

Iraq to resist US 'attempt' to topple Saddam

BAGHDAD, Sept 5: Iraq said today it would resist what it said were attempts by Washington and allies to topple President Saddam Hussein and his government, reports Reuter.

State newspapers ridiculed Western media reports that Saddam Hussein faced difficulties at home after defections to Jordan last month of two important Iraqi government figures.

They said Iraq did not fear exercises by US troops close to its borders or the deployment of aircraft carriers within striking distance of Iraqi territory.

"It seems that US policy makers are ill-advised as how to deal with Iraq. They think that Iraq, like any other Third World country, would be subdued by rumbling US tanks near its borders," commented the English-language daily Baghdad Observer.

Thousands of US and Kuwaiti troops are taking part in joint exercises in the oil rich state neighbouring Iraq. The timing of the ma-

noeuvers was advanced to deter what US officials described last month as a perceived threat by Iraq to Kuwait's security.

"Iraqis are keeping vigilant eyes on suspicious US manoeuvres. They are preparing themselves for the worst and they are confident they will bury all foreign designs," the Observer said.

The paper said the US was trying to "destabilise the political and security situation in Iraq to create pretexts to interfere in its internal affairs."

The paper said Iraq was certain the US would not commit ground forces to any possible attack on Iraq. It said Washington would use missiles and warplanes in its attack but these will not "intimidate the battle-hardened Iraqis."

The paper denounced opposition figures abroad, including one recent director, Lieutenant-General Hussein Kamel Hassan, as outlaws "with no popular base whatsoever inside Iraq."

The official Al-Qadisiya

newspaper said talk of an imminent end to the regime in Iraq was baseless. It said Iraq's enemies forgot that the membership of the ruling Baath Party "exceeded one and half million people. Iraq and its leader will remain in bumper prosperity."

AFP adds: A call for a holy war against the United States and Israel was issued at the opening of an International Islamic Conference in Baghdad attended by more than 2,000 people.

Speaking at the opening session of the three-day meeting, Mohammad Tahir Al-Qadri, head of the Korean Preaching Organisation in Pakistan, urged "Muslims all over the world to start a jihad against the United States and Israel."

Nearly 100 participants came from abroad, mainly Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Turkey, Jordan, Sudan, Egypt and Syria and also from non-Muslim states such as Russia, Australia, Germany and the United States.

Izzat Ibrahim, Deputy

Chairman of Iraq's top political body, the revolutionary command council, also lashed out at the US and the Jewish state.

"The United States is the enemy of the Arabs. It aims with its ally Israel to undermine the development of the Arabs and Muslims," he said.

"The United States and the West have launched a war against Iraq because Iraq has made a lot of progress in various fields, and this is against their wishes," he added.

He charged Washington with using "the UN Security Council as a tool to issue resolutions against Iraq."

The conference, organised by the Baghdad-based Popular Islamic Conference Organisation (PICO), is to discuss the oil and trade ban imposed on Iraq since its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, and "Islamic unity and solidarity."

PICO, an umbrella of Islamic Non-Governmental Organisations, was set up in Baghdad in 1983



Firemen work at extinguishing the fire resulting from the car bomb which exploded Monday in Birkhadem, a southern suburb of Algiers. The blast injured at least 10 people and caused major damage to a government building, an AFP reporter at the site said.

— AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

ROK soldier defects to DPRK: A South Korean army soldier has defected to North Korea through the heavily armed border, the communist North's official radio said Monday. AP reports from Seoul.

Staff Sgt. Han Hyo-su, 24, an assistant platoon leader from South Korea's 25th Army Division, crossed the central border Monday to defect, the North's Central Radio said.

Israeli stabbed to death: A Palestinian girl stabbed an Israeli to death and wounded his wife at a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank early Monday, security sources said. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Kim Dae-Jung launches new party: South Korea's best-known opposition leader made his political comeback official Tuesday by inaugurating a new party with conservative-centrist platforms. AP reports from Seoul.

Kim Dae-Jung, 69, thus ended 2 and a half years of political retirement as part of an expected march toward running for president in 1997. Backed by nearly 70 legislators, the National Congress for New Politics immediately became the largest opposition force in the 299-member National Assembly.

Floods claim 31 in Morocco: Thirty-one people, including six children, have been killed in floods in central and southwestern Morocco, state television reported on Monday. Reuter reports from Rabat.

It quoted a preliminary report by the Interior Ministry as saying 18 people were killed in the central region of Taza while 13 others died near Marrakesh, 330 km (200 miles) from Rabat.

Greece, Macedonia to resume talks: Neighbours Greece and Macedonia agreed Monday to resume talks aimed at resolving disputes over the name and flag used by the former Yugoslav republic. AP reports from Athens.

The two nations' foreign ministers are to meet in New York next week for their first face to face talks since UN-mediated negotiations stalled two years ago, said Thomas Miller, the American charge d'affaires in Athens.

Diarrhoea kills 30 in Zaire: An outbreak of bloody diarrhoea in a northern Zaire town has killed 30 people, state radio said on Monday. Reuter reports from Kinshasa.

An epidemic of the ebola virus which struck the western Zaire town of Kikwit earlier this year was originally mis-diagnosed as bloody diarrhoea. A total of 233 people died of ebola before the bug burned itself out.

Mild quake rocks Sumatra island: Indonesia's Sumatra island was rocked by an earthquake measuring 4.8 on the Richter scale, the official Antara news agency reported yesterday. Reuter reports from Jakarta.

The report said the quake shook Tarutung, 300km (186 miles) south of the north Sumatra capital of Medan, around 11:36 am (0436GMT) on Monday. It caused no major damage or injuries.

Assad's refusal to upgrade talks disappoints Israel

JERUSALEM, Sept 5: Israeli leaders on Monday said they were disappointed by Syrian President Hafez Assad's refusal to upgrade the level of negotiations between the two countries, reports AP.

In a possible sign of re-doubled American efforts to spur the talks, meanwhile, Israel's Channel Two TV reported Monday that the United States is proposing March 1996 as a target date for reaching agreement.

To date, Israel and Syria have avoided setting formal target dates in their four-year negotiation. But U.S. officials have said it was essential to reach agreement by the end of 1995, before upcoming Israeli and the U.S. electoral campaigns.

Israeli government officials could not confirm the report.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told reporters the Israeli-Syrian peace talks appear "more cloudy than before," but stressed Israel would continue efforts to reach an agreement.

In Cairo Sunday, Assad criticised Israel's negotiating stance as violating international resolutions calling for its withdrawal from territories occupied in the 1967 Mideast war.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has indicated he is ready for a large-scale withdrawal from the Golan Heights, seized from Syria in that war, but has not publicly met Assad's demand for a full return of the strategic plateau.

Despite several meetings between top army officers and the two countries' ambassadors in Washington, the talks appear to be deadlocked.

Israeli leaders have called for holding higher-level talks — for example, between foreign ministers — but Assad rejects the idea.

All the agreements we have obtained so far were achieved by negotiations not only at the military level but also the political level," said Peres, referring to Israel's peace agreements with Egypt, Jordan and the PLO.

Taliban militia captures Herat

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Sept 5: Afghanistan's opposition Taliban overran the western city of Herat Tuesday, sending provincial government leaders fleeing toward the Iranian border, a spokesman said, reports AP.

The Taliban force of former Islamic religious students launched an offensive in western Afghanistan several days ago, first capturing a major government military base at Shindand before continuing their westward march toward Herat, about 96 kilometres (60 miles) away.

"We entered Herat this morning and are in full control," said Abdul Rahman Zahid, a Taliban spokesman in northwest Pakistan.

It was impossible to independently confirm the Taliban claims, although western diplomats in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad also reported an opposition victory in Herat.

Afghan government representatives could not immediately be reached for comment.

The Taliban, based in southeastern Khandahar province, stormed into the Afghan fray late last year

when they captured about one-third of the country and threatened to topple the capital Kabul.

In March President Burhanuddin Rabbani's troops pushed the Taliban out of firing range of Kabul bringing peace to the war-devastated capital for the first time since Muslim insurgents took power from the Communists

UN experts defuse 40,000 land mines in Yemen

ADEN, Yemen, Sept 5: A team of UN bomb disposal experts has defused more than 40,000 land mines planted around the southern port city of Aden during the 1994 Yemeni civil war, the team's head said Monday, reports AFP.

Briton Paul Kelly said his team, which arrive in Yemen six months ago at the request of the government, still had tens of thousands of mines yet to dismantle.

Kelly said 52 anti-tank and anti-personnel minefields stretching over 200 square kilometres (80 sq miles) had been uncovered.

The people of Herat greeted us by cheering and waving as we entered the city," said Zahid, although it's not clear how he was in contact with his comrades in Herat.

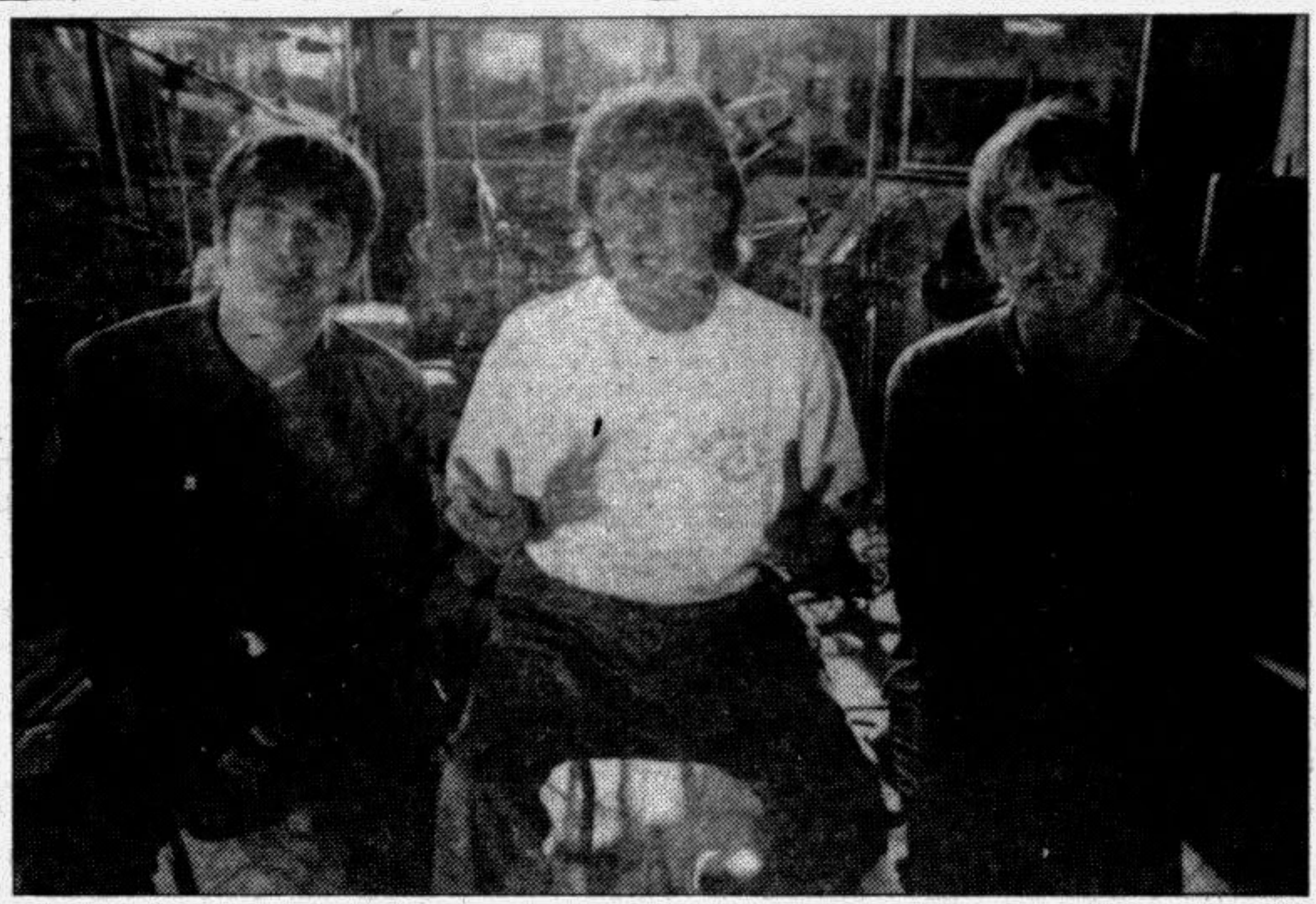
Herat Governor Ismail Khan fled the city before dawn on Tuesday in a 50-vehicle caravan carrying government officials and their families.

AFP adds from Tehran: The governor of the western Afghan province of Herat, which fell to the Taliban Islamic militia, has taken refuge in neighbouring Iran, Afghan sources said today.

General Mohammad Ismail Khan and between 300 and 600 of his troops fled to Dugharun, the main border point between the two countries in eastern Iran, the sources said.

The Taliban Islamic militia in Afghanistan captured the northwestern provincial capital Herat overnight after government forces defected, Afghan sources here said today.

The fall of Herat was confirmed by members of several international aid organisations based in the city.



Pop idols (from L to R) Noel Gallagher of Oasis, Paul McCartney and Paul Weller at the Abbey Road studios in London Monday to record the "Help" album in aid of the victims of Bosnia's bloody civil war. All the songs must be finished before midnight to qualify, even if groups are abroad touring.

— AFP/UNB photo

United South-East Asia is no more a utopia

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Sept 5: It took nearly three decades for it to happen, but the once-utopian vision of a united South-East Asia is finally coming into clear focus, reports IPS.

Since 1967 the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been an "incomplete" organisation, one that claimed to be the regional grouping but had nearly half of the envisioned ten member nations outside its orbit due to the Cold War's ideological battles.

Thus, until late July, the organisation that was formed in part as a bulwark against communism's spread through Indo-China, had just six members: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

On July 28, Cambodia obtained observer status while communist Vietnam was admitted to ASEAN in rites here — the biggest push yet toward realising the vision of a united South-East Asia that has eluded the region for 28 years since ASEAN was created.

"With Vietnam's entry, a very important step has now

been built towards reaching the target of making ASEAN truly the Association of all South-East Asian Nations," Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi said at the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting held last month in Bandar Seri Begawan.

And while the three other non-ASEAN countries in the region — Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar — have yet to become full members, their admission will be only a matter of time.

This December, the heads of government of all the South-East Asian countries for the first time will meet in Bangkok, on the occasion of ASEAN leaders' fifth summit.

Laos, which became an observer in 1992 along with Vietnam, says it hopes to become an ASEAN member in 1997, when the organisation turns 30.

Myanmar, a pariah in much of the west, has been attending the ASEAN ministerial meeting as the host country's guest for two years now. In Brunei, it acceded to the treaty of amity and cooperation, one of the steps toward membership.

Vietnam has spent the past few years normalising ties with the rest of the world. Hanoi and Washington restored formal ties a few weeks ago, just as the region marked the 20th year since the Vietnam War ended.

It is hard to fix a timetable for when the ASEAN-7 will become the ASEAN-10, but many expect it before the end of the century.

Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Rodolfo Severino says there are few political hurdles to Laos and Cambodia's membership, but adds they have to do more in economic reforms to prepare them for joining the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) too.

"If it's just political, there's no problem," Severino said in an interview with IPS. "But there are other things to consider and the most complicated is AFTA."

ASEAN countries are keen to see Vietnam successfully hurdle the transition to a market economy, hoping to see it become a model for economic liberalisation for other emerging economies. Laos is moving cautiously to ASEAN membership be-

India hopeful to win release of hostages

SRINAGAR, Sept 5: Indian authorities said today that negotiations with separatist guerrillas holding four westerners hostage in Kashmir were progressing and they still hoped to win the release of the tourists, reports Reuter.

"Things are moving," said KB Jandial, a spokesman of the government of Jammu and Kashmir state, "we are working towards a positive development."

He denied newspaper reports that talks with Al-Faran militants had broken down, saying officials had contacted an unidentified intermediary on Monday for a fresh round of discussions.

Azeri SC bans Communist Party

MOSCOW, Sept 5: Azerbaijan's Supreme Court outlawed the former Soviet republic's Communist Party just weeks before parliamentary elections are due to be held, ITAR-Tass news agency reported Monday, says AFP.

The Court acted after the Azerbaijani Justice ministry said the activities of the party contradicted the Caucasus republic's law on independence, a ministry official was quoted by ITAR-Tass as saying.

The ban will prevent the party from participating in the November 12 polls.

UNITA rebels kill 32

LISBON, Sept 5: Thirty-two people from Angola, Britain and the Philippines have been killed in an ambush laid by UNITA militants in Angola's Lunda Norte Province, press reports said Monday, reports AFP.

The Angolan news agency Angop, monitored in Lisbon, said 24 Angolans, three Britons and five Filipinos died when 15 rebels opened fire on a truck that was headed from Dundo to Lucapa, the main town of the province, last weekend.

The identity of the foreign victims who were employed by the Lucapa Mining Company was not immediately known, said military spokesman Jose Manuel.



Fireworks lighten the sky of West Jerusalem with a view of the golden Dome of the Rock Mosque in Old City Monday at the opening of the Jerusalem 3000 year festivities. Palestinians and the European Union are boycotting the 15-month celebrations.

— AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Snake potion saves his life

LONDON: A British soldier on a ill-fated mountain expedition will return to Borneo to thank the jungle "medicine woman" who saved his badly injured hand with a potion of snake flesh, bones and herbs, reports Reuter.

Sergeant Bob Mann slashed open the palm of his right hand and almost severed two fingers on his machete when descending the previously unconquered low's gully on Mount Kinabalu.

His hand turned gangrenous. Mann and a colleague stumbled through the jungle, battling dehydration and starvation until they found a village.

There an old lady forced the injured arm into a jar of snake potion. Doctors said they believe it saved Mann from amputation.

He is now returning to Borneo to make a television documentary about his epic battle for survival. "The biggest thing for me is going back to thank the villagers that nursed us," he told reporters on Monday.

Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Neill was marooned on Kinabalu with Major Ron Foster and three Hong Kong Chinese soldiers before being rescued by Malaysian forces.

Five other soldiers in the group decided to make their way down the mountain and raised the alarm. Accusations that they had acted without authorisation were dismissed by the inquiry.

Father cum kidnapper

CARBONDALE, (Illinois): A man barged into a third-grade classroom, threatened the teacher and students with a gun and dragged his 8-year-old daughter off screaming and crying while other pupils hid under desks, reports AP.

"I think that if anything gets me emotional, it was the terror on that little girl's face and the feeling I couldn't help her," the teacher, Emma Durr, said Tuesday as police searched for John D. Moro and his daughter, Demetria. Moro, 34, of Centralia, was charged with aggravated kidnapping in an arrest warrant. He had been banned by court order from having any contact with his daughter, school Superintendent Chris Rigdon said.

Demetria shouted "Oh no!" and rushed behind Ms. Durr when Moro — who was also on a school list forbidding him from seeing his daughter — entered the classroom Monday afternoon.

"I just said, 'You're not allowed to be in the building. She's not going with you,'" Ms. Durr said. "It all happened so fast. He said, 'She's coming with me.' He reached for her. I told him again to leave. He took a step towards me, fumbled around, and came out with a gun. I guess it was in the waistband or pocket of his blue jeans."

Authorities said Moro waved his gun at the teacher and students and then dragged his screaming daughter into the hallway. Rigdon and two custodians intervened, but backed off when he pulled the gun again.

Moro shoved the girl into a car and sped off. A parent in a truck in the parking lot gave chase but couldn't keep up, Rigdon said.

Police found the car a few miles (kilometres) away in a wooded recreation area. Investigators believe Moro then took off with his daughter in another car he had waiting.

Troops shell Tamil boats near hijacked ferry

COLOMBO, Sept 5: The military shelled Tamil rebel boats sailing between a guerrilla base and a hijacked ferry with 144 people on board, an official said Tuesday, reports AP.

None of the rebel craft were hit by the shelling on Monday evening from a military base four kilometers (2.5 miles) from the ferry, the military official said on condition of anonymity.

The shells were fired away from the ferry so that the passengers would not be in danger," said the official.

The rebels have promised not to harm the 136 passengers and eight crew members who were aboard the Iris Moana ferry they seized on August 28. The hostages include three newborn babies, 12 other children under seven and 58 women.

Government officials say the rebels have set tough conditions for the release of the hostages but would not say what they are.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has been mediating with the

insurgents about the hostages.

On Monday, Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte warned that the government would not allow the rebels to sail the ferry to the nearest rebel stronghold, 75 kilometers (45 miles) away.

The guerrillas have told the Red Cross they intend to take the hostages to the stronghold in the northern Jaffna Peninsula.

On August 29 the separatists used the ferry to lure and destroy two naval gunboats and apparently kill their 21 sailors.

Since then, Sri Lankan warships and aircraft have kept the 125-ton ferry under surveillance from a distance.

The rebels reportedly used small boats to take some of the hostages from the ferry to a nearby guerrilla base, and government officials don't know how many are still aboard.

The ferry is anchored off the coast of Mullaitivu, 280 kilometers (175 miles) northeast of Colombo.