

Israel may dismantle one settlement in Golan

JERUSALEM, May 27: In an apparent nod to Syria, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Friday that Israel may dismantle one settlement in the Golan Heights during the first stage of a peace treaty, reports AP.

It was the first time Rabin answered a Syrian demand that Israel withdraw from the Golan Heights immediately after the two sides sign a treaty.

The possibility that Israel would set a precedent by withdrawing from a single settlement in the first stage has been raised in past negotiations between the sides, but Israel has never publicly agreed to this.

"At the most one settlement," Rabin said, speaking on national television's top rated news programme.

Israel has been insisting on its demand that once the two sides negotiate a treaty, which would entail a significant Israeli withdrawal from the Golan in exchange for peace, there would be a test period of normalised relations before the evacuation takes place.

Rabin said one issue of debate between Israel and the Syrians was "how to ensure that we will implement and test for approximately three years the full normalisation of relations before we reach the peace border, and while we have only carried out a very limited withdrawal."

He said the initial withdrawal "would be more symbolic than geographic."

With the majority of television sets tuned in, Rabin appeared to be gearing the Israeli public for the renewal of negotiations with Syria, which were revived on Wednesday by an agreement on the framework of security arrangements.

The interview followed comments by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on Thursday, which indicated Israel was ready to meet Syria's demand to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights in exchange for peace.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from the Syrians during the 1967 Middle East War. Since then, some 11,000 Israelis have settled in the area.

DPRK threatens to fight 2nd war with US on Korean peninsula

SEOUL, May 27: North Korea, accusing Washington of planning a nuclear calamity, said Saturday it is ready to fight a second war with the United States on the heavily armed Korean peninsula, reports AP.

The harsh remarks by the communist party organ Rodong Sinmun came while US and North Korean negotiators met in Kuala Lumpur for a fifth session of deadlocked talks on replacing the North's nuclear programme suspected of weapons development.

"If the United States continues to take the adventurous road to war, ignoring our peace overtures, military conflicts are inevitable," the North's official Korea Central News Agency quoted Rodong Sinmun as saying.

Although Rodong did not directly touch on the ongoing nuclear talks, changes in rhetoric of the North's tightly controlled media provide insights into policies of the reclusive country's leadership.

The North accused Washington of shipping in large quantities of planes, tanks, missiles and other sophisticated weaponry into South Korea.

"The bellicose elements of the United States are resorting to adventures to unleash a nuclear war on the Korean peninsula," KCNA said.

US military officials in Seoul have said the latest shipments have nothing to do with the nuclear tensions and are part of the regular modernisation programme for the 37,000 American troops stationed in South Korea.

North Korea has been trying to dismantle an armistice that has been in effect since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War and sign a peace treaty directly with Washington, snubbing rival South Korea.

Washington insists any peace treaty must be negotiated between the two Koreas, which technically remain at war. Their border is the

world's most heavily armed, with nearly 2 million troops deployed on both sides.

Tensions rose sharply over the past year because of suspicions that the North is running a clandestine nuclear weapons programme.

AFP adds: North Korea today strongly hinted that it had devised a face-saving formula to allow it to accept light-water reactors from its rival South Korea, if they are properly labelled.

Pyeongyang's mouthpiece, the KCNA, quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying that North Korea did not place much importance on where the reactors are manufactured, but were more concerned on which country's technology and design they are based on.

The spokesman denied press reports that the US-North Korea nuclear talks, now underway in Kuala Lumpur, were deadlocked because of the North's rejection of South Korean model light-water reactors.

"We have consistently maintained that we attack importance to what country's technology and design the reactors are based on and that we do not give much importance to where they are manufactured," he said.

"The problem is that the US side, motivated by another purpose, insists on offering light-water reactors to the DPRK (North Korea), labelling them as a South Korean model, although they are based on US technology and design."

He said there was no such thing as a South Korean model light-water reactor, if there are then they are based on technology and design of "the suzerain state," referring to the United States.

North Korea and the United States reached an agreement in Geneva last October, on freezing and eventually tearing down its suspect nuclear facilities in return for two 1,900-megawatt light-water reactors.

India won't sign NPT in its present form

NEW YORK, May 27: External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee has said India will not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in its present form but will continue to work for "genuine" non-proliferation through elimination of all nuclear weapons, reports PTI.

"It is our conviction that only a time-bound programme for elimination of all nuclear weapons will provide the framework for effective progress towards genuine non-proliferation," he said, addressing a luncheon meeting of the council on foreign relations here yesterday.

Mukherjee emphasised India's commitment to human rights but said terrorist violence in Kashmir and elsewhere in the country would be met by security forces with "adequate force."

"No government has succeeded in combating terrorism without the use of force," he said.

However, vigilance would be maintained to prevent violation of human rights, Mukherjee said, adding all serious allegations would be investigated and violators punished.

"India has nothing to hide. Kashmir is freely accessible to Indians and foreigners, individuals and media, and Delhi-based diplomats frequently visit the state," the minister said.

Saying India lives in a "tough neighbourhood" and faces many potential dangers in the region, Mukherjee rejected any regional approach to non-proliferation.

"The procurement of nuclear material, weapon technology and delivery systems by countries such as Pakistan through subterfuge and clandestine means call into question the effectiveness of NPT and various ad hoc export regimes," he said.

Emphasising free access to high technology, Mukherjee said "It is specially important to India which is undertaking economic transformation and which has always favoured the US as the source for high technology products."

BRIEFLY

Blast in Heathrow Airport: The Emir of Kuwait was caught in a security scare when an explosion shook the royal lounge at London's Heathrow Airport on Friday, Reuters reports from London.

There was a huge bang and you could feel the ground shake. It was just like a bomb going off. Everyone immediately thought there had been some sort of terrorist attack," said one airport worker.

2 LTTE rebels killed: Two Tamil rebels were killed in northern Sri Lanka as clashes continued between the guerillas and government troops, a military spokesman said Saturday, AP reports from Colombo.

Troops on patrol clashed with the rebels on Friday near the Pooneryn army camp, 280 kilometers (175 miles) north of Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital, a military spokesman said.

Also Friday, the guerillas attacked a fishing village of Sinhalese and Muslim people in northeastern Sri Lanka and killed at least 42 of them.

US senators meet Ramiro: Two US senators met with President Ramiro de Leon Carpio on Friday to discuss the deaths of an American innkeeper and a Guatemalan rebel who was the husband of an American lawyer, AP reports from Guatemala City.

Sen Arlen Specter, chairman of the Senate Intelligence committee, and Sen Michael DeWine were investigating the deaths of American innkeeper Michael Devine and Efrain Bama, a guerilla and husband of American lawyer Jennifer Harbury.

Peres arrives in Rabat: Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres arrived in Morocco Friday for surprise weekend talks with PLO chief Yasser Arafat, AP reports from Rabat.

There were no immediate details about the agenda of the meeting, which comes less than one week after Israel froze plans to confiscate an additional 53 hectares (140 acres) of mostly Arab land in Jerusalem.

Nepalese minister resigns: A Nepalese minister resigned after he failed to get elected to Parliament, officials said Saturday, AP reports from Kathmandu.

Hari Prasad Pandey was included in Prime Minister Manmohan Adhikari's cabinet as the minister of state for water resources and industry. Under the constitution, a non-elected member is required to become a lawmaker within six months. Pandey was left with no choice as he failed to do so.

Ramos' allies leading in polls: Special congressional and local elections were held in two predominantly Muslim provinces in the southern Philippines yesterday as allies of President Fidel Ramos maintain their lead in the slow count of senatorial votes, AFP reports from Manila.

Spokesmen of the commission on elections said special polls were being held in Sulu and Maguindanao after the elections there on May 8 were declared void due to cheating and fighting between rival political factions.

Canadian official to visit Lanka: The Canadian secretary of state will visit Colombo next week and try to end Sri Lanka's escalating civil war, the Canadian high commissioner said Saturday, AP reports from Colombo.

Raymond Chan will hold discussions with Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and Deputy Foreign Minister D P Wickramasinghe during his three-day visit.

Explosions rock Aden: Huge explosions rocked the southern Yemeni city of Aden yesterday and witnesses said several people were injured, Reuters reports from Yemen.

They said explosions started with a blast apparently from Jabal Hadeed (steel mountain), known to be the site of ammunition dumps, in central Aden on the coast and continued for about 30 minutes.

Delay in Kashmir polls likely: India's chief election commissioner indicated Saturday that it may not be possible in July to hold the first legislative election in strife-torn Kashmir in eight years, AP reports from Srinagar.

Many Kashmiri politicians and state government officials feel that conditions are not right for a ballot, said T N Seshan who travelled to Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu-Kashmir state, from New Delhi to assess the situation.

Rwanda stops genocide arrests

NAIROBI, Kenya, May 27: Rwanda says it has stopped arresting all but the most serious suspects in ethnic massacres last year, blaming prisons so overcrowded that prisoners are suffocating, reports AP.

Interior Minister Seth Sendashonga, in a Rwanda radio broadcast monitored in Kenya Saturday, didn't say how many prisoners had died.

Rwanda's prisons were built to accommodate a total of 6,000 inmates, but the population has swelled to 35,000 since last July. In March, 74 inmates were crowded into one small cell in a Kigali jail.

Nationwide strike protests Pak bid to alter blasphemy law

KAWALPINDI, May 27: Police fired tear gas to disperse 500 Muslim demonstrators in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi today during a nationwide strike against government plans to alter a controversial blasphemy law, reports Reuters.

Witnesses said police used tear gas after some of the protesters stopped traffic and smashed windcreens of vehicles in a busy district of Rawalpindi near the capital Islamabad.

In a separate incident, Shiite Muslim protesters lay down to block a main road, but police dragged them away, clubbing them with riot sticks. At least two were arrested.

Shops were closed and traffic was thin in other Pakistani cities in response to the strike called by the National Solidarity Council, an alliance of 13 religious groups.

In Karachi, gunfire wounded a milkman and a 15-year-old boy and youngsters burned tyres in several districts, witnesses said. University examinations were cancelled in Lahore, capital of Punjab province, where most markets were shut.

Muslim conservatives have



French President Jacques Chirac (L) receives Friday the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, at the Elysee Palace in Paris. The Emir is on a private visit to France after a four-day state visit in the United Kingdom. — AFP/UNB photo

India likely to have another hung parliament

NEW DELHI, May 27: A split in India's ruling Congress (I) Party has put the opposition in the driver's seat ahead of general elections next year, but the worries of political uncertainty refuse to go away, reports AP.

The rift — the third in the Congress' 110-year history — has further weakened a party already losing ground rapidly across the country, forcing political analysts to predict a third consecutive hung parliament.

Few in the Congress are hopeful of retaining power in the nationwide polls in early 1996 after nearly five years of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's innings.

"Our hopes were not high even before, after last week's split, no one can say whether our party will even get a simple majority," a Congress MP said. "It will be a miracle if we make it in the next elections."

The Congress broke up on May 19 when Rao's critics elected a foe of the 73-year-old prime minister as a rival party president at a convention attended by tens of thousands of activists here.

It marked the culmination of a leadership tussle that split into the open when Rao's deputy in the cabinet, Arjun Singh, quit in December after the party was mauled in two key state elections.

The Congress' split, on top of the steady erosion of its support base, has predictably

been welcomed by the opposition, which is determined to unseat the country's oldest political party.

"With the split, the Congress is out and my party is in," boasted Sushma Swaraj of the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), the main opposition party.

But most others in the opposition have their fingers crossed.

Prakash Karat, a communist leader, said the Congress would not be able to win more than 150 seats in the 545-seat parliament, while the BJP would fail to substantially improve its present tally of 119 MPs.



Palestinian landowner Sheikh Khalil Amiri, 58, leads a protest prayer in a football field, Friday, on a land of 175 hectares confiscated by Israel in 1991 in the Arab Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sur Baher. Same 200 residents of the area gathered. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has given his go ahead for 6,500 housing units to be built for Jews on this land, after cancelling the expropriation of 53 hectares in other parts of East Jerusalem. — AFP/UNB photo

Opposition urges embargo on Myanmar junta

BANGKOK, May 27: Opposition groups called for a worldwide arms and economic embargo of military-run Myanmar Saturday, the fifth anniversary of a general election won by pro-democracy parties which were subsequently suppressed, reports AP.

A statement from three groups also urged the Association of Southeast Asian Nations not to invite Myanmar to its annual meeting in July and to unconditionally release detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy swept the 1990 general elections, but the junta refused to accept the results and instead jailed or silenced its opponents.

France calls urgent NATO meeting

BRUSSELS, Belgium, May 27: France called an emergency meeting of ambassadors from the 16 NATO nations Saturday to discuss the escalating war in Bosnia, reports AP.

France called the meeting late Friday night and the envoys were scheduled to meet midday (1000 GMT) at alliance headquarters here.

Officials of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) said they did not know what exactly the French wanted to discuss.

French President Jacques Chirac on Saturday morning held an urgent meeting on Bosnia with Premier Alain Juppe and other top officials.

Chirac on Friday said he'll pull his country's peacekeepers out of the UN force in Bosnia if they're not better protected.

Lankan troops start hunt for rebels

COLOMBO, May 27: Sri Lanka troops today began hunting through the country's eastern jungles for the Tamil rebels who killed 42 villagers on Friday, a military spokesman said, reports Reuters.

"We are conducting clearing operations in the area," he said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting of their own homeland in the north and east of the country, opened fire on about 65 families living in the fishing village of Kalaruwa in the eastern Trincomalee district, the first major attack on civilians in three years.

Today, the rebels killed one soldier and wounded two others when the attacked a patrol near Pulmoddai, also in Trincomalee, the spokesman said.

He said that in the north on Friday, troops clashed with a group of Tigers at Pooneryn where the military has a base, killing two rebel fighters.

Off the Record

Being fed up with.....

LITTLE OXLEY, England: Nigel Lambert says he was fed up with his ex-wife, demands, so he gave her the business, reports AP.

Nigel Lambert, 36, laid off all his employees and parked five trucks in front of his ex-wife's house, where they were sitting for fourth day Saturday.

"Even if we had the power to remove these vehicles, we don't have the keys for the damned things," said Inspector Norman Williams of Maidstone police.

Police have been issuing parking tickets at 24 pounds (dhs 38.40) per truck per day since the trucks arrived on Wednesday.

Lambert divorced his wife Caroline three years ago. Since then, they have been contesting the settlement for her and the couple's two children.

"As far as I am concerned, the firm is shut down and has been given away to my wife. I have walked away," Lambert said Saturday.

Mrs Lambert told reporters she had nothing to say.

'They're more scared of us than we are of them'

PHOENIX: A man bothered by the frenzied barking of his penned-up dogs went to investigate — and found a mountain lion in his back yard, reports AP.

"Sure I was scared," Joe Perez said Friday. "I would be crazy if I wasn't scared. I ran back in the house."

Game and Fish Department workers shot the lion twice with tranquilizer darts, then released him in the Bradshaw Mountains south of Prescott, hoping it would make a new home there.

Authorities believed the big cat was a yearling who had come off South Mountain, a park preserve on the southeastern Phoenix border. They said he probably was pushed out by other lions and was looking for territory to establish as his own.

No one was injured.

The cat had some wounds that probably resulted from running into fences, wildlife officials said.

The animals pose little danger unless they are cornered, said state ranger Brian Anthony. "They're more scared of us than we are of them," he said.

Monkey born in captivity!

BEIJING: A rare golden monkey has been born in captivity, the first success in a 2-year-old breeding project, the official Xinhua news agency reported Friday, says AP.

The monkey, named for its golden fur, is found in the mountains across southern China. But it is threatened with extinction, in part from being hunted for its brains, which are believed to have medicinal value.

The female monkey was born at a breeding farm at the Fanjingshan nature reserve in the southwestern province of Guizhou, Xinhua reported. It did not say when the monkey was born.

Researchers captured 10 golden monkey's in the wild in 1993 and sent them to the breeding farm, the news agency said. The monkey's reproduce about once every three years, according to a researcher Xinhua did not identify by name.

Black baron UK 94!

PLYMOUTH: An unemployed Englishman who called himself the "black baron" on Friday became the world's first person to be convicted of writing and planting computer viruses, reports AP.

Not only did Christopher Pile, 26, place viruses on computer bulletin boards — which can be accessed by other users — but he also developed a virus that enabled other users to create their own viruses using his instructions.

He signed the viruses he wrote "black baron UK 94." His actions are thought to have cost companies an estimated one million pounds (1.5 million dollars).

A police source in this town on the south coast of England said it was "the first time in the world that anyone has been convicted of actually writing computer viruses."

The most common computer viruses freeze screens and send out false messages, preventing users from accessing vital information. Others can wipe clean a computer's hard disk or reformat the memory.

Pile admitted 11 charges under the computer misuse act and one of inciting others to spread viruses.

He was granted conditional bail until he is sentenced later this Summer, but the judge warned him he faces a custodial sentence.

Strike cripples Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, May 27: A strike called by Muslim militants to protest against a visit by India's poll panel chief to decide on elections in Kashmir paralysed the troubled state today, reports AFP.

All shops, businesses and banks were shut in this summer capital of Kashmir ahead of the state will hold balloting to pick a local government.

Private and public transport were off the roads across Srinagar, the urban hub of a bloody Muslim separatist campaign. Similar strikes were also reported elsewhere in the picturesque Kashmir valley.