

Canada may hike immigration quota to 500,000

TORONTO, Aug 18: The Canadian government is proposing to increase the annual immigration quota to 500,000 from the current level of 225,000, with a government minister admitting that immigrants made an "enormous contribution" to the nation's economic growth, reports IANS.

According to a report in the Toronto Star, the plan to increase the immigration quota is the result of shortage of labour in many parts of the country, including Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan provinces.

In the past two years, the Immigration Department reportedly let in 50,000 immigrants less than the 225,000 ceiling. Elinor Kaplan, the new Citizenship Minister, is seen to have greater sensitivity towards immigrants than her predecessor Lucienne Robillard. She conceded she is thinking of increasing the immigration quota. Getting to a goal of 500,000 immigrants annually "is an important discussion," she said.

"We know that immigrants who come to Canada make an enormous contribution to our economic growth," Kaplan was quoted as saying. "We've had tremendous success in our immigrant communities among

new Canadians and they have created not only a success for themselves but for all of Canada," she said.

There is also a cause for alarm. The number of skilled workers leaving Canada for the U.S. has increased dramatically: from 17,000 in 1986 to 98,000 in 1997. Between 1995 and 1997, 69 per cent of computer graduates in this country went to the United States and 52 per cent of all engineering graduates went south of the border because of higher pay and other benefits.

Kaplan reportedly said she has already asked her department to develop new strategies to increase the annual immigration quota and that it needs to streamline the process to speed up the clearance of immigration applications. "We need to make sure that we have the people here for the jobs that are being created today and will be created in the future," she stated, adding that all Liberal Party Members of Parliament "understand the importance of bringing people here that want to build this country."

"They know and I know that it brings prosperity. New immigrants create jobs, new immigrants bring their talents, their expertise, their creativity and ingenuity and their knowledge of the world," she said.

IZMIT, Turkey, Aug 18: The world rallied today to help Turkey, ravaged by an earthquake that killed at least 2,000 people, buried hundreds more and set the country's biggest oil refinery aflame, reports Reuters.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan pledged all possible UN help while many countries, even Turkey's traditional rival Greece, dispatched or promised expert rescue teams, medical aid and money.

Crisis centre officials in Ankara told Reuters that the death toll stood at 2,033 at 2300 GMT on Tuesday as rescuers made desperate efforts to find survivors of the quake which hit the country's most populous region.

Turkey declared its quake-devastated northwest a disaster area late on Tuesday, enabling the government to commandeer private and public resources to provide help.

Turkey's chief earthquake expert, Professor Ahmet Mete Isikara of Istanbul's Kandilli observatory, revised his rating of the quake to above 7 on the Richter Scale from a previous measurement of 6.7.

The US Geological Survey put the size of the earthquake, which was followed by some 300 aftershocks, at 7.8 on the Richter Scale. It called the quake one of the world's most

powerful in two decades.

The death toll rose by the hour but officials declined to say how high it would go. Hundreds were feared buried in rubble.

The quake struck at 3:02 am (0002 GMT) on Tuesday, killing many in their sleep.

Hours later, thousands fearing their homes would collapse bedded down under the stars in Istanbul, Turkey's commercial centre, as well as Izmit, the industrial city which bore the brunt of Tuesday's pre-dawn quake 90-km (55 miles) to the east.

Others rendered homeless had no choice but to sleep outdoors. The force of the quake ripped out electric pylons and tore cables apart, leaving parts of the region without electricity.

It also toppled the minarets of dozens of mosques in the mostly Muslim country. There were no immediate reports of damage to Istanbul's architectural treasures such as the Blue Mosque.

In Izmit, rescue teams struggled to reach residents buried under dozens of collapsed buildings.

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit held out hope survivors would be found.

The quake turned an Izmit cemetery into an assembly line. Workers operating bulldozers

dug rows of trenches on a hill-top to take the overflow from an overcrowded cemetery below.

"The bulldozers will keep digging until we have room for everyone," said Veysel Cakir, overseeing the grim task.

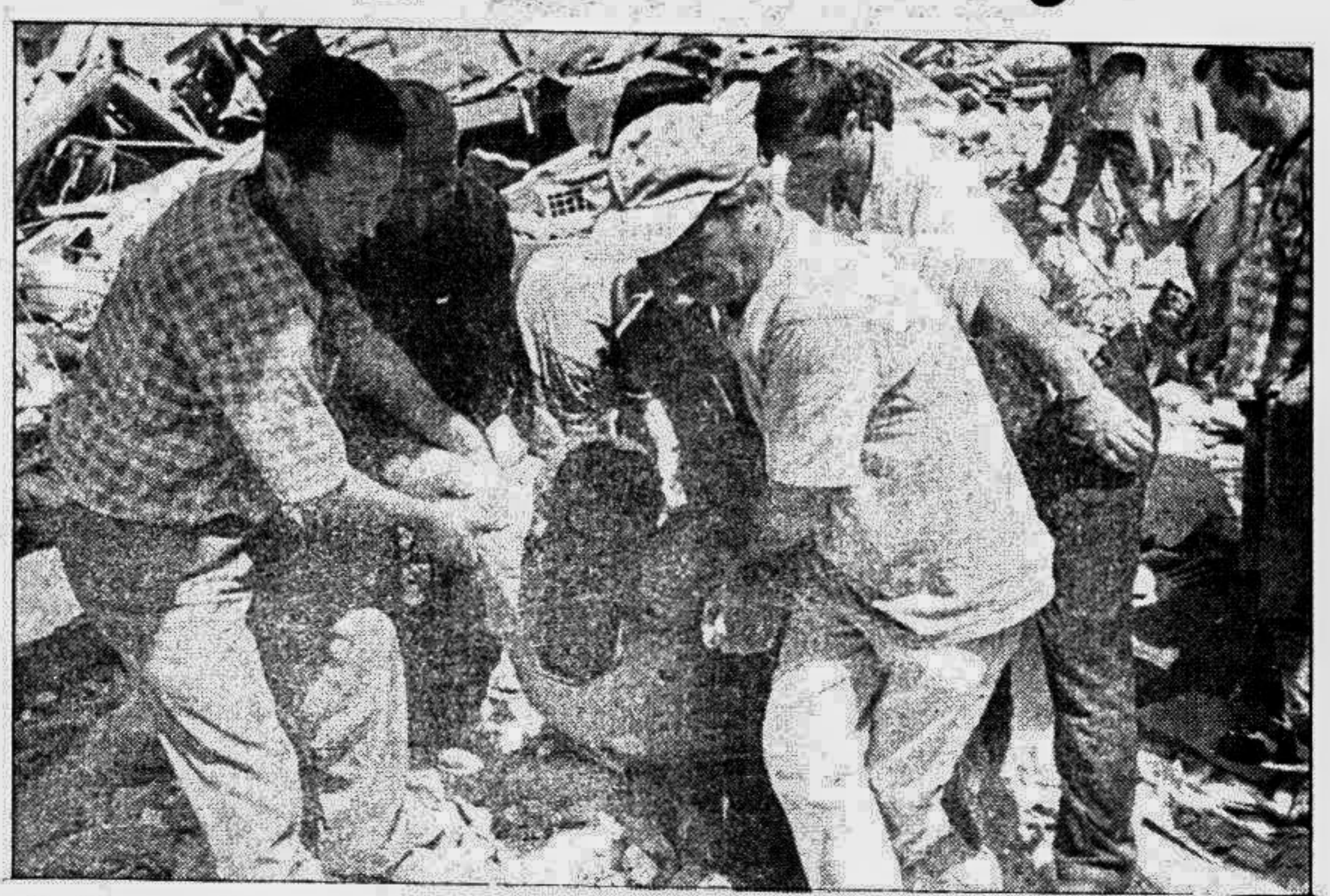
Outside an Izmit hospital, some 150 doctors and nurses struggled to save the wounded strewn among the dead.

The United States rushed a 70-member search-and-rescue team to the disaster area. Israel, which counts Turkey as its strongest regional ally, said it was answering Ankara's call for survivor-seeking sniffer dogs.

Swiss rescuers led by three golden Labradors were among the first foreign teams to search the rubble. Germany home to the largest Turkish population outside Turkey, sent salvage teams with dogs also.

The epicentre was near Izmit, where an uncontrollable fire at Turkey's biggest oil refinery prompted fears of an explosion. The Tupras refinery in Izmit said it evacuated all employees and rescue teams broke off their efforts overnight.

In nearby Golcuk, Turkish rescue teams dug at the ruins of a naval base building in search of some 200 buried sailors. Some 20 bodies were recovered. A guard said he and his comrades struggled to big them out with their bare hands.



Residents of Ada Pazara, the epicenter of the earthquake, drag the body of a man who was killed when his multi-storied building collapsed during the 6.8 earthquake in western Turkey, Tuesday. The earthquake, one of the worst in recent Turkish history has so far killed some 3,000 people with the death toll certain to rise, and thousands injured, as rescue teams scramble to find survivors, and those buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings. — AFP photo

'Pakistan can build neutron bomb'

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: Pakistan has the capacity and expertise to build a neutron bomb, a prominent Pakistani nuclear scientist said Wednesday, following the disclosure by rival neighbour India it could also make the devices, reports AFP.

The country by the grace of God has such well-trained, specialised and capable nuclear scientists who can design and build a nuclear weapon of any type or size including a neutron bomb," N.M. Butt said.

The scientist, speaking on a television programme, said sufficient quantities of material used for making neutron bombs were also available within the country.

Neutron bombs are designed to maximize neutron radiation. They are lethal to all forms of life but, having a reduced blast, leave buildings and infrastructure relatively undamaged.

In the bomb the neutron-producing fusion process domi-

mates over the fission trigger.

Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in May last year in prompt reaction to atomic detonations by India. The tests triggered international alarm and sanctions as well as calls for restraint by the two countries.

Indian Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) chairman Rajagopala Chidambaram said Monday that after the nuclear tests India could design and make nuclear weapons of "any type or size."

"It is not difficult to build such a device," Chidambaram said of India's capacity to build a neutron bomb.

India exploded a hydrogen bomb and four fission devices during its tests last year.

Despite declaring a moratorium on further tests, India has not halted its nuclear weapons research, according to top officials of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, which designed and built the devices.

Indian political parties converge on economic philosophy

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: A convergence in the economic philosophies of India's major political parties is fuelling hopes that start-stop reforms may finally move onto the fast track, analysts said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The alliance led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party and the main opposition Congress party both unveiled their election manifestos this week, showing a striking similarity of approach to the economy.

"It is really the first time that we have seen a convergence on the economic issues in the manifestos," said P.D. Kaushik, economist at the independent Rajiv Gandhi Foundation.

Both the parties said economic growth should be pushed up by increased spending on agriculture, focusing on specific export growth areas and speed-

ing up the privatisation of state-run firms.

They also came together in proposing to bring in a Fiscal Responsibility Act aimed at trimming India's ballooning fiscal deficit, while both targeted an annual foreign investment inflow of 10 billion dollars.

"It is hard to distinguish who is the originator of these policies. They look very similar," Kaushik said, adding that any consensus was welcome as the country begins to emerge from a three-year economic slowdown.

"Whoever comes to power, one thing is certain. We can definitely see more reforms at a faster pace," he said.

India's economic reforms, launched by the Congress party in 1991, were aimed at dismantling decades of central planning and bringing foreign investment into key sectors such as telecommunications and

power.

But political instability, especially in the past four years, has hampered the reform process, with governments coming to power and falling swifter than their policies can be properly implemented.

The conservative BJP's reform credentials have traditionally been suspect, but the manifesto of the alliance it heads made a very clear commitment to deepening and speeding up reform.

At the same time, the Congress manifesto included a nod to the BJP's "swadeshi" (economic self-reliance) stance, promising to encourage and support Indian multinationals and Indian brands.

Both parties also pledged to fight India's corner at the World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle in November.

'Barak ready to withdraw from all of Golan'

CAIRO, Aug 18: Prime Minister Ehud Barak is ready to withdraw from all of the Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria, Israel's deputy foreign minister Nawaf Massalha said in remarks published here Wednesday, reports AFP.

Massalha, the first Arab-Israeli in the post, also told Al-Ahram Hebdo that a withdrawal from the Golan as well as from south Lebanon could be decided within two years, while a Palestinian solution could take four years.

"The Syrians want negotiations to resume at the point where they stopped in 1996," Massalha was quoted as telling the French-language weekly published in Egypt.

Barak, who was foreign minister at the time, is ready to withdraw the Israeli army to the June 4, 1967 borders, or those that existed just before the Arab-Israeli war in which Syria lost the Golan. Massalha told the paper.

"For him, this commitment must be the result of negotiations and not a prerequisite for negotiations," he added.

Turning to the Palestinian track, Massalha said Barak did not consider the main problem to be implementing the lapsed November 1998 Wye River accords, which call for further Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank.

"He does not want to waste time in controversy over applying this agreement but instead proceed directly to the negotiations on the final status," he told the weekly.

He added that "the real problem (over Wye) resides in the fact that military experts were trying to convince Barak to modify the withdrawal maps." Israel says it is concerned for the security of its settlers.

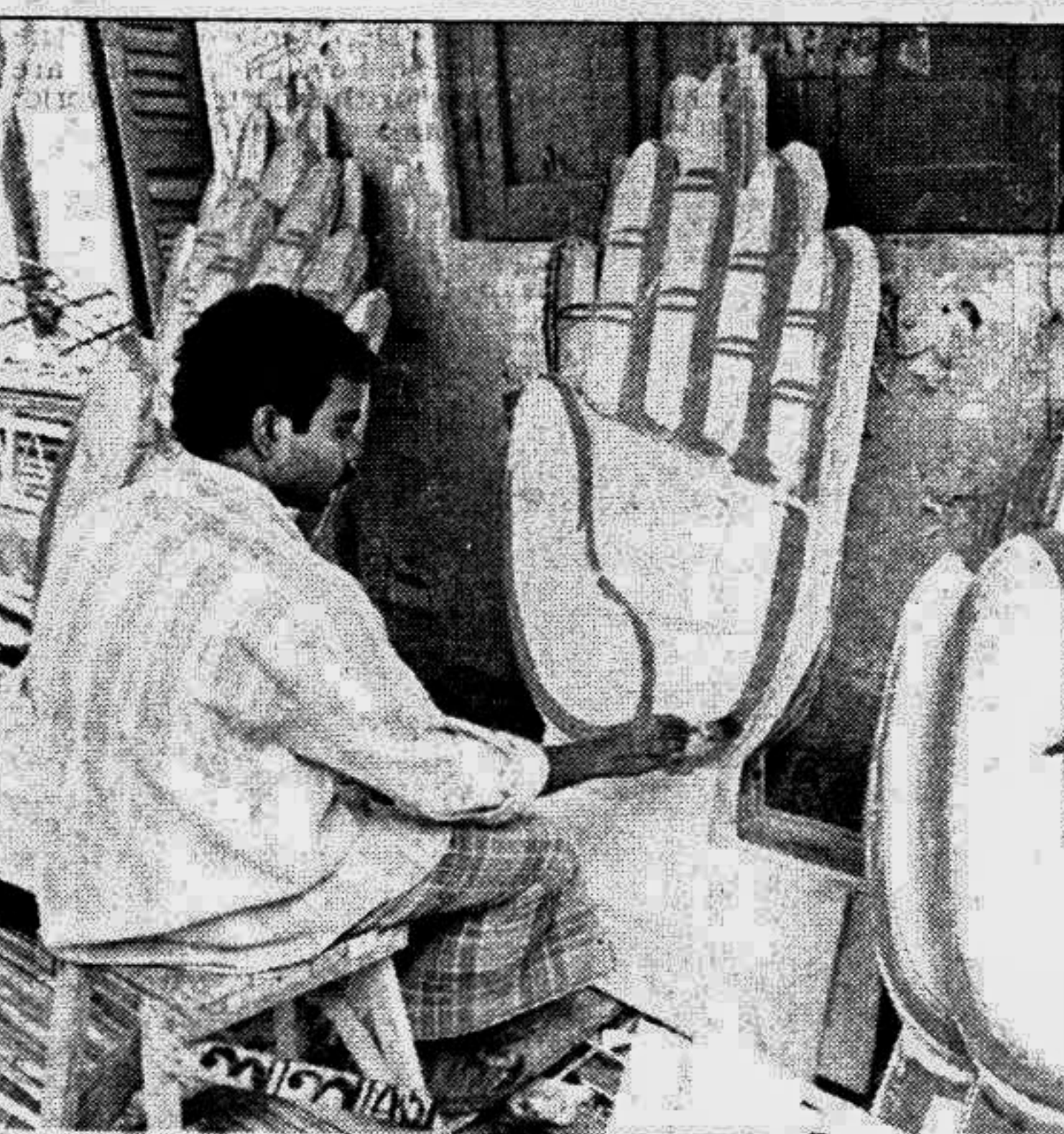
Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has accused the new government of trying to wriggle out of its commitments under Wye, signed by the previous right-

wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu who then suspended implementation.

Meanwhile, another meeting between Palestinians and Israelis to try to reach an agreement on the Wye River land-for-security agreement broke up early on Wednesday without result although the two sides did agree to meet later the same day.

The negotiators remained far apart not just on the timetable for the two delayed military withdrawals from the West Bank to which Israel is committed but on a range of other issues, according to Palestinian senior negotiator Saeb Erakat.

"The talks were tough and difficult. The Israeli could make it easier if they commit themselves to what was written in the agreements and not try to modify them," Erakat told AFP after the meeting.



An artist prepares cut-outs of the Congress(I) Party symbol in Calcutta Wednesday. The cut-outs will be used by the party during campaigning for the forthcoming Indian general elections. — AFP photo

Russia assails NATO as Serbs face reprisals in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Aug 18: Russia is blaming its NATO peacekeeping partners for on-going attacks against Kosovo Serbs as the rapidly dwindling ethnic group buried their latest victims — killed in a mortar attack in an area where American troops are supposed to keep order, reports AP.

"Violence is raging in Kosovo, the killings of peaceful civilians, arsons and robberies of non-Albanians multiply," the Russian Foreign Ministry said Tuesday. "In essence, ethnic cleansing is in full swing in Kosovo. This is the outcome of the 'policy of pacifying' Albanian separatism on the part of several Western nations."

The statement was a clear reference to American support for the Kosovo Liberation Army during the 78-day NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, which ended when Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic accepted a peace plan in June.

Russia called for "energetic actions" to stop "terrorism, sepa-

ratism and ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo. The statement also charged Kosovo's independence-minded ethnic Albanians of openly challenging the international community.

Russia leveled its charge one day after attackers presumed to be ethnic Albanians fired nine mortars onto the southeastern village of Klokot, killing two Serbs and injuring five. The KLA is supposed to have turned over all mortars and heavy weapons to peacekeepers, although it was unclear whether the guerrillas launched the attack.

On Tuesday, black-scarved Serb women joined other Serb villagers in Klokot to bury the victims — a 23-year-old woman and a 24-year-old man. An American tank stood guard outside the Serbian orthodox church as the solemn procession passed through the village.

Threats by ethnic Albanian neighbours have prompted most of the province's 200,000 Serbs to flee. But Klokot villagers vowed to stay, despite the

attack.

"We don't have anywhere to go," cried Ljubic Marinkovic, an old woman gathered outside a house with a hole in the roof from a mortar blast. "Should we just go on the street?"

Russia vehemently opposed NATO's bombing campaign and generally sided with the Serbs, Moscow's traditional allies and Slav Orthodox brethren. The Russians have sent 3,600 peacekeepers to Kosovo.

Hopes that ethnic tensions may be easing were raised Monday when ethnic Albanians in the northern city of Kosovska Mitrovica called off a demonstration after UN and French officials announced a plan to allow 25 Albanian families a day to return to their homes in the Serb-controlled sector.

The city has been divided along ethnic lines, with ethnic Albanians on one side of the Ibar River, the Serbs on the other and French troops trying to keep them separated to prevent violence.



Russian troops prepare for a raid in Dagestani villages against Islamic fighters under the leadership of Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev and Iordanian Militant Khattab, Tuesday. Moscow dispatched its two top security ministers to Dagestan on Wednesday as Russian reinforcements poured into the region to prepare a second push against Islamic gunmen. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Gunmen kill 13 in Bogota: Suspected right-wing paramilitary gunmen shot to death at least 13 rural villagers on Tuesday and dumped their bodies along a highway, police said, AP reports from Bogota.

A 13-year-old girl was among the dead in the early-morning attack in Zambrano, a township 335 miles (560 kilometers) north of Bogota in the state of Bolivar. Based on witness accounts, the assassins were probably members of a paramilitary group, said State police chief Col. Francisco Bermudez.

Russian minister in Dagestan: Defence Minister Igor Sergeev arrived yesterday in Dagestan, where 12 days of fighting between Russian troops and Islamist insurgents have killed hundreds of soldiers, AFP reports from Makhachkala.

President Boris Yeltsin on Tuesday said Sergeev must play a leading role in trying to resolve the conflict. The Defence Ministry in Moscow refused to provide any details of Sergeev's visit, as did officials in Makhachkala.

IAF fighters collide in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 18: Two Indian Air Force fighter jets collided at the main airport in the northern Indian state of Kashmir on Wednesday, killing one of the pilots, reports AFP.

The two MiG-21s collided just after take off from Srinagar airport at around 1:40 p.m. (0810 GMT), air force officials said.

One pilot died instantly, while the other was said to be in critical condition.

An army spokesman meanwhile said three more members of the Indian security forces had been killed in separatist-linked violence elsewhere in Kashmir overnight Tuesday.

Almost one-third of world's population infected with TB

WASHINGTON, Aug 18: Almost one third of the world's population is infected with the bacterium that causes tuberculosis according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), reports AFP.

Writing in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Christopher Dye and his WHO colleagues estimate that 1.86 billion, or 32 per cent of the world's population, are infected with Mycobacterium tuberculosis.

TB is a disease affecting the lungs and other parts of the body. In some people the bacteria can remain dormant and

become active if their immune system becomes weakened or if they become malnourished.

For 1997, in the 212 countries composing the WHO's world list, the number of new cases of tuberculosis was 7.96 million, of which 3.52 million cases were of infectious TB lung disease.

"TB continues to be a huge international health concern mainly because of poor control in Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and eastern Europe," and because of the high rates of TB infection with HIV in some African countries.

Russian reinforcements pour into Dagestan

MAKHACHKALA, Russia, Aug 18: Moscow dispatched its two top security ministers to Dagestan on Wednesday as Russian reinforcements poured into the republic to prepare a second push against Islamist gunmen holed up in the strife-torn republic's mountains, reports AFP.

Defence Minister Igor Sergeev and Interior Minister Vladimir Rusalov were scheduled to take part in a meeting of the Dagestan security council where a military plan to dislodge insurgents occupying villages in the Botlikh region would be worked out.

Russia airlifted an additional 500 soldiers and 30 pieces of heavy military equipment into the region overnight, officials said.

Russian forces flew more than 20 sorties over the region in the past 24 hours, managing to destroy a local television broadcast antenna used by the Islamists.

Moscow officials said they had successfully blocked an attempt by gunmen from Chechnya to cross into Dagestan early Wednesday in order to help insurgents occupying the Botlikh region.

The officials reported that Russian defence ministry forces, who have taken over command from interior ministry troops, have also taken control of the Kharami mountain pass, the main link between Chechnya and the Bot-

likh region and the site of fierce fighting throughout the conflict.

Federal Security Service (former KGB) officials cited by Moscow news agencies said they had intercepted radio communications between the gunmen suggesting that they were preparing a new invasion of Russian territory.

A spokesman in Moscow told Interfax that Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, who is leading the insurgents in Dagestan, was ready to lead an assault on Russia's North Ossetia region on Chechnya's north-western border.

The North Ossetian military base of Mazdok was used by Russian forces as a springboard during its December 1994 invasion of Chechnya.

Moscow prosecutors have issued arrest warrants for Basayev and his field commander, identified as the Jordanian-born Hattab and another gunman known only as Gapur.

Basayev already tops Moscow's wanted list for his 1995 war-time siege of a Russian hospital that killed some 200 people.

Russian troops have killed an estimated 600 gunmen since some 1,200 Islamists crossed from Chechnya into Dagestan on August 7 and declared the republic independent.

A Chechen spokesman for the insurgents said Tuesday that the group currently controls 20 villages in western

Dagestan and is planning to mount a new offensive later this week.

Russian officials, however, say that the gunmen only control five towns in the southern Botlikh region, where the group is reportedly surrounded by Russian forces.

Pentagon to review Diana documents for Al Fayed

WASHINGTON, Aug 18: The Pentagon said on Tuesday it had agreed to review documents in its possession about the late Princess Diana to see whether they shed any light on her death two years ago, reports Reuters.

Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon said Defence Department officials doubted there was anything useful in the documents, but that the review would be made at the request of former Sen. George Mitchell, acting at the behest of Mohamed Al Fayed, the Harrod's owner whose son died in a Paris car crash with Diana.

"We have found absolutely no connection between any documents in the Defence Department and any information that would shed light on the cause of the accident. There is nothing we have that sheds any light on the cause of this accident," Bacon told reporters.

India developing arms to 'cook' enemy jets, missiles

BOMBAY, Aug 18: Indian scientists say they are close to developing a powerful electron accelerator that could be used as a weapon to bring down enemy missiles and planes reports AFP.

The accelerator is capable of emitting microwaves packed with "gigawatts of power," that would "cook" missile and aircraft computer guidance systems, the Press Trust of India said Wednesday, citing scientists at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Bombay.

The machine, the KALI-5000, will be ready for testing by the end of this year, according to P.H. Ron, head of the centre's accelerator and pulse power division.

However, Ron admitted it

would be some time before the 26-tonne accelerator could be "compact" into a viable size for military use.

The machine was originally designed for industrial use and has tanks containing 12,000 litres (3,120 gallons) of oil.

Another report from Islamabad says, a key Kashmir guerrilla group said Wednesday the Indian Army had started jamming its radio frequencies in a "communications offensive" against Mujahideen fighters.

"They are trying to neutralise our communications system which has been operating inside Indian-held Kashmir for a decade," a spokesman for Hizbul Mujahideen said in a statement.

Chopstick in brain!

TOKYO, Aug 18: A four-year-old Japanese boy diagnosed with a minor throat injury later died and was found to have a chopstick stuck in his brain, a report said today, says AFP.

The youngster, Shunzo Sugino, was eating cotton candy when he fell on the stick which then pierced the back of his throat and penetrated his brain, said the Yomiuri Shim-bun.

A specialist in Tokyo's Kyorin University Hospital allegedly told the boy's mother that the injury was not serious and sent him home with some antibiotics and painkillers.

The 7.6 centimetre (three-inch) chopstick was discovered in the boy's brain in a post-mortem, the report said.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) chats with Nepalese Foreign Affairs Minister Ram Sharan Mahat during their meeting in New Delhi Wednesday. Mahat is on a three-day official visit to India to discuss bilateral issues. — AFP photo