

Palestinians dismiss Israel's truce as a public relations ploy

By the Associated Press
INTERNATIONAL

JERUSALEM — Palestinians today dismissed Israel's announcement of a unilateral truce as a public relations ploy, saying calm cannot be restored until Israel halts construction in Jewish settlements and lifts sweeping travel restrictions on Palestinians.

Overnight, Palestinian gunmen fired on Israeli army outposts in eight locations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and troops returned fire in every case.

Israel's defense minister announced Tuesday that Israeli troops were ordered to stop firing except in life-threatening situations and would no longer initiate military action.

In recent weeks, Israeli troops entered Palestinian territory dozens of times, razing police stations and homes, usually in response to Palestinian mortar fire on Israeli settlements.

Raanan Gissin, adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, would not say whether such incursions would be halted completely under the new policy.

The army spokesman, Brig. Gen. Ron Kitrey, said he assumed the forays would now need government approval, rather than being initiated by field commanders, but added he still needed to study the new orders.

HANOI, Vietnam — U.S. Ambassador Douglas "Pete" Peterson announced today that he will resign from his post July 15 and return to his home state of Florida.

American's first postwar ambassador to Vietnam said he submitted his resignation to President Bush on

ap news capsules

Tuesday.

"It has been an honor to serve two presidents in building a new relationship between the United States and Vietnam," he said.

The announcement fuels speculation that Peterson is considering a run for governor in Florida, a post currently held by President Bush's brother, Republican Jeb Bush.

Florida Democratic leaders earlier approached Peterson about entering the race.

Peterson, a Democrat who served three terms in the U.S. Congress before being appointed to Vietnam, has not commented publicly on his political future. His short statement did not mention his future plans.

Peterson, a former U.S. Air Force pilot held prisoner for 6 1/2 years during the Vietnam War, was appointed in 1997 by then-President Clinton. Diplomatic ties had been formally established in 1995.

NATIONAL

DEARBORN, Mich. — Ford Explorer owners who replaced their sport utility vehicles' tires after last summer's Firestone recall may soon be changing those tires again.

Ford Motor Co. announced Tuesday it would replace all 13 million Firestone Wilderness AT tires now on Ford vehicles — twice as many tires as Bridgestone/Firestone included in its August recall.

After analyzing road test data, government research and scientific data "we simply do not have enough confidence in those tires in keeping our customers safe," said Jacques Nasser, Ford's president and chief

executive.

Bridgestone/Firestone Chief Executive John Lampe defended the company's tires in a written statement Tuesday, saying: "No one cares more about the safety of the people who travel on our tires than we do. Our tires are safe. When we have a problem we fix it."

Ford said millions of vehicle owners would be sent notices instructing them to have their Wilderness AT tires replaced with tires made by Goodyear, Michelin and Continental. Free replacements will be available at Ford dealers; customers who buy replacements will be reimbursed up to \$110 for 15- and 16-inch tires and up to \$130 for 17-inch tires.

MIAMI — The jet repair company blamed for its role in the fatal 1996 ValuJet crash has agreed to pay a federal fine with no admission of wrongdoing even as a judge expressed doubts over the prosecution's case.

SabreTech, the nation's first aviation company to be convicted of criminal charges stemming from a commercial jet crash, agreed to pay a Federal Aviation Administration fine of \$1.75 million, down from a proposed \$2.25 million.

Also Tuesday, a federal appeals judge in Miami hearing SabreTech's appeal of the case questioned the underpinnings of the charges on which it was convicted.

"I think there are problems with this very important case," said Judge J.L. Edmondson, leader of a three-judge 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel. "I have doubts about whether

this is truly a violation of the law or not."

SabreTech, ValuJet's maintenance contractor, was convicted of nine counts of hazardous materials violations for improperly packaging explosive-tipped oxygen generators and delivering them as cargo to ValuJet.

ValuJet workers loaded the cargo on the plane, which crashed in the Florida Everglades on May 11, 1996, killing all 110 people aboard.

SAN FRANCISCO — After suggestions, pleas and lobbying proved unsuccessful, California lawmakers went to court to try and force federal regulators to cap wholesale electricity prices.

"There's a danger this entire economy can come unbound," warned Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, who joined Senate President John Burton and House Speaker Robert Hertzberg in a suit filed Tuesday against the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

The move came after unsuccessful lobbying by Democratic Gov. Gray Davis and other lawmakers to get the commission to impose strict price caps while wholesale power prices reach historically high levels.

"The citizens of California are suffering immediate irreparable harm," the lawmakers wrote to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction over FERC.

Joe Cotchett, who sued oil and tobacco companies and represented consumers hit by the savings and loan scandal, is representing California in the lawsuit — for just \$1 a month.

Unlike Attorney General Bill Lockyer, who is investigating pricing practices of independent power pro-

ducers, Cotchett's team is focusing on the threat that outages pose to the public.

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON — Enduring numbing hours of votes on dozens of Democratic amendments, the Senate drew closer to passage of an 11-year, \$1.35 trillion tax cut package.

Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., said he hoped to reach an agreement with Democrats to vote on a limited number of remaining amendments today and "find a way to successfully complete this legislation."

Even as the Senate waded through 43 roll call votes Monday and Tuesday, negotiators were discussing ways to bridge differences between the House and Senate in hopes of getting the tax bill to President Bush by week's end.

"We're going to be able to get it done in the time frame" of Memorial Day, predicted House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas, R-Calif.

WASHINGTON — Unable to guarantee that cell phones are risk-free, congressional investigators are urging the government to provide more consumer-friendly and up-to-date information for the millions of Americans who use the devices.

A report Tuesday by the General Accounting Office found that federal agencies don't always provide the most current information on cell phone radiation and research, and often their materials are too technical for average consumers to understand.

The number of cell phone subscribers has surged to 115 million, making questions about their safety more pressing.

"Wireless service is less and less perceived as an ancillary, discretionary service," said Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass.

The report pulled together research by major health agencies, interviews with prominent scientists and other data to arrive at this consensus: Current research doesn't show that the energy emitted by cell phones has adverse health effects, but "there is not yet enough information to conclude that they pose no risk."

WASHINGTON — After losing a vote that would have stripped annual student testing from President Bush's education plan, House conservatives set their sights on vouchers, saying Bush's testing proposal should be coupled with an "escape valve" for children in low-scoring schools.

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate so far have kept vouchers out of the education bills they are considering, but the House was scheduled to take up two voucher amendments today. The Senate likely will debate its own voucher proposal later in the week.

White House advisers this week said the administration still supports the private-school tuition allowances, but Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., said Bush was "missing in action" on vouchers and expanded spending flexibility for school districts.

Conservatives later met with Bush at the White House, where they said they would support the education plan — with promises that he would back separate bills addressing their concerns.

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