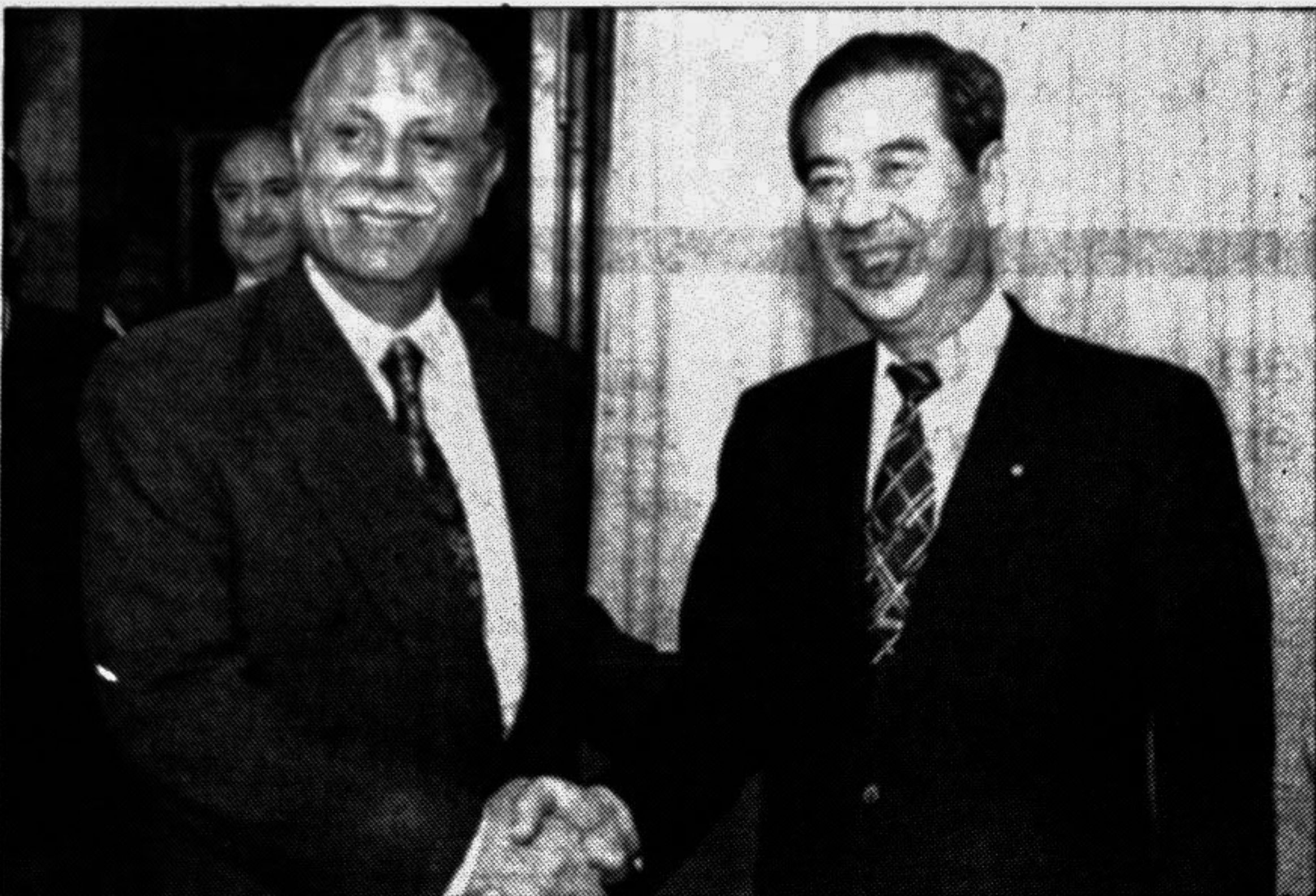


International



Pakistani Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub (L) receives his Japanese counterpart Yukihiko Ikeda at Islamabad international airport lounge, Monday. Ikeda, who is to travel to New Delhi from Islamabad on Wednesday, is expected to try to persuade Pakistani and Indian government leaders to review their objections to signing Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). — AFP/UNB photo

AICC session : Mamata calls parallel programme

CALCUTTA, July 22: The rebel Congress MP, Mamata Banerjee, yesterday challenged the party high command by announcing a parallel programme on August 9, during the AICC plenary session here and dared them to expel her, reports PTI.

Banerjee, who stopped short of announcing the formation of a new party, said that the "final" would be on August 9. The restive crowd cheered her when she said this at a rally here organised in memory of the 13 Youth Congress workers killed in police firing on this day in 1993.

Giving a broad hint that they might float a new outfit, Pankaj Banerjee, MLA and her close associate, said that they would file tickets and symbols to the 65,000 candidates in next year's Panchayat election.

Training guns at the high

command and especially CWC member, Pranab Mukherjee, she alleged that they had made a deal with the CPI-M to capture power at the centre.

WBCC, meanwhile, demanded that AICC take an early decision on Mamata who repeatedly attacked them.

WBCC sources further said that she was damaging the party by attacking the leadership in public meetings. Since the WBCC could not take any step against her as she was an MP, AICC should not make any delay in taking a decision in this regard.

Banerjee alleged that Mukherjee advised the AICC chief, Sitaram Kesri to make friends with the CPI-M for power at the centre. "Mukherjee wants to be the vice-president of India while Kesri wants to become prime minister. I know

their politics and what they are upto."

A number of leaders including Sudip Bandopadhyay, Pankaj Banerjee and Sadhan Pandey wondered how Mukherjee, who has "no followings", decided the policies of the Congress.

Bandopadhyay also charged Mukherjee with scuttling the efforts of the high command to make a rapprochement between the two warring factions of the party.

Mukherjee, WBCC President, Somen Mitra and Dasgupta had joined hands to isolate and corner Mamata in the party, he charged.

Announcing the parallel programme during the AICC plenary, Banerjee, who just remained a primary member of Congress, said that she would prove who were the real Congress on August 9.

House chooses Bill Skate as new PNG PM

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea, July 22: Parliament on Tuesday chose Port Moresby governor Bill Skate as prime minister to lead the new government, which will be dominated by the former ruling coalition, reports AP.

The choice is remarkable because Skate had vowed since the June elections that he would not join forces with the former governing coalition — until Monday, when he and other opposition leaders flip-flopped and allied with them.

The new ruling alliance includes the country's four major political parties. Skate defeated former prime minister Sir Michael Somare by 71-35 in the 109-seat parliament.

He takes over as prime minister from Sir Julius Chan, who lost his seat in last month's election after 29 years in politics.

A member of the former ruling Pangu party, John Pundari, was elected speaker of Parliament, defeating a group of parties and independents headed by Somare.

Skate had campaigned against the former Chan government, accusing it of corruption and speaking out against its controversial plan to hire mercenaries to quell a secessionist rebellion on Bougainville island.

3 killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, July 22: Three people including a police officer were killed Monday in Pakistan's troubled city of Karachi, police said, reports AFP.

Inspector Aslam Hyatt, in his 30s, was attacked by unidentified gunmen while sitting with his friends on the roof of a building under construction in the city's eastern Gulshan-e-Iqbal area.

Doctors said 15 bullets hit him. Another person was shot dead in city's eastern Gulshan-e-Iqbal area, police said, adding that they had found a bullet-riddled body in the western district of Orangi.

Around 400 people have been killed in Karachi since January this year, including scores of political activists and at least 15 policemen.

Police have detained 2,029 people in a crackdown against criminals and terrorists in the city over the past fortnight.

Rains threaten pilgrimage to Amarnath Cave

SRINAGAR, July 22: Rain was slowing a pilgrimage by 50,000 Hindus to a mountain cave in Kashmir, where land-slides and freak storms killed 250 people during last year's devotions, reports AP.

Police, mindful of the disaster last year during the annual trek to the Amarnath Cave, asked devotees to halt when rain began Monday in the mountains. The group was later allowed to proceed, but a new group hoping to begin the arduous three-day trek on Tuesday was also stopped because of rain.

The pilgrimage takes Hindus through India's only Muslim majority state, and militants seeking independence have in past years threatened devotees. But this year, in an apparent attempt to soften their image, two of the largest pro-separatist groups, Hizbul Mujahideen and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, issued statements in local newspapers welcoming the pilgrims.

"There is no threat from any militant organisation, but we are not leaving anything to chance," said Kul Bhushan Jandiyal, the government spokesman in Srinagar.

More than 5,000 soldiers were guarding the 45-kilometre (28-mile) trail pilgrims will take to a cave where they will worship a giant stalagmite representing Shiva, the god of destruction. A new moon on Sunday heralds the beginning of the pilgrimage, which by tradition must be completed in a month.

A 100-kilometre (62-mile) bus ride from Srinagar takes the pilgrims to the resort town of Pahalgam, from where the walk to the cave begins.

Cabinet reshuffle likely in next 2 weeks

Probe commission urges Arafat to sack corrupt ministers

GAZA CITY, July 22: A special commission investigating corruption in the Palestinian Authority urged Yasser Arafat Monday to sack several ministers and senior bureaucrats for misappropriating public funds and abuse of power, says AFP.

Arafat's spokesman announced later that the Palestinian leader was expected to reshuffle his government in the next two weeks, but said the decision was taken before the commission's report was published.

The report detailed a litany of financial mismanagement within the self-rule authority.

"It is not only a waste of money, it goes well beyond that, it is a question of bad management, lack of experience and violating regulations," said Tayeb Abdel Rahim, the authority's secretary general who

chaired the commission.

Arafat created the commission to investigate an internal audit which found that some 326 million dollars, 40 per cent of the self-rule government's budget, had been wasted or mismanaged by authority departments in 1996.

"Official accounts of certain ministries were opened in the name of the minister, without the Finance Ministry being notified, and grants and foreign aid were deposited in these accounts, which were not registered in the ministries' budgets, the report said.

The 127-page report, issued after a two-month investigation, was presented to the Palestinian president with recommendations that several ministers and senior officials be sacked, but Abdel Rahim would

not identify them.

"There are such recommendations, it is up to the president to decide," he said.

Another committee member, Judge Majid al-Masimi, said those implicated in the report were "ministers, director-generals of ministries and other senior officials."

"We recommend that the people be given satisfaction," Masimi said.

Arafat's spokesman Marwan Kanafani said the Palestinian leader was planning a Cabinet reshuffle in the next two weeks "in order to tackle the coming times which promise to be more difficult both on the economic and political fronts."

He denied it was connected with the corruption report.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Justice Minister Freih Abu Med-

dein tendered his resignation because of "Administrative problems" but Arafat has yet to accept it, Kanafani said.

Palestinian sources said Abu Meddein wanted to protest against Arafat's nomination of more than half a dozen judges last week without informing him.

If his resignation is accepted, it would be among the first by a minister in Arafat's authority.

Abu Meddein was a top Arafat lieutenant in the Palestinian leader's Fatah Movement in the Gaza Strip during the 1987-93 uprising, or intifada, against Israeli occupation.

In the corruption report, Palestinian ministers were cited for "Abuse of power and misappropriating money from their ministries."

Pakistan to send list of nominees for 8 JWGs

Tariq Butt writes from Islamabad

Pakistan will send to India early next month a list of its nominees for the eight joint working groups (JWGs) which the two countries have agreed to set up to tackle outstanding bilateral issues.

Islamabad is firming up its strategy about the composition and methodology of the JWGs which the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries had decided on in their talks held here in June.

A marathon meeting of officials of several Pakistani ministries and departments was held here over the weekend as a follow-up to the foreign secretaries' talks.

"I am sure the same exercise (consultation to formulate a follow-up action on the outcome of the secretaries' talks) must be under way in India. Once a plan is drawn up, both

sides will exchange notes on account of it," acting Foreign Secretary Khalid Saleem said. Both sides will formalise something before they enter into the next round of talks in New Delhi in September this year.

A senior official told IANS that Pakistan would not go against any international agreement relating to any dispute with India while deciding about the composition and methodology of the JWGs.

More consultations would be held among different ministries and departments on the same lines. The list of nominees will be sent to India through diplomatic channels.

The secretary-level talks were resumed in March this year after more than three years.

— India Abroad News Service

US urges Hun Sen to consider decision

Cambodia appeals for entry into ASEAN

KUALA LUMPUR, July 22: Cambodia is appealing for entry into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations when the trading group meets on Wednesday to admit Laos and Myanmar, reports AP.

Earlier this month, ASEAN decided to put off Cambodia's admission to the regional grouping following a violent coup July 5 by Hun Sen, one of the country's two prime ministers.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told reporters that a request had been received from Cambodian Foreign Minister Ung Huot.

"We foreign minister have certainly to sit and discuss that since it was a formal letter to us," Abdullah said.

He said they would also listen to reports from an ASEAN

delegation that met last week with King Norodom Sihanouk, ousted First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh and Second Prime Minister Hun Sen.

ASEAN's stance will depend a great deal on the report by the delegation, which comprised Foreign Ministers Ali Alatas of Indonesia, Domingo Siazon of the Philippines and Prachuch Chaiassarn of Thailand, said Abdullah.

Abdullah, acting as spokesman of ASEAN, said that by admitting Burma the group could "continue interacting with them."

Reuters adds: The United States on Monday urged Cambodia strongman Hun Sen to consider his decision not to cooperate with a regional mediation effort for his crisis ridden country.

Opposition jets pound Taliban posts as fighting continues

KABUL, July 22: Heavy fighting raged north of the beleaguered Afghan capital Tuesday as opposition jets pounded Taliban positions and the two sides waged a blistering artillery duel, reports AP.

A steady stream of refugees packed into trucks and on foot trudged toward Kabul to escape the fighting, according to eyewitnesses and reporters.

The occasional pickup truck with dead and wounded Taliban soldiers roared down the rocket-riddled road toward the Afghan capital.

Taliban soldiers were trying to hold back an onslaught by an opposition coalition, which has made some significant gains in recent days.

On the weekend the Taliban lost some key territory. Opposition soldiers pushed them out of Charikar, the capital of Parwan province, some 60 kilometres (36 miles) north of Kabul and Baghram Air Base, about 40 kilometres (24 miles) north of the capital.

The opposition alliance, led by former military chief Ahmed Shah Massoud and Uzbek warrior, Malik Pahlawan, now is within rocket range of the capital.

But eyewitnesses said Taliban soldiers still control the high ground surrounding the capital making advances by opposition forces hazardous.

On Tuesday morning opposition jets pounded the Taliban's mountain top positions sending smoke billowing skyward. There were no immediate reports of casualties, but Taliban soldiers on the front line were nervous.

"Several times the Taliban positions came under bombardment. I saw one jet drop two bombs on the high ground," said an eyewitness who refused to give his name and fled with

his family when Taliban soldiers approached.

Several turbanned Taliban soldiers in pickup trucks attacked journalists trying to reach the front line.

They beat several of the journalists with sticks and

warned them to stay away from the front line.

There was no comment from any Taliban official in Kabul to explain whether the official Taliban position was to keep journalists away from the front line.



TV picture released Monday by WTN shows Afghan opposition alliance leader Ahmed Shah Masood addressing July 17 in Northern Afghanistan. The Taliban authorities admitted Sunday they had lost the northern provincial capital of Charikar to opposition troops led by Ahmed Shah Masood. The opposition stood its ground Monday after making key gains in a weekend of bloody fighting during which they claimed to have killed up to 700 Taliban warriors.

— AFP/UNB photo

NASA takes steps to preserve good communications with Pathfinder

LOS ANGELES, July 22: NASA engineers are taking steps to preserve good communications with the Mars Pathfinder after losing contact with the spacecraft over the weekend, reports AP.

Controllers were back in touch Monday with the spacecraft after communication problems held up weather data and pictures from the red planet.

"What a difference a day makes," said project manager Brian Muirhead at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Engineers used the renewed contact to radio up new software to avert the computer resets that plagued the mission on July 10, 11 and 14. Then they spent hours deciding which rocks the Sojourner rover would visit after moving away from a whitish rock called Scooby Doo.

30 massacred in eastern Colombia

BOGOTA, July 22: A right wing death squad massacred about 30 people in a remote village of eastern Colombia Red Cross and local officials said on Monday.

The attack took place in Mapiripan in Meta province over the weekend but Teddy Torbeum, head of the Red Cross in Meta province told Reuters the final death toll was not yet clear.

He said the mayor of Mapiripan this morning and he told me that at least 30 people had been massacred. But we will not know exactly how many dead there are until we can recover the corpse, Torbeum said in a telephone interview.

Half of world's people don't have access to a toilet: UNICEF

LONDON, July 22: Half of the world's people do not have access to a toilet or even a decent latrine, increasing the likelihood of epidemics of cholera and other illnesses that kill 2.2 million children each year, a UN report said, reports AP.

The number of people lacking decent sanitation has grown from 2.6 billion in 1990 to 2.9 billion, driven by population growth, urban crowding and pressures on the budgets of developing countries, the report said.

"As one organisation, we have a limited scope of influence," said Joe Crowther, the director of the field programme for Amigos de Las Americas, a US programme that sends teenagers to help poor communities in Latin America. "We can't eliminate it. The international community often focuses on one enviable issue when the basic things are often the greatest

killers."

At issue is waste contaminating water supplies, polluting open areas and attracting disease-carrying vermin. The problem is most acute in rural areas, where only 18 per cent of people worldwide have access to a toilet or latrine, according to UN statistics. In urban areas of developing countries, 63 per cent have decent sanitation.

However, the report used data from countries with widely varying definitions of "adequate" sanitation. For instance, Uganda reports that 80 per cent of households have access to adequate sanitation, but the figure shrinks to 3 per cent if pit latrines are excluded, the report said.

"Sanitation is not a sexy issue," said Dennis Warner, chief of rural environmental health at the World Health Organisation. "Governments often do not have a political commitment to working on it. They don't like to provide services to squatter set-

tlements because it makes the aid official. They hope the problem will go away, but it doesn't."

UNICEF, a UN agency, said the problem could be solved in 10 years for an amount equal to about 10 per cent of global military expenditures for one year. The cost of providing an adequate toilet or latrine ranges from 5 dollars to 60 dollars, it said.

The agency blamed the problem partly on the huge payments that industrialising countries must make on loans taken out during the 1980s.

Other experts blame the governments themselves. "The funds are available," says Jose Hueb, a sanitation engineer with the World Health Organisation in Geneva. "The question is the government's priorities."

Many developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, cut basic services such as sanitation construction due

to structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s, UNICEF said.

"The greatest problem is our lack of funds," said Georgina Kwesha, a diplomat at the Zimbabwean Embassy in London.

In practical terms, that may mean choosing between spending for sanitation or education, she said.

Christopher Chika, first secretary for the High Commission of Kenya in the United Kingdom, says sanitation cannot be a priority when the country is dealing with so many other problems.

Like most developing countries, Kenya has struggled with international debt since the 1970s. From 1981 to 1987, capital expenditures for water and sewage fell by a factor of 10.

But safe water is the country's priority, he said, and because a major part of the population is nomadic, "They are not in need of a latrine."

Last group of Nicaraguan rebel surrenders arms

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, July 22: A group of 387 rebels — believed to be the last — surrendered their weapons to authorities Monday in Nicaragua, during a ceremony headed by President Arnoldo Aleman and monitored by international observers, reports AP.

The group was part of an undetermined number — some say several hundred — of former Contra rebels who have rearmend in recent years to protest what they claimed was the failure by then — President Violeta Chamorro to give them land and financial help so they could return to civilian life.

Aleman, who was elected last year and took office in January, promised to provide that help.

"We will support you so that you can return to civilian life, so that you take up the plough and man the tractor... so that we truly respect our laws and life as civilized people," he said.

Nicaragua's government has been trying to disarm disgruntled former fighters of the 1980s

civil war. The group giving up their weapons on Monday, in a ceremony monitored by international observers from Europe and the Organisation of American States, was believed to be the last of them.

The weapons were dismantled and broken on the spot.

The disarmament in the village of Ayapal, 225 miles (360 kilometres) north of the capital, Managua, coincided with Aleman's launching a dialogue for peace. The initiative was aimed at achieving some understanding among the country's quarrelling political groups, especially the leftist Sandinistas.

For months the Sandinistas have been holding violent demonstrations to protest efforts by Aleman to sell off state enterprises nationalised by the Sandinistas and return hundreds of expropriated properties to former owners.

At least 50 people have been hurt in clashes between police and demonstrators over the past three weeks.

Annan agrees to Kabila's request to broaden probe into massacres

UNITED NATIONS, July 22: In another bid to appease the Congolese government, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has agreed to broaden an investigation into alleged massacres to include periods during the rule of deposed President Mobutu Sese Seko, reports AP.

Annan agreed that the investigation would look into alleged massacres starting in March 1, 1993, when Hutu refugees began to flee into the country from Rwanda, according to a letter released Monday.

The United Nations is planning to send a team to the former Zaire to look into allegations that forces of President Laurent Kabila massacred thousands of Rwandan refugees in the east of the country. Kabila's forces ousted Mobutu in May.

Kabila had refused to allow the mission unless the investigation looked into alleged killings before his revolution.

In a July 15 letter to Kabila, made public Monday, Annan said the scope of the investigation would now include violations that took place in eastern Congo from March 1993 and not simply during the seven-month Congolese rebellion.

Annan said he expected to receive the report by December. The concession was the latest the international community has won to Kabila in hopes of winning his approval for the investigation. US Ambassador Bill Richardson claimed in June that he had won a pledge from Kabila to allow the investigation starting July 7.

But the pledge proved to be less than firm. Kabila rejected a team of the UN Human Rights Commission, in part because he said the proposed team leader, Roberto Garreton of Chile, was biased against his government.