

Israel, PA talks begin in Washington

JERUSALEM, Nov 3: Israel and the Palestinians head back to the negotiating table Monday in Washington, with Israel saying "practical progress" can be made and the Palestinians gloomy that Israel is evading any real issues, reports AP.

"We will take part in the talks, despite the fact that they have no chance," Yasser Arafat was quoted Sunday as saying in the Israeli newspaper Maariv.

The talks will be convened under the stern eye of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who wants Israel to commit to a "time-out" in settlement expansion, and reportedly also is pushing for a commitment on the date and scope of an Israeli troop withdrawal from rural West Bank land.

The Palestinians, however, say they fear that Foreign Minister David Levy, who is leading the Israeli delegation, is not authorised to negotiate on those issues.

"He can hold talks all day long, but your Cabinet didn't empower him to do a thing," Arafat told Maariv. "He can conduct talks, but he cannot propose any solutions."

The talks were held up a week while the Israeli government debated the positions Levy would take. On Wednesday, the Israeli Cabinet authorised Levy to fly to Washington for the talks.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Aviv Shiran said Levy was "empowered by the Cabinet to talk about all the issues on the agenda." Including a timeout and West Bank withdrawal.

Israeli government spokesman Moshe Fogel said Israel was looking for "practical progress" in areas such as the opening of a Palestinian airport and seaport in the Gaza Strip, called for in the existing Israeli-Palestinian agreements but not yet implemented.

"We're very close to making progress on some of the issues," he said.

Fogel would not comment on whether Israel would negotiate on the more complicated issues of the settlements and the further redeployment. He said, however, that Israel would not go forward with a redeployment until the Palestinians did more to satisfy Israel's security demands.

"We have lingering suspicions that they're not really committed to fighting terror," he said.

Dodi was the one for Di

LONDON, Nov 3: Princess Diana told her two hair stylists that Dodi Fayed, who died with her in the car crash in Paris, was "the one" for her on the day she left Britain for the final time. According to extracts from a new book published here, reports AP.

"I think this is it. This is the one," Diana told her hairdressers Tess Rock, 31, and Natalie Symons, 27. The Sunday Mirror newspaper reported in its extract of the women's book, "Our Diana Diaries."

Rock and Symons said that their late, famous client declared she was attracted to the millionaire son of Harrod's Store-owner Mohammed Ali Fayed because of his exotic accent and the way he said, "Diana, you're so Naughty."

Diana also had an affectionate brother-sister relationship with the Prince of Wales despite the bitter break-up of their marriage, the women reportedly learnt.

The hair stylists said they had written the book to challenge views in other books and newspapers that Diana was an "emotional wreck."

"She was absolutely not the emotional wreck that (author Andrew) Morton makes her out to be, the flaky woman that the papers keep talking about. She was a 36-year-old woman who was happy and madly in love," said Rock.



People of Baghdad read Iraqi newspapers on Sunday to follow news of the current impasse between their government and the UN. The Iraqi leadership decided last Thursday to continue cooperating with the Security Council's Special Commission but not to allow American weapons inspectors. Two Americans were for the second time politely refused entry after landing at an airfield west of Baghdad Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

Court grants bail to Kim's convicted son

SEOUL, Nov 3: Citing health reasons, a Seoul court granted bail Monday to a son of President Kim Young-sam serving a three-year jail term for bribery and tax evasion, reports AP.

Court officials said Kim Hyun-chul, 37, was expected to be released later Monday under bail of 100 million won (dollar 105,000) after serving less than a month of his sentence.

Attorneys for the president's son told the court he was under extreme mental and physical strain and could not continue prison life.

In October, a district court sentenced Kim Hyun-chul to prison and ordered him to pay 2.1 million dollars in fines, about what he was convicted of taking in bribes and avoiding in taxes.

It was the first-ever criminal case involving a close relative of an incumbent president and one of the most publicised trials in South Korean history.

President Kim was not implicated in the case but the scandal eroded his authority in his final year in office. The president's single five-year term ends in February, and he is barred by law from seeking reelection.

Serbia's popular ultranationalist to run again for presidency

BELGRADE, Nov 3: An ultranationalist politician who received the most votes in Serbia's invalidated presidential elections will run again in the repeat vote, his party said Sunday, reports AP.

Vojislav Seselj, leader of the ultranationalist Serb Radical Party, has become a key player in what remains of Yugoslavia.

In the October 5 elections, which were invalidated by low turnout, Seselj defeated the Socialist candidate and protégé of Yugoslavia's autocratic President Slobodan Milosevic, Zoran Djindjic.

Milosevic has picked a new candidate for the repeat race, his close aide and current Yugoslav Foreign Minister Milan Milutinovic. Many analysts believe Milutinovic will be no match for the increasingly popular Seselj.

In the last elections, Seselj walked away with a majority of votes cast.

Several democratic opposition parties called for a boycott of the last elections to protest what they said were unfair conditions. They succeeded in persuading more than half of the electorate not to vote.

BRIEFLY

Indo-Pacific fishing confce begins

The fifth international conference on fishing in the Indo-Pacific region opened in Noumea yesterday, bringing together nearly 300 specialist from 30 countries, organisers said, AFP reports from Noumea.

The four-yearly conference in this year focusing on the biology of fish species and ecology and their application to the management and exploitation of natural fish resources. The Indo-Pacific region contains two-thirds of the world's 20,000 known species of fish.

Tornado skips through Florida

A tornado skipped through the Atlantic Coast community of New Smyrna Beach, tearing whole second stories off homes. Thirty people suffered minor injuries, AP reports from New Smyrna Beach.

Firefighters had to dig some people out of beachside homes that collapsed during the storm that struck early Sunday. Thousands of customers lost power in the community just south of Daytona Beach. The 64-unit Diamond Head Point condominium complex on the Indian River was devastated by the storm. Resident Roger Vayles said his wife Sal got up to close the window to keep rain out, and was just returning to bed when the twister hit.

9 die as wall collapses in India

A mud wall collapsed in a northern town Monday, killing nine villagers in northern India, a news report said, AP reports from New Delhi.

Details were sketchy of the incident near Kaithoon, a village 400 kilometres (250 miles) southwest of New Delhi, United News of India news agency reported quoting local officials. It said five people were rescued from the debris. It was not clear how the accident occurred.

Ex-secret service agent faces espionage charge in UK

LONDON, Nov 3: A former member of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service has been arrested and charged with spying for a foreign power, police reported Sunday night, reports AP.

The government agency, also known as MI-6, is responsible for spying against foreign countries.

Scotland Yard said in a statement that the 34-year-old man has been charged under the section of the Official Secrets Act dealing with espionage activities against the British state.

The statement did not identify the man or say what foreign power he is accused of spying for but said he will appear before London's Bow Street Magistrates Court on Monday for arraignment. It gave no time for Monday's court hearing.

Arraignment hearings normally last only a few minutes and are confined to formal identification of the accused and outline details of the charge. The accused, who at that stage is not required to say whether he or she is guilty or innocent, is then normally remanded to await trial at date to be announced later.

Scotland Yard refused to give any details about the case. But it said it had nothing to do with accusations that appeared in a London newspaper earlier Sunday that the agency's sister service MI-5 ignored advance warning of a bombing in 1994 of the Israeli Embassy. MI-5 is the British government agency responsible for counterespionage.

The report in The Mail on Sunday appeared after the government lifted an injunction on reporting bugging by MI-5.

The newspaper report quoted former MI-5 officer David Shayler as saying that after the blast the agent who had received a written warning of an imminent attack tried to cover-up by 'burying' it in a colleague's cupboard. The paper did not identify the MI-5 agent who reportedly received the warning.

Thirteen people were injured in the bombing on July 26, 1994, and another six were hurt in explosions later that day at the offices of Jewish charities in London.

The attacks, apparently aimed at damaging the Middle East peace process, came a day after King Hussein of Jordan and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shook hands at the White House.

Two months ago, the government got an injunction barring publication of Shayler's claims.

Women face uphill battle in today's polls in Jordan

AMMAN, Nov 3: Jordan's only elected woman lawmaker recalls that a Muslim fundamentalist leader once offered her a free wardrobe if she would take to the veil as an observant Muslim, reports AP.

Another time, a conservative tribal leader hurled an ash-tray at legislator Toujan Faisal when she spoke out against corruption during a debate in parliament.

Faisal refused the clothes and the ash-tray missed. But the message in both cases was clear: Women should stick to their traditional role — staying at home or appearing veiled in public — and leave politics to men.

But the 48-year-old Faisal is ignoring the message despite her troubles as a lawmaker. This year, she is back as one of 17 women among the 535 candidates contesting Tuesday's parliamentary elections.

"It was an arduous and painful path, just like a garden full of prickles," Faisal told The Associated Press. "But I know I am daring and very few can do what I do."

A former television talk show hostess, Toujan first contested elections in 1989. But she lost after her campaign against polygamy drew calls for her blood by Muslim fanatics; Islam allows men up to four wives at the same time.

She won the 1993 elections on a platform of women's rights and created a stir in the parliament, or House of Representatives, by challenging King Hussein's constitutional right to dissolve parliament. A court threw out her case.

Despite her firebrand appeal, Faisal finds public acceptance difficult — as do other women seeking a role in politics.

A recent opinion poll by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan found that less than 30 per cent of Jordanians believe women are capable of political leadership.

Some members of Jordan's most powerful fundamentalist group, the Muslim Brotherhood, are urging women to be fired from government jobs as a way to ease unemployment among men. The Brotherhood's political arm is boycotting the elections, but some rebel members are contesting as independents.

Jordanians are not unique among Arabs in having few women in politics.

Protests on in Baghdad supporting govt move US congress leaders for military action against Iraq

WASHINGTON, Nov 3: Congress top four leaders agreed that the United States should respond quickly, including taking military action, to show Iraqi President Saddam Hussein that his decision barring Americans from UN weapons inspection teams is unacceptable, reports AP.

The only thing that he (Saddam) seems to understand is action, and that's what's going to have to happen," House Democratic Leader Dick Gephardt said Sunday.

But the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, said that while all options are being considered, at this stage it is the United Nations, not the United States, that must confront the Iraqis.

"This is not a fight between the United States and Iraq. This is Iraq confronting the United Nations and (UN) Security Council Violations," Richardson said Sunday on ABC television's "This Week."

The Baghdad government declared last week that Americans could no longer participate in UN weapons inspections and gave 10 American inspectors in Iraq until Thursday to leave the country.

On Sunday, Iraqi officials, turned away three Americans trying to enter in advance of the teams' resumption of work on Monday and Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations said Sunday night they would not be allowed in Monday, either.

Also late Sunday, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan offered to send a mission to Iraq to defuse the crisis after the United States dropped opposition to such a move.

Lott speculated that the reason the Iraqis are trying to shut out the Americans is that the inspectors "were very close to finding some more very dangerous weapons."

Saddam's actions, added Daschle, "are completely unacceptable, and I think we have to act sooner rather than later."

Talking from New York, Richardson said the United Nations is not seeking a military confrontation with Iraq. "The first priority has to be to resolve this diplomatically. We want to be in concert with the UN and especially our colleagues on the Security Council," he said.

Protests took place in Iraq for the fifth straight day Sunday supporting the government's decision to stop cooperating with US officials from the UN Special Commission to disarm Iraq (UNSCOM), witnesses and state television said.

Some 15,000 people rallied in Mosul, 400 kilometres (250 miles) north of Baghdad, with banners that said "Yes to President Saddam Hussein," "No to the Americans" and "No to injustice," witnesses there said.

Iraqi Kurds also took part in the march, they added.

State television reported that similar demonstrations occurred in the southern cities of Basra, Diwaniya, Najaf, Nasiriyah and Hilla, and in the northern city of Kirkuk.

Gunmen kill 2 Shi'ite Muslims in Pakistan

LAHORE, Nov 3: Gunmen shot and killed two Shi'ite Muslim activists in eastern Punjab province on Monday in the latest round of religiously motivated killings to sweep the country, reports AP.

Dilawar Hussein and his brother, Bakr, were sitting outside a store in the busy downtown district of Sialkot, some 200 kilometres (120 miles) north of the Punjab capital of Lahore, when four men on two motorcycles sped past.

They opened fire and the brothers died immediately, according to police officials.

Both brothers were activists of the militant Shiite group, known as the Movement for the Enforcement of Shiite Law. The victims also were brothers-in-law of a member of the Punjab provincial Assembly, Akhtar Hussein Rizvi.

No one has claimed responsibility for the latest killings, but police suspect Sunni Muslim rivals.

In recent days religiously motivated violence has claimed several lives, mostly in the southern port city of Karachi. On Sunday three Sunni Muslim clerics were shot dead, as well as a young student, who was killed on his way to attend the funeral of one of the slain clerics.

Dozens killed as storm lashes Vietnam's coast

HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam, Nov 3: More than 200 fishing boats were sunk and hundreds more were missing at sea as a powerful tropical storm lashed Vietnam's southern coast early Monday, reports AP.

Dozens of people were confirmed dead, but officials warned the death toll could climb into the hundreds with the fishing boat crews still unaccounted for.

The United Nations Disaster Management Unit said at least 1,150 small boats were missing in the wake of tropical storm Linda, which slammed down on southern Vietnam's Ca Mau province Sunday night and early Monday morning. Linda was classified a typhoon by Vietnam's meteorological office.

Pounding the coast with winds of more than 130 kilometres per hour (80 mph), the storm left a trail of destruction in its wake through Ca Mau province, local officials said.

Thousands of families were left homeless as Linda swept across the province late Sunday and early Monday. As many as 13,000 clappedboard and mud homes were flattened or heavily damaged by powerful winds, a central government official told The Associated Press.

Fighting leaves 42 dead or hurt in Lanka

COLOMBO, Nov 3: Government troops and Tamil Tiger guerrillas clashed in northern Sri Lanka leaving 42 dead or wounded military officials said Sunday, reports AP.

The rebels of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked an army patrol south of Killinochchi Saturday, leading to a fierce firefight, the officials said.

They said four soldiers were killed and 12 wounded in the clash.

They quoted LTTE radio transmissions to say that 26 rebels, including four leaders, were also killed or wounded in the encounter.

Czech president to remain in hospital

PRAGUE, Nov 3: Czech President Vaclav Havel, who is suffering from pneumonia, will have to remain in hospital for at least eight days, the head of his medical team said on television Sunday, reports AP.

Havel "still has a fever and feels tired and weak, but is in a good mood," said Dr Miroslav Cerkak, who is also the Czech Republic's deputy health minister.

The 61-year-old president took a turn for the worse early Sunday and became feverish. The doctors said, but gave no further details.

Havel underwent a second lung X-ray which gave nearly the same results as one on Tuesday, Cerkak said.

Cerkak also said the President would have to recuperate for several weeks after the hospitalisation, although he could not be precise on the amount of time needed for a full recovery.

Havel, who underwent surgery for lung cancer last year, spent a "difficult" night Wednesday at a military hospital, his personal doctor said.

Still on an antibiotics, he had returned home Thursday where he was put under the care of a team of four doctors.

The Prague newspaper Pravo on Saturday quoted Havel's wife Dagmar as saying it was his second bout with pneumonia since August and she was concerned about his health.

India must shed its Pakistan obsession in foreign policy

Recent meetings between Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers, bilateral talks at the Foreign Secretaries' level, the periodic rhetoric emanating from New Delhi and Islamabad expressing the desire for better India-Pakistan relations and the repeated advice given to India and Pakistan by foreign well-wishers that the two countries must engage in further confidence building measures (CBMs), all seem to give the impression that there is genuine movement taking place in the sphere of India-Pakistan relations.

However, anyone familiar with the substance of India-Pakistan relations will recognise that much of all this is merely hot air and should not be taken seriously by the attentive Indian public.

The danger is that the Indian leadership may well get carried away by its own rhetoric and spend far too much time and energy on attempting to improve India-Pakistan relations.

When such attempts fail, as they will, the backlash in India may lead to greater jingoism which is likely to inflame the perception of danger from Pakistan and thus build a kind of

liberal, secular, and inclusive in character and runs directly counter to Pakistan's exclusivist, religion-based, and illiberal definition of national identity.

The Indian ideological counterparts of the dominant Pakistani political elites, the Hindutva brigade symbolised by the Sangh Parivar (the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh and its wings), are likely to feel more at ease in the company of Pakistani ideologues than mainstream Indian politicians because the former share the fundamental assumptions of the two-nation theory with the Pakistani rulers. However, the ideological division between mainstream Indian political elites and their Pakistani counterparts creates a major chasm between them which is impossible to bridge.

This ideological division has important practical consequences and is central to the mutually irreconcilable Indian and Pakistani perceptions of the problem of Kashmir. Differences over Kashmir in turn reflect the divergent Indian and Pakistani assumptions on the basis of

simple reason that the stronger party is able to insulate its state and nation building projects to a greater degree from unwelcome neighbourly intrusion.

It will be foolhardy to believe that continental ballistic missiles (CBMs), however sophisticated in their conception, will be able to successfully manage, leave alone resolve, these fundamental contradictions. CBMs will, therefore, continue to be marginal, if not irrelevant, to the central issues in India-Pakistan relations.

Indian policy towards Pakistan should, therefore, be envisioned and formulated on the basis of a clear sighted appraisal of these fundamental issues that continue to determine India-Pakistan relations. It must, therefore, encompass the following strategies:

(a) Marginalise, in fact render irrelevant, Pakistan as far as the Kashmir issue is concerned by quickly and deftly proceeding with the process of political reconciliation with the people of the Valley that has already been set in motion by the revival of the political process in the state last year.

(b) This must be coupled with the maintenance of a

Russian cosmonauts remove old solar panel on Mir

MOSCOW, Nov 3: Two Russian cosmonauts dismantled a failing solar panel on the Mir space station Monday, keeping a close eye on one of their spacesuits after it developed last-minute problems, reports AP.

Mission Control said everything was going well as Mir commander Anatoly Solovoyov and crewmate Pavel Vinogradov disconnected power cables on the panel before removing it. US astronaut David Wolf, the third member of Mir's crew, manned controls inside the station.

The mission started two hours late after final checks revealed that Solovoyov's space suit was not transmitting data, which would allow Mission Control to monitor oxygen levels and other safety factors. Mission Control decided to go ahead with the mission when attempts to repair the suit did not succeed, cautioning Solovoyov to closely monitor his suit.

You should be more attentive and regularly report the pressure and report back," Mission Control Chief Vladimir Solovoyov instructed the Mir commander by radio.

"We carried out the spacewalk as planned, but with a two-hour delay. This is unpleasant, but not dangerous," Solovoyov, the mission chief, later told reporters.

Mission Control Chief Igor Goncharov stressed the cosmonauts were in no danger despite problems with the suit.

"Solovoyov's spacesuit is working fine. The only problem is a communications block," he said.

The cosmonauts were to remove an old solar panel, which was wearing out, and make way for the installation of a new one in a second spacewalk set for Thursday.

Solovoyov, the world's most experienced spacewalker, was making his fourth trip outside the Mir's pressurised modules since arriving in August. In his career, he has made more than a dozen spacewalks.

Monday's mission was part of an ongoing operation to boost the Mir's power supply, cut nearly in half when the station was hit by a cargo ship during a practice docking in June.