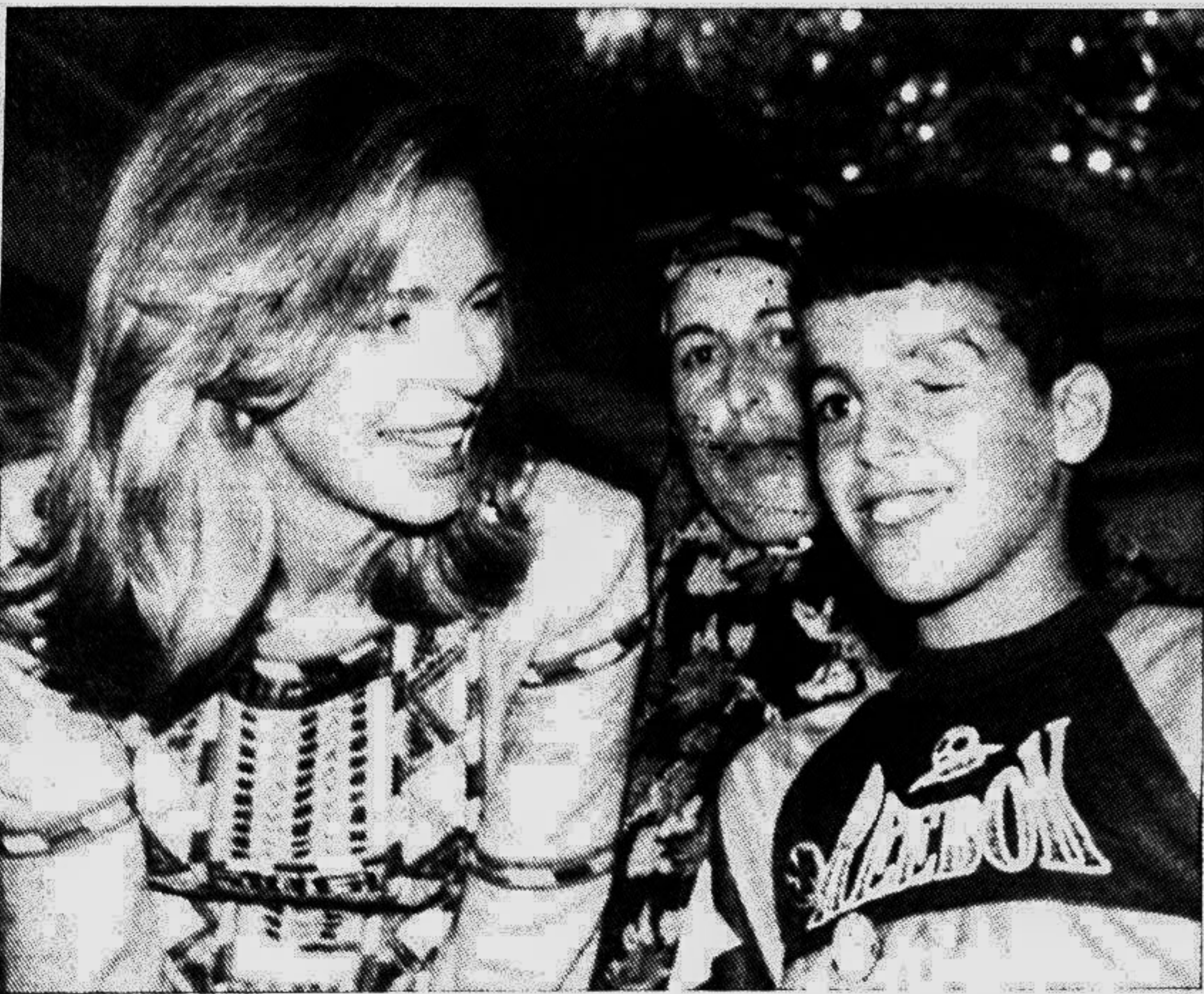


International

Conference in Amman

ME govts urged to sign int'l treaty banning landmines



Jordan's Queen Noor, the wife of King Hussein, shares a light moment with 12-year-old Jordanian landmine victim Ibrahim Qasem, on Sunday during the Landmine Conference in Amman. Qasem was injured in Modwara near the Saudi-Jordanian border in 1994.

AMMAN, July 13: Landmine campaigners urged Middle East governments on Sunday to follow Jordan's decision to sign an international treaty banning anti-personnel mines, reports Reuters.

A statement issued at the end of a two-day conference of landmine survivors called on governments to sign and ratify the 1997 treaty, describing it as "the best framework for the total elimination of anti-personnel mines."

Queen Noor of Jordan, pledging personal support for the landmine campaign, announced on Saturday her country would be the fifth in the Middle East to sign up to the treaty, which now has the support of 128 countries.

Noor described the Middle East and North Africa, where more than half of all deployed mines are believed to have been laid, as the world's "landmine heartland."

The statement said governments of the region, even if they refused to sign the treaty immediately, should take interim steps such as a permanent ban

on production or export of mines and setting a timetable to get rid of stockpiles.

It called on all countries in the Middle East to make public detailed information on production, stockpiles and exports of anti-personnel landmines, and urged all parties to conflicts not to use mines.

The statement also called for better treatment and rehabilitation of the thousands of people maimed by landmines every year.

Middle East and North African countries are littered with landmines, laid as long ago as World War II and also used in Arab-Israeli conflicts, the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf crisis.

But resistance to the anti-mine treaty remains strong in a region where borders are heavily mined and most countries regard the mines as a legitimate defence.

Apart from Jordan, the only countries to have signed the Ottawa treaty are Algeria, Tunisia, Qatar and Yemen.

Countries like Egypt, which says its land is littered with 23 million mines, say they need major financial assistance to locate and destroy the mines. Syria says it wants to focus on ridding the Middle East of other weapons of mass destruction, landmine activists say.

Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Israel are all still mine producers, but the campaigners say they hope countries like Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates might sign the treaty soon.



Pope John Paul II waves to the faithful from his vacation residence in Lorenzago di Cadore — in northern Italian region of Veneto, during the Angelus address Sunday. The pontiff, who is vacationing till July 21, invited people to make time during the age of technology to enjoy the beauties of nature.

Home Minister says Indian legal system has lost all credibility

NEW DELHI, July 13: India's corruption-ridden and inefficient legal system has lost all credibility, the number two in the ruling Hindu Nationalist government was quoted as saying today, reports AFP.

The Times of India quoted Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani as saying that the current problems of "corruption, criminalisation and arbitrariness" were affecting the judiciary.

"Until recently, it still commanded respect and radiated hope," Advani said, adding the judiciary needed "radical and deep reforms."

Instead of being part of the solution, it has ironically become part of the problem, he said.

"It is the judicial system, judges, lawyers, bar associations, litigants associations and allied institutions who should build a favourable climate in favour of reforms."

Legal cases in India can take a year or more to resolve.

with people detained for years without trial.

Several top politicians, including former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, are currently facing trial for corruption but the cases, plagued by adjournments, have been going on for a couple of years without progress.

The accused are all out on bail, with several of them continuing to serve in parliament. Corruption has hit the judicial system. A High Court judge was arrested last year in the eastern city of Calcutta for unaccounted wealth totalling millions of dollars.

Referring to the delays and steep legal cost, Advani said: "even for the innocent and wronged citizens, the sheer process of seeking justice become a punishment in itself."

"It is the judiciary has to regain its credibility, then we as a nation must act concertedly and fast."

Pakistan's nuclear programme has backing of Muslim world: Arafat

ISLAMABAD, July 13: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said today that Pakistan's nuclear programme matched that of Israel and had the backing of the Muslim world, reports Reuters.

"If Israel can have a nuclear weapon, then why should you not have it?" The official APP news agency quoted him as saying in a stopover in the Pakistani capital en route to China.

"There is very positive and strong reaction from (the) Muslim world to Pakistan's nuclear tests," Arafat was quoted as saying.

Israel has not admitted having a nuclear weapon but is widely thought to have developed one.

APP said Arafat had condemned economic sanctions which the government says have brought it close to default on 30 billion dollar of foreign debt.

Pakistan has shunned the label "Islamic Bomb" used by some commentators to describe the six devices which Pakistan said it tested at the end of May following five tests the same month by arch rival India.

'Hun Sen's party will artificially win majority in July 26 polls'

TRAM KOK, July 13: Two weeks before Cambodians are scheduled to vote opposition politician Sam Rainsy said Monday the election would be "a farce" aimed at legitimising power seized by strongman Hun Sen in a coup last year, reports AP.

He predicted that Hun Sen's ruling party will "artificially" win a majority in the July 26 polls, even though, if the elections were free and fair, "the majority of the people in Cambodia would vote for change."

"The next election is going to be a farce with a foregone conclusion," Sam Rainsy said, after speaking to a crowd of about 500 supporters at a rally 90 km southeast of Phnom Penh.

The elections are the first since last July's coup, when Hun Sen ousted Prince Norodom Ranariddh as his co-prime minister, shattering a tense dual premiership formed after UN-sponsored elections in 1993.

In an effort to gain international legitimacy and aid that was cut following his violent takeover, Hun Sen — who was sole prime minister before 1993's election — agreed to go ahead with this year's polls.

There has been widespread criticism that Hun Sen has stacked the official electoral bodies in his favour, denied the opposition equal access to the media and used intimidation and violence in an effort to ensure he wins.

There have been at least six politically motivated killings in the past six weeks, according to human rights workers.

Sam Rainsy said that while he and other opposition leaders have succeeded in drawing large crowds in the run-up to the elections, many people have been intimidated from coming to his rallies by local authorities loyal to Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party.

Sam Rainsy predicted that Hun Sen's party would win 70 of the 122 seats in the National Assembly; a coalition of parties that support Hun Sen would win 15 to 20 seats; and that he

and Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party would win the remaining 40 seats.

"I am looking beyond the elections," Sam Rainsy told reporters, adding that he considered the campaign as an opportunity to meet the people and raise his political profile.

"I am building an alternative after the election to the present communist regime," he said.

Hun Sen's pre-1993 government was a single-party communist state.

Supporters waving blue flags with the Sam Rainsy Party's logo — a single candle — shouted "Bravo! Bravo!" as he arrived at the pagoda in Tram Kok village and in an hour-long speech began attacking Hun Sen's government as "communist" and backed by Vietnam.

Hun Sen is identified by many Cambodians with the decade-long Vietnamese occupation that followed Hanoi's invasion in 1979, which ousted the genocidal Khmer Rouge from power.

Ailing economy dominated Hashimoto's tenure

TOKYO, July 13: When Ryutaro Hashimoto became Japan's prime minister two and half years ago, he was highly regarded as a tough negotiator and savvy leader, reports AP.

But on one issue he has proved weak — the economy.

During his 35-year career in national politics, Hashimoto's policymaking and analytical skills won him several top Cabinet positions, including the trade, finance, and transportation portfolios.

Hashimoto's star really ascended when, as trade minister in 1995, he demonstrated a rare toughness against Washington in a bitter and high-profile auto sales dispute.

Hashimoto, who is 60 and comes from the Okayama area of southern Japan, also won praise for his diplomacy in settling several thorny issues.

To quell opposition to US military bases on Okinawa, Hashimoto last year arranged to return land leased to the United States to the local government. He promised aid to

shore up Okinawa's struggling economy.

But his toughness — he is an expert swordsman and a mountain climber — has gotten him into trouble as well.

He triggered protests from China and other nations invaded by Japan by visiting a shrine dedicated to Japan's fallen war dead — including those hanged for crimes against humanity.

It was the ailing economy, however, that dominated his tenure.

After he took office in January 1996, Hashimoto made a series of controversial and unpopular fiscal decisions — including an increase in the national sales tax and a bailout for housing loan companies awash in bad loans.

Worries about Japan's deepening economic morass, a major factor in the broader financial crisis throughout Asia, had sent Hashimoto's support ratings to record lows in recent months.

BRIEFLY

**Blast hurts 1 outside Orient House:** A Palestinian man was injured Monday when a bomb exploded near the Orient House, the PLO's unofficial headquarters in east Jerusalem, the police said, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The 40-year-old east Jerusalem resident was injured in the head and legs when he came in contact with a plastic bag containing the bomb, which had been placed near a trash can some 30 meters outside of the Orient House compound, police spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby said.

In the past the Orient House has been the scene of angry protests by right-wing Israelis who have demanded that the government shut down the site.

**Canadian FM to visit ROK:** Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy will visit South Korea next week for talks on trade and other issues, government officials said Monday, AP reports from Seoul.

During the July 23-26 visit, Axworthy will meet President Kim Dae-jung, Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Park Chung-soo and Finance and Economy Minister Lee Kyu-sung.

Key issues will include expanding bilateral trade and investment, the current situation on the Korean Peninsula and the economic crisis in Asia, the Foreign Ministry said.

**Rebels kidnap 9 Filipino students:** Renegade Muslim rebels have kidnapped nine college students returning home for a weekend stay with their families on a strife-torn southern Philippine island, a local official said Monday, AP reports from Zamboanga.

Vice Gov. Bonnie Balano said the students, five women and four men, were kidnapped Saturday in a remote village in Lamitan town on Basilan Island. Police said the victims are children of rich Muslim traders on Basilan.

Balano identified the leader of the kidnapers as Wahab Sakape, a former Moro National Liberation Front leader who reportedly has turned to banditry. He said Sakape demanded a "huge ransom" in exchange for the students but declined to give the exact amount.

**6 killed in Tajik fighting:** At least six people were killed and several others wounded Sunday during fighting between opposition Islamic forces in Tajikistan, according to sources within the opposition, AFP reports from Dushanbe.

The sources said the death toll was provisional and could rise.

Fighting broke out on Sunday in the Kofarnikhon region of the former Soviet republic, an opposition stronghold about 20-km east of the capital Dushanbe.

One source in the security forces said there had been inter-ethnic fighting among the opposition, during which an unknown number of people was killed.

**Italian FM in Algiers:** Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini arrived in Algiers Sunday evening for a two-day official visit, and was welcomed at the airport by his Algerian counterpart Ahmed Attaf, AFP reports from Algiers.

An Italian Foreign Ministry spokesman said Dini's visit, his second to Algeria in six months, was to evaluate the democratisation process there at first hand and to help deepen its development.

Rome has been following closely the political reforms that followed the election of President Liamine Zeroual in November 1995, said the spokesman.

**2 engineers kidnapped in Colombia:** Two Colombian petroleum engineers were kidnapped Sunday by rebels of the leftist National Liberation Army (ELN), police said, AFP reports from Bogota.

The kidnapping occurred just as peace talks between 40 representatives of Colombian social groups and ELN representatives began in Mainz, Germany.

Those three-day talks are to set a framework for a peace agreement between the ELN and the government of president-elect Andres Pastrana.

**Polls in Tasmania on Aug 29:** The island state of Tasmania will hold an election on August 29 in which the government will campaign to sell off the state-owned electric system, AP reports from Hobart.

Premier Tony Rundle on Monday announced the timetable leading to what he said would be the most important election in the state's history. He said the government's main election plank will be to privatise the Hydro Electric Corp.

It will campaign on selling the transmission and retail arms and leasing the generating assets for 99 years.

'Iraq executed 35 for failed uprising after Gulf War'

CAIRO, July 13: Iraq has executed 35 political prisoners arrested during a failed uprising in southern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, a human rights group said Monday, reports AP.

The prisoners were from three Shi'ite Muslim towns, the Iraqi Communist Party's Centre for Human Rights said. The bodies were handed over to their families in late May and early June, it said.

The London-based group listed the names of the executed prisoners, including a woman arrested in Al-Hillah, a town 100-km south of the capital Baghdad. It said all were executed inside Abu Ghraib prison west of Baghdad.

There was no way to confirm the report, and the secretive Iraqi government rarely responds to such charges.

But in April, Max Van Der Stoep, a former Dutch foreign minister who heads a UN human rights commission investigating abuses in Iraq, said purges inside prisons and other executions may have accounted for 1,500 deaths in the country last year.

**Indonesian army urged to show restraint in Irian Jaya**

JAKARTA, July 13: Activists and social workers urged the Indonesian military Monday to show restraint in Irian Jaya province, where security forces have clashed with pro-independence protesters, reports UNB.

One policeman and one demonstrator have been killed in recent protests in the remote province, where a small band of separatist rebels has been fighting for decades.

In Jakarta, members of private organizations visited the government-backed National Human Rights Commission to complain about reports that the military was persecuting civilians in Irian Jaya.

Even though it is a government agency, the commission has often been critical of its sponsor.

Willi Sawaki, an organizer of The Solidarity Committee of Irian People, told the commission that soldiers had allegedly raided homes and were interrogating suspected protesters.

Pro-independence activists have been growing bolder in Irian Jaya, as well as the disputed territory of East Timor, since the resignation in May of authoritarian President Suharto.

His successor, B.J. Habibie, has pledged democratic reform but has ruled out giving way to separatist demands.

ASEAN FMs to discuss major changes in policy in ensuing Manila meet

MANILA, July 13: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, based since its start on non-interference in each others' internal affairs, has matured and is ready to consider more direct involvement and criticism, an official said Monday, reports AP.

"Times have changed. After 31 years we are now adults and we should be able to discuss our problems frankly," Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Domingo Siazon said.

He said ASEAN foreign ministers, at a meeting this month in Manila, will probably begin "a major change in ASEAN's policy from non-intervention to a more pro-active policy of flexible engagement."

The shift comes as Southeast Asian countries are becoming more aware that problems in one nation — such as currency

devaluations, political unrest or haze caused by forest fires — often affect its neighbors.

"The realization that we are all together in the same boat is becoming clear," Siazon said.

The policy shift would make it easier, for example, for ASEAN members to talk to Indonesia about its forest fires, which each year blanket much of the region in dangerous haze.

Siazon said the proposed change in the once-sacred non-intervention policy will not be part of the formal agenda at the foreign ministers' meeting, and is likely to be discussed instead during informal events such as dinners or golf games.

The non-intervention policy has long been a sensitive issue because of non-democratic governments in some ASEAN countries. But Siazon noted that political and economic re-

forms are now occurring in most ASEAN members.

The foreign ministers' meetings, which begin July 24, "will most probably be a turning point in ASEAN's history," he said in a briefing to reporters.

"Today, all the countries in ASEAN are in a state of change."

Siazon, Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, and Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim have all called publicly for ASEAN to shift to a more flexible engagement policy.

Siazon, however, said he does not expect an immediate consensus from all nine ASEAN members.

ASEAN began to stretch its non-intervention policy last year when it postponed Cambodia's bid for membership because of a coup led by co-premier Hun Sen.

China for wider contacts with Taiwan to push reunification

BEIJING, July 13: Seeking to steer Taiwan into reunification talks, China is calling for more exchanges with the island, the official People's Daily reported Monday, says AP.

China desires increased contact with Taiwanese from "all political parties and all walks of life," the People's Daily, in its overseas edition, quoted Vice Premier Qian Qichen as saying.

Concerned about the rise of pro-independence political groups on Taiwan, China has invited once-shunned leaders of the main opposition Democratic Progressive Party to visit, along with politicians from the ruling Nationalists and other parties.

Exchanges reached a high tide in the first half of the year, with 461 Taiwanese visiting China as part of official scholarly or political delegations and 3,544 Chinese travelling to Taiwan for such purposes, the

paper said.

Increased visits come as the two organisations charged with handling relations — China's Association for Relations Across the Strait and Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation — move toward ending their three-year break in dialogue.

Top negotiators may meet as early as this fall to discuss restarting talks.

Qian was quoted as saying that the range of contacts between the two organisations should be expanded. That could help develop consensus on an agenda for future talks leading to reunification, the paper quoted him saying.

China has been pushing for years for direct talks on reunification, but Taiwan has preferred to negotiate practical issues such as fishing agreements before moving on to more sensitive, difficult political questions.

France ready to mediate ME peace if US gives up drive

DAMASCUS, July 13: France is ready to take the initiative in seeking a Middle East peace if Washington gives up its drive to restart the peace process, Syria's official Sana news agency on Sunday quoted the French foreign minister as saying, reports AFP.

"We hope to cooperate with the United States and support their efforts, but while keeping our own perspective and capacity to make suggestions," Sana quoted Hubert Vedrine as saying in an interview with one of its correspondents.

If the United States "comes to the point of giving up its efforts, then we will take other initiatives," Vedrine said.

The interview comes just four days before Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad visits France.

France is "always capable of taking the necessary initiatives when it is necessary to move things along, and to formulate suggestions to animate new ideas" Vedrine said adding that "what must be avoided above all is to end up again with no perspective."

Vedrine also called for coordinating "international positions and initiatives."

He said "the current serious and worrisome situation does not permit losing time in a futile competition between this or that diplomacy."

Australia must not withdraw from Southeast Asia: Thai FM

SYDNEY, July 13: Australia must not withdraw from Southeast Asia in response to the region's economic crisis, Thai Foreign Minister Dr Surin Pitsuwan told Australian business and the government Monday, reports AP.

"No country is an island," Surin told reporters. "We have been integrated, it cannot be reversed."

He said engagement, integration and cooperation were the answers to the problems in the region.

Thailand is not concerned about the emergence of Pauline Hanson's right-wing populist One Nation party, which opposes Asian immigration, he said.

"I don't think the Thai leadership or Southeast Asian lead-

ership will be too concerned about that problem, about that issue," Surin said.

Surin said he was in Australia to familiarise himself with the nation's current views on the Asian financial crisis.

"And to try and convince Australian business that there is an opportunity up there" in Asia, he said, he will meet with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer on Tuesday to discuss issues including the political situation in Cambodia.

He will also meet with Deputy Prime Minister and Trade Minister Tim Fischer and Defense Minister Ian McLachlan during his visit.

Australia and Thailand could only benefit from each other's co-operation and support.

Russian PM in Japan

TOKYO, July 13: Russian Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko arrived in Japan on Monday to discuss bilateral economic cooperation and a proposed peace treaty, reports AP.

But the timing of the visit could not be worse as Japanese Prime Ryutaro Hashimoto announced his resignation shortly after Kiriyenko arrived.

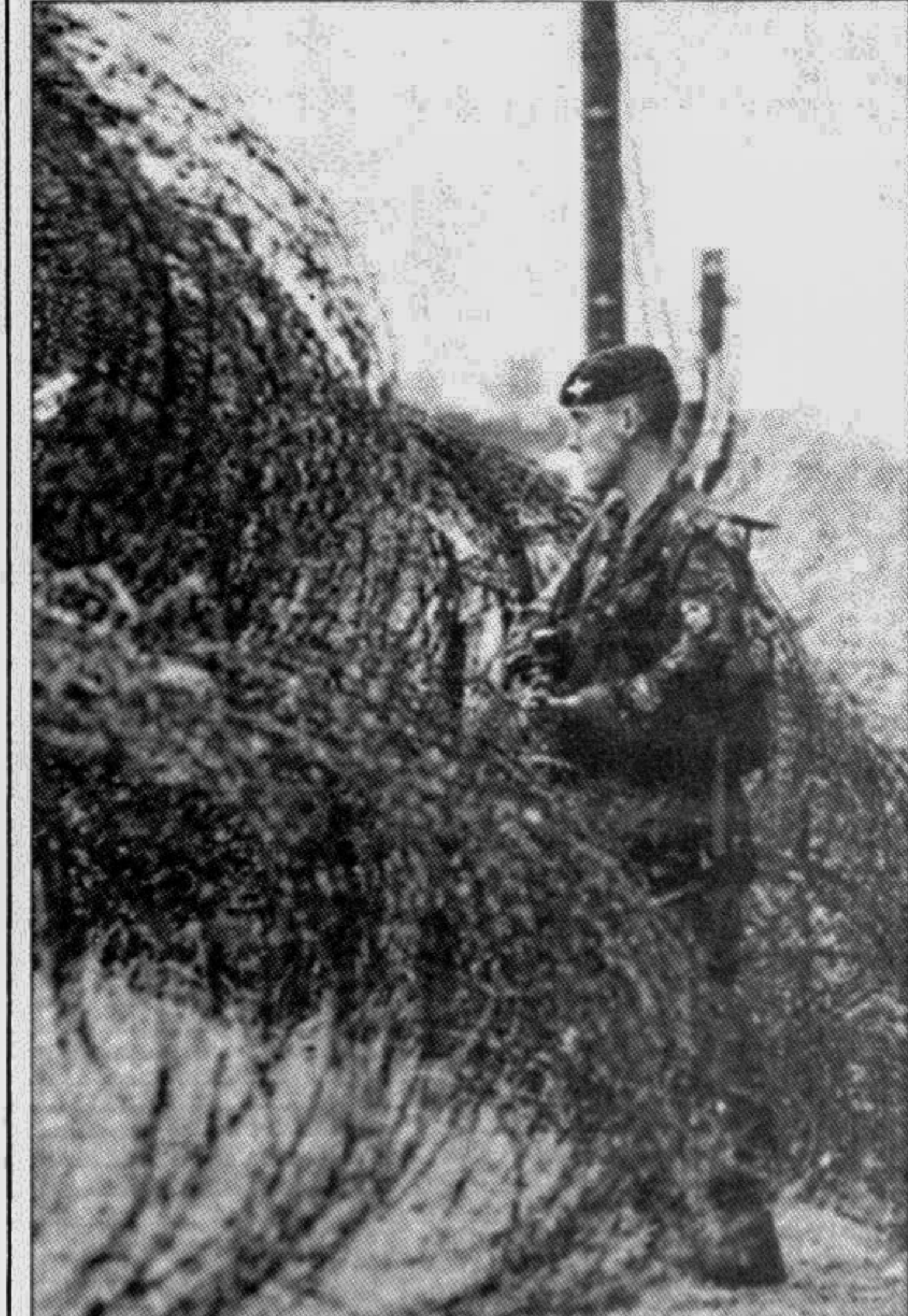
Hashimoto resigned to take responsibility for a major electoral defeat by his ruling Liberal Democratic Party in Sunday's elections for Parliament's upper house.

Kiriyenko, the first Russian premier to visit Japan, was to seek further Japanese economic assistance during his two-day stay by expanding bilateral co-operation programmes, part of his efforts to overcome Russia's financial turmoil.

Former Tamil rebel leader flown to S'pore for treatment

COLOMBO, July 13: A top former Tamil rebel leader turned politician who was beaten into a coma by more militant Tamils has been flown to Singapore for medical care, his associate said Monday, reports AP.

Douglas Devananda, secretary general of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), was attacked by last month's Tamil inmates in the high security Kalutara prison near Colombo where he had gone to look into the welfare of the prisoners.



A British paratrooper looks through coils of barbed wire near Drumcree Church, south of Belfast, Sunday. The trooper and the wire are part of the security ring in place to uphold the ban on Protestant marchers parading down the nearby Catholic Garvaghy Road. — AP/UNB photo