

Conservatives lose parliamentary majority in Greece

ATHENS, Sept 9: The ruling conservative party lost its parliamentary majority Thursday when a dissident member withdrew his support and declared himself an independent, reports AP.

The move by New Democracy party deputy Theodoros Simbilides increased pressure on Premier Constantine Mitsotakis to call early elections.

The 75-year-old Mitsotakis now controls only half of the 300-member unicameral Parliament.

Simbilides declared his independence after visiting speaker Athanasios Tsaldaris. He is one of five New Democracy members who support Andonis Samaras, a former conservative party foreign minister who was dismissed and resigned from Parliament last October.

Samaras later founded his own party called Political Spring.

With elections looming, Mitsotakis was scheduled to meet with President Constantine Caramanlis later Thursday where he is expected to submit his resignation. Prior to his call at the presidential palace, the premier met with his Cabinet to explain the situation and outline his strategy.

According to constitutional procedure, Caramanlis would give Mitsotakis three days to form a new government and seek a vote of confidence from Parliament. If he fails to win a majority, elections conducted by a caretaker regime would then be held within 45 days.

Mitsotakis has warned that if he lost his parliamentary majority he would call early elections.

Sino-British talks on HK ends without accord

BEIJING, Sept 9: The 11th round of Sino-British talks on how to hold Hong Kong's last elections under British rule ended Thursday with the two sides apparently no nearer an agreement, reports AP.

"We've engaged in substantive discussions," Sir Robin McLaren, Britain's ambassador to China, told reporters after the morning session, "but there still is a gap between our two sides."

As usual, McLaren declined to say if any progress was made or to reveal the contents of the talks which have been going on since April.

When the 11th round opened Wednesday, McLaren and his counterpart, Vice

Moeen Qureshi visits Siachen glacier

ISLAMABAD, Sept 9: Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Moeen Qureshi Wednesday visited troops stationed on the 22,000 feet high Siachen glacier, a scene of sporadic skirmishes with Indian army, reports AP.

Troops of the two countries have been locked in confrontation on Siachen, in Kashmir, since the early 1980s and a series of bilateral talks in past have failed to resolve the issue over control in the region.

Qureshi was quoted by the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) as saying in an address to the troops that the government would utilise all resources to meet defence needs.

Foreign Minister Jiang Enzhu, alluded to one obstacle to progress: a British proposal to give Hong Kong's civil servants a seat in the local legislature.

China opposes the new British proposal on grounds that it would politicize the civil service and violates the Basic Law, the Chinese-drafted mini-constitution for Hong Kong after the 1997 transfer of the British colony to Chinese rule.

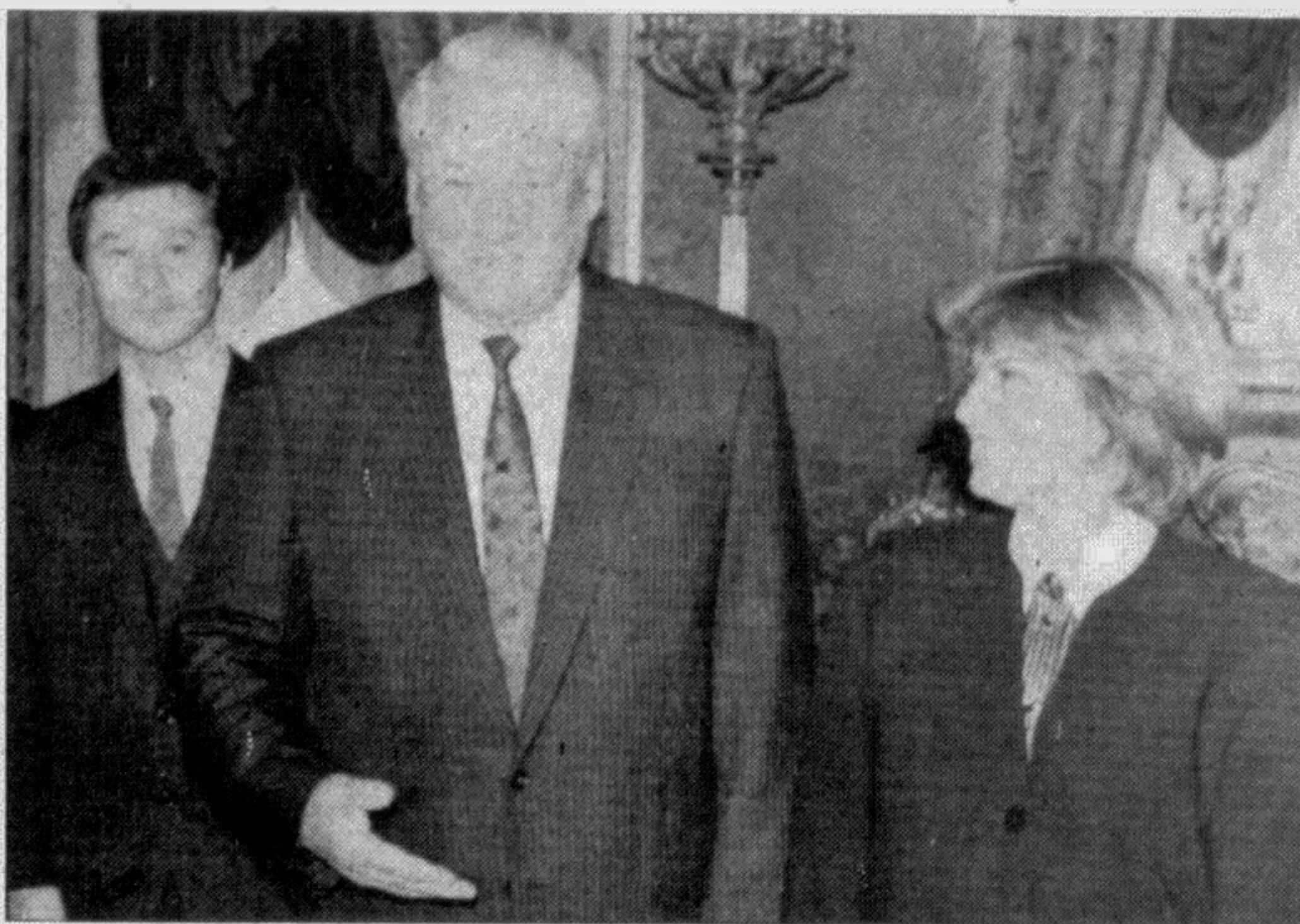
McLaren said, "It is not our view that if there were a functional constituency seat for the civil service that would in any way import politics into the civil service or that it would affect the political neutrality of the civil service."

The Sino-British dispute over Hong Kong's 1994 and 1995 elections began last October when the British-appointed governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, proposed expanding voter participation in the polls.

China opposes the plan, fearing it could lead to the election of more liberal democrats and to calls for more political freedom on the mainland. It has demanded a say in the elections because those elected would still be in office in 1997.

Beijing has threatened to replace Hong Kong's government if the elections are held under Patten's plan. But Britain has repeatedly said a Chinese guarantee to allow the elected officials to serve out their terms essential to an agreement.

McLaren was asked whether, with time running short for the 1994 district board election, there was a deadline for the talks.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (L) welcomes Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller to the Kremlin, in Moscow Sept 9. Ciller, Turkey's first ever female prime minister, is on a two-day visit to the Russian capital, Moscow where she is expected to hold talks on political and economic cooperation as well as the situation in Armenia. — AFP photo

US, Russia sign defence pacts

WASHINGTON, Sept 9: Defense Secretary Les Aspin and his Russian counterpart signed agreements Wednesday to strengthen defense ties between the former Cold War foes, including a plan to hold joint peacekeeping exercises and set up a "defense hotline," reports AP.

"This is new symbol of the new ties between our countries," Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev told reporters after meeting with Aspin at the Pentagon.

Grachev, a general, later spoke with President Clinton during a White House meeting with Anthony Lake, the president's national security adviser. Clinton reiterated his support for Russian President Boris

Yeltsin and expressed admiration for the Russian leadership's determination to make democracy work, a senior Pentagon official who attended the meeting told reporters afterward.

The agreements stem from last spring's Vancouver summit between Clinton and Yeltsin. Details on implementing the accords are yet to be worked out.

Aspin said the generals in charge of the American and Russian forces designated to participate in the joint peacekeeping exercises would meet Thursday to discuss details. He said it was too early to know when the exercises would be held.

The units picked to participate are the 3rd Infantry

Division in Germany under the command of Maj. Gen. Leonard D. Holder Jr. and the 27th Motorized Rifle Division commanded by Gen. Maj. Anatoly Sidiakin.

"It is an agreement that recognizes that the well-being and security of the United States and the Russian Federation are vitally related," Aspin said. "It is an agreement that seeks to put the years of superpower rivalry and nuclear confrontation behind us."

Among the other elements of the agreement:

—Establishing what Aspin called a defense hotline, a communications system linking the Pentagon and the Russian Ministry of Defense to permit easy telephone communication on routine matters. Grachev

Israel stockpiles over 200 atomic bombs

WASHINGTON, Sept 9: Israel has stockpiled more than 200 atomic bombs and missile warheads as part of a nuclear arsenal which may be bigger than Britain's, NBC news reported on Wednesday, says Reuter.

Citing a range of unidentified sources, the network said it had developed "a comprehensive picture of how Israel could meet a number of nuclear threats."

Israel has never officially confirmed that it possesses nuclear weapons. For the record it says it will "not be the first to introduce" nuclear weapons in the region.

NBC said Israel was hiding as many as 100 Jericho I and II missiles in camouflaged bunkers in the Judean hills and in Galilee. The missiles have ranges of 700 (1,126 kms) and 1,100 miles (1,770 kms), the network said. Longer range rockets are in the test and development phase, it added.

189 Palestinian deportees start their journey home

ZOMMARAYA, Lebanon, Sept 9: Nearly half the Palestinians expelled by Israel last winter began their journey home Thursday, first stopping for searches, questioning and a check-up in Israeli army tents set up in south Lebanon, reports AP.

Israel agreed to take back 189 of the 396 men stranded in a rocky campsite since they were banished from the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. The rest are to return by Dec 17, the first anniversary of their expulsion.

But eight of the men who

could return Thursday were missing when an Israeli soldier called their names.

There were rumours, not immediately confirmed, that they had disappeared into nearby Lebanese villages because they feared they faced life sentences in Israeli prisons.

The rest entered Israeli-occupied south Lebanon at Zommaraya, walking through an army gate one by one as their names were called. They headed to three tents for interrogation and check-ups.

Ten Israeli buses, with curtains drawn across the passen-

gers windows, waited to carry the men across the Israeli border, 12 miles (19 km) to the south.

The joy of going home was tempered with uncertainty. Some of the returning Palestinians probably face detention camps or prison cells. Most of the deportees belong to the fundamentalist Hamas movement. Others are associated with the Islamic Jihad in Palestine movement.

"We filled our stomachs to the brim," said Mohammed Baroud, 43, of Gaza.

Four more drug barons held in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Sept 9: Police have arrested four more alleged drug barons as part of a stepped up effort against the country's powerful drug cartels, officials said Thursday, reports AP.

Those arrested Wednesday near the western frontier city of Peshawar included Hajji Qadar Gul Khan, a former member of parliament who runs a flour mill in the region. Also held was Seth Saifullah, a candidate for the provincial parliament in next month's elections.

Many suspected drug barons have large legal businesses and are well-connected politically.

North Korea rejects N-talks with South

SEOUL, Sept 9: North Korea failed to meet a condition for further dialogue with the United States by rejecting Inter-Korean talks on nuclear issues Thursday, a South Korean official said, reports AP.

"We cannot but resort to a UN Security Council resolution if problems remain unresolved through dialogue," a senior Foreign Ministry official said in a news briefing, referring to the possibility of sanctions against the North.

The Communist North is suspected of trying to develop nuclear weapons. It contends that its nuclear program is purely peaceful, but — despite international pressure — has blocked UN inspectors from two suspected nuclear waste sites.

In an apparent effort to ease its international isolation, it has insisted on taking up the issue in talks with the United States, with which it has no diplomatic relations. Meanwhile, it has stalled talks with rival South Korea, with which it concluded a nuclear arms ban agreement last year.

The United States has said there must be progress in North-South Korean dialogue if its talks with Pyongyang are to continue.

South Korea had called for vice minister-level talks with North Korea Friday at the border

trade village of Panmunjom on exchanging special envoys to discuss nuclear and other issues.

But on Thursday, the North rejected the call, insisting its southern rival should promise first to halt military exercises with the United States.

Instead, the North suggested it might open Inter-Korean contacts on September 23 once South Korea makes a commitment.

"We once again urge the South side to give an affirmative reply by then with sincerity," North Korea said through its official news agency, monitored in Tokyo.

Meanwhile, US Assistant Secretary of State Robert L. Gallucci was to arrive in Seoul Thursday for a five-day visit.

South Korean officials said Gallucci, a chief US negotiator in talks with Pyongyang, would hear South Korea's stance that requirements for another round of North Korea-US meetings have not been satisfied.

The two Koreas earlier had agreed to reopen dialogue, before the North raised the unexpected demand that Seoul promise to discontinue yearly war exercises with the United States.

The North also insisted that South Korea stop seeking alliances with other countries to pressure Pyongyang



Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell leaves Government House Sept 8 after announcing the federal election will be held on Oct 25. Campbell's Progressive Conservative Party has an absolute majority in the house and has been in power since 1984. — AFP photo

Violence claims 23 in two days Fresh attacks on black commuters

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 9: Gunmen renewed attacks on black commuters Thursday after a night of deadly ambushes, bringing the death toll to 23 in a pattern of violence that has clouded political breakthroughs, reports AP.

Two blacks died and three were wounded Thursday in two separate attacks near the township of Kaitleng and in the same areas as Wednesday night's killings. The death toll from those attacks was 23, including 21 killed when a gang

opened fire with automatic rifles on hundreds of people waiting in line for taxis.

No arrests were made. The African National Congress said the perpetrators' aim was to delay multiracial elections and disrupt progress being made by black and white groups negotiating the end of apartheid.

"Like all previous incidents of violence, the latest seems timed to coincide with major breakthroughs made at the negotiating forum," said ANC

spokesman Ronnie Mamoepa.

The latest attacks began hours after political parties approved the formation of a multiracial council that will help run the country until elections and force the white government to share power with blacks for the first time.

Police Maj Eugene Opperman said it was too early to say if the killings were politically motivated or if they were linked to violent feuds between rival taxi operators that have led to ambushes in the past.

Taxi vans are a major mode of transportation for blacks, and there is often ruthless competition for fares and good routes that often erupts in violence against commuters.

Attacks on black commuters also have been part of the political violence that has killed thousands of blacks in recent years and hindered reforms toward ending apartheid.

Police blame a power feud between the ANC and the rival Inkatha Freedom Party for the violence.

Off the Record

Gay man infected with AIDS by priest

DENVER (Colorado): A 36-year-old gay man on Tuesday charged he was infected with the AIDS virus by a Roman Catholic priest who abused him in a sexual relationship lasting 20 years, beginning when the man was in his early teens, reports Reuter.

"I want the church to accept its role in the sexual abuse that I and others have endured at the hands of priests," Thomas Perea told reporters after a lawsuit was filed in his name against father Delbert Blong and the Diocese of Pueblo, Colorado, where Perea said he met the priest.

The lawsuit seeking unspecified monetary damages was filed in state court in the Colorado town of Boulder, where Perea lives and works as a substitute school teacher.

Perea, who broke into tears several times, said that only after he had seen television reports of youths molested by priests did he realise he had been manipulated.

He said he was first molested by the priest when he was in the eighth grade in southern Colorado.

Judge rules lesbian unfit to be mother

RICHMOND: A lesbian is unfit to be a mother, a judge ruled Tuesday, allowing a woman to retain custody of her homosexual daughter's 2-year-old son in a case watched closely by gay-rights activists, reports AP.

Judge Buford Parsons ruled just half an hour after the close of day-long hearing in which the grandmother and mother testified.

The grandmother, Kay Bottoms, had argued that the boy could grow up not knowing the difference between men and women if he is returned to Sharon Bottoms and her lover, April Wade. The daughter testified that she herself was harmed by years of sexual abuse from her mother's live-in boyfriend.

Parsons, an Henrico County Circuit Court Judge, deemed that Sharon Bottoms' relationship with her live-in partner renders her an unfit parent.

'Pearl of Allah'

DENVER: The giant pearl known as the "Pearl of Allah" goes on sale Friday as part of a US Marshals Service auction in Denver, reports AP.

The football-size gem, called the "Pearl of Allah" because one of its owners thought he saw the face of the prophet Mohammed in its gnarled surface, was seized by court order following a dispute over ownership.

The Marshals Service already has one "substantial" offer from a Muslim country, Jack Egnor, US marshal for Colorado, said.

He said he'll be glad to get rid of it and resolve an eight-year battle over who owns it.

An appraisal by the San Francisco Gem Laboratory suggested the pearl may be worth more than 40 million dollars.

The 6,000-year-old pearl weighs 14 pounds, one ounce, (6.4 kgs) and measures 9.5 inches by 5.5 inches (24 cm by 14 cm).

No hugging, no kissing without 'yes, yes'

DAYTON, Ohio: There may be "yes, yes" in her eyes, but unless her lips say the same thing — over and over — sex is a no-no at Antioch College, reports AP.

The small liberal arts school in nearby Yellow Springs requires students to give and get verbal consent before any type of romantic contact.

And one "yes" won't do. Consent must be given for each specific act, from kissing to intercourse.

The policy — adopted last January at the school known for innovation and social activism — is aimed at date rape.

"What this establishes is, 'I did say no,'" college spokesman Jim Mann said. "It also establishes that if someone is drunk or passed out, they do not have the ability to consent."

Antioch developed a "relatively harsh" policy to deal with sexual assaults after an alleged date rape in 1990, Mann said. Under the policy, students can be removed from campus within 24 hours if accused of sexual offenses, and the alleged victims are assigned advocates to represent them.

The expanded policy reads: Verbal consent should be obtained with each new level of physical and/or sexual contact or conduct in any given interaction, regardless of who initiates it. Asking, "Do you want to have sex with me?" is not enough. The request for consent must be specific for each act.

Riyadh to help finance Palestinian dev plans

JEDDAH (Saudi Arabia), Sept 9: Saudi Arabia has agreed to help finance Palestinian development plans under the autonomy deal for the Israeli-occupied territories, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said here Wednesday, reports AP.

"The Saudis have accepted a contribution," he told reporters at the end of a one-day visit to the oil-rich Gulf state. "They have accepted that the agreement needs support, especially from Arab countries."

Hurd had talks with King Fahd and Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal on the Middle East peace process, the situation in the Gulf and bilateral ties.

Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation have reached an agreement on limited autonomy starting in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho. The Jewish state hopes it will be signed in Washington on Monday.

Gulf Arab states cut off aid to the PLO because of its support for Iraq following the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

But Saudi Arabia and its partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council — Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates — on Monday backed the autonomy agreement.

The European Community proposed on Wednesday a new aid programme worth 500 million ECU (\$585 million dollars) over five years to support peace and stability in the Middle East.

Arafat has said the Palestinians would need six billion dollars in aid for the first three years of autonomy.

Among a series of development projects, the Palestinians plan to build airfields in both Gaza and Jericho, he told the Egyptian daily Al-Ahram.

ROK rejects Jackson's fresh bid

SEOUL, Sept 9: South Korea has rejected a fresh bid by US pop superstar Michael Jackson to stage a concert in Seoul because it could have a negative effect on Korean society, Culture and Sports Ministry officials said today, reports Reuter.

"Jackson's promoters this week submitted an application to perform in Seoul on November 13 and 14, but we rejected it," a ministry official said.

Jackson's first request to perform this month was rejected three weeks ago.

Kashmiri rebels step up attacks on Indian troops

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 9: Muslim rebels stepped up attacks on Indian forces in Kashmir Wednesday on the anniversary of a local leader they revile as a traitor, as 16 more people died in separatist-related violence, reports AP.

Some 22 Muslim rebels were also arrested overnight in a stepped-up security operation to dismantle militant strongholds in the troubled valley, police said in Srinagar, an urban hub of the secessionist campaign in the northern state.

Militants sniped at security patrols at several places in the summer capital Srinagar to mark the 11th anniversary of the death of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, Kashmir's first Chief Minister after 1947.

Sheikh Abdullah earned the sobriquet the "Lion of Kashmir" for his role in freeing Kashmir from the despotic rule of a Hindu Maharajah, Hari Singh, in 1947.

Police said an army soldier died and four others were wounded in an ambush outside Srinagar.

BRIEFLY

Blast kills 3 in Ukraine: A blast furnace exploded at a Ukrainian steel mill, killing three workers and injuring 24, the Ukrainian news agency reported Wednesday, Reuter says from Kiev.

The agency said the furnace was being stoked up to full power when the explosion occurred on Tuesday in the central city of Dniprodzerzhinsk.

A government commission was set up to investigate the cause of the blast.

Four US marines killed: Two US military helicopters collided Wednesday during a training exercise in the California desert killing four marines, authorities said, AFP reports from California.

The AH-1 Cobra helicopters were conducting a shooting exercise at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Training Centre in the Mojave desert some 215 kilometers (120 miles) northeast of Los Angeles, according to the military.

Officials did not immediately reveal the cause of the accident which killed the four marines who had been assigned to the air corps state in North Carolina.

Truck kills 2 striking workers: A truck driver was charged with reckless murder for running down two striking steelworkers on a picket line outside a wire plant, AP reports from Colombiana.

Larry Gray Jr., 24, of Ragland, kept driving in his 18-wheeler after hitting the two men Tuesday outside the National Standard plant, Police Chief Richard Todd said. He was arrested about 15 miles (24 kilometers) away and jailed without bail.

Todd said police had a videotape shot by a security guard of Walter Fleming, 55, and Keith Cain, 23, being hit.

After the deaths, strikers threw rocks, sticks, pipes and tools at some 75 workers as they left the plant, escorted by law enforcement officers, Sheriff James Jones said. Some cars were damaged, but no one was injured, he said.

Palestinian hanged: A Palestinian man convicted of molesting and then murdering a 5-year-old boy was hanged in a public square at dawn Wednesday, AP reports from Damascus.

Mohammed Hussein Deyab, a 29-year-old gardener from the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp, was hanged in Al-Abasayeen square in the heart of Damascus, state-controlled media reported.

The government-run Al-Baath newspaper said Deyab lured the boy to his room on March 4 by promising him money, abused him and then strangled him with a belt.

Five new US envoy named: President Bill Clinton on Wednesday named new US ambassadors to Belgium, Austria, Haiti and The Republic of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the White House said, reports Reuter from Washington.

Clinton named Alan Blinken, a New York city businessman, to be ambassador to Belgium; Swannee Hunt, a Colorado community leader, to be envoy to Austria; and William Swing, a career diplomat, as ambassador to Haiti.

Clinton also chose Richard Teare, a veteran diplomat, to be US envoy to Papua New Guinea, The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

The nominations require Senate confirmation.