

Pakistan to sign CTBT only after lifting of US sanctions

ISLAMABAD, Sept 14: Pakistan has made it clear that it will not sign the comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT) until the US removes all sanctions and that this stand has nothing to do with India's draft nuclear doctrine, reports PTI. We will not consider the signing of the CTBT till the time the sanctions imposed against by the US are removed, foreign minister Sartaj Aziz was quoted as saying by English Daily Dawn, in the first official remarks on the issue. Referring to Pakistan's earlier pledge to sign the treaty within this month, Aziz said the commitment was conditional as Islamabad had promised to do so only if a coercion-free environment is created. Our condition has not yet been met so there is no question of signing CTBT at this stage. Aziz made it clear that India's nuclear doctrine had nothing to do with Pakistan's decision. Last week foreign secretary Shamshad Ahmed had said in a statement that Pakistan was reconsidering its decision to sign the CTBT since the security environment in the region had undergone a change due to India's nuclear doctrine.

Washington plans to indict Saddam on war crimes charges

WASHINGTON, Sept 14: The United States accused Iraqi President Saddam Hussein of blocking humanitarian aid to his people and is pushing to indict him on war crimes charges, a top State Department official said Monday, reports AFP. The effort to indict Saddam Hussein as a war criminal is now getting underway, and we, too, are using our diplomacy to try to support the establishment of a war crimes commission on Iraq, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk told reporters. We are... working with other countries who share our concerns to try to build a consensus in favour of a war crimes commission on Iraq, Indyk said. A possible indictment would charge the Iraqi leadership with war crimes against their own people, as Iraqi leaders have blocked international aid and aggravated the country's humanitarian situation, Indyk said.

Mahathir urged to pardon jailed newsmen

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 14: International press groups Tuesday urged Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to pardon a Canadian journalist jailed for contempt of court, reports AFP. In a letter to Mahathir, the New-York based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said it was "deeply dismayed" with the six-week imprisonment of Murray Hiebert. Hiebert, 50, local bureau chief of the Far Eastern Economic Review, began his prison sentence Saturday after losing an appeal. We believe that no journalist should be jailed for what he or she writes, executive director Ann Cooper said in the letter. CPJ is particularly concerned that Hiebert's harsh sentence might be seen as a warning to journalists covering the politically charged trial of former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, whose case has brought international scrutiny to Malaysia's judicial system. Anwar, who was arrested and arrested last September and is now serving a six-year sentence for corruption, is currently being tried on sodomy charges. The trial was adjourned Friday when Anwar was hospitalised with suspected arsenic poisoning. The CPJ urged Mahathir to pardon and immediately release Hiebert. It called for a "thorough and impartial investigation into Hiebert's prosecution to determine if there was any miscarriage of justice."

Myanmar exiled students begin hunger strike

BANGKOK, Sept 14: Nine exiled students began a hunger strike Tuesday in front of the Myanmar embassy in the Thai capital, demanding the release of political prisoners held by the Yangon military regime, reports AP. Sitting in front of the diplomatic compound in central Bangkok, the students each carried feathers from a peacock - the symbol of democracy and student campaigners in Myanmar, also known as Burma. The military regime has systematically oppressed the people's struggle and arbitrarily arrested more than 500 activists this month, including many of our members," a statement from the All Burma Basic Education Students' Union said. Their protest is in support of the so-called 9-9-99 campaign for disobedience inside the military state, which failed to materialize when authorities tightened security and threatened to "annihilate" agitators. Myanmar authorities acknowledge arresting about 40 people in the run-up to Sept 9. Diplomats have estimated that about 100 were arrested.

UN pulls out staff, refugees from E Timor

JAKARTA, Sept 14: The UN abandoned its compound in the East Timorese capital Dili Tuesday to the vengeance of the militias and issued a dire warning that thousands of refugees were on the brink of starvation, reports AFP. Aid and relief agencies demanded urgent food drops and the rapid deployment of UN peacekeepers, talks in New York aimed at hammering out a UN peacekeeping agreement for the shattered territory were dragging on. The UN mission in East Timor (UNAMET) evacuated 110 UN staff and 1,487 refugees sheltering in its Dili compound to Australia, saying security was "not really tenable". Witnesses described how pro-Jakarta militia torched the empty building sending plumes of smoke billowing over Dili, which has been destroyed in a two-week orgy of destruction by the militias and the Indonesian army. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata warned from Geneva of a humanitarian catastrophe facing the thousands of terrified people driven out of cities into the inaccessible mountains by the militias. We are in a race against time to save the lives of tens of thousands, or perhaps even more, terrified people affected by weeks of wanton violence and forcible displacement, she said. UNAMET chief Ian Martin said on arrival in the northern Australian city of Darwin at the start of the refugee airlift that

conditions in Dili had worsened and that urgent action was needed. Martin said the refugees evacuated Tuesday were only "a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in East Timor" and that thousands were on the verge of starvation. There are very large groups of people with no access to food. It is hard to overstate the urgency of bringing food to them," he said. He added the compound in Dili was now closed, but stressed UNAMET had not left East Timor completely and that about a dozen UN staff were still in the province monitoring conditions. UNHCR Field Officer Christine Planas told AFP the organisation wanted to fly food into the airport East Timorese capital Dili and deliver it by land, rather than organising often ineffectual airdrops. But she said Indonesia had failed to provide guarantees that flights into Dili airport would not be attacked by militia. "Minimum security guarantees have to be provided before you can land and we have not been able to get these," Planas said. A shuttle service of 11 Australian Air Force Hercules transports began the operation at dawn to evacuate the UN compound, and Australian troops are understood to have helped secure Dili airport. In New York, a top-level delegation which visited Jakarta and East Timor reported to the

Security Council that "the grave humanitarian crisis in East Timor should be given the top-most priority by the United Nations." But despite mounting concern for the plight of the refugees, Security Council President Peter van Walsum of the Netherlands said Monday that talks between Indonesia and the United Nations would not resume Tuesday. According to one western diplomat, the extra day would give UN Secretary General Kofi Annan time to confer with Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Alatas and Portugal's Foreign Minister Jaime Gamas on a blueprint for the peacekeeping force. Amid signs of a looming battle over the make-up of the force, US President Bill Clinton dismissed Indonesian objections to the participation of Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and the United States. "I don't believe they should dictate the composition of it once having acknowledged that the United Nations should come in," he said. In Jakarta, the chairman of Indonesia's ruling Golkar party called for the countries to be excluded. But Australian Defence Minister John Moore downplayed talk of difficulties, saying his government expected the UN force to be mandated as early as Wednesday. Indonesian Foreign Minister Alatas also said in New York his country would not impose any conditions on the force.



A Timorese refugee sheds tear as she arrives at the refugee processing centre at Warrara, Darwin, in northern Australia yesterday. The United Nations was closing its besieged compound in Dili and evacuating 1,300 East Timorese to Australia. — AFP photo

India's SC rejects ban on exit, opinion polls

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: India's Supreme Court Tuesday rejected a plea by the Election Commission to enforce a ban on the publication or broadcast of exit and opinion polls during ongoing general elections, reports AFP. It is absolutely wrong on the part of the Election Commission to come to the court seeking execution of the guidelines issued by it," the five-judge court said in its ruling. Even if we direct the government, how is the government going to enforce it? "In our view the writ petition has no merit. Hence, it is dismissed." The election watchdog had petitioned the court to enforce its guidelines banning the electronic and print media from disseminating exit and opinion polls during the staggered elections, which began September 5 and end October 3. Within hours of the court ruling, the commission issued a notification withdrawing the guidelines. While it was considering the petition, the court had stopped a private television network from broadcasting an exit poll conducted during the first phase of voting. The Pindu national-led coalition government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had opposed the Election Commission ban, saying it impinged on freedom of expression and information. We make clear that we have not gone into whether the

commission's guidelines violated right to free speech," the court said, adding the commission should have considered the question of enforcement before passing its guidelines. Vajpayee's BJP party, which had been riding high in the opinion polls before the election began, said the Supreme Court ruling would be "appreciated" by all. The judgement "upheld freedom of the press that can only be restricted under very extraordinary circumstances," said BJP spokesman J.P. Mathur. The Election Commission's order was an indirect way of imposing censorship on the media," Mathur added. SAARC film festival begins in Colombo Sept 17. COLOMBO, Sept 14: Fandi blockbuster 'Kuch-Kuch Hota Hai', Gurdas Mann-S'arrer 'Martyr-In-Love', Major Punj's 'Booty Singh's and 'Ahiya' by Bejoy Mishra (all feature films) would be part of the first SAARC film festival to be held in Colombo from 17 to 24 of this month, reports PTI. The festival which was due to be held here last year, but was postponed as it clashed with dates of the SAARC summit here, would be held with the participation of all SAARC countries, an official release said here yesterday.

N Korea threatens military strike against South over border dispute

SEOUL, Sept 14: North Korea Tuesday threatened to strike South Korea if its navy tries to cross over P'yongyang's new self-declared border, reports AFP. The bellicose warning over the disputed inter-Korean border came just a day after it emerged that North Korea had agreed to suspend testing long-range missiles in a move aimed at creating peace and stability in the region. The North, however, poured cold water on the good moods of US and South Korean officials, relieved the North has agreed to freeze test-launching rockets in return or an easing of decades-old US sanctions.

The official Korean Central News Agency warned it would use military force to assert the new border it drew in the Yellow Sea two weeks ago to replace the UN-declared Northern Limit Line (NLL). The agency slammed Seoul for insisting on the validity of the NLL and warned it would not shy away from defending its new Military Demarcation Line, drawn in such a way as to swallow up five South Korean islands. "We can never recognise (the NLL) and will take decisive self-defensive measures against any breach of the Military Demarcation Line at the West

Sea of Korja (Yellow Sea) proclaimed by us," it said. It lashed South Korea for being a "flunkey" of the United States and Japan, saying its people "do not tolerate any reckless anti-North confrontation and war moves of the South Korean authorities but decisively smash them." The latest aggressive rhetoric came after days of relative silence from the North's official media following its agreement at talks in Berlin to suspend long-range missile launches in return for a partial lifting of sanctions. US and South Korean officials had hailed the move as a possible sign the North would

cooperate to ensure regional stability following the landmark agreement in principle. But analysts pointed out the agreement only signalled the start of a long and hard bargaining process during which the North would likely revert to its old diplomatic recipe of using threats and brinkmanship to win concessions from its enemies. In June, North and South Korea fought a bloody gunbattle over the NLL, which was imposed by the UN at the end of the Korean War in 1953, after North Korean military and fishing vessels repeatedly strayed over it.

Moscow blast death toll rises to 116

MOSCOW, Sept 14: Security forces combed Moscow for suspects Tuesday as the death toll reached 116 in a suspected bomb blast that reduced an eight-story apartment building to a heap of bricks, dust and mangled furniture, reports AP. Rescuers continued to search the wreckage for victims of Monday's explosion in Moscow, the fourth major blast in Russia in the last two weeks. Search crews reached the building's basement Tuesday, which was full of water from burst pipes. Children's toys floated in the muck. Rescuers had pulled out 116 bodies, including 12 children, by Tuesday, the Emergency Situations Ministry said. Nine wounded people were hospitalized, including several residents of a neighbouring building. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion, which police suspect was caused by a bomb. Authorities blamed terrorists and the government ordered a massive security operation in Moscow and other cities. Police fanned out through railway and subway stations, markets and other crowded areas of the capital, checking identity papers, and searched for stores of explosives in buildings across Moscow.

BRIEFLY

Quake hits eastern Japan: An earthquake, measuring 4.0 on the open-ended Richter scale, hit eastern Japan Tuesday but there were no reports of casualties or damage, officials said. AFP reports from Tokyo. The quake took place at 4:32 p.m. (0732 GMT) with the epicentre located in the Pacific off the coast of Chiba prefecture, east of Tokyo, the meteorological agency said. Tsunami tidal waves were not forecast.

N Korean soldier defects to South: A man claiming to be a North Korean soldier defected to South Korea on Tuesday after making his way to an island near the world's last Cold War frontier, AFP reports from Seoul. The man, who claimed to be a North Korean army soldier, was found on an islet just six kilometres (3.5 miles) from the coast of the Stalinist state. The defector, identified as Dong Il-Sop, 25, arrived on an islet near Kangwa Island, which lies close to the western port city of Incheon, Yonhap News Agency quoted a local resident as saying.

Three Pak opposition lawmakers arrested Charges of murder, violence

KARACHI, Sept 14: Pakistani police arrested three opposition lawmakers on charges of murder and violence just hours after they were released from a weekend crackdown, officials said Tuesday, reports AFP. Kanwar Khalid Yunus, member of the National Assembly (lower house), and Mohammad Hussain, a provincial deputy, were picked up on murder charges in the violence-prone port city of Karachi, they said. Liaquat Qureshi, another legislator from the southern province of Sindh was taken into custody for violence-related crimes, they said. The trio, from Sindh's politically strong Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), were among 400 opposition leaders and ac-

tivists freed by the authorities on Monday after a weekend police crackdown on opposition parties to thwart rallies against the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Karachi police chief Farooq Amin Qureshi said Yunus was charged with instigating the 1998 murder of a woman social worker allegedly by MQM militants. Hussain was also wanted in the killing of a policeman by militants during the unrest in Karachi in which some 4,000 people have died over the past four years, he said. MQM leaders condemned the arrests as a part of a conspiracy to politically eliminate the party by implicating its workers in "false and fabricated cases." MQM, representing Urdu-speaking migrants from India after the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, is actively involved in the opposition's current campaign to oust Sharif, and force fresh elections. Sharif rejects the demand saying his 30-month old government was given a mandate for a five-year tenure until 2002. He said Monday he would continue to pursue his agenda to rid the country of poverty and its economic ills. The ethnic-based MQM is at loggerheads with Sharif, who dismissed the government in Sindh and imposed direct federal rule in October last year to curb lawlessness in the province.

5 Maoist rebels killed in Nepal: At least five Maoists guerrillas, including three women, were killed in separate clashes with police guards in far northwest districts of Nepal, police sources said Tuesday, AFP reports from Kathmandu. The anti-parliamentary and anti-monarchy underground communist guerrillas attacked the police guards who were searching for the underground leftists in Rolpa, Jajarkot, Kalikot, and Rukum districts in the far northwest of Kathmandu, a police source said. Police launched a manhunt for the guerrillas on 29 August accusing them of killing Nepali Congress activists, teachers and social workers suspected of supplying information to the police.

Turkish quake toll rises to 7 ANKARA, Sept 14: The death toll from the quake that jolted northwestern Turkey Monday rose to seven when rescue workers pulled the body of a soldier from the ruins of a building in Izmit early Tuesday, the all-news channel NTV reported, says AFP. The latest toll by the government crisis centre in Ankara for the 5.8 Richter aftershock to the August 17 tremor was six dead and 422 injured as of 9:00 p.m. (1800 GMT) Monday.

Landslide claims 17 in Philippines: All but one of 18 people were killed when the van they were riding was buried by a landslide set off by torrential rain on a mountainous Philippine road, officials said Tuesday, AP reports from Baguio. Police and firefighters retrieved 17 bodies, including those of eight women, from the van, which was crushed by mud and falling boulders Monday on a road beside a ravine in Tuba town in Benguet province, an official said. A teen-age girl was pulled out alive and taken to a hospital, officials said. Rescuers earlier estimated that the van was carrying at least 14 people.

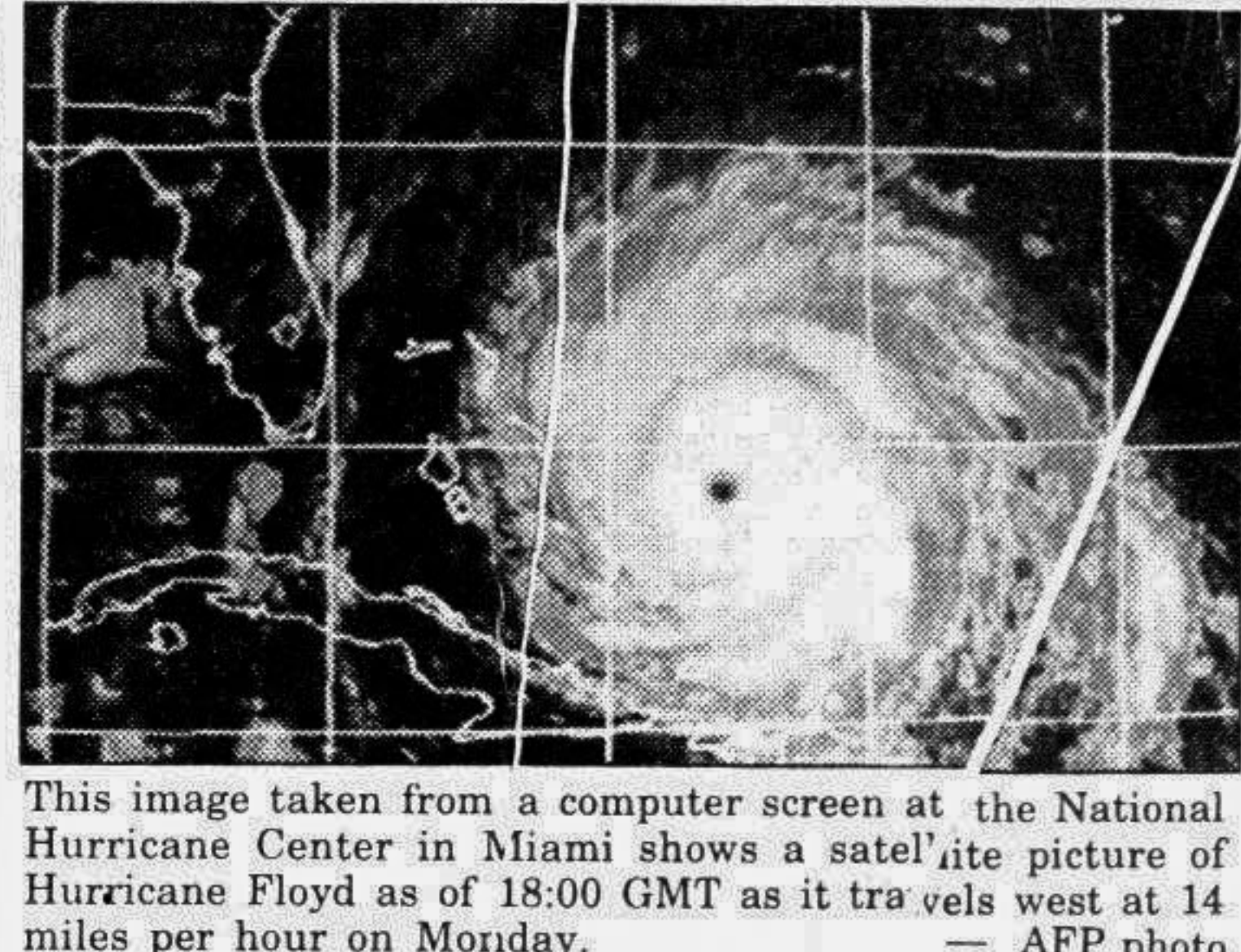
Manmata accuses Basu of making personal attack

CALCUTTA, Sept 14: Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee yesterday charged West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu with launching "personal attacks" against her during the election campaign and said this indicated that the CPI (M) is afraid of the outcome of the coming poll, reports PTI. This is not the first time that Basu launched personal attack against me. But I do not mind. I will not resort to personal vilification campaign. The people will give a befitting reply," she told newsmen at her residence after filing nomination for the ensuing poll. Denying that she has resorted to mud-slinging during electioneering, the firebrand leader said that Basu is answerable to the people. People now want a change and the CPI (M) is afraid of the poll outcome. Banerjee reiterated that her party will join the ministry if the BJP-led national democratic alliance is returned to power.

Hurricane Floyd heads for Florida coast

MIAMI, Sept 14: A "monster" hurricane bore down on the eastern Bahamas late Monday as it headed for the Florida coast where thousands of people began to evacuate their shore-side homes, reports AFP. Hurricane Floyd battered the island of San Salvador with winds of up to 250 kilometres (155 miles) per hour and pelting rain as its centre churned just 55 kilometres (35 miles) off the island at 2000 GMT according to the US National Weather Service. In Florida, Miami-Dade county mayor Alex Penelas declared a mandatory evacuation late Monday of 270,000 coastal Florida residents threatened by the hurricane. You've got an absolute

catastrophe out there heading in this general direction. If it doesn't turn, we can all get hammered by this," warned Jerry Jarrell, director of the US National Hurricane Center (NHC). "This is just a monster storm out there," he added, warning that "in a lot of ways this is a much worse storm than Andrew," the August 1992 hurricane that left 40 dead and wreaked millions of dollars in damages south of here. Heading the warnings, state Governor Jeb Bush declared a state of emergency, mobilising the National Guard and enhancing coordination among towns and granting Florida emergency management head Joe Meyers power over local authorities.



This image taken from a computer screen at the National Hurricane Center in Miami shows a satellite picture of Hurricane Floyd as it travels west at 14 miles per hour on Monday. — AFP photo



Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy (R) and PLO number-two Mahmud Abbas shake hands at the opening of talks on a final peace accord at Erez, the main crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip on Monday. Under an accord signed eight days ago, Israel and the Palestinians are to achieve a framework accord in five months and a final peace settlement in September 2000. — AFP photo

Israel, Palestinians at loggerheads over Jewish settlements

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Sept 14: Israel and the Palestinians were at loggerheads on Tuesday over Jewish settlements in the occupied territories only a day after the formal launch of talks to forge a final peace accord, reports AFP. A top Palestinian official warned Israel's settlement policy could torpedo the negotiations while Prime Minister Ehud Barak moved to express solidarity with settlers and strengthen the Jewish state's sovereignty over Jerusalem. "Settlements and the continuation of this policy, whether in Jerusalem or outside Jerusalem, will kill the final status negotiations," a Palestinian information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said in an interview with AFP. "So either we solve this problem or there will be no movement ahead," said Abed Rabbo, who is expected to be named top Palestinian negotiator in the final-status talks with Israel. The negotiations, aimed at reaching a comprehensive

peace agreement by September 2000, were launched at a ceremony Monday, six years after the signing of the Oslo peace accords. But no further working meetings have been scheduled. Abed Rabbo also said the Palestinians would hold off declaring an independent state until the one-year deadline has passed, but added that a referendum was planned on the final-status accord. "We will not declare a state unless we have resolved all outstanding questions with Israel, including those of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders and the distribution of water." The hearty handshake at Monday's ceremony between Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and PLO number two Mahmud Abbas could not disguise the apparently irreconcilable differences on the most contentious issues, including Jerusalem and the settlements. Former premier Shimon Peres told the Jerusalem Post newspaper he believed it would take two years for the conclusion of

a final deal, which under the Oslo timetable should have been wrapped up in May 1999. "Barak can of course have his own assessment, but I believe that some issues will be impossible to sort out quickly," said Peres, now minister for regional planning. In an apparent show of support for settlers, Barak's office announced that the premier planned Tuesday to visit Maale Adumim, the largest of the 16 Jewish settlements dotted across the West Bank and Gaza Strip and home to around 25,000 Jews. Maale Adumim, which stands east of Jerusalem on land occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War, was at the centre of a controversy last month after US Chairman Burger King opened a ceremony there despite stiff Arab opposition. Levy had insisted Monday that the colorless "will remain under Israeli sovereignty."

Haim Ramon, minister in Barak's office, said the vast majority of people living in settlements would continue to live under Israeli rule, but he did not rule out the dismantling of some isolated enclaves. But Abbas said the resumption of the negotiations required "a full cessation of all Israeli settlement activities, whether expanding existing ones, building new settlements or confiscating land and other related activities." And at the very moment the talks were launched at Erez crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip late Monday, Barak was holding a meeting in Jerusalem designed to tighten Israel's hold over the holy city. The government will work to strengthen Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, especially in the year of intensive discussions on the permanent status agreement," Barak told the inter-ministerial committee meeting. And Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, an architect of the Oslo accords, presented the committee's plan to construct a vast complex in Jerusalem aimed at housing foreign embassies.