

US considering to take part in peacekeeping force

'NATO preparing plans for air, ground operations in Kosovo'

WASHINGTON, Aug 14: The United States would "strongly consider some sort of participation" in a NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo if a diplomatic solution to the crisis there can be found, the Pentagon's spokesman said Thursday, reports AP.

Bacon said. That could range from a "show of force to significant military action," he added. "Right now the primary consideration is on putting together a possible air force, if necessary." If a ceasefire or peace agreement were reached, NATO could shift to putting together a ground force to support such an effort, he said. "NATO hasn't reached that stage yet. I think it's fair to say that the United States would strongly consider some sort of participation... in a force to enforce a ceasefire or a peace agreement," Bacon said.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that up to 240,000 people have been displaced by the fighting between Serbs and separatist Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of the Serbian province's population. Meanwhile, a team of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians chosen to try to negotiate peace with the Serbian government faces a serious drawback: A lack of support from the rebel

Albanian rebels and politicians to stop squabbling and join forces, said the ongoing violence in Kosovo made it imperative to start talks immediately — with or without the rebels. The ethnic Albanians' five-member team comprises mainly disciples of Rugova, a pacifist supported by one branch of the KLA and despised by others. Rugova, Hill and European diplomats hope the rebels and other ethnic Albanian politicians will join negotiations with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic if they see progress is being made toward autonomy for Kosovo. "There are open seats for other representatives and politicians to be included" in talks, Rugova said. He was surrounded by Hill and representatives of the so-called Contact Group — the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

Clinton's plan to visit India, Pakistan is still under review

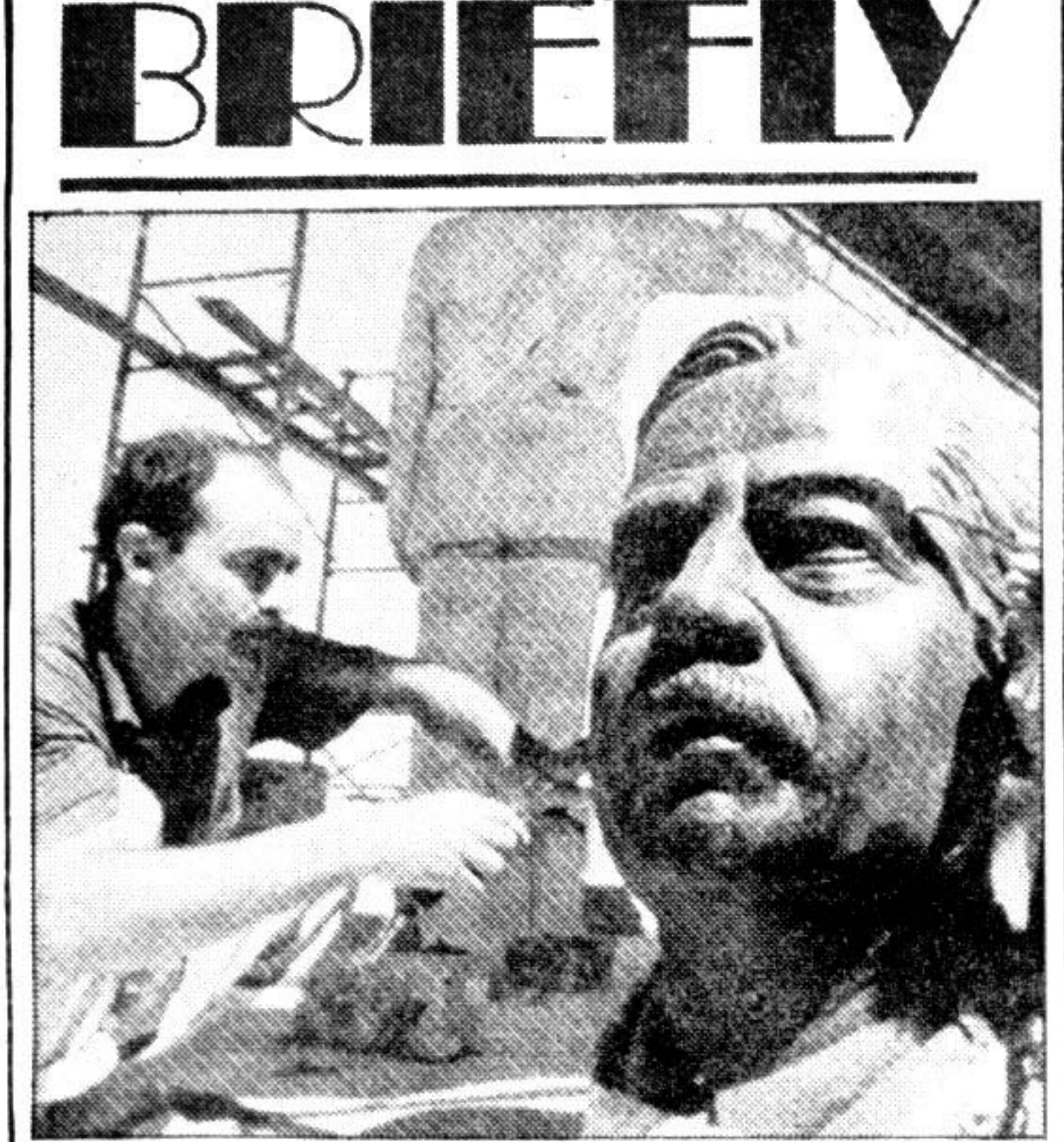
WASHINGTON, Aug 14: US President Bill Clinton's proposed visit to India and Pakistan is still under review, presidential spokesman Mike McCurry has said, reports PTI. As a practical matter it would have to be made some time but not necessarily too much in front of the proposed tour, as we have demonstrated in the past, McCurry told reporters on Thursday. Regarding mounting legal fees over the plethora of sex and other charges against Clinton, McCurry said, "I have seen a reported six million dollars and I have believed in the past that it is about right. However, he said, it would be something reported formally by the managers of the Legal Expense Trust when they make their disclosure, as they have done in the past. The White House has said that when Clinton testifies long-distance, electronically to the Grand Jury on August 17, he proposes to answer all questions fully. Some lawyers had suggested that he has a right to plead privacy if he is so inclined.

UNSC expresses grave concern Taliban jets continue to bomb opposition stronghold in north

KABUL, Aug 14: Taliban warplanes repeatedly bombed an opposition stronghold Thursday in northern Afghanistan as militia reinforcements poured in to consolidate sweeping gains, an opposition leader saying heavy fighting still raged in the area, reports AFP. Taliban sources said reinforcements were flying in from the southern stronghold of Kandahar and from Kabul to join the push against the forces of the ousted government military strongman Ahmad Shah Masood. The hardline Islamic militia said Wednesday it captured three northern towns, two of them vital supply bases for Masood and his beleaguered forces now cut off from the rear. Independent sources and the official Iranian news agency IRNA said Taliban planes launched eight air raids Thursday on the Bamiyan province stronghold of the opposition Shiite Muslim Hezb-i-Wahdat faction in central Afghanistan. The whole town is in flames," IRNA said from

Tehran quoting witnesses. The independent Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said that at least 13 people were killed and many injured but an exact toll was not yet available. Top Wahdat leader Rasul Talib, in the Pakistan border city of Peshawar, told AFP: "The bombings caused casualties among the civilian population and also damaged the property." "There are no facilities to treat the wounded and all aid organisations have already evacuated the town," a witness in Bamiyan was quoted by IRNA as saying. Aid agency sources said they had reduced their staff numbers in Bamiyan and northern Faizabad towns for security reasons. The staff evacuated had been flown to Kabul and Pakistan, they said, without giving the exact number of expatriates withdrawn. "The situation is 'very tense' in Bamiyan, an aid worker said, requesting anonymity. Ethnic Uzbek warlord Abdul

Rashid Dostam said heavy fighting was raging between opposition troops and the Taliban militia in the north, IRNA added. Dostam said the clashes were taking place in Hairatan, on the border of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, which the Pakistan-based AIP said had fallen Wednesday to the Taliban. "Our troops are mopping up pockets of resistance and establishing contacts with the local population," Taliban's Radio Sahrati said. Masood is now "besieged" in the Panjshir Valley, north of Kabul, and northeastern Badkhash province, Taliban officials said. Masood has told the local population in Panjshir and other pockets he holds north of the capital to provide food for his soldiers who are planning guerilla activities against the Taliban, source said. On the front lines about 40-km north of Kabul, Taliban soldiers were upbeat, they said they were awaiting orders to launch a "big push" against Masood.



Iraqis work on a wax head of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in a warehouse in the outskirts of Baghdad Thursday. The head will be cast in bronze as part of a more than five metre tall statue to be placed in a street in central Baghdad. — AP/UNB photo

Castro celebrates 72nd birthday: Fidel Castro celebrated his 72nd birthday — his 39th as chief of Cuba — with hundreds of schoolchildren at a Havana youth and vocational centre, AP says from Mexico City. The celebration Thursday included a birthday cake at the Ernesto Guevara centre and a congratulatory letter to Castro from Cuban athletes participating in the Central America and Caribbean Games in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

Top honour for Habibie's wife: Indonesian President B J Habibie yesterday awarded the nation's highest honour to his own wife and seven former and current senior officials, and lesser medals to 30 other public figures, AFP says from Jakarta. In a ceremony at the Merdeka palace, Habibie conferred the Star of the Republic of Indonesia, second class, on his wife, Hasi Anun Besari Habibie. The Star is the nation's top honour and has five classes.

Couple commits suicide in Japan: Two physically handicapped lovers forbidden to marry by their families have been found drowned in a lake in an apparent case of double-suicide, police said yesterday, AP says from Tokyo. The bodies of Masaru Kawanaka and Megumi Nakama were found Thursday floating in Lake Biwa, a scenic tourist spot in western Japan, with their hands tied together, said police spokesman Tetsuo Koga. Their wheelchairs were discovered at the bottom of the lake, and police believe they pushed themselves off a high part of the shoreline, Koga said.

7 die in Mexican desert: Seven people believed to be illegal immigrants died in the desert north of the Mexico border after waiting for days in extreme heat for a smuggler's van that never arrived, authorities said, AP reports from California. The bodies of five men, a woman and a teen-age boy were found about 65 km north of the border Thursday by a farm worker, said Bill Strassberger, spokesman for the Immigration and Naturalisation Service.

Former Honduran FM dies at 71: Roberto Palma Galvez, Honduras' former foreign minister and a member of the military junta that ended Julio Lozano Diaz's dictatorship, died Wednesday at the age of 71. No cause of death was released, AP reports from Honduras. He was buried with honours Thursday in Tegucigalpa. Palma Galvez was secretary in the junta that ended Lozano Diaz's rule in 1956.

NZ Dy PM and Treasurer sacked: New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer Winston Peters has been sacked, Prime Minister Jenny Shipley announced yesterday, AP says from Wellington. She told a hastily called press conference that, with regret, she had asked Governor-General Sir Michael Hardie Boys to dismiss Peters.

Israel arrests Muslim cleric: Israel arrested a Muslim cleric from the West Bank suspected of involvement in the shooting deaths of two Jewish settlers last week, neighbours and Israeli Radio said Thursday, AP reports from West Bank. Dirar Hamabni, a 37-year-old religious leader, was arrested late Tuesday in his village of Assira, close to where the two Jewish seminary students were killed while patrolling their Jewish settlement of Itzhar, Israeli radios reported.

ROK to free 2174 prisoners: Some 2,174 prisoners, including 94 political convicts, will be freed under a sweeping amnesty of 7,007 people to mark South Korea's 50th anniversary, Justice Minister Park Sang-Chun said yesterday, reports AFP. Among the prisoners to be freed Saturday is one of the country's most prominent political detainees, dissident poet Park No-Hae who was jailed for life seven years ago for leading an underground revolutionary group.

16 held for inciting riots in Jakarta: Police have arrested 16 people suspected of instigating riots in Jakarta in which 1,200 people were killed, police said yesterday, AP says from Jakarta. Thousands of shops and homes, many of them owned by ethnic Chinese, were looted or burned in the May riots, which helped dislodge former President Suharto's hold on power.

Japan sat link-up delayed again: Technical difficulties forced Japan's space agency to again delay a docking experiment between two orbiting research satellites, a spokeswoman said yesterday. In the latest attempt, Nakamura said the Hibokoshi's positioning system went out of control at around 9:00 pm Thursday (12:00 GMT). A collision-prevention system was automatically activated, making the two satellites move apart, she said.

FBI lab to test evidence from two bombing sites

WASHINGTON, Aug 14: Evidence from the bombing of two US embassies in Africa is to arrive at the FBI laboratory this weekend for tests to confirm what explosives were used and whether both bombs had the same ingredients, reports AP. Officials in both Kenya and Tanzania have given permission for evidence to be tested in the United States, Assistant FBI Director Donald Kerr, who heads the FBI lab, said Thursday. Kerr was among top bureau officials who used a briefing here to praise the cooperation the FBI is getting from local officials in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. The nearly simultaneous bombings killed 257 people and injured more than 5,000. Meanwhile, President Bill Clinton on Thursday led the United States in mourning 12 Americans killed in the Aug 7 bombing in Kenya. Standing before black hearses bearing flag-draped caskets in which 10 of the bodies were brought home, Clinton said, "No matter what it takes we must find those responsible for these evil acts and see that justice is done." A senior US official has said a Czech-made high explosive called Semtex, seen in previous terrorist attacks, is suspected in the nearly simultaneous East Africa bombings, on the basis of initial field examinations. FBI officials would not confirm that. "Field tests are not 100 per cent accurate," said Thomas H Jourdan, a chemist who heads the FBI lab's materials and devices unit. "They just tell us presumptively what we're looking." A British forensic team was expected to join the 22 FBI lab examiners at the two sites shortly. "It will take at least four more weeks to complete examination of both bomb sites and witness interviews, and from that we will develop leads," Pickard said. There were 700 interviews to conduct in Nairobi and 200 in Dar es Salaam, he said.

UN military observers to stay in Angola till Sept 15

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 14: The Security Council, in renewing the mandate for the UN force in Angola on Thursday, strongly deplored the recent surge in fighting in the country and held the formal rebel movement UNITA responsible, reports AP. The 15-member council decided to keep UN military observers in Angola until Sept. 15 — a short extension that indicated the council's concern about the country's deteriorating security situation. "The situation is particularly grim as over 1 million people are now internally displaced due to the derailment of the peace process," said Slovenia's ambassador, Danilo Turk. "There is little doubt that UNITA bears the brunt of the responsibility for this lamentable state of affairs."



Taliban fighters with their guns celebrate in the front-line, 40-km northeast of Kabul on Thursday. With the Taliban closing in, foreign aid workers and hundreds of Afghan families fled territory controlled by the opposition northern alliance. — AP/UNB photo

'Kashmir issue to be resolved under UN resolutions'

ISLAMABAD, Aug 14: Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif today demanded Kashmir issue be resolved under UN resolutions, reports PTI. We have no dispute with our neighbours except India over Kashmir, Pakistan demands that Kashmir issue must be resolved according to UN resolution, Sharif said in his message on Pakistan's Independence Day today. Indian nuclear tests posed a serious security threat to the whole South Asian region particularly to Pakistan, which has longstanding dispute with India over Kashmir, the Prime Minister said. In this situation, we adopted the path shown by our founding father Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah who said the primary responsibility for the defence of our country will rest with us and Pakistan must be prepared for all eventualities and dangers, he recalled. Sharif said the best way in which we can serve the cause of peace is by removing the temptation from the path of those who think that we are weak, and therefore they can bully or attack us. That temptation can only be removed if we make ourselves so strong that no body dares to entertain any aggressive designs against us. Reuters adds from Islamabad: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also said today Pakistan would not give up its nuclear capability in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions, saying the country's security came first. "We know if we accept the life of humiliation, then all sanctions would be lifted, but such a life is not acceptable to us," Sharif said in an address at a flag-hoisting ceremony to mark Pakistan's 51st independence day anniversary.

Muzaffarabad says: Pakistan's opposition leader Benazir Bhutto urged Indian and Pakistan leaders yesterday to reduce tensions, saying a small mistake could lead to a war between the two nuclear powers. She told a news conference she had first hoped nuclear tests by the two arch-rivals in May would prove to be a deterrent against a threat of another war between them. Another Reuters report from

Independence Day ceremonies India launches nationwide security clampdown

NEW DELHI, Aug 14: India launched a nationwide security clampdown today, amid fears of terrorist strikes by separatist groups on the eve of the Independence Day, reports AFP. As well as major cities across the country, special security operations were underway in sensitive states such as Muslim-majority Kashmir, the hotbed of Sikh militancy Punjab, and northeastern tribal areas, police officials said. Anil Agarwal, security chief in the capital New Delhi, said an additional 20,000 policemen and troops had been deployed to guard against separatist militants. "We are on maximum alert and are taking no chances," Agarwal told AFP, adding that police had specific information regarding planned Independence Day strikes by militants fighting for separate homelands. India celebrates its 51st year of independence from British rule tomorrow. "The thrust of the security arrangements will be to avoid any sniper attack, planting of im-

provised explosive devices and complete protection of political leaders," said Delhi police chief V N Singh. "The entire police force will be on duty to ensure foolproof security," Singh said. The week surrounding Independence Day is traditionally a time when militants across India step up their activities to press home their various struggles for autonomy and independence. In northeastern India, where myriad tribal groups have been fighting the government and each other for decades, at least 50,000 federal troops have been deployed to prevent any violence, local police said. Six rebel outfits in the states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya have called for a 12-hour general strike tomorrow and a complete boycott of any Independence Day celebrations. "We do not believe in any functions organised by the colonial and imperialist Indian forces," said a joint statement issued by the rebels.

Ambulance put on standby at roadblock for Suu Kyi

YANGON, Aug 14: The military regime said Friday that an ambulance has been put on standby at a roadblock where Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi was in the third day of a new standoff against the government, reports AP. Suu Kyi's party, the opposition National League for Democracy, has said the government will be responsible for her health if she is not allowed to visit her supporters in Bassein, 160 kilometers (100 miles) west of Yangon. Suu Kyi, 53, was stopped Tuesday at a checkpoint 32 kilometers (19 miles) west of the capital. It was the site of six-day standoff last month that ended when authorities forcibly drove her back to her Yangon home. She was suffering dehydration and fever.

Off the Record

Accused murderer turns out to be actual target!

LITTLETON, Colorado: A man jailed in the slaying of two ministers was released after it turned out he wasn't the killer, but the intended victim, reports AP. Arthur Murdock was released Wednesday after police determined his wife allegedly asked a 17-year-old boy to kill him during a meeting with the two ministers. Murdock never showed up and the youth shot and killed the ministers, one of whom resembled the intended victim, police said. "Yes, it's possible he didn't know that wasn't her husband," said Arapahoe County Undersheriff Grayson Robinson. Joel A England, 24, of Denver, a music minister at Galilee Baptist Church, and Roderick B Marable, 39, a lay minister at Heritage Christian Centre, were shot to death Saturday at a home England had rented to Murdock and his wife, Natalie. Police said Marable resembled Murdock. The investigation initially focused on Murdock because his wife had accused him of domestic abuse, but investigators determined Murdock was at a barbecue all day Saturday.

Justifying an 'employment discrimination act'

MELBOURNE: An anti-discrimination tribunal Friday gave permission for an Australian telephone sex service operator to advertise for women workers only, after the owner said women who wanted to talk to men could simply call their local fire station, reports AP. "Let's face it, why would a woman need to pay for a fantasy phone call when all she has got to do is ring up the local army base or fire station," Peta King told the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal. "I am sure the guys there would be only too happy to talk to her for nothing." King sought and was granted an exemption from the Equal Opportunity Act, which requires that job advertisements not specify a gender preference. She said she was bombarded with male job applicants every time she advertised for her business, Grandma's Live Phone Talk. But all her clients were heterosexual men so she had no need for male workers. "I need the exemption," King said. "If I cannot put 'ladies only,' I have so many men that ring and apply for the job, and when you tell them that you don't have work for men some of them become very obstreperous," she said. "In fact some of them have reported me to the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal." The business advertised for new workers often because the job was difficult and few workers stayed long.

Rescue workers start evacuating flood victims in China

BEIJING, Aug 14: Rescue workers began evacuating more than 20,000 people who were stranded after floods washed out railway tracks in northeast Heilongjiang province, state-run media reported Friday, reports AP. Floods also forced the closure of the main rail line in northwestern China, between the Xinjiang capital, Urumqi, and the city of Lanzhou, the reports said. With a rain belt stretching across central China, floods were predicted to continue and to worsen in the northeast and along the Yellow River.

Indians have little to celebrate as 'Golden Jubilee' year ends

NEW DELHI, Aug 14: As the curtain falls Saturday on India's 50th year of independence, there seems little left to celebrate amid crippling political instability, economic slowdown and heightened tensions with Pakistan, reports AFP. New Delhi earmarked 12 million dollars for parades and celebratory events during the anniversary year, but the real fireworks came in May when India conducted five underground nuclear explosions that triggered a series of similar tests by Pakistan. The underground tests were ordered by the Hindu nationalist-led coalition government, less than two months after it came to power. For many analysts the resulting strain in ties between New Delhi and Islamabad poses the most pressing concern for the government here. Tension with Pakistan is

not a good sign... but I hope that it is only darkness before the dawn, or rhetoric before results," said BG Verghese at the Independent Centre for Policy Research. "We need to live together as friends and both need to work towards that," Verghese said. Talks between the South Asian arch rivals broke down last month over Kashmir, triggering 10 days of artillery duels across the line of control dividing the Indian-and-Pakistan-controlled areas of the disputed state. Meanwhile, the nuclear tests drew US-led sanctions that have heightened pressures on India's economy as it struggles with the fallout of the Asian financial crisis. Such issues are likely to be addressed in Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's traditional speech to the nation on Saturday morning. Ambrose Pinto, who heads the non-governmental Indian Social Institute here, denounced the government's nuclear weapons programme, saying millions of dollars were being wasted as India is still struggling to overcome crippling poverty. "It is a sad story, the bomb does not reflect the aspirations of the people, one of the arguments put forward is that we gained international status with the bomb. We can have a status without a bomb, like Japan." About 40 per cent of India's 960 million people live below the poverty line, and after 50 years of independence from British rule the country still faces enormous social problems. More than 130 million people have no access to basic health facilities and about 230 million are without safe drink-

ing water. Seventy per cent of the population lacks basic sanitation and nearly half is illiterate. Meanwhile, 50 per cent of Indian children under age five are malnourished and the country's per capita investment in health and education is a meagre 14 dollars compared to 160 dollars in a country like South Korea. The average Indian earns less than 400 dollars a year. "India has not done much regarding poverty, quality of life and social justice which are preambles of our constitution. We should not take another 50 years for this," Verghese said. But other analysts said the main evil plaguing India was its growing political instability, which has resulted in five governments and two national elections since 1996. Jay Dubashi, a political

commentator and Hindu nationalist ideologue, argued that stability was the key to future development. "In a scenario where there is a political vacuum no progress is possible. All other issues such as poverty and illiteracy stem from this problem. There is a slow deterioration of political leadership, politicians have become selfish about power and privileges and all the other problems of the nation have been relegated to the background," Dubashi said. "At the moment, it is a great tragedy." India's current minority coalition, led by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP - Indian people's party), has already been close to collapse on several occasions since coming to power in March. Sri Lankan President's children on LTTE hit list

COLOMBO, Aug 14: President Chandrika Kumaratunga asked editors Thursday not to print or broadcast pictures of her two teenage children, saying they were targets of Tamil Tiger rebels, reports AP. "She is really concerned about their safety," said Media Minister Mangala Samarawera, holding a letter from the president. Kumaratunga's son Vimukti, 16, and daughter Yasodara, 18, are both students in Colombo schools. The president's appeal came after a private television station showed her daughter's picture during a programme on potential targets of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which is fighting for a Tamil homeland in the north.