### 39 Fijian soldiers charged with mutiny

SUVA, Dec 5: The Fiji military charged 39 rebel soldiers on Tuesday with mutiny over a failed uprising at Suva's Queen Elizabeth Barracks in November in which eight soldiers were killed and seven wounded, reports Reuters.

The soldiers from the elite Counter Revolutionary Warfare (CRW) unit will face a military court martial in February and could be sentenced to death if found guilty, army legal adviser Lieutenant Colonel Ratu Etueni Caucau said.

The soldiers have been given an opportunity to consult their legal advisers because of the seriousness of the extent of the penalty, especially when the form of death penalty is dictated by the military court," Caucau told reporters in Suva.

The soldiers could also face civil charges including murder, assault, damage of property and unlawful possession of weapons.

The rebel soldiers stormed the armoury and took over the Suva barracks on November 2, but lost control of the compound six hours later after a gunbattle with more than 60 soldiers loyal to Fiji's military commander Frank Bainimarama.

### 15 killed during Aceh rebel anniversary celebrations

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia, Dec 5: At least 15 people, including an Indonesian marine, were killed during celebrations for the birth of the separatist movement in the Indonesian province of Aceh, police and residents said today, reports AFP.

Monday marked the 24th anniversary of a declaration of nationhood by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), marked by residents in this oil and gas rich province with prayers and the raising of thousands of rebel flags.

But celebrations during which police said they confiscated 3,000 banned GAM flags provincewide led to the deaths of 15 people, police and residents told AFP on

Tuesday. Six rebels died in a firefight with a joint police-military patrol in Keunareuh, West Aceh, a source at the district police sta-

tion there said late Monday. However GAM sources said the six were ordinary citizens who were shot dead" because troops mistakenly thought they had just returned from raising the banned separatist flag at a ceremony in the area.

In North Aceh, a total of four people were killed in three separate incidents on Monday, police spokesman Superintendent Yatim Suyatmo told AFP on Tues-

Suyatmo said the four included a marine killed in an ambush in the Cot Ngabeng area, a GAM stronghold.

## Philippine military, former Muslim rebels declare truce

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, Dec 5: The military and former Muslim separatist rebels declared a truce today, two days after four people were killed and 24 others wounded in a clash on a southern Philippine island, officials said, reports AP.

Jamasali Abdurahman, a Moro National Liberation Front leader, said officials from the military and MNLF met early Tuesday and agreed on a truce.

The MNLF also sought the withdrawal of troops close to their camps to prevent another clash, Jamasali said. No agreement was reached on this.

Two government troops and two former rebels were killed in the clash Sunday between the military and about 40 MNLF members Patikul on Jolo, said Col. Hilario Atendido, spokesman for the military's Southern Command.

Atendido said soldiers pursuing members of the Muslim extremist Abu Sayyaf group, which is holding an American and a Filipino hostage, were attacked by MNLF gunmen.

# US, China welcome Pakistan's 'maximum restraint'

WASHINGTON, Dec: The United States on Monday welcomed Pakistan's promise of restraint along the tense Line of Control in Kashmir as a "positive" development in relations between Islamabad and its nuclear-rival India, reports AFP.

Pakistan gave the undertaking on Saturday in what is being seen as a response to India's offer of a ceasefire to Muslim separatist groups

during the holy month of Ramadan. "There have been positive developments," said State Department

spokesman Richard Boucher. "The government of Pakistan has reiterated its intention to exercise maximum restraint along the Line of Control in Kashmir, and we cer-

tainly welcome that." Boucher said the move was an important compliment to India's

ceasefire -- which came into effect last week. The US position on the flashpoint region is that it is a dangerous threat to peace which must be solved with negotiations, but it stops short of taking an official role as a broker between India and Pakistan.

Meanwhile, China today cautiously welcomed a Pakistani offer to exercise "maximum restraint" along its disputed border with India in Kashmir.

Pakistan made the announcement on Saturday and urged India to open a "meaningful dialogue" on the issue. We have taken note of the proposal put forward by the Pakistani

government," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said during the ministry's regular briefing.

'We welcome and support all efforts that are conductive to the improvement of the relations between India and Pakistan and the relaxation of tensions in the region," she said.

Amid signs of a tentative easing of tension between the two archrivals, India reacted to Pakistan's announcement on Monday when Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee saying New Delhi's ceasefire could be extended if the Islamabad government cooperated. But he also called on Pakistan to end cross-border "terrorism" and violence and adopt a posture of peace and friendship with India to create "a conducive atmosphere.

India's unilateral ceasefire came into force on November 27 at midnight across the troubled Kashmir Valley to mark Ramadan. But it was rejected by most Islamic separatist groups who have vowed to step up attacks during the period.

Indian Kashmir's main separatist forum, the Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference, which groups more than 20 outfits, welcomed the peace moves and Islamabad's offer to exercise "maximum restraint" on the Kashmir border.

Pakistan has also invited Hurriyat leaders for talks on the Kashmir problem.

# Mori appoints new Cabinet Two former prime ministers get key positions

ruling party and breathe life into an administration quo. many Japanese see as an embarrassment, reports

To bolster his eroding powerbase, Mori gave key positions to two influential former prime ministers Kiichi Miyazawa and Ryutaro Hashimoto. Having two former prime ministers in the Cabinet would be unprecedented.

Japan's political scene. Stressing the need for continuity. Mori had several ministers retain their former posts and drew almost exclusively from the ruling three-party coalition for the appointments.

would dispel concerns over Mori's ability to run the tion minister. Masahiko Komura, an ex-minister. nation. He faces major tasks, namely the revival of Japan's still-struggling economy, a government restructuring plan to take effect next month and elections for Parliament looming.

"Mori is the weakest prime minister in history. I change will bolster his sagging administration.

TOKYO, Dec 5: Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori don't think they can do much," said Shigenori appointed a new Cabinet today, putting together a Okazaki, a political analyst at UBS Warburg in lineup intended to unite this country's fractious Tokyo. 'This is another government of the status

> Following the mass resignation of his Cabinet in the morning an expected formality Mori had the difficult job of putting together a lineup that satisfied rival factions within his party and a public unhappy with his performance since he took office in April.

With both Miyazawa and Hashimoto appointed, it is the first time in Japan's history that two former The reshuffle does not presage major changes on prime ministers serve simultaneously as Cabinet members a situation that could lead to bickering for

The new Cabinet included some familiar faces: Yohei Kono remained on as foreign minister, and Doubts remained over whether the shake-up outspoken Chikage Ogi kept her post as construcwas appointed to head the Justice Ministry.

Still, Mori did make some changes including appointing Hashimoto to serve as head of Okinawan affairs and government reform and he's hoping the



Yoshiro Mori

## Scientists discover signs of lakes on Mars

CALIFORNIA, Dec 5 In what they termed their "most significant discovery yet", US space agency scientists said Monday that they have discovered evidence that ancient Mars might have had numerous lakes and shallow seas, reports DPA.

Speaking at a press conference at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratories just outside Los Angeles, the researchers said their highresolution pictures showing layers of sedimentary rock indicated that Mars might once have been a lot more like Earth than previously believed.

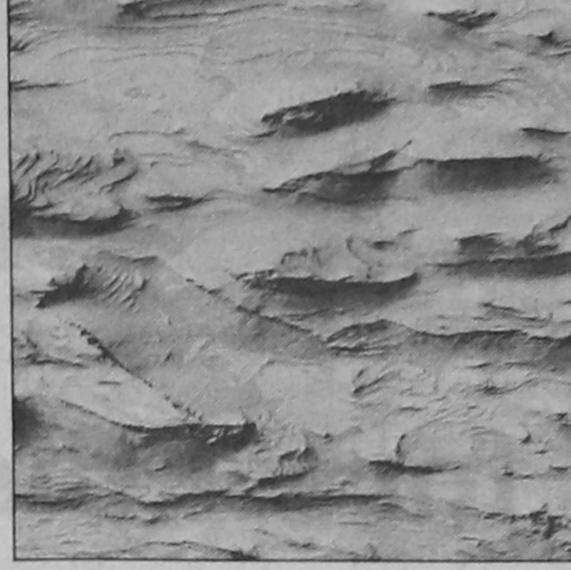
The discovery of the rock formations provide experts more focused areas to search for signs of life on future Mars missions.

They also provided a boost to the ilnxed Mars finding fossil evidence of life on Mars. - AFP photo programme of the National Aeronautics and Space

Administration (NASA), which lost both its Mars Climate Orbiter and the Mars Polar Lander last year. "We see distinct, thick layers

of rock within craters and other depressions," said Dr Michael Malin, principal investigator for the Mars Orbiter Camera on NASA's Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft. 'They may have formed in lakes or shallow seas.

"We have never before had this type of irrefutable evidence that sedimentary rocks are widespread or Mars. These images tell us that early Mars was very dynamic and may have been a lot more like Earth than many of us



This image released by NASA on Monday was the first image received by MOC scientists that began to hint at a larger story of layered sedimentary rock on Mars. Nasa scientists announced that these layers once hosted Martian lakes leading to speculation for

had been thinking."

Such layered rock structures where there were once lakes are common on Earth. Scattered around Mars, they indicate that the planet might once have had abundant water supplies that are a key component for the creation of life forms.

The pancake-like layers of sediment compress and cement to form a record of a planet's history in rock.

'The story is actually quite complicated, and yet the implications are tremendous, researcher Dr Ken Edgett sald. "Mars has preserved for us, in its sedimentary rocks, a record of events unlike any that occur on

he planet today. This is changing the way we think about the early history of Mars a time, perhaps, more than 3.5 billion years

It is reasonable to look for evidence of past life on Mars in these remarkably similar sedimentary layers," said Malin, who revealed that the new images had led him to drop his previous opposition to the Idea that Mars was wet and warm in its early history.

'The nearly identically thick layers would be almost impossible to create without water," he

The researchers did, however, allow for the possibility that a denser atmosphere on early Mars

could have allowed greater amounts of wind-borne dust to settle out on the surface in ways that would have created the sedimentary

Independent experts were split in the assessment of the discovery. Robert Craddock, a geologist with the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum, said scientists had known about the layered deposits for three decades.

"In reality, they haven't seen anything we haven't seen before." Craddock said on the space.com website. 'You and up with the impression they're making new discoveries, when all they're doing is looking at it with new

37 policemen

feared dead

in Kashmir

bus plunge

JAMMU, India, Dec 5: All 37

policemen travelling on a bus

which plunged into a deep gorge

in Indian Kashmir were now

feared dead, police said today,

Srinagar, the summer capital of

the state, to Jammu when it

Mohan told Reuters that 30 bod-

ies had been recovered from the

scene of Monday evening's acci-

dent at Ramban, 150 km (93

miles) east of Jammu, the winter

capital of Jammu and Kashmir

cal failure," he said, adding that

39 bodies had been recovered and

the other seven had probably

"It was the result of a mechani-

The bus was on its way from

Superintendent of Police Saji

reports Reuters.

skidded off the road.

## Gore campaign files appeal in Florida

TALLAHASSEE, Florida, Dec 5: The legal team of Democratic presidential hopeful Al Gore filed an appeal late Monday asking that the Florida Supreme Court immediately review its election contest, reports AFP.

"Final resolution of that dispute will determine which presidential candidate receives the majority of the electoral votes, the Gore legal team said in the

'The Florida Supreme Court must immediately and finally resolve the issues," the appeal pointed out.

The appeals court promptly passed the motion on to the Florida Supreme Court. Asked whether the justices

would look at the case later Monday, court spokesman Craig Waters said: "The court will not take any further action tonight. The appeal was filed less than

an hour after Leon County Circuit Court Judge Sanders Sauls



rejected a motion by the Democratic candidate contesting the outcome of the US presidential election in Florida.

The official results gave Republican George W. Bush a tight 537-vote margin over Gore out of nearly six million votes

Sauls' ruling dealt a severe blow to Gore's efforts to overturn

Florida's certification of Bush as the winner of that southeastern state's 25 Electoral College votes in the November 7 election. With Florida's electoral votes,

Bush has enough to capture the presidency.

Lead Gore attorney David Boies said he believed Judge Sauls had erred when he concluded Gore had failed to prove his case for the recount of thou sands of disputed ballots.

'This ruling comes without the judge having looked at a single ballot," Boies said. 'The ballots. were the best evidence of the voters' intent."

The case is separate from a ruling on Monday by the US Supreme Court, which told the justices here to reconsider their decision to include late hand tallies in election results.

Waters did not exclude the possibility that the two cases could be joined.

## Radiation leak discovered in Russian N-plant

MOSCOW, Dec 5: A radiation leak has been discovered at a nuclear power plant in Novovoronezh, southern Russia, a source in the energy ministry said Tuesday cited by Interfax news agency, reports AFP.

Above normal radiation levels were registered during checks around a water pipe serving two of the five reactors, type VVAR-210 and VVAR-365, which were taken out of operation in 1988 and 1990 respectively, the source added.

## World's oldest man dies

LOS ANGELES, Dec 5: The 111-year-old Benjamin Harrison Holcomb, who was recognised by Guinness Book of Records as the oldest man in the world, died last Saturday, said a spokesman for his nursing home Monday,

when his daughter Leona Ford kilometres southwest o Oklahoma City.

inson. Kansas. Holcomb was accepted by Guinness Book as the oldest man last May.

day at a time the best you can." He spent most of his life in farms near Apache, southwest-

for either being a father of four children or old age.

another reason known for his longevity is his way to relieve himself from sorrow and grief crying it out. It was not until five years ago

Nursing Home. His two daughters and a son, all in their 80s, paid daily visits to him.

## Blair 10 points clear of Conservatives LONDON, Dec 5: British Prime are talking about a May election

Minister Tony Blair won another opinion poll boost today, giving him a 10-point lead over the opposition Conservatives as he weighs whether to call a general election by next May or June, reports Reuters.

The ICM poll for the Guardian newspaper put Blair's Labour Party on 44 per cent, up four points over the past month, while the Conservatives were unchanged on 34 per cent. The Liberal Democrats were down economy, public services and four points on 16 per cent. Speculation has been mount-

ing in Britain's media that Blair plans to call and early election in the first half of next year to capitalise on his party's apparent high rating with voters.

ICM's 10-point lead would give Blair a parliamentary majority of more then 100 seats.

week gave Labour an even bigger lead of 15 points.

ends in May 2002, has made little secret lately of the fact that he is thinking hard about an early election. He said in a newspaper inter-

but some are suggesting that

Blair could go to the country even

earlier April 5 has been men-

Blair, whose term officially

view published on Monday that he believed he had the right agenda on issues such as the welfare to win the next general election.

Blair has quickly recovered from fuel protests in September that nearly brought Britain to a standstill and plunged Labour behind the Conservatives in opinion polls for the first time since the 1997 general election.

Labour can point to an econ-A MORI poll for the Times last omy that is in strong shape and the Conservatives have so far failed to make any serious impact

of the young princes were likely to

be more contemporary than those

were given a modern upbringing

by their mother Princess Diana

groups such as the Spice Girls,

Charles, was killed in a Paris car

crash in 1997. Her death

prompted a huge public outpour-

ing of grief and arguments over

the style of funeral she would

queen had at first insisted Diana

be given a private funeral with no

official royal involvement, only

Media reports suggested the

Diana, former wife of Prince

and are known to be fans of pop

Britney Spears and All Saints.

William, 18, and Harry, 16.

of their older relatives.

have wanted.

### been carried down the Chenab river at the bottom of the 800metre (2,400-foot) Himalayan Troops mount fresh offensive

against LTTE COLOMBO, Dec 5: Hundreds of heavily armed troops mounted a fresh offensive against Tamil rebels in northern Sri Lanka today as the guerillas tried to blast a key bridge elsewhere, the defence ministry said, reports

Troops backed by artillery and armoured cars moved some two kilometres (more than a mile) into territory held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Jaffna peninsula, ministry spokesman Sanath Karunaratne

'The operation was launched at 9:00 am (0300 GMT) and it appears the terrorists are fleeing," Karunaratne said.

There was no immediate reaction from the guerillas.

## UNICEF seeks \$207m for children in crises

GENEVA, Dec 5: The United Nations Children's Fund said on Monday that it needed at least \$207 million in 2001 to protect and educate the world's most vulnerable children, says Reuters.

Launching the appeal, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy told a news conference that the money would help to protest children in crisis zones such as the Great Lakes Region in Africa and in Indonesia from disease, starvation and exploita-

The cash would be spent on immunisation, basic schooling, AIDS education and mine awareness, providing clean water and proper sanitation, and protection from abuse and exploitation including the recruitment of child soldiers.

Bellamy said that the appeal targeted Kenva, where 80,000 children were in immediate danger from drought, and Sierra Leone, where only one third of the population can get safe water.

Among the 19 crisis areas are also North Korea, the communist bastion which is gradually opening up to the rest of the world, and civil war-torn countries such as Eritrea and Somalia, and drought-ravaged Afghanistan.

## Dalai Lama re-establishes contact with Beijing

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: The Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader fighting to free his homeland from Chinese rule imposed in 1950, said on Monday he has re-established contact with Beijing, the Voice of America

reported, says Reuters. The US-funded international broadcasting service said the Dalai Lama told reporters at a news conference in Dharamsala. India, where he has lived in exile with thousands of followers since 1959, that his brother had visited Beijing in late October at the

The brother, Gyalo Thundup, returned with a message from China's communist leadership, but the Dalai Lama would not

invitation of Chinese authorities.

requesting that the Chinese of religious leaders held at the

fact-finding delegation into Tibet. VOA said, citing his remarks at the news conference and in an interview with VOA. Asked by reporters whether

sent a change in Beijing's attitude toward him, the Dalai Lama said it was too early to tell, according to the VOA report, which was also posted on the VOA Web site: http://www.voanews.com. He also said he asked his brother to travel around Tibet during his visit to China, but

Chinese authorities had pre-

the renewed contact might repre-

provided no direct quotes from the Dalai Lama, instead paraphrasing his remarks. China has called the Dalai criticises foreign countries that The Dalai Lama said he allow him to visit. It also blocked responded to the message by his appearance at a world summit

reports AP.

the Koreas.

September, saving he was "troublemaker" who must be kept

Earlier in Dharamsala, the

Tibetan spiritual and political leader was joined by other Buddhist leaders and followers as they marked his 50th anniversary as Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama fled to northern India in 1959 after a failed

uprising against Chinese rule. While his government-in-exile has no international recognition the Dalai Lama's non-violent campaign to free Tibet won him a vented him from doing so. VOA Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, and has garnered widespread inter

national sympathy and financial

support. In recent years, the Dalai Lama reveal its contents, the VOA Lama a separatist, and routinely has softened his original demands for Tibet's Independence from China, saying he is willing to accept autonomy if that will help to preserve Tibetan government allow him to send a United Nations in New York in culture.

The surrounding area was sealed off and testing is being carried out on the air, water and

The Novoronezh plant's five nuclear reactors were built in the 1960s. Only three are still in service.

reports Xinhua. Holcomb passed away in peace

was in company at bedside, according to Brent Busby of the Carnegie Nursing Home, 140 Born on July 3, 1889, in Rob-

On how he could have lived so long, he used to say 'You live one

ern Oklahoma. He failed to be a battlefield soldier as many o people of his time had experienced during the two world wars,

Apart from living simple life,

when he moved to the Carnegie

## Many political commentators with voters. Tailored funeral for royal family!

LONDON. Dec 5: Britain's royals would like, but the wishes teenage Princes William and Harry, along with senior members of the royal family, have been asked to plan their own funerals, the Daily Telegraph reported today, reports Reuters.

The government had asked

members of the royal family, including Queen Elizabeth and heir-to-the-throne Prince Charles, to list their wishes for their funerals in a bid to prevent the arguments that followed the death of Princess Diana in 1997, the newspaper said. A spokesman for St James's

Palace, which represents Prince Charles and his sons William and Harry, was quoted as saving that plans had been made for a number of eventualities."

the style of music and service their death, the newspaper said. It said the palace gave no indi-

The royals were asked to state their wishes for a guest list and they would like in the event of

cation of the style of funerals the

relenting after Prince Charles put up ferocious resistance. Charles and Prime Minister Tony Blair were in agreement that Princess Diana should be laid out at St James' Palace and the given a public funeral at Westminster

# the 1950-53 Korean War, a conflict that left several

ment. North Korea has one of the largest armies in the world about I million troops as well as a longrange missile programme that has prompted Washington to consider building a national missile defence system. kilometre wide Demilitarised Zone, a buffer between Five delegates from each side met Tuesday for the

> The railway will link the two capitals. Seoul of the South and Pyongyang of the North, and continue on to Shinuiju, a major city on the North's border with China. The railway was severed just before the

peninsula at the end of World War II. There is no regular means of cross-border travel or communication for ordinary Korean citizens.



# Quake jolts Tokyo: A pre-dawn earthquake with

a preliminary magnitude of 5.5 jolted Tokyo and nearby areas Tuesday, but there were no reports of damage or injuries. AP reports from The quake was centered about 40 kilometers (25 miles) under the seabed off the coast of Ibaraki prefecture (state), about 112 kilo metres (69 miles) northeast of Tokyo, the Meteorological Agency said. The tremor, which struck at 1:47 am (1647 GMT Monday), was felt in Tokyo and surrounding prefectures (states), arousing people

3 hurt in Moscow gas blast: Three people were injured in an explosion early yesterday in a Moscow apartment block, the Interfax news agency reported, AFP reports from Moscow.

from sleep. Kazuo Takeuchi, an Ibaraki police spokesman, said no

damage or injuries were reported from the earthquake.

The blast was thought to have been caused by a gas leak on the fifth floor of the building in the southeast of the Russian capital, the report said. Emergency services were sent to the scene. Domestic gas explosions are relatively common occurrences here, but residents remain wary of more sinister causes for such blasts amid a spate of contract killings and following a series of terrorist actions by Chechen separatists.

# Two Koreas discuss cross-border railway

PANMUNJOM, Dec 5: Military officers from both Koreas held talks today on reconnecting a crossborder railway, one day after the South warned that the North remains a serious threat to its security.

was the latest in a series of discussions on the project at the heavily guarded border, which is expected to ease tension dramatically between the two old The two armies must clear thousands of land mines in the railway corridor that crosses the 4-

The meeting at the border village of Panmunjom

Reconnection of the railway was agreed on at the first inter-Korean summit in June, when the leaders of the two states pledged to work towards reconciliation and reunification after decades of hostility. However, Seoul's Defence Ministry released a report Monday which said that North Korea retains

55 per cent of its key forces near the border with South Korea. This means a surprise attack on South Korea is possible at any time without a prior redeployment of its units," said the annual report, known as the

The North invaded the South at the beginning of

million people dead and ended without a peace treaty. The Seoul government's chief wartime ally, the United States, keeps 37,000 troops in the South to guard against any threat from the communist Though short on food, fuel and modern equip-

talks on construction of the railway as well as a fourlane highway, which would become the first direct transport link across the border since the Korean

Korean War. US and Soviet forces partitioned the Korean

North Korean Colonel Ruy Yong-Chol (C) and other military offi-

cials cross over to South from North Korea in Panmunjom, South Korea, yesterday under the guidance of a South Korean military official (L). South and North Korean military officials held talks on restoring cross-border railway and road links, but with wider security wrangling expected to loom over the contacts. - AFP photo