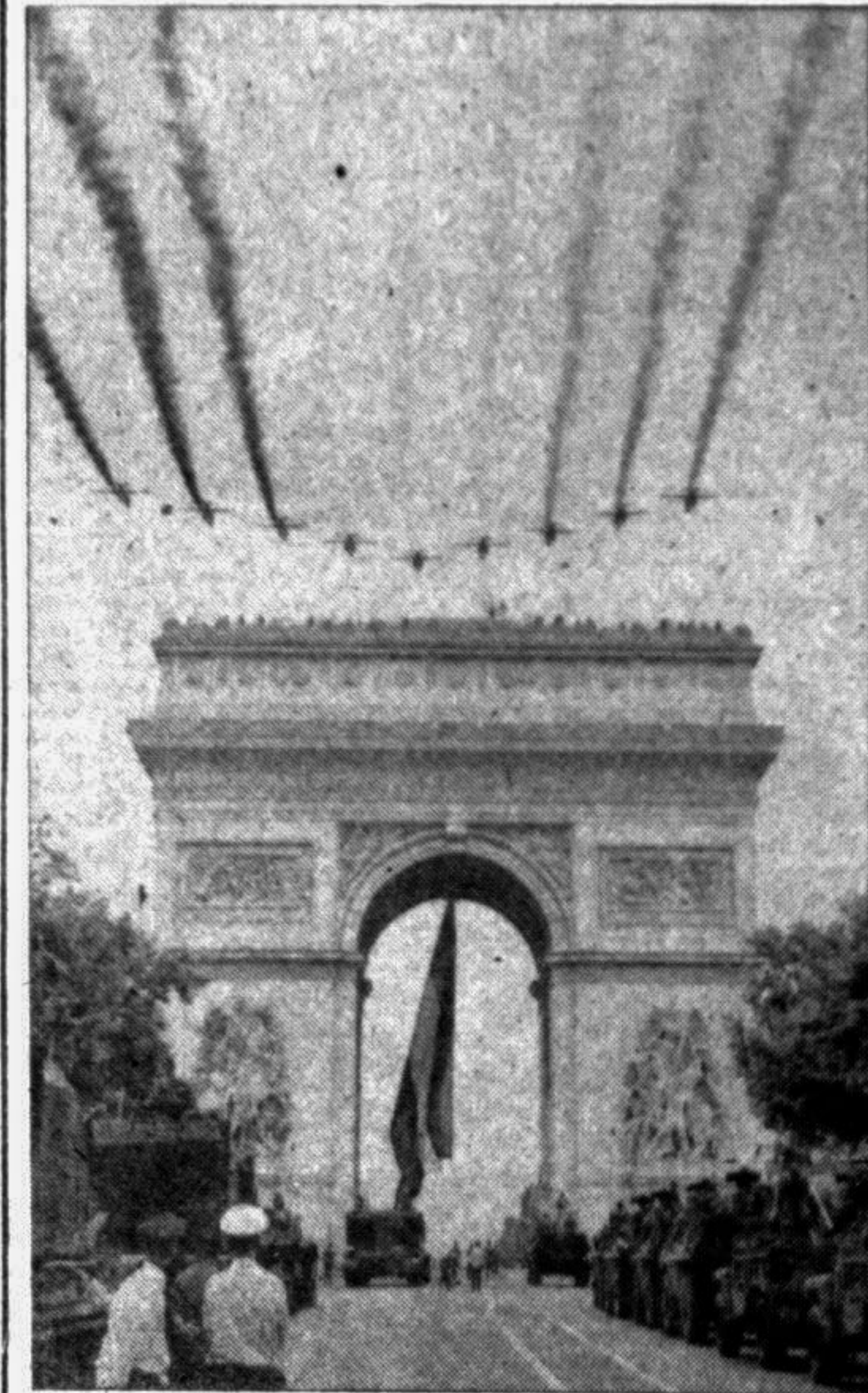


BRIEFLY



French Alpha jets sweep over the Arc de Triomphe yesterday in Paris, as France staged its spectacular annual Bastille Day military parade.

Mugabe to marry next month: Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, 72, will next month marry a former secretary half his age with whom he already has two children, a newspaper reported yesterday.

Arafat arrives in Cairo: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived in Egypt yesterday for talks with President Hosni Mubarak on the embattled Middle East peace process, state television reported.

US actor Peck undergoes surgery: Veteran US actor Gregory Peck underwent emergency surgery for a suspected intestinal ailment yesterday shortly after receiving a Czech Film award, the Czech news agency CTK reported.

2 Russian troops killed in Grozny: Two Russian soldiers were shot dead in the central market of Grozny, capital of the secessionist southern republic, the Interfax News Agency said Sunday.

Blast rocks Northern Ireland: A car bomb caused the explosion early this morning in a hotel in Enniskillen, northern Ireland, police said.

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23 feared killed in Darjeeling landslides

SILIGURI, July 14: At least 28 persons were feared killed in Kathnong sub-division of Darjeeling district in major landslides yesterday, according to official sources, reports PTI. The Municipal Affairs and Urban Development Minister Asok Bhattacharya, who left for Kalimpong this morning, told PTI that the sub-division was experiencing the worst-ever landslides making the area inaccessible by road.

At least 18 houses had collapsed in a major landslide at Parbangtar last evening, he said adding that the actual number of casualties could be ascertained only after removal of the debris.

A team led by the Block Division Officer (BDO), Kalimpong, with aid loads of relief reached the area this morning, the minister said.

The entire sub-division remained cut-off since yesterday following a series of landslides at Kafer, Lolegaon, Ninabong, Delchand, Sornabong.

Fresh riots erupt in Northern Ireland

LONDON, July 14: Fresh riots erupted in Londonderry, northern Ireland's second city, early this morning even though IRA guerrillas had pleaded for calm and pledged to protect their Irish nationalist supporters, reports Reuters.

About 100 youths gathered in the city centre and dragged burned-out cars from earlier violence, the most serious for many years to form makeshift barricades from which to hurl petrol bombs at police.

The renewed rioting reflecting Catholic anger at a police decision to allow hardline pro-British protestants to parade through a Catholic area, flew in the face of an appeal by the Irish Republican Army for restraint.

Police reported that several cars were seized and set ablaze by rioters to draw in security forces who then became targets for petrol bombs and stones.

A few incidents were reported in the capital, Belfast, but the violence appeared centred on Londonderry, the birthplace of militant Irish nationalism.

Libya rejects UN condemnation

TRIPOLI, July 14: Tripoli on Saturday rejected condemnation by the UN sanctions committee of a flight made by Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi in violation of a UN air embargo, reports AFP.

The officials news agency Jana said Gaddafi's flight to the Arab summit in Cairo last month and the flights by Libyan pilgrims to the Hajj in Saudi Arabia in 1995 were not in contravention of the embargo imposed on Libya in 1992.

The trip of the head of state and that of the Libyan pilgrims are a sacred right which do not need any prior permission and concern the sovereignty of an individual state and member of the UN said a statement from the Libyan delegation to the UN published by Jana. It added that Libya conforms to all UN resolutions and respects international treaties.

Greek vessel catches fire off Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, July 14: A Greek cargo vessel that caught fire off Sri Lanka was being towed today to the Colombo Port and all 24 crew members had been rescued, according to the ship-to-shore Colombo radio communications centre, reports AFP.

The MV Sea Star-9 reported that it was in flames off the island's southern coast and the Sri Lankan Navy and another tug boat responded to the SOS early Saturday and rescued the crew, a Colombo radio spokesman said.

The ship was apparently carrying a cargo of flour and iron, the spokesman said. "The crew has now been brought by the navy to the southern port of Galle."

The burnt out ship was being towed some 180 miles (288 kilometres) to the Colombo Harbour, the spokesman said. No further details were immediately available.

Ploughing by elephants

HARARE, July 14: Environmentalists and wildlife organisations have welcomed the idea of ploughing by elephants in communal areas in Zimbabwe, reports Xinhua.

However, these organisations have called for a full scale research on the subject before it is introduced, the Sunday Mail reported today.

In separate interviews with the paper the groups hailed the "productive utilization of wildlife," which was in line with the government policy of "conservation through utilisation."

They said India had been using elephants for logging purposes for centuries, asking why not use our elephants for ploughing and boost communal agricultural production.

Tigers smash bunker in Jaffna, kill 13 troops

COLOMBO, July 14: Tamil guerrillas smashed an army bunker line in northern Sri Lanka today, killing 13 soldiers as security forces kept up an offensive against them elsewhere, officials said, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched the pre-dawn assault against security forces in the village of Sarasali and triggered a 45-minute fire fight, a military statement said.

Troops retaliated with artillery and small arms fire, the statement said. Later the terrorists fled the area carrying their dead and wounded. Ground troops confirm that terrorists suffered heavy casualties.

The Tiger attack came as thousands of elite army troops kept up a major drive against the LTTE in the eastern of Batticaloa and claimed killing at least 22 rebels in the past four days.

Since the LTTE lost its hold on the northern peninsula of Jaffna after a series of military operations begun in October, the guerrillas have escalated violence in the north-east of the island.

Tigers are leading a protracted campaign for independence in the island's northern and eastern regions where the two million Tamil minority is concentrated. More than 50,000 people have died in bitter fighting.

AP adds: The Tamil rebels suffered heavy casualties during the assault Saturday near the village of Sarasali in the Jaffna Peninsula, 200 miles (320 km) north of the capital, Colombo, said military spokesman Maj Tikak Dunuwille. He did not provide any figures.

In May, the government announced it had gained control over the entire Jaffna peninsula, which had been the rebels stronghold.

The guerrillas have been fighting for a homeland in northern and eastern Sri Lanka for minority Tamils to redress what they see as discrimination by the majority Sinhalese.

More than 42,000 people have been killed in the 13-year conflict.



Russia's Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin (L) greets US Vice-President Al Gore at Vnukovo airport in Moscow on Saturday. Gore arrived for a three-day official visit to Russia during which he will meet with President Boris Yeltsin for talks on Moscow's economic reform, disarmament and international cooperation.

Settlement of longstanding issue

Benazir's fresh plea to India for third party mediation

ISLAMABAD, July 14: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Saturday renewed Pakistan's plea for third party mediation to settle its longstanding dispute with India over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, reports Reuters.

The state media quoted her as telling reporters in the Punjab provincial capital of Lahore that Pakistan would welcome mediation although it had not exhausted the process of bilateral talks.

India has in the past opposed proposals for third party mediation and wants only bilateral talks on Kashmir, over which the two countries have fought two of their wars since their independence from Britain in 1947.

But Benazir quoted by the state radio, recalled successful mediation between the two sides three times in the 1960s — a peace pact after the 1965 war, a treaty on sharing river waters and the settlement of a boundary dispute in the Kutch area.

Her remarks renewing the mediation proposal came a day after she met visiting US ambassador to New Delhi Frank Wisner.

Benazir is also yet to send a reply to a letter, New Indian Prime Minister HD Dev Gowda had sent her last month proposing a resumption of high level talks which stalled in January 1994 when New Delhi balked at Islamabad's insistence that the main focus be on Kashmir.

India which is fighting a separatist Muslim revolt in the two thirds of Kashmir it rules, wanted wide-ranging talks with no conditions. Pakistan holds the remaining third of the region.

The officials APP news agency quoted Benazir as saying the United States had stated in clear terms it would mediate only if both India and Pakistan agreed to such a course.

She said she and Wisner discussed a number of matters at Friday's meeting in Lahore, including Indian plans to hold state assembly election in Kashmir in September or October.

APP quoted her as saying that while "The people of Kashmir stand for plebiscite and independence, there is no justification for India to talk of state elections under the bayonets of 600,000 troops deployed there."

Off the Record

Getting married in sea world!

ORLANDO, Fla: Before god, the state of Florida and a chorus of angel fish, they married, reports Reuters.

The bride and groom in a wet suit swam to her groom at the sandy bottom of the tropical reef aquarium at sea world, a white veil floating like a cloud behind her.

The groom in a black wet suit with white bow tie and cummerbund, smiled at her through speckles of fish food that glowed in the blue light like diamonds.

More than 1,000 exotic fish were in attendance on Saturday at the wedding of sea world curator of fishes John Kerivan, 48, and 28-year old Grace Pawlak, a high school science teacher.

The Orlando couple decided to marry in the 160,000-gallon fish tank because it was the spot where they first met four years ago when Pawlak worked there.

"This is not an ordinary occurrence," said sea world spokeswoman Becca Bides, noting that the theme park does not offer wedding services.

Bride and groom appeared nervous as they struggled with last-minute preparations in an entry pool above the tank where several dozen wedding guests and tourists pressed their noses to the glass in awe.

"Honey," he said, "Sweetie" she said as she spit into her goggles and wiped them clean. Friends helped Pawlak attach her veil, which came complete with a seeded pearl tiara.

"We're taking the plunge," she said in a jittery voice as she grabbed a bouquet of white silk flowers.

Bier of Pharaohs in auction

INDIANAPOLIS: Some people will do anything for a bottle of beer. At the Indianapolis Museum of Art, some were willing to play over \$500, reports AP.

The museum auctioned off two bottles of Tutankhamun Ale, a British made beer purportedly made from a 3,250-year-old recipe of Egyptian beer markets. A third bottle will be auctioned off Saturday night.

Christopher Stack and Lori Eifoymsom, both of Indianapolis, each paid \$525 for the bottles. Only 1,000 bottles were brewed, and three were donated to the museum.

"We didn't know what to anticipate because we're not commonly in the business of doing this," said Anne Robinson, a museum spokeswoman. "But we're very happy it worked out so well."

The beer's story reads like an Indiana Jones movie. Archaeologists from Cambridge University's Egypt Exploration Society joined with Scottish and Newcastle Breweries six years ago, when the team uncovered a massive kitchen complex in the Sun Temple of Queen Nefertiti, a relation by marriage of King Tut.

The archaeologists examined grains and seeds left behind by ancient brewers and the dregs of beer from excavated jars were analysed to determine how the beer was made.

Peace talks may resume only if previous accords respected: Yandarbiyev

GROZNY, Russia, July 14: Chechen rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev said on Saturday that peace talks with Russian negotiators could only resume if previous accords were respected and monitored by international observers, reports Reuters.

An upsurge in fighting in the past week has flown in the face of President Boris Yeltsin's pre-election pledges to put an end to the 19th-month conflict and prompted speculation that the Kremlin might be seeking a military solution.

Yandarbiyev, in a statement received by Russia's ITAR-Tass news agency in the Turkish capital Ankara, called on Moscow to respect the agreements reached in May and

June which gave Chechnya about six weeks of relative peace. "A continuation of talks with Moscow is possible only if Russia unconditionally fulfills its obligations, if there is strict international control and UN mediation and if those responsible for breaching the accords are punished," he said.

Russian forces have stepped up attacks on villages in the south of Chechnya, saying troops had been attacked by rebels in one of them and that another contained Yandarbiyev's headquarters.

A separate rebel statement received in Ankara denied that Chechen independence fighters had been responsible for two bomb blasts on trolley buses in Moscow this week.

FBI chief in KSA again to try to forge accord on Dhahran blast probe

WASHINGTON, July 14: For the second time in nine days, FBI Director Louis Freeh is on a quiet mission to Saudi Arabia to resolve lingering disagreements over the investigation of the bombing of a US military complex, reports AP.

Freeh will try to forge an agreement with top Saudi officials, including Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, Saudi Ambassador to the United States, to end bickering between FBI and Saudi investigators. He arrived in Jeddah on Friday after a secret departure from Washington on Thursday. He also was to visit Riyadh and return this weekend.

A team of more than 70 FBI investigators has been sent to the Arab kingdom to join the investigation of the June 25 truck-bombing of a military housing area in Dhahran, which killed 19 US servicemen and wounded hundreds of others.

But there remain problems with information flow and cooperation between the US and Saudi agents.

We haven't been allowed to talk to people in the community. We've been restricted to the US post and interviewing the US airmen and their families," one US law enforcement official said Saturday.

FBI agents at the scene have analysed rubble, debris from the truck and the bomb itself, but they have been hampered by a lack of forensic equipment on site, said this official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The official said, apparently, no agreement has been reached yet to allow debris to be brought to the United States for scientific examination.

Meanwhile, faced with new warnings of terrorist attacks, US officials are planning to take the offensive to protect American forces in Saudi Arabia.

"You can't sit here and wait to be attacked," Air Force Lt. Gen. Howell Estes III, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Friday.

Diana makes appeal for understanding

LONDON, July 14: Britain's Princess Diana made an appeal for "understanding" late on Saturday after newspapers published photographs of her crying in public the day after the terms of her divorce from Prince Charles were announced, reports Reuters.

The fact that the princess of Wales was persistently followed by seven press motorbikes and two press motorcars this morning is the reason for the distressing photographs which are now being published, said a statement from her office issued to the Press Association News agency.

"She has asked that her sons and their parents are given some understanding at a sad time for all of them," it said.

Sunday newspapers published two sets of photographs, one showing a distressed-looking Diana wiping her eyes behind sunglasses, as she walked in Hyde Park in central

London wearing shorts and a T-shirt.

The other showed her, again wearing sunglasses, but clearly distraught, sitting at the driving wheel of her car.

"She appeared at the end of her tether, as if she had been crying all night," a passer-by who saw the princess in the park told the News of the World.

Newspapers have unanimously declared the terms of the divorce a defeat for Diana, who had been determined to carve out a public role for herself.

She is to lose the prestigious title her royal highness in exchange for an estimated 17 million pound (26 million dollars) lump sum settlement.

This means she will be obliged to curtsy to other members of the royal family, technically including her own sons, William, 15, and Harry, 11.

Troops on alert after bus bombings in Moscow

MOSCOW, July 14: Police and soldiers were out in force around Moscow, while the mayor offered a bid reward for information in a pair of bus bombings that have put the capital on edge, reports AP.

Extra security was visible Saturday in buses, trolleys and subway stations Saturday, with police, soldiers and plain-clothes security officers watching for unattended packages and hoping to reassure wary passengers. Thursday's and Friday's bombs were hidden in cloth bags slipped onto the buses.

Two dozen people remained hospitalised, eight in serious condition, from Friday's explosion during the morning rush hour, which injured 28 people.

Mayor Yuri Luzhkov promised a new crackdown on vagrants, and underclass and said that city would pay a "huge" reward — he did not specify the amount — to anyone who helps find the perpetrators.

The Interfax news agency cited an unnamed source as saying the reward might be as high as \$1 million, but that could not be confirmed.

Authorities released composite sketches of two dark-haired men they said were seen running from the scene of Friday's bombing that blew out the front of a bus three miles northeast of the Kremlin.

Brunei throwing lavish birthday party for its ruler

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, July 14: Oil rich Brunei is throwing a lavish birthday party for its powerful ruler, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, who has invited his favourite pop star Michael Jackson to perform for his subjects, reports AFP.

Bathed in a sea of lights at night, the Bruneian capital is decorated with bunting, flags and arches to mark the special day of the Sultan, who turns 50 Monday.

Sultan Hassanal, reputedly the world's richest man, is also prime minister and defence minister of the tiny Borneo kingdom of 300,000 people, which has been an Islamic monarchy for six centuries. Hassanal wields absolute power over his kingdom, a British protectorate until 1964

when he reluctantly accepted independence from London, which still keeps a battalion of Gurkhas here.

The Sultan's birthday is the premier event in the national calendar, but the state is giving added focus to it this year because it is his "golden birthday," a government official said.

To mark the event, state-run national carrier Royal Brunei Airlines is offering a special gift to economy class passenger — a 50 per cent discount in fares to selected destinations for a month from Thursday.

The destinations include Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Osaka, Singapore, Taipei, Jakarta and Beijing.

Jackson concert is the icing on the cake, a businessman close to the palace said of the celebrations.

Workers were putting the finishing touches Sunday to an expensive man-made garden 40 kilometres (25 miles) from here, that will include a 30,000 capacity world class amphitheatre for Jackson to belt out his songs Tuesday night.

The eight hectare (20-acre) garden, an extension of the multi-million dollar Jerudong Theme Park, already open to the public, includes a musical fountain, a mammoth arch made of granite and other material imported from Italy, China, Germany and Australia.

Many facilities at the theme park, reputedly the biggest in southeast Asia, are comparable to those in Disneyland, but it has not pulled crowds from the region because Brunei authorities have not publicised it aggressively.

Ours is the only one of its kind in the world mainly because the public is admitted free of charge on the kindness of his majesty, who built it primarily for his subjects," said Ascalon Jerry, a project architect.

Work on the Theme Park supervised by foreign experts including those from the giant EuroDisneyland in Florida, started in 1993 and the initial phase was completed and opened to the public in 1995.

Palace sources said the garden project, costing tens of millions of dollars, was a birthday present from the Sultan's three brothers work on it began only four months ago after Jackson gave the greenlight to perform here.

Sultan Hassanal, whose fortune is estimated at more than 30 billion US dollars, personally invited Jackson, who flew in here secretly Saturday in his private jet, sources said.

The American pop icon is staying in one of several posh palaces in the capital that will also house Britains Prince Charles and several other foreign dignitaries scheduled to arrive later Sunday for the birthday bash.

As there will be no charge for Jackson's concert, organisers expect a large turnout, including fans from neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia. Many tourists have extended their stay here on hearing of the concert.