

US, Israel fail to agree on settlement compromise

AFP, Jerusalem

US Middle East envoy George Mitchell failed to wrest a compromise on settlements from Israel's prime minister on Wednesday, but the two leaders agreed to meet again on Friday for a third attempt in a week.

"The meeting is over... they agreed to meet again on Friday," a spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office told AFP after the encounter in Jerusalem.

Mitchell will also meet for a second time with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas on Friday, the latter's office announced.

The former US senator was due to head to Lebanon later in the day to meet President Michel Sleiman as part of his latest tour of the region.

Mitchell huddled with Netanyahu for several hours on Wednesday, a day after shuttling between the premier and Abbas,

urging both sides to show "responsibility for peace" and take steps towards restarting their stalled negotiations.

Mitchell is trying to get Israel to agree to some kind of a moratorium on settlement construction that would be acceptable to the Palestinians and enable the resumption of peace talks that were suspended in late December amid the Gaza war.

"We hope to bring this phase of our efforts to a positive conclusion in the coming weeks," he said.

Mitchell has been seeking a compromise that would pave the way for a three-way meeting between Netanyahu, Abbas and US President Barack Obama at the UN General Assembly later this month.

But he has faced an uphill task.

Hawkish Netanyahu has repeatedly ruled out a complete freeze to Israel's settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, including annexed east Jerusalem -- a move insisted on by the Palestinians in order to resume peace talks.

On Monday, Netanyahu repeated that he had no intention of implementing a complete freeze, saying any halt would be temporary, would not extend to east Jerusalem, and would exclude some 2,500 units already under construction.

Shortly after arriving for his latest regional trip, Mitchell said Washington shared a "sense of urgency" for peace talks to resume before the end of September.

Standing in the way are Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinian land, home to half a million Israelis.

The settlements are viewed as illegal by the international community, and one of the major obstacles in reaching any peace deal.

Obama's administration has been working towards a comprehensive peace package that would see Israel strike deals with the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon, and Arab states normalise relations with the Jewish state after more than 60 years of conflict.

'4.5 million children could die without climate aid'

AFP, London

At least 4.5 million children could die if wealthy nations fail to provide more funds to help impoverished countries combat global warming, development charity Oxfam warned yesterday.

The organisation said in a report it was concerned that industrialised nations would take money out of existing funds dedicated to economic development in order to help poor countries battle climate change.

"With only Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK in support of additional funds, Oxfam is concerned that December's climate negotiations in Copenhagen could fail, unless action is taken now by Heads of State," it said.



PHOTO: AFP

Supporters of the Indian Samajwadi Party chant anti-state government slogans during a protest rally in Allahabad yesterday. Protesters gathered to highlight concerns over rising corruption and misuse of public funds under the Uttar Pradesh state government.



PHOTO: AFP

This combo shows photos of new Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama (top L) and cabinet members in Tokyo yesterday, Finance Minister Hirohisa Fujii (top 2nd L), Deputy Prime Minister Naoto Kan (top R), Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Masayuki Naoshima (bottom L), Defence Minister Toshimi Kitazawa (bottom 2nd L), Consumer Affairs, Population, Gender Equality Minister Mizuho Fukushima (bottom 2nd R), Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano (bottom R) and new Foreign Affairs Minister Katsuya Okada (top 2nd R). Yukio Hatoyama's Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) took office yesterday after winning landmark elections on Aug 30 that ended more than half a century of almost unbroken conservative rule.

Women bring fresh air to Japan's new parliament

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's new government boasts a record number of women, including two cabinet ministers, slightly shifting the gender balance in a country with historically low female representation in politics.

The election victory of the

centre-left Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) altered the demographic map of the lower house, with 54 women winning seats in the 480-member chamber, up from 43 after the last election.

One of them, Keiko Chiba, 61, is the new justice minister, who opposes the death penalty and wants to encourage

national debate on ending capital punishment.

Chiba also wants to push an issue dear to the hearts of many Japanese women -- allowing married couples to have different surnames, a break with the current practice of forcing wives to assume their husbands' family names.

Japan's new PM wants trust, openness with Obama

AFP, Tokyo

A week ahead of his debut on the world stage, Japan's new Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama said Wednesday he wants to build a "relationship of trust" but also frankness with US President Barack Obama.

Hatoyama is set to meet Obama, China's president Hu Jintao and other world leaders at the UN General Assembly and climate change talks in New York, and a Group of 20 summit in Pittsburgh on reviving the world economy.

Speaking in his first press conference in office, the centre-left leader said that while his

government values the traditional US alliance, it will take a less subservient stance than the ousted Liberal Democratic Party.

"Japan up until now has been receptive to the United States, but I want to build a relationship in which Japan can act more proactively and tell them our opinions frankly," the Stanford-trained engineering scholar said.

On the sidelines of the global gatherings, Hatoyama is arranging his first face-to-face meeting with Obama, where he will have to balance the demands of Japan's traditional US ally with that of his supporters at home.

Both sides committed war crimes in Gaza war Reveals UN probe

AP, United Nations

A UN investigation concluded Tuesday that both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza committed war crimes and possible crimes against humanity, raising the prospect that officials may seek prosecution in the International Criminal Court.

The probe led by former South African judge Richard Goldstone concluded that "Israel committed actions amounting to war crimes, possibly crimes against humanity," during its Dec.

27-Jan. 18 military operations against Palestinian rocket squads in the Gaza Strip.

In a 575-page report, Goldstone and three other investigators also found evidence "that Palestinian armed groups committed war crimes, as well as possibly crimes against humanity."

Goldstone said the probe, which included interviews as well as a review of documents, photos and 30 videos, was completed Tuesday morning, just hours before the hastily called news conference.



Request for Expression of Interest For Appointment of a Facilitator to Develop a Market for Quality Fertilizer in Bangladesh

Katalyst is a pro-poor, market development project implemented under the Ministry of Commerce of the Government of Bangladesh by Swisscontact and GTZ International Services and funded by a donor consortium. It partners with a wide range of private and public sector organizations in order to leverage its resources and maximize impact. Katalyst is working in the Fertilizer sector with a vision to increase the productivity of certain crops by promoting the use of balanced fertilizer with an emphasis on soil health and fertility management. Katalyst invites **Expression of Interest** from organizations who share a similar vision and approach for pro-poor development. The organization is expected to have the following criteria:

- Substantial experience in the fertilizer sector of Bangladesh
- An ample pool of human resources with fertilizer sector expertise
- Experience and ability in liaising and collaborating with relevant stakeholders from both public and private sector
- Expertise in monitoring and evaluation of market development projects and translating project outcomes in a comprehensible and presentable manner
- Ability and willingness to reach out to farmer communities from remote areas and work in remote yet potential markets
- Reasonable understanding of the goals and objectives of Katalyst and adherence to its market development strategies and principles
- Experience in working on market development projects is preferred

Interested firms are requested to send in their 'Letter of Interest' elaborating why they think they are suitable for this role along with profile of organization (among others mention legal status, research experience, organizational work experience, client profile) and team (mention expertise in project management, economic analysis and fertilizer sector) to rural.sectors@swisscontact-bd.org mentioning "EOI for Facilitator in Fertilizer Sector" in the subject line by **29 September, 2009**. Only short listed organizations will be notified of a meeting on methodology and terms of reference. Following that, proposals will be sought, based on which final selection will be made. This 1 year contract shall start no later than 15 November, 2009. No queries through any medium will be entertained.

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