

International

US asks Israel to take troops out of Hebron

JERUSALEM, June 25: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher is asking Israel's new prime minister to talk with the Palestinians and to take his troops out of the West Bank city of Hebron, reports AP.

Christopher said en route from Washington Monday he feels that both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Arabs are willing to resume peace talks unconditionally.

Arab leaders meeting in Cairo over the weekend demanded that Israel agree to yield the territory captured in the 1967 and 1973 Middle East wars before meaningful talks can begin.

Christopher said the positions of the 21 Arab League members meeting in the Egyptian capital were so diverse that their communiqué is not a useful document for negotiating purposes.

Progress toward peace lies in the hard-slogging negotiations between the parties, Christopher told reporters aboard his Air Force jet.

The Arabs also warned in their communiqué that economic and diplomatic ties to the Jewish state could be jeopardized if Netanyahu strays from the "land for peace" for

multis of his predecessor.

Netanyahu accused the Arabs on Sunday of trying to dictate terms for peace talks.

Christopher began a two-day trip to Jerusalem for meetings with Israeli officials, then to Cairo to see Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

"We support continuation of good relations between Israel and the Arabs, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

Netanyahu's reluctance to cede land for Arab recognition could make Christopher's search for further peace accords more difficult, in fact, Christopher said. It will take some time to get talks reopened.

But he said: "You can see a common theme. The parties want to continue the peace process. They don't want to return to conflict."

Netanyahu has vowed to hold on to the Golan Heights, a strategic plateau on the border with Syria, and opposes the Palestinians' call for an independent state with its capital in Jerusalem.

AFP from Jerusalem Adds: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has decided not to unveil any details

of his plans concerning the peace process during talks with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, his spokesman said.

"There is no intention to present any position to the Secretary of State Christopher during his visit," Shai Bazak said.

"The American administration requested the meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu to update him on political moves on the agenda in advance of his trip to the United States," he said.

Christopher arrived in Jerusalem early Tuesday and was due to meet with Netanyahu around 1:30 pm (1030 GMT) before holding talks with foreign minister David Levy and then again seeing Christopher over dinner.

Another AFP report from Cairo says Arab countries have set Israel an eight-week deadline in which to make clear its intentions in the peace process. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's advisor has said.

After two months the Arabs will draw up a definitive evaluation of the policies of the new government, he added, saying the position had been adopted by the 21 Arab leaders

Govt to propose legislation to tighten UK's asylum rules

LONDON, June 25: The government said Monday it will propose legislation to deny state benefits to some asylum seekers in Britain, following an embarrassing defeat in the law courts, reports AP.

Social Security Secretary Peter Lilley told the House of Commons that amendments to the law would stop bogus asylum seekers claiming benefits, which he said cost the government 200 million pounds (300 dollars) annually.

"Britain should remain a sanctuary for those fleeing persecution. We are acting now to ensure this country remains a safe haven and not a soft touch," Lilley said.

The Court of Appeal ruled on Friday that the government had no authority in law to impose regulations which cut benefits to asylum applicants.

Lord Justice Simon Brown, one of three justices who heard that case, said the removal of benefits for asylum seekers would leave them "so destitute that to my mind no civilized nation can tolerate it."

The government said it was still considering an appeal to the House of Lords.



Forensic pathologists and gravediggers carry a body from a mass grave in the village of Ravno, north of Sarajevo Monday. The mass-grave, the biggest one excavated in the Sarajevo area so far, contains 47 bodies of Muslims killed by rebel Serbs in June 1992. — AFP/UNB photo

Politicians, businessmen, LTTE target Chandrika for assassination

COLOMBO, June 25: Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga has said she is a target for assassination by both Tamil Tiger rebels and crooked businessmen and politicians fearful of her crackdown on corruption, reports Reuters.

Kumaratunga's disclosure, reported today in the government-owned Daily News, was made in a speech last Sunday to a meeting in Mirigama town, about 25 miles (40 kms) north of the capital Colombo.

"It is not only Tamil Tiger rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran who would like to see a world without me. The Daily News quoted Kumaratunga as saying, 'Kumaratunga's security director Nihal Karunaratne con-

firmed the story, saying her disclosure was based on intelligence reports.



Deuba faces no-confidence in parliament today

KATHMANDU, June 25: The 10th session of Nepal's Parliament which opens Wednesday, is expected to be a crucial one for Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's survival, political observers here said.

The forthcoming session is crucial for Deuba because the main opposition, the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) leaders are determined to outvote the nine-month old coalition government," political analyst Hari Shrestha told AFP.

The main opposition has charged the Deuba government of failing to check rampant administrative corruption, control escalating market prices and maintain law and order.

The NCP-UML claims to have the support of dissident

lawmakers from the rightist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), one of the three ruling parties, and has vowed to unseat the coalition government through a no-confidence motion this time, though it failed in a similar bid in March.

The tripartite coalition government headed by Nepal Congress (NC) leader Deuba, was formed on September 12 after three parties — the NC, the RPP and the pro-India Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) — jointly overthrew a 10-month-old NC-UML government through a no-confidence motion.

General secretary of the RPP Rabinendra Sharma told AFP: "Of course, the Communists try to pull down the coalition government again but they will not succeed." The NCP-UML has tried to

woo our parliamentarians to support its move in the Parliament against the tripartite government again.

"But the Communist will not succeed because nearly 15 out of 20 RPP lawmakers are ministers in the present 48-member cabinet," Shrestha said.

The 1994 general elections for the 205-member Lower House of Parliament resulted in a hung Parliament in which the NCP-UML bagged 88 seats, the NC 83, the RPP 20, the NSP three, with the remainder going to other Communist groups or independents.

On March 24, the NCP-UML tried to outvote the government through a no-confidence motion with the help of extreme rightist MPs from the RPP, but they ditched the Communists at the last moment.

Newspapers mock Yeltsin's proposal for coalition govt

MOSCOW, June 25: Several newspapers mocked Monday Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov's proposal for a coalition government on Tuesday, with one comparing him to a scorned suitor, reports AP.

The daily Izvestia ran pictures of unwilling potential partners in the coalition on the front page, along with their refusals, and it called Zyuganov's idea a "fantasy."

Zyuganov, who is sagging in the polls as he faces a July 3 presidential runoff with President Boris Yeltsin, said Monday the Communists wanted to form a coalition government made up of the nation's leading political forces.

He said the Communists would take a third of the seats on the council.

Largest mass grave around Sarajevo unearthed

SOKOLINA, Bosnia Herzegovina, June 25: Forty-seven bodies were unearthed Monday from the largest known mass grave around Sarajevo. Survivors said they were the remains of people captured by Serbs, put on a bus, and then blown into bits with anti-tank rockets, reports AP.

The June 14, 1992, massacre at Sokolina set the precedent for "ethnic cleansing" — the purging of ethnic groups through harassment and killing — a practice that came to characterize the 3-and-half-year Bosnian war.

The charred shell of the rusted bus remained at the site Monday — a grisly memorial to the dead. All its windows were missing and rusting bullet holes dotted the metal sides.

Monday's exhumation was a sad homecoming for Emir Mujkic, one of the eight survivors of the late-evening massacre. The last time he had been to this field was the day after the slaughter, when he guided people from a nearby Muslim-held village to the site to bury the dead.

Amid a background chorus of wails from relatives of the victims, Mujkic relived the ordeal he said started when Serbs overran nearby Ahatovici, 6 miles (10 kilometers) north of Sarajevo, in May 1992.

After being held for weeks, he and 54 other Muslim men were loaded onto the bus and told they were on their way to a prisoner exchange.

Instead, he said the Serbs purposely destroyed the bus in a hail of ordnance, including anti-tank rockets near Sokolina, just southeast of Ahatovici.

Death of jailed businessman Myanmar under pressure to explain

SINGAPORE, June 25: Myanmar came under mounting pressure Tuesday to explain the death of a jailed businessman who had represented four European countries and was close to opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, reports AFP.

Questions have been raised over the death of James Leander Nichols from an apparent stroke over the weekend.

A special envoy from Norway was in Yangon at the time to express support for pro-democracy forces in Myanmar.

Singapore-based Norwegian envoy Anne Thalmann met Aung San Suu Kyi as well as associates of Nichols, a former honorary consul of Denmark, Finland and Norway and consular correspondent of Switzerland.

"Norwegian authorities will ask for a full medical report," a senior diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said in Singapore today.

A remembrance service for Nichols is expected to be held this weekend in Yangon and Norway "would like to be represented" at the gathering.

BJP vows to win UP polls

NEW DELHI, June 25: India's main opposition party Tuesday vowed to win power in the country's most populous province after its half a dozen rivals failed to agree to jointly contest upcoming state elections, reports AFP.

The Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) made the claim a day after former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao announced a pact with a party of Hindu "untouchables" for the Uttar Pradesh polls.

Rao, 74, said his Congress (I) Party would fight the elections along with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP or Majority People's Party), burying the

prospects of a grand alliance of anti BJP parties.

The Congress-BSP accord left the United Front coalition of Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda floundering after its overtures to BSP leader Kanshi Ram for an electoral pact went unheeded.

The Hindu Nationalist BJP said it would naturally sweep the polls.

"There would now be a triangular fight in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and we hope to achieve better results," said BJP spokesman Krishan Lal Sharma. "Now no one can stop us from coming to power in Uttar Pradesh."

Uttar Pradesh (UP) which has a population of 140 million, is a politically sensitive state which has given Indian seven of her 11 prime ministers, it would go to the polls in August or September to pick a state government.

The Congress, BSP and the ruling United Front coalition had been tipped to put up joint candidates against the BJP to defeat the latter in a state that in recent years has become a bastion of Hindu nationalists.

Analysts had said the BJP would find it tough to get a majority of the 425 constituencies in the Uttar Pradesh legislature if there was a one to one fight instead of a triangular contest.

Jerusalem always to remain Israel's undivided capital

JERUSALEM, June 25: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday that Jerusalem would always remain Israel's "undivided capital," at a celebration marking the 3,000th anniversary of Jewish rule over the holy city, reports AP.

"Jerusalem was and always will be the undivided capital of Israel and the Jewish people," Netanyahu said at a ceremony to light up the city's walls.

Israel captured and annexed Arab East Jerusalem after the 1967 Middle East War.

Security in big cities tightened Jamaat buries workers killed in Pak violence

ISLAMABAD, June 25: A rightwing religious party buried its dead Tuesday, a day after an anti-government protest turned violent killing four people, including one police officer, reports AP.

Jamaat-e-Islami (Party of Islam) has finally plunged into the battlefield, party chief Qasi Hussein Ahmed was quoted as saying.

At least 60 people were injured, nine of them seriously, during the demonstration in neighbouring Rawalpindi to protest a budget that imposes

heavy new taxes. The protest spun out of control after a police force of 1,000 opened fire on about 500 emotionally charged demonstrators, according to eyewitnesses.

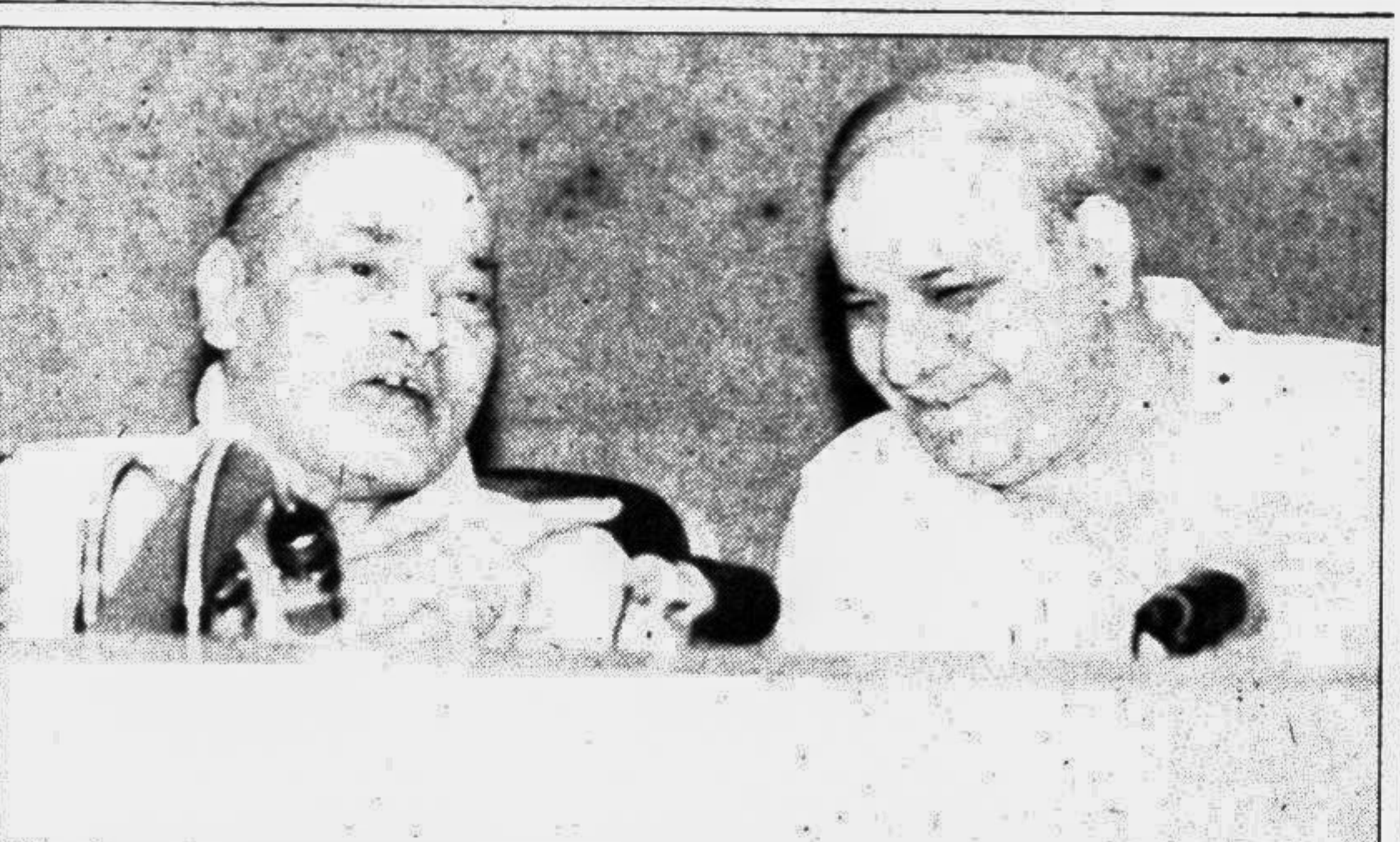
The government has ordered a judicial inquiry into the killings.

Reuters adds: Pakistani authorities tightened security in big cities today to prevent any repeat of anti-corruption riots on which two Islamic activists were killed and 70 people injured.

China, Mongolia, Russia sign treaty

China, Mongolia and Russia have signed a treaty legally defining the northwestern border linking their three countries, Xinhua reported. AFP says from Beijing.

The protocol, which provides for the "legal location of the joint border points in the eastern and western sections of the border," was signed Tuesday, China's official news agency said. The signatories were Chinese vice-foreign minister Zhang Deguang, Mongolian Ambassador to China Dagva Ts. Pkhagvan and Russian Ambassador Igor Rogachev.



Former Indian premier P V Narasimha Rao (L) talks with Bahujan Samaj Party (Majority People's Party) supremo Kanshi Rao on Monday after forging an alliance between his Congress (I) and the party of low-caste Hindus to contest elections in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The alliance ends a year of feuding between the two erstwhile rivals. — AFP/UNB photo

Environmental refugees rising by 3m every year: FAO

LISBON, June 25: Around 100 million environmental refugees have been made homeless by encroaching desert land and their numbers are swelling by three million every year, an international conference was told here Monday, reports AFP.

As many as 850 million people are affected by desertification, the representative of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), El-Hadji Sene, told the opening session of the five-day meeting.

Portuguese Agriculture Minister Fernando Gomes De Silva told delegates that the problem concerned the industrialised countries including Europe as well as the third world.

Among countries represented here were some not usually associated with deserts — Sweden, Austria, Britain and

Switzerland, for example.

The conference groups international specialists and aims to ways of combating the phenomenon and restoring a healthy balance to the world's most fragile ecosystems; organisers have hailed it as the most significant meeting since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio De Janeiro.

Around 100 experts from some 80 countries are participating in the conference, organised by Portugal, Senegal and Cape Verde Islands, three countries hardest hit by the social and economic hardships stemming from expanding desert frontiers.

The first aim of the conference, entitled "International Gathering of Experts on Restoring Degraded Forest Ecosystems" is to draw up a report on experiments in afforestation and re-forestry in ar-

reas worst affected by drought.

The experts' findings will be based on eight working documents which identify the scientific, economic, ecological, social and cultural reasons for the problems.

The documents will be discussed by working groups corresponding to four main regions — sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Americas and region including the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

As well as the FAO, the inter-governmental forestry panel set up at Rio in 1992 and non-governmental organisations from many countries are actively participating.

Portugal is the European country most affected by desertification. Forest fires, exacerbated by a five-year drought, have in the past ten years destroyed more than 800,000 hectares of forest

Iran has military base with 30,000 troops in Sudan

WASHINGTON, June 25: Iran has a military base with 30,000 troops in Sudan, a Sudanese human rights advocate told a congressional group on Monday, reports Reuters.

"There are 30,000 Iranian fighters in Sudan," Maghoub El-Tigani, president of the Cairo-based Sudan human rights organisation, said at a US capital briefing sponsored by the congressional human rights caucus. He said the Iranian base was at Arous in Sudan.

Tigani urged the United States and other nations to impose stronger sanctions against the National Islamic Front government until it restored democracy and ended human rights violations. The NIF took power in a 1989 military coup.

"We want to humiliate the government," he said. Asked if sanctions might hurt the people of Sudan more than the government, El-Tigani replied, "what do we have to lose?"

Off the Record

Influence of TV, movies on teens

NEW YORK: A third of US youths (12 and older) say they are encouraged to have sex because the media make it seem normal, and more than half the girls say they learn about birth control from TV and movies, according to a new survey, reports AP.

Seventy-four per cent of the youths questioned said at least one parent had talked to them about sex, according to the study by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation released Monday. However, only 46 per cent said their parents talked to them about birth control and just over half (55 per cent) said their parents had discussed sexually transmitted diseases.

"It's clear that if teens today are going to make responsible decisions about sex, they need more than the 'birds and bees.' They need practical information about how to use contraception, and negotiate sexual relations," said Suzanne Delbanco, a spokeswoman for the foundation.

The phone survey of 757 girls and 753 boys ages 12 to 18 was conducted from March 28 to May 5 by Princeton Survey Research Associates. It has a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

Nearly a third of those surveyed (29 per cent) said they had had sex and 4 per cent said they had at least one child.

Among the sexually active, 36 per cent said they still don't know enough about birth control and 30 per cent said they need more information about where to get contraceptives. Forty-seven per cent said they wanted to know more about preventing AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

A third of the youths said they believed some teenagers have sex because TV and movies make it seem normal for them to be sexually active.

Fashion magazines are an important source of information about sex, birth control and sexually transmitted diseases, more than a third of the girls said.

Fifty-three per cent of the girls said they got their sex education from the TV or movies.

The Menlo Park, California-based foundation is an independent, non-profit organisation that studies health policy, reproductive health and the AIDS virus in this country and health and development in South Africa.

Baby-friendly hospital boom

UNITED NATIONS: The number of baby friendly hospitals around the world has almost doubled from 4,282 at the end of 1995 to 7,779 now, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), reports Xinhua.

9 Ukrainian die after eating mushroom: Nine people have died in Ukraine after eating poisonous wild mushrooms, the latest victims of pollution and food shortages caused by falling living standards, the Health Ministry said on Monday, Reuters reports from Kiev.

"People do not know which mushrooms are edible and there is no public attempt to explain the difference," Ministry spokesman Anatoly Voloshin said by telephone. Ukrainians have resorted increasingly to picking wild mushrooms to feed their families as living standards in the former Soviet Republic have plunged.