

Clinton ready to host Jordan-Israel summit

WASHINGTON, June 23: President Clinton is willing to host a Washington summit with King Hussein of Jordan and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel if the two Mideast leaders think it would help the peace process, US officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

progress. Next month, with the help of the Army Corps of Engineers, they will begin planning a road to connect Jordan with Egypt through Israel.

Also in July, the two sides will try to mark their border, concentrating on the Jordan valley where the line has been in dispute for decades.

King Hussein has hesitated to come to final terms with Israel while Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians have not settled their differences with the Jewish state. But on a visit here this week Hussein appeared to shed his customary caution.

"As far as we are concerned," he told reporters on Tuesday, "this is a sovereign matter involving Jordan itself and has nothing to do with, nor is tied to, movements on any other tracks."

Slow progress on the Syrian front caused Secretary of State Warren Christopher to reconsider going to the Middle East this week. But he is holding open the possibility of making a trip in July, after the G-7 summit in Naples of the major industrial democracies.

Clinton meanwhile, praised the "courage and vision" of Hussein in pursuing peace with Israel and pledged ongoing US support for the Mideast peace process.

"I want to reaffirm the support of the United States for a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, including the Syrian track, and we will do whatever we can to keep both things going," Clinton said at an Oval Office photo session Wednesday before seeing the king.

Clinton said the Mideast peace process "remains a very important priority for me and for our administration and I am very encouraged by where we are now in the whole process."

US suspends threat of sanctions North Korea pledges to freeze N-programme

WASHINGTON, June 23: A "very happy" US President Clinton is suspending a threat of sanctions and preparing to offer North Korea a way out of its isolation in return for its pledge to freeze its nuclear programme, reports AP.

Clinton on Wednesday called North Korea's decision to halt the nuclear programme a "very important step forward" towards defusing a tense, months-long dispute with the communist regime.

In return, Clinton said the United States would suspend its campaign at the United Nations to punish Pyongyang with economic sanctions and would resume high-level talks with North Korea next month in Geneva, Switzerland.

The president appeared upbeat at the day's developments during a nationally televised news conference.

"We have the basis to go forward and I'm very happy about it," Clinton said. "The world will be the winner if we can resolve this but we've not done it yet."

Later, a senior administration official voiced caution about the North Korean's erratic responses over time. "It would be a mistake... to allow ourselves to become wildly optimistic or wildly pessimistic," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity. "What matters here is what they say and what they do... What matters is what we can accomplish."

Later, Clinton and President Kim Young-Sam of South Korea discussed the developments in a 20-minute telephone call, the White House said. The

presidents agreed the news was a "very positive development," but noted that it was not a solution to the nuclear problem.



President Bill Clinton (R) announces that North Korea has confirmed a willingness to freeze its nuclear programme as National Security Advisor Tony Lake (L) looks on during a press conference at the White House on Wednesday.

has played a cat-and-mouse game with the International Atomic Energy Agency, admitting inspectors but refusing to let them conduct a comprehensive search. Specifically,

fuel rods removed from an experimental reactor were kept from the inspectors and they also were denied access to waste sites.

The inspectors were trying to determine if plutonium was diverted to nuclear use before 1989. Some analysts are convinced North Korea has at least one atomic bomb and may be playing for time in order to build an arsenal of a half-dozen by the end of the year.

Clinton said the three major conditions of a freeze had been met.

As a result, the President said he would give North Korea the opportunity to "move with dignity into the international community."

Hinting that North Korea might eventually gain diplomatic recognition from the United States, he said the talks in Geneva would cover "the full range of security, political and economic issues that affects North Korea's relationship with the international community."

Two rounds of high-level talks were held last year with North Korea but failed to resolve the dispute over a nuclear programme that the West fears could lead to the spread of dangerous weapons to a raft of dictatorial regimes.

He said that North Korea had agreed to all three conditions set by the United States: the Koreans must not reprocess spent plutonium removed recently from an experimental reactor, they must not refuel the reactor and they must permit international inspectors to maintain safeguards against nuclear proliferation.

Off the Record

School director prefers crocodiles to kids

BANGKOK: A Bangkok private school owner prefers crocodiles to kids and would rather lose his school than abandon the 18 reptiles living on the premises, reports AFP.

"If I have to choose between abandoning the crocodiles or closing my school, I prefer to keep my crocodiles," said school director Jira Smithchoti.

Jira was given 20 days to get rid of the crocodiles after complaints of a crocodile pit on school grounds were made by concerned parents.

In a letter to the office of Private Education Commission, a copy of which was obtained by AFP, Jira said the crocodiles were safely caged and posed no danger to the 2,500 students aged three to 12 years.

He adopted the crocodiles — ranging in size from 50 centimeter (20 inches) to 1.8 metres (5.94 feet) — on May 29, saying they were threatened with extinction and that children should learn to live in harmony with nature.

He invited the commission to visit the school and check on safety precautions.

Weight-lifting benefits elderly folks?

BOSTON: Even for the very, very old, it appears it's never too late to benefit from getting in shape, reports AP.

A study found that frail people in their late 80s and 90s get around more quickly, climb stairs better and sometimes even throw away their walkers after a few weeks of lifting weights to strengthen their legs.

"People have an unduly negative attitude about what can be done with those at the end of their lives. We need to be more optimistic," said the study's director, Dr. Maria A. Flatarone of the US Department of Agriculture Human Nutrition Research Center at Tufts University in Boston.

The work is a much larger follow-up to a groundbreaking study four years ago by the same team. That report showed that working out strengthens aging muscles. This one found that extra strength improves people's lives.

The new study suggests one reason the elderly grow chair-bound is that their muscles are weak from lack of exercise.

Dr. Elean Hadley, associate director for geriatrics at the National Institute on Aging, recommended that nursing homes start up exercise programmes.

Pope warns women not to emulate men

VATICAN CITY: Pope John Paul II cautioned women Wednesday against trying to be just like men and said they have a duty not to cooperate with those who would portray them as objects of pleasure for men, reports AP.

"Lay Christians are called to fight against all the forms that adopt this mentality," the pope said in remarks to the public gathered in St. Peter's Square for his weekly general audience.

The pope offered his thoughts on women's rights just two days after the Vatican indicated it is seeking to expand and reinforce the roles of women as nuns and lay workers in the Catholic Church.

Feminists and liberal Catholics have attacked the pope for his insistence that the priesthood is reserved for men.

In his remarks Wednesday, the pope didn't address the prohibition against women priests, which he restated last month.

But he asserted that "perfection for the woman isn't being like the man, in making herself manlike to the point of losing her specific qualities as woman."

A woman's "perfection," he added, "is in being a woman, equal to man but different."

He urged the two sexes to cooperate. The pope said that "too often women are considered like an object because of the male ego."

Although all Christians should oppose the degradation of women, the pope said, "Women themselves have the duty to contribute to obtaining the respect of their personality" by "not stooping to any form of complicity with that which contradicts their dignity."



One-party system will continue, says Deng

HONG KONG, June 23: Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping has made a rare public appearance, telling officials that China's one-party system will remain unchanged and urging them to learn from the downfall of the Soviet Union, a newspaper reported today, says AP.

Deng, accompanied by Liu Huaqing, vice chairman of the central military commission, went to northeastern coastal city of Qingdao in Shandong, where he told local officials, "China must not have a multi-party system." The Beijing-backed Wen Wei Po said.

The report, which quoted what it called authoritative sources, said the visit took place recently. The date was not given, nor was the report accompanied by a photograph. The story came after series

of overseas reports saying Deng, 89, is either seriously ill or even dead. All these accounts were flatly denied by the Chinese government as well as by Deng's children.

Deng's previous appearance was in the lunar new year in February when he appeared on Shanghai television looking frail, and needing to be supported by his relatives.

In his three-point advice to officials in Qingdao, the 89-year-old Chinese leader also told officials to learn the lessons from the former Soviet Union by ensuring strong relations between China's central and regional governments.

For many analysts, communism collapsed in the Soviet Union in part because central control in Moscow was weakened by pro-independence sentiment in member states.

4 Asian nations using US military aid to violate human rights: AI

WASHINGTON, June 23: Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia are examples of Asian nations using US military aid to violate human rights, Amnesty International USA said on Wednesday, reports AP.

The international human rights group said it focused on the four nations because they represent different types of abuses rampant throughout the region.

Security assistance to Asia consists mainly of direct training and narcotics control, the group reported.

In 1995 proposals, Thailand tops the list with 350 million dollars in foreign military sales, 1.25 million dollars for fighting narcotics and one million dollars in direct training.

Turkey reacts to Amnesty report

ANKARA, June 23: Turkish government yesterday reacted angrily to an Amnesty International report which urges Washington to rethink aid to Turkey, reports Xinhua.

Ankara called on the organisation "to see the true face of the Kurdish Workers' Party's (PKK) terrorism."

US freezes assets of Haitians

WASHINGTON, June 23: President Clinton Wednesday ordered a freeze of US-held assets of all Haitian nationals in a bid to oust military rulers from power in Port-au-Prince, reports Reuter.

White House spokeswoman Dee Dee Myers said, in announcing the move, that the blocking of assets was designed to put pressure on wealthy Haitians who oppose the return of democratically-elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

This is aimed at blocking the assets of wealthy Haitians in US banks or places controlled by the United States, such as overseas branches of US banks," Myers said.

She said the order applied to named individuals who participated in or supported the military government regime and their families "in Haiti or wherever resident."

China military team in Myanmar

BANGKOK, June 23: A high-level Chinese military delegation is in Myanmar on a goodwill visit, state-run Radio Yangon reported, says Reuter.

The radio, in a dispatch monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said the delegation had arrived in Yangon today.

The delegation was welcomed by senior Myanmar commanders, including Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Tin U. Air Force Chief of Staff Major General Tin Ngwe and Navy Chief of Staff Rear Admiral Tin Aye, the radio said.

Led by the commander of the Chengdu military region, General Li Jiu-long, the Chinese also on Wednesday met Myanmar's Army Commander in Chief, General Maung Aye, it said.



The first Palestinian policewoman, Inass Shalabi, 21, walks through the Nusairat Camp in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday with an unidentified colleague.

Rabin foresees war with Syria without peace deal

JERUSALEM, June 23: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has warned that war could erupt with Syria within several years unless there is a peace agreement between the long-time rivals, reports AP.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres disclosed that Israel has offered new proposals to Syria for an Israeli troop pullback and security arrangements to break a five-month negotiating deadlock.

Speaking to the Keren Hayesod fundraising group, Rabin aimed his remarks on Syria to right-wing groups that insist Israel can have peace and still hold on to the Golan Heights.

"That's complete nonsense," Rabin said. "Whoever

wants to say he wants all the Golan Heights has to prepare for war, three, five years or seven years from now," Rabin said.

Israel captured the strategic Golan plateau from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war and later annexed it. Syria has demanded a full withdrawal in exchange for peace. Israel wants a staged pullback and won't commit to any withdrawal before security arrangements and full-fledged diplomatic ties are negotiated.

Rabin repeated in an interview Thursday morning with Army radio that Israel was ready to "make painful compromises" to make peace.

He assailed right-wing leaders who have asserted that

Arab nations "no longer have a military option. That is a delusion," and recalled the 1973 Mideast war which took Israel by surprise.

Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the opposition right-wing Likud party, accused Rabin of surrendering.

Netanyahu said Israel was avoiding war because Israeli forces in the Golan Heights were holding Syrian forces in check.

Peres told Jewish fundraisers at a separate meeting that Israel has made "several interesting proposals" to the Syrians. If they respond, he said, "there could be a breakthrough in negotiations."

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Cambodian minister warns

Outlawing Khmers may lead to more bloodshed

PHNOM PENH, June 23: A government move to declare the Khmer Rouge guerrillas outlaws brings the risk of even greater bloodshed for Cambodia, a Cabinet minister warned Thursday, reports AP.

Despite a series of failed talks with the Khmer Rouge since the government was elected in May 1993, there remains hope for a peaceful solution, said Minister of Finance Sam Rainsy.

"We should never get too desperate to find a peaceful solution because nothing is worth the bloodshed," he said in an interview. "We are heading for a big war if we declare the Khmer Rouge outlaws."

"This government will become repressive as those against war will be considered pro-Khmer Rouge," he added. "People will be imprisoned,

tortured, killed, because if they support peace they will be considered a Khmer Rouge accomplice."

"It would be 10 times worse than McCarthyism," he said, using the American term for suppression of political opponents.

Cambodia has been embroiled in war since the Khmer Rouge, which killed hundreds of thousands of people during its 1970s rule, was overthrown in late 1978.

The Khmer Rouge boycotted the 1993 UN-organised poll and has continued fighting to hang on to roughly 15 per cent of the country's territory.

The government had allowed Khmer Rouge representatives to maintain an office in the capital in hopes of negotiating peace, but gave up after another round of talks failed.

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The delegation was welcomed by senior Myanmar commanders, including Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Tin U. Air Force Chief of Staff Major General Tin Ngwe and Navy Chief of Staff Rear Admiral Tin Aye, the radio said.

Led by the commander of the Chengdu military region, General Li Jiu-long, the Chinese also on Wednesday met Myanmar's Army Commander in Chief, General Maung Aye, it said.

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Ghali meets Yemeni leaders today

UNITED NATIONS, June 23: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali will see leaders of North and South Yemen Friday in an effort to get a ceasefire in the country's bitter civil war, UN sources said Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Boutros-Ghali intends to hold separate meetings with Abdul-Karim Al-Irayani, Yemen's Planning and Development Minister, and Haider Abu Bakr Al-Attas, who serves as prime minister for secessionist South Yemen, the sources said.

War broke out between the North and South on May 4 after four years of uneasy political union with Northern Yemeni troops this week surrounding Aden, the Southern capital, and firing on parts of the city with artillery.

Yemen's influential Gulf Arab neighbours to the North were displaying increasing signs of anger that Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh was persisting in his drive to crush his southern rivals.

The Southerners clearly hoped that UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi, who left Cairo empty-handed Monday, would present a report that would lead to some sort of pressure being placed on Sanaa, the Yemeni capital in the North.

Security Council sources said there may be another resolution next week reiterating the 15-member body's demand for a ceasefire, which Boutros-Ghali will also stress in his separate talks with the two leaders.

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BRIEFLY

Algerian troops kill 26 rebels: Algerian security forces killed 26 Muslim rebels in sweeps through two villages, the official Algeria news agency APS said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Tunis.

Tipped off by a former activist, security forces attacked an armed fundamentalist group and killed 23 militants in Tagarmount village, some 320 km (210 miles) southeast of Algiers, APS said quoting an official statement.

Three other militants, armed with shotgun, were killed by security forces the same day in Haouche El Ghir village, 350 km (230 miles) southwest of Algiers.

Yeltsin to sign EU accord: President Boris Yeltsin left for the Greek island of Corfu Thursday to meet with the leaders of the European Union and sign an agreement on partnership and cooperation, the ITAR-Tass news agency said, AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin was scheduled to meet EU leaders at dinner Thursday night and sign the pact on Friday. He will return to Moscow on Saturday, the news agency said.

Under the accord, the EU would phase out quotas on many Russian products and replace them with tariffs. In 1998, the two sides would evaluate Russia's progress towards a market economy and their trade relations and then decide whether to move on to a full-fledged free trade agreement.

Wage board for Indian newsmen: The Union Labour Minister, P A Sangma has said the much-awaited wage board for journalists and non-journalists would soon be formally announced after all the formalities have been completed, PTI reports from Itanagar.

Sangma, who is accompanying the Union Home Minister S B Chavan to the north-east, told newsmen here Wednesday that the former Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court, R K Manisana Singh would be the chairman of the board.

Other members would represent major national organisations of journalists, managements and two representatives of the Union government.

CIA to close 15 posts in Africa: The Central Intelligence Agency is planning to close 15 of its posts in Africa because of budget reductions, the Washington Post reported in Thursday's editions, Reuter reports from Washington.

One result of the proposed CIA action would be to reduce the US presence in more than a dozen African countries, the paper said.

Another would be to cut off ongoing relationships with local intelligence and police, the Post said, citing a top retired CIA official with covert experience in the area.

8 die in Russian chopper crash: Eight people died and three were injured when a helicopter crashed in Russia's autonomous regions of Tatarstan, the Ministry for Emergency Situation said today, Reuter reports from Moscow.

The helicopter, which came down 180 km (110 miles) south west of the regional capital Kazan, was surveying a gas pipeline in the energy-rich region when it crashed on Wednesday.