

## International

# UN summit sets ambitious course for 21st century

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 9: Heads of state and government leaders from more than 150 countries ended an unprecedented UN Millennium Summit yesterday by setting an ambitious course for the 21st century, reports Reuters.

A resolution in the form of a Millennium Declaration, adopted by acclamation, pledged efforts in pursuit of peace, security, disarmament and the eradication of poverty.

"We are determined to establish a just and lasting peace all over the world in accordance with the objectives of the Charter," it vowed.

"We believe that the central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalisation becomes a positive force for all the world's people," it said, reflecting efforts to ensure that an ever-tightly linked world economy

does not leave poorer countries behind.

The declaration endorsed targets set by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a near-Utopian report last April that called for halving by the year 2015 the 22 per cent of the world's population now existing on less than a dollar a day. It also aimed at halting and reversing by then the scourge of AIDS, malaria and other major diseases.

By the same date, the world leaders resolved, boys and girls alike should be able to complete a full course of primary schooling, with maternal mortality reduced by three-quarters of current rates and under-5 child mortality cut by two-thirds.

The theme of the three-day Millennium Summit was "The United Nations in the 21st Century," with the declaration billed as its crowning achievement.

But much of the business of diplomacy was transacted on the margins of the summit, away from the mind-numbing oratory of more than 60 speeches a day, in secluded meeting rooms, hotel lounges and specially constructed niches at UN headquarters.

Perhaps the most closely followed developments outside the Assembly hall were those connected with US President Bill Clinton's efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

But as the summit closed, no solution had yet been found for the highly emotive issue of the future of Jerusalem.

The declaration adopted as the centrepiece of the summit enshrined the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility.

The leaders pledged to "spare

no effort to free our peoples from the scourge of war, whether within or between states, which has claimed more than 5 million lives in the past decades."

The document also took aim at such evils as transnational crime, including trafficking in human beings and money laundering. Also targeted were drugs and the illicit traffic in small arms that fuel numerous low-tech wars.

Without mentioning any specific examples, the declaration promised to minimise the adverse effects of UN economic sanctions on innocent populations and to strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

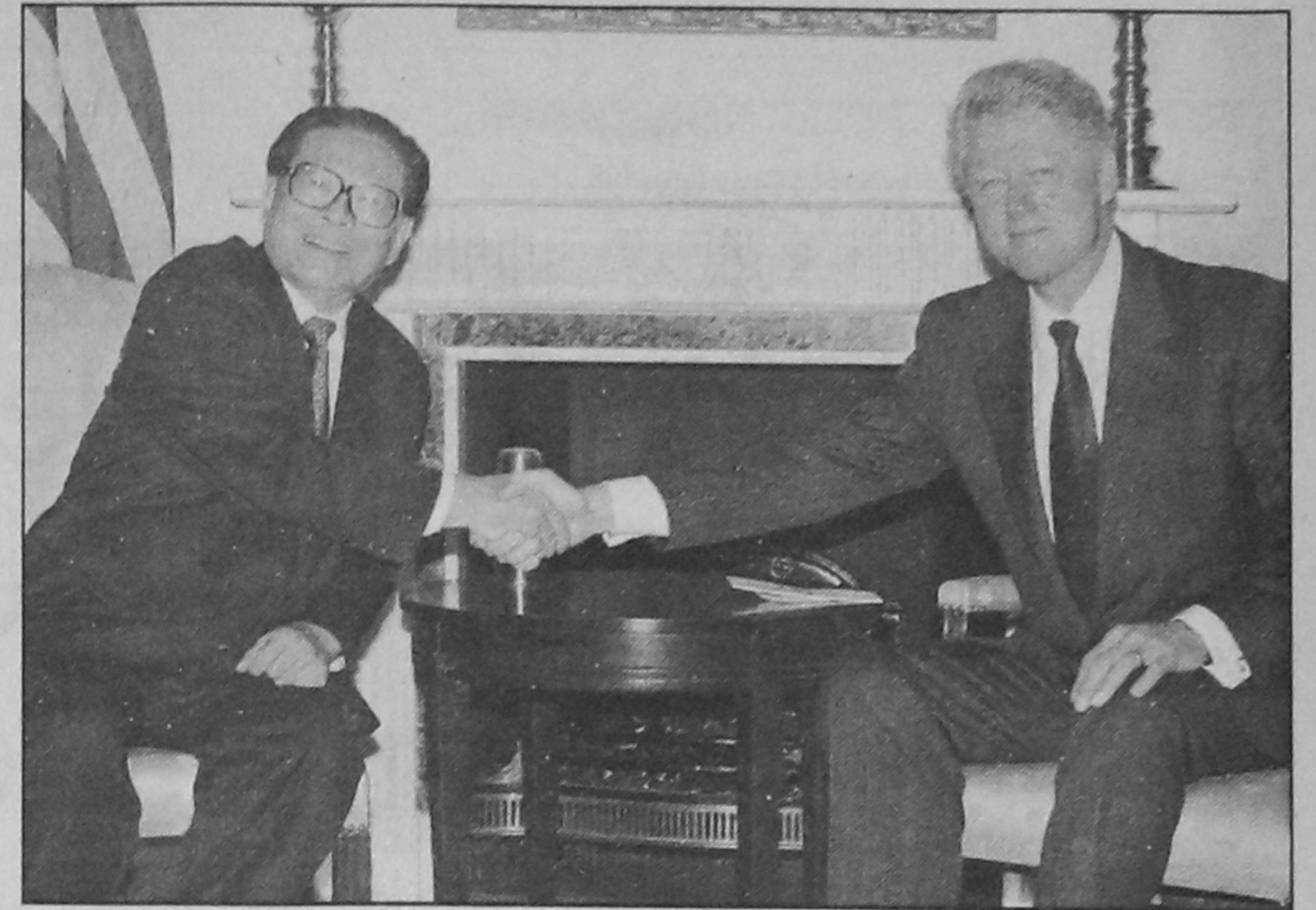
In a bid to meet Africa's special needs, it promised to support the consolidation of democracy there and to take "special measures to address the challenges of poverty-eradication and sustainable development."

The means cited included debt-cancellation, improved market access and increased flows of foreign investment and technology transfers.

Under the rubric of tolerance, the declaration said human beings "must respect each other in all their diversity of belief, culture and language."

"Differences within and between societies should neither be feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity," it said.

A week before the opening of the Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, the declaration urged UN members "to observe the Olympic Truce," now and in the future. This ancient Greek tradition, revived by the General Assembly in 1993, stopped wars in their tracks, enabling athletes to travel and compete without fear of death or capture.



US President Bill Clinton (R) meets with Chinese President Jiang Zemin in New York on Friday. Both Clinton and Zemin are in New York this week attending the United Nations Millennium Summit. --AFP photo

## Lanka eases censorship restrictions

COLOMBO, Sept 9: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has lifted a ban on public meetings and eased some censorship regulations amid opposition from local and international media groups, officials said Friday, reports AFP.

The blanket censorship was imposed on May 3 banning virtually any form of criticism of the government. It was replaced with restrictions on military operations against Tamil Tiger rebels.

"Basically the censorship will now be limited to reporting on the war," a government information department official said.

Chief censor Ariya Rubasinghe said the president had eased the censorship from Tuesday.

The move came five days after the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) urged President Kumaratunga to lift the censorship ahead of the October 10 parliamentary elections.

The CPJ said it was imperative that journalists in Sri Lanka were allowed to comment independently without fear of reprisals in the run up to polls.

The CPJ is dismayed by recent indications that censorship regulations are still in force in Sri Lanka, despite earlier assurances by the media minister (Mangala Samaraweera) that these restrictions would be lifted by mid-August, well in advance of the upcoming parliamentary elections, the CPJ said earlier this week.

## Jordan eases visa restrictions

AMMAN, Sept 9: Jordan has eased visa restrictions for visitors from 13 countries in a bid to attract more tourists, according to a Tourism Ministry spokesman, reports AP.

The new entry regulations, which went into effect on September 1, applies to visitors from Israel, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Iran, North Korea, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, India, China, Uzbekistan, Macedonia and the former Yugoslav Republic.

Visitors from those countries can obtain visas at Jordanian entry points provided they have return tickets and bank affidavits issued by certified tour operators in their home country, the spokesman said.

Previously, visitors from the 13 countries had to obtain visas from Jordanian diplomatic missions prior to coming to Jordan. Visa issuance used to take up to four weeks.

The spokesman said the fee for single entry and transit visas remained 15 dollars and double the amount for multiple entry visas valid for six months.

The new regulation also allows for visa exemption for tourist groups of at least five people over the age of 18 who plan to spend more than two nights in Jordan, he added.

## Severe storm kills 42 in N Korea

BEIJING, Sept 9: A severe tropical storm that hit the northeastern coast of North Korea has caused widespread devastation and left at least 42 people dead, a UN official in China said today, reports DPA.

The worst storm in 30 years broke dikes in the south of the worst-hit Hamgyong province, causing the reported deaths, the UN coordinator for humanitarian aid for North Korea, David Morton, said in a statement distributed in Beijing.

Roads, railways, bridges and power and telephone lines were also destroyed. The storm hit on August 31, but news had only just filtered out from the secluded communist state.

Crops were also wrecked in the country where previous natural disasters and mismanagement have caused malnutrition. Heavy rainfalls had caused further damage in the province of Ryanggang.

Several thousand people have been mobilised for rebuilding efforts, and financial aid was urgently needed.

## Filipino rebels free four European hostages

JOLO, Philippines, Sept 9: Abu Sayyaf Muslim gunmen in the southern Philippines freed four Europeans among their 23 hostages after a bloody shoot-out over a cash ransom dispute, officials said, reports AFP.

The rebels turned over the four European hostages to top government negotiator Roberto Avenajado's emissaries who were earlier ambushed by a faction of the Abu Sayyaf unhappy over the distribution of millions of dollars in ransom payments.

Military helicopters later plucked Frenchman Stephane Loisy, Finns Seppo Fraenti and Risto Vahanen and Marc Wallert of Germany, as well as the emissaries from the Abu Sayyaf, and took them to nearby Zamboanga city.

European government representatives were to receive the freed hostages there, the negotiator Roberto Avenajado said.

Sources said that according to an agreement struck with the Abu Sayyaf, two French journalists among the remaining hostages would be released in about two days by Libyan negotiator Rajab Azarrouq said they might encounter "problems" because of infighting among the gunmen.

The French journalists, Jean-Jacques le Garrec and Roland Madura were seized while covering the

hostage crisis in July.

Aside from the journalists, the Abu Sayyaf are holding one American and 16 Filipino hostages.

The fighting in Jolo island threatened to scuttle a painstakingly arranged deal brokered by Libya under which the Abu Sayyaf was supposed to hand over the European captives in exchange for pledges of up to 10 million dollars in "development aid" from Tripoli.

Sources close to the negotiations say millions of dollars in ransom have been paid to the Muslim extremists to secure the hostages so far.

Avenajado said his emissaries Ernesto Pacuno and Salim Jumaani were ambushed by a faction of the Abu Sayyaf gunmen while en route to the village of Bandang for the handover.

Witnesses said the attack was mounted in the village of Pantao Dahlil by a Commander Nandy whose faction holds the two French journalists.

Nandy's boss, Abu Sabar, later fought with the faction headed by Galib Andang, alias Commander Robot, and Mujib Susukan, who had been holding the four freed European hostages.

Robot and Susukan together with the government emissaries fled from the firefight in the nick of time, though government emissary Ernesto Pacuno said Susukan sustained superficial injuries.

## 13 drown in India boat capsizes

LUCKNOW, Sept 9: An overcrowded boat capsized in a river in India's most populous state, drowning 13 people, police said Saturday, reports AP.

One body was washed ashore, nearly five kilometers (three miles) downstream from Pashpura village in the northern Uttar Pradesh state. Police Superintendent MK Basha, of nearby Rampur town, told The Associated Press. The boat had overturned in the rain-swollen waters of the Pilakhar river.

Police on Friday had put the death toll at 30. The boat, carrying 44 people, capsized mid-stream in the late afternoon. Four people swam to safety near Pashpura, but it was feared that the other passengers had drowned in the fast-moving waters of the river.

Police officials, however, confirmed Saturday that they had received reports that 31 people were rescued or swam ashore.

## PLO starts meeting on state declaration

GAZA CITY, Sept 9: The Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organisation started its meeting today to decide on whether or not to declare an independent Palestinian state on September 13, journalists saw, reports AFP.

The meeting opened with a minute of silence in memory of Palestinians killed by the Israeli army.

Just over 100 of the Council's 129 members were present at the meeting, which is being held in the presidential palace in Gaza in the presence of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The meeting is scheduled to last for two days.

Arafat had pledged to declare a state on September 13, the date fixed last year by Israelis and Palestinians for reaching a final peace accord.

However, he has come under strong international pressure, particularly from Israel and the United States, to postpone the declaration.

## Northeastern Indian states invite rebels for talks

GUWAHATI, India, Sept 9: The regional heads of seven northeastern Indian states today offered unconditional peace talks to separate tribal guerrilla organisations in a bid to restore peace in the troubled region, reports AFP.

The chief ministers of the frontier region made the joint appeal at a peace rally in Guwahati, the state capital of Assam which is the largest of the seven northeastern provinces.

"We want peace and an end to all forms of violence," said Zoramthanga, Chief Minister of Mizoram state.

"We sincerely appeal to all rebel groups to come forward and hold negotiations with the Indian government," he said.

Zoramthanga was himself a former rebel commander for 20 years before joining a New Delhi-inspired peace process in the region in 1986.

Hundreds of people including school children earlier Saturday took to the streets to protest against a rise in tribal separatist violence in India's northeast, which is also called the "Seven Sisters" of India.

"People in the region are sick and tired of seeing violence and killings," said Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of insurgency-hit Tripura.

The regional leaders also flayed the Indian gov-

ernment for failing to offer a definite and time-bound development assistance package for the neglected region.

"For years the region was neglected by successive central governments leading to a sense of alienation and frustration among the youths," said Manipur Chief Minister Wahengbam Nipamacha Singh.

"The north has remained backward and isolated and despite that the central government has never taken the region seriously," he said.

The Manipur leader too offered to hold talks with some of the guerrilla groups of his home-state.

The offers came a week after a frontline tribal guerrilla group said it will walk out from a fragile truce in Nagaland unless India extended the ceasefire to the other states of the region.

The outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) is the largest tribal guerrilla organisation here. It has been waging a homeland campaign in the northeast since India's independence in 1947.

The NSCN-led insurgency has left more than 25,000 people dead in Nagaland and in adjoining regions in the past 52 years.

More than 50,000 people have died in the entire northeast during the five decades of tribal separatist violence here.

## UN calls on Indonesia to disband W Timor militia

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 9: The Security Council insisted that Indonesia immediately disarm and disband the militias that killed three UN aid workers in West Timor and said those responsible must be brought to justice, reports AP.

US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke said Friday it was time to review whether an international war crimes tribunal was necessary because of the scale of attacks and indications that the Indonesian government may not be able to prosecute the crimes sufficiently.

Speaking before the Security Council unanimously adopted its resolution, Holbrooke announced the council was sending a mission to Indonesia and East Timor to investigate the resurgence of militia activity against UN workers and civilians on both sides of Timor. The date for the mission's departure hasn't been set.

"We have ample evidence that the threat is increasing," Holbrooke said. "We must face facts. The Indonesian military, or to be more precise, elements within the Indonesian military, are directly or indirectly responsible for these outrages."

All UN workers fled West Timor after a militia-led mob stormed office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in the town of Atambua on Wednesday, killing three UN workers and three other civilians.

On Friday, UN officials said another 20 civilians were feared dead by marauding militia members

continuing the attacks.

The militias are the same gangs that, with backing from elements in the Indonesian military, wreaked destruction in East Timor after residents there voted for independence in an August 1999 referendum. The anti-independence militiamen were pushed into the western part of Timor island when UN peacekeepers took control of the east.

UNHCR has been caring for the tens of thousands of East Timorese who fled to West Timor during the post-vote violence.

This week's attacks led to heated criticism at the United Nations of Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, who was in town for the UN Millennium Summit, which opened and closed its historic session with a minute of silence to commemorate the slain aid workers.

Wahid tried to assure world leaders that Indonesia was in control of the situation, announcing that two battalions had been deployed to West Timor and that suspects were already in custody.

"Everything is under control," Wahid told a news conference on the sidelines of the Summit Friday. "The situation now is going very well."

But the council said Indonesia had to do more to disarm the militias, which have been terrorising East Timorese in the West Timor refugee camps and also are blamed for the deaths of two UN peacekeepers in East Timor recently.

## BRIEFLY

**Quake hits southern Philippines:** A moderately strong earthquake located very close to Zamboanga city in the southern Philippines sent residents rushing out of their homes early Saturday but caused little damage, officials said, AP reports from Philippines.

The earthquake, which registered a preliminary magnitude of 5.1, hit at 6:41 am (2241 GMT Friday) and was centered just 13 kilometers (eight miles) northwest of Zamboanga, a southern commercial center, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said. The earthquake was caused by a shallow local fault under the Zamboanga Peninsula, it said.

**Iran-Algeria ties restored:** The presidents of Iran and Algeria agreed on Friday to restore full diplomatic relations at ambassador level in another improvement in Tehran's ties with Arab states, Reuters reports from United Nations.

The reconciliation ended almost a decade in which Algeria's rulers accused Iran of aiding and abetting Islamic rebels in the North African state, and Tehran accused the Algerian military of brutally repressing Muslim activists. A joint statement said Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and his Algerian counterpart, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, "recognized the strength of the bonds tying their countries through Islam and Islamic civilisation."

**Landslide kills 5 in Nepal:** Five members of a Nepali family died when a landslide crushed their home in the country's mountainous west, officials said today, Reuters reports from Kathmandu.

The five died on Friday in Arghakhanchi district, 350 km (218 miles) west of Kathmandu, a police official said. Their deaths take the toll in this year's monsoon floods and landslides to 143 since June. Landslides and flash floods triggered by monsoon rains are an annual feature in the Himalayan kingdom.

**DPRK accepts US apology:** North Korea has accepted a US apology for the treatment of the North Korean delegation to this week's UN Millennium Summit, who flew home from Frankfurt in protest at body searches by US airline staff, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on Friday, Reuters reports from New York.

"We are putting all this behind us," Albright told reporters in New York for the summit, which the North Koreans boycotted because of the incident at Frankfurt airport. The delegation led by designated head of state Kim Jong-nam, had planned to fly to New York via Frankfurt but turned back in mid-journey because of the searches.

## Russia to cut 350,000 troops by 2003

MOSCOW, Sept 9: With a decision to cut 350,000 troops, Russia's leaders appear to have decided that they can no longer afford armed forces like those that once stood eyeball to eyeball with NATO, reports AP.

The troop reduction, confirmed by Defence Minister Igor Sergeev on Friday, would slash the ministry's forces from 1.2 million men an enormous force that no longer gets money to properly equip, train and feed its servicemen.

"A corresponding decision has been made, and now (we) are preparing suggestions for the president on how to carry it out," Defence Minister Igor Sergeev told journalists.

Speaking at a ceremony at the headquarters of the Kantemirovskaya tank division outside Moscow, Sergeev said the reduction would be complete by 2003.

The move appears to reflect Russian leaders' growing recognition that the nation's lagging economy can no longer afford a military modeled on the Soviet forces that squared off against the United States and Europe during the Cold War.

That required a large land army of troops and tanks, thousands of combat aircraft and hundreds of ships, plus thousands of nuclear missiles.

The current Russian defence budget is just 5.1 billion dollars, compared with annual US defence spending of about 290 billion dollars.

"They just can't afford to keep up a world class armed forces on that kind of money," said Keith

Bush, head of the Russian and Eurasian Programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

The Kursk "is just one example of overreach," said Bush, pointing to the lack of rescue and safety equipment that left the navy floundering to reach the sub after it sank August 12.

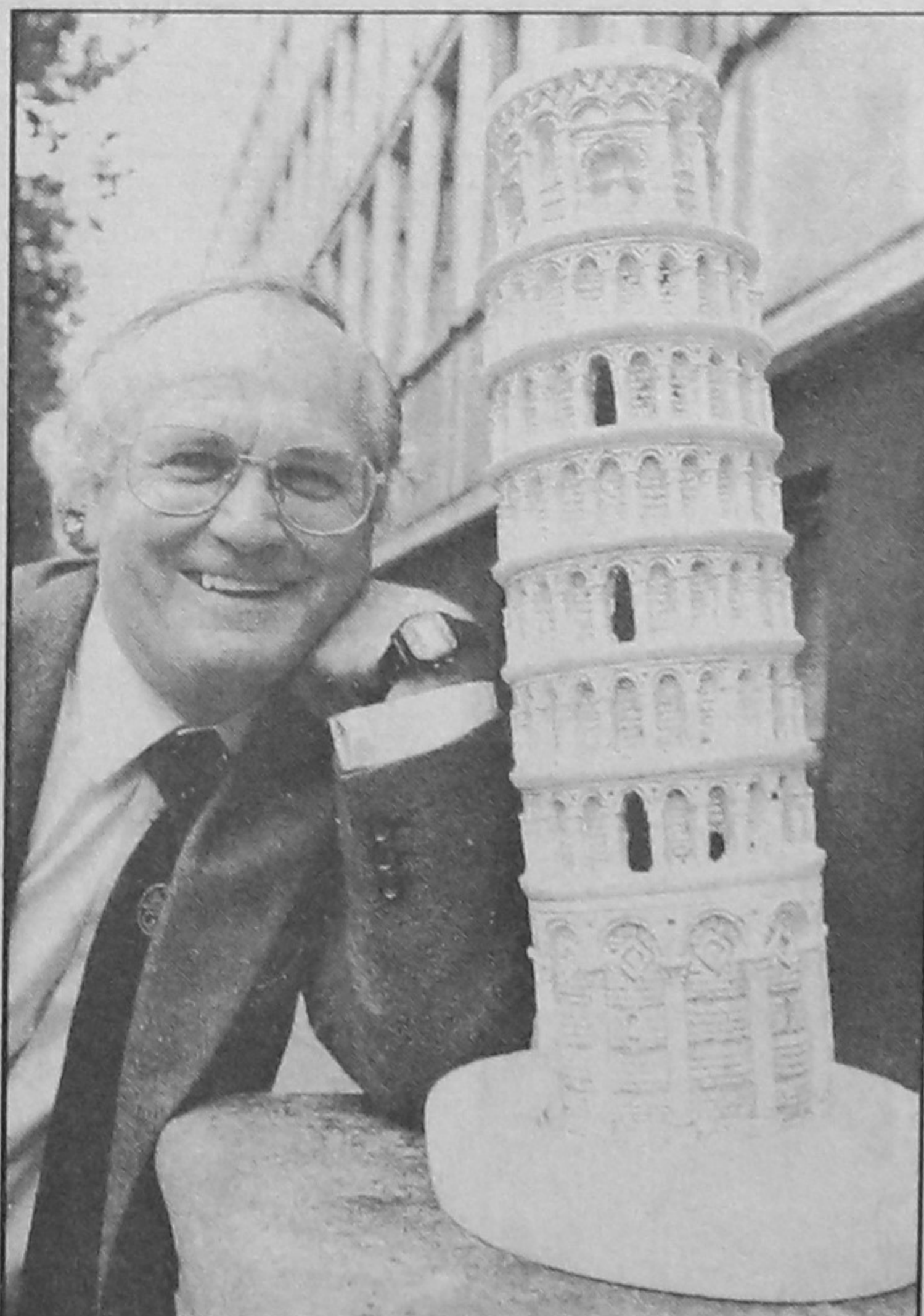
## Russian embassy official suspected of spying leaves Japan

TOKYO, Sept 9: A Russian Embassy official suspected of spying on Japan left the country today, a day after the Japanese naval officer who allegedly gave him classified documents was arrested, reports AP.

Television news showed Victor Bogatenkov, a 44-year-old military attaché, pushing his way through a crowd of reporters at Tokyo's main international airport to board an afternoon Aeroflot flight bound for Moscow.

Police believe that he bought military secrets from a Japanese naval officer assigned as a researcher to the country's National Institute for Defense Studies.

The officer, 38-year-old Lt. Cmdr. Shigehiro Hagsaki, was taken into custody Thursday night when police found him meeting at a Tokyo restaurant with Bogatenkov.



Professor John Burland poses with a model of the Tower of Pisa on Thursday after the announcement that he and other members of the commission set up to save the tower had succeeded in reversing the tilt which was threatening to topple it. Using expertise gathered whilst trying to protect Big Ben during the construction of the new tube station below, British scientists were able to help Italian engineers reverse the tilt. --AFP photo

## Plane hijacked in Colombia, passengers freed

BOGOTA, Sept 9: A leftist guerrilla prisoner hijacked a plane carrying 21 people Friday, later freeing his captives unharmed when the plane touched down and left him in rebel territory, police said, reports AP.

Three guards were escorting the convicted murderer from Bogota to the southwest city of Florencia, said police director Gen. Ernesto Gilibert.

The prisoner went to the bathroom, emerged with a handgun, headed for the cockpit and commandeered the plane, 15 minutes into flight following a refueling stop along the way in the southwestern provincial city of Neiva, Gilibert said.

"He said it was a hijacking, that it was to obtain his freedom and that he was a guerrilla," said Jose Orlando Ossa, a passenger aboard the Dash 230 turboprop run by the small Colombian carrier Aires.

Ossa said the hijacker identified himself as a member of Colombia's largest guerrilla army, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

Once on the ground at the FARC-held airport in the southern town of San Vicente del Caguan, Ossa said the hijacker stepped off the plane and a uniformed FARC member came aboard.

The FARC rebel "asked for our forgiveness, saying that he had no knowledge of this (the hijacking) and that we would all be able to go free," Ossa added.

The plane later returned to the airport in Neiva, where the passengers got off unharmed.