

Guatemalan peace talks resume in Mexico today

QUATEMALA CITY, Aug 2: The Guatemalan government and guerrilla leaders will resume talks Monday in Mexico aimed at ending more than three decades of civil war, officials said Saturday, reports AFP.

Manuel Conde, president of the government commission that will travel to Mexico City for the talks, said he would ask United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to begin discussions on incorporating the rebels into the democratic process.

The first task in the new round of talks is to sign an accord on human rights, which has been the subject of negotiations between the government and a rebel coalition since last year without resolution.

Conde said he hoped that the issue can be settled so that the talks can move on to decide mechanism for a ceasefire and demobilization of the insurgents, among other things.

He indicated that President Jorge Serrano has given assurances that he has pen in hand ready to sign the accords.

But the atmosphere of the talks is strained because of the case of Maritza Urrutia, a university student who was apparently kidnapped July 23 and resurfaced eight days later saying she had asked authorities for refuge to abandon the guerrilla movement.

Rebel leaders have disputed the official version of the case and charged that the army was engaging in a new "policy of counter insurgency."

'UN-Iraq confrontation unfinished result of Desert Storm' Kuwaitis fear fresh attack from Baghdad

KUWAIT, Aug 2: Two years after the Iraqi invasion, Kuwaitis fear a new attack from their big neighbour, reports AFP.

Newspapers here have been writing recently that Kuwait won a battle but not the war. Saddam Hussein is, after all, still in power in Baghdad, 17 months after the end of Gulf War in February 1991. Kuwaiti Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah called Saturday on his people for more vigilance to face the hostile intentions of the Baghdad regime.

"We must be extremely vigilant and watch the movements of the perfidious Baghdad regime which persists in not applying international resolutions," he said.

The Iraqi regime is "an outlaw and so we expect the worst," he said recently about Iraq's refusal to accept the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border as determined by the United Nations.

In this context, the sending by Washington of 2,400 soldiers to Kuwait, where there is already a Patriot anti-missile battery, has been greeted here with a sentiment of relief mixed with concern.

The return of the US army is seen among politicians and the man-in-the-street as a sign of the continuing Iraqi threat. Kuwaitis would like to see international pressure on Baghdad, and even a decisive action to overthrow Hussein's regime.

Articles in the Kuwaiti press recently spoke once again of their disappointment that the Desert Storm offensive in February 1991 had not continued until Hussein was toppled.

The recent confrontation between Iraq and the United Nations is the unfinished result of Desert Storm," editorialist wrote in Al-Sassaa newspaper.

It does not help matters that Iraq is once more claiming that Kuwait is part of its territory. The Baghdad newspaper Babel, run by Hussein's eldest son Wadi Saddam Hussein, has said recently that Kuwait is an Iraqi province.

Indeed, the Iraqi media is once more saying that Kuwait

was never an "independent entity" but used to be part of Basra in southern Iraq.

These claims bother Kuwaitis as they remember what they call atrocities committed by Iraqi soldiers during their seven-month-long occupation of Kuwait.

"Despite our joy in seeing our country freed, we continue to live in anguish and fear, unable to chase the spectre of invasion," said Mohamed Dashti, a Kuwaiti engineer.

Others think of family members still imprisoned in Iraq. Kuwaiti origin minister Sheikh Saleh Al-Sabah recently put the number of displaced at 760 Kuwaitis and 140 of other nationalities.

Off the Record

Jackson's flu disappoints fans

LONDON: Rock superstar Michael Jackson, suffering from flu, pulled out of a London concert at the last minute on Saturday, disappointing 72,000 British fans, reports Reuter.

The 33-year-old singer had complained of dizziness and was "extremely disappointed" at being forced to cancel his performance at Wembley stadium, a spokesman for Jackson's company said.

"Jackson is suffering from a virus which meant we were forced to cancel the performance on the advice of a physician," the spokesman said.

He added: "Michael loves to perform, he's in heaven when he's performing. He isn't happy this evening, he's happy when he's on stage."

Fans had already filled the stadium and support acts had started the show before it was announced that Jackson would not appear. Some young people in the audience burst into tears at the news.

The sudden cancellation of Jackson's third London concert this week was the latest twist in his high-pressure visit to Britain as part of a European tour.



Saddam is out of touch with reality: Cheney

WASHINGTON, Aug 2: Defence Secretary Dick Cheney said Saturday that US military exercise announced for Kuwait are meant to demonstrate the readiness of US forces to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who according to Cheney is "out of touch with reality," reports AFP.

Cheney, in an interview with Cable News Network, brushed aside suggestions that Washington's decision to send 2,400 troops for exercises sought to provoke Baghdad into a new armed confrontation.

This notion that somehow this is designed to be a provocative act, I put over there in the category with their (Iraqis) claim in recent days that Kuwait is part of Iraq," Cheney said. "It would be laughable if it weren't so tragic."

"This is a government that clearly is out of touch with reality. It refuses to recognize that two-thirds of their army was destroyed in the Gulf War, that it's a shadow of its former self in terms of military capability."

Cheney said the operation intrinsic action exercised announced Friday had been planned for September but was advanced because of Iraq's confrontation with UN inspectors seeking documents at the Iraqi Agriculture Ministry earlier this month.

The defence secretary said the troops would probably remain in the region "a matter of weeks or a couple of months at most the deployment," Cheney said, "will allow us to demonstrate our capacity to return rapidly to the region in the event of a crisis."



PALUNG, Nepal: Mrs Gita Kafle of Nepal whose husbands was aboard the missing Thai Airways flight, is comforted by an unidentified relative on Saturday. The Airbus went missing with 113 passengers on board July 31.

Relatives await news on crash victims at Kathmandu airport

KATHMANDU, Aug 2: Relatives of passengers on a crashed Thai Airways jetliner gathered Sunday at Kathmandu's airport, watching the sky for helicopters that will bring back bodies, and they fervently hoped, survivors, reports AP.

Riot police carrying tear gas guns and rifles kept order among the 200 people who kept a vigil at the airport. They crowded into the arrival lounge and waited outside in a drizzle, listening to transistor radios for the latest news on the search of the crash site and keeping eyes peeled for helicopters returning from there.

But hours after soldiers reached the area Sunday on a Himalayan mountainside 22 miles (35 kms) northwest of Kathmandu.

40 MQM women held in Karachi

KARACHI, Aug 2: Pakistani police detained at least 40 women in Karachi on Saturday while they were reading the Quran and praying for their leader, a spokesman for their Mohajir National Movement (MQM) party said, reports Reuter.

MQM spokesman Osama-qadri said the police bated-charged some 300 assembled women and detained 40 of them. No police comment was immediately available. He said the women were reading the Quran and praying for Altaf Hussain, the leader of the MQM which has been targeted by authorities in a current army-led crackdown on crime in the southern province of Sindh, of which Karachi is the capital.

Hussain is in London for medical treatment.

Another report says: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called off a planned trip to Kabul after bomb and rocket attacks on Saturday in the Afghan capital in which a general was killed.

A spokesman for Sharif said

Germany seeks permanent seat in Security Council

BONN, Aug 2: Germany is seeking permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council in exchange for its participation in UN military operations, according to Bild AM Sonntag, quoting an unidentified member of the Bonn government, reports AFP.

Germany will begin negotiations on the issue as soon as Japan — which the newspaper said also aspires to permanent member status — puts in a request, the paper said in its latest issue appearing, Sunday.

A spokesman at the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Bonn said however that the matter was not a priority.

Bush a failed president of a big country, Clinton says

NEW JERSEY, Aug 2: Trying to pre-empt Republican attacks branding him a "failed governor from a small state," democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton on Saturday called President George Bush a "failed president of a big country," reports Reuter.

"I think I'm running against a failed president of a big country," Clinton, the six-time governor of Arkansas, told an outdoor news conference.

Citing his record of job creation and income growth in his own state, he said, "I come from a state that has always been one of the poorest states in America."

"But the difference between my state and the country is since I've been governor we've been going in the right direction and the country's going in the wrong direction."

Arkansas, a southern state of about 2.3 million people, had an estimated per capita income in 1990 of dollar 14,218, the fourth lowest among the 50 US states.

Clinton came out of the democratic convention last month with a huge surge in opinion polls and an aggressive campaign style. So far he has countered most republican attacks — while the republicans themselves seem more divided over the Bush-Quayle ticket by the day.

The democratic candidate flew to New Jersey to meet with members of the democratic governor's association.

He was joined by some of the democrats' most powerful speakers, including Texas Governor Ann Richards and New York Governor Mario Cuomo, who were upbeat about their candidate's fighting spirit and prospects for winning the White House in November.

Richards, who said she hoped republicans "enjoy themselves and spend a lot of money" at their nominating convention in her state



UN team in S Africa to monitor today's strike

JOHANNESBURG, Aug 2: A team of United Nations observers arrived to try to help prevent violence when the African National Congress launches a national strike Monday, reports AP.

Police on Sunday report nine deaths in nation-wide political violence, including seven black men killed in an attack on a squatter camp near Johannesburg.

The three other Kuwaiti airliners still in Iran are to be returned to Kuwait soon, Hassan Shafti, Director of Iran's national airline, told Tehran radio without specifying a date.

Radio Tehran announced Monday that Iran had handed over the six aircraft to a Kuwait official and that the first of these had taken off for Kuwait from Mashad airport in north-east Iran, where the other aircraft are parked.

Shafti also denied press reports that said Iran is using Iraqi civilian planes flown to Iran during the Gulf crisis in 1990-1991. The Iranian airline official said none of these planes was civilian, except for the six, Kuwaiti planes that Iran is now returning to Kuwait.

But the National Union of Metal workers of South Africa, which represents tens of thousands of auto-workers, says it will start a nationwide strike Monday in conjunction with the ANC campaign.

President F W de Klerk's government has warned the strike could spark violence, while business leaders say it will further damage an economy already in recession.

Atlantis releases European satellite

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla, Aug 2: Atlantis' astronauts released a European satellite early Sunday after scientists solved communications problems that had forced a one-day delay, reports AP.

Swiss astronaut Claude Nicollier released the reusable European satellite from the end of the shuttle's robot arm, which had held it above the shuttle's cargo bay since Friday night.

BRIEFLY

Five killed in US plane crash: A US Navy plane crashed in the Atlantic 75 miles (120 kilometers) north of Puerto Rico during a training flight, killing all five people aboard, the Navy said.

It was the second plane from the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy to crash in less than two weeks.

The E-20 Hawkeye, a twin-engine turboprop plane, crashed Friday about four miles (seven kilometers) from the carrier as it was approaching to land in clear weather, the Navy said.

Policeman commits suicide in HK: A Hong Kong police sergeant hanged himself last week, the third police officer to commit suicide in the past month, local newspapers said on Sunday, Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

A suicide note found by a cleaner indicated Cheung Ka-Fuk, 42, had financial problems.

Hong Kong's police force has in recent years been stretched by a wave of violent crime and dwindling recruitment.

Iraq breaking UN embargo: Iraq is breaking the UN economic embargo and selling refined oil clandestinely to Turkey. The Mail on Sunday newspaper reported here, AFP says from London.

"The Iraqi dictator is actively encouraging the sale of oil — his only source of export revenue — to a mass vital western currency to prop up his ailing regime," the newspaper said.

"Exploiting the poverty of local Kurds, Baghdad is actively encouraging the conversion of hundreds of lorries in Turkey. Each carries huge and empty 9,000-litre tanks into Iraq. There the drivers part with vital western currency and then ferry Saddam's fuel back across the border, where local businessmen sell it for up to 400 per cent profit," it added.

Mohammadi Afghan's first VP: Afghan Interim President Burhanuddin Rabbani has appointed Nabi Mohammadi, Chief of the Harakat Inqilab Islami faction, as the country's first Vice President, state-run television announced Saturday, AFP reports from Kabul.

Mohammadi, an expert on Koranic law who is considered a moderate, enjoys support from royalist tribes in southern Afghanistan.

On Wednesday, Rabbani appointed Mauvi Mir Hamza of his own Jamiat-i-Islami faction as a Vice President.

As first Vice President, Mohammadi will be senior to Hamza, who is a Pashtun from the northern province of Parwan.

Palestinian shot dead in Gaza: Israeli soldiers shot dead one Palestinian and wounded another in a firefight in the occupied Gaza strip town of Khan Younis Sunday morning, Israeli security sources said, Reuter from Jerusalem says.

The army confirmed a Palestinian was killed in a clash. "An army force that was operating in the area of Khan Younis encountered a wanted terrorist hiding inside a house. Gunfire was exchanged and the terrorist was killed... the army force had three wounded, one critically," an army spokesman said.

Croatians go to polls

ZAGREB, Aug 2: Croatians go to the polls today in their first parliamentary and presidential elections since war broke out last year following their republic's breakaway from former Yugoslavia, reports Reuter.

Some 37 parties and eight presidential candidates are taking part in the ballot combining majority and proportional systems of voting which political analysts believe will likely result in the re-election of President Franjo Tudjman.

The fate of his Croatian Democratic Union is far from certain.

Radical Arabs look for new front to carry on 'holy war'

MUZAFFARABAD, Aug 2: After sharing the honours of victory in the Afghan war, thousands of radical Arabs are looking for a new front to carry on their holy war, reports Reuter.

Unwanted at home, their next stop could be a short step across Pakistan to Kashmir where some Muslim militants say they hope the Arabs will join their Jihad (holy war) against India.

"If there is delay it is from us, not from them," says Ghulam Rasul Dar, General Secretary of Hezb-UI-Mujahideen, one of the main Muslim militant groups fighting New Delhi's forces in the mountains and valleys of Indian Kashmir.

"Many Afghan Mujahideen (holy warriors) are also ready to join the Kashmir War," Dar said in an interview at his office in Muzaaffarabad, capital of Pakistan's Azad (free) Kashmir.

"Ours is the war of the whole Muslim nation," he said, pleading for the Islamic world to give Kashmiris the same aid they gave Afghan guerrillas who won power in Kabul in April.

Pakistan controls a third of the Himalayan region over which it has fought two wars against India since the two nations were carved out of British India on independence in 1947.

The Islamabad government denies Indian charges it trains and arms the militants who have fought a savage war for two years to wrest India's only Muslim-majority state from the Indian union.

But Pakistan is widely believed by diplomats to provide material aid to pro-Pakistani militants who use Azad Kashmir for sanctuary. The fighters move back and forth across the heavily-defended ceasefire line that divides the two armies.

Abdur Rahim Turabi, Azad Kashmir chief of Pakistan's radical Jamaat-I-Islami Party, sees plenty of potential recruits among the estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Arabs who have fought at one time or another with the Afghan Mujahideen.

"They are not going back, they are there waiting for a new front," he said.

These Arabs, battle-hardened by their Afghan experiences and fired with religious zeal, represent a serious potential threat to often auto-cratic states of the Middle East and North Africa.

Earlier this year, Algerian veterans of the Afghan War were blamed for violence spawned by government suppression of Islamic fundamentalists when they looked set to win power in elections.

Many still in Afghanistan are Palestinians or drawn from Saudi Arabia and across the Islamic world by the ideology and sponsorship of the radical Muslim Brotherhood. Jamaat is the Pakistani counterpart of the Brotherhood.

Radical Kashmiri militants, dependent on help from Pakistan with whom they want to

join, believe these warriors could add religious fervour to their struggle, increase their exposure in the Arab world and draw in funding and weapons.

The idea does not find favour with those Kashmiris who want their state to be secular and independent.

"Any participation by foreigners will further complicate the (Kashmir) issue at international level," said Amanullah Khan, Chairman of the pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF).

Clinton campaign official killed in plane crash

ALASKA, Aug 2: A Clinton campaign official and two Australians were among five people killed when a floatplane from a fishing lodge crashed, State police reported Saturday, says AP.

C Victor Raiser II, 52, national financial co-chairman of the Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton, and his son, R Montgomery Raiser, 23, were killed Thursday when the De Havilland Beaver crashed in a narrow mountain pass and burst into flames. Both men were from Washington, DC.