

## International

## World leaders mourn Assad

LONDON, June 11: Allies and adversaries of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad mourned his death, some pledging to press forwards for Middle East peace, some voicing concern for the future of the volatile region, reports Reuters.

Assad died on Saturday at the age of 69. The Syrian parliament immediately amended the constitution to make it possible for his 34-year-old son Bashar to succeed him.

Israel, long-time adversary of the wily leader once dubbed the "Mr No" of Middle East diplomacy, struck a conciliatory note.

The government of Israel understands the grief of the Syrian people following the death of President Assad, said a statement issued by Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office.

"Israel worked in the past for a peace deal with Syria and will continue to work for this in the future with all future leadership," it said.

US President Bill Clinton, for whom a final settlement would crown his last year in office, said he regretted there had been no overall deal during Assad's lifetime.

China mourned the death of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, calling him a "respected friend" and expressing confidence that relations between the nations would continue to advance.

President Assad was the outstanding leader of Syria who has contributed all his life to the development of the country and the happiness of the Syrian people," Xinhua news agency quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao as saying today.

Russian President Vladimir Putin described Assad as a friend of Russia. He was also quoted as saying the Syrian leader's death caused him concern for the future of the Middle East peace process.

French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin said France's concerns about Syria had been increased. He expressed the hope Syria would not face a period of instability and that a political team wanting peace would emerge.

The Arab world mourned Assad. Saudi Arabia said it would "continue to stand by the Syrian people and whoever they choose to succeed the departed president."

## Chemical plant explosion kills four in Japan

TOKYO, June 11: Investigations began today into a massive explosion which ripped through a chemical plant in Japan Saturday, killing four people and injuring at least 27 others, a police spokesman said, reports AFP.

The blast gutted the plant, run by Nissin Chemical Co. Ltd. in a residential area in Gunma some 100 km north of Tokyo, and destroyed or damaged at least 80 houses.

A huge fire raged for six hours before being extinguished.

Police said a total of 151 officers and investigators had been on an on-the-spot inspection at the plant, where workers had been refining chemicals to be used semiconductor production.

"We started investigations this morning, mainly trying to find the cause of the explosion," said a spokesman for the Gunma Police Department.

The four killed were employees of the plant, while the injured included local residents.

## Early revival of Israeli-Syrian peace talks unlikely

JERUSALEM, June 11: The death of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has sounded the knell for a rapid resumption of the stalled Israeli-Syrian peace process as Damascus focuses its efforts on ensuring a smooth transfer of power, Israeli newspapers said today, reports AFP.

"It doesn't matter whether the power struggle in Damascus culminates in Assad's son Bashar or anyone else in power -- the peace process between Israel and Syria will be frozen now for an indefinite length of time," wrote the respected analyst Zeev Schiff in a front-page commentary in the Haaretz newspaper.

The death of Syria's authoritarian ruler was splashed across the front pages of all Israel's newspapers, with columns of analysis and commentary inside.

Peace talks between the long-time foes resumed in December in the United States after an impasse of almost four years, but they broke down only weeks later in dispute over the fate of the occupied Golan Heights plateau, which Syria demands back as the price of peace.

Assad's son and designated heir Bashar, who is expected to be chosen by parliament later this month to become president, is unlikely to make concessions to win a deal with Israel.

"It will have to focus efforts at the start towards consolidating his rule and ousting domestic opponents and under the circumstances it is doubtful that he will take chances by pursuing a compromise agreement with Israel," Schiff added.

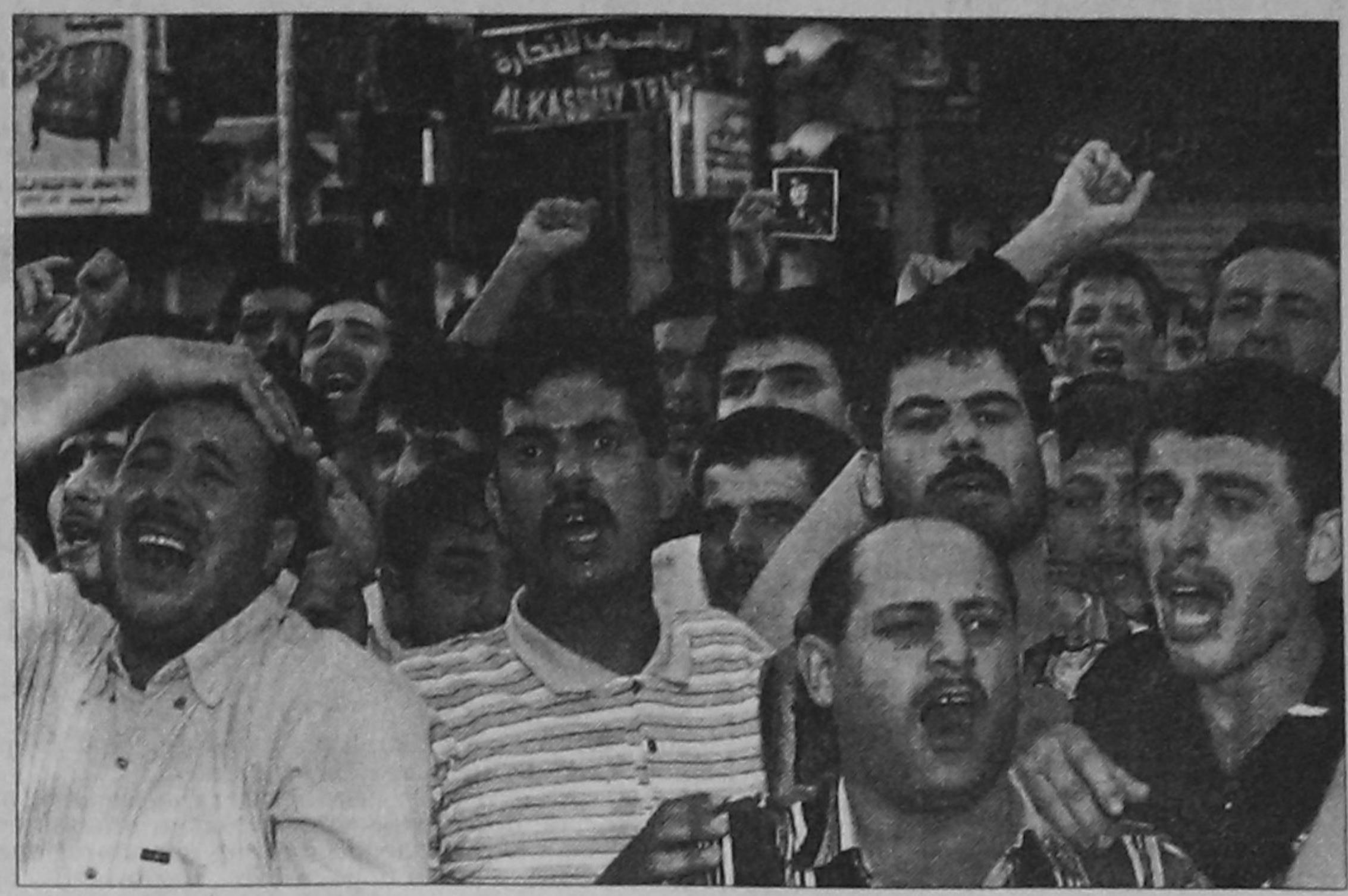
"He's sure to fear that such a move would be highly dangerous for him right now."

The best-selling *Yediot Aharonot* newspaper, quoting senior officials, said that Assad's death may accelerate the resumption of the negotiations in the long-run even though no progress can be expected in the near future as Syria tries to ensure a smooth transition.

He said however that once the situation in Damascus stabilizes, either with Bashar or another leader, "there may be a real chance to reach an arrangement with Syria and have Syria open up to the west."

Former Israeli ambassador to the United States, Itamar Rabinovich, who was involved in previous negotiations with Syria, spoke of the "mixed legacy" left by Assad in an article in the Hebrew newspaper *Maariv*: "The idea of peace with Israel but at a high price."

The *Maariv* said Assad's death moves the peace negotiations "into second or even third place."



Syrian citizens mourn the death of President Hafez al-Assad in the streets of Damascus on Saturday. His son Bashar, 34, is widely expected to succeed him after parliament amended the constitution which stipulated that a candidate to be head of state must be at least 40.

— AFP photo



South Korean Song Yang-Kyu (R) and Bae Un-Shik (L) mimic South Korean president Kim Dae-Jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il at a mimic contest in Seoul yesterday to celebrate the historic summit between the two Cold War foes. — AFP photo

## Tamil refugees a problem for India: Minister

NEW DELHI, June 11: Sri Lanka's lingering and bloody civil war must be resolved politically, an Indian federal minister said today, stressing that a huge influx of Tamil refugees was a severe problem for India, reports AFP.

Commerce and Industry Minister Murasoli Maran from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu told the Hindustan Times daily that lasting peace in the neighbouring war-torn Sri Lankan island could only be reached through a political settlement, preferably within Sri Lanka itself, but did not rule out any foreign involvement.

"There has to be a political solution," he said. "The opposition and the ruling party there may come together in Lanka but we do not know what the Buddhist clergy is thinking."

The Buddhist clergy has been a predominant force in Sri Lanka where the government has been trying to get them involved in stopping the bloody civil war between Sri Lankan troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the island's north.

The minister said a major hurdle to a settlement was the fact that nobody was talking to the Tamil rebel group LTTE or its supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran.

"They say they are talking to the LTTE but nobody has met Prabhakaran. Nobody knows what his views are, what he wants."

Maran's uncle, Muthuvel Karunanidhi, the head of the regional DMK party and chief minister of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu recently stirred up controversy by suggesting that Sri Lanka could

end the "unhappy marriage" between the Tamil rebels and the government with a partition similar to the former Czechoslovakia.

Following this comment, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called an emergency meeting last week with members of the Indian ruling coalition to forge a national political consensus on the Sri Lankan crisis.

In the meeting, Maran backed New Delhi's policy of supporting Sri Lanka's territorial integrity and the island's unity.

Maran said in remarks published Sunday that Tamil refugees were posing a major problem in Tamil Nadu, home to a growing number of ethnic Tamils and separated from Sri Lanka by a narrow stretch of water.

## BRIEFLY

## Reza Khatami second deputy speaker:

Leading reformist Mohammad Reza Khatami, brother of Iran's President Mohammad Khatami, was elected early Sunday to the post of second deputy speaker of the Majlis, or parliament, AFP reports from Tehran.

Mohammad-Reza, head of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), won 135 votes out of 248 deputies present while Bejjad Nabavi, a secular left-wing leader, won 155 votes and was made first deputy speaker. The vote confirms the IIPF's dominant position within the parliament's reformist coalition, which holds some 80 per cent of the seats.

**Mob burns 5 robbers to death:** An angry mob beat up five men caught robbing passengers on board a public minibus in the Indonesian capital on Saturday and then burnt them to death, AFP reports from Jakarta.

A passenger being robbed by the five on board a minibus near East Jakarta's Kampong Rambutan bus terminal shouted for help, alerting people milling around waiting for public transport, the Kompas daily said. The five robbers changed minibuses but the vehicle was blocked by a growing crowd who forced the five to come out. The men were set upon, beaten up and then set on fire, the daily said.

**Khairul Anam**  
General Manager (Commercial)  
for Managing Director.

## Korean summit delayed by one day

SEOUL, June 11: The first-ever summit between leaders of North Korea and South Korea has been delayed by one day and will start Tuesday, the South Korean government announced today, reports Park as saying.

North Korea requested the delay in a telephone call Saturday night, citing "unavoidable technical reasons," said Park June-Young, chief spokesman for South Korean President Kim Dae-jung.

South Korea "accepted the delay in consideration of the position of the host country," Park said in a statement. The three-day summit will end Thursday, instead of Wednesday, he said. No further details were released.

North Korean media have not yet reported the delay, South Korean officials said.

Unification Minister Park Jae-kyu said the delay does not mean in any way that the summit would be in jeopardy.

"The North side requested the delay to make thorough preparations, so there will be no problems with President Kim's visit to and stay in Pyongyang," the national *Yonhap* news agency quoted Park as saying.

*Yonhap* also quoted the unification minister as saying that a 30-member South Korean advance team was now staying in Pyongyang after finishing all preparations for the summit with North Korea, including President Kim's itinerary and press coverage.

The South Korean president had planned to fly Monday to Pyongyang to meet his North Korean counterpart, Kim Jong-Il, in a summit that offers hopes for gradual reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula after decades of bitter conflict.

The two are expected to discuss the dispatch of economic aid from the rich South to the impoverished North, as well as the reunion of separated families. Among the most contentious issues that might be raised are the US military presence in South Korea, and North Korea's missile and nuclear programmes.

North Korea's agreement to host a summit is a notable compromise because it previously disdained most attempts at dialogue by Seoul, a government it considered illegitimate.

The two countries agreed to a summit in 1994. But North Korean leader Kim Il Sung died at age 82 only weeks before he was to meet his South Korean counterpart, Kim Young-sam.

His son and successor, Kim Jong-Il, consolidated his power in the years that followed.

The peninsula was divided at the end of World War II in 1945 into the communist North and the pro-Western South. A heavily militarised border separates the two countries.

## Italian ship bound for India hijacked

AHMEDABAD, India, June 11: An Italian merchant vessel destined for India's Kandla port on the western coast has been hijacked by a group of stowaways who have threatened to blow up the ship, a port official said today.

"We received a message from the local agents of the ship that a group of 14 stowaways have taken control over the vessel," Deputy Conservator of Kandla Port Trust, Praveen Chandra Chaturvedi told Reuters from Kandla.

"According to the message, the stowaways have threatened to blow up the vessel if it moved towards India," Chaturvedi said.

The captain of the 15,000-tonne MV Med Star, who flashed a message to Kandla port on Friday said the captors clandestinely boarded the vessel at the Iranian port of Bandar-e-Abbas, where the ship sailed on Thursday, according to Pawanji Kalra, an official from the ship's agent Pearl Shipping.

He said the ship was empty and did not make any stops along the way.

Kandla port official Chaturvedi said the vessel was located some 150 nautical miles from Indian waters and about 275 miles from Kandla port on Saturday evening.

## Ruling coalition wins by-polls in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, June 11: Malaysia's ruling coalition managed to eke out a victory in a weekend by-election despite recent turmoil in the ethnic Chinese party that has been one of the coalition's pillars, reports Reuters.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's Barisan National (BN) coalition, as expected, retained the Teluk Kemang parliamentary constituency in southwestern Negeri Sembilan state in Saturday's by-election.

## RHD Notice Inviting Tender

1	Tender Notice No :	194/Mkg of 1999-2000.
2	Name of work :	Tender for construction of ticket counter-cum-labour shed east side and west side of Kaliganga River on 10th KM of Shingair-Horimpur via Balirakk Road under Manikganj Road Division during the year 1999-2000 in 2 (two) groups.
3	Estimated cost :	Group No I Tk 2,75,146/- & Group No II Tk 2,75,146/-.
4	Earnest money :	Group No-I Tk 5,503 & Group No-II Tk 5,503/- in favour of EE (RHD), Manikganj Road Division in BD/TC/Protirakha Sanchaya Patra and Bonus Sanchaya Patra etc in any scheduled bank of Bangladesh.
5	Time allowed :	45 (Forty-five) days each group from the date of issue of work order.
6	Eligibility of contractors :	A' to 'E' class general category of RHD contractors.
7	Name of offices of availability of tender documents :	Office of the EE (RHD) Manikganj/Dhaka Division, Dhaka/Narsingdi/Narayanganj/Munshiganj/Gazipur/Planning & Design Division, Dhaka Zone, Dhaka and SDE (RHD) Manikganj/Nayerhat under Manikganj Road Division.
8	Name of offices to receive tender bids :	Superintending Engineer (RHD), Dhaka Road Circle, Dhaka/Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation Circle, Dhaka/EE (RHD) Manikganj Road Division and SDE (RHD) Manikganj/Nayerhat under Manikganj Road Division.
9	Last date and time of receipt of tender bids :	Up to 19-6-2000 during office hours.
10	Last date and time of receipt of tender bids :	At 12.30 PM on 20-6-2000.
11	Date and time of opening of the tender bids :	At 1.00 PM on 22-6-2000 in the office of the EE (RHD) Manikganj Road Division.
12	Chargeable head lottery :	168-RBF/266-Dev.
13	Date and time of lottery :	At 3.00 PM on 26-6-2000.
14	Authority of estimate approved :	Estimate submitted to SDE (RHD) DRC, Dhaka for favour of his kind approval.

MD HELAL UDDIN  
Executive Engineer (RHD)  
Manikganj Road Division Manikganj

## 180 nations adopt plan to step up campaign for women's equality

UNITED NATIONS, June 11: Five years after a landmark UN conference set women's equality as an achievable goal, more than 180 nations have adopted new measures to accelerate the international campaign to reach it, reports AP.

But women's rights activists and several countries including the United States, South Africa and Norway said the new initiatives didn't go far enough to speed implementation of the 150-page platform of action adopted in Beijing in 1995.

Despite fears that delegates would chip away at the Beijing platform, the weeklong UN Women's Conference ended Saturday with no backtracking — which was welcomed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan who urged delegates earlier in

the week to protect and advance the gains made by women five years ago.

Delegates on Saturday approved the new plan to implement the Beijing platform, as well as an accompanying political declaration, following all-night negotiations that delayed the wrap-up of the conference by a day.

Before General Assembly President Theo-Ben Gurirab called for a decision, two dozen nations expressed reservations on specific points in the new document. A dozen more commented after consensus was approved.

Gurirab, who is Namibia's foreign minister, declared that the document moved the global agenda for women forward.

If governments demonstrate the necessary political will and allocate the human and financial resources required, I am convinced that the goals of gender equality, development and peace will become a reality very early in the 21st century," he said before gaveling the conference to an end.

The new action document includes tougher measures to combat domestic violence and sex trafficking, and to tackle the impact of HIV/AIDS and globalisation on women.

But despite an all-night session, virtually no progress was made on the most contentious issues — including access to safe abortion, sexual rights, sexual orientation, and equal rights of inheritance.

That disappointed grassroots groups, which had been

lobbying for more specific goals and stronger action, especially on issues regarding sexuality and reproductive health.

"We regret that there was not enough political will on the part of some governments and the UN system to agree on a stronger document with more concrete benchmarks, numerical goals, time-bound targets, indicators, and resources aimed at implementing the Beijing platform," said a statement by the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University and the Women's Environment and Development Organization.

The United States are expressing regret that the conference did not move forward on several reproductive and sexual issues.