

Russia now a good friend, says China

BEIJING, Oct 4: Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen in a message to his Russian counterpart today said their two countries had become "good neighbours and friends" after decades of tension, reports AFP.

Qian, who is now in Washington for talks with US President Bill Clinton and other senior officials, had sent a congratulatory message to Andrei Kozyrev on the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Moscow and Beijing, the Xinhua news agency said.

Although the relations between China and Russia followed a tortuous road during the past 45 years, their rela-

tions are now those of good neighbours and friends," Qian wrote.

The foreign minister said a visit to China by Russian President Boris Yeltsin in 1992 "facilitated the development of cooperation" between the two countries in trade, culture and science and technology.

"The recent visit to Russia by Chinese President Jiang Zemin raised bilateral ties to a completely new level prior to the start of a new century," he added.

Jiang, who went to Russia at the beginning of September, was the first Chinese head of state to visit Moscow since Mao Zedong in 1957.

Demand for separate state: 14 killed in two days

Curfew in 7 Uttar Pradesh towns

NEW DELHI, Oct 4: Seven hill towns in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, were under curfew today following two days of violence which have claimed at least 14 lives, officials said, reports AFP.

The officials in the state capital Lucknow said curfew had been imposed in the northern towns of Dehradun, Rishikesh, Shrinagar, Kotdwar, Pauri, Nainital and Haldwari to stem further violence in the impoverished hill districts.

At least 14 people have been killed and nearly 200 injured in clashes since Sunday between police and supporters of a movement in the hill districts to carve out a separate

state in Uttar Pradesh called "Uttarakhand."

Curbs have also been imposed in the towns of Roorkee, Shaharanpur and Muzaffarnagar to quell demands for "Uttarakhand," the official said.

Schools and colleges were order closed until Monday in the holiday Hindu town of Haridwar as unrest spread following the deaths of 11 Uttarakhand supporters in police firing on Sunday in the town of Muzaffarnagar.

At least three people died and 40 were injured when police opened fire again on Monday to break up violent protests in the districts of

Kumaon and Garwal. Two people were shot dead in Dehradun and one in nearby Nainital.

The Uttarakhand activists are also protesting a proposal by the state administration to reserve more government jobs for low caste Hindus, arguing that the higher castes out number their social inferiors in the region.

Most of the inhabitants of the proposed Uttarakhand are high caste Hindus opposed to the government of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, a champion of the lower castes.

The surge in violence has promoted state leaders of Prime Minister P V Narasimha-

Rao's Congress (I) party to threaten to withdraw their support for Yadav's coalition government.

The congress said it was "actively considering" withdrawing support due to the violence.

Yadav met with Rao here Monday and said the police action in Muzaffarnagar was promoted by a directive from New Delhi's police commissioner to "stop and search" Uttarakhand activists proceeding to the capital for a rally.

The Asian Age newspaper said Yadav had brought photocopies of the order to show to Rao and Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan.

Israel, Jordan pledge to sign peace treaty

WASHINGTON, Oct 4: Israel and Jordan pledged Monday to sign a peace treaty in the near future after they agreed during high-level talks at the White House to take steps to boost relations, reports AFP.

President Bill Clinton who hosted the talks said Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres had held a productive session in advancing the peace process in the Middle East.

In a joint communique, the three countries reaffirmed their commitment to "achieve a full peace treaty between the two countries, hopefully in the near future."

A senior US official, who requested anonymity, said earlier the two sides "certainly hope to achieve peace."



Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan (C) speaks at a press conference at the White House in Washington on Monday as US President Bill Clinton (L) and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (R) look on.

Ousted Hutus demand power-sharing

KIGALI, Oct 4: Exiled Rwandan leaders blamed for orchestrating ethnic massacres want a share in the rebel-installed government that overthrew them or they will discourage Hutu refugees from returning home, reports AP.

But the new government that gained power in July is unlikely to offer concessions to Hutus it wants tried for war crimes.

Hutu leaders in neighboring Zaire have told a UN-sponsored task force on repatriation there can be no massive movement of returnees until a power-sharing deal is cut, the deputy commander of UN peacekeepers in Rwanda, Brig Gen Henry Anyidoho of Ghana, said Tuesday.

Anyidoho, the top UN official in the task force, returned Monday from visiting refugee camps in Zaire where he met with Hutu leaders, including former military chief of staff, Augustin Bizimungu.

"They want to have a say in running the country politically. They said very clearly that if they stay outside it cannot be considered a solution to the

Rwanda situation," Anyidoho told reporters.

It says Hutu soldiers and civilian militias, spurred on by officials of the ousted government, massacred more than 500,000 people, most of the Tutsi, in an orgy of ethnic bloodletting after the death of Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana in a mysterious plane crash April 6.

Habyarimana was returning from Arusha, Tanzania, where he participated in talks on a peace accord signed there in August 1993. The pact envis-

Aga Khan seeks divorce!

LONDON, Oct 4: The Aga Khan, leader of the world's 25 million Ismaili Muslims, is seeking a divorce, a spokesman said here on Monday, reports AFP.

"The Aga Khan does not normally make statements on his or his family's private lives and therefore will issue no further statement on this development," the spokesman told AFP.

aged bringing the Tutsi-led Rwanda Patriotic Front rebel army into a transitional government ahead of elections two years later.

Anyidoho said exiled Hutu leaders "want to go back to Arusha."

But he said UN officials were doubtful that previous talks, obstructed mainly by the former Hutu government, could be revived.

Even before the ethnic bloodletting, "there have been several attempts to put transitional structures into place, but all have failed," he said.

An estimated 20,000 Hutu soldiers loyal to the former government and some 50,000 militias are living in refugee camps outside Rwanda's borders.

They have killed and threatened refugees who want to go home and have terrorized relief workers.

Hopes of any significant repatriation receded as Hutu politicians, soldiers and refugee leaders held sway in refugee camps, said Anyidoho.

He said Zaire vowed to disarm the Hutu soldiers and militias, but UN members of

the task force, which includes 10 Zairean officials have not been shown any seized weapons.

No decision has been made whether UN peacekeepers might have a role in disarming refugees, he said.

The UN refugee agency says reprisal killings by Tutsi soldiers in the new government's army have deterred the return of refugees, but it also conceded that pressure and intimidation by Hutu extremists are the main factors halting repatriation.

Relief workers have been driven out of Katala camp near Goma by violent clashes as security deteriorated in Zairean camps in recent days.

On Monday, the UN Children's Fund reported Hutu manning roadblocks to control routes leading to the Rwanda border from refugee camps in Tanzania, after a series of attacks on refugees there.

UNICEF said calm returned to Benaco camp Tuesday and the medical charity Doctors Without Borders said its relief workers who fled violence in Benaco have returned to Tanzanian camp.



French President Francois Mitterrand (L) greets Japanese Emperor Akihito (2nd R) and Empress Michiko (R) upon their arrival at Orly Airport, near Paris on Monday for a six-day state visit to France.

Ozone hole over Antarctic reappears

WELLINGTON, Oct 4: A hole in the ozone layer over the Antarctic has reappeared and it is wider than last year, scientists said today, reports Reuters.

"The ozone hole over Antarctica appears fully formed and is larger and more intense than last year," the New Zealand Antarctic programme and the National Institute of Waters and Atmosphere research (NIWA) said in a joint statement.

Ozone is a form of oxygen found 12 to 20 km (eight to 13) high in stratosphere.

Since the late 1980s a large hole has formed during the southern spring in September and October. Scientists estimate more than

half the ozone over the Antarctic has been lost.

The normally thick layer of ozone absorbs harmful ultraviolet radiation from the sun, protecting people and animals from skin cancers.

"This year more than 70 million tonnes of the gas is expected to vanish for the spring season," NIWA scientist Tom Clarkson said.

Satellite data from the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) showed a rectangular shaped area of very low ozone concentration covering the Antarctic continent, compared with a slightly smaller triangular hole observed last year, Clarkson said.

Readings from New Zealand's arrival heights Antarctic laboratory, in McMurdo sound, on the edge of the hole, showed readings, approaching last year's minimum of 129 Dobson units, the standard measuring unit of ozone layers.

The level today fell to 133 units and New Zealand scientists Sylvia Nichol said it could fall lower over the next week. In the mid-1980s readings were around 300 at this time of the year.

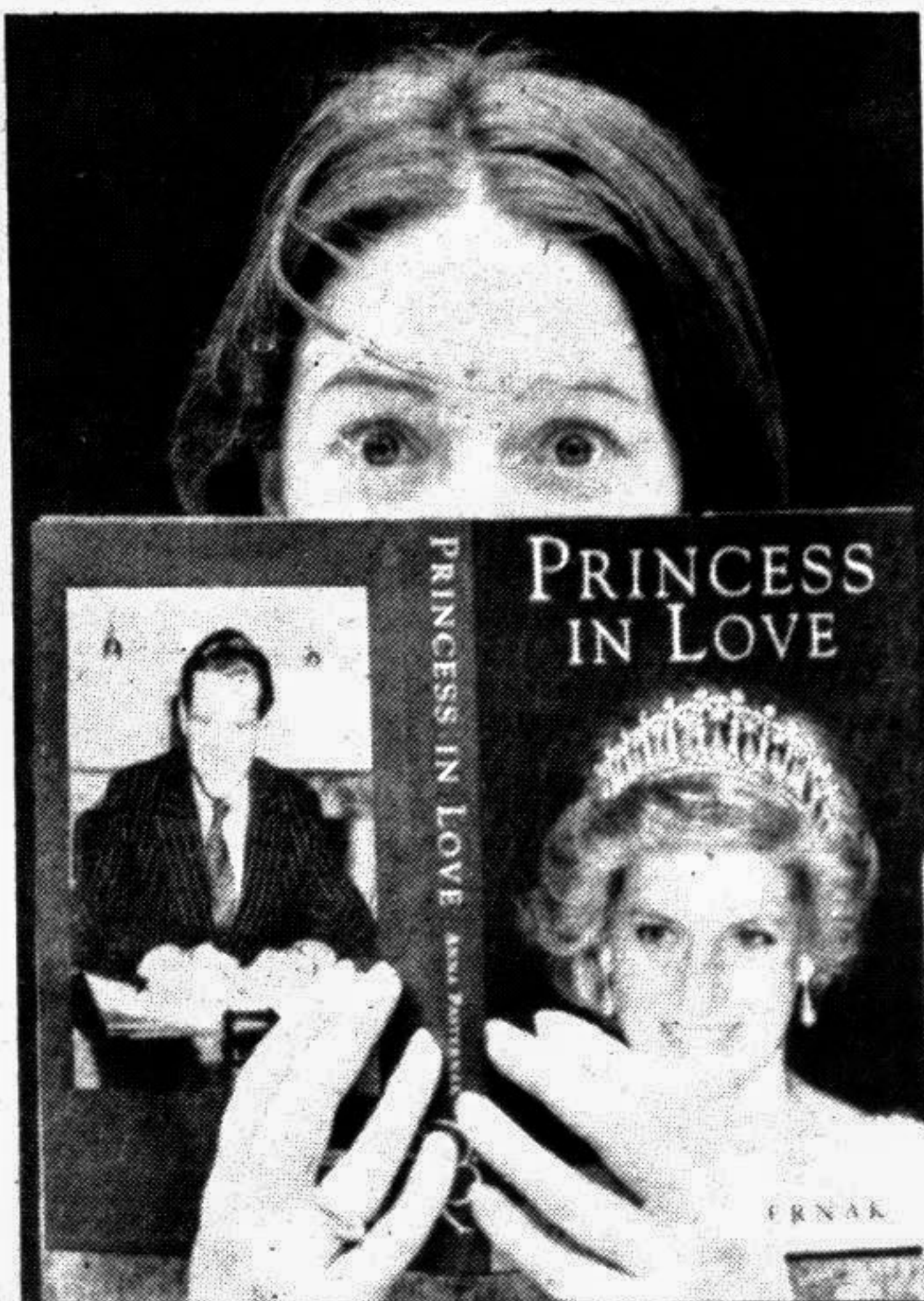
Clarkson said ozone depletion is triggered by the combination of sunlight, cold spring temperatures and pollutants from Chloro Fluoro Carbons (CFCs). CFC are gases widely

used as refrigerants, industrial cleaners and as propellants in many aerosol sprays.

Nichol said she expects similar sized holes to develop over the Antarctic for the next 20 years, despite international action to limit the use of CFCs, because of the amount of chlorine pollutants already in the atmosphere.

Opposition Labour Party environment spokesman Peter Hodgson said the size of the hole was a concern, particularly as this year there was no effect from the eruption of mount Pinatubo in the Philippines. Scientists believe a 1991 eruption of the volcano contributed to ozone depletion.

Off the Record



A young Londoner takes the opportunity of an early purchase on Monday of the controversial book 'Princess in Love' which claims that Britain's Princess Diana had a three and a half year affair with Major James Hewitt, a former cavalry officer.

Reports differ about Di's affair

LONDON: Princess Diana was said Tuesday to be hurt and angry over a book that claims she had a five-year love affair with her riding instructor before her separation from Prince Charles, reports AP.

Reports differ about what did or didn't happen. The Sun quoted the princess' "closest friends" as saying she has not denied Army Maj James Hewitt claim in the book "Princess in Love" that she had a sexually active affair with him.

The Sun quoted the friends as saying that 33-year-old Diana has told them she is "flabbergasted and shocked" by the details in the book and that "I am very hurt and very angry."

But two other papers reported denials Diana had sex with him.

The Daily Mail reported: "She insisted to friends: 'We never had sex. He wanted to, but I never let it happen.'"

The Daily Telegraph said: "One friend reported the princess as saying: 'It is simply not true that we ever had sex. He lives in a fantasy world.'"

None of the papers named the friends. Buckingham Palace spokesmen on Monday dismissed the book by freelance journalist Anna Pasternak as "cheap and grubby," but made no denial of Hewitt's claim.

Britons snapped up 100,000 copies at 14.99 pounds (dls 23) a time on the book's first day of sale Monday and the story was page one news in 11 national circulation daily newspapers Tuesday.

The liberal daily the Guardian spoke of fears the monarchy's moral authority may have been undermined by the latest alleged royal scandal. It quoted an unnamed member of the queen's Privy Council of advisers as saying: "I don't see how this can go on. It is making the royal family a worldwide laughing stock."

The Daily Mirror tabloid devoted 13 of its 32 pages to the story, calling it "a tale of doomed passion" and "one of the most sensational love affairs in royal history."

Bizarre lawsuits!

MANILA: A Filipino lawyer, known for his bizarre lawsuits, filed a civil case on Tuesday demanding 200 trillion pesos (7.69 trillion dollars) in damages from the Japanese Emperor and millions of Japanese for Japan's occupation of the Philippines during World War II, reports AFP.

Ely Velez Pamatong, in a case filed at a local court, named "Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko, Prince Mikasa, Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama and one to 200 million" people as defendants in his class suit.

Pamatong said that the royal family, the prime minister and all Japanese who were more than 21 years old at the time of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, "are being sued in their individual capacities," for the destruction caused by the occupation.

Japanese officials insist that all Philippine claims for restitution have been settled through various aid projects.

Pamatong is known for outlandish projects such as filing an unsuccessful suit to have all Filipinos born before the United States granted the country independence in 1946, declared US citizens.

Birth control pills cause breast cancer?

LODNON: Women who take birth control pills for four years or longer have a higher risk of breast cancer, Dutch scientists reported, says Reuters.

The scientists, trying to clarify confusion caused by dozens of conflicting studies, said the risk depended on a woman's age and how long she had taken the pill. But they did find a definite risk.

"We conclude that four or more years of oral contraceptive use, especially if partly before age 20, is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer developing at an early age," they wrote in the Lancet Medical Journal.

"Our findings strongly suggest that long-term oral contraceptive use is related to the risk of breast cancer and that the association varies by age at cancer diagnosis. Among young women (aged under 36 at diagnosis), the use of oral contraceptives for four or more years was associated with double the risk found with shorter use."

FIS call to boycott French products

NICOSIA, Oct 4: The armed wing of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) called on Algerians on Monday to launch a trade and cultural boycott of France, accusing Paris of interfering in the country's internal affairs, reports AFP.

In a statement published by the London-based Arab daily Al-Hayat, "the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) called on Algerians to remember France's crimes against Algeria and to boycott French products by not importing or buying them."

It said the boycott should be extended to culture and tourism.

If France is stubborn enough not to abandon its colonial policies, we will take the necessary measures, the statement added without elaborating.

"The presence of police and French military experts" as well as "the participation of the French air force in bombing raids in the eastern Algerian mountains" showed a "flagrant French interference in Algeria," the statement added.

It said the move came after a visit on August 3 by French Defence Minister Francois Leotard whom the group dubbed the minister of war.

BRIEFLY

LTTE men kill radio announcer:

Suspected Tamil Tiger guerrillas shot dead a radio announcer in northern Sri Lanka as the government suspended a major offensive against the rebels, officials said today, AFP reports from Colombo.

Gunmen from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) stormed the residence of Jiffrey Rajabdeen at Vavuniya late Monday and shot him at close range, an official said.

China grants parole to Wei:

China's most famous dissident Wei Jiangsheng, who has not been seen in public since he was re-detained last April, has been granted parole, a Beijing-backed newspaper in Hong Kong reported yesterday, Reuters says from Hong Kong.

The Wen Wei Po quoted China's Vice Minister of Justice Zhang Geng as saying Wei had been granted parole according to Chinese law.

2 more Jewish settlers held:

Police on Monday arrested two more Israelis suspected of membership in a Jewish armed underground that planned to wage attacks against Palestinians, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The arrests brought to 14 the number of suspects held in the case since September 2, including seven who have been released after questioning, Israel radio said.

US Agriculture Secy quits:

Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy resigned on Monday, saying an investigation into charges he accepted gifts from firms doing business with his agency had distracted him from his duties, AFP reports from Washington.

This is my choice, no one has asked me to resign, said Espy who added that President Bill Clinton had accepted his resignation and that he would step down by December 31.

Soyuz TM-20 blasts off:

A manned Russian spacecraft blasted off from Baikonur last yesterday morning on a mission to hook up with the orbiting space station Mir, mission control said, AFP reports from Baikonur, Kazakhstan.

The Soyuz TM-20 was carrying a German representing the European Space Agency and two Russian astronauts on a mission known as Euromir 94. The craft is scheduled to hook up with the Mir on Wednesday at 2330 GMT.

Fire claims 2 in China:

Two men were killed and another injured in China's Shenzhen Special Economic Zone when a fire engulfed a commercial building, a news report said yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The two men were overcome by smoke in the Changhong Industrial and Trade Co. hotel, located on the top floors of the firm's building, the Wen Wei Po newspaper said.

ROK Planning Minister resigns:

The government's top economic planner resigned on Tuesday but the move was not expected to affect economic policy, presidential officials said, AP reports from Seoul.

President Kim Young-sam accepted an offer by Economic Planning Minister Chung Jai-suk to resign for health reasons and named Finance Minister Hong Jae-hyong to replace him, the officials said.

Russia shuts down N-plant:

An emergency oil shortage at a Russian nuclear power plant forced officials to shut down one of its reactors, the ITAR-Tass news agency said on Tuesday. Radiation levels were reported normal, AP reports from Moscow.

Low levels of oil caused the plant's automatic protection system to switch off one of the generators Monday. Management at the Kalinin plant, located 160 kilometres (100 miles) northwest of Moscow, then decided to shut down the entire reactor unit.

Cardoso wins exit poll:

Fernando Henrique Cardoso was headed for an easy first round victory in Brazil's presidential election, exit poll results showed on Monday, Reuters reports from Sao Paulo.

The results of the poll conducted by a private research firm Ibope, showed Cardoso, a free-market advocate, headed for a victory of about seven percentage points over the combined total of all his opponents.

Volcano Mayon may erupt:

Scientists on Tuesday raised an alert at volcano Mayon after jets of steam and earthquakes were observed again, reports AP from Manila.

July Sabit, spokesman for the Philippine Institute on Volcanology and Seismology, also said scientists ruled out volcanic activity in Mount Malindang on Mindanao island after villagers reported sulfuric smells and river silt.

Filipino hostage dies:

President Fidel Ramos on Tuesday urged kidnappers to free their two captives after a third died of sickness in captivity, AP reports from Manila.

Two government engineers and a woman community organizer of the National Irrigation Authority were kidnapped on September 14 in Siraway, a remote town 770 kilometres (480 miles) south of Manila. The chief engineer, Rolando Rizón, died after suffering from a diabetic attack in captivity.

Chechen terrorists plead guilty:

Three Chechen terrorists pleaded guilty to causing the death of four hostages in a helicopter hijacking and kidnapping drama in July, a news agency reported Tuesday, AP reports from Stavropol, Russia.

Four women hostages were killed in an explosion and shootout July 29 when commandos stormed a helicopter held by armed kidnappers in Mineralniya Vody, a southern Russia resort town near the breakaway republic of Chechnya. Six other hostages and five policemen were wounded.

US soldier shot in Haiti:

A US soldier was wounded by gunfire, the first such American casualty since the start of operation "Support Democracy" last month, US military spokesman said yesterday, AFP reports from Port-au-Prince.

The unidentified soldier underwent surgery overnight for the stomach injury and was listed Monday in stable condition, General Henry Hugh Shelton, the commander of US troops said. He added that the victim's chances of recovery were excellent.