

# Kashmir pullout almost complete: Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, July 17: The withdrawal of Islamic fighters from mountain tops in the Indian sector of Kashmir neared completion Saturday under a disengagement accord between Pakistan and India, officials said, reports AFP.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif reiterated his commitment to a negotiated settlement of the 51-year Kashmir dispute as calm prevailed in Kargil, the scene of bitter fighting until about a week ago.

Pakistani officials said a clear picture would be available later in the day about the completion of the disengagement, taking place under a July 11 agreement between Pakistani and Indian military chiefs.

A military official said no "unlawful incident" had been reported amid the ongoing disengagement.

Indian military officials said troops had been ordered to "treat any remaining Pakistani intruders as hostile." They said a second deadline for their withdrawal which expired at

dawn Saturday would not be extended.

The two-month conflict ended after Sharif, implementing an agreement reached with US President Bill Clinton in Washington, asked the guerrillas to leave the peaks they had captured.

The rival armies also fought fierce artillery duels during the crisis along the 720-kilometer (446-mile) Line of Control (LoC) that divides Kashmir into Pakistani and Indian zones.

Sharif, visiting troops Friday in northern Pakistan near the LoC, urged India to start a meaningful dialogue to resolve the Kashmir issue, source of two of the three wars between Pakistan and India since 1947.

"We do not want war. By our acts, we have proved to the world that we are a peace-loving nation," he was quoted by the official APP news agency as saying.

He said the tensions could have led to a major war between the two nuclear states. "We realised the sensitivity of the situation and averted a ferocious

war." Pakistan has put its military losses at 187 officers and troops killed and 24 missing, while claiming that 1,700 Indian soldiers were killed in the conflict.

According to Indian official figures, some 333 Indian soldiers were killed compared to 679 infiltrators.

Pakistani leaders and the official media have been forcefully defending the de-escalation as a diplomatic triumph for Sharif in the face of attacks from religious parties.

They stressed Clinton's promise of "personal interest" in encouraging an Indo-Pakistani dialogue to resolve the Kashmir dispute, pinning hopes on the international community helping to bring about permanent peace.

Pakistan's army chief, General Pervez Musharraf, admitted in an interview with the BBC broadcast Friday that Pakistani troops had engaged in "occasional and aggressive patrolling" on the Indian side of the LoC.

## Megawati vows to revive Indonesia

TOKYO, July 17: Indonesia's popular opposition figure Megawati Sukarnoputri has pressed her readiness to take action to revive the country as Indonesia's new president, a daily reported Saturday, reports AFP.

Priority is to the unification of the country. Megawati, whose party holds a solid lead in the June 7 election, wrote for Japan's mass-circulation Yomiuri Shinbun.

Her party, Democracy Party-Struggle, has well-planned policies to revive the country as a democratic nation and a sound business partner in a bid to win international confidence, Megawati said.

The 52-year-old matronly daughter of the country's first president, Sukarno, said she was ready to take action.

She said those who did want reform were blocking her from becoming president against the will of a majority of Indonesian people.

Megawati added that when she became president, she would like to welcome Japanese people and deepen friendly relations between the two countries.

Megawati's party topped the election, garnering 33.7 per cent of the 165 million valid votes, about 12 million votes in front of the ruling Golkar party which won 22 per cent.

Her chances of winning the presidency, however, remain uncertain as incumbent President B.J. Habibie, who is running with a Golkar ticket, appears set to gain support of the country's Muslim parties.

People's Consultative Assembly, the country's highest legislative body, is scheduled to convene in November to select a new president.

## Ukrainian rocket blasts off from Kazakh base

MOSCOW, July 17: A Ukrainian rocket blasted into space from Kazakhstan's Baikonur space base today, the second launch after the Kazakhs lifted a ban on blast-offs, reports Reuters.

A Russian rocket with a cargo craft with supplies for the Mir space station took off the day before. Marking the end of a row which began after a Russian Proton booster rocket crashed and scattered debris all over central Kazakhstan.

A spokeswoman for Russia's mission control confirmed that the Ukrainian Zenit rocket, carrying a Ukrainian-Russian research satellite, took off from the former Soviet cosmodrome on the remote steppes of Kazakhstan at 0538 GMT.

Its launch followed that of the Soyuz Booster rocket on Friday, two days later than scheduled. It is transporting a Progress cargo craft with food, oxygen and a navigation system to the space station's Russian-French crew.

"I am very happy that the launch was a success. It is significant in terms of whether we fulfill our planned programme for the crew on board (Mir)," a visibly pleased Boris Ostroumov, deputy director of the Russian space programme, said on Friday.

Ukraine will also be relieved at Zenit's launch as it was the first since one of the rockets crashed in September 1998 with 12 satellites of an international telecommunications consortium on board. The consortium had said it wanted to see a successful take off before proceeding with the deal.

Moscow leases Baikonur, the main former Soviet space launch base, for 115 million dollars a year. But the deal has hit trouble, with Russia failing to pay the rent.

A Russian Proton-K rocket exploded soon after launch on July 5, scattering debris over parts of Kazakhstan and raising fears that toxic fuel contaminated the soil and water supplies.

## Former student leader arrested in China

BEIJING, July 17: A democracy activist who was among a student delegation that spoke to China's leaders before the Tiananmen massacre has been formally arrested for calling on people to remember the crackdown, his wife said Saturday, reports AFP.

In April, 50-year-old Jiang Qisheng wrote a letter urging Chinese people to hold a candle-light vigil on the 10th anniversary of the June 4, 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, his wife Zhang Hong told AFP.

Zhang said police told her that Jiang had been arrested on charges of propaganda and incitement to subvert state power, but no legal documents had been produced.

"They told me to wait from the notice of arrest as there are still several days between when he is charged by the prosecutor and the opening of trial," she said.

The absence of an official arrest notice prevents Jiang's lawyer from establishing what his rights are, said Liu Qing of the New York-based Human Rights in China (HRIC), in a faxed statement.

Police took Jiang from his home in Beijing on May 18 and have not yet produced any legal documents, it said.

At the time of the massacre, Jiang was a doctoral student at the People's University. He was deputy chief of the student delegation which held talks with then Chinese premier Li Peng, said the HRIC.

# Chinese military manoeuvres in Taiwan Strait

HONG KONG, July 17: Hong Kong newspapers reported Saturday that China was conducting military manoeuvres in the Taiwan Strait and airports in the south were on alert as political tensions with Taipei mount, reports AFP.

China's state media meanwhile stepped up its condemnation of Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui, calling him an "historical sinner" for "attempting to split the motherland" over his remarks on the island's statehood.

Lee's insistence a week ago that Taiwan was a separate state infuriated China and set off the latest round of cross-strait acrimony.

Sources in Beijing told AFP Friday that China had ordered a low-level military alert in its southern regions facing the Taiwan Strait.

Fujian local authorities also conducted drills with civilian vessels on China's side of the strait, a provincial government spokeswoman told AFP.

Wen Wei Po, a Hong Kong paper which usually reflects the views of the Chinese govern-

ment, reported Saturday that more than 100 civilian vessels conducted "exercises" for 12 hours in waters near Fujian on Thursday.

As the vessels headed towards the south China seaboard, many of the men on board sang the communist marching tune "We must liberate Taiwan," the paper said.

The mass-market Apple Daily, quoting Japanese defence officials, said: "Ten Chinese military vessels, believed to be taking part in a military exercise, were seen near north Diaoyu Island from Thursday morning until night."

The newspaper said the manoeuvres, 200 nautical miles northeast of Taiwan, "were not typical."

The Oriental Daily News, another mass-market paper, said Xiamen airport in the south had received notice that it should be prepared to change flight schedules to tie in with People's Liberation Army air force drills.

It said Fuzhou airport, also in the south, was closed to civilian traffic for three hours on

Thursday morning.

The Shantou air force command, which took part in intimidating 1996 war games in the Taiwan Strait, had also been conducting military exercises in recent days, the Oriental Daily said.

Two Hong Kong newspapers reported Friday that President Jiang Zemin signed a military order on Tuesday telling forces in the southern cities of Nanjing and Guangzhou to be on alert for war preparations.

A Taiwanese defense ministry spokesman said Friday there were no signs of Chinese military movements.

China's state media on Saturday accused Lee of trying to take advantage of current anti-China sentiment in the United States.

"Lee gradually tore off his camouflage and changed his policy towards the mainland from the 'one China' principle," said a commentary by the Xinhua news agency and carried in Chinese newspapers Saturday.

"His divisive remarks also exposed his attempt to impose his influence on Taiwan's polit-

ical situation when he leaves office next year," it said, adding that it was "doomed to failure".

China lobbed missiles into the sea off Taiwan in 1996 in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Taiwanese not to vote for Lee in the island's first direct presidential election.

Lee told German radio that relations between Taiwan and China were on "state-to-state" basis. The remarks were his most explicit yet on the island's status and provoked apoplexy in Beijing.

China maintains Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory which should eventually submit to Beijing's rule.

The People's Liberation Army has said it stands ready to act should Taiwan assert its independence.

China has threatened to take Taiwan by force if it ever declares independence.

# Barak wants to wrap up peace accords by 2000

## Palestinians for US role in peace process

JERUSALEM, July 17: Prime Minister Ehud Barak hopes to complete peace agreements with the Palestinians and Israel's neighbours Syria and Lebanon by November 2000, a senior Israeli official said on Saturday, reports AFP.

"During their talks in Washington, Barak and US President Bill Clinton set a target date of November 2000 for reaching a comprehensive peace settlement," the official said, confirming an Israeli television report.

"This date will allow us to fix a framework for the negotiations with the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon," the official told Israeli public radio.

The November 2000 date was set with the US presidential elections of that month in mind, the official said.

Never before has Israel set a target date for a comprehensive Middle East peace since it signed the first Arab-Israeli peace agreement with Egypt in 1979.

A right-wing Likud party deputy, Danny Navet, criticised the setting of a deadline. "This is a big mistake because Israel is tying its hands," Navet told Israeli radio.

Israeli-Syrian peace negoti-

ations have been frozen since February 1996 while Israeli-Palestinian talks on thorny "final status" issues such as borders, Jerusalem and refugees are yet to get off the ground.

Syria is demanding the return of the Golan Heights, seized by Israel in 1967 and annexed in 1981.

Meanwhile, the Palestinians demanded publicly on Saturday that the United States maintain its supervision of peace talks with Israel after the Jewish state said it wanted to limit the US role.

The Palestinian Authority insists that US supervision is the best way to reach a peace accord in these difficult negotiations," the Palestinian cabinet said in a statement after a meeting in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

But ahead of his current US trip, new Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Washington -- which intervened actively to keep peace contacts alive between the Palestinians and Israel's previous headline government -- should return to a role of "facilitator."

In an interview with the New York Times Wednesday Barak described the United States as "overly involved," suggesting

the Americans should stop acting as "arbitrator, policeman and judge" and return to their "special roles as facilitators."

Israeli officials fear that a direct US role could provoke friction with Washington, which was critical of the failure of the previous right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu to abide by signed agreements.

Barak, who is in the United States for talks with President Bill Clinton since Thursday, has agreed to work towards a target date of November 2000 for the conclusion of peace deals with Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinians.

The Israeli leader, who took office 11 days ago, telephoned Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to inform him of his discussions with Clinton. Arafat's spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina said.

Arafat stressed the need for a "very rapid" implementation of Wye, which requires Israel to hand over more West Bank land to the Palestinians, the spokesman said.

Arafat and Barak, who first met last Sunday, will meet again on the Israeli leader's return from Washington, he added.

## Israel will buy 50 F-16 fighters

NEW YORK, July 17: Israel has told the United States it will purchase 50 advanced F-16 fighter aircraft, senior Israeli officials told AFP here Friday, reports AFP.

The decision was communicated by visiting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to US President Bill Clinton and Defence Secretary William Cohen, said the officials, who spoke on condition they not be named.

There were no immediate details on the dollar value of the deal, which is contingent mainly on the quality of avionics and radar that will equip the planes.

Israel has been studying for years whether to purchase the F-16 manufactured by US aerospace giant Lockheed-Martin or by F-15s manufactured by rival Boeing.

An Israeli daily reported on July 11 that Boeing had offered to sell Israel a secret model of its F-15 fighter-bomber to win a contract valued as high as 4.5 billion dollars for the sale of 110 planes.

Barak considered and accepted the recommendation from the defense establishment, including Moshe Arens, the former headline defense minister, to opt for the F-16's, one senior Israeli official said.

Arens had been expected to announce a decision on the planes in May, shortly after Barak defeated former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in general elections.



Pakistani foreign minister Sartaj Aziz (far right) along with other cabinet ministers brief the leaders from Pakistan-held Kashmir in foreign office yesterday. Aziz briefed Kashmiri leaders about the current situation of the Line of Control (LoC) and Washington accord. — AFP photo

## Emir opens new Kuwait parliament

KUWAIT CITY, July 17: Kuwait's emir opened the first session of the newly elected parliament Saturday by urging MPs to cooperate with the government on reforming the Gulf Arab state's economy and electoral system, reports AFP.

"We must work together to protect democracy and enhance the national path," Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah said in a speech delivered to MPs by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah.

"We must solve all important issues and divert work from the obstacles that faced us in the previous legislative term," the emir said, referring to his May dissolution of parliament after a breakdown in cooperation between MPs and the government.

Measures aimed at encouraging foreign investment and reviving trade have all been referred to the national assembly in the hope that they'll be approved to exchange trust between us," Sheikh Jaber said.

The new parliament must approve some 60 decrees passed by the government after the dissolution of parliament.

These include Kuwaiti women's right to vote and stand as candidates from 2003, the opening up of the economy to foreign investment and growth in the private sector.

The prime minister told MPs that the emir's decision to grant women political rights was a "brave initiative."

The 50 MPs were also due to take an oath and elect a speaker and members of the parliamentary commissions, following elections on July 3 won by opposition liberals and Islamists.

There are two candidates for the position of speaker -- former speaker Ahmad al-Saadun, an opposition MP, and pro-government MP Jassem al-Kharafi.

## Arms cache found in Belfast: Four arrested

BELFAST, July 17: Four people were arrested after Northern Ireland police seized firearms in a house in Belfast, a spokesman said Saturday, reports AFP.

Three were stopped late Friday and a fourth overnight, he said.

Police found a sub-machine-gun, three handguns, a hand-made explosive device and bomb-making components at a house in the south of Northern Ireland's provincial capital.

At another house on the same street, police found baseball bats, cudgels, and combat clothing.

Baseball bats are regularly used by paramilitaries to break bones, particularly kneecaps, of dissident members of their organisations in internal score-settling.

## BRIEFLY

**Clinton, Blair talk N Ireland issue:** US President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair discussed efforts to revive the peace process in Northern Ireland in a telephone call Friday, Xinhua reports from Washington.

White House spokesman P J Crowley said that Clinton and Blair expressed some hope that after a period of reflection both sides would "be prepared to sit down and reengage on these issues."

**N Korea to free US woman:** North Korea is ready to release a US citizen it has detained for a month, a spokesman for New Jersey Sen Robert Torricelli said on Friday, Reuters reports from Washington.

Spokesman Richard McGrath said the woman, garment maker Karen Han, had been in North Korea to help build a hospital when she was arrested on June 17 on a charge of "insulting local officials."

**Sihanouk returns home:** Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk left Pyongyang yesterday to return home after a 12-day official visit to North Korea, the North's official news agency said, AFP reports from Seoul.

"The king of Cambodia, Norodom Sihanouk yesterday left Seoul by a special plane after 12-day official goodwill visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

**Floods kill 8 in Iran:** Flash floods in northwestern Iran killed eight people and left five others missing, Iran's official television reported Friday, AP reports from Dubai.

The floods hit the city of Mahmeshan in the Zanjan province Thursday night, destroying 150 houses and damaging its agricultural and dairy industry.

**2 charged with subversion in China:** A physics professor and an independent labour organiser have been charged with subversion in central China, a human rights group said Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

China is in the midst of a crackdown on the China Democracy Party, a banned opposition group, and other dissent. It has handed out lengthy prison terms to founders of the party, and is reported to have charged dozens of people.

**Spanish PM to visit ME states:** Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar will start a visit on Sunday to five Mideast countries where he will express support to the restart of the peace process in the region, the Foreign Ministry said on Friday Xinhua reports from Madrid.

Aznar will visit Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian self-rule areas and Israel, where he will meet with heads of government such as Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak.



Indonesian defence minister and armed forces commander General Wiranto (R) shakes hands with new deputy chief of the Armed Forces Admiral Widodo, formerly chief of staff of the navy, yesterday. The deputy Armed Forces' Chief position had been left vacant for 13 years and Widodo's appointment has sparked rumors, denied by Wiranto, that Wiranto could be heading for a political position. — AFP photo

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