

8 more street kids murdered in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil, Aug 29: "Extermination squads" have murdered eight more street children in the last three days, police reported Saturday, says AP.

Four of the children were killed in or near Recife, a provincial capital 2,480 kilometers (1,490 miles) north of Rio.

Thirteen-year-old Wedson Silva was found in a Recife schoolyard shot and beaten to death. Only 20 days ago he had appeared on the front pages of local papers with the leader of a national anti-hunger movement who treated him to breakfast. Three other youths were found murdered in Olinda, a town 40 kilometers (24 miles) from Recife, police said.

In Salvador, a provincial capital 835 kilometers (500

Bosnian Serbs endorse Geneva peace plan

PALE, Bosnia, Aug 29: Bosnian Serbs have seized the political high ground by unconditionally endorsing the Geneva Plan that aims to end Bosnia's 16-month ethnic war, reports Reuter.

Overcoming misgivings about having to relinquish pockets of historically Serb land, the self-styled Bosnian Serb assembly heeded their leadership's urgings and endorsed the plan on Saturday by a two-thirds majority.

By agreeing to the plan after three days of tense debates, Serbs intend to make peace while locking in international recognition of a Serb state in

Bosnia as part of a loose union with Croat and Muslim states.

The vote at a mountain-top ski resort was a triumph for Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, who helped negotiate the compromise peace plan and whose credibility was on the line.

"This is a big victory, the victory of peace in our parliament," Karadzic said after the vote.

Armed with his assembly's mandate, Karadzic returns to Geneva on Monday for reconvened peace talks with Croats and Muslims.

Asked about the conditional acceptance of the plan by the Muslim-controlled Bosnian parliament, Karadzic said: "Each conditioning of the peace plan in fact amounts to a rejection of the peace plan. We agreed in Geneva that these (territorial) concessions we made were the last. If they do not amount to peace they will be withdrawn."

"Nevertheless," he added, "I believe the Muslim side will accept the plan because this constitutes a last chance."

We expect we are moving in the direction of peace and that all three sides will accept the peaceful solution because that way they gain most."

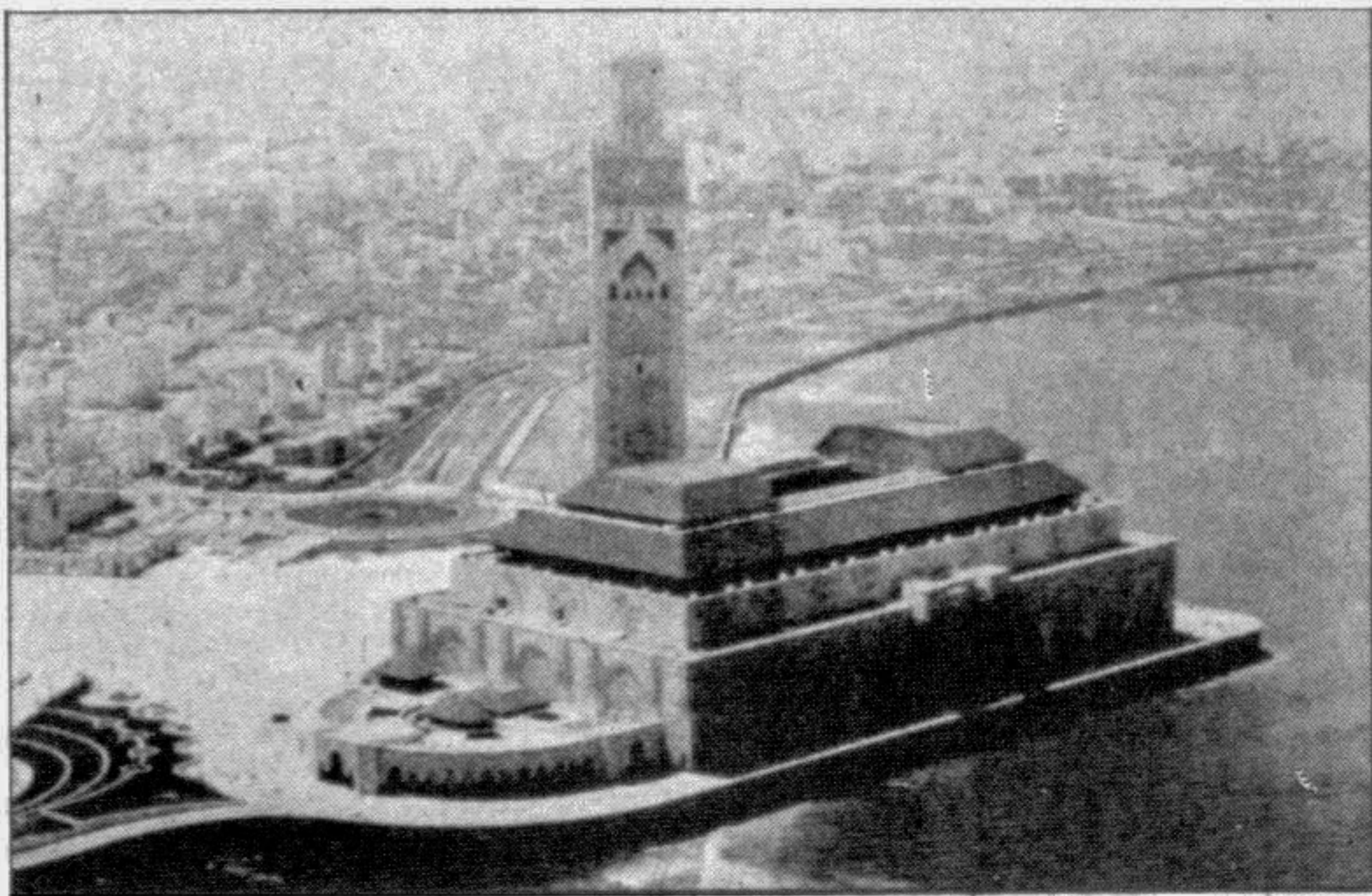
The peace initiative requires Serbs to hand over more than a

King Hassan opens world's 2nd largest mosque today

CASABLANCA, Aug 29: Graced by the planet's tallest minaret, a laser pointing the way to Mecca, and a retractable roof, the world's second-largest mosque opens Monday, reports AP.

King Hassan II will inaugurate the mosque bearing his name in a televised ceremony reinforcing his role as leader of Morocco's 24 million Muslims in a region torn by Islamic unrest.

The inauguration culminates a controversial seven-year project to give this seedy port Africa's biggest, most luxurious mosque, rivalled in size only by the one at Islam's holiest site in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.



Aerial view of the newly-built Hassan II Mosque lying on the shore of Casablanca, Morocco, taken August 28 that will be inaugurated today (Monday). It will be the world's second largest mosque with a capacity of 20,000 people, 200m long, 100m large and 60m high. — AFP photo

Arjun disclaims ambitions to become PM Cong-I averts factional fight

NEW DELHI, Aug 29: Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's ruling Congress (I) party has decided to bury factional hostilities and gear for crucial November state elections at the end of a stormy parliament session, reports AFP.

Party MPs gave Rao a vote of confidence at a crucial meeting here on the weekend where a widely-expected showdown between loyalists and dissidents was averted as the party moved to paper over emerging cracks, party spokesmen said.

Rao exuded confidence at the end of the meeting Saturday night where dissident leader and cabinet heavyweight Arjun Singh stressed the need to rejuvenate the party but dis-

claimed ambitions to become premier.

"We are perfectly united and not divided as some people had thought," the 72-year-old premier said in a brief speech, underscoring the need for rank and file to maintain discipline and go to the November polls united.

The party MPs met as parliament adjourned after a stormy monsoon session that saw Rao survive the most determined opposition attempt to oust him since his minority government took office in June 1991.

Seven opposition defectors, whom Rao on Friday described as "saviours," helped him narrowly stave off a no-confidence



The newly elected President of Singapore, Ong Teng Cheong waves to his supporters yesterday after he was declared the winner in Singapore's presidential elections. Ong, 57, is the republic's first president with executive powers. — AFP photo

Cambodia should have a king

PHNOM PENH, Aug 29: The chairman of the national assembly, who also leads one of Cambodia's major political factions, voiced strong support Sunday for the restoration of a constitutional monarchy, reports AP.

Son Sann, head of the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party, also favoured giving the Communist Khmer Rouge a role in a new government to encourage national reconciliation.

The 81-year-old elder statesman said Cambodia should have a king to ensure stability.

"In the next five to 10 years, if Cambodia wants to stay away

from war, it must not be allowed to have a competition for president," he said.

A draft of a new constitution, written by a national assembly elected in May, gives the head of state broad powers to hire and fire senior civil servants and judicial and military officials.

A Cambodian government delegation will go to Pyongyang, North Korea, Monday to submit the draft to interim head of state Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Son Sann said.

The head of state position is tailor-made for former monarch Sihanouk, who ruled the country for several decades in a variety of positions before being deposed in a 1970 military coup.

Son Sann served more than 20 years under Sihanouk in various ministerial-level positions.

Son Sann said that the satisty Sihanouk, Cambodia should have a constitution similar to one promulgated in 1947, but with slight changes to take greater account of democratic and human rights.

"The monarch is the representative of sovereignty and the national reconciliator when the country is in an emergency," Son Sann said.

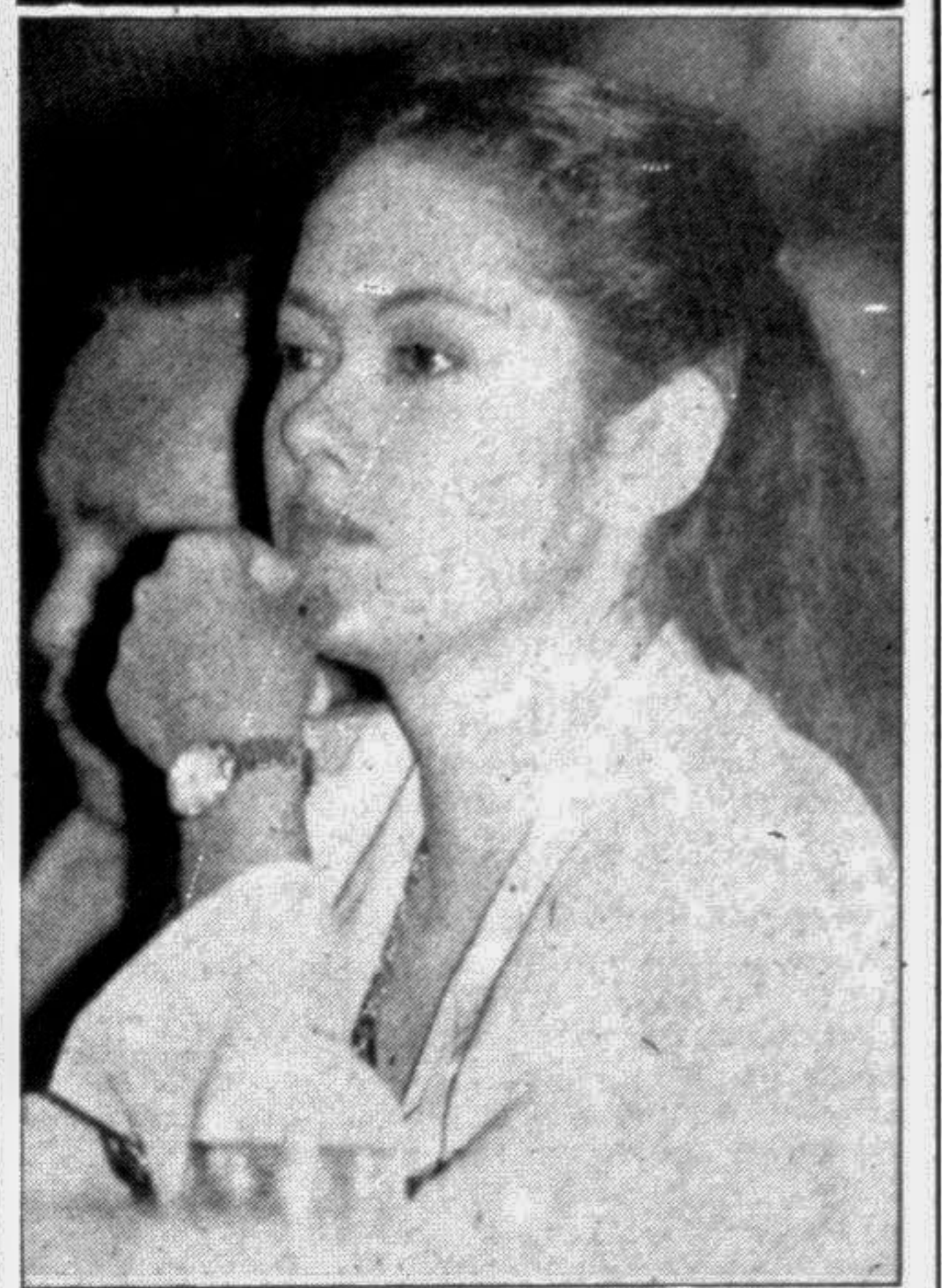
Probe into Pak prison riot ordered

MULTAN, Pakistan, Aug 29: The government on Sunday ordered an inquiry into a prison riot that left 16 inmates dead and more than 60 others injured, reports AP.

According to newspaper reports, the disturbance began Friday night with a hunger strike by women inmates protesting a new order to separate mothers and children.

About 3,700 inmates are packed into the sprawling prison compound of dank, cement cells in this central Punjab city.

Off the Record



Philippine movie actress and candidate for the Miss World pageant Ruffa Gutierrez appears before a senate inquiry in Manila August 24 following a controversy involving several well-known actresses allegedly recruited to the oil-rich nation of Brunei as prostitutes for members of the royal family. Gutierrez, 19, denied she was among several local actresses allegedly frequenting Brunei as high-class prostitutes. — AFP photo

Sour notes in Jackson's Bangkok tour

Bangkok was recovering from "Michael Jackson fever" Sunday as some sour notes still echoed around the Thai capital after the American pop singer's week-long visit, reports AP.

Shortly before his departure for Singapore Saturday, a fracas erupted between his handlers and locals while Jackson was on a video shoot at the Thai air force cadets academy.

"Get out of here and go home. Never come back again," an angry crowd shouted at Jackson and his group, according to the English-language Bangkok Post.

The altercation began after Jackson's bodyguards and Thai police attempted to stop photographers and television cameramen from zooming in on the singer while the video was being shot. Some film was reportedly confiscated.

The academy had placed no restrictions on the media but Jackson's tea controlled media access tightly throughout the week.

Diana wants to groom son for throne

Princess Diana does not want a quick divorce from her husband Prince Charles because she wants to groom their son for the throne, a Sunday newspaper reported, says Reuter.

Just weeks after a rival newspaper reported that she was seeking an early divorce from the estranged husband, the Sunday Express quoted a "senior adviser to the royal household" as saying she did not want to lose her influence within the royal family.

It said she feared being frozen out of the process of grooming her eldest son, Prince William, II for the throne if she left the royal family. William is next in line for the throne after his father.

Diana's lawyers took the unusual step earlier this month of denying a report in the Mail on Sunday that said she was planning to file for divorce within months.

Ukraine's PM predicts immediate fall of govt

KIEV, Aug 29: Ukrainian Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma predicts the imminent collapse of his government, thrown into disarray by the resignation of its chief economic planner, reports Reuter.

Kuchma said on Saturday that a fall would be inevitable after the departure of Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Pynzenyk, and the inevitable reaction by parliament next week of a market reform plan.

The government which I had been living through its final days, Kuchma told reporters as he attended an airshow near Kiev.

Yesterday's statement (by Pynzenyk) is ample proof of that, he said, and even if we brought in the best specialists in the world they could never create a programme acceptable to this parliament."

Pynzenyk stepped down on Friday, saying conservatives in the government were blocking reforms and Kuchma had lost control.

His departure compounded an acute political and economic crisis which all breaches of power appear powerless to tackle.

Twenty months after independence from the Soviet Union, the country has no formal plan to overhaul the economy after seven decades of communist rule.

Despite an attempt by Kuchma to institute a tight monetary policy, monthly inflation in Ukraine stands at about 40 per cent just below the 50 per cent threshold for hyperinflation.

The country's interim currency has tumbled against both the dollar and the Russian rouble and a huge budget deficit has hardly been dented.

Ukraine's immediate political future is equally uncertain.

Two days of parliamentary debate last week produced no agreement on whether to call new elections or to proceed with

Rebels attack police truck in Bogota, kill 10

BOGOTA, Colombia, Aug 29: Presumed leftist rebels ambushed a police truck in the outskirts of Bogota Saturday, killing at least 10 officers, local radio stations reported, says AP.

The guerillas detonated dynamite alongside the truck on a highway near the village of Ume, about 20 kilometers (14 miles) south of Bogota. Although there was no official word on the number of dead and wounded, the RCN and Caracol radio networks said between 10 and 14 policemen had died.

Rebels apparently belonging to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — known as the FARC — opened fire on the policemen after the blast, the networks reported.

The press office of the national police headquarters was not answering its phone Saturday afternoon. The radio stations said the head of Bogota's police, Col Luis Montenegro, had travelled personally to the site of the attack.

It was not immediately known how many police agents were injured or if there were any casualties among the rebels.

BRIEFLY

Iranian dissident shot dead

Farsi-speaking gunman shot dead an Iranian dissident at his lodgings in Ankara Saturday, police said, Reuter reports from Ankara.

The police, quoted by Anatolian news agency, said Behran Azadfer, 35, answered the door to two men who asked his identity and then shot him three times, killing him instantly.

Azadfer and two friends, all ethnic Azeris, fled to Turkey from Iran a year ago and had sought help from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Ankara, police said.

Azadfer's friends said they heard the assailants speaking farsi. The gunmen escaped after the killing in the city's shabby Altindag district and police began searching for them.

Indian troops leave for Somalia

A team of 200 Indian soldiers left here for Somalia Saturday to set up camp for 4,000 Indian troops due to arrive in the African nation as part of UN peacekeeping operations, a Defence Ministry spokesman said here, reports AFP from New Delhi.

He said the 200 soldiers flew out of New Delhi in four United Nations aircraft to set up camp for the other soldiers who are to begin arriving next week.

Guerillas attack SLA position

Guerillas early Saturday attacked a position of Israel's proxy militia in South Lebanon with automatic weapons but caused no casualties, South Lebanon Army (SLA) sources said, reports AFP from Marjayoun.

The pro-Syrian Amal Shi'ite militia claimed the attack on the SLA position in Saldoon near Jezzine in Israel's self-declared "Security Zone" of South Lebanon.

SLA guns riposted by firing about 15 shells at the Iqlim al Tuffah heights, northwest of the southern port of Sidon, but also caused no casualties, Lebanese police said.

Quake rocks Bombay

An earthquake of medium magnitude rocked Bombay and several other cities in western India, but caused no apparent damage, officials said, reports AFP from New Delhi.

The tremor, measuring 5.2 on the open-ended Richter scale, shook Bombay, India's commercial hub, for six seconds at 9:56 am (0426 GMT), prompting people to pour out into the streets, the official said.

The quake also shook several other towns and cities in the western state of Maharashtra, of which Bombay is the capital, but caused no damage, the Press Trust of India said.

Saturday's tremor follows a similar earthquake that rocked Bombay on Tuesday.

Cuba awards Russian General

Cuba has awarded two medals to the departing Russian General in charge of Moscow's military contingent here, the official Granma newspaper said Saturday, reports AFP from Havana.

The decorations were to reward General Valeri Kotin's achievements including the withdrawal earlier this year of a Soviet combat unit that was stationed on the island since shortly after the 1963 missile crisis.

The newspaper did not say whether Kotin would be replaced.

SAS attendants go on strike

The Scandinavian Airline System's flight attendants went on strike in Denmark on Sunday. About 25 per cent of SAS's international flights will have to be canceled, the company said, reports AP from Stockholm.

The strike went into effect at midnight with the breakdown in mediation attempts for a new agreement between SAS and the CAU, the Danish cabin attendants' union.

SAS is the jointly owned national carrier of Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

About 1,200 Danish flight attendants are on strike and all SAS domestic flights in Denmark will be grounded.

Cholera claims 118 in Mexico

Cholera has killed 118 people in Mexico so far this year while 7,250 people have been stricken with the virus, the health ministry said in a report released Saturday, reports AFP from Mexico City.

Ten people died of the intestinal ailment in the third week of August alone, the ministry said.

Cholera most often is spread through contaminated food or water, the infection is not serious if addressed swiftly, but can be fatal if left untreated.

Fans crowd outside hotel to greet Jackson

SINGAPORE, Aug 29: Pop star Michael Jackson turned 35 Sunday, and prepared for his first Singapore performance, while fans waited outside his hotel with birthday cards and presents, reports AP.

Publicist Lee Solters said Jackson had nothing planned during the day except tests of the sound equipment at the open-air National Stadium.

Actress Elizabeth Taylor arrived early Sunday at the Raffles Hotel to give the troubled pop star some moral support during an ongoing investigation of child molestation allegations.

Taylor, who married Larry Fortensky at Neverland, Jackson's Santa Barbara County ranch, told Newsweek that Jackson would rather cut his own wrist than harm a child. He worships children.

More support was offered by about 30 youthful fans who carried a box of cards and presents and a banner reading "Happy Birthday King of Pop."

Jackson arrived from Bangkok on the second leg of his "Dangerous" world tour Saturday. He has said nothing about an investigation by the Los Angeles police of allegations that he sexually abused a 13-year-old boy.

According to confidential documents, the boy told Los Angeles child welfare workers that Jackson had oral sex with him during a four-month relationship that began in February. Police opened an investigation on August 17.

The entertainer has denied any wrongdoing, and his handlers contend the allegation arose out of a 20 million dollar extortion attempt by the boy's father, a Beverly Hills dentist.

The young fans bearing gifts in the sweltering heat outside Jackson's hotel rejected the allegations.

"It is really unfair to make such allegations of a great singer like him," said Silvia Dantelzi, 18, of Vicenza, Italy.

"It's a lie, it's a lie, it's a lie," said Lillie Kowsar, 18, from Westwood, Calif.

Jackson's arrival and the allegations were overshadowed in Singapore's media by coverage of the country's first presidential election. There has been no reaction by officials in this conservative mini-state, whose leaders warn against decadent western values.



Pop star Michael Jackson waves to his fans from the window of his suite at the Raffles Hotel in Singapore Saturday. — AFP photo