



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (C) and unidentified members of the Jerusalem Committee of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference pray on Monday during the 18th meeting of the committee in Agadir. Arafat warned yesterday that East Jerusalem was "the key to peace or war" in the Middle East and stridently reconfirmed his people's claim to sovereignty over the east of city. —AFP photo

OIC spells support for Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem

AGADIR, Morocco, Aug 29: Fourteen Muslim states expressed strong support on Monday for Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem, at a meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference's Jerusalem Committee, reports AFP.

Foreign ministers meeting in this southern Moroccan city said Monday in the committee's final declaration that it was opposed to any limits on Palestinian sovereignty in east Jerusalem.

They also called upon the world's nations to recognise a Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital when such a proclamation is made. The committee demanded that all countries maintain their embassies in Tel Aviv, rather than moving them to Jerusalem, a direct challenge to Washington. Israel's strong supporter which has threatened to move its embassy to the disputed city.

The fate of Jerusalem and its sites holy to Christians, Jews and Muslims, is the toughest issue dividing Israel and the Palestinians and was the prime

reason for the failure of the Camp David peace summit last month.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said earlier Monday that east Jerusalem was "the key to peace or war" in the Middle East, stridently reconfirming his people's claims to sovereignty there.

We reject all sovereignty over al-Quds except Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Christian sovereignty," he said. Al-Quds in the Arab name for Jerusalem.

Our efforts towards peace have hit a wall of refusal on Israel's part, which refutes the very foundations of the peace process," he added.

The Palestinians want sovereignty over east Jerusalem as the capital of a future state they have vowed to declare this year.

The United States and Egypt are intensifying efforts to bring the Palestinians and Israelis closer to an accord, particularly on Jerusalem.

US President Bill Clinton is due in Cairo on Tuesday for talks with his Egyptian counterpart Hosni Mubarak.

Israel captured the eastern

sector of the city in war in 1967 and later annexed it as part of its "united eternal" capital, a position not recognised by the international community.

A just peace in the Middle East on the basis of international law remains one of the committee's primary missions, it said in its declaration, which called for the pursuit of negotiations.

The Jerusalem Committee also demanded the immediate implementation of UN Resolutions 242 and 338, calling for Israel to retreat from the occupied territories.

It also called upon nations to respect Resolution 194, on the fate of Palestinian refugees, another major sticking point in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts.

The Jerusalem Committee was created in 1975 to help free east Jerusalem from Israeli control and to preserve its Islamic and Arab heritage.

It groups Bangladesh, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Pakistan, the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Senegal and Syria.

International Clinton, Mubarak to help strike deal by Sept 13

CAIRO, Aug 29: US President Bill Clinton met Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak today, saying they hoped to help the Israelis and Palestinians "get over this next big hump" and strike a peace deal by a September 13 deadline, reports Reuters.

"Time is short," Clinton said as he and Mubarak sat down at Cairo airport to discuss the Middle East peace process. "We're going to work together and see if we can find a way to help the parties get over this next big hump."

Clinton failed at last month's Camp David summit to bridge gaps between Palestinian

President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Those talks covered the most vexing issues in the 52-year conflict, including the status of the holy city of Jerusalem, final borders, and the fate of Palestinian refugees and of Jewish settlers on the West Bank.

Mubarak has been a key player in the diplomatic effort since then to bring the two sides to an agreement, meeting over the weekend with Arafat and with Israel's acting foreign minister Shlomo Ben-Ami earlier this month.

"We are trying to do our best

to find a resolution," said the Egyptian president, whose nation was the first in the Arab world to sign a peace agreement with Israel. "We hope to finish it by September."

The White House played down expectations for the meeting, which took place in the airport's presidential lounge, saying only that Clinton wanted to touch base with the Egyptian leader about issues including the fate of Jerusalem.

"I don't expect any decisive action to result," US National Security Adviser Sandy Berger told reporters aboard Air Force One as Clinton flew to Cairo from Arusha, Tanzania.

Tight security for general strike in flood-hit Andhra

HYDERABAD, India, Aug 29: Thousands of troops were deployed today in the flood-hit southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh amid a general strike to protest against the police shooting of at least two people, reports AFP.

Officials in the state capital Hyderabad said tight security was imposed in the coastal state, which is already reeling from devastating floods that have left 144 people dead in the past week.

Tuesday's state-wide strike was called following violent clashes the day before in Hyderabad, as police fired on political activists who tried to storm the state assembly to protest against recent power rate hikes.

Police said at least two people were killed and more than 65 injured, while press reports and protest organisers said as many as four people were killed.

Schools, colleges, shops and offices were closed for the day and there was almost no civilian traffic on the roads, witnesses said. The government withdrew state-run buses fearing they could be torched.

Hyderabad police chief S. Sukumar said troops were ready for any eventuality, adding that one policeman was

in critical condition after being injured in Monday's violence.

"There is a strong possibility that the opposition workers may resort to violence to enforce the strike but we have deployed enough men to ensure the day passes peacefully," Sukumar said.

"Except for a few sporadic incidents of stone throwing, the situation is by and large peaceful," he said.

Sukumar also defended Monday's action in which the police fired 40 rounds of shots. "Activists from opposition parties forced him to down the shutters. They said: 'We will burn your shop if you don't listen to us.' We are poor people and we don't want to antagonise anybody so we followed their instructions," he said.

Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu appealed to the opposition to call off the strike, saying the state had enough problems dealing with the worst floods in nearly 50 years.

Naidu blamed "extremist elements" for the violence and accused India's main opposition Congress party of "allowing itself to be led into an alliance" with militant communist groups active in the state.

Hostage release to speed up normalisation of France, Libya ties

TRIPOLI, Aug 29: The freeing of three French hostages from the Philippines thanks to Libyan mediation will speed up normalisation of relations between Paris and Tripoli, French Cooperation Minister Charles Josselin said here overnight Monday, reports AFP.

He was speaking to journalists on his arrival in the Libyan capital where later today he was to greet French hostages Sonia Wendling and Maryse Burgot and Franco-Lebanese Marie Moarbes, among a group of six freed Sunday by the Muslim group Abu Sayyaf in Jolo Island.

"Over several months our relations had already moved into a phase of normalisation," Josselin said. "This positive action by Libya in freeing the hostages obviously can only improve the relations between our two countries."

The six ex-hostages were expected to arrive in Tripoli at around 15:00 BST after a brief overnight stay in the United Arab Emirates. They left the Philippines on Monday.

The Libyan authorities are to hold a welcoming ceremony for them later in the day to celebrate their release.



Former South African President Nelson Mandela (L) directs US President Bill Clinton (R) to his seat after returning from private discussions, and prior to speaking to the all the delegates in Simba Hall on Monday at the Burundi Peace Talks in Arusha, Tanzania. —AFP photo

Burundi peace deal signed in Arusha

ARUSHA, Tanzania, Aug 29: An accord aimed at ending seven years of civil war in Burundi is signed here late Monday in the presence of African statesmen and US President Bill Clinton, but without the participation of some of the key players, reports AFP.

After last-minute amendments and a nine-hour delay, the majority of parties involved in two years of talks here signed the agreement, which aims to reconcile Burundi's dominant Tutsi minority and Hutu majority and to make the government and army more reflective of the country's ethnic proportions: About 15 Tutsi and 85 per cent Hutu.

Former South African president and chief peace mediator Nelson Mandela attended the signing ceremony, after managing at the eleventh hour to convince some of the Tutsi groups, who have the most to lose under the new arrangements, to drop their refusal to sign.

After the signing, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said the accord meant "no genocide, no monopoly on power, that means democracy and security for all. That means none of you should have any fears."

All Hutu delegations present in this northern Tanzanian town signed the accord, but the two main Hutu armed rebel groups did not attend and have not taken part in the Arusha talks.

Four of the 10 Tutsi parties put their names to the document, although with many reservations, having earlier insisted they would not because they wanted more time for talks.

While extremist, the six remaining Tutsi non-signatories are not prominent players in Burundi's political scene. Sources initially said five pro-Tutsi parties had signed, but this was later revised to four after officials counted the signatories to the deal.

Mandela gave the Tutsis a tongue-lashing during the ceremony, accusing them of trying to sabotage the agreement, and of putting personal self-interest above the yearning for peace of most Burundians.

He had repeatedly urged ethnic Tutsis and Hutus to make deep concessions so that a peace deal could be possible.

The accord leaves much work to be done before all issues are resolved and the peace process can be considered complete

Military pressing Delhi to take action on Pak militants' camp

NEW DELHI, Aug 29: A section of the Indian military is pressing for tougher action — including air strikes — against Muslim militant camps in Pakistan, despite stated government opposition to any such action, reports AFP.

Amid multiplying incursions by Pakistan-backed militants fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, military experts say frustration is growing within the army and air force over Delhi's policy of restraint regarding any crossing of the disputed Kashmir border.

Former Indian Air Force (IAF) chief S K Kaul said pressure was growing on the government to lift the order — implemented during last year's

News Analysis

Kargil conflict — preventing IAF planes from crossing the Line of Control dividing Indian- and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

"There can be no half-measures. The air force cannot be sent to do a task with its hands tied behind its back," Kaul said. "Air strikes are one of the options available to us and if the time is ripe one should go ahead."

A senior IAF source said there was a "definite craving within the air force for combat-level reconnaissance followed up with aerial strikes on terrorist camps."

But the political will for

such an action is almost non-existent, with Defence Minister George Fernandes recently ruling out any switch to a "hot pursuit" policy.

I believe the concept of hot pursuit can lead to uncontrolled escalation, Fernandes said, adding the security forces in Indian Kashmir were capable of containing the Muslim insurgency.

While recognising the frustration felt by the supporters of "hot pursuit" Fernandes stressed that the military had to toe the government line.

"The idea of hot pursuit has been debated on and off, and the government is often criticised for not being tough enough."

UK commander meets leader of Sierra Leonean kidnappers

LONDON, Aug 29: Britain's Defence Ministry confirmed on Monday that a senior army officer had met face-to-face with the leader of the militia responsible for kidnapping 11 British soldiers in war-torn Sierra Leone, reports AFP.

Lieutenant-Colonel Simon Fordham talked with Brigadier Kallay, chief of the West Side Boys militia, at a UN peace-keeping base at Masiaka, a MoD spokesman confirmed.

US Muslims back Gore

WASHINGTON, Aug 29: Democratic Party presidential hopeful Al Gore has the backing of a majority of US Muslims, a survey released Monday showed, reports AFP.

The vice president is supported by 55.9 per cent of US Muslims, with the Republican candidate, Texas Governor George W. Bush, backed by 24.1 per cent, according to an American Muslim Council/Zogby International poll.

Twenty per cent of the US Muslim community has yet to make a decision on the candidates.

One million flock to London street carnival

LONDON, Aug 29: Two revellers were seriously injured on Monday as festivities reached a peak at London's Notting Hill Carnival, Europe's largest street festival, reports AFP.

Police said about one million people joined the revelry on Monday — fewer than last year as intermittent rain kept many people away.

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