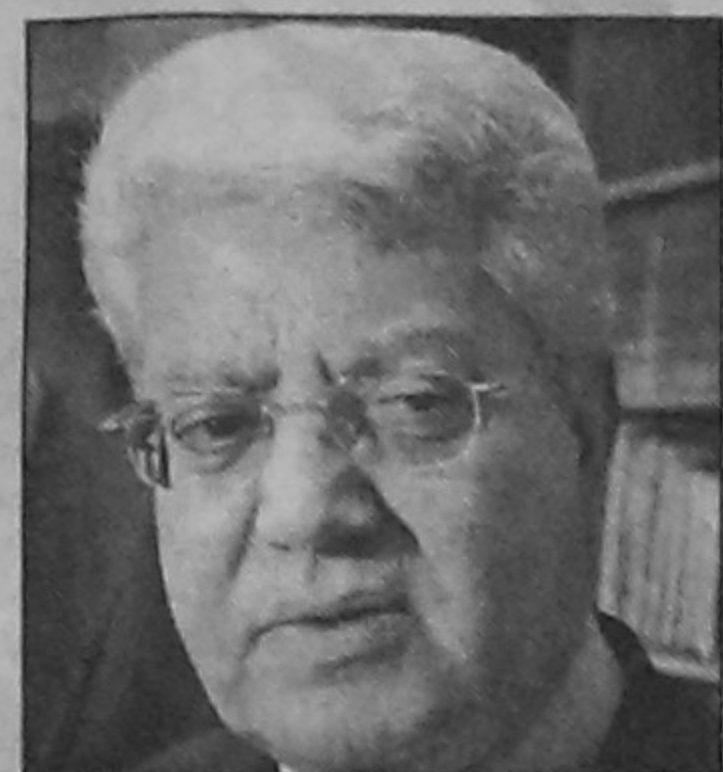


## International



## Israeli Foreign Minister resigns from Barak gov't

JERUSALEM, Aug 2: Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy announced his resignation today, delivering a new blow to Prime Minister Ehud Barak's crippled government, reports AFP.

Levy said at a news conference at parliament that he had "no option" but to resign because of Barak's concessions to the Palestinians over the sensitive issue of Jerusalem at last month's Camp David peace summit.

"It is not possible to be in government and to explain things that you oppose," Levy said.

Levy's announcement came as parliament was debating a bill sponsored by the opposition Likud calling for the dissolution of the 120-member body and the calling of early elections, which are not due to be held for another three years.

He said he would vote in favour of the bill, which faced a preliminary vote on Wednesday but is unlikely to undergo any further readings until parliament returns from its summer recess due to start this week and run until late October.

Barak said he was not surprised by Levy's resignation, which officially takes effect in 48 hours.

"I cannot say that I do not regret my foreign minister's resignation. I have a great deal of respect for David Levy," Barak told reporters minutes after the announcement.

## South Korea begins talks with US on military accord

SEOUL, Aug 2: US and South Korean officials opened talks Wednesday on revision of a military agreement that critics say infringes on South Korea's sovereignty, reports AP.

The talks, the first since 1996, aim to refashion a 1965 accord that governs the legal status of American troops stationed in South Korea.

Frederick Smith, deputy assistant secretary of defence for Asia-Pacific affairs, represented the United States in the two-day talks on the Status of Forces Agreement, or SOFA.

The South Korean delegation was headed by Song Min-soon, director-general of the Foreign Ministry's North American affairs bureau.

The central issue at the talks is how much legal jurisdiction South Korea should have over the 37,000 US troops stationed here under defense treaty.

The agreement, revised in 1991, requires American soldiers suspected of crimes to remain in the custody of the US military until they are convicted through the South Korean court system.

Seoul wants custody upon indictment or the issuance of an arrest warrant, and also wants to include environmental regulations in the SOFA.

Demand for inclusion of environmental regulations gained currency after the US military admitted last month that it dumped 20 gallons (76 litres) of the chemical formaldehyde into the Han River, a main source of drinking water for Seoul's 12 million people.

Activists used public criticism of the chemical dumping to demand an end to the US military presence in South Korea, which is designed to guard against any threat from communist North Korea.

President Kim Dae-jung on Tuesday warned against resurgent anti-Americanism among some South Korea activists, reminding South Koreans that Washington remained the country's "biggest supporter."

## 71 killed in flash floods in northern India

SHIMLA, India, Aug 2: At least 71 people were killed and many more were missing as flash floods ravaged parts of the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, a state government spokesman said today, reports AFP.

Other official sources in the state capital of Shimla said the toll from the floods could be more than 150.

State government spokesman B.D. Sharma said the death toll went up to at least 71 early Wednesday after rescuers found six more bodies of villagers killed in the flooded mountainous areas.

The floods, triggered by a series of cloudbursts over the Tibetan border, hit a 200-km stretch along the Sutlej River overnight Monday north of the state capital Shimla.

Himachal Pradesh chief minister Prem Kumar Dhumal also said the toll was likely to rise as

many people were reported missing.

The flood waters inundated the sulphur-bath health resort of Tattapani, which is visited daily by thousands of Indian tourists.

Dhumal also said Sutlej, which drives three hydropower stations in northern India, was flowing above the danger level.

The flooding caused damage initially estimated at 10 billion rupees (227 million dollars), according to the chief minister.

Flood waters poured into two state-run power stations in the Himachal Pradesh districts of Bhawana and Jhakri, Dhumal added.

Some 20 bridges had been washed away and all communications severed with the strategic district of Kinnaur, which borders Tibet.

A state government official painted a grim picture and said household belongings and bodies were sighted flowing down the

Sutlej, once a virtual paradise for anglers.

The death toll would be more as entire districts of Kinnaur and Rampur up to Tattapani have been hit by the floods. The hot-water springs at the Tattapani tourist complex are completely under water.

"Sutlej is flowing 60 feet above danger levels and the 120 megawatt-Bhava power project in the region is also flooded," the official said.

"There is no mode of wireless communications available in those places and so we have engaged fishermen to find bodies flowing down to the Bhakra dam," he said of a vast man-made reservoir in nearby Punjab state fed by the Sutlej.

Officials from India's state-owned National Thermal Power Corp said a 1,500-megawatt project under construction in the region of Jhakri, was also under water.



Commander of the United States Pacific Fleet, Admiral Thomas Fargo, accompanied by Vice Commander of the Chinese North Sea Fleet Admiral Ding Guige (L), inspects a guard-of-honour during a welcoming ceremony for the US guided missile cruiser USS Chancellorsville, which arrived at the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) naval base in the eastern Chinese port city of Qingdao yesterday. The vessel's port call, the first by a US naval ship since the May 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, coincides with a visit to China by Admiral Fargo.

## US embassy to be shifted to Jerusalem by Jan 20: Barak

JERUSALEM, Aug 2: The United States plans to move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem by January 20, the day President Bill Clinton leaves office, Prime Minister Ehud Barak said, reports AP.

Barak told Israel television Tuesday that he understood the United States "will rent offices by January 20, and they will build an embassy."

When asked about Barak's statement, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Delong and White House spokesman P.J. Crowley both said they had no information that a final decision had been made on such a move.

The two officials referred back to Clinton's statement Friday that he intends to review moving the

embassy and that he will make a decision by the end of the year.

Barak mentioned the embassy move as among the positive results of the failed US-mediated summit at Camp David with the Palestinians.

In the wake of the summit, Clinton said Friday he was putting the embassy move "under review and I'll make a decision sometime between now and the end of the year on that." The statement apparently aimed to support Barak, embattled by hard-liners at home who say he offered too many concessions at Camp David.

The embassy move would lend support to Israeli claims to the city and would infuriate many in the Muslim world. Protests broke

out in some Palestinian cities after Clinton's statement, and some militant groups have threatened to target US diplomats if the United States moves its embassy.

After the Camp David talks fell apart, Clinton also warned the Palestinians not to follow through with their pledge to declare statehood unilaterally on September 13, if there is no agreement by that deadline for a final peace deal. Clinton said the move would be a "big mistake" and said the "entire relationship" with the Palestinians would be reviewed.

He also suggested the Palestinians were more to blame for the failure of Camp David, by not moving as Israel had on the sensitive issue of Jerusalem.

## Political reform bill Lanka's main opposition withdraws support

COLOMBO, Aug 2: Sri Lanka's main opposition party today formally withdrew support for President Chandrika Kumaratunga's controversial political reform bill, 24 hours before it was due to be placed before parliament, reports AFP.

The opposition United National Party (UNP), which holds the balance of power to make or break the reforms, informed the government Wednesday at their final round of talks that they would oppose the reform bill.

UNP chairman Karu Jayasuriya said they could not support the move as the govern-

ment failed to win the backing of the influential Buddhist clergy, and Tamil rebels, before rushing through the reforms.

"We told the government today that under the circumstances we are not in a position to give them the support they require in parliament," Jayasuriya said.

The UNP's formal withdrawal means the ruling People's Alliance will have to engineer the defections of at least 10 opposition UNP MPs, assuming the government is able to retain all its allies.

Tamil legislators said moderate Tamils were still undecided

although they had supported Kumaratunga on most other issues.

On July 7, President Chandrika Kumaratunga announced an historic agreement with the UNP after holding bipartisan talks since March 9 but the parties failed to secure a final agreement after a breakdown on key issues relating to the proposed constitutional changes.

The UNP demanded the government disclose the contents of the bipartisan talks held between May and July and that they win support for change from a broad cross section of society.

## Uttaranchal to become 27th state of India

NEW DELHI, Aug 2: Lok Sabha last night took one step forward towards creation of Uttaranchal, which would become the 27th state, with passage of a bill for carving the new state out of Uttar Pradesh, PIT reports.

The House adopted by a voice vote the Uttar Pradesh State Reorganisation Bill with Home Minister LK Advani assuring the members that economic viability of the new state will be taken care of. The state which is being carved out of 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh was in accordance with the aspirations of the people, Advani said while replying to a debate.

This is the second of the three statehood bills which have been taken into consideration by the House.

## Pakistan arrests Indian citizen for spying

PESHAWAR, Aug 2: Pakistani authorities arrested an Indian citizen on charges of spying at Pakistan's northern frontier when he was returning from neighboring Afghanistan, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Aslam Abdur Rehman, 38, was arrested last Thursday near Torkham, 50 kilometers (30 miles) west of Peshawar, the capital of the North West Frontier Province, a security official said on condition of anonymity.

Itukhar Khan, a government official in Torkham, confirmed the arrest, saying that Rehman was being interrogated by a joint team of Pakistani border forces and security agencies.

There was no immediate comment from Indian officials.

Rehman spent more than six months in Afghanistan.

Pakistan, one of the three countries that recognizes Afghanistan's Taliban government, is seen as a close ally of the orthodox Islamic militia which rules 90 per cent of the war-battered country.

Last year, militants hijacked an Indian passenger plane to Afghanistan's southern city of Kandahar to demand the release of three jailed leaders.

## Anwar Ibrahim's appeal dismissed

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 2: The country's highest court on Wednesday dismissed jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim's appeal to force Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to testify in a sodomy trial after Anwar declared he had no faith in Malaysia's top judge, reports AP.

The former deputy prime minister told Chief Justice Eusuff Chin that he would not proceed with the appeal because he doubted the judge's ability to be just.

Anwar was arguing his own case just three days before a High Court was scheduled to deliver a verdict in his year-long sodomy case.

"There still persists in me great apprehension and fear of bias," he told Eusuff, who was presiding over a three-judge bench. "I'm left with no choice and am compelled not to participate in the proceedings since I've no confidence in Your Lordship."

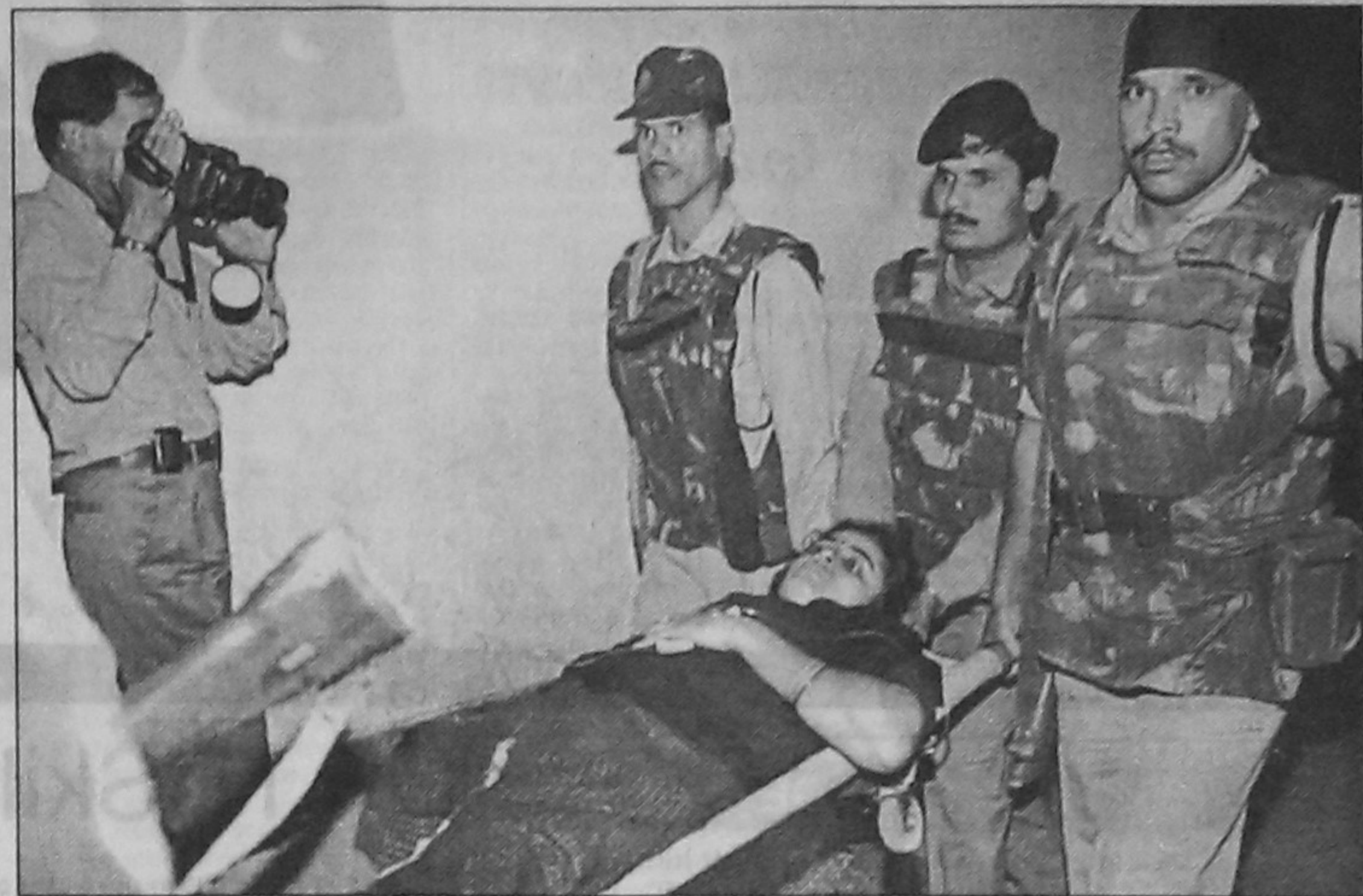
Anwar asserted that Eusuff's refusal to consider an earlier plea that the judge dismiss himself from hearing the case and replace himself by another judge undermined his confidence on whether he would be given a fair hearing.

"You do not wish to proceed (with the appeal)," Eusuff asked.

"Yes, I don't wish to proceed under the circumstances since Your Lordship is sitting," Anwar replied.

The bench then dismissed the appeal and upheld High Court Judge Ariffin Jaka's ruling that Mahathir's testimony was not relevant to the sodomy trial.

In April, Ariffin ended a six-month effort by the defence to subpoena Mahathir, forcing his lawyers to approach the appellate court and the Federal Court to argue that Mahathir masterminded a conspiracy to destroy his protégé's career.



Indian security personnel carry a wounded Hindu pilgrim to a Srinagar hospital late Tuesday, after some 30 people were killed by suspected Kashmiri separatist militants in Pahalgam earlier in the day. The death toll from a series of massacres in Kashmir has climbed to 84.

—AFP photo

## Kashmir massacres won't derail peace process

Vajpayee tells parliament

NEW DELHI, Aug 2: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said today a spate of massacres of Hindu civilians by Muslim rebels in Kashmir would not derail the fragile ceasefire process in the troubled state, reports AP.

Vajpayee also accused Pakistan of directing the attacks, which began late Tuesday night and claimed 84 lives in seven separate incidents.

"We want to tell the terrorist groups that we will not abandon the peace process in Kashmir," the prime minister told parliament, referring to the ceasefire initiative launched a week ago by the main Kashmiri militant group, Hizbul Mujahideen.

"It now is absolutely transparent that after the steps taken by the Hizbul Mujahideen to end violence ... to restore peace in Kashmir, groups owing allegiance to Pakistan or groups directly ordered by Pakistan have risen to derail the peace process by the

massacre of innocent people."

The Indian prime minister said the attacks occurred despite increased security offered to thousands of Hindus on an annual pilgrimage to the holy Amarnath cave temples in southern Kashmir.

"We had taken all security measures for the pilgrimage but in view of the killings there, it is now become a necessity that security for the pilgrims is further stepped up," he said.

Vajpayee urged MPs to support his Hindu nationalist-led coalition government in battling the wave of separatist violence in strife-torn Kashmir.

"I, with your support, would like to tell these terrorist groups that the journey we have undertaken in Kashmir is that of peace and we will not abandon that path."

"We will face many hazards and we will squarely face them. One voice should emerge from this parliament that India will not bow

to terrorism," Vajpayee said in a hard-hitting address.

The prime minister's statement sparked uproar in parliament's lower house.

Parliament was adjourned as allies of BJP party also joined the protests.

The members called for the dismissal of Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah's state government and said New Delhi should provide compensation to the relatives of those killed.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training the Islamic extremist groups in Kashmir. Islamabad denies the charge but offers diplomatic and moral support to what it describes as the Kashmiris' just struggle for self-rule.

The secessionist violence in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, has left more than 25,000 people dead in the region since 1989 when the rebels launched their bloody anti-Indian rebellion.

## Armed youths seize 165 oil workers in Nigeria

LAGOS, Aug 2: Armed youths have seized 165 workers of the oil company Royal Dutch/Shell and are holding them hostage on two rigs in southeast Nigeria, a company spokesman told AFP today.

Thirty-five youths, who are demanding employment by Shell's Nigerian subsidiary Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC), seized the rigs in southern Bayelsa State around 2:00 p.m. (1900 BST) on Monday, swarming aboard from eight high-speed boats, local Shell spokesman Harriam Essa Oylofo said.

He said the 151 Nigerians and 14 expatriates being held were being confined to their quarters on the rigs, situated in one of the

most inaccessible areas of the troubled Niger Delta oil-producing region.

The delta is an area of brackish sea-water creeks, swamps and mangrove islands, threaded throughout with hundreds of oil wells and pumping stations and thousands of kilometres of pipelines.

It is a sweltering place, with constant heat, the highest rainfall levels in west Africa and an average humidity level of 95 per cent.

The seizure of the 165 men and two rigs is believed to be among the largest ever in the delta. A total of 80 men were seized on one rig and 85 on another.

Asked to confirm that the

youths were armed, Oylofo said: "Our people do not give up our rigs, or themselves, very easily."

No word had been received on the condition of the detained men, added the official, who declined to give the nationality of the expatriates.

"We have reached out to community leaders and the Bayelsa State government. We have sent some people over, and we are awaiting feedback," the spokesman said.

"It is a stand-off," he said. Shell is the largest of six major foreign oil companies operating in Africa's largest oil-producing country, accounting for around half its 2.03 million barrels of oil production per day.

## Abduction of film star Mediator to begin talks with Veerappan

BANGALORE, India, Aug 2: A mediator was set to hold talks today with India's most-wanted bandit over the abduction of a top movie star, as the southern city of Bangalore limped back to life after violence by outraged fans, reports AP.

R.R. Gopal, editor of the bi-weekly magazine Nakeeran, left the southern city of Madras overnight Tuesday to meet with Veerappan in the jungles of nearby Karnataka state, a senior police official said.

Veerappan abducted southern movie idol Rajkumar on Sunday,

sparking two days of violence and a curfew in the Karnataka state capital Bangalore.

Gopal had brokered an agreement with Veerappan in 1997 during the abduction of nine foresters.

Offices, banks and businesses in Bangalore, which were forced to down shutters for two days by irate Rajkumar fans, opened again Wednesday.

Schools and other educational institutions, however, remained closed as a precautionary measure.

A police spokesman said more

than 300 people had been arrested in the city "as a preventive step" to contain further ethnic violence, after one person was killed Monday.

Veerappan is a Tamil while Rajkumar belongs to the dominant Kannadiga community in Karnataka. The two communities have a long history of ethnic strife.

Bangalore joint commissioner of police B.N. Nagaraj said prohibitory orders restricting the size of public gatherings remained in force.

## BRIEFLY

**Hasmy new UNSC president:** Ambassador Hasmy Agam of Malaysia took over on Tuesday as president of the Security Council, succeeding ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica, Reuters reports from United Nations. The post rotates monthly according to the English alphabetical order of the council's 15-member delegations.

**Naxal violence claims 149 since '97:** A total of 149 persons — 55 police personnel and 94 civilians — were killed in 284 incidents of Naxalite violence in Madhya Pradesh from January one, 1997 to June 30 this year, PIT reports from Bhopal. Giving this information in a written reply to a question by Prabhakar Singh (BJP), State Home Minister Nand Kumar Patel said nine police personnel were killed in firing while 43 died in landmine explosions. In the last three years, Naxalites had not spread their area of influence to any new district, he said.

**Oman nabs 87 illegal immigrants:** Omani police have arrested 87 illegal immigrants, mostly from neighbouring countries, newspapers reported on Wednesday, AFP reports from Muscat.

Oman Times said the immigrants were caught in different areas of Oman over the past weeks by police after tip-offs from local people. Those arrested included 42 Yemenis, 10 Afghans, 10 Indians, seven Iranians, four Somalis, four Pakistanis, one Iraqi and an Emirati national. Nationalities of eight others were not known, the paper said. The sultanate, which is an oil and gas exporter, has launched a campaign to replace foreign workers, who account for around a third of the 2.3 million population, with nationals.



A woman protester smashes the window of a police car as demonstrators marched in downtown Philadelphia on Tuesday. Thousands of protesters have taken to the streets to voice their opinion on different issues during the Republican National Convention.

—AFP photo

## Republican convention 280 protesters arrested in Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA, Aug 2: Demonstrators clashed violently with police, tying up the heart of the city on the second night of the Republican National Convention. Police arrested at least 280 people before the protests began to subside as night fell, reports AP.

Among the injured Tuesday was Philadelphia Police Commissioner John Timoney, who said his bicycle was used as a weapon against him.

"I've got a few bumps and bruises but I'm OK," he said.

A number of state delegations were late getting to the convention, but the programme began as scheduled. Most protests were far from the First Union Centre arena where the gathering is being held.

"It looked like Democrats having a strategy meeting out there," said North Carolina State Rep. Arlie Culp, an alternate delegate whose group encountered demonstrators shouting, "Capitalist

pigs go home."

Police said 282 people had been arrested by late Tuesday, including 10 charged with felony assault on an officer. The number was expected to increase.

The clashes came after three days of mostly peaceful protests. Protesters had promised a day of disruptions Tuesday in opposition to the death penalty, police brutality and other causes.

"We have taken the streets," said Sue Kelly, 54, of Richmond, Virginia, marching against the death penalty. "We just don't like Republicans and what the ruling class stands for."

The worst exchanges came near the Wyndham Franklin Plaza Hotel where Gov. George W. Bush will stay Wednesday and Thursday. Other events centred around City Hall and near prominent hotels.

Protesters slashed tires on police vehicles, dumped orange

paint on some and spray-painted obscenities on others. Graffiti denouncing the death penalty and police also was sprayed on City Hall.

Overturned trash bins were pushed into traffic and, outside a hotel, police kept about 60 protesters from setting several bins on fire.

Police responded with batons after being hit by protesters, many of whom hid their faces behind black bandanas, torn shirts and ski masks or were dressed in black and camouflage.

Several protesters were left bleeding after being struck in the head and chest with batons. Police could not immediately confirm whether any of those in custody were injured.

Eventually, about 100 police officers on bicycles stormed into the area with the most violent activity and herded protesters back into a small grassy area.