

US to urge India in talks not to block CTBT: Christopher

WASHINGTON, July 18: Secretary of State Warren Christopher said on Wednesday the United States would accept a compromise version of the proposed nuclear test ban treaty and he would urge India in talks next week not to block the landmark pact.

In an interview with Reuters, he said the Clinton administration ideally would still like to see "various improvements" in the text proposed by Dutch diplomat Jaap Ramaker chairman of the 61 nation negotiations in Geneva last month.

But in the first public acknowledgment that the United States has thrown its weight behind Ramaker's version, Christopher told Reuters "like in all negotiations of that kind, there are places where you feel that from your own standpoint, provisions could be slightly improved."

But in an overall sense, we think the overall product is a very important one and we'd simply like to get it open for

signature because it would be such an important step forward for the world as a whole." US officials said President Bill Clinton decided two weeks ago to forgo further efforts to find a more flexible formula for having the treaty enter into force, which had been a major end game dispute in the negotiations.

Instead, Clinton agreed the administration would try to convince other countries to accept Ramaker's text as is and avoid additional negotiations when the next session of the conference on disarmament reconvenes in Geneva on July 29.

"It isn't quite coming together as quickly as we'd like to see it" one US official told Reuters.

Failure of the conference to approve a text and send it to the United Nations General Assembly in New York for signature would be a major blow to Clinton's arms control agenda and a serious setback in efforts to achieve the long-sought pact.

We have reached a judgment that this is an acceptable treaty that meets our requirements and we think the best way to get a treaty at this stage is not to have everybody make the best of the enemy of the good, said a senior US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Some US officials are concerned that India, a so called threshold nuclear state might try to block the treaty — which bans all atomic test from being sent to the United Nations.

Christopher said when he holds talks with India's new Foreign Minister I K Gujral, in Jakarta next week "I'll be urging them (India) not to block that approach... it should not be within the capacity of India to block such a treaty."

The two ministers will meet on the fringes of the August 23-25 Association of Southeast Asian Nations' annual meeting.

Christopher said he telephoned Gujral a few days ago to make sure we'd have a useful and effective meeting."

4,000 Tigers attack key military base in north

COLOMBO, July 18: More than 4,000 Tamil separatist rebels attacked a key military base in northern Sri Lanka Thursday, and desperate soldiers called in air strikes to stop the guerrillas from overrunning the camp, military officials said, reports AP.

Waves of rebels broke through the Mullaitivu army camp's defence lines during the midnight assault, sending the 1,500 soldiers inside scurrying for cover, officials said.

Naval gunboats which rushed to the area were being driven back by the rebel boats and mortar fire from the shore. One naval gunboat was damaged and a sailor killed in the fighting, in which a rebel boat also was destroyed, said a senior navy official.

Air force pilots flying over the battle zone reported that most of the base was in rebel hands, about 12 hours after the fighting began. At dawn, air force planes and helicopter gunships began bombing and

strafing rebels, officials said.

Heavy casualties were feared in the fighting, but the military headquarters in Colombo had few details from the area because the rebels had destroyed communication lines to the camp, about 275 kilometres (172 miles) north-east of the capital, Colombo, officials said.

In November 1993, the rebels launched a similar attack on the Pooneryn military complex in northern Sri Lanka, and 754 soldiers and sailors and 700 rebels were killed in four days of fighting.

Troops continue to fight back and are holding on," said a Ministry of Defence statement.

Responding to distress signals by the soldiers, naval gunboats arrived off the coast of Mullaitivu, but were unable to get close because the rebels opened fire with mortars from the shore.

The nearest military base, 40 kilometres (25 miles) away,

reported it had lost contact with the besieged soldiers about four hours after the attack began, said the officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The military was gathering soldiers in the port city of Trincomalee to attempt an amphibious landing to help save the base. Trincomalee is 90 kilometres (56 miles) south of Mullaitivu.

The attack was the biggest in the north since government troops drove the rebels out of their longtime stronghold of Jaffna city in December, capping a grueling 50-day offensive.

In May, the military announced that it had extended its control over all of the Jaffna Peninsula, and 400,000 Tamil civilians who had fled during the offensive had returned to their homes.

The rebels either retreated into the jungles in the north or moved to Tamil-dominated areas in eastern Sri Lanka.

Taliban rockets kill 12 in Kabul

Five Afghan factions form peace front

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, July 18: Five Afghan factions have signed an agreement forming a peace front to work for a transfer of power from embattled President Burhanuddin Rabbani, the leaders of one of the groups said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Syed Ahmad Gailani, leader of Mahaz-i-Milli, told reporters the pact was signed on Monday in the northern Afghan town of Mazaj-i-Shajif, the headquarters of opposition warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum's Jumahi-Milli movement.

The three other groups were Jabha Nijat-i-Milli of ex-president Sibghatullah Mojaddidi, Shi'ite Muslim Hezb-i-Wahdat of Karim Khalili and a council ruling the eastern province of Nangarhar.

Jumla, Wahdat and Jaha were already working in an anti-government alliance, but the Nangarhar Council led by provincial Governor Abdul Adner and Mahaz-i-Milli had previously been effectively neutral.

Gailani said a commission comprising three men from each of the five groups had been set up with its base in the Nangarhar capital of Jalalabad to work for forming a broader council that could take power from Rabbani.

The commission would other groups, including the powerful opposition Taliban Islamic militia, factions backing the government and prominent individuals to help in forming the broader council, he said.

AP adds: A barrage of rockets devastated a crowded fruit market in central Kabul on Thursday, killing at least 12 people and wounding 36 others, witnesses and doctors said.

One of the rockets fired by the Taliban militia landed in the middle of the market's main road. Mangled bodies were scattered across the road amid debris and dozens of overturned fruit carts.

BRIEFLY

UNSC debate on Sudan postponed:

The Security Council has postponed until next week its planned debate on whether to toughen sanctions on Sudan, which is suspected of harbouring terrorists, council president Alain Dejammet said Wednesday. AFP reports from United Nations.

The council has instead decided to focus its meeting Thursday on the situation in Bosnia, he added.

W Bengal passes bill for minorities:

The West Bengal Assembly yesterday passed the West Bengal minorities commission bill, 1996 for setting up a minorities commission for the protection of the religious and linguistic minorities in the state. PTI reports from Calcutta.

The bill sought to provide a broad-based statutory commission to replace the current commission which was constituted by administrative resolutions. The Minorities Affairs and Wakf Minister, Md Amin said that the commission would have judicial power.

Teenager kills mother in France:

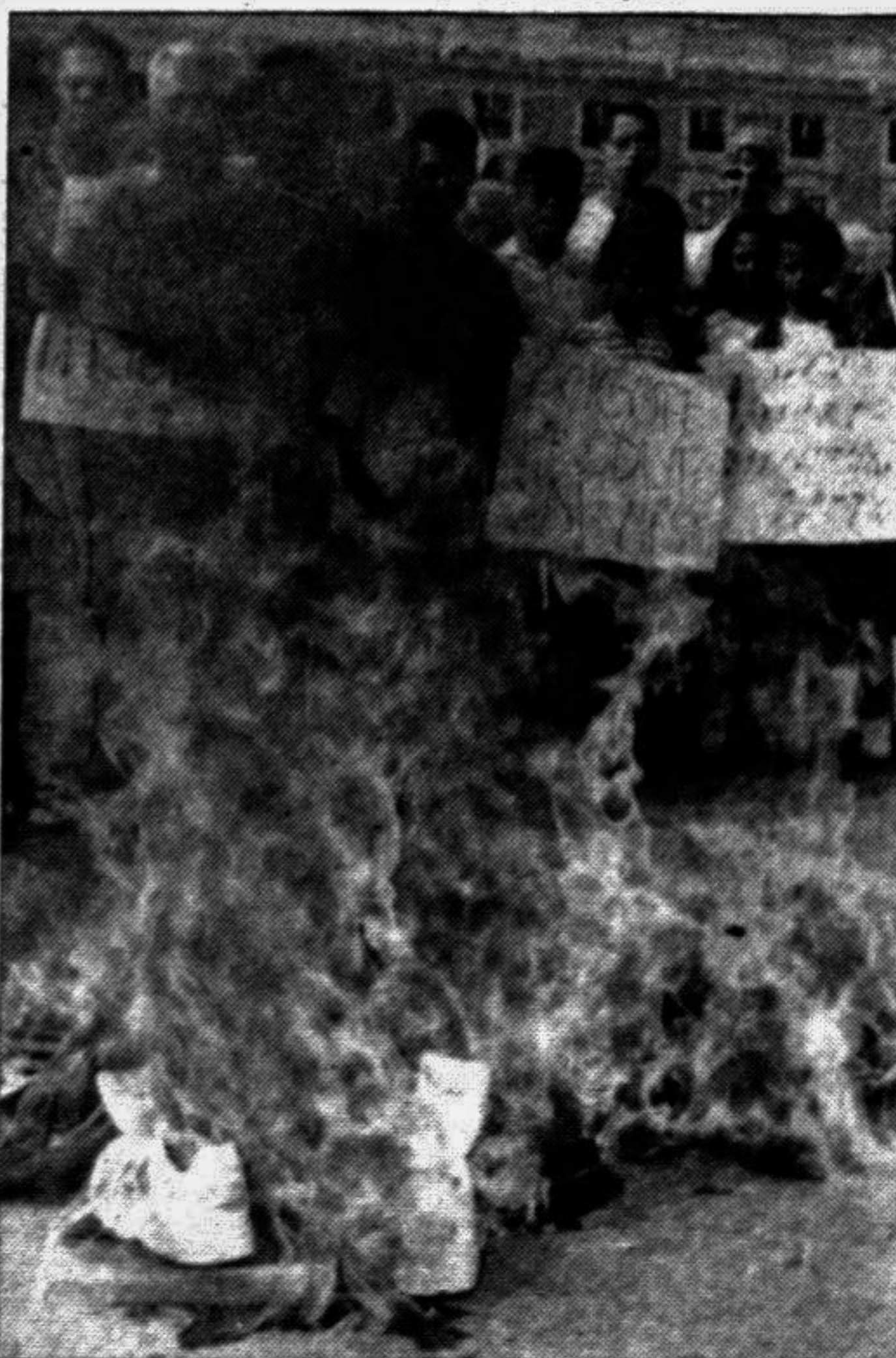
A 16-year-old girl shot her mother dead near Nantes late Wednesday then took a train for Paris, where she was arrested on arrival after confessing to a passenger, police said. AFP reports from Nantes.

The unnamed teenager allegedly gunned down her 54-year-old mother, a dermatologist, 3 with several shots from a pistol while her father and elder sister were on a trip to Canada. Police and prosecutors refused to give any details of the motive for the killing.

Ex-British PM's 80th birthday marked:

Prime Minister John Major on Wednesday hosted a Downing Street banquet to celebrate the 80th birthday of former Conservative Premier Edward Heath. AFP reports from London.

Queen Elizabeth II and her husband the Duke of Edinburgh were among the guests who also included former foreign secretaries Lord Goring and Geoffrey Howe and violinist Yehudi Menuhin. The dinner was the highlight of a glittering round of dinners and parties that have been held over the last week for Heath whose birthday was on July 9.



East Timor activists burn products from Indonesia in Lisbon Wednesday to protest against their import by European countries. East Timorese, both in Portugal and in East Timor protested the 20th anniversary of Indonesia's annexation of the former Portuguese colony.

— AFP/UNB photo.

10 Indian soldiers killed in Manipur

NEW DELHI, July 18: Ten Indian soldiers were killed and one injured in an ambush by suspected tribal rebels in the far eastern state of Manipur, the Press Trust of India reported today, says AFP.

Officials told the news agency that nine soldiers from the Jammu and Kashmir light infantry battalion were killed Wednesday when the rebels opened fire on a patrol some 60 kilometres (37 miles) from the state capital Imphal.

One soldier died later in hospital, they said. There have been no claims of responsibility.

The officials said troops had been rushed to the site of the ambush to search for the assailants.

US group, Filipino senator get UN population award

UNITED NATIONS, July 18: The United Nations presented its annual population award Wednesday to a Filipino senator and a US organisation that has helped launch family planning services in 30 countries, reports AP.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented the dollars 12,500 award to Pathfinder International of Watertown, Massachusetts and Philippines Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani.

Ramos-Shahani, sister of Philippine President Fidel Ramos, is one of her country's leading advocates of population control and has strongly advocated the view that the Philippines' exploding population has exacerbated economic problems.

Pathfinder International, founded in 1957, has supported more than 2,000 programmes in some 30 countries on subjects such as family planning and AIDS prevention.

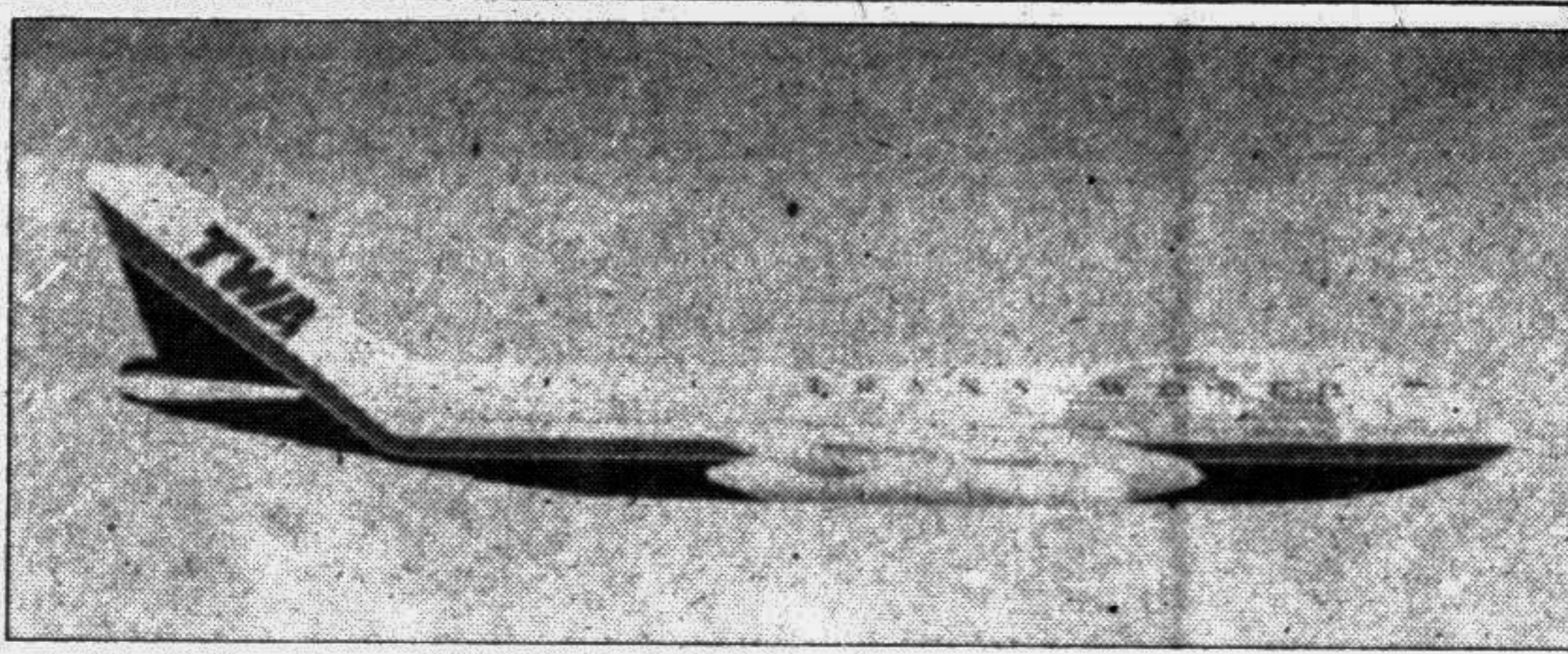
ME peace process is dead: Velayati

TEHRAN, July 18: Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said Wednesday he believed the Middle East peace process was "dead," just as his country had predicted, reports AP.

"The new Israeli government does not even respect the so-called positive points of the talks on the issues of Jerusalem, Golan Heights and the Jewish settlements," Velayati said in an interview with AFP. "According to our assessment, the peace process is dead."

"It was cooked up between Israel and the United States," he said, referring to the US-sponsored peace process.

Iran, which has called for an end to Israel, had repeatedly called on Arab countries to avoid making peace with the Jewish state. Despite initial progress in the peace process, which is based on the principle of land for peace, Israel's new right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has taken a hardline, saying his country would not turn over any more occupied land.



An illustration shows a TWA Boeing 747. A Paris-bound TWA jumbo jet exploded in mid-air and crashed into the Atlantic after take-off from New York JFK airport Wednesday. Over 200 passengers are feared to have lost their lives.

— AFP/UNB photo

US won't press for ban against junta

ASEAN rejects demands for sanctions on Myanmar

JAKARTA, July 18: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations defended its growing ties with Myanmar on Thursday, rejecting demands for sanctions to pressure its military rulers to improve human rights, reports AP.

Myanmar is to be given observer status in ASEAN at a meeting of its foreign ministers this weekend in Jakarta, and eventually is expected to become a full member of the group.

"ASEAN has one cardinal rule, and that is not to interfere... in the internal affairs of other countries," said Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, chairman of the week-end meeting.

Alatas said Myanmar's participation in ASEAN will not be affected by its internal politics and human rights record. Moreover, he said he hoped Myanmar, as well as Laos and Cambodia, would soon join ASEAN.

In addition to Indonesia, the current members are Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei and Vietnam.

"Hopefully, yes, by the end of the century, all 10 Southeast Asian countries will be under one single roof," Alatas told reporters. "That would be in fulfillment of the long-held dream of the ASEAN founding fathers."

ASEAN leaders say their "constructive engagement" policy of dealing with the generals rather than ostracising them will coax them to end their crackdown on pro-democracy activists led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Alatas said ASEAN's approach has helped ease political and economic problems in Myanmar.

"Any objective observer would see that there have been some very positive developments," he said, including last year's release of Suu Kyi from

house arrest.

Despite this, Western countries are expected to raise the issue of coordinated sanctions against Myanmar during talks after the meeting.

Alatas said ASEAN officials will listen but aren't likely to be swayed.

Reuters adds from Washington: The United States, faced with opposition from Asian countries, will not press sanctions against Myanmar. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said on Wednesday.

"I think that we do not see a present role for sanctions," he told Reuters in an interview.

"But we want to have a discussion with other countries in the region to see what steps they might be prepared to take to try to ensure that the regime in Myanmar does not take additional repressive action and provides more openness for their people," he said.



US President Bill Clinton (R) leans towards US First Lady Hillary Clinton Wednesday in the East Room of the White House during a ceremony for the Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies Programme. Arkansas court watchers are expecting President Clinton to testify by Videotape Wednesday in the criminal trial of two former associates.

— AFP/UNB photo

Netanyahu faces Arab anger for hardline stands in Cairo

CAIRO, July 18: Benjamin Netanyahu arrived Thursday in Egypt on his first visit to an Arab country as Israel's prime minister, facing Arab anger over his hardline stands regarding the Middle East peace process, reports AP.

Egyptian newspapers greeted Netanyahu with a barrage of insults that reflected the Israeli prime minister's unpopularity here.

"No to the Rotten Smell in the Land of Egypt," read the banner headline Thursday of the opposition newspaper El-Ahram. It was a play on Netanyahu's name in Arabic which means rotten smell.

Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal el-Ganzoury met Netanyahu at Cairo International Airport, and the two then left for Egypt's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the burial site of the late President Anwar Sadat, who was assassinated by Muslim militants in 1981.

Sadat was the first Arab leader to make peace with Israel after a remarkable visit to Jerusalem in 1977.

Netanyahu then was to meet President Hosni Mubarak for two rounds of talks.

Although one of the Middle East's most moderate countries, Egypt has forcefully led the campaign to slow normalization with Israel since Netanyahu's election less than two months ago.

With the backing of Syria and Saudi Arabia, Egypt last month convened the Arab world's first summit in six years and has helped orchestrate a flurry of meetings among Arab leaders.

The summit was one sign that Netanyahu's victory is doing more to unify the divided Arab world than years of diplomacy.

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Scientists seeking biological weapons to fight mosquito

PANAMA CITY, Florida, July 18: Scientists are seeking ways to silence that annoying, threatening whine in the night — the mosquito buzzing around you, its prey, reports AP.

These days they're studying how to turn biology against the mosquito. They're investigating hormones, diseases, toxic spores, cannibal insect larvae and microscopic relatives of spiders and crabs.

They believe these could be alternatives to insecticides that can be expensive, could harm the environment and may lose effectiveness as mosquitoes build up resistance to them.

"Those problems are probably never going to go away," says US Department of Agriculture Researcher Don Barnard. "So, whether you want to do it now or whether you want to do it 20 years from now, there's going to have to be alternative methods in place."

The USDA Centre for Medical, Agricultural and Veterinary Entomology in Gainesville, where Barnard is lead mosquito-and-fly researcher, is working on the problem. So are two state laboratories in Florida, home to more than 70 species of the bloodsucking pests.

One approach may be to fight mosquitoes with mosquitoes.

Florida A and M University's John A. Mulrennan Sr Laboratory in Panama City is studying cannibals that in the larval stage eat the

larvae of other mosquitoes. As adults they feed on plant nectar, so are harmless to people.

The research began a few years ago with a gigantic tropical species from Burma, but the inch-long (2.5-centimetre-long) creatures proved better actors than killers. The lab provided some of the giants for the movie "Jurassic Park." But the species doesn't adapt well to Florida's climate.

"There's a problem with its ability to overwinter in Florida," said lab director John Smith. Scientists are looking at other cannibal species that may adapt better.

The university's researchers also are studying microscopic arthropods, called copepods, that feed on newly hatched mosquito larvae.

They are easy to rear and their tiny size means they can be applied to mosquito breeding areas, such as stagnant ponds, with conventional pesticide equipment such as backpack sprayers, Smith said.

A bacterium isolated in Egypt also can be applied like an insecticide. A larva "will pull these little toxic spore crystals into its body thinking it's food," Smith said. "Once it's inside, it basically dismembers the mosquito."

Another potential weapon under study at the university lab is a synthetic hormone that keeps juvenile mosquitoes from molting into adults. Although effective, it doesn't work well

in highly polluted environments or if not applied at just the right time, Smith said.

Scientists at the University of Florida's Medical, Entomology Laboratory in Vero Beach are trying to find out what it is about the Asian tiger mosquito that seems to be killing off yellow-fever mosquitoes.

The answer could have major implications for worldwide disease control.

The yellow-fever mosquito is the top spreader of its namesake disease and Dengue fever.

The Asian tiger's advance has correspondent with a decline of yellow-fever mosquitoes, something even a multimillion-dollar eradication effort failed to do in the 1960s, said Florida professor George O'Meara.

One theory is the Asian tiger may be carrying certain pathogens that do not affect them but are deadly to yellow-fever mosquitoes, O'Meara said.

Federal researchers already are preparing to field-test a pathogen from Thailand that has been effective in the laboratory against the larvae of the yellow-fever mosquito.

The USDA's Barnard said state and federal environmental regulators have given permission to release the protozoan in semicontrolled conditions at Gainesville. A similar test is being planned for Argentina.

The protozoan has an advantage over some of the other biological alternatives, such as copepods, hormones and toxic spores, because it wouldn't have to be repeatedly applied by mechanical means, Barnard said.

It would be spread by female mosquitoes and then propagate itself in the environment.

The federal lab also is studying a tiny nematode. The wormlike parasite, isolated in Argentina, lives inside a mosquito larva, growing to eventually take up most of its body cavity.

"You can look at these things under the scope and you can see these nematodes would around inside," Barnard said. "It's like a non-stop corkscrew."

Although biological alternatives have shown promise, no one is ready to declare victory in the mosquito war.

"We're always really careful about talking about biocontrol agents because it's an area of research that expectation just hasn't been met in terms of field application," Barnard said. "A lot of people are pretty skeptical."

But, he said, mosquitoes already have shown they can develop resistance to chemicals and there are limits on how much insecticide formulas can be changed to overcome that ability.

"When that peters out, if there isn't something in place then we won't have any way to control mosquitoes," Barnard said.

10 bodies of Russian POWs found

Troops get mandate to use force against Chechens

MOSCOW, July 18: Russian troops, battling separatist guerrillas in the southern Chechen region, have been given a mandate by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin to use force to keep the peace process on track, reports Reuters.

A meeting on Wednesday of Russia's state commission on Chechnya mapped out a strategy for handling the conflict for the rest of this year, ITAR-Tass news agency said.

Chernomyrdin and other participants pledged to adhere to President Boris Yeltsin's plan for ending the fighting, announced with great fanfare during his re-election campaign.

An upsurge in fighting almost immediately after Yeltsin's July 3 election victory has raised doubts about

Moscow's commitment to a peaceful settlement to the 19 month conflict.

A six week truce agreed in May has collapsed and the warring parties blame each other for violating the accords.

Chernomyrdin, who is not regarded as hardliner on Chechnya lashed out at rebels on Wednesday for stirring up violence and said military force would be applied if necessary to restore peace.

AP adds, authorities on Thursday found the bodies of 10 Russian POWs enslaved, tortured and then executed by Chechen rebels.

The bodies of four officers and six soldiers were found near the village of Khutuni in southeastern Chechnya, where Russian forces are pursuing a recent offensive against the separatists.

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