

Hezb won't resume attacks on Kabul airport

ISLAMABAD, Sept 13: Afghanistan's dissident Hezb-Islami faction said on Saturday it had taken control of all approach routes to Kabul but had agreed to peace mediators' requests not to resume attacks on the Capital's airport, reports Reuters.

"Kabul is completely surrounded from all sides," a Hezb official said in the Pakistani border town of Peshwar.

But Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Masood left Kabul to visit northern Afghanistan, and was due back on Saturday or Sunday, raising questions about the effectiveness of the encirclement.

Peace brokers who negotiated a ceasefire that halted three weeks of fighting in Kabul last month persuaded Hezb leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar not to force closure of the airport.

The threat ... has been postponed at the request of the mediatory council," Afghan news agency said.

The negotiators said that in return they would try to convince the government to stop shelling Hezb positions elsewhere, the Hezb official in Peshwar said.

The fundamentalist Hezb, nominally a partner in the four-month-old Islamic government, had adopted a conciliatory approach because it did not want to be blamed as negotiators try to silence the guns, the Hezb official said.

But he said fighting was still raging in the north between Hezb fighters and formerly communist militia now absorbed into the government army.

Hekmatyar maintains the government has failed to comply with last month's

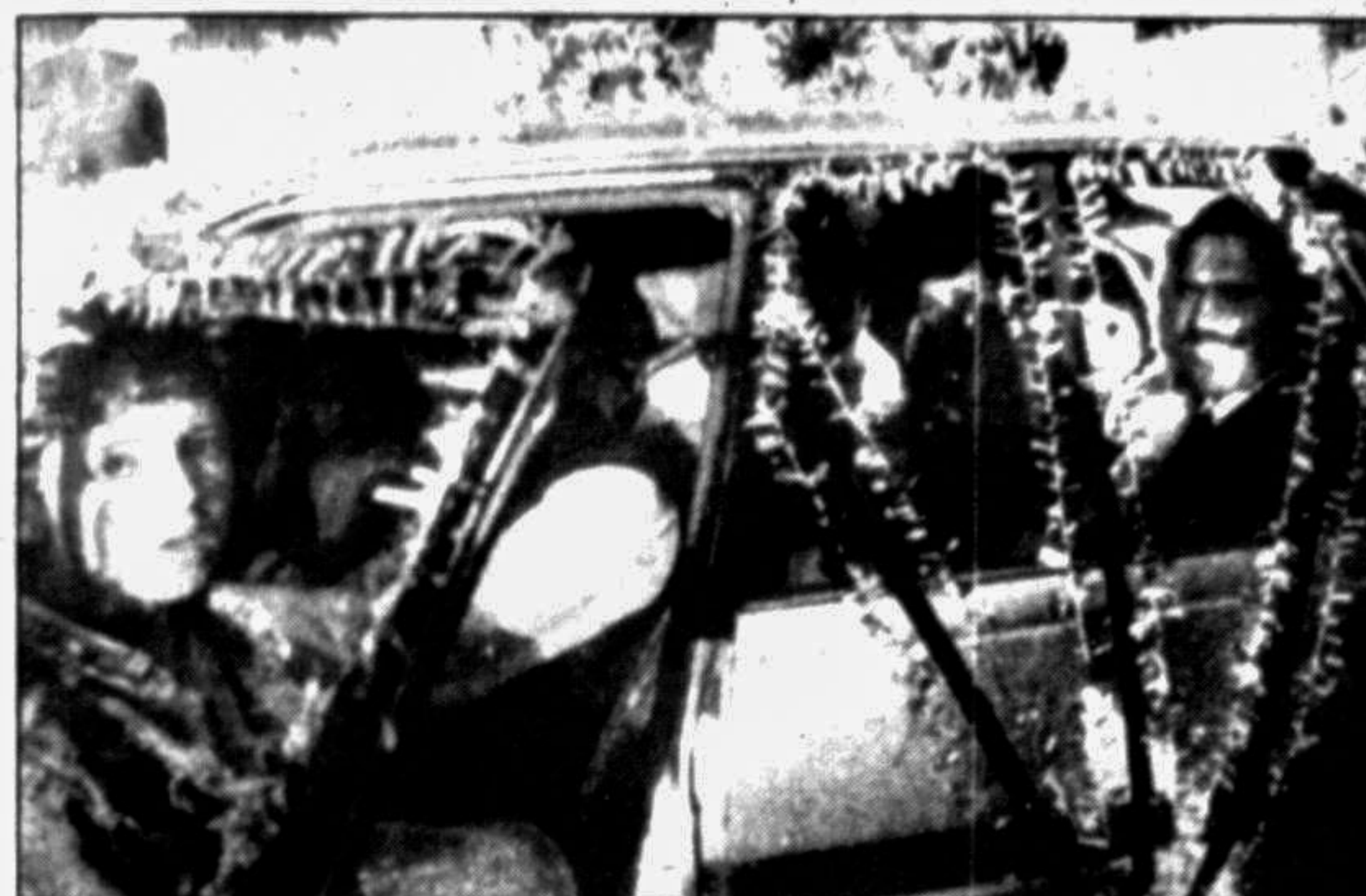
ceasefire by not ordering the militia, his bitter enemies, out of Kabul.

The militant's defection to the Mujahideen helped topple the communist government, but Hekmatyar brands them traitors.

In Kabul, a ministry of defence spokesman said a drive to rid the capital of unauthorised armed men was making progress.

Xinhua adds: Pakistan and Iran have agreed to fully cooperate on the Afghanistan issue.

The common understanding was reached between Iranian President Rafsanjani and the Pakistani leadership after the two sides had in-depth discussion on the situation in Afghanistan during Rafsanjani's recent visit to Pakistan.



KABUL: An Afghan couple sit in a car on the way to celebrating their wedding in Kabul on Saturday. As life in the capital returns to normal capital, people go on with plans which were interrupted by the factional fighting between rival Mujahideen groups. — AFP/UNB photo

US starts emergency airlift to Somalia

WASHINGTON, Sept 13: The United States began an emergency relief airlift to Hoddur, Somalia, on Saturday to help people suffering from famine brought on by civil conflict and drought, the US Agency for International Development said, reports Reuters.

The United States is already delivering food to people in Belet Weyne and Baidoa, Somalia, and Wajir, Kenya.

About 15 tonnes of US-donated corn meal will go to Hoddur, bringing the total amount of donated food to Somalia and Kenya by United States to nearly 2,600 tonnes, USAID said.

AP adds: The Red Cross and the United Nations have announced plans to sharply increase the amount of food sent to Somalia. But the UN kept on hold plans to airdrop food in remote villages saying it needs

more time to prepare on the ground.

Canada on Saturday joined the international effort to fly food to hundreds of thousands of starving Somalis, and the United States expanded its relief operation.

A group of officials from the European Community, led by British Development Minister Baroness Chalker, on Saturday began a two-day visit to assess the situation in Somalia and in refugee camps in eastern Kenya.

Drought and warfare already have killed at least 100,000 Somalis this year, and the United Nations says another 2 million could die within weeks if sufficient food is not delivered soon. The country has fallen into anarchy since the ouster of President Mohammed Siad Barre in January 1991.

Floods, landslides claim 220 in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Sept 13: Heavy rains have triggered floods and landslides in the northern Jammu-Kashmir state, killing 220 people, destroying houses and disrupting road traffic, news reports said Sunday, reports AP.

The Times of India newspaper said 119 people died Saturday in various parts of the state. More than 600,000 people were marooned in several northwestern border districts since the floods began Tuesday, the paper said.

It said more than half of the deaths occurred in the mountainous Kashmir Valley where

Muslim guerillas are fighting for autonomy or independence against what they say is corrupt and oppressive Indian rule.

The floods damaged or swept away several bridges connected to roads, which were closed to traffic for the fourth running day Saturday, the reports said. Telephone communications also were affected.

Troops conducting relief and rescue operations in the border villages airlifted about 300 people to safer areas, the paper said.

Serbs fail to meet UN deadline

SARAJEVO, Sept 13: Serb forces have failed to fully meet a deadline to place heavy weapons under UN supervision, but officials said the process had begun and they delayed heavy fighting for the day, reports AP.

UN officials on Saturday said the Serbs complied around Sarajevo but not around Bihac and Jajce, where Croatian radio reported heavy fighting.

"Although this process is not yet completed, we believe this is a start," UN envoy Cyrus Vance said in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

European Community foreign ministers meeting near Hatfield, England, agreed

Saturday to support a US proposal to impose a "no-fly" zone over Bosnia and said Serbia should be denied Yugoslavia's seat at the United Nations.

But they decided to hold off on any action after their peace negotiator, Lord Owen, reported the Bosnian Serbs had partially complied with the weapons deadline.

Sarajevo was relatively quiet, but overnight artillery and small-arms fire were reported around western suburbs. The Bosnian Health Ministry reported 31 people killed and 189 wounded across Bosnia in the 24-hour period ending noon Saturday.

Fighting also was reported around the eastern city of

Gorazde.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in six months of warfare since Bosnia's Muslims and Croats voted on Feb. 29 for independence, touching off a Serb rebellion.

Under a recent agreement, Bosnian Serbs were to place their tanks and rocket launchers around Sarajevo, Gorazde, Bihac and Jajce under UN supervision by Saturday.

All four are predominantly Muslim or Muslim and Croat cities that have been under siege by Serbs.

Vance said in a statement that the Serbs had finished moving weaponry at 11 sites around Sarajevo, but not in Bihac, in northwestern Bosnia,

or Jajce, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) northwest of Sarajevo. The former US Secretary of State said the Serbs had already moved their guns away from Gorazde.

The monitoring has begun for all the positions in Sarajevo, and we expect the same in Bihac and Jajce this weekend," said Shannon Boyd, a spokeswoman for the UN Protection Force in Zagreb, Croatia.

Lt. Col. Richard Gray, the senior UN officer monitoring compliance with the agreement, said Bosnian government troops had pledged to permit UN monitoring of what few heavy guns they have around Sarajevo.

HK grants asylum to 30 Chinese dissidents

HONG KONG, Sept 13: Hong Kong has quietly granted political asylum to some 30 dissidents who fled China in the wake of the 1989 crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, a newspaper reported here today, says AFP.

The Sunday Morning Post said as many as 800 mainland asylum seekers — more than double previous estimates — had crossed into the territory since the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989.

The newspaper, which did not identify its sources, said the number of rejected asylum seekers deported back to

China was also much higher than previously thought.

Albert Ho Chun-Yan, a leader of the Hong Kong Alliance in support of the patriotic democratic movement of China, confirmed there was a group of Chinese dissidents here who had been given permission to stay, but declined to cite the number of people involved.

The Sunday Morning Post said government officials refused to discuss the "politically sensitive" issue, ahead of policy announcements by Governor Chris Patten expected to affect the British colony's delicate relationship with China.

Golden Lion award for Chinese film

VENICE, Italy, Sept 13: The Chinese film "Qiu Ju Da Guan" (The Story of Qiu Ju), by Zhang Yimou, won the Golden Lion Award at the 49th Venice film festival Saturday, reports AP.

The story of a simple Chinese country woman who searches for justice in the face of a harsh rural dispute also gained a best actress award for its leading lady, 26-year-old Gong Li.

Yimou won a Silver Lion at Venice last year for his previous film, "Raise the Red Lantern," also starring Gong Li.

Silver Lions this year went to UN Coeur En Hiver, by Frenchman Claude Sautet, the Spanish film "Jamon Jamon," by Juan Jose Bigas Luna, and "Hotel De Lux" by Romanian Director Dan Pita.

Jack Lemmon, 67, was awarded best actor for his role as Shelley Levene, a real estate employee whose job is threatened by recession in "Glengarry Glen Ross," by James Foley.

Saddam's brother suggests press freedom in Iraq

BAGHDAD, Sept 13: A brother of President Saddam Hussein said in a newspaper commentary on Saturday that the government should introduce press freedom as a first step towards political reform, reports Reuters.

Barzan Al-Tikriti, a former intelligence chief and Iraq's envoy to the UN in Geneva, said the creation of a multi-party system in Iraq would be impossible without press freedom.

"We cannot establish democracy without granting the freedom of the press otherwise we would be constructing a building without foundations," he added in the commentary published in the government newspaper Al-Jumhouriyah.

The commentary, which he said represented a personal view, urged the government to end its monopoly on the press by allowing individuals and political groups to publish their own newspapers.

"Freedom of the press will be achieved when the govern-

Thais begin voting

BANGKOK, Sept 13: Thai eligible voters began casting their ballots this morning to select their favourite candidates for the House of Representatives, reports Xinhua.

The general election, the second one within this year, will produce 360 house representatives, or members of parliament (MPs) from over 2,400 candidates from a dozen political parties. The previous election was held in March. The election was held here today following the May incident, in which the military opened fire on demonstrators who engaged in activities of opposing non-elected persons to be appointed prime minister.

Today's poll is rather important for the political parties because getting more house seats will lead a party to become a core in the next government and the party leader will have a better chance to be the prime minister.

In Bangkok, the polling activities are apparently normal and no incident has been reported so far.

That's begin voting

Iraq has six newspapers, Jumhouriyah, the ruling Baath Party Daily Al-Thawra and the defence ministry newspaper Al-Qadisiyah are all state owned.

Saddam's eldest son Uday owns the Daily Babil, a sports daily, Al-Baath Al-Ridaim and two weeklies, Rafidain and Al-Rashed.

The government also has a weekly magazine — Alef Ba. "Press freedom materialises when it stays away from influence," Tikriti said.

"The government has no right to prevent a citizen from issuing a newspaper. Every citizen has the right to publish a newspaper," he added.

"Press freedom is a right of the people."

Tikriti's call was the third in less than a week for reform in Iraq.

On Monday, Uday called for democratic reforms to thwart what Iraq dubs western attempts to dismember the country.

Off the Record

New world order places women in the kitchen?

STOCKHOLM: With their numbers declining in parliaments worldwide, female legislators fear that their place in the "new world order" may be — so to speak — back in the kitchen, reports AP.

The number of women in the world's parliaments fell from a peak of almost 15 per cent in 1988 to 11 per cent last year, the lowest figure since 1975.

"This is depressing," said Anita Gradin, a Swedish parliamentarian who joined other female lawmakers for a six-day special conference about declining female representation being held by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The organization, formed more than a century ago to promote democracy, brings together about 500 legislators from 118-member parliaments twice a year.

Delegates in Stockholm said there had been a rise in conservatism following the democratic revolutions in the former East bloc and that women often were the first to lose their jobs at a time of recession.

The 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, for example, contributed to a sharp decline in the number of women parliamentarians.

"When we gained independence, it was impossible to start fighting for women's rights since nobody, not even men, had any rights," said Nijole Ozelyte-Vaitiekuniene, one of 13 women in Lithuania's 141-seat parliament.

Childbirth — women's only route to economic security

WASHINGTON: Attitudes towards women in many developing countries are the most important factor in population growth and a leading cause of poverty, according to a report by the Worldwatch Institute, a US "think tank," reports Reuters.

"Gender bias in subsistence economies ranges from wage discrimination, to exclusion from development programmes, to legal barriers to owning land, to systematic violence against women," the report says.

Gender bias keeps population growth rates high the report says, because childbirth becomes a woman's only route to economic security.

Although rises in female literacy have been linked to declines in the birthrate, according to the report, the gender gap in literacy has widened. In a 15-year period, the number of women unable to read grew by 54 million while the number of illiterate men grew only four million.

First thighbone cancer operation in China

BEIJING: Chinese doctors have succeeded in replacing the entire thighbone and knee for a bone cancer patient, reports Xinhua.

This was the first such operation ever done in China.

The operation was conducted jointly by Fan Yushan and Jing Hai of the No 309 army hospital, with the artificial joints provided patient was a young male farmer from Henan province. Observation over the two months after the operation showed that the patient can walk well with little discomfort.

Arab League against interference in Iraq's internal affairs

CAIRO, Sept 13: Foreign Ministers of the Arab League countries said Saturday there must be "respect for the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of Iraq", reports AP.

The statement stressed the need to respect this principle "in line with the charter of the United Nations, international law and resolutions of the Security Council."

The ministers' stand was not spelled out in a formal resolution, in order not to upset the Gulf states, but expressed in a statement ready by league Secretary-General Esmat Abdel Meguid.

In the statement read at the close of a meeting here, the ministerial council also said it

was "concerned to preserve the independence of Iraq, the unity of its people and its territorial integrity."

At the start of the meeting, Abdel Meguid urged the West to be more flexible in its dispute with Libya over the Lockerbie bombing.

Meanwhile AP adds: The Arab League and Egypt on Saturday threw their full weight behind the United Arab Emirates in its dispute with Persian Iran over sovereignty of three islands.

The league also called for preserving Iraq's independence, its territorial integrity, unity of its people and non-interference in its internal affairs.

Arab League Secretary

India may surpass China as most populous country

NEW DELHI, Sept 13: India has been unable to contain its population explosion by encouraging sterilization and may displace China as the most populous nation early in the next century, says a study released Monday, reports AP.

India is adding more people to the world's population than any other country, accounting for one of every five births, according to the report.

Although discredited by experts, sterilization remains the most widely used form of birth control in India. Government officials are rewarded or penalized only if they meet or fall short of sterilization targets, so many do not bother to promote reversible contraception like condoms and birth control pills.

As a result, birth control has not really caught on, especially among younger women, said the 60-page report by the Population Crisis Committee, a non-profit organization in Washington. It said about 45 per cent of Indian couples use contraception, far below the 72 per cent of China.

"From a demographic perspective, India

may be the world's most critical country," the report said. "With its young age profile and continuing increase in women of childbearing age, its population could exceed 2 billion before stabilizing."

India was one of the first countries to begin trying to lower its birth rate, but a culture that values big families has been resistant. Many Indian couples will not stop having children until they have at least two sons because they believe males are superior.

Although the government's campaign has succeeded in dropping the average number of births for Indian women to 4 from around 6, India lags other populous countries. The average is 2.5 in China.

India's estimated population of 883 million is growing about 2 per cent annually, or more than 17 million people each year, the study said.

"If present trends continue, India will surpass China as the most populous country early in the next century," said the Crisis Committee, a privately financed organization that has

studied population trends for 27 years.

In a separate report, it was more optimistic about China, which has 1.2 billion people and has long been striving to slow its growth.

China has promoted the one-child family as the ideal, using rewards and punishments to persuade people to comply. As a result, average family size fell by 60 per cent in two decades.

"If current efforts continue, the question appears to be when, not if, China will achieve an essentially stable population," the report said.

Since the number of women in their peak child-bearing years will increase this decade, however, China's population likely will grow well into the 21st century, adding at least a half billion people before stabilizing, the study said.

Government officials in China and India would not comment on the projections.

India has stressed sterilization for 17 years. When Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared emergency rule in 1975, her son Sanjay, a powerful political figure who wanted to

curb the population, encouraged states to practice forced sterilization. In just one year, the number of sterilizations more than tripled, to 8.3 million.

Widespread resentment eventually led to demonstrations, riots against family planning and a general election that drove Mrs Gandhi from power in 1977. Many politicians responded by playing down the importance of family planning.

In 1984, Mrs Gandhi's elder son, Rajiv, became prime minister and began to expand contraceptive choices. But even today, federal grants to states are based on the number of sterilizations and there are no incentives for other contraceptive methods.

Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao says he wants to reduce the emphasis on sterilization and to encourage the use of IUDs, birth control pills and condoms.

"The government has yet to demonstrate that it can bring about fundamental changes in the way the family welfare programme is currently organized and implemented," said the report by the Population Crisis Committee.

Pak defence minister to visit China

ISLAMABAD, Sept 12: Pakistani Defence Minister Ghous Ali Shah said on Saturday he would visit China next month for talks on defence collaboration, Radio Pakistan reported, says Reuters.

Shah gave no precise dates for his visit, it said.

Prime Minister Nawaz is due to visit China from October 6 to 11. The radio did not say if the defence minister would accompany him.

Islamabad's reliance on Chinese military supplies and technology has grown since the United States halted economic and military aid in 1990 over worries Pakistan had stepped up efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

Jackson leads Clinton's voter registration drive

WASHINGTON, Sept 13: Bill Clinton kicked off a national voter registration drive Saturday that will be led by Jesse Jackson in an effort to add thousands of black voters to the rolls in anticipation they will vote the Democratic ticket, reports AP.

But questions remained as to whether relations between the men have warmed in the wake of Jackson's complaints of a "push-off" strategy by the Clinton campaign.

Jackson sought to add the first unregistered voters to poll books during the seventh annual Black Family Reunion here, saying the vote "has so much power."

Clinton campaign workers said the drive would include 300 events in 30 cities.

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