Russian servicemen killed: Four Russian servicemen were killed and three wounded when a military truck struck a column of troops, officials said on

Tuesday, AP reports from Moscow. The accident happened near the city of Budyonnovsk in southern Russian when the truck's driver lost control of the heavy vehicle. There was an evidence that the military driver was drunk, the Interfax news agency reported, quoting local military officials. The report didn't say when the accident occurred.

Strong quake shakes Japan: A fairly strong earthquake, with a preliminary magnitude of 6.5, shook southern Japan Tuesday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, AP reports from Tokyo.

The Central Meteorological Agency issued tidal wave warnings for the Pacific coast off Tokyo and neighbouring areas. The agency said the quake, at 3:28 pm (0628 GMT), was centered about 20 kilometres (12 miles) under sea off Torishima Island in the Pacific, 650 kilometres (390 miles) south of Tokyo.

Indonesian quake kills 18 so far: The death toll from a strong earthquake and its aftershocks in the northwestern Indonesian island of Sulawesi has risen to 18, and damage has been estimated at 6.8 billion rupiah (2.1 million dollars), a report said yesterday, AFP says from Jakarta.

The latest death was a 52-year-old woman who died from heart failure after a strong aftershock early on Monday, the Antara News Agency said without quoting sources. The report said the quake caused 6.8 billion rupiah in damages in Pare Pare. the Pinrang district and in the town of Sidraq, all in an area facing the strait of Makassar where the tremor was centred.

Birth rate declines in India: India's birth rate declined 0.9 points from 1995 to 1996, the largest drop in recent years, a news agency reported Tuesday. AP reports from New Delhi.

United News of India, citing the most up to date figures from the government's registrar general, said the birth rate declined to 27.4 per thousand in 1996 from 28.3 in 1995. Between 1994 and 1995 it declined by only 0.4 points, and was steady over 1993-1994. India has struggled to control its population, expected to reach 1 billion in the next century.

Air crash kills 3 in Taiwan: Two Taiwan military fighter planes collided yesterday near the eastern city of Hualien, killing three pilots, the Air Force Headquarters said, AFP reports from Taipei.

PNG Finance Minister sacked: Papua New Guinea Finance Minister Roy Yaki has been sacked after just three months in office, Prime Minister Bill Skate announced, Reuter days from Port Moresby.

Skate told reporters late on Monday that Yaki was dismissed on poor economic management and for damaging PNG's bilateral relationships with China by visiting Taiwan without cabinet approval. Yaki was replaced by Public Service Minister Iario Lasaro, who also replaced Yaki as leader of the People's Democratic Movement (PDM) at a special party caucus meeting held over the weekend.

Fiji rejoins Commonwealth: Fiji rejoined the Commonwealth yesterday as its 54th member state, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said in a statement, AFP reports from Suva.

The announcement followed an official communique from Commonwealth Secretary-General chief Emeka Anyaoku welcoming Fiji's re-admission after a 10-year absence. Fiji was ousted from membership of the Commonwealth at the Vancouver meeting in October 1987 after a second military coup which declared Fiji a republic, replacing the Queen as head of the coun-

dies as bridge collapses in US: Scaffolding on the Queensboro Bridge collapsed, killing one worker and injuring five others who were left dangling by their safety harnesses high above the East River, AP says from New

Two cranes were lifting a 60-foot (18-metre) long piece of scaffolding beneath the bridge's roadbed when the scaffolding buckled Monday; collapsing in a "V" and causing the workers to lose their footing. What caused the scaffold to buckle had not been determined. The scaffolding was being installed in preparation for repair work. One worker, Thomas Malcolm, 48, of the borough of queens, fell to the bottom of the "V" and suffered fatal head injuries. It was unclear why his harness did not hold him in place.

5 executed in China: Five drug traffickers have been executed by gunshot in southwest China, and another 22 have been sentenced to die, an official newspaper said Tuesday, AP reports from Beijing.

The five were executed in Chongqing after the city's No. 1 Intermediate People's Court confirmed their sentences Friday, the China Youth Daily said. Another 22 drug traffickers also were sentenced to death Friday by the Chongqing court, the newspaper said. It did not say whether the sentences have been carried

2 die during fitness test in India: Two young Indian men died of heart attacks while being tested for physical fitness during a recruitment drive by the state-run Railway Network, the Indian Express newspaper said yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Rajan Meshram and Pramod Chavande, both 21, collapsed during a 1,500-metre (4,950-foot) race in the western city of Nagpur, the Express said. Railway authorities supervising the test first thought the men were suffering from exhaustion. But they were later found to have suffered from cardiac arrest when they were later taken to the hospital where they died.

5 held for killing 2 in Colombia: Five people suspected in the murder of two Colombian rights workers in a brazen attack in the capital were arrested, prosecutors said Monday, AP reports from Bogota.

Four men and one woman were captured Sunday during a series of police raids in the northwest city of Medellin. They face homicide charges, according to the chief prosecutor's office. The suspects are accused of killing Mario Calderon, 50, and Elsa Constanza Alvarado, 36, a couple who worked on human rights projects. They were shot to death May 19 in their Bogota apartment by at least five submachine gun-wielding men posing as federal agents.

Haze recedes

Domestic flights resume in Malaysia

Sumatra.

ing areas.

the future as well.

donated to Malaysia.

Department, however, warned a change in wind direction could

bring back the pollution from

thousands of hectares of forests

still burning in Indonesian

Kalimantan and Indonesian

offering assistance to tackle the

problem and a French team is

here to teach Malaysian fire-

men how to fight fires from he-

licopters, including ferrying

water and water bombing burn-

told reporters the training

would help the Malaysians in

perts on respiration and air

pollution arrived Monday,

bringing 139,000 dollars worth

of fire-fighting equipment to be

they would carry out research

on the health effects of the haze.

which has been around for the

past two months, and would

The Star daily reported that

although rain fell in some parts

of Sarawak state on Borneo is-

land after weeks of drought

health authorities warned vil-

lagers not to drink the water

unless it was properly treated

because pollutants in the haze

had caused acid rain.

submit it to the government.

Leader Takeshi Ishii said

Team leader Philippe Cova

A team of six Japanese ex-

France is one of few nations

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 30: Malaysia Airlines (MAS) said Tuesday it had resumed all domestic flights as the thick haze that led to intermittent cancellations over the past two weeks receded, reports AP.

MAS media relations controller Fadhilah Mustaffa said when contacted by telephone that there were, however, a few delays on domestic flights because of haze over some airports.

For example, the airport here was closed for an hour this morning because of the haze,"

she said. Daily flights to and from Medan, in Indonesian Sumatra. had also resumed Tuesday after the Polonia Airport opened

there, Fadhilah said. The Airport had been closed due to haze as well as the crash of an Indonesian Garuda Air Bus Friday night.

The smog had lightened further in most areas of the nation Tuesday, the Department of Environment said.

In seven of 18 areas where air quality is monitored the Air Pollutant Index (API) had

moved to the "good" level Tuesday, compared to just five areas Monday.

In all other areas the API registered a "moderate" level of airborne pollutants. The Meteorological Services

Arafat in Morocco to examine possibility of Arab summit

RABAT, Morocco, Sept 30: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived in the Moroccan capital Monday, his third stop in two days on a North African tour to try to mount what he said would be an "urgent Arab summit meeting," reports AP.

On his arrival, Arafat denounced "Israel's intransigence and non-respect of the Oslo accords."

He spoke as a resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was announced in New York.

Arafat said he would meet with King Hassan II to examine "the possibility of an urgent Arab summit" and discuss other issues. The monarch, who heads the Al Qods Committee of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, has played a be-hind-the-scenes role in the peace process and served as a link between Israelis and Palestinians.

In the Tunisian capital of Tunis earlier Monday, Arafat said the Israeli government has not given its foreign minister the power to make needed decisions in negotiations.

Foreign Minister David Levy has not been given "The prerogatives allowing him to decide on important and urgent ques-

tions," Arafat said, nevertheless expressing hope "for results" at the negotiating table.

Arafat met with Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and with Algerian President Liamine Zeroual

The Palestinian leader called for the Arab summit "to form a common position" after Israel said it was ready to restart the peace process after a six-month stalemate.

In his meeting with the Tunisian leader, Arafat reaffirmed the Palestinians' "Determination" that Israel respect the calendar for the redeployment and withdrawal of Israeli troops and 'Which is running late despite the presence of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright who was unable to convince the Israeli government," Arafat said. Arafat hammered at the gov-

ernment of Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu. It refused

"The rigorous and faithful application of accords signed at the White House under the sponsorship of President Clinton and which are international agreements", Arafat said. Arafat's political counselor,

Nabil Abouradeneh, urged creation of a "mechanism" to monitor the application of the

existing peace accords. The watchdog process would

bring "Credibility to negotiations because we have signed accords and we demand that they be applied," Abourdeneh told reporters on Sunday.

Abourdeneh said Monday's scheduled meeting between US, Israeli and Palestinian officials in New York will show "How much Israel is ready to respect the signed accords." Israel's decision Sunday to

unfreeze half the tax revenue

owed to the Palestinians - dlrs 17 million "Must be followed by other steps and we demand restitution of all the Palestinians' funds," said Abourdeneh. He also called on the United States to "Play a dynamic and

effective role and put pressure on Israel to respect its commitments." Meanwhile, a new poll of American Jews suggests that

the majority of them support a slowdown of Israeli settlement expansion as a means to achieve peace, and believe that the United States should pressure the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to restart the peace pro-

The results were released Monday, just hours before Secretary of State Madeleine Al-

bright announced that Israel and the Palestinians had agreed to resume negotiations after a six-month stalemate.

Eighty-nine per cent of those polled support the peace process, while 84 per cent said they thought the United States should apply pressure to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

US, UK reaffirm support for Iraqi opposition to unseat Saddam

LONDON, Sept 30: Britain and the United States have "reaffirmed their support" for the Iraqi opposition and its bid to unseat President Saddam Hussein, the opposition said after a meeting held here on Monday, reports AFP.

"British and American officials reaffirmed their support for the Iraqi opposition and the objected of establishing democracy in Iraq," the Iraqi National Congress (INC) said in a statement.



A model wears a pink see-through top with a bright blue and gold pattern skirt by British designer Paul Frith during his Spring/Summer 98 show in London, Monday. Frith's show is part of London Fashion Weel.

- AP/UNB photo

Outgoing head of UN nuclear energy agency says

Iraq may be hiding more nuclear secrets despite monitoring

VIENNA, Austria, Sept 30: The outgoing head of the UN's nuclear energy agency warned delegates to its annual conference on Monday that Iraq could still be hiding military nuclear secrets despite years of intensive inspections and monitoring, reports AP.

"The blank spots in this picture have become fewer," said Hans Blix of Sweden at the International Atomic Energy Agency's 41st annual conference. "But it's not impossible that some equipment might be undetected. Iraq is under UN orders to

scrap nuclear, biological and chemicals weapons programmes and long-range missiles as part of international policing of its armaments following the 1991 Gulf War. The UN Security Council is

waiting for an October 11 report by weapons inspectors on whether Iraq has honoured its promises to stop blocking their efforts. Until the inspection team certifies compliance, the council will not lift crippling

economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after President Saddam Hussein sent his forces into Kuwait in 1990, touching off the Gulf War.

Iraqi and North Korean secretiveness about their nuclear programmes has kept inspectors of the agency busy. North Korea is also suspected of at least trying to manufacture an atomic weapon behind the backs of the agency, which acts both as the UN watchdog on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and the promoter of peaceful nuclear use.

"The completeness of the inventory they have provided cannot be verified," Blix said of North Korea's plutonium supplies. Agency inspectors monitor declared plutonium amounts as one way of trying to establish whether nuclear material is being diverted from peaceful to military use.

South Korean representative Sook-Il Kwun criticised the "irresponsible and non-cooperative behavior" of North Korea

and said, "This frustrating situation should not be allowed to continue.

Delegates from Japan and the European Union also expressed concern over North Korea's refusal to cooperate with the agency

Only the US delegation, led by Secretary of Energy Federico Pena, spoke of any cooperation with North Korea. Under a 1994 agreement, North Korea is working with the United States to safely store used nuclear fuel.

Pena also spoke of progress at home in taking nuclear material used in US weapons and converting it to peaceful uses.

Russia also is taking similar steps. Pena said, as the two countries work together with the atomic energy agency.

"But I would hope that progress is not limited to the United States and Russia," Pena said. "All five nuclear weapons states have a shared responsibility to place excess fissile materials under agency inspection."

US House extends time limit of application for legal residence WASHINGTON, Sept 30: A residence, either because they're gious organizations, benefits

day before thousands of illegal immigrants lose their eligibility to remain in the United States while applying for legal residence, the House acted Monday to extend the deadline by three weeks, reports AP. On a 355-57 vote, the House

approved a stopgap bill bankrolling government operations beyond the Oct. 1 start of the fiscal year. The bill, which finances government through Oct. 23 while Congress completes its appropriations process, also would extend to that date the immigration provision due to expire at midnight Tuesday. The Senate is due to take up similar legislation Tuesday.

Immigrant communities nationwide have been in a panic in recent weeks over possible loss of the measure that allows undocumented immigrants to file here for legal status instead of at US consulates abroad. In exchange, filers must pay a dirs 1,000 fine.

The legislation does not benefit all the 5 million-plus illegal immigrants living in the United States. Instead, it is targeted at those eligible for legal

already in line for visas or are the spouse or minor child of a US citizen. Parents of adult children who are US citizens also can apply.

Some 345,000 people took advantage of the rule in 1995 and 1996. This year, an estimated 214,000 are applying.

Critics say the programme should be ended. They contend the government shouldn't reward immigrants who are here unlawfully at the expense of those who are following the rules. Extension also would foster more illegal immigration, they say. "This is blatantly unfair to

the millions of people around the world who abide by our laws... and wait their turn," said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, urging his colleagues to defeat the legislation. "It makes a joke of our immigration system. Lawmakers will decide next

month whether to renew them provision for a longer period. The Senate already has approved a permanent extension. Immigrant-rights groups argue that the provision, which is supported by business and relionly those who already are on track for legal residence.

Vintage car rally Two Germans die in collision in Pakistan

QUETTA, Sept 30: A German father and his son taking part in a 16,000-kilometer (9,920mile) vintage car rally died when their car smashed into a passenger bus in western Pakistan, Pakistani officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

The two men, identified as Rene and Josef Fiet, were driving in the Beijing-Paris Vintage Car Rally toward the western Pakistani city of Quetta Monday when the crash took place, officials said up to to to a saw din Rene Fiet died immediately

when his wintage: Volkswagen careened into a bus 12 kilometers (7 miles) north of Quetta. His son, Josef, who suffered head injuries, died later at a local hospital, official said.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright looks on as Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, left, shakes hands with Palestinian Authority negotiator Mahmoud Abbas before their meeting in New York Monday. Israelis and Palestinians agreed Monday to resume negotiations, ending a six-month stalemate and breaking what Albright called "A downward spiral" in the Mideast. — AP/UNB photo

Investigators visit Di-Dodi's car crash site, bring wrecked Mercedes

PARIS, Sept 30: A month after the crash that killed Princess Diana, investigators returned to the Pont de l'Alma tunnel Monday - bringing with them the wrecked Mercedes for an attempt to reconstruct the accident, reports AP.

Police closed off traffic at about 8 pm and forced dozens of journalists and cameramen away from both entrances to the tunnel along the Seine River, where Diana's Mercedes crashed into a cement pillar in the early-morning hours of August 31.

About an hour into the operation, a flatbed truck arrived with the wrecked vehicle on top, wrapped completely in dark green plastic, and slowly backed into the tunnel.

Before that, three cars were driven at several-minute intervals into the tunnel, watched carefully by investigators from the elite Criminal Brigade police unit.

Cars also were sent into the tunnel from the opposite direction, apparently to see what witnesses could have made out from that vantage point. Investigators set up a tripod near the entrance with an engi-

neering tool used to measure distance and trajectory. They also used tape measures, and examined marks on the tunnel's wall.

Judge Herve Stephan, one of two judges heading the probe. was believed on the scene, along with a top prosecutor in the case, Maud Coujard. Stephen already has made one fact-finding trip to the tunnel. In their efforts to keep on-

lookers and journalists away, police closed off the sidewalks near the tunnel, blocked the view with large trucks and even searched nearby bushes with flashlights to make sure no one was watching.

The approach road to the tunnel was blocked off all the way back to the Place de la Concorde — not far from the Ritz Hotel, where the Mercedes began its fateful journey the night of the crash. Cars were backed up on the adjoining road, and some slowed down to watch the action — causing at least one minor collision. No one was hurt.

Although investigators clearly were attempting at least a partial reconstruction of the crash, it wasn't a complete one

in the legal sense, because that would have meant lawyers for the various parties - including those representing the photographers under investigation in the crash - would have been present.

Reconstructions are typically used by French authorities to iron out inconsistencies in testimony and test out various theories. Investigators have been fo-

cusing on excessive speed and the blood-alcohol level of the driver, Henri Paul, as likely causes of the crash. Paul, who was legally drunk at the time, was killed along with Diana and her boyfriend, Dodi Fayed. But they also have been looking at the role of nine photographers and one press motorcyclist who were tailing the Mercedes that night. The 10 are under formal investigation for

manslaughter and failure to assist people in danger. Police also are looking into the possibility that a second car was involved in the crash. They are searching for the owner of small car, probably a Fiat Uno. that may have sideswiped the Mercedes, causing it to veer out of control.

Muslims won't be misled by BSP minister's

announcement'

FAIZABAD, UP, Sept 30: The Ayodhya-Faizabad Babri Masjid Action Committee convenor, Wasi Khan, today said the Muslim community would not be misled by the announcement of BSP minister, Buniyad Mussain Ansari, in the coalition government, led by Kalyan Singh, that he would offer Namaz (prayer) at the disputed site in Ayodhya, reports

Terming the announcement of Ansari as a mere "political stunt" Khan said the Muslims were aware of the game plan of the BSP and the BJP that these announcements were aimed at winning over the Muslim sup-

Khan said Muslims were aware that the BSP which was saying that it would look after the interests of the minorities were running the government with the support and backing of the "forces" responsible for demolition of Babri Masjid in

Diana's dress fetches \$ 2m at benefit auction

BOSTON, Sept 30: An anonymous buyer from Florida paid dollars 2m at a benefit auction for a black velvet gown that Princess Diana wore to the London opening of the musical "Les Miserables" in 1985, re-

ports AP. Barbara Jordan, a philanthropist and owner of a Boston boutique, bought the gown in May for dlrs 36,000 at an auction of Diana's dresses at Christie's in New York. Jordan donated the dress to Community Servings, a local charity that provides meals to people with AIDS.

"Diana was one of the original celebrities to commit time and effort to the fight against AIDS," said the group's executive director, Dede Ketover. "As beneficiaries, we are pleased to honour the princess's memory in the spirit in which she lived her life.

The winning bid was placed over the phone. The benefit was held at the Four Seasons hotel. Diana was killed last month

in a car crash in Paris. In August, Jordan donated another of Diana's dresses that she had bought at Christie's. The burgundy velvet dress raised dirs 25,000 at a celebrity auction benefiting several community service groups on Martha's Vineyard, where Jordan also has a house.

Lawyer says

\$13 b belonging to Marcos found in Swiss bank

LOS ANGELES, Sept 30: A lawyer for victims of the regime of Ferdinand Marcos told a judge on Monday that investigators had found close to 13 billion dollars belonging to the estate of the late Philippines leader in a Swiss bank, reports Reuter.

US District Court Judge Manuel Real imposed a temporary injunction on the Union Bank of Switzerland, one of that country's major financial institutions, ordering it not to move any of the money in ques-Under Real's order, assets

held by the bank in the United States could be seized should his order be disobeyed. Union Bank of Switzerland has a number of branches in Amer-The 13 billion dollars figure was believed to be far higher

than any previous estimates of the money stashed away by Marcos during his two decades in power. Earlier, lawyers for human rights victims during Marcos'

rule accused the family and un-

named Manila officials of

conniving to sell two tons of

gold from secret Swiss accounts of the former president.

The former victims were awarded 2 billion dollars in damages by a US court for the ordeals they suffered under the regime and are fighting for ownership of Marcos' assets kept in Switzerland.

Yeltsin threatens to dissolve Duma

MOSCOW, Sept 30: Russian President Boris Yeltsin today issued a veiled threat to dissolve the Duma, the lower house of parliament, amid persistent wrangling with his government, Russian news agencies

reported, says AFP. According to the constitution, we are witnessing a clear disagreement between the government and the Duma. The Duma should reflect on what the president must do in such a situation, Yeltsin was quoted as saying by Interfax and Itar-

Monks protest Colombo's peace package for Tamils

COLOMBO, Sept 30: Hun- government troops and Tamil dreds of saffron robed Buddhist monks demonstrated in Sri Lanka's capital Tuesday, demanding that the government scrap its plan to give minority Tamils more powers to rule

themselves, reports AP.

The monks placed flowers at a statue of Buddha, then sat for three hours on a street in front of Colombo's City Hall, waving placards and shouting slogans. They drank coconut milk to quench their thirst in the heat of the tropical midday sun.

The government has proposed giving more autonomy to the country's eight regions, including a Tamil dominated one, more to contain an ethnic Tamil separatist war in Sri Lanka's northeast.

A parliamentary committee is writing the plan into a new constitution, but the main opposition United National Party, whose support is crucial in parliament, has not decided on its stand. If parliament approves of the plan, it must pass a refer-

endum. The plan will allow the regions sweeping powers over everything but the military, foreign affairs and banking. A 14-year-old war between

rebels has so far claimed more than 50,000 lives. Tamils say they are discriminated against in jobs and education by the Sinhalese, who dominate the government and military. Sri Lanka's Buddhist monks

have traditionally championed the rights of the majority ethnic Sinhalese, who are mostly Buddhists. Seventy per cent of Sri Lankans are Buddhists. Most Tamils, who are 18 per cent of the country's 18 million people, are Hindu.

Many monks carried placards criticising the government's official spokesman, Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera, for condemning a hardline Sinhalese group which wants parliament to reject the state's proposals.
"We demand that the media

the monks, Inamaluwe Ananda. Samaraweera said Tuesday that his remarks were being

minister apologise for insulting

the Sinhalese race," said one of

used to mislead the monks, and said he had wanted to "Draw attention to the serious consequences" of not solving the Tamil issue.