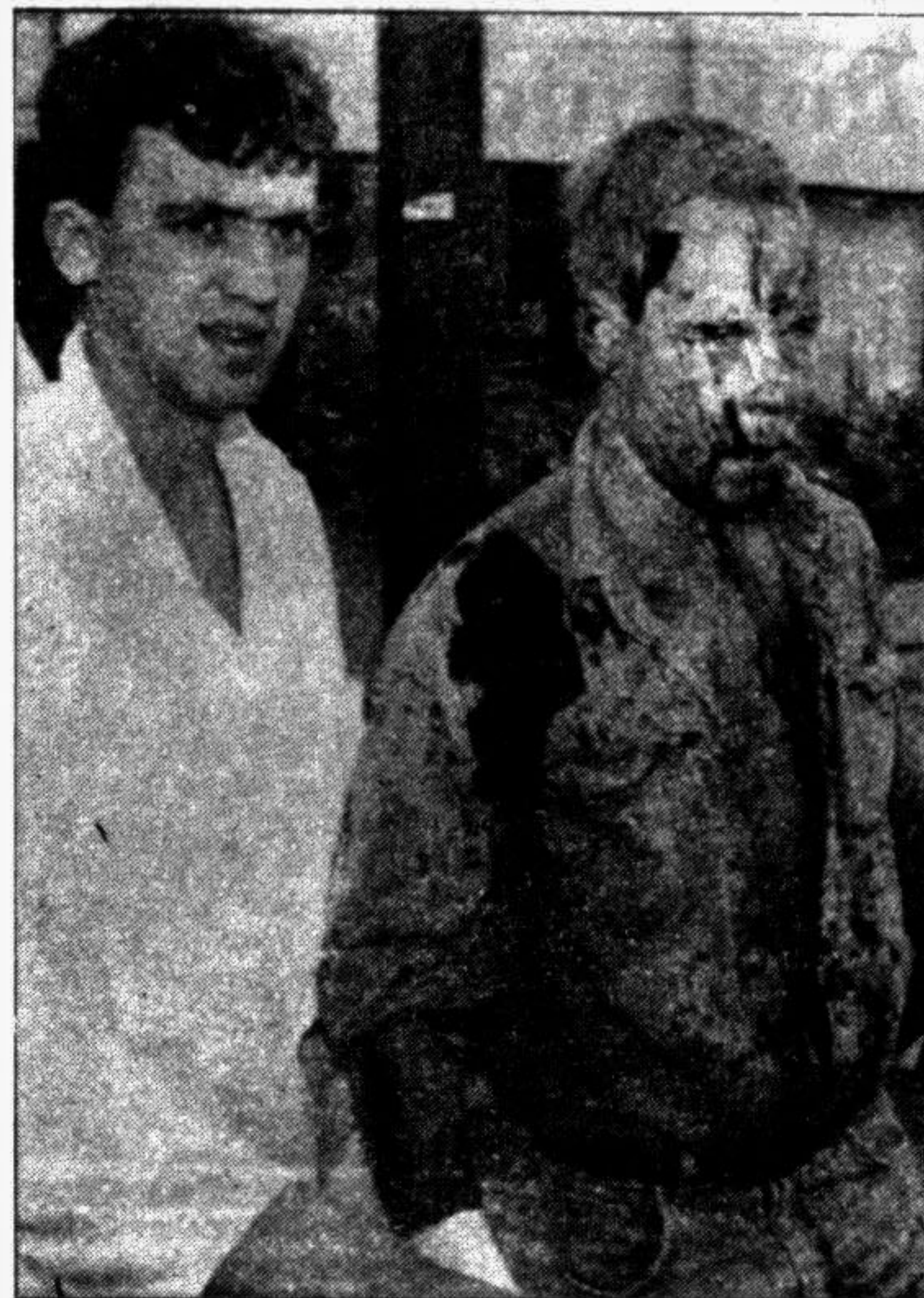
"First Premadasa closed the court house by proroguing parliament till September 24. Then he takes advice from his legal counsel and tells the judge, in this case the Speaker, that he cannot proceed with the case," Athulthududali said.

This is a clear attempt to intimidate the Speaker (Mohammad Hanifa Mohammad), MPs and a breach of parliamentary privileges. The President is so desperate he may even abolish parliament altogether."

Premadasa told the Speaker that he had been advised by Attorney General Sunil de Silva that since the impeachment resolution had not been listed for debate at the time parliament was suspended, the motion "has lapsed."

Parliament was suspended on August 30, two days after the Speaker received the impeachment motion moved by some 47 MPs from Premadasa's United National Party (UNP) and virtually the entire opposition.

The Attorney General has also advised that the constitutional clause that prevented the President from dissolving parliament "has ceased to be applicable."



OSIJEK, Yugoslavia: A foreign journalist (R), who was wounded when a hotel was hit in Osijek on Sept 14 by heavy shelling during an attack by federal Yugoslav forces, is being helped to a first aid centre by a Croatian assistant. —AFP/UNB photo

Federal troops in Zagreb surrender

ZAGREB, Sept 15: All the soldiers and officers of a Yugoslav army garrison in the Croatian capital Zagreb surrendered to Croat nationalist forces, reports AFP.

Croatian television said the federal army forces in two other garrisons, at Gospić and Perusica, in the south of the republic had also given themselves up to the Croats.

The two towns were bombed by Mig fighter planes earlier in the day. One of the aircraft was seen to be giving off black smoke as it flew away.

The television said the Zagreb garrison had contained 94 officers, all of whom had surrendered along with their men and around 50 civilians employed at the facility.

In a separate development, Federal Air Force officials in Belgrade admitted that one of their planes had "mistakenly" opened fire on a Serbian town, killing three people and injuring nine, four of them seriously.

The Air Force statement said the incident, at the town of Bac, was due to poor visibility.

Bac is located near the Croatian town of Vukovar, which came under heavy air attack in Saturday's fighting.

The attacks were part of an attempt by Yugoslav federal forces to relieve besieged garrisons in the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia.

The garrisons are surrounded by Croatian forces, and have had their water and electricity supplies cut off.

Floods kill 17 in Vietnam

BANGKOK (Thailand), Sept 15: The biggest floods since 1978 in Vietnam's main rice-growing area have killed 17 people, left thousands in need of food, and forced 10,000 families to flee, the Vietnam News Agency reported Sunday, reports AP.

The floods in the southern Mekong River Delta in recent days threaten to damage 70,000 hectares (173,000 acres) of rice fields and 40,000 hectares (99,000 acres) of orchards, the official agency said.

The water level has been receding in the upper river basin but is forecast to rise in the coming days in the lower basin, said the report, monitored in Bangkok.



TBILISI, Georgia: A woman brandishes a cross during a demonstration in favour of Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia in front of the parliament here September 14. — AFP/UNB photo

Referendum on fate of Lenin's embalmed body urged

MOSCOW, Sept 15: The vice of Soviet state founder Vladimir Lenin called on Saturday for a referendum to decide on the fate of his embalmed body, fueling a row between liberal reformers and remnants of the discredited Communist Party, reports Reuter.

In the Baltics, US Secretary of State James Baker promised the three newly-independent states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia 14 million dollars in aid to support their emerging democracies.

Tension continued to run high on the Soviet Union's southern rim in the republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan.

In a letter to Pravda, Olga Ulyanova sharply criticised a proposal by liberals to move the embalmed body of Lenin, who died in 1924, from its Red Square mausoleum and bury him in St Petersburg along side his mother.

The grave... would become a place for feigning on the ashes of Vladimir Lenin, Ulyanova wrote, a decision about moving the body of VI Lenin can be taken only by a countrywide referendum.

The marble tomb housing Lenin's corpse became a communist shrine visited by countless millions after it was built in 1929.

Removal of his body would deal a huge symbolic blow to the disgraced Communist Party, whose activities were suspended by President Mikhail Gorbachev after last month's failed coup.

The controversy is due to come to a head on October 2 at the first session of the Supreme Soviet under the new post-coup power structure, dominated by individual republics.

Gorbachev has agreed to a debate on a proposal put forward by St Petersburg's radical Mayor, Antony Sobchak, that Lenin's body should be removed from the Mausoleum and buried in St Petersburg's Volkovskoye cemetery with his mother.

Sobchak and other liberals, now in the ascendant, say this would be in accordance with Lenin's last wish.

But Ulyanova, daughter of one of Lenin's brothers, hotly contested this in her letter to Pravda.

"The rumours about a last will of VI Lenin are not based on any documents, she wrote.

Thousands of public statues of Lenin have disappeared and streets that bore his name are resuming their original titles as his revered image dissolves in a wave of anti-Communism.

In the breakaway Republic of Georgia, the nationalist leadership, under fire from intellectuals and students, postponed the start of the school year.

Georgian authorities also banned publication and distribution of Soviet newspapers as organs of a hostile state.

The Republic's capital Tbilisi has been the scene of daily demonstrations for and against President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, an ardent nationalist who seeks to take his volatile Republic to independence from the Soviet Union.

His critics accuse him of repressing non-Georgian minorities in Georgia and of increasing dictatorial behaviour in his republic of 5.4 million people.

At least 3,000 Georgians demonstrated against Gamsakhurdia on Friday in the latest large street protest and later marched to the university to support a protest vigil by academics.

In Azerbaijan, unidentified hijackers held 84 passengers hostage on a train they seized at Ordubad in the Soviet autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan near the Iranian border, Soviet television reported.

Azerbaijan, which declared itself independent after the coup, has been tense since an ill-tempered presidential election last Sunday.

Off the Record

Madonna's undergarment fetches \$ 11,000

MOUNT CLEMENS (Michigan): An autographed bra worn by singer Madonna in the movie Truth or Dare fetched 11,000 dollars at a charity auction held at the Rotary Club here, reports AFP.

The point, black-and-luchia undergarment was donated by Madonna after Ken Kish, Managing Director of the Rotary Club where the auction was held late Friday, wrote to her asking for it, the club official said.

The proud owners of the autographed undergarments said they plan to put it on display at their restaurant, the Mon Jin-Lau, located a few kilometers south of Madonna's hometown of Rochester Hills, Michigan.

"Wed like Madonna to stop by for dinner, anytime, one of the restaurant owners said.



Not a political plug for Bush

NASHVILLE (Tenn): The Federal Election Commission says Randy Travis singing his hit tune "Point of Light" in a televised salute to Operation Desert Storm wasn't a political plug for President Bush, reports AP.

The decision responded to a complaint filed by Lina Accurso of Port Chester N.Y. a self-described fan of the country singer. The complaint filed in May singled out the song, but not Travis — who wrote the anthem to volunteerism at Bush's request.

Accurso charged that the song, when it was performed in April, gave Bush an unfair advantage for a re-election bid. She asked the FEC to halt airplay or give Democrats equal air time.

FEC spokesman Fred Eiland said the panel disagreed with Accurso's argument.

Travis has called the complaint disconcerting. "The song is a personal expression of support for all of America's many volunteers," he wrote in a letter to the FEC.

Five flares in 'Evening Shade'

LOS ANGELES: Actor Burt Reynolds was released Saturday from a hospital where he was admitted for tests after a fire flared in front of him on the set of CBS-TV's Evening Shade, reports AP.

Reynolds entered Sherman Oaks Hospital and Health Center for observation Friday. They did chest X-rays and blood gases, and everything's fine," said "Evening Shade", executive producer Harry Thomason.

Reynolds, 55, was taping scene before an audience in which he heated a baby bottle in a microwave oven. The script called for the bottle to explode and for co-star Michael Jeter to turn a fire extinguisher on it.

But baby powder sprayed from the prop fire extinguisher caught fire, producing a ball of flame that singed Reynolds' eyebrows, Thomason said.

Reynolds wanted to continue the scene, but "We just didn't want to take any chances on him having ingested anything," Thomason said.

Bull terrier kills baby

SYDNEY (Australia): A two-month-old baby died in a hospital Sunday after being mauled by his family's bull terrier dog, police said, reports AP.

They said the dog grabbed the baby by the neck as he was lying in a bassinette in the back yard of house in suburban North Richmond.

The child's mother, who was hanging laundry, chased the dog and had to beat the terrier with a stick before it would release the child.

The baby died a short time later of severe neck and facial injuries at Hawkesbury Hospital.

The dog was destroyed by a veterinarian later Sunday.

Police and the New South Wales state coroner are investigating the incident. No other details were immediately available.

BRIEFLY

Hindu Parishad to build Ram Temple:

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) proposes to begin construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya by November end or December from the spot where its foundation was laid in November 1989, a senior VHP leader said, reports PTI from New Delhi.

The VHP has almost completed acquiring land, buildings, shops and stalls in front of the disputed shrine so as to own the entire area around it to help build the temple, Surya Krishna, the VHP joint General Secretary, said.

"We expect that by November 18, all legal, social and otherwise, will be removed by the Uttar Pradesh government so that we can begin the temple construction from the Shilanyas site, he said.

US conducts 5th nuclear test:

The US government Saturday conducted its fifth nuclear weapons test of the year after a series of delays due to unfavourable wind conditions, reports AFP.

Monitors in downtown Las Vegas and atop high-rise hotels on the Las Vegas gambling strip detected motion from the blast 170 kilometers (105 miles) away, the Energy Department said.

The bomb, detonated at a depth of 670 meters (2,200 feet) had an explosive yield equivalent to between 20 and 150 kilotons of dynamite.

Soviet scientists, who earlier this summer monitored preparations for the blast, were not present on Saturday.

The test had been set for Wednesday but was delayed toward populated areas.

100 Croats killed in clean-up drive:

Around 100 Croats were killed during a "clean-up" operation in the Croatian city of Kostajnica, which fell to Serbian separatist and Yugoslav army forces Friday, the official Tanjug news agency in Belgrade said Saturday, reports AFP.

Four Serbs died during the operation, Tanjug added in the report, which quoted Serbian sources in Kostajnica, 150 kilometers (90 miles) southeast of the Croatian capital Zagreb.

It said Serbian forces also captured another 370 Croatian national guards and police in the city.

Radio Croatia said Friday that only 50 Croatian national guards remained in the city, after its forces "had withdrawn" following several days of heavy fighting.

Bush, Fahd talk Middle East issues:

President George Bush called on Saudi King Fahd Saturday to discuss Middle East topics but the White House declined to say whether they talked about the western hostages being held in Lebanon, reports AFP.

White House Spokesman Sean Walsh in Washington said the two leaders discussed "general topics related to the Middle East." But he refused to say whether they talked about intensive diplomatic efforts underway to win the release of 11 hostages.

Fahd met Friday in Jeddah with UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar who had just arrived from Iran, which is believed to have strong influence over extremist Muslims holding the western hostages, including five Americans.

Soviet-Arab ties to remain strong:

Soviet relations with Arab countries are to remain strong despite political changes in the Soviet Union, but will be based on economic ties rather than ideology, Soviet presidential envoy Yevgeny Primakov said in Abu Dhabi late Saturday, AFP reports.

The Soviet Union had "a new concept of relations with Arab countries, based on the development and widening of economic relations between the two parties," Primakov told journalists.

"Before the USSR's relations with certain Arab countries were based on an ideological foundation," added Primakov on the first day of a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

15S African mine workers killed:

At least 15 mine workers were killed Saturday in bloody clashes between rival black factions at Winklaank Gold mine east of Johannesburg, mine owners Gengold said, reports AFP.

Five miners were killed when fighting erupted in the morning after an argument between miners in a male hostel at the mine near Evander, 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of Johannesburg, Gengold said in a statement.

Mine security forces used teargas to disperse the fighting miners, but 10 more miners were killed when fighting flared again in the afternoon.

Gengold added that the violence stemmed from tribal differences and that the situation at the mine was "tense" late Saturday.

US plans to keep naval base in Cuba:

The United States plans to keep its Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba despite the pullout of Soviet troops, a Defense Department spokesman said in Washington on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The Department of Defense is not considering pulling out of the naval base at Guantanamo Bay, said the spokesman when asked if the department was considering a troop pull-out in view of the Soviet withdrawal.

Guantanamo Bay has a regional mission that goes beyond countering the Soviet presence in Cuba and finally, Guantanamo Bay provides training and logistical support for US navy units operating in the region, he said.

Cuba Saturday demanded that the US leave in light of Soviet plans to withdraw troops.