

2nd day of ME peace talks

Expressions of hope give way to hard bargaining

QUEENSTOWN, Maryland, Oct 16: Israeli and Palestinian leaders settled in for a second day of peace talks Friday at a rustic Chesapeake Bay retreat...

At centre stage in the closed-door negotiations is an American plan designed to clamp down on terrorists in the West Bank...

tary Joe Lockhart said, and broke up at 0040 GMT Friday. It included a group meeting of all three delegations...



President Clinton walks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, right, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington Thursday to set the stage for the Mideast peace talks at the Wye River Conference Centre in Maryland.

BRIEFLY



Former Turkish prime minister and the leader of True Path Party, Tansu Ciller, talking to reporters in Ankara Thursday after appearing before a parliamentary commission...

Suspected bomber held in Lanka

Sri Lanka's anti-terrorism police have arrested a Tamil woman suspected of plotting an attack in Colombo, police said yesterday, AP says from Colombo.

Vietnamese PM to visit China

Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai will pay an official visit to China from October 19 to 23, at the invitation of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji, Xinhua says from Beijing.

Man held for threatening Clinton

A man with a history of making threats has been ordered held without bond on charges of threatening President Bill Clinton before the president was to arrive in June, AP reports from Eugene, Oregon.

Tremor jolts NE India

An earthquake measuring 5.5 on the Richter Scale rocked India's mountainous northeastern region early yesterday but there were no reports of deaths, a government official said, Reuters says from Guwahati.

11 peasants killed in Colombia

An ultraright death squad murdered at least 11 peasants in a remote mountain village in northern Colombia, a government official said on Thursday, Reuters says from Bogota.

Philippine rebels free captive

Under threats of a military offensive, suspected Muslim rebels on yesterday released a Filipino trader they kidnapped more than a month ago in the southern Philippines, AP says from Zamboanga, Philippines.

UN ends police mission in Croatia

The United Nations on Thursday ended its civilian police operation in Croatia's eastern Slavonia area, a heavily-Serb populated region the United Nations administered after the 1995 Dayton Balkan accords, Reuters reports from United Nations.

Quakes shake Siberia

Two earthquakes shook the eastern Siberia region of Russia, but did not cause any serious damage of injuries, a news report said yesterday, AP reports from Moscow.

Asia Art Festival opens in China

The Asia Art Festival, the first event of its kind hosted by China, opened on Thursday in Beijing with a performance by the state art troupe from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Xinhua says from Beijing.

Huge iceberg breaks off from Antarctica ice shelf

WASHINGTON, Oct 16: An iceberg larger than the state of Delaware has broken off the Ronne Ice Shelf in Antarctica in what scientists believe may be a sign of global warming, the US National Ice Centre announced on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The iceberg, named A-38, is 92 miles long, and 30 miles wide and covers an area of about 2,751 square miles.

The National Ice Centre is run by the US Navy, NOAA, and the US Coast Guard, which is part of the transportation department. Its mission is to provide worldwide operational ice analyses for the United States and allied nations.

Ice shelves are massive, floating sheets of snow and frozen water that encircle the Antarctic mainland. Scientists believe that the breaking off, or calving, of icebergs is an important mechanism in the disintegration of ice shelves, and may be an indicator of global warming.

NATO, Yugoslav army sign air surveillance accord

BELGRADE, Oct 16: Following up on this week's agreement to bring peace to Kosovo, NATO and the Yugoslav military signed an air surveillance accord to make sure the Yugoslav president pulls his forces out of the strife-torn province, reports AP.

The deal signed in Belgrade between NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, Gen Wesley Clark, and Yugoslav Army Chief-of-Staff Gen. Momo Perisic, is the first in a series of measures designed to force President Slobodan Milosevic to keep his promise or face airstrikes by the powerful Atlantic alliance.

Milosevic agreed this week to withdraw remaining Serb forces from Kosovo, begin negotiations with ethnic Albanians toward self-rule in the southern Serbian province, and allow up to 300,000 refugees to return to their homes.

His compliance with the breakthrough accord reached with US envoy Richard Holbrooke will be monitored by unarmed spy planes as well as some 2,000 verifiers.

Amid new accusations by Kosovo Albanian refugees of Serb police intimidation, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana said Thursday in Belgrade that despite some progress, Milosevic has a long way to go to meet NATO's Saturday deadline.

"He must comply, he must comply fully and immediately," Solana said after meeting with the Yugoslav leader. "According to our information, and our information is good, many army and special police units remain in Kosovo."

Britain calls for tougher action against Myanmar

LONDON, Oct 16: Britain called Thursday for tougher action against Myanmar, possibly including a ban on EU transit visas for its military junta, to pressure Yangon to improve its record on democracy and human rights, reports AFP.

Junior Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett said he wanted the European Union to step up pressure on the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the official name of the ruling military regime in Yangon.

The European Union has already taken a series of measures against Myanmar, including military and economic embargoes and a ban on entry visas for senior members of the SPDC and their families.

Some 90 per cent of Kosovo's 2 million inhabitants are ethnic Albanians and most favour independence.

In Vienna, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe agreed Thursday to oversee the 2,000-member "ground verification mission" — unarmed monitors who will roam through Kosovo to make sure terms of the agreement with Holbrooke are being honored.

The OSCE will sign the ground verification agreement today in Belgrade with Yugoslav Foreign Minister Zivadin Jovanovic.

Also, the outgoing Cabinet of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was expected to approve a plan today to contribute 14 German jet fighters for any NATO attack.

Efforts to save Kosovo's refugees from disaster as winter approaches have been stepped up in the aftermath of the agreement.

Hyderabad, India, Oct 16: At least 69 people have died this week in India's southern state of Andhra Pradesh due to incessant rains and heavy flooding, state officials said today, reports Reuters.

Most of the deaths occurred when houses collapsed, but some victims were struck by lightning or electrocuted, officials said. Seven fishermen were also missing.

State Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said in a statement that he had asked Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to give financial assistance to the state government.

Relief Commissioner BP Acharya said on Thursday that massive relief operations had been launched to evacuate people to safer places from "vulnerable" villages.

He said relief camps had been set up and medical teams had been deployed to prevent the outbreak of epidemics. He also said that 4,761 houses and 264,210 hectares of farmland had been damaged.

Floods in Andhra Pradesh claim 69

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Typhoon Zeb kills 74 in Philippines, 6 in Taiwan

TOKYO, Oct 16: A weekend typhoon Zeb approached islands in southern Japan on Friday, after killing at least 74 people in the Philippines and six in Taiwan in a trail of destruction, reports AP.

With maximum sustained winds of 108 kph Zeb was located about 190 kilometers west of the island of Ishigaki in Okinawa prefecture, or state, as of 4:00 pm (0800 GMT), Japan's Meteorological Agency said.

The typhoon was moving north-northeast at about 20 kph in the East China Sea, the agency said. Weather reports forecast rain for most of western and central Japan over the weekend.

At least 35 domestic flights to southern Japanese destinations were cancelled Friday, airline officials said.

Disaster officials in the Philippines said the typhoon left at least 74 people dead, mostly due to drownings and landslides. At least one person died of electrocution, while another was bitten by a snake. Ten people were missing.

forced to flee their homes in the Philippines because of flooding. Most have since returned home, but more than 10,000 people remained in 28 government shelters.

At least five provinces have been declared in a state of calamity, to allow emergency funds to be released to these areas. Price control also has been established to prevent profiteers from taking advantage of the situation.

In Taiwan, six people were dead and four missing after Zeb roared across the island Friday. Rivers in the Taipei area swelled their banks, and low-lying urban areas in Taipei county were flooded by torrential rains. Residents were evacuated to safety by rescue workers patrolling through the night in inflatable boats.

One woman was reportedly drowned in Taipei, and two persons were killed in eastern Hualien county when their car plunged into a flooded drainage ditch, the Interior Ministry's disaster rescue center reported.

Schools and offices were closed in most parts of the island Friday, and the stock exchange also suspended trading in the capital of Taipei. Many international flights were cancelled, and other arriving in Taipei were rerouted to Hong Kong, airport officials said.



A protestor wearing a gas mask protests the shut down of two independent newspapers in Belgrade Thursday. The Serbian government decided to shut down two Belgrade dailies, "Dnevni Telegraph" and "Danas" for allegedly violating government decree that required self-censorship at a time of NATO threats.

Latest flare-up in India-Pakistan propaganda war

NEW DELHI, Oct 16: WWW.armyinkashmir.com isn't what it was meant to be, reports AP.

The web site designed by India's army to tally alleged attacks by Kashmiri insurgents and ceasefire violations by Pakistan has been turned inside out, apparently by a Pakistani hacker.

Now, the site is "dedicated to all the Kashmiri brothers who are suffering the brutal oppression of the Indian army."

The latest flare-up in the Indo-Pakistan propaganda war occurred as negotiators of the two countries met for the first time in a year in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad to resume talks on Kashmir.

The Asian Age newspaper said the web site was overridden by an unnamed information service in Lahore, Pakistan. The army quickly moved its site to a new address, www.univall.com, and resumed publishing its own version of events.

According to the army's daily count, Pakistani troops fired 280 artillery shells and 3,045 rounds of small arms fire across the border on Thursday.

Less sophisticated statistics on the hacked web site does not list daily actions by India in Kashmir. But it offers a table summarising alleged atrocities, presumably since 1989 when the insurrection began. It claimed 59,170 Kashmiris have been killed, 7,013 raped, 461 "schoolchildren burned alive," 25,901 wounded and 38,450 "disabled for life."

Minister for ban on black magic in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Oct 16: Shocked by the mysterious murders of at least 153 people accused of sorcery, Indonesia's justice minister wants black magic outlawed even though it's been practiced in the Southeast Asian nation since ancient times, reports AP.

During recent months, parts of main island of Java been terrorised by masked killers dressed in black, according to police, witnesses and media reports.

They say the killers strike at night, cutting their victims' throats and sometimes hanging mutilated bodies in trees or tossing them in the street.

PAS continues protests in Malaysia Govt moves to curb sale of opposition newspaper

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 16: Authorities moved to curb sales of an opposition party newspaper as its editors stepped up a campaign to garner greater sympathy for jailed dissident Awang Ibrahim, news reports said Friday, reports AP.

The publishers of Harakah, the official newspaper of the Islamic Party (Istiqamah) in Malaysia, or PAS, have been ordered to explain to the Home Ministry why they were selling the paper on newsstands in an apparent violation of a rule against public distribution, New Straits Times daily reported.

Samsudin Osman, secretary-general of the home ministry, said Thursday that the Harakah was allowed to be sold only to members of the Islamic party and not to the public.

"We have reminded the publisher several times in the past," he said. "We are going to remind them again of this requirement at the meeting next week."

Editors of the newspaper said that sales have skyrocketed over the past two months, since they started publishing strident articles against Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

Anwar was fired by Mahathir on Sept. 2 as deputy prime minister and finance minister after being dubbed too immoral to rule.

Beginning Nov. 2, he faces trial for alleged corruption and illegal homosexual acts. Anwar has denied the 10 charges, saying they were fabricated to eliminate the challenge he posed to Mahathir.

The Harakah and other fringe papers published by opposition activists on the Internet, have become increasingly popular among Malaysians jaded by pro-government coverage in the nation's major newspapers.

The Islamic group, meanwhile, continued to organise demonstrations in defiance of authorities.

Late Thursday, more than 2,000 people defied police to gather in the northern Kedah state to listen to speeches by the president of PAS, Fadzil Noor, and other leaders of a new coalition of opposition groups, the Malaysian People's Justice Movement.

Int'l pressure propels India, Pakistan to negotiating table

ISLAMABAD, Oct 16: As the world watches, the newest nuclear powers of Pakistan and India open talks on Friday aimed at preventing a deadly race between the uneasy neighbours for nuclear weapons and missiles, reports AP.

At the heart of the three days of talks is the disputed Kashmiri Lathi.

New Delhi "cannot operate in a vacuum," she said. As a result Pakistan is looking to the international community "to lean much more heavily on the Indians not to do anything to create pressure for deployment" of nuclear weapons, she said.

week Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said it's unlikely any major breakthrough on Kashmir will emerge from the talks.

"This is a process... we can't expect a breakthrough on an issue like this on the first meeting," he said.

But the fact that both sides are talking, said Aziz is indicative that the two countries realise "something has to be done."

Both Pakistan and India possess missiles capable of carrying single and multiple nuclear warheads.

"The world is petrified of an early use," says Lodhi.

But for Pakistan signing a no-first use pact is untenable because India has enough conventional fire power to knock out Pakistan's nuclear facilities and command and control centres.

Thus said Lodhi Pakistan would need an agreement that would guarantee that neither India nor Pakistan would launch a first conventional strike, similar to a no-war pact.

It is in the interest of both countries, she said "not to go down the whole deployment road."

News Analysis

— the flash point of two previous wars between Pakistan and India since 1947 when British colonial rule ended.

Analysts here say international pressure, particularly from the United States, has propelled Pakistan and India to the negotiation table after more than one year.

He said the world's oceans were rising at such a rate that millions of homes near sea level could be underwater in two centuries if current predictions were correct.

Upon his arrival in Pakistan on Thursday, India's Foreign Secretary K. Raghunath said the two neighbours were on the "threshold of a new relationship."

Neither side appears to have moved on their positions on Kashmir. Pakistan is demanding a vote by Kashmiris on both sides of the disputed border to decide whether to join Islamic Pakistan or mostly Hindu India. Pakistan also wants international mediation to settle the protracted dispute.

India has rejected both. "There is no room for any third party involvement," said Raghunath at the airport.

In an interview earlier this year, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said it's unlikely any major breakthrough on Kashmir will emerge from the talks.

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