

## 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 Paris 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 defence 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 Khomeini, 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).

Khomeini 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. Khomeini before and after the (1979 Islamic) revolution," the court said.

Khomeini 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 headline court Tuesday.

Iran's conservative-dominated judiciary has waged a crackdown on the largely pro-moderate President Mohammad Khatami press 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 splash 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 the relationship between Charles and 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 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 reluctant 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

BHARAT, 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.

Gandhi told a 50,000-strong meeting in pouring rain in this western town that India lost nearly 400 soldiers while fighting the guerrillas in Kashmir because of the government's ineptitude.

"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.

"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.

It would be Gandhi's maiden attempt to enter Indian parliament.

Her speech confirmed the Congress campaign tactic to attack Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee'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 Pakistan 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.



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

## S Arabia denies nuclear link with Pakistan

RIYADH, Aug 5: Saudi Arabia has denied reports it is seeking to acquire nuclear weapons from Pakistan following a visit by the kingdom's defence minister to Pakistan's nuclear facilities, a newspaper said today, reports Reuters.

The London-based Saudi-owned daily Asharq al-Awsal quoted Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz as saying the kingdom was not looking for nuclear weapons from Pakistan or any other country.

"Saudi Arabia is a signatory of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and is committed to its international pledges," Prince Sultan told the daily. He said the kingdom wanted to see the region free of all types of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

Earlier this month Western officials expressed concern that Saudi Arabia might be seeking to acquire weapons from Pakistan after Prince Sultan toured the Kahuta plant with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in early May.

Prince Sultan said his visit to Pakistan's Kahuta uranium enrichment plant and missile factory did not "exceed the first entrances of the site and did not include secret facilities as was reported."

## Police raid Falungong leader's house

BEIJING, Aug 5: Chinese media Thursday continued their propaganda blitz against Li Hongzhi, founder of the banned Falungong sect, by highlighting his luxurious lifestyle, reports AFP.

Police raided Li's house in Changchun, the capital of the northeast province of Jilin, and found three Buddha statues bearing the likeness of Li, alongside six other smaller Buddha statues and incense from India, said the Guangming Daily.

They also found a 29-inch colour TV, a hi-fi set, a leather sofa and seven high-quality watches, said the official Xinhua news agency.

The house which cost Li 116,000 yuan (14,000 US dollars) also had modern office facilities, Xinhua said.

# Taiwan, China fighters nearly clash over Taiwan Strait

TAIPEI, Aug 5: Provocation by the Chinese air force almost sparked a confrontation with Taiwanese fighter jets, a news report said Thursday, reports AFP.

An undetermined number of Chinese Sukhoi 27s targeted two Taiwanese air force Mirage 2000-5 fighters with their firing control radars Monday, the United Daily News reported.

The incident came as the People's Liberation Army test fired a ballistic missile on Chinese territory.

"The signal of provocation was obvious," the paper quoted authoritative military sources as saying.

It said a clash could have occurred if the Taiwanese air force had not ordered its two French-made jets to leave the zone.

The paper said several other Taiwan fighters were put on alert to monitor the Su-27s.

Tensions between China and rival Taiwan have been heightened by a statement by President Lee Teng-hui that he wanted "special state-to-state" relations with China.

China considers Taiwan a rebel province and has threatened to use force to stop the nationalist island declaring formal independence.

Taiwan's Defence Minister Tang Fei said Wednesday the nationalist island will steer clear of any action that might further fuel the tensions, amid reports of increased military plane sorties by both sides over the Taiwan Strait.

"We'll not take any provocative steps," Tang told reporters amid the worst cross-strait tensions since 1996.

"But we will take every possible step and measure to ensure sufficient self-defence."

The Washington Post quoted an unnamed US official as

saying China -- which seldom sends planes over the straits -- had flown more than 100 sorties with three different types of aircraft.

Another official reportedly said Taiwan had flown roughly the same number during the last three weeks and crossed the centre line of the straits.

The United States has voiced concern about the possibility of accidents resulting from the stepped-up military sorties in the Taiwan Strait.

The United Daily News said the Chinese air force had sometimes flown up to 30 sorties a day in the strait, notably by Jian-7 and Jian-8 fighters.

Beijing saw Lee's remarks on relations as a shift from the "One-China policy" accepted by Beijing, Taipei and Washington, which has provided the basis for cross-strait peace for 50 years.

# New Korean peace talks begin "No progress" on missile tension

GENEVA, Aug 5: The latest round of four-party Korean peace talks began in Geneva Thursday, with hopes for progress, slim in meetings likely to be overshadowed by fears of a new missile launch by Pyongyang, reports AFP.

North Korean diplomats said bluntly that "no progress" had been made in bilateral talks on the missile issue with the United States ahead of the peace talks.

The Chinese official chairing the meeting said he hoped for a "positive attitude" during the five-day talks, but delegates played down prospects of any breakthrough at meetings likely to be clouded by the missile issue.

"We hope all the parties will take a very positive attitude, particularly in view of the recent tension in the peninsula," said Qian Yongnian at the talks between the two Koreas and the US.

He insisted the missile issue was "definitely not on the agenda" of the four-party talks, the sixth round of peace negoti-

tations aimed at resolving finally ending the 1950-53 Korean War.

But he admitted: "We have not started the meeting so I do not know whether the subject will be discussed or not."

The head of the North Korean delegation meanwhile said bilateral meetings with the United States on Tuesday and Wednesday had failed to bring the two sides any closer to agreement on the missile issue.

"There was no progress in the bilateral with the United States," said Kim Gye-Gwan, adding that overall in the talks: "We have consistent principles. It is impossible to make any change."

Asked whether the missile issue would be broached during the four-party talks, he told reporters simply: "You'll see."

The four-party peace talks, launched in December 1997, aim to reduce tension and finally end the 49-year-old war which has become the world's last Cold War conflict.

In bilateral talks Tuesday and Wednesday, the United States reiterated its "serious

concern" at reports that Pyongyang is preparing to launch a long-range missile test, possibly this month.

North Korea responded by warning that pressure on its government will not help the search for peace with the South.

"If the United States continues to press us it only serves to increase our determination to strengthen our defence capacity," a North Korean diplomat told AFP. "It will not help to resolve anything," he added.

The talks between North and South Korea, and their respective Cold War allies China and the United States, are to continue until Monday.

Caution about prospects for the talks is largely due to tough North Korean demands which Washington and Seoul have rejected.

The isolated Stalinist state insists that the 37,000-strong US forces in South Korea withdraw before a permanent peace treaty can be signed to replace the armistice currently in force.

A US official said Thursday it would not be discussing the issue with Pyongyang.

## BRIEFLY

### 8 children drown in floods:

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

"We have received reports that eight children were drowned in Kampong," 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 of 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, seismologists said, AFP reports from Taipei.

The tremor hit at 5:30 am (21:30 GMT Wednesday) with its epicenter located 5.3 kilometres (3.3 miles) northwest of Taitung town.

### Samoan MP charged with murder:

A Samoan government member of parliament and former cabinet minister, Toi Aukuso, was Wednesday charged with the murder of Public Works Minister Luagala Levaola Kamu last month, the prime minister's department said in a statement, AFP reports from Apia.

The son of another cabinet minister, Eietse Leafa Vitale, was also last week charged with the killing. His father, Leafa Vitale, was Wednesday tossed out of the ruling Human Rights Protection Party, the statement added.

### French tourist missing in Myanmar:

Myanmar police have launched a nationwide search for a French tourist who has been missing since early July, officials said Thursday, AFP reports from Yangon.

A Myanmar junta spokesman said police had expanded their search after no sign of the unidentified man was found around the central city of Mandalay where he was last seen several weeks ago. The spokesman denied that the man had been arrested for attempting to contact underground democracy groups in the military-run state.

# Myanmar students plan general strike

BANGKOK, Aug 5: Exiled pro-democracy activists on Thursday called for a mass uprising against the Myanmar junta and revealed detailed plans to incite 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."

Saturday is 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 Myanmar people felt they had an "appointment" with 9-9-89. 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.

All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABPDF) spokesman Aung Thu Nyein said activists were also asking people to wear yellow on Saturday and light candles in support of democracy.

"We are calling for a strike. We are calling for a people's campaign on that day to honour those who sacrificed themselves in 1988," he said.

"The revolution started then, has not finished and the Burmese people will accomplish their goal this time," he told reporters at a press briefing.

The atmosphere in Myanmar is very conducive to another general uprising."

National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma spokesman Teddy Buri said Myanmar was in worse shape now than in 1988.

He said drug addiction was "rampant," the economy a shambles, hospitals had run out of medicine and 300,000 youths were waiting to attend universities which had been closed since 1996.

Meanwhile, the opposition party led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, which won 1990 elections only to be denied power by the generals, was stronger than ever, he said.

"The junta is feeling very jumpy and has begun taking precautions (against social unrest in the next two months)," he said.

# Japan, S Korea conduct first joint naval drills

TOKYO, Aug 5: Japan and South Korea conducted their first joint naval drills Thursday mobilising some 1,400 personnel and five warships in the face of a furious reaction from North Korea, reports AFP.

"The first joint exercise by the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force and the South Korean naval forces is taking place today" in the East China Sea, a Japanese defence official said.

Japan and South Korea have not previously conducted joint exercises because of bitter memories of Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula between 1910 and 1945.

North Korea's mouthpiece Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) quoted the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper as saying the exercise was a "very ill-boding military movement."

"This proves that the Japanese reactionaries' moves for re-invasion of Korea are entering a phase of implementation," the report said.

Their joint military exercise is aimed at making a surprise attack on the DPRK (North Korea) from A to Z.

"Japan is about to make a direct involvement in a new Korean war unlike in the past," Japan's plans for reinvading Korea were "practically rounded off," it said.

What remains to be done is only to pull up a trigger for re-invasion. To this end they are

busy staging joint military exercises in and around South Korea.

The exercise coincided with mounting fears that North Korea may be preparing to test-fire a long-range Taepodong II ballistic missile after it stunned Japan with a launch last August.

Military officials in Seoul said in June the naval exercises were prompted by the launch of last year's missile which sparked panic in Tokyo, Seoul and Washington.

Japan mobilised 630 troops along with three warships to the drill.

It sent the 5,200-tonne helicopter destroyer "Shirane" which is equipped with SH60J military helicopters and armed with machine guns, a short-range SAM missile system and torpedoes, along with the 2,950-tonne destroyer "Setoyuki," and the 2,000-tonne "Tone."

In the air, Japan used a total of three SH60J helicopters and one P3C patrol plane.

South Korea supplied a helicopter destroyer and a destroyer, along with a P3C patrol plane and a sea-borne helicopter. Some 500 South Korean troops were mobilised, the official said.

"We do not call it a military exercise as the phrase can give the wrong impression of the practice," a Japanese defence agency official told AFP.

# 5 rail officials suspended for Indian train disaster

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Five senior Indian railway officials have been suspended after one of the country's worst train disasters earlier this week, the Press Trust of India reported today, reports AFP.

They include the regional railway manager, the chief operations manager, the chief safety officer and two other officials stationed at the headquarters of the North Eastern Frontier Railways in the far-eastern city of Guwahati, railway sources said.

The sources said the chief of India's Railway Board, VK Agarwal, issued the suspension order late Wednesday after an on-the-spot assessment of the accident.

Board chairman Agarwal late Wednesday said the railways planned to enforce "army-type discipline" among its nearly 1.6 million staff to prevent future deaths and accidents on the network.

Two passenger trains collided head-on in the remote eastern railway station of Gaisal early Monday after one of them was diverted to a wrong track.

The disaster has claimed nearly 300 lives. An official probe into the accident began in Gaisal today after the debris and bodies from the site had been cleared.

# Women suffer more stress than men

NEW YORK, Aug 5: All over the world, women suffer more stress in their lives than men, especially full-time working mothers with children under the age of 13, according to a study released on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Overall, by a margin of 21 per cent to 15 per cent, women are more likely than men to say their feel "super-stressed," Roper Starch Worldwide, a New York-based marketing, public opinion, advertising and media research group, found.

"Whether being a working mother of young children is inherently the issue, or whether it is a matter of living up to societal or cultural expectations, the world needs to develop stress-busters to ease the lives of these women," said Tom Miller, director of the study of 30,000 people in 30 countries.

In interviews with people aged 13 to 65 years old, the researchers found that nearly one in four, or 24 per cent, of full-time working mothers with children under 13 felt more kind of stress almost every day.

Family, work and money were among the most common complaints of the women interviewed.

The lowest rates of stress among women were teenagers (14 per cent) and women who are not mothers (17 per cent).

Roper Starch Worldwide said the survey was projectile to 1.39 billion people. It said the sampling error was plus or minus four percentage points for each country.

Women consistently reported higher levels of stress than men across economic and social categories, the researchers said.

— More single women than single men feel intense daily stress (17 per cent vs 12 per cent).

— A greater proportion of married women experience daily stress than single men (21 per cent vs 17 per cent).

— Among couples living together, 24 per cent of women said they face stress often every day versus 19 per cent of men.

— Widowed women feel more highly stressed than widowed men (21 per cent vs 10 per cent).

— Separated or divorced women exceed separated or divorced men in feeling stress by a three to two margin or 28 per cent versus 20 per cent.

— More women executives and professionals feel "super-stressed" than men (23 per cent vs 19 per cent).

— More white-collar women than men (21 per cent vs 16 per cent) and more blue-collar women than men (24 per cent vs 17 per cent) feel "super-stressed".



A rescue helicopter takes off from a Japanese Naval vessel during the first naval drills for the search and rescue exercise with South Korea in the East China Sea, 200 kilometers west of the southern Japanese port city of Sasebo, yesterday. — AFP photo