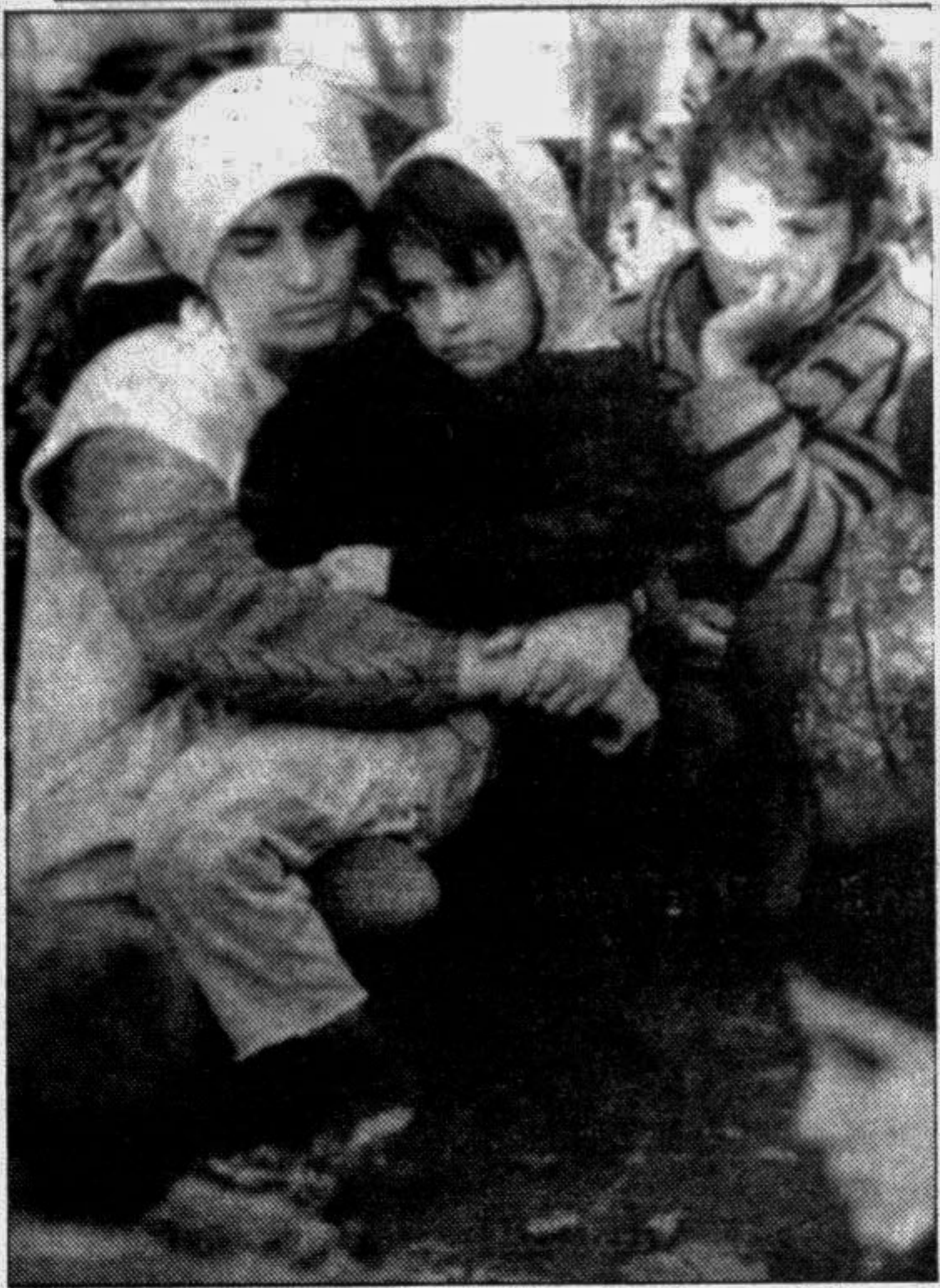


BRIEFLY



An ethnic Albanian woman from the village of Trpeza hugs her daughter in front of a fire in the forested hills in the Berisha mountains after fleeing their village, some 30 km from Pristina, Wednesday following renewed Serb shelling in the area late Tuesday. New skirmishes between Serb forces and Kosovo Liberation Army fighters have prompted the United Nations to send monitors to the region to assess the situation on the ground. — AP/UNB photo

**Road mishap claims 15 in India:** A bus plunged into a gorge in India's mountainous northeast, killing at least 15 people and injuring another 18, Press Trust of India news agency said Thursday. AP reports from New Delhi. The accident occurred Wednesday night as the driver tried to accelerate after the bus wheels got stuck in mud in monsoon rain near Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim state, PTI said. The injured were hospitalised.

**Taiwan's first lady visits Europe:** Tseng Wen-fu, wife of Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui, is visiting Europe on behalf of her husband who is unable to travel there because of China's diplomatic pressure, AP reports from Taipei. Taiwan's China Times newspaper labelled Tseng's trip "first lady diplomacy," suggesting she would carry out political contacts on Lee's behalf. But a foreign ministry spokesman, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the visit was "entirely innocent."

**11 condemned to die in Sierra Leone:** Eleven civilians including three women were Wednesday condemned to die for committing treason in Sierra Leone, AFP reports from Freetown.

The Freetown High Court of Justice sentenced five other civilians, also convicted of treason, to ten-year prison terms. Among those condemned for their involvement in a junta ousted in February was 75-year-old former mayor of Freetown Nancy Steele and two other women, Kaindeh Bangura and Mahila Mansana.

**Ethiopian PM in Malaysia:** Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi began a five-day visit to Malaysia Thursday to promote trade and investment, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Zenawi, accompanied by Trade Minister Kasahaun Ayele, other senior government officials and dozens of businessmen, was officially welcomed at Parliament Square by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, the national news agency Bernama reported.

**2 Naxalites killed in India:** Two Naxalites were killed in separate encounters with police in the extremist-affected Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh Wednesday, PTI reports from Karimnagar. An extremist belonging to the outlawed People's War Group (PWG) Sanjeev died in an exchange of fire with a special police party near Gurrampalli village while two of his accomplices fled the scene, police said.

**118-year old woman dies in Vietnam:** One of the world's oldest women, Le Thi Co, has died at the age of 118, press reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi. Co, who had 14 children, seven of them still living, died at her home in a poor village near Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam. The Saigon Giai Phong newspaper said she would be buried next Tuesday. Co went to hospital for the first time in her life in September for treatment for pneumonia. It was then that doctors found her heart was on the right and the liver on the left, the opposite to everyone else.

**4 die in typhoon in Philippines:** Four people were killed and thousands forced to evacuate their homes as Typhoon Babs slammed into the main Philippine island of Luzon yesterday, officials said in Manila, AFP reports from Manila.

Defence secretary Orlando Mercado, who heads civil defence operations, told radio station DZBB that at least four people had been reported killed in the eastern provinces which felt the brunt of the typhoon.

**9 die as lorry turns turtle in India:** Nine people were killed and 19 injured when a lorry in which they were travelling turned turtle near Kushtagi in Karnataka's Koppal district yesterday, a police spokesman said in Bangalore, PTI reports from Bangalore. He said the deceased included two women and added that the injured had been hospitalised.

**Hun Sen pressures opposition to break deadlock**

PHNOM PENH, Oct 22: Cambodian leader Hun Sen used Thursday's anniversary of a peace agreement ending the country's civil war to pressure the opposition to form a coalition government with his party, reports AP. "Only those who want to prolong the anarchy and instability prevent efforts to set up a new government," Hun Sen said in a televised speech marking the anniversary of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords. Hun Sen's party won 64 of the 122 seats in parliament in July's national election, but not the two-thirds majority necessary to form a government on its own.

Opposition parties led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh and former Finance Minister Sam Rainsy have refused to enter into a coalition with Hun Sen until their allegations of election fraud had been thoroughly investigated. International monitors said the election was relatively free and fair. Hun Sen said his current government would remain in power as long as the opposition refused to form a new one. Ranariddh and Hun Sen were on opposite sides during the country's long civil war. After the United Nations brokered the Paris agreement and supervised a 1993 election, the two men formed a coalition government as co-prime ministers. Hun Sen ousted Ranariddh in a bloody coup in July 1997. International mediation was needed to force him into allowing Ranariddh to participate in July's election. Since the election, negotiations on a new government so far have proved fruitless, despite occasional mediating sessions with King Norodom Sihanouk, who is also Ranariddh's father.

**Clinton wins authority to lift sanctions against India, Pakistan**

WASHINGTON, Oct 22: US President Bill Clinton won authority on Wednesday to lift economic sanctions against India and Pakistan imposed after their nuclear tests, reports Reuter. He signed a 500 billion US dollars government spending package including the sanctions provision, which have him power to waive most sanctions against India and Pakistan and resume trade finance and other aid programmes for up to 12 months.

US officials said Clinton would only actually waive sanctions if progress was made in nuclear nonproliferation talks with New Delhi and Islamabad. "We can waive the more economically-oriented sanctions, but it doesn't mean we'll do it," a senior State Department official said. Arms sales to the two countries will still be prohibited. Nuclear tests by both nations automatically triggered US sanctions in May and meant US banks could not lend to the two governments. The sanctions suspended foreign aid and trade finance, and required Washington to oppose non-humanitarian loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

US officials said Clinton could use the waiver to restart export-import bank, overseas private investment corporation and trade and development agency programmes in India and Pakistan and to support all IMF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank loans, restrictions on US banks may be lifted for 12 months.

**Habibie vows to serve till 2000**

JAKARTA, Oct 22: President B J Habibie has rejected calls to step down and plans to serve as president until the year 2000, the official Antara news agency reported Thursday, reports AP. Habibie replaced authoritarian President Suharto, who quit in May amid student protests and riots after 32 years in power. Dissatisfaction over Indonesia's worst economic crisis in decades was largely responsible for his downfall.

Habibie has promised to hold parliamentary elections next May and then a special assembly of legislators and other delegates will convene next December to choose a president and vice president. Student protesters have periodically called for Habibie to resign, but the president said that Indonesia's move toward democracy would suffer if he succumbed to their demands.

"If I do it, then that would signal the end of democracy," Antara quoted Habibie as saying Wednesday at the state palace. Habibie said democracy can fail if a minority that dominates the media's attention is granted its goals even though it doesn't represent most of the population.

**One dies from burst heroine capsules in stomach**

KARACHI, Oct 22: An African National died at Karachi Airport after heroine-filled capsules in his stomach burst, officials said Thursday, reports AP.

Ibrahim Ismail, 23, carrying a Cameroon passport, collapsed as he arrived to board a flight for Mumbai in India. An autopsy was carried out in a hospital and around two and a half kilograms (six pounds) of heroin was recovered from his body, the officials said.

**58 Tamil Tigers killed in Lanka**

COLOMBO, Oct 22: At least 58 Tamil Tiger rebels were killed when police commandos destroyed a guerrilla base in eastern Sri Lanka and in fighting elsewhere, government military officials said today, reports Reuters. They said 10 rebels were killed when police commandos overran a key Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) base in the eastern Batticaloa district early today.

Details of the fighting were not immediately available. Army spokesman Brigadier Sunil Tennakoon told a news conference 19 rebels were killed by troops near the northern Mankulam town during the past week.

"LTTE offered a lot of resistance by firing mortars at soldiers in Mankulam, but troops are going ahead with their plans and consolidating positions," he said, adding 18 soldiers were also wounded in the fighting. BJP's attempt to bring religion into classroom protested

**BJP's attempt to bring religion into classroom protested**

NEW DELHI, Oct 22: Education officials walked out on Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee Thursday, angrily accusing his Hindu nationalist party of trying to bring religion into the classroom, reports AP.

The immediate spark for the brief walkout at a conference of state education and youth affairs ministers was the singing of a hymn to the Hindu goddess of learning by a chorus of blind children. The hymn was the last straw for officials incensed by recommendations by a "group of experts" circulated by the federal government that "education should be Indianised, nationalised and spiritualised."

The unidentified experts also called for including study of Hindu religious treatises at all levels of education. "They want to make this a theocratic state," fumed S H Chakravarty, minister for higher education in the leftist government of West Bengal, a state in eastern India. He was among about 40 state ministers from all over the country, their shouts competing with the clear voices of the blind children who stormed out of the opening ceremonies.

**Yeltsin's minister advises him to find VP to delegate power**

MOSCOW, Oct 22: A top Russian minister struck at the heart of Boris Yeltsin's presidency Wednesday by advising the ailing Kremlin chief to swallow his pride and find a vice president to whom he can delegate power, reports AFP.

The blunt piece of counsel came as Yeltsin, 67, skipped yet another day at the office to briefly check into a hospital for what the Kremlin billed as a routine health scan.

The Russian president underwent an X-ray, the Kremlin said. He then returned to his Gorky-9 suburban dacha at which Yeltsin has spent most of the past nine days nursing a reported chill that developed during an aborted trip to central Asia.

A spokesman said doctors at the central clinical hospital where Yeltsin also recovered for three weeks from a November 1996 quintuple heart bypass operation diagnosed the president's condition as "normal." But Yeltsin's political health is not, and even his old allies and current aides are joining the opposition's calls for the president to pass on his vast powers into healthier and more able hands.

First Deputy Premier Vadim Gustov, one of Russia's most senior ministers, on Wednesday said the country should rein-

state the vice-presidency — an option some aides say might just keep Yeltsin in power until his term expires in 2000.

The issue is a sensitive one for Yeltsin, who abolished the post in 1993 when it belonged to arch-rival Alexander Rutskoi... Yeltsin then helped re-write Russia's constitution, in part to get rid of the rival position, and attacked parliament with tanks to quell dissent.

Now a governor, Rutskoi had spent four months in the notorious Lefortovo prison for challenging Yeltsin's authority. "The constitution is not dogma," Interfax quoted Gustov as saying on a visit to the Central Russian town of Vladimir.

"We have taken the American constitution as a model, but they have a vice president who works with a parliament. But we cut that part out," Gustov said.

Gustov, in charge of state and regional policies, said Russia must take a "reasonable approach" to amending its constitution and ending the government with some powers currently resting in the presidency.

While such remarks by a top minister would have sounded preposterous here only a few weeks ago, the burly ex-governor of Russia's northwest Leningrad district was merely saying in public what many Kremlin insiders have long

been thinking.

"All sorts of people are drawing the same conclusions — for instance about reinstating the vice-presidency," Itogi Magazine editor Sergei Parkhomenko cited a top Yeltsin adviser as saying.

"Besides, some of the current presidential contenders would not mind combining the vice-president's and the prime minister's duties," the adviser said. Yeltsin often vanishes from view for long periods and this year he has mostly abdicated daily management of Russian affairs to his ever-changing governments.

But while the Kremlin chief has ruled out running for a third term as president in 2000, he has ignored opposition calls for him to step down on health grounds or correct the constitution's strong tilt in favour of the executive.

Russia meanwhile is experiencing an alarming economic nosedive while Yeltsin's authority and popularity all but vanish and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov's government appears deadlocked over how to solve the financial mess.

Backing up Gustov's comments, constitutional court chairman Marat Baglai told Moscow Echo radio Wednesday that preparations for constitutional amendments that strip Yeltsin of his power "should be very intense."

**ME peace talks US revises proposed security measures for WB**

QUEENSTOWN, Oct 22: Confronted by a threatened Israeli walkout, the Clinton administration revised US-proposed security measures in a projected West Bank accord and sought Yasser Arafat's approval, reports AP.

The revisions were made in a lengthy meeting late Wednesday night between Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was sufficiently satisfied to retract his threat to go home without an agreement.

Albright then met with Arafat, while senior US, Israeli and Palestinian officials held a flurry of meetings at the secluded Wye conference centre and Netanyahu awaited the results.

"These are serious and difficult issues that we're still working on," said White House spokesman Joe Lockhart. "What we need — and hope we'll see — are serious efforts to make progress on these issues."

A Palestinian official told the Associated Press that "the security file was closed." But Aviv Bushinsky, Netanyahu's spokesman, told AP "there is a lot of work to do."

Netanyahu had warned the Israelis were prepared to leave the talks if there was no substantial progress on security and the removal of anti-Israel clauses in the Palestine Liberation Organisation's charter.

agreement," he told reporters in a late night telephone hookup from the summit site. "Clearly handing over the text is another phase of the process and significant in its own right," Rubin said. "Whether it leads to an agreement is an open question."

"Israel wishes to achieve an agreement and hopes there is a similar desire on the Palestinians' side," Netanyahu said in a statement after his session with Albright.

President Bill Clinton followed the developments from the White House. Rubin said Albright would telephone Clinton Thursday morning, and the president would decide then whether to return here.

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The Palestinians, meanwhile, said they would reject any new Israeli demand. Ahmed Tibi, an adviser to Yasser Arafat, said "internal politics" in Israel was blocking a land-for-peace accord.

He said the Palestinians have already made sufficient changes to their covenant.

Netanyahu has been under tremendous pressure to resist a troop pullback from the West Bank. On Wednesday, hardliners in his government and leaders of the powerful Jewish settler lobby vowed to bring down the coalition government if he signs a deal.

With the atmosphere souring on the seventh day of the talks, Israel and the Palestinians exchanged accusations on which side was responsible for the slow progress in concluding a land-for-peace accord.

And yet, Arafat telephoned 49th birthday congratulations to Netanyahu and urged him to stay on and complete the agreement.

Tibi said he had delivered flowers to Netanyahu on Arafat's behalf.

Turning grave at a news conference in English, Hebrew and Arabic, Tibi said the Palestinians had already accepted the US recommendations. "We are waiting for a yes from the Israelis," he said.

**Lankan govt rules out talks with Tiger rebels**

COLOMBO, Oct 22: The government Thursday ruled out any peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels, as its military reported battlefield successes, reports AP.

There is no move on our part to start the process, no move whatsoever," Constitutional Affairs Minister Lakshman Peiris told reporters in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital.

Peiris was reacting to a news magazine interview by a Tamil Tiger spokesman, who said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were not averse to resuming dialogue with the Sri Lankan government through a facilitator.

Citing the examples of Kosovo and Bosnia, Tiger spokesman V. Rudrakumar, a US-based lawyer, told the Midweek Mirror in London that any major Western power could bring the two sides together to talk. Peiris said his administration was not against a facilitator, but ruled out any negotiations for now.

Sri Lanka's 15-year-old civil war has its roots in the conflict between two ethnic groups with distinct languages, cultures and history. The majority Sinhalese — who make up 76 per cent of Sri Lanka's 18.5 million people — are mainly Buddhists.

Most Tamils, who are 18 per cent of the population, are Hindus. Several rounds of peace talks with the LTTE in the past have ended with the rebels breaking off negotiations and staging surprise attacks on the military. The last unsuccessful negotiations were held in April 1995.

Meanwhile, military spokesman Brigadier Sunil Tennakoon said government forces killed 48 rebels in fighting in the past two weeks in the north and east. At least 39 government soldiers were wounded.

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**Malaysian court orders trial of 127 anti-govt protesters**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 22: A local court has ordered the trial of 127 people who were arrested for participating in a demonstration that demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, news reports said Thursday, reports AP.

They were produced Wednesday before a magistrate and charged with unlawful assembly and disobeying police orders to disperse from the streets of downtown Kuala Lumpur on Saturday, The Star daily said.

All 127 pleaded innocent to the charge. One person pleaded guilty and was fined 2,000 ringgit (dlsr 526).

Police have arrested people each time groups sympathetic to jailed dissident leader Anwar Ibrahim have organised protests. But so far the protesters have been released within days and not formally charged in court.

If convicted in the trial that begins in May, the accused could be jailed for one year and fined 10,000 ringgit (dlsr 2,600).

Police have declared all pro-Anwar demonstrations illegal. Since Anwar's arrest, several thousand Malaysians have gathered in Kuala Lumpur and other towns regularly to demand justice for the jailed leader. Anwar faces trial beginning Nov. 2 on 10 counts of cor-

ruption and illegal homosexual acts.

Mahathir, who fired Anwar as deputy Prime Minister and finance minister on Sept. 2, has said the protesters want to overthrow his government by violence.

Speaking to local reporters Wednesday at a news conference which foreign reporters were barred from attending, Mahathir blamed the foreign press of trying to influence Anwar's trial by biased reporting.

"The government is on trial as far as the foreign media is concerned," Mahathir said.

"They are not concerned whether Anwar is guilty or not but they want to make sure the government or the courts are guilty," Mahathir was quoted as saying by The Star.

Meanwhile, Anwar's case continued to attract international attention. On Wednesday, Abid Husain, the special rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion for the UN Commission on Human Rights visited Anwar's wife and expressed admiration for her courage in facing up to the threats of arrests and police intimidation.

Azizah, Anwar's wife, said earlier she hoped she would not be arrested on charges of encouraging protests against Mahathir.



A Palestinian woman with a framed picture of a relative, held in an Israeli jail, sits at the side of the road near the entrance to the Gush Katif region in the Gaza Strip Wednesday. In a signal to the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Washington, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip held a demonstration in support of the Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. — AP/UNB photo

**Risks of nuclear conflict in Asia have become reality**

LONDON, Oct 22: The risks of a nuclear conflict in Asia have become a reality for the first time after Pakistan and India's nuclear tests in May, while North Korea continues to threaten regional stability, the IISS think tank said in its annual report on military balance, reports AP.

The new found nuclear capability of India and Pakistan, which have fought three wars since they gained independence from Britain 50 years ago, has introduced major uncertainty, the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies said.

One military fact is clear each side is capable of striking a devastating blow against the other, the IISS said.

"There is a new risk, that should relations between them deteriorate badly one might be tempted to make a pre-emptive strike against the other's nuclear capability."

The two countries, which between them account for 80 per cent of defence spending in south and central Asia, have also been spending hundreds of millions of dollars on an escalating conventional arms race.

North Korea, itself in a state of battle readiness against its neighbour and ideological enemy South Korea, is exacerbating regional tensions by pressing ahead with missile technology exports to Pakistan, the IISS said.

"The North Korean regime struggles to survive, the missile and nuclear programmes are the only means to exerting influence on the major power, the IISS noted.

Some estimates suggest that 65 per cent of North Korea's armed forces, including up to 80 per cent of its artillery and missile capability are within 60 miles (100 kilometers) from the southern border, according to the report.

Other areas of instability are in Central Asia, where the risk of a resurgence in Islamic un-

rest in Tajikistan has increased since the government banned religious parties in May.

In Tajikistan and in Uzbekistan the IISS said the authorities have begun a crackdown with Russian encouragement on Islamic groups.

"This is likely to incite terrorist action rather than damp it down," it said.

The situation is worsened by instability in neighbouring Afghanistan, which fuels the trade in weapons of all kinds, according to the London Think Tank.

In Afghanistan itself, despite impressive military advances the Taliban militia has not succeeded in extending its control to northern areas of the country occupied by opposition forces, the IISS report said.

In east Asia armed conflict is at a relatively low level but a series of natural disaster floods in China and South Korea and the tidal wave in Papua New Guinea have caused more casualties than any fighting it remarked.

**In favour of Hindi, Urdu**

NEW DELHI, Oct 22: Multilingual India could end the dominance of the English language over Hindi and Urdu only if there was better cooperation between those working to promote the two languages, say experts, reports IANS.

Voicing their opinions at a function in the central Indian city of Jaipur, 250km from here, the experts also called for Hindi to be made the medium of government administration.

The only difference between Hindi and Urdu, they stressed, was the script, which was Devanagari for Hindi and Persian for Urdu. The Hindu newspaper reported.

India, a veritable Tower of Babel, has 18 officially recognised languages. The last census, in 1991, listed 1,652 languages as mother tongues spoken in India.

Besides, the total number of people who speak Hindi or Urdu far surpasses those who speak English, which is a mere 7.6 per cent across the world, the paper said.

Noted academicians, litterateurs, artists and journalists also put forth the demand to use India's national language.

Hindi, for administrative work which is presently done in English.

At the function, held to facilitate distinguished artist Ramgopal, Vijayvargya and writer Bhagwati Prasad Deopura, experts asserted that use of Hindi would foster unity in the country.

Addressing the meet, Allahabad University's former Vice-Chancellor Ramcharan Mehrotra said that education at all levels should be imparted in Hindi, including in subjects like medicine, engineering and management.

Saying that Mahatma Gandhi also regarded Hindi and Urdu as one language, Mehrotra added that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had raised the stature of Hindi by addressing the recent session of the United Nations General Assembly in that language.

The artist and the writer, who were honoured, said Hindi and Urdu were very rich languages and had been relegated to lower slots by English because writers and speakers in the two languages felt themselves to be inferior and promoted use of English.