

Turks flee homes fearing fresh earthquake

BURSA, Turkey, Aug 20: Millions of Turks, fearing tremors signalled another disaster, camped under the stars today while the death toll in the 72 hours since an earthquake rocked the country topped 7,000, reports Reuters.

People abandoned their homes on a hot and muggy night on the recommendation of the country's chief earthquake expert.

They crowded into every grassy spot of Bursa, the country's textile capital perceived by experts as the likeliest place to be shaken by a second quake.

"Everyone is very nervous," said Hasan Mutlu, a factory worker in his 40s, who curled up for the night with his dog Blackeyes in the main square of the province of two million.

"We've all seen the news and ... we don't want to end up the same," said Mutlu, his wife having left to stay with relatives.

The chief of Turkey's main earthquake observatory,

Mehmet Ali Isikara, said a series of tremors was reason enough for people to leave their homes for 24 hours for fear the buildings would collapse in a repeat disaster.

Hours later, after meeting other experts, Isikara revised his forecast and said he no longer expected a second quake. But hedging his bets, he told a television interviewer: "If it was up to me, I would still stay outside."

Rescuers have been trying frantically to save thousands of people trapped in the rubble of their homes since Tuesday's earthquake rocked the industrial northwest while most lay asleep. The quake measured 7.4 on the Richter scale.

The death toll, the highest of any earthquake in Turkey for 60 years, climbed to 7,085 at 2245 GMT on Thursday with more than 33,000 people injured.

The Bursa governor's office said the grounds of schools and

other public buildings had been opened along with the Ataturk Stadium "for our citizens to spend the night safe and sound."

Officials estimated about 60 per cent of the city was on the street.

Governors of other provinces issued similar orders. Residents bedded down in the disaster area, including in Istanbul, the country's commercial center.

They came armed with mattresses, pillows, blankets, deck chairs and flasks of coffee.

At Akinci air base near the capital city Ankara, residents of lodging apartments were also evacuated, an officer at the base said.

In Bursa, people staked their claims to park benches on a first-come, first-served basis. A man placed his television in the window of his flat while sitting out on the pavement watching the news with a remote control in his hand.

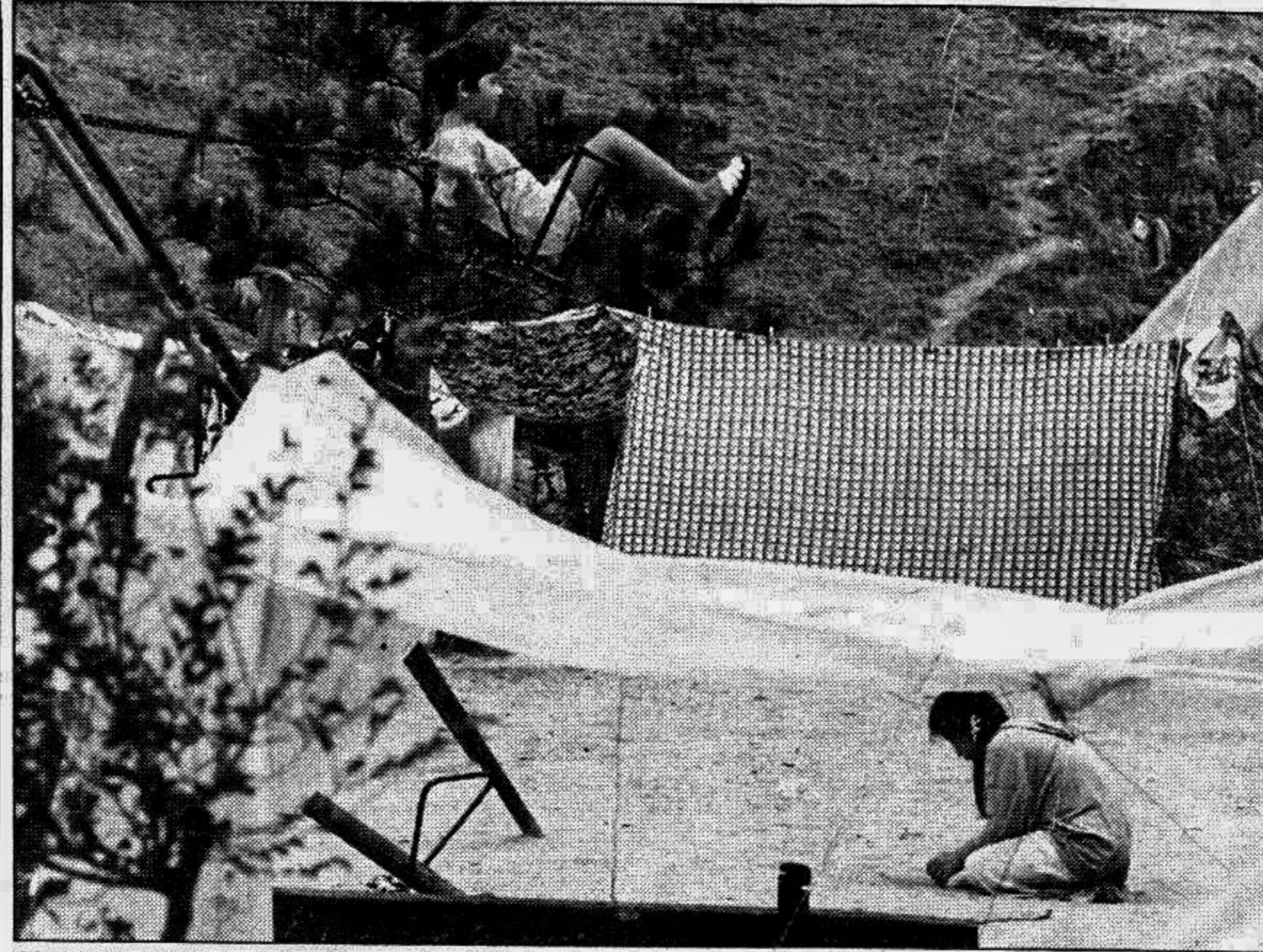
Another report says: death toll in the devastating earthquake that struck Turkey this week could go as high as 40,000 people. UN official for humanitarian affairs, Sergio Piazzi, said Friday, reports AFP.

"It is a possibility," Piazzi, who is head of the regional office for European humanitarian affairs, said when questioned if the number of dead could rise to such a figure.

The Turkish government crisis centre in Ankara said early Friday that the death toll was now at 7,085 people with another 33,559 injured, but a government spokesman said the toll was expected to rise much higher.

Piazzi said he based the projection on Turkish estimates that some 35,000 people were still trapped under rubble, alive or dead.

"There is still a very high chance of finding survivors" to Monday or Tuesday next week, he said.



Children play next to the makeshift tents set by their families near Istanbul Friday after the earthquake that hit Turkey on Tuesday killing more than 7,000 and injuring more than 33,000. Turkey's top seismologist warned the public on Thursday in Turkey's quake-hit northwest to be on alert as the region could be hit by an increasing number of aftershocks.

\$ 8 b given in aid to Turkey so far: UN

GENEVA, Aug 20: Turkey has so far received more than eight billion dollars (7.5 billion euros) in cash donations from the international community to help it cope with the aftermath of its earthquake, the UN aid coordination agency said Friday, reports AFP.

In addition, countries have sent more than 2,000 rescue experts and 120 dogs to northwest Turkey to search for survivors of the disaster, which has claimed at least 7,085 lives, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

The Turkish government continues to appeal for further international assistance, notably in the form of tents, field hospitals, medical equipment, search material, cranes, body bags, blankets, fire fighting gear and mobile kitchens, OCHA added.

Sikh separatists caught with huge explosives in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Aug 20: Three suspected Sikh separatists have been arrested in New Delhi with 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of plastic explosives, police officials said Friday, reports AFP.

One official described the seizure as the "biggest ever haul of explosives" in the Indian capital.

The separatists, arrested late Thursday, were believed to belong to the outlawed Khalistan Commando Force (KCF).

Police also seized a dozen detonators, electronic remote control devices, hand grenades and pencil timers, indicating a planned campaign to disrupt next month's general election.

The KCF are the hardline remnants of a 10-year Sikh separatist drive to set up an independent Sikh homeland called Khalistan (land of the pure).

The movement was snuffed out in 1993 after claiming more than 25,000 lives.

RJD, Cong, left parties reach accord in Bihar

NEW DELHI, Aug 20: Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Congress and left parties yesterday reached an agreement on seat sharing for contesting the 54 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar to take on the BJP-JDU(U) combine in the coming elections, reports PTI.

This was announced by RJD Chief Laloo Prasad Yadav who had extensive discussions with Congress President Sonia Gandhi in the last few days and other party leaders.

We will fight as one in each of the 54 seats, we will have a common candidate, he told reporters but declined to give details of the seat sharing accord.

Party sources said that RJD had agreed to give 13 of the 54 Lok Sabha seats to Congress in Bihar, four to CPI and one each to CPI(M) and Marxist Coordination Committee (MCC) as part of electoral arrangements among them to prevent split of non-BJP votes.

Sources said Congress had staked its claim for over 20 seats.

They said RJD decided to give four seats to CPI while in Ballia there is likely to be a friendly fight between the two parties as RJD did not want to give up a sitting seat to CPI which had done well there in the past.

Lankan police kill suspected suicide bomber

COLOMBO, Aug 20: Police opened fire and killed a suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomber as he attempted to blow up a military vehicle in northern Sri Lanka Friday, officials said in the capital Colombo, reports AFP.

The man was hit by officers as he ran towards their road block in the northern district of Vavuniya, a government spokesman said, adding that a civilian, was also killed in the firefight.

The man came riding a cycle and at the check-point started running towards a jeep when constables opened fire, the spokesman said.

He added a search had begun for another man who accompanied the suspected bomber.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has stepped up suicide bombings since the July 29 assassination of a moderate Tamil legislator in Colombo.

Myanmar junta urged to release 37 dissidents

BANGKOK, Aug 20: Myanmar students in exile called Friday for Myanmar's military rulers to release 37 pro-democracy activists, arrested ahead of a planned uprising next month, reports AFP.

At a press conference Thursday, the junta said it had arrested 26 people in the central town of Pegu and seven more in the southern towns of Ye and Moulmein in connection with the planned uprising.

The military said another four people, including members of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) had been arrested earlier in the northern town of Mandalay.

"The press conference was pure theatre held only to intimidate the people of Burma and to serve as propaganda for their own forces," said Aung Thu Nyein of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF).

UN sounds alarm over Serbs' exodus

Russia threatens to quit KFOR

MOSCOW, Aug 20: Russia is considering withdrawing its troops from the Kosovo peacekeeping effort, Ivashov said.

Meanwhile, the United Nations refugee chief sounded rising alarm here Friday over the exodus of tens of thousands of Serbs and gypsies from Kosovo.

"This is becoming increasingly alarming," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata said.

The number of Serbs in Kosovo had dropped dramatically since NATO's 11-week campaign of air strikes, which ended in June, she told the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan.

The number of Serbs in Kosovo before the conflict was estimated to be about 200,000, she said.

"This is just a rough guess but at least we are aware that 170,000 have already left," Most

month to discuss the Kosovo peacekeeping effort, Ivashov said.

There are a lot of attacks, personal attacks on Serbs who are staying on," Ogata said.

There were only about 2,000 Serbs left in the capital Pristina, she said, compared to 40,000 before the conflict. The situation for gypsies suspected of collaborating with Serb oppression of ethnic Albanians in the province was even worse.

Serbs were driven out systematically. "There usually is a letter sent to them, then a visit and then attacks on them if they don't leave," said the UN official.

In the past week in Kosovo, there had been nine murders and seven serious assaults, "mostly against the vulnerable, and that angers me. A lot of the people left are old people."

had fled to Serbia and Montenegro, fearing for their personal safety.

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Led by children, in either Albanian flags or small UCK uniforms, a group of some thousands of people join a march in Pec Thursday. They were carrying Albanian and American flags and posters reading "Release the prisoners, Release my father, Viva NATO" demanding to release Albanian prisoners from Serbian prisons.

—AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Nigeria to cut size of military:

Nigeria plans to cut the size of its military by more than a third to 50,000 troops over the next 10 years or more, a defence ministry spokesman said Thursday, AP reports from Abuja.

Col. Godwin Ugbo said soldiers would not be laid off and the cuts would be made mainly through the retirement of armed forces staff with 35 or more years of service.

Clinton celebrates birthday: President Bill Clinton spent his 53rd birthday on Thursday criticising the impact of Republican tax cuts on education and receiving best wishes from Russian President Boris Yeltsin before starting a family vacation, Reuters reports from Washington.

Moments after Education Secretary Richard Riley wished Clinton happy birthday in introducing him to a group of educators gathered at the White House, the president renewed his vow to veto a Republican tax cut approved by Congress.

3 die in brawl in Indonesia:

At least three people were killed and seven injured in a mass brawl on a remote island in strife-torn Maluku province, police said Friday, AP reports from Jakarta.

Lt. Col. Didiek, chief of North Maluku police, said about 50 people have been interrogated in connection with the inter-village fighting on Halmahera island, about 2,500 kilometres (1,560 miles) northeast of Jakarta.

Gaddafi for unity of African states:

Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi in an interview published Friday urged African nations to put aside their differences and create a "United States of Africa," AP reports from Paris.

"I want to create a new Africa," Gaddafi told the French daily Le Figaro, saying that the jumble of nations on the African continent could not survive economically unless they united.

South Asia moves to ban land mines

WADDUWA, Sri Lanka, Aug 20: South Asian military officials and diplomats agreed Friday to adopt "incremental steps" to ban land mines while recognising problems posed by tension between India and Pakistan, reports AFP.

A South Asian regional seminar on anti-personnel mines at the southern Sri Lankan beach resort of Wadduwa hammered out a six-point plan to try to persuade governments to move towards signing the Ottawa Treaty, which bans mines' use.

The three-day conference organised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) ended with a call for bilateral deals to eliminate the use of mines along peaceful borders in the region.

The organisers said India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan could agree not to deploy mines along their common borders and such moves would be a sign of a regional willingness to move towards a total ban.

Out of the seven South Asian

Association for Regional Cooperation states, only Bangladesh and the Maldives signed the Ottawa treaty.

Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have agreed to consider it later.

"Discussions indicated that most countries in the region support the eventual elimination of anti-personnel mines and appropriate steps towards this goal," said a report following the seminar.

ICRC's Peter Herby said India and Pakistan had shown "great willingness" to eventually eliminate their anti-personnel mines but ongoing problems along their border prevented an early ban.

"We are not going to resolve the India-Pakistan issue here but participants from both countries have contributed very positively to the discussions," Herby said.

He said neither country felt they were in a position to immediately give up the use of mines because of ongoing disputes.

UN worried at recruitment of students by Taliban

ISLAMABAD, Aug 20: The United Nations is "worried" over the increasing recruitment of young students from religious schools in Pakistan by the Taliban to fight in Afghanistan, UN officials said Friday, reports AFP.

"The process has been going on for some time and we are worried it is increasing," UNICEF representative for Afghanistan, Louis-Georges Arsenault, told reporters at the UN information centre here.

A Taliban delegation recently visited Pakistan to recruit around 2,500 Afghan and Pakistani youths from seminars in the northwestern region, he said.

Earlier this month the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan himself expressed "deep concern" over reports of the involvement in the conflict of students, some as young as 14.

Arsenault would not "quantify" how many youths were involved in the Afghan fighting, but reports in the Pakistani press last week said more than 5,000 students, mostly Afghans, had left to join the Taliban ranks.

UN coordinator for Afghanistan, Bronckez Szynalski, said tens of thousands of Afghans displaced by the fighting north of Kabul over the past several weeks should be allowed by the Taliban to return to their homes.

Putin vows to fight terrorists Russia prepares for raids as Dagestan fighting spreads

MAKHACHKALA, Russia, Aug 20: Fighting in Dagestan spread into northern parts of the republic on Friday as Russia heightened security alerts across the volatile region to wage off feared terrorist attacks, reports AFP.

Snipers from neighboring Chechnya shot one Russian soldier and wounded another near the northern Dagestan town of Kizlyar, according to the interior ministry press center here.

Two weeks of fighting that has killed at least 40 Russian soldiers and an estimated 500 Islamic had previously concentrated in the southern mountainous Botlikh and Tsumadim regions.

But officials in the Chechen capital Grozny said they had begun to bolster their security presence and dig trenches along the northern border with Dagestan because of "endless shelling" from Russian soldiers.

Russian jets and helicopters delivered 37 rocket strikes against the rebel strongholds over a 24-hour span -- the heaviest air assault since the republic's independence from Russia but has so far met little support from the multi-ethnic population.

Well-trained in guerrilla fighting and more familiar with the rough terrain than the Russians, the gunmen from Chechnya say they have made

better progress against the much larger Russian force than they had thought possible themselves.

A Russian interior ministry spokesman told AFP that the gunmen in overnight fighting had taken hold of three new villages in Botlikh -- Roti, Akur and Chado.

And in the Chechen capital Grozny, a spokesman for the Islamists said they had burned two Russian personnel carriers and saw at least seven bodies of dead Russian soldiers after another failed assault on the gunmen's positions.

The Grozny official said

37 die in Iran building collapse

TEHRAN, Aug 20: Thirty-seven people were killed when a wall collapsed at a crowded wedding in northwestern Iran, Tehran radio reported today, reports Reuters.

It said 25 guests were injured after the wall caved in under the pressure of the crowd at the party in the village in east Azerbaijan province late on Thursday.

Russian air raids have also led to casualties among civilians, although he provided no further details.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Friday he wanted a political resolution to violence gripping Russia's southern border but vowed to strike back against "international terrorists" in Dagestan.

"I am convinced that international conflicts, including the problems in Chechnya, cannot be solved through military means," Putin was quoted as saying by ITAR-TASS while visiting Russia's Novgorod region.

"The Chechen problem must be resolved through political means, and this is what we intend to do," said Putin. "At the same time, we are prepared to give an adequate response to the challenge presented to us by international terrorists."

Russian troops and Islamic gunmen have waged battle in Dagestan since a group of insurgents crossed from the neighboring separatist republic of Chechnya on August 7 and proclaimed independence from Moscow.

Putin had previously vowed to dislodge rebels from their positions by the middle of next week. But a ground assault against the gunmen was delayed following two failed pushes against insurgents' positions earlier this week.

Indian PM accuses opposition of triggering Kashmir conflict

KARNAL, India, Aug 20: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee told an election rally here Friday that opposition parties were partly responsible for sparking the recent Kashmir crisis, reports AFP.

Vajpayee said the incursion by hundreds of Islamic guerrillas over the disputed Indo-Pakistan border in Kashmir was a direct result of the "opposition conspiracy" to bring down his coalition government in April.

"The opposition conspired to topple the coalition but failed to act in a responsible manner for providing an alternative," Vajpayee said.

"All this gave an impression that our minority government had become weak," he told supporters in Karnal, in the northern state of Haryana.

Vajpayee said Pakistan had been tempted to take advantage of the political instability created by the "power hungry" opposition, to push heavily-armed army personnel over the border.

Pakistan has denied Indian claims that Pakistani soldiers were involved in the two-month Kashmir conflict, insisting that the guerrillas were all Kashmiri freedom fighters.

The military offensive to push back the infiltrators, launched on May 9, cost the lives of more than 400 Indian soldiers.

The main opposition Congress party has accused the government of negligence in failing to detect the incursion in its early stages.

Earlier Friday, Vajpayee had played down concerns over India's nuclear weapons programme, and stressed that New Delhi remained committed to global nuclear disarmament.

China, Pakistan and the United States have all voiced concern over the publication this week of India's draft "nuclear doctrine," which envisages the development of a land, sea and air-based nuclear deterrent.

But Vajpayee insisted the doctrine was merely a draft for public discussion and not a final document.

'Famine claims 2 to 3 m people in DPRK'

WASHINGTON, Aug 20: North Korea appears to be emerging from its four-year famine, one of the worst this century that may have killed two or three million people, The New York Times said Friday, reports AFP.

"We now know that more than 10 percent of the population starved to death," Andrew Natsios, a former vice president of World Vision relief agency and author of a new study on North Korea, told the daily.

Most of those who died from starvation were old people and children, or urban dwellers of any age who could not forage off the land, Catherine Bertini, executive director of the UN World Food Program said in an inter-

view.

On her return from a recent visit to North Korea, Bertini said international food aid was "the only reason why there might be some stability now in the nutritional lives of many North Koreans."

She said the situation had improved from a previous visit two years ago, but that the country needed more international help.

"Two years ago we saw no food in the country at all ... There weren't small animals around. I remember distinctly not ever hearing a bird sing -- or seeing a bird. I can count on one hand how many oxen we saw," Bertini said.