

International

US for referendum on WB withdrawal

Arab League blasts Israel's plan for 'greater Jerusalem'

CAIRO, June 24: The Arab League described as "extremely serious" Tuesday Israel's plan for a "greater Jerusalem" and accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of "wiping his feet on signed peace accords," reports APF.

The approval given by the Israeli government to the plan for a super-municipality in Jerusalem is an extremely serious decision, its secretary general, Esmat Abdel Meguid, said.

"Arab consultations are continuing at the highest level to take a decision in response to the Zionist plans which are aimed at completing the Judaising of Jerusalem," he said.

The league called a meeting of the permanent representatives of its 22 members for Thursday here to study the Israeli decision.

In a statement, it said the meeting was requested by the Palestinian Authority and Su-

dan, which heads the ministerial council of the organisation.

On Sunday, the Israeli government approved a plan to annex to Jerusalem several Jewish townships to the west, boosting the disputed city's population by another 30,000 Jews.

The project also calls for creating a "super-municipality" encompassing not only the city but also nearby Jewish settlements in the West Bank, although, Netanyahu has said they would not be annexed.

Another report adds: The United States supports the idea of a referendum on an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank but would prefer such a plebiscite be held soon, officials said Tuesday.

"We prefer this sooner, rather than later," said State Department official who asked not to be named.

Israeli television reported

earlier that the referendum was likely to take place in mid-September after the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approves the limited pullback.

"Whatever internal process they need to go through to get approval of the need to go forward with the peace process is fine with us," said the official.

Israel has yet to agree on a US plan proposed months ago to break the 15-month stalemate in peace talks in which Israel would withdraw from at least another 13 per cent of the West Bank in exchange for Palestinian security steps.

According to Israeli television, a decision by Netanyahu could be announced Sunday at his next weekly cabinet meeting.

Opinion polls show that most Israelis support additional pullbacks from the West Bank.



Women activists of the Shiv Sena, a right wing Hindu party, raise anti-Pakistan slogans in Mumbai Tuesday, protesting against the recent massacre of 26 Hindus in the northern Indian state of Kashmir by Muslim separatists. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Libya violates UN air embargo:

A Libyan plane flew to Chad and returned, violating a 6-year UN air embargo, Egypt's Middle East News Agency reported Tuesday, AP reports from Cairo.

The plane landed at Tripoli international airport Tuesday with a senior Chadian diplomat and the wife of Chad's parliament speaker, MENA said. It gave their names in Arabic as Adam Kojo and Marina Kamochi.

4000 fall ill of poisoning in US: More than 4,000 people fell ill in Illinois after eating potato salad in which a form of the e. coli bacterium was found, according to the associated press. Xinhua reports from Washington.

Health officials said that a virulent form of e. coli also sickened at least six children in Georgia.

Mexican charter plane crashes: A charter airliner with up to 80 people on board crashed late Tuesday in the mountains of Northern Mexico, police and aviation officials said, AFP reports from Mexico City.

Roberto Eax Villazamudio, commander of civil aviation at the Mexico City International Airport, confirmed that the aircraft had crashed. A Chihuahua state police officer who gave his name only as Astorga said that he was in contact with the area via short wave radio and that there were initial reports of three dead but that the figure had risen.

3 die in Philippine landslide: Three government employees were killed in a landslide in the northern Philippines triggered by heavy rains, a government report said yesterday, AP reports from Philippines.

The three — a woman and two men — had sought shelter during a heavy downpour late Tuesday inside a covered bus stop on a mountain road in Bontoc, Mountain Province, when the side of the mountain behind the shed collapsed on them.

Maureen O'Sullivan dead: Actress Maureen O'Sullivan, the Irish-born beauty who starred as Jane in a string of Tarzan films, has died at age 87, AP reports from Phoenix.

O'Sullivan, whose seven children included actress Mia Farrow, died Monday night at Scottsdale Memorial Hospital in suburban Phoenix, hospital spokeswoman Felicia Thomas said Tuesday. Thomas said she didn't know the cause.

Spore to buy US choppers, missiles: Singapore has asked to buy eight AH-64D Apache Attack helicopters and 216 Hellfire laser-guided missiles, the Pentagon said Tuesday, estimating their cost at \$20 million dollars, AFP says from Washington.



Soledad Becerril, Mayor of Seville, is surrounded by journalists at Valencia's Manises airport Tuesday. Becerril was a passenger on the hijacked Iberia plane that was forced to land in Valencia. The hijacker, identified as Spaniard Javier Gomez, surrendered and all 131 passengers were freed unharmed. Pictured centre left is Valencia's mayor, Rita Barberá. — AP/UNB photo

Destruction of chemical weapons Russia won't be able to meet deadline of 2008

MOSCOW, June 24: Russia will not be able to complete a programme of destroying its chemical weapons by 2008 as required by a global convention it signed last year, a senior Russian Defence Minister official said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Lieutenant-General Valery Kapaashin, Director of the programme, told Ekho Moskvy Radio Russia would have to use a provision in the convention allowing an additional five years to countries unable to complete the programme in time.

"There is nothing criminal in the delay," Kapaashin said.

He made clear Russia's financial woes were to blame and said the final destruction of the country's chemical weapons hinged on the broader state of the economy.

"Depending on the country's economic situation, Russia may be able to accomplish the programme after two additional years."

The convention that Russia signed last November obliges Moscow to destroy its huge arsenals and covert production plants to peaceful use within a decade.

It allows an extension of the period for destruction of chemical weapons to 15 years. But Russian officials have said in the past that any such extension would raise the overall costs.

Officials put the cost of destroying Russian chemical weapons at more than 5 billion US dollars spread over 10 years. They said Russia aimed to receive at least a quarter of the sum from other countries.

Clinton vetoes legislation on Iranian sanctions

WASHINGTON, June 24: President Bill Clinton has vetoed legislation on Iranian sanctions, saying it would damage the national interest, reports AP.

The legislation would have automatically imposed sanctions on any foreign government or business that supplied ballistic missile technology to Iran.

The veto on Tuesday night of the Iran Missile Proliferation Act came less than a week after Clinton expressed hope for "a genuine reconciliation with Iran" if it complies with international standards of conduct and moves away from its support of terrorism and distribution of dangerous weapons. The administration already has eased travel to the United States for Iranians and is supporting cultural and academic exchanges.

Under the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act, the president may impose sanctions on foreign companies that invest at least 20 million dollars annually in Iran's oil and gas sectors.

The vetoed bill would have required "sweeping application of sanctions according to inflexible and indiscriminate criteria," Clinton said in a statement. Sanctions could be wrongly triggered against individuals and businesses worldwide and would be disproportionate attention over the past year and a half, he said.

Russia recently adopted new legal and administrative measures to deal with the problem and its progress must be encouraged, not undercut, he said, and the bill would have made it more difficult for the United States to work with Russia in this area. Imposition of unilateral US sanctions, could damage work with Russia in other areas, he said, such as arms control, law enforcement, counter-narcotics and combating transnational crime.

Some members of Congress said they would push to override the veto, citing concern over moves by Russia and China to supply Iran with missile technology.

"This proliferation cannot and must not be ignored. It is a direct threat to peace in the Middle East," said Rep. Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat.

"This carefully crafted legislation will strengthen the president's hand in dealing with proliferators."

House International Relations Chairman Ben Gilman, a New York Republican, asked Republican leaders to immediately schedule an override vote, saying the veto is "deeply distressing" in light of the assistance Iran has gotten from Russia on missile production.

tionate, penalising minor violations the same as major ones, he said.

But Clinton said he was particularly concerned about the bill's impact on the US effort to work with Russia to stem the flow of technology from Russia to Iran's missile programme, a "very real problem" that the administration has given priority

Indonesian troops block anti-govt protest by workers

JAKARTA, June 24: Hundreds of soldiers blocked workers from staging an anti-government protest at the national Parliament Wednesday, reports AP.

A standoff with the military developed after about 200 demonstrators gathered at the office of the Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union, or SBSI.

The army stopped a fleet of buses that had been chartered to take them to the legislature about 10 km away.

Soldiers also blocked a main road and prevented another 100 workers from reaching the union's office.

Protesters chanted and waved banners at the troops, but the situation remained peaceful.

Indian forces kill 6 Kashmiri militants

SRINAGAR, India, June 24: Six Muslim separatist militants were killed after a gun-battle with Indian forces in Kashmir early today, police said, reports AFP.

The encounter took place at a village near the town of Achabal, 60 km south of the summer capital of Srinagar.

A police spokesman said Indian security forces ringed the village following a tip-off. Seven homes were burnt down during the incident.

He said the guerillas belonged to the pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen group.

More than 20,000 people have died in a Muslim separatist campaign raging in the divided Himalayan state of Kashmir since 1989.

Chandrika accepts opposition challenge to hold snap polls

COLOMBO, June 24: Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga has accepted an opposition challenge to hold snap elections two years ahead of schedule, a state-run newspaper said today, reports AFP.

Kumaratunga told her ruling People's Alliance legislators she was ready to face a presidential election anytime, and that she was assured by party members that they could "convincingly win," the Daily News said.

The remarks came as the main opposition United National Party (UNP) will support delaying provincial council elections, if the government agreed to an early presidential vote.

The president assured government parliamentarians that she was prepared to face a presidential election any time from now on," the Daily News quoted "authoritative political sources" as saying.

Presidential elections are due by 2000 and according to the constitution the incumbent can call a snap poll only after completing four years out of the six-year term.

6 more killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, June 24: Gunmen with automatic rifles shot and killed a policewoman as she stepped out of her home in an ethnically troubled southern neighbourhood of Karachi Wednesday, said police officials, reports AP.

The motive for the killing of Farukh Sultana, the former head of Pakistan's all-women police force, was not immediately clear, but police say it is linked to the relentless ethnic violence terrorising the country's financial capital.

On Wednesday police in armoured vehicles patrolled several violent neighbourhoods, after a night of ethnically motivated violence left six people dead and several people injured, including a small boy caught in the crossfire, said police.

Late on Tuesday gunmen attacked an office of MQM's

largest faction led by exiled leader Altaf Hussein, killing two people and injuring two others. No one was arrested.

By early Wednesday bands of armed men were roaming the streets of the area forcing shopkeepers to close and warning people to stay indoors.

In a separate incident gunmen broke into the home of another Hussein supporter and killed two people.

A fifth Hussein activist was killed in a shootout in the troubled Korangi neighbourhood in eastern Karachi. A young boy was hit by a stray bullet and was in hospital in satisfactory condition, said police.

A sixth person, who had not been identified, was killed in a southern neighbourhood in the old part of the city.

Off the Record

Not alone anymore

NEW YORK: Macaulay Culkin, star of the "Home Alone" movies, won't be alone any more, reports AP.

Culkin and Broadway actress Rachel Miner, both 17, married Sunday at a small stone church in Washington, Connecticut, in front of family and friends, according to Culkin's publicist, Paul block.

Because the newbies were under 18, they had to present. Notarised statement of parental consent for a marriage license. Town Clerk Sheila Anson said the couple were issued a license Saturday.

Miner starred in the recent Broadway production of "The Diary of Anne Frank" in the role of Margot, Anne's sister.

Culkin's film credits include two "Home Alone" movies, "My Girl," "The Good Son" and "Richie Rich." He made the Forbes magazine's richest entertainer list in 1993 after earning \$23 million dollars over two years.



Holbrooke threatens NATO airstrikes against Yslavia

BELGRADE, June 24: US Envoy Richard Holbrooke warned both sides in the Kosovo conflict that it has reached a critical stage after talks with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and ahead of meetings with separatist Albanians, reports Reuters.

Holbrooke delivered a threat of punitive NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia if Milosevic failed to withdraw special police units from the disputed province so that peace talks could start with its ethnic Albanian majority.

He was due in Pristina, the Kosovo capital, on Wednesday morning to meet ethnic Albanian leaders and then to visit the battle zone in western Kosovo where Serbian police are fighting guerrillas of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

A veteran Balkan trouble shooter, Holbrooke declined to divulge the confidential details of his meeting with Milosevic but stressed that restraint was needed from both sides.

Holbrooke said countries involved in international mediation, including the contact group of six major powers, were bringing in additional observers to monitor what was happening in Kosovo.

The United States and its European allies fear the conflict could seep across the southern Balkans, destabilising Macedonia, which also has a restive ethnic Albanian population, and Bosnia.

Kosovo Albanian leaders and the KLA want independence for Kosovo where Albanians outnumber Serbs by nine to one and are resisting Milosevic's western-backed offer of autonomy.

The KLA are effectively a wild card in the peace process because its fighters owe no allegiance to the traditional Kosovo Albanian political leadership.

US officials said Secretary of State Madelein Albright discussed the crisis on Tuesday with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, whose government opposes NATO's threatened intervention to try to bring about a ceasefire. Greece and Macedonia also expressed opposition on Tuesday to the use of force.

"We will gain most from a peaceful solution, and the least out of war," Greece Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos said after talks with his visiting Macedonian counterpart Blagoj Handziski. "Those in comfortable (western) capitals who like war games should be more modest. Enough blood has been spilled from their amateurism."

Yugoslav Prime Minister Momir Bulatovic warned his country would defend itself if attacked by NATO but said he hoped a negotiated solution was still possible.

Jakarta for meeting with Lisbon, UN to discuss E Timor issue

JAKARTA, June 24: Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said Tuesday his government was ready to give East Timor special status in a bid to find a lasting solution to the issue that is acceptable to the international community, reports Reuters.

Alatas was quoted by the official Antara news agency as saying he had conveyed this to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan during a meeting in New York Thursday.

"For this aim, Indonesia is also ready to discuss the substantial elements of the special status for East Timor with Portugal, under the framework of the tripartite dialogue under the mediation of the UN Secretary-General," he said.

Alatas told reporters after a meeting with Abilio Aaujo of the East Timor Foundation for Reconciliation and Development that he had asked Annan

and his Special Envoy for East Timor, Jamsheed Marker, to present the proposal to Portugal.

"The UN Secretary General will ask Jamsheed Marker on Wednesday to meet with the Portuguese government," he said, adding that Annan is thinking of holding a tripartite meeting soon.

"If necessary, the meeting could be held at the foreign ministers level and not just the senior officials level as in the previous meetings," he added.

Meanwhile, Indonesian President BJ Habibie is to meet Bishop Carlos Belo, spiritual leader of East Timor, today, a day before the head of state is due to make a key policy address on human rights.

"This meeting is in order that the president is proactive in communicating with prominent Indonesian figures, including from East Timor," State

Secretary Akbar Tanjung told reporters Tuesday.

"Various things will be discussed, including the East Timor issue," he said, adding Alatas would also take part.

Belo, the Roman Catholic bishop of East Timor's capital Dili, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 along with self-exiled East Timorese leader Jose Ramos-Horta for their efforts in seeking a peaceful settlement in the territory of 800,000 people.

Indonesia invaded East Timor in December 1975 ending a short-lived independence movement that rose from the ashes of a civil war in the wake of Portugal abandoning its colony the year before.

Jakarta declared East Timor its 27th province in July 1976 in an act not recognised by the United Nations, which still regards Lisbon as being the administering power.



Prisoners of the Apanteos penitentiary, located 66 km northwest of San Salvador, the El Salvadoran capital, accompany one of the three prison guards taken hostage after an uprising broke out Tuesday, as the release him to authorities. Some 250 prisoners seized control of the prison and at least six people were injured before the riot was put down. — AP/UNB photo

Ethiopia gives stern warning to Eritrea

ADDIS ABABA, June 24: Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said on Tuesday his government would teach Eritrea a lesson if it failed to withdraw from Ethiopian territory. Meles told Reuters he was prepared to "go the extra mile" for mediation in the conflict between the horn of Africa neighbours, but he said the Ethiopian government was also preparing for war.

Meles stressed Ethiopia had no territorial claims on Eritrea and no intention of interfering domestically with the government of Eritrean President Isayas Afewerki.

"Our target is to reverse the invasion... the political objective is to make sure the invasion does not take place again," he said in an interview.

China seeks US help to fight 'greenhouse' gases

BEIJING, June 24: On the eve of President Clinton's visit, China's environment minister appealed Wednesday for closer cooperation in tackling deadly pollution created by the nation's rush for modernisation, reports AP.

Xie Zhenhua, head of the State Environment Protection Agency, said environmental agreements would be signed during Clinton's state visit, the first by a US president in almost 10 years.

The United States wants China's support in efforts to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases blamed for global warming. China is looking to US technology and investment to help control its worsening pollution problems.

"As two major players in the environmental field the two countries have broad prospects for cooperation," Xie said at a pre-summit news conference.

Apart its advanced environmental technology, US successes and failures in tackling pollution offer lessons on environmental protection, he said.

So far, the two countries were not cooperating as fully as they could, Xie said.

China "has quite a few environmental problems," he said. "I hope that through the visit, further cooperation in the environmental field between the two countries can be strengthened."

Chinese economic plans for 1996 to 2000 called for a 450 billion yuan (dls 54 billion) investment in the environment.

Xie welcomed foreign companies to take part, saying "the market is extremely big."

"We hope these foreign enterprises can make money by investing in the environmental protection field in China, he said.

Iraq denies using VX nerve gas in Gulf War

Baghdad, June 24: Iraq categorically denied Tuesday reports that it succeeded in making a weapon out of the fatal nerve gas VX in 1990 prior to the Gulf War, reports AP.

"This lie will not survive any more than have previous lies," a government spokesman said.

He said that the report, carried by the Washington Post Tuesday, resembled numerous previous allegations by the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) on Iraqi disarmament.

The Washington Post reported that warhead fragments recovered in March from a destruction pit at Taji, Iraq, by UN inspectors were found to contain "significant amounts" of VX disulfide and stabilizer.

The Pentagon confirmed Tuesday that a US Army laboratory found traces of VX nerve gas on fragments of Iraqi warheads indicating that Baghdad had used the gas as a weapon despite its repeated denials.

"Iraq is amazed that UNSCOM would choose a US Army laboratory rather than other laboratories of countries which are not politically hostile to Iraq," the Iraqi government spokesman added.

UNSCOM Chief Richard Butler is to brief the UN Security Council on Iraq today a day before the council is likely to extend sanctions against Baghdad for two more months.

Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said that Butler would present the finding regarding VX in his briefing.

US President Bill Clinton said Tuesday the report that Iraqi missiles were armed with VX nerve gas before the Gulf War justified the US hard line position on weapons inspections.

"It proves that the United States has been accurate and correct in our insistence all along that we support the UN inspections in Iraq," Clinton told reporters during a White House ceremony.

"And it proves that our decision to oppose relaxing the sanctions until all the UN resolutions have been complied with is an accurate one," he said.