

Ghali concerned at ME violence

UNITED NATIONS, May 27: Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali expressed concern on Tuesday over the escalation of violence in the Middle East, which he said could jeopardise peace efforts, and urged maximum restraint on all sides, reports Reuters.

"The Secretary-General is deeply concerned by the recent escalation of violence in the Middle East in which Israelis, Lebanese and Palestinians have been killed and injured. He deplores the loss of innocent life," a statement issued through a UN spokesman said.

"The Secretary-General believes that a continuation of hostilities can only heighten tensions in the region and might even jeopardise the efforts that are presently underway to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. He urges all sides to exercise maximum restraint so that the momentum achieved thus far in the peace process may be sustained," the statement concluded.

Violence erupted in southern Lebanon last week when pro-Iranian Hizbollah militants attacked positions of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA), killing an SLA man and capturing four others. Israeli planes and helicopters have launched repeated raids against Hizbollah targets in southern Lebanon and in the Syrian-occupied Bekka Valley, killing at least 17 people.

In addition, three Islamic militants and an Israeli border policeman were killed in a shootout in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, touching off two days of clashes in which Israeli troops wounded scores of Palestinians.

An Israeli schoolgirl was stabbed to death on Sunday



AFGHANISTAN: (From L to R) Foreground: Pakistani Minister for Labour Ijaz-ul Haq, Afghan Defence Minister Shah Masood, fundamentalist guerrilla leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Saudi mediator Abdullah Naif hold a press conference in Lewa rocket base, 20 km east of Kabul Monday, announcing a "historical" peace accord between rival Mujahideen factions. — AFP/UNB photo

EC still undecided over trade ban on Serbia

BRUSSELS, May 27: European community officials discussing sanctions against Serbia were locked in argument on Wednesday over how deep and broad a trade ban should be, a Portuguese spokesman said, reports Reuters.

There are delegations that consider that the community, for efficiency's sake, should not act unilaterally but should submit sanctions proposals to the United Nations Security Council," the spokesman told reporters.

Portugal holds the EC's rotating presidency.

The envoys were also discussing whether a trade ban should cover both exports and imports to and from Serbia and its ally Montenegro and whether items such as services should be included, the spokesman said.

No delegation said it opposed a trade ban, but any recommendations from Tuesday's meeting would have to be endorsed by EC states ambassadors meeting today before they could be approved by ministers.

Only relatively junior envoys from the 12 EC capitals were taking part in the talks.

They were studying a range of options for sanctions drawn up by the EC's executive European Commission aimed at forcing Serbia to pull the ramp federal army out of the breakaway republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The options range from a blanket trade ban or an oil embargo to cutting sports links.

In Lisbon, the leader of the Serb community of Bosnia-Herzegovina said any attempt to impose sanctions on Serbia would unite Serbs throughout the old Yugoslavia.

"This is senseless this threat against Serbia... its going to be counter-productive. Radovan Karadzic told reporters on the sidelines of EC-sponsored peace talks in Lisbon.

This injustice made to Serbia is going to consolidate 10 million Serbs, to motivate them... from all over Yugoslavia, he added.

Mate Boban, the leader of Bosnia's Croat community, said sanctions would have to be tough, comprehensive and applied for at least two months before they would show any effect.

Diplomats said a high-level EC political decision appeared impossible before next week at the earliest even if Tuesday's negotiators managed to overcome resistance by France, Greece and Spain to any harsh moves against Serbia.

BRIEFLY

Mojaddedi appeals for aid: Interim Afghan President Sibghatullah Mojaddedi on Tuesday appealed for international aid for the reconstruction of his war-devastated country, Reuters reports from Islamabad.

Mojaddedi made the appeal, specially directed to Muslim countries and the developed world, in a speech at a dinner hosted by Pakistani President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, hours after he arrived on a two-day state visit.

"The economically poor but rich at heart Afghan people are in need of every kind of assistance for the reconstruction of their motherland and hope that friendly countries will not forget them at a time when they have initiated the process of reconstruction."

Mojaddedi arrived yesterday for his first state visit to the country that helped his guerrilla coalition take power from a collapsed communist government.

Storm leaves 27 dead in Myanmar: A storm struck five townships in western Myanmar's Rakhaine state killing 27 persons, according to an official report here Wednesday, Xinhua says from Yangon.

On May 19, the storm struck Taungur, Thandwe, Manaung, Kyaukphyu and Ramree townships of the state. As a result, 27 persons and 182 cattle were killed, 19 people were reported missing.

During the storm, a total of 433 houses were destroyed and 24 powered boats were lost.

PLO condemns Israeli raids: The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) condemned Israeli raids in South Lebanon on Tuesday, saying they threatened the Middle East peace process, Reuters reports from Tunis.

"The Palestinian leadership follows with great concern the savage aggressions launched by the Israeli forces against the Lebanese villages and the Palestinian camps, a PLO spokesman said in a statement published in Tunis.

"What the Israeli army is doing reveals the atrocious face of this criminal aggression against Lebanon and the Arab nation at the time the peace process is going on, the statement said.

It requested that the United States assume its responsibilities in front of Yitzhak Shamir's government and its criminal bands.

US condoles Philip Habib's death: The US State Department, for whom Philip Habib worked for 37 years, expressed "deep regrets and sadness" over the death of the former diplomat in France at the age of 72, AFP reports from Washington.

Philip Habib was a man of great courage, unparalleled tenacity, high intellect and deep warmth, said state department spokesman Richard Boucher.

"His accomplishments in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America made a profound contribution to American foreign policy and left an enduring legacy, he added.

Habib began his diplomatic career in 1949 and retired for the final time in 1986. During that time, he helped defuse several international situations and is credited for bringing Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to the negotiating table in 1977.

5 Kurds killed in Turkish raid: Turkish aircraft pounded positions inside Iraq on Tuesday, killing five Iraqi Kurds and wounding four, well-informed sources reported, AFP says from Zakh.

The raid targeted the Iraqi-Turkish border region of Kani-Masi, the sources in northern Iraq said, adding that the dead fell in the village of Dire, a Christian Kurdish dominated town.

Turkish aircraft bombed the Kani-Masi valley and neighbouring hills which had served as a refuge to Iraqi Kurds following their aborted coup against the Baghdad government in March 1991, for seven hours from 7-00 am (0400 GMT).

According to unofficial reports from Ankara, Turkish army units backed by fighter jets and helicopter gunships entered Iraqi airspace Tuesday to search for Turkish Kurdish separatist fighters and killed 20 of them.

Jew stabbed to death in Gaza: An Arab assailant stabbed a Jewish settler to death in the occupied Gaza Strip on Wednesday, three days after an Israeli girl was fatally knifed in a Tel Aviv suburb, the army said, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The assailant was shot and seriously wounded by Jews from the Kfar Darom settlement, the army and radio reports said. He was evacuated by army helicopter to a hospital in the nearby Israeli city of Ashkelon.

Following the stabbing, a curfew was placed on the Arab town of Dir el-Balah and surrounding areas, an army spokesman said. Wednesday was the last day of a three-day closure of the Gaza Strip imposed after the Tel Aviv stabbing, which was allegedly carried out by an Arab resident of the Gaza Strip.

The stabbing victim was the second Kfar Darom settler to be killed by Arabs this year. He was the 93rd Israeli to be killed since the beginning of the 4 1/2 year uprising against Israeli rule in the occupied territories.

Bandits ransack residence of Saudi envoy in Kabul

KABUL, May 27: Armed bandits ransacked the residence of Saudi Arabia's ambassador for the fifth time, the latest in a string of attacks against foreign missions and aid organisations, diplomats said Wednesday, reports AP.

The bandits overpowered the guard at the Saudi residence in southeastern Kabul on Monday night, broke furniture and stole the few small items that had been left in the house, the diplomats said.

The guard was tied, blindfolded, and threatened but not harmed, the sources said.

The interim Islamic government condemned the robbery and called it "an act of sabotage" designed to harm the new regime's relationship with Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia gave billions of dollars to the Mujahideen, or Islamic holy warriors, in the 14-year war against successive governments installed by the former Soviet Union.

But Riyadh has not reopened its mission since the rebel government replaced ousted President Najibullah's regime last month. France oversees Saudi Arabia's interests in Afghanistan.

Earlier this month, masked bandits armed with automatic rifles scaled the 10-foot (3-metre) high walls of the Saudi mission and stole two Mercedes Benz cars, several pairs of Gucci shoes and about 20 expensive carpets.

Some mujahideen groups have blamed rebel fighters backed by Iran, Saudi Arabia's rival. But diplomats and government officials believe it was probably independent groups trying to take advantage of the disorder and lack of security in the capital since the Islamic interim government took over on April 28.

Kabul has been divided among the dozen diverse rebel factions, each responsible for maintaining law and order in its areas. But within each party, commanders with their own armed forces often act independently.

Despite the interim government's insistence that Kabul's security has improved, diplomats and most rebel groups say the new administration has been unable to stop the violence.

In the past week, the Egyptian embassy has been ransacked and about 300,000 Afghans (600 dollar) and a half dozen carpets taken.

The house reserved for the US deputy chief of mission, the No 2 ranking American diplomat in Kabul, was robbed.

Rebel groups also have hijacked UN cars and taken over houses of UN workers evacuated from Kabul before the rebels stormed the city.

Myanmar students demonstrate near embassy in Delhi

NEW DELHI, May 27: Some 30 Myanmar students sang patriotic songs, chanted pro-democracy slogans and waved placards denouncing Myanmar's military government as they attempted to march on the Myanmar embassy here today, reports AFP.

Police stopped the peaceful demonstrators, who were marking the May 27, 1990 election victory by Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy, about 1.6 kilometre from the embassy compound.

However, they allowed seven of them to approach the embassy complex in the posh Chanayapuri diplomatic enclave in an attempt to convey a petition to the ruling junta, officially called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which has refused to recognise the election results.

Embassy staff refused to accept the Myanmar Students' League petition, which demanded that the SLORC surrender power to the "elected representatives of the people."

Off the Record

Batman shot daddy dead

JOHANNESBURG: A 4-year-old boy dressed in a Superman outfit fatally shot his father in the head with a pistol after announcing, "You're under arrest," reports AP.

The boy's mother, Meriam Gawryjolek told police her son Sebastian was imitating behaviour he had seen on his favourite videos, which include Superman, Batman and Robocop.

According to Mrs Gawryjolek, Sebastian on Tuesday got a hold of his father's .38 revolver, dressed up in his Superman outfit, walked into his parents' bedroom and said, "Papa, I'm Robocop. You're under arrest."

He then shot his father, Szczepan, a 34-year-old mining engineer in Welkom, a town southwest of Johannesburg.

Mrs Gawryjolek said her son appeared to have only a vague idea of what had happened.

"Batman shot daddy dead. Papa is in the hospital," Mrs Gawryjolek quoted her son as saying.

I'm not a mad woman

LAMBOURN, England: A jilted aristocratic wife gave away her husband's vintage wine, poured paint over his limousine and chopped the arms off 32 of his expensive suits, reports Reuters.

Lady Sarah Graham-Moon, 54, went on the rampage when her husband Sir Peter, 49, moved in which his lover close to the marital home in Lambourn, Southern England.

She poured five litres of white paint on his blue BMW car, delivered bottles of wine like milk for astonished villagers to wake up to and snipped his suits made by Savile Row Tailors.

"I know what hurts him and where his soft underbelly is and that's his material possessions, said Lady Sarah. "It gave me a hell of a buzz. I'm not a mad woman. I was fed up. The worm has turned."

Suicide pact between gays

NEW DELHI: A gay couple, in despair over social disapproval of their liaison, stabbed each other in a suicide pact and one was fatally wounded, a news agency reported Wednesday, says AP.

Press Trust of India said the survivor was hospitalized in serious condition Wednesday, a day after the stabbing.

A note recovered from the 18-year-old dead boy said they had lived together as "husband and wife" for one year, Press Trust said. It did not give the names of the couple.

The note asked that the two boys be buried in the same grave, the news agency quoted police as saying in Trichur, which is in the state of Tamil Nadu, 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) south of New Delhi.

India has no law forbidding homosexual relationships, which are rarely exhibited openly in India's rigidly conservative society. Sodomy and marriage between people of the same sex, however, is illegal.

Best way to win US dollar award

SYDNEY: A court here Wednesday awarded a woman 85,000 dollars (64,300 US) in New South Wales's first damages claim for injury through passive smoking in the workplace, reports AFP.

Non-smoker Liesel Scholem, 64, a psychologist formerly employed by the state's Health Department, claimed that her asthma was made worse by breathing tobacco smoke for 12 years, and she was diagnosed as having emphysema.

The four-man jury took three hours to bring in a finding of negligence against the Health Department.

Scholem told the court that she had worked at Sydney's Ryde Community Health Centre for nine years before restrictions on smoking by either staff or patients were imposed.

A complete ban was not fully enforced until 1986, the year she stopped working.

Scholem later said she felt "very happy, tremendously relieved and vindicated," but said her work had "taken away my health, and no verdict can make up for that."

They've nothing to celebrate

SYDNEY: Aborigines on Wednesday marked the 25th anniversary of the referendum that gave them civil rights, but there was little occasion for joy, reports AP.

"We have nothing to celebrate, except lack of integrity, practical apartheid and genocide," said Aboriginal writer and poet Kevin Gilbert.

Even government officials could not dispute Aborigines' disadvantaged state.

Our objective an independent Palestinian state: Ashrawi

THE HAGUE, May 27: Smiling but firm, Hanan Ashrawi emphasised each word: "Our objective is very clear, we want an independent Palestinian state."

The Palestinian spokeswoman at the Israeli-Arab Middle East peace talks launched in Madrid continued: "We are going to do everything possible to get this Palestinian state through negotiations."

In an interview here with AFP on Tuesday, Ashrawi said the peace process started last October had produced recognition of a Palestinian national identity. Palestinians were speaking on their own behalf

and were "recognised as a nation among nations."

But "the most glaring failure so far of the peace process is the fact that we have not been able to evolve protection for Palestinians and a system of accountability for Israel by which Israel would be held accountable for its actions like any other state in the world," Ashrawi said.

She thought there had been a real change in the world's perception of the situation, that "one country cannot impose its will on the rest of the world."

She charged that Israeli occupation had "created an apartheid system which is really racist. Israel has incorporated racism in its own political and legal establishment."

She added that Israel "has always behaved as a country above the law, and deserving preferential treatment." It had accordingly absolved itself of the most basic norms and values that govern civilised behaviour." The result was to dehumanise others and deprive them of their human rights, Ashrawi said. But she added: "I don't believe that Israeli people as a whole are racist."

On bilateral negotiations, with the fifth session ending in Washington three weeks ago,

Saudi warning against pilgrims

RIYADH, May 27: Saudi Arabia on Tuesday warned pilgrims attending this year's Hajj (pilgrimage) to the holy sites against bringing to the kingdom politically-oriented publications, reports AFP.

Violators, as well as anyone found to buy "publications or tracts politically or ideologically oriented," will be punished or turned back home, the interior ministry said in a statement.

It said that some pilgrims were found to have introduced to the kingdom — home of Islam's holiest sites at Mecca and Medina — publications which are incompatible with the objects of the Hajj.

The purchase of these publications or tracts during the pilgrimage are strictly forbidden," said the statement carried by the official Saudi news agency SPA.



South Korean Democratic Party presidential nominee Kim Dae-Jung acknowledges applause from the delegates during a party convention Tuesday. Kim won the presidential nomination of South Korea's main opposition party, launching his third bid for the presidency over two decades. — AFP/UNB photo

Quake hits Solomon

HONG KONG, May 27: A major earthquake, registering seven on the Richter Scale, jolted the vicinity of the Solomon Islands' Santa Cruz group today, the Hong Kong Royal Observatory said, reports AFP.

The Epicenter of the earthquake, which struck at 0523 GMT, was initially determined to be in the vicinity of the small Archipelago about 590 kilometers east-southeast of the Solomon's capital of Honiara, it said.

An earthquake measuring seven on the Richter Scale is considered capable of widespread, heavy damage in urban areas.

Proposed all-European army worries US, Britain

BRUSSELS, May 27: Despite soothing words from Germany, the United States and Britain remain uneasy about a proposed all-European army that they fear could weaken the NATO military alliance, reports AP.

US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney was wrapping up on Wednesday a two-day meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that has been dominated by worries about the new army.

French President Francois Mitterrand and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl last week announced plans for a

joint 35,000-man corps that would be ready for deployment outside NATO territory by 1995.

The corps, which would be headquartered in Strasbourg, France, was designed to further Western Europe's desire to play a stronger role in its own defense and reduce the part played by the United States.

France and Germany would like it to be a key element in the drive by the European Community, the 12-nation trading bloc, to form a political union in the coming years. They have invited other na-

tions to join in. Spain and Belgium are considering the invitation but have not given a final response.

At the start of the NATO meeting Tuesday, defence ministers questioned Germany's defence chief, Volker Ruehe, about the plan. French officials were not available because France, while a member of the 16-nation alliance, does not belong to its joint military command.

"There were still a lot of unanswered questions about how the Franco-German corps would operate and what its relationship with NATO would be," said British Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind.

"There is at best an ambiguity if not as yet a silence on some of these details," he told a news conference.

A senior US defence official, who refused to let his name be used, said the allies were reassured by some of Ruehe's explanations. But, he said, "I don't think all of the concerns were erased."

The allies are concerned about how the corps would react with NATO and the Western European Union, a nine-nation security group that will become the European Community's defense arm.

They question whether the corps first allegiance would be to NATO.

The discussion underscores the worries the United States has about the changes in Europe and its future role on the European continent.

The Bush administration already has announced plans to snip its European forces in half from the Cold War peak of 325,000 to 150,000. US officials fear that the Franco-German corps could encourage critics demanding further cutbacks.

Officials said there was an agreement in principle that

Koreas fail to set date for next meet

SEOUL, May 27: North and South Korean officials met for about four hours today but made little headway on the vexed issue of mutual inspections of their nuclear sites, a southern spokesman said, reports Reuters.

The two sides even failed to set the date for the next meeting of their joint nuclear control committee, dimming prospects they will be able to carry out inspections in mid-June, as agreed in principle previously, he said.