

International

Arafat for 'European presence' at Erez talks

UNSC asks Israel, PA to pursue talks, fulfil commitments under accord

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 5: The UN Security Council on Friday urged Israel and the Palestinians to pursue negotiations and fulfil their commitments under existing peace agreements, ahead of a new round of US-brokered peace talks, reports AFP.

The call was contained in a letter to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali agreed by all 15 Council members after non-permanent member Egypt requested that the matter should be placed on the Council's agenda.

Western diplomats said that the letter, which also said the Council remained determined to "provide the needed backing" for the peace process, appeared to be a gentle reminder to Washington that the United Nations had a stake in the process.

Washington is dismissive of a UN role in the process and in-

sists it is a matter for the parties themselves under US sponsorship.

Earlier report says, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called in Paris Friday for a "European presence" at Israeli-Palestinian talks to start Sunday at the Erez-crossing between the Jewish state and the Gaza Strip.

Arafat made his comments to reporters after meeting with French President Jacques Chirac.

US President Bill Clinton Friday said he was sending his Secretary of State Warren Christopher to the Middle East and is scheduled to spend several hours in Egypt before returning to Gaza City, they said.

Christopher was scheduled to leave Washington Monday for a nine-day tour of five African countries but Clinton told reporters at Chautauqua, New York, that he had told him:

"Go to the Middle East first."

Arafat arrived in Paris on Friday for talks with Chirac on the Middle East situation, after a visit to Italy as he tries to muster European support.

Another report from Cairo says, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived in Cairo today to brief President Hosni Mubarak on the results of the emergency Washington summit boycotted by the Egyptian leader.

Arafat arrived here from France, where he held talks with President Jacques Chirac, and is scheduled to spend several hours in Egypt before returning to Gaza City, they said.

Christopher declined an invitation from US President Bill Clinton to attend the Washington summit, which brought together Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordan's King Hussein, officials said, before leaving for Africa.

The US State Department's coordinator for the Middle East, Dennis Ross, will represent the United States at the Erez talks, which will focus on

clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in the Palestinian territories.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators are to open intensive talks at the Erez crossing between Israel and Gaza on Sunday aimed at putting the Middle East peace process back on track after the violence which left more than 80 people dead in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher was to head to the Middle East Saturday for top-level meetings coinciding with the resumption of Erez talks.

Christopher was scheduled to confer with Netanyahu in Jerusalem and Arafat in Gaza, officials said, before leaving for Africa.

The US State Department's coordinator for the Middle East, Dennis Ross, will represent the United States at the Erez talks, which will focus on

the long-delayed Israeli redeployment from the West Bank town of Hebron.

Meanwhile, Israel lifted Friday its blockade of the Palestinian town of Jenin in the north of the occupied West Bank, a military spokesman said.

He said that the curfew on the city of Hebron would again be eased Saturday to enable residents to do their shopping.

The measures were among those imposed in the wake of fierce clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces last week, when more than 50 people were killed.

The blockade of Bethlehem in the south of the West Bank was lifted Thursday.

Israeli-Palestinian talks are set to resume Sunday in an attempt to ease tensions and reach an agreement on the continuation of the peace process.



French President Jacques Chirac (R) talks, on Friday in Paris, with Palestinian authority President Yasser Arafat (L), during the European trip of the Palestinian leader on his way back from the Israeli-Palestinian summit held in Washington. — AFP/UNB photo

Communists for removal of Kashmir Governor

NEW DELHI, Oct 5: Indian Communists demanded today that Kashmir Governor K V Krishna Rao be sacked for attacking a Muslim party which won the first elections in a decade in the strife-torn state, reports AFP.

The only way to control the arrogance of ... Rao is to remove him and replace him by a political man," said the Communist Party of India (CPI), a member of Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's government.

The CPI statement came two days after Rao told a newspaper that leaders of the National Conference Party, which won the September polls in Kashmir, might indulge in corruption after forming a new state government.

"They must give a good government," Rao said. "They must not indulge in corruption and

neoponism. They used to do all this, these very chaps."

CPI general secretary Muqumuddin Farooqi said Rao's comments were "highly objectionable."

"The governor's sermon to the newly-elected members of the National Conference needs to be sharply nailed down as thoroughly improper," the party said.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), another government ally, said the governor had "no business to stay on in the job after saying something like this."

Both the CPI and CPI-M have good relations with the National Conference, which won a landslide victory in the staggered ballot to the Kashmir Assembly. It was the first state assembly election since March 1987.

UN barred from reacting to Taliban treatment of women

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 5: China and Indonesia on Friday prevented the Security Council from reacting to the Taliban Islamic militia's treatment of women since seizing the Afghan capital Kabul, diplomats said here, reports AFP.

The diplomats said that during a 45-minute discussion of an Italian proposal for the council to criticise Taliban's severe restrictions against women, the US delegation remained silent.

Since taking over the capital one week ago, the Taliban have banished women from work and closed girls schools in line with policy in other Taliban-controlled regions.

Taliban fighters armed with machine guns and sticks on Friday forced residents of the

Afghan capital into mosques for prayers to mark the Muslim holy day.

Security Council president Gerardo Martinez Blanco was only authorised by the 15-member Council to express to the press "concern" about the events in Afghanistan, and to urge all factions to "renounce the use of force and engage in a constructive political dialogue to achieve national reconciliation."

Martinez Blanco declined to explain to reporters why there was no reference to the situation of women in the statement.

The Italian proposal notably had the backing of countries such as Chile, France and Russia, the diplomats said.

During the discussions, Indonesian Ambassador Nugroho

Wisnunurtri caused a stir in the Council Chamber when he told his colleagues in an apparent slip of the tongue that "despite being" a Muslim-dominated country, Indonesia supported the role of women.

One envoy summarised his Indonesian colleague's position jokingly as: "Despite being a Muslim Country, we like women."

China systematically blocks moves by the Council to step into the human rights arena, which is also a ticklish issue in Indonesia.

But Beijing is also a close ally of Pakistan, which is believed to support the fundamentalist militia in Afghanistan despite official denials.

Politician's bid to raise campaign money by nude pose

BALTIMORE, Oct 5: Most candidates dread getting caught with their pants down. Not John Kimble. He's willing to take everything off for Playgirl to raise money for his US congressional campaign, reports AP.

The Republican candidate says he's sent non-naked photos of himself to the magazine in the hope editors will ask him to pose sans the shorts.

"I've noticed the popular guys have all had sex scandals," Kimble said Friday. "Sex sells. I don't think it will hurt me in such a Democratic area."

Kimble says he will pose in the raw only if radio shock jock Howard Stern helps him raise 1 million dollars.

But Playgirl said it would consider publishing Kimble's photos if editors like what they see.

EU leaders seek more unity at Ireland summit

DUBLIN, Ireland, Oct 5: Divided on myriad issues, the 15 European Union leaders gather for a summit Saturday hoping to expand on the little common ground they have found so far to rewrite the EU treaty and forge a closer bond, reports AP.

Opposing each other on issues from the right to veto decisions to the number of commissioners each nation can have on the Executive Commission, the leaders agree on one thing — the treaty negotiations so far have moved at a snail's pace.

"We have to find a new impulse, a new determination," said French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette at the convening of the informal meeting.

Early this summer, the 15 leaders confidently set June next year as the date for finishing the new treaty, but confidence has been sapped to the extent that the summit here will be seen as a success if that date simply can be confirmed.

"We are looking for a reaffirmation of the timetable," said Foreign Minister Dick Spring of Ireland, which hosts the summit.

Clinton in dark about China

HONG KONG, Oct 5: US President Bill Clinton is in the dark about China because he has never paid a visit to Asia's biggest nation in his four years in office, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen has said, reports AP.

In an interview telecast on Friday on CNN International, Qian noted that unlike his predecessor George Bush, the president — who is up for re-election in November — "has never been to China."

"Therefore, I assume that he does not have adequate knowledge about China," he continued.

"However, in his talk with a journalist of the New York Times on the 29th of May of this year, he said that there is a changing process in his understanding about China," Qian said.

"It should be an improvement," he added.

Bush served as head of a liaison office in Beijing in the mid-1970s prior to the establishment of sino-US diplomatic ties in 1979.

Bid to prevent exodus of Tamil India, Lanka step up naval patrols

COLOMBO, Oct 5: Sri Lanka and India have stepped up naval patrols to prevent an exodus of Tamil refugees fleeing to neighbouring southern India, a senior minister said here Friday.

Energy Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte said both countries were keen to ensure that Sri Lankans did not cross a narrow strip of the Indian Ocean to go to the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Ratwatte, who is also the minister in charge of the government's military drive against the country's separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas, accused the rebels of orchestrating the movement of refugees.

More than 300 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees arrived in southern India Tuesday, two days after the final bastion of Tamil separatists fell to government troops.

Number of old people to become double by 2020

"As such, population ageing presents new and serious challenges for national and international public health," it added.

Quoting forecasts by independent scientific organisations, WHO said seven developing countries will figure among the nations with the biggest proportion of old people by 2020.

China is expected to have 231 million old people, India 145 million, Brazil 30 million, Indonesia 18 million, Pakistan 18 million, Mexico 15 million and Bangladesh 14.5 million.

The proportion of the aged population in Europe was set to rise in the next quarter century to 24 per cent, 23 per cent in East Asia, 17 per cent in Latin America and 10 per cent in South Asia.

The "oldest" countries will be Japan, with 31 per cent of the population aged over 60 and Italy, Greece and Germany, all with more than 28 per cent.

Between 1985 and 2025 the proportion of old people in Colombia, the Philippines, Kenya and Thailand will grow at a rate of 300 per cent, 10 times higher than in Britain or Sweden, WHO said.

Off the Record

Spookie, the first lion to undergo heart operation

PRETORIA: Spookie, a rare white lion cub, became the first lion to undergo a delicate and lengthy operation to repair a heart defect here Friday, veterinary surgeons said, reports AFP.

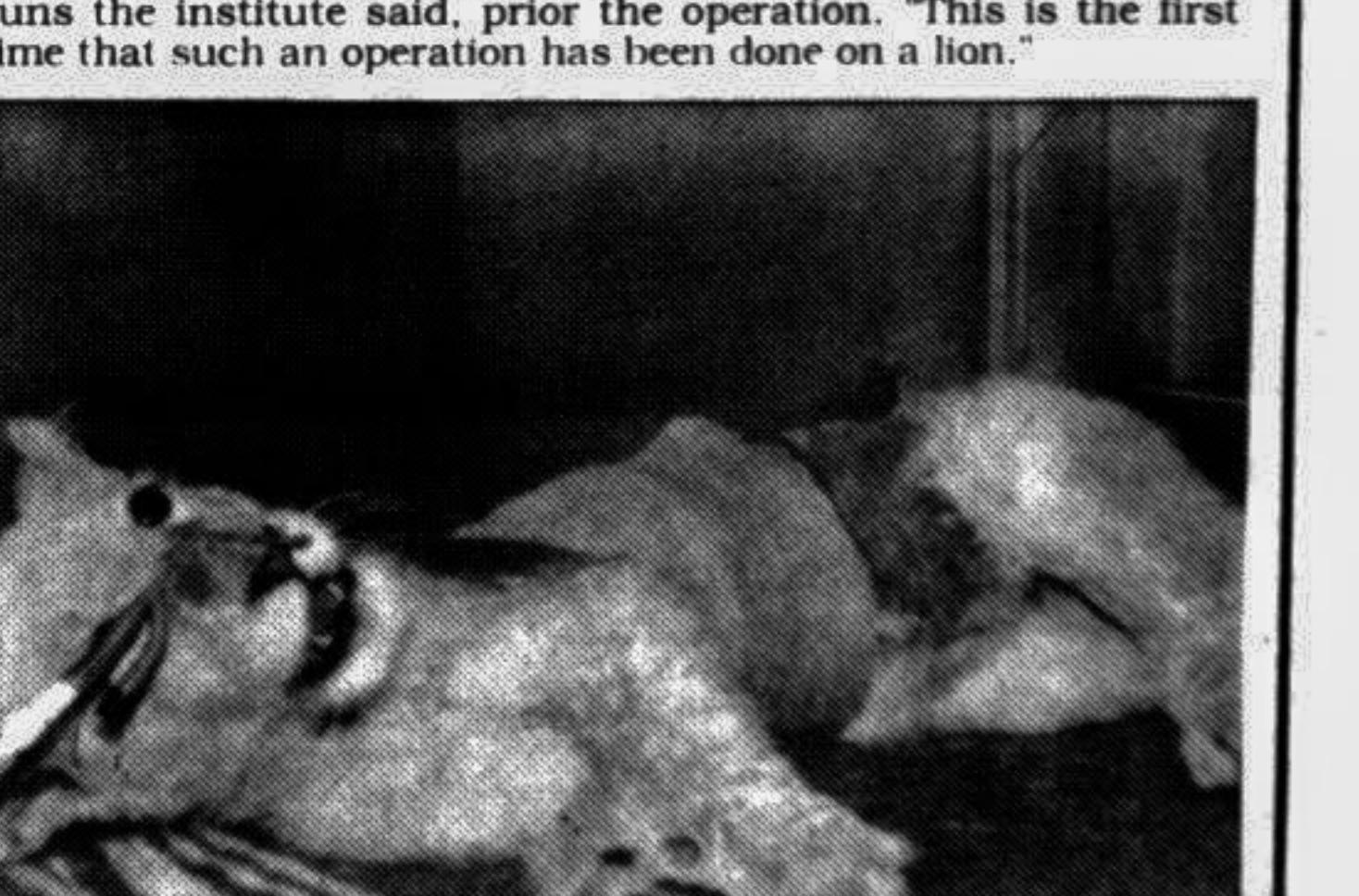
The surgical procedure was a great success, said Jeremy Goldin, the head of surgery at the Ondersteppen Veterinary Institute where the operation was performed.

"We will only know in about two weeks if she will survive and if she starts eating properly," Goldin said.

The four-month-old cub, whose name means "little ghost" in Afrikaans, was born with a defective aorta that pressed the gullet against the heart and caused difficulty in breathing and swallowing.

It took the veterinarians more than four hours to tie off the arch in the aorta and correct the narrowing in the gullet, Goldin said.

"Similar operations have been done on pets but not always with a good outcome," a spokesman for the university which runs the institute said, prior to the operation. "This is the first time that such an operation has been done on a lion."



Spookie, the four-month-old white lion emerges from a five-hour open heart operation at Ondersteppen Veterinary Hospital on Friday. She underwent the operation, the first of its kind, in a bid to save her life. It will only be known after two weeks if the little lioness will live. — AFP/UNB photo



A Taliban militia (C) stops a taxi and a bicycle rider with a stick in his hand forcing them to go for Jummah prayers in front of the Pul-i-Khishti mosque, in Kabul on Friday. Prayers were enforced for anyone who ventured near the mosque one week after the religious fighters stormed into Kabul. — AFP/UNB photo

Saddam has rebuilt army into credible fighting force

LONDON, Oct 5: Saddam Hussein has rebuilt the devastated Iraqi army into a credible fighting force by reviving the country's military industries and smuggling in military hardware, according to Jane's Intelligence Review, reports AP.

Following Iraq's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam cut the army's strength, reorganized the command structure, and most importantly restarted the country's pre-war network of military industries, the magazine said in its November issue made available on Friday.

"As a result, Iraq has been able to maintain and repair major weaponry, often by cannibalizing other equipment that is not crucially required by

a smaller army, while other material has been smuggled in from abroad," it said.

In the short term, Iraq has sufficient capability to deal with any domestic challenge and analysts believe it retains "a qualitative superiority" over the armies of Iran and states in the southern Persian Gulf, the magazine said.

But if the international arms embargo against Iraq continues, the army will face serious problems in the longer term as more and more equipment breaks down and becomes impossible to repair, it said.

US intelligence estimates also say Iraq's military has been reconstituted into a substantial and threatening force.

The oil-rich Baghdad regime was spending \$1 billion a year on arms imports before the 1990 invasion of Kuwait and used to buy new equipment rather than repair and maintain its military hardware, Jane's Intelligence Review said.

But the arms embargo forced Iraq to adopt a new "make and mend" approach, Jane's Intelligence Review said.

Under terms of the Gulf War ceasefire, Iraq was not barred from rebuilding its state run conventional arms industry.

Before the war, Iraq had the capacity to assemble tanks, convert and repair combat aircraft, produce aerial weapons, artillery systems, rockets and small arms, the magazine said.

"Opinions differ over the extent to which the industry in general has been revived, but some analysts believe there are now more than 200 weapon production/repair establishments across Iraq, with most of them concentrated in the Baghdad and Mosul areas," Jane's said.

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