

International

Arafat, Netanyahu begin talks today

QUEENSTOWN, Maryland Oct 14: The secluded retreat with its lush gardens, leaves of autumn gold and flowing river is more appropriate for lovers than foes, reports AP.

But that is where Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will begin their talks on Thursday to try to produce an agreement on security issues and the West Bank.

Unlike most of their meetings — many of them at a bleak border outpost in the Gaza Strip — Palestinian and Israeli negotiators will not have the opportunity to air their differences in public or wag accusing fingers in front of TV cameras. The media will be a safe 15-minute ride away.

The Clinton administration has decided to keep the talks off-limits to the press to maximize chances for the summit's success. The 1,100-acre (440-hectare) Wye River Conference Center, owned by the nonprofit Aspen Institute, was chosen as the site of the meeting because of its remoteness from Washington — it's 70 miles (110 kilometers) away from the capital on Maryland's Eastern Shore — and its comfortable atmosphere.

It's a strategy that has worked before. In 1977, the Carter administration brought together Israelis and Egyptians to negotiate for about 18 months, in seclusion, the Camp David peace accords. In 1993, Israelis and Palestinians held secret talks in Norway that produced the Oslo accords.

"Serious negotiations take place away from media spotlights. They focus on substance rather than slogans," said Ahmed Qureia, speaker of the Palestinian parliament who took part in the Oslo talks. Mustafa Khalil, Egypt's prime minister during the Camp David talks, said the format used at those meetings worked because the participants could not take their negotiations to the airwaves.

"Announcing to the world where they stood at every point in the negotiations would make it hard for them to back down and reach a compromise," said Khalil.

Tamar Rabinovich, Israel's former ambassador to Washington who participated in failed talks with the Syrians in 1996 at the same site, also known as the Wye Plantation, said it's better if the negotiators confront the public with a finished deal.

"There has to be secrecy in the sense that before you reach a breakthrough, you need to be able to make new decisions or change your mind without your own public or the opposition or your own partners who are fed by the media interfering in the negotiations," he said.

Those talks failed, partly because of a series of bombings in Israel blamed on Muslim militants. The talks this week face a similar problem. Netanyahu demanded that Arafat's Palestinian Authority do more to prevent terror attacks against Israelis and said no deal would

be signed on an Israeli troop pullback from the West Bank after an Israeli student was shot and killed Tuesday and another wounded outside Jerusalem.

"In light of this gloomy reality, there is absolutely no chance, at this stage, of signing an agreement," Netanyahu said in a statement released in Jerusalem on the eve of his departure for the United States.

The 1996 meetings between Israelis and Syrians at Wye offered an unprecedented opportunity for the two groups to live briefly under the same roof. Since the talks took place in the winter, the two sides were not inclined to take walks in the woods. But they had ample opportunity to fraternize in the library and living room and over shared meals.

"With the Syrians, there has been an absence for so long that the contact is very artificial and very difficult," said Rabinovich. "Just being together under the same roof, at dinner, was a big change and an important step forward."

He said the two parties meeting this week at the plantation have a few advantages the Israelis and Syrians did not have. One is the presence of the decision-makers, which will save negotiators traveling and communicating back and forth to update their leaders and get fresh instructions.

"I'm doubtful that in four or five days of seclusion at the Wye Plantation everything will be finished," said Rabinovich. "But it's to the good, there's no question, I hope they'll have plenty of walks in the woods."

Militants kill 3 in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, Oct 14: A rocket fired by separatist militants slammed into a police residential complex in Kashmir on Wednesday, killing at least two officers and wounding eight policemen. Another policeman died in an ambush nearby, and two were wounded, police said, reports AP.

The attacks occurred as India and Pakistan prepared for a round of talks beginning Thursday in Islamabad on their dispute over Kashmir, the Himalayan territory over which they have been fighting for 50 years.

The rocket badly damaged two apartments in Surankot, a town in the Poonch district, 210 kilometers (130 miles) northwest of Jammu, said K Rajendra, a deputy inspector-general of police. He blamed the attack on Muslim insurgents.

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Holbrooke, announcing a deal after nine days of intensive talks with Milosevic, said on Tuesday that NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and US General Westley Clark, the NATO supreme commander, would travel to Belgrade soon.

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Milosevic noticed to withdraw troops fast

BELGRADE, Oct 14: Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was under notice today to pull back his forces rapidly to avoid punitive air strikes from NATO as suspended for four days to allow a peaceful solution to the Kosovo crisis, reports Reuters.

A last-ditch deal on Kosovo was welcomed by Yugoslav authorities and foreign governments for having averted any immediate prospect of risky military intervention and setting out firm steps for halting Serb Albanian violence in the region.

But the accord wrung from marathon talks between US envoy Richard Holbrooke and Milosevic stirred suspicion and dismay among some — especially Kosovo Albanians — by leaving some key issues unresolved.

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Holbrooke said the OSCE, Europe's security watchdog, would assemble an international team of 2000 "compliance verifiers," backed by NATO spotter planes, to ensure Yugoslavia observes its commitments to end its crackdown.

The deal, announced by Holbrooke at a news conference and by Milosevic in a televised speech, averted for now the imminent threat of NATO air strikes, authorised at a meeting in Brussels on Monday of NATO ambassadors, against Yugoslavia.

The agreements we have reached remove the danger of military intervention against our country," Milosevic said in a nationally televised speech.

The Yugoslav news agency Tanjug said a political pact had also been agreed envisaging "free and fair" elections within nine months to set up an autonomous government in Kosovo, which has a 90 per cent ethnic Albanian majority.

The Tanjug report set out an ambitious timetable over the next month for deciding details of the OSCE presence.

Fundamental elements of Kosovo's eventual status based on a big power contact group proposal, and electoral regulations.

But the Holbrooke-Milosevic agreement's clear tilt towards autonomy within Yugoslavia, rather than outright independence for Kosovo, was swiftly condemned by the guerrillas

while civilian opinion leaders heaped doubt on the accord. Bardhyl Mahmuti, Swiss-based spokesman for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), told Reuters "We insist on full independence. We cannot live with Serbia."

"We agree to a three-year-transition period that would lead to self-determination. If Milosevic accepts this, that would be satisfactory to the KLA," he said.

In the Kosovo capital Pristina, Vetton Surroi, an editor of the ethnic Albanian newspaper Koha Ditore, said: "The deal is not linked to a serious political negotiating process. It reinforces Milosevic's authority on the ground."

Reaction in Belgrade was also mixed, with some Serbs saying Milosevic had saved the nation's integrity while others thought he had sold out.

Dragan Tomi, Milosevic's socialist party high officials and Serbia's parliament speaker, congratulated Milosevic, saying: "We are satisfied and happy that what we wanted has been achieved — sovereignty of the state, territorial integrity and national dignity has been preserved."

But opposition parties, although supporting peaceful solution, criticised Milosevic for being irresponsible.

"With bad leadership of the country, he (Milosevic) brought us to the brink of war and was forced to give huge concessions," the Democratic Party said.

Saudi diplomat found dead in Australia

CANBERRA, Oct 14: The first secretary of the Saudi Arabian embassy in Australia has been found dead in a pool of blood in his apartment in the nation's capital, police and diplomatic sources said Wednesday, reports AP.

Australian Federal Police spokesman Eric Meyer said the man's body was found in an apartment in the inner-Canberra suburb of Kingston, close to Parliament House, late on Tuesday.

The Saudi embassy said the man was Abdullah Al Ghamdi, 54, who had failed appear at work Tuesday.

A colleague went to his apartment and found Al Ghamdi lying on the floor of the kitchen in a pool of blood, the embassy said in a statement.

"At this stage our city crime team is investigating," Meyer said.

"It is still classed a suspicious because we have not established the circumstances leading up to the death. Police conducted a search last night and will continue today."

Turkish-Kurdish clashes leave 52 dead

VAN, Turkey, 14: Fifty-two people have been killed in clashes over the past two days in southeastern Turkey between government troops and Kurdish rebels who sneak into the country from their bases in nearby Syria, Iran and Iraq, the Anatolia news agency said Wednesday, reports AP.

Turkish troops killed 36 Kurdish rebels near the city of Van, 1,250 kilometers (781 miles) southeast of Ankara, the capital, while two soldiers and 14 village guards were killed in the clashes near the town of Catak, it said. Military officials were unavailable to comment.

Kurdish guerrillas have been fighting for autonomy in Turkey's southeast since 1984 and are a source of tension between Syria and Turkey, which accuses Damascus of sheltering and supporting them. The conflict has killed some 37,000 people.

Nepal's 1st commercial radio station goes on air

KATHMANDU, Oct 14: Nepal's first private commercial radio station went on air today and was urged by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to play a role in the country's education and development, reports AP.

Inaugurating Kantipur FM 96.1, Koirala said: "The advancement of science and technology should be applied to the development of the national economy."

An employee told AFP the station would broadcast 20 hours a day "suiting the latest technology, fully equipped transmitters and the most advanced broadcasting studios at its ideally located station in the Nepalese capital."

Yeltsin returns to work in Kremlin

MOSCOW, Oct 14: President Boris Yeltsin, suffering from a respiratory infection that forced him to cut short a foreign trip, returned to work in the Kremlin on Wednesday, reports AP.

Yeltsin plans several working meetings throughout the day, the presidential press service said. It gave no other details.

Yeltsin's press spokesman, Dmitry Yukushkin, said Tuesday that doctors ordered the president to stay in bed and that he would not be in the office all week.

Doctors insisted on Monday that Yeltsin fly home from a visit to Central Asia day ahead of scheduled because he was suffering from an upper respiratory infection, was coughing and running a fever.

Clinton's misleading statement in Lewinsky case should be grounds to restore Paula's suit

WASHINGTON, Oct 14: Paula Jones, saying President Clinton's misleading testimony about Monica Lewinsky should be grounds to restore her dismissed lawsuit, has asked a federal appeals court to let her incorporate the argument in the case, reports AP.

Even though it's unusual to admit information that was unavailable when a case was dismissed, Clinton's denial of a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky left the case "tainted by perjury, obstruction of justice or other fraud," Mrs Jones' lawyers argued.

"No fair-minded person" who reviews Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's findings "can fail to conclude that Mr Clinton lied under oath ... in this case and unlawfully interfered with Mrs Jones' efforts to gather evidence, her lawyers argued in a brief made public Tuesday."

Clinton's lawyers, in their reply, argued that the president's testimony last January denying an affair with the former White House intern was irrelevant to the Jones case.

The 8th US Circuit Court of Appeals, which holds oral arguments Oct 20 in St Paul, Minn on Mrs Jones' appeal, lifted its secrecy order on the Jones filing and most other legal briefs that have been submitted by both sides.

Meanwhile, a source knowledgeable about settlement talks between lawyers for Clinton and Mrs Jones said dialogue between the two parties is at an impasse while the Jones camp internally debates how to divvy up any payment.

Mrs Jones has legal bills to cover — not only form her current attorneys at the Dallas law firm of Rader, Cambell, Fisher and Pyke, whose contingency agreement was for 40 per cent of any settlement or judgment, but also her former attorneys, Joe Cammarata and Gil Davis, who hold an \$800,000 lien on the case.

The Oct 20 oral argument date in St Paul is considered a deadline for an agreement in the near future. But the source, who spoke on conditions of anonymity, said a \$700,000 offer from Bob Bennett, Clinton's attorney, has languished on the table — neither accepted, rejected or countered — as the other side negotiates among its parties.

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President Clinton, accompanied by Maryland Lt Gov Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, left, and Sen Edward Kennedy, waves while attending an education event at Forest Knolls Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, Tuesday. — AP/UNB photo

Military exercise plan near border Indian defence minister terms Pakistan's alarm 'uncalled for'

NEW DELHI, Oct 14: Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes said today that Pakistan's alarm over India's plan to stage military exercises near its border was "uncalled for," the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says Reuters.

PTI quoted Fernandes as saying in the eastern city of Patna that New Delhi had informed Islamabad of its plan to conduct war games and that Pakistan was considering a military exercise of its own later this month.

"We have already informed Islamabad, (which) is also contemplating an exercise later this month," he said.

On Tuesday a Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman said he was not aware of any plans by Pakistan to carry out its own military exercises.

He said Pakistan was concerned about India's exercises, and said New Delhi could be trying to spoil the climate ahead of this weekend's peace talks between the arch-foes.

"We are extremely disturbed by these reports, particularly by the reported nature, size and timing of the exercises," the spokesman told reporters.

"The timing of the exercises is also perhaps in keeping with the (Indian) tradition of attempting to vitiate the atmosphere before every round of talks," he said.

PTI quoted Fernandes as saying that the exercise had nothing to do with this week's foreign secretary-level talks in Islamabad, the first since the dialogue process broke down over disputed territory of

Kashmir last year. "It will not harm it," he said. "It is like an exercise we do for physical fitness ... the army has to do it to keep the jawans (soldiers) fit."

India said on Monday it was planning a routine military exercise near the border with Pakistan next month.

Britain's electronic telegraph said on Sunday that India planned an exercise involving some 100,000 troops.

The report, quoting western intelligence sources, said the war games would be the biggest in over a decade and would be carried but in the Rajasthan desert and over the Arabian sea by land, air and sea forces.

Tensions on the Subcontinent have risen since May when India and Pakistan carried out a series of nuclear tests.

Forest fires rage in Israel

Forest fires raged for a fourth straight day in northern and central Israel on Tuesday, temporarily closing a major highway and forcing thousands of residents to leave their homes, AP says from Jerusalem.

Fires in the Carmel forests blazed out of control near the northern port city of Haifa and residents of three nearby villages evacuated the area, some for the second time in two days. Hundreds of prisoners were evacuated from two large jails in the north.

Gunmen kill 6 in Mexico: Gunmen have killed six people and wounded another in a possible drug-related hit in a poor neighbourhood of Tijuana, a Mexican town on the US border, AP says from Tijuana, Mexico.

The latest round of violence in the border region occurred at about 3:30 am Tuesday in a southern Tijuana neighbourhood called El Pipila. Two people were arrested hours later.

Blast claims 10 in Mexico city: A massive blast at a small fireworks factory in the outskirts of Mexico City left at least 10 people dead and dozens of others injured or missing Tuesday, authorities said, AFP reports from Mexico City.

Other sources said 16 people died in the blast at Tultepec, which prides itself as being the pyrotechnic capital of Mexico because of the large number of home industries involved in the manufacture of fireworks — some illegally.

2 DPRK soldiers defect to ROK: Two North Korean soldiers walked across a mine-infested border and defected to South Korea on yesterday, the Defence Ministry said, AP reports from Seoul.



A high school student shouts during a demonstration in Rennes, France, Tuesday. Galvanized by a national show of force, high school students again took to the streets across France to protest crowded classes and to demand better education facilities. The words 'angry high school' students are written on her face. — AP/UNB photo

Annan calls for cessation of military action in E Timor

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 14: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on Tuesday for a cessation of all military activity in East Timor and a substantial reduction of the Indonesian military presence there, reports Reuters.

A statement issued through a UN spokesman said Annan was disturbed by rising tensions in East Timor, particularly reports of armed clashes in the former Portuguese territory and remarks attributed to local officials that apparently provoked large-scale protests in recent days.

Anti-Indonesian protests escalated this week after the Jakarta-appointed governor, Abilio Soares, told civil servants they risked being fired if they opposed Indonesia's proposals on granting autonomy, but not independence, to the territory.

The United Nations does not recognize Indonesia's 1986 annexation of East Timor, but UN sponsored talks in August involving the foreign ministers of Indonesia and Portugal made progress toward finding an internationally-acceptable resolution of the problem.

The Secretary-General would like to underline that, in view of the important opportunities that have been created for

Iraq to delay cooperation with UN arms inspectors

BAGHDAD, Oct 14: President Saddam Hussein and his top advisers decided Tuesday to delay a decision on resuming cooperation with UN weapons inspectors, the official Iraqi News Agency reported, reports AP.

INA said the decision came at a meeting chaired by Saddam of the Revolutionary Command Council and the regional command of the Baath party.

The Iraqi leaders heard a report from Tariq Aziz, Iraq's deputy prime minister, who returned to Baghdad after meetings in New York with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

"It was decided during the meeting to resume the discussion of these issues in a forthcoming meeting," INA said. It did not say when this would be.

The meeting here came as top UN weapons inspectors briefed the UN Security Council on the stalled arms inspections and UN efforts to determine whether Iraq loaded VX nerve gas into missile warheads.

Anwar released from ISA detention, moved to jail

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 14: Malaysian authorities Wednesday removed dissident leader Anwar Ibrahim from detention under the harsh Internal Security Act and shifted him to a regular jail on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, reports AP.

Anwar, 51, was driven in a blue Pajero car crammed with policemen and flanked by outriders, eyewitnesses said. He still wore a neck brace that was prescribed by doctors after he alleged being beaten in police custody.

Anwar's Sept. 20 arrest under the Internal Security Act, which allows indefinite detention without trial, has come in for sharp criticism, both from domestic rights groups and international organisations.

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Iraqi women beating their breasts as a sign of mourning for the deaths of their children, which they blamed on the continuing UN trade sanctions on Iraq, during a demonstration on Tuesday outside the UNDP in Baghdad. — AP/UNB photo