

PLO's chief negotiator puts off Jerusalem trip

JERUSALEM, June 20: The PLO's chief negotiator, Nabil Shaath, postponed a trip to Jerusalem today under pressure from Israel, Palestinian sources said, reports AP.

Shaath, the highest-ranking Palestinian official to return for self-rule, had announced a "purely personal visit" to the holy city for today.

"He is not coming to Jerusalem today," one senior Palestinian source told AFP. You can say it is because of a heavy timetable, but may be it

needs more preparation."

"However, the visit has not been called off completely. It will take place later."

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's spokesman said Sunday: "Such a visit has to be coordinated with us. Shaath did not do that."

"Israel is not opposed to the principle of a visit to Jerusalem by Shaath so long as it is private."

Shaath, who spent the night in the self-rule enclave of Jericho, had said his trip would be to see friends and pray at the Al-Aqsa mosque in the old city.

He said, he also wanted to visit Faisal Hussein, the West Bank leader of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's Fatah Group.

The planned visit drew sharp criticism with the opposition Likud Party which demanded that the government prevent the new Palestinian authority from meeting in east Jerusalem.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert urged Rabin to stop Shaath from entering the holy city at all, saying it "would be contrary to the government's official position on Jerusalem."

ROK proposes pre-summit talks with DPRK

SEOUL, June 20: South Korea on Monday proposed a re-opening of dialogue with rival North Korea to arrange summit talks brokered by former US President Jimmy Carter aimed at defusing nuclear tensions, reports AP.

In a telephone message to North Korea, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Yung-duk proposed that officials of the two Koreas meet next Tuesday to discuss the summit proposal.

South Korean officials hope a direct meeting between the presidents of the two countries would help resolve the crisis over North Korea's refusal to allow full inspections of its nuclear sites.

But tensions remained high Monday despite the summit proposal.

North Korea accused the South of making "reckless military provocations" over the weekend by sending 300 troops and heavy weapons inside the demilitarized zone that separates the countries.

South Korea's Defence Min-

istry called the charge propaganda.

"We have done nothing to justify such an accusation," said a ministry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The summit, if held, would be the first since the division of the Korean Peninsula into the Communist North and capitalist South in 1945. Past proposals for summit talks have failed.

During Carter's visit last week to North and South Korea, North Korean President Kim Il Sung suggested a meeting with his South Korean counterpart, Kim Young-sam.

Carter conveyed the proposal to Kim Young-sam, who quickly accepted it.

Among other proposals, the North also suggested a cut in military forces in both North and South Korea to 100,000 troops, Carter said. Kim Il Sung told Carter he had 600,000 troops; US intelligence officials say they number 1.1 million.

South Korea's government had no immediate formal reac-

tion to that proposal, but officials privately called it unrealistic.

After a detailed briefing from Carter on Sunday about his trip, White House officials said there was room for optimism, but counseled caution.

Although Carter said he believed "the crisis is over," two US senators assessing American military preparedness in South Korea disagreed.

"The crisis is still with us," said Sen John McCain, an Arizona Republican. He said Washington should continue to pursue strong sanctions against the North, and if those fail, he called for "selective air or cruise missile strikes" to destroy its nuclear capability.

"What the North says is not an issue. What they do is the issue," said Sen Phil Gramm, a Texas Republican.

Meanwhile, a group of 50 churchwomen marched in Seoul calling for peace.

"No sanctions," said some of the signs carried by the marchers, members of the

Women's Solidarity for Peace.

Deputy South Korean Prime Minister Lee Hong-koo, meeting reporters after a government security meeting Monday, said the Seoul government hopes summit talks can be held "as soon as possible."

But government officials privately said arrangements could drag out for several months.

In the telephone message, South Korea made clear that the first priority of the summit should be resolving the nuclear crisis, Lee said.

North Korea has denied that it is making nuclear weapons, and so far has refused to discuss the crisis with South Korea, arguing that it can only be resolved through direct negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington.

North Korea regards its southern rival as "a US colony."

All dialogue between the Koreas has been cut off since last year because of the nuclear dispute.

Off the Record

Hillary has too much influence?

WASHINGTON: A majority of Americans feel First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton has too much influence, a new poll showed Sunday, reports Reuter.

The NBC-Wall Street Journal poll, reported on NBC's "Meet the Press," found that 51 per cent of respondents felt Hillary had too much influence, 38 per cent felt she had the right amount of influence and only 7 per cent felt she did not have enough.

Broken down by political affiliation, the poll showed that 57 per cent of Democrats felt Mrs Clinton has just the right amount of influence, 33 per cent felt she had too much and 8 per cent felt she did not have enough.

Only 21 per cent of Republicans felt she had the right amount of influence, 75 per cent felt she had too much and 3 per cent felt she did not have enough.

The poll also asked about general feelings towards Mrs Clinton, and found women's impressions more favourable than men's.

Fifty-four per cent of women had positive feelings for the first lady, and 30 per cent had negative feelings. Among men, 39 per cent had positive feelings about Hillary and 40 per cent had negative feelings.



Expensive rain!

LONDON: A small businessman has been sent a 62-pound (94 dollar) bill by his water company for the rain falling on his roof, a British newspaper said yesterday, reports Reuter.

Yorkshire Water sent the bill to Neil Davies for his 12 foot by 8 foot office, even though his car hire firm in Queensbury, northern England, is not connected to public water or drainage systems, the Daily Telegraph said.

Davies told the company he was not connected to the public system. "I nearly fell off my chair when they told me it was for the water falling on my roof. I said, 'surely you are kidding me.' But they said, 'No, Mr Davies, we certainly are not.'"

The newspaper said the water company has now put the bill on hold while they check whether rain from the office roof is draining into the public system or running into open land.

Rushdie wants his Indian estate back

NEW DELHI: Salman Rushdie, the India-born author hiding from Muslim extremists who have vowed to kill him, has filed a petition claiming a small estate in the Himalayan foothills, a newspaper reported Monday, says AP.

The petition asks the High Court in Himachal Pradesh state to demand that the state government vacate the resort cottage and one acre estate in the town of Solan, The Times of India said.

Rushdie claims that the house was presented to him by his father, Maulvi Anis Ahmed Rushdie, on July 4, 1969.

Rushdie denied that his Muslim father had migrated to Islamic Pakistan when the subcontinent was partitioned by departing British colonialists in 1947. Many Muslims left India then to live in Pakistan, and their abandoned property was either kept by the government or given to Hindus who left Pakistan for India.

The author, who has lived in Britain for years, did not indicate that he would move to Solan, a sleepy town in forested hills 300 kilometers (185 miles) north of New Delhi. Rushdie went into hiding in 1989 after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran declared the novel "Satanic Verses" blasphemous and ordered his death. Iranian religious leaders have put a 3 million dollars bounty on Rushdie's head, forcing him to remain in hiding most of the time and to travel around with bodyguards.

US students fare poorly in maths, writing

PRINCETON: An international survey found that American college teachers think the worst of their students' math skills and not much better when it comes to writing and speaking, reports AP.

Only 15 per cent said American high schools adequately prepared students for college-level math and quantitative reasoning.

That was the poorest showing in the survey of 14 countries released Sunday by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Foundation questionnaires were completed by 20,000 respondents in five European, four Western Hemisphere and four Asia-Pacific nations, plus Hong Kong.

Faculty in Hong Kong gave their students the highest math rating, with 40 per cent saying pupils were adequately prepared. South Korea was a close second.

The findings parallel the results of international tests in which Asian students regularly outscore Americans in math.

Asked if undergraduates are adequately prepared in writing and speaking skills, 20 per cent or less of the faculty thought so in the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, Chile and Israel. Almost 60 per cent of South Korean teacher said their students were sufficiently trained in writing and speaking.

Rabbani will transfer power to 'legitimate' assembly

KABUL, June 20: Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani will not resign at the end of June but is prepared to transfer his authority to a legitimate national assembly, an official spokesman declared Sunday, reports AP.

"The president is waiting for an authorised assembly to be established, to which he will deliver his authority," said presidential spokesman Abdul Aziz Morad.

Morad rejected demand of rival faction leader Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar that Rabbani must resign at the end of June, saying the president's legitimacy rested on the Kabul Grand National Assembly held in December 1992.

Haitian border troops turn back US Senator

FUMBYA, Haiti, June 20: Armed soldiers turned back US Senator Bob Graham on Sunday when he tried to reach Haiti's porous border with the Dominican Republic to check on the enforcement of international sanctions, reports AP.

Accompanied by US ambassador William Swing, Graham made his attempt two days after Haiti's de facto government issued a decree barring unauthorized people from the border, the coastline, Haiti's international waters and other strategic areas.

The captain of a seven-man contingent at a checkpoint in Fumbya, seven miles (11 kilometers) from the border, told Graham pleasantly but firmly that he needed written authorization to proceed farther.

Haiti is in the grip of an international trade embargo designed to pressure the ruling military to return power to elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, ousted in a coup in September 1991. President Clinton last week barred most financial transactions between the two countries, and commercial flights will stop June 25.

Graham said he came here to assess the effectiveness of the embargo in light of the increased suffering inflicted upon the people in the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

Military leaders have been enriching themselves on sales of black-market gasoline entering primarily across the border with the Dominican Republic.



A militiaman wounded by rebel mortar shrapnel is carried to the Red Cross hospital by a comrade on Sunday in the Rwandan capital, Kigali.

Italy won't contribute troops to French-led force in Rwanda

ROME, June 20: Italy will not contribute troops to a French-led force to end fighting in Rwanda and will wait until an international mission has been agreed, Defence Minister Cesare Previti said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

"The French are taking unilateral action and we do not have any intention of taking part," Defence Minister Cesare Previti told public television.

"We've already indicated that we are willing to do something if there is an international agreement," Previti said, adding that the issue would be discussed further at a meeting on Tuesday of the Western European Union.

An estimated 500,000 people have died in the civil war and massacres in the central African state since April.

Tensions between the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu tribes are at the root of the conflict.

France asked the UN Security Council on Friday to allow a quick intervention of French-led forces into Rwanda to halt the massacres before additional UN troops can be deployed.

French President Francois Mitterrand said on Saturday that his country wanted to send its own units without waiting for the full formation of a United Nations force.

Only two or three African states, but no European countries, have agreed to take part in the operation, Mitterrand said.

Italy has contributed peace-keeping troops to United Nations operations in Somalia and Mozambique.

Pope John Paul said in his regular address on Sunday that the international community had shown courage in trying to stop the fighting in Rwanda.

Another report says: A Rwandan rebel leader says he will not meet a French envoy being sent to Africa to explain the humanitarian goals of France's planned military intervention. Radio France Internationale reported on Sunday.

The radio quoted Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) military chief Paul Kagame as saying he will not meet the envoy. Jean-Michel Marlaud.

The envoy was given the task of contracting the warring sides in Rwanda but the RPF "has refused to listen," said the radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Tutu against French action in Rwanda

BRUSSELS, June 20: Archbishop Desmond Tutu said Monday that French troops should not intervene in Rwanda, and called instead for an all-African force to stop the bloodshed, reports AP.

The South African churchman warned the intervention force proposed by France would not work because of Rwandan rebels' opposition.

"They are not going to be effective if one side doesn't trust them," Tutu, the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner, told a news conference here.

Tutu, in Belgium for a two-day visit, said France and other Western nations should instead provide funding and logistical support to stop the slaughter of civilians in the central African nation's 10-week-old civil war.

Israeli planes raid Hezbollah bases again

MARJAYOUN, Lebanon, June 20: Israeli warplanes rocketed suspected pro-Iranian Hezbollah guerrilla bases in South Lebanon today, the second such attack in two days, security sources said, reports Reuter.

There was no immediate report of casualties in the air strike, the 17th into Lebanon this year.

The sources said two planes fired two rockets at the posts in the rugged hills of Lqlim Al-Toufah, from where Hezbollah (Party of God) guerrillas launch attacks on Israel's occupation zone in the south.

Witnesses said smoke billowed over the area.

US diplomats worry over Clinton's policy handling

WASHINGTON, June 20: Many members of the US foreign service have lost confidence in President Clinton's handling of foreign policy. The Washington Post reported today, says Reuter.

It said interviews with dozens of foreign service officers during the past several weeks had indicated a widespread perception that Clinton was unwilling to give much time and attention to foreign policy problems.

Likewise, Clinton's top aides, including Secretary of State Warren Christopher, were faulted by those surveyed as unable to fill the resulting void.

In addition, foreign service officers tended to believe that "many foreign governments have concluded that the United States cannot be depended upon to exert the vigorous, coherent leadership expected of the world's only remaining superpower," The Washington Post said.

The sharp decline of public confidence in President Clinton's handling of foreign policy is echoed by many of America's professional diplomats, who say that policy wings in places like China, Bosnia and Haiti have created a sense of indecision and drift about the US role in world affairs," it said.

American teen Michael Fay to be freed today

SINGAPORE, June 20: An American youth who gained fame when he was flogged for vandalism is scheduled to be released from prison Tuesday, reports AP.

Michael Fay is expected to return to the United States on Wednesday, accompanied by his father, family members said. George Fay arrived in Singapore on Sunday from Kettering, Ohio.

The teenager has been in Queenstown Prison since March 31, when his judicial appeal was rejected in the Supreme Court.

He celebrated his 19th birthday on May 30, and his fellow seniors at Singapore American School graduated while he was behind bars.



A southern Yemeni 130mm artillery unit fires towards northern positions from a beach in Aden on Sunday.

UN mediation efforts to halt war in Yemen fail

CAIRO, June 20: A UN special envoy today announced the end of his mediation effort here between the warring Yemeni sides after failing to broker a ceasefire in their civil war, reports AP.

Former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi told AFP "there will be no meetings today with the Yemeni parties" after a fruitless day of discussions on Sunday.

Brahimi said he would meet Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdel Meguid before leaving on Tuesday for New York, when he will report back to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

He had met separately with the Northern and Southern delegations on Sunday, but

they refused to hold a joint session and there was no agreement on how to set up a ceasefire mechanism.

The Southerners later announced that they were pulling out of the talks because Brahimi's meeting with their rivals had failed to produce results.

The Southerners also charged that the Northern team had no mandate to agree a ceasefire.

Seventy-nine people had been killed and 248 wounded by late Sunday in a four-day barrage of the Southern bastion of Aden by Northern forces loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Brahimi was sent on a fact-finding mission in line with a

UN Security Council resolution adopted on June 1 calling for an immediate ceasefire.

The North has insisted that a joint military commission should be set up to oversee a truce in the war which broke out on May 5.

But the South has accused Sanaa of playing for time in the hope of continuing its assault on Aden, capital of a breakaway state declared by Southern leader Ali Salem Al-Baid on May 21.

Another report from Sanaa adds: Government forces dropped bombs and fired rockets on the besieged capital of the breakaway south Monday, touching off southern air strikes.