

Ethiopia, Eritrea sign peace accord in Algiers

ALGIERS, June 18 : Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a peace accord today in Algiers, ending a two-year-old war between the Horn of Africa neighbours, an AFP correspondent at the scene reported.

The accord, brokered by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), was signed by Eritrean Foreign Minister Haile Woldensae and Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, in the presence of Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, at the People's Palace in the Algerian capital.

The peace plan allows for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force in a buffer zone which will extend along the border 25 km into Eritrea.

It also calls for the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from areas deep inside Eritrea, beyond disputed border regions which were at the root of the fighting that broke out in May 1998.

Under the 15-point OAU plan, the two countries would end all armed air and land hostilities immediately after signing the document, (and) guarantee free movement and access of the peacekeeping mission.

The UN peacekeepers would be charged with monitoring the cessation of hostilities and the redeployment of Ethiopian troops, ensure observance of the security commitments agreed by the two parties, and to monitor the Eritrean temporary security zone provided for in the accord.

The deal also stipulates that Eritrea remain "at a distance of 25 km from redeployed Ethiopian positions."

The plan said Ethiopian redeployment would be carried out within two weeks of the UN deployment, although no date has been announced yet for the peacekeepers to move in.

Earlier, Eritrean authorities said Saturday they were re-arranging Ethiopians living in the country, on the eve of the expected signing of a peace deal with Ethiopia to end their bloody two-year war.

With International Red Cross cooperation, Ethiopia was "finalising the necessary arrangements to expedite the voluntary departure of Ethiopians who have decided of their own free will to return to Ethiopia," an Eritrean foreign ministry statement said.

Insisting it was intervening to stop violence against Ethiopians sparked by the one-month-old surge in hostilities between the Horn of Africa neighbours, the statement admitted some young Eritreans had "rashly and emotionally taken the law into their hands."

This had occurred after they had been "provoked and taunted by some Ethiopians."

The government had taken the necessary legal steps to ensure the safety and security of Ethiopians that may need it, the statement added, saying authorities here reserved the right to repatriate Ethiopians "on a case by case basis."

There was no immediate reaction from Addis Ababa.

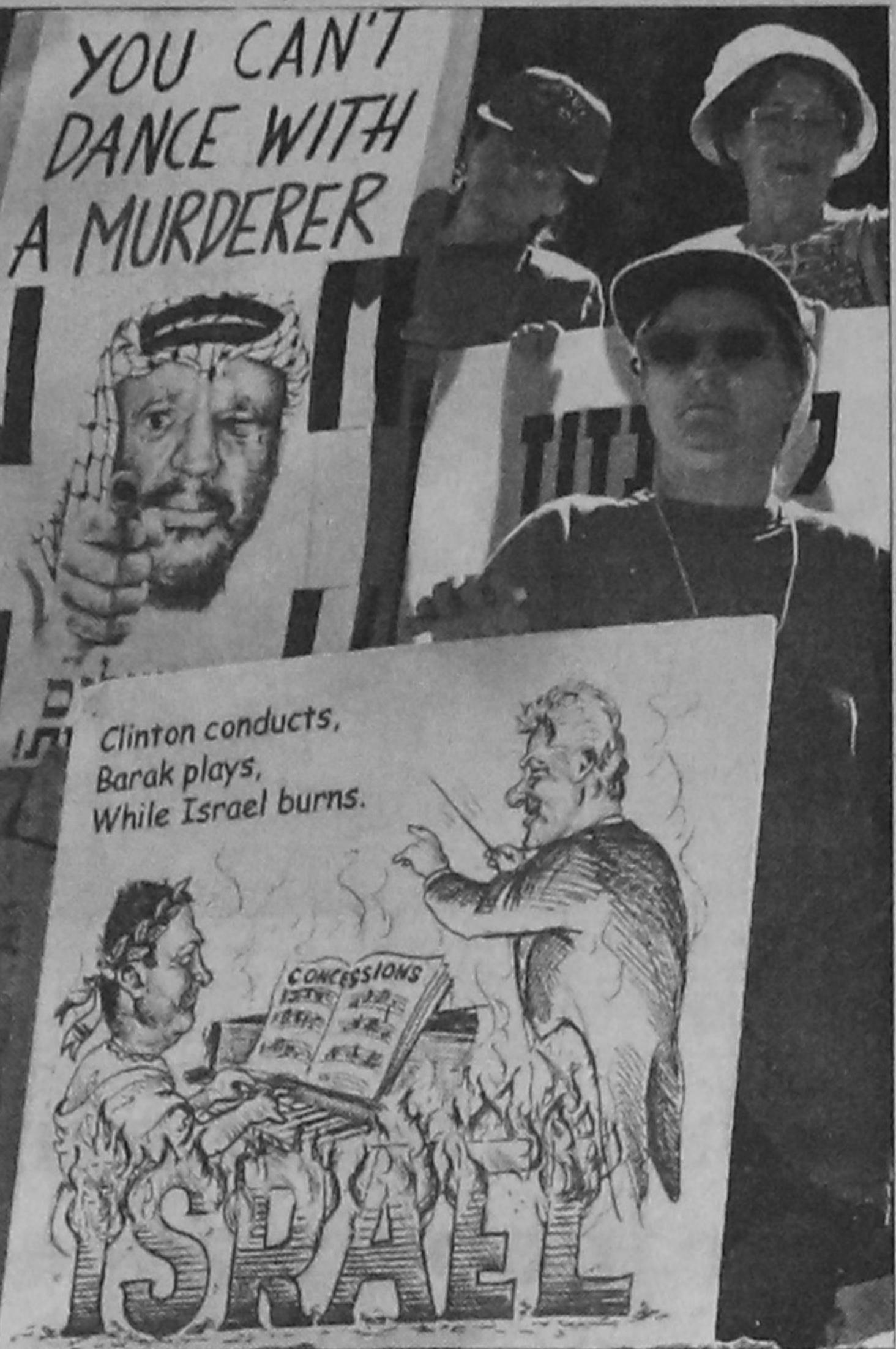
The announcement coincided with the arrival in Asmara of UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy, who issued an appeal for donors to send urgent funds to the troubled Horn of Africa region.

At the start of the war, many Ethiopians living here had been working at the Red Sea port of Assab, half of whose population of 40,000 was then Ethiopian.

Eritrea agreed to a revised OAU peace plan last weekend after 12 days of indirect talks in Algiers, but Ethiopia only gave its firm acceptance only on Wednesday.

The new plan allows for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force in a security zone which will extend along the border 25 kilometres (15 miles) into Eritrea.

International



Right-wing Israelis protest land transfer to the Palestinian Authority in front of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office in Jerusalem yesterday during a Security Cabinet meeting on Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Israelis and Palestinians concluded talks Saturday near Washington, DC with no tangible outcome regarding Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and a framework accord.

— AFP photo

Fiji crisis enters 2nd month with no sign of resolution

SUVA, June 18 : Hostages being held by gunmen in Fiji's parliament will today reach the end of their first month in captivity with no signs their release will come anytime soon, reports AFP.

Martial law authorities have given coup plotter George Speight a drafting role in a new constitution and are considering a number of his nominees for an interim civilian government.

Martial law spokesman Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini at a press conference Saturday was explicit about how the Fijian army, the vast majority of whose soldiers are indigenous Fijians, fell about Speight.

They have made their case, they have stood up for indigenous Fijian aspirations, and we sympathise with that, but beyond that the country's path forward must be charted that will bring peace, stability and economic well-being to our people, he said. And he cited World

Speight Saturday held what he said was his last news conference. He said the media, particularly international jour-

Fears of LTTE suicide attacks rise ahead of peace moves

COLOMBO, June 18 : When Sri Lanka's peace moves reach a crucial stage, politicians must run the gauntlet of suicide bombers who have kept fear alive and fuelled the island's seemingly unending Tamil separatist bloodshed, reports AFP.

As President Chandrika Kumaratunga seeks consensus with the country's main opposition to conclude talks by her 55th birthday on June 29, the authorities fear the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels could strike again.

Police say one of the injured is believed to be the bomber. Police warned last week that the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had sent about 25 suicide bombers to stage attacks in and around the capital.

Senior politicians and military leaders have been asked to scale down their public appearances or take tighter security measures to prevent attacks, a senior police officer said.

He said there could be more attacks as the Tigers faced military pressure in the north of the country where they failed to keep up a "rolling offensive" and dislodge government forces from the peninsula of Jaffna.

The Tigers are outnumbered more than 10 to one by government forces, but what they lack in manpower they make up with the die-hard determination of a elite band of Black Tiger suicide bombers.

The Black Tigers attracted international attention nine years ago when a woman suicide bomber carried out an attack here on December 18 last year, three days before presidential elections.

After a string of failed suicide bomb attacks, the rebels claimed success when they blew up Industry Minister C. V. Gooneratne on June 7 while he led a parade to drum up support for government troops battling Tamil Tigers.

— AFP photo

A week later there was another bombing which was initially thought to be the work of a 'Black Tiger' suicide bomber. Three people were killed and seven others injured in that attack.

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A woman with explosives strapped to her body blew up herself and Gandhi during an election rally in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu on May 21, 1999.

However, the suicide bombers had carried out their first attack nearly four years earlier when a rebel known as

Captain Miller drove an explosive-filled truck into an army camp on July 5, 1987 and killed 40 soldiers.

The Tigers had announced that 147 Black Tigers had died up to July last year. Within rebel ranks it is a privilege to be a suicide bomber.

The perks include a final supper with Tamil Tiger supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran, who considers them the "protective armour" of ethnic minority Tamils.

The Black Tiger success rate has suffered in recent months but that has not stopped them.

President Kumaratunga lost her right eye in the December 18 suicide bombing but 26 others were killed and over 100 wounded.

Eighteen days later on January 5, the Tigers struck again, this time opposite the office of the prime minister. The attack by a woman suicide bomber killed 11 others, including four security personnel assigned to protect Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike.

Tamil politicians say it is difficult to understand what drives young men and women to carry out suicide bombings. Unlike in the Middle East, the Tiger rebels are not motivated by religion to stage suicide bombings.

In fact, suicide is a sin according to Hinduism, the religion followed by most Tiger guerrillas.

It is not religion or Tamil culture that is driving the Black Tigers, says former rebel-turned Tamil legislator Dharmalingam Sidharthan. "It must be purely the political ideology."



Virmati Chaudry (R), wife of ousted prime minister and hostage Mahendra Chaudry, prays at a church in the capital, Suva yesterday. Chaudry along with other captives have been held hostage for 30 days by Fiji coup leader George Speight and his supporters.

— AFP photo

BRIEFLY

4 killed in Japanese avalanche

An avalanche killed four people and injured another four in central Japan today, as they were trying to rescue a man who had gone missing while collecting wild plants, police said, reports AFP.

The avalanche occurred when a rescue helicopter was approaching what was believed to be the body of the missing 52-year-old man at Mount Asakusa, some 200 km north of Tokyo, a local police spokesman said. The four were "hit directly by hard masses of snow rather than engulfed," the spokesman said, adding that the 1,586-metre (5,234-foot) mountain was dotted with lingering snow in this season.

10 Tamil Tigers killed: Sri Lankan troops killed at least 10 Tamil rebels, including three women fighters, in fresh attacks in the island's embattled northeast, the government said in a statement. AFP reports from from Colombo.

Troops fired artillery at positions of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Welikanda area in the east on Friday, the government's Special Media Information Centre (SMIC) said in a statement.

It said eight rebels, including three women, were killed in the attack while another 18 were injured.

2 killed in Malaysian jet crash: Two people, including a Singaporean, were killed Sunday when an aircraft belonging to a flying school plunged into the sea, the national news agency Bernama reported. AFP says from Kuala Lumpur.

The bodies of Singaporean pilot Faizol Mohamad Ibrahim, 29, and parachute jump master Sivalingam Shamugam, 42, have been recovered from the South China Sea off Mersing in southern Johore state, the police were quoted as saying.

10pc increase in defence spending in Pak budget

ISLAMABAD, June 18 : Pakistani Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz said today he had not slashed the defence budget and the reduction reflected in this year's outlay was due to shifting of military pensions to the civilian administration budget, reports AFP.

The military spending for the fiscal year to June 2001 has actual been increased by about 10 percent, Aziz clarified in his post-budget press conference.

The national budget unveiled by Aziz in a late night broadcast on Saturday showed the military government capped defence spending at 133.5 billion rupees (2.57 billion dollars) against 143.4 billion (2.75 billion dollars) for the outgoing fiscal year to June 30.

Philippines evacuates 66 from Solomon Islands

MANILA, June 18 : A Philippine air force plane today evacuated 43 Filipinos and 23 other foreigners from the troubled Solomon Islands, the foreign department here said, reports AFP.

The C-130 aircraft took off from Honiara on Sunday with 43 Filipinos, 16 Papua New Guineans, citizens, five Malaysians and two Chinese. Foreign Undersecretary Benjamin Domingo told reporters here.

The Papuans were offloaded at Port Moresby as the aircraft refuelled for the last leg of its flight to Manila, he added.

Israel test-fires missiles

LONDON, June 18 : Israel has test-fired cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, fuelling fears of an escalation in the Middle East arms race, the Sunday Times reported, citing Israeli defence sources.

The tests took place in May off Sri Lanka, the sources said, and hit targets at sea at a range of about 930 miles (1,500 km), the Times said.

Israel has never confirmed nor denied it has nuclear weapons and refuses to submit nuclear sites to international inspection.

'2500 Pak militants waiting to cross into Kashmir to wreak havoc'

SRINAGAR, India, June 18 : About 2,500 armed and trained militants are waiting to cross into Indian-administered Kashmir from Pakistan to wreak havoc in the divided country, reports AFP.

The Pakistani strategy is to keep the pot boiling, to try to bleed India through a thousand cuts to continue international attention and force international intervention in Kashmir, he said.

India blames arch-rival Pakistan, which administer part of disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, for Speight's cause -- while disagreeing with his methods -- and their international appearance.

Tarakinikini revealed there would be room for Speight's nominees on a planned team to draw up a new constitution. This came a day after a Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) was assured the country would return to its 1997 multi-racial constitution.

The 1997 constitution was adopted under an indigenous Fijian-controlled government of then coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka and came into place with the then publicly stated unanimous support of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC).

Speight Saturday held what he said was his last news conference. He said the media, particularly international jour-

nalists, were not presenting his side of the story accurately or fairly. Only local journalists would be allowed to talk to him in future, he said.

The military, who declared martial law on May 29, appear caught between their sympathy for Speight's cause -- while disagreeing with his methods -- and their international appearance.

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The foreign terrorists are sent for a period of two years. They are paid 200,000 Indian rupees (4,597 dollars) prior to induction and 300,000 (6,896 dollars) on their return (to Pakistan), he said.

"The funds are provided from Islamic countries and narcotics trade."

He cited as proof a new militi-

ant group, Jash-e-Mohammed (Army of the Prophet), headed by Pakistani cleric Maulana Masood Azhar, which he claimed had recruited 5,000 people so far.

Azhar and another militant, Mushtaq Zargar were released from Indian prisons to secure the freedom of 128 Indian Airlines passengers in December. The plane was hijacked after it left the Nepali capital Kathmandu.

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