

Taliban fighters on their Russian made vehicles rush to the front-line, 20 kilometres north of Kabul Sunday. After heavy fighting, Taliban took control of Shebergan city from warlord - AP/UNB photo Rashid Dostum's forces in the north of Afghanistan Sunday.

Mazar-e-Sharif tense as Taliban troops closing in

Azizullah Shasaq, a spokesman for the Hezb-e-Wahadat militia that controls Mazar-e-Sharif, confirmed his ally warlord Rashing Dostum had lost Shebergan, about 100 km west of Mazar-e-Sharif. Taliban sources said they captured many of Dostum's fighters, but had no firm figures or casualty report, and were advancing on Mazare-e-Sharif from the west

Taliban radio reported Sunday that fighters also had broken through enemy defence miles east of Mazar-e-Sharif. Red Cross spokesman

Michel Schaffner, speaking by telephone from Peshawar, on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, said about 10 aid workers in Mazer-e-Sharif had requested the Red Cross to evacuate them. Schaffner said Monday the Red Corss would have to "assess the security situation' before flying in.

Mazar-e-Sharif was "very tense," he said.

Seven expatriate Red Cross workers flew out of Mazar-e-Sharif to the Afghan capital of Kabul Sunday, leaving behind a handful of Afghan staff, Schaffner said. Their departure was routine, he said. The Red Cross has been overseeing projects in Mazare-e-Sharif from Kabul because the security in the northern town has long been considered unpredictable.

Taliban fighters briefly held Mazar-e-Sharif last May but retreated after street battles. mostly with Hezb-e-Wahadat fighters, that left several hundred Taliban fighters dead. It is believed that as many as 2,000 Taliban soldiers who were taken prisoner in that fighting were later massacred.

AFP adds: A Taliban military transport plane has crashed during a routine supply flight to frontlines in northern Afghanistan, official sources said today.

State-run Radio Shariat said the aged Soviet-made Anotonov 32 crashed while approaching for landing at their northern enclave of Kunduz and blamed technical problems for the

Ex-French marine's high-speed driving maybe a factor in Di's car crash

LONDON, Aug 3: A French former marine was quoted on Sunday as saying his high-speed driving might have been a major factor in the car crash which killed Princess Diana last year, reports Reuters.

Francois Levistre, 54, told Britain's Sunday People newspaper: "thinking about it carefully, I now understand how I could have helped cause the

"I was close behind the car, as much as 10 metres, and my driving may have caused it to

swerve and lose control." Levistre, a truck driver by profession, said he was speed-ing in a dark grey Ford Ka through the Paris underpass last August where the princess car crashed.

His comments came in an interview with investigators working for journalist Nicholas Farrel who is writing a book on the crash, the newspaper said.

Cross-border artillery fire continues

Sharif warns India to stop being 'irresponsible'

LAHORE, Pakistan, Aug 3: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif brought the nuclear issue into the Kashmir dispute Sunday, and warned India to stop being "irresponsible" as the rival forces continued their cross-border artillery fire,

reports AFP. The death toll passed 90 from five days of fighting, and villagers who fled their homes along the Indian side of the frontier described the fighting as all-out war, with the sky lit up by tracer bullets and artillery flashes at night.

A top Indian Air Force offi-cial told AFP in Srinagar: "We are ready for any eventuality and are on total alert. However, I do not foresee a war breaking

Sharif accused New Delhi of

Triggering the clashes and said the shelling was not in the interests of the two nuclear states "India must remember that

there are now two nuclear states in the South Asian Sub-continent, their new status demands of them greater responsible attitude," he said.

Eight Pakistanis and three Indians were killed Sunday, officials on both sides said.

An official Indian statement said "three more persons, including two women, were killed in Uri, about 100 kilometres north of the Indian town of Srinagar "due to shelling by Pakistani troops.'

Pakistani officials said two bodies were found in a stream near the frontier town of Chinari, 51 kilometres South of

3: Fighting intensified Sunday

leashed a wave of new attacks

on villages in the centre and

west of the separatist province,

while rebel leaders urged the in-

ternational community to re-

sources reported clashes in the

central Drenica and western

Djakovica regions of Kosovo,

leaving around 10 dead and

sending thousands of others

Belgrade's week-long attempt to

deal a knock-out blow to ethnic

Albanian separatists was con-

tinuing, despite recent pledges

by Yugoslav President Slobo-

dan Milosevic that he had

The Kosovo Democratic

League (LDK), the main ethnic

Albanian party in the southern

Serbian province, said dozens

of Albanian civilians had been

killed since the offensive began

The reports indicate that

fleeing from their homes.

called off his troops.

a week ago.

Serb and Ethnic Albanian

act, reports AFP.

in Kosovo as Serb forces un-

Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani -administered Kashmir, and six people were killed in the Nikroun, Shahkot

and keil sectors. Both sides have accused each other of triggering the fighting. which erupted last week as Sharif and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee held

talks in Sir Lanka.

Pakistan's Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Majid Malik, said the Indian shelling was a pre-planned "conspiracy" to sabotage the talks, but Pakistan would not be intimidated.

Meanwhile, Indian and Pakistani forces traded artillery fire in the disputed Kashmir re-gion for a fifth day in a row today as the death toll passed 90. Indian officials in the dis-

puted Himalayan territory said

Fighting intensifies in Kosovo

the exchanges had stopped for a few hours during Sunday night but began again in the - rning.

They said two more deaths in Indian territory had been recorded, taking the total to 34, while 56 people have been reported on the Pakistan side

since Thursday. India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir since their independence in 1947, and the long-running dispute regularly erupts into skirmishes.

The northern Himalayan state is seen by many as a nuclear flashpoint in the region.

The United States had been leading international calls for the dispute to be solved as a matter of urgency following nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May.

ISLAMABAD, Aug 3: Mazare-Sharif in northern Afghanistan was described as tense Monday, a day after Taliban fighters captured a nearby town and claimed to be closing in on their enemies' stronghold from two directions, reports

lines at Ahrytan, about 40

50 suspected Tamils arrested

Police thwart LTTE plan for attacks on Colombo

BBBBBB

Japanese PM wants to visit Russia:

Japan's new prime minister wants to visit Russia as early as

November to discuss a territorial dispute that has blocked the

two countries from signing a formal peace treaty to end World

ritory) returned as soon as possible." Prime Minister Keizo

Fidel Castro in Granada: President Fidel

Castro arrived Sunday at the Point Salines Airport, which was

begun by Cuban workers and completed by the United States

bados where he unveiled a memorial to the 73 victims of the

bombing of Cubana Airlines Flight 455. It crashed off the is-

2 killed on Tajik-Afghan border:

Russian troops guarding Tajikistan's southern border killed

two suspected drug smugglers and captured four more men in a

Afghanistan, the site of frequent clashes between Russian

troops and drug smugglers, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

The Russian troops also seized 30 kilograms of opium from the

8 shot dead in Colombia: At least eight

people were shot dead and four wounded Sunday in Colombia's

main oil port in what could be another attack by the country's

two days after a government report linked the military to a

Shell blast kills 3 in Vietnam: Three

people were killed and two others were seriously injured when a

war-era artillery shell exploded in the central province of Ha

to Vset off the detonator so they could get to the explosives and

Philippine military frees 5 Saudis: The

military has released five Saudi Arabian men suspected of

having trained Muslim guerrillas in the southern Philippines

after authorities found no evidence to support the suspicion,

tioning on Saturday in the town of Sultan Kudarat in Maguin-

An army spokesman said the five were taken in for ques-

The incident took place last Tuesday when the villagers tried

massacre of 36 people in the same city earlier this year.

Tinh, local police said yesterday, AP says from Hanoi.

and official said yesterday, AP says from Philippines.

The attack in Barrancabermeja in northeast Colombia came

The gun battle took place Sunday night on the frontier with

shootout, officials said yesterday, AP says from Moscow.

far right, police said, AFP says from Bogota.

sell the shell for scrap iron, police said.

danao province and released the next day.

Castro arrived in Granada at 1:28 pm (1728 GMT) from Bar

"I would definitely like to use such a chance to have (the ter-

War II, a news report said yesterday, AP says from Tokyo.

Obuchi was quoted as saying by Kyodo News agency.

after its 1983 invasion, AFP reports from St George's.

land's coast on October 6, 1976.

men, the report added.

COLOMBO, Aug 3: Sri Lankan police arrested 50'suspected Tamil rebels in citywide raids last week, claiming to have thwarted a plan for terrorist attacks on the capital, a state-run newspaper reported Monday, reports AP.

The arrests were made last Monday, two days before the opening of a seven-nation regional summit, said the Daily

Colombo police confirmed the arrests, but declined to give

Following the interrogation of four Tamil rebel suspects, arrested earlier, police picked up 50 suspects in raids on boarding houses, construction sites. restaurants and jewelry shops, the Daily News said.

It said the network had planned a series of bomb attacks and assassinations.

The paper said police discovered a new strategy of the main Tamil rebel group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, of sending infiltrators posing as construction workers and gold artisans. The gold business is dominated by Tamils in · · The Tigers have struck in Colombo several times in the past with car bombs and suicide squads, and have assassinated a president and several other leading politicians.

Militants among Sri Lanka's 3.3 million Tamils are fighting for an independent Tamil homeland saying they are discriminated against in Sri Lanka, a country of 18.5 million people off India's southern coast. More than 54,000 people have died in the insurrection that began in 1983.

Meanwhile. The Sri Lankan government plans to salvage the 60,000-ton MV Cordinality that was sunk off the country's eastern coast by Tamil Tiger rebels last year, officials said Monday.

Minister of Ports Development MHM Ashraff has asked the Marine Pollution Prevention Authority to select a salvage company by August 15 so that the operation can be carried out before the onset of the northeastern monsoon in late September, an official statement said.

King Fahd

hospitalised

RIYADH, Aug 3: King Fahd appeared weak, tired and in a wheelchair in a Saudi television broadcast of his admission to hospital for medical test yesterday, reports AFP.

The king, who is in his mid-70s and has been in ailing health for the past two years, feebly extended his hand to a string of well-wishers. Among them was his half-

brother, Crown Prince Abdallah Ibn Abdel Aziz, who has on previous occasions taken control of state affairs when the king is hospitalised.

Saudi television began broadcasting Quranic verses as the news was announced of the hospitalisation. But it later resumed normal programmes.

"The custodian of the two holy mosques. King Fahd Ibn Abdel Aziz, arrived today in Riyadh from Jeddah (west of the Kingdom) to undergo some medical tests at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital." the official SPA news agency said on Sunday.

"May Allah keep the custodian of the two holy mosques in good health," it added, without giving details of the tests.

Another picture of Clinton-Lewinsky intimacy emerges

WASHINGTON, Aug 3: Another photograph emerged Sunday showing President Bill Clinton and a smiling former White House intern Monica Lewinsky embracing, reports The photo, published on the

cover of Time magazine, shows the two in an embrace at an Octoher 1996 democratic party fundraiser. The photo is similar to a

frequently played videotape of an event at the White House where Clinton, as he greets members of a crowd, embraces Lewinsky.

Lewinsky is the former White House intern with whom Clinton allegedly had an affair.

Flash floods leave 100 dead in South Korea

SEOUL, Aug 3: Flash floods have left more than 100 persons dead or missing around South Korea's popular Mount Chiri resort, officials said today, as thousands of rescuers scoured the area, reports AFP.

Thirty-five bodies had been recovered by this morning but 60 people were still listed as missing, the Central Disaster Agency (CDA) said.

A fire fighter was killed and two of his colleagues injured during rescue and recovery operations Sunday as torrents continued to rush down the mountain amid heavy rains, the CDA official said. Forty-four families, includ-

ing 119 people, were left homeless, the official said. He said property damage in the rainstricken areas was estimated at about 41.40 billion won (33.38 million dollars).

Meanwhile, about 11,000 soldiers, police and government officials were on alert in southern provinces as weather experts issued fresh warnings of heavy rains which have already hit southern China.

Unanswered questions on Rajiv murder Cong to step up pressure for independent probe

NEW DELHI, Aug 3: India's main opposition Congress Party today vowed to step up pressure for an independent probe into unanswered questions in the 1991 assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, reports Reuter.

The Indian government said last week it would widen a probe into Rajiv murder by setting up a monitoring agency to follow up the report of a one-man investigating commission.

But the Congress, now led by Rajiv's widow, the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, said it was not satisfied.

"A general feeling is gradually gaining ground that the conspiracy did not end with the assassination, it continues even today to cover the role of those involved," wrote party leader Vishwajit Prithvijit Singh, in The Pioneer newspa-

Rajiv Gandi was killed by a Sri Lankan Tamil woman sui cide bomber at an election rally in May 1991 in the southern Indian town of Sriperumbudur, but the Congress has repeatedly called for a wider probe.

The party wants the role of foreign intelligence agencies and domestic political groups and individuals to be investigated in what it believes was a failure to provide adequate security to its charismatic leader.

The Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's highest decision making body, said on Sunday night that while it accepted the final report of the investigating commission headed by retired Judge Milap Chand Jain, it was not happy with the government's response to its recommendations.

Hun Sen's party leading in 8 provinces

Cambodian EC agrees to recount some results

Butler begins crucial talks

with Iraqi officials

PHNOM PENH, Aug 3: Responding to opposition complaints, Cambodia's Election Commission agreed Monday to recount votes from certain areas in last week's general election, reports AP. The recount was scheduled

later Monday even though pre-

liminary totals for slightly more than half of the 23 electoral constituencies have not vet been released. Results released so far from 11 provinces show Co-Premier

Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party leading in all but three of

One of the two constituencies captured by the opposition FUNCINPEC party was the central province of Kampong Cham, the country's biggest constituency, with 18 of the National Assembly's 122 seats.

While the National Election Committee has not estimated the allocation of seats among the winners, a projection by the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia, an independent election monitoring group, gives the ruling Cambodian People's Party 64 seats. FUNCINPEC 43 and its ally, the

BAGHDAD, Aug 3: UN arms

inspection chief Richard Butler

began crucial talks with Iraqi

officials in Baghdad today on

the last two months of weapons

inspections in the sanctions-

agency said, reports AFP.

Affairs, INA said.

hit state, the official INA news

Iraqi negotiating team led by

Deputy Prime Minister Tareq

Aziz at the Ministry of Foreign

Foreign Minister Mohammad

Said al-Sahhaf, Oil Minister

Amerrashid, Transport Minis-

ter Ahmed Murtada and Iraq's

Butler arrived in Baghdad on

UN envoy Nizar Hamdoon.

Butler and his party met the

The Iraqi team includes

Sam Rainsy Party, 15. A spokesman for the Na; tional Election Committee said Monday he hoped preliminary tallies would be completed for all constituencies Tuesday or Wednesday, but that the com-

mittee had not yet received all

documentation from two

Rattanakiri. The spokesman also defended the committee's decision to change the mathematical formula by which the winners of the July 26 vote will be allocated their parliamentary seats, explaining at length that

well before the election. The change in formula, which was not widely publicised until late last week, favours the top vote-getting party in any particular province.

it was approved and publicised

In practice, this would work to the advantage of the ruling party, and is significant because it could provide that party with enough extra seats - over the original formula - to attain a parliamentary majority.

Sunday saying he hoped for "good results" from the talks.

this done as soon as possible, to

get to the end of the disarma-

ment phases so the (UN) Secu-

rity Council could consider he

sanctions issue," Butler told re-

cover "what has been achieved

through the work schedule"

agreed by both sides in June,

hoped to present a favourable

report on Iraqi weapons in-

spections to the UN when it next

discusses the lifting of the em-

The Butler-Aziz talks will

At the time, Butler said he

porters in Baghdad.

Butler said.

bargo in October.

"Our steadfast aim is to get

Special amnesty for political prisoners in ROK

SEOUL, Aug 3: South Korea is considering releasing a large number of political prisoners in a special amnesty to be announced by President Kim Dae-Jung on August 15, officials said today, reports AFP.

The amnesty, marking the 50th anniversary of South Korea's founding in 1948, may benefit dozens of prisoners held for pro-North Korean or leftist activities, a justice ministry official said.

"This will be a revolutionary step in our judicial history to reflect President Kim's human rights policy," he said.

PRISTINA. Yugoslavia. Aug Its presidency appealed for day of relative calm Saturday. appeared to give the answer. the international community An AFP correspondent saw to "abandon its indifference Serb forces shelling the villages and react with more determiof Kelecka and Nekovec, in cennation" in resolving the crisis tral Kosovo, sending thousands in Kosovo, whose 90 per cent of inhabitants fleeing to the ethnic Albanian majority

wants independence. The LDK leadership said world leaders "silence and passivity" had merely encouraged Serb aggression.

Rebels of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) have this week suffered a wave of setbacks in the face of the widespread Serb operation, losing control of several strongholds and their grip on key supply roads.

On Thursday, Milosevic told a European Union delegation which met him in Belgrade that the offensive in Kosovo "has come to a halt."

However a diplomatic source said he did not specify if his pledge concerned only the area around Malisevo, a former KLA stronghold captured on Tuesday, or the whole province. Sunday's fighting, after a

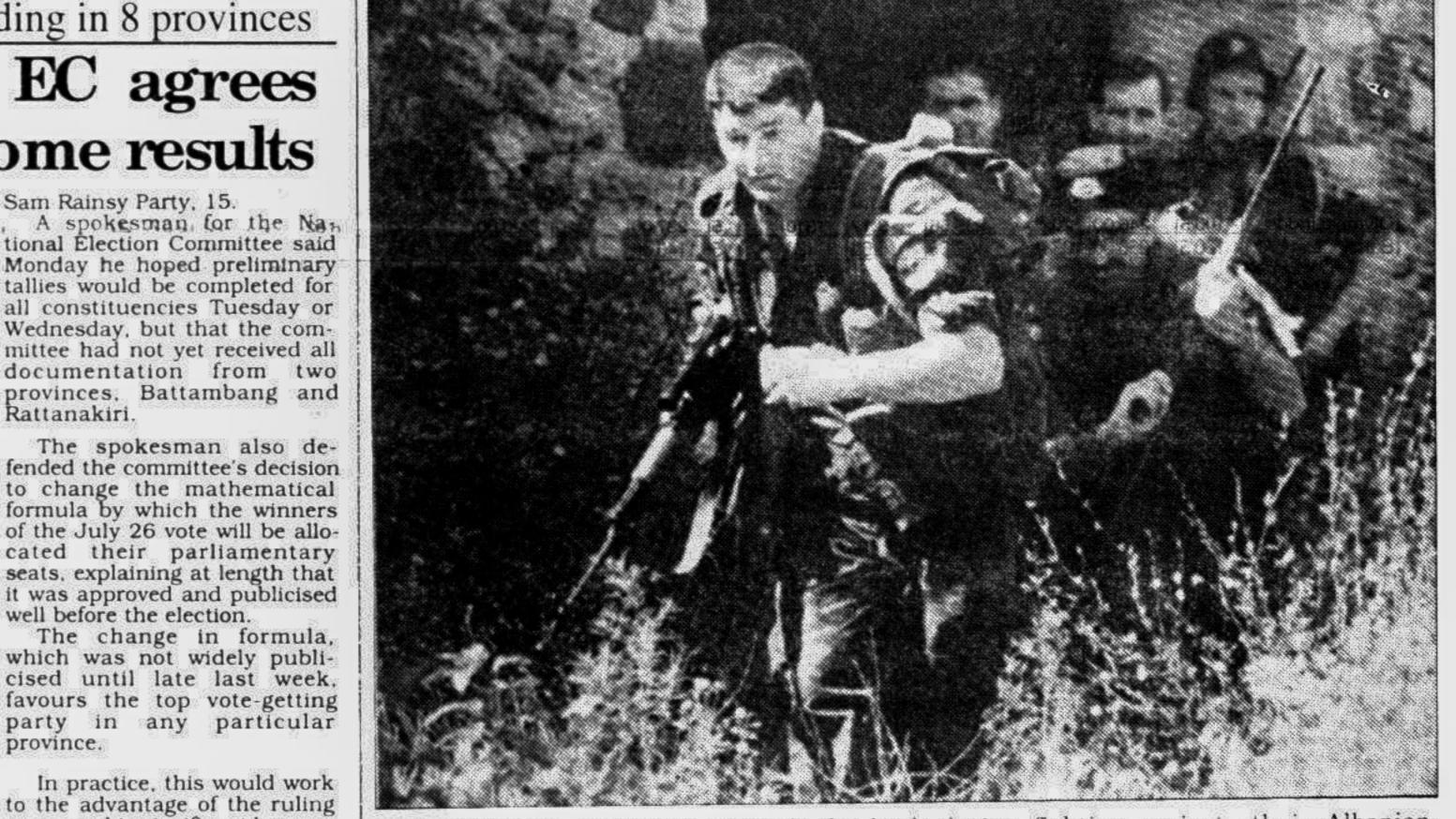
rate of one every 15 minutes into the valley on the road between Pristina and the western town of Pec. An ethnic Albanian human

nearby hills. The shells fell at a

rights official, Murt Musliu, speaking to AFP by telephone from Srbica in central Kosovo. said the Serbs started bombarding nearby Lausa and Poljance at day break. His report was confirmed by a well-informed Serbian sources, who said an operation was underway against the two villages.

ing spread to two villages surrounding Glogovac and Klina, respectively southeast and southwest of Srbica. He said eight Albanians had been

According to Musliu, fight-



Serb policemen advancing through the bush during fighting against ethnic Albanian militants of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in the village of Prilep, some 80 km southwest of Pristina Sunday. Police trying to secure Pec-Djakovica road, one of the strategir road in Kosovo frequently attacked by Albanian rebels. - AP/UNB photo

Off the Record

World's strongest man BUDAPEST: "man-mountain" contestants from nine countries heaved and hoed, grunted and groaned, and in the end, Riku Kiri of Finland emerged the winner Sunday in the In-Kal Cup "strongest man" contest, reports AP. On Saturday, there was the millstone lift, the farmer's walk

- 250 kilogram weights and walk as far as you can and Kiri managed to walk 70 metres - the throw-for-height, and the stone ball lift. Sunday's events were pulling two armoured vehicles, with a

combined weight of nine tons, for 16 metres; the crucifix (holding two logs); and the power stairs, which calls for walking up and down six stairs with weights up to 275 kilograms.

"Man, this heat really saps your energy," said Lyndon, with temperature officially 36 degrees Celsius, but the vent was in an open stadium, with the sun pushing the real temperature well

An ambulance was on standby, but no serious injuries were reported.

Khatami transforming Iran into a nation ready for democracy

TEHRAN, Aug 3: In the year he has been president, Mohammad Khatami has led a nation trying to make the difficult transition from autocracy to democracy against the wishes of the powerful hard-line clergy, reports AP.

Although a cleric himself, Khatami has opposed the religious hard-liners who have ruled Iran with an iron hand since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

His main achievement has been to open the political atmosphere by raising issues and strictures troubling the average citizen. By breaking the taboo on discourse, he has allowed Iranians to speak their minds.

In a country headed by a religious leader seen by the clerics as God's representative. Khatami has challenged the hard-line view that freedom and human rights are somehow Western inventions out of line

with Muslim tradition. Khatami, 55, says that without freedom there can be no Is-"If religion stands in the way

of freedom, it will lose," has been one of his often repeated statements. The president's efforts face a

struggle. He has been powerless to change the laws because the Majlis, or Parliament, is dominated by hard-liners.

Although Khatami is the elected leader, the constitution gives the hard-line supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, control of such key instruments of power as the police and judiciary. And as God's representative, he has the last

word on all matters. Even in foreign policy. Khatami watered down the war cry of "Death to America" by promoting cultural and sports exchanges with a country known since the revolution as "the Great Satan."

Khatami's popularity has been his chief weapons since he took office last August 3. He received more than 20 million votes in May elections, thrashing the hard-line candidate Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, in a country of 60 million population.

Some moderates feel the demand for change is already too strong to be curbed. "There is no doubt about which side will win this power struggle, but it could take time, said Abbas Amir Entezam, who was in the provisional govern-

ruling clergy. "No matter what the hardliners do, things can never go back to they way they were," he said. "Even if they do away with Khatami, public opinion will force his successor to tread the same path toward democracy."

ment after the revolution but

was later jailed for opposing the

Iranian Mojahedin combatants display seized weapons and a vehicle which was attacked by Iranian terrorists in Baghdad on Saturday. The Mojahedin maintain an extensive presence in Iraq including a 45,000 strong army along the Iran-Iraq border which is led by Massoud - AP UNB photo Rajavi.