

Vajpayee warns Pakistan from attacking India

ALLAHABAD, Sept 16: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee yesterday warned Pakistan from making any further military attacks on India and said such a move would result in devastating losses to Islamabad, reports PTI.

Pakistan must have realised the folly of intruding in the Indian territories for the fourth time since 1946 by suffering huge losses in the battlefield as well in the International Community, he said at an election meeting here.

Ridiculing Pakistan for its desire to resume bilateral talks, he said, "The talks have to wait till an atmosphere of trust is created by Islamabad."

Criticising the previous Congress governments for not reclaiming one-third of Jammu and Kashmir from Pakistan despite successes in the battlefields in 1965 and 1971, the Prime Minister said the Congress had buckled under international pressure by not doing so.

He asked the Congress to explain as to why Aksai Chin was lost to China during the Congress regime and one-third of Kashmir not reclaimed from Pakistan despite the fact that the Indian Army had decisively won the 1971 War and captured about 90,000 enemy soldiers.

US, China both want better relations

BEIJING, Sept 16: Just four short months ago, Chinese mobs attacked the US Embassy in Beijing, vowing revenge for the accidental US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia during the Kosovo conflict, reports AP.

Now that Chinese and US leaders are talking again, popular sentiment is following suit. "We very much want to see relations with the United States improve," said Ken Wan, who sells imported Californian wines and gave the English version of his name.

"China must continue opening up and putting economic construction first. When we're strong, all these problems can gradually be resolved."

Meeting Saturday in New Zealand, Presidents Jiang Zemin and Bill Clinton both said they want better ties. That would serve China's goals of building its economy and reuniting with Taiwan and US aims of greater business and diplomatic opportunities.

Tensions over Taiwan are the foremost concern in China. But many other pitfalls trouble the love-hate relationship between the United States and China: Fundamental disagreements over China's human rights policies, suspicions about China's missile exports to Pakistan, and allegations of Chinese nuclear weapons espionage in the United States.

Fresh blast shatters bldg in Russian city, 17 killed

MOSCOW, Sept 16: A suspected bomb shattered a large apartment building Thursday in a southern Russian city, leaving at least 17 people dead and 165 others injured, officials said.

The suspected bomb hidden in a truck exploded near the nine-story apartment building in the city of Volgograd close to Russia's volatile northern Caucasus region, the Interior Ministry said.

Traces of explosives were found in the wreckage, the Federal Security Service said. It was the fourth major explosion involving a large apartment building in Russia during the past two weeks.

The blast brought down the front of the building and damaged a nearby police station and about 20 other surrounding buildings, Interior Ministry officials said. 17 people were

killed and 165 others were injured, 47 of them seriously, they said.

Five other people were missing and believed trapped in the wreckage.

Firefighters were fighting a blaze engulfing several floors of the building as rescue workers searched for survivors, officials said.

President Boris Yeltsin discussed the latest explosion at a meeting Thursday with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. "We have the strength and resources to wipe out terrorism," he said, according to the Interfax news agency.

The blast Thursday came after a series of suspected terrorist attacks in Russia during the past two weeks that targeted large apartment buildings. The building in Volgograd contained about 100 apartments, officials said.

Russian authorities suspect Islamic Militants from southern Russia are responsible for three earlier explosions that killed at least 275 people, including 118 who died in a Moscow apartment explosion on Monday.

Volgograd is close to southern republic of Dagestan, where Russian troops have been battling Islamic militants for the past month. The militants, who are fighting for a separate Islamic state, had threatened to strike targets in Russia.

A car bomb destroyed a military housing complex September 4 in Dagestan, killing 64 people in addition to the suspected bombing of two apartment buildings in Moscow.

Authorities have not produced any evidence linking the blasts to any particular group.

The latest explosion came after massive security sweeps in Moscow and other major Russian cities.

50 killed in fresh Lankan fighting

COLOMBO, Sept 16: Eighteen LTTE rebels, 10 soldiers and 22 civilians were killed in different incidents of confrontation between the Sri Lankan troops and the rebels in the north even as the army conducted a limited offensive in the northern Parantam yesterday to secure strategic locations, reports PTI.

An army press release here said 18 rebels including five women cadre of the LTTE were killed in sporadic clashes between the rebels and the army in the north.

The clandestine LTTE Radio, Voice of Tigers this evening alleged that 21 civilians were killed and 41 others injured in aerial bombardment of some of the villages under its control by the air force.

It said Israeli-made KFIR Jets bombed the villages causing extensive damage. However, there was no word of confirmation from the airforce here.

Also army units which have conducted a limited offensive

operations at Parantam near northern Jaffna on Tuesday to gain strategic locations extended the operation yesterday. Army sources here said several LTTE vehicles were destroyed in the army attack.

Meanwhile, ten soldiers were killed and 15 wounded in northern Sri Lanka today when Tamil Tiger rebels opened fire on a military vehicle as it ran over a landmine.

The attack occurred in Tachchanamarathamadu in Mannar district, some 240 km north of the capital, they said.

Further details were not immediately available.

There was no comment from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels who have been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in the country's north and east since 1983.

Algerians vote in amnesty referendum

ALGIERS, Sept 16: Algerians were voting Thursday in a referendum on an amnesty law that would give President Abdelaziz Bouteflika the mandate he wants for ending the country's seven-year-old civil war, reports AFP.

"We got up early to say 'yes' to an end to the bloodshed," one Algiers resident told AFP early Thursday after polls opened at 8:00 a.m. (0700 GMT).

"I didn't vote in the presidential election in April, but this is different. ... I can't say 'no' to peace," said Said, another voter who formerly supported the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).

Many of those lined up to vote said they had been encouraged by Bouteflika's assertion Wednesday that the "FIS question has been resolved," that "there is no place for the FIS in Algeria."

The front pages of La Nouvelle Republique and El Moudjahid blared "Yes to Peace." "We Vote Yes for Peace." Bouteflika's plan to bring an end to a war that has claimed 100,000 lives since 1992

Indonesia abrogates security treaty with Australia

JAKARTA, Sept 16: The Indonesian government said Thursday it was breaking off a security treaty with Australia, which has harshly criticised Jakarta for its handling of the East Timor crisis, reports AP.

Australia is due to lead a UN-approved peacekeeping force to the Indonesian province of East Timor within days.

Faisal Tanjung, the security affairs minister, announced the treaty rupture.

The government of President BJ Habibie has been caught by a nationalist backlash against his decision to allow Australia to lead the force into the violence-wracked province of East Timor.

Tanjung said that Indonesia had decided to "review some aspects of Indonesia-Australia bilateral ties."

"As a result of this review, the government of the Republic of Indonesia has decided to abrogate the agreement between Indonesia and Australia on maintaining security, signed December 18, 1995," he said.

no longer consistent with the spirit and letter of the agreement."

The treaty is a broadly worded agreement recognising mutual interests in the region and pledging cooperation between the two armies.

Many Indonesians claim that Australia has taken a hostile stance toward Indonesia, following the breakdown of law and order in East Timor.

This was affirmed Thursday by Nugroho Wisnumurti, a senior foreign ministry official, who said the government wasn't objecting to Australia leading the UN forces in East Timor.

"We have no difficulties to go along with the decision of the (UN) secretary general," he said.

Addressing the news conference immediately after Faisal Tanjung, Wisnumurti warned Australia that its forces could face significant risks if they take sides in the conflict in East Timor.

"It is in the interests of Australia itself not to face trouble like the UN forces in Somalia," he said.

Gallic burial site found

PARIS, Sept 16: A burial ground dating from the time of the Gauls has been found at Paris's Charles de Gaulle Airport during extension work, the French Culture Ministry said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Archaeologists had concluded that the site contained items dating back to the Gauls and to Gallo-Roman times, including a dozen tombs of Gallic chieftains, two of them still intact.

A ministry statement said one of the best preserved tombs dated back to around 300 BC and was that of a man. The corpse was buried on a two-wheeled chariot, decorated with several bronze items, it said.

The other tomb was also that of a warrior on his combat chariot.

Typhoon York pounds HK

HONG KONG, Sept 16: Typhoon York pounded Hong Kong with a direct hit on Thursday, blowing windows out of downtown skyscrapers, triggering flooding and blocking roads with uprooted trees, while officials warned dangerous landslides could come next, reports AP.

One man died after being struck by flying debris and at least 216 people were injured in the worst storm to hit Hong Kong in 16 years, a government spokesman said, using customary anonymity.

The typhoon, packing maximum winds of 150 kph (93 mph), forced the closure of schools, financial markets and most businesses. Ferry services to outlying islands and to the neighbouring Portuguese enclave of Macau were suspended.

as fishing boats scurried for cover.

Typhoon York was the most powerful tropical storm to hit Hong Kong since Typhoon Ellen struck on September 9, 1983, the government said. Ellen killed at least eight people, though several more went missing at sea.

Typhoon York was whipped up by "dramatic changes in strength and direction of wind," said KM Leung, senior scientific officer at the Hong Kong Observatory.

The observatory raised a No. 10 hurricane signal, the strongest warning Hong Kong meteorologists issue during tropical storms.

Sherrie Wu, a Hong Kong office worker who originally came from Guangzhou, China, stared up at a government

building with glass blown out of offices nearly 40 stories high.

Most people stayed home behind boarded up doors and windows.

Hong Kong's usual early morning bustle gave way to mostly empty streets, littered with fallen trees, rolling trash cans and other debris. The normal Hong Kong traffic noises were gone, replaced by the eerie sound of powerful winds whistling among the massive skyscrapers.

At least 40 roads were closed, mostly from fallen trees or scaffolding but at least one that had been littered with thousands of shards of glass after window panes came plunging down from tall office buildings.

BRITFLY

Jet skids off Rome runway: An Alitalia plane carrying 140 people from the holiday island of Sardinia skidded off a rain-soaked runway at Rome airport Wednesday while attempting to land. No one was hurt seriously, Reuters reports from Rome.

Airport officials said two people were treated for shock after the MD-80 plane tilted to its left and ploughed off the tarmac onto a stretch of grass. The 133 passengers and seven crew members on board got out via escape slides lowered from the emergency exits and were taken to the Fiumicino airport terminal by bus.

3 troops die in Turkey chopper crash: One officer and two soldiers were killed on Wednesday when a military helicopter crashed in southeastern Turkey, Turkish military sources here told Xinhua in Ankara.

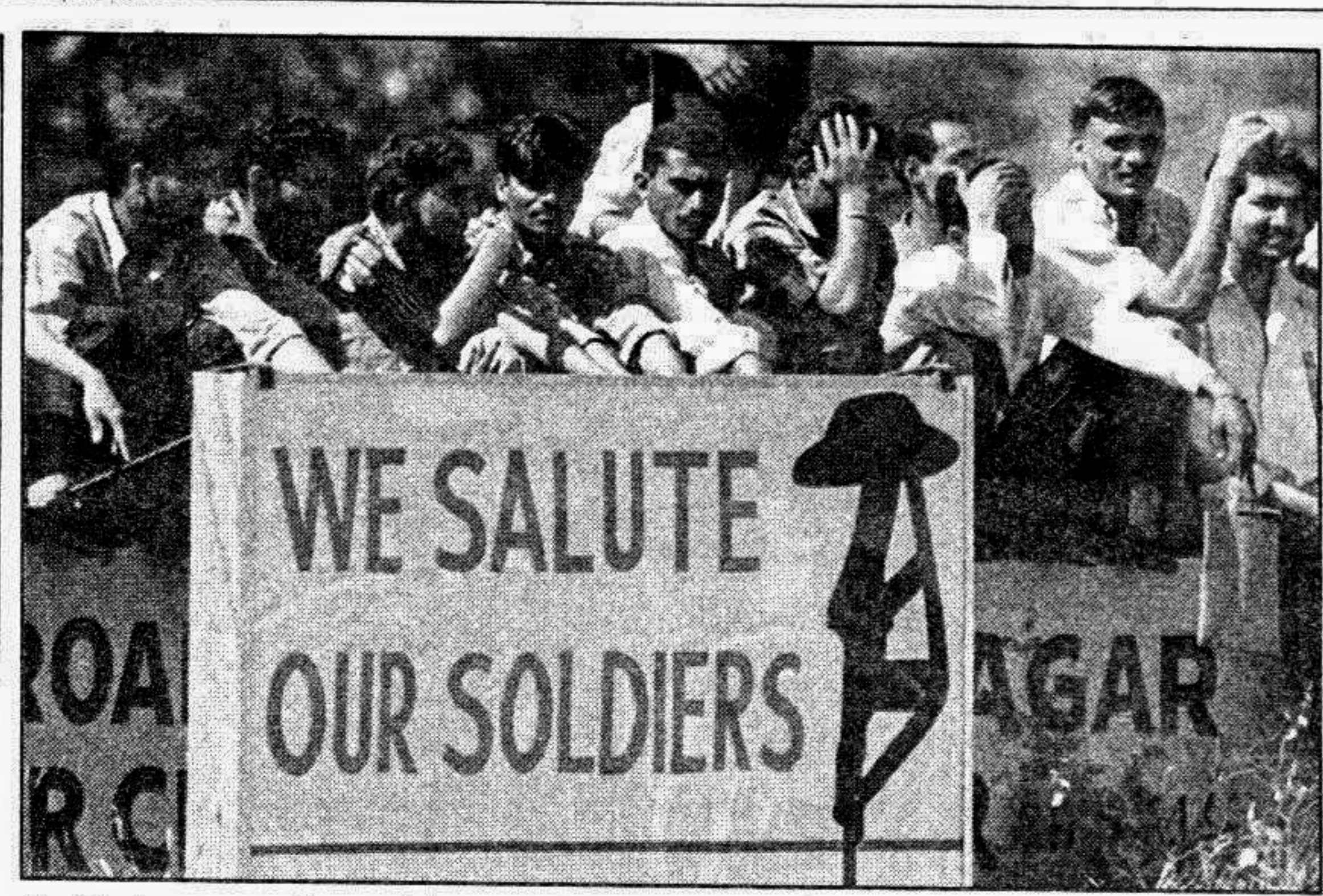
The sources who asked not to be named, said that the UH1 military helicopter crashed at Koprucay village in Pervari town of Siirt province due to the technical problems, killing three military personnel and wounding four others.

British HR activist gets 7 yrs jail in Myanmar

YANGON, Sept 16: British human rights activist Rachel Goldwyn was Thursday sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment by a Yangon court, lawyers said, reports AFP.

Goldwyn, 28, who pleaded not guilty to charges under Myanmar's Emergency Provisions Act, will appeal the verdict handed down in a court in Yangon's notorious Insein prison, lawyers said.

She was arrested last week after chaining herself to a lamppost in downtown Yangon and singing a pro-democracy song two days before a planned dissident uprising.



Residents on a rooftop waiting to welcome opposition leader Sonia Gandhi on an election campaign tour, set by a patriotic sign alluding to the recent Kashmir conflict Wednesday. The conflict, sparked by Islamic militants' intrusion into Indian-held Kashmir, has become the single most important issue, along with Sonia's foreign origins, in the current election campaign.

Shooting in Texas church: Eight killed

FORT WORTH, Texas, Sept 16: A man shouting obscenities and mocking religion walked into a church service for teenagers, pulled a gun and opened fire, fatally shooting seven before he shot and killed himself in a church pew, reports AP.

"He hits the door real hard to make his presence known and he just immediately started firing," said Dax Hughes, the church's college minister.

The man using a large-caliber handgun, fatally shot three adults and three teenagers in the church Wednesday night, and wounded at least eight more before he killed himself, said Lt David Ellis of the Fort Worth Police Department. The eighth person died in the hospital.

Seven more were taken to the hospital with shooting injuries, several in extremely critical condition, Ellis said.

Police said they did not have a motive for the shooting. The man appeared to be in his 20s or 30s, police said, but they did not know his identity.

Weakened Hurricane Floyd makes landfall in N Carolina

WILMINGTON, North Carolina, Sept 16: A weakened Hurricane Floyd hit the US mainland at Cape Fear east of here, unleashing heavy rain and fierce winds that caused widespread flooding and power outages along much of the US eastern seaboard, reports AFP.

The biggest storm to hit the region this century lost steam as it churned toward the North Carolina coast, lashing Cape Fear before travelling northeast at a speed of 35 km, the National Hurricane Centre said.

At least two hurricane-related deaths were reported across the state, an emergency official said.

Mark Van Selver, a spokesman for the North Carolina emergency management centre in Raleigh also said that 80,000 homes across the state were without power, a figure expected to increase as the huge hurricane cut a destructive path on its northbound journey.

Extensive flooding was also reported and motorists were advised to stay off the roads, he added.

More than 2.5 million residents had fled the US eastern coast over the past few days to escape Floyd's onslaught in one of the biggest evacuations in this country since World War II.

But Floyd skirted Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, to the relief of the millions of residents of those states who had fled coastal areas in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

At 5 a.m. (0900 GMT), the eye of the hurricane had passed Wilmington and was 40 km to the northeast, advancing at a speed of 35 km with winds gusting at around 160 km.

Floyd, which was downgraded from Category Four to a weaker Category Two hurricane, was expected to continue hugging the coastline for the next few hours before turning inland, said NHC spokeswoman Trisha Wallace.

Category Two hurricanes have winds of around 161 km per hour.

into a tropical storm and travel all the way to Maine," Wallace added.

Authorities said it was much too early to give an estimate of hurricane-spawned damage, but early projections that insurers would have to cough up to 12 billion dollars appears to have been exaggerated.

Heading north with much reduced strength, Floyd was now expected to cost insurers between two and eight billion dollars, according to California-based Risk Management Solutions.

President Bill Clinton on Wednesday declared a state of emergency in both states even before the powerful hurricane made landfall.

"I hope that every citizen will heed the warnings of the officials and the recommendations to take every action to protect their families and stay out of harm's way," Clinton said during a stopover in Hawaii on his return to Washington from New Zealand.



US President Bill Clinton speaks to reporters Wednesday from the tarmac in front of Air Force One at Hickham Air Force Base in Honolulu. Clinton declared a state of emergency in North and South Carolina, making them eligible for disaster relief funds even before Hurricane Floyd strikes the states.

US to ease sanctions against DPRK

WASHINGTON, Sept 16: US President Bill Clinton will announce an easing of five-decade-old sanctions against the hermetic communist state of North Korea as early as Friday, CNN reported Wednesday, reports AFP.

The move was being recommended by national security advisor Sandy Berger and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in the wake of US-North Korean talks in Berlin last weekend, the Cable News Network said.

The secretive communist state agreed to halt testing of long range missiles on the condition of continued talks with the United States.

The decision paves the way for limited financial transactions and trade between the two countries, the channel said.

Test results of alleged poisoning of Anwar Ibrahim likely by end of week

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 16: Hospital officials expect to have test results on the alleged poisoning of former Malaysian No. 2 leader Anwar Ibrahim by the end of the week, a news report said Thursday, reports AP.

Anwar, the former deputy prime minister, was admitted to a hospital a week ago after accusing his political enemies of trying to poison him. His family and lawyers released test results last Friday that they said showed dangerous levels of arsenic in his urine.

Abdul Khalid Kadir, the director of National University Hospital, said the Hospital would "probably" know the outcome of Anwar's tests by the end of the week. He did not specify if they would be immediately released but appealed to the public to stop calling the hospital to check on Anwar's condition.

"Our doctors are looking after the patient and the public can rest assured that he is in the best of hands," Abdul Khalid was quoted as saying in the Star newspaper.

India pours fresh troops into Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 16: India has sent massive troop reinforcements to Kashmir to counter the resurgence of a 10-year-old Muslim separatist campaign in the disputed Himalayan region, reports AFP.

Sixty battalions of the army have been moved into the state and the deployment will be completed on Thursday," said Kashmir police chief Gurbachan Jagat said.

He said a major offensive would be launched against Muslim militants, who have intensified their activities following the recent Kashmir conflict and in the run up to month-long general elections which began September 5.

The Kashmir conflict required a large redeployment of forces along the disputed border with Pakistan, easing the pressure on militants operating in the Kashmir valley and other areas.

Instead of hiding in the forests, these militants came down near the villages and there were incidents where they managed to sneak into heavily guarded camps," Jagat said.

The militants have enforced a violent boycott of the ongoing elections in Kashmir, attacking candidates, party supporters and election officials.

To try and ensure adequate security, voting in the state's six constituencies was split into three stages. Polling in one seat was postponed following the murder of a candidate.

Maot rebels abduct 6 Maot guerrillas kidnapped

Turkish army snubs PKK pullout, calls for surrender

ANKARA, Sept 16: Turkey's armed forces Thursday disregarded a promise by Kurdish rebels to pull out of Turkey, calling instead for their unconditional surrender as the only way to end a bloody 15-year conflict in the country's southeast, reports AFP.

The withdrawal of some PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) militants to northern Iraq is an activity the organization undertakes before winter every year," the general staff said in its report for the month of August on military activity against the PKK.

The difference this year is that the withdrawal has been moved forward and is being presented in a different light," said the report carried by the semi-official Anatolia news agency.

The PKK said late last month that it would retreat outside Turkey's borders -- without specifying where -- following an appeal for a democratic and political solution to the Kurdish question by its jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan, on death row after being convicted of treason.

The group announced a week later that it was ending its armed campaign for Kurdish self-rule in southeastern Turkey to transform itself into a political organization.

But the army remained unimpressed by rebel pledges to end the conflict that has claimed more than 31,000 lives. "The withdrawal from Turkey to northern Iraq or another place does not lessen the current threat," the report said.

Off the Record

Polythene addict cow? NEW DELHI: Veterinary surgeons in India removed 4,000 plastic bags from the stomach of a cow during a four-hour operation, the Indian Express newspaper said Thursday, reports Reuters.

The cow... had, over three years, swallowed the polythene bags and other foreign objects, including a coil of metal wire, a screw, a piece of sari and a napkin," the daily said.

It quoted one of the vets, Harischandra Jadedja, as saying that the plastic bags alone weighed 45 kg (99 lb).

The cow, which had to be administered over 70 stitches, is recovering without any complications," he said.

Twins' tutorial

LIVERPOOL, England: The teachers at a Roman Catholic school in northwest England may be forgiven if it takes them some time to recognise all their new students by name, reports AP.

Nine sets of twins make up part of the first-year class of 121 students at St. Paul's and St. Timothy's Infant School this year.