

Israel signals to free Palestinian prisoners

JERUSALEM, June 30: Israel has signalled it may agree to release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners as part of last minute efforts to meet a Saturday deadline for agreement on a troop pullout from the West Bank, reports Reuter.

Palestine Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat accused Israel on Thursday of using the detainees as hostages to force the Palestinians to make fresh concessions before the deadline.

Today thousands of prisoners went into the 13th day of a hunger strike to press demands for their release as Israel and the PLO struggled round the clock to reach an accord.

West Bank clashes recalling the bloodshed of the Palestinian uprising, or Intifada have accompanied the prisoner's protest.

"We have committed ourselves to releasing prisoners," Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told Israel television.

"A cabinet committee is studying all the possible criteria for a release, and I assume it will do everything in its power to bring about a prisoner release."

Attending a rally in Gaza on Thursday in support of the prisoners, Arafat said all 5,500 must be freed although he conceded the release could be gradual.

They want us to meet their conditions, Arafat said of the Israelis. "They are using the prisoners as a card and as hostages to blackmail us to make concessions."

Arafat said Israel had proposed releasing 1,500 prisoners but only after the PLO signed an interim agreement on the next phase of their peace deal, the troop pullout and elections for a Palestinian Council.

PLO officials said the United States, sponsor of the talks, urged both sides on Thursday to show flexibility and achieve an accord.

Clinton okays \$15m defence funds for RRF in Bosnia

WASHINGTON, June 30: President Bill Clinton on Thursday authorised 15 million in defence funds to begin US military support for a Western Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) in Bosnia, prompting bitter criticism from Republicans, reports Reuter.

Clinton's executive allocation of Defence Department funds for US transportation and some military equipment to back British, French and other troops in the controversial 12,000 member force avoided a special request for Congressional funding.

The State Department said US support could reach 95 million dollar and Senator Bob Dole of Kansas and House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia the top Republicans in Congress immediately accused Clinton of wasting resources on a belated and failed UN operation in Bosnia.

We are displeased by your administration's decision to disregard our strong opposition to funding the Rapid Reaction Force to protect UN peacekeepers, they said in a joint letter to the president.

Gingrich and Dole expressed special displeasure over plans to provide US close air support for the force which will contain no American troops.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry conceded in announcing Clinton's move earlier on Thursday there was strong opposition in Congress to the reaction force designed to protect harried NATO peacekeepers even though no US soldiers would be involved.

"You can judge Congressional sentiment as well as we can."

There wouldn't be sufficient support in Congress for any larger supplemental (fund-

ing). McCurry told reporters.

The Pentagon said on Thursday US support for the force of British, French, Dutch and Belgian troops now being gathered for Bosnia could total up to 50 million dollars.

But State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said US support would total 95 million dollar in all including 60 million dollar worth of kind contributions equipment logistical and airlift support intelligence and communications and 35 million dollar in cash to underwrite for six months the cost of about 2,000 of the Rapid Reaction Force troops.

Burns acknowledged the precise mission of the force still has not been defined but said the administration felt compelled to act to help the allies strengthen the UN peacekeeping operation in Bosnia, even though it is an uphill battle.

"It gets into the questions of whether or not we stand by our allies in the Balkans at a very tough time. You know, when our allies encounter difficulties and when some people are betting that UN operations will not succeed it doesn't behave the United States to turn and run," Burns said.

McCurry said Clinton's action would provide an initial 12 million dollar for airlift and sealift and 3 million dollar for military equipment. He did not say where the funds would come from in the shrinking defence budget.

Navy Captain Mike Doubleday, a Defence Department spokesman told reporters a military cargo ship had left Richmond Virginia for Britain on Wednesday to take British military equipment to Croatia

Off the Record

Women's loud praying disrupts church services!

GREENSBURG, Pennsylvania: A magistrate dismissed criminal trespassing charges Thursday against two women who were barred from entering a church because they prayed too loudly, reports AP.

District Magistrate James Albert signed an order after the Diocese of Greensburg decided not to pursue the charges against Joan Sudwoj and Cynthia Balconi. The women, known as the "rosary ladies," had repeatedly disrupted church services by yelling their prayers and drowning out the priest.

The women were charged with contempt of court when they attended Holy Thursday Mass at the cathedral April 13. They were arrested and charged with trespassing when they tried to enter the cathedral the next day.

The contempt of court charges were dropped in late May because the women had caused no further disruptions. The women have since moved to Vienna, Ohio.

£ 1m suit for wrong imprisonment

LONDON: A Belfast man wrongly jailed for 15 years for a 1974 IRA pub bombing in Britain which killed seven people is suing the police for one million pounds (1.5 million dollars). The Sun reported on Friday, says AFP.

Paul Hill, 40, who Thursday issued a writ against the Surrey (southern England) police, was one of the so-called "Guildford Four" who were imprisoned for the Birmingham bombing but released in 1989 when their convictions were quashed on appeal after they had served 15 years.

Hill, who lives in the US with his wife Courtney, is claiming damages for "personal injuries, mental anxiety, physical distress, inconvenience, loss and damage," according to The Sun.

Hill says he was subjected to "assault, battery, false imprisonment, malicious prosecution, nuisance, negligence, and breach of duty," the paper reported.

Brutal

NEWCASTLE, England: A British prison officer clubbed his wife to death, then dismembered her body and stored the parts in the family freezer, a court heard here Wednesday, reports AFP.

Michael Allen, 44, allegedly battered his wife Myrtle over the head with a hammer as she dozed on a bed in their spare room.

He then hacked off her hair and tried to flush it down the toilet before cutting up her corpse, the court was told.

Allen, who worked in the hospital wing of a top security jail in Durham, M Northern England, set expressionless in the dock at the Crown Court here as the Macabre story unfolded.

He allegedly turned the corpse upside down in the bath to let blood drain out before dissecting the body into seven pieces and hiding it in the freezer.

Allen then played the role of a distraught husband whose wife had suddenly disappeared, said prosecutor Paul Batty. He said the accused kept up an "elaborate charade" by pretending that his wife had walked out on him.

DPRK reaches accord with US to ship N-fuel rods

WASHINGTON, June 30: North Korea has reached agreement with the United States to ship nuclear fuel rods with enough plutonium to make five nuclear weapons out of the country for safe-keeping, reports AP.

Announcing the accord Thursday, Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gallucci said delivery of heavy fuel oil to North Korea would be resumed and US diplomats would go to Pyongyang to find a location for a diplomatic office.

The developments grew out of an accord reached earlier in the month reaffirming the supplying of South Korean light-water reactors to North Korea to replace a gas graphite reactor suspected of being part of a nuclear weapons programme.

North Korea had balked at the ties to South Korea, with which it has been at odds for nearly a half-century. Under the accord, South Korea will be the prime contractor, but parts of the new reactors, valued at about 4.2 billion dollars, may be manufactured in the United States or in other countries.

A North Korean demand for an additional 1 billion dollars in transmission lines and other equipment was deferred.

In talks concluded this week in Pyongyang, the two sides agreed that the rods would be exported to a safe location in containers after the fuel is stabilised, Gallucci said.

The Clinton administration also will resume shipment of heavy fuel oil.

Politicians plotting to kill Phoolan?

NEW DELHI, June 30: Phoolan Devi, the reformed bandit queen who spent 11 years in jail for the massacre of 22 men, has accused politicians of plotting to kill her because of her campaign for India's lower-caste millions, reports AFP.

Devi, who was freed by the Supreme Court in February 1994 after she was found to be suffering from cancer, said she felt like returning to the jungles of central India because of the alleged plot to kill her.

"Once again I am a fugitive," the 38-year-old bandit queen told AFP at the new house she purchased here with the advance royalty given to her by a French publishing house which will soon market her biography in Europe.



Journalists from different newspapers protest the banning of six Urdu-language evening dailies Thursday for allegedly sensationalising violence in the strife-plagued city. The government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto imposed a two-month ban on papers, accusing them of playing up the current ethnic and sectarian troubles. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Iraq's new oil minister named: Iraq yesterday named as its new oil minister General Amer Mohammad Rashid, the country's main negotiator with the UN disarmament commission (UNSCOM), the official INA news agency reported, AFP says from Baghdad.

Rashid, head of Iraq's military industrialisation organisation, replaced Safaa Hedi Jawad by presidential decree, the agency said.

There was no explanation for the change, which saw Jawad become advisor to president Saddam Hussein's office.

Last US envoy to Cuba dies: Philip W Bonsal, the last US ambassador to Cuba before diplomatic ties with Fidel Castro's government were severed in 1961, died of pneumonia Wednesday. He was 92, AP reports from Washington.

Bonsal was a member of the State Department's foreign service and served as ambassador to Colombia, Bolivia and Morocco during a 27-year career that ended with his retirement in 1965.

4 civilians killed in Sarajevo: Four civilians were killed and at least six badly wounded after mortar shells hit the west side of Sarajevo yesterday, doctors at a local hospital said, Reuter reports from Sarajevo.

The shells hit the western suburb at around 11 am (0900 GMT), Reuter reporters at the scene said.

Hamas leader joins hunger strike: The ailing spiritual leader of the Muslim militant group Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, joined some 3,400 Palestinian security detainees in a hunger strike Thursday, prison officials said, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The prisoners, some of whom have gone without food since June 18, have said they would only stop their fast once Israel commits itself to a release timetable for all detainees.

2 militants shot dead in Egypt: Police shot and killed two Muslim extremists Thursday in southern Egypt, security officials said, AP reports from Cairo.

Police raided a hideout near the village of Awlad Azar, 390 kilometres (240 miles) south of Cairo killing Rifaat Ahmed Yousri, 24, and Abul-Hassan Mohammed Abul-Hasan. An automatic rifle and ammunition was found with them.

Quake rocks Baikal Lake area: An earthquake of between six and seven points on the Richter scale rocked the area near Lake Baikal in eastern Russia at about 03.00 Moscow time yesterday, Itar-Tass news agency, monitored in London reported, AP says from London.

The operational headquarters of the Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations said the tremors in Irkutsk reached six points on the Richter Scale which has a theoretical maximum of nine points.

Novelist Ted Allan dead: Ted Allan, a versatile author who wrote well-regarded screenplays, stage plays, novels and children's books died Thursday of respiratory failure, associates said. He was 79, AP reports from Toronto.

Allan received an Academy Award nomination for best original screenplay in 1976 for the script of Jan Kadar's "Lies My Father Told Me." He also wrote the screenplay for John Cassavetes' "Love Streams."

Montreal int'l jazz festival begins: The 1995 Montreal International Jazz Festival kicked off Thursday night with the focus on Oscar Peterson's homecoming, AP reports from Montreal.

Peterson played his first concert in his hometown since 1989 and the Place des Arts show was all the more emotional because the jazz pianist has fought back from a stroke two years ago that threatened to paralyze his left side. The festival, which runs 11 days expects about 1.5 million spectators, and even more if it doesn't rain.

Lightning kills 10 in Ukraine: Lightning has killed 10 people in storms throughout Ukraine in the past week, officials said on Thursday, including a woman and her grandson killed in a freak strike inside their home, Reuter reports from Kiev.

Russia firm to sell N reactor to Iran

NICOSIA, June 30: Iran said on Thursday that Russia had promised to stick to its planned sale of nuclear reactors to Tehran despite US complaints, this would help the Islamic state acquire nuclear weapons, reports Reuter.

The Iranian news agency IRNA said the pledge was made by Georgi Kaurav, spokesman for Moscow's Energy Ministry, as the United States and Russia held nuclear talks in Washington.

"In an exclusive talk with IRNA here (Moscow) on Wednesday, Kaurav stressed that Russia is committed to its former agreements with Iran," IRNA said.

The official news agency quoted Kaurav as saying that the delivery of reactors to the Islamic republic would not be an issue at US-Russian talks on Thursday in Moscow.

US task forces propose tough anti-immigration measures

WASHINGTON, June 30: A Congressional task force proposed firm measures to curb illegal immigration Thursday, including requiring hospitals to report illegal aliens who come to emergency rooms for treatment and denying federal education funds for undocumented children, reports AP.

Under the plan submitted to the House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich, virtually all federal benefits would be denied to illegal aliens. They still could receive emergency medical treatment, but hospitals would be required to report undocumented patients to federal authorities for deportation.

Gingrich broadly endorsed the proposals, calling them "Specific, common-sense, practical recommendations."

He estimated the task force plan, which also calls for a fortified border and a constitutional amendment ending automatic citizenship for children born of undocumented immigrants on US soil, would cut illegal entries by at least 70 per cent.

An estimated 5 million undocumented aliens are in the country, with the majority residing in California, New York, Texas and Florida.

In a statement, the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic civil rights group, accused the task force of pandering to public opinion on illegal immigration.

"It is not consistent with American values to throw children out of school and onto the streets," and lawmakers should "cease the dangerous and ugly game of immigrant bashing for political gain," the group said.

Last November, California voters approved the controversial Proposition 187, which, like the task force, would deny public education and non-emergency health care to illegal immigrants and would additionally require doctors, teachers and welfare workers to turn in those suspected of being in the country illegally.

The California measure, challenged on the basis of a 1982 Supreme Court ruling that illegal immigrants are entitled to public education under the Constitution, remains stalled in the courts.

The task force would leave the decision on schooling illegal aliens up to the states but would deny them any federal funds for the aliens' education.

Jerusalem mayor to take legal steps to close PLO HQs

JERUSALEM, June 30: Jerusalem's hawkish mayor said Friday he would take legal steps to close down the city's PLO headquarters unless the office applied for a rezoning permit within two weeks, reports AP.

Mayor Ehud Olmert said the move, approved by his city council late Thursday, was aimed at forcing the Palestinians to recognise Israeli sovereignty over all of the city, including the eastern part claimed by the PLO as a future capital.

Olmert said he took action after the PLO earlier this month revived the Arab city council that ran east Jerusalem before the sector was captured by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Middle East war.

The mayor on Friday singled out the senior PLO official in Jerusalem, Faisal Husseini.



US President Bill Clinton (R) reaches out to grab a baby being passed over a crowd gathered on the South Lawn at the White House Thursday. The crowd was invited to see President Clinton depart on a trip to Chicago for attending a presidential gala at the Chicago Hilton Hotel yesterday. — AFP/UNB photo

Pope, Orthodox leader sign jt statement seeking greater unity

VATICAN CITY, June 30: Pope John Paul and the leader of the world's Orthodox Christians signed a joint statement on Thursday pledging their separated churches would seek greater unity as the year 2000 approaches, reports Reuter.

It said improved relations between the world's 950 million Roman Catholics and 150 million Orthodox Christians would help the cause of peace. It also issued an appeal to save the environment and for Eastern European countries to be allowed to join the European Union (EU).

"We believe the more concerted and active cooperation will also facilitate the influence of the church on peace and justice in the areas of political and ethnic conflict, the statement said apparently in reference to former Yugoslavians.

It was signed after a colourful and solemn mass presided by the Pope in St Peter's Basilica, one of the rare occasions in Christian history that two men with the title holiness were under the same roof.

The mass ended a three-day visit to the Vatican by

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, only the third Orthodox leader to meet a Pope since the great schism of 1054.

The statement urged everybody with the greatest of care, to address the currently critical ecological problem to avoid the grave danger, of the perverse-use of resources that are gifts of God."

It added, "we also pray for the full realisation without delay of the European Union hoping that its borders will be enlarged towards the East."

The Catholic Orthodox split was sealed by mutual ex-

communications in 1054 after a host of theological disputes.

The two churches mutually nullified the excommunications in 1971, seven years after Pope Paul VI and Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras embraced on Jerusalem's Mount of Olives.

In his address to the congregation, Bartholomew said the time had come to close the chapter on "many afflictions and just as many humiliations and called divisions among Christians one of the beasts' afflicting humanity."

The 75-year-old Pope said the start of Christianity third millennium in the year 2000 represented a great challenge for humanity and particularly for Christians.

"We cannot therefore remain separated," the Pope told the congregation in Christendom's largest church.

In an act highly symbolic of the quest for unity, the two leaders prayed together at the tomb of St Peter, who led all Christians before the splits of the 11th and 16th centuries.

Both the Pope and Bartholomew touched on the thorny issue of papal primacy in an eventually reunified church.

'N Korea biggest source of instability in E Asia'

TOKYO, June 30: North Korea remains the biggest source of instability in East Asia, the Japanese defence agency said in its latest white paper, published here today, reports AFP.

The report by the agency — the equivalent of a Defence Ministry — said the mass of North Korean forces on the Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), and Pyongyang's effort to develop intermediate-range missiles comprise "the main factor of instability in the region."

"Japan has very serious concern" about the missile development, said an agency counsellor, Keiji Omori, at a press conference where the white paper was unveiled.

He also pointed to potential risks involving China, which has launched a programme to modernise the People's Liberation Army (PLA),

coupled with a continuing effort to update its nuclear arsenal.

China has set up military-style structures on coral reefs in the disputed Spratly islands in the South China Sea, a move that "has served to heighten tension with the neighbouring countries," Omori said.

The document, adopted by the cabinet of Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama today, also noted rising defence expenditure by members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), grouping Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Despite persisting factors of instability, Japan will maintain a defensive military posture and continue to encourage dialogue and confidence-building in the Asia-Pacific region, the white paper said.

Bartholomew said it should be considered a "primacy not among people but rather among the ministries of service."

The Pope suggested that papal authority would have to be supreme in a unified church because Christ had given St Peter, the first Pope full power to rule the flock on earth in a major encyclical last month, the Pope said he would be willing to seek a way of exercising papal primacy that would make it acceptable to the Orthodox of the East as well as to separated Protestant and Anglican churches in the West.