72 killed in Kyrgyzstan quake

Kyrgyzstan

6.6-magnitude earthquake

near Chinese border

SISHKEK -

KAZAKHSTAN

AFP, Bishkek

Rescuers raced to reach a remote village in Kyrgyzstan on Monday after a strong earthquake killed at least 72 people in a mountain-China, officials said.

The quake late Sunday, which Kamchybek Tashiyev said. measured magnitude 6.6 according to the US Geological Survey houses, made of clay and straw, (USGS), razed the village of Nura so they were totally destroyed," in the isolated Alaisky district, Kanatbek Abdrakhmatov, head of

"Right now the number of dead is 72," Deputy Emergency Situations Minister Turatbek Dzhunuchaliyev said in a press metres away. conference.

people needed urgent hospitaliruined in the quake, which was centre," said Tashiyev. felt as far away as the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, about 400 kilo- were also treating people on metres (250 miles) away.

Nura, a village of some 960 residents close to the point where the borders of Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan and China intersect.

"The picture we saw was frightening. The village of Nura is ous area near the border with fully destroyed, 100 percent," Emergency Situations Minister

"These were dilapidated high in the Tian Shan mountain the Institute of Seismology in Bishkek, told AFP.

Victims were being ferried by helicopter from Nura to the main regional city of Osh, 220 kilo-

"The helicopter will make as He added that more than 60 many flights as needed to transport wounded people needing sation and 128 houses had been medical attention to the regional Rescue workers and doctors

the scene and the Emergency officials said International Committee of Dzhunuchaliyev said. earlier that more than 100 people the Red Cross had given vichad been injured, mostly in tims food, tents and blankets, hampered by the remoteness of the of Independent States (CIS), a of casualties.

village and a lack of telephone links grouping of former Soviet with it, while roads had become republics. impassable in some places due to the quake, officials said.

"Efforts to assist the victims Bakiyev's office said. are being complicated by the hospitals, by a lack of communications and by the destruction of official Dinara Sagynbayeva.

The US Geological Survey (USGS) said the epicentre of the earthquake was 60 eastof 27.6 kilometres.

An aftershock of magnitude 5.1 hit the region just over two 20,000 houses. hours later, the USGS said.

Medvedev offered his condolences in a telegram to his Kyrgyz counterpart Kurmanbek Bakiyev Kyrgyzstan. and ordered Russian rescuers to Kremlin said in a statement.

Kyrgyzstan on Thursday for a

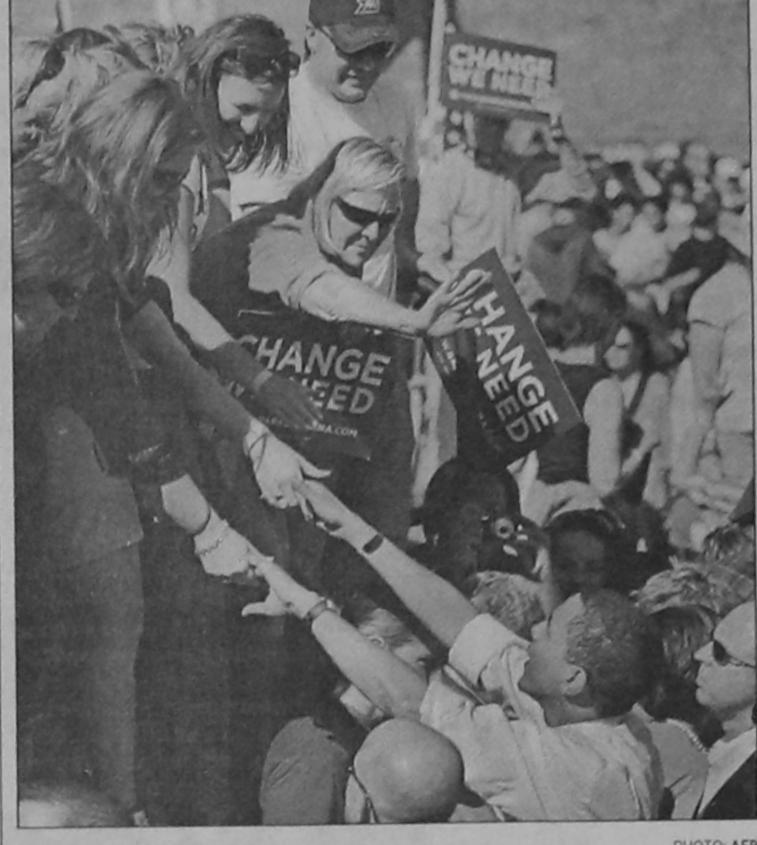
The meeting would go ahead on schedule despite the quake,

Kyrgyzstan, a landlocked and distance of the villages... from mountainous nation of five million people, is one of the poorest states of the former the roads," said health ministry Soviet Union and lies in a seismically active region.

In February 2003, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake in northwest China, with an epicentre close southeast of Sary-Tash at a depth to Kyrgyzstan in the foothills of the Tian Shan mountains, claimed 268 lives and razed

Soon after Sunday's quake a Russian President Dmitry moderate tremor with a magnitude of 5.7 hit China's far northwest, just over the border with

Two more earthquakes were assist the relief effort, the recorded Monday, measuring 6.6 and 5.1 respectively, in the Medvedev was to visit Himalayan region of Tibet, the US Geological Survey said, but But rescue efforts were being summit of the Commonwealth there were no immediate reports



Democratic presidential candidate Illinois Senator Barack Obama shakes hands with supporters at a rally on Sunday at Asheville High School in Asheville, North Carolina.

'Iran does not believe 2nd US presidential debate today

AFP, Asheville

Republican John McCain is threatening to take off the gloves in his second presidential debate with Democrat Barack Obama yesterday, hoping to pummel his way back into electoral contention.

With his poll numbers heading south and the US financial crisis playing to Obama's strengths, McCain needs a game-changing performance during the candidates' prime-time clash in hardship. Nashville, Tennessee.

Heading into the second leg of the three-debate series, both campaigns have been trading low blows with the November 4 election now less than a month away.

On Saturday, McCain's running to lead.

mate Sarah Palin accused Obama of "palling around with terrorists," in an exaggerated reference to the Democrat's ties in Chicago to a former 1960s radical, university professor William Ayers. Obama meanwhile alleged

McCain's health care policies would deprive 20 million more Americans of life-saving insurance coverage, as he ramped up his portrayal of the Republican as out of touch with voters' financial

Both charges were furiously denied by the other side and fireworks are possible at Tuesday's debate, especially given McCain's strategy of turning the election into a referendum on Obama's fitness

Curfew in Kashmir thwarts separatist rally

AFP, Srinagar

Thousands of Indian security forces implemented a strict curfew in Kashmir yesterday, preventing separatists from holding a proindependence rally.

Organisers behind recent anti-India protests in Kashmir had urged the residents to rally during the day in Lal Chowk, or Red Square, in the heart of summer capital Srinagar.

But city authorities imposed the curfew on Sunday and detained key separatist leaders to stop the march taking place.

Security vehicles fitted with loudspeakers drove through the streets of Srinagar, ordering people to stay indoors as security personnel patrolled the deserted streets.

"We are enforcing a strict curfew across Srinagar and other (Muslimdominated) towns," police officer Pervez Ahmed told AFP.

India paves the way for legal surrogacy

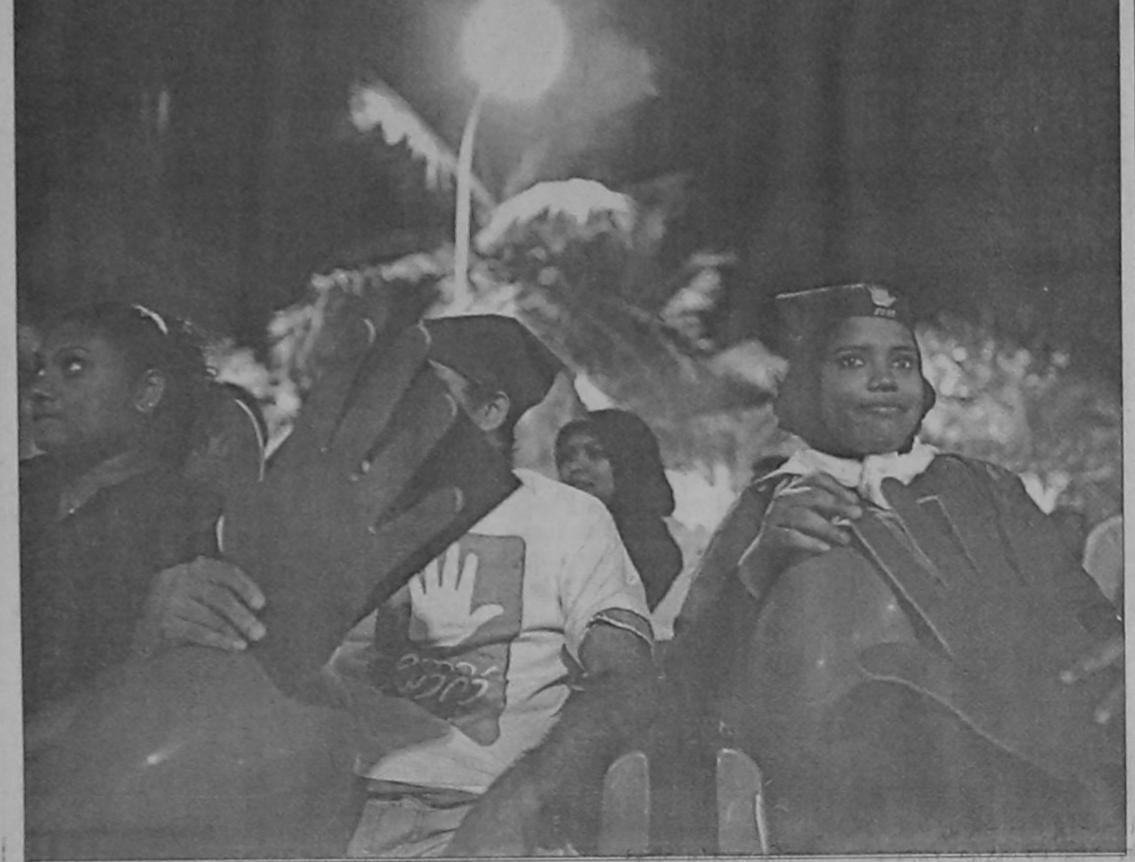
THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court has not only confirmed what everyone already knew, that surrogacy is a commercial industry in the country, but it also ruled that renting a womb is legal.

The judgment delivered by the apex court last week ends a drawnout debate on the ethics concerning the practice. The court gave the verdict in a

case relating to a baby girl called Manji, born out of the sperm of a Japanese husband and an anonymous donor's egg implanted in the womb of an Indian surrogate mother in Anand town in Gujarat state.

Ever since her birth on July 25, the baby has been in a legal limbo because the Japanese couple -Ikufumi Yamada, 45, and his wife Yuki Yamada, 41 - who had paid for the services of the surrogate mother, had divorced by then. While Yamada wanted to keep the baby, his ex-wife did not wanther any more.



Supporters of Maldives president and Dhivehi Rahyithunge Party's (DRP) presidential candidate Maumoon Abdul Gayoom take part in an electoral rally in Male on Sunday. Around 200,000 Maldivian will vote in the presidential elections scheduled to take place on October 8 to elect their next president.

Time running out on Israel-Palestine deal

Says Livni

Israeli Prime Minister-designate Tzipi Livni warned Sunday that time is running out for a peace on indefinitely. agreement with the Palestinians, with extremists gaining strength as negotiations stumble.

In her first foreign policy speech since her appointment to form a new government, Livni said Israel must press ahead with peace talks because "doing nothing has its own

Israel and the Palestinians Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank. resumed talks last November at an sides cast severe doubt about chose Livni to replace him.

meeting the target.

negotiating team, warned there are dangers in letting the process drag "An understanding of what is

time is not working in the favor" of Israel and regional moderates, she said. She was referring to the growing strength of Islamic Hamas militants, who overran the Gaza ment, Israel would have to hold a Strip last year and are challenging moderate Palestinian President

international conference hosted by ence in Jerusalem. She is currently date of January 2009, when Bush Minister Ehud Olmert's transition Palestinians for peace. leaves office, for completing a government. Plagued by multiple peace deal, but little apparent corruption investigations, Olmert Palestinians must continue regardprogress has been made, and both resigned last month after his party

Livni is trying to put together a Livni, who heads the Israeli majority coalition government. She has until Nov. 3, but she warned that protracted political turmoil could be harmful.

"Creating political stability under way in the region shows that quickly is necessary not for political needs, but so that we can ... deal with the challenges from outside, economic and others," she said. If Livni fails to form a govern-

general election early next year. Hard-line Likud opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu is confident Livni spoke at a strategy confer- of victory, running roughly even with Livni in current polls. He President Bush. They set a target the foreign minister in Prime opposes most concessions to the

Livni said peace talks with the less of the leadership changeovers in the US and Israel.

Israel, US will attack'

AFP, Washington

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, in an interview published Monday, said his country did not believed Israel or the United States would launch a military strike against Iran over its nuclear programme.

Asked in an interview with Newsweek magazine and The Washington Post if he believed there would an Israeli or US attack on Iranian nuclear facilities, Mottaki answered flatly: "No."

He did not elaborate. At the same time, he welcomed the US decision last July to send one of the top State Department officials, William Burns, to attend negotiations with Iran in Europe, interpreting the move as a realistic

"We welcomed the participation by Mr. Burns in the Geneva talks," Mottaki said. "We feel that if this is the real approach taken by arch enemies, was given a licence the US right now vis-a-vis the with such efforts."

previously, the administration of tions against countries such as President George W. Bush attached Iran, Sudan and Cuba.

conditions to its participation in the talks with Iran. Burns's presence in Geneva,

argued Mottaki, "meant that those were no longer in play."

Meanwhile, Iran said on Monday that it did not plan to allow a US research and policy thinktank to open in the Islamic republic after Washington gave its blessing for such a move.

Washington said on October 2 that it had given rare approval to the American Iranian Council (AIC) to set up an office in Iran, although the State Department insisted that US policy towards Tehran had not changed.

But Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Hassan Ghashghavi told reporters: "This matter was not discussed and is not being discussed. The issue is not on the agenda."

The AIC, which is devoted to improving ties between the two to establish a presence in Tehran by nuclear issue, they must continue the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control The foreign minister said that (OFAC), which enforces US sanc-

Afghanistan, Taliban reject reports of Saudi peace talks

Afghan voter registration starts

AFP, AP, Kabul

The Afghan government said yesterday it was hoping for peace talks nism and with whose help -- we are with the insurgent Taliban movement but denied a media report

also rejected the US media report that representatives of the militia had met Afghan government offi-24 and 27.

the Islamic country during the holy month of Ramadan and attended a there were no negotiations with the Taliban, a spokesman for President Hamid Karzai said.

The government did however were ousted from power in 2001. want such talks in order to find a way to end a Taliban-led insurgency, spokesman Homayun Hamidzada made by Karzai last week.

"It has not happened yet. We would like that to happen but how, when and where, by what mecha-

working on that," Hamidzada said. "Saudi Arabia is the leading that a first round of negotiations country in the Islamic world... The took place in Saudi Arabia last president has said clearly that we look up to the Saudi king and if A spokesman for the Taliban such a thing would happen, we would welcome it," he said.

A spokesman for the Taliban, Zabihullah Mujahed, said: "This is cials in Mecca between September totally untrue. We have not had any talks or negotiations with the gov-Afghan religious scholars visited ernment, neither in Saudi nor

anywhere else." Meanwhile, Afghanistan began dinner with King Abdullah but registering voters Monday for next year's presidential polls, an election likely to be the most dangerous and challenging since the Taliban

The Islamist militant movement, which has regained control of large swathes of the country, said told AFP, reiterating a statement it will not participate and warned other Afghans not to.





A combo of recent pictures made yesterday shows (from L) French scientists Luc Montagnier and Francoise Barre-Sinoussi, and German Prof Harald zur Hausen. Harald zur Hausen, Barre-Sinoussi and Montagnier won the Nobel Medicine Prize on Monday for separate discoveries of two viruses causing HIV and cervical cancer, the Nobel jury said in Stockholm.

Thaksin seeks asylum in UK

AFP, London

Ousted Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra has applied for political asylum in Britain, where he has spent most of his time since being forced out of office two years ago, officials said on Monday.

The Home Office said Thaksin applied for asylum when he flew into Britain in early August, breaking his bail conditions in a corruption case in Thailand.

"He applied for asylum pretty much when he landed ... and so did his wife," a spokesman told AFP.

But the Home Office said it coup. could give no further information on the progress of the applications because it does not comment on individual cases.

issued a fourth arrest warrant for Thaksin on September 26 when he failed to appear in court in Thailand to face corruption charges in a property scandal.

against the couple since Thaksin

was ousted in a September 2006 price.

convicted on tax evasion charges, adding to the legal cases piling up

One of his lawyers, Watchara Seangprathum, said in August that Thaksin planned to ask for asylum in Britain saying the "request will Thailand's Supreme Court note their malicious treatment in

and freedom" The Supreme Court is trying Thaksin and his wife in absentia on charges accusing him of using His wife, Pojaman, has been his political influence as premier to help his wife buy a plot of prime Bangkok real estate from the central bank at a knockdown

Thailand, where they lack security

This IUCN undated handout picture taken in India shows a Fishing Cat (Prionailurus viverrinus). Half the world's mammals are declining in population and more than a third are probably threatened with extinction, according to an update released on Monday of the "Red List," the world's most respected inventory of biodiversity.

Half of mammals 'in decline' Says extinction 'Red List'

AFP, Barcelona

Half the world's mammals are the evolutionary ladder, and good news showing that conser- AFP, Seoul than a third probably face extinc- eral species of whales, dolphins cies from slipping into the catetion, said an update yesterday of the "Red List," the most respected inventory of biodiversity.

A comprehensive survey of mals worldwide," said Schipper. mammals included in the annual for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), that a quarter of the planet's 5,487 known mammals are clearly at risk years ago, many experts say. of disappearing forever.

even grimmer because researchers periods of mass extinction. have been unable to classify the threat level for another 836 mammals due to lack of data.

"In reality, the number of threat- survival status. ened mammals could be as high as 36 percent," said IUCN scientist Jan Schipper, lead author of the mammal survey, in remarks pubjournal Science.

The most vulnerable groups are out. primates, our nearest relatives on and porpoises.

"Our results paint a bleak pic- return: "extinct." ture of the global status of mam-

which covers more than 44,000 evidence that Earth is undergoing and Mexico. animal and plant species, shows the first wave of mass extinction

Over the last half-billion years, starting in the early 1990s. But the actual situation may be there have only been five other

and animals in one of half-a-dozen beyond the threshold of viability, categories depending on their experts say.

species catalogued are listed as future extinctions," said Jane "threatened" with extinction, with Smart, the head of the IUCN's dispute over verification of the by Pyongyang. 3,000 of them classified as "criti- Species Programme. "We now lished separately in the US-based cally endangered," meaning they know what species are threatened, face a very high probability of dying what the threats are and where."

There were a few slivers of declining in population and more marine mammals, including sev- vation efforts can prevent a spegory from which there is no

The black-footed Ferret, native to the United States, was moved The revised Red List, unveiled at from "Extinct in the Wild" to "Enreport by the International Union the IUCN's World Conservation dangered" after it was successfully Congress in Barcelona, is further introduced into seven U.S. states

The European bison and the since dinosaurs died out 65 million wild horse of Mongolia made similar comebacks from the brink

But these remain exceptions that highlight the need to act before The Red List classifies plants other species populations dwindle

"The longer we wait, the more Nearly 40 percent of 44,838 expensive it will be to prevent

N Korea gave ultimatum on nuclear deal

Says pro-Pyongyang paper

group in Japan.

North Korea has given the United States an ultimatum to accept its proposed solution to the latest nuclear row between the two sides, a pro-Pyongyang newspaper said

"The North Korean side appears to have suggested ways to peacefully resolve the nuclear dispute, through the top US negotiator (Christopher Hill) to six-party talks and issued an ultimatum related to this," said Choson Sinbo, newspaper of a pro-Pyongyang Korean

breakthrough if Washington responds positively to the proposals.

Hill visited Pyongyang last week to try to rescue a six-nation deal, which is crumbling because of a The US negotiator had been invited North's declared nuclear programme.

return he had had "very substan- after staging its nuclear test.

tive" talks but gave no immediate details.

"A bold and epochal solution might have been forwarded (from the North) as time is running short ahead of the US presidential election," said Chosun Sinbo, which

normally reflects the hardline

communist state's thinking.

"The six-party talks, reactivated after North Korea's underground nuclear test in October 2006, may break down if the two sides fail to reach an agreement," it said. In such a case North Korea may

try to reverse its nuclear disablement to strengthen its hand in It gave no details but predicted a negotiations with the next US government, the daily said. But Hill's trip shows it does not

want to waste the diplomatic efforts made so far, the paper said. Pyongyang accepted the six-

nation aid-for-disarmament deal The US negotiator said on his in February 2007, just four months