

International

Israel, Palestinians reach crucial deal on prisoners

JERUSALEM, Sept 3: Israel and the Palestinians have clinched a deal on prisoner releases, the key obstacle holding up the signing of a revised land-for-security accord, Palestinian officials said on Friday, reports AFP.

"The issue of the prisoners has been solved but there is still a small gap on other issues," the official said without elaborating.

Israeli army radio also said the Palestinians had accepted proposals on prisoner releases put forward by the government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak after three weeks of protracted negotiations but that differences remained on conditions for a final peace accord.

"But there is disagreement on the issue of unilateral measures. (Palestinian leader Yasser) Arafat does not want a formula that bars him from unilaterally proclaiming a state," the radio said, quoting government sources.

However, Barak's office said nothing had yet been settled.

"They haven't given us an answer. Nothing has changed," an official in Barak's office said, adding that there would be no signing ceremony Friday.

"There is no meeting right now. Regarding the prisoners, there is not going to be even one more prisoner let out, except these 350 that we agreed."

Clinton's buy home in NY

AUBURN, New York, Sept 3: US President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary signed a contract for a post-White House home in New York, they said in a statement, the surest sign yet that she intends to make an unprecedented bid for the Senate, reports AFP.

"We appreciate everyone who helped make our search for a new home an enjoyable experience," the Clintons said in the statement issued in New York where they were vacationing.

"We particularly want to thank the homeowners, their neighbors, and the real estate brokers who have been so gracious to us throughout our search," they said.

The Clintons are looking to settle in the state where Hillary Clinton has set up an exploratory committee for a Senate race in 2000.

The 110-year-old five-bedroom Georgian colonial house in the New York City suburb of Westchester County comes complete with a swimming pool, an exercise room and close proximity to golf courses. It was listed at 1.7 million dollars.

Thousands protest in Aceh

JAKARTA, Sept 3: Police fired warning shots to stop a convoy of 2,000 people heading for a rally in Indonesia's troubled Aceh province, press reports said Friday, reports AFP.

The crowd lay down on the road linking Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh, and Medan in the neighbouring province of North Sumatra, after police forced their convoy of vehicles to halt around 18 kilometres (11 miles) east of the district capital Sigli on Thursday, the Jakarta Post said.

Police fired shots in the air when the vehicles refused to stop, and the people were then forced to leave the vehicles, the paper said.

The crowds then spread out in the road in protest.

"We only plan to attend a meeting, nothing else ... the police didn't have to fire shots ... many panicked," one of the participants said.

They had planned to attend a mass rally at the Darussalam University in Banda Aceh to call for a self-determination referendum for Aceh.

BRIEFLY

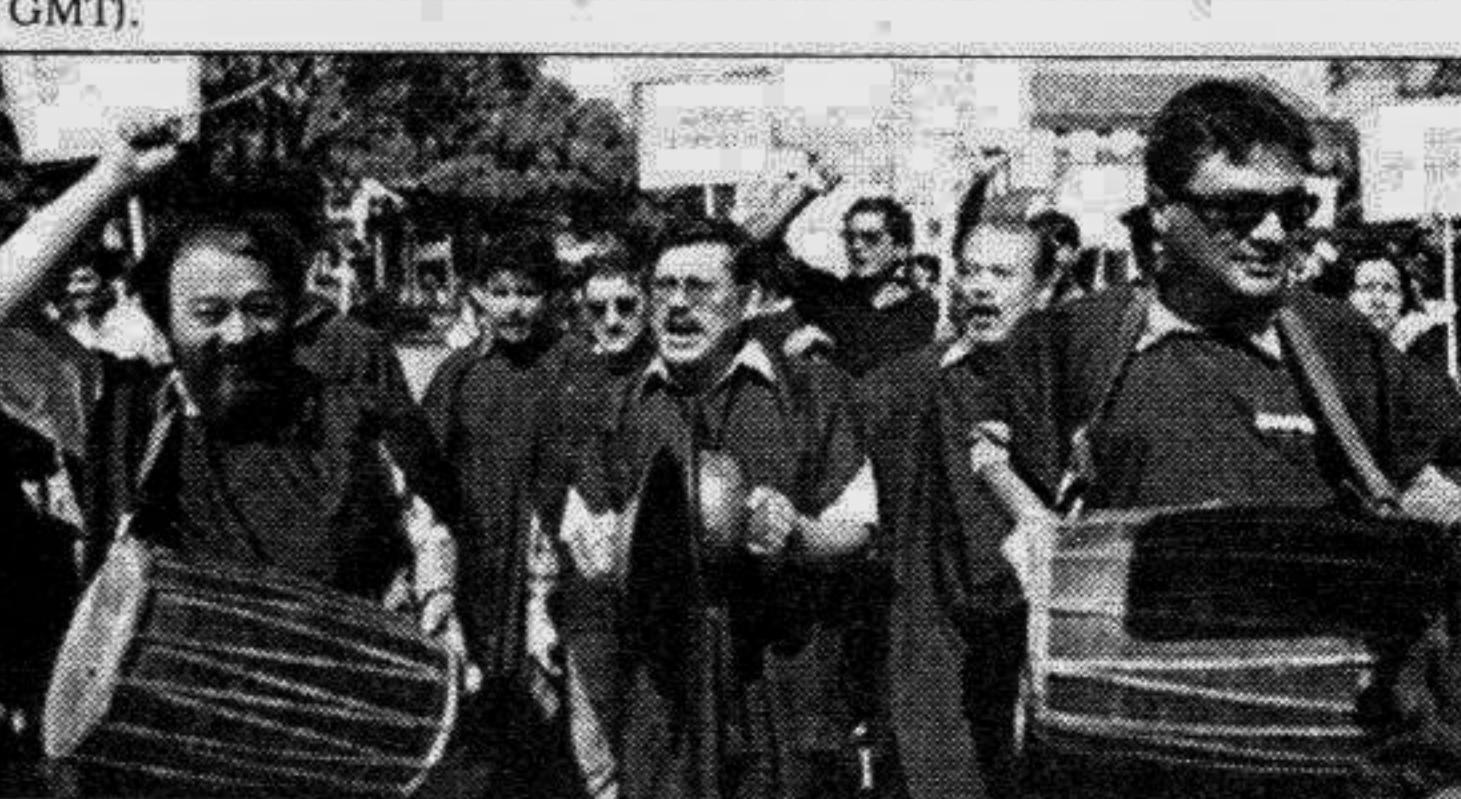
Panama tightens links with US:

Panama's new government will cooperate with the United States on issues of common concern and tighten bilateral ties, said President Mireya Moscoso on Thursday, Xinhua reports from Panama City.

President Moscoso met with US Attorney-General Janet Reno yesterday, the first day of her term of office. The governing Arnulfista Party, with Mireya Moscoso as the president, has traditionally maintained good relations with the United States. After the meeting, Reno left Panama City for home.

Quake shakes Athens: A mild earthquake registering 4.6 on the Richter scale shook Athens yesterday morning, but police said there were no reports of injuries or damage, Reuter reports from Athens.

Seismologists said the quake occurred at 8.30 am (0530 GMT).



Human rights activists stage a protest rally wearing black dress and beating on drums and cymbals Friday in Kathmandu. Fifteen different human rights organisations are protesting over government's delay in fulfilling their demand for the formation of a Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights.

— AFP photo

— AFP photo