India, China hold talks on border dispute

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 2: Indian and Chinese military of-ficials have held secret talks to defuse tensions created by Chi-na's construction of a road in a disputed border area, reports

A senior Indian army intelligence official in Kashmir said Monday that officials from both sides had met after the Indo-Tibetan Border Police discovered the construction work last month.

The official told AFP that a unit of 40 Chinese army engineers were involved in building the road in the district of Daulat Beg Oldi, some 140 kil-metres (90 miles) north of the Kashmiri town of Leh.

According to a report in the Frontline fortnightly maga-zine, the road had intruded four kilometres (2.5 miles) into noman's land claimed by both

Chinese soldiers engaged in the construction "were unarmed and evidently confident that there would be no armed reprisal," the magazine said,

citing military sources. Indian Kashmir has a 1,568 kilometre (980 mile) disputed

border with China. The two Asian giants have a history of troubled relations and fought a Himalayan border

Algeria to hold referendum on peace plan Sept 16

ALGIERS, Aug 2: Algeria will hold a referendum September 16 on a peace plan put forward by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika with a view to ending a seven-year Islamic insurgency, Bouteflika's office announced Sunday, reports AP.

The so-called "civil concord" plan is a step-by-step proposal for national reconciliation that includes a large amnesty and reduction of prison terms for militants not guilty of murder, rape or planting a bomb.

Bouteflika has said he will resign if his plan, already approved by the country's parliament and senate, is rejected by the Algerian people.

Algeria has been engulfed in an Islamic insurgency that began in 1992 after the militarybacked government canceled elections that the Islamic Salvation Front was set to win. Since his election in April Bouteflika has been taking steps to end the conflict, including an official acknowledgment

that 100,000 people have been killed during the insurgency. A few dozen militants were the first to be pardoned last month, released from an Algiers jail to coincide with the anniversary of the country's independence from France in

Computer failure on Mir space station

MOSCOW, Aug 2: A computer failure on the Mir space station's steering system has forced the crew to switch to a back-up system, mission control in Korolev, near Moscow, said Monday, reports AFP.

The problem, which happened on Saturday, did not cause a loss of power but forced the Franco-Russian team to install a new guidance system. said a spokesman.

The central computer has since been replaced and everything was going normally, he added.

On August 28, Mir will be abandoned by the crew, Russians Viktor Afanasyev and Sergei Avdeyev and Frenchman Jean-Pierre Haignere. There is not enough money to send up another crew.

After several months of unmanned flight, Mir will fall back to Earth, breaking up in the atmosphere above the Pacific Ocean.

Mir, which holds an orbit 300 kilometres (190 miles) above the Earth, has been in operation for 13 years.

Two Chinese dissidents jailed for subversion

BEIJING, Aug 2: A Beijing court Monday sentenced two members of the outlawed China Democracy Party (CDP) to jail terms of eight and nine years for attempting to subvert state power, dissident sources said.

reports AFP. Zha Jianguo and Gao Hongmin were sentenced by the Beijing Intermediate People's Court following a three hour trial, Zha's daughter, Zhu

Huiyi, told AFP.

"Both men intended to lodge appeals with the court," she

Zha, who was sentenced to nine years, and Gao had been in custody since they were taken from their homes by police in late June.

"We protest the convictions and severe sentences of Zha Jianguo and Gao Hongming by the central communist party authorities," a faxed statement sent to AFP by the CDP said.

"We protest the central communist party's political persecution of the China

Democracy Party," it said. The main evidence against the two appeared to be a series of declarations made by the Beijing branch of the CDP this year in which the party stated its goals to legally register the party and help bring democracy and the rule of law to China, Zha Huiyi said.

China test-fires long-range missile Level-two military alert in southeast region

BEIJING, Aug 2: China Mon-day successfully test-fired a new type of long-range ground-to-ground missile within its territory, the state Xinhua news agency reported, reports AFP.
No other details were imme-

diately available. The test comes as tensions between China and Taiwan have intensified after Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui declared early last month that relations between Taipei and Beijing should be regarded as "special

state-to-state relations".
Military experts had been expecting China to test its Dong Feng-31 (East Wind) missile. Jane's Defence Weekly has said the missile has range of 8,000 km (5,000 miles) and is capable of carrying a single, 700 kg (1,500 lb) nuclear warhead.

Another type of missile, the submarine-launched Julang II, is also slated for test-launch this year, state media reported in June.

The Julang II is based on Dong Feng technology and also has an 8,000 km range. The missile would first be launched from a diesel submarine and then from a Chinese-built Xia Class nuclear submarine, the

official media said. "We have known for some time that the DF-31 should be operationally deployed by China in 2000," said Robert Karniol, Asian correspondent for Jane's.

"That suggests there'll be one or more test launches before the deployment," he told Reuters. China was expected to build between 10 and 20 DF-31 missiles, some of them for deploy-ment on hard-to-find mobile

launchers, according to Jane's

Strategic Weapon Systems.
They would replace the DF-4,
a missile with half the range and developed in the 1960s. The brief Xinhua report did not say where China conducted today's test launch, which took place after weeks of angry Chinese invective and veiled

demand to be treated as an China considers that a step toward independence and on Saturday Defence Minister Chi

military threats over Taiwan's

Haotain renewed Beijing's longstanding threat to use force against Taiwan if it tried to go

its separate way.

Meanwhile, China has ordered a level-two military alert for People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces on the coast along the Taiwan strait, a newspaper reported Monday as a row with Taiwan continued to rumble.

The powerful Central Military Commission ordered the alert, one step above normal readiness, in southeast Fujian province after Taiwan's semiofficial Straits Exchange Foun-dation (SEF) backed Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's call for "state-to-state" ties, the Sing Tao Daily said, citing unnamed sources in Bejing.

The independent Chinese language paper said "inland PLA forces have started to move toward the coast off Taiwan Strait, with airports in the province busy with military planes landing and taking off, while food provisions are being delivered by roads and rail" to

The Beijing-backed Wen Wei

Po daily also said PLA forces in the southeastern region were

"still undergoing mobilization."
Citing unnamed sources, the
daily said "the advanced fighter
aircrafts have recently been shifted (from airport to air-port)" but it said it was not clear how long they would remain at their new posts.

It cited a military expert as saying that such movements in PLA aircraft occured only where there were "exercises or combat duty being carried out." Unconfirmed reports from Beijing last month also said that PLA troops on the coast facing Taiwan had been placed on a level-two (yellow) military

Lee's stance was reiterated in a letter from the SEF to China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), the channel through which the two sides communicate in the absence of official

ARATS rejected the letter. saying it "seriously violated" the One China principle which the two sides adhere to.



Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops march back to their barracks in Shanghai yesterday. China has ordered a level-two military alert for PLA forces on the coast along the Taiwan Strait as a row with Taiwan continued to rumble. - AFP photo

Russia wants to rebuild ties with Israel Yeltsin tells Barak during talks

MOSCOW, Aug 2: President Boris Yeltsin discussed the Middle East peace process with Ehud Barak on Monday, saying Moscow wanted to improve ties with Israel and do business with its new premier, reports

Speaking at the start of talks in the Kremlin, Yeltsin said Russia wanted "to rebuild Russia-Israeli ties," Interfax re-

"We are not saying that our ties were bad or insufficient. No, we were always side-by-side on the issue of resolving the Middle East," said Yeltsin. "But this resolution was proceeding too softly," he said.

"We would like to do business with you, Israel's new, young prime minister," Yeltsin added. Russia co-sponsored the Middle East peace process started in Madrid in 1991 with the United States, but has taken a back seat in the negotiations as its influence in the region waned with its loss of superpower status after the end of the

Barak raised Moscow's ties with Iran and Iraq -- seen as a security threat to the Jewish state -- during the talks with Yeltsin, the Kremlin's chief foreign policy advisor Sergei Prikhodko told Interfax.

Analysts linked Barak's one-day visit to Moscow, his first since taking over as Israel's premier last month, to a recent trip to the Russian capital by regional rival President Hafez al-Assad of Syria.

During his July visit, Assad signed a multi-billion dollar arms deal for advanced Russian T-80 tanks, SU-27 multipurpose warplanes and missile systems.

Israeli officials in Jerusalem said Barak hoped to obtain clarifications on the intentions of Assad, whose country plays a key role in regional

Peace talks between Damascus and Israel are deadlocked over the issue of the return of the strategic Golan Heights on the Israeli-Syrian border. Syria is demanding that Is-

rael return the whole of the strategic Heights, which it occupied in 1967 and annexed in 1981, before it will conclude a peace treaty.

Barak was later to meet his counterpart Sergei Stepashin and the Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, before meeting with Jewish community leaders against a background of a spate of attacks on Jewish targets. Prikhodko said Yeltsin had

"denounced abominable displays of anti-Semitism," vowing: "The culprits will be brought to justice."

An extremist student earlier this month stabbed and seriously wounded a community leader in a Moscow synagogue. the worst anti-Semitic attack here since the Soviet Union's demise in 1991.

Two weeks later police con-ducted a controlled explosion on a home-made bomb placed outside a city synagogue, sparking fears that anti-Semitic sentiment in Russia was on the

Indian army chief sees more Kargil-like situations

WASHINGTON, Aug 2: Indian Army Chief General VP Malik has said that emergence of more 'Kargil-like' situations could not be ruled out and added that fighting was continuing on the Line of Control (LOC) even after all Pakistani intruders

had been evicted, reports PTI. "I can't ignore statements that there will be more Kargils being made at the political level in Pakistan. We have to anticipate an increase in terrorism in Kashmir," general Malik told Newsweek Magazine in an in-terview published in its forthcoming issue.

Stating that Pakistanis had been evicted from entire Kargil sector, he said "but the fighting continues on the LOC. There's firing going on and intermittent artillery. But it is across the LOC. There are no Pakistanis inside India.

The chief of Army Staff said the Indian operation to flush out the Pakistani troops "went as expected within the confines of that sector," and added that Islamabad did not make any attempt to open any front.

Diana Fund donates \$4.86m for war victims.

LONDON, Aug 2: The memo-rial fund named after the late Princess Diana announcement loday grants totalling nearly three million pounds (\$4.86 million) to help war victims in countries ranging from Rwanda to Bosnia, reports Reuters.

Much of the money would go to charities helping women and children in former war zones, the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund said in a state-

Nearly one-third of the grants would help reinforce the campaign against landmines to which the fund had already contributed a million pounds. In the last year of her life, Princess Diana used high-profile visits to Angola and Bosnia to raise international awareness about the threat of landmines.

"The grants reflect our determination to reach out to some of the most vulnerable people in the world, bringing hope to lives broken by violence," said Andrew Purkis, the - AFP photo | fund's chief executive.

Sri Lanka seeks int'l help to combat Tamil Tigers

COLOMBO, Aug 2: The Sri Lankan government on Monday appealed for foreign support to combat Tamil Tiger rebels blamed for the internationallycondemned slaying of a peace advocate in the country, reports

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar who met Colombobased diplomats later told reporters he was seeking intelligence sharing with other countries but there was no request for direct military aid. "No government donates

arms and we have no intention of asking," Kadirgamar sa'd. "Our aim is to ask them to curb, if not minimise the fund raising of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and that will make a difference here.' The separatist LTTE has

been accused of Thursday's suicide bombing of moderate Tamil legislator, Neelan Thiruchelvam, who had co-authored a peace plan aimed at ending decades of ethnic con-

flict in the country. Kadirgamar thanked US President Bill Clinton for his message condemning the assassination and said there had been a global outcry against the killing of a peace advocate.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan also condemned the killing but urged Sri Lankans to pursue efforts to end the conflict which has claimed over 55,000 lives since 1972.

Canada and India also spoke out against the bombing while rights group Amnesty Interna-tional and several other nongovernmental agencies also condemned the killing.

There has been no reaction from the LTTE to the slaying or the allegation that it was responsible for the murder with the deployment of a suicide bomber, a trade mark of the Tiger guerillas.

"Now, at last, the community of nations recognises the fact that the individual interests of a state, which are without doubt paramount as far as each state is concerned, can also be gravely affected by activities that take place far beyond their borders," Kadirgamar said.

He noted that the US state department had designated the LTTE as a "foreign terrorist organisation" in October 1997 and Canada and Britain were also tightening laws to curb rebel activities.

Kadirgamar, a member of Sri Lanka's minority Tamil community, made an impassioned appeal to Tamils abroad to stop funding the guerillas.

Clinton in his message said that with the assassination of Thiruchelvam "a powerful voice for reconciliation in Sri Lanka has been silenced."

"I hope that this tragedy will spur efforts to find an end to the fighting and to build a lasting peace in Sri Lanka," Clinton said in a statement from Sarajevo where he was attending a Balkans summit.

Kadirgamar said the killing of Thiruchelvam appeared to be a rebel response to the government power-sharing plan that is expected to be presented in parliament this month.

"We will not allow a government to be held permanently to ransom by a terrorist group," the minister said adding however, that the government had not ruled out talks "but not today or tomorrow" with the

Scientist Lee denies giving secrets to China

WASHINGTON, Aug 2: A scientist fired for allegedly handing over US nuclear warhead secrets to China insisted on American television Sunday he had not done "anything wrong", reports AFP.

"The truth is I am innocent; I have not done anything wrong." Taiwanese-born Wen Ho Lee told CBS's "60 Minutes" in his first public statement since his dismissal.

Asked if he had ever passed secrets to China, Lee responded "No. I never have done that and I have no intention of doing

"I devote the best times of my life to this country ... I tried to make the country stronger so that we can protect the American people but suddenly they told me I'm a traitor and I'm totally lost.

Lee, a US citizen since 1974. has not been charged with any crime since his March 8 firing from the atomic research laboratory at Los Alamos, New Mex-According to CBS, the US

government is preparing to prosecute Lee for mishandling computer files without evidence showing that the information subsequently got into the wrong Separately, Newsweek re-

ported in its August 2 issue that lawyers for Lee plan to meet with US Justice Department to head off criminal charges against him.

Asked why he thought the government fired him and suspected he was a spy. Lee said. "My best explanation of this is they think I'm Chinese ... I was born in Taiwan: I think that is part of the reason.

"And the second reason, they want to find out some scapegoat. They think I'm the perfect (one) for them to blame." Lee, who worked in a top se-

cret division of Los Alamos Na-

tional Laboratory, pointed out

top secrets for the last 18 years. I know the top secrets of the nuclear weapons very well." Explaining Lee's firing. Energy Secretary Bill Richardson told CBS on the same pro-

he was "the only one Oriental,

Chinese people working on the

gramme: "This individual massizely violated our security for cedures at Los Alamos. Lee said he downloaded data from classified to unclassified status because it was "part of my job -- to protect my code, to pro-

tect my file. I do that routinely". "I have never given that information to any unauthorised person," he said, adding: "I have three passwords; it's almost impossible for anyone to break

The act of downloading classified information to an unclassified environment is common occurrence in government offices, according to officials quoted by CBS.

BELLEFE

Monica injured in car accident: Monica Lewinsky suffered only scrapes and bruises when her

sport utility vehicle overturned on a freeway, the California

Highway Patrol said, AP reports from Ventura. Lewinsky, who was driving alone, reached over to the passenger seat to take something out for her purse, realised she was close to a motor home, veered away and then lost control of her vehicle Sunday afternoon, said Bob Inman, a CHP dispatcher. Her Ford Explorer crossed a dusty median strip on a highway about eight kilometres north of town and toppled on its side, he said. Lewinsky was transported to Community Memorial Hospital in Ventura, where she was treated and released. according to a nursing supervisor.

Bomb blast kills 10 soldiers in Algeria: Ten soldiers were killed and five were injured in a bomb attack

on Sunday at Batna, 430 kilometres southeast of Algiers, the daily El Watan reported. AFP says from Algiers. The incident brought an unofficial tally from violence in Algeria to 21 dead and 11 wounded in the past week. El Watan reported that the bomb detonated on the Batna-Ain Touta road as a military vehicle was passing.

plane crash leaves 4 dead: A single-engine plane crashed in a cornfield just after takeoff, killing four of the five people aboard, authorities said, AP

reports from North Lima, Ohio. The fifth person, a 15-year-old boy, was hospitalised in serious condition at Cleveland MetroHealth Medical Center, a nursing supervisor said. The six-seater Piper Cherokee's flight originated in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and was headed to Pennsylvania when it crashed at about 2 pm Sunday, 800 metres north of the airfield in North Lima, where it had stopped to refuel, said state Highway Patrol Ltd Brian Girts.

Strong earthquake rocks Chile: A strong earthquake rocked central Chile and its capital Sunday night, measuring between four and five on the Mercalli scale, Chile's National Emergency Office said, AFP reports from

No one appeared to be injured and no major damage occurred from the quake, the Interior Ministry office said. Santiago residents in high-rise buildings emerged in a panic as the tremor struck at 9:07 p.m. (0107 GMT). The Mercalli index gauges the intensity of a quake as felt in a given location on a scale of one to 12, a reading considered to equate to total damage.

Taliban capture Charikar city, Bagram base

ISLAMABAD, Aug 2: Taliban forces captured the key northern city of Charikar after heavy fighting with troops loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood, independent and Afghan sources said Monday, reports AFP.

The sources said the Islamic militia had also seized back the vital Bagram airbase Monday, which they captured and then lost again within hours on Sunday. Making fresh advances since

the launch of their summer offensive last week, the Islamic militia entered Charikar from the western Ghorband district, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported. The Pakistan based news

service said at least 28 Masood

soldiers died and many were

wounded in the fighting for

Charikar. The AIP put the Taliban losses at five dead. It said the Islamic militia also captured 130 opposition

fighters and seized a large quantity of arms and ammunition in the city. Earlier independent sources in Kabul said hundreds of

civilians fled the surrounding districts as the Taliban troops advanced into Charikar. "Taliban troops are in Charikar and they have also advanced northwards and are on the edge of Jabul Saraj," one

source in Kabul said. Jabul Saraj is strategically important as it guards access to the Salang Tunnel on the main Salang highway that links Kabul with northern

7 key leaders quit MQM

Afghanistan.

KARACHI, Aug 2: The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which dominates politics in Pakistan's biggest city. Karachi, has splintered with the resignation of seven key leaders, party sources said Monday, reports AFP.

The rift, publicly attributed to differences with exiled party chief Altaf Hussain, could be the precursor to a dissident group "with an extremist agenda" an MQM source said. Seven leaders including three legislators who have worked closely with Hussain, who has lived in London since 1992, submitted their resignation and sent a fax message to local newspapers. A spokesman for the group.

vowing to defend the rights of Mohajir settlers, said it believed in the religious teachings of "eye for an eye and death for

"It is the first Mohajir group which has openly come out with an extremist agenda," an MQM official said.

The MQM, which represents Urdu-speaking migrants from India since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, enjoys massive support in Karachi, provincial capital of the southern province of Sindh.

Karachi has seen frequent social and political troubles which have claimed an estimated 4,000 lives in the past four years.

Rebels kill 17 in Colombia: Entire area flattened

BOGOTA, Aug 2: Leftist rebels attacking a rural police station over the weekend flattened an entire downtown area, killing eight civilians as they fired wildly with homemade

missiles, reports AP. Nine police officers also were killed, another eight wounded and seven more taken prisoner during the three-day siege that ended Sunday in western Antioquia state. Four children were among the dead. It was one of the deadliest

assaults on civilians in recent memory by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, the largest of the country's guerilla armies. About 300 rebel fighters focused their rampage on barracks manned by only 35 officers. The FARC is engaged in peace talks with President

Andres Pastrana, but the negotiations begun in January are proceeding without a cease-fire. Even before the weekend's fighting, the FARC was holding more than 450 police and soldiers prisoner from similar attacks. The group hopes to use the human bounty as a bargaining chip in negotiations to end Colombia's 35-year conflict.

Although the rebels often attack remote police outposts, the scale of the destruction in Narino - a sugar and coffeeproducing town of 4,000 residents - was astounding. "I haven't words for what I'm

seeing, the horror," state police commander Ruben Carillo told The Associated Press by telephone soon after reaching the ravaged town Sunday afternoon, 100 miles northwest of

Indonesia delays polls results again

JAKARTA, Aug 2: Bogged down in bureaucratic bickering, the Indonesian Election Commission failed again on Monday to release long-delayed results from the country's most open parliamentary ballot in 44 years, reports AP.

The latest postponement was announced by frustrated commission members despite a call by President B J Habibie on Sunday to release the results immediately. It has been almost two

their ballots. The figures were to have been announced Monday morning after a meeting of the 53-mem-

However, one senior com-

ber commission.

months since Indonesians cast

mission official, Jakob Tobing, told reporters the meeting broke down after members began criticising one another. The commission is made up of representatives from 48 political parties that contested the

June 7 ballot as well as five gov-

ernment-appointed representa-Several party representatives expressed anger at some government appointees who had earlier criticised the commission's inability to post re-

sults quickly. Tobing, who represents the leading opposition party of Megawati Sukarnoputri, described the meeting as intense.

"We need a psychological breakthrough to have dignified solution," he said. Representatives of the parties would meet later Monday in a bid to end the deadlock and give dissenting parties an opportunity to "reposition gracefully," Tobing said. Buyong Nasution, a prominent lawyer and a government

appointee who has called on the

commission to disband because of incompetence, accused some party officials of unnecessarily drawing out the process. He described them as "irrational" and the latest delay as

disappointing. The results, delayed by weeks of painfully slow procedures and infighting among commission members, were held up on July 26 when 27 tiny parties failed to sign off on the tally, saying the historic elec-

tion had been unfair On Sunday Habibie asked that the results be announced on Monday after an electoral watchdog committee rejected about 100,000 allegations of r regularities.

The election was the first

free ballot in Indonesia since 1955 and was the first step in the selection of a new president. As such, the results are regarded as crucial to the democratic transformation of the world's fourth-most populous nation after decades of authoritarian rule under ex-President

The final figures are expected to closely mirror previously released unofficial tallies that gave Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle a clear lead with 34 per cent of the vote. The ruling Golkar Party, which underpinned Suharto's 32-year reign and now backs Habibie, came in second with 22 per cent.

Suharto, who quit amid

protests and riots last year.

Last week Megawati, the daughter of Indonesia's founding leader, Sukarno, publicly staked her claim to the presidency and called on Habibie's government to get ready to step

South Korean volunteers and marines rescue civilians from a flooded village in Munsan, some 50 Km north of Seoul, yesterday. Some 28 civilians, including soldiers, have died and some are still missing in torrential rains.