

### Gunman kills Lankan lawmaker

**COLOMBO, Nov 2:** A lawmaker from a minority Tamil political party and his driver were shot dead in their car by an unidentified gunman today, police said, reports Reuters. The attack happened at Wellwatte, eight-km (five miles) south of Colombo city centre, they said. Nadasarajah represented Jaffna district for the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a former Tamil rebel group that has nine seats in the 225-member legislature. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels have in the past targeted EPDP members whom they accuse of being traitors to the campaign for an independent homeland in Sri Lanka's north and east for minority Tamils. The LTTE have been fighting since 1983 in a war which has claimed more than 55,000 lives.

### Women political rights Parliamentary commission blasts Kuwaiti Emir

**KUWAIT CITY, Nov 2:** A move to give Kuwaiti women political rights ran into trouble Monday when a parliamentary commission criticised the Emir for issuing a decree on the subject, the official KUNA news agency reported, says AFP. The issue was not an emergency, and therefore Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah should not have issued a decree on the matter while parliament was dissolved, said Fahd al-Azmi, chairman of the interior and defence commission. He described the decree as "unconstitutional." The Emir dissolved parliament in May, after accusing it of "obstructionism," and used the period before the July elections to issue several decrees, including one giving women the right to vote and to be elected in the next elections in 2003. The Kuwaiti constitution allows the Emir to issue emergency decrees in the absence of parliament, as long as they do not violate the constitution. However, the deputies subsequently have to ratify them. The decree giving votes to women will shortly be put to the 50 members of the new parliament, which is dominated by the opposition, for their approval.

### 54 pc Australians against proposed republic: Poll

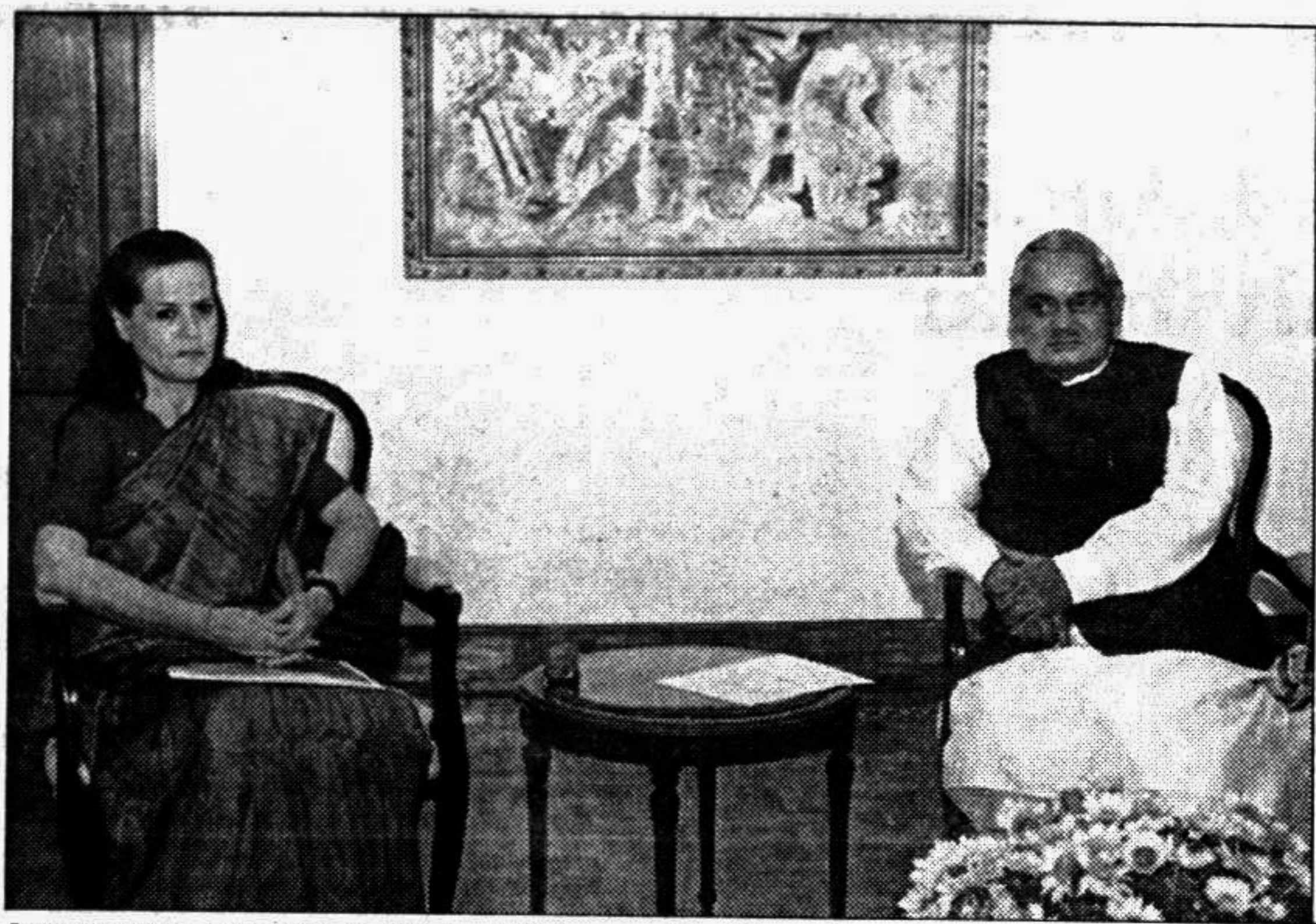
**SYDNEY, Nov 2:** The referendum proposal for Australia to replace Britain's Queen Elizabeth II as head of state and become a republic is headed for defeat, according to a poll published Tuesday, reports AP. With four days to go, the latest NewsPoll published by The Australian newspaper shows 54 per cent of people surveyed are against the proposed republic, while 42 per cent are for it. Four per cent were undecided in the poll of 1,250 people across Australia over the weekend. There was a slight swing, however, towards the republic compared to a NewsPoll taken one week previously. In that poll, support for the 'yes' case was 41 per cent and support for the 'no' case was 56 per cent. On November 6 Australia's 12.3 million voters will have the chance to turn the nation from a constitutional monarchy into a republic and replace the queen and her representative in Australia, the governor general, with a president elected by a two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament.

### Israel tests new Arrow missile

**JERUSALEM, Nov 2:** Israel successfully completed the first "system-wide" test of its state-of-the-art Arrow interceptor missile on Monday, the defence ministry said, reports AFP. This resounding success of the complete Arrow Weapon System test demonstrates that the system passed the critical milestone in its path to initial operational capability and all its components perform as planned," the ministry said in a statement. The Arrow system is being developed jointly with the United States, at a cost of about two billion dollars but has slipped well behind schedule. Israel radio said it was the seventh test of the missile.

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Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee sits with main opposition leader and Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi yesterday at the start of an emergency all-party meeting to discuss the devastating cyclone in eastern India. Between 3,000 and 5,000 people are feared dead after the cyclone struck the coastal state of Orissa four days ago. — AFP photo

## India steps up relief work in cyclone-hit state

**BHUBANESHWAR, India, Nov 2:** India today stepped up emergency relief work in the eastern state of Orissa after desperate survivors of a devastating cyclone rioted for food, reports AFP. Mi-17 helicopters dropped food packets to millions still totally cut off in towns and villages partially submerged by flood waters, as some 2,000 soldiers worked around the clock to restore road and rail links. Four days after the cyclone hit, Orissa officials were still wary of providing an estimated death toll, citing the lack of communications with many affected areas. "The death toll can reach anything between 3,000 and 5,000 as many villages in the coastal area have been washed away by tidal waves as high as 40 feet (12 metres)," said one senior government official quoted by the United News of India. So far rescuers have recovered some 200 bodies. "We are in the dark about the real extent of damage," Orissa Chief Secretary Sudhanshu Mishra told AFP. "There has been large scale damage to property. The entire coastal belt is still under water."

One of the worst-hit areas was the port town of Paradip, where the region's top administrator, A.K. Baisnab, told reporters that virtually every house had been flattened. "A group of people told reporters... that Paradip was under eight feet (2.4 meters) of saline water." The Pioneer said, "In many areas dead bodies could be seen floating." A Paradip port official reportedly made contact with New Delhi over a borrowed satellite phone begging for urgent relief before he was cut off. "There is no food and no drinking water," a New Delhi official quoted him as saying. "There are hundreds of bodies floating around. We will not last much longer this way. Please do something." Residents in the Orissa state capital Bhubaneswar, which has been without electricity since Friday, were becoming increasingly desperate, with squabbles breaking out as they queued, buckets in hand, for precious drinking water. "It is a mess. A total mess," one state government official admitted. Officials said 51 bodies floating in water were recovered at Astarang, in Puri district, and 39 in Cuttack district. Many of the bodies were mutilated and bloated.

### Angry mob attacks ministers' chopper

An angry mob demanding food attacked a helicopter carrying federal ministers on an inspection of the cyclone ravaged eastern Indian state of Orissa, newspapers reported Tuesday. A group of journalists accompanying the ministers was also heckled and a photographer was slapped, The Times of India and other dailies said. The mob anger in the devastated port town of Paradip stunned Defence Minister George Fernandes and two of his colleagues but they were unhurt and the helicopter suffered no damage. One of the ministers, Naveen Patnaik, scrambled on to the helicopter as the visibly frightened pilot took off in a hurry. He returned later to the spot to pick up the other two ministers.

## Chechen refugees gather at closed border

**KAVKAZ, Russia, Nov 2:** Thousands of refugees fleeing Russian bombing in Chechnya massed here today, as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin rejected calls for a halt to hostilities ahead of talks with US President Bill Clinton in Oslo. Despite a promise to open the border again between Chechnya and Ingushetia after allowing a trickle through on Monday, the Russian military kept the refugees' escape route closed, an AFP correspondent reported. On the border crossing at Kavkaz, the line of Chechens seeking shelter in Russia stretched 15 kilometres, with the refugees complaining of bitter cold and food shortages as they waited without any shelter in sight.

Russia sealed the border ten days ago out of fears that rebel gunmen might enter federal territory, ignoring international protests. Moscow then broke a promise to open several refugee corridors on Friday. A single bus was allowed in the opposite direction into Chechnya Tuesday, an AFP correspondent saw. According to Moscow, 562 people were allowed into Ingushetia in the last 24 hours. But an AFP correspondent at the scene counted only some two hundred civilians who crossed the border to safety on Monday.

In Oslo, Putin prepared for tough talks with Clinton, who will voice Washington's growing concern about Russia's intensifying military campaign in Chechnya. "The president will make clear that we are very concerned," White House spokesman Joe Lockhart told reporters in Oslo, where world leaders are gathered to commemorate the assassination of Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin.

## Acehnese burn parliament after referendum demands rejected

**JAKARTA, Nov 2:** A 5,000-strong crowd of protesters today burned a provincial parliament building in West Aceh after MPs rejected their demands for a referendum on self-determination for the troubled province, a report said, reports AFP. The state Antara news agency said security forces opened fire on the crowd when they later marched to the nearby district military command in the West Aceh capital of Meulaboh and tried to force an officer there to lower the Indonesian flag. One person was injured in the firing, Antara said, adding

the troops opened fire when the officer refused to take down the flag and the crowd then tried to force their way into the headquarters. The violence in West Aceh came a day after a soldier was killed and two others wounded in North Aceh, reports and the military said. The attack on a military convoy in the subdistrict of Jeumpa on Monday killed Second Corporal Asli Chani-go and injured two of his fellow soldiers, the official Antara news agency quoted Second Lieutenant Edli Haryanto, a spokesman of the local military command, as saying. The soldiers were on their way to a military rally in nearby Bireun subdistrict when their convoy was attacked from a hill by gunmen two kilometres before they reached the destination, Haryanto said. He said security forces launched a sweep in the area after the ambush. The military in Aceh confirmed the incident but declined to give further information. The Kompas daily reported Tuesday that several hours after the ambush 30 shop-houses were torched in the Jeumpa area.

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### EgyptAir carrying 33 military officers

**WASHINGTON, Nov 2:** The EgyptAir jetliner that crashed after takeoff from New York Sunday was carrying about 33 Egyptian military officers who were returning home after attending training programmes and visiting arms contractors in the United States, a Pentagon spokesman said, reports AFP. The Egyptian officers were in the United States for a variety of reasons, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said. "Some were visiting defence contractors. Some were doing training, various sorts of training," he said. "The officers were connected to Egypt's AH-64 Apache attack helicopter programme, Bacon said. He was unable to say whether they were pilots or involved with the programme in some other way. In Cairo, sources close to the military gave conflicting figures as to the number of officers aboard EgyptAir Flight 990, which plunged into the sea off Massachusetts on a flight from Los Angeles to Cairo, with a refuelling stop in New York. One source said 32 were aboard and came from the air force and the anti-aircraft defence branch, while another said there were 34, who came from the artillery and the navy. Bacon said there were "approximately 33" officers aboard the ill-fated flight. The sources in Cairo agreed they included a general and other senior ranks, and they had been on a training mission in the United States. Rear Admiral Tarek Nour, the Egyptian defence attaché in Washington, said however that all were junior officers. "They were receive some training," Nour told AFP. "Names and numbers, I don't know exactly." The identities of the officers were not immediately available, and the Egyptian defence ministry refused to comment.

### Ukraine fulfils tank contract with Pakistan

**MOSCOW, Nov 2:** Ukraine has fulfilled a 650-million dollar contract to supply 320 tanks to Pakistan, the head of the Kharkiv tank factory at Kharkiv, Hrihory Maluk, said yesterday, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported, says AFP. The last orders were for two deliveries of 105 tanks this year. The contract was Ukraine's biggest, Maluk said. Negotiations are now under way on a contract to maintain the tanks, he said.

### Mob sets church on fire near Jakarta

**JAKARTA, Nov 2:** In Indonesia's latest outbreak of Muslim-Christian violence, a mob torched a church Tuesday in West Java, police and witnesses said, reports AP. Following the early-morning attack, dozens of police were deployed around the gutted Shalom Protestant Church in the town of Depok, 35 kilometers (20 miles) south of Jakarta, to the head of the church. Hundreds of people armed with knives had gone on a rampage," said a police officer who spoke on condition of anonymity. "We could do nothing to stop them because we were outnumbered." Tuesday's arson attack was the latest in a string of incidents between the two religious communities. Hundreds of people have died this year in a series of Christian-Muslim clashes in eastern Maluku province. But in contrast to Maluku, where a number of churches and mosques have been damaged or destroyed, incidents between the two groups on the most populous island of Java have been few and far between. Ninety per cent of Indonesia's 210 million people are Muslim. New President Abdurrahman Wahid has repeatedly pledged to defuse tensions between Indonesia's religious communities. Elsyre Silahou, a church official in Jakarta, said Tuesday's incident occurred after residents of a mainly Muslim neighborhood vehemently objected to the newly built church being located in their part of town.

### Shooting spree in Germany: 4 killed

**BAD REICHENHALL, Germany, Nov 2:** Police stormed a house in this southern German town Monday and found the bodies of a 16-year-old youth and his sister, ending a siege which claimed four lives, reports AFP. The youth, described by classmates as a loner, had earlier fired randomly on passers-by, killing two people and wounding eight, four of them seriously. The drama began around midnight Monday when the youth barricaded himself in his family's home near the city's hospital with several weapons and a large supply of ammunition. Police said he had taken several rifles from his father's weapons closet. His father was a member of a shooting club. He began firing randomly on passers by, killing a man and a woman, police said. He began shooting from a window "at everything that moves." It took several hours before police were able to remove one of the wounded and the two bodies from the youth's field of fire. Police said the shootings stopped around 12:30 p.m. (17:30 BST).

## New 'Bermuda triangle'!

**WASHINGTON, Nov 2:** Four recent aviation accidents in the Atlantic Ocean involving planes leaving New York city raise questions about the safety of one of the world's busiest air corridors, but experts say the phenomenon is merely a coincidence, reports AFP. The death toll is staggering, with nearly 680 people killed in the area in just over three years. In July 1996, TWA flight 800, a Boeing 747, exploded a few minutes after take off, coming down in the waters off Long Island, killing 230 people. In September 1998, a Boeing MD-11 crashed further north, near Halifax, Canada killing 229 people. In July, a Piper Saratoga piloted by John F. Kennedy, Jr. plunged into the ocean near Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, killing him, his wife and her sister. And on Sunday, the EgyptAir Boeing 767 plummeted into the same waters. EgyptAir chairman Mohamed Fahin Rayyan, said the coincidence was "strange," noting that the site of Sunday's

accident was near the TWA accident and John F. Kennedy, Jr. tragedies. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said that the two accidents in the same area make his question whether or not the air routes should be changed. "There may be something in the atmosphere or weather conditions may be sometimes very tough there," he said, dismissing the possibility of a terrorist act. "So I think it should be investigated by the United States and if it is needed to change the routes, the airways, depending on the discussions and the assessment of the situation in this part of the world." Coincidence or not, three of the fatal flights started at New York's Kennedy airport. The downed Piper was piloted by a Kennedy, further raising the question of a "Kennedy curse." "It is pure coincidence," said the International Air Transport Association, Pierre Jeannot, saying that the high volume of traffic near New York

raises the number of accidents there. Every day, more than a thousand flights and 100,000 passengers take off from John F. Kennedy airport. Two other large international airports, Newark and La Guardia also serve New York and send flights into the same corridor. "If they had just all suddenly disappeared, for no reason, obviously that would be something else," said Rudy Kapustin, a former investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board. "But it's not the case." James McKenna, transportation and safety editor for the trade magazine, Aviation Week, challenged the notion of a new "Bermuda triangle," an area noted for the disappearance of many aircraft. "Each accident involved a different aircraft type," he said. "They were all at different points in the sky when they encountered problems. They encountered different types of problems."



Finland's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Jukka Valtassari (2nd R), who is heading a three-member European Union delegation, meets with cabinet members of toppled Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government in Islamabad yesterday. A three-member European Union fact-finding mission is in Pakistan to assess the situation in the country after the last month's military takeover. From left are Sartaj Aziz, former foreign minister, Khalid Anwer, former law minister, Zafarul Haq, former religious minister and Shujaat Hussain, former interior minister. — AFP photo

### Indo-Pak talks will begin soon, hopes US

**BANGALORE, Nov 2:** The United States yesterday said it hoped that dialogue between India and Pakistan at the highest level would begin as soon as possible. "We strongly encourage dialogue between India and Pakistan at the highest level," the US ambassador to India, Richard Celeste, told PTI here. Celeste made the comment when asked if the US subscribed to the view of defence minister George Fernandes, who had said in Ahmedabad yesterday that talks with Pakistan could be resumed only if it refrained from cross-border terrorism and shelling along the line of control (LOC). "We have strongly condemned cross-border terrorism wherever and whenever it occurred so we would hope that we will see terrorism reduced and ceased... and we would hope to see dialogue between India and Pakistan begins as soon as possible," he said. Celeste said the visit of President Bill Clinton to India had not yet been finalised. "I hope that will happen soon."

### Gas stoves may make asthma worse: US study

**WASHINGTON, Nov 2:** Gas stoves may be a risk factor for asthma, joining cigarette smoke, household dust, cats and mould, researchers said on Monday, reports Reuters. A study of adults with asthma showed that those who cooked with a gas stove were twice as likely to visit a hospital emergency room with an asthmatic crisis as those who used electric stoves. Dr Mark Eisner and colleagues at the University of California San Francisco said they surveyed information from allergists, pulmonary specialists and general family doctors in California, and then talked to 539 people by telephone. The researchers told a meeting of the American College of Chest Physicians in Chicago that 15 per cent of the asthma patients who they talked to used gas stoves. "Those using a gas stove were about twice as likely to visit an emergency room," Eisner said in a telephone interview. This held true even when researchers considered income, age, gender, race and other factors that might affect asthma rates, he said. No one knows what causes asthma, which is marked by a closing of the airways, but pollution, allergies to dust mites and cigarette smoke are all known to make it worse.

Asked if the US was seeking some kind of concession from India to make the visit "successful" Celeste said, "no... no yes (Clinton's) visit will happen in any event. I believed that it will be a successful visit." Responding to questions, Celeste said insurance companies in the US would be happy once the insurance bill was passed and "they can come in." "They (the companies) have been waiting for a long time, and, unfortunately, they have to wait for another two to three months."

### BRIEFLY

**Quake rocks Taiwan again:** An earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale rocked Taiwan Monday night, the central weather bureau said. AFP reports from Taipei. There were no immediate reports of casualties. The tremor was registered at 1.53 am (23:53 BST) with its epicentre at 55 kilometres northeast of Chengkung town on the eastern part of the island and 30 kilometres underground.

**Aliyev gets Ataturk peace award:** Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliyev Monday received Turkey's Ataturk International Peace Award for his efforts for peace in the Caucasus, AFP reports from Ankara. Aliyev "is a great statesman and politician who has undoubtedly taken his place among the prominent personalities of the 20th century," Turkish President Suleyman Demirel said at a ceremony at the presidential palace here.

**Israeli warplanes raid Lebanon:** Israeli warplanes raided Tuesday a hilltop in southeastern Lebanon, the pilot said without mentioning any casualties, AFP reports from Rashaya. Fighter-bombers fired two missiles on the Tallet-Daydaba hilltop in the Western Bekaa district in southeastern Lebanon at around 11:00 a.m. (15:00 BST), they said. No guerrilla operations against the Israeli-occupied border zone in southern Lebanon had been reported prior to the raid.



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak (R) and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat shake hands at the beginning of a meeting between the two sides' delegations in Oslo on Monday. — AFP photo

## Leaders renew push for Middle East peace

**OSLO, Nov 2:** Leaders of the Middle East peace process paid homage Tuesday to Yitzhak Rabin, offering solemn tribute to the slain Israeli premier and renewing a push for Israeli-Palestinian peace in this city where their historic talks began, reports AFP. US President Bill Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat were to gather at Oslo City Hall for a ceremony commemorating Rabin's life and tragic slaying four years ago by an enemy of his peace policies. But as they recalled the past, the leaders and their aides also worked around the clock planning for the immediate future as Israelis and Palestinians prepare to settle their most profound disagreements and cement a permanent peace pact. "If Israel wants to remain a Jewish state and not turn into the new Kosovo, it is essential to establish a Palestinian state as our neighbour," another former Israeli prime minister, Shimon Peres, said. Peres, who shared a Nobel Peace Prize with Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for launching Israeli-Palestinian peace talks here in 1993, told reporters that the creation of a Palestinian state was "only a question of time."

Barak, Arafat and Clinton, joined in Oslo by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and representatives of the European Union and several Arab states, held a flurry of bilateral meetings ahead of planned three-way summit talks later Tuesday. At the centre of the discussions were the so-called final status issues -- the most intractable disputes between Israel and the Palestinians -- that must be resolved before the two sides can achieve a lasting peace. Those issues include the status of Jerusalem, which both sides claim as their capital, the borders of a Palestinian state and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. In a meeting with Clinton on Monday, Barak outlined his government's positions on those issues and a senior US official said afterwards that all sides perceived a unique "moment of opportunity" now in the quest for Israeli-Palestinian peace. "It should not be lost," the official said. "If it is lost it will probably not come again for a while."

In addition to holding private, individual discussions with Clinton, Barak and Arafat also held their own face-to-face meeting overnight and a Palestinian official described those talks as "positive." The two-day Oslo summit began Monday.