INTERNATIONAL

Thai PM mulls resignation amid pressure to end crisis

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister indicated yesterday that he may resign in the wake of crippling political violence and pressure from military to end crisis.

Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, who has held the job for little more than three weeks, said he was considering his position as anti-government protesters

prepared for another mass rally. Asked if he would resign or dissolve parliament, Somchai told reporters: "It's the issue that I must consider, what's best in both the short and long term. I'm not attached to the idea of being prime minister.

"I have to study the pros and cons of each scenario, such as dissolving the House or resignation," he said.

Somehai is struggling to govern Thailand amid political protests between the three armed forces, I

that show no signs of abating. On Friday his spokesman

insisted he would not quit, but in the past few days, senior military leaders have put pressure on the premier to take a decision on his future and solve the crisis.

Somehai insisted there was no rift between himself and the military however. "I am still talking with them, there is no conflict," he

But on Saturday, Thailand's highest-ranking military officer piled pressure on the government to end political unrest in which two people were killed and hundreds injured this week.

Supreme Commander General added. Songkitti Jaggabatara, who oversees the army, navy and air force, said he had instructed the government to solve the country's political crisis, ruling out any immediate military action.

"We have held consultations Thaksin Shinawatra.

problem," he told reporters Saturday. "As of now there is no coup, it's not time for the military to come out," said Songkitti, whose role is

largely ceremonial. However, Air Force Chief Marshal Ittaporn Subhawong raised the spectre of future military action if the government called for it.

"There must be martial law or a state of emergency declared before the military can come out legally," Ittaporn said.

The prime minister, who is also the defence minister, is a former judge... so I assume that he will know what he should do," he

On Tuesday police fired tear gas on demonstrators who had blockaded parliament to protest a government plan to amend the country's constitution, a move they say is aimed at helping ousted premier

On Tuesday police fired tear gas

have told the government to solve the on demonstrators who had blockaded parliament to protest a government plan to amend the country's constitution, a move they say is aimed at helping ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

The People's Alliance for Democracy claims the current government is running the country on behalf of Thaksin, who was toppled in a September 2006 coup following other PAD protests.

Thousands of the group's supporters marched to parliament on Tuesday where Somchai --Thaksin's brother-in-law -- was delivering his first policy address.

Bloody clashes that followed between the protesters and police left two dead and at least 478 people injured in the worst street violence in Bangkok in 16 years.

Somehai has since announced an independent investigation into the incident, but the PAD on Friday said it would hold further rallies on October 13.



Israeli crowds shout and gesture toward riot police during clashes with Israeli security forces in Acre on Friday. Police clashed with Jewish protesters in Acre as Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni travelled to the northern Israeli city to appeal for calm after two days of clashes between Arabs and Jews.

Pirates threaten to blow up arms-laden ship

AP, Nairobi

With US warships lurking nearby, the pirates who hijacked an armsladen Ukrainian tanker off Somalia threatened to destroy the vessel unless a ransom is paid, a spokes-

man for the bandits said. Besides the US ships, a Russian frigate was heading toward the scene, raising the stakes for a possible commando-style raid on the ship. Pirates have seized more than two dozen ships this year off the Horn of Africa, but the hijacking of the Faina has drawn the most international concern because of its dangerous cargo.

The vessel is carrying 33 tanks and other heavy weapons.

Also on Friday, armed pirates in speedboats hijacked a Greek chemical tanker with 20 crew members in the Gulf of Aden near Somalia, a piracy watchdog official said.

The threat by the pirates on the Faina was unusual. Pirates operating off Somalia rarely harm their hostages, instead holding out for a ransom that often exceeds \$1 million. But international pressure was mounting regarding the Faina hijacking, with Nato forces planning to deploy.

Exiled Aceh rebel leader returns to Indonesia

AFP, Banda Aceh

The founder of Aceh's separatist rebel movement voiced his commitment to the troubled peace process Saturday as he made an emotional homecoming after nearly 30 years in exile.

Free Aceh Movement (GAM) founder Hassan di Tiro was greeted by thousands of cheering supporters and former guerrillas as he flew into the capital of the war-torn and tsunami-scarred Indonesian province for a twoweek visit.

Di Tiro, aged 83 and now a Swedish citizen, cried as he embraced his elderly sister and kissed the ground after being helped to kneel on an Islamic prayer mat on the tarmac at Banda Aceh's airport.

It is the first time he has set foot on home soil since he fled to Sweden in 1979, and comes as -political tensions mount in the province ahead of elections in April.



This undated picture, released from the Korean Central News Agency yesterday shows the North Korean leader Kim Jong II inspecting a women's battery of Korean People's Army unit 821 at an undisclosed place in North Korea, It was the first time since mid-August that official media has carried a photograph of Kim Jong II.

Turkey's military attacks Mugabe unilaterally 'gives rebels in northern Iraq

AP, Ankara

Turkish warplanes and artillery bombed dozens of Kurdish rebel targets in northern Iraq following an escalation in rebel attacks, the military said Saturday.

"The warplanes successfully bombed all of the 31 targets in a midnight operation," the military said. "The targets were later shelled by artillery units."

The offensive against rebel report. hideouts in Iraq's Hakurk area was the sixth cross-border Turkish bombing since the guerrillas killed 17 soldiers in a surprise attack on the border last week. The rebels ambushed a police bus on Wednesday, killing four policemen and the driver in the Kurdishdominated city of Diyarbakir, further escalating tensions.

Turkey's military and civilian leaders are pondering new measures to tackle the rebels, including extending detention periods and deploying thousands of antiterrorism police in the battered southeast.

Turkey, meanwhile, has increased pressure on the Iraqi Kurdish administration in northern Iraq to help in the fight against the rebels. CNN-Turk television, citing diplomatic sources, said Saturday that talks were under way. Authorities did not immediately confirm the

Turkish leaders said the military could launch a new ground attack against the rebels if needed. A weeklong ground incursion in February reportedly killed hundreds of rebels but the rebel group still poses a serious security threat.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, branded a terrorist group by the US and the EU, has been fighting for autonomy in the southeast since 1984. Tens of thousands of people have been killed.

his own party key posts'

BBC Online

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has allocated key ministries to his own party - in defiance of a power-sharing deal, reports

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) said the move had put the deal "in jeopardy"

The MDC had signed the powersharing agreement with Mugabe's Zanu-PF party on 15 September.

But the parties have been deadlocked in allocating ministries and have called back South African mediators. South Africa's former President

Thabo Mbeki was invited back after a meeting on Friday between Mugabe, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai and MDC splinter group head Arthur Mutambara.

On Saturday, Zanu-PF said a list of ministries had been agreed by all

the parties. Bright Matonga, Zanu-PF's

previous cabinet, told the BBC the allocation was very fair.

Zanu-PF takes 14 ministries and 16 are allocated to the two factions of the MDC, he said. Matonga said the post of

finance minister had yet to be decided. But MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa said: "This is Zanu-PF's arrogant wish list that puts the

whole deal into jeopardy. It is unilateral, contemptuous and outra-"Just yesterday we agreed to call in the facilitator Thabo Mbeki because there was a deadlock. The

MDC totally and absolutely rejects

this nonsense." One of the MDC's key expectations was that it would get control of the police if Zanu-PF controlled

Under the deal Mr Mugabe remains president while Tsvangirai becomes prime minister.

But the deal has so far failed to

deputy information minister in the ease the country's crippling economic crisis.

On Thursday, it was announced that Zimbabwe's annual inflation rate had soared to 231,000,000 percent.

Meanwhile, the UN says it needs \$140m for food aid over the next six months. Critics of Mugabe say he trig-

gered the economic crisis when he

began seizing white-owned farms for land redistribution ahead of parliamentary elections in 2000. But Mugabe blames Western sanctions, which target him and his

chief supporters for wrecking Zimbabwe's economy. The crisis worsened after disputed elections earlier this year.

Tsvangirai gained more votes than Mugabe in March's polls, but not enough for outright victory.

He pulled out of a run-off in June, accusing Zanu-PF militia and the army of organising attacks on its supporters, which left some 200 people dead.

India-born nun

to be canonised

CNN-IBN, Bharnamganam (Kerala)

India will soon have its first

Catholic saint. Sister Alphonsa

from Kerala will become the first

nun from India to be canonised by

the Vatican ahead of Mother Teresa.

She'll be Saint Alphonsa on

to Sister Alphonsa is that of curing a

nine year old boy's deformity. And,

the boy along with his father has

already left for Rome to be a part of

deformity, is now walking like a

normal child. His parents believe

that their prayers at Sister

Alphonsa's tomb were answered.

And this is one of the many beliefs

that formed the basis for India's

first Catholic nun being bestowed

alphonsa's tomb and there we

prayed one whole night and by the

next day the miracle happened,"

says the Genil's father Shaji.

"We took him to Sister

Genil, who was born with a

the canonisation ceremony.

One of the miracles attributed

today

October 12.

sainthood.

Pakistanis take shelter in Afghanistan as battles rage

AFP, Shultan

Things are bad back home, says school director Said Nabi Said, one of thousands of Pakistanis who have fled into 'Afghanistan to escape an offensive against al-Qaeda-linked militants.

"The Pakistani government bombed us with airplanes and artillery strikes to punish the people of Bajaur for having good relations with the militants." said the 27-year-old just across the border in Afghanistan's eastern Kunar province.

"Since the start of the fighting two months ago, the situation is critical: thousands of houses have been destroyed and hundreds of civilian people, mostly women and children, were killed," he

Shultan, about 10 kilometres (six them -- gathered for food handouts from the International Committee

of the Red Cross.

They are among about 20,000 people whom the United Nations refugee agency says have fled the Pakistan military operation against Taliban and al-Qaeda linked Islamic militants in the Bajaur tribal region.

The exodus marks a reversal of history: about eight million Afghans fled mostly to Pakistan over the 30 years of conflict that destroyed their country, from Soviet invasion to civil war. Among this new batch of refu-

gees are Afghans who lived in exile in Pakistan for more than 20 years. Islamabad has ordered all 60,000 Afghans in Bajaur to leave, saying they may be involved in militant

Afghanistan but I left for Pakistan Around him in the village of in 1980," said 45-year-old Mohammad Hachem. "Now the miles) from Pakistan, several hun- house is destroyed, the land is not Pakistan.

AFP, Lima with relatives, in his case his parents. Whichever side of the border they come from, these people all

Kunar and Bajaur are separated only by two hours of twisting road through imposing mountains.

belong to same Pashtun tribe, the

In one Kunar district, Shigal, about two-thirds of the 11,000 newcomers are Pakistanis and onethird Afghans, according to Patrick Schwaerzler of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"We belong to the same nation, the same tribe," said Said.

to another man. "He's Afghan, I'm Pakistani, he's my cousin. We have land both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. You want to separate "I had a house and land in us? It's like splitting a body in two."

Hachem said many of the homes here were occupied by four to five families.

"They share their food with us dred people -- not a woman among cultivated ... so I stayed in but of course it is not much. They do their best... but what we have is Like the others, he is staying not our own," he said.

14 killed in Peru in worst Shining Path attack in 10 years

Shining Path guerrillas ambushed a military convoy in southern Peru, killing at least 12 soldiers and two civilians in the bloodiest attack in a decade in a country still haunted by the Maoist group's brutal insurgency, the military said Friday.

The ambush, which also wounded at least 17 people, occurred Thursday night against a convoy of four army trucks transporting troops and civilians near the Ene-Apurimac river valley in Huancavelica department, which "Look at him," he said, pointing | is in the Andean mountains about 250 kilometres (155 miles) southeast of the capital Lima.

The death and injury tolls were revised downwards from an earlier report that gave 19 killed -- 12 military and seven civilians -- and 11 injured, after a military patrol visited the area where the clash took place, the armed forces said in a statement.

Officials said rebels detonated explosives as the convoy rounded a bend in a road and then followed up the bombing with automatic weapons fire.

Violence-hit Andhra town remains under curfew

PTI, Hyderabad

Curfew continued in violence-hit Bhainsa town of Andhra Pradesh for the second consecutive day today with no fresh reports of any untoward incidents. "The situation is very much

under control. No untoward inci-

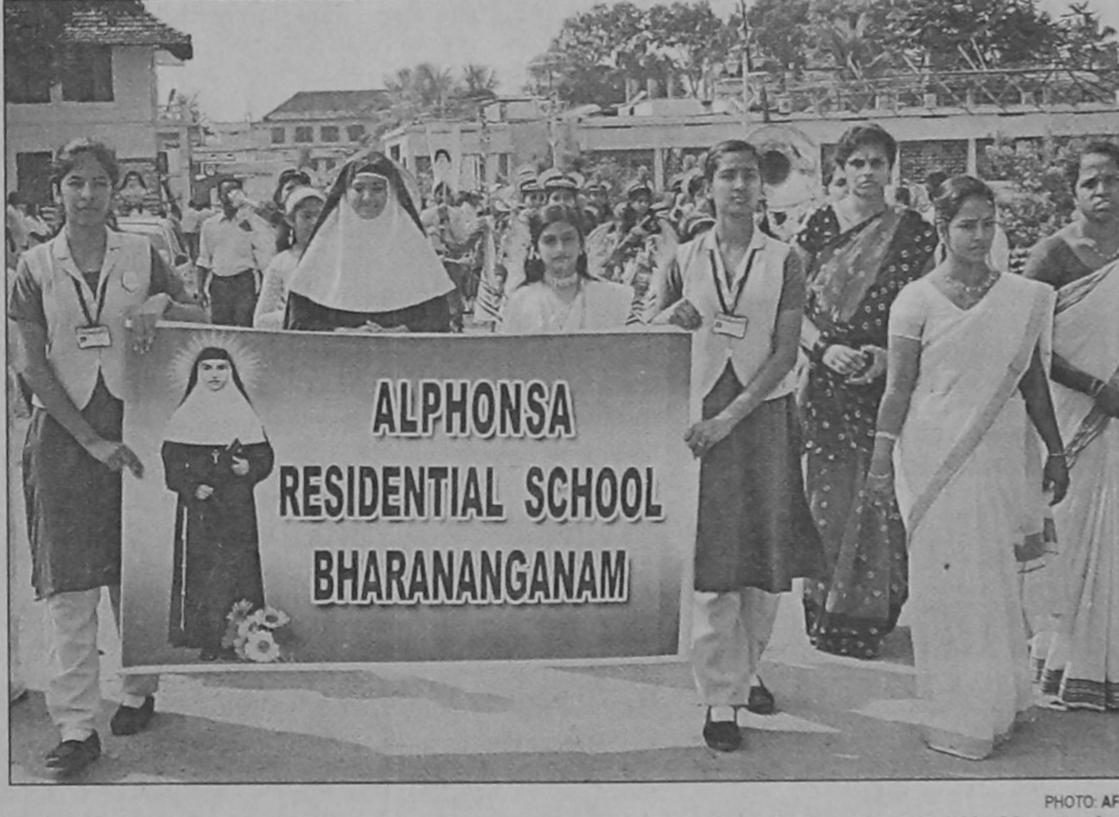
dents have been reported after

yesterday's clashes," District Collector Ahmed Nadeem told PTI over phone. "We have conducted peace committee meetings at various sensitive places of the town. Elders

their communities," he said. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC continue to be in force at Nirmal and Adilabad towns, the official said.

were also pacifying members of

Three persons were killed and 25 others, including eight policemen, injured in communal clashes approved by the country's demobetween two groups that broke out | cratic institutions including parin the town in Adilabad district | liament, which must ratify the pact. ment that would replace the UN Washington can live with the yesterday.



Indian schoolchildren walk to the tomb of Sister Alphonsa in Pala, some 70km south-east of Kochi yesterday. Christians are gearing up to celebrate the naming of the young Roman Catholic nun from the southern Indian state of Kerala as India's first woman Saint. Sister Alphonsa, who once disfigured herself to avoid marriage, will be canonised by Pope Benedict XVI today, some 60 years after her death.

Top Shia cleric won't block US pact, says Iraqi PM

AP, Baghdad

Iraq's prime minister said Friday that the country's most influential Shia cleric will leave the decision on the future of US troops to the government and parliament a step that could remove a major obstacle to a deal.

Friday as a car bomb killed 13 people in a Shia enclave and thousands of Shias marched to mourn the assassination of a lawmaker, which their leaders blamed on the Americans. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki,

Tension rose in the Iraqi capital

a Shia, journeyed Friday to the Shia holy city of Najaf to brief Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani about the progress in talks with the US on a security agreement governing tion to democratic rule. operations of American forces starting next year.

oppose the security deal if it is unstable for meaningful balloting.

wants it to be done through the the parliament approve this, then unresolved. (al-Sistani) will be convinced that is what the Iraqi people have

Al-Sistani's office had no com-

However, it would be politically untenable for al-Maliki to accept a deal and send it to parliament for ratification if al-Sistani spoke out publicly against it. Al-Sistani's earlier insistence

that only elected officials draft Iraq's first constitution after the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein forced the United States to change its blueprint for the country's transi-Al-Sistani also pressured the

Americans to agree to the first post-After a 2 1/2-hour meeting, al- Saddam elections in January 2005, Maliki told reporters that the even though many US officials Iranian-born cleric would not believed the country was too

American and Iraqi officials have said they are close to an agree-"He does not want anything mandate for US forces in Iraq; the language in the draft deal.

forced or imposed on the Iraqi mandate expires Dec. 31. But the people," al-Maliki said. "Rather he most contentious issue legal jurisdiction and immunity for US institutions. If the government and troops under Iraqi law remains

> Al-Maliki said the US had made major concessions, including agreeing to pull US forces back to their bases by the end of June and to a full withdrawal by Dec. 31,

2011. President Bush had steadfastly refused for years to set a timetable for a troop withdrawal, saying that should depend on security conditions on the ground. Iraqi politicians say they cannot sell the deal to their war-weary public without a timeline for the end of the US

presence. However, one senior US official, close to the talks, confirmed Friday that the Americans had agreed to the June and 2011 dates.

The official, who requested anonymity because the talks are ongoing, said the United States still believes that security conditions should determine the withdrawal schedule but that



Austrian rightist Haider dead at 58

AP, Vienna

Austrian politician Joerg Haider, whose far-right rhetoric at times cast a negative light on the Alpine republic, has died in a car accident at age 58.

Carinthian province police official Friedrich Hrast said the accident happened early Saturday in the south of the country when Haider's car veered off the road near the city of Klagenfurt and overturned while trying to overtake another car. He said Haider suffered severe injuries to his head and chest and was taken to a hospital where he was pronounced dead. Haider was alone in the car at the

time of the accident. Haider, who was born Jan. 26, 1950 in Upper Austria, was governor of the province of Carinthia and leader of the far-right Alliance for the Future of Austria at the time of his death.

Indian army keeps working to rescue boy trapped in well AP, Lucknow

Soldiers worked Saturday to rescue a 2-

year-old boy trapped for more than 36

hours in a 150-foot-deep abandoned well

had stopped responding to his parents'

Rescuers said the boy, Sonu Kumar,

in northern India.

voices and feared he may have lost consciousness. "Time is running out," said Ashok Kumar Shukla, a doctor involved in the rescue operation. "We are keeping our

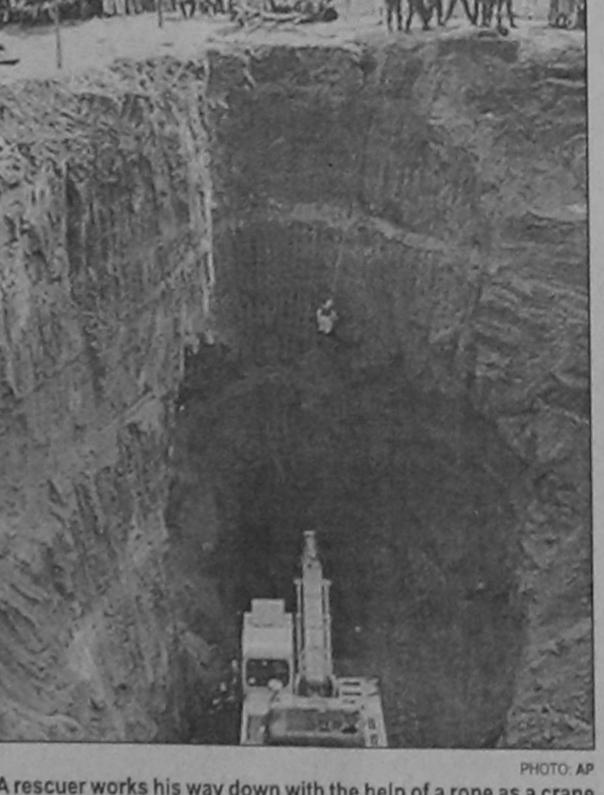
fingers crossed." The boy fell into the well Thursday evening in Leharkapurwa village near Agra, 250 miles southwest of Lucknow, the state capital of Uttar Pradesh. He is believed to be trapped about 70 feet deep. The Water Works Department dug the

well last summer but abandoned it

because it was dry, officials said.

Government spokesman Diwakar Tripathi said two engineers were suspended and the contractor who dug the well was arrested. Rescue workers were feeding oxygen through a pipe to help keep the boy alive, said senior police official Raghuvir Lal. The army plans to dig a 75-foot tunnel to

reach Sonu, Lal said.



A rescuer works his way down with the help of a rope as a crane digs into the soil during an operation to rescue a 2-year-old boy trapped for more than 36 hours in a 150-foot (45-meter)-deep abandoned well in Leharkapurwa village near Agra, about 400km southwest of Lucknow, India on Saturday.