

## International

Air strike may be close: Clinton

# Peace monitors pull out of Kosovo embassies begin evacuating staff

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Mar 20: International monitors sent to Kosovo five months ago to verify a now-defunct ceasefire evacuated today as a determined NATO and defiant Serbs geared up for a showdown over the rebellious province, reports AP.

Amid ominous signals of a resumption of all-out war, fighting was reported in the north today and a huge column of Yugoslav tanks and other armoured vehicles was on the move west of the capital Pristina.

The situation in Kosovo was deteriorating dramatically within a day after peace talks ended in failure in Paris.

In Washington, US President Bill Clinton warned Friday that the talks collapse had raised the stakes and "if we and our allies don't have the will to act, there will be more massacres."

NATO has threatened mas-

sive airstrikes against Serb-led Yugoslav if President Slobodan Milosevic does not accept a peace plan providing for sweeping autonomy for Kosovo and NATO troops to police the accord.

After the Serb delegation rejected the plan Friday, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe ordered the evacuation of the 1,380 monitors. A few left Friday and the rest were streaming out Saturday to neighboring Macedonia.

The evacuation, which began before dawn, appeared to be proceeding without problems, but in a sinister sign of what lies ahead it passed a Yugoslav convoy of about 30 vehicles, including tanks, armoured vehicles, and trucks carrying anti-aircraft guns, heading westward from the Pristina area.

William Walker, the US diplomat who heads the monitoring mission, said he now expects "a more dangerous time."

"My military advisers say things could go bad," he said in an interview at the Macedonian border, where 60 OSCE vehicles stood waiting to be processed through customs.

The departure of the monitors could lead to an escalation of violence without the presence of international groups to mediate. Serb sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said ethnic Albanian rebels launched attacks today on a Serb police station and two patrols northwest of Pristina in the rebel-held Drenica region.

Reporters also said shelling was heard in the north.

The monitors were sent to Kosovo under an October 12 agreement between Milosevic and US envoy Richard Holbrooke for a ceasefire, which began breaking down in December.

Signs of the seriousness of

NATO's threat were evident in Yugoslavia's capital, Belgrade, where the embassies of the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany, Austria, and France began evacuating staff and family members.

He said he knew this could put American and allied pilots at risk. "The Serbs have a strong air-defence system. But we must weigh those risks against the risks of inaction," he said.

At the news conference, Clinton noted that 40,000 of Serbian troops and police had massed threateningly on the Kosovo border. Asked if an offensive into Kosovo by these forces would trigger airstrikes, he replied: "I think whatever threshold they need to cross has already been crossed."

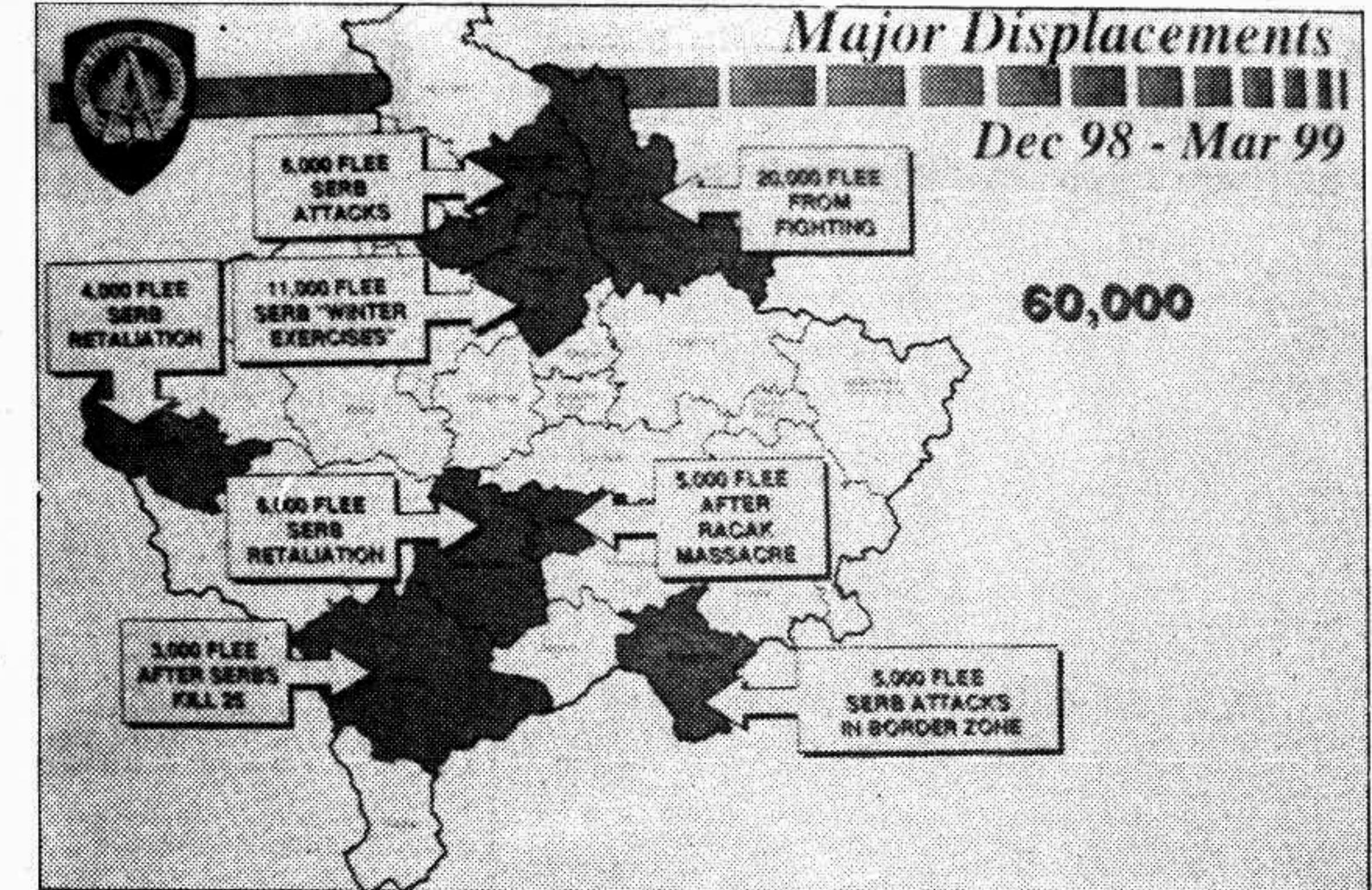
Despite Western threats, the Serbian government remained firm in rejecting the peace plan, calling it an "American-Albanian attempt" to breakaway Kosovo from Serbia.

ference and a briefing for congressional leaders Friday, Clinton suggested that an air bombardment of Serb positions may be close.

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A map shows the major displacements of the Kosovar population from December 1998 until March 1999 as it was presented by the Supreme Allied Force Commander Europe (SACEUR), US General Wesley Clark, during a press conference in Mons Friday as a Kosovar delegation visited NATO SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers in Europe), who signed the Kosovo peace plan in Paris Wednesday.

— AFP photo

## Yeltsin dismisses chief of staff

MOSCOW, Mar 20: Russian President Boris Yeltsin dismissed his Chief of Staff on Friday and replaced him with a deputy, a Kremlin spokesman said.

The spokesman contacted by Reuters said Yeltsin had signed an order dismissing Nikolai Bordyuzha from his post as Chief of Staff and Secretary of the influential Security Council. He said Bordyuzha's former deputy Alexander Volshin would become the new chief of staff. It was not clear who would take up the Security Council post.

Bordyuzha, a 49-year-old former KGB officer, left hospital on Thursday after undergoing treatment for what the Kremlin said was a heart condition.

## Marxist rebels kidnap 55 people in Colombia

BOGOTA, Mar 20: Marxist rebels abducted at least 55 people Friday in a kidnapping spree across three Colombian provinces, authorities said, reports Reuters.

Witnesses told the Radionet All News Radio Network the wave of abductions began Thursday in southern Putumayo province, where paramilitary gunmen raided a village near the oil refining town of Horminga and carted off 25 townspeople in the back of trucks.

Police and local government sources however were unable to confirm any kidnappings in Putumayo.

The worst incident occurred in northern Cesar province, where Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels nabbed at least 30 motorists at a makeshift road-block erected across a major highway, according to a report issued by army headquarters in Bogota.

It said the mass kidnappings took place early Friday morning in an area known as Ft. De-Sastre or the disaster but did not explain the origin of the name.

## We love each other: Clinton

WASHINGTON, Mar 20: President Bill Clinton declared Friday that he and his wife, Hillary, love each other. He said he doesn't know whether she'll run for a Senate seat from New York, reports AP.

Amid mounting speculation about Hillary Clinton's political plans two weeks before her husband's term ends, the president said at a news conference, "I literally don't have a clue" whether she will run for the Senate.

He said she told him a year ago, however, it might be a good idea to move to New York after they leave the White House. Running for the Senate would require her to establish a separate residence in New York before they move out of the White House.

As for the first couple's personal relationship following a year of revelations about his affair with a former White House intern, Clinton said, "We're working hard. We love each other very much and we're working on it."

## Did Nathuram kill Gandhi?

NEW DELHI, Mar 20: Did Nathuram Godse kill Mahatma Gandhi?

This question is raised after 51 years by a petition filed in the Supreme Court yesterday which seeks re-investigation of the case by CBI citing grave irregularities in the trial, reports PTI.

The petition filed by director of controversial play "Me Nathuram Godse Boloy" Pradeep Chandrakant Dalvi, claimed that no post mortem was done on Gandhi's body, no ballistic report of the bullet allegedly fired by Godse was called for and two key witnesses Abha and Mani, the granddaughters of Mahatma Gandhi, were not examined by the prosecution.

Given these irregularities the petitioner said it could not have been established conclusively that Nathuram had killed Mahatma on January 30, 1948.

## Libya to hand over PanAm blast suspects by Apr 6

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 20: Libya officially informed the United Nations on Friday it would turn over for trial by April 6 two men accused of blowing up a PanAm airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988, reports Reuters.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he was "greatly encouraged by this development and necessary arrangements would now be initiated" by his Mandella made the announcement in Tripoli with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, UN sources said the letter included all the points Mandella had made.

The United States and Britain say they have convincing evidence the two men — Abdel Basset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi and Lamont Khalifa Fhimah — planted the bomb that blew up PanAm flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie on December 21, 1988 killing 270 people in the air and on the ground.

After initial scepticism, the US State Department welcomed the development. Spokesman James Foley said in Washington, "We welcome the news that we have heard from President Mandella today. We are expecting the turnover of the two suspects to custody in the Netherlands on or before April 6."

One potential stumbling point in the agreement an-

nounced by Mandella is that Libya wants the Security Council to adopt a resolution on all the arrangements concerning the suspects.

But Mandella said this was not a condition. "It is our wish. We had better leave it in the hands of the Secretary-General."

Under Security Council resolution, UN sanctions against Libya are suspended once the two suspect arrive in the Netherlands. Following a report by Annan after 90 days, the Council must vote to lift them permanently.

Mandella said the sanctions, imposed in 1992 and tightened in 1993, would definitely be lifted after Annan's report, indicating Washington and London may have given private assurances they would vote in favour.

Annan has to report on Libya's cooperation on giving information on alleged terrorist bases in its country and whether Tripoli had cooperated satisfactorily with France on the 1989 mid-flight bombing of a UTA airliner over Niger in which 171 people died.

The Indian officials said the four also violated the agreement that the passengers would board the bus at the starting point in the Pakistani city of Lahore.

## India sends back four Pak bus passengers

NEW DELHI, Mar 20: Indian authorities turned back four Pakistani passengers from the newly-introduced bus service for carrying excess baggage that included two little lambs in a basket, a news report said today.

This was the first hitch in the bus service that began playing last week. Indian and Pakistani passengers are checked at the land border near Amritsar, 400 km north of New Delhi.

Each of the four passengers off-loaded on Friday was carrying dried fruits and cigarettes worth 15,000 rupees (348 dls). One of the carried the lambs as well, The Times of India newspaper said.

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## Balloonists land in history

GENEVA, Mar 20: A Swiss doctor and British pilot, riding friendly winds and their own dogged spirit, today crossed an invisible line on Africa's map and drifted onto immortal, the first to realise man's century-old dream of circling the world in that fickle, fragile craft called a hot-air balloon, reports AP.

After 19 days aloft, Bertrand Piccard, Brian Jones and their silvery Breitling Orbiter 3 floated past longitude 9 degrees west at 0954 GMT to complete the 26,500-mile (41,850-kilometer) nonstop circumnavigation, a feat that had challenged and eluded dozens of balloonists before them.

Passengers travelling by Lahore-New Delhi-Lahore bus service are allowed to carry baggage up to 20 kilograms (44 pounds). When the four refused to pay for excess baggage and the customs duty on cigarettes, the Indian officials sent them back to the Pakistani side, the newspaper said.

The Indian officials said the four also violated the agreement that the passengers would board the bus at the starting point in the Pakistani city of Lahore.

Triumphant but weary, the record-making duo sped on toward a landing probably early Sunday in Egypt.

For all the dangers and difficulties of long-distance ballooning, the historic voyage was relatively uneventful for Piccard, 41, grandson and son of famed explorers of the air and sea, and Jones, a 51-year-old balloon instructor and grandfather.

They lifted off among the snowy Swiss Alps on March 1, drifted down to the sands of North Africa, caught a jet

stream and headed on across the Arabian Desert, over India and on to the lush green of southeast Asia.

There was celebration in the Breitling Orbiter makeshift control room at Geneva airport, where a team of flight controllers, meteorologists and technicians has been following the balloon's progress 24 hours a day.

Piccard's wife Michele and their three small daughters set off to Africa for a reunion with her husband, while Jones' wife Joanna decided to remain in Geneva.

Chief meteorologist Luc Trullmann said the balloon had more than enough fuel to make it to Egypt.

"They've got two bottles of fuel left. We don't need a whole day's flying any more, but we need to conserve some fuel because the landing may be difficult," said Trullmann.

In a conversation with air traffic control in Dakar, Senegal, Saturday morning, Piccard was asked whether he was going to Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, or to Mali.

"Negative. We do not land. We go to Egypt. We are a balloon flying around the world," Piccard replied.

## N-tech theft from US lab

### Clinton steps aside from condemning China

WASHINGTON, Mar 20: President Bill Clinton on Friday resisted pressure to condemn China for allegedly stealing US nuclear secrets and doggedly defended his administration's policy of engagement, reports AP.

The pro-independence activist group said the attack and robbery in East Timor on Friday night were politically motivated. But security forces were not immediately available to confirm the killings or say who may have planned them.

Tensions in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor have increased this year following Indonesia's policy reversal on the territory it invaded in 1975. Human rights abuses and rebel war have plagued the island in southern Indonesia since the invasion.

## Four killed in E Timor

DILI (Indonesia), Mar 20: Men armed with guns and wearing masks attacked a village in East Timor at night and opened fire on three homes, killing four civilians and injuring five, according to a priest and an activist group, reports AP.

The pro-independence activist group said the attack and robbery in East Timor on Friday night were politically motivated. But security forces were not immediately available to confirm the killings or say who may have planned them.

Tensions in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor have increased this year following Indonesia's policy reversal on the territory it invaded in 1975. Human rights abuses and rebel war have plagued the island in southern Indonesia since the invasion.

It is my understanding that the investigation has not yet determined for sure that espionage occurred," he said.

Though he described US-China relations as "inherently frustrating" he made a strong case for their development and said he was looking forward to the visit here next month of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji.

"I believe the course I have followed with China is the one that's best for America, disagreeing where we have serious disagreements, pursuing our common interests where I thought it was in the interest of the United States," he said.

Clinton also defended his administration's response to early warnings that China may have stolen nuclear technology.

"I am confident that we in the White House have done what we could to be aggressive about this," Clinton said, referring to allegations China stole nuclear technology from a US lab in mid-1980s.

The president also dismissed allegations that he suppressed information about the reported theft to shore up his own political fortunes and chronically

## Japanese, ROK urge DPRK to stop escalating confrontation

SEOUL, Mar 20: Japan and South Korea agreed today to seek greater engagement with North Korea in efforts to eliminate the communist state's menacing missile and nuclear capabilities, reports AP.

Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung agreed on the common policy toward North Korea during nearly two hours of talks.

The leaders also agreed to deepen a growing partnership between the two historical rivals by boosting economic and cultural exchanges.

"We have an intention to improve ties with North Korea," Obuchi said at a joint news conference with Kim. "We urge North Korea to stop escalating confrontation and tension and open the door for reconciliation and exchanges."

Obuchi came here Friday for a three-day visit, his first since becoming the prime minister last summer. The trip follows a visit to Japan by Kim last October.

Obuchi said Japan is willing to help North Korea if Pyongyang takes "constructive measures" regarding its missile programme and other pending issues between the two countries.

Infuriated by North Korea's firing of a multistage rocket over its territory on August 31, Japan has since suspended all food aid and talks aimed at normalising ties with the famine-hit communist country.

North Korea claims that the rocket launched a satellite into earth's orbit but Tokyo believes it was a firing of a ballistic

missile.

South Korean officials say the North's agreement considerably defused tensions on the peninsula, giving new impetus to their policy of engaging

North Korea.

Other major topics discussed at the Obuchi-Kim talks included "action plans" for a "21st-century" cooperation agreement signed during Kim's October visit to Japan.

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