

CBI interrogates Rao about bribery scam

NEW DELHI, Sept 5: Federal police for the first time interrogated former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao about allegations that he bribed lawmakers to win support for his government, a newspaper reported Thursday.

Rao denied the allegations that he ordered his Congress Party to pay off four opposition lawmakers to support his minority government in a confidence vote three years ago. The Hindustan Times newspaper reported quoting unnamed federal police officials.

If proved true, the case would further damage the reputation of the former government, which was mired in scandals through much of its five-year term, but which had never

touched the prime minister himself. Independent confirmation of the newspaper report was not immediately possible. Police officials and Rao were not available for comment.

On Wednesday, officials of the Central Bureau of Investigation asked Rao 15 to 20 questions about his alleged involvement in the bribery scam, it said. The newspaper quoted unnamed CBI officials as saying the questioning was a formality and they had reached no conclusions.

The case stems from accusations in a public interest lawsuit by a social activist that Rao was involved in payments of 30 million rupees (\$57,000 dollars), but which had never

BJP to help eliminate Kashmiri militants

JAMMU, Sept 5: India's main opposition party said Wednesday it would give a free hand to Indian security troops to help them "eliminate" Kashmiri militants if elected to power in the state elections beginning Saturday, reports AFP.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India's People's Party, said in its poll manifesto it would also take "Stern Action" against arms smugglers, while offering rehabilitation to victims of the guerrilla warfare raging in the state.

"We will declare Kashmir Valley and other militancy-affected areas as disturbed and give a free hand to army and paramilitary forces to eliminate gun-wielding militants,"

BJP's state president Vaid Vishnu Dutt said. More than 15,000 people have been killed in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, since 1989.

"We will also take stern action against arms smugglers and rehabilitate victims of militancy in Kashmir," Dutt said.

Thousands of people have fled the Himalayan province to neighbouring Indian states since 1989.

Dutt said the BJP would also set up a separate regional council with "full political, economic and administrative powers," in line with the demands of various local political leaders.

Objectives for US mission in Iraq achieved: Clinton

WASHINGTON, Sept 5: President Clinton declared that airstrikes against Iraq have left Saddam Hussein strategically worse off, but Iraqi forces still challenged US patrols in the newly expanded "no-fly" zone over southern Iraq, reports AP.

Clinton, speaking with reporters in the Oval Office on Wednesday, declared a success for the twin US missile strikes against Iraqi air defence sites sparked by Iraqi attacks on a Kurdish faction in the north of the country.

"I'm satisfied this mission has achieved the objectives we set out for it," Clinton said in his first assessment of the US moves.

Saddam now "knows there is a price to be paid for stepping over the line," the president said. "He is strategically worse off."

Even so, Iraqi forces confronted US flyers twice as they began their patrols Wednesday over the expanded no-fly zone for Iraqi aircraft that Washington unilaterally declared the day before.

An Iraqi air defence radar site illuminated an Air Force F-16 with its signal, a sign of getting ready to fire a surface-to-air missile. After the warplane responded by unleashing an anti-radar missile, the site went silent, defence secretary William Perry told reporters.

Two Iraqi MiG-29s also apparently tried to "lock on" to US jets conducting a routine patrol, but turned away as they neared the 33rd parallel, the northern border of the expanded no-fly

zone, defence officials said. Clinton vowed no changes in that policy, saying "We will do whatever we have to do in the future to protect our pilots."

To reinforce the buffer zone between Iraq and its neighbours, Clinton announced Tuesday that the no-fly zone would be expanded about 60 miles (97 kilometres) farther north, to the 33rd parallel. That would take it to the suburbs of Baghdad, where a defiant Saddam ordered his armed forces to shoot down any foreign aircraft.

Clinton said US objectives are limited "but our interests are clear: To demonstrate once again that reckless acts have consequences, to reduce Saddam's ability to strike out again at his neighbours, to increase America's ability to prevent future acts of violence and aggression."

Reaction to the latest con-

frontation was mixed. Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole supported Clinton's handling of the crisis, saying Wednesday, "He's doing what he should do."

Asked if the president waited too long before taking action, he said, "We'll talk about that later. Not today."

Gen. Colin Powell said he doubted Saddam would put up any serious resistance.

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Reaction to the latest con-



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein meets with his military advisors Wednesday to discuss the latest action by the US after a second wave of cruise missile attacks. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Pet knows when owner coming home!

LONDON: A British researcher has proved what dog owners have long suspected — that their pets know when they're coming home from work, reports Reuter.

The research showed that 46 per cent of dogs started preparing to welcome their owners up to an hour before they got home, even if they worked irregular hours, Thursday's Times newspaper reported.

The animals usually become agitated and go to the window to watch for the owner's return. "Some people might call this weird, but for many pet owners it is perfectly normal," said researcher Rupert Sheldrake, former director of Cell Biology and Biochemistry at Cambridge University.

Some cats and other pets showed the same psychic bond with their owners, said Sheldrake, who collected 1,500 case studies from around the world and carried out a survey of more than 400 pet-owning households in Britain.

One mynah bird would begin shouting "Robbie's coming home" when its owner was returning from an overseas trip, the Times said.

Early elephants were about the size of a dog!

LONDON: A few fragments of tooth found in a Moroccan phosphate deposit show that elephants were among the first modern mammals, French scientists reported on Wednesday, says Reuter.

The early elephant lived 60 million years ago, was about the size of a dog and probably did not have a trunk, Emmanuel Gheerbrant and colleagues at the University of Paris said.

But, in a report in the science journal Nature, Gheerbrant said it was clearly an ancestor of the modern behemoth, with teeth almost identical to the next-oldest elephant fossil.

He said it was a significant finding that would change not only what scientists believed about elephant evolution, but what they knew about early mammals in general.

This implies that the origin of the modern orders of mammals was earlier than we believed," Gheerbrant said in a telephone interview.

Before, palaeontologists thought that elephants evolved in the early eocene — the modern epoch of time that started 55 million years ago and was marked by the rise of the mammals.

Elephants are very advanced in the evolutionary scheme of things and are related to ungulates, which include deer, cattle and pigs.

Benazir rejects demands for early polls under caretaker govt

ISLAMABAD, Sept 5: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto warned political opponents on Wednesday of her populist support when she again rejected opposition demands for early elections under a caretaker government, reports Reuter.

In a hard-hitting speech in parliament, Benazir called the demand for a caretaker government as a brainchild of "exploiters, fortune seekers and adventurers."

In an earlier speech on Wednesday to a public rally at Dargai in the North West Frontier province, she urged opposition parties to have talks with her on national issues rather than threatening agitation to oust her 34-month-old government.

"The poor people of the country are with me, the street power is with me, the silent majority is with me, they are not with you," Benazir said while addressing herself to opposition parties now campaigning against her.

The opposition parties accuse Benazir's government of corruption and misrule and want her to step down. Alternatively, they want

President Farooq Leghari, a member of Benazir's Pakistan People's Party, to sack the Prime Minister and appoint a neutral caretaker government to hold elections.

Benazir denies the corruption charges and says she will complete her five-year tenure until October 1998.

The corruption charges against the government are being levelled by "those people who themselves are most corrupt and want to resist the tightening noose of law," Benazir said in an interview with a local television channel shown on Wednesday.

In her speech to parliament's lower house, Benazir seemed particularly angry with an opposition deputy's suggestion for forming a consensus caretaker government excluding both Benazir and her arch-rival, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

"There is no question of a consensus government," she said about the proposal from Mehmod Khan Achakzai, leader of Pashtun Khawaja Milli Akami Party based in the southwestern province of Baluchistan.

Netanyahu confident about ME peace prospects

TEL AVIV, Israel, Sept 5: Taking peace after his landmark meeting with Yasser Arafat, Benjamin Netanyahu predicted they will fashion a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement, reports AP.

The goal is "maximal freedom for the Palestinians and maximal security for Israel," Netanyahu told reporters Wednesday in Tel Aviv, mapping out his vision for a future Palestinian entity that would be not quite the state the PLO seeks — but possibly more independent than some of his hard-line voters would want.

Netanyahu's meeting Wednesday with Arafat — the first between a right-wing Israeli prime minister and the Palestinian leader — helped ease Israeli-Palestinian tension growing since his May election victory over peace architect Shimon Peres.

But many in Netanyahu's Likud Party are livid over his handshake with a man they still consider a terrorist — and they promised the premier an unpleasant reception at a party convention Thursday.

"It's a grave mistake," veteran Likud Party lawmaker Uzi Landau said. Cabinet ministers

Benny Begin and Ariel Sharon vocally opposed the move. And nationalist Moledet Party leader Rehavam Zeevi said he felt like apologising to his party's supporters for advising them to vote for Netanyahu in May.

Outside Netanyahu's office Wednesday, right-wing demonstrators waved signs saying "Thou shalt not betray."

Jewish settler activist Benny Elon heckled Netanyahu during his joint news conference with

Arafat, shouting, "What are you doing, Mr. Prime Minister?"

Leaders of Jewish settlements said Thursday they felt deceived by Netanyahu, whom they had supported in the election.

Pinchas Wallerstein, chairman of the settlers Council, said Netanyahu has not lived up to promises to speedily expand the 144 settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. He said settlers would now take matters into their own hands and built privately.

Pictures of The Handshake were splashed across front pages of Israeli and Palestinian newspapers Thursday. The Yediot Achronot daily ran it with a Netanyahu quote saying, "One of the most difficult moments of my life."

In the photographs, Netanyahu looked grim as he reached across a table — reportedly there to prevent an embarrassing Arafat hug — to grasp Arafat's hand.

Even as the two leaders spoke, aides bickered about the height of the podiums for the news conference, with the Palestinians saying Netanyahu was taller and insisting it be changed.



A woman waves a US flag as others clap their hands Wednesday during a ceremony at the convention centre in Los Angeles, California where 9,000 people were sworn in as United States citizens. Nationwide, nearly one million people will become US citizens this year, doubling last year's record of 500,000. — AFP/UNB photo

Students attack US consulate in Lahore

LAHORE, Sept 5: The student wing of a hardline religious party attacked the United States consulate in the eastern Punjab capital on Wednesday to protest the US cruise missile assault on Iraq, reports AP.

About 100 students belonging to Jamaat-e-Islami party threw rocks at the walled compound of the US consulate in Lahore shortly after sunset, officials and witnesses said.

Two firecrackers also were thrown at the building and exploded, but no one was hurt. The students who arrived in two buses shouted anti-US and anti-government slogans.

A student leader Ali Ahsan urged Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government to distance itself from the US attack on Iraq that occurred Tuesday and Wednesday.

Clashes leave 23 killed in Burundi

BUJUMBURA, Sept 5: Twenty Hutu rebel fighters and three soldiers were killed in clashes overnight on hills overlooking the Burundi capital Bujumbura, the army said today, reports AP.

Army spokesman lieutenant colonel Isidore Ndirakobuca said another soldier had been injured in the clashes, but operations against the rebels would continue.

AP adds: The clashes on Tuesday and Wednesday were the heaviest fighting since a military government took over on July 25.

Baheer new Afghan ambassador to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Sept 5: Ghairat Baheer, the son-in-law of Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, has been appointed Afghanistan's ambassador to Pakistan, diplomatic sources said today, reports AP.

Baheer, 38, currently Hekmatyar's special envoy to Islamabad, is expected to take over the post next week after formal approval by the Pakistani government.

The Afghan embassy in Islamabad has been without a fully fledged ambassador for the last two years.

Educated in Australia and Saudi Arabia, Baheer has been in charge of the foreign relations section of Hekmatyar's Hezb-I-Islami faction. He is married and has five children.

UNSC wrangles over text to condemn Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 5: US attacks on Iraq have raised nationalist anger and complicated American diplomatic efforts to maintain a united front against Saddam Hussein, reports AP.

For two days, the UN Security Council has wrangled over the text of a resolution to condemn Iraq for its attack on Kurdish areas of the north and to demand an immediate withdrawal of Iraqi forces. None of the 15 council members has openly expressed support for Saddam. In fact, the council agreed unanimously Tuesday to maintain crushing economic sanctions imposed after Baghdad invaded Kuwait in 1990.

But the council has not agreed on how to respond to Iraqi military moves. A sticking point appears to be the American attacks, which many governments believe only complicated the situation.

Britain has circulated a draft resolution to condemn Iraq without mentioning the US attacks. But Russia, China

and France have all said they oppose the resolution in its current form.

The US tactics have spurred nationalism and diverted attention from what British and American diplomats consider the core issue: Getting the Iraqis out of the protected zone.

Russia, for example, has also urged an Iraqi withdrawal. But the Russians are chaffing over Washington's unilateral decision to attack.

"What causes serious concern is that Washington actually claims a role of a supreme arbitrator in an attempt... to substitute for the Security Council which has an exclusive right to sanction the use of force," the Russian UN Mission said in a statement Wednesday.

It said the air strikes set a dangerous precedent, contradict international law and are unacceptable.

Indonesian Ambassador Nugroho Wisnumurti said the major problem facing the council was "how to address the US military action against Iraq."

sharply with the strong support for the attacks among the American people. A poll by the ABC TV network showed nearly eight in 10 Americans approved of the attack and 73 per cent said they approved of the way President Bill Clinton is handling the situation.

Diplomats say the lack of council unanimity shows that unlike Saddam's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the latest crisis is more complicated.

Competing national interests are at stake. France, for example, has participated in enforcing the "no fly" zones over Iraq and has traditionally supported measures to protect the Kurds.

But France is also eager to see implementation of the UN plan to allow Iraq to sell limited amounts of oil to buy food and medicine for its people — and enable Baghdad to resume paying its debt to France and other countries.

Bob Dole, the Republican candidate in the US presidential election, opposes the plan.

Clinton said the plan it cannot proceed for now.

The British resolution notes that the situation in Iraq has led to a freeze on the oil-for-food deal.

France's UN Ambassador Alain Dejammet said his government would not support any resolution which even hinted at using oil-for-food might as leverage against Iraq.

"I'm afraid we could give an opportunity or a pretense to some" to block implementation, he said.

Iraqi claims the Kurdistan Democratic Party faction (KDP) invited it into the north to help fight the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which has ties to Iran.

Last month, the KDP said Iranian troops were supporting PUK forces with artillery attacks aimed at dislodging their forces from a strategic town near the border with Iran. Iraq denies any meddling in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The allegations drew little international attention and no council action.

Farrakhan slams hostile US policies against Iraq, Cuba, Iran, Libya

HAVANA, Sept 5: US militant black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan on Wednesday condemned Washington's hostile policies against Iraq, Cuba, Iran and Libya as heartless and inhuman and said he feared for the future of the United States, reports Reuter.

Speaking in Cuba where he held talks with Cuban President Fidel Castro, the Nation of Islam leader urged President Bill Clinton to "leave the Cuban people alone" and lift the longstanding US embargo against the communist-ruled island.

Farrakhan said he was in Cuba as part of a tour of states that were "under (US imposed) sanctions and embargoes," before Cuba, he had visited Iran, Iraq, Libya and Sudan.

All these states are listed by Washington as alleged sponsors of international terrorism. "We hope soon to visit North Korea," he told a news confer-

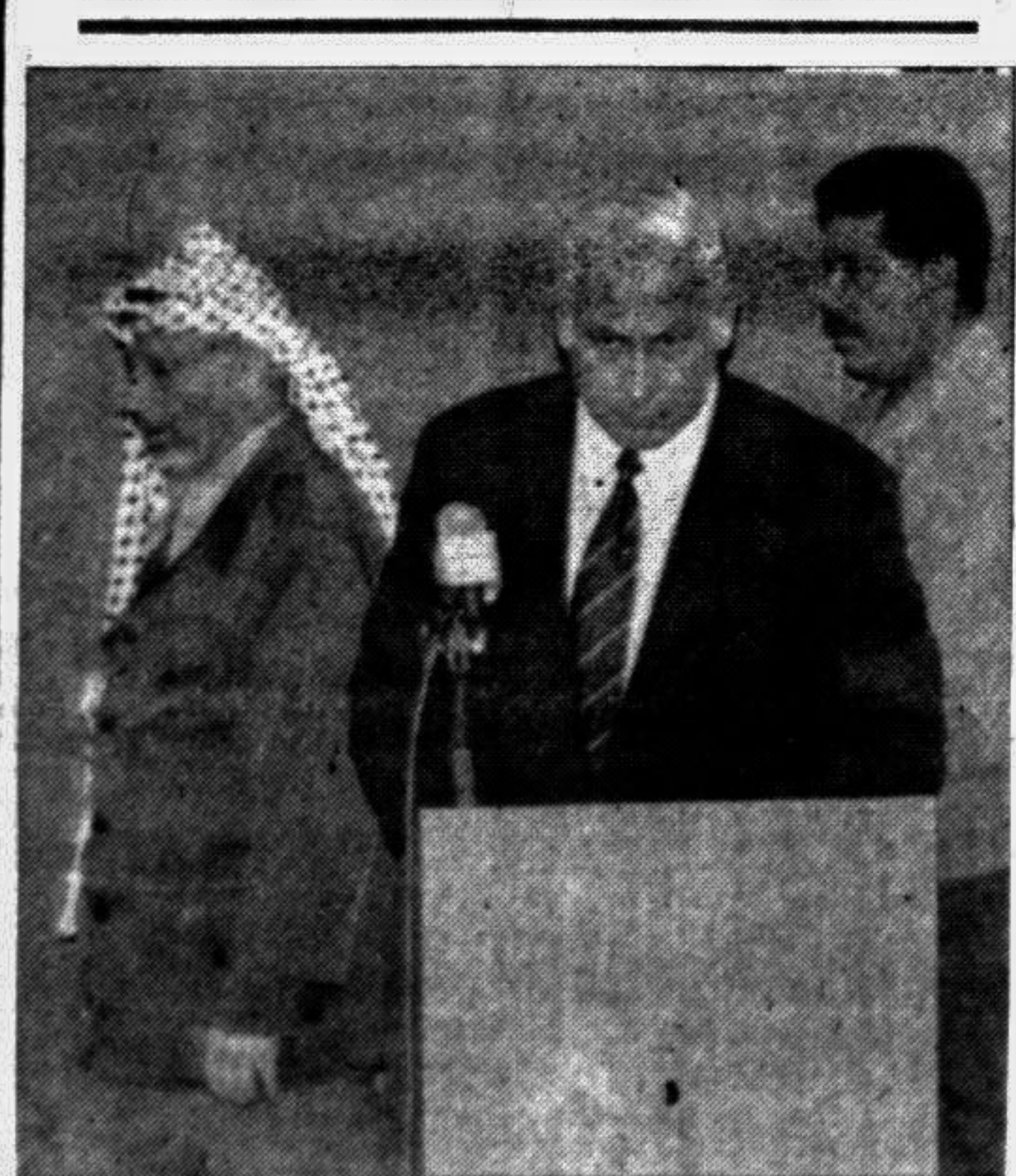
ence before leaving Havana. Condemning Washington's "unjust policies against these countries," he said, "It appears that the heart of the American leadership is not heart of compassion for human suffering."

In an apparent direct appeal to Clinton, he went on: "It appears you don't have the heart of a human being anymore."

"If our government continues on the path it is going, I fear for the future of America. I believe America... if it continues on this path, may go the way of ancient Rome, Egypt, Babylon and Sodom and Gomorrah," Farrakhan said, invoking cases of ancient civilisations that either declined or collapsed.

Referring to the US missile attacks against Iraq, he said it was sad to see that in an election year President Clinton was using "the enormous military power of the US to add more pain and suffering to the Iraqi people."

BRIEFLY



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (R) and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat (L) arrive for a joint press conference after their historical summit at Erez crossing point on Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Bombay bldg collapse toll now 18

Rescue struggled yesterday to clear rubble from a building that collapsed on Tuesday leaving 18 dead, according to the latest toll, AFP reports from Bombay.

Hospital sources also said another nine people were still being treated for injuries. Firefighters, hampered by narrow alleyways, were unable to get bulldozers or equipment to the old-four-storey building and have been searching with their bare hands or with shovels.

Murder sparks riot in Jakarta

The murder of a schoolboy sparked a riot by hundreds of students in Jakarta, the Jakarta Post reported yesterday. AFP says from Jakarta.

The dead boy's schoolmates took to the streets of central Jakarta Wednesday throwing stones at other students and pedestrians near the school, the Jakarta Post reported. Police detained 25 students. The private school student, Bachtiar Effendi, was stabbed in the stomach Tuesday evening by students from another private high school, according to the Central Jakarta Police Chief Colonel Abubakar Nataprawira.

Air France jet makes forced landing

An Air France jumbo jet en route to Paris from Johannesburg was forced to make an emergency landing at Marseille airport yesterday after it was struck by lightning, emergency workers said, Reuter reports from Marreille, France.

Several passengers were injured by falling baggage and other objects in the cabin when the Boeing 747 jet encountered strong turbulence and then descended rapidly to make the landing at Marseille's Marseilles Airport, they said. Some of the passengers were treated at nearby hospitals while others were treated at the airport, they said.

Quake hits southwest of Tokyo

An earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter Scale struck near a small island 600 km (370 miles) southwest of Tokyo early Thursday morning and caused minor tsunami tidal waves, Japan's meteorological agency said, Reuter report from Tokyo.

There were no reports of casualties or damage. The tremor, which struck around 3.15 am (1815 GMT Wednesday) with its epicentre near Torishima Island, was felt in parts of the Tokyo area, the agency said.

Road mishap kills 19 in Indonesia

Nineteen people died when a passenger bus and a truck collided on a major road in central Sumatra, the official Antara News Agency reported yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

The accident happened on Tuesday at Bungo Tebo, about 300 kilometres (186 miles) west of Jambi, according to Jambi Police Chief Colonel Solihin. The bus, which was travelling from Medan in north Sumatra was carrying 37 passengers. Seventeen passengers died, 12 were badly injured and eight were lightly injured in the crash on the major trans-Sumatran road. The truck driver and his assistant driver also died in the accident.

China executes 15 more

Authorities in China's central Henan province have executed 15 convicted thieves after a mass sentencing, the procuratorial daily said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

The 15 were shot soon after sentencing for crimes ranging from railway heights to car theft, the newspaper said. Eight of the condemned had been members of two gangs that stole goods worth a total of more than 1.573 million yuan (190,000 dollars) from trains between 1992 and 1994, it said.

Baywatch star wounded

Nineteen-year-old US actor Brandon Call, who formerly had a role in the television show "Baywatch," was shot while trying to elude two people who chased his car, police said Wednesday. AP reports from Los Angeles.