

Pakistan rules out war with India

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: The Pakistan Defence Minister, Ghous Ali Shah, has ruled out the possibility of war with India saying that political leaderships of both the countries wanted to solve their problems through peaceful negotiations, PTI reports.

"There exists no possibility of armed conflict between Pakistan and India on the Kashmir dispute and I think both the countries have desire to negotiate and decide issues by putting their cases, rather than taking decisions by force," Shah said while talking to press persons in Rawalpindi at a dinner Sunday night.

Newspaper reports here quoted the minister as having said that "talks and negotiations will definitely bring better results as use of force will be no option."

Replying to a question, Shah said skirmishes and occasional exchange of fire were routine matters when forces were deployed on a "hot border."

He said the situation on Indo-Pak border "is alright and there is nothing to be worried about."

Another report from Srinagar says: Four security personnel and two militants were among 15 people killed and 24 injured in separate incidents in Kashmir valley where life remained paralysed for the fourth day yesterday.

In their anti-militant drive, security force arrested 20 persons including a deputy district commander and an area

commander of militant outfits from different areas of the valley since last night, an official spokesman said yesterday.

Four persons including a security personnel were killed and four securitymen were injured when militants and security forces clashed at Gulshan Nagar-Nowgam in Srinagar Monday evening, the spokesman said.

A BSF commandant who was among the injured later succumbed to his injuries, official sources said.

The owner of a flour mill and two of his workers were killed when security forces fired on a private truck.

Zardari barred from living with his family

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: The husband of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto said yesterday authorities had barred him from living with his family though they released him from jail to attend parliament, reports Reuters.

Asif Ali Zardari said in an interview he had instead been put in a government lodge after being brought to Islamabad on Saturday from a jail in Karachi on the orders of National Assembly (Lower House) Speaker Gohar Ayub Khan.

"They (authorities) are trying to tell that the Speaker can only call me but still it is the government which calls the shots," he said.



HOUSTON: First Lady Barbara Bush (C) kisses former US President Ronald Reagan (R) goodbye after US President George Bush (L) paid a visit Monday to the former First Family. — AFP/UNB photo

Bush, Clinton to hold three debates

WASHINGTON, Aug 18: President George Bush and Democratic Presidential candidate Bill Clinton will hold three televised debates September 22, October 4 and October 15, the commission organizing the events said Monday, reports AFP.

The first will be at the east Lansing, Michigan, campus of Michigan State University, the second at the University of San Diego, in California, and the last at the University of Richmond, in Virginia.

The commission said Vice President Dan Quayle will debate his Democratic Party rival, Senator Al Gore, September 29 in Louisville, Kentucky, in the run-up to the November Presidential election.

Hekmatyar renews offer for truce

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: A disident Afghan Mujahideen chief bombarding Kaul with rocket fire for nearly two weeks has blamed the Islamic coalition government for starting the fighting and renewed his offer of a ceasefire, reports Reuters.

Fundamentalist Hezb-I-Islamic leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar renewed sporadic rocket attacks on the Afghan capital today, just hours after issuing a call for peace.

"We want peace and are ready for understanding, but regrettably others want fighting and are resorting to a course which makes it impos-

sible to reach any understanding," he told Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Pakistan on Monday in remarks carried on the Hezb-run Message of Freedom Radio.

President Burhanuddin Rabbani has ruled out Hekmatyar's return to the interim government and said all Mujahideen parties in the 10-member ruling leadership council would oppose readmission of the Hezb.

The beleaguered government needed economic and political help from the United Nations but had the power to repulse the Hezb without foreign intervention, Rabbani said.

More than 1,000 civilians have been killed or injured since Hekmatyar began his blistering rocket assault on Kabul nearly two weeks ago. Water and electricity supplies have been cut and food prices are soaring.

Hekmatyar renewed his offer of a ceasefire on condition the Uzbek militia that fought for the former Soviet-backed communist government withdrew from the Afghan capital within one week, Message of Freedom Radio said.

The current attacks are started by the communist generals and our attacks are aimed only at them," he said.

The government said on Monday it would be difficult even to implement a ceasefire to ensure safe evacuation of foreigners from Kabul because Hekmatyar could not be trusted.

UN Council okays observer for South Africa

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 18: The UN Security Council on Monday authorized the deployment of observers to monitor township violence in South Africa, reports AP.

The 15 council members voted unanimously to adopt a resolution authorizing the observers, whose deployment was recommended by special UN envoy Cyrus Vance.

Vance, a former US secretary of state, visited South Africa in June. He spent two weeks meeting with political parties and issued a report to the United Nations on what it could do to help end the political stalemate between the government and black groups.

Vance recommended 30 observers be sent but the UN resolution sets no number, leaving that up to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Several countries, including Russia, have expressed concern about the cost of the observers.

Last Thursday, the Pretoria government accepted UN proposals for reviving political talks, including sending observers to monitor township violence and a possible amnesty for political prisoners.

The broad acceptance of the UN proposals had raised hopes that the government and the African National Congress would resume talks on ending white rule. But the ANC, which halted talks in June to protest political violence, rejected the overture. It objected to government suggestions for a broad amnesty that would cover security force members, comparing it to a "criminal pardoning himself

for crimes he has committed."

Vance's suggestions, endorsed by the Security Council in Monday's resolution, included observers, release of political prisoners and investigation of all groups accused of instigating violence, including the security forces.

The ANC has repeatedly alleged that security forces helped to provoke political violence, and the massacre of more than 40 blacks in the Boipatong township June 17 led it to pull out of negotiations on a new constitution.

Meanwhile, ANC claims the white government wants an amnesty for its security forces because top officials have been involved in political crimes.

Rejecting government proposals for blanket amnesty, the main black opposition group said an amnesty could perpet-

uate rather than end the political violence that has claimed thousands of lives.

In a separate statement, ANC President Nelson Mandela said an amnesty could be considered by a future multiracial government. But he said the white government had no right to issue an amnesty because it was responsible for political crimes.

The ANC pulled out of power sharing talks in June to protest political violence in black townships. It is demanding an interim government and other concessions as the condition for returning to the talks.

Mandela reiterated Monday that he believed President F W de Klerk was partly responsible for the violence in black townships in which thousands have been killed.

ME talks begin Aug 24

Israel to propose compromises

JERUSALEM, Aug 18: Israel will propose compromises to Syria and the Palestinians in upcoming peace talks, including a possible territorial concession on the Golan Heights, Israel radio reports said Tuesday, reports AP.

The reports came as Arab delegations hesitated about attending next week's talks, complaining that Washington's decision to grant 10 billion dollars in loan guarantees to Israel raises doubts about the US role as an honest broker.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's spokesman, Gad Ben-Ari, refused to comment on the reported compromise offers. He said Israel expected all parties to show up at the negotia-

tions starting Monday in Washington.

State-owned Israel radio said in an unattributed report that the government would propose an interim settlement with Syria including partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.

Syria demands a complete Israeli pullback from the strategic heights that were captured in the 1967 Middle East war and later annexed by Israel.

The Haaretz daily said Secretary of State James A Baker III has renewed a proposal to deploy US troops on the Golan during an interim phase, with a promise that Syria eventually

would win back sovereignty over the plateau.

In negotiations with the Palestinians, the Israelis want to focus on election of a Palestinian administrative council in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, media reports said. A target date for the election is next spring.

Israel wants the council to run Palestinian affairs during a five-year period, but insists the body not have lawmaking powers that could bolster the Palestinian demand for statehood.

The initial Israeli proposal said the council should have 13 to 15 members. But the

Davar daily, quoting senior government sources, wrote Tuesday the Israelis would agree to a substantial increase in the number of council members.

The Palestinians want to elect a 180-member legislative assembly, and have said they would renew the demand during the upcoming round of talks.

Arab leaders and officials of the PLO were to meet Wednesday in Damascus to review their participation in the peace talks after US President George Bush reversed himself last week in backing loan guarantees to help Israel absorb Russian immigrants.

UN envoy hopeful of implementing Salvadoran accord by Oct 31

SAN SALVADOR, Aug 18: The UN official in charge of El Salvador's peace process said Monday he had established a new timetable for the implementation of the accord that ended 12 years of civil war in this Central American nation, reports AP.

The new timetable should help bring the UN-monitored peace process, which has suffered serious delays, back on track for its October 31 deadline, Marrack Goulding told a press conference.

Both sides will have one month to overcome delays in the implementation of the agreements, Goulding said. "I have confidence that this date (October 31) is feasible," Goulding said.



SARAJEVO: People carry a civilian on Monday who was wounded during a bombardment in the city centre. Seven people were reportedly killed and 44 others wounded due to heavy shelling of the city by Serbs. — AFP/UNB photo

Unprecedented response from world community for aid to Somalia

NAIROBI, Aug 18: Aid appeals for starving Somalia have provoked an unprecedented response from an international community which had seemed disinterested in the fate of people in the arid horn of Africa nation, reports AFP.

The most recent appeal for urgent assistance came from the UN representative in Somalia, Mohamed Sahnoun.

The United States has now pledged 145,000 tons of food aid as soon as possible, and a first group of 33 American soldiers was due to arrive on Monday in the Kenyan port of Mombasa to prepare the relief effort.

France announced yesterday that it would start a 10-day airlift beginning Wednesday to transport 200 tonnes of ur-

gently needed food to people in the area of Baidoa, south-western Somalia.

Britain decided on Sunday to provide 18 million pounds (34 million dollars) in urgent aid.

Italy, meanwhile, said on Sunday it was ready to send a representative to the Somali capital Mogadishu to try to promote dialogue between warring factions in the country.

Previously, the Italians, formerly one of the colonial powers in Somalia, seemed to have given up hope of mediating any settlement between the factions.

On Thursday, Italy also said it was sending food supplies and medicines worth 20 million dollars to Somalia.

Even Israel - which is not recognised by Somalia, a member of the Arab League - said on Sunday it was willing to send food and medical aid.

The French Minister for Health and Humanitarian Action, Bernard Kouchner, and Irish Foreign Minister David Andrews have just visited Somalia to assess the situation.

The international mobilisation comes as 500 UN troops were due to arrive in Mogadishu, to be deployed at the port and airport as security guards and to protect relief operations in the capital.

Food convoys and depots in Somalia are frequently attacked by looters. Weapons are much easier to find than food. "The instability poses prob-

lems, of course, but the only way to eliminate it is to bring in more and more food aid," a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Nairobi said on Monday.

The ICRC has set up 400 collective kitchens in Somalia. On Monday, one of its freighters arrived in Mogadishu with 2,000 tons of food aid and a helicopter to take it to the town of Obbia, north of the capital, which is difficult to reach by road.

The World Food Programme, which has already delivered 3,000 tonnes of food to the port of Kismayo in the south, on Saturday began an airlift to Baidoa.

Off the Record

Addicts are highly creative
GLASGOW, Scotland: Princess Diana on Monday urged people not to judge alcoholics and drug addicts, reports AP.

Speaking to the 36th International Congress on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Diana said addicts are often highly sensitive and creative people.

"Sadly, many people still regard addicts as a moral weakness," said the 31-year-old princess. "A number of these self-appointed moralists even choose to make such judgments from behind a cloud of cigarette smoke."

She said people with lively imaginations often hide in fantasy for protection from the world.

"Imaginative children lose themselves in fantasy worlds through stories. Later they might choose to escape through Ecstasy, uppers, alcohol and addiction," she said. Ecstasy is the mood-altering drug MDMA, often sold illegally in dance clubs.

Diana is married to Prince Charles, heir to the British throne. A recent book portrayed the marriage as loveless and Diana as suicidally unhappy and suffering from an eating disorder. As is customary with British royalty, she has refused to comment.

It is hard to escape politics

PARIS: From the Riviera's teeming beaches to the icy summit of Mont Blanc, French vacationers are finding it hard to escape politics this summer, reports AP.

The reason: barely one month remains before a pivotal referendum on European union. Proponents of the Maastricht treaty say a "No" vote could kill the move toward a strong, united Europe; opponents say a "Yes" vote could be the death of a strong, independent France.

Politics usually hit a standstill in late August as elected officials join their compatriots on holiday before the country returns to work in September.

But this year the emotional debate over the treaty is spilling over into the peak vacation period, even though the pro-Maastricht Socialist government officially wants to confine the campaign to two weeks before the September 20 referendum.

I am with you

WARSAW, Poland: More than 30,000 teenagers cheered and waved hands at the opening Friday of a 12-hour rock music marathon held to raise funds for AIDS-infected children, reports AFP.

The legendary British hard-rock group Uriah Heep joined more than 40 leading Polish bands and performers to play at a charity concert held at Warsaw's largest stadium.

"I am with you," said President Lech Walesa in a support message read at the start of the concert. "I believe you will do everything possible to make the world smile on all those who suffer."

The event was organized by a drug rehabilitation group MONAR and the Health Ministry. Marek Kotanski, MONAR head and the event's organizer, hoped to raise about 4 billion zlotys (295,000 dollars) to subsidize house for AIDS-infected children as government subsidies for AIDS prevention and care programme fall short of the quickly increasing needs.

"I wanted to organize a concert that would make Poland wake up, that would stir people's conscience," Kotanski told The Associated Press during the concert.

For more than a year MONAR has been trying to set up houses for children with AIDS, but has repeatedly met with hostility of prospective neighbours. In July, a mysterious fire destroyed one of MONAR's two houses in the Warsaw suburb of Laski, donated to the group by a US backed foundation.