

Israeli minister says give up Golan

MIDDLE EAST
From Steven Saxe
in Jerusalem

AN Israeli minister said yesterday Israel would have to relinquish "sovereignty" over the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for a peace treaty.

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid, who has participated in talks between Israel and the PLO on Palestinian self-rule, made the comment before a key summit between the US and Syrian presidents.

"Just as Israel won't be prepared for any concession without full and secure peace, Syria won't be ready for any concession without the return of its sovereignty over the Golan Heights," Sarid told Israeli armed forces radio.

"Israel for its part, I believe, will have to give up its sovereignty over the Golan Heights."

US President Bill Clinton meets Syrian President Hafez al-Assad in Geneva today, hoping to break a deadlock in Israel's two-year-old peace talks with Syria.

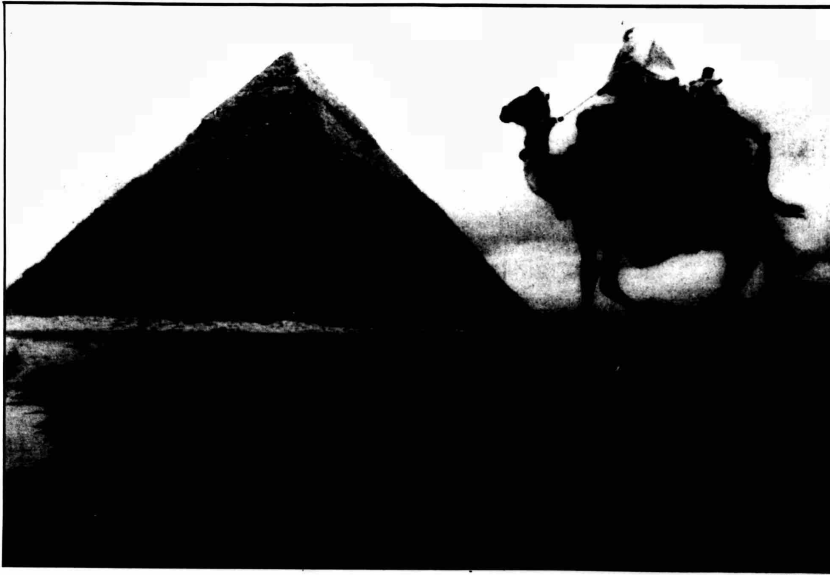
The US-brokered talks are stalled over the strategic Golan Heights, captured by Israel from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war. Syria demands a total Israeli withdrawal.

Israel says it could pull back but will not say how far or under what conditions until Damascus agrees to what Israel calls "full peace" including embassies, open borders and trade.

"I very much hope that President Assad... will be much clearer on the key issues which are the meaning of peace, the normalisation of relations between Syria and Israel and security arrangements on the Golan Heights," Sarid said. "If this will be the case the government of Israel for its part will have to make... perhaps the most important and difficult decisions of any government since the establishment of the state (in 1948)," he said.

Opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, whose Likud party opposes an Israeli withdrawal from the area, said he had seen documents which showed the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was willing to return the whole area to Syria in stages.

"Israel is prepared, according to the Rabin government, to implement a full withdrawal from the entire Golan to the 67 lines, a withdrawal in stages, if it proposes American forces be placed (in the area)," Netanyahu told army radio.



Pyramid in a puddle: The Chephren pyramid is reflected in water after heavy rains in Cairo yesterday disrupted life in the Egyptian capital.

Clinton thanks Belarus for scrapping its nuclear arms

BELARUS
From Gene Gibbons
in Minsk

US President Bill Clinton paid a brief ceremonial visit to Belarus yesterday to congratulate the small former Soviet republic for joining the ranks of non-nuclear states.

Clinton, accompanied by his wife Hillary and their 13-year-old daughter Chelsea, flew in from Moscow after a two-day summit with Russian President Boris Yeltsin that focused largely on post-Cold War efforts to dismantle atomic weaponry.

A White House official said the president had pledged an extra \$25 million to help Belarus destroy its nuclear weapons. This brought US aid to Belarus's denuclearisation program to a total of

\$101 million, he added.

Clinton went immediately after arrival to an official guest house, which was built in 1972 for a visit by then-US President Richard Nixon, for talks with Belarusian parliament chairman Stanislav Shushkevich and other officials.

The US leader's five-hour stay also included a wreath-laying ceremony at the World War Two victory memorial in central Minsk and a speech at the Academy of Sciences. He was also to sign an agreement aimed at encouraging US investment.

Clinton wound up his visit by going to a forested area on the outskirts of Minsk to light a candle at the Kurapaty Memorial, which commemorates the victims of the reign of terror during the rule of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

Clinton is among the first foreign

leaders to be invited to the site, which for decades was concealed by Soviet authorities and which still represents one of the most tragic episodes for a people beset by war and repression in the 20th century.

The full extent of the murders committed by agents of the Soviet NKVD secret police prior to the Nazi invasion is still uncertain as new evidence emerges. Resident Poles, Jews and Russians, as well as Belarusians, were among the victims.

US officials said Clinton's visit to Minsk was designed to show his gratitude for its decision to dismantle and ship to Russia 72 SS-20 strategic nuclear missiles left on its territory after the Soviet era.

Clinton's visit underlined one of the themes of the Moscow summit, which

was crowned by a tripartite agreement between the United States, Russia and Ukraine that calls for the scrapping of Ukraine's nuclear arsenal — the third largest in the world.

The agreement still has to be ratified by Ukraine's parliament, which is hostile to the idea of denuclearisation and has not honoured any previous disarmament deal made by Kravchuk.

The deal promises impoverished Ukraine US and Russian security guarantees and Western aid.

Clinton and Yeltsin also agreed that the United States and Russia would no longer target their nuclear missiles at each other or anyone else. The pact is more symbolic than substantive because the missiles could be re-targeted in a matter of minutes.

WORLD IN BRIEF

100 die as boats sink

■CALCUTTA — More than 100 people were feared drowned when two pilgrim boats collided in the Bay of Bengal yesterday and one was torn in half, police said. About 150 passengers were spilled into the water as they returned from a pilgrimage to the holy Sagar Island, they said.

Botha mediates

■MASERU — LESOTHO'S capital Maseru was calm yesterday following two days of clashes between rival army factions, witnesses said. South African Foreign Minister Pieter Botha visited the tiny mountain kingdom, which is entirely surrounded by South African territory, yesterday to mediate in the dispute.

Bosnia talks

■CAIRO — Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa left Cairo for Geneva yesterday to attend an Islamic ministers' meeting to discuss developments in Bosnia. Moussa said he would join the foreign ministers of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan and Senegal for two days of talks.

No verdict

■LOS ANGELES — The jury weighing the fate of Lyle Menendez, who with his brother Erik is accused of killing their wealthy Beverly Hills parents, ended its deliberations Friday without reaching a verdict. The panel will resume its discussions tomorrow.

Hash haul

■KARACHI — Anti-narcotics officers have seized 30 tonnes of hashish worth one million dollars on the domestic market in southwestern Baluchistan province, officials said yesterday.

Bribe scandal

■TOKYO — Japanese prosecutors are poised to question a former government minister about alleged involvement in a bribery scandal, a newspaper reported on Saturday. State prosecutors believe Seiroku Kajiyama, a former trade and justice minister, had taken 10 million yen (\$90,000) from a construction company.

Doctor's order

■CAIRO — A plane carrying 229 passengers from Cairo to New York turned around just 10 minutes after take-off when a doctor on board realised he had forgotten his own medicine.

Clashes in Kabul kill hundreds

AFGHANISTAN

RIVAL Afghan factions each claimed victories as bloody battles for power went into a third week yesterday.

Fighting between forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his opponents resumed in eastern Kabul after an overnight truce, with aerial attacks and shelling, a spokesman for the Hezb-Islami party said in neighbouring Pakistan.

The Hezb, headed by Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, is allied with northern Afghan warlord Ahmad Shah Dostum, who started the current round of fighting by launching a power grab in Kabul on New Year's Day.

Pro-Rabbani forces recaptured the areas of Qala-i Zaman and Deh Khojaid Khan from rival forces on Friday, official Kabul Radio said. But the Hezb spokesman in the northwestern Pakistani town of Peshawar denied the report, saying his group's forces had advanced in the eastern suburbs.

Government jets bombed rebel positions around Kabul on Friday, two days after rebel jets dominated the skies over the capital, Kabul Radio, quoting the defence ministry, said on Friday night that a large number of rebel militiamen were killed or injured in the attacks. Rebel forces fired shells and rockets into residential areas killing many people and causing extensive damage, it said.

Both sides have rejected Pakistan's appeal for a ceasefire from Friday to allow for a negotiated settlement. Pakistan on Tuesday shut its border at the Khyber Pass, where more than 15,000 refugees had crossed since January 1 to escape battles estimated to have killed hundreds of people.

At least 50,000 people from Kabul have flocked to Jalalabad mid-way between Kabul and Pakistan since January 1, according to UN officials.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in battles for Kabul since April 1992.

Bus bombs kill three in Turkey

TURKEY

THREE people were killed and 20 were injured in central Turkey when time-bombs hidden in luggage exploded on inter-city buses, police said yesterday.

No group claimed responsibility for the Friday night blasts which damaged four buses, they added. Rebel Kurds have attacked buses in the past but this was the first use of bombs.

The semi-official Anatolian news agency said police were now searching all luggage on

buses entering and leaving Istanbul. Security officials in southeast Turkey, meanwhile, said troops had killed seven Kurdish separatists in clashes.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is fighting for an independent Kurdish homeland in the southeast. More than 10,000 guerrillas, soldiers and civilians have been killed since 1984.

In other incidents, bombs rocked the offices of the state social security department and a right-wing political party in Istanbul yesterday.

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