

Israel proposing measures contradictory to deal on Hebron: PLO



Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat is greeted by Israeli President Ezer Weizman as Arafat arrives on his first official visit to Israel on Tuesday, at the private villa of Weizman in Caesarea. — AFP/UNB photo

JERUSALEM, Oct 9: The PLO says Israel is proposing measures that contradict a deal the two sides signed on Hebron, defying an assurance the Jewish state gave the United States that it was not seeking to renegotiate the agreement, reports Reuter.

Palestinian negotiator Hassan Asfour said after Tuesday's talks that Israeli demands had deadlocked the negotiations and a US mediator was expected to propose new ideas to bridge the gaps between the two sides when talks resumed today.

"We are still in a deadlock. The Americans are expected to come up with bridging proposals," Asfour told Reuters.

The Israel-PLO talks were renewed on Sunday after violence sparked by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's opening of an archaeological tunnel near Islamic sites in Arab East Jerusalem last month cost the lives of 59 Palestinians and 15 Israelis.

Israel agreed in a deal with the PLO last year to withdraw from most of Hebron, a city holy to Muslims and Jews, after pulling out of other large West Bank towns to make room for Palestinian self rule.

The redeployment in Hebron, due seven months ago, was postponed over a wave of suicide bombings which killed 59 people in the Jewish state, Netanyahu, who ousted Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shimon Peres in elections last May, wants added measures to ensure the security of 400 Jewish settlers in the town before pulling his troops back.

But Netanyahu vowed on Sunday during a visit to Israel by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher that the measures

he sought were within the confines of the existing agreement.

A clause in the Israeli-Palestinian interim agreement signed a year ago says:

"Palestinian police stations or posts will be established in area H-1 (the area to be handed over to the PLO) manned by a total of up to 400 policemen equipped with 20 vehicles and armed with 200 pistols and 100 rifles for the protection of those stations."

Asfour said Israeli negotiators had refused to put their proposals in writing.

Israeli government spokesman Moshe Fogel told Reuters: "I will not comment on that. I will not go into specific details about Israel's proposals."

A Palestinian official who refused to be named said the PLO had proposed setting up a joint operation room in Hebron to deal with security issues but refused to reopen the agreement.

Earlier on Tuesday Palestinian President Yasser Arafat

made his first public visit to Israel for a meeting with President Ezer Weizman to underline a renewed PLO-Israel commitment to settle disputes through negotiation instead of violence.

Weizman, whose role is largely ceremonial, had announced plans two months ago to invite Arafat when Netanyahu was still refusing to see the Palestinian leader.

"Negotiations will be the tool to resolve our differences," Arafat said after a 25-minute meeting with Weizman, a former defence minister who became an advocate of peace with the Arabs.

Hours after the meeting Israel announced it would let 10,000 Palestinians enter the Jewish state from the Gaza Strip for work beginning on Wednesday, easing a two-week closure on the area.

AFP from Cairo adds, Arab countries would like Europe to play a "catalyst" role in the Middle East peace process without undermining the efforts deployed by the United States, a

senior Arab League official said.

"We don't want Europe to compete with the United States but to play a catalyst role in the peace process," the official, who declined to be named, told AFP.

The European Union dispatched Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring, whose country holds the EU presidency, to the Middle East today for talks with Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian leaders.

Spring also had discussions with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Israel ahead of the start Sunday of vital Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

"The United States has played an essential role in the region and it is out of question to challenge that," the Arab official said.

But Europe could help move the world's leading power in the right direction like France did when it succeeded in involving Washington in Bosnia and when it helped secure a positive settlement in Lebanon in April," he said.

Off the Record

Popular TV circus clown!



LYNDHURST: Bob Dole sharpened his criticism of President Clinton and promised to hit harder on the administration's ethical controversies in their next debate, reports AP.

"Bozo's on his way out," Dole said, comparing Clinton to a popular American television circus clown.

Dole targeted Clinton's integrity in two speeches before rains cut short his bus tour and chased the Republican nominee back to his Washington campaign headquarters.

"His words are no good. My word is good and I'll keep my promises to the American people," Dole said, telling voters a plot to believe Clinton's line that the Republican ticket would cut health insurance to pay for tax cuts.

"One man in the crowd shouted to Dole as he shook hands. 'Please get Bozo out of the White House.'"

"Dole called back, 'Bozo's on his way out!'"

Dole spokesman Nelson Warfield sought to play down the remark as a "light moment along the ropeline." But it recalled the final weeks of President Bush's 1992 losing campaign when Bush referred to Clinton and Al Gore as "two bozos" who had less foreign policy expertise than a dog.

Clinton deputy campaign manager Ann Lewis took note of Sunday's civil debate between the presidential rivals and added, "I guess this means the era of civility lasted a day and a half."

White House spokesman Mike McCurry added, "It's not hard to imagine that Senator Dole might be feeling a little desperate at this point."



Two models show off two 18th century Ottoman Kaftan's on Tuesday, which are part of a sale of 18th century Ottoman clothing and a selection of Islamic works of art at Sotheby's on October 17. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Myanmar frees 63 detainees:

Myanmar said on Tuesday it had released the last batch of 63 detainees being held after a recent crackdown on activists of Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy party (NLD). Reuter reports from Yangon.

They were the last of a total of 573 NLD Party members and supporters who were detained to prevent the NLD from holding a party congress at the end of September. The ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) had deemed the meeting illegal and barred access to Suu Kyi's home where the congress was to be held from September 26.

Megawati appears before court:

Indonesia's leading opposition figure, Megawati Sukarnoputri went yesterday to the Jakarta trial of 64 supporters accused of involvement in riots in the capital in July, witnesses said, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Megawati, accompanied by scores of lawyers and other supporters, arrived at the tightly guarded Central Jakarta District Court where five separate trials were to begin yesterday.

Fire kills 11 children in Kuala Lumpur:

Fire gutted a dormitory in a remote town on the island of Borneo early Wednesday, killing eleven children aged 8 to 11 and injuring seven others, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The fire broke out just after midnight in Kampung Sessang in the southwestern part of the Malaysian state of Sarawak. Fire Chief Wan Alkap Wan Drus of the nearby town of Saratok told the Bernama news agency. By the time firefighters arrived from Saratok, 60 kilometers (35 miles) away, the fire had burned itself out, Wan Alkap said. He said the cause was under investigation.

IISS defence survey

US remains strongest, Russia declining

LONDON, Oct 9: Despite major cutbacks, the United States remains the strongest military power in the world — and Russia's military capabilities continue to decline, a leading research centre said in its annual survey released Wednesday, reports AP.

Since 1992, Russian military spending has fallen by about 45 per cent to around \$2 billion dollars per year, the International Institute for Strategic Studies said. But despite economic difficulties and its decline from military superpower status, Russia continues to spend more on the military than any country except the United States.

The institute said there were no new military trends following President Boris Yeltsin's election to a second term in June. But it concluded that "the

decline in capability in all departments of the Russian armed forces seems set to continue."

In contrast, it said, the United States is pushing ahead with plans for a capability to fight two major regional conflicts at the same time, if necessary, and expects to improve its ability to rapidly deploy forces outside the country.

During the past 12 months, the institute said, major military developments included the deployment of NATO-led peacekeeping troops to Bosnia and the renewed US commitment to military alliances in the Asia-Pacific region with Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

Washington also showed a commitment to Taiwan by deploying carriers when tensions with China heightened before Taiwan's presidential election in March, it said.

US reducing naval presence in Gulf

WASHINGTON, Oct 9: A US battle group led by the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson left the Arabian Sea Tuesday, significantly reducing the US naval presence in the Gulf area, reports AP.

The Vinson's departure left a single US aircraft carrier and its battle group in the Gulf, where a confrontation between the United States and Iraq led to a major military buildup last month.

The United States retaliated for an Iraqi offensive into a Kurdish safe haven in Northern Iraq by expanding a no-fly zone in southern Iraq from the 32nd to the 33rd parallel.

The movement of the Vinson signals US confidence that Iraq has abandoned efforts to reconstitute its air defences in the south, which were struck by US cruise missiles September 3 and 4.

Besides the carrier USS Enterprise, there are still 17 US navy vessels in the US fifth fleet's area of operations, which includes the Gulf.

Eight F-117 Stealth fighters and three armoured battalions remain in Kuwait, and a squadron of F-16s is in Bahrain in addition to US warplanes enforcing the no-fly zone from a new base in Saudi Arabia.

The Vinson, which was headed for Australia, was accompanied by three guided missile cruisers, an attack submarine, a guided missile frigate and two supply ships.

Meanwhile, Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said Tuesday that Baghdad wanted talks with Washington, but the United States was opposed to dialogue.

Addressing some 300 representatives of Iraqis living

Strike paralyses Kashmir Farooq Abdullah sworn in as Chief Minister

SRINAGAR, India, Oct 9: A Kashmiri party Wednesday assumed power in India's insurgency-racked state, as a protest strike called by separatists partially shut down the state capital, reports AP.

Farooq Abdullah, 60, was sworn in as the state's top elected official by federally appointed Governor K V Krishna Rao at a brief ceremony. That ended nearly six years of direct federal rule.

However, the All Party Hurriyat Conference, an umbrella organisation of 32 separatist groups, vowed to continue their struggle for secession. The group called on Kashmiris to shut their shops and stay home Wednesday to show their opposition to Abdullah's government.

More than 14,500 people have been killed in Kashmir since 1989, when a simmering campaign for an independent

Kashmir erupted into a full-scale insurgency.

Abdullah's National Conference is the only local Kashmiri party that contested the state election last month. It won 54 seats in the 87-member state assembly, the rest were shared by two national parties, the rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress Party, and smaller groups.

Thousands of soldiers and police officers guarded government buildings in capital Srinagar as nearly 300 politicians and guests of Abdullah attended the ceremony held in a high security zone.

Abdullah is burdened with the promise of ending the militancy and securing wider autonomy for the state — his main election assurance to the voters. Abdullah had earlier served as the state's chief minister. But he left office in 1989.

The separatists want Kashmir to become part of Pakistan, India's Islamic neighbor, or to become independent. India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir.

The balloting last month was marred by bombings that left four people dead, strikes, and accusations that voters were forced to go to the polls by India security forces who wanted to make the election a success.

Officials in New Delhi hope the Abdullah's assumption of office would be a first step toward a return to normalcy in Kashmir.

AFP said: A strike called by Muslim militants paralysed the Kashmir valley today ahead of the swearing-in of Farooq Abdullah as the troubled region's first chief minister in six years.

Government offices, banks, post offices, businesses and courts were shut in Srinagar

and other Muslim-majority towns in response to the call by the Freedom Conference, an umbrella group of Muslim separatist groups.

Most vehicles stayed of the roads in Srinagar, the state summer capital.

The Freedom Conference called for the shutdown to denounce last month's elections to the Kashmir assembly, which catapulted Abdullah's pro-India National Conference party to power in the first elections since 1987.

Abdullah, a Muslim politician who supports Kashmir's 1948 accession to India, is to be sworn-in as the Himalayan state's chief minister at a building adjoining the Dal Lake here under heavy security.

Abdullah is set to announce a three-tier government comprising nearly 25 ministers, party sources said.

Masood forces halt Taliban advance towards Salang Pass

KABUL, Oct 9: Forces loyal to ousted Afghan army chief Ahmad Shah Masood have cut off a large force of the Islamic Taliban militia in the strategic Salang Pass and inflicted heavy casualties, western aid workers said today, reports Reuter.

They said Masood's counter-attack had forced the Taliban, who took Kabul on September 27, to suspend their attempt to advance into Masood's Panjsher Valley stronghold from the village of Golbahar at the mouth of the Gorge leading into the valley.

"There are no Taliban left in

Golbahar," one aid worker said. He said a colleague in the town of Jabal Os-Siraj, where the road to Golbahar forks from the main highway up to the Salang Pass, had counted 39 dead Taliban fighters being brought down the highway during a single hour late on Tuesday.

He said the Taliban had lost at least 100 dead and suffered many more wounded in fighting that raged overnight as Masood's men shelled concentrations of Taliban warriors and reinforcements heading for the Salang Pass across the Hindu

Kush mountain range.

The fighting eased on Wednesday morning, but Masood's forces now controlled hills almost as far as Jabal Os-Siraj and sporadic shelling could still be heard, the aid worker said.

Journalists trying to reach the frontline were stopped halfway between Jabal Os-Siraj and the town of the Charikar, about 10 km (six miles) to the south. Taliban commanders and fighters refused to give any information to reporters.

AFP adds, former Afghan prime minister Gulbuddin

Hekmatyar could not reach Mazar-i-Sharif today for a scheduled meeting with northern warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam to forge an anti-Taliban alliance, a spokesman said.

Ghairat Baheer said that business elsewhere prevented Hekmatyar from reaching Dostam's headquarters in northern Afghanistan.

However, he said president Burhanuddin Rabbani, ousted by Taliban 12 days ago, was already in Dostam's base and the outcome of their talks could be acceptable to Hekmatyar.



Taliban religious militia move up a fully loaded multi-barrel rocket launcher to the newly opened front with fighters of ex-communist General Abdul Rashid Dostam in the Salang, north of Kabul Tuesday. In the 12 days since the Taliban captured Kabul, Dostam remained neutral. The Uzbek warlord has now committed himself on the side of ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani. — AFP/UNB photo

FBI to double its overseas presence over four years

WASHINGTON, Oct 9: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) citing the need to combat international terrorism, narcotics trafficking and organised crime, wants to double its overseas presence over the next four years, reports IPS.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation believes that it is essential to station more of its highly skilled special agents in other countries to prevent foreign terrorism and foreign crime from reaching into the United States to kill and harm Americans in their own workplaces, streets homes and houses of worship," FBI Director Louis Freeh said in a 52-page proposal submitted to both the Senate and house judiciary committees.

"The United States has been ravaged for far too long by foreign criminals originating in partial or complete sanctuaries abroad and using their beyond-the-border advantages to carry

out terrorism, drug trafficking, and other violent crimes while they also rob American pockets by vast, complex economic crimes," he added.

"It must be absolutely clear that FBI agents stationed overseas are not intelligence officers they are not a shadow intelligence agency, and they will not engage in espionage," said Freeh, whose plan has been endorsed by the State Department Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

The overseas agents, officially known as "legal attaches," will work in cooperation with their foreign counterparts to uncover international terrorists, drug lords and gangsters, with the goal of gaining their conviction in US courts, Freeh said.

Tel Aviv, Islamabad, and Cairo. The later three cities, Freeh recently said, are "critical centres where US... interests, particularly in the counter-terrorism area, are greatly at risk."

The expansion plan, which would require the FBI to more than double its current a million dollar budget for overseas operations by 1998, calls for offices to be opened next year in Argentina, Estonia, India, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the Ukraine.

Among the countries where the FBI plans to begin operations in the final two years of the plan are Brazil, Chile, Spain, Austria, Denmark, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan.

Even if Congress which currently is in recess until early next month approves the entire plan, the FBI's overseas offices would still be dwarfed by its domestic operations, which

employ some 10,000 special agents and a support staff of 14,000.

"We will have FBI agents tripping over CIA, agents, tripping over DIA (Defence Intelligence Agency) agents, tripping over state department intelligence officers," warned retired Admiral Jack Shanahan, director of the centre for defence information, Washington think tank.

"Better communications between the CIA and FBI would be more beneficial than sticking (FBI) agents around the world," Shanahan argued. He added that it is intelligence agents currently stationed overseas are no cooperating fully with the FBI, "we should fire them."

Steven Aftergood, director of the project on government secrecy at the American Federation of Scientists noted, historically, there has been quite a bit of suspicion, and a lack of coop-

eration, between the FBI and the intelligence community.

According to Aftergood much of this ill will is a result of the intelligence community's efforts to protect its sources and methods of operations. He said it is "not entirely a joke" to suggest that in their efforts to root out terrorists drug traffickers and other criminal overseas FBI agents may uncover CIA assets.

Unlike Shanahan, who called the FBI's expansion plan an "overreaction" to the current political climate in the United States Aftergood said that in light of growing amount of criminal activity that crosses international borders, "the plan could serve a constructive purpose."

More effective way of birth control

MEXICO CITY: Mexican researchers have found a more effective way of birth control using just three pills instead of the traditional dosage of 25 over the menstrual cycle, reports Xinhua.

The Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) said Tuesday that taking three birth control pills in the first 72 hours of the menstrual period was more effective in preventing pregnancy.

This was because the first three menstrual days were the key to modifying the human hormone cycle that regulated fertility.

The three pills, one for each day, will be made up of estrogen, a hormone similar to that produced by a woman's ovaries but in much smaller quantity.

Vicente Cortes Gallegos, a researcher in the Gynecology-Obstetrics Hospital run by the IMSS, explained that the finding was based on observation of the critical phase of ovulation.

He said that by taking the pills at the beginning of the menstrual cycle, the hormone which regulated fertility could be altered without having to take more pills thereafter.

Gallegos said that the dosage of birth control pills would decrease by 90 per cent thanks to the new contraceptive method, while birth control costs would drop by more than 50 per cent.