

International

Violence escalates in south of Beirut

UNSC agrees to bring Israel, PA back to talks

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 9: The 15 members of the UN Security Council agreed to do all they can to get Israel and the Palestinians back to the table...

table — all council members committed themselves fully to that objective, Weston said. The July 30 suicide bombings by Islamic militants at a Jerusalem market "reinforces the urgency of a return to negotiations," he said.

Dennis Ross's arrival on Saturday to try to break a crisis in Israel-Palestinian peacemaking. Israeli planes unleashed rockets south of Beirut on Friday just hours after Katyusha rockets fired from Lebanon slammed into northern Israel.



A massive column of smoke billows over the Soufriere Hills volcano as it erupted again Friday. Guadeloupe and other islands have been working on a plan for the possible evacuation of the 5,000 people who remain on the British Caribbean colony.

20,000 children below one die in Benin every year

COTONOU, Aug 9: Almost 20,000 children die every year in Benin before reaching the age of one, the head of the United Nations population fund told an international conference here, reports AFP.

Aid to malnourished DPRK children should not be held hostage: UNICEF

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 9: Aid to 800,000 North Korean children suffering from malnutrition should not be held hostage to the politics of the Communist state, UNICEF director Carol Bellamy said, reports Reuters.

those of North Korea and those released last month by the aid agency, Caritas. "It is very important that the immediate significant humanitarian crisis not find itself hostage to what is also a political crisis. Humanitarian needs can't wait," she told a news conference.



An unidentified Bosnian woman amongst children touches the cheek of Princess Diana, in Tuzla Friday. Princess Diana arrived her for a three-day visit to Bosnia as part of her global campaign against landmines.

Kashmir violence claims 17 lives

SRINAGAR, Aug 9: Seventeen people, including 13 militants and two army jawans, were killed and 20 others, mostly security personnel, wounded in militancy related violence in Kashmir since Thursday evening as security forces intensified their anti-militant operations keeping in view the coming Independence Day celebrations, reports PTI.

Egypt plans to launch 'Islamic satellite' to determine exact Muslim lunar month

CAIRO, Aug 9: The Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Nasr Farid Wasel, said in statements published Friday that his country planned on launching an "Islamic satellite" to determine with precision the Muslim lunar calendar, reports AFP.

terminated by the sighting of the new moon and often Muslim states observed different dates for the start of these months. The Muslim month starts the day after the moon's crescent is seen with the naked eye.

BRIEFLY

Kim likely to amnesty Chun, Roh: South Korean President Kim Young-Sam is likely to amnesty former presidents Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo before he finishes his official term early next year, a senior government official said yesterday, AFP reports from Seoul.

It belongs to the president's prerogatives to amnesty convicts, the unidentified official was quoted as saying by Yonhap news agency.

"But it is expected that the president will conclude the issue of pardoning the two former presidents before he finishes his official tenure," he said.

IFGO conference ends in Denmark: The 15th Congress of the International Federation on Gynecology and Obstetrics (IFGO) closed Friday in Copenhagen, Denmark, Xinhua reports from Stockholm.

About 6000 gynecologists and obstetricians from more than 1000 countries took part in the five-day meeting to discuss ways of improving the health of women and the newborn.

Fumes sicken 109 in India: As many as 109 persons, including 90 students, were hospitalised after they inhaled poisonous fumes emanating from an insecticide godown at Kather village in the powerloom town of Bhabradri in the neighbouring Thane district on Friday, PTI reports from Mumbai.

The students and 19 teachers, including three women, of New English High School complained of dizziness and vomiting after they inhaled toxic fumes emanating out of the godown situated nearby and were admitted to Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, police yesterday said adding that they were out of danger.

6 policemen killed in Andhra: Six policemen were killed yesterday when their vehicles ran over a landmine in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, the Press Trust of India reported, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Two others were injured in the explosion in the coastal state's Annavaram district.

The news agency said the landmine planted by Maoist guerrillas of the outlawed People's War Group, which often targets the police in its campaign against feudal landlords in Andhra Pradesh.

Israeli jets bomb south of Beirut: Israeli warplanes bombed yesterday the base of a pro-Syrian Palestinian group on the outskirts of Naameh, south of Beirut, security sources said, AFP reports from Siden.

Two jets fired two missiles at 19:10 pm (1610 GMT) on hills near Naameh, 15 kilometres (9.3 miles) south of Beirut, they said.

The pro-Syrian Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, led by Ahmed Jibril, has a base in Naameh.

Jose Maria meets Mahathir: Costa Rican President Jose Maria Figueres Olsen paid a courtesy call Saturday on Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, a news report said, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Figueres was accompanied by Costa Rica's Minister of Trade Jose Manuel Salazar and Minister of Education Eduardo Dorvan, the national news agency Bernama reported. Also present was Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Figueres, on a two-week private visit, had stayed at the holiday resort island of Pulau Langkawi in the Straits of Malacca, 400 kilometers (240 miles) northwest of here and also trekked in the tropical jungles of Sarawak on Borneo island.

23 executed in China: China has executed 23 people convicted of offences from murder to hoiganism in the southern boomtown of Shenzhen, which borders onto Hong Kong, the Shenzhen Special Zone daily said yesterday, AFP says from Beijing.

The 23 were sentenced at a public rally held by the Shenzhen Intermediate people's court on Friday and executed shortly afterwards. All were workers from outside Shenzhen who had committed a number of offences ranging from the theft of an automatic machine gun from the people's armed police to murder during a bar brawl.

Mild quake shakes Japan: A moderate earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.1 shook the Tokyo area early Saturday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, AP reports from Tokyo.

MNLF leader appeals to int'l donors for aid

GENERAL SANTOS, Philippines, Aug 9: Former Muslim guerilla leader-turned-development chief Nur Misuari on Friday appealed to international donors to help develop war-ravaged areas in the southern Philippines, reports AFP.

At the meeting, the government presented potential donors with a list of 85 projects for financing, ranging from roads, bridges, ports, social services, agriculture, skill development and education, including Islamic-based schools.

While we have signed the peace agreement, the infrastructure is not yet present, the economy is still in shambles," Misuari said at the formal opening of a fund-raising drive for the country's 14 Muslim-populated provinces.

OAU chief slams execution in Burundi

HARARE, Aug 9: Zimbabwean leader and Chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Robert Mugabe on Friday condemned the recent execution of five people in Burundi, reports AFP.

Mugabe said the executions carried out by the military junta of major Pierre Buyoya constituted a violation of human rights.

He said the hanging of the five on July 31 in Bujumbura might not help improve the situation in the strife-torn Central African nation.

"By carrying out the hangings, President Buyoya's government, moreover, has created a situation which does not augur well for the envisaged all-party talks due to take place later this month," Mugabe said in a statement.

Sihanouk powerless to help resolve Cambodian crisis

PHNOM PENH, Aug 9: Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk said in a letter released Saturday that he is powerless to help the people of his country following a coup that ousted his son as co-prime minister, reports AP.

Nonetheless, he clearly disapproved of the violent and bloody July 5 putsch led by co-prime minister Hun Sen. The king said he holds totally different views from the people now in power, and branded the political situation a comedy.

"The fate of our nation is terribly sad," the king said in a letter to exiled opposition political leader Sam Rainsy dated August 8. "I have no ability to do anything. The power is totally in their hands."

The king left Cambodia during November for a month-long programme of medical treatment in Beijing, but has not returned.

Hun Sen, jealous of the king's popularity, has threatened the royal family in the past.

Rainsy had written an appeal to Sihanouk not to issue a royal decree recognising Foreign Minister Ung Huot as Ranariddh's replacement.

Pentagon honours China's army chief

WASHINGTON, Aug 9: China's top general was honoured at the Pentagon Friday with a 19-gun salute as part of a US charm offensive to coax the Chinese military to be more open, reports AFP.

General Fu Quanyou, Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), met with General John Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after the full-honours arrival ceremony at a parade ground overlooking the Potomac river.

The generals agreed on the importance of maintaining high-level military contacts, a US defence official said.

They discussed North Korea and agreed on the need to continue the four-party talks between North and South Korea.

Marxist rebels kill 26 troops in Colombia

BOGOTA, Aug 9: Marxist guerrillas said on Friday they had killed 26 soldiers posing as right-wing paramilitary fighters, and that six of their own men had died in a fierce battle in eastern Colombia, says Reuters.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's oldest and largest rebel force, said they attacked the troops last Saturday in an isolated hamlet about 25 miles (40 km) from the town of Mapiroman, which was the scene of a brutal massacre last month.

China and the United States that aim to put a formal end to the Korean war, the official said.

Neither Taiwan nor US-Japan defence guidelines came up in their talks, the official said.

Fu arrived in the United States August 5 for a little-publicised tour of US military installations. He is the second-highest ranking Chinese military officer to visit the United States since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

Over protests from human rights groups and some members of Congress, the Clinton administration in December renewed a campaign to improve military-to-military relations with Beijing.

NASA already is withholding final approval for a replacement for Foale, citing concerns voiced at levels all the way up to President Clinton himself.

With an investment of more than \$4 billion in Mir, which it sees as a stepping stone to the international space station, it is likely to maintain the commitment — but only if repairs pan out.

"I don't think NASA can make a firm commitment until the power is restored," said Geoff Perry, head of the Kettering Space Observers Group in Cornwall, England.

In the meantime, an international debate has been raging for weeks over safety on the dilapidated Mir.

"For many observers, it is hard to understand why human lives are being put at risk — and hundreds of millions of dollars

Uncertainty shadows Mir rescue mission

Progress cargo ship poked one or two small holes in the side of the Spektr scientific module when it smacked into it during a practice docking.

But the astronauts scheduled to visit Mir next month on the US shuttle Atlantis say an analysis of photographs and telemetry suggests that more than the Spektr was damaged.

Writing on their mission's site recently on the World Wide Web, they said the theory is that the Progress "may have careened into the end of the Base Block module (main Mir module) and even the Kvant-1 module."

If that is borne out, it could greatly increase the Russians' damage estimate of between \$17 million and \$22 million, and give the US space agency NASA more reason to abandon its role in the aging Mir for safety reasons.

Russian officials say the

just heard more about the breakdowns lately.

A US expert called the Russian orbital station "a treasure that should not be wasted."

"Mir is doing for us exactly what it should be doing," said Harvey Wichman, director of the Aerospace Psychology Laboratory at Claremont McKenna College in California.

"The things that went wrong on Mir don't usually happen with a new vehicle, so the forthcoming international space station won't provide these lessons until it, too, is aging," he wrote in a newspaper commentary.

The Russians are sticking to their own planned scenario for Mir's demise.

On Friday, President Boris Yeltsin visited the Khrunichev Space Center in Moscow and was briefed on plans to revive the power-starved Mir. Officials also previewed the Mir's final shutdown — in 2000, after an international space station becomes operational.

Pathfinder in good shape to send its rover on bonus journeys

PASADENA, California, Aug 9: Officially done with its 30-day mission, Mars Pathfinder is in good enough shape to send its rover on bonus journeys, including a trip up a hill to see what lies beyond, according to scientists, reports AP.

The goal now is to concentrate on more long-range monitoring of the Martian weather and surface before possibly sending the rover Sojourner dozens of metres (yards) away from Pathfinder for a journey up a gently sloping hill, scientists said Friday.

"We will have to go very slowly," said project scientist Matthew Golombek. "This is the long, long, long, long range plans for the rover."

The probe landed July 4 near the Mars equator for what

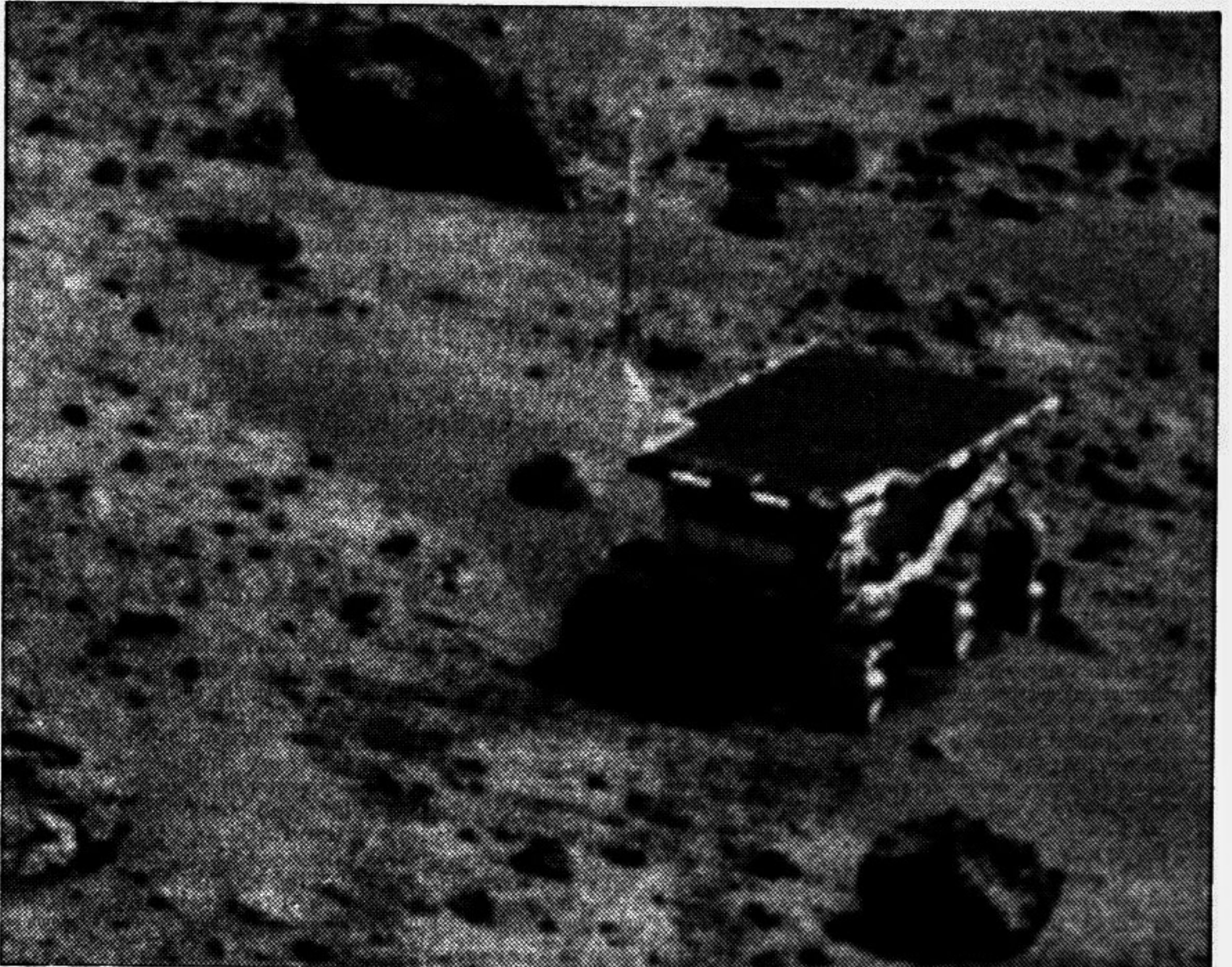
Nat'l Front to remain a coalition, says Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 9: Malaysia's governing National Front will remain a coalition and not become a single party, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said Saturday, reports AP.

The coalition comprises 11 Malay, Chinese, Indian and other ethnic parties. It has been returned to power at every election since independence from Britain in 1957 with big majorities in Parliament.

Some members have suggested that it might be time to amalgamate them all into a single party.

Speaking to reporters after chairing the front's supreme council meeting, Mahathir said the front is not ready to become a single party and will remain a coalition until the idea of a single party is accepted by everyone.



This image of the Sojourner rover was taken at the end of day on Sol 30 and released by NASA on Friday. The rover is perched atop Mermaid Dune, a dark material distinct from the surrounding bright surface. Dark red rover tracks extend from the foreground to the base of the rover's wheels.