

International

Assad greets King Hussein in Damascus

'Israel may pull out of Lebanon if Hezbollah men give up arms'

JERUSALEM, Aug 3: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday Israel would be ready to pull out of Lebanon if Islamic militants were disarmed and no measures were taken against the Jewish state's allies in the area, reports Reuters.

The right-wing Israeli leader told Israel television in an interview that such an arrangement with Beirut could pave the way for a formal peace deal with Syria.

"If we know that Hezbollah is disarmed in Lebanon, that it won't attack us anymore and that a proper arrangement is made for our allies in South Lebanon and we have satisfactory security for our northern border from the Lebanese side then we have no reason to be in Lebanon," Netanyahu said.

It was the first time Netanyahu — who ousted dovish

prime minister Shimon Peres in elections two months ago — spelled out what has been dubbed the "Lebanon first" initiative aimed at breaking the deadlock in peace move with Syria.

Damascus has rejected the idea. Israeli troops and members of their allied South Lebanon Army patrol a 15-km (nine-mile) occupation zone in South Lebanon which the Jewish state says is necessary to protect its northern border.

Islamic militants from the pro-Iranian Hezbollah (Party of God) group have waged a guerrilla war to expel Israeli soldiers from Lebanon, where Syria is the main powerbroker.

"I think this would be a real contribution towards achieving a wider understanding which will in the end bring about formal peace with Syria," Netanyahu said.

A senior Syrian official on Friday described the "Lebanon first" proposal as a "trap aimed at sabotaging the brotherly Syrian-Lebanese ties" which could not lead to peace.

Syria's price for peace is a complete Israeli withdrawal from the strategic Golan Heights which the Jewish state captured in 1967 Middle East war.

AFP adds: King Hussein of Jordan arrived in Damascus today on his first visit in years for talks with President Hafez Al-Assad on sealing their reconciliation and efforts to jumpstart the peace process with Israel.

Syrian officials said Assad greeted the king at the airport at the start of the one-day visit.

King Hussein was accompanied by Prime Minister Abdel Karim Kabarti.

Top negotiators to visit Grozny
Moscow keen to restart collapsed peace talks

MOSCOW, Aug 3: Top Russian negotiators said Friday they would fly to the devastated Chechen city of Grozny this weekend to try to restart collapsed peace talks with separatist rebels, although no concrete meeting is set, reports AFP.

The secretary of the government commission on resolving the 20-month war, Sergei Stepashin, said he told the mediator of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that he was ready to meet rebel leaders.

"We arrive on Saturday and this is not secret. I have said via OSCE mission chief Tim Guldman that we are ready to meet," Stepashin told reporters.

No time or place has been set for a meeting, however. Nationalities Minister Vy-

acheslav Mikhailov, also going to Grozny, indicated there would be little room for compromise, squarely blaming the Chechens for the breakdown in talks.

He accused Chechen rebel chief of staff Aslam Maskhadov of deliberately avoiding new talks "to try and convince people that the federal centre is the side violating the agreement."

The two sides signed a wide-reaching peace accord in June, just before the presidential elections, but Russian forces went back on the offensive shortly after president Boris Yeltsin's re-election.

Mikhailov said that while he supported new talks — the first since the now Moribund accord was signed — military force would continue to be used in so-called "special operations."

Police summon Megawati for questioning
Jakarta imposes travel ban on speakers of free speech forum

JAKARTA, Aug 3: A travel ban has been placed on all speakers who addressed a free speech forum here in support of opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri, the official Antara news agency reported Saturday, reports AFP.

A decision has been made to take out dependents said Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon. We expect the vast majority of dependents will leave.

"They'll be out relatively soon it's a question of chartering flights to get them out," he told AFP.

The decision to pull out the 1,000 dependents of US military personnel in Saudi Arabia coincides with the move of some 4,000 US troops from Dhahran and Riyadh to an air base in the desert.

The source did not provide the names or number of people on the blacklist and Antara did not report which authority issued the list.

Dozens of activists, student leaders and members of the

Indonesian Democracy Party (PDI) addressed the six-week forum outside the PDI headquarters.

A violent military raid on the PDI headquarters last weekend put an end to the free speech forum, and expelled Megawati supporters from the building.

Mass riots followed in which three people died and 26 were injured.

Meanwhile, Indonesia's opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri has received a police summons for questioning this morning, her lawyer confirmed with AFP Saturday.

"She received the police summons on Friday night at 8 pm (1300 GMT) to go to the

Jakarta police headquarters today at 10 am (0300 GMT)," Robert Tambunan, one of her lawyers.

Tambunan said Megawati planned to co-operate with police and attend the questioning session with her lawyers.

AP adds: A labour leader accused of inciting rioting last weekend that killed at least three people has been charged with subversion, his lawyer said Saturday. The crime is punishable by death.

Also Saturday, police said they have summoned pro-democracy leader Megawati Sukarnoputri for questioning about events leading up to the violence.



A rocket is sent airborne from one of the Russian "Grad" missile system launchers in the Shatoy region of the war-torn North Caucasus republic to Chechen separatist positions on Thursday.

— AFP/UNB photo

PA slams Israeli PM for lifting freeze on Jewish settlements

JERUSALEM, Aug 3: Palestinian officials have slammed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to lift a freeze on Jewish settlements in occupied lands as a huge setback for peace, reports Reuters.

Israel's decision on Friday to ease restrictions on settlements came as hundreds of Palestinian rioters stormed a PLO prison in the West Bank town of Tulkarm, freeing around 40 jailed activists from the Islamic militant Hamas group.

Residents said the Palestinian police opened fire on the 2,000 protesters, killing 38-year-old Ibrahim Hadayah, whose two sons were jailed. The protesters were demanding the release of imprisoned relatives on hunger strike.

The Palestine Liberation

Organisation jailed hundreds of Hamas activists after an Islamic bombing spree in February and March that killed 59 people in the Jewish state. Hamas has spearheaded Palestinian opposition to Israel-PLO peace moves.

Members of the Palestinian Authority (PA) discussed Israel's decision to cancel restrictions imposed by the previous government hours after it was announced.

"The Israeli government's resolution is serious setback to the peace process. I think settlement activity, building settlements, expanding settlements is a de facto cancellation of peace," said Palestinian Authority (PA) member Saeb Erekat.

The decision marked the new Likud administration's clearest break yet with the

policies of the dovish Labour government which forged peace deals with the PLO.

The right-wing Netanyahu, who ousted Labour in a national election two months ago, opposed the peace deals.

This spells an end to the previous government's policy of hanging the communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza out to dry," Netanyahu told.

Settler leaders said Friday's decision by the Israeli government could increase the Jewish population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 50,000 over the next two years.

Around 130,000 Jewish settlers currently live in the West Bank and Gaza, home to two million Arabs. Israeli-PLO peace deals launched Palestinian self-rule in parts of the area in what Palestinians hope is a step to statehood.

EU wants to see failure of Dayton accord: Tudjman

ZAGREB, Aug 3: Croatian President Franjo Tudjman emerged from talks with his US counterpart Bill Clinton on Friday furious with Europe for trying to heap the blame for continuing disputes in Bosnia on his Croatian government and the Bosnian Croats, reports AFP.

As an EU deadline looms for truceless Croats in the divided, southern city of Mostar, Tudjman lashed out at "European circles for blaming Croats for all the ills currently plaguing Bosnia's Dayton peace accords."

"The United States has a leading role but there are European circles which want to see Dayton (the Bosnia peace accords) fail and the Croats blamed for this," Tudjman told Croatian journalists in Washington in remarks broadcast by Croatian television.

Tudjman's meeting with Clinton ended without the usual joint statement to the international press and the traditional photograph, and the Croatian president also cancelled an expected visit to Atlanta to see the Olympic Games due to illness and return directly to Zagreb.

Croatia was expected to come under fire in the meeting on two counts for Bosnian-Croat intransigence.

He European Union has given the Bosnia-Croats in the southern city of Mostar until midnight (2200 GMT) Saturday to end their boycott of the newly-elected city council of which a mainly Muslim coalition has a majority.

Mijo Brajkovic the mayor of Croatia held west Mostar, said Friday that the Croats would not give in.

Off the Record

Protest against monkey project

SAN FRANCISCO: About two dozen activists, some wearing space suits and monkey masks, staged a noisy protest Friday to demand the federal government cancel a \$3 million dollars project to send monkeys into space, reports AP.

"NASA, stop torturing monkeys now," some chanted. The demonstration was an appeal to the Senate, where a vote was scheduled on an amendment that could cancel the project, which involves the United States, France and Russia. The project studies bone loss and the effects of space travel on astronauts' muscles.

Two monkeys are scheduled to fly into space in October. "I'm not an extremist. I could see in some cases where you can use animals for medical reasons, but I can't justify this in my mind," said Barbara Chase as she passed out flyers at the downtown Federal Building.

But Susan Paris, president of Americans for Medical Progress Educational Foundation, said it is important to understand the health effects on astronauts.

"We know there is bone loss and heart muscles get affected when astronauts fly into space," she said, "but we need to understand why that happens."

Hunt for missing elephants

COLOMBO: Police detectives in Sri Lanka are hunting for at least seven elephants reported missing from various Buddhist temples, police said Saturday, reports AP.

The directive to send sleuths on the trail of elephants came from President Chandrika Kumaratunga after allegations that elephants donated to various temples were being kept as pets in the homes of powerful local businessmen and politicians.

The custodians of the temple of the tooth, which Buddhists believe contains a tooth of Lord Buddha, had complained to protest Kumaratunga as they could not find enough elephants this year for an annual religious parade.

Temples in many parts of the country usually send their elephants to take part in the parade honoring the tooth, held in the central mountain city of Kandy, 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of the capital, Colombo.

The two-week-long spectacle with more than 100 elephants, and thousands of drummers, dancers and flag bearers, took place in July.

The custodians told Kumaratunga that the elephants given to some temples by the country's elephant orphanage could have been kept as pets by politicians and businessmen who served as trustees of temples.

The complaint to the president said seven elephants were known to be missing, but the number could be higher.

Kumaratunga has ordered the Criminal Investigations Department of the police to find the elephants, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Tigers kill 3 farmers

COLOMBO, Aug 3: Tamil Tiger rebels shot and killed three farmers in eastern Sri Lanka, as a week-long lull continued in the military's offensive in the north aimed at capturing the largest guerrilla town, an official said Saturday, reports AP.

The rebels continued intermittent mortar attacks on soldiers clearing mines in Paranthan town, which the military captured a week back, said Major Tilak Dunuwille, a military spokesman.

The army says it plans to capture Kilinochchi, six kilometres (4 miles) away, where Tamil rebels relocated after the fall of their stronghold of northern Jaffna City last December.

The military says at least 42 rebels and 17 soldiers have died so far in the thrust. The rebels say 10 Tamil civilians were also killed and 30 were wounded by military shelling, but military officials say only identified rebel targets are being attacked.

The government does not permit journalists to travel to the region and all communication links have broken down due to the fighting.

BRIEFLY



Kim Hyong U, permanent representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations, addresses reporters Friday at United Nations headquarters in New York. The ambassador discussed relations between North and South Korea and hopes for reunification.

— AFP/UNB photo

12 Indians die after consuming liquor:

Twelve people died after consuming home-made liquor. The Times of India reported yesterday. Reuters reports from New Delhi.

Five of the 12 were in India's northern state of Haryana, which had banned liquor sales from July 1. The other seven were in the eastern state of Bihar. At least 35 others in Haryana were admitted to various hospitals in serious condition. In Bihar the incident took place in the state's capital Patna, the newspaper said.

Typhoon claims 39 in Taiwan: At least 39 people died and 34 went missing when typhoon Herb lashed Taiwan in this week, triggering the worst flooding in 30 years, the United Daily News reported yesterday. AFP reports from Taipei.

The death toll would rise as more bodies of victims buried by landslides in central Taiwan were retrieved, the paper predicted. The official National Police Administration (NPA) toll stood at 19 dead and 41 missing.

ULFA rebels kill 4 cops in Assam: Separatist guerrillas in India's north-east state of Assam killed four Indian policemen, on Friday, officials said. Reuters reports from Guwahati.

They said United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) rebels opened fire on a police vehicle in Dhubri town, killing the four. The ULFA is fighting to create a separate homeland. More than 2,000 people have died in the rebellion over the past 10 years in Assam known for its tea and rich oil reserves.

US eases restriction on Ukraine: The United States on Friday scrapped Cold War era restrictions on defence trade with Ukraine, the eighth former Soviet republic to be taken off the prescribed list. AFP reports from Washington.

This is a major step forward for Ukraine and for the development of a very close US-Ukraine relationship. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said. Ukraine was taken off the US government's international traffic in arms regulation list (ITAR) which directs the State Department to deny licenses or defence services to certain countries.

2 foreigners kidnapped in Chechnya: Two members of a French humanitarian mission have been kidnapped by unknown armed people in the Chechen capital Grozny, a news agency said Saturday. AP reports from Grozny. ITAR-Tass did not identify the mission but said its leader Jean-Pierre Mahe reported the abduction Saturday to Chechnya's Moscow-backed Interior Ministry.

Gunmen kill 2 Egyptian cops: Suspected Islamic militants shot dead two policemen and a local official in a village of Egypt's troubled southern province of Minya, police said yesterday. AFP reports from Cairo.

They said three gunmen, believed to be members of the outlawed *Jamaa Islamiyya*, killed the policemen standing guard outside the home of the mayor of Ashmunine village late Friday. As they fled, they also gunned down a local official who was coming out of a mosque, police said.

8 die as ferry sinks in Vietnam: Eight people died when a ferry carrying twice the load it was licensed for sank in a river in central Vietnam, the official Nhan Dan Daily reported yesterday. Reuters says from Hanoi.

The newspaper said the vessel was swamped by high waves as it navigated the Gianh river to the north of the wartime demilitarised zone. Nhan Dan said the ferry had been carrying 40 passengers and 600 kg (1,320 pounds) in goods. It was licensed to carry half that amount.

Peasants, troops clash in Colombia: At least two people were killed and more than 15 injured on Friday in a violent clash between peasants and government security forces caught on opposite sides of one of the frontlines of Colombia's drug war, authorities said. Reuters reports from Bogota.

Former French PM
Debre dead

PARIS, Aug 3: Former French prime minister and one of the founders of the Fifth Republic Michel Debre died today at the age of 84 at his home in Montlouis-Sur-Loire, local media reports quoted an announcement by his family as saying, reports Xinhua.

Born on January 15, 1912 in Paris, Michel Debre was the son of Robert Debre, an internationally renowned pediatrician at the time.

Debre joined the resistance force against Germany during World War II and was the government's representative in the region of Angers in the fight for the liberation of France from the Nazi occupation.

He was prime minister under General Charles de Gaulle from 1959 to 1962, and occupied several ministerial seats from 1966 to 1973.

President Jacques Chirac said in a message of condolence that France has lost one of its greatest servants.

One of the four sons of Michel Debre, Jean-Louis Debre, is now the Interior Minister.

Nepali opposition
to block passage
of river treaty
with India

KATHMANDU, Aug 3: Nepal's main opposition party said yesterday that it would block passage of treaty with India on border river development in the Nepali Parliament, reports Xinhua.

The coalition government is expected to table the Nepal-Indian treaty on Mahakali River to the on-going Parliament session for ratification.

President of the opposition Communist Party of Nepal (UML) Man Mohan Adhikari said at the Lower House that the treaty could only be presented to Parliament six months from now after extensive discussions on every aspect of the treaty.

The ratification of the treaty, which needs at least a two-thirds majority in the House, would be unlikely without the support of the UML, which holds 89 seats in the 205 seat Lower House.

US to pull out dependents of army men from KSA

WASHINGTON, Aug 3: The United States has decided to pull out dependents of US military personnel from Saudi Arabia, where 24 Americans have been killed in two terrorist attacks since November a Pentagon spokesman said Friday, reports AFP.

A decision has been made to take out dependents said Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon. We expect the vast majority of dependents will leave.

"They'll be out relatively soon it's a question of chartering flights to get them out," he told AFP.

The decision to pull out the 1,000 dependents of US military personnel in Saudi Arabia coincides with the move of some 4,000 US troops from Dhahran and Riyadh to an air base in the desert.

The source did not provide the names or number of people on the blacklist and Antara did not report which authority issued the list.

Dozens of activists, student leaders and members of the

Wives of Western hostages seek Kashmiris' help

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 3: The wives of two Western tourists kidnapped by Muslim rebels in Kashmir more than a year ago pleaded with local villagers Saturday to help win their husbands' release, reports AFP.

Jane Schelley, wife of American Donald Hutchins, and Julie Mangan, wife of British Keith Mangan, met the village head at Magam Rakh, the head priest of the local mosque and other villagers.

"Please provide us with clues about our husbands and we will be thankful to you," Schelley told one of the village women.

"We want to know whether they are alive or dead."

Indian authorities launched a search of Magam Rakh two months ago for the bodies of the men and two other Western hostages after an arrested Muslim militant said all had been killed by their captors, but none were found.

17 Afghans die in tribal clash

ISLAMABAD, Aug 3: A tribe in eastern Afghanistan said on Friday it had routed a rival tribe in two days of fierce battles over disputed land, a Pakistan-based Afghan news service reported, says Reuters.

At least 17 people were killed and 25 wounded in the battles between the Shinwar Roadad tribes in Nangarhar province, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said.

It quoted a Shinwar spokesman as saying his tribe had captured most areas under Roadad control and taken about 100 tribal people hostage while others were on the run.

There was no independent confirmation of the report.

On Thursday, AIP reported that at least 15 people were killed and more than 30 wounded in a pitched battle involving tanks and artillery.

ate. "All Somalia's people are witnessing that fighting cannot settle the Somali problem," Ali Mahdi told reporters gathered at his north Mogadishu villa Friday. "I will insist that Somali people come together, sit together, discuss peacefully who their leader for the future will be."

Ali Mahdi said Aidid's death had created an opening for a new international conference where all Somali factions could decide the country's future. But he also noted that his fighters remained on the battlefields and would return fire if attacked by Aidid's men.

Aidid's radio station said a 30-member committee had been appointed to head his United Somali Congress-Somali National Alliance, whose members are drawn primarily from the Habr-Gedir sub-clan of the Hawiye clan, one of the six in Somalia.

The radio broadcast a statement, apparently from the new committee, calling on the soldiers of the National Army — Aidid's militia — to "remain watchful and defend their rights."

The station also declared a 30-day mourning period, and broadcast somber music and messages of condolence to Aidid's family. Aidid is survived by his third wife, Khadija, said Gurhan, and 14 children.

Prof Ioan M Lewis, a British expert on Somalia, said Aidid's death opens the situation to "positive developments." Attempts since 1991 to broker agreements among the faction leaders in Somalia have

generally been "a complete waste of time," largely because Aidid wasn't interested in negotiating, Lewis said.

White House spokesman Johnson said the Clinton administration hopes that Aidid's removal from the scene can set the foundation for a more peaceful future for Somalia.

Aidid was the leading force behind the overthrow of former dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991. During the dictator's increasingly brutal 21-year rule, Aidid served in the army, cabinet and as Somalia's ambassador to India. Siad Barre named him intelligence chief but began to suspect Aidid of plotting against him and jailed him from 1969 to 1976.

As Siad Barre's rule weakened, Aidid turned on his boss. Aidid's fighters drove the fallen leader from Mogadishu in January 1991. Shortly after, two Hawiye sub-clans — one led by Ali Mahdi and the other by Aidid — began quarrelling over the spoils.

The country of 8 million people dissolved into a collection of fiefdoms with no central government. Thousands of heavily armed militias, brandishing weapons Siad Barre received from the Soviets and the West, roamed Mogadishu and the rest of the country terrorising civilians and destroying the economy.

Often travelling in jeeps or trucks grossly over-armed with anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, and frequently under the influence of *khat*, a popular narcotic plant, they disrupted education, business and farming.

Aidid's death may offer a way out of Somali civil war

MOGADISHU, Aug 3: The death of faction leader Mohamed Farah Aidid may offer a way out of five years of civil war that has left hundreds of thousands dead of violence and starvation, rival militia leaders say, reports AP.

Aidid's militias had forced UN peacekeepers to abandon Somalia. And a US manhunt for Aidid during the peacekeeping mission led to a battle that killed 18 US soldiers and a reported 300 Somalis. The slaughter, in October 1993, prompted President Clinton to speed up the withdrawal of US forces, which was completed the next year.

The official cause of Aidid's death Thursday was a heart attack, although White House spokesman David Johnson said the 61-year-old general reportedly died from surgery to treat a gunshot wound he received during fighting.

He was buried Friday, and the streets of Mogadishu, the capital, were quite. Aidid was wounded in a July 24 battle for the key Medina neighbourhood that controls an important road out of the city.

Shortly after his burial in a simple Muslim ceremony, Mogadishu radio stations run by his two archrivals announced unilateral cease-fire.

The radio stations — run by Ali Mahdi Mohamed, who controls north Mogadishu, and Osman Hassan Ali Atto, a former Aidid backer who formed his own militia — also noted that talks among as many as 15 political factions were possible if the team named to replace Aidid was ready to negoti-

More than 350,000 Somalis died in the famine and the fighting.

Five hundred Pakistani UN peacekeeping troops were sent to Mogadishu in September 1992 to protect aid workers trying to distribute food and medical supplies to people displaced by the fighting.

The first US Marines went ashore at Mogadishu on December 8, 1992. Western diplomats tried to negotiate with Aidid and other Somali leaders to end the chaos. But the United Nations soon accused Aidid of ambushing peacekeepers and issued a warrant for his arrest.

By February 1993, thousands of Somalis in Mogadishu, egged on by Aidid, were rioting against the foreign intervention.

Aidid repeatedly denied responsibility for the ambush that killed Pakistani peacekeepers in June 1993, and accused the UN forces of favouring his rivals.

The United States withdrew in March 1994, and the final UN contingent pulled out a year later.

Renewed fighting broke out this year as Aidid battled a coalition of other factions for control of south Mogadishu and large areas in the south of the country.

Hospitals and clinics in Mogadishu last week reported more than 100 people killed and another 400 wounded in the past month.

There are still an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 people displaced from other areas of Somalia living in Mogadishu and another 475,000 Somali refugees outside the country.