Turkish House passes law to keep repentant 'terrorists' out of jail

ANKARA, Aug 27: The Turk-ish parliament late Thursday voted into law a bill that conditionally allows some members of terror groups to avoid prison sentences if they turn them-

selves in, reports AFP.

The law could benefit some members of Abdullah Ocalan's rebel Kurdish Democratic Party (PKK), which announced Wednesday that it had started pulling its forces out of southeastern Turkey, ahead of the September 1 date it had set for

To benefit from the law, the "terrorist" must lay down arms and surrender, must have been involved in no combat and must reveal information "that will prevent crimes being committed."

Founders and high ranking political or military cadres of the group will be exempt from the law, as will any members who have killed or wounded

Turkish security forces. This would exclude Ocalan. who is under a death sentence at the island prison of Imrali, in the Marmara Sea, after being captured by Turkish agents in Nairobi in February.

Putin visits Dagestan

MOSCOW, Aug 27 : Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Friday made a surprise visit to Dagestan to "see the situation" for himself after nearly three weeks of fighting there between Islamic insurgents and Russian forces, the government press service said, reports AFP. He met with Magomedali Magomedov, the leader of the tiny Russian republic, after arriving in the Dagestan capital Makhachkala, Russian news agencies said.

The reports said he was considering heading on to the district of Botlikh in Dagestan's southwest, where some of the worst battles have taken place between the insurgents, who are based in neighboring Chechnya. and Russian soldiers.

India snaps last air links with Afghanistan

NEW DELHI Aug 27: India has frozen commercial flights to Kabul, snapping the main lifeline for thousands of Afghan refugees here who regularly travelled back home to tend to family and business, rcports AFP.

Afghan national carrier Ariana Airlines said Friday it was ordered last week to halt triweekly flights from the northern Indian city of Amritsar to

India blamed the suspension on "operational reasons" and threw out the airline's appeal this week to operate three flights to ferry 50 tonnes of cargo, mostly medicines, held up in Amritsar, Ariana officials told AFP.

"We had appealed that as we are a commercial airline operating in India since 1956 we should be allowed to operate three ad hoc flights to clear the backlog but nothing has happened," said Abdul Rahim, Ariana's chief represantative in

Nepal's flood, mudslide death toll hits 165

KATHMANDU, Aug 27 Twenty-five more people have died in floods and mudslides in Nepal bringing the death toll to 165, a home ministry source said Friday, reports AFP. The latest deaths came after

72-hours of heavy rain in four remote villages in Chitaun district, 156 km south of Kathmandu, the source said. Of the 25 reported dead, only

nine bodies had been recovered, he added. The Department of Meteo-

rology had said at least 140 people, including men, women and children, had died in the last 10 weeks. An official of the ministry of agriculture said although the

monsoon rains started in June. two weeks later than usual time, adequate rainfall had helped boot food production this year. Twenty-five percent of

Nepal's cultivable lands are reclaimed and agricultural production is also largely dependent on monsson rains.

Officials here predicted food production of 6.4 million tonnes this year against the targetted 6.1 million tonnes.

Bin Laden is renegade CIA agent: Gaddafi

CAIRO, Aug 27: Suspected in-ternational terrorist leader Osama bin Laden is a renegade former employee of the US Central Intelligence Agency, Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi alleged in an interview pub-

lished today, reports AP.
"Osama bin Laden is one of those naive Muslims who were duped by the United States and were used to fight the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Gaddafi told the Al-Hayat daily.

Such people, who were "a fabrication of the American intelligence services". later turned against the United States and began attacking its

interests, he said. Bin Laden, a billionaire of Saudi origin, is accused by Washington of organising the bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam which killed 224 people, including 12 US citizens, and injured thousands a year ago.

Pak police detain hundreds of PPP, MQM activists

KARACHI, Aug 27: Pakistan of detained party workers at police Friday continued a crackdown against two opposi-tion parties for a second day. arresting hundreds of workers from the two parties which are waging a campaign against the government, political sources said, reports AFP.

The dragnet targetted activists of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's main opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the ethnic Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad in Sindh province.

"Our activists were harrassed, humiliated and arrested," PPP spokesman Akbar Mirza said, putting the number

Mirza said the crackdown was aimed at suppressing "our protest campaign" including a planned province-wide strike on September 4.

A PPP central leader Qaim Ali Shah said the government was trying to silence the "voice of dissent" as it felt a threat to its "undemocratic" rule as a result of the opposition cam-

paign.
The MQM, which represents from India after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, has also

called for a complete shutdown on September 4 in Sindh.

The ethnic party said around

100 of its workers had been taken into custody by police, slamming the roundup as a "barbaric act of dictatorial government" by Prime Minister

Nawaz Sharif. In Hyderabad, 160 kilometers (100 miles) northeast of here, markets and shops were closed as MQM supporters there observed a protest, witnesses said, adding groups of armed men resorted to aerial shooting

overnight in the city. Police officials said around 200 workers, mostly from the PPP, had been detained as part of preventive measures to maintain law and order.

The authorities have imposed a ban on holding gather ings in Sindh.

"We will not allow anybody to create law and order situation. We will deal with troublemakers with an iron hand," Karachi police chief Farooq Amin Qureshi said.

The PPP is politically the largest party in Sindh, followed by the MQM which is protesting against the government over alleged persecution of the Mohajir community.

Sharif placed Sindh under direct federal control in October to curb lawlessness and terrorism, setting up special anti-ter-rorism courts which have sentenced to death dozens on charges of murder and other crimes.

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 27: Muslim separatist rebels fighttaging the coming polls coming Indian rule in Kashmir pletely," the separatists' statehave threatened to punish state ment said. employees doing official elec-Militant violence has ection work during next month's national polls, a daily said to-

Kashmiri rebels issue election

warning to state employees

draw up a "programme of sabo-

salated in the disputed state of Kashmir, administered in part by India's arch-rival Pakistan, The English language since the dates for the upcoming Greater Kashmir newspaper elections were announced.

Meanwhile, security was tightened in the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar where the state's top Muslim cleric and separatist leader Umer Farooq was due to lead an anti-election protest rally later Friday, police

CEC warns against politicising military

I can't express my love for

India in words:Sonia

More than 24,000 people have died in separatist-linked Meanwhile, India's Chief violence in the state since 1989. Election Commissioner M.S. Hizbul chief Saifullah Gill warned political parties Khalid and other leaders would Friday not to drag the armed

forces into their pre-election debates on the recent Kashmir

crisis. Gill said the Indian military was "apolitical" and ought to be

left out of the campaign for next month's general elections. "We have never said stop debating Kashmir, but don't drag our armed forces, which have such a great historical character of being apolitical, into it,"

The two-month conflict has become a key campaign issue, with the government basking in the reflected glory of the victory in Kashmir, amid opposition charges that it failed to detect the initial incursion into In-

dian teritory. Opinion polls suggest the government will win a clear majority in the elections.

Women give sweets and fruits to boys in gala dresses wearing painted moustaches on the occasion of the 'Gai Jatra' festival in Kathmandu Friday. The boys go around the city in the name of departed family member who died within the year. It is believed that the ritual procession led the path to heaven for the departed soul. - AFP photo

BELLARY, India, Aug 27: Inthe names of her assassinated husband Rajiv Gandhi and mother-in-law Indira Gandhi -velopment. both former prime ministers. Since coming to power last "Twenty-one years ago Indira Gandhi came here. She got the love and affection of the people here and that has brought me

dian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi said Friday she was "tied to the Indian soil" as she opened her campaign in the rural seat where she will contest next month's general elections, reports AFP. "I cannot express in words

day, reports AFP.

published a threat issued by the

powerful Hizbul Mujahideen

rebel group, which warned "de-fiants" of "serious action."

and groups have urged the elec-

torate of Muslim-majority

Kashmir to boycott the Septem-

ber-October vote," India's third

general election since 1996.

Muslim separatist leaders

the love I have for India," the ' Italian-born Congress Party president told more than 15,000 supporters at a campaign rally in her Bellary constituency in the southern state of Kar-

Bellary is considered one of the safest Congress seats in the country, but Sonia faces a formidable opponent in the Hindu nationalist BJP party candidate, Sushma Swaraj -- a high profile politician who has vowed to make Sonia's foreign origins her main campaign

With her daughter Priyanka beside her, Sonia stressed her adherence to the historical and ideological legacy of the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty into which she married in 1968. "My family's only identity is

sacrifice and service to the nation." Sonia told the rally in a speech delivered entirely in

"I have made India my own. J am tied to the Indian soil," she added, while repeatedly evoking back," she said.

Sonia, contesting her first Indian general election, is also running from the northern constituency of Amethi, India's election laws allow candidates to stand for two seats, although one must be dropped in the event of winning both. Sonia has come in for some

criticism for choosing Bellary, with opponents suggesting she is using it as a "banker" seat just in case she loses Amethi -- the Gandhi family's traditional constituency. Sonia took Indian citizen-

ship in 1983, 15 years after her

marriage to Rajiv, and only entered Indian politics last year. Security was very tight for the first of four rallies Gandhi was slated to attend around the

constituency on Friday. "There have been some threats from Pakistan-backed militants." Bellary police chief A.R. Infant said.

Bellary is an extremely impoverished community, and Gandhi used her speech to chal-

lenge the BJP-led coalition government's commitment to de-

year, they have done nothing for India's development. Development has been completely stopped. They promised much but did nothing," she said.

Her daughter Priyanka. 27, also spoke in the official state language Kannada. "The whole country is watching you, Priyanka said, appealing to voters to support her mother. "You have to make her win

the election do not disappoint Not everybody in the audi-

ence was impressed. "Bellary has been a Congress

seat since independence, but we still lack decent roads, hospitals and water supplies," said Naga Ram, a 30-year-old shopowner. But others were keen on the

idea of having the Congress president -- and a Gandhi -- for their MP. "Our sympatics

Sonia Gandhi, Tuis sacrificed a lot for the countries. said K. Srinivasa kao, a 35 year-old small-time business-"She's an important person

in India. If she wins she will do something for us," Rao said.

UN slams Jakarta's handling of militia violence in E Timor

DILI, East Timor, Aug 27: The United Nations on Friday led international condemnation of Indonesia's handling of militia violence in East Timor UNAMET suggests that it was as an exiled separatist leader called for a UN peacekeeping force, reports AFP.

The United Nations demanded that Indonesia crack down on armed anti-independence militias trying to disrupt Monday's vote on East Timor's future. And the head of the UN Mis-

sion in East Timor (UNAMET),

Ian Martin, slammed Indone-

sian police handling of the

cellation of a joint rally by op-

militia rampage Thursday which left five dead The violence forced the canponents and supporters of independence on the final day of the vote campaign on Friday.

"All that was witnessed by the militias carrying guns, weapons and that once again heavily armed police failed to intervene when that militia violence was carried out in front of them," Martin told foreign journalists.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer urged Indonesia to take action to maintain security in the lead-up to the ballot, in which East Timorese will vote on an offer of broad autonomy.

The clashes in the East Timorese capital erupted on the last day of campaigning by pro-In-

donesian supporters, including the armed militias, ahead of the

Two independence supporters were shot dead by Aitarak militia members and another one by police. Two pro-Indonesian militia members were later stabbed to death. Exiled independence cam-

paigner Jose Ramos-Horta urged Australia and the United States to take tougher action against Indonesia and said the deployment of an international peacekeeping force was impera-

"At this stage the conditions require a peacekeeping force because it is the only way to save the whole process and to save lives," the Nobel winner told.

Indian bus disaster 41 bodies recovered

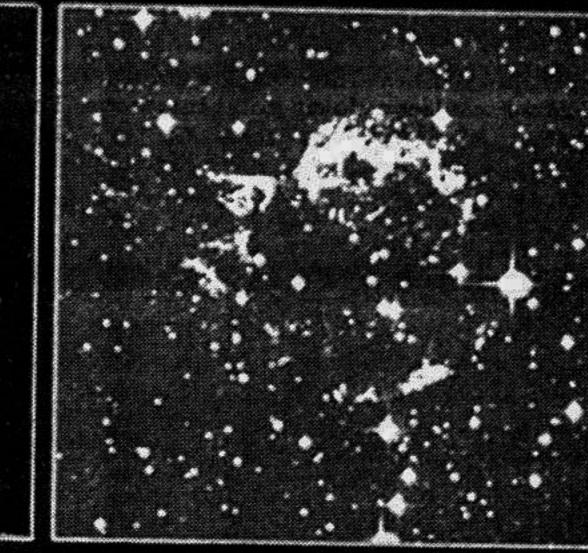
NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Rescuers had pulled out 41 bodies Friday from a bus that plunged into an abandoned reservoir in southern India with some 80 passengers on board, the Press Trust of India said, reports

Local police official T. Madiyal said rescue work was continuing at the 100-foot (30metre) deep reservoir in Karnataka state, where the accident occurred Thursday.

The accident site is about 30 kilometers (18 miles) from Devanagere town. The victims were mainly Hindu pilgrims who were returning to Devanagere after offering prayers at a local temple.

Ninety-four people were killed in the same region on June 7.





This photo released by NASA Thursday shows the first image from the Chandra X-ray telescope of the Cassiopeia A supernova remnant (L) and the Cassiopeia A supernova as taken with an optical telescope (R).

Explosives seized from Tigers: Police seized 42 kilograms (92 pounds) of high explosives from a suspected hideout of Tamil Tiger rebels in a tea-growing area near Colombo, thus averting an attack on the capital, a senior police official said Friday, AP reports from Colombo.

"It is surely a big success. Otherwise the explosives would have been used to create terror in Colombo," said Assistant superintendent of Police SMK Kirigalla of Badulla, a tea growing area 150 kilometers (93 miles) southeast of Colombo.

Trader burnt to death in India: A group of miscreants on Thursday burnt to death a trader at

Padiabeda, about 145 km from Baripada, after ransacking his cloth shop, police said, PTI reports from Baripada India. The trader, after being set ablaze by the miscreants, was rushed to the sub-divisional hospital at Karanjia in a critical condition where he succumbed to his injuries, the sources said.

Blast in coal mine kills 19 in China: An explosion in a coal mine in central China on Tuesday killed 19 people and left 36 missing and feared dead, a newspaper report said Friday, AP reports from Beijing.

The gas explosion occurred during a power outage at a stateowned mine in Hanzhuang village near the city of Pingdingshan in Henan province, the Workers Daily reported.

accepting bribes

ROME, Aug 27: A man named as a key figure in a probe into a Kremlin financial scandal has accused Russian President Boris Yeltsin of accepting bribes, the Italian daily Corriere della Sera reported Friday, reports AFP.

Russian-born businessman Felipe Turover told the newspaper he was a witness in four investigations in Russia and in Switzerland because of his longstanding high-level contacts in Russia.

He said Yeltsin was "behind" Pavel Borodin, the Kremlin's head of economic affairs suspected of having taken bribes from Kosovar businessman Bexhet Pacolli in return for important construction contracts in Moscow.

Borodin and behind Borodin there is only one person, the most important of persons," said Turover.

Asked by the newspaper who he meant, he added: "President Yeltsin, who still backs him (Borodin) because Borodin knows too much.

Turover continued: "When he (Borodin) is no longer useful or is too much of a threat, he will fly through a window like his predecessor, the Treasurer of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) Krushina. who in 1991 took a dive from the window of the same office that Borodin occupies today."

Turover, who holds joint Israeli-Spanish nationality. added: "For 30 years you have the flower of the construction industry present in Russia.

Yeltsin accused of Indian troops rush to set up winter posts in Kashmir

DRASS, India, Aug 27: Indian troops are racing against time to build snow bunkers and stockpile enough food to survive their first winter in the mountains along the disputed Kashmir border with Pakistan, reports AFP. High-altitude army posts

that were once deserted during the bitter winter are now being manned permanently, to avoid the sort of border incursion that sparked the recent twomonth conflict along the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Indian- and Pakistan-controlled Kashmiri. For the soldiers who must

take up the winter posting, the race is to complete all the necessary preparations before the

first snowfalls that will cut off the region for five to six months.

In Drass, some 150 km

northest of the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar, hundreds of mules and horses are loaded every morning with construction material, water and food. They then begin the treach-

erous journey up the steep slopes of the nearby Tiger Hills -- a strategic ridge that climbs to 16,000 feet (4,800 meters) and overlooks the main Srinagar-Leh highway. Army engineers have been

working day and night, carving roads and mule tracks into the

"At least 12 kilometers (seven miles) of road have been

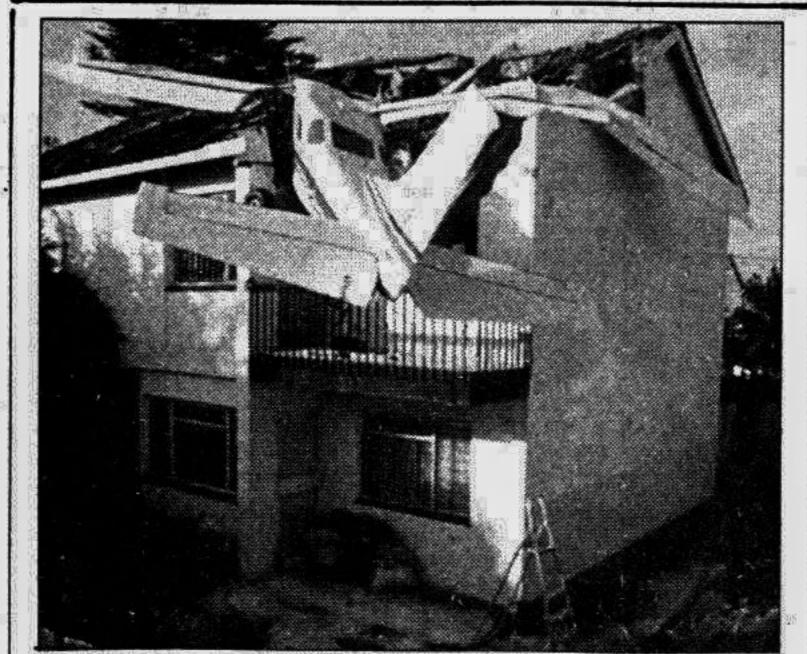
built so far on Tiger Hills and for the rest we will have to be satisfied with mule tracks," said sapper Avtar Singh.

"Next summer, we will have enough time to really improve things. India launched a major military offensive on May 9 against

what New Delhi said were mainly Pakistan regulars who had crossed the LoC and occupied strategic heights on the

Indian side. Pakistan said the infiltrators were Kashmiri freedom

The two-month conflict cost more than 1,000 lives on both sides, and forced the Indian army decision to maintain a year-round presence there.



A Cessna 206 light aircraft has penetrated a roof of a house Thursday in the Langata district, near a Nairobi airport. The aircraft was carrying five aid workers, including two US citizens, a Dutch national, a Thai and a Tanzanian woman. One person whose nationality is now unknown was killed and at least three injured in the - AFP photo crash.

"Behind Pacolli, there is '270,000 N. Koreans died from famine'

SEOUL, Aug 27: Around 270,000 people have starved to death in the past four years in North Korea because of a severe famine, South Korean officials

said Friday. "Between 1995 and 1998 one million people are estimated to have died, and about 26 percent of those -- around 270,000 people -- died from famine alone," National Statistical Office (NSO) official Jeong Bong-

Myung told AFP. The number of deaths is lower than estimates by aid groups and a US Congress team that between 1.5 and 3.0 million had died of famine and famine-related causes.

There have been estimates that the total death toll was between two and three million, but it is logically impossible for 10 percent of the population to have died within a few years," a Seoul official said.

"That is and over-estima-

tion." North Korea also denies reports that up to three million people have died of starvation and related illnesses, but has conceded that the figure stands

at around 220,000. Reliable figures and information are however notoriously difficult to obtain from scretive Stalinist North Korea.

The NSO compiled its statis-tics in conjunction with the ministry of unification and Pyongyang-watchers, based on North Korean statistics published in 1993 and on interviews with defectors from the communist country.

It said North Korea's total population stood at 22.08 million on July 1, 1999, just 47 per-cent of the population of rival South Korea, after decreasing by an estimated 0.58 percent be-tween the end of 1994 and 1998 amid the famine.

US Coast Guard rescue 75 migrants from Pacific

WASHINGTON, Aug 26: More than 75 Asian migrants, many of them malnourished and dehydrated, were found adrift in the Pacific on a 140-foot (43meter) fishing vessel that had been at sea at least 30 days, the US Coast Guard said Thursday, reports AFP.

The ship was disabled and adrift about 560 kilometers (350 miles) north of Midway when it sent a high frequency radio distress call early Monday morning, Chief Petty Offi-cer David Santos told AFP. Because of the unusual way

high-frequency radio signals travel at night, the signal first came through at a Coast Guard facility thousands of miles away in the east-coast state of Virginia, Santos said.

A nearby ship stopped by the fishing vessel at the Coast Guard's request and found the boat full of people needing food and water. They left as many supplies as they could, but did not have much to offer, Santos



Shankracharya Madhavanand Saraswati (L), one of India's leading Hindu priests, blesses former finance minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi Friday ahead of next month's national elections. Singh, who as finance minister in 1991 was largely responsible for the opening of Indian markets, is contesting on behalf of the main opposition Congress Party. - AFP photo