

International



Trisha Yearwood poses with her award for female vocalist of the year backstage at the Country Music Association Awards show in Nashville, on Wednesday.

— AP/UNB photo

# Albright criticizes settlement expansion Israel vows to build 300 new units in West Bank

JERUSALEM, Sept 25: Bolstered by revelations that have deeply embarrassed Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu raised the stakes in his war of words with the Palestinian leader and promised to build another 300 housing units in the West Bank, reports AP.

His pledge to settlers Wednesday night that construction would begin soon in the settlement of Efrat, south of Bethlehem, was sure to anger the Palestinians and irritate the United States, which had asked Israel for a temporary halt in settlement expansion.

"We are building both in Efrat and in Judea and Samaria," he said, using the biblical name for the West Bank. "And we are going to build more both in Efrat and around it. The land of Israel is being built in front of our eyes, and that's a good thing."

Netanyahu timed his announcement as Arafat was scrambling to defend himself against Israeli accusations that his Palestinian Authority had let four suicide bombers slip away. Arafat ordered the arrests Wednesday of 20 suspected

Islamic militants and tightened security at the Nablus city jail where Hamas activists are held.

The arrests came a day after Israel identified four suicide bombers from two recent attacks in Jerusalem as Hamas activists from the village of Asira near Nablus. The July 30 and Sept. 4 attacks killed 25 people, including five bombers.

Israel's Channel 2 television, quoting unnamed security sources, said there were "specific warnings" of another bomb attack in the near future.

"What is needed at this moment is for the Palestinian Authority and those who lead it to join the fight against terrorism and thus make progress in the political process possible," Netanyahu said.

Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians have been stalled since March, when Israel broke ground on a new Jewish neighbourhood in disputed East Jerusalem. Since then, each side has accused the other of obstructing their resumption.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, on her first visit to the region earlier this month, had asked for a "time-

out" in Israeli settlement building in order to help get the peace process back on track. Netanyahu's government rejected that request, saying there could be no movement in the peace process until the Palestinians did more to fight terrorism.

The announcement of the bombers' identities deeply embarrassed Arafat, who had insisted the bombers came from abroad. The four had walked out of a loosely guarded Palestinian jail in Nablus last year, and their names were on a list of 88 Islamic militants Israel had given the Palestinian Authority with the demand they be arrested.

Asked about the incident, Arafat said Wednesday: "They escaped. What can I do?"

Meanwhile US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, struggling to reopen Mideast peace talks, on Wednesday condemned a decision by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to build new homes for settlers on the West Bank.

Albright said through a spokesman that she did not consider the building of new apartments in Efrat "consistent

with the climate" needed for further negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The spokesman, James P. Rubin, said Netanyahu made no mention of the decision in a telephone conversation earlier with Albright. It centered on her admonition to the Israeli leader to preserve the character of an Arab neighbourhood in east Jerusalem.

Last week, Netanyahu approved a compromise that kept Jewish families from moving into apartments in a project and left them under the care of Jewish yeshiva students.

Rubin said the US Embassy in Tel Aviv had confirmed Netanyahu's decision to expand settlements in Efrat, where reporters said 300 new apartments are planned.

The 1993 and 1995 Oslo accords between Israel and the Palestinians bar new settlements on the West Bank but do not deal with expanding existing ones. Israeli government officials have described expansion as a natural occurrence as families grow and need more room.

## Israel steps up Palestinian house demolitions: HR group

JERUSALEM, Sept 25: Israel has waged a punitive campaign of house demolitions against Palestinians in the wake of a suicide bomb attack earlier this summer, an Israeli human rights group charged Wednesday, reports AP.

Since the July 30 bombing in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda marketplace, Israel has destroyed 29 Palestinian homes built without permits in areas of the West Bank it still occupies, leaving at least 163 people homeless, the group B'tselem said in a report.

Fifteen Israelis were killed in the July 30 attack. A second attack on Sept. 4 killed five Israelis.

B'tselem said the increase in demolitions was the result of a government decision following the July 30 attack, "proving that the lack of a building permit or other planning considerations were not the reason for the demolitions."

"We found various reasons why these homes were demolished that had nothing to do with the supposed environmental or planning reasons which the Israeli government gives," Yuri Ginbar, author of the 43-page report, told The Associated Press.

"These are just the pretexts for demolitions ordered as punishment and reprisal."

The number of demolitions carried out in August was four times the number carried out in July, 10 times the number in June and twice the number in

May, B'tselem said.

A statement issued by Israel's military government in the West Bank charged that the B'tselem report was "riddled with inaccuracies" and "exaggerations."

Israel "demolishes houses in accordance with the law as is commonly accepted in democratic countries throughout the world," the statement said.

The statement noted that although Israel retains control of 70 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, only 80,000 Palestinians — out of about 2 million total — live in those areas.

B'tselem said it is virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits in those areas. Israel has demolished more than 1,800 homes there in the past 10 years, allegedly because of lack of permits, the group said.

"Many of these homes were demolished in order to keep Palestinians away from bypass roads, planned and existing, and away from areas connected with the implementation of the next stage of the Oslo (peace) agreements," Ginbar said.

Ginbar urged the Israeli government to turn over planning and zoning control to the Palestinians.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, on her first trip to the region earlier this month, urged Israel to halt house demolitions as a step toward restoring control in the faltering peace process.

## 'Strong Sino-US ties crucial for world stability'

BEIJING, Sept 25: Building strong relations between the United States and China is essential for mutual prosperity and stability US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said Thursday, reports AP.

We in the United States have an enormous interest in a successful China," Rubin said in a speech at Beijing's People's University. "As China becomes more integrated into the global economy... we need to work together on a wide range of fronts."

Despite lingering points of friction, Washington and Beijing are working extra hard to generate good will ahead of Chinese President Jiang Zemin's trip to the United States late next month.

Rubin said he expected Jiang's visit to be a major step forward in improved relations.

He emphasized that the US and China remain at odds on important issues, including financial liberalisation, the free flow of information, and human rights. But both nations need a "steady and strong" relationship to help ensure each other's success, he said.

"The question is what is the best way to advance our interests and beliefs," Rubin said. "We believe that the process of

engagement is the most likely means to make progress on all of the issues we have with China."

"We just have to invest more of our time and energy on China," Rubin said.

The first senior US official to visit since China convened its 15th Communist Party Congress, Rubin lauded an announcement by Jiang at the gathering that the government will begin selling off some state-owned enterprises to help restructure inefficient industries.

Such steps are needed to promote competitive industries as China opens its markets to foreign goods and services to gain admission to the World Trade Organisation, he noted.

During his meetings, Rubin also will urge Beijing to implement and enforce existing agreements, such as the one on intellectual property rights.

Rubin laid out a seven-point list of economic challenges facing China, including enhancing competition, strengthening financial markets, increasing the free flow of information, combating corruption, improving the rule of law, expanding market transparency and increasing openness and integration into the global economy.

## France endorses Japan, Germany for UNSC seats

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25: France's foreign minister on Wednesday endorsed Germany and Japan for permanent membership of the Security Council but said other new members must be those able to contribute to international peacekeeping, reports AP.

In an address to the UN General Assembly, Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said France agrees that the composition of the 15-member council "is no longer an accurate reflection of the political geography of the world today."

"In this connection, we must take into account the Security Council's indispensable role in peacekeeping and therefore elect countries able to contribute to this task, whether they are from the North or South," he said.



Soha Arafat, (R) wife of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, (C) is escorted by a security officer upon their arrival at Arafat's official headquarters in Bethlehem Wednesday to greet visiting Czech President Vaclav Havel. Mrs Arafat angrily accused Israel of "provocation" on Wednesday after she was stopped by Israeli soldiers at an army roadblock for about one hour on her way back to Gaza by soldiers who demanded she present identifications.

## AWS wins general polls in Poland

WARSAW, Sept 25: The right-wing Solidarity Election Action Group (AWS) won last Sunday's general elections in Poland, official results released by the electoral commission early today confirmed, reports AP.

The AWS took 22.83 per cent of the vote, compared with 27.13 per cent for the outgoing ruling ex-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD).

The Freedom Union (UW) won 13.37 per cent, the Peasants Party (PSL) 7.31 per cent and the Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (ROP) 5.56 per cent.

Other parties failed to gain the five per cent required to be represented in parliament, but four seats could go to national minorities.

The commission said the actual distribution of seats in the 460 member Lower House of Parliament, the Sejm, would be announced later today.

According to media estimates, the AWS would have 200 seats, the SLD 164 the UW 60, the PSL 27 and the ROP five.

## Western nations warn against impeding peace in Bosnia

NEW YORK, Sept 25: Major Western nations on Wednesday said they would advocate "increasingly strong measures" against anyone who impeded the 1995 Dayton agreement which ended the 43-month war in former Yugoslavia, reports Reuters.

Foreign ministers from the six-nation Contact Group, frustrated by the slow pace of peace in Bosnia, issued their latest threat in a statement after a 90-minute meeting here. Their aim was to keep the pressure on the various Bosnian factions still deeply divided despite the peace accord.

"The Contact Group will take increasingly strong measures against those impeding progress in implementation of the Dayton accord and the Sirta declaration," the group said.

While Muslims and Croats are also at fault, US officials said the six — Russia, the United States, Britain, Italy, France and Germany — are increasingly agreed that hard-line Bosnian Serbs "compose the major obstacle" to peace.

Confirming a change in its position, Russia joined the others in backing Western leaning Bosnian Serb President Biljana Plavsic in her plans to call new parliamentary elections which are opposed by Bosnian Serb hard liners.

The group urged the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to formally undertake to supervise the polls, called for next month.

For the first time, the allies also publicly raised concerns

about rising tensions in the Albanian-dominated Serbian province of Kosovo, they warned against violence by the government of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic or Albanian radicals and urged peaceful dialogue.

"We do not support independence (for Kosovo) and we do not support maintenance of the status quo. We support an enhanced status for Kosovo within the former Republic of Yugoslavia," a second group statement said.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who chaired the meeting on the fringes of the UN General Assembly, said the Contact Group did not discuss a continued presence of NATO-led peacekeeping forces in Bosnia beyond a June 1998 deadline. This did come up in bilateral talks, she said.

She affirmed a long-term US commitment to Bosnia. But stress no decision has been made on whether NATO or US military forces would have to extend their planned stay, although this is being discussed.

Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov told her — and reporters later — that Moscow had no problem with that prospect.

The ministers urged Bosnian authorities to respect results of local elections held earlier this month and threatened "strict measures" against anyone who impeded full implementation of the polls.

AFP adds from Belgrade: Bosnian Serb President Biljana Plavsic and her hardline rival Momcilo Krajisnik agreed to elections Wednesday in order to end their long running power struggle and test their respective backing.

The accord between the two came after a four-hour meeting with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, who had backed the hardliners against the Western-backed Plavsic in their struggle for power, the official Tanjung news agency reported.

Saddam orders Quranic radio station for Iraq

BAGHDAD, Sept 25: President Saddam Hussein has ordered the establishment of a Quranic radio station for the country, Baghdad radio reported Wednesday, reports AP.

Most countries in the region already have such stations, which feature reading of the Quran, which is Islam's holy book, as well as instruction about its meaning.

Once a champion of secular socialism, Saddam has in recent years cultivated an image of closeness to Islam as the religion's influence had increased throughout the region.

The new station is to begin broadcasting Oct 15, the radio said.

Iraq has three state-run radio stations, including a youth station controlled by Saddam's oldest son, Qadafi.

## ASEAN sees progress on exiled politicians to return to Cambodia

NEW YORK, Sept 25: Southeast Asian foreign ministers reported some progress Wednesday on the possibility of allowing Cambodian politicians who fled the country after a July coup to return, reports AP.

Ministers from Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand met Wednesday at a New York hotel with Ung Huot, installed as co-premier following Cambodian leader Hun Sen's bloody July coup.

Hung Huot assured the ministers that the Cambodian government was reining in any remaining lawlessness by disarming people, and was intent on preparing for elections in May, said Domingo L Siazon, the Philippine foreign minister.

Siazon also said Ung Huot welcomed international observers for the May elections and said ASEAN could have a role.

"There is a feeling of less tension in the city, Siazon quoted Ung Huot as saying.

Hung Sen ousted his rival co-premier, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, in the July 5-6 coup,

and has threatened to prosecute him for arms smuggling, collusion with Khmer Rouge guerrillas and other violations if he returns.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said progress was made on the issue of the exiled politicians' return.

"We see now a possibility of proving an arrangement that would make it possible for these politicians to go back without any perceived or real threat to their personal security," Alatas said. He didn't elaborate.

The ministers planned to meet with Ranariddh, possibly Monday, Siazon said.

After the nearly two-hour meeting with Ung Huot, the ministers joined their counterparts from other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for a meeting on UN reform.

The ASEAN ministers didn't take up the issue of Cambodia's seat in the UN General Assembly, left vacant after the UN credentials committee deferred a decision on who would represent the country — Hun Sen's government or Ranariddh.

## BRIEFLY

**Cargo ship capsizes in Lanka:** A Caribbean owned ship loaded with food for the isolated northern Jaffna Peninsula sank in bad weather off Colombo Thursday after springing a leak, an official said, AP reports from Colombo.

The crew of the MV Astoria — two Philippines and 12 Sri Lankans — were rescued by tug boats before the ship sank three kilometres (1.8 miles) from the Colombo Port, said a port official on condition of anonymity.

The 1,600 ton ship owned by the Astoria Shipping Company of St Vincent in the Caribbean, had been chartered by local traders to carry rice, flour and sugar to the peninsula which can be reached only by sea and air.

**'Mir safe for US astronaut':** A former astronaut heading up a safety review panel is urging the US space agency chief to send astronaut David Wolf to Mir, saying the Russian space station is safe enough for a four-month visit, AP reports from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

"It's a go" because was reviewed that the systems on board the Mir present no more risks than they have for the previous flights that have gone up there," Gemini and Apollo astronaut Thomas Stafford told "CBS Evening News."

**Cyclone claims 8 in India:** Indian authorities issued a cyclone alert in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh Wednesday, as torrential rains claimed eight lives and flooded large areas officials said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The Meteorological department said a depression in the Bay of Bengal about 75 kilometres (45 miles) from the coast was expected to hit the state later Wednesday, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported. The deep depression is likely to turn into a cyclonic storm, Andhra Pradesh relief and rehabilitation commissioner A K Tigdi and in Hyderabad, the state capital.

**US envoy to Lanka named:** President Bill Clinton Wednesday named career diplomat Shaun Donnelly as Ambassador to Sri Lanka, the White House announced in a statement, AFP reports from Little Rock.

An expert in international economic affairs, Donnelly has worked as a diplomat in Egypt, Ethiopia, Mali, Senegal and Tunisia, according to the statement issued in Little Rock, Arkansas where Clinton was Wednesday night. The appointment must be confirmed by the Senate.

**Agreement to start talks in Ireland:** Agreement was reached Wednesday evening in Belfast over a formula for the start of multi-party peace talks in northern Ireland parties to the talks said, AFP reports from Belfast.

The deal, after a day of intense negotiations between Protestant and Catholic parties in the province, should lead to the first ever roundtable talks aimed at securing a peace settlement.

**Israeli official meets Ross:** Israeli Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh met Wednesday with US Middle East mediator Dennis Ross and presented new evidence concerning Palestinian terrorist activities, an Israeli diplomat said, AP reports from Washington.

Part of the presentation dealt with the Palestinians identified by Israel as being responsible for two suicide bombings in Jerusalem, the diplomat said. Naveh had spent more than three hours with Ross on Tuesday. On Thursday, a Palestinian delegation will meet with Ross.

**US journalist dead:** Frances Starner, a veteran US journalist who covered the Vietnam War from its origins in the early 1960s through the fall of Saigon in 1975, died Wednesday in Bangkok after a long illness, AP reports from Bangkok.

Starner, 77, who had resided in Bangkok for two decades. A Montana native, she arrived in southeast Asia in the late 1950s, working first as a scholar in the Philippines and later as a

## Militants call for ceasefire in insurgency in Egypt

CAIRO, Sept 25: A group of 33 Muslim militants, accused of murdering 26 policemen and attempting to topple the government, on Wednesday called for a ceasefire in the insurgency in Egypt, reports AP.

It was the second appeal by members of al-Gamma al-Islamiya, or the Islamic Group, for an end to the bloodshed.

The government rejected the earlier call, saying it was a ploy by defendants seeking lighter sentences.

A statement read by one of the militants in a Cairo State Security Court on Wednesday said "We reaffirm the call for a ceasefire and the halting of military operations."

## Developing nations unveil their own reform agenda for UN

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25: Developing countries told the UN General Assembly on Wednesday they would not support any reform plan that scales back economic development, reports AP.

Sweden also told the annual General Assembly debate that the United Nations cannot be reformed "under the threat of political and financial crisis."

The government rejected a clear reference to the US refusal to pay its arrears unconditionally.

Swedish Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallen called on all UN debtors "including the main debtor, the United States," to pay their bills by the end of the year.

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## Angolan minister calls for ban on UNITA rebels

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25: Angola's foreign minister urged the Security Council to implement sanctions it approved last month to punish the former rebel movement UNITA for reneging on its peace accord, reports AP.

"The Angolan people looks forward for the Security Council to demonstrate firmness and determination," in applying the sanctions, Angolan Foreign Minister Venancio de Moura told world leaders Wednesday attending the General Assembly debate.

Last month the Security Council approved a travel ban on UNITA officials and their

families beginning Sept. 30 if it didn't get assurances that UNITA had taken concrete steps to comply with a 1994 peace accord.

The ban would suspend travel by UNITA leaders outside the country and flights abroad from UNITA-controlled areas.

De Moura said UNITA was violating its peace pact by maintaining a 35,000 member army, massing weapons and failing to turn over rebel-held land to the government.

"It appears that the leader of this organization has not abandoned its strategy of talking over the power by force," he said.

## Ties between Hungary, Slovakia at stake over ICJ's ruling on Danube dam

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, Sept 25: A hydroelectric station planned during the Cold War and abandoned in its aftermath has set two former Communist allies against each other in a bitter feud before the world court, reports AP.

Hungary and Slovakia, already locked in a bitter war of words over Slovakia's treatment of its 600,000-strong ethnic Hungarian minority, turned to the court in 1993 to settle their longstanding quarrel over damming the Danube River.

Hungary says it abandoned plans to dam the Danube after learning that the project would wreak havoc in the river's flood

plain.

Slovakia countered that the environmental argument was a smokescreen to mask Hungary's decision to unilaterally dump the multi-million-dollar project.

Each country has accused the other of breaking international law. After four years of hearings and a visit to the river, the world court — the United Nations' highest judicial body — was ruling on the dispute Thursday.

Officially known as the International Court of Justice, the world court has no enforcement power and relies on states to voluntarily comply with its rulings.

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members: the United States, Russia, China, France and Britain.

Several other proposals have been floated including adding non-permanent seats and restricting veto powers of the newcomers.

Mugabe also called on the international community to support the new president of the Congo, Laurent Kabila, who ousted longtime dictator Mobutu Sese Seko last May.

The United States and other developed countries have threatened to withhold aid unless Kabila allows the United Nations to investigate allegations that his forces massacred thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees during his successful rebellion.