

Special N Korean envoy arrives in Seoul today

SEOUL, Sept 10: A special North Korean envoy will visit Seoul for four days from Monday to discuss a planned visit to South Korea by the North's supreme leader Kim Jong-il, officials said today, reports AFP.

Kim Jong-Sun, a close aide to the supreme leader, will also discuss the dramatic rapprochement between the rivals since the historic summit between their leaders in June.

The envoy will meet President Kim Dae-Jung and other South Korean officials during his key visit which will include a tour of historic sites in Seoul and the southern resort island of Cheju, the president's office said.

"As Kim Jong-il's special envoy, Kim Jong-Sun will visit Seoul from September 11 to 14," the president's office said in a statement.

"During his visit, Kim Jong-Sun's 10-member entourage will meet President Kim and other government officials to hold broad discussion on relations between South and North Korea," it said.

Blast in Saudi desert kills British couple

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Sept 10: An explosion killed a British couple on a weekend drive through the Saudi desert outside the city of Jeddah, a British diplomat said today, reports AFP.

Tom Tomlinson, vice consul in Jeddah, said that Ian McGhee, 48, was killed on the spot in Friday's accident and his 36-year-old wife Susan died of her injuries before a rescue party reached the scene.

The couple in their four-wheel-drive apparently strayed off the road into a restricted area of the Bahra desert used for army training and detonated a device which they found and handled, he said.

The injured woman telephoned for help and tried to walk back to the main road under a blazing Arabian sun after the blast which damaged their car, but she was found dead by the rescue team.

McGhee, employed with the sales division of a local company, was a 20-year resident of Saudi Arabia, while his wife worked in a Jeddah hospital. Saudi authorities are still investigating the exact cause of the explosion.

Palestinians set to delay statehood declaration

Peace talks with Israel resume today

GAZA CITY, Sept 10: The Palestinians heralded today a delay of their much-trumpeted plans to declare an independent state, on the eve of a new round of last-ditch negotiations to forge a final peace with Israel, reports AFP.

"Most of those who spoke said the postponement must not go beyond the end of the year and this is what I am sure will happen," said Salim al-Zaanun, chairman of the PLO's Central Council, which was holding its final day of meetings on statehood.

The council, the PLO's mini-parliament and its second most important decision-making body, began its deliberations here Saturday on the statehood proclamation, planned to coincide with a September 13 deadline for a peace accord.

Al-Zaanun told reporters that an open-ended delay would only maintain the status quo and would not advance the Palestinians' 52-year struggle for independence.

"An open postponement means giving (Israeli Prime Minister Ehud) Barak the ability to carry out his plan to keep the Palestinian people under an administrative self-rule authority forever," he said.

Al-Zaanun said he believed the council would either vote to announce statehood on November 15, the anniversary of Yasser Arafat's 1988 symbolic declaration of independence in Algiers, or on January 1, the date marking the beginning of armed struggle against Israel by Arafat's group, Fatah.

In a closed-session of the 129-member council on Saturday, Arafat announced the resumption of talks with Israel but said "major differences" remained.

A Palestinian official said the talks would resume on Monday, with a Palestinian team led by senior negotiator Saeb Erakat and preventive security chief in the Gaza Strip Mohammed Dahlan and the Israeli side led by acting Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami and negotiator Gilad Sher.

Israel, which has warned that a unilateral declaration would sink the peace process, welcomed the likely delay.

"If the Palestinians decide to delay the proclamation of a state we can only applaud it because it shows their desire to continue the peace process in a positive way, even if I consider that the chances of an accord are slim," Ben Ami told army radio.

Again this year, Israel and the United States pushed Arafat not to make the statehood proclamation in the absence of a peace agreement, and US President Bill Clinton warned that Washington would sever relations.

Many PLO members said Saturday that they favoured building a Palestinian state de facto, rather than by proclamation, by setting deadlines for the creation of much-needed state institutions.

Barak's spokesman Gadi Baltansky said Sunday that the prime minister is ready to strike a deal with the Palestinians that defers the most sensitive issue dividing them, the future of Jerusalem.

The prime minister is ready to consider a delay on Jerusalem as proposed by the Americans during the Camp David summit," Baltansky told army radio.

Clinton and Barak held an impromptu meeting in New York Saturday where they agreed to try to advance peacemaking.



Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, flanked by a representative of the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Taysir Qoba (1st R), the chairman of the PLO's Central Council Salim al-Zaanun (3rd from R) and Mohammad Sbeih, Secretary General of the PFLP, attends the PLO's Central Council in Gaza City yesterday. Arafat said he was sure that the 129-member body would vote to postpone its planned declaration of statehood, but not beyond the end of this year.

-AFP photo

British troops attack S Leone militia base, free six soldiers

FREETOWN, Sept 10: British troops today attacked a militia base in Sierra Leone and freed six British soldiers and a Sierra Leonean officer held hostage since August 25, a British military spokesman said here.

Before first light a joint British military operation launched an attack on the West Side Boys camp with the aim of releasing the hostages; the operation is still ongoing but all six British hostages and the Sierra Leonean were safely back in our hands," Lieutenant Commander Tony Cramp said.

The situation on the ground requires further activity," Cramp said, responding to questions about the ongoing battle between British troops and the West Side Boys, a breakaway faction of a junta that ruled Sierra Leone between May 1997 and February 1998.

The hostages had been held at the militia's jungle base in Okra Hills, some 70 km east of the capital. Cramp said he was unable to give details of casualties.

The military spokesman said the raid was carried out because officials believed the hostages were in imminent danger, and that talks for their release were bogging down.

"Although we have had contact with the group holding them over the last couple of days it was felt that those talks and negotiations were not going anywhere and on the advice of the team conducting the negotiations it was felt there was an imminent danger to the guys being held and therefore the military option was taken," Cramp said.

Cramp said the operation was carried out with the full knowledge of Sierra Leone's President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and the cooperation of the UN peacekeeping mission, UNAMSIL.

Asked about casualties on either side, Guthrie said: "I wouldn't rule it out."

Sierra Leone's renegade West Side Boys militia captured 11 soldiers of the Royal Irish regiment and a Sierra Leonean liaison officer on August 25. Five of their captives were released on August 30.

The Special Director's Award went to Indian director Buddhadeb Dasgupta for his film "The Wrestlers", a lyrical portrayal of the devastating impact of violence on a small town in rural India.

Spanish actor Javier Bardem won the Volpi Cup for best actor for his moving and forceful portrayal of Arenas in "Before Night Falls" and Rose Byrne won the award for best actress for "The Goddess of 1967" by Clara Law.

"La Faute A Voltaire" (It's Voltaire's Fault), by Abdel Kechiche, won the \$100,000 prize for best directorial debut.

"I strongly believe this is the

'The Circle' wins best film award at Venice festival

VENICE, Italy, Sept 10: A dark Iranian movie about the oppression of women called "The Circle" directed by Jafar Panahi, won the prestigious Golden Lion award for best film at the Venice Film Festival on Saturday, reports Reuters.

US painter and director Julian Schnabel took home the Jury Grand Prize for best director for "Before Night Falls" about the life of gay Cuban novelist and poet Reinaldo Arenas whose controversial work made him a victim of Cuban censors.

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Parliamentary elections Ruling party candidate gunned down in Lanka

COLOMBO, Sept 10: Unidentified gunmen today shot dead a ruling party candidate for Sri Lanka's elections together with one of his key supporters amid fears of more bloodshed, officials and diplomats said, reports AFP.

Chelyan Perimpanayakam, a member of the People's Alliance (PA) party, was gunned down at a home in the predominantly Muslim town of Kalmunai.

Police said the victim was the first candidate at the October 10 parliamentary elections to be killed in a violent campaign that has claimed the lives of six party supporters since parliament was dissolved on August 18.

No one has yet claimed responsibility, but a local PA leader, Somasundaram Ganeshamurthy, said he believed the attack was carried out by a rival Muslim group which is also allied to the ruling party.

The latest killing came five days after President Chandrika Kumaratunga's estranged brother, Anura Bandaranaike, was gunned down at a home in the predominantly Muslim town of Batticaloa although in some other areas they are fielding candidates jointly.

The quake could be felt island-wide including in the capital, on the northern part of the island.

In the Hualien city "moviegoers ran out of the theatres to seek shelters after the quake hit," the cable television TVBS reported.

In Taipei the mass transit rail system was shut down for five minutes.

Seismologists expected more aftershocks from the quake.

Strong quake shakes Taiwan

TAIPEI, Sept 10: An earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale hit Taiwan today, sending panic-stricken residents running for shelters in the streets, officials said, reports AFP.

But there were no initial reports of casualties or damage, seismologists said.

The quake struck at 04:54 p.m. (1454 BST), with its epicentre 4.0 km southeast of the eastern Hsinching township in Hualien county.

It originated 20 km below the earth's surface.

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Shuttle Atlantis docks to space station

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla, Sept 10: With a final whizp of the control jets on space shuttle Atlantis, astronaut Terrence Wilcutt gently docked the orbiter to the International Space Station today, reports Reuters.

This was the third time a US shuttle had docked at the orbital construction site. The Atlantis crew will spend at least five days outfitting the station in advance of the first long-duration crew's arrival in November.

From 1,000 feet away, the station appeared on television monitors at Mission Control like a tiny hummingbird hovering outside the shuttle's window.

As Atlantis inched closer, the station revealed itself to be an ungainly combination of tubular modules and connecting nodes stacked 13 stories high. As construction continues through at least 2006, the station will only appear less like a human habitat as it sprouts modules in every direction and half an acre of solar panels follow the sun.

Still, it will be home for rotating crews for at least 15 years, as NASA and its partners in Russia, Europe, Canada and Japan conduct science and study the ways humans can adapt physically and psychologically to long-term space travel.

Atlantis and the International Space Station are now one vehicle orbiting the Earth," said NASA commentator Rob Navias, the voice of Mission Control in Houston. "A textbook rendezvous throughout the course of the night."

Wilcutt, a US Marine Corps colonel making his fourth space flight, managed the docking despite the malfunction of a navigational tool called a star tracker, mounted near the overhead window used during the maneuver. Instead, he made do with other navigational tools available in the shuttle.

Sealed tenders in two-envelope system are invited from bonafide suppliers/dealers/agents for supply of computer & other equipment at Bangladesh Survey Institute under the Development Project titled Repair, Reconstruction & Modernisation of Bangladesh Survey Institute.

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