

PLO warns US, other sponsors about risks to Middle East talks

TUNIS, Feb 8: The PLO has warned the United States and others about risks to the Middle East peace talks if Washington grants Israel loan guarantees to resettle immigrants, a Palestinian official said here Friday, reports AFP.

The Palestine Liberation Organization recently sent a "clear letter on this issue" to the talks sponsors, the United States and Russia, as well as to Arab and European states, PLO Information Department head Yasser Abed Rabbo said.

Abed Rabbo said he feared the United States was heading for a compromise that would amount to a capitulation on Israel's request for guarantees on 10 billion dollar in loans spread over five years.

There is a risk that the peace process could come to a halt because granting the guarantees "would give legal backing" to Israeli settlements in

the occupied territories, Abed Rabbo said in a statement to AFP.

Abed Rabbo, a member of the PLO executive committee, said the PLO is examining developments in the loan guarantee issue as well as the expected resumption of bilateral Israeli-Arab talks on February 24 in Washington.

"We believe that the future of the peace negotiations depends specially on the question of the United States not accepting the bank guarantees for Israel and the halt of Israeli settlements," he said.

Abed Rabbo described as "confused" the last statements from US Secretary of State James Baker about the loan guarantees. Such statements appear aimed at paving the way for a compromise which would amount in fact to a total submission to Israeli demands," he added.

UN to invite 150 Afghan leaders to peace talks

PESHAWAR, Feb 8: The United Nations wants to invite some 150 leading Afghan figures to peace talks in April aimed at seeking a political settlement to the Afghan conflict, informed sources here said Friday, reports AFP.

UN envoy for Afghanistan Benon Sevan last week asked Pakistan-based Afghan opposition groups to submit lists of those willing to attend the intra-Afghan peace assembly to be held in Switzerland, Turkey or another Muslim country, the sources said.

Sevan has had a total of 28 meetings his four-day stay in Peshawar, close to the Afghan border, and is scheduled to go to Kabul on Sunday and then Tehran two days later.

Afghan president Najibullah will not be invited to the talks, the sources said.

According to the Resistance news agency Media, those invited from Kabul would be "representatives of Kabul and not of the Kabul regime."

Media said the assembly would be attended by lower ranking figures.

BRIEFLY

Fire claims 10 lives in Grozny: At least 10 people were killed in the northern Caucasus city of Grozny when a fire they set inside an arms depot touched off a series of violent explosions. ITAR-TASS News Agency said on Friday, reports Reuter from Moscow.

TASS, quoting the local Interior Ministry, said scores of attackers forced their way past guards and entered the depot, where they set a fire to their way.

The storehouse, packed with weapons and ammunition, collapsed in the subsequent explosions and at least 10 people were killed, it said.

The incident apparently took place on Thursday.

The region, formally a part of the Russian Federation, is a hotbed of separatism and rebels have raided army and Interior Ministry bases to collect weapons.

Three beheaded in Saudi Arabia: Sword-wielding Executioners beheaded Friday three Saudis convicted of burglary and of using a knife to make a woman pose nude for 'blackmail' photographs the Saudi Arabian Interior Ministry announced, AFP reports from Riyadh.

The three "entered a citizen's house, where they stole jewels and furniture after forcing his wife at knifepoint to pose naked for a photo session, which they used as a means of blackmail" the ministry said in a statement.

The three were identified as Saad Al-Ayoubi, Ahmed Fekih and Khaled Al-Zahrani.

On December 20, three other Saudis found guilty of murder and theft were decapitated in the holy city of Mecca, in western Saudi Arabia.

4,000 die of starvation in Ethiopia: About 4,000 people have died of starvation in Ethiopia's drought-stricken eastern region of Ogaden a local politician was reported as saying on Friday, reports Reuter from Addis Ababa.

An official of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) told the state-run Ethiopian news agency his group had discovered in a three-day tour of local districts that 3,915 people had died and 91,000 more were affected by drought.

Last month the United Nations started an airlift of food and medicine to supply an estimated 350,000 people faced with starvation in the Ogaden.

The news agency said the ONLF had appealed to Ethiopia's government to respond urgently by sending food to the Ogaden but that no action had been taken so far.

Turkmenistan gets UN membership: The Security Council unanimously endorsed on Friday the former Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan for United Nations membership, reports Reuter from United Nations.

The council had previously cleared the way for the former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Moldova to join the world body.

Only Azerbaijan and Georgia have not yet applied.

The world organization at present has 166 members.

Russia, not previously a UN member, last December took the place of the defunct Soviet Union, including its permanent seat on the 15-member Security Council.

Bush to announce election plans: President Bush Friday told a group of school children he would announce his re-election plans next week, AP reports from US.

In an exchange with a group of children outside a health clinic, Bush discussed what it's like to be president and how one gets elected. Reporters picked up bits of the exchange including gets this: "Don't tell them, next Tuesday, you watch, it's the big announcement."

However, two Bush aides who spoke on condition of anonymity said the announcement might not come until Wednesday.

The announcement had been expected some time next week.

Bush visited the Logan Heights Family Health Centre and watched a child being immunized as part of his West Coast trip to publicize the health care package he announced on Thursday.

Avalanche kills 7 in Lebanon: Seven people died in an avalanche that buried homes in a Lebanese Mountain Village following days of heavy snowstorms, Interior Minister Sami Khatib announced Friday, reports AFP from Beirut.

Three fishermen meanwhile were missing and feared drowned in stormy seas off the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, but a fourth fisherman reached shore, Lebanese Television reported.

Seven died in an avalanche that struck Hazzerta Village, in central Lebanon, where rescue workers backed by Syrian and Lebanese army bulldozers arrived Friday afternoon, General Khatib told journalists.

The avalanche buried two three-story buildings and a second avalanche occurred during the rescue operations, he added.

20 killed in Thai building collapse

BANGKOK, Feb 8: At least 20 people were killed and more than 60 injured when part of a 30-storey building under construction collapsed in Bangkok. Thai emergency workers said today, reports Reuter.

The building, called Diamond House, is in a luxury compound where many foreign ambassadors live.

Ambulances struggled to the site through Bangkok's heavy evening rush hour as emergency radio frequencies carried pleas for electrical generators to be rushed to the scene.

The steel scaffolding pulled away from the building between the 19th and 20th floors when overloaded by workers finishing their shift, labour department official Prasit Chaitongean said at the site.

Big Five urged to press India to stop killings JKLF vows to flout ban on ceasefire line

ISLAMABAD, Feb 8: Amanullah Khan, leader of the militant Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Friday urged the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to press India to stop killings in Kashmir, reports AFP.

The militant leader, believed to be in hiding after the Pakistani government outlawed a planned march by JKLF supporters into Indian-held Kashmir, also vowed again in a statement that his party would flout the ban.

The JKLF continued mobilising people in Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistani-administered Kashmir, to storm the border Tuesday in solidarity with Kashmiri Muslims fighting for secession from New Delhi, sources there said.

The Pakistan Foreign Office said late Thursday that "the government will not allow any irresponsible elements to create a law and order situation at the line of control" dividing the state between India and Pakistan.

The tough government

statement came as India asked the five permanent members of the UN Security Council—Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States—to press Islamabad not to escalate tension over Kashmir.

Calling India's demand that they urged Pakistan to stop the march "most unreasonable," Khan said the security council members should force New Delhi "to put an end to holocaust in Kashmir and honour its international pledges on granting right of self-determination" to the Kashmir nation.

The statement, released by his party, said the decision to cross the ceasefire line was thrust on the JKLF by India as it continued a "genocide" in Kashmir.

The JKLF chairman, speaking to AFP from hiding on Thursday, said Islamabad's statement indicated it had bowed to Indian pressure.

"We will try to avoid a head-on collision" with Pakistani authorities, he said, warning that if a clash was imposed "we will have no alternative" but to resist.

45,066 foreigners studying in Japan

TOKYO, Feb 8: Some 45,000 foreigners were enrolled at Japanese universities, graduate schools, junior colleges and other special schools in 1991, an Education Ministry survey revealed yesterday, reports Xinhua.

Starting May 1 last year, the survey showed a total of 45,066 foreigners were studying at educational institutions in Japan, up almost 9 per cent from 1990.

But the year-on-year growth was slower than then average for the 1982-1990 period when the rises were between 10 and 30 per cent a year, the ministry said.

And yet the number of foreign students was some 10,000 more than the government had previously planned, it said.

Under a Japanese government plan to increase the number of foreign students to 100,000 by the end of this century, a target of around 34,500 foreign students had been set for fiscal 1991.



SAN SALVADOR, Religious leaders embrace during a thanksgiving mass in the central plaza of the capital celebrating the peace accord struck between the government and leftist rebels recently. —AFP/UNB photo

Shamir nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

OSLO, Feb 8: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has been nominated for the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, unofficial but reliable sources said Friday, reports AP.

The sources did not say who made the nomination. The Nobel awards committee, which chooses Peace Prize winners, declined to comment.

The committee does not release a list of candidates for the dir 1 million prize, which attracts about 100 nominees a year.

Nominations closed a week ago. Among those reportedly nominated were Shulamith Katznelson of Israel, for promoting understanding in the Middle East, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the Salvation Army and Doctors Without Borders.

Move to resolve territorial, military issues Yeltsin proposes summit with Ukrainian President

MOSCOW, Feb 8: Russian President Boris Yeltsin has proposed a summit with his Ukrainian counterpart, setting a conciliatory tone ahead of a key meeting today of heads of government of the Commonwealth of Independent States, reports Reuter.

Yeltsin told reporters on his return from France on Friday he was ready to meet Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk to resolve vexing territorial and military issues dividing the Commonwealth's two top members and threatening the entire grouping.

He said a summit of the 11 Commonwealth leaders, set for February 14 in Minsk, could be extended one day for a bilateral session with Kravchuk.

Asked if the two republics

could resolve their differences, Yeltsin said: "I think we can, in as much as we are not making any claims on the borders or want to change borders with Ukraine."

"I think when we meet... on February 14 we will discuss these questions. And then I want to suggest to Kravchuk that perhaps we stay for the 15th and discuss our bilateral relations."

The proposal marked the first glimmer of compromise in a rising war of words between the powerful neighbours. It set the stage for Saturday's lesser gathering of heads of government.

That session, at the ostentatious former communist party hotel, was called to address

immediate funding for the troubled armed forces, ease trade barriers among the 11 members and coordinate the use of western import credits.

Also on the agenda is a proposal to restrict windfall profits after the lifting of controls sent prices for most staples skyward.

Tar-Tass news agency said the leading commonwealth members have already expressed support for an accord to remove trade barriers, although it cautioned differences could still surface.

"By signing this agreement, Commonwealth states will take one more step toward creating a single economic space on the territory of the former Soviet Union," Tass said.

Israel to slow down settlements

WASHINGTON, Feb 8: Israel is signalling its willingness to slow down but not stop settlement activity on the West Bank and in Gaza in order to secure US help in absorbing tens of thousands of Jewish refugees, reports AP.

Despite the gesture Friday, there is still disagreement between Israel and the Bush administration over Israel's year-old request for the United States to co-sign dir 10 billion in commercial loans.

Even though Israel has offered to pay any reasonable costs of securing the loans, the administration is using the request as an opportunity to pressure Israel not to add to the more than 100,000 Jews who live on land the Arabs lost in the 1967 war.

The Arabs hope to recapture the land in negotiations that probably will resume here

later in the month.

The Arabs have tried since the Carter administration to get the United States to deliver Israel, an Israeli official said Friday after Israeli Ambassador Zalman Shoval met with Secretary of State James A. Baker.

"I hope this is not the intention of the United States," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The official said Israel would not accept a freeze on Jewish settlements, even though the demand was "perfectly legitimate" from the U.S. standpoint.

"We have principles, we have beliefs, we have our rights," said the official, referring to Israel's assertion that Jews have a right to live anywhere, including the West Bank and Gaza.

And Yet, the official indicated that Shoval signalled concessions to Baker.

One, he said, was acceptance of the principle that any money spent on settlements would be deducted from the 10 billion dollar housing loan Israel is asking the Bush administration to guarantee.

The apparent Israeli concessions were presented as "counter-proposals" to Baker's suggestion last week that Israel promise not to start any new settlements in the territories.

Baker's proposed compromise would permit Israel to complete those already under construction. That could mean up to 20,000 new homes, according to some estimates.

Shoval and Baker will meet again in about two weeks, after Baker completes a trip to the former Soviet Union.

Nine killed in Algerian violence

ALGIERS, Feb 8: Muslim fundamentalists defied hundreds of Algerian troops and riot police late on Friday night and at least nine people were reported killed and 55 wounded in the widespread violence, reports Reuter.

Hospital staff were summoned to Algiers hospitals to help emergency units, Algiers Radio said.

In darkened stronghold areas of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) sporadic shooting could still be heard as the Algerian news agency APS reported calm returning to cities and towns across the North African country.

In Les Ruisseaux, an FIS bastion in the capital, heavily armed police guarded road junctions as others, pistols

Off the Record

Teen-age psycho

OSAKA: A 17-year-old forced her way into a 12th-floor apartment and threw a sleeping baby girl from a balcony to the ground below, police said, reports AP.

The baby died at a hospital about one hour later, officials said.

The baby's 37-year-old mother, Yoko Tokataya, told police she opened the door of her apartment because the teen-age girl was sobbing and kicking a tricycle outside, a police official said.

He said the girl burst into the three-room apartment, picked up the sleeping baby and some of her toys and threw them from the balcony.

He quoted Tokataya as saying she couldn't stop the girl from throwing her daughter because it "happened so suddenly that I couldn't do anything."

The official said the girl had been treated at a mental hospital 2 1/2 years earlier after she was violent at home.

The girl lives near the apartment house, but Tokataya did not know her, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Police declined to identify the girl because she is minor.

Human turns half stone

PORTLAND, Oregon: The right half of 11-year-old Robin Newton's body, along a dividing line that runs straight down her spine, is as hard as stone. The left half is normal, reports AP.

Robin suffers from an extremely rare and mysterious disease in which the muscles become ossified, or turn to bone. But doctors said they have never seen anything quite like Robin's condition, in which normal tissue is symmetrically separated from diseased.

Because one side of her jaw is affected, her teeth are clenched shut. She can move her lips and talk through her teeth, but eating is a problem. Last week, doctors removed several teeth and put a feeding tube in her stomach.

Robin can walk but has trouble getting around. Her right leg is 20 centimeters shorter than her left, and bone spurs have made it painful for her to wear a lift in her shoe. Doctors removed the spurs last week to ease the pain.

Still, Robin is an active youngster who gets up early in the morning and goes to bed after midnight "unless we wear her out first," said her foster mother, Ella Newton. Robin lived in a Mexican orphanage until she was 9.

The disease itself is not fatal, one of her doctor Kent Vincent said, although the sedentary lifestyle it can force on its victims slightly decreases life expectancy.

"But for Robin, since she's completely mobile, I would expect she's have a normal life span," he said. "She's been a real motivated girl. In the long term, her biggest trouble will be that she continues to grow in a lopsided manner."

How old is the Great Sphinx?

CHICAGO: Seismic studies that conclude the Great Sphinx is 2,000 years older than traditionally believed were blasted as "pseudoscience" during a heated debate between experts, reports AP.

Robert Schoch of Boston University told a meeting Friday of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that he believes the Great Sphinx was sculpted between 5000 and 7000 B.C., based on the erosion of the massive limestone carving.

The finding has outraged scholars of Egyptian history who say it disputes generations of archaeological research into the Great Sphinx and the civilization that built it.

Schoch said Friday that his seismic studies clearly show that the Sphinx is much more weathered or eroded than the nearby tomb. If the tomb is dated at 2500 B.C., the Great Sphinx has to be more than 2,000 years older, he said.

The weathering profiles on the Sphinx are indications that something is different, he said. "You see very distinct differences in the seismic profile."

Mark Lehner, a University of Chicago archaeologist who has studied Egyptian history for more than 25 years, heatedly rejected Schoch's findings.

"You don't overthrow Egyptian history based on one phenomenon like a weathering profile," he said. "That is how pseudoscience is done, not real sciences."

The major fact disputing Schoch's conclusion, Lehner said, is the absence of an evidence that a civilization advanced enough to carve the Great Sphinx existed in Egypt from 5000 to 7000 B.C.

"If the Sphinx was built by an earlier culture, where is the evidence of that civilization?" Lehner asked. "Where are the pottery shards? people during that age were hunters and gatherers. They didn't build cities."

Ghali announces major UN staff shake up

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 8: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali on Friday announced a sweeping reorganization of UN headquarters, slashing 14 major positions and departments in an effort to streamline bloated bureaucracy, reports AP.

The changes, affecting 13 of 27 undersecretaries-general, will take effect February 29 and are considered the first phase of a continuing process of reorganization.

"All the changes are aimed at streamlining the Secretariat and making it more efficient and economical," said Francois Ghuliani, Boutros-Ghali's spokesman who announced the changes.

The reorganization's scope is unprecedented. The last attempt at reform was in November 1986, when then Secretary-General Javier Perez

de Cuellar announced a hiring freeze and a 15 per cent cut-back by attrition.

"It's too early to tell, but his appears more than simple window dressing," said John Teasdale, spokesman for the UN Association of the United States, a pro-UN research and lobby group. "It appears to go beyond the kind of tinkering we've seen in the past."

The best-known beneficiary of the changes will be Giandomenico Picco, who negotiated the release of Western hostages in Lebanon. He will be promoted to assistant secretary-general in two new political departments charged with peacemaking and early warning of crises.

But the shakeup will not involve staff layoffs at headquarters where more than 6,000 civil servants are employed. Financial savings to the

fiscally hard-pressed organization are unknown.

Ghuliani said the work of phased-out departments will

be absorbed by others. "I don't know about savings," he said, adding that the aim was not to save money but to improve efficiency. "Apart from the 14 jobs which were abolished, there is no question of losing jobs," he said.

The two new departments to be headed by Picco will cover different geographical areas. One will be headed by Undersecretary-General James Jonah of Sierra Leone and the other by Vladimir Petrovsky, a former Soviet first deputy foreign minister.

Last Friday world leaders at the United Nations urged the secretary-general to renovate UN peacemaking and peace-keeping operations, but did not call specifically for reorganization.

Two of four women undersecretaries-general will be replaced.

List of major posts

The following are among the key staff changes UN

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced on Friday in an effort to streamline bloated bureaucracy.

The changes are effective March 1.

Antoine Blanca of France is being appointed director-general of the United Nations Office at Geneva. He also will head the Center for Human Rights in Geneva. Blanca currently is director-general for development and international economic cooperation, an office that is being phased out.

Margaret Joan Anstee of Britain, replaced as head of the Vienna office, will become special representative for Angola in charge of implementing peace accords for that nation.

Giorgio Giacomelli of Italy is being appointed director-gen-

eral of the United Nations Office in Vienna, in addition to his responsibilities as executive director of the UN International Drug Control Programme.

Ji Chaozhu of China is being appointed undersecretary-general in the newly created department of economic development. He is currently undersecretary-general of the department of technical cooperation for development, a discontinued post. He will be in charge of five eliminated departments which are being consolidated.

Eugenius Wyzner of Poland is being appointed undersecretary-general for public information. He formerly was in charge of conference services which was discontinued, and served as Poland's UN ambassador.

