

US president says India a model for those building civil societies

Aziz Haniffa writes from Washington
US President Bill Clinton has said India is a "model for other nations and peoples" seeking to build civil societies and institutionalise democratic values and shares with the United States "a special responsibility for promoting peace."
In a message to participants gathered here to attend the annual conference of the Indian-American Friendship Council, Clinton said the interaction between the people of the US and India was "a process that has enriched us all and has fortified the foundations on which our democracy rest."
Clinton's message, read out at the conference by Democratic Rep Gary Ackerman, noted that "in recent years, the bonds we share have developed an important new dimension, as economic reforms in India have generated unprecedented levels of bilateral trade and investment."
Clinton said, "the United States seeks to further deepen these and other ties in ways that will advance the security and prosperity of our nations and help us to keep faith with the principles that guided the founders of our democracies."
The President recalled that "over the course of the past 50 years, India has confronted many challenges, but has stayed true to its founding principles."
"In so doing," he said, "India has become a model for other nations and peoples around the globe who are still striving to build civil societies, to institutionalise democratic values of free expression and religion and to find strength in their diversity."
Clinton declared that "as we mark the 50th anniversary of India's independence, we recognise that our two nations also share a special responsibility for promoting peace."
— India Abroad News Service

Foreign powers urged not to meddle in Afghan affairs Anti-Taliban factions to form provisional govt

MAZAR-I-SHARIF, Afghanistan, June 14: Factions opposed to Afghanistan's purist Islamic Taliban movement said on Friday they planned to form a new provisional government, reports Reuter.
Abdul Rahim Ghafoorzai, deputy foreign minister in the ousted government led by then-president Burhanuddin Rabbani, told a news conference the new administration would be formed mainly of technocrats rather than guerilla faction leaders.
"I can assure you that the new government will mainly consist of non-party members," Ghafoorzai said in the northern opposition-held city of Mazar-i-Sharif.
He said the previous administration, driven from Kabul by the Taliban last September, had failed to bring peace.
"In Kabul one of the main problems was a lack of adequately qualified intellectual members of the government who had the ability to bring about a substantial change," he added.
He said he hoped to announce the members of the new government within two days.
IRNA adds: Iran has requested the foreign powers to stop meddling in Afghanistan's internal affairs as it would further complicate the country's critical situation.
The only way for salvation of Afghanistan is to curtail foreign hands, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati told reports before leaving here.
He also called on belligerent sides in Afghanistan to find a solution to end the conflict in a manner that would be to the benefit of all factions.
"We believe that no single group could rule Afghanistan. Prolongation of the crisis will have adverse impact on security in the region including Central Asia, Velayati stressed.
Regarding Iran's foreign policy under the new administration, he said the principles will not change.
Velayati said the president elect Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami favours promotion of cooperation with neighbouring countries and regional states, the Central Asian republics in particular.
Meanwhile, Velayati met with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Apas Jumagulov Wednesday. The two officials expressed satisfaction over the present status of bilateral relations and voiced readiness to further promote them.
In the meeting, Velayati called for implementation of all agreements reached between the two countries and said that Iran was ready to transit Kyrgyz goods.

India fire Four cinema managers held

NEW DELHI, June 14: Indian police have arrested four managers of a cinema in the capital where 57 people died in a fire, and more people are expected to be detained, a senior official said today.
Deputy Police Commissioner Maxwell Ferreira told Reuters that authorities have accused the four managers of criminal negligence in the fire which broke out in the packed movie theatre on Friday.
"We have arrested four people from the cinema's management," Ferreira told Reuters by telephone. "More arrests are likely."
He said police had registered cases against the four for criminal negligence causing grievous hurt, causing deaths due to criminal negligence and use of combustible materials. The four were to be arraigned in a Delhi court today.
Ferreira said a small fire had broken out on Friday morning in the transformer which hours later exploded during the premiere of a Hindi movie. "We will have to see to what extent the transformer was repaired," the police official said.
Most of the victims were trapped in the balcony and suffocated when poisonous smoke engulfed the theatre, which was packed to its capacity of 1,050 seats, Ferreira said.



The head of the Syrian trade delegations Rateb al-Shallah (R) shakes hands Friday with his Iraqi counterpart Zouher Abdel Ghafour Younes during their meeting in a tent at Tanaf the Syrian-Iraqi borders 300 km from Damascus. An Iraqi delegation arrived in Syria for the first such visit since their mutual border was closed in 1982, indicating of growing warmth between the two countries. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Mubarak returns from Libya: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak yesterday returned home after winding up a two-day visit to Libya during which the two countries signed a cooperation agreement on trade and investment, Xinhua reports from Cairo.
According to the agreement, signed in Tobruk, Libya, the two countries will exert their utmost efforts to enhance bilateral trade. The two sides will also set up under the agreement joint investment adventures in the domains of iron and steel industry, petrochemicals, phosphates and cane sugar.

Gunmen kill 1 more in Karachi: Unidentified snipers yesterday shot dead one person after three overnight killings in the troubled Pakistani port city of Karachi, police said, AFP reports from Karachi.
A policeman and an activist of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) were among the three people killed in shootings by hit-and-run assailants in different parts of the city late Friday, they said. Since Monday 24 people have died here in renewed violence amid tensions between MQM and its breakaway group, MQM-Haqia.

Heavy rain kills 4 in Ghana: A daylong rainstorm caused flooding that killed at least four people and forced thousands to flee their homes, officials said Friday, AP reports from Accra.
The rain, which began Thursday morning, finally let up early Friday. Several bridges in Accra and in the port city of Tema were washed out, and roads were under water, creating huge traffic jams. Police reported two deaths in Accra and two in Tema, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) away. The meteorological services department said the 21-hour storm dropped as much as 178 millimeters (seven inches) of rain.

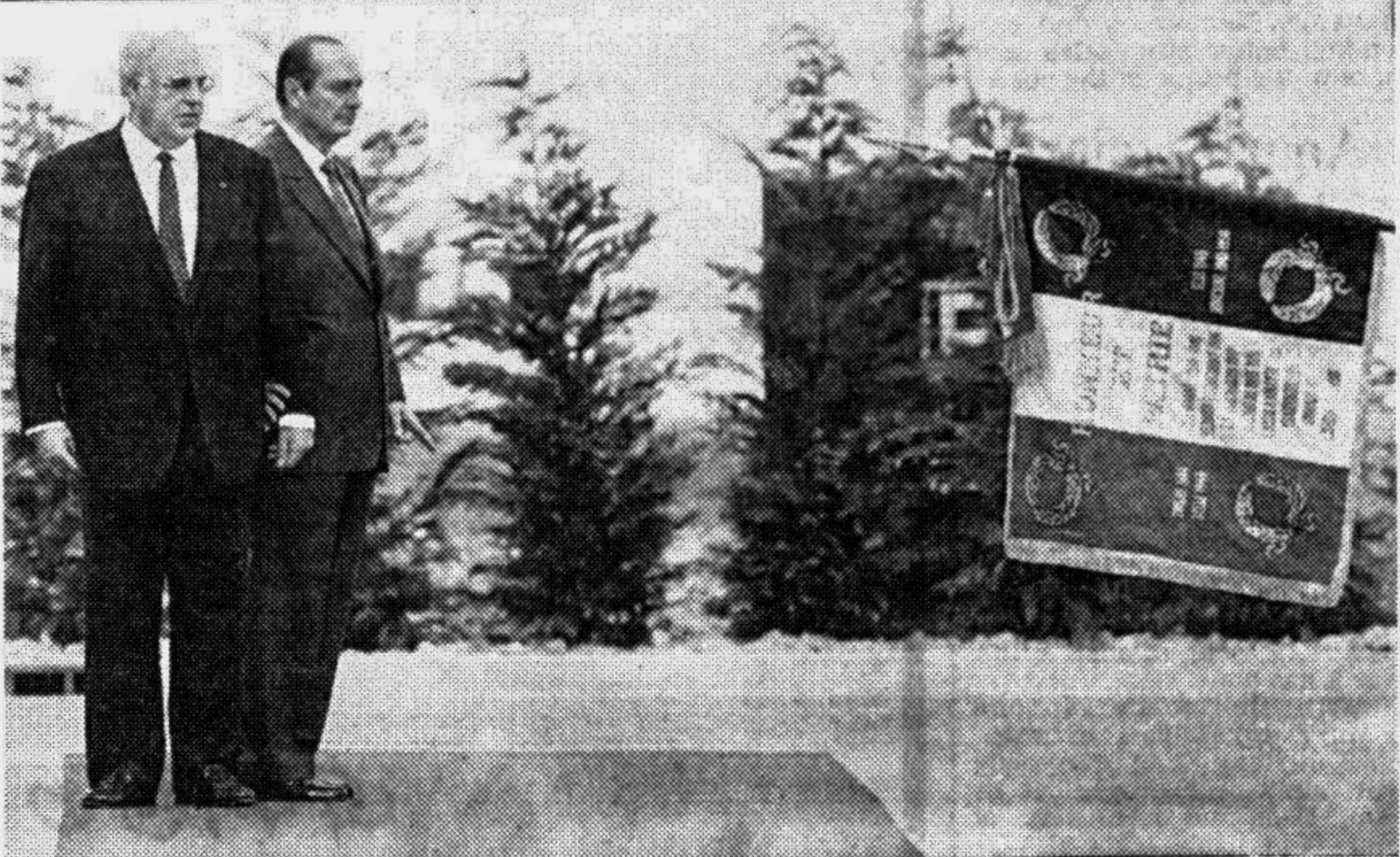
Deng's daughter visits HK: The youngest daughter of Deng Xiaoping has visited Hong Kong on the first known trip here by a member of the late Chinese patriarch's family since his death on February 19, a report said yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.
Deng Rong was seen shopping at a glitzy central department store Friday with her daughter and a female aide, the Apple daily said, adding that she bought six pairs of shoes and a selection of clothes. The article was accompanied by two photographs showing Deng standing at a store counter and covering her face as she left the shop.

US urged to settle F-16 dispute: Pakistan Friday urged the United States to settle for an out-of-court resolution of the F-16 aircraft deal and urged it to refund the 628 million dollars Islamabad paid for 28 of these aircraft, PTI reports from Islamabad.
A foreign office spokesman in Islamabad said Pakistan has called upon the US administration to find an amicable solution to the impasse now as the option of refund from the sale of the said aircraft. Pakistan finalised the 628 million dollar deal in 1989 but the delivery was blocked as US invoked the Pressler amendment banning arms sales to Pakistan because of its nuclear programme. Washington had identified Indonesia as a third country buyer but Jakarta has now decided against the purchase.

Australia ferries 138 boat people: Australia's Immigration Department yesterday ferried 138 boat people from an island off Queensland this week to the mainland, Reuter reports from Canberra.
A customs' boat on Friday guided the group to Thursday Island in the Torres Strait between Australia and Papua New Guinea after their trawler was stranded on a Sandbank, an Immigration Department spokeswoman told Reuters.
"We don't yet know where they are from or why they are here," she said.

China slams European Parliament: China's parliament yesterday slammed the European Parliament for what it called a baseless attack on Beijing's policies on human rights and Hong Kong, warning that the criticism had poisoned ties, Reuter reports from Beijing.
"We would like to seriously demand these people in the European Parliament that they should discard the Cold War mentality, conform to the trend of the times and do something useful for the healthy development of China-Europe relations," the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress, or parliament, said in a statement.

Romanian cargo ship sinks: A Romanian cargo vessel, the Calarasi, has sunk in choppy high seas off port St Johns in the Transkei, South Africa, after losing engine power on Friday morning, said a source reaching Johannesburg, Xinhua reports from Johannesburg.
A May Day signal was received via Durban Radio when the ship ran into trouble about ten nautical miles off Port St Johns, said the source. Twelve crewmen were airlifted to safety by South African Air Force rescuers after they were found floating in a dinghy not far from maritime rescue co-ordinating centre in Cap Town.



German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and French President Jacques Chirac listen to national anthems at the opening of the 69th Franco-German summit on Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

Clinton to launch campaign against racial divisions

WASHINGTON, June 14: President Bill Clinton is launching an ambitious campaign aimed at overcoming the still prevalent racial divisions in the United States by appealing for dialogue and tolerance, although details of the plan remain vague, reports AFP.
Clinton, who on Thursday named a seven-member commission that will study ways to improve US race relations, will speak on the subject in San Diego, California, on Saturday in what is being billed as a major milestone in his presidency.
On Friday, Clinton told journalists the time is ripe for such an initiative.
"I think this is the right time to do this because there is not a major crisis engulfing the nation that dominates the headlines everyday. The economy is strong, crime is down. Our position in the world is good," he said.
"We will soon be in the next few decades, a multi-racial society in which no racial group is in a majority," the president said, adding that he expects concrete proposals to improve race relations.
Even before his speech, however, Clinton's efforts are drawing criticism from some black organisations which are seeking more actions rather than words and from conservatives opposed to the system of racial quotas in place in some education and employment practices since the 1970s.
Clinton, a Democrat from the southern state of Arkansas, the challenge will be to overcome simple rhetoric and good intentions to offer something tangible to improve race relations.
With Republicans controlling Congress it will be difficult to obtain funding for any new social programmes aimed at improving the lot of minorities and urban ghettos.
But the White House maintains the effort is not an academic exercise.
"There will be things small and things consequential, large and policy driven," said White House spokesman Michael McCurry, mentioning the issues of housing, crime and health care.

Troops-rebels clashes leave 12 dead in Lanka

COLOMBO, June 14: Sporadic fighting between Tamil Tiger guerrillas and government troops left 12 people dead in the north and east of Sri Lanka, the military said Saturday, reports AP.
The series of clashes came on the sidelines of the main battle front north of Vavuniya, where columns of soldiers have been trying for the last four weeks to capture a vital highway to the Jaffna Peninsula.
In the eastern district of Ampara, rebels stopped a passenger bus near Ondachchidam village Friday and gunned down three policemen and two civilian passengers, said Major I Dewage, a military spokesman.
The attackers escaped into the jungle, 200 kilometres (125 miles) east of Colombo, the capital.
Also Friday, three guerrillas were killed in an attack on a military outpost at Putnamai in the district of Batticaloa, also on the east coast, said Dewage. One soldier was wounded.
In the northern Jaffna district, a land mine on the road near Chavakachcheri destroyed a military truck and killed four soldiers, said Dewage. Eight soldiers were wounded in the incident 300 kilometres (185 miles) north of Colombo.
No developments were reported Saturday in the campaign to seize the northern highway, which is becoming one of the largest and operations of the 14-year war against the Tamil Tiger rebels.

Pol Pot flees to escape Khmer Rouge troops

PHNOM PENH, June 14: Pol Pot has been reported fleeing east along the northern Cambodian-Thailand border in an attempt to escape Khmer Rouge troops who have turned against him, a senior military commander said today, reports AFP.
"We see two options," said Deputy Chief of Staff Bhiek Bun Chhay. "One is that those loyal to Pol Pot lay down their arms and the second is that Pol Pot will kill all those loyal to him and kill himself."
"My guess is that he will kill all of them and then kill himself," Bhiek Bun Chhay said.
According to the commander, Pol Pot was being carried on a stretcher, and about 200 to 250 men still loyal to him were believed to be about 13 kilometres (eight miles) west of the historic Preah Vihear Temple which sits on a mountain that abuts the border.
Thai soldiers had reportedly sealed off their side of the border in that area to prevent any chance of escape north, he said.
He added that five out of the six remaining Khmer Rouge divisions, about 1,000 men, had turned against Pol Pot. Only one, Division 801, led by the guerrilla supreme's portage, Commander Sarouen, remained loyal.
Nhiek Bun Chhay, speaking to reporters at the home of First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, said that 95 per cent of Pol Pot's former guerrillas were in pursuit and intended to capture the notorious architect of the "killing fields" alive.

Lanka to project country's positive image to world

COLOMBO, June 14: Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry said today it was stepping up efforts to project a positive image of the war-torn country to the world, reports Reuter.
A ministry statement said the government would appoint communications experts to its missions in key capitals.
"These officers will engage in projecting a positive image of Sri Lanka from their respective stations and endeavour to correct any misperceptions entertained in some quarters in these countries," a ministry statement said.
Sri Lanka has been plagued by negative publicity from fighting between its armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels.
Officials said the main aim behind the appointments was to counter LTTE propaganda.



Spanish chefs serve a giant paella from one of seven enormous pans for about 15,000 people in Madrid Friday at a benefit for UNICEF. — AFP/UNB photo

US dismisses reports on progress in ME peace

WASHINGTON, June 14: The US State Department dismissed reports of progress in Mideast peacemaking Friday, reports AP.
"We can't point to any particular progress," spokesman Nicholas Burns said as an Egyptian diplomat, Osama el-Baz, held talks in the region alternately with Israelis and Palestinian leaders.
There were reports that Palestinians and Israelis were moving toward the negotiating table and that Israel had agreed to slow construction of a housing project for Jews in the Jerusalem area.
But, Burns said, "I don't know of any change on Har Homa," as the project is known in Hebrew.
Israel's announcement in March it would build on disputed land touched off a Palestinian uproar. And then, a Palestinian death threat against any Arabs who sold land to Jews caused a stir in Israel.

Israel reviews laser-based air defence system

LOS ANGELES, June 14: Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai on Friday reviewed the world's first laser-based air defence system designed to use in northern Israel against Katyusha rockets, reports AFP.
Mordechai expressed hope that the tactical high energy laser (THEL) would be particularly helpful in protecting border towns like Kiryat Shmona, which has already been hit by a deadly Katyusha rocket attack.
He stopped here on a weaponry and aircraft tour of military installations and defence contractors in Arizona, Texas and Minnesota before heading off next week for the Paris Air Show.
The 89 million dollars project is still under development. If future tests prove successful as were to be conducted at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico in February, deployment in Israel could begin mid-1998.
TRW spokesman said that the company's laser defence system would allow Israel to respond immediately to rocket threats at a fraction of the cost of the Patriot missiles that are normally used against the rockets.
Katyusha rockets have been used in warfare since World War II, but they have since been improved to be more lethal and can now be fitted with chemical and biological warheads.
The laser-based air defence system would enable a gunner and commander to visually spot the rockets and initiate an automatic tracking and firing response that could be stopped only by a manual override.
"This is designed to protect settlements," said Brooks McKinney, TRW's public relations manager. "It will be very, very good at protecting civilian populations and military facilities."

European Parliament urges India to save tigers

LONDON, June 14: The European Parliament, in an unprecedented move, has passed a resolution calling on India to enact an emergency action plan to save tigers, reports PTL.
The resolution, which was passed last night, urged the Indian Prime Minister, I K Gujral to reconvene the Indian Board for Wildlife under his chairmanship to enact the action plan on tigers in cooperation with state chief ministers.
The passage of the European Parliament resolution comes in the wake of an emergency session of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in the Zimbabwean capital of Harare.
Indian organisations who are present in strength in Harare are also canvassing for continued ban on ivory trading.

Journalist's train journey experience thru' Beijing-HK direct route

ON THE BEIJING-KOWLOON TRAIN, June 14: As the train cut through the golden wheat fields of central China, Mrs Chi, proud member of Hong Kong's elite Jockey Club, plied her new friend with stories, advice and mineral water, reports AP.
Get a Hong Kong bank card, she counselled—they can also be used in neighbouring China to draw Hong Kong dollars or Chinese yuan.
An Hui, a bookish 27-year-old student of robotics from China's industrial northeast, listened intently. She is taking up a two-year research post at Hong Kong's highly regarded University of Science and Technology and bubbled with excitement at the prospect of her first visit to the British colony.
By the time the train reached Hong Kong's Kowloon station, the two women had exchanged phone numbers. "Call if you have a problem," Mrs. Chi said.
Another contact made. Another friendship forged. As Hong Kong counts down the final days to its July 1 reunification with China, connections like these are smoothing the way at a day-to-day human level.
The train on which An Hui and Chi Tai Lihua shared a comfortable compartment also is tying Hong Kong closer to Beijing. Rushed into service 44 days before the handover, the train is the first to link China's capital directly with Hong Kong on the southern coast.
Before the 30-hour, 2,471-kilometre (1,532-mile) service was inaugurated May 18, rail passengers had to change trains or walk across the border.
The new train, since joined by direct service between Hong Kong and Shanghai, still stops for a cumbersome customs check near Guangzhou, capital of southern Guangdong province.
But the border crossing itself is seamless.
Train 97 is numbered to match the year of the handover, and in contrast to the squalor and surliness travelers often experience on other Chinese trains, this one has new mint-green decor, comfy beds and friendly service.
Attendants in crisp white uniforms stood in each carriage and told boarding passengers to "approach us with any problem."
They snapped to attention each time the train pulled into a station, and polished the hang rails before travelers got off.
The service is specifically geared to meet the demands of pampered Hong Kong travelers. It's in mundane ways like this that Hong Kong hopes consumer power will gradually raise China's standards.
Setting out at 7:30 am from Beijing West Station, Asia's largest, Train 97 rolled sedately along at an average 90 kph (55 mph), giving passengers plenty of time to take in the view and piece together the vast, diverse tapestry that is China.
Heading south, the air grew steamy. Jade-green rice paddies replaced wheat fields. The drawl of Mandarin gave way to southern China's singsong dialects.
The train's 11 stops included Changsha, near where a young Mao Tse-tung once led a failed uprising, and Guangzhou, where his successor, Deng Xiaoping, sheltered before seizing power and unleashing China's capitalist revolution.
The train has a dining car, and on the station platforms, vendors sold bags of boiled eggs, steaming bowls of roast chicken legs, beers and Cokes.
Many compartments were empty, possibly because Chinese need permits to enter Hong Kong, or because tickets are costly for the average Chinese. Sleepers cost 706 to 1,191 Hong Kong dollars (91 to 154 dollars) one way. But that's still much less than the average air fare of nearly 2,300 Hong Kong dollars (300 dollars).
Travelers included a young doctor from Beijing's Union Hospital, heading to Prince of Wales Hospital in Hong Kong to study intestinal disorders; a Malaysian tourist; a Chinese engineer looking forward to two days of sightseeing in Hong Kong before going to Cambodia to build a factory.
In between breaks for instant noodles and swigs of tea, Mrs Chi regaled Ms. An with tales of Hong Kong: its passion for horse races and the stock market; its border arrangements that allow Hong Kong people to get Chinese license plates and drive across, its hopes that China will uphold Hong Kong's prosperity as promised.
"Hong Kong has had the good fortune to be managed by the English but be populated by hardworking Chinese" she said. "We'll just have to see if that good fortune continues. For that we'll have to look to the heavens, to God, and pray a lot."
In fact, Hong Kong's economic well-being has been tied to China since Deng Xiaoping opened the nation's doors to foreign investment in the late 1970s and Hong Kong entrepreneurs rushed in. Mrs. Chi and her husband, who moved from China to Hong Kong a few years earlier, invested in hotels and often go back to attend to business.
Mrs. Chi and Ms. An stared out the window as the train entered Hong Kong on a rusting steel bridge over the polluted Shenzhen River.
NEW YORK, June 14: The United States and North Korea ended three days of missile talks Friday without substantial breakthroughs but with an agreement to meet again this summer, reports AP.
US officials appeared satisfied that the North had agreed to continue the dialogue over ways to curb the communist government's missile programme.
The United States claims North Korea has sold long-range Scud missiles to Iran and Syria. Washington also is concerned over reports that the reclusive state is preparing to deploy long-range Rodong I missiles capable of hitting South Korea and much of Japan.
In 1993, North Korea test-fired a Rodong missile toward the Sea of Japan, which divides the peninsula from Japan. The missile has a range of 620 miles.

US, ROK missile talks end

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