

Israeli troop withdrawal needs another month'

JERUSALEM, Feb 10: Despite a breakthrough in PLO-Israel talks, Israel's prime minister said Thursday it would take at least a month to finalise an agreement, and there would be no prisoner releases or Israeli troop withdrawal until then, reports AP.

PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres initiated an agreement on Wednesday in Cairo, Egypt, resolving key issues that had held up the Israel-PLO accord, signed on the White House lawn September 13.

Speaking on Israel radio, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said talks would resume in Paris on trade issues and in the Egyptian resort of Tabu on the details of turning over control of the occupied Gaza Strip

and West Bank town of Jericho to Palestinians.

"What was signed in Cairo is a very important step towards completing the agreement," he said. "I predict that at least another month will be necessary in order to finish the details of the agreement to a full accord."

Arafat saw Wednesday's pact as a step toward the fulfilment of his dreams for a Palestinian state.

"We can say that Palestine — and the name of Palestine — has returned to the map of the Middle East," he said.

Rabin's office said Rabin and Arafat would meet after agreement was reached on all issues. The negotiations were expected to be a lot less difficult than the two-month wrangle over security questions.



PLO chairman Yasser Arafat (L) shakes hand with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (R) as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (C) looks on February 9 in Cairo after they signed a security agreement paving the way for the launch of Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho. — AFP photo

NAM to press UN to end war in Bosnia

JAKARTA, Feb 10: The non-aligned movement will exert pressure on the United Nations and European countries to end the civil war in Bosnia, Indonesia, chairman of the group, said today, reports Reuter.

"What we need to continue to fight for the UN and neighbouring countries of former Yugoslavia to actually carry out their responsibilities," Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said.

Alatas was speaking to reporters after meeting president Suharto and officials from other movement countries attending a meeting in Jakarta to discuss unrelated issues.

"The UN decisions which have been agreed should be really implemented and aggression and atrocity ended," Alatas said.

Riots claim three

Indefinite curfew imposed in Kanpur

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: An indefinite curfew was imposed Thursday in a northern town after Hindu mobs killed three people, at least two of them Muslims, in the worst outbreak of religious violence in India in months, reports AP.

The Hindus went on the rampage Wednesday in the industrial town of Kanpur hours after unidentified assailants killed a Hindu politician, Kala Bachcha, in a bomb attack, police said.

Age old Hindu-Muslim tensions erupted into the biggest communal conflagration in four decades when Hindu fanatics destroyed an ancient mosque on December 6, 1992, setting

off two months of nationwide riots that killed 2,000 people. The country had remained largely peaceful since then.

Bachcha, a member of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, is believed to have led attacks on several Muslim homes during the previous riots that also engulfed Kanpur.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bomb attack but Muslim who wanted to take revenge are suspected, said a local journalist, Pravin Srivastava.

Kanpur, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, is 160 kilometers (100 miles) from the site of the demolished Babri mosque.

BRIEFLY

Demand for Volkstaat rejected:

There will never be a Volkstaat (folk state) in South Africa, African National Congress (ANC) President Nelson Mandela said on Wednesday, according to a South African press association report. Xinhua says from Johannesburg.

Addressing the annual congress of the national union of mineworkers in Pretoria, Mandela said his organisation rejected the demand for a Volkstaat by rightwingers, and would never grant it.

"But we are prepared to sit down and discuss with the Afrikaner Volksfront how we can accommodate their fears."

Mandela postpones Israel visit:

Nelson Mandela, president of South Africa's African National Congress, postponed a visit to Israel until after the Jewish state signs an agreement with the PLO on troop withdrawal from the occupied lands, Xinhua reports from Jerusalem.

Mandela was scheduled to visit the Jewish state by the end of February, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Gadi Baltiansky, said Wednesday.

Mandela will probably come in March, he said, adding the head of the mainstream black movement in South Africa will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and other Israeli leaders.

3 killed in Congo violence:

Three people were killed and one seriously wounded in Brazzaville late Wednesday when gunmen fire on a bus, hospital sources said, AFP reports from Brazzaville.

The attack, by unidentified men, took place in Brazzaville's southern Baongo suburb, scene of some of the most violent clashes in the Congo's recent confrontation between government and opposition parties.

Wednesday's incident follows a week-long lull in fighting after the January 30 ceasefire between President Pascal Lissouba's supporters and those of opposition leader Bernard Kolelas.

US recognises Macedonia:

The United States Wednesday formally recognised the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and said it would establish full diplomatic relations with the Balkan state once it pledges to try to resolve differences with Greece, Reuter reports from Washington.

"This move is in recognition of the democratic expression of the citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to establish a sovereign and independent state based on democratic principles," the White House said in a statement announcing the decision.

The statement said that President Clinton had sent a letter to President Kiro Gligorov conveying the decision, which it said would "help promote stability in the region."

Road mishaps claim 19 Thais :

Nineteen workers on their way home for Lunar New Year holidays were killed and 15 injured in two separate traffic accidents in northern Thailand, police said yesterday, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Eleven people were killed and eight injured when two trucks collided on Wednesday in Kalasin province, 510 KM (330 miles) northeast of Bangkok.

All the victims worked at a southern Thailand rubber factory and were travelling home for the holidays, police said.

Serb leader threatens to boycott peace talks

GENEVA, Feb 10: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, furious at the threat of NATO airstrikes on Thursday threatened to quit the Bosnian peace talks, reports AP.

Karadzic demanded a full international investigation of the massacre last week in Sarajevo's market place, accusing Muslim-led forces of carrying out the atrocity in order to blame it on the Serbs.

"We don't have any reason to go on with the conference until we get an international investigatory body to investigate and resolve the Sarajevo massacre," Karadzic said.

Karadzic was clearly furious as he arrived for talks with international mediators, Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic and Bosnian Croat representative Miroslav Milosevic.

Bosnia's Silajdzic, who appeared more upbeat than for months, said the NATO 10-day ultimatum to the Serbs to withdraw their heavy artillery from around Sarajevo was "a

step in the right direction, but let's see if NATO will live up to its promise."

NATO also called on Bosnia's Muslim-led government to place its heavy weapons under UN control and refrain from attacks launched from Sarajevo.

Karadzic earlier had brushed off the NATO threat. "We have nothing to do with NATO," he said as he left his luxury hotel.

Silajdzic said the move by the Western military alliance "brings back the balance of power," between the out-gunned government and the Serbs.

"The legal government of Bosnia can not get arms because of the international embargo. The Belgrade regime, the aggressor side, had got all the weapons they wanted," he said.

"So there was this imbalance of power which made peace impossible. Now there is the balance of power so peace

is possible," he added.

Lord Owen, European Union envoy who is mediating Geneva-based peace talks, welcomed NATO's announcement.

But he said it should be seen as part of an overall effort to negotiate a settlement and that Serbs and the Muslim-led Bosnian government were already agreed to a pullback of heavy weaponry from the capital.

"I believe that's got a pretty good chance of being implemented," Owen said.

UN envoy Thorvald Stoltenberg, the other chief mediator, said the NATO decision was "very significant and a good sign for the negotiations."

The combination of NATO, UN and European Union efforts "greatly reduced" the chance that air strikes will actually have to be deployed, Owen said. The joint approach "hopefully will mean that the horror of Sarajevo will be something that we will put behind us."

Zhirinovsky predicts bleak future for Czech Republic

PRAGUE, Feb 10: Outspoken Russian ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky said on Wednesday Czechs would soon be forced to clean the boots of German officers — a message he planned to bring to Prague, reports Reuter.

The Czech Republic was doomed, he said in an interview with the daily newspaper Lidove Noviny, referring to Nazi Germany's seizure of Czechoslovakia in a prelude to World War II.

A year ago once-communist Czechoslovakia split into the two independent states of the Czech republic and Slovakia.

Zhirinovsky, added that President Vaclav Havel would

be condemned by the entire Czech nation in 10 years' time just as Russians now condemn former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Zhirinovsky predicted a bleak future for the Czech Republic, which is widely seen as the shining star of economic transformation in eastern Europe and has won praise from the international financial community.

"Your country is perishing," Zhirinovsky insisted.

"I assure you that there won't be any Moravia or Sudetenland (bordering on Germany) within 10 years. Young Czechs will be forced to speak German, go to German

churches and clean the boots of German officers."

Zhirinovsky, who commentators say will be a serious rival to Boris Yeltsin in Russia's presidential elections in 1996, did not spell out when he thought the Czech Republic was doomed and Germany poised to take it over. The former Czechoslovakia was swallowed by Germany in land-grabbing campaigns before World War II but regained independence after the war.

Zhirinovsky has been invited to the Czech Republic by the republican party, the fourth strongest of the country's parties, which shares many of his far-right views.

Mahathir thinks NATO will not strike on Serbs

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 10: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, a vocal supporter of Bosnia's Muslims, said Thursday he thinks the West will back down from its threats to make air strikes on Bosnian Serbs, reports AP.

Mahathir predicted that the United States and its NATO allies will wait until the end of their 10-day ultimatum to the Serbs to remove artillery from around Sarajevo and then come up with a reason why strikes were not necessary.

He said "everybody knows" that "the Americans and NATO... will not carry out the air strikes on the Serbs."

"Eventually the Serbs will continue with ethnic cleansing," said Mahathir, who did not give reasons for his views.

Mahathir has called for air strikes on the Serbs and a lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia-Herzegovina so that Bosnian Muslims could get arms to fight.

Malaysia, a largely Muslim nation of 18 million, has been a leading critic of the way Europe and the United Nations have reacted to the Bosnian conflict.

Russia, Ukraine reach agreement on N-issues

KIEV, Feb 10: Russia and Ukraine reached preliminary agreement Wednesday on the destruction of the Ukraine's nuclear weapons, though the actual content of the agreement was not disclosed, reports AP.

Talks had centred on compensation that Ukraine is seeking for the nuclear play load contained in 176 long-range missiles slated for dismantling under a US-Russia-Ukraine accord signed January 14.

A statement from the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said the agreement had been reached on a package of measures to apply the January 14 understanding

6000 students protest against Koirala

KATHMANDU, Feb 10: More than 6,000 students and others protested Wednesday against Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, accusing him of deception in the by-election loss of a potential rival, reports AP.

The protestors surrounded Koirala's office and shouted criticisms that he was to blame for Monday's defeat of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, President of Koirala's ruling Nepali Congress Party.

There was no violence but riot police were called out to prevent the students from moving too close to the central secretariat housing the prime minister's office.

The students finally calmed down after Bhattarai called on them, a radio broadcast, to restrain themselves until a Nepali congress meeting he has called for next Wednesday to discuss the country's political situation.

Off the Record



This photo released by Miramax Films shows New Zealander director Jane Campion, who was nominated for best director for the 66th Academy Awards for her movie "The Piano." Campion became only the second woman to be nominated for best director in the history of the Academy Awards. — AFP photo

List of Oscar nominees

BEVERLY HILLS, California: The following is a list of the Oscar nominees announced Wednesday, reports AP.

Picture: "The Fugitive," "In The Name Of The Father," "The Piano," "The Remains Of The Day" and "Schindler's List."

Actor: Daniel Day-Lewis in "In The Name Of The Father," Laurence Fishburne in "What's Love Got To Do With It," Tom Hanks in "Philadelphia," Anthony Hopkins in "The Remains Of The Day" and Liam Neeson in "Schindler's List."

Actress: Angela Bassett in "What's Love Got To Do With It," Stockard Channing in "Six Degrees Of Separation," Holly Hunter in "The Piano," Emma Thompson in "The Remains Of The Day" and Debra Winger in "Shadowlands."

Director: Jim Sheridan for "In The Name Of The Father," Jane Campion for "The Piano," James Ivory for "The Remains Of The Day," Steven Spielberg for "Schindler's List" and Robert Altman for "Shortcuts."

Murdoch discourages his children to watch MTV

NEW DELHI: The media magnate Rupert Murdoch discourages his children from watching Music TV, reports PTI. "This was stated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president L K Advani, after his 45-minute meeting with Murdoch at the party office here Wednesday evening.

Advani said he had specifically pointed out to Murdoch the 'serious consequences' specially of MTV channel of Star TV on Indian viewers to which Murdoch said that he did not allow his children to watch MTV.

Airplane unexpectedly injures bicycle-riders

MANILA: Two bicycle-riders in the Philippine province of Bulacan were slightly injured when they were hit by a light airplane which unexpectedly landed near them, a newspaper reported here Thursday, reports AP.

The plane, described in the Manila Standard newspaper, as a light experimental two-seater, was heading for an airport in Bulacan province, just outside Manila on Tuesday when it developed engine trouble, forcing it to land near an irrigation canal.

Two brothers, aged 22 and 12, who were biking near the canal were hit by a wing of the landing plane and had to be treated at a nearby private clinic. The pilot of the plane was unhurt, the daily added.

Baby sitter murders 3-month-old boy

AUSTIN, Texas: A baby sitter was charged Wednesday with murdering a 3-month-old boy who had been missing for 2 1/2 weeks. She drew a map for authorities leading them to the child's grave, reports AP.

Cathy Lynn Henderson, 37, said the baby, Brandon Baugh, died accidentally from a fall while in her care January 21 at her home near Plugerville, an Austin suburb.

"I was holding him with only one hand. He pushed out of my arm and flipped over. Brandon landed on his head," said a statement released by her lawyers Tuesday.

She said she tried to revive him for an hour, then panicked, buried him and fled to Missouri.

China protests Taiwan leader's visit to Manila

MANILA, Feb 10: China on Thursday protested the visit of Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui and his meeting with President Fidel Ramos and other Filipino officials, reports AP.

This is a serious incident which has violated the "One China" policy observed by the Philippine government," a statement by the Chinese Embassy said.

The statement said the embassy was instructed to lodge the protest.

Ramos met Lee Wednesday during a brief stopover by the Taiwanese leader at the former US Subic Bay naval base northwest of Manila.

Subic is being converted into a free port where Taiwanese businessmen have promised to invest.

In a statement after his meeting with Lee, Ramos said it was brief, unofficial and dealt mainly on economic issues. He

added it was not a violation of the "one-China policy," which considers Taiwan as a part of China.

"The Philippine government values highly the Philippines' relations with the People's Republic of China and will take care to ensure that those relations continue to be preserved and strengthened," Ramos said.

The Chinese embassy said: "The incident has greatly hurt the feelings of the Chinese people and sabotaged the friendly relations between China and the Philippines."

China has denounced the trip and notified several Southeast Asian nations that their relations with Beijing will suffer if their officials met with Lee.

Lee's visit stop at Subic was part of an unofficial tour of Southeast Asia. After the meeting with Ramos, Lee flew to Bali, Indonesia, officials said.



Thousands of protestors surround Nepalese Prime Minister Koirala's office in Kathmandu on February 9 and shout criticisms that he was to blame for Monday's defeat of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, President of Koirala's ruling Nepali Congress Party. — AFP photo

Shevardnadze urges UN to send peacekeepers to Abkhazia

LONDON, Feb 10: Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze appealed to the United Nations on Wednesday to send peacekeeping forces to the breakaway Abkhazia region, reports Reuter.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, read out on Georgian radio, Shevardnadze said several thousand Georgians had been forced to flee the Gali area of Southern Abkhazia following recent attacks by what he called Abkhaz separatists.

"The hallmark of Abkhaz separatists can be easily recognised in the latest disaster," Shevardnadze said.

Special envoy defends controversial UN operation in Somalia

MOGADISHU, Feb 10: Outgoing United Nations special envoy Jonathan Howe has defended the controversial UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) on Wednesday and says the world body can still restore peace in the broken country, reports AP.

Howe, who expects to leave Somalia at the end of February after 11 months as envoy, said Wednesday it would take time for the United Nations to define its role as a global peacekeeper.

A retired US rear admiral, Howe stressed that the cut in UN forces from more than 25,000 to a maximum of 22,000 would not cripple the world body in Somalia.

But he said the withdrawal

of US forces by March 31 would force a new policy of reconciliation with warlord Mohamed Farah Aideded, the man the UN hunted for four months, culminating in a vicious firefight in October that killed 18 US servicemen.

Their deaths forced US President Bill Clinton to order the Americans home, depriving UNOSOM of its mainstay. Other Western countries also decided to withdraw their troops.

Howe defended the abortive manhunt, saying Aideded's capture was never his priority. It was simply a short cut to defuse the tension in Mogadishu.

Howe was criticised for the killings of Somali civilians dur-

ing UN military strikes against Aideded, and for posting wild west-style wanted posters offering a 25,000-dollar reward for general Aideded's capture.

Aideded's supporters responded by offering rewards for the man they called "Animal Howe."

"At the time we issued the warrant I believed that Aideded should have been brought into the legal system," Howe said.

Howe became personally identified with the hunt for Aideded, which until it was called off overshadowed the UN mission in Somalia that initially had been organised to end a famine that killed an estimated 300,000 people.

"I to this day believe that the manhunt for Aideded was

not as big an event as the international media portrayed it to be," Howe said.

"But even while believing he should have been apprehended, our priority was still the peaceful reconciliation of Somalia's warring factions — and that's called nation building," he added.

"We've learned lessons by the hundreds in terms of working with contingent forces from 28 different nations — there are a lot of problems when each nation has to repeatedly refer back to its government for direction," he told AP.

The former UN military chief in Somalia, Lieutenant General Cevik Bir of Turkey said he had been unable to

command some forces because they referred his orders to their national governments before obeying.

Howe criticised the UN over staffing and planning. "The United Nations is overwhelmed with the numbers of missions and world problems that it's charged with solving, but certainly we could have been better staffed and policy could have been better planned."

Howe said tensions had been reduced in Mogadishu in the past four months and said things should now move forward.

"We're doing great things here that have never been done before and with national reconciliation of past warring

factions I think that we can expect to see a transitional national council in place very soon," he said, referring to the interim government that the factions agreed to form under UN-brokered peace accords.

But critics of Howe's policy say the TNC is a major stumbling block.

"If national reconciliation is not worked out beforehand, if all factions are not happy with the selection of council members, then there will be trouble ahead," a senior UN official warned.

Howe will be temporarily replaced by Lansana Kouyate, currently deputy special envoy. Kouyate has promised a "lighter touch" and more emphasis on political reconciliation.

US not qualified to be judge of human rights: DPRK

PYONGYANG Feb 10: A Foreign Ministry spokesman of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) said yesterday that the United States was not qualified to consider itself as a "judge of human rights" or to interfere with other countries' affairs, reports Xinhua.

He said the United States, where "the condition of human rights is serious," should try to manage its own problems better.

"More than 9 million people are unemployed in the United States, 35 million living below the poverty line and 1.4 million in prison," he pointed out.