

Ties with China will improve, hopes Khatami

TEHRAN, Sept 1: Iranian President Mohammad Khatami here yesterday expressed the hope that friendly and cooperative relations between Iran and China would further develop, reports Xinhua.

Accepting credentials presented by Sun Bigan, China's new ambassador to Iran, Khatami said China enjoys an important status in the world, and it occupies a special position in Iran's foreign policy.

He said that both Iran and China are against hegemony and power politics, are striving to develop themselves and their economic cooperation has been going on very well. He said he hoped for more economic and trade cooperation between the two sides in the future.

The president pointed out that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a certain country has been trying to turn the world into a uni-polar one, which he said is not realistic.

The objective of the proposed "dialog among civilizations" is to enable every country in the world to respect each other and treat each other equally, he said. Khatami put forward "dialog among civilizations" soon after he took office in 1997.

Both Iran and China had in the past made important contributions to human civilization and they can have excellent dialog between them, Khatami added.

Over 1,50,000 hit by flood in Malda

MALDA (WB), Sept 1: Over 1,50,000 people of Malda and North Dinajpur districts in North Bengal have been affected in floods following heavy rains in the past few days, official sources said yesterday, reports PTI.

In Malda 200 villages were submerged by rivers Ganga, Mahananda and Fulahar affecting over 70,000 people, Additional District Magistrate Nikhilendu Hazra said.

The Ganga was flowing eight centimeters above the red signal mark in Malda, he said.

In North Dinajpur 80,000 people were rendered homeless as heavy rains flooded Raiganj, Itahar and Islampur, State Minister of Home (Civil Defence) Srikumar Mukherjee told PTI.

Many homeless people have taken shelter on National Highway 34.

Relief measures have been undertaken by the district administrations and dry food and tarpaulins are being distributed among the affected people, district sources said.

US welcomes Jordanian action against Hamas

WASHINGTON, Sept 1: The United States on Tuesday said it welcomed the steps taken by Jordanian authorities against the hardline Palestinian Hamas movement, reports AFP.

"We welcome the action taken by Jordan, we think it's a positive step," State Department spokesman James Foley told reporters.

But the crackdown, which involved the closure of its offices in Amman, and the arrests of dozen of Hamas members, was purely a matter for the Jordanian authorities to decide, he added.

His comments appeared aimed at protests in the Arab world against the move, in particular criticisms from Palestinian and Moslem militants that the action was designed to pander to the United States and its friends just ahead of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to the region.

In addition, the Jordanians issued arrest warrants for five Amman-based leaders of the militant opposition group.

"We think this is the token which is being offered to Albright during her visit to the region," Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder and spiritual guide of Hamas, said in Gaza.

"This is part of a US effort to put pressure on the Movement to enter into a peace process which we consider to be selling out the Palestinian cause," he charged.

Violence looms over start of counting of votes in E Timor

DILI, Indonesia, Sept 1: With armed anti-independence militiamen roaming streets and villages in East Timor, gunshots rang out through the night in one town and a teen-ager was killed in the provincial capital, police said Wednesday, reports AP.

The violence followed Monday's relatively peaceful referendum on independence. The outbreak raised fears that the territory could slide back into lawlessness as pro-Indonesia militias — sensing defeat — try frantically to take control of whatever they can.

There was gunfire throughout Tuesday night and into early Wednesday in the militiamen-controlled town of Hera, 10 miles (16 kilometers) outside the capital, Dili, said Hiro Ueki, a spokesman for the UN elections team. Police were checking news reports that four people killed there.

Police said an unidentified

teen-ager was slain in central Dili.

On Tuesday, militiamen carrying homemade guns, machetes and some military weapons set up roadblocks across East Timor's mountainous countryside and harassed UN staff — in one case shooting at a helicopter carrying ballot boxes. Militias, believed to be backed by Indonesia's military, accused the United Nations of encouraging independence.

Monday's landmark ballot asked the mostly Roman Catholic East Timorese whether they wanted to become independent or remain part of mostly Muslim Indonesia as an autonomous region. About 98.6 per cent of registered voters turned out, UN officials said. The high turnout is believed to favour a vote for independence.

Vote counting was set to begin in Dili on Wednesday, although results may not be

known before Sept 7.

The next step will be a vote in a 700-member special assembly to approve the results. While some lawmakers oppose independence for East Timor, the ballot results will likely be respected. President BJ Habibie has promised to abide by the referendum.

Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said the United Nations would have to temporarily take over East Timor. The United Nations intends to supervise the change of power in the territory, whether to autonomy or independence.

Troops from Indonesia invaded a few months after East Timor was given independence from Portugal in 1975. Indonesia annexed East Timor in 1976, triggering years of guerrilla warfare and human rights abuses.

On Tuesday, US President Bill Clinton said he was en-

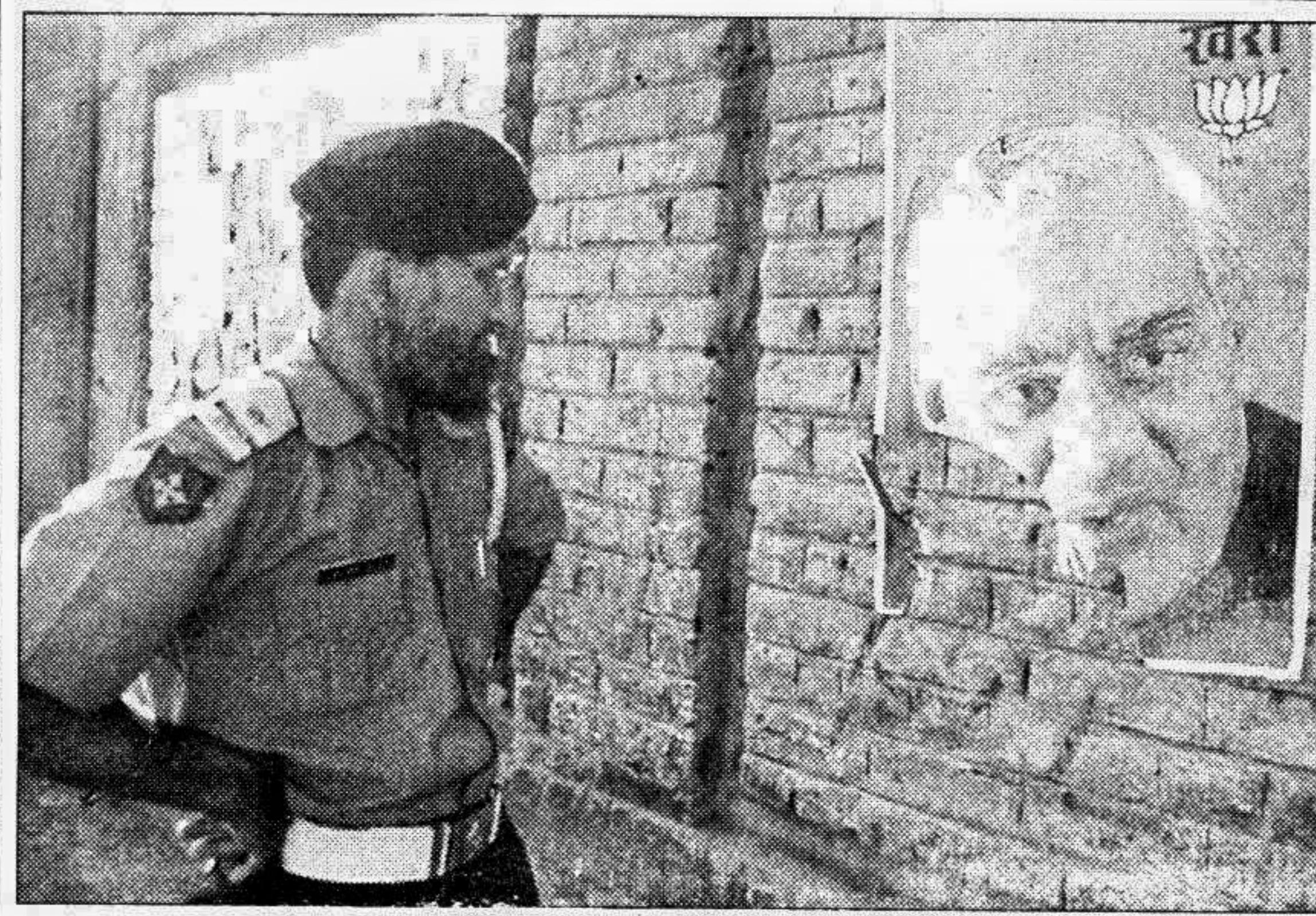
The UN Assistance Mission in East Timor called for an immediate end to all violence in the half-island territory northwest of Australia. "Now is the time for everyone to lay down their weapons," said UNAMET spokesman David Winkler.

But tensions were high Tuesday and Wednesday, when most pro-independence activists lay low to avoid hundreds of militiamen roaming Dili neighborhoods and nearby villages. "I think the situation is uncertain," said activist Jose Rendado. "Many people are worried."

Militiamen blocked fearful independence supporters from leaving East Timor by plane, ship or road on Tuesday.



Pro-Indonesia "Aitarak" militiaman Flacido Manezes Alves's brother (C) is comforted by two fellow militiamen yesterday during his brother's funeral after Alves was killed by pro-independence supporters in recent clashes. Despite a violent campaign of intimidation by pro-integration militias, 98.6 per cent of East Timorese voters cast their votes in a UN-held self-determination poll with results expected within a week. —AFP photo



A policeman looks at a defaced election campaign poster showing Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in Srinagar yesterday. As the two main political parties trade accusations of responsibility for the recent conflict in Kashmir with Pakistan, and campaigning for the upcoming elections continues, India has accused Pakistan of again triggering heavy mortar exchanges across the disputed Kashmiri Line of Control. —AFP photo

Britons pay tributes to Diana

LONDON, Sept 1: Thousands of people have been visiting Kensington Palace in London to mark the second anniversary of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, reports Xinhua.

And hundreds of bouquets as well as toys, candles and photographs have been left at the palace gates, echoing the vast sea of tributes laid in the days after her death two years ago.

People have travelled from around the UK to pay their respects, while some foreign visitors have also laid tributes.

The princess died with Dodi Fayed and his chauffeur when their car crashed in a road tunnel in Paris on 31 August 1997.

Many people at Kensington Palace have called for a permanent memorial to the princess. More than 2,000 people have so far signed a petition. But initial plans for a memorial garden near the palace were abandoned when residents objected.

Organised Jiji Marseilles was quoted by BBC as saying: "Almost everybody who has been here has signed in support. We don't want anything too expensive or lavish, just a small fountain to remember her by."

The Memorial Committee is instead refurbishing a playground in Kensington Gardens and will create a memorial walkway along the princess's funeral route, as well as a schools achievement award and so-called "Diana nurses," caring for children at home.

Strike turns violent in Colombia

BOGOTA, Sept 1: Colombia's nationwide strike took a violent turn yesterday evening as unidentified attackers shot at a union leader and a 10-year-old girl was shot dead during a clash with police, reports AFP.

Unknown gunmen shot at a car carrying Central Workers' Union (CUT) leader Domingo Tovar, injuring one his escorts, near a union headquarters in the capital, police said.

Tovar had just left the headquarters of the Federation of Colombian Educators (Fecode), which he also heads, when gunmen opened fire on his car.

Meanwhile, a 10-year-old boy was shot dead in a poor suburb south of here during between police and protesters who traded stone throws and gunfire, a hospital spokesman told the private Radionorte.

The girl was caught up in the middle of the clash when she was trying to gather information for school project, the spokesman said. She was shot in the head and died at the hospital.

Until night fell, the first day of a national strike by some 20 million workers had been largely peaceful.

The only major incident occurred in western Colombia, where an unidentified armed group seized a hydroelectric power plant and briefly took 54 people hostage, without firing a single shot.

After all-night talks, Israeli negotiator Gilad Sher and his Palestinian counterpart, Saeb Erekat, held a short break but were scheduled to resume their drive to iron out disagreements on implementation of the US-brokered Wye River land-for-

India alleges fresh Pak attack on Kashmir: 14 die

which lasted from Sunday to Tuesday in the northern Kashmir border region of Shyok-Turtok.

An Indian army spokesman in New Delhi, however, dismissed Pakistan's claim as "baseless and mischievous" and said "no such attack was

launched by the Indian army."

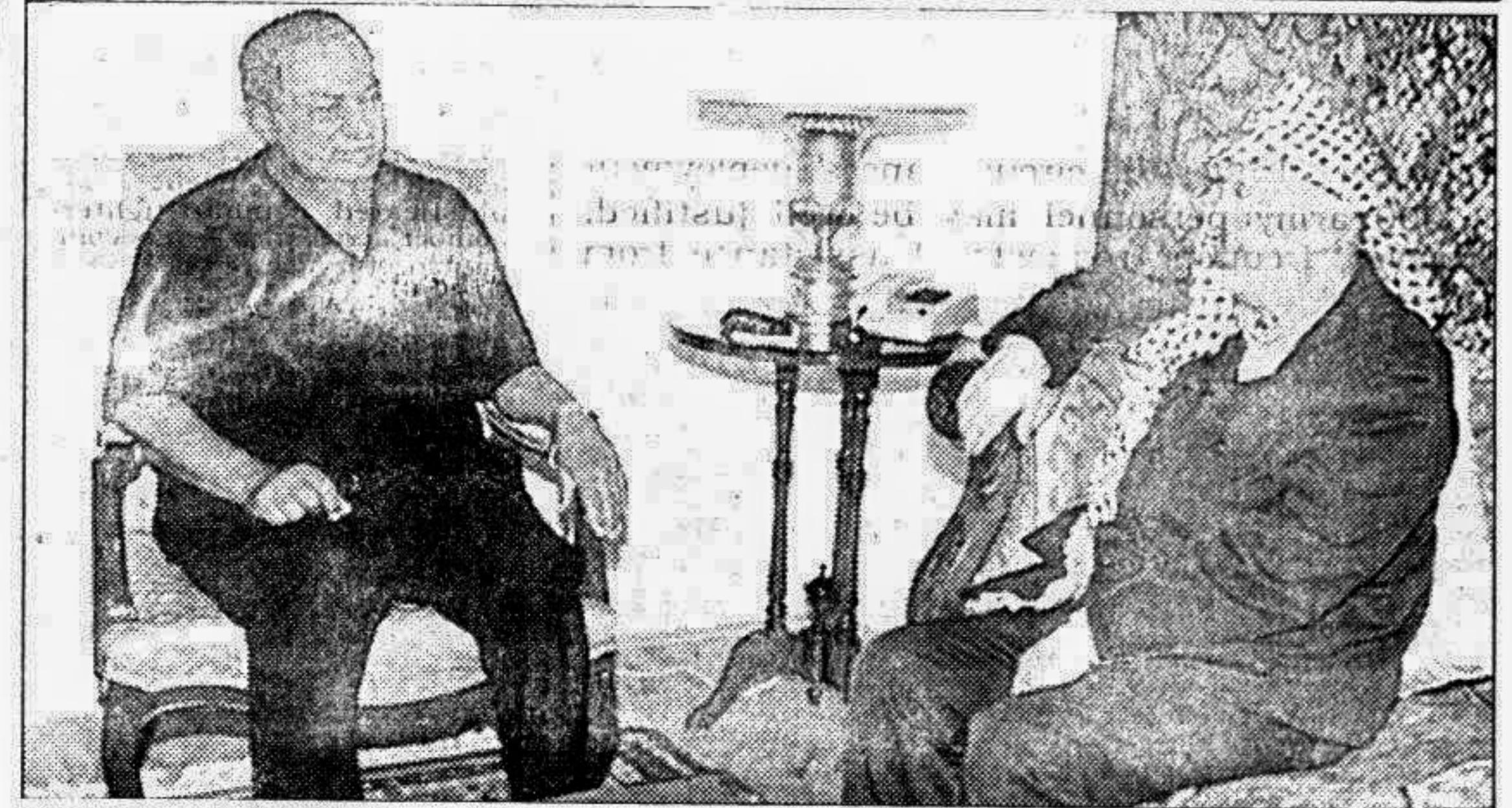
India and Pakistan were engaged in fierce artillery duels and clashes on the Kashmir border from early May to mid-July as Indian forces battled to oust Pakistan-backed guerrillas from strategic Indian peaks they had occupied earlier in the northern zone of Kargil.

India said Pakistani troops had been among the infiltrators who had taken the peaks, but Islamabad denied the charge.

The crisis, which brought the two countries dangerously close to war, eased when the guerrillas vacated the peaks after an agreement between Pakistan and India.

Kashmir, divided between Pakistan and India and claimed by both, has caused two of the three wars between the rival neighbours since partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

A separatist rebellion against Indian rule in Muslim majority Kashmir has left more than 25,000 people dead since 1989.



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak meets with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat (R) at his seaside summer residence in Borg al-Arab, 30 km west of Alexandria, Tuesday. The talks focused on how to break the logjam with Israel over the Wye River accord. —AFP photo

Israel, PA continue talks

JERUSALEM, Sept 1: Israel and the Palestinians held intensive negotiations Wednesday in a last-minute attempt to complete a new peace agreement in time for US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to the Middle East, reports AP.

She and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak were expected to convene his inner cabinet in the evening to approve it.

Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin also included the date for part of the planned Israeli troop withdrawal in the West Bank under the Wye agreement.

"I very much hope that in the next few hours all these issues will be solved, including the sensitive issue of the security

prisoners," Beilin told Israel Radio.

Sher and Erekat had already made some progress on deadlines for a withdrawal, and both expressed optimism that a deal may be closed before Albright arrives in the Middle East on Thursday.

Under the Wye River land-for-security agreement, Israel has to withdraw from at least 13 per cent of the West Bank in three stages in exchange for Palestinian security measures.

Barak has pressed the Palestinians to accept some changes in the agreement, which was signed at the White House last October by his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Estrada warns Muslim rebels against kidnapping

MANILA, Sept 1: President Joseph Estrada said Wednesday guerrillas who claim kidnapping and other crimes will be dealt with harshly, citing a weekend military assault that forced a Muslim rebel group to free an abducted child, reports AP.

"Rebellion should not be bailed, it should be crushed," Estrada said.

"We have to impress in their minds that we have only one government and whoever violates our laws would be punished," he said in a radio interview.

Estrada said authorities were pursuing the kidnappers. Police and army troops were chasing the kidnappers on the outskirts of Tuburan town in southern Basilan province, the military said.

A military spokesman said air and ground attacks on suspected hideouts of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Tito-Tito town in Basilan forced the rebels to release the 4-year-old captive Tuesday.

Removal of ovary lowers risk of breast cancer for women

WASHINGTON, Sept 1: Women at high risk of developing breast cancer due to a genetic mutation can reduce the risk by up to 67 per cent by having their ovaries removed, a new study finds, reports AP.

The study focused on women at five institutions who had tested positive for a mutation of the BRCA1 gene, a condition linked to a high risk of breast cancer, said Timothy R Rebbeck of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

He is first author of a study that appears Wednesday in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

Forty-seven of the women had undergone surgery to remove both ovaries, while another 79 women had the gene mutation, but not the surgery.

Rebbeck said that among those who had ovarian surgery, there was a 67 per cent reduction in the incidence of breast cancer after 10 years. For women followed for between five and 10 years, the risk reduction was even greater — about 72 per cent.

"This is helpful, but it is a small study," said Dr Lynn C. Hartmann, a cancer specialist at the Mayo Clinic. "It clearly needs to be taken with some caution."

The BRCA1 gene mutation is thought to be a factor in a small percentage of both breast and ovarian cancer cases nationally, but among women with the mutation their chances of developing the diseases is very high, Rebbeck said.

For women with the mutation, plus a family history of breast cancer, the lifetime risk of breast cancer can be as high as 80 per cent, he said. For ovarian cancer, the risk can be 40 per cent to 50 per cent, Rebbeck said.

Medical science has been struggling to find the best way to treat such women and to determine who should be tested for the BRCA gene mutation.

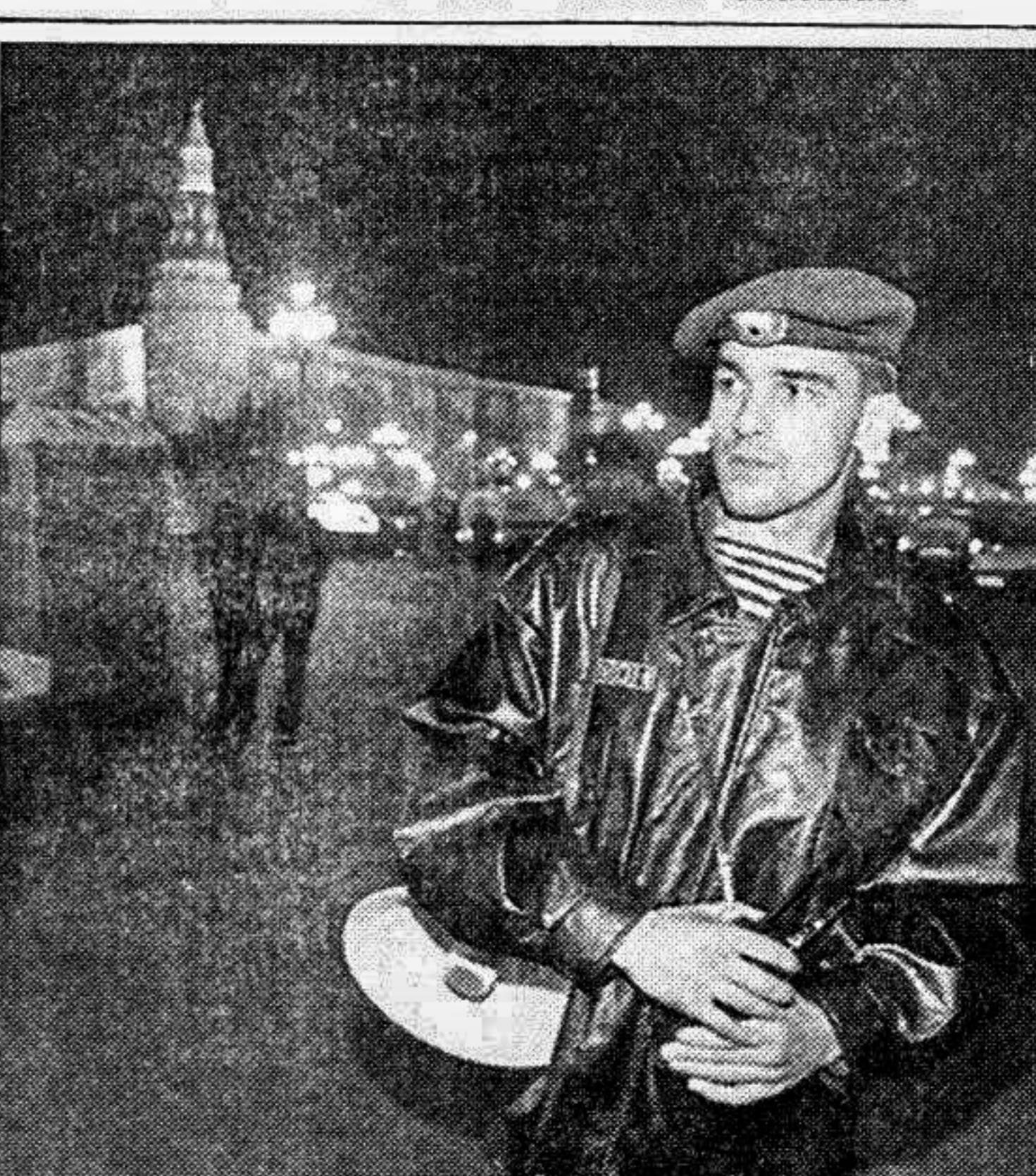
Among the options being studied and practiced are preventative mastectomy and the use of drugs that appear to lower the incidence of breast cancer among women at high risk.

Removing the ovaries has been used to reduce the ovarian cancer risk, but some experts believe the surgery also would reduce the risk of developing breast cancer by limiting hormones that can encourage tumor growth.

This is the first study demonstrating a surgical approach to breast cancer risk reduction among BRCA1 mutation carriers, Rebbeck said. Although only a small percentage of women have the mutation, he said, the findings may help doctors and patients make decisions about how to deal with risks posed by the mutation.

Dr Kathy J Helzlsouer of Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health said in a journal editorial that although the findings are "reassuring," the results are not the final answer.

"This study...is only a first step in determining what are the best management options for women who carry BRCA1 mutations and need to be interpreted with care," Helzlsouer wrote.



A policeman guards Manezhnaya Square near the Kremlin in Moscow Tuesday after an explosion in a nearby underground shopping mall. At least 41 people were injured in the blast that ripped through a games arcade in the Oktotny Ryad underground complex. —AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Pope to meet Saddam: Pope John Paul will meet Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who has been ostracized by many nations since the 1991 Gulf War, when the Pontiff travels to Iraq on a religious visit in December, a Jewish group said on Tuesday, Reuters reports from Los Angeles.

The World Jewish Congress said it was informed of the Pope's plans during recent discussions one of its top officials had with the Vatican on the millennial visits the Pope plans to make this year and next to historic Biblical sites in the Middle East, including Israel, Egypt and Syria.

Four Euro tourists freed in Iran: Four European tourists and an Iranian national were released Tuesday by their Iranian kidnappers, state media reported, AP reports from Dubai.

The official Islamic Republic News Agency, quoting an informed source, said the three Spaniards, an Italian and an Iranian were released in the evening. It gave no further details. The Spanish foreign Ministry confirmed the five hostages had been freed but had few other details. "They are in good shape," ministry spokesman Jose Luis Solano said in Madrid.

Malaysia departs 469 Indonesians: Malaysian authorities deported 469 illegal Indonesian immigrants on Wednesday, the official Bernama news agency reported. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The Indonesians, all men between the ages of 18 and 50, were put on two ships in Malacca and ferried to the Indonesian town of Dumai on Sumatra island. Scores of policemen supervised the deportation, which was part of a campaign to evict illegal workers from Malaysia. The campaign began soon after Malaysia's economy began to slide in 1997 and jobs, especially in the construction industry, began to disappear.