

Nepal to seek 3rd party mediation to resettle Bhutanese refugee issue

KATHMANDU, Aug 1: Nepal will seek Dutch mediation to resolve the problem of resettling 90,000 Bhutanese refugees who have lived in United Nations-run camps in Nepal since 1991, officials said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Nepal as said it is ready to involve a third party to break the stalemate between the two Himalayan kingdoms and would ask Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Johannes, for help in talks on the issue during his visit to Nepal next week, they said.

"Refugees are the major mission of the Dutch minister," a spokesman for Nepal's Foreign Ministry told Reuters. "We will explain our general position to the Netherlands," said Foreign Secretary Kedar Bhakta Shrestha.

About 100,000 Bhutanese of ethnic Nepal-origin have fled Bhutan in the past six years, claiming they were victims of ethnic discrimination in the wake of a pro-democracy movement in 1990 that Bhutan suspected was begun by Nepali dissidents.

Nepal as demanded that Bhutan take back all refugees who can prove they were citizens there, but Thimphu has refused, saying the refugees forfeited their citizenship because they left voluntarily.

Ethnic Nepali make up about a quarter of Bhutan's 1.6 million people.

Seven rounds of ministerial talks between Kathmandu and Thimphu have failed to settle the issue of repatriating the refugees in eight camps in eastern Nepal.

New Burundi govt moves ahead despite threat of sanctions

BUJUMBURA, Burundi, Aug 1: Facing sanctions and a barrage of international criticism, Burundi's new military-backed leader has moved ahead with plans to quickly form a new government by naming a new prime minister, reports AP.

Pierre Buyoya, the Tutsi major who deposed the Hutu president in a military coup last week, picked Pascal Firmin Ndimira, a Hutu, as his prime minister Wednesday.

Earlier Wednesday, African leaders meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, vowed to impose sanctions on the tiny Central African nation to punish the new regime for ousting a fragile but legitimate government.

"I think the reaction against this new government has been too harsh," Ndimira told reporters after swiftly moving into the prime minister's residence on Wednesday. "People are looking at the situation from a distance and they do

not quite understand that we are in the midst of falling into civil war."

Ndimira said his mission as prime minister is to implement a new ideology of reconciliation instead of an ideology of violence.

The appointment of Ndimira is viewed as a concession to the country's ethnic Hutus, who make up 85 per cent of the population of 6 million. Many Hutus, however, still see the coup as another example of the Tutsis' refusal to share power.

"It doesn't matter if the prime minister is a Hutu or Tutsi, the new regime will serve Tutsi interests only," said Emmanuel Mpayokurera, a Hutu member of the suspended parliament.

Tutsis traditionally have maintained power in Burundi through control of the military. Fighting between the army and Hutu rebels has intensified this

year, fuelling fears of widespread massacres similar to those in neighbouring Rwanda two years ago.

In a formal declaration ending their brief summit, leaders from Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Zaire and Cameroon said they were committed to putting "all necessary pressure on the regime in Bujumbura (the Burundian capital), including sanctions" to return to negotiations to resolve the conflict.

But the African leaders did not disclose details of such sanctions, which they said would be handled by "technical experts."

This statement echoed the response following the last regional summit in Arusha on June 25 when ousted President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya and other Prime Minister Antoine Nduwayo appealed for outside help to staunch the bloodshed in Burundi.

4,000 US troops to be shifted to new bases within KSA

WASHINGTON, Aug 1: More than 4,000 US troops will be shifted to new bases within Saudi Arabia under a new protection plan costing about 200 million dollars to be shared equally by the two countries, the Pentagon said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Air force Col Doug Kennett, a Defence Department spokesman, outlined details of a security agreement announced by the US and Saudi defence leaders in Saudi Arabia earlier on Wednesday and said protective shifts had already begun.

Kennett told Reuters the United States will move all of its air operations and 4,000 air force personnel involved in there from Dahrhan and Riyadh to more remote Prince Sultan Air Base at Al-Kharj, 60 miles (100 km) southeast of Riyadh.

US patriot anti-aircraft batteries and their 500 personnel will remain in Dahrhan, but the troops will be moved from Khobar Towers Housing Complex to King Abdul Aziz compound for better protection.

Kashmiri leaders refuse to meet US envoy

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 1: Separatist leaders in Kashmir refused to meet the visiting US ambassador Thursday, as Indian officials discussed whether to grant a US senator's request to tour the trouble-rife district, reports AP.

The flurry of interest in Kashmir comes as India prepares to stage the first local election in the state of Jammu-Kashmir in nine years.

Political activity was suspended and the state legislature was dismissed after a Muslim rebellion erupted in 1989. Nearly 15,000 people have been killed in Kashmir since then.

Omer Farooq, head of a pro-separatist coalition called the Hurriyat Conference, said he declined a request to meet US Ambassador Frank Wisner because of his stand supporting the elections.

The Hurriyat opposes the elections for the state legisla-

ture, saying it wants a referendum on whether the Muslim-majority territory should remain part of India, which is predominantly Hindu.

Wisner's "statements were not like by the Hurriyat," said Farooq.

Farooq said Wisner was ignoring allegations that elections held in Kashmir two months ago for the federal parliament were rigged and Kashmiris were coerced to vote by Indian soldiers.

Meanwhile, India was studying a request by US Senator Hank Brown, chairman of the Senate subcommittee on South Asia, to visit Kashmir during a trip to India due to begin this weekend.

A report from Washington in the Indian Express newspaper Thursday said India had turned down Brown's request, but a US embassy official said the visit to Kashmir was still being discussed.

Liberian factions agree to immediate truce

ABUJA, Aug 1: The chairman of the Liberian Council of State and leaders of Liberia's warring factions said Wednesday they had agreed to "an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities throughout the country," reports AP.

The also agreed to the withdrawal of troops to positions held before the two-day Abuja summit of West African leaders.

In a joint statement released in the wake of a meeting with Nigerian head of state General Sani Abacha on Tuesday, the warlords reaffirmed their total commitment to the Abuja accord.

They also expressed their support for ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) initiatives aimed at bringing about a lasting solution to the Liberian crisis.

The statement copy of which was sent to AFP on Wednesday, was signed by the chairman of the council Wilton Sankawulo and by leaders of warring factions who also sit on the council.

The are Charles Taylor of

the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) Alhaji G V Kromah of the Mandingo Branch of the Ulimo (ULIMO-M), George Booley of the Liberian Peace Council (LPC) and Oscar Jaryee Quiah of the Liberian National Council.

The leaders of the warring factions also agreed to turn their pre-Abuja positions over to ECOMOG (the Nigerian led West African peacekeeping force in Liberia) to enable the free movement of people and goods.

All checkpoints are to be dismantled from August when the disarming of faction fighters is to begin.

The effort must be completed by September 30, the statement said.

In addition, the Liberian council of state called for the resumption of the deployment of ECOMOG troops to enhance the disarmament process.

It also called on Liberians, in the spirit of national reconciliation and solidarity to fully support the disarmament process which shall proceed free and fair democratic elections aimed at a lasting peace in Liberia.

Indonesian court refuses to allow PDI men to return to their party HQs

JAKARTA, Aug 1: A court Thursday refused to rule on allowing opposition members to return to their party headquarters, sealed off by police since the raid last weekend that sparked two days of violent protests, reports AP.

The opposition was stonewalled in a 30-minute hearing to legally challenge official efforts to dismiss Megawati Sukarnoputri as party leader.

A trial was to have begun Thursday, but was postponed to August 22 because the head of the three-judge panel was at home with a toothache.

Megawati, daughter of Indonesia's founding President Sukarno, is trying to overturn her ouster as leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party at a rebel party congress organised by the military in June.

"This is an urgent matter. As you know, our headquarters was attacked. We demand that it be returned," said her lawyer, Rio Tambunan. "Megawati is still the chairwoman of the PDI."

But Judge Zulkifli Lubis, one of the two judges present, said the without the missing colleague, they couldn't grant the request.

BRIEFLY

Chandrika to visit South Korea:

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga will make a four-day state visit to South Korea this month at the invitation of President Kim Young Sam, a presidential spokesman said, AFP reports from Seoul.

The August 11-14 trip will be the first by a Sri Lankan head of state in 12 years, and is "expected to provide an opportunity to substantially develop bilateral relations and serve as a basis for further South Korean economic advancement into southwest Asia," the spokesman said. Kumaratunga and Kim are expected to discuss global and regional security concerns, the North Korean situation as well as bilateral issues, he said.

2 Hizbollah men killed in Lebanon:

The Israeli army said yesterday its forces killed two Hizbollah guerrillas in Israel's South Lebanon occupation zone, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

An army spokesman said Israel and its Lebanese militia allies came under fire on Tuesday night in the eastern sector of the zone and returned the fire. The spokesman said at first that one Hizbollah guerrilla was killed. Later he said the body of a second guerrilla was found.

Lankan Liberal Party leader dead:

The leader of Sri Lanka's Liberal Party Chanaka Amarantunga died in a road accident yesterday at the southern town of Pajiyagala, 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of the capital Colombo, police said, AFP reports from Colombo.

Amarantunga who was in his late 40s formed the right-wing Liberal Party here in 1988 to fight local council elections. However, the party failed to secure a seat in parliament despite Amarantunga being regarded as an articulate speaker.

ROK to repatriate bodies of 2 DPRK men:

The bodies of two North Korean soldiers washed into the South by last week's floods will be repatriated to the North at an early date as a humanitarian gesture, the South's Defence Ministry said Thursday, AFP reports from Seoul.

The two bodies in full military uniform were found Monday and Wednesday when flood waters in two streams receded after torrential rain slashed areas of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). One wore the insignia of a lieutenant. The rains left some 87 dead or missing, many of them from front-line troops buried in mudslides on the southern side of the frontier.

43 killed in China coach plunge:

Forty-three people were killed and 12 others seriously injured when a coach plunged into a deep ravine. The coach was on its way to Xichang city from Muli in Sichuan province when it fell into a 300 metre (990-foot) deep ravine on July 17 the China-funded Ta Kung Pao said in a report, AFP says from Hong Kong.

It was not known why the accident was belatedly reported, nor what caused it.

Mongolia concludes accord with US:

Mongolian president Salmaagyn Ochirbat has said his country concluded a security cooperation treaty with the United States in June. The Nihon Keizai Shimbun reported Thursday, AFP says from Tokyo.

The president said in an interview with the newspaper that the deal as part of Mongolia's policy to have closer relations with Washington in various areas, including economic, political and cultural exchange matters.

Anti-govt pamphleteer held in US:

An 18-year-old self-styled anarchist who allegedly wrote and distributed a homemade, anti-government pamphlet has been charged with advocating the overthrow of the US government, AP reports from Jonesboro.

Jason Paul Moreland remained in jail Wednesday in lieu of dollars 50,000 bond. Moreland turned himself in Sunday. Authorities obtained a warrant for his arrest Saturday after the pipe bombing at Centennial Olympic Park, although police say they don't think he played any role in the crime, which killed one person and injured 111.

Earthquake rocks China:

An earthquake measuring 5.7 on the Richter Scale followed by a large aftershock jolted a mountainous region of central Tibet on Wednesday, officials said, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The earthquake rocked remote and populated Xaitongmoin county in Xigaze prefecture at 4.00 pm (0800 GMT) and lasted for 45.6 seconds, an official of the seismological Bureau in Xigaze said.

PLA marks 69th birth anniversary:

People's Liberation Army (PLA) marked its 69th birth anniversary in Beijing yesterday with a call for increased combat capabilities, especially in high tech wars. AFP reports from Beijing.

Defence Minister Chi Haotian told the army's top ranks that China would build a powerful army ready to defend the motherland at all costs, according to reports from the official media. "We will build up a powerful army by relying on the advancement on science and technology improving weaponry and equipment and strengthening research in military science," he said according to the China Daily.

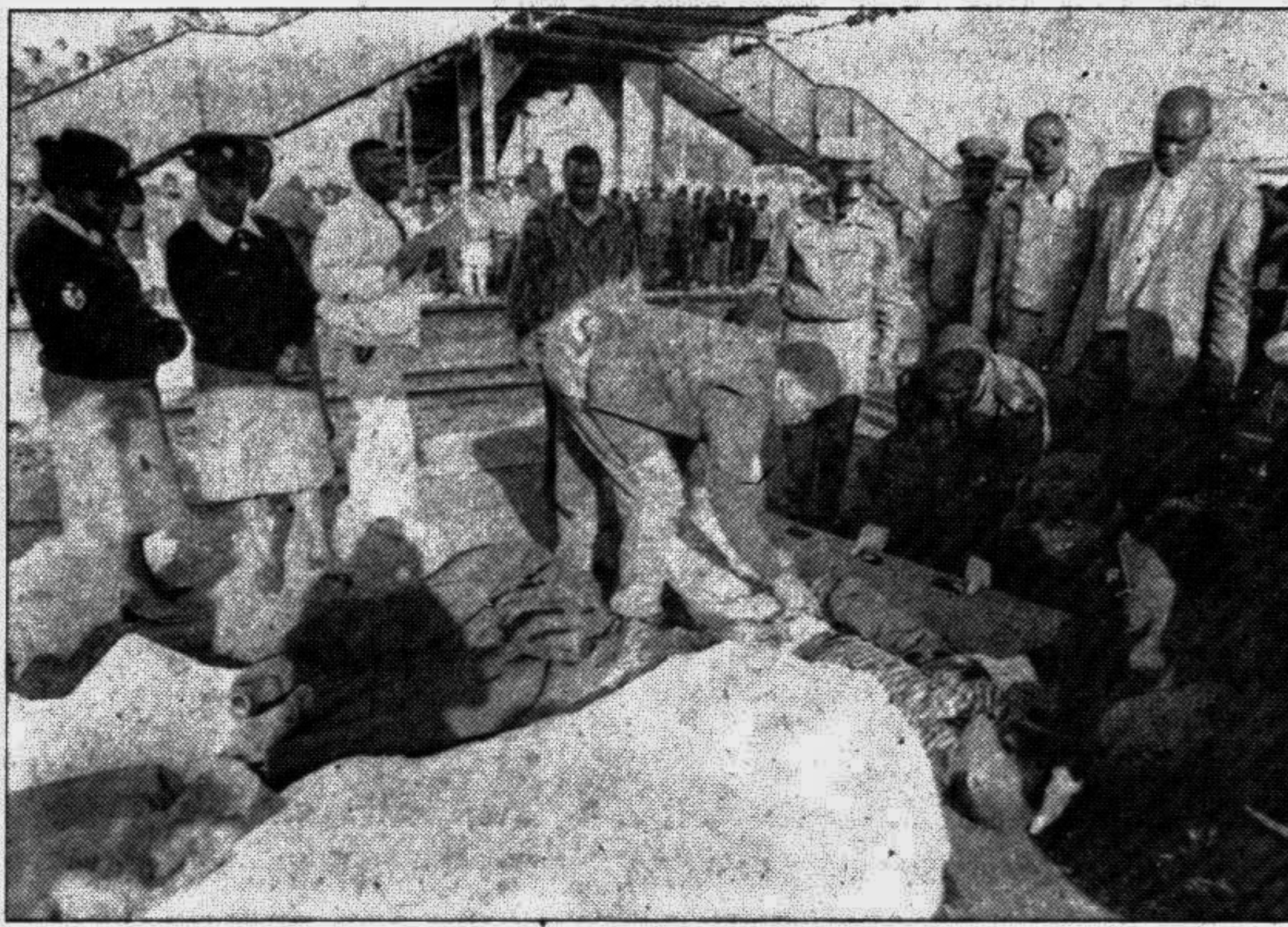
US to maintain its troops in Kuwait

KUWAIT, Aug 1: US Defence Secretary William Perry said Wednesday that Iraq and Iran continued to "threaten" the Gulf and that the United States would maintain its troops in Kuwait, the official Kuwaiti news agency reported, says AP.

Perry also indicated that US troops in Kuwait would not be relocated to protect them from terrorist attack, as will be done in Saudi Arabia, KUNA reported.

The defence secretary made the comments during a brief visit to the Emirate before heading for London, KUNA reported.

The United States, which led a multinational coalition that liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991, has maintained equipment and weapons in the Gulf Emirate to equip a 4,000-member brigade.



South African police and investigators inspect the body of one of the 15 people killed during a stampede early Wednesday, at a railway station in Thembisa east of Johannesburg Wednesday. Ticket queue fracas erupted when security guards used electrified prods to repel commuters as they surged into the station.

Netanyahu, Syrian envoy talk troops pullout from Lebanon

JERUSALEM, July 1: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a secret meeting with a Syrian representative to discuss a possible Israeli troop pullout from Lebanon, a newspaper reported Thursday, reports AP.

A troop withdrawal would be a first step toward peace with Syria, the main powerbroker in Lebanon.

The Haaretz newspaper said the meeting was held at Syria's request and took place in Jerusalem last month, shortly before Netanyahu visited the United States.

It said only Netanyahu and two of his advisers know the

meeting took place. Speaking to The Associated Press on Thursday, Netanyahu's media adviser, David Bar Ilan, denied the report.

Haaretz said Netanyahu suggested an interim agreement in which Israel would withdraw troops from a security zone it occupies in southern Lebanon in exchange for security arrangements along the Israel-Lebanon border.

Negotiations between Israel and Syria have been on hold since spring.

Netanyahu, who was elected in May, has thrown the future of the talks into question by ruling out the return of the

Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Mideast War. Syria wants the heights back in exchange for any peace deal.

Reuter adds, an Israeli newspaper reported today that a Syrian envoy secretly visited Israel and discussed with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a proposal for getting Israeli troops out of Lebanon.

Israel radio said the prime minister's office denied the report of the daily newspaper Haaretz. But in the past secret talks — denied at first — have led to breakthroughs in Middle East peace efforts.



Malaysian Premier Mahathir Mohamad (R) is assisted by Roy Ng (L), Sony's senior technical executive, as he tries Sony's Trinitron 5000 video conference system after Mahathir launched the four-day Multimedia Asia 96 conference and exhibition in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday. The four point video conference system cost 85,000 Malaysian ringgit.

— AFP/UNB photo

Junta opposes new bid to secure Abiola's release

ABUJA, Aug 1: Nigeria's military junta Wednesday opposed a new bid by the lawyer of detained millionaire politician Chief Moshood Abiola to secure his release, judicial officials said here, reports AP.

At the Federal High Court here government lawyer, Tochukwu Onwugbutor challenged a motion filed by chief Rotimi Williams urging court to acquit and discharge Abiola of all treason charges against him.

Abiola has been in prison since June 1994 following his self declaration as president on the basis of June 1993 presidential elections which he claimed — with the agreement of many neutral observers to have won.

— AFP/UNB photo

Congress should take decision on Rao's leadership, says Jyoti Basu

CALCUTTA, Aug 1: The West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, today said that it was for the Congress to decide whether P V Narasimha Rao should continue as its leader after the Delhi High Court upholding the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's order of summons to him, reports PTI.

Asked for his comment if Rao should remain Congress president even after the court summons to him as a co-accused in the Lakshubhai Pathak cheating case, the chief minister told newsmen at the Writers Building T understand from press reports that Rao pleaded not guilty.

Basu said that "if a congress party worth the name exists, it has to take a decision on Rao."

To another query if Rao should remain Chancellor of the Vishva-Bharati, he quipped "this too is Congress affair and the party has to take a decision in this regard."

Off the Record

Oldest ever tyrannosaur found

PHU WIANG, Thailand: With visions of the gigantic T Rex from "Jurassic Park" wreaking terror in their minds, the four visitors beheld the skimpy remains of the world's oldest known tyrannosaur with a twinge of disappointment, reports AP.

"I thought there would be some more than this, and it would be bigger," commented Dr Nara Vacuorn, a radiology professor at a Bangkok hospital. "But Thailand can still be very proud of it."

Staring back from the dry stream bed, oblivious to Hollywood blockbusters or national pride, lay the tail bones of an ancestor of Tyrannosaurus Rex experts estimate are 20 million years older than any previously known specimen.

Recent publication of the discovery in the scientific journal Nature revealed to the world — and most Thais — that this Southeast Asian country has proven a treasure trove of dinosaur fossils since excavations began just 15 years ago.

Buddhist monks find bones after seeing dinosaurs in meditations. Villagers plunder fossils in the belief they have magical powers. Even the semi-revered royal family has a "dinosaur named after it."

But few knew much about Thailand's dinosaurs until the tyrannosaur discovery was disclosed.

"Everybody knows tyrannosaurus from 'Jurassic Park,'" said Varavudh Suteethorn, chief paleontologist in the country's dinosaur digs. "And since this is the oldest known ancestor, everybody is curious."

A geologist uncovered the tyrannosaur fossils in 1993 at the Phu Wiang National Park, an oasis of rocky hills and trees some 400 kilometres (250 miles) northeast of the capital, Bangkok.

Corruption, poverty, repression — root causes of rioting in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Aug 1: Along busy Salemba Raya Avenue, rioters choose their targets with care, reports AP.

A Honda dealership was gutted by fire. Next door, the French Cultural Centre was untouched. A seven-story bank building was reduced to a charred skeleton while adjacent small shops emerged unscathed.

Banks, office buildings and buses — everything stoned or firebombed Saturday was a symbol of a ruling class that many Indonesians regard as increasingly selfish and oppressive.

The chairman of Indonesia's biggest independent labour union has been detained at his home for questioning since Tuesday night. The union said Wednesday that he had been accused of masterminding last weekend's rioting.

Leftist subversives may be blamed for the violence, but plenty of ordinary Indonesians who endure corruption, re-

pression and a vast gulf between rich and poor are seething with frustration under President Suharto.

The former general who seized power in 1966 is credited with having brought stability and modest prosperity to a starving country on the brink of civil war. Streets where Indonesians once lined up for rationed food are filled with motorbikes and Japanese cars.

Most Indonesians still make less than 2 dollars a day, however, living in zinc-roofed shanties without running water while businessmen in Suharto's inner circle have become some of the world's richest billionaires.

"We have been colonised for so long by our own people, and perhaps the time has come for us to be aware of it," said Hussein, a father of four who joined in the protests. Like many Indonesians, he uses only one name.

At least three people were killed in the riots, more than

90 injured and 22 buildings burned in the worst day of anti-government violence in decades. Police beat protesters with clubs and rifle butts and detained more than 200 people.

The protest erupted after authorities trying to remove Megawati Sukarnoputri as head of the Indonesian Democratic Party raided a sit-in by her supporters at its headquarters.

The party, known as the PDI, is one of three allowed under Suharto. It is tiny, tightly regulated and powerless.

But in a country where most political activity is banned, it gave a platform to Megawati, a daughter of the late President Sukarno who has emerged as an unlikely champion for the poor, who want better lives, and the middle-class, who seek democracy.

The problems are like straws that piled up, said political scientist Arief Budiman.

"The military intervention in

the PDI was the match that set it on fire."

In many ways, Indonesia is experiencing a common conflict in Asia, where rising incomes have fuelled democratic aspirations in Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and elsewhere.

While other Asian nations are opening up their politics, Suharto has stuck to the autocratic system he imposed after ousting Megawati's father in 1966 following food riots and a failed leftist coup.

"Now is one of those opportunities for the people to strive for more democracy, for their sovereignty," said Bastama, a student from Bogor, the city where Sukarno lived under house arrest until his death in 1970.

"I joined the protest because I am aware that Megawati has begun what we have to strive for."

Arief compares Indonesia's discontent to the upheaval in the Philippines before dictator

Ferdinand Marcos was over-

thrown.

"Many people believe that to have democracy, Suharto has to go, either naturally or by force," Arief said.

Suharto, who grew up in rural poverty, took power with a mission to improve the lot of farmers and workers. He spent heavily on farm research, imported high-yield rice strains and provided subsidised fertiliser. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation gave him a medal in 1985 when Indonesia finally achieved self-sufficiency in its staple rice crop.

Suharto puts himself up for re-election every five years by an assembly filled with members either picked or approved by his ruling Golkar Party.

He runs unopposed each time, although in 1993 the army nominated a general who withdrew only under intense government pressure.

"Suharto is still widely regarded as the only leader ca-

pable of holding together this fractious country of 13,000 islands and 300 ethnic groups.

In recent years, however, he has squandered his public goodwill by tolerating rampant corruption.

Megawati, a soft-spoken former housewife, stepped into this volatile mix 10 years ago. Regarded at first as a curiosity, she has attracted thousands of supporters, many of them admirers of her late father.

At 49, she is no revolutionary. She follows the rules of Indonesia's restricted political arena, winning a seat in parliament in 1987 and, in her low-key way, calling attention to human and labour rights.

Instead of launching street protests when the military organised a rebel party congress to remove her as party chief, Megawati filed a lawsuit. After the crackdown Saturday, she said she would file another one.

US firm to veto Ghali's bid for second term

WASHINGTON, Aug 1: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said on Wednesday the US decision to veto a second term for UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali if necessary to block him would not change, reports Reuter.

"That's an irrevocable position," Christopher told the House of Representatives International Relations Committee. "We are firm in it. We do not intend to change it. We think the UN needs new leadership."

Christopher said President Bill Clinton decided to veto Boutros-Ghali's second term if necessary because he and his advisors decided that only a new UN leader could gain US support, including congressional support, for the United Nations and truly reform the international organisation.