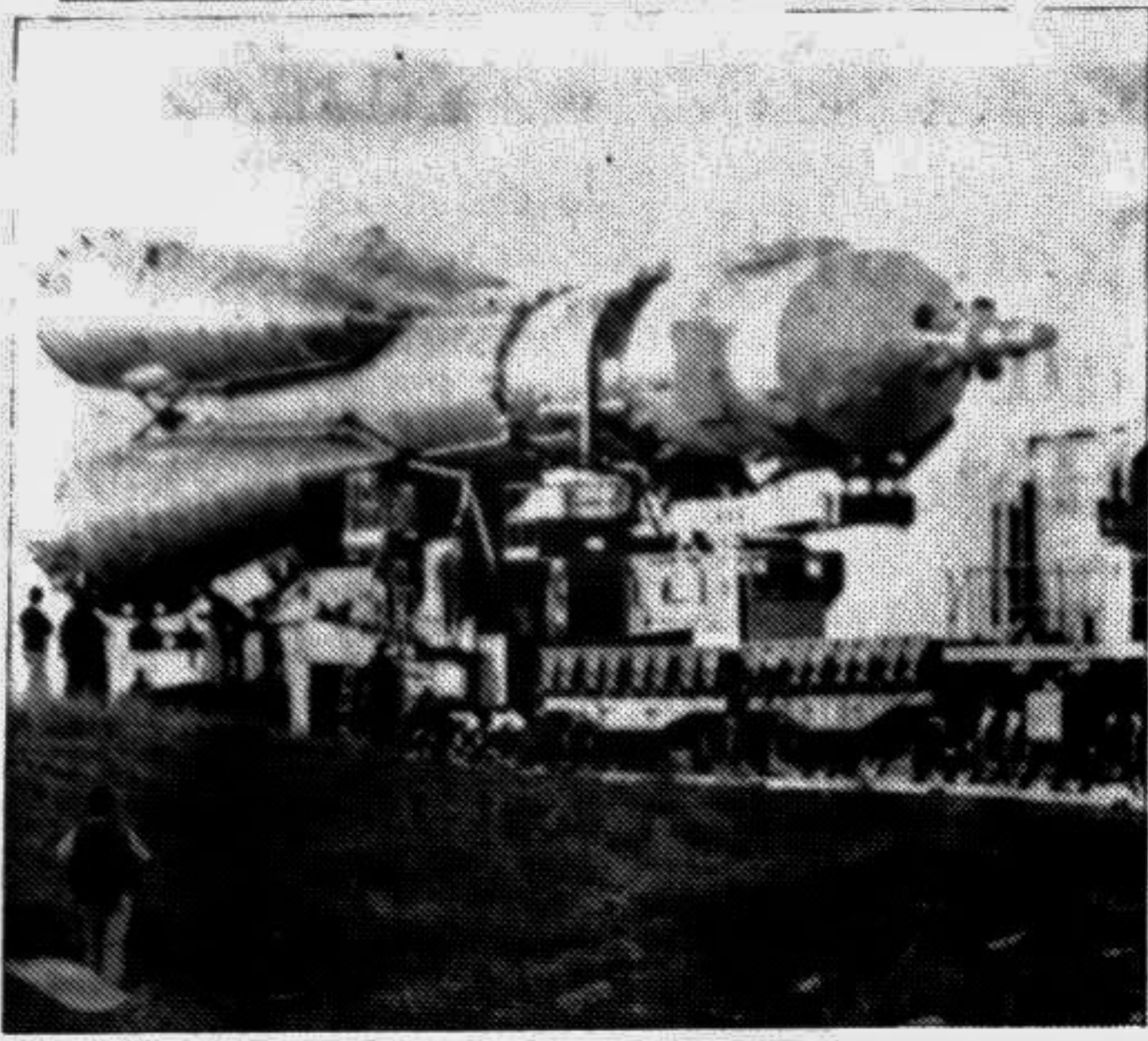


BRIEFLY



The rocket "Soyuz TM" is transported to its take off position in preparation for the launch of the Franco-Russian space flight "Cassiopean mission" in Baikonour, on Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

500 Indian children sick after eating at Independence Day celebration

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: As many as 500 children were rushed to hospital in western India when they became sick after eating sweets distributed at two gatherings to celebrate India's Independence Day, news agencies and dailies said Friday, reports AP. The children complained of severe stomach ache and many vomited on Thursday afternoon after eating local sweets at two schools — one in Bhandari where food poisoning has killed 49 people since they ate at a local restaurant last week.

The second group of children became ill after eating sweets distributed by their school in Kharegaon. The Pioneer daily reported. Most of the children were between the age of six and 12.

Both towns are near the city of Bombay, India's main financial centre and its most ritzy metropolis.

All the hospitalised children were out of danger, said United News of India news agency quoting Ujwal Uke, a local government administrator.

Many of the children were discharged late Thursday after doctors gave them a stomach wash and treated them with antibiotics. The Times of India daily said.

The cause of the latest poisoning was not immediately known. The Times of India, quoting unnamed doctors said the sweets, made of milk and sugar, were stale.

Doctors suspect that last week's poisoning, in which nearly 200 people were hospitalised, could have been caused by bacteria that grows in badly preserved food or by a poisonous weed, seeds of which were reportedly found in the food samples.

The Datura weed is a source of medicinal alkaloids and is also used in folk rites for its poisonous, narcotic or hallucinogenic properties. It has known to be used by villagers to commit suicide.

Americans in Pakistan urged to be cautious

WASHINGTON, Aug 16: The US State Department said Thursday that people with a history of violence and anti-Americanism in Pakistan may be planning attacks against US interests by the end of August, reports AP.

In a public announcement, the State Department urged Americans to be wary about their personal security. It recommended that they vary schedules and routes and be alert to any surveillance and "unusual or inquisitive phone calls."

Americans also were urged to be suspicious of unexpected visitors or packages and any incidents perceived to be out of the ordinary.

33 killed as house collapses in Peshawar

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Aug 16: A total of 33 people were killed and seven others injured Thursday when a house collapsed near this city in northern Pakistan, local officials said, reports AP.

Some 50 people were attending a wedding in the three storey building when it collapsed, the officials said, adding 10 young girls and eight women were among the dead.

8 feared dead in Argentina chopper crash

ARGENTINA, Aug 16: Eight people were feared dead after a helicopter crashed and caught fire in Argentina's northern province of Tucuman, state news agency Telam said early yesterday morning, reports Reuter.

The helicopter fell in a remote area, which made rescue efforts difficult, the news agency reported. A man waiting to get aboard the helicopter told the police it began burning immediately after the crash.

US urges India, Iran Don't veto sending N-test ban treaty to UNGA

GENEVA, Aug 16: The chief American negotiator appealed to India and Iran on Thursday not to veto sending a nuclear test ban treaty to the General Assembly for approval, reports Reuter.

US Ambassador Stephen Ledogar said it was important for the survival of the conference on disarmament that states unable to back the pact still also the forum to send it to New York.

But the global accord to ban all nuclear explosions remains endangered mainly due to potentially fatal opposition from India a nuclear "threshold" state, according to some delegates.

Western officials believe India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, and arch-rival Pakistan could swiftly assemble

nuclear weapons, although both countries deny they have already done so.

Ledogar, asked how the 61-member Geneva body could overcome opposition at a plenary session scheduled for Tuesday, replied "by finding a formula whereby the parties concerned would be satisfied to veto substance but not to veto process and thereby harming the conference on disarmament unnecessarily."

"There is a lot at stake," he added.

The US envoy said: "I would argue that it is not necessary to Indian or Iranian purposes to destroy the conference as a credible institution in order to make their points."

Indian Ambassador Arundhati Ghose told the negotiating committee on Wednesday that

her country could not accept the draft text in its current form. It would not allow the text by chairman Jaap Ramaker to be forwarded to the full conference.

New Delhi says it cannot accept a draft text saying the pact will become law only when ratified by 44 states including India, a condition it views as undermining its sovereignty.

India also says it will not sign the current draft as it fails to commit the five declared nuclear powers Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States to a firm timetable for eliminating their nuclear weapons.

Iran's envoy Sirous Nasserli in a speech to the conference on Thursday called for further negotiations on the text.



US Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole (L), and his wife Elizabeth wave from the podium of the San Diego Convention Center on Thursday during the conclusion of the Republican National Convention. The convention officially nominated Bob Dole as the 1996 Republican presidential candidate. — AFP/UNB photo

Israel announces plans for second meeting with Arafat

JERUSALEM, Aug 16: Israel announced on Thursday plans for a second high-level meeting with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat but dismissed as "propaganda" his appeal for US help in Middle East peace making, reports Reuter.

Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who on Thursday night presented to senior cabinet ministers a plan for Israeli army redeployment in the West Bank city of Hebron, will meet Arafat soon, his spokesman said.

Israel's Channel One Television said Mordechai has refused to meet Arafat until receiving Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's backing for his Hebron redeployment

ideas.

Mordechai's plan recommends undefined security adjustments to an existing Hebron pullback agreement reached between the dovish Israeli government Netanyahu ousted in May elections and the Palestinians, Israel's Channel Two television said.

Netanyahu's office confirmed Mordechai presented his plan in an evening meeting in Jerusalem. It said the plan would continue to be discussed next week and refused to elaborate.

reached with Israel's previous government.

"Any changes in the agreement are dangerous because it can lead to other changes which will bring about the collapse of the accords," Abbas told Israel Television's Arabic Service.

Netanyahu said earlier on Thursday Israel wanted to keep its agreements but Mordechai had to find a way to manage the complicated security needs of the only Palestinian city with Jewish settlers living in it.



Chechens walk through the battle-ravaged centre of Grozny on Thursday. Meanwhile Russian National Security Advisor Alexander Lebed arrived in Grozny for ceasefire talks with rebel leader Zemlikhan Yanderbiyev. — AFP/UNB photo

Taliban rocket kills 3 in Kabul

A rocket fired by the rebel Taliban Islamic militia hit a market in the Afghan capital Kabul on Thursday, killing three people and injuring 12, the official Kabul Radio reported, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

The broadcast, monitored in Islamabad, said the rocket hit the Karte Seh area, in southwestern Kabul, which had no military significance. The Taliban has frequently fired rockets and artillery on Kabul since it laid siege to the city in October in its drive to topple President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government.

Earthquake shakes eastern Japan

An earthquake registering 4.7 on the Richter Scale shook eastern Japan early yesterday but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, the meteorological agency and police said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicenter of the quake which occurred at 1:03 am (1603 gm) Thursday was located about 50 kilometres (30 miles) underground in the southern part of Ibaraki prefecture, north of Tokyo, the agency said.

13 Indonesians kidnapped

Thirteen Indonesians have been kidnapped in central Irian Jaya by separatist fighters, according to separate reports received in Jakarta Thursday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The 12 men and one woman, who were kidnapped Wednesday, were employees of a logging company. No further confirmation was available and local authorities contacted by phone refused to comment.

35 electrocuted in Peru

At least 35 people were electrocuted when a high-tension cable fell on a crowd attending a civic festival in the southern city of Arequipa, local authorities said yesterday, AFP reports from Lima, Peru.

The 10,000-volt cable was brought down by fireworks set off around midnight Wednesday to mark the city's 456th anniversary.

Thirty-six others were taken to a local hospital, according to mayor Roger Caceres.

14 Peruvians poisoned to death

Fourteen people have died in northern Peru from drinking homemade liquor apparently produced from methyl alcohol, Health Ministry officials said Thursday, AP reports from Lima, Peru.

The deaths occurred in three different towns over the weekend, according to the Health Ministry. Five people who drank the brew survived and were being treated in a hospital in Sullana, 530 miles (880 kms) northwest of Lima.

13 die in tribal feud in Pakistan

A tribal feud spun out of control on Thursday leaving 13 people dead, including 11 members of the same family, the state run news agency reported, AP reports from Islamabad.

The shooting took place in the rugged Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, largely controlled by tribesmen. A property dispute supposedly sparked the feud in the village of Dosarra, about 200 kilometers (120 miles) northwest of the capital of Islamabad.

Blast kills cop in Assam

A police officer was killed in a bomb blast in the far-eastern state of Assam on Thursday as when he tried to remove a black flag hoisted by ethnic militants on India's independence day, police said, AFP reports from Guwahati, India.

Renewed fighting in Libya leaves scores dead

CAIRO, Aug 16: Renewed fighting between two Islamic militant organisations and Libyan security forces has left scores dead, the two opposition groups said in a statement in an Arabic daily today, reports AP.

The armed Jamaa Islamiyya and the Movement of Islamic Martyrs said in a statement in London-based Al-Hayat that the situation in the east of Libya has deteriorated severely over the past weeks.

"Several battles have taken place between militants and the security forces causing dozens of deaths on both sides," according to the paper.

The Movement of Islamic Martyrs said the Libyan security services had foiled an assassination attempt planned by its militants in Benghazi against Libyan Defence Minister Colonel Abu Bakr Younis Jaber, it added.

On Tuesday travellers arriving in Egypt from Libya said Libyan security forces backed by warplanes had clashed with Islamic fundamentalists in eastern Libya, and that such skirmishes had been taking place for more than a year.

The security forces are backed by Mig-23 and Sukhoi planes which have been bombing armed Islamist hide-outs in the mountainous area between Derna and Jabal Lakhdar for the past week, one Libyan traveller said.

The armed Jamaa Islamiyya said in a statement signed by its leader, Abu Abdallah Sadek, that "five of its members, including the head of the Khaled Al-Zentani Cell of Tripoli and 16 security service troops had been killed in a seven-hour battle at Ain Marah near Derna in eastern Libya when one its cells ambushed a security service battalion," the newspaper said.

On Tuesday travellers arriving in Egypt from Libya said

Russians, Chechens fighting each other for no clear reason: Lebed

GROZNY, Russia, Aug 16: Given broad powers to end the disastrous war in Chechnya, Russian security chief Alexander Lebed wasted no time before heading to the secessionist republic, reports AP.

A day after President Boris Yeltsin effectively put Lebed in charge of the war, the former paratrooper general met with leaders of the secessionist rebels in Chechnya.

Nobody needs the war, Lebed told reporters at the Russian military base in Khankala near the Chechen capital of Grozny. The best soldiers of Russia — Russians and Chechens — are crushing each other... but they are fighting each other for no clear reason.

Lebed, who became Russia's security chief this summer, said the war was being prolonged because it was profitable to some people. He promised to name names and punish the culprits.

After meeting with Russian commanders at Khankala, Lebed climbed into a helicopter and flew to the village of Stariye Atagi, 15 miles (25 kms) southeast of Grozny, where he held talks with separatist leader Zemlikhan Yanderbiyev and the rebel's military commander, Aslan Maskhadov.

The interfax news agency, quoting the Russian military command, said Lebed was expected to return to Khankala Thursday evening.

Details on the talks were not immediately available. Interfax said a press conference would be held on Friday.

It was Lebed's second peacemaking trip to Chechnya in five days.

Lebed's first trip produced talks between top commanders on both sides that partially quelled the bloody battle for Grozny.

Then on Wednesday, Yeltsin gave Lebed authority to oversee the military, security services and other federal agencies in Chechnya.

The rebels overran Grozny on August 6, setting off one of the fiercest battles since the war began 20 months ago. They now have free run of the city, where demoralised Russian soldiers hunkered down in heavily fortified posts and burned-out Russian tanks and army vehicles litter the streets.

The fighting in Grozny eased Wednesday after Russian and rebel commanders told their troops to hold fire. But the informal ceasefire fell far short of the ceasefire Lebed wanted, and sporadic clashes continue.

Much of the city was shattered and abandoned Thursday. Huge pillars of black smoke from burning oil refineries snaked into the sky.

COLOMBO, Aug 16: The United States today said American troops in Sri Lanka are training government forces and are not directly involved in the conflict with separatist Tamil Tiger rebels, reports AP.

"At no time have American service members been involved in combat operations in Sri Lanka," the United States Information Service (USIS) said in a statement issued here.

We emphasise that US armed forces have not and will not be involved in the current conflict.

Police foil Tamil rebel attack on ministers

COLOMBO, Aug 16: Two Tamil rebels, dressed as schoolboys and riding explosive hidden in their bicycles to a government rally, were shot and killed by police commandos Thursday, military officials said, reports AP.

Two government ministers were to attend the rally in eastern Sri Lanka. The rebels tried to speed pass a check point where the commandos were stopping people for a search, officials said. Earlier, officials said the rebels had opened fire with pistols.

Police later found explosives concealed in the hollow metal frames of the bicycles.

The rebels were intercepted nearly three hours before the scheduled arrival of Mohammed Ashroff, the shipping minister, and Mohammed Fowze, the health minister, at the meeting in Kalmunai town, 220 kilometers (135 miles) east of Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital.

Ashroff heads the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, a key ally of the governing People's Alliance, and also supervises relief operations in war-torn areas.

The guerillas have in the past used suicide bombers to attack politicians and military leaders. In July, a rebel suicide bomber killed 23 people in an attack on Housing Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva in northern Jaffna city. The minister, however, escaped with head injuries.

In another attack, the rebels, fighting for a Tamil homeland, lobbed grenades at the office of a South Korean company on Thursday in the eastern port city of Trincomalee, 230 kilometers (145 miles) northeast of Colombo. No one was, however, injured.

But the blast damaged the office of Korea Telecom International which building a telephone exchange in the port city.

UNSC prepares to toughen sanctions against Sudan

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 16: The Security Council is threatening to cut air links to Sudan to punish the Islam-inspired government for failing to turn over suspects in the 1995 assassination attempt against Egypt's president, reports AP.

Council President Antonius Eitel of Germany said the 15 members received a draft resolution from Egypt, supported by non-aligned countries, and would discuss it Friday.

The draft foresees sanctions on air traffic. Eitel said without elaboration. A copy of the draft, obtained by The Associated Press, would require all 185 UN members to deny landing rights to Sudan Airways planes.

Such a move would represent a strengthening of limited sanctions which went into effect May 10 after the Khartoum government refused demands to surrender three Egyptians sought in the assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia claims the conspirators used Sudan Airways to ship weapons into Addis Ababa and that the state-run airline held a plane so that one of the suspects could escape after the attempt to kill Mubarak failed.

The May sanctions required all 185 UN member states to "significantly reduce" the number of Sudanese diplomats abroad and "restrict or control" their movements.

It also urged countries to restrict entry of Sudanese officials into their territory and demanded that Sudan stop aiding terrorists.

Sudan claims the suspects are no longer in the country and has accused the United Nations of trying to undercut its government as it tries to end a protracted civil war in the south.

Council diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the ban on Sudan Airways would not take effect immediately to give the Sudanese time to comply with the demand to turn over the suspects.

Off the Record

It took six hours to remove him

NEW YORK: Dozens of firefighters, police and emergency medical workers struggled for more than six hours on Thursday to remove a man who weighed more than 900 pounds from his apartment after he had difficulty in breathing, officials said, reports Reuter.

Emergency workers had to knock out walls and shore them up to widen the staircase of apartment building to remove the man, emergency medical services spokesman Capt. William Olsen said.

Turtle's finger hunt

AMSTERDAM: A giant turtle bit off the tip of a woman's finger at Amsterdam Zoo Friday, after she put her arm over the wall surrounding its pond, the zoo official said, reports AP.

A spokesman for the zoo said it had not been possible to recover the piece of finger and the woman had to have the stump stitched up at a local hospital.

The turtle, which comes from South America, has lived at the zoo for more than 30 years. Its normal diet consists of fish with the occasional small mammal.

India plans to create new state Uttarakhnad

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: India, bowing to local demands, announced plans on Thursday to carve out a new state from the Himalayan region of northern Uttar Pradesh, reports Reuter.

Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, in a speech marking India's 49th anniversary of independence, said the government would hasten the process to create the state, to be named Uttarakhnad.

"Discussions on Uttarakhnad have been going on for a long time. We have taken an important decision to create the state. We will soon bring a bill," Deve Gowda, speaking in Hindi, said from the ramparts of Delhi's Red Fort.

Uttarakhnad would become the 27th state, with a population of more than four million people. Uttar Pradesh is home to over 140 million, of the country's estimated 930 million people.

Residents of eight Uttar Pradesh hill areas are seeking a separate state because, as they say, the state government in distant Lucknow has not provided adequate development opportunities.

Latest agitation for a new state began about five years ago, led by unemployed youths who believe their prospects will improve in a separate state.

But the overall demand dates back to several years after independence from Britain in 1947. Hill people traditionally see themselves as different in outlook from people on the plains.

Deve Gowda said a bill for the new state would be placed before the members of the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly soon after local elections likely in late September or October.

Egypt won't sign treaty banning chemical weapons

CAIRO, Aug 16: An Egyptian foreign ministry source said on Thursday that Egypt would not sign an international treaty banning chemical weapons unless Israel signed a similar accord prohibiting nuclear arms, reports Reuter.

"Egypt's position is clear... It will not sign the chemical weapons treaty unless Israel signs the nuclear non-proliferation treaty," the unnamed official said.

Egypt's position is a regional one and it has reservations about the presence of a state with a nuclear programme that is uncontrolled by the international safeguards," the source added.

Fifty-four states have so far ratified the organisation for the prohibition of chemical weapons (OPCW) treaty since 1993, still short of the 65 needed for the convention not take effect.

'US troops in Lanka not involved in conflict with Tiger rebels'

COLOMBO, Aug 16: The United States today said American troops in Sri Lanka are training government forces and are not directly involved in the conflict with separatist Tamil Tiger rebels, reports AP.

"At no time have American service members been involved in combat operations in Sri Lanka," the United States Information Service (USIS) said in a statement issued here.

We emphasise that US armed forces have not and will not be involved in the current conflict.

The US does provide training to Sri Lankan army and air force personnel in non-combat skills, the statement said, in the first US response to veiled threats by the rebels over Washington military aid to Colombo.

All activities related to the training events took place well away from areas of active military operation," the USIS statement said.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), currently battling government forces in the island's north-east, recently warned that Washington's diplomatic and military support of Colombo would "expand" the war.

The US green berets are training the government's Sinhala Army in Colombo," the Tigers official Liberation Tiger publication said in its July 15-31 issue.

"At the same time, American arms are being sold to the Sri Lankan government since it has withdrawn its earlier stand of not selling lethal weapons to Sri Lanka."

The publication also said the US had issued statements critical of the Tigers.

"It is the wish of our people that America should do all possible to create a peaceful atmosphere in the Sri Lankan island by adopting a neutral stand and diplomatic efforts," it said.

Anything other than this will only further complicate the ethnic issue and expand the war, resulting in human misery.

Last month, the US branded the Tigers as terrorists and suggested the Sri Lankan government should not negotiate peace with the rebels.

US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns was quoted as saying the Clinton administration considered the LTTE to be ruthless and vicious terrorists.

"It is up to the Sri Lankan government to make whatever decisions it wishes on this matter," Burns said.

"As a general rule, the United States itself certainly will not have productive relations with any terrorist group."

17 rebel Kurds, 6 govt troops killed in Turkey

ANKARA, Aug 16: Seventeen rebel Kurds and six government troops were killed in four recent clashes in south-eastern Turkey, the scene of a separatist uprising, officials said Friday, reports AP.

Two armed rebels from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) were killed when security forces raided their home in a suburb of the regional centre Diyarbakir on Thursday, the southeast's regional governorship said in a statement.

Security forces killed 15 rebel Kurds and lost six members in three other clashes in mountainous areas in Mardin, Hakkari and Tunceli provinces, it said. The statement did not specify the dates of the clashes.

Regional governorship announced earlier on Thursday that 22 PKK rebels had been killed in five other clashes with governments troops in the region.