



Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat applauds Leah Rabin, wife of late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Thursday during their meeting in Ramallah, where they both signed a vow to work toward peace on the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Palestinian autonomy accords. Leah Rabin and Arafat signed a document "reaffirming" Israeli and Palestinian commitment to the peace process in a ceremony attended by Yossi Beilin, a leading figure of the Labour Party and one of the main architects of the autonomy agreement. — AFP/UNB photo

Israel rejects US call to stop expansion of settlements

JERUSALEM, Sept 12: Israel yesterday rejected a call by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to stop settlement building in the Palestinian territories, reports AP.

"We cannot freeze settlements, just as one cannot freeze life," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman David Bar-Illan told reporters.

Albright said earlier during a speech to Israeli high school students that "Israel should refrain from unilateral acts, including what Palestinians see as provocative expansion of settlements, land confiscations, home demolitions."

"Such actions appear designed to prejudice the outcome of negotiations and they undermine Palestinian confidence in Israeli intentions," she said after two days of talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Netanyahu.

It was Albright's first direct public criticism of Netanyahu's policy of expanding Jewish housing on occupied Palestinian land since she launched her peace mission on Wednesday.

AP from Ramallah adds: Wrapping up a visit aimed at cajoling Israelis and Palestinians back toward peace, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is driving home the message that Yasser Arafat must fight terrorism, reports AP.

Albright planned to deliver her message to the Palestinian leader at a meeting Friday, the second with Arafat on her current visit.

Later Friday, she was scheduled to leave Israel for Syria, where she will attempt to get Israeli-Syrian peace talks restarted after a 1-1/2 year freeze. Israel's Channel 2 TV said she would carry a written message from Israeli officials, but gave no details.

Albright's first trip to the Middle East as secretary of state has appeared frustrating so far.

On Thursday, she met with both Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and said afterward that there was still "a long way to go" to restore trust and reopen negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Albright said she and Arafat "have an agreement that terrorists are terrible." But she reserved judgement on his ability to counter terrorism over the long term. "For us, we will have to see how this is carried out over a sustained period."

After meeting with Albright

for more than two hours, Arafat pledged to confront "the enemies of peace."

"I offer my condolences to ... the people who fell victim to terrorist activities in Jerusalem," Arafat said. "I say enough violence. This is time for peace."

But he also blamed Israel for the six-month impasse, citing Netanyahu's refusal to pull back further on the West Bank, to stop new construction in Jerusalem or to halt settlement activity.

"I want to reiterate that the Palestinian Authority will meet all its responsibilities, and I hope the Israeli government will do the same," Arafat said.

Albright countered that "there is nothing as dastardly as suicide bombers," referring to the attacks on Israel that have claimed 25 lives in the last six weeks and more than 200 since the signing of the first Israel-PLO accords in 1993.

Besides demanding that Arafat dismantle the operations of Hamas and other militant groups on the West Bank and Gaza, Albright is urging Netanyahu to make some gestures to the Palestinians.

Netanyahu refuses to turn over to the Palestinian Authority 67 million dollars in taxes withheld from Palestinian workers or to ease the restrictions he has imposed on Palestinians' travel.

"It is hard to understand how withholding money is a security issue," Albright said.

In a talk with Israeli students Thursday, Albright maintained that "one has to believe that the Palestinian people, like you, want to have peace, and want to have a land, an area of their own, in which they can exercise their legitimate rights."

"One has to believe that with an end to their quest, the tool of terrorism would not be used."

Still, some Palestinian officials have criticized Albright for stressing Israel's security too much, at the expense of their concerns.

Furthermore, a senior Palestine Liberation Organization official said that Arafat told Albright he "cannot fight terrorism alone ... I need help in fighting regional terrorism."

Albright responded, according to the official: "I agree, but I need it to begin from here."

Injured bodyguard doesn't know Di, Dodi Al Fayed, Paul dead

LONDON, Sept 12: The severely injured bodyguard who survived the crash that killed Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed and their driver Henri Paul doesn't know they are dead, according to a news report Friday, reports AP.

The London newspaper The Mirror quoted doctors treating Trevor Rees-Jones in hospital in Paris as saying the ex-British soldier is still too ill to be told and may not be informed for a few weeks.

Rees-Jones, 29, who was Fayed's personal bodyguard, was the sole survivor in the car that crashed in a Paris road tunnel on Aug. 31 while being chased by news photographers.

He suffered severe face and chest injuries and punctured lungs and is still recovering from 10 hours of surgery a week ago to reconstruct his face.

The Mirror quoted his mother, Jill Rees-Jones, as saying: "He's unconscious most of the time. His jaw is wired and he can't really speak. He is not fit enough to be told about Diana and Dodi but the good news in his recovery is slow."

Three blood tests show Paul was driving with an alcohol level three times the legal limit. He also had taken the anti-depressant Prozac and a painkiller, a prescription drug used to prevent aggression and treat alcoholism.

BRIEFLY



One of the victims of the sinking of the ferry boat "Fierté Gonavienne" lies on the beach Thursday at Montrouis, Haiti. At least 83 people died and hundreds are still missing after the ship capsized and sank on Monday. — AFP/UNB photo



One of the victims of the sinking of the ferry boat "Fierté Gonavienne" lies on the beach Thursday at Montrouis, Haiti. At least 83 people died and hundreds are still missing after the ship capsized and sank on Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

Lightning, rains kill 25 in India: Lightning and heavy rainfall killed 25 people in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, local news agencies reported Thursday, AP says from New Delhi.

Five people were killed today when a five-storey building collapsed following two days of heavy rains. Officials in the affected districts of Guntur and Warangal said that 20 others, including two children, were killed when lightning struck Thursday night, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

Fashion world pays tribute to Versace: The Italian fashion world paid tribute to slain fashion designer Gianni Versace, with his favourite model Naomi Campbell opening a showcase of Italian design on the Spanish Steps, AP reports from Rome.

A teary-eyed Naomi inched her way down the marble steps Thursday night in a floor-length pink chiffon gown with daring slits up each side to the song "I'll be missing you." The music was chosen by Donatella and Santo Versace, the designer's sister and brother as well as his closest collaborators.

ROK resumes F-16 flights: South Korea has resumed flights of 35 F-16 jet fighters after a monthlong hiatus for mechanical checks, the air force announced Friday, AP reports from Seoul.

The jets, built by South Korea under a licence from Lockheed Martin, were grounded after an F-16 of the same model crashed on a routine training mission in early August. The pilot escaped unharm. On Friday, air force investigators said they found a malfunction in the system that injected fuel to the crashed plane's engine.

Pilgrims allowed to enter Bethlehem: The Israeli Army permitted pilgrims to enter Bethlehem yesterday for the first time since imposing a total siege on the Biblical town following a triple suicide bombing on September 4 in Jerusalem, officials said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

But the town of 35,000 remains sealed to all movement in or out by Palestinians and is closed to Israelis, an army spokesman said.

Chopper crash lands in Lanka: A Sri Lankan Air Force transport helicopter crash landed in northern Sri Lanka yesterday during an operation against Tamil Tiger rebels, defence sources said, adding their were no casualties, AFP reports from Colombo.

The Russian built MI-17 helicopter was transporting troops near the town of Pullyankulam where heavy fighting was raging between government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Defence sources said the pilots carried out an emergency landing when the tail rotor malfunctioned.

1083 people kidnapped in Colombia: A total of 1,083 people have been abducted in Colombia so far this year, the country's top anti-kidnapping official said Thursday, AFP reports from Bogota.

Ruben Dario Ramirez said that 19 foreigners were among those kidnapped this year and that seven of them were still being held. Foreigners taken hostage this year included Americans, Austrians, a Brazilian, a Canadian, Ecuadorans, Germans and Spaniards.

Haiti ferry capsizes death toll now 88: Eight bodies washed up Thursday near the Haitian port town of Montrouis, bringing to 88 the death toll from the sinking of the ferry ship Fierté Gonavienne, officials said, AFP reports from Port-au-Prince.

India to see coalition govts from now on, says Gujral

NEW DELHI, Sept 12: Coalition governments will be the order of the day in India from now on, Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said in remarks published today, reports AP.

"The era of single party rule is over," Gujral was quoted by the pioneer newspaper as telling members of his Janata Dal (people's party), the dominant partner in his centre-left united front coalition, late Thursday.

No party would again be able to muster a majority on its own in the national parliament, he said.

"Since 1989 the country has been witnessing a trend of no (single) party securing a clear majority to rule at the centre ... the trend will continue," he said.

Gujral's comments followed claims by the Congress (I) party, which keeps his multi-party government afloat, that Indian voters were disenchanted with coalitions.

In 1989 India got its first coalition government which collapsed within one year. Another minority government followed for a few months.

The Congress, India's oldest party which has governed the country for most of the half century since independence in 1947, returned to office in 1991 without bagging a majority in the 545-seat parliament.

34 killed as Tigers damage govt chopper

COLOMBO, Sept 12: Tamil Tiger rebels badly damaged a government helicopter over northern Sri Lanka early Friday as 34 combatants were reported killed in ground fighting, the military officials said, reports AP.

On Thursday, the rebels fought fiercely with troops trying to dislodge them from Pullyankulam, a strategic town, killing at least 20 soldiers, said the officials who can't be named under briefing rules. Another 67 soldiers were wounded.

The guerrillas, in a broadcast on their clandestine radio, admitted having lost 14 fighters.

On Friday, the rebels targeted Ukrainian-built MI-24 helicopter bombarding their positions with rockets and cannons. The gunship was hit by cannon fire from the ground, said the military officials, who cannot be named under briefing rules.

The helicopter made an emergency landing at a nearby government air base. The 4-member crew was unhurt.

The rebels have promised to hand over the bodies of 20 soldiers to a Red Cross representative later Friday, said Harsha Gunawardhana, an International Committee of Red Cross spokesman.

Communist Party congress opens Jiang vows revolution in ownership of public firms

BEIJING, Sept 12: Chinese President Jiang Zemin today opened a crucial Congress of his ruling Communist Party by vowing a revolution in ownership of public firms that could lead to mass privatisation in the ailing state sector, reports Reuters.

Diplomats said Jiang's first major policy speech since the death of Deng Xiaoping last February was a clarion call to push on with the late paramount leader's capitalist-style reforms.

Deng's pragmatic principles should be enshrined in the party's constitution, Jiang told the opening session of the five-yearly Congress.

The Central Committee proposes that the party, at its 15th Congress, establish Deng Xiaoping theory as its guiding ideology, Jiang said, effectively ensuring Deng's sweeping reforms a leading place in party dogma.

In a speech that ranged over the revolutionary past and future of Chinese Communism, Jiang also warned foreign countries not to interfere in its campaign to reunify with rival Taiwan and warned against overseas military alliances.

He vowed that China would not seek to establish any military bloc but said Beijing would craft smaller but tougher defences by trimming 500,000 men from its three million-strong People's Liberation Army by the end of the century.

After calling on Deng's theories to legitimise his reforms, Jiang pledged a strategic shift in ownership patterns and told state firms they would have to stand on their own.

"China needs to develop diverse forms of ownership with public ownership in the dominant position," Jiang told more than 2,000 party delegates in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, a Stalinist monument redolent of an earlier age of Communism.

"We should make strategic adjustments of the position of the state-owned sector of the economy," said the state president and party chief.

Ranariddh plotting with ex-Khmer Rouge rebels against me: Hun Sen

PHNOM PENH, Sept 12: With opposing factions jiriding for a showdown at the United Nations, Cambodian leader Hun Sen said the world body might as well disband if the co-prime minister he deposed in a coup is allowed to represent the country, reports AP.

The UN General Assembly meeting scheduled Sept. 26 has fast become the latest battlefield between Hun Sen, who has consolidated power over most of Cambodia since the July coup, and Prince Norodom Ranariddh, struggling from exile to retain recognition.

The coup has put exceptional pressure on the United Nations over who will be viewed as Cambodia's legal leadership, since the takeover shattered the coalition established by the 1993 elections the UN organized and guaranteed with a \$1.2 billion peacekeeping operation.

Hun Sen has justified his takeover with claims that Ranariddh was plotting with former Khmer Rouge guerrillas against him. There has been no evidence of a plot, though both premiers had made deals with Khmer Rouge factions to beef up their own armed strengths.

Speaking to reporters Friday at a graduation ceremony at an agricultural school, Hun Sen declared that if the United Nations gives accreditation to Ranariddh it would send a signal that "everyone can do what he wants."

"If the deserter whose activities threatened so many lives is allowed by the United Nations to sit in violation of the royal decree signed by the king, I think the world has no need for the United Nations any more," Hun Sen said.

King Norodom Sihanouk, 74, the prince's father, has signed letters of accreditation for Hun Sen and Ung Huot, the new co-prime minister Hun Sen installed after the coup to replace Ranariddh.

The king, whose powers are limited by the constitution and Hun Sen's growing authority, has made it clear, however, that he still regards Ranariddh as the legal co-prime minister.

NASA Inspector General questions safety of Americans on Mir

CAPE CANAVERAL, FLORIDA, Sept 12: Despite their peppy appearances, the first Americans to live on Russia's space station Mir endured more hardships than previously thought — hardships only now being revealed, reports AP.

They laboured in sweltering conditions for months, inhaled air with increased levels of carbon dioxide that made them woozy and put up with the constant smell of garbage. Also, they have a dangerous ignorance of the Russian escape capsules that they might have to steer home in an emergency.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration Inspector General Roberta Gross described these problems and others in a letter to the chairman of the House Science Committee, Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. Her remarks come just two weeks before NASA's next shuttle flight to Mir, when a sixth American will be left on the station.

"We are aware that the Russians have successfully surmounted serious problems on the Mir," Gross wrote in a letter dated August 29.

"Nevertheless, ongoing problems on the Mir are occurring at a time when the Russian government may not be in a position to provide adequate financial and technical support to enable the aging space station to operate safely."

Moreover, these problems are exacerbated by the Russian failure to timely or fully communicate with NASA. Without knowledge of the problems on Mir or its operating systems, NASA cannot fully prepare our astronauts for their mission.

A spokesman for Russia's Mission Control, Valery Lyudin, expressed surprise Thursday when informed of the critical tone of Gross's report. He said cooperation between the two space programmes is fine and that "things have been getting better" since two cosmonauts salvaged power aboard the battered station three weeks ago.

Lyudin said he couldn't comment on specific charges until he saw the report, but strongly defended the space station despite its string of recent troubles.



British top model Naomi Campbell (R) and an unidentified colleague wear evening clothes designed by Versace and cry during XII manifestation "Donna Sotto le Stelle" (Woman under the stars), organised in memory of Italian stylist Gianni Versace on the steps of Trinita's dei Monti late Thursday. The fashion evening usually takes place in July at the end of Rome fashion show. The evening was dedicated to Italian stylist Gianni Versace who was killed the day before the original fashion show was due to take place. — AFP/UNB photo

Calcutta streets were beginning of Mother Teresa's odyssey

CALCUTTA, Sept 12: To get to where Mother Teresa's voyage of sacrifice began, follow Calcutta's Creek Lane through a neighbourhood of humble homes and tiny businesses — a hardware store, a print shop, even a tropical fish wholesaler, reports AP.

The street twists and turns like its namesake, one moment wide enough for a car, the next too narrow for a pedestrian to pass a bicycle rickshaw.

At No 14, climb two flights of stairs so old most of the paint has worn off. There waits 89-year-old Michael Gomes, his eyes clouded and hearing going, but handshake firm.

In 1949, Gomes parish priest asked him if he would provide a home for "sister Teresa," a young woman, who, the priest said, "wants to serve the poor, and wants to live with the poor."

"I did not hesitate. If you were in my place, you would not have hesitated," Gomes said. "She was a gift from God... very great gift."

Perhaps it's only hindsight that allows Gomes to say today that from the beginning he saw something holy in the former Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, now known to the world as Mother Teresa. The Nobel peace laureate who led a worldwide charity died last Friday, and already, the Vatican is being pressed to declare her a saint.

She came to stay on the top floor of Gomes home — where he now lives with his extended family sprawled throughout the two lower floors — after leaving a nearby Loreto order convent in Calcutta, where she had been a teacher since 1929. Three years before her arrival, she

said she had heard a call from God "To serve Him among the poorest of the poor."

She first moved to a home run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, but that was too far from the school she had opened in Calcutta's Mottijheel slum. Gomes' home was more convenient, and likely provided the independence she needed to recruit followers.

By the time she outgrew the top floor of No 14 in 1953, 28 other women had joined her, Gomes said. She had been granted permission to found her own order, the Missionaries of Charity, in 1950.

Gomes remembers the young women were lively, once playing a game of tug-of-war on the balcony overlooking the neighbourhood's muddy streets and tenement rooftops strung with laundry.

"They were normal human beings, not all the time praying," he said.

One room was set aside for chapel with an altar built by a neighbourhood cabinet maker. Today, it's a bedroom in a dark, cement-floored apartment cooled by fans and decorated with religious drawings and one pastel of Mother Teresa's familiar, smiling profile.

"Mother was full of love all the time, she never looked angry — even if she was angry, she never showed it," said Polton Roy, one of her first students at the Mottijheel School.

"If the school was not here, I don't know what we would have done. Because of the school, all of us have some education, we can work," said Roy, a maintenance man at a lamp factory.

Mother Teresa arrived in Mottijheel in 1947, asking slum

dwellers whether there were children she could teach. Philomena Maiti, now in her 70s and still living in Mottijheel, remembers helping to spread the word about the young nun who wanted to help, and Mother Teresa soon had scores of students learning their lessons in tin-roofed shacks.

The community later built brick-and-plaster classrooms, and Maiti says, developed self-respect. The school has 250 students today, taught by five lay teachers and two members of Mother Teresa's order.

"Mother said it was her love for the poor and the need that forced her to do her work. She put that feeling in me, too," Maiti said.

She attracted followers wherever she went, even when the work was hard. In 1952, she opened Nirmal Hriday, or "Pure Heart," the first of many homes for sick and dying street people. Here, Mother Teresa and her sisters cleaned maggots from the rotting faces of leprosy victims, washed the emaciated bodies of the malnourished, held the hands of the dying.

"Welcome to Mother's first love," reads a blue-on-white sign on a wall at Nirmal Hriday. Indeed, Mother Teresa seems to have found her true calling when she turned her attentions to Calcutta's most desperate.

At her death, the Missionaries of Charity had 4,000 nuns and ran 517 orphanages, soup kitchens, homeless shelters and clinics around the world.

The group is headquartered not far from where it all began, a five-minute drive from the Gomes home.

Russia may try to return to Soviet era: Clinton

WASHINGTON, Sept 12: President Bill Clinton said on Thursday the case for expanding NATO included the remote possibility that Russia could abandon democracy and "return to the threatening behaviour of the Soviet period," reports Reuters.

In July the 16-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) agreed to invite three nations — Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic — to begin negotiations to become members in the Western security alliance.

Clinton, who has strongly advocated enlarging the alliance, now must win US Senate approval for that agreement. He offered his justification for the expansion in a letter to Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Texas Republican.

Annan defends appeal for talks in Algeria

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 12: UN Chief Kofi Annan yesterday defended his appeal for dialogue in Algeria that had infuriated the Algerian government, and said he was defending "the sanctity of life."

"Right from the beginning I would offer my mediation whenever I think that would be helpful," he said at a news conference here.

In late August, Annan appealed to the two sides in the conflict to engage in a dialogue to end the violence, but the Algerian government rejected the call as interference in Algeria's internal affairs.

E Timorese leader more vulnerable to cause in jail

SYDNEY, Sept 12: East Timorese resistance leader Xanana Gusmao believes he is more valuable to the cause as a figurehead in an Indonesian prison than if he were freed and exiled, a newspaper said Friday, reports AP.

The Sydney Morning Herald, reporting from Jakarta, carried comments by Gusmao, who was captured by Indonesian troops in East Timor five years ago, but did not specify how it obtained them.

The Herald said, "These rare comments and descriptions were passed on by a reliable contact."

The Herald quoted Gusmao, 50, as saying, "You know, I was in the jungle for 18 years. Eighteen years of feeling helpless, of seeing friends die. You feel a great rage inside you, but there is nothing you can do."

South African President Nelson Mandela has in recent months been campaigning for an East Timor peace settlement, including Gusmao's release and the granting of autonomy for the strife-torn former Portuguese colony.