

# Tamil rebels seek C'wealth support

COLOMBO, Oct 22: Tamil rebels fighting for a separate nation in northern and eastern Sri Lanka have sought support of Commonwealth countries for their struggle, a statement by the rebels said on Friday, reports AP.

In a letter addressed to the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Limassol, Cyprus, the Tamil Tigers, the largest guerilla group, requested that their right to self-determination be recognised internationally.

Sri Lanka, which is a member of the Commonwealth group, is being represented at the summit by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

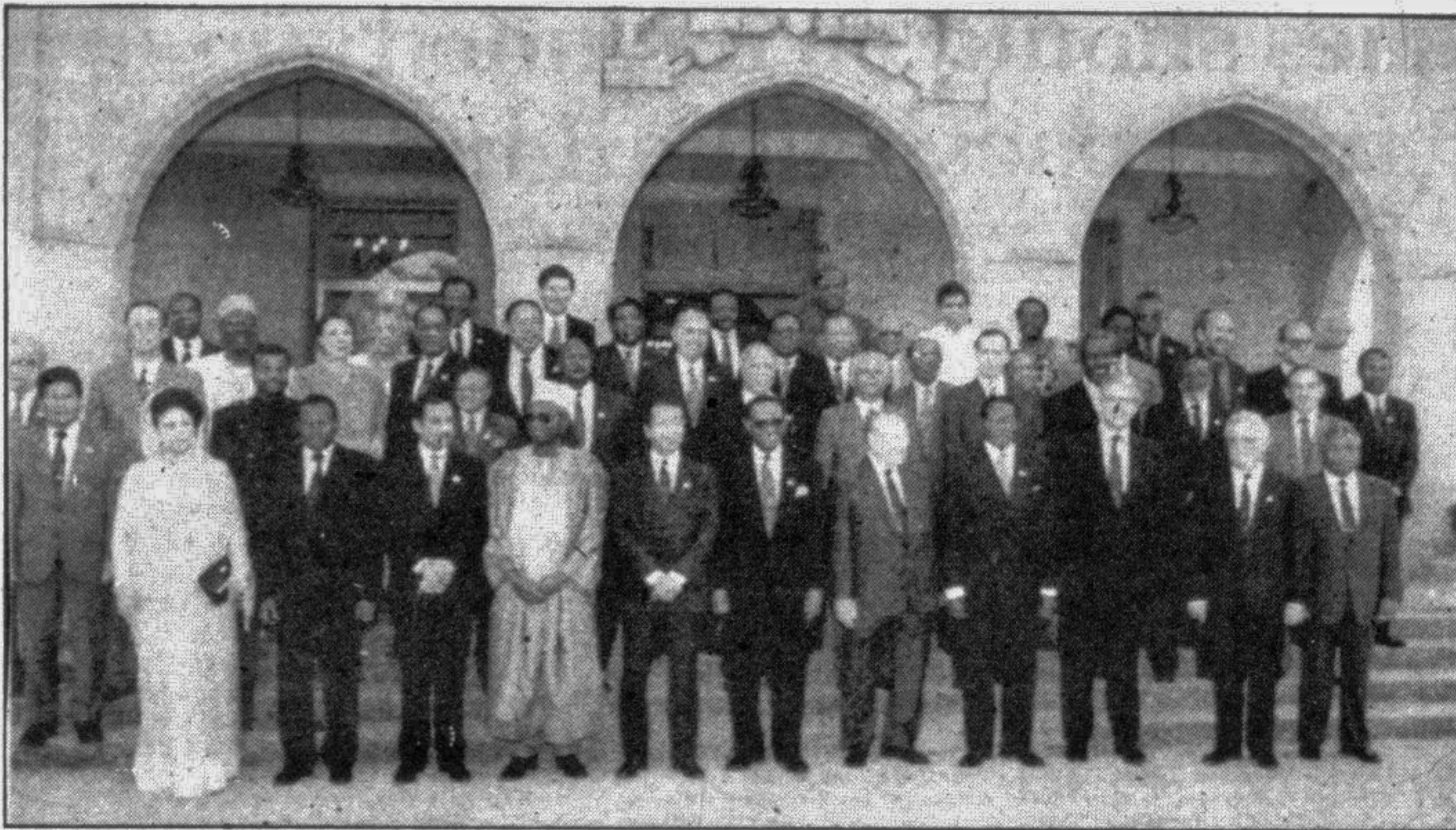
In a letter Thursday to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, the

Tigers said "their said their right to freely choose their political status" be accepted, a communique issued by the Tigers' London office said.

"If the Government of Sri Lanka persists in its determination to subjugate the Tamil people, the Tamils... will continue to fight to restore their own sovereign state," said the letter.

On Friday, government troops killed six suspected rebels in eastern Sri Lanka, a military spokesman said.

More than 18,000 people have been killed in the decade-old separatist war. Tamils, who form 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people, claim they are discriminated against by the majority Sinhalese, who control the government and military.



Heads of state and other representatives from Commonwealth countries pose for a family picture at the Presidential Palace in Nicosia on Thursday at the opening of the Commonwealth summit. — AFP photo

# Six Tigers killed

COLOMBO, Oct 22: Security forces operating in thick jungles in eastern Sri Lanka killed at least six Tamil guerillas in an ambush in the region, a military spokesman here said today, reports AP.

Army troops carried out the attack Thursday in coastal Batticaloa district on a group of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerillas, the spokesman said, adding there were no casualties among government forces.

Troops also seized an automatic weapon, four T-56 magazines, four hand grenades and two cyanide capsules from the dead rebels. The militants were killed when they moved out of a small jungle hideout,

the spokesman said.

On their way back to camp, troops stumbled on to an abandoned LTTE hideout and destroyed two bicycles and 22 bags of rice stocked by the rebels ahead of the northeast monsoon due this month, the spokesman said.

Another report says, Tamil separatists said Friday they had appealed for recognition to commonwealth leaders now meeting in Cyprus.

"There is an urgent need for the international community to recognise that the Tamil population in the north-east of the island are a people with the right to freely choose their political status, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said.

# US opposes Indo-Pak N-plans

WASHINGTON, Oct 22: The United States said Thursday it would continue to urge India and Pakistan to prevent the spread of atomic weapons in their South Asian region, reports AP.

"We have made clear our opposition to nuclear weapons development in South Asia over many years," said acting State Department spokesman David Johnson.

He was commenting on Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's statement one day after assuming office that "we will protect Pakistan's nuclear

programme and will not allow our national interest to be sacrificed."

The United States has "ongoing senior level discussions on this issue with the governments of Pakistan and India, Johnson said, and "will continue to urge both governments to undertake direct high-level discussions on this and other issues dividing them, including Kashmir."

The spokesman said the United States congratulated Ms. Bhutto on being selected to form a government after her

party won parliamentary elections on October 6.

The United States looks forward to working with her on "continued economic reform and development in Pakistan, regional security and non-proliferation in South Asia as well as tensions between Pakistan and India over Kashmir."

India exploded an atomic device in 1974 and is widely reported able to make nuclear weapons despite disavowals of intention to do so. Pakistan in recent years has confirmed the correctness of intelligence re-

ports that it had attained capability for producing them.

Prolonged dispute over the border state of Kashmir, in Himalayas, has prompted concerns about a nuclear arms race in South Asia.

India wants discussion of the nuclear issue to take into account nuclear weapons arsenals of other countries in the region such as China, but spurns current US and Pakistani proposals to bring China, Russia and the United States into regional nonproliferation talks.

# BRIEFLY

**Jackson puts off Chile concert:** Michael Jackson cancelled his first concert in Chile just hours before it was to start Thursday, blaming an unspecified illness, AP reports from Santiago.

Thousands of fans already had gathered at the national soccer stadium when the cancellation was announced.

Jackson's local promoter refused to elaborate, but local radio reports said Jackson got sick from drinking tap water. Other reports said he was suffering throat problems because of unusual weather.

**Fire at Chinese oil refinery:** A fire at an oil storage tank raged on for its second day Friday at a refinery in the east China city of Nanjing, the official Xinhua News Agency said, AP reports from Beijing.

Xinhua said the tank, which was holding 6,000 tons of gasoline, caught fire Thursday evening and was still burning more than 15 hours later. It said no information was released about casualties and damage.

Fire brigades, police and soldiers were fighting the fire, it said.

**German soldier jailed:** A 22-year-old German soldier was given a two-year suspended jail sentence in Rostock Thursday for his part in a race attack which brought international condemnation, court sources said, AFP reports from Germany.

The soldier, who has a child, tried to storm a hostel for asylum-seekers in August last year, and threw stones at police trying to intervene.

For five straight nights, hundreds of youngsters, spurred on by neo-Nazis, attacked and burned down the hostel.

**US soldier sentenced in Seoul:** The Seoul district criminal court on Friday sentenced a US Army soldier to 10 years in prison for severely beating a Korean woman, AP reports from Seoul.

Sgt. John R. Salois, 26, of Woonsocket, RI, was found guilty of beating Kim Kuk-hye, a 51-year-old bar owner, into unconsciousness shortly after midnight on May 28.

Judge Ha Kwang-ho said the American soldier deserves stern punishment for running away from the crime. Although no evidence was presented, Salois is also believed to have sexually assaulted the woman, he said.

**Blast damages court bldg in Italy:** A powerful explosion damaged the court building in the Northeast Italian city of Padua, police said Friday, Reuter reports from Rome.

A police spokeswoman said the blast appeared to have been caused by a bomb but added no one was injured. The blast blew out windows in buildings in a radius of some 200 metres (yards).

**Car bomb kills 2 in Lima:** Shining Path guerillas were blamed Thursday for detonating a large car bomb near a five-star hotel in downtown Lima, killing two passers-by and wounding at least 40 others, AP reports from Lima.

It was the first major violence in the capital since the rebels bombed the US Embassy in July.

Police said the rebels detonated the 220 pound (100-kg) bomb in a side street near the Crillon Hotel at 8 pm (0100 GMT), when the streets were full of people returning home from work. The luxury hotel was packed with tourists and Peruvians attending an Israeli big band performance, but no one inside was seriously hurt, police said.

**Turkey starts trial of 106 fundamentalists**

ANKARA, Oct 22: One hundred and six alleged Islamic fundamentalists went on trial here Thursday in connection with a fire in the eastern Turkish town of Sivas that killed 37 people, reports AP.

Three of the accused are on the run and being tried in absentia on charges of murder and arson for the July 2 fire which was set in a hotel during a riot by Muslim fundamentalists. They could face a death sentence if found guilty.

Most of the accused are charged with belonging to a subversive organisation, which carries a prison term running from five to 15 years.

# Clinton faces trouble with foreign policy

WASHINGTON, Oct 22: President Clinton admitted Thursday he has had trouble with foreign policy but said the post-cold war era presents problems as challenging as those faced in the aftermath of World War II, reports Reuter.

"In this struggle to find our way in the world, there are those who have said, well, I haven't done everything right, and to that I plead guilty," Clinton told a Democratic fundraiser.

"But I'll tell you one thing, in this administration we show up for work every day with our sleeves rolled up, and with the determination to face the challenges before us," he said.

Clinton and his foreign policy team of Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Defence Secretary Les Aspin

have faced withering criticism in recent weeks over U.S. policies for Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia.

An October 3 attack by Somali guerillas killed at least 18 U.S. soldiers in Mogadishu, and more recently Haitian protesters forced an American ship carrying a contingent of support troops to turn away.

The problems in Somalia and Haiti have raised doubts about whether Clinton will be able to follow through on a pledge to contribute 25,000 troops to an international peacekeeping mission in Bosnia.

Many members of Congress, including some from his own Democratic Party, have expressed serious doubts about Clinton's stewardship of U.S. foreign policy, and the president this week fended off a challenge

from Senate Republican leader Bob Dole to restrict his military options in Haiti.

The president said the end of the cold war has given rise to some complicated foreign policy issues that will take some time to work out. He compared it to the challenge then-president Harry Truman faced in the years after World War II, when the cold war began with the Soviet Union.

"There were a couple of years after World War II where we had to work out what our foreign policy was going to be, when we had to work through in our own minds what America's responsibilities at home were."

"And we're going through the same period now. We know we're the only superpower, he said.

# Indian army veteran jailed in Australia

BRISBANE, Australia, Oct 22: A retired Indian army veteran who attacked his estranged son-in-law and his uncle with a machete as they prayed in a Sikh temple was sentenced to six years in jail on Friday, reports AP.

Jarnal Singh Dhoter, 60, was found guilty of injuring Sukdev Singh Sandhu, 41, and Jaswant Singh, 22, at a Sikh temple on October 18, 1992. The attack was videotaped because the religious ceremony was being recorded.

The jury could not agree on a verdict on two alternative charges of attempted murder on both men.

Sukdev received a wound to the neck six inches (15 cms) long and three inches (eight cms) deep and cuts to his hand, while Singh was cut on his hand and upper arm as he tried to ward off the blows.

Singh had married Dhoter's daughter, half-sister in July 1992, one week after he first met her when he arrived in Australia from his home in Punjab, India.

Balwinder had been previously been the wife of Singh's deceased brother, Palwinder Singh Sangha.

After his brother committed suicide last year, their father had arranged for him to marry Palwinder, as it was custom for the younger brother to marry his brother's widow.

The court heard the couple had separated after two months and the marriage had not been consummated.

Defence attorney Ian Callinan said Dhoter had been shattered after Singh left his daughter and believed Singh had only married her to secure permanent residency in Australia.

Dhoter moved to Australia in 1985 after retiring from more than 20 years service in the Indian army.



PLO chairman Yasser Arafat (R) and his wife Souha pose for photographers upon their arrival at Le Bourget airport near Paris on Thursday. Arafat is in Paris for a two-day official visit. — AFP photo

# Off the Record

## Cream to shrink women's thighs

MILWAUKEE: Developers of a cream that appeared to shrink women's thighs say they have been besieged by callers wanting to know where they can buy it, reports AP.

"It's been horrible," Dr. Frank Greenway, a clinical professor at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in Torrance Calif, said Thursday. "I figured I was presenting to a bunch of scientists. I can't deal with this, I'm back here trying to sort out patients."

Greenway presented the research on the cream this week in Milwaukee at the annual meeting of the North American Association for the Study of Obesity. He reported that a teaspoon of the cream a day for five weeks reduced women's thighs by one-half inch to 1-1/2 inches (1.25 cm to 3.75 cm).

Dr. Bruce Frome of the International Pain Research Institute in Santa Monica, who Greenway has licensed to produce the cream, was also flooded with calls, which he was not able to return, his office said.

The cream is not yet available, Greenway said.

Obesity researchers continued to express doubts about whether the cream was truly effective and whether its effects would persist, but many agreed that further testing was in order.

## Living fossil killed

TERRANOVA DI POLLINO, Italy: A well-known pine tree that took root in the Middle Ages was destroyed in an arson attack called "barbaric" by a conservation group Thursday, reports AP.

The blaze Wednesday night consumed the tree, which had become a symbol of the National Park of Pollino, about 200 kms (125 miles) southwest of Naples.

Police say the tree, estimated at 700 to 800 years old, was soaked with a flammable liquid before being set on fire.

"It is a serious crime not only against the park, but against the culture and history of this land," said Grazia Francescato, president of the World Wildlife Fund in Italy.

"This barbaric act has killed... a living fossil," he added.

## Royal climber

KATHMANDU (Nepal): The Duchess of York scaled a Himalayan mountain with a mentally disabled man this week, returning Friday after nine days in a snowy wilderness, reports AP.

The duchess, who is not known to be a climbing enthusiast but is a keen skier, climbed the 5,806-meter (19,199 ft) Mount Pokhalde on Wednesday with Paul Sillito. He was helped to the top by a professional mountaineer.

The party descended Thursday to the village of Thyangboche, at 3,939 meters (13,000 feet), and camped there overnight in a tent. On Friday, a Nepalese army helicopter flew them back to Kathmandu.

The expedition was sponsored by Macintyre Care, a British charity that helps disabled people live as independently as possible. The duchess, the former Sarah Ferguson, is a patron of the charity.

"She led from the front," Gordon Owen, chairman of the charity, told reporters at Kathmandu airport.

Dressed in a light pink vest, chocolate-coloured woolen skirt and climbing boots, the 34-year-old duchess refused to talk to reporters. When asked about the expedition, she only said, "Very good."

Her longtime friend Alison Lebal, who also climbed the mountain, added, "We had a nice time."

Owen, who returned to Kathmandu on the same helicopter, said six other mentally handicapped persons will be helped to climb the mountain on Friday and Saturday.

The "purpose is to prove that disabled people are as good as non-disabled people. And that they can make valuable contributions to social life," Owen said.

He said the duchess stayed on the summit for about a half hour.



# UN may extend its mandate in Somalia

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 22: The UN mandate in Somalia is likely to be extended while diplomats forge a new mandate that reflects the turn away from military action, diplomats and UN officials said Thursday, reports AP.

The next six-month mandate is expected to emphasize political reconciliation while dropping the mandate for Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aided, who is blamed for attacks on UN peacekeepers.

The current mandate, scheduled to expire on October 31, probably will be extended for two weeks, officials said.

The international mission in Somalia, begun to protect aid deliveries to hungry Somalis, lost support as the United Nations focused on capturing Aided. After suffering losses in battles with Aided's militia, the United States demanded a change in the operation.

Diplomats and officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they want to hear a report from Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali about his talks in Africa about Somali reconciliation and peacekeeping. He is to return by the end of the month.

A major focus of talks surrounding the new mandate has been how to take up the slack after the United States pulls more than 10,000 troops out of Somalia by March 31. Other European nations are expected to pull out as well.

# Mandela hints at emergency rule in S Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Oct 22: African National Congress (ANC) President Nelson Mandela said Thursday that emergency rule could be imposed in South Africa if peaceful negotiations fail, reports AP.

Mandela told state television that if the conservative Freedom Alliance (FA) resorted to violence, the multi-party transitional executive council due to oversee the April 27 elections could impose emergency rule.

"If they (the FA) launch a violent campaign, we will consider other options."

# Turkey starts trial of 106 fundamentalists

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Most of the accused are charged with belonging to a subversive organisation, which carries a prison term running from five to 15 years.

# Guerilla war spreads beyond the lush Kashmir valley

KARARA, India, Oct 22: Until this year, Tahirah Bhatt was not bothered by Indian soldiers searching the countryside for Muslim separatists. Her home was outside the zone of conflict, reports AP.

No longer, the guerilla war in northern India is spreading beyond the lush Kashmir Valley, silencing optimists in the government who claimed the rebels were losing momentum.

Now, soldiers come looking for Mrs Bhatt's son Rafik, who has joined the guerillas. "I tell them that if they find him, they should shoot him. But the moment they go away, I pray to Allah for long life for my son," she said.

In August, Muslim gunmen

hijacked a bus near this village in the terraced hills south of Kashmir. They ordered Muslims off the bus and then killed 16 Hindus.

It was the worst civilian massacre by the rebels since the breakaway movement erupted into outright insurrection three years ago.

After that attack, the army was put in charge of law and order, and troops moved in to the once peaceful hills in the Doda district south of Kashmir.

Nevertheless, hundreds of guerillas are coming down from Kashmir.

On September 13, according to a source close to one of the militant groups, 200 guerillas slipped into the area, many armed with rocket

launchers and grenades. Seventy-five guerillas from another group infiltrated the next day, hiding arms in the homes of sympathisers, the source said, on condition of anonymity.

The militants are demanding that Jammu-Kashmir — the only one of India's 25 states with a Muslim majority — be split off from India, which is overwhelmingly Hindu. More than 7,500 people have died in the insurrection.

Some militant groups want independence. Others want unification with Pakistan, the Islamic nation that was carved out of India when Britain gave up its empire here in 1947. Kashmir has been the flash-point for two of the three wars

between India and Pakistan.

Two days after the bus massacre, Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao accused Pakistan of assisting the militants and warned it to stop. "Kashmir is part of India. Nothing can take it away from us," he said in an Independence Day speech to the nation.

The Muslim uprising was at first confined to the Kashmir Valley, which is heavily Muslim. But in recent months the guerillas have staged grenade and rocket attacks in the southern Jammu area, where Hindus make up 45 percent of the population.

One recent night, 15 men armed with assault rifles shipped down from the hills to

Ghulam Rasool's hut in this village for a midnight dinner. Their presence in the village of 3,000 people was common knowledge, but no one called the police.

During military searches, the militants take to the hills, shepherding goats and sheep and burying their weapons.

It is a cat-and-mouse game familiar in Kashmir, but new here. And, as the security searches become more frequent, support for the militants seems to grow.

"The guerillas come through the highest passes on the hills from the Srinagar Valley, strike here and then go back," said N S Salaria, the police superintendent of Kishtwar, the town where the

massacre took place August 14. The area is about 600 miles (950 kilometers) north of New Delhi.

Salaria said the militants are trying to worsen hostility between Hindus and Muslims. State officials fear an exodus of Hindus similar to the flight of thousands of people from Kashmir in the first year of the uprising.

So far, about 75 Hindu families have moved from the rural villages to the Hindu-dominated cities of Jammu and Kathua, officials say.

The Hindus who stay behind live in fear. "They (the militants) will wipe out our whole family if we inform the police of their whereabouts," said Gulzar Chand.

# Radioactive leak at UK plant

LONDON, Oct 22: British Nuclear Fuels (BNF) late Thursday reported a radioactive leak at the Thorp reprocessing plant at Sellafield, Cumbria, North-west England, saying minor seepage had occurred, reports AP.

BNF, describing the incident as very minor, said a pump had leaked a litre of Uranyl Nitrate liquid which seeped into an enclosed area. It was being used for testing the plant and was quickly cleaned up, BNF said.

A spokesman from the environment watchdog Greenpeace said the incident demonstrate the plant was unsafe.