

# All eyes on Wye as Israel, PA set to start talks

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: The Israeli and Palestinian leaders are sitting down with US President Bill Clinton to negotiate a US proposal for a further withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank in exchange for stricter Palestinian measures against terrorism, reports AP.

With the approach of a May 1999 deadline for completing a full Israeli-Palestinian peace accord, US officials said they felt a sense of urgency to end 19 months of stalemate over the West Bank.

Clinton was meeting with Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat early Thursday at the White House, then flying to the Wye River Conference Centre, a secluded resort on Maryland's eastern shore about 112 kilometres from Washington, to convene the talks formally.

The three leaders were to have dinner together Thursday night at Wye, with only Clinton returning to Washington. Aides said Clinton was not scheduled to rejoin the negotiators but would do so if it would help.

Under a US plan that Netanyahu and Arafat will discuss, Israeli troops would withdraw from a further 13 per cent of the West Bank, giving Palestinians a measure of control of 40 per cent of the territory. Israel wants firmer Palestinian assurances of security for Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Clinton made telephone calls Wednesday to Arafat, Netanyahu, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and King Hussein of Jordan, who is hospitalised at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, for cancer therapy. Clinton also met for two hours with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger, his national security adviser, officials said.

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Although there was no timetable, officials said the

talks most likely would run through Sunday.

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Clinton intended to keep a close eye on the talks but has put the onus on Arafat and Netanyahu to wrap up what is considered only an interim step toward a final peace accord. Time is pressing because Arafat has said he will unilaterally declare a Palestinian state next May if there is no final peace.

The important point is that we can't get there, we can't reach that point unless both parties come in the spirit of wanting to make an agreement," Lockhart said Wednesday "so ultimately it will be up to the parties."

On the Palestinian side, Saeb Erekat, a senior negotiator, said Wednesday the Israeli troop pullback under discussion must be followed by a third one even if the two sides agree to move to negotiations on a final settlement. He said the Palestinians were ready to do their part to make a deal.

"Rest assured we have a policy of zero-tolerance for terrorism," Erekat said at a news conference.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is greeted in the White Room at London's No. 10 Downing Street by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, right, before Middle East peace talks, Wednesday. Arafat later left for Washington to hold talks with President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. — AP/UNB photo

# Taliban militia agree to free all Iranian prisoners

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan, Oct 15: The Taliban militia Wednesday agreed to release all Iranian prisoners following assurances from a special UN envoy that Tehran would also free all Afghan prisoners, a Taliban official here said, reports AP.

The agreement was reached during a lengthy four-and-a-half hour meeting between the Taliban's supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's special emissary Lakhdar Brahimi, Taliban spokesman Abdul Hae Mutmaen said.

He said the Taliban had also agreed to hold a face to face meeting with Iranian officials in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in a bid to normalise bilateral relations, which have sharply deteriorated in recent months.

The meeting in Jeddah will be held soon under the auspices of the 52-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Mutmaen said.

The Taliban Shoorā (advisory council) will meet to decide about the date and composition of the Islamic militia's delegation to Jeddah, he said.

Brahimi who was accompanied by OIC Assistant Secretary

General Ibrahim Bakr described his talks with the Taliban's reclusive leader as "very promising."

"I am very, very hopeful," Brahimi told reporters before leaving for Islamabad after his daylong visit, designed to defuse tensions between Iran and Afghanistan.

He gave no immediate details saying he would submit a report to the UN secretary general but later confirmed the Taliban statement to reporters in Islamabad.

Omar's close aide Wakil Ahmad described the talks with UN delegation as "very good and positive."

The Taliban spokesman did not give a date for the swap of prisoners with Iran.

However he said the Taliban would shortly free a first unspecified number of Iranian prisoners and would then allow the rest to go after they received the Afghan prisoners in return. Mutmaen said the Taliban authorities had also agreed to allow a UN team to investigate the murder of an Italian officer in Kabul in late August.

"We will fully cooperate with

the UN probe team," he added. He hoped the UN aid agencies would return to Afghanistan to resume relief operations, suspended after the killing of the UN official.

The UN withdrew its aid workers after colonel Carmine Calo, an Italian officer with the UN mission, was killed in Kabul on August 22, two days after a US cruise missile attack on suspected terrorist camps allegedly run by Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden in eastern Afghanistan.

The Taliban officials here said while the focus of the talks was Iran-Afghan tensions, the UN delegation also discussed the human rights situation and drugs problem with the Taliban's supreme leader.

On opium cultivation in the war-ravaged country, he said the Taliban would be ready to discuss a ban "if the UN recognized our government" and suggested alternate means for Afghan farmers.

"If we clamp a crackdown now it will create complications and economic woes of the Afghan farmers," Mutmaen added.

# NATO, world leaders keep up pressure on Milosevic

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Oct 15: A wary NATO and world leaders were keeping up the pressure on President Slobodan Milosevic, saying he needs to withdraw many more Serb forces from Kosovo province before Saturday's deadline, reports AP.

About halfway through the four-day grace period given Milosevic to show he has met international demands for ending the Kosovo turmoil, NATO officials said he had a long way to go. And despite noting signs of progress, a US spokesman called compliance efforts a mixed bag.

"NATO authorities will have to make a judgment at the end of the week, whether there is substantial and serious compliance on the part of President Milosevic," State Department spokesman James Rubin said in Washington on Wednesday.

In case there isn't, the alliance is continuing with preparations for air raids against the Serbs. NATO warplanes are being moved to bases in Italy, just across the Adriatic Sea from Yugoslavia.

International officials gathered in Paris and Vienna on Thursday as part of the assessment process and push for peace in Kosovo. The Balkans Contact Group of five leading Western nations plus Russia was to meet in Paris.

Later Thursday, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe was set to approve the verification mission it will oversee in Kosovo. The move will authorize Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek, the OSCE chairman, to sign an agreement on the mission with Yugoslav authorities in Belgrade on Friday.

The verification mission was a key part of the deal struck Monday by US envoy Richard Holbrooke with Milosevic to end his seven-month crackdown on ethnic Albanians, who are the vast majority in Kosovo, a Serb province.

Western nations were discussing naming Jacques Klein, the American deputy to Bosnia's top international mediator Carlos Westendorp, as head of the 2,000-person mission — to

be composed largely of Europeans.

British Foreign Minister Robin Cook said Wednesday that Britain will contribute 200 people to the verification force, and both Russia and Germany are expected to make similar contributions.

Efforts to save Kosovo's Albanian refugees from disaster have been stepped up in the aftermath of the agreement, which put off the threat of impending airstrikes against Yugoslavia.

The UN refugee agency resumed aid convoys to refugees Wednesday, two days after suspending them for fear of Serb retaliation if NATO attacked. Rubin said European and American monitors — the advance team for the verification force — found evidence of refugees returning.

But many refugees remained in hiding, fearing reprisals from Serb special police who have torched their villages and been accused of atrocities against civilians — not just ethnic Albanian rebels fighting for Kosovo's independence.

# Off the Record

## VIP medical treatment for baby elephant

SINGAPORE: Intensive hand care, water therapy and a unique team of human and animal surgeons worked together to save the leg, and perhaps the life, of the first elephant born at Singapore's Zoological Gardens, reports AP.

Sri Utama, whose name means "First Lady" in the Tamil language, now swims daily in the elephant pool with her caretakers as part of the therapy to strengthen the leg, zoo officials said Wednesday.

The Asian elephant's humerus bone was fractured when she was born April 18 at a weight of 107 kilograms to 19-year-old Jamilah.

"We don't know what happened. The birth occurred early in the morning," said zoo spokeswoman Priscilla Yim-Stacey. "The mother had never seen a birth and the herd had not experienced one. The babies are very fragile."

Veterinarians put Sri Utama's leg in a splint to keep it from coughing the ground and fed her milk by hand. The mother is brought near each day, but is controlled by zoo workers, "because she might get too excited, or be clumsy if the baby tries to nurse," said Kim-Stacey.

Meanwhile elephant specialists, veterinarians and orthopedic surgeons were consulted. When X-rays indicated the bone was not healing well, an elaborate surgery was conducted Aug 3 at the Singapore Turf Club, where horses receive treatment. A team of doctors found that Sri Utama's bone was healing much stronger than the X-rays had shown, although the injured leg was shorter than the other three. Screws were inserted at a weak point, and by the end of August the surgical wound had healed.

Zoo veterinarians believe that over Sri Utama's long life span, the injured leg can grow to normal length. She now weighs 186 kilograms.

## 'Clinton should be shot'

HELENA, Montana: A Republican legislative candidate was quoted as saying President Bill Clinton should be tried for treason and shot for allowing a US company to give satellite technology to China, reports AP.

Bob Davies of Bozeman on Tuesday denied using the word "shot" and said his statements at a Republican candidate's forum earlier this month may have been "intemperate."

But he added: "I believe Bill Clinton should be found guilty of treason and held accountable just like any citizen should be."

He likened Clinton to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were executed in the electric chair as spies in 1953 for allegedly giving atomic secrets to the Soviet Union.

Davies' statements at the Oct 2 event were recounted in a letter to the editor in Sunday's Bozeman Daily Chronicle from someone who was at the forum. Bill Wilke, Chronicle managing editor, said the Secret Service has obtained a copy of the letter from the newspaper.

Davies said he had not been contacted by the Secret Service yet.

## Bad news for computer games freaks

BEIJING: Computer game wizards, beware, says AP.

China's capital is trying to banish computer games from cultural and recreation facilities to protect the health of students and prevent piracy, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported Thursday.

The city's Cultural Department has ordered all establishments that provide computers to the public for training and network services, including internet cafes, to prohibit game playing, threatening severe punishment for violators, Xinhua said.

It said investigations were already underway.

The ban apparently reflects concern that students who are hooked on the games are squandering their time and neglecting physical exercise.

It also is intended to crack down on facilities that use pirated computer games and CD-ROMs, the report said. Chinese and foreign software makers complain that pirated products account for most of the computer software in circulation in the country today.



Outgoing German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, centre, poses with the Bonn photographers for a group photograph prior to his last cabinet meeting in the Bonn Chancellery Wednesday. The photographers thanked him for the sixteen years they had accompanied him as Chancellor and Kohl fulfilled their wish to be photographed with him. — AP/UNB photo

# US State Department says Turkey's obstacles to joining EU are of its own making

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: A top US State Department official urged the European Union to say "clearly and unequivocally" that it is reserving a place for Turkey when it is ready for EU membership, reports AP.

Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott said in a speech on Wednesday that such an EU declaration will be the best guarantee of Turkish progress on human rights and other issues that have prevented the EU from accepting Turkey as a member.

While encouraging a more open attitude by the EU, Talbott said many of the obstacles that have blocked Turkish EU membership are of Turkey's own making.

Talbott, the State Department's second ranking official, spoke at a gathering at the Washington Institute on Near East Policy. He delivered a memorial lecture in honour of the late Turkish President Turgut Ozal.

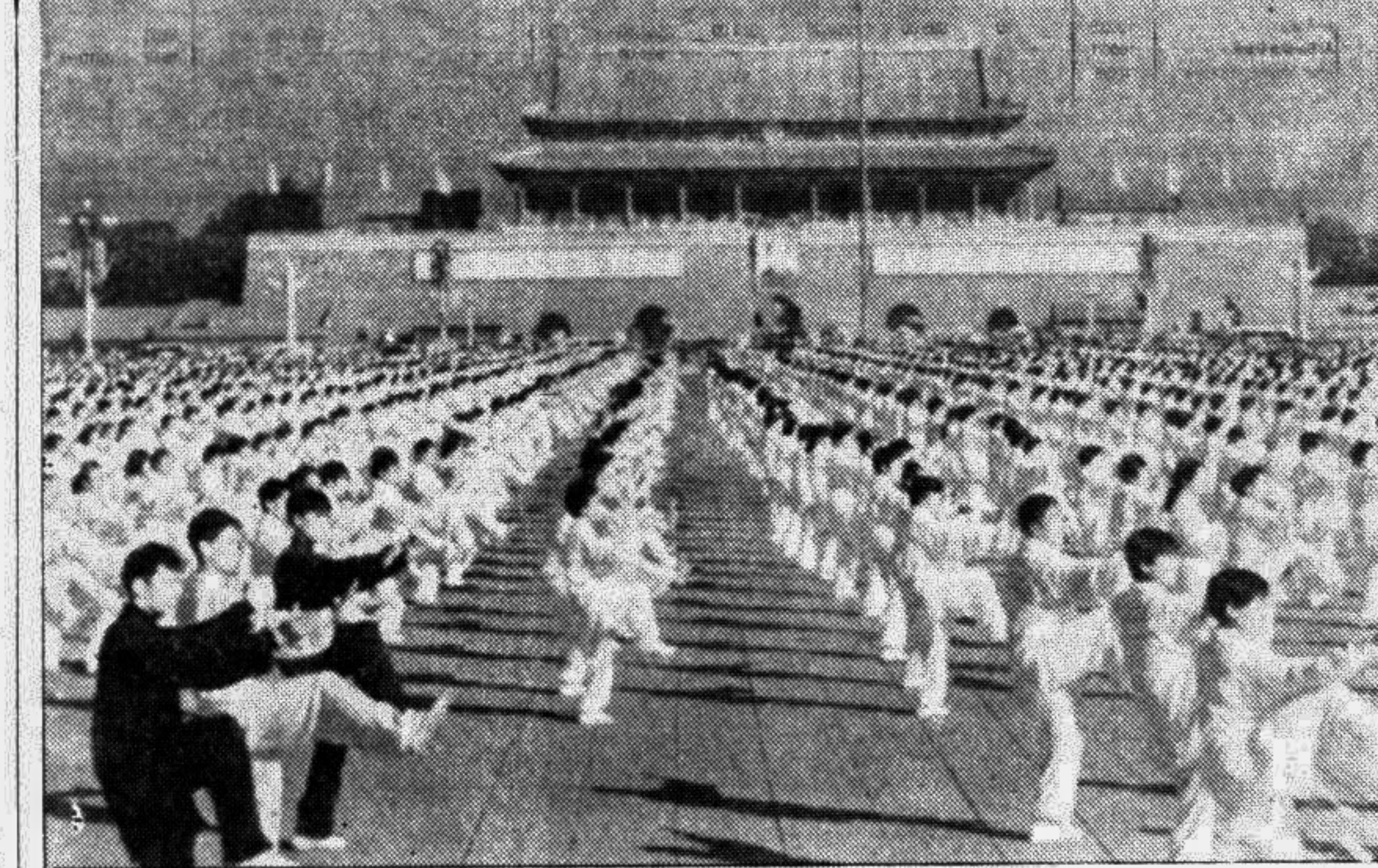
The EU, among other factors, has pointed to Turkey's poor human rights record in rejecting it as a candidate for membership for the time being.

Talbott said the United States will persist in urging the EU to find ways of bringing Turkey more fully into the process of EU enlargement.

"We do not believe that European unity and integration will be fully successful if a key European country is set uniquely alone and apart," Talbott said.

Discussing the problem of secessionist Turkish Kurds, Talbott said the United States defends the right of Turkey to defend itself against terrorists.

But, he said, the United States believes that there "can be no solely military solution to the problems that continue to plague Turkey's southeast. Any enduring answer to Turkey's Kurdish question will depend on the willingness of the Turkish government to safeguard the human rights of all the people of Turkey."



About 10,000 Chinese shadow boxers gather in Beijing's vast Tiananmen Square on Thursday. The event celebrated the 40th anniversary of the founding of the China Martial Arts Association. Shadow boxing is very popular in China, with the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping once saying Taijiquan (Chinese shadow boxing) is good for health. — AP/UNB photo

# BRIEFLY

**S'pore FM to sign MOU with China:** Singapore's foreign minister headed to China on Wednesday to sign a land exchange agreement for chancery and consulate premises and a legal cooperation memorandum of understanding, the Foreign Ministry said, AP reports from Singapore.

Shanmugam Jayakumar will join Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan in signing the land agreement, and witness a concord on reciprocal training of Foreign Ministry officials.

**Bus accident claims 15 in India:** A bus traveling through central India veered off a bridge and plunged into a river killing 15 people and injuring 24 others, domestic news agencies reported yesterday, AP reports from New Delhi.

The accident happened late Wednesday when the driver lost control of the bus and it fell into the Poram River in Madhya Pradesh state, the United News of India said.

**Rockets hit Israeli villages:** Several Katyusha rockets hit near Israeli villages along the border with Lebanon yesterday, causing no injuries, the Israeli army reported, AP says from Jerusalem.

The small, unguided missiles, apparently fired by Lebanese guerrillas, landed in an orchard, according to Israel radio. Residents of the villages went into bomb shelters. The Israeli army said some rockets also landed in the Israeli-controlled section of Lebanon just across the border.

**2 Indian soldiers killed in Jammu:** Two Indian soldiers were killed in a clash with separatist militants in Kashmir on the eve of Indo-Pakistan talks on the disputed territory, officials said yesterday, AP says from Jammu.

Army officials said the two soldiers were killed in a gunbattle with militants, but police said the militants ambushed the soldiers at a checkpoint. The clash occurred Wednesday night in Poonch, a district bordering Pakistan, about 200 km northwest of Kashmir's winter capital Jammu.

**Wole Soyinka back in Nigeria:** Nigerian playwright and Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka has returned from exile, giving General Abdulsalam Abubakar a high-profile vote of confidence in his intention to restore democratic rule, Reuters says from Lagos.

Soyinka, 64, was welcomed home on Wednesday evening by hundreds of followers who sang freedom songs and tried to embrace him at the airport in Lagos, which is the country's commercial capital and the heart of opposition's long years of military dictatorship.

**Differences arise as China-Taiwan talks head into second day**

SHANGHAI, Oct 15: Top negotiators from rivals China and Taiwan headed into a second day of high-level talks here today with optimism but stark differences on the agenda, reports AP.

The chairman of Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), Koo Chen-Fu, is due to sit down for a second meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Daohan, in the afternoon after touring the skyscraper-studded new Pudong business zone.

The two men held their first meeting in five years late Wednesday. Officials from both sides hailed the discussion as a frank exchange of views and hopes.

**Sudan extends ceasefire for 3 more months**

KHARTOUM, Oct 15: Sudan has announced officially that it will extend for a further three months, a ceasefire in the southern region of Bahr El-Ghazal, which was due to expire today.

Sudanese Foreign Minister, Mustafa Osman Ismail, speaking at a press conference here Wednesday, reiterated what he told AFP on Monday that his government had taken the decision for "humanitarian reasons" and in response to appeals by the United Nations secretary Daniel Arap Moi and the Italian government.

# September was the hottest month on world record

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: Temperatures sizzled throughout the United States and the world last month, making it the hottest September on record, the US government said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

September's temperatures were the latest in an unprecedented string of record high, which have some scientists worried that they are caused by global warming. The warming trend has been linked to increased use of fossil fuels such as oil and coal, which produce heat-trapping gases in the environment.

"The recent string of unusu-

ally high global average temperatures could be a sign of accelerated global warming," said Thomas Karl, director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) climate data centre. Next month, negotiators from around the world will meet in Buenos Aires to discuss a climate treaty that would limit emissions by industrialised countries in an effort to stabilise global temperatures.

In the near term, the weather should cool off soon now that a weather phenomenon known as La Nina is taking hold, according to the NOAA.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, left, with Senora Nilda Patricia Velasco de Zedillo, wife of the Mexican President, as they watch the inspection of the guard at London's Buckingham Palace Wednesday. The Zedillos are on a four day official visit to Britain. — AP/UNB photo

# Impeachment inquiry meet into Clinton's conduct soon

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: White House and House Judiciary Committee lawyers will meet next week for the first time to discuss the impeachment inquiry into President Bill Clinton's conduct, reports AP.

The session next Tuesday will be held as the committee's chairman considers trimming back the allegations.

Paul McNulty, a spokesman for the committee, said Wednesday the panel's lawyers would invite White House counsel Charles FC Ruff "to provide us with exculpatory information."

The meeting also would cover how the House and the White House could "work together to expedite the process," McNulty said.

Meanwhile, the White House and Democrats in Congress called attention to a National Public Radio report on a potential conflict of interest involving Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr.

A issue was whether Starr should have disclosed to the Justice Department conversations he had — as a private attorney in 1994 — with Paula Jones' original lawyers on the issue of presidential immunity.

Starr's office said he "did not" have anything secretive about his contacts. Starr noted that former Jones lawyer Gil Davis mentioned the conversations on a national television show last January.

# Anwar to be tried on all 10 charges

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 15: Malaysian authorities are ready to prosecute jailed dissident Anwar Ibrahim on six sodomy and corruption charges in addition to the four charges he now faces, newspapers said Thursday, reports AP.

Attorney-General Mohhtar Abdullah said the prosecution had applied to the High Court to fix a trial date, the New Straits Times daily reported.

"The prosecution has all the necessary evidence... for all the 10 charges against Anwar," he said, rejecting speculation that authorities weren't ready to prosecute.

Anwar, 51, was fired Sept 2 as deputy prime minister and arrested 18 days later. He had clashed with Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad over economic policy before being dismissed for alleged immoral homosexual acts and corruption.

Anwar has pleaded innocent to all five counts of corruption and five counts of sodomy, claiming they were trumped up by his political adversaries. He has been ordered to stand trial Nov. 2.

Mohhtar said that if the hearings on the first four corruption charges could be completed by November, the prosecution would apply for hearing dates for the other charges in December or January.

Meanwhile, Mahathir was quoted by a newspaper Thursday as saying he had thought about abolishing the Internal Security Act, (ISA) the harsh law that was used to arrest Anwar and his supporters. It pro-

vides for indefinite imprisonment without trial.

But he reportedly dropped the idea after security forces told him that there was still the threat of instability in Malaysia.

"That is why the ISA must be maintained, to prevent people from creating chaos in the country without seeking justice in the courts," Mahathir was quoted as saying by The Star newspaper.

**NLD insists on right to hold rallies**

YANGON, Oct 15: The National League for Democracy, Myanmar's main opposition party, says it has the same right as the military government to stage mass rallies, reports AP.

A statement from the NLD, received Thursday, also criticized a series of mass pro-government gatherings being held around the country, saying, "Such rallies only complicate the political conditions."

Since the end of last month, the military government has been organizing mass rallies at which participants have called for the removal of NLD leaders, accusing them of disturbing the peace and hindering economic progress.

The NLD statement claimed that "people from various social and economic organizations and public servants were forced to attend the state-sponsored mass rallies and read out proposals and passed resolutions."