

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 AFP.

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 Olert 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."

The expulsion took place shortly after midnight, said the broadcast, quoting a statement by the Romanian Interior Ministry. It did not specify the destination of the Romanian airline Tarom's charter plane that flew them out.

Romania expels 36 Lankans

BUCHAREST, June 20: Romania has expelled 36 illegal aliens from Sri Lanka, who apparently were seeking to reach western Europe, Radio Bucharest reported early Sunday, says AP.

The expulsion took place shortly after midnight, said the broadcast, quoting a statement by the Romanian Interior Ministry. It did not specify the destination of the Romanian airline Tarom's charter plane that flew them out.

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. — AFP photo

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.

Serbs threaten counter-attack against Muslims

SARAJEVO, June 20: Bosnian Serb leaders have threatened to launch a decisive counter-offensive in response to an attack by the Muslim-led Bosnian army that the Serbs say has driven thousands from their homes, reports Reuter.

The threat comes despite the United Nations saying that fighting which threatened to wrack a nine-day-old truce in Bosnia had eased on Sunday.

The Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic told Reuters that the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) would launch a "counter-offensive identical to that in Gorazde" if Muslims attacks on the mount Ozren area did not stop.

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 defended 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.

Heatwave claims 150 in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, June 20: The Pakistan authorities are struggling to cope with a sizzling heatwave that has claimed 150 lives in recent weeks, news reports said today, says AP.

The country is anxiously awaiting monsoons to provide relief from temperatures that have reached up to 50 degrees Celsius.

There are widespread water shortages, daily power cuts due to reduced hydro-electric generation and increasing incidence of dehydration, diarrhoea and jaundice, reports said.

In Islamabad the intense heat has sparked bush fires on the Margali hills on the northern fringes, adding to the problems of authorities already struggling to cope with scarcity of drinkable water.

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.

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 had not 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.

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.

"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 in December 1992.

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 Kenting, 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. — AFP photo

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 Esamat 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 Abdallah Saleh.

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