

Russia to reopen talks on rocket deal soon

NEW DELHI, July 29: A Russian team will visit India to reopen talks on a rocket engine deal, Moscow froze following pressure from the United States, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"We will have to discuss the whole matter and a team is coming soon from Russia," Rao told Parliament of the spiked 350 million dollar deal for the sale of two Cryogenic engines and rocket technology to India's space industry.

NZ condemns Israeli attack on Lebanon

WELLINGTON, July 29: Prime Minister Jim Bolger condemned Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon as a "disproportionate" response to Hizbollah attempts to end the Middle East Peace process, reports AFP.

"Attacks on civilians, by either side, create immediate humanitarian problems", Bolger said in a statement.

"All involved must exercise restraint to avoid further escalation. There is no advantage to anyone in a continuation of the present conflict."

Kabul warns of retaliation against Russian aggression

KABUL, July 29: Afghanistan demanded on Wednesday that Russia withdraw its forces along the border with Tajikistan and warned that it would respond to any more attack, reports Reuter.

"The Afghan government emphasises that Russian troops should be removed from our border as soon as possible," the Foreign Ministry said, issuing a resolution taken at an emergency cabinet meeting on Tuesday.

It called on the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Conference to put pressure on Moscow to pull its troops back from the Tajik border.

Moscow has said Kabul is backing cross-border attacks by Tajik rebels who fled into Afghanistan after their defeat in a civil war last year.

Kabul was ready for talks with the Russian federation to end the spate of cross-border attacks this month that have evoked memories on both sides of the 10-year Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, officials said.

"We are willing to send a delegation to a meeting in Dushanbe," Deputy Foreign Minister Hamid Karzai said in an interview.

"Afghanistan is not interested in interfering in the internal affairs of Tajikistan, but will not tolerate any aggression on the border and if the aggression continues Afghanistan will have to react," the Foreign Ministry said.

In Moscow, the ITAR Tass news agency said Russian and Tajik force unleashed "a massive artillery and mortar strike" across the border into Afghanistan.

The bombardment was part of a major air and ground operation launched in Tajikistan last Sunday to destroy a force of Afghan-backed Tajik rebels, it said.

It coincided with a political initiative by Russian President Boris Yeltsin to solve the Tajik-

Afghan border crisis, in which he has appointed Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev as his special representative in Tajikistan.

Yeltsin gave Kozyrev the primary task of establishing dialogue between the Tajik government and rebels, a statement issued by Yeltsin's office on Wednesday said.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry said it was ready to mediate between the Tajik government and the rebels.

"We do not want Russia to repeat the mistake of occupying Afghanistan," it said.

Yeltsin's attempts to promote negotiation seemed to be a response to fears of many Russians who, remembering their country's disastrous 10-year military adventure in Afghanistan, fear being dragged into another losing war in the region.

Tass quoted military sources as saying the army sweep was initiated after up to 400 heavily armed rebels, including Afghan Mujahideen guerillas, crossed the Pyanj river marking the border and massed near the village of Vart.

Tass said rebel reinforcements had tried to cross the frontier near border post 11 to help their comrades.

AFP adds: Russian President Boris Yeltsin's claim that the Afghan-Tajik border was also "a Russian frontier" was vigorously rejected by a senior Defence Ministry official in Kabul today.

"Tajikistan is an independent country and it has its own borders. Under no circumstances are these borders Russian borders," said General Yunus Qanooni, political chief and spokesman of the Defence Ministry.

Yeltsin, who made the border claims at last Monday's Russian security council meeting, was quoted as saying "everyone must understand that this frontier is also a Russian frontier not just a Tajik one."

"There is no logic to Yeltsin's claim", Qanooni said.

Off the Record



Sophia (L), a former Mrs Capwell and Gina, the present wife of CC Capwell fight like a couple of cats on a hot tin roof in the TV soap Santa Barbara. —Star TV photo

Baby factory to breed male heirs

BEIJING: A Chinese farmer was arrested for running a baby factory out of his home by forcing his wife and three teenage daughters to bear sons for paying-clients, the Information Daily reported Wednesday, says AFP.

Police raided the home in March and discovered that the racket began seven years ago.

The four women gave birth to a total of 17 babies, including 12 boys, and earned tens of thousands of dollars, the report said.

The youngest daughter, just 14, was forced to have sex with a 60-year-old man, who paid 10,000 yuan (about 1,750 US dollar on the floating exchange rate, in hopes of having a male heir.

The farmer, identified only by his last name Qin, lived in the remote hills on the border of Hebei and Shanxi provinces, with no other families around for 15 kilometres (10 miles).

The business started after Qin brought home a stranger, named Hou, who was kicked out of his home by his wife's parents for failing to have a son.

Hou convinced Qin to let him have sex with his 35-year-old wife for a month and pay them 4,000 yuan if she gave birth to a boy, which she did.

Fergie's hope of salvaging image blocked

LONDON: The Duchess of York's hopes of salvaging her public image by becoming a special UN envoy have been blocked by the British government and Buckingham Palace, newspapers reported Wednesday, says AP.

A lawmaker said he would press the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to find someone — "anybody else" — to fill the job.

"I was appalled by the original announcement that she might be given this job," said Sir Nicholas Fairbairn of the governing Conservative Party.

"I cannot think of anybody else I would sooner not appoint to this post than the Duchess of York," he said.

The new job for the duchess, better known as Fergie, was announced June 10 when she accepted a humanitarian award in London on behalf of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata.

Seven weeks later, newspapers reported, her appointment has yet to be confirmed.

The Daily Mail said the government and Buckingham Palace fear appointing the ebullient, indiscreet Fergie as goodwill ambassador "could turn into an embarrassing disaster."



BRIEFLY

13 more Kurds killed in Turkey: Turkish troops killed at least 13 separatist Kurdish guerillas on a mountain bordering Iran, the Anatolia news agency said on Wednesday, AP reports from Agri.

But the agency said guerilla casualties could be much higher, quoting provincial governor Ismet Metin as saying captured guerillas reported that about 100 insurgents had died in the clashes.

Security forces, supported by jets and helicopters, were operating on the Tendurek mountain on the Iranian border since Monday.

The agency earlier reported that the guerillas on the mountain had infiltrated from Iran.

Air China starts flights to Israel: China's national airline, Air China, inaugurated direct flights to Israel Wednesday, AP reports from Tel Aviv.

An Air China 747 jet from Beijing landed in the afternoon at Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv with 27 passengers, after a 10 1/2-hour flight.

At a welcoming ceremony, Air China's president, Xu Bailing, said he hoped that the planned weekly charter flights would help develop further cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Israel's Transport Minister Yisrael Kessar said, "This is an historic moment for us." He expressed hope for closer ties with China.

Israel and China established diplomatic ties in January 1992. Israel's national airlines, El Al, began weekly flights to Beijing shortly afterwards.

Andorra enters UN: The General Assembly on Wednesday unanimously welcomed Andorra, a tiny European nation located between France and Spain in the Pyrenees mountains, as its 184th member, AP reports from United Nations.

Andorra will be one of the smallest UN members, along with San Marino, Liechtenstein and Monaco.

Andorra has a population of about 56,000 and an area of 180 square miles (467 square kilometers). Slightly more than a quarter of the population is Andorran. The rest are French, Portuguese and Spanish.

8th victim of Rio massacre dies: The leader of a gang of a street kids has died from wounds suffered when gunmen shot on a group of sleeping youths in the shadow of the Candelaria Cathedral, the eighth victim of the attack, AP reports from Rio De Janeiro.

Marco Antonio da Silva, 20 — known as "Ruco," or "Blondie" in Portuguese, died Tuesday at Souza Aguiar Hospital, hospital officials said Wednesday. He had been in a coma since the shooting last Friday.

Survivors said three state policemen were among the five gunmen. They have been detained for questioning. Nilo Battista, the Secretary of Justice of Rio de Janeiro state, said two more state policemen would be detained soon as suspects.

Strike for higher wages: Some 80,000 public employees struck for higher wages Wednesday. They were to be joined by as many as 55,000 teachers on Thursday, AP reports from San Jose.

Most government offices were at least partially closed. Hospitals treated emergency cases only.

The strike was called by the Permanent Workers Council, which claims the 5 per cent raise received by public employees three weeks ago is insufficient.

President Rafael Angel Calderon accused strike leader of political motives. Presidential elections are scheduled for February.

Fire bomb kills one in Florida: Someone threw a fire bomb into a grocery store, burring one person to death and injuring four others, police said Wednesday, AP reports from Florida.

Police have no suspect or motive for the attack at the B and B Fish Market.

The bombing occurred Tuesday night with three customers and the store's two owners inside, said police spokeswoman Sandra King.

"A man simply opened the door to the market and threw inside a fire bomb, which exploded," she said.

Customer James Smith, 47, instinctively dropped to the floor and was caught in the flammable material.

He was burned over 80 per cent of his body and died Wednesday at a hospital, she said.

Angolan troops recapture Cubal town

Luanda, July 29: Angolan government forces have recaptured the town of Cubal, west of the UNITA rebel stronghold of Huambo, the army said, reports Reuter.

An army statement on Wednesday said government troops inflicted heavy losses on UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) during the attack on Cubal on Tuesday.

News of town's recapture came as Angolan chief-of-staff General Joao De Matos told reporters in the eastern city of Luena that the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) government expected to regain the initiative on several fronts in the next few days. He gave no details.

E European arms traders desperately seeking new markets

VIENNA, July 29: East European arms manufacturers, thrown into crisis by the collapse of communism, are desperately seeking new markets to avoid closing factories which used to provide the military hardware for Moscow's Cold War allies, reports AFP.

Since communist governments fell one after another in Eastern Europe in 1989 more than 100,000 people employed in arms industries in Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania have been made redundant.

The end of the Warsaw Pact, the general reduction in defence expenditure, the breakup of the former Soviet Union — which used to be a major arms market — and UN embargoes on Iraq and Libya have combined to

spell disaster for east European arms manufacturers.

Since 1989 Slovakia's revenue from arms sales has plunged from 690 million dollar to 50 million at the end of last year.

Arms production has halved in Poland, while Bulgaria, which used to export up to 800 million dollar worth of arms each year under communism, has seen its weapons factories reduced to one-third capacity.

The crisis has been even more dramatic in Romania. The Balkan nation, which once boasted a flourishing indigenous arms industry, has seen its weapons production fall by 95 per cent compared with 1985, and it has virtually stopped exporting military equipment.

Hungary has cut arms production by 90 per cent.

The unemployment figures in eastern Europe's arms industries make alarming reading: 60,000 in Poland, 42,000 in Slovakia, 25,000 in Bulgaria and about 12,000 in Romania.

The future continues to look bleak.

Romanian Defence Minister Nicolae Spiroiu has said 60,000 more jobs are threatened in Romania's military production sector, and a report by a Bulgarian parliamentary commission released in June said new markets had to be found urgently to prevent more redundancies among the 100,000 employees in the country's military industries.

There are two options for East European arms manufac-

turers faced with collapsing sales: find new markets, or convert from military to civilian production.

The latter option is very costly, and is no guarantee of new markets.

The Czech republic has gone for the first option.

In June, 12 Czech enterprises, prompted by the Skoda Plzen Engineering Group, former a new company called RDP Group, specialising in making military hardware.

The company plans to play an active role in restructuring the Czech army. It will also produce a rapid-firing Howitzer and modernise Soviet T-72 tanks to compete with western arms manufacturers in the world market.

The strategy has already got

off to a good start. RDP is drawing up plans to cooperate with the French company Sofma, which specialises in arms exports and technology transfer. The deal is particularly aimed at modernisation of the T-72, 6,000 of which are currently in service worldwide.

Slovakia, home to three-quarters of the former Czechoslovakia's military industries before the breakup of the federation, plans to convert 50 of its arms factories over the next five years to production of drilling equipment and agricultural machinery, instead of tanks and pistols. The cost of the conversion is put at 534 million dollar.

In Poland analysts have calculated that conversion of part of the country's arms factories

to civilian production would cost about one billion and would be impossible to finance out of the state budget.

In Bulgaria, which has traditionally shipped arms to the Middle East, the authorities have decided that military production is one of the few viable pillars of the battered economy, and are seeking new markets under communism Bulgaria exported 96 per cent of its military production.

Neighbouring Romania has effectively lost its traditional arms markets in Iraq and Libya, and is implementing a cash programme to convert some of its arms factories. One tank factory in Bucharest is now producing gas cookers and underground trains.

500 killed in S African violence this month

DURBAN, July 29: More than 5000 people have been killed in South Africa's black townships so far this month, the highest monthly toll in three years, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The HRC, a human rights monitoring group linked to the African National Congress, said most of the violence took place in townships east of Johannesburg where at least 255 people have been killed since the July 2 announcement of an election date.

Police have blamed many of the deaths on feuding between the ANC and the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party.



BEIRUT: Supporters of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah demonstrate through the streets Thursday against the four-day Israeli bombardments in South Lebanon. The placard shows a caricature of US Secretary of State Warren Christopher with a Star of David on his forehead. — UNB/AFP photo

Arafat demands UN session to discuss Lebanon issue

KUALA LUMPUR, July 29: Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) chief Yasser Arafat demanded here today an emergency session of the UN Security Council to discuss Israel's bombardment of Lebanon, reports AFP.

"The situation is serious and the UN Security Council must sit immediately to discuss the issue," a senior PLO spokesman quoted Arafat as saying during a special meeting here with diplomats representing 19 Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member countries.

Hani Al-Hassan, political adviser to Arafat who is on a visit to Kuala Lumpur, told reporters the PLO had contacted UN Security Council permanent members France, Britain, China and Russia to help "stop the carnage" in southern Lebanon.

"Apart from them, we are in contact with the Lebanese government and all other Arab countries and ANM to put a stop to [Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin's bloody campaign," said Hani.

Arafat on Wednesday contacted President Suharto of Indonesia, which is leading NAM, to also help lobby for the Security Council session," he said.

Rabin vowed on Wednesday to continue "mercilessly" the bombardment until pro-Iranian

Hezbollah and other Palestinian guerillas based in southern Lebanon stop rocketing north-ern Israel.

More than 80 Lebanese have been killed and hundreds wounded as Israel has sought to force the civilian population northwards to apply pressure on the Lebanese and Syrian governments to halt Hezbollah rocket attacks.

Israel launched the operation Sunday with a devastating air assault backed up by heavy artillery barrages against the Islamic fundamentalists and radical Palestinian bases.

Meanwhile, a Palestinian leader warned Thursday of increased retaliation against Israeli attacks in south Lebanon, which have caused more than 150,000 civilians to flee the region.

"Palestinians can do a lot to confront Israeli military forces attacking south Lebanon," said Hani Al-Hassan, a central committee member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

"The PLO's popular uprising against Israel can be escalated in many ways," he told reporters.

Hassan is in Malaysia with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, who arrived on Wednesday. Arafat will go on to Vietnam on Friday for a three-day visit, government officials in Hanoi said.

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