

International

Israeli troop withdrawal from West Bank

PA accepts US proposals on breaking deadlock

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Apr 4: The Palestinian Authority has accepted in principle US proposals on breaking a peace-making deadlock with Israel over troops withdrawal from the West Bank, a senior Palestinian official said on Friday, reports Reuters.

"We expect (US presidential envoy) Dennis Ross to come back to the region with written documents or that they will be submitted through (Secretary of State) Madeleine Albright," the official, who asked not be identified, told Reuters.

He said the plan raised by Ross during a four-day mission that ended on Monday called on Israel to hand over another 13.1 per cent of the West Bank to self-rule in return for Palestinian moves "to combat violence" and avoid incitement against Israel.

The position of the Palestinian Authority that was conveyed to the US administration was that it accepted in principle the US idea to break the current deadlock," the official said.

The authority had asked the US government "to submit those ideas in writing for further discussion," he said.

Israel has called the 13.1 per cent figure unacceptable and insisted that the US proposals lay out a detailed roadmap for Palestinian steps on security in parallel with a phased Israeli troop withdrawal.

The Palestinians had been demanding an Israeli pullback from another 30 per cent of the West Bank, in three redeployments, under interim peace deals.

Citing security concerns, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has offered only a two-phased withdrawal and the swift start of so-called "final-status" talks on permanent boundaries.

The official said the under its plan, the United States would guarantee that a third redeployment would take place.

Netanyahu has proposed a bilateral Israeli-Palestinian committee be formed to discuss the issue of a third stage.

"We're no suckers. We don't give without receiving. We want to receive something real in return," Netanyahu said in public comments this week about the Ross mission.

Netanyahu has denied that he sent Ross home empty-handed and said bridging proposals, which he did not detail, had been made. He estimated that talks over a package of US ideas would continue.

The Palestinian official said the US draft proposals called on Israel not to build new settlements and to ensure the expansion of existing ones did not spill over their current boundaries.

Albright has already urged a "time-out" in settlement activity. Israel's right-wing government has rejected any limitations on Jewish settlement on land occupied in the 1979 Middle East War.

The groundbreaking for a new settlement in Arab East Jerusalem in March last year threw Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking into a deep crisis

15 LTTE rebels killed in Lankan fighting

COLOMBO, Apr 4: At least 15 Tamil Tiger rebels have been killed in renewed fighting between government forces and the guerrillas in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, the defence ministry said today, reports AP.

Soldiers killed eight members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) just outside the rebel-held town of Mankulam on Friday in two gun battles, the ministry said in a statement.

It said another Tiger guerrilla was shot dead near the army-held town of Kilinochchi further to the north on Friday.

Six Tiger rebels were killed in a joint army and police attack on a rebel base in the northeastern district of Trincomalee on Friday, the ministry said.

It said several soldiers wounded in the confrontation had been taken to a nearby hospital.



Qazi Hussain Ahmed, leader of Jamat-i-Islami, Pakistan's right-wing Islamic party addressing an anti-government rally against the ratification of Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) by the government, in Islamabad on Friday. Qazi claimed that after ratification, the inspectors of UN could come at any time to inspect various sites. He said Sharif government has kept the CWC ratification secret from the nation. Pakistan always refused to have atomic bomb capability and maintains its programme is for peaceful purposes. — AP/UNB photo

Hewitt won't sell Di's love-letters

LONDON, Apr 4: James Hewitt says he burned dozens of love letters from Princess Diana, kept others as a memento of their affair and would never contemplate selling them, reports AP.

Sixty-two letters which Hewitt had kept in a safe at his home are now in the hands of Kensington Palace, after Hewitt's former fiancée allegedly tried to sell the letters to The Mirror, a daily tabloid.

"Just because I kept them doesn't mean to say I was going to do anything bad with them," Hewitt was quoted as saying in Saturday's late edition of the Sun, the Mirror's larger-selling rival. "They are something that was part of our relationship. Something I could hold on to physically as part of a memento." The Sun quoted Hewitt as saying.

His former fiancée, Anna Ferretti, was arrested by Metropolitan Police on Friday, and questioned about her part in taking the letters from Hewitt.

"My client has been fully cooperative with the police and you will appreciate that there is an ongoing investigation and we cannot comment any further at this stage," said her attorney, Michael Caplan.

The Sun said Metropolitan Police detective took a statement from Hewitt in Spain on Friday.

The Mirror reported Thursday that Ms Ferretti tried to sell 62 handwritten letters to editors of the tabloid for 150,000 pounds (dhs 250,000), saying she wanted to sell them before Hewitt did.

Mandela's heir apparent for boosting ties with Asia

CAPE TOWN, Apr 4: Just as the American president tried to highlight Africa's economic potential in his recent visit, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki travels to Asia hoping to boost the continent's international trade and political ties, reports AP.

Mbeki leaves Monday for a 12-day visit to Japan, China and South Korea. He will try to convince Far East investors that Africa is putting its bloody and corrupt past behind in favour of stable politics and free markets.

US President Bill Clinton sounded a similar note in his Africa tour, which ended Thursday.

Despite recent economic woes among the "tiger economies" of the Far East, the region remains a model of growth and Mbeki, the heir apparent to President Nelson Mandela, will focus on trade.

"This trip is about both firming political relations and trying to boost trade with such an important region," said Mbeki spokesman Ricky Naidoo.

In Japan, Mbeki will notch up a diplomatic first when he is received by Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, a privilege normally only accorded to heads of state. He will also hold talks with Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and other ministers.

Speaking to journalists at a briefing Wednesday, Mbeki acknowledged South Africa's role as a representative for all African nations.

"We are keen to market Africa to Japan, and to be able to deal with whatever conceptions and misconceptions they may have about the African continent," Mbeki said.

In China, Mbeki will cement political ties after South Africa's decision last year to cut formal relations with Taiwan in favour of China. The diplomatic switch was considered a move to woo Chinese investment for South Africa.

China backed Mandela and Mbeki's ruling African National Congress in the days it was a banned anti-apartheid movement.

Trade and Industry Minister Alec Erwin just spent five days in China with a business delegation on a trip to boost economic links.

Mbeki will visit the capital, Beijing, as well as the former British colony of Hong Kong. He also will hold talks with President Jiang Zemin and the newly-appointed premier, Zhu Rongji.

'Khmers regain full control of their stronghold in north'

PHNOM PENH, Apr 4: Hard-line Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan said Saturday that his forces have regained full control over the northern Cambodian jungle base of Anlong Veng, which fell briefly last week to mutineers supported by government troops, reports AP.

In a Khmer Rouge radio broadcast, Khieu Samphan appealed to rebel soldiers and civilians to return to Anlong Veng so that the guerrilla movement could consolidate the recaptured territory.

It was the first time any Khmer Rouge leader has spoken over the airwaves since the mutiny broke out within their ranks last week.

The split appears to have severely weakened what remains of the hardcore loyalists, but the government-backed mutineers were apparently unable to hold Anlong Veng.

"Presently we are in complete control of the liberated zone... the invading soldiers have been beaten by our army, and have run away in disarray," Khieu Samphan said in reference to the government army.

A senior Cambodian government general admitted Friday that Khmer Rouge guerrillas were counter-attacking in

taking a strategic hilltop temple the Khmer Rouge garrison ceded to the government last weekend.

'Dodi warned of car accident'

ATLANTA, Apr 4: Diana's psychic says she warned the princess's lover to beware of a car crash not long before the couple's Mercedes spun out of control in a Paris traffic tunnel along the Seine, reports AP.

Rita Rogers said on CNN on Friday that when she gave a reading to Dodi Fayed, his late mother told him through her that he should not go driving in a car in Paris.

"I had a very funny feeling about Dodi," she told interviewer Larry King. "I said to him, 'I get an impression of France, and I said, 'I know you go to France an awful lot, but I got the tunnel (and) a black Mercedes and the water.'"

"Fayed looked rather shocked," Rogers said, and promised to be careful. After the couple returned to their vacation in France, Rogers said, Diana called and promised that she would be careful too.

BRIEFLY

Jackson's wife gives birth to girl: The King of Pop has a princess to go with his Prince, AP reports from Beverly Hills.

Michael Jackson's wife, Debbie Rowe Jackson, gave birth Friday to their second child, a girl, at Spaulding Pain Medical Clinic in Beverly Hills, a source close to his organisation told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The hospital refused to comment. Paris Michael Katherine Jackson was born at 6.30 am and weighed 7 pounds, 9 ounces, (3,430 grams) the source said. Mrs Jackson had earlier said that the child would be named Paris because she was conceived in the city of Light.

DPRK to replace envoy to Moscow: North Korea has decided to replace its ambassador to Russia, an official news report said Saturday, AP reports from Seoul.

North Korea's official Pyongyang Radio reported that Ambassador Song Sung Pil made a farewell visit to Russian Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov on Tuesday, according to Seoul's Naewoo Press, which monitors the North's news media. Pyongyang Radio did not say who will replace son. But South Korean news reports said Park Eui Choon, the North's former ambassador to Lebanon, will be named to the post. Son has been ambassador to Moscow since 1990.

Paraguay takes US to World Court: Paraguay took the United States to the World Court Friday in a dispute over a Paraguayan national on death row in Virginia, AP reports from The Hague.

Paraguay contends that US officials violated an international treaty when they failed to inform Francisco Breard that he had the right to seek assistance from the Paraguayan consulate when he was arrested for the 1992 rape and murder of Ruth Dickie in Arlington, Virginia.

Russian to launch sat on Tuesday: The twice-postponed launch of seven international communication satellites into orbit aboard a Proton-K booster rocket will take place on Tuesday, a news agency reported Saturday, AP says from Moscow.

The launch, originally scheduled for April 2, was delayed for a second day on Friday because of strong winds and heavy rains near Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome. The launch has now been set for Tuesday, the Interfax news agency said.

Canadian cops to carry sidearms: The provincial government Friday authorised officers of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary to carry sidearms, ending its status as the only unarmed police force in Canada, AP reports from St John's, Newfoundland.

Justice Minister Chris Decker made the announcement in the legislature, saying government would implement the recommendations of a legislative committee. Previously, officers on the 313-member force kept their weapons in a locked compartment in their patrol vehicles unless they obtained special permission from a supervisor to carry a gun.

Attack on US interests in Egypt feared: The State Department said Friday it had received information of "undetermined reliability" that extremist groups may be planning terrorist attacks against US interests in Cairo, Egypt, AP reports from Washington.

The announcement urged US citizens travelling to or residing in Cairo to exercise greater than usual caution. At the same time, the State Department said it is rescinding a directive allowing certain Americans in Israel, the occupied territories and Kuwait to return home voluntarily.

Yeltsin postpones his Japan trip: Russian President Boris Yeltsin has postponed his April 11-13 trip to Japan by one week, a statement issued on Friday by Japan's Foreign Ministry in London said, Reuter reports from London.

The statement said Yeltsin told Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto in a telephone call that he was delaying the trip due to "Russia's internal situation." The statement, issued by Japan's Foreign Ministry during a meeting of 25 European Union and Asian leaders in London, also said the visit would be shortened to two days from three.

US considers fees for Internet: The small but growing number of Americans who make long-distance calls over the Internet could face higher charges under an idea being discussed by regulators, AP reports from Washington.

The Federal Communications Commission, in a report to Congress due April 10, is expected to recommend that Internet phone companies pay fees — just as traditional long-distance companies now do — to support universally available phone service in the United States. "We're considering that and then what we would say in our report, in essence, would be, 'This makes sense,'" said a senior FCC official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.



A passerby runs away from the crash site as firemen try to rescue two police officers stuck in the wreckage of a police helicopter that crashed into the top floor of a building in downtown Istanbul, Friday. The lifeless body of one officer lay hanging down for hours while rescuers used cutting machines to take him out. At least one policeman was killed and at least three others were injured. — AP/UNB photo

Violent crime wave rattles Peruvians

LIMA, Peru Apr 4: Computer engineer James Cuglievan was returning to Lima after a day at the beach when a tire blew out on his four-wheel-drive vehicle, reports AP.

When he got out to change the tire on the Pan American Highway, three armed men burst out of the bushes, ignored his pleas to just take what they wanted and shot him three times.

The attackers, who had thrown tacks on the road, fled with only his girlfriend's purse. Cuglievan died on the way to a hospital.

A wave of violent crime is shaking residents of this city of 7 million people as they emerge from a war against leftist rebels that has killed 30,000 people since 1980.

The guerrillas, weakened by the capture of their main leaders, have pulled back to remote highland areas and jungle regions, where they carry out occasional attacks on civilian militias about represent no threat to the government.

Police records show crime has tripled since 1991 in the Peruvian capital, with more than 600 crimes a day reported. Experts say crime is vastly under-reported in Lima, where residents distrust the police.

In cafes across Lima, people are talking about a surge in "quickie kidnappings" in which victims are grabbed at gunpoint and held for several hours while the kidnappers empty their bank accounts and sometimes their homes.

Police say victims are sometimes tortured to force them to reveal how much money they have. The bodies of those who resisted have been found dumped on the sides of roads.

"Crime has changed from petty theft to organized gangs using the weapons of war," said retired Gen. Hector Jhon Caro, former head of Peru's anti-terrorism police. "What is frightening is that the criminals are still learning. It could get much worse."

In middle-class and wealthy neighbourhoods, houses are guarded by high walls topped with spikes. Many people have moved to walled-in suburbs protected by armed guards.

Peru's major business organizations have called on President Alberto Fujimori to use his

Megacities bringing poverty to doorstep of the rich in S Asia

NEW DELHI, Apr 4: South Asia's new megacities have brought poverty to the doorstep of the rich, the author of a UN-aided report on human development said on Friday, reports Reuter.

South Asia's urban population has more than doubled since 1970 and by 2025, nearly half would live in cities such as Karachi and Bombay that are already coming apart.

"Poverty is increasingly an urban phenomena," said Mah-bub-ul-Haq, author of a report on human development in South Asia.

"This can explode in our faces," he told Reuters in an interview.

One-third of Bangladesh's urban population lives in the capital, Dhaka, and in Pakistan another one-third are crowded into Karachi and Lahore.

One-fifth of India's urban population lives in the five large cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Madras and Hyderabad.

Together these eight cities would house 133 million people by 2015.

"Unless policy-makers deal with this issue on a top priority basis, these megacities of the poor can explode through sheer despair," said Haq, a former Pakistani finance minister said.

The disparities are showing up.

"Everybody in posh localities in Karachi gets water to saturate the lawns and the slums... 37 per cent of the people live there... buy water from water tankers," said Haq who heads the Islamabad-based Human Development Centre, a UN-aided think tank.

Only 20 per cent of Karachi's 12 million people have access to a sewerage system. In Delhi 70 per cent of the people have no such access.

Imelda rejects call to bury remains of Marcos

MANILA, Apr 4: Former Philippine first lady Imelda Marcos today rejected calls by relatives to immediately bury the remains of her late husband Ferdinand Marcos, saying only an "honorable" burial would do, reports AP.

The preserved corpse has been kept for the past five years in an air-conditioned mausoleum at the late dictator's ancestral home in northern Batac. Simeon Valdez, a House of Representatives member and distant Marcos relative, wants the remains buried in Batac so the "bones can have easy access" to the tomb of the town's famous son, press reports said.

But in an open letter addressed to "uncle Simeon," Imelda Marcos said it was the government's responsibility to show how Filipino people "hold the dead sacred" by giving an "honorable burial" to a former soldier and president of the republic.

Marcos died in exile in Hawaii in 1989, three years after he was toppled in a bloodless popular revolt. He is accused of looting the national treasury during his 20-year rule.

President Fidel Ramos, also a distant relative, has refused the family's request that Marcos be entered at the heroes' cemetery in Manila, a burial site for soldiers.

As the Marcos influence in Batac has waned, the state of the corpse has been under threat. In 1996, the local utility cut off the supply of electricity to the mausoleum due to mounting unpaid bills.

Imelda Marcos, who has been sentenced to nine years in prison for graft, is running for president in the May 11 elections. She is free on bail.

Thousands of street children trying to eke out livings in Kabul

KABUL, Apr 4: At age 10, Khalilullah daydreams of becoming a doctor, reports AP.

His boss, Mohammed Raza, all of 15 himself, laughs at the idea that there might be a good future in Afghanistan.

"This country is only fighting," says Raza, who oversees four younger boys who spend their days weaving carpets.

Raza and his crew are among the tens of thousands of children trying to eke out livings in Afghanistan's shattered capital. They weave carpets, shine shoes, beg, whatever they can to earn a little money.

One international aid group estimates at least 28,000 children are living on the streets.

Most of them wander the city, their hands outstretched asking for "bakheesh," or money. Outside stores, small children, some barely 5 years old, ask for chocolate.

Several aid groups have set up drop-in centres where street children can get a meal and a couple of hours of schooling. But together they barely handle 3,000 children.

"The problem is so big, we believe there are more than 28,000 children on the street. But we haven't enough money to help them all," says Colin Tucker of Terre des Homes, a group devoted to helping children in crisis.

For Raza and his carpet-weaving crew, their work-place is a corner of an alley. To one side is a rancid garbage dump and to the other a muddy rocket-blasted street.

The boys kneel on a solid piece of green carpet weaving strand after strand of wool. Their feet warmed by ragged socks and mud-caked sandals.

Raza has been on the job since he was 9. He earns 300,000 for every square yard of carpet his young crew weaves. That's roughly 10 dollars. From that he has to pay the weavers.

Ten-year-old Mubashir has been on the job 15 days and he hasn't been paid yet. His tiny fingers are raw from the wool and red from the cold.

Mubashir says he thinks he would like to stop working and go to school, but "my father is dead — a rocket killed him — and my mother is too old."

Cynical and street smart, Raza can neither read nor write. He went to school for three years, back when the communists were still in power in Kabul and fighting in the civil war was away from the capital.

A loose alliance of Islamic groups drove the Marxists from power six years ago. Then they turned their guns on each other, devastating Kabul in years of fighting that killed 50,000 people and maimed tens of thousands. Entire neighbourhoods are littered with land mines and unexploded rockets and artillery shells.

The city's schools were closed, except for occasional attempts to reopen them. Fighting between rival factions would resume and invariably a rocket would hit a school, like the one in 1995 that killed 10 teachers as they sipped tea at Kabul University.

Schools were open again just before the Taliban religious army seized Kabul in September 1996. But the Taliban shut them, saying the curriculum was not in keeping with the strict Islamic teaching its leaders espouse.

In recent months the Taliban has allowed some schools to reopen but only for boys. Under the religious army's rule, girls have been banished from school and women forced off the job.

During a three-day visit to Kabul this past week, UNICEF's Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, urged Taliban leaders to set up schools for girls. But she said Friday that it was uncertain whether the Taliban would follow through on promises to give women equality in education.

Even for boys, there are few official schools open.

International aid workers say there are more than 160 "home" schools, set up by out of work teachers — most of them women. Aid groups are trying to help these schools by providing textbooks, paper and some money.

Aid workers say children's health needs also are enormous.

"Children are dying and they don't need to be dying," says Dr David Southall, a British paediatrician with Child Advocacy International.

At Kabul's only children's hospital, an average of six children die each day, says the hospital administrator, Mohammed Hussein.

Most of them die of pneumo-

nia. In one room, 24 children lie on steel cots, some four to a bed, huddled around a diesel-fired stove. Mothers with barely room to sit rock their babies, whispering in their ears, trying to soothe them.

In the nearby nursery, many newborns die because there are no working incubators or oxygen.

Hussein gestures toward the hospital's six incubators — the glass broken, wires hanging limply by the side, soiled mattresses torn. "We got those from India 32 years ago," he says.

Twenty years of civil war have left Afghans with little hope things will get better any time soon.

"We are just patching holes," says Jack Bell, programme manager of children in crisis, another British aid group. "Until they stop fighting and other countries stop sending weapons to Afghanistan... it won't change."