

International

US expresses concern, Japan freezes fund for KEDO

# Missile launch by DPRK raises fears about Asian security

TOKYO, Sept 1: Tokyo issued a strong protest against North Korea for firing a missile over the Pacific Ocean where debris from it was believed to have landed, reports AP.

The missile launch Monday renewed worries over security in Asia and raised serious questions about the adequacy of Japan's defence systems.

Government spokesman Sadaaki Numata said Tuesday that Japan did not know about the missile launch until it was informed by the US military. He added that Japan had no independent monitoring system to warn of the launching.

Numata also said Japan has frozen the one billion dollars it had committed to a project with South Korea, the US and Europe to supply North Korea with two nuclear energy reactors. And sending food aid to the reclusive communist state was now more difficult, he acknowledged.

"Our relations with North Korea are going to be more severe than they have ever been," Foreign Minister Mashahiko Komura said after attending a special Cabinet meeting, where the missile topped the agenda.

Komura said the missile may help speed up Japan's proposed joint development of a missile defence system with the United States.

"Japan's people are extremely anxious and I am deeply worried," Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi was quoted by Kyodo News agency as saying.

Defence officials said the missile appeared to be the new Taepo Dong 1, which has a longer range than the old model and is capable of reaching all of South Korea and Japan.

With no official diplomatic channels with the reclusive communist state, even issuing a protest was a problem.

When a protest was levied in New York overnight to Kim Chang Guk, the North Korean deputy ambassador to the United Nations, he merely rejected North Korea's usual criticism against Japan's security arrangement with the United States, the Foreign Ministry said.

North Korea remained mute on the missile in its official news being monitored by the Radiopress agency in Tokyo.

The Defence Agency said it will analyse any parts of the missile retrieved by the dispatched military ships. A non-military government plane and ship were sent to the Sea of Japan where the first stage of the missile was believed to have landed, government officials said.

Defence tends to be a sensitive topic for many Japanese

because of the backlash from the bitter memories of extreme militarism during World War II. The pacifist movement is a powerful lobby group in Japan, and the slightest sign of heightened military might draws nervous protest from Asian neighbours.

That is partly why the missile defence system project has been so slow in coming.

In an editorial Tuesday, the liberal Ashahi newspaper warned against any hasty action on the missile defence project, and instead called for "calm." The more conservative Yomiuri newspaper, however, called for a prompt decision in favour of the project.

The North Korean missile drew heightened concern from abroad as well.

"For North Korea, development of its military power is strategic issue that directly affects its survival. So it will never give it up," said South Korean Defence Minister Chun Yong-taek.

Meanwhile, North Korea's launch of a long-range ballistic missile over Japan and into the Pacific Ocean — its first use of such a two-stage weapon — is a dangerous development for the volatile region's security, US officials said.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed concern. The missile test "is

something that we will be raising with North Koreans" in talks in New York, she said Monday during a visit to Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital.

The closed-door talks resumed Monday afternoon, but no information on developments was released.

At the State Department, spokesman Lee McClelleny called the launch "a matter of deep concern to the United States because of its potentially destabilizing impact in North-east Asia and beyond."

The missile, dubbed Taepo Dong 1, has a range of 1,500 kilometers (940 miles), and is capable of reaching all of South Korea and Japan. It appears to be the first time North Korea has fired a weapon capable of reaching any point in Japan.

Reuters adds: A deal to fund the construction of two nuclear reactors for North Korea was shelved today after the Stalinist state test-fired a missile over Japanese territory.

The Seoul-based Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), which is overseeing the project, said a cost-sharing resolution, announced on Monday, had been "indefinitely postponed by some member countries."

"The adoption of the resolution ... has become more difficult as a result," a KEDO statement said today.

## Vaccine against diarrhoea approved

WASHINGTON, Sept 1: The US Food and Drug Administration approved on Monday the first vaccine against a leading cause of childhood diarrhoea, a virus that hospitalises 55,000 American children a year and kills 1 million in other countries, reports AP.

RotaShield is for the intestinal infection called rotavirus that is the leading cause of severe diarrhoea in childhood. It was developed by the National Institutes of Health and licensed to Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories.

RotaShield is an oral vaccine given to infants in three doses, at ages 2 months, 4 months and 6 months.

For now, children older than 6 months should not begin the vaccination, the FDA said. Rotavirus is so prevalent that about 75 per cent of all children are infected before age 5, but the youngest infants are usually the sickest.



Embattled Congo President Laurent Kabila, left, meets with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, centre, and Namibian President Sam Nujoma, right in Windhoek Monday. — AP/UNB photo

## Who should control India's nuclear button?

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: Now that India has gone nuclear, who should control its atomic button?

Military leaders have suggested that the government set up a panel of top Cabinet ministers and defence officials to control the country's nuclear arsenal. The Indian Express reported Tuesday, reports AP.

The newspaper said army, navy and air force officials have approved the proposal in a study titled, "Options for India — Formation of a Strategic Nuclear Command."

The National Command Authority, which would be headed by the prime minister, will advise a panel of the three service chiefs on the use of nuclear weapons if necessity arises, the paper said.

The orders would then be executed by a command post.

India set off five underground nuclear explosions in May, 24 years after it first tested a nuclear device. Pakistan retaliated in May with six tests, triggering fears of an arms race in the sub-continent. The tests drew international economic and political sanction against India and Pakistan.

## UN council calls for pullout of all foreign forces from Congo

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 1: The UN Security Council on Monday called for a ceasefire in Democratic Republic of Congo and demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces, reports AFP.

The 15-member council reiterated its ceasefire call — the third in two weeks — in a formal statement after a closed-door briefing by Congolese Planning Minister Badimayi Mulumba.

The council statement called for "an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of all foreign forces and the initiation of a peaceful process of political dialogue with a view to national reconciliation."

The Security Council urged UN chief Kofi Annan, who intends to host talks on the conflict on the sidelines of this week's Non-Aligned Movement summit, to continue his urgent contacts with regional leaders in search of a negotiated solution.

DRC President Laurent Kabila seemed intent Monday on a

military solution, boasting during a lighting visit to Namibia that the Tutsi-led rebels who have tried to overthrow him

## Vajpayee not sick, says BJP, Gen Secy

MUMBAI, Sept 1: BJP General Secretary Pramod Mahajan yesterday scotched off rumours concerning the health of the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, reports PTI.

"He is half and hearty," the former advisor to the prime minister told mediapersons here at an informal briefing.

"The prime minister is not suffering from any of the ailments ... There is nothing," he categorically stated. All the reports concerning the health of Vajpayee have already been clarified by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), by the prime minister himself, he said expressing surprise over a news item in a city evening which was quoted as saying that Vajpayee had been advised against using a helicopter.

will be defeated "in a week or two."

Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe are backing Kabila against the rebels who according to Kabila are supported by Uganda and Rwanda.

Monday's statement was the first in which the security council made any reference to foreign forces, which were not identified.

Another report from DRC adds: The Democratic Republic of Congo town of Kaleme was firmly in rebel hands Monday, an AFP correspondent reported after flying into the southeastern town on the shores of Lake Tanganyika from the rebels' eastern stronghold of Goma.

Rebel troops were manning anti-aircraft guns at the airport and patrolling in the town, which has a population of some 100,000.

Residents said government soldiers fled without a fight along with several thousand townspeople, when the Tutsi-led rebels arrived last Wednesday.

## Violence claims 10 in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 1: At least 10 people, including a Muslim cleric, died in separatist-related violence overnight in the troubled Indian state of Kashmir, Police said today, reports AFP.

Five civilians were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Hooner, a border village in Kupwara district north of Srinagar, a police spokesman said, adding senior police officials had been sent to the site.

In another incident late Monday, unidentified gunmen killed a 75-year-old Imam of a local mosque in Kupwara.

Police said Imam Khazir Pir was gunned down just outside his house as he returned from prayers at the mosque.

Elsewhere, suspected Muslim separatists killed a woman and a child in an attack on a Hindu family in southern Kashmir, while a police officer was shot dead in a militant ambush in a northern district.

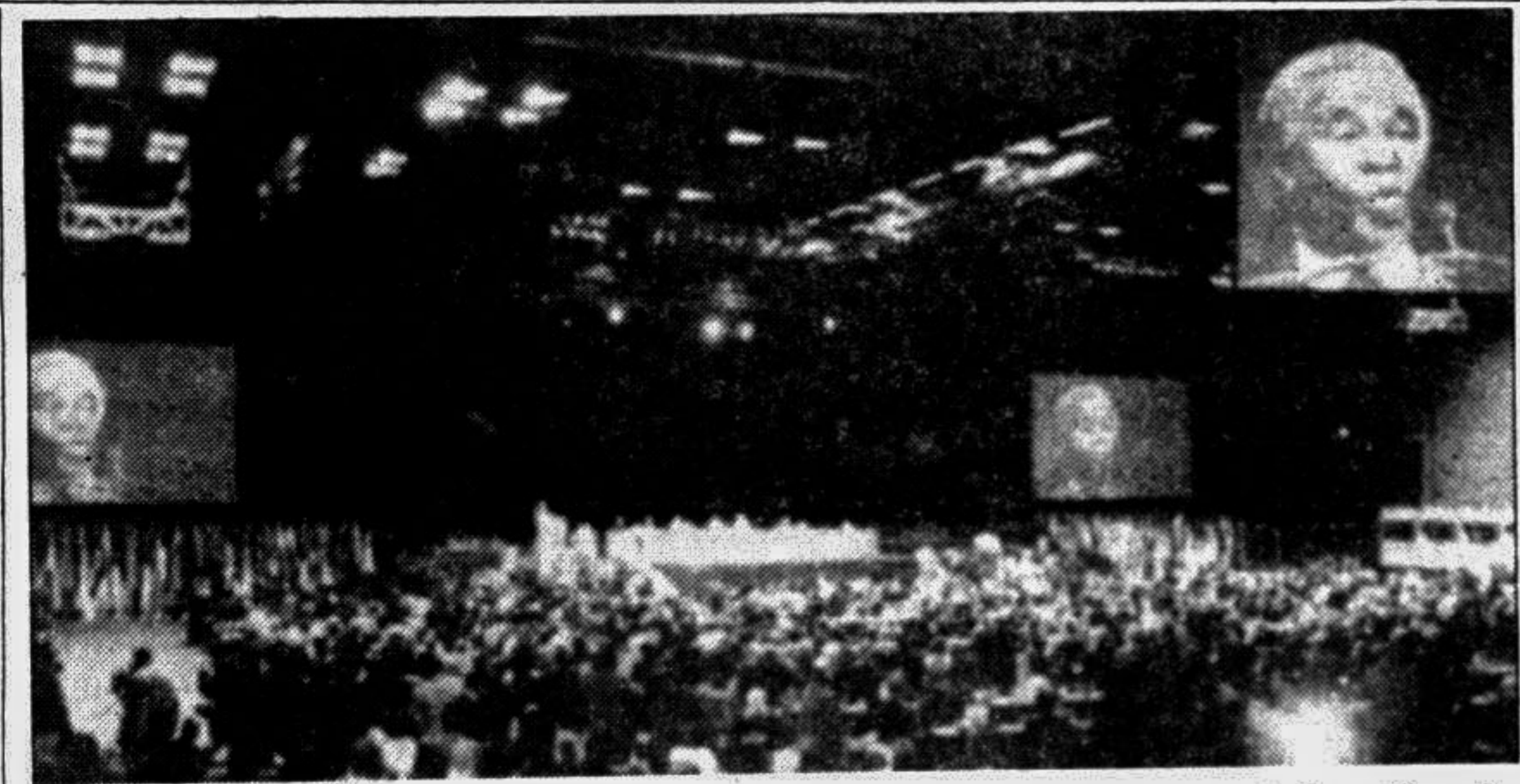
One militant was also killed in a separate shootout with police.

## Iran seeks UN mediation over missing diplomats

ISLAMABAD, Sept 1: The Taliban Monday called for United Nations mediation over 10 missing Iranian diplomats whom Tehran alleges are being held prisoner by the Islamic Militia, reports AFP.

"We demand the UN mediate between Iran and Afghanistan," senior Taliban official Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil told the Afghan Islamic Press, adding that the Taliban had no information about the diplomats' whereabouts.

Iran says the 10 diplomats and an Iranian journalist were taken prisoner by the Taliban when the militia overran the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif on August 8. The Taliban deny taking them.



South African Deputy President Thabo Mbeki addresses delegates at the 12th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Durban on Monday. Mbeki delivered the opening address of the ministerial meeting. — AP/UNB photo.

## Pak opposition vows to block proposed Islamic laws

ISLAMABAD, Sept 1: Pakistan's opposition parties vowed Monday to form a grand alliance to stop a proposed constitutional amendment that would impose Islamic law in the country, reports AP.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's proposed new Islamic order would undermine the constitution, wreck the state institutions and threaten the country's unity, said opposition politicians.

"These proposed laws are a conspiracy against the country and a joke on the name of Islam," Senator Ajmal Khattak, the leader of opposition Awami National Party and a former ally of Sharif told The Associated Press. "We have decided to form a grand alliance of opposition parties and start a movement against the bill in early September."

The proposed constitutional amendment introduced Friday would scrap the British common laws and impose laws based on the Muslim holy book, the Quran.

Sharif controls a two-thirds majority in Parliament and it seems likely the amendment will pass with little difficulty.

The opposition says the amendment would impose a system in Pakistan like the one in neighbouring Afghanistan where the hard line Taliban army rules.

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The amendment says that the federal government will be

"obliged" to enforce prayers five times a day, collect an annual tithings as well as to "prescribe what is right and to forbid what is wrong."

In a speech to Parliament Monday former prime minister Benazir Bhutto said the country's security was threatened because for the radical Taliban militia.

She said Sharif supports Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, because he wants to impose a similar type of government here.

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## Abiola's wives sue junta

LAGOS, Nigeria, Sept 1: Two wives of the late opposition leader Moshood Abiola filed suit Monday against Nigeria's military junta, charging that Abiola died in prison because he was not given proper medical care, reports AP.

Dupe Abiola and Teju Abiola filed separate suits against the country's military ruler, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, as well as his ministers of justice and internal affairs. They are seeking one billion Naira, or nearly \$12 million, in compensation.

The death of Moshood Abiola, husband and father of my children, was the consequence of the unlawful violation of the fundamental duty of the defendants to provide him with the necessities of life in detention," the suits charge.

The two women are also demanding an official declaration that Abiola's death amounted to murder by the state and that it was the duty of the junta to provide him with adequate medical care.

## Iraq urges UNSC to probe links between UN team, US, Israel

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 1: Iraqi UN ambassador Nizar Hamdoun asked the president of the Security Council on Monday to investigate alleged links between UN weapons inspectors and the United States and Israel, reports Reuter.

Hamdoun said he handed over a letter requesting a probe into what he called "this whole mess that has been generated by the resignation" last week of American UN arms inspector Scott Ritter and reports that Washington had intervened to "try to reschedule" inspections in accordance with its own wishes.

When Ritter resigned, he accused the Security Council, Secretary-General Kofi Annan and

the United States of failing to deal firmly with Iraqi obstruction of UN weapons teams. He also said Washington had intervened several times to try to influence the timing and target of some inspections.

Ritter reiterated his criticism in an interview on public television's "News Hour" with Jim Lehrer on Monday, saying the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) could have achieved "meaningful disarmament results" if a key inspection had not been thwarted this summer.

"We weren't allowed to do our job out of fear of a confrontation in which the United States wouldn't be able to muster the required support in the Security Council to respond effectively," Ritter said.

Top US foreign policymakers decided to "put pressure on the special commission to slow down, to postpone, to cancel inspections because they would lead to a confrontation which the United States was not willing to step up to," Ritter said.

The text of the Iraqi letter from deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz was not immediately circulated at the United Nations, a copy was also sent to Annan, according to reports from Baghdad.

"It was said to accuse UNSCOM, in charge of disarming Iraq, of being a tool of the United States to spy against Iraq and to accuse Ritter of spying on Iraq for the United States and Israel.

## BRRIEFLY

**Rail accident claims 5 in India:** Five passengers were killed when five cars of a speeding passenger train ran off the tracks near the Indian capital, police said yesterday, AFP says from New Delhi.

**NZ painter Wollaston dies:** New Zealand's greatest painter Sir Tosswill Wollaston died peacefully in South Island's Nelson Sunday at the age of 88, the New Zealand television reported on Monday, Xinhua says from Wellington.

**US closes missions in Ghana, Togo:** The United States has closed its embassies in the West African countries of Ghana and Togo because of security threats, the State Department said on Monday, Xinhua reports from Washington.

**10 die in Lithuanian plane crash:** A Lithuanian helicopter carrying wedding guests on an excursion crashed in a lake, killing 10 people including the parents of the bride and groom, AP says from Lithuania.

**Guatemalan mudslide death toll 42:** The death toll from a mudslide last week that buried homes in northern Guatemala rose to 42, with four people still missing, disaster relief officials said, AFP reports from Guatemala.

**Top Vietnamese dissident freed:** Vietnam's best-known dissident was freed Tuesday and flown in to Bangkok, where he expressed a longing to return to his own country and keep struggling for democracy, AP reports from Bangkok.

**Russian military presence in Latvia formally ends:** SKRUNDA, Latvia, Sept 1: More than 50 years after the Soviet Union annexed the Baltic states, the Russian military presence in the region ended Monday as the early warning radar station at Skrunda was shut down, reports AP.

**Philippine President Joseph Estrada, right, presents the Ramon Magsaysay award for International Understanding to former President Corazon Aquino during ceremony Monday in Manila. The award, which comes with a medallion and US \$50,000 dollars cash, is Asia's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.** — AP/UNB photo.



Philippine President Joseph Estrada, right, presents the Ramon Magsaysay award for International Understanding to former President Corazon Aquino during ceremony Monday in Manila. The award, which comes with a medallion and US \$50,000 dollars cash, is Asia's equivalent of the Nobel Prize. — AP/UNB photo.

## Russian military presence in Latvia formally ends

SKRUNDA, Latvia, Sept 1: More than 50 years after the Soviet Union annexed the Baltic states, the Russian military presence in the region ended Monday as the early warning radar station at Skrunda was shut down, reports AP.

Early in the morning the Skrunda phased array radar peered into the skies over western Europe for the last time to search for NATO ballistic missiles and bombers that never came.

Latvians, who could barely conceal their joy, view the radar's closing not as the final passing of the cold war but as the end of Russian occupation.

"We consider it as the end of World War II on Latvian soil," Latvian Foreign Minister Valdis Birkavavs told journalists.

"The day was marked as a holiday by Skrunda's 2,400 residents, with flags flying from buildings and a festive concert staged in a local park.

"We've been waiting a long time for this day," one Skrunda resident said. "We have nothing personal against the soldiers, but the radar gave a lot of people headaches."

Russia preferred to play down its final Baltic retreat, denying media access to any of the 450 departing soldiers and their families.

## No evidence of chemical weapons exposure in Gulf

WASHINGTON, Sept 1: A US Senate committee report concludes there is no evidence to support the theory that US soldiers who fought in the Gulf War and then became mysteriously ill were exposed to nerve gas, reports AP.

"We have found nothing to show that the illnesses are related to chemicals," said a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee official who spoke late Monday on condition of anonymity.

The panel planned to make the study public on Tuesday.

The bipartisan report, prepared over the last year, backs the military's long-held assertion that chemical weapons were not to blame for the illnesses.

But it is highly critical of a Pentagon conclusion last year that up to 100,000 soldiers were exposed to low doses of nerve

gases released in the demolition of an Iraqi ammunition depot in March 1991, days after the war had ended. That report said the doses were too small to have caused any sustained health problems, but it marked the first official acknowledgment that there was any exposure at all.

The Senate report argues there is no hard evidence to back the report's conclusions. It says the Pentagon, working with the CIA, relied on a flawed computer model to recreate the exposure levels and assumed a worst-case scenario.

The Senate report concludes that there is just one case where there is hard evidence of chemical exposure — that of Army Pfc. David Fisher, who was exposed to mustard liquid in March 1991.

## Riots continue for 2nd day in N-Indonesia

JAKARTA, Sept 1: Mobs defied anti-riot police and attacked Chinese-owned shops for a second day Tuesday in a northern town where mobs tore down the gates of a prison, freeing dozens of prisoners, reports AP.

Hundreds of soldiers patrolled the debris-strewn streets of Lhokseumawe, a day after crowds burned buildings, stoned military trucks and looted from stores owned by ethnic Chinese. It was the biggest riot since deadly unrest in May that helped oust former President Suharto.

Most of the town of 600,000 was quiet Tuesday. But witnesses said young men were hurling rocks at shuttered stores in the business district. Some shopkeepers were hiding inside.

Police briefly dispersed the rioters with tear gas and warning shots, but the mobs kept drifting back.

Ninety prisoners were on the run Tuesday after crowds raided a prison the previous night, helping or forcing inmates to flee in the darkness even though guards fired warning shots.

On Monday, rioters left a wide path of destruction, burning a hotel, a discotheque, beauty salons, a ruling party office and part of a shopping centre. Many Chinese-owned stores were pelted with rocks and looters plundered rice, sugar and other basic necessities.

The Chinese are resented because they dominate business in Indonesia, which is struggling through its worst economic crisis in three decades.

## Off the Record

### Titanic comes to the small screen

LOS ANGELES: After sailing to success on the silver screen, the makers of "Titanic" are launching a version of the award-winning epic for the small screen, which goes on sale this week, reports AP.

Video stores across the United States planned to stay open past midnight Monday to face the expected frontal assault of "Titanic" fans hoping to be the first to buy the tape on Tuesday.

To date the record holder for video sales is Disney's "The Lion King," with 30 million copies sold since March 1995.

Paramount has spent 50 million dollars in a promotion campaign to launch the video. The company hasn't said how many copies have been sent to retailers, but analysts put the number at more than 20 million.

Cable chain QVC has already sold more than 229,000 copies since it started taking orders on June 15. When it started taking orders, QVC sold 13,500 copies in 14 minutes, the company said.

### Lewinsky could make history again

NEW YORK: Monica Lewinsky's saga could become the highest-priced sex story in history, reports AP.

The tabloid Star offered \$1 million to Lewinsky for exclusive rights to her story, editor in chief Phil Bunton said Monday. Bunton said the Star has not heard back from her lawyers since the offer was made about 10 days ago.

Citing unidentified sources, the magazine said HarperCollins offered \$2 million to Ms Lewinsky for a book and a second unidentified publisher offered \$1.6 million.

Despite the offers, there has been no indication the woman in the centre of the White House sex scandal is willing to sell her story, The New Yorker said.



"I did not offer Monica Lewinsky \$2 million for a book, said Judith Regan, head of Regan Books, a division of HarperCollins.

She said she hadn't talked to Lewinsky since January, and suspected Lewinsky's mother, writer Marcia Lewis, was putting out misleading information to drive the book offers up.

Post columnist Cindy Adams reported Monday that Lewinsky's mother would serve as her ghostwriter and was holding out for a \$10 million offer before she "puts pen to paper on Monica puts knife to Clinton."

Lewis is the author of a book about the sex lives of famed tenors Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras.