

'Significant progress' on borders in ME talks

Olmert, Abbas hold meet to boost peace

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel said yesterday it has made "significant progress" on the issue of the future borders of a Palestinian state following a top-level meeting between the two sides.

"We have made significant progress on the two issues of outlining the borders of the future Palestinian state and the security arrangements between Israel and the Palestinian state," a senior Israeli official said.

The official was speaking after a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas at which he was present.

"Olmert and Abbas have instructed the negotiating teams to move forward on these issues," he said, adding that "the teams were already working with maps during the talks."

The two leaders met just hours

after US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wrapped up her latest visit to the region during which she pressed the two sides to advance US-brokered peace talks launched five months ago.

"These were possibly the most serious talks the two sides have ever had," Olmert's spokesman Mark Regev said after the third meeting between the two in less than a month.

"The timetable set out in Annapolis is achievable," he said, referring to the US-hosted conference in the Maryland city last November at which the two sides vowed to strike a full peace deal by 2009.

Since then they have been deeply divided on the core issues of the decades-old conflict that have bedeviled past peace efforts, including final borders, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements, and the status of Jerusalem.

A spokesman for Abbas on

Sunday cast doubt on the ability of Middle East peace negotiators to strike a deal by the end of the year.

"The gap is still wide in the negotiations with the Israeli side," said Nabil Abu Rudeina after a meeting between Abbas and Rice in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

After the meeting Abbas said the two sides were "in a race against time" but that he still hoped to conclude an agreement by the end of the year.

But a Palestinian official who asked not to be named said Jewish settlements in the West Bank were still a central sticking point in the talks, making it difficult for the two sides to agree on final borders.

"The settlements are the fundamental obstacle in the way of peace. Israel in the negotiations has said it wants to keep 10 percent of the West Bank," the official said on Sunday.

"(But) the Palestinian side refuses to let Israel keep a single

metre of the West Bank and refuses to exchange more than 1.5 percent (in a mutual land exchange)," the official added.

The talks have made little visible progress since they were relaunched five months ago but both sides are under pressure to show progress ahead of Bush's visit to the region next week in honour of Israel's 60th anniversary.

And on Sunday, Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit chided both Israel and the Palestinians for keeping other mediators in the dark about their revived peace talks.

The two sides "should reveal the results, as well as the nature of these negotiations and the progress made so far, to mediators" including Egypt, Abul Gheit said in a Qatari newspaper interview.

"We should be made aware of the nature of the talks ... so we can better support these negotiations," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

A handout picture shows Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (L) and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas (R) before a meeting in Jerusalem yesterday. Olmert and Abbas met Monday on the heels of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's latest bid to boost the Middle East peace process.

Number of Chinese nuclear subs cause of concern for India

PTI, New Delhi

India yesterday voiced concern over the build-up of Chinese submarines equipped with nuclear arsenals in its neighbourhood amid indications that the issue would be discussed by the Cabinet Committee on Security soon.

It is a "cause for security concern" to India, Naval Chief Admiral Suresh Mehta told news persons here when asked about the revelations by satellite pictures that China had amassed five nuclear submarines carrying long range missiles.

"It is not the nuclear submarine bases that matter, we are concerned over the number of nuclear submarines that are being built in our neighbourhood," he said.

Defence Minister A K Antony sought to be evasive on the subject, saying the country's armed forces are capable of taking "full care of our security interests" whether it is sea lanes or land borders.

The CCS is likely to meet soon to deliberate on the security implications that the build-up in the South China sea will have on India.

The pictures suggest that China has secretly built a major underground nuclear submarine base that could threaten India and other countries in the region.

ADB announces \$40m fund to fight global warming

AFP, Madrid

The head of the Asian Development Bank announced yesterday a new fund to combat damage caused by climate change, which he termed a "fundamental threat" to economies and livelihoods in Asia.

"I am pleased to announce that we will ... establish a Climate Change Fund, with an initial contribution from ADB resources of 40 million dollars (26 million euros)," Haruhiko Kuroda said in an inau-

gural address to the ADB's board of governors meeting in Madrid.

"The Fund will allow a more holistic approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation, including forestry and land use, changes in livelihood, health impacts, and increase emergencies and disasters caused by climate change."

"Climate change is a fundamental threat to achieving Asia's development objectives, and to life and livelihoods," the ADB president said.

Japan looks to immigrants as population shrinks

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's ruling party is considering plans to encourage foreign workers to stay in the country long-term, a daily reported Monday after the birth rate fell for the 27th successive year.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has proposed setting up an "immigration agency" to help foreign workers -- including providing language lessons, the Nikkei economic daily said without naming sources.

The party also intends to reform current "training" programmes for foreign workers, which have been criticised for giving employers an excuse for paying unfairly low wages, the paper said.

LDP lawmakers believe that immigration reform will help Japanese companies secure necessary workers as the declining birth-rate is expected to further dent in

the nation's workforce, it said.

A group of about 80 LDP lawmakers will draw up a package of proposals by mid-May, it said. No immediate comment was available from the party on Monday.

A government report on the falling birthrate warned in April that Japan's workforce could shrink by more than one-third to 42.28 million by 2050 if the country fails to halt the decline.

The government said Monday the number of children in Japan has fallen for the 27th straight year to hit a new low.

Children aged 14 or younger numbered 17,250,000 as of April 1, down by 130,000 from a year earlier, the internal affairs ministry said in an annual survey released to coincide with the May 5 Children's Day national holiday.

The figure is the lowest since 1950 when comparable data started.

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3.	Electric Soup Kettle	2 nos.
4.	Linen Room Rack/Selves	3 nos.
5.	Reglazing of Bath Tub, Commode, Seat Cover & Basin	13 nos.

Group-B (2nd Re-Tender)		
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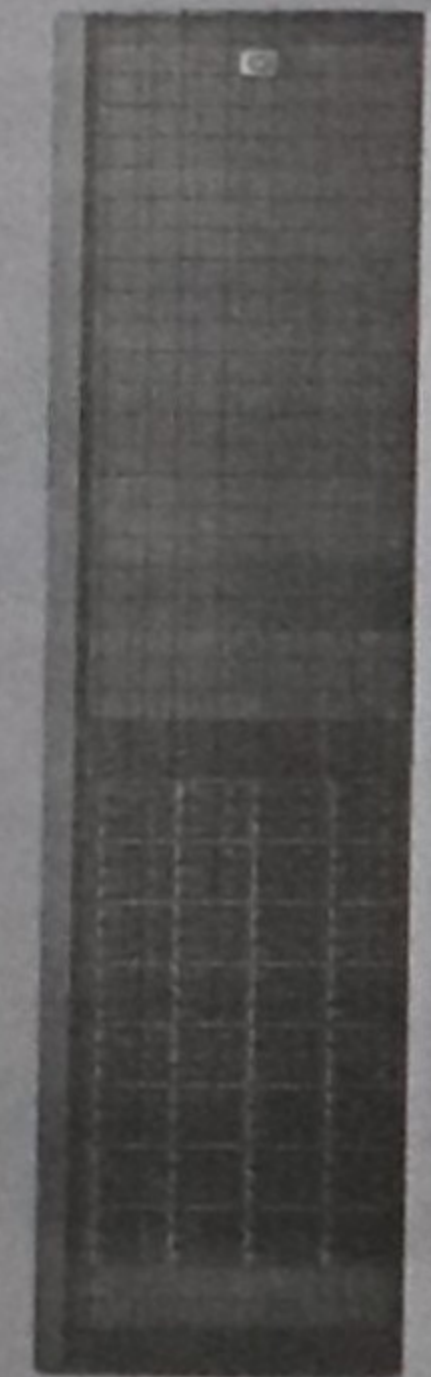
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