

International

Hamas calls for clashes with Israeli troops

JERUSALEM, Oct 4: Hours after Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington, the Islamic militant Hamas movement urged its followers to clash with Israeli soldiers and civilians, reports AP.

Netanyahu and Arafat agreed to start talks to resolve the obstacles preventing implementation of the autonomy accord on Sunday.

Hamas distributed a leaflet in Jerusalem telling followers to confront Israeli soldiers following Friday prayers to say "no to the treaty to the unfruitful negotiations abyss."

"Our people are determined to face the Zionist masses around the cities with the stones of the children, the chests of the youth and the calls of the mothers," said the leaflet.

The call for violence came after bloody battles last week killed 15 Israelis, 58 Palestinians and three Egyptians and jeopardized Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Hamas is Arafat's most virulent political opponent and was held responsible for most of the suicide attacks that killed dozens of Israelis earlier this year.

The leaflet called on Arafat to instruct his forces "not to obstruct the national and Islamic forces that are determined to continue the military and popular resistance."

Israel TV said that the smaller Islamic Jihad movement and another Palestinian opposition group, the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine, also distributed leaflets calling on followers to clash with Israeli troops.

Earlier Reuters says, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday appealed to Palestinians not to lose hope in peace talks and said a Washington summit Palestinians called a failure was a chance for a "fresh start" on peace.

"I ask you, don't go into mourning. Don't lose hope," Netanyahu said on Israel Channel One television's Arabic service in an address to Palestinians. "This is an opportunity, for a fresh start for the peace process," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu appealed to Palestinians to remain calm and have faith in negotiations scheduled to resume on Sunday at Erez Checkpoint on the border between Israel and self ruled Gaza.

"I want to say something to Palestinian viewers. There are no winners and no losers if we fight each other," Netanyahu said. "If we fight each other and if we return to bloody riots, we will both be losers. If we walk together on the process of peace, we will both be winners," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu returned on Thursday from a White House summit, hailed as a success by Israel.

Benazir trying to deflect attention from her troubles at home : Analysts 'Pakistan to match any N-escalation by India'

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 4: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Thursday vowed that her country would match any nuclear escalation by India, and called for a multi-lateral conference to ease regional tensions, reports AFP.

In speech to the UN General Assembly, Benazir also denounced "propaganda" linking Islam to terrorism.

"This is wrong," she said, speaking on behalf of "one billion peace-loving Muslims," and pointing out that extremism was on the rise in east and west.

She assailed India's rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), adopted by the Assembly on September 10, which provides for an end to nuclear test explosions.

Benazir said that "Just as we are prepared to sign any and all nuclear treaties if India simultaneously signs with us, any step of nuclear escalation by our neighbour will find a response from us to preserve our national security."

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is exactly the kind of global measure for a non-proliferation and disarmament that India has been championing for years," she went on mocking New Delhi's decision to veto the treaty at Geneva talks and oppose its adoption here.

see the reality," she said. Both countries, which are nuclear threshold states, have refused to sign the CTBT, effectively preventing it from coming into force.

India refused on the ground that the pact failed to set a specific timeframe for nuclear disarmament, while Pakistan decided against signing fearing Indian nuclear ambitions.

The CTBT, which has been signed by the five declared nuclear powers, can only come into force if signed and ratified by 44 named countries possessing a nuclear reactor, including India, Israel and Pakistan.

Benazir called for a conference grouping India and Pakistan, the five permanent Security Council states — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — in addition to major powers such as Germany and Japan, which would offer a "framework genuine negotiation."

She said that such a conference could focus on the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan, the promotion of conventional arms control, and measures to address nuclear restraint which would "reduce the danger of a nuclear arms race in South Asia."

Such multilateral talks could lead to "resolution of the conflict, arrest the nuclear threat and promote prosperity in South Asia," Benazir said, re-

calling that her country and India had fought four wars, indirectly or directly, between independence in 1947 and 1971.

Benazir devoted much of her speech to the situation in disputed Kashmir, which she said was "the core issue that divides Pakistan and India."

Pakistan, which runs the northern third of Kashmir, and India, contest the ownership of the Himalayan territory.

She again criticised elections in the Indian state of Kashmir last month as a sham, and called for the implementation of UN resolutions providing for a plebiscite under UN auspices leading to self-determination for the disputed Himalayan territory.

The Pakistani prime minister failed to refer to last Friday's seizure of the Afghan capital Kabul by Taliban Islamic militia believed to be backed by Islamabad.

Her only reference to Afghanistan was as she noted confidence in the ability to resolve conflicts had been "visibly shaken after the experience in Somalia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Liberia, Rwanda and Burundi."

Indian political analysts said. "It is a superfluous statement," said Sridhar, a senior official of the government-funded Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

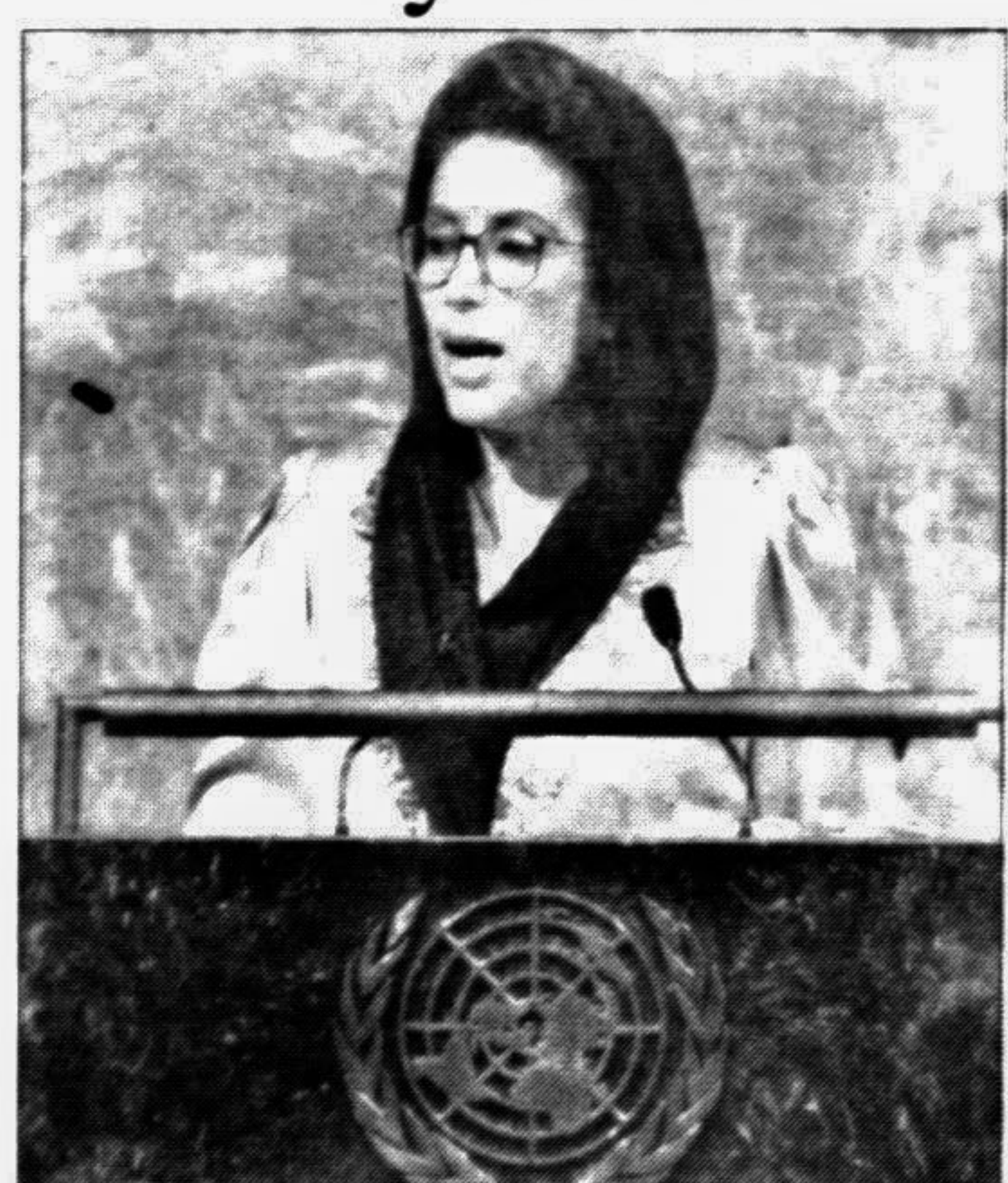
Benazir said on Wednesday that the world could not remain indifferent to the rise of a fundamentalist Hindu India bent on producing and deploying nuclear capable ballistic missiles.

She was speaking at a meeting of foreign ministers of the 53-member Organisation of the Islamic Conference in New York.

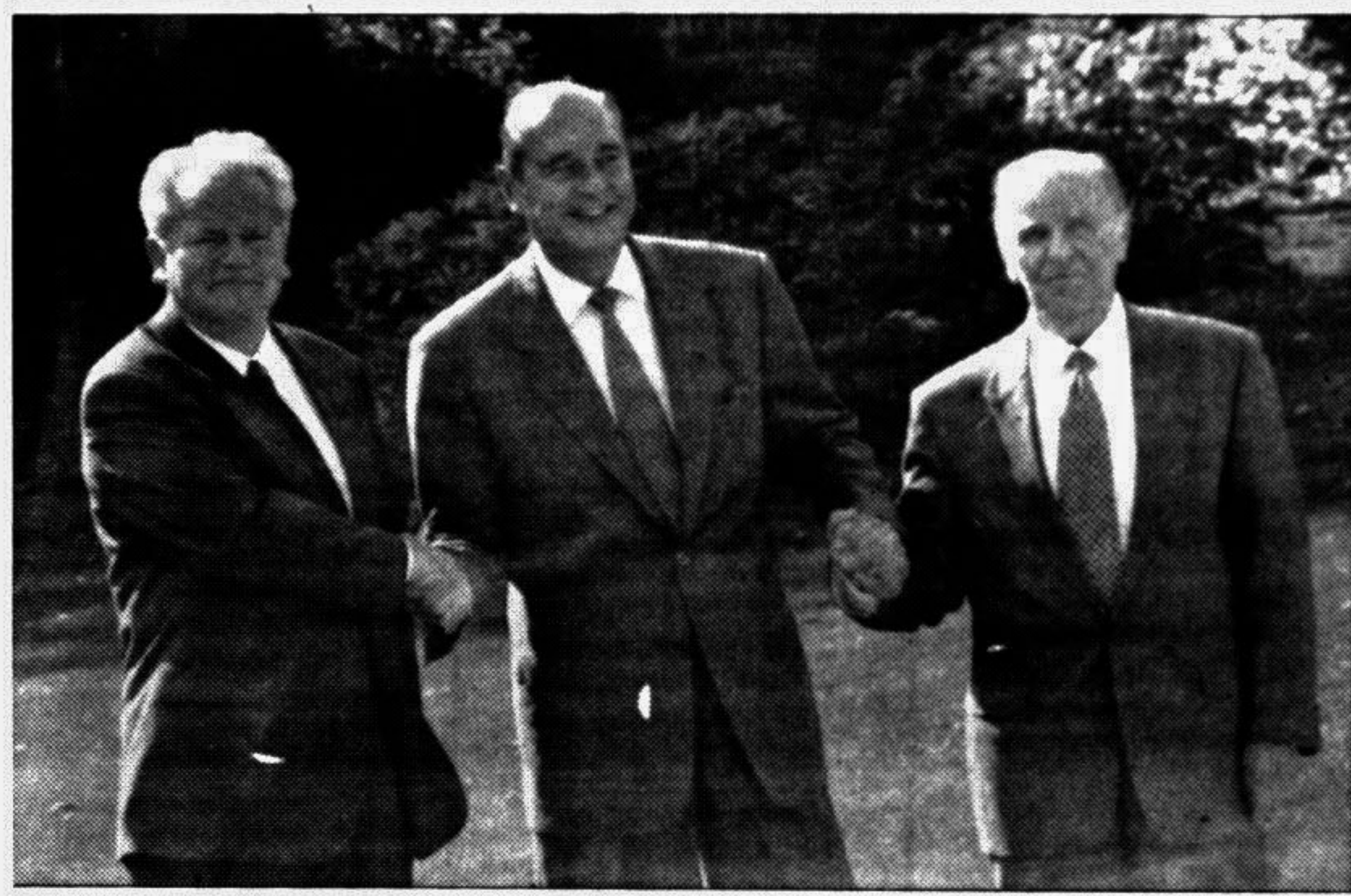
"Indian's pursuit of a nuclear and ballistic weapons programme is of serious concern," she said.

"Of equal concern is its reluctance to engage in a meaningful dialogue on the issues of nuclear and conventional arms control bilaterally, regionally or globally."

New Delhi had no official reaction to Benazir's statement, but one official who asked not to be named called her comments "desperate words" to deflect attention from Pakistan's own domestic tensions.



Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto addresses the Fifty-first session of the General Assembly on Thursday at UN Headquarters in New York. — AFP/UNB photo



Serb President Slobodan Milosevic (L) and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic (R) shake hands with French President Jacques Chirac (C), Thursday in the gardens of the Elysee Palace in Paris. Milosevic and Izetbegovic went into an unscheduled session of bilateral talks "with the intention of reaching an agreement on concrete measures" a close source said. — AFP/UNB photo

7,500 US troops to remain in Bosnia Presidents of Bosnia, Serbia agree on diplomatic ties

PARIS, Oct 4: The presidents of Bosnia and Serbia have agreed to establish full diplomatic relations, taking another step toward a permanent peace in the Balkans, reports AP.

The breakthrough came Thursday after hours of hard bargaining between Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic and Bosnia's Alija Izetbegovic, and their enemies who had rarely met since Bosnia's 3 and a half year war, which many Bosnians accused Serbia of fomenting.

Milosevic's acceptance of Bosnia effectively grants Izetbegovic what he wanted: Assurances that Bosnian Serbs will not secede to join a "Greater Serbia."

"Yugoslavia and Bosnia will establish diplomatic relations on embassy levels and will provide that citizens can travel on both sides without visas," Milosevic and Izetbegovic said

in a joint statement. "Yugoslavia will accept the integrity of Bosnia."

Serbia, along with tiny Montenegro, forms what is left of prewar Yugoslavia, which once included six republics, including Croatia and Bosnia.

It was unclear when Thursday's agreement would take effect. French President Jacques Chirac, the host of the talks, said "there will be an exchange of ambassadors as soon as possible."

The guarantee against secession angers some Serbs in Bosnia. Commenting on the summit, Bosnian Serb president Biljana Plavsic told Bosnian Serb radio that "the illusions that President Milosevic is the leader of all Serbs must stop." She accused Milosevic of never being serious about creating a pan-Serb state.

Another report from Washington says, about 7,500 US

troops will remain in Bosnia into March, America's top general told lawmakers Thursday.

The latest Pentagon plan for the withdrawal of the 15,000-member US troop contingent in Bosnia will require sending in 5,000 more as a "covering force" to help the withdrawing forces.

Gen. John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that a total of 7,500 US soldiers would stay in Bosnia until mid March, a larger figure than the Pentagon provided in earlier statements.

"By 20 December we expect to be down to a force of 10,000 Americans, 7,500 covering and 2,500 withdrawing," Shalikashvili said.

Republicans on the committee complained of a "credibility gap" between the Clinton administration and Congress in light of repeated statements

Benazir likes to see Taliban give rights to women

LONDON, Oct 4: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said in an interview broadcast here Thursday that she hoped the fundamentalist Taliban militia which has seized power in the Afghan capital would ensure that women's rights were respected, reports AFP.

"Obviously I would like to see my neighbouring countries also give rights to women which I feel women are entitled to," she told BBC television's Newsnight programme.

"Obviously I would like them to open girl's schools. Obviously I would like them to

moderate their policies. "Obviously I would like to persuade them ... to follow policies that are more enlightened and more emancipated," she said in the interview, filmed earlier this week in London while Benazir was en route to speak at the United Nations in New York.

One of the Islamic fighters' first actions on seizing Kabul last week was to order women to stop working and to close girls' schools as they had done in other parts of the country, although the new acting deputy foreign minister said earlier this week that the moves were only temporary.

Asked during the BBC interview if she welcomed the Taliban's success in capturing Kabul, Benazir said that "if the country is unified, it would be a welcome development for the whole world."

"There would be a government to deal with Afghanistan, the transit to Central Asia, and unless there is peace in Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics can never be truly independent," she said.

Benazir denied that Pakistan had backed the Taliban. "We did not back any group," she insisted.

Pakistan was quick to welcome the new Taliban government in Kabul.

BRIEFLY

Clinton leading over Dole

President Clinton continues to lead Republican opponent Bob Dole by at least 18 points, according to three new national polls. With little more than a month to go before Election Day, other new surveys found Clinton running even with Dole in Indiana and leading substantially in New Hampshire, both traditionally Republican states. Clinton also was far ahead in mostly Democratic Maryland. If the election were held Thursday, according to the national polls released Wednesday, this is how the vote would go: — Clinton and Al Gore 55 per cent, Dole and Jack Kemp 34 per cent, Ross Perot and Pat Choate 5 per cent in a rolling average of nightly CNN-USA Thursday-Gallup samples Sunday, Monday and Tuesday (872 likely voters, margin of sampling error plus or minus 3.5 percentage points), AP reports from New York.

Romania ratifies treaty with Hungary

Romania's parliament on Thursday ratified a friendship treaty with Hungary which will help the two former Warsaw pact members to join NATO and the European Union. Members of the lower chamber of deputies voted heavily in favour of the treaty which leaders of the two countries signed last month and which provides guarantees for the rights of the 1.6 million ethnic Hungarians in Romania's Central Transylvania region.

The status of ethnic Hungarians in Romania bedevilled relations between the two countries when they were under communist rule, Reuters reports from Bucharest.

Blasts rock Corsica Island

At least three blasts rocked a minister's mayoral office, the holiday home of a parliamentarian and a post office in the French Mediterranean island of Corsica during the night parliamentarism police said yesterday. No one claimed responsibility for the attacks but similar bombings have been blamed on Corsican separatists. The first explosion at 9:20 PM (19:20 GMT) damaged the town hall at Ile Rousse, hitting the office of Mayor Pierre Pasquini, who is also junior minister for veterans affairs in the French government. A bomb had exploded at his daughter's villa in August. An hour later, a small bomb caused slight damage at the post office in Biguglia near Bastia, Reuters reports from Ajaccio, Corsica.

Chechens open information centre in Kiev Accord aimed at Chechnya's revival signed

MOSCOW, Oct 4: In a step aimed at assuring lasting peace in Chechnya, the separatist leader and Russia's prime minister agreed Thursday to form a joint commission to oversee the republic's postwar revival, reports AP.

"It's a serious step in the necessary direction," Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said after talks with a delegation led by separatist chief Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev.

The signing gives new momentum to peace efforts that had largely been stalled since the signing of an agreement six weeks ago which halted the fighting but left many issues unresolved.

In another positive sign for peace prospects, President Boris Yeltsin gave the controversial August 23 accord a timely endorsement Thursday, a day after parliament blasted the deal as tantamount to a Russian surrender.

The new commission is aimed at helping the two sides move from leadership negotiations to the painstaking day-to-day work of peace in Chechnya. Chernomyrdin said forming a coalition government and preparing new elections will be

priority tasks. The new panel also will deal with the Russian withdrawal, preparation of an economic revival plan, steps to fight crime and terrorism and war reparations.

The commission's Russian and Chechen co-chairmen are expected to be named within a few days. Its decisions will be binding.

"We have confirmed once again that there is no alternative to peace, a peace dialogue even if this will be a long, complex and thorny path," Chernomyrdin said in a statement issued after the 90-minute talks.

However, in a sign the political impasse has yet to be broken, he indicated that Moscow has not softened its stance against independence for Chechnya, saying the "territorial integrity of Russia... must be unquestionable."

AFP adds: Russian President Boris Yeltsin gave his national security chief Alexander Lebed a public dressing down on television Thursday, saying he must stop quarrelling and cooperate better with government colleagues.

Appearing haggard on ORT public television, Yeltsin said

he had had a "long and difficult conversation" with Lebed but had rejected Lebed's offer to resign. He was speaking from the Central Clinical Hospital where he is awaiting heart surgery.

Yeltsin, who wore an open-collared shirt and V-necked sweater, said Lebed had "voiced a number of demands."

Another AP report says, leading Ukrainian nationalists helped Chechen rebels open an information centre in Kiev on Thursday, cheering it as a sign of solidarity against Russian aggression.

Ukraine's government has maintained a carefully neutral stance regarding Moscow's 22-month-old war in breakaway Chechnya, wary of offending the Kremlin. But many Ukrainians openly sympathise with the Chechens.

Militants from Ukraine's radical UNA-UNSO movement have fought alongside Chechen separatists since the war broke out, and have reportedly supplied the rebels with some weapons.

Ukraine's nationalist party Rukh provided the Chechen information centre with office space and equipment.

Torrential rain kills 50 in four Indian States

NEW DELHI, Oct 4: At least 50 people have been killed by floods and landslides in four Indian states, toppling houses and sweeping away victims in swirling waters, a news report said Thursday, according to AP.

The worst hit was the southern state of Andhra Pradesh accounting for 25 dead in the last two days. Thousands of people have moved to high ground with their homes submerged by gushing waters in Kurnool and Cuddapah districts, said N Chandra Babu Naidu, the state chief minister.

Islamabad, Tehran agree to coordinate Afghan policy UN urged to impose arms ban on Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 4: Uzbekistan called Thursday on the United Nations to impose an arms embargo against Afghanistan as a first step toward bringing peace to the Central Asian country, reports AP.

"To stop arms deliveries to Afghanistan should be an indispensable condition for any peace process," Uzbekistan Foreign Minister Abdul Aziz Kamalov told the UN General Assembly. "It has to be directed against those who keep on supplying armaments into the conflict area."

He did not cite any specific arms supplier, although Pakistan has been alleged to have supplied weapons to Taliban rebels who seized the capital Kabul last week.

Enforcement would be a major problem in any such embargo. Smuggling across Afghanistan's porous borders has been going on for generations.

But Kamalov said the inability of any force in Afghanistan to police the borders made such an embargo all the more impor-

tant. "The lack of possibility to control the borders of Afghanistan by their own forces requires the efforts of the international community to ensure the elimination of arms deliveries," he said.

AFP adds, Pakistan and Iran have agreed to closely coordinate their policy on Afghanistan, with Islamabad sending envoys to Central Asian Republics to seek their views following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) said today.

Quoting Foreign Secretary Najmuddin Shaikh the report said Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati met Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in New York Thursday and conveyed Iranian apprehension over the situation in Afghanistan, it said.

The meeting was the first formal contact between Iran and Pakistan since the Taliban Islamic militia seized Kabul.



A colourful banner combining all 16 German state flags is hoisted at Berlin's symbol of unity, the Brandenburg Gate, as festivities and parades mark the sixth anniversary of German reunification in the capital Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Mysterious return

CALCUTTA: The wife and children of a 65-year-old Indian had the surprise of their lives when the man showed up at his own funeral, reports Reuters.

Dulal Chandra Das, who turned up on Wednesday, was missing for more than a month and presumed dead after relatives in the eastern city of Calcutta identified a body that resembled him.

But Das, who was suffering from anaemia, said he had gone off to pray at a temple for a miracle cure. He decided to return after a Hindu goddess appeared in his dream and told him to go back home.

"She even told me that my sons were about to perform my sharadh (last rites)," Das told reporters on Thursday. "I returned home and the dream turned out to be true. I am sure I will soon get cured and start my business of selling potatoes in a local market."

Lucky baby on bin

BUENOS AIRES: An alert garbage collector noticed movement in a bag he was about to throw into the crushers of a disposal truck and saved the life of a newborn baby girl abandoned by her mother, officials said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The girl, only a few hours old when she was found on Wednesday, was recovering in a hospital while police looked for her mother. She was baptised "milagros" — miracle — by hospital staff.

Garbage collector Miguel Angel Vanderberg was near the end of his round in the Buenos Aires suburb of Barracas when he found the baby in a closed rubbish bag.

"She is alive and well, but she was very cold and has been put in an incubator and on a drip to get her temperature back to normal," said Juan Carlos Buscaglia at Sarda Hospital, where Vanderberg rushed the baby after wrapping her in rags.

"Hiding her in a plastic bag protected her from the cold a bit, though saving her must have been the last thing on the mind of whoever did this," the doctor told reporters Thursday.

The garbage man tried to fight back the tears as he told reporters: "Just think, if the bag hadn't moved."

Tell-all book as therapy for Fergie

LONDON: Advice from a former Fergie friend: Read it and weep. You'll feel better, reports AP.

Sipping champagne after the Duchess of York dropped objections Thursday to the publication of her book, Alan Starke advised her to read it as therapy.

Now that the court-ordered injunction has been lifted, "Fergie: Her Secret Life," will appear on bookstands on November 4 with the sobriquet, "The book she tried to ban," the Michael O'mara publishing company said.

"Fergie" is the tabloid nickname for the former Sarah Ferguson, who had fought the book's publication fearing her deepest secrets would be revealed.

Starke said his book was not sensationalist. "The story I'm telling is not meant to be a tacky expose to generate money," said the bankrupt Starke. "I think it's an important story for a whole lot of reasons."

Among those reasons, he said the book would be therapeutic for the duchess.

"I feel for her," Starke said, sipping champagne at a book fair in Frankfurt. "I hope she pays a lot of attention to that book when she reads it and I hope it helps her in analysing herself and her own flaws so she doesn't keep repeating them."

He said her flaws included being "vacillating" and a "chameleon."

Starke is a former business partner of John Bryan, the American who was photographed nuzzling the feet of the topless duchess.

The photographs were published in 1992, two months after the duchess separated from Prince Andrew. The couple divorced in May.

Junta frees 2 opposition leaders Nigeria defends HR record

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 4: Nigeria defended its human rights record Thursday before the UN General Assembly and criticised Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy for spreading "malicious falsehood" against the West African country, reports AP.

"We must, therefore, guard against the use of human rights as a pretext for advancing the individual or collective interests of one section of the international community against another," Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi said.

"In this regard, Nigeria takes strong exception to Canada's statement in this Assembly a few days ago, which carried malicious falsehood against my country."

During his speech to the General Assembly on September 24, Axworthy said Nigeria, Burundi and Burma constituted "the most recent challenges to our collective ability to support the democratic aspirations of peoples."

Canada remains firmly committed to the restoration of democracy in these countries, Axworthy said. To do other-

wise, he added, would question "the legitimacy of our commitment to UN values."

In his speech, however, Ikimi claimed international criticism of Nigeria's human rights record was based "largely on media reporting ... without any investigation of the facts of the matters."

Ikimi said the Nigerian government had made steady progress toward implementing democratic rule, "taking into account the objective realities of our national situation so as to ensure an orderly transition."

He cited the local elections held last March as a sign that "our transition to civil rule is now fully on an irreversible course."

Last Sunday, the Commonwealth, an association of over 50 nations that are or were once ruled by Britain, spurned Canadian appeals to impose sanctions on Nigeria until it improves its human rights record.

AFP adds from Lagos: Nigeria's military rulers have quietly freed two key opposition leaders jailed for pro-democracy activities. Opposition sources said.