

STATEHOOD BID AT UN Palestinians to renew drive next month

REUTERS, Ramallah

The Palestinians will next month renew a bid to upgrade their status at the United Nations, their foreign minister said yesterday, a move which could strengthen their statehood claims after talks with Israel stalled.

Palestinians are listed as a UN observer "entity" with no voting rights. They will ask to be made a non-member observer state at the UN General Assembly on September 27, Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki told reporters in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Such status, akin to the Vatican's, would be an indirect recognition of their claims on statehood in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. It would allow them to join a number of UN agencies, as well as the International Criminal Court.

The Palestinians say Israeli settlement-building on occupied West Bank land has stymied prospects for a bilateral statehood deal. Disagreement over the issue led to negotiations stalling in 2010.

Malki said President Mahmoud Abbas would make the status request in a speech and the Palestinians would then lobby for

support among UN member states, many of which are sympathetic to the campaign and regard the West Bank settlements as illegal.

A simple majority vote in the 193-member General Assembly would be enough to bestow non-member observer status, bypassing the Security Council - where the United States, Israel's ally, has a veto.

"We are looking forward to getting 180 votes," Malki said. "We will become a non-member (observer) state in 2012."

Once that was achieved, he said, the Palestinians would pursue full UN membership. However that would require approval by the Security Council - and Washington.

A similar campaign by the Palestinians last year proved short-lived amid opposition from Israel and the United States, which said a Palestinian state should be founded in agreement with Israel.

Israeli officials had no immediate response to Malki's announcement.

Malki's remarks appeared to signal the Palestinians might put off the General Assembly vote at the United Nations until after the US election in November, in the run-up to which President Barack Obama would be mindful of his pro-Israel constituency.



Demonstrators hold a sign reading, "with god's help, victory is coming soon" at a demonstration against President Bashar Al-Assad of Syria yesterday in Istanbul, Turkey. Inset, Syrian rebel fighters stand around an anti-aircraft machinegun mounted on a truck in the northern city of Aleppo as decisive battles raged through Syria yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US PRESIDENTIAL POLL Clint Eastwood endorses Mitt Romney

BBC ONLINE

Oscar-winning actor and director Clint Eastwood yesterday endorsed Republican Mitt Romney in the race for the White House.

Eastwood attended a Romney fundraiser in Sun Valley, Idaho, said to have raised over \$2m.

The Dirty Harry star said he was endorsing the Republican because "the country needs a boost somewhere".

In February Eastwood starred in a Chrysler Superbowl advert, Halftime in America, sparking debate over whether he backed President Barack Obama.

At the time, Eastwood had said he was not endorsing either candidate and, speaking to Fox News, said he was "certainly not politically affiliated with Obama".



Clint Eastwood

"It was meant to be a message about just about job growth and the spirit of America," Eastwood said in February of the Super Bowl advert.

On Friday Romney said of Eastwood's endorsement: "He just made my day. What a guy."

After an introduction from Romney, Eastwood spoke to about 325 guests gathered for the Idaho fundraiser.

Eastwood said he first saw Romney when he was running for governor of Massachusetts, and Eastwood was directing the film Mystic River in Boston.

Eastwood said he thought: "God, this guy, he's too handsome to be governor. But it does look like he could be president."

Backing Romney, he added that Romney would "restore a decent tax system... so there's a fairness and people are not pitted against

Upbeat US jobs data boosts Obama

AFP, Washington

The US economy created a solid 163,000 jobs in July, official data showed Friday, helping President Barack Obama dull Republican attacks despite a slight uptick in the jobless rate.

The Labor Department said unemployment rose 0.1 points to 8.3 percent, in a monthly report that was nevertheless heralded as evidence that the world's largest economy is still on track.

Economists had predicted a much more modest creation of 100,000 jobs during July, after a weak increase of 64,000 in June.

"Finally, we have some good news on the employment front," said Nigel Gault, an economist with IHS Global Insight. "The report will alleviate fears that the US might be tipping back into recession."

With fewer than 100 days to go until the US presidential election, White House contenders seized on the report's seemingly mixed message in order to shape the tone of the debate.

After the job report, Obama has opened up a two-point lead in national tracking polls in key swing states like Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania, leaving Romney with plenty to do if the election is not to slip through his fingers.

Obama reacted soberly to the report, saying more work was needed to climb out of the deepest crisis since the 1930s.

Iran tests missile amid tensions

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran has successfully test fired a new short-range missile equipped with a guidance system it plans to install on all future missiles it builds, Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi said yesterday.

"With the fourth-generation of the Fateh 110, the armed forces of our country are able to target and destroy land and sea targets, enemy headquarters ... missile seats, ammunition sites, radars and other points," Vahidi said in quotes carried by Islamic Republic News Agency.

The Fateh 110 has a range of around 300 km, IRNA reported, meaning it would only be able to strike Iran's immediate neighbours.

UN to send food aid to flood-hit N Korea

Death toll rises to 169

REUTERS, Seoul

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has said it will send a first batch of emergency food aid to impoverished North Korea, where a series of deluges and a typhoon have left hundreds of people dead or missing.

The North's state media reported yesterday that the death toll from flooding between late June and the end of last month had increased to 169.

KCNA news agency said the number of missing had risen to some 400, while 212,200 had been left homeless.

In a statement published on its website on Friday, WFP said it would send emergency assistance comprising "an initial ration of 400 grams of maize per day for 14 days".

A United Nations mission which recently visited the affected regions found considerable damage to maize, soybean and rice fields, the WFP statement said.

Since the mid-1990s, North Korea's agricultural sector has become increasingly vulnerable to floods and drought as a result of widespread deforestation.

A recent UN report classified 7.2 million of the country's 24 million population as "chronic poor", and said one in three children was stunted from poor nutrition.

Gunfight, car blast rocks central Tripoli

AFP, Tripoli

A gunbattle between youths allegedly competing for space in a market place and a car blast rocked the centre of the Libyan capital yesterday, leaving one wounded, residents and security sources said.

"There was a fight between youths over market space," Mohammed, a young resident of Al-Rashid neighbourhood near Martyr's Square, told AFP.

"They were shooting at each other and throwing gelatin," an easily available TNT-based explosive used in fishing, said the resident, adding that the fighting took place at around dawn.

A car blast -- apparently caused by gelatin -- rocked the same area.

The shopping district bustled with activity in the morning after the car had been removed from the area, an AFP journalist said.

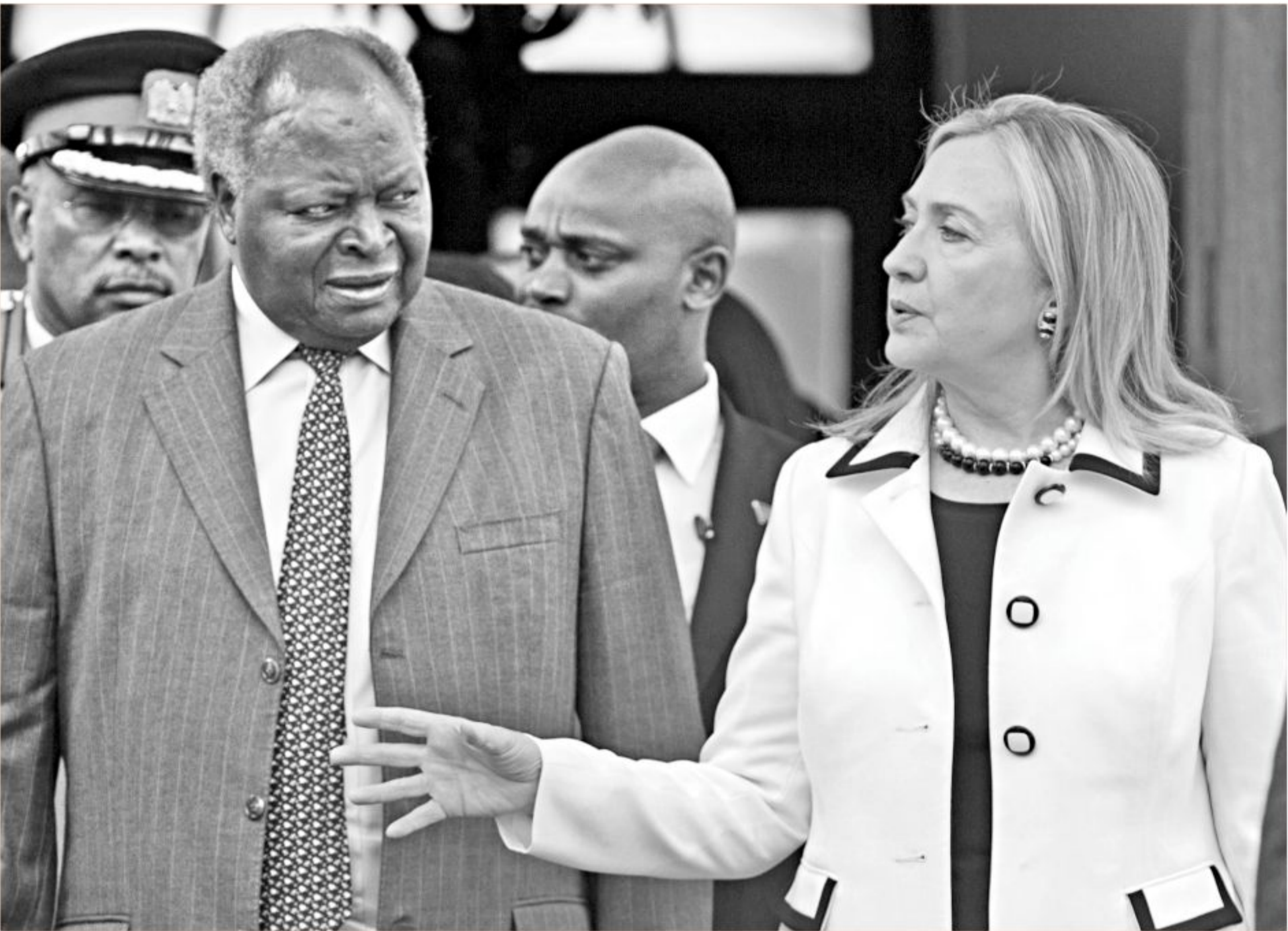


PHOTO: AFP

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meets with Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki at the State House, in Nairobi, Kenya yesterday. Hillary urged Kenya to hold free and fair elections and be a role model for Africa, underlining the need to avoid the bloodshed and economic loss suffered during the last vote five years ago during her visit.

Sudan, South Sudan settle oil dispute

AFP, Addis Ababa

Sudan and South Sudan have hammered out a deal over oil, one of a series of bitter disputes that brought the rivals to the brink of all-out war earlier this year, African Union mediator Thabo Mbeki said early yesterday after long-running talks in the Ethiopian capital.

"The parties have agreed on all of the financial arrangements regarding oil, so that's done," he said, two days after a United Nations deadline for the two neighbours to resolve their differences on oil and borders expired, and Mbeki said they would meet next month to try to find a compromise on the disputed region of Abyei.

Mbeki said a timetable would now be drawn up for the resumption of oil production and exports, which are key to the economies of both deeply impoverished countries.

However, analysts suggest it could take up to six months for South Sudan to be able to resume full oil production.

The AU has been mediating the talks to try to resolve disputes that flared after South Sudan became independent in July 2011, following a 2005 deal to end one of Africa's longest civil wars.

Landlocked South Sudan took with it three-quarters of the oil held by the previously united nation, but the processing and shipping facilities remained in Sudan.

The two sides could not agree on how much Juba should pay to export its crude through northern pipelines and ports, leading the South to shut down production in January after Khartoum began seizing the oil in lieu of payment. Oil generates about 98 percent of South Sudan's revenue.

Mbeki's announcement came hours after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for an urgent compromise following talks with South Sudan's President Salva Kiir in



Spain inches towards a full EU bailout

REUTERS, Madrid

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy inched closer on Friday to asking for an EU bailout for his country, but said he needed first to know what conditions would be attached and what form the rescue would take.

His comments, at his first post-cabinet meeting news conference since taking office last December, came a day after the European Central Bank signalled it was preparing to buy Spanish and Italian bonds but only after EU bailout funds were triggered and countries had asked for help.

A source said separately that Spain would not decide whether to apply for several weeks.

Buying bonds and providing aid would all be designed to bring down what have been prohibitive borrowing costs in the indebted countries.

Rajoy said he was ready to do what is best for Spain, going far further than he did on Thursday when, during a press appearance with Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti, Rajoy three times declined to say whether he would seek the aid.

A source familiar with Rajoy's thinking confirmed this possibility was actively looked at and that Rajoy was ready to bear the political cost of a request.

In a letter to Herman Van Rompuy on Friday, Rajoy urged the president of the European Council to work towards creating a euro zone-wide banking and fiscal

British coalition faces rift over political reform

REUTERS, London

The junior party in Britain's coalition government said on Friday the two-year-old alliance was entering "uncharted territory" after reports that Prime Minister David Cameron planned to drop promised parliamentary reforms.

Newspapers said Cameron was set to abandon reforms to parliament's unelected upper chamber, the House of Lords, that have been championed by his Liberal Democrat partners after he failed to overcome opposition within his own Conservatives.

Cameron's office said talks on the Lords were still in progress and that an announcement would be made in due course.

But the reports were greeted with fury by the left-leaning Liberal Democrats, who have seen their opinion poll ratings slump

after joining the centre-right Conservatives in government in 2010.

Lib Dem legislators have reluctantly backed many Conservative measures as part of a coalition deal struck between the two parties.

But the Conservatives' failure to keep their side of the bargain by supporting reform of the Lords threatens to chill already the lukewarm relations between the two sides and provoke the Lib Dems into tit-for-tat retaliation.

That could potentially trigger what one Lib Dem legislator has said could be a "chain reaction" of disagreements between the coalition partners.

Cameron and Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg have said the row over the Lords would not lead to a divorce or divert the coalition from its primary aim of restoring Britain's economy back to health after being hit by the global financial crisis.

UK mini drone to take on Taliban

PTI, London

It may seem like one of the futuristic James Bond gizmos, but it is for real. A new 'nanodrone' weighing just 198 grams, one of the smallest unmanned aerial vehicles in world, has been devised in UK and is currently being examined by US military to take on the Taliban.

It fits in the palm of a hand could become a potent new weapon for the forces in the fight against the Taliban.

Military chiefs believe the spy drone called the SQ-4 Recon, worth £20,000 and one of the smallest unmanned aerial vehicles in the world, will save soldiers' lives in Afghanistan. It is a miniature version of Little Nellie, the autogyro flown by James Bond in the film "You Only Live Twice".

Devised by Cardiff-based BCB International and Middlesex University's Autonomous Systems Laboratory,



the SQ-4 Recon is being examined by the US military.

The 'nanodrone' contains two cameras, which allow soldiers to look over hills and inside enemy bunkers without the risk of being killed or injured, the Daily Mail reported. It can be operated remotely.