

Barak names Arab Israeli deputy FM

JERUSALEM, Aug 5: Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Thursday named an Arab Israeli as deputy foreign minister, the first such appointment in Israel's 51-year history, reports AFP.

Nawaf Masalha, a seasoned 55-year-old Labour MP, will serve under Foreign Minister David Levy. Barak's spokesman Parsi Tzadok told AFP.

"This nomination reflects the government's desire to work for equality between Jews and Arabs in line with its election promises," Tzadok said.

The Israeli parliament is to vote on the nomination on Thursday afternoon, along with the appointment of five new ministers -- including a second woman cabinet member -- and seven deputy ministers.

The post of deputy foreign minister is the highest political position yet achieved by a member of Israel's Arab minority which accounts for one-sixth of the country's population of six million.

However, since Barak took office last month, four Arab Israelis including Masalha have been appointed to parliament's sensitive foreign affairs and defense committee.

Iranian daily suspended for five years

TEHRAN, Aug 4 (AFP) - The Iranian pro-reform daily, Salam, whose closure sparked days of riots in Tehran in July, was suspended Wednesday for five years by a special court for clergy, the official IRNA news agency reported, says AFP.

The court also sentenced the paper's director, Mohammad Khoenia, 60, to a three-year ban on working as a journalist, and a fine of 23 million rials (7,600 dollars at the official rate).

Khoenia was originally sentenced to three years in prison, but that sentence was replaced by the ban on the paper, the agency said.

The alteration was justified "by the services rendered to the nation by Mr. Khoenia before and after the (1979 Islamic) revolution," the court said.

Khoenia for many years followed a radical revolutionary line, and became famous as a leader of the 1979 seizure of hostages at the US embassy in Tehran.

He was convicted last week on a sweeping array of charges ranging from libel and defamation, to publishing lies and classified information and insulting members of parliament.

The editor of Salam, Abbas Abdi, who faces charges of insulting the clergy and the Iranian people, was freed on bail by the hardline court Tuesday.

Iran's conservative-dominated judiciary has waged a crackdown on the largely pro-modern President Mohammad Khatami in recent months.

At least three pro-Khatami papers have been closed down since the beginning of the year and dozens of journalists arrested or called in for questioning.

Charles-Camilla ties revived

LONDON, Aug 5: British newspapers splashed reports today that Prince Charles, long-time lover Camilla Parker Bowles and his two sons by the late Princess Diana were enjoying their first "family" holiday, reports Reuters.

They were on a yacht cruising the Mediterranean, said the newspapers, some citing unidentified friends of the royal family for their information.

The holiday would be seen as another step towards formalising heir-to-the-throne Charles's relationship with Camilla, the Daily Telegraph said.

The top-selling Sun tabloid quoted a close friend of Camilla as saying she had been "excited and nervous" about leaving for the trip from a private airfield in England because she did not like flying.

But she was reported to be overjoyed about the holiday, The Sun said.

"She sees the break as another significant step in winning acceptance for her relationship with Charles," it said.

Officials at St James's Palace, Charles's official residence, declined to comment on the reports.

After years of artfully dodging the lenses of the world's media, Charles and Camilla finally emerged together for the first time in late January.

As the couple left London's exclusive Ritz Hotel by a side entrance, press photographers gorged themselves on what until then had been the most elusive royal photograph of all.

The carefully-choreographed scene was of major significance for Charles, determined that Camilla should be accepted as his partner in the wake of Diana's death and his divorce from her before that.

Since Diana died in a Paris car crash in 1997, Charles and Camilla have appeared reluctantly to test public opinion about their affair.

Camilla, lover of the future king for more than 25 years, threw a 50th birthday party for Charles last November but both stayed out of the limelight.

They have also been to clubs, restaurants and friends' weddings together but have nearly always kept a low profile.

Newspapers said Charles's oldest son Prince William, 17, had suggested that Camilla join the holiday cruise.

Sonia blames BJP govt for Kashmir conflict

The BJP government is responsible for the deaths of our soldiers in Kargil.

It was Gandhi's first public meeting since she confirmed this week that she would be a candidate in the September-October national elections which are expected to produce another hung parliament.

Her speech confirmed the Congress campaign tactic to attack Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpeyi's handling of the Kashmir conflict, in which more than 1,000 combatants reportedly died on both sides.

India launched a major two-month military offensive in early May against Islamic guerrillas and alleged Pakistani soldiers who had crossed the border and occupied key hills in

Indian Kashmir.

News reports say the infiltration took place weeks, probably months, earlier. Indian officials admit the government and its intelligence wings failed to detect the initial guerrilla movements.

Gandhi, who took to politics only last year, said the infiltration occurred "because the Pakistanis found a weak and incapable government in New Delhi (and) took advantage of the situation".

Congress hopes that by playing up the intelligence failure, it can take the wind out of the Hindu nationalists' sails over the Kashmir conflict, which the government is pushing as a major military and diplomatic victory.

The upcoming elections will be the third in India since 1996.

BHOR, India, Aug 5: Indian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi Thursday blamed the ruling Hindu nationalists for the recent intrusion of Muslim guerrillas into Kashmir which almost sparked a war with Pakistan, reports AFP.

"We are proud of the sacrifices our soldiers have made in defending the motherland against the Pakistani intruders," the Italian-born Gandhi said in a 17-minute speech delivered in Hindi.

"But how did these people get there in the first place? What was the government doing?" she asked.



All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leader Javed Mir (L) chats with a woman yesterday during a campaign to boycott the next elections in Kashmir. The APHC has asked Kashmiri people not to vote in the forthcoming Parliamentary Elections. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

8 children drown in floods

Eight children are feared to have drowned and thousands of people have been left homeless by flash floods in the southern Cambodian province of Kampot, a Red Cross official told AFP on Thursday.

"We have received reports that eight children were drowned in Kampot," said Cambodian Red Cross disaster management director Uy Sam Ath. But he said the Red Cross could not yet fully confirm the toll, reported to them by local officials and residents hit by flash floods early Wednesday.

Tea executive abducted in Assam

Tribal guerrillas kidnapped an executive working on a tea estate in the northeast Indian state of Assam, police said on Thursday, Reuters reports from Guwahati.

The manager of the Lakhipur tea garden in Cachar district was forcibly taken away from his house last night by militants belonging to the Dima Halam Daoga (DHD), a police officer said.

Quake hits Taiwan

An earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale rocked southeastern Taiwan on Thursday, but no casualties or damage were reported.

The temblor hit at 5:30 am (2130 GMT Wednesday) with its epicenter located 5.3 kilometres (3.3 miles) northwest of Taitung town.

The quake was the 11th anniversary of the August 8, 1988, uprising in which hundreds of pro-democracy demonstrators were gunned down and a junta took over the government of former military dictator Ne Win.

Opposition groups said the Myanmarese people felt they had an "appointment" with 9-9-99 — nine is a powerful figure in Myanmar numerology — to repeat the events of 1988 and end the military's 37-year domination of politics.

No one can predict the future but there is an atmosphere of possibility all over Burma, that this period will be the beginning of a wave of force that will topple the regime," All Burma Students Federation Union spokesman Min Zin said.

The expectations of the people in the street in Burma are high everywhere."

Exiled student activists in Bangkok said underground pro-democracy networks inside Myanmar were planning to in-

stigate a general strike on Saturday's uprising anniversary to encourage unrest on September 9, a day of numerical significance, reports AFP.

Dissidents and exiled politicians said expectations were high that civil unrest would break out around Myanmar on that date, with monks and students planning acts of disobedience this week to encourage a "revolution."

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