

Yeltsin turns his attention to sign deal with NATO

MOSCOW, May 13: President Boris Yeltsin boosted by a treaty aimed at formally ending the bloody war in Chechnya, turns his attention today to an elusive long-term pact with Russia's Cold War foe NATO, reports Reuters.

As he prepared for a new round of talks with NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, Yeltsin began a round of telephone diplomacy with Western leaders by calling French President Jacques Chirac.

Chirac hopes to host the signing of a treaty in Paris on May 27. Officials say it may give Russia security guarantees, such as assurances that the West will not advance nuclear arms into new member states, and a say in NATO decision-making.

But both Moscow, bitterly opposed to NATO's plans to admit former Soviet satellites in eastern Europe, and NATO, adamant it will not appease Russia to the detriment of new members like Poland, have said they cannot be certain of meeting that deadline.

Solana is due to hold new negotiations with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov this evening. As in the past, neither side plans to brief reporters and it seems unlikely there will be dramatic announcements, whatever progress is made.

Some Kremlin sources, as well as Western insiders, have said Yeltsin has made up his mind to sign a deal this month. Analysts say that may prompt the Russian leader to gloss over differences to allow for a public show of diplomatic success.

The vaguely-worded peace treaty Yeltsin signed with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov on Monday was seen as an example of the Kremlin leader's determination to end a flagging negotiation process with a document setting out common views but risking skirting over the nub of the dispute.

Yeltsin said the accord consisted of only one point: "A peace treaty has been signed. This is the gist of it."

As provided by the Kremlin, there were three points:

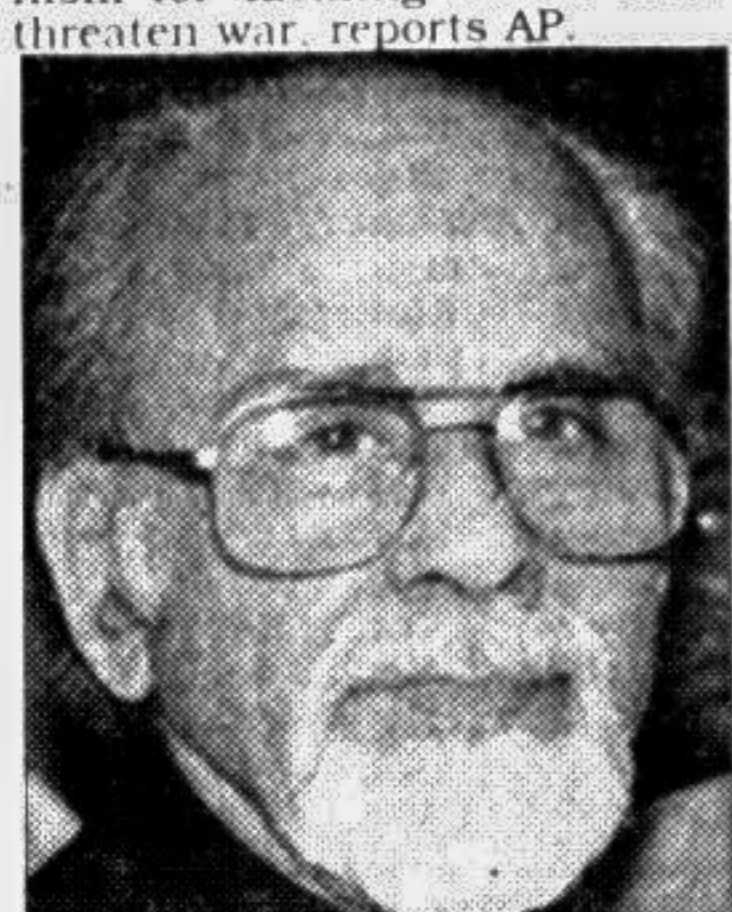
That Russia and the breakaway Muslim region would never again resort to the violence that culminated in a 21-month war and tens of thousands of deaths up to August 1996.

That relations would follow "norms of international law."

Both leaders, speaking after the signing in the Kremlin, said the document marked the end of four centuries of conflict between Moscow and the North Caucasus people.

Talks between Gujral, Sharif may end Indo-Pak deadlock

MALE, May 13: On the surface, the achievements of the first India-Pakistan summit in four years appear modest. But the meeting bridged a chasm of mistrust and created a mechanism for tackling issues that threaten war, reports AP.



I K Gujral

Monday's talks between Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral of India and Pakistan's Nawaz Sharif saw a subtle but significant shift when the two men agreed to form working groups to negotiate their problems.

In so doing, India agreed for the first time to discuss Kash-

mir, the Himalayan territory claimed by both sides. And Pakistan agreed to de-link Kashmir — what it calls "the core issue" — from other problems like trade, boundary demarcations and visas.

"It is a major step in a step-by-step approach," said Shekhar Gupta, editor of the India Express, an influential daily. "The talks this time were held in a spirit of realism."

Meeting on a tropical resort island in the Maldives, Gujral and Sharif agreed to set up a hot line between New Delhi and Islamabad. They also arranged to release jailed fishermen who strayed into each other's waters and civilians who overstayed their visas.

Kashmir is an emotional issue for both countries. They have fought over it twice since the subcontinent was partitioned in 1947 at the end of British colonial rule. Kashmir now is divided between them.

A recent suggestion that the 30-year-old ceasefire line be recognised as a permanent border drew a barrage of protests in India. Pakistan constantly denounces alleged human rights abuses by the Indian army against Kashmir's populace.

Pakistan claims Kashmir because it has a Muslim major-

ity. It demands a referendum by residents on both sides of the frontier to decide which country they want to belong to. India's claim to Kashmir is based on the decision by its Hindu ruler at the time to accede to India.

In India's state of Jammu-Kashmir, a Muslim insurrection began in 1989 that so far has cost 16,000 lives. India accuses Pakistan of fomenting the rebellion with arms and training. Pakistan says its confines itself to diplomatic and moral support.

Kashmir almost triggered another war in 1990, with both sides capable of using nuclear weapons.

For both Gujral and Sharif, selling concessions to their politically volatile hardliners at home will not be easy.

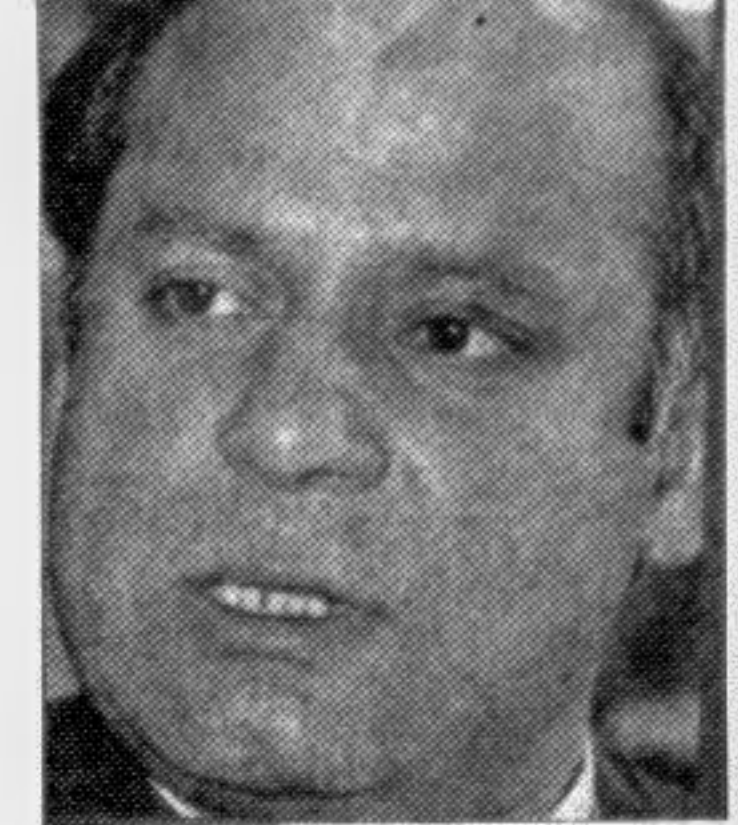
Sharif, who won an overwhelming majority in last February's election, has the political muscle. Gujral, on the other hand, heads a shaky coalition of 16 parties, and is susceptible to pressure from powerful Hindu nationalists in the opposition.

Gujral "has to prepare public opinion and give it to them in small doses," said Inder Malhotra, an eminent Indian political commentator.

Also significant in this

summit was the presence of key officials, boosting confidence that the directives of the two leaders will not be diluted by reluctant civil servants or sluggish bureaucracies.

Nevertheless, positions on Kashmir remain fundamen-



Nawaz Sharif

tally opposed. Both sides see it as a cardinal issue of sovereignty. Even with good will, it would take a long time to resolve such a sensitive 50-year-old dispute.

But, as Pakistan's senior diplomat Shamsah Ahmad said, "Now at least both sides are talking to each other."

Assam govt seeks more paramilitary forces to maintain law and order

GUWAHATI, May 13: The Assam government has urged the centre for more paramilitary forces to maintain law and order and protect vital installations in the state, reports PTI.

In a memorandum submitted recently to the Prime Minister, I K Gujral, the Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta said out of the 153 CRPF companies presently in the state 64 had been specifically earmarked for counter insurgency operations under the unified operations.

With ten CRPF companies deployed for neutral forces on the Assam-Nagaland border only 79 companies were left to tackle insurgent groups not operationally covered by the unified command and protect vital central government installations like the ONGC oil and power grid corporation.

1480 murdered in Pak Punjab in four months

ISLAMABAD, May 13: Around 1,480 murders have been reported in a wave of violent crime over the past four months in Punjab province, home to 60 per cent of Pakistan's 132-million people, police told a high court, reports AFP.

In the same period there were 1,892 robberies in the region, the chief of Punjab police informed the Provincial High Court in Lahore, the Associated Press of Pakistan news agency reported.

The police officials, appearing before a two-judge bench of the court on Monday said 12,441 people wanted in connection with serious crimes remained at large.

It was not clear whether the police figures included dozens shot dead in the province since January in attacks linked to sectarian unrest involving militant groups from the majority Sunni and minority Shiite Muslims.

The government has deployed troops in 10 cities and towns across Punjab to prevent outbreaks of violence during the current Islamic holy month of Muharram, which started on Friday.

Maoists kill 2 RPP activists in Nepal

KATHMANDU, May 13: Two people were killed and 13 injured in a clash between political party workers and hardline Communist insurgents in a remote village in western Nepal, officials said today, reports Reuters.

They said the incident took place on Sunday in Rolpa district when workers of Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand's Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), campaigning ahead of local polls, were attacked by Maoists.

sult, a growing young population seeking employment at a rate much higher than the region's economies can provide. Moreover, they note, there is international concern about "increasing extremism by both Islamic and Jewish activists, leading at times to terrorism...."

Their five-step programme for a future security architecture for the Middle East entails:

- 1) Refraining from adopting security policies that diminish the security of neighbours.

This would mean "greater awareness" by countries of the Middle East of what the authors saw as a "security dilemma," namely a neighbour's diminished security rarely translates to gains in a country's own well-being. Rather the pursuit of policies should be aimed at augmenting a country's security



Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral called on his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina at Kurumba Island resort centre in the Maldives on Sunday. — PID photo

Ross' mission hampered by major divisions 'Palestine to be declared independent state in '99 if negotiations fail'

RAMALLAH, West Bank, May 13: A top Palestinian official said yesterday that the Palestinians would unilaterally announce an independent state in 1999 if negotiations with Israel did not bring them a nation, reports AFP.

"The accords with Israel set the interim period as lasting for five years from the date of September 4, 1994. So the following day we will announce our independent state," said Ahmed Korei, President of the Legislative Council.

Korei made the comments in the West Bank self-rule area of Ramallah after meeting with a

delegation of Italian businessmen, lawyers and intellectuals.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has said in the past that a state will be announced at the end of the interim period, raising warnings by Israel of a sharp response if he does so.

The declaration of principles signed by Israel and the Palestinians in 1993 and the later "Oslo agreements" of 1994 launched self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza and set the end of the interim period in 1999.

The agreements also said negotiations for the final status of the Palestinians were due to be-

gin last March and be completed by 1999.

The Palestinians want to emerge from negotiations with a state and east Jerusalem as its capital. Israel has vowed not to divide Jerusalem and has demanded strict limitations on any eventual Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross' mission to the Middle East is being hampered by "major divisions" between Israelis and Palestinians but will be extended, the State Department said Monday.

Spokesman Nicholas Burns said that the primary disputes were over Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem.

Palestinian officials have asked for the Jewish colonisation to be frozen as a pre-condition for resuming talks with Israel that were interrupted two months ago.

"We believe both sides are negotiating in good faith and want to reconnect, Burns said."

Asked about the possibility that King Hussein would intervene to get the talks moving, he said only that the sovereign was already playing a major role, and was a genuine peacemaker.

According to a senior Jordanian official, Ross asked Monday in Amman for King Hussein's help in pulling the discussions out of the impasse.

The US envoy has been shuttling back and forth between Israel and the Palestinian territories for the past week and will be in the region until the end of the week.

Sunday, he met with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in the West Bank. Saturday, he went to Egypt to meet with President Hosni Mubarak.



Recent TV grab of Saudi Arabian dissident Osama Bin Laden aired Sunday as he answers to a journalist's questions in an undisclosed location in Afghanistan, late March and beginning of April. Laden is a billionaire wanted by the United States and Saudi Arabia on charges of financing international terrorism. — AFP/UNB photo

Lankan forces move to capture key road link

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, May 13: The military met with stiff resistance from Tamil Tiger rebels as it launched an offensive Tuesday to capture a vital road link in northern Sri Lanka, military officials said, reports AP.

First reports said at least one soldier was killed. The rebels rained mortar and heavy machine gunfire on three advancing columns of troops which set out from three front line villages, officials said.

Covered by war planes, helicopter gun ships and artillery fire, the soldiers began the onslaught about 210 kilometres (130 miles) north of Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital, the officials said on condition of anonymity.

The offensive was aimed at recapturing a road linking the town of Vavuniya to Kilinochchi — an 88-kilometre (55 miles) stretch of shell-scarred highway that slices through thick jungles.

The road would give the government land access to the Jaffna Peninsula, which can now be reached only by air or sea which has hampered plans to rebuild the region destroyed during the 13-year-old civil war.

Local newspapers quoted military intelligence reports saying that the rebels had moved in large numbers from eastern Sri Lanka to the north

to dig bunkers and trenches along the highway, fearing a military offensive.

The last major battle with the rebels was last February when government troops retook the road to the isolated coastal town of Mannar town from Vavuniya after a 16-day fight.

Before moving into rebel territory, the army opened a continuous barrage of artillery fire as it moved up heavy armoured vehicles in preparation for the advance, aid workers confirmed.

"We were awakened to the deafening sounds in the morning (Tuesday). The offensive seems to have begun in a big way," said Sivamadhan Kishore,

a Sri Lanka Red Cross official in Vavuniya.

After the fall of their stronghold, Jaffna City, in December 1995, the rebels moved their headquarters to Kilinochchi. The troops by mid-1996 captured most parts of Jaffna Peninsula and later in September took control of Kilinochchi, driving the rebels into the jungles.

The rebels are fighting for a homeland for minority Tamils, who account for 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 18 million people. They claim discrimination by the Sinhalese, who control the government and military. The war has killed more than 48,000 people.

Asian community in UK hurt at non-representation

LONDON, May 13: The Asian community of the United Kingdom, a traditional vote bank of the Labour Party, is upset and hurt over non-representation on this largest ethnic minority group in the Tony Blair government, reports PTI.

With the Labour's massive sweep in the general elections, the community's hopes of getting a first-ever representation in the British Council of Ministers had heightened as the largest contingent of five Asians were elected on Labour Party ticket.

The feelings of the community were summed up by Manish Chotali, Secretary-General of the National Congress of Gujarati organisation in Britain, who said, "The Asian community was shocked at the exclusion of Keith Vaz, a firm Blair supporter and an able shadow

minister (during the conservative rule), from the new council announced by the new prime minister."

"Vaz is an important bridge between the new Labour and the Asian community and we hope that this omission would be rectified in the future so that Blair administration can truly reflect a one-nation government," Chotali said in a statement.

Vaz, who got re-elected from the Gujarat-dominated Leicester east constituency with an increased margin of about 20,000 votes, was hotly tipped to find a birth as junior minister in the Blair cabinet.

He is one of the five Asians who got elected on a Labour ticket, the other four being Pira Khabra, Marsha Singh, Ashok Kumar and Pakistani millionaire Mohd Sarwar.

Thatcher vows to fight challenges to her legacy

ORLANDO, Florida, May 13: Two weeks after voters in Great Britain swept from office the party she led into power in 1979, former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher vowed to fight the new government if it tries to dismantle her legacy of privatisation and lower taxes, reports AP.

"We shall challenge them and attack them on every policy that we think is not in accord with the things we created," said the former Conservative Party leader in a luncheon address to two British-American business groups in Orlando, her first appearance in the United States since the British election.

The Labour Party handily won the British elections earlier this month, winning the prime minister's office for the first time in 18 years and close to two-thirds of the seats in the Parliament, including

Thatcher's former seat. Thatcher attributed Labour's success to their adopting conservative policies. Earlier this year, Thatcher had criticised her party, and by default her successor, John Major, for moving too close to the center.

"One of the real problems of the last election was that I converted my opponents," Thatcher said Monday to audience laughter. "They were electable after 18 years because it was time for a change."

Thatcher said she expects labour to maintain conservative policies on privatization and income taxes. She was less certain if Labour would follow the Conservatives' resistance to participating in the European community.

"We'll have to watch and make sure it's not just a conversion of convenience but a conversion of reality," she said.

Ruling party survives no-confidence in Taiwan

TAIPEI, Taiwan, May 13: Taiwan's ruling party on Tuesday narrowly survived a no-confidence motion brought by opposition legislators capitalising on public outcry over rising crime, reports AP.

The 78-76 vote, with one abstention, underscored the ruling Nationalists' shrinking power base as they contend with a public perception that they have failed to root out corruption and guarantee law and order.

Public outrage was set off by the kidnap-murder of a popular singer's daughter — the latest of three recent high-profile slayings, all of them unsolved.

As lawmakers were voting in the legislature, the opposition

in the separate National Assembly managed to prevent President Lee Teng-hui from delivering a televised address, demanding that he first apologize to the public for his government's shortcomings.

Opposition deputies occupied the podium waving banners and wearing smocks festooned with protest slogans.

"Public safety has reached such a stage that we had no choice but to hold this protest to reflect the anxiety of the people," said New Party deputy Wang Chih-ping.

The no-confidence motion was introduced by the New Party and the Democratic Progressive Party in hopes of toppling Premier Lien Chan.

A new vision for Middle East security proposed

WASHINGTON, May 13: In yet another collaboration between an Arab and an Israeli scholar, a new vision for Middle East security has been advanced by two well-respected strategic analysts, the first, a science advisor to Jordan's King Hussein and the second, an Israeli arms control expert at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, reports AP.

At a luncheon at the Middle East Institute (MEI) on May 8, Abdullah Toukan and Shai Feldman underlined the need for thinking "differently" about the region's security and their feeling, as expressed in their book, that "the problems entailed in bridging the remaining gaps are not insurmountable."

Their just-released book is titled, "Bridging the Gap: A Future Security Architecture for

the Middle East." It is the first in a series on conflict prevention sponsored by the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict.

The gist of their joint effort is a five-point programme to overcome what they call the gap in the "threat perceptions and security concerns" between the Arab states and Israel. Regardless of whether these are justified or not, they write, "these threat perceptions were deeply held by Arabs and Israelis and had important behavioral consequences — first and foremost in defense doctrines and security policies."

The volatility of the region, they point out, is further compounded by the fact that it suffers a chronic shortage of water, and has "one of the world's largest refugee problems," with an average annual population growth of 3 per cent and, as a re-

sult, a growing young population seeking employment at a rate much higher than the region's economies can provide.

Moreover, they note, there is international concern about "increasing extremism by both Islamic and Jewish activists, leading at times to terrorism...."

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This would mean "greater awareness" by countries of the Middle East of what the authors saw as a "security dilemma," namely a neighbour's diminished security rarely translates to gains in a country's own well-being. Rather the pursuit of policies should be aimed at augmenting a country's security

without diminishing the neighbours' self-confidence.

2) Enhancing the process launched by the Middle East Arms Control and Region Security (ACRS) working group of the multilateral Middle East peace negotiations which were launched in Moscow in January 1992.

The authors advocate the establishment "without delay" of the Regional Security Center agreed upon at these talks, which are at present stalled after Israel commenced construction in March on its Har Homa settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

3) Expanding the Middle East track-II talks which in their opinion provide "important opportunities for informal exchanges among scholars and other non-officials in the region, allowing the parties to air their perceptions and concerns

in an uncommitted fashion."

It was actually at these informal get-togethers at various international settings that Toukan and Feldman cemented their relationship and agreed to put their thoughts in writing. Another joint effort between an Arab and an Israeli was undertaken by Sari Nusseibeh and Mark Heller when they collaborated on "No Trumpets No Drums: A Two-State Settlement for the Israel-Palestine Conflict."

4) Establishing a Middle East Cooperative Security Framework (MECSF) to enhance the security of the region's states through military and non-military means.

It is their view that this proposed framework would gradually replace the ACRS process and would enjoy "a high profile, thus illustrating that the re-

gion's states have moved from a narrow pursuit of national security to a serious effort to enhance regional security."

MECSF would be managed by the states in the region rather than the two co-sponsors of the peace process, the United States and Russia, a development that would demonstrate that the Middle East peace process has matured.

5) Ensuring the continued engagement of the United States in the Middle East.

They argue that the United States should continue to enhance the region's security "by facilitating the peaceful resolution of disputes, by helping deter aggression and extremism, by encouraging economic development, democratization and human rights, and by strengthening moderate government in the region."



Natasha Daniels reacts after being named 1997 Australian Penthouse Pet of the Year in Sydney Tuesday. The 23-year-old hairdresser from the Gold Coast wins over USD 50,000 worth of prizes as well as lucrative modelling contracts. — AFP/UNB photo