

International

Albright urges Israel, PA to hold direct talks

WASHINGTON, July 11: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called on Israel and the Palestinians Friday to hold direct talks to resolve the remaining issues in the way of reviving the peace process, reports AP.

"It is now essential for the parties to talk with each other," Albright told reporters at the start of a meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

"We don't think that this impasse can be resolved and that we can come to a conclusion if they do not talk to each other," she said.

The call for a face to face meeting came after Albright held several lengthy telephone conversations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to try to get him to sign on to US proposals for restarting the peace process.

Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat have not set down together for talks since a midnight meeting was organised by envoy Dennis Ross in October 1997 at the Erez crossing in Gaza.

That meeting was the first

between the leaders in eight months.

Albright reiterated that the United States was nearing the end of its effort to try to revive the dialogue that broke down 16 months ago, threatening the Oslo peace process with collapse.

"We are clearly coming to the end of this phase and we cannot let it go on indefinitely," she said.

"I believe that we are coming towards the end," she added.

But she asserted that the United States would remain engaged in the search for peace in the Middle East.

One just can't walk away from a situation that is as difficult and as important to all of us as the Middle East and the peace process, she said.

Meanwhile, the United States is opposing Palestinian request to allow its chief Yasser Arafat, to fly to Libya, western and Arab diplomats said in the United Nations.

Washington stopped the request when the Palestinian observer mission brought it before the committee overseeing sanc-

tions against Libya, the diplomats said.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was allowed to land in Libya on Thursday on a lightning visit to wish Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi a rapid recovery from a recent hip operation. He was the first head of state to fly to Libya with UN permission.

The Palestinians said they may ask for the exemption once again on Monday, diplomats said.

The Palestinian mission phrased their request for an exemption to expand its Cabinet by saying that it was sending a presidential plane with dignitaries and doctors.

In general, exceptions to embargoes are made for humanitarian reasons.

In Washington US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said that Mubarak's visit was a one time gesture.

A one time humanitarian visit is appropriate but we are not going to go along with any further visits for the purpose of just paying courtesy calls on Gaddafi, she said.



Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa meet with reporters Friday at the State Department in Washington. A discussion was held by Albright and Moussa on the protracted stalemate between Israel and the Palestinians over the future of the West Bank. Albright said there is little the US can do "if the parties do not talk to each other."

**'Abubakar serious about democracy'
Ethnic violence jars Nigerian capital**

LAGOS, Nigeria, July 11: Trying to quell ethnic violence that left nine bodies in the streets, riot police took up positions around mosques Friday while gangs of youths set fires, smashed windows and blocked roads, reports AP.

Three days after the death of the country's most prominent political prisoner, Moshoud Abiola — a southern ethnic Yoruba — waves of rioting and violence appear to be pitting Yoruba against Nigeria's northern Hausa Muslims.

For the third straight day Friday, youths rioted in the streets in parts of Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos. That violence had ended by late afternoon, but streets in some neighbourhoods remained tense and watched over by scores of police and soldiers. Officers in helmets and flak jackets milled around mosques.

Violence between Hausa and the predominately Christian Yorubas also was tearing at the southwestern city of Ibadan, long an enclave of anti-government sentiment.

Nigerian authorities fear the political violence is being fanned by Hausa-Yoruba enmity. That antagonism was born after Nigeria's 1960 independence from Britain, when northerners quickly took control of the country. They have held power ever since, except for a period of about four years when southerners were in control.

Another AFP reports says: Nigeria's Abdulsalam Abubakar, head of the new military government, is "serious" about transition to democracy in his country. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said Friday.

"In my contacts with General Abubakar, I'm quite confident he's serious, he's well intentioned," said Annan in a press conference.

Abubakar succeeded General Sani Abacha on June 9 after that military leader died of a heart attack.

Annan met with the new Nigerian strongman 10 days ago to press him to move forward in instituting democracy.

**Low turnout likely in today's polls in Japan
Politicians take to streets in final day of campaigning**

TOKYO, July 11: Politicians took to the streets in a final day of campaigning Saturday for a set of nationwide elections dominated by concerns over how to pull this country out of its worst recession in decades, reports AP.

At stake in the elections Sunday are half of the 252 seats in Parliament's upper house.

Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's ruling Liberal Democratic Party is in no danger of losing its hold on power because it enjoys a strong majority in Parliament's more influential lower house.

But concerns over Japan's deepening economic morass have sent Hashimoto's support ratings plunging to record lows over the past several weeks, and

experts say a poor showing could be enough to force a leadership change.

"This election is effectively about confidence in the Hashimoto administration," the mass-circulation Yomiuri Shimbun said in a front-page story Saturday.

Analysts had until recently predicted that voter apathy and an ineffectual opposition would allow the LDP to regain control of the upper chamber for the first time since 1989.

Turnout for Sunday's election is expected to be among the lowest ever, possibly falling below 50 per cent of all registered voters.

But recent polls have indicated the LDP may be facing a tougher battle than expected,

forcing the party to revise downward its earlier predictions of significant gains.

Now, the party — which represents conservative interests and business — says it is aiming to gain the 61 seats that would allow it to break even.

If that happens, the ruling party would again have to seek outside partners to pass legislation. It had previously worked with two much smaller parties — the Socialists and another liberal group — in a rather precarious coalition.

Sunday's elections are the first upper house elections since Hashimoto came to power in early 1996. As a member of the more powerful lower house, Hashimoto himself does not stand for reelection.

Vajpayee puts off decision to expand his Cabinet

NEW DELHI, July 11: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has indefinitely put off a decision to expand his Cabinet due to infighting within the coalition and his right-wing party, a report said today, reports AP.

The Business Standard newspaper said Vajpayee was under pressure from his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) to give a Cabinet post to a senior BJP leader by replacing Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha.

"Vajpayee wanted to give the portfolio to Jaswant Singh," said a close aide and a former Finance Minister in the short-lived BJP government 1996, "but then (the) party did not want people defeated in national polls to become ministers."

There was also talks about

Sinha losing his job to Rajass than Chief Minister Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, who is facing pressure from the state's BJP members to quit," the report said.

It added that a key ally, the regional AIADMK, which threatened last month to withdraw support to the fragile 14-party coalition, wanted two more of its members in the Cabinet.

AIADMK leader Jayalalitha Jayaraman has argued that two ministers from her party quit the government over corruption allegations and "therefore the vacancies must be filled" by her own party members.

There had been speculation the AIADMK might support the main opposition Congress Party's bid to form a rival government unless its demands were met, including the sacking of

the local administration in Jayalalitha's home state of Tamil Nadu.

The Congress, the second largest group in the parliament has said it could form a government if the ruling coalition fell and smaller opposition groups gave it support.

Another coalition partner, the Equality Party, has also asked for more representation in the Cabinet, the newspaper said.

India's BJP-led government admits its performance since it won power in March has been lacklustre, except for its surprise decision to stage nuclear tests in May which sparked a tit-for-tat response from Pakistan and global sanctions.

India has had five governments and two elections since 1996.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II receives the Ambassador of Bolivia, Jaime Quiroga-Matos, who presented credentials at Buckingham Palace Friday.

BRIEFLY



A Serb policeman behind a wall of sandbags at a checkpoint at Gornja Klina, 40 kms northwest of Pristina, controls the area using sniper gun immediately after an attack by the Kosovo Liberation Army, Friday.

Brazil to ratify NPT, CTBT: Brazil will ratify the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) on Monday, a Foreign Ministry official said, Reuters reports from Brasilia.

Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso will sign the two documents in the presence of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan who is touring Latin America, said Antonio Guerreiro, head of the ministry's Disarmament Department, said Friday.

Polish PM meets Clinton: Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek met US President Bill Clinton at the White House Friday where they discussed the expansion of NATO and Poland's role in Eastern Europe, AFP says from Washington.

President Clinton expressed strong support for Poland's strides in building ties with its neighbours and efforts to promote stability, democracy and free market economy throughout Central and Eastern Europe according to a joint statement.

Drug dealer executed in China: A drug trafficker who brought 16.8 kilograms of heroin in Yunnan and abroad and sold a fourth of it, was sentenced to death by Beijing's No. 1 intermediate court and executed on Tuesday, Xinhua says from Beijing.

The man, Yang Zhigang, bought the heroin with the help of three accomplices and sold 4 kg for more than a million yuan (120,000 US dollars), according to the court. Police found 11.3 kilograms of heroin in his house when Yang was arrested.

**SAARC summit
Truck seized amid fear of bombing in Colombo**

COLOMBO, July 11: Police seized a rice-laden truck from the north fearing Tamil Tiger rebels may have planted bombs in it just weeks ahead of the seven-nation South Asian summit, officials said Saturday, reports AP.

The truck was intercepted Friday outside Sri Lankan capital Colombo after it came from Vavuniya, 210-km to the north, a police official said on condition of anonymity.

Intelligence reports had indicated that the Tigers would attack targets in Colombo ahead of the July 28-31 summit.

The rebels normally target military and government facilities but also aim for soft targets to dramatise their 15-year-old campaign for a separate homeland for the minority Tamils.

Police were checking the truck to see if there were cavities in it that could conceal bombs, the officer said.

HR activist urges US to pause pressure on Cuba

MEXICO CITY, July 11: A leading Cuban human rights activist said Friday that the United States should pause in its pressure against Fidel Castro's Cuba, where the number of political prisoners has fallen sharply, reports AP.

"There has not been so low a level of repression in the country for decades," said Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation.

Di-Dodi affair was not just some 'holiday romance'

LONDON, July 11: Princess Diana was madly in love with Dodi Fayed when they died in a car accident in Paris last August, and their relationship was not just some "holiday romance", Diana's stepmother said today, reports AP.

In an interview with Britain's Mirror tabloid, Countess Spencer, 68, backed Dodi's father, the Egyptian millionaire Mohamed Al-Fayed, who has been criticised by Diana's brother, Earl Spencer, for claiming that the two were to marry.

"What Diana and Dodi had was no holiday romance. This was real love, the kind you can look for all your life and never find. I know because they both told me," the Countess said. Diana and Dodi enjoyed a Mediterranean cruise days before they died.

"People should know the truth about their relationships, rather than what the rumour-mongers with their own agendas would have us believe," she added.

In a recent BBC documentary, Spencer dismissed claims Diana was about to marry Dodi, saying the relationship has not gone past the "heady stage". He also branded Al-Fayed's claims that the car crash was no accident as "monstrous".

But Al-Fayed, owner of the luxury Harrod's store in London, said it was "unwise" for the Earl to dismiss the relationship between Diana and his late son.

4 rockets hit Kabul airport

KABUL, July 11: Four rockets slammed into the airport in Afghanistan's beleaguered capital on Saturday, just one day after the United Nations announced it was suspending its flights into Kabul, reports AP.

The rockets were fired by opposition fighters, led by ousted military chief Ahmed Shah Massoud, who was driven from Kabul in 1996 by invading Taliban troops.

Opposition fighters vowed to continue its rocket assaults on the Kabul airport in an attempt to prevent Taliban jet fighters from using the runway.

The UN stopped all its flights into Kabul after rockets twice landed at the airport while its aircraft was parked on the tarmac. The rocketing has been occurring almost daily for the last

two weeks.

Several of the rockets have gone astray and landed in nearby residential area killing at least three people and wounding several others, most of them from flying shrapnel.

The Taliban army controls about 85 per cent of the country, including the capital of Kabul, while its opponents rule in about 15 per cent of the country.

Most of the area under the opposition rule is in northern Afghanistan. The opposition is a collection of small groups that largely represents Afghanistan's minority ethnic groups.

In the area controlled by the Taliban religious army a harsh form of Islamic law has been imposed.

UK tightens rules on exports to India, Pakistan

LONDON, July 11: The British government Friday announced additional measures to tighten its rules of the exports of nuclear-related goods to India and Pakistan, reports Xinhua.

In a written answer to parliament, British Foreign Office Minister Tony Lloyd said that the Labour government made this latest decision because both India and Pakistan demonstrated their lack of commitment to non-proliferation and damaged the stability of South Asia.

"Under these regrettable circumstances it is right that we should deny the export of nuclear-related goods to India and Pakistan where they could assist their nuclear programmes," Lloyd said.

Under the new measures, the British government discouraged British nuclear scientists or nuclear personnel from maintaining contacts with Indians and Pakistanis.

In addition, India and Pakistani people are to be barred from visiting British nuclear facilities.

Annan to discuss Chiapas conflict in Mexico

UNITED NATIONS, July 11: Secretary-General Kofi Annan didn't rule out Friday a possible UN mediating role for the rebellion in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, reports AP.

At a news conference to launch his five-nation Latin American trip, Annan said he was reviewing documents from government officials and non-governmental organisations about the issues.

**Off the Record
Russian way to cut costs!**

MOSCOW: The cash-strapped military has apparently found a new way to cut costs — it's been feeding some soldiers with canned dog food instead of meat, a newspaper reported Friday, reports AP.

Military prosecutors, who recently checked army food depots near Moscow, found 1,000 tons of dog food, the business daily Kommersant reported.

The prosecutors also discovered that butter, fish and other products at the depots were bought after their shelf life had already expired.

The check revealed many other irregularities, the report said. In one example, a Russian meat factory was systematically placing less meat in its cans than indicated by the label. The military paid for some 16 tons of meat that it didn't receive.

When the prosecutors warned the military command about their intention to check several other food depots throughout Russia, LtD Gen Vyacheslav Savinov, the chief of the Defence Ministry's food service, submitted his resignation report, the newspaper said.

The Russian armed forces have been plagued by rampant corruption and other crimes. Dozens of senior officers have faced criminal charges in recent years.

Once treated like a family, now a real family

ALMATY: The presidents of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have always treated each like family, but soon they will have an official reason to do so when their children marry later this month, Kyrgyz officials said Friday, reports AP.

Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev's son, Aidar, and his Kazakh counterpart Nursultan Nazarbayev's daughter, Aliya, plan to marry on July 17 in the town of Cholpon-ata about 210 kilometres east of Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, the officials said.

The ceremony will take place at Akayev's residence on the picturesque shores of Issyk-kul Lake in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan, Interfax reported.

Despite their busy schedules, the fathers of the bride and groom won't have far to travel to the ceremony. Earlier in the day, they will attend a Central Asian Union meeting in Cholpon-ata with Presidents Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan and Emomali Rakhmanov of Tajikistan.

Aliya is the youngest of Nazarbayev's three daughters and the last to marry, the spokesman said. Aidar Akayev, a student, is the second eldest of Akayev's four children, a Kyrgyz presidential spokesman said.

**10 arrested in Britain, Ireland
Rival N Ireland groups agree to hold talks**

BELFAST, July 11: After six nights of violence and displays of force, Protestant marchers and their Catholic opponents plan to talk their way out of a confrontation, which has sorely tested, Northern Ireland's recent turn toward compromise, reports AP.

Representatives of the Orange Order and the Catholic resident of the Garvaghy Road in Portadown, 40 kms southwest of Belfast, accepted Prime Minister Tony Blair's invitation to try to find a durable solution to a march that has sparked violence for a third summer.

The violent potential of Northern Ireland's ancient sectarian hatreds has been evident in the disorders that erupted across the province after orange marchers were stopped Sunday by police and soldiers.

Police fired plastic bullets Friday night at Protestant hard-liners who again tried to break through barricades around the Drumcree Anglican church, where the Orange march was stopped Sunday. However, the crowd on a cool and rainy night Friday was substantially smaller than the estimated 20,000-plus of the night before.

Police later reported that the crowd had used a grappling hook attached to a car to try to pull away the barbed wire on the barricade. The attempt failed, but a spokesman said the 4,000-strong crowd forced the lines of defence to be reinforced, as officers took cover behind armoured vehicles.

Another report adds from London: Police foiled a bombing attack in London on Friday and arrested 10 people in a joint British-Irish operation against IRA splinter groups opposed to the Northern Ireland peace agreement, Scotland Yard said.

Six arrested in London followed raids by police in Dublin, Wexford and Dundalk, all in the Republic of Ireland, where four arrests were made.



British Army troops in full riot gear walk towards a army helicopter, Friday, in a field beside Drumcree Road, Portadown, Northern Ireland, as tension rises between loyalists and the security forces on the 6th day of the Orange Order standoff.

US Senate adopts resolution of support to Taiwan

WASHINGTON, July 11: The Senate Friday adopted a resolution of support to Taiwan, in effect rebuking President Bill Clinton for his remarks about the nationalist controlled island during his recent trip to China, reports AP.

The resolution, adopted by 92 to 0, reaffirmed the US longstanding commitment to Taiwan and the people of Taiwan.

It stressed that efforts to defame the future of the island "by other than peaceful means" would be considered a threat to the peace and security of the western Pacific and of grave concern to the United States.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott accused Clinton of shifting policy toward Taiwan

by publicly stressing US opposition to independence for the island or to its membership of international organisations.

Clinton's remarks made during a meeting with Shanghai intellectuals — made no departure from established US policy on the island, but they prompted a sharp reaction from Taipei and a warm welcome from rival Beijing.

This was "a major victory for Beijing and a major slap for democratic Taiwan", Lott said Friday.

"Before Shanghai US policy was to acknowledge Beijing's position, now we have apparently made Beijing as position our policy," Lott also said.

Clinton spelled out in the clearest terms to date that Washington will stick strictly to its one China's policy on Taiwan.

for Taiwan, or two China or "one Taiwan one China". Clinton said summing up his talks with Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

China regards Taiwan run by nationalist who fled the mainland after losing a war with the Communists in 1949, as a breakaway province and has never ruled out the use of force to seize it.

AP adds: The resolution, by Majority Leader Trent Lott, a Republican, and Democratic Sen. Robert Torricelli, was approved without debate.

"Passage of this resolution sends a powerful signal that the Senate is not accepting President Clinton's new policy," Lott said. "It's a strong statement coming so soon after his return to the United States."

At the White House, presidential spokesman Mike McCurry disputed Lott's characterization.