

## BRIEFLY

**DPRK closes port to foreigners:**

North Korea has closed its western port of Nampo to foreigners without any official explanation, the Itar-Tass news agency said in a report out of Pyongyang, AFP says from Moscow.

It said the port was closed several days ago. Diplomatic sources cited by the agency said the move could be linked to an alleged cholera epidemic that broke out there several days ago, or to the presence of several Chinese ships, at Nampo which, according to the agency, could be carrying strategic material.

**20 Tajiks, Kazakh guard killed:**

A clash along the Tajik-Afghan border killed 20 Tajik rebels and one Kazakh border guard, the Itar-Tass news agency reported Thursday, AP says from Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Two Tajik government soldiers were also killed in the fighting Wednesday, when Kazakh soldiers freed 16 other Tajik servicemen who had been taken prisoner by the rebels. Several weapons were seized in the raid, Itar-Tass said.

**4 hostages freed in Norway:**

Police yesterday said four hostages held by two armed robbers at an airport in southern Norway were free and the hostages were unharmed, Reuter reports from Oslo.

"It's all over. The hostages are unharmed," police officer Tore Olsen told Reuters. He declined all further comment.

**Serb radical leader held:**

Serbian police yesterday arrested ultra-nationalist leader Vojislav Seselj as he left home on his way to his party headquarters, his bodyguard Petar Panic said, AP reports from Belgrade.

Seselj, head of the Serbian radical party and leader of a Serb militia group said to have taken part in the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina, had his parliamentary immunity removed Wednesday after he spat at the Speaker of the Yugoslav federal parliament, Radovan Bozovic.

**Ju CPC Political Bureau member:**

Huang Ju, Mayor of Shanghai, was elected a member of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party central committee at the committee's fourth plenary session, which concluded in Beijing on Wednesday, Xinhua reports from Beijing.

According to a decision of the meeting, Wu Bangguo and Jiang Chunyun, both members of the Politburo, were added to the secretariat of the party central committee.

**Myanmar blast leaves 2 dead:**

Two people died and four others injured as a walkie-talkie exploded recently in a village of Mudon township in southeast Myanmar, local press reported yesterday, Xinhua says from Yangon.

The walkie-talkie was sent by the Mon minority nationality armed group who said that they will return to legal fold. But the walkie-talkie suddenly exploded when the head of the village switched it on.

**Forest fire kills 9 in S Africa:**

A forest fire swept through a workers' compound in northern South Africa overnight, killing nine people, State radio reported Thursday, AP says from Nelspruit, South Africa.

The fire in Frankfort State Forest was brought under control Thursday morning as a soft rain began falling and winds died down, allowing the search for more victims to resume.

**Kurds' mass grave found:**

A mass grave containing the bodies of 44 Kurds executed by Iraqi soldiers has been found on the outskirts of the northern city of Sulaymaniyah, Kurdish officials said on Wednesday, AFP reports from Sulaymaniyah.

They said the discovery was made after a tip-off from the man who dug the grave in April 1991, during the Kurdish uprising against Baghdad.

**Bill to stop smoking on flights:**

A bill to ban smoking on all international flights to and from the United States was approved by a House of Representatives committee on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Washington.

The bill from the House Public Works and Transportation Committee would ban smoking on all US and foreign airlines on the final leg of flights to the United States and the first leg of flights from the United States.

**7 die in Argentine plane fire:**

A private plane caught fire during refueling at a regional airport, killing at least seven people and causing serious injuries to two others, a news agency reported on Wednesday, AP says from Cordoba.

The plane, a small twin-motor jet, burst into flames at the airport in the provincial capital of Cordoba, 440 miles (710 kilometers) west of Buenos Aires, the Diarios y Noticias news agency said.

**Greeks need visa:**

Albanian legislators approved on Wednesday a presidential decree forbidding Greeks from entering Albania without a visa, AP reports from Tirana.

The decree, which waived visa requirements from nationals from Arab countries and Israel, was adopted by 60 of the 83 deputies taking part in the vote.

**Cholera claims 14 in Ukraine:**

Fourteen people have died of cholera in Ukraine and 568 are infected with the disease, Ukrainian radio reported late Wednesday, quoting a government health agency, AFP reports from London.

The radio, monitored in London by the BBC, said the number of cholera cases had increased by 90 on Thursday. The city of Nikolayev in southern Ukraine was worst affected, with 278 people suffering from the disease, which broke out earlier this month.

**Quake rocks Java Sea:**

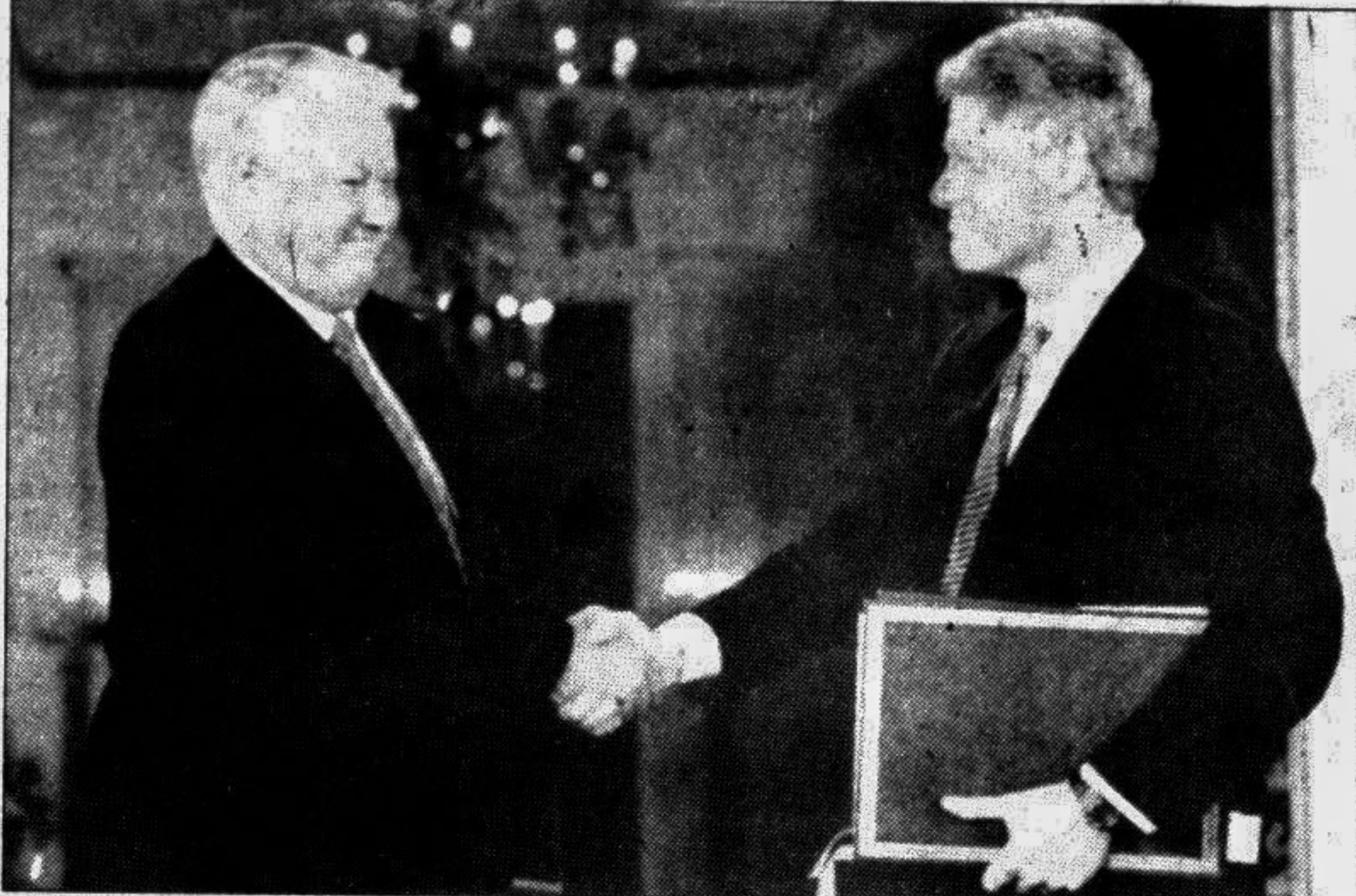
An intense earthquake rocked the Java Sea late Wednesday but there were no reports on damages or casualties, an official at the Meteorology and Geophysics office in Jakarta said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Handi Andi said the quake, which measured 6.4 on the Richter scale, broke out at 23.39 on Wednesday (17.39 GMT), and its epicenter was about 85 kilometers (52.7 miles) northwest of the central Java, capital of Semarang.

**Serial killer to die in Russia:**

A Siberian teacher identified by chance from an old school photo has been sentenced to die for murdering and raping five women, AP reports from Moscow.

Izvestia said he lured his victims into his car by offering them free rides, then drove to secluded sites to rape and kill them. It said he always kept something of the victim's as a memento.



President Bill Clinton (R) shakes hands with Russian President Boris Yeltsin (L) after signing several agreements, including a "partnership for economic progress" statement, pledging closer economic ties between the US and Russia, at the White House on Wednesday. — AFP photo

## Rabin threatens to halt peace talks with Syria

JERUSALEM, Sept 29: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin threatened on Wednesday to halt peace talks with Syria if he doesn't win a Parliament vote of confidence next week, reports AP.

He spoke during a meeting with Labour Party parliament members, including a half dozen who oppose Syrian demands for a withdrawal from the Golan Heights. They are threatening to introduce legislation requiring a special parliamentary majority of 70 out of 120 for such a pullback.

Rabin will present a policy statement when Parliament opens for its winter session October 3 and will consider a vote taken afterwards as a motion of confidence in the peace process, said party spokesman Micha Lancy, quoting Rabin to reports.

"If we don't have a majority

then perhaps I shall announce a cessation of talks with Syria," Rabin was quoted as saying.

He said demands for a special majority could tie his hands in negotiating with Syria since the ruling coalition commands a minimal parliamentary majority of 61 out of 120.

Rabin's comments to a closed-door session of his ruling Labour Party came two weeks before US Secretary of State Warren Christopher was expected for some more shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Syria.

Rabin also said there were still "very wide gaps" in talks with Damascus and that he hasn't agreed to Syria's demands for a full pullback in the strategic plateau. An 18-day hunger strike by 13 residents opposed to any concessions has focused the country's attention on the issue.

Israel captured the Golan Heights overlooking northern Israel in the 1967 Middle East war, and Syria is demanding the return of the entire zone in exchange for peace.

According to Lancy, Rabin said a final border and the length of time that a withdrawal would take remained unclear.

But Rabin stressed the historic significance of a peace treaty with Israel's toughest enemy, Lancy said. He warned that a freeze in talks with Syria could mean escalated fighting along the border with Lebanon, which is under Syrian influence.

He said Syria had a good track record in sticking to agreements, Lancy said. Israel and Syria signed a disengagement accord in the Golan in 1974 which put United Nations monitoring forces as a buffer.

## NATO may intensify air strike against Serb forces

SEVILLE, Spain, Sept 29: As prospects fade for an early end to the international arms ban on Bosnia's Muslim-led government, the NATO allies on Thursday debated using more air strikes against Bosnian Serb forces, reports AP.

Before going into a NATO defence minister meeting, US Defence Secretary William Perry predicted an alliance endorsement of "the continued and more vigorous application of NATO air strikes" to deter Bosnian Serb attacks against Muslim troops and civilians or any of the 23,000 UN peacekeepers in the war-torn re-

public. "We need a robust response to it and not a small response," Perry told reporters on arrival here Wednesday.

"When we go in, I want to go in with compelling force, force not necessarily just proportionate to the act that was taken but enough to make it clear that there's a heavy price to pay for violating these rules that NATO has established."

NATO planes have scrambled six times this year to fire on Bosnian Serb forces violating various safe zones or other agreements. But the results have been minimal.

The two-day NATO defence ministers meeting here is the first attended by France since the country quit NATO's integrated military command in 1966.

But officials said French Defence Minister Francois Leotard's presence signals no end to France's independent stance within the alliance and stressed the defence ministers' meeting is in informal session.

In addition to Bosnia, the ministers will discuss NATO's new cooperative ties with Eastern Europe through its 'Partnership for Peace' programme.



Haitian pro-Aristide lawmakers Senator Julio Larosiere (R) and Rep Ernst Peolro Caseus (L) embrace on Wednesday after being reunited at parliament for a special session to debate an amnesty law for the country's military leaders. Larosiere and nine other members of parliament came back from exile in the US and Canada earlier on September to secure a quorum. — AFP photo.

### 3 states to probe Estonian ferry capsized

TURKU, Finland, Sept 29: Investigators from three countries were set to begin probing why a modern Estonian ferry capsized and sank in fierce storms in the Baltic sea with the loss of more than 800 lives, reports Reuter.

The shocked leaders of Estonia, Sweden and Finland ordered the inquiry after the ferry Estonia, built in Germany in 1980, sank early on Wednesday in one of Europe's worst peacetime maritime disasters.

The tragedy occurred only a few hours after a Swedish safety official deemed a seal on the ferry's loading ramp to be faulty, Swedish maritime union and safety officials said.

Estonian police were quoted by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio as saying that if negligence was found in the maintenance of the ferry they would prosecute and seek long jail sentences for anyone convicted.

### 4 top Ugandan rebel commanders, 12 others killed

KAMPALA, Sept 29: Four top commanders and 12 fighters of the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) were killed in recent clashes with government forces in Gulu district, northern Uganda, local daily "The New Vision" reported today, says Xinhua.

The four commanders killed include Rasca Orach Lupia who commanded the LRA's store unit, Okello Dunka who is said to have been a brigade's operations and training officer, and Charles Bwonge, chief signals officer. The fourth was not specified.

The paper quoted Major Charles Angina, an intelligence officer in Gulu as saying yesterday that Rasca Orach had been a prominent commander in the LRA. He was killed in a night exchange of fire when his group attempted to attack a village, Major Angina said.

### Ex-army troops in Salvador end Assembly siege

SAN SALVADOR, Sept 29: About 500 retired soldiers from El Salvador's civil war ended a two-day occupation of parliament on Wednesday and freed legislators they had held in the building to demand financial support, reports Reuter.

The occupation ended after the government agreed to open negotiations with an organisation representing the ex-soldiers who were demobilised under the terms of 1992 peace accords that ended a 12-year civil war.

The agreement is that nobody will leave the negotiating table until there are solutions to our demands," said one of the organisation's leaders at the start of negotiations.

### 90000 Americans died in accidents last year

CHICAGO, Sept 29: Ninety thousand Americans died in accidents last year, half of them in car wrecks, the first time in five years that the accidental death toll has risen, a safety group said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

"More people are driving and as a result, more people are dying on the roadways," said Alan Hoeskin, a statistician at the National Safety Council which calculates accidental deaths every year.

Besides the rise in fatalities caused by more social and recreational driving due to a growing economy, the death toll from falls and poisonings also increased from 1992, when nearly 86,000 died in accidents.

The number of deaths in the United States from accidental causes such as motor vehicle crashes, falls, poisonings, drownings and fires had declined every year since 1988, until the five per cent increase in 1993, the Safety Council said.

## China opposes use of force in UN operations

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 29: China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen on Wednesday strongly objected to the use of force in UN sanction peacekeeping operations, saying that the world should have learned its lessons in Somalia, reports Reuter.

"A lesson should be drawn from what befell the UN peacekeeping forces in Somalia," he told the 49th General Assembly session.

"No peacekeeping operations or humanitarian aid programmes should be permitted to interfere in the internal affairs of any country, still less to use force and get embroiled in a conflict between parties."

Qian was referring to the failure of UN and American forces to restore peace in Somalia over the past two years, and by implication, the recent US intervention in Haiti by US troops and France's sending of troops to Rwanda last summer.

The minister also told the 184-member Assembly that this country should be admitted to the new World Trade Organisation, the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

"China needs to cooperate with the rest of the world, which in turn needs such an important trading partner as China," he said, adding: "a World Trade Organisation without China will be inconceivable."

US opposition is considered the main stumbling block to quick Chinese membership.

American officials have publicly said the US would back China once it meets economic requirements. But privately some US officials have said that President Clinton would not push for China's entry during his first term in office, in part on human rights grounds.

## Off the Record

### "A drink a day keeps doctor away"

WASHINGTON: A drink a day keeps the doctor away. At least it reduces the possibility of heart attacks, according to a study published in the American Medical Association journal, reports PTI.

Total mortality is reduced in those who consume one or two drinks a day as compared with teetotallers, the study said.

But it warned that consumption of three or more drinks a day causes increased mortality.

The study was based on blood tests of 531 healthy doctors cooperating in a separate national study.

It said while 100,000 people die each year in the United States due to alcohol-related causes, 135,884 additional deaths from heart diseases result from nation wide abstinence.

### Is Hillary pregnant?

WASHINGTON: As Hillary Rodham Clinton's spokesman, Neel Lattimore fields questions from inquiring minds every day. But he drew the line Wednesday at this tabloid-inspired query: Is the first lady pregnant? "I don't have the guts to ask her," he said with a laugh, reports AP.

A tabloid paper that hits the grocery store stands this week reports breathlessly that "insiders" tell a British biographer Hillary Clinton is due in April. The first lady turns 47 next month.

White House officials denied the report privately. Publicly, they laughed it off.

"This is the same publication that said she adopted a space alien baby," Lattimore said. "If they already have a space alien baby, I don't know if they need another one."

### Disney to abandon planned America theme park

RICHMOND: Walt Disney is abandoning plans to build its Disney's America theme park near the famous Manassas Civil War battlefields, reports AP.

Critics, including some historians, argued that the proposed 650 million dollars park and adjacent developments would pollute the area and detract from true historic sites only a few miles (kilometers) away.

"While we do not agree with all their concerns, we are seeking a new location so that we can move the process forward," Peter S Rummell, president of Disney Design and Development Co, said Wednesday.

Disney officials envision a park that would reflect historical themes on about 100 acres (40 hectares) of land, surrounded by hotels, a campground, public golf course and commercial buildings. In all, Walt Disney Co, had purchased 3,000 acres (1,250 hectares) of land for the project about 35 miles (56 kms) west of the nation's capital and five miles (eight kms) from the Manassas National Battlefield near Haymarket.

"We recognize that there are those who have been concerned about the possible impact of our park on historic sites in this unique area, and we have always tried to be sensitive to the issue," Rummell said.

### Stone to mark grave of Jacqueline Onassis

WASHINGTON: Four and a half months after she was buried, a permanent stone will mark the grave of Jacqueline Onassis. The marker will read simply: 'Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis — 1929-1994', reports AP.

The former first lady is buried at Arlington National Cemetery next to John F Kennedy and two of their children. Cemetery Superintendent John Metzler said the stone is the same size as Kennedy's and made from the same material, a special slate quarried in Maine that will not fade.

Metzler said the cemetery plans to begin installing the marker on October 5, expecting that the grave site will be open to the public again no later than October 8. Jacqueline Onassis died on May 19 of cancer.



### James Bond film producer Saltzman dies in France

PARIS, Sept 29: British film producer Harry Saltzman, famous for his work on the early James Bond movies, has died in France, his family announced on Wednesday. He was 78, reports AFP.

Saltzman, who has lived in France for several years, died overnight at the American Hospital in Neuilly outside Paris.

Among his most well-known production — credits were those for the first 11 007 spy movies, including the 'First Ever Doctor No'.

His output also included co-producing 'Fahrenheit 451' with Orson Welles, Britain.

## Hubble Constant — a key to discover age of universe

LONDON, Sept 29: US astronomers said today they had calculated the Hubble Constant, a vital key to discovering the age of the universe, reports Reuter.

The only problem is: Their findings indicate the universe is younger than the presently estimated age of the oldest stars.

In a report in the science journal Nature, Mike Pierce of the Indiana University and colleagues said they had cracked the problem of measuring distances to certain star groups and were then able to calculate the Hubble Constant.

Their report seemed certain to provoke an international debate on how astronomers see the universe.

The Hubble Constant, a

mathematical figure to determine distance between stars and galaxies, is a key to the "big bang" theory which states the universe started from an infinitesimal point and is expanding.

Scientists say the Constant can be used to work out how fast the universe is expanding, and thus how old it is and whether it is likely to continue to expand or will eventually collapse.

The Hubble Constant is 87 km (54 miles) per second per megaparsec, Pierce said in an interview. A megaparsec is the distance light travels in 3.2 million years at the speed of 186,000 miles (300,000 km) a second.

This high value, in conjunction with most currently

fashionable cosmological models, conflicts with the ages of the oldest known stars," Pierce and colleagues wrote.

"The age estimate for the oldest stars in the Galaxy is 16 billion years," Pierce told Reuters in a telephone interview, citing an age calculated by estimating the gas content of stars.

"If you take the standard model for the big bang — for the Hubble Constant we measure produces an age of some thing between seven and 11 billion years. That's the paradox."

"Either there's a problem with the age measurements of estimates of these models... or there is a problem with the model, the description for the big bang."

To calculate the Constant, astronomers must measure both the distance of stars and how fast they are moving.

Calculating the velocities is really quite easy. The trick has always been getting the distances," Pierce said.

He and his colleagues used a land-based telescope on Hawaii and a special computer-corrected camera to measure the light from a group of cepheids, or pulsating stars, in the constellation Virgo.

Cepheids are used to measure space distance because their brightness, and therefore distance, can be measured from their regular pulsing.

Once they found the distance, Pierce said, the Hubble Constant became obvious. He added that astronomers would question the accuracy of his

land-based measurements.

But he said he was confident that his findings would be verified by Hubble space telescope, which is orbiting earth and making the most accurate observations yet of space. It is now looking at the same group of stars.

"The new estimate... given by Pierce and his colleagues... is high enough to conflict with some other recent measurements, and will come as an unwelcome news to many theorists," Craig Hogan, an astronomer at the University of Washington, wrote in an accompanying commentary in Nature.

"With such important consequences resting on the outcome, the debate looks set to continue."

## Iran denies production of atomic bombs

TEHRAN, Sept 29: Iran has rejected allegations by the US central intelligence agency that Iran is about to produce atomic bombs by the next decade, reports Xinhua.

Iran's official news agency IRNA reported late Wednesday night that the rejection was made by the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI).

AEOI spokesman Ali Shirzadian said that by disseminating such fake news the US mass media wants to divert the world's public opinion from the 'illegal nuclear activities of the Israeli regime'.

The spokesman noted that the assistance from the United States to Israel has become a serious nuclear threat in the region and the world.

Meanwhile, he said, Iran has proposed a plan to comprehensively declare the Middle East region as a nuclear-weapons free-zone and that Tehran is not in quest of nuclear weapons.

He noted that Iran's nuclear activities have been focused on peaceful utilisation of nuclear energy.

He said that high-ranking officials and inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have visited Iran's nuclear facilities twice and confirmed that Iran's nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

The Americans continuously have claimed in the past 15 years that Iran is to obtain nuclear weapons within five years.