

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 Europe 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 Horologii" 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 Europe 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.

International

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.

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.

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



Supporters of Hindu Shiva Sena leader Bal Thackeray hold portraits of their leader and shout slogans during a protest march in New Delhi yesterday. More than a hundred supporters took to the streets to protest the independent Election Commission's barring of Thackeray from seeking political office or voting for six years for fomenting religious hatred.

— 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 Pakistani Muslim League party dominates the parliament and the next elections are more than two years away.

Sharif, defying the 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.

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

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.

But he warned: "Serbia will only have a future when Mr. Milosevic and his policies are as Serbia and Montenegro.

And leading opposition figure Dragos 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.

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.

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 Zivord Djordjevic, Borba's editor.

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 another 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.

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

Restore trust before talks, Vajpayee tells Pakistan

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.

The aircraft are being sold 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/APS-145 radars, 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.

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, 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 FARC.

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 Burulimur 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," he said.

Armed police and soldiers patrolled the city and outlying areas.

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

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 Amboin, 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.

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