

Assad, Mubarak call for mini-summit to boost Arab unity

DAMASCUS, June 4: Presidents Hafez al-Assad of Syria and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt called here yesterday for a mini-summit to boost Arab

solidarity because a full summit was impossible, reports AFP. Assad told Egyptian journalists that "circumstances" prevented a 21-member Arab League summit and instead called for a meeting of the heads of state of the eight Arab countries that signed a cooperation accord after the Gulf War.

A summit of signatories of the March 1991 Damascus declaration-Syria, Egypt and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - would improve Arab ties and solidarity, the Syrian President said.

Arab diplomatic sources said the talks between Mubarak and Assad were to focus on South Lebanon, which has been subject to Israeli raids since May 21, the Middle East peace process and the UN sanctions against Libya.

Syria has said the tension in South Lebanon threatened the peace talks begun in Madrid last October.

Honecker indicted

BERLIN, June 4: Berlin prosecutors said Wednesday they had indicted former East German leader Erich Honecker in the deaths of 49 people who tried to flee from his Communist regime, reports AP.

The new charges greatly increase the number of counts against Honecker, who has found refuge in the Chilean Embassy in Moscow. He originally had been charged with four deaths of people seeking to reach the West.

The 49 deaths for which Honecker has been indicted on manslaughter charges amount to nearly one-quarter of the people killed trying to flee over the Berlin Wall or the now-vanished inner-German border.

"People were killed in a cold-blood way," chief prosecutor Dieter Neumann told a news conference. Wednesday's announcement spelled out in detail the indictment, which had been announced only in general terms on May 15.

Berlin prosecutors say Honecker issued shoot-to-kill orders to his border guards, and was responsible for mines and automatic firing devices installed on the frontier. Honecker fled from Germany to Moscow in March 1991.

NATO to play peacekeeping role in European conflicts

OSLO, June 4: NATO foreign ministers are, for the first time, setting the stage for possible deployment of their soldiers as peacekeepers in European conflicts, reports AP. A decision to approve a new peacekeeping role for the 16-nation North Atlantic Treaty Organization was expected Thursday at the start of a two-day meeting.

The change would mark a reversal of past policy limiting use of troops to alliance territory and give the military organization a new mission throughout Europe in the post-Cold War era.

"We strongly support (the idea)," US Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger said Wednesday.

Eagleburger, leading the US delegation, refused to say whether US and other Western soldiers might be dispatched as peacekeepers to war-torn Yugoslavia.

"That is a bridge we cannot cross yet," he told reporters after meeting with Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg.

"I would think in the abstract... in the future the

Yugoslav-type situation is one you would have to think about," he said.

Leaders of Bosnia-Herzegovina pleaded again Wednesday for military help from West European nations in the fight against Serbs, trying to gain control of the newly independent nation.

European leaders have so far refused to send peacekeeping forces. But they have imposed economic sanctions on Serbia, which is widely accused of fomenting the fighting.

NATO diplomats say alliance soldiers would more likely be used to help keep the peace in former Soviet republics. Often mentioned is the ethnic strife between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Under the proposal, NATO soldiers, logistical equipment and other supplies could be sent on peacekeeping missions mounted by the 52-nation conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. It draws together the United States and Canada with all European nations.

On the eve of the meeting,

details were still being worked on.

France, wary of expanding the influence of the US-dominated NATO, pressed for a more limited definition of the new peacekeeping role. The United States backs a broader approach.

NATO would deploy peacekeepers only after a request from the CSCE. Each case would be considered individually. Not all nations would have to take part.

During the meeting, the United States and Britain were expected to press France for more details about its plans for an all-European army.

Germany, which drew up the proposal with France, insists the 35,000-strong force would not weaken the alliance. But the United States and Britain remain uneasy about the idea and want to hear first-hand from France.

The Franco-German corps was designed to further Western Europe's desire to play a stronger role in its defence and reduce the part played by the United States.

But American officials fear it could weaken NATO and en-

courage critics in Congress demanding further cutbacks of US troops in Europe. Washington has announced plans to have American forces in Europe to 150,000 by 1995.

On Friday, the foreign ministers will meet with counterparts from former Warsaw Pact adversaries to tighten political and security ties.

The meeting of three-dozen foreign ministers will be part of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, a special forum set up last year to draw the alliance's former foes closer without granting them membership.

Eight of those nations - all former Soviet republics on Friday will sign a landmark treaty to reduce tanks and other non-nuclear arms in Europe.

The accord was completed in 1990 but has never gone into effect.

Western nations worry the treaty will unravel now that the Soviet Union, a signatory, has dissolved. They have insisted that the former Soviet republics honour its terms.

8 killed on Kashmir border

JAMMU (India), June 4: Eight people were killed and seven injured in a night-long skirmish on the Kupwara section of the Kashmir border, an Indian Border Security Force (BSF) spokesman said here today, reports AFP.



BEIJING: US Television correspondent Todd Carrel of ABC News (3rd-L) and cameraman Mike Nolan of CTV Canadian Television (back to camera) try to evade Chinese plainclothes police after they attempted to tape a man who unfurled a banner on Tiananmen Square on Wednesday. The two were arrested along with a CTV correspondent after being roughed up. Nolan's camera was also confiscated.

US protests arrest of 7 reporters in Beijing

WASHINGTON, June 4: The United States Wednesday protested the arrest of seven foreign reporters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, site of the brutal 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, reports AP.

As soon as our embassy in Beijing heard of the incident it immediately sought an explanation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and public security officials, said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

We will continue to pursue the issue with the Chinese Foreign Ministry, he said.

Boucher said three Japanese journalists, two Canadians, one American and a German were manhandled.

BRIEFLY

Two killed in Pak plane crash: A Pakistani air force Mirage fighter crashed into a school building in Punjab province on Wednesday, killing two crewmen, police said, Reuter reports from Multan.

They said one school child was injured but most escaped harm since classes were being held outside in the shade of nearby because of hot weather.

The crash occurred at Shah Jamal, 65 km (40 miles) southeast of the town of Multan.

A wing commander and trainee pilot were killed. The cause of the crash was not known.

Kurds inaugurate parliament: Kurdish rebels inaugurated their parliament in northern Iraq Thursday in what they see as a final break with Saddam Hussein's Baathist government in Baghdad, Reuter reports from Irbil.

"There is no turning back now, we are on our own," guerrilla leader Jalal Talabani told Reuters. "If our parliament works, everyone in Iraq will be convinced Saddam must go."

The 105-member Kurdistan national parliament, elected 16 days ago in a vote denounced by Baghdad as illegal, holds its first meeting in a chamber built by Saddam to house what Kurds say was once an assembly of Quislings.

"We are holding the meeting in that room to make a political and moral point," said Hoshiyar Zebari, a senior official of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Mali's ex-president faces trial: Mali's ex-president Moussa Traore, toppled 15 months ago in a coup and mass uprising, goes on trial Thursday charged with the murder of pro-democracy protesters, Reuter reports from Bamako.

He is the first African leader to stand trial since democratic reforms swept the continent three years ago - and one of very few to be brought to book in a region where many former leaders have been killed or fled into exile.

The 55-year-old general, currently held at a paratroop base just west of the capital Bamako, could face the death penalty if found guilty.

Prosecutors will try to prove he ordered security forces to kill protesters clashing in March 1991 for multi-party democracy in the arid West African country, which Traore had dominated since he seized power in a 1968 coup.

In four days of demonstrations and riots more than 200 people were killed, including about 60 burned to death when troops locked them in a shop and set fire to the building. Many more were gunned down in the street.

Lankan newsmen form action body: Sri Lanka's journalists formed an action committee Wednesday to combat what they said was the government's opposition to a free press, Reuter reports from Sri Lanka.

More than 500 journalists held a meeting in the capital to adopt a seven-point programme which called on all political parties and other mass organisations to safeguard the freedom of the press.

"We want the repeal or the amendment of laws which prohibit the press from fulfilling its duty," said Lucien Rajakarunanyake, one of the organisers of the movement.

"There is a lot of covert and overt opposition to a free media," he said. The government "rushed to the courts whenever an article critical of the administration was published," he added.

China bans BBC correspondent: China has banned British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) correspondent James Miles from reporting or interviewing while his journalist's pass is held by authorities, Miles said Thursday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

Miles' pass was taken by police and no indication was given as to when it would be returned.

Miles, who has reported from China for the BBC since 1988, was detained for more than five hours on April 30 after he covered a protest in Beijing's Tiananmen Square by seven Europeans, including British member of parliament Robert Pary.

Miles was later summoned to the foreign ministry for a "severe warning" and was accused of taking part in the demonstration, something he said he strongly denied.

William Maxwell Gaines dead: William Maxwell Gaines, the founder and publisher of the comic book Mad Magazine, died Wednesday at the age of 70, the magazine's editor said, AFP reports from New York.

Gaines died in his sleep at his home in Manhattan, according to co-editors, John Ficarra and Nick Meglin.

Gaines began the satirical monthly in 1952, creating the goofy character Alfred E Newman whose gap-toothed face was usually featured on the cover and whose "what - me worry?" became a national catchphrase.

The magazine, which never had advertisers and survived on newsstand sales and subscriptions has a circulation of about one million.

Israeli human rights group accuses covert forces of killing Palestinians

JERUSALEM, June 4: An Israeli human rights group has accused Israeli undercover army units of unjustifiably killing wanted Palestinians, reports Reuter.

The B'tselem monitoring group said in a report issued today (Thursday) that 19 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip had been killed by undercover soldiers often disguised as Arabs between January 1 and May 8 this year.

It said the special forces killed 25 Palestinians in 1991. "In the last few months undercover units have been acting on a much larger scale. Accordingly more people were

killed by them," said Naama Yashuvi, who wrote the B'tselem report.

"These are unjustified killings. They are killings of people who could be caught without being killed," she told Reuter.

"There are clear cases where it was self-defence, but there are many cases when they could catch someone without killing him and endangering their own lives," she said.

The report said covert forces had killed about 90 Arabs since the "Intifada", the uprising in the occupied territories, began in December 1987.

Palestinian Human Rights Groups and leaders have accused Israeli undercover units of conducting "summary executions."

The US State Department's annual Human Rights report issued last February said at least 27 Palestinians were killed last year by Israeli non-uniformed security personnel.

The B'tselem report, the result of seven months' research, is the first by an Israeli monitoring group on special units.

It said the army had eased firing orders and the definition of a "life-endangering situation," enabling soldiers to use a self-defence claim to justify

any instance of opening fire. Half of those killed were unarmed, the report said. B'tselem, knew of five Palestinians killed apparently by mistake, it said.

"Many of those killed were shot from close range, and hit in their upper body. In many of the cases, the person killed was hit by a large number of bullets," the report said.

The special units operate using fatal fire only in many cases no serious attempt is made to stop the person killed, or to employ less severe measures (such as plastic and rubber bullets, tear gas)," it said.

Concern over test of Agni Pakistan wants to end diplomatic expulsions

ISLAMABAD, June 4: Pakistan attacked India today for test firing a new missile and a cross-border "interference" but said it wanted to end a series of diplomatic expulsions that have chilled relations, reports Reuter.

Links between the two neighbours, never good, worsened recently over allegations that Indian Intelligence Agents were fomenting trouble in Pakistan's southern province of Sind.

India demonstrated its weapons superiority last week by test firing its 2,500 km (1,500 mile) Agni Missile that would bring all of Pakistan within range if deployed.

Senior Foreign Ministry Official Mohammad Shaharyar Khan called the launch a

source of concern to Islamabad and not conducive to peace in the region.

"While Pakistan recognises the right of a sovereign state to acquire defensive equipment and defence-related technology, the acquisition of armaments should be proportionate to legitimate defence requirements," he said.

Pakistan, which has fought three wars against India since independence 45 years ago, is sensitive about anything that could upset the military balance in South Asia.

Shaharyar Khan repeated Pakistani charges of Indian meddling in Sind, where the Army has been put in charge of a major security operation against bandits and political violence.



AMMAN: PLO Leader Yasser Arafat's wife, Souha Tawil (L), enters the Al-Husseini Hospital in Amman, on Wednesday, to visit Arafat after his successful brain operation. Om Jihad (R), wife of Late Fatah Leader Kalil Al-Wazir, accompanied her.

Global AIDS epidemic getting out of control

WASHINGTON, June 4: The global AIDS epidemic is threatening to soar out of control largely because of complacency and a lack of coordination in national and international efforts to fight the disease, according to a new report by Harvard University researchers, reports USIS.

The report, the most comprehensive to be issued since the start of the AIDS epidemic in 1981, predicts an explosive spread of the disease, going beyond recent projections of the World Health Organization

(WHO).

The Harvard researchers told reporters June 3 it is estimated that between 38 million and 110 million adults, and more than 10 million children, will be infected with the AIDS virus by the year 2000. About 24 million adults and several million children will have developed AIDS symptoms, up to 10 times as many as today.

In contrast, the WHO predicts 10 million AIDS cases and 30 million to 40 million infections by the end of the

decade.

The new report also predicts a major shift in the worldwide location of AIDS infections, with 42 per cent occurring in Asia by the year 2000, surpassing sub-Saharan Africa, which is expected to account for 31 per cent of the total.

The conclusions of the one-year study, entitled "AIDS in the World 1992," are based on a survey of epidemiologists from around the world. The report, to be released later this year, was prepared by the

Harvard-based Global AIDS Policy Coalition, an international research network for AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

"The gap between lagging national and international efforts against AIDS and the expanding pandemic is widening rapidly and dangerously and a new global strategy for the 1990s is urgently needed," said Dr Jonathan Mann, director of the International AIDS Center at the Harvard School of Public Health.

The study calls the AIDS

Off the Record

Elvis fans choose between the prince and the king

MEMPHIS, Tenn: America has chosen its presidential nominee. And now it's picking its king, reports AP.

The Postal Service on Thursday said to release the results of the balloting held to decide whether the Elvis Presley stamp to be issued next year will depict him as a sleek young rock 'n' roller or an older, jumpsuited Las Vegas act.

Presley's former wife, actress Priscilla Presley, was to announce the results at Graceland, the singer's former home in Memphis that draws more than 6,500,000 tourists a year.

Voting was conducted by mail April 6-24, and postal officials received more than 1.1 million of the more than 5 million ballots prepared. Most of the ballots apparently ended up in Elvis fans' scrapbooks, officials said.

The vote marked the first time the Postal Service has asked the public to select postage stamp art. Officials commissioned two portraits, one of Presley in his "Hound Dog" years, cradling a "50s-style microphone, the other representing him in his later years as a Vegas showman, when he favoured bejewelled jumpsuits and capes.

Critics objected to the project's \$135,000 promotional costs, but the Postal Service said it expects to make money on the stamp as a collector's item.

Elvis fans have argued for years that their hero's likeness should grace a postage stamp. But others said the singer's drug abuse made him a poor subject for such an honour.

The Postal Service said the stamp will recognize Presley's contribution to American music, not endorse his way of life.

The Elvis stamp is the first in the Postal Service's "Legends of American Music" series. Stamps of Presley only will be issued the first year.

Presley began his climb to fame in Memphis in the 1950s, selling more records than any other entertainer. He died at Graceland in 1977 at 42.

This has the same effect as Graceland getting on the National Register of Historic Places," said Graceland spokesman Todd Morgan. "It makes the general public who aren't that informed about Elvis realize just how important he was."

Fossil skulls challenge origin of modern man

NEW YORK: Researchers have discovered two fossil skulls in China and say the find challenges the idea that modern humans evolved just from African ancestors or any other single group, reports AP.

The discovery supports an alternative view, that modern humans arose from interbreeding among ancestors from Africa, Asia, the Near East and possibly Europe, said study co-author Dennis Etlar.

"It seems as if all people throughout the world that was populated at that time made a contribution to the evolution of modern humans," Etlar said.

Supporters of an African Origin for modern humans said the new find did not change their minds.

But one of them, Chris Stinger, head of the human origins group at the Natural History Museum in London, said the skulls are important. They are the most complete specimens yet from China that show the human ancestor called Homo Erectus evolving into a more advanced species, he said.

The find is reported in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature by Li Tinayuna of the Hubel Institute of Archaeology in Wuhan, China, and Etlar, a doctoral candidate in paleo-anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

The skulls appear to be at least 3,500,000 years old by preliminary dating, and from male adults, Etlar said in a telephone interview. The fossils were found in 1989 and 1990 in Yunxian, in the Hubel province of central China.

The researchers said the skulls came from Homo erectus, a creature that appeared at least 1.7 million years ago and evolved several hundred thousand years ago into what some scientists call "archaic Homo sapiens."

Electric blankets for snakes

ADELAIDE: A reptile park is seeking donations of electric blankets to keep 150 of its cold-blooded snakes warm but the goal is to keep them awake, not put them to sleep, reports AP.

Stuart Benke, head keeper at Bowman Park, said he needs the 30 blankets to keep the slithering reptiles cozy enough to stop them from hibernating.

The park, near Crystal Brook in northern South Australia state, is involved in venom production, but crisp winter now under way brings a rapid stop to the fang flow.

Benke said the blankets were put under the snakes' aquariums to create a warm environment so they could continue to be milked about once a month.

The park already supplies scientists at Adelaide Childrens Hospital with venom for research into arthritis and blood-thinning products.

The snakes include brown snakes, death adders, tiger snakes and taipans.

Americans lose the battle of the bulge

WASHINGTON: Americans are exercising more than ever, watching what they eat but still losing the battle of the bulge, according to a survey of health practices released on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

While 37 per cent of adults work out strenuously at least three days a week, the highest level ever, nearly two-thirds of Americans are overweight, according to a survey by prevention magazine.

And, though Americans have cut back on foods high in fat and cholesterol since the poll was started in 1983, the number of overweight adults has risen five per cent in that time.

Aside from the bad news about weight, the survey found that, overall, Americans are taking better care of themselves than at any time in the past nine years.

About 90 million Americans are trying to cut down on cholesterol and 102 million are trimming back on fatty foods.

The number of Americans who smoke has fallen five per cent since 1983 to about 25 per cent of the population although the decline has slowed in recent years.

Arafat may leave hospital tomorrow

AMMAN, June 4: Yasser Arafat is expected to be discharged from the hospital on Saturday and has been told to lay off work for at least three weeks, his doctors said Thursday, reports AP.

"Arafat is in an excellent shape today," said Dr. Adel Shureydyh, the Jordanian neurosurgeon who removed a cerebral blood clot from the PLO chairman on Monday.

He said he removed the bandage from Arafat's head Wednesday night.