

Arafat's travel to be prevented from Gaza Strip to West Bank

Rebels, Lebanese troops kill 12 Israeli soldiers

INSARIYEH, Lebanon, Sept 5: Guerillas and Lebanese troops intercepted an Israeli commando raid deep inside Lebanon early Friday, killing at least twelve Israeli soldiers, Lebanese security officials said, reports AP.

One civilian also died and several Lebanese fighters were wounded in the confrontation, the officials said.

There was no immediate comment from Israel about its fatalities which, if confirmed, were believed to be Israel's highest death toll in a single confrontation in Lebanon more than a decade.

Israeli jet fighters, helicopter gunships and a gunboat joined the nighttime battle against Shiite Muslim guerillas and Lebanese army troops, who apparently spotted the raiding party and thwarted a commando operation.

At daybreak, smoke from smoldering bushes in orange groves off the road just outside the village of Insariyeh clouded the combat zone. Guerillas collected abandoned military gear.

One of the guerillas packed in a cardboard box a blackened military boot with the right leg, severed from below the knee, still stuck inside it.

A BMW sedan, its windows blown out by bullets and shrapnel, rested on the side of the road, a 35-year-old woman dead on the back seat. Soldiers at the scene said the driver of the car, which was driving on the road at the time of the confrontation, survived with injuries.

The Israeli operation came hours after a triple suicide bombing in Jerusalem killed seven people, including the three bombers, and injured 200. The Palestinian militant group Hamas claimed responsibility.

The latest cycle of violence struck a new blow to Middle East peace efforts.

There had been hopes that next week's scheduled visit by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would revive the faltering peace process. The chief American diplomat said her trip to the Mideast would go ahead despite the Jerusalem attack.

It was not immediately clear what was the target for the helicopter-borne Israeli commandos. But Sheikh Abdul-Amir Kabalan, deputy spiritual leader of Lebanon's 1.2 million Shiite Muslims, the country's largest sect, may have been a possible target. Beirut radio stations said the moderate cleric, who is influential with the pro-Syrian Amal militia, has a house in Insariyeh, where the Israelis landed by helicopter during the night. It was not known whether he was there at the time.

Insariyeh is on a hill just off the coastal highway, about halfway between the main southern port cities of Sidon and Tyre.

The combat zone was about 25 miles (40 kms) from an Israeli occupied border enclave in southern Lebanon and some 30 miles (45 kms) north of the Israeli border.

Israel has in the past struck at guerilla bases and commanders deep inside Lebanon to avenge attacks on Israeli troops in the south.

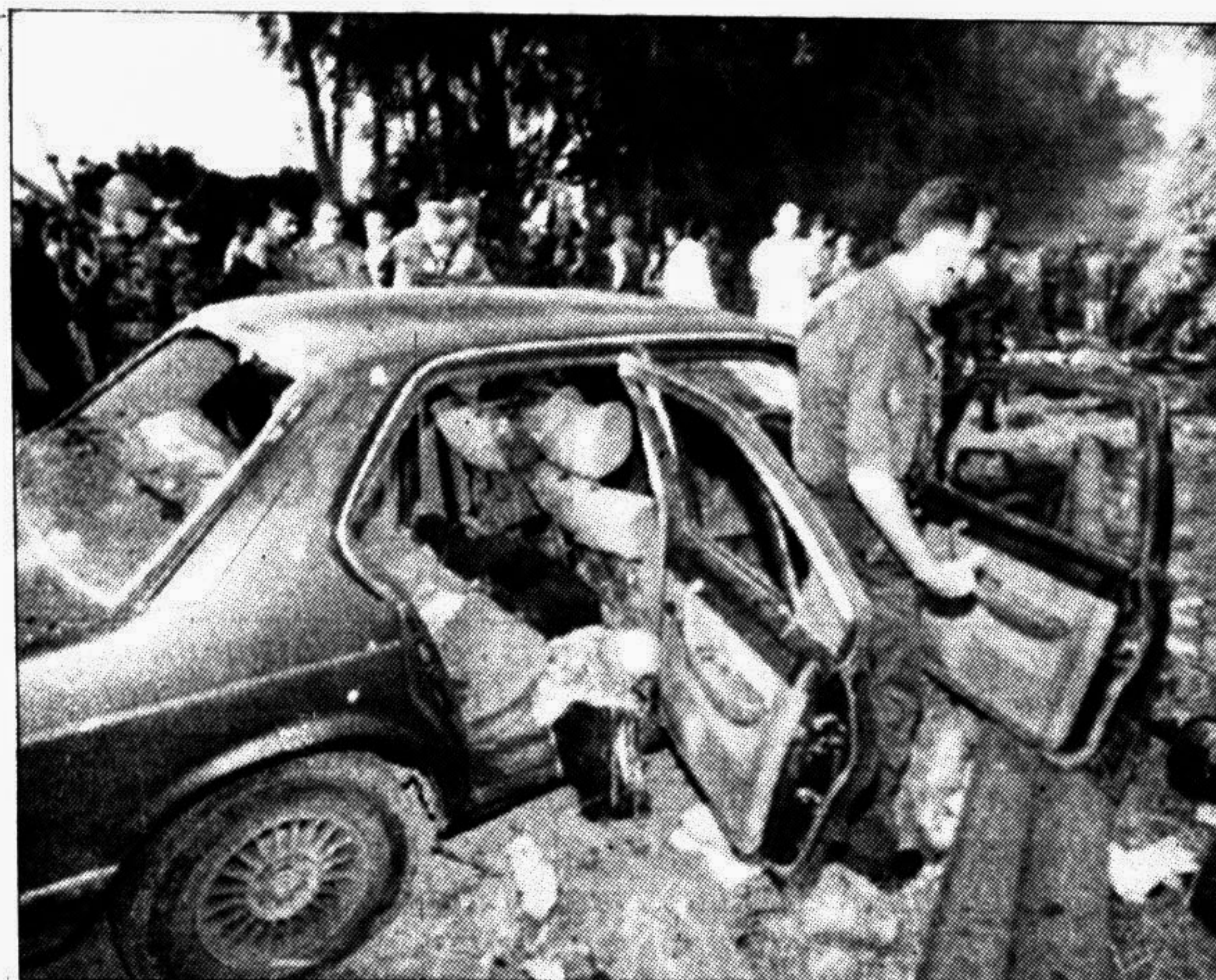
Last month, helicopter-borne Israeli commandos landed behind the front-line and set off bombs, killing three guerilla commanders. More than 30 people, most of them Lebanese civilians, were killed in southern Lebanon in August in attacks and reprisals.

AFP adds: Israel will prevent Palestinian President Yasser Arafat from traveling from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank after the triple suicide bombing in Jerusalem on Thursday, Israeli public radio said.

Arafat was to have taken his helicopter from Gaza to the West Bank town of Ramallah to participate in a cabinet meeting today, the radio added.

The travel ban on the Palestinian leader is in retaliation for the suicide bombings in a busy pedestrian mall in Jerusalem that killed at least seven people and injured 172.

Israel reimposed a strict closure of the Palestinian territories following the bombing but senior Palestinian officials are usually allowed to pass through.



A Lebanese policeman inspects a car in which a Lebanese woman lies dead in Ansariyeh, where Israeli forces clashed with Lebanese guerillas yesterday. Eleven Israeli soldiers were reported killed, 4 injured and one missing during a marine commando raid against guerilla bases inside Lebanese territory. — AFP/UNB photo

'Reagan strong in body, but losing memory'

WASHINGTON, Sept 5: Former President Ronald Reagan, his memory ravaged by Alzheimer's disease, often cannot identify members of his family, but he can still communicate with "that twinkle in his eye and smile," his son says, reports AP.

"You can't really carry on a conversation with him. You can talk to him, but you're not going to carry on a conversation," Michael Reagan said. "But he's alert."

The younger Reagan, a conservative radio talk-show host, spoke to The Associated Press in opening a promotional tour for his latest book, "The City on a Hill: Fulfilling Ronald Reagan's vision for America."

The 264-page book outlines Michael Reagan's conservative agenda, criticizes today's Republican Party leadership and lambastes President Bill Clinton and former President George Bush.

It also offers brief glimpses at the life Ronald Reagan leads as a victim of Alzheimer's disease.

"These days, because of the Alzheimer's, he doesn't always know my name when I come to visit him but he knows who I am. I'm the guy who gives him a hug," Michael Reagan wrote.

Diana was a happy woman in the last weeks of her life

LONDON, Sept 5: In the last weeks of her life, Princess Diana was a happy woman, reports AP.

Her acrimonious 16-year marriage to Prince Charles was behind her. She was more confident about her public role. Friends said she was deeply in love — and, according to one tabloid report, boyfriend Dodi Fayed had just spent tens of thousands on a custom-made diamond ring to prove it.

"I know that she was happy — happier than she had been in a long time," Carolyn Bartholemew, Diana's former roommate and the godmother to her son, Prince Harry, told The Sun newspaper.

The British princess and the Egyptian millionaire met at a polo match in Windsor 10 years ago. But their romance only began this summer as they cruised again and again in the sun-drenched Mediterranean, occasionally stopping in the haunts of the rich and famous.

Beatriz Flecha de Lima Nasr, who became of close friend of Diana's when her husband was Brazilian ambassador to Britain, told The Express she spoke to the princess Aug. 25, during her last vacation with Dodi.

"She said for the first time in years everything was going well for her and that her life was great. She couldn't wait to let her closest friends know," said Mrs. Nasr, who considered the princess to be like a sister. "The tragedy is that Diana was at last finding true happiness."

Debbie Frank, Diana's personal astrologer for the last

eight years, wrote in The Sun that the princess phoned her Aug. 12 "breathless with excitement" as she headed off by helicopter with Dodi to visit clairvoyant Rita Rogers.

"I was so happy for her after all the years of emptiness," Frank said. "The power of her emotions was huge, and the power of her love matched them. Sadly, it was the public who fed her love, and in her private life she was often lonely. But with Dodi, all that changed."

Just before her final vacation with Dodi in Sardinia, Diana spent five days cruising the Greek islands with Rosa Monckton, president of Tiffany and Co and a close friend.

"She was relaxed and very happy and seemed to have found a sort of peace in her life," Ms Monckton said.

According to those who knew her, the princess had two different views of her future life.

Ms Monckton said Diana talked a lot about involving herself with more children's charities. The princess was godmother to Ms Monckton's two-year-old daughter, Domenica, who has Down's syndrome.

"I think she was feeling clearer about her public role. She was more confident. It had been a year since her divorce and she could see a way forward for her and for her sons," Ms Monckton said.

But Richard Kay, The Daily Mail's royal correspondent,

said Diana phoned him from Paris six hours before she died and said she planned to withdraw completely from her formal public life around November and live as a private person.

As someone who had been close to Diana for five years, Kay said he believed she meant it, and that Dodi was "a significant factor in that decision."



"She was in love with him and, perhaps more important, she believed that he was in love with her and that he believed in her," Kay said.

When Dodi and Diana flew to Paris from Sardinia last Saturday, they went to the Ritz Hotel, owned by his father, Mohamed Al Fayed.

According to The Sun, Dodi then went to see jeweler Alberto

Repossi, whose exclusive shop is near the Ritz, to pick up a magnificent diamond ring he had ordered 10 years earlier.

Repossi refused to confirm or deny the report Thursday, but one of his employees told The Associated Press that Dodi indeed bought the ring.

At the Ritz, Dodi discovered that Saudi millionaire Hassan Yassin, his stepfather's brother, was a guest.

According to The Mirror, Dodi phoned Yassin just before he went to dinner with Diana.

"I said, 'You seem happy. This relationship with Diana has advanced very quickly. You should declare it,' he said. 'It's serious. We're going to get married.' I told him, 'The sooner the better and he said, 'You'll hear it very soon,'" the paper quoted Yassin as saying.

Over dinner at the Ritz, The Sun said Dodi gave Diana the ring.

They were supposed to meet Yassin afterwards, but he told the paper that Dodi said to many photographers were around and suggested they meet Sunday.

Dodi and Diana left the Ritz in a Mercedes, pursued by paparazzi, and died after it crashed in a tunnel under the Seine. The diamond solitaire ring was found in the wreckage, according to The Sun.

"I think it was a very, very serious relationship," Yassin told The Daily Mail. "It was going to be a great adventure. But now it is all so tragic. This is the Romeo and Juliet of the 20th century."

Picture agency didn't spare Di even at her last moment

HONG KONG, Sept 3: A Hong Kong-based magazine has reportedly offered to buy pictures of Princess Diana taken just after the car accident in Paris that killed her, her companion Dodi Al-Fayed and their driver, a report said today, says AFP.

The report published in the South China Morning Post said a small Paris-based picture agency has been reported trying to sell the photographs worldwide while doctors were still trying to save Diana following the crash on Sunday.

LS Presses Diffusion Director Laurent Sola told that English-Language newspaper that a Hong Kong magazine offered "any price he wanted" for the pictures on Wednesday.

Sola said he had sold the photos to a US magazine for 250,000 US dollars but stopped the sale when he heard Diana had died.

His assistant, Dominique Petit, told the post the Chinese-language oriental daily news had contacted them about buying pictures of Diana's last day, but not of the crash.

"There are no photos after the accident," Petit said, adding "we withdrew them when we learnt of Diana's death."

Oriental Daily News could not be immediately contacted to confirm the report. Eastweek, a magazine published by oriental daily, would not comment.

The Oriental Daily news printed pictures of Diana arriving at the Ritz Hotel for dinner with Fayed before their fatal journey in its Wednesday's edition.

31 killed in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Sept 5: At least 31 people, including three children, were killed in the Sierra Leonean capital before dawn Thursday when Nigerian troops shelled ships violating an embargo against the ruling junta, reports AFP.

The shelling occurred as the Nigerian-dominated West African peacekeeping force in the Liberian capital Monrovia said 11 of its troops were killed by an exploding mine Wednesday near Freetown's international airport, blaming it on the junta.

An AFP correspondent saw 31 bodies buried in a Freetown cemetery following the shelling. Other victims of the shelling, which hit a busy dockside marketplace, were brought to the city's mortuary as the funeral cortege left.

The army officers, who seized power in a May 25 coup, boosted security here Thursday, setting up anti-aircraft guns on the main road to state house and deploying soldiers armed with automatic weapons on the capital's streets.

US official meets Pak foreign secy for talks

ISLAMABAD, Sept 5: A senior US official met with Pakistani foreign secretary here today for talks on bilateral matters, South Asian affairs and India-Pakistan relations, official said, reports AFP.

Rick Inderfurth, the new US Assistant Secretary of States for South Asia, flew into Islamabad from New Delhi late Thursday on his maiden visit to Pakistan.

Officials said Pakistani foreign secretary, Shamshad Ahmed, briefed him on the current state of the five-month-old process of dialogue between India and Pakistan to normalise their relations plagued by Kashmir dispute.

Kashmir's ownership dispute has triggered two wars in the sub-continent described as

'Flashpoint' in the region.

The foreign secretary will hold a third round of talks with his Indian counterpart in New Delhi this month. Inderfurth will also meet President Farooq Ahmed Leghari and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, diplomatic sources said.

Pakistan will also convey its concerns about India's missile programme which they say poses a direct threat to security in the region.

Yeltsin denounces public execution in Chechnya

MOSCOW, Sept 5: President Boris Yeltsin on Thursday denounced a public execution in the breakaway Chechen republic, saying it was unacceptable at a time when Russia was thinking of banning capital punishment, reports Reuter.

"It's outrageous," Yeltsin said in response to a reporter's question during a tour of a new pedestrian street in Moscow. "At a time when we are thinking of ways to ban capital punishment they are doing this in the most outrageous public way," he added.

Chechnya staged its first public execution on Wednesday,

putting to death a young man and his wife found guilty of murder by an Islamic court.

The execution by a firing squad made up of masked men with Kalashnikov assault rifles was witnessed by hundreds of people in the Chechen capital and shown on Russian television news.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said the execution was a throwback to the Middle Ages. "It is savage, medieval," he said.

The chairman of Russia's State Duma (lower house of parliament) also condemned the public execution.

Atrocities during colonial rule of India Hindu militant group asks queen to apologise

NEW DELHI, Sept 5: A militant Hindu group has asked Queen Elizabeth II, who is to visit India in October, to apologise for the "wrongs committed by the British" during the Raj, the Asian Age said today, reports AFP.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council) said it was opposed to the visit at a time when India was celebrating 50 years of independence from Britain.

"This is certainly not the year when the Queen should visit India," the newspaper quoted VHP president Ashok Singhal as saying here.

"But if at all she does, she should apologise to the people in every corner of our country for the atrocities committed by the British," during their colonial rule of India.

Singhal, however, said the VHP would not organise street

protests against the Queen during the visit.

It was the second criticism of the Queen's proposed trip in two days.

On Wednesday, an Indian nationalist group warned the Queen not to visit India and accused her of trying to "bleed" New Delhi's economy.

The Azadi Bachao Andolan (Movement to Save Independence) group said the British monarch's intentions were similar to those of a predecessor of the same name.

"In 1600 during Queen Elizabeth II's regime, the East India Company laid the foundation of British imperialism in India, Queen Elizabeth II would like to see the new world order — the dream of white — ruled multinationalism firmly established (in India) by 2000," the group said.

Govt officials warn Delhi of joining strike

NEW DELHI, Sept 5: Government officials today warned that they will join an indefinite strike called by four million state workers to press for parity in wages, reports AFP.

The All India Confederation of Government Officers' Association said it had decided to participate in the strike because the government had ignored the demands of tens of thousands of civil servants.

"We would be forced to launch an agitation since the militant elements in our group are getting restive," it warned.

The confederation is demanding pay parity with senior bureaucrats, quicker promotions and other perks.

National Trade Unions on Thursday said four million state employees would launch an indefinite strike from September 24 unless the government meets their demands.

They are protesting against a government decision to hike wages for most federal workers by 95 per cent compared to an almost 300 per cent hike for senior bureaucrats.

Villagers return 'black box' of crashed Vietnam Airlines jet

PHNOM PENH, Sept 5: A flight recorder believed to have been stolen by villagers from a crashed Vietnam Airlines plane was returned Friday following appeals on radio and television stations, reports AP.

Government spokesman Khieu Kanharith said a peasant family came forward with the "black box" which may help explain the cause of the Wednesday crash that killed at least 65 people.

The instrument was apparently "blown away" by the force of the exploding Soviet-built Tupolev 134 aircraft, Khieu Kanharith said.

A family living near the crash site, a stretch of rice paddies about one kilometer (half mile) south of Pochentong International Airport, recovered the black box and brought it to the TVK television station. They were given a reward.

"The station then made a call to the authorities, and it is now in our possession," Khieu Kanharith said. "We are very happy."

Vietnam Embassy officials confirmed that a Vietnamese boy, identified as Vu Hung Thinh, about four, who was shuttled between hospitals with head injuries after the crash, was thought to be the second-known survivor.

A one-year-old Thai boy, Chanayuth Nim-Anong, also emerged alive and returned Thursday to Bangkok with his father, who had been awaiting the ill-fated plane when it crashed. His mother was killed.

Royal Family hurt by wave of press criticism

LONDON, Sept 5: Buckingham Palace on Thursday said the Royal Family had been hurt by a wave of press criticism accusing them of being unmoved by the British people's sorrow at the death of Princess Diana, reports Reuter.

The palace also announced that Queen Elizabeth would make a televised broadcast to the nation before the funeral of Princess Diana, killed in a high-speed Paris car crash on Sunday. The broadcast was expected to take place this evening.

In Paris, police detained at least two more photographers in the investigation into the crash.

The Royal Family, and Queen Elizabeth in particular, came in for a barrage of media and public criticism on Thursday for their apparent coldness in the face of a massive outpouring of national grief after Diana's death.

Buckingham Palace very rarely responds to criticism.

Temporary truce in Lanka for immunisation programme

COLOMBO, Sept 5: A temporary truce between government forces and Tamil Tiger guerillas got underway today to allow a United Nations agency to carry out a nation wide polio immunisation programme, officials said, AFP reports from Colombo.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said both the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the government will honour today and tomorrow as "days of tranquillity."

The warring sides have also agreed to observe the truce on October 10 and 11 to again allow the immunisation campaign to go ahead across the country.

UNICEF officials said similar arrangements in 1995 and last year, the UNICEF said in a statement.

More than 50,000 people have been killed in the rebel's protracted Tamil separatist war.

'Survival of Royal Family depends on how it handles death of Diana'

BALMORAL, Scotland, Sept 5: The way the Royal Family handles the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, was viewed by commentators here today as crucial to the survival of the monarchy into the next century, reports AP.

The press rejoiced and crowded at a series of gestures to dispel at growing suspicion of indifference to the nation's grief and the Royal Family's first public show of mourning since the Princess died early Sunday.

"They used to tell us what to do. Now we tell them," wrote a columnist in the Daily Express, adding that the day would come to be seen as a watershed for the monarchy "Faced with a future which is by no means certain."

"Queen bows to her people," said the Daily Telegraph, in a headline echoed in the Independent. The Sun newspaper commented that in recent days, "The Royal Family has let us down."

A senior civil servant quoted by the Financial Times said: "It would appear that the survival of the Royal Family is being de-

cided on how it handles the death of Diana."

The monarchy has drawn harsh comment this week on the contrast between their lack of public emotion and the outpouring of mourning that has seen weeping crowds queue up to 11 hours to sign books of condolences at Buckingham, Kensington, and St James' Palaces.

The British public has been losing patience with a Royal Family which embodies the British spirit of the "stiff upper lip."

There is now almost universal acceptance that the breath of fresh air which Diana let in through the palace windows has to be followed by major changes within the monarchy and that time honoured royal protocol is no longer enough for a people mourning the human face and common touch which Diana brought.

At the gates of Kensington Palace, where Diana used to live and from where her funeral procession will begin Saturday, the hundreds of thousands of flowers have started to form a huge cross, around 100 metres

long and wide.

Police now estimate that some six million people will watch her funeral procession to Westminster Abbey and then north from London to the family home in Northamptonshire in Central England. Some twenty-seven thousand police officers will be on duty.

An estimated 2.5 billion people will watch around the world — only in Antarctica will the event not be televised.

On Thursday, responding to the mood of the nation, Queen Elizabeth II, in mourning black hat and coat, her husband Prince Philip, Diana's ex-husband Prince Charles and her sons Princes William and Harry walked slowly along the lines of bouquets and cards left outside Balmoral Castle in memory of Diana.

The two young princes stood close to their father as they cast their eyes over the flowers and gently picked up the cards, reading tributes to their 36-year-old mother, who died in a car accident in Paris with boyfriend Dodi Al-Fayed, 42, and their

driver Henri Paul, 41, early Sunday.

Prince Harry, 12, particularly seemed keen to read as many as he could. Hardly once letting go of his father's hand, he read message after message.

Prince William, 15, looked shy but was also eager to read the messages in a visit which followed a private memorial service to the Princess at Craighall Parish Church nearby.

Buckingham Palace also announced a series of gestures to show they were not remaining aloof, including the Queen's second-ever address to the nation later Friday — excepting her annual Christmas message — and for the first time ever, the replacement of the royal standard over Buckingham Palace with a Union Jack flag flown at half-mast.

In addition it emerged that Royal Family members will take over Diana's role with many of her favourite charities.

But the Queen's Press Secretary Geoffrey Crawford issued a statement saying the Royal Family had been "hurt" by recent criticism.

"The Princess was a much loved national figure, but she was also a mother whose sons miss her deeply," said Crawford.

"Princes William and Harry themselves want to be with their father and grandparents at time in the quiet haven of Balmoral as their grandmother, the Queen, is helping the Princes to come to terms with their loss."

Also on Thursday the palace announced details of the funeral. Pop-singer Elton John, a close friend of the Princess, will sing and adapted version of his hit song "candle in the wind".

Prime Minister Tony Blair will read from Corinthians XIII. There will also be a tribute from Earl Spencer, Diana's brother. The archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, will lead the prayers.

Diana's sisters, Lady Sarah McCorquodale and Lady Jane Fellowes, will also read at the service.

A minute's silence, which will be mirrored across the nation, will be the centerpiece of

the service.

Saturday's funeral will be attended by world personalities, including US First Lady Hillary Clinton, Queen Noor of Jordan and Pakistani cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan.

Spencer has asked six British tabloid newspaper editors, who were invited, to stay away.

The procession will take the coffin, carried by a gun carriage, from Kensington Palace to Westminster Abbey.

It is still not known whether the young Princes will walk behind the coffin.

Meanwhile in Paris three more photographers were held by police probing the crash which killed Diana, Dodi Al-Fayed, and their chauffeur Paul.

Police in Paris said the judge investigating the deaths is considering legal action against the Ritz Hotel for sending the couple out with Paul, who was nearly four times over the legal drink drive limit and reportedly did not have a licence to drive a Limousine.