India, Singapore, Ukraine offer to help salvage jet

Lankan army ask for radar to

ROK students on hunger strike: Fifty South Korean students began a hunger strike yesterday demanding the government prosecute two former president over a bloody army crackdown on a civilian uprising 15 years ago. Reuter reports from Seoul

"Fifty people started fasitng yesterday and dozens more will join eveyr day. About 200 will be on a hunger strike be fore Friday," said a student spokesman from Korea University

Rifkind arrives in Sarajevo: British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind arrived in Sarajevo yesterday to meet Bosnian government officials and visit British troops operating in and around the besieged city.

Reuter reports from Sarajevo. Rifkind landed at Sarajevo Airport at 0830 GMT in a British C-130 cargo plane. The foreign secretary spent Sunday in Belgrade, where he met Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and discussed prospects for an end to the war in Bosnia.

195,000 Indonesians to perform Hajj: Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, will send 195,000 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia next year, the director-general for Islamic and Hajj affairs was quoted as saying yesterday Reuter reports from Jakarta.

The official Antara news agency quoted Amidhan as say ing in a statement the number included 40,720 people from the 1995 waiting list and 154,230 new pilgrims.

China opens Taklamakan highway: One of the world's longest desert highways has opened to traffic in China's northwest off-rich Xinjiang region, the semi-official China News Service said yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

The Taklamakan Highway, which stretches 520 km (320 miles), was completed ahead of schedule on September 4, the agency said. The highway reduces the driving distance from Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, to the oil town of Hetian by 500 km (310 miles) to 1,500 km (930 miles).

Chechens kill Russian soldier: A Russian soldier was killed and eight wounded in fights in the Chechen capital Grozny and the Bamut region in the west of the republic, Interfax news agency reported yesterday, AFP says from Moscow.

Citing a federal army spokesman, it said the Russians were fired on 20 times in the past 24 hours and attacks have recently "become more aggressive." He did not say where the casualties were hit. However, Russian troops have "liquidated" Chechen positions, he added, without giving further details.

Confce on saving Aral Sea opens: A Three-day international conference devoted to saving the Aral Sea in Central Asia opened in Uzbekistan on Monday, news agencies reported, AP says from Nukus. Uzbekistan.

The conference, sponsored by the United Nations, is expected to try to devise solutions for the dramatic drying up of the slightly salty waters of the Aral Sea, the world's fourth largest lake.

Balladur fails to win by-polls: A disenchanted French electorate failed to elect former Premier Edourad Balladur and other members of his conservative government in the first round of legislative | the prospect of cooperation by elections. AP reports from Paris.

Balladur once favoured in the polls to win the spring presidential elections, garnered nearly 60 per cent of the vote in Sunday's vote.

Ramos to seek clemency for maid: President Fidel Ramos will make a personal plea for clemency for a Filipina maid condemned to death in the United Arab Emirates if appeals to higher courts there fail. Philippine Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon said

yesterday, AFP reports from Manila. "We have to review the case, there are two more appeals. Pending that, if the conviction is still negative, the president will appeal for clemency, "Siazon said referring to 16-year-old Saran Balabagan, who was sentenced to death in the UAE on Saturday for killing her Emirati employer.

France plans to increase aid to S Pacific nations

PORT MORESBY, Sept 18: France, under fire in the Pacific for its nuclear tests, plans to increase foreign aid to the region and will consider signing a regional Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, (NFZT), French Cooperation Minister Jacques Godfrain said here today, reports AFP.

He also said the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will send a mission to France's South Pacific nuclear testing site at Mururoa Atoll and that both Australia and New Zealand. which strongly oppose the tests, will be part of it.

Speaking to reporters after a closed session with delegates from the 16-nation South Pacific Forum. Godfrain said France had offered to increase aid for education, telecommunications, energy and fishing to Pacific nations.

French aid is worth 20 tests were announced.

million dollars annually to the Pacific, but Godfrain declined to say how much new aid would be provided.

Australian Pacific Island Affairs Minister Gordon Bilney said the meeting was not productive "in the sense of major results or changes but it left both sides going away considerably better informed about the views of each side and the sensitivity of the views and the intensity with which they are held."

Godfrain denied the aid offer was designed to placate Pacific nations, which strongly protested the resumption of nuclear tests at the Mururoa Atoll.

"For the French government, cooperation is never compensation, it is humanitarian," Godfrain said, adding the decision to increase aid had been made before the

pinpoint Tigers' mortars ing radar after Palaly came COLOMBO, Sept 18: Sri under attack, narrowly miss-Lanka's army is asking for ing aircraft and vital installaradar to pinpoint rebel mortions, according to a senior tars as troops press opera army officer in charge of tions to secure a key northcounter-insurgency opera ern airbase, launch pad for a

planned drive against the

Tamil separatists, defence of-

Reuter

ficials said today, reports

an area immediately south of

the huge Palaly Airbase in the

northern rebel stronghold of

Jaffna after breaking from

their defence lines last

Tuesday, military spokesman

brigadier Sarath Munasinghe

He denied reports there

had been heavy army shelling

But field commanders

have asked for mortar-locat-

of the area. When the Tigers

fire mortars at us we retali

ate. he said

Troops were in control of

"They (rebels) keep moving their mortar positions so we find it difficult to locate and destroy them." he said.

Radar would allow troops to locate rebel mortars quickly and enable artillery to lay down accurate counterbarrages to destroy them, he added. He was unable to say from where the army planned to acquire the equipment but said it would

Northern residents quoted rebel radio as saying 11 civilians among the wounded were two women from the same family who

had their legs amputated The military operation Condemned Operation Handshake-2, was launched to destroy the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels mortar positions and secure the airbase from attacks, according to

defence officials "People think the army might capture more areas to push the Tigers out of mortar range," a northern resident

More than 35,000 troops are massing for the northern offensive against the rebels whose 12-year war for an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the island's north and east has cost more than 50,000 lives.

The navy last week took delivery of three gunboats from China, ordered to re-

place two boats that were sunk and another which was damaged in April, when the rebels broke off a truce and resumed fighting.

The army is also seeking more armour and artillery and the air force more helicopters and attack planes.

AP adds: India, Singapore and Ukraine have offered to locate and possibly retrieve a military plane that crashed into the sea last week, killing 75 people, state-run radio said Monday

The Indian Air Force in a message urged its Sri Lankan counterpart to specify what assistance it could offer, the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation said.

A Singaporean salvage company is prepared to send a submarine to locate the wreckage.

Russia angry over NATO's 'bigger is better' ideas

BRUSSELS, Sept 18 NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serbs may rile the Russians. but the idea of enlarging the Western military alliance to include Moscow's former partners in Eastern Europe really has them steaming, reports AP.

For many in the 16-member North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, expansion into the vacuum left by the crumbling of the Soviet Union is only natural.

For some of the countries freed from the heavy hand o the former Warsaw Pact, it is a chance for security against future Russian dominance.

For Moscow, it is clearly an effort to isolate Russia.

Dr Alexander Konovalov. director of Moscow's Centre for Military Policy and Systems Analysis, said expansion proposals show NATO "does not believe in the possibility of democratic transformation in Russia."

The West is taking advan-

tage of Russia's current weakness "to gain the most favourable strategic position

for further confrontation NATO steadfastly refuses to identify potential joiners. but the countries most often mentioned as first in line for full membership are Poland. Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia. Others see the three Baltic states of Estonia. Latvia and Lithuania as natural members.

Ask Col Marian Kowalewski of the Polish Defence Ministry why Poland so desperately wants in and he responds with wide-eyed astonishment, then offers a lesson in modern European history and past Russian invasions.

Clyde Kull, Estonia's ambassador to NATO and the European Union, says expanding NATO is clearly a part of the process of protecting democracy in these newly emerging free countries.

Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama (R) and PLO leader Yasser Arafat walk - AFP /UNB photo together towards Arafat's office for talks in Gaza City Monday.

Blair for cooperation with Liberals to oust Tory

LONDON, Sept 18: Britain's main opposition Labour Party today opened up with the minority Liberal Democrats to oust the ruling conservatives at the next general election, reports Reuter.

The news is likely to be a blow to Prime Minister John Major, whose political fortunes appear to have improved slightly in the past few weeks but who still face an uphill battle to claw-back ground in opinion polls before the election due by May

But Labour leader Tony Blair's remarks, in an interview with The Times newspaper published as the fiercely independent minded Liberal Democrats hold their annual conference in Scotland, are likely to be controversial.

Blair, who has radically changed the Labour Party since taking over as leader last year following the sudden death of John Smith, said he was prepared to discuss police with the Liberal Democrats before an election.

He said he also foresaw discussion with the Liberal Democrats on legislation after the election, even if Labour came to power with a large overall majority in Parliament.

"There will be a lot of

people who will object to what I am saying. But I think increased cooperation with the Liberal Democrats is sensible," Blair said.

I do not take a tribal view of politics I do not believe that no idea of any worth can come from a political party other than my own. I see a proper dialogue of ideas with the Liberal Democrats."

Blair's comments came hard on the heels of a vote on Sunday at the Liberal Democrats' conference in Glasgow to abandon the party's traditional position of distancing itself from both the ruling Conservatives and Labour.



A victim of a bomb blast in a department store cafe in the western Turkish town of Izmir is covered with a newspaper as police investigators seal off the site to secure evidence Sunday morning. The delayed-bomb was placed in a bin at the cafe, which is frequented by the military, the Anatolia news agency reported. A soldier was among 4 people killed, - AFP/UNB photo | vear. another 25 wounded.

. Murayama meets Arafat in Gaza

GAZA CITY, Sept 18: PLO chairman Yasser Arafat went into talks today with Tomichi Muravama, the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit the autonomous Gaza Strip, reports AFP.

Japanese officials said Murayama, who took a helicopter to Gaza from Jerusalem, would renew Tokyo's commitment to grant the Palestinians at least 100 million dollars a year in aid.

The money is to be increasingly paid directly to the Palestinian authority for specific projects rather than through third parties such as the World Bank.

Arafat went to a helipad overlooking Mediterranean Sea on the northern edge of the strip to greet Murayama.

The two drove to Arafat's Gaza City headquarters where a red carpet welcome ceremony took place, attended by several PLO "ministers".

Aidid captures Baidoa town

NAIROBI, Sept 18: Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid captured the inland town of Baidoa at the head of 600 men in a blitz Sunday and was holding 17 expatriate aid workers in "protective custody" there today, relief workers said, reports AFP.

Details were sparse because General Aidid's militiamen ripped out short-wave radio equipment, but relief workers in Nairobi said the militiamen were also holding a number of Somali aid workers at the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) compound in Baidoa.

General Aidid led a column which included 30 "technicals" — pickup trucks with heavy weapons mounted - from his south Mogadishu stronghold to Baidoa, some 250 kilometres (150 miles) away, in the middle of the night, they said.

Clinton plans to visit Moscow next year

WASHINGTON, Sept 18 US President Bill Clinton plans to visit Moscow next year for a nuclear-safety summit with Russian and G-7 leaders to try to reach an international agreement on handling loose nuclear weapons. Newsweek reported on Sunday, says Reuter. Clinton is expected to sign

directive at the symmit ordering dollar 100 million in US aid to help Russia safeguard its bomb-grade fissionable material, Newsweek said. The aid would be up from 10 million dollar this

Off the Record

Crocodile story turned out to be hoax BANGKOK: It was a crocodile story that turned out to be

a crock, reports AP. Hundreds of police were mobilised, motorists were

stopped and warned, and thousands of residents of Chonburi were holed up in their homes south of Bangkok Sunday night

They believed a flash flood freed more than 300 crocodiles from a local tourist attraction. "Hundreds of crocs on the loose," said an 8-column,

banner headline of Monday morning's national daily Bangkok Post. But later Monday morning, the manager of the tourist

attraction said the story had no teeth. "It's just not true," said Sanlan Temsiripong, manager of the Crocodile Farm, in Sri Racha district of Chonburi, 70

kilometres (44 miles) from Bangkok. Sanlan said police had visited his farm early Monday only to find that all of his 30.000 crocodiles were still in their pens.

"My farm is at the base of a hill," he said. "There is no flood here.

Sanlan said he believed the rumour was started by pranksters who spread the word by walkie talkies, which are used by many people in flood-stricken areas when telephone lines are down.

Sheep carcasses in treetops

WELLINGTON: At least five dead sheep, their feet bound with wire, were found Monday in the treetops of a pine forest, some as much as 100 feet (30 metres) above the ground, reports AP.

Another six carcasses were found decomposing on the forest floor, said John Bergman, a spokesman for the local government in Nelson, on South Island about 80 miles (130 kilometres) west of Wellington.

A hiker found the sheep early Monday.

"It appears they've been dropped or dumped on the forest tops and filtered their way down to the bottom," Bergman said. "There is absolutely no way people could have climbed the trees and hung them up there."

He said a farmer disposing of the sheep may have been flying them to "an offal pit. Maybe the strap on the sling broke."

Bergman said a pilot has contacted the government and offered to explain.

"We may be close to finding out what the reason was for the sheep drop," Bergman said.

Strange hobby PARIS: A retired bookkeeper who has made a hobby of

crashing high-security gates, getting photographed with French presidents and other luminaries, has shown up in the pages of a magazine with his exploits, reports AP. "Claude X" has made it, uninvited, to every Bastille Day

garden party at the Elysee Palace since 1981, each time bluffing presidential security guards to do so, according to the weekly news magazine VSD, published Thursday. Claude X was at the July 14 garden party given by President Jacques Chirac, and even shook Chirac's hand in

the tribune of honour at the Bastille Day military parade. getting past the presidential escort to do so. The uncovering of Claude X comes at a sensitive time in France, in the midst of a bomb wave that has killed seven

people and put soldiers in the streets. The Elysee Palace refused to comment on Claude X's exploits. Since Chirac took office in May, presidential protection has been cut in half as part of an effort to reduce the trappings of officialdom.

It actually was the state-run television channel France-2 that brought Claude out of the closet.

France 2 equipped him with tiny cameras and asked him to get close to Chirac at the Bastille Day military parade. VSD said. The show was to have been aired September 18.

However, France-2 announced Tuesday that an "inopportune sequence" of a show related to presidential protection would not be aired. It gave no explanation.

Claude X "is neither minister nor diplomat and was not invited to the posh functions he has made a habit of attending. VSD wrote. Since retirement, it said. Claude X has been living out his "childhood dream: To get close to the greatest.

India accused of kidnapping

No country is safe from AIDS or HIV virus

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, from AIDS or the HIV virus that leads to it, and governments are just beginning to mobilise their resources to fight it, a regional AIDS conference was told today, reports AFP.

great magnitude," Peter being hindered by public ig-Godwin of the United Nations Development Programme told some 3,000 delegates from 60 countries here for the Third International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific.

Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and the Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus (HIV) are spread mainly by risky sexual behaviour and the sharing of hypodermic needles among drug users. Pregnant women may then pass the disease on to their children.

"Today, more and more level.

people are finding someone HIV/AIDS," Deputy Minister of Public fort there," he said. Health, told the conference.

Governments and private all too slowly to fight the deadly disease. "It is a serious problem of spread of HIV/AIDS and are norance, traditional taboos about discussing sex and a lack of general concern, the experts said.

India with its 900 million people, already hard-hit level Thailand with its estimated The Acquired Immune 800,000 HIV cases, and isolated Myanmar probably will years, experts said.

> PS Ghadowar, India's Deputy Health Minister, said his country has set up a national committee to fight AIDS and was organising similar committees at the state ence.

India has identified "high Sept 18: No country is safe close to them is a victim of risk areas" such as the red Sora-At light districts of its big cities Klimpratoom, Thailand's and is "making a special ef-

> The anti-AIDS campaign also is making an attempt to groups have been organising educate the public about the

But Ghadowar acknowledged that the campaign faces built-in problems such as the traditional reluctance of Indians to talk about sex publicly or even at the family

"But we are working on

these," problems, he said optimistically. AIDS/HIV "is not suffer worst in the coming a big problem in China now but if we don't carry out an effective programme to prevent its spread it may become serious," Chen Minzhang, China's Health Minister, told the confer-

He said there were only

1.707 recorded cases of the disease in China at the end of 1994, including 65 cases of full-blown AIDS.

·But Michael Merson, the chairman of the session from Yale University in the United States, said China's actions to battle AIDS/HIV could be crucial.

"Many of us feel that success in fighting AIDS depends on the ability of China to control it," he said. Australia, meanwhile, al-

ready has had notable success in educating its people about AIDS and developing programmes to fight it, said Carmen Lawrence, that country's Health Minister. He attributed this success

to a "very political and vocal" gay community that has educated itself about AIDS, the low incidence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) and the country's well developed primary health care sys-

But Lawrence said Australia still has a problem with AIDS among its indigenous population, and warned that it may be difficult to duplicate its general success against AIDS in other countries where situations differ.

Godwin said six UN agen cies are working together to fight AIDS, trying to raise people's awareness of the problem, to increase understanding about its causes and consequences, to integrate the various concerns about AIDS, and to strengthen regional and national abilities to respond to the disease.

"But until we realise that the people who are affected are not the problem but part of the solution, our efforts will be unsuccessful, he said.

The conference in this northern Thai city continues through Thursday.

Ziang to meet Clinton in Oct

BEIJING, Sept 18: Chinese President Jiang Zemin will meet his US counterpart Bill Clinton in New York next month, barring any "unforeseen events' instigated by Washington, Premier Li Peng said today, reports AFP.

In an interview with AFP Chairman Lionel Fleury, Li stressed that Sino-US relations had been "tense" in recent months.

"However, we have noted signs from the US side that they are willing to take steps to normalise relations," Li

Sino-US ties went into a

"We think the time has tailspin in June after allowed Washington Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui to make a controversial "private" visit to the United States - overriding Washington. strenuous protests from Beijing.

US based group offers

Al-Faran if it was presented

through the Pakistan media.

rather than either the Indian

media or Indian government.

Srinagar adds: A separatist

group accused India on

Monday of kidnapping

Western hostages - and

killing one of them — to vilify

Kashmir's battle for

that India may kill the four

remaining hostages and

There is every likelihood

Another report from

mediation with Al-Faran believed its offer of mediation ISLAMABAD, Sept 18: A would be more acceptable to

US-based group for religious freedom offered Monday to mediate with Al-Faran group holding four Western hostages in Indian-controlled Kashmir, reports AP The offer was made simultaneously to the Indian

government through its embassy in Washington, DC and the Al-Faran group. through the Pakistani media, said Rev. PD John, executive director of the Prayer Council for International Religious Freedom.

come for a non-government agency to step in and offer its services." John told The Associated Press in telephone interview from

ascribe it to the Mujahedeen fisiamic holy warriors) of Kashmir," the Harakat-ul-Ansar militant group said in a statement released in Srinagar

An Indian official called John said his group the accusation ridiculous

independence