

Tempers flare at HK airport

Low toll from air crash hailed as miracle

HONG KONG, Aug 23: Hong Kong airport was flocked with angry travellers Monday as airlines scrambled to make up for cancellations following the China Airlines (CAL) crash which killed two people, reports AFP.

The operations of Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific Airways were "significantly disrupted" as Chek Lap Kok airport remained half closed due to the crash, an airline spokesman said.

Driving rain and wind from the remnants of typhoon Sam was compounding the problems, he said.

CAL flight CI-642, on route from Bangkok with 300 passengers and 15 crew, flipped on landing in China and Taiwan. One of two runways at the airport reopened in the early hours Monday.

Thousands of passengers who returned to the airport Monday after their flights were cancelled Sunday found themselves waiting for more than two hours to check in.

"I've been waiting since Sunday, and I'm still waiting for the past two hours," an angry passenger on his way to Jakarta told AFP.

At some airline departure

counters, heated exchanges of words broke out.

"Of course, I'm not happy. What if my boss fires me for not being able to return to work on time if my flight is being delayed for another two days," a Taiwanese passenger told reporters.

Many passengers complained that airlines had not made emergency preparations by accommodating them in hotels. Hundreds ended up spending the night at the airport.

Several airlines have set up hotlines to enable passengers to enquire about flight schedules.

It was not immediately known when the airport would be fully operational as investigators studied the wreckage of the crashed Taiwanese airline's McDonnell-Douglas 11 jet.

Albert Lam Kwong-yu, director of civil aviation, told a press conference on Monday that the wreckage would remain on the runway until investigators finished their work.

"I personally would like to see both runways operating as soon as possible," he said.

About 40 members of the crash victims' families, CAL officials and Taiwan Civil Aeronautic Administration investigators on board a charter flight to Hong Kong had to abort their landing Monday.

Their plane had tried twice but was unable to land due to bad weather.

Hong Kong on Monday hailed the "miracle" that kept the dead toll down from the China Airlines crash to just two, but the Taiwan carrier faced anger over its safety record.



Investigators survey the scene of the wreckage of a China Airlines aircraft Monday at Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok Airport. The burnt-out shell of the McDonnell-Douglas 11 was still strewn across one of the airport's runways following the crash landing Sunday evening that caused delays and cancellations to flights. Two people died and over 200 people were injured in the crash.

As an investigation got underway into how the plane burst into flames after a wing of the MD-11 jet clipped the ground, CAL management and Taiwan's transport minister both made public apologies.

The two fatalities were a 30-year Taiwanese man, Lin Keng-hui and a 40-year-old Por-

tuguese woman, Helena Videla.

A plane bringing experts and families of the Taiwanese victims on Monday twice had to turn back to Taipei because of bad weather at Hong Kong, officials said.

And the wreckage of the jet and more rainstorms caused more delays to flights into and

out of Hong Kong where only one runway was in use.

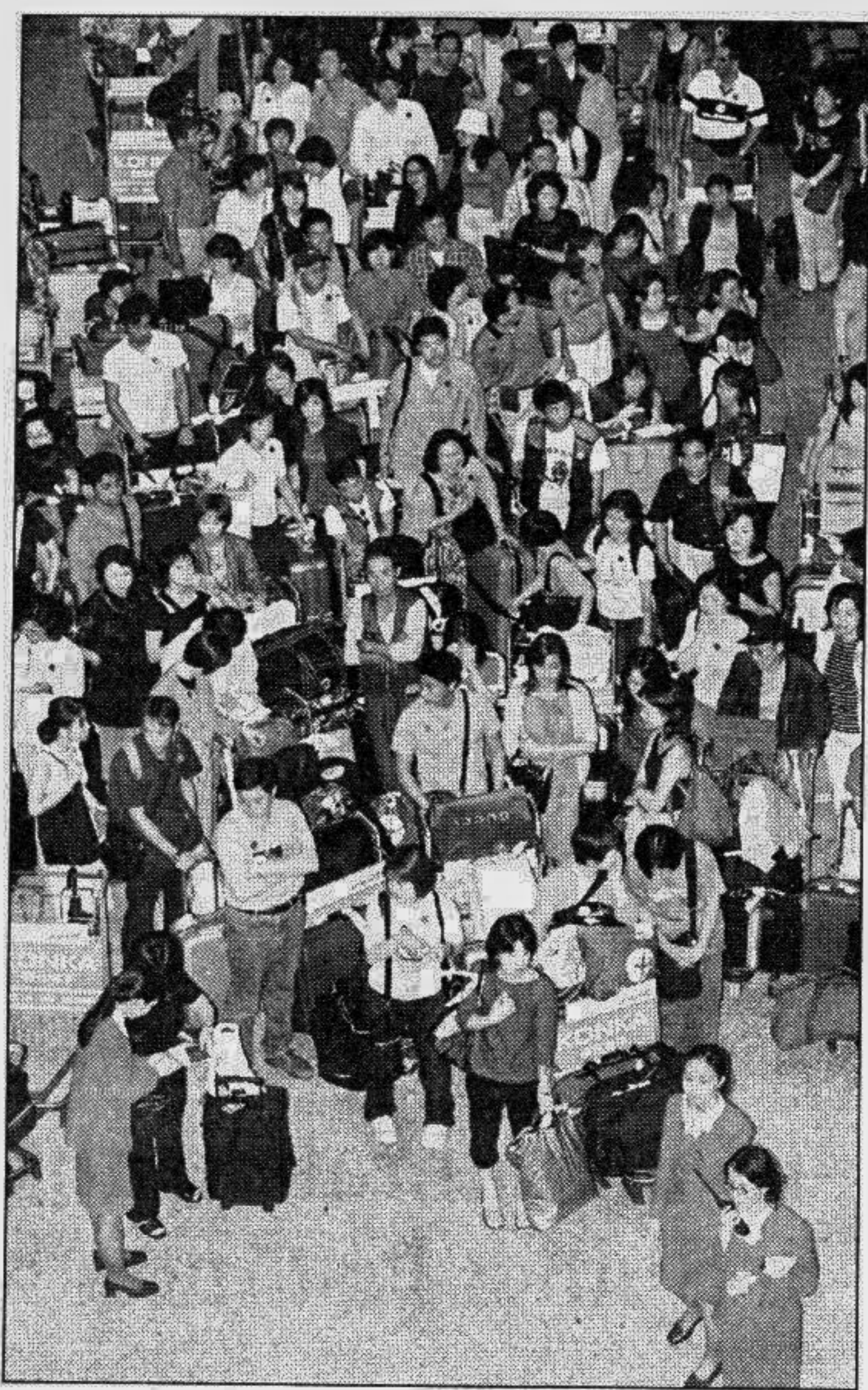
But there was widespread relief that the casualty toll was not worse.

Meanwhile, China Airlines on Monday apologised for the crash-landing by one of its jets in Hong Kong which killed two passengers and injured more

than 200.

"China Airlines expresses the deepest apologies for the incident that shocked the country," company chairman Chiang Hung-tai told reporters.

"We will fully cooperate with Hong Kong authorities on the investigation of the accident possibly caused by typhoon."



Passengers await their instructions, late Sunday, at Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok Airport, following the crash of a China Airlines aircraft. The burnt-out shell of the McDonnell-Douglas 11 plane, which left two dead and over 200 injured, still sits straddled across one of the airport's runways Monday, causing numerous delays and cancellations to flights.

BRIEFLY

Drunk Kashmiri minister quits: Shamed after being caught drunk on Pakistan's alcohol-free national airline, a Kashmiri legislator resigned Monday, a government official said, AP reports from Muzaffarabad.

Public Works Minister in Pakistan-ruled Kashmir, Chaudhury Mohammed Yasin, was arrested last week and charged with drunkenness, a crime in Islamic Pakistan, where alcohol is forbidden.

Bus accident claims 22 in China: A bus swerving to avoid an oncoming van plunged off the edge of a highway and fell 120 meters (400 feet) into a ravine, killing 22 people in northern China, a newspaper said Monday, AP reports from Beijing.

The bus, with 52 people aboard, was bound from the city of Xi'an in Shaanxi province to Yilong in Sichuan province when the accident occurred Saturday morning in Chang'an County in Shaanxi, the Beijing Youth Daily reported.

7 killed in ambush in Algeria: Seven members of an Algerian self-defence group died overnight when they were ambushed by armed Islamic extremists in Lakhadaria, 70 kilometers (45 miles) southeast of the capital Algiers, informed sources told AFP Sunday.

S Korean President to visit NZ: South Korean President Kim Dae-jung will visit New Zealand and Australia September 10-18 to boost diplomatic and trade ties with an Asian regional forum and with the two states, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Seoul.

Kim's trip will start with his participation in the forum of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders on September 12 in Auckland, New Zealand, the presidential office said.

Hopes fading for survivors

ISTANBUL, Aug 23: As fewer victims were pulled alive from the rubble of Turkey's earthquake, hopes faded for the tens of thousands believed trapped beneath the wreckage, reports AP.

Only two women survivors were found Sunday and further rescue efforts may be hampered by rains that are expected to engulf northwestern Turkey on Monday.

Fearing health risks, including rain that could be contaminated by toxins pumped into the sky from a huge fire that burned at Turkey's biggest oil refinery, Health Minister Osman Durmus urged people to evacuate the area near the refinery in Izmit, about 90 miles (145 kilometers) southeast of Istanbul.

Energy officials, speaking on customary condition of anonymity, said an oil spill from the refinery had spread up

to 1 1/2 miles (two kilometers) off the shores of the Sea of Marmara.

Minister irks Turkish press

ISTANBUL, Aug 23: The Turkish press Monday called for the head of Health Minister Osman Durmus over his botched handling of earthquake relief coordination and his ultra-nationalistic statements on foreign assistance, reports AFP.

"Enough: shut up and leave," the daily Radikal said in a banner front page headline, calling Durmus a "callous, ignorant racist."

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit and Deputy Prime Minister Devlet Bahceli, president of Durmus's ultraright Nationalist Action Party (MHP), "will be criminal accomplices" if they fail to sack the minister, a columnist for the liberal daily wrote.

Jayalalitha fails to turn up for joint rally with Sonia

VILLUPURAM, Aug 23: The much publicised joint rally of Congress President Sonia Gandhi and AIADMK Chief Jayalalitha here failed to materialise yesterday, robbing the event of its spectacle, as Jayalalitha did not turn up, reports PTI.

Sonia who waited for over 45 minutes for Jayalalitha, ultimately gave up and went ahead with her address to the largely attended public meeting.

Jayalalitha, who was scheduled to campaign in parts of Chennai and Chengalpattu en route to Villupuram, 160-km from Chennai, did not leave her residence till 1530 hours and everyone knew that she could never make it in time for the 1700 hrs rally.

Speaking at the meeting, the AIADMK Villupuram district secretary SS Pannerselvam said Jayalalitha wanted to come but was caught in a sea of humanity while canvassing for south Chennai Congress candidate V Dhandayuthapani near Chennai.

Vajpayee urges voters Give my alliance a full term

NEW DELHI, Aug 23: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Monday urged voters to give his alliance a full five-year term to complete his coalition government's unfinished agenda, reports AFP.

"The National Democratic Alliance is going to the electorate with a self-evident record of performance," Vajpayee told an election rally in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad, capital of Gujarat state.

"We also go to the people with a solemn promise that we shall accomplish the incomplete agenda with even greater dedication and determination in our next term in office," Vajpayee was quoted as saying by the United News of India.

India goes to the polls in September-October, the country's third general election since 1996.

Vajpayee said his alliance's vision was "clearly spelt out in the common manifesto of the National Democratic Alliance, which is aptly called an agenda for a proud and prosperous In-

dian."

The alliance, led by Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party, in its manifesto last week promised to pump up the country's military and economic muscle.

It said the defence spending would be increased and pledged a reform-minded government, but with strongly Indian characteristics.

Vajpayee's government, which lasted 13 months in power during which time it was plagued by internal squabbling, collapsed in April after losing a confidence vote plunging the country into a fresh bout of political instability.

"If given a fresh mandate to govern, I promise that India will witness unprecedented progress in all spheres in the next five years," Vajpayee said.

"Faster and more balanced development with benefits to all regions and all sections of society will be my top priority."

"We are seeking renewed mandate on the basis of performance and promise. The per-

formance of our government in the short time we were there is for all to see."

He said India's military success in driving out Islamic guerrillas, who had crossed over to the Indian-controlled region in disputed Kashmir, had "imbued the entire nation with the spirit of self-confidence."

"Our national security is stronger than ever before. In spite of having had to fight a war, our economy is also in a buoyant position," he said.

Vajpayee said his government had succeeded "in bringing down communal tension and violence to a record low."

Christians, who make up just 2.5 percent of India's overwhelmingly Hindu population of some one billion, say attacks against the community have increased since the Hindu nationalist BJP party came to power in March 1998.

But Vajpayee denied the charges and said "there was an atmosphere of unity and amity in the country today."

Russia escalates assault against Dagestan rebels

TANDO, Russia, Aug 23: Russia on Monday delivered the strongest single-day air strike yet against Islamist rebels in the mountains of Dagestan and prepared to launch a decisive ground offensive to flush out the gunmen, reports AFP.

The interior ministry said 140 gunmen who crossed over from neighboring Chechnya two weeks ago were killed by Russian forces in a battle near the tiny village of Tando, where the rebels have proclaimed their own independent Islamic state.

Russian forces flew 68 sorties over its southern republic, delivering 38 rocket strikes against villages near the Chechen border still under the gunmen's control.

Officials in Moscow said the group includes Islamic extremists from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Battles were also continuing

Monday in the villages of Ansalta and Rakhata.

Moscow officials on Sunday vowed to take the village of Tando by mid-afternoon.

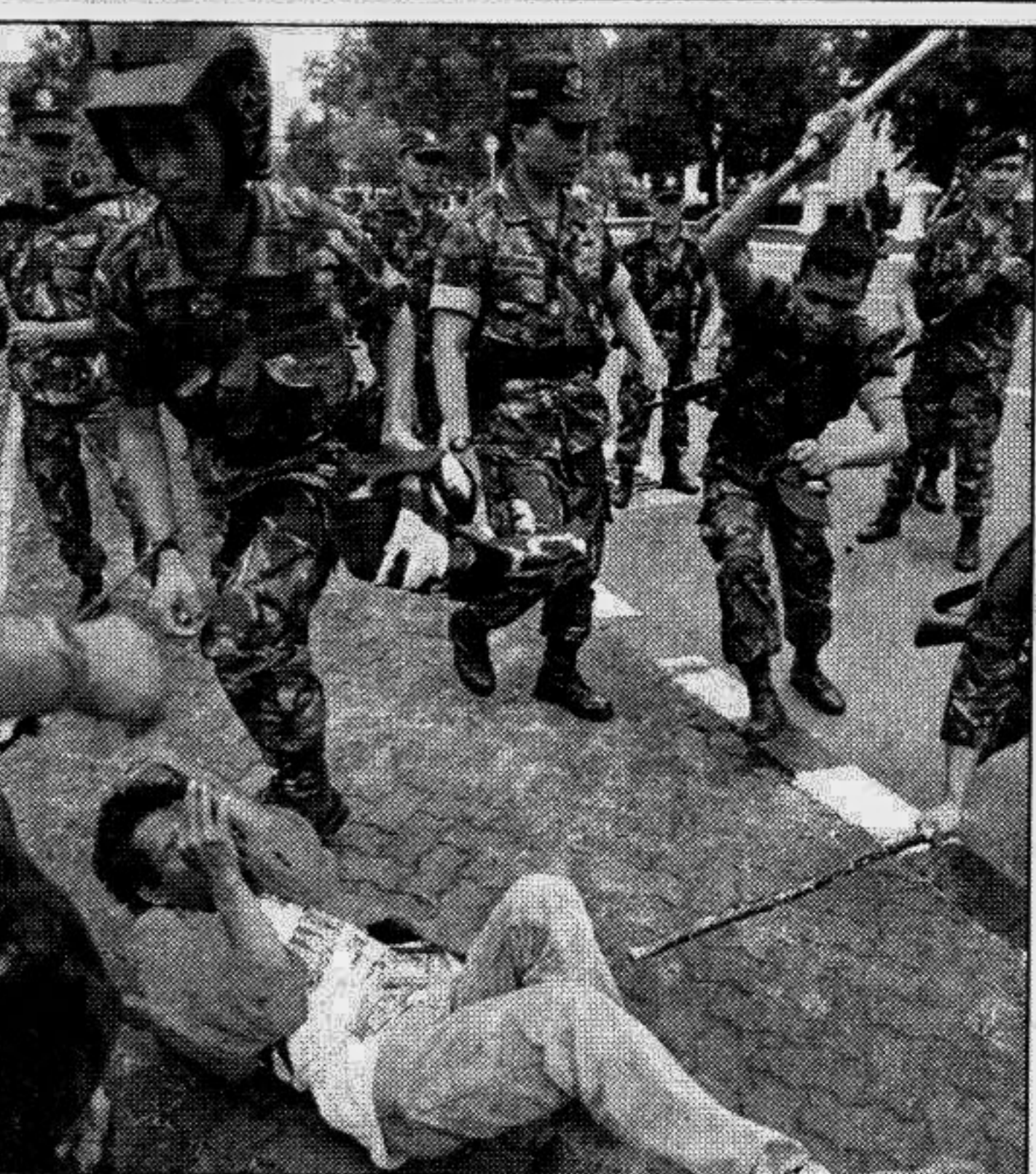
"Today we will raise the Russian flag over Tando," vowed General Vladimir Kulakov, who commands interior ministry forces in the region.

But intense fighting here continued Monday morning with Russian troops still refusing to launch a decisive ground offensive, relying on air attacks instead.

The rebels, more familiar with the difficult terrain than the Russians, have used caves dotting the mountains to temper the bombing campaign.

Russian officials said one paratrooper was killed and four wounded during fighting overnight.

Officials in the Chechen capital Grozny, however, said 130 Russian soldiers had been killed in the past 24 hours.



An Indonesian student protects his face as soldiers kick and beat him near the Merdeka Palace in Jakarta Monday.

A fight between Swadeshi and Videshi

BELLARY, Karnataka, Aug 23: This is a fight between Swadeshi and Videshi, BJP leader Sushma Swaraj, locked in an electoral battle with Congress President Sonia Gandhi from Bellary Lok Sabha seat, said yesterday, reports PTI.

"I have not come here to fight the election but to uphold the self-respect of India," Swaraj told an election rally here.

Delivering a major portion of her address in Kannada, she compared her electoral fight with that of Mahabharata saying it is for a cause and mission.

Kosovar Albanians push back Russian KFOR troops

ORAHOVAC, Yugoslavia, Aug 23: A blockade by ethnic Albanians on Monday turned back the first Russian KFOR peacekeepers from the central Kosovar town of Orahovac, a spokesman for the activists said.

Towards eight o'clock (0600 GMT) at least 20 Russian soldiers came in three armoured cars then left after an hour after being prevented from passing," a former member of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) told AFP.

Demonstrators have blocked the roads into Orahovac with their own vehicles in a bid to prevent a Russian KFOR force from replacing Dutch soldiers already patrolling the town.

Saudi Prince Faisal buried

RIYADH, Aug 23: Saudi Arabia's royal family buried King Fahd's eldest son, Prince Faisal, in Riyadh yesterday in a quiet ceremony reflecting the kingdom's *wahhabi* branch of Islam, reports Reuters.

The prince, who was chairman of the kingdom's youth organisation, died of a heart attack on Saturday a few days after returning from the Arab Games in Jordan. He was born in 1946.

King Fahd held prayers for his dead son on Saturday night in Spain, where he is convalescing after eye surgery in June, and was advised by doctors not to return to Riyadh, according to a source at his Marbella residence.

Bridge linking Israel, Jordan opens for cementing peace

SHEIKH HUSSEIN BRIDGE, Jordanian-Israeli Border, Aug 23: Jordan and Israel on Monday officially opened the Japanese-funded Sheikh Hussein Bridge linking their countries, saying it was a key pillar of their peace treaty, reports AFP.

"This bridge is one of the cornerstones of the edifice of peace which we all hope to build upon," Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdel al-Ilah al-Khatib said in a speech.

His Israeli counterpart David Levy echoed him, saying "We are proud to be here. This is a small bridge but it holds great hope which expresses the will of both nations to go ahead with the peace process."

The Sheikh Hussein Bridge is, along with the Wadi Araba crossing in southern Jordan, one of two overland links between Israel and Jordan, unlike the King Hussein bridge, ex-Alembey, which joins Jordan and the West Bank.

The two-lane 90-meter-long (300 feet) and 12-meter-wide (40 feet) bridge is located in northern Jordan around 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of the Sea of Galilee in a semi-arid region dotted by a few palm trees.

Khatib walked the short distance to the Israeli side to shake hands with Levy and then both linked up with Japan's ambassador to Jordan, Koichi Matsumoto, for the cutting of a red ribbon in the middle of the bridge.

The leader of the Japanese delegation, Koki Chuma, chairman of the standing committee on foreign affairs of the Diet, cut the ribbon cheered on by officials on both sides.

"It is Japan's sincere hope that lasting peace will be attained soon (in the Middle East) in order to bring about stability and development in this region," Chuma said.

"It is a great honour for Japan to have an opportunity to participate in such a project which is one of the fruits of the peace process and the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel," he said.

Taiwan won't fire first shot against China

PENGHU, Taiwan, Aug 23: Taiwan's military has said it would not fire the first shot in a conflict with China but pledged to block any attack from its rival, as Beijing heaped vitriol on President Lee Teng-hui, reports AFP.

"We will never pull the trigger first," defense ministry spokesman Kung Fan-ding told reporters on a recent visit to military bases on islands in the Taiwan Strait.

He said Taiwan would not make any provocative steps to further aggravate cross-strait tensions, which erupted last month when Lee said Taipei wanted ties with Beijing to be redefined as a "special state-to-state relationship."

"We would rather bear the first strike from the Chinese communists," said Kung.

But he warned the military would not hesitate to fight back if Beijing launched an attack.

Taiwan's military frequently uses Penghu, the closest air base to China, for exercises aimed at repelling a landing by hostile forces.

designated for on-duty air crew at the air base reminded pilots of the importance of preventing accidental clashes with China in the Taiwan Strait.

"Try not to heighten tensions or escalate the feud" and "Try not to spark disputes but reduce hostilities instead," they read.

Lee confirmed earlier this month that Chinese fighter jets had twice crossed the dividing line between the two rivals, but he reassured Taiwanese that the planes had quickly backed off when challenged.

Chinese ambassador to the United States Li Zhaoxing renewed Beijing's threats in Washington last Thursday, warning his government would not "rule out the force option" if Taiwan moved towards independence.

Despite the threat, air force officials said morale was high among its units.

"Our IDFs (Indigenous Defense Fighters) are armed with Tiennchien II air-to-air missiles, which give us beyond-vision combat capability," said a confident Lieutenant Colonel Chou Chen-hua.

Signs on the wall of a room



Afghan refugees residing in India display anti-Pakistan banners during a demonstration near the UN office Monday. The demonstrators accused Pakistan of meddling in their internal affairs by allegedly backing the Taliban militia, through its intelligence wing --the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Recent fighting between the Taliban and opposition military commander Ahmad Shah Massoud have caused thousands of civilians to flee the area.