

Int'l peace talks on Nagorno-Karabakh yield no result

ROME, Sept 11: International talks on ending the bloody ethnic war in the disputed Transcaucasian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh broke up in failure on Thursday without any agreement on if and when they would resume, delegates said, reports Reuter.

The inconclusive end to the 11-nation talks left the future of the Italian-led international mediation effort hanging in the balance.

Italy, acting on behalf of the 52-Nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), has been trying to negotiate a ceasefire since March. Ethnic fighting in the territory has claimed 2,000 lives since 1988.

Armenia and the enclave's Armenians agreed to the Italian conditions for a truce, but Azerbaijan made other demands.

Armenia expressed fears on

Thursday that unless there was a ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, the fighting along its border with Azerbaijan could worsen.

The enclave is populated mainly by Armenian Christians, but was put under the rule of Turkish-speaking Muslim Azerbaijan in the early years of Soviet power.

Because of a procedural wrangle pitting Azerbaijan representatives against representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian majority, the Rome talks broke up without setting a date for the next meeting.

To avoid further disputes, Italy has labeled the latest Rome meeting an "informal" one — without name plates or titles.

"No decision were taken. We never managed to hold a formal session," said Azeri chief delegate Andir Mekhtiev.

The council also called for

ANC to sit with govt to discuss ways of resolving crisis Security Council deplores massacre in Ciskei

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 11: The UN Security Council Thursday deplored the massacre in Ciskei Monday of 28 unarmed supporters of the African National Congress who were killed when soldiers opened fire on their demonstration in the nominally independent South African homeland, reports AFP.

Current Security Council President, Ecuadorian Ambassador Jose Ayala Lasso, said in a statement that council members were concerned about "the continued escalation of the violence in South Africa."

"They emphasise once again the responsibility of the South African authorities for the maintenance of law and order and call on them to take all measures to end the violence and to protect the right of all South Africans to engage in peaceful political activity without fear of intimidation or violence," said the statement.

The council also called for

full compliance with the 13-member UN observer team which is to go to South Africa Friday.

Monday's massacre claimed 28 lives and injured 190, according to the South African government.

AP adds: The African National Congress and Ciskei security forces accused each other Friday of waging reigns of terror but there were signs of a thaw in ANC relations with President FW de Klerk.

The African National Congress announced Thursday it was willing to meet de Klerk to discuss ways of resolving political violence. De Klerk requested an urgent meeting following the killing of 25 protesters by police and soldiers in the nominally independent Ciskei homeland.

The ANC at attached conditions that have blocked previous bids to revive talks, but the statement was the closest it has come to agreeing to meet

de Klerk since negotiations were derailed in June.

"A meeting... could have some merit if it were to address the problem of violence," ANC Secretary General Cyril Ramaphosa told a news conference.

To ensure success, the meeting must be preceded by "through preparations... as well as practical actions" to meet ANC demands for an end to political violence and freedom for political prisoners, he said.

There was no immediate response from the government.

Ramaphosa says relations with the South African government are at their "lowest ebb... ever" because of the Ciskei bloodshed, which erupted as thousands of ANC supporters marched across the Ciskei border to protest its military government.

The killings prompted re-

talistatry attacks on homes of Ciskei police and soldiers in villages around Bisho, the Ciskei capital.

The homeland government said Friday 24 homes had been destroyed since Monday and three village leaders supporting the government had been killed. It blamed the ANC and allies for the violence.

The ANC said Friday one of its supporters was beaten to death by Ciskei soldiers in a village outside Bisho.

"It is clear the Ciskei security forces have gone on an orgy of indiscriminate killing," the group said in a statement. "Fear is ruling throughout the villages of the Ciskei as soldiers invade villages and assault people at random."

Ciskei's ruler, Brig Oupa Gqozo, said his forces opened fire after a marcher shot and killed a Ciskei soldier. The ANC and witnesses deny this and say Ciskei forces fired without provocation.

Iran sticks to claim over Abu Musa island

TEHRAN, Sept 11: Iran on Thursday rejected a call from the gulf monarchies to reconsider its claim over the disputed island of Abu Musa near the strategic strait of Hormu, saying it had written proof of sovereignty, reports AFP.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Morteza Sarmadi described the Gulf Cooperation Council's criticisms of Iran over the Abu Musa dispute as "unpleasant" and said it was a "blatant violation of the good neighbourly relations" between Tehran and the monarchies.

The United Arab Emirates has accused Iran of seizing control of Abu Musa, which had it shared with the UAE Emirate of Sharjah under a 1971 agreement.

However, Sarmadi said that

"according to existing valid, legal and historical documents and evidence," Abu Musa, and two other disputed islands - Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb - "belong to the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The GCC foreign ministers gave their full support to the UAE on Wednesday in its dispute with Iran, describing Tehran's move as a "violation of the territorial integrity of a GCC member state" and a "threat to security and stability in the region."

Sarmadi countered Thursday that Iran "would not allow any country to interfere in its internal affairs, or allow the violation of its national sovereignty and territorial integrity."



BIRMINGHAM, England: Mother Teresa talks to children from St. Chads school September 9 in Birmingham. — AFP/UNB photo.

700 wanted Palestinians held so far

JERUSALEM, Sept 11: Seven hundred wanted Palestinians have been arrested this year, according to Israel's Army-Chief of Staff Ehud Barak, who described 450 of them as "dangerous activists", reports AFP.

"More than 100 turned themselves in," general Barak told military correspondents on Wednesday.

Troops had shot dead 11 armed and wanted Palestinians in the last three months, he added.

"In the past, every time we arrested Palestinian activists we noticed that their numbers increased."

Japan reacts to Yeltsin's decision: Oldest US war veteran dead: Gas explosion in China: 45 killed:

Rao greets Muslims: The Prime Minister, PV Narasimha Rao, Thursday extended greetings to the people on the occasion of Eid-E-Milad-un-Nabi, reports ITI from New Delhi.

In a message, Rao said "I send my best wishes to my Muslim brothers and sisters on the joyous occasion of the birth anniversary of the holy prophet."

The festivities on this auspicious day symbolise the long tradition of religious tolerance and communal harmony in our country, he said.

The Prime Minister expressed confidence that the anniversary this year would be held in the same participative spirit with the people of other faiths joining their Muslim brothers and sisters in celebrations.

Japan reacts to Yeltsin's decision: Japanese leaders reacted with shock and dismay to Russian President Boris Yeltsin's decision to call off a visit to Tokyo and said it was unlikely the trip could be rescheduled this year, reports Reuter from Tokyo.

Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa said early Thursday it was "unfortunate" that Yeltsin had postponed the visit at just four days' notice.

"He said he had to put off the visit for several months due to domestic problems," Miyazawa told reporters after talking to the Russian President by telephone.

Yeltsin, who was due in Tokyo on Sunday, called off the trip after it became evident it was doomed to failure because of differences over a decades-old territorial dispute.

Oldest US war veteran dead: The oldest known US war veteran died Thursday at 106, reports AFP from Phenix.

Nathan Cook lied about his age when he was 15 in order to join up with the navy in 1901 and spent the next 44 years in the service, seeing action in China, the Philippines and both world wars.

"The passing of our nation's oldest war veteran is more than just an historical footnote," said veteran's Affairs Secretary Edward Derwinski. "Nathan Cook's life spanned a period in which America grew from a nation just emerging on the world scene to become the greatest power on earth."

Gas explosion in China: 45 killed: Forty-five people were killed in a gas explosion in a coal mine in eastern China's Jiangxi province, the semi-official China News Service (CNS) said Friday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The blast in the transport yard of the mine in Quoshan in central Jiangxi province on Wednesday injured 29 others, it said.

The explosion was caused by an electrical spark created by careless workers, CNS said.

Japan too tough on issue of Kuril Islands: Yeltsin

CHEBOKSARY, Russia, Sept 11: Russian President Boris Yeltsin said Friday he had postponed his visit to Japan this week because Tokyo had been too tough on the issue of returning the disputed Kuril Islands, reports AP.

"There have been lots of reasons to postpone the visit. Japan raised the question on the Kuril Islands too categorically. That's why there was nothing to go with," Yeltsin told reporters after arriving in the city of Cheboksary for a meeting with Russian regional officials.

Yeltsin on Wednesday abruptly decided to delay indefinitely his planned visit to

Japan on September 13-16 under pressure from nationalists who oppose returning the islands, which the Soviet Union seized at the end of World War II.

He said he had no intention of watching anti-Russian pickets that were expected from Japanese student groups during the visit, who had embarrassed former Soviet President Mikhail S Gorbachev during his trip to Japan in April 1991.

Yeltsin is under increasing pressure from the conservative Russian legislature as well as vocal Russian nationalists not to give in to Japanese demands

Night-time curfew lifted Myanmar frees 31 more politicians

BANGKOK, Sept 11: Myanmar's military government ended a four-year nationwide night-time curfew today and freed another 31 political prisoners, official radio Yangon reported, says AFP.

The order ending the curfew was signed by Major General Khin Nyunt, who is secretary of the ruling junta and the nation's powerful intelligence chief, the radio said in a broadcast monitored here.

Khin Nyunt said the curfew — imposed in September 1988 when the military seized power and crushed a nation-

wide pro-democracy movement — could now be lifted as the Myanmar's internal security situation was under control.

The original eight-hour nightly curfew was shortened by two hours a month after the September crackdown, in which thousands of people were killed.

The State Law and Order Restoration Committee (SLORC) — the official name for the ruling junta — has been taking an increasingly softer stand since General Saw Maung, the leader of the 1988

coup, retired last April for health reasons. He was succeeded as SLORC chairman by General Than Shwe.

Among its reconciliation efforts have been a general amnesty for prisoners no longer considered a security threat, reopening of the universities, the first face-to-face meeting with opposition political leaders since 1990 and the cessation of its military campaign against various ethnic rebel groups.

Another 31 political prisoners were released today, bringing the total freed to 371.

Several hundred common criminals have also been released.

But opposition leaders who fled to border sanctuaries after the 1988 bloodshed have called the SLORC's actions cosmetic. They note, among other things, that the US State Department earlier this year estimated there were still some 2,000 political prisoners in Myanmar.

Among those still held is Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who is in her fourth year of house arrest in Yangon.

Syria rejects Israel's proposal to cede part of Golan

DOHA, Qatar, Sept 11: Syria's foreign minister has rejected Israeli proposals to withdraw from parts of the strategic Golan Heights, saying all of the territory must be returned, reports AP.

Farouk al-Sharaa made the comments Thursday after consulting with Egypt and the oil-rich Gulf nations and gaining support for Syria's negotiating stance at Middle East peace talks in Washington. His comments were quoted Friday in Qatar dailies.

The return of parts of the Golan is unacceptable and contradicts the spirit of the initiative, Sharaa said.

"It also contradicts the contents of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338," Sharaa added.

The resolutions call for Israel to withdraw from war-torn land in exchange for peace with its Arab neighbors.

Israel captured the strategic Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war and

annexed the territory in 1981. On Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said explicitly for the first time that Israel was prepared to return some of the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for peace.

The latest round of peace talks, sponsored by the United States and Russia, are in recess while Syrian and Israeli delegates consult with their governments. Israeli officials have said Syrian proposals put forward in the current round showed opportunities for compromise.

Earlier Thursday, a communique issued by foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council along with the Egyptian and Syrian foreign ministers expressed "extreme satisfaction" with Arab efforts at the peace talks.

The GCC groups Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in an alliance for economic, development and security cooperation.

The communication stressed the Arab position that a lasting peace can only be achieved by "an Israeli pullout from all occupied Arab territories, including holy Jerusalem and the Golan, and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate right to self-determination."

Mitterrand undergoes prostate surgery

PARIS, Sept 11: President Francois Mitterrand underwent prostate surgery Friday and was reported in satisfactory condition.

Mitterrand, 75, was admitted Thursday evening to Cochin hospital in Paris for the surgery, his office said, reports AP.



NOTTINGHAM, England: The Prince and Princess of Wales arrive September 9 at the Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham for an official visit. Prince Charles left hospital some days ago after knee surgery. — AFP/UNB photo.

Rafsanjani's remarks anger Delhi

NEW DELHI, Sept 11: India is to take up with Iran a remark reportedly made by President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in Pakistan that the Kashmir issue was an "Islamic problem," an official said Thursday, reports AFP.

A Foreign Office spokesman here said "the matter would be taken up with the Iranian government."

"An expression of interest in matters concerning the Indian citizens, whatever is their religious faith, is obviously a question of interference," he said.

Rafsanjani was reported to have made the observation about Kashmir, the Muslim-

majority region claimed by India and neighbouring Pakistan, during a visit to Islamabad Monday.

The Indian spokesman's disclosure of New Delhi's decision to take up the matter came two days after Federal Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan strongly criticised the Iranian president's statement.

India would be compelled to give a "bitter response" if Iran interfered in the controversy, the Press Trust of India news agency quoted him as saying. India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir since independence from Britain in 1947.

Off the Record



BAR GIRLS ON THE MARCH: Bar girls from Bangkok's notorious Patpong nightlife area, march through the Thai capital September 9 during a campaign to get out the vote. The September 13 election is for a new 360 seat house of Representative which will nominate the next Thai Prime Minister from among its members. Thai poster left translates, "If you sleep with he ghost, I will not vote for you." — AFP/UNB photo.

Men's sperm density declining

LONDON: A Danish study published has found a significant reduction in men's average sperm count over the past 50 years, possibly due to environmental pollution, Reuter says.

The study, in the latest edition of the British Medical Journal, said sperm density had nearly halved and semen quantity had decreased by nearly 25 per cent.

Professor Niels Skakkeback, of Copenhagen University, said this "remarkable" decline made it likely that a greater proportion of men would have difficulty fathering children.

The study, based on an analysis of 61 papers covering 15,000 men worldwide between 1938 and 1990, said average sperm density had dropped from 113 million per millilitre to 66 million per millilitre and semen volume had decreased from 3.4 millilitres to 2.75 millilitres.

Skakkeback said this might reflect an overall reduction in male fertility, but a corresponding dramatic increase in male genito-urinary abnormalities and testicular cancer supported the theory that environmental factors were to blame.

"It must be something in the environment, although we don't know what it is," he said. "Some medical experts have linked industrial contaminants such as PCBs, a toxic chemical compound produced in industrial processes, to lower sperm counts."

New Delhi suffers from 'Holy Cow Syndrome'

NEW DELHI: It could have been a round up in the Wild West, but it was in the heart of New Delhi, AP reports.

As eight "cowboys" stalked it with lassos, the cow bolted across a road and triggered an accident before it jumped a 1.5 meter wall and disappeared.

A motorbike trying to avoid the cow slammed on its breaks and crashed onto its side, its driver nearly run over by a speeding car.

"See that?" yelled Akash Ghosh, one of the "cowboys," or city animal catchers. "This happens all the time."

This year's heavy monsoon rains have brought tens of thousands of cattle into the streets of India's capital, where they stare serenely at drivers and snarl up traffic.

So it is left to the city's 120 cattle catchers to deal with the cows and bulls who saunter down busy streets and laze on the narrow traffic islands.

"We suffer from the Holy Cow Syndrome," said Maxwell Pereira, the city's traffic police chief. "Not a soul takes the pain to move the cows off the road — they all skirt around them."

The sight of a lassoed cow being forced into a government truck often arouses public anger and sometimes violence.

Anrudha Kumar, a veteran city cowboy, recalls one cow that climbed up to the second story of a government building to escape capture. "There were hundreds of employees there but no one helped us. Instead they called us butchers and evil men."

Any motorist who hits a cow risks attack from angry Hindus. Most drivers would leave a wounded animal on the road and flee.

Many accidents happen on poorly-lit streets at night, but "by the morning neither the cow nor the driver is around to tell you what happened", said Pereira, the traffic cop.

No sex in space

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, Sept 11: The first married couple to fly in space has vowed to work, not play, on the week long U.S. shuttle science mission scheduled for launch on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Mark Lee, 40, and Jan Davis, 38, who married in January 1991 after being assigned to the crew, say they will leave their intimate relationship back on earth when endeavour, the newest of the U.S. fleet, heads to orbit on a flight chartered by the space agency of Japan.

"We're going to take a picture up there together, but other than that, we just want to do our jobs," said Lee, in a recent interview with Reuter. The couple will wear matching shirts when they pose for the picture.

"I don't think of us as a husband and wife in space. We just think of ourselves as two astronauts," said Lee, who will be in charge of science operations on board.

Speculation about whether the married couple will have sex in space is "irresponsible, inaccurate and misleading," said Barbara Schwartz, a spokeswoman for the astronauts at NASA mission control in Houston, Texas.

Christina wins MTV Awards

LOS ANGELES — That songbird Christina has won the Asian Viewers' Choice at the 1992 MTV Video Music Awards held here Thursday.

The 25-year-old dancer and singer almost broke into tears when her name was announced in the packed Pauley Pavilion in the UCLA campus watched by 11,000 people.

Christina, whose full name is Christine Aguilera, was nominated for her video J'ring Mai Glia, produced by Dawn Padungvichiew.

It was one of six entered for the category from Asia. These are Chang Yui Shen's Take Me To The Moon (Taiwan), Marsha's Taak Hak (Thailand), The Dawn's Lisang Bangka Tayo (Philippines), Artists R A P's Ikhlis Tapi Jaun (Malaysia) and Lo Ta Yu's Story of The Train (Taiwan).