

Palestinians, Israel resume 'final status' talks

NEVE ILAN, Israel, Nov 14: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators opened the latest round of final status talks to reach a permanent peace accord here this morning, reports AFP.

Chief Israeli negotiator Oded Eran and his Palestinian counterpart, Culture and Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo, refused to speak to reporters before the opening of the meeting in this village just west of Jerusalem.

Israeli public radio reported late Saturday that the two sides had agreed to tackle the tough issues in the talks simultaneously rather than break down the discussions point by point.

The final status talks are intended to reach a permanent agreement on the eventual borders of a Palestinian state, the question of Palestinian refugees, the fate of both Jerusalem and the Jewish settlements on the West Bank, and the sharing of water resources.

Earlier Saturday the two sides remained at odds over a promised Israeli pullback from the West Bank due to take place Monday under September's landmark Sharm el-Sheikh peace accord.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

The Palestinian cabinet demanded that Israel amend the proposed maps for the pullback to include populated areas, marking a significant toughening of the Palestinian position since Friday.

UN sanctions imposed on Taliban

Protesters attack US embassy in Kabul

KABUL, Nov 14: The United Nations ignored last-minute pleas from Afghanistan's Taliban army and imposed sanctions today to demand the arrest of suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden reports AP.

Within two hours of the sanctions taking effect, thousands of protesters swarmed into Kabul's rocket-riddled streets burning US flags and shouting "death to America", said eyewitnesses.

They reached the former US Embassy and pelted the giant black gate with rocks and stones. Before reaching the embassy demonstrators attacked the World Food Programme office with rocks and stones.

Taliban soldiers fired automatic rifles in the air to stop the mob from storming the United Nations building, witnesses said. Taliban troops also tried to prevent them from reaching the US Embassy but after 10 minutes the crowd marched forward.

One young Taliban soldier, his head wrapped in the traditional turban, shouted "long live Osama". Others joined in shouting "Osama is a great Muslim".

The United Nations is demanding bin Laden be handed over to the United States or a third country to stand trial on charges he masterminded last year's twin bombings of US embassies in East Africa.

The protesters — all men — began their demonstrations at Pashunistan Chowk, an intersection in the heart of the city, and not more than a few hundred metres from the former US Embassy building.

The demonstrators demanded sanctions be lifted and accused the United Nations of being a "puppet to the United States".

In Kabul where early morning temperatures Sunday barely climbed to freezing, residents who spoke to The Associated Press complained bitterly about the United Nations and United States.

The Afghan people are dying... it is an unfair decision for the Afghan people," said a schoolteacher Mohammed Ibrahim, who lives in a sun-baked mud home. His family home was destroyed several years ago by relentless fighting between rival Islamic factions who took control of Kabul from the former communists.

About 70 per cent of the capital lies in ruins, ravaged by four years of factional fighting that

ended in 1996 when the Taliban army threw out a coalition of Islamic parties headed by former president Burhanuddin Rabbani's government.

The United Nations recognizes Rabbani's government which now operates in barely 10 per cent of Afghanistan. The Taliban who espouse a harsh brand of Islamic law, rule the remaining 90 per cent of the country.

The UN sanctions against Afghanistan came into force at the stroke of 1100 BST Sunday or midnight Eastern Standard Time in the United States. The Security Council did not consider a postponement which was sought by Kabul.

The sanctions will prevent Taliban-controlled Ariana Afghan Airlines from landing or taking off overseas and will mean the freezing of Taliban accounts abroad.

Ariana carries nearly all the country's post and handicraft exports and is a key link to Afghan expatriates working in the Gulf.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

The airline made its last international flight late Saturday, when a plane carrying 14 tons of cargo flew in from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates.

Wahid orders corruption probe against 3 ministers

SINGAPORE, Nov 14: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid has ordered three ministers to be investigated for alleged corruption in a bid to demonstrate his commitment to clean up government, Singapore's Sunday Times reported, says AFP.

Attorney-General Marzuki Darsusman told the daily on Saturday he had received the instructions to proceed with the investigations from Wahid while in Washington on a private visit.

"I think he wants to tell everyone that he is genuinely against corruption, and is doing something to stem the tide in the government," Marzuki said.

He is trying his best to win the confidence of the business community in particular so that they will be comfortable enough to put their money back into Indonesia," he added.

He declined to name the three ministers, who will remain suspended during the investigation.

Efforts to set up clean government has been one of the key reformist demands and Wahid pledged to fight corruption when he was elected by parliament in October.

Floods in France: Hundreds evacuated

TOULOUSE, France, Nov 14: Hundreds of people were evacuated from threatened villages in southwest France yesterday after heavy floods and mudslides left 19 dead and nine missing, officials said, reports AFP.

A mother and her three children died when their house was buried under a mudslide in the town of Labastide-Rouairoux, in the Tarn department. A homeless man also died in Tarn.

With rain still falling, worst hit was the Aude region, where the death toll hit 12 on Saturday.

Among the dead were two people in the village of Estagel, near the southern city of Perpignan, which was buried in up to two metres (six and a half feet) of mud. A merchant navy officer fell off a German boat off the coast near Narbonne.

The local authorities said six other people were reported missing in the area after witnesses saw cars falling into overflowing rivers and being swept away.

Two people were killed in the eastern Pyrenees region.



Women trying to keep themselves warm near Duzce, northwestern Turkey Saturday following a powerful earthquake on Friday. —AFP photo

More survivors found in Turkey

Quake toll rises to 374

ANKARA, Nov 14: At least 374 people were killed and 2,923 others injured in the powerful earthquake that struck northwestern Turkey on Friday, Health Minister Osman Durmus said in a statement early Sunday, reports AFP.

In his statement, carried by the Anatolia news agency, Durmus said that the toll could rise as rubble-clearing work in the quake zone continued.

Friday's tremor with an epicentre at Duzce town, measured 7.2 on the Richter scale and followed a 7.4-quake on August 17, which devastated Turkey's northwestern industrial heartland and killed some 20,000 people.

Meanwhile, rescuers found more survivors from the massive earthquake today but were forced to amputate the arm of a pregnant woman to free her from the rubble.

As temperatures dropped close to freezing with nightfall, Turkish and foreign search-and-rescue teams were fast losing hope of extricating more survivors from the debris caused by Friday's quake, which claimed close to 400 lives.

Turkish rescuers in the city

of Bolu rescued a pregnant woman from under a collapsed building after amputating her arm to free her, the Anatolia news agency reported Saturday.

Turkish troops had been struggling since late Friday to extricate the woman, identified as Nilgun, but ran into trouble as they failed to free her arm.

Five people in the town of Duzce, the epicentre of the tremor with a magnitude of 7.2 on the Richter scale, were saved more than a day after the quake struck.

A father and his two children were extracted from the rubble of their home early Sunday 30 hours after it was razed to the ground.

Mehmet Aykut, his son Ozgur and his daughter Ozlem were immediately hospitalised, the Anatolia agency reported. It did not give details of their condition.

Late Saturday, coal miners from the Black Sea province of Zonguldak pulled a mother and daughter alive from under rubble more than 24 hours after the earthquake, the all-news NTV channel reported.

Murvet Durucan, 60, and her 29-year-old daughter Ilknur were dug out from the second

floor of a multi-storey building after eight hours of intense work that commenced at noon Saturday, the report said.

The two women were immediately taken to the local hospital, but there was no immediate word on their condition.

Earlier Saturday, rescuers in the quake zone also found two university students.

In Kaynasli, a town of about 7,500 inhabitants where the health ministry said most of the casualties occurred, a volunteer doctor from Istanbul explained that people trapped under the debris in temperatures as low as two degrees Celsius (36 degrees Fahrenheit) could survive "at most three days."

Hypothermia would more quickly set in on the human body in a state of shock, Levent Ozkan said.

Meanwhile, hundreds of people left homeless after the earthquake — which razed some 300 buildings according to preliminary figures — were camping out in the open for a second night.

Meteorologists warned the cold but dry weather would be replaced by rains from next week, which would further add to the misery of survivors.

Russian troops closing in on Grozny

GROZNY, Russia, Nov 14: Russian troops have entered the rebel stronghold Bamut but do not have control of the town, a spokesman for the Chechen presidency said early today, reports AFP.

He confirmed Russian claims Saturday that federal troops had entered the town in western Chechnya, which was a key hideout for rebel fighters during the last conflict opposing Russia and the breakaway republic (1994-1996).

Abdumuslimov said that Chechen military units "fought off three attacks by Russian troops who were trying to take control of Bamut."

Russian forces have been pounding the town with bombs and artillery fire for several weeks.

Bamut, nicknamed the "immortal fortress" by Chechen troops, is famed for its resistance during the last conflict. The Russians made several bloody attempts to seize the town, but did not succeed in wresting control until May 1996.

Russian forces were also continuing to close in on the Chechen capital on three separate fronts with troops between five and 15 km from the city.

Heavy aerial and artillery bombardments of Grozny overnight killed five people and wounded seven, according to Chechen military spokesman Vakha Ibrahimov.

The vast majority of the capital was without water, electricity or gas Sunday, forcing residents to melt snow for drinking water and break up furniture to

use as fuel rather than venture out into the war zone for supplies.

In Moscow, Russian President Boris Yeltsin was due to meet his Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Sunday ahead of the OSCE summit in Istanbul November 18-19, Itar-Tass reported.

The White House confirmed Friday that US President Bill Clinton would meet Yeltsin during the summit, where Russia is likely to face increasing criticism for its hardline insistence on a military rather than a political solution to the crisis in Chechnya.

Putin, who has led Russia's tough stance over its offensive against the rebel republic, attended a security council meeting Saturday to assess the military campaign.

BRIEFLY



Miss USA Jessica Nicole Szegedi, 20, (L sitting), Miss Greece Elene Liafou, 24, (R sitting), Miss Turkey Hulya Mutiu, 21, (R standing) and Miss Intercontinental (name not available) attend on Saturday a press conference in Hanoi. The beauty contest "Miss Friendship of the World Pageant" is to be held in Hanoi this week with women from 30 countries taking part in the first contest of its kind. —AFP photo

India, Myanmar sign accord:

India and Myanmar ended a three-day meeting on Saturday with an agreement to curb cross-border terrorism, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The two countries, which share a 1,643-kilometre border, signed a document agreeing to "control and contain cross-border militancy in their respective territory, drug trafficking and smuggling, and opening of more border trade centres."

10 killed in Egypt train crash:

Ten people were killed in Egypt on Saturday when a train smashed into a rescue site where workers were attempting to get passengers out of an overturned truck on the rails, officials said, AFP reports from Cairo.

Seven other people were badly wounded when the Cairo-bound train ran over a group of workers from the state cement company who were trying to get three people out of the truck after it flipped over onto the track.

Italy building collapse toll 59:

Fifty-nine bodies have been pulled from the rubble of a collapsed apartment block in Foggia, a southeastern Italian town, according to new official figures released early Sunday, AFP reports from Foggia.

EgyptAir flight voice recorder recovered

NEWPORT, Rhode Island, Nov 14: US Navy search crews have recovered the cockpit voice recorder from EgyptAir Flight 990, officials announced early today, reports AFP.

Officials with the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said Navy divers retrieved the voice recorder shortly after 10:00 p.m. Saturday (9:00am BST Sunday) from the crash site off the coast of Massachusetts.

"We are pleased that we are able to share this very important news with family members," NTSB Chairman Jim Hall told a press conference early Sunday.

Officials said the recorder was dented on one side, and that the pinger — the electronic locating device — had become detached.

There was no information about the condition of the audio tape inside the device.

Hall, who said the recorder would be flown by helicopter to Washington for analysis, said recovering the device was a major breakthrough that could provide clues to the cause of the tragedy, which killed all 217 people on board.

"We are hopeful that we will have good voice information off this recorder," he said.

The recorder retrieved Sunday is one of two "black boxes" now recovered from the wreckage. The plane's flight data recorder was pulled out of the ocean early Tuesday.

The Cairo-bound Boeing 767 crashed into the Atlantic Ocean about 100 km off the coast of Nantucket Island, just 30 minutes after take-off from New York's John F. Kennedy Inter-

national Airport on October 31. Investigators said the voice recorder tapes conversations taking place in the cockpit in the half-hour before the crash.

The audio tape could reveal whether there were mechanical problems during the flight, for instance, or whether an intruder entered the cockpit.

Aviation experts have said the way Flight 990 plummeted into the Atlantic could suggest the crew intended to crash, and investigators have not ruled out a suicide mission by one of the pilots.

While officials were seeking to discourage hasty speculation on possible crash causes, investigators have not ruled out a possible terrorist act or pilot suicide. However, no evidence of any explosives has been found.

However relatives and colleagues said none of the eight-member flight crew was mentally unstable or had histories of professional misconduct.

Analysis of EgyptAir's flight data recorder prompted speculation Saturday that someone in the cockpit may have turned a switch that cut off power to two engines of the Boeing 767 in mid-flight.

Both plane engines shut down about 20 seconds after the automatic pilot disengaged, just before the plane plunged into the Atlantic.

The manual cut-off of the engines showed that someone was controlling the descent of the plane, according to the flight data recorder analysis.

According to news reports Saturday the FBI was examining psychological profiles of the passengers and the co-pilot of the doomed flight.

Muslim rebels free 100 hostages in Philippines

COTABATO, Philippines, Nov 14: Muslim separatists freed 100 people they took hostage after a pre-dawn raid on a southern Philippine Christian village, in the latest attack to mar formal peace negotiations, reports AFP.

About 200 Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas stormed the village of Tibao in Mang town North Cotabato province, killing a pro-government militiaman and wounding four others before taking hostage the villagers.

Five MILF guerrillas were also killed and seven were wounded in clashes in nearby municipalities as two major rebel camps came under heavy mortar fire from the military, military and rebel commanders said.

Town Mayor Luigi Cuervo said the guerrillas herded the hostages into a Catholic church and the men were ordered to dig foxholes near a highway, where MILF forces had set up blockades to prevent government troops from advancing.

The guerrillas threatened to shoot the villagers if they fled, but allowed them to leave unharmled later, Cuervo said.

The attack came two weeks after formal peace negotiations were launched in late October to hammer out an accord to end the MILF's 21-year insurgency to set up an independent Islamic state in the south.

In Manila, Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado accused the rebels of violating a ceasefire agreement and warned the latest attack "could endanger the peace talks."

N Ireland parties set for 'final' peace talks

BELFAST, Nov 14: Northern Ireland's rival political parties are preparing to resume Monday what the US mediator George Mitchell has called the "final" and critical stage in talks to salvage the peace process, reports AFP.

David Trimble, the leader of the key Protestant Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), is likely to push for more concessions in the latest republican proposals, which senior UUP officials are reported to have rejected, a senior party figure said Saturday.

Mitchell — reportedly furious at the latest setback — ordered the rival Protestant and Roman Catholic parties to spend the weekend assessing their next moves in the process, which remains blocked over the enmeshed issues of setting up a cross-party government and paramilitary disarmament.

The parties were last week on the brink of a breakthrough as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was reported to have contacted Mitchell directly with its proposals for the first time during the process.

Hopes rose sharply mid-week that a deal was in the offing as Trimble edged closer to putting the proposals to his party.

But these were dashed abruptly late Thursday amid a flurry of reports that a vote taken by 27 senior members of the UUP appeared to reject the deal.

The vote has left Trimble in a quandary as to whether he should put the deal to the party as a whole.

The 27 senior figures are considered to be among the

most liberal members of the party.

The party's 900-strong Ulster Unionist Council — which is expected to meet on November 27 — include headline members who fiercely oppose moves to form a cross-party government with the IRA's political wing Sinn Fein before the paramilitary begins disarmament.

Trimble has until the November 27 meeting to decide whether to try to sell the deal to the council.

Press reports on Sunday suggested that Trimble might be ready to risk a split in the party in order to put the proposals to the wider membership.

Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson let it be known Saturday that he was ready to tour the troubled province to rally support for the proposals among grass-roots UUP members.

Republican politicians and much of the British press urged Trimble to grasp the deal, which many Irish nationalists say will not be bettered.