

Pakistan to step up anti-India tirade

ISLAMABAD, July 24: Pakistan has asked its diplomatic missions abroad to intensify its anti-India tirade on the Kashmir issue, reports PTI. A top aide of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said the missions had been told to highlight the Kashmir problem more effectively at the international level. Tariq Farooq, Adviser to Sharif, repeated allegations of human rights violations in Kashmir and claimed the liberation movement had now reached a very crucial stage. There was a need for stepping up practical support and help for the Kashmiri people, he said. So far, Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad (IJ) leaders have in public spoken about extending moral, diplomatic and political support for the secessionists in Jammu and Kashmir. But they have rebutted Indian charges of aiding and abetting the separatists through financial and material assistance.

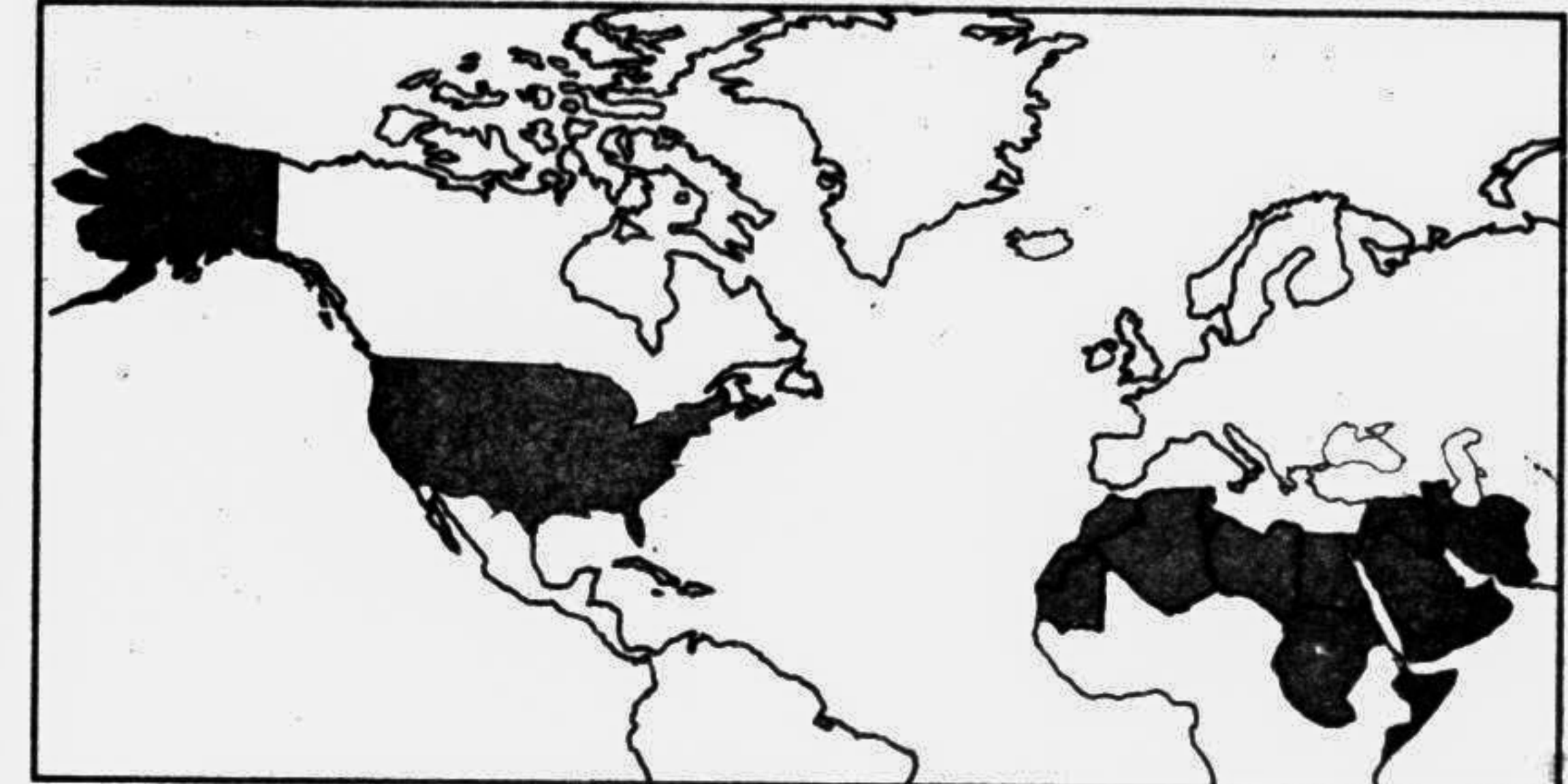
ME peace confce in the offing as Israel is ready for talks

JERUSALEM, July 24: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said Tuesday it appears that Israel "is approaching a start to talks with the Arabs because Syria has created new conditions in the Middle East," Israeli radio reported, says AFP. "In one month or two, we will begin to speak with our neighbours, he said, created a new situation." Shamir said a day after US Secretary of State James Baker left Israel. Baker ended here a five-nation Middle East tour in which he secured Syria's acceptance of US proposals for a peace conference. "As the way things are cur-

PLO's role must be taken into account : Arafat

Another AFP report from Washington adds: President George Bush hopes Israel will agree before next week's US-Soviet summit to attend a Mideast peace conference, but he has set no deadline for the Israeli answer, the White House said Tuesday. "There is no deadline for a response from Israel", Presidential Spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said. Bush's top national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, said Monday following a visit to Israel by Secretary of State James Baker that Washington wanted a response on the peace conference before the summit begins Tuesday. The statement, and its implied pressure on the Israeli government to agree to attend the summit, drew sharp criticism from Israeli officials. Fitzwater said the US President hoped to have a positive Israeli response concerning the peace conference, which several Arab governments have tentatively agreed to attend, before the summit so he and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev could announce their joint sponsorship of the meeting. "Would we like to have it before the Moscow summit? yes," Fitzwater said. "But that is not the same as saying there's a deadline." The Israeli government said Monday it would announce its decision in a matter of days and not weeks, although Baker said Tuesday in Kuala Lumpur that it could take several weeks to get an Israeli response. Fitzwater also sought to play down another statement by Scowcroft, who for the first time Monday indicated Washington was linking progress in the peace process to 10 billion dollars in aid that Israel has requested from the United States to help settle Soviet Jews. "There is no linkage," Fitzwater said. But the added: "However everyone knows that our policy on settlements is that they are an obstacle to peace. It is a matter that we have to consider in engaging the total relationship with Israel, but there is no direct linkage."

rely presented, it seems that we are approaching a start to talks with Arab countries, even if there remain problems to resolve, such as the composition of the Palestinian delegation to a future peace conference," the Premier said. Shamir also said that the Syrian leader "follows the same approach as Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who in his time launched direct peace talks with Israel," Israeli radio reported. "Assad understood that the Soviet Union lost its greatness, and that America remains the sole superpower," Shamir was quoted as saying. "Whoever wants to work with the United States and respect their will for peace and stability in the region must recognize the existence of the state of Israel," Shamir said.



The United States and the Middle East.

Washington to consider Japanese plan for security

ASEAN rejects US call to pressurise Burmese military

KUALA LUMPUR, July 24: Six Southeast Asian Nations Tuesday rejected a US call to pressure the ruling Burmese military to allow people elected in May last year to govern, reports AP. "We don't, of course, condone what is happening there," said Thai Foreign Minister Arsa Sarasin. "But, simply, we cannot change them by putting pressure on them." Arsa said isolating Burma would not help. "We feel strongly that we ought to engage them, talk to them, reason with them and (make them) feel that in the future there will be a country that can contribute toward the peace and stability of Southeast Asia," he said. Thailand was joined in rejecting the US call for pressure by the five other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations — the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei. Representatives of the countries are conferring in Kuala Lumpur this week with ASEAN's major trade partners. Robert B Zoellick, US under secretary of state, told the meeting Monday. "Without our efforts, the people of Burma will suffer longer; undeveloped and undemocratic, Burma will poison the region with narcotics and remain a cancer of instability." Burma's ruling military junta has refused to let the pro-democratic winners of May 1990 elections take office. The US government said it was imposing trade sanctions against Burma because of lack of progress in easing political repression and suppressing the narcotics trade. Burma drew fire internationally for its human rights record after troops fired on pro-democracy demonstrators in 1988, killing hundreds. No official investigation was held to determine blame for the shoot-to-kill orders. Reuters adds: The United States has told its southeast Asian allies it wants to reshape its ties with the region and would consider a Japanese proposal for a security forum for the Asia-Pacific, a senior US official said on Tuesday. The United States wants to study the reaction of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to the Japanese proposal, he told reporters. He was speaking after US Secretary of State James Baker met Foreign Ministers from Asian and other countries with which the group has close ties in its so-called dialogue partners. It is an interesting idea that reflects some of the thinking that has been bubbling. We obviously want to look carefully at what ASEAN thinks about it because the notion builds on an ASEAN structure, the official said. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama on Monday proposed that ASEAN use its annual Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) with its seven dialogue partners as a forum for security talks. Nakayama told the ASEAN ministers that regional security discussions were necessary as doubts remained about the Soviet Union's intentions in the area Japanese officials say they see no role for the Soviet Union in the proposed forum. Foreign ministries from ASEAN — Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand — met last week. They are now holding their three-day PMC with the dialogue partners — the United States, Japan, Canada, the European Community, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea. The US official said Baker had won "strong support" from ASEAN for his recent peace mission to the Middle East. He also said the United States was now looking for more partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region which would go beyond security issues. Earlier US Under Secretary of State Robert Zoellick told ASEAN the United States was committed to the region and wanted to forge a sense of community in this "remarkably diverse and dynamic region."

Punjab death toll rises to 2,700 Bus with CRPF troops ambushed : 11 killed

NEW DELHI, July 24: Sikh militants killed 11 people in Punjab and lost as many of their own men to police bullets and fractional rivalries. Pushing past 2,700 the year's death count in their violent homeland campaign, reports AFP. The victims included a federal policeman killed when militants ambushed a busload of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) troopers at dawn Tuesday near the industrial city of Ludhiana, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. The attackers used rifle fire and remote-controlled bombs planted on a tractor-trailer to stop a bus, carrying about 20 policemen returning from duty. Fifteen policemen and one passing scooterist were injured in the ambush. Nine suspected Sikh militants were killed in five separate gunbattles with police Monday night and Tuesday elsewhere in Punjab, a rich farming state in India's north bordering Pakistan. Several well-armed groups of Sikh militants are fighting for a theocratic homeland called Khalistan in Punjab in a violent drive which has cost thousands of lives since taking off in 1983. Ten civilians were gunned down overnight Monday in hit-and-run attacks by Sikh separatists, PTI said. In one incident, gunmen stormed the house of a Sikh villager identified as Mohinder Singh, killing him along with his wife, a grandson and a granddaughter, the news agency said.

UK to axe Gurkhas by three battalions

LONDON, July 24: The British Army's Brigade of Gurkhas is to be reduced from five infantry battalions to two under Armed Forces cuts announced by Defence Secretary Tom King on Tuesday, reports Reuters. Renowned for their fighting capacities and armed with their distinctive curved-bladed kukri knives, the Gurkhas have been part of the British Army since 1816. King told Parliament that as a first step, two battalions would merge to one next year. The current strength of 7,000 men — professional soldiers recruited in Nepal — would be cut to about 2,500 after Britain returns Hong Kong to China in 1997. Three Gurkha battalions are stationed in the British colony, another is based in

Strikes prohibited in Nepal

KATHMANDU, July 24: The government on Monday prohibited employees working in certain key government services from striking work, the government announced, reports AP. The interior Ministry said the ban would apply to employees in the departments of posts and telecommunications; health; water distribution; solid waste disposal and electricity. According to the notice, violation of the ban will attract a maximum of six months imprisonment. The move followed a week-long strike by employees in post offices and other government offices demanding improved working conditions and pay hikes of up to 60 per cent.

BRIEFLY

2 protesters freed in China: Officials on Tuesday confirmed the release of a pair of democracy activists who were jailed for five months after returning to China from Hong Kong, reports AP from Beijing. Li Lin and Li Zhi, brothers from the central Chinese city of Hengyang in Hunan province, had fled to Hong Kong in 1989 after China's massive democracy movement was crushed. They returned to China early this year and were quickly arrested. Although the Lis were not prominent dissidents, their treatment received close attention in Hong Kong because other fugitives regarded it as a test case. They said Chinese officials had promised the pair immunity.

Body parts found in US apartment: A large number of human body parts were found early Tuesday in an apartment building where neighbors had complained for more than a month of a foul odor, police said, AP reports from Milwaukee. Lt David Vahl said officers went to the apartment and arrested the 31-year-old man who lived there after getting a report from a citizen shortly before midnight. A police officer at the scene who declined to give his name said authorities were investigating the possibility of up to 15 deaths.

Instant photo-booth blast in Oslo: Two women received head injuries when a coin-operated instant-photo booth blew up as it took a picture, police said Tuesday, AP from Oslo reports. Police Officer Jo Wanderaas said an aerosol can of paint remover had been left in the machine at an Oslo shopping center. They can leaked, creating a gas pocket, and a spark from the photo flash exploded the gas, he said. "I heard a terrible explosion. I saw a woman fall out of the wrecked booth. Another woman was lying on the floor, bleeding heavily from her nose," witness Hanne Lindstad told the Oslo newspaper Vardens Gang.

13 killed in Indian violence: At least 13 people died and a dozen more were injured when violence erupted as Shiite Muslims observed Moharram in two Indian states, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said Tuesday, AP reports from New Delhi. A number of towns in Gujarat were placed under indefinite curfew after fighting broke out between rival groups during Moharram processions.

HK typhoon sweeps Chinese coast: Typhoon Brendan swept towards China's southern coast Wednesday after causing havoc in the Philippines, officials in Hong Kong said, Reuters reports from Hong Kong. As Brendan neared to 100 km (60 miles) south of Hong Kong, strong winds and heavy rain tore down bamboo scaffolding and advertising signs in the British colony and uprooted trees, crushing one taxi. Thirteen people were injured by flying debris but none seriously.

Seoul to sell 5,000 tons rice to N Korea: The government on Tuesday formally approved a South Korean company's plan to export 5000 tons of rice to Communist North Korea in the first direct deal between the two rival countries, AP from Seoul says. A government committee, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister-Unification Minister Choi Ho-Joong, authorized Seoul's Cheongji Trading Co. to sell the rice in exchange for cement and coal from North Korea. The rice, worth \$1.75 million, was being loaded aboard a ship in the southwestern port of Mokpo that was to leave this weekend to deliver the rice to Najin, a port on North Korea's east coast.

Missing businessmen return to Kuwait: Two businessmen, one an American and the other a Briton, have been returned to Kuwait after they strayed across the border into Iraq, diplomats and security officials said Tuesday, reports AP from Kuwait City. The two were reported missing last Tuesday. They were reportedly picked up by Iraqi security forces, questioned in the border town of Safwan and then turned over to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross on Monday, said one official who spoke on condition of anonymity. ICRC officials could not immediately be reached for comment. Barry Lowen, spokesman for the British Embassy here, confirmed that the British national was returned to Kuwait. He declined to give the man's name, but said he was planning to leave Kuwait soon. Lowen said the Briton and the American "were in some way connected with the oil-field fires." He declined to give further details.

Lebanese troops fire at Israeli warplanes: Lebanese Army soldiers on Tuesday fired anti-aircraft guns at low-flying Israeli warplanes which staged mock raids against newly disarmed Palestinian refugee camps, the army reported, AP from Sidon says. It was the first time the army fired on Israeli aircraft in at least 16 years. No hits were scored, but the incident underlined Lebanon's commitment to protect Palestinian refugees after the camps' guerrilla fighters were stripped of their weapons under a Lebanese-PLO reached accord earlier this month. Col Ali Shreim, spokesman for the South Lebanon command, said the incident took place from 11 am to 11:30 am (0800-0830 GMT).

Mudslides bury thousands of homes: Walls of mud and debris tumbled down Mount Pinatubo's rain-swollen rivers Tuesday, burying thousands of homes around the volcano and forcing more than 60,000 people to flee, reports AP from Manila. At least five lives have been lost in two days of flooding as heavy rains loosened tons of debris from the slopes of the ash-spewing volcano, which began erupting last month. The flooding began Monday as tropical storm Brendan swept the region. In some villages, walls of mud and debris three meters (10 feet) high swept down river beds, leaving channels and burying nearby homes.

Off the Record

British wings for Air Russia

LONDON: The British Airways and Aeroflot are expected to sign an agreement on the establishment of the joint venture Air Russia. It will be based in Domodedovo, where a new international terminal will be built, and will make international flights to Europe, North America and the Far East. Air Russia will use the latest passenger planes, possibly the Boeing 767. British Airways expects to invest 20 million dollars into the joint venture, reports IAN.

Sales of space tomatoes not taking off

HOUSTON: Sales of space tomatoes grown from seeds that spent six years in orbit aren't exactly taking off, reports AP. The Fiesta grocery store located near the Johnson Space Center started selling the tomatoes for \$3.99 a pound two weeks ago. "They're slow-moving," said Rene Garcia, who manages the store's hydroponics garden. "I expect a lot of customers buy them for a novelty item." More than 12 million tomato seeds spent years orbiting the Earth aboard the Long Duration Exposure Facility, retrieved by a shuttle crew last year. The seeds were stored on the spacecraft to see how exposure to space affected them. They "took a while to ripen. But they were 6-year-old seeds," Garcia said. The store got its seeds in February from the Ellington Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol, which is working with Fiesta on ways to grow seeds in space-like conditions. Fiesta grows vegetables in hydroponic gardens, where plants are not grown with soil, but rather with nutrients flowing through water. "Anything that comes out of space, you tend to be wary of," Garcia said of the low tomato sales. "But they are safe."

Firefighters handling sex-change well

LOS ANGELES: Sensitivity training was ordered for firefighters who work with a veteran captain who is undergoing a sex change operation and changing his name from Michael to Michele, reports AP. Capt Michael Kaemerer, becomes the department's second female captain and said her gender reversal was being handled well by the Los Angeles Fire Department. "The Fire Department is being very professional about it," Kaemerer said. "Everyone has been very professional. I just don't want to talk about it. I'm a happy person." Firefighters working with Kaemerer, who has been with the department for over 20 years, refused to discuss the captain. Russell Boxley, a department psychologist, and Patricia Kinaga, a deputy city attorney, worked with department officials to counsel other firefighters. "The department is trying to be sensitive about something we have never dealt with before," said Andrew P Fox, president of the local chapter of the firefighters union.

Insulin with a difference

MOSCOW: Diabetes patients have to take insulin injections daily. But if produced on board a spaceship, an insulin injection will suffice for a month, reports IAN. "Our assistants are weightlessness, the absence of gravitation," explains Alexander Yegorov of the Salyut Design Bureau. "All chemical processes proceed ideally in conditions of weightlessness, with the crystal lattice intact, and hence the insulin we get is near-perfect." And not insulin alone, but germanium, silicon and other substances. The only thing lacking is a space-borne factory. The Salyut Design Bureau created the famous Mir stations and the quantum and spectre modules, as well as a series of recoverable spaceships. The feasibility study for such a factory in space is ready. The designers think that it will be fully automated, with the goods sent back to earth on board a shuttle, which would bring back raw materials. The factory could produce up to two tonnes of valuable substances a year. If the Salyut finds partners who would invest some 500 million rubles in the construction. But in five years the factory could bring returns to the tune of at least 2,000 million dollars. The Salyut designers have quite a few other interesting ideas, such as a laser complex for super-precision welding, a solar energy accumulator, a collapsible fuel tank, and other innovation that could interest potential customers.

Noriega's lawyers denied access to US classified documents

MIAMI, July 24: Lawyers for deposed Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega claimed on Tuesday that the US government was withholding sensitive classified documents they consider crucial to his defence, reports Reuters. "The only document the government will ever allow into evidence is a confession by the General", said Frank Rubino, a Noriega defence lawyer, after a hearing that Noriega attended. Noriega's attorneys have fought prosecutors over secret US documents under the classified Information Procedures Act, which protects documents deemed to threaten national security. "It's critical," said Rubino of his fight to introduce certain documents into the case. "To defend the General we need to show the truth". Noriega's lawyers are not allowed to discuss documents they seek, and court hearings on the issue of evidence that



Noriega began last week have been closed to the press. But Rubino has said he intends to subpoena President George Bush and several CIA Directors. The hearings were attended by staff from the US State Department and the CIA. The government has maintained that most of the material Noriega seeks is irrelevant to the case. Noriega was indicted with 15 co-defendants by a Miami grand jury in 1988 on drug trafficking and money laundering charges. His lawyers claim the former strongman, who has called himself America's "man in Havana" can prove that US agencies sanctioned many of his activities. Noriega, who headed Panamanian intelligence for years, has said he was friendly with several CIA heads and assisted them in intelligence gathering. A witness in a related case claimed that Noriega approved a gun-for-cocaine smuggling operation out of Panama in the mid-80s. But Noriega claims that he assisted US leaders in anti-drug operations. His trial is scheduled to begin on September 3.

Emergency in Madagascar, Opposition leaders arrested

ANTANANARIVO (Madagascar), July 24: President Didier Ratsiraka declared a state of emergency in the capital Tuesday and security forces reportedly arrested at least two leaders of the opposition coalition seeking his ouster, reports AP. The crackdown on the island off the coast of south-eastern Africa came a day after opposition politicians, backed by thousands of supporters, marched into government ministries in a symbolic seating of their own self-declared government. Soldiers were deployed in Antananarivo's main square Tuesday morning, but they re-

treated by early afternoon as thousands of demonstrators 242 oil well fires out of 600 stopped. KUAWAIT, July 24: Firefighters have put out 242 of Kuwait's 600 oil well fires since March, Kuwaiti officials said on Tuesday. "Up to Monday, fires at 242 wells had been put out," an Oil Ministry official told Reuters. Retreating Iraqi troops set fire to about 600 wells and blew up 130 others, crippling the emirate's main source of wealth. Those arrested Tuesday included at least two, possibly more, of the opposition's shadow ministers. The government issued arrest warrants for other politicians, including top opposition leader Albert Zafy. Ratsiraka's government remained in place despite Monday's show of defiance, but the six-party opposition hoped the existence of a parallel administration will undermine his authority.