

Peres, Arafat hold truce talks

AP, Gaza International Airport

At the prodding of the United States, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on Wednesday held long-awaited truce talks aimed at ending a year of fighting.

Arafat greeted Peres outside the VIP hall at Gaza International Airport. The two leaders shook hands, without smiling or looking at each other.

Just three miles (five kilometers) from the meeting site, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy was killed and 11 other youngsters were wounded in a confrontation with Israeli troops Wednesday. Earlier in the day, three Israeli soldiers were wounded in the same area by a bomb Palestinians set off at an Israeli army post.

The violence underscored how fragile any truce will be. Previous truce efforts have collapsed, including a deal brokered in June by CIA chief George Tenet.

A major test will come Friday when Palestinians plan to mark the anniversary of the fighting with marches across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Traditionally, such marches have ended in confrontations with Israeli troops.

The United States hopes to calm the Mideast conflict, which threatens to get in the way of coalition-building efforts for the US-led fight against international terrorism.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell repeatedly called Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in recent days, urging them to hold the talks. Sharon canceled two previous sessions, arguing Arafat was not



Yasser Arafat



Shimon Peres

trying hard enough to contain violence.

Peres and Arafat were expected to issue a joint statement at the end of their meeting. According to a draft obtained by the Associated Press, the two leaders were to pledge to resume security coordination and exert maximum effort to enforce a cease-fire. Israel was to ease its security closures of the Palestinian areas, the document said.

Peres and Arafat would also renew their commitment to recommendations by the international Mitchell Commission on how to end the fighting and resume peace talks according to the draft.

The Mitchell Commission, which issued its report in May, spelled out a series of confidence-building steps the two sides would take over a period of several weeks.

The commission said the Palestinians should make a '100 per cent effort' to prevent terrorist operations and punish perpetrators, while Israel should freeze all settlement activity and not use lethal force in dispersing unarmed Palestinian demonstrators. The commission asked Israel to lift its closures, permit Palestinians to return to their jobs in Israel and transfer to the Palestinian Authority millions of dollars in tax revenues Israel has withheld for the past year.

Last week, Arafat announced an informal truce and ordered his security forces to prevent attacks on Israelis. However, there have been numerous shootings since then and two Israeli women were killed by Palestinian gunmen.

US envoy meets ex-Afghan king

AP, Washington

A senior diplomat from the US embassy in Rome met Tuesday with deposed Afghan king Mohammed Zahir Shah, the State Department said, as officials in Washington weighed various options for dealing with suspected terrorists in Afghanistan.

"He ... has a continuing interest in ending the bloodshed in his country so today, the charge of our embassy in Rome met with the king to discuss this situation in Afghanistan," spokesman Richard Boucher said.

Boucher declined to comment on the specific nature of the talks between the former king and the embassy's Charge d'Affairs, William Pope.

He insisted that Washington was in "regular contact" with the king as well as other expatriate groups but could not say when the last meeting with the monarch had been.

"I don't know precisely," Boucher said. "I know we've seen him from time to time."

A State Department official said later that the last meeting with the former king had occurred December 3, 2000, but that US diplomats "meet much more often with members of his entourage."

UK FM holds talks with Sharon

AP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon held talks here late Tuesday with British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw after a diplomatic spat over comments Straw made about the Palestinian uprising had been resolved.

The meeting took place at Sharon's office in the defence ministry in Tel Aviv, the prime minister's office said in a statement.

According to the statement, Sharon stressed during the meeting that terrorism could not be tolerated in the western world.

"There is no good and bad terrorism," Sharon said. "A murder is a murder."

The prime minister added that in his view, terrorism was "directed against the democratic values of the west."

Straw, according to the statement, praised Sharon for "the efforts and determination you have shown in the search for peace."

Straw arrived in Israel earlier Tuesday amid a storm over comments he made linking the September 11 terror attacks in the United States and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

Violence kills 8 in Kashmir

AP, Srinagar

Five Islamic separatist militants are among eight people killed in overnight violence in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said yesterday.

A Muslim militant and an Indian soldier died in a clash at Watergam village near Sopore, 50 km north of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, police said.

Two more soldiers were injured during the gunfight which broke out after Indian troops moved into Watergam to conduct house-to-house searches.

Another militant and a policeman were killed in a similar gunbattle at Hadipora village in the adjoining border district of Kupwara, a police spokesman said.

Elsewhere in Kashmir, Indian border guards Wednesday shot dead a militant during a search-and-cordon operation at Tuli Nowpora village.

PHOTO: AFP
Israeli soldiers construct a military post at the Kalandia check-point in the West Bank near Ramallah on Tuesday.

Anti-terrorism campaign 'UN must play greater role'

AP, United Nations

Approve a comprehensive treaty against terrorism. Exchange information and gear after the money trail. Tackle poverty, conflict and ignorance which breed terrorists.

After two days and more than 60 speeches, nations around the world agreed that the United Nations must be a major player in the global fight against terrorism and won immediate support from the United States, Russia and China. By the time the debate ended Tuesday night, many other countries expressed support for a strong UN role from South Korea to South Africa, and Ukraine to Peru.

Denmark's UN Ambassador

Ellen Margrethe Loj spelled out the stakes bluntly.

The 189 UN member states must show the world that the political will exists to act following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, she said. Otherwise, the United Nations will become a redundant "talking club" that could not be taken seriously.

The General Assembly has approved a dozen legal instruments since 1963 to fight terrorism, but only five have been ratified by more than 100 countries, and one aimed at halting the financing of terrorism hasn't taken effect yet because not enough countries have ratified it.

The addresses during a scaled-down opening debate in the General Assembly provided a foretaste of a meeting next week

that will focus entirely on international terrorism. It starts next Monday and will last three days because over 100 countries want to speak.

At Monday's opening session, Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for the United Nations to play a major role in the long-term international fight against terrorism and won immediate support from the United States, Russia and China.

By the time the debate ended Tuesday night, many other countries expressed support for a strong UN role from South Korea to South Africa, and Ukraine to Peru.

On Wednesday, meetings with the Egyptian, Dutch and Irish foreign ministers were planned.

Much of the interview focused on bin Laden, the Saudi expatriate who is the prime suspect in the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

He (bin Laden) is too great a liability to have in their country," Powell said. "The whole world is uniting against him."

He said cooperation by the Taliban could lead to

significant benefits for Afghanistan, resulting from improved ties with the West.

Powell commented in an interview with The Associated Press on a busy day in which he took part in top secret briefings for senators and House members on the Bush administration's counter terrorism plans. He also had meetings with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Italian Foreign Minister Renato Ruggiero.

Powell suggested Tuesday that the Taliban rulers may drop their resistance now that they face virtually total global isolation.

"I hope the Taliban will come to the realization that he (bin Laden) is too great a liability to have in their country," Powell said. "The whole world is uniting against him."

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PHOTO: AFP
Workers continue their search in the wreckage of the World Trade Center on Tuesday in New York. Search and rescue efforts continue in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attack.

PHOTO: AFP

An Afghan man pushes two children in a wheelbarrow in Chaman in the buffer zone between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The UNHCR said they were ready to help the reported tens of thousands of Afghan refugees who fled their homes in the wake of possible US strikes on their country but Pakistani authorities did not yet allow the refugees to cross into Pakistan keeping them in a buffer zone between the two countries.

Indian envoy in US to spell out support

REUTERS, Washington

against Afghanistan's Taliban could be fraught with risks for India, particularly if Pakistan's army turns against President Pervez Musharraf for cooperating with Washington.

Despite deep resentment in India of Musharraf's role in the bloody conflict in Kashmir, New Delhi has said it wants to do nothing that would make life more difficult for him.

"He'll be saying, 'We'll take the high road. You can count on us,' one well-placed expert, who spoke on condition of anonymity, predicted of Mishra's talks with US officials.

The State Department has kept a tight lid on details of support pledged by other countries since hijackers crashed planes into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, and seized another plane that crashed in rural Pennsylvania. The Sept. 11 attacks left nearly 7,000 people missing or dead.

Rivalry between nuclear-capable India and Pakistan makes Mishra's visit all the more sensitive. Promises of help from New Delhi are potentially inflammatory in Pakistan, where Musharraf faces a backlash from Islamic guerrilla groups.

Bush cuts short his Asia trip

AP, Washington

President George W Bush has cut short a trip to Asia next month, dropping visits to Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing, because of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Bush's only stop will be in Shanghai, China, for the Oct. 20-21 annual summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Bush had been scheduled to be out of Washington October 15-24 on a three-country journey and a holiday in Hawaii. Officials said he did not want to stay away that long.

In Shanghai, Bush is expected to meet with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. Bush's planned visits to Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing will be rescheduled when circumstances permit, the White House said.

Taliban isolated on all fronts

REUTERS, Kabul

The leader of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban has turned to the American people, appealing for common sense in assessing whether his guest, the world's most wanted man Osama bin Laden, masterminded this month's suicide plane attacks.

While tens of thousands of Afghans were fleeing toward the borders of their landlocked country, fearing a US military attack in the hunt for bin Laden, those who support the purist Taliban were preparing to demonstrate their backing in the capital, Kabul.

The ruling Taliban was left with but a single ally on Wednesday, its neighbour Pakistan, after Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, cut off all ties with the puritanical Muslim movement.

Under siege from the rest of the world, and under attacks from within, the Taliban has responded defiantly by insisting that anyone helping the United States punish them for protecting the Saudi-born dissident bin Laden faced the wrath of their holy warriors.

The leader of the purist movement, the one-eyed Mullah Mohammad Omar, appealed to Americans late on Tuesday to use their own judgment in responding to last week's devastating attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon rather than blindly following their government's policy to attack his country.

"You accept everything your government says, whether it is true or false," Omar said in a message faxed to Reuters from his headquarters in the southern city of Kandahar.

Mullah Omar faces a delicate balancing act since the rising military threat could stir questions in Taliban ranks, especially about the wisdom of continuing to protect bin Laden and his al Qaeda organisation from US demands for their destruction.

Bin Laden brought money, manpower, expertise and access to the rest of the Muslim world; now he may bring the destruction of the Taliban.

"Don't you have your own thinking? Can Osama bin Laden carry out such an act in America?" Omar asked in his appeal. "So it will be better for you to use your sense and understanding."

But the Taliban have announced plans for war, ordering a mobilisation of more than 300,000 men and seizing food supplies from a United Nations warehouse intended for victims of a crippling drought that has exacerbated the country's woes.

Saudi Arabia's links with the Taliban have long been cool, but the formal severing of ties means Pakistan is now the only country to recognise the Afghan administration, although Islamabad withdrew its diplomats on security grounds on Monday.

The move by Saudi Arabia has undermined the Taliban's attempts to pitch its crisis as a battle between the United States and the Islamic world.

Pakistan said it would retain ties to provide a win-dow for the Taliban to the outside world.

C'wealth urged to take strong stand on terrorism

AP, Canberra

A meeting next month of British Commonwealth leaders will help build support for the US offensive against terrorism and should go ahead, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said Wednesday.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and 45 leaders from Britain and its former colonies are due to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, or CHOGM, from October 6-9, in Brisbane, the capital of Queensland state.

In the past week, Downer and Prime Minister Tony Blair have said there is a risk that it could be

called off if the United States and its allies, particularly Britain, begin military action in Afghanistan, or if a number of national leaders pull out.

However, Downer said he had received clear indications that British Prime Minister Tony Blair, was still coming.

"Tony Blair is very committed to coming to CHOGM and he's committed to coming to CHOGM because CHOGM does represent a very good opportunity to make a strong statement on terrorism and to consolidate the international coalition against terrorism," he told reporters.

US secures support of its wealthy allies

AP, Washington

The United States has won support from its wealthy allies for a coordinated campaign to freeze the assets of terrorist organisations.

Finance ministers of the world's seven richest industrial countries issued a joint statement Tuesday in which they pledged to "ensure that no stone goes unturned in our mutual efforts to wage a successful global campaign against the financing of terrorism."

The G-7 countries the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Canada also agreed during a telephone conference call convened by US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill to meet Oct. 6 in Washington to coordinate efforts against terrorism and the global economic slowdown.

While the group said a hoped-for economic rebound in the United States had been set back by the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, they pledged to take the necessary action to boost growth in their economies.

"We expect a near-term return to sustained economic growth and stable financial markets," the finance ministers declared in their joint statement.

Last piece of WTC torn down

AP, New York

down. She was supposed to lead a tour of the trade center on the afternoon of the attack.

The metal wall "should be part of a memorial, so it can stand as a lasting memory to all the people who died there," she said.

Removal of the tower will also make cleanup efforts safer and easier, the mayor said.

Earlier, as New Yorkers voted in a primaries for his replacement, Giuliani encouraged residents to get on with life.

"Life is risky," he said. "You can decide to live your life and salvage from the bombed Alfred P.

Murrah federal building in 1995 was used in a memorial to the 168 victims. Also, Berlin, London and Hiroshima have erected monuments from wartime debris.

The number of confirmed dead at the trade center rose Tuesday to 26 and get access to bank accounts without having to produce a body.