

Peace accord for Chechnya Chernomyrdin cautiously welcomes Lebed's deal

MOSCOW, Sept 2: Kremlin envoy Alexander Lebed, who claims to have ended the war in Chechnya, must persuade the Russian governments that the deal he reached with Chechen separatists achieved peace with honour, reports Reuters.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin gave a cautious welcome to the accord but said he would go over the final document with Lebed only today. There was no sign that Lebed would have an early meeting with President Boris Yeltsin, whom aides say is still resting.

"I haven't yet seen the final document... but I am convinced that we are on the right path," Chernomyrdin said. "We must

have courage, endurance and patience. We should continue moving ahead but Russia's interests should not be infringed."

He had said last week that Yeltsin had approved Lebed's proposals. But amendments were made during the negotiations with rebel chief of staff Aslan Maskhadov and Chernomyrdin said he needed to discuss the accord again with Lebed.

The deal defers a final decision on Chechen claims for independence for five years and commits Moscow to pulling out the troops sent to crush a bid for secession in December 1994.

Yeltsin too wants an account, a spokesman said.

Iraqi action against Kurdish minority Clinton urges world leaders to discuss 'course of action'

LITTLE ROCK, Ark, Sept 2: President Bill Clinton called several world leaders on Sunday to discuss a "course of action" in response to Iraqi military action against the Kurdish minority in northern Iraq, the White House said, reports Reuters.

With Clinton already having put US force in the region on high alert in response to the Iraqi moves, officials insisted that no options were being ruled in or out.

Two US envoys, joint chiefs of staff chairman General John Shalikashvili and assistant secretary of state John Peltre, were in Saudi Arabia for diplomatic discussions, officials said.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry said Clinton spending the weekend in his home state, called less than a half dozen world leaders "who share our concern about Iraqi military activity in northern Iraq" and the outcome was "strong agreement that we should work together to fashion

the appropriate response."

The United States government is consulting closely with those who share our concerns about Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's behaviour. We are sharing with them ideas on what course of action the United States government might pursue to make it clear that there are consequences for behaviour by Saddam Hussein that have no justification, he said.

McCurry would not say what plans were being discussed but insisted that no options were being ruled in or out.

The outcome of these calls was strong agreement that we should work together to fashion the appropriate response," he said.

He would not give specifics on the calls, but other officials said Clinton talked to British Prime Minister John Major and was likely to speak with French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl as well as a number of Arab leaders, including Saudi Arabia's King Fahd.

Govt-MNLF sign peace accord

MANILA, Sept 2: Muslim rebels and the Philippine government signed a peace agreement Monday formally ending the country's worst insurgency, which killed more than 120,000 people in 26 years, reports AP.

The rebels agreed in the pact to accept increased autonomy in Muslim areas in the southern Philippines, instead of their original demand for a separate Muslim state.

More than 1,500 government and rebel officials — some in colourful traditional dress — and representatives of Muslim nations watched at the presidential palace as rebel leader Nur Misuari and chief government negotiator Manuel Yan signed the agreement, finalized just last week in Jakarta.

This is a great moment for all of the countries of Southeast Asia," said Indonesian foreign

Minister Ali Alatas, who hosted three years of peace talks.

It was the first time that Misuari has entered the presidential palace.

This could mean the end of scourge and darkness for our people," said Misuari, a quiet-spoken, bearded former university professor who has exchanged battle fatigues for a suit and is running as a government-party candidate in a local election next week.

Outside the palace, several thousand people released balloons and honked horns to welcome the agreement.

The pact is a major achievement for President Fidel Ramos, who has sought since taking office four years ago to settle three separate insurgencies — by Muslim rebels, Communists and right-wing soldiers — that have desta-

billed the nation and impaired its economy.

Although two smaller Muslim rebel groups still reject the peace pact, the acceptance by Misuari's Moro National Liberation Front means that Ramos administration has now largely settled two of the three rebellions.

Talks with divided Communist rebels still have not succeeded, but military officers who led a series of coup attempts against Ramos predecessor, Corazon Aquino, have been granted amnesty and some have won election as senators.

But Ramos warned that the government must now focus on eliminating poverty and injustice in the south, one of the Philippines poorest regions.

The root causes of conflict will not go away just because we have signed this agreement," he

To set up Arafat-Netanyahu summit Israeli, Palestinian officials meet secretly

JERUSALEM, Sept 2: Israeli and Palestinian officials have been meeting secretly to set up a summit between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, top aides to both leaders say, reports AP.

Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Ilan confirmed Sunday that meetings between Dore Gold, a top Netanyahu aide, and Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, were taking place.

Israel's Channel Two Television said a meeting between Netanyahu and Arafat could occur within days, Palestinian sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the leaders could meet as soon as Monday.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met until dawn Sunday, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said in Alexandria, Egypt. He said he believed significant progress could come soon.

Palestinians have been bitter that Netanyahu has not met with Arafat since taking office in June.

Netanyahu — who once said he would never meet the PLO leader — said Sunday that he would talk with Arafat when the situation warranted such a meeting.

Any meeting is dependent on specific developments which I hope are in the making," he said on Israel Television. "This means that when the developments happen, there will be a meeting. There are contacts."



Philippine President Fidel Ramos (C) applauds as Nur Misuari (R) chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and government chief negotiator Manuel Yan (L) shakes hands after exchanging documents following the signing of the historic peace accord in Malacanang Palace on Monday ending a 24-year-old Muslim rebellion in the south of the county. — AFP/UNB photo

Dole blasts Clinton's ME policy

WASHINGTON, Sept 2: Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole on Sunday assailed President Bill Clinton's Middle East policy, faulting weak leadership on Iraq, meddling in Israel and "moral confusion" about state sponsored terrorism, reports Reuters.

In a pair of Washington speeches before the US National Guard Association and the Jewish service group, B'Nai Brith, Dole accused Clinton of a "failure of American leadership" in confronting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"Saddam Hussein has been testing American leadership and found it lacking," Dole said of Iraqi attacks this weekend in Kurdish areas of northern Iraq.

He faulted Clinton for relegating Iraqi affairs to "low level" officials and said it was no surprise that Saddam Hussein has "ignored those barely audible" US warnings.

"We don't need to analyse Saddam's actions, we need to condemn Saddam's actions and do it very strongly," said Dole.

After missiles Taiwan, China try poetry

TAIPEI, Taiwan, Sept 2: After the missiles and angry words, China and Taiwan are trying poetry, reports AP.

At a meeting with a Taiwanese politician last week, Chinese President Jiang Zemin reportedly delved into ancient love sonnets to woo China's arch-rival.

According to Taiwan's China Times newspaper, Jiang came up with: "May we all be around for a long while, so that thousands of miles apart we can still watch the moon together."

It was in sharp contrast to the mood just five months ago, when China was test-firing missiles near Taiwan and vilifying its president as a splitter of the Chinese motherland.

China regards Taiwan, seat of the Nationalists who fled the Communist takeover in 1949, as a secessionist province to be recovered by force if necessary.

But Jiang's honeyed verses have strengthened a belief among Taiwanese that China has given up trying to intimidate Taiwan into submission, and is instead trying to win it over gently.

Trip to Libya US to take action against Farrakhan

WASHINGTON, Sept 2: US authorities will take action against Nation Of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan over his trip to Libya, White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta said Sunday, reports AP.

"Clearly enforcement action will be taken against him," Panetta said in an interview with NBC. But he declined to specify what measures Farrakhan faced for violating a ban on travel to Libya for the second time.

The black militant traveled to Tripoli, where he received a human rights award Friday. But the US Treasury Department has refused his request to be allowed to accept the 250,000 dollars that come with the award, and a further one billion dollars he says Gaddafi has promised to give him.

"We've made very clear that he is not to accept these funds under the law," said Panetta.

"I have to tell you that we treat him like anybody else who accepts funds from a terrorist nation. If he accepts those funds, then he'll be prosecuted," said Panetta.

DPRK links peace talks to US military withdrawal from ROK

SEOUL, South Korea, Sept 2: North Korea suggested Monday it would enter proposed Korean peace talks if Washington agrees to discuss an immediate withdrawal of its 37,000 troops from South Korea, reports AP.

South Korean officials described the suggestion as unacceptable.

The proposal is something we can hardly accept, and that might be their typical brinkmanship to get more concessions," a Unification Ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In April, President Clinton and South Korea's President Kim Young-sam suggested that the Koreans discuss a peace treaty to replace the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War. Washington offered to mediate the talks, inviting Beijing to play the same role.

Calling the U.S. military presence in South Korea a "stumbling block to peace and unification" of the Korean peninsula, North Korea said its withdrawal must be on the agenda of the proposed four-way talks.

"If the U.S. is not interested in discussing an immediate withdrawal of the U.S. troops from South Korea at the talks, such talks are undesirable," an unidentified North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman said in a report carried by Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency.

South Korea is adamantly against the pullout of U.S. troops stationed in its territory under a mutual defence treaty. The United States fought on South Korea's side in the Korean War.

Last month, thousands of students rallied in Seoul, demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops to facilitate Korean unification. The government crushed the protest with riot police and arrested 5,000 of the demonstrators.

South Korea believes that the 37,000 American troops and their sophisticated weaponry deter possible military provocations by North Korea, with which it still is technically at war.

North Korea claims that the end of the Cold War no longer justifies the U.S. military presence, which it says heightens tension on the peninsula.

Both Koreas want to replace the current armistice with a peace treaty. But they differ widely on how to arrange a new peace mechanism.

North Korea favors two-way talks with Washington, snubbing South Korea, which it regards as a U.S. puppet. The United States insists that peace should be discussed between the two Koreas.

The Koreas have remained sworn enemies ever since the peninsula was divided at the end of World War II into the communist North and the pro-Western South.



Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (L) and US Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan (R) listen to a doctor during the opening ceremony of a new hospital in Tripoli on Sunday. Farrakhan is in Libya to attend the festivities of the 27th anniversary of the Libyan revolution in Tripoli. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Mother Teresa improving: Doctors treating Mother Teresa for a chest infection said Monday there is no cause for worry and that the Roman Catholic nun is progressing well. AP reports from Calcutta.

X-rays taken Sunday evening showed no fresh infection in her lung, said Woodlands Nursing Home medical director AK Sen. Pictures taken in the morning with a portable machine had turned out to be dense and doctors wanted another set of tests down, he said in a telephone interview.

Romanian held with explosives in US: A Romanian immigrant carrying explosives and weapons in his luggage was arrested as he prepared to board a flight at Tampa International Airport, authorities said, AP reports from Tampa.

The FBI refused to speculate why Roman Regman, 21, of Brooksville was carrying the materials in his carry-on luggage while trying to pass through a security checkpoint Saturday. "That's of course going to be one of the focuses of the investigation — to determine what the men's motive was," FBI spokesman Brian Kenseal said Sunday.

3 climbers missing in Pakistan: Three climbers, two Britons and a New Zealander, are missing on a mountain in Pakistan, the British foreign office said on Sunday, Reuters reports from London.

A spokesman said the two Britons were Stephen Thornley and Andrew Boas, but did not give their ages. He said a family member had asked his office and the British High Commission in Islamabad to investigate. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported the other climber was New Zealander Chris Hoare and said the three were part of a team trying to climb Disteqhil Sar, one of the world's highest mountains.

Blast kills 1 in Cambodia: One person was killed and four wounded early yesterday morning when a bomb exploded in a house just 500 metres (yards) from a stage that co-premier Hun Sen was scheduled to give a speech from later in the day, police said, AFP reports from Mongkol Borei.

However, they said that the bomb was not intended to kill or harm Hun Sen and was instead the work of a jealous suitor involved in a love triangle that included a senior police official.

Pro-Yeltsin candidate wins polls: President Boris Yeltsin's candidate easily won election as governor of the Saratov region in the first of dozens of such provincial elections, officials said Monday, AP reports from Saratov, Russia.

Dmitry Ayatskov won about 81 per cent of the votes in Sunday's election with a voter turnout of 60 per cent, according to voting returns. Ayatskov had been serving as governor after being appointed by Yeltsin.

Bus mishap claims 10 in Philippines: Ten people were killed when a bus crashed onto a parked dump truck in the southern Philippines town of Talisayan on Sunday, police said, AFP reports from Iligan, Philippines.

The bus swerved onto the sidewalk to avoid smashing head-on with another bus, police told reporters.

Colombian drug lord surrenders: Helmer "El Pacho," Herrera the last Cali cartel drug kingpin still at large, surrendered to police in southwestern Colombia on Sunday in a gesture he described as a gift to the nation, Reuters reports from Bogota.

A national police spokesman said Herrera a master of disguise and the target of a nationwide manhunt for more than a year, surrendered shortly after noon (1700 GMT) at a prearranged meeting place outside the southwestern city of Cali,

in the street," said Khalil Shaikaki, a Palestinian intellectual. "He has to clean up his act."

Shaikaki said Arafat's calls for mass protest were aimed at redirecting frustration away from himself as well as at the Israeli government for foot-dragging on the peace process.

Just 15,000 worshippers — less than the regular turnout — came to pray Friday at the Al Aqsa mosque, and only about 100 showed up Sunday for Mass at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Palestinian leaders first blamed beled-up Israeli security, then claimed they had intentionally kept the protests small to avoid escalating tensions with Israel.

Maya Omari, a 28-year-old worker in a Ramallah law of-

politicians who have spoken out against Arafat's government have themselves wound up in jail.

"People thought that when the Palestinian Authority came, the situation would be better — that the Authority was going to help them, the Authority was going to stand by them, the Authority was going to do good things for them," said Bassem Eid, a Palestinian human rights activist. "But today, the Authority is oppressing these people — arresting them, torturing them, suppressing their freedom of speech."

Human rights activists Eyyad Sarraj has been jailed twice this year after accusing Palestinian security forces of making arbitrary arrests and torturing prisoners. Sarraj said he was beaten by interrogators.

In May, a Palestinian photographer for Agence France Presse was jailed and beaten after taking a picture — of two boys washing a donkey — that police said insulted the Palestinian government.

Two weeks ago, Palestinian police raided a Ramallah bookstore and seized the books of Edward Said, a prominent Palestinian critic of Arafat and a Columbia University professor.

"Today people are hopeless," said Eid, who worked for six years documenting Israeli human rights violations against Palestinians before quitting to focus on abuses by Arafat's government.

In addition, economic conditions are growing more desperate in Gaza and the West Bank, where Israeli military experts estimate the standard of living has declined 30 per cent since self-rule began.

Stories of government corruption are rampant, and Arafat is pouring money into his nine security forces instead of the infrastructure, Eid said.

"I don't think the Palestinian people need nine security forces," he said. "What about education? What about health?"

Even with self-rule, Israeli policies still intrude into daily life — border closures that keep Palestinians from entering Israel to work, petty humiliations at army checkpoints, curfews on Palestinian towns and villages.

"The Palestinian people today are between the Israeli hammer and the Palestinian rack," Eid said. "Once they suffered only from the Israelis, now they are suffering from both."

at least eight prisoners have died in Palestinian custody and reports of torture are growing. Hundreds of supporters of the militant Islamic group Hamas have been jailed for months without charge, and human rights workers, journalists, and

to Jerusalem's holy sites in protest, reports AP.

But just a handful of regular worshippers came to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Sunday, and an earlier Muslim prayer protest also yielded a disappointing turnout.

The lackluster support indicates the challenge Arafat faces in trying to harness his people's anger into a unified resistance. Disillusioned by their crumbling economy and their corruption and human rights abuses of Arafat's government, Palestinians appear unwilling to take to the streets for him.

"I'm afraid it might just be a little too late for Arafat to try to get on the good side of the man

Arafat urges Palestinians to flood into Jerusalem's holy sites

JERUSALEM, Sept 2: Furious over his treatment by Israel's new hard-line government, Yasser Arafat issued a call to Palestinians to flood into Jerusalem's holy sites in protest, reports AP.

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Vajpayee suggests in TVI interview Freeze Kashmir issue for ten years

SRINAGAR, Sept 2: The former Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee has suggested for "freezing" the Kashmir issue for ten years and developing Indo-Pakistan relations in trade and other fields during the period, reports PTI.

In an interview to the Srinagar-based correspondent of Television International (TVI), Vajpayee said "such an arrangement has been done to some extent with Pakistan. This can be done with Pakistan too."

When the reporter asked whether the suggestion of putting Kashmir dispute in cold storage was the official stand of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Vajpayee said, "If Pakistan agrees to the proposal, I can prevail upon my party on the matter."

The former Prime Minister said "Pakistan should give up its obsession with Kashmir. Our Pakistani friends should realize that India would never accept their claim on Kashmir and that too on the basis of religion."

India was once divided on the basis of religion," he said, adding, "no further division could be accepted."

He said there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan. "India can never accept the logic that Kashmir should go to Pakistan because Kashmir is a Muslim-majority region. Then what about Jammu and Ladakh?" he asked.

Vajpayee said it was time Pakistan started a new chapter on bilateral ties with India. "But, I doubt the leaders in Pakistan would listen to the changing time."

He said Pakistan had been trying to grab Kashmir through use of force. "Now a proxy war is on. That has also failed. They should give up the obsession with Kashmir and realise that Kashmir has become a part of Indian union, after completing all legal formalities."

He observed that the politics of gun has been rejected by Kashmiris.

Off the Record



A model presents a jacket made out of recycled tyres by Swiss designer Long Ly-Xuoung during the Creative Show at the IGEDO fashion fair in Dusseldorf, Germany, on Sunday. From 1 to 3 September 1293 exhibitors from 36 countries present their Spring-Summer 1997 collections here. — AFP/UNB photo

Lucky infant

BANGKOK: The baby whose birth brings Thailand's population to the 60 million mark will be awarded about 150,000 baht (6,000 dollar) worth of gold, reported the Bangkok Post Saturday, reports AP.

But late-starting contestants will be at a distinct disadvantage in the contest, announced Friday by the health ministry. The blessed event is projected to happen in a month's time.

Deputy health minister Sora-at Klinprathum announced that the prize will be awarded to the first child born after 11 pm on November 2.

Contestants delivered by Caesarean section are not eligible. The lucky infant can expect to be featured on TV and billboards across the country, reported the Post.

Sporting couples who did not get a jump on preparing their entry are not completely shut out. There will also be prizes for people who correctly guess the time and place of the lucky birth.

The contest is meant to publicize family planning. Sora-at said that if Thailand had not implemented a family planning campaign 25 years ago, its population would now be 80 million people, straining the state's resources. The campaign cut the population growth rate from 3 per cent annually to 1.1 per cent, he was quoted as saying.

Church describes contraceptives as "pornography"

NAIROBI: The Roman Catholic church in Kenya set fire to sex education books, AIDS awareness pamphlets and condoms, describing them as "pornography," to demonstrate its opposition to artificial birth control, local newspapers reported Sunday, says AFP.

The archbishop of Nairobi Cardinal Maurice Otunga led a congregation of young faithful in torching the books and condoms at the city's Uhuru Park on Saturday.

A similar ceremony to denounce contraception and sex education literature was held jointly by the Roman Catholic church and the Muslim scholars in Nairobi in August last year.

The Roman Catholic church opposes the use of contraceptives, saying they encouraged sexual promiscuity and immorality.