

## UN may have to withdraw its workers from Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS, July 15: The United Nations may have to withdraw its workers from Afghanistan because of restrictions imposed by the ruling Taliban leadership, the UN envoy to the country said, reports AP.

Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN chief's special envoy for Afghanistan, said Tuesday that the Taliban is violating the terms of a May agreement by placing unacceptable restrictions on aid workers, particularly in the capital, Kabul.

"If these conditions are not acceptable, my opinion is that we will have to tell the Taliban 'You have signed an agreement, you implement it, or let us go and work somewhere else'."

He said a major problem came when the Taliban forced international aid workers in Kabul to relocate to abandoned dormitories for what the authorities said were security precautions.

When asked if the United Nations was at the point of giving the Taliban one last chance, Brahimi said the Taliban must know there is a limit to what the United Nations will toler-

ate. "There are growing pressures on us in part from the donor community — to say there is a limit to what you can stand."

Relations have been deteriorating steadily between the United Nations and the Taliban, which has imposed a strict version of Islamic rule in the 85 per cent of the country it controls.

The Taliban has forced girls out of schools and women out of jobs. Health care for women is limited. All Muslim women — including foreigners can go out in public only under the escort of a close male relative.

The United Nations has about 60 international workers in Afghanistan, including representatives from the World Food Program, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Taliban wants Afghanistan's seat at the United Nations, which is currently held by former president Burhanuddin Rabbani, the leader of an alliance fighting to oust the Taliban from power.

## Arafat concludes Beijing visit with moral support for ME peace process

BEIJING, July 15: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat left Beijing Tuesday armed with promises of financial backing and moral support for the Middle East peace process, reports AP.

Arafat said he held "very important" talks with Chinese leaders and signed agreements for Chinese financial support for his Palestinian government. He gave no details.

China had an important role to play in "pushing forward the peace process and to protect the peace process" in the Middle East, Arafat said in a pre-departure news conference.

In a meeting with Arafat Tuesday, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji reaffirmed China's long-standing support for the Palestinians' just cause and said Chinese businesses would support a Palestinian state with investments.

Zhu told Arafat Israel's delay in withdrawing from the West Bank was "wrong" and said China supported negotiations on the basis of land for peace. Despite supporting the

Palestinians, Beijing would never be a moderator in the Middle East peace talks, Zhu said.

Arafat also met top officials including President Jiang Zemin, who told him China supported the establishment of a Palestinian state and would use its seat on the United Nations Security Council to push the peace process forward.

Arafat accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of blocking the peace process and of not carrying out commitments made in accords signed in 1993 and 1995 in Oslo.

"The aim of this Israeli government is to abrogate the agreements, annex Jerusalem and turn it into a Jewish city," Arafat said, condemning recent Israeli moves to make Jewish suburbs part of Jerusalem and thereby ensure a Jewish majority.

He said he raised plans with China for a summit of Arab nations to discuss the peace process and support for the Palestinian authority. Arafat is seeking interna-

tional support for his effort to establish a Palestinian state in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Netanyahu's government has stalled on withdrawing troops. Israel has refused a US compromise that would link a pull-back from 13 per cent of the West Bank with corresponding security gestures from the Palestinians. Arafat supports that initiative.

China has long been a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause but over the past decade has developed good diplomatic and strong economic ties with Israel.

AFP adds: The Palestinian Authority's number two, Mahmud Abbas, is expected to meet Israeli defence minister Yitzhak Mordechai in a few days, a Palestinian official who asked not to be identified said Tuesday.

The meeting, which the United States had called for, would be the first in a series of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks, the official said. The date of the initial meet-

ing will be set after Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat returns from China at the end of the week, he said.

The talks probably will not last for more than a week, the official added.

US State Department spokesman James Rubin said Monday that Israel and the Palestinians had agreed to a high-level meeting.

Rubin also said: "The ball is not in the Palestinian court. The ball is in the court of the Israelis to try to work with the Palestinians and work with US to come to a second yes."

But Israeli Environment and Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan Tuesday brushed off US accusations that Israel was at fault for the failure of US efforts to end the 16-month stalemate in peace talks.

"What is worse: that the United States will place the guilt on us or we will give in to the pressure?" Eitan, also Deputy Prime Minister, asked on Israeli radio. "It's best we don't give in. The alternative is to stop existing."

## Suspects linked to Texas separatists Plot to kill Clinton, officials revealed

BROWNSVILLE, Texas, July 15: Three men suspected of links to a Texas separatist group plotted to kill President Bill Clinton and other government officials by shooting them with a cactus thorn poisoned with the AIDS virus, according to court documents released on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The men were jailed two weeks ago on charges of conspiring to use weapons of mass destruction against federal officials, but details of their alleged plans were sparse because documents relating to the case had been sealed until this week.

Two newly unsealed affidavits from an FBI agent describe a bizarre plot in which the suspects allegedly planned to use modified cigarette lighters to shoot thorns dressed with the AIDS virus, Anthrax, Botulism or Rabies into their victims.

Targets included Clinton, US Attorney General Janet Reno, FBI Director Louis Freeh and other federal and local officials, according to the affidavits filed by federal prosecutors.

The three suspects — Johnnie Wise, 72, Jack Grebe, 43, and Oliver Emigh, 63, — were arrested on July 1 at Lomita, Texas, near the border with Mexico. US magistrate John Black ruled on July 2 that they should be detained without bond.

In one of the affidavits, FBI special agent Franklin Sharkey said a document entitled "declaration of war" had been sent to Clinton and others by e-mail on June 12.

On June 26 an e-mail message was sent to Freeh which began: "Your FBI employees and their families have been targeted for destruction by revenge. We the people are extremely mad and will not accept the inequities any longer." Similarly worded threats were sent to Clinton and the other intended victims, the document said.

Sharkey said an unidentified witness who cooperated in the FBI investigation told how one suspect had described plans to turn a cigarette lighter into an assassination weapon.

## BRIEFLY

### Israel legalises sale of Viagra:

Israel Tuesday authorized the sale of the Viagra anti-impotence pill, which had been selling at skyhigh prices on the black market. AFP says from Jerusalem.

Patients suffering from impotence will be able to obtain the medication with a doctor's prescription, a health ministry spokesman said. The spokesman also expressed hope that legalizing the sale of Viagra "would break the black market where the price of Viagra has recently reached astronomical levels."

**3 convicts shot dead in Colombia:** Three convicts were shot and killed by guards and another was wounded as they tried to escape during a riot at a prison in northeastern Colombia on Tuesday, authorities said. Reuters reports from Bogota.

In retaliation, another group of inmates took four of the wardens hostage at the prison near the town of Socorro in Santander province.

**Outbreak of fever worsens in Vietnam:** A worsening outbreak of dengue fever has killed 120 people in Vietnam so far this year, five times the death toll for the same period in 1997, the Ministry of Health said yesterday. AP says from Hanoi.

It said 46,373 people have contracted the disease this year, triple the figure for this time in 1997. Two-thirds of the provinces have reported cases.

**Fire destroys 63 huts in Hanoi:** A fire that started in an oven destroyed 63 thatched huts in southern Ho Chi Minh City, leaving 300 people homeless, police said yesterday. AP says from Hanoi.

A traffic jam and the small size of the alley leading to the area in the city's District 8 prevented 13 firetrucks from reaching the scene. Firefighters worked with pumps and buckets for an hour to extinguish the blaze that started at 5 pm Monday. No casualties were reported.

**Polish UN observer shot in Georgia:** A Polish woman working as a United Nations military observer in Georgia was shot dead by unidentified attackers at the entrance to her apartment, officials said yesterday. AP reports from Tbilisi, Georgia.

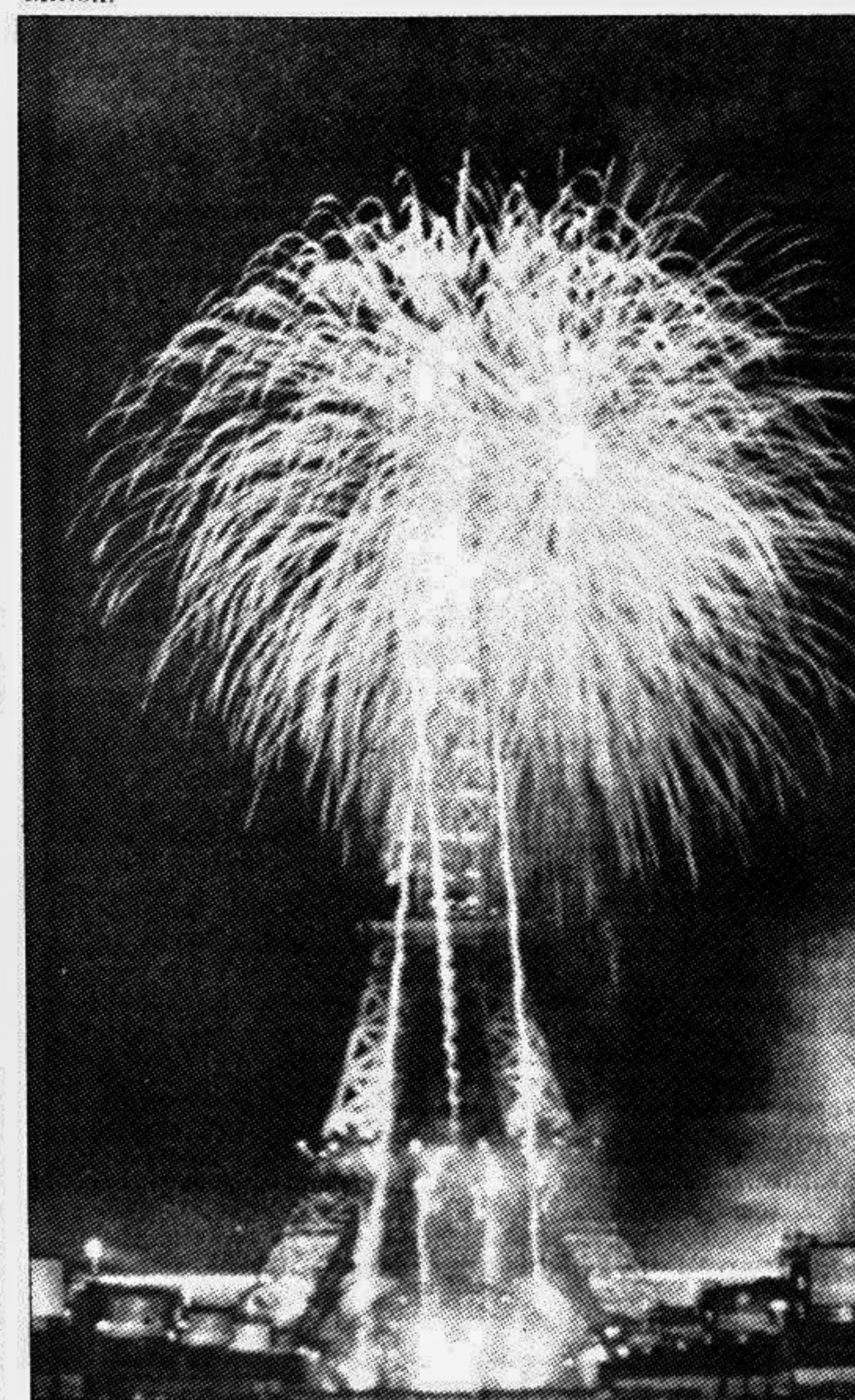
Maria Magdalena Kawoska, 31, was shot at point-blank range on Tuesday evening, said Maya Musidze, a spokeswoman of Georgia's Interior Ministry. The motive for the attack was not immediately known.

**Yilmaz loses 1st round in motion:** Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz on Tuesday lost the first round of an opposition attempt to topple his government through a censure motion, Reuters says from Ankara.

"The motion has been accepted", Deputy Speaker Yasin Hatipoglu said after deputies voted by show of hands to pursue a censure motion against Yilmaz, accused of corruption in a land deal. A second round of voting is expected in the coming week.

**Belarus president denied US visa:** The United States on Tuesday announced visa restrictions for Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko and several dozen members of his government, Reuters says from Washington.

"Each travel request, except those to international organizations in the United States, will be examined with the presumption of denial," State Department spokesman James Rubin said. The restrictions were in retaliation for Belarus's attempt to gain possession of the US ambassador's residence in Minsk.



Multi-coloured fireworks cascade down over thousands of people gathered on the Champs de Mars in Paris, Tuesday night to watch the fireworks over the Eiffel Tower at the end of French musician Jean Michel Jarre's musical concert in celebration of Bastille Day. Bastille Day celebrates the French Revolution in 1789 which ended the rule of the French monarchy. — AP/UNB photo



First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton talks with Maria Rust, of the National Park Service, as they sit next to an old Edison phonograph and electric light during a visit to the Thomas Edison National Historic Site in West Orange, NJ, Tuesday. Mrs Clinton stopped at the former Edison laboratories where the famous inventor worked on many of his creations, including the world's first moving pictures, during the second day of the "Save America's Treasures" tour. — AP/UNB photo

## Nobel laureate urges UN envoy to delay visit to East Timor

DILI, Indonesia, July 15: With tensions mounting in East Timor, a Nobel peace laureate has urged the UN envoy for the troubled territory to postpone his visit to Indonesia this week, reports AP.

Bishop Carlos Belo, one of East Timor's most vocal critics of Indonesian policy, said the security situation in the former Portuguese colony had deteriorated because of the planned visit.

UN envoy Jamsheed Marker was scheduled to arrive in Indonesia on Thursday, and a spokesman for the United Nations in New York said he is expected to visit Indonesian-controlled East Timor.

During Marker's last visit in March 1997, Indonesian soldiers killed two pro-independence protesters during a rally timed to coincide with his trip.

Last month, security forces killed another two activists in East Timor during protests held to impress three visiting European ambassadors.

"I call on Jamsheed Marker

to postpone his planned visit this time to East Timor. That is my opinion," the Suara Timor Timur newspaper on Wednesday quoted Belo as saying. He suggested that Marker come instead in September or October.

Belo, who won the Nobel peace prize in 1996 for his efforts to solve the long conflict in his homeland, also called on the Indonesian government to consider his suggestion.

"Don't worsen the situation any more," he said. There was no immediate reaction from the United Nations to Belo's appeal.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas has said a visit by Marker to East Timor would not be wise because it would likely increase tensions.

On Wednesday, about 400 students staged a peaceful, anti-Indonesian demonstration on the grounds of University of East Timor in Dili, the capital.

Half a dozen trucks carrying police and soldiers drove slowly past the campus as banner-wav-

ing protesters shouted slogans calling for a vote on independence. They also demanded the release of Xanana Gusman, a jailed separatist rebel leader from East Timor.

Tensions have been high in East Timor this week not only because of Marker's scheduled visit but also because the 22nd anniversary of Indonesia's annexation of the territory falls on Friday.

Scared by the possibility of escalating protests and reprisals from indigenous residents, tens of thousands of non-Timorese Indonesian settlers have fled since late last month. Many shops are closed in Dili as their owners have left town.

Indonesia annexed East Timor in 1976, a year after its troops intervened in a civil war that broke out as Portugal abandoned the half-island territory.

The United Nations, Portugal and many other governments refuse to recognise Indonesian sovereignty there.

### 880-carat blue sapphire found in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, July 15: An 880-carat blue sapphire the size of a chicken egg that could become one of the world's most valuable gems has been found in central Sri Lanka, trade officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

Leela Dharmadasa, owner of the mine in Ratnapura about 70 kilometres from Colombo, will put the sapphire up for auction after it is cut and polished. The raw stone has been shown to President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Leslie Punchedewa, one of Sri Lanka's top gemologists, said if cut properly the gem will be among the 10 most valuable blue sapphires in the world. The value is difficult to assess but it could approach \$1 million, the expert said.

Sri Lanka has produced the three largest blue sapphires ever found, including the 'Star of India' on display in New York's Museum of Natural History. Its gems have been fabled since the days of the 13th Century Venetian traveler Marco Polo.

Exports have been badly hit in the recent years by low production and competition from new producers, Tanzania, Madagascar and Vietnam.

A decade ago, the sale of gems and jewelry was the third largest foreign exchange earner. Last year, it fell to sixth.

## Assad visits France today

DAMASCUS, July 15: President Hafez Al-Assad visits France for the first time in 22 years on Thursday as Syria casts around for friends following the failure of US-directed talks to deliver Middle East peace, reports Reuters.

"The situation in the Middle East has not been so dangerous since the 1991 conference in Madrid (that started peace talks) and the end of the cold war," Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara told the French magazine Le Point. Assad, who rarely ventures outside the region, will meet president Jacques Chirac on Thursday and Friday and hold separate talks with Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

The search for a wider relationship with the European Union — trade association talks have begun — is underlined by the decision to include three cabinet ministers with economic responsibilities among the five accompanying Assad.

But Assad will be seeking French and EU action to breathe life into the peace talks, which have been stalled for 15 months.

Assad's hopes for regaining the Golan Heights captured by Israel in 1967 — the central Syrian demand — now look bleak in the face of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's refusal to consider a withdrawal.

"Today there will be total peace or no peace at all. There is no middle ground," said Shara, who is accompanying Assad in France, now, with Benjamin

Netanyahu, peace is unobtainable."

The trip to Paris is not the only sign Assad is looking for alternatives after seeing few returns from backing the US plans unveiled at the Madrid peace talks.

### Namibia, DRC talks end

LUANDA, July 15: The leaders of Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) wrapped up talks with their Angolan counterpart on Tuesday on the troubled political situation in the oil and diamond-rich southern African country, reports Reuters.

Angolan national radio said presidents Laurent Kabila of the DRC and Sam Nujoma of Namibia met Angolan President Eduardo Dos Santos to discuss the peace process in Angola.

Kabila is a close ally of Angola and analysts say Nujoma is respected by both the Angolan government and UNITA.

They did not speak to reporters after the meeting at Dos Santos' residence south of the capital Luanda, but Angolan radio reported the leaders said the peace process was hampered by the absence of a mediator.

UN mediator Alloune Blondin Beye, who spent five years negotiating a peace deal between the government and the rebel movement UNITA, was killed in a plane crash on June 26.

## Khatami condemns N-tests by India, Pakistan

TEHRAN, July 15: Iranian President Mohammad Khatami deplored Tuesday the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan in May, the Iranian News Agency IRNA reported, reports AFP.

In a meeting with a Pakistani religious official, Zafar Al-Haq, Khatami hoped that the two countries would act to protect peace and tranquility in the region and bring tension to an end, IRNA said.

In the meantime we recommend Pakistan, as a friendly state, to observe self-restraint and launch diplomatic initiatives to remove its concerns. Khatami was quoted as saying.

### Yeltsin won't seek 3rd term

MOSCOW, July 15: Russian President Boris Yeltsin on Tuesday signalled he would not to seek re-election in 2000, saying he hoped the country would work calmly with a new leader come the new millennium, reports AFP.

"I hope that in the year 2000 Russia will calmly start to work with the new president," the Interfax news agency cited him as saying.

His comment came after the head of the Russia's region bloc in parliament, Leg Marozov, said the Kremlin chief had ruled out seeking a third term.

"I take seriously (Boris Yeltsin's) clear and unambiguous statement that he will not stand in the year 2000," Marozov told journalists after meeting Yeltsin.

Constitutional Court President Marat Baglay said earlier this month that Russia's top court would meet October 15-17 to consider the legal feasibility of a third term.

### King Hussein in US for medical tests

AMMAN, July 15: King Hussein of Jordan headed for the United States on Tuesday on a surprise visit for medical tests on what he said were recurring fevers, reports Reuters.

The 62-year-old monarch, a heavy smoker who was treated for cancer six years ago, said his symptoms could only be properly diagnosed at a clinic in the United States where he has returned regularly since his 1992 cancer operation.

"The fever which I suffered a while ago has returned, about three times a day," said the king, who has had a number of apparently minor ailments since the cancer surgery.

"Thank God all the tests which have been done do not show that there is any great problem at all."

## Off the Record

### Insatiable appetite indeed

COLOMBO: A Sri Lankan 17-month infant appears to be a child of five years, according to the Sinhalese newspaper The Island, reports Xinhua.

He eats a kilogram packet of powdered milk. Large quantities of biscuits and a plateful of rice adequate for a day. But these still fail to satisfy his appetite.

Born to a poor family in the north central province, Umantha Iroshan is the third child of father SG Subasinghe, a village protection officer and mother WD Malini.

His weight was 3.4 kilograms when he was born, however, he weighed 22 kilograms on July 8.

Five minutes after being breast fed, Iroshan cries for more. He is given a cup of powdered milk because his mother has no more breast milk to feed him but he continues to cry for more.

Doctors at the local hospital where his parents take him regularly in the hope that they could do something about his insatiable appetite said there is nothing wrong with him and there are no medicines to curb his appetite.

They advised the parents to give him less food. But the parents queried, "When he cries for more, could we ignore him?" The local government authorities have called for public donations to tend the abnormal child.

**Once a president, now a kidnapper!** BUENOS AIRES: A federal judge Tuesday ordered former Argentine President Jorge Rafael Videla to remain in custody on charges of abduction, concealment and detention of five children, reports Xinhua.

Judge Roberto Marquiech said the Videla falsified public documents to cover the identities of the kidnapped children. Videla, who was the president in 1976-1981, took the children from their legitimate guardians who were suspected of being subversives or political dissidents, delivering them to members of the armed forces or to third persons with the goal of detaining and concealing them.

The judge ordered five million US dollars of Videla's assets to be frozen.

An appeals court could order the former president placed under house arrest, court sources said. His defenders appealed last Wednesday to the judge's decision not to authorize his house arrest, but to keep him in prison where he has been confined since June 9.

### Four Indian N-researchers denied visas to enter US, UK

BOMBAY, July 15: Four Indian nuclear researchers were denied visas to enter Britain and the United States in the wake of Indian nuclear tests that met worldwide condemnation, the scientists said Wednesday, reports AP.

R Chidambaram, chairman of India's Atomic Energy Commission and a key figure behind the May tests, was not issued a visa to attend the four-day annual executive committee meeting of an international group of crystal specialists that begins Wednesday in Arlington, Virginia.

Placid Rodrigues, director of the Indira Gandhi Center for Atomic Research and Baldev Raj, a top scientist behind the same institute, were denied entry into Britain to attend a meeting last week of editors of a scientific encyclopedia at Oxford University.

Another scientist from the Indira Gandhi center, N Ravi, was not issued a visa for a June-end meeting in Britain. His trip

would have been funded by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"It is just one of those things. But I do hope these restrictions will ease in time. Scientists in general have always been open to international cooperation," Chidambaram said.

A spokeswoman for the US embassy in New Delhi refused specific comment on Chidambaram's case, but said US law provided for the refusal of visas to people from any country believed to be trying to access nuclear technology.

The scientists from the Indira Gandhi center said that in response to their visa applications, they received a fax stating that it was British policy to refer to London "applications from those involved in atomic research."

The British High Commission in New Delhi had no immediate comment. India's tests and retaliatory tests from rival Pakistan conducted raised fears of a nuclear conflict in South Asia.