

Delhi fire death toll 44: The death toll from a New Delhi market fire rose to 44 today and several other victims were in critical condition, the Press Trust of India said,

AFP reports from New Delhi. Hospital sources said 12 more people died overnight, making Monday's fire the worst in the Indian capital this year. Monday's fire devastated a row of shops in a densely populated business quarter after a large quantity of chemicals stored in a two-storey building exploded.

US sends back 79 Cubans: The United States returned to Cuba 79 people who attempted to reach Florida by sea in the largest repatriation of illegal immigrants from the communist-led nation in four years, officials said, AFP reports from Havana.

Two US Coast Guard cutters entered Cuban waters to return the group of would-be immigrants, which included 69 men, six women and four children, the official National Information Agency said. The Tuesday operation brings to 1,905 the number of Cubans repatriated by the Unties States since Washington and Havana agreed to choke off the flow of illegal immigrants to the United States.

800 arrested in Chennai: Over 800 persons, many of them belonging to the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam, had been taken into preventive custody since Monday in the wake of discovery of five explosive devices in various parts of the state, police said, AFP reports from

Chennai. Those taken into custody also included 15 members of the

banned Islamic outfit 'Al Umma,' primarily from Coimbatore. Police and the state government suspect the acts to be the handiwork of this organisation. Police said over 200 Hindus were also taken into custody.

eight Naga villagers

IMPHAL, Jun 2: In a fresh outbreak of ethnic violence suspected Kuki militants gunned down eight Naga vil-

Naga passengers aboard it, paraded them and were shot at, first official reports reaching here said.

the spot, another succumbed to injuries on the way to hospital, the sources said.

rious bullet wounds, sources said, adding the remaining passenger escaped to nearby thick jungles.

Yesterday's killing was in retaliation to the May 16 attack by Naga militants on Kuki travellers on the same area. One

have rushed to the spot and launched a massive combing operation, the sources added.

deputy chairman of state planning board Chungkhokai doungel condemned yesterday's incident and strongly condemned the attack on unarmed vil-

He reiterated his appeal to the centre to declare unilateral ceasefire with all important underground groups operating

signed with all important underground groups in the north eastern region, the ceasefire would be of no value, he told

He asked the authorities to intensify security measures in the area and said he has already asked the government to open security posts in the area as armed militants often attacked the villagers in the area.

Heavy artillery fighting between India, Pakistan troops

SRINAGAR, India, June 2: Heavy artillery fighting raged between Indian and Pakistani troops in Kashmir today, as India kept up air strikes to oust Islamic guerillas occupying key hills, officials said, reports

Fierce battles were reported in Kashmir's Batalik ranges. which includes the northern border areas of Drass, Kargil and Mushkar and Nobra valleys, officials said.

Military sources said Indian troops advancing for a ground assault at Batalik were forced to retreat temporarily because of Pakistani shelling. Indian army officials reported several casualties, but did not give precise details.

The Indian air force carried out an eighth day of air strikes on the guerillas on Kashmir's borders, a spokesman said. He said the air strikes were mostly by fighter jets and ground-support aircraft.

"The missions will continue," the spokesman said. Pakistan said at least three school children were killed Wednesday and five others in-

jured when Indian artillery shelled a border village. The Indian army rejected the charge as "pure fabrication."

Pakistani military officials had made a similar claim Tuesday -- that seven children were killed in Indian shelling -but New Delhi dismissed the report as propaganda.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said India was facing "external aggression" in Kashmir, but said New Delhi could consider giving safe pas-sage back to Pakistan to the guerillas.

Vajpayee, speaking at the launch of a new Indian destroyer in Bombay, said Indian military action had been successful and warned that Pakistan would be "mad" if it used nuclear weapons. "The situation ... has im-

proved considerably with our forces gaining considerable success in repulsing the infiltrators," he said.

"I offer my sincerest gratitude to our brave soldiers and officers who are fighting an external aggression in Kashmir." Vajpayee said. "Several of them have laid down their lives in the defence of the motherland. "The territorial integrity of India is sacred to us, dearer to

us than our lives." But a military official in the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar said the campaign against the guerrillas was expected to drag on because of the

difficult terrain. "To immediately dislodge them is not possible," the offi-

cial told AFP. "But with every passing day, we are trying to demoralise the infiltrators by maintaining pressure.

"The infiltrators will have no alternative but to die in our offensive or return to Pakistan.'

The Indian offensive in northern Kashmir began three weeks ago to dislodge up to 600 heavily-armed Moslem guerrillas who have taken over strategic mountains in Indian Kashmir.

India has accused Pakistan of helping the guerillas cross into Indian territory, a charge Islamabad has rejected.

On May 26, India launched air strikes against the guerillas.

who New Delhi says include Pakistani soldiers. The first air strikes were the first since a separatist campaign began in Kashmir in 1989.

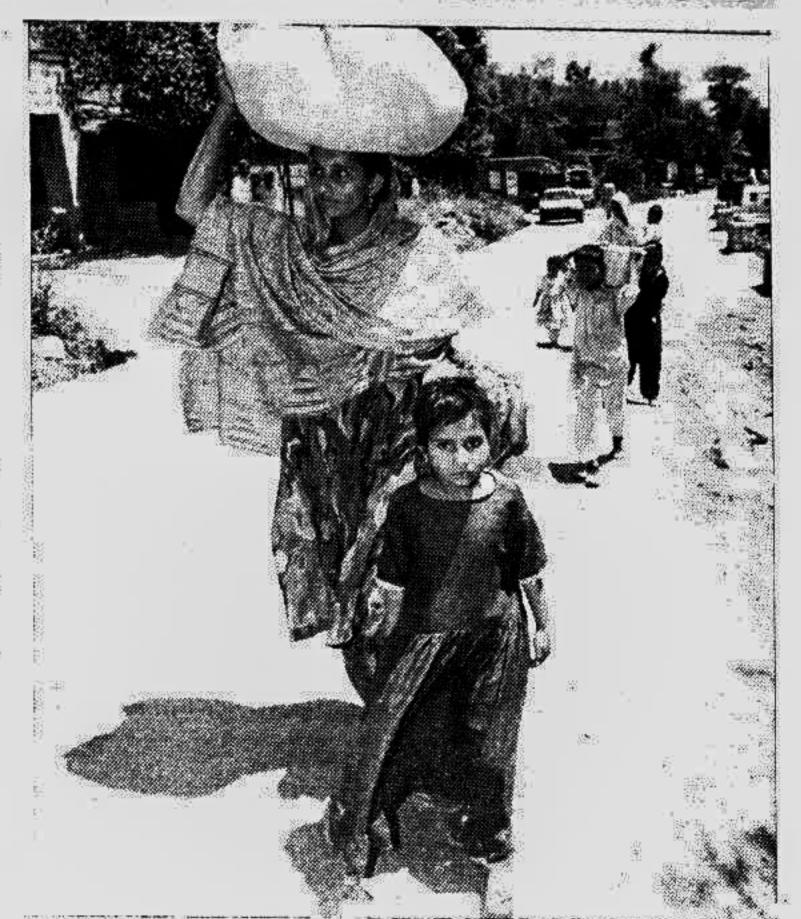
The fighting has heightened tensions between the nuclearpowered Asian rivals who dispute the ownership of Kashmir. The two countries have fought three wars since 1947, two over Kashmir.

India and Pakistan have agreed to hold talks between their foreign ministers in a bid to reduce tensions, but neither country has announced a date.

On Tuesday, however, Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh said there could be no constructive talks with Pakistan without Islamabad first stopping "its aggression" in Kashmir.

Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani said Wednesday that Pakistan had earlier waged three "aggressions" against India -- in 1947-48, 1965 and 1971.

This time, "it is a case of an armed intrusion by Pakistan amounting to naked aggression." the minister said.



A mother with her children flees the village of Samahni, at Line of Control in Pakistan-held Kashmir on Tuesday as the fighting between Pakistan and Indian troops continues. - AFP photo

Fresh violence flares up

Kuki rebels gun down

lagers and injured another at Thanjingpokpi area, about 25 kms east of here this morning, official sources said, reports Armed militants sopped a bus at Thangjingpokpi area at around 8 am, called out ten

While seven of them died on

Another Naga sustained se-

Kuki tribal was killed in the in-

Police and security forces Senior Kuki leader and

in the north east.

Unless the agreement was



South Africans wait patiently in the queue at the polling station in Bellville, Cape Town, yesterday to vote in the country's second fully democratic general elections. President Nelson Mandela was among the first South Africans to vote in the country's second democratic elections. - AFP photo

2 killed as S Africans go to polls occupant of the house was

JOHANNESBURG, June 2: Two people were killed and two wounded in separate incidents in black townships of the KwaZulu-Natal flashpoint of Richmond, police reported Wednesday as South Africans went to the polls, reports AFP.

Police spokesman Superintendent Henry Budhram said the incidents were still being investigated and said the motives were un-"Because its Richmond there

is an indication that it could be political, but at this point in time we have no evidence that substantiate that the motive was political," Budhram told state radio SABC.

"The situation is tense but the normal activities are taking place," Budhram added. In one incident, a woman

was killed when gunmen opened fire on a house in an African National Congresscontrolled township of Ndaleni, police said.

Police said the shooting happened at around midnight Tuesday hours before polling was due to commence. Another wounded, they said.

The suspects apparently fled in the direction of a nearby township area controlled by the rival United Democratic Movement (UDM), according to the police, who said spent cartridges found at the scene showed heavy calibre weapons

Police said they had also found the body of a second woman elsewhere in the township after shooting was heard overnight. A second person was also wounded in that attack, they said.

More than 1,000 troops and police have been deployed in Richmond's black townships to counter pre-election violence. after bloody feuding between the ANC and UDM killed more than 80 people last year.

The deployment forms part of a contingent of 20,000 security forces throughout volatile Kwazulu-Natal in a bid to guarantee free and fair elections.

Another report adds: President Nelson Mandela was among the first South Africans to vote in the country's second democratic elections yesterday saying he felt "absolutely won-

"It's a very exciting day," 80year-old Mandela said after pointing out that he was casting his ballot for only the second time. The first was at historic all-race elections in 1994 which brought his African National Congress to power.

Smiling broadly, Mandela was accompanied by his wife Graca when he voted in the Johannesburg suburb of Houghton. The couple were surrounded by a crush of photographers and journalists. As he entered the polling

booth, an aide passed Mandela his reading glasses so he could meanwhile,

President Thabo Mbeki said he was voting for democracy when he cast his ballot in South Africa's general election at the Pretoria suburb of Hatfield early yesterday. "This is a vote for democ-

racy," Mbeki told reporters in Hatfield as hundreds of people queued outside the polling sta-

assassinate Sonia Gandhi

COLOMBO, June 2: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels who have been blamed for the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi Wednesday denied allegations that they planned to kill his

widow, reports AFP. The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). in a statement sent from their London office, said they were "shocked and distressed" by Indian media reports accusing them of a plot to kill Sonia Gandhi.

"The LTTE wishes to deny categorically reports emanating from sections of the Indian media that our liberation movement has conspired to assassinate Sonia Gandhi, the president of the Indian Congress party," the statement

It was the first LTTE statement from the group's London office in nearly eight months. Since late last year, the group had stopped sending daily fax messages to news agencies and diplomats here.

The brief LTTE statement made no comment of an Indian Supreme Court ruling against members of the LTTE charged with the 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi during a campaign rally.

The Indian Supreme Court last month acquitted 19 Indians and Sri Lankans who had been previously sentenced to death by a lower court for involvement in the slaying but upheld the death penalty on four convicts.

The LTTE, which is outlawed in Sri Lanka and India, has denied ordering Gandhi's Two Indian newspapers re-

ported last month that Gandhi was being targeted by the LTTE who feared she would launch an offensive against them if she came to power. The Hindu newspaper quoted

senior intelligence officials as saying the LTTE had resolved in an April meeting in Durban, South Africa, to kill Italianborn Gandhi in a car bomb at-

Tamil Tigers deny plot to Russian, EU envoys to meet Milosevic on peace plan

BELGRADE, June 2: Senior Russian and European Union envoys head for Belgrade on Wednesday to hear whether President Slobodan Milosevic accepts a Western peace plan for Kosovo amid Serb accusations that NATO is trying to torpedo the talks by intensifying

airstrikes, reports AP. Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, who represents the European Union, and Russian ex-Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin will present Milosevic with the terms of the plan proposed by the G-8 groups of major industrialised nations

plus Russia.

The Finnish president said the mission would not be a negotiating trip. "We have come now to the point where the clarity has to be sought from the Yugoslav side," he said.

In the Yugoslav capital, Goran Matic, a government minister who is close to Milosevic, accused NATO of try-

ing to undermine peace negoti-

Every time a breakthrough seems near, he said, there is "an intensification of the bombing that turns these diplomatic ef-

forts useless." Matic said. NATO, for its part, gave no sign of a letup in the air bombardment which started March 24. striking Serb military targets across Kosovo and hitting power lines, fuel depots, and TV

relays in and around Belgrade. Also targeted late Tuesday and early Wednesday were special police headquarters on Mount Tara, in southwestern Serbia: a radio relay in Ruma. northwest of Belgrade: the military airport in Batajnica. northwest of Belgrade; and barracks near Kursumlija, about 200 kilometers southeast of the capital, ac-

cording to the Serbian media. On Tuesday, alliance jets accidentally fired across the border into Albania, hitting government bunkers, injuring a

refugee and narrowly missing a

group of foreign journalists.
The aircraft, some of them

A-10 ground attack jets, were aiming for Serb positions just inside Kosovo when they unleashed their bombs on a line of Albanian military bunkers by mistake.

In the first hint at an overall death toll among Yugoslav forces. Third Army commander Col. Gen Nebojsa Pavkovic reportedly said that his army, partly deployed in Kosovo with 180,000 men, had suffered less than 1.800 deaths. His remarks were carried in a report by the private VIP daily Wednesday.

In Bonn. Germany, Chernomyrdin and Ahtisaari met Tuesday with US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott to assess prospects for a political settlement.

Talbott said the success of the envoys' mission depends "on hard decisions" by Belgrade. "Obviously the two gentlemen have exceedingly hard work in

front of them," he said.

China issues new warning ahead of Tiananmen anniversary BEIJING, June 2: Two days unity and stability and disrupt

ahead of the 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre, China issued a new warning Wednesday against destabilisation by "hostile forces", reports

But pro-democracy dissidents have vowed to test the limits of the communist government.

'The hostile forces in and out of China are unwilling to see a prosperous socialist China marching forward." said an editorial in the Communist Party's People's Daily. Beijing has already sternly warned that it will not welcome

commemorations of the deaths of pro-democracy students, stepping up pressure on dissidents over the past month. "We must cherish and safeguard the social stability and

said the editorial. It added that the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by NATO forces "was

designed to disturb China's

Sinn Fein wins

deputy mayor's

BELFAST, Jun 2: The IRA-

linked Sinn Fein party won the

deputy mayor's post in Belfast

City Council for the first time

in history Tuesday, reflecting

the rising Catholic population

in the Northern Ireland capital

Fein's 13 members on the 52-

member council, was elected on

a 26-25 vote. Besides her party

colleagues, support came from

the Social Democratic and

Labour Party or SDLP, which

moderate Catholics support,

and the middle-of-the-road

Alliance Party, which draws

support from both sides of the

found divisions that remain de-

spite last year's peace accord,

all 25 members of the pro-

British Protestant benches

voted to try to put a Protestant

hard-liner into the deputy post

ROK, DPRK to

resume talks

North Korea have agreed in

principle to resume high-level

talks over fertiliser aid for the

famine-stricken North and the

reunion of families separated

SEOUL, June 2: South and

In an expression of the pro-

Marie Moore, one of Sinn

reports AP.

community.

instead.

unity of all ethnic groups in the same way we cherish our eyes."

Despite the renewed pressure members of the underground

Since Sunday, members have quietly assembled in a park every afternoon wearing white shirts and black armbands to honour the unarmed prodemocracy demonstrators who were killed in the army crackdown on June 4, 1989, CDP

uniformed and plainclothes police have kept close watch but stopped short of dispersing the

"Our technique is to hold discussions, sometimes inviting passers-by in the park to join in," the dissident said. "When they (police) approach, we just

move to another part of the "So far no one has been detained...because we all go voluntarily as individuals for this activity, it's not organized," he

Hut Wan the and that the ger of arrest would peak on the eve of the anniversary on Thursday, as the party planned to go ahead with a large afternoon demonstration for which authorities have denied ap-

CDP members will attempt to give speeches and distribute leaflets as specified in the formal application submitted and

month. They also plan to mark the anniversary on Friday evening by holding lit candles at a public gathering. Wang said.

200 dead in Nigerian oil region, say reports

people are feared dead in ongoing clashes in the oil-producing Niger delta region of southern Nigeria, press reports said Wednesday, reports AFP. Reports in most newspapers put the toll of the inter-com-

LAGOS, June 2: Up to 200

Saturday with an attack on the town of Arunton, at around 200, the worst for some time in the

were sketchy.

Details of who died and how

munal clashes, which began

But all sides agreed the flareup in violence in the troubled Niger delta region is an early crisis for Nigeria's new civilian

who was sworn in Saturday.

ad for a video game "more fun

ping the violence.

quarters in the area. The oil-producing region,

from a lectern in the Rose

ing of a local government head-

150 soldiers had been dispatched to the area of the fighting, around Escravos, south of

ties in the area on ways of stop-The clashes are primarily between two local ethnic groups, ljaws and Itsekiris, who have been involved in a dispute for the past two years over the sit-

leaders of the local communi-

the major oil town of Warri in an attempt to deter further at-Delta State's new governor, James Obori, was reported last night to be consulting with

An Indonesian policeman stands by a burning flag of the United Development Party (PPP) as security forces intervened to break up a skirmish between supporters of rival political parties in Yogyakarta on Tuesday. Violence erupted when PPP supporters confronted Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-S) campaigners from parading through the AFP photo

Clinton orders probe into video games' link to violence

than shooting your neighbour's Garden. "But the time has come cat," ordered a government into show some restraint, even if vestigation into whether — and it has a short-term impact on how — the entertainment busithe bottom line. ness markets violence to chil-The 1 million dollars, 18dren, reports AP. month review by the Justice "Our children are being fed a Department and Federal Trade dependable daily dose of vio-Commission is the latest initialence." Clinton said, that tive from a president grasping amounts to the typical child

for solutions to an increasingly witnessing 40,000 play murders deadly spate of shootings in the and 200,000 dramatised acts of nation's schools. violence by his 18th birthday. Clinton said federal investi-Such a barrage blurs the line gators will "study the extent to between "fantasy and reality which the video game, music violence" for too many young and movie markets do actually people, the president said market violence to children"

only laxly restrict sales to mi-

FTC Chairman Robert Pitofsky said his staff will, as in probes of the tobacco and alcohol industries, look into the entertainment companies' internal marketing records even if it takes subpoenas.

pulsory processes," Pitofsky said.

Douglas Lowenstein, presi-

Association. promised cooperation with a "fair-minded review. On the dais with Pitofsky,

Janet Reno, Clinton held up several colourful video-game

Nitrous Oxide," showed a souped-up handgun and promised: "More fun than shooting your neighbour's cat." Another, for a PlayStation package called "Guilty Gear," pictured comic-bcok-type warriors lobbing fireballs. "Kill your friends guilt-free," it beck-

"If you look at some of these ads, it's hard to argue with a straight face that the games were made for adults in the first place," Clinton said.

since the end of the Korean War in 1953, reports AFP. power to egg children on and lure them in. By ordering the study himself and paying for it with existing funds, Clinton pre-empted a

here said it had been postponed. Judiciary Committee "It was originally planned at Chairman Orrin Hatch released 11:00 a.m. but it is being dea statement welcoming Clinton layed," a unification ministry and his "newfound interest" to official said, adding that he had the Republican fold. no further details.

the nation's economic development. "China needs development

and China must remain strong. China must steadfastly avoid letting a disturbance created by outside forces spark internal chaos," it said.

China Democracy Party (CDP) vowed to test the authorities with another public garbaring in the eastern city of Hangzhou.

member Wang Rongqing told "Now there are around 100 members going each day," he said, adding that a handful of

proval. signed by 50 members last

Suharto files defamation suit against Time

JAKARTA, June 2: Former Indonesian president Suharto on Wednesday filed a criminal defamation suit against Time magazine for a report alleging he had stashed some nine billion dollars in a foreign bank, reports AFP.

"I deem that the report by the

Time magazine is false, it is an

action that runs against the

law, an insult and a defamation in writing that can also possibly be categorized as slander." Suharto said after filing his suit at the national police headquarters. "Therefore, there is no other

way for me but to go through le-

gal channels," Suharto told

journalists. Suharto was accompanied by his oldest daughter Siti Hardiyanti "Tutut" Rukmana and six lawyers. "Time states that I have

transferred money from a

Swiss bank to another bank in

Austria totalling nine billion

dollars.

"I have repeatedly said I do not have any account overseas and no shares abroad," Suharto Time's May 24 edition also

said Suharto and his family were sitting on a 15 billion dollar fortune. The former head of state, now 77, said that by filing the suit, police can now question the magazine over its report.

Under Indonesian law, the po-

lice probe will allow prosecu-

tors to prepare legal charges. Suharto said his lawyers had sent Time two warning letters demanding they provide evidence or information on the transfer "but it turns out Time could not give the evidence."

One of Suharto's lawyers, Juan Felix Tampubolon, told AFP that after studying the Time report, the lawyers believed the report can be categorized as "a criminal act, that is slander, defamation and in-

Suharto's youngest son, Hutomo "Tommy" Mandala Putra. 36, whose personal wealth was estimated by Time at some 800 million dollars, became the fourth of the children to be questioned over the family's wealth at the attorney gen-

eral's office. On Tuesday, eldest son Sigit Harjoyudanto was questioned for seven hours. Tutut was questioned for eight hours the day before, and Bambang Trihatmojo, the second son on Friday. All have been accompanied by their lawyers.

US top buyer of Iraqi oil

UNITED NATIONS, June 2: The United States bought more Iraqi oil in the last six months under the UN humanitarian programme than all of Europe combined, the United Nations said, reports AP.

The United Nations said Tuesday that Iraq exported 3.93 billion dollars in oil over the six months that ended May 24, a record amount since the UN launched the oil-for-food programme in 1996 to provide for Iraqis suffering under UN sanc-

Of that, Washington bought 44.6 per cent of the crude, Europe 42.5 per cent and the Far East 12.9 per cent, according to figures from the programme, which lets Iraq sell limited amounts of oil - dlrs 5.26 over six months — to buy food and medicine.



"I would hope we could talk to these companies and get voluntary compliance. But certainly if we feel that we can't complete our responsibility here, we're going to turn to com-

dent of the Interactive Digital

first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Attorney General

ads that he considered offen-One, for the game "N20

"Advertisements have a particular role here. They have the

An agreement to hold the talks in Beijing on June 21 was scheduled to have been signed Wednesday morning in the Senate-passed measure intro-Chinese capital, but officials duced by Kansas Republican Sam Brownback. Senate