

Palestinians demonstrate in Ramallah, Gaza City

Arafat accepts US, Israeli demands to rein in militants

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Aug 12: The deep freeze on Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking may be thawing, reports AP.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Monday reluctantly accepted Israeli and US demands that he rein in militant Islamic groups.

"We have a start at this point," US envoy Dennis Ross told reporters as he shuttled between meetings Monday at the governor's mansion in the autonomous West Bank city of Ramallah. He met with Arafat in one meeting.

In another part of the building, Shin Bet security agency chief Ami Ayalon and other Israeli met with Palestinian intelligence chief Amin al-Hindi, West Bank security chief Jibril Rajoub and his Gaza counterpart, Mohammed Dahlan. Israel Radio said the US team in the three-way talks included CIA officials.

A Palestinian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Palestinians agreed to resume regular security meetings and that Israel accepted their condition that the Americans take part in them.

The details of the security cooperation were unclear, and the parties were expected to continue meetings Tuesday to work them out. Ross was also to meet Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Also Monday, thousands of Palestinians, including supporters of the militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, rallied against Israel's policies in Ramallah and Gaza City.

"Netanyahu, your crimes will lead to disaster" said a banner in Ramallah, where protesters burned Israeli flags. "America is an ally of the enemy" one protester shouted through a loudspeaker.

The demonstrations, held with the permission of Arafat's

government, were a vivid and perhaps deliberate show of the pressures the Palestinian leader faces from his own people. The Israeli government said Arafat still has much work out for him.

"It is exactly these types of demonstrations that the Palestinian Authority obligated itself to bring under control," government spokesman Moshe Fogel said.

Israel's key demands appear to be that the Palestinians arrest some 200 key Islamic mili-

tant and restore close intelligence sharing with Israel in an effort to foil attacks such as the July 30 double-suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed 16 people.

The Palestinians initially followed such actions in the spring in 1996, when Shimon Peres was Israel's prime minister.

But after the latest bombing, the Palestinians refused to continue apparently because they doubted the peace process could be completed with Netanyahu, who once opposed the Israeli

PLO accords.

Ross has a complicated task. The Palestinians have refused to cooperate with Israel until Netanyahu ends settlement building in disputed territory, while Israel sees security cooperation as a prerequisite for any political concessions.

However, he appears to be making headway by taking Israel's position in the short term and holding out for the Palestinians the prospect of a broader US political initiative within several weeks once the security issue has been settled.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat chats with United States Middle East envoy Dennis Ross at the beginning of their meeting in Ramallah on the West Bank Sunday. Ross, who earlier met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is launching a new mission aimed at salvaging the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. — AFP/UNB photo

Bodo men execute 11 in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Aug 12: Tribal separatist guerrillas today executed 11 men during a dawn raid on an isolated village in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam, police said, reports AFP.

Gunmen belonging to the Bodo security forces took over the village of Lahapara, some 70 kilometres (43 miles) from here, tied a group of men to trees and shot them at point blank range.

The militants then set ablaze more than 50 houses before fleeing.

The Bodo rebels are fighting for an independent homeland for members of the Bodo tribal community in Assam, the campaign has left about 5,000 people dead since 1986.

Police said the executions were part of a settling of scores between two rival militant Bodo factions. The victims, however, were Hindus and not part of either group.

Lahapara is a stronghold of the Bodo land Tiger Liberation Force (BTLF).

Khatami unveils his cabinet

TEHRAN, Aug 12: Iran's new President Mohammad Khatami unveiled his Cabinet today naming the current Iranian ambassador to the United Nations to replace long-time Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, reports AFP.

UN Ambassador Kamal Kharazi, 53, a former director of the official IRNA news agency, was named to replace Velayati, who has served as the Islamic republic's foreign minister for the past 16 years.

Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, energy minister in the outgoing government of former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was named to the key portfolio of oil minister replacing Ghohraez Aghazadeh.

A graduate in civil engineering from Tehran University, Zanganeh was responsible for rebuilding Iran's power network following the devastating 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Pak FM says Boys who join Taliban are volunteers

SYDNEY, Aug 12: Pakistan's foreign minister on Tuesday insisted all of the hundreds of teenage boys who have gone from Pakistan to join the Taliban Islamic militia in Afghanistan are volunteers, reports AP.

A religious school in Karachi was charged with kidnapping last week after it sent more than 40 students to Afghanistan. But officials at the school said the boys volunteered to join the Taliban's holy war against its northern-based Afghan enemies.

"They were all volunteers," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Mohammed Siddique Khan Karzai said.

There are reports that certain people voluntarily — on their own — nothing to do with the government, or any organisation — have crossed over and are participating in that blood-bath," he said.

Last Friday, a student from the Jamia Islamia school in Karachi, 13-year-old Maroof Ahmed, said he was "forcibly" sent to join the Taliban militia in the Afghan capital Kabul by his conservative Islamic clerics.

"I was ordered by the head of the school to go to Afghanistan," he told reporters in Karachi. "I cried all the way but they would not listen."

Hundreds of other young boys traveled north with him in a caravan of buses, Maroof said upon his return to Karachi.

"I was the youngest of them," he told reporters.

Maroof's parents filed a lawsuit against the school, prompting an investigation by authorities in the southern port city.

The Karachi Citizen-Police Liaison Committee found that more than 1,500 pupils from religious schools in Karachi alone had been sent to fight in Afghanistan.

Most of the soldiers in the Taliban militia are Islamic seminaries-turned-guerrilla fighters who studied in Pak-

istan while the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan in the 1980s.

CWC elections

Pilot unhappy over rejection of demand for recounting votes

NEW DELHI, Aug 12: Former union minister, Rajesh Pilot, today expressed anguish at the rejection of his demand for recounting of all the votes in Congress Working Committee (CWC) elections saying it was unfortunate and unhealthy in any democratic set up, reports PTI.

Pilot, who lost in the race for the highest policy making body in the Congress by a narrow margin, said "although it was an internal party affair, I am hurt because my request for recounting of the votes was not entertained."

Asked to comment on the outcome of the CWC polls held during the AICC plenary in Calcutta, Pilot said he would take up the matter with the party president, Sitaram Kesri.

"I have always been pleading for more transparency in party functioning. It was very unfortunate that my request for recounting of votes was not entertained," he said.

Pilot said he did not want to create any controversy at the plenary and dilute the impact of various important resolutions adopted there. "I accepted the announcement of CWC results with a feeling that I should take up the matter with Kesri later," he said.

Replying to a query, Pilot said he was not in any panel in the CWC election but "I was certainly in the delegates' channel and that is why I secured so many votes from friends and supporters."

Sudanese president to meet Mandela for talks

JOHANNESBURG, Aug 12: Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir arrived in South Africa on Monday night ahead of delicate talks with President Nelson Mandela on ways to end a 14-year civil war in southern Sudan, officials said.

"Yes, the (Bashir) has arrived. He has no official arrangements tonight," a South African foreign affairs official told Reuters, adding that the Sudanese president was expected to meet Mandela on Tuesday morning.

The official said talks would take place in Pretoria and had been scheduled provisionally for 0900 GMT.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who has recently met delegations from the conflicting sides in the Sudan, would also send a special envoy to Pretoria for the talks, the Foreign Affairs Department said in a statement.

The envoy, who was not identified, would be at the meeting "in support of finding an acceptable and lasting solution to the problem," the statement said. It gave no further details.

Mandela has played the role of peace broker several times since he emerged in 1990 from over a quarter-of-a-century in jail to lead South Africa from apartheid to democracy.

Chinese dissident urges Jiang for democratic reforms

BEIJING, Aug 12: Chinese dissident Qin Yongmin has made a bold call for a crucial forthcoming Communist Party Congress to embrace democratic reforms, reports Reuters.

Qin said today he had written to Communist Party chief Jiang Zemin, urging the introduction of county-level elections and the lifting of a ban on political debate in the local media before the end of the century.

He called on Jiang to introduce provincial and central government-level elections and guarantee the freedom to stage street protests.

BRIFFLY

3 robbers shot dead in Karachi:

Police in the port city Karachi shot and killed three robbers in two separate incidents in the southern port city Karachi, authorities said Tuesday. AP reports from Karachi.

In the first robbery, police shot and killed two bandits making off with 3,000 rupees 73 dhrs from a shop in Karachi's southern district. Three passers-by also were injured in the shooting. In the second robbery, police shot and killed a man trying to steal a car. Two policemen were injured when the robber fired on them, authorities said.

Spl force for embassies in Peru:

Police on Monday launched a special 1,200-member force trained in sharpshooting, deactivating explosives and building security to guard foreign embassies and diplomatic residences after the recent four-month hostage crisis at the Japanese ambassador's residence, Minister Gen. Jose Villanueva said, AP reports from Lima.

US actor Christian Slater held:

Actor Christian Slater was arrested after he allegedly bit a man in the stomach and then scuffled with officers as a rowdy party turned into a brawl at a posh high-rise, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Slater, 27, was booked Monday for assault with a deadly weapon, Detective Ron Phillips said. The detective didn't describe the weapon, which could range from his fists to a firearm, and said he did not know if bail had been set. Police responded to the Westwood condominium Monday morning and were told that Slater fled the 14th-floor apartment through the stairwell. He was taken into custody between the eighth and ninth floors and then scuffled with the officers, Phillips said.

Chopper crash kills 2 in UK:

Two people died Monday when a helicopter crashed into a field, spilling debris across part of a nearby motorway, AP reports from Preston.

Police said the Bell Jet Ranger landed on its roof and burst into flames near the village of Nether Kellet, 210 miles (340 kilometers) northwest of London. "I heard the crash and I went to the field to see if I could do anything," said eyewitness Barry Humpage. "The helicopter was just a ball of flame. One man who had brought a fire extinguisher was trying to put out the flames."

2 die in police firing in India:

Two villagers were killed in central India when police fired on a mob which threw stones in protest against the acquisition of village land for a coal mine project, the United News of India (UNI) said yesterday, Reuters reports from New Delhi.

The news agency said the incident took place on Monday night at Kusumunda near the town of Korba, 500 km (310 miles) east of Bhopal, capital of the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Yeltsin sending FM to Georgia:

President Boris Yeltsin told the Georgian leader on Monday that he is sending his foreign minister down to help resolve the lingering dispute over the breakaway province of Abkhazia, AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin made a telephone call to Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze, who thanked him for his efforts to bring the two sides together, Shevardnadze's press service told the Interfax news agency.

Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov also called Shevardnadze, telling him that he would be in the Georgian capital on Thursday, Interfax said in reports from Tbilisi.

Fire sweeps thru' forests in Russia:

The worst fires in decades in northern Russia are sweeping through forests and threatening several villages, officials said Monday, AP reports from Moscow.

In the Arkhangelsk region, the area of burning forests has increased almost five times in the past week to nearly 8,000 hectares (20,000 acres), the ITAR-Tass news agency said, citing regional officials.

More than 1,000 people are helping fight fires, but their efforts are hampered by a shortage of tractors, bulldozers and fuel for the machinery, as well as for fire-fighting aircraft, the report said.

Italian troops leave Albania:

The last Italian soldiers of an Italian-led multinational force pulled out of Albania on Monday, one day before the end of their mandate, AP reports from Terana.

As the troops departed, Albanian authorities began a crackdown on the country's armed gangs, arresting three men and wounding another in a shootout in the southern port of Vlora, considered one of the most lawless cities. Shootouts between armed gangs are still commonplace in many areas, particularly in the south, and hundreds of thousands of weapons are still in private hands after widespread looting of state armories.

Bid to disrupt Independence Day celebrations foiled in Srinagar: 7 killed

SRINAGAR, Aug 12: Police Monday foiled a militant plan to disrupt Independence Day celebrations in Srinagar with the arrest of three militants, including a self-styled acting chief of pro-Pakistan Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen (TUM), reports PTI.

Elsewhere in Kashmir, four militants, including two mercenaries, and a government employee were among seven persons killed in militancy-related violence as security forces arrested five militants since last evening, an official spokesman told PTI here today.

An Intelligence Field Unit (IFU) of Jammu and Kashmir police raided militant hideouts in parts of Srinagar and arrested three militants, including a self-styled acting chief commander of TUM, Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh alias Aslam Sheikh.

Ten hand grenades, a pistol, its two magazines six rounds and 500 rounds of AK ammunition were recovered from them, he said, adding the interrogation conducted revealed that large number of hand grenades recovered by the IFU was meant to cause explosions in Srinagar city on the eve of Independence Day celebrations.

He said the government employee, Aliaf Ahmad Bhat, working in forest department, was killed and four others were injured in a grenade explosion at Jehangir Chowk near the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly Secretariat today.

The security personnel deployed there fired some rounds in the air in self-defence, he said.

Sihanouk meets Cambodian PMs

BEIJING, Aug 12: Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk today met with Second Prime Minister Hun Sen and Co-Prime Minister Ung Huot bidding to win royal approval for the new leadership in Phnom Penh, despite the monarch's sudden threat to resign, reports AFP.

The high-powered government delegation — which also included acting head of state Chea Sim and a large retinue of senior officials — travelled to Beijing to seek the king's blessing for the new line-up at the top.

Law to help Rwandan women inherit property soon

KIGALI, Aug 12: The Rwandan government is hoping to enact legislation that would allow women to inherit and own property and improve the living standards of thousands of widows, reports AFP.

The drafting of bills to grant women equal inheritance rights to men and to allow them to co-own property within marriage has been initiated by Rwanda's Family and Social Welfare Minister Aloise Inyumba.

"If we manage to get through the legislation, which is now waiting for government and parliamentary approval, it will really be a breakthrough in our culture, because for the first time the woman and the child will be entitled to property ownership," Inyumba said in a recent interview.

US plans to hold talks with Azeri, Armenian leaders

WASHINGTON, Aug 12: The United States is planning to hold a decisive round of talks with Armenian and Azeri leaders next month to try to hammer out a settlement for Nagorno-Karabakh, a State Department official said Monday, reports AFP.

"September will be a fairly intensive time," said the official, who asked not to be named.

He said that "very serious discussions" were to be held after the September 2 elections in Nagorno-Karabakh to try to reach an agreement ending the conflict.

Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian-populated enclave located inside Azerbaijan, is seeking to secede from Baku.

24 feared dead as floods hit India

GARHWA (S. Bihar), Aug 12: At least 24 persons were feared drowned as flash floods inundated over 240 houses in six villages under Bhandaria block in Garhwa district on Sunday, the district magistrate, Siyaram Sharan Sinha said, reports PTI.

Sinha told PTI that swirling waters inundated the vast countryside through outlets of Kutku dam following torrential rains.

Of the 24 persons reported missing, bodies of four had so far been fished out while an intensive search was on for others, he said.

Sinha said the district administration had undertaken rescue and relief operations in the affected areas on "war-footing."

The affected villages were Bhanja, Anmaro, Sanya, Chapia, Chemo and Kutku, he added.

Unpopular cabinet to be reshuffled, says Thai minister

BANGKOK, Aug 12: Thailand's Interior Minister on Tuesday promised a cabinet reshuffle to satisfy the public's desire for a change in government, but he asked for more time to work on the country's problems, reports AP.

"The government is aware of the public sentiment and the demand for change. A cabinet reshuffle will be made in response to the demand," Minister of the Interior Snoh Thienthong told Radio Thailand.

Calls for Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchayudh to resign have been mounting as the country's economic problems intensify. Newspaper editorials, democracy activists, academic, and a former prime minister have all urged Chavalit to step down.

Anger against the government is expected to increase with the imposition of fiscal austerity measures, including a 3 percentage point rise in the value-added tax, which were necessary to secure an international rescue package.

Thailand received pledges Monday for \$1.6 billion in loans from the International Monetary Fund, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia to help revive its battered economy. Thailand has suffered from a fall in exports, a real estate glut and mismanagement of financial institutions.

120 men, women expelled from Western Wall for praying together

JERUSALEM, Aug 12: Police forced 120 men and women from Judaism's holiest site Monday for praying together, reports AP.

Some tripped and fell as police forced the members of a liberal Jewish group from the Western Wall plaza on the eve of Tisha Be'Av, the date of the Jewish calendar marking the destruction of the Jewish Temple by Romans in 70 AD. On this day, thousands of Jews read the Book of Lamentations at the Wall, the Temple's last remnant.

50th anniversary of independence Pakistan still at crossroads facing socio-political challenges

ISLAMABAD, Aug 12: Many of the generation which saw Pakistan created after independence from Britain 50 years ago still see the country at a crossroads and facing serious socio-political, economic and social challenges, reports AFP.

With Pakistan under military rule for more than half of its life since gaining independence on August 14, 1947, and none of its civilian governments completing a full term, many Pakistanis point the finger at an insincere leadership and power politics, as reasons for the nation's ill-fortune.

Half of the country was lost during Pakistan's first brush with being ruled by a military dictatorship, when East Pakistan seceded in 1971 and became independent Bangladesh.

"We have lost past Pakistan, we should be ashamed, we have done dishonesty to this country," bemoans Hashim Reza, 87, who was a close associate of the nation's founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Reza, a retired bureaucrat, who joined the Civil Service in 1934, had worked under Jinnah for the rehabilitation of million of refugees who mi-

grated to Pakistan, carved out British India in 1947.

Pakistan inherited very little from the partition of the Subcontinent and was soon pushed into turmoil when its founding father died soon after independence and the nation ran a foul of its bigger neighbour, India.

Both sides, while celebrating 50 years as independent countries, have fought two of three wars over lingering disputes over who owns the predominantly Muslim Kashmir region.

The tension between the neighbours has triggered an arms race, with India and Pakistan both claiming nuclear capability and spending massively on defence.

Pakistan's economy suffers under 60 billion dollars in domestic and foreign debts and analysts say the country's economic system has fostered widespread disparity in income distribution.

A limited feudal and industrial section of the society is reaping the benefits of the growth and the living conditions of a majority of Pakistanis has deteriorated, they say.

Fifty years on, since the birth of their country, a quarter of the 135 million Pakistanis

live below the poverty line.

"Pakistan is far from its objective," Ghafoor Ahmed, deputy chief of the Jamaat-i-Islami Party, said. "It was formed to become an Islamic welfare state but the rulers failed to achieve its objective."

Pakistan has slide into a culture of violence, attributed by many to rampant political and administrative corruption.

The Afghan war next door has put a further burden on Pakistan and has triggered an influx of three million refugees and a proliferation of arms and drugs among Pakistani society.

Nationhood still seems a long way off despite the common bond of Islam among its people. Ethnic problems plague Karachi and other parts of southern Sindh province where several thousand people have died in recurring violence over the years.

For the first time in its history, the country faces an unprecedented upsurge in sectarian trouble in Punjab province, home to 60 per cent of the population, with 150 deaths this year attributed to sectarian strife between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims.

'Lanka should back India's bid for Security Council seat'

Sugeeswara Senadhira writes from Colombo

Sri Lanka should go all out to canvass for India's bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council and convince Pakistan to do the same, according to a leading foreign policy expert.

Dr. H.S.S. Nissanka, author of a series of highly acclaimed books on Sri Lanka's foreign policy, has urged the government to actively campaign in favour of India for the proposed Asian seat.

Dr. Nissanka's paper was published in the state-owned Daily News, which, according to analysts, is an indication that his views reflect the thinking of the government.

He said Asian countries, especially members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), are politically and morally obliged to support India's candidature.

The scholar said there was no doubt that Sri Lanka would vote for India at the U.N. General Assembly. "But," he added, "that is not enough. Sri Lanka should go all out to canvass for India and bring all her powers of persuasion to bear upon Pakistan, which till a few years ago was actively engaged in propaganda against India's becoming a permanent member."

He noted that under the present administrations of both India and Pakistan, there were diplomatic efforts to mend bilateral differences. "In such a situation Sri Lanka's request for Pakistan too to support India will go a long way," he said.

Dr. Nissanka has been praised by Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike as an outstanding analyst and researcher of Sri Lanka's policy.

An analyst, commenting on Dr. Nissanka's paper, said that his advice to India to "make a direct request to Pakistan to extend her support for India's candidature for a permanent membership" could also reflect the official view in Colombo.

Dr. Nissanka said it is politically and economically expedient and opportune for Sri Lanka to go all out in India's support. "Sri Lanka should actively canvass for India in country-to-country encounters as well as at international fora," the scholar said.

Dr. Nissanka pointed out that India has done a lot of spadework and launched a campaign for its candidature. "Some Third world countries have already pledged their support to India," he noted.

"In case of Asia, the obvious choice is India. There are two more very strong candidates - Indonesia and Malaysia - but there is reason to believe that even they would back India," he said.

He also listed India's achievements to support New Delhi's candidature. "India is well on the way to the status of an economic giant. She has the potentiality to be an industrial giant too. It is India that gave the lead to other developing countries in following a non-aligned foreign policy right from national independence in 1947.

"Of all the sovereign states belonging to the Third world, India has the largest and most sophisticated diplomatic network. She is the largest democracy in the world and also has the largest middle class in the world. In education, business enterprises and in many facets of scientific research, India has taken long strides ahead since independence," he wrote.

— India Abroad News Service

700 inmates escape from 2 Honduran prisons

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, Aug 12: An estimated 700 inmates escaped from two Honduran prisons Monday after rioting prisoners set fire to the facilities, authorities reported, reports AP.

One inmate was shot to death by guards as he tried to flee the Trujillo prison in northern Honduras, according to Jose Romero, the facility's director. Some inmates reportedly stole taxi cabs to make their getaway, while others reportedly fled on foot along highways.

Inmates set fire to the state prison at Santa Barbara, 125 miles (200 km) west of the capital, and the Trujillo facility in the northern province of Colon.

The Santa Barbara and Trujillo prisons were completely destroyed by the fire," said Romelia de Artica, director of the national prison system.

Artica said, "escapes by inmates are normal in Honduras," but noted "we don't have sufficient information on the incidents because the situation is very confused."

About 500 inmates reportedly escaped from the Santa Barbara facility.