

Dramatic twist of ME events

Arafat warns to give up progress under Oslo peace accords

NABLUS, West Bank, Aug 17: Rejecting Israeli demands for more security cooperation, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said his people would rather give up progress made under the 1993 Oslo peace accords than knuckle under to Israeli economic pressure, reports AP.

A top Palestinian official also said the Palestinians are considering a boycott of Israeli products as a counter-measure to Israeli economic sanctions. Arafat told a gathering of Palestinian intellectuals and journalists in Nablus on Saturday that Israel's economic sanctions are a declaration of war in order to humiliate the Palestinian people, starve the Palestinian people and make them kneel.

"This Palestinian people will not kneel to anyone but God," he said. "This siege will not break us."

Arafat warned that Palestinians were prepared to return to the hardships of the years

prior to the signing of the Oslo accords.

"We are willing to wipe it all out and start anew," he said.

After a double suicide bombing July 30 that killed 16 people in a market in Jerusalem, Israel closed its borders with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, blocking 100,000 Palestinian workers from reaching their jobs in Israel.

Israel also stopped paying an estimated \$40 million in Palestinian tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, making it difficult for Arafat to meet his government's payroll.

Arafat said Saturday the suspension of payments was "theft of our funds" and demanded that the sanctions be lifted unconditionally.

Arafat's economic adviser Khaled Islam said the Palestinians are considering a boycott of Israeli products unless the sanctions are lifted.

The idea is to gradually close the Palestinian market to

Israeli products," he told reporters. "They cannot sell their products in our markets while we do not receive the revenue from taxes levied on them."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the sanctions will not be lifted until Arafat takes tough action against Islamic militants, who Israeli authorities believed are responsible for the July 30 bombing.

After four days of intensive shuffling between Arafat and Netanyahu this week, US envoy Dennis Ross returned to Washington, saying he was optimistic that security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians had been restored and that Netanyahu would soon lift the sanctions.

But so far there has been little movement from either side.

Palestinian police did cooperate with Israeli forces on Saturday to find the body of a Israeli taxi driver in Palestinian-controlled Jericho. Palestinian

police arrested three men, who were sentenced to long prison terms later in the day for the slaying.

Israeli officials — including Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani — praised the cooperation of the Palestinians and Arafat called it an example of how the peace accords were working.

But Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Ilan said catching three armed robbers was "not the same as destroying the infrastructure of the terrorist organizations."

During his speech Saturday, Arafat recalled the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip between 1987 and 1993 and Israel's siege of Beirut in 1982.

The Palestinians broke off security coordination with Israel in March, when Israel broke ground for the controversial Har Homa housing project for Jews in east Jerusalem, where the Palestinians hope to establish a capital.



Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral (L) greets India's new Vice-President Krishna Kant in New Delhi Saturday. Kant is the joint candidate of Gujral's United Front government and the Congress (I) Party, which is the power behind the minority coalition. — AFP/UNB photo

Gujral against Queen's Amritsar visit

LONDON, Aug 17: Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral warned in an interview published here today that Britain's Queen Elizabeth II should not visit Amritsar, the scene of a bloody massacre by British forces in 1919, reports AFP.

"It is a goodwill visit and we would not like to add anything historically that would cause bitterness," he told the Observer, referring to the Queen's planned visit to India in October.

Amritsar, a city in Punjab which is also the holy city of the Sikhs, was the scene of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in which hundreds of civilians were mown down by British bullets.

The Observer said senior British and Indian officials were working intensively on a compromise under which the Queen would visit the Golden Temple of the Sikhs as planned but would then also visit the massacre scene.

It added that no apology would be expected from the British monarch, but that her very presence would be widely seen as a gesture of reconciliation.

Rajiv murder Jain Commission may submit report soon

NEW DELHI, Aug 17: The Jain Commission, probing the conspiracy aspect of Rajiv Gandhi assassination, is likely to submit its interim report to the government this week, official sources today said, reports PTI.

The voluminous report is likely to cover crucial sequence of events from 1981 onwards leading to the assassination of the late premier on May 21, 1991 and the facts and circumstances of the murder, besides containing several crucial documents and records, they said.

When contacted, the chairman, Justice Milar Chand Jain, said efforts were being made to submit the report by August 31, before the panel's eleventh six-month extension expires.

Commission sources had earlier said that the interim report would be based on the arguments of different parties aspect of its probe, which is likely to begin soon.

'Reforms in police admn, judiciary to help combat terrorism in India'

NEW DELHI, Aug 17: India will continue to be threatened by the scourge of terrorism unless the very systems of the police administration and judiciary in the country are reformed, former Punjab Director General of Police K P S Gill said on Saturday, reports PTI.

"Our system is not designed to deal with the extreme situations of terrorism as it happened in Punjab in the eighties and prevalent now in Jammu and Kashmir and the northeast," he said at the release of his book 'Punjab: The Knights Of Falsehood'.

The government, the police and the judiciary should be able to appreciate the ground realities. A concerted effort of all the three will help tackle terrorism, he said.

Troops withdrawal UNITA didn't deny UN terms

LUANDA, Angola, Aug 17: A representative for the former rebel movement in Angola denied the group has refused to comply with terms of a peace agreement being monitored by the United Nations, reports AP.

Horacio Junjivili responded on a radio programme late Friday to a statement by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who said he is suspending the further withdrawal of UN troops from Angola because former rebels have refused to comply with peace agreements.

In a report released Friday, Annan told the Security Council he would keep 2,650 UN troops in the African country until at least the end of October. The decision is subject to council approval.

But Junjivili said UNITA has "Opened everything up for the verification of the UN observers."

Hun Sen forces close in on last royalist stronghold

P'ONG VILLAGE, Cambodia, Aug 17: Backed by artillery and rockets, forces of Cambodian strongman Hun Sen pushed to within seven kilometres (four miles) of the last stronghold of royalist resistance Sunday, reports AP.

Soldiers at this front-line position said they had been ordered to seize within three days O'Smach, a border enclave to which more than 15,000 resistance fighters and civilians have fled.

Troops said a major offensive was also being planned against Anlong Veng, the last bastion of hardcore Khmer Rouge guerrillas.

This could not be confirmed by other sources.

Villages along Highway 68, the main route towards O'Smach, have fallen like dominoes to Hun Sen's forces despite artillery fire from the royalists and a multitude of homemade mines and booby traps.

Soldiers and civilians loyal to ousted First Premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh fled Phnom Penh and other areas of the country, with a number heading into this jungled region of northern Cambodia bordering Thailand. The prince was deposed in a bloody coup July 5-6 by Second Premier Hun Sen, with whom he had shared power.

That authorities have strung barbed wire along the frontier opposite O'Smach to prevent a stampede out of Cambodia by the thousands. But Thailand has said it would grant temporary asylum to unarmed Cambodians whose lives were in danger.

On Saturday, sporadic shelling around O'Smach from Hun Sen's forces sent hundreds of civilians rushing in panic toward the barbed wire frontier. Families have loaded up wooden carts with belongings in preparation for a rapid exodus into Thailand.

Pathfinder rover frees itself from rocks, begins trek for Shark

LOS ANGELES, Aug 17: The Mars Pathfinder rover freed itself from the grasp of two rocks and began a plodding course for a rock nicknamed Shark, which scientists expect the rover will reach Sunday, reports AP.

NASA scientists commanded Sojourner to leave the rocks that had stopped it cold when the rover's onboard hazard detection system sensed the rover's suspension was too tilted Thursday.

Images downloaded via satellite "confirmed Sojourner has pulled away and left these rocks in the dust," Carl Steiner of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory said Friday in his report summing up the mission's 42nd day on Mars.

Scientists had hoped to receive new images of Shark, too, but discovered the rover had rotated too far away from the rock to film it. It was expected to spend Saturday traveling toward the rock, but details would not be available until the following day.

Saturday also marked the passing of the rover's 1,000th hour on the planet surface. The rover rolled out of the lander 11/12 days after the initial July 4 landing.

The lab also received another section of the massive panoramic image of the planet's surface and "rover movie," Steiner said.

The Pathfinder team continued to deal with the rover's aging problems. Sojourner has far outlived its anticipated seven-day life, but the team has said the plan to keep running it as long as they can.

The automatic stop encountered when the rover found itself sandwiched between two rocks, which prompted the team to consider software changes that would allow it to be more adventurous.

Kabila offers to mediate in Congo crisis

KINSHASA, Aug 17: Laurent Kabila, president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, offered Saturday to mediate in the crisis in neighbouring Congo after brief talks with his Congolese counterpart Pascal Lissouba, reports AFP.

Lissouba arrived earlier in the day on an unannounced visit and left six hours later after a short meeting with the leader of the former Zaire.

Kabila announced on state radio later that he was prepared to receive Lissouba's rival, Denis Sassou Nguesso, whose militia forces have been pitted against government troops in Brazzaville since early June.

Worldwatch Institute 'World faces increasing food shortage, water scarcity, foodgrain prices'

WASHINGTON, Aug 17: The world faces increasing food-grain prices, food shortage and water scarcity, which are likely to worsen unless drastic steps are taken, says Worldwatch Institute, a non-governmental think tank, reports PTI.

Unless steps are taken soon to reverse the trends and make them environmentally sustainable the problem will group worse, says Lester Brown of the institute, who has authored a new report on the subject.

The deterioration of the earth's ecosystem, he said, is slowing growth in world food production during the nineties and ushering in an era of scarcity.

After a half century of falling grain prices, the 39 per cent rise in the world price of wheat over the last three years may signal a new era of rising grain prices, he added.

He points out as India and China become more prosperous, they will demand more meat. That is already happening, and that means more feedgrains.

Moreover, the building of roads, factories and houses will at the same time result in reduced acreage to grow food. No new breakthroughs like the green revolution are on the cards. At the most, research promises only a few years' reprieve, he said.

For the world's affluent who spend a small share of their income for food, said Brown, even a doubling of world grain prices would not have a major immediate effect.

But for the 1.3 billion people in the world who live on a dollar a day or less, such a rise could be life-threatening, the report said.

Heads of households unable to buy enough food for their families would hold their gov-

Worldwatch Institute 'World faces increasing food shortage, water scarcity, foodgrain prices'

ernments responsible and are likely to take to the streets.

The resulting political instability in third world cities could affect the earnings of multinational corporations, the performance of stock markets, the earnings of pension funds, and the stability of the international monetary system. In short, it could disrupt economic progress, the Worldwatch report cautioned.

5 Saharan states to set up new economic regional grouping

TRIPOLI, Aug 17: Five Saharan countries — Libya, Niger, Chad, Mali and Burkina Faso — agreed at a summit in Tripoli to set up an economic regional grouping, a spokesman said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The five heads of states have reached a decision favouring closer ties between their countries and have instructed their foreign affairs ministers to discuss practical ways for its implementation," said Niger's Foreign Affairs Minister Ibrahim Assane Mayaki.

He told reporters that the idea was to set up a regional economic grouping within the framework of the organisation of African Unity.

The foreign ministers of the five countries will meet next month to discuss mechanisms for such a grouping ahead of a second summit likely to be held later in September, Mayaki said.

He said Nigeria, whose military ruler Sani Abacha missed the Tripoli Summit due to ill health, would be invited to join the group.

Pak President, PM say Nusrat Fateh Ali's demise a national loss

KARACHI, Aug 17: Musicians, singers, fans and government leaders voiced deep grief over the death of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan after the towering king of Pakistan melody died Saturday in London from a heart attack, reports AFP.

"It is undoubtedly the demise of the king of music in Pakistan," said Junaid Jamshed, a member of pop group Vital Signs.

President Farooq Ahmed Leghari and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif paid eloquent tributes, terming the passing of Nusrat a "national loss."

He had no parallel in the world of music, Leghari said, while Sharif noted his singular contribution to the art of 'Qawwali' or devotional singing.

"I feel one of the greatest voices which this land has ever inherited has gone away, Pakistani music has been orphaned," Jamshed told AFP.

The greatest man like Peter Gabriel said Khan possessed the greatest voice on the earth. It is the death of the legend who was a great composer, singer and musician," Jamshed added.

"He was a great artist with his own style. It is a great loss and the vacuum could not be filled because artists of his calibre and stature are born in centuries," leading Pakistani musician Nisar Bazmi said.

"He used western instruments in eastern music beautifully."

He was a king of timing of tempo and had the credit to introduce qawwali into western music," Bazmi said.

"I was crazy about Michael Jackson, Madonna and Lata Mangeshkar but I have not listened to them as much as I have Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. I have got all of his collection but now it is said that I will not listen to his new music, songs," said Naseem Ahmed, a college student.

"He was our pride. He was a great figure in the world music globally," businessman Farooq Ahmed said.

"I will close down my CD player for three days to mourn the death and will be again with the voice I have loved so much," said Irum Irfan, college student.

People recalled a television interview broadcast on the 50th anniversary of Pakistan's independence, celebrated on Thursday.

PTI report says: The sudden demise of Pakistani music maestro Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, who conquered the hearts of Indian audience by breaking political barriers, has left Hindi music industry stunned.

Pak President, PM say Nusrat Fateh Ali's demise a national loss

Expressing grief, noted lyricist Javed Akhtar said Nusrat Khan was trying his best to improve the relations between India and Pakistan.

Akhtar, who had teamed up with Nusrat Khan to create the album 'Sangam', said the alter had regretted that while a Pakistani artist could come and perform in India the same was not the case with Indian artists in Pakistan.

Nusrat's music was like a fresh breeze to the Hindi film music, melody queen Lata Mangeshkar said adding, "It is very unfortunate that I could not sing for such a great wizard."

Lata said she was slated to sing for Nusrat Khan in "Aur Pyar Ho Gaya", which was released yesterday, but could not do that as the film got delayed and she went abroad.

Shiv Sena supreme Bal Thackeray, who had earlier expressed reservations over the Pakistani singer's visits to Mumbai for programmes, said he was not against the artiste.

Thackeray, who recently released the audio cassette of "Aur Pyar Ho Gaya", said he was piqued at some remarks made by Nusrat. "But Nusrat later clarified that the remarks were misquoted to him" Thackeray added.

"What is worrying is that arising from the post-war baby boom, the number of elderly will increase even more rapidly after that."

Singapore's elderly population is projected to rise to

800,000 by 2030.

"The will then make up over 18 per cent of the total population," Yeo said. "It has complex social, economic and health dimensions."

Experts have said the problem may be even more acute in Singapore because of its smaller population base compared with its neighbours like Indonesia, which has a population of nearly 200 million people.

One way Singapore is trying to cope is to raise the retirement age, Yeo said. Beginning in January 1999, the retirement age will be increased to 62 years from 60.

Yeo said "The longer term plan of eventually raising it to 67 years," the health minister said.

BRIEFLY

Ranariddh leaves for Manila: Cambodia's Prince Norodom Ranariddh left yesterday for Manila as part of an international drive for support against second Prime Minister Hun Sen, who ousted him from power in Phnom Penh six weeks ago, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Prince Ranariddh was scheduled to meet Philippine President Fidel Ramos on Monday, aides said. Ranariddh declined to talk to reporters before departure, but said he would meet the press in Manila.

2 killed as bldg collapses in Bombay: Two people were killed and five others were injured when a six-story building collapsed, police said Sunday, AP reports from Bombay.

The injured — two children and three women — were rescued by fire fighters from a huge chunk of concrete rubble. Police are investigating the cause of the collapse around midnight on Thursday.

Strong typhoon lashes Okinawa: Strong gusts buffeted Okinawa as a powerful typhoon swept toward the subtropical island on Sunday. Air and sea transportation has been interrupted, and thousands of power failures have been reported, AP says from Naha.

Winnie, the season's 13th typhoon, was packing winds of up to 162 kilometers (100 miles) per hour, and was expected to hit the island by Sunday night. As of 11 am (0200 GMT) the storm was located about 160 kilometers (99 miles) southeast of Naha, Japan's Meteorological Agency said. The typhoon was moving to the west at 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) per hour, the agency said.

Bear kills 2 in Canada: A woman from the United States was mauled to death by a black bear in a remote park in British Columbia as two children watched helplessly, AP reports from Lland River, British Columbia.

A man who tried to save Patti McConnell, 37, of Paris, Texas, also was killed by the bear. McConnell's 13-year-old son and a college student were mauled by the animal as well but survived. Royal Canadian Mounted Police said Raymond Kitchen, 56, of Fort Nelson, British Columbia, was killed while trying to save McConnell. Kitchen is believed to have been an experienced hunter who was familiar with the habits of bears.

Rebels kidnap 13 in Colombia: Leftist guerrillas on Saturday kidnaped 13 municipal officials in the northern town of Simiti as part of a campaign to undermine planned elections in October, local media reported, AFP reports from Bogota.

About 50 guerrillas, members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), entered the town 350 kilometres (215 miles) north of the capital and urged residents to boycott the scheduled municipal elections. More than 200 people have died in attacks and clashes between rebels and security forces since the beginning of August.



Ousted Cambodian First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh (C) is escorted by Philippine Foreign Ministry officials and security men on his arrival at Manila airport Sunday. Prince Ranariddh is in Manila to gather support against Cambodian strongman Hun Sen who deposed him from power last month. He is expected to meet Philippine President Fidel Ramos today. — AFP/UNB photo

Chandrika still far apart from her promised ethnic peace plan

COLOMBO, Aug 17: When Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga romped to power three years ago she promised ethnic peace but her government marks its anniversary Tuesday amid an ever escalating Tamil separatist war, reports AFP.

President Kumaratunga's offered a "hand of friendship" to the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as she formed a cabinet on August 19, 1994 but since then they have only drifted further apart as bitter foes.

The guerrillas initially agreed to talk. Kumaratunga went on to win a whopping 62 per cent of the popular vote at presidential elections less than three months later with a mandate to push her peace efforts.

However, after the Tigers abruptly pulled out of peace talks in April 1995 to resume their drawn out campaign for an independent homeland called Eelam in the island's north east, Kumaratunga changed her tactics.

She called the military campaign against the guerrillas a "war for peace," the war is taking a heavy toll both in the battlefield and the balance sheet.

"The consequences of the war are painfully evident on every aspect of our lives," Justice Minister G L Peiris said recently while calling for peace in Sri Lanka where the war has killed over 50,000 people since 1982.

The country's growth rate of 3.8 per cent last year was the lowest in seven years, defence expenditure in the last three years has been at record levels accounting for nearly a quarter

of government spending. Price have been climbing with the essential commodities, electricity and fuel going up rapidly despite promises by the ruling People's Alliance to bring them down.

An effigy of Kumaratunga was burnt by opposition activists led by former prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at a demonstration on Saturday. More protests are planned, the opposition United National Party (UNP) said.

Despite escalating costs, the government says it is determined to militarily neutralise the LTTE before implementing a political solution to the ethnic conflict.

Minister Peiris who is also the junior finance minister said the government will continue to fight the LTTE unless it

agreed to resume talks on "substantive issues within a specified time frame."

"We will continue to meet armed aggression with the force of arms," the minister said. He is also pushing a radical constitutional reform package that seeks to turn the country into a federal state in all but name.

The government says it wants to push the reforms through parliament by November but the opposition says that re-writing the constitution is no guarantee of peace.

The LTTE has already rejected the power sharing plan unveiled by President Kumaratunga in August 1995. The LTTE has accused the government of not solving the economic problems of minority Tamils before political talks. Security forces are currently

engaged in their biggest ever ground offensive against the LTTE in a bid to open a key highway through rebel-held territory in the north of the country amid stiff resistance.

With the escalation of the war, President Kumaratunga and key members of her government have become prime targets of the LTTE which is credited with the long-list political assassinations, officials said.

A government statement Thursday said security experts from France, India and the US asked to relocate Kumaratunga from her present official residence to a safer location because of possible attacks from the LTTE.

The already tight security measure for President Kumaratunga in the past 30

months have given the impression to foreigners that the head of state was under siege, the statement said.

"Many foreign visitors have commented on Sri Lanka as being a country where the capital city and the head of state are both operating while under siege," the statement said.

The siege mentality may extend to the country's parliament where Kumaratunga's party has a slender one-seat majority. However, Kumaratunga has tried to assert her power by sacking a dissident minister.

But most analysts say the government needs better parliamentary support to push its ambitious reform plan and snap polls to win more seats before the full six-year term are very much on the cards.

S'pore worried as number of elderly people rising

SINGAPORE, Aug 17: Singapore is worried by the rapidly increasing number of people over the age of 65 and the problems it will raise for the island-state, Health Minister Yeo Cheow Tong said today, reports Reuter.

Yeo said in a speech before medical specialists that Singapore now has 210,000 people over the age of 65 in a population of 3.1 million people.

"By the year 2020, we will have about 530,000 elderly, or 13 per cent of the population," he said.

"What is worrying is that arising from the post-war baby boom, the number of elderly will increase even more rapidly after that."

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Experts have said the problem may be even more acute in Singapore because of its smaller population base compared with its neighbours like Indonesia, which has a population of nearly 200 million people.

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