

International

# Ross' four-day ME shuttle ends inconclusively



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat talks to US peace envoy Dennis Ross during their meeting at Arafat's office in Gaza City, Sunday. Arafat and Ross met for the second time in two days in an effort to reach agreement on an Israeli pullback from West Bank. AP/UNB photo

JERUSALEM, Mar 30: A four-day Mideast shuttle by a senior US envoy ended inconclusively Monday, with neither Israel nor the Palestinians ready to commit themselves to a US plan to resume the stalled peace process, reports AP.

The envoy, Dennis Ross, was to meet one more time with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday evening before returning to Washington to brief US President Bill Clinton on the talks.

Ross has been trying to win Israeli and Palestinian agreement to a US proposal for an Israeli withdrawal in stages from 13.1 per cent of the West Bank, with each step accompanied by Palestinian security gestures.

Netanyahu's senior aide, David Bar-Illan, denied Israeli media reports that the Israeli leader increased his initial withdrawal offer from 9 per cent to 11 per cent, and that a deal was close.

"No discussion of percentages has taken place, and no Israeli offer has been made," Bar-

Illan told The Associated Press.

The Palestinians, meanwhile, have not signed on to the idea of Palestinian reciprocal steps for Israeli troop pullbacks, Bar-Illan said. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat appeared angry after a meeting with Ross on Sunday.

In a demonstration of just how violent the climate is, a carload of explosives that authorities believed was meant for use in a terror attack went off prematurely on Sunday in the West Bank town of Ramallah. A Palestinian man was killed in the blast.

Palestinian police said Monday they have not identified the body, and have established a connection to one of the militant groups that have carried out attacks on Israel in the past.

In the nearby town of El Bireh, Palestinian students on Monday stoned Israeli troops who fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse them.

Israel's 5 million Arab citizens, meanwhile, planned rallies and marches Monday to mark Land Day in commemoration of a 1976 protest against land confiscations in which six people were killed.

In the southern Negev Desert, marchers were to plant 1,500 olive trees to symbolize their ties to the land.

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were to observe a partial commercial strike in a show of solidarity.

Land Day in the past has triggered violent confrontations, and Israeli police deployed reinforcements in Arab towns and villages on Monday. As a precaution, the Israeli army barred Israeli civilians from entering two tiny Israeli enclaves in the West Bank, Joseph's Tomb in Nablus and an ancient synagogue in Jericho.

Israeli media reported Monday that Ross was making some progress in getting Israel and the Palestinians to agree to the US proposal for a 13.1 per cent troop withdrawal.

# Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams says Reunification of Ireland 'not possible at this stage'

LONDON, Mar 30: Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams has admitted in a newspaper interview published today that the reunification of Ireland is "not possible at this stage" of the peace process, reports AP.

He told the Swiss daily Le Temps that any accord resulting from the peace talks which resume today in Belfast, would be viewed by the Republicans as "an interim measure, a step forward on the path to a united Ireland."

Adams, whose party is the legal arm of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), said he was "optimistic" about the negotiations, but he said "major obstacle" to agreement was "the refusal of the Ulster Unionist Party (the main moderate protestant party) to involve itself totally in the process."

Its member still refuses to talk to Sinn Fein and their tactic is clear, they are trying to sign an agreement which excludes our party."

But Adams said it would be "completely illusory to imagine

that a lasting peace could be based on a partial agreement which failed to take account of the demands of such a large section of the community."

Adams said a good agreement called for "changes at all levels" to reduce the "crippling inequalities between the two communities (Catholics and Protestants)."

The Sinn Fein leader called for "demilitarisation" of society in Northern Ireland. In the guise of a police, we have a paramilitary militia.

Foreign British troops must be taken home and an impartial police force set up," he said.

Adams reiterated his call for the release of political prisoners and welcomed the actions of the new British Labour government. "The new British government has adopted a different style," he said, adding that it had "the capacity to bring change because it no longer depends on the unionists' votes," as did the former conservative government of John Major.

# Ranariddh returns to Cambodia amid protests

PHNOM PENH, Mar 30: Prince Norodom Ranariddh was immediately dogged by protesters Monday after returning to Cambodia from nine months of exile after being deposed as co-prime minister in a bloody coup, reports AP.

The protests were orchestrated by the arch-rival who toppled the prince, strongman Hun Sen, and indicated the troubles Ranariddh will have in contesting elections. Hun Sen has called for July 26.

Ranariddh stepped out of the Thai Airways International plane as scheduled shortly after noon. Pointedly, no red carpet had been laid out since he was stripped of his co-premier title after the takeover.

The prince was greeted by ambassadors and other dignitaries who see his return as vital to give a measure of democracy to the polls.

Accompanied by his own security guards, he was whisked away in his car to a hotel.

Some of the protesters organised by Hun Sen ran alongside the car as it left the airport, holding up banners denouncing him. A few hundred protesters were waiting outside his hotel when the prince arrived.

Ranariddh's staff handed out a statement in which the prince vowed to reunite and strengthen his royalist FUNCINPEC party, which was torn in to factions

after the coup. He thanked all the countries that had pressured Hun Sen to allow him to return.

"I'm truly delighted and deeply moved to be back in my beloved Cambodia," Ranariddh said in the statement.

"Only a new government born out of free, fair and credible elections certified by the international community will receive the recognition and multi-form assistance which our country, Cambodia, desperately needs for its reconstruction and development."

The protesters, mostly poor, said they had been ordered to go by local authorities and been handed banners denouncing Ranariddh. About 1,500 marched through Phnom Penh's streets, while a few hundred gathered at the airport.

The airport protesters bore banners with slogans like "Don't Follow People Who Cause Political Insecurity," contrasting with a heavy security presence and hundreds of United Nations officials, journalists and Ranariddh supporters.

The prince plans to stay only a few days in Cambodia because of security fears — he changed his hotel Saturday following the murder of an Australian businessman at the one where he had planned to stay and still under "unmet conditions" in a Japanese plan enabling his return.

Under the plan, the prince is to ensure a cease fire by his armed supporters in northwest Cambodia and break all links to the Khmer Rouge guerrillas whose loose alliance has permitted his men to withstand army offensives.

The Khmer Rouge faction is meanwhile crumbling, with the government supporting renegades who have launched attacks against their commanders since midweek. The government side apparently has established a tenuous control over Anlong Veng, the main guerrilla base, but a counter-attack is expected.

The Cambodian Daily newspaper Monday cited government claims that the Khmer Rouge leader, Ta Mok, and the movement's notorious historic chieftain, Pol Pot, were on the run and could be captured in the next few days.

The reports could not be independently verified but have diverted attention from Ranariddh's return, so far that biggest political event of the year.

Meanwhile Reuter adds: An official of Prince Norodom Ranariddh's royalist FUNCINPEC Party was shot dead on the eve of the prince's return in what colleagues suspected was a political killing but Cambodian authorities said was a robbery.

# Vajpayee to welcome TDP members into his cabinet

NEW DELHI, Mar 30: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee hopes to shore up his fragile governing coalition by bringing in another party, he said after the party helped him win his first vote of confidence, reports AP.

Vajpayee, speaking to reporters Sunday after being draped with flowers and mobbed by crowds on an emotional visit to his home constituency in the northern city of Lucknow, said he would welcome members of the Telugu Desam Party, known as the TDP, into his Cabinet.

Vajpayee expressed confidence he would complete his five-year term, something no politician has been able to do in recent years. He is the fourth prime minister India has had in two years.

"Democracy has no place for uncertainty and anarchy," he was quoted as saying by United News of India.

Newspapers reported Monday that Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party was negotiating with the TDP, which has 12 members in parliament, including the speaker who votes only in cases of ties.

Days before 11 TDP voters helped Vajpayee win the 274-261 confidence measure Saturday. The BJP had ensured the election of a little-known TDP candidate as speaker. The TDP, which counts on support from

Muslim in Andhra Pradesh, may want even more concessions before joining the Hindu nationalist BJP's government.

The BJP has said that for now it will not pursue goals that could alienate Muslims, including building a Hindu temple at the site where some of its supporters tore down a mosque in 1992. The destruction of the mosque set off deadly Hindu-Muslim rioting across India.

TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu said the main reason he supported the BJP in Saturday's confidence vote was because of his rivalry with the Congress party. If Vajpayee had been toppled in the confidence vote, Congress would have tried to form its own coalition government.

In 1996, Vajpayee resigned rather than face a confidence vote he knew he would lose after only 13 days as prime minister. His short-lived minority government was replaced by a coalition of parties united only in their opposition to the BJP. The coalition tried under two prime ministers to form a stable government, and when it failed new elections were called three years ahead of schedule.

The new elections produced a parliament similar to the one voted in 1996: dominated by the BJP, but with no party holding the majority needed to govern without partners.

# Gunmen kill 3 Shi'ite activists in Pakistan

MULTAN, Pakistan, Mar 30: Gunmen on motorcycles shot dead three Shi'ite activists taking an early morning walk to work in the Pakistan town of Multan, police said, reports Reuter.

The elderly Shi'ites were killed by two unidentified gunmen in the Punjabi town, police said. No other details were immediately available.

Drive-by shootings by masked men on motorcycles have killed more than a dozen people this year, mostly Shi'ites.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Monday's attack but police said it appeared to be part of tit-for-tat killings between militants of the Shi'ite and majority Sunni faiths.

At least 54 people have been killed in sectarian violence across Pakistan this year. About 150 people were killed in the central province of Punjab in sectarian killings in 1997.

# Yeltsin unlikely to stand in polls

MOSCOW, Mar 30: President Boris Yeltsin, quoted by Russian news agencies, indicated today he would not stand in the 2000 presidential election and would cooperate with a bid launched on Saturday by ex-prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, reports Reuter.

Interfax quoted Yeltsin as saying Chernomyrdin's surprise announcement "stemmed from the spirit of cooperation" between himself and Chernomyrdin and that Chernomyrdin would "head" the presidential campaign. ITAR-Tass quoted Yeltsin as saying of the campaign: "I will not be part of it."

# Lone Muslim minister in Andhra Pradesh resigns

HYDERABAD, Mar 30: The lone Muslim minister in Andhra Pradesh, Basheeruddin Babukhan, today resigned from the state cabinet in protest against TDP voting in favour of the BJP-led government at the centre even as the Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu said he would explain the party's political compulsions to him, report PTI.

Naidu said Babukhan would be explained about the circumstances which compelled TDP to take the decision.

However, Babukhan has said his decision was irreversible.

In another significant development, the vice-president of Hyderabad TDP unit, Zafar Javed resigned from party in protest against Telugu Desam voting in favour of BJP-led government.

However, the state TDP minorities cell met in the evening and passed an unanimous resolution welcoming TDP stand of voting in favour of Vajpayee government and reposed full faith in the leadership of Naidu

# Communists likely to win Ukraine's election

KIEV, Mar 30: An exit poll showed the Communist Party was likely to win most votes in Ukraine's parliamentary election, pressing a political showdown with embattled President Leonid Kuchma, reports Reuter.

A large number of the former Soviet Republic's 37 million registered voters, fed up with economic hardships had been widely expected to vote for the left in Sunday's election in a show of no-confidence in Kuchma's slow reforms.

At a polling station in the capital, a school decorated with balloons in Ukraine's national colours of blue and yellow, 52-year-old Laritavna Kuznetsova voted for the Communists.

"I have had a chance to compare that Soviet government with this government," she said. "Then I feared for nothing — I did not fear for my children, my life or where my next meal was coming from. Now I'm afraid."

The share of votes forecast for the Communists by the exit poll was almost nine per cent higher than in the last opinion survey conducted before the election.

"As of 10:00 pm the latest exit poll result we have is 26 per cent for the Communists," said Iiko Kucheriv, head of the Democratic Initiative group, an independent think-tank which conducted the poll.

Three other main left-wing

parties and blocks polled 12 per cent.

Valery Khmilko, an analyst at the Kiev centre for political studies, said: "Our parliament will be more left-wing which will make it more difficult to conduct economic reforms in Ukraine."

"We expected a left victory, but not one on quite this scale."

As he cast his vote in central Kiev, Kuchma told reporters he was ready to work with the new parliament.

# Fresh fighting leaves 12 dead in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Mar 30: Government forces shot dead at least 11 Tamil Tiger guerrillas in renewed fighting as the rebels killed a police constable, the defence ministry here said Monday, reports AFP.

Army soldiers killed seven members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) near the rebel-held town of Mankulam on Sunday while another four were killed in the northern peninsula of Jaffna, the ministry said.

It said a constable was killed and three others were seriously wounded when the LTTE attacked a police post in the east of the country on Sunday.

# Mandela won't bend to US pressure to restrict ties with Libya, Cuba

WASHINGTON, Mar 30: President Nelson Mandela of South Africa called President Bill Clinton a man of "thick skin and strong nerves" but stressed Sunday that he will not bend to US pressure to restrict his nation's relations with countries such as Libya and Cuba, reports AP.

"Libya, Cuba and Iran are my friends, and I propose to honour that friendship," the 79-year-old president said in an interview on CNN's "Late Edition."

Mandela's support for countries the United States regards as hostile or backers of terrorism was one of the few sore spots in Clinton's visit to South Africa that concluded Saturday.

Mandela said his position on Libya, Cuba and Iran, supporters of his long struggle against apartheid, did not affect the success of his talks with Clinton.

"The president is one of the most decent men I've come across, and he has got a thick skin and strong nerves," Mandela said. "We emerged from those discussions with our mutual respect enhanced. I really respect President Clinton."

On Friday, Mandela urged Clinton to "set an example to all of us" and make peace with Libya, Cuba and Iran.

"We profoundly disagree," White House National Security Adviser Sandy Berger said in a later interview on CNN from Africa. "I understand his posi-

tion, he wants to support the people who supported the freedom movement during all those years. But our position on Libya is also based on moral principles." He said Libya must give up suspects alleged to be behind the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103. "We have to send a message to terrorists that they cannot outlast us."

# Robin Cook to marry Regan on Apr 19

LONDON, Mar 30: British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said on Sunday that he planned to make his former assistant "as happy as she makes me," eight months after their affair became the Labour government's first front-page sex scandal, reports AP.

The couple, all smiles, posed for photographers outside Chevening House, his official residence in Kent, southeast England, where the 52-year-old Cook will marry Gaynor Regan, 41 on April 19 at a private ceremony.

"The last couple of months have been difficult for both of us but our commitment is greater and our love is deeper because of the experiences we have been through together," Cook said.

# BRIEFLY

**2 workers executed in Philippines:** Muslim extremists executed two abducted rubber plantation workers whose families failed to pay ransom in a southern Philippine province, a police official said Monday. AP reports from Zamboanga.

Suspected Abu Sayyaf guerrillas hacked the workers to death and threw their bodies in the sea off the island province of Basilan, where fishermen found them on Sunday. The killings were the latest violent act attributed by authorities to the Abu Sayyaf, the smaller of two Muslim rebel groups still battling the government to establish a separate Islamic state in the southern Philippines.

**100 evacuated from homes in Quebec:** About 100 people have been evacuated from their homes in southern Quebec after several rivers swelled following unseasonably warm temperatures, civil defence authorities said Sunday. AFP reports from Montreal.

The Chateauguay river in the Monteregie region rose some three metres, leading authorities to close several back roads and to evacuate homes in the area, said Jacinthe Lacroix, a spokeswoman for the Civil Defence Service. In the Beauce region in southern Quebec the Chaudiere river also burst its banks and several towns along the river have taken emergency measures to prevent damage.

**German fugitive held in Argentina:** A German fugitive linked to a kidnapping that led to payment of the largest ransom in German criminal history was arrested on Saturday in a luxury Buenos Aires hotel, an Interpol agent said, Reuter reports from Buenos Aires.

Thomas Drach, 38, was detained at 12:30 am EST (17:30 GMT) in room 801 of the luxury Caesar Park hotel in the upscale Recoleta neighbourhood by an eight-man team. Eduardo Musto, head of operations for Interpol in the Argentine Federal Police Department, told Reuters. Drach is wanted for the 1996 kidnapping of German tobacco tycoon Jan Philip Reemtsma.

**Political writer held in China:** An engineer who wrote an unpublished manuscript about political reform has been arrested on charges of plotting to subvert China's government, a human rights group said Monday. AP reports from Beijing.

Liu Gangxiu, a 34-year-old from Zhongshan city in southern Guangdong province, was arrested Saturday, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said. It quoted Liu's wife, Xiao Le, as saying that seven police who came to their house Sunday afternoon informed her of Liu's arrest and said he was locked up in Zhongshan's No. 1 detention centre.

**Donald Kalpokas Vanuatu's new PM:** Donald Kalpokas was yesterday elected by members of parliament as Vanuatu's new prime minister in place of outgoing premier Serge Vohor, officials said, AFP reports from Port-Vila.

Kalpokas, whose Vanuatu Pati won March 6th general elections, won the support of 35 of parliament's 52 members. He was expected to name his cabinet later yesterday.

Although it was the largest party after the elections, the Vanuatu Pati fell short of an overall majority leading to intense negotiations on who would be prime minister.

**Filipina gets life term in Japan:** A Filipina who murdered the fellow Filipina wife of a US sailor in Japan and stole her money and jewellery was sentenced to life imprisonment yesterday by a Japanese district court, Reuters reports from Tokyo.

According to the ruling, on May 12 last year Maria Lopez, 32, stabbed Gloria Morris, 29, more than 30 times in the chest and abdomen at Morris's apartment on the Atsugi naval air facility near Tokyo. Lopez then stole about 110,000 yen (\$39 dollars) in cash and jewellery from Morris, an acquaintance who lived in the same apartment block.

**Road mishap kills 12 in India:** Twelve people were killed when a bus plunged into a valley in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported yesterday. AFP says from New Delhi.

Forty-nine others were injured in the accident late Sunday in the state's Prakasam district.

# 28 killed in Peruvian plane crash

LIMA, Mar 30: A Peruvian air force plane carrying civilians who were fleeing El-Nino driven floods crashed into a shantytown in the northern city of Piura Sunday, killing 28 people, President Alberto Fujimori said, reports AP.

The latest death toll was much higher than the figure of 12 fatalities provided earlier by a doctor at a local hospital.

The Russian-made Antonov military transport plane was carrying people stranded by floods from the city of Tumbes near the Ecuadorian border to Piura, 530 miles (850 kms) northwest of Lima.

It fell to earth 6 miles (10 kms) from Piura airport at 9:30 AM.

Fujimori told reporters that 28 passengers died, 15 survived and seven were unaccounted for, adding that some passengers walked from the wreckage with minor injuries.

The pilot had radioed the control tower in Piura that one engine had stopped working and that he would try to land, Fujimori said.

The plane crashed nose first into a drainage channel in the shantytown, splitting into two pieces, he said. There were no reports of deaths among people on the ground.

There have been no reports of foreigners on the plane.

Most of the passengers were merchants carrying produce to Piura. The air force arranged the flight after floods cut off the highway from Tumbes, Fujimori said.



Palestinian protestors hold up a banner that reads in both Arabic and English, "No Peace With Settlements" during a demonstration held outside of Bethlehem in the Nahalin valley Sunday. The banner refers to the Israeli Government's policy of building new settlements in the West Bank which the Palestinians view as an obstacle to peace. — AP/UNB photo

# Yeltsin steps back into political fray

MOSCOW, Mar 30: Russian President Boris Yeltsin steps back into the political fray today for the first time since the day he sacked as prime minister dropped a bombshell by announcing plans to stand for the presidency, reports Reuter.

Yeltsin's scheduled talks with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan offer him the chance to break his public silence on the latest twists in a week of high-stakes political drama since he sacked Viktor Chernomyrdin as Prime Minister.

The 67-year-old president, who spent the weekend outside Moscow, also faces a battle to win parliament's approval for inexperienced reformer Sergei Kiriyenko as Prime Minister after the biggest parliamentary party said it opposed him.

"No, he won't get through," Communist Party leader Genady Zyuganov told Reuters on Sunday, dismissing Kiriyenko's chances of being confirmed in office by the opposition-domi-

nated state Duma, the lower House of parliament.

"He's worked for four months as a minister, he's 35 years old to propose him for the post of prime minister is simply not serious," Zyuganov said.

The Communist Party holds nearly one third of the seats in the Duma and can muster a simple majority if it has the support its allies — enough to block Kiriyenko.

The communists are flexing their muscles for a battle with Yeltsin over Kiriyenko, whose image as one of a new breed of young market reformers is not to their liking. They want reforms slowed to ease the hardship endured by ordinary people.

Yeltsin has also sounded a warning cry by threatening to dissolve the Duma if it rejects Kiriyenko three times.

But he has met Chernomyrdin's announcement, made in a television interview on Saturday, with silence.

Although Yeltsin told Chernomyrdin to prepare a presidential campaign when he sacked him last week, most analysts doubted he meant his 59-year-old long-time ally to be his successor.

His decision raised the possibility that Yeltsin might try to seek a third term as president or had decided Chernomyrdin had accumulated too much power.

The Kremlin's silence on the announcement did nothing to remove the impression that Chernomyrdin's declaration may have taken the presidential administration by surprise.

If Chernomyrdin has indeed acted out of step with his former boss, one consolation for the Kremlin will have come in a new opinion poll showing the sacked prime minister would get only six per cent of votes in an election were held now.

Chernomyrdin has a dour image and is a poor public speaker who has long been in

Yeltsin's shadow, the president had repeatedly criticised the government for failing to push reforms through, a failure which finally cost Chernomyrdin his job.

The new poll, carried out by the public opinion foundation before the upheavals of the last week, also had bad news for Yeltsin. It showed Zyuganov ahead of the field with the support of 21 per cent of the 1,500 people surveyed.

A Kremlin source told Interfax News Agency on Sunday that Yeltsin would make his views known on Chernomyrdin's presidential bid soon.

The first opportunity is when Yeltsin meets Annan at 11 am (0700 GMT) for talks expected to focus on Iraq and Yugoslavia's Kosovo Province as well as other international issues.

Yeltsin also meets Namibian President Sam Nujoma on Tuesday.



Britain's Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, pictured with his partner, Gaynor Regan, at his official residence at Chevening House in Kent, 50 kilometres south of London Sunday. Cook, 52, and his 41-year-old former aide Regan are to marry at Chevening House in April five weeks after his divorce from his wife of 28 years. — AP/UNB photo