

# BRIEFLY

**Chandrika slates ICRC:** President Chandrika Kumaratunga Friday criticised the International Committee of the Red Cross for saying that government jet fighters had bombed a church in northern Sri Lanka during the military's recent offensive. AP reports from Colombo.

The church had not been damaged in the bombing and strafing of Jaffna during last month's military offensive against Tamil rebels, she told reporters. "Only a few tiles have been shifted when a bomb or a mortar fell in the church's compound."

**Settlers' leaders meet Rabin:** Leaders of Jewish settlers fighting against the extension of Palestinian rule in the West Bank yesterday met Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

"We hope to see understanding for our security and other needs," said settler leader Uri Ariel. "We hope for agreement, not just to meet for the sake of meeting." The settlers on Thursday called a three-day truce at the end of a week of confrontation with security forces who daily removed hundreds of them from barren West Bank hilltops where they camped to illustrate their determination to cling to the land.

**Indian army kills 8 Naga rebels:** The Indian army killed eight guerillas belong to a separatist tribal group in the northeastern state of Nagaland, an army spokesman said Friday. Reuter reports from Guwahati.

The spokesman told Reuters an army patrol killed the rebels and seized a cache of weapons from their hideout after an hour-long gunbattle in Tuentsang district, about 150 km (90 miles) northwest of the state capital Kohima, on Thursday.

**ME talks end without progress:** Israeli and PLO negotiators yesterday ended a week of talks on extending Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank with little progress made, a senior PLO negotiator said. Reuter reports from Eilat.

"We did not resolve the hard core issues despite working day and night," Ahmed Korei, known as Abu Alla, told Reuters. He listed the main issues as the redeployment of Israeli troops out of Arab communities, a timetable for redeployment and security issues. The talks are to resume in Eilat on Monday.

**Divorce rate up in Beijing:** The divorce rate in the Chinese capital is reaching levels comparable to the West, with a record one in four marriages ending in breakup, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Friday. AP says from Beijing.

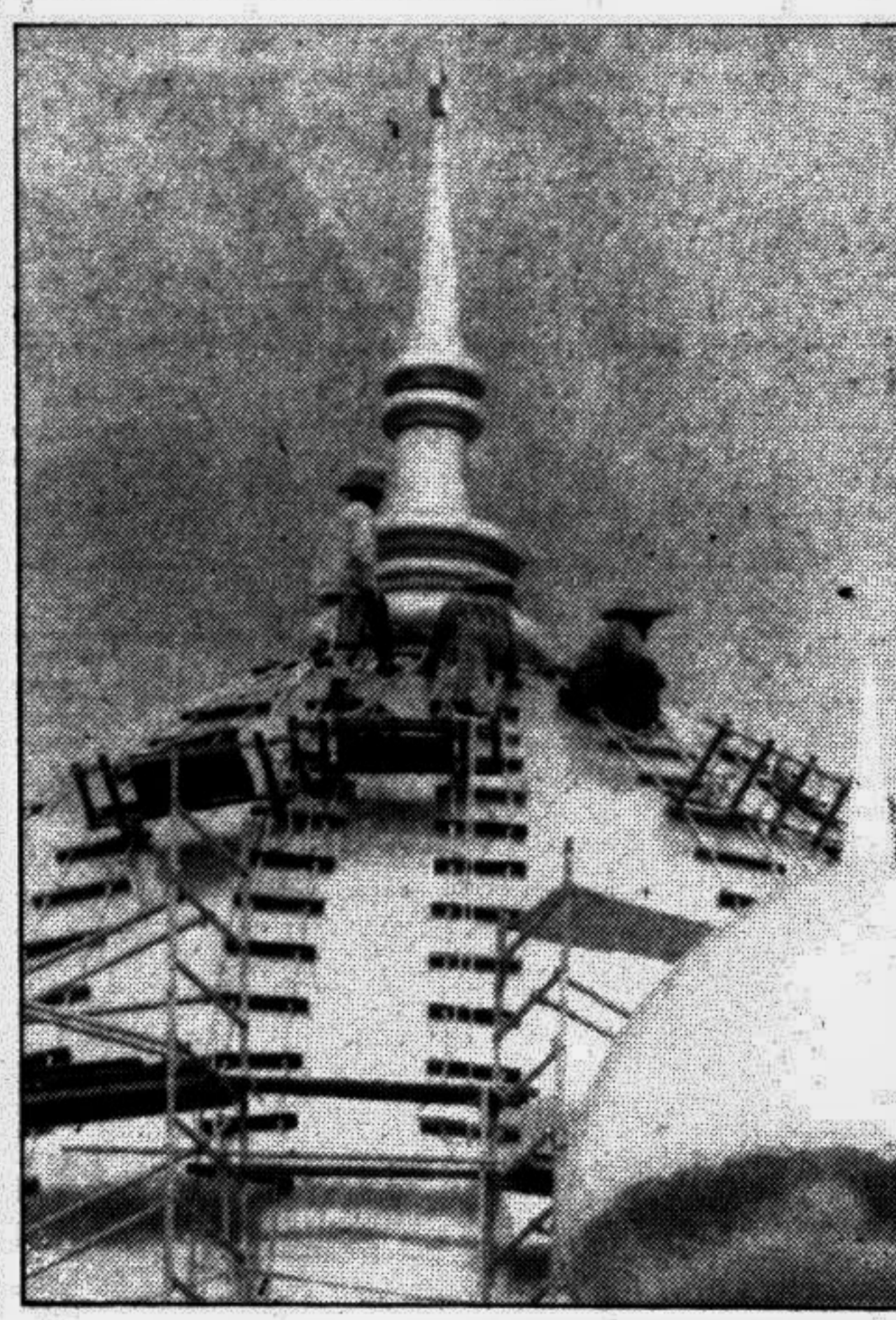
The report said husbands are to blame in 70 per cent of the divorces, in some cases because they acquire girlfriends after becoming wealthy. In the other 30 per cent, wives were blamed for not respecting their in-laws and putting too many restrictions on their husbands.

**Quake hits Kobe, Osaka in Japan:** A moderate earthquake registering 3.4 the Richter scale shook Kobe and Osaka area in western Japan Friday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, the Meteorological agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicenter of the quake, which occurred at 9:48 am (00:48 gm), was located 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) under the seabed in Osaka bay, the agency said.

**Pilot dies in Sudanese jet crash:** A Sudanese air force pilot was killed when his plane crashed during a training flight, the official news agency SUNA reported Thursday. AFP says from Khartoum.

Captain Abdel Hamid Inayat Abdel Hamid, the son of a diplomat, died in the accident on Monday, caused by a technical failure. It said the crash took place over the Wadi Saidna Air Base north of Khartoum.



Thai workers polish the gold plated dome on Thursday of the Sultan Hassanalk Bolkiyah Mosque named after the current ruler which is located in Bandar Seri Bagawan, the capital of Brunei. This oil rich Islamic sultanate is the smallest country in Southeast Asia with a population of about 270,000. — AFP/UNB photo

**Manila weighing US offer of F16s**

MANILA, Aug 4: The Philippines said today it was weighing a US offer to sell to Manila some of the 28 F-16 jets originally ordered by Pakistan, reports AP.

Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon, who held bilateral talks with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Brunei on Tuesday, told reporters here that "there is an offer," but would not disclose the terms suggested.

"But of course, initially on the Philippine side, we still have to look at the financing and the terms."

The Philippine military has put a squadron of fighter-interceptors and high-speed patrol boats at the top of its shopping list from a two billion dollar modernisation programme.

## Arms ban on Bosnia gradually becoming ineffective

UNDATED, Aug 4: At his chalet high above Lake Geneva, a blue-chip weapons dealer is enjoying the alpine air this summer and standing by for the go-ahead to pour 10,000 newly minted Kalashnikovs into the Yugoslav fray, reports AP.

Over in the more workaday world of rush-hour London, another broker is trying to make his own big break, one ear on the car phone, the other on the news from Washington.

"I'd like to get in there and do a little business myself," he assures a reporter.

As much as anyone, the world's arms merchants are closely watching the US debate over lifting the weapons embargo on Bosnia. Contracts are in the offing.

But the embargo's future may hinge less on what eventually is decided in Washington than on what happened two weeks ago in Switzerland, when representatives of 52 Islamic countries simply declared the UN boycott invalid. Iran and others are already openly planning arms supplies for Bosnia's Muslim-led government, leaving the 1991 embargo resolution in shreds.

— Czech authorities intercepted a shipment of Semtex, a plastic explosive, certified for shipment to Africa but found to be headed instead to one of the embargoed governments of former Yugoslavia, a knowledgeable source in Prague told The Associated Press.

Iran has smuggled Chinese-made Red Arrow anti-tank missiles to the Bosnian government forces, a US intelligence source reported. The Croatian military somehow obtained Russian-made Mi-14 twin-turbine amphibious helicopters in violation of the embargo, Cardenas said in a New York interview.

In a new report on the war, a well-placed US Army intelligence analyst says the arms smuggling routes to Bosnian government forces, via Croatia, are becoming well-established.

Much war materiel is off-loaded at the Croatian ports of Split and Ploce, often from small boats that evade NATO's Adriatic Sea blockade, and sent over new road links to the Bosnian-held city of Mostar, writes Lt. Col. John E. Sray, who was intelligence chief for UN peacekeepers in Bosnia until late 1994.

Other weapons are flown into Croatia's capital, Zagreb, for more difficult overland delivery to the Bosnian Muslim heartland, he reports. Bosnia's ambassador in Washington, Seven Alkalaj, is open about the clandestine resupply operation.

"There's no problem acquiring arms," he said. "There are lots of arms sellers in the world who have access to any kind of weaponry you wish to buy."

## Satish Sharma ready to give up Amethi seat for Rajiv's son

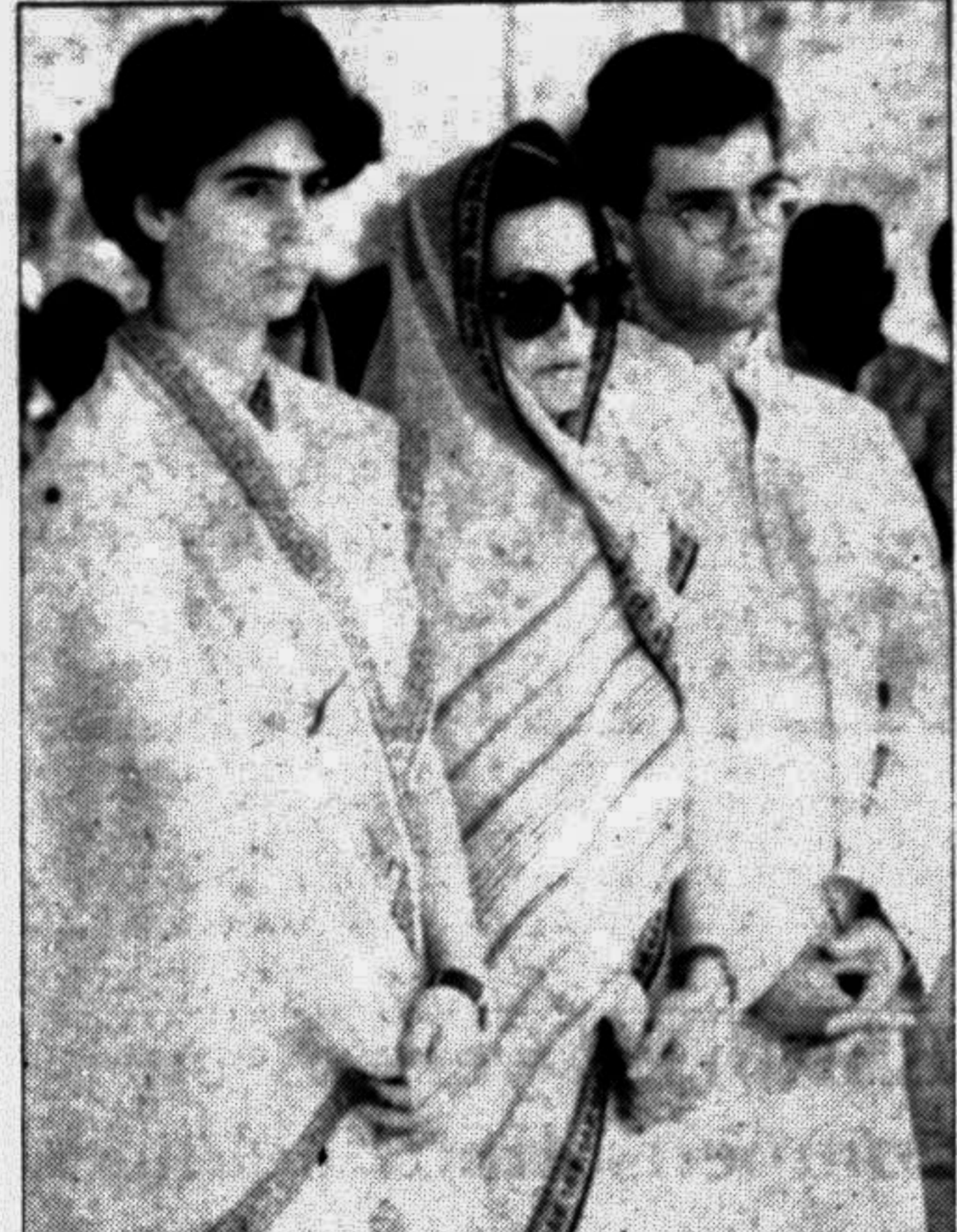
# Rahul may enter politics

NEW DELHI, Aug 4: Rahul Gandhi, the son of slain former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, appears to be preparing for a plunge into politics after years of uncertainty about his future, political sources say, reports AFP.

The fresh speculation about the Gandhi family's political ambitions was rekindled recently after a minister announced that he was willing to give up his seat in parliament for the 25-year-old Rahul.

Petroleum Minister Satish Sharma told a public meeting at the weekend that he would continue to nurse the largely rural constituency of Amethi, some 550 kilometres (343 miles) from here, for the powerful Gandhi family.

"If a member of the Gandhi family, be it Sonia or Rahul, wishes to contest from Amethi, I shall vacate the seat then and there," Sharma, a close friend of the family, said in the small northern town of Jais.



A file picture from May 1991 shows Rahul Gandhi (R), 25, son of slain former Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi, standing with his mother Sonia (C) and sister Priyanka during a funeral ceremony for Rajiv Gandhi. Rahul, a management graduate from Harvard, is rumoured to join politics, after an Indian minister said he was ready to quit his parliament seat for the young Gandhi. — AFP/UNB photo

## US Senate okays bill to speed up anti-missile defence system

WASHINGTON, Aug 4: The Republican-led Senate voted on Thursday to speed up an anti-missile defence for US cities which opponents and Clinton administration officials said would violate the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, reports Reuter.

By a 51-48 vote, the Senate approved 300 million dollar for the speed up in a 265 billion dollar defence authorisation bill which would order the new defence to be built by 2003.

The Republican-led House of Representatives has already approved 450 million dollar for the speed up, virtually assuring Congress's approval of the money in its final defence bills in the fall.

The Senate rejected 51-49 an effort by opponents to remove details of the anti-missile defence that Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Defence Secretary William Perry said would violate the 1972 US-Soviet ABM treaty.

The bill would order a US defence with multiple anti-missile sites. Christopher and Perry said that it would violate the ABM treaty provision allowing each side only one anti-missile site around nuclear missile fields.

They said such a US threat to violate the ABM treaty might lead to Russian refusal to carry out two Strategic Arms Reduction (START) treaties reducing long-range nuclear missiles on both sides.

"Such a (multiple-site US defence) is unnecessary and would place the START I and START II treaties at risk."

But supporters said the bill contemplates US-Russian agreement on revising the ABM treaty to allow multiple sites, and some said they doubted Russia would disagree.

The supporters said the speed up is needed because up to 20 countries are developing or acquiring missiles that could reach parts of the United States and some of them are developing nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

## Canberra calls Paris' threat of trade ban an empty bluster

SYDNEY, Aug 4: Australian officials, unions and activists opposing France's resumption of South Pacific nuclear tests said Friday that Paris' threat to stop buying coal and uranium was empty bluster.

France also plans to file protests with the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation about Australia's Diet condemns French N-test plans.

TOKYO, Aug 4: Two days before the 50th anniversary of Hiroshima's atomic bombing, Japan's parliament Friday voted to condemn French nuclear test plans in the Pacific and to denounce Chinese nuclear tests as well, reports AP.

The government has already issued a diplomatic message of protest over the French plan to set off a series of experimental nuclear explosions underneath French-held Mururoa Atoll in the South Pacific.

A boycott of French goods has gained widespread support from private groups and some government officials, including Finance Minister Masayoshi Takemura, who has stressed Japan's status as the only country so far to be on the receiving end of a nuclear attack.

after that I wouldn't bank on it," he said. The 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima is Sunday.

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"I think they will have the sensitivity to wait for Hiroshima Day to be over, but

## Benazir renews support for Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD, Aug 4: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, visiting troops at northern Siachen Glacier, renewed Thursday Pakistan's support for the Muslim revolt in the Indian-administered Kashmir, reports AP.

Pakistan will continue to extend "moral, diplomatic and political support to the people of Indian-held Kashmir in their just war for their right to self-determination," the official Associated Press of Pakistan quoted her as saying.

"The spirit of martyrdom and bravery of our armed forces on Siachen has inspired the Kashmir freedom fighters," in the Indian-held Kashmir, she said.

"I assure you that soon we shall not only find a solution to the Siachen issue, but also the Kashmiris will achieve freedom — and you will play a major role in this success," she told the troops.

## UK to pullout paratroops from N Ireland

BELFAST, Aug 4: Britain announced on Friday it is withdrawing a tough paratroop regiment from Northern Ireland, closing a controversial chapter that began with bloody shootings in 1972 and ends as the province celebrates a year of peace, reports Reuter.

Britain insisted the withdrawal was routine, amid a current impasse in peace moves over demands that IRA guerillas scrap weapons to consolidate a ceasefire.

Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, welcomed the pullout of "this notorious regiment" but said the number of troops in the province would not actually fall. Nor would it bring Belfast any closer to a permanent peace.

Most recently, paratrooper Lee Clegg caused fresh outrage in the British province when released from jail early after killing a teenage woman at a Belfast checkpoint that was halting joy riders.

## Chandrika vows to press ahead with her plan

COLOMBO, Aug 4: President Chandrika Kumaratunga vowed today to press ahead with her political plan to end Sri Lanka's ethnic bloodshed but said separatist rebels were unlikely to accept it and would have to be defeated, reports AFP.

Kumaratunga said she expected the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to reject the plan for regional autonomy unveiled Thursday and ruled out negotiating with the guerillas.

"Logically thinking, I don't see how they will accept the proposals unless they are militarily weakened," she said. "We are not going to discuss with rebels who are warring with our soldiers."

She said the Tigers had already rejected foreign or international mediation to bring about a settlement.

"We can win the battle militarily. But unless we have a political solution we can't win the war," Kumaratunga said, adding that a "vociferous minority" opposed a political settlement because they wanted war to continue.

The peace package would give extensive autonomy to eight regions, including areas where Tamils dominate. The plan requires a two-thirds majority in parliament and approval at a referendum.

## AI accuses Algeria of extra-judicial killings

PARIS, Aug 4: Amnesty International (AI) accused Algeria's security forces on Friday of hundreds of extra-judicial killings and widespread use of torture in their war with Muslim fundamentalists, reports Reuter.

The human rights group said it had written to Algerian President Liamine Zeroual giving him details of alleged worsening abuses and urging him to clamp down.

"Homicides seem to be replacing arrests," Amnesty International said in a statement. Torture, which seemed practically to have disappeared between 1989 and 1991, now seems institutionalised.

It said that no violations of human rights were now being investigated by the military-backed government.

Amnesty said Algeria's security forces had a right to use force to protect against crimes by armed Muslim militants but that "extra-judicial executions, sue of torture and disappearances by the security forces can never be tolerated."

More than 40,000 people have been killed in Algeria in violence between government forces and Muslim guerillas since authorities cancelled a general election which the radical Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win in 1992.

## Off the Record

### Summer heat puts sex on back burner

DETROIT: When the summer heat sizzles, sex often gets put on the back burner, reports AP.

Researchers say that's major reason why there are fewer births nine months after a heat wave. A study found an increase of only 10 degrees Fahrenheit (6 degrees Celsius) in summer temperatures reduces births the following spring by up to 6 per cent.

Population experts who conducted the study at the University of Michigan and Boston University say sex is only part of the equation — biology also appears to play a role.

Other studies have found lower sperm counts and higher rates of miscarriages during hot weather, said David A. Lam, professor of economics and population studies at the University of Michigan.

A leading expert on human sexuality said the results of the latest study are consistent with what others have found.

"High temperatures lead to a reduced sense of well-being, which is likely to be associated with reduced sexual interest," said Dr John Bancroft, director of the Kinsey Institute for sex research at Indiana University.

Bancroft said reduced interest in sex during heat waves, rather than reduced fertility, is probably the main reason for the lower birth rate.



American singer Michael Jackson hugs Minnie during a visit he made to Disneyland Paris on Wednesday. Jackson arrived incognito the day before and strolled around the park all day long where he tried particularly the new attraction Space Mountain. — AFP/UNB photo

## UK bans book on Gulf War

LONDON, Aug 4: Britain's Ministry of Defence has won a court order banning publication of a book believed to disclose details about the work of an elite British army unit during the Gulf War, a Ministry spokeswoman said Thursday, reports AP.

It is thought that the book — entitled "Immediate Action" — contains confidential details of the operations of the Special Air Service (SAS) during the Gulf War in 1991.

The book, by Andy McNab, author of the best-selling novel "Bravo Two Zero" would have compromised the "operational effectiveness and the personal security of personnel," the spokeswoman said.

While standby deals take shape, Muslim governments are taking action.

Iran's foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, paid a whirlwind visit to Croatian and Bosnian leaders in Split and Mostar on Monday, and later said "no obstacles exist" for shipping arms to Bosnia via Croatia.

Malaysian officials, meanwhile, announced a crash programme to organise arms supplies to Bosnia. Islamic countries that do not ship arms directly may at least help finance Bosnian purchases.

Sray, the intelligence analyst, believes all the rearming will do the Bosnian army little good.