



Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar speaks about the government's efforts to end the long-running Tamil separatist war at the Foreign Correspondents' Association in Colombo Tuesday. Kadirgamar said Colombo's peace efforts were deadlocked and there was no immediate prospect of ending the drawn-out war that has claimed over 55,000 lives in the past 27 years.

—AFP photo

War crimes Serb general arrested in Austria

THE HAGUE, Aug 25: The Bosnian Serb General Momir Talic, indicted on war crimes charges by the UN tribunal in The Hague, was arrested Wednesday in Austria, the court's prosecutor Louise Arbour announced, reports AFP.

Freed Malaysian leader vows to keep fighting govt

KAJANG, Malaysia, Aug 25: Malaysian opposition leader Lim Guan Eng was given a rousing welcome by cheering supporters on his release from jail on Wednesday, and immediately vowed to keep fighting the government, reports AFP.

Lim, the deputy secretary general of the Democratic Action Party (DAP) who was freed after serving two thirds of an 18 month term for sedition and publishing false news, said he was ready to face prison again.

Vajpayee ridicules Congress as govt demolition expert

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Wednesday lambasted the opposition Congress Party as being expert in bringing down governments, but incapable of running them, reports AFP.

Addressing an election rally in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, Vajpayee blamed Congress for forcing India's third general election since 1996.

"My government did not die a natural death but was strangled, thus forcing another mid-term election on the country," Vajpayee was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India.

German Cabinet meets in its new home in Berlin

BERLIN, Aug 25: The German cabinet was meeting on Wednesday in its new home in Berlin for the first time in more than 50 years, reports AFP.

With the chancellor's office finally installed in Berlin on Monday, the first cabinet meeting marks the government's definitive return to the capital after 54 years in Bonn.

And the German parliament is scheduled to take possession of the historic Reichstag building in its first session there on September 8.

On the agenda of the cabinet meeting was the finalisation of the government's plans for spending and pension reforms in the face of stiff opposition from within Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's own social democrat SPD party and its powerful trade union allies.

HK airport returns to normal

HONG KONG, Aug 25: Operations at Hong Kong International Airport were slowly returning to normal Wednesday in the wake of a ferocious typhoon and a Taiwanese airliner crash that left two dead, reports AFP.

Airport officials said 15 of the 487 scheduled flights were cancelled by lunch time Wednesday. On Tuesday, 41 out of 507 scheduled flights were cancelled.

At Chek Lap Kok airport, the long queues of angry passengers at airline counters, particularly Taiwan's China Airlines and Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways, had disappeared, with passengers rescheduled to other airlines.

Omar narrowly escapes attack Blast near Taliban leader's house: 10 killed

KABUL, Aug 25: A truck bomb set off the night of the home of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar killed at least 10 people and caused widespread devastation in the city of Kandahar, Taliban officials said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The elusive Omar narrowly escaped the bomb late Tuesday, sources said. But scores of people were injured and buildings up to one km away were damaged.

"It was a deliberate act of sabotage by the enemies of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," Taliban spokesman Abdul Hai Mutmaen said. He declined to say who the militia thought was responsible.

Mutmaen said the truck, carrying explosives crammed into a barrel, was parked near Omar's house on the Herat Highway in the southern city.

Omar's home is a short distance from a residence once used to house accused terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden.

Independent sources said the offices of the Red Cross and

French aid group Medicines Sans Frontières -- located about a kilometre from Omar's house -- were severely damaged in the attack.

"The Red Cross has no windows left," one source said.

In Kabul, all foreigners were asked to stay indoors for security reasons amid fears of increased tension, sources said.

The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press said at least 10 people were killed and 25 vehicles destroyed with the blast leaving a crater the size of tennis court.

"Mullah Omar was seen safe and sound after the explosion," it said, while independent sources confirmed two dead and 41 injured, adding the toll was expected to rise.

AIP said a Taliban guest house was mostly destroyed and the Pakistan consulate -- about 400 metres from the blast -- sustained serious damage. Official sources in Pakistan said none was hurt at the consulate.

Pakistan is one of the few countries to recognise the Tal-

iban as the legal government of Afghanistan. The militia have their headquarters in Kandahar.

AIP said the explosion occurred while Taliban guards were trying to remove the truck. Mulla Omar had walked out of his house, seen the truck and moved away moments before it detonated, sources said.

Immediately after the strike Kandahar residents fled the city, believing another missile strike had been launched on Afghanistan by the United States.

The White House immediately denied any involvement saying "there is no truth at all to any report of US government involvement."

A spokesman for anti-Taliban alliance which has fought a five year civil war against the militia said he was unable to confirm or deny whether the opposition was responsible for the Kandahar attack.

"We are looking at what happened but it's just not the sort of thing we do," he told AFP.

Pak PM blames India for arms race

ISLAMABAD, Aug 25: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday said India had fuelled an arms race in South Asia and called for a peaceful resolution of disputes dividing the two countries, reports AFP.

"We want peace and prosperity in the region: let us sit down and solve disputes amicably," Sharif told a convention of overseas Pakistanis in the capital Islamabad.

It was in the interests of both countries and the region to rise above half a century of mutual hostility and divert resources to economic development, he said.

"It is India which has generated tensions and a race for arms," he added, referring to last year's nuclear tests in India, which he said compelled Pakistan to follow suit to safeguard its security.

He stressed that a durable peace between Pakistan and

India depended on a just settlement of the festering dispute over Kashmir, the Himalayan region divided between the two and claimed by both.

Kashmir, where the rival armies were engaged in two-month confrontation from early May to mid-July, has caused two of the three wars between the neighbours since their independence in 1947.

"We want to resolve the dispute at the negotiating table," Sharif said, adding another war between the two nuclear powers would bring nothing but "disaster".

He said Pakistan demonstrated its desire for peace by defusing the recent crisis in Kashmir by overseeing the withdrawal of Moslem guerrillas from Indian territory.

Pakistan has shown it is a "responsible nuclear state" and has a "responsible leadership,"

Sharif said.

Sharif rejected India's accusation that Pakistan was responsible for the long running turmoil in Indian-held Kashmir, where a Moslem separatist campaign has killed more than 24,000 people since 1989. But he vowed Pakistan would continue its "whole-hearted moral, political and diplomatic support" for the "just and genuine struggle of the Kashmiri people for their right to self-determination".

"Pakistan cannot be a silent spectator to atrocities and repression in Kashmir," he said.

It was the United Nations' responsibility to implement its own resolutions on Kashmir, he added.

The UN resolutions on Kashmir adopted in 1948-49 called for a referendum to enable the population to choose between union with India or Pakistan.



Tens of thousands of pro-independence supporters parade atop trucks holding the colors of the National Front for East Timor Resistance (CNRT) and portraits of their jailed leader, Xanana Gusmao, during a massive motorised campaign rally through the streets of Dili Wednesday.

—AFP photo

Mammoth pro-independence rally in Dili E Timor vote must go ahead: UN

DILI, East Timor, Aug 25: Over 10,000 independence supporters paraded through the East Timor capital Wednesday as Indonesia was given new warnings about violence ahead of a vote on the territory's future, reports AFP.

The UN Security Council passed a motion insisting the ballot go ahead next Monday, but expressed concern about recent violence blamed on pro-Indonesian militia groups.

Thousands gathered at the new Dili offices of the National Resistance Council of East Timor (CNRT) to hear speeches by pro-independence leaders. "They want to come out and say that we are still here, that we will not be intimidated," CNRT coordinator David Ximenes said.

The crowd later listened to a recorded speech by jailed separatist leader Xanana Gusmao. They sang and danced, before setting off in trucks, buses, motorcycles and on foot in a massive procession across Dili.

"This is a testimony, it proves that the people want freedom and independence for their country," CNRT official Leandro Isaac commented as the massive procession passed by.

Many waved the independence cause flag. They held framed pictures of Gusmao or wore T-shirts bearing his face. Others just drew a semblance of the leader in pen on their shirts.

Whole families cheered the parade, some in their best

clothes, some were barefoot in rags. Some threw water on marching participants sweating under the sweltering sun.

Police estimates given to the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) put the crowd at some 10,000, but others said there were more.

Shouts of "Viva Timor Leste!" ("Long live East Timor!") and "Viva Xanana" resounded throughout the multitude.

"Our suffering has not been in vain," said one man in the rally whose friends were waving the blue, white and green independence flag.

A mass rally was staged in Dili on Tuesday supporting autonomy with Indonesia.

East Timor's 430,000 people will vote next Monday on whether they want autonomy.

Death toll in Bihar floods reaches 239

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: The death toll from flooding in the eastern Indian state of Bihar has reached 239, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported on Wednesday, reports AFP.

The agency said 10 more flood-related deaths were reported from Bihar's inundated central district.

PTI quoted officials as saying that most rivers were rising menacingly in the impoverished state where 2,768 villages spanning 21 districts have been underwater since July.

Almost five million people have been affected by the floods in Bihar, the worst in the region in more than a decade.



A young boy applies a dab of colour (Tilak) on the forehead of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate for Chandni Chowk Vijay Goyal, as Bollywood actor Mukul Dev (2nd from L) and actress Dipti Bahtanagar (R) participate in the campaigning in old Delhi Wednesday. Indian opinion polls have given Vajpayee and the BJP a slight advantage over their Congress (I) rivals in the upcoming general elections.

—AFP photo

Fresh quake sparks panic in Turkey

IZMIT, Turkey, Aug 25: The number of dead in the Turkish earthquake soared dramatically by nearly 6,000 in one day as a fresh quake shook the northwest sparking more panic, reports said, reports AFP.

With two separate tolls released Tuesday, the government crisis center in Ankara said the death toll now stood at 17,997, compared with 12,148 Monday.

Kocaeli, the province of which Izmit is the capital, remained the worst hit, with a tally of 10,868 dead.

Although no official figures have been released, some 30,000 to 35,000 people are feared trapped under the rubble, according to estimations in the Turkish media.

A UN relief agency in Geneva said Monday that Turkey had asked for 45,000 body bags.

Meanwhile, an earthquake measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale shook Ankara and the surrounding region Tuesday evening, the Anatolia news agency reported.

The epicentre of the new quake was at Haymana, some 50 km southeast of the capital.

The tremor created panic in parts of Ankara, sending people into the streets in fear. There were no details of injuries or damage.

Public anger at what is widely perceived as a dysfunctional state apparatus continued to mount as the media showed images of people seeking shelter from the rain in body bags and makeshift tents made of blankets, linen and plastic sheeting.

Interior Minister Sadettin Tanir said a number of public educational and recreational facilities had been cleared and were ready to be used as temporary shelters.

Scores of survivors fled the not so solid ground of their cities to find safe haven on the waters of the Marmara Sea, aboard two passenger ships docked at Izmit's Derince port, an AFP correspondent saw.

Prime Minister Bulent Ece-

vit, in an interview with CNN, said his government was tackling the housing problem and promised that all people left homeless by the August 17 temblor would be housed in tent cities within one month.

After that, he said, "hundreds of thousands" of prefabricated houses would be brought in from overseas and, "within a year, we will have established settlements in geologically secure areas" for people left homeless by the quake.

The numbers going around are 150,000 to 200,000 people left homeless. Foreign Minister Ismail Cem said in a television interview Tuesday.

Newspapers Tuesday slammed the Red Crescent material used in the most wanted tent cities set up outside stricken urban centers as outdated and unhygienic.

The tents near Yalova, set up without foundations, were flooded, the semi-official Anatolia news agency reported, and survivors were forced to spend the night standing or trying to

sleep leaning against tent posts.

The weather bureau offered no respite, forecasting continuing rain over the next three days, raising fears -- immediately rejected by health officials here and overseas -- of epidemics.

A Turkish private came down with typhoid fever in Adapazari, Israeli relief official Dr. Carlos Guzman told AFP, but he gave assurances that it was an isolated case and of no great significance.

Medical experts nevertheless warned that the rains greatly increased the risk of communicable disease.

Vigilante groups armed with shotguns and sticks patrolled the sodden ruins of their homes against looters. 51 of whom have been arrested so far in the earthquake zone -- often after suffering heavy beatings at the hands of furious survivors.

The unprecedented criticism of state and government continued, with the liberal daily Milliyet headlining, "The mentality that destroyed us."

Security declaration signed Russian, Chinese presidents seek to broaden 'strategic partnership'

BISHKEK, Aug 25: Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin in bilateral talks on Wednesday discussed expanding their "strategic partnership" and regional security issues, reports AFP.

The talks were conducted over breakfast ahead of a five-nation "Shanghai Five" summit grouping Russia, China and three Central Asian states on regional security and economic cooperation.

Yeltsin and Jiang "discussed further practical steps in the development of a strategic partnership between Russia and

China in the international arena," Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told journalists following the meeting in the tiny Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek.

The Russian foreign minister stressed that the partnership was not a military bloc to counter the West.

As he arrived in Bishkek late Tuesday, a boisterous Yeltsin talked of being prepared for a "fight against westernizers" in an apparent slap at those Russians who feel the country should adopt a western model of democracy and economic development.

Meanwhile, Leaders of Rus-

sia, China and three Central Asian states signed a declaration here Wednesday pledging to work together to improve security in the region, reports AFP.

"This declaration will announce to the world that our five states are ready to support security and find ways to work together for mutual cooperation and development," said Chinese President Jiang Zemin at the signing ceremony.

It was signed by Jiang and presidents Boris Yeltsin of Russia, Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, Emmomali Rakhmonov of Tajikistan and Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan.

Main Turkish rebel groups starts pull-out

ANKARA, Aug 25: Turkey's main Kurdish rebel group, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), announced Wednesday its armed forces had started their withdrawal from Turkish territory, in line with an appeal from its imprisoned chief Abdullah Ocalan, a PKK statement quoted by the DEM agency said, reports AFP.

"Our armed forces have started their withdrawal from north Kurdistan even before September 1," the statement said.

September 1 was the date given by Ocalan early this month when he called on his rebels to stop their armed rebellion against Ankara and withdraw outside Turkish borders. The PKK said later it would comply with this "order".

UN team in Cambodia for talks on Khmers' trial

PHNOM PENH, Aug 25: A team of senior United Nations legal experts arrived in the Cambodian capital Wednesday for crucial talks aimed at setting up an international-style trial for surviving Khmer Rouge leaders, reports AFP.

The delegation's leader, UN Assistant Secretary General for Legal Affairs Ralph Zacklin, said he was positive of securing an international role in a "Killing Fields" tribunal despite the government's rejection of the latest UN proposals.

"We are ready to discuss all issues with the Cambodian government," Zacklin said at start of the team's six-day mission, widely seen as the UN's final bid on the thorny issue characterised in recent months by rejection, deadlock and fresh consultations.

"I am always optimistic at the beginning of a mission. If the meetings go well we would expect to be behind the introduction of a mixed tribunal," Zacklin told reporters, refusing to give any further details.

The long-awaited visit follows the leaking of UN plans to dominate a domestic trial comprising of mixed local and international judges, prosecutors and lawyers, in order to maintain international standards in a trial.

Prime Minister Hun Sen has rejected the proposals, which give the UN the final say over which ex-rebels are indicted, as "tantamount to a violation of national sovereignty" and has dismissed UN criticisms of Cambodia's much-maligned judiciary.

Russians warn Dagestani violence may return

MOSCOW, Aug 25: Moscow's press and senators on Wednesday treated with caution reports by generals that they had crushed an Islamic uprising in Dagestan, fearing an inevitable return of fighting in Russia's unstable south, reports AFP.

And a top spokesman for the rebels reported that field commander Shamil Basayev had already returned to Dagestan to chart out a new invasion by his Chechen-based gunmen.

"It is too early to speak of an end to this campaign," the Sevodnya daily warned in a headline.

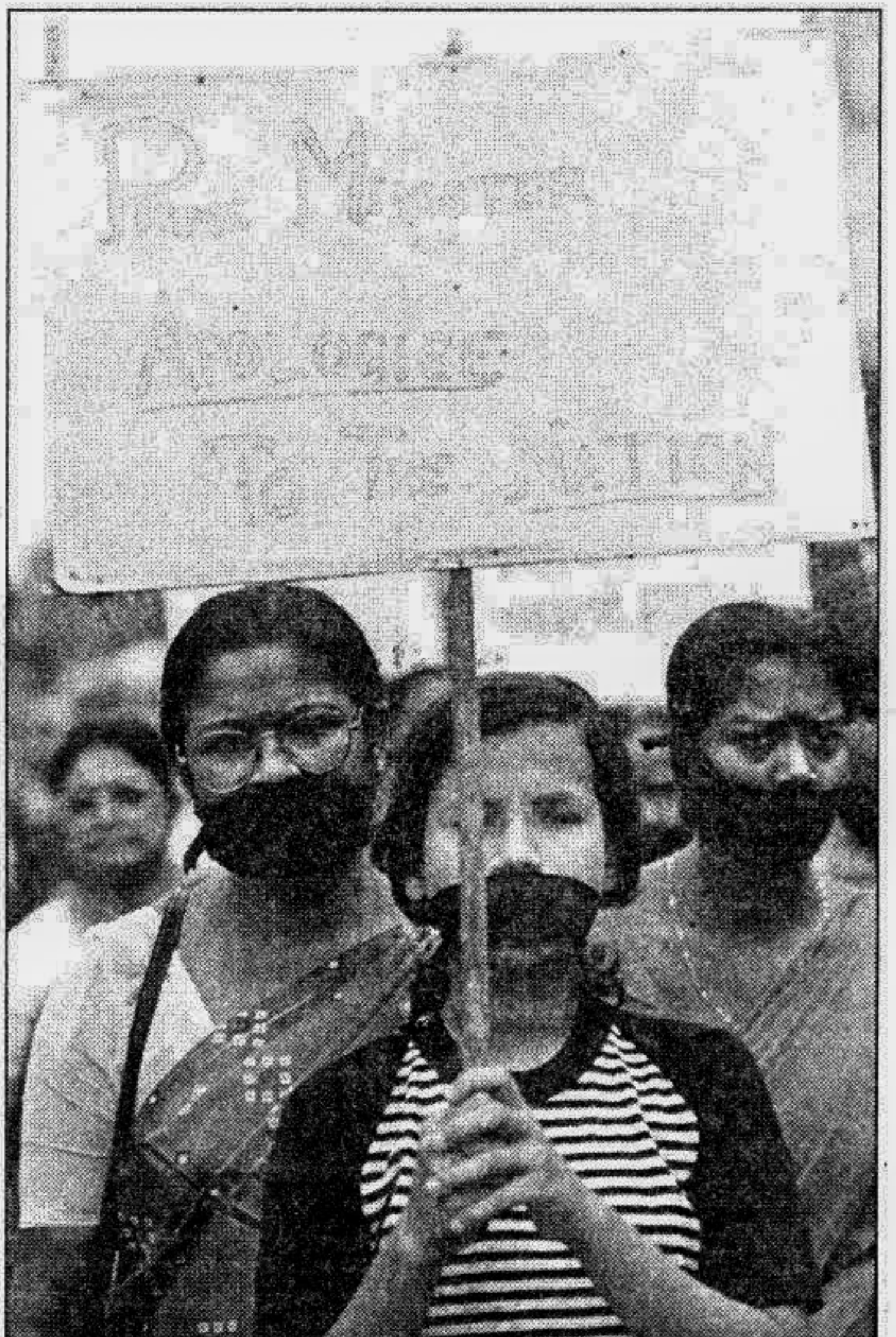
The federal forces are facing a new assignment -- avoiding a new invasion from Chechnya.

This, despite yesterday's success, will not be easy because the border remains open.

Russian defense ministry generals on Wednesday said Islamic insurgents had been dislodged from all 32 villages dotting the mountainous Botlikh region invaded by the insurgents on August 7.

The group, composed mainly of Chechen gunmen who three years earlier fought a brutal but successful war for independence from Russia, had proclaimed Dagestan a sovereign Islamic state.

Russia's top regional defense commander said more than 1,000 insurgents were killed during Russia's air offensive.



Women members of the Congress (I) Party protest with black clothes tied across their mouths in Calcutta Tuesday. The women were protesting against the alleged beating up of women in a public rally earlier, organised by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and attended by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Muzzafarpur, Uttar Pradesh. The women also claimed that Calcutta had become unsafe for women and that the state government should take steps to ensure women's safety.

—AFP photo

BRIEFLY

3 killed in Aceh province: One police officer and two civilians were killed in separate incidents in Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh as tensions grew, police said Wednesday. AP reports from Banda Aceh.

Lt Col Endang Emaiqil Bagus, a local police chief, said unidentified assailants shot to death 2nd Sgt S Tarigan, was shot to death while riding a motorcycle on Tuesday in Indragaya, Pidie regency.

3 killed, 2 held in Assam: Three people were killed and another injured in two separate incidents in Assam on Tuesday, PTI reports from Tezpur.

Suspected National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) ultras shot dead a businessman and his daughter-in-law at Pataspur village in Sonitpur district. In another incident at Barphukhari village in Darrang district, one ULFA Ultra, Pinku Deka alias Kulip Gogoi was killed in an encounter while another identified as Bhaskar Deka alias Vidyut was injured. Two other militants were arrested following the encounter.