

# Israel, Palestinians still divided on settlements

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Dec 20: Israel and the Palestinians emerged from a new round of final peace accord talks today still sharply divided on the key sticking points of borders and Jewish settlements, reports AFP.

Palestinian sources said the Israeli team failed to meet their demands for a halt to construction of new homes for Jews in occupied territories and did not answer concerns that Israel was trying to redraw borders.

Under the interim Sharm el-Sheikh accord, the two sides are to reach a framework agreement in mid-February and a final deal in September, but their negotiations have been dogged by a row over Prime Minister Ehud Barak's settlement policy.

During the meeting in the West Bank town of Ramallah between teams led by Oded Eran for Israel and Yasser Arafat for the Palestinians, Israel presented its positions on the two key questions, the sources said.

They said Israel wanted the final borders to take into account its security demands and "facts on the ground," referring to settlements in particular.

The Palestinians insisted that the aim of the negotiations is to implement 242 and 338 which should lead to a complete Israeli military and civilian withdrawal to the pre-June 4.

1967 borders," the Palestinian information ministry, led by Abed Rabbo, said in a statement.

It was referring to UN resolutions calling for Israel to withdraw from land occupied during war with the Arabs.

All settlement activity should be stopped, including construction based on old tenders and the issue of new tenders. There should also be a halt to land confiscation and the demolition of houses," the ministry said.

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based Al Jazira satellite television station.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat told the Spanish newspaper El Mundo that a final status agreement could be reached even before next September, despite the difficulties.

"In any case I intend to declare Palestinian independence next year -- no matter what," Arafat said.

The Hebrew newspaper Yediot Aharonot on Monday quoted an Israeli army assessment saying a full Golan withdrawal to the borders that existed before Israel's capture of the region in the June 1967 war could diminish Arafat's willingness to compromise.

"A full withdrawal from the Golan within the framework of a peace agreement with Syria will make it harder for Arafat to make a territorial compromise in the negotiations with Israel and is liable to toughen Palestinian demands on the issue of Jerusalem," the paper quoted an army intelligence document as saying.

But Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said Monday he had assurances from Barak that he would not favour one track at the expense of another.

"I hope the peace process will move forward on all tracks, Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian, which are at the heart of the conflict," he told the Qatari

## Ershad Shikdar

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was recorded with Sonandanga thana on May 30. But five others were included in the chargesheet after re-investigation by Detective Branch Inspector Haripada Das. There are 18 prosecution witnesses in the 'triple murder' case.

Meanwhile, some political organisations have expressed concern over the alleged reluctance of the police to recover illegal arms and ammunition possessed by Ershad Shikdar and his accomplices.

Leaders of these political parties alleged that armed cadres of Shikdar are trying to regain their lost ground at the Skid Ghat.

The intra-party rivalry in the ruling AL has, of late taken an alarming turn over taking control of the Handl Workers' Union at the Skid Ghat.

The faction led by the state minister for Disaster Management and Relief Talukdar Abdul Khaleque favours normally to return there while the other faction led by the Whip Mostafa Rashidi Shuja wants Sramik League to take control of the Skid Ghat.

The smugglers and black marketers have increased their activities taking full advantage of the double-standard of the ruling party leaders, sources said.

Hundreds of quintals of Indian sugar are allegedly being unloaded at the Skid Ghat off on from barges.

The sale of phenylid and other drugs are on sharp rise right under the nose of the police and a group of ruling party leaders and activists who get share of the sale proceeds, sources alleged.

## Full moon

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the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

The camp will be open to lunar-watchers from the evening until 11 p.m. The Astronomical Association said that telescopes would be provided to those interested in watching the moon, subject to a clear sky.

It said that the moon will be full and there will be a sharp impact on high and low tide as the moon will pass by the earth at a distance of 356,654 km. Normally it moves round the globe from a distance of more than 400,000 km.

## Tofail

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He said Bangladesh has enormous potential for investment with the government offering an equally attractive incentive package to both local and foreign investors.

"Let us share our complementarities and resources for the economic development of both the countries," he said, adding that private sector initiatives would be the most effective at this end.

Appreciating highly the initiatives in forming this joint chamber, Jyoti Basu said through this trade body both the next-door neighbours would be able to avail the opportunity of sharing the resources to the mutual benefit.

It would also strengthen the spirit of regional cooperation among the South Asian nations, he observed.

Tofail observed trade gap exists and would remain as entrepreneurs, mainly garment producers, are importing huge cotton, yarn and fabrics from India to produce export-oriented apparels.

It is driven by market force, so there should not be any ambiguity. But, time will come when there would be no trade gap as Bangladesh can increase export to India substantially, he said.

The Speaker in the letter explained the importance of the coming session and urged the Opposition leader to attend it for greater national interest.

The letter also mentioned the scope for the prime minister and Opposition leader to speak in the House on the opening day of the session before the presidential address.

Talking to the BBC radio, Speaker Chowdhury said he was ready to initiate dialogue with the government if the main opposition BNP raised any demand or condition in response to his letter.

Replies to a question, he said that the Speaker's neutrality depended to a large extent on amending the existing law of impeaching the Chair by a simple majority.

BNP leader M Saifur Rahman had earlier told the radio that his party would consider a reply to the Speaker's letter after discussing it.

Prime minister's parliamentary affairs adviser Suranjit Sengupta was quoted by BBC as saying that the BNP lawmakers were free to discuss anything in the House, including the prime minister's remarks which had enraged the BNP.

The Speaker's request to the Opposition leader came the day after deputy opposition leader AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury had set five pre-conditions for the BNP lawmakers' presence in parliament.

Chowdhury told reporters on Sunday that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina must apologise for the "indecent" remarks she recently made in the House about the Opposition leader.

On the last day of the last session, the PM spoke about Khaleda's arrest from a city hotel during the anti-Ershad movement in 1987 as well as her academic records.

The remarks must be expunged from the proceedings of the parliament, Chowdhury said and added the prime minister must not make such comment in future.

He also demanded that the Speaker play neutral in conducting business of the House and that the government implement its four-point deal with the BNP earlier.

Opposition MPs belonging to BNP, Ershad-led Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami have absented themselves from the two consecutive sessions since they walked out of the budget session in June.

The opposition parties are now campaigning for an early general election.

# Grand nat'l rally in city Jan 1

Chhatra Union President Monjur-e-Khoda Torik, Central leaders of JSD-backed Chhatra League Obaidur Rahman Chunnun expressed their solidarity and determination to join any Nirmul Committee programmes against the anti-liberation forces and autocrats, fundamentalists and conspirators of the four-party alliance.

## Jailbreak

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with injuries, the DC said.

"It appears that the jailbreak by the convicts was pre-planned," the DC said after preliminary investigation.

Three prisoners of Ward No. 2, each serving over 10 years' RI, gathered near gate No. 2 for a briefing on their routine day work inside the prison compound.

But suddenly they attacked guard Mofazzel Hossain when he opened the door of the godown to distribute tools among them. They disarmed him, beat him and snatched the keys. They broke open the armoury, took away the three rifles and about 100 bullets, released six others and escaped through the gate, firing blank shots, the DC said.

The three rifles are the only firearms in the prison which accommodates about 444 prisoners, four times its capacity, the DC said.

Asked whether the prisoners had any grievances, the DC said it is being investigated.

"There was no additional guard at the jail gate when the convicts escaped," jail Super Biswanath Das said. Nine other guards were deployed in other areas inside the jail compound at that time. There are 41 guards at the prison now, which is inadequate for the prisoners, he said.

The Sherpur district jail has seven wards including one for female prisoners, he said. UNB adds from Sherpur: Senior officials visited the jail soon after the incident. Inspector General of Prisons Brigadier Walur Rahman and DIG (Prison) Abdus Zahir were also here yesterday.

Two prison wardens — Meen Shahjahan and Mofazzel — were suspended. A case was filed in this connection with the sader thana.

## JCD leaders

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that leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, BN's student wing, brought out a peaceful procession in the city on Friday to protest Dhaka University authority's decision to confer honorary Doctorate Degree on Prin. Md. Shahidul Haqina.

Police, on orders from the three officers, cordoned the procession and indiscriminately beat the JCD leaders and activists with rifle butts and sticks. They also ordered police to nab Sohel and Pintu alive or dead, the complainant alleged in the petition, it said.

Police had arrested about 50 JCD leaders and activists from the spot during the incident. Sohel, Pintu, and another leader Monjur-e-Elahe were injured when they were beaten and dragged on to a police van.

## Discrimination

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likely party, despite a ban on party politics at the UP level. Over 70 per cent of those members said they belonged to the Awami League.

The study also attempted to gauge the community and women representatives' awareness of local issues. The report suggested almost 60 per cent of people in both groups didn't know village and family courts exist. However, the report also indicated only 39 per cent of women representatives are satisfied with the verdicts, compared to almost 76 per cent of community respondents.

The report concluded with eight recommendations, including (a) more government support for gender-specific policies, (b) more policies to promote the equality of male and female elected members, (c) more research on the causes of gender discrimination, and (d) a better network between local and national community programs so people can confront issues like gender, government and democracy more effectively.

## Civil society

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Bangladesh's electricity coverage is only 16 per cent, compared to India's 55 per cent and Malaysia's 92 per cent, he said.

Dr. M Asaduzzaman, Research Director of BIDS, said competition would not be uneven if the agricultural production is subsidised and prices do not fall even after a good harvest.

"Bangladesh can be a rice exporting country," he said.

The government should give subsidy to the agricultural sector as high as five per cent and Bangladesh can plan to export jute and shrimps in the post 2005 regime, as these are not included in the WTO's list.

Dr. Kazi Shahabuddin, Research Director of BIDS, said there was no alternative to crop diversification.

Prothom Alo Editor Motiur Rahman said: "We are entering the new millennium through a conflict."

Among others, Prof. Wahiduzzaman Mahmud of the Dhaka University, Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor Khondakar Ibrahim Khaled, Fazle Hossain Abed, BRAC Executive Director, Dr. Zaeed Bakht, Taherunnesa Abdullah also took part in the discussion.



A police officer watches over election workers as they load ballot boxes onto a bus yesterday on their way to polling centres in the capital Colombo. Sri Lankans go to the polls today to choose a president, days after a bloody assassination attempt against current President and People's Action Party candidate Chandrika Kumaratunga that left 21 dead.

AFP photo

## Taliban, opposition exchange prisoners

BARIKAU FRONTLINES, Afghanistan, Dec 20 : Sitting cross-legged on a sunny hilltop, the Afghan Taliban commander surrounded by his armed soldiers was talking with his opposition counterpart on the radio, reports AFP.

Mawlawi Habibullah Reshad, chief of interrogation for the Taliban Intelligence Department, was arranging to swap 14 prisoners with the opposition.

"Prisoner-swapping between us has been an ongoing process. In the past two months we have swapped 350 prisoners from both sides," he said.

Around him the desert frontlines of Barikau, 45 km north of the capital Kabul were quiet, as Taliban troops and opposition fighters loyal to Ahmad Shah Masood observe the Muslim holy month of Ramdan.

"This is another sign of the National Front's political hegemony," said Kerk Kim Hock, secretary general of the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP).

"It shows the arrogance of the power they have been enjoying, which is manifested in the way they were bulldozing their way

## New parliament opens in Malaysia

### Opposition stages walkout

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 20 : Malaysia's new parliament opened acrimoniously today with the opposition staging a walkout in protest at what one called Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's attempts to "bulldoze" the constitution, reports AFP.

Another opposition leader, Fadil Noor, said: "If they can breach the laws at the first sitting we are very worried that they will continue to violate the constitution in subsequent meetings."

"We are staging a temporary walkout as a sign of protest," Fadil told reporters before the opposition members returned to be sworn in.

Fadil leads the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), the largest non-government group with 27 seats. It is due to become the new opposition leader in the house.

Mahathir hit back, telling reporters the opposition "seems to be bringing street brawling into parliament."

The king must act on the advice of the cabinet in summoning parliament. But he issued the notice on December 13, two days before Mahathir's new cabinet held its first meeting.

Opposition MPs, whose numbers doubled to 45 in the November 29 election, complained that the parliament had been summoned unconstitutionally.

"We are staging a temporary walkout as a sign of protest," Fadil told reporters before the opposition members returned to be sworn in.

Initial police reports said investigators had found a wig at the site and suspected the assailant had been a man in a woman's clothing. That view was changed after the bomber's severed head was found intact.

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