

US for strong stand to allow UN inspectors into Iraqi weapons site

UNITED NATIONS, June 19: The United States urged the Security Council on Wednesday to take a strong stand over Iraq's refusal to allow UN inspectors into suspected weapons sites, reports AP.

But some members appeared reluctant to go along with the US demand.

Last week, Iraqi Republican Guards prevented UN teams from entering two compounds to search for banned weapons. The inspectors must certify that Iraq has complied with UN orders to destroy those weapons before the council will lift crippling economic sanctions imposed after Baghdad invaded Kuwait in 1990.

US and British diplomats have described the Iraqi action as the most serious defiance of the United Nations since 1992, when inspectors were kept from the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture for 28 hours.

"This is a serious matter," chief inspector Rolf Ekkeus told reporters Wednesday. "It is a clear violation of Security Council resolutions" allowing inspectors to enter any site they choose.

Iraq claims that it has the right to restrict access to sensitive sites that affect national security and the safety of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. It has accused the United States of using the UN inspectors as a cover for gathering intelligence.

After a closed-door council meeting Wednesday, US Ambassador Bill Richardson said the United States wanted "an appropriately strong response" to the latest incidents.

Richardson did not spell out what action the United States deemed appropriate but accused Iraq of systematically refusing to cooperate UN inspectors.

Diplomatic sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said British and American diplomats were consulting with other countries to win support for a strong public statement condemning Iraq.

But the sources said some council members were reluctant to adopt a strong position, and it was questionable whether Richardson had the influence with other ambassadors to win them over.

A Chinese diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the council should support the UN inspectors but should also respect "reasonable security needs and protection of Iraqi sovereignty."

He said several delegations remain unconvinced that the incidents show Iraq is trying to hide something from the inspection team.

AFP adds: UN arms inspectors on Wednesday apologised for mistakenly entering an Iraqi Christian church while searching for concealed weapons of mass destruction.

The incident triggered an official statement by the Iraqi government complaining that the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors had "stormed their way" into two Chaldean monasteries and a church in the Baghdad area.

UNSCOM political adviser Gustavo Ziaurvinen told AFP that "it was a human mistake, so we have to apologise for the inconvenience to the nuns and the priests."

Ziaurvinen said that the team was led by a representative of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) who mistakenly entered the church.

11 more killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, Pakistan, June 19: Eleven people were killed in violence in Pakistan's volatile city of Karachi on Wednesday amid mounting tension between rival factions of an ethnic party, police and witnesses said, reports Reuter.

Most shopping and commercial centres were shut for the second day running in a strike enforced by the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) after nine people, including five MQM workers, were shot dead by unidentified gunmen on Monday.

Police said a 15-year-old boy Assad was killed and three other children injured when a homemade bomb blew up in Assad's hands in Karachi's eastern Landhi district on Wednesday.

A 20-year-old worker of the rival breakaway MQM-Haqiqi, Saleem, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Landhi, ambulance workers said.



Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan raises his hands as Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller looks on as they meet here Wednesday. Erbakan said Thursday he would step down as prime minister ending a turbulent 12 months in power during which he enraged the military and some western allies. He was due to hand over to his coalition ally Ciller, leader of the Conservative True Path Party. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Clinton meets Hassan: President Bill Clinton met with Jordan's crown prince Hassan on Wednesday for talks on keeping middle eastern peace efforts on track, Reuter reports from Washington.

"We are not going to give up, Hassan said after meeting Clinton at the White House." "There's no question of our not persevering in attempting to build peace." "Clearly we have to find ways and means of making this thing work, and that's what we're applying ourselves to," he said.

Journalist detained in Tonga: A newspaper journalist was detained by police overnight in the kingdom of Tonga and interrogated over a letter published in his newspaper, the editor of the Times of Tonga Kalafi Moala said yesterday, AFP reports from Wellington.

He said police took deputy editor Filokalafi Akauola into custody Wednesday and held him overnight. He was questioned all night, Moala said. He was released this morning but may later face charges.

Drug trader killed in Albania: Troops of the Greek contingent of the multinational force in Albania killed a drug trafficker who tried to do business with them, the independent television station Mega reported late Wednesday, AFP reports from Athens.

The Albanian in company with others had gone to the Greek camp at Elbasan in the centre of the country and tried to sell his wares. When the troops refused, the Albanians fired in the air and the Greeks did likewise, the report said. The Albanians then shot at the Greeks who replied, killing one of the group, the television said.

1 executed in US: A Mexican man was executed Wednesday by lethal injection for a 1985 stabbing murder, the Texas criminal justice department said, AFP reports from Austin.

Shortly before the execution, Governor George Bush turned down a request by Mexican Foreign Minister Jose Angel Gurría to delay the execution of Irineo Tristan Montoya, 29, while legal challenges to the sentences were sought. Montoya's supporters maintain that he signed a confession in English — which he does not speak after a police interrogation without the presence of a lawyer or consular official, he was convicted in 1986.

Rebels kill 2 SLA men in Lebanon: Two officials of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) were killed late Wednesday by the pro-Iranian Hezbollah, the militia said Thursday, AFP reports from Marjayun.

The killings happened in the Israeli-established buffer zone of southern Lebanon.

Diana meets Mother Teresa: Britain's Princess Diana met with Mother Teresa on Wednesday taking time to greet well-wishers outside a New York city convent, Reuter says from New York.

The Princess and the Nobel Peace prize winner waved to the crowd, and Mother Teresa hugged a baby outside the Missionaries of Charity residence in the Bronx. The petite 86-year-old Mother Teresa appeared fit as she stood with the statuesque Princess.

2 killer whales die in Japan: Two killer whales captured early this year have died in captivity at an amusement park in eastern Japan, AP reports from Tokyo.

The deaths occurred at Nanki Shirahama Adventure World which bought three whales from among 10 taken from the sea near Wakayama prefecture on February 7, according to an official of the Wakayama prefectural fisheries agency. The first, a male, died June 14. Three days later, a female died. The third whale is still in captivity at the park.

Teen-ager gets 20 yrs jail in US: A teen-ager was sentenced Wednesday to 20 years in prison for setting a fire that killed a 3-year-old boy and his 15-month-old sister, AP reports from White Plains.

"I understand they had their whole life ahead of them," 17-year-old Delvon Bolling said. "I can't change what happened." The blaze broke out in 1996 in a New York apartment building. A film crew shooting the Denzel Washington-Whitney Houston movie "The Preacher's Wife" nearby helped rescue tenants.

Suu Kyi's supporters fail to celebrate her birthday

YANGON, June 19: Myanmar military police prevented about a hundred of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters from visiting her Yangon home to celebrate her 52nd birthday Thursday, reports AP.

About 20 of Suu Kyi's relatives and aides, however, were allowed into her compound for a quiet ceremony in which she offered food to five Buddhist monks, a traditional merit-making ritual.

Suu Kyi has been under a state of semi-house arrest since September 1996, when the military sealed off her home to prevent a congress of her political party and stop her from giving weekend speeches to the public.

Since then they have granted only limited access to the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner.

With riot police lurking in a truck nearby, more than a hundred of Suu Kyi's supporters gathered at the office of her political party, the National League for Democracy, near the golden Shwedagon Pagoda.

Wearing the collarless, orange jacket of the NLD, they heaped elaborately wrapped gifts on a table inside the office.

Many hoped Suu Kyi, who is recovering from a fall last month in which she hurt her back, would leave her home and come join them.

"Since we cannot go to her house, we celebrate her birthday here and we all wish for her health and success," said Hla Mying, a 54-year-old female NLD member.

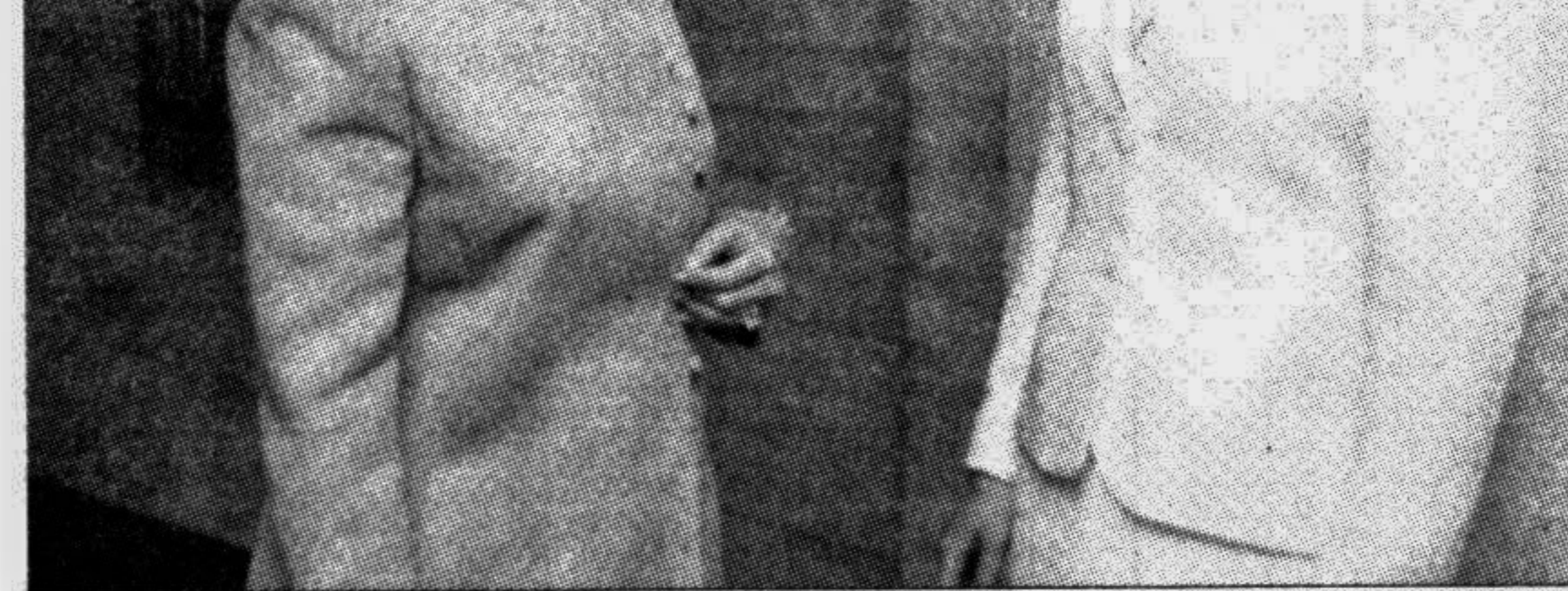
An aide at Suu Kyi's home said that if the Nobel laureate couldn't come to the party of office, she would send Tin Oo and Kyi Maung, the party's vice chairmen, to greet the supporters.

This was Suu Kyi's second birthday celebration since her release from six years of house arrest for her political activities in July 1995.

On her birthday last year, before the military blockaded her home, streams of supporters filed in and out of her compound all day delivering gifts and wishing her well.

On Thursday, in cities such as Paris, Manila, New Delhi, Bangkok, Tokyo, New York and Washington DC, supporters held their own protests and celebrations to mark the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner's birthday.

They have also designated her birthday as Burma Women's Day, to spotlight women's contributions to the struggle for democracy.



US First Lady Hillary Clinton (L) meets with Diana, Princess of Wales, at the White House in Washington, DC, Wednesday. Diana is in Washington to promote a global ban on the use of landmines. — AFP/UNB photo

AI Report '97 alleges Hundreds of Indians were extra-judicially executed

NEW DELHI, June 19: Hundreds of people were extra-judicially executed by the security forces, custodial deaths were more rampant as thousands of political prisoners were held without charge or trial in India in 1996, Amnesty International alleged yesterday, reports PTI.

"Hundreds of people were reportedly extra-judicially executed by members of the security forces in various parts," the organisation said in its international report for 1997 released today.

It said harassment, abduction, rape and "deliberate and arbitrary killings were perpetrated by so-called renegades in Jammu and Kashmir and by other such groups in Assam and other states with the support of the security forces."

About custodial deaths, it claimed that torture, including rape, and ill-treatment were endemic throughout the country, leading or contributing to at least 200 such deaths in custody.

The number of custodial deaths was recorded by the National Human Rights Commission at 159 in first three months of 1996.

The report, released here by President of Amnesty International (Indian section), SS Nehra, said victims of torture in custody included suspected political activists, criminal suspects, people from the underprivileged section and those defending their economic and social rights.

Gujral honours ex-army chief

UDAIPUR, June 19: The Prime Minister I K Gujral, today honoured former chief of the Indian Army, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw and former naval chief, Admiral VS Shekhawat on the occasion of 421st anniversary of the famous Haldighati Battle, reports PTI.

In this 16 century battle Maharana Pratap took on the might of Mughal Emperor Akbar to defend the motherland.

Gujral presented Pratap Galantry Awards instituted by the government of Rajasthan, at a function, organised at Shahi Bagh in the Haldighati area, about 40 km from here.

He presented cash awards of Rs one lakhs and Rs 50,000 to Manekshaw and Shekhawa respectively as the mammoth gathering gave a standing ovation to the two warriors.

The recipients of the awards were also presented with citation plaques and mementos.

Off the Record

DNA everywhere

NEW YORK: A new study suggests that people are leaving their unique genetic markers all over the place — pens, keys, coffee mugs — and it can be traced back to an individual, reports AP.

That provides a good tool for investigating crimes, say forensic scientists who recovered DNA from a number of everyday things and matched it back to the people it came from.

The technique has already been used to provide evidence in cases of attempted murder, rape, armed robbery, extortion and drug trafficking, the Australian scientists said.

At the same time, the researchers found people can pick up other people's DNA on their hands. That raises at least the possibility that a person could plant or accidentally leave somebody else's DNA at a crime scene.

Most people know DNA can be recovered from blood or semen, and they may have heard that evidence in the Unabomber case includes DNA recovered from some licked stamps.

Scientists said it's no surprise that DNA can also be found on objects casually touched by hands. Prior reports have described getting it from doorknobs, for example.

The new study is presented in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature by Roland A H van Oorschot and Maxwell K Jones at the Victoria Forensic Science Center in Victoria, Australia.

It's not clear where the DNA that people shed casually comes from, van Oorschot said. But there is some evidence that "naked" DNA — DNA that has escaped from dying cells — can be on the skin, he said.

The researchers recovered DNA from leather briefcase handles, pens, a car key, a locker handle and telephones, and found the samples matched the DNA of people who regularly used each item. One of the phones also yielded the genetic profile of somebody who used it only occasionally.

They also found that people left identifiable DNA on plastic knife handles, a mug and a glass after handling them for only 15 minutes. New vinyl gloves, worn for 20 to 90 minutes, gave the genetic profile of whoever wore them.

DNA could be picked up even from plastic tubes that had been held for only five seconds. When two or three people handled tubes, DNA from the different users could be recovered.

World's environmental conditions worsen, WHO report says

GENEVA, June 19: The world's environmental quality has worsened since the Earth Summit five years ago, and is responsible for 25 per cent of all preventable illnesses, a UN study said Wednesday, reports AP.

"There has been an increase of air pollution, worsening water quality and further degradation of soil throughout the world," said Wilfried Kreisler, executive director of the World Health Organisation.

The WHO report, assessing the impact of the 1992 meeting of world leaders in Rio de Janeiro, lumped together under "environment" everything from homicide to unhealthy kitchens.

Children are hardest hit, especially in the Third World, with as many as two-thirds of all preventable health afflictions among youngsters the result of poor environmental conditions, it said.

Over 20 per cent of children in the least developed countries die because of environmental causes before the age of five, compared with less than 1 per

cent of children in developed countries, the report said.

Respiratory infections and diarrhoeal diseases are the chief upshots of poor environmental quality, the study said, with air pollution causing an estimated 3 million premature deaths worldwide.

Tudjman reelected Croatian president

ZAGREB, June 19: Croatian President Franjo Tudjman was re-elected as head of state last weekend with 61.41 per cent of the vote, according to final results released by Croatia's Electoral Commission on Wednesday, reports AP.

Tudjman easily beat his two rivals Dravko Tomac of the former Communist SDP who garnered 21.03 per cent and Liberal Party candidate Vlado Gotovac, who took 17.56 per cent of the vote.

Turnout in Croatia was 57.68 per cent for last Sunday's presidential vote while abroad, the turnout among Croats was 23.49 per cent, officials said.

Some 2.8 million of these deaths are due to indoor air pollution exposure, with almost all cases occurring in developing countries, it said. As many as many a billion people, mostly women and children in developing countries, are exposed to high levels of indoor air pollution.

The study found that the workplace was the most hazardous environment, with 125 million people injured each year, resulting in 220,000 deaths.

Workers worldwide are often exposed to chemical, radioactive, allergenic, biological and mechanical hazards as well as poor physical conditions, it said.

The results can be infertility, cancer, poisoning, musculoskeletal disorders, disease, allergies or severe mental disorders, the report added.

Kreisler said that while conditions have worsened, there is reason for optimism because of a new willingness at both the local and national level to address the problem.

Congolese, UN aid officials say 40,000 Rwandan refugees to be airlifted home soon

BUKAVU, Congo, June 19: A group of 40,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees hiding in the forest in eastern Congo will soon be airlifted home, Congolese and UN officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

But armed militiamen mixed with the refugees will not be allowed to leave unless they surrender their arms, said Benjamin Nkundabantu, the vice-governor of South Kivu region.

Nkundabantu, the Congolese official, said former Rwandan Hutu soldiers and Hutu militia are among the refugees and have been attacking villages and soldiers in the Bukavu area.

He said he had urged UN officials to return the refugees quickly, but warned that armed elements could not be treated as normal refugees.

"We consider them the enemy," he said. "If they don't deposit their arms we will confront them. If they do deposit their arms, they can be repatriated as civilian refugees."

His comments came before the expected arrival on Friday of a team of UN investigators looking into alleged killings of Rwandan refugees.

A UN refugee official said this was the first time Kabila's government has given figures on how many refugees are in a particular area, and it was likely that the figure of 40,000 accounted only for the civilian refugees.

More than 700,000 people have returned home since Laurent Kabila's rebels took up arms in October and attacked Hutu militants in refugee camps in eastern Congo.

Some 50,000 others have re-

Frequent blazes terrify New Delhi

NEW DELHI, India, June 19: Across the narrow corridor from an elevator, tangled wires hang from an electrical fuse box carrying the warning, "DANGER: 440 Volts," reports AP.

The building's only entrance is a steel gate wide enough for just one person.

To a firefighter, the Patel Chest Hospital is a disaster in the making. And it's just one of 89 multi-story buildings in New Delhi that the fire department says is waiting to go up on smoke.

In the last week, four major fires ravaged high rises. On Friday, 60 people died in a crowded movie theatre that caught fire from a faulty electrical transformer in the basement.

On Tuesday alone, 50 fires were reported in this city of 10 million people. One man jumped to his death from a burning four-storey building.

Nurses reports said the victim had two relatives who died in the theater blaze four days earlier.

"The entire city is worried. So are we," says Prof Harbans Randhawa, the hospital's director.

The state-funded medical institute has no emergency exits, no sprinklers, no water tank for fighting fires. Randhawa blames the government for not sanctioning 5 million rupees (143,000 dollars) for fire control.

The clinic's two dozen patients are in a separate wing that is deemed less dangerous because it is one story. The library, classrooms and research

laboratories are housed in the more hazardous, multi-storey wing.

Under public scrutiny after so many accidents, the fire department says it is helpless be-

cause occupants ignore safety standards.

"The housekeeping of the buildings have to be done by those occupying it," says P K Sharma of the Delhi Fire Service. "Even where systems are installed, they are probably useless because they aren't maintained."

As he sat at his desk Wednesday, Sharma's eyes were red and his voice hoarse from commanding his brigade at two large fires the previous day. Both were believed caused by short circuits from faulty wiring.

Fires in poor, unkept neighborhoods are so common that they rarely cause public comment, but Friday's disaster — and horrific television footage of the victims — struck terror in the city.

Among the dead at the afternoon malline were 12 children. Casualties included the families of influential businessmen and public figures who were attending the premier of the latest blockbuster, a war movie called "Border."

City authorities ordered a quick investigation of other public areas. Preliminary results showed most of the city's 74 theaters and 200 banquet halls are unsafe. Of the 1,200 buildings that are more than five stories high, 89 are unsafe.

Like the theatre, many buildings are virtually inaccessible to fire trucks. "The big problem we had in reaching Uphaar cinema was to remove all the cars parked around," said Sharma, the fire officer.

Confec of World Metropolitan Mayors opens in Moscow

MOSCOW, June 19: The fifth conference of World Metropolitan Mayors opened here yesterday and is focusing on metropolitan ecology, anti-crime activities, supply and transportation, reports Xinhua.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin told the conference in a telegram that it is important for proper predictions and future proposals to analyse the developing trend of metropolises in the next millennium.

Lankan troops search for 7 missing soldiers

COLOMBO, June 19: Government troops Thursday searched for seven soldiers reported missing after battle with Tamil Tiger guerrillas in Sri Lanka's northeastern jungles in which 32 people died, military officials said, reports AP.

Military intercepts of rebel radio messages indicated that at least nine rebels were killed when naval gunboats fired on the guerrillas withdrawing by boat, officials said. Earlier, the military said 23 soldiers were killed.

Five soldiers were wounded in the guerrilla attack near the town of Pulumdadi town in the Trincomalee district 250 kilometers (155 miles) northeast of the capital.



Alicia Machado, of Venezuela and Miss Universe 1996, speaks during a press conference for a private television station in Caracas Wednesday. Machado announced she has begun taping soap operas in Argentina, Chile and Peru, and was doing screen tests in Mexico and Venezuela. — AFP/UNB photo