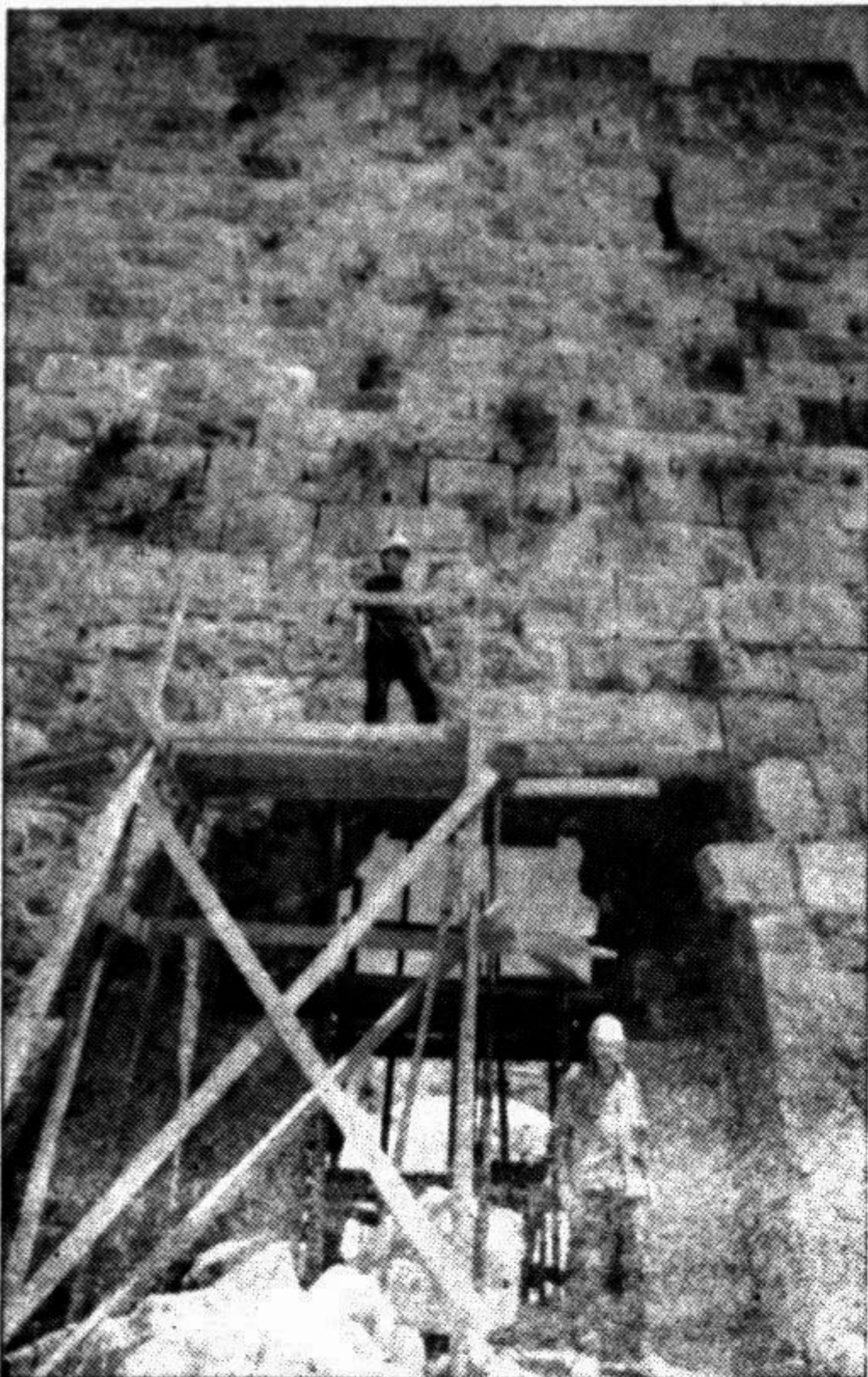


BRIEFLY



Workers open Thursday, a 15th century gate found in the walls of Jerusalem's Old City. The small, 2 by 1.5 metres high gate was used for people on foot and was sealed in the 16th century by the Turks. Seven gates give access to the Old City on Friday, while an eighth, the Golden Gate on the Temple Mount, is sealed, awaiting, according to tradition, the Messiah. — AFP/UNB photo

Thai "Bloody May" suit dismissed: A Thai court Friday dismissed a 10 million baht (dhs 400,000) civil suit against Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon, former prime minister and leader of the military group responsible for a violent crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in May 1992. AP reports from Bangkok.

At least 52 people were killed, more than 700 injured and several dozen are still listed as missing from the events known as "Bloody May," when troops in Bangkok opened fire on unarmed protesters who were demanding Suchinda resign as prime minister.

Tigers kill Buddhist priest: Sri Lankan Tamil rebels shot dead a leading Buddhist priest and long-time critic of the rebel cause yesterday in the north central Polonnaruwa district, police said. Reuter reports from Colombo.

The "Dibulagala Priest," as he was commonly called, was known for his hard-line stand against the mainly Hindu Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, fighting for a homeland in the north and east of majority Buddhist Sinhalese Sri Lanka.

Rebels opened fire on the high priest of the Dibulagala temple, who sometimes carried a handgun, as he was travelling in his car, killing him and his driver, police said.

Manila-Singapore normal ties soon: President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines was quoted Friday as saying he expects to restore normal relations with Singapore soon, possible next month. AP reports from Hong Kong.

Both countries recalled their ambassadors last March after Singapore hanged a Filipino maid, Flor Contemplacion, who was convicted of murdering another Filipino maid and a Singaporean child. Many in the Philippines believed Contemplacion was framed.

Blast kills 8 Kurds in Turkey: A powerful bomb left at bus stop exploded Thursday in southeastern Turkey, killing eight Kurds, including four children. AP reports from Diyarbakir, Turkey.

The bomb went off at a bus stop in the centre of city of Batman. It exploded at 5:30 pm as villagers waited for buses to take them home. Twenty were injured, many losing limbs, the regional governor's office said in a statement.

China cancels minister's US trip: Angered by President Clinton's decision to allow Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui to make a private visit to the United States, China announced Friday that it had cancelled a US trip by its defence minister, Chi Hsiang-shan. AP reports from Beijing.

Chi, who also has a state commission, was expected to travel to the United States in mid-June to reciprocate a visit by US Defence Secretary William Perry last December. The Foreign Ministry announced in a statement carried on the national evening news.

7 Filipinos die in bus crash: Seven people were killed and 11 others injured in a bus crash on a motorway near Manila, the official Philippine News Agency (PNA) said yesterday. AFP reports from Manila.

A small bus stayed off its lane and crossed into oncoming traffic in heavy rain late Thursday, then smashed into a larger shuttle bus at the South Expressway in Muntinlupa town, PNA said, quoting police investigators.

Ebola toll rises to 121 in Zaire: The death toll in Zaire's ebola virus outbreak has risen from 108 to 121, a Zairean committee helping fight the disease said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Kinshasa.

The number of confirmed cases of the disease, for which there is no known vaccine or cure, had risen from 144 to 160, it added in a statement.

Sailor dies as vessels collide: A seaman was killed when two ocean-going vessels collided in the busy Strait of Malacca off Malaysia's southwestern Negeri Sembilan state. Malaysian port officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

5 more killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, May 26: Five more people were shot dead on Thursday including two soldiers and a police officer while five people, including a pupil, were injured when gunmen opened fire on a school here, officials said, reports AFP.

The bullet-riddled bodies of the soldiers, abducted earlier by unidentified people, were recovered late Thursday, officials said.

One of the soldiers worked at the air defence regiment while the other was employed at an infantry regiment, the officials said adding that both men had been on leave.

NATO air strikes to continue until Serbs halt attacks

ROME, May 26: NATO will continue "robust" air strikes until they achieve their goal of halting Serb attacks. US Defence Secretary William Perry predicted Friday, reports AP.

Perry, speaking at a news conference with Italian Defence Minister Domenico Corcione, refused to give any details about renewed NATO air strikes against a Serb ammunition dump outside Sarajevo.

But Perry indicated that NATO, which had unleashed allied aircraft against the Bosnian Serb ammunition depot on Thursday, would keep up the attacks for some time.

"I fully support the NATO action. I believe it will be a robust action, a vigorous action. I believe it will be effective," Perry predicted.

A NATO statement issued in Brussels confirmed that allied war planes had again hit the

Serb ammunition dump located near the Bosnian Serb stronghold of Pale, and that initial reports indicated the strike was successful.

Reuter from London adds: British Defence Minister Malcolm Rifkind said today that fresh NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serb positions were virtually inevitable.

"The situation is now extremely grave," he told BBC radio. "I think it must be expected that some kind of action will follow."

The Serbs were given an ultimatum to clear the hills around Sarajevo of illegal guns and tanks by noon (1000 GMT) today or face new air strikes.

Another report from Moscow says: President Boris Yeltsin today showed little sympathy for Bosnian Serbs targeted by NATO air strikes,

saying they had not heeded Russian warnings to halt military activity.

But he added that Moscow had warned Serb leaders that if they did not stop their military activity Bosnian Serb positions would be bombed by NATO.

"They did not do this (stop military activity) and so they got it," he said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that a NATO strike against Bosnian Serb military targets had been one-sided and would not help end the conflict there.

AFP from Paris adds: France today urged the international community not to accept the escalation of fighting in Bosnia and said Prime Minister Alain Juppe would chair a special cabinet meeting to decide on the necessary response.

UN officials say 65 people were killed and 115 wounded after Bosnian Serbs fired shells into five Bosnian towns in the worst massacre since a Sarajevo market was hit in February 1994. The attacks were apparently in retaliation for Thursday's NATO air strikes against a Bosnian Serb ammunition depot near Sarajevo.

Government spokesman Francois Baroin, in an interview on RMC radio, said "the international community must not accept this escalation."

"France's position under Alain Juppe when he was foreign minister was to stand very firm," Baroin said.

"This position," he added, "has been strongly reiterated following the unacceptable reaction of the Bosnian Serbs overnight to the allied operation."

SNP overwhelms Tories in crucial by-election

PERTH, Scotland, May 26: Scottish Nationalists overwhelmed Britain's ruling Conservatives in a crucial by-election on Thursday that reduced Prime Minister John Major's parliamentary to 11 in the 651-seat House of Commons, reports Reuter.

In a result announced early on Friday morning, Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) candidate Roseanna Cunningham took the traditionally safe Conservative seat of Perth and Ninross with a majority of 7,311. The seat was left vacant by the death of Maverick Conservative Sir Nicholas Fairbairn.

The conservative candidate, London banker John Godfrey, failed to bring out his predecessor's considerable personal vote and was pushed into third place by Labour's Douglas Alexander. "For 16 years Scots have been humiliated by a Tory (Conservative) government," Cunningham said after the re-

sult was announced. "Tonight Scots have humiliated the government."

Labour came a poor third in the 1992 general election, which Cunningham lost to Fairbairn by 2,094 votes.

Despite her 1992 performance, Cunningham was dropped and was only reinstated as SNP candidate after grassroots protests.

"We've never done well in this area before," said George Robertson, Scottish Labour's leading politician. "But this is a crisis for the government — we're the only party to increase its 1992 general election vote."

"We hammered the Tories and on this showing would take four more of their seats in a general election."

Alexander notched up 9,620 votes to Godfrey's 8,990. Veronica Linklater gained 4,932 for the Liberal Democrats.

Anti-election campaign begins in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, May 26: Pro militant activists launched a campaign on Friday aimed at preventing India from holding the first legislative election in Kashmir in nine years, reports AP.

Members of the All Party Freedom Conference, an umbrella organisation of more than 30 political and religious groups in Kashmir, formed a motorcade of 17 cars and buses and drove from Srinagar toward the town of Pulwama for an anti-election rally.

"We want freedom! No election!" a group of several hundred militant supporters shouted from the streets of Srinagar as the convoy left and began its campaign.

The All Party Freedom Conference plans to hold as many protests as possible around Jammu-Kashmir state, urging people to boycott the election that the government

plans to hold in July. Since late 1989, Indian soldiers have been battling Muslim militants fighting for Jammu-Kashmir's independence from India. More than 11,000 people have been killed in the insurrection in the only predominantly Muslim state in mostly Hindu India.

Most of the state's militant organisations have said they would boycott an election. Instead, they want a plebiscite asking voters whether they want to remain part of India, become independent, or become part of neighboring Islamic Pakistan.

Pakistan, which controls part of Kashmir and has fought two wars with India over the territory, supports the Kashmiri militants in Jammu-Kashmir and reportedly arms some of them.

India's federal government has ruled the state since dismissing its legislature in January 1990, about four years after the lawmakers had been elected.

They are congenitally incapable of telling the truth. They were born that way," Mahathir was quoted as saying by the national Bernama news agency. BBC officials were not immediately available for comment.



Queen Sirikit (R) of Thailand receives an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters during ceremonies at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD, on Thursday. The degree honours the queen's lifetime of humanitarianism and devotion to her homeland. — AFP/UNB photo

Cabinet reshuffle likely in mid-June Rao faces another challenge

NEW DELHI, May 26: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao already grappling with a damaging rift in his Congress (I) Party, was facing another challenge today as legislators demanded the sacking of corrupt ministers, reports AFP.

The Hindustan Times said 33 Congress MPs had urged Rao in a joint letter to drop at least six allegedly corrupt members of his cabinet, saying venality and inefficiency were responsible for the party's debacle in recent state polls.

The MPs "pointed to the party leadership's continued dithering on pruning the council of ministers of elements who have failed to deliver the goods and against whom charges of corruption are being levelled," the newspaper said.

Rao's opponents within the cabinet did not identify the six ministers whose resignations were being sought.

The 73-year-old premier dropped three members of his cabinet under pressure last year but several other prominent ministers remain under a cloud.

The Hindustan Times quoted sources close to the prime minister as saying that Rao had told the parliamentarians he would take "action" in the second week of June, after returning from a foreign tour.

The Times of India reported this week that Rao would carry out a cabinet reshuffle in mid-June, including 14 ministers and shifting three or four to party organisational work at the grassroots level.

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China executes 12 for robbing artifacts

BEIJING, May 26: China executed 12 people on Thursday for robbing graves and trafficking in priceless cultural artifacts in Shanxi and Hubei provinces, the official Xinhua news agency said, reports Reuter.

Four public security officials were imprisoned for abuse of office while investigating two of the cases, Xinhua quoted Supreme People's Court Vice President Liu Jiachen as saying.

Liu said the executions should send a signal that Beijing was serious about halting the theft of China's cultural heritage and that a specialised national crackdown was planned for 1995.

Russian police still using 'human weapons'

BERLIN, May 26: A method developed by the Soviet KGB that turned soldiers and security agents into programmable "human weapons" is still being used by Russian police, it was reported on Thursday, reports AP.

The psycho-weapon relies on hypnosis and high-frequency radio waves to turn people into fearless, conscienceless fighting machines. Germany's respected ARD television said in a report.

Depending on the treatment, it can be activated through code words or cyphers.

Developed beginning in the 1970s as a top secret project, the method was first publicised early this year at a conference in Russia sponsored by the Glasnost Foundation of former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, ARD reported.

"This is the destruction of the human intellect," former project leader Valery Kaniuka said in the report by ARD's Panorama programme.

Russia-Chechnya talks yield no result

GROZNY, Russia, May 26: The long-running peace talks between Russia and Chechnya yesterday yielded no result, reports Reuter.

Nikolai Semenov, the senior Russian official at Thursday's meeting in the shattered capital Grozny, said the two sides had agreed to keep on talking.

Yet the protagonists' negotiating positions were so far apart it seemed unlikely any breakthrough would be made soon.

Chief Chechen spokesman Movladi Udugov said the rebels still insisted Moscow withdraw the troops it sent into the region last December if, a demand the Kremlin always dismisses.

In turn, the rebels appeared very unlikely to hand over all their weapons as Russia demands.

Off the Record

Wins on principle, loses in fact

TORONTO: Jim Egan and Jack Nesbit won a point Thursday when the Supreme Court ruled discrimination against gays is illegal. But they still lost their case with the court's refusal to award federal spousal pension benefits to gay couples, reports AP.

The court ruled that Canada's Charter of Rights prohibits discrimination against homosexuals. It further ruled that gay couples are more eligible for the same pension benefits as married or common law couples.

"Yes, we lost the case," Egan said in a telephone interview from his home in Courtenay, British Columbia. "But I would hardly describe it as a landslide victory for the opposition."

Egan, 73, and Nesbit, 67, have been a couple since they met 1948, exchanging rings and living a life that in most ways mirrors traditional marriages. The pair went into business together.

When Egan retired and began to receive his pension in 1986 under Canada's Old Age Security Act, he applied for spousal benefits for Nesbit. He was refused on the grounds that the Act defines spouse as someone of the opposite sex.

..... to preach homeopathy!

BRIGHTON: A man who lunged at Prince Charles on Thursday in an apparent attempt to preach homeopathy was tackled to the ground by police, reports AP.

The bearded, barefoot man, wearing shorts and a T-shirt, broke through police lines and thrust a leaflet on the benefits of homeopathy at the prince, but did not touch him.

The unidentified man headbutted a policeman during the ensuing struggle. He was handcuffed and taken into police custody. The prince was bundled into his limousine.

Prince Charles was in the southeastern coastal city of Brighton to unveil a commemorative plaque at the restored Victoria Fountain, named for his great-great-grandmother.

Animal rights activists who protested the visit said the man was not from among them.

The prince is an avid fox hunter. The protesters shouted, "Go Home You Animal Abuser."

Mine in fishing net instead of fish

CHARLESTON: A fisherman who thought he had caught a weather buoy in his nets instead hauled ashore a World War II-era mine, causing authorities to evacuate a 500-foot (150-meter) area and call in a bomb squad, reports AP.

There was no danger, the US Navy experts said Thursday. The explosives had long ago seeped out of the now-harmless casing.

A live mine of this type during World War II carried 300 pounds (135 kilograms) of TNT, enough to scatter shrapnel as far as a mile (1.6 kilometers).

A state fish and game warden spotted the mine in Scott Hockema's boat while checking boats in the Charleston basin and called police, county sheriff's Lt Dale Willis said.

Hockema said the mine had come up in his nets Sunday from 3,000 feet (900 meters) deep, 20 miles (32 kilometers) west of Coos Bay.

"They really made a big deal out of it," he said. "I didn't know it was a bomb."

5 lakh Iraqi Kurds may face starvation: WFP

ARBA, Iraq, May 26: About 500,000 Iraqi Kurds could face starvation if international donors fail to pay for food aid to northern Iraq, officials from the World Food Programme (WFP) warned Thursday.

Desperate parents have offered their children to rich families hoping they might be fed, and some have even had to be stopped from poisoning their offspring, Kurdish officials and residents told AFP.

"What we distributed last month did not cover the basic needs, nor did it the month before," Abdurhaman Meygag, head of the Arbil branch of the WFP, said.

Necim Oman Surtshi, secretary of the Conservative Party of Kurdistan (CPK), said some parents had offered their children to rich families "not as slaves, but in the hope that rich people will feed them."

Lack of funds have already

Israel willing to withdraw fully from Golan Heights

JERUSALEM, May 26: Israel, buoyed by fresh progress in the US-brokered peace process with Syria, has inched closer to unveiling its trump card in the cagey talks — willingness to withdraw fully from the Golan Heights, reports Reuter.

US special Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross hailed as "an important development" the surprise Israeli-Syrian accord that paves the way for detailed talks on security arrangements.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres linked the crucial Golan issue on Thursday to the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty,

forged through agreement to a total withdrawal from Sinai, which like the Heights was captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war.

The price is the price that we paid also in the Egyptian matter," Peres told leaders of the ruling Labour.

Although the price of peace with Damascus doesn't have to be identical," Peres said, the former Likud government set a precedent regarding Egypt, and we cannot run away from it."

He added: "There is no Syrian that I know who is willing to be less than an Egyptians."

Washington said on Wednesday Israel and Syria had agreed on a framework enabling detailed talks between military experts, frozen since the countries' army chiefs met last December.

Israel's abrupt suspension this week of a plan to seize Arab land for Jewish housing in East Jerusalem — a freeze reluctantly ordered by a shame-faced Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to stave off the fall of his government — contributed to the progress on the Syrian track, Ross said on Thursday.

The framework was welcomed by Syria, the PLO, Jordan, and Egypt, all vigorous opponents of the proposed land grab. Cairo said the accord could lead to Israeli-Syrian peace next year.

But Rabin cautioned that gaps were still wide over the Golan, which has kept talks mired since they began in 1991.

Peres agreed, "this is not yet a breakthrough, most of the work lies ahead of us," he said.

The sides, once arch-enemies, have shadow boxed for years over Syria's insistence on a total pull out from the Golan.

Rabin has kept Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad questioning about the exact withdrawal Israel is willing to make, holding out for progress in normalisation or security arrangements.

Both Rabin and the White House feel 1996 election campaigns closing in and would dearly like to crown Arab-Israeli moves with a peace treaty with Syria, the region's cornerstone.

Rabin accused Likud opposition leader Benkamin Netanyahu of having suggested to Syria's leadership that it would reap more extensive concessions from Israel if it waited to make peace with a victorious

Likud after the November 1996 election.

Netanyahu, denying the charge, said Rabin wanted to trade away the full Golan, rendering northern Israel "indefensible".

Israel has said that Syria, while still demanding return of the entire Golan, no longer insisted that Israel agree in advance that security arrangements be equal.

Israel argues that, because it is smaller than Syria, it should not be required to demilitarise as much territory along its side of the future border.

Aum men planned to attack Diet, PM's residence

TOKYO, May 26: Several hundred members of the Aum supreme truth sect planned to attack the prime minister's residence and parliament in November while radio-controlled model helicopters spread deadly Sarin gas on the city, the Sankai Shimbun reported today, says AFP.

The information came in a confession from the sect's chief doctor, Ikuo Hayashi, 48, said the newspaper, citing police sources.

The sect is suspected of being behind the March 20 Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway.