

BRIEFLY

Turkish forces kill 19 Kurds : Turkish forces killed 19 Kurdish separatist rebels Monday in separate incidents in southeast Anatolia, officials said, AFP reports from Ankara.

Six rebels from the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) were killed in Top-Tepe near the frontier with Iraq, said a statement from the Diyarbakir prefecture which coordinates the fight against the separatists.

Five others were killed in the eastern region of Bingol and eight in Sirt, Tunceli and Van districts, the statement said.

Election in NZ Nov 6 : New Zealand's Prime Minister Jim Bolger on Tuesday announced general elections will be held November 6, exactly one century after New Zealand became the first country to allow women to vote in national elections, AP reports from Wellington.

Bolger told reporters he was pleased the election date, as was expected, will coincide with the anniversary of the female vote. However, he made no mention of policies designed to woo women voters.

Major to visit Malaysia Sept 21: British Prime Minister John Major will arrive Kuala Lumpur September 21 for talks with his Malaysian counterpart Mahathir Mohamad and other officials, the government said Tuesday, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying Major will have "substantive discussions" with Mahathir on multilateral and bilateral issues during the two-day official visit.

Major will be accompanied by his wife Norma, Trade Minister Richard Needham and other senior government officials. Several representatives from the private sector will also be in the British delegation.

3 killed in Kabul blast : At least three people were killed and five injured when a bomb exploded outside the Defence Ministry building in Kabul Monday, state-run Radio Kabul said, AFP reports Islamabad.

The broadcast monitored here said the injured included Defence Ministry official Mohammad Yunus Qanooni, who belongs to the same Jamiat-i-Islami Party as Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

The condition of the injured who were admitted to the hospital was "out of danger," the radio said.

King Birendra to visit China: King Birendra of Nepal will visit China next week, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday, reports Reuters from Kathmandu.

The visit, from September 20 to 27, is at the invitation of Chinese President Jiang Zemin, the ministry said.

It will be Birendra's second foreign visit since he ceded his absolute powers to a pro-democracy campaign in 1990.

He visited India in May. Nepal has traditionally tried to balance relations between its two giant neighbours.

40 killed in Indian road mishap: An overcrowded bus skidded off the road and crashed into ditch Tuesday, killing at least 40 passengers, a news agency reported, AP says from New Delhi.

More than 100 people were travelling in the bus, which was built to carry about 60 people, when it went off the road while overtaking another vehicle, United News of India said.

The accident occurred near the town of Hajipur in Bihar state, about 1,100 kilometers (98 miles) east of New Delhi.

Rescuers had recovered 35 bodies, police said, including two children and four women. The number of injured was not immediately known.

Jury selection for WTC bombing trial begins

NEW YORK, Sept 14: A day after the signing of a historic Mideast peace accord in Washington, jury selection begins Tuesday in the case that brought fears of Middle East terror to American shores, reports AP.

The impact of those fears on potential jurors in the World Trade Centre (WTC) bombing trial could be a huge obstacle to the defence, and lawyers say jury selection could be the most important part of the trial.

"I suspect that every potential juror we have either has a friend or a relative who works in that building," said Atiq Ahmed, lawyer for suspect Palestinian chemical engineer Nidal A. Ayyad, 25.

He said most of the 5,000 potential jurors likely will find themselves unable to put away memories of the February 26 explosion as prosecutors recount the disaster that killed six people and injured more than 1,000.

It will probably take weeks to choose an anonymous jury from the pool, one of the largest groups ever assembled for a federal trial.

The US District Court trial before Judge Kevin Duffy likely will last the rest of the year.

The four defendants, all Muslims fundamentalists, are charged with conspiracy and face a maximum penalty of life in prison without parole if convicted. Two other suspects are fugitives and a seventh man has been severed from the trial for reasons that remain unclear.

Defence lawyers have submitted questions aimed at digging out signs of prejudices about Arabs, Muslims, Israelis, US policies in the Middle East and fears about terrorism.

Among those charged with conspiracy in that case is Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman.

China frees longtime prisoner Wei

BEIJING, Sept 14: China released its most famous political prisoner, Wei Jingsheng, on Tuesday, in an apparent effort to boost its bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games, reports AP.

Wei was jailed in 1979 after denouncing senior leader Deng Xiaoping and calling for democracy to accompany the country's economic modernisation programme. He was just six months away from completing his 15-year prison sentence.

Chen Ming, a Justice Ministry staffer, said Wei was freed on parole Tuesday morning because he had "obeyed prison regulations."

However, his release comes 10 days before the International Olympic Committee announces the venue for the 2000 Olympic Games, with Beijing a major contender.

PLO-Israeli accord to open way for solution of ME issues: UN

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 14: The Security Council expressed hope Monday that the peace pact between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) will lead to a lasting peace in the Middle East, reports AP.

The agreement "will open the way for a permanent solution of all the issues involved in the Middle East problems and for the definitive installation of the peace and tranquillity in that part of the world," the council said.

In a prepared statement, the council congratulated both the Israelis and the Palestinians "for the courage and the state-manship with which they have undertaken the initiative that have led to this outstanding result."

The council called the pact, which provides for limited self-rule for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho, "one of the most remarkable breakthroughs in the search for peace in the Middle East."

The signing of the accord was "a historic step towards the solution of one of the most difficult and delicate problems that have been affecting the international peace and security during the last three decades," the council said.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali will meet today with PLO leader Yasser

Arafat in New York, a UN spokesman said Monday.

Vatican City

Reuters adds: The Vatican on Monday called the peace accord signed by Israel and the PLO in Washington a necessary and courageous act.

And an official at Italy's National Conference of Catholic Bishops said it would have an important impact on the church's relationships with Israel and Islam.

"The signing of the accord is a courageous and necessary act," Vatican Chief spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said in a statement.

European Community

The European Community paid tribute to Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation for signing a peace accord in Washington on Monday and pledged to remain a major aid supplier to the occupied territories.

The European Community and its member states pay tribute to the vision and courage of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders who signed this historic agreement which represents a positive breakthrough in the peace process," the EC said in statement.

"The European Community is ready to offer a package of immediate aid of 20 million euros (24 million dollar) and to discuss medium term aid with

Palestinians institutions as they are formed.

Pakistan

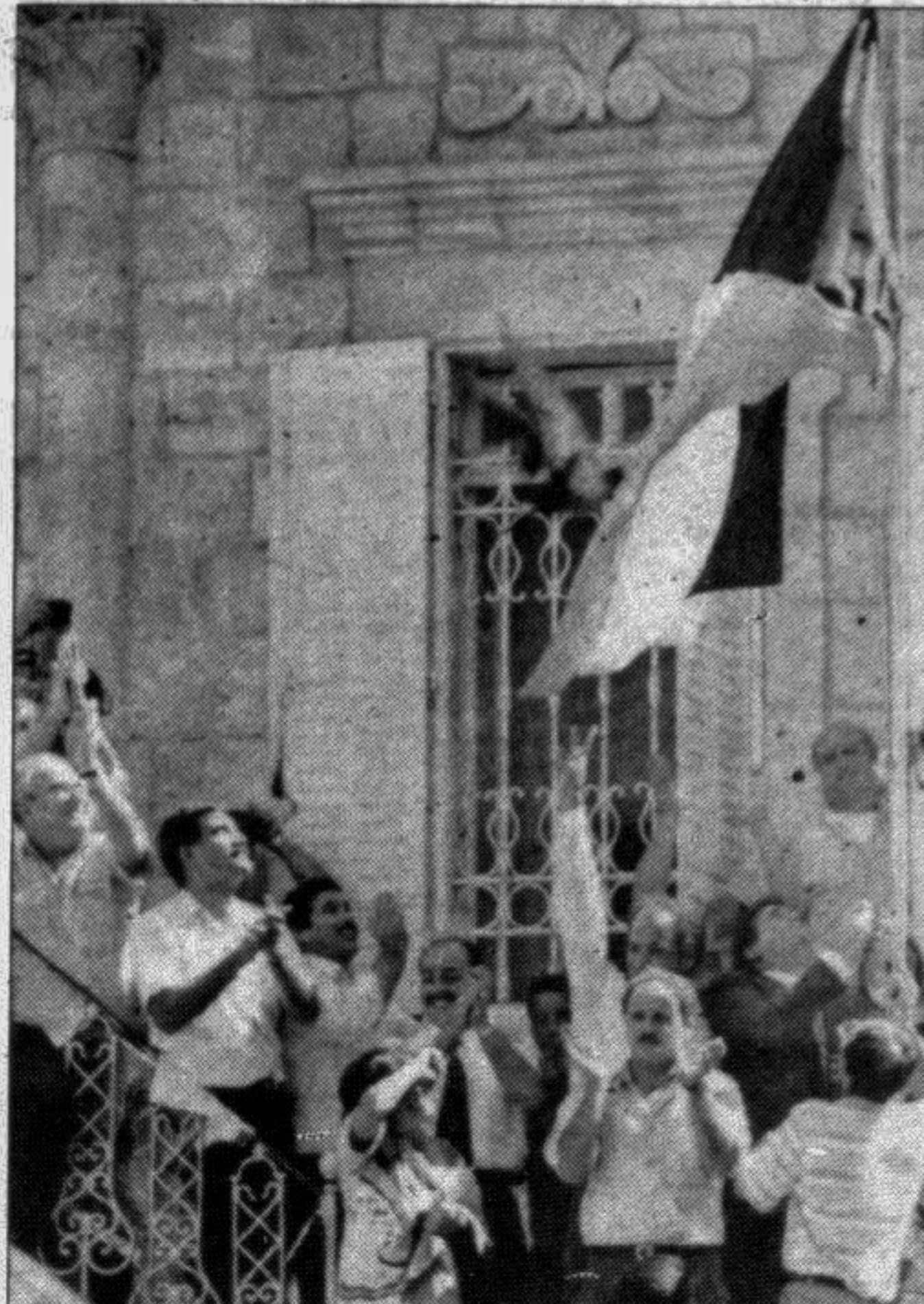
Pakistan welcomed Monday the PLO-Israeli agreement as a "first step" toward a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement.

In a statement issued here, the government expressed hope that a final agreement would conform to international obligations on Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and implementation of the Security Council resolutions.

Islamabad has studied "the PLO-Israeli agreement entitled the declaration of principles on Palestinian interim government arrangements in the occupied territories and welcomes it as a first step toward a comprehensive peace settlement," the statement said.

"The government of Pakistan notes that this initial agreement acknowledges and reaffirms the obligations of the negotiating parties to address all the issues that are of international concern, particularly the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338."

The government reaffirmed Pakistan's "consistent policy of supporting the just aspirations of the Palestinian people and its recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."



A dove flies as the Palestinian flag is raised in the Orient House in Jerusalem Monday, where the local Palestinian leaders have their headquarters. — AFP photo

Zimbabwe may set up ties with Israel

HARARE, Sept 14: Zimbabwe, one of Israel's harshest African critics, may establish diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, Foreign Minister Nathan Shamuyarira says, reports AP.

He told the mass circulation Herald newspaper of Harare that Zimbabwe welcomed the signing Monday of a peace accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

"This historic agreement opens a new chapter and we will review our relations with Israel in the context of this agreement," Shamuyarira said. But he did not specify any steps toward establishing diplomatic ties.

Zimbabwe has had no formal contact with Israel since independence in 1980. Twenty one African nations have ties with Israel.

Alon Liel, Israel's ambassador to neighbouring South Africa, ended a three-day visit to Harare on September 10 without meeting with government representatives.

Contacted Tuesday by the Associated Press in South Africa, Liel said he met with the chief PLO representative in Harare during his visit.

It was the first meeting between and Israeli envoy and Ali Halimeh, a veteran PLO diplomat based in southern Africa for the past decade.

Liel said Halimeh forecast a thaw in relations between Israel and Zimbabwe after the signing of the Israel-PLO accord.

Arafat will be main loser: Iran

NICOSIA, Sept 14: Iran said on Monday Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat would be the main loser in the Israel-PLO peace pact, which it branded a treason bigger than Egypt's Camp David accords with the Jewish state, reports Reuters.

Tehran Radio said in a commentary the agreement offered no tangible gain for Palestinians and would not end the Middle East crisis.

It would turn the PLO into an instrument for suppressing the Intifada, the Palestinian uprising in occupied territories,

and give Israel an opportunity to normalise its ties with other Arab states and reduce the Palestinians' leverage, the radio said.

"There will be many difficulties in implementing this deal at the popular level. Arafat and the PLO will definitely be the ultimate losers in this game," the radio said.

"Arafat, by gaining self-rule in two per cent of the land of Palestine, has sold the other 98 per cent to the Zionist regime. Moreover, he has paved the way for Israel's economic and political

domination in the entire Arab world," it said.

Israel, by giving the PLO self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, will gain time to reach separate deals with other Arab states, the radio said.

The pact envisages a comprehensive settlement with the Palestine Liberation Organisation by 1998.

"If the Zionist regime succeeds in normalising its relations with the Arab countries in the meantime. The PLO will not have the significance for it to

consider giving new or important concessions, let alone returning the holy Jerusalem and other occupied territories," the radio said.

"Thus the opponents of the deal consider it a much bigger treason against Palestinian ideals than the Camp David accords."

The Camp David accords led to the first peace treaty by an Arab country with Israel for which most of the Arab world denounced Egypt as a traitor for years.

US eases economic sanctions on Vietnam

WASHINGTON, Sept 14: President Bill Clinton eased economic sanctions against Vietnam on Monday to let US firms join in international development projects, but refused to lift the trade embargo until Hanoi resolves the issue of US servicemen missing from the Vietnam war, reports Reuters.

Clinton acted in renewing his powers under the Trading with the Enemy Act, which restricts US trade with Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea and several

other countries.

To recognise the recent steps taken by the Vietnamese government to resolve the fate of American Prisoners of War (POWs) and those missing in action (MIA) and most importantly, to encourage further progress, the President has decided to permit American companies to participate in development project in Vietnam funded by international financial institutions, a White House statement said.

Clinton's decision, which follows his decision in July to stop blocking international loans to Vietnam, clears the way for American firms to take part in oil exploration projects.

A dozen companies are reported to be competing for Thanh Long, Vietnam's most promising unwarmed oil block, and bids close in mid-October. Development will be in partnership with the Vietnamese-Russian joint venture oil firm

Vietsovpetro, reports Reuters.

Another report from Hanoi says, Vietnamese officials and US businessmen welcomed US President Bill Clinton's decision to ease the US economic embargo against Vietnam but said sanctions should be scrapped completely.

"We welcome any step forward," one government official said privately. "But it doesn't go far enough and doesn't meet the interests of the two peoples. He's just meched forward."

Formal government comment was expected later in the day after Hanoi had received official notification from Washington of Clinton's decision, announced by the White House.

US firms will be able to compete for contracts funded by loans from multilateral institutions like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) but will still not be able to implement other contracts or trade in Vietnam.

Dr Ngen Xuan Oanh, a leading consultant in Ho Chi Minh city and a former south Vietnamese Prime Minister said: "We are grateful to the President for allowing American businesses to participate... but I'd like a much larger opening than that."

"All business in Vietnam should be open to American businesses... it's still too limited."

Oanh said Clinton had decided on a compromise and he hoped the president would do more later to lift the embargo.



ANC President Nelson Mandela (C) holds a candle symbolising hope for peace at a rally in Cape Town Monday aimed at addressing the white community and what he called their legitimate fears for the future. On right, is Cape Town mayor Clive Keegan. — AFP photo

3 Brazilian ministers resign

BRASILIA, Sept 14: Three Cabinet members who belong to Brazil's largest party resigned as relations worsened between the party and President Itamar Franco, reports AP.

The Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), Franco's main support in Congress, had five members in the Cabinet, but with Monday's resignations is now down to one — the Education Minister. Political opposition to Franco has been increasing within the party.

Environmental Minister Fernando Coutinho Jorge was the first to resign Monday, 13 days after the resignation of then Agriculture Minister Barros Munhoz, also a party member.

Hours later Transport Minister Alberto Goldman and Social Security Minister Antonio Brito turned in their resignations to give Franco liberty to change the composition of his Cabinet in the face of rising opposition by PMDB.

Benazir faces sceptical voters as she plans comeback

ISLAMABAD, Sept 14: Benazir Bhutto's sculpted face still makes the cameras click furiously. Her charm can bring a crowd alive, and the prominent family name assures her a starring role in Pakistan's perennial political dramas, reports AP.

But Bhutto, now 40 and mother of three, is no longer the golden girl of Pakistani politics. Seeking to return to power in October 6 elections, she faces sceptical voters who remember her disappointing performance as prime minister from 1988 to 1990, when she was the first woman to lead a modern Muslim state.

Pakistan, the largest democratic nation in the Islamic world, is holding its third ballot in five turbulent years that have seen the death of a military dictator and the demise of two elected governments on corruption charges, including Bhutto's.

Bhutto's left-leaning Pakistan People's Party and the

conservative Pakistan Muslim League, led by the recently resigned Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, appear to be running neck and neck.

But neither leader inspires much confidence in a nation burdened with a shaky economy and an escalating drug and gun smuggling problem.

Bhutto senses this and says she's changed.

"The voter has got more demanding," Bhutto says in an interview with The Associated Press at her whitewashed home in Islamabad, the capital. "In 1988, the voters just wanted democracy. Our campaign was much more general then. Now we are more specific."

Mindful of Muslim tradition, she wears a loose, flowing purple dress, often fiddling with her white headscarf that slides from her curled black hair.

Her tone is stern, her eye contact so direct it borders on a stare. She smiles and laughs only when discussing her children, whose pictures hang on

the living room walls. "When I campaign, the children says, 'Take us with you.' I tell them, 'No, I can't. They say, 'So give us a chocolate.' And I give them a chocolate," she says.

Politics and family have always been closely linked for Bhutto, daughter of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was overthrown and hanged in the 1970s.

During her father's rule, she was educated at Harvard and Oxford. She marched in anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, headed the Oxford Union Debating Society and was an occasional visitor to nightclubs.

The image of a liberated woman that won her admirers in the West sometimes works against her in conservative Pakistan, though it adds spice to the political intrigue surrounding the Bhutto clan. Her polo-playing husband Asif Zardari, whom she barely knew when they wed in 1987, was jailed in 1990 on charges that

included extortion and kidnapping. Never convicted, he was released in February and is running for a seat in the National Assembly.

Bhutto, meanwhile, doesn't appear to be on speaking terms with her brother Murtaza, who



Benazir Bhutto

also plans to run for the assembly despite his own legal problems. He was implicated in a 1981 hijacking of a Pakistani plane to Afghanistan. He remains there while trying to get

the criminal charges dropped before the election.

Gossip mongers have contributed to the family soap opera by speculating that Bhutto is again pregnant.

"I'm not having a baby right now," she says. "I'd like to have another baby sometime, but every time I have one a government goes" — a reference to the collapse of Pakistan's governments in 1988, 1990 and 1993, the same years her children were born.

Family adventures aside, the election comes at a crucial juncture for Pakistan.

Caretaker Prime Minister Moeen Qureshi, a suave, ex-vice president at the World Bank, has slashed government subsidies on basic items such as wheat, cooking oil and gasoline, leading to price hikes.

Qureshi said he measures were urgently needed to avert an economic crisis, and the international financial community

Off the Record

Emperor rescued after 1,500yrs

CINCINNATI: Hadrian's friends finally rescued him. He had waited more than 1,500 years for their assistance, reports AP.

A 5th-century earthquake in the prehistoric city of Troy rocked a marble statue of Roman emperor Hadrian off its perch, broke the statue and left it buried under rubble.

University of Cincinnati archaeologists recovered it this summer and reattached the arms and head found nearby. The legs are still missing.

Hadrian ruled the Roman Empire from 117 to 138 A.D. His statue once stood in the place of honour above a theater stage in Troy, in what is now western Turkey. The earthquake hit about 470 and toppled the stone theater and the marble statue.

C. Brian Rose, 37, who directed the excavation team, said it was a good summer for archaeologists from Cincinnati and the University of Tubingen, Germany, who reopened the Troy site in 1988 for excavation. The site was first excavated in the 1930s by Carl Blegen, a University of Cincinnati classics department professor from 1927 to 1957.

Troy was actually nine cities built one on top of the other in a large mound like a layer cake and inhabited for 4,800 years, Rose told the Cincinnati Enquirer last week. The overall mound is about 600 feet (180 meters) by 450 feet (135 meters).

The statue of the curly-haired emperor wears a general's garb: a cuirass; a layered skirt; a decorated cuirass; and a scarf draped over his shoulders.

The statue is now on display in a museum in the nearby Turkish town of Canakkale.

Fight over definition of gays

WASHINGTON: Judges on a federal appeals court sparred with lawyers Monday over whether an admitted homosexual who is also celibate would be discharged from the military under pre-Clinton administration rules, reports AP.

The issue was raised when Justice Department lawyer Anthony Steinmeyer was explaining the difference in military policy toward homosexuals before the Clinton administration adopted the "don't ask, don't tell" rule that will go into effect next month.

Steinmeyer said the military defined a homosexual as a person whose conduct, activities, desire and intent show that he is gay.

"I could use a shorthand phrase 'celibate homosexual,'" Steinmeyer said. "That is a person who says if I had sex, I would prefer a person of the same sex, but I'm not going to have sex, never had sex and never will."

Such a person would not have the desire for sex and therefore would not fall under the military's definition of a homosexual, Steinmeyer said. He added that the government doesn't take action against people for thoughts unrelated to conduct.

Judge Patricia Wald asked if anyone had avoided discharge from the military by making that claim.

"To my knowledge no one has made it, so it was never accepted," the government lawyer replied.

"Now we are dancing on the head of a pin," commented Judge Abner Mikva.

WHO S-E Asia body meets in Delhi from Sept 21-27

The forty-sixth session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia will be held in New Delhi from September 21-27, says a press release.

Senior health officials and administrators from all eleven member states in the region will be attending the meeting.

Representatives from other United Nations agencies and many non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations in official relations with WHO will also attend the meeting which will be addressed by the Director-General of WHO, Dr Hiroshi Nakajima.

The 7-day session of the Regional Committee will, among other important agenda items, nominate the Regional Director, consider an update on AIDS, WHO's Ninth General Programme of Work, and the report of the Regional Director for the period, July 1991-June 1993.