

BRIEFLY

Singer jailed in Vietnam: One of Vietnam's most popular and controversial singers was given a suspended sentence of a year in jail for his performance of banned songs at a wild birthday party broken up by police, a report said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

Ngoc Son was charged with 'abusing the rights to freedom and democracy by violating the benefits of the state and social organisations' during a birthday party organised for an overseas Vietnamese friend at a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, the Tuoi Tre newspaper said.

2 quake shake south China: Two earthquakes in the southwest China region of Guangxi seriously injured three people, destroyed and damaged more than 1,100 homes and cut transport and telecommunication links, the People's Daily said yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

The quakes, measuring 3.8 and 4.5 on the Richter scale, hit Daifua county just after 3 pm local time on Wednesday, affecting 21 villages, it said.

Takemura to visit 3 states: Japanese Finance Minister Masayoshi Takemura will visit China, Singapore and Malaysia this month to exchange views with regional leaders, the finance ministry said yesterday. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Takemura is taking advantage of a parliamentary recess to visit Beijing on January 9-11, Singapore on January 11-12 and Kuala Lumpur on January 12-14. He will return to Tokyo via Singapore on January 15.

Gunmen fire on Israeli car: Gunmen fired on an Israeli car in the West Bank Friday wounding two passengers, one seriously, settlers said. AP reports from Jerusalem.

The shooting topped a week of violence in which 10 Palestinians were killed by Israeli troops. Aharon Dome, a spokesman for the Settler Council, said the shooting occurred north of the Palestinian city of Ramallah. He said that one Israeli was seriously wounded and a second had suffered moderate injuries.

Studeman CIA's acting chief: President Bill Clinton appointed on Thursday CIA Deputy Director William Studeman to temporarily head the intelligence agency, an official said. AFP reports from Washington.

Studeman, 54, a former director of Naval Intelligence, was to act as interim director following the surprise resignation last week of Director James Woolsey.

US move for peace in Cyprus: The United States has launched efforts to "breathe some new life" into a peace process for Cyprus and enable UN forces separating the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities to leave the Mediterranean island, reports AP from Washington.

President Clinton Thursday named New York lawyer Richard Beattie as his special envoy to seek resolution of the 20-year dispute, perhaps by bringing Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots together in a federation, the White House said.

Angola-UNITA meet Tuesday: The government military chief of staff agreed on Thursday to meet with his UNITA rebel counterpart in no-man's land near the conquered rebel capital to discuss disarming their troops, a UN official said, reports AP from Luanda.

Chief of Staff Gen Joao de Matos and top UNITA rebel soldier Arlindo "Ben-Ben" Pena will meet on Tuesday in the central highlands, at a point roughly equidistant between their front lines, the UN's top military observer in Angola, Gen Chris Garuba, told The Associated Press.

S African minister Slovo dies: South Africa's Housing Minister Joe Slovo, a white who dedicated his life to fighting apartheid, died peacefully in his sleep yesterday after a long battle with cancer, reports Reuter from Johannesburg.

Slovo, 68, was Chairman of the South African Communist Party and a leading figure in President Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC).

Child dies in Colombian revolt: With oil tanks ablaze on the horizon, troops moved in Thursday to quell a peasant uprising in southern Colombia that reportedly left one child dead and cost millions of dollars in oil revenue, AP reports from Colombia.

Manila departs 8 Iranians: Eight Iranians who were denied entry at Manila's airport because of suspicions about their reason for visiting were deported Friday as part of security precautions for Pope John Paul's visit to Manila next week, AP reports from Manila.

The Iranians, seven men and one woman, arrived Thursday from Malaysia. They first said they were on a business trip, then after further questioning by immigration agents claimed to be tourists.



Held Iranian national Janah Talebi (L) interviewed by journalists at Manila airport's exclusion room on Thursday after immigration authorities barred eight Iranians including Talebi from entering the country. — AFP photo

Islamabad denies Moscow's allegations

ISLAMABAD, Jan 6: Pakistan today denied that Afghan refugees on its territory were being sent to fight against the Russians in the breakthrough republic of Chechnya, reports AFP.

Pakistan is not aware of any such movement of Afghan refugees from its territory to Chechnya, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said, responding to Moscow's allegations. We have categorically advised the Russian authorities of this fact.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Grigory Karasin had said in Moscow that mercenaries were being recruited in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and in refugee camps in Pakistan.

Iran was blamed for allowing the transit of mercenaries across its territory to Russia.

India purchases enriched uranium from China

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: India has purchased enriched uranium from China to run a US-built atomic power plant, and a nuclear analyst said Friday the move allowed New Delhi to avoid angering the United States by reprocessing spent fuel, reports AP.

India started receiving the uranium from the China Nuclear Energy Corp. on Thursday so it can continue to operate the plant in Tarapur, near the western city of Bombay.

It is the first time India has bought nuclear fuel from China and another indication that the two countries, which fought a war in 1962, are slowly im-

proving their relations.

In 1979, the United States stopped selling enriched uranium to India because it refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Tarapur is the only US-made nuclear plant in India.

When Washington stopped selling India uranium, it began buying it from France. But France stopped that in late 1993 under pressure from the United States when a 25-year agreement on international inspection of the plant ended.

Indian officials were quoted Friday as saying the Chinese deal was approved by the International Atomic Energy Agency, which will inspect the

plant to make sure it complies with its safeguards.

India could have continued to run Tarapur for a while by reprocessing spent fuel, but that would probably have angered the United States, India says it has the right to reprocess the spent fuel, but the United States disagrees.

In an interview with The Associated Press on Friday, atomic energy analyst G. Balachandran said India probably avoided US criticism by buying the fuel from another country and voluntarily opening up the plant to international inspections.

The Tarapur issue was one of the irritants between India

and the United States, and both sides have backed away from a confrontation," said Balachandran, who was recently a senior visiting scientist at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

Officials at the US Embassy in New Delhi were not immediately available to comment on the deal.

The low-grade uranium from China is being reprocessed into bundles at the Nuclear Fuel Complex in the southern city of Hyderabad and will be used in Tarapur's two 500-megawatt reactors.

The Tarapur plant was built by General Electric in 1969.



Newt Gingrich (L) Speaker of the House of Representatives, laughs as President Bill Clinton (R) looks on during a meeting of the bipartisan leadership of Congress on January 5 at the White House. — AFP photo

Progress in Afghan talks

JALALABAD, Jan 6: A UN peace envoy to Afghanistan held talks on Thursday with Hezb-i-Islami Party leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the arch rival to President Burhanuddin Rabbani, and said some progress had been made, reports Reuter.

We made some progress in our talks," envoy Mahmood Mestiri told reporters after about two hours' meeting with Hekmatyar at the former Royal Winter Palace in the eastern town of Jalalabad, capital of Nangarhar province bordering Pakistan.

"We are focusing now on the necessity of the transferring of power as soon as possible," he said.

John Monjo, who met Rabbani in Kabul on Wednesday, also met Hekmatyar at Jalalabad on Thursday. Afghan sources said. But no details of his meeting were available.

Mestiri, a former Tunisian foreign minister who arrived in Jalalabad on Wednesday on the second leg of his current trip to try to end factional fighting in the war-ravaged country, said he and Hekmatyar had agreed on a formula for the transfer of power by Rabbani. But he gave no details.

Hekmatyar, who together with northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum leads a coordination council fighting against Rabbani's forces, said he had forwarded his formula to which the UN envoy had

agreed.

Mestiri, who met Rabbani in the capital Kabul on Sunday, said the embattled president did not reject transfer of power. But he added: "What I got from his side ... is half an answer."

Asked if the UN peace plan had incorporated his conditions, he said the conditions concerning the current situation had been included.

About his meeting with Monjo, he said the United States was supporting the UN peace plan.

Monjo also had a meeting on Wednesday with Dostum in the northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif, an Afghan source said.

An extended presidential term of Rabbani had ended on Wednesday.

Truce to usher in new era of peace: Kumaratunga

COLOMBO, Jan 6: A truce in Sri Lanka's 11-year ethnic civil war will begin Sunday and could one day lead to a lasting peace between the nation's Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority, President Chandrika Kumaratunga said Friday, reports AP.

"I pray that this will be the dawn of a new era of peace for our long suffering nation," Kumaratunga, the new socialist president, said in a speech opening a session of Parliament.

The truce, the most significant accord in five years, was negotiated Tuesday by a government team and Tamil Tiger leaders in the rebel stronghold of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka.

Details of the agreement were to be published later Friday.

More than 34,000 people have been killed in the Tamil insurrection since 1983. Three more rebels died and eight soldiers were injured Thursday night in a military ambush in a village in the

north, officials said Friday.

In her speech, Kumaratunga repeated that the government is committed to a peaceful solution. She also warned that it does not want peace at any cost, "but peace with honour."

"The dignity and self-esteem of all parties will be buttressed by the proposed solutions. ... The interests of the majority community will be safeguarded," she said during a ceremony that included a 21-gun salute and honour guard.

The next round of government rebel negotiations will occur January 14, and the president said the government will propose giving the Tamils some autonomy in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, the areas where they are fighting for homelands.

Kumaratunga also said a cautious and democratic approach that encourages dialogue, eliminates distrust and promotes a consensus is at the heart of the government's commitment.

"Our government sees this

cessation of hostilities as a prelude to peace talks which would address the substantive issues underlying the armed conflict and the ethnic problems," she said.

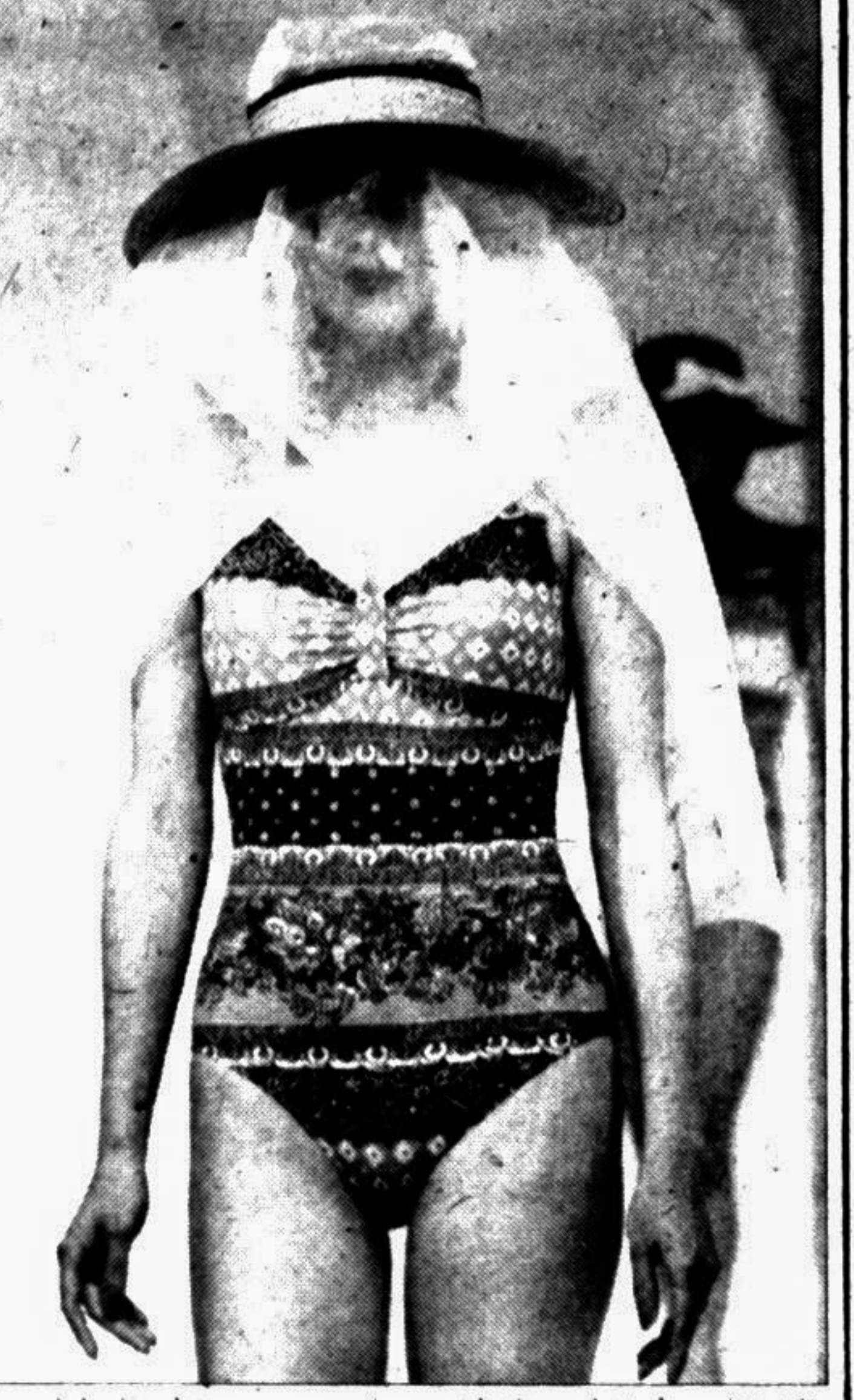
Both sides had wanted a truce to be in place by the time Pope John Paul II arrives in Colombo January 20 for a two-day visit.

Kumaratunga's party won last year's presidential and parliamentary elections by promising to end the war and that easily defeated a party that had governed Sri Lanka for 17 years.

The truce will be monitored by a committee of government officials, Tamil Tiger rebels and foreign representatives, reportedly the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The predominantly Hindu Tamils — 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people say they are discriminated against, by the Buddhist Sinhalese, who control the government and the military.

Off the Record



A model displays a one-piece ethnic printed swimsuit during the 1995 swimsuit show by a Japanese textile designer Teijin in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP photo

Unwed mother tosses child

CHICAGO: An unwed teenager who had concealed her pregnancy from her mother and gave birth in her bathroom, then tossed the baby naked out a second-floor window into the bitter cold and went off to school, police said, reports AP.

Marisol Melendez, 18, was charged Thursday with aggravated battery to a child as the infant — named Zoe, the Greek word for life, by hospital employees — lay in critical condition.

"The mother was very afraid of her parents," said Lt. Jose Urteaga, who described Melendez as a high school senior with good grades. She didn't want her parents to know that she was pregnant.

Melendez was on her way to school Wednesday morning when she started feeling sick and returned to her West Side apartment, because she feared she was in labour. Urteaga said. Her mother was sleeping and her father at work.

"She sat for approximately three hours in her dining room crying and praying" before going into the bathroom and delivering the 6-pound (2.7-kilogram) baby, said Officer Linda Reiter.

Melendez threw the baby out the window into the alley. "She wasn't thinking. She just wanted to get it over with," the officer said.

Fortunately for the baby, Gloria Sosa's car wouldn't start. Sosa, who lives in the same building as the Melendez family, found the baby as she walked behind the building on her way to the store to get change for the bus.

"I heard something crying, and at first I thought it was a cat. When I got closer, I saw it was a baby," Sosa said. "My heart just went down to the pit of my stomach."

Love's strange logic

LONDON: A Briton who drove over her husband after an argument, fracturing his skull and breaking his legs, escaped jail after he pleaded for her, Thursday, Daily Telegraph said, reports Reuter.

"I can't live without her," wheel chair-bound Fred Brennan, who is still taking painkillers to cope with his 45 leg fractures, told police after the incident which put him in hospital for five months.

A court in Newcastle, northern England, gave Thai-born Nittaya Brennan, 42, a nine-month suspended sentence for grievous bodily harm after her husband spoke up for her. "She is very argumentative," her 55-year-old husband said after the hearing. "We're back together and very happy."

Sex: The Catholic experience

NEW YORK: Books, movies and stand-up comics describe American Catholic sexuality as a procession between the bedroom and the confessional. But a prominent sociologist says Catholic sex isn't a contradiction in terms, reports AP.

Catholics have sex more often, approach sex more playfully and are more likely to enjoy sex than non-Catholics, concludes the Rev. Andrew Greeley in a new book "Sex: The Catholic Experience." The book reviews survey data from 1989 to 1991 on Americans' sexual behaviour.

In fact, the data suggest those people looking to spend more time making love than falling asleep watching TV on the couch should consider Catholic spouses. In one survey of Protestants, more than 60 per cent who were married to Catholic spouses reported having sex once a week or more. In comparison, 54 per cent of Protestants married to Protestant and 40 per cent of Protestants with Jewish spouses reported having sex with the same frequency.

Catholics "may well be repressed," Greeley said in an interview. "The only point in my book is that they are less repressed than others."

Greeley, a Catholic priest and senior director of the National Opinion Research Centre at the University of Chicago, said the findings will burst a few bubbles.

Rao faces fresh trouble

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was faced with fresh trouble today after three powerful regional leaders of his Congress (I) Party refused to call off a virtual revolt, reports AFP.

One of them, Vazhpaday Ramanurthy, likened Rao to Mikhail Gorbachev, saying he was presiding over the destruction of the 109-year-old Congress Party just as the latter brought about the Soviet Union's disintegration.

An opinion poll published today in the times of India newspaper provided little solace to the beleaguered prime minister, with 49 per cent of the 1,523 people surveyed saying his performance was just "average."

Thirty-three per cent of the people polled in six major cities said the 73-year-old Rao was doing a "good" job, while 17 per cent rated his performance as "bad".

The latest attacks on Rao, who is also the Congress president, followed his decision to name a trusted aide, Jitendra Prasada, as the chief of the party in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

But newspaper said today most members of the Uttar Pradesh Congress were still siding with Narain Dutt Tiwari, the former party boss in the state who is openly critical of Rao.

The simmering anger within the party against Rao has come out in the open since the Congress rout in elections in two key states last month and the resignation from Rao's cabinet of his main rival, Arjun Singh.

A congress spokesman, however, claimed that all was well for Rao.

"No (Congress) prime minister has faced so many problems as Rao is facing now," said a party leader here. The dissidence has forced many critics to train their guns on Rao loyalists across India's 25 states.



British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd (L) talks with Indian Finance Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday in New Delhi. Hurd extended Britain's support for India's economic liberalization policies. — AFP photo

UN ready to mediate Chechnya crisis

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 6: Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali expressed concern on Thursday over fighting in the breakaway Russian republic of Chechnya and said the United Nations was prepared to mediate in the dispute if asked, reports AFP.

Boutros-Ghali said UN officials have agreed to provide humanitarian relief to refugees in the region, and appealed for talks to resolve the crisis with no further use of force.

He said that the United Nations was willing to act as a mediator in the dispute but said it would become involved only if a "member state" requests assistance.

"Unless a member state asks mediation or any kind of assistance we will not intervene," he said.