

Turkey's new president Ahmet Necdet Sezer poses following his election on Friday, at the Parliament in Ankara. Sezer mustered 330 votes in a third-round ballot of the 550-member parliament, well over the required simple majority of 276 votes. He will be sworn in on May 16 for a single seven-year term, taking over from President Suleyman Demirel.

- AFP photo

Iran reformers claim win in second-round

vote

TEHRAN, May 6: Iranian reformers said today they had trounced their conservative rivals in the second round of parliamentary elections and vowed President Mohammad Khatami's reforms were now "irreversible," reports AFP.

Although final results are yet to be released by the interior ministry, the largest pro-Khatami party, the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), claimed reformers had taken 52 of the 66 seats at stake in the

If confirmed the numbers would give reformists a comfortable majority when the next parliament convenes at the end of the month, ending the longtime conservative stranglehold on the legislature.

"We expected this," said an IIPF spokesman, adding that according to party figures it had taken 43 seats with an additional nine going to other members of the pro-Khatami "2nd of Khordad" coalition.

He said conservatives had managed to take just 10 spots in the 290-seat legislature up for grabs in Friday's balloting, with the remaining four going

to independents.
"It reflects the fact that the people of Iran want the reform programme that the president has in mind." the spokesman told AFP, adding that reformers had taken around 81 per cent of

the popular vote. The party also took a swipe at its conservative rivals, who responded to the reform victory in the first round by closing down almost all of the pro-Khatami press and ordering a recount of votes in all-important Tehran.

Bombs explode in two buses: 6 killed in Philippines

BUTUAN, May 6: Bombs ripped through two passenger buses in the southern Philippines on Saturday, killing six passengers and injuring 35 people, a radio station reported, reports AP.

The first bomb blew away the rear section of a bus owned by the Land Car Inc in Surigao City, north of Butuan on the island of Minadao, killing four women outright, radio station DXJM reported, quoting Surigao City Mayor Alfonso Ca-

At least 27 people were hospitalised, three in serious condition, the radio report said. A second bomb exploded in

the rear of a bus owned by Ilemma Express at it passed through a village in Butuan. killing two male passengers and injuring eight other passengers, the emergency room staff at the MJ Santos Hospital in Butuan said. Police said the bomb was

hidden inside a sack of rice.

Police alerted by the bombing in Surigao, inspected other buses in the city and found a much larger bomb in the back of a bus owned by Bachelor Express that also came from Butuan. They defused it.

The bombings followed other blasts around the Mindanao region, scene of gun battles between the government and Muslim secessionist rebels this week.

Fire kills eight at Taiwan hospital

TAIPEL May 6: A fire which investigators suspect may have been deliberately started killed eight patients at a hospital for seriously ill senior citizens in northern Taiwan early Saturday, a fire department officer

said, reports AFP. The blaze, which also injured 18 others, occurred at 2:16 a.m. in Jenai Hospital in Ilan, Su Chih-sheng, head of the

city's fire department, said. The fire was put out in half an hour by more than 100 firefighters dispatched to the scene Su said. Investigators were

probing the cause. "Records from the department showed that the hospital didn't meet the fire code, including emergency light and evacuation facilities." Su said.

318 UN peacekeepers, workers taken hostage in Sierra Leone

UNITED NATIONS, May 6: In a new and humiliating blow to the UN force in Sierra Leone, rebels there captured 208 Zambian peacekeeping troops and stole 13 UN armoured personnel carriers, the United Nations said Friday, reports AFP.

The capture of the Zambians, who were on their way to reinforce a position at Makeni in central Sierra Leone, took the number of UN hostages held by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to an estimated

bring its peacekeeping force to unharmed, Eckhard said. full strength as quickly as postary General Kofi Annan said efforts to free the hostages were "political in nature."

said he did not want "to speculate what happens next" if the efforts of several African heads of state failed to persuade RUF

Eckhard said the estimate of 318 detainees included 92 people previously announced, less the four-man crew and two pas-sengers of a UN helicopter who were released by the RUF on evidence that there was fighting

The six had been captured on armoured personnel carriers." Monday near Kailahun, in the far east of Sierra Leone.

After they were freed, the crew flew the helicopter and the passengers to the capital, Free-But while the UN sought to town, and all were apparently

In addition to the Zambians, sible, the spokesman for Secre- another 24 members of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) were abducted on Friday in Kailahun, Eckhard Spokesman Fred Eckhard said. He did not identify their nationalities.

He added that about 100 Nigerian soldiers had been detained near Kambia, in the

leader Foday Sankoh to call off north-west of Sierra Leone but his attacks and free the were "later released minus their

> He said the number of casualties in a week of clashes withthe RUF was four missing, presumed dead, and 12 wounded.

in the taking of the Zambian He said "we know from heli-

bers of the RUF had taken the vehicles, which were among 16 used by Zambian peacekeepers The rebels were thought to be using the APCs for "military movements," he said, but it was

not clear where they were head-

copter surveillance" that mem-

Asked whether the vehicles had weapons mounted on them, he replied that they were used for transport, but when the RUF stole them, they also took the individual weapons of the

Zambian soldiers.

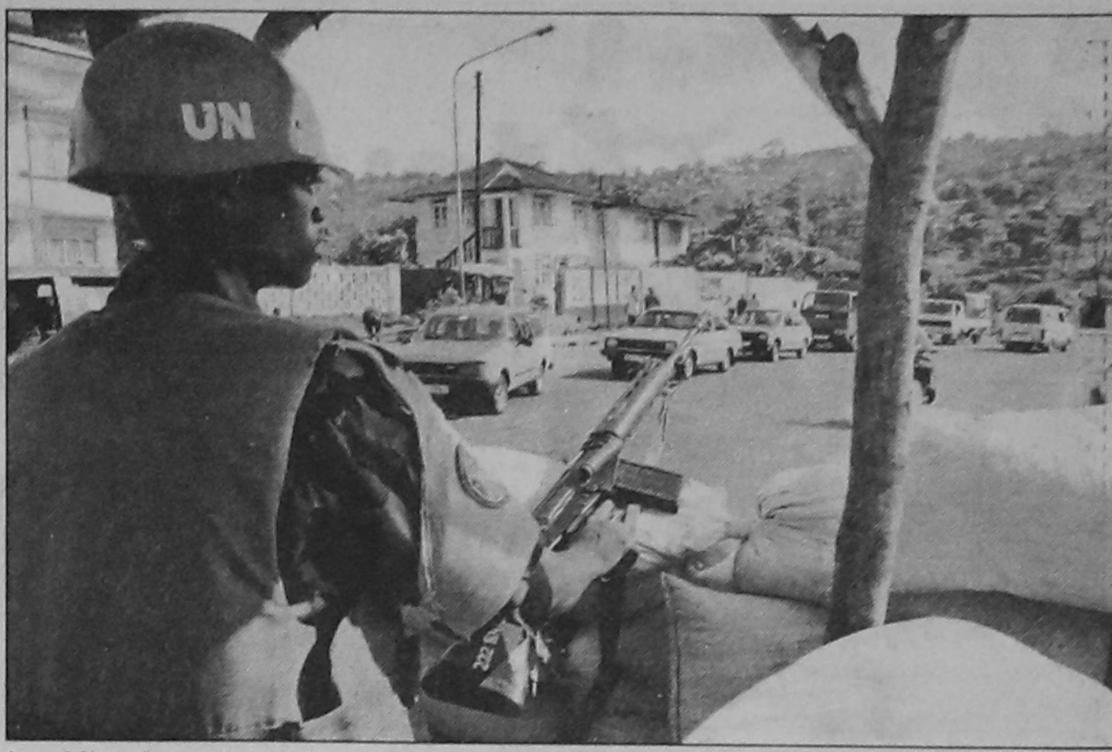
Eckhard recalled that "the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone has been authorised by the Security Council to use deadly force if necessary to protect itself, the people and the government.

But, he said, "that would be a call for the force commander to

Early in the week, the Indian general in charge of UNAMSIL, Vijay Jetley, said he would be ready to use force to free his

men if negotiations failed. At the time, fewer than two dozen troops had been seized by the RUF, which is notorious for the brutality with which it pursued a nine-year civil war against the government of

Sierra Leone. The war formally ended on July 7, with a peace agreement which gave the RUF and mutinous army units a share of power and amnesty for crimes committed during the war.



A soldier from the UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) mans a checkpoint in Freetown on Friday. Rebel forces in Sierra Leone have disarmed and detained 208 Zambian peacekeepers and stolen 13 UN armoured personnel carriers from them, a UN spokesman said. - AFP photo

'Love Bug' virus: Computer

Lanka amends public security law

US to consider humanitarian aid

COLOMBO, May 6: The government amended a controversial law that was brought in as part of measures to fight Tamil Tiger rebels, a state run newspaper said Saturday, as the military continued to claim victories in the battle for Jaffna, reports AP.

The Public Security Ordinance dealing with detentions and arrests was amended, the state-run Daily News said. The law was imposed Wednesday after the country was put on war status, giving sweeping powers to the armed forces and admin-

anyone for up to one year and must inform the relatives within one day, the paper said. The earlier version of the law left it to the discretion to the authorities.

aircraft, ships and property without giving any reason, ban publication of newspapers and leaflets, and prohibit demonstrations and strikes that may harm the country's war efforts. Meanwhile, the military

continued on the "offensive" against the rebels, said military spokesman Brig Palitha Fer-

"The rebels seem to have run out of steam," Fernando said. He said the air force continued its bombing missions and took on rebel targets. He refused to give details of the outcome of

the missions. Earlier, military officials said the morale of the military has improved since the government's hardline stand against the rebel advance toward their former capital.

Government troops are hold-The government can detain ing on to a new defence line, which is about 25 kilometres southeast of Jaffna city. The rebels did not post any

new information on the group's internet web site Saturday. On Thursday, Sri Lanka re-Authorities can also seize newed diplomatic ties with Is-

rael after a 30-year lapse. A delegation of Sri Lankan officials are expected to travel to Israel to discuss renewed relations. Sri Lanka is hoping to get weapons from Israel to replen-

Vietnamese Communist Party Secretary General Le Kha Phieu (front L), Vietnamese

President Tran Duc Luong (front R), Prime Minister Phan Van Khai (R, behind soldiers)

and National Assembly Chairman Nong Duc Manh (L, behind soldiers) carry the coffin of

veteran leader Pham Van Dong during a state funeral in Hanoi yesterday. Dong, the first

Prime Minister of communist-ruled unified Vietnam, died last week at age of 96.

was quoted as saying.

ish its armaments.

A Russian delegation has also arrived in Sri Lanka. The government has not given a reason for the Russian presence, but Sri Lanka has in the past bought arms and aircraft from the former Soviet Union.

PTI adds: The United States would certainly consider a request for humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka though Washington has not received any request to this end from the island country, a state department spokesman has said.

Sri Lanka has not asked the US for any assistance in the current situation, but we would certainly consider a request, the spokesman said.

He said that in the past, the US has provided Sri Lanka certain military equipment as well, under careful review of human rights considerations.

The US has also provided some military training in the past under its programmes, following the same criteria. But in response to the current fighting the US has not been asked to provide any assistance, he said.

Musharraf for trilateral talks on Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, May 6: Pakistan army ruler General Pervez Musharraf yesterday proposed trilateral talks between New Delhi, Islamabad and Kashmiri leaders to resolve the Kashmir issue, reports PTI.

Kashmir issue can only be solved through trilateral talks between Pakistan, India and Kashmiri leaders, Gen Musharraf said.

He said there was some problem along the Line of Control and asserted that the army was prepared to meet any eventual-

Another report adds: The unprovoked and indiscriminate shelling by the Pakistani troops continued today in Kupwara and Baramula sectors even as the death toll in the week-long shelling in north Kashmir rose to nine.

A 12-year-old boy, who was among the 12 school children injured in the Pakistani firing on a school building at a village in Uri sector on Wednesday, succumbed to his injuries here early today, an official spokesman said.

A civilian lost his life and three others were seriously injured when a barrage of shells, fired from across the border hit forward villages in Karnah, Keran, Tanghdar and Machil sectors of Kupwara yesterday,

Free 11 Kashmiri leaders, Amnesty Int'l asks India

NEW DELHI, May 6: Human rights watchdog Amnesty International asked India vesterday to release another 11 Kashmiri secessionist leaders held in federal prisons for months, reports AFP.

The call followed the release Thursday of five separatist leaders who were among 25 members of the Freedom Conference - an amalgam of two dozen Kashmiri separatist and political groups - arrested in September and October last

"We call on the government to release the remaining 11 immediately," the Londonbased rights group said in a statement received here.

as prisoners of conscience since their detention since last September and October followed their call for a boycott of elections," it said. Amnesty said it was "partic-

ularly concerned that there were many cases of political activists held for years without recourse to the judicial process" in the insurgency-torn Kashmir

China stops tourist visas to foreign journalists

HONG KONG, May 6: Chinese authorities have stopped issuing individual tourist visas to foreign journalists in a bid to tighten its control on the press, a newspaper reported Saturday.

Foreign journalists are told personal trips to mainland China must now be in government-supervised tour groups, an unidentified foreign ministry spokeswoman in Hong Kong was quoted as saying in the South China Morning Post. Mak Yin-tang, head of the

Hong Kong Journalists Association called the controls "unreasonable" and said they "infringe on freedom of movement."

Hong Kong and Beijing were unavailable for comment Satur-

decade-old policy of usually allowing foreign journalists to travel freely in the mainland when not working, the English-

The newspaper said the visa

restrictions coincide with a Chinese government campaign to purge liberal Chinese academics, restrain foreign correspondents in Beijing and to warn Hong Kong press against covering news advocating Taiwanese independence.

experts identify a suspect lines and computer terminals. precisely to prevent intrusions

WASHINGTON, May 6: Computer security experts around the world scrambled today to cope with new versions of the "Love Bug" virus, as investigators homed in on the alleged hacker -- believed to reside in the Philippines -- who authored the voracious e-mail program. reports AFP.

By early Saturday, the virus had spawned as many as nine copycat versions, including at least one with far greater destructive capacity than the orig-

On Saturday Philippine investigators, working with the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced they had identified a 23-year-old suspect living in Manila, but gave no other details. Officials in Washington said

the US Pentagon and State Department came under attack from at least five new mutations of the virus, although Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said there were "no reports that the virus had an impact on military operations."

It was unclear how the virus penetrated the Defence Department's classified computers, which use their own fibre optic

by hackers. Defence officials said however, that just one percent of the system was affected.

A total of 2.5 million files had been infected in North America, 325,000 in Europe, 129,000 in Asia and 25,500 in Australia and New Zealand. Among those hit by the virus around the world were computer networks at the US Congress, the White House and Pentagon and the British and Danish parliaments.

US State Department servers registered 125,000 hits from the virus, but succeeded in eradicating them, according to a department official. However, the United Nations

headquarters in New York escaped damage from the virus, UN spokesman Farhan Haq "Our e-mail system was shut down for about an hour as a

precautionary measure, but it is

hard to say that the bug did any real damage," Haq said. The virus appeared Thursday and spread around the world in a matter of hours via an e-mail with the message "ILOVEYOU."

Friday with new messages, including "Joke," Very Funny," and the especially destructive "Mother's Day Order Confirmation" e-mail which overwrites the ".bat" and ".ini" files needed

to start up a computer.

According to a tracking site maintained by Trend Micro Inc., a leading provider of antivirus software, some 3.1 million computer files had been infected worldwide as of 1000 GMT Friday. The original bug allegedly

was planted last month by a

hacker who identified himself

as "mailme", "spyder" and

"ispyder" and left a message saying "I hate to go to school." In Latin America, Argentina appeared hardest hit with 150,000 users affected while the

bug was mitigated in Asia because it was unleashed after the end of the business day. With most offices closed for national holidays, however

Japan, with 13,000 infected files, and China, with just 3,800, got off lightly. Three Hong Kong govern-

ment computers were infected. though no data or files were Variants were circulated lost, said officials.

Britain to revive N Ireland's power-sharing govt BELFAST, May 6: Britain reinstate the institutions by been working fervently to find a

will revive Northern Ireland's May 22," Blair said. power-sharing government within three weeks if feuding Unionists and republicans both back a new formula to break the peace deadlock, Prime Minister Tony Blair said Friday, reports

Speaking after a marathon session of talks aimed at ending a three-month peace stalemate, Blair said the historic crosscommunity executive and assembly would be back in business by May 22 if all sides agreed to the new proposals, drawn up by London and

Dublin. The proposals call on the Irish Republican Army and other paramilitary groups rapidly to pledge that they will put their weapons beyond use. Britain will then restore the institutions and reciprocate with demilitarisation measures of its own.

"The two governments have put proposals to the parties, and subject to a positive response to those proposals, it will be the intention of the government to

"It is now incumbent upon the parties and perhaps in particular the paramilitary organisations to give their response. to the proposals that we have made," Blair said.

"I very much hope that response is positive and in particular that we can make sure that the arms issue is dealt with completely and verifiably." he The province's peace process

fell into a dangerous impasse in February when pro-British Unionists threatened to bring down the new devolved local government because of the Irish Republican Army's failure to

Blair was forced to suspend the power-sharing government and assembly on February 11 to preempt a Unionist walk-out, and the peace process has languished ever since in a dreary climate of blame and counterblame that has threatened to undermine the 1998 Good Friday peace accords.

formula that will persuade the IRA to make the necessary commitment on disarmament

that will in turn convince the Unionists that it is worth giving the power-sharing institutions another chance. The new blueprint seeks to do that, according to a statement issued by Blair and Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern, who

jointly hosted Friday's session

at Hillsborough Castle south of The formula said that the IRA and other paramilitary organisations "must now for their part urgently state clearly that they will put their arms com-

pletely and verifiably beyond "Such statements would constitute a clear reduction in the threat," the statement said.

In return it said Britain would reciprocate by taking "further substantial normalisation measures" -- a euphemism for reducing its own military London and Dublin have presence in Northern Ireland.

Conditions for ceasefire

Philippine asks rebels to stop fighting, free hostages

JOLO, Philippines, May 6: The two Muslim separatist groups fighting the government are working together, and if they want a cease-fire, they should lay down their arms and free all their hostages to prove it, Philippines Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado said today, reports AP.

render. If they lay down their arms we can talk," Mercado said in a nationally broadcast statement. "We cannot have a situation

where residents can't sleep because they don't know when MILF will strike.' The government will only consider the Moro Islamic Lib-

eration Front's 48-hour cease-

fire offer under those conditions, Mercado said. It was the government's first statement linking the MILF with the much smaller Abu Sayyaf, which is holding a total

of 29 hostages. "As far as we are concerned, they are operating with each other," Mercado said. "Our information is, they are moving in and out of each other's territory, they have been helping

each other.' The separatists are fighting for an independent Islamic state in the Philippines impoverished Mindanao region, home of the country's Muslim minority. The MILF agreed to a ceasefire and started talks with the

government in 1997, but con-

flicts have escalated recently. The MILF denies any connections to the two kidnappings riveting the nation: A group of 21 hostages taken from a Malaysian resort island, including 10 foreign tourists, on

taken on March 20. Abu Sayyaf split off from the main rebel group, the Moro National Liberation Front, in 1991. The MNLF signed a peace

Much more radical than the April 23, and another group of MILF. Abu Sayyaf is thought to eight remaining Filipino have only about 200 to 1,000

treaty with the government in



Passengers of the last commercial flight out of Jolo board the plane at the airport yesterday on Jolo island in the southern Philippines. The airport was closed indefinitely due to security concerns. - AFP photo

retaliatory raids early Friday, air raids, considering they had but reserved the right to hit served their purpose of "pun-

Lebanon following the Israeli Barak were satisfied with the

JERUSALEM, May 6: Israel

backed off from further

reprisals against Lebanon Fri-

day despite a new Hezbollah

rocket strike on the north of the

country, amid appeals for re-

straint from the United Na-

and France, reports AFP.

tions, Britain, the United States

Public radio said the secu-

Three killed in Kashmir: Suspected Muslim separatist rebels gunned down a policeman along with his father and brother on Saturday in the Indian state of Kashmir, a defence official said, AFP reports from Jammu. A spokesman for India's Border Security Force said a group

Nazir Ahmed early Saturday in the village of Gool, some 150 kilometres from the Kashmiri winter capital of Jammu. EU-Russia summit May 29: A summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and high-ranking officials from the European Union is due to take place on May 29, Russian diplomatic sources told the Itar-Tass news agency Friday, AFP reports from Moscow.

of men staged the attack at the home of 25-year-old constable

The EU will be represented by the Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres -- whose country currently occupies the union's rotating presidency -- European Commission President Romano Prodi, and the EU's chief diplomatic adviser, Javier Solana.

back at the appropriate moishment and dissuasion." Barak, speaking later on Israel did not want to un-

leash a military escalation in sion, nevertheless issued a new Lebanon, after its air attacks on warning. power facilities that followed a "I would not recommend Hezbollah rocket strike Thursanyone launch rockets attacks day, an unnamed senior official on our people living in the north as we will react with The radio said members of harsh strikes against those rerity cabinet had decided not to the inner cabinet chaired by Issponsible and those behind launch further attacks on raeli Prime Minister Ehud

them or supporting them," he Barak also explained why there had been no reprisals by Israel after fresh Hezbollah rocket attacks on the north

Friday. "We should not react in a moment of anger, because we do not want an escalation during the final stages of our cutting ourselves off from the Lebanese tragedy." He added that Israeli forces will leave Lebanon by July 7, as previously promised.

Hezbollah members in

Lebanon celebrated, saying the

lack of an Israeli retaliation

was a victory for them. Hezbollah information offi cer for southern Lebanon Samir Aalameh told AFP that "scores of politicians and citizens have called Hezbollah to congratulate it for forcing Israel to stop its aggression and forcing it not to retaliate against the

A large part of Lebanon was

without power Friday after the

Israeli air raids in the early

morning knocked out two elec-

Katyusha rockets.

tricity relay stations.

Israel backs off from new strikes against Lebanon private Channel Two televi-

reports AP.

Government officials in

China's, move reverses a

language daily reported. For reporting purposes, they must have journalists visas, although Chinese authorities haven't always enforced that

"We regard the jailed leaders