

Golan Heights are Syrian: Israel

JERUSALEM, July 15: Israel's public admission that the Golan Heights are Syrian has given new impetus to the search for peace ahead of US Secretary of State Warren Christopher's arrival in the region on Monday, reports AFP.

"We have admitted to Syrian sovereignty over the Golan on many occasions," Peres said Thursday.

In fact it was the first public admission of Syrian sovereignty over the plateau Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war and sparked angry reaction from settlers and the right.

Peres was, according to his aides, referring to a secret government decision on June 19, just a few days after the war ended, recognising Syrian sovereignty and offering a withdrawal in exchange for peace and security guarantees.

The national unity government led by Labour Prime Minister Lev Yeshkol with right-wing Likud leader Menachem Begin as a minister, transmitted the decision

to the United States.

The statement from Peres brought added hopes for Christopher's new shuttle between Jerusalem and Damascus after a series of trips back and forth this year failed to achieve a breakthrough.

"It's the first time an Israeli leader has made such a statement in public," Syrian expert Yossi Olmert told AFP of the sovereignty admission.

Christopher's trip will not be a waste of time," predicted Olmert, who took part in secret meetings with Syrian experts late last year. Syria denied the contacts.

Meanwhile, AP from Damascus reports: Syria accused Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Friday of preparing the Israeli army for a new war to capture more Arab land.

A commentary in Al-Baath, the newspaper of Syria's ruling Baathist Party, referred to recent assertions by Rabin that the danger of war had not passed despite the Middle East peace negotiations.

US, India to ensure safety of commercial N-plants

BOMBAY, July 15: India and the United States agreed on Thursday to cooperate to ensure the safety of their commercial nuclear plants, US secretary for Energy Hazel O'Leary said, reports Reuter.

"We have got a great beginning from which to build a relationship which focuses on the question of safety," O'Leary told Reuters in an interview at the end of a visit to India.

The agreement appeared to dilute the suspicions built up on both sides after India exploded a nuclear device 20 years ago. India insists its programme is for peaceful purposes.

Washington wants India to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but New Delhi says it is discriminatory because neighbouring China, with whom it fought a border war in 1962, is already a nuclear weapons power.

O'Leary said NPT did not come up in talks she had with officials, including Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan

Singh. She said the main purpose of the visit was to promote trade and cooperation in the energy sector and urged the Indian government to give counter payment guarantees for power projects undertaken by foreign private sector companies.

She said one trillion dollar worth of development projects had been proposed for developing Asian countries such as India.

While the international funds were available, only those finalised quickly would get them, she warned.

"You have to be seen internationally, not just in the United States, that India is a good place to do business," she said.

On Thursday, she met in Bombay the heads of India's nuclear establishment.

"We agreed today that our two regulatory commissions with responsibility for safety of commercial power reactors begin to exchange visits in the area of nuclear safety and

power plants, have training, exchange of information and informal discussions in other areas that we will later outline," O'Leary said.

O'Leary said it will also lay the ground work for India to sign a convention on nuclear safety.

France last year refused to go on supplying nuclear fuel to India's oldest power station, built by General Electric at Tarapur in the western state of Maharashtra, unless India agreed to accept International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

India has rejected international inspection of its nuclear programme, and says it can supply its own low enriched uranium, in place of the French fuel.

O'Leary said she would not comment on the current level of safety in India's nuclear reactors.

"It is not our role to pass judgement on safety standards in other countries. That is for the convention to do," she added.

India's reactors have been the subject of concern recently. Its Atomic Energy Regulatory Board stopped regulatory work at four nuclear reactors after defects led to the collapse of part of a dome being built at an atomic power plant in the southern state of Karnataka. Fires were reported last year at reactors near Madras and at Narora in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. The Madras Plant was briefly closed for checks.

India has a total nuclear power generating capacity of 1,720 megawatts, which is just 2.5 per cent of its energy needs, most of which are met by thermal power stations and hydro-power.

It has seven operating pressurised heavy water nuclear reactors and two of an earlier design. It is building five more reactors of 220 megawatts each and two of 500 megawatts.

Plants on the drawing board awaiting approval have a combined capacity of another 8,380 megawatts.

Pakistan, Egypt sign extradition treaty

ISLAMABAD, July 15: Pakistan and Egypt signed an extradition treaty on Thursday that would allow Islamabad to extradite Muslim militants wanted by Cairo, reports Reuter.

But visiting Egyptian Justice Minister Farouk Seif-Nasar, who signed the treaty with Pakistani Interior Minister Nasrullah Babar in Islamabad, said his government would not use it to seize former Egyptian Mujahideen guerrillas who fought former Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

"In the treaty both the governments have agreed to surrender the fugitive offenders to each other to face trial and serve the sentence," a Pakistan government statement said.

A Pakistan Foreign Ministry statement quoted Seif-Nasar as saying Cairo's "intention was not to seek the extradition of former Egyptian Mujahideen through the framework of this treaty."

"The objective was only to apprehend those who had engaged in criminal activities and taken refuge in the other country," it quoted him as

telling Pakistani Foreign Minister Asif Ahmed Ali.

Egypt has sent security teams to Pakistan in recent months to find Islamic militants and pressed Islamabad to sign the treaty as part of a crackdown on anti-government fundamentalists.

Pakistan has come under pressure from the United States and several Arab countries, particularly Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, who say Muslim militants use its northwestern town of Peshawar as a safe haven to plan operations elsewhere.

Pakistan blames India for firing

ISLAMABAD, July 15: Pakistan accused India's army Thursday of firing at civilians on the highways near the disputed border that divides the Himalayan state of Kashmir, reports AP.

Army spokesman Brig Gen Mohammed Iqbal said two people were injured when sharpshooters hit a truck last Monday.

BRIEFLY

Dramatic rise in diabetes deaths:

Deaths from diabetes are rising dramatically, the World Health Organisation reported Thursday, adding that there will be 100 million people suffering from the disease by the end of the century, AFP reports from Geneva.

Diabetes is a disease that impairs the ability of the body to use sugar and causes sugar to appear abnormally in the urine.

Specialists quoted by WHO in its report said the rise in the number of diabetes was due in large part to unhealthy lifestyles and fat-rich diets, a lack of physical exercise, obesity and stress.

Huge heroin seized in Britain:

Customs officers said on Thursday they had seized heroin with an estimated value of 25 million pounds (39 million) from a Bulgarian registered lorry at the southern English port of Dover, Reuter reports from London.

The 150 kg (330 lbs) of heroin were found hidden in a false compartment during a random customs check on the lorry after it arrived by overnight ferry from the Belgian port of Zeebrugge.

Customs and Excise said in a statement the Bulgarian driver of the lorry was being questioned about the haul.

Abed Rabbo in Gaza: Palestinian Information and Culture "Minister" Yasser Abed Rabbo arrived in the Gaza Strip on Thursday from Egypt after Israel lifted a ban on him entering the autonomous territory, AFP reports from Gaza City.

Abed Rabbo arrived in the Strip via the Rafah border crossing point. Israel had prevented Abed Rabbo entering the Gaza Strip on Wednesday while a Palestinian militant, Jihad Amarin, remained there.

After his arrival, Abed Rabbo headed for the Palestine hotel where PLO chairman Yasser Arafat was holding a late night meeting with Gaza residents.

Peru extends emergency: A state of emergency in four Peruvian provinces is to be extended by a further 60 days following a decree issued on Thursday, Xinhua reports from Lima.

The four provinces are Cornel Portillo, Padre Abad, Puerto Inca and Ucayali.

The measure is aimed at facilitating operations against terrorism and drug trafficking in those areas, an official source said. The armed forces are authorised to assume control of domestic order during the period.

27 die in Italian gas blast: Twenty-seven people died and seven were injured Thursday when a gas explosion demolished retirement home in Motta Visconti, just outside Milan, rescue workers said, AFP reports from Rome.

The collapse of the 10-year-old building was the most serious in Italy since a six-floor building collapsed in 1985 in the southern town of Castellana.

As residents were gathering for breakfast, an extremely violent explosion shook in the dining hall. I heard a huge explosion and when I looked out of the window there was no retirement home left, a neighbour said, while other witnesses spoke of seeing a blue flame just before the blast.

Pak army team in Lanka: A Pakistan military delegation led by Joint Chief of Staff General Shamim Alam Khan arrived in Colombo Thursday on a three-day goodwill visit, an official statement said, AFP reports from Colombo.

Khan, who is being accompanied by three other senior military officers, is due to pay a courtesy call on President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga before leaving the island Saturday, the statement said.

Immigration official held: An Indonesian immigration official was arrested after shooting at the car of Jakarta's military commander when the general tried to overtake him on a busy toll road, local newspapers said Friday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

A military spokesman said Bambang Rasmintardjo, 41, an employee of the Immigration Office, also fired at police sent to detain him on Thursday.

He said Rasmintardjo did not allow high-profile Jakarta commander Major General Hendropriyono to overtake him on the toll road to Bogor, 60 km (37 miles) south of Jakarta, on Wednesday night. He could not confirm whether shots were fired during the dispute.

Charles, Diana appear at same venue

LONDON, July 15: Prince Charles and his estranged wife Princess Diana on Thursday appeared in public at the same venue for the first time since the heir to the British throne confessed to adultery on nationwide television last month, reports Reuter.

The two arrived separately at the wedding of Lady Sarah Armstrong-Jones, 30, a niece of Queen Elizabeth, to Daniel Chatto, 37, at a 17th-century church in London's city financial district. They both smiled and waved to a cheering crowd.

It was not known whether they greeted each other or acknowledged each other inside the small church.

Congress meet at Red Fort fails to live up to expectation

NEW DELHI, July 15: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao received mixed reviews today for his performance at a giant rally aimed at cementing his position at the helm of the Congress (I) Party, reports AFP.

Rao's speech fails to impress partymen. The Times of India said, adding that the much-ballyhooed party gathering at old Delhi's 17th century Red Fort had failed to live up to expectations.

Congress spokesmen had boasted that more than a million people would gather on the grounds of the Moghul-built Red Fort but no more than 250,000 Congress supporters — braved a scorching sun to attend.

Many of those who did sit

through Rao's 100-minute speech, delivered from behind a bulletproof glass screen, left uninspired, editorial writers said.

The general impression among the party rank-and-file was that the Prime Minister would unfold a new programme of action, give the party a new direction or a new slogan," the Times of India said.

"But Rao's speech was more like a progress report of his government."

The newspaper said that if the purpose of the rally was to bestow upon the 73-year-old Rao the cult-like status enjoyed by his Congress predecessors, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and her son,



Narasimha Rao

Rajiv, then he had fallen far short of the mark.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian Peoples Party) was

predictably critical of the Prime Minister, dismissing his speech as "lacking in credibility, confused and defensive."

It said that the claim by Rao, who launched radical economic reforms after taking power in June 1991, to be following the quasi-socialist economic policies of India's first premier, Nehru, was a "blatant lie."

The business standard asked why the rally was held at all. A charitable explanation could be that Rao, tired of being accused of being a slow starter, has decided to kick off the election campaign early," it said.

Other newspapers agreed that Rao appeared to be laying the groundwork for assembly elections to be held in 10

states later this year and early next year.

Reading between the lines of his speech, several dailies said the Prime Minister had indicated that he may call early general elections.

Parliamentary polls are not due until 1996 but the Economic Times said Rao may intend to hold a general election at the same time as the state assembly polls.

The Asian Age described the Congress rally as "the modern, democratic form of the Roman Triumph, when the victorious general home from the campaigns was awarded his day of glory by the senate."

"The Congress rally was an offering from a party to a leader who has rescued it from faltering circumstances and

40 killed in Turkish clashes

ANKARA, July 15: Thirty-two rebel Kurds and eight members of the Turkish Security Forces were killed in clashes, officials said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Interior Minister Nihat Mentese said at least 20 members of the outlawed Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) were killed in a clash with security forces in the eastern border province of Kars on Thursday.

Eight soldiers were killed in the clash, near Kagizman town close to the Armenian border, the Anatolian News Agency quoted him as saying.

Twelve rebels were killed in another clash in the south-eastern province of Hakkari, security officials in Diyarbakir City said.

They did not say when the fighting took place.

Troops searching the mountainous area near the Iraqi border found the bodies of three rebels believed killed in earlier fighting and seized 199 hand grenades and 103 rocket propelled grenades and ammunition.

Aristide demands int'l swift action against military

WASHINGTON, July 15: Exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on Thursday demanded "swift and definitive" action by the international community to oust the military rulers in his country, reports Reuter.

But he said in a statement he was constitutionally prohibited himself from calling for military intervention.

Such action is now being weighed by the United States to restore Aristide, ousted in September 1991 coup, to power.

Aristide, referring to the Governors Island Agreement of July last year in which the military leaders promised to step aside, said: "I do not speak on behalf of the international community but I remain confident that it will respond to the flagrant violations of an agreement to which it is a party."

He added: "It is up to the international community to take swift and definitive action to ensure compliance by the coup leaders with the Governors Island Agreement."

President Clinton has repeatedly stated that military intervention is an option for ousting the Haitian military, which has defied a raft of international sanctions imposed by the United Nations.

Although senior officials say no invasion is imminent, a flotilla of US warships some carrying marines, has been sent to the waters off the Caribbean state and US forces have practised exercises they would need to evacuate US civilians if they invaded.

Off the Record

Too high a price for fashion

KUALA LUMPUR: A Malaysian woman, who lost both her breasts after a breast enlargement job, has sued the beauty salon operator who performed the therapy, the New Straits Times newspaper reported yesterday, says Reuter.

Soo Yok Lin, who has had mastectomy to both her breasts, is claiming up to 22,493 ringgit (dollar 8,680) in damages in her suit filed in a Kuala Lumpur court on Thursday.

Soo alleged Lee Yoke Sim, who owned the beauty salon, performed breast enlargement on her using firming methods and injections without advising her on the side-effects earlier this year.

She said Lee first treated her with a breast firming machine but introduced injections when her breast size did not increase.

Crime worse than murder

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani court sentenced a Muslim clergyman on Thursday to 30 years in prison for torturing and mutilating his wife, the state television said, reports Reuter.

The court in Rawalpindi, near Islamabad, also ordered Mohammad Sharif to pay a fine of 210,000 rupees.

Sharif, prayer leader of a mosque in Punjab province, was charged with inserting a red-hot iron bar into the vagina of his wife last February after a dispute between the couple.

The incident aroused a new outcry for women's rights and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first woman leader, called for a moral crusade against violence on women.

On Bhutto's orders, Sharif's 24 year old wife, Zainab Noor, was treated in a London hospital and returned last month. Zainab was brought to a Rawalpindi hospital in February by her husband who told doctors she had fallen on a burning oil stove.

Doctors became suspicious when they found serious internal burns and Zainab later said her husband had become angry, tied her up and inserted the red-hot iron rod into her womb.

Bhutto's nine-month-old government has already begun setting up separate police stations run by women to help women victims of violence and appointed women judges.

Royal skeletons on display

BEIJING: China is, for the first time, exhibiting skeletons of five princes and two princesses who were killed by their brother in a palace coup 2,200 years ago, reports AP.

The skeletons were unearthed nearly 20 years ago in the burial grounds of Qin Shi Huang, China's first emperor who ruled from 259 B.C. to 210 B.C., the official Xinhua News Agency said.

The skeletons are those of Qin Shihuang's children, who were killed by their brother, Hu He, in a palace coup after Qin's death, Xinhua said. Hu He ruled as the second emperor of the Qin dynasty until 207 B.C.

The skeletons were dismembered, and one was found with a bronze arrowhead behind the ear, indicating they suffered a "miserable death," Xinhua said.



Bosnian nurse Vera (C) holds up the two five-day-old babies Edis (L) and Zlatan in Sarajevo's maternity ward on Thursday. Sarajevo's main Kosevo hospital is expecting 2,300 births this year, about 1,000 more than last year according to the hospital's gynaecologist doctor Sreco Simic (R). — AFP photo

UN inspectors leave for Iraq

MANAMA, July 15: A United Nations inspection team left for Baghdad today to study Iraq's missile research and development programme, a UN official said, reports Reuter.

Spokesman Roald Opsahl said the 10-member team, headed by Norbert Retenke of Germany, would stay in Iraq for 10 days.

UN teams are pressing to set up long-term monitoring of Iraqi facilities related to its banned weapons systems, a prerequisite to easing or lifting an oil and trade embargo.

The testing programme is expected to last a minimum of six months after which the Security Council can consider lifting the embargo, imposed on Baghdad in 1990 for invading Kuwait.