

No Bangladeshis among 1800 deported by KSA

KARACHI, Sept 27: Pakistani authorities today disembarked 733 Pakistani nationals from a ship who were deported by Saudi Arabia for illegally staying in the oil-rich kingdom, officials said, reports AFP.

The disembarkment started after authorities allowed the ship carrying 1,800 Pakistani and Indian nationals to berth at the Karachi Airport after being anchored outside the Arabian Sea for almost two days.

The Al-Madina left Jeddah with 735 Pakistanis and 1,098 Indians on board and arrived here late Thursday, officials said, adding here were no Bangladeshis on board as was suggested in initial reports.

Officials confirmed that three people aboard, including two Pakistanis and an Indian, died during the voyage and other sick people were removed to hospital.

Officials said the ship would proceed to Bombay to off load Indians late yesterday evening.

Hundreds of Pakistani men, women and children descended from the ship as officials checked their passports and travel documents, while the Indian nationals remained on board.

Officials said no arrest of the Pakistani deportees was likely as they had travelled on valid

Israel greets PA efforts to mend ME peace process

JERUSALEM, Sept 27: The Israeli government coolly greeted Palestinian efforts to mend the Mideast peace process in the last few days as dozens of suspected members of the militant group Hamas were rounded up and a number of Hamas installations were shut down, reports AP.

"I hope this signifies a real effort to try to get at the infrastructure of terrorism," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu brushed off US demands for a settlement freeze, saying he would continue building in the Jewish enclaves in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to accommodate natural population growth.

Netanyahu's defiant stance raised tensions with the United States at a time when US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is trying to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Netanyahu surprised Albright this week by announcing he would build 300 more homes in the West Bank settlement of Efrat, despite her recent call for a "time-out" in such construction. "I am calling on the prime minister to honour the time-out," an angry Albright said Thursday.

But in an interview Friday, Albright said the move was ill-timed, but that "if you were just to take the act on its own, it's not something that is particularly provocative. Frankly, it is within the boundaries of an existing settlement."

Albright also declined Friday to criticise Netanyahu for not tipping her off to the expansion when she spoke on the telephone Wednesday. "I think it would have been helpful if he had told me," she said.

The Netanyahu government has argued it must continue to build to accommodate the settlement's natural growth. However, government critics say Netanyahu is luring Israelis to settlements with generous grants and tax breaks.

Albright also demanded during a Middle East visit earlier this month that the Palestinians crack down on Islamic militant's responsible for a series of suicide attacks in Israel.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat appeared to be honouring his side of the bargain — over the past three days. He has rounded up dozens of suspected members of the militant group Hamas and closed 16 Hamas institutions, including a kindergarten and a TV station.

Arafat was spurred into action after Israel delivered proof this week that four suicide bombers involved in two recent attacks in Jerusalem were Hamas activists from the West Bank who walked out of a loosely guarded Palestinian jail last year.

Arafat had insisted for weeks that the bombers responsible for the July 30 and Sept. 4 attacks came from abroad.

Palestinian intelligence agents answered phones Friday at the Hamas-affiliated television station they shut down, apparently monitoring calls. The owner of the station, located in the West Bank town of Nablus, was among those arrested in Arafat's sweep.

Netanyahu reserved judgement Friday on Arafat's campaign, saying: "I hope this signifies a real effort to try to get at the infrastructure of terrorism."

Israel insists Arafat crush the Hamas militants involved in suicide bombings as a condition for resuming peace talks frozen since March. However, Palestinians insist that Israel halt settlement construction before they come back to the negotiating table a demand Israel is not likely to meet.

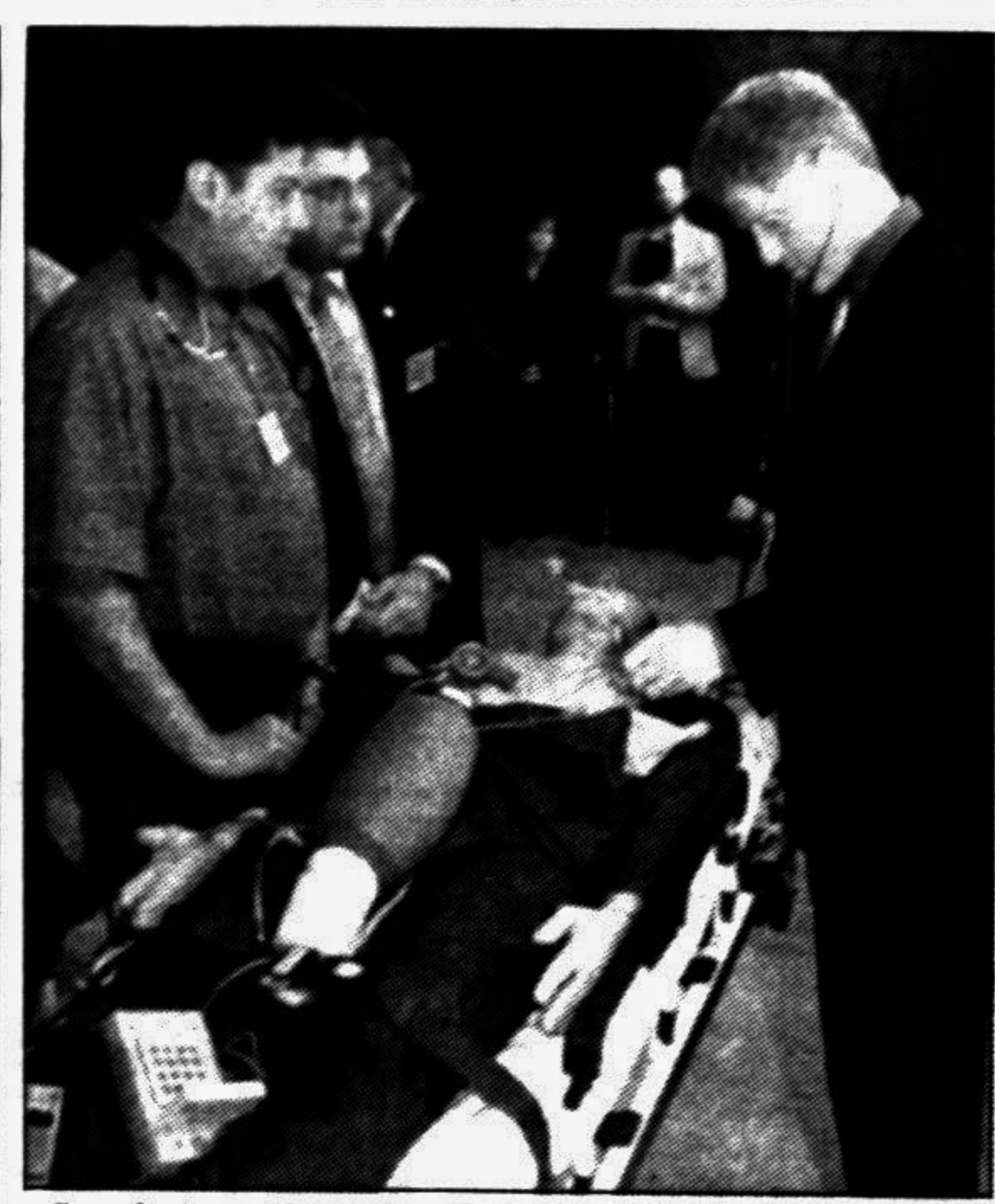
Asked whether he would consider Albright's request for a settlement freeze, Netanyahu said Friday: "I don't see anyone suggesting that construction be stopped in Arab communities that have natural growth as well."

Netanyahu said he was surprised by the angry US reaction to his decision to build more homes in Efrat, saying the construction was already approved by the previous Labour government of Yitzhak Rabin.

However, Efrat Mayor Enon Achiman said while Netanyahu's predecessors had approved plans to prepare infrastructure for 300 homes, they had not given the go-ahead to build.

Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, who served as Labour's housing minister, said the previous government favored expanding Efrat, but was aware this could cause friction with the Palestinians.

"As long as the building was done quietly and without fanfare and within Efrat, we supported it," Ben-Eliezer said. "However, now is a sensitive time and that must be taken into account."



San Jacinto Community College student Saul Balderras, left and EMT director Jay Cloud look on as President Clinton checks the heart-beat on a mannequin while touring class displays at the college in Pasadena, Texas, Friday. The President was shown several displays including automotive, emt and computer technologies after giving a speech to students and faculty. — AP/UNB photo

'Some Palestinians may face starvation' PLO police round up scores of Hamas militants

GAZA, Sept 27: PLO forces have rounded up scores of suspected Hamas militants in the West Bank and Gaza and shut down all of the Islamic movement's social-welfare agencies in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian police said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has demanded a far-reaching Palestinian crackdown on Hamas activists as a precondition to any further return of occupied land to Yasser Arafat's Palestinian self-rule Authority.

In sweeps over the past three days, Palestinian police hunting Hamas activists arrested some 30 Gazans and as many as 40 suspects in the West Bank, police officials said.

Netanyahu's demand followed two Hamas suicide bombings that rocked the heart of downtown Jerusalem over the summer, killing 20 and wounding hundreds.

The bombings lightened the nose on an Israeli-PLO peace process already dealt a near-death blow by Netanyahu's March approval of a new settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

Israel has pressed Arafat to shut Hamas institutions it alleges are part of a "terrorist infrastructure."

The Jewish state is conducting a West Bank manhunt of its own to track down Hamas men suspected of ties to the bombings.

AP adds: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat warned Friday that some Palestinians could face starvation if a blockade in their area is not lifted.

Israel closed off areas under Palestinian control after suspected Hamas militants carried out two suicide bombings in Jerusalem on July 30 and September 4, killing 20 Israelis. Since then, the restrictions have eased somewhat, and some 13,000 Palestinians are now allowed into Israel.

Still "Some Palestinian areas are threatened by starvation because of the continuity of the siege," Arafat told Egyptian television. His comments were carried by the official Middle East News Agency.

Arafat said Palestinian areas were losing some 10 million dollars a day due to the closure.

Smoke haze may be the cause of Indonesian jet crash

JAKARTA, Sept 27: Trying to determine if the thick haze over Southeast Asia was a factor, investigators on Saturday sifted through the wreckage of an Indonesian jetliner carrying 234 people that crashed in an area of Sumatra clouded with smoke from hundreds of forest fires, reports AP.

The bodies of 212 people had been located by early Saturday in the lush, rugged terrain, airline official John Pieter said. No survivors were found.

The bodies, many cut and burned, were taken to nearby Medan for identification by distraught relatives as investigators continued their search for other victims and the airplane's flight recorders.

Six Japanese, three Germans, two Americans, a Dutch citizen and at least one Malaysian were among the passengers on board the Garuda Airlines A-300B4 Airbus, the airline said. The rest were Indonesians. A state-owned television station played somber music as it screened a list of victims' names Friday night. The names and nationalities of the dead could not be confirmed, however.

Authorities stressed the cause of the crash Friday had not been determined.

The dense haze has disrupted air traffic and forced airports to close because of dangerously low visibility. On Friday, rescue teams complained that the smoke prevented them from flying helicopters to the crash site, located about 32 km (20 miles) west of Medan's Polonia Airport, 1,400 km (870 miles) northwest of Jakarta.

The 15-year-old twin-engine plane had been on a flight from Jakarta to the Sumatra island city of Medan, where some of the worst fires have been smoldering for months.

The official Antara news agency said the plane descended into the haze as it prepared to land at Medan. An unconfirmed report indicated the visibility was under 500 metres (1,600 feet) at the time.

Antara reported that radar contact was lost eight minutes after the pilot had radioed for guidance for his final approach. The plane crashed at 1:55 pm local time, an airline official said.

Officials quoted witnesses as saying the plane was flying low in the haze when it hit a tree and crashed into pieces. Some witnesses told Antev television that they heard an explosion just before impact.

The weather conditions were OK for landing, but there was smoke haze around Medan at the time," Communications Minister Haryanto Danuirtoro said.

Airport officials declined to say whether the aircraft had been on a visual or instrument approach, or what the visibility was at the time of the crash.

Residents in Medan told The Associated Press that the haze was the worst they had seen since the pollution crisis started two months ago. Many people remained indoors Friday because it was difficult to breathe, said Ching Ting Lien, an editor of a local newspaper.

Many of the fires have been deliberately lit by forest companies and plantation owners waiting to clear land cheaply. A drought blamed on the El Niño weather system has delayed the monsoon rains and allowed the fires to burn fiercely for weeks.

Kesri urged to appeal to Sonia to lead party

NEW DELHI, Sept 27: Former union minister CK Zaffar Sharief has urged the Congress president, Sitaran Kesri, and the working committee members to jointly appeal to Sonia Gandhi to lead the party, reports PTI.

In a letter to the party president, Sharief reminded him about Sonia Gandhi's presence and participation in the Calcutta Plenary Session and the response she evoked among the party workers.

He said Sonia's presence at the AICC session and the message she delivered "in itself is very clear to Congressmen in general and its leaders in particular."

"We must divert the attention of the people from the narrow outlook of communalism and casteism by giving a broad vision and explaining how unity is important for political stability and how we lived all these ages preserving unity in diversity," he said.

"However, he said, it was possible only by a charismatic leader and "We have seen the response of the people to Sonia Gandhi wherever she made an appearance."

Myanmar defends its human rights record

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 27: Myanmar foreign minister lashed out Friday at Western critics of its human rights record, saying critics had fabricated charges and ignored its progress in the economic and social development, reports AP.

The fact is that never in our post-independence history have we enjoyed in Myanmar such economic growth, never have the Myanmar people better enjoyed the basic human rights to peace and stability, shelter, clothing and food than at present," Ohn Gyaaw told the General Assembly.

He claimed the United States and other Western nations "turn a blind eye to all these positive developments and accomplishments by the government of my country, and indulge in the ritual of unfounded fabricated charges against my country."

Policy toward the nine-year-old military government in Myanmar, he said, "shows as the number of human rights violations... contentious issues between the United States and Southeast Asian countries."

The United States has banned all new investment in Myanmar and is seeking international cooperation to isolate it economically and politically to pressure the military government into negotiating with the opposition and allowing freedom of speech and freedom of movement.

The Association of South-East Asian Nations admitted Myanmar to the regional trading bloc last July, ignoring the disapproval of the United States and Europe, which said reforms in Myanmar should have been a prerequisite for membership.

Another report adds: In a rare sign of goodwill towards the country's democratic opposition, Myanmar's military government allowed nearly 700 members of Aung San Suu Kyi's political party to attend a congress inside her lakeside compound Saturday.

That was more than twice the number of delegates the government said it would permit to attend the 10-day congress of Suu Kyi's party. The generals have allowed since they released the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner from six years of house arrest in July 1995.

BRIEFLY

7 sentenced to death in China: Seven people have been sentenced to death for murder and armed robbery at a public rally in Shanghai, an official report said Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

The Shanghai No 2 court sentenced the seven Thursday. The men all were migrant workers who had robbed taxi drivers by threatening them with guns or daggers, the newspaper Liberation Daily reported. When victims resisted, they were injured, sometimes fatally, it said. Public sentencing rallies are often held as part of a nationwide campaign against crime.

Hun Sen to meet Kofi Annan: Cambodian strongman Hun Sen will meet with Secretary General Kofi Annan Tuesday to try to win support for his government, first Prime Minister Ung Huot said Friday, AFP reports from United Nations.

But UN spokesman Juan Carlos Brandt could not immediately confirm Hun Sen's meeting with Annan who is also scheduled to meet earlier on Tuesday with Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the first prime minister who was ousted in the July 5-6 takeover.

Road mishap kills 9 in Manila: Nine people, including a five-month old baby, were killed when a commuter mini-bus fell into a ravine in the Philippine province of Nueva Ecija shortly before dawn Saturday, a local radio station reported, AFP says from Manila.

The privately-owned DZRH said 17 other people were injured when the mini-bus fell into the ravine. The cause of the accident was not disclosed.



South African President Nelson Mandela, centre, with celebrity guests, left to right, Jemima and husband Pakistani cricketer turned politician Imran Khan, Supermodel Naomi Campbell, Liberian President Charles Taylor, Mandela's companion, Graca Machel, friend Lyzette Derouaux with Jazz legend Quincy Jones, actress Mia Farrow and actor Tony Leung Pose for a photograph at Pretoria station prior to departing in the revamped Blue Train for Cape Town. The train is considered to be Africa's most luxurious. — AP/UNB photo

NATO, Russian FMs approve action plan for cooperation

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 27: NATO and Russian foreign ministers meeting for the first time as a new permanent Joint Council, on Friday approved an action plan that will test their pledge of post-Cold War cooperation, reports Reuter.

Concluding a two-hour session at the United Nations, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov told a news conference it was a success.

But Primakov warned future progress would depend on continued adherence to key principles such as mutual trust and "equality between the parties."

Russia continues to be negatively disposed to NATO enlargement, this council however, is called to keep the world from returning to confrontation and to make a major step toward the future, he told the closed council meeting.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said NATO's new mission is to contain risk and US officials agreed.

In another sign of cooperation, the United States, Russia and three other ex-Soviet states on Friday signed a handful of arms agreements that could finally clear the way for a new round of radical reductions in strategic weapons.

The accords set terms for new theater missile defence systems and extended for five years the period stipulated for implementation of the START-2 treaty which would slash US and Russian long range nuclear arms by up to two-thirds.

Proponents say the accords will give Russia's parliament more confidence to ratify START-2 as the US Senate did.

With the Joint Council US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said their aim was to move quickly to take certain cooperative steps.

This includes creating stronger military contacts, stationing Russian military representatives at NATO and opening an Alliance Information centre in Moscow.

'Paula Jones fails to turn over document'

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas, Sept 27: US President Bill Clinton's lawyer says Paula Corbin Jones has failed to turn over a document purporting to describe "distinguishing characteristics" in Clinton's genital area, reports AP.

Robert Bennett on Friday asked a federal judge to order Mrs. Jones to hand over a copy of the document. Failure to obtain it could hurt the president's defence against Mrs. Jones' sexual harassment suit, Bennett said.

Mrs. Jones' lawyers, Joe Cammarata and Gilbert Davis, withdrew from the case.

Cambodian official dispels rumours of coup, rifts

PHNOM PENH, Sept 27: With rumours of imminent coups, violence and political rifts swirling through Phnom Penh, senior government official Chea Sim on Saturday denounced "hearsay" or divisions in the ruling party, reports AP.

Barrampt rumours about differences in the Cambodian People's Party have put Phnom Penh on edge less than three months after the party's most powerful leader, Hun Sen, deposed co-prime minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh in a violent takeover.

The US and Australian embassies put wardens on alert over the weekend to warn their nationals to take special security precautions at night, when Phnom Penh can be dangerous even in normal times due to crime.

There was no heightened presence of troops or police in the streets or any sign of unrest to support the rumours, which spread rapidly in Phnom Penh even in normal times.

"These are just rumours with the political and psychological aim of polluting the political atmosphere," said Chea Sim, who is president of the party as well as the National Assembly.

Chea Sim and others in the party leadership were, according to some reports, opposed to Hun Sen's decision to use military force against his political rivals in a July 5-6 coup.

Ranariddh was ousted and remains in self-exile along with other prominent politicians. Scores of the prince's loyalists were killed or went into hiding. The prince faces arrest if he returns, though Hun Sen has promised others will be safe.

The United Nations last week decided to leave vacant Cambodia's seat at the General Assembly, a stinging blow against international legitimacy Hun Sen has sought by promising new elections in 1998.

Top generals call for total army loyalty to Jiang

BEIJING, Sept 27: Two of China's top generals have called for total army loyalty to Communist Party chief Jiang Zemin, reports Reuter.

Generals Zhang Wannian and Chi Haotian, who became the only two vice-chairman of the powerful Central Military Commission at a party congress this month, threw their weight behind Jiang and his plan to slash the army by half a million troops.

"We must study and carry out the spirit of the 15th party congress, and most importantly study the report made by General Secretary Jiang Zemin," the newspaper quoted Zhang as saying in a speech at China's Defence Academy.

British tabloids changed more than the royal family after Di's death

LONDON, Sept 27: Outside Kensington Palace, the bouquets now just trickle in the dozen. The condolence books are closed; and Queen Elizabeth II is back in her Scottish retreat, reports AP.

Yet nothing is really the same since Princess Diana hurried to her death in a Paris tunnel in the early hours of that Sunday morning four weeks ago, a legally drunk driver at the wheel and paparazzi photographers in pursuit.

Some changes promise to be profound: like the pressure on the monarchy to loosen up, to stop, in the words of an ex-Foreign Secretary, Lord Howe, radiating "a feeling of being stuck behind an electric fence."

In essence, to be more like the 36-year-old princess.

And there are tentative signs of the House of Windsor taking a left out of the book of the princes they stripped of the title Her Royal Highness after her divorce from Prince Charles a year ago.

Palace spokesmen are more forthcoming: no more of the "We never comment on personal matters of the royal family." Instead, there are tidbits about how grateful the royals are, how sad.

Prince Charles was uncharacteristically emotional last week, making his first public appearance after the Sept. 6 funeral of his ex-wife.

In the northern city of Manchester on Sept. 19, he departed from his formal speech to say he will always feel the loss of Diana and was "unbelievably proud of the children," Prince William, 15, and Prince Harry, 13.

Britain's tabloid newspapers have changed more than the royal family. No more stories about royal love lives, no more paparazzi pictures.

"Motor bike chases, stalking and hounding are unacceptable — and editors who carry pictures obtained by them will be subjected to the severest censure," Lord Wakeham, chairman of the self-regulatory press watchdog, the Press Complaints Commission, said Thursday.

And editors, including ones who paid high prices for pictures this summer of Diana and Dodi Fayed, the new beau who died with her, agreed to adopt tougher new guidelines on Privacy laws.

"We have to embrace a change in the country," said Piers Morgan, editor of the 2.4-million circulation Daily Mirror. "There is a lack of tolerance, a lack of acceptance for some of the excesses that went on before. It is only right that we should clean up the act."

How well the chastened attitude will survive passing of time and practical pressures of circulation war remains uncertain.

Condolence letters to William and Harry, now back in their boarding schools, still arrive at St James's Palace, Charles' London residence. More than 300,000 have been received.

About 15 bouquets now are laid daily at Althorp, Diana's ancestral home where she is buried on an island in an artificial lake.

"I think it will go on for years and years," said Valerie Amos, a hairdresser from Plymouth in southwest England. She was one of about 50 people at the ornate black and gold gates of Kensington Palace one recent afternoon.

Like the hundreds of thousands who thronged the London palaces in the week between Diana's death and funeral, the latecomers felt they knew her.

Dealing with the legend of Diana is, however, taking on an increasingly practical air: running the burgeoning memorial fund; shops handling record sales of Elton John's "Candle in the Wind 1997" song; Diana books staring from shop windows.

The memorial fund is now at 8 million pounds (dls 12.8 million), and possible headed to 200 million pounds (dls 320 million) with the "Candle in the Wind" sales.

And then there's the battle to stop mementos turning tacky — and gifts getting sold.

Trustees, including Diana's sister, Lady Sarah McCorquodale, are negotiating with companies to make approved products for sale in aid of the fund.

Voluntary groups who cleared some 25,000 tons of flowers from in front of Kensington Palace in two weeks boxed all the cards.

But some 3,000 of the toys left by mourners, the ones that weren't burned by vigil candles, are being distributed anonymously to children's hospitals and homes so recipients won't know the toys had been left in memory of Diana.

"There's a feeling that someone might make a fuss if they got a Diana toy," said Carol Mayers, a director of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, which is distributing the toys along with other charity gifts. "One wouldn't like to see a whole load of Diana's toys on a street market stall in a year's time."

Quake jolts Italy: 10 die

ASSISI, Italy, Sept 27: The earthquake's first jolt dug deep cracks into the precious frescoes of the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi. But as friars and engineers gathered to behold the damage, even greater tragedy struck, reports AP.

With several dozen people inside the 13th century church, the second jolt sent huge sections of the vaulted ceiling crashing to the ground in an explosion of white dust. Four in the group were killed; one friar, another about to take his vows and two structural experts.

Six other people also died Friday when several tremors hit earthquake-prone central Italy. Dozens of people were pulled out alive from under piles of debris, at least 12 people were injured and some 2,500 were left temporarily homeless.

The first tremor, with a 5.5 magnitude, struck at 2:33 am and was centred around Foligno in Umbria, a region dotted with historic towns. It was felt as far away as Rome, 90 miles (140 kilometres) to the southwest.

At 11:30 am, the mayor of Assisi, regional cultural officials, several friars, engineers and reporters went to the basilica to inspect the damage. AP photographer Plinio Lepri was with the group.

"I was taking pictures of the frescoes when I felt a first tremor," he said. "Maybe five minutes later, there was a stronger one and in that instant it seemed like everything fell around me."

"There was dust everywhere. I couldn't see anything. The rubble was up to my hips. I saw a light in one part of the cathedral. I had to climb over rubble, and kept falling. I was kind of in shock. I went toward the light and managed to get out a window," he recounted.

Other historical monuments were damaged in the earthquakes but the 13th century basilica was the hardest hit.

One of the world's most popular tourist attractions, it is most famous for 28 frescoes depicting the life of the 13th century saint who founded the Franciscan order.

UN won't send peacekeepers to Congo

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 27: The United Nations put off a decision Friday on sending an international force to Congo saying conditions for such a deployment had not been met, reports AP.

The factions to the fighting have failed to implement a ceasefire UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had demanded as a condition for the deployment of the troops.

"We believe that before there is commitment of a peacekeeping force, there'll be a political framework and that hasn't happened yet," said US Ambassador Bill Richardson, this month's president of the UN Security Council.