

## Yeltsin pledges to resolve crisis in Dagestan

MOSCOW, Aug 12: President Boris Yeltsin said today the military were involved in "serious work" in Dagestan, the southern Russian republic that was invaded from Chechnya last weekend, and the crisis would be resolved "gradually, without haste," reports AFP.

"The agency work is being done," the agency worked Yeltsin, as saying, in his first comments since the crisis began on Saturday.

"We will solve this problem gradually, without haste," Yeltsin, 68, had been in seclusion since the latest conflict to shake the volatile northern Caucasus erupted.

Some 1,200 insurgents from Chechnya invaded parts of Dagestan and proclaimed the republic independent from Russia. At least 11 Russian soldiers have been killed.

It is the most serious fighting in the region since the 1994-96 Chechen war, in which Moscow fought to prevent Chechnya from bolting from the Russian Federation.

## Saddam's threats destroyed ties, alleges Iran

TEHRAN, Aug 12: Iran said today that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's threats of force against the Islamic republic had "destroyed everything" and harmed normalisation of ties between the two nations, reports AFP.

"His surprising and unpredictable words have destroyed everything and set back the process of normalisation," Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi said as Baghdad and Tehran stepped up their war of words following a provocative speech by Saddam on Sunday.

"Unfortunately, our location on the globe makes us neighbours with Iraq and Afghanistan. But I suppose we have to make do," he said on state radio. He accused Iraq of "procrastinating" in the exchange of POWs and demanded that Baghdad provide "clear answers" to resolve one of the thorniest issues dividing the two more than a decade after the end of their 1980-1988 war.

Iraq and Iran have bitterly accused each other of causing the breakdown in last month's POW talks in Baghdad after Saddam on Sunday threatened to use force against Iran to resolve outstanding issues from the war.

## Exiled activists accuse Myanmar junta of fresh crackdown

BANGKOK, Aug 12: Exiled activists accused Myanmar's junta today of a fresh crackdown on dissent for fear of a student uprising similar to that experienced in 1988, reports AFP.

The Thailand-based National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), an umbrella group of exiled activists and politicians, said some 44 people in Bago, north of Yangon, had been detained recently.

Four activists aged 18-23 were arrested on August 2 and were being held by military intelligence in Bago town, an NCUB statement said.

It said 40 others in the Bago area were detained earlier. It included representatives of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The crackdown seems to be a result of the fear of the military of a repetition of the countrywide demonstrations in 1988 that brought about the downfall of former dictator General Ne Win."

Junta officials could not immediately be contacted to confirm the report.

Last Sunday marked the 11th anniversary of the popular uprising in the military-ruled country on August 8, 1988, in which hundreds of democracy demonstrators were gunned down and a junta took power from Ne Win.

## US scientists find virus linked with breast cancer

SYDNEY, Aug 12: US scientists have discovered evidence of a virus linked to human breast cancer which they say could lead to the development of a vaccine for the disease, reports Reuters.

The virus, almost identical to one causing breast cancer in laboratory mice, was found in more than 85 per cent of women with breast cancer. Robert Garry of Tulane University told an international virology conference in Sydney this week.

The human mammary tumour virus, which Garry said was hereditary and non-infectious, was also discovered in 20 per cent of people without breast cancer.

"If the virus has the same role in human breast cancer as mouse breast cancer then this is a very significant step in fighting the disease," Garry told Reuters today.

"Finding a vaccine shouldn't be all that difficult," he said. Breast cancer specialists were sceptical, saying the link between a virus and diseases was not necessarily causal.

"Fifty per cent of women who have breast cancer might also have brown hair, that doesn't mean brown hair causes cancer," John Boyages, director of the New South Wales Breast Cancer Institute, told Reuters.

## UN calls for talks to settle disputes

# Pakistan sending reinforcements to southern border with India

ISLAMABAD, Aug 12: Pakistan was sending reinforcements to its southern border with India today after a second day of aerial clashes that prompted the US to declare the nuclear neighbours were "going in the wrong direction," reports AFP.

Pakistani military leaders said they were sending troops, paramilitary rangers and marines to join commandos in the area, where Wednesday they fired at least one missile at Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft and Tuesday a Pakistani surveillance airplane was shot

down, killing 16.

Indian officials said one surface-to-air missile was fired at one of three helicopters carrying Delhi-based journalists to view the wreckage of the downed Pakistani aircraft. No one was injured in the incident.

Pakistani military spokesman Brigadier Rashid Gureshi spoke of "missiles" being fired but stressed they were targeted at two jet fighters escorting the helicopters, which he said intruded into Pakistani airspace.

The day before, Indian MiG-21 fighters shot down a Pak-

istani naval aircraft saying it was spying, had violated Indian airspace and ignored demands to land.

Pakistan claimed the plane was on a training mission and shot down in its own airspace.

Two days of clashes further raised tensions between the two South Asian rivals, just one month after the end of 10 weeks of bitter fighting along their disputed border in Kashmir.

The United States, France and the United Nations all expressed concern and urged India and Pakistan, who conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests in May

last year, to resume their stalled peace dialogue.

US State Department spokesman James Rubin said: "It's hard to be optimistic at this stage. If anything, today's events are an indication that we were going in the wrong direction."

AP adds from UN: The UN Security Council on Wednesday backed Secretary-General Kofi Annan's call for talks between India and Pakistan to settle their differences peacefully.

India shot down a Pakistani military plane Tuesday, killing 16 people, and Pakistan fired a surface-to-air missile Wednesday at Indian aircraft heading to the border region.

Annan urged both countries to avoid "tit-for-tat" incidents that could lead to spiralling violence. UN spokesman Fred Eckhard said Wednesday.

"He continues to look forward to the resumption of the bilateral dialogue between these two countries," Eckhard said.

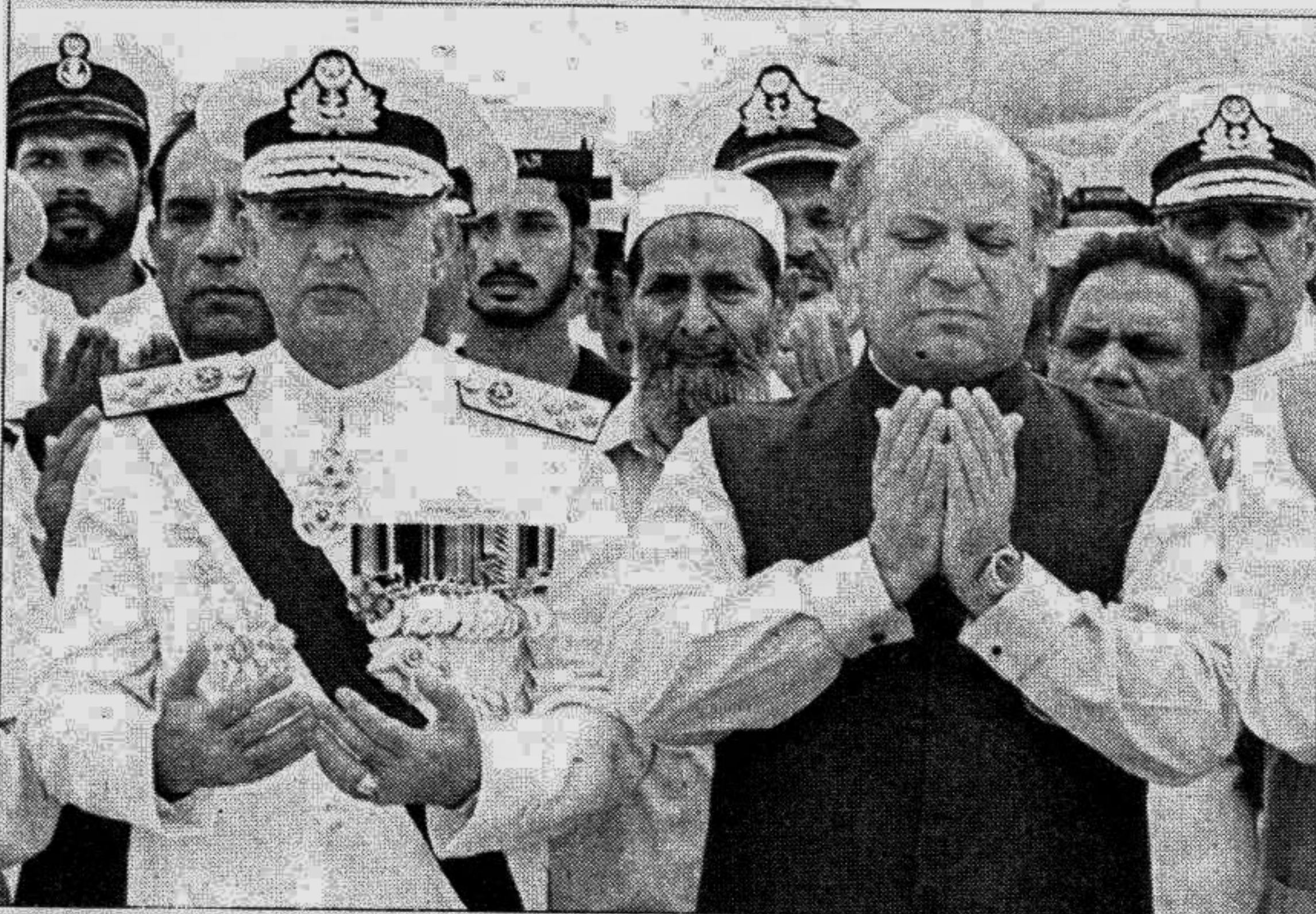
On Tuesday, Annan urged India and Pakistan to exercise "maximum restraint" and expressed concern at escalating tensions in the region.

India's charge d'affaires at the United Nations said his country's views on Tuesday's incident to a senior UN official. Pakistan's new UN ambassador, Inamul Haque, delivered a letter from his government to Annan when he presented his credentials on Tuesday.

Both incidents were raised Wednesday at the Security Council, which did not issue a statement.

Namibia's UN Ambassador Martin Andjaba, the current council president, however, said council members "took note" of Annan's statement and encourage both India and Pakistan to settle the problem through bilateral consultation.

He said "no further steps are being considered" by the council.



Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (R) offers prayers along with Pakistan Naval Chief Fasih Bukhari (L) and other senior naval and military officers for the 16 naval personnel at Mehran base in the port city of Karachi yesterday. Six officers and ten sailors were killed when Indian fighter jets fired a missile on a Pakistani patrol aircraft on Tuesday.

— AFP photo

## ROK slams Kazakhstan over alleged sale of MiG-21 to DPRK

SEOUL, Aug 12: South Korea has strongly protested to Kazakhstan's alleged sale of MiG-21 fighter jets to communist North Korea, the foreign ministry said today, reports AFP.

Foreign Minister Hong Soon-Young summoned Kazakhstan's ambassador here to lodge the complaint against the alleged multi-billion dollar deal, officials said.

"The minister conveyed his regret that Kazakhstan shipped the MiG fighters to North Korea and asked the Kazakh government to prevent the recurrence of such incidents," an official said.

Ambassador Tulegen Zhueyev replied that his government had fired Defence Minister Altan Bayev and National Security Council chairman Nurtal Abykayev in connection with shipments of jets to foreign countries, the official

added.

But he did not make it clear to which countries the used warplanes had been shipped. Embassy officials were not available for comment.

The move came a day after the United States voiced serious concerns about reports that Kazakhstan had exported a consignment of MiG-21 fighter jets to North Korea.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service chief Chun Yong-Tack said late Wednesday that the former Soviet state in central Asia had sold 34 second hand jets to starving Pyongyang for a price of 40 million dollars each.

"The North may have used some of an amount of 1.4 billion dollars earned from weapons and merchandise exports, cash remittances from Koreans living in Japan and drug sales to buy the planes," he

told a parliamentary panel.

North Korea, which is thought to be preparing to launch a new long-range missile which could hit parts of the United States, is assembling the jets at a factory near Pyongyang, he added.

"We have serious concerns about transfers of this kind and we continue to monitor this case very, very closely," US State Department spokesman James Rubin said Wednesday.

Rubin did not say how many MiGs the United States believed to be involved but South Korean officials said the Stalinist North had obtained 40 planes.

Satellite pictures showed containers believed to have MiG-21 kits being unloaded from freighter planes and carried by trains to assembly plants, a South Korean official was quoted as saying in the Munhwa Daily.

## Rebels kill two civilians in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Aug 12: Separatist militants raided the homes of two businessmen in India's northeastern state of Assam, killing two civilians, a senior police officer said today, reports Reuters.

"Heavily armed militants raided the houses of two businessmen at Damara Bazar in Goalpara district and opened indiscriminate fire, killing two people, including a businessman, on the spot," he said. The incident occurred late on Wednesday.

Goalpara is 150km (90 miles) southwest of Dispur, the state capital.

Earlier on Wednesday, separatist guerrillas of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) detonated a bomb on a road 200 km (120 miles) north of Dispur, killing two soldiers. Three others died in hospital, police said.

## Mujahideen vow to avenge on India's shooting of Pak plane

ISLAMABAD, Aug 12: A Kashmiri militant group today vowed to avenge India's shooting down of a Pakistani naval surveillance plane earlier this week, reports Reuters.

"Mujahideen (holy warriors) will definitely take revenge from India and the revenge would be such that India will remember for years to come," Sayed Salahuddin, the supreme commander of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, said in a statement.

His statement was issued as Pakistan buried the 16 naval officers and sailors killed on Tuesday when Indian MiG 21 jets shot down the naval surveillance plane.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended the emotional ceremony for the crew at a naval base in Karachi where the flag-draped coffins of the men were displayed.

Salahuddin, who heads one of the largest groups fighting the Indian rule of Kashmir, said the air attack was "an act of cowardice".

"The Indian military and political leadership is resorting to cheap tactics in order to wipe out the frustration of their people over the Kargil debacle," he said.

## Jewish centre shooting in LA: Gunman surrenders

LAS VEGAS, Aug 12: The white supremacist wanted in the shooting of five people at a Los Angeles Jewish community center led to Las Vegas in taxis, walked into an FBI office and confessed, saying he wanted his act to be "a wake-up call to America to kill Jews," authorities said, reports AP.

Buford O'Neal Furrow Jr., 37, also will be charged in the slaying of a postal worker who was shot Tuesday near the community center, authorities said Wednesday.

Los Angeles police and federal agents poured into Las Vegas to question Furrow.



Workers of India's Congress Party sort through campaign material, including poster of Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi, in Srinagar yesterday. The world's largest democracy will head to the polls in staggered polling days from September to October. India is facing its third national election since 1996.

— AFP photo

## 6 aid workers kidnapped in Liberia

LONDON, Aug 12: Six aid workers, including four British, have been kidnapped by an armed gang in Liberia, British officials say, reports AP.

The Foreign Office said Wednesday night that three of the Britons were working for British-based medical charity Merlin, where they were helping to rebuild hospitals.

The other two abducted were Norwegian and Italian staff working for the charity Medecins Sans Frontieres, the British Broadcasting Corp. reported.

A statement from Merlin, released late Wednesday, said its workers had been seized between 7 am and 8 am local time Wednesday after armed men entered their compound in Kolahun, located in Lofa County near the Sierra Leone and Guinea borders.

Earlier Wednesday Liberian

President Charles Taylor declared a state of emergency in Lofa County, where he said insurgents based in neighbouring Guinea had captured several towns overnight.

Taylor told journalists that troops had broken across the Guinean border Tuesday and taken Kolahun, one of Lofa County's main towns, and a number of surrounding communities.

Government forces were being rushed to the front and Taylor called on all "able-bodied men" to report for military service. Government troops had closed Liberia's border with Guinea, he said.

Midwife Sara Nam, 30, transport expert David Heed, 26, and 33-year-old doctor Mike Roe were snatched from Merlin's Kolahun compound, the charity said.

## Ethiopia kills 746 rebels in two and a half months

ADDIS ABABA, Aug 12: Ethiopia said today it had killed 746 rebels in fighting in the east of the country in the last two and a half months, and accused neighbouring Eritrea of arming the rebels, reports Reuters.

The Defence Ministry said in a statement that Eritrea's actions showed its lack of commitment to an Organisation of African Unity (OAU) peace plan for ending the border war between the Horn of Africa nations.

Today, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a shadowy rebel group, said it had killed 107 government soldiers and wounded 95 in a series of offensives in the south of the country this month.

A similar report from the OLF last month that it had killed 519 enemy soldiers was dismissed by Ethiopia's government as "pure fabrication" and met with a denial that any

fighting had taken place. But today the Defence Ministry responded by saying it had the upper hand in fighting against the OLF and the Islamic fundamentalist Al Itihad rebel group.

"The National Army killed

## Reinforcement troops arrive in Ambon

JAKARTA, Aug 12: Hundreds of Indonesian troop reinforcements arrived in the devastated eastern island of Ambon today after another outbreak of religious violence this week, witnesses said, reports Reuters.

Ambon city centre was said to be quiet, with shops and offices closed after three days of clashes between Muslims and Christians which killed at least 17 people, including a soldier.

746 and captured 357 Oromo Liberation Front and Al Itihad terrorists who have been armed by the dictatorial Eritrean regime to carry out subversive activities in eastern Ethiopia between May 26 to August 10," it said.

Ethiopia and Eritrea have been locked in a border war since May last year in which tens of thousands of soldiers are thought to have died.

Hopes of a peaceful resolution were raised last month when both sides said they accepted an OAU peace plan in principle. Negotiations followed under Algerian mediation to hammer out the details of a cease-fire and peace accord.

Eritrea this week said it accepted the OAU's detailed proposals to end the war, but Ethiopia asked for clarification of certain clauses — a move which Eritrea called a "transparent ploy" to block peace.

## BRIEFLY

**Ford, others honoured:** Twenty-five years to the week after he was thrust into the presidency by Watergate, Gerald Ford returned to the White House on Wednesday to be praised as the steady hand that helped America heal, AP reports from Washington.

Presidents Bill Clinton and Ford strode side-by-side into the East Room, where Ford and seven other people received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

**11 killed in Zimbabwe mishaps:** At least 11 Zimbabweans have been killed while 50 others were injured in road accidents since the Heroes and Defense Forces holiday travels which began Tuesday, reports Xinhua from Harare.

Police Wednesday said of the 73 accidents reported from all the provinces by late Wednesday morning, Harare had the highest number with 34 recorded accidents. According to the police, most of the accidents were due to speeding and negligence by some drivers who were driving while drunk.

**Putin takes break in schedule:** Acting Prime Minister Vladimir Putin took a break in his busy schedule of forming a new government to travel to St Petersburg for a memorial service for his father who died last week, a spokeswoman said on Thursday, Reuters reports from Moscow.

She said Putin left for Russia's second city on Wednesday evening for the service and was back by early yesterday. He was expected to hold a cabinet meeting at noon (0800 GMT) today and meet Russian President Boris Yeltsin later.

## Lankan tycoons offer talks with LTTE rebels

COLOMBO, Aug 12: Sri Lanka's top entrepreneurs have agreed to meet Tamil separatist leaders to help end the country's 16-year civil war, a state-run newspaper reported Thursday, reports AP.

The businessmen could mediate between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to settle the insurrection that has killed 58,000 people and damaged the economy.

The Daily News said that Lalith Kotelawala, head of the Business Forum, has agreed to meet by October with the rebel leaders if the government and the main opposition United National Party agree to a written proposal on how to solve the Tamil ethnic issue.

Kotelawala's business empire includes insurance, banking and real estate development. The newspaper said that several other business leaders would join him in a meeting with the rebels.

The government says that it will not agree to the division of Sri Lanka, an island nation of

18.5 million people off India's southern coast.

But the government says it is willing to grant greater autonomy to Tamil majority areas in the north and the east. In that way, the Tamils, who complain of discrimination by the Sinhalese majority, can have their own provincial administrations.

The settlement proposal requires a two-thirds majority of Parliament to pass a constitutional amendment. However, the government has only a single vote majority in the 225-member legislature.

The opposition United National Party has in the past refused to support an autonomy plan for Tamils, who are mostly Hindu. The UNP believes such a plan may herald the dismemberment of Sri Lanka, a Buddhist majority country.

Kotelawala was not reachable for comment on the newspaper report. But his office said he took part in a meeting Wednesday with members of the government and the UNP.



Police block Acehnese protesters to prevent them from trying to get closer to the Ministry of Defense in Jakarta yesterday. The demonstrators, including Acehnese and Muslim student groups, demanded that the military withdraw its troops and blamed it for the continuing violence in the troubled province of Aceh.

— AFP photo

## Last solar eclipse of the millennium thrills millions

CALCUTTA, Aug 12: The last total solar eclipse of the 20th century raced across vast swathes of the world, dramatically plunging day into night and thrilling millions from Canada's east coast to the Bay of Bengal, reports Reuters.

In one of nature's great spectacles, the sun turned black and appeared ringed with fire for just a minute or two on Wednesday — presenting a diamond ring effect to many watching on earth.

Druids danced, Muslims prayed, Hindus bathed and Europeans stopped work and took to the streets as an eerie twilight followed by darkness covered their countries.

Although cloud and rain obscured the view for many, those who fully saw the three-hour long eclipse were awestruck. "Imagine what our ancestors must have felt like when it hap-

pened to them 2,000 years ago," said astronomer David Hughes as the eclipse snuffed out the light at Land's End in southern England, where the eclipse first cast its shadow on land.

Pope John Paul, a keen astronomical watcher, peered at the last solar eclipse of the millennium through a square of tinted glass and cut short his weekly general audience to be sure not to miss the event.

In the Iranian city of Isfahan, where the US space agency NASA said there was the best viewing, Muslims performed the "namaz-e ayat," a special prayer offered at times of natural phenomena to celebrate God's glory and power.

Thousands of Iranians and tourists poured into the majestic central square of the trading city, erupting in whistles, applause and shouts of "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest).

The eclipse began over the Atlantic Ocean nearly three hours earlier when the moon completely covered the sun at 0931 GMT off Canada's east coast near Nova Scotia.

It set off across the ocean at 1,500 miles per hour (2,400 kph) and ended in the Bay of Bengal off India three hours later.

The final homage to nature came from around 700,000 devout Hindus who took a "lucky dip" in a gigantic pond in the northern Indian city of Kurukshetra, a sacred site because it is where the Bhagwad Gita, the Hindu holy book, appeared.

"According to Hindu mythology, if you take a dip during the solar eclipse or do a nice deed on this day, the benefit is a thousand times more," said Holy man Manu Kumar Sharma.

At 1010 GMT eclipse first appeared over land at Britain's Scilly Isles and then within a minute swept over the English

mainland at the county of Cornwall. People cheered, wept and popped champagne corks as an eerie darkness fell and the horizon glowed. The temperature plummeted by up to 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

The reaction was repeated in the eclipse's 70-mile (110-km) wide path of totality across Europe.

In Paris, traffic stopped and office blocks emptied as hundreds of thousands poured into avenues, parks and open spaces under the Eiffel Tower and Tuileries gardens.

Many laughed at fashion designer Paco Rabanne's apocalyptic predictions that the Russian space station Mir would crash into the French capital at the time of the eclipse.

Not only did Mir not plunge to earth, it also got the first view of the moon's shadow from

space.

The point of greatest eclipse — as the moon's axis passes closest to earth — fell on the Romanian town of Rimnicu Vilcea for two minutes and 27 seconds but clouds spoiled the view.

At Bucharest zoo, birds and monkeys returned to their quarters preparing for the night. But minutes later, they went out again, disoriented as a sliver of sun reappeared.

Ponties at the zoo, misled by the darkness, tried to mate. "Ponties in our zoo usually mate after dark," the zoo keeper told Reuters. "Those two males were fooled by the eclipse and thought it was time for sex."

Romania's state news agency said tourists in Black Sea resorts used their bare hands to catch thousands of disoriented fish swimming in shallow waters.

There were huge traffic jams

in Europe — some as long as 50 km (30 miles) as motorists stopped to look at the eclipse.

In Berlin, a 24-year-old German was a victim of the eclipse when he was severely burned after he climbed a power pylon to get a good view and touched the 20,000-volt cable.

British hospital authorities said 200 calls were received from people who looked at the eclipse without protection for their eyes.

Phones went unanswered at financial trading rooms throughout Europe as dealers joined in the rush to see the eclipse.

Several British newspapers splashed pictures of the eclipse across their front pages on Thursday. The top-selling Sun tabloid used its whole front page for one photo, letting it speak for itself without a headline or comment.

## Milosevic says NATO, US great threat to humanity

BELGRADE, Aug 12: NATO and the United States represent a "great threat" to humanity and international law, Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic told visiting Russian legislator Nikolai Ryzhkov on Wednesday, reports AFP.

"The dictate of force, imposed by the Atlantic alliance and spearheaded by the United States, represents the greatest threat to the future of humanity," Tanjug news agency said citing a communique issued after their meeting.

Milosevic has been indicted by the UN war crimes tribunal for his part in the crackdown on Kosovo's ethnic Albanian population which led to NATO's 11-week air campaign that ended in June.