

## Peace no closer in West Asia

Israel's withdrawal from Gaza isn't nearly enough, but the wait for a better deal could last forever.

Jonathan Freedland

THEY ARE calling it the war of the colours. On one side, the Jewish settlers facing eviction from Gaza urging their fellow citizens to wear or wave orange to protest the withdrawal. On the other, the settlers' opponents who have failed to agree on a colour scheme and so flutter their approval in shades of blue, blue-and-white and green.

In the coming weeks, Israelis will witness scenes that stir some of the deepest emotions in their national culture. They have had a foretaste already. On Tuesday, Corporal Avi Bieber was jailed for 56 days for his refusal to participate in the demolition on Sunday of deserted homes in the Gush Katif area of Gaza. Come August 15, there could be hundreds of Corporal Biebers, refusing to raise their hands to their fellow Israelis, and endless television pictures showing former settlements blown to rubble. If settlers turn on Israeli soldiers who have come to evict them, it will not look like a culture war — but a civil war.

What makes this conflict so strange is the make-up of the two sides. For who has become the chief hate figure of the Israeli right? None other than the man despised by much of the global left: Ariel Sharon. His decision to leave Gaza threw Israeli progressives into initial confusion. Surely if he was for it, they had to be against it. More substantially, they suspected a trick, the first step in a neat game of quid pro quo — giving up Gaza in return for American, and therefore global, permission to keep the best chunks of the West Bank. That view remains credible and yet, as August 15 draws near, it becomes harder to remain unmoved by what is about to unfold. For one thing, the pullback from Gaza is clearly a good thing in itself.

There is the prospect for long-term progress too. The sunniest optimists see Gaza as a crucial precedent. Once Mr. Sharon has countenanced a withdrawal, the taboo will be broken.

The momentum, say these hopeful types, will be unstoppable. The coalition Mr. Sharon has cobbled together for disengagement will break up, leading to new elections. If he fights those and wins, he could withdraw from the Jordan Valley and a few more isolated set-

tlements in the northern West Bank.

Of course, it is easy to puncture such hopeful talk. The trauma felt by the Israeli right may well serve as a reverse precedent, leaving many Israelis convinced that withdrawal was an experience too painful to be repeated. That argument would be boosted by an upsurge in attacks on Israeli civilians: if the suicide bombers were to return in numbers, motivated by the belief that it was violence which pushed Israel out of Gaza, there would be little Israeli eagerness to hand over yet more land.

But those who fantasise that the Gaza move could set in train a revival of the traditional Middle East peace process may be guilty of a larger mistake. For such a view misses what is really going on here — and how revolutionary a figure Ariel Sharon has turned out to be.

He has made what the experts call a "paradigm shift," breaking the old peace-making model, in which the two sides negotiated and made compromises, in favour of going it alone — with or without the enemy.

Until now, most advocates of peace have regretted this shift, arguing that it seeks to impose a solution favouring Israel and making the Palestinians passive observers of their own fate.

Those criticisms have bite, but a powerful case for unilateralism exists all the same. I heard it in a recent conversation with Haim Ramon, a Labour Minister in Mr. Sharon's Government.

Everyone knows the outlines of a final two-state solution, he says. The trouble is, the two sides cannot get there. Even if Israel could bring itself to give back most of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, the Palestinians under Abu Mazen could not agree to waive the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

The withdrawal is not very appealing, promising only interim management of the conflict rather than a full resolution of it. Compared to a just, fair accord between the two sides — a handshake, smiles and sunshine — it is unalluring. But compared to what we have now, and the prospect of 38 more years of occupation, it looks like the lesser evil. An end to occupation is best. But a unilateral, partial end to occupation is surely better than nothing. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

# Kaplan sentenced to life in prison

## Plot to overthrow Turkey's secular system

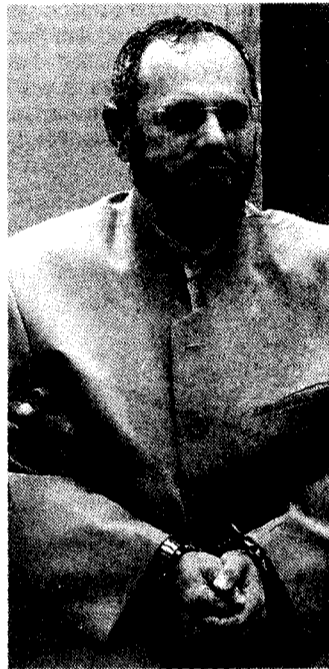
ISTANBUL: A Turkish court has sentenced Muslim extremist Metin Kaplan, alias "The Caliph of Cologne," to imprisonment for the rest of his life for plotting to overthrow Turkey's strictly secular system.

Announcing the verdict at the end of a high-profile trial, judge Metin Cetinbas said Kaplan and his extremist group, based in Cologne in Germany, were "terrorists".

"Terrorism, whoever commits it and for whatever reason, is a crime against humanity," judge Cetinbas said. "Reactionaries will never be given a chance."

He announced that the court would not allow Kaplan to benefit from a reduction in his sentence because he showed no remorse during the trial. Kaplan — leader of the Union of Islamic Communities, also known as "Hilafet Devleti" (Caliphate State, in Turkish) — had been on trial since December following his expulsion from Germany on charges linked to his role as the leader of the group, which aspires to set up a state in Turkey based on Islamic law.

Throughout the trial, Kaplan rejected the accusations directed against him but spoke out in favour of installing the rule of Islam — which he described as the best system in the world — in Turkey. "I never pushed people towards violence, hatred or terrorism," Kaplan told the tribunal in his final defence speech earlier on Monday. "We are not separatists. We are not terrorists or



Turkish radical Islamist cleric Metin Kaplan, dubbed the "Caliph of Cologne," in this file photo. — REUTERS

anarchists. I want a Turkey where the Koran is the constitution, the Sharia is the law and Islam is the state. You might not like my ideas, but you do not have the right to call me a terrorist" he said. Kaplan moved to Germany in 1983 as a political refugee in 1992. Kaplan and his family lived on welfare payments in Germany. — AFP

# Sharon, Abbas meet to discuss Gaza pullout

52 Islamic Jihad activists held in crackdown as Israel gives up policy of restraint

**JERUSALEM:** Israeli and Palestinian leaders sat down for their first summit meeting since the declared a truce in February, with a spike in violence, an overnight Israeli arrest raid and an airstrike clouding the atmosphere.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas arrived at Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Jerusalem residence at mid-afternoon on Tuesday for the talks, which were expected to focus on coordination of Israel's planned pull-out from Gaza and part of the West Bank starting in August. It was the first such summit in Jerusalem.

In the hours before the meeting, Israeli forces swept through the West Bank, arresting 52 suspected Islamic Jihad militants, its first big crackdown since a February cease-fire, abandoning a policy of restraint.

Mr. Sharon was expected to repeat a demand of Mr. Abbas to disarm the militants. While insisting that all groups must follow the truce, Mr. Abbas has shied away from armed confrontations, fearing civil war and preferring control through negotiation.

Israel's deputy Defence Minister Zeev Boim warned that Israel would lash out at militants if Mr. Abbas' forces to not control them. "The situation is similar to that of a terminally ill patient. If Abu Mazen doesn't apply emergency treatment regarding quiet, we will have to fight terror



**DEEP DIVISIONS:** Palestinians confront an Israeli soldier during a demonstration against the construction of the barrier on the outskirts of the West Bank village of Marda, near the Jewish settlement of Ariel, on Tuesday. — PHOTO: AP

with full force." Mr. Boim told northern Gaza Strip, said Palestinian Interior Ministry spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khousa. Army Radio said it was a failed attempt to kill an Islamic Jihad militant — meaning resumption of targeted killings suspended with the truce. The Israeli army gave no information on the airstrike, but said Palestinian mortar and rocket fire had come from the area earlier in the day. There were no cases of injuries. — AP

# Gaza pullout talks begin

Jerusalem, June 21

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As the meeting opened on Tuesday, an Israeli aircraft fired two missiles at an abandoned

structure in the northern Gaza Strip, said Palestinian Interior Ministry spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khoussa. Army Radio said it was a failed attempt to kill an Islamic Jihad militant — meaning resumption of targeted killings suspended with the truce. The Israeli army gave no information on the airstrike, but said Palestinian mortar and rocket fire had come from the area earlier in the day. There were no reports of injuries.

The pre-dawn roundup of Islamic Jihad activists in the West Bank signalled a policy shift by Israel. Under the cease-fire, Israel has limited its operations to arrests of militants actively involved in attacks.

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said the military changed tack because the Palestinian Authority has been "inef-

fectual." "When we found out that the Islamic Jihad was carrying out acts of terror and wasn't adhering to the truce... Then, there was no choice but to take resolute action," Mofaz said.

Islamic Jihad unleashed a new wave of attacks beginning Saturday, when militants shot up an Israeli army post in Gaza in a raid that left one of the attackers dead. On Sunday, militants killed a soldier in an ambush near the Gaza border with Egypt. A militant was also killed in that attack. On Monday, gunmen ambushed an Israeli civilian vehicle driving through the northern West Bank, killing one of the passengers.

In response, the military decided it will go after anyone affiliated with Islamic Jihad group.

AP



# Explosion in car kills anti-Syrian leader in Beirut

Beirut, June 21

AN ANTI-SYRIAN politician was killed in Lebanon on Tuesday when a bomb ripped through his car, two days after parliamentary elections brought victory for an alliance opposed to Damascus' role in the country.

George Hawi, a former leader of the Lebanese Communist Party, died instantly in the blast in the Wata Musaitbi neighbourhood of Beirut, witnesses and security sources said.

"After the explosion, the car kept going and then I saw the driver screaming and he jumped out of the window. We rushed to the car and saw Hawi in the passenger seat with his guts out," said Rami Abu Dargham, who owns a sandwich shop nearby.

The 400-gram charge was placed under the passenger seat of Hawi's Mercedes and detonated by remote control, judicial sources said. His driver apparently escaped serious injury.

It was the second killing of an anti-Syrian figure in Beirut this month. Newspaper columnist Samir Kassir was killed on June 2 when a similar explosion destroyed his car outside his home.

The United States said after Kassir's killing it had information about a Syrian hit list targeting Lebanese leaders. Damascus has denied the claim and denounced Hawi's killing.

Syria bowed to global pressure to withdraw its troops from Lebanon in April after anti-Syrian protests swept the country when former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri was assassinated in a truck bombing in February.

A UN team that visited Lebanon certified that Syria had ended its 29-year military presence. But UN chief Kofi Annan ordered the team back after Kassir's killing amid claims by Lebanese anti-Syrian opposition figures that Syrian intelligence agents were still running free in the country.

UN investigator Detlev Mehlis questioned the head of Lebanon's presidential guard as part of an international probe into Hariri's



An FBI agent examines the wreckage of George Hawi's car.

killing, a UN official said.

Syria's critics in Lebanon have urged Colonel Mustafa Hamdan, the most senior of Lebanon's pro-Syrian security chiefs to remain in power since Hariri's murder, to step down.

Hawi's politician stepson, himself a critic of Damascus, pointed the finger at remnants of the pro-Syrian security agencies, though Lebanon's top security chiefs have resigned in recent months.

"The security agencies continue to kill the democrats and are trying to assassinate democracy in Lebanon and the independence uprising," Rafi Madoyan told reporters, referring to the protests after Hariri's death. "It is not just George Hawi, there are many others on the hit list."

Syrian-backed President Emile Lahoud promised to investigate the incident.

Reuters

22 JUN 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Israel, Palestine agree to raze Gaza homes

Reuters  
Jerusalem, June 19

ISRAEL AND the Palestinian Authority have agreed that the homes of the Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip will be destroyed when Israel pulls out of the area, US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said on Sunday. Rice, on a visit to Israel and the West Bank, said Israel and the Palestinian Authority had also agreed to cooperate to ensure the withdrawal would proceed peacefully, hailing it as a historic step toward resolving the West Asia conflict.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon reaffirmed there could be no progress along a US-backed peace "road map" — leading to the creation of a Palestinian state — unless the Palestinian Authority disarmed and dismantled militant groups.

In the Gaza Strip, an Israeli soldier was killed and two others were wounded in an attack by Palestinian gunmen on troops and civilian contractors along the border with Egypt, the Israeli army said. One of the attackers was shot dead.

"Israel and the Palestinian Authority agree that the settler homes in Gaza should be removed," Rice told a news conference after meeting Sharon. "Therefore the parties will work toward a plan for destruction and cleanup." Palestinian officials have said they prefer the red-roofed homes, built on occupied land in 21 Jewish settlements in Gaza, be demolished so that high-rise housing can be constructed in the crowded coastal strip, home to 1.3 million Palestinians.

"It was their choice. If they wanted them, they could have had them," Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Mark Regev said. Palestinian officials said rubble from the settlements, whose evacuation is due to begin in mid-August, could be used to build a seaport for Gaza.

An Israeli official said it would take three to four weeks to complete the pullout and Israel would then immediately raze the houses. He said the Palestinians had agreed to clear the debris in a project that would generate jobs in Gaza.

During the two-day visit, which included talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday, Rice called on both sides to agree on specifics about how to carry out the withdrawal, saying time was running out. Israel fears that Palestinian militants could fill a security vacuum in Gaza after the pullout unless Palestinian security forces take over from the withdrawing Israeli troops.



Israeli vice premier Shimon Peres welcomes Rice to Jerusalem on Sunday.

At the news conference, Rice said Israel and the Palestinian Authority recognised the withdrawal "must proceed peacefully and without violence" directed toward settlers and soldiers.

"Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority will take the necessary actions and will coordinate such actions where appropriate to ensure a peaceful disengagement and economic viability and hope for the Palestinian people," she said, without giving details. "The most important thing is they need to make certain there are no surprises here, that both sides know precisely what's going to happen and that they can work together," Rice later told Fox News.

Abbas, citing his fears of civil war, has rejected Israel's demands that he confront militant groups that have spearheaded the Palestinian uprising that began in 2000. The Palestinian leader has said he prefers to co-opt the gunmen into the Palestinian security services and the groups to which they belong into the political mainstream.

Sharon is due to hold a summit with Abbas on Tuesday, their first meeting since declaring a truce in Egypt on February 8. Abbas is expected to press Sharon to open Gaza's borders, which Israel controls under interim peace deals, to wider movement of people and goods after the pullout.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Hosni Mubarak to run for fifth term

Will appoint a Vice-President for the first time in his 24-year reign

Simon Tisdall

**CAIRO:** Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak is to seek a fifth consecutive term in office and will appoint a Vice-President for the first time in his 24-year reign if, as is expected, he wins the first ever contested presidential election in September.

Ending months of speculation, the President's spokesman, Soliman Awaad, told the London-based *Guardian* newspaper that Mr. Mubarak (77) would announce his candidacy as soon as the constitutional court approved a new electoral law.

"This will be Mubarak's last term," Mr. Awaad said. "He wants a free, democratic and fair election. He wants to be remembered as the one who did this."

"He will appoint a Vice-President. Certainly he will do this," Mr. Awaad said. "These changes will be his legacy."

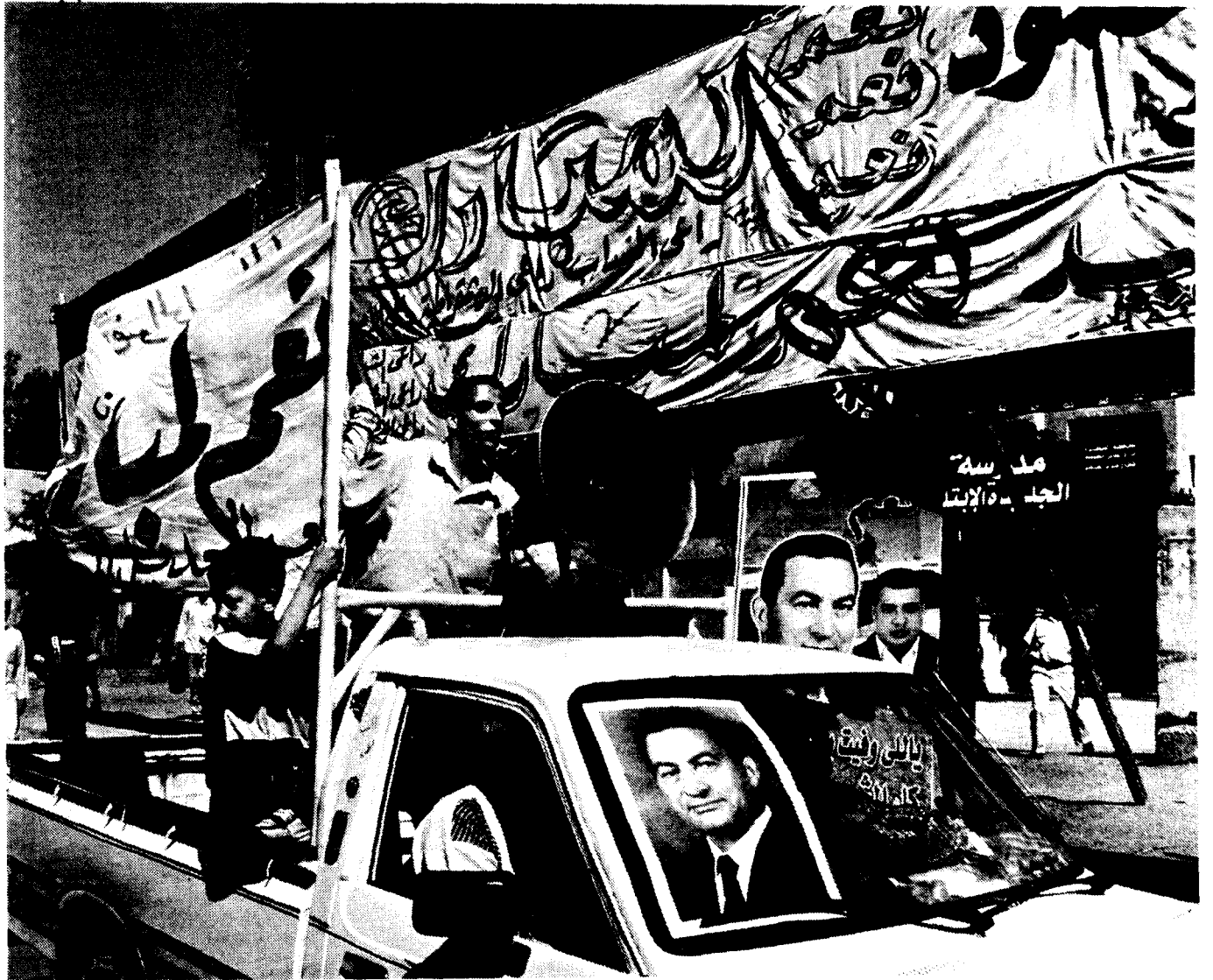
A senior official who asked not be identified said that the Vice-President, who will inevitably be seen as Mr. Mubarak's potential successor, would be a civilian rather than a member of the armed forces.

## Military figures

The official said Mr. Mubarak wanted to reduce the involvement of military figures in public life that dates back to Gamel Abdel-Nasser's 1952 revolution, when the monarchy was overthrown by a military coup.

The identity of Mr. Mubarak's choice as Vice-President will be a matter of intense interest in Egypt, the Arab world's leading country, and in the U.S., which provides Egypt with \$ 1.8 billion a year in aid and has been urging democratic reform.

Interviewed this week at the Air Force Club in Cairo, Gamal



**SPREADING THE MESSAGE:** An Egyptian volunteer stands on a vehicle, sporting posters of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and calls upon people to vote for him, in this recent photo.. - PHOTO: AP

Mubarak, Mr. Mubarak's son and a leading figure in the ruling National Democratic party, repeated assertions that he was not seeking higher office.

The insistence on a civilian appointee appears to rule out Egypt's powerful security and intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman, a former army general who

has been tipped as a future President. It was unclear how military chiefs might react to an unprecedented attempt to reduce the armed forces' influen-

ce. Opposition parties remain sceptical about the President's intentions and the new electoral system. - ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

# Lebanon polls: Ex-army chief trounces rivals

WAS 12 11/13 14/6  
Souk El-Gharb (Lebanon), June 13

LEBANON'S FORMER army commander and his allies have handed other opposition groups a surprising defeat in parliamentary elections.

Candidates backed by Christian leader Michel Aoun, who recently returned to Lebanon after 14 years in exile, won 15 of 16 seats Sunday in a key voting area.

The four-stage elections — held over consecutive weekends — are the first since Syria withdrew from Lebanon. Sunday's vote took place in Mount Lebanon and the eastern Bekaa Valley.

Before Sunday's election, Aoun split from opposition leader Walid Jumblatt — with whom he had supported an independence movement, the so-called Cedar Revolution. That movement peaked in March and pressured Syria to remove its troops from Lebanon.

Aoun, 70, instead ran on a platform to defeat old-guard nepotism with the help of pro-Syrian groups.

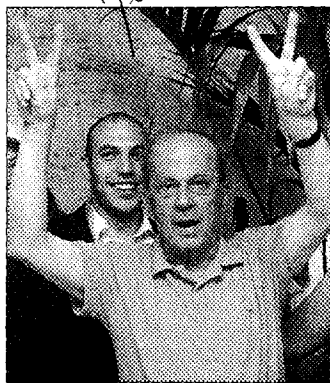
His success could dent the opposition's drive to gain a majority in the legislature, and could leave him a key player in the fight over Syrian control.

The third round was crucial as it is deciding nearly half of the seats in the Parliament.

In the first round of voting, the son of assassinated former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri won all seats up for grabs in the capital of Beirut.

But Syria's most powerful allies in Lebanon, Hezbollah and Amal, won phase two of the elections in the southern areas bordering Israel.

The final round of voting, to be held next Sunday, will take place in northern Lebanon.



AP  
Lebanese Christian leader Michel Aoun celebrates his victory with his aides at his home near Beirut.

Jumblatt accused Aoun of being brought into the election by the Syrians to undermine the opposition in the third phase.

"Michel Aoun is a small (Syrian) tool," the Associated Press quoted him as saying. "True he succeeded, I concede that."

The Christian leader's victory in the third round means he could play a critical role in the debate over Syrian control of Lebanon and whether pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud retains his position.

"I'm staying to the last moment that I have in my tenure," Lahoud vowed on Sunday.

His cousin, Nassib Lahoud, a top Lebanese opposition candidate who appeared headed to defeat, said he fears he could be targeted for assassination.

"I think we are all in danger," he told reporters. "There is no reason to feel safe as long as we don't have control of the security services."

Voting was overshadowed by US-backed opposition claims that Syrian intelligence agents are still active in Lebanon.

Agencies

## Kuwait names first woman

minister

Indo-Asian News Service

KUWAIT CITY, June 12. — A University professor has been appointed Kuwait's first woman Cabinet minister. Professor Massouma al-Mubarak, a political science teacher at Kuwait University, was named as planning minister and minister of state for administrative developments affairs.

Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah announced Prof. Al-Mubarak's appointment today.

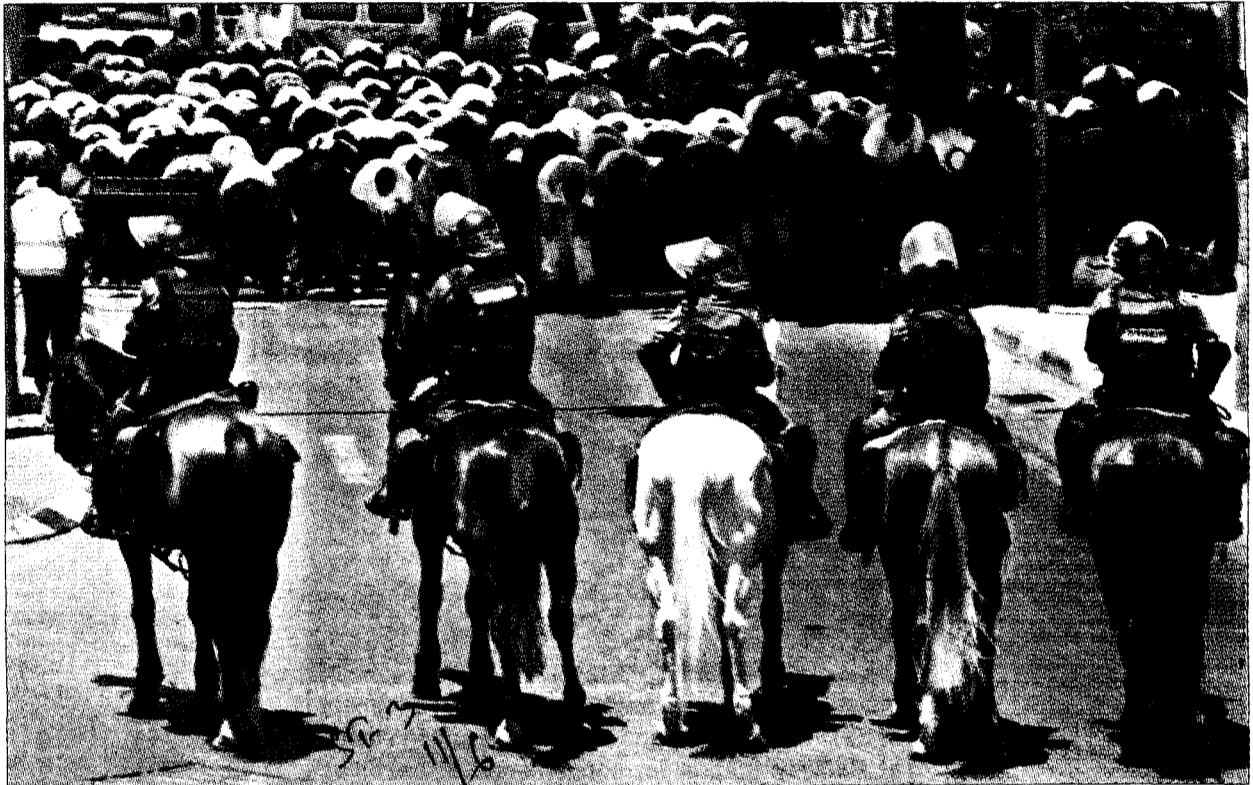
The two portfolios she is taking were previously held by Sheik Ahmed Abdullah al-Ahmed al-Sabah, who will retain his post as communications minister.

The nomination makes Kuwait the third country in the Gulf to name a woman as minister, following Qatar and Oman.

The Kuwait Cabinet named two women to its municipal council on 5 June, less than a month after the parliament passed a Bill granting women the right to vote and stand in elections — a breakthrough in the Gulf country.

‘SHARON GOVT DRAGGING FEET ON WITHDRAWAL’

# Israel warned of intifada



Israeli mounted policemen keep watch as Palestinians perform the Friday prayer in the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem. — AFP

**Donald MacIntyre** in Ramallah

June 10. — A key Palestinian Cabinet minister has claimed that Israel's refusal to give detailed answers on Gaza disengagement was threatening to make the planned withdrawal a "failure" and pave the way to a third Palestinian uprising or intifada.

Mr Dahlan launched a fierce attack on Mr Ariel Sharon's government yesterday for refusing to give the Palestinian Authority more detailed plans of the area it is vacating, and for not committing to the access to external markets needed by Gaza to revitalise its stricken economy.

Mr Dahlan, the civil affairs minister responsible for coordinating the non-security aspects of disengagement with Israel, complained that on present showing the plan would simply mean a "repackaging of the occupation" in the Gaza Strip and would not be a success as a means of advancing the peace process.

Mr Dahlan said he was not "surprised by the behaviour of Israel because I believe Israel wants to delay all the decisions till the final moment and then blame the Palestinians for the failure of disengagement".

He added: "What the Israelis are really doing is to create the conditions for a third intifada to take

place." Citing Israel's refusal to give positive answers on the use of crossing points in and out of Gaza, including the - currently distant - possibility of Israel allowing the Strip's airport to be rebuilt, on the control regime that will apply to the southern border with Egypt, and on "safe passage" between Gaza and the West Bank, Mr Dahlan said the PA had heeded the call from the international community to co-ordinate the withdrawal plan with Israel.

But he had "begun to question" whether Mr Sharon wanted Gaza disengagement to be the beginning rather than the end of a peace process. — **The Independent**

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THE STATESMAN

## Dealing with a new Palestinian reality

**I**srael and its western allies find themselves in a quandary after the militant group Hamas put up a strong performance in elections to Palestinian local bodies. This Islamicist organisation secured a third of the vote and gained control over several municipalities and village councils. There is a good chance that it could do as well in the parliamentary elections scheduled for July. If the results are along expected lines, Hamas is likely to be in a position to exert influence disproportionate to its parliamentary strength. Fatah, the formation that has traditionally dominated Palestinian politics, is going through a phase of internal struggle and, while it is likely to capture a majority of seats, it might not always act as a united entity. With Hamas set to play a major role in the affairs of the Palestinian Authority, Israel and its western allies might soon discover that they cannot persist with the policy of shunning the militant organisation. They maintain that they will not discard this policy until Hamas gives up extremist violence and acknowledges the Zionist state's right to exist. However, Israeli officials have already begun to deal with Hamas mayors and village heads to sort out matters of day-to-day existence. Some European diplomats also appear to have recognised the new reality and established contacts with the political arms of the Islamicist formations. To an extent, the West is coming face-to-face with its own rhetoric. When countries such as the United States press for the democratisation of the Arab world, they must be prepared for the eventuality of formations not to their liking doing well in elections. It makes no sense to conduct policy as if they did not exist.

At this juncture, it is highly unlikely that Hamas will come round and accept the existence of a Zionist state alongside a Palestinian one in the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan river. However, this organisation does not appear to be of a unanimous mind that such an outcome can be achieved only through violent means. After all, it has time and again responded positively to the Palestinian Authority's demands that it suspend militant activity. (In many instances, truces were broken because of provocation from the Israeli side.) Several sections have also appeared inclined to accept the Fatah leadership's view that the Palestinians must stick to the peaceful and democratic path and wait until anticipated demographic changes come about. The theory is that the Arabs will form a majority of the population in the land between the river and the sea within a few decades, and that Israel's existence as a distinct entity will become tenuous once this happens. With its popularity growing on account of its charitable works and clean image, Hamas should know that playing the waiting game could be to its advantage.

11 JUN 2005

THE HINDU



# France casts shadows across the Bosphorous

M.K. Bhadrakumar

**B**Y A coincidence, the fateful Sunday of May 29, when the rejection of the European Constitution in the referendum in France came to be known in Turkey, also happened to be the 552nd anniversary of the conquest of the Byzantine capital of Constantinople (present day Istanbul) by Fathi Sultan Mehmet. The event in 1453 marked Ottoman entry into "Europe." Does the French vote presage difficulty for Turkey's "re-entry" into Europe?

Large swathes of Eurasia — Ukraine, Moldova, the Balkans, and the Caucasus — face similar predicaments. The post-velvet revolution regimes in the Ukraine and Georgia come under stress. The European Union should have spearheaded their painful "integration" into the Western world. Their induction into NATO is predicated on a EU underpinning of some sort. Their ability to disengage from Russia significantly depends on their "EU option."

The Balkans and Black Sea regions — Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro, Croatia — face uncertainty as regards their prospects of gaining entry into the EU. The broken parts of former Yugoslavia may begin to drift if they are deprived of the dream of a possible EU membership at some point. Meanwhile, the EU is poised somewhat awkwardly in the Balkans — a guide, guardian and philosopher, but not yet an assured long-term benefactor.

The impact on the geopolitics of the region remains to be seen. Will the "Balkan question" reappear? Unresolved issues of ethnicity, blood feuds, pogroms, religious extremism, and sub-nationalism lurk below the surface. To prevent a breakdown, what sort of interim ties could the EU offer? Will the drive toward making Black Sea an American lake be sustainable without the region's comprehensive integration?

For Turkey, the French referendum result came as a double shock within the week. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's announcement of early elections was already a matter of disquiet. The prospect of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) headed by Angela Merkel winning

## A sense of unease prevails that Turkey will have to settle for a vastly different European Union than it may have sought.

the German election worries Turkey. Last October, she proposed that all that Turkey could aspire for was a "privileged partnership" with Europe that allowed increased economic cooperation between Turkey and the EU but would leave Turkey outside EU, looking in. Last Thursday, she repeated that the EU "cannot simply return to business as usual" but must reconsider its plans for Turkey. CDU foreign affairs spokesman Friedbert Pfluger elaborated that "Europe is in crisis" because of "overstretching" of the EU's political capacities, and that a CDU-led government would seek a temporary halt to EU enlargement, in particular by seeking the option of a privileged partnership with Turkey.

The Gallic opinion is equally set against Turkey's EU membership. "The two most important factors behind the French reaction are perhaps Europe's economic stagnation and its ever-rising unemployment... The Europeans have started to see both Brussels and the enlargement process as a threat to their own welfare," Faik Oztrak wrote in *Milliyet*.

Even ardent supporters of EU membership sombrely take note that the ground beneath their feet has shifted. Prominent Turkish commentator Sami Kohen wrote: "Now the EU will turn inwards, and take care of its own problems, but while dealing with these problems, it will slow down the enlargement process... there is [also] a phobia against Turkey." While Turkish intellectuals rationalise, popular perception is one of injured pride — that Turkey faces deep-rooted European cultural prejudices.

Samuel Huntington (author of *The Clash of Civilisations*) plunged deep into these searing Turkish debates by stating in Istanbul last week: "Turkey's history, culture, religion and economy are so different from those of the EU that its chances of being accepted into the EU are virtually non-existent." According to the Harvard

professor, Turkey should either aspire to lead the Islamic world, or focus on nationalism. He added that if Turkey opted for the latter path, it should concentrate on its security and development without being distracted by EU ambitions or the Islamic world.

But the choices are not that straightforward. The EU means different things to different layers of Turkish society. For the influential, flashy corporate world in Istanbul with well-established trans-national ties with European business and industry, EU membership is a natural progression in life. But, for the intelligentsia or the established political elite that grew up in the shadows of "Ataturkism", if the EU is appealing it is for a different reason — EU membership is Turkey's tryst with destiny as Mustafa Kemal had charted out Turkey's farewell to its entanglement with the Muslim world.

The "pro-EU" impetus in Turkey's secular course is acceptable to the Turkish military too, but as the self-appointed guardians of the Turkish state, the military would be cautious about excessive surrender of Turkish sovereignty to Brussels. Thus the French and Dutch votes as regards their antipathy towards a centralised Europe under a Brussels-based bureaucracy would, arguably, be a matter of quiet satisfaction for the Turkish military.

But for the silent majority in the Anatolian heartlands, EU membership means something entirely different. They share neither the corporate world's passion for neo-liberalism nor the intelligentsia's cultivated attraction to European Enlightenment. They are devoutly Muslim and are deeply rooted in Turkey's Islamic heritage. For them, EU membership offers neither appurtenances of "prestige" (which they do not need, given their sense of belonging to their traditions and culture) nor the prospect of a "European home" in an intellectual or emotive sense (with

which they have no real interest in claiming affinities), but, simply, plainly, EU is a means of improving their quality of life.

Furthermore, the stark existential choices as Professor Huntington made out for the country's political elite and intelligentsia aside, cutting across Turkish society, EU membership was also a democracy project, given the pervasive public disenchantment with the functioning of democracy in Turkey. (In the parliamentary elections in 2002, the Turkish public resorted to wholesale rejection of the established political elite.) Turkey is undertaking an extraordinary reform programme in terms of fulfilling the criteria for EU membership. There is potential risk of reform losing steam in the face of a quiet despondency that the EU is shifting the goalposts. Despite affirmation that Turkey needed reform — EU or no EU — it is unclear whether an intrinsic commitment to reform is indeed inherent to the order of priority of the political elite.

### Regional implications

Turkey's orientations would have regional implications. It cannot be otherwise as Turkey is far too important a power. But Turkey has a tough neighbourhood too — that includes one nuclear power, or allegedly two in a non-too-distant future. Some of Turkey's neighbours would wish that Ankara did not take seriously Professor Huntington's advice to become a regional power. Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Evripidis Stylianidis said, "If Turkey feels rejected by Europe, it might return to its past wish to become a regional power. This might have a negative impact on Turkish-Greek relations." Teheran, Damascus, Yerevan, Baghdad, or Nicosia too would keenly watch.

As the French referendum results were getting known, British Foreign Secretary phoned his Turkish counterpart to convey Britain's continued support for Turkey. (No such calls came from Paris, Berlin or The Hague.) It so happened that the IMF agreed on a \$10 billion standby credit for Turkey. As the IMF put it, "Turkey's economic performance is at its strongest in a generation." The first tranche of \$837 million was promptly disbursed. The IMF also agreed to the postponement of Turkey's debt repayment of nearly \$4 billion in 2006.

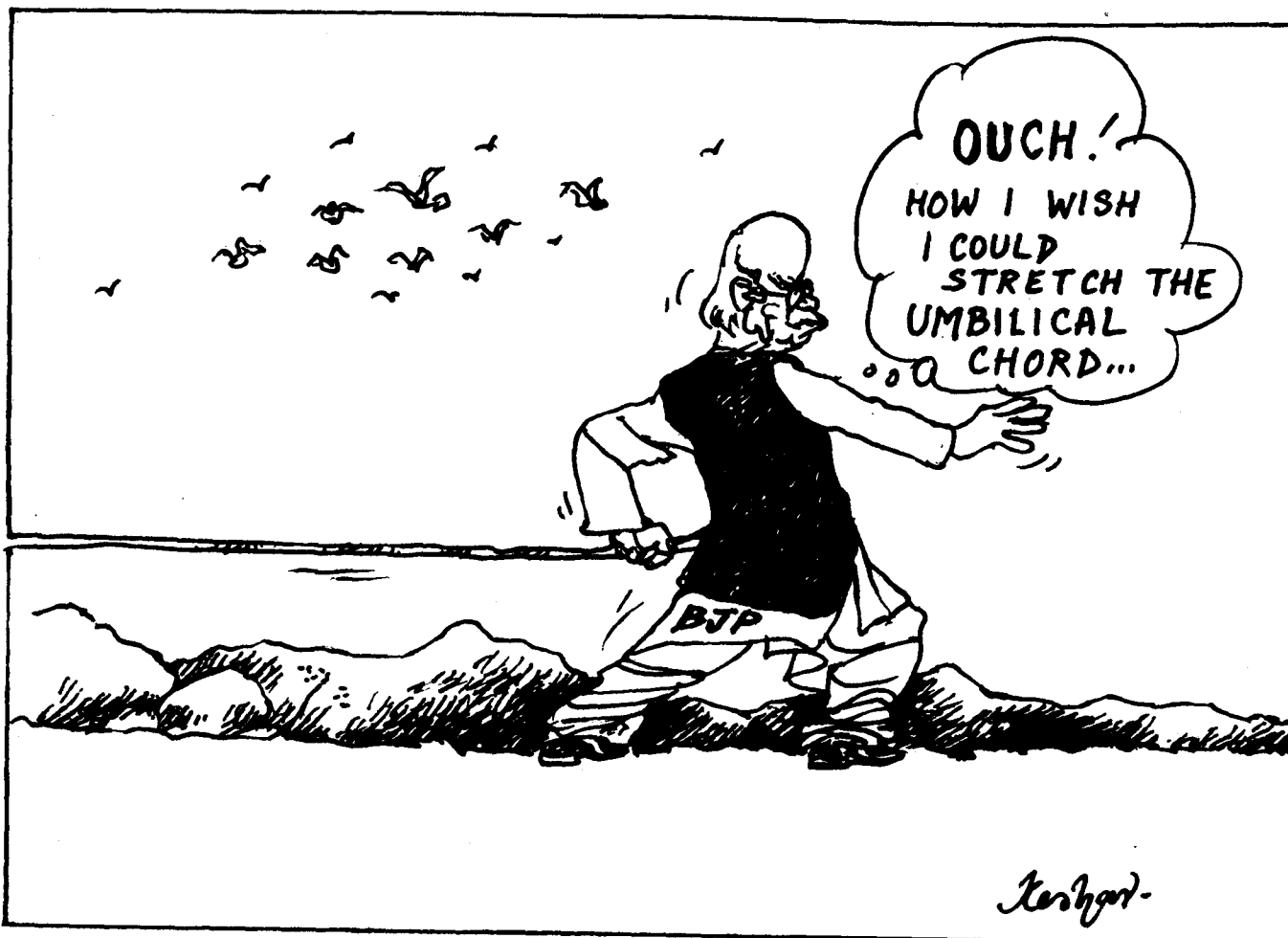
For the first time since Turkey's intervention in northern Cyprus in 1974, a U.S. Congressional delegation visited the region last week. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan visited Washington on President George W. Bush's invitation. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice counselled Europe to "include" Turkey. These are meaningful gestures. But U.S.-Turkey relations are delicately poised. Kurdish nationalism in Iraq remains a grave issue. Turkey's frustrations over a U.S.-Kurdish axis boil over from time to time — adding to the vast reservoir of "anti-Americanism" in public opinion. Yet the U.S. would like Turkey, an important NATO ally, to play certain defined roles in the American regional policy. Ankara would draw a careful line between where American interests ended and its interests began. Turkey has been harmonising with EU's regional policy — and the EU does not view former Soviet republics ("Turkestan") with missionary zeal. Moreover, Turkey's cooperation with Russia and China is expanding rapidly.

Equally so, Turkey has been reticent about the U.S.' Middle East Initiative and unresponsive to American promptings to project itself as a role model in the Muslim world. Turkey has a complex legacy with Muslim world, borne out of its tumultuous Ottoman history.

Besides, the Islamic world is getting crowded with state and non-state actors — Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Hamas, Hezbollah, Muslim Brotherhood, Jemaah Islamiyah, and the ubiquitous Al-Qaeda. After almost a century's absence, Turkey would have to "fit in." And an overarching question always remains: what is it that the Islamic world can offer Turkey that Turkey lacks?

Turkey's options are thus ultimately narrowing — though that alone does not quell its angst. A sense of unease prevails that Turkey will have to look for a place within Europe but settle for a vastly different EU than it may have sought.

### CARTOONSCAPE





# Israel to free 400 prisoners

Jerusalem, May 29 (Reuters): Israel's cabinet today approved the release of 400 Palestinian prisoners in what Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called a bid to bolster moderate Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas ahead of a Gaza pullout.

But the Palestinian Authority said Israel had failed to coordinate the release with it and would leave behind bars prisoners the Palestinian public most wanted to see free.

Israel freed 500 prisoners on February 21 after Abbas and Sharon announced a ceasefire at a summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Sharon later suspended the promised release of 400 more, citing Palestinian inaction in disarming militants.

"Israel has complaints about the Palestinians, even very serious complaints, relating to the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings," Sharon told the cabinet, which voted 18-3 in favour of the release.

"But even those who believe the events of the coming months could strengthen extremist terrorist forces, must understand the need to bolster the main, moderate element of the Palestinian Authority and carry out what we promised," he said.

Sharon was referring to Israel's planned evacuation in August of all 21 Jewish settlements in Gaza and four of 120 in the West Bank and fears among opponents of the move that anti-Israeli militants would claim the pullout as a victory.

The prisoners issue is highly emotive for Palestinians, who see their 8,000 brethren held in Israeli jails as fighters for freedom from occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

At the cabinet session, Sharon told ministers that none of those slated for release "had blood on his hands", a reference to participation in attacks that caused Israeli casualties, a government official said.

"This step of releasing 400 Palestinians is considered not to have met the Palestinian conditions and does not fit Palestinian needs," Sofian Abu Zaydeh, Palestinian minister of prisoner affairs, later told a news conference in Gaza.

"Our priority is to start to release those who were arrested before (interim peace deals in) 1994 — teenagers, women, the sick and old people, and political leaders. Those are our priorities."

30 MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

## Low turnout in Lebanese election

Atul Aneja

MANAMA: Voter turnout was low in the first phase of Lebanon's parliamentary elections whose results are likely to reflect the relative strength of the country's ethnic and religious groups. "According to the statistics I have received, turnout was somewhat low. It was about 12 per cent at 11 a.m." [local time], or four hours after the polls opened, Prime Minister Nagib Miqati told a press conference. Voting took place in Lebanon's capital Beirut, but other areas will be covered in three additional phases. A poor turnout threatens to undermine the legitimacy of the polls. The elections follow the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February. His death had triggered a wave of protests, seeking the departure of Syrian troops from the country. Hariri's son Saad, riding on a wave of sympathy following his father's killing, is expected to do well, especially in the Beirut area, where 19 seats of the 128-member Parliament are being contested. Voting in the south will take place on June 5, where the Shias organised under the Amal-Hizbollah alliance are the dominant force. Nearly 30 per of the Lebanese are Christians. Analysts point out that contests in the northern and central areas are expected to be tight where the Christians are in force but have been unable to come together on a single political platform. A 100-member team from the European Union is monitoring the polls.



Hind Hariri (left), daughter of Lebanon's slain leader Rafik Hariri, is accompanied by her mother Nazek, as she casts her vote in Beirut on Sunday. - PHOTO: AP

30 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

# Egypt reform vote amid protests

Opposition says the proposed change restricts independents

**CAIRO:** Police used clubs to break up an Opposition rally as Egyptians headed to polling stations on Wednesday to give their verdict on an electoral reform to allow competitive presidential polls for the first time.

AFP correspondents at polling stations in several parts of the country said voter turnout was low though the president of the Upper House of Parliament said it was like a "tidal wave."

The Opposition, which complains that the proposed amendment severely restricts independent candidates and overwhelmingly favours veteran President Hosni Mubarak's ruling party, called for a boycott and held several protest rallies.

Mr. Mubarak, under heightened local and international pressure to introduce political reforms in a country still ruled under a state of emergency, was among the first to vote in the referendum.

Egypt's 32.5 million voters are being asked simply to answer "yes" or "no" to a single question — whether they back the reform which paves the way for the first multi-candidate election in September.

"I said yes to the President of course because what we know is better than what we don't know," said one woman voter who turned up at a school polling station covered in banners reading "Yes to Mubarak! Yes to more reforms! Yes to constitutional change!"

Local teacher Assayed Mohammed said he voted "yes because voting no is even worse — it means that nothing would change."

In an eve-of-polling-day address, Mr. Mubarak — who has yet to say whether he will run for



**DEMANDING MORE CHANGES:** A supporter of the left-wing umbrella organisation Kefaya (Enough) staging a protest against the referendum on poll reform, in Cairo on Wednesday. — PHOTO: AFP

a fifth six-year mandate — called on Egyptians to "actively participate" in the referendum.

## Key test

Analysts have said that the key test would be turnout rather than the number of votes cast for or against the reform proposal.

"Calls for boycott have failed. Egypt's people, who are stubborn, have refused to be told what to do," Senate president Safwat Al-Sherif said.

Under the proposed changes, independent candidates for September's election must collect

250 signatures from members of national and provincial assemblies that are dominated by Mr. Mubarak's party.

All three Egyptian Presidents so far had been approved by a legislature dominated by the ruling party and elected unopposed by popular referendum.

Club-wielding police violently broke up a Cairo demonstration called by left-wing umbrella organisation Kefaya (Enough) and arrested 10 persons, AFP reporters witnessed. "We're here to protest against this farce of a referendum" prominent writer So-

nallah Ibrahim told AFP. Several Kefaya activists were beaten up with sticks, some left with their mouths bleeding.

In Ismailiya, northeast of the capital, about 20 persons were arrested at a rally by secular and Islamist Opposition elements. It was described as the first joint demonstration by Egypt's main Opposition groups: the centre-liberal Wafd, the Marxist party Tagammu, the Nasserist Party, the pro-Islamist Labor party, the centre-right Al-Ghad, Kefaya and the banned Muslim Brotherhood. — AFP

26 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

# Double vision in Beirut

By any moniker, Lebanon's political transformation since 14 February has been extraordinary. The enormous bomb that killed Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri triggered a historic popular outcry, and an unprecedented unification of politicians of differing religions and ideologies, all opposed to Beirut's pro-Syrian government. Syria was widely blamed for having a hand in Hariri's assassination, a claim that it denies.

The resultant two months of street protests and Opposition political assertiveness, echoed and bolstered by international pressure, prompted the resignation of pro-Syrian Prime Minister Omar Karami and his government, and the official withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, where they have been since 1976. With a temporary "national unity" Cabinet now in place, parliamentary elections – finally free from Syrian tutelage – have been slated to begin on 29 May.

Almost as soon as the extraordinary political movement began, so did the inevitable race to label it. Names inform popular understanding of an event, and Western governments and media immediately seized upon the label "Cedar Revolution" to promote their view. The term suggests the recent "Orange Revolution" in the Ukraine and the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia – both popular uprisings in response to alleged electoral fraud that succeeded in unseating corrupt governments. The term reinforces the Bush administration's warm embrace of the winds of democracy.

But on Lebanese soil, the term "Cedar Revolution" is underutilised at best, and offensive at worst. On hearing the movement's putative name, the Lebanese often profess amusement: "CNN can't get enough of that," says one business student. Although some local media have begun picking up the term (or using the hybrid "Cedar Intifada"), some citizens express concern that the term "Cedar" is not a unifying national icon – rather, it has long symbolised two Maronite Christian Right-wing parties, the Phalange, and the Guardians of the Cedars.

"It's a very sensitive word for me," says Haitham, a computer engineer, "because it reminds us of the inter-sectarian fighting that perpetuated 15 years of civil war here." To be sure, the cedar graces the Lebanese flag, which has been embraced by multitudes during the "Beirut Spring". But some Lebanese are troubled that the flag itself is a descendent of an 18th century Maronite

The Syrian forces have left and the Americans are pushing their model of Western democracy in West Asia. Where does that leave Lebanon? FRANCES Z BROWN reports



Posters of slain Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and his son Saad are seen hung in downtown Beirut. The posters are part of an election campaign. — AFP.

flag and the French mandate-era Lebanese Legion, a reminder of the historic dominance of the French-favoured Lebanese Maronite Christians.

The term "Independence Intifada", meanwhile, echoes among the Opposition politicians, billboards, and citizens of Beirut. The chant "Freedom! Sovereignty! Independence!" has become the movement's hallmark. Ubiquitous bumper stickers proclaiming "Independence '05" in Lebanon's three languages – French, Arabic and English – grace seemingly every vertical surface in the capital, Beirut. "We just want a true independence," one activist told me though his signboard made a pun at the expense of Syria's President, his "independence" mantra accentuates that the Lebanese are tired of all foreign interference.

Further, the word "intifada" harkens to another, ongoing struggle: the Palestinian uprising against Israel. It's a defiant word from the viewpoint of a country that views Israeli and American interests as nearly synonymous. This uprising is not confirming any American foreign policy grand scheme.

For Lebanon, the "independ-

dence" being invoked is an economic imperative as much as a political one. Hailing from a country of merchants, Lebanese citizens complain loudly that the Syrian occupation enabled Syrian politicians' corrupt business interests, as well as the multitudes of Syrian guest workers, to ravage the Lebanese economy.

Hariri's dramatic assassination dealt a huge blow to Lebanon's emerging tourism industry. In the mean time, anxiety and mourning after the bomb meant that Lebanese citizens checked their own entertainment spending. Three months onwards, the Lebanese widely affirm that while politics may take some time to sort itself out, Lebanon's businesses needed business.

The sister of Hariri and the wife of Opposition leader Walid Jumblatt jointly organised a week-long "Unity Festival" to lure consumers back to Beirut's downtown, featuring everything from a "Waiters' Marathon" to a national farmers market, with plenty of celebrity singers alongside. Advertising rhetoric frequently calls upon citizens' sense of patriotism: "Show your love for Lebanon," reads one ad. "Eat sandwiches at Lina's."

Beside the cacophony of slogans proclaiming "independence!", both economic and political, the term "democracy" scarcely raises a peep. For one thing, Lebanon has had a form of democracy for decades. Its major shortcoming, in many eyes, is the particular Lebanese "confessional" system that allocates political positions according to religious sect – a feature that will still be intact for the election. Additionally, many Lebanese hope that the electoral system's other weakness, Syrian foul play, was made moot by the Syrian departure.

But the word choice indicates a wide Lebanese suspicion towards the facile labelling and forceful insertion of "democracy". Some feel that the dogged American insistence on the democratic mantra has made the term a cliché: "They gave Iraq a delivery democracy, like a pizza," Bashir, a manager of a clothing store, tells me: "The Iraqis have no experience with political parties and real Opposition, so of course the democratic process will fail." Ziad, an electricity company employee, agrees. "There's war in Iraq now, and there will be another dictator."

Lebanese also profess that democracy is too complex an institu-

tion to become a policy sound-bite. "We want true democracy, free from foreign intervention, but if it happens overnight it will be a mess," Nour tells me. Besides, it seems that the USA is hardly a credible democratic champion. "Elections are never fair, not even in the USA. Look at Al Gore," Bashir says.

Does it matter that the T-shirts on Lebanese streets proclaim "independence" and "intifada", not "revolution"? So what if amongst all the cries of reviving the "economy", no one in Lebanon is chanting "democracy" nearly as fervently as the White House? The disparity between Lebanese and Western rhetoric could just be a question of semantics: Independence implies self-determination, which promotes democracy.

But this difference in naming signifies a deeper disparity in the ways the West and Lebanon understand the past three months' events. This dissimilarity may only increase with time. As an episode recedes in history, terminology often gives meaning to events, not the other way around.

Brand names provide a mental shortcut. The "Cedar Revolution" is a quick mode for the West to classify Lebanon's movement alongside the uprisings in Georgia and the Ukraine: popular campaigns, inspired by Western models of free speech and authentic democracy, to unseat corrupt political structures. For a White House bemoaning the former Lebanese government's acquiescence to the demands of Hizbullah and its catering to a rogue Syria, it's a great image (and too bad about the Cedar icon's controversy). On the other hand, the omnipresence of the Lebanese slogan "independence" reinforces a very Lebanese notion of Lebanese exceptionalism. And "Intifada" conjures up another struggle – this one is not a feather in the American policy machine's cap. Both sides, the Lebanese and the West, can celebrate this spring's historic developments. But as the details begin to fade, the two disparate labels will enable two incongruent recollections of the movement.

On the one hand, it was an event that confirmed the American promotion of worldwide democratic revolution; on the other, it was an event that embodied the Arab aspiration of independence from outside oppression. With this discord, how can the "logical next step" for both sides possibly be harmonious?

(Reprinted with permission from YaleGlobal Online [http://yaleglobal.yale.edu] a publication of the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization.)

India has been exciting the world's imagination for sometime and many investors have begun to have a fresh look at the country and explore its potentials as an alternative to China.

George Evans, the director of international equities at the Oppenheimer Funds, Inc is one of them, who has

been "much more enthused about India than China".

International investors want growth with protection for their shareholders and India seems attractive because its legal system including property and contract law is well developed. Evans was quoted as saying in a Canadian newspaper,

MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

# When will Israel leave Gaza?

Evidence is mounting that Israel is, as feared, buying time and consolidating its hold on the big West Bank settlement blocs.

Ian Black

ARIEL SHARON's decision to put off Israel's "disengagement" from the Gaza Strip is just the latest worrying sign that the path to peace with the Palestinians is going to be a lot bumpier than expected. Originally scheduled for July, the pullback has now been postponed to mid-August, after Tisha Be'Av, the fast when Orthodox Jews mourn the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians and Romans. This deference to religious sensitivities — by a secular Prime Minister — is a reminder that even for settlers drawn to Gaza by cheap loans and pristine Mediterranean beaches rather than any biblical or ideological pull, abandoning it is another calamitous, historic loss.

Yet though the majority of Israelis support withdrawal, evidence is mounting that it is, as feared, intended to buy time and consolidate the hold on the big West Bank settlement blocs, cutting off Jerusalem and keeping Palestinians behind the "security fence" in disconnected enclaves that cannot be a viable state.

## Bad omens

True, February's ceasefire has just about held, breaking the cycle of suicide bombings and targeted killings, but the omens are bad.

Mr. Sharon suspended prisoner releases because Mahmoud Abbas, struggling with Yasser Arafat's legacy, has failed to disarm militant groups. Successes for the Islamist movement Hamas in the Palestinian local elections have introduced a new complication: it's an impressive achievement for Middle Eastern democracy — but, unlike in Iraq and Lebanon, not one George W. Bush, or Mr. Sharon, will welcome.

Israelis, worrying introspectively about the future, are pondering whether it is wise to leave Gaza to Hamas — its flags flying in triumph over the neat cottages and swimming pools of 20 abandoned settlements. Hamas — the Arabic acronym means Islamic Resistance Movement — cannot accept, as the PLO has, the Zionist right to even partial possession of what it sees as Muslim patrimony.

But its appeal to Palestinians fed up with the Fatah establishment, 38 years since the 1967 occupation, is undeniable. And while its ability to deliver local services and clean politics may matter more than ideology, the ideology won't go away.

## Monument to failure

Hamas, above all, is a monument to failure. Back in the 1970s, after a younger, slimmer General Sharon crushed resistance in Gaza, the Israelis built up Muslim organisations as a counterweight to the PLO, Fatah and the Left. But what was sown in mosques and clinics was reaped in blood.

Wasted time and missed opportunities meant that by the time the first *intifada* erupted in 1987, Hamas was a force to be reckoned with — which Yitzhak Rabin's Labour Government could not crush by mass deportations to Lebanon.

Now it is part of reality, and likely to do well in July's elections to the Palestinian Parliament. If Israel does not want to deal with Hamas, it will have to try harder to help Abbas deliver an independent state.

Gaza's next big moment will be when James Wolfensohn, former head of the World Bank, arrives to look at post-withdrawal needs. Sensibly, he is including the West Bank — underlining the point that Gaza must be the beginning, not the end, of Israeli concessions.

Things will get interesting when, Gaza evacuated, pressure builds for a return to the "road map" to a comprehensive peace. That will be the time for Mr. Bush to finally spend the "political capital" he has pledged.

Gaza, a guttural "Ghaza" in Arabic and "Aza" in Hebrew, echoes the Hebrew word "Azazel" — hell. It is hellish for more than a million Palestinians living in misery in the world's most densely populated place and, in different ways, for the Israelis who have ruled it for far too long.

Leaving it should be a cause for celebration, not lamentation. But what happens next will matter much, much more.

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17 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

# WOMEN GET THE VOTE, FINALLY

## Kuwait rights age-old wrong

Associated Press

KUWAIT CITY, May 16. — For the first time in Kuwait's history, parliament today approved women's political rights, clearing the way for them to run in parliamentary elections.

However, an article included in the Bill requires that any woman politician or voter must abide by Islamic laws. It was not clear what limits this may put on women's rights.

The Bill was approved in a 35-23 vote with one abstention, bringing scores of women activists in the gallery to their feet in applause. Some ululated and began singing the national anthem.

"I am overexcited. I can't believe this," said activist Ms Rola Dashti, who said she would run in the next parliamentary election in 2007. "I'm

starting my campaign as of today." Ms Dashti said she was not concerned by the vague reference to Islamic laws, saying it probably just meant separate polling stations and not an Islamic dress code. "They can't impose veils on voters," she added.

The Bill comes too late for women to participate in municipal elections in June. The next polls they can vote and run in will be the 2007 parliamentary elections.

Kuwait's Cabinet had asked for the vote earlier today in a surprise move after attempts had been stymied by fundamentalist lawmakers, who successfully inserted the Islamic law article in the final Bill.

Women activists have for years been pushing for their right to vote and run for parliament, but several attempts to give them political rights have over the years been defeated in

the House.

Ms Massouma al-Mubarak, a political analyst and professor at Kuwait University, said the parliament approval was long overdue. "This is the right thing to do," she said. "It is no favour from anyone." She, however, added that any conditions put on the Bill would be a violation of the Constitution.

"When you put conditions only for women, this is extra constitutional. The Constitution puts no conditions on anyone," she said. "No dress code, no Islamic law, and no nonsense."

Although Kuwaiti women have reached high positions in oil, education and the diplomatic corps, the country's 1962 election law limited political rights to men. And among men, only those over 21 years and who are not members of the police or the military are allowed to vote.

17 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

# Fatah prevails but Hamas gains in polls

## Complications foreseen for Mahmoud Abbas' efforts for peace with Israel

**RAMALLAH:** President Mahmoud Abbas's ruling Fatah faction survived a challenge by Hamas in Palestinian local elections but the Islamist militant group opposed to peace with Israel showed it is an increasingly potent political force.

Unofficial results released on Friday showed Hamas making strong inroads in key urban centres in the West Bank and Gaza, an indicator it could do well in this summer's parliamentary ballot, possibly complicating Mr. Abbas's peace efforts.

Fatah won control of 52 of the 84 municipal councils being contested in the West Bank and Gaza in Thursday's vote, while

Hamas won 24, the Palestinian Election Committee said. Smaller factions took four councils, and four were undecided.

Hamas disputed the results, saying it had captured councils in 34 towns and villages.

Mahmoud al-Zahar, a Hamas leader in Gaza, said many of the independent candidates who won council seats in the West Bank actually belonged to Hamas but chose not to run as members of the group for security reasons.

A team of European observers said except for a few minor problems, the elections had been fair and democratic, meeting a condition set by international aid donors. — Reuters



**UPBEAT:** Hamas' supporters celebrate their party's victory in the local elections, at Beit Lahya town in northern Gaza Strip on Friday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

07 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

THE HINDU



# Junctions and roadblocks in Arab politics

Hamid Ansari

“THE DISTURBING aspects of Arab democracy,” wrote a columnist in *Haaretz* recently, “are its implications for Israel.” These were listed: advent of democracy in Arab countries would make Israel lose its unique character and the “shared values” with America emanating from it; given the freedom of choice, Arab voters might elect Islamist “extremists”; Arab opinion, as per the most recent Arab Human Development Report, is trenchant in its criticism of Israeli actions in occupied territories and reflection of it in elected bodies would be worrying news. “A far-reaching soul-searching is necessary on the question of how Israel will be affected by political reforms in the region.”

Paradoxically enough, one impulse for Arab democracy comes from an Israeli politician close to official Washington. It is the thesis of Nathan Sharansky that since democracies are inherently peaceable, Arab democracies would embrace Israel. Spokespersons of Arab democratic groups, on the other hand, continue to bracket domestic freedoms with the liberation of Jerusalem.

Promotion of participatory governance is not an exercise in a vacuum. The link between a reform agenda and progress in the peace process was highlighted by Foreign Minister Bernard Bot during the Dutch Presidency of the European Union last year.

## Major premises

Unstated major premises underlie these perceptions. The principal Israeli concern is to implement the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, sustain pressure on the new Palestinian leadership, increase the pressure on the Hamas, de-

The reform process, it would seem, will remain state-driven in the immediate future. The external moorings of the Arab state may need to be reinforced to stabilise domestic dislocations that may occur in the interim.

fect to the maximum extent American moves for implementing the roadmap, divert external interest in the peace process by focussing on developments in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Egypt.

In a word, all steps towards a Final Settlement are to be deterred. Painting an alternate scenario, Efraim Helevy, former head of Mossad and now National Security Adviser, has advocated a long-term U.S. military presence in the heart of the Arab world (including Palestinian areas).

For a change the attention of the eastern Arab world is riveted on matters electoral — in Lebanon in May, in Palestinian areas in July, in Egypt in September. The issue in Lebanon is ostensibly domestic and in reality geo-political: the role of the Hizbullah and the orientation of Lebanese politics. In areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority, attention is riveted on the gains likely to be made by the Hamas. In Egypt, the issue is one-party, one-man rule.

Imponderables surround the next step. What would happen if the Hizbullah reemerges as a credible political entity, if the Hamas wins a majority or a substantial number of seats, if the Egyptian dispensation is shaken? *Al Ahram* feels “the elections reflect current struggles between

those who want to cooperate with the U.S.-Israeli scheme and those who oppose it.” The message of the modest but significant Saudi exercise in municipal elections, revival of the practice that prevailed in Hejaz 80 years earlier, is not to be missed. A “Golden List” of candidates endorsed by the Ulema carried the day. Could these, as David Hirst put it, lead to a paradox: “Imperial America will not like the democratic Arabia that missionary America will have helped to spawn.”

The visit of Crown Prince Abdullah to the Bush ranch at Crawford is noteworthy. It resulted in a resolve “to forge a new relationship” based on accommodation of mutual concern. The Saudis reiterated their “call on all those who teach and propagate the Islamic faith to adhere strictly to the Islamic message of peace, moderation and tolerance; and reject that which deviates from those principles.”

In return for this encyclical, and an endorsement of “an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank,” Mr. Bush applauded the Saudi reform programme and promised an entry to the WTO before the end of 2005. To drive the point home, the U.S. “thanked” Crown Prince Abdullah for his peace plan of March 2002 but

did not endorse it!

The complexity of strategic games now in progress is evident. At state level, each player wishes to outfox the other, concede the minimum and extract the maximum. On another plane, public perceptions are assertive of principles and exploratory of the limits that can be reached. The protests in Bahrain and Egypt are one manifestation of it; the violence in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are another.

A more ominous happening is the trial and conviction this week of 30 Omanis for plotting to overthrow the Sultan and install an Islamic government. The charge sheet makes evident the indigenous nature of the group. It was said in defence of the accused that they sought to propagate the teachings of “Ibadi Islam” — the earliest and most principled case of dissidence in Muslim history.

The reform process, it would seem, will remain state-driven in the immediate future. The external moorings of the Arab state may need to be reinforced to stabilise domestic dislocations that may occur in the interim. Constraints on autonomy of decision-making would be attributed to imperatives of globalisation.

The National Press Club, Washington, was recently the venue of a discussion among “insiders” on nuances of policy on the peace process. Fatal mistakes were identified in the Clinton period; these include change in “the vocabulary and the vernacular with respect to settlement activity,” and acting as “Israel’s lawyer.” It was felt the present time is not appropriate for diplomatic initiatives since Abu Mazen has the intention to do a deal with Israel but lacks capabilities while Ariel Sharon has the capability but lacks the intention.

The Bush administration, said a participant, has a “preference for promoting democracy rather than promoting peace”; if a way is not found to promote both at the same time “we are likely to end up without democracy and without peace.” Another participant was critical of the step-by-step approach to a two-state solution: “Sharon would like either long-term interim agreement or a Palestinian state with provisional borders, which may be the same thing. Abu Mazen has said he can’t accept anything short of a final status agreement.” President Bush, while formally committing himself to a two-state solution, is “ambivalent” about the options and does not consider the matter a strategic priority.

## Unavoidable conclusion

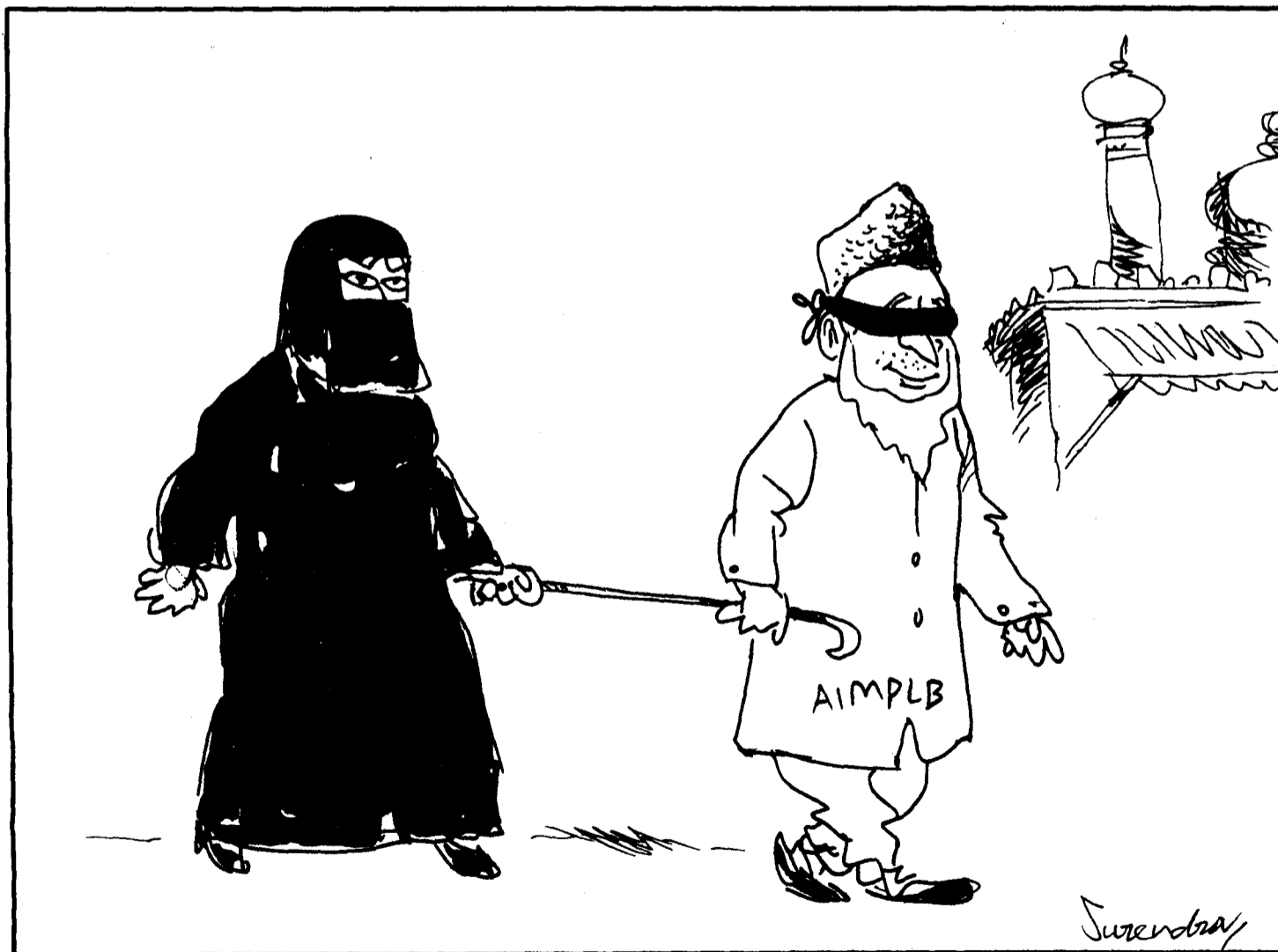
The conclusion is unavoidable that movement at Israel’s pace suits American strategic interests. Official declarations signed with Arab leaders reiterate the need for a just, negotiated, settlement; Arab public opinion perceives the *status quo* as unjust, imposed, and perpetuation of a regime of settlements.

Rhetoric, in the meantime, abounds. The U.S., an ardent supporter of the President writes, “has signalled its willingness to gamble on the young, the new and the unknown.” The focus is also on public diplomacy. A Beirut editor, supportive of the cause, has offered some practical advice on how to go about it. Emphasis, he says, should be on style and mannerism, credibility, consistency, clarity of motives, contextual relevance, legitimacy, and avoidance of militarism.

More evidence regarding militarism is contained in the text of the secret memorandum that Prime Minister Tony Blair was compelled to make public this week. It was written on July 23, 2002, and contains the assessment that “Bush has made up his mind to take military action” and that “intelligence and facts were being fixed around policy.” One last sentence in this remarkable document is noteworthy: “There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action!”

(The writer is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.)

## CARTOONSCAPE





# Putin firm on missile sale to Syria

Donald Macintyre in Jerusalem

## To teacher with love

April 28. — The Russian President, Mr Vladimir Putin, today made clear his determination to go ahead with the sale of anti-aircraft missiles to Syria despite strong pressure from Israeli leaders to revoke it.

Neither Russia nor Israel made any effort to disguise the open disagreement on this and other issues in talks which both Mr Putin and the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ariel Sharon, nevertheless went out of their way to depict as cementing improved relations between the two countries.

In civilities that went beyond the routinely diplomatic, Mr Sharon, whose parents were born in Russia, today greeted Mr Putin in Russian and told him "he should feel among brothers" on his visit to Israel. Mr Putin reflected that he was glad to

JERUSALEM, April 28. — Hoping to rekindle childhood memories, Mr Vladimir Putin has invited his school teacher Ms Mina Yuditzkiya to dinner, 32 years after her immigration to Israel. Ms Yuditzkiya taught German to the Russian leader in Leningrad, rechristened St Petersburg after the collapse of the USSR, the *Yediot Ahronoth* daily reported. — PTI

be visiting at the time of the Passover and the Orthodox Christian Easter and declared: "I would like to wish the Jewish People well with all my heart; I wish joy for the entire Jewish family."

But on arms for Syria, on the best way of securing peace in West Asia, and on Russia's help for Iran's nuclear programme — help which the Russian President insisted was confined to peaceful uses — the

talks did little to remove the sharp differences which remain between the two governments.

Mr Putin defended his decision to sell SA-18 missiles to Syria and disclosed in talks with the Israeli President, Mr Katsav, for the first time that he had vetoed a contract also to sell longer range — 185 mile-Iskander missiles to Damascus on the grounds that Israel would not be able to intercept them.

By contrast, the anti-aircraft missiles being sold "cannot reach Israeli territory", he said, adding: "To come within their range, you have to attack Syria. Do you want to do that?"

Responding to Israeli complaints that the weapons could fall into the hands of Hizbollah, Mr Putin said the missiles could not be shoulder-fired and would not work if uncoupled from the jeeps on which they were mounted. — **The Independent**

29 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

# Syrian troops leave Lebanese soil

**Robert Fisk  
in Mianaa (Lebanon)**

April 26. — After 29 years in Lebanon, the very last Syrian soldiers — men who were unborn when their army arrived — were trucked through the Mianaa border station in Lebanon, making victory signs and waving. What victory? What was there to wave about? Mission accomplished. That was what we were supposed to believe this was, an army of peacekeepers returning triumphantly home to Syria after decades of sacrifices. They even took their statues with them. Some Lebanese didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Those who cried were able to visit the dungeons where, years ago, they were held and tortured. Those who smiled included General Ali Habib, chief of staff of the Syrian army and the much more sinister figure of General Rustom Ghazale, Syria's head of military intelligence in Lebanon. He didn't smile very much and doesn't have much to smile about because the UN investigation team



HOME COMING: Syrians welcome home their compatriot soldiers at Jdaidet Yabous border post on Tuesday. — AFP

due to arrive here next week wants to know more about what Gen. Ghazale knew about the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri on 14 February. Gen. Ghazale knows all, the Lebanese believe.

But yesterday it was Gen. Habib who did the talking, praising the 250 Syrian special forces standing before him on the old French airbase at Rayak where the troops who have died in

Lebanon had been prevailed upon to thank their military guests for their overlong stay. Gen. Habib talked of sacrifice and laid a wreath before a newly built memorial to Syrian troops who have died in

Lebanon since 1976. None mentioned a figure, of course, only the battle against Israel which they fought — and in two cases won — in 1982. The true figure of Syrian dead is in fact around 12,000.

The Syrian army, which came here on an Arab League peacekeeping mandate in 1976, was not humiliated in its last hours. The Lebanese army paraded hundreds of troops alongside the red-bereted Syrians and both presented arms to their respective commanders.

A Syrian commander told the Lebanese troops: "Brothers in arms, so long." The soldiers responded: "So long." A Lebanese commander then addressed the Syrians: "Brothers in arms, thank you for your sacrifices." His soldiers repeated: "Thank you for your sacrifices."

There was a tinny Lebanese band and a rather more melodious band from the Syrian army which struck up *The Keel Row*, to which the Syrians bounced along in time to the music, running past the reviewing stand of Lebanese and Syrian officers.

Across the border in Syria, it all looked good on the state-run TV, not least because a party of Syrian civilians had been trucked to the frontier to show their soldiers with flowers. — **The Independent**

# “The future doesn't hang on a single man”

Israeli Vice-Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, says his Labour party will leave the government if Israel halts the process of peace with the Palestinians.

Chris McGreal

W. A. ...  
S HIMON PERES does not like talking about the past. History, the Israeli Vice-Prime Minister and Labour party leader says, bores him. “I never think back. Since I cannot change the past, why should I deal with it? You have to really deal with the future,” he said in an interview.

Those Israelis who cast the Nobel peace prize winner as one of the “Oslo criminals” for attempting to make peace with the Palestinians a decade ago might say he cannot bear to reflect on his failure. But the octogenarian former Prime Minister is almost as reluctant to talk about a not-too-distant future; what the Israelis call “the day after.”

## ‘Disengagement plan’

Only the very pessimistic — or optimistic for those who share the views of the hard core of Jewish settlers — now doubt that Ariel Sharon intends to carry through his “unilateral disengagement plan” to pull out of the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli Prime Minister has staked his political future on removing the 8,000 Jewish settlers living there. The Israeli public overwhelmingly backs the move as a step toward “separation” from the Palestinians, and Mr. Peres has taken his Labour party into the government to ensure it goes ahead.

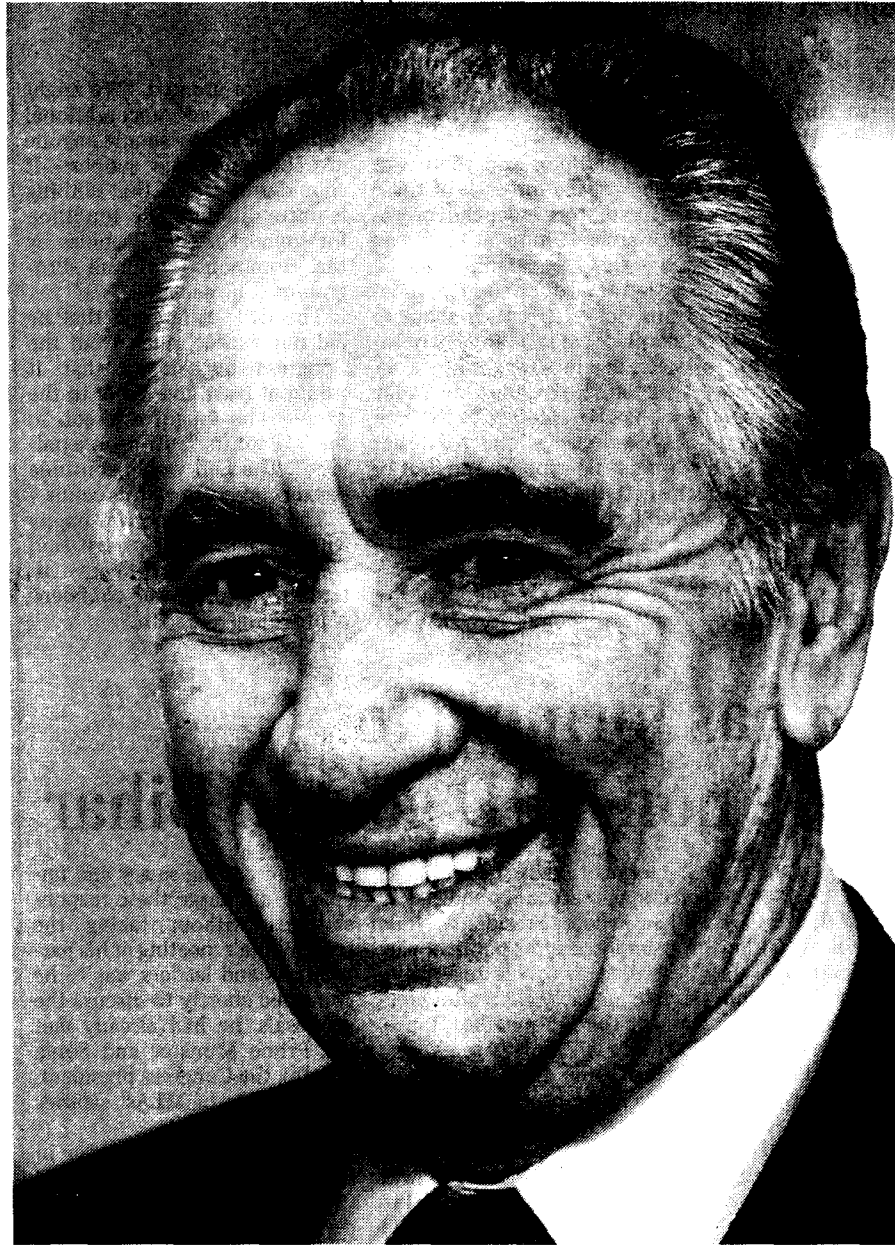
But then what? Is Gaza the beginning of a process that will also see Israel withdraw from most of the West Bank and the establishment of a real state for the Palestinians? Or is it Gaza first and last, as the Palestinians fear, with disengagement a cover for Mr. Sharon to entrench more than 400,000 settlers living in the rest of the occupied territories while unilaterally imposing the borders of a rump Palestinian homeland that would remain in Israel's grip?

Mr. Sharon is not saying, but Mr. Peres may hold the key. “The only reason I am in the government is the peace process. We don't have any other reason,” he said, adding that the party would leave the government if Israel halted the peace process.

“One thing I believe is that the future doesn't hang on a single man, whether he's a Prime Minister or anybody else ... Clearly it's not the man that decides about reality, it's the reality that decides about the leader.”

## ‘Security fence’

By rights, it should be Mr. Peres' Labour party that is leading the charge from Gaza. Under a different leader, the party cam-



Shimon Peres ... commitment to the peace process.

paigned in the general election two years ago on a pledge to unilaterally pull out of Gaza, and it first proposed building a “security fence” along the West Bank border. Mr. Sharon used to dismiss both measures as a victory for terrorism.

The Prime Minister stole the tactics when

his support began to ebb, but the manoeuvre deeply divided his Likud party and now he is forced to rely on Labour to make his disengagement plan possible.

Despite criticism from his own party, Mr. Peres says he will keep the administration afloat so long as there is a return to the

United States-led “road map.”

“The day after there will be an extreme difference between us and Likud. Labour will say go for the road map. Likud will say it too but only after the Palestinians destroy the infrastructure of terror,” he said.

But he is in no great hurry to get there. “If you have a brilliant plan without a majority or a mediocre plan with a majority, you have to pay attention to the majority, not to the brilliance of the proposals. And for the first time here there was created a majority.”

## Nervous Palestinians

Talk of moving slowly makes the Palestinians nervous and suspicious. They say Israel uses delay to tighten its grip on territory by creating “new facts on the ground.”

“It seems the Israeli negotiations are on the basis of making peace among themselves,” said the Palestinian chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat.

“My analysis is that Mr. Sharon is trying to cancel the third phase of the road map that specifies Israel has to end the occupation and negotiate the status of Jerusalem and refugees. Everything I see is going in that direction.”

The Palestinian leadership wants Israel to state clearly that the final objective is a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Sharon's allies say that even if that is his intent he cannot say so publicly without inflaming opposition to the withdrawal from Gaza and provoking a further revolt in his Likud party that might bring down the government.

## Two key issues

Mr. Peres doubts that the Israeli public is ready to go that far. “I'm not sure. I think I would wait on the issue of Jerusalem ... and also the issue of refugees. These are the two things that may prevent us from having a majority for the time being.”

So is Mr. Peres confident that, after the pullout from Gaza is complete, Mr. Sharon will return to the road map and negotiate a settlement?

“I don't have a reason to deny what the Prime Minister says but I believe a combination of what he said and what is happening on the ground will really push all of us to continue the peace process.”

“You can't stop it. If you reach the middle of the lake and you feel tired, don't swim back,” he said. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

23 APR 2005

THE HINDU

## 21 Kurdish rebels killed in clash

**DIYARBAKIR (TURKEY):** Four members of the Turkish security forces and 21 Kurdish rebels were killed in a clash during a security operation in the southeast of the country, local officials said on Friday. The death toll from Thursday's clash had earlier stood at three soldiers and an unknown number of rebels. Fighting broke out when a group of outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels responded with fire after they were ordered to surrender by security forces near the town of Pervari in Siirt province and the town of Eruh in Sirnak, the Sirnak governor's office said. Several guns, hand grenades, mines, rounds of ammunition and explosives were seized in rebel hide-outs in the area, a communique said. Security forces were pressing on with their sweep of the region which began on April 12, it added. The PKK waged a bloody campaign for self-rule in southeastern Turkey between 1984 and 1999. The conflict claimed more than 36,000 lives and was the source of accusations of gross human rights violations on



both sides. The PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire in 1999 after its leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured and tried in Turkey, but it called off the truce last year, raising tensions. — AFP

## Kyrgyzstan not for more foreign forces

Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW:** The "tulip revolution" leaders in Kyrgyzstan are against any build-up of foreign military presence in the Central Asian republic.

"I do not think there is any need to deploy additional foreign forces in Kyrgyzstan," the Prime Minister and acting President, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, said after talks with the visiting U.S. Defence Secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld, in Bishkek. Mr. Rumsfeld said the U.S. air force base at Ganci in Kyrgyzstan will remain till the completion of the war in Afghanistan. Earlier, U.S. de-

fence officials suggested the U.S. bases in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will stay beyond the Afghanistan campaign. Mr. Bakiyev also poured cold water on U.S. plans to deploy several AWACS spy planes at the Ganci base. He said the issue was not discussed during his talks with Mr. Rumsfeld. The U.S. military has KC-135 refuelling aircraft and C-130 cargo planes, as well as about 1,000 troops stationed at Ganci. Russia also has an air force base in Kyrgyzstan, and the new Kyrgyz leaders have pledged to keep both the Russian and the U.S. bases in place.

# Fire and rage in the shadow of Abu Ghraib

By Rory Carroll

**BAGHDAD, APRIL 10.** An orange sun set over the city, casting just enough light to finish the kickabout, when the players heard the unmistakable sound of rockets whooshing overhead.

Seconds later the missiles slammed into Abu Ghraib, the jail adjoining their football pitch. Explosions resounded across the complex and more rockets launched. The Americans fired back.

The 25 children and seven adults sprinted to a wall enclosing the school grounds and huddled together, waiting for the storm to pass. But the attack intensified and bullets peppered closer so the group scrambled into a communal toilet. They cowered in darkness as hits on their shelter showered dust and masonry fragments. Some of the children started to sob, vomit and soil themselves.

"We put our hands in the children's mouths to stop them crying. It was the most difficult time of my life," said Abu Mohammad (38).

For 12 hours the group crouched in the three square metre space, murmuring prayers as car bombs detonated outside, until dawn broke and they emerged, waving a white T-shirt, to a scene of devastation.

## Demand for withdrawal

Last Saturday's attack on Abu Ghraib drew worldwide headlines as one of the boldest militant operations in Iraq, which wounded 44 U.S. troops and underlined the vulnerabilities of the occupation two

years after the invasion.

Thousands of Shias loyal to the militant cleric Moqtada al-Sadr gathered in Baghdad yesterday, the anniversary of the city's fall and the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue, to demand an American withdrawal. It is a wish even closer to the heart of Arab Sunnis, who form the insurgency's backbone. The attack on Abu Ghraib, a symbolic target since last year's inmate abuse scandal, underlined a shift from hit-and-run ambushes to large-scale assaults.

To tackle the sprawling complex 32 km west of the capital, which doubles as a U.S. base, they used almost every type of weapon in their armoury. An internet statement purportedly from the militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi claimed it was the work of his group, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and depicted a heroic, slick engagement which lasted several hours and deployed seven suicide car bombers. "Then the merciful brigades and Muslim soldiers clashed with the infidels."

This version, according to senior coalition commanders, was aimed at sympathisers in the Gulf who funded the insurgency and expected to see results before stumping up again. The Americans painted a less dramatic picture, saying mortar rounds and rockets were followed by attacks by gunmen on foot. At one point, defenders destroyed a suicide car bomb before it reached the walls and rapid-response troops backed by Apache helicopters and artillery repulsed the rest of the attack after 40 minutes. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005



**QUIT IRAQ CALL:** Followers of the radical Shia cleric Moqtada Sad gather in their thousands calling for the U.S. forces to leave their country, near the Freedom Statue in Baghdad. — AFP

11 APR 2005

THE HINDU

# Crisis in Lebanon

By Chinmaya R. Gharekhan

**T**HE ASSASSINATION of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri, on February 14, 2005 has hit the small Mediterranean nation like a small tsunami. The impact of the forces it has unleashed is difficult to assess now but it will surely be felt beyond the confines of Lebanon. Unless the various political and religious groups display maturity and wisdom, the country could slip back into a civil war like the one it experienced from 1975 until 1990.

Lebanon has a population of about four million, just over a quarter of Delhi's population. There are as many as 18 religious groups, but for political purposes, it is divided into roughly equal proportions among Sunnis, Shias and Christians. The Druze, a sect of Shias, constitute around 10 per cent of the population, and are extremely influential, thanks mainly to the leadership of the Jumblat family.

The Lebanese Constitution provides for safeguards to ensure that no single confessional group, as religious groups are described there, monopolises power. Thus, the President has to be a Christian, the Speaker a Shia and the Prime Minister a Sunni. The Commander of the Armed Forces must be a Christian and the troops have to maintain a ratio of 50:50 between Muslims and Christians. All these arrangements may not seem to conform to commonly-understood democratic norms but they have worked for Lebanon, so far.

The current crisis owes its origin to the amendment of the Constitution in September 2004 which made it possible for Emile Lahoud, the Christian Maronite President, to be re-elected for an additional, but abbreviated, three-year term. Rafiq Hariri was most reluctant to support the constitutional amendment but, according to all Lebanese accounts, was prevailed upon by Syria to go along. Hariri resigned following the constitutional amendment. Soon thereafter, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1559 which called for the withdrawal of all foreign, meaning Syrian, forces from

*Unless the political and religious groups display wisdom in tackling the crisis that developed after Rafiq Hariri's assassination, Lebanon could slip back into a civil war like the one it experienced from 1975 until 1990.*

Lebanon. Hariri was widely believed to have worked with France and the United States in having the resolution pushed through the Security Council. His popularity with the Lebanese people increased beyond the Sunni population. The history of the Syrian presence in Lebanon is quite complex. Syrian forces first went to Lebanon in the 1970s to protect the Christian population and stayed on after Israel occupied a swath of southern Lebanon and established its own security zone inside Lebanese territory in 1982. The presence of the Syrian troops was legitimised by the Taef agreement in 1989. However, when Israel vacated southern Lebanon in 2000, the Lebanese people thought there was no longer any justification in Syria maintaining a presence in their country.

Hariri had a sophisticated system of personal security. His convoy always consisted of three identical black Mercedes vehicles, one of which he drove himself. His assassination is further confirmation that there is no such thing as foolproof security. The identity of the assassins remains a mystery. The day after Hariri's murder, the Security Council asked the Secretary-General to "follow closely the situation in Lebanon and to report urgently on the circumstance, causes and consequences of this terrorist act". It was perhaps not wise to give such a broad, political mandate to a fact-finding mission which was headed by a police officer. The mission, sure enough, did not reach any conclusion regarding the causes of the assassination nor about the identity of the perpetrators. It only reported that the assassination took place in an atmosphere polarised around the Syrian influence in Lebanon. The Security Council will shortly ask the Secretary-General to establish an international investiga-

tion commission to get at the truth.

The circumstances of Hariri's death have galvanised and united hitherto rival sections of Lebanese society into demanding the truth — *Haqiqa* in Arabic. All sorts of conspiracy theories are doing the rounds in Beirut, but no one in any responsible position, even in the Opposition, is pointing the finger at Syria, though nearly all of them want Syrian forces to leave Lebanon. Syria vehemently denies any role in Hariri's assassination and reminds everyone that it had absolutely nothing to gain from it. Lebanon's President, Emile Lahoud, whose extension in office Hariri did his best to prevent, told me that whoever killed Hariri was an enemy of Lebanon.

Hariri, in his death, has emerged as an even larger figure than he was in his lifetime. He came to occupy the office of Prime Minister after the end of the brutal and brutalising civil war. A self-made billionaire who made his money in Saudi Arabia, Hariri rebuilt Lebanon after the civil war. He invited foreign corporations to invest in Lebanon and made huge strides in recreating Lebanon of the pre-civil war era. Beirut once again became a popular tourist resort for the Arab world.

International media flocked to Beirut which regained its proud position of being the intellectual and media centre of West Asia. Hariri started his political career as the leader of the Sunnis and ended up, more so after his death, by being acknowledged as the leader of certainly a large majority of the Lebanese people. Nabih Berry, the leader of the Shia group, Amal, and Speaker of Parliament, told me that Hariri was the only person he knew who combined in himself three assets: immense wealth, immense ability and immense dynamism.

Lebanon is very tense today. In the wake of Hariri's death, the government of the day resigned but the Prime Minister was asked to form a new government. He has the necessary majority to do so, but he is insisting on forming a government of national unity together with the Opposition. The Opposition, however, is unwilling to support this. If the government is not formed within a few days — it might be too late already — the elections, due by the end of May, might have to be postponed. The Opposition does not want that either. In fact, it is accusing the Prime Minister of deliberately delaying forming the Government so that the elections can be postponed. One possible solution being considered is the formation of a 'neutral' government or a government of 'wise' men and women. Bahia Hariri, MP and sister of the late Prime Minister, is increasingly mentioned as a consensus prime ministerial candidate.

Another notable feature of the current scene is the respect in which the Hizbollah, the Party of Allah, is held by nearly all sections of society. The Lebanese people might be unhappy with the Syrian presence on their soil, but they deeply resented Israeli occupation of a sizeable chunk of their territory from 1982 until 2000. The Hizbollah is given the credit by everyone, including the present government, for the liberation of south Lebanon.

Furthermore, the Hizbollah is not using its militia for any violent activity in the country. Indeed, its members are increasingly merging into the mainstream of political life. Already, a dozen Hizbollah members are in the present Parliament; their numbers are expected to increase after the next election. The external demand for disarming the members of the militia has also been substantially muted in recent weeks.

Terrorist attacks, apparently targeting Christians, have taken place in recent weeks in which a couple of Indians have been the innocent victims. No one in Lebanon believes the country will once again descend into a civil war. One can only hope that they are right.

11 APR 2005

THE HINDU



# Bush, Sharon to discuss Gaza pullout, settlements

JEFFREY HELLER  
WACO, TEXAS, APRIL 11

**P**RESIDENT George W. Bush hosts Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at his Texas ranch on Monday to reaffirm US support for an Israeli pullout from Gaza, but will also raise concerns about West Bank settlement growth.

Bush's stated intention to bring up with Sharon a project still in its preliminary stages to expand the largest Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank, could inject a rare note of discord into the talks between the two allies.

But US and Israeli officials played down any notion that Bush would try to sour Sharon's first taste of homestead hospitality at the Presidential spread in Crawford, a visit capping a year of political manoeuvring in Israel for the Gaza plan's survival.

An outbreak of violence in the Gaza Strip could provide the backdrop for Sharon to try to focus the summit on his bedrock demand, echoed by Washington, that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas disarm and dissolve militant groups.

"They are pointing a gun to (Abbas's) head," a senior Israeli official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said about

Israeli PM Ariel Sharon is welcomed to Texas by US Chief of Protocol Donald Eisenstat (in flat) on Monday. Reuters



Palestinian militant groups that fired dozens of mortar bombs at Jewish settlements in Gaza over the weekend.

This followed the killing of three unarmed Palestinian youths by Israeli troops in disputed circumstances in southern Gaza. The violence was the most serious in the area

since Abbas and Sharon declared a ceasefire at a February 8 summit.

"The firing (of the mortars) was a flagrant violation of the understanding achieved at Sharm el-Sheikh and it will be a central issue to be raised in my talks with President Bush," an aide quoted Sharon as

## Israel says retaliatory fire could endanger truce

**JERUSALEM:** Israel warned Palestinians that retaliatory shelling by militants could collapse a two-month truce, as thousands brought three Gaza teenagers killed by Israeli soldiers to a cemetery.

The warnings came as thousands of Israeli police faced off in Jerusalem against a handful of Jewish extremists who had vowed to stop Israel's pullout from Gaza in the summer by converging on the most sensitive religious site in the region to Jews and Muslims.

The showdown forced Israel to divert troops from Gaza ahead of the planned meeting today between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and US President George W. Bush during which the Israeli Premier hopes to secure clear support for his Gaza pullout plan.

But on the plane to Texas, Sharon warned that a two-month truce is in danger after militants aimed dozens of mortars and rockets at Gaza's Jewish settlements in retaliation for the fatal shooting of the teenagers.

Sharon said the mortar and rocket fire "is a flagrant violation of the understandings" from his February truce summit with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, "and this will be a central issue to be raised in my talks with President Bush."

—AP/PTI

saying on the flight to Texas on Sunday. "Abbas is weak. He needs assistance, but you can only help someone who helps himself," said a senior Israeli official.

Abbas says he wants to co-opt militants with jobs in mainstream institutions, rather than try to suppress them, in an effort to avoid civil strife. Late on Sunday, Sharon met at his hotel in Waco, Texas, with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to prepare for the session with Bush at the ranch 25 miles away.

Israeli officials said they expected Bush to reaffirm his strong backing for the Gaza withdrawal slated for July, the first removal of Jewish settlements from occupied territory that Palestinians want for a state.

Sharon has promoted his plan domestically to remove all 21 settlements in Gaza and four of 120 in the West Bank by citing Bush's assurance a year ago that Israel would not be expected to give up some West Bank settlement blocs in future peace deals.

But Sharon, trying to blunt Rightist resistance to his plan, went a step too far for Washington by pledging to pursue construction of 3,500 homes for Israelis in a narrow corridor between the West Bank settlement of Maale Adumim and Jerusalem.

Palestinians fear the Maale Adumim project would largely cut off the West Bank, which would form the bulk of a viable state they seek, from the eastern Arab part of Jerusalem, which they want as its capital—a demand Israel rejects. They have called the plan an obstacle to peace.

Bush was expected to tell Sharon there can be no expansion of Jewish settlements under the US-devised "road map" peace plan. It calls for a freeze of Israeli "settlement activity" as part of mutual steps with the Palestinians leading to the creation of a Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

Israeli officials rushed to assure the United States there would be no new work at Maale Adumim for at least two years. Israeli Vice Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the controversy was "out of context, unnecessary and totally irrelevant" since Maale Adumim was only five minutes by car from Jerusalem and "we never said we would pull back to the '67 lines".

—Reuters

# SITUATION IN LEBANON

## Fears Of A Major Regional Conflict

By YEVGENY SATANOVSKY

It seems the situation in Lebanon has driven the Middle East to the brink of another war. After the 14 February assassination of Rafiq Hariri, the former premier and one of the richest men in Lebanon, his country and the region in general found themselves facing another crisis. Hariri, who was close to the French and Saudi leaders, opposed the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon. Although in September 2004, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1559 on the initiative of Paris and Washington, and which stipulated the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, no progress was made in this area until Hariri's murder.

### US-French congruence

His death made the problem worse. It forced both the Lebanese opposition and the international community, first of all the United States and France, to bring pressure to bear on Syria to accelerate the solution of the issue. Contrary to expectations, Russia did not side with Syria, which is part of America's "axis of evil", and urged Damascus to pull its troops out of Lebanon.

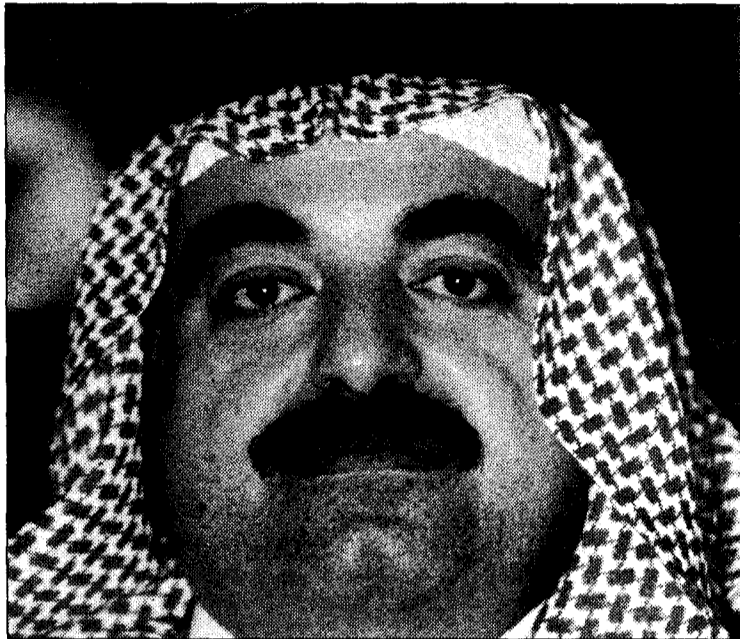
What consequences may Syria's implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 have? For the US, the existence of an Iranian-Syrian alliance supporting the anti-Israeli activity of the Lebanese Shia Hezbollah, recognised by America, Israel and now some European countries (for example, the Netherlands) as a terrorist organization is of great importance. This gives Washington grounds to be suspicious of the Syrian presence in Lebanon and serves, if necessary, as a pretext for bringing military pressure to bear on Syria to force it to withdraw its troops.

Lebanon has been a zone of France's special interests since the 19th century. The mountainous regions of this country, populated mostly by Christians,

*The author is president of the Russian Institute of the Middle East and is associated with Ria Novosti*

were under its protection when Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire. Everyone in the region knows Paris's special sensitivity to Lebanese Christians' demands. Although it may be viewed as America's constant European antagonist, France une-

lity under Syrian control. However, this will be the choice of the Lebanese. The Christians, Druses and some Sunnis are sick of Syrian occupation, which can be seen in the mass demonstrations in Beirut. At the same time, a large part of the Leba-



pectedly shared the US position on Syria, which had formerly enjoyed its support thanks to Hariri's force of personality.

### Recipe for chaos

If the Lebanese politicians favouring Syrian presence in Lebanon were received at Jacques Chirac's presidential palace as warmly as the late former premier was, Paris's position could have been different. France saw Hariri's murder as an undeniable blow to its interests in the Middle East and its own prestige. Accordingly, France's position on Syria is as tough as America's. Guided by good intentions, neither Paris nor Washington has considered a potential tragic turn of events in Lebanon, which is highly similar to how the countries of the anti-Saddam coalition did not consider the consequences of the Iraq war.

De facto, Lebanon may prefer a new civil war to current stabi-

nese population that advocates continued Syrian presence, with Shi'ites at the core, is prepared to uphold the right to power in a country where it has been deprived of influence matching its ranks and the ambitions of its leaders.

In Lebanon, the presidency has traditionally been held by Maronite Christians. However, whether they can retain power after the Syrian withdrawal is a major question. The Lebanese Shi'ite movements Hezbollah and Amal, which Teheran and Damascus have taken under their wing, oppose the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country. After this happens, the Shi'ites will destabilise the situation, first of all in southern Lebanon and in the Bekaa Valley where the Syrian military force is deployed.

Entering into a conflict with the Druses, Sunnis and Christians, they will explode Lebanon

from within. There is a high probability that civil war will break out again after the Syrians withdraw. It cannot be ruled out that Lebanon will have to ask for the introduction of a foreign peace-keeping force as a result of conflicts between various ethnic and religious groups. This will probably be either a Nato force or the French army. In reality, one occupation will be replaced by another.

From the geopolitical standpoint, Lebanon is (after France's transfer of the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey in 1939 and Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights in 1967) Damascus's last hope to establish a "Greater Syria". This has been the main project of several generations of Syrian leaders, including Hafez Assad. Withdrawal from Lebanon means that Syria will have to abandon this hope.

### Effect on Israel

Another regional player, Israel, is not strategically interested in a conflict in Lebanon. Nor does it need any deterioration of the situation on the Lebanese-Israeli and the Syrian-Israeli sections of the border. However, Israel is on the brink of an internal political crisis due to the forthcoming withdrawal of settlements from the Gaza Strip. The aggravation of the situation near the northern border may turn out to be a life belt for Israeli generals. This will allow them to avoid playing any role in the internal conflict in Israel that is threatening to escalate into an "orange revolution" or a civil war.

Accordingly, the situation around Lebanon gives no grounds for optimism, even though some Lebanese are euphoric over the end of Syrian occupation, while the US and France see this as an important stage in the implementation of their regional policies. Consequently, the tight knot of problems involving Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, Iran and the US forces in the region may become the source of a major regional war in the near future.

Earlier, the USA helped us with technology and now they have promised to give us hardware. — Mr Pranab Mukherjee, declaring India is interested in procuring sophisticated military aircraft for defence preparedness.

Pakistan's purchase of F-16s would not amount to starting an arms race or inducting a new weapons system as Pakistan already has a fleet of these planes. — Mr Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri, in Lahore.

Reunification is not possible. Pakistan was created as a separate homeland based on the demand of the Muslims of the subcontinent. ...I do not want to enter into a debate on who won and who lost (the Kargil war). Neither your people will accept (this) nor ours, we will end up debating it. — General Pervez

Musharraf.

It is not for me to analyse (this) but for my critics to do so. — Mr Narendra Modi, asked in a TV interview if he had become an international symbol of hate.

The support for SP is increasing throughout the country and people are getting attracted towards it. — Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav.

Usurping political power is equivalent to hooliganism which the Left leaders are trying to resort to before the KMC polls. — Mr Subrata Mukherjee, Mayor, alleging that Left leaders were threatening to "usurp" the civic board.

I am gratified that my entry seems to have galvanised many

young people, including my own cousin in active politics. — Mr Varun Gandhi, BJP leader and cousin of Congress MP, Mr Rahul Gandhi.

We will expose the GNLFF-led Hill Council's corruption in the last 17 years before the public. The state government always heard Mr Ghisingh's demands and tried and helped the council financially. But now we see, the council led by him had never done any development work for the rural and poor people of the Hills. — Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary.

It is a miracle by Nizamuddin Baba that I am here with you all, taking part in this peace march. Otherwise, it was just not possible. I had been put on a flight to Lahore and the plane had started moving when the permission

to enter Delhi was finally given. — Meera, Pakistani actress, who was held up at Delhi airport for not carrying proper travel documents.

The culture of maintenance of buses and trams is nearly nonexistent. But how can you change the habit. — Mr Subhas Chakraborty, West Bengal transport minister, saying the multiplicity of unions was part of the problem.

Whether I am invisible or not should not be judged by the performance of my government. — Dr Manmohan Singh, responding to Mr LK Advani's charge that he is invisible in his governance.

I'm not free until I get out of Japan... I am going to relax in Iceland. — Bobby Fischer, criticising President Bush for his eight months of detention in Japan as he got ready for a new life in Iceland.

**ON  
RECORD**



# Sudan slams UN Darfur decree

Reuters  
Khartoum, April 1

SUDAN REACTED angrily to the United Nations resolution of sending Darfur war crime suspects to the International Criminal Court (ICC), calling the move "unfair, ill-advised and narrow-minded".

However, the two main Darfur rebel groups welcomed the resolution and said they would both comply by sending to the court any members of their groups accused of crimes.

The UN Security Council, late on Thursday, voted 11-0

with four abstentions to refer a sealed list of 51 people accused of crimes against humanity in Darfur to the ICC, after last-minute wrangling to allow exemptions for US citizens. The resolution is the first referral to the ICC by the council.

"I believe it is unfair, ill-advised and narrow-minded," Sudan's state minister for foreign affairs Najeeb al-Kheir Abdul Wahab asserted. "It undermines the government's quest for justice in Darfur through reconciliation," he added.

Abdul Wahab said the government would never-

theless study the resolution and take "appropriate action" on its implementation. He declined to say whether the government rejected or accepted it. The list includes senior Sudanese government and army officials, Arab militia leaders and some rebel leaders and foreign army commander.

Sudan, for the first time earlier this week, said it had arrested 15 officials from the military and security forces for crimes including rape, killing civilians and burning villages. But analysts said it was too little too

late for the Security Council, which also strengthened an arms embargo on the African nation and imposed a travel ban and assets freeze on those who violate a shaky ceasefire in remote Darfur.

The UN felt Sudan has done very little to disarm the Arab militias, accused of a widespread campaign of rape, killing and burning of non-Arab villages in Darfur in over two years of rebellion by non-Arab groups. More than two million people have fled their homes and tens of thousands have been killed in Darfur.

02 APR 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# The great divide

By Jamal Juma'

***The Wall being built by Israel in the West Bank has to be seen as a political project. Its fallout for the Palestinians cannot be seen as only a humanitarian issue.***

FEBRUARY AND March have seen wide-scale escalation of popular Palestinian resistance all over the West Bank to the ever-intensifying Israeli occupation and apartheid. Particularly in Hebron, Beit Surik, Saffa, Ni'lein and Budrus. The Ramallah demonstration of March 14 was the high point of mobilisation against the Apartheid Wall being constructed across the West Bank. The struggle has escalated against a backdrop of political developments designed to make Palestinians passive subjects to the racist colonisation project that is the Apartheid Wall.

These political developments are: the Sharm al-Sheikh conference; the announcement by the Occupation Forces that they were making "modifications" to the Apartheid Wall; the conference in London; and the attitude of the United Nations, which has chosen to pursue the issue of the Apartheid Wall in "humanitarian" terms. Common to all these is the attempt to stifle Palestinian opposition to the Wall, and to shape its "normalisation" into the demographics of the West Bank.

The issue of the Wall was negated in the Sharm el-Sheikh meetings. It only surfaced in a meek joint statement, which called it a "controversial issue." Further, the conference stressed the need for a "calming" period in Palestinian resistance and activity. This was expected to occur while the Apartheid Wall and the settlements continued to expand. Indeed, the Occupation Forces have used the *de facto* impasse to pick up the pace of the "third phase" of the Wall, which started in the south in November 2004. Particular fervour has gone into construction of the Apartheid Wall around Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The rhetoric of "calming down" and "ceasefire," which does not deal with the Apartheid Wall and settlement construction as part of Israeli violence has no meaning. The implementation of the ICJ (International Court of Justice) order — to dismantle the Wall — is not a negotiable or controversial issue but forms the basis of international law.

Undermining the ICJ decision, and consolidating the U.S. and European desires to see a re-routing of the Wall's path, the Occupation Government announced a "modification" plan. Although some changes in the Wall route were made in individual villages, the Wall and its network of Jewish-only settlements and roads and military zones continue as before in the rest of the West Bank, annexing some 47 per cent of it. It will

still leave Palestinians in ghettos or semi-ghettos, linked together with tunnels and bridges under Occupation control. What is new in this Wall route is that it is being mooted under the title of a "disengagement plan" approved by the Americans and Europeans who seem to consider it part of the "road map" (to peace).

The Palestinian people were alert to the false impressions the Occupation Forces were attempting to create around their colonial project, which seeks to impose apartheid upon them. They realise how the Wall draws the features of the final settlement even before negotiations begin. They totally reject the notion that isolated ghettos being created across the West Bank refer to any kind of "viable state." That the Wall is a bulldozer and a catalyst of the expansionist Zionist colonial project in Palestine is not hard to discern for the Palestinians, who have experienced decades of colonialism and destruction of livelihood, dignity and communities.

It has now been over a year since the opening session of the ICJ, and more than eight months since its decision that the Wall should be halted and dismantled. While it was expected that Israel would reject the decision (it has never been prepared to abide by international law), it was more surprising that the call for the implementation of the ICJ decision had started to dissipate from the official PA discourse. The Wall has been pushed into the background as if it is just an illusion in the Palestinian consciousness. For the Europeans and Americans, the issue has been the Wall's path and not the Wall itself. Thus the ICJ decision appears to have been annulled by all parties, except by the Palestinian people (the affected people) who are using every possible occasion to call for respect for international law and full implementation of the decision.

The process to normalise the Apartheid Wall — in contempt of international law — has been a discourse increasingly evident in the U.N., which prefers to treat it as a "humanitarian," and not political, issue. On his visit to the West Bank, the U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, reiterated the previous U.N. announcements that a damage register office

would be established for those affected by the Wall. This move is highly alarming in a context where U.N. pressure on Israel to stop the Apartheid Wall is completely missing. Is it money instead of respect for international law the U.N. seeks to provide for the Palestinian people? Moreover, the wealth of reports and statements by U.N. officials all emphasise the humanitarian implications, ignoring the real issue of the Wall's existence, thus serving to legitimise the *de facto* construction of the Apartheid Wall.

The concrete ramifications of the self-out of the Palestinian people, land and struggle became really evident at the Conference held in London last month. Foreign Ministers, the World Bank and Mr. Annan met with officials of the Palestinian Authority to lecture about "internal reforms," "security matters" and, above all, money. Up to \$1.2 billion has been promised to the Palestinian Authority. This was slightly more than the minimum amount (\$900 million) calculated by the World Bank in its report of December 2004, which appeared to be a do-it-yourself guide on how to administer an entire people in an open-air prison with detailed analysis of the financial necessities of life behind the Apartheid Wall. The bottleneck of the World Bank feasibility study — the hi-tech gates in the Apartheid Wall — has been solved with the Bank volunteering to stump up the money and it is now competing with a U.S. standing offer of funding the project. However, despite the meticulous calculations of the world's most important finance experts, and the "generosity" of the donor community the Palestinian people are not putting up their land and lives for sale.

The Palestinian popular resistance has responded to these developments with escalating grassroots mobilisation in various locations. In Jerusalem the people of Beit Hanina, Beit Surik, Biddu, Dahya, and Ram struggle against the Wall being built to isolate Jerusalem from the West Bank. Land has been confiscated for settlement expansion and the Judaisation of Jerusalem in a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing.

The third phase of the Wall has led to further construction and land confiscation in Hebron, Yatta, and the

Old City, and, in turn catalysed residents into a struggle against the Apartheid Wall. In West Ramallah, and in Safa and Bel'in clashes have emerged on a daily basis with Palestinians shot at, injured, detained and tear gassed.

The demonstration on March 14, organised by the Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, was the crowning moment in a "month of continuous struggle." The huge attendance of people in the demonstration, from all areas of the West Bank, reflected the popular movement against the Wall. Slogans and statements revealed the deep anger of the people at the unrelenting construction of the Apartheid Wall, and widespread opposition to political developments designed to demobilise and pacify resistance to the Occupation.

Rejection of the deceitful "modifications to the Wall," were emphasised in calls for the restoration of international law and dismantlement of the Wall. Criticism was also directed at the official PA position and discourse, which has not sought to use the ICJ decision.

However, it was Mr. Annan, and the branches of the U.N. in Palestine, who received the lion's share of the people's anger on March 14. Mr. Annan failed to utter one word about the necessity to respect international law. His focus on the register office suggested the issue is humanitarian and can be solved with a few dollars. Moreover, the recent report of the OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) came to the same conclusion. The inability to treat the Apartheid Wall as a political issue — one that is intrinsic to the Zionist colonial project for the West Bank — is a deeply disturbing development within the United Nations.

What Mr. Annan and the U.N. have stated simply mirrors the rhetoric of the Zionists. They too consider the issue "humanitarian" and show an "understanding" to deal with it! They too act in contempt of the ICJ decision as do Mr. Annan and the U.N. report. We are left to ponder what exactly is the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Is it to adopt the Israeli-American position in relation to U.N. decisions, founded on the basis of double standards? Or is it to facilitate the implementation of international law, and support the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle for justice, sovereignty and freedom?

(The writer Jamal Juma' is Coordinator of the Palestinian grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign. [www.stopthewall.org](http://www.stopthewall.org).)

# Libyan leader calls Israelis and Palestinians 'idiots'

Agence France-Presse  
Algiers, March 23

MAVERICK LIBYAN leader Muammar Gaddafi on Wednesday upstaged the final session of the Arab summit with an unscheduled address describing Israelis and the Palestinians as "idiots", and leaving his audience in fits of laughter.

"The Israelis are idiots and so are the Palestinians," Gaddafi said in the speech at the closing session of the two-day summit in Algiers. The session is usually reserved for a reading of the fi-

nal resolutions. "The Jews are dying by the dozen because they are in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. If these regions are so important to them, why didn't they occupy them before seizing other Arab lands," Gaddafi asked.

And he didn't stop there. "The Palestinians, too, are idiots because they lost these territories in 1967. So we must admit that both are idiots," was his assertion. The leaders, including Abbas who is making his debut at an Arab summit after he succeeded Yasser Arafat who died in

November, broke out into uncontrollable laughter.

The unpredictable Gaddafi rambled on for more than one hour, giving advice on topics as diverse as women's rights in the male-dominated Arab world, Iraq, the Syrian-Lebanese crisis, democracy, terrorism, Uganda and Ghana. Gaddafi noted that the summit proved to the world that the Arabs "are not racist" because they welcomed several foreign dignitaries who addressed the meeting. "We have transformed this Arab forum into an international tribunal," he said.



Muammar Gaddafi leaves after his speech at the Arab summit

# CIA report blames Iraq's chemical ammo on Egypt

Associated Press  
New York, March 13

EGYPT SECRETLY supplied crucial help, both technology and expert manpower, to the chemical weapons programme of Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980s, according to US arms investigators.

The Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Iraq Survey Group says Egyptian specialists helped the Iraqis make "technological leaps" on poison gas at the height of the Iran-Iraq War, when Baghdad used nerve agents to kill thousands of Iranian soldiers and Iranian and Iraqi civilians.

The US report is the most authoritative and detailed since such collaboration between the Arab nations was first rumoured in the late 1980s.

The Cairo government rejected those earlier allegations, and Egypt's Washington embassy reiterated that denial when asked about the CIA report. But United Nations arms inspectors, who scoured Iraq's files and facilities in the 1990s corroborated the US finding.

Egypt has long been believed to possess chemical weapons. Experts say there is strong evidence that Egyptian warplanes repeatedly used mustard-gas bombs against royalist forces during Cairo's intervention in the Yemen Civil War of the 1960s.

In 1981, after the outbreak of war with Iran, Saddam's Iraqi government paid Egypt \$12 million "in return for assistance with production and storage of chemical weapons," the US report says.

The Iraq Survey Group, led by CIA special adviser Charles A. Duelfer, had spent 20 months in 2003-2004 searching for evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, cited by US President George W. Bush as the rationale for invading Iraq two years ago.

The US arms teams discredited Bush's claims, finding that Iraq had dismantled its advanced weapons programmes under UN inspection in 1991. In the process, the Americans uncovered previously unreported details of the programmes, such as the findings on Egypt and chemical arms.

"During the early years, Egyptian scientists provided consultation, technology and oversight allowing rapid advances and technological leaps in building weapons," the Duelfer report says.

14 MAR 2005

# Withdrawal date after April: Syria

Associated Press

BEIRUT, March 13. — Syrian troops will not withdraw completely from Lebanon until at least after a 7 April meeting between senior Syrian and Lebanese military officers to discuss their redeployment, Lebanon's foreign minister said today.

It was the first definitive word on when Syria will actually fix a date for full withdrawal.

Mr Mahmoud Hammoud also said the joint military commission would set the "duration, time and

location in these matters". He made the remarks after meeting with UN envoy Mr Terje Roed-Larsen in Beirut, a day after the UN envoy's had visited Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Mr Roed-Larsen indicated he had extracted a timetable for full withdrawal from Mr Assad during their meeting yesterday, but would not reveal it until he'd met with UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan this week.

Mr Assad had told his parliament on 5 March that Syria's 14,000 troops would be redeployed to Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley

by 31 March, but a complete withdrawal would be deferred until after later negotiations.

A senior Lebanese army officer today said some 4,000 Syrian soldiers had crossed the border into Syria since the troop pullout began on Tuesday. "Another 4,000 soldiers in Lebanon's central mountains have redeployed to the Bekaa region. This is in addition to 6,000 troops already stationed in the Bekaa," he said on condition of anonymity. He added that the fate of the 10,000 troops remaining in the Bekaa would be discussed at the military commission.

## Massacre in US hotel

BROOKFIELD (Wisconsin), March 13.

— A man armed with a handgun fired during an evangelical church service at a suburban Milwaukee hotel, killing seven people before taking his own life, police said. Two teenagers and a 72-year-old man were among the victims.

At least two church groups were holding meetings in the Sheraton hotel at the time of the shootings, police said. The victims were all in the same room yesterday afternoon where officers found the bodies of four people and the gunman. Three others died later at a hospital, Brookfield police chief Mr Daniel Tushaus said. "There is nobody else being sought at this time as a suspect." — AP

# Democracy in West Asia

By Seumas Milne

FOR WEEKS a Western chorus has been celebrating a new dawn of Middle Eastern freedom, allegedly triggered by the Iraq war. Tony Blair hailed a "ripple of change," encouraged by the United States and Britain, that was bringing democracy to benighted Muslim lands.

First the Palestinians, then the Iraqis have finally had a chance to choose their leaders, it is said, courtesy Western intervention, while dictatorships such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia are democratising under American pressure. And then in Lebanon, as if on cue, last month's assassination of the former Prime Minister triggered a wave of street protests against Syria's military presence that brought down the pro-Damascus Government in short order.

At last there was a democratic "ce-  
dar revolution" to match the U.S.-backed Ukrainian "orange revolution" and a display of people power to bolster George W. Bush's insistence that the region is with him.

The first decisive rebuff to this fairy tale of spin was delivered in Beirut on Tuesday, when at least 500,000 — some reports said it was more like a million — demonstrators took to the streets to show solidarity with embattled Syria and reject U.S. and European interference in Lebanon.

Mobilised by Hizbullah, the Shia Islamist movement, their numbers dwarfed the nearby anti-Syrian protesters by perhaps 10 to one; and while the well-heeled Beirut *jeunesse doree* have dominated the "people power" jamboree, most of Tuesday's demonstrators came from the Shia slums and the impoverished south.

stands to weaken one of the last independent Arab regimes, however sclerotic, open the way for a return of Western and Israeli influence in Lebanon, and reduce Iran's leverage.

What the U.S. campaign is clearly not about is the promotion of democracy in either Lebanon or Syria, where the most plausible alternative

The claim that democracy is on the march in the Middle East is a fraud. It is not democracy but the U.S. military that is on the march. The Iraqi elections may have looked good on TV and allowed Kurdish and Shia parties to improve their bargaining power, but millions of Iraqis were unable or unwilling to vote, key political forces were excluded, candidates' names were secret, alleged fraud was widespread, the entire system designed to maintain U.S. control and Iraqis unable to vote to end the occupation. What has actually taken place since 9/11 and the Iraq war is a relentless expansion of U.S. control of West Asia. The Americans now have a military presence in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar — and in not one of those countries did an elected government invite them in.

Of course Arabs want an end to tyrannical regimes, most of which have been supported over the years by the U.S., Britain and France: that is the source of much anti-Western Muslim anger. The dictators remain in place by U.S. licence, which can be revoked at any time — and managed elections are being used as another mechanism for maintaining pro-Western regimes rather than spreading democracy. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

## *Managed elections are the latest device to prop up pro-Western regimes.*

Mr. Bush's response was to ignore them completely. Whatever their numbers, they were, it seems, the wrong kind of people.

The anti-Syrian protests, dominated by the Christian and Druze minorities, are not in fact calling for a genuine democracy at all, but for elections under the long-established corrupt confessional carve-up, which gives the traditionally privileged Christians half the seats in Parliament and means no Muslim can ever be President. The neutralisation of Hizbullah, whose success in driving Israel out of Lebanon in 2000 won it enormous prestige in the Arab world, is certainly one aim of the U.S. campaign to push Syria out of Lebanon. But the pressure on Syria has plenty of other motivations: its withdrawal

to the Assad regime are radical Islamists. In a pronouncement which defies satire, Mr. Bush insisted on Tuesday that Syria must withdraw from Lebanon before elections due in May "for those elections to be free and fair." Why the same point does not apply to elections held in occupied Iraq — where the U.S. has 140,000 troops patrolling the streets, compared with 14,000 Syrian soldiers in the Lebanon mountains — or in occupied Palestine, for that matter, is unexplained. And why a United Nations resolution calling for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon has to be complied with immediately, while those demanding an Israeli pullout from Palestinian and Syrian territory can be safely ignored for 38 years, is apparently unworthy of comment.

# Americans agree to Abu Ghraib handover

Michael Howard  
Baghdad, March 10

AMERICAN FORCES have agreed to hand over control of the infamous Abu Ghraib prison to the newly elected Iraqi authorities in an attempt to draw a line under one of the most shameful episodes of the Iraq war.

Iraq's human rights minister, Bakhtiar Amin, said that the US had agreed to the pullout at the four main detention facilities, including Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad, the prison at the centre of the abuse and torture scandal.

Two other locations in the centre of Iraq and a British run prison in the south will also be handed over to Iraqi control, although no deadline has been set, Amin said.

He said he had requested the transfer of authority of the country's prisons from major general William Brandenburg, the US commander of detention facilities in Iraq.

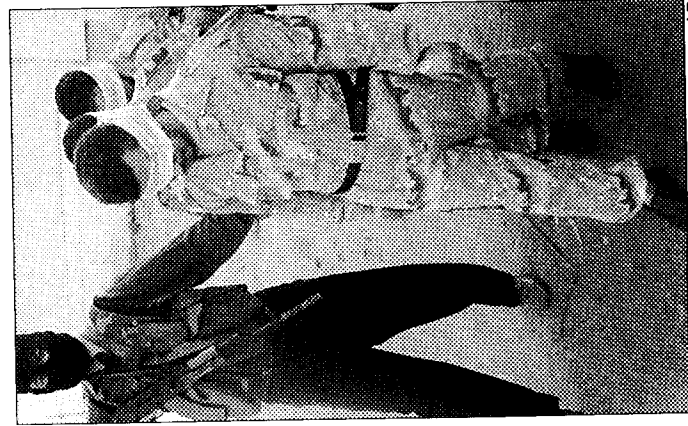
"We have discussed and asked that the detention centres be transferred to the Iraqis. They agreed to that," the human rights minister said. "It is an important sign of Iraq's new sovereignty that the new authorities take charge of its de-

tainees and its detention facilities."

The prison was at the centre of a political storm after revelations of mistreatment and torture of Iraqi inmates by their US guards. The scandal was exposed last April with the publication of photographs and video film showing US soldiers abusing naked Iraqis and forcing them to perform sex acts.

The furore damaged the reputation of the US army and paved the way for the disclosure of other abuses of Iraqi detainees by foreign troops in Iraq, including by British soldiers in the largely Shia south. Amin, whose ministry monitors conditions in Iraq's US-run penal facilities, said the transfer will begin after the formation of the new Iraqi government, which is due to happen in the next few weeks. The transfer would take place gradually and sensibly. "Iraq still needs time and international assistance and training to prepare and control and run and manage these prisons in a fit and proper way," US military officials in Baghdad could not be reached for comment. But on Tuesday, an army official said US forces were considering pulling out of Abu Ghraib because of a spate of attacks on the facility by insurgents.

The Guardian



Iraqi cops guide three blindfolded detainees dressed as army soldiers.

## Mosque blast kills 30

A SUICIDE bomber blew himself up at a Shia mosque during a funeral on Thursday, killing at least 30 people. US troops cordoned off the northeastern Tameem neighbourhood near the mosque, a poor area of the city crowded with many homes. Civil vehicles and ambulances ferried casualties to hospitals.

Rows of overturned white plastic chairs were stained in blood. Body parts, believed to be of the bomber, were spread around the area, and the smell of gunpowder filled the yard. Windows of nearby cars were shattered.

Mosul has been a hotbed of insurgent activity and the scene of many bombings, drive-by shootings and assassinations against the country's security services, Iraq's Shia majority and people thought to be working with US-led forces. The deal between the clergy-backed United Iraqi Alliance and a Kurdish coalition will allow a new government to be named when the National Assembly opens next week. It calls for the government to begin discussion on the return of 100,000 Kurds to the northern city of Kirkuk.

AP, Baghdad

# Lebanon divided over Syrian troops pullout

Barbara Slavin

THE ANTI-SYRIAN demonstrations taking place almost daily in Beirut's Martyrs Square since last month might leave the impression that all of Lebanon is rising up against Syrian occupation.

On Tuesday, a counter-demonstration by Hezbollah, a Shia group, shows there's another face of Lebanon. Lebanese Shias are an estimated 40 per cent of the country's 4.4 million people. They're not so eager for a quick departure of about 15,000 Syrian troops — some of them started pulling out on Wednesday — a fixture in Lebanon for 29 years. Syria has been under pressure to pull out its troops since the February 14 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in a car bombing. Several prominent Lebanese politicians have blamed Syria. The United States, France and other countries have demanded a full Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

But Lebanese Shias fear a withdrawal would hurt their interests and cause a return to civil strife, says Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Rela-

Lebanese, taken recently, showed widespread revulsion for Hariri's murder, but different views about who was responsible. Non-Shias were much more inclined to pin the blame on Syria. About 50 per cent of Druze and Maronite Christians blamed Syria or its Lebanese allies. By contrast, 53 per cent of Shias blamed Israel, and 19 per cent blamed the US. Forty-two per cent of Maronites said they thought the Syrians would withdraw from Lebanon.

Kenneth Katzman, a West Asia expert says US has been too quick to interpret the anti-Syria protests as a sign that Lebanon is on the road to democracy. "It's not Eastern Europe circa 1989," after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he says. "Democratic movements in Lebanon are being used by ethnic and religious groups for their own interests."

**Karami comeback as PM?** Lebanon's President on Wednesday looked set to ask outgoing pro-Syrian Prime Minister Omar Karamito form a government on Wednesday, a step sure to anger the anti-Syrian Opposition who pressured him to resign in the first place.

USA Today



AFP

Syrian troops withdraw from the Dahr al-Baydar area in Lebanon on Wednesday.

AFP tions. Lebanon was embroiled in a civil war from 1975 to 1989. The war was fought largely between Muslims, 60 per cent of the population, and Christians, 39 per cent. It involved most of Lebanon's 18 re-

ligious and ethnic groups, as well as Palestinians, and left more than 100,000 dead.

Today, Lebanon remains divided, and "important segments will side with the Syrians," Haass says. A poll of 1,250



## Lebanon MPs back pro-Syria PM

AP & AFP

MDEIREJ (Lebanon), March 9. — The outgoing pro-Syrian Prime Minister, who was forced to resign last week by Opposition protests, was virtually assured reappointment after a majority of lawmakers backed him today.

An unofficial count gave Mr Omar Karami more than half the votes in the 128-member legislature. A formal announcement by President Emile Lahoud, who consulted with legislators today, could be made as early as tomorrow.

In a related development, Syrian ambassador to the USA Mr Imad Moustapha has said that his country's troops will be out of Lebanon long before May. "They are actually being withdrawn today," he told CNN TV yesterday. "We will do this as soon as possible, even long time before May."

The comment followed a demand by President Bush, who warned Syria yesterday that its military and intelligence forces should be out of Lebanon before May parliamentary elections in the country. Mr Bush also warned his Syrian counterpart, Mr Bashar al-Assad, again resorting to what he called "delaying tactics and half measures".

THE STATESMAN

10 MAR 2005

# Sunrise in the Mideast?

Are these stirrings of democracy for real? Much depends on the sagacity of political leaders

THE ripples of change are gathering momentum in the Middle East. Syria has just announced a partial withdrawal of troops to Lebanon's Bekka Valley. Although this move falls short of the demand for total withdrawal called for by the UN and the Lebanese people, it nevertheless is a significant development. The assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri seems to have galvanised civil society in the Middle East, long held hostage by an assortment of regimes. It is one sign of hope amongst many. The Palestinian Authority has democratically elected a successor to Arafat. Despite a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, the peace process between Israel and Palestine has once again acquired a dose of realism and much needed momentum. Even the Saudis are promising that women will be allowed to vote, not in this year's election, but possibly in the next one. Libya is now back in the mainstream. And Egypt has, for the first time, allowed a multi-party presidential election.

This does not amount to a full-fledged democratic revolution just yet. The media and the electoral machinery will be still largely controlled by the state and free expression runs grave political risk. But there is little doubt that the torchbearer of Arab nationalism, Egypt, is changing. The world is waiting to see how enduring these changes are. There have been so many false dawns in the Middle

East that it is too premature to get optimistic. Algeria's return to democracy a few years ago unleashed a deadly civil war. Some are nervous about a similar fate befalling Egypt. Much will depend on how prudently the transition will be accomplished. There is no denying the fact that there is considerable American pressure behind these changes. In a quote attributed to the president of Yemen, it is said that if the leaders of the Middle East do not trim their moustaches, the Americans will come and shave them off. Even in Egypt's case, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice cancelled her visit and aid was withheld to put pressure on the Egyptians to reform. But the United States will have to be careful in how it applies pressure. Too much overt pressure or military action could once again consolidate anti-liberal forces. Much in the Middle East will depend upon the political judgment of the US.

But there is clear evidence that in many societies in the Middle East, long held taboos are being broken. Where all this churning will end is an open question. Will the current rulers have the sagacity to guide these nations to becoming more open societies? Will the fear of imperial powers unite Islamist elements or will it give the moderates greater hope? These questions are yet to be answered, but there should be little doubt that the region is waking from its political slumber.

INDIAN EXPRESS

09 MAR 2005

09 MAR 2005

# Syrian troop pullback by March 31

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, MARCH 7. The Presidents of Syria and Lebanon have announced that Syrian forces would withdraw to Lebanon's eastern Beqa'a Valley by March 31, following which negotiations on a complete withdrawal would begin.

The announcement, made after the Syrian President, Bashar Assad, and the Lebanese President, Emile Lahoud, had met in Damascus, said the troops would pull back from northern and central Lebanon to the east, near Syria's border. Military officials from both countries will decide, within a month, how many troops would remain in the valley and for how long. A statement issued at the end of the summit said, "The two sides affirmed their commitment to the Taif Accord and its mechanism ... and their respect to all resolutions issued by the international legitimacy including (U.N. Security Council) Resolution 1559."

Under the Taif accord of 1989, Syria is entitled to position its troops in an identified zone within the valley. It stipulates that the two Governments have to determine the "strength and duration" of the forces.

Analysts point out that Syria might need to keep around 2000 "early warning" forces in the

valley in anticipation of an Israeli attack. It would not contradict the accord as long as Israel continues to occupy parts of Lebanese territory. Israel withdrew from most parts of Lebanon in 2000, but the Shebaa farms area, which is presently under Israeli occupation, is disputed.

The pro-Syrian groups in Lebanon have opposed the withdrawal. The Hizbullah chief, Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah, who is popular among the Shias — the largest community in Lebanon, asked supporters to demonstrate in Beirut on March 8 to denounce foreign intervention and to express gratitude to Syria.

He also invited Opposition groups — which have staged protests to demand a Syrian pullout since the February 14 assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, to join the rally. Mr. Nasrallah rejected the U.N. resolution 1559 which calls for the pullout of foreign troops and the disarmament of Hizbullah, which had played a leading role in enforcing an Israeli retreat from Lebanon in 2000.

"We have the right to reject the international resolution because it is a blatant interference in our internal affairs and all its clauses are free services to the Israeli enemy," Mr. Nasrallah said.

## SYRIA UNDER PRESSURE

SYRIA IS UNDER increasing pressure to withdraw its troops from Lebanon after Saudi Arabia and Egypt joined the West and Russia in asking it to do so. Damascus had hoped the two leading Arab countries would mediate a compromise that would enable it to retain troops in the Beqa'a valley even as they were being pulled out from the rest of Lebanese territory. Syria's President Bashar al Assad, who had suggested such a deal in recent interviews, returned disappointed from Riyadh after Saudi authorities told him it was time to follow through on the 1989 Taif agreement. Under this agreement, which brought an end to the Lebanese civil war, the redeployment to the Beqa'a is envisaged as only a prelude to a complete withdrawal. With the Arab countries refusing to mediate with the West on this issue and Russia unlikely to exercise its veto, the Assad Government might soon face the prospect of United Nations Security Council sanctions. Syria has been able to withstand the sanctions imposed on it by the United States in 2004 since most of its trade is with the European Union. Damascus also seems to have believed until recently that the international community, which was deeply disturbed by the devastating impact of the decade-long embargo imposed on Iraq, would be reluctant to adopt such a course of action again. However, with France and the United Kingdom lining up firmly behind the call for a withdrawal, this calculation might prove wrong. Syria ensures through its dominance that Lebanon will not make a separate peace agreement with Israel and leave it isolated as the only neighbour that refuses to recognise the Zionist state. The increased pressure that the West will exert in such a situation is bound to weaken Syria's hand when it tries to negotiate a return of the Golan Heights as the

price for making a peace treaty with Israel. The Assad regime could be in big trouble if the people who were driven out of the Golan in 1967 are deprived even of the hope that they will be able to return to their lands some day.

Damascus does not of course cite just strategic reasons to justify its presence in Lebanon. Even those countries that are calling for a Syrian withdrawal acknowledge that the Government in Beirut will not be able to impose its writ over large parts of the country without assistance. Lebanese society has not fully recovered from the turmoil of the civil war. The various ethnic and sectarian groups that fought one another for more than a decade could revert to savage strife in the absence of a powerful force to keep them apart. In fact, the U.S. has suggested that an international peace-keeping force could be inserted as a necessary buffer.

There is no guarantee that international peace-keepers will be able to reconcile the rifts between the various Lebanese groups. Indeed, the presence of such a force might exacerbate those differences since the equations of power between these groups have changed over the years. For instance, the Maronite Christians might look up to the foreign force as a saviour that will reinstall them in the pre-eminent position they enjoyed in the past. On the other hand, the Shias who have become powerful under Syrian patronage might regard this force as an obstacle to their advancement. The Shia parties, Hizbollah and Amal, did not join the anti-Syria campaign launched by the rest of the Lebanese political opposition after the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri. Damascus will hope it can play a waiting game so long as the Shias, and sections of other communities, remain loyal.

# Syria set to announce troop redeployment in Lebanon

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, MARCH 5.** Against the backdrop of mounting international pressure, the Syrian President, Bashar Assad, is set to announce the redeployment of his country's troops in Lebanon.

Syria's official *Tishrin* daily said that Mr. Assad's speech in Parliament would be about "current political developments."

The Lebanese Defence Minister, Abdul-Rahim Mrad, who has not yet been relieved of his duties as the pro-Syria Government, which resigned earlier, continues to play a caretaker role, said that Mr. Assad was expected to announce "a redeployment to the Bekaa region" in eastern Lebanon.

Mr. Mrad said that Syria

wanted to keep some troops inside Bekaa for a longer duration, pending negotiations with the Lebanese Government as prescribed by the Taif Accord of 1989. Syrian political commentator, Sami Moubiyan, told *The Hindu* that, "The Syrians can only guarantee their security interests by maintaining 2,000 troops in the Bekaa Valley, as an early warning system against any Israeli attack."

## Security concerns

He pointed out that such a move would not contradict the Taif Accord, which permits Syria to position its troops in the Bekaa Valley so long as Israel occupies any part of Lebanon. While Israel has withdrawn from most of Lebanon in 2000, its forces continue to occupy the dis-

puted Shebba farms. In a day of fast-paced developments, Lebanese troops in armoured carriers briefly surrounded the Syrian intelligence headquarters in Beirut. The around 50 troops, however, later withdrew, with officers saying that the move was precautionary, and meant to protect the Syrians.

Mr. Assad's expected address follows intense pressure from the United States, France, Britain and Saudi Arabia seeking an end to Syria's political influence in Lebanon, exercised through the deployment of its 15,000 troops and intelligence assets inside the country. The U.S. President, George W. Bush, warned Syria on Friday that nothing short of a full withdrawal would do. "When we say withdraw we mean com-

plete withdrawal — no half-hearted measures," he said. "Syrian troops, Syrian intelligence services must get out of Lebanon now." He had earlier called for all Syrian forces to be out by May, prior to elections that are due that month.

Faced with the mounting pressure Syria sent its Deputy Foreign Minister, Walid Moullem, to consult officials from Russia, its traditional ally. Mr. Bashar himself travelled to Saudi Arabia, while Arab Foreign Ministers convening in Cairo considered the crisis in Lebanon.

The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, following his meeting with Mr. Moullem said that Moscow had secured a commitment from Syria that it would respect the U.N. resolution demanding the pullout of its forces.

THE HINDU

06 MAR 2005

# Global heat on Syria as Assad visits Riyadh

**Riyadh, March 3 (Reuters):** Syrian President Bashar al-Assad held crisis talks today with Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah amid resounding international calls on Damascus to quickly end its military presence in Lebanon.

Diplomats said Assad, accompanied by Syrian foreign minister Farouq al-Shara, held a closed-door meeting with Prince Abdullah in Riyadh in the presence of foreign minister Saud al-Faisal.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder joined the international chorus by calling on Syria to leave Lebanon "immediately".

"Syria must pull out of Lebanon immediately," Schroeder said late yesterday during a visit to Sanaa.

Schroeder added that Lebanon should be given a chance for sovereignty and its own development. He said that could only be achieved through compliance with Security Council resolutions stipulating immediate Syrian withdrawal.



**A protester holds a picture of slain former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri during an anti-Syria rally in Beirut. (Reuters)**

Arab heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Egypt have stepped up mediation efforts with Assad to pull out his 14,000 troops from Lebanon in compliance with UN resolution 1559 following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri.

Lebanese Opposition groups have blamed Syria for

Hariri's death and have been holding protests to pressure Damascus to withdraw its troops and intelligence forces from Lebanon.

The chancellor's comments came in a meeting with Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh yesterday during a visit to Sanaa as part of a regional tour.

Arab diplomats said the

Arab mediation efforts focused on securing Syria's consent to set a timetable to withdraw its troops from Lebanon.

Analysts said Assad was reaching out to friendly Arab states allied with the US to find a way out of the crisis.

"Syria is under intense pressure from all sides at the moment. Assad hopes to get backing from his ally Saudi Arabia at this difficult time," said Saudi commentator Mohammad al-Harfy.

Assad met Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani yesterday to discuss US pressure on Damascus.

Assad told *Time* that he expected to remove his troops from Lebanon in a few months but Washington said it was sceptical of Assad's pledge.

Thousands of demonstrators, blaming Syria for Hariri's death, have turned out in Beirut to call for the troop withdrawal. Lebanon's pro-Damascus government resigned on Monday, but Syria denies it was involved in the killing.

# Lebanon govt quits

Beirut, Feb. 28 (Reuters): Lebanon's Syrian-backed government resigned today in a surprise move as thousands of protesters waving Lebanese flags rallied in central Beirut to demand the withdrawal of Syrian forces from the small country.

Lebanon's President Emile Lahoud accepted the resignation of the Syrian-backed government today and asked it to continue in a caretaker capacity. The presidential office, which announced the acceptance in a statement, did not say when Lahoud would start consulting parliamentary deputies to choose a successor to outgoing Prime Minister Omar Karami.

The resignation of the government came amid unprecedented public pressure and blame for former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri's killing this month. "The people have

won," main Opposition leader Walid Jumblatt told LBC television after Karami announced the resignation of the cabinet to a parliament session debating Hariri's killing. Ecstatic protesters waving flags called for Syria to leave Lebanon where it has wielded political and military power for decades.

International pressure is piling on Syria to quit its neighbour. Another Opposition figure Elias Atallah said the demonstrations must go on until Syria leaves.

"Out of concern that the government does not become an obstacle to the good of the country, I announce the resignation of the government I had the honour to lead," Karami said. His government had a majority and was expected to win a no-confidence vote that was meant to close a parliamentary debate on Hariri's assassination.



# Mubarak bows to democracy call

Associated Press  
Cairo, February 26

EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak on Saturday ordered a revision of the country's election laws and said multiple candidates could run in the nation's presidential elections, a scenario Mubarak hasn't faced since taking power in 1981.

Mubarak said in a surprise announcement that the country needed "more freedom and democracy." The surprise announcement, a response to critics' calls for political reform, comes shortly after historic elections in Iraq and the Palestinian territories, balloting that brought

a taste of democracy to the region. It also comes amid a sharp dispute with the United States over Egypt's arrest of one of the strongest proponents of multi-candidate elections.

"The election of a President will be through direct, secret balloting, giving the chance for political parties to run for the presidential elections and providing guarantees that allow more than one candidate for the people to choose among them with their own will," Mubarak said in an address broadcast live on Egyptian television.

Mubarak — who has never faced an opponent since becoming President after the 1981 assass-

ination of Anwar Sadat — said his initiative came "out of my full conviction of the need to consolidate efforts for more freedom and democracy."

The audience before him at Menoufia University broke into applause and calls of support, some shouting, "Long live Mubarak, mentor of freedom and democracy!" Others spontaneously recited verses of poetry praising the government.

Mubarak said he asked parliament and the Shura Council to amend Article 76 of the constitution, which deals with presidential elections. Mohammed Kamal, a leading member of the ruling party's policy-making committee,

said parliament would propose its amendment within two weeks. Mubarak said the amendment would then be put to a public referendum before the presidential polls, which are scheduled for September. Kamal said he expected the referendum to be held within nine weeks.

As recently as last month Mubarak had rejected Opposition demands to open presidential balloting to other candidates, and he was obviously aware of the historic potential of his announcement. "If it happens, it would be the first time in the political history of Egypt that a chance is given to somebody who is capable of shouldering the responsibility to

protect the people's achievements and future security to come forward for presidential elections with parliamentary and popular support," he said.

Egypt holds presidential referendums every six years in which people vote "yes" or "no" for a single candidate who has been approved by parliament. Mubarak has been nominated by his ruling National Democratic Party to stand in four presidential referendums, winning more than 90 per cent of the vote each time.

Mubarak has not officially announced his candidacy for a fifth term, though he is widely expected to be nominated by his ruling party.

86-13 JAV

M. Asad

# Syria pledges troops pullout from Lebanon

Associated Press  
Damascus, February 24

25/2  
h. Amin  
Hariri 13

SYRIA WILL abide by a 1989 agreement in withdrawing its troops from Lebanon, the foreign ministry said on Thursday in the first government statement since an international uproar arose against Damascus from the February 14 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Syria also offered to help Lebanon with the investigation into Hariri's slaying. "The important withdrawals which have already been carried out and what will be carried out later will be in agreement with Lebanon based on the Taif Accord," a statement said, referring to the 1989 Arab-brokered pact.

Hariri and 16 others died in a bombing that destroyed his motorcade of armour-plated vehicles. More than 100 people were injured. Since then, there have been loud and massive demonstrations against Syria and the Damascus-allied Lebanese government, as well as calls for Syria to withdraw its troops. Thursday's announcement did not break new ground in Syria's long-standing policy on Lebanon, where it has 15,000 troops and is the main power broker. "Syria once again affirms its commitment to implement the Taif agreement and the bilateral agreements between Lebanon and Syria," the foreign ministry statement said. It did not give a timetable but noticeably referred to "withdrawals," and not just deployment, the term used for past troop movements.

"Speeding up the pace of withdrawals requires enabling the Lebanese army and internal security forces to fill the vacuum that could take place in a way that does not undermine the security of Lebanon and Syria," said the statement, apparently explaining why Syria may not be considering an im-

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 FEB 2005

2001 ✓

## TOWARDS A FREE GAZA

W. Anshu  
400-10

WITH THE ISRAELI cabinet approving plans for the withdrawal of soldiers and settlers from parts of the Palestinian territories, the residents of these areas have reason to hope that they will soon have a fair measure of freedom. The cabinet vote on February 20 was the last formal step that needed to be taken as the Knesset had already endorsed the plan and voted funds for its implementation. From now on, the decisions to be taken will largely be administrative in nature. As laid down in the plan, Israel will begin to evacuate all civilian settlements as well as military bases inside the Gaza Strip by the middle of 2005. (A small military unit will remain to guard the Rafah border with Egypt.) A few settlements in the West Bank will also be dismantled at the same time. A compensation package has been drawn up and the process of identifying the beneficiaries has begun. Once started, the withdrawal is expected to be completed in about three months. If all goes well, the Gaza Strip will be free from an Israeli presence for the first time in 38 years. However, this does not mean the Palestinian Authority will be able to exercise control over this slice of territory in all spheres. The Zionist state will continue to have the final say on water resource management. It is also not likely to permit the Authority to make use of the Gaza airport and harbour. So long as these restrictions are in place, the Palestinians will not be able freely to move out of the Strip or develop their economic resources.

Israel appears to have recognised that peace efforts will make little headway if unemployment and poverty levels in the Gaza Strip remain as high as they are now. It has made tentative moves to mitigate this situation by

lifting some restrictions on the employment of Palestinians. However, most of the Palestinians who worked in Israel until the outbreak of the *intifada* are unlikely to get back their jobs. Another measure taken by the Government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon can only add to the resentment over a lack of economic opportunities. While the boundary wall that runs along the flank of the West Bank was realigned on the orders of the Israeli Supreme Court, the changes were not for the better in all cases. The Sharon Government did comply with the Court's order that the wall should not cut off West Bank residents from their schools or means of livelihood. However, it carried out the realignment in such a way that large settlements remained on Israel's side of the wall. The Palestinians have reason to believe that Israel will try to keep possession of these large settlements, which together make up at least seven per cent of the West Bank, even under a final peace pact. During the negotiations held over the 1990s the Palestinians indicated they could give up small portions of the West Bank provided they were given land of equal extent and quality. There is no sign that Israel is holding out any such offer.

With the Palestinian militant organisations observing the ceasefire, Zionist extremists pose the strongest threat to the withdrawal plans. These elements who hold the view that any withdrawal from the occupied territories is an infringement of a religious edict might resort to violence if their campaign of protest proves ineffective. The Palestinian Authority has controlled the extremists on its side with a mix of political adroitness and firmness. Israel will now be called upon to demonstrate that it can reciprocate with positive action and gestures.

THE HINDU

23 FEB 2005

# Israel sets free 500 Palestinian prisoners

**None of those released had 'blood on hand'**

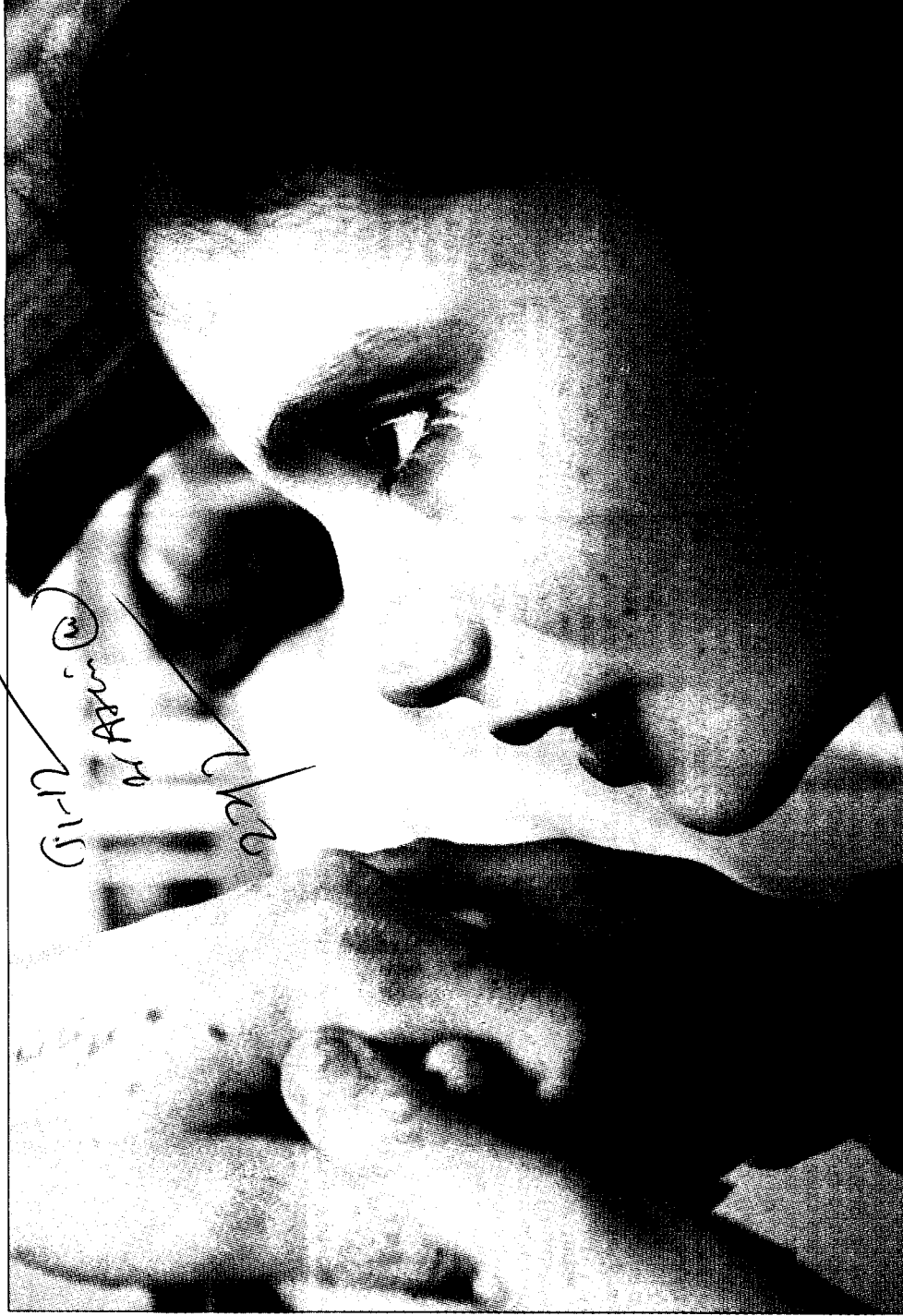
Betunia (West Bank): Israel on Monday freed 500 Palestinian prisoners in the largest mass release in nearly a decade, a gesture meant to bolster a ceasefire deal with new Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Even as smiling prisoners flashed the 'V' sign through bus windows while passing Israeli checkpoints into Palestinian areas, Abbas' dominant Fatah movement further strengthened his hand by approving a new cabinet with loyalists in key posts. Prospects for peacemaking have brightened since Abbas was elected to succeed Yasser Arafat on a platform of non-violence and persuaded militants to abide by a de facto truce. But many Palestinians say Abbas will need even larger prisoner releases to get the armed groups to formalise the ceasefire he agreed with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at a February 8 summit in Egypt. Israel holds about 8,000 prisoners.

"I feel good, but it is not a great happiness for us," said Nizar Shukry, who served three years for involvement in shooting attacks. "Something's missing. We are hoping for the release of all prisoners because we all fought for the same cause."

Buses left Israeli jails before dawn carrying handcuffed prisoners, many smiling broadly through the windows, to border crossings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Some knelt in prayer before being transferred to Palestinian buses for the trip home to tearful reunions with family and friends.

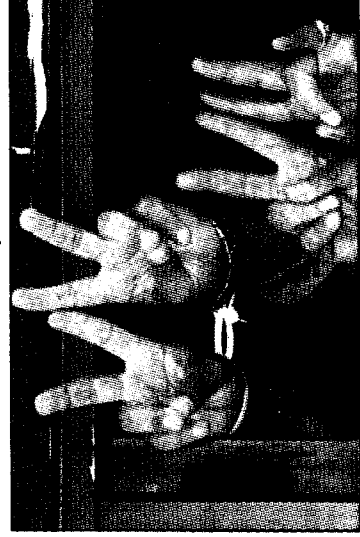
It was Israel's biggest prisoner release since 1996, when 800 were freed. None of the prisoners—400 more are to be freed in coming weeks under a package of measures agreed at the summit—had been found guilty of attacks that killed or wounded Is-



**THE HOMECOMING: A Palestinian girl greets a relative released from an Israeli prison as he arrives at the West Bank town of Tul Kareem on Monday ceasefire.**

raelis. Most had already served at least two-thirds of their sentences. Mohammed Dahlan, a close Abbas adviser who is set to join the cabinet, said Palestinians awaited a wider release. Palestinians want those who carried out attacks on Israelis to be included too. But Israel has so far ruled out freeing prisoners with "blood on their hands".

About half the prisoners freed on Monday were from Fatah, Abbas' faction. The rest were from Islamic factions that are still weighing whether to agree formally to the



## Israeli cabinet ratifies Gaza Strip pullout

By Greg Myre

Jerusalem: Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon won cabinet approval on Sunday for two sweeping plans intended to reshape Israel's relations with the Palestinians: the withdrawal of Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip, and a revamped route for the separation barrier in the West Bank.



After months of fierce political battles, Sharon now has substantial momentum to forge ahead with the two initiatives, which should greatly influence the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the coming years. After the votes, he and his defence minister signed orders calling for Gaza evacuation to begin on July 20.

"The decision which the government of Israel made today was a difficult one, a very difficult one," Sharon said in a speech Sunday night. But, he added, the Gaza withdrawal "ensures the future of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state".

The cabinet approved the Gaza pullout by a strong but expected margin, 17 to 5. The dissenting votes came from members of Sharon's right-wing Likud Party, including Benjamin Netanyahu, the finance minister, and Natan Sharansky, the minister for Jerusalem affairs. NYT News Service

# Israeli Cabinet approves Gaza evacuation

*by Asher*  
*49-14 21/2*  
*(W)*

**JERUSALEM, FEB. 20.** The Israeli Cabinet on Sunday gave its overwhelming approval to the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon's plan to evacuate the 8,000 Jewish settlers living in the Gaza Strip, public radio reported.

The so-called disengagement plan was approved by 17 votes to five among members of the coalition Cabinet, it said.

The vote paves the way for Israel by the autumn to leave occupied Palestinian territory for the first time in the history of the Jewish state.

Under the terms of the plan, all 8,000 Jewish residents of Gaza and around 300 living in four isolated settlements in the northern West Bank are due to be uprooted from their homes.

## Troops to leave

All but a handful of troops guarding the Rafah border crossing from southern Gaza into Egypt will have left by the end of the year.

The outcome of the vote was widely expected after Mr. Sharon brought the Centre-Left Labour party into his coalition last month.

While most waverers inside his own Likud party appeared to

have come round by the end, the Finance Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was among those who voted against, just four days after Parliament, which has already endorsed the principles of disengagement, adopted a law which will grant compensation pay-outs to the evacuees.

## Revised route for barrier

Once the plan is approved, Mr. Sharon and the Defence Minister, Shaul Mofaz, will have the power to sign orders for the physical evacuation of the settlements — expected to take place five months after the orders are signed.

The Prime Minister hopes that the departure from Gaza will ease the pressure on Israel to withdraw from parts of the West Bank where the majority of the 245,000 settlers live.

As part of that strategy, the marathon Cabinet session was also expected to see Ministers vote on a revised routing of the West Bank barrier, which will incorporate the major settlement of Maale Adumim near Jerusalem, and the Gush Etzion settlement block in the south of the territory. — AFP

THE HINDU

21 FEB 2005

# Iran, Syria for united front to counter threats

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, FEB. 16.** Iran and Syria have said that they are ready to form a united front to face challenges and threats from abroad.

The visiting Syrian Prime Minister, Naji al-Otari, who held talks with senior Iranian officials told reporters that "This meeting, which takes place at this sensitive time, is important, especially because Syria and Iran face several challenges and it is necessary to build a common front."

His host, the Iranian Vice-President Mohammad Reza Arif said, "Our Syrian brothers are facing specific threats and we hope they can benefit from our experience. We are ready to give them any help necessary."

Both countries are under intense U.S. pressure, with Washington accusing Iran of seeking nuclear weapons. The U.S. tensions with Syria have heightened since the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, on Monday. The U.S. on Tuesday recalled its Ambassador to Syria for urgent consultations following Mr. Hariri's killing.

The announcement from Iran and Syria was carefully timed and came as Hariri was buried in the Lebanese capital Beirut.

## Differences growing: U.S.

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

**WASHINGTON, FEB. 16.** The U.S. has stepped up the pressure on Syria by announcing that its Ambassador in Damascus, Margaret Scobey, is being recalled

for urgent consultations even as the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, talked of "growing differences" with Syria.

"The Syrian Government is unfortunately on a path right now where relations are not improving but are worsening," said Dr. Rice after a meeting with the Egyptian Foreign Minister.

## U. N. concern

The Security Council expressed grave concern at the killing of the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri and a Presidential statement approved by all the members called for a report from the Secretary-General on the "circumstances, causes and consequences" of the killing. It also expressed concern over the "further destabilisation" of Lebanon and called on all parties to "cooperate fully and urgently" for the implementation of a resolution that called for Lebanon's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence.

The U.S. has not directly accused Syria of a hand in the assassination but has used the developments to point to Damascus' role in Lebanon. "When something happens in Lebanon, Syria needs to help to find accountability for what has happened there. There is a part of the destabilisation that takes place when you have the kind of conditions that you do now thanks to Syrian interference," said Dr. Rice calling for a "full investigation."

The State Department spokesman said the American Ambassador, Ms Scobey, delivered a message to Damascus expressing "profound outrage" at the "heinous act of terrorism."

# Hariri death raises fears of instability

Associated Press  
Cairo, February 15

## THE RIPPLE EFFECT

LEADERS ACROSS West Asia condemned the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, fearing it would reopen old wounds and threaten the fragile Palestinian-Israeli truce.

The massive attack in Beirut on Monday — killing 10 people, injuring 100, igniting 20 cars and shattering windows a mile away — stunned a country that has been relatively stable since civil war ended in 1990. "The stability of Lebanon is in the interest of the Palestinians. The assassination of Hariri threatens regional security," said Palestinian National Security Adviser Jibril Rajoub, who has been involved in the recent Palestinian-Israeli peace overtures.

Tension in Lebanon has been escalating since the UN Security Council passed a US and French-sponsored resolution in September essentially calling for Syria to back off of Lebanon, a country where it has about 15,000 troops and political dominance.

After the blast, attention immediately focused on Lebanon's stability. But in the background, many wondered about the attack's potential impact on ongoing Arab-Israeli security talks, which so far have not included Syria and are opposed by militant groups with Syrian support.

Lebanon, largely because of Syrian influence, remains an important part of the West Asia peace equation. The Lebanon-based militant group Hezbollah has been launching occasional attacks on Israeli forces in a disputed area near the Lebanese-Israeli border, and Israeli officials recently accused the group of plotting to assassinate Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas to scuttle a fragile truce.

Israeli Vice-Premier Shimon Peres, apparently referring to Syrian influence in Lebanon, said "many innocent people lost their lives because they have a state within a state, an army within an army and respect for life is not high enough."

Jordan has been pressing for the resumption of the peace talks and government spokeswoman Asma Khader said the attack affects "Lebanon's security and stability and that of the region."

Numerous regional governments rushed to condemn the attack. Much of the attention in Lebanon

turned to Hezbollah and Syrian security forces to see if the attack signalled a stand against the West Asian truce or a hardening insistence on Syrian domination of Lebanon. Lebanese opponents of Syria's role in their country quickly blamed Damascus

Interim Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi said that the attack "isn't only directed at Hariri but is targeting the Lebanese situation and the whole regional situation. I ask God to protect and preserve Lebanon from the dangerous slide (into violence), and that the Lebanese government can quickly bring things back to normal." Allawi said, in reference to the chaos of country's 15-year sectarian civil war: "Any disturbances in the neighbourhood will negatively affect the situation in Iraq."

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he hoped "this bloody assassination attempt will not be a return to the days of civil war in Lebanon," and described the bombing as a "red flag, a warning signal." Assad urged Lebanese "to strengthen their national unity and oppose those who are seeking to sow divisions among the people," according to Sana, Syria's official news agency.

Hezbollah and Syrian President Hafez Assad condemned the attack, along with Palestinian militant groups Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Islamic Jihad called the attack a "cowardly assassination" and said only the U.S. and Israel would benefit.

In Iran, foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi condemned the bomb as "an act of terrorism." He urged the Lebanese people to stay "watchful" about "plots of the enemies" of their country.

Lebanese opposition leaders gathered after Hariri was killed and issued a statement demanding Syrian troops withdraw from Lebanon within the next three months and calling on the international community to intervene to help "this captive nation."

"We hold the Lebanese authority and the Syrian authority, being the authority of tutelage in Lebanon, responsible for this crime and other similar crimes," they said in their strongly-worded statement read by legislator Bassem Sabei, a member of Hariri's party.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 FEB 2005



# Blast rocks Beirut

FORMER LEBANESE PM, NINE OTHERS KILLED



Lebanese vent their sorrow following news of Hariri's assassination in Beirut on Monday. (Below) Rafik Hariri. — AFP

Agence France Presse

BEIRUT, Feb. 14. — Lebanon's five-time Prime Minister and billionaire tycoon Rafiq Hariri was killed in a massive bomb blast in Beirut today that stoked fears of fresh sectarian strife 15 years after the end of the civil war.

Another nine people were killed and about 100 wounded when the explosion ripped through Hariri's motorcade, leaving a trail of carnage and devastation in a busy seafront area in scenes reminiscent of the 1975-1990 war.

The attack, which drew condemnation from across the globe, was claimed by a previously unknown Islamic group which said in a video broadcast on Al-Jazeera TV that it killed Hariri for his ties with Saudi



**Hariri's death removes a main political buffer in a country divided between an Opposition opposed to Syria's 15,000 troops in Lebanon and the pro-Syrian government**

Arabia.

Media reports said the blast was caused by a car bomb and that the dead included bodyguards of the 60-year-old Hariri,

a rags-to riches Sunni who resigned as Prime Minister four months ago in a row over the Syrian dominance of Lebanon's political affairs.

The attack, which plunged Lebanon into grief and despair and raised worries about the stability of the country that is treading a delicate path between its Muslim and Christian communities.

"Such acts are a reversion to a chapter in Lebanon's history that he had hoped was long past. It is imperative that the already fragile situation in the region should not be further destabilised," said a statement from UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan.

The killing came at a time of political tension in Lebanon and international pressure over Syria's role in the country, a few months ahead of legislative elections.

THE STATESMAN

15 FEB 2005

# Lebanon ex-PM killed in massive bomb attack



A disfigured corpse lies on the ground amid blazing cars at the scene of a huge blast in Beirut

**Beirut:** Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who led the country for much of the 15-year period after its civil war ended in 1990 but had recently switched to opposing Syria's role in the country, was killed in a massive bomb explosion that ravaged his motorcade, the official Lebanese news agency said on Monday.

Hariri moved toward the opposition camp after leaving office in October—in large part because of a dispute concerning Syria's controversial role in Lebanon. Hariri had rejected a Syrian-backed insistence that a rival politician, President Emile Lahoud, remain in office as president for a longer period.

The US has strongly also criticised Syria's interference in the country.

The news agency, quoting a statement

from American University Hospital, said Hariri arrived dead at the hospital, his body mutilated in the massive explosion. Hariri's own future TV broadcast citations from the Koran, the Islamic holy book. Nine other people were also killed in the massive blast and 100 wounded, the news agency said. Several of Hariri's bodyguards were among those hurt or killed, said Lebanese legislator Bassem Yammout.

Syria's President Bashar Assad called the attack "a horrible criminal act", according to Al-Jazeera television.

At least 20 cars were set on fire in a blast that devastated the front of the famous St George hotel, blowing off balconies, and damaged a British bank and the Phoenicia hotel.

Bystanders and ambulance workers

made crude stretchers to carry the wounded to vehicles to take them to nearby hospitals. TV footage showed several men dragging a slain victim partially covered by a brown blanket through the rubble-strewn street before letting go of his arms and letting him fall to the ground. Flames still licked from his body and his face appeared grossly disfigured by burns.

Explosions in Beirut—while common during the 1975-90 civil war—have become rare since the conflict ended.

Hariri is a self-made billionaire who led Lebanon for 10 of the years since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war. Since he resigned in October, he has been considered to be in the opposition. He has been in a rivalry with pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud for years. Agencies

THE TIMES OF INDIA 15 FEB 2005

CF-3  
12/13

# Knesset approves prisoner release list

W. Aylin  
②

Associated Press

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13. — Israel's Cabinet today approved a list of names of 500 Palestinian prisoners to be released in coming days, in line with agreements reached at a West Asia summit last week.

The prisoner release is one of several Israeli gestures to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas. Israel will also allow several dozen Palestinian militants who had been expelled from the West Bank to return to their homes and gradually hand five West Bank towns to Palestinian control.

Later today, Israeli and Palestinian security officials were expected to meet to discuss the details of the transfer of the town of Jericho.

An Israeli official said the prisoners to be released had not been involved in violent acts against Israelis, and almost all had completed two-thirds of their sentences.

However, he said, violent offenders could be freed later if a de facto ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians holds. "If we see that things positively developing on the ground, there will be other kinds of prisoners that will be presented to (a Cabinet) committee," the official said.

Not included in the initial release is Qassam Barghouti, son of jailed Palestinian uprising leader Marwan Barghouti, Israeli officials said. Israeli security officials said last week that Qassam Barghouti would be one of the 500 prisoners to be freed. But Israeli

Cabinet minister Mr Haim Ramon said a check indicated he had been involved in planning an attack against Israelis — a violation of the criteria Israel established for the release. The younger Barghouti, a student in Egypt, was arrested upon entering the West Bank in December 2003 on suspicion of "terrorist activities". The elder Barghouti is serving five life sentences for involvement in deadly attacks and is not up for release.

In line with the agreements reached at last week's West Asia summit in Egypt, Israel is to release an additional 400 Palestinian prisoners within three months. Criteria for these releases is expected to be considered by a joint Israeli-Palestinian committee, set up at the summit.

THE STATESMAN

14 FEB 2005

# Britain, USA congratulate elected Iraqis

Associated Press

LONDON, Feb. 13. — British officials and US lawmakers congratulated Iraqis elected to the country's National Assembly after results from Iraq's first free elections in more than 50 years were announced today.

"The Iraqi people have taken another important step on the way to a secure and democratic future," foreign secretary Mr Jack Straw said in a statement. "I congratulate all those elected to the new Transitional National Assembly of Iraq." Iraq's majority Shi'ite Muslims won nearly half the votes in the 30 January election, giving the long-oppressed group significant power but not enough to form a government on its own.

Mr Straw wished the Assembly members well in electing a Presidency Council to oversee Iraq's new executive and in overseeing the drafting of Iraq's constitution. "I call upon the international community to rally behind the transitional Iraqi government and renew its support for the Iraqi people," he added.

American lawmakers said political give-and-take to form a coalition is expected as no Iraqi group won the votes needed to form a new government on its own.

"That's really part of that democracy that we're all so happy that they're working towards," said Senate Majority Leader Mr Bill Frist.

The slate of Shi'ite Muslims for the 275-member National Assembly received just under half of the votes cast in the 30 January elections, the first since Saddam Hussein was ousted as President in 2003. A two-thirds majority of the Assembly chooses the President and two Vice-Presidents, which could push the Shi'ites to form a coalition with other political groups.

"They're brand new at this and it really depends on how they reach out," Sen. Joseph Biden, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told *Fox News Sunday*. The candidate list dominated by Kurds came in second while the slate put together by Prime Minister Mr Ayad Allawi finished third.

## GRAND AYATOLLAH ALI AL-SISTANI:

Although not a candidate in the election, Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric issued an edict describing voting as a "religious duty". Al-Sistani (75) has great influence in the majority Shi'ite community and has opposed anti-American violence.

## ABDEL-AZZ AL-HAKIM:

Shi'ite cleric and leader of the Shi'ite political alliance that overwhelmed other candidate lists in the election, receiving over four million votes, or about 48 per cent of the total. He and al-Sistani led the United Iraqi Alliance.

## IBRAHIM AL-JAAFARI:

Interim Vice-President and the main spokesman for the Islamic Dawa Party, which waged a bloody campaign against Saddam's regime in the late 1970s.

## JALAL TALABANI:

Sunni Kurd and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of two key northern Kurdish parties, his alliance came in

## KEY PLAYERS

second in the election, with 2.175 million votes, or 26 per cent.

## MASSOUD BARZANI:

Sunni Kurd and leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, founded in 1946 by his father.

## AYAD ALLAWI:

The interim Prime Minister's candidate list, the Iraqi List, won 1.168 million votes, or 13.8 per cent of the total, in the announced results.

## AHMAD CHALABI:

Secular Shi'ite banker and one-time Pentagon confidante who led the Iraqi National Congress, an umbrella for groups that included Iraqi exiles, Kurds and Shi'ites.

## GHAZI AL-YAWER:

Interim President, a largely ceremonial post. Mr Al-Yawer's Iraqi Party only won about 150,000 votes — less than two per cent, throwing his future in the new Iraqi government in doubt.

**ADNAN PACHACHI:** The prominent secular Sunni was overwhelmed in the election — the candidate list led by the elder statesmen took only 12,000 votes, or 0.1 per cent.

## NASEER KAMEL AL-CHADERCHI:

Sunni lawyer, businessman and landowner who leads the National Democratic Party.

## HUSSAIN AL-SHAHRISTANI:

One of six figures chosen by al-Sistani to draw up the United Iraqi Alliance's candidate list.

## ADIL ABDUL-MAHDI:

Interim minister of finance and a leading politician in the powerful Shi'ite Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Ran with United Iraqi Alliance.

## HAMID MAJID MOUSSA:

Economist, leader of the Iraqi Communist Party since 1993 and a member of the former Iraqi Governing Council.

— AP

ALLIANCE BAGS 48 PER CENT VOTES

# Shi'ites sweep Iraq polls

AP & AFP

BAGHDAD, Feb. 13. — Iraq's majority Shi'ites have won nearly half the votes in the nation's landmark 30 January elections, giving the much oppressed community significant power to form the first Shi'ite government in an Arab state in 1,000 years. The main Shi'ite list, the United Iraqi Alliance, backed by powerful spiritual leader Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, received more than 4 million votes, or about 48 percent of the total valid votes. A Kurdish alliance was second with 26 per cent of the votes and Prime Minister Mr Ayad Allawi's list was third with about 13.8 per cent votes, the Iraqi Electoral Commission said today. The turnout was 58 per cent.

The Shi'ites will now have to form a coalition in the 275-member National Assembly with the other main parties. The new coalition will select a new President and a new Prime Minister. The President and two Vice-Presidents must be elected by a two-thirds majority.

"We have a responsibility now to work together for the sake of the people," Vice-President Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, a leading Shi'ite and a possible prime ministerial candidate, said. Mr Mouwafak Al-Rubaie, national security adviser and a Shi'ite politician, told Al-Arabiya TV: "Iraq and its new government can't be built by one faction or shade and it is not possible that only two or three sects participate in this government."

However, minority Sunni groups, which largely boycotted the elections and form the core of the insurgency, rejected the elections — raising the prospect of continued violence. In an interview with Al-Jazeera TV, Mohammed Bashar of the anti-American Association of Muslim Scholars said the fact that there was no international or UN monitor in Iraq made him question the



A Shi'ite flagellates himself on a Baghdad street on Sunday during the traditional *ashura* procession, even as the community celebrated its win in Iraq's watershed polls. — AFP

poll results. "Those who boycotted the polls are more than those who took part in it. Boycotting elections does not mean the boycotter will renounce his rights."

Also today, Kurds in Kirkuk celebrated absolute victory in local council elections in Tamin province, flying Kurdistanian flags and shooting in the air.

## Iran-clerics entente worries USA

With a Shi'ite coalition set to take power in Baghdad, US officials have begun grilling top Iraqi Shi'ite politicians to try and gauge the extent of their relationship with Iran, a predominantly Shi'ite nation ruled by its clergy.

In recent talks, US diplomats have bluntly asked Shi'ite leaders how a Shi'ite Iraqi government would react if Iran came under attack, a senior Shi'ite leader said. The Iraqi Shi'ite leaders reportedly assured the Americans that they would be more concerned about how the attack would affect Iraq. They also stressed on Iraq's independence. But despite those assurances, the USA remains worried over the future role of the Shi'ite clerics in Iraq and Iran.

More reports on page 2

# Historic handshake

Sharon and Abbas have a distance to go

The smiles and handshakes on display when Prime Minister Sharon and President Abbas agreed on a truce offer a welcome breather in the cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. The decisions to release 900 Palestinian prisoners, as well as to turn some West Bank cities over to Palestinian control, are encouraging. It cannot be said for certain, however, that the roadmap for peace is on track and will not be derailed again. It is true that Sharon found it impossible to trust Arafat, but thinks he can work with Abbas. However, the Palestinian Authority has as many as 12 competing security organisations, which are basically armed militias. There are other groups outside its ambit, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Both have stated the truce is not binding on them. If, they were to mount a major attack, how would the Israelis react? Can Abbas weld together a dozen militias to form an effective security organisation that would enforce the peace?

The answers to these would depend on concessions that Sharon is willing to make, in settling the substantive questions that remain between Israelis and Palestinians. Returning some West Bank cities to Palestinian control may mean, in Sharon's mind, annexing the rest for Israel, or is it a test for the time a Palestinian nation will exist in the West Bank and Gaza strip alongside Israel? There is also the troublesome question of a right to return of Palestinian refugees. Sharon has invited Abbas to visit his ranch in southern Israel, when doubtless these issues will be discussed. Troublesome questions will pop up over policing the ceasefire and the answer may involve the presence of international monitors and security advisers. International aid is also needed to provide some economic space for Palestinians, as well as help Abbas reconstruct Palestinian security forces. The truce is a promising beginning, but there is a long way still to go.

THE STATESMAN

12 FEB 2005

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## Abbas, Sharon put peace process back on track

### At last, cycle of violence could be broken

He may not have the flamboyance of Yasser Arafat but Mahmoud Abbas possesses in abundance a quality the late chairman never had, namely pragmatism. He has always expressed the view that the intifada was a self-inflicted catastrophe for Palestinian national interests. So when he reached out to Israeli premier Ariel Sharon at the historic Sharm el-Sheik peace summit and the latter reciprocated, we have every reason to believe that peace is now a very real possibility. Abbas is very low-key, he has not promised Palestinians an all-or-nothing solution. Despite the fact that militants made an attempt on his life soon after he took over as president, Abbas has held out a hand of friendship to them. Surprisingly, they have responded favourably and a truce is on at the moment.

#### TIMES VIEW

Israel, in turn, has agreed to pull out of five West Bank towns and suspend all military operations against the Palestinians. Abbas has regained the West's goodwill with his conciliatory gestures. And irrespective of his personal antipathy towards the Palestinians, Sharon finds he has no option but to do business with the Palestinian leader.

In fact, so persuasive has Abbas been that even the militant Hamas has entered the political mainstream and has accepted that a Palestinian state can be restricted to the West Bank and Gaza. Of course, Sharon is under siege from the right-wing elements in his party but, for once, he appears willing to weather the storm. The Americans, without whose involvement a lasting peace agreement cannot be put in place, have signalled their approval of the pace of the confidence-building measures. The Arab countries are now gung-ho and have thrown their considerable weight behind Abbas. For a change, both the Israelis and Palestinians have agreed to proceed incrementally, sorting out problems along the way. Now that the cycle of violence is slowly being broken, ordinary citizens on both sides can breathe easy. This is the welcome peace dividend of the Sharm el-Sheik accord.



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2005

PP Mani Abbas  
A CHANCE FOR PEACE

AN OPPORTUNITY TO restart negotiations for a permanent settlement of the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians could arise if the ceasefire declared on February 8 is sustained. Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, did display an intent to put the last four years of violence behind them when they met at the Egyptian resort of Sharm-el-Sheikh. However, given the history of the conflict, it will be foolhardy to assert that a lasting peace is around the corner. While this caveat should be kept in mind, the first summit-level meeting between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders since the start of the second *intifada* in September 2000 must be regarded as a welcome development. For progress to be made, the Zionist state and its international backers will need to give Mr. Abbas sufficient time and incentive to assert his authority and sell the truce to his people. There is no need to over-react to the declaration by Hamas that it is not a party to the ceasefire. This militant organisation, along with others, has already reached an informal agreement with the Authority to suspend the violent campaign. A condition set by the militant organisations appears to have been met with Israel agreeing to suspend its policy of assassinating leaders of the armed resistance. Even before he completed the task of reorganising his security apparatus, Mr. Abbas took the commendable step of deploying forces to prevent militant attacks.

Israel has promised that it will release hundreds of Palestinian detenus and withdraw its troops from five West Bank cities. While these measures can provide some relief to the people in the occupied territories, the Palestinians are not likely to be satisfied by these conciliatory

gestures alone. In particular, they will expect Israel to stop the construction of the defensive wall that cuts deep into the West Bank at several points. The jettisoning of this project will allay misgivings among Palestinians that the Zionist state intends to annex the portions of the West Bank on its side of the wall. Further, the Sharon Government will have to give up its habit of exerting unreasonable pressure on the Authority to dismantle the infrastructure of the militant organisations. Mr. Abbas showed he had his own plans to draw the militant groups into the mainstream when he asserted that his people would have one state, one military, and a pluralistic society. He clearly intends to disallow the existence of armed groups outside the ambit of the Authority even as he grants extremist organisations the scope to participate fully in the political process. Israel will only damage its own interest if it insists that the Authority should forego this opportunity and tackle the extremists through harsh measures.

The road map for West Asian peace drawn up two years ago envisaged that Israel would dismantle some of the illegal colonies it had established in the West Bank. However, the Sharon Government now maintains it can undertake this measure only after it has implemented plans for a complete withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Very little has been done to execute this plan since the pre-condition is that the Palestinians cease all hostile activities. With Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, promising to assist in the task of controlling militant activity, Israel's excuses for delaying the withdrawal have become weaker. Palestinians are not likely to give up the armed resistance without tangible evidence that peace will bring benefits.

# Israel agrees to remove major checkpoints

AP & AFP

RAMALLAH, Feb. 9. — Palestinian leader Mr Mahmoud Abbas today said that Israel has agreed to remove major roadblocks as part of its planned withdrawal from five West Bank towns and cities in the coming weeks.

"The Israelis will withdraw from

the cities and the adjacent areas and will leave checkpoints, and Palestinian security forces will replace them," Mr Abbas said.

Israel's first concrete gesture would be to reopen the main Erez crossing between Gaza and Israel today. Five hundred Palestinian prisoners are to be freed next week by Israel, to be followed by 400 more at a later stage. Mr Sharon's

office said a ministerial committee to discuss this would meet on Sunday. A second summit between Mr Sharon and Mr Abbas could

take place within a week at Mr Sharon's Sycamore ranch, a senior Israeli official said today.

In Moscow, Russian foreign minister Mr Sergei Lavrov today said that a high-level meeting of the Middle-east quartet tasked with

advancing the peace process will be held in London on 1 March.

## Minister opposes Sharon

Israel's foreign minister Mr Silvan Shalom said yesterday that he would lead the campaign for a national referendum on the planned Gaza withdrawal, which could delay the pullout for months.

# LANDMARK ACCORD BY RED SEA



ENTENTE CORDIALE: Mr Ariel Sharon (left) and Mr Mahmoud Abbas before the start of the summit on Tuesday. — AFP (More reports & photographs on page 2)

**Lara Sikkhtian**  
in Sharm el-Sheik (Egypt)

Feb. 8. — Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Mr Mahmoud Abbas declared today that their people would stop all military and violent attacks against each other, pledging to break a four-year cycle of bloodshed and get peace talks back on track.

With the flags of their countries whipping in the wind in

this Red Sea resort, Mr Sharon and Mr Abbas met face-to-face at a West Asia summit, grinning broadly and surrounded by smiling aides as they leaned across a broad white table to shake hands.

In one sign the talks went well, Egypt and Jordan announced immediately afterwards that they would return their ambassadors to Israel after a four-year absence, possibly within days.

But the Palestinian militant

group, Hamas, immediately called the deal into question, saying it would not be bound by the ceasefire declaration and was waiting to hear from Mr Abbas and to see what Israel would do next.

As part of the deal, Israel will hand over control of five West Bank towns to the Palestinians within three weeks and immediately release 500 Palestinian prisoners.

Those agreements and the sight of Mr Abbas and Mr

Sharon shaking hands were the clearest signs yet of momentum in the peace process after Arafat's death in November and Mr Abbas' election to succeed him in January.

An Israeli official, Mr Gideon Meir, said: "There was a great atmosphere in the talks... smiles and joking." An invitation to both sides to meet separately with President Bush at the White House this spring added another round of momentum on the summit's eve.

"We have agreed on halting all violent actions against Palestinians and Israelis wherever they are," Mr Abbas declared in a statement made after the meetings, as he, Mr Sharon, Egypt's President Mr Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah II sat around a round table. Mr Sharon made a similar pledge. "Today, in my meeting with chairman Mr Abbas, we agreed that all Palestinians will stop all acts of violence against all Israelis everywhere, and, at

## PEACE POINTS

- All military and violent attacks against each other to stop.
- Israel to hand over control of five West Bank towns to the Palestinians within three weeks.
- 500 Palestinian prisoners to be released.
- Egypt and Jordan to return their ambassadors to Israel after a four-year absence
- Sharon invites Abbas to his ranch in southern Israel.

## ON RECORD

- **Sharon:** We have agreed on halting all violent actions everywhere.
- **Abbas:** A new opportunity for peace is born today in the city of peace.
- **Mubarak:** If the road is long, we took the first step.

the same time, Israel will cease all its military activity against all Palestinians everywhere.

As part of the handover of five West Bank towns, Israeli and Palestinian security commanders are to meet tomorrow to prepare the handover of Jericho, the first West Bank town in the list of five, said the Palestinian negotiator.

After the immediate release of 500 Palestinian prisoners, another 400 will also be freed.

— Associated Press

# Israel, Palestinians declare ceasefire

● Peace means Palestinian state alongside Israel: Abbas ● Violence should not murder hope: Sharon

By Atul Aneja  
**MANAMA, FEB. 8.** After four years of bloodshed, the Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, today declared a formal end to violence, kindling hopes of a possible revival of the stalled peace talks. "We have agreed with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to cease all acts of violence against the Israelis and the Palestinians wherever they are," Mr. Abbas said in a statement.

The Palestinian leader held discussions with Mr. Sharon at a summit hosted by Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm-el-Sheikh. Jordan's King Abdullah II was the fourth invitee to the talks, which come after the death of the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, and Mr. Abbas' election to the post of PA President last month. "Peace means the establishment of a democratic Palestinian state alongside Israel," Mr. Abbas observed.

Mr. Sharon, on his part, declared: "Today, in my meeting with Chairman Abbas, we agreed that all Palestinians will stop all acts of violence against all Israelis everywhere, and, at the same time, Israel will cease all its military activity against all Palestinians everywhere."

He added: "Israel intends to honour [the] Palestinians' right to live in independence and dig-



**HISTORIC HANDSHAKE:** Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (left) and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon shake hands during their meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on Tuesday hoping to end bloodshed and heralding peace. — Reuters

nity." The Israeli leader called upon all those present to "declare that violence won't be allowed to murder hope."

Mr. Mubarak told reporters that he welcomed the "determination and willingness" of both

sides.

## Hamas sceptical

Notwithstanding expressions of optimism, the Palestinian militant group, Islamic Resistance Movement or Hamas, has

expressed reservations about the summit's outcome. "There is no sense now in talking about a truce," Hassan Youssef of Hamas told *Al-Jazeera* television.

"We have not seen any serious organisation would take no decision before hearing from Mr.

Abbas on the outcome of the summit. Mr. Zahar also stressed that the Israeli disposition towards political prisoners was a major concern.

Expressing scepticism about the results of the summit, Hafez

Barghouti, Editor-in-Chief of the Palestinian daily, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah*, told *The Hindu* over telephone from Ramallah that he "hoped" the summit would result in the revival of the peace process.

"Mr. Sharon has said in the past that he would not release prisoners who have blood on their hands.

The Israeli Prime Minister is not entitled to make such remarks after being responsible for the deaths of so many innocent Palestinians," he said.

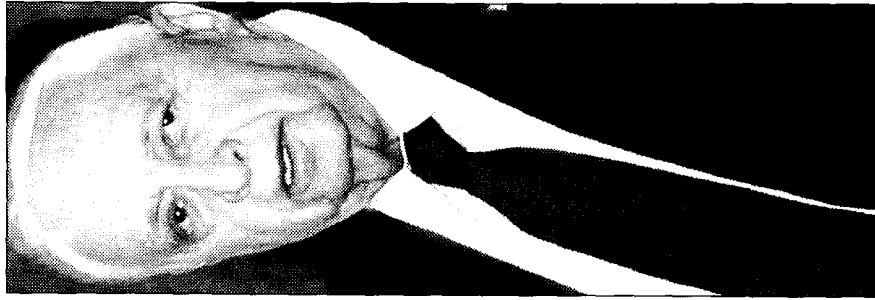
The Palestinian political commentator, Hani Al Masri, pointed out that the ceasefire would hold only if Israel first demonstrated on the ground that it was exercising restraint.

During his meeting, Mr. Sharon invited Mr. Abbas to visit Israel — an offer that the Palestinian leader accepted. Mr. Sharon also extended invitations to Mr. Mubarak and King Abdullah to visit Israel.

Hectic diplomacy in the coming days is expected to see Mr. Sharon and Mr. Abbas visiting Washington at the invitation of the United States President, George W. Bush.

Later, Mr. Mubarak indicated that the other issues hampering peace in West Asia, including the dispute between Syria and Israel over the Golan Heights, would be addressed in the coming days.

# W. Asia rivals in peace meet



Ariele Sharon

**Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt), Feb. 7 (Reuters):** Israeli Prime Minister Ariele Sharon and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will try to end four years of bloodshed and take a step back towards negotiations at a summit in Egypt tomorrow.

The highest-level meeting between the two sides since near the start of the Palestinian uprising in 2000 aims to seal a fragile calm and prepare the ground for reviving a US-backed "road map" for a Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

Adding force to any announcement from the summit in Sharm el-Sheikh will be the presence of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who invited the leaders, and Jordan's King Abdullah.

Hopes for an end to decades of conflict have shot higher since Abbas was elected last month to succeed late leader Yasser Arafat and managed to coax a *de facto* truce from militants.

But armed factions have fallen short of declaring a formal ceasefire, while neither side shows signs of budging on key issues obstructing a

peace deal like borders and whether Palestinian refugees get a "right of return" to Israel.

"This is a time in which we expect we have opportunities for peace," US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said after meeting Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

"It does not guarantee that there will be the positive outcome for which we all hope. That is what the parties have to work toward," she said in Tel Aviv, ending a West Asia visit today that showed Washington's new engagement.

Rice said Abbas and Sharon had accepted an invitation to the White House in the spring. She also named a US general as security coordinator, underscoring a view that hopes of ending the conflict rest on stopping the bloodshed first.

Washington, like its Israeli ally, had long accused Arafat of fomenting violence — despite his denials — and President George W. Bush refused to meet him.

Israeli and Palestinian officials alike say they would like tomorrow's summit to bring a formal end to the violence that

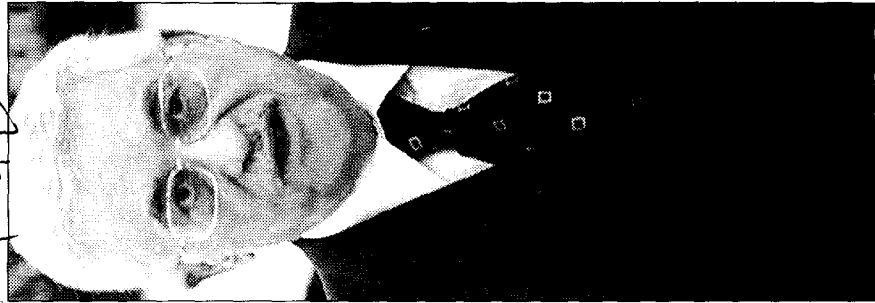
erupted in 2000 when talks collapsed for a Palestinian state on land occupied by Israel in the 1967 West Asia war.

But the vital agreement of militant groups for declaring a ceasefire remains in doubt.

The factions have said Israel's promise to free 900 out of 8,000 Palestinian prisoners — not including those convicted of deadly attacks — to pull back troops from some West Bank cities and to stop targeting top militants are not enough.

"We will determine our position only when we receive Israeli commitments and guarantees," said Sami Abu Zuhri of Hamas. If violence does stop and Palestinians rein in militants, as they are meant to under the road map, Israel would like to coordinate with Abbas on its plan to withdraw settlers from Gaza.

Palestinians fear the pull-out is meant to cement an Israeli hold on the West Bank and say Israel must abide by a road map commitment to freeze settlement growth in the territory. Many more traps lie on the road to a final peace deal and the two sides are far apart on fundamental issues.



Mahmoud Abbas

# Rice names W Asia pointman

## Sharon, Abbas to hold talks with Bush separately in Washington

SAUL HUDSON  
TEL AVIV, FEBRUARY 7

SECRETARY of State Condoleezza Rice announced on Monday the appointment of a US general as security coordinator to protect budding West Asia peace moves and that Israeli and Palestinian leaders would visit Washington.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and new Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, due to hold a landmark summit in Egypt on Tuesday on halting more than four years of violence, will meet separately with President George W. Bush in the spring.

Ending a West Asia visit that signalled a renewed US commitment to peace efforts



Rice and Abbas in Ramallah on Monday. Reuters

after Yasser Arafat's death, Rice told a news conference in Tel Aviv that Lieutenant-General William Ward had been appointed security coordinator.

The move fell short of assigning a US envoy to oversee

peacemaking, which Rice said she preferred to be as free of foreign mediation as possible, and underscored a belief new hopes for ending the conflict rested on halting bloodshed first.

"General Ward's mandate

is on security, which after all really has to get established and has to be moving forward in order for us to make progress," Rice said.

Ward, she said, would "assist the Palestinian Authority to consolidate and expand their recent efforts on security and encourage resumption of Israeli-Palestinian security coordination". Ward was previously commander of the NATO Stabilisation Force in post-war Bosnia and had previous assignments to Egypt, Somalia, Germany and South Korea.

"We have agreed on a ceasefire with the Palestinian factions... and we hope that we will get a positive response from the Israelis on a mutual ceasefire," Abbas, elected last month, said after meeting Rice in Ramallah. —Reuters

# Rice harps on a unified Iraq, W Asian peace

Associated Press  
Ankara, February 6

THE US wants help from Turkey and other countries to "sustain the momentum" toward West Asia peace, and incitement to anti-Jewish violence and sentiment must end, secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said here on Sunday.

She sought to reassure Turkey that the Bush administration wants Iraq to remain whole and at peace with its neighbours. "Israel deserves to live in peace and the Jewish people deserve the respect of their neighbours," Rice said following meetings with Turkish President Ahmet N. Sezer and foreign minister Abdullah Gul.

"We have been very clear that incitement cannot be ignored," Rice said, adding Arab governments cannot consistently say they support peace while tolerating horrific characterisations of Jews in the media. "We are looking at what we can do to sustain the momentum toward peace between Israel and the Palestinians," Rice said before leaving Turkey for Jerusalem, where she planned to see Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon late on Sunday. The next day, she was to go to the West Bank for talks with new Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

Anti-US sentiments have been strong in Turkey since the start of the war in Iraq.

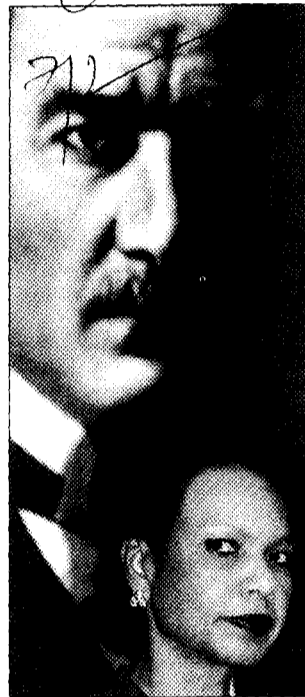
Earlier, Rice said Israel and the Palestinians should control their own path to peace, with help from West Asian nations and others. The US does not need to take a leading role now, Rice had said on Saturday.

"When our involvement needs to take on a different character, we will do precisely that," Rice said en route to Ankara, the last stop on this leg of her European and West Asia trip.

Later in her first trip abroad as President Bush's new chief diplomat, Rice returns to Europe for stops in Italy, France, Belgium and Luxembourg. Some of the European stops pave the way for Bush's own European trip later this month.

Rice had already met Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday.

Turks worry the war in Iraq could lead to the disintegration of the neighbouring country and the creation of a Kur-



Rice stands in front of a portrait of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk during a Press meet in Ankara on Sunday.

dish state in the northern areas. That could embolden Kurds in southeastern Turkey, where the Turkish army has been battling Kurdish rebels since 1984. The fight has left 37,000 dead.

"I'm here really in part to say to the Turks that we are fully committed, fully committed, to a unified Iraq," Rice said aboard the plane to Turkey. "We are making that message clear through all channels that we have in Iraq."

Relations between the United States and Turkey have been strained since Turkey's parliament in 2003 refused to host US soldiers for the Iraq invasion, which most Turks strongly opposed.

The West Asia portion of Rice's trip gives her a chance to see each of the main players in what could be renewed negotiations for a Palestinian state. However, Rice will not attend a Sharon-Abbas summit in Egypt next week.

"The United States wants very much for this to be a process that is the parties' process, that is owned by the parties," and their neighbours, the secretary of state said, asserting that the United States will offer assistance in a variety of ways.

07 FEB 2005



# Rice wades into West Asia

**Tel Aviv, Feb. 6** (Reuters): Condoleezza Rice began her first visit as secretary of state to the heart of the West Asian conflict today with Israelis and Palestinians already set on a new course of dialogue after four years of violence.

Flying into Israel from Turkey, she planned to hold talks later in the day with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Jerusalem and tomorrow with new Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank.

Both sides will hold a summit in Egypt on Tuesday on reviving a US-backed peace "road map", making the mission of Washington's top diplomat less of an arm-twisting exercise and more of an affirming exercise of change after Yasser Arafat's death.

Criticised for too little in-



**Rice at the Yad Vashem holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.** (Reuters)

volvement in West Asian peace efforts in his first term, President George W. Bush sent Rice to the region to back up his pledge to press harder for an end to the conflict.

But she will not attend the summit in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh and signalled she preferred to see

Sharon and Abbas make progress as free of foreign mediation as possible. "I hope we would all get into a mind-set that says if the parties are able to continue to move on their own, that's the very best outcome," Rice, on an eight-day tour of Europe and West Asia, said en route to Ankara, the stop before Tel Aviv.

Abbas' election last month to succeed Arafat, viewed by the US and Israel as an obstacle to peace, has stirred international optimism, and Rice pledged to discuss ways for the sides to coordinate security and defuse crises.

One crisis was averted today when negotiators hammering out terms for the summit agreed to defer a decision on how many Palestinian prisoners Israel will release as a goodwill gesture.

Under the deal, a joint Israeli-Palestinian committee will review the release roster after Tuesday's talks in what a Palestinian official called "a positive step forward".

Israel had disappointed the Palestinian leadership by refusing to include those jailed for deadly attacks among the 900 prisoners it intends to free.

Abbas is under enormous domestic pressure to secure freedom for 8,000 prisoners, among the most emotive issues for ordinary Palestinians, many of whom have relatives in Israeli jails.

Political analysts differ over how much the US should intensify a brokering role largely dormant under Bush, although he championed the "road map" charting steps towards a Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

# Rice's effort to bolster West Asia peace

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, FEB. 6. The U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, is set to begin talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders that could lead to the revival of peace talks.

Dr. Rice who arrived in Israel today will hold discussions with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and later on Monday with the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, in Ramallah.

Dr. Rice arrives at a time when tensions between the Palestinians and Israel have somewhat eased. Her visit precedes the first summit meeting between Mr. Sharon and Mr. Abbas on Tuesday at the Egyptian resort town of Sharm-el-Sheikh. The Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, is hosting the meeting which the Jordanian King, Abdullah II, will also attend. Egypt is keen to give the summit a wider regional dimension.

The Egyptian Foreign Minister, Ahmed Abul-Gheit, is today carrying a message from Mr. Mubarak to the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad so that comprehensive peace talks on resolving the wider Arab-Israeli conflict can begin. Israel has captured the strategic Golan Heights, which once belonged to Syria.

The U.S. has strongly praised the Palestinian election as a step towards democracy and has welcomed the efforts of Mr. Abbas to get militant factions to agree to an informal ceasefire.

On the eve of her visit, Ms. Rice said Washington would want the sides to continue making progress. "I hope we would all get into a mind-set that says if the parties are able to continue to move on their own that's the very best outcome," she said. "When our involvement needs to take on a different character then we will do precisely that."

## Joint committee

AP reports:

Israel on Sunday signalled it would consider freeing some Palestinian prisoners involved in attacks on Israelis, defusing a crisis with the Palestinian Authority. Last week, Israel's Cabinet approved the release of 900 prisoners, none involved in violence. Palestinian officials complained that the planned gesture did not go far enough.

07 FEB 2005

THE HINDU

# Iran, Syria hit back at Bush

By Julian Borger

WASHINGTON, FEB. 4. The Syrian and Iranian Governments have reacted angrily to the U.S. President, George W. Bush's vow to confront them over their alleged harbouring of terrorists and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Bush's State of the Union speech on Wednesday identified Syria and Iran as the primary obstacles to the administration's declared mission to spread peace and democracy in West Asia.

It sent tremors through the region, raising fears that the administration might have more military action on its second-term agenda.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, denounced the U.S. as "like one of the big heads of a seven-headed dragon," menacing his country under the direction of "Zionist and non-Zionist capitalists".

"Bush is the fifth U.S. President seeking to uproot the Iranian nation and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Carter, Reagan and father Bush and Clinton failed. This President will also fail," the Associated Press quoted him as saying.

## Growing nervousness

The response from Damascus also reflected growing nervousness at Mr. Bush's intentions. "Freedoms cannot be exported by tanks and planes, death and destruction," said Syria's Information Minister, Mehdi Dakhlallah.

"Everyone knows that Syria is cooperating in fighting terrorism, but the definition of terrorism cannot be selective and based on ideology and politics," he said.

In his speech, Mr. Bush restated the commitment he made in last month's inaugural address to dedicate foreign policy to spreading democracy — particularly in West Asia.

He pledged \$350 millions in support for Palestinian nation-building. He also made a distinction between non-democratic allies, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to whom Mr. Bush offered encouragement for democratic reforms, and adversaries such as Syria and Iran, for whom he reserved tougher words.

Using the sort of rhetoric once applied to Saddam Hussein, he said: "To promote

peace in the broader Middle East (West Asia), we must confront regimes that continue to harbour terrorists and pursue weapons of mass murder."

He said Syria was harbouring terrorists, and dubbed Iran "the world's primary state sponsor of terror," accusing it of pursuing nuclear weapons. In an apparent call for an Iranian democratic uprising, he declared: "To the Iranian people, I say tonight, 'As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you.'"

Flynt Leverett, a West Asia expert in the National Security Council during Mr. Bush's first term, pointed to a difference in tone between the warnings aimed at Syria and at Iran.

"He still is basically addressing the Syrian regime," said Mr. Leverett. "With Iran, it struck me that ... this President is not going to do a deal that would legitimise the regime."

If that analysis proves accurate, the speech is bad news for Europe's hopes of getting the U.S. more involved in talks with Iran over suspending uranium enrichment. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

## Iran not on agenda: Rice

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, FEB. 4. A military intervention in Iran to thwart its contentious nuclear programme was not currently on America's "agenda" and Washington hoped to resolve the dispute through diplomatic means, said the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, here today.

She did not appear to rule out the option underlining the fact that there were no military plans "at this point in time."

Dr. Rice, who arrived here on Thursday at the start of a whistle-stop tour of Europe designed to mend fences after the recent divisions over Iraq, echoed Mr. Bush's warning that Iran must give up its nuclear ambitions.

She also attacked Iran's human rights record and, in a significant remark in the context of regime changes in Iraq and Afghanistan, said: "Iran is not immune to the changes that are going on in this region." Earlier she told journalists accompanying her that "unelected mullahs" were not a good thing for the Iranian people or the region.

Describing her talks with Mr. Straw as "productive," Dr. Rice said Washington and London shared a common view on Iran's controversial nuclear programme.

# Israel ready to 'risk' talking

AFP  
Jerusalem, February 4

AHEAD OF next week's landmark West Asia summit, Israel said it was ready to "take risks" in its negotiations with the Palestinians but discord emerged over some gestures by Israel including the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

"We are strong enough to take risks in negotiating with the Palestinians," Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told public radio. "All our security officials believe that important changes have taken place within the Palestinian Authority because it's the first time a Palestinian leader opposes terrorism," he added, referring to Mahmud Abbas.

Abbas has publicly called for an end to the armed struggle against Israel while seeking to clinch a ceasefire deal with hardline militants. He and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon are to meet next Tuesday at a summit in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh, the first meeting between the top Palestinian and Israeli leaders in more than four years.

"We must take risks to improve



**GUNS AND PRAYERS:** Israeli soldiers stand guard as Palestinians pray in a West Bank village on Friday.

the chance" of reaching an agreement with the Palestinians, Olmert said, suggesting that the summit would probably not be cancelled even if a Palestinian militant attack took place.

He said the objective at Sharm el-Sheikh was to succeed to "convince the world of Ariel Sharon's courage and boldness in accepting to make gestures towards the Palestinians."

"It's now up to them to prove that they are capable of implementing what they promised," ad-

ded Olmert, who also serves as Industry and Trade Minister.

The one-day summit is widely expected to close with a mutual ceasefire declaration.

Palestinian negotiations minister Saeb Erakat said he hoped "the summit will be successful and will tackle negotiations (on key issues)." Israel's six-member so-called kitchen cabinet gave its green light on Thursday for an army withdrawal from five West Bank cities and the transfer of security control to the Palestinians.

# Israel to cut West Bank presence

Jerusalem, Jan. 30 (Reuters): Israel is likely to pull back its troops from several West Bank cities within days, defence minister Shaul Mofaz said today, in a further sign of cooperation with a new Palestinian leadership.

"I think there is an opportunity to create a new reality," Mofaz told Israel Radio after talks late yesterday with Palestinian official Mohammed Dahlan, a former Gaza security chief, on confidence-building steps.

"One of the issues we discussed is the transfer of (West Bank) cities," Mofaz said.

"It is very possible responsibility will be transferred (to Palestinian security forces) in some of the cities in the next few days. We are supposed to meet again to finalise the issues."

Sources close to the Palestinian delegation said agreement was reached on the handover this week of five cities in the West Bank, where militants wanted by Israel would be kept in check by the Palestinian Authority.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie called the Mofaz-Dahlan meeting "very successful" and said its results would be evident soon.



Sharon (left) and Abbas: On the road to peace

The Israeli army has checkpoints surrounding West Bank cities and has mounted frequent raids against militants since the start of a Palestinian uprising in September 2000.

But violence has dropped significantly since Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas deployed security forces across the Gaza Strip earlier this month to prevent attacks on Israelis before a planned Israeli pullout from the occupied territory this summer.

Abbas, backed by the US as a moderate and reformist, was elected to succeed Yasser Arafat as president on January 9 and has been trying to coax gunmen into a ceasefire they say must be reciprocated by Israel.

Israel said on Friday it was sharply reducing proactive military operations in the Palestinian territories as a response to Abbas' efforts.

Violence flared, however, in the southern Gaza Strip, where Israeli troops killed an unarmed Palestinian near the Egyptian border, medics said. The army said he came within 15 metres of a post in an area off-limits to Palestinians and soldiers shot him.

Officials said Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would meet around February 8 to explore ways to revive a peace "road map" charting mutual steps towards the creation of a Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

The talks would coincide with a visit to the region by new US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice. She has pledged intensive personal involvement to pursue Israeli-Palestinian peace after Arafat's death.

Mofaz said he and Dahlan also discussed the issue of an Israeli release of Palestinian prisoners, a move that could boost popular support for Abbas, "but nothing has been decided on the scope or timing".

31 JAN 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

# Fear is the key in Iraq elections

New York Times  
Baghdad, January 27

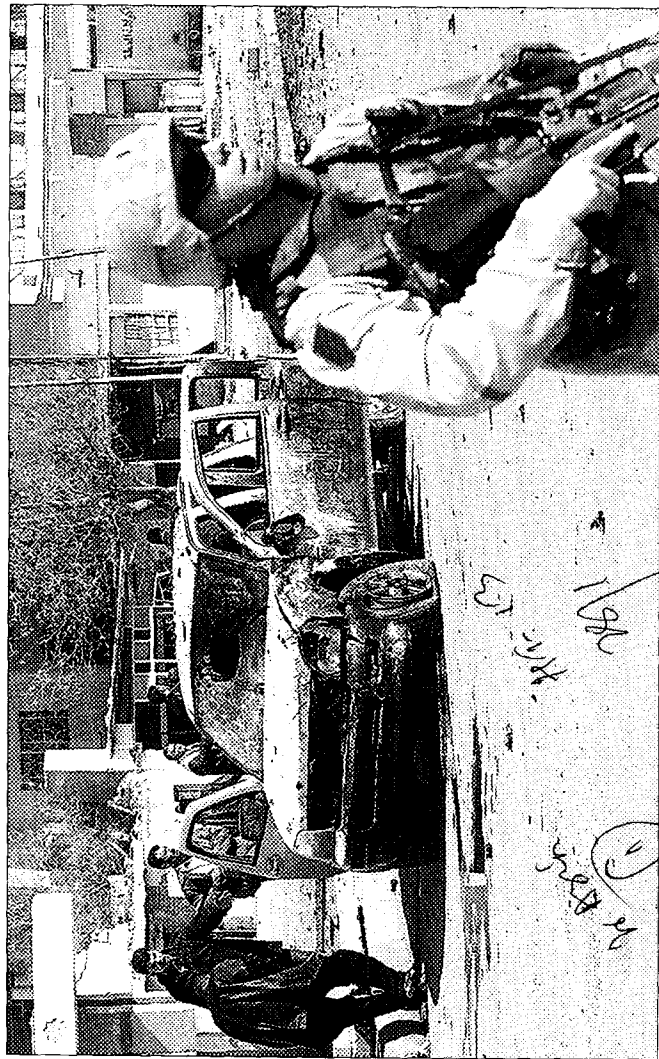
RAAD AL-NAQIB, a 46-year-old dentist, will not vote on Sunday, when Iraqis will have their first opportunity in a generation to participate in an election with no predetermined outcome.

It is, he says, far too dangerous when insurgent groups have warned they will target anybody who approaches a polling station. Starkly put, Baghdad is not under control, either by the Iraqi interim government or the US military.

Daily life here has become a deadly lottery, a place so fraught with danger that one senior US military officer acknowledged at a briefing last month that no place in the wide area of the city assigned to his troops could be considered safe.

Although the US military command has cited surveys that have shown 80 per cent of Baghdad's residents eager to vote, informal surveys by reporters have turned up many people like Naqib who say they will stay away from the polls.

"Every day, when you leave your home, you don't know what will happen — bombs, bullets, kidnapping," Naqib said.



AFF  
A US soldier at the scene of an explosion near Governor Building in Baqouba, 60 km from Baghdad. One Iraqi army officer was killed and six others were wounded.

In one Baghdad office, only one of 20 people asked said he intended to vote, the others all citing the fear of being targeted by insurgents, either as they walk to the polls — all civilian more than once.

US commanders, showing that they, too, are worried about the turnout, have included Baghdad among the four of Iraq's 18 provinces where security issues pose a major threat to the voting.

## Fresh militant attacks; 19 die

INSURGENTS STAGED attacks across Iraq on Thursday, killing at least 19 civilians and members of the security forces. Despite a massive security clampdown, insurgents set off car bombs, staged ambushes on Iraqi and US forces and attacked polling stations and government buildings. In Samarra, a suicide bomber killed seven people and five more died in clashes between insurgents and Iraqi forces backed by US troops. Five people were killed and 15 wounded in a bomb attack on an Iraqi military convoy near Baghdad.

**Crash kills 31 Marines:** Thirty-one US soldiers died in a helicopter crash in Iraq and six more were killed in insurgent attacks on the deadliest day for American forces since they invaded the country 22 months ago. The US transport helicopter went down near Rutba, in the desert of western Iraq on Wednesday presumably due to bad weather.

AFF, Baghdad

BAN ON CIVILIAN WEAPONS

# Abbas pushes ahead with peace plans

Associated Press

RAMALLAH, Jan. 27. — The new Palestinian leadership today banned civilians from carrying weapons and indicated it will appoint a new interior minister known for his tough stance against militants, clear signals of seriousness about reining in violence — an Israeli precondition for peace talks.

The decree banning Palestinian civilians from holding weapons was a gesture toward Israel and the USA, which have long demanded disarming of militant groups responsible for attacks that have killed more than 1,000 Israelis, as well a double signal to Palestinians — that the Abbas regime will be based on law and order, and that police will not allow militants to strut in public with their weapons.

Even before the decree was issued, Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon said he was "very satisfied" with the actions of the new leader, Mr Mahmoud Abbas. He has been pressing hard for a declaration by militant groups of a halt to attacks against Israel. For now, the militants have agreed to a temporary suspension of violence to test Israel's response.

Pushing for peace, Mr Abbas urged Israel to respond swiftly to calls for a mutual ceasefire with armed factions who have already agreed to an unofficial temporary truce. "We are interested in a mutual ceasefire. The



Mr Sharon (above) has expressed his satisfaction over Mr Abbas' efforts to stop the violence by Palestinians.

Israelis have also told me that they are interested but they need to respond very quickly," he told reporters. "There is no reason why they should delay any decision."

Also today, Palestinian police were preparing to deploy in central and southern Gaza to stop militants from attacking Israelis, as they have been doing in northern Gaza for the past week. The new deployment was set for tomorrow morning, Palestinian officials said.

28 JAN 2005

THE STATESMAN

# An uncertain wait

By Vaiju Naravane

*Turkey has a long way to go before qualifying itself for EU membership. It has to bring itself in line with the democratic and institutional principles that govern European nations.*

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AN TURKEY be considered a European country? The answer to that question was given at the 25-member European Union summit in Brussels on December 17, 2004, when heads of state and government agreed to formally open talks on Turkey's accession to the select European club at whose door Ankara has been knocking with singular persistence since 1963.

But the answer, when it came, was a conditional one. While EU leaders gave a date — October 3, 2005 — for the opening of accession talks, they also warned that the negotiations could drag on for up to 20 years, with no firm promises of membership at the end. This sets Turkey apart from all other candidate countries for which accession talks have been close-ended.

By responding with a conditional yes, EU leaders were in fact turning the proposition around. Implicit in their response is the question: is Turkey fit to be in Europe? With the onus of proof lying with Ankara. For the past decade, Europe has been dragging its feet over opening formal membership talks with Turkey, shifting the goalposts each time the Turks pressed for a firm answer.

The objections to Turkey joining Europe are numerous: Turkey is large with a growing population of 70 million people. Despite its secular Constitution, it is not considered fully democratic because of the preponderant role the army has played in its recent history. Its treatment of the minorities and its human rights record do not in any way match European standards. Turkey is poor and undereducated and it will cost billions of Euros in development aid to allow the Turks to catch up with everyone else.

But the overriding principal argument against Turkey's accession to the EU is that of religion, culture, history and geography. Straddling East and West, sharing its frontiers as much with Europe — Greece, Bulgaria — as with the Middle East — Syria, Iraq, Iran — Turkey falls between two cultural stools.

Like many other European thinkers and commentators both from Europe's Right and Left, Jean-Louis Bourlanges, a French member of the European Parliament, questions Turkey's suitability to join the European club on civilisational grounds. "Turkey is not part Europe and it is foolish to persist in building a multi-civilisational EU with unlimited, ever-extending borders. Turkey's accession must involve, first and foremost, a redefinition of the European project with citizens deciding whether they

want an EU devoid of specific civilisational underpinnings or whether they wish to limit it to borders inherited from history and geography," he says.

These geographic, cultural, religious and political borders, he says, are clear and set in the Bosphorous Straits. While the contributions of Turkey to Western institutions such as NATO, the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), the European Council and the United Nations have been valuable, and must not be underestimated, they do not make Turkey European. Does Europe really wish to share its borders with Syria, Iran or Iraq? Does it wish to import the endemic instability of the Middle East? Can Europe allow itself to be undermined from within, he asks.

Those opposed to extending Europe's borders up to Syria and Iran feel such an Europe would have little consistence. It would be overstretched and dysfunctional in budgetary, judicial and institutional terms. Turkey's accession would make Europe borderless, powerless, ill-defined and irrelevant as an international player. Opponents of Turkey view Washington's continued pressure on the EU to accept Turkey's membership bid as proof of America's Machiavellian intention to further weaken its main rival in the international arena by saddling it with a time bomb, both in terms of retarded and costly economic development, and the Trojan Horse of a large and growing Muslim population.

Supporters say the absorption of Turkey should pose no problem since Europe is no longer a solid unified bloc of developed economies but rather a mosaic of nations big and small with variable geometry, moving in concentric circles at differing speeds. An excluded Turkey could not be an effective firewall against Islamic fundamentalism and Middle Eastern instability. Anchoring Turkey in the EU would reassure Europe's growing population of Muslims (an estimated 9 million scattered mainly across France, Germany, Britain, Italy and Spain). Turing away Turkey would send a negative signal to the fastest growing segment of Europe's population.

Writer Guy Sorman, a passionate supporter of Turkey's EU bid, says:

"If Europe is to build a new and constructive rapport with the Islamic world, one opposed to what the Americans have done in the Middle East, it is imperative that Turkey is allowed into the EU. Turkey is a living example of a compromise between secularism and Islam, a reminder that choices other than purely confrontational ones are both possible and available. Rejecting Turkey means closing our horizons, refusing a global role, accepting American hegemony."

In the past three years, there has been a significant shift in European public opinion over the Turkish question. This is closely related to the aftermath of 9/11 and an increase in Islamophobia across Europe. A recent pan-European poll shows that public opinion in several countries, including France, Germany, Austria, Poland and Greece, is opposed to Turkey's accession. In France, for example, 67 per cent of the population would vote 'no' if a referendum were to be held today. French President Jacques Chirac came in for some severe criticism when he announced he was in favour of allowing in the Turks, even though his cautious approbation was punctuated by an impressive series of ifs and buts.

Critics of full membership for Turkey have proposed a special partnership regime whereby Turkey would be granted special privileges but would be formally kept out of the Union. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has already rejected such an offer saying Turkey would settle for all or nothing.

A significant stumbling block in the negotiations process could be the status of Cyprus and Turkey's stubborn refusal to recognise the island state's pro-Greek Government. A row over Cyprus, which joined the EU in May 2004, almost derailed the talks until a last minute solution was found, with Turkey agreeing to sign a protocol extending its 1963 association agreement with the EU to cover all member-states, including Cyprus. Ankara insists this does not amount to a formal recognition of the Mediterranean island state. However, over the next two decades that the talks are expected to last, Turkey will have to work out some acceptable solution. Ankara now says it will turn again to the United Nations and the good offices of Kofi Annan whose

WLF Ann  
Turks  
HD-10

peace plan was accepted by Turkish Cypriots in Northern Cyprus but rejected by Greek Cypriots.

It is difficult at this stage to evaluate the economic impact of an eventual integration of Turkey. Clearly, because of its size, its potential but also its economic weakness, Turkey will pose an enormous challenge to the EU. With its 70 million people, the admission of Turkey alone, with its mainly agricultural economy and accompanying poverty, will be equivalent to the addition of 10 new members last May.

Figures published by the European Union appear staggering. Simulations based on Turkish integration in 2015 suggest Turkey would receive 28 billion euros in "catching up" aid by 2025 — a third of the EU's current budget.

France and Germany, who would like to limit their EU payments to 1 per cent of GDP, would have to contribute significantly more. If they refuse, other beneficiary countries, such as the new entrants from Eastern Europe, would receive less. With Turkish per capita income at 28 per cent of the EU average, every region of Turkey would be eligible for extra development funding, a fact that makes weaker EU economies baulk.

So is Turkey fit to be part of Europe? The true answer to this question will come in the next decade. The EU has said Turkey is "not a candidate like the others." Which is a diplomatic way of pointing to the religious question while underlining several difficulties: that Turkey will be the most populous nation of Europe in 20 years with tremendous regional disparities within its borders. Turkey has a long, long way to go before qualifying. Its human rights record has to improve. It has to bring itself in line with the democratic and institutional principles that govern European nations. Healthcare, education, treatment of minorities, the status of women, freedom of expression — all need looking at. But Turkey must also work on and reconcile itself to its own past by recognising the Armenian genocide of 1915.

As the French daily, *Le Monde*, said in an editorial: "One of the major virtues of the European Union is to encourage applicants to reform, to modernise themselves, to respect the rights of minorities, to break with hegemonist temptations. There is no reason why this educational virtue should not work with the Turks. For them the choice is clear: if they meet the conditions set by the European Union, they could become a full member in 10 to 15 years. It is now for the Turks to seize this opportunity."



# Palestine groups' nod to ceasefire

Agencies  
Gaza City, January 24

WHILE NO formal ceasefire has been announced, two of the largest Palestinian militant groups — Hamas and Islamic Jihad — have tentatively agreed to a "period of calm", if Israel does the same, a Palestinian legislator overseeing negotiations said on Monday.

Ziad Abu Amar told *Voice of Palestine* radio: "We are ready to see if Israel is ready to respond to that and then to hold a truce."

Israel has said it will not launch incursions into Gaza so long as no additional Qasam rockets or mortars are fired from the Palestinian territory at Jewish settlements or into Israel.

Negotiating with the militants since last week, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas sounded hopeful late on Sunday.

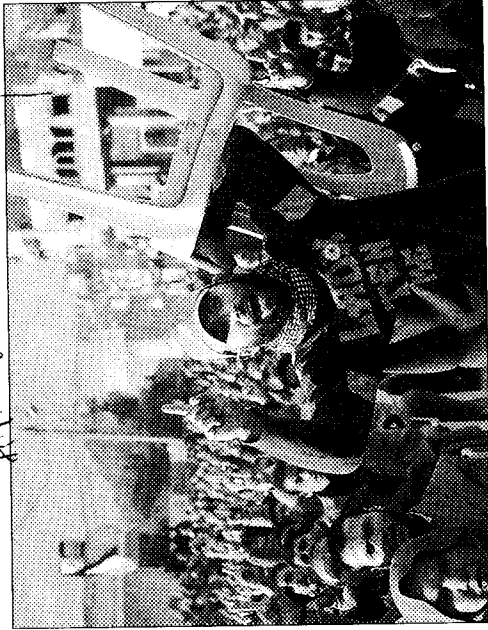
"In these last few days, there has been a real dialogue with the (militant) or-

curity forces to rein in Palestinian attacks on Israeli targets has long been a key sticking point in West Asia peace process between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

A week ago, Abbas ordered Palestinian security forces to stop attacks on Israeli targets. By Friday, Abbas had deployed about 2,000 security forces around northern Gaza to stop rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli communities.

Abbas has ordered an investigation into an attack that killed six Israeli civilians on January 13 for which Hamas, the Popular Resistance and Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility.

Hamas' military wing, Izzedine al-Qassam, has admitted responsibility for terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians as well as attacks against the Israeli military. Israel and the US State Department consider Hamas a terrorist organisation.

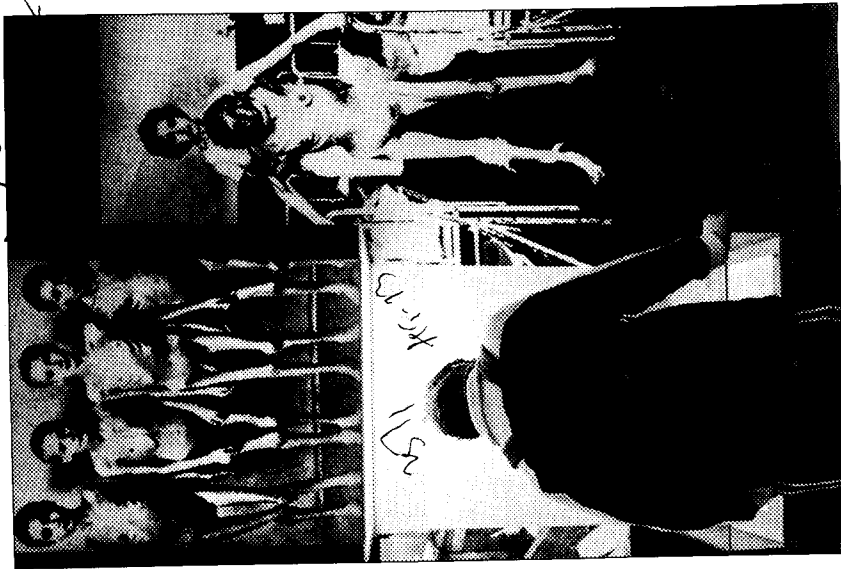


REUTERS  
Palestinians chant anti-Israeli slogans during a Hamas rally in Beit Hanoun, Gaza Strip, on Monday.

of Israeli aggression."

"From this point, we can say that there has been significant progress in the talks, our differences have diminished and therefore we are bound to reach an agreement very soon."

The use of Palestinian se-



AP  
A man looks at images from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem on Monday

25 JAN 2005

Mr Abbas (2)

# Hot seat

KS

## Short honeymoon for Mahmoud Abbas

The political optimism in the Mideast that came with the decisive victory in the Palestinian presidential elections of Mahmoud Abbas, a man of moderate convictions who is known not to favour violence, didn't last long. Israelis had cooperated in the holding of Palestinian elections, and Prime Minister Sharon had called to congratulate Abbas on his election victory. President Bush, who had taken Sharon's cue in boycotting Arafat, invited Abbas to the White House. But all it took was a deadly attack at a Gaza crossing by a Hamas suicide bomber before it was back to the familiar tough posturing. Sharon has launched military manoeuvres and threatens large-scale raids into the Gaza strip. Abbas is truly in the hot seat now, because if he cannot demonstrate that he can turn off the tap of terror and control violence from the Palestinian side, the Israelis will have no incentive to negotiate with him and will go ahead unilaterally with their plans. Wisely, Abbas has decided to deploy Palestinian security forces on the border between Israel and the Gaza strip, asking them to curb militant attacks.

During his tenure as prime minister under Arafat, he had managed to get militant commanders to agree to a truce, which would give him space for talking with Tel Aviv about a negotiated solution. But Sharon let him down, saying that he was not interested in a truce, and persisting with targeted assassinations of Hamas and Islamic Jihad commanders. That makes Abbas's job tougher this time, as his preferred option is to co-opt militant leaders into running the Palestinian Authority. Sharon, on the other hand, wants him to confront them, which could lead to civil war among the Palestinians. In other words, a logjam similar to when Yasser Arafat was around, except that there is no Yasser Arafat to blame it on. Perhaps, along the lines of what is called a "confidence building measure" in the Indo-Pakistani context, Israelis and Palestinians could cooperate on what they both agree, by coordinating their forces for an orderly Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza strip. Subsequent to that, some political concessions are necessary from Israeli; while Abbas must demonstrate that he can get a grip on the anarchy within the Palestinian camp.

25 JAN 2005

THE STATESMAN

# ইজরায়েল: সুসংকেত

গাজায় সামরিক অভিযান স্থগিত রাখিয়া এবং নূতন প্যালেস্টাইনি নেতৃত্বের সহিত নিরাপত্তা বিষয়ে আলোচনা শুরু করার সিদ্ধান্ত লইয়া ইজরায়েল সংঘর্ষ ও রক্তপাতের পরিবর্তে শান্তিকে একটা সুযোগ দিতে মনস্থ করিয়াছে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী এরিয়েল শ্যারন এই মর্মে তাহার কোয়ালিশন সরকারের সিদ্ধান্তের কথা জানাইয়া দেওয়ায় সকলেই স্বস্তি বোধ করিতেছেন। প্রয়াত ইয়াসার আরাফতের উত্তরসূরি হিসাবে মাহমুদ আব্বাসের নির্বাচন প্যালেস্টাইনে যে শান্তি-সম্ভাবনা জাগ্রত করিয়াছিল, জঙ্গি হামলায় শুরুতেই তাহা নস্যাৎ হইবার উপক্রম হইল। গাজায় 'হামাস' জঙ্গিদের আক্রমণে ছয় জন ইজরায়েলির মৃত্যু আবার এক দফা ইজরায়েলি অভিযানের আশঙ্কা মূর্ত করিয়া তুলিয়াছিল। হামাস, আল-আকসা শহিদ ব্রিগেড এবং ইসলামিক জিহাদের মতো জঙ্গি সংগঠন ইজরায়েলের বিরুদ্ধে সশস্ত্র হামলা প্রত্যাহারের আহ্বান প্রত্যাখ্যান করায় জঙ্গি দমনে ইজরায়েলি অভিযান প্রায় অনিবার্য হইয়া ওঠে। কিন্তু মাহমুদ আব্বাস তাহার পূর্বসূরির তুলনায় অনেক বেশি দৃঢ়তার পরিচয় দেন। তিনি নিরাপত্তা রক্ষীদের গাজা সীমান্তে মোতায়েন করিয়া ইজরায়েলের বিরুদ্ধে জঙ্গি হামলার সম্ভাবনা রোধ করিতে সচেষ্ট হন। সম্ভবত তাহার এই তৎপরতা তাহার পূর্বসূরির নিশ্চেষ্টতার তুলনায় এরিয়েল শ্যারনের মন ভিজাইয়া থাকিবে। আরাফতের সঙ্গে যেখানে সব রকম আলোচনার দরজাই বন্ধ করিয়া দেওয়া হইয়াছিল, সেখানে আব্বাসের সহিত শান্তি-আলোচনার প্রক্রিয়া পুনরারম্ভ করার উদ্যোগ দেখা যাইতেছে।

অবস্থানের এই স্বাগত পরিবর্তনের নেপথ্যে শুধু যে প্যালেস্টাইনি কর্তৃপক্ষের চরিত্রে পরিবর্তনের ঘটনা রহিয়াছে, এমন নয়। একই সঙ্গে রহিয়াছে ইজরায়েল সরকারের চরিত্রগত পরিবর্তনও। তাহার নিজের দল কটর দক্ষিণপন্থী লিকুদ-এর সমর্থন হারাওয়া শ্যারন বামপন্থী লেবার পার্টির সমর্থনে সরকার গঠন করিয়াছেন। এই দল বরাবরই গাজা ও ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংক প্যালেস্টাইনিদের ফিরাইয়া দিবার এবং শান্তিপূর্ণ আলোচনার মাধ্যমে সমস্যা সমাধানের পক্ষপাতী। ফলে শ্যারনের পক্ষে অধিকৃত গাজা হইতে ইহুদি বসতকারীদের তুলিয়া দিবার প্রকল্পটি রূপায়ণ করা অপেক্ষাকৃত সহজ হইবে। একই সঙ্গে নবনির্বাচিত প্যালেস্টাইনি নেতৃত্বের সহিত বন্ধ থাকি শান্তি-প্রক্রিয়া নব পর্যায়ে শুরু করাও সম্ভব হইবে। এক বার তাহা শুরু হইলে সার্বভৌম প্যালেস্টাইনের জন্য মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র প্রণীত 'রোড-ম্যাপ' ধরিয়া অগ্রসর হওয়ার সম্ভাবনাও মূর্ত হইবে। সব দিক দিয়াই এ সব আশার কথা। তবে তাহার মধ্যেও অনেক কাঁটা রহিয়াছে। গাজা ও ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংক-এর অধিকৃত প্যালেস্টাইনি অঞ্চল হইতে যদি ইহুদি বসতকারীদের বহিষ্কার করা না যায়, তবে হামাস, আল-আকসা ব্রিগেড কিংবা হেজবুল্লা ও ইসলামি জিহাদের মতো জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীগুলি তাহাদের ইত্তিফাদা বা সশস্ত্র প্রতিরোধ বন্ধ করিবে না। আবার এই জঙ্গি হামলা বন্ধ না হইলে ইজরায়েলও প্যালেস্টাইনি এলাকায় তাহার জবরদখল ছাড়িবে না। এ প্রায় 'ডিম আগে না মুরগি আগে' বিরোধভাসের মতো। অথচ যে কোনও সফল দরকষাকষি বা চুক্তির প্রক্রিয়া শুরু করিতে হয় নিঃশর্ত আলোচনা দিয়া। উভয় পক্ষই যদি রকমারি পূর্বশর্ত আরোপ করে, তবে সেগুলি অক্ষরে-অক্ষরে পালন করিয়া চুক্তি পর্যন্ত পৌঁছনোই অসম্ভব হইয়া ওঠে।

আপাতদৃষ্টিতে মনে হইতে পারে, ইজরায়েল তাহার এই সিদ্ধান্তের মাধ্যমে প্যালেস্টাইনিদের শান্তিতে বাঁচিবার বিরাট এক সুযোগ করিয়া দিতেছে। কার্যত কিন্তু শ্যারনের এই সিদ্ধান্ত ইজরায়েলেরই শান্তিতে থাকার সুযোগ। মোকাবিলা এবং দমনের নিরবচ্ছিন্ন অভিযান ইজরায়েলকে গত চার দশকে কিছুই দেয় নাই, কিছু ইহুদির মৃত্যু ছাড়া। বদলা হিসাবে ইজরায়েল হয়তো দশ গুণ প্যালেস্টাইনির প্রাণনাশ করিয়াছে। কিন্তু তাহাতে ইজরায়েল-প্যালেস্টাইনি দ্বন্দ্বের কোনও সুরাহা হয় নাই। অথচ এই দ্বন্দ্বটি জিয়াইয়া থাকার অর্থই হইল পশ্চিম এশিয়া-সহ সমগ্র ইসলামের ভুবনে জায়নবাদ ও তাহার পশ্চিমী মুকুব্বিদের বিরুদ্ধে ঘৃণা, অন্তর্ঘাত ও সন্ত্রাস ছড়াইবার পটভূমি প্রস্তুত রাখা। ইজরায়েলের জবরদস্তির কাছে প্যালেস্টাইনি উদ্বাস্তুদের বধনা ও অপমান গোটা মুসলিম দুনিয়ায় পাশ্চাত্যের হাতে প্রাচ্যের প্রতারণা, শোষণ ও পীড়নেরও প্রতীক হইয়া উঠিয়াছে। মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র ও ব্রিটেন-সহ পশ্চিমী দেশগুলি ভাগ্যবিড়ম্বিত ইহুদিদের নিজস্ব রাষ্ট্র ইজরায়েলের সমর্থক হওয়ায় এবং প্যালেস্টাইনিদের নিজ ভিটেমাটি হইতে উৎখাত করার মূল্যে সেই আগ্রাসী জায়নবাদের সাফল্য অর্জিত হওয়ায়, তৃতীয় বিশ্বের মুসলিমরা পশ্চিমী সভ্যতা ও সংস্কৃতির আগ্রাসনের বিরুদ্ধেও তাহাদের প্রতিরোধ গড়িয়া তুলিয়াছে। এই প্রতিরোধ প্রায়শ ইসলামি সন্ত্রাসের চেহারা বিস্তারিত হইতেছে। ইজরায়েল-প্যালেস্টাইনি দ্বন্দ্বের নিরসন তাই সভ্যতার অগ্রগতির স্বার্থেই জরুরি। এ জন্য আগ্রাসনকারীকেই প্রথম পশ্চাদপসরণটি করিতে হইবে।

# Israel, Palestinians move towards peace

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, JAN. 21. The Palestinian Authority has started deploying its forces in the northern Gaza strip to prevent militants from firing rockets at Israeli targets.

Hundreds of policemen were being positioned from today — the day marking Eid Al-Adha festivities. The exercise will be completed by Sunday.

Israel has also agreed to ease traffic restrictions on the main road running north-south through Gaza. On Thursday, it announced that the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt would be reopened in one direction

on Friday.

The crossing has been closed since December 12, following a Palestinian attack on a nearby army outpost, which killed five soldiers. The prolonged closure had left thousands of Palestinians stranded on the other side.

## Relative calm

The Israeli army on Thursday also reopened the Gush Katif junction in Gaza until 3 p.m. local time. The junction was closed for 24 hours following a Palestinian attack there, in which an Israeli security officer was killed.

The implementation of reciprocal confidence building

measures began following talks between the Palestinian security chief in Gaza, Musa Arafat, and Israeli security authorities. Mr. Arafat told the Associated Press news agency that the force deployment in the north would also be extended to the southern Gaza Strip. His remarks came amid relative calm in Gaza on Thursday.

For the second day in a row, Palestinian militants did not fire rockets at Israeli targets. This was partly attributed to the unilateral deployment of Palestinian policemen in several cities and towns in Gaza where no agreement with the Israeli military was required.

THE HINDU

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THE HINDU

# Australian embassy hit in blast

By Atul Aneja

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**MANAMA, JAN. 19.** A series of blasts have rocked Baghdad, killing at least 26 persons, ahead of the controversial national elections on January 30.

Five massive explosions — all suicide car bombings, echoed through the Iraqi capital within a space of 90 minutes this morning. The attacks appeared to target local and foreign security forces.

The coordinated strikes took place a day after the Iraqi interim government declared that it was adopting stringent measures to prevent violence during the election phase.

At least 18 persons including five Iraqi police officers were killed when an explosives laden car driven by a suicide bomber exploded near the police headquarters.

The strike resulted in maximum casualties.

Half an hour earlier at least two Iraqis were killed and two Australian soldiers were slightly wounded when a suicide car bomb exploded outside the gates of the Australian embassy. Another blast shook the International Airport, killing two Iraqi security guards.

Two more soldiers died in an explosion at a military complex.

## Claims responsibility

A car bomb also exploded at a bank used to pay police salaries, killing at least one person.

A group led by Al-Qaeda ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi claimed responsibility for the suicide bomb attacks on the embassy and two police stations, according to Internet statements.

The statements from the Al-Qaeda Organisation for Holy War in Iraq said members of the group's "martyrdom squadrons" struck the three locations.

The Australian Ambassador Howard Brown said he believed the blast targeted a building used by its security personnel. "It was a car bomb aimed at the building where the security people are based. It was quite a substantial explosion."

In Canberra, the acting Foreign Minister, Philip Ruddock, said the attack had blown out windows of the staff residence. The AFP news agency quoted a policeman as saying the suicide bomber had smashed his vehicle against sand barriers and blast walls in front of the building.

American troops and tanks swiftly sealed off the area, where burning wreckage was scattered.

## China taking steps

China has said that it is taking "all measures" to secure the release of eight of its national who were kidnapped in Iraq.

An official spokesman said the men had gone to Iraq individually in search of work and, having failed, were returning to China when they were kidnapped.

A group calling itself Numan Brigade released a video of the men and called on China, an opponent of the war, to clarify its role in Iraq.

The body of a staff member, of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who had disappeared while on duty on 13 January, was found yesterday.

# Abbas terror shield for Israel

Reuters

Gaza, January 19

PALESTINIAN SECURITY forces will deploy to the Gaza Strip's borders with Israel within days to enforce President Mahmoud Abbas's order to halt militant attacks, their top commander said on Wednesday.

Abbas met security chiefs and leaders of Hamas militants overnight in the shadow of a suicide bombing that evoked the obstacles he faces in persuading gunmen to halt violence so he can start talks on a Palestinian state on Israeli-occupied land.

He is caught between the militants and Israeli demands for an end to attacks as a condition for peace negotiations. Israel cut

ties after a deadly assault at the border last week.

After meeting Abbas in Gaza City, public security chief Major-General Abdel-Razek al-Majaydeh said an "arrangement is under way to deploy national security forces on the borders within two days to prevent violations".

Abbas, the successor to Yasser Arafat, who Israel refused to deal with over unceasing bloodshed in a four-year revolt, ordered his security forces on Monday to prevent attacks.

Islamist militants signalled continued defiance by firing two mortar bombs into a northern Gaza settlement on Wednesday, causing damage but no casualties. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was to convene his secu-

rity cabinet on Wednesday to consider tougher military action in Gaza if Abbas does not subdue militants soon.

On Tuesday, a Hamas suicide bomber killed an agent of Israel's Shin Bet security service and wounded seven other Israelis in a blast at an army checkpoint near the Gush Katif block of Jewish settlements in southern Gaza.

Abbas met leaders of the powerful Islamist faction to try to persuade them to put down arms. "Calm was one of the points raised in the meeting within the framework of stabilising the Palestinian situation. We have listened to Abu Mazen (Abbas) and we will study the issue within the movement," said Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas spokesman in Gaza.

# Iraq returns to haunt Blair again

London, Jan. 19 (Reuters): Iraq returned to haunt Prime Minister Tony Blair today as pictures of British soldiers apparently abusing Iraqis were splashed over newspapers in an echo of last year's Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

As a court martial of three British soldiers continued in Germany, front-page pictures showed naked Iraqi prisoners appearing to be forced to simulate anal and other sexual acts under "Shame" and "Shock" headlines.

Just four months before an expected election, Blair was forced yet again to answer questions on Iraq — nearly two years after the deeply unpopular war started.

"Everyone finds those photographs shocking and appalling, and there are simply no other words to describe them," Blair told parliament, adding, however, that the majority of British troops had acted with distinction and honour.

Questions over the Prime Minister's decision to side with President George W. Bush and go to war, especially given the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, have led to a slump in Blair's personal trust ratings.

But in the last few months Blair, tipped to win the election expected in May albeit with a reduced majority, had steered political debate back onto domestic issues.

"Everyone finds those photographs shocking and appalling, and there are simply no other words to describe them," Blair told parliament today. He insisted a majority of British troops had acted with distinction and honour.

"There is obviously a certain amount of damage because Blair is associated with the policy in Iraq," said Wyn Grant, politics professor at Warwick University.

"It had been off the agenda for the last few weeks and this will bring it back," he said, adding he could come under greater pressure if Iraqi elections on January 30 do not go smoothly.

The court martial is the latest in a series of hearings against US and British soldiers after photographs of

## ABU GHRAIB BATON PASSES TO BRITISH FIST



Corporal Mark Cooley beats an Iraqi detainee at an aid camp known as the Bread Basket near Basra, Iraq, in May 2003. (AP)

abuse by US troops at Abu Ghraib jail emerged last year, sparking global outrage.

Blair has said the Abu Ghraib scandal was a personal low point and it was at that time speculation arose that he may stand down. Some observers said the photos could help al Qaida.



"There will be such anger against the coalition, and against Britain in particular, that there is no way cooperation and goodwill can prevail," Tam Dalyell, a member of Blair's Labour Party, told Sky television. That view had some resonance in Baghdad.

"Now I'm starting to hate the British: they are worse than the Americans, they are dogs," said Safaa Hadi, a 16-year old on a Baghdad street.

But unlike Abu Ghraib, the trial has not sparked allegations of systematic abuse.

At the trial in Osnabrueck, Germany, a British soldier ac-

on and lance corporals Darren Larkin and Mark Cooley.

Accusations against the soldiers emerged when staff at a photo lab in Britain showed police photos taken by a fourth soldier, Fusilier Gary Bartlam.

He was found guilty of a series of offences. Joseph Giret, a civilian lawyer for Kenyon, told the court his client was following orders to round up looters pilfering food stores near Basra. Under a plan called "Ali Baba", troops were told that looters were to be "worked hard" to repair damage and deter further pilfering.

Yesterday, the prosecution said the order was against international law preventing civilians from being detained and forced to work, but the prosecutors said soldiers' actions went far beyond it.

Colonel Nicholas Mercer, a senior legal officer stationed in the Gulf during the war, told the court the soldiers had received adequate training in the laws of armed conflict and should have known civilians were to be treated humanely.

**Everyone finds those photographs shocking and appalling, and there are simply no other words to describe them**

— Tony Blair

cused of abusing and sexually humiliating Iraqi prisoners had only been following orders to work them hard, the man's lawyer told a military court today.

The defence began cross-examining witnesses at the trial of Corporal Daniel Keny-

## Bombs on wheels kill 26

Baghdad, Jan. 19 (Reuters): Insurgents detonated a suicide truck bomb outside Australia's embassy in Baghdad today and hit Iraqi security targets with at least three car bombs, killing 26 less than two weeks before January 30 elections.

The deadliest attack was a blast near a police headquarters and hospital in eastern Baghdad. The US military said the bomb killed 18 people.

Half-an-hour earlier a suicide truck bomb rammed into the security barriers outside the Australian embassy. Two Iraqis were killed and two Australian soldiers were wounded. A third vehicle bomb killed two Iraqi security guards near Baghdad airport and a fourth bomb killed two civilians and two soldiers.

# Abbas summons militants for talks

Associated Press  
Gaza City, January 18

PALESTINIAN LEADER Mahmoud Abbas summoned militant leaders to ceasefire talks in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday and said he is hopeful he can persuade them to halt attacks on Israel.

Abbas, whose political survival depends on the success of the negotiations, said in an interview that Israel must do its part by halting military operations — a guarantee Israel has been unwilling to give. "I am going to Gaza with the hopes of reaching an agreement," Abbas said in Ramallah.

The militants have sent mixed messages on whether they would suspend attacks, with some signaling a truce is possible if Israel stops arrest raids and targeted killings of wanted Palestinians. Abbas has ruled out using force against the militants, despite Israel's insistence that he crack down.

Abbas met on Tuesday with David Pearce, the US consul-general in Jerusalem, and said he is serious about dealing with



Israeli children sing a song against Palestinian attacks during a rally in the southern Israeli town of Sderot on Tuesday.

AFP

the militants, but needs time to reach an agreement, according to a top Palestinian official. Abbas asked for the United States

to put pressure on Israel to give him some time, the official said on condition of anonymity.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel

Sharon suspended contact with Abbas after an attack on a Gaza border crossing last week that killed six Israeli civilians. Sharon also has threatened a major raid into Gaza to stop militants from firing rockets at Israeli targets, but so far hasn't taken any large-scale action.

The European Union on Tuesday urged Sharon to halt military operations to give Abbas a chance to bring the militants under control.

Israeli defence officials say wide international opposition to a large-scale Israeli raid is tying policy-makers' hands. The officials said Sharon planned to meet army commanders Tuesday to discuss methods of stopping the rocket and mortar fire.

Israel has demanded that, as a preliminary step, the Palestinians deploy security forces in the areas in northern Gaza used to launch the rockets, Israeli officials said on Tuesday.

On Monday, Abbas instructed the Palestinian security forces to try to prevent attacks against Israel and to investigate the attack at the border crossing.



NO COVERT SEARCH: PENTAGON

# Bush keeps his options open on Iran

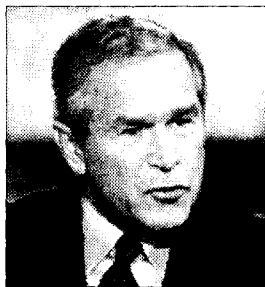
Press Trust of India

## Plans ahead

WASHINGTON, Jan. 18. — Amidst reports that US commandos had entered Iran searching for suspected weapon sites, President Bush has said he would not rule out military action against the country if it did not reveal details of its nuclear programme.

"I hope we can solve it diplomatically, but I will never take any option off the table," Mr Bush told NBC News last night when asked if he would rule out military action against Iran. "If it continues to stonewall the international community about the existence of its nuclear weapons programme."

Mr Bush's comments came even as Pentagon dismissed as "riddled with errors" a report written by



'I hope we can solve it diplomatically, but I will never take any option off the table'

WASHINGTON, Jan. 18. — Mr George W Bush has said he has "a big agenda in mind", which includes his campaign promises to overhaul social security and the legal liability system; improve the tax code, school standards and the budget process; and make health care accessible to more Americans. He acknowledged that four years is not a lot of time to get it all done. "We got to get moving and get some things done before — before people kind of write me off." Mr Bush said unity across party lines will be the most important message in his inaugural address on Thursday. — AP

investigative journalist Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* magazine claiming that the US President had authorised covert military operations in 10 Asian countries, including Iran.

The report said US commandos had entered Iran to search for hidden sites used for developing nuclear weapons, adding Pakistan was helping the USA with information on the sites.

Pentagon's spokesman Mr Lawrence DiRita said the article "is so riddled with errors of fundamental fact that the credibility of his (Hersh) entire piece is destroyed". He, however, neither confirmed nor denied Hersh's claim.

# Tranquility at last?

JK DUTT on the Herculean task that awaits the newly elected leader of the Palestinian Authority

SF-7  
18/1

**M**AHMOUD ABBAS' victory in the just concluded elections for the presidency of the Palestinian Authority brings new hope in finding a final solution to the timeless Israel-Palestine problem.

The biggest factor in Abbas' favour is, as Palestine's Prime Minister of the day he interacted very well with the two key players concerned, Ariel Sharon and George Bush, when a peace plan was evolved by a multinational group some three years ago with the express objective of establishing an independent state of Palestine by 2005. Unfortunately, Abbas had to quit his job over continuous differences with his boss, the late Yasser Arafat, resulting in the entire plan getting shelved. Abbas' successor, Ahmed Joreii, the now-on, now-off Prime Minister, went the same way. This paved the path for a resurgence of violence.

Hopefully, and especially after the Palestinian Cabinet on Monday asked the security forces to prevent attacks against Israel, all this will be a thing of the past. A reported statement by the leading faction of Hamas favouring the peace process' resurrection has added a fresh impetus for peace. Abbas is well known for his perspicacity, open mindedness and an even temperament. He must utilise these traits to good effect in the days to come. It might be taken as a fortuitous omen that his rival for the President's post, the hardliner Mohammed al Barghouti, did not make it.

It would behove discussing the outstanding issues that have been plaguing Israel and Palestine. A new attempt has to be made now by both sides, jettisoning dogma and invoking flexibility in its place. The humanitarian aspect of the conflict, an aspect that affects all categories of Israelis and Palestinians, must be the guiding beacon. Five issues are at stake.

Right on top is the removal of Jewish settlements from the West Bank and Gaza strip to enable Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland. This issue has been an extremely contentious one at all the three previous summits at Camp David, Oslo and Sharam el Shaikh. Both sides have to understand two facts: one, the vacating Jewish set-



Palestinian women display photographs of prisoners held in Israeli jails. In Hebron, West Bank. (Inset) Mahmoud Abbas. — AFP



tlers have to be accommodated only in the Israeli mainland and this mammoth task cannot be achieved in a day but in a phased manner over a period of time; and two, the induction of Palestinian refugees into the vacated areas has to be likewise scaled over a length of time. Abbas and Sharon are wise enough to comprehend this and go about organising a smooth outflow-inflow. This was indicative when Bush first mooted the multinational plan.

At the same time, Sharon has to convince his new government of the sincerity of purpose of this contentious subject and drive home the dire necessity of breaking down the so called "security wall" erected by Israel in Palestinian territory. This act should be the starting point before any outflow-inflow commences. If so deemed, a UN sponsored demolition force could be deployed for this purpose since previous "attempts" by the Israeli military failed.

The second issue concerns the status of Jerusalem. Both sides have to give up their respective dog-in-the-manger positing over

this holy city. The best course would be to retain Jerusalem as a common religious arena, to be shared by people of the whole region. Surely the Palestinians can select another city, perhaps Ramallah, as their capital.

The third issue is also linked to Jerusalem namely, ownership of the Temple Mount-Noble Sanctuary shrine/Al Haram Al Sharaf-Al Aqsar mosque. Reportedly, the ownership dispute became so volatile at the time of Sharon's taking over from his predecessor, the moderate Ehud Barak, that fighting erupted almost immediately. It does not require bloodshed to prove loyalty to any faith; on the contrary, the Gods would be happy to see peaceful religious coexistence.

Fourth is the Golan Heights issue involving Syria. Israel has a valid case here. Barak had agreed to vacate these strategic heights if Damascus gave an assurance that this stretch would not be used as artillery and mortar positions for bringing down observed fire on Israeli settlements. Surprisingly, no such guarantee was forthcoming either from the late President, Hafez al Assad, or his successor son, Bashar. Apparently, Hezbollah calls

the shots in the matter of the Golan Heights and the Syrian government does not want to antagonise Hamas' sister-in-arms. The scenario should change now. It might be a magnanimous gesture on Tel Aviv's part to pull out from these heights in a repeat move as witnessed in South Lebanon during Barak's rule.

The fifth and last issue is sharing of water from Lake Tiberias. Israel controls the distribution of water in a parsimonious manner. What with Israel's remarkable domestic water management system, it would only be humane for Tel Aviv to relinquish its stranglehold on Tiberias. Truth be told, Israel has ample water of its own.

Abbas has huge task ahead of him. Palestine has no industry to call its own other than a bit-part tourism. All its workers earn their daily bread from Israeli industrial establishments. Abbas has to pressurise the Arab world to set up adequate infrastructure to kick-start Palestine's industry in West Bank and Gaza. Concurrently, the erstwhile Gaza-West Bank land connector must be revitalised in order to facilitate free movement between the two wings. The UN too can influence its member nations in setting up Palestine's industry as well as agriculture. The new state of Palestine needs to build up a parent economic growth path if it is to survive independently. Once the economy starts to flourish, Palestine can think in terms of raising its own armed forces.

India can successfully contribute to the peace process as both Israel as well as Palestine has always treated India as a friend. New Delhi's setting up diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv in 1992 did not draw any Palestinian criticism. To begin with, India should formally invite Abbas at his earliest convenience. Next, New Delhi can offer its services as a facilitator, much like Norway in Sri Lanka, and suggest a salubrious place like Goa or Nainital, for Israeli and Palestinian delegations to hold talks. In due course, New Delhi can also elevate its status to that of a moderator. Sustained negotiations under "coercive persuasion" can produce miracles. India should seize this opportunity to carve a niche for herself in the realm of International Relations in the new millennium.

(The author is a retired Lt. Col. Of the Indian Army.)

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17/1

## A DECISIVE MANDATE

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IT WAS ALWAYS on the cards that the Fatah candidate, Mahmoud Abbas, would be elected President of the Palestinian Authority. None of the six rivals had the personal profile or the organisational backing to pose a viable challenge. The election had essentially become a no-contest when the one potentially serious opponent, Marwan Barghout, withdrew from the fray. However, Mr. Abbas' victory was genuine and well-earned. As several hundred international observers have certified, the Palestinians demonstrated once again that they have built a healthy democratic tradition. Fatah's various factions and the parties that make up the Palestine Liberation Organisation did not throw their weight behind Mr. Abbas out of an undemocratic sense of subservience to a leader. They did so because they were alert to the risk a divisive contest could pose to the national unity that is of such critical importance at the current juncture. Mr. Abbas might never acquire Chairman Yasser Arafat's stature. However, the new President does have the political skills and the administrative experience to provide sagacious leadership at a crucial juncture in Palestinian history.

While the verdict does not come as a surprise, the size of the turnout at the polling stations and Mr. Abbas's margin of victory have significant implications for the future of Palestinian politics. A low turnout might have boosted the confidence and stock of the militant religious

groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which boycotted the elections. There is no guarantee that Mr. Abbas will continue to retain the support he received at the polls. However, the new President will begin his term with the knowledge that his people have faith in his political approach. The militant groups are apparently adjusting to the reality since they have declared that they will soon hold discussions with the Palestinian Authority on their future course of action.

While Mr. Abbas did sporadically resort to fiery rhetoric during the campaign, his overall message was constructive and forward-looking. Of particular significance was his call for the winding up of an armed uprising that he believed had become counter-productive. However, the new President might not be able immediately to follow through on his intent to restart negotiations with Israel that have been stalled for the past four years. The most urgent task before Mr. Abbas is the revitalisation of the administrative machinery of the Palestinian Authority, which came close to collapse under the pressure of Israel's state terrorism. However, there is only so much the Palestinian Authority can do to restore peace in the region. Now that the Palestinians have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a leader who seeks a peaceful settlement, Israel has no excuse for persisting with its brutally oppressive policies. For a start, it must lift the siege imposed on Palestinian towns and villages.

**THE HINDU**

**17 JAN 2005**

## হিংসার মধ্যেই আকবাসের শপথ প্যালেস্তাইনে

রামাল্লা, ১৫ জানুয়ারি: রক্তক্ষয়ী হানা, পাল্টা হানার মধ্যে প্যালেস্তাইনি প্রেসিডেন্ট পদে শপথ নিলেন মাহমুদ আকবাস। শপথ নিয়েই তিনি জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীগুলির কাছে অস্ত্র-সংবরণের আর্জি জানিয়েছেন। গত তিন দিনে গাজা ভূখণ্ডে সেনা-জঙ্গি সংঘর্ষে ১৫ জন নিহত হয়েছেন।

ভোটে জয়, হোয়াইট হাউসে আমন্ত্রণ, ইজরায়েলি প্রেসিডেন্ট শ্যারনের কাছ থেকে শুভেচ্ছা, গত কয়েক দিনের ঘটনা আকবাসকে দেশের বাস্তব পরিস্থিতি থেকে অনেক দূরে নিয়ে গিয়েছিল। কিন্তু বৃহস্পতিবার গাজাতে ইজরায়েলি সেনাদের উপর প্যালেস্তাইনি জঙ্গিদের হামলায় শান্তির সেই বৃদ্ধ ফেটে যায়। আকবাসেরই ফতেহ গোষ্ঠীর একটি শাখা, আল-আকসা মার্চাস ব্রিগেড ও হামাস গোষ্ঠী এই হামলার দায় স্বীকার করে।

কাল রাত থেকে প্যালেস্তাইনের

সঙ্গে সব কূটনৈতিক সম্পর্ক বন্ধ করে দিয়েছে ইজরায়েল। তাদের দাবি, জঙ্গিদের নিয়ন্ত্রণ করতে আকবাস অবিলম্বে ব্যবস্থা নিন। আজ গাজার রাফা শহরে ইজরায়েলি গোলায় নিহত হন ছয় প্যালেস্তাইনি, আহত ১১ জন। বেশ কয়েকটি শিশুও রয়েছে।

আকবাস কিন্তু স্পষ্ট জানিয়েছেন, তিনি কোনও পক্ষেরই হিংসা সমর্থন করেন না। প্রেসিডেন্ট হিসেবে প্রথম বক্তৃতায় তিনি বলেন, “প্যালেস্তাইনি জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী বা ইজরায়েলি সেনা যারাই করুক, এ ধরনের হিংসাত্মক কাজের সব সময়েই নিন্দা করি।” পশ্চিম এশিয়ায় শান্তি ফিরিয়ে আনার লক্ষ্যে আমেরিকার প্রস্তাবিত ‘রোড ম্যাপে’ যে তাঁর পূর্ণ সমর্থনও আকবাস জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন। কিন্তু ইজরায়েলের দাবি মেনে তিনি জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীগুলির উপর কী ভাবে নিয়ন্ত্রণ জারি করবেন, তা স্পষ্ট বলেননি।

— পি টি আই

# Newly sworn-in Abbas neck-deep in crisis

Associated Press  
Ramallah, January 15

MAHMOUD ABBAS was sworn in as Palestinian Authority President on Saturday and started his job facing two crises: Israel cut contacts with him until he reins in militants, and two top election officials resigned amid allegations of irregularities in the vote that brought Abbas to power.

In the Gaza Strip, six Palestinians were killed by Israeli army fire in two separate incidents on Saturday, two days after Palestinian militants killed six Israeli civilians at a Gaza cargo crossing. The renewed violence dampened expectations — fanned by the election victory of the moderate Abbas — that the two sides could break out of their deadlock after more than

four years of fighting. In his inaugural speech in Ramallah, Abbas said he extends his hand in peace to Israel, called for a ceasefire and said he was committed to the US-backed "road map" peace plan.

However, he made no direct mention of how he would deal with the militants — the most pressing item on his agenda. Abbas said only that he would enforce the rule of law and "deepen the dialogue" with various Palestinian factions, an apparent reference to his attempt to negotiate a ceasefire with militants.

Abbas did not refer to Israel's decision to suspend contacts until he takes action against the armed groups. Israel announced the boycott on Friday, in response to the attack on the Gaza crossing, with one Israeli official say-



AFP  
Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at his inauguration ceremony in Ramallah on Saturday.

ing the gunmen had apparently set out from a Palestinian Authority base.

Israeli officials welcomed Abbas' call to end violence but said he must now trans-

## 46 Palestinian poll officials quit

FORTY-SIX MEMBERS of the Palestinian election commission, including top managers, resigned on Saturday, saying they were pressured by Mahmoud Abbas' campaign and intelligence officials to abruptly change voting procedures during the January 9 polls. Two senior members of the commission, Ammar Dwaik and Baha al-Bakri, resigned early on Saturday, and officials later said 44 more members resigned. Six top election officials were among those who resigned. The resig-

late that into action. Abbas struck a largely conciliatory tone Saturday,

saying Israelis and Palestinians are "destined to live side by side and to share

this land". He condemned all violence, including the Gaza attack. He called on Israel to halt military operations, including targeted killings of wanted Palestinians. "We are seeking a mutual ceasefire to end this cycle of violence," he said.

He said the Palestinians are ready to meet their obligations spelled out in the road map, and that Israel must do the same, including halting Jewish settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza.

However, the road map also calls on the Palestinians to disarm militants, a step Abbas is unwilling to take. He has said he would try to persuade, but not coerce, the armed groups to halt attacks. After the Gaza crossing attack, Israel warned that Abbas is quickly running out of time.

In new violence on Saturday, six Palestinians were killed by Israeli army fire. Near the Gaza-Egypt border, an Israeli tank fired shells and machine guns, killing two Palestinians and wounding 10.

## Islamic Jihad statement

The radical Islamist group Islamic Jihad poured cold water today on an appeal by new President Mahmoud Abbas for a mutual ceasefire with Israel, saying that "armed resistance" was the best form of self-defence against the Israeli army. "We confirm the importance of Palestinian dialogue and we are ready to have this dialogue with Abbas but we reiterate that the armed resistance is connected to the existence of the occupation," Mohammed al-Hindi, leader of Jihad, said.

# Abbas calls for truce; Israel snaps contact

161 By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, JAN. 15. The Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, was sworn in as the Palestinian Authority President today, amid first signs of friction with Israel following a militant attack on Thursday.

During his inaugural address, Mr. Abbas called for a ceasefire and implementation of the "road map" that is meant to bring lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Advocating revival of peace talks, he said: "Our hand is extended toward an Israeli partner for making peace."

## "Stick to commitments"

In his speech before members of the Palestinian Parliament, Mr. Abbas stressed it was important for both sides to abide by their commitments in order to make progress.

"Partnership cannot be achieved by dictation, and peace cannot be reached by partial or interim solutions," he observed. Mr. Abbas called on Israel to cease "assassinations, closures, confiscation of lands, and the building of the separation fence."

The new President condemned Israeli attacks as well as its violent response by mil-

itants. "We condemn these actions, whether by the Israeli occupation forces or the reactions of some Palestinian factions. This does not help bring about the calm needed to enable a credible, serious peace process. We are seeking a mutual ceasefire to end this vicious circle."

As the ceremony began, there were reports that the Israeli army had killed seven Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Abbas' inauguration came a day after Israel broke off all contacts with the Palestinians following a militant strike at a border crossing point, in which six Israelis were killed. The militant groups, Hamas, Popular Resistance Committees and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade took joint responsibility for the strike.

## Gaza isolated

In response to the attack, Israel has isolated Gaza by closing two major crossing points. A third crossing point near the southern town of Rafah, close to the Egyptian border, had been closed last month. Consequently, the flow of good and humanitarian supplies to Gaza has now been largely restricted.

Mr. Abbas, on his part, has been unhappy with the Israeli

decision, a group of Israeli lawmakers of Arab origin who met him on Friday said.

Talab al-Sana, who was part of the group, told Israel Army Radio that Mr. Abbas was upset about Israel holding him responsible for attacks, even before he had been sworn in as President.

## No crackdown

Mr. Abbas also reiterated that he had no intention of launching a crackdown against militant groups. Instead, he would seek their commitment for restraint through dialogue. Analysts point out that Mr. Abbas could offer the groups, especially Hamas, a say in decision-making.

He also explained his disposition towards armed militants in a letter sent to key Arab leaders. The Palestinian Foreign Minister, Nabeel Shaath, who sent the letters in Mr. Abbas' name said, "Our commitment to the ceasefire will be based on a national Palestinian agreement."

Responding to the attacks, the Hamas leader in the West Bank, Hassan Yousef, said the group was ready to suspend attacks as part of a deal with Mr. Abbas. But Hamas had the freedom of action before an agreement was reached, he said.

THE HINDU

16 JAN 2005

# প্যালেস্তাইনে নয়া দৌড়

ইয়াসার আরাফতের কাঁটার মুকুট আপাতত মাহমুদ আব্বাসের শিরেই শোভা পাইবে। প্যালেস্তাইনের প্রেসিডেন্ট পদে তাঁহার জয় অবিসংবাদী। প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বীদের তিনি এতটাই পিছনে ফেলিয়া জিতিয়াছেন যে, তাঁহারা নিশ্চয় ভাবিতেছেন, প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা না করিলেই ভাল হইত। তাঁহার এই জয়কে স্বাগত জানাইয়াছেন ইজরায়েলের প্রধানমন্ত্রী এরিয়েল শ্যারন। সেই সঙ্গে থামিয়া থাকা শান্তি-আলোচনা অদূর ভবিষ্যতে পুনরারম্ভ করার আশাও উচ্চারণ করিয়াছেন। মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ ডব্লিউ বুশও টেলিফোনে তাঁহাকে অভিনন্দিত করিয়া হোয়াইট-হাউসে তাঁহাকে আমন্ত্রণ জানাইয়া রাখিয়াছেন। এ সবই প্রত্যাশিত। ইজরায়েল এবং মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র ইয়াসার আরাফতের উগ্রপন্থা সহ্য করিতে পারে নাই, আব্বাসের মতো একজন নরমপন্থী তাহাদের কাছে আরাফতের উত্তরাধিকারী হিসাবে নিঃসন্দেহে স্বাগত। গণতান্ত্রিক পদ্ধতিতে সেই নরমপন্থী রাজনীতিক প্যালেস্তাইনের প্রেসিডেন্ট নির্বাচিত হওয়ায় প্যালেস্তিনীয়দের অনুমোদনও কতকটা স্বতঃসিদ্ধ। প্যালেস্তিনীয়রা যে সংঘাতের পরিবর্তে শান্তি ও আপসের পক্ষপাতী, সেই বার্তাও এই নির্বাচন পাঠাইয়াছে। আপাতদৃষ্টিতে ইহা নূতন নেতৃত্বকে বাড়তি নৈতিক কর্তৃত্ব বলীয়ান করিবে।

তবে আর মাহমুদ আব্বাসের শিরোভূষণকে কাঁটার মুকুট বলা কেন? কারণ তাঁহার এই জয় সম্ভব হইয়াছে ইজরায়েলের কারাগারে বন্দি জঙ্গি প্যালেস্তিনীয় নেতা মারওয়ান বারযৌতির প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা হইতে সরিয়া দাঁড়ানোর ফলে। নির্বাচনের পূর্বাঙ্কে অনুষ্ঠিত জনমতসমীক্ষায় দেখা গিয়াছে, বারযৌতি প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা করিলে তিনিই সর্বাধিক ভোট পাইতেন। অস্যার্থ, দ্বিতীয় দফার 'ইস্তিফাদা' বা জয়নবাদের বিরুদ্ধে সশস্ত্র প্রতিরোধের প্রতি এখনও অধিকাংশ প্যালেস্তিনীয়ের সমর্থন আছে। বারযৌতি অবশ্য একের স্বার্থেই সরিয়া দাঁড়ান। কিন্তু জঙ্গিনোভাবাপন্ন প্যালেস্তিনীয়দের খুশি করিতে আব্বাস তাঁহার প্রচার পূর্বে কখনও মুখোশাধারী জঙ্গিদের কাঁধে চড়িয়া ঘুরিয়াছেন, কখনও ইজরায়েলকে 'জয়নবাদী দুশমন' বলিয়া শনাক্ত করিয়াছেন। হয়তো দর্শকাসনের দিকে চাহিয়াই তিনি এ সব করিয়া থাকিবেন। তবে হামাস ও হেজবুল্লাহর মতো জঙ্গি সংগঠন নির্বাচন বয়কট করিয়াছে। মানববোমা হামলায় সিদ্ধহস্ত 'আল-আক্সা শহিদ ব্রিগেড'ও তাঁহার পিছনে নাই। এবং নির্বাচিত হওয়া সত্ত্বেও তাঁহার নেতৃত্বের বৈধতা নির্ভর করিবে ইজরায়েলি শাসকদের কাছ হইতে তিনি প্যালেস্তাইনের জন্য ঠিক কতটুকু মর্যাদা ও স্বাধিকার আদায় করিতে সমর্থ হইবেন, তাহার উপর।

ইজরায়েল আরাফতকে বিশ্বাস করিত না। তাঁহার উত্তরাধিকারীকে কতটা দাক্ষিণ্য দেখাইবে, সেটা নিশ্চিত নয়। এরিয়েল শ্যারন গাজা হইতে ইহুদি অভিবাসীদের সরাইয়া লওয়ার প্রক্ষে তাঁহার দক্ষিণপন্থী সহযোগীদের সমর্থন হারাইয়া লেবার পার্টির সাহায্যে সরকার টিকাইয়া রাখিয়াছেন। তাঁহাকেও দ্রুত কিছু করিয়া দেখাইতে হইবে। কিন্তু তিনি কেবল এই সিদ্ধান্ত কার্যকর করিলেই তাহা আরাফতের উত্তরসূরির নেতৃত্বের সাফল্য রূপে গণ্য হইবে না। ইজরায়েলের কারাগার হইতে বন্দি প্যালেস্তিনীয়দের মুক্তি, বেথলেহেমের মতো প্যালেস্তিনীয় শহর দিয়া শুরু করিয়া ক্রমে ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংক-এর সব জনপদের নিরাপত্তার পূর্ণ দায়িত্ব প্যালেস্তিনীয় কর্তৃত্বের হাতে ছাড়িয়া দেওয়া, গোটা আরব বিশ্বে ছড়াইয়া থাকা প্যালেস্তিনীয় শরণার্থীদের প্রত্যাবর্তনের অধিকার মঞ্জুর এবং পশ্চিম এশিয়ার 'বার্লিন প্রাচীর' ভাঙিয়া ফেলা সহ সব চেক-পয়েন্টে প্যালেস্তিনীয়দের যাতায়াতের উপর নজরদারি শিথিল করার মতো কণ্টকিত বিষয়গুলির নিষ্পত্তি করিতে হইবে। ইহার কোনও একটি বিষয়কে অমীমাংসিত রাখিয়া প্যালেস্তিনীয় স্বাধিকারের কথা বলা আসলে সীমাবদ্ধ সার্বভৌমত্বের সাম্রাজ্যবাদী তত্ত্বকেই প্রকারান্তরে কার্যকর করা। সেটা মাহমুদ আব্বাসের নির্বাচনকে সমাদর করিবে না। এমন নয় যে নিষ্পত্তি রাতারাতি হইবে। কিন্তু সেই দিশাতেই শান্তি আলোচনা অগ্রসর হইতেছে, এই সদর্থক ইঙ্গিতটি প্রকটিত হওয়া দরকার। অন্যথায় পশ্চিম এশিয়ার রক্তমঞ্চ হইতে আরাফতের প্রস্থানে যে নূতন 'সুযোগ ও সম্ভাবনার জানালা' উন্মোচিত হইয়াছে বলিয়া এরিয়েল শ্যারন আল্লাদ প্রকাশ করিয়াছিলেন, তাহা স্বপ্নমেয়াদি প্রতিপন্ন হইতে বাধ্য।

# 18 killed as violence surges in Iraq

Agencies  
Tikrit, January 11

A SUICIDE car bomber killed seven policemen in Saddam Hussein's home town and gunmen shot dead eight people in a minibus south of Baghdad on Tuesday in the latest attacks to threaten Iraq's January 30 election.

A group led by al-Qaida ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi said it carried out the bombing against what it called "cowardly mercenaries" at police headquarters in Tikrit, a Sunni Muslim stronghold in northern Iraq. Eight officers were also wounded.

US President George W. Bush said in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* that he was working to ensure the elections go forward as planned on January 30, but warned the vote was only a "first step" towards a permanent government.

Tuesday's bombing against the police came a day after Baghdad's deputy police chief was assassinated, one of a rash of attacks that left more than a dozen people killed on Monday.

The US military said the car bomb blew up near a police station in northern Tikrit, a bastion of Sunni



People look at the wreckage of a vehicle following a car bombing in Basra on Tuesday. AFP

## Some areas too unsafe to vote

SOME AREAS of Iraq will probably be too unsafe to take part in the January 30 elections, PM Iyad Allawi said on Tuesday, and he promised to increase the size of the army in the face of a bloody insurgency. Allawi said the government had allocated \$2.2 billion to expand the army and provide it with new weaponry. The volatile Anbar province west of Baghdad and areas in the north around Mosul have seen little preparation for the vote.

AP, Baghdad

rs recognise that free societies will be their doom."

US embassy officials turned down an offer from prominent Sunni fundamentalist clerics who said they would lift calls for an election boycott among their embittered religious community if the Americans gave a timeline for their withdrawal from Iraq.

Arab elite, which dominated Saddam's regime, that the new parliament will be dominated by the long oppressed Shia majority.

Bush, asked if there was a plan to bring the Sunni population into the future government if they do not vote on January 30, said the US was working to ensure as high a participation as possible. "We want there to be wide participation. We want there to be a government that is representative," Bush told the *Wall Street Journal*. "There are people there who can't stand the thought of elections moving forward ... And the reason why is because extremists who have adopted the philosophy which is the opposite of ou-



# Abbas win succour to war-weary West Asia

Eric Silver in Jerusalem

Jan. 11. — In the streets of Jerusalem and the West Bank this week, war-weary Israelis and Palestinians celebrated Mr Mahmoud Abbas' landslide victory in the Palestinian presidential elections as a chance for a new start. They were united in their hunger for change.

But four years after the collapse of the heady optimism of the 1993 Oslo Accords, Israelis needed to be convinced that Mr Abbas (Abu Mazen) meant what he said about suspending the armed struggle and that he could deliver.

Palestinians were equally sceptical about Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon's intention to make a compromise peace that would



MEETING OF THE HANDS: Now it's up to Mr Mahmoud Abbas (left) and Mr Ariel Sharon to fulfil the united hopes of Israelis and Palestinians for peace. — AFP

meet their minimum national aspirations. Mr Ze'ev Raz (62), a jewelry designer in Jerusalem's Nahalat Shiva shopping precinct, is a tactical optimist, but a strategic pessimist. "Abu Mazen's election, along with our planned disengagement from Gaza, will increase the chance of stopping the violence," he said. "People will get on with their lives. It will start a process that

will feed itself. I predict that it will happen within six months. The tourists will come back. Israelis and Palestinians will feel the economic benefits."

It wouldn't, however, be peace. "Over the years the Palestinian leadership never built the foundation of trust between the two nations," Mr Raz contended. "To my regret, they only fostered hatred and extremism — on both sides. Peace will take generations, but it's enough that there won't be war."

Mr Yosef Vander (72) hoped for change, but cautioned: "Every Arab leader fears to do anything drastic. Abu Mazen wants peace, but he's afraid of what the extremists will do to him..."

## Sharon willing

JERUSALEM, Jan. 11. — Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon told his Cabinet that he intended to talk with the newly-elected Palestinian Authority Chairman Mr Mahmoud Abbas today and expected to meet him "in the coming weeks". Mr Sharon added that the two would meet to advance the progress on a number of issues, centring on Palestinian efforts to end terrorism. Earlier reports quoted Palestinian foreign minister Mr Nabil Shaath as saying the two were likely to meet "probably in two weeks". Meanwhile, Israel President Mr Moshe Katsav today called Mr Abbas to congratulate him on his victory. — PTI

# Agenda for Abbas

## New PLO leader brings hope of peace

GK 12  
11/11

Mahmoud Abbas will step into the shoes of the late Yasser Arafat as president of the Palestinian Authority. He bagged 66% of the votes polled in an election held on January 9 to elect a successor to Arafat. Does Abbas hold out a greater chance of peace in Israel? George W Bush and the Israeli establishment seem to think so because of his moderate leanings — he has said that violence is not the road to peace. A key participant in the Oslo talks leading to the Washington peace accord of 1993, Abbas is believed to hold the view that Israel and Palestine should live in peaceful coexistence. His chief task lies in convincing the Palestinian polity of the need to recapture the Oslo spirit of a negotiated settlement, since washed away in rivers of hate and bloodshed. The assassination in November 1995 of Yitzhak Rabin, who signed the Washington accord with Arafat, was a major setback from which the region is yet to recover. Israel began to lose faith in a shared solution and elected the hardline Ariel Sharon to power in 2001, after a despairing Ehud Barak failed with his moderate overtures. Sharon's frank aggression bolstered militant forces espousing the Palestinian cause, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Meanwhile, Arafat began to lose sight of his earlier moderate and secular convictions, as elements of Islamic fundamentalism filtered into what was a just struggle for a deprived homeland. It is hardly surprising that in such a poisoned environment, Abbas is seen by some as a stooge of the US. Meanwhile, Sharon and Bush have emerged stronger, their misplaced 'clash of civilisation' thesis seemingly playing itself out on the ground.

So what can Abbas do? He would have to work on restoring the faith of his people in the Authority, eroded in Arafat's time. To ensure he is not perceived as a puppet, Abbas should engage the US and yet not seem too conciliatory. For instance, Sharon's offer of 'disengagement', or pull-out from Gaza, should not be taken too seriously, even as it has US blessings, because it is a distortion of the Washington accord. Under this disengagement, Israel will continue to control West Bank and East Jerusalem, while not having to make any concessions to the millions of Palestinian refugees displaced in the wars of 1948 and 1967. The elections hold out a lesson to Palestinian militants as well. In other trouble spots such as Kashmir, Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland, espousers of violence were finally isolated. It is to be hoped that the same will be true of Palestine.

ABBAS FACES LONG LIST OF CHALLENGES AFTER DECISIVE VICTORY

# The high road ahead

Lara Sukhtian in Ramallah

Jan. 10. — Mr Mahmoud Abbas was elected Palestinian Authority President by a landslide, partial results showed today, giving the pragmatist a mandate to resume peace talks with Israel — but also leaving him with the tough task of reining in powerful armed groups.

Israeli leaders welcomed Mr Abbas' victory, but said they will watch closely how hard he tries to subdue militants. Mr Abbas could easily lose his political capital over a major bombing or shooting attack, and while most militant groups signaled they are willing to give him a chance, not all have signed on to a truce with Israel.

Still, his victory held out the promise of a new era after four decades of chaotic and corruption-riddled rule by Yasser Arafat, who died on 11 November. Mr Abbas, has promised to reform the government and the unwieldy security services.

Many Palestinians had high expectations of Mr Abbas, widely known as Abu Mazen. Based on results from 14 of 16 electoral districts, Mr Abbas won 61.6 per cent of the vote, election officials said today.

Final results were expected later in the day. Mr Abbas' main challenger, Mustafa Barghouti, won 21 per cent, while the remaining five candidates scored in the lower single digits.

There was some confusion about voter participation, a possible point of contention between Mr Abbas' Fatah movement, which was pushing for a high turnout, and the Islamic militant group Hamas, which had called for a boycott.

The Central Election Commission changed voting procedures mid-way through the



Palestinian women walk in front of the Israeli separation barrier at Kalandia checkpoint in Ramallah on Monday. (Inset) Mr Mahmoud Abbas. — AFP

election, keeping polling stations open an additional two hours and allowing all Palestinians above the age of 18 to cast their ballots, not just those who had registered.

In his acceptance speech, Mr Abbas said he faces a difficult mission, but he reiterated that he would not go after militants.

Instead, he said, he wants to "give our fugitives a life of dignity. I present this victory to the soul of Yasser Arafat and present it to our people and to our martyrs."

After exit polls predicted a sweeping Abbas victory, cheering supporters took to the streets of the West Bank and Gaza late yesterday. A US observer team headed by Senators Joseph R Biden

Jr., and John Sununu, said in a statement that the Palestinians "have conducted a clean, open and fair election." In Washington, US President George W Bush called the election a "historic" step toward a Palestinian state. "The United States stands ready to help the Palestinian people realise their aspirations," he said. The Palestinian Opposition group, Hamas, announced today that it will work with the new Palestinian Authority President, Mr Mahmoud Abbas.

#### Sharon's coalition

In Israel, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Cabinet approved a new coalition today, another step to-

wards a planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and West Bank. However, the new government still needs Parliamentary approval in a vote scheduled later today. Approval was cast into doubt when 13 members of the ruling Likud party, which opposes the Gaza withdrawal plan, said they would oppose the creation of the coalition.

Mr Shimon Peres meanwhile, praised Mr Abbas as a wise leader, and expressed hope that peace talks could resume. Mr Ehud Olmert, the Israeli vice-premier, said Mr Abbas needs to take immediate action against militants. Mr Sharon plans to meet Mr Abbas soon, the Israeli leader's aides said. — AP

# Abbas poised for victory

Ramallah, Jan. 9 (Reuters): Palestinians today voted for a successor to Yasser Arafat and looked likely to elect Mahmoud Abbas, who has pledged to revive peacemaking with Israel after years of bloodshed.

But while a steady stream of Palestinians cast their ballots on a cold and sunny day, Hamas and other militant groups urged a boycott of the poll and Israel reasserted that progress towards peace depended on a halt to "terrorism and violence".

Former US President Jimmy Carter, one of 800 international monitors of the first Palestinian presidential election since 1996, said it appeared Israel was keeping its vow to ease the passage of Palestinians at military checkpoints.

"There is no (Israeli) intimidation I have seen," Carter said after visiting checkpoints near Arab East Jerusalem, where observers reported that some Palestinians had complained their names were not on voter lists.

However, voting has been extended by two hours to 1900 GMT because some voters were being held up by Israeli army checkpoints, election officials said.

Abbas, casting his ballot under a portrait of Arafat, who died at the age of 75 on November 11, said turnout was high.

"The elections are going very well and this proves that the Palestinian people are moving towards democracy. There are obstacles but the determination of the people is stronger," Abbas, 69, said in Ramallah.

Analysts said that to build a popular mandate for talks, Abbas needed at least 60 per cent of the vote and a large turnout among the 1.8 million eligible voters.

As if to underscore the hardships facing Abbas, Pales-



Mahmoud Abbas casts his ballot in Ramallah. (Reuters)

tinian militants fired at least two rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip today, witnesses said. There were no immediate reports of Israeli casualties. Abbas has demanded such attacks stop.

In a disputed area on the Israel-Lebanon border, Hizbollah guerrillas attacked an Israeli patrol. Al Jazeera television said an Israeli soldier was killed and three wounded. Israeli security sources said two Israelis were hurt.

Abbas, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, was forecast to take 52 to 65 per cent of the vote, more than twice the support commanded by his closest challenger, human rights activist Mustafa Barghouthi.

Abbas waged a crowd-pleasing campaign, pledging to uphold the iconic Arafat's struggle for statehood in Israeli-occupied territories, but by non-violent means.

Israel, which branded Arafat an "arch-terrorist", believes it can do business with Abbas, a co-architect with Israel of past peace deals.

# Abbas emerging frontrunner in Palestinian election

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, JAN. 9. Crucial day-long elections for the post of the President of the Palestinian Authority, which are likely to reorient the Palestinian struggle for a homeland ended tonight, with Mahmoud Abbas emerging as the frontrunner for the post.

Balloting across 3,000 polling stations began at 7 a.m. (local time) and ended at 7 p.m. Polling was brisk in the Israeli occupied West bank and Gaza strip. Around 30 per cent of the 1.8 million eligible voters had cast their ballot by 3 p.m. However, around 500 people were reportedly turned away from an Israeli-run polling station in Jerusalem.

The former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter, who was monitoring the poll at the station, said he was unhappy with the incident. East Jerusalem under international law has been designated as occupied territory. Despite annexing the area in 1967, Israel considers it as its exclusive domain. Unlike the West Bank and Gaza, voting in the area was held in Israeli post offices. Official announcement of the poll result is expected on Monday.

The Islamic Resistance Movement, popularly known as Hamas, which has in the past spearheaded a campaign of suicide bombings in Israel, has boycotted the elections. Hamas,



**The Palestinian presidential candidate, Mahmoud Abbas, casts his ballot in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Sunday. — Reuters**

which had participated in recent municipal elections, has also decided to contest the July parliamentary poll. While polling was still underway, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Silvan Shalom, said the new Palestinian leadership must crack down on "terrorism". Mr. Abbas, during the closing stages of the election campaign has rejected this view, saying that he would negotiate with armed militant groups and persuade them to end violence.

THE HINDU

10 JAN 2005

# Boycott shadow on Palestine polls

AFP & AP

JABALIYA (Gaza Strip), Jan. 8. — Hamas and Islamic Jihad members vowed to obey orders from their Islamist groups to boycott tomorrow's Palestinian election as front-runner Mahmud Abbas urged a massive turnout to bolster his legitimacy. "I won't vote and I don't believe in these things. This election is an Israeli-American game marketed for Palestinians to distract them from their struggles. Nothing less," said Abu Mohammed from Islamic Jihad in northern Gaza.

Parliamentary elections on 17 July  
GAZA CITY, Jan. 8. — Palestinian parliamentary elections will be held in the Gaza Strip and West Bank in July, six months after this weekend's presidential race, acting president Mr Rawhi Fattuh announced today. "The parliamentary elections will be held on 17 July," he told reporters in Gaza City. — AP

army roadblocks in West Bank and Gaza Strip today, and Palestinian officials complained that Israel isn't fully complying with promises to ease travel restrictions. At one checkpoint, hundreds of cars were waiting today morning. Palestinians reported that a 60-year-old man was killed by army fire at the barrier.

**Spanish journalists held**  
Two Spanish journalists were briefly held by gunmen in the Gaza Strip today, security sources said, stressing that the pair had not been kidnapped.

"I support Islamic Jihad, but I was going to boycott the elections even before they called for it," said the 32-year-old sign painter from the run-down Jabaliya refugee camp.

Consenting to talk only in deserted strawberry patches in the northern Gaza Strip, a 24-year-old engineering graduate said his obedience to Hamas was total.

"Firstly, I don't believe in any of the candidates. Secondly, I am a Hamas member. Tomorrow is a day off for me," he said.

International observers toured

# Palestine goes to polls today

## PLO chief Abbas tipped to win

Ramallah, January 8

PALESTINIANS WILL on Sunday elect their second president ever. Pollsters have predicted victory for PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas.

If the leader pulls it off, the win will give a boost to his illustrious career. Less than 18 months ago, Abbas' vocation appeared to be at an end when he quit as Prime Minister after a bruising power struggle with the man he is now poised to replace. But as Yasser Arafat lay terminally ill in October last year, Abbas put aside any lingering resentment and reconciled with his old boss. Within hours of Arafat's death on November 11, he assumed the mantle of Palestine Liberation Organisation chairman and was soon chosen official candidate of the Fatah faction for the presidential election.

Abbas has been careful to associate himself with the legacy of Arafat. Much of his campaign rhetoric has been straight out of the Arafat textbook.

While some Israelis call him an

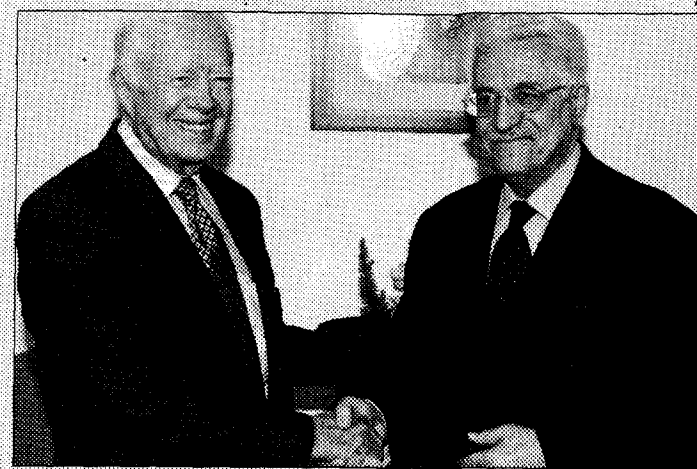
## The contestants

**Mahmoud Abbas** (Fatah)  
Polls say he's favourite. Principal architect on the Palestinian side of the 1993 Oslo autonomy accords, which paved the way for the creation of Palestinian Authority. Opposed to the use of violence in Palestinian uprising.

**Mustafa Barghouti** (Independent)  
Prominent human rights and democracy campaigner. Consistent critic of Palestinian Authority. Strongest challenger to Abbas.

**Tayseer Khaled** (DFLP)  
Founding member of Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine. Also a member of PLO executive committee.

**Sayed H. Barakeh** (Independent)  
Islamist academic and



Mahmoud Abbas with former US President Jimmy Carter.

businessman. Former Islamic Jihad member.

**Abdel Kareem Shbair** (Independent)  
Lawyer based in Gaza. Seeks right of return for Palestinian refugees.

**Bassam al-Salhi** (People's Party of Palestine)  
Favours civil resistance.

**Abdel al-Ashkar** (Independent)  
Professor held in US. Accused of helping Hamas.

Arafat mark-two, Abbas has also peppered his speeches with blunt denunciations of the militarisation of the Palestinian uprising, sentiments unimaginable under

Arafat. Militants have castigated him for "hurting our own people". His comments have inevitably irked the likes of Hamas.

But in an end-of-campaign press

conference on Friday, Abbas said he could persuade the armed factions to sign up a repeat of a truce signed during his premiership.

AFP

## Israel threat on vote eve

Jerusalem, January 8

ISRAEL ON Saturday threatened to cancel plans to ease restrictions on the Palestinian territories for the presidential election following a West Bank shooting attack that left a soldier dead.

"Israel warned the Palestinian Authority that it could scrap the measures to ease the restrictions for the ballot, following the attack that killed a soldier," the public radio reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's top aide Dov Weisglass passed on the message to chief election observers Jimmy Carter and Michel Rocard.

The two are expected to convey the message to Mahmoud Abbas, PLO chairman at a meeting on Saturday, the radio said.

A soldier was killed and four other Israelis wounded on Friday in the northern West Bank in a shooting claimed by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an offshoot of the dominant Palestinian movement Fatah.

Israel had announced its troops would keep a low profile during 72 hours as of Saturday in order to facilitate the second Palestinian presidential elections.

Some roadblocks and senior officers posted at the remaining checkpoints have been removed in a bid to allow Palestinians to travel more freely from their homes to polling stations.

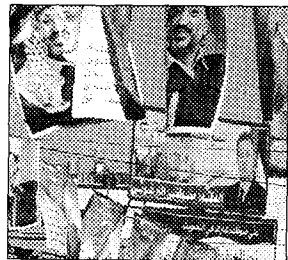
AFP

## Spirit of Arafat looms large

Nablus, January 8

THE SPIRIT of Yasser Arafat continues to tower over the campaign of the man who hopes to inherit his mantle as president.

Mahmoud Abbas, who has already succeeded Arafat as chairman of PLO, has drawn heavily on his long relationship with his old boss to portray himself as the natural successor to the "rais" (leader). Campaign posters festooned around



Posters of Mahmoud Abbas and Arafat in Ramallah.

the towns and cities of the West Bank and Gaza Strip

invariably feature images of the two men side-by-side against a backdrop of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque. Abbas' speeches at election rallies are peppered with references to the "heroic struggle" of Arafat for an independent Palestinian state.

In fact, during a trip to Nablus, Abbas even wrapped himself in the cloak of Arafat, addressing a rally at the city's Al-Najah University, where a poster of Arafat is the largest on show.

## Tough task ahead of Hamas as well

Gaza, January 8

THE BOYS from Hamas were busy ripping down placards to put up a message of their own, under the snapping green flags of Islam. But their message wasn't about Sunday's presidential election; it was a commemoration of a Hamas hero, Yahya Ayyash, a master bomb-maker known as the 'Engineer', who was killed by Israel nine years ago with a booby-trapped cell-phone.

Hamas, which seeks Israel's destruction, is urging its supporters to boycott the election. Yet, the poll is nearly as big a test for Hamas as for those running for it. For several years, its popularity was on the rise. But now, after four years of violence and the death of Yasser Arafat, Hamas is struggling against a shift in political sentiment toward the mainstream.

## Lowdown on elections

- 7 candidates will contest the second Palestinian presidential election on Sunday
- About 1.8 million Palestinians are eligible to vote in West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem
- Nearly 150,000 of the 3.5 million refugees living in Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere can be likely to vote
- Count begins in Ramallah on Sunday
- Result to be announced at on Monday
- Over 800 international observers to be present

Agencies

# Abbas denounces 'Zionist enemy'



Mr Abbas greets supporters at an election rally on Tuesday. — AFP  
AFP & AP

91-2 51  
KHAN YUNIS (Gaza), Jan. 4. — Palestinian presidential poll front runner Mr Mahmud Abbas launched a withering attack on the "Zionist enemy" today after Israeli troops killed seven people in northern Gaza.

"We pray for the souls of our martyrs who fell today in the Zionist enemy's tank shelling in Beit Lahiya," Mr Abbas, also the PLO chairman, told an election meeting in southern Gaza. It was unusually harsh language from the former Prime Minister who is considered as a moderate.

An 11-year-old boy was among the seven people killed in the Beit Lahiya region of northern Gaza this morning in what the military said was a response to attacks on Israeli targets.

The Israeli fire came in response to Palestinian mortar attacks on an industrial zone near the Erez crossing between Israel and Gaza. The Israeli military said an Israeli was lightly hurt by the mortar fire, but had no immediate comment on Israeli tank fire.

Palestinian witnesses said two Israeli tank shells hit an area on the edge of the town of Beit Lahiya, close to Erez. "People were in the streets, including farmers, school children and women," a resident said.

Hospital officials said at least three of the bodies had been decapitated. They said two of the wounded were in critical condition.



# Here's looking at you, Turkey

**W**ILL Samuel P. Huntington be proved wrong on the "clash of civilisations" if and when Islamic Turkey joins the European Union (EU)? And will that enable the EU to put an end to the decades old ethno-territorial feud in Cyprus? I was in Turkey in December, 2004 when its prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, returned home after attending the EU Summit in Brussels and obtaining a start date for "accession talks" for EU membership. There was much happiness and jubilation, and also some apprehension. The ruling liberal Islamist party, the AKP, organised a huge triumphant rally for the prime minister. There were minor protests rallies too, on the prime minister compromising on Turkey's support to Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus. After fulfilling EU's Copenhagen criteria of democracy, human rights and fiscal reforms, and obtaining its approval to start "accession talks" on October 3 2005, Turkey may yet take 10-12 years to become a regular EU member.

Europe today is uneasy about its Muslim minorities. The alarmists feel that Turkish membership could turn out to be an Islamic Trojan horse. They fear that Turkey's 70 million population, with comparatively lower per capita income, will be a drag on the EU. The optimists, however, bank on Turkey's moderate Islamic credentials, potential consumer markets, its large armed forces (part of NATO), and most importantly, its geo-strategic location.

As compared to the Arabs, the Turks were latecomers to the Muslim faith. The bi-continental spread of the Turkish Ottoman Empire (13-19th century AD) and their continual interaction with the west enabled them to



Why the world must take note as Turkey knocks on EU's door

V.P. MALIK

make practical decisions on governance, adopt new technologies and reform age-old sharia laws. They allowed the charging of interest (denounced as usury in the Koran) and abolished slavery despite strong resistance from the Arab Wahaabis. The Ottomans are credited with having introduced secular laws, a constitution, a parliament, and western style schools and universities in Turkey. But the person who injected the strongest dose of modernisation and moderation was Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder of the Turkish Republic

and university academics. Turkish religious moderation is very noticeable in Istanbul and Ankara where the malls and bazaars prepare for Christmas like any other Muslim festival.

There is no anti-Semitism in Turkey. Turkey and Israel maintain a good relationship. The Turks sympathise with the Palestinian predicament and yet allow the Jews to live peacefully and enjoy minority community status. Kemal Ataturk may not enjoy the same reverence as he did some years ago, but it will not be easy for any Turkish Islamist

Following a Greek junta coup in Cyprus, Turkey intervened militarily in 1974 and officially "recognised" the Turkish Cypriots. "De-recognition" of Greek Cypriots divided Cyprus into two separate ethnic parts. Since then, Turkey and the internationally accepted Cyprus have had no relations. The latter is faced with the problems of the presence of Turkish troops in the north, and the inability to use sea lanes and air space of that part of the island.

To become an EU member, Turkey will need Cyprus's support and a normalisation of relations. That would put an end to the long-standing ethnic problem in Cyprus. In Brussels, Erdogan had to promise the extension of the 1963 Customs Union Agreement to 10 new EU members, including Cyprus, before the start date for accession talks. This was short of the Cypriot demand, but not too far from the "recognition" goal. Although the Turkish Armed Forces have made no comments, many Turks resent giving up on "sacrifices made by Turkish soldiers since 1974". Since the accession talks will be open-ended and there is no guarantee of EU membership, Turkey has no choice but to make this compromise.

Geographically, Turkey is more Asia than Europe but it appears to harbour a greater attraction for the West — its modernity, higher economic standards, democratic politics, and with that, the secular ethos. Will the clash of civilisations within Turkey, and the Turks' decision to make Europe-style progress, abandoning outdated ethno-territorial problems in Cyprus, have some lessons for the rest of the world? We wait and watch.

*The writer is a former chief of army staff*

**There were many modernist theologians in Turkey who envisaged a comprehensive renewal of Islam and they have had considerable public support**

lic, in the early 20th century. He abolished all signs of radical Islam. He established and nurtured the democratic institutions that make Turkey a different Islamic country today.

There were many modernist theologians in Turkey who envisaged a comprehensive renewal of Islam and they have had considerable public support. However, since then, political Islamism has made an entry into Turkey. The present ruling party which is pursuing EU membership is also Islamist to an extent. There are no burqas on the streets but the number of scarf-wearing women has been slowly increasing, a trend resented by the modernists, Turkish armed

politician to completely change the Turkish mindset and way of life institutionalised by him.

The optimists in Europe consider Turkey as the archetype of "moderate Islam". They believe that its membership would be an antidote to radical Islam and not a religious threat to the EU. The alarmists, however, fear the unleashing of a previously marginalised and suppressed Islam and a fundamentalist backlash when Turkey joins the EU.

Turkey's imbroglia with Cyprus, a million strong nation and a member of the EU since May 2004, started in the 1960s when it began to support Turkish Cypriots in the northern part of the island against the Greek Cypriots.

# Israel launches major offensive in Gaza

11-10  
17/11  
Jerusalem: About 50 Israeli tanks and armoured vehicles on Sunday launched a major offensive in the northern Gaza Strip, a week ahead of Palestinian elections to choose a successor to Yasser Arafat.

The latest incursion in Beit Hanun came hours after the Jewish state ended a three-day incursion in the Khan Younis refugee camp in southern Gaza, some two months after the area had come under a massive 16-day army operation in which more than a hundred Palestinians were killed.

The Israeli army said the raid began after two rockets hit the southern Israeli town of Sderot, wounding a woman. "In the light of the continuous launching of Qassam rockets which terrorise communities inside Israel, the Israel defence force is operating in the areas to reduce the attacks," the army said in a statement.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei had accused Israel of working to undermine the elections by undertaking military operations in the Gaza Strip. Calling the military onslaught in Khan Younis a "crime", Qurei on Saturday warned Israel of any attempt to obstruct the Palestinian elections scheduled for January 9. Twelve Palestinians, most of them armed militants, were killed in the Khan Younis raid. Israeli forces also destroyed 10 homes and a market in the area during the operation, Palestinian sources said.



Ahmed Qurei

In Gaza City, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said he wanted to protect militants from Israel, rejecting Israeli demands that he crack down on them. It was Abbas' latest campaign gesture to court gunmen seen by many Palestinians as resistance heroes and by Israel as terrorists. Agencies