

Sonia Gandhi, widow of late former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi hugs a youngster in Soweto on Wednesday. During her first visit to South Africa, she laid a wreath on Hector Peterson's grave, a youth killed during June 1976 pupils' uprising. — AFP/UNB photo

Shevardnadze meets Tansu Ciller: Two days after he was injured in a bomb blast, Georgian

leader Eduard Shevardnadze hosted Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller who arrived on an official visit to her country's smaller neighbour. AP reports from Tbilisi, Georgia.

The cuts and grazes from Tuesday's bomb attack were still visible on Shevardnadze's face, but the former Soviet foreign minister looked fit and rested when he greeted Ciller at Tbilisi's main airport.

Iran frees 100 Iraqi POWs: Iran has freed 100 Iraqi prisoners of war, most of them seized at the start of the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war, the ICRC said in a statement handed to reporters in Baghdad Thursday,

Reuter reports from Baghdad. "On August 18, 100 Iraqi prisoners of war were released by the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad (SM) most of them had been captured at the outset of the war between Iran and Iraq," the statement said.

British, Irish leaders to meet Sept 6: British and Irish leaders will meet in Britain Wednesday to discuss ways of moving toward all-party talks in Northern Ireland, the two governments announced Thursday, AP reports from London.

Prime Minister John Major and Irish Prime Minister John Bruton will meet at Chequers, Major's official country residence, his office said.

Blast kills 11 miners in Spain: Eleven miners were killed early Thursday in an explosion down a coal mine at Mieres in northern Spain, local

officials said. AFP reports from Mieres. Spain. They said about 15 men were working in the same gallery when the blast occurred at around 3.15 a m (0115

GMT). 20 militants held in France: Police

arrested 20 people suspected of involvement with extremist Islamic movements in dawn raids Thursday in the French capital and Lyon, seizing weapons and documents, police said, AP reports from Paris. The sweep operation was ordered by the Paris anti-ter-

rorist judge in charge of investigations into two recent bloody bomb attacks in Paris and a failed bomb attack on the Lyon-Paris high-speed train line last weekend.

Palestinian cops arrest 3 newsmen: Palestinian police in self-ruled Gaza have arrested three Palestinian newspaper reporters, a PLO official said yesterday. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

He declined to give a reason for their detention. Israel radio said the three, arrested late on Wednesday, were suspected of activity on behalf of the militant Muslim movement Hamas, which opposes the 1993 Israel-PLO peace deal.

Kuwait-Iraq talks on missings end: Ruwait and Iraq on Wednesday ended two days of lengthy talks on the fate of 605 people reported missing in Kuwait under the 1990-1991 occupation officials said. AFP reports from Kuwait City.

The two sides met for around 11 hours Wednesday on the Kuwait side of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), an official with Kuwait's national committee for the missing and prisoners of war said

ROK enforces smoking law: smo king in all South Korean trains, subways, underground arcades, elevators and on domestic flights will be banned starting Friday under a new anti-smoking law, officials said

Thursday, AP reports from Seoul. Violators will be fined 30,000 won (39 dlrs), said the officials at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. The new law also calls for drastic measures and strict penalties to cut down on teenage smoking and severely limit it in public places.

Lebanese Muslim leader shot dead: A leading Sunni Muslim fundamentalist, Sheikh Nizar Halabi, was shot dead in front of his house in Beirut on

Thursday, police said, AFP reports from Beirut. Two of his sons were wounded. Sheikh Halabi was a leader of the Habashist religious

sect which won two seats in parliamentary elections in

Literacy rate increases in W Bengal: The literacy percentage in West Bengal has increased to 70.39 per cent this year from 52.72 per cent in 1991. according to the Minister for Adult and Mass Education. Anju Kar, PTI reports from Midnapore.

Speaking at the inauguration of a post-literacy evaluation programme in Midnapore Wednesday. Kar said that 71 lakh people have been covered under the state government's literacy programme.

2 shot dead in Indonesia: Indonesian troops shot dead two men alleged to be separatist rebels in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, but local people claim they were civilians, reports reaching in Dili

said yesterday. AFP says from East Timor. Troops of the Bacau area military command shot the young men, identified as Marcelino Da Silva Belo and Augusto Freitas Belo, outside their homes in Wailakama village on July 27, sources said.

PLO, Israeli cops sign agreement

JERUSALEM. Aug 31 Israel and the Palestinians agreed Wednesday to establish a hot line between their police chiefs and to sign a formal cooperation agreement on police issues, reports AP

Israeli Police Minister Moshe Shahal and chief Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qureia announced the agreements after meeting in the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat, where the sides delegations are holding talks on expanding Palestinian auton-

Israel radio said the Palestinians formally agreed to not carry out police activities in east Jerusalem. Israel has accused Palestinian security of operating in the sector, which the PLO wants as a future Palestinian capital.

Men dominate Japan's team to women's confce

TOKYO, Aug 31: Japan's official delegation to the biggest-ever women's conference will be dominated by men. reports AP.

The delegation leader is a man - chief government spokesman Koken Nosaka. - and seven of the 10 main delegates approved by the Cabinet Tuesday are male.

The government said many countries' delegations to the United Nations conference, opening Monday in Beijing, will be headed by Cabinet ministers.

However, since there are no women in Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's Cabinet, no woman was available for the job.

The three female members of the Japanese delegation are two officials from the Labour Ministry and one from the Foreign Ministry.

Kazakh president wins referendum

ALMATY. Aug 31: Kazakhastan's President Nur Sultan Nazarbayev appeared sure of victory today in a constitutional referendum that will give him sweeping powers to force through his brand of steady economic reform reports Reuter.

Nazarbayev hinted at his next steps when he voted on Wednesday, promising that if the constitution passed, an election law would be adopted and parliamentary election held.

Everybody should be a slave to the constitution and law - and only in this case will the freedom and independence of every person be assured. Nazarbayev told reporters.

The 55-year-old former Soviet Politburo member. who has headed Kazakhstan since 1989, was due to announce preliminary referendum results at a news conference today.

US warns against terrorist attacks in ME

WASHINGTON, Aug 31 The United States is warning "a variety of parties" in the Middle East that it will not tolerate terrorist attacks against US citizens or property, the State Department said Wednesday, reports AP.

Spokesman Nicholas Burns reiterated that "we consider it important that any individual or group that may be tempted to take such actions understand fully the consequences of doing so."

The Washington Post reported Wednesday that US officials had warned Syria that it holds Damascus responsible for threats from Palestinian terrorist groups.

Burns said, however, that the warning conveyed as a diplomatic message was not directed at any one party "but at a variety of parties in the Middle East, and we're very confident that message has been understood."

NATO air raids damage large number of Serb targets

WASHINGTON, Aug 31: NATO warplanes and artillery damaged 'a substantial number of targets" in initial attacks on Bosnian Serb forces, the Pentagon said on

Wednesday, reports Reuter. Those military targets ranged from air defence facilities to heavy weapons, ammunition storage dumps and command centres, Deputy Defence Secretary John White said at a Pentagon briefing.

"A large number of targets were successfully attacked. We have preliminary indications that a substantial number of targets were damaged. heavily in many cases," he told reporters, adding that a full damage assessment was not vet available.

White and Admiral William Owens, Vice Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the NATO raids were still

Shevardnadze outside his office Tuesday.

COLOMBO, Aug 31: The

Sri Lankan government has

asked the International

Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC) to help determine the

fate of 128 people aboard a

ferry hijacked by Tamil

by the Sri Lankan govern-

ment to help search for the

people," an ICRC spokesman

told Reuters. "We have

started proceeding in this

trying to contact the

Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam (LTTE) headquarters

sula to find out what was

happening aboard the state-

Officials said the ICRC was

matter"

"The ICRC has been asked

rebels, officials said today.

"ongoing" and they could give few specific details of the attacks, undertaken in retaliation for Bosnian Serb shelling of Sarajevo.

White said the targets included "fixed military installations such as ammunition storage and reload areas. command, control and communication facilities and Bosnian Serb heavy weapons."

"Targets were selected based on their potential role in controlling or conducting future destructive attacks against the people of Sarajevo," he added.

"Owens declined to say

where raids were conducted in addition to the Sarajevo area and around the Serb stronghold of Pale. He said he did not have an assessment of how many Serb anti-aircraft missiles and radars had been destroyed but that "the success of the strikes was ap-

Georgian soldiers sit on an APC in a street in Tbilisi on Wednesday as security mea-

sures have been intensified in the Georgian capital one day after an assassination

attempt on Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze. Police meanwhile announced the

arrest of ten suspects in connection with the car bomb attack which slightly injured

Sri Lanka asks ICRC to help search

hijacked ferry

run ferry, the Irish Mona.

the eastern coast.

guerillas.

which guerillas hijacked off

All communications be-

A military spokesman said

tween the vessel and the

on Wednesday Sri Lankan Air

Force planes were monitor-

ing the movements of the

ferry off the army base of

Mullaitivu, but the navy was

keeping a safe distance,

fearing more attacks by the

Mullaitivu, we can see it."

Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe

in the northern Jaffna penin- Wednesday." We don't know civilians and the sick be-

told reporters

It is still there off

military have been cut.

parently very good."

Defence Secretary William Perry and army General John Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had previously vowed that any NATO air raids would first target the Bosnian Serbs' sophisticated air defence system of radars and Soviet-built mis-

White said the NATO strikes were carried out in carefully planned coordination with French, British and Dutch artillery stationed with an allied Rapid Reaction Force outside Sarajevo.

The two officials said that White had ordered a number of additional US military aircraft put on alert to be sent to the region to join the 86 American attack and support planes already in the area if they were requested by NATO commanders.

- AFP/UNB photo

whether they are holding

The navy sent in two gun-

boats and Israeli-built dvora-

class fast-attack craft to in-

spect the vessel which at-

tacked one of the dvoras with

what is thought to have been

a rocket-propelled grenade.

A second dvora was at-

tacked but it managed to sink

two sea Tiger vessels carry-

ing up to 30 Tigers each, he

said. Twenty-one navy per-

sonnel were missing, pre-

on by the government to carry

The Irish Mona, chartered

them hostage.

Munasinghe said.

sumed dead.

if the LTTE has taken the tween the northwest islands

civilians and killed them or was hijacked

Leftists-called strike paralyses Nepal

KATHMANDU, Aug 31: A strike called by leftist groups' to protest against Nepal's supreme court ruling to restore parliament paralysed life today in the Himalayan kingdom, reports Reuter.

In the capital Kathmandu, scene of student protests since the Monday verdict shops, schools and offices were closed. Factories in the three districts of Kathmandu, Laitpur and Bhaktapur downed shutters.

Police said the strike was peaceful except for a lone incident in the city where a school bus was stoned.

Hikmat Karki, General Secretary of the Students' Union, one of the pro-communist groups which called the strike, said police in Bhaktapur arrested four of its members.

Supporters of the minority

communist government held rallies across the city, shouting slogans against the court which ruled on Monday that Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikary's June recommendation to dissolve parliament and hold fresh polls was un-

constitutional. The All Nepal National Students' Free Union (ANNSFU). the student wing of the ruling Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party, called the court judgement "decei-

"The supreme court judgement is deceitful," said Yogesh Bhattarai, a student leader. "The strike is against the politically motivated rul-

Protesters carried banners denouncing supreme court Chief Justice Bishwanath Upadhyaya. "Death to Bishwanath," they chanted.

Off the Record

2,000 tonnes of moon cakes

BEIJING: Bakeries in China's capital Beijing are expected to bake 2,000 tonnes of moon cakes for the midautumn festival this year, The People's Daily reported Wednesday, reports Reuter.

They have come up with about 250 varieties of moon cakes which contain ingredients ranging from red bean paste to duck eggs, walnuts, sesame seeds, melon seeds and almonds.

Moon cakes are traditionally eaten during the mid-autumn or moon festival which this year falls on September 9.

A giant 90 kg (198 lb) moon cake auctioned on Monday raised 4,800 yuan (578 US dollar) for the Chinese Organising Committee of the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, scheduled for September 4-15 in Beijing.

One pound fetches 95,000

LONDON: A British stamp collector who bought an album at a car-boot sale for one pound (1.55 dollars) has sold two of the stamps for 95,000 pounds (146,900 dollars), reports Reuter. The rare stamps from Trinidad, dating back to 1847,

were among the first issued by a British colony. The anonymous collector from the Isle of Wight, off the

south English coast, told a local radio station on. Wednesday the album appeared fairly mundane but the bought it because he liked the cover.

Rats being trained to catch cockroaches

KIEV: Driven to desperation, people in a vermin-infested town in eastern Ukraine have started to train rats to catch cockroaches, à newspaper wrote Wednesday, reports Young rats that have had a two-month course to teach

them to attack roaches, but not people, can fetch up to the equivalent of 1.5 dlrs at the central market in the town of Lugansk, the newspaper Nezavisimost (Independence) wrote. Rats also can be trained to drive away mice and other

rats from their owners' home, the newspaper wrote.

"What a great idea. In Kiev, we certainly have enough rats for at least two hundred years," said Yelena Gribok, head doctor at the city sanitary authorities in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine.

There is one snag, Gribok warned.

If your rat bites you, the odds are, you would die within two weeks. Rats are carriers of a dangerous virus that kills nine people out of ten who get bitten, she said.

France urged to call off series of N-tests and demonstrate indifference

WELLINGTON, Aug 31: The Labour parties of Britain. New Zealand and Australia urged French President Jacques Chirac today to take the "courageous" step of calling off a planned series of nuclear tests, reports Reuter.

The three parties said in a join statement there was overwhelming international opposition to the decision to conduct up to eight underground blasts in French Polynesia.

"We do not accept that there is any justification political strategic, technical or moral - for this decision," said the statement, signed by Australian Senate President Michael Beahan, New Zealand Labour leader Helen Clark and Britain's shadow Foreign Secretary Robin Cook. "Further tests would not

only risk doing irreparable damage to the marine environment of the South Pacific

to the views of those living in the region, they would undermine international efforts to control the spread of nuclear weapons and promote disarmament". France has said the tests

will take place between September and May, and officials have said the first one is imminent. The three Labour parties said they deeply regretted

the refusal of Britain's conservative government to speak out against the French testing programme as a fellow nuclear state. "We are alarmed at the

potential for continued nuclear testing by two nuclear weapons states. France and China, to poison the atmosphere of the final critical phase of the comprehensive test ban treaty negotiations." they added.

Govt-rebels talks reach 'crucial stage' in Kashmir in an attempt to determine

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 31: Talks between Indian officials and Muslim rebels holding four Western hostages have reached a 'crucial stage' with the abductors setting a new Thursday deadline, sources said today, reports AFP.

The Al-Faran abductors have reportedly told negotiators they were unhappy with government "delaying tactics" on their demand for the release of 15 jailed Muslim separatist in a swap for the four hostages, sources said.

Sources close to Indian negotiators said the talks with the abductors have reached a "crucial stage" as Ai-Faran have asked for a final reply on their demands by Thursday latest.

The group took Britons Paul Wells, 23, and Ketth Kangan, 33, German Dirk

Hasert, 26, and American Donald Hutchings, 42, between July 4 and July 8 near the Kashmir trekking resort of Pahalgam.

The guerillas killed a fifth hostage. Norwegian Hans-Christian Ostro, 27, whose beheaded body was dumped in early August.

Hundreds of angry Muslims staged protests in a Kashmir town Wednesday against the alleged murder of a woman by Indian border guards as an inquiry was launched into the incident, witnesses said.

They said protestors poured into the streets of Tral town, 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of this state summer capital, to vent their anger against the alleged killing of 55-year old Saja

Begum on Monday. We want freedom.

"Indians go home" and "blood for blood", the demonstrators cried as the town observed a general strike for the third straight day.

A neighbour consoles on Wednesday, Ruhee (R) the daughter of Saja Begum, who

apparently was shot dead by the Indian Border Security Force on August 28 as Kashmiri

villagers came out in large numbers to protest outside her house.

shot dead when she scuffled with border guards who allegedly tried to rape her two teenaged daughters. Ruhee and Mubeena. The border security force

has launched a probe into the incident, which was initially described as accidental death by a spokesman. He said Begum died when

a border guard "accidentally" fired on her after she tried to snatch a grenade that had been found in her house. A BSF team had raided her home after receiving information that she harboured Muslim rebels

Begum's death was de-

nounced in Tral Wednesday by senior Muslim leaders including Yasin Malik, Head of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, and Shabir Shah, who visited her grave Residents said Begum was to offer prayers.

- AFP/UNB photo

"Indian security troops cannot stop us from achieving freedom." Shah said in an emotionally-charged speech. Meanwhile, mass protests

also erupted in Srinagar Wednesday after a baker, Bashir Ahmed, was allegedly shot dead by border guards to avenge a rebel attack on a BSF picket, witnesses said. Police, however, said he

was killed in crossfire. Hundreds of people marched shouting anti-Indian slogans while accompanying Ahmed's cortege to Srinagar's main cemetery. The killing sparked an instant

shutdown in the city's main business district. Witnesses said the strike

would continue Thursday. Police said additional forces had been deployed in Srinagar to pre-empt vio-

Indian border guards and security forces are frequently accused of widespread human rights abuses in Kashmir, India's only Muslim

majority state. Reuter says, militants holding four Westerners hostage in Kashmir conveyed messages from three of them to the Indian government on

Wednesday, officials said. A spokesman for the government of Jammu and Kashmir state said Al-Faran guerillas transmitted answers to a series of questions which authorities had put to them

the hostages were unharmed. "Al-Faran as provided some responses to questions about the personal lives of

ernment spokesman said. "We have no reason to believe they are not safe," he said in reply to questions

three hostages," a state gov-

about their health. The spokesman said authorities were cross-check-

ing the answers to ensure they had been made by the three hostages. American Donald Hutchings told Indian negotiators

on Monday by radio that he was well. The negotiators asked him further questions about the other three -German Dirk Hasert, and Britons Raul Wells and Keith Mangan — that only they could answer, to prove they were also in good health.