

## Election chief urges Kashmiri separatists to contest polls

SRINAGAR, India, July 31: India's election chief urged Muslim separatists in Kashmir Saturday to take part in the September-October national elections instead of boycotting, as they usually do, reports AFP.

M.S. Gill told reporters in the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar that the separatists, whose bloody campaign against Indian rule in Kashmir has claimed more than 24,000 lives since 1989, should contest the elections.

"After getting elected you can raise your voice in parliament and seek solutions to all your problems," he said.

The Chief Election Commissioner said there would be "adequate security" for the polls in Kashmir, where balloting begins on August 4.

"I will try to see the polls are free and fair," he added.

Some Muslim separatist rebel groups in the divided state of Kashmir want independence from India while some others want a merger with Pakistan, which administers part of the disputed Himalayan territory.

## Giant extrasolar planet discovered

SANTIAGO, July 31: A giant extrasolar planet near a star located 56 light years away from the Earth has been discovered by astronomers from the European South Observatory situated north of Chile's capital of Santiago, reports Xinhua.

The mass of the planet is 2.26 times greater than Jupiter, the largest planet in the Earth's solar system, and its distance from the star is almost the same as that of Earth from the Sun, local media quoted the astronomers as saying.

The planet, christened "Iota Horb", moves in a 329-day orbit around the "Iota Horologium" star in the Horologium constellation. The star also has a mass 1.03 times greater than the earth's sun, said Marton Kurster, an astronomer from the European South Observatory and one of the discoverers of the planet.

Kurster said the distance between Iota Horb and its star is almost equal to the distance between the earth and the sun.

However, it is not yet known whether the planet has a satellite or some form of life.

Extrasolar planets are not visible from the earth, but they can be detected by observing the influence they have on their own suns.

# Israel wants to delay Wye accord implementation

## Golan pullout pledge ruled out

JERUSALEM, July 31: Israel has proposed to the Palestinians that it postpone the full implementation of last October's Wye River until early next year, a top aide of new Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Saturday, reports AFP.

"We are proposing to the Palestinians that we sign a framework agreement by next spring, which would include implementation of the redeployment from the West Bank agreed to in the Wye agreement," said Sneh, who is set to be appointed deputy defence minister.

"The framework agreement should allow us to tackle in detail all the issues on the agenda for the final status talks" on a permanent settlement with the Palestinians, Sneh told public radio.

He said Barak wants to delay the third West Bank pullback agreed to by his hardline predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu at Wye because Israel wants to "reach a version which would

allow final status talks to start in the best possible conditions."

The Palestinian leadership, headed by Yasser Arafat, on Friday urged Israel to implement the pledged pullbacks within three weeks, "refusing any change to the agreement."

An official Palestinian statement said that there was "no question of renegotiating the accord as that would lead to crisis."

In signing the Wye agreement, Israel pledged to pull out of the agreed land in three stages. Only the first of these -- involving a withdrawal from two per cent more of the West Bank -- was carried out by Netanyahu's government before it froze implementation last December.

Meanwhile, Justice Minister Yossi Beilin said Friday that Israel is not prepared to give an undertaking to withdraw from the whole of the Golan Heights as a precondition for renewed peace talks with Syria.

"I do not believe that the talks can resume if Syria demands that Israel accept their final demand from the outset," said Beilin, a leading dove in the government.

It is not legitimate for one side in a negotiating process to demand that the other side accept its views before the discussions have even resumed," he told public radio.

"We did not accept such a precondition when we negotiated with the Syrians up to March 1996" when the talks with Damascus were broken off, said Beilin, a member of the then Labour government.

Damascus insists that Israel gave an undertaking before the talks were halted to pull out of the whole of the strategic plateau which Israel occupied in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed in 1981.

The new Israeli government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak has agreed to Syria's demand that the talks resume where they left off but disputes

whether an undertaking was ever given to withdraw to the 1967 borders.

Israel insists it only ever spoke of a withdrawal to the pre-1948 border between Syria and Palestine.

The difference between the 1948 and 1967 borders is only a matter of a few square kilometres (miles), but crucially it would give Syria access to the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee, Israel's main reservoir.

Syrian Defence Minister Mustafa Tlass insisted in comments published in the Damascus press Friday that Israel withdrew to the 1967 border as the price for peace.

"Peace is impossible without the return of all Arab land and rights," he said during a tour of Syrian troops in Lebanon.

"A resumption of peace talks between Israel and Syria and Lebanon requires a clear undertaking from Barak's government to withdraw fully from the Golan Heights and south Lebanon," he said.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair (C) waves to the crowd of ethnic Albanians welcoming him in Pristina yesterday. Blair is in Kosovo to visit British troops stationed there, to meet with local political leaders as well as make contact with the local citizens. — AFP photo

## Sharif sees no threat from anti-govt rallies

ISLAMABAD, July 31: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has voiced confidence his government can withstand a hostile campaign by religious parties over its Kashmir policy, reports said Saturday, reports AFP.

"No one can oust my government through rallies and demonstrations," The Nation daily quoted him as saying Friday at a public meeting near the northwestern city of Peshawar.

Religious and political parties have held several anti-government rallies since the pullout of Islamic fighters from strategic peaks in Indian Kashmir and have vowed to oust the prime minister.

The ruling Pakistan Muslim League party dominates the parliament and the next elections are more than two years away.

Sharif, defending the de-escalation of the conflict with India and calling his opponents "charlatans," said his mission was to create more jobs and put the country on the road to rapid socio-economic development.

He also called on India not to set preconditions for talks to resolve the dispute over Kashmir, which has caused two of the three wars between the neighbours since their independence in 1947.

# Serbs told to dump Milosevic

## Summit on Balkan reconstruction

SARAJEVO, July 31: US and EU leaders have urged the people of Serbia to reject Slobodan Milosevic's failed nationalism, but Yugoslavia has dismissed their summit on Balkan reconstruction as a "NATO meeting," reports AFP.

At an international conference in Sarajevo Friday, Western leaders called on Serbs to embrace their vision of a prosperous "Greater Europe" free from the scourge of war.

US President Bill Clinton said Serbia would remain an international outcast so long as Yugoslav President Milosevic remained in office, and he pledged to aid democratic opponents of a regime he branded corrupt and dangerous.

His call was echoed by the European Union, which promised Belgrade a share in the Balkans reconstruction bonanza if it accepted the principles of the "Stability Pact" signed by regional leaders last month in Germany.

"Our goal is the full integration of this region into a Europe where borders unite rather than divide," Clinton said in a written address. "Our answer to calls for a 'greater Serbia' and a 'greater Albania' must be a greater Europe."

He insisted the West had no plans to build a wall around Serbia and said it would heed Moscow's call for urgent humanitarian aid for the country this winter.

But he warned: "Serbia will only have a future when Mr. Milosevic and his policies are consigned to the past."

Reaction from Belgrade was one of contempt and a warning that regional cooperation would be impossible without the participation of the rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

The conference was nothing but a "NATO meeting," said Ivica Dacic, spokesman for Milosevic's Socialist party.

"This is a pact for the destruction of Yugoslavia," Dacic said.

The official Borba newspaper also dismissed the Sarajevo summit as a "western farce" in an editorial Friday.

And on Saturday, Borba charged the United States and western Europe would use the stability pact to lay claim to natural resources.

"Having been proclaimed, the stability will open up possibilities for the West to dip into the natural riches of the Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Romanian plains," said Zivorad Djordjevic, Borba's editor.

The Yugoslav opposition Civic Alliance, from the Alliance for Change coalition, warned that leaving Yugoslavia to "rot in isolation" would lead to "civil war" between nationalists and the opposition as well as Serbia and Montenegro.

And leading opposition figure Dragoslav Avramovic said: "It is difficult to make the pact work without Serbia."

In addition, Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin hit out at the exclusion of Moscow's historic ally from the talks on ensuring long-term stability in a region traumatised by four wars in 10 years.

But while warning of a "humanitarian catastrophe" this winter, Stepashin signed the summit's final declaration and said Moscow approved the pact's broad goals of fostering democracy, rights prosperity and economic reform.

French President Jacques Chirac urged Serbia to assume its rightful place among the family of European nations by instituting democratic change.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, whose country was the prime mover behind the Sarajevo conference, cautioned the pact could only "succeed in the long-term if Yugoslavia is a partner."

## BRIEFLY

### Rail track bombed in Assam:

Suspected separatist guerrillas yesterday bombed a railway track connecting India's remote northeast state of Assam with the rest of the country, officials said. Reuters reports from Guwahati.

"The main railway line was blocked because of a bomb blast near Sarupeta railway station, and a goods train carrying rice was derailed," Dilip Bora, a railway spokesman, told Reuters.

### UK nomination for NATO SG:

Prime Minister Tony Blair said Friday that he has nominated Defence Secretary George Robertson to be secretary-general of NATO, AP reports from London.

"George has exactly the right mix of defense expertise and political and diplomatic skills," Blair told reporters in Sarajevo during a Balkans summit. "He would do an excellent job and we will be pressing his case very hard," said Blair, who was quoted by Press Association, the British news agency.

### 27 feared dead in Pak bus plunge:

Some 27 passengers were feared drowned when a mini bus fell into a rain-swollen storm drain Saturday near the town of Muridke in Pakistan's province of Punjab, it was reported, AFP reports from Islamabad.

The bus was travelling from the provincial capital of Lahore to the city of Gujranwala with 30 people aboard, the official APP news agency said. Rescuers saved three passengers and army divers were searching for the missing, the agency said.

### Russian guards seize 100 kg heroin:

Russian border guards based in Tajikistan seized 100 kilograms of heroin overnight on the border with Afghanistan, one of the biggest hauls in the region in recent years, spokesman Colonel Alexander Kondratiev said today, AFP reports from Dushanbe.

The Russians intercepted a group of seven to nine traffickers as they entered Tajik territory some 230 kilometres east of Dushanbe. In the subsequent shootout one trafficker was killed and the others fled.

### Fire kills 4 in Moscow:

The bodies of four young men were found in a burned out tourist centre in the town of Nevel in the Pskov region north of Moscow, a news agency reported Friday, AP says from Moscow.

The fire broke out in the two-story tourist centre several hours before dawn Friday. Investigators are looking into the cause of the fire, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. In the central Russian city of Volgograd, firefighters and the police were trying to extinguish a blaze in the upper floors of a 16-story downtown building, the news agency said.

# Car bomb blast kills 9 in Colombia

BOGOTA, Colombia, July 31: A powerful car bomb ripped through the Medellin offices of the army's anti-kidnapping squad, killing at least nine people and injuring 30 others, officials said, reports AP.

The bomb, a truck packed with at least 200 pounds (90 kilos) of explosives, went off at 3:15 pm Friday in a residential neighbourhood of Medellin, 155 miles (250 kilometres) northwest of Bogota, said Medellin police spokesman Haten Dasuki.

Among the dead were a female passerby, two officials from the federal prosecutor's office, and an agent from the state security police, officials said.

Nine people were killed in all, and at least seven of the wounded were soldiers, Gen Eduardo Herrera, commander of the army's 4th Brigade based in Medellin, told Radionet radio.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but Herrera blamed Colombia's largest rebel army,

the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

Interviewed by RCN Television Friday night, senior FARC commander Raul Reyes said he had no knowledge of the attack. "We regret the deaths," said Reyes, a member of the rebel group's 7-man ruling junta.

The FARC has been engaged in peace talks with the government of President Andres Pastrana since January, but there is no cease-fire in effect.

On Friday, government and rebel negotiators met in the rural southern village of La Tunia, but failed to reach agreement on the role for international monitors in peace talks to end Colombia's 35-year conflict.

Presidential peace envoy Victor G. Ricardo said the guerrillas were refusing to accept the appointment of an international commission to accompany the talks and monitor a massive region the government has ceded to the FARC.

# US to compensate China

## Bombing of embassy in Belgrade

BEIJING, July 31: China and the United States on Friday reached agreement on compensation for the casualties inflicted in NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade following talks between the two sides, reports AFP.

The United States will pay... a sum total of 4.5 million US dollars to the people who were injured and the families of those killed in the tragic and mistaken bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade," David Andrews, US State Department legal advisor told reporters at a news briefing.

"Our intent is to provide the money to the individuals," he said, after concluding the second round of US-China talks on the compensation.

"We have worked out an arrangement whereby the 4.5 million US dollars will be transferred through the Chinese government to the families of those killed and the injured," he added.

Andrews, who heads the US negotiation team, said the money would be split between the families of the three Chinese journalists killed and the 27 Chinese nationals injured in the strikes on May 7.

The breakdown will be decided by the Chinese side. We have agreed on the figure that we think represents the humanitarian concerns of both sides," he said.

US Congress will be notified on Monday, said Andrews, adding, however, that approval from Congress is not required.

China and the US have agreed to meet again, possibly in late August, to discuss property damage related to the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and to US diplomatic properties in China in the aftermath, he said.

"We have agreed to proceed in parallel with discussions on damages to Chinese property in Belgrade and damage to US property in China," Andrews said.

He declined however to comment on whether China had come closer to accepting the US explanation that the bombing was a tragic mistake.

# Uneasy calm on Indonesia's Batam island

JAKARTA, July 31: A tense calm descended on Indonesia's industrial and resort island of Batam Saturday after three days of ethnic clashes that left 14 dead, a local official said, reports AFP.

"It has been calm and secure so far, there has been no report of clashes or violence," Second Sergeant Lina of the police command overseeing Batam and the adjoining islands said.

West Batam subdistrict chief Buralim earlier said the last violent incident had taken place Friday.

"We still had clashes (Friday), especially in the Batu Aji area but no one was killed,

but today it has been calm so far," he told AFP.

Buralim said more than 10 huts had been torched Friday on the island that lies just south of Singapore, and a policeman was injured after being pelted with stones when he tried to separate warring gangs.

Shops, business and schools remained closed Saturday "because employees are apparently still afraid to go to work," he told AFP by telephone.

Meanwhile in the eastern Indonesian city of Ambon, a fragile calm was evident after more than 2 people were killed last week in the latest outbreak of clashes between Muslims and

Christians, witnesses said.

However, there were sporadic cases of arson. A house in the Poka low-cost housing area across the bay from Ambon, deserted by its occupants since Thursday, was torched, a witness said.

Marines were rushed to a Christian area in southwestern Ambon as a crowd gathered there after a man was prevented from burning down a house, an AFP photographer said. Three bottles filled with fuel were found after he escaped.

Armed police and soldiers patrolled the city and outlying areas.



Colombian army soldiers salvage equipment from the bomb-devastated anti-kidnapping command headquarters of the Colombian army on Friday in Medellin, Colombia. — AFP photo

## Vitamin 'E' deficiency causes loss of memory

INDIANAPOLIS, July 31: Low levels of vitamin E may be linked to memory loss in the elderly, researchers said on Friday, reports Reuters.

Researchers from the Regenstrief Institute for Health Care and the Indiana University Centre for Ageing Research said they looked at other antioxidants such as Vitamins A and C and beta-carotene and did not find the association that they did with Vitamin E.

A poor overall diet was also seen as likely a factor in having a poor memory.

Spinach, prunes and other foods rich in vitamins including Vitamin E have previously been associated with mental acuity.

The study, which comprised 4,809 people older than 60, took place over six years. The subjects were given simple memory tests and underwent blood tests, and their medical and dietary histories were compiled between 1988 and 1994.

The study did not determine whether the low levels of Vitamin E were the cause of memory loss or the effect. The researchers urged further study of the relationship.

Study author Anthony Perkins said in a statement that researchers were examining antioxidants because they are known to protect against damage to the body from free radicals circulating in the body.

The study was published in the American Journal of Epidemiology, a publication of the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health.

# Restore trust before talks, Vajpayee tells Pakistan

NEW DELHI, July 31: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee today told Pakistan to restore trust, broken by the Kashmir conflict, before talks could begin with Islamabad, reports AFP.

"We want good ties with our neighbours but we cannot clap with one hand," Vajpayee told a public function here.

He said his landmark cross-border bus trip to Pakistan in February was a mark of friendship "but we got enmity in return."

"This has hurt us. For good relations it is necessary that trust be restored," Vajpayee said.

The Kashmir crisis began after the Pakistan-backed intruders crossed over the Line of Control separating Indian and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, and occupied Indian positions

in the divided state.

Pakistan has denied that it has backed the intruders or its soldiers were involved.

The conflict ended after the Muslim guerrillas agreed to withdraw following international pressure, mainly from the United States.

Vajpayee said though the guerrillas had withdrawn from the Indian-held regions "shelling was continuing."

He said Pakistan must stop aiding the Muslim separatists in Kashmir, who are campaigning against Indian rule.

"Innocent people are being killed in Kashmir. Is this the way to establish good relations. Is this the way to prepare for talks? I hope that across the border this will be given a thought," Vajpayee said.

# Pentagon may sell two aircraft to Taiwan

WASHINGTON, July 31: The Pentagon on Friday announced the "possible" sale to Taiwan of two E-2T Hawkeye 2000E aircraft and related technology, reports AFP.

Taiwan needs the aircraft "to augment its present operational inventory and its self-defence capacity," the Pentagon said in a statement. Taiwan already has four E-2Ts in its air force.

The proposed sale of this equipment will not affect the basic military balance in the region," it added.

The announcement came as tensions between China and Taiwan remained high two weeks after Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui said their rela-

tions should be on a "state to state" basis.

China considers Taiwan a renegade province and has threatened to attack if Taipei declares independence.

Besides the Hawkeye reconnaissance patrol aircraft, the sale will include two AN/APG-145 radar, two T56-A-427 engines, two OE335/A antenna groups, two Mission Computer Upgrade/Advanced Control Indicator Sets and two Passive Detection System upgrade of software laboratory.

Also included in the transaction — valued at 400 million dollars — will be spare and repair parts, support and personnel training, the Pentagon said.

# US probe hits the moon in search for water

WASHINGTON, July 31: The US satellite Lunar Prospector slammed into the moon at around 5:52 a.m. (0952 GMT) Saturday in an attempt to confirm the presence of water there, a NASA spokesman said, reports AFP.

"We have impacted the Lunar Prospector on the moon," David Morse said.

The satellite fired up its engines before impact in a bid to hit a crater near the moon's south pole 50 to 60 kilometres (31 to 38 miles) in diameter thought to conceal pockets of ice.

And although NASA confirmed the probe had crashed landed right on target, it was still unclear whether it had proved the existence of ice.

"The vehicle has impacted on the correct location," Morse

said. "We are confident we went down into the crater and hit the right location."

But he added: "We have no indication of any visible plume" of water vapour.

It might be hours or even days before that could be confirmed, Morse said.

Experts had hoped the impact would throw up ice and rocks that would be visible by observatories in space or on earth.

Scientists are expecting to get a close-up look at the impact by observing data from several sites, including the Hubble Telescope, the Submillimeter Wave Astronomy Satellite, the McDonald Observatory in Texas and the Keck Telescope in Hawaii.

But NASA says if a weak signal is observed, it may take

weeks or even months to analyse the data from the army of telescopes to detect any water on the moon.

And it admits the effort is a longshot, with the likelihood of success estimated at 10 per cent or less.

The satellite, which was launched January 6, 1998, and had already completed 6,800 orbits of the moon, was also carrying the cremated remains of the famous geological astronomer Eugene Shoemaker.

Shoemaker, who had always dreamed of studying moon rocks, was prevented from becoming an astronaut by a medical condition.

He died on July 18, 1997, and becomes the first person whose remains are released on a celestial body other than earth.