

RUSSIAN SCHOOL CARNAGE

World traumatised

REUTERS, London

Tragic, despicable, inhumane, cowardly, barbaric, evil, and astonishing -- the deaths of a hundred or more people including children in a siege in Russia sparked strong words for the hostage-takers from world leaders.

"I suspect that Putin's immediate concern will have been to be seen to be strong rather than to be seen to be negotiating," said Alex Standish, editor of Jane's Intelligence Digest. In a statement in the name of the presidency of the 25-nation EU, Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot said all countries should work together to prevent such tragedies.

"Here terrorists without conscience tried to reach political goals by murdering people," he said. Egypt expressed its sympathy for the "friendly Russian people in this ordeal," while Israel's foreign minister called the events an "an intolerable criminal terror act."

learn that a large number of children and others had lost their lives or were injured. Greece condemned what it called a "cowardly terrorist action." Spain said there was a "wave of concern" for the victims. Irish Foreign Minister Brian Cowen said his reaction was "horror and sadness."



Women light candles at a church in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, yesterday. Rescuers pulled more bodies from the ruins of a school gym as Russia was plunged into mourning after a three-day hostage-taking ended in carnage in Beslan, with at least 322 dead, half of them children.

Pictures tell all in Russian papers

The front page of one of Russia's most authoritative newspapers had no headline or story on its front page yesterday. Instead Izvestia showed a man with a pained look on his face rushing a girl to safety in his arms. She was semi-naked and clutching on to his neck with a look of horror on her face. A militiaman stood solemnly in the background.

Hurricane prompts mass evacuation

BBC ONLINE

About 2.5 million Americans have been ordered to leave their homes along Florida's east coast in advance of the expected arrival of Hurricane Frances. The hurricane has already hit the Turks and Caicos Islands and continues to pound the islands of the Bahamas.



Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran (R) and his Pakistani counterpart Riaz Khokhar (L) arrive for secretary level talks in New Delhi yesterday. Senior Indian and Pakistani officials began talks to finetune the agenda for today and tomorrow's first ministerial meeting in three years.

Progress with Pakistan 'not insignificant'

Delhi ready to talk to militants

AFP, New Delhi

Progress in ongoing peace talks with Pakistan has been "not insignificant" and the process can be sustained, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said yesterday. "We are a government that is only 100 days old and in this short period of time we have ... (completed) the Composite Dialogue," Singh told his first media conference since taking office on May 22.

steps towards resolving the dispute over Kashmir. The proposals were accepted on Saturday during talks in New Delhi between Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and his Pakistani counterpart, Riaz Khokhar, according to a joint statement issued after the talks. Meanwhile, India's prime minister said yesterday his government was ready to talk to any militant group, including those in Kashmir, abandoning previous preconditions that the rebels must first disarm.

Rebels planned attack, hid weapons in school basement earlier

AFP, Moscow

Guerrillas who took 1,000 hostages in a Russian school close to Chechnya for three days staged a well planned attack after first scouring the area and then disguising themselves as workers rebuilding a gym, officials said yesterday. Russian newspapers and some politicians have questioned how a dozen guerrillas could take so many hostages and then stand up to hundreds of Russian troops during a grisly raid that lasted for more than six hours and killed more than 322 people.

The head of the North Ossetian security service said that he was certain now that the guerrillas had located their point of attack well in advance and did not simply rush in on the school on the first day of class on the spur of the moment. "We found a large amount of explosives and mines, and their number says that this attack was planned in advance," Valery Andreyev was quoted as saying by Interfax. "The armaments were hidden on the school grounds," he said. He gave no other details but other news reports fleshed out the story. They quoted an unnamed source as saying that the militia first scouted out two other schools before settling on School Number One -- the main one in Beslan -- because it was undergoing major reconstruction work over the summer.

27 more Pak ministers take oath of office

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf yesterday swore in another 27 ministers, three days after inducting a 32-member cabinet headed by newly elected Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, officials said. One federal minister and 26 ministers of state took their oaths of office, they said. Portfolios of the ministers would be announced later, the officials said. Aziz, a key ally of Musharraf, was sworn in as prime minister last week and won a parliamentary vote of confidence that was boycotted by the opposition. He was chosen for the job after Zafarullah Jamali resigned in June in a transfer of power planned by Musharraf. Aziz, a former Citibank executive, entered politics as finance minister after Musharraf's 1999 coup and still retains the finance ministry.

Bush & Kerry trade jabs on campaign trail

REUTERS, New York

President Bush and Democratic rival John Kerry traded blows over jobs and security Friday as they began a final two-month election sprint, with Bush touting his economic record and Kerry launching a fierce counter-attack on Republicans who "can't tell the truth." Bush, who opened up a significant 11-point lead on Kerry in a new Time poll, hailed a government report showing 144,000 US jobs were created in August and said "because we acted, our economy is growing again."

Kerry said at a rally in Newark, Ohio, a key battleground state. "It's time for us to have a president of the United States who can look you in the eye and when he does, you know you're being told the truth." The Time magazine poll, taken over the last three days of the Republican convention, showed Bush leading Kerry 52 percent to 41 percent among likely voters and ranking ahead of him on issues like handling the economy, the Iraq war, taxes and terrorism. Most polls heading into the convention had shown Bush and Kerry neck and neck, but Bush gaining ground and developing a significant advantage over Kerry on issues like national security. Kerry said on Friday he would not allow Bush or Vice President Dick Cheney, who led a stinging assault on Kerry at the convention, to question his fitness to serve. "I will not have my commitment to defending this country questioned by those who refused to serve when they had had a chance, and I will not have it questioned by those who misled this nation into war in Iraq," the Vietnam veteran said. Neither Bush nor Cheney served in Vietnam. Bush was in the Texas Air National Guard and Cheney obtained five draft deferments. Both Bush and Kerry hit the road to visit key swing states ahead of the long Labor Day holiday weekend, traditionally the kick off for political races.

Israel launches missile strike against Hamas

Palestinians aiming for polls next year

AFP, Gaza City

Israel pressed its threatened onslaught against Hamas yesterday, launching an early morning air strike in the Gaza Strip and a major search operation in the northern West Bank following this week's deadly double suicide bombing by the Palestinian militant group. Israeli helicopters swooped down on the Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip overnight and launched a rocket at a home suspected of being used by Hamas to manufacture weapons and explosive devices. Palestinian security sources said the building, which was targeted in a similar raid two months ago, was severely damaged, although there were no immediate reports of casualties. Israeli troops also slapped a curfew on four northern West Bank villages and carried out a massive search operation for wanted mili-

tants. Commanders made the order in the villages of Jaba, Sandakumieh and Asafa Saturday morning. The curfew was imposed in Hilat Adaher the previous day following clashes between troops and stonethrowing protesters. All four villages are close to the town of Jenin, regarded by Israel as a militant bastion. Troops were going house to house looking for suspects. In Jaba, they surrounded a school. An incursion into the nearby village of Yamun sparked a gunbattle between troops and armed militants. In the Fara refugee camp, a Palestinian was seriously wounded by Israeli fire. In the town of Tubas, troops were greeted by stonethrowing protesters. The Israeli military would only confirm it detained five Hamas activists in the West Bank overnight. The whole territory has seen

intense military activity since Tuesday's deadly suicide bombings in the southern Israeli city of Beersheva by Hamas which killed 16 people, aside from the bombers from the Islamic militant movement. On the political front, the Palestinians said they were aiming to hold elections across the occupied territories in spring of next year. "We hope to be able to hold general elections (presidential, parliamentary and municipal) next spring," the head of the central electoral commission, Ali Jarbawi, told reporters at Yasser Arafat's West Bank headquarters flanked by the Palestinian leader. The two men then launched a voter registration drive, that Jarbawi said should last a month. A further three months would then be necessary for the rest of the preparations, he added.

World press mourns school siege victims

AFP, Paris

Harrowing photographs of traumatised children fleeing their school at the brutal climax to a Russian hostage crisis dominated the world's front pages yesterday, with many slamming Moscow for failing to prevent a bloodbath. Some 250 people were killed, many of them children, and 700 injured, when Russian troops stormed a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, where 1,000 hostages had been held by heavily-armed militants demanding independence for Chechnya. The bulk of world coverage focused on the horror of the killings, with strong words for Russian President Vladimir Putin, criticising his botched handling of the siege and headline stance on rebel Chechnya. "Mother Russia's agony," read the headline in Britain's The Times. "Slaughter of the children," said The Daily Telegraph, while The Independent said simply "The blackest day", below a shot of a body being draped in a sheet. Putin came to power as a strongman who would sort out Chechnya,

Britain's Daily Telegraph noted. "One war and many terrorist atrocities later, he seems further from his goal than ever," it charged in an editorial, while The Independent warned that "the very worst response would be a punitive crackdown on Chechnya." "Dazed, shaken and bloodied," headlined the International Herald Tribune, which warned in an editorial that Putin had no choice but to negotiate with Chechen separatist leaders. "Unless he now opens a serious negotiating channel with legitimate Chechen leaders, the situation can only get worse," the paper said. "Carnage," headlined France's Liberation daily, which argued that "the master of the Kremlin has fallen into a trap" and that Putin's hard line on Chechnya had "opened the way for Islamic terrorism". France's Le Figaro newspaper criticised what it called Russia's "tradition of force," saying that in Russia's recent history "not a single hostage-taking had ended without dozens of civilian deaths."



'Clinton has multiple artery blockages'

AFP, New York

Former president Bill Clinton has "multi-vessel coronary artery disease" but should recover well after surgery next week, according to the surgeon who advised the ex-president about his options after examining his heart. Clinton checked into a New York hospital Friday and was awaiting heart bypass surgery after seeking medical help for chest pains and shortness of breath. Physician Anthony Pucillo administered an angiogram early Friday at Westchester Medical Center and the test, in which dye is injected into a patient's arteries, showed that the fast-food loving former president has "multi-vessel coronary artery disease." Pucillo told the New York Daily News.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat registers for the forthcoming elections during the launching of a voter registration drive at his West Bank headquarters in Ramallah yesterday. The Palestinians are aiming to hold general elections in spring of next year.