# BDMFFF



US actor Tom Hanks holds his award for outstanding performance, in a leading role for his part in the movie "Forrest Gump" during the inaugural Screen Actors Guild Awards Show on Saturday in Los Angeles. - AFP photo

Yemen, S Arabia sign MOU: Yemen and Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on early Sunday morning to resolve their 60-year-old border dispute. Sanaa television reported, Reuter says from

The television broadcast live coverage of the signing ceremony between Yemeni and Saudi delegations in the Saudi holy city of Mecca.

Naruhito, Masako visit Kobe: Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako made their first visit to earthquake-devastated Kobe Sunday, consoling victims still homeless more than a month after the quake, AP reports from Kobe, Japan.

The royal couple had gone to the Middle East on a previously scheduled visit Jan. 20, just three days after the Jan. 17 quake. That caused some criticism of the Foreign Ministry and the Imperial Household Agency and the trip was cut short after a week.

60pc Irish back peace plan: More than 60 of Ireland's people support the British-Irish peace plan for Northern Ireland and are prepared to change the country's constitution to help, according to a poll published by the Sunday Press newspaper, AP reports from Dublin.

Earlier polls in Northern Ireland and Britain also showed strong support for the proposals announced Wednesday by Prime Minister John Bruton and British leader John Major.

Kim Jong's tribute to Marshall O: North Korea's heir apparent Kim Jong-Il paid his last respects to the country's second-ranking leader, Marshall O Jin-U as he lay in state in Pyongang, an official report said on Sunday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Reclusive Kim. 53, visited the bier of O on Saturday after the 78-year-old armed forces minister died of cancer earlier in the day, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a dispatch monitored here.

Basque rebels clash with cops: Basque militants and police clashed repeatedly overnight after a demonstration against a Spanish group blamed for the killings of 25 people in France's Basque region in the 1980s. authorities said on Sunday, AP reports from Boyonne.

Militants threw gasoline bombs and burned crowd barriers, while police responded with tear gas. No injuries were reported, but the windows of two banks were smashed and one car set on fire by one of the Molotov cocktails.

US actor Vincent Gazzo dies: Actor and playwright Michael Vincent Gazzo, best known for his role as a Mafia lieutenant in the film "The Godfather, Part II," has died from complications of a stroke, a family spekeswoman said on Saturday. Gazzo was 71. Reuter reports from Los Angéles.

The spokeswoman said Gazzo, who was nominated for an Academy Award for his portrayal of Frank Pentageli in the 1974 movie, died in a Los Angeles hospital on February 14.

Zhirinovsky heads for Baghdad: Russian ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky led a 50-man delegation on board two battered traqi buses on Saturday and headed for Baghdad to underline opposition to economic sanctions on Iraq. Reuter reports from Amman.

"We are for eliminating all sanctions from Baghdad, from Iraq." Zhirinovsky said as he led the group, largely parliamentarians, from Jordan's main airport.

Tremor shakes S Guatemala: An earth tremor measuring 5 on the Richter scale shook southern Guatemala on Saturday but there were no reports of damage or injuries, the National Seismology and Volcanology Institute said. Reuter reports from Guatemala City.

The epicentre of the tremor was in the southern province of Santa Rosa, 88 miles (142 kms) south of Guatemala City, institute director Eddy Sanchez said.

# Explosion kills 25 Russian servicemen near Grozny

International \_\_\_\_\_

MOSCOW. Feb 26: An explosion killed at least 25 Russian servicemen near the Chechen capital of Grozny, casting a further pall over Moscow's bedevilled campaign to crush the separatist region's independence bid, reports Reuter.

Itar-Tass news agency. quoting officials at Russian military headquarters in the town of Mozdok, said the men died early on Saturday when an unidentified explosive device suddenly detonated.

The dead included members of an OMON, special purposed Interior Ministry unit, regular Interior Ministry troops and staff of the federal counter-intelligence service. Tass gave no further details.

Russian officials said on Friday 1,146 servicemen had

Pakistan against

India's permanent

seat at UNSC

Jamsheed Marker, who has just completed his tenure as

Pakistan's Ambassador to the

United Nations, has said that

Islamabad is opposed to India

getting a permanent seat at

the Security Council as New

Delhi has "violated" the United

Nations resolutions on Kash-

tions should be the minimum

requirement for the purpose,

Implementing the resolu-

Besides, he said, aspects

like other claimants for the

seat from Asia would also have

to be taken into consideration.

cently, he said Indonesia and

Pakistan could be among the

remark by a newsman that ap-

plying the criteria strictly

would disqualify even some

present permanent members.

Heavy artillery

duels in Kabul

defying truce

to Afghan President Burhanud-

din Rabbani and the Shilite

Hezb-I-Wahdat faction ex-

changed intense rocket and

artillery fire here overnight

Saturday, breaching a UN-

sponsored ceasefire, reports

From the sound of the ex-

plosions, the attacks appeared

centered in areas controlled by

Abdul Ali Mazari, head of the

pro-Iranian Wahdat, in the

southwestern part of the capi-

struck the northwest districts

of the city, Khair Khana and

The centre of Kabul where

It was unclear today

whether these attacks, which

lasted more than an hour.

were accompanied by troop

movements or caused casual-

N Korea cancels

visit by seven

women to South

seven North Korean women for

a seminar on sex slaves used by

Japan's World War II army was

canceled just hours before they

were to cross the border Sun-

the first by North Koreans to

South Korea in 15 months, and

had been expected to help

thaw the longstanding dead-

lock in relations. The two

sides have not been on speak-

ing terms because of nuclear

for the abrupt cancellation, the

South Korean Unification Min-

North Korea gave no reason

The visit would have been

day, reports AP.

disputes.

istry said.

SEOUL. Feb 26: A visit by

Karte Parwan, which are con-

part of the president's artillery is positioned was also ham-

trolled by Rabbani.

mered.

Rocket and mortar fire also

KABUL, Feb 26: Forces loyal

But he did not respond to a

Talking to newsmen re-

mir, reports PTI.

other claimants.

he added.

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 26:

been killed so far in a conflict which is rapidly becoming Moscow's bloodiest war since World War Two.

The death rate in the 11. weeks since troops were sent into Chechnya is already much higher than for the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, where 14,000 died over 10

Commonwealth television said Chechen religious leaders met Russian military representatives on Saturday to discuss possible ways of ending the war, but chances for success seemed slim.

Russian artillery pounded Chechen positions outside Grozhy throughout the night and into Saturday to try to cut off routes into the capital and stop rebel infiltration.

COLOMBO, Feb 26: Tamil

rebels have accused the gov-

ernment of delaying the next

round of peace talks aimed at

ending the ethnic war, a

newspaper reported on Sun-

your part to resume the fourth

round of talks has impeded the

formation of peace commit-

tees," the Island newspaper

quoted rebel negotiator Tamil

Both sides have traded ac-

cusations that each is delaying

the start of talks aimed at

finding a political solution to

the 11-year-old war that has

October; have so far focussed

on economic issues and the

The talks, which began in

"The deliberate delay on

day, says AP.

Chelvam as saying.

killed over 34,000.

The shelling sent a black cloud of oily smoke soaring into the air above Grozny, suggesting the city's major oil refinery had been hit.

AP adds: An electrical short circuit triggered the explosion in Chechnya's capital on Saturday that killed at least 25 Russian servicemen. Russian army officials said Sunday.

"Those killed in the explosion on Grozny's southern outskirts included 20 members of the OMON, or special riot police squads, plus Interior Ministry troops and staff of the Federal Counter-intelligence Service.

The blast resulted from a short circuit in a remote-control device used to detonate mines, an unidentified spokesman at Russia's military

Tamil Tigers accuse govt

of delaying peace talks

fire. The panels are to be

headed by officials from Nor-

way. Canada and the Nether

lands, who came here six

the next round is likely to be

rebels was in a letter to

Kusumsiri Balapatabendi, the

head of the government nego-

denied government accusa-

tions that the guerillas have

violated the ceasefire by plot-

Chandrika Kumaratunga, con-

structing new camps and car-

rying out a massive recruit-

ting to assassinate President

The government has said

The latest charge by the

The rebel negotiator also

weeks ago.

held next week.

tiating team.

ment campaign.

Six committees were to be

set up to monitor the cease- for a homeland in the north

command base in Mozdok told the Itar-Tass news agency.

There were no immediate reports Sunday on the hostilities in the Grozny area, where heavy fighting erupted the day before as Russian forces tried to encircle the secessionist capital.

The Russian government. which portrays the fighting in Grozny as being in the mop-up stage despite continued battles, said First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets would visit Grozny and Mozdok early in the week. The visit is connected with plans to rebuild war-battered Chechnya and restore its economy, an unidentified government spokesman told the Interfax news agency.

and east for minority Tamils

who, they say, suffer discrimi-

nation from the Sinhalese ma-

jority, which controls the gov-

Meanwhile, the government

ended a four-year-ban on using

a road linking the northern

rebel-stronghold of Jaffna and

the mainland, the military said

pledged to end the sufferings

of the minority Tamils, most of

whom live in the north and

were locked in because of a

war between separatist rebels

guerillas operated an illegal

ferry service across a lagoon to

help civilians cross into the

During the ban. Tiger

and army soldiers.

mainland.

The new government had

ernment and the military.

## Thai PM offers mediation in govt-Karen dispute

border.

BANGKOK, Feb 26: Thailand has offered to act as mediator between the Myanmar military government and minority rebel groups to try and end fighting in its neighbour, the Bangkok Post reported today, reports

Thai prime Minister Chuan Leekpai said it was always Thailand's intention to see the warring parties hold talks to restore peace, the Post reported. He made his offer at a political rally in southern Thailand late on Saturday.

The Post also said Deputy Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan gave Thailand's full support to Karen refugees fleeing the fighting on humanitarian grounds. He said the refugees would return home only when the situation there had returned to normal and they had decided to go of their won free

A Myanmar army offensive against the rebel Karen National Union (KNU) has sent up to 10,000 ethnic Karen to Thailand as refugees since December. They joined some 60,000 Karen already in Thai camps along the Thai Myanmar

Normally cordial relations between Thailand and Myanmar have been strained after Rangon launched the offensive against the autonomy-seeking Karen guerillas in southeastern Myanmar.

Karen guerillas on Tuesday withdrew under fire from Kawmoora, their last defensive base on the border. Thai army officers monitoring the fighting said about 3,000 troops plus an extensive battery of heavy weapons were deployed against the 1,000 defenders of Kawmoora.

# Off the Record

### Virgin Mary in politics

NEW DELHI: Christians in a southern state are enraged by posters and cut-outs depicting a powerful politician as Virgin Mary, newspapers reported Sunday, reports AP.

Thousands of posters were plastered on the walls of houses in Madras city showing Tamil Nadu state Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jayaram as Virgin Mary on the politician's 47th birthday Friday.

"The Christian community is most pained at it. ... We could never imagine that such an act could ever be done," said Madras Archbishop, the Most Rev. Arul Das James, in a

State politician V Gopalaswamy said the posters especially hurt the sentiments of Christians because "the chief minister is heading a corrupt government which has perpetrated atrocities against women. The birthday bash of Ms Jayaram, who heads a regional

party known by its acronym AIADMK, highlighted the eagerness of her supporters to please her who, critics say, are rewarded with lucrative government contracts and jobs. Dozens of Ms Jayaram's fans walked on burning coal to

show her their loyalty and one politician gifted 47 pairs of earrings to school girls. Many lawmakers took out ads in newspapers in which they

described Ms Jayaram as a "living deity." Some printed pictures depicting her as a Hindu goddess, but one by a Christian supporter drew the protests.

### Million dollar compensation for bacterial burger

SEATTLE: A girl who lapsed into a 42-day coma after eating a hamburger tainted with the E coli bacteria will receive a 15.6 million dollar settlement, her family said,

The settlement with the Foodmaker Inc. parent company of the Jack in The Box restaurant chain, awaits a judge's

"I'm pleased with it," said Rex Kiner, whose daughter Brianne was 9 when she fell ill in 1993. "I think the family's happy too, for what we've been through." Brianne, now 12, suffered a stroke and damage to almost

every organ system in her body and is now undergoing rehabilitation. She awoke from her coma two years ago Friday. Company spokeswoman Karen Bachmann declined to discuss details of the settlement.

More than 500 people were fell ill after eating under cooked Jack in the Box hamburgers contaminated with E coli. Three children died. Their parents reached settlements with Foodmaker, including one worth 1.3 million dollar. After filing a class action suit last year, four other families split a 533,523 dollar settlement.

## seven-week-old ceasefire. Peace process alive: Israel

JERUSALEM, Feb 26: After a week of dire Palestinian warnings that the peace process was moribund, Israel insisted it was very much alive and even making slow progress despite months of delay, reports AFP.

As Chairman Yasser Arafat fought to rally his increasingly sceptical troops at a tense meeting of the PLO executive committee in Cairo on Tuesday, just across the city Israeli and Palestinian negotiators struck another small deal.

It was, the second mini-accord in a week as the two sides stumble towards and agreement to hold the first Palestinian elections on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"The process with the

Palestinians is not dead, on the contrary it's alive, government spokesman Uri Dromi told

"We are still making progress, there are never-ending contacts." he said after an unprecedented series of summits and meetings in the Middle East, Europe and the United States to keep the process on track.

There are setbacks once in a while, but it's an on-going process," Dromi said.

"We have a common goal, to implement the declaration of principles. We differ how to do it and at what pace, but basically we are moving forward to an accepted goal.

Israel's refusal to redeploy outside built-up Palestinian ar-

eas on the West Bank or even negotiate the redeployment until it considers that security has improved lies at the root of the PLO's anger.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin repeats over and over again that Israel will finally implement the second phase of autonomy - redeployment and elections which were scheduled to take place by last July

There is no other alterna tive and the government of Israel is determined to continue the peace process." Foreign Minister Shimon Peres vowed Thursday.

Despite the obstacles, there are signs that Israel is readying for a gradual pullback.

# Troops put down police mutiny in S Africa

UMTATA, South Africa, Feb 26: Troops were sent into an eastern South African province to put down a police mutiny on Saturday, sparking a gun battle that left one officer dead, reports AP

The South African Press Association said the shooting broke out near the Umtata airport, and two protesting police officers were hit. One of the injured later died.

Soon afterward, about 500 officers who had been protesting their pay began removing vehicles used to block roads in Umtata, a former homeland capital about 700 kilometres (about 400 miles) southeast of Johannesburg.

National Police Commissioner George Fivaz said in a statement from Pretoria that army troops and police reinforcements would work together, and would continue to patrol Umtata until he was satisfied order was restored. Police officials refused to say how many troops and officers had being deployed.

"The time has come to act decisively against indisciplined elements within police ranks. Not to do so will mean that the people will be at the mercy of increasing crime and violence," said Fivaz, who was appointed in January to reform a chaotic force.

The protest began on Friday after Eastern Cape Premier Raymond Malaba, saying he feared he would be taken hostage, refused to meet with them to discuss a pay dispute.

The protesting officers said they had not received raises promised in April. But Mhlaba said officials had uncovered an attempt by police to grant themselves unauthorised increases of up to 159 per cent by manipulating government computers.

In addition to the police crisis. Mhlaba was negotiating on Saturday for the release of a guard taken hostage by inmates at an Eastern Cape

#### Polls begin in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, Feb 26: Voters in Tatikistan had only one choice today as polls opened for parliamentary elections amid fears of political violence to cast a ballot for a supporter of neo-communist president Emomaly Rakhmonoy or to stay at home, report AFP.

The Tajik Peoples Unity Party (PUP), the only legal opposition party, which had only been authorised to register five candidates said Saturday it would not take part in the poll because of anti-democratic practices by Rakhmony's regime.

In the wake of a rocket attack her Thursday on a bus carrying doctors and nurses of the Russian border-guards which killed one person and wounded six.

#### Rajiv's assassination still haunts Indian politics delays are linked to corruption enigmatic widow is now seen named no one other groups in left office in 1989. They in-

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: Unanswered questions about the Rajiv Gandhi assassination still haunt his family and Indian politics, reports AP.

Four years after the gruesome death, of the former prime minister, his quarreling successors in the Congress Party have made the assassination a political issue that could affect the fate of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and his

shaky government. Tamil guerillas fighting for independence in neighbouring Sri Lanka have been blamed for the suicide bomb that killed Gandhi and 17 other people at a campaign rally near Madras in southern India on May 21.

1991. Prosecutors believe the motive was vengeance for what the Tamils thought was Gandhi's betrayal. They have

the plot, but some people still suspect a wider conspiracy involving foreign powers.

The various investigations into the case seem to be dragging on endlessly, and many people wonder why.

A closed-door trial of 26 people accused of helping the suicide bomber has been repeatedly delayed. Only 84 of the 1,000 listed witnesses have been heard by a special court in Madras.

A judicial inquiry to unmask any conspiracy by foreign agents has been stymied by uncooperative Indian intelligence agencies and by procedural wrangling

A separate inquiry into alleged lapses in Gandhi's security has censured six top civil servants for withdrawing his elite bodyguard unit after he

clude two former intelligence bosses and a Cabinet secretary. None has been punished

on Saturday.

The Gandhi case was raised by Arjun Singh, formerly the No 2 person in the governing Congress Party, in a broadside against Rao that was viewed as Singh's bid for leadership.

Singh, in resigning from Rao's Cabinet, charged that there was "a sinister design (to make) a determined effort to cover up the entire events that led to the assassination." Coming just after the

Congress Party lost badly in three state elections, the charges deepened a sense of siege around the prime minis-

Skeptics say Singh resur

rected the Gandhi case to win

political support from Sonia

Gandhi The slain leader's

as the torch bearer of the dynasty that began with Gandhi's grandfather, Jawaharial Nehru, and his mother, Indira Gandhi, Rao suspended Singh from

From left to right, French actress Jeanne Moreau (honorary Cesar), French actor Alain

Delon who accepted the award for Isabelle Adjani (not present) for best actress, British movie

director Mike Newell - the Cesar for best foreign movie "Four Weddings and a Funeral," US

movie director Steven Spielberg (honorary Cesar) and US star Gregory Peek (honorary Cesar)

pese for photographers during the 20th Cesar awards ceremony at the Palais des Congress

the party in January for six years for "indiscipline," but even people loyal to the prime minister are unsettled by the nagging issues. "I am not satisfied with the

way the assassination case has progressed," said Mani Shanker Aiyar, formerly Gandhi's spokesman and now a congress Party lawmaker. "I am concerned that so

many key witnesses, including Congress leaders, are finding excuses not to give their testimony," Aiyar told The Associated Press

Conspiracy theorists mostly enemies of the Congress Party — suspect the during the convoluted history of India's involvement in the Tamil uprising in Sri Lanka. India, which has 55 million

- AFP photo

Tamils, armed the rebels dur ing the early days of the revolt against the Sinhalese majority that controlled Sri Lanka and openly discriminated against the Tamil minority.

In 1987, Gandhi brokered a peace agreement for Sri Lanka and sent a peacekeeping force to disarm the rebels. Before signing the accord. Gandhi had met the rebel commander. Velupillai Prabhakaran, in New Delhi and asked him to cooperate. Prabhakaran later backed out.

Indian soldiers who once clandestinely trained the guerillas ended up fighting them. More than 1.500 Indians were killed before the

force was withdrawn in 1990. Now. Prabhakaran is the main suspect in the assassination plot, and he is being tried in absentia.

If he is convicted, India would be under pressure to seek his extradition - even though the 6-month-old Sri Lankan government is now negotiating with the shadowy guerilla chieftain.

Meanwhile, Singh's questioning is yielding results.

Prosecutors will expedite the Madras trial by reducing the number of witnesses from 1,000 to 300, and hope to finish by the end of the year.

The government has ordered security agencies to turn over secret documents to M C Jain, the judge who is investigating whether there was a conspiracy.

#### China terms US reports on HR as 'fabrication' BEIJING, Feb 26: Beijing is-

sued a scathing rebuttal on Sunday of the US State Department's recent report on human rights abuses in China. labelling the document a mishmash of "hearsay and fabrication," reports AFP. The highly critical US re-

port, published on February 1, "distorts facts and confuses right and wrong," the State Council's information office said in a lengthy commentary carried by the official Xinhua news agency The cases listed in the an-

nual State Department report, which highlighted arbitrary arrests, detentions without trial and torture of prisoners, "could not stand up to close scrutiny," the commentary