

17 non-Asian states back Japan for UNSC seat

TOKYO, Oct 25: Only 17 countries — none in Asia — have gone before the United Nations General Assembly to declare support for a permanent Japanese seat on the Security Council, the Japanese Foreign Affairs Ministry confirmed today, reports AFP.

Vatican sets up ties with PLO

VATICAN CITY, Oct 25: The Vatican established official ties Tuesday with the PLO in an action intended to protect church interests in the Middle East and keep its hand in the peace process, reports AP.

comment on the existence of a memorandum which, according to the Asahi Shimbun newspaper, was sent recently by UN Ambassador Hisashi Owada raising alarm over the lack of support, especially in Asia.

More than 170 countries voiced an opinion before the General Assembly but only 17 of them have pushed the candidature of Japan. Two Pacific countries — Australia and Fiji — are among them, but none are from Asia.

According to the newspaper, Owada asked the Japanese government to increase its efforts to win support from Asian countries. In particular, he pointed to the silence of Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, which had expressed support during visits by Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama last August.

Lanka steps up security for Chandrika, opposition MPs

COLOMBO, Oct 25: A 24-hour curfew was eased at dawn today but Sri Lanka remained under a state of emergency declared shortly after the killing of opposition leader Gamini Dissanayake and 56 others while campaigning, reports AFP.

More vehicles were seen on the roads here today and people reported for work as life began to slowly return to normal after Monday's devastating bomb attack on an opposition United National Party (UNP) rally, witnesses said.

Information Minister Dhamasiri Senanayake said the emergency would be maintained giving wide powers to the military to arrest and detain suspects and said security

has been further tightened for political leaders.

"We have also stepped up security for the Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga and even other opposition MPs who have asked for more bodyguards," Senanayake said after an emergency cabinet meeting late Monday.

Moderate Tamil leaders as well as defence officials have blamed the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for Monday's suspected suicide bombing but the guerrillas for their part have flatly denied.

The LTTE told reporters in the northern Jaffna town Monday that they were "shocked"

by the killing. There was no reaction in Jaffna to the slaying of Dissanayake who had a remote chance of winning the November 9 presidential election.

The elections commissioner says the law states that the poll should go ahead as planned and the opposition UNP will have three days to name a substitute candidate.

The government in the meantime has indefinitely postponed planned talks with the LTTE, and Senanayake said they will have to await the outcome of a probe before deciding on the future of the peace process.

Government negotiator Lionel Fernando said the bomb

attack in Colombo's Thotalanga district would be a setback to the government's effort to seek an early end to ethnic bloodletting that has left over 30,000 dead since 1972.

Dissanayake's family said the killing was the work of the LTTE "to deprive the mainstream political parties of their leadership and thus weaken the entire political fabric of the nation."

Kumaratunga initiated a dialogue with the LTTE shortly after winning the August 16 parliamentary election in a bid to end the Tiger's protracted campaign for independent homeland, which has claimed more than 30,000 lives.

Off the Record



American supermodel Cindy Crawford poses naked with a cat and a fake fur Russian hat for a campaign against furs organised by the American association PETA yesterday in Paris. — AFP photo

Beijing rejects Taipei's proposal for talks

HONG KONG, Oct 25: A Chinese spokesman on Monday rejected a Taiwanese proposal for bilateral meetings at presidential level that would be held on the sidelines of international occasions, reports AFP.

A spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the Communist Party's central committee, quoted by Xinhua, said the idea was "improper" and sought "to give people the impression of two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan, on international occasions."

The informal summit proposal was recently aired in Taipei as a means of strengthening contact between the two rivals.

Communist-governed China and the nationalist government have held a series of high-level political talks, but have never held a summit, a move that China says would give respectability to the government of what it considers to be a renegade province.

The spokesman quoted by the Xinhua news agency monitored here, said the concept of meeting on the sidelines of international events was also "puzzling" as the Taiwan issue is an internal affair.

ROK boat fire death toll rises to 25

DANYAN, Oct 25: The death toll from a fire aboard a sight-seeing ship rose to 25 on Tuesday as weeping relatives tried to identify bodies burned beyond recognition, reports AP.

Police, assisted by navy divers, searched the murky waters for six people still missing. The fire broke out on the 54-ton Chungju No. 5 Monday as it cruised on Chungju Lake in central South Korea with 134 people on board.

Searchers recovered five bodies Tuesday, bringing the death toll to 25. The fire injured 33 people, many seriously, and local fishermen rescued 70 people from the ship.

Fresh clan fighting in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU, Oct 25: Rival subclans fought with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades in southern Mogadishu on Tuesday and Somali reporters said at least three people were killed, reports AP.

UN military spokesman Maj Rich McDonald described the fighting as "quite intense." He said the UN had no reports of casualties.

The fighting began Monday night in a neighborhood known as Bermuda, one of the most violent sections of the city. It is named after the Bermuda Triangle, the Atlantic Ocean region where ships and airplanes have reportedly disappeared mysteriously.

Woman spends 13 years with forceps in stomach

BEIJING: A Chinese woman who spent 13 years with a pair of 16 centimetre (six inch) forceps left in her stomach after surgery has been awarded damages of 29,000 yuan (3,400 dollars), China Consumer News reported yesterday, says AFP.

Hu Quanzheng, a peasant from eastern Sichuan province underwent sterilisation in 1978 as part of China's family planning programme.

It was not until 1991, after a series of examinations that she underwent further surgery to remove the object, the newspaper said.

Hu later sued and received 29,000 yuan in damages, the report said. It did not say whether the doctor responsible had been prosecuted.

Bizarre case!

LONDON: A man jailed for life this year for a double murder has won a retrial because four members of the jury used a ouija board to consult the spirit of one of his alleged victims, reports AP.

An article in The Times of London on Tuesday called the Court of Appeal case decided by a three-member panel consisting of the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, and two other judges, bizarre.

The Court of Appeal in London is the second highest court in the land after that of the Law Lords of the House of Lords. Lord Taylor and the two other judges in their ruling on Monday quashed the two convictions against insurance broker Stephen Young and ordered him to be retried at London's Central Criminal Court.

Young, 35, must stay in prison until his retrial, which will be held on a date yet to be fixed.

He was jailed for life last March after the jury at the Crown Court at the seaside town of Hove, 50 miles (80 km) south of London, found him guilty of murdering newly-weds Harry and Nicola Fuller. Young had pleaded innocent at his trial.

HR violations part of dev process: Suharto

JAKARTA, Oct 25: President Suharto has said that human rights violations in Indonesia may occur as part of the development process and called on greater efforts to remedy the problem, reports AP.

But Suharto said Indonesia cannot blindly follow western-dominated views on human rights such as those sponsored by the United Nations.

"We need to study the various UN decisions on human rights. We will ratify the ones which are in conformity with our national ideology," Suharto said Monday while inaugurating a government-sponsored workshop on human rights.

Suharto's remarks come a month before Indonesia is to host 18 national leaders at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting when foreign media and government attention would be focused on the country.

Indonesia's human rights record has come under increasing scrutiny in areas such as East Timor, a former Portuguese colony that Jakarta annexed in 1976, its curbs on the local press and poor labour conditions.

In East Timor, Indonesian troops killed more than 50 people taking part in a pro-independence demonstration in late 1991, according to a government-appointed investigation.

Suharto did not elaborate on the violations.

BRIEFLY

22 feared drowned in India: At least 22 people were feared drowned yesterday after a boat taking them to a Hindu ceremony capsized in a river in northern India on Monday, the Press Trust of India reported, AFP says from New Delhi.

Thirteen people managed to swim to safety after the boat sank in the Sarayu River near the village of Dhanghata, police told the news agency, but at least 22 others were missing and presumed dead. Police said the boat was taking Hindu faithful to the city of Faizabad for a religious ceremony.

Ghali condemns Colombo incident: Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has condemned as an act of terrorism the weekend bombing of an election rally in Sri Lanka that killed a presidential candidate and more than 50 other people, Reuter reports from United Nations.

The secretary general deeply regrets the death of the candidate for the presidency of the United National Party, Gamini Dissanayake, together with at least 56 other victims of the bombing in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Sunday, a statement issued through a UN spokesman on Monday said.

Quake shakes Pakistan: A moderate earthquake shook northern and central Pakistan yesterday, rattling windows in the capital, Islamabad. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, Reuter says from Islamabad.

Officials at the meteorological office in the northwestern city of Peshwar said the quake at 5:55 am (0055 GMT) measured 5.7 on the open ended Richter scale and had its epicenter 300 km (180 miles) north of Peshwar in the Hindu Kush range.

81 rebels arrested in Egypt: Security forces arrested 81 suspected Muslim militants throughout Egypt in the past week in a bid to quell a surge in violence, police said on Monday, AFP reports from Cairo.

Thirty nine of the militants were arrested in the provinces of Suhag, 485 kilometers south of Cairo and Qalubiyah, 50 kilometers north of here, police said.

Palestinian killed in Nablus: Israeli army special forces killed a Palestinian near Nablus in the occupied West Bank on Monday, military sources said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

They said the Palestinian was one of several occupants of a car who had "resisted" when ordered to a stop at a road block near the village of Qarawat Bani Hassan, south of Nablus.

Rebels kill 21 in Mali: Eight people including one imam, were killed on Sunday in the river port of Gao, northeast Mali in reprisal attacks the day after a "rebel" night raid in the same town left 13 people dead, officials said on Monday, AFP reports from Bamako.

The Mali government condemned on Monday, "the unacceptable settling of scores and the pillages that followed the attack by elements determined to set Mali on a course of spiralling violence," but did not provide additional information.

SA mine blast claims 5: At least five people, including three rescuers, were killed in an accident at a South African gold mine near Johannesburg, the mine owners said in a statement yesterday, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

The three rescuers died after they were overcome with toxic fumes late on Monday while trying to locate two missing miners after a blasting accident at Doornfontein Gold Mine. All five bodies had been brought to the surface, the company said.

Confce on women refugees: A conference on Muslim women refugees will be held in Sharjah on November 13 to discuss their physical and psychological sufferings, GNA reports from Sharjah.

The conference will be organised by the Department of Information and Culture, the UN High Commission for Refugees and the International Islamic Relief Organisation.

Actor Raul Julia dies: Actor Raul Julia, star of "Kiss of the Spider Woman" and the Addams Family films, died on Monday of complications following a stroke, hospital officials said. He was 54, Reuter reports from New York.

The Puerto Rican-born actor was also known for playing left wing Latin American political figures and for his stage work including the role of "Mack the Knife" in an acclaimed Lincoln Centre revival of "The Three Penny Opera."

7 Picasso paintings stolen: Seven paintings by Pablo Picasso, worth 4 million US dollars, were stolen last weekend from a private art gallery in Zurich, Switzerland, Xinhua reports from Geneva.

The thieves sneaked into the gallery, which closed on the weekend through the cellar of a neighbouring building and stole the paintings, according to a Zurich police source.



British Prime Minister John Major (R) and his Irish counterpart Albert Reynolds (L) meet at Chequers, UK for a summit meeting to agree on a framework for new inter-party talks on Northern Ireland. — AFP photo

Shabir Shah seeks int'l help for liberation of Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Oct 25: Kashmir's top separatist leader Shabir Shah, just freed from prison, has rejected India's plans for elections, to be held soon, in the Himalayan region and called on the United States and Britain to back his secessionist drive, reports Reuter.

"I appeal to the US President Bill Clinton, the UK and the UN to bring pressure on India to give up its obstinacy and arrogance," Shah said in an interview late on Monday.

Shah, called the "Nelson Mandela of Kashmir" by supporters, spoke to Reuters in a brick house rented by his followers on the outskirts of Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir state.

He said he would not give up his lifelong struggle for

Kashmir's freedom despite spending 20 of the past 26 years in prison for advocating secession from India.

Shah, 41, was first jailed at the age of 15 for leading a demonstration against Indian rule in Kashmir. In 1988, his father died after being beaten in police custody.

Shah said he had been beaten, chained, stripped, deprived of sleep and placed in solitary confinement. He said his ears and kidneys had been damaged, and he can only stand for short periods because of pain in his feet.

He was arrested in 1989, the year the militants launched an armed separatist rebellion, and was released on October 14 in Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir.

In his first days of freedom, Shah has toured the Himalayan

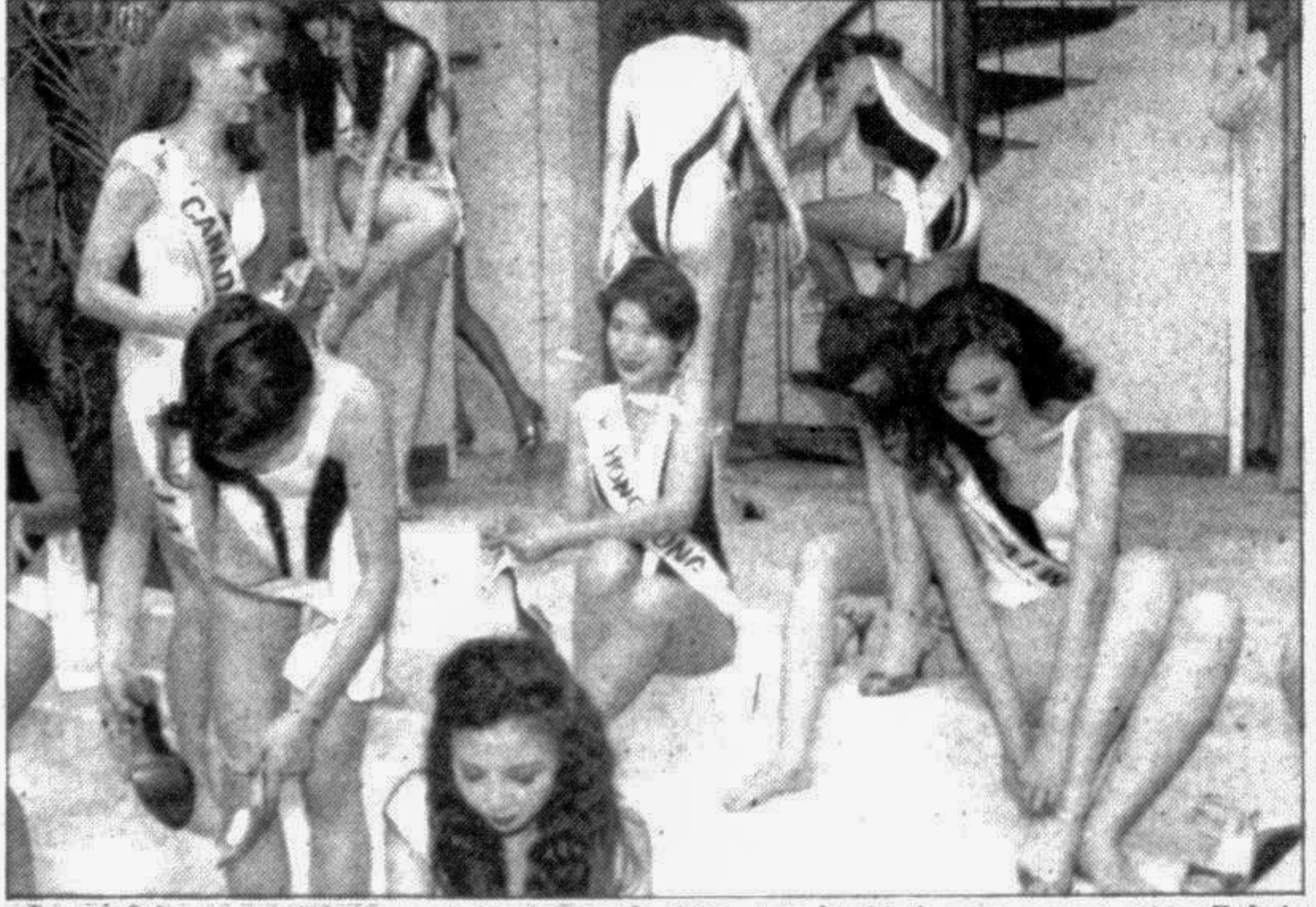
region drawing hundreds of thousands of supporters chanting "Free Kashmir". A rally in Srinagar last week drew an estimated 200,000 people — the biggest gathering in the Himalayan city for nearly two decades, residents said.

Shah, a Muslim, said the crowds included many Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists, showing the people wanted a chance to cast a separatist vote.

"Everywhere I have gone the slogans have been 'We want freedom'," said Shah, whose dark beard is flecked with grey.

"That is a kind of referendum. That is the message to the government of India."

Shah was the fourth secessionist leader freed in recent months in hopes of rallying regional support for elections that New Delhi wants to hold in March



Some of the 28 candidates participating in the Miss Asia Pacific beauty contest take off their shoes for a pictorial yesterday in Manila. Clockwise from bottom, Miss Korea Mi Ho Chang, Miss Japan Sayaka Ishizaka, Miss Canada, Susanne Rothfoss, Miss Israel Nathalie Cohen, Miss Hong Kong Lei Li and Miss Taiwan Chen Wei-Ling. The new Miss Asia Pacific will be crowned on November 5 in central Cebu Island. — AFP photo

French school expels 9 girls for wearing headscarves

LILLE, France, Oct 25: A French high school expelled nine Muslim girls on Monday for defying a government ban on wearing Islamic headscarves in class, reports Reuter.

The headmaster said 11 other girls were likely to be expelled today for wearing the headscarves seen by French authorities as a symbol of Muslim fundamentalism, defended by the girls as part of a traditional dress.

Among the 11 remaining cases, three might be limited to a simple warning said Claude Thomas, head of the Faldeherbe state run school in Lille in northern France.

UN peacekeeping faces ethical problems: Ghali

LONDON, Oct 25: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has urged major powers tired of growing involvement in peacekeeping not to turn their backs on countries that ask for help in resolving new crises, reports Reuter.

Boutros-Ghali, addressing a dinner in London on Monday said the world body now faced ethical problems in deciding which conflicts to tackle since the expansion of UN peacekeeping.

"We have a fatigue. The member states are less keen to intervene in peacekeeping operation... Less ready to offer the equipment and they don't want to get involved," he said.

"The real problems is this: Why must we intervene in this

region and not in another situation? On what basis are we intervening? If a member state is asking the assistance of the United Nations, is asking the mediation of the United Nations, I believe that it is a duty of the United Nations to intervene."

Boutros-Ghali said that while there were thousands of UN troops in former Yugoslavia, he had been unable to secure any forces for the former Soviet republic of Georgia despite a personal appeal from President Eduard Shevardnadze.

The United Nations had sent only a few observers to Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The conflicts there had been bloody but had won comparatively little international atten-

tion. A UN force for Rwanda was still not up to strength, he said.

The United States and others wanted to end the costly UN operation in Somalia, widely seen as a failure, since there was no political will to end the conflict.

"Why must we pull out of Somalia and continue to stay in Cyprus? ... We are still there in Yugoslavia," Boutros-Ghali said.

"Certainly this is an ethical problem because the United Nations has been created to assist all the member states, without difference, to solve peacefully their international disputes."

The annual cost of the 17 UN peacekeeping operations around the globe could reach

four billion dollars by the end of this year, Boutros-Ghali said, compared with just a few hundred million dollars just after

the end of the Cold War. As the United Nations ap-

proaches its 50th anniversary next year, the role of "blue helmet" forces has also changed. They are now required to take on a wide variety of tasks and intervene in civil wars or countries without a government.

For this reason, Boutros-Ghali said the United Nations was increasingly prepared to "farm out" operations and turn to others for help, as it has done with NATO in Bosnia, with the United States in Haiti and with France in Rwanda.

But he acknowledged that it was a far cry from his 1992 proposal to create a standing UN force, with contributions from member nations, that could be deployed when crises arose.

"It is certainly second best,"

Floods claim 245 children in Vietnam

HANOI, Oct 25: At least 245 children died in floods in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, according to latest figures, raising the total death toll to 288, the Communist Party newspaper Nhan Dan reported today, reports Reuter.

The floods in six provinces in the delta were caused by heavy rains in catchment areas further north in China, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

The increase in the death toll, officially announced as 180 two weeks ago, was apparently not due to fresh flooding but because of late reports coming in from remote areas.

Earlier reports said crops and property worth more than 1.040 billion dong (95 million US dollar) had been destroyed