

Mujahideen reject talks with Kabul

ISLAMABAD, Sept 18: Radical Afghan rebels said on Tuesday they would not talk peace with anybody from President Najibullah's ruling Watan (Homeland) Party, reports Reuter.

Two radical Mujahideen guerrilla groups called Watan a grouping of communists whom they blamed for more than a million deaths in the 13-year-old Afghan civil war.

They were commenting on a senior Pakistani official's statement on Monday saying that Islamabad had indications Najibullah personally would not take part in any intra-Afghan dialogue as part of a UN process leading to a transitional government in Kabul and elections.

Several guerrilla groups have rejected a cease-fire offered by Najibullah on Sunday, calling it a stunt.

The Mujahideen will reject talks "in which even a single member of the Communist Party is involved," Jamiat-Islami Guerrilla Party's radical leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar said.

The Mujahideen will not accept any system or government in which a single communist is included," he told a meeting of Afghan refugees near the northwestern Pakistani town of Peshawar.

Another radical party leader, Mohammad Younis Khalis, said there would be no difference between Soviet-backed Najibullah and any other Watan Party member representing him.

Blasts rock Karachi

KARACHI, Sept 18: Four explosions rocked this Pakistani city today causing minor property damage but no casualties, police said, reports AFP.

The incidents coincided with a strike called by the Jive Sind Students Federation to protest the detention of student leaders.

Assam borders with adjoining states declared disturbed areas

NEW DELHI, Sept 18: The Indian government declared Assam's provincial borders with three adjoining states "disturbed areas" giving sweeping powers to security forces engaged in a crackdown against Maoist rebels in the region, reports AFP.

The Federal Home Ministry Tuesday night declared the northeastern state's borders with Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh disturbed in a bid to cut off escape routes of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) rebels.

Ministry officials in New Delhi said today that soldiers pursuing the manhunt have also been given special powers to detain and interrogate without court permission.

It also declared Chirap and Changlang districts in adjoining Arunachal Pradesh disturbed areas, saying the situation was volatile there as well.

"The central government is of the view that areas declared disturbed area in such a disturbed and dangerous state that use of armed forces in aid of civil administration were necessary," a government spokesman said here.

The whole of Assam was stamped "disturbed" during a previous anti-ULFA military campaign in the oil-rich state condemned "Operation Bajrang" last November.

The federal government toughened its stand on the ULFA issue after Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia Tuesday rejected the Maoists' demand for a swap of seven Indian officials abducted by the rebels for an unspecified number of guerrillas held in prisons.

Assam is governed by the Congress (I) Party of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao. The ULFA, which came into prominence last year, does not recognise the state of India and seeks independence.

Saikia's rejection followed an expiry of a Tuesday 1230 GMT deadline set by the ULFA for the execution of the seven captives including four officials of the Oil and Natural Gas

Commission (ONGC) abducted July 1.

ULFA rebels have already killed one kidnapped ONGC engineer, T S Raju, triggering a costly six-day petroleum strike by 40,000 protesting ONGC officials' countrywide.

Indian army troops searching for Maoist guerrillas in a sweep through the thick jungles of northeastern Assam state have found only deserted rebel camps an army spokesman said on Tuesday.

The army was ordered to move against United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) guerrillas on Sunday after they killed one of a group of hostages abducted more than 10 weeks ago.

The spokesman said troops backed by helicopters had

raided 24 camps over the past three days but rebels had deserted all, apparently anticipating the sweep.

If the situation demands the Indian army may airdrop military personnel to flush out the militants, he said in the state capital Guwahati.

He said 142 ULFA members or supporters had been arrested so far but only about 30 were considered hardcore militants.

Army and paramilitary forces are patrolling highways and key roads around the clock and Assam's borders with neighbouring states have been sealed, the spokesman said.

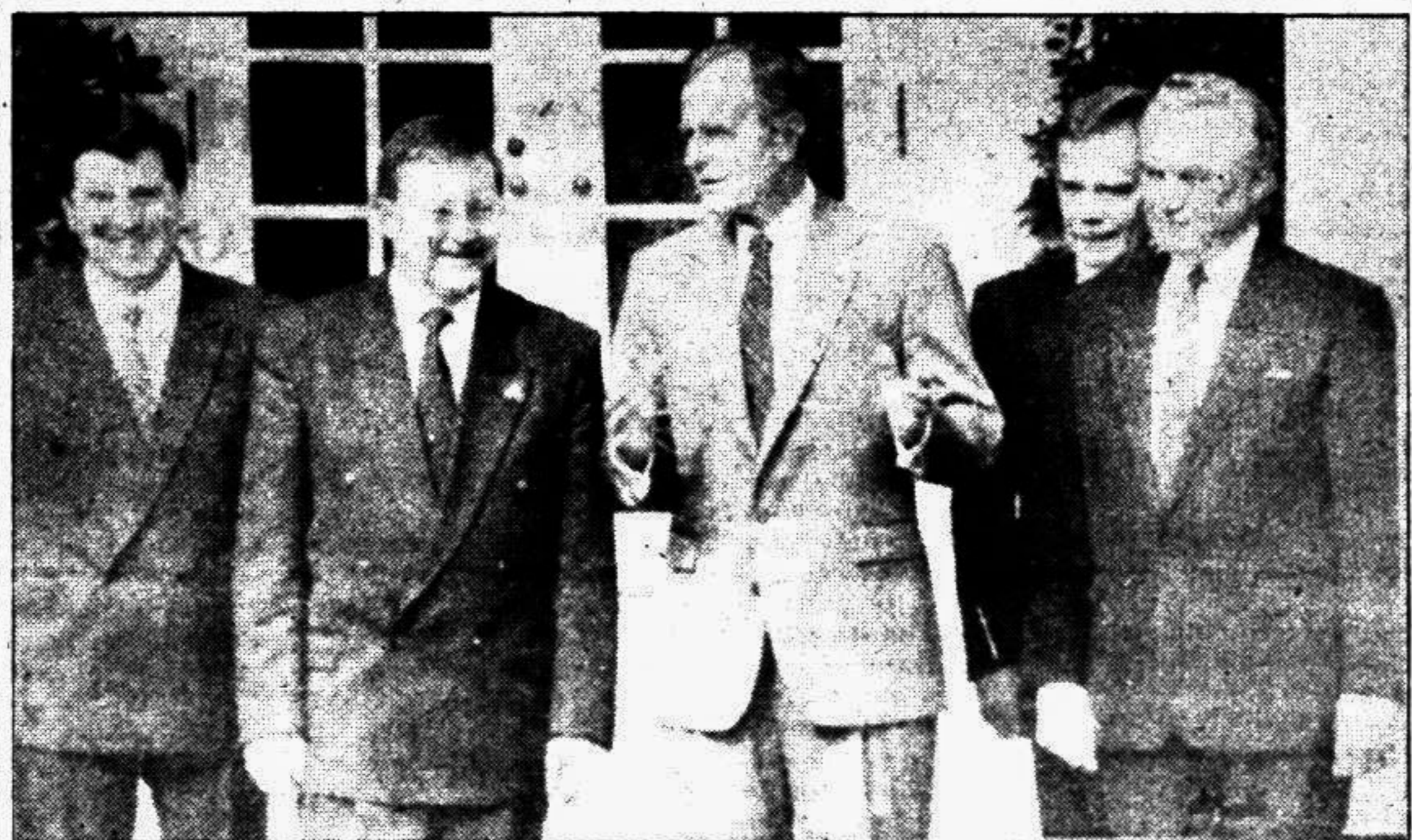
An ULFA ultimatum to the state government to free its jailed members in exchange for seven surviving hostages

expired on Tuesday evening. The government did not release any prisoners and there was no word about the fate of the hostages.

The ULFA kidnapped 15 people in Assam on July 1. They released six of them but have killed a petroleum engineer they were holding captive and a Soviet mining engineer.

State Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia freed more than 500 jailed militants during two months of bargaining with ULFA leaders although he failed to secure the release of the hostages ULFA wants all of its members in Jail released first.

ULFA says New Delhi exploits the state's oil and tea resources to the disadvantage of Assamese.



WASHINGTON: US President George Bush poses in the Rose Garden at the White House September 17 with the three presidents of the newly-independent Baltic states. From left are Latvian President Anatolys Gorbunovs, Lithuanian President Vytautis Landsbergis, President Bush, and Estonian President Arnold Fedorovich Ruutel. —AFP/UNB photo

Fate of EC-brokered ceasefire in doubt

Fighting in Zagreb continues

ZAGREB (Yugoslavia), Sept 18: Sporadic fighting and sniper attacks cleared the streets of the Croatian capital Zagreb early today shortly before a new European Community brokered ceasefire was due to go into effect, Zagreb radio said, reports AFP.

After a night of raids by Yugoslav warplanes and gunfire around federal army garrisons in the city, snipers armed with silencer-equipped rifles could be seen stationed on the roofs of some public buildings, including the National Library and local military court, eyewitnesses and police said.

The city's streets were deserted Wednesday morning as the noon (1000 GMT) ceasefire deadline approached. All train service between the city and its suburbs was suspended due to the fighting, police said.

With the continued fighting, chances looked slim for the new truce, which was signed Tuesday by European

Community (EC) mediator Lord Carrington, the presidents of Croatia and Serbia and Yugoslav military officials.

Lord Carrington said in a BBC radio interview today that failure of the ceasefire would unleash the "bloodiest civil war there has been for some time."

He doubted whether it would be worth continuing with the EC conference on Yugoslavia in the Hague, due to resume Thursday, if the ceasefire, brokered by the EC, did not hold.

Overnight air force planes attacked the former Zagreb airport, now a helicopter base controlled by Croatian national guardsmen, in the city suburbs, while shooting was heard through the night and into Wednesday morning on the city outskirts as well as in the centre, near the bus station, Zagreb radio said.

It said ambulances had come under sniper fire but reported no casualties.

Many inhabitants were huddled in shelters after repeated air-raid warnings sounded.

In other fighting, federal army troops backed by the air force were attacking the towns of Komarevo, Sunja and Gornji Viduseva, about 60 kilometers (35 miles) south of here, Zagreb radio said.

Fighting was also raging at Ogulin, 70 kilometers (45 miles) southwest of Zagreb, and at Varazdin, 60 kilometers (35 miles) north of Belgrade, where federal warplanes bombed two airports late Tuesday.

Reuters adds: A Croatian official accused the Yugoslav army Wednesday of violating a ceasefire that came into force in the rebel republic at midday.

Imra Agotic, a Croatian Defence Ministry spokesman, told Reuters fighting had continued in the town of Varazdin, about 75 km (50 miles) north of the Croatian capital Zagreb after the deadline passed.



UNITED NATIONS: The new President of the United Nations General Assembly Samir Shihab, of Saudi Arabia (R) talks to UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Quellar here September 17. The Saudi envoy won 83 votes in the General Assembly presidential election. —AFP/UNB photo

Premadasa rules out dissolution of parliament

COLOMBO, Sept 18: Beleaguered President Ranasinghe Premadasa, facing an impeachment move in parliament, has discounted reports of an imminent dissolution of the Sri Lankan legislature, press reports said today, reports AFP.

The state-run daily news said Premadasa had "instructed" several secretaries of ministries to launch an accelerated development programme for the next four years and had said there would be no dissolution of parliament.

Dissident leaders said they feared Premadasa might sign a proclamation dismissing parliament at a time on Wednesday evening considered auspicious by many astrologers here.

The newspaper reports came as Premadasa reasserted his right to call a snap general election, saying impeachment proceedings against him has lapsed with his August 30-September 24 suspension of parliament.

Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Haniffa Mohammad has already rejected Premadasa's assertion that the impeachment move had lapsed with the suspension of the 225-member assembly.

"This (reassertion) is fresh proof of the President's desperation, what is this reluctance to allow this motion to be discussed in parliament?" Lalith Athulathmudali, a key ruling party dissident, said Tuesday.

He said Premadasa may threaten government MPs with dissolution to prevent their campaign to charge him on a wide range of crimes ranging from corruption to treason.

Political analysts here believe that MPs whose loyalty may be in doubt will not receive the ruling United National Party's endorsement in a future election.

Yang Shangkun hospitalised

BEIJING, Sept 18: Chinese President Yang Shangkun has been admitted to a hospital and was unable to attend a state function today, Prime Minister Li Peng said, reports AFP.

Li took Yang's place at a welcoming ceremony for Botswana President Quett Masire and told the visitor that Yang, 64, was unable to be present because he had been hospitalised.

"Because of catching a cold, President Yang asked Prime Minister Li Peng on his behalf to preside over the welcoming ceremony of the visiting President of Botswana and host a banquet in honour of the visiting President," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

The spokesman said he did not know if Yang was in hospital.

In April, Yang was rushed to a hospital after coming down with what officials said was a cold and was out of public view for three days.

He missed his official duties for more than one month after contracting acute appendicitis in June 1990.

Discovery lands safely

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, California, Sept 18: The Discovery space shuttle landed at Edwards Air Force Base early today after bad weather thwarted a scheduled landing at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, reports AFP.

The Discovery touched down at 12:38 am (0738 GMT), the fifth shuttle landing in darkness at Edwards. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had planned to land the spacecraft at Kennedy in the first nighttime landing of a shuttle there.

The craft's crew of five astronauts ended a five-day mission whose main objective was placing the upper atmosphere research satellite in orbit to study the earth's shrinking ozone layer over the next 18 months.

Off the Record

Let freedom ring

PHILADELPHIA: A group said Tuesday it will ring the Liberty Bell and other bells around the world in an international call for the freedom of hostages everywhere, reports AP.

Let Freedom Ring, a Hartford, Conn.-based organization, said it plans a ceremony on Oct. 6 to "ring" the Liberty Bell while bells in Jerusalem, Moscow, Kiev and London chime in, appealing for the immediate release of all hostages, prisoners of war and those missing in action.

"While we stand on Independence Mall, our counterparts around the world will echo our sentiments," said organizer Arnold Betzer. "Let's let freedom ring, and let every man return to his family. Let them return at the sound of the bell."

In addition, Betzer said, "We're asking everyone to drive with their car headlights on during the day, keep a light lit at night and ring a bell at noon, local time."

Betzer said the groups will stage future events to raise money and awareness of the continuing hostage drama. Events will include a concert on May 20 at Philadelphia's Academy of Music.

"Right now, the monumental changes and the move to democracy and freedom taking place in Europe and the Soviet Union underscore the basic desire and need that people have for freedom," Betzer said. "We want to remind everyone in the United States and the world that America is the shining example of freedom."

Backed by the Liberty Bell and 24 empty chairs reserved for American hostages, MIAs and POWs, Betzer gave out four checks of \$5,000 each to organization supporting efforts to bring home the missing. Checks were given to No Greater Love, the National Forget-Me-Not Association, the American Defense Institute and the Journalists Committee to Free Terry Anderson, the kidnapped Middle East chief correspondent for The Associated Press.

Tabloids cleaning up their act

LONDON: Britain's tabloid newspapers, renowned for their steamy stories of sex and scandal, have begun to clean up their act, the head of a press watchdog on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) was formed in January this year by the media industry in an attempt to raise journalistic standards through self regulation.

"I think there is a new attitude among editors," said Lord McGregor of Durris, the PCC Chairman, presenting the group's interim report. "They are taking steps to observe the code [of journalistic conduct]."

A government report last year gave the press 18 months to put its house in order, warning that a statutory code would be imposed if it did not.

Patsy Chapman, Editor of Britain's most popular tabloid Sunday paper, The News of the World, said the new watchdog system had affected editorial decisions.

"I do know that my paper and other papers have not proceeded with stories. They might have tackled a year ago," Chapman said. "Stories of intrusion, celebrities. There is a just a different attitude altogether."

The interim report said that during its first six months the PCC received 714 complaints about press behaviour and stories, of which 235 were currently before the commission. Eighteen complaints were adjudicated on by the commission's full panel.

For not digging deep enough

A Dutch grave-digger has been suspended for not digging deep enough, reports Reuter.

A bereaved family complained last week that a relative's remains had been buried only 10 cm (four inches) below ground level. The legal minimum depth is 65 cm (26 inches), police in Moergestel in the southern Netherlands said on Tuesday.

The grave-digger said he could not bury the coffin any deeper because there was another casket below it. The church which suspended him declined comment "for reasons of piety."

US, Kuwait to sign defence pact today

WASHINGTON, Sept 18: Kuwait and the United States will sign on Thursday a 10-year defence agreement aimed at ensuring security and stability in the Gulf, Defence Department spokesman Pat Williams said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The accord to be signed by Kuwait Defence Minister Ali al-Sabah Al-Salim and US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney had already been initiated earlier this month.

The agreement envisions setting up American military materials in Kuwait. Holding regular joint training exercise, and the use of port facilities by the US Navy.

Williams declined to give more details about the accord.

Meanwhile, The Kuwaiti National Council, the country's interim legislature, on Tuesday backed a proposed US Kuwait defence accord but stressed the Emir's sovereignty and ties to the Arab World.

The council approved the defence arrangement at a closed door meeting during which details of the plan were presented by Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah and Foreign Minister Sheikh Salim Sabah al-Salem, the Kuwaiti news agency reported.

The accord calls for Washington to secure the defence of Kuwait for 10 years, allows US forces to pre-

position equipment in the Emirate, offers port facilities to the US Navy and calls for joint US Kuwaiti maneuvers.

While backing the accord "to safeguard the Kuwaiti people," the Council in a communique argued that government policy must reflect the "independence, freedom and total sovereignty of Kuwait, which is an integral part of the Arab World and will remain faithful to all brotherly and friendly countries that supported it during the War of Liberation."

Shortly after a US-led coalition drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait last February, the Emirate joined Syria, Egypt and five other regional states to draft plans for an Arab security force for the Gulf.

Kuwait's overtures to outside powers such as Washington irked several Arab states notably Egypt — who insist that Arab nations must carry the defence burden.

Sheikh Saad according to Kuna, said contacts were under way with Britain on Kuwait's defensive needs, while France too had shown an interest.

The 75-man National Council that approved the US-Kuwait defence accord is an interim body that will be replaced by a parliament in legislative elections scheduled for next year.

BRIEFLY

OIC summit begins Dec 9: The Organisations of the Islamic Conference (OIC) will hold its sixth summit from December 9-12 in Senegal. OIC official Mamadou Wabab Tallia said in Dakar on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

It will be the first time that the 45-member organisation, which represents the world Muslim community, has held a summit in sub-Saharan Africa since it was founded 20 years ago.

9 Tamil rebels killed in Lanka: Security forces shot dead nine Tamil guerrillas while eight others died in an explosion hours after four soldiers were killed outside a main rebel base in Sri Lanka's northeast, officials in Colombo said, reports AFP.

A military spokesman said troops Tuesday killed nine fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in eastern Batticaloa during a cordon and search operation in the coastal district.

He said eight more Tigers were killed in an explosion at a LTTE office in northern Vavuniya district, hours after four soldiers died in a bid to break through rebel defences in neighbouring Mullaitivu district.

It was not immediately clear what triggered the blast at the LTTE office.

24-hour BBC TV news for Asia: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) said on Tuesday it would begin a 24-hour television news service to Asia in November, reports Reuter from London.

The round-the-clock Asian news and information channel, part of the BBC's "World Service Television," will be beamed via a satellite operated by the Hutchvison Company of Hong Kong to 38 nations with a potential audience of 2.7 billion people.

"It is such a large chunk of the world, there is clearly demand for this sort of service," BBC spokesman Robert Wilson said.

The Asia service adds to Europe-wide satellite broadcasts launched by the BBC in April. "Africa might be next, then South America, North America and Australasia," Wilson said.

\$150m emergency aid for Albania: The world's rich industrialised countries pledged 150 million dollars in emergency aid for Europe's poorest country Albania on Tuesday, reports Reuter from Brussels.

The group of 24 (G-24) countries, set up to support reform in east and central Europe, made the pledge in response to an appeal from Albanian Deputy Prime Minister Gennex Pashiko.

"It is intolerable that in Albania, children are starving — they go to bed each night hungry," he told a G-24 meeting.

He said one in 10 children under the age of three in the capital Tirana was malnourished and one in three in the surrounding district. In the countryside, every other child went hungry.

Plea to close Chernobyl plant: The former Director of the Chernobyl nuclear power station, released this week after serving four years in a labour camp, said on Tuesday the plant should be closed to prevent a new accident, reports Reuter.

Viktor Bryukhanov told the trade union daily Trud in Moscow, "I believe the best solution would be to close down the station."

Asked if he feared a recurrence of the April 1986 disaster at Chernobyl — the world's worst nuclear accident — Bryukhanov replied simply "Yes."

Bryukhanov was sentenced in July 1987 to 10 years in a labour camp for gross safety violation leading to the disaster.

Bush names director of Peace Corps: President George Bush Tuesday named Elaine Chao, a 38-year-old Taiwan native, as Director of the Peace Corps, reports AFP.

Chao, now a Deputy Transportation Secretary would replace Paul Coverdell if her nomination is confirmed by the Senate.

The Peace Corps was created three decades ago to help develop countries, mainly by using volunteers to teach English, agriculture, sanitation and other programmes.

time to write.

The statement said the decision of the Procurator General of the U S now removes the legal obstacle impeding my return to my homeland. Therefore it becomes a reality. I shall return to my native land but before I do, the writing I began earlier must be completed here.

The Soviet Union's Chief Legal Officer, Procurator General Niola Trubin, said on Tuesday there was no prof to substantiate a charge against Solzhenitsyn of betraying the motherland.

The case has been dropped in the absence of any actions (substantiating) the commission of a crime. Tass said.

The move cleared the way for a return to the Soviet Union by the writer who has made his home in Cavendish, Vermont after being forcibly deported in 1974 for publishing in the West a multi-volume expose of the Soviet Prison System, Gulag Archipelago.

Solzhenitsyn is writing a major novel on Soviet life that he has been working on for several years. Friends said that now that he is free to return, he has pledged to finish the work as quickly as possible.

"He feels that his return to Russia would be a final return and that once there he would be engaged in other works and have to time for writing," a friend said.

Solzhenitsyn awarded the Nobel Literature Prize in 1970, was deported and stripped of his Soviet citizenship under hardline Communist leader Leonid Brezhnev after his writings attacked Stalinist tyranny in few have this century.

Much of his work focused on the Soviet Prison Camp System the Gulag and drew on his own experiences as a political prisoner after being arrested in 1945 for criticising Stalin's wartime leadership.

In exile he remained a fierce critic of the Soviet Communist System and vowed never to return until both Communism and the KGB had collapsed.

I shall return to my native land: Solzhenitsyn

President Mikhail Gorbachev issued a decree last December offering to restore Solzhenitsyn's Soviet citizenship.

In an interview broadcast last week on NBC television, Solzhenitsyn said: "I was always sure that I would one day return. Before these events, under the KGB and the Communist Party I did not have the possibility to return."

He also noted in the interview that he could not go back while the treason charges remained still lodged against him.

Asked about recent developments in Soviet democracy, the writer said, "what I predicted a quarter-century ago has now happened. Back in the West at that time they either did not believe it, or did not think it was necessary, what I called for and predicted."

Solzhenitsyn has always made it clear that he wanted to return to die in Russia. But his wife was quoted in the Soviet daily newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda on Tuesday as saying he would not come back until he had finished his latest work.

All his books are now published in the Soviet Union, though in the past Solzhenitsyn has said he would like them to be published in greater quantities to reach as many people as possible.