

Israel should honour its pledge to withdraw from Hebron : French FM

PARIS, July 24 (AP) — French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette said Wednesday that Israel should honour its pledge to withdraw from Hebron, the last West Bank city under Israeli occupation, reports AP.

De Charette said France was committed to supporting the peace process. Talks between the Israelis and Palestinians and plans for a Hebron withdrawal have been effectively frozen since a series of suicide bombings by Islamic militants in February and March.

Peace is the only alternative, and for that everything that has been signed should be

Opposition seeking consensus for Benazir's removal

ISLAMABAD, July 24 (AP) — A splintered political opposition was meeting Wednesday in the Pakistani capital in an effort to forge a united front to drive Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto from power, reports AP.

The meeting was called by opposition leader and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who claimed an emerging force was building against Benazir.

"Anybody who will stand with the government will have to face the people's wrath," Sharif told reporters.

Sharif's Muslim League in particular is hoping to find common ground with Pakistan's Islamic front of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

It was the first time since Benazir came to power in 1993 that most of Pakistan's divided opposition held a joint meeting. In addition to the Jamaat-e-Islami and Muslim League, 12 other smaller political parties were participating in the gathering.

The Benazir government in



Recent months has come under increasing pressure over a variety of issues, including accusations of election fraud, rampant corruption and economic mismanagement. The opposition has been building momentum against the government since Benazir unveiled the federal budget last month and introduced sw-

eping new taxes.

Economists and business leaders called the budget as "anti-people," saying it could lead to hyper-inflation.

On Sunday, the fractious opposition in southern Sindh province merged during a general strike called to protest the budget and what they termed corruption, illegal activities and discrimination in the government.

"We want to keep building on what was started in Sindh and find a constitutional way for the removal of this government," Muslim League spokesman Musahid Hussain said.

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Qazi Hussain Ahmed took part in Wednesday's meeting, just days after completing a 1,000-kilometer (620 miles) train march from the central city of Lahore to Hyderabad in Sindh.

Aboard a train with a team of supporters, Ahmed used the whistle stop journey to hold anti-government protest rallies in the towns and villages dot-

Britain introduces bill to prosecute child molesters

LONDON, July 24 (AP) — Legislation that would allow Britain to prosecute crimes of child molestation and terrorism committed overseas was proposed by the government on Tuesday, and is expected to pass, reports AP.

The legislation would be principally aimed at "sex tourists" who exploit the availability of child prostitutes in countries like the Philippines and Thailand, but would also be used against alleged terrorists seeking refuge in Britain, a Home Office statement said.

"There should be no escape for those depraved people who commit sexual offenses against children whether in this country or abroad," said David Maclean, the junior Home Office minister who introduced the legislation.

The opposition Labour Party said it would support the legislation, which is similar to laws on the books in 12 other countries, including the United States.

The senior Home Office minister, John Howard, said the legislation would be proposed before parliament at the earliest opportunity.

When the British government first began studying the issue last year, some legislators expressed concern that difficulties obtaining evidence would make the law impracticable and unenforceable.

But recent convictions in Australia and Sweden against offenders who sought child sex in the Far East quashed those concerns.

Maclean said he expected no more than ten prosecutions a year, and that he preferred to extradite the offenders. But he noted that countries where child prostitution is most rampant do not press for extradition.

"Countries who complain about the problem are sometimes loathe to ask for extradition," he said.

Campaigners against "sex tourists" say that many countries are concerned about how such trials would impact on their much needed tourism dollars.

UNICEF estimates there are a million children working in the sex trade.

BRIEFLY

Floods claim 70 in Nepal: Some 70 persons were swept away in a flash flood earlier this week at a village near Nepal's border with China, the state-run RSS News Agency said yesterday. AFP reports from Kathmandu.

More than 170 people are believed to have been killed in floods and landslides over the past two weeks amid unremitting heavy rains. The 70 people were believed to have perished after the Bhairav Kund steam burst its banks late Monday and rushing waters flooded Tatopani village, some 85 kilometres (52 miles) northeast of Kathmandu, RSS said.

French FM meets Arafat: French Foreign Minister Herve De Charette met Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Tuesday in Gaza the fourth of Middle East diplomatic swing to help revive stalled Arab Israeli peace talks, Reuters reports from Gaza.

De Charette on his first tour of the region since hardliner Benjamin Netanyahu won Israel's premiership in May elections, said in Jordan earlier on Tuesday Arabs wanted the European Union (EU) to play a higher role in the US led peace process.

Cholera breaks out in US: The number of US cholera cases has jumped markedly in the past five years, with most brought in by travellers from foreign countries and resistant to antibiotics, federal researchers say, AP reports from Chicago.

But the risk of cholera to the individual traveler remains extremely low, the researchers found in a report in Wednesday's issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association. From 1992 through 1994, 160 cases of cholera were reported to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. That was up significantly from the 136 cases reported in the 27 previous years, from 1965 through 1991.

Chopper of Burundis president stoned: Angry crowds stoned the helicopter of Burundis Hutu President on Tuesday as he tried to attend the mass funeral of 304 members of the Tutsi minority tribe slain over the weekend, officials and state radio said, Reuters reports from Buzubura.

President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, whose two predecessors were assassinated, had to abandon plans to attend the mass funeral at Bugendana in Burundi's central Gitega region and flew to safety, an aide said Ntibantunganya was unhurt.

N Korean defects to S Korea: A North Korean farmer crossed the heavily guarded demilitarised zone between the two Koreas and defected to the south under cover of dense fog early yesterday, Defence Ministry officials said, AFP reports from Seoul.

The farmer was spotted by South Korean border guards at 7:42 am (2242 GMT) in the demilitarised zone near Cholwon, 60 kilometres (37 miles) north of Seoul, the ministry said.

Nationwide dengue alert in Manila: The Philippine department of health has raised a nationwide dengue alert following a rise in dengue fever cases in the country, particularly in metro Manila, the local press reported yesterday, Xinhua reports from Manila.

Health secretary Carmencita N Reodica said that local officials, non-government organisations and the public would be mobilised in the elimination of breeding grounds of mosquitoes that carry the dengue virus.

Fierce fighting at Mullaitivu kills 28 more troops Lankan govt comes under fire for news blackout on war

COLOMBO, July 24: With some 1,500 troops pinned down on a northern beachhead, the government came under fire in Parliament Wednesday for its news blackout on what could be the worst debacle of the 13-year war against Tamil rebels, reports AP.

Opposition legislators accused the government of acting irresponsibly in censoring news of a rebel assault on the Mullaitivu camp on the north-east coast, which the Tamil Tigers claim to have overrun last week.

"The country is not being told anything about the situation in Mullaitivu," said Ranil Wickremasinghe, leader of the opposition United National Party, demanding a full parliamentary debate.

"The government should make a statement and lift the censorship on the local media," he said.

Military officials said 1,000 troops won landed Tuesday on

a beach south of Mullaitivu, joining several hundred already there, were expanding their beachhead.

The military is building up its strength for what is expected to be a counterattack on the rebels, who claimed to have wiped out the 1,200-man garrison, 275 kilometres (170 miles) north of the capital, Colombo.

Reports on the fighting in non-government Colombo newspapers have large white gaps, in which the word "censored" is written in big letters. Rebel statements, published from the Tigers' offices in Europe, do not appear in the Sri Lankan press.

Televised reports on the battle by the British Broadcasting Corporation are blocked out by cable operators wary of the censorship rules imposed last April.

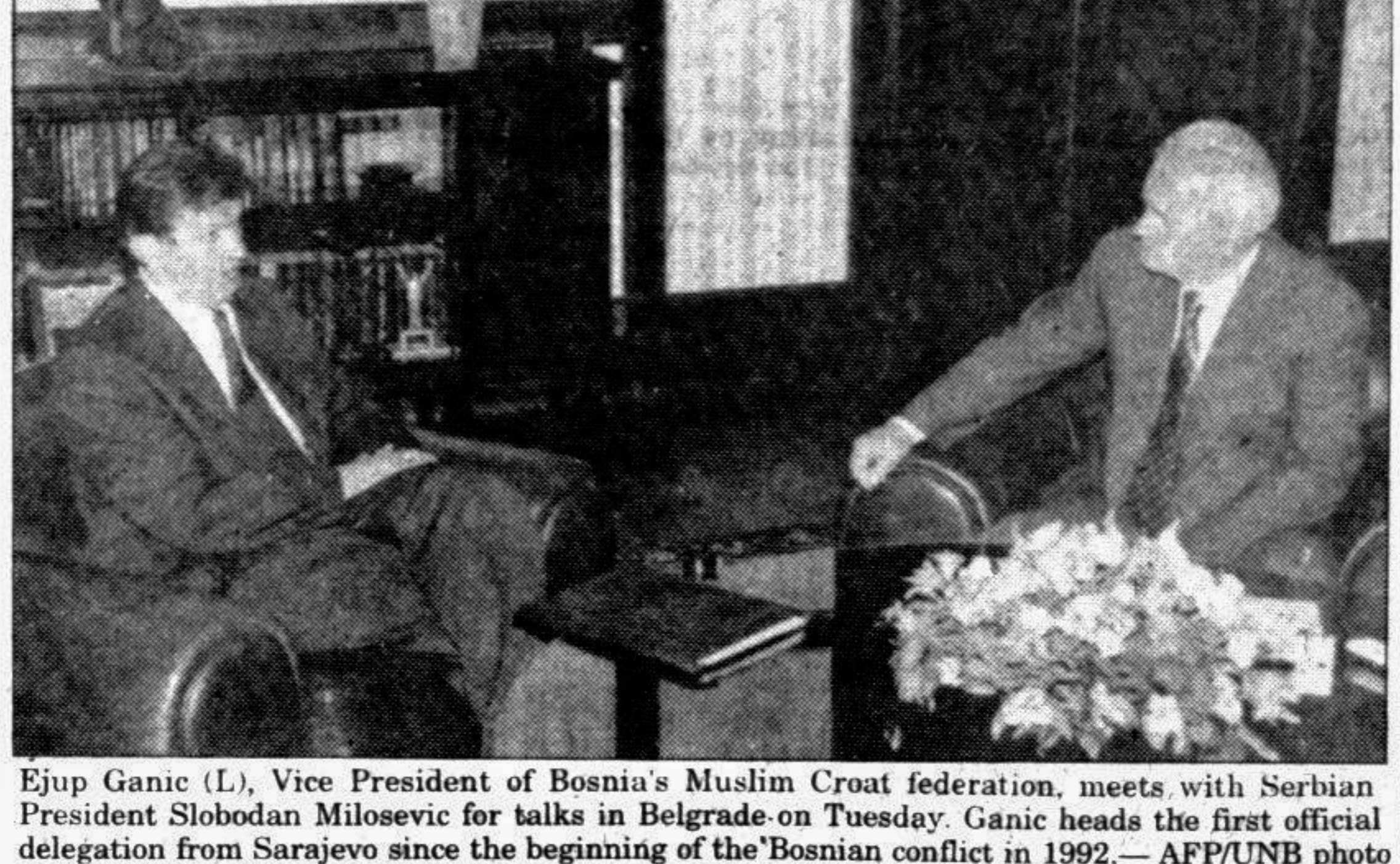
The Defence Ministry has made no statement about casualties since Sunday, when it

said 300 soldiers in Mullaitivu were presumed dead and 37 commandos from a relief force also had been killed. It said 400 rebels were killed.

AFP from Colombo adds: fierce fighting raged into a seventh day in Sri Lanka today after Tamil Tiger separatists killed 28 troops sent to help army forces in the embattled northeast, the rebels said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said the soldiers were killed during fighting late Tuesday south of an army garrison at Mullaitivu town that was reportedly overrun by the guerrillas with the loss of hundreds of lives.

AP says, Government soldiers battled Tamil Tiger rebels Wednesday to extend a beachhead in northern Sri Lanka, preparing for an assault on a military camp that the guerrillas claimed to have overrun, officials said.



Ejup Ganic (L), Vice President of Bosnia's Muslim Croat federation, meets with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic in talks in Belgrade on Tuesday. Ganic heads the first official delegation from Sarajevo since the beginning of the Bosnian conflict in 1992.— AFP/UNB photo

US, Russia support proposed nuclear test ban treaty

JAKARTA, July 24: The United States and Russia issued a joint statement backing a proposed nuclear test ban treaty Tuesday — although it does not fully satisfy either Washington or Moscow, reports AP.

Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov urged that the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, as proposed in Geneva on June 28 by Dutch mediator Jaap Ramaker, be supported by other nuclear powers.

Primakov read the statement through an interpreter at a news conference attended by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Both are in Jakarta for annual meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, known as ASEAN.

"We urge other participants

in the negotiations to also support that draft, so when the work of the session of the conference on disarmament is resumed on July 29, its participants could make a decision to approve the draft treaty and to send it for approval and for opening for signature in the course of the forthcoming session of the United Nations General Assembly," Primakov said.

He said the draft "does not fully satisfy both sides."

A senior US diplomat told reporters that there was a growing consensus on the latest draft of the treaty despite its shortcomings. He did not elaborate.

"Negotiations by 61 nations on a Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty missed a June 28 deadline to produce an accord,

Off the Record

Lovers' legacy

PHILADELPHIA: A man who spent 20 years in love with a neighbour he never married bequeathed 11 million dollars to her alma mater in her honour, reports AP.

Harvey Wexler, who died in October, left the gift to Bryn Mawr in honour of Joan Coward, a 1946 graduate who died of cancer six years before him. It is the largest ever to the school, 3 million dollars more than one from the Pew Memorial Trust in 1979.

Wexler and Coward lived in modest one-bedroom apartments in the same building in Washington, D.C. for 20 years.

"They spent almost all day, every day together," said Coward's sister-in-law, Margaret Johnson. "But not, as she jokingly said, for breakfast."

Both were economists, she for the government and he in private industry. They met at a conference when he saw her and asked a mutual friend for an introduction.

Talk of marriage came up from time to time, but it never happened.

"I guess they each wanted to maintain that certain separateness and independence," Coward's sister, Nancy Urban, said. "They said the fact they weren't married strengthened their relationship."

Wexler's gift will be used to create two professorships, one in economic history and named for his parents, Samuel and Etta Wexler, and the other, in political economy, named for Coward.

Church's telephone code for phone sex service!

SUVA, Fiji: Tuvalu's powerful national church is outraged that the tiny central Pacific island has boosted government revenue 10 per cent by leasing its international telephone code to be used for phone sex services, reports AP.

"If it is true then this is the most degrading thing that has ever happened to Tuvalu," said the Rev. Rosette Alefaio of the Ekelesia Kelesano, the church that dominates the lives of 90 per cent of the nation's 9,000 Polynesian citizens.

Alefaio had received faxed pages from a British magazine, Men Only, displaying numerous ads offering "Live One to One" sex conversation to callers who dial a number prefixed by Tuvalu's country code, 688.

"Tuvalu is a Christian country and things advertised in the magazine do not, and never will happen in Tuvalu," he said.

Prime Minister Kanuua Latai has denied knowledge of the nature of the calls.

Lopati Tefoto, director of Tuvalu Telecommunications Corp, said that since April Tuvalu has been paid at least US 50,000 dirrs a month and was being equipped for TV on its nine atolls by Asia Pacific Telecommunications, which has bought rights to use excess capacity on Tuvalu's international telephone exchange.

Tefoto said he understood the calls were for "marketing" purposes, and said he was unaware of sexual calls. "We were told that this is purely for data transmission," he said.

Revenue received for the calls amounts to about 10 per cent of Tuvalu's national budget of US 4 million dirrs to 5 million.

Tuvalu, which has only 10 1/2 square miles (27 square km) of land, relies on foreign license fees, remittances from Tuvaluans working on foreign ships, foreign aid and revenue from a national investment fund of about US 30 million dirrs.

Burundi stops forcing Rwandans back home

KIGALI, Rwanda, July 24: After forcing 30,000 Rwandans out of refugee camps in five days, Burundi has agreed to temporarily stop sending them back home, a UN official said Tuesday, reports AP.

The agreement was reached between top Rwandan and Burundian officials, said Paul Stromberg, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Kigali.

"We have been told there will be at least a temporary halt of the operation and we hope it will be permanent," he said.

The operation that began Friday has driven 30,000 Rwandan refugees — mostly Hutus — from two camps in northern Burundi, where they fled two years ago in fear of retaliation from the new Tutsi-led government.

The former Hutu-dominated government slaughtered more than 500,000 people in Rwanda, most of them Tutsis or opposition Hutus.

Before Burundi's move to shut down the two camps, there were 84,000 refugees in six camps in northern Burundi.

On Friday, Burundian troops entered the Kibezel camp, home to 15,000 Rwandans, and forced them onto trucks bound for Rwanda. While thousands obeyed, thousands more fled into surrounding hills.

Stromberg said after consultations with UN officials, senior ministers in Rwanda and Burundi agreed to suspend the operation and review the situation, despite threats to force all the Rwandan refugees back home by next week.

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"We urge other participants

Khmers abduct 25 peasants, kill 21

PHNOM PENH, July 24: Khmer Rouge guerrillas abducted 25 peasants in the northern province of Siem Reap last week and then slaughtered 21 of them for no apparent reason, the Cambodian government said today, reports AP.

The massacre comes as the rebels have stepped up activities across the country coinciding with the onset of the monsoon season which brings heavy rains that bog down government troop movements.

The rebels kidnapped the civilians from their village in Siem Reap's northern most district of Samrong near the Thai border sometime between July 15 and 21, according to Ministry of Information spokesman Sieng Lapress citing reports the military.

Nepal to take up border issue with India soon

KATHMANDU, July 24: The Nepal government has promised the opposition party that it would soon take up a controversial border issue with India due to an agreement signed early this month by local border officers, reports Xinhua.

Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka Tuesday told a lower house meeting that a parliamentary committee would be formed soon to look into the issue.

On July 3, border officers of southern Nepal's Jhapa district and neighbouring Indian district of Kisanaguri reportedly signed some border papers, among others, requiring people living within 15.3 kilometers from the border to move out.

It was also reported that a new border pillar had been set up an almost 1 kilometer inside the Nepali territory in the border town of Bhadrapur.

"Public anger over the border agreement appeared in the district and the Bhadrapur town authorities had expressed grave concern over the Indian encroachment," according to the local press.

Some MPs of the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (UML) have been accusing the government for its "ignorance" to the controversial issue in the parliament during the last few days after they made an on-site inspection to the southern border area.

Chief district officer of Jhapa Birendra Kumar Singh said he could not submit the text of the agreement to the central government as a border officer who attended the talks was missing.

TWA jetliner crash: No traces of explosives found yet

EAST MORICHES, New York, July 24: Divers descended from the US Navy's best salvage ship and recovered more victims from the wreckage of TWA Flight 800, but officials acknowledged that nothing found so far in the debris or bodies shows traces of explosives, reports AP.

Also, Pentagon analysts have found no sign on radar tapes or high-altitude photographs of a missile or anything else that might have brought down the jumbo jet, spokesman Kenneth Bacon said Tuesday.

President Clinton said that based on regular reports he's receiving, none of the evidence establishes a cause.

The jumbo jet exploded in the air and crashed July 17 off Long Island, New York shortly after leaving Kennedy Airport, killing all 230 people aboard. It was the second worst crash

alone without the full testing," said a federal official in Washington, speaking on condition of anonymity. No traces of explosives have been confirmed in FBI lab tests of the wing fragment, other wreckage or bodies through Tuesday evening.

Two new pieces of plane debris were shipped to the FBI laboratory Tuesday, but it could take until Thursday for sophisticated tests to determine whether or not they contain bomb residue.

White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta said "chemical leftovers" had been found on bodies and debris from the plane, and investigators were focusing "most closely" on terrorism.

Material from autopsies was also going Washington, said Charles Wetli, a medical exam-

iner in Suffolk County, New York.

Officially, investigators have said they are not yet sure whether the explosion was caused by a bomb, a catastrophic mechanical failure or a missile.

The Pentagon has turned radar tapes and satellite photos of the explosion, but so far they have provided "nothing significant, nothing helpful" to understand what caused the disaster, Bacon said.

The search for debris focused on a section of the continental shelf where divers located a 60-by-30-foot (18-by-9-metre) piece of fuselage in a "wreckage field" of airplane parts.

The recovery effort gained momentum Tuesday with the arrival of the USS Grasp, a high-tech Navy salvage-and-reuse ship.

The Grasp, which brought 23 additional divers, is equipped with a robot and special video and scanning equipment. It can support divers as far as 190 feet (57 metres) down and lift heavy objects.

Overnight, using sonar equipment, investigators mapped out 14 target areas in the 3-by-4 mile (5-by-6.5-kilometre) grid to guide the divers working under more than 100 feet (30 metres) of water Tuesday.

Because of the depth, divers were able to work for only a short time before returning to the surface, and had to wait several hours before going for another, even shorter dive.

Two key targets were the plane's voice and data recorders, the so-called black boxes. Searchers had not detected the sounds the boxes

are supposed to emit, most likely because they were shielded behind wreckage or dirt, said Robert Francis, vice chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board.

Investigators were anxious for quick recovery of wreckage for two reasons: Clues might be washed away the longer the debris remains in the water and, if the plane was sabotaged, the saboteurs, trail is getting colder.

"The recovery of the victims takes priority," Francis said. "We are concentrating on the people, we are not concentrating on aluminum."

Before Pataki's announcement, the medical examiner's office had said remains of 108 had been recovered. Of those, 77 have been positively identified.

United Nations, July 24: Washington's threats to investigate allegations that UN officials have campaigned for UN chief Boutros Boutros-Ghali are being made against staff which is working under extremely stressful circumstances, UN spokesman Sylvana Foa said. These are "bully tactics."

These threats and blatant attempts at intimidating UN staff really smack of the McCarthy era, Foa said, referring to US Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose investigations in to alleged Communist subversives 40 years ago ruined thousands of careers in government, Hollywood and academia.

On Monday, US Mission spokesman James Rubin said Washington planned to look into how UN personnel were being used to promote Boutros-Ghali's drive to win a second term. Boutros-Ghali's current mandate expires December 31.

Washington has threatened to use its veto to block a second five-year term for Boutros-Ghali and has called for a secretary-general who is more dedicated to reform.