

Palestinians banned from living in Israel

Court Ruling Will Hit Several Families Hard

Jerusalem: Israel's highest court narrowly upheld on Sunday a controversial law that severely restricts Palestinians from living in Israel with their Arab Israeli spouses and children.

The restrictions, imposed in 2002 at the height of Israeli-Palestinian fighting, are believed to have kept hundreds, and possibly thousands, of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians from moving to Israel to live with their families. An expanded panel of 11 judges voted 6-5 against a petition to strike down the law.

"This is a very black day for the state of Israel and also a black day for my family and for the other families who are suffering like us," said Murad El Sana, an Israeli Arab attorney married to a Palestinian woman from the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

"The government is preventing people from conducting a normal family life just because of their nationality," El Sana told Israel Radio, minutes after the ruling was announced.

The court had granted El Sana's wife, Abir, a temporary injunction preventing her deportation. But El Sana said the high court's ruling made it almost impossible for the couple and their two children, aged 2

years and five months, to continue living together.

The law states that only Palestinian women over the age of 25 and men over 35 are eligible to join their families in Israel, and eventually receive citizenship.

The government has repeatedly said the legislation was based on security concerns. "No place in the world is required to admit citizens from a country or authority with which it is in a state of conflict," Justice Minister Haim Ramon said. "We have to remember that this law was legislated during the Palestinian uprising, when several people who received citizenship through family unification carried out attacks."

But the restrictions also cut to a more sensitive demographic issue—the fear that the country's Jewish majority could be threatened if too many Palestinians were granted citizenship.

In their 263-page ruling, the 11 judges took the unusual step of each writing their own opinion, an expression of the issue's divisiveness.

State Prosecutor Yochi Genesim said the state has granted 6,000 of 22,000 requests for family unification since Israel and the Pales-

tinians signed an interim peace deal in 1993. The remainder were rejected, some for security reasons, Genesim said.

In the current climate of tension, the law is necessary to prevent Palestinians from using Israeli residency or citizenship to carry out attacks against Israelis, she said.

Israeli Arabs are free to travel freely throughout the country, something that is difficult, and sometimes impossible, for West Bank and Gaza Palestinians.

"Today the war is conducted on the home front. You need creative ways to combat that," Genesim said.

Zehava Galon, a lawmaker for the dovish Meretz Party, slammed the decision. "We thought the Supreme Court would be the last bastion and unfortunately, it failed in its mission," Galon said. "The SC could have taken a braver decision and not relegated us to the level of an apartheid state."

Orna Kohn, an attorney from Adalah, a group that fights for the rights of Israeli Arabs, said the court's ruling trampled on the basic rights of people. "The bottom line is the Supreme Court refused to intervene with a law that is racist," Kohn said. AP

TC

15 MAY 2006

Israel pushes army into Gaza Strip

NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI
GAZA, JUNE 28

PALESTINIAN civilians greeted an Israeli Army push into Gaza today with a mixture of defiance and despair, stocking up on food and fuel, even as masked gunmen manned barricades and vowed to fight, and medics parked ambulances at busy street corners, ready for casualties.

Many people stayed home after Israeli air raids overnight — part of efforts to force Palestinian militants to free an abducted soldier — knocked out power

and water supplies.

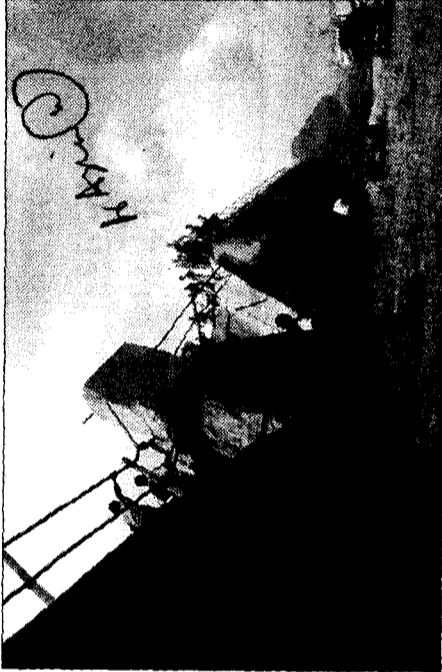
Israeli tanks backed by helicopter gunships and artillery drove into southern Gaza early today, stepping up pressure on militants to release Corporal Gidal Shalit, who was seized in a cross-border raid on Sunday.

Militants wielding assault rifles and anti-tank rockets were deployed in streets, alleyways and behind mounds of dirt. Others have laid homemade mines and barbed wire along roads near northern border areas. Palestinian officials said missile strikes had badly damaged Gaza's lone power plant. Around 70 per cent

of the strip's 1.4 million people would be without power for six months, they said.

The Ministry of Health said it had declared a full emergency in all hospitals and clinics in Gaza, but added that medical supplies might run out within weeks. Israeli war planes flew low overhead, setting off sonicbooms that smashed windows and frightened children.

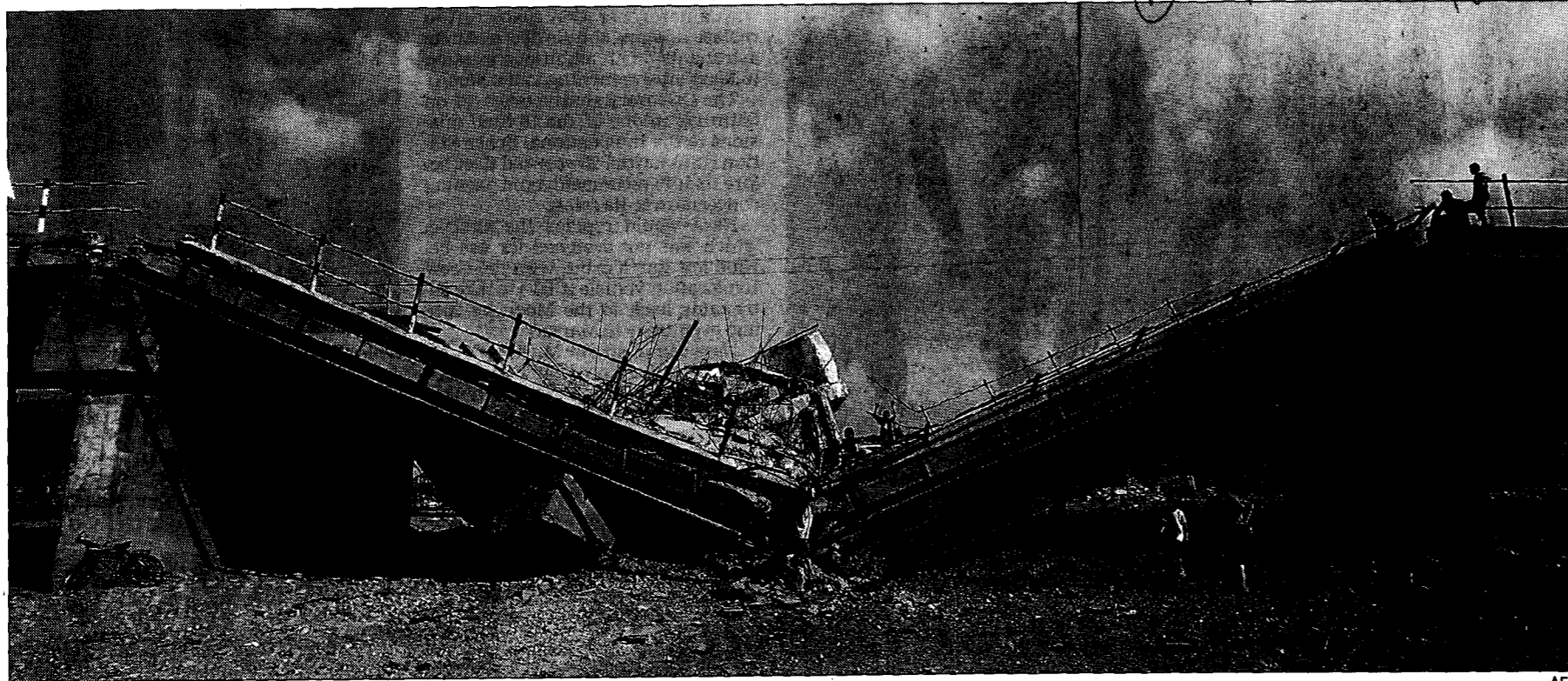
Defending the incursion, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the Jewish state "would not hesitate to take extreme steps" to secure the soldier's freedom. —Reuters



Palestinians look at a bridge destroyed by Israeli army warplanes on a main road in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday. AP

Gaza under attack from Israel

26 Amir (2) 12/12 28/6



Palestinian children inspect a destroyed bridge after an overnight Israeli air strike on Gaza City on Wednesday. Israel launched a ground offensive after a wave of targeted air strikes. AFP

Threat to kill Hamas leaders

Jerusalem, June 28

ISRAEL WARNED that they will kill exiled Syrian-based leaders of the ruling Palestinian Hamas movement on Wednesday, blaming them for the abduction of a soldier by militants in the Gaza Strip.

"Hamas's and Islamic Jihad's leaders and general headquarters are in Damascus in locations the Syrians know perfectly well," Israeli Public Security Minister Avi Dichter told public radio.

"We have transmitted clarifications and warnings through diplomatic channels to the Syrians on this matter, but they have chosen to disregard them. This therefore gives Israel full permission to attack these assassins," he said.

"For years, Israel has held Syria responsible for some of the terrorist actions perpetrated on Israeli territory," added Dichter, a former chief of Israel's domestic security agency Shin Beth.

A number of Israeli officials have said Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal, who is exiled in Syria, was in their sights over the kidnapping of the soldier in an attack near the Gaza border on Sunday.

Israel compared the 50-year-old Meshaal to al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, and called for international pressure on Syria to expel him.

Meshaal is one of Israel's most wanted men and survived a bungled assassination attempt by Mossad agents in 1997 in Jordan.

A close aide to Meshaal said in Amman that the Hamas supreme spurned the volley of Israeli threats. "Abu Al Walid (Meshaal) believes in God and in fate. The Israeli threats do not scare him," the aide said. AFP

Bridges, power station blown up

Water, electricity has been cut off to pressure Palestinian militants into releasing a captive soldier

ASSOCIATED Press
Rafah (Gaza Strip), June 28

ISRAEL TURNED up the pressure on Palestinian militants to release a captive soldier on Wednesday, sending its warplanes to bomb a Hamas training camp after knocking out electricity and water supplies for most of the 1.3 million residents of the Gaza Strip. Also, Israel said, its warplanes flew over the home of Syrian President Bashar Assad, in a message aimed at pressuring him to win the release of a captured Israeli soldier.

The Hamas-led Palestinian government called for a prisoner swap with Israel, saying the Gaza offensive would not secure the soldier's release.

Tensions escalated on Wednesday evening as the military fired artillery near Gaza City — the first time Israel has targeted that area during the offensive. There were no reports of injuries or damage, and the army said it was testing artillery units and had not fired at a specific target.

Palestinians dug in behind walls and embankments, preparing for a major strike after Israel sent in troops and tanks and bombarded bridges and a power station. Warplanes fired missiles in northern and southern Gaza. No casualties have been reported since the offensive began early on Wednesday.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel wouldn't balk at "extreme action" to bring the soldier home, but had no inten-

tion of reoccupying Gaza. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas deplored the incursion as a "crime against humanity".

Overnight, Israeli tanks and soldiers began taking up positions east of the Gaza town of Rafah under cover of tank shells, witnesses and Palestinian security officials said. Israeli warplanes fired at least nine missiles at Gaza's only power station, cutting electricity to 65 per cent of the Gaza Strip, engineers at the station said.

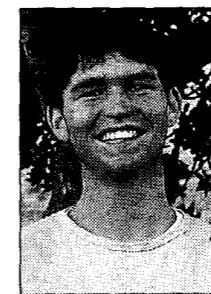
The station's three functioning turbines and a gasoline reservoir were engulfed in flames. The Israeli military said in a statement that three bridges were attacked "to impair the ability of the terrorists to transfer the kidnapped soldier." Knocking down the bridges cut Gaza in two.

Militants warn they will kill hostage

A PALESTINIAN militant group on Wednesday threatened to kill an abducted Jewish settler if Israel doesn't stop its raid on the Gaza Strip.

The Popular Resistance Committees said in a statement that "we are running out of patience."

Agencies



REUTERS

The abducted, Elishu Asheri.

Hamas, Fatah 'recognise' Israel

Crisis Over Abduction Of Israeli Soldier Overshadows Agreement

Gaza City (Gaza Strip): The rival Hamas and Fatah movements on Tuesday completed an agreement over a plan that implicitly recognises Israel, ending weeks of acrimonious negotiations, a top official said.

"We have an agreement over the document," said Ibrahim Abu Najah, coordinator of the 'national dialogue' over the proposal.

"There is no complicated issue left because everyone signed and everyone approved the document," he said.

Salah Zeldan, another negotiator, said preparations were being made for a formal signing ceremony. "All political groups are prepared for a mutual ceasefire with Israel," he said.

"It's a historic moment and an important moment in our history," said Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri. "In the shadow of the escalation and the aggression against our people, our people emphasised unity."

President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah has been trying to coax his Hamas rivals into endorsing the document, which was formulated by senior Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. He has endorsed the plan as a way to end



A Palestinian demonstrator holds a photograph of a relative being held in an Israeli jail during a protest in Hebron on Tuesday. The protesters are demanding their children be released in exchange for an Israeli soldier kidnapped during a Palestinian operation. Israel has rejected a demand from Palestinian groups for the release of women and children in exchange for information on the soldier

crippling economic sanctions against the Hamas-led Palestinian government and pave the way to reopening peace talks.

However, the deal was over-

shadowed by a crisis over the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier and opposition to the deal voiced by Islamic Jihad, a small militant group that has carried out

numerous attacks against Israel.

"In today's meeting, we announced we reject some of the articles of this document and we have reservations about other articles," said Khaled Al Batch, spokesman for Islamic Jihad.

The plan calls for a Palestinian state alongside Israel, in effect recognising Israel. It also calls on militants to limit attacks to areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast War and calls for formation of a coalition Palestinian government.

Hamas and Fatah have been locked in a bloody power struggle since Hamas won legislative elections in January. Hamas controls the parliament and cabinet. Abbas, a political moderate, was elected separately last year.

Israel has said the document is an internal Palestinian matter, but said it falls short of international demands that Hamas renounce violence and formally recognise the Jewish state.

With Hamas-linked militants holding a captured Israeli soldier, the Palestinian agreement is even less likely to reduce tensions. Israel has massed troops along its border with Gaza, promising a broad offensive into the area. AP

✓ Hamas nod to Israel identity

Jerusalem, June 22

HAMAS HAS made a major political climbdown by agreeing to sections of a document that recognise Israel's right to exist and a negotiated two-state solution, according to Palestinian leaders. *to Assad* *KFR*

In a bitter struggle for power, Hamas is bowing to an ultimatum from the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, to endorse the document drawn up by Palestinian security prisoners in Israeli jails, or face a national referendum on the issue that could see the Islamist group stripped of power if it loses.

But final agreement on the paper, designed to end international sanctions against the Hamas government, has been slowed by wrangling over a national unity administration and the question of who speaks for the Palestinians.

Yasser Abed Rabbo, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's executive committee and a lead negotiator on the prisoners' document, said Hamas had agreed to sections that call for a negotiated and final agreement with Israel to establish a Palestinian state on the territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem.

"Hamas is prepared to accept those parts of the document because they think it is a way to get rid of a lot of its problems with

the international community. That's why it will accept all the document eventually," he said. *23/6*

Hamas declined to discuss the negotiations in detail.

If it formally approves the entire document, it will represent a significant shift from its founding goal of replacing Israel with an Islamic state and its more recent position of agreeing a long-term ceasefire, over a generation or more, if a Palestinian state is formed on the occupied territories but without formally recognising the Jewish state.

Abed Rabbo said he expected an agreement in the coming days, but that important differences still had to be settled, particularly over the document's call for the formation of a national unity government.

He described that as "the major issue that will determine the fate of two nations for decades" because a unity administration, built around a common policy of negotiations with Israel, would be the only way to combat its plans to unilaterally impose its final borders and annex parts of the occupied territories.

Abed Rabbo said the July 26 referendum would be called off if there was agreement on the document, but that a ballot could be held later if Hamas blocked the formation of a new government or failed to agree on a negotiations policy. **The Guardian**

25 JUN 2006

Hamas militia disowns govt's ceasefire offer to Israel

REUTERS
GAZA, JUNE 16

HAMAS militants distanced themselves on Friday from a ceasefire offer that the Palestinian government led by the Islamist group made to Israel.

Differences over the truce offer—which was conditional on Israel halting military activity in Gaza and the West Bank—could point to dis-

agreement between Hamas's grassroots and the government over its tactics toward the Jewish state.

"We are not interested in making any offers or proposals. When the occupation stops its killings and crimes against our people then the factions may look into the issue in accordance with the interests of our people," said Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas's official spokesman.

Abu Zuhri said a ceasefire offer was announced by the cabinet spokesman on Thursday in an interview with Israel Radio represented only the government, and not the group.

The Islamists formed the Palestinian government in March after winning parliamentary elections. Hamas members hold all key cabinet positions, including the Prime Minister's portfolio.

Israel completes weapons shipment to Abbas, says report

AGENCIES

JERUSALEM, JUNE 15

ISRAEL has transferred nearly 1,000 M-16 rifles to forces loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as part of moves to bolster the moderate leader against Hamas rivals, an Israeli newspaper reported on Thursday.

Israel's decision to allow shipment of the weapons from Jordan comes amid an increasingly violent power struggle between Abbas and the Islamic militant group, which formed the new Palestinian government in March after winning a parliamentary election.

The mass circulation *Yedioth Ahronoth* daily, which did not quote any officials, said shipment of about 950 of the American-made M-16s was completed in the past day. Two trucks escorted by the Israeli Army took 400 rifles to the West Bank city of Ramallah, where Abbas has his headquarters, it said. Another 550 guns were escorted to the Gaza Strip, Hamas's stronghold, it added.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said on Tuesday that he had approved a shipment of weapons and ammunition to bolster Abbas's



Security officers loyal to Abbas guard the Palestinian parliament during a session in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Thursday. AP

security forces. "I did this because we are running out of time and we need to help Abbas," said Olmert.

Meanwhile, the spokesman for the Hamas-led Palestinian government said on Thursday that the Islamic group is prepared to restore a cease-fire with Israel, several days after calling off the truce to protest a deadly explosion on a Gaza beach.

"This is very clear for us. We are interested to keep the situation and quit, especially in the Gaza Strip," said government spokesman Ghazi Hamad at Gaza City. "We are

ready to do it, but (only) if the Israeli side has a strong intention to respond positively to the call...to stop their aggression."

Hamas had fired several dozen rockets toward southern Israel over the weekend. But in recent days, there has been a lull in the Hamas rocket fire.

Israeli officials said today that the lull was due to threats earlier this week that Israel would begin killing Hamas leaders, including Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, if the rocket fire continued.

Bush sorry for teasing vision-affected reporter

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, JUNE 15

PRESIDENT George W. Bush, who often teases members of the White House Press corps, apologized after he poked fun at a reporter for wearing sunglasses without realizing they were needed for vision loss.

The exchange occurred at a news conference yesterday in the rose garden.

Bush called on *Los Angeles Times* reporter Peter Wallsten and asked if he was going to ask his question with his "shades" on. "For the viewers, there's no sun," Bush said to the television cameras.

But even though the sun was behind the clouds, Wallsten still needs the sunglasses because he has Stargardt's disease, a form of macular degeneration that causes progressive vision loss.

The president later called the reporter to say he was sorry. "I told him he needn't apologise. I wasn't offended," said Wallsten.

16 JUN 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

EIGHT CIVILIANS, INCLUDING TWO SCHOOLCHILDREN, AMONG VICTIMS OF AIR STRIKE

Israeli attack kills 10 Palestinians

Associated Press

GAZA CITY, June 13: A failed Israeli air strike against a car carrying militants along a main road in Gaza City today killed nine Palestinians, including two schoolchildren, Palestinian hospital officials said.

The Israeli military said that the militants were on a mission to launch rockets at southern Israel.

Palestinian witnesses said two missiles were fired, but they missed the car.

The second missile came two minutes after the first, after a crowd had begun to gather around the scene of the attack, witnesses said. Eight of the Palestinians killed were civilians, hospital officials said, and Islamic Jihad said the other two belonged to the ranks of its militant group.

32 Palestinians were injured in the strike, three of them seriously. Doctors at Gaza's Shifa hospital found it difficult

to work with the large number of casualties, and some were being treated on the bloodied floor.

At the hospital's morgue, where the bodies were brought, angry women shouted: "Death to Israel, Death to the occupation!"

An explosion was heard minutes later in the nearby town of Jebaliya.

Palestinians said Israel had carried out another air strike, but the Israeli army said it did not operate there, and no casualties were immediately reported.

Israel-Palestinian violence has escalated since an explosion on a Gaza beach on Friday killed eight civilians.

Palestinians have blamed the deaths on an Israeli artillery round.

Israeli military officials said today that the military's investigation shows the deaths were caused by a mine planted by militants from the Palestinians' ruling Hamas party.

14 JUN 2006

THE STATESMAN

✓ Hamas calls off truce, fires barrage of rockets at Israel

Militant group threatens "earth-shaking" response

BEIT LAHIYA (GAZA STRIP): The ruling Hamas group fired a barrage of 15 rockets at Israel on Saturday, hours after calling off a truce with Israel in anger over an artillery attack that killed seven civilians in Gaza.

The Hamas militants' announcement to call off the cease-fire, reached in February 2005, raised the prospect of a renewed campaign of deadly suicide bombings and a wave of bloodshed.

Hamas also claimed responsibility on Saturday for firing at Israel at least 15 rockets, as well as a barrage of mortar bombs. The attacks caused no casualties.

"The earthquake in the Zionist towns will start again and the aggressors will have no choice but to prepare their coffins or their luggage," the Hamas militants said in a leaflet. They vowed to "continue the resistance with these earth-shaking

actions." Israel's artillery attack on Friday was part of a wider aerial and artillery bombardment of suspected Palestinian rocket-launching sites that killed a total of 10 people, three of them militants.

The violence fuelled tensions already high over an Israeli air strike on Thursday that killed the Hamas Government's top militant commander, Jamal Abu Samhadana.

Friday's artillery attack tore

into a beach-side picnic in Gaza, killing seven civilians, and leading Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to condemn the attack as a "genocidal crime." He called for international intervention and declared a three-day period of mourning.

His rival, Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas, said the shelling was a "war crime" and urged an end to recent fighting between Hamas and Mr. Abbas' moderate Fatah movement.

But overnight on Saturday, gunmen shot and killed a 39-year-old Palestinian security officer in a botched kidnapping attempt. The force, loyal to Mr. Abbas and Fatah, accused Hamas of the killing and vowed to "stop Hamas' game whatever the price."

During the funeral procession for Maj. Bassam Qutub, a gun-battle erupted between gunmen from Hamas and the Preventive Security force. — AP

Abbas calls referendum

RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called on Saturday a referendum for July 26 on a plan which would implicitly recognise Israel's right to exist.

"The Palestinian people in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are asked to give their verdict in a referendum on July 26 on the document of national unity — the prisoners' document," Mr. Abbas said

in a signed decree which was read out to the press by Tayeb Abdelrahim, secretary general of the Palestinian Authority.

The document — based on a blueprint drawn up by prisoners held by Israel — calls for a national unity government, an end to attacks in Israel and the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel on land conquered by the Jewish state in 1967. — AFP

Hamas rockets hit Israel

February 2005 truce ends after counter-attacks

AGENCIES
Jerusalem, June 10

THE MILITARY wing of Hamas said on Saturday it fired rockets from Gaza into Israel, a day after seven Palestinians died when Israeli artillery fired on a Gaza beach.

The Izzedine al Qassam group issued a leaflet in Gaza that said it shot seven rockets at Israel. Hamas, which holds political power in the Palestinian territories, does not recognise the state of Israel.

The Israeli military confirmed Saturday's attack from Gaza, saying 11 rockets had been launched into Israel. The military did not say who was responsible and reported no damage or injuries. Pieces of the rockets have not been found.

Izzedine al Qassam said on Friday that its attacks on Israel, suspended since February 2005, would be renewed in the wake of a string of Israeli strikes, including the artillery shell blast that killed at least seven Palestinians picnicking on a northern Gaza beach on Friday.

Palestinians said the picnickers were killed in shelling from a gunboat. The killings sparked swift and sustained outrage in the Palestinian territories and elsewhere. Israel said it had believed the beach was empty.

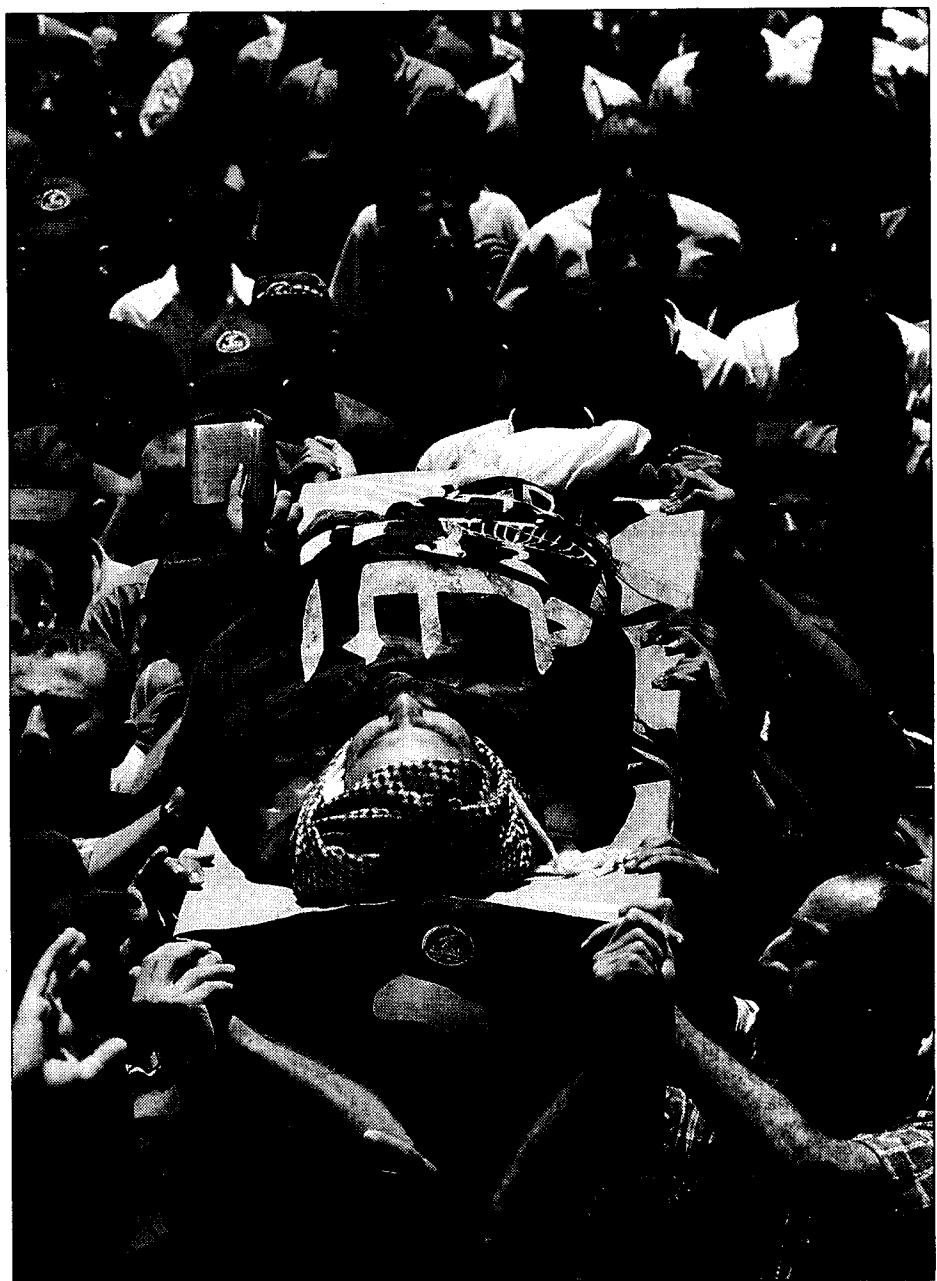
Israeli Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz said the military was investigating the possibility that it was not naval artillery that struck the Palestinians. The IDF said earlier it had been firing on rocket-launching areas in Gaza after a militant attack earlier in the day.

The target areas were believed to be uninhabited, a representative said. The Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz* reported IDF had apologised for the beach killings, saying it "regretted the strike on innocents."

'Referendum is meaningless'

ISRAELI PM, Ehud Olmert dismissed a referendum on a Palestinian statehood proposal as "meaningless" in an interview with British newspapers published on Saturday. "The referendum is an internal game between one (Palestinian) faction and the other. It is meaningless in terms of the broad picture of chances towards some kind of dialogue between us and the Palestinians," the *Financial Times* and *The Independent* both quoted Olmert as saying.

Reuters, London



Palestinian mourners take the body of Jamal Abu Samhadana, a commander of the Popular Resistance Committees, for his funeral in Rafah, Gaza Strip. Samhadana, an advisor in the Hamas-led government, was killed along with three other militants in an Israeli air strike.

AFP

THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 1 JUN 2006

Abbas extends Hamas deadline

7/6
ASSOCIATED Press
Ramallah, (West Bank), June 6

PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday extended a deadline for Hamas to accept a document that implicitly recognises Israel, temporarily averting a showdown with the Islamic movement.

Abbas said he would give Hamas until Thursday to agree to the plan or face a national referendum. Abbas had initially given Hamas until Tuesday to respond to the ultimatum, but decided to give the group more time after consulting with the powerful PLO executive committee.

Abbas wants to hold the non-binding vote to put pressure on the Hamas-led government to accept the plan, which calls for a Palestinian state alongside Israel, implying recognition of the Jewish state. Hamas, committed to Israel's destruction, has demanded changes to the proposal and said it would boycott the referendum.

During Tuesday's meeting, the PLO executive committee endorsed the document and authorised Abbas to call his referendum, said Yasser Abed Rabbo, a senior Palestinian official. He said Abbas would not accept any changes to the document.

"President Abbas has informed the PLO leadership that he's going to prepare for the referendum by the end of the week and will announce this at a Press conference before the weekend", Abed Rabbo said. "We're giving enough time, about three days, for our brothers in Hamas to reconsider their position". The referendum would be held 40 days after the announcement. Abed Rabbo said negotiations with Hamas could continue until the day of the vote. Hamas officials welcomed the offer to extend an ongoing "dialogue" over the document, but said they remained opposed to any deadlines.

"We still have a chance of making this dialogue a success", said Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas at a Cabinet meeting in Gaza City.

07 JUN 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

US warns Iran N-talks won't be open for long

AGENCIES
VIENNA, JUNE 2

THE United States warned Iran it will not have much time to respond once offered an international package of rewards designed to encourage Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, suggesting that the window would close and be replaced by penalties if it doesn't act quickly.

"It really needs to be within weeks," US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told NBC television, referring to a response to a package of perks and penalties from six world powers aimed at halting Iran's enrichment activities.

The package, agreed upon on Thursday by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, carries the threat of UN sanctions if Iran remains defiant over the nuclear programme that could produce a bomb.

A short statement issued on Thursday night did not mention economic sanctions, but officials said privately that Iran could face tough Security Council sanctions if it refuses to give up uranium enrichment and other disputed nuclear activities, US officials said.

The formal offer of talks is expected to be made by France, Britain and Germany—the EU nations that previously negotiated with Tehran. A US State Department official said he expected Tehran would be invited to begin new negotiations "within a matter of days."

Russia and China, which both hold vetoes in the Security Council, might also join in any future talks with Iran.

In Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Iran "will not face a deadline to respond to the proposal of the six nations"—but said he expected Iran to give an answer within a few weeks of receiving the offer, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.



(From left) French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Britain's Foreign Minister Margaret Beckett during a press briefing after a meeting at the British Residence in Vienna on Monday. AP

Meanwhile, Iran will not stop its nuclear enrichment activities, despite mounting international pressure, a top official said on Friday. "Iran is determined to go ahead with its nuclear enrichment work for peaceful purposes," the deputy head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation Mohammad Saeedi told Iran's students news agency ISNA. His comments came before major world powers were to deliver on Friday a pivotal proposal to Iran combining incentives to halt work that could produce nuclear weapons with a threat of UN Security Council action if it refuses.

Saeedi repeated Iran's official view, saying Iran was open to talks with Washington but it would not agree to the US precondition that atomic fuel work be frozen first. "America's wanting to enter nuclear talks is like someone who wants to play football... but sets conditions before his qualification is approved," Saeedi said.

Rajapakse to seek "fresh outlook"

V.S. Sambandan

10-18 2/6
COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse on Thursday told the visiting U.S. Undersecretary for South and Central Asia Richard A. Boucher that he would seek a "fresh outlook" on a negotiated political settlement for the island-nation's decades-long separatist conflict.

Mr. Rajapakse, who met Mr. Boucher in Colombo said he would ask an all-party conference (scheduled for Friday) "to work out suitable proposals for devolution of power."

All-party conference

The President would "ask the all-party conference to have a fresh outlook into this matter, and arrive at consensus on proposals that could be placed before the LTTE for negotiation," an official release said. Mr. Rajapakse also emphasised that the "failure of earlier proposals to solve this crisis was because they did not have the agreement of the LTTE, and it would not be practicable to impose any unilateral solution, without agreement with the LTTE."

The "frank and cordial exchange of views" between Mr. Rajapakse and Mr. Boucher lasted over an hour, a senior Presidential source told *The Hindu*. Senior Sri Lankan officials and the U.S. envoy to Sri Lanka, were present during the



Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Richard A. Boucher, in Colombo on Thursday. -

PHOTO: SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

meeting. On the nature of the negotiated political outcome, Mr. Rajapakse explained the need "to seek a Sri Lankan solution and not be confined to the solutions in other countries." However, he "did not rule out the possibility of some of those solutions being suitable in the Sri Lankan context," the Presidential

office statement said. The President also explained to Mr. Boucher that the LTTE would also have to "look at the present opportunity to arrive at a negotiated settlement and come for discussions." It will also have to understand that "acts of violence such as massacres of civilians, attacks on children, Human Rights violations and the tactics of terror cannot achieve the desired results for the Tamils."

Earlier, addressing the American Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Boucher, said the U.S. welcomed "the E.U.'s decision to list the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation."

"As we've said many times and will continue to say, the Tamil Tigers must renounce terror in word and deed, stop the violence and recognise that the only solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka is a political one."

Assuring Washington's continued support to Sri Lanka to "combat terror," he said: "we will do whatever we can to help the sovereign Sri Lankan Government in its struggle against this menace." Mr. Boucher ruled out a military solution to the conflict. However, he said the U.S. military assistance was "not to encourage a return to war," but was "meant to help Sri Lanka deter a return to war." He said the U.S. was working with other governments to "cut off financing of terrorist groups, including the Tigers."

02 JUN 2005

THE HINDU

Israeli threat to Hamas on borders

Accept terms and resume talks, Palestinian group told

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: In a flurry of statements, Israel has reiterated that it would begin settling its borders with a future Palestinian state unilaterally, unless the militant group Hamas accepted its conditions and resumed talks by the year-end.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his Cabinet colleagues have demanded that the Palestinian group Hamas must renounce violence, recognise Israel's right to exist and abide by the previous peace agreements as a precondition for talks. The Hamas charter calls for the destruction of Israel, but its leaders have been focusing on the withdrawal from Palestinian territories that Israel had occu-

piated during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Setting a deadline, Mr. Olmert said, "We will wait for a month, two months, three months, six months, and if we see no change, then we will probably move forward even without an agreement." Mr. Olmert's "convergence plan" that he wishes to implement envisages the removal of remote Israeli settlements and consolidation of key settlements inside the "security wall" that Israel has raised in order to block suicide bombers from the West Bank reaching Israeli territory. Mr. Olmert warned that, "If the Palestinians do not accept these conditions, Israel will have to determine its borders by itself." Mr. Olmert hopes to implement

his plans before the Bush Presidency in the United States ends in the beginning of 2009.

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni has said the new administration had no intention of resuming peace talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whom she described as "irrelevant."

Turnaround

Israeli officials have been saying talks would be meaningless unless there was a turnaround in the thinking of Hamas, which has formed a new Palestinian Government following parliamentary elections in January 2006.

Meanwhile, Israeli Justice Minister Haim Ramon has said the Government would make up

its mind by the end of the year on whether negotiations with the Palestinians could be held. "If by the start of next year, we see that there is no Palestinian partner, we will begin to promote our initiative after having mobilised support [for convergence] from the international community," he said.

Mr. Ramon said a target of end-2008 had been set to implement the convergence plan. "By that date, we will deploy on the border which will mark the permanent frontier of the state of Israel." Keen to get external support for his plan, the Israeli Prime Minister is heading for Washington by the end of this month. He is also expected to meet Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the coming weeks.

11/5 ✓
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11 MAY 2006

washingtonpost.com

Iranian Leader Praises Hamas

Call for Aid Issued To Muslim Nations

By Scott Wilson
Washington Post Foreign Service
Tuesday, February 21, 2006; A10

JERUSALEM, Feb. 20 -- Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called on Muslim nations Monday to fund the Palestinian government after Hamas takes control of the cabinet, praising the radical Islamic movement for ignoring international pressure to recognize Israel, according to Iranian state television.

"The only way to succeed is to continue resistance against the occupier regime," Khamenei told Khaled Mashal, leader of Hamas's political wing, during his visit to Tehran. The Palestinians "knew that their vote for Hamas meant the fight against the Zionist occupier regime," he said.

Hamas, formally known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, won a large parliamentary majority in elections last month. But Israel and Western donors are moving to isolate the Palestinian Authority financially as Hamas, designated a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, begins work to form the next cabinet, expected to be complete in about five weeks.

On Sunday, Israel's cabinet froze tax and customs payments that it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, drawing a rebuke Monday from the U.N. envoy here. The roughly \$55 million in monthly transfers, a process established under the 1993 Oslo accords, accounts for about half of the authority's monthly payroll expenses.

"These are monies that belong to the Palestinians and should not be withheld," Alvaro de Soto, the U.N. envoy, told the Reuters news agency. "It follows that the formation of a new government and the approval of its program should be awaited and that actions prior to that would be premature."

The United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations, a group of Middle East peace interlocutors known as the quartet, had recommended last month that Israel delay freezing the funds until after Hamas forms the next cabinet. Quartet officials said they did not want to undermine Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, whose secular Fatah movement remains in charge of the caretaker government.

Israel's decision to freeze the money immediately makes it doubtful that the Palestinian Authority will be able to pay all of its 150,000 employees and trainees at the end of the month without fresh funding.

The Israeli cabinet has demanded that Hamas renounce violence, recognize the Jewish state and abide by agreements backed previously by Fatah. The quartet has echoed those demands.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/20/AR2006022000665_pf... 3/6/2006

Since the Hamas victory, Mashal and other party leaders have been reaching out to Muslim governments for political and financial support to keep the Palestinian Authority afloat.

Abbas met Monday in Gaza with Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's nominee for prime minister, to discuss the process of forming the next cabinet. Once Hamas is officially invited to assemble the cabinet, Haniyeh will have five weeks to do so. Hamas officials began meeting Monday with other Palestinian faction leaders in the hopes of creating a broad government.

Various Arab governments are considering stepping up financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority if aid from Western donors, which totals roughly \$1 billion a year, is suspended. The Arab League is working to organize a \$50 million monthly payment to the authority.

Khamenei, the unelected cleric who holds ultimate power in Iran, told Mashal that all Muslim countries should contribute to the Palestinian Authority to ensure Hamas's political success.

"Such voluntary aid will create a psychological connection between the Muslims and the Palestinian issue and will have a great effect on the world," Khamenei said, according to Iranian state television.

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NostradamusOnline.com

Oil price not in our hands, says OPEC

179-1A
2379

Blames it on political tension, rampant speculation

DOHA: OPEC can do very little now to tame record oil prices, said two member countries of the powerful oil cartel on Saturday laying the blame on political tension and rampant speculation.

"Prices are not in the hands of OPEC, now the genie is out of the bottle," Shukri Ghanem, head of the Libya National Oil Company, told reporters on the sidelines of the 10th International Energy Forum in Doha.

"It is a function not only of fundamentals but of this political situation in the Middle East [West Asia], so there should be a solution for this political question if stability in the market is needed."

The forum kicked off ahead of Sunday's official opening with a meeting between Oil Ministers and heads of the world's largest oil companies.

Mr. Ghanem echoed similar comments made by Qatar's Oil Minister who blamed the

record high oil prices of more than \$75 a barrel on "horrible" speculation and "geopolitics" than any objective shortage of supplies. "This frenzy is fabricated by speculators who are taking advantage of it in the most horrible way," Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiya told reporters.

"If you can stop the politicians from making negative statements, I am sure you will see almost 15 dollars disappear from the price." Asked if he was referring to the market's concern over recent hardline statements about Iran's nuclear programme by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mr. Attiya said: "It is not just Iran, everybody is making statements."

Mr. Attiya said his country, which has the world's third largest gas reserves but is OPEC's smallest oil producer, was investing \$5 billion to boost oil production by 2009 to 1.1 million barrels per day (bpd) — AFP

23 APR 2006

THE HINDU

'Israel foiled Hamas plot to kill Abbas'

AGENCE France-Presse
London, May 7

ISRAELI INTELLIGENCE foiled a Hamas plot to assassinate Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas by tipping him off in advance, a report in the British newspaper, *The Sunday Times*, claimed.

The Hamas armed wing, Ezze-dine al-Qassam Brigades, had planned a hit on Abbas at his Gaza City office, intelligence sources told the weekly. Israel sent a missile warning Abbas of the danger, prompting the Palestinian leader to cancel a planned visit to the territory.

"Hamas considered Abbas to be a barrier to its complete control over Palestine and decided to kill him," said a Palestinian source, who was an advisor to Abbas's predecessor Yasser Arafat and is a close aide of Ab-

Olmert moves into Sharon's chair

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Ehud Olmert (picture left) took over at the helm of the new Israeli Cabinet on Sunday, moving out of his old offices in the trade and industry ministry into Ariel Sharon's office. Olmert has been chairing Cabinet meetings since early January when former Prime Minister Sharon suffered a massive stroke. But he declined to take over his stricken mentor's offices and also left Sharon's seat at the head of the Cabinet table vacant until Sunday.



AFP, Jerusalem

bas, according to the newspaper.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri, however, called the allegations "fabricated" and part of a "British conspiracy aimed at provoking internal strife". "The British government is not satisfied with starving the Palestinian

people, so now it is also trying to provoke discord," Abu Zuhri said at a press conference in Gaza.

The militant group Hamas swept to power after elections in January at the expense of Abbas's Fatah movement. Abbas's spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeina, also

termed the report false. The plot, if true, is the clearest sign yet of the tension between them within the Palestinian Authority. Hamas's attempts to govern have been hampered by a US and European Union boycott. They decided to suspend aid to the Palestinian government formed by Hamas.

The Sunday Times said the group would have also targeted former civil affairs minister Mohammed Dahlan, an influential Fatah deputy from Gaza. "We monitor every movement of Hamas," an Israeli intelligence source told *The Sunday Times*. "So when we learnt that Abbas's life was in danger, we made sure to inform him without delay."

Abbas divides his time between his offices in the West Bank town of Ramallah and Gaza, a Hamas stronghold.

08 MAY 2006

Israel sets Hamas peace deal deadline

ASSOCIATED Press
Jerusalem, May 10

ISRAEL WILL give the Palestinians until the end of the year to prove they are willing to negotiate a final peace deal, and will unilaterally set borders by 2008 if they don't, a close associate of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said on Wednesday.

Increasing the pressure on the Palestinians, the Israeli company Dor Energy, the sole provider of fuel to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, decided on Wednesday to halt fuel shipments within 12 hours because of growing Palestinian debt, Israeli and Palestinian officials said.

Head of the Palestinian Petrol Commission, Mujahid Salame, said he expected gasoline supplies to run out on Thursday. "If this happens, there will be a humanitarian crisis," he said. Some gas stations are already closed.

Justice Minister Haim Ramon was the first Israeli official to set a deadline for the Hamas government to renounce violence and recognise the Jewish state. He said Israel would make "honest attempts" at negotiations until the end of this year.

Hamas accused Israel of only pretending to seek negotiations. Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, who is close to Abbas, said talks could resume immediately under Abbas' leadership, without waiting for a change in Hamas' positions.

11 MAY 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

GAZA | Mahmoud Abbas says agreement includes acceptance of Palestinian state alongside Israel

Hamas, Fatah agree to Palestinian borders

MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH
RAMALLAH, MAY 11

AFTER months of tensions, senior members of the rival Hamas and Fatah factions have forged a joint platform, including acceptance of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, said Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

However, it was unclear whether Hamas, particularly the group's hard-line leaders abroad, will back the programme, which would signal a major softening of positions. Until now, Hamas has balked at the West's demands that it renounce violence, recognise Israel and accept existing peace agreements. The document was formulated by senior Hamas and Fatah members who are imprisoned by Israel, and was presented to Abbas on Wednesday. Abbas, the moderate leader of Fatah,

said he backs the draft, which also authorises him to lead peace talks with Israel. "This document is very important. I adopt the position of those heroes," he said referring to the prisoners. "It includes a deep and realistic political vision that to a very large extent represents my point of view...and thus I adopt it."

Hamas spokesman Mushir al Masri praised the effort, but said it was only a beginning. "It could be a good base for a national platform and a national dialogue; but it still needs more discussion," he said. Tensions have been rising since Hamas defeated Fatah in legislative elections early this year. Abbas, elected separately last year, has been in a power struggle with Hamas-led government.

Fatah and Hamas are to hold crucial talks in two weeks to try to settle their differences, and the draft could be part of the negotiations. The negotiations were held in Israel's Hadarim Prison,

where Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti and Abdel Khaleq Nathe of Hamas are serving time. It was not clear whether Nathe had the blessing of the Hamas leadership abroad, including Syrian-based Khaled Mashaal.

The document calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state "in all the lands occupied in 1967," a reference to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. Such an implied recognition of Israel would mark a major breakthrough for Hamas, which remains committed to the destruction of the Jewish state.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said he is ready to withdraw from much of the West Bank to create an independent Palestinian state. But he plans on holding on to large blocs of West Bank settlements and holy sites in east Jerusalem. Israel withdrew unilaterally from Gaza last year.



A Palestinian hurls stones at an Israeli army vehicle in Jenin on Monday. Reuters

Cops march in favour of Abbas to counter Hamas

IBRAHIM BARZAK
GAZA CITY, MAY 18

THOUSANDS of police loyal to moderate Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas marched in a show of force on Thursday, a day after the Hamas government deployed a 3,000-strong army of militants with assault rifles, grenades and missiles in its most brazen power play yet.

Abbas, who has been wrangling with Hamas over control of the security forces, demanded that the government take the new militia off the streets immediately, said Saeb Erekat, an Abbas adviser. However, PM Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas said the unit is legal and suggested it would not be disbanded.

There were no signs that Palestinian

1915
police, dominated by supporters of Abbas' Fatah Party, were getting ready to take on the Hamas unit. In Thursday's march, police chanted "Jerusalem, the president, the homeland," clapping and whistling, as they walked past Hamas gunmen. However, neither made a move.

Tensions were also rising in the West Bank, where a senior Hamas politician, Deputy Prime Minister Nasser Shaer, had to cut short a meeting after Fatah gunmen surrounded an office building he was in and fired in the air. Shaer later left town under heavy police escort. The unprecedented Hamas-Fatah friction, including ambushes against two Hamas gunmen in Gaza earlier in the week, came amid new efforts to explore a possible revival of Mideast peace talks. —AP

INDIAN EXPRESS

19 MAY 2006

Turkey Premier criticises General

Army chief calls for rally by secularists

ANKARA (TURKEY): Turkey's Premier, in a move likely to escalate ongoing tensions, accused the country's top General on Saturday of irresponsibility for encouraging secular Turks to keep up mass protests after the killing of a High Court judge.

The assassination of the judge and wounding of four others by an alleged Islamist extremist on Wednesday has stoked fresh confrontation between Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Islamist-rooted ruling party and the secular establishment, which for the last 83 years has sought to restrict Islamic influence in the 99 per cent Muslim country.

Erdogan regime blamed

Tens of thousands of pro-secularist Turks flooded the capital with protests, many shouting for the Government to resign.

Pro-secular circles and Opposition parties have largely held Mr. Erdogan and his Government responsible for the attack.

The assailant shouted "I am a soldier of God!" before shooting the judges and said his attack was in retaliation for the headscarf decision, authorities said.

Gen. Hilmi Ozkok, the head of the staunchly secular military, said on Friday that the march by secular Turks condemning the shootings was "admirable." "But this reaction should not be limited to a single day, to a single event. It must gain continuity and it should be followed by everyone all the time," Gen. Ozkok said. Mr. Erdogan criticised Gen. Ozkok for making such a public statement.

"Expecting and suggesting such protests and reactions for the future can never be the right attitude," Mr. Erdogan said.

"I should say this openly. Because, we as the people who are in positions which require responsibility, should know what we should advise and how." Mr. Erdogan warned that Gen. Ozkok's remarks might affect Turkey's economic stability. — AP

Turkey key to new accord with Islam

The EU should stop worrying about questions of identity and open up the club's doors?

Madeleine Bunting

AT THE end of this week, there will be a ceremony in the south-eastern Turkish port of Ceyhan to mark the first tanker to be loaded with the oil that has been piped over 1,000 km from Baku in Azerbaijan. One of the most ambitious and controversial energy schemes in the world is finally coming to completion. It will transport the oil wealth of central Asia to hungry world markets, bypassing Russia.

And this huge pipeline, whose course runs through zones of chronic political and seismic instability across the Caucasus, is only the beginning of how Turkey is exploiting its old strategic and geographic advantages to develop a web of pipelines for oil and gas, stretching from Asia into the heart of Europe. Plans for a gas pipeline across Turkey, under the Aegean to Greece and eventually to Italy, are well advanced. The reserves of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan will soon be linked to energy-hungry Europe.

Turkey is offering Europe a cornucopia of dazzling possibilities as the pipelines are laid and the economy booms. Not surprising then that the Turkish and western European political and economic elites feasting at last week's Forum Istanbul — the Turkish equivalent of the Davos World Economic Forum — are chorusing heartily from the same hymn sheet. It was a lovefest as participants got giddy on the dream of a utopian future in which Muslims and secularists happily co-exist, ancient enmities between Christian and Muslim are reconciled, and Turkey pioneers a way forward beyond "clash of civilisations" simplicities.

Sound a bit far-fetched? Plenty of Kurds,

Armenians, and Greek Cypriots would snort with derision. But Istanbul has that kind of intoxicating impact on many. It is a city whose history is steeped in the exchange of civilisations as well as their clash. Istanbul sits on a cultural fault line as well as a geological fault line, yet that has been a source of cross-fertilisation as well as conflict.

That cross-fertilisation is evident on the streets and the ferries criss-crossing the Bosphorus. Women in headscarves walk arm in arm with peers sporting long flowing hair, tight T-shirts, jeans and trainers, and young women canoodle with their boyfriends or husbands — public displays of heterosexual affection inconceivable in any other Muslim culture. The promise held out in these commonplace Istanbul images are of an accommodation between Western individualistic modernity and religious traditionalism.

This is now part of Turkey's sales pitch for EU membership. "We can draw on our Ottoman past of a multi-ethnic empire which achieved a remarkable degree of religious tolerance, to help Europe reach an accommodation with its 15 million Muslim minorities," runs the spiel. "We don't just offer to keep your lights on, heat your hot water and provide young labour to pay for your ageing populations' pensions. We also offer a thousand years of experience in bridging cultures, in hybrid civilisations. We hold out Istanbul as a model for the cities of western Europe with large Muslim populations."

But what slowly dawns is the shrill undertone of this sales pitch and how it is chosen by Turks to convince themselves as much as anyone else. For this is a country that spent much of the 20th century poised precariously between secularism and politi-

cal Islam. As both become more globally aggressive, it risks being torn between them.

That danger was brought sharply home last week when a gunman opened fire in a Turkish court, killing one judge and injuring four others. The assailant, a lawyer, subsequently explained his attack as revenge for the judge's ruling in a recent case that a teacher who wore a veil outside work should not be promoted to head teacher of a primary school. The ruling is in line with Turkey's strict interpretation of secularism. The state rules out veils in any public building (thus banning even the current Prime Minister's wife from public functions); yet it has always funded and closely regulated the country's Islamic worship.

Maintaining the ban, a sacred legacy of the revered father of Turkey, Ataturk, risks excluding a lot of girls from a university education and the labour market, while a relaxation of the ban risks alienating the powerful military, who regard themselves as the keepers of the Ataturk flame.

This murder will only confirm the fears of the secular Europeanised elite that Turkey's delicate balance of faith and secularism is unravelling. They feel beleaguered as the ruling Justice and Development party promotes the religious into positions of power. A wife in a headscarf has become an essential attribute for the ambitious Turk.

The secular elite is clinging to EU membership as the one hope of reversing this trend. If the process slows down — as it might well do given such incidents as the fracas that has erupted between France and Turkey over a law proposed in the French legislature outlawing denial of the Armenian genocide — the reaction could prompt an

intensification of Islamism.

The application to the EU is characterised by two ironies, neither of which is lost on the Turks. Firstly, although Turkey pioneered secularism in the Muslim world, discussion in the EU of Turkey's application to join has focussed on its 97 per cent Muslim population. Secondly, although Turkey has finally resolved its decades-old identity crisis as to whether it is European or Asian — the majorities in favour of EU accession are substantial — Europe has now plunged into an identity crisis.

Much of the opposition to Turkish EU membership pivots on these ironies and the questions they prompt: is Europe a geographical or a cultural entity, and how do you define the boundaries of either? Nilufer Gole, a Turkish academic working in France, warns of the grave dangers of a narcissistic European Union obsessed by these questions of identity rather than motivated by the sense of project (initially, Franco-German peace) that gave birth to the EU and has sustained it. It's the project — of peace, of economic growth, of democracy and human rights — that appeals to Turkey, not indeterminate questions of identity.

An EU project that carved out a distinctive European engagement with Islam in which Turkey was a key partner would trounce Samuel Huntington's specious and self-fulfilling theory of a "clash of civilisations." Naked self-interest — those pipelines and pensions — will help drive this project forward. But I am aware that many would attribute my enthusiasm to that intoxicating Istanbul effect of a city prickling with minerals above a sparkling blue sea. — ©Guar-

dian Newspapers Limited 2006

Israel captures top Hamas commander

REUTERS
RAMALLAH, MAY 23



ISRAELI security forces captured on Tuesday the top Hamas commander who is accused of masterminding suicide bombings during a more than 5-year-old Palestinian revolt.

An army spokeswoman said 41-year-old Ibrahim Hamed,

was arrested in Ramallah, West Bank, ending a manhunt launched in 1998. Hamas confirmed Hamed's identity.

Witnesses said troops surrounded Hamed's hideout and then forced their way in using lock-busting bombs on the doors. A second Palestinian was also taken into custody in the raid, the witnesses said.

The army said that Hamed was responsible for attacks on Israelis, including

Hamas suicide bombings that killed more than 60 people. He is also accused of planning attacks on Israel's rail infrastructure and gas depots.

An Israeli colonel involved in the capture told Army Radio that Hamas would have trouble replacing Hamed. "What made him special was his creativity in finding complex ways to attack Israelis," the colonel said.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said

the arrest would not dent the group's capabilities. "Hamed will neither be the first nor the last resistance leader to be arrested or martyred," Zuhri said.

Israeli military action against Hamas has become relatively rare, with security forces focusing efforts against another militant group, Islamic Jihad, which has spurned ceasefire efforts and carried out most of the recent suicide attacks.

Conditional ceasefire possible, says Haniyeh

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said the Hamas-led government is willing to offer a conditional long-term ceasefire. "If Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders, peace will prevail and we will implement a ceasefire for many years," Haniyeh told the daily *Ha'Aretz*. "Our government is prepared to maintain a long-term ceasefire with Israel," he added. The Hamas leader also said that his government is ready for talks with Israel on practical matters, though not on ideological or political issues. —AP

24 MB: 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

Huge fire engulfs Istanbul airport

Authorities say there is no immediate indication of any terrorism link to the blaze

ISTANBUL: A huge fire engulfed the cargo section of Istanbul's Ataturk International Airport on Wednesday, temporarily disrupting air traffic and causing thousands of people to flee, authorities said.

Deputy Governor Fikret Kasapoglu said at least three persons were injured in the blaze which spewed thick black smoke high into the air. He said authorities suspected a short-circuit may have caused the fire. There was no immediate indication of

any terrorism link.

Planes dropped water onto the flames, and airport authorities said the fire was slowly being tamed.

Blaze under control

"The fire is under control and we're taking precautions to prevent it from spreading to passenger terminals," said Baris Tozar, the undersecretary of the Transportation Ministry.

"There are no problems concerning flight security," Mr. To-

zar added. Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbas also said the threat was decreasing.

"There is still some smoke, but its potential to spread has been stopped," said "God willing, it will be contained in that area."

Private NTV television said the blaze began in a section where fuel depots were located. Airport director Irfan Balta said planes had been successfully moved away from the danger area.

The cargo building is used to store international cargo arriving in Istanbul. A hangar housing military aircraft is located nearby.

Governor Muammer Guler of Istanbul said parts of the building collapsed after the fire.

Private Sky-Turk television reported occasional explosions, and said chemicals may have caused the fire.

Radical Islamic, leftist and Kurdish militants are active in Istanbul and Kurdish militants recently claimed responsibility for a major fire at an Istanbul factory. — AP

25 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

Israel must halt crisis among Palestinians

If Israelis won't deal with Hamas, they could end up facing a more radical alternative: Islamic Jihad or even Al-Qaeda.

Jonathan Freedland

FROM THIS distance, the Palestinians look to be in dire straits – even by their standards. A people who have plunged the depths of misery seem set to sink even lower. Denied financial aid by an international community that turned off the cash after Hamas won its unexpected majority in January, the Palestinians are collectively going broke. Gaza is especially badly hit. Women are selling off their jewellery just to feed their children. Some men were caught digging up the ground: they wanted to pull out municipal water pipes and sell them for scrap. According to B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, Gaza's medical system is in "crisis" thanks to "grave shortages" of supplies.

Nor can Palestinians trade their way out of poverty. The main crossing out of Gaza, at Karni, is closed more than it is open – preventing farmers from getting their perishable produce to market: their strawberries just lie rotting, denying the growers their livelihood. The nights bring no respite. Gazans are living with round-the-clock artillery shelling, which Israel says is retaliation for the Qassam rockets fired by Palestinians over the border. The West Bank has experienced multiple Israeli raids, leaving civilians, including children, dead.

And now, Palestinians are turning on each other, with street fights and shootouts between Hamas and groups aligned with the old rulers of Fatah. This week, Fatah said it had defused a bomb intended to kill the head of the Palestinian security services, a man loyal to Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority (PA) President and leader of Fatah. On Saturday, the head of Palestinian intelligence, another Fatah loyalist, was injured when a blast tore through a lift. Fatah blames Hamas for both attacks.

Society in turmoil

It all smacks of a society turning on itself, destroying its infrastructure, killing its own leaders. But those closest to the reality plead for caution, counselling that things might look worse than they are. There is no humanitarian disaster yet, they say, though there could be one. B'Tselem notes that while Gazan hospitals are short of medical supplies, West Bank clinics are getting by. The group says that movement has become more restricted between the various regional blocs of the West Bank, but easier within them. And Israel's new Defence Minister, the Labour leader and long-time anti-occupation activist Amir Peretz, has promised more openings at Karni. Meanwhile, Middle East analyst Hussein Agha urges scepticism about talk of civil war. The Fatah-Hamas clashes owe more to economic, familial and personal rivalries than they do to a political clash. "This is rivalry over fiefdoms, turf wars," he says.

It is right to be rigorous in these matters. But even the coolest heads worry where things are heading. Up to one in four of the Palestinian population are employees of the PA, and yet it has no money to pay anyone – even the Prime Minister, Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh, has not received a penny since taking office.

There are glimmers of hope. This week, Israel released about £5 million of Palestinian tax revenues it had collected but had refused to hand over. Meanwhile, the EU was reported to have found a way to funnel cash to Palestinian teachers, doctors, and pensioners while bypassing Hamas – an approach backed earlier this month by the Quartet of the EU, the U.S., the U.N., and Russia. Yet on Tuesday, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act, a set of sanctions

condemned by Americans for Peace Now, an avowedly Zionist organisation, as draconian and sweeping.

The moral objections to this latest U.S. move, and the whole international policy of denying aid to the Palestinians, are obvious: it punishes Palestinians for their democratic choice of Hamas in free and fair elections; and it's hard to explain a world where sanctions are imposed not on the occupier but the occupied: this is the politics of Lewis Carroll.

The counter-argument is clear enough. It says it is unreasonable for anyone to expect normal relations with a movement still committed to terrorism.

This argument may be logical, but it should not be good enough for Israel. Put simply, even if Israel is not persuaded of the moral case for abandoning its current stance, it should do so for its own self-interest.

First, if it allows a humanitarian crisis to engulf the Palestinian territories, the rest of the world will be forced to act – and will end up dealing with Hamas after all. Israel wants Hamas to remain *persona non grata*, which means it has to avoid a dramatic deterioration.

Secondly, the error behind a sanctions policy is its assumption that the victims of sanctions turn on their own government. But the evidence already points the other way, to Palestinians rallying around the new leadership. "It becomes an issue of pride," says Tel Aviv University analyst Gary Sussman. "When people fight sanctions it becomes a national project."

Thirdly, and related, is the assumption that if Hamas can be starved into defeat, if sanctions can somehow trigger "regime failure," then a more amenable leadership will take its place. The flaw here is historical. Time after time Israel has sought to bypass Palestinians' chosen representatives, deeming them too extreme. Eventually, it has had little choice but to deal with the official leadership – only to find it has been overtaken by a more radical alternative. Israel ignored and undermined Fatah, so it got Hamas. Now, Palestinians warn, if Israel won't deal with Hamas it will eventually face Islamic Jihad or even Al-Qaeda, which is already making inroads in Gaza. When that day comes, Israel will regret missing its chance to deal with the relative moderates of Hamas.

There is one last, self-interested reason why Israel should want Hamas to get its hands on the money it needs. "It will keep them busy," says Mr. Agha. With a society to run, there will be less appetite for a return to violence. As things stand, warns Mr. Agha, some within Hamas are already wondering what reward 17 months of ceasefire have brought: they are talking of breaking away, perhaps to align themselves with Al-Qaeda and its methods.

So Israel should take the lead, urging the U.S., Britain, and the rest of the world to allow this money through. That is not a call for negotiations between Hamas and Israel: few believe the time is ripe for that. Instead, Ehud Olmert should get on with the next phase of Israeli withdrawals from occupied territory while Hamas starts state-building. Meanwhile, the two sides can engage in day-to-day, practical cooperation – without either having to take the unpalatable step of recognising the other. It will be parallel unilateralism, the two sides moving alone – but in sync.

None of this offers much heroism. It does not speak the language of moral, noble purpose. It speaks of self-interest. Israel must prevent disaster befalling the Palestinians – for Israel's own sake. – ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

25 MAY 2006

Hamas militia back in Gaza



A militant of the Palestinian Abu Rish Brigades, an armed offshoot of the former ruling Fatah party, marches during a rally in Gaza City, on Saturday. AFP

Associated Press

GAZA CITY, May 27. — The Hamas-led government sent its private militia back into the streets of Gaza today, a day after withdrawing the force to help calm an increasingly bloody standoff with forces loyal to President Mahmoud Abbas.

Hamas officials said the move wasn't meant as a provocation. But Mr Abbas' Fatah movement said the deployment risked igniting new violence and threatened negotiations on the President's ultimatum to the militants to accept a

plan that would implicitly recognise Israel.

Mr Abbas, elected separately last year, has been seeking to curb Hamas' authority in security matters and other areas. Hamas decided to form its militia in April after Mr Abbas placed a loyalist in charge of forces that report to the Hamas-controlled interior ministry.

The militia was deployed for the first time last week, setting off days of clashes with Fatah-dominated security forces that left 10 people killed.

The 3,000-strong Hamas militia has been at the cen-

tre of the Palestinian infighting, and Hamas' decision to withdraw the black-clad force yesterday was widely seen as a conciliatory gesture.

Youssef Zahar, spokesman for the militia, said today's deployment did not contradict the previous day's decision. At the time, Hamas said the force would remain on standby at fixed locations and resume limited patrols in the future.

"The police stations are closed to us, so we're making use of some streets," Zahar said.

The presence of the Hamas gunmen was much

smaller than earlier this week, with forces stationed at several major intersections and near the homes of senior Hamas government officials. The situation appeared to be calm, and in some instances, Hamas gunmen chatted freely with regular policemen.

Fatah spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khoussa, however, said the return of the Hamas force, even in small numbers, was "unacceptable and illegal". The lack of its presence on the streets yesterday brought great relief. "Their return signals the possibility of new friction," he said.

28 MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

Blasts rock Egypt resort

Cairo, April 24 (Reuters): Three explosions shook the Egyptian Sinai resort of Dahab today, killing 30 people and wounding more than 100, rescue and security officials said.

Witnesses said smoke billowed up from the town's tourist bazaar, and residents said they saw body parts and debris on the street after an explosion at a restaurant. An interior ministry statement gave a toll of 10 dead and 100 injured. The ministry often lags behind other sources. It said there were four foreigners among the dead, but did not give their nationalities.

Witnesses in the small beach and diving resort, which is popular with backpackers, described scenes of carnage and chaos.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called the explosions a "wicked terrorist act". "The President stressed the need to ... track down those responsible for this wicked terrorist act, so that they pay the penalty by force of law," the state news agency Mena said.

A cafe worker who was about 200 metres from the scene said: "We saw many dead people. People were screaming. People were being taken to hospital. Egyptians went to give blood. There were body parts. There's police everywhere."

"There were body parts and debris in the street... There are ambulances and

WICKED TERRORIST ACT, SAYS MUBARAK



The Egyptian Sinai resort of Dahab

cars taking people to hospital," said another resident, who also did not want to be named.

The explosions took place at the Nelson Restaurant, the Aladdin Cafeteria and the Chazala Supermarket, the interior ministry said.

An official with the local ambulance service said many of the dead appeared to be foreigners.

Israeli divers often stay in

the resort but with the Passover holiday over it is unlikely many were there. The Israeli ambassador in Cairo and Israeli authorities said they did not know of any Israeli casualties.

It was the third set of three explosions on the eastern coast of the Sinai peninsula since October 2004, when a group attacked the Hilton hotel in the border resort of Taba and two other resorts on

the northeast coast, killing 34 people.

The Egyptian authorities said a closely related group attacked again in the up-market resort of Sharm el-Sheikh in July last year, killing at least 67 people. Those attacks were both on Egyptian holidays — October 6 and July 23. Today's explosions coincided with the ancient spring festival of Shamm el-Nessim, when Egyptians head out of town.

The explosions today took place in quick succession at about 1715 GMT. "There is smoke coming from the area and there are people running everywhere," said one witness, who heard the blasts.

One visitor said police were stopping cars and buses leaving the resort and had imposed restrictions on movements in and out of backpacker camps in the area.

Fatah, Hamas make up

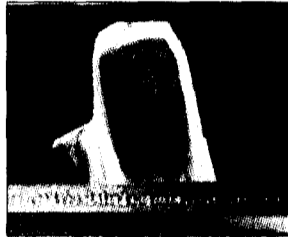
Associated Press

GAZA CITY, April 23: The militant Hamas group and the rival Fatah Party agreed today to work to end tensions between their competing branches of the Palestinian government that exploded into violent clashes and mass protests throughout Palestinian towns in recent days.

But friction threatened to boil over again with neither the Hamas-controlled Cabinet nor Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' more moderate Fatah faction backing down from their conflicting demands in a fierce struggle for control of the security forces.

Supporters of the two sides traded gunfire and hurled stones and firebombs yesterday, and Fatah leaders warned the violence could deteriorate into civil war. In a meeting that began yesterday and is continued till today, Hamas and Fatah officials said they would take steps to end the fighting. "The two move-

Laden threatens in new tape



An Al-Jazeera grab during broadcast of a new audiotape from Osama bin on Sunday. ■ AFP

conducting "a Zionist (Jewish) crusaders (Christian) war on Islam". Israeli government spokesman Raanan Gissin said bin Laden had decided to attack Israel to deflect growing Arab animosity toward Al-Qaida. ■ AP

ments have agreed to call on our Palestinian masses to stop all displays that might lead to tension," Fatah official Maher Mekdad said, reading a joint statement. "They agreed to work together to strengthen national unity". But no agreement was reached on control of the security forces, participants said. Outside the meeting, which was mediated by

CAIRO, April 23: Al-Qaida terrorist leader Osama bin Laden issued ominous new threats today, appearing to justify attacks on civilians in the West and calling on his followers to go to Sudan to fight a proposed UN force in Darfur. In his first new message in three months, bin Laden also said in the audiotape that the West's cut off of aid to the Palestinian Hamas-led government proved Washington and Europe were

Egyptian security officials, thousands of Fatah supporters shouted anti-Hamas slogans.

Abbas, whose Fatah Party lost the January parliamentary elections, has been trying to shore up his already considerable powers to marginalise the rival Hamas group, which calls for the destruction of Israel and is listed as a terror organisation by the USA and the

European Union.

After the Hamas Cabinet took office last month, many Western nations froze desperately needed aid to the Palestinian government, causing a financial crisis. The government is nearly three-week late in paying March salaries to its 165,000 employees and Hamas officials say they do not know when they will have the needed money.

The government was further isolated after Hamas officials defended an Islamic Jihad suicide bombing in Tel Aviv on 17 April that killed eight Israelis. Israeli interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the attack completed "the transformation of the Palestinian Authority to a terrorist authority". The international community will now understand that we don't have a partner", he told his weekly Cabinet meeting today, according to participants. The weekend unrest followed Abbas' efforts to take control of all the Palestinian security forces.

24 100 2008

THE STATESMAN

Abbas deals a blow to Hamas

WAS
GNS and AGENCIES
Jerusalem, April 21

THE PALESTINIAN President, Mahmoud Abbas, on Friday blocked Hamas's plans to set up a controversial security force, which was to consist of militants and be headed by the No. 2 on Israel's wanted list.

In the biggest demonstration yet of the power struggle for control of Palestinian politics, Abbas issued a presidential decree vetoing Thursday's announcement by the interior minister, Said Siyam. As President, Abbas, of the Fatah party, wields considerable power and has the right to approve or reject key appointments.

The Hamas Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh, is expected to meet with his interior minister later today to plan a response. Siyam's decision to set up the new force and appoint Jamal Abu Samhadana as its commander was seen as a major provocation to Abbas, to Israel and to the international community.

Samhadana (43) was a founding member of a militant group suspected of a deadly attack on a US diplomatic convoy. He served a year in Palestinian jails for in-

volvement in militant activity.

The new force was to be made up of militants from various factions. Under the current arrangement, the interior minister controls three branches of the security forces, while the president has direct command over three other groups. However, Abbas is also overall commander of the security forces.

Abbas and Hamas have been wrangling over the scope of their respective powers since the Islamic militant group won parliamentary elections in January. After the Hamas victory, Abbas took control of the state-run media, the Palestinian Investment Fund and the authority controlling borders.

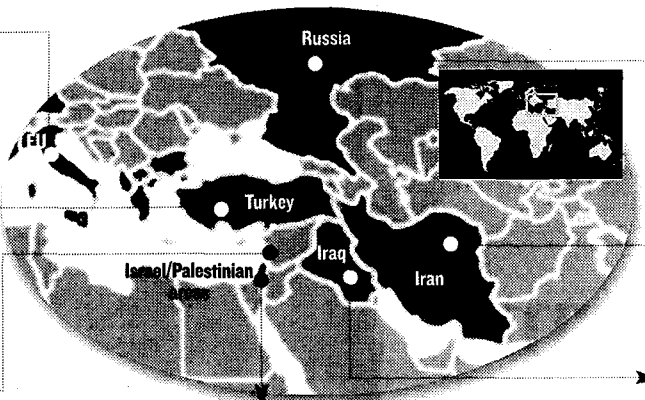
Hamas has complained it was largely left with paying salaries for some 165,000 government employees — a task it cannot meet because the West has cut off financial aid.

In a letter to Haniyeh, Abbas wrote, "We have learned through the media that the interior minister issued decisions violating the law. All the officers, soldiers and security personnel are asked not to abide by these decisions and to consider them non-existent".

THE HOUSTON TIMES

MIDDLE EAST STATUS

Growing Israeli-Palestinian tensions, ongoing Iranian nuclear crisis and the civil war-like situation in Iraq are firing up under the Middle East powder keg. Areas involved and key players



EU

- Freezes aid for Palestinian Authority
- Prefers diplomatic solution for Iran crisis
- Supports Iraq reconstruction

J Manuel Barroso, EU President



TURKEY

- Ongoing unrest (Kurds)
- Rumours on increased US military presence

R Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish PM



HAMAS

- Does not recognise Israel
- Defends terrorist acts, such as suicide bombings

Ismail Haniyeh, Palestinian PM



ISRAEL

- Economic and political boycott of Hamas government
- Calls Iran-Syria-Hamas new "axis of terror"

Ehud Olmert, Israeli PM



RUSSIA

- Keeps up financial aid for Palestinian Authority
- Refuses sanctions against Iran

Vladimir Putin, Russian President



IRAN

- Financial aid for Hamas
- Does not recognise Israel
- Controversial nuclear programme
- Aggressive anti-western policy

M Ahmadinejad, Iranian President



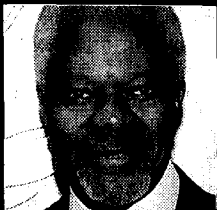
IRAQ

- On the brink of civil war
- Difficulties in forming a government
- Pending Saddam Hussein trial

Jalal Talabani, Iraqi President

UNITED NATIONS

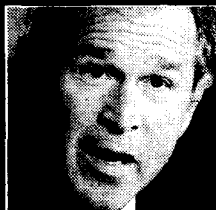
- Stops financial aid for Palestinians
- Calls on Iran to halt uranium enrichment
- Seeks way to revive Mideast peace talks



Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General

UNITED STATES

- Wants to isolate Hamas: no financial assistance for Palestinians
- Hardline policy against Syria, Iran (military option)
- Fights insurgency in Iraq



George W Bush, US President

CHINA

- Refuses sanctions against Iran
- Offers continued help to Iraq in its reconstruction



Hu Jintao, Chinese President

Source: AP, Reuters/Graphic: SANJAY KAPOOR

Russian financial aid for Hamas

VERA KALIAN
MOSCOW | APRIL 15

RUSSIA said on Saturday it had promised emergency aid to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, breaking with fellow mediators, the EU and Washington which have stopped funding to try to force Hamas to recognise Israel.

A Foreign Ministry statement said the offer came in a telephone conversation on Friday between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

"Mahmoud Abbas highly appreciated the intention of Russia, confirmed by Lavrov, to grant the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority urgent financial aid in the nearest time," it said.

Russia is a member of the quartet of Middle East mediators searching for an



Off duty masked policemen block a road in Khan Younis, Gaza, on Saturday

end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, along with the UN, the EU and the US.

The US and the EU have halted di-

rect aid to the Palestinian Authority because it has not renounced violence, recognised Israel or agreed to abide by interim peace deals.

Washington has barred American citizens and organisations from most business dealings with the Palestinian Authority. Israel has also blocked the transfer of customs and tax receipts.

Larvov had earlier criticised the halting of aid, though he has urged Hamas to meet the demands of international mediators. He said the only way to make Hamas meet international demands was to work with it, not boycott it.

It was wrong to deny aid to the Palestinians "because in democratic elections they elected a government made up entirely of Hamas members...we are convinced that this approach is mistaken", as quoted in a statement last Tuesday. —Reuters

15 APR 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

E.U. halts aid to Hamas Government

HD-16
12/17

Militant group says Israel's severing of ties is tantamount to declaration of war

David Gow and
Conal Urquhart

LUXEMBOURG/TEL AVIV: The E.U. on Monday increased the pressure on the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority to recognise Israel and renounce terrorist violence by suspending all direct aid to the new Government.

Europe is the largest single donor to the Palestinian territories, providing Euro 500 million a year, of which just under half goes directly to the PA.

Agencies' warning

Aid organisations warned that the decision to cut off assistance would simply damage people living on about £1 a day and drive them further into the arms of extremists. Aid accounts for 25 per cent of Palestinians' incomes.

But E.U. Foreign Ministers said aid for electricity, water, food, health and education would be channelled via agencies close to, but not controlled by, Hamas.

Their decision to suspend aid

European aid to Palestinians

The European Union sends some \$300 million for the Palestinian Authority in annual aid. European nations also contribute individually some \$300 million, partly for humanitarian aid through the U.N. and private agencies.

	To Palestinian Authority	United Nations and others
Germany	\$76	\$56.6
France	30.8	12.4
Britain	+30	+30
Italy*	27	-
Belgium*	13	-
Netherlands	6.2	34.4
Denmark*	4.1	-
Finland	+3	+3
Ireland	0.9	4
Greece	-	6.8
Sweden	-	66
Luxembourg	-	3.7
Spain	-	2.5

Figures were not included for Austria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Poland, Malta, Slovakia.

SOURCE: AP Research AP

Jack Straw said aid had been suspended while "an urgent search for other routes to ensure that public servants like teachers and doctors get paid is undertaken".

He added: "Our overwhelming concern is to make sure that ordinary people's lives are not damaged. At the same time, European taxpayers would find it intolerable if they found their money used for terrorists or terrorist operations."

Hamas could resolve the problem by committing itself to non-violence and recognising Israel and abiding by previous peace agreements, he said.

The new Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, severed all direct contacts with the PA at the weekend. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said the policy violated previously signed agreements and international law. Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas spokesman, said Israel's step amounted to a "declaration of war". — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

came after Palestinian Finance Minister Omar Abdel Razeq warned that the PA's financial crisis was desperate, leaving him

unable to pay 140,000 civil servants. E.U. Ministers dismissed such talk as exaggerated.

British Foreign Secretary

1 - 100 100 THE MINOR

Sharon declared incapacitated

Israeli Cabinet announces Ehud Olmert will be interim Prime Minister

12-16
17/9

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's five-year tenure has formally ended with the Cabinet declaring that he has been permanently incapacitated.

The Cabinet announced that Ehud Olmert would assume the charge of interim Prime Minister from Friday, exactly 100 days after Mr. Sharon suffered a massive cerebral stroke. Under Israel's succession law, an interim Prime Minister has to be appointed within 100 days of the incapacitation of a Premier.

Israel's Cabinet Secretary Yisrael Maimon said, "The suggestion laid forth today [Tuesday] is to appoint the head of the Kadima party, the acting Prime Minister [Mr.] Ehud Olmert, as the Prime Minister in practice." This was the first occasion when the Israeli law of succession has been invoked to replace an incapacitated Premier. The Kadima



- Kadima initiates talks for forming coalition
- Israel declares Hamas-led regime a "hostile entity"
- Violence escalates in Gaza Strip

ma party, formed by Mr. Sharon prior to his illness, has won 29 of the 120 seats in the recent Israeli parliamentary elections.

Soon after winning elections, Kadima, under Mr. Olmert's

stewardship, began efforts to form a coalition government by involving other parties. Kadima hopes to cobble together an alliance comprising at least 61 lawmakers, including its own 29 members.

Controversial decisions

It has also apparently taken two controversial decisions. It is set on settling Israel's permanent borders with the Palestinian territories, even if it demands taking unilateral action. Besides, it has signalled that it intends to isolate the Islamist militant group Hamas, which has won the Palestinian parliamentary elections.

Kadima has initiated talks with the Centre-Left Labour party, which won 19 seats. The Labour party leader, Amir Peretz, has pledged support for Kadima, but has expressed reservations about imposing unilaterally defined borders on the Palestinians. The Israeli dai-

ly, *Yediot Ahronot*, has reported that Kadima was keen to arrive at a final border settlement by 2008 during the tenure of U.S. President George W. Bush.

Kadima will also begin talks with Likud party and the ultra-Orthodox Shas, which have 12 lawmakers each, despite its opposition to Mr. Olmert's unilateral withdrawal plan.

The Pensioners Party, which won seven seats at the election and the Left-wing Meretz, which has five MPs, are other possible partners in the coalition.

Meanwhile, Israel has declared the Hamas-led Palestinian Government a "hostile entity". Israel, the U.S. and the European Union are imposing a financial boycott on the Palestinian Government.

There has been an escalation of violence, with Israeli artillery pounding sites in northern Gaza, where Palestinian groups have allegedly launched rocket attacks.

12 APR 2006

THE HINDU

Olmert puts heat on Hamas govt

Snaps Ties With PA, Threatens Militants

Jerusalem: Israel ratcheted up the pressure on the new Hamas-led Palestinian government on Sunday, severing all contacts and vowing no let-up in operations against militants after the killing of 15 Palestinians in weekend strikes.

As the armed wing of Hamas threatened to avenge the killing of 15 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, Israel's acting premier Ehud Olmert pledged to strike as long as militants continued to fire rockets.

"One thing must be clear— whoever fires Qassam rockets, whoever is engaged in terrorist activity, is a legitimate target and will be dealt with without hesitation by the security forces," Olmert told a cabinet meeting. "There is no restriction on the security services regarding the carrying out of these actions wherever they identify the danger of terrorist activity."

Olmert later hosted a meeting of top security and diplomatic officials in which it was decided that any foreign official who made contact with the Hamas government would be shunned and Is-

rael's own boycott was reaffirmed. "Israel will not hold ties with the Palestinian Authority which is a hostile authority," he said. Olmert, whose Kadima party is to head the next coalition after its own election victory last month, has consistently refused to deal with Hamas.

Israeli government spokesman Asaf Shariv said relations with Abbas would be limited, and peace talks were out of the question.

"The PA is one unit and does not have two heads," the statement said, adding that Israel will work to undermine the Palestinian government.

Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman for the Palestinian president, said Israel should negotiate with Abbas, who is the head of the PLO, because Israel signed its agreements with it. Abu Rdeneh said Israel should not "look for any pretext for escaping from the negotiating table." The cabinet also rejected the idea of using Abbas to bypass the new government and boosted Olmert's plan to impose a border in the West Bank by 2010. Agencies



Palestinians try to extinguish a burning factory after it was hit by Israeli shells in northern Gaza

STRIKES | Iran brands reports as 'psychological warfare' to pressure it on its nuclear programme

US plans to attack Iran: US magazine

AGENCIES

WASHINGTON, APRIL 9

THE Bush administration, which publicly advocates negotiations to halt Iran's nuclear programme, is accelerating military planning for possible attacks against Iran, and has not ruled out using tactical nuclear weapons, according to an article in the *The New Yorker*.

On Sunday, Iran branded as "psychological warfare" the report that the US military was planning air strikes to pressure Tehran to abandon its controversial nuclear programme.

"We regard that (planning for air strikes) as psychological warfare stemming from America's anger and helplessness," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters.

The article by Seymour M Hersh asserts the Pentagon this winter presented the White House with an option to use bunker-buster nuclear bombs against Iran's underground nuclear sites. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff later sought to drop that option, unidentified officials at the White



An anti-US demonstration to protest Iranian and Washington negotiations on Iraq in Tehran on Saturday. AP

House resisted, the article stated. The article cites numerous anonymous sources, including former Pentagon and intelligence officials, as well as sources described as having ties to the Pentagon but no direct involvement in its decision-making. Asked about the article, Frederick Jones, a National Security Council spokesman, said on Saturday:

"We're not going to discuss military planning. As the president has said repeatedly, we along with the international community are pursuing a diplomatic solution to the issues surrounding Iran's nuclear programme."

But four Pentagon, military and administration officials who participate in high-level deliberations on Iran and who were granted anonymity to speak candidly rejected the article's contention that

the Bush administration was considering nuclear weapons in a possible strike against Iran.

"I've never heard the issue of nukes taken off or put on the table," a senior Pentagon official said. The article also states that American combat troops have been ordered to infiltrate Iran to collect target data and to cultivate relationships with indigenous groups who oppose the government in Tehran. "The article contains information that is inaccurate," said Michele Ness, a spokeswoman for the Central Intelligence Agency. She declined to elaborate.

The article asserts that American carrier-based attack planes have been flying simulated nuclear-bomb runs within range of Iranian coastal radars. A Pentagon official said he was unaware of any such flights, but added that within the last three weeks Iran had ratcheted up its air defenses so high that it accidentally shot one of its own aircraft. Senior administration officials, while emphasizing that their preferred path is diplomatic, have not ruled out military attacks if negotiations should fail.

'UN Security Council cannot force us on enrichment U-turn'

ALI AKBAR DAREINI
TEHRAN, APRIL 9

IRAN said on Sunday it was a "big mistake" for the US and its allies to think the UN Security Council will be able to force Tehran to give up uranium enrichment, but it insisted it was open to negotiations over its nuclear programme.

The comments by Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi came as a team from the UN nuclear watchdog agency were in Iran to inspect its facilities for uranium enrichment and uranium reprocessing, a visit Iran hopes will boost its case that its intentions are peaceful.

The UN Security Council has demanded that Iran suspend all enrichment of uranium—a key process that can produce either fuel for a reactor or the material for a nuclear warhead—and gave Tehran until April 28 to comply before the International Atomic Energy Agency reports back to the council on its progress.

"If they (the US and its European allies) think referring Iran to the U.N. Security Council makes Iran to give up its rights, they have made a big mistake," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters on Sunday.

—AP

10 APR 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

Israeli forces take Palestinian cabinet minister into custody

NIDAL AL MUGHRABI
GAZA, APRIL 6

ISRAELI security forces took into custody a member of the new Hamas-led Palestinian cabinet today at a roadblock on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Hamas sources said.

The Israeli Army and interim PM Ehud Olmert's office had no immediate comment. Israel Radio said Khaled Abu Arafa, an independent who serves as minister of state for Jerusalem affairs, was detained because as a resident of Arab East Jerusalem, he is banned by Israel from entering areas in the West Bank administered by the Palestinian Authority.

Abu Arafa was stopped at an impromptu roadblock that Israeli soldiers positioned in the occupied territory, north of Jerusalem, Hamas sources said.

"They stopped the car and asked the minister to get out and when he refused they forced him by pointing the rifle in his face," one of the sources said, citing accounts from witnesses who telephoned Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh.

Abu Arafa was en route to the office of former Palestinian minister Ziad Abu Ziad for a handover ceremony and was taken by soldiers to an unknown location, the sources said.

Hamas, sworn to Israel's destruction, held its first cabinet meeting on Wednesday following its victory in the January 25 Palestinian election.

Israel says it cannot consider dealing with Hamas until the Islamic group recognises the Jewish state, renounces violence and accepts



Khaled Abu Arafa stands next to an Israeli border police officer after he was detained, at the police station in the West Bank settlement of Maaleh Adumim on Thursday. AP

prior interim Israeli-Palestinian peace accords.

Palestinian cabinet spokesman Ghazi Hamad said Israel was undermining the work of the new government. "The arrest of a cabinet minister proves the falseness of Israel's arguments that it seeks peace," Hamad said.

Israel's Haaretz web site said the Shin Bet security service had detained Abu Arafa and a bodyguard. Haaretz quoted security sources as saying Abu Arafa was taken into custody

because as a holder of an Israeli identity card, which East Jerusalem residents are allowed to carry, he cannot enter areas designated by interim peace deals as under Palestinian Authority control. Israel captured East Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed it in a move that was not recognised internationally. Palestinians want east Jerusalem as the capital of the state they hope to establish in the West Bank and Gaza. —Reuters

INDIAN EXPRESS

Hamas hints at recognition of Israel

ASSOCIATED Press
Ramallah, April 7

HAMAS IS ready for a "two-state" solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a senior official said on Friday, in what would appear to be a softening of Hamas' position and imply recognition of the Jewish state.

The official said Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas would discuss the idea with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, a moderate, in a meeting in Gaza City later on Friday.

"Haniyeh is to tell Abu Mazen (Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas) tonight that Hamas is able to adopt the two-state solution as a platform of the Cabinet. But we know Israel doesn't accept us. We want to give room for movement and to lift international pressure on the Cabinet," the senior official said.

In a published interview on Friday, Palestinian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Zahar also confirmed Hamas's willingness to discuss a solution that would

agreements. In Brussels, the EU announced on Friday it would cut off direct aid payments to the Hamas-led government.

The idea of accepting a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an apparent attempt by Hamas to appease the international community, without having to state directly that it is recognising Israel.

Hamas officials have said they would only grant such recognition in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from all lands Israel occupied in the 1967 Mideast War — the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem.

In exchange for backing a two-state solution, Hamas wants Abbas to grant the group its "constitutional rights," the senior Hamas official said.

Abbas has taken steps recently to curb Hamas' power in security matters.

On Thursday, Abbas named a longtime ally to supervise the security forces that are supposed to be under the authority of the Hamas Cabinet.

New rulers to throw belly dancing out

KEEN TO show that Hamas is not the Taliban, the new Palestinian culture minister has said he will not be ordering dynamiting of statues or forbidding prayers to anyone but Allah. But there are limits — and belly dancing is one of them. "Belly dancing is naked women. This is not Islamic. Russian belly-dancers from Egypt come here to do it," said Attallah Abu al-Sibbah. "If the phenomenon spreads, our people might react by killing people," he said.

The party is intent on cleaning up society. For a start, it will ban casinos and see if there is a way to ban alcohol. It also wants segregation of men and women in places of public entertainment. The Gaza strip's three big cinemas closed in 1987. Sibbah thinks they should start showing films again. "I would open cinemas, it could be an education. Hollywood is not all bad. *Titanic* was a good film," he said, apparently having forgotten the scenes of Kate Winslet disrobed. **GNS**

implicitly recognise Israel.

He said his government is prepared to discuss the idea with the Quartet of international Mideast negotiators — the US, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations.

"Let us speak about what is the meaning of the two-state solution," he told *The Times* of London. "We will ask them what

is their concept concerning the two-state solution." Only a day earlier, Haniyeh had told *The Associated Press* that Hamas would not recognise Israel.

The contradictory statements came as Hamas is under intense international pressure to moderate its views, including recognising Israel, renouncing violence and accepting existing peace

Olmert's Israel

Another phase in Mideast politics

The Middle East enters a new phase with the election in Israel that has propelled Ehud Olmert and his Kadima Party to centre-stage. Floated by Ariel Sharon barely four months ahead of the elections and before he slipped into coma, the performance of the party has been rather dismal though it has emerged as the largest bloc in the Knesset. This ought not to detract from Olmert's achievement; he has been able to steer a fledgling outfit to victory through a convincing campaign. Particularly notable has been his overture to the Palestinians in his hour of triumph. Short of negotiating with Hamas, he has reaffirmed his call for peace talks with the Palestinian Authority, led by Maffimoud Abbas, and has renewed the pledge to make painful compromises, such as uprooting some Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Notable no less is that the victory has coincided with the formal assumption of office by the Hamas. He has a four-year plan to implement the roadmap towards a two-state solution - the outcome of Sharon's decision to withdraw from Gaza. He will of course need the goodwill of the USA, Russia, the European Union and the UN for the plan to succeed.

Olmert's crucial task for now will be to grapple with the complexities of forming a coalition, a form of governance that has become a striking feature of Israeli politics. The elections, above all, have brought about a dramatic change in the fortunes of the parties. Sharon's original Likud, that once boasted the majority of seats in the Knesset, is now down in the dumps, having secured barely 10 per cent of the seats. The performance of Labour, the old Left, has been fairly impressive. The Right is shattered and Likud has been reduced to a rump. It has clearly failed to shore up its fortunes despite the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections a few months ago. And just as independent international observers had vouchsafed on the fairness of that election, the triumph of Kadima has been hailed as a faithful reflection of Israeli sentiment that gives considerable weightage to concessions on land and a security barrier rather than refusal to compromise and the use of arms. The victory of Ehud Olmert has been remarkable without being spectacular; it will be historic if the new arrangement works and 2010 sees a change in political geography.

03 APR 2006

174 1000 1000000

Israel begins form new govt

DEAN YATES

JERUSALEM, APRIL 2

ISRAEL took its first steps towards forming a new government on Sunday when the president began meeting political parties for talks likely to focus on an expected coalition led by interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Several parties should back Olmert to be the next prime minister after his centrist Kadima party won most seats in March 28 elections—even though it fared worse than predicted.

President Moshe Katsav opened discussions with Kadima representatives, officials said. He will next meet members of the Centre-Left Labour Party, which came second. Discussions are likely to last several days.

Under Israeli law, the President then decides which party leader, expected to be Olmert, is best placed to form a government. Labour is expected to join the Kadima coalition, although a sticking point could be who will get the vital post of finance minister, a job Labour sees as vital to its so-



Prime Minister Ehud Olmert

cial programme. Kadima won only 29 seats in the 120-member parliament, forcing Olmert to build a coalition to win backing for a planned uprooting of Jewish settlers from swathes of the occupied West Bank if peacemaking with the Palestinians stays frozen.

Israel would keep major settlements under a plan that would remove thousands of settlers and trace a border along a barrier Israel is building in the West Bank, where 240,000 Israelis live among 2.4 million Palestinians.—Reuters

02 APR 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

NO Hamas-led government in Palestine faces Western heat 3/1/06 11-15

Ottawa: Canada suspended all contact and financial aid to the new Hamas-led government in the Palestinian territories, foreign minister Peter MacKay announced on Wednesday, becoming the first nation to do so.

The new Palestinian government sworn in earlier Wednesday, dominated by the radical Islamist group Hamas, has not addressed the concerns raised by Canada and others over non-violence, the recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations including the roadmap to Middle East peace, MacKay said in a statement.

"As a result, Canada will have no contact with members of the Hamas cabinet and is suspending assistance to the Palestinian Authority," the minister said.

"A clear commitment by the Hamas government to the principles that we and the international community have outlined remains an essential precondition for Canada to resume any assistance to the Palestinian Authority," he added. However, officials said, humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people directly would not be affected by suspending aid to the new government.

MacKay later described Hamas to reporters outside the House of Commons as "a terrorist organisation" that is banned in Canada and said Ottawa would remain firm in its decision to shun the group until it renounces terrorism and violence.



Ismail Haniya

"There will be no contact with Hamas or the Palestinian Authority, none whatsoever until such time as they denounce violence and change their position. And we're firm in that," MacKay said.

"We are not going to fund terrorism," he said.

MacKay indicated the quartet—the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations—held this same position, although none had yet moved to cut off ties with the Palestinian government or to deny them funds.

Canada had provided about \$21 million annually for development projects in the West Bank and Gaza, according to officials, or a total \$333 million since 1993.

Some \$6 million in projects are being suspended, including new Palestinian Authority housing construction, a feasibility study to refurbish and manage a Ramallah industrial park, and funding to convene justice ministers from the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Jordan and Egypt annually to talk.

Meanwhile, reports from Washington say that the US diplomats are being cautioned to make sure that any contact they have with the Hamas government is not with a member of the militant resistance organisation, the state department said on Wednesday. Spokesman Sean McCormack said an administrative notice to that effect was sent to US diplomats outlining procedures to ensure they avoid dealing with Hamas members. AP

3 1 MAR 2006

THE HINDU OF INDIA

Hamas assumes office amid threats of isolation

Abbas swears in 24-member Cabinet, including one woman

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: The new Palestinian Government led by Hamas has assumed office amid growing threats of a financial boycott and political isolation by the United States, Europe and Israel.

The new Cabinet was sworn in by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Gaza and his representative in the West Bank.

A travel ban imposed by Israel prevented the ceremony from taking place at a single venue. Consequently, the swearing-in formalities were coordinated "virtually" through a videoconference link.

The solemnities began with the incoming Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, laying his hand on the Koran. "I swear by God to be loyal to the homeland, its holy places, people and its national heritage, and to respect the Constitution and the law, and uphold entirely the interests of the Palestinian people," he said.

Haniyeh's pledge

The other members of the 24-member Cabinet, including one woman and one Christian, were then sworn in. Mr. Haniyeh described his Government's oath-taking as "historic."

He pledged to work closely with Mr. Abbas, and called for talks with Israel. Israel, however, has rejected dealing with Hamas, as the Islamic group has not recognised it. The Hamas has also linked its renunciation of violence, to an Israeli pledge to vacate all occupied Palestinian territory.

With the Hamas showing no inclination so far to shift from its stand, it has begun to face enormous pressure from the U.S., the E.U. and Israel to back down.



TAKING CHARGE: Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh (left) takes oath in front of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Gaza on Wednesday. - PHOTO: REUTERS

Threatening financial curbs, U.S. President George Bush said on Wednesday, "I think that aid should go to suffering Palestinians, but nor should it go to a Government, however, which has expressed its desire to destroy its neighbour."

The 25-nation E.U., the highest donor to the Palestinian Authority, has also warned it would be forced to slash some amount of aid, unless the new Palestinian Government

altered course. Israel has already suspended disbursement of millions of dollars in monthly tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority after the Hamas emerged victorious in the Palestinian parliamentary elections.

Coalition talks

Israeli gunboats also shelled northern Gaza on Wednesday - the first such incident after Israel pulled out of the area last summer.

As the Hamas took office, leaders of the newly elected Kadima party in Israel, began informal discussions to form a new coalition government. The Kadima has declared its intent to finalise the borders between Israel and a future Palestinian State during its tenure. Kadima party officials were quoted as saying that they would wait for a year to see if the Hamas moderated its stance before going ahead with their plans.

Canada suspends ties, aid

OTTAWA: Canada suspended all contact and financial aid to the new Hamas-led Government in the Palestinian territories, Foreign Minister Peter MacKay announced on Wednesday, becoming the first nation to do so.

The new Palestinian Government sworn in earlier on Wednesday, dominated by the radical Islamist group

Hamas, has not addressed the concerns raised by Canada and others over non-violence, the recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations including the roadmap to Middle East peace, Mr. MacKay said in a statement.

"As a result, Canada will have no contact with members of the Hamas

Cabinet and is suspending assistance to the Palestinian Authority," the Minister said.

However, officials said, humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people directly would not be affected by suspending aid. Mr. MacKay later described Hamas as "a terrorist organisation". - AFP

Kadima wins Israeli poll

Finalisation of the country's boundaries high on agenda: Olmert

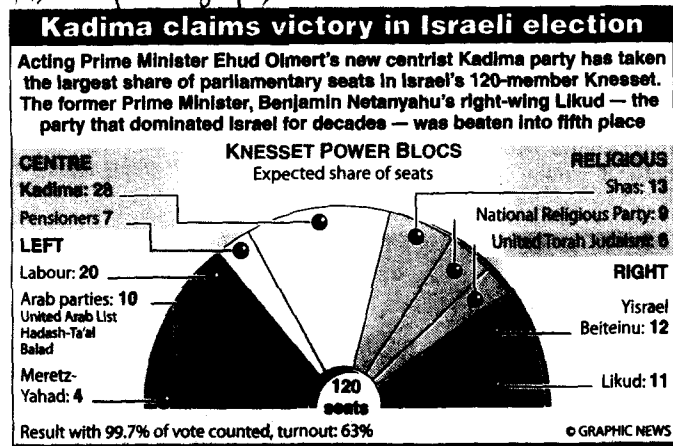
Atul Aneja

DUBAI: The Kadima party founded by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon won the maximum number of seats in Tuesday's parliamentary elections, raising the prospects of a unilateral fixation of the country's territorial boundaries with a future Palestinian state.

The Kadima Party, whose leader is in hospital in a coma, won 28 seats, with the Centre-Left Labour Party emerging second with 20 seats.

Likud trounced

The hard-line Likud was trounced in the elections, winning just 11 seats and was placed in the fifth position behind two far-Right parties. Voting turnout stood at a record low of 62.3 per cent. Kadima was expected to form a Government with Labour and other smaller parties as its coalition partners. However, its inability to win a larger number of seats would make it critically dependent on support from its



coalition allies. Under Israel's complex proportional representation, the exact number of seats may change in line with the redistribution of final votes.

Kadima leader and acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has stated that Israel's boundaries with a future Palestinian state could be settled unilaterally. On Wednesday, in what appeared to be his victory speech,

Mr. Olmert reiterated that the finalisation of boundaries would be high on agenda during his term in office. "In the coming period we will move to set the final borders of the state of Israel, a Jewish state with a Jewish majority. We will try to achieve this in an agreement with the Palestinians. This is our hope and prayer," he said.

In the past, there have been

suggestions that Israel would remove 70,000 Israelis from settler outposts in the West Bank while retaining the main settlement blocks in the area.

An estimated 250,000 settlers reside in the territory occupied by Israel during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Responding to the election results, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who was in Khartoum to attend the Arab summit said, "The result was expected. But what is more important now is that (Mr.) Olmert change his agenda and abandon his unilateral plans to fix the borders."

The Arab summit, on its part, adopted a resolution in reaction to Kadima's victory. It said, "Israeli measures including... fixing Israel's borders unilaterally in a way that fulfils its expansionist greed render impossible the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state."

See editorial

THE HINDU

THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2006

A welcome result

As expected, the Kadima party led by Israel's interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has emerged as the single largest formation in the Knesset after the parliamentary elections held on March 28. Surveys of public opinion taken soon after the party was formed in November 2005 had projected that it could capture as many as 42 seats in the 120-member House. Mr. Olmert might not be too disappointed that Kadima could get only 28 seats, considering that it was yet to have an organisational structure in place. It had also to go to the polls without its star attraction, Ariel Sharon, who is in a coma after suffering a stroke in early January. The overall outcome indicates that a majority of Israeli voters have rejected political formations that seek to perpetuate the colonial occupation of Palestinian territories. Likud, which has traditionally been the foremost among them, has lost so much ground that it has been upstaged by a party of Russian immigrants as the main protagonist of the hard Right. The Labour party, which favours an immediate resumption of negotiations with the Palestinians, did reasonably well by winning 20 seats under an untested leader, Amir Peretz. In the lead-up to the election it was widely expected that a Kadima-Labour coalition would form the core of a new government. Although the two parties together do not command a majority, they are likely to secure the support of the Pensioners Party (seven seats) and the 10 Arab members of parliament. Additional support could come from the left-wing Meretz (four seats) as well as the religious parties Shas (13 seats) and United Torah Judaism (six seats). Such a coalition is likely to remain stable even if the religious parties decide to break away later.

Given the broadly anti-occupation mandate, Mr. Olmert can have no excuse for shying away from his campaign promise that his Government will close many of the Israeli colonies in the West Bank. Even assuming this plan is carried out, only about 60,000 settlers of the estimated 400,000 living in the West Bank will be evicted, and about 8 per cent of the territory captured in the 1967 war will still remain under occupation. The boundary wall that causes an almost apartheid-like separation between Israel and the Palestinian territories will also stay. For all that, the withdrawal could still be a significant move towards the winding up of an unjust and unsustainable occupation. Given Kadima's programme, it is indeed fortuitous that this party will not be able to rule without the support of Labour. Mr. Peretz, who wants the portfolios of either defence or finance, is likely to be a powerful member of the cabinet. He could be in a strong position to urge that withdrawal is carried out through a process of negotiations with the Palestinian Authority rather than unilaterally. Mr. Peretz may also press for the revival of an offer made by previous Labour governments that Israel could transfer some of its own territory to compensate for the land it wishes to annex.

Israel Churning

A new separation plan for Palestine

IF Palestinian elections redrew the landscape of Middle East politics with a victory for Hamas, Israeli voters also threw out existing political arrangements by handing the highest number of Knesset seats to a newly formed party, the Kadima. Ariel Sharon's exit from Likud appears to have abolished that party from the centre to the margins of Israeli politics, as it came in a poor fifth this time. The election has been seen as a referendum on Kadima's radical plan to draw up boundaries with a Palestinian state unilaterally by building a separation wall. This would also entail dismantling West Bank settlements that fall beyond this boundary, in the same manner that Sharon withdrew Jewish settlers from the Gaza strip. Kadima may not have a strong hand as the Israeli vote has been fractured, and it will have to enter into agreements with disparate coalition partners to muster the required majority of 61 Knesset members. But Labour, which pulled in the second largest number of seats and will most likely be a coalition partner, is a supporter of disengagement.

The larger question, though, is whether Israel can cut wide swathes through occupied territory and lock up its land and water resources by building a wall that keeps Palestinians out — an act that will look to the international community as a unilateral annexation of territory. It is unlikely that Israel will look very much beyond Washington for support; and given the tendencies of the present US administration that support will be forthcoming. But that isn't going to be enough to end conflict in the region. A territory in which Palestinians are locked up and subjected to rising population and poverty rates will be like a pressure cooker, and some of the ensuing violence will spill over to Israel. Among other things, such a territory will be an ideal base and recruiting ground for Al-Qaida. More positive outcomes are possible, however, if the plan has been conceived as an initial negotiating gambit, designed to induce the Palestinians to enter into talks about a permanent border. That Kadima leader Ehud Olmert has called for just such a dialogue since his election victory lends support to this interpretation. But for talks to happen Hamas, whose government has just been approved, will first have to amend its existing charter and recognise Israel's right to exist.

30 MAR 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

ISRAEL ELECTION Vows to set frontier by 2010 by removing isolated West Bank settlements Olmert wins, starts building coalition

DEAN YATES
JERUSALEM, MARCH 29

INTERIM Prime Minister Ehud Olmert began building a coalition on Wednesday after winning Israel's election on plans to impose final borders with the Palestinians by uprooting many West Bank settlements.

Appealing to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Olmert said in a post-election speech that Israel was ready to live alongside the Palestinians in peace after decades of conflict.

But in the absence of peace talks—now a remote prospect with the Islamist militant group Hamas about to take office—Olmert has vowed to set Israel's frontier by 2010 by removing isolated West Bank settlements and expanding bigger blocks there.

Olmert's centrist Kadima



Ehud Olmert

Party fared worse than expected in Tuesday's poll, signalling he might struggle to sustain support for his plan. Kadima's showing of 28 seats in the 120-member Parliament was among the lowest for an election winner.

But some political analysts said Olmert should be able to stitch together a coalition that would

suits showed Centre-Left Labour with 20 seats, the ultra-orthodox Shas with 13, ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu with 12 and Right Wing Likud with 11. Opinion polls had originally predicted Kadima would win 44 seats.

Kadima, founded just four months ago, was expected to seek a coalition with Labour and small parties, in talks expected to last for weeks. Some religious parties and one representing pensioners could back his West Bank plan.

Maya Jacobs, a Kadima spokeswoman, said unofficial coalition talks with leading parties including Labour had begun.

Palestinians condemn Olmert's West Bank plans as denying them a viable state. The sweeping measures would uproot tens of thousands of Jewish settlers while tracing a border along a fortified barrier Israel is

building inside the West Bank. Olmert's unilateral approach appeals to many Israelis worn down by a five-year-old Palestinian uprising and worried by the rise to power of Hamas, which is sworn to destroy Israel.

A Hamas spokesman, Sami Abu Zuhri, condemned the proposal. "Olmert's plan is very dangerous and completely rejected by Hamas. The plan will push the region into greater escalation and we will lobby all Palestinians to confront it," Abu Zuhri said.

Olmert has ruled out any dealings with Hamas until it recognises Israel, disarms and accepts interim peace deals.

Some 60,000 West Bank settlers could be affected by Olmert's plan, far more than the 8,500 removed from Gaza last year. Some 240,000 Israelis live in the West Bank. —Reuters

'Policies should change'

KHARTOUM: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Wednesday that the Israel election result would make no difference to the Palestinians unless Olmert changed his policies. "This result will not change (anything) as long as the agenda of Olmert himself does not change and he does not abandon the question of 'unilateral agreements'," Abbas said in Khartoum where he has gone for an Arab Summit. —Reuters

avoid the need to negotiate with Right Wing parties opposed to any withdrawal from West Bank land that settlers see as a Biblical birthright. "I think we can run a government with 28 seats. It will be difficult, but possible," elder statesman and senior Kadima politician Shimon Peres said.

Besides Kadima, election re-

Can Hamas do it?

57 29/5

JK DUTT suggests ways of tackling the outstanding issues that constitute the age-old Palestine-Israel problem

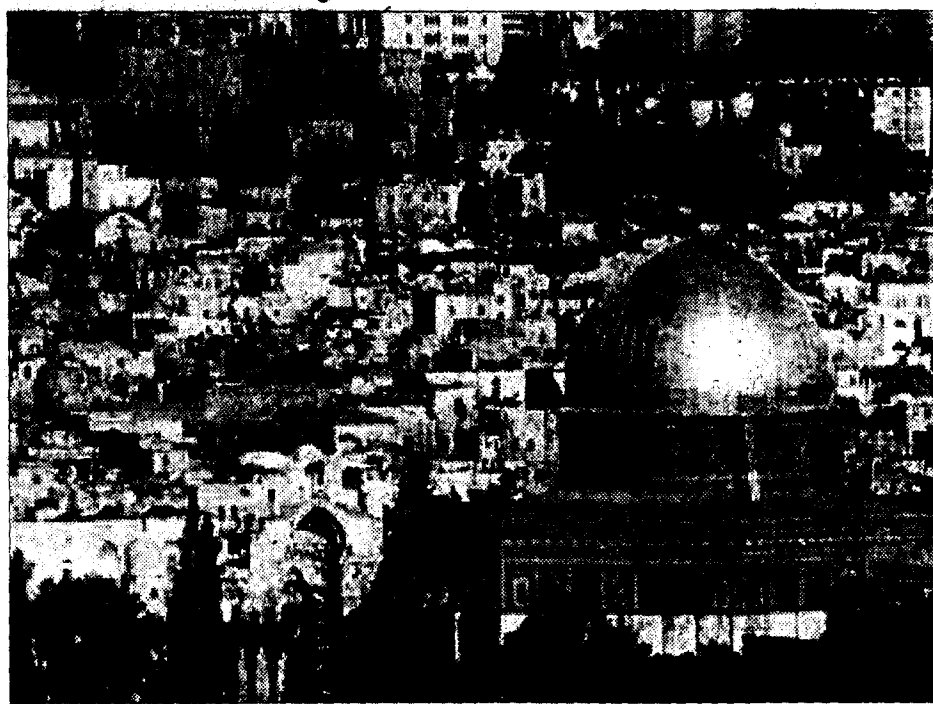
PALESTINE'S Prime Minister designate Ismael Haniyeh is probably facing the biggest challenge of his political career. The entire world's attention is focussed on him with just one incisive query – can he produce a miracle?

While there has been some concern among several western nations about Hamas' shock victory in the recent elections, both Moscow and Brussels have shown good statesmanship by acknowledging the party's ascendancy into its current position of political power. Meanwhile, the regular funds that Palestine had been receiving from Israel towards its sustenance have been stopped courtesy Washington's pressure on Tel Aviv. Moscow has made up this loss and there are reports that the European Union is also of the opinion to help Hamas out financially. Further, President Vladimir Putin personally invited leading members of Hamas to Moscow – an invitation that was gratefully accepted – to advise them on how to get about conducting statecraft with Israel.

Destiny has its own way of arranging events and one of the methods in this regard is the actuation of the proverbial quote, "the old order changeth, yielding place to new". The removal of Yasser Arafat on the one side and Ariel Sharon on the other has opened up a fresh approach to addressing the age-old Palestine-Israel problem, a problem that has caused limitless suffering to both. An assessment of the situation as it stands today would be rewarding, especially if suggestions on how to tackle the outstanding issues are also discussed simultaneously.

There are six prime issues that have been the bone of contention between the Jews and the Palestinians for well over six decades or so. Let us analyse these one by one. Heading the list is the issue of Palestinian refugees returning to their homeland. Ever since Theodore Herzl politicised the Jewish aspect of ownership of the relevant real estate in West Asia and Mufti Haj Amin reciprocated on behalf of the Palestinians, a period of unending conflict both political as well as military has engulfed the area for some 70 odd years. The intensity of this conflict rose after the United Nations officially sanctioned the creation of Israel in 1948. Three major wars, one each in 1948, 1967 and 1973 were instrumental in thousands of Palestinians fleeing to other countries as refugees. Constant strikes and counter strikes by both sides have continued unabated since.

Periodic talks between Israel and Palestine, mainly sponsored by the USA in consonance with the international community, brought delegations from both sides to venues like Camp David, Oslo and Sharm el Sheikh. The Palestinian side demanded that the territory captured by Israel during the three wars be returned so that its refugees could be repatriated. The Israeli side represented that while in principle they were willing to do so provided some other points be agreed to, vacation of this territory could only be done in a phased manner because the vacating Israelis had to be accommodated in the Israeli mainland in a segment by



Jerusalem: disputed land

segment mode; it simply could not be done in one shot as the Palestinians reportedly had wanted. Israel proved the fact by placing geographical statistics in terms of space available vis-à-vis the continuous influx of Jews from all over the world. Apparently, this was not acceptable to the Palestinians with the erstwhile Palestine Liberation Organisation being labelled as the spoilsport.

The intransigence displayed by both sides resulted in the status quo of this vital issue for years on end. The first glimmer of hope was shown by an earlier Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak when he decided to vacate southern Lebanon on the explicit understanding that the Palestinians would not misuse this liberalism to exercise terrorist tactics on Israel from southern Lebanon. This understanding has held to date. On his part, Sharon vacated Gaza amid huge obstinacy from Jewish settlers in that strip. However, he compounded it by erecting a so-called security wall all along the West Bank's perimeter to keep out Palestinian terrorists. This wall undid his good intentions in Gaza. Be that as it may, the authorities in Palestine should encourage the refugees to return.

The second issue is linked with the first to wit, Israel must remove all Jewish settlements from Gaza and the West Bank. Well, Gaza has been done with but West Bank remains. It is on this matter that Haniyeh has to walk a tight rope; he has to convince his people that there is no getting away from acceptance of the truism that the stretch of land from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea has to be shared by both Jews and Palestinians. Peace can only mate-

rialise if this truism is given due credit. Desperately hanging on to the "Ottoman Empire syndrome" will produce nothing. At the same time, he also has to convince the incoming Israeli Prime Minister of the same theory and persuade him to bring down the security wall. As a first step he should order an immediate cease-fire to all attacks on Israelis by his men as also by Hezbollah. The intifada ideology will not produce any worthwhile outcome.

Number three is the status of Jerusalem. Palestine wants Jerusalem as its capital but Israel is unwilling to concede this saying that this holy city is religiously bound with the Jews and this bond cannot be surrendered. In fact, the Palestinians too have a similar claim as brought out in the next issue. The most pragmatic solution would be for both Palestine and Israel to honour Jerusalem as a religious heritage and leave it at that. Palestine can opt for Ramallah as its capital with justification as this was Arafat's headquarters.

Issue number four is the ownership of a holy shrine located in Jerusalem. This shrine saw the birth of three religions, namely Christianity, Judaism and Islam. While the first has remained in the background, the other two have been contesting the ownership. The Jews call this shrine Noble Sanctuary and Temple Mount while the Palestinians call it the Al Haram Al Sharaf Mosque and the Al Aqsar Mosque. The shrine is prominent by its golden dome. The best thing to do would be to share the shrine using the universal maxim that every religion in the world inevitably preaches tolerance

and respect for other faiths.

The fifth issue is a tricky one – the Golan Heights of Syria. These heights have been under Israeli occupation since 1967 as a protective measure against the bringing down of artillery and mortar fire by Hezbollah on Jewish settlements in the West Bank. A last ditch attempt made by Bill Clinton in 2000 to make Syria's previous President, the late Hafez al Assad, keep Hezbollah in check in this respect failed. The present incumbent Bashar al Assad (Hafez's son) is equally reluctant like his father. Haniyeh has to prove to Tel Aviv that these heights will never again be used for targeting Israel, a commitment that should not be difficult once the foregoing issues start moving favourably.

The sixth and last issue is the sharing of the water of Lake Tiberias – earlier known as the Sea of Galilee – by Israel and Palestine. These waters are currently under Israeli control as the lake is adjacent to the Golan Heights. This is a minor issue really and will automatically get resolved through diplomacy when the major ones are settled. In terms of priority, the first four issues need to be resolved first followed by the last two.

India should contribute its mite to the Palestine-Israel problem since both these nations maintain good working relations with New Delhi. The recently concluded nuclear agreement with the USA might force India to step in willy-nilly. In order to get this agreement passed by various bodies that matter, for example, the American Congress, the Nuclear Supplies Group, the IAEA and so on, New Delhi will have to face an awkward situation in that Jews play a dominant part in decision making. The American Congress for instance has a strong Jewish lobby, a lobby that can easily throw a spanner in the works. If push comes to shove, George W Bush would rather play safe with his Jewish vote bank than oppose its constituents.

The point therefore for India is, New Delhi has to get actively involved in the Palestine-Israel peace process and oversee a road map for the formation of an independent Palestine with Tel Aviv's concurrence. Precedence for this already exists in the plan mooted a few years ago by the USA, Russia, the EU and the two concerned West Asian states. India should proceed from where this plan was left off, effectively utilising the theme of "peaceful coexistence".

A step in the right psychological direction would be for Ismael Haniyeh to translate into Arabic the haunting words of the Jewish crooner Dalia Lavi's immortal number, *Jerusalem*, and broadcast the song across the length and breadth of Palestine. The last verse of this song goes thus:

"When will tomorrow's sons, tomorrow's daughters

Have a taste of the bread cast upon the waters

And put down the swords that perform the slaughters

Where Jerusalem is."

(The author is a retired Lt. Col. of the Indian Army.)

ELECTIONS ■ Virtual referendum on separation from Palestinians

Israel votes on future border

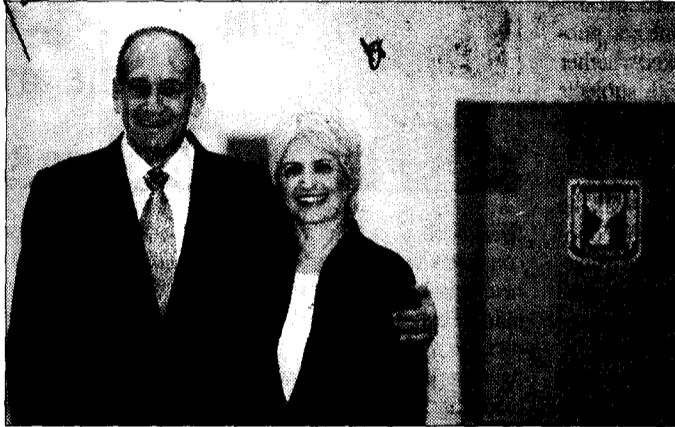
JOSEF FEDERMAN

JERUSALEM, MARCH 28

ISRAELIS voted on Tuesday in a historic election billed as a referendum on the future of the West Bank, with the leading candidate, acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, promising to pull back from most of the territory and draw Israel's final borders by 2010.

Barring an unexpected surge by hawkish parties, Israelis were expected to give a green light to Olmert's proposal to separate from most Palestinians after 39 years of military occupation.

Israel began the "disengagement" process last summer with its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, but Tuesday's vote marked the first time the leading candidate has laid out a concrete vision for the future of the West Bank. "This is perhaps the most important election in all of Israel's life," said Mordechai Aviv, 76, of Jerusalem. "We are going to separate between us and the Arabs.



Olmert with his wife after voting in Jerusalem on Tuesday. The poll is seen as a referendum on the country's future in the West Bank. AP

This is very important for us to continue having a Jewish state."

As Israelis voted, two people—an adult and a child—were killed in an explosion near the Gaza border. Initial reports by police and medics said the two were struck by a homemade rocket fired from Gaza by Palestinian militants. However, medics later said they two could also have been killed by ordnance lying in a field.

The Islamic Jihad militant group claimed responsibility, saying the attack was timed to disrupt the Israeli election. In the past, Palestinian violence has driven Israeli voters toward hard-line parties.

Polls opened at 7 am and were to close at 10 pm, to be followed immediately by exit poll results broadcast by the three main TV stations. Final unofficial results were expected early Wednesday.

Election Day is a state holiday in Israel, where many of the 8,276 polling stations serving 4.5 million voters are set up in schools. By midmorning, turnout was about 10 per cent, the lowest for the hour since election officials started keeping score in 1973.

Security was extremely tight, with some 22,000 police and border police patrolling Israel's frontier with the West Bank, particularly around Jerusalem. The military had sealed off the West Bank and Gaza two weeks earlier, barring all Palestinians to prevent possible attacks by militants.

Pollsters predicted that Olmert's centrist Kadima Party, founded in November, would win the most votes, well ahead of the center-left Labor Party and the right-wing Likud. However, an unusually large number of voters said they were undecided, and pollsters said large fluctuations were possible. Success for Kadima has been defined as winning at least 35 of 120 seats in parliament. —AP

29 MAR 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

Hamas blinks at mediating quartet

NIDALAL-MUGHRABI

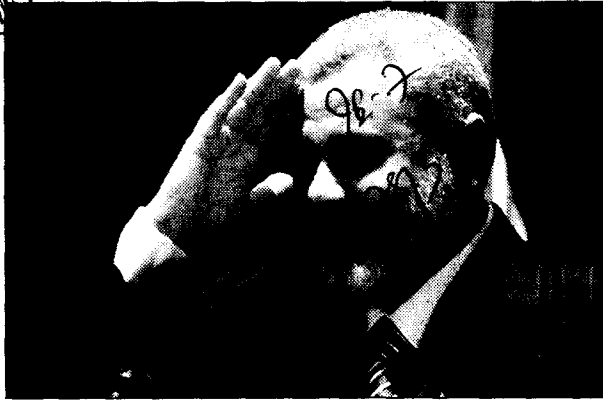
GAZA, MARCH 27

HAMAS called on Monday for talks with Western powers to try to reach a "just peace" in the Middle East but showed no sign of softening its stance on Israel as it presented its government to the Palestinian parliament.

Hamas's Prime Minister-designate, Ismail Haniyeh, told Parliament that the new government, expected to win a vote of confidence on Tuesday or Wednesday, would be ready for a dialogue with the "Quartet" of mediating powers.

The Quartet—the US, the EU, Russia and the UN—has said Hamas, winner of Palestinian elections in January, must recognise Israel, renounce violence and accept past peace agreements or risk losing vital aid.

The militant Islamic group is formally committed to destroying the Jewish state. The parliament session came on



PM Ismail Haniyeh to present his government's agenda at the start of a parliament session in Gaza on Monday. AP

the eve of elections in Israel, where the main issue is a plan by interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to withdraw from remote Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank while expanding the largest blocs.

"The people have the right to struggle against the occupation," Haniyeh said. But he added: "Our government will be ready for a dialogue with the Quartet...to look into all

ways to end the status of struggle and to achieve calm in the region. "Our people are in need more than any other nation on earth for peace, for security and stability.

Our government will not spare any effort to achieve a just peace in the region." But Haniyeh showed no sign of agreeing to demands by Western powers and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas that it commit to ne-

gotiations with Israel.

Meanwhile, Abbas denied threatening to bring down Hamas' incoming government but insisted that the militant group must adopt more moderate stances to avoid a stalemate with his authority.

Abbas had warned in a letter to Haniyeh, made public on Saturday, that he would "exercise my mandate and authority" when needed to protect Palestinian interests—seen as a veiled threat to use his constitutional powers to fire the Prime Minister.

But yesterday, Abbas told journalists, "there is no threat at all." He added "I only told them that there is a political programme that differs from that of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and the Palestinian President and that this will hinder our work in the near future," Abbas said after talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheik.—AP

Sharon's legacy on test

Kadima presses on with plan to put separation before peace

Chris McGreal

JERUSALEM: In the early days of the campaign for Tuesday's general election in Israel, the once mighty Likud party launched an advertisement playing on the name of its new but dominant rival — Kadima.

Kadima is Hebrew for "Forward." The advert showed the face of its leader and acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert alongside what was meant as a derisive declaration: "Forward to the 1967 borders!"

It was an attempt to portray Kadima as a danger to Israel with its plan to pull out of large parts of the occupied West Bank, and Mr. Olmert as a coward for retreating from the dream of a greater Israel in the face of an advancing Palestinian Islamic group, Hamas.

Likud was forced to pull the advert after many voters thought it was pro-Kadima, agreeing with what they saw as a

positive message: Don't talk to the Palestinians; separate from them.

Opinion polls say that Kadima, the party created by Ariel Sharon only four months ago, will crush Likud, which he took to power in 2001 with promises to break the Palestinians.

Mr. Sharon — still in a coma after suffering a stroke earlier this year — tore Likud apart by pulling Jewish settlers out of Gaza.

Referendum

Likud's leader, Binyamin Netanyahu, has described Tuesday's ballot as a referendum on Kadima's plans. Mr. Olmert is, indeed, seeking a mandate for his proposal to draw Israel's final borders within four years by moving tens of thousands of settlers from some parts of the West Bank while annexing the larger colonies that are home to hundreds of thousands of other settlers.

He intends to use the vast West Bank barrier to mark out the border, and he plans to decide its final route by talking to the Americans but not the Palestinians. "We want to set the permanent borders of Israel, and to do so we must separate from the Palestinians," he told Israel radio on Sunday. "In order to separate from the Palestinians, we must define for ourselves our red lines."

Mr. Netanyahu has tried hard to portray Kadima's policy as surrendering territory to Hamas without getting anything in return. He favours the continued use of force to hold on to all that Israel now controls.

However, Lior Chorev, a leading Kadima campaign strategist, said his party's lead was built on a belief among large numbers of Israelis that while the occupation could not go on, there was, as Mr. Sharon frequently said, "no partner for peace" on the other side. It is a view strength-

ened by Hamas's victory in the recent Palestinian election — leaving only "unilateral separation". Mr. Sharon founded Kadima in November as a vehicle to continue his unilateral strategy in the face of debilitating hostility within Likud. At the time, the new party was widely viewed as a one-man, one-theme show. After Mr. Sharon's stroke in January, his opponents in Likud quietly rejoiced at what they saw as the new party's burial.

They doubted that Mr. Olmert — who does not carry the same political clout as the maverick general he succeeded — could provide leadership over what they saw as a nationally divisive issue.

But Mr. Sharon had tapped into a deep desire among many Israelis to be rid of the Palestinians, and the polls show that most voters want to see his strategy carried through by Kadima. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

28 MAR 2006

Ex-Likud voters turn to Kadima

Netanyahu may not be able to pull off a victory

Martin Patience

ASHDOD (ISRAEL): The catchy Likud party jingle boomed around the reception room – “Likud is Right, Likud is your heart, Likud is your head.”

With blue and white placards proclaiming “Netanyahu is a strong leader,” the 400-strong crowd craned their necks towards the Rina Banquet Hall’s main entrance.

But the politician they were all straining to catch a glimpse of, Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu, caught them by surprise. The 56-year-old former Prime Minister entered the banquet hall through the kitchen.

Mr. Netanyahu will be hoping that he can perform a similar manoeuvre and pull off a surprise win in this month’s Israeli elections, but this looks unlikely.

Likud is trailing third in election opinion polls.

The party that headed the last Israeli government imploded after the decision of its former leader, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, to withdraw from settlements in Gaza and the West Bank last summer.

Ultimately, Mr. Sharon and other senior members left Likud and formed the new Kadima party – currently leading in the polls.


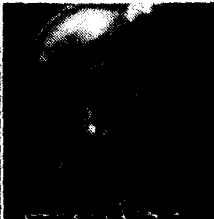

Ferocious critic

As a ferocious critic of the withdrawals, Mr. Netanyahu was once again elected the leader of Likud in December.

Mr. Netanyahu warns that continued withdrawals from the West Bank would only jeopardise Israel’s security and not

Floating voters key to Israel's election

Security is the top issue in Israel's parliamentary election, with acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert the front-runner to form a coalition government in the 120-seat Knesset. But latest polls show one in five of Israel's five million voters is still undecided over who to vote for

		
Kadima: Centrist party founded by Ariel Sharon late last year, led by 60-year-old Ehud Olmert , (above) acting Israeli Prime Minister	Likud: Right wing party led by former Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu , 57	Labour: Centre left party - the "party of the poor" - led by former trade union leader Amir Peretz , 54
Security: Has replaced disengagement with withdrawal (controversial) in absence of peace with Palestinians, Olmert proposes to evacuate isolated settlements in West Bank and turn separation barrier into permanent eastern border by 2010	Security: Is exploiting Hamas's recent election victory, claiming Olmert's plan " will bring Hamas to the borders " and place Tel Aviv within Palestinian rocket range	Security: Likud promises expansion
	Golan Heights: No withdrawal	Economy: Participation in Kadima government dependent on increase in monthly minimum wage from \$750 to \$1,000 and mandatory pensions for all citizens
	Economy: Continue free market reforms - cut VAT from 16.5% to 14%	Cut unemployment by half - create 400,000 jobs over 4 years

Pictures: Associated Press © GRAPHIC NEWS

strengthen it. On a windswept evening in the drab industrial port-town of Ashdod, he took this message to his supporters.

Under glaring lights and mirrored roofs, the crowd of Russian immigrants listened attentively to Mr. Netanyahu as they tucked into the chocolate croissants and fresh orange juice laid on for them.

“They didn’t build coffee shops and discos there and say ‘what nice people those Jews are’,” Mr. Netanyahu told the crowd, referring to the evacuated settlements in Gaza.

“They didn’t build some fish

restaurants there,” he said, teasing the Russian Jews in his audience for their fondness for shellfish, a non-kosher food.

“No, instead they fired rockets at Israel from the settlements we evacuated.”

One of Mr. Netanyahu’s biggest problems is shoring up the support of former Likud voters who are increasingly turning to Kadima. A 25-year-old voted for Likud in the last election but says that Kadima will receive his support at this election. — © 2006 BBC News/Distributed by the New York Times Syndicate

23 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

HAMAS ■ EU hands over \$78-m cheque to UN for Palestinians, future aid conditional

Haniyeh gives Abbas Cabinet list

ASSOCIATED PRESS
GAZA CITY, MARCH 20

INCOMING Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas on Sunday presented his new Cabinet to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, he told reporters after an hour-long meeting. While the EU handed the UN a check on Monday for US\$78 million in urgent aid for Palestinians, but warned repeatedly that future aid was at risk unless the newly formed Hamas government commits to peace with Israel.

Haniyeh said Abbas would study the list and then present it to the Parliament, which must vote its approval. Haniyeh said Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar would be the new Foreign Minister. Haniyeh said there would be 24 ministers, 10 from Gaza and 14 from the West Bank. Some



Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh, from the Islamic group Hamas (left), meets Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Gaza City on Sunday AP

would be technocrats, he said.

The lone woman in the Cabinet, Mariam Saleh from el-Bireh, next to the West Bank city of Ramallah, said after Haniyeh's announcement that she would be

Speaking after Haniyeh, Abbas said he would submit the names to the PLO executive committee within two days. He would not say whether he approved the Cabinet. The committee is the PLO's main decision-making body, and if it rejects the list, Abbas would have to return it to Hamas for further negotiations.

Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministers of the EU—the Palestinians' largest source of foreign aid more than US\$600 million a year—debated the impact of a Hamas government on future assistance, as will the 25 EU leaders at a Brussels summit later in the week.

"Hamas is at a crossroads," said Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, whose country holds the EU presidency. She said the Islamic organisation—which the EU considers a terror-

Israel opens Gaza crossing

GAZA: Israel said it would reopen the main goods crossing into Gaza on Monday after warnings of a looming humanitarian crisis in the strip, where gunmen demanding jobs clashed repeatedly with Palestinian security forces.

Israel and the US have sought to isolate Hamas and the new government. The EU said it did not want to go soft on principles, but added it would leave the door open for Hamas to change its stance on Israel.

Israel said it would reopen the Karni goods crossing later on Monday for limited shipments. It was last closed on March 13. —Reuters

ist group because it is sworn to destroy Israel—"will have to decide which road to take" for the sake of the well-being of the 4 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

4 April headline W SF2 2003

Hamas submits Cabinet list

March 19. — Incoming Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas today presented his new Cabinet to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, he told reporters after an hour-long meeting.

Haniyeh said Abbas would study the list and then present it to the parliament, which must vote its approval. Haniyeh said Hamasleader Mahmoud Zahar would be the new foreign minister. Haniyeh said there would be 24 ministers, 10 from Gaza and 14 from the West Bank. Some would be technocrats, he said. The lone woman in the Cabinet, Mariam Saleh from el-Bireh, next to the West Bank city of Ramallah, said after Haniyeh's announcement that she would be "in the service of women."

Israel predicted that Mr Haniyeh's government would be a "pariah regime" if Hamas did not

recognise Israel, renounce violence and honour previous agreements.

Mr Mark Regev, a foreign ministry spokesman, said: "They have decided to conduct themselves outside the norms of international legitimacy. Most governments in the world will not be dealing with them, including Israel. That's their choice, and they will have to deal with the consequences."

Ghassan Hatib, planning minister in the outgoing administration, warned that the Palestinian Authority might collapse if donors stopped delivering aid. "If the PA is not able to fulfill its financial obligations," he said, adding, "the public might feel that they don't need it. If the PA stops paying salaries, the employees will no longer be willing to continue their work. Health, education, welfare and other systems will collapse."

— AP/The Independent

20 MAR 2006

THE STRAITS TIMES

Hamas unveils Cabinet

Abbas unlikely to grant approval until after Israeli polls

MB
100-17
SDB Palestine

Peter Beaumont

RAMALLAH: The militant Palestinian organisation Hamas on Saturday unveiled its new Government, setting Palestinian society on an inevitable collision course with Israel and the international community.

The announcement comes after weeks of negotiations following Hamas' election victory in January and after the group had apparently failed to persuade any more moderate parties to join a coalition.

Loyalists in the Islamist group will now control the key Finance, Security and Foreign Affairs Ministries, triggering

threats by the U.S. and Israel, supported by the U.K. and E.U., that they would financially isolate the new Government unless it rejected violence.

Foretaste of problems

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, whose leader Ahmed Sadaat was dramatically seized from a Jericho prison last week by Israeli forces, will vote this weekend on whether to join Hamas, in a move unlikely to soften the new Government's image.

The declaration of the list of Hamas Cabinet members must now be approved by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas

along with its Government programme. In a foretaste of problems ahead, Israel is withholding customs dues and taxes collected under the Paris Protocol on behalf of the Palestinian Authority following the election

Mr. Abbas is expected to put off the approval of a new Government until after Israel's March 28 election, but his confidants say he is not yet ready to force a full-blown confrontation with the Islamist militants. Mahmoud Zahar, the movement's leader in Gaza, has been named Foreign Minister, while Said Siyam, a popular Hamas lawmaker, will head the Interior and Civil Affairs Ministries. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

20 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

Hamas completes formation of Palestinian cabinet: officials

NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI
GAZA | MARCH 18

HAMAS on Saturday completed forming a Palestinian cabinet that will put loyal members of the Islamic militant group in charge of key ministries, including interior, foreign affairs and finance, Hamas officials said.

More moderate factions, including President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah movement, refused to form a government with Hamas.

Hamas's inability to win coalition partners and its decision to appoint its own members to the three key ministries could bolster US and Israeli efforts to isolate the new government diplomatically and economically. Even now, Abbas could also object to Hamas's line-up, triggering a constitutional crisis. Hamas holds an outright majority in the Palestinian parliament.

According to sources close to the deliberations, Hamas has decided to name Omar Abdel-Razeq, a prominent West Bank economics professor and Hamas election official, to the post of finance min-



Hamas leader and Palestinian Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh.

ister. Abdel-Razeq, a professor at an-Najah University, headed Hamas's election committee for the West Bank. He was arrested by Israeli forces early in January and was released three days ago, Hamas sources said.

The US and Israel have vowed not to provide any money directly

to a Hamas-led Finance Ministry, responsible for the salaries of about 140,000 Palestinian Authority employees and security forces.

Hamas's choice for foreign minister will be Mahmoudal-Zahar, a top leader in Gaza whom Israel has tried to assassinate, Hamas sources said. —Reuters

19 MAR 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

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A needless provocation

W
Arafat

While Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert apparently authorised the raid on the Jericho jail to shore up his political fortunes, the United States and the United Kingdom have to share much of the blame for the violence that flared up subsequently. The raid would not have been feasible had the Western powers not withdrawn the monitors they had posted in the facility under a 2002 agreement. This agreement came about because a few Palestinians who were wanted by Israel had taken refuge in the Ramallah headquarters of Chairman Yasser Arafat. With Israel threatening to raid the premises, the Western powers had worked out an arrangement by which the wanted men were to be kept in the custody of the Palestinian Authority but under the scrutiny of American and British supervisors. Over the past four years, Israel and its Western allies have complained that the detenus were being treated very leniently. However, until Hamas won the parliamentary election, Washington and London had given no indication that the monitoring arrangement would be wound up. The leaders of the Islamist movement had declared that they would release the detenus once they assumed office. Mr. Olmert would have found himself in an untenable political situation had Hamas acted on its declaration. One of the Jericho detenus, Ahmed Saadat, is alleged to have been involved in the assassination of former Israeli Minister Rehavam Ze'evi. The Israeli Prime Minister apparently calculated that his electoral prospects would be severely damaged if Mr. Saadat was set free ahead of the parliamentary election. Mr. Olmert's political opponents would have accused him of being soft on terrorism; such an accusation might have resonated among the electorate since his main campaign promise is that he will shut down the smaller settlements in the West Bank.

The claim by Israel and its Western allies that they did not act in concert lacks credibility. Mr. Olmert who has been slipping in popular ratings needed to demonstrate that he is a strongman. That the Israeli army was able to launch the operation half an hour after the last batch of monitors drove away from the jail does appear to indicate it had prior information. The U.S. and the British governments have of course already declared that they would have no dealings with Hamas. However, they have offered only a weak explanation for their decision to withdraw monitors without waiting to see whether the release of detenus was indeed ordered. While Washington and London have cited concern for the safety of their citizens as the justification, it is inconceivable that either the Palestinians or Israelis would have harmed the monitors. This has been established by the fact that most Westerners taken hostage during the riots that followed the raid were soon set free. All in all, the withdrawal of the supervisors appears to have been intended to provoke Hamas into an indiscretion.

Hamas reiterates right to resist Israel

Chris McGreal

HD-13 1A/3

JERUSALEM: Efforts by Hamas to form a national unity government that will win international acceptance are faltering after the group delivered a statement of principles to the Palestinian president that the administration reserves the right to "reassess" peace accords with Israel.

The Hamas Prime Minister-designate, Ismail Haniyeh, has spent weeks trying to draw the defeated Fatah party into the government but his efforts suffered a further setback at the weekend at a meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, the Fatah leader and Palestinian President.

Mr Haniyeh presented a statement of principles for the new government which sources said failed to meet demands by the President, as well as Is-



Hamas supporters welcome Palestinian Parliament Speaker Aziz Dweik in Nablus on Monday. - PHOTO: REUTERS

rael and foreign Governments, for clear recognition of the Jewish state, an end to violence and a commitment to abide by existing agreements.

Mr Abbas, in his letter asking Mr Haniyeh to form a government after Hamas's landslide election victory, said he expected a public commitment from Hamas that its administration will honour accords with Israel. But the Hamas document took a different position.

"The Palestinian Government will address the reality created following previous agreements between the Authority and the occupation and it is the right of the Government to reassess these agreements on the basis of international law and in accordance with the rights of the Palestinian people," it said.

On the question of recognising Israel, Hamas was non-committal. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

THE HINDU

washingtonpost.com

Iran Rejects Russia's Proposal on Uranium

With Security Council Action Looming, Tehran Takes Stance of 'Wait and See'

By Karl Vick
Washington Post Foreign Service
Monday, March 13, 2006; A12

TEHRAN, March 12 -- Iran rejected an offer from Russia to enrich uranium on its behalf Sunday, closing the door on what had been the most promising diplomatic resolution to international concerns over its nuclear program.

"The Russian proposal is not on our agenda anymore," a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, told reporters at a conference on energy and security in the Iranian capital. "The situation has changed. We should wait and see how developments will go on among different states, including the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council."

The Security Council is scheduled to take up the matter this week. The International Atomic Energy Agency last week reported doubts about Iran's nuclear activities to the council, after voting last month to report Iran but delaying the formal action for 30 days while diplomats made a final push on the Russian bid.

No breakthrough occurred, however, and Asefi's dismissal appeared firm. Iran had dismissed the Russian overture when it was first offered last year, insisting that any deal allow uranium enrichment on Iranian soil.

Diplomats said Iran appeared to entertain the proposal later chiefly to stall moves to send the issue to the Security Council. Momentum toward punitive action has been building since fall, when Iran resumed work that France, Britain and Germany said broke an agreement with them to suspend enrichment activities.

"You had the impression it was largely tactical," a European diplomat in Iran, speaking on condition of anonymity, said of the negotiations over the Russian plan. "There were several occasions where the Iranians went to the TV and said, 'We almost have a deal.'"

"We had the impression before" the IAEA board meeting, the diplomat said, "that the Iranians were desperately trying to give the board the impression something was imminent."

Yet the Russian plan remains attractive to the countries aligned against Iran, including the United States, by keeping the riskiest elements of the nuclear fuel cycle outside the country. Russia offered to bring uranium from Iran, enrich it in Russia and gather the spent fuel to assure it was not diverted for military purposes. The United States and some allies suspect Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons; Iran says its program is intended solely to produce energy.

"The Russian proposal from our point of view is still a very good proposal," the diplomat said, "should

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they ever decide to accept it."

A prominent Russian lawmaker said Iran was hurting its case before the Security Council, where Russia and China, among permanent members with veto powers, are regarded as especially reluctant to impose penalties. The three other permanent members are the United States, France and Britain.

Iran's dismissal "destroys the last and real possibility of a compromise," said Konstantin Kosachyov, chairman of the international affairs committee in Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, the Interfax news agency reported.

"By all accounts, Tehran's decision will seriously radicalize the upcoming debates over the IAEA report in the U.N. Security Council, since trust in Tehran's plans and ambitions has been strongly undermined," he said.

Meanwhile, Iran's foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, said Iran would not use oil as a weapon in the dispute, despite earlier threats by other Iranian officials. In remarks possibly aimed at China, which relies on Iran for more than 10 percent of its imported oil, Mottaki said Iran would continue to supply petroleum to Asia.

But the foreign minister also suggested that Iran might withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, following the example of North Korea.

"Iran stresses restoration of its right to access nuclear technology and prefers to make use of internationally recognized mechanisms and benefit from its membership of the Non-Proliferation Treaty," Mottaki said. He added, however, that Iran would "revise its policies if it reaches the conclusion that current mechanisms cannot preserve the Iranian nation's rights."

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Energy, Iran Spur Turkey's Revival of Nuclear Plans

By Karl Vick
Washington Post Foreign Service
Tuesday, March 7, 2006; A14

ISTANBUL -- Turkey is reviving its long-deferred quest for nuclear power, pressed both by serious energy shortfalls within its own borders and by strident nuclear ambitions in neighboring Iran that threaten to upset a regional balance of power.

"The rise in oil prices and the need for multiple sources of energy make our need for nuclear energy an utmost priority," Energy Minister Hilmi Guler said last month in announcing plans to build as many as five atomic energy plants. The first, to be located on the Black Sea at Sinop, would come on line in 2012 and ease Turkey's costly dependence on natural gas, 90 percent of which arrives by pipeline from Russia and Iran.

With a rapidly expanding economy, a population of 70 million and scarce petroleum deposits, Turkey appears to be a logical candidate for nuclear power. Guler, who made his remarks while visiting a nuclear plant in Virginia, said the new Turkish reactors could provide about a tenth of the 54,000 megawatts the country expects to need over the next two decades.

"Turkey is a very poor country in respect to power. This has made the country very vulnerable," said Fatih Birol, chief international economist at the energy agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a cooperative of 30 countries that fosters good governance. Birol said that after briefing Turkey's foreign and energy ministers in recent weeks, "I think this government is rather determined to go ahead."

Neighboring Iran's nuclear program, which the United States and other countries have called a cover for developing nuclear weapons, also looms over the revival of Turkey's program, which has had numerous false starts since the early 1960s. Iran and Turkey are almost identical in population and economy and regard each other roughly as equals in a famously combustible region with no dominant power.

"Iran with nuclear production will be the dominant power," said Ozdem Sanberk, a former ambassador to Washington who heads the Turkish Economic and Social Studies research group in Istanbul. "There will be an asymmetrical relationship."

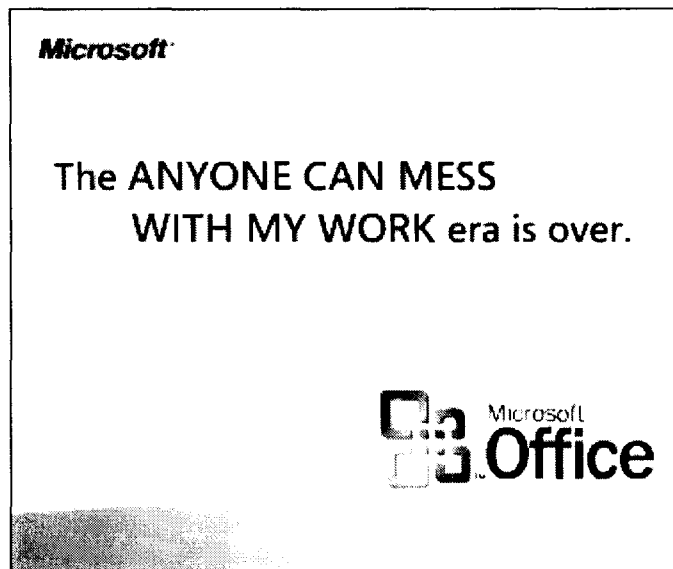
Sanberk has argued recently that Turkey has no choice but to pursue a nuclear program of its own under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"If we want to leave an independent country to our future generations, we do not have the luxury to delay," Sanberk wrote.

U.S. officials are trying to use Turkey's unease over developments in Iran as part of international efforts


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to persuade Tehran to suspend its nuclear program. Last month, the U.S. ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Greg Schulte, spent two days in Ankara for what the U.S. Embassy described as "intense dialogue and cooperation" on the Iranian question. Senior officials of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, whose roots in Islam afford some entree with Tehran, lately have turned up the volume. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said Turkey was "saddened by Iran's restarting uranium enrichment."

Any Turkish move toward a nuclear weapons program would mark a dramatic departure from long-standing foreign policy and military doctrine. Guided by the slogan of the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, "Peace at home, peace in the world," Turkish diplomats and the powerful general staff have invested heavily in international institutions, deploying troops repeatedly to Afghanistan and ratifying the most stringent additions to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"Turkey's state policy is always: Play the game within the rules," said Mustafa Kibaroglu, a nuclear proliferation expert at Bilkent University in Ankara. But "if Iran goes nuclear, then who knows?"

In the past, Kibaroglu saw merit in a domestic nuclear industry for Turkey. In a recent interview, however, he argued for alternatives, including improvements to the electrical grid, which leaks as much as a quarter of the power it produces.

"I'm not supporting Turkey's nuclear energy program anymore," he said, "because I'm not clear about what the real intention is. Let's put it that way."

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Hamas should embrace peace roadmap: Lavrov

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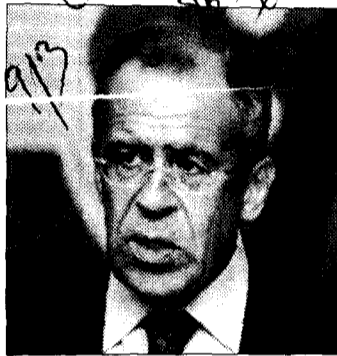
WASHINGTON, MARCH 8

RUSSIAN Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has urged the Palestinian militant group Hamas to unreservedly accept the international "roadmap" to West Asia peace.

And he reaffirmed that Hamas leaders had during meetings with Russian officials in Moscow sent conciliatory signals about the roadmap, drawn up by international diplomatic "quartet": the US, Russia, the EU and the UN.

"We did hear from them that they would respect the authority and competencies of President (Mahmud) Abbas," the head of the Palestinian Authority, Lavrov said at a joint news conference with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice yesterday.

"We also heard from them that they would be ready to express their position on the roadmap and to hopefully endorse the



Sergei Lavrov. Reuters

roadmap—as drafted by the quartet—without any reservations," he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had caught the other members of the "quartet" by surprise when he invited Hamas leaders to Moscow following the militant group's shock victory in January 25 legislative elections.

The Moscow meeting last weekend marked the first time that Hamas had been received by an in-

ternational power.

Hamas officials described their visit to Russia as a "breakthrough" they hoped would help the group—listed as a terrorist organisation by Israel, the US and Europe—establish international legitimacy.

Meanwhile the World Bank has announced a US\$ 42 million grant to assist the immediate financing needs of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

The World Bank, which announced the grant late yesterday, said the money is meant to divert "a severe financial crisis" from suspending vital basic needs and services to the Palestinian people.

David Craig, World Bank Country Director for the West Bank and Gaza, said the money will allow the PA to maintain stability in the short term by covering urgent payments for salaries of civil servants. The Bank is financing around 12 projects in the Palestinian territories, totaling around US\$ 154 million.

Israel issues assassination threat

Associated Press

JERUSALEM, March 7. — Israel warned today that it would assassinate the incoming Palestinian Prime Minister and other Hamas politicians if the Islamic militant group resumes attacks, but the acting Israeli premier also pledged a drastic cut in spending on Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Today, defence minister Mr Shaul Mofaz of Kadima told Army Radio that Israel would not hesitate to assassinate Hamas leaders if the group resumes attacks against Israel. Acting Prime Minister Mr Ehud Olmert and others in his front running Kadima Party delivered these messages just three weeks before Israel's election.

The centrist Kadima, which is trying to court both hardline and dovish voters, is expected to form the next government, but has been sliding in the polls. In recent days, party officials have been more forthcoming about their post-election agenda, apparently to stem the erosion in voter support. Earlier this week, Mr Olmert's key security adviser said Israel would dismantle more West Bank settlements and try to draw its final borders in the next four years.

Another key campaign issue is Israel's position on Hamas, which won the Palestinian parliament election in January and is poised to form the next Palestinian government. Hardline candidates have accused Mr Olmert of being too soft on Hamas, which is sworn to Israel's destruction and refuses to renounce violence.

Asked specifically about Ismail Haniyeh, the designated Prime Minister from Hamas, Mr Mofaz said "If Hamas... presents us with the challenge of having to confront a terror organisation, then no one there will be immune. Not just Ismail Haniyeh. No one will be



Palestinians shout anti-Israel slogan during the funerals of Islamic Jihad members Munir Sukar and Ashraf Shalluf in Gaza City on Tuesday. — AFP

Two rebels killed in Israeli attack

JERUSALEM, March 7. — Snapping up its offensive against Palestinian militants, the Israel air force fired a missile at a car killing two people in Gaza Strip, including two Islamic Jihad activists, and an eight-year-old boy. Seven people were also injured in the attack, carried out in the Shujayeh neighbourhood in the south-eastern part of the Gaza City yesterday. The Israel Defence Forces said that the target of the attack was senior Islamic Jihad militant Muir Sabhar, who was allegedly involved in organising Qassam rocket attacks on Israel. "The attack was carried out within the framework of IDF activity against the launching of projectiles rockets from the Northern Gaza Strip," a statement from the IDF said. Islamic militant leader Hamas condemned the strike as a "massacre." Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas called it a "flagrant violation" against his people. Sabhar was also directly involved in attempts to smuggle weapons. Ashraf Shalluf (35), who was accompanying Sabhar, was also killed. Mr Mofaz said he has instructed the IDF and the Shin Bet internal security service to target all those involved in firing Qassam rockets into Israel. — PTI

immune." Haniyeh brushed aside the warnings. "The continued escalation aims to shed more Palestinian blood, confuse the situation and hamper... the formation of the Palestinian government," Haniyeh said during a session of the Palestinian Parliament in Gaza City. In the past five years, Israel has killed scores of suspected militants, along with Palestinian bystanders, in so-called targeted attacks, usually missile strikes from heli-

copters. Among those killed were Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin and his successor, Abdel Aziz Rantisi.

Abbas' power can be stripped

Triggering a major confrontation with Fatah party, Hamas-dominated-Palestinian Legislative Council has voted to strip Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas of certain pow-

ers provided by the Fatah-led previous government through certain legislation.

The crisis, the worst since Hamas scored a landslide victory in January's general elections, kicked off following a PLC session held in Ramallah and Gaza City on Monday, through video conferencing, decided to annul a number of legislation carried out by the Fatah-led previous government soon after the parliamentary elections. The move evoked a strong response from Abbas' Fatah party with his close aide Tayeb Abdel Rahim dubbing the vote as "an attempt to stage a coup against the Chairman".

The ousted Fatah Party will boycott today's session of the Hamas-dominated Parliament to protest the militant group's overturning new powers for Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas, a Fatah official said.

Hamas has 74 seats in the new parliament and Fatah, 45. On Monday, Hamas nullified powers the outgoing Fatah-ruled parliament gave to Abbas to cancel the new Parliament's laws and appoint Fatah officials to key positions. Fatah lawmakers responded by walking out of the Parliament chamber.

Mr Azzam al-Ahmed, Fatah's parliamentary faction leader, served notice of the boycott, and said the party would file suit against Hamas in the Palestinian Supreme Court today.

"They used their majority to infringe the law on behalf of their interests, and we are resorting now to the judiciary to help us protect the law," Al-Ahmed said.

"Some people are trying to thwart the session to make people believe that we are not able to run the sessions, but I tell them that we are able to do so," Mr Zahar said.

Dealing with Hamas

Hamas does not appear to be in any hurry to re-examine its policy towards Israel. It is more than a month since this Islamist party won a historic victory in elections to the Palestinian parliament. Its spokesmen insist it will not abandon armed resistance so long as the Zionist state continues to occupy the territory captured in the 1967 war. From a short-term Hamas perspective, such a reiteration of the hard line makes sense. With elections to the Knesset scheduled for late March, it is possible Israelis may choose a Prime Minister who is averse to negotiations. While the incumbent and front runner, Ehud Olmert, intends to pursue a policy of unilateral withdrawal from the occupied territories, his rival, Binyamin Netanyahu, refuses to consider any concessions. The Palestinian Prime Minister-designate, Ismail Haniya, cannot be faulted for deciding not to show his hand until he knows the identity of his main interlocutor. The question is whether Hamas will soften its stance, if Mr. Olmert wins and shows a willingness to restart negotiations. Palestinian Islamists are ideologically opposed to the existence of the Zionist state. They believe Israel was forced out of the Gaza Strip because it could not withstand their armed resistance. These factors might work against Hamas changing course. On the other hand, Mr. Haniya and associates are being pressed by the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, and by some external actors to give up the armed struggle, recognise Israel, and endorse the agreements forged during the Oslo processes.

Hamas has offered to observe a permanent truce if Israel withdraws from the occupied territories, releases Palestinian prisoners, and allows refugees to return. There seems to be little chance that Israel will withdraw from all parts of the West Bank or let refugees resettle within its borders. Towards the end of the Oslo round of negotiations, the Palestinians (then led by Fatah) showed some signs of flexibility on these two points. While Hamas is not likely to come round easily, it should take note of recent opinion polls that show that 84 per cent of Palestinians, including 60 per cent of its own voters, favour a resumption of negotiations. Further, there will be considerable external pressure on the government Mr. Haniya will form to pursue a moderate course. Israel has withheld the taxes and customs duties it is obliged to pass on to the Palestinian Authority. The United States and the European Union are likely to cut off aid on the ground that they cannot provide funds to an administrative entity run by a 'terrorist' outfit. It is clearly unwise to push Hamas into a corner but Israel and its allies might be hoping that the pre-emptive sanctions will create a situation in which President Abbas can use his constitutional powers to dismiss the Haniya government. This gamble can be disastrous, especially if it triggers an open clash between Hamas and Fatah.

07 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

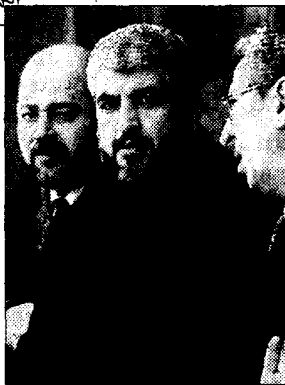
Hamas in Moscow, won't discuss Israel recognition

VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
MOSCOW, MARCH 3

HAMAS' political leader reaffirmed the organisation's hard stance today at the start of a three-day visit to Russia aimed at denting the Palestinian militant group's international isolation, saying that its refusal to recognise Israel wasn't a subject for talks.

"The issue of recognition (of Israel) is a decided issue," said Hamas' leader Khaled Mashaal upon arrival in Moscow. "We don't intend to recognise Israel."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was scheduled to receive Mashaal in what will be Hamas' highest-profile foreign visit. The Hamas delegation is set to have talks with Lavrov's deputy, Alexander Saltanov, as well as Russian lawmakers, and meet Russian



Hamas' political leaders Mashaal, Marzouk, in Moscow on Friday. AP

Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II.

After arriving in Moscow, Mashaal accused Israel of blocking the Mideast peace process and said that Israeli "occupation" of the Palestinian lands will top the agenda in Moscow talks. "No conditions will be put forward during our visit to Moscow," he

said. "We will listen to Russia's position and clarify ours."

Russia's special Middle East envoy, Alexander Kalugin on Thursday said, "We're not going to put forward demands. We'll seek to convince them that now is the time to take responsible decisions. If you come to power and form a government, you must understand you are assuming a great responsibility."

Russian analysts were predicted that the talks being held on Friday and Saturday would lead nowhere.

"Hamas won't listen to Russia because Moscow has no real levers of influence over them," said Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of the foreign policy magazine *Russia in Global Affairs*. "This is not the time of the Soviet Union, when we had real clout in the region." —AP

March 4, 2006

Hamas Delegation Visits Moscow for a Crash Course in Diplomacy

By **STEVEN LEE MYERS**
and **GREG MYRE**

MOSCOW, March 3 — Russia greeted the leaders of the militant Palestinian group Hamas on Friday with a pointed warning that the organization had to recognize Israel and dismantle its militias or face isolation.

As Hamas officials began a high-profile, three-day visit here, the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said that Moscow would convey to them a position shared by the United States and other international mediators in the Middle East conflict, as well as "most of the Arab capitals." He said Hamas, which won control of the Palestinian parliament last month, needed to transform itself into a legitimate political movement on the model of the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland.

"I don't think Hamas would have any serious future if Hamas doesn't change," Mr. Lavrov said in a briefing for American news organizations shortly before he met the Hamas delegation at the Foreign Ministry.

Hamas has shown little interest in moderating its positions, which call for the destruction of Israel. After meeting with Mr. Lavrov, Hamas's political leader, Khaled Meshal, reiterated the group's demands that Israel leave the territories it occupied in 1967, allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, release Palestinian prisoners and tear down the security barrier it has been building.

"In our opinion, the problem is not in the position of the Palestinian people, but in the occupation," Mr. Meshal, who lives in Syria, said in remarks at the airport. "We are for peace in the region, which may become possible only after the end of the occupation."

The invitation from President Vladimir V. Putin, announced last month during a visit to Spain, surprised and angered Israeli and American officials, who had tried to isolate Hamas after its victory in Palestinian elections. Russia has since sought to reassure its sometime partners that it did not intend to diverge significantly from international efforts to resolve the conflict.

The Hamas visit had all the trappings of an official one, with the delegation coursing around a snowy Moscow under heightened security. Mr. Putin was not scheduled to meet with Mr. Meshal or the other Hamas leaders, but the Palestinians have been offered a tour of the Kremlin on Sunday, as well as meetings with lawmakers, diplomats, Russia's Muslim leader, Ravil Gainutdin, and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleksy II.

Though Hamas delegations have visited Iran and Turkey since the election, the trip to Moscow is the first outside the Islamic world. It has given the group, classified by the United States and the European

Union as a terrorist organization, an international legitimacy it clearly desires, much to Israel's chagrin.

"The Russian invitation has broken the Israeli and American effort to isolate Hamas," Saleh Bardawil, a Hamas leader who was elected to the Palestinian parliament, said in an interview in Gaza City. "It is a political achievement and a victory for the Palestinian people."

Russia's invitation has strained Moscow's relations with Israel, which had steadily improved since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a onetime patron of the Palestine Liberation Organization and several Arab countries.

Only a year ago, Mr. Putin made the first visit by a Kremlin leader to Israel, where he received a red-carpet welcome. After Mr. Putin invited Hamas leaders to Moscow, Israel's transportation minister, Meir Sheerit, called the gesture "a real knife in the back." Since then, Israel has moderated its criticism of Moscow, evidently reassured by Russian promises to press Hamas to accept Israel's right to exist, to respect past agreements and, in effect, to disarm.

Mr. Lavrov repeated those demands on Friday, though he cautioned that the process could be lengthy. "I'll be very frank," he said in the briefing with American reporters, speaking English. "We don't expect that Hamas will do all this and change themselves overnight. It will be a process — hopefully, not as long as the process in Great Britain regarding Northern Ireland."

"But it will be a process," he added, "and I have some precious hope that having become now a legitimate political factor in the Palestinian and Middle East life, Hamas will reassess its new role, for which maybe it was not ready when the elections took place."

The Hamas visit underscored a new assertiveness in Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East and beyond, seemingly at the expense of the United States. At a news conference in January, Mr. Putin described Hamas's electoral victory as "a very serious blow" to American diplomacy and called for a collective, multinational effort to promote peace.

The first day of the Hamas delegation's visit appeared to resolve little. "The Israeli state is the aggressor and the occupier," Mr. Meshal said in a news conference Friday evening. "The Palestinians are the victims, so who should recognize whom?"

The Russian Foreign Ministry, however, issued a statement saying that Hamas had agreed to adhere to a March 2005 cease-fire, provided that Israel refrained from violence.

Israel and the United States seemed resigned to Russia's new role as a mediator. After a meeting on Russian-Israeli relations on Tuesday, Israel's acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, said Israel valued relations with Russia and that "ways must be found to improve them and tighten the understanding."

The statement did not mention the Hamas trip to Moscow. Amnon Sella, a Russian expert at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, said in an interview that Israel would like to see the world united in isolating Hamas and Iran, but preferred, for now, not to pick a fight with the Kremlin.

"If we had it all our way, then Israel would like a united front, with the whole world leaning on Iran and Hamas," Mr. Sella said. "But that is not going to happen. So what is the second-best choice?"

Steven Lee Myers reported from Moscow for this article, and Greg Myre from Jerusalem. Rachel Thorner contributed reporting from Moscow.

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Russia Ties Hamas's Prospects to Change

Radical Palestinian Group Must Become Peaceful Party, Foreign Minister Says

By Peter Finn
Washington Post Foreign Service
Saturday, March 4, 2006; A11

MOSCOW, March 3 -- Russia's foreign minister said Friday that the radical Islamic group Hamas has no "serious future" unless it transforms itself into a peaceful political party and integrates its military wing, which has claimed responsibility for dozens of suicide bombings in Israel, into the legitimate Palestinian security forces.

"This is the message we here in Moscow will be conveying to Hamas and hoping that Hamas will be listening," said the foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, before meeting with a delegation from the Palestinian group, which won parliamentary elections in January.

"We don't expect that Hamas will do all this and change itself overnight," said Lavrov, who will visit Washington on Monday. "It will be a process hopefully not as long as the process in Great Britain regarding Northern Ireland," where paramilitary groups have been encouraged to disarm and enter politics.

Russia, the United States, the European Union and the United Nations -- known in the Middle East peacemaking process as the quartet -- have called on Hamas, formally known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, to recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept international agreements previously signed by the Palestinian Authority.

After a two-hour meeting with the Hamas delegation, Lavrov said that "the Hamas leaders said they would honor earlier agreements," including the Arab Peace Initiative and the U.S.-backed peace plan known as the "road map."

Lavrov noted that these call for recognition of Israel in exchange for resolving issues connected with Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. He said that Hamas "insisted the moves must be reciprocal."

Khaled Meshal, head of the Hamas delegation, laid out what his organization defines as reciprocity. "If Israel officially announces readiness to return to the 1967 borders, to the return of Palestinian refugees, the destruction of the dividing wall, the release of all arrested Palestinians, our movement will take steps towards peace," Meshal said, citing steps sharply at odds with Israeli positions.

When he arrived in Moscow, Meshal said the issue of recognition of Israel was a "decided issue. We don't intend to recognize Israel."

The invitation to Hamas to visit Moscow, which President Vladimir Putin extended last month, took

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The Moscow visit also drew criticism in Israel, where commentators noted that Russia was willing to speak to Hamas but has refused negotiations with separatists in Chechnya. Russia has never labeled Hamas a terrorist organization.

Putin, however, will not meet with the delegation, apparently in an effort to avoid further damage to relations with Israel. The Palestinian group will get only a sightseeing tour of the Kremlin, Russian officials said.

Lavrov rejected suggestions that Russia was trying to wrest control of the diplomatic process in the Middle East from the United States. "If there is a deficit of leadership to promote the commonly agreed goals, then we believe we have a responsibility to fill this deficit and to try -- without taking over anybody's role," he said in the 30-minute interview at the Foreign Ministry.

Lavrov said Russia was motivated by the same spirit of international cooperation that it has shown in its negotiations with Iran over that country's nuclear program. Russia has offered to enrich uranium on its own soil for Iran's nuclear power plants, so as to guarantee that the country could not use the fuel to develop nuclear weapons.

Russia did not make this offer "for the sake of propaganda," Lavrov said, "because before this was announced we had very quiet, very professional consultations" with the European Union, United States and the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency. Russia acted "only after everyone said, 'This is a brilliant idea. Why don't you try it?'"

The energy agency board plans to meet at its Vienna headquarters Monday to discuss Iran. Iranian negotiators met again with officials from Britain, France and Germany in Vienna on Friday, but E.U. officials said there was no breakthrough on a deal to allay foreign concerns that Iran is trying to build nuclear weapons.

Lavrov said he had not given up on reaching a deal before the meeting. "I would not yet state that time is running out," said Lavrov, a former ambassador to the United Nations. "Let's give them a chance. The work continues."

If Iran fails to agree to a compromise by Monday, particularly a return to a moratorium on enriching uranium, the matter could switch to the U.N. Security Council, which has the power to impose sanctions. Lavrov, however, made it clear that he wants to keep the issue away from the Security Council and resolve it through the IAEA. He said the U.N. agency is the best mechanism to monitor Iran's activities and reach a compromise.

"If the issue is sent to the Security Council, we are concerned that this would lead to an escalation of the situation," the minister said. "If it is in the Security Council -- I know how the Security Council works -- you start with a soft reminder, then you call upon them, then you require, then you demand, then you threaten. It will become a self-propelling function while we haven't yet received answers from our partners on what would be the actual strategy in the Security Council."

He called military action unacceptable, "both for the Iranian situation but also in the context of what is going on the region. And I'm saying this not to send any messages to Iran so they should not be afraid of the use of force. . . . I want to emphasize the need for all those involved to develop a strategy to prevent

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The invitation to Hamas to visit Moscow, which President Vladimir Putin extended last month, took some governments by surprise. The United States and European Union have sought to isolate the group

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Mideast Climate Change

Published: March 1, 2005

It's not even spring yet, but a long-frozen political order seems to be cracking all over the Middle East. Cautious hopes for something new and better are stirring along the Tigris and the Nile, the elegant boulevards of Beirut, and the sand-swept towns of the Gaza Strip. It is far too soon for any certainties about ultimate outcomes. In Iraq, a brutal insurgency still competes for headlines with post-election democratic maneuvering. Yesterday a suicide bomber plowed into a line of Iraqi police and Army recruits, killing at least 122 people - the largest death toll in a single attack since Saddam Hussein's government fell to an American invasion force nearly two years ago. And the Palestinian terrorists who blew up a Tel Aviv nightclub last Friday underscored the continuing fragility of what has now been almost two months of steady political and diplomatic progress between Israelis and Palestinians.

Still, this has so far been a year of heartening surprises - each one remarkable in itself, and taken together truly astonishing. The Bush administration is entitled to claim a healthy share of the credit for many of these advances. It boldly proclaimed the cause of Middle East democracy at a time when few in the West thought it had any realistic chance. And for all the negative consequences that flowed from the American invasion of Iraq, there could have been no democratic elections there this January if Saddam Hussein had still been in power. Washington's challenge now lies in finding ways to nurture and encourage these still fragile trends without smothering them in a triumphalist embrace.

Lebanon's political reawakening took a significant new turn yesterday when popular protests brought down the pro-Syrian government of Prime Minister Omar Karami. Syria's occupation of Lebanon, nearly three decades long, started tottering after the Feb. 14 assassination of the country's leading independent politician, the former prime minister Rafik Hariri.

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If Damascus had a hand in this murder, as many Lebanese suspect, it had a boomerang effect on Lebanon's politics. Instead of intimidating critics of Syria's dominant role, it inflamed them. To stem the growing backlash over the Hariri murder, last week Syria announced its intentions to pull back its occupation forces to a region near the border - although without offering any firm timetable. Yesterday, with protests continuing, the pro-Syrian cabinet resigned. Washington, in an unusual alliance with France, continues to press for full compliance with the Security Council's demand for an early and complete Syrian withdrawal. That needs to happen promptly. Once Syria is gone, Hezbollah, which has engaged in international terrorism under Syrian protection, must either confine itself to peaceful political activity or be shut down.

Last weekend's surprise announcement of plans to hold at least nominally competitive presidential elections in Egypt could prove even more historic, although many of the specific details seem likely to be disappointing. Egypt is the Arab world's most populous country and one of its most politically influential. In more than five millenniums of recorded history, it has never seen a truly free and competitive election.

To be realistic, Egypt isn't likely to see one this year either. For all his talk of opening up the process, President Hosni Mubarak, 76, is likely to make sure that no threatening candidates emerge to deny him a fifth six-year term. But after seeing more than eight million Iraqis choose their leaders in January, Egypt's voters, and its increasingly courageous opposition movement, will no longer retreat into sullen hopelessness so readily. The Bush administration has helped foster that feeling of hope for a democratic future by keeping the pressure on Mr. Mubarak. But the real heroes are on-the-ground patriots like Ayman Nour, who founded a new party aptly named Tomorrow last October and is now in jail. If Mr. Mubarak truly wants more open politics, he should free Mr. Nour promptly.

It is similarly encouraging that the terrorists who attacked a Tel Aviv nightclub on Friday, killing five Israelis, have not yet managed to completely scuttle the new peace dynamic between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Israel contends that those terrorists were sponsored by Syria, but its soldiers reported discovering an explosives-filled car in the West Bank yesterday. The good news is that the leaders on both sides did not instantly retreat to familiar corners in angry rejectionism. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the new Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, have proved they can work together to thwart terrorism and deny terrorists an instant veto over progress toward a negotiated peace.

Over the past two decades, as democracies replaced police states across Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America, and a new economic dynamism lifted hundreds of millions of eastern and southern Asia out of poverty and into the middle class, the Middle East stagnated in a perverse time warp that reduced its brightest people to hopelessness or barely contained rage. The wonder is less that a new political restlessness is finally visible, but that it took so long to break through the ice.

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March 4, 2006

Hamas Seems Undeterred by Threat to Cut Aid

By JOEL BRINKLEY

WASHINGTON, March 3 — Six weeks after Hamas's surprising win in the Palestinian parliamentary elections, American and European officials say they are beginning to give up hope that the threat to cut off financial support will prompt the group to moderate its positions, leaving the West with a nearly impossible dilemma as it decides how to respond.

"What to do is not so simple, and we are not even close to having a solid response yet," said Marc Otte, the special European Union representative to the Middle East.

In Moscow on Friday, Khaled Meshal, the Hamas leader, once again said Hamas had no interest in recognizing Israel, and would maintain the informal cease-fire that has been in place for the last year only if Israel refrained from violence.

Asked Friday about the hope, stated often by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, that Hamas would back down from its hard-line stance in the face of the threat of economic insolvency, a senior administration official said, "You never know, but I don't see any indication that it's going to happen." The official requested anonymity under government rules.

Mr. Otte, in a talk here at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, did not even mention the possibility that Hamas would renounce its charter and take a more moderate stance. He is in town for meetings on Capitol Hill and with Bush administration officials, and he left the impression that for the Europeans particularly, the choices are bleak. Mr. Otte and others noted that a cutoff of aid to the Palestinian government would present the United States and Europe with difficult questions.

For example, will the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, with its financing cut off, be able to organize the next election, so that Hamas does not remain in power unchallenged? Will the United States and Europe be held responsible for the probable closure of Palestinian schools, once the money to pay the teachers and administrators is taken away?

Patrick Clawson, deputy director of the Washington Institute, noting that the United States and Europe, the main financiers for the Palestinian Authority, have both said they will continue providing humanitarian aid, predicted that the definition of such aid would be revised. Paying teachers, he said, will "be considered humanitarian aid."

But Mr. Otte disagreed. "It's not so simple to define," he said, because the European legal definition restricts it to "funding for an emergency, like a natural disaster." If aid in various forms is to be provided directly to the Palestinian people, he added, Europe has no structure in place to administer that aside from the Palestinian Authority. "To reconfigure this is going to take time."

Mr. Otte also repeated a concern of both European and American officials. "What happens when one

stops paying salaries to 70,000 security personnel who are there with guns and no one to report to?" he asked.

Europe provides the largest portion of direct aid to the Palestinians; \$600 million was promised last year. Most American aid is either humanitarian or for development projects. The Europeans have not threatened to cut off aid, only to reassess it once the Hamas government takes office. But the United States position is firm. Officials say United States law does not allow the government to provide aid to a terrorist group.

"We have not, do not and will not provide assistance to Hamas, in government or out of government," C. David Welch, assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, told Congress on Thursday. He noted that the Palestinian government had largely complied with the American demand that \$50 million in development aid recently disbursed to the Palestinian Authority be returned.

Some Bush administration officials worry that Europe's open discussion of its misgivings about cutting off aid is giving comfort to Hamas, leading its leaders to hope that some of the financing might continue. "There is the view that the lack of clarity is giving Hamas room to maneuver that we'd rather not let them have," the senior official said.

But Mr. Otte had a warning for the United States, where some officials have said they hope a cutoff of aid will result in the collapse of the Hamas government. "Be careful about making assumptions," he said. "We made assumptions about the Palestinian elections" that proved to be wrong. No one predicted that Hamas would win. "The quick collapse of the Hamas government, we don't know what consequences it would have."

US, Israel 'plot Hamas ouster, Fatah's return'

Plan To Isolate Palestinian Authority, Freeze Funding

By Steve Erlanger

Jerusalem: The United States and Israel are discussing ways to destabilise the Palestinian government so that newly elected Hamas officials will fail and elections will be called again, according to Israeli officials and Western diplomats.

The intention is to starve the Palestinian Authority of money and international connections to the point where, some months from now, its President, Mahmoud Abbas, is compelled to call a new election. The hope is that Palestinians will be so unhappy with life under Hamas that they will return to office a reformed and chastened Fatah movement.

The officials and diplomats, who said this approach was being discussed at the highest levels of the US state department and the Israeli government, spoke on condition of anonymity. They say Hamas will be given a choice: recognise Israel's right to exist, forswear violence and accept previous Palestinian-Israeli agreements as called for by the United Nations and the West, or face isolation and collapse.

"The point is to put this choice on Hamas's shoulders," a senior Western diplomat said. "If they make the wrong choice, all the options lead in a bad direction."

The strategy has many risks, especially given that Hamas will try to secure support from the larger Islamic world, including Syria, Iran and private donors. It will



A Palestinian youth hurls a stone at Israeli soldiers during recent clashes in the West Bank

blame Israel and the US for its troubles, appeal to the world not to punish Palestinians for their democratic choice, point to hardship that a lack of cash will produce and may also resort to a military confrontation with Israel.

The destabilisation plan

centres largely on money. The Palestinian Authority has a monthly cash deficit of some \$60 million to \$70 million after it receives between \$50 million and \$55 million a month from Israel in taxes and customs duties collected by Israel at the borders but owed to the Palestinians.

Israel says it will cut off those payments once Hamas takes power. Also, some aid the Palestinians receive will be stopped or reduced by western governments as Hamas is listed as a terrorist organisation. Israel also controls entrance and exit from the West Bank and Gaza Strip for people and goods, and the currency used in Palestinian territories, the Israeli shekel.

Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has announced that Israel would consider Hamas to be in power the day the new parliament is sworn in: Saturday. So beginning next month, the Palestinian Authority will face a deficit of at least \$110 million a month, which it needs to pay salaries to 140,000 employees, breadwinners for a third of Palestinians. The employment figure includes some 58,000 members of the security forces, most of which are affiliated with the defeated Fatah movement.

If a Hamas government is unable to pay workers, import goods, transfer money and receive significant amounts of outside aid, Mr. Abbas, the president, would have the authority to dissolve parliament and call new elections, the officials say, even though that power is not explicit in the Palestinian basic law. The potential for an economic crisis is real. The Palestinian stock market has already fallen about 20% since the election and the Authority has exhausted its borrowing capacity with local banks. NYT News Service

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Reintroducing Hamas

THERE COULD be more to Russia's invitation to leaders of the Palestinian militant group Hamas to Moscow than meets the eye. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced plans to ask the winners of last month's Palestinian polls over to Moscow for parleys. And now France has indicated its willingness to follow suit. On one hand, this will cause concern and consternation in Israel and elsewhere — which is understandable, given Hamas's credentials as a militant group that routinely uses terrorism and violence as political tools. Besides, its charter is still dedicated to the destruction of Israel. On the other hand, this may encourage more Western capitals to opt for talks with a group that the US and the EU have branded a terrorist outfit.

After all, Hamas did win a democratic election, taking 76 out of the 132 seats in the landmark poll and defeating Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas's ruling Fatah faction. It is likely that the group would go in for an alliance with other parties to form a government, if only for the simple reason that interaction with the international community would be

very difficult if it tried to govern alone. Senior leaders of its political wing now openly speak of reciprocating any Israeli steps towards peace, suggesting a tacit acceptance of the two-State solution at some point. Hamas leaders also appear keen to put the onus on the international community, which indicates a willingness to accept international mediation. While no State would seriously consider dealing with terrorist groups that deny Israel's right to exist, it would be different with a Palestinian Authority that remains committed to these positions, even if it draws parliamentary support from members who won on Hamas tickets.

History shows that responsibilities attached to democratic politics often tame militant ideologies. In fact, by participating in the electoral process, Hamas has left for itself the Hobson's choice of moderating its ideology. For that's the only way it can prevail over voters in any large number. Hamas risks being marginalised if it fails to deliver practical results as it addresses a wide range of constituencies. The new line of thinking in Moscow and Paris probably draws from all this.

Israel, Hamas not for compromise

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: Israel and the Palestinian Islamic group, Hamas, have aired their deep differences on ways to settle their conflict revolving around the status of the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well as the right of war-displaced Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland.

In a television interview, Israel's acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel would not withdraw from three major Israeli settlement blocs in the West Bank, but would be ready to pull out of other areas where most of the Palestinians reside.

"United Jerusalem"

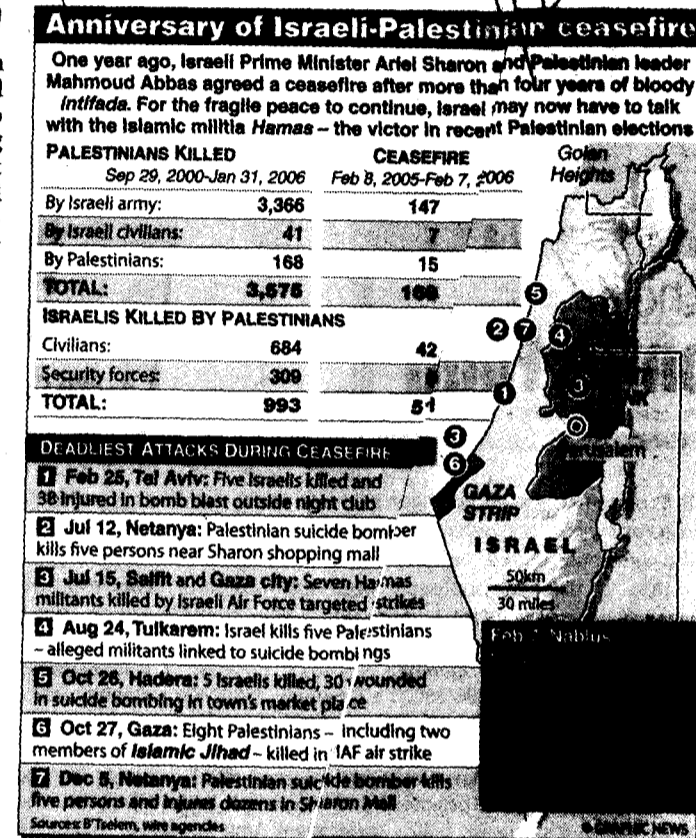
Mr. Olmert's offer, which he wanted to implement if his Kadima party won parliamentary elections, scheduled for March, excluded the key settlements of Ariel, Gush Etzion and Maaleh Adumim, where an estimated 75 per cent of Israeli West Bank settlers resided.

The Ariel bloc was deepest inside the West Bank, and extended to about 17 km.

The other two were suburbs of Jerusalem city. Mr. Olmert also said "united Jerusalem" would be retained, implying that the city's eastern sector, which Palestinians claim as a future capital, would not be given up.

Rejecting the unilateral Israeli plan, the Hamas leader, Khaled Meshaal, said that Israel must conform to borders as they existed before it occupied Palestinian territories in the Arab-Israeli 1967 war.

In return, Hamas could offer a "long-term truce", to allow negotiations, mediated by the international community, that would



result in a political settlement of the conflict.

"Truce would be long-term but limited, because there's a Palestinian reality the international community must deal with. There are those kicked out of their land in 1948, the international community must find a solution for those people."

Despite enormous international pressure including the threat of aid cut-off after it won the Palestinian parliamentary elections on January 25, the Hamas has not shifted its stance of not recognising the state of Israel. Mr. Mesh-

haal, who is based in the Syrian capital Damascus, but is currently in Cairo as part of a Hamas delegation, said his organisation was ready to take a "serious step" but only when Israel recognised the right of Palestinian self-determination.

Hamas leaders have already begun to reject Mr. Olmert's observations. Sheikh Yasser Mansour, a senior Hamas figure, was quoted as saying, "If he (Mr. Olmert) wants to find a solution (to the Israel-Palestinian conflict) he must accept less than what he wants."

02 FEB 2006

THE HINDU

There is a tension in the Islamic world between the desire for democracy and a respect for liberty. How can the West tap it?

How Hamas got its

VOTE BANK



FAREED ZAKARIA

GEORGE W. BUSH is not a man for second thoughts, but even he might have had some recently. Ever since 9/11, Bush has made the promotion of democracy in the Middle East the centrepiece of his foreign policy, and doggedly pushed the issue. Over the last few months, however, this approach has borne strange fruit, culminating in Hamas's victory in Gaza and the West Bank.

Before that, we have watched it strengthen Hizbullah in Lebanon, which (like Hamas) is often described in the West as a terrorist organisation. In Iraq, the policy has brought into office conservative religious parties with their own private militias. In Egypt, it has bolstered the Muslim Brotherhood, one of the oldest fundamentalist organisations in the Arab world, from which Al Qaeda descends. "Democracies replace resentment with hope, respect the rights of their citizens and their neighbors, and join the fight against terror," Bush said last week in his State of the Union address. But is this true of the people coming to power in the Arab world today?

There is a tension in the Islamic world between the desire for democracy and a respect for liberty. (It is a tension that once raged in the West and still exists in pockets today.) This is most apparent in the ongoing fury over the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a small Danish newspaper. The cartoons were offensive and needlessly provocative. Had the paper published racist caricatures of other peoples or religions, it would also have been roundly condemned and perhaps boycotted. But the cartoonist and editors would not have feared for their lives. It is the violence of the response in some



A Hamas rally: If you stifle moderate dissent, guess who reaps the discontent?

ing radicals with fresh ammunition. This is not, however, a wholly convincing case. For one thing, opposition to the Iraq War is not a radical phenomenon in the Middle East, but rather an utterly mainstream one. Almost every government opposed it. Moreover, the rise and fall of Islamic fundamentalism was a broad and deep phenomenon, born over decades. It could hardly reverse itself on the basis of a year's news. Does anyone believe that if there had been no Iraq war, Hamas would have lost? Or that the Danish cartoons would have been published with no response? The political Islamist movement has

usually gain considerable popular support. So they reinvented themselves, emphasising not revolutionary overthrow but peaceful change, not transnational ideology but national reform. They were still protesting the dictators, but now they organised demonstrations in favor of democracy and honest politics.

There were extremist elements, of course, still holding true to the cause of the caliphate, and they broke off to create separate groups like Al Qaeda. (Some of this radicalism remains within the diaspora communities of Europe more strongly than in the Middle East itself.) But it is notable that well before 9/11, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood condemned terrorism directed against the Mubarak regime, and it recently distanced itself even from the tactics of the Iraqi insurgency. It has sought instead to build support for its own social and political programme in Egypt. For its part, not only did Hamas decide to participate in the elections — for the first time — but it campaigned almost entirely on a platform of anti-corruption, social services and assertive nationalism. Only Al Qaeda and

its ilk have condemned any participation in elections, whether by Iraqi Islamist groups or by Hamas.

THIS coming to terms with democracy, however, should not be mistaken for a coming to terms with Western values such as liberalism, tolerance and freedom. The programme that most of these groups espouse is deeply illiberal, involving the reversal of women's rights, second-class citizenship for minorities and confrontation with the West and Israel. The most dramatic example of these trends is in southern Iraq, where Shiite religious parties rule without any checks. Reports abound that civil servants and professors are subjected to religious and political tests, women are placed under strictures never before enforced in Iraq, and all kinds of harmless entertainment are being silenced by vigilantes. When entering the office of Iraq's

prime minister, Ibrahim Jaafari, one now sees women swaddled in veils and gloves, a level of zeal rarely seen elsewhere in the Muslim world.

Some of these forces have gained strength because of a lack of other alternatives. For decades the Middle East has been a political desert. In Iraq, the reason that there are no countervailing liberal parties is that Saddam Hussein destroyed them. He could not completely crush mosque-based groups and, by the end of his reign, he actually used them to shore up his own legitimacy. In much of the Muslim world Islam became the language of political opposition because it was the only language that could not be censored. This pattern, of dictators using religious groups to destroy the secular opposition, played itself out in virtually every Arab country, and often beyond. It was the method by which Pakistan's General Zia ul-Haq maintained his own dictatorship in the 1980s, creating a far stronger fundamentalist movement than that country had ever known.

The broader reason for the rise of Islamic politics has been the failure of secu-

lar politics. Secularism exists in the Middle East. It is embodied by Saddam Hussein and Muammar Kaddafi and Hosni Mubarak and Yasser Arafat. Arabs believe that they have tried Western-style politics and it has brought them tyranny and stagnation. They feel that they got a bastardised version of the West and that perhaps the West was not the right model for them anyway. Islamic fundamentalism plays deeply to these feelings. It evokes authenticity, pride, cultural assertiveness and defiance. These ideas have been powerful sources of national identity throughout history and remain so, especially in an age of globalised economics and American power. In face of the powerlessness, alienation and confusion that the modern world breeds, these groups say simply, "Islam is the solution."

Inevitably we have to ask ourselves what to do about these movements that are ris-

ing to power. The first task is surely to understand them — understand that they thrive on pride and a search for authenticity. These forces play themselves out in complex ways. It is obvious by now that the US — and Europe as well — understand countries like Iraq and Iran very little. In Iraq, the United States overturned old social structures and governing patterns with little thought as to what would replace them. We believed that democracy and freedom would solve the problems of disorder, division and dysfunction.

OR CONSIDER Iran. Many Americans had become convinced that the vast majority of Iranians hated their regime and were trying desperately to overthrow it; all we needed to do was help them foment a revolution. There's little doubt that the regime is brutal and unpopular. But it also appears to have some basis of support, in mosques, patronage systems and poorer parts of the country. And those who do not support it are not automatically Western liberals. After all, there was an election in Iran and, despite low turnout, the eventual vote was free and secret. (Back when the winner of Iranian elections was a liberal, Mohammed Khatami, people often cited the vote as proof that the fundamentalists were failing.) Five candidates took part in the most recent race. The pro-Western liberal came in fifth; the conservative West-basher came in first.

My own guess, and it is just a guess, is that some Iranians — not a majority, but not a tiny minority, either — accept their current regime. This is partly because of its ideology and patronage politics, and partly because of general inertia. (We have only to look at Iraq to see that Shiite religious figures do have some hold on their populations.) Add to this an apparatus of repression and \$60-a-barrel oil

their appeal. If politics is more open, these groups may or may not moderate themselves, but they will surely lose some of that mystical allure they now have. The martyrs will become mayors, which is quite a fall in status.

But to accept these forces is not to celebrate them. It is important that religious intolerance and antimodern attitudes not be treated as cultural variations that must be respected. Whether it is Hindu intolerance in India, anti-Semitism in Europe or Muslim bigotry in Saudi Arabia, the modern world rightly condemns them all as violating universal values. Recent months have only highlighted that promoting democracy and promoting liberty in the Middle East are separate projects. Both have their place. But the latter — promoting the forces of political, economic and social liberty — is the more difficult and more important task. And unless we succeed at it, we will achieve a series of nasty democratic outcomes, as we are beginning to in so many of these places.

THIS fight is not one the fundamentalists are destined to win. The forces of liberalism have been stymied in the Middle East for decades. They need help. Recall that in Europe for much of the last 100 years, when liberal democrats were not given assistance, nationalists and communists often triumphed through the democratic processes.

Above all, the forces of moderation thrive in an atmosphere of success. Two Muslim societies in which there is little extremism are Turkey and Malaysia. Both are open politically and thriving economically. Compare Pakistan today — growing at 8 per cent a year — with General Zia's country, and you can see why, for all the noise, fundamentalism there is waning. If you are comfortable with the modern world, you

Islamic fundamentalism was supposed to be on the wane. Five years ago the best scholars of the phenomenon were writing books with titles like 'The Failure of Political Islam'. And yet one sees political Islam on the march across the Middle East today. Were we all wrong? Has Islamic fundamentalism gotten a second wind?

parts of the Muslim world that suggests a rejection of the ideas of tolerance and freedom of expression that are at the heart of modern Western societies.

Why are all these strains rising now? Islamic fundamentalism was supposed to be on the wane. Five years ago the best scholars of the phenomenon were writing books with titles like *The Failure of Political Islam*. Observers pointed to the exhaustion of the Iranian revolution, the ebbing of support for radical groups from Algeria to Egypt to Saudi Arabia. And yet one sees political Islam on the march across the Middle East today. Were we all wrong? Has Islamic fundamentalism gotten a second wind?

There are those who argue that the collapse of the Arab-Israeli peace process, the war on terror, and the bloodshed in Afghanistan and Iraq have all contributed to the idea that Islam is under siege — provid-

changed over the last 15 years. Through much of the 1980s and 1990s, Islamic fundamentalists had revolutionary aims. They sought the violent overthrow of Western-allied regimes to have them replaced with Islamic states. This desire for Islamic states and not Western-style democracies was at the core of their message. Often transnational in their objectives, they spoke in global terms. But it turned out that the appeal of this ideology was limited. People in Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and countless other places rejected it; in fact, they grudgingly accepted the dictatorships they lived under rather than support violent extremism. In this sense, political Islam did fail.

But over time, many of the Islamists recognised this reality and began changing their programme. They came to realise that shorn of violent overthrow, revolution and social chaos, their ideas could ac-

The forces of moderation thrive in an atmosphere of success. Compare Pakistan today — growing at 8 per cent a year — with General Zia's country, and you can see why, for all the noise, fundamentalism there is waning. If you are comfortable with the modern world, you are less likely to want to blow it up

and you have a regime that has many ways to stay in power. President Ahmadinejad understands these forces. He emphasises in his daily television appearances not Islamic dogma but poverty alleviation, subsidies, anti-corruption projects and, above all, nationalism in the form of the nuclear programme. Ahmadinejad may be a mystic, but most of his actions are those of a populist, using the forces that will work to keep him in power. This picture of Iran, gray and complex, is much less satisfying than the black-and-white caricature. But it might be closer to the truth.

Elections have not created political Islam in the Middle East. They have codified a reality that existed anyway. Hamas was already a major player to be reckoned with in Gaza. The Muslim Brotherhood is popular in Egypt, whether or not Hosni Mubarak holds real elections. In fact, the more they are suppressed, the greater

are less likely to want to blow it up.

There are better and worse ways to handle radical Islam. We should not feed the fury that helps them win adherents.

Give Bush his due. He has correctly and powerfully argued that blind assistance to the dictatorships of the Middle East was a policy that was producing repression and instability. But he has not yet found a way to genuinely assist in the promotion of political, economic and social reforms in the region. A large part of the problem is that the US — and the West in general — are not seen as genuine well-wishers and allies of the peoples of these countries in their aspirations for a better life. We have stopped partnering with repressive Middle Eastern regimes, but we have not yet managed to forge a real partnership with Middle Eastern societies.

Newsweek

Russia to urge Hamas to recognise Israel

REUTERS

GAZA, FEBRUARY 16

PALESTINIAN Islamic militant group Hamas has received an official invitation for talks in Russia, a leader of a faction said in the Gaza Strip on Thursday.

Khalil Abu Laila said the invitation was sent to Hamas politburo Chief Khaled Me-shaal, who live in exile and that a date for the visit would be agreed later.

Hamas had already said it would accept Moscow's invitation, which has upset Israel and the US by challenging their campaign to isolate the group unless it recognises the Jewish state's right to exist.

The Russian initiative has seemed to open a crack in the Quartet of Middle East mediators—including the UN, EU and Washington.

But Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday that Moscow agreed that Hamas must commit to seeking peace with Israel to win international acceptance.

"We will work toward Hamas accepting the Quar-



Khalil Abu Laila

tet's positions. This is not just the Quartet's opinion but also that of the majority of nations, including Arab nations,' he said after talks with EU leaders in Vienna.

No transit for Hamas PM

JERUSALEM: Israel will prevent any Palestinian premier from Hamas from travelling from the Gaza Strip to the seat of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, a senior official said today.

"Those who belong to a terrorist movement that advocates the destruction of the state of Israel cannot claim any privilege concerning their freedom of movement," an official in the Prime Minister's office said in a statement. —AFP

US House votes to halt Palestine aid

WASHINGTON: The House of Representatives voted to withhold direct US foreign aid from the Palestinian Authority unless Hamas revokes its call for the destruction of Israel. The House approved the measure by 418 to one on Wednesday. The Senate is yet to vote.

The House measure states that "no US assistance should be provided directly to the Palestinian Authority if any representative political party holding a majority of parliamentary seats within the Palestinian Authority maintains a position calling for the destruction of Israel."

House majority leader John Boehner on Wednesday said, "The US is encouraged by the free, and fair elections held by the Palestinian people, and we will continue to support their democratic reform efforts," adding "the US does not and will not support terrorist organisations." —AFP

16 FEB 2006

INDIA EXPRESS

SANCTIONS ■ Funding and travel curbs to weaken new govt Israel to isolate Hamas

JOSEF FEDERMAN

JERUSALEM, FEBRUARY 17

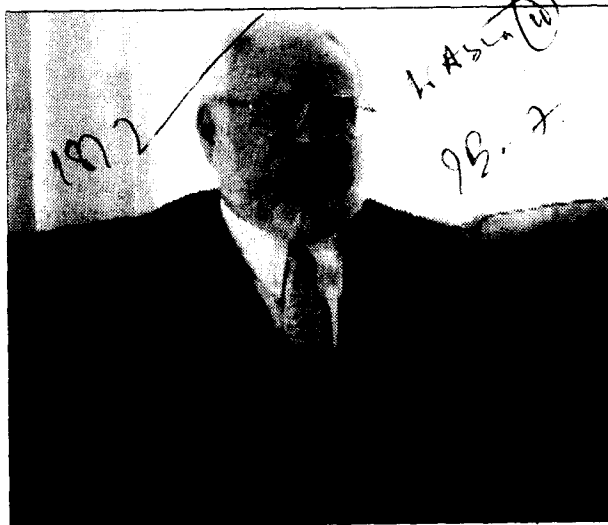
ISRAEL will clamp down on Palestinian areas, cutting the West Bank off from Gaza, banning Gaza workers from Israel and halting funding, in a campaign to weaken Hamas as it assumes power.

The measures emerged from a security meeting on Thursday, and acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is expected to approve them.

Israel's Cabinet is to approve them on Sunday and put them into effect immediately the day after the new, Hamas led Palestinian parliament takes office.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas will demand that Hamas publicly accept his goal of reaching a peace deal with Israel and recognise past agreements with the Jewish state, officials said.

Since Hamas won Palestinian legislative elections last month, Israeli leaders have taken a tough line against the group. They have rallied international opposition to Hamas and said there will be no dealings with the militants until they change their ways.



Newly appointed Palestinian Parliamentary speaker Aziz Dweik in Ramallah, will be sworn in on Saturday. Reuters

On Thursday, senior Israeli officials approved a series of tough measures aimed at crushing the Gaza Strip's already teetering economy.

"The swearing-in of the Palestinian parliament on Saturday rings a gong for us," Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said, according to meeting participants. "A Hamas government will mean an authority of terror and murder."

Israel will bar Gaza labourers, stripping about 4,000 Palestinian families of their main source of income, and halt the movement of Pales-

tinian officials between the West Bank and Gaza.

Israel will consider more economic sanctions, including restrictions on Palestinian exports, the officials said.

Blocking access to Israel would be devastating for Gaza. The Israeli market is the largest for the impoverished coastal strip, and most of Gaza's exports to the rest of the world go through Israel.

Israel is likely to halt monthly transfers of about \$50 million in taxes and customs duties it collects for the Palestinians. The transfers are

crucial for the Palestinian Authority to pay salaries to 140,000 government workers. Israel has said humanitarian aid would continue.

Mushir al-Masri, an incoming Hamas lawmaker, condemned the Israeli threats.

"This is collective punishment on our people," he said. "The world should realise that more pressure on the Palestinian people will create more tension and everyone is going to be a loser, including Israel."

Israeli critics warn that the measures could plunge ordinary Palestinians even deeper into poverty, encouraging extremism and violence.

Meanwhile Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said today that Moscow would urge Hamas to join the Middle East peace process within the Quartet.

"We hope that this will allow us to continue to move forward toward a situation where Hamas will become a legitimate and useful component of the Middle East peace process," Lavrov said.

Lavrov said that Russia was considering the composition of the talks that are to meet in Moscow and waiting for proposals from Hamas.

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Hamas dominated Parliament sworn in

Islamic group rejects Abbas' call, reiterates commitment to resistance

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: The Palestinian Parliament dominated by the Islamic group Hamas has been sworn in amid uncertainty over its relationship with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and U.S.-backed Israel.

At the inaugural session of Parliament in Ramallah, which was video linked with lawmakers in Gaza who were stranded because of Israeli travel restrictions, Mr. Abbas invited the Hamas to form a Government. Hamas leader Ismail Haniya is expected to become Prime Minister.

"Since Hamas won a majority in the Legislative Council, the election results created a new political given

and as a result will be charged with forming the new government," he said. He pledged to cooperate with Hamas, which had routed his Fatah Party in the January 25 parliamentary polls.

Oslo accords

Mr. Abbas pointed out that there could not be any deviation from the Oslo accords, under which the Palestinians have been entitled to exercise internal autonomy in designated areas.

"We have not and will not accept any questioning of the accords' legitimacy," Mr. Abbas said, adding they had become a "political reality to which we remain committed."

Mr. Abbas also said the Government would have to accept negotia-

tions as the "sole" basis for achieving Palestinian goals — a move implying that Hamas must shun violence.

"We, as presidency and Government, will continue our commitment to the negotiating process as the sole political, pragmatic and strategic choice through which we reap the fruit of our struggle and sacrifices over long decades," he said. He is expected to handover a formal letter to Mr. Haniya where he is likely to spell out the Government's policies, including acceptance of the two state solution under the U.S. backed "road map," a recognition of Israel's right to exist, and pursuit of a non-violent struggle against Israeli occupation.

But soon after Mr. Abbas' ad-

dress, Hamas leadership has rejected his call. "Hamas rejects negotiations with the occupation under the current circumstances, while occupation and aggression continues," said the group's spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri. "We re-emphasise the commitment to resistance as a natural right of our people."

Hamas has earlier indicated its inclination to have a long-term truce agreement with Israel, but has opposed international pressure on it to disarm.

Under Palestinian law, Hamas would be in charge of some of the Palestinian security forces, but decisions related to appointments and promotions would have to be filtered through the President's office.

Rejects Abbas Call To Pursue Peace-making Efforts With Israel

Hamas takes over Palestinian Parliament

Wafa Amir

RAMALLAH 18 FEBRUARY

ISLAMIST group Hamas took over as the dominant party in the Palestinian parliament today and swiftly rejected President Mahmoud Abbas's call to pursue his peace-making efforts with Israel. The swearing-in of the parliament, elected last month, paves the way for Hamas to form a government that is on a potential collision course with Abbas and faces a boycott by major powers unless it renounces violence and its vow to destroy Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel is considering tougher restrictions on Palestinians as a way to pressure the government to be led by Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, seen by Palestinians as a relative pragmatist. In a speech at the opening of parliament, Abbas said the new government must recognise past peace deals with Israel and commit itself to pursuing statehood through talks, but he stopped short of setting conditions for forming a cabinet. "The presidency and the government will continue to respect our commitment to the negotiations as a strategic, pragmatic political choice," Abbas said. "At the same time, we must continue to strengthen and develop forms of popular resistance of a peaceful nature."

Abbas's words won applause from Fatah lawmakers but not from Hamas members. "We were elected on a different political agenda," said Haniyeh as sessions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, joined by video link, broke off for Muslim prayers.

One newly elected Hamas lawmaker

whether to impose tough new measures against the Hamas-led government, possibly banning labourers and goods from entering Israel from Gaza.

Israeli officials said a decision would only be taken once Hamas assumes control of parliament and sets out its policies. "Our intention is to make it clear that Israel will not be dealing with a terrorist organisation called Hamas," said Gideon Meir, a senior official of Israel's Foreign Ministry. Abbas said any new restrictions on the Palestinians would amount to "blackmail".

The United States, which has asked the Palestinian Authority to return \$50 million in aid to prevent it from reaching Hamas, cautioned Israel against taking any measures that would make life difficult for the Palestinians. But Washington, and its allies have urged nations to boycott Hamas, which has masterminded nearly 60 suicide attacks against Israel since a 2000 uprising, unless it disarms and recognises the Jewish state and past peace deals. Neither the Palestinians nor Israel have met commitments under a US-backed peace "road map" which demands a freeze in expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and a start to the disarming of militant groups.

Hamas, which has largely adhered to a truce for the past years, has refused to give up its weapons. In a sign of the internal unrest that a Hamas-led govt will also have to deal with, about 400 gunmen from a Fatah militia protested outside the hall where parliamentarians met in Gaza. They were demanding unpaid salaries — Reuters



Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' apparent choice for Prime Minister, centre, greets lawmakers inside the Palestinian parliament in Gaza City on Saturday

prayed on the floor of the building in Gaza. Hamas won control of the Palestinian Legislative Council in a Jan. 25 parliamentary election, beating Abbas's long-dominant Fatah which is widely accused of corruption and mismanagement. Hamas won 74 seats in the 132-member parliament. Hamas boycotted the previous parliamentary election in 1996 because it rejected interim peace accords with Israel. It says those deals are now dead and it will not be bound by

them.

Hamas officials have said the group will soon present an initiative to parliament including a proposal for a long-term truce with Israel if it withdraws from land captured in the 1967 Middle East war and which Palestinians seek for a state. But the group has repeatedly said it will not rescind its call for Israel's destruction or recognise the Jewish state.

Israel's cabinet will consider on Sunday

Hamas to form Government

Fatah to join as junior partner in Palestinian Cabinet led by Haniyeh

GAZA CITY: Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas formally tasked Hamas's Ismail Haniyeh on Wednesday with forming a Government after the Islamists' landslide victory in an election last month, an official said.

Mr. Abbas handed over a letter to Mr. Haniyeh formally charging him with the task at his Gaza City office, an arrangement agreed between the moderate Palestinian Authority President and leaders of the radical movement late on Tuesday.

"I received the nomination letter from President Abu Mazen [Abbas]. The Hamas leadership will examine the contents of this letter before soon giving a definitive response to the President," Mr. Haniya said.

Tentative agreement

Fatah gave its tentative agreement on Wednesday to an offer by its old rival Hamas to become the junior partner in a coalition government after its crushing defeat in last month's Palestinian election.

The head of Fatah's bloc in Parliament told reporters after talks with Hamas leaders that the faction had agreed in principle to joining the Cabinet, though the two sides still needed to reach an accord on a common programme. — AFP

Ismail Haniyeh - Palestinian Prime Minister

■ **1962:** Born to poor refugee family at *Shatil* refugee camp, Gaza

■ **1983:** Attends *Islamic University of Gaza*, becomes activist in *Islamic Student Bloc*, precursor to *Hamas*

■ **1987:** Graduates with BA in Arabic literature. Haniyeh is detained three times during mass uprising - *Intifada* - against Israeli occupation

■ **1988:** Imprisoned for six months

■ **1989:** Imprisoned for three years for his role in Hamas resistance

■ **1992:** Deported to southern Lebanon along with more than 400 other Hamas activists

■ **1993:** Returns to Gaza - appointed Dean of Islamic University

■ **1997:** Appointed head of office of *Sheikh Ahmed Yassin* - Hamas' spiritual leader

■ **Sep 2000:** *Al-Aqsa Intifada* begins. Conflict claims almost 1,000 Israel and more than 3,500 Palestinian lives

■ **2001:**

■ **2003:** Haniya and Yassin survive assassination attempt by Israel

■ **Apr 2004:** *Rantisi* assassinated

■ **Jan 25, 2006:** Hamas List victory in *Palestinian legislative election*

■ **Feb 16:** Hamas selects Haniyeh as its choice for Prime Minister in meeting with Palestinian President *Mahmoud Abbas*

■ **Feb 21:** Abbas presents Haniyeh with official letter of appointment, calling on Hamas to accept existing agreements with Israel. **Haniyeh has five weeks to form a cabinet**

Picture: Associated Press

© GRAPHIC NEWS

2006 THE HINDU

Hamas & the politics of hate

George Bush has, for five years, spoken in exalted terms about bringing democracy to the world, particularly to the "Middle East". The Palestinians have spoken, in what observers agree, was a free and fair election. They have, contrary to all expectations, voted for Hamas, an Islamist movement which rejects all negotiation with Israel and is committed to its destruction. Hamas gained 60 per cent of the 132 seats in parliament of the Palestinian Authority.

It has been outlawed as a "terrorist organization" by the USA and the European Union. Now, it appears, the democratic prospectus, the "solution" to the multiple problems of West Asia, is no solution at all. Democracy is not enough. Free expression of the will of the people does not suffice to bring them into the fold of a curiously shifting entity called "the international community", an ad hoc alliance which serves the Western powers as a more convenient and flexible notion than the lumbering bureaucracy of the UN.

Tony Blair has spelled out the dilemma for the victors of Hamas, who appeared to be as astonished as anyone else at their overwhelming success over Fatah. Hamas must choose between democracy and violence, stated Blair, disingenuously, since democracy and violence co-exist well indeed in those other recent models of Western-induced democracy, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The widely recognised presence in the democratic government of Afghanistan of drug barons, war lords and rulers of regional fiefdoms does nothing to impair the purity of the new administration which the USA has brought to that country. Similarly, in Iraq, the sectarian split, which has been exacerbated by the insurgency, and is now institutionalised by election of a Shia majority, is also promoted by the USA as part of the irresistible march of democracy. But the Palestinians, who voted in accordance with all the rules of the universal electoral game as preached by the Western powers, have created an unparalleled crisis. In doing so, they have called the bluff of the slogans tirelessly reiterated by all the solemn enunciators of the sanctity of democracy.

There are, of course, unique circumstances in which the election took place. The vote for Hamas was a vote against the rulers of a venal and corrupt administration led by Hamas, stories of whose misappropriation of funds intended for the Palestinian people have exacerbated daily discontent in the Palestinian territories.

The fact that Hamas has been providing welfare and health care to the people in the absence of a functioning formal system, also undoubtedly acted in favour of the Islamists.

But the question remains: if the Palestinians voted for a party which has, as a basic tenet of its belief, the wiping out of Israel, a member- state of the UN,

what legitimacy can be accorded it? Does the triumph of Hamas turn all the Palestinians who voted for it into terrorists?

The real question ought to be, not the threat to the existence of Israel, which is assured by the most powerful states of the world, and whose military power is unrivalled in the region. There is no question that any state which seriously attempted to eliminate, or even gravely impair, the state of Israel, could instantly expect itself

NEW VISTAS JEREMY SEABROOK

the Palestinians. The circumscribed Palestinian Authority ~ surely a contradiction in terms ~ proved itself powerless to "rein in" its militants. Israel imposed impossible conditions on an entity which did not have the power to comply with them. This shows the disingenuous determination of Israel to project itself, with all its military and economic power, uniquely as the injured party, while attributing a fictional destructive capacity to its impotent adversary.



THE VEIL AND THE VOTE: A woman makes her way through flags of various Palestinian factions contesting the Gaza election as she enters a polling station. AFP

to be annihilated.

The existence of Israel is surely less pertinent in the victory of Hamas than the non-existence of Palestine. It should also be recalled that the state of Israel was also born in terror, as the anti-British violence of the 1930s and 1940s, when Britain's "mandate" was being resisted by the militants of the Irgun Zvai Leumi.

The Palestinians, scattered and stateless, are in no position to destroy Israel; but Israel is certainly in a position to deny the autonomy and sovereignty of

by the outcome of its own "democratic" sermons, the West has responded with its ultimate supra-political ~ weapon, namely the threat to withdraw funding from the Palestinians, by the grace of which the sketch of a Palestinian administration continues to exist, albeit in squalor, impoverishment and perpetual insecurity.

With more than 70 per cent of Palestinians in poverty and an unemployment rate of about 35 per cent, the Hamas victory is said to have "worsened" the financial crisis in an administration which depends for almost two-thirds of its budget on overseas aid. The powers of the world thereby demonstrate another truth, which everyone knows ~ that there is a determinant upon the lives of people which exists above and beyond whatever political choices they make; and that is the supreme, celestial and invincible power of money.

By withholding humanitarian assistance to some of the most wretched people on earth, the West hopes to bring the government of the Palestinian Authority to its own reason. In other words, where democracy fails to deliver the result sympathetic to the lords of the earth, simple blackmail must be resorted to.

Some commentators have looked for hope in the spaces between rhetoric and reality. Hamas has maintained a year-long truce in its attacks on Israel. It has been suggested that Hamas may set up a government of independents and technologists rather than of militant ideologues. It may not be the wisest policy of the "Quartet" ~ the USA, UN, EU and Russia ~ to insist on recantation by Hamas before a judgment is made on its capacity for pragmatism.

Nothing that has happened immediately threatens the right of Israel to exist, in spite of the intemperate and ill-judged opinions of that other pseudo-democratic figure, the President of Iran. Indeed, Ahmedinejad and his denial of the Holocaust is himself a consequence of, and response to, the actions of the West in collusion with Israel ~ hypocrisy over a ghostly and impalpable "peace process" and the invasion of Iraq. The coming to power of Hamas is part of the worldwide growth of ideologies of transcendence, which flourish only when all secular alternatives have been exhausted.

The indefinite and assured safety of Israel will be guaranteed only by the indefinite and assured safety of the Palestinians in their own state; surely a proposition not so unthinkable as to throw the whole of what calls itself the civilised world into such agitated confusion.

(The author lives in Britain. He has written plays for the stage, TV and radio, made TV documentaries, published more than 30 books and contributed to leading journals around the world.)
email:yrb63@dial.pipex.com

Hamas will not recognise Israel

STEVEN Erlanger
Jerusalem, January 29

THE EXILED political head of the radical Islamic group Hamas said on Sunday morning in Damascus, Syria, that the group would not "submit to pressure to recognise Israel, because the occupation is illegitimate and we will not abandon our rights," nor would it disarm, but would work to create a unified Palestinian army.

But the leader, Khaled Meshaal, also said Hamas would adopt "a very realistic approach" toward governing the Palestinian Authority and would work with the Fatah president, Mahmud Abbas, on an acceptable political programme.

Resistance, he insisted, is a legitimate



Meshaal in Damascus on Saturday.
AFP

Olmert lobbies for boycott

Israel's interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared on Sunday that his government would boycott a Palestinian government that includes Hamas and he urged other countries to do the same. He said he had spoken to Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac, Hosni Mubarak, Jordan's King Abdullah and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on the matter.

Reuters, Jerusalem

right that Hamas would "practice and protect", and he defended attacks on Israeli civilians, which included many suicide bombings until a cease-fire nearly a year ago.

Meshaal said Hamas was "ready to work with Europe and even the United States if they wish."

During the campaign, Hamas leaders made statements representing a range of responses about the possibility of negotiating with Israel, extending the current cease-fire and declaring a long-term truce, as long as Israel pulled back to its 1967 boundaries, including the ceding of East Jerusalem.

The group's election platform did not repeat its direct calls for the destruction of the state of Israel.

But arguing against any fundamental changes are Hamas's deeply held religious views, as expressed in its charter, sermons and election platform.

The New York Times

Nepal King invents 'democracy', promotes it

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU JANUARY 29

IT'S almost been an ingenious model of election that the royal regime has invented and vowed to implement. Candidates have filed 'nominations' without their knowing it, and those who know that they are candidates are not being able to go out for the campaign.

Yet, the regime under direct leadership and supervision of King Gyanendra is determined to hold elections for municipal elections on February 8 ignoring appeal from political parties and the International community including the European Union,



King Gyanendra

US and India.

Dhan Kumar Neupane, a housewife discovered that she was candidate for the post of chairperson for ward no 14 under Kathamandumunicipal body. Her husband rescued her on Saturday-the last date for withdrawal of nomination

Nepal to cancel some local polls

KATHMANDU: Hundreds of candidates for Nepal's first elections since 1999 have pulled out, afraid of reprisals from Maoist rebels, forcing the cancellation of polling in some areas, the Election Commission said on Sunday. It said voting would go ahead as planned on February 8 only in 36 of 58 municipalities. In the remaining 22, elections will not be held either because there are no candidates or those remaining have been declared elected unopposed. After 647 candidates pulled out, only 3,007 remained to contest 4,146 seats, the Commission said. "This means there will be elections only in 36 municipalities. Voting in 22 municipalities will not be held either because there are no candidates or some had been declared elected unopposed," spokesman Tej Muni Bajracharya said. —Reuters

by protesting in front of the local election office. It was a hard time for the couple to convince the commission officials that she can not be forced to contest election against will. The alliance of seven pro-democracy parties has not only

boycotted the election, but its most prominent leader, G P Koirala, has also appealed to the government officials not to cooperate with the Government.

The Chief Justice, Dilip Kumar Poudel turned down commission's request to de-

pute officials from the judicial services. While the Maoist rebels issued an ultimatum on Saturday that the candidates who would not withdraw by Tuesday would be awarded 'most stringent' punishment which means 'execution'.

Government has shut-down colleges and universities for fear of organised protest until the voting is over.

There are reports from half a dozen municipalities that the candidates were not allowed to withdraw nomination. A large number of them have been kept in the army, para-military and police barracks without family members, relatives and party members being given access to

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Israel plays funds card

Associated Press

JERUSALEM, Jan. 29. — Israeli officials on Sunday suggested the government could delay the monthly transfer of millions of dollars to the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority while it reconsiders relations with the Palestinians after Hamas' victory in legislative elections.

Israel every month transfers an average of 250 million shekels (\$54 million, or euro44 million) to the Palestinians each month.

The money is collected from taxes from Palestinians workers in Israel, and from customs and duties collected at Israeli-controlled border crossings.

Israel has in the past held up the transfers during intense fighting. And each time it has been, saying that it

did not want the money to go to terrorists. The Israeli Cabinet discussed the matter Sunday but did not make a final decision on whether to make the next transfer, scheduled Thursday.

A meeting participant said the transfer date is not set in stone and Israel could hold up the funds until it becomes clear how Hamas' victory will affect Palestinian policy.

The official said on condition of anonymity since he was not authorised to speak to the media on matters such as these. Hamas' charter calls for Israel's destruction and the group has carried out deadly suicide bombings in Israel. The most important priority for Israel now is to make the correct decision. Especially regarding the funds, not necessarily to make the payment on time, the official said.

THE STATESMAN

30 JAN 2006

Despite the hardline on Israel, various Hamas officials have spoken differently

On Israel, Hamas a house divided?

STEVENERLANGER

JERUSALEM, JANUARY 29

THE exiled political head of Hamas, Khaled Meshal, said in Damascus on Saturday that the group will adopt "a very realistic approach" toward governing the Palestinian Authority.

But he also added that Hamas will not "submit to pressure to recognize Israel," nor would it disarm, but would work to create a unified Palestinian army. But he also added that Hamas was "ready to work with Europe and even the United States if they wish."

The Meshal news conference was a good example of the mixture of messages coming from Hamas.

During the campaign, Hamas leaders made statements about the possibility of negotiating with Israel, extending the current ceasefire and declaring a long-term truce, as long as Israel pulled back to its 1967 boundaries.

But arguing against any fundamental changes are Hamas's deeply held religious views, as expressed in its charter, sermons and election platform.

Those views suggest that the kind of transformation that the secular PLO took 25 years to make will be highly unlikely for a fundamentalist religious organization that regards all Israeli territory as irrevocably Muslim land.

So how committed is Hamas to its stated positions?

"It's a revolutionary situation," said Yossi Alpher, co-editor of bitterlemons.org, an Israeli-Palestinian journal. "This is the first time any Islamic group has been elected to run an Arab polity, and there are no real precedents... I think we have to take Hamas at its words and assume that as Islamists, they have some core beliefs that won't change."

The most fundamental of those beliefs, says Hisham

Ahmed, a political scientist at Birzeit University in Ramallah and a student of Hamas, is that the entire land of Palestine belongs to God and is Muslim holy land.

The 9,000-word Hamas charter, written in 1988, is explicit about the struggle for Palestine as a religious obligation. It describes the land as a *wafq* or endowment. It portrays the Jews as evil, citing an anti-Semitic version of history going back to the Crusades.

Mokhaimer Abu Sada, a political scientist at Al Azhar University in Gaza, says he believes that "Hamas has already moderated its stance toward Israel," pointing to its election platform.

"Hamas is a very coherent and disciplined organization, but that doesn't mean there's a consensus in the leadership."

Even when its founder, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, was alive, he said, "there were hard-liners and pragmatists."

Sada believes the pragmatists will eventually win.

Various Hamas officials have spoken differently about talks with Israel, and some of their comments were collected and translated by the Middle East Media Research Institute. Even the two most prominent leaders in Gaza, Mahmoud Zahar and Ismail Haniya, have had slightly different tones.

Zahar is normally harder-line, closest to Meshal in Damascus, while Haniya, who led the Hamas list and could be prime minister, takes a slightly softer tone, and the jailed Hamas leader in the West Bank, Sheik Hussein Youssef, is softer still.

Meshal rules out negotiating with Israel entirely. Haniya says that negotiations are "not on the Hamas agenda, since past negotiations have been unsuccessful."

But Zahar said, "There is no prohibition on negotiating

with Israel, but the political crime is to sit with the Israelis, exchange smile and say there is progress, when in reality there is not progress."

Hamas also appears willing, on the evidence of Hamas mayors elected in big towns like Qalqilya, Nablus and Deir al Baleh, to talk to lower-level Israeli officials from the army or the electricity company about needed services to Palestinian constituents.

But no Hamas leader or candidate is on record as sanctioning a permanent recognition of Israel's right to exist side by side with an independent Palestinian state, which has been the cornerstone assumption of peace negotiations since the Oslo accords in 1993.

As Zahar also said, "We do not recognize the Israeli enemy, nor his right to be our neighbour, nor to stay, nor his ownership of any land."

The New York Times

INDIAN EXPRESS

30 JAN 2006

Now the real challenge for Hamas

Palestine's majority party must swap terrorism for political strategies. Then perhaps real progress can be made towards peace.

Will Hutton

IT IS a decisive moment in the Middle East. Hamas, victor in the Palestinian elections, may turn out to be Islamic variants of the African National Congress or Sinn Fein, the terrorists who negotiated the only and obvious peace settlement. Or this victory may point to a new era of violence, the despair of the Palestinians legitimising a new wave of terror.

Islamic fundamentalism, the ideology of terrorist suicide bombing and the passionate sense of Palestinian injustice is a lethal combination and Hamas is its most obvious expression. To suppose that Hamas can drop its commitment to liberating all of Palestine and resisting Zionism's claims to the last inch to suppose the impossible. Now that its stance has been validated by voters, perhaps nothing can be expected except violence and political impasse.

My hunch is that we can expect better and that Hamas will try to move away from terrorism. For while it may have earned its

place in Palestinian regard through its uncompromising role in the *intifadas*, it has to do something with the political capital it has won. The decision last summer to participate in elections for a legislative council that was created by the Oslo accords it once fiercely opposed was itself a straw in the wind. Hamas always was as much apolitical as a religious organisation and its political dimension was there for all to see. Now it has won, it is locked in a political, rather than terrorist, dynamic.

Justifying terrorism as a general principle is impossible. There are acts of terrorism which have had desirable consequences, such as the end of apartheid in South Africa. But that is no more than our acceptance of *realpolitik*, reflecting the side we are on. Palestinian resistance to cruel occupation and the confiscation of their land is understandable, but that does not mean it can shelter under a general moral principle justifying terrorism. The only principle available to justify terrorism is that the consequences of its actions justify the vio-

lent means. But if the terrorist has not subjected his or her intentions to any kind of scrutiny, participation or vote by the people for whom he or she is acting, then there is no escaping that the decision belongs in the same category as murder.

This is even true if the act of terrorism is to try and right a great wrong, which is what Hamas would claim.

This is why Hamas' election victory is so significant. The movement cannot dodge the fact that, as the new majority party, its morality is no longer its own. The Palestinians may agree that they should resist Israel with violence, but this will now become an act of war rather than a clandestine act of terrorism. And Hamas does not want war.

Extraordinary change

Already this reality is forcing extraordinary change. Two senior Hamas leaders have indicated that their charter, which calls for Israel to retreat to pre-1948 borders, could be amended. It has accepted that it cannot impose the *sharia* law. Furthermore, Pal-

estine possesses the embryonic institutions of a genuine democracy. The worst mistake that the international community could commit is to refuse all dealings with Hamas. This is a moment when the west must commit even more aggressively to support and strengthen Palestine's fragile democratic and welfare infrastructure. It is far too early to talk of progress on a peace settlement, but Hamas could eventually prove to be as promising a partner for peace as Fatah and Yasser Arafat were once considered to be.

The paradox is that Hamas would never have had its chance without the American conviction that the route through the Middle Eastern quagmire was the progressive introduction of democracy. But it is not just voting that will count in Palestine; it is, by Arab standards, the free press, the independent courts, trade unions, and enfranchised electorate.

Hamas now has to justify its actions before this demanding audience and terrorism will not stand the test. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

Thousands join anti-imperialist rally at World Social Forum

Hugo Chavez calls for unity to defeat the American "empire"

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CARACAS (VENEZUELA): Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez led a rally against imperialism at the World Social Forum on Friday, telling thousands of activists they must unite their distinct causes to defeat the U.S. "empire."

Mr. Chavez urged activists to "take up the work of a great international anti-imperialist front to do battle in the whole world. We have to bring together all our causes. Unity, unity, unity! We can only do it united," Mr. Chavez said to rousing applause in a Caracas coliseum.

The crowd went wild as Mr. Chavez stepped on stage, and they kept cheering when he hugged American peace activist Cindy Sheehan before launching into a fierce attack on U.S. President George W. Bush's government. (Ms. Sheehan has taken her campaign to Caracas, as she repeatedly lashed out at the U.S. administration and Iraq war, reports AFP.)

Brave woman

"A kiss for you, brave woman," Mr. Chavez said as he introduced Ms. Sheehan, who is the mother of a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq and who gained international attention when she set up a protest camp near Mr. Bush's ranch in Texas last year.

One of Mr. Bush's most outspoken critics, the Venezuelan President called the U.S. govern-



JOINING FORCES: U.S. anti-Iraq war activist Cindy Sheehan (left) waves as Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (right) and other activists applaud during a World Social Forum conference in Caracas on Friday. - PHOTO: AFP

ment "the most perverse, murderous, genocidal, immoral empire that this planet has known in 100 centuries."

He ticked off the names of revolutionary icons from Venezuela's 19th century independence hero Simon Bolivar to Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and urged activists to follow their example by resisting U.S. imperialism.

Mr. Chavez said before he

came to power in 1999, the U.S. essentially controlled his country's vast oil reserves, adding that "Venezuela will never again be a colony of the United States."

Washington has raised concern about the health of democracy under Mr. Chavez and has accused him of destabilising the region. He has shrugged off the claims, saying his Government is democratic.

"He's amazing," said 22-year-old Italian activist Paulo Depino, who scrambled over rows of seats trying to get a closer view of Mr. Chavez. "He's a true revolutionary leading a historic process to transform this society."

Social programmes

The Venezuelan leader, who says he is leading a socialist revolution, has poured millions of

dollars in booming oil profits into social programmes for the poor. Opponents fear he is steering the world's fifth-largest oil exporter toward Cuba-style Communism.

Mr. Chavez, a close ally of Fidel Castro, told the crowd, "in a few hours I should be in Havana" to meet the Cuban President and discuss joint projects toward regional integration. - AP

THE HINDU

29 JAN 2006

A famous victory

But some good must come of it

The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian election is a watershed in the history of the Middle East. It now emerges as a dominant force in Palestine and this alone is bound to have a profound impact on the peace process with Israel. The sheer scale of the victory was wholly unexpected, perhaps also for Hamas which had in the run-up to the election offered to play second fiddle to the Fatah in the event of a coalition. As it turns out, Fatah has met its eclipse. With 76 seats in Parliament, Hamas is now in a position to form a government. The verdict is a victory of democracy. Independent observers have testified to the remarkable integrity that marked the election. With a genuine 78 per cent turnout, it showcased what a free and fair election is all about. The verdict must appear still more momentous when one reflects that the voting was conducted under continued military occupation. In large measure, the victory can be attributed to the discontent against the Fatah government, generally perceived as corrupt. There is little doubt that Hamas gained a fair measure of popularity through its twin campaign planks of education and health programmes. Its agenda was widely accepted by voters, notably the poor Palestinians.

For all that, peace in the Middle East remains unpredictable. The process may get still more complex as the fundamental principles of Hamas remain unchanged — the recognition of the right of Israel to exist, which happens to be its founding charter; and an almost fanatical faith in suicide bombing as a means to political power. Which is why euphoria must be tempered with caution. The comity of nations has urged Hamas to renounce violence. Israel's reaction was to be expected; it has ruled out negotiations with a Palestinian government that will now be represented by a terrorist organisation. No less belligerent has been the reaction of the White House with Bush virtually putting Hamas on notice... "If your platform is the destruction of Israel, it means you're not a partner in peace". It may be a different matter that Bush has not been a particularly honest partner in the peace process in Iraq. But as a perceived global warrior, he has the potential to make the waters murkier. The region is on the turn and the future must hinge on Hamas' course of action. 'Twas a famous victory, but some good must come of it.

THE STATESMAN

29 JAN 2006

Hamas vows to work with West

Damascus: Hamas will be as effective in politics as in fighting Israel, its supremo predicted on Saturday, vowing the Islamist group will work with the international community after its electoral win. Syrian-based **Khaled Meshaal** said Hamas would take account of realities in its approach to Israel, though there was no question of the them abandoning its non-recognition of the Jewish state.

"Those who are counting on our defeat are wrong. We have succeeded in the resistance and we will succeed in politics, reforms and change," Meshaal said. Meshaal held out a hand to the vanquished Fatah faction of Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas but indicated that Hamas would promote a different platform to that espoused by the moderate Abbas. "We have been elected on the basis of our programme," he said.

He said Hamas' priorities were to introduce reforms in the Palestinian political system, to reorganise "the Palestinian house" and to "protect the resistance and close ranks around this resistance". "We will carry out reforms as soon as possible. We will coordinate with Arab countries, Muslim countries, Euro-

pean countries and all the international community," he said. "We are ready to work with Europe and even the US if they wish," he said, maintaining Europe was a more suitable partner as it had better knowledge of the region than US.

Meshaal also proposed that its militants and their weapons should be absorbed into a united Palestinian army if the international communi-

ty wants the movement to disarm. It was an option for "all the Palestinian arms to be pooled into a unified Palestinian army which, like all the other armies of the world will be aimed at protecting our country from foreign occupation," he said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan President Pervez

Musharraf has said that the international community must give the militant Hamas a chance to transform itself into a force for peace and stability. Addressing a press conference in Geneva, Musharraf said: "Everyone thought he (Sharon) was a military man, a strongman, that he's the one who was destroying peace. But as it developed, it ended up as if he was the only hope of peace in that region," Musharraf said. Agencies



Fatah gunmen storm parliament

Ramallah: Gunmen opened fire from the roof of the Palestinian parliament on Saturday as thousands of Fatah supporters called for party leaders to resign after their defeat in this week's election. On the second day of Fatah protests, 40 gunmen climbed onto the roof of the Palestinian parliament in the West Bank town of Ramallah, firing in the air to demand Fatah leaders resign.

Militants from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, affiliated to Fatah, and around 600 party activists converged on the parliament. Gunmen erected a Palestinian flag, a yellow Fatah banner and a picture of their late leader, Yasser Arafat, on the roof of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Some 80 masked Al-Aqsa militants fired rounds of bullets into the air and vowed that they would no longer adhere to a de facto Palestinian truce in attacks on Israel, which officially expired at the end of 2005. AFP

THE TIMES OF INDIA

29 JAN 2006

✓ Hamas slams US aid threat ✓

Islamist leader says it's blackmail, won't disarm in fight against Israeli occupation

REUTERS

GAZA | JANUARY 28

SENIOR Hamas leader Ismail Haniyehon on Saturday rejected international calls for the Islamic militant group to disarm and renounce violence to prevent cuts to international aid for the Palestinian Authority. "This aid can not be a sword over the heads of the Palestinian people and will not be material to blackmail our people, to blackmail Hamas and the resistance. It is rejected," said Haniyeh.

He added that Hamas, sworn to Israel's destruction, was committed to keeping its arms and resisting Israeli occupation. Haniyeh was speaking after the US threatened to cut back its \$234 million in

aid earmarked for the Palestinians this year because Hamas was expected to form a new Palestinian government.

"They've got to get rid of that arm of their party which is armed and violence and secondly, they've got to get rid of that part of their platform that says they want to destroy Israel," said US President George W Bush.

EU officials have also indicated that a refusal by Hamas to renounce violence and recognise Israel could have consequences in its relations with a Hamas-run Palestinian Authority. The EU is the biggest donor to the Palestinian Au-



Ismail Haniyehon

thority, with aid of \$612 million last year.

Defiant in the face of international pressure, Haniyeh said the Palestinians would only disarm and end the armed struggle when

Israel ended its occupation of land the Palestinians seek for an independent state.

Hamas seeks to replace Israel and the Palestinian Authority with an Islamic state. It has said it would support the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a first step.

Meanwhile, Fatah gunmen and Palestinian police, angry at Hamas's election vic-

tory, took over parliament buildings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on Saturday and opened fire in the air, witnesses said. Some climbed on to the roof of the parliament in Ramallah, which was not in session at the time, demanding the resignation of senior members of President Mahmoud Abbas's long-dominant Fatah movement.

In the Gaza Strip, police briefly stormed into the parliament building's compound, firing in the air, to protest against any transfer of security responsibility to Hamas, an Islamic militant group.

A faction of Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades said on Saturday it would not observe a truce with Israel after Fatah lost to the militant Islamic group Hamas in a Palestinian parliamentary election.

INDIAN EXPRESS

29 JAN 2005

FATAH DOESN'T WANT COALITION, TURKEY OFFERS TO MEDIATE BETWEEN ISRAEL, PALESTINE

Hardline high for Hamas



A boy in a Hamas cap celebrates the Islamist party's victory. On Thursday. — AFP

Associated Press

RAMALLAH, Jan. 27. — Israel ruled out talks and the vanquished Fatah Party rejected a joint government with Hamas after the Islamic movement's sweeping victory in Palestinian elections, in what could be first steps to isolate the militant group and freeze West Asia peace initiatives. But Turkey today offered to act as an intermediary between Israel and the Palestinians. The 57-member Organisation of Islamic Conference also "may perhaps take on an important role," Turkish Prime Minister Mr Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said he would ask the party that won the most votes in elections — the Hamas — to form the next government. "Until now, we haven't asked anyone to form the government," Abbas said. "We are talking with all factions, and of course we will ask the party that won the majority to form the government."

The USA and European nations declared yesterday that Hamas could not form a legitimate government unless it dropped its demand to destroy Israel and renounced violence. Israel went a predictable step further. Acting Prime Minister Mr Ehud Olmert issued a statement saying: "Israel will not negotiate with a Palestinian administration if even part of it is an armed terrorist organisation calling for the destruction of Israel." US President Mr George W Bush said: "If your platform is the destruction of Israel, it means you're not a partner in peace, and we're interested



(Clock-wise from top left) Mr Khalid Meshaal, exiled political bureau chief of Hamas, and winners Mahmud Zahar and Mr Ismail Haniyeh. Mr Haniyeh was the party's top poll candidate. — AFP

■ Israel will not negotiate with a Palestinian administration if even part of it is an armed terrorist organisation ~ Olmert
■ If your (Hamas') platform is the destruction of Israel, it means you're not a partner in peace, and we're interested in peace ~ Bush

Similar statements came from other parts of the world. Fatah, turned out of office by Palestinians' angry over its corrupt and inefficient government, offered no help to Hamas, catapulted into leadership after its first-ever foray into parliamentary politics.

Fatah leaders decided late Thursday not to enter a joint government with Hamas. By the numbers, Hamas does not need Fatah — it won 76 of the 132 seats in Parliament. Fatah, the undisputed ruler of Palestinian politics for four decades, got only 43. Palestinian Prime Minister Mr Ahmed Qureia of Fatah and his Cabinet resigned to make room for a Hamas govern-

ment.

Thousands of angry Fatah supporters marched in Gaza City early Friday, firing rifles in the air and demanding that Fatah leaders resign, while backing their decision to stay out of a Hamas government. A relatively minor incident marred an otherwise peaceful political revolution. A large crowd of Hamas supporters briefly clashed with Fatah loyalists outside the Palestinian Parliament in the West Bank city of Ramallah, with both sides throwing stones after Fatah activists pulled a Hamas flag from the building. Hamas leaders immediately took to the airwaves to send out a moderate message. "Don't be afraid," Mr Ismail Haniyeh, the top Hamas candidate, told the BBC. At a victory news conference late Thursday, however, Mr Haniyeh said Hamas will "complete the liberation of other parts of Palestine." He did not say which territories he was referring to or how he would go about it. Hamas ideology does not recognise the presence of a Jewish state in an Islamic West Asia. In recent years, some Hamas leaders have grudgingly accepted the idea of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, as long as it was understood to be only a stage towards freeing all of Palestine, including Israel.

Mr Abbas said he remained committed to peace talks and suggested they be conducted through the Palestine Liberation Organisation, an umbrella group of Palestinian organisations that he expects to head. Mr Haniyeh said he did not expect the veteran Fatah leader to resign.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2006

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Hamas takes all

to Abbas (W)

The emphatic victory of Hamas, the extremist group that swears by militancy and the destruction of Israel, in the Palestinian parliamentary elections has shaken up the political landscape of the region. Before the election, it was expected that Hamas, also known as the Islamist Resistance Movement, would make a strong showing. But no one predicted its getting an absolute majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council. With this ends the four-decade hegemony of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and its biggest constituent, Fatah, among the Palestinian people, although Yasser Arafat's successor, Mahmoud Abbas, will continue as President. The main question now is whether Hamas as a party of responsible government will be different from the group that has taken responsibility for most of the suicide attacks and other acts of terrorism. Clearly, Palestinians do not want to be led and ruled in the old way. They evidently expect the new party in power to provide good governance and also play a strong hand against Israel. Hamas has an efficient track record of providing, through its network of social welfare organisations, education and health facilities in Gaza and the West Bank. But while uncompromisingly opposing Israel's state terrorism and its oppression of the Palestinian people, the militant organisation needs to show a willingness to coexist with the Jewish state and learn to settle disputes and differences through talks, not explosives and guns. In 1988, the PLO accepted the two-state principle and thus the need to negotiate with Israel. But will Hamas resile from its policy of never engaging with the Jewish state?

The larger question is whether Israel will be willing to respect the democratic choice of the Palestinian people in a free and fair election and engage with their new leadership. When he was Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon did not consider even the Fatah Government a partner for peace. He initiated unilateral moves aimed at disengaging from Palestine, including the withdrawal of security forces and Zionist settlers from Gaza. His successor, Ehud Olmert, has declared that talks with the new militant Palestinian leadership are out of the question. With the Knesset elections coming up in March, he is certain to use the Hamas victory as justification for more unilateralism to win votes for Kadima. The right-wing Likud under Binyamin Netanyahu has called for a tough line on Palestine. There could be a total breakdown of communication between the two sides — and worse may follow, depending on the results of the Israeli election. If the international community is genuinely interested in finding a solution to the world's longest-running conflict, it must use its leverage to convince the two sides that the only way forward is intelligent negotiation of a two-nation, two-state solution.

28 JAN 2006

THE HINDU

Palestinians' democratic choice must be respected

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The excuses given for refusing to deal with Hamas will not wash. This is a chance for Europe to have an independent role.

Jonathan Steele

HAMAS' TRIUMPH in Wednesday's Palestinian elections is the best news from the Middle East for a long time. The poll was a more impressive display of democracy than any other in the region, outstripping last year's votes in Lebanon and Iraq both in turnout and the range of views that candidates represented.

Whereas in Iraq parties that opposed the occupation had to downplay or even obscure their views, Palestinian supporters of armed resistance to Israel's expansionist strategies were able to run openly. It is true that Hamas candidates did not make relations with Israel the centrepiece of their campaign. They focussed on reform in the Palestinian Authority. But few voters were unaware of Hamas' uncompromising hostility to occupation and its record in fighting it.

Wednesday's election was remarkable also in owing nothing to Washington's (selective) efforts to promote democracy in the Arab world. Instead, it was further proof that civil society in Palestine is more vibrant than anywhere else in the region and that Palestinian politics has its own dynamics, dictated not by outside pressure but the social and economic demands of ordinary people in appalling conditions. Providing a forum to freely express hopes and fears, debate policy, and seek agreed solutions is, after all, what democracy is about.

Predictable response

In Israel and Washington, reaction to Hamas' victory has been predictably negative. European governments should take a more sensitive view. The first watchword is caution. Applaud the process but do not take

issue with the result. While the dust settles and Hamas works out its own priorities for government, Europeans should calmly analyse why Hamas got so much support.

Among several Hamas leaders I met in Gaza last summer, Mahmoud Zahar, one of its last surviving founders, exuded the clearest sense of inner steel. Trained as a medical doctor in Cairo, and now a short, middle-aged figure with combed-over grey hair, he left several impressions. This is no mosque-driven revolutionary or wealthy *jihadi* of the Osama bin Laden type, motivated by ideology or a desire for adventure. Like other Gazans, he has felt the occupation on his skin. His wife was paralysed and his eldest son killed by an Israeli F-16 attack on his house in 2003. Mr. Zahar was in the garden and lucky to survive. In spite of that, he took the lead last year in persuading colleagues that Hamas should declare a truce or period of "calm" with Israel. For 11 months no Hamas member has gone on a suicide-bombing mission. That is no mean achievement, which foreign diplomats rarely credit.

Mr. Zahar's reasons were not just tactical — a desire to deny Ariel Sharon a pretext for abandoning his retreat from Gaza. His strategy is to de-escalate the confrontation with Israel for a long period so that Palestinian society can build a new sense of unity, revive its inner moral strength, and clean up its institutions. He feels western governments give aid and use the issue of negotiations with Israel only as a device for conditionality and pressure, not in the interests of justice.

So he wants Palestinians to have a broad-based coalition government that will look to the Arab and Islamic worlds for economic partners and diplomatic support. It's a kind of "parallel unilateralism," matching the

mood in Israel where the peace camp clearly has lost all real purchase. "Israeli attitudes show they don't intend to make any agreement. They're going to take many unilateral steps," Mr. Zahar told me. "In this bad unbalanced situation and with the interference of the west in the affairs of every Arab country, especially Syria and Lebanon, we can live without any agreement and have a 'calm' for a long time. We're in favour of a long-term truce without recognition of Israel, provided Sharon is also looking for a truce. Everything will change in 10 or 20 years."

Mr. Zahar also left me with no sense of embarrassment about the imminence of power. He pointed out that Mahmoud Abbas would remain President for three more years, as though implying he could be a convenient front for inevitably unproductive talks with Washington and Israel while Hamas acted as a watchdog on the main issues. "There will be no contradiction between the Palestine legislative council and the President," he said. "We will be the safeguard, and the safety valve, against any betrayal."

Along with caution in reacting to the Hamas victory, Europe's second priority should be to maintain continuity. Any cut-off in EU aid would only be a gift to Israel's hardliners. The EU is the largest international donor to the Palestinian Authority, and Javier Solana, the EU foreign policy chief, blundered last month when he told a Gaza press conference that "it would be very difficult for the help and the money that goes to the Palestinian Authority to continue to flow" if Hamas were in government.

Measured statements

Wednesday's EU statements were more measured. If Europe, weak though its power

may currently be, wants to have an independent role in the Middle East, clearly different from the manipulative U.S. approach, it is vital to go on funding the PA regardless of the Hamas presence in government. Nor should the EU fall back on the cynical hope that Hamas will be as corrupt as Fatah, and so lose support. You cannot use European taxpayers' money to strengthen Palestinian institutions while privately wanting reforms to fail. Hamas should be encouraged in aiming to be more honest than its predecessors.

Above all, Europe should not get hung up on the wrong issues such as armed resistance and the "war on terror." Murdering a Palestinian politician by a long-range attack that is bound also to kill innocent civilians is morally and legally no better than a suicide bomb on a bus.

Hamas' refusal to give formal recognition of Israel's right to exist should also not be seen by Europe as an urgent problem. History and international politics do not march in tidy simultaneous steps. For decades Israel refused even to recognise the existence of the Palestinian people, just as Turkey did not recognise the Kurds. Until 15 years ago Palestinians had to be smuggled to international summits as part of Jordan's delegation. It is less than that since the Israeli Government accepted the goal of a Palestinian state.

Hamas may eventually disarm itself and recognise Israel. That will be the end of the process of establishing a just *modus vivendi* for Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East. It cannot be the first step. Today's priority is to accept that Palestinians have spoken freely. They deserve respect and support. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

Hamas not for destruction of Israel: Meshaal

WAS-11
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President Abbas to invite Islamist group to form government

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has declared that he would ask the Islamist group Hamas that has swept the Palestinian parliamentary elections to form government.

"We are carrying on contacts with all factions, and of course we will ask the party that won the majority to form the government."

Earlier, senior leader Saeb Erekat of the Fatah party, which secured only 43 seats in the 132-member Parliament, had said his group would sit in Opposition.

Despite the advocacy by some Hamas leaders in the Palestinian territories that the government should be formed in "partnership" with Fatah, leader of the group in exile Khaled Meshaal appeared lukewarm to the proposal. In an interview with an Italian daily *La Repubblica*, Mr. Meshaal said the talk for a coalition with Fatah was "premature."

No disarming

The Damascus based Mr. Meshaal, who had been appointed leader of Hamas after the assassination of Abdel Aziz Rantisi by Israel in 2004, also declared that his group had not issued a call for the destruction of Israel.

"The [Hamas] statute does not in fact call for the destruction of Israel. In Arabic, it says: 'End the Israeli occupation of Palestine'. We don't want to eliminate them, only to obtain our rights. For that reason, the paragraph remains."

Mr. Meshaal made two more points. First he declared that the Hamas would not disarm as had

Key players in Islamic militant Hamas

1 Khaled Meshaal, 40-year-old teacher and supreme leader of Hamas. Currently living in exile in Damascus. Meshaal succeeded Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantisi who were both assassinated by Israel in 2004. Meshaal is a member of a group that has been accused of carrying out suicide bombings against Israel. Meshaal took part in negotiations with Israel in 2005.

2 Dr. Mahmoud al-Zahar, 50. Hardline leader of Hamas in Gaza. Surgeon and former personal doctor to Yassin, al-Zahar was severely injured in an airstrike on his home in 2003 in which his son was killed. Could become Hamas' first Prime Minister.

3 Hassan Youssef, Hamas' most prominent public face on TV. Youssef was expelled from Palestinian territories in 1993. He is believed to be a member of the Hamas' military wing. He is believed to be a member of the Hamas' military wing.

Others Many groups believed to be groups that were active in Gaza with control over borders between Hamas, Fatah and Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Pictures: Associated Press © GRAPHIC NEWS

been demanded by the U.S., European Union (E.U.), and the U.N. after the group won Wednesday's elections. He emphasised that the Hamas would "certainly not" lay down its arms

as long as much of its territory was occupied. "Only force has produced results," he said, alluding to the recent Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. A statement by the quartet group comprising

the U.S., Russia, the European Union and the U.N. had urged Hamas to give up violence and accept Israel's right to exist.

Roadmap rejected

Second, the Hamas leader categorically rejected as one-sided and "unacceptable" the "road map" anchoring a two-state solution to end the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. While Fatah and Hamas leaders deliberated on their plans, their activists clashed near the city of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza strip.

The Hamas' impressive performance has evoked strong reaction in the region. Iran congratulated Hamas and lauded the Palestinian people for choosing "to continue the struggle and resistance against occupation."

But, Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa said Hamas must accept the Beirut initiative that had called for a Arab recognition of Israel.

World Bank special envoy James Wolfensohn said Hamas' victory could mean a termination of aid, due to the "lack of certainty and hope."

✓ Hamas win puts West Asia peace at risk



AP
Hamas supporters gave out sweets at the Ein el-Hilweh refugee camp on Thursday to celebrate the victory.

CHRIS McGreal
Gaza City, January 27

THE ISLAMIC militant group Hamas, won a crushing victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections as results pouring in on Thursday showed it had swept away Fatah's 40-year monopoly of power. Hamas's ascendancy casts a shadow of doubt over the chances of a negotiated settlement in West Asia.

Israel's acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, joined the US, Britain and other countries in calling on Hamas to renounce violence and its goal of destroying Israel. On Friday, the US State Department announced that it will review all aid to the Palestinians following the Hamas victory.

The Palestinian president and veteran Fatah leader, Mahmoud Abbas, asked Hamas to form the government after it unexpectedly won 76 seats in the 132-seat parliament in a stingy verdict on the corruption and mismanagement of Fatah's rule, and the failures of

the peace process. Fatah won 43 seats. Thousands of Hamas supporters took to the streets to celebrate, shooting in the air and handing out cakes. They clashed with Fatah activists in Ramallah as the Hamas flag was raised over the Palestinian parliament. Last night, hundreds of Fatah gunmen, angry at the result, fired in the air in Gaza.

Hamas leader, Mahmoud al-Zahar, said his party would begin immediate consultations with Fatah and smaller parties about forming a government. Fatah, however, prefers to stay away. Zahar said his organisation reserved the "right to resist" Israeli attacks. "We are under occupation. We are entitled to self-defence. If Israelis stop their aggression, we will too," he said.

Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader in the new parliament, called on the West to respect the election result. "Don't be afraid" is our message to the outside world. Hamas is an aware, mature and movement," he said.

The Guardian

Ehud Olmert,
Palestine acting PM:
■ Israel cannot allow Hamas to join the Palestinian Authority. It is a terrorist organisation which calls for the destruction of Israel and must be disarmed.

Jimmy Carter,
former US President:
■ US would have to cut off direct aid to the Palestinian Authority if Hamas is in the government.

George W. Bush,
United States President:
■ We will not deal with a party that articulates the destruction of Israel as part of its platform. You can't be a partner for peace if your party has an armed wing.

Tony Blair,
British PM:
■ Hamas will have to make its choice and decide between a path of democracy and a path of violence.

Pervez Musharraf,
Pakistani President:
■ The dictates of democracy have been met, so why should we deny that? Let's all put pressure on Hamas so that it behaves in the right manner.

Hamid Karzai,
Afghan President:
■ The world should give Hamas a chance to prove itself while in government.

GOVERNMENT

- Up to Abbas to pick a Prime Minister but he will need the support of Hamas; Fatah leaders say they will not participate in any Hamas coalition

PRIORITIES

- Internal issues, insecurity, poverty and health care: expected to promote Islamic values without necessarily imposing them by force

PEACE WITH ISRAEL

- Hamas wants Israel to give up West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem; Israel asks Hamas to stop calling for the destruction of the Jewish state.

✓✓ ✓ Hamas wins absolute majority in Palestinian parliamentary polls

Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei resigns; Fatah decides not to join new Government

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: The Palestinian Islamic group, Hamas, has won a resounding victory at the parliamentary elections held on Wednesday, upsetting the Fatah, which has for decades symbolised Palestinian aspirations for an independent state.

The final tally was due to be announced later, but Hamas leaders said they had won more than 70 seats, thereby securing an absolute majority in the 132-member Parliament. The European Union (E.U.) election observer Richard Howitt was quoted as saying that Hamas might have won up to 80 seats.

Conceding defeat, Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei submitted his resignation to President Mamoud Abbas, hours before elections results were announced.

Caretaker Cabinet

"This is the choice of the people. It should be respected," Mr. Qurei said. "If it's true, then the President should ask Hamas to form a new government." The Cabinet remained in office in a caretaker capacity.

Hamas has offered to form a government in partnership with Fatah, which will make a formal announcement on its position to the proposal later, Information Minister Nabeel Shaath said. However, senior Fatah leader Saeb Erekat had earlier said after meeting Mr. Abbas that his party had decided to sit in Opposition. "Hamas will be asked to form the new government," Mr. Erekat observed. "We in Fatah will not join them. We will be a loyal Opposition and rebuild the party." The Hamas leader in exile Khaled Mashaal had, during the day, called Mr. Abbas from



STUNNING VICTORY: Hamas supporters celebrate election victory at Jabalya refugee camp on Thursday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

Syria to discuss the outcome of the poll. "He stressed Hamas insists on a partnership with all the Palestinian factions, especially our brothers in Fatah,"

the group said on its website.

As indications of the poll results emerged, there was jubilation in the Hamas camp. In the Gaza Strip — the bastion of

Hamas support — thousands of supporters poured out into the streets to savour the victory. "Mohammad Deif should be our Defence Minister," said

one Hamas supporter, alluding to the Hamas military leader who heads Israel's hit list. Hamas activists were seen waving the group's green flags. "Congratulations and victory for Islam," some of them said as people embraced each other and distributed sweets. Hamas has still not abandoned its call for the destruction of Israel and had spearheaded a campaign of suicide bombings that have targeted Israelis.

Israel silent

Israel has so far not commented on the outcome of the poll, but prospects of an early revival of peace talks with Palestinians have virtually disappeared following the Hamas success.

On Wednesday night, Israeli acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had stressed that Israel would not negotiate with Hamas. The Hamas leader Mushir al-Masri has also emphasised that Hamas had no intention of holding peace talks with Israel. "Recognising Israel is not on the agenda either now", he said.

Meanwhile, U.S. President George W. Bush told *Wall Street Journal* on Wednesday that he would not deal with Hamas unless it renounced its position on the destruction of Israel. European Union, the largest provider of aid to the Palestinians, said that it would work with any government that was "prepared to work by peaceful means."

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan congratulated the Palestinian people on the elections, but asserted, "any group that wishes to participate in the democratic process should ultimately disarm."

THE HINDU

27 JAN 2006

Palestine goes to polls

Associated Press

RAMALLAH, Jan. 25. — Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians flooded polling stations today to cast ballots in their first parliamentary election in a decade. The Palestinians' first truly competitive election helped cement democracy in the post-Yasser Arafat era, but it was also likely to give unprecedented power to Hamas, the Islamic party that calls for Israel's destruction. The ruling Fatah Party is reeling from corruption allegations after running the Palestinian Authority for 12 years.

Pre-election polls showed the two parties almost in a dead heat in the race for the 132 parliament seats, and a post-election coalition — either between Hamas and Fatah or with some of the nine other parties running — was expected. Long lines formed at polling stations throughout the day and 73 per cent of 1.3 million eligible voters cast ballots.

Election officials began counting the votes soon after polls closed and preliminary results were expected late today or early tomorrow.

A telephone poll of 6,500 voters by the West Bank's An Najah University



A woman walks by the flags of different Palestinian factions contesting the elections to enter a polling station in Gaza City on Wednesday. — AFP

showed the Fatah with more than 42 per cent of the vote and Hamas with more than 34 percent. The poll had a 5 percentage point margin of error. An exit poll broadcast by Israel's Channel 2 TV showed Fatah getting 43 per cent to 32 per cent for Hamas. The polls only reflect the results of the national vote for each party. Half the seats are chosen at the district level,

where Hamas was expected to do well. Hamas' success has alarmed Israel and the West, but Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas argued that luring the group, responsible for dozens of deadly attacks on Israel, into politics would tame it and increase the chances for peace. The election will usher in a new Parliament and Cabinet, but Abbas, who was elected

last year, will remain head of the Palestinian Authority regardless of the results.

Palestinians were given the day off to vote and the election was held in a celebratory atmosphere that was rare in the recent years of fighting with Israel. Some 13,500 police officers guarded the 1,008 polling stations to prevent gunmen from disrupting the vote, and there were no reports of major violence.

IN RECKONING

■ **FATAH:** Marwan Barghouti, 46, considered a possible successor to Abbas. **Mohamed Abu Ali Yatta**, 50, second on the Fatah list. Not previously occupied any position in Fatah. **Intissar Wazir:** A long time leader of the Palestinian women's movement, has been a member of the Palestine National Council since 1974.

■ **HAMAS:** **Ismail Haniyeh**, 46, the top candidate of Hamas. A member of the political leadership of Hamas since the 1990s.

Mohammed Abu Teir, 55, second on the Hamas list.

Jamila Shanti: Born in 1955, the leading woman candidate for Hamas and is third on the group's national list.

The planks

■ **Negotiations with Israel:** The Fatah wants to resume dialogue with Israel. Hamas has sent mixed messages about it.

■ **Use of violence:** Fatah rejects the use of violence by either side. Hamas favours "armed struggle".

■ **Jerusalem, refugees and borders:** All parties demand east Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

■ **Corruption:** All parties have pledged a frontal attack on corruption, including Fatah, seen as the main offender.

“Globalisation does not mean you have no political choices”

✓✓
HD " 23/1

Sir Howard Davies, Director, the London School of Economics and Political Science, believes that, despite all its imperfections, globalisation is the “least bad” way to organise economic life. In an interview in Kolkata, he, however, cautions that countries can suffer if they get the sequencing of globalisation wrong.

Marcus Dam

You have spoken of the need to promote the debate on globalisation and that people in authority, even in some of the more developed countries, have started questioning some of the basic principles surrounding free trade and free global capital markets. What in your opinion are the downsides of globalisation?

What I was saying then was against the background of the debates about speculative capital flows and also the difficulties in making progress in free trade negotiations. In general I am a supporter of free markets and of, if you like, globalisation — though it is not a particularly helpful term because I think that with all its imperfections it is the least bad way we have discovered for organising economic life.

But I think that experience shows that countries can suffer if they get the sequencing of globalisation wrong and if they open up markets to competition suddenly, when they have, through their actions, constrained the competitiveness of their domestic companies.

So I think the risks are in the wrong sequencing of — if you like — globalisation.

You mention the ‘risks’. But when you use the word ‘imperfections’ in globalisation what do you really mean? Are these ‘imperfections’ inbuilt within the process?

I wouldn't say that they are necessarily inbuilt. But the problem is that if you look at the Asian crisis of 1997-98 you had freedom for banks in places like Thailand and in Indonesia to borrow from overseas, which increased the availability of capital in the country and you had a fixed exchange rate. Suddenly the fixed exchange rate collapsed and then the banks were indeed troubled because they got un-hedged; so they collapsed and companies collapsed and you really created a problem.

Is that a problem of globalisation? Really it's a problem of an inconsistent approach — when you have one bit that was free and another bit that was fixed and you had a conflict between the two. Not imperfection in the sense of the general open market but in the way people have done it, which has at some times been incompatible.

To what extent might have globalisation undermined the existing political processes in developing countries that are on the threshold of embracing open-market economy?

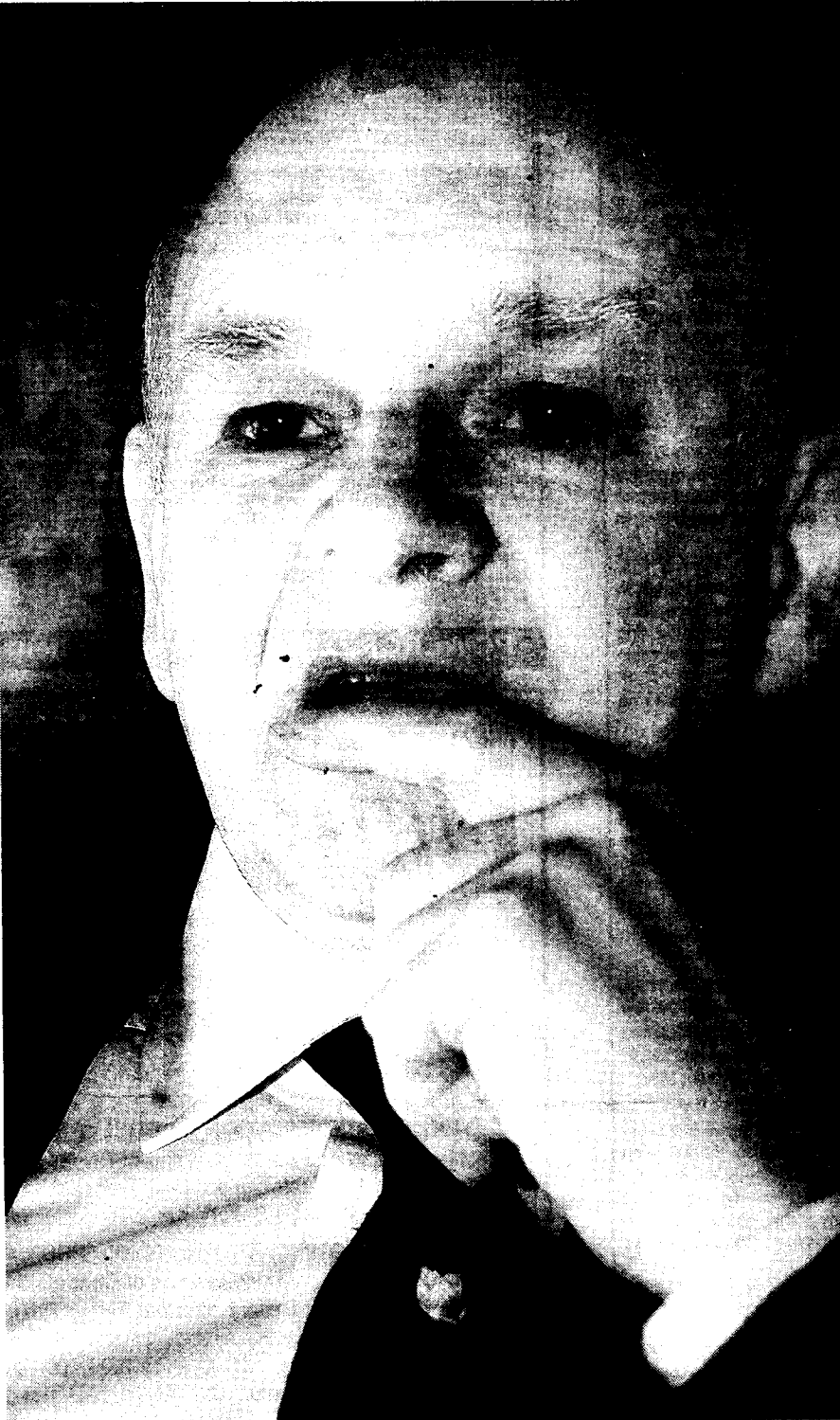
As far as whether globalisation has impeded political choice I don't personally think so. Even in developed countries, it is quite clear that there are still major political choices to be made. For example, if you compare the United States of America and Germany you see that the USA spends 30 per cent of its GDP on public expenditure while the Germans spend 55 per cent. It is a massive political choice they are making.

So I think the notion that globalisation is pushing you towards one particular method of organising society just isn't true. It is quite clear that countries which are very open trading countries can make significantly different choices.

What about those developing countries in the process of opening up markets?

I still think that is the case. I still think that you can have a reasonably open trading economy and can still have a large amount of state control of the economy.

If you contrast Mexico with India, who in many respects operate in similar relationships to the rest of the world, Mexicans have no domestically owned banking system, the



Sir Howard Davies: “If you are not borrowing from the IMF, there is no particular reason why you should be paying any particular interest to what it says.” — PHOTO: SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH.

Indians have more or less a still very dominantly state-owned banking system. So I just don't buy this argument that globalisation means you have no political choices. It may mean that you don't have the choice to be hopelessly inefficient and hope that the world won't notice. But to me that it is not a deliberate political choice anyone should wish to make.

What, in your opinion, are the lessons developing countries like India might learn from the collapse of economies in certain East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Latin American countries such as Argentina, and some sub-Saharan Africa?

I think that my analysis of the Asian crisis is that there was some sort of inconsistency, some incompatibility, an inconsistent policy mix in those countries.

The main problem in Argentina was a fiscal problem. Really it was the inability of

the domestic political system to control public borrowings. Sub-Saharan Africa is a whole different picture. The problem there is mostly a lack of capital inflows by anybody. So I don't think that you can get many lessons from sub-Saharan Africa.

The general lessons to be learnt from Latin America and the crisis in Asian countries are the need to think through very carefully about the nature of your market-opening measures, having to be sure that your trade mobilisation, your capital flow mobilisation, your domestic fiscal policy, are compatible with each other.

Would you agree that the International Monetary Fund has precipitated global instabilities by pushing through capital market liberalisation programmes prematurely?

I think that in different countries there are different criticisms you can make of the

IMF. But I'd not buy the notion that the IMF is driven by what you call market fundamentalism. I think that the IMF's prescriptions have often been quite realistic in terms of relating their general bias in favour of open markets to the particular stresses of individual countries.

But I think that the more interesting issue now with the IMF is really that in a situation in which very, very, few countries are actually borrowing from the IMF, what it [the IMF] does and what are its tools. The IMF can only impose restraints on people as conditions of borrowing. If you are not borrowing from the IMF there is no particular reason why you should be paying any particular interest to what it says.

How is India fitting into the transnational economy. There are fears that reforms in the agricultural sector could mean displacement of small farmers, with the industrial and infrastructure sectors not being capable of absorbing the risks of such structural shift.

If you look at how India is regarded internationally the picture is a very mixed one. On the one hand you have a country clearly super-competitive in some areas — notably in the IT sector.

What is also good about India is a financial system more diversified than many developed countries, a robust equity market that is reasonably regulated — number three among Asian markets in terms of its integrity and flexibility, well above China. And there are people who attach high value to India's democratic system; we have seen changes in regime in India without massive disruptions to the economy. One concern about China was if there is a major political disruption what then?

On the other hand, you see the World Bank index of cost-of-doing-business in the country — a combination of how easy it is to import contracts, the regulations and length of time it takes getting approvals — India is 116 out of 155 countries. So, India is still seen as a licence raj, very bureaucratic. Perhaps even worse is that Transparency International — a good NGO which looks at countries in terms of corruption — rated India very poorly with far too much of buying of influence and contracts, particularly in the public sector.

And then the other downside is the one you identified — a growing dispersion of income. I think that what people must focus on is the significant differences in literacy rate [across the population].

The Government should be trying to use the wealth being created in the country to strengthen the literacy programme particularly in the rural areas and should also be working much harder on corruption.

It is argued that in several developing economies trade liberalisation has taken place before the establishment of social safety nets. Jobs have disappeared, the poor farmers can hardly compete with the subsidised produce from the First World.

If you are talking about areas where First World products are subsidised I agree that there is a serious risk. I certainly agree that if you are dealing with countries which are giving subsidised exports into your markets you cannot be content to allow liberalisation, on one side, when you are fighting people who are unreasonably subsidised, on the other. So I agree that it is a serious thing.

The issue of social safety nets is really a question of a country's affordability and also what the realistic position is currently. It seems to me that India has been a very protected market for many years but not been able, as a result of that, to put in place a particularly high social safety net.

Pamuk charges: Turkey puts ball in law's court

Ankara: Turkey's justice minister has left a critical decision on whether to drop charges against novelist Orhan Pamuk to a local Istanbul court, according to officials, in an apparent attempt to avoid outraging Europe by allowing a renowned author to stand trial for his views or angering nationalists by dropping the case.

Justice Minister Cemil Cicek's decision came at a delicate time for European Union aspirant Turkey. This week, the EU is to begin a review of the country's justice system.

The high-profile trial has already outraged European Union officials and sparked questions over the country's commitment to free speech.

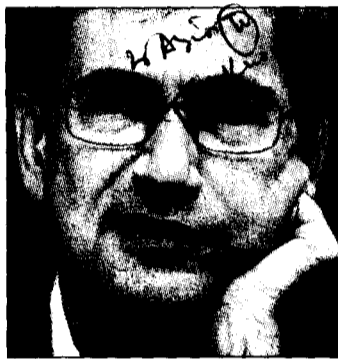
Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government has made joining the EU a cornerstone of its policy and passed sweeping reforms of Turkey's legal code. On October 3, Turkey realised one of its dreams when the EU agreed to open membership talks with the overwhelmingly Muslim country.

The government apparently did not want to risk a face off with the EU over the sensitive case.

The local court—which halted the trial of Pamuk on December 16, the day it began—had asked the ministry whether it should continue with the case.

The local court could now drop the charges against Pamuk, based on a technicality, saying the Justice Ministry's consent is missing from the file.

Cicek, however, reiterated to the court that his ministry had no say in the matter under the



new penal code passed in June, a senior Justice Ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

"The authority in this issue belongs to (the justice system)," the state-owned Anatolia news agency on Sunday quoted Cicek as telling the court in his written response.

Cicek's response was sent to the court on Friday. It was not clear when the court would is-

sue its decision. The next hearing is on February 7.

The local court had argued that it could not continue the trial since there was no approval from the justice ministry to try Pamuk for his remarks which predate the June reform. Cicek insisted the amendments in the penal code in June had lifted the ministry's say over the case.

Pamuk was charged under a law that makes insulting Turkey a crime after a Swiss newspaper in February quoted him as saying: "30,000 Kurds and one million Armenians were killed in these lands, and nobody but me dares to talk about it." AP

TRIAL OF A WRITER

2 A MAR 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

New judge for Saddam trial

BAGHDAD: Less than 24 hours before the resumption of the trial of ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein on charges of crimes against humanity, the court on Monday appointed a new interim chief judge.

Rauf Rashid Abdel Rahman, a member of the five-strong panel trying Mr. Hussein, will take over from Rizkar Mohammed Amin who resigned earlier this month, court's investigating judge Raed al-Juhi told AFP.

Mr. Rahman was born in Halabja, the Kurdish town which allegedly became a symbol of repression in 1988 when Mr. Hussein's forces used chemical weapons against its inhabitants, killing several thousand persons.

"He will remain as presiding judge until such a time as an official decision is taken on whether to accept judge Rizkar's resignation," Mr. Juhi added.

Mr. Amin, also a Kurd, who stepped down following strong criticism of his running of the court, said he would not go back on his decision. Mr. Amin was criticised for being too lenient with the defendants and their repeated nationalist tirades condemning the court. — AFP

24 JAN 2006

THE HINDU

Hamas corners Fatah on hometurf

By Steven Erlanger

Nablus (West Bank): Nasser Joumaa, pale and thin, was facing some tough questions from his own Fatah members. "Our generation is being ignored," said a tall, bearded man in a small house, packed and cloudy with cigarette smoke, as more young men listened at the windows. "Where are the respected people to vote for on Fatah's list? Not you, Nasser, but there are corrupted people in this list."

Joumaa, 39 and respected here for his military and political prowess, looked pained. "I share your concerns," he said. "People are angry with Fatah and its performance, and so am I. I'm one of the angry members of Fatah. But we express our anger inside. We face a bigger challenge now from Hamas, and in a difficult situation we stand together."

Fatah, the mainstay of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, is in trouble, even here in Nablu, one of the West Bank's toughest and largest cities, and a longtime stronghold for the group. Fatah is struggling to beat back the radical Islamic movement Hamas—which won an astonishing 13 of Nablu's 15 local council seats a month ago, and elected an efficient, worldly yet devout mayor, Adli Yaish.



Palestinian opinion polls vary, but all show that Fatah is in trouble even in Nablu, the longtime stronghold of the ruling party

Palestinians vote on Wednesday in elections for a new legislature, the first such vote in a decade.

The coming vote is the first time that Hamas has run in elections

PALESTINIAN POLLS

for roles within the Palestinian Authority—because the authority was set up in the 1993 Oslo accords with Israel, which Hamas is committed to destroy. But Joumaa is convinced that Hamas means to destroy Fatah first, if not now then by stages, and he yawns Fatah

US spent \$1.9m to help Fatah

The United States spent about \$1.9 million of its yearly \$400 million in aid to the Palestinians on dozens of quick projects before elections this week to bolster the governing Fatah faction's image with voters and strengthen its hand in competing with the militant faction Hamas, American and Palestinian officials said on Sunday. The spending was intended "to work with the Palestinian Authority to enhance democratic institutions and support democratic actors, not just Fatah," said Micaela Schweitzer-Bluhm, a spokeswoman for the American consulate in East Jerusalem. The programme, run by the United States Agency for International Development, was described in *The Washington Post*. American and Palestinian officials who spoke anonymously because they were not authorised to speak to reporters said that the programme, which started in August, was intended to help defeat Hamas and that the government had done a detailed political analysis to try to focus on constituencies where Hamas was doing well. NYT News Service

members not to lose sight of the longer battle.

"Hamas talks of partnership with Fatah, but it wants to replace Fatah," he said. Palestinian opinion polls vary, but all show that Fatah still leads Hamas, but not by much, and Hamas seems to be gaining. Fatah has 42% to Hamas's 35%, according to pollster Khalil Shikaki of the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research; it has 35% to Hamas's 30%, with a larger number of undecided voters, according to Nader Said, a poll director for Birzeit University in Ramallah. NYT News Service

25-8
29/11

King and us

The Saudi king is useful to India, even beyond foreign policy

Handwritten notes: "Handwritten notes" and "29/11" are present near the title.

SAUDI royals may not be a liberal democrat's cup of tea, or even barrel of crude. But there's no denying their importance. A quarter of the world's oil — some petroleum specialists are questioning Saudi Arabia's reserves, however — two of Islam's holiest shrines and thanks in part to these two attributes, the country's importance in all policy responses to radical Islam, make the ruling family a priority in chanceries around the world. India, playing host to a Saudi monarch after 51 years, however may have realised that its view of Saudi Arabia's importance needs to be nuanced.

The oil-for-sweat (1.5 million, predominantly unskilled and semi-skilled Indians work in Saudi Arabia, remitting four billion dollars annually) economic relationship doesn't reflect India's economic transformation. Saudi demand for high-level entrepreneurial and technical skills is still huge and India should be in a position to supply some of that. And since the conservatives of the House of Saud haven't been given a particularly easy time by jihadis,

something useful may well come up when the prime minister talks terrorism with the king.

Saudi Arabia is useful for India beyond foreign policy, however. The political predilection in this country to treat its 140 million Muslims as an undifferentiated electoral mass has led to keeping them mostly out of the reach of the reformist forces interrogating Indian society's other conservative elements. That this stasis hasn't produced the problematic and overt radicalisation seen in other countries is a tribute to both the republic and its largest minority. But that's hardly enough and, as the homegrown terrorist caught in the Bangalore IISc attack shows, it may not be a permanent solace. Saudi Arabia is an exemplar in this context of the dangers of prolonged non-reform. The royals preside over a society so badly in need of transformation that many well-wishing observers fear the capacity to handle change may have been significantly eroded. India's Muslims deserve infinitely better — there's no better Republic Day pledge to take in the company of Saudi royals.

PM receives King Abdullah

First visit by a Saudi King to India in 51 years

Diplomatic Correspondent *KS*

NEW DELHI: Setting aside protocol, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh personally received Saudi Arabian King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud at Palam airport here on Tuesday evening. It is the first visit by a Saudi King to India in 51 years.

As King Abdullah set foot in India, official sources told this correspondent that Hizbul Mujahideen chief, Syed Salahuddin, usually based in Pakistan, has held a meeting with Kashmiri leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani in Mecca. Geelani was recently permitted by New Delhi to perform the Haj pilgrimage.

According to the sources, Salahuddin, who has routinely taken responsibility for major terrorist strikes in India, frequently travels to Saudi Arabia on a Pakistani passport. The Saudi Government has had no hesitation in issuing him a visa, the sources maintained. Apart from Salahuddin, several leaders of the Pakistan-based Jamaat-e-Islami are said to be in Mecca.

The Saudi King, who will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations, arrived here from China. He is scheduled to



SETS ASIDE PROTOCOL: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh receiving King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia at the airport in New Delhi on Tuesday. - PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN

meet President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and the Prime Minister on Wednesday.

Ahead of the visit, the External Affairs Ministry spokesman said that some bilateral cooperation agreements were likely to be signed during the visit.

"His Majesty would inaugurate a Saudi Exhibition at Pragati Maidan and address a business summit hosted by the apex chambers of Indian commerce and industry."

"A sizeable Saudi business delegation is accompanying His

Majesty. A special session of the India-Saudi Arabia Business Council would also be held. His Majesty would also visit Jamia Millia Islamia [on January 27] where he would receive an honorary doctorate," the spokesman said.

2 JAN 2006

27

TALKS NEXT MONTH DESPITE TEHRAN INSISTENCE ON URANIUM ENRICHMENT

Iran digs its heels in

Associated Press

VIENNA, Dec. 21. — Iranian and European negotiators tentatively agreed today to meet for further talks next month, signalling a possible new start to negotiations meant to reduce fears that Teheran wants to make nuclear arms. But Iran again insisted on enriching uranium domestically despite concerns it could misuse the technology to make nuclear arms.

Foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki insisted Iran had the right to control the entire cycle for producing fuel for a reactor, from extracting uranium to enriching it. "We don't want talks just for the sake of talks," he told reporters in Teheran. "When we talk about nuclear technology to produce

fuel for our reactors, it means enrichment and having the complete nuclear fuel cycle." Mr Mottaki made the comments in Teheran as Iranian and European negotiators met in Vienna, Austria for the first time since August, when Iran's decision to resume uranium conversion, a precursor of enrichment, torpedoed their talks.

Mr Mottaki appeared to be pessimistic today, suggesting USA was sabotaging EU-Iran dialogue. "Americans tried, before the talks, to impose defeat as the result of the talks on the will of the European countries," he told reporters. Iran has vowed that it will never give up its right under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to enrich uranium and produce nuclear fuel — despite fears that it will exploit enrichment to make the fissile core of nuclear

warheads. Wednesday's talks are high level. Britain, France and Germany were represented by officials who report directly to their foreign ministers, and Iran sent Mr Javad Vaidi, who handles international affairs for the Supreme National Security Council. European negotiators, emerging from talks with their Iranian counterparts, announced that they would consult with their governments on resuming dialogue with Teheran over its atomic ambitions, including uranium enrichment, a possible pathway to nuclear weapons. Talks on the issue broke off in August after Iran ended a freeze on uranium conversion, a precursor to enrichment.

"Both sides set out their positions in an open and frank manner... (and) agreed to consult with their respective leaderships with a

view of holding another round of talks in January," said Mr Stanislas Laboulay, the senior negotiator for France. He said those talks would be aimed at "agreeing on the framework of (further) negotiations."

Few details were immediately available about the substance of today's talks. But they were significant in signaling a return to dialogue after months of growing nuclear tensions exacerbated by recent anti-Jewish comments from Iran's president, EU criticism of Teheran's human rights record and Western concerns about alleged Iranian support for terrorists.

The main issue in Vienna, however, was Iran's insistence that it had a right to enrich uranium, a technology that could produce either nuclear fuel or the fissile core of warheads.

A new era of choice for Palestinian voters

The new variety of candidates means Palestinians can vote for the first time on issues as substantive as corruption, the role of Islam, and the use of violence.

Anne Barnard

PALESTINIAN VOTERS are facing the broadest range of political choices in their history as they prepare to choose their leadership after a series of seismic events that have altered the Middle East landscape.

For the first time, the party founded by Yasser Arafat is squaring off on the national stage against its long-time rival, the militant group Hamas. Although Hamas has carried out scores of suicide bombings against Israel and is listed by the U.S. State Department as a terrorist group, it is respected by many Palestinians for its piety, anti-corruption stance, and network of social services.

The ground shifted for Palestinians with the November 2004 death of Arafat, who had personified and controlled Palestinian policy for decades, and then again with Israel's withdrawal last summer from the Gaza Strip after 38 years of occupation. Now, a generational struggle within Arafat's party, Fatah, has burst into the open before the January 25 election of the 132-member Palestinian Legislative Council, the parliament for the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"This is a critical moment," said Khalil Shikaki, a Palestinian sociologist who has tracked Palestinian public opinion for the past decade. "The struggle we have seen in the street for five years" — the struggle for power and authority within Palestinian society — "is about to be transferred to the institutions."

All this ferment has brought Palestinians a more meaningful choice than they had last February, three months after Arafat's death, when they elected Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestinian Authority, the governing body for Palestinians.

Although parliament has far less power than the President, Palestinians view the legislative election as a referendum on their leadership. The legislature approves Cabinet members, oversees the budget, and can issue a vote of no confidence in the government.

Hamas, the only group that rivals the popularity and patronage power of Fatah, boycotted last year's presidential election. So did the jailed leader of Fatah's young guard, Marwan Barghouti, who now, after a fierce internal struggle, heads the party's candidate list. Hamas also boycotted the previous legislative elections in 1996.

The new variety of candidates means Palestinians can vote for the first time on issues as substantive as corruption, the role of Islam, and whether and how to use violence in the struggle with Israel, which captured the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 1967 war.

The election will help set the course for how the Palestinian Authority deals with Israel 12 years after the Oslo Accords, which were supposed to lead to the creation of a Palestinian state, but instead became mired in a stalemate that led to the bloodiest conflict ever between Palestinians and Israelis from 2000 to early 2005.

Both sides had hoped Arafat's death in November 2004 would yield new leadership with the legitimacy among Palestinians and the clout with the Israeli government needed to shake up the deadlocked peace process. But Palestinian policy has appeared confused and unmoored in the past year, even as Israel has charted a decisive new course, unilaterally building a security barrier to separate Palestinians from Israelis and withdrawing from Gaza on its own terms.

Palestinian politicians, militant leaders, and analysts say that without a clearer strategy, Palestinians risk allowing Israel to shut them out entirely by taking further unilateral moves that would replace bilateral negotiations with a final settlement dictated by Israel.

Now, dissatisfied voters are being offered several choices.

Hamas refuses to renounce violence and advocates an Islamic state. Fatah's young guard echoes Hamas' anti-corruption stance but wants a secular state. Fatah officially accepts Israel's existence and is pushing for a Palestinian state alongside the Jewish

state, but still has an armed wing and a fierce internal debate over whether violence is acceptable. And several slates of independents have also entered the fray.

Many Palestinians are riveted by the new debate among imperfect political choices — especially after Hamas trounced Fatah in municipal elections in several West Bank cities last month.

Disillusionment

Yet even with so much at stake, many are deeply disillusioned with politics that appear to have accomplished little for Palestinians, who after more than a decade under the Palestinian Authority still live in Third World conditions in West Bank and Gaza.

According to the World Bank, 43 per cent of Palestinians live below the poverty line, 23 per cent are unemployed, a figure that reaches 60 per cent among youth in refugee camps. Just 66,000 of the West Bank and Gaza's 3.3 million Palestinians work in Israel, down from 150,000 before the second *intifada*.

Palestinians cite other reasons for cynicism about the elections, in which half the legislators are chosen from nationwide party lists and half from geographical districts.

In its first decade, the Palestinian Legislative Council has had only a limited impact on budget and governance issues.

And it is part of a Palestinian Authority already widely discredited in the eyes of both Palestinians and Israelis, whose military intervention can crush the authority at will. The violence at every stage of the election process — gunmen taking over election offices and issuing demands, clashes in the streets disrupting Fatah's primary voting — has underscored the authority's weakness.

And militant factions that don't participate in the election could still have a decisive vote. Islamic Jihad, a relatively small but hard-line group, is boycotting the elections and has unleashed six suicide attacks against Israel since February, when Palestinian militants declared a truce. A major attack that

prompted a massive Israeli crackdown could undermine any elected government and halt any progress in the conflict.

Palestinians prefer Fatah when they think about national issues like the peace process but increasingly prefer Hamas on local issues, Mr. Shikaki said. A poll he released this month indicated that Fatah was slated to beat Hamas 43 per cent to 25 per cent in the national party-list vote that determines half of the legislature. But Hamas was on track to tie Hamas in the local district races that determine the other half of the seats.

Palestinians seem ambivalent about the emergence of Hamas, which favours rule by Islamic law, as a growing political force.

Only about 15 per cent of Palestinians define themselves as Islamists, in favour of an Islamic state, according to Mr. Shikaki's Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research. About 15 per cent are committed secularists, and the remaining 70 per cent Mr. Shikaki calls "traditional Muslims," who have increasingly defected from Fatah to Hamas.

Many who support Hamas' anti-corruption agenda remain uncomfortable other things Hamas has done in areas it controls, like banning cinemas and alcohol. Randa Abu Rabiee is experiencing that confusion. Dr. Rabiee, who favours a Palestinian state alongside Israel, works on health issues in Nablus and spent last year in Canada on a peace and reconciliation programme, said the participation of the Islamists gave the election "a new taste, a better taste" — because it changed the calcified political landscape.

But Dr. Rabiee said of the Islamists, "They are like a knife with two blades." She resents Hamas leaders for encouraging young boys to blow themselves up and fears that if they win, they will start to interfere in the details of life, such as her decision not to cover her hair. "They will say, 'God gave us the authority,' and they are going to organise our life the way they want." —New York Times News Service

Iran unfazed by sanctions threat, to carry on N-research

REUTERS

Tehran, January 14

IRAN WILL not be deflected from its drive to develop nuclear technology if it is referred to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Saturday.

"If they want to destroy the Iranian nation's rights by that course, they will not succeed," Ahmadinejad told a news conference.

The United States and European Union powers have said they want to have Iran referred to the United Nations because it has failed to allay their suspicions that its nuclear programme is aimed at developing weapons.

Iran raised the stakes in the dispute this week by removing UN seals to gain access to equipment that purifies uranium, which can be used for power or, if highly enriched, in bombs.

Despite repeated questions, Ahmadinejad declined to clarify whether the atomic research work that Iran was resuming would involve small-scale production of enriched uranium, as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has said.

The United States, Britain, Germany and France say talks with Iran are at a dead end, and that they will ask the board of the IAEA, the UN nuclear watchdog, to pass the case to the UN Security Council. However, they have ruled out a military strike on Iran.

They said this week Iran had consistently breached its commitments and failed to show its nuclear activities were peaceful. Tehran denies it is seeking to develop nuclear weapons and says it needs nuclear technology only for electricity.

"We have said time and again that we don't need nuclear weapons," Ahmadinejad said. "Nuclear weapons are pursued by those who want to settle everything by bullying others."

"We want to live in peace side-by-side with the international community," he added.

Ahmadinejad was asked whether Iran would play the "oil weapon" and hold back the world's second biggest reserves of crude from hungry energy markets to retaliate against international pressure. "We have the necessary tools to defend our rights," he said.

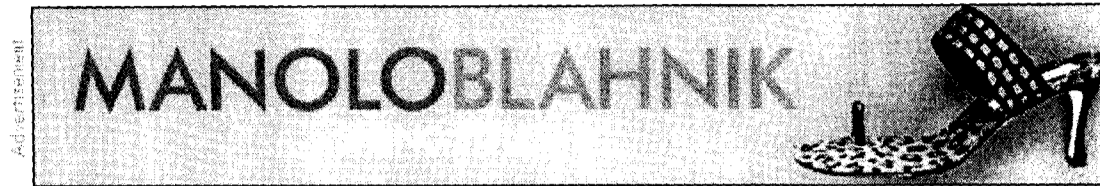
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Hamas Sweeps Palestinian Elections, Complicating Peace Efforts in Mideast

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- Hamas Victory Now a Major Issue in Israeli Election Campaign
- Harper Tells U.S. to Drop Arctic Claim

Advertisement

By *Scott Wilson*
 Washington Post Foreign Service
 Friday, January 27, 2006; Page A01

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Jan. 26 -- The radical Islamic movement Hamas won a large majority in the new Palestinian parliament, according to official election results announced Thursday, trouncing the governing Fatah party in a contest that could dramatically reshape the Palestinians' relations with Israel and the rest of the world.

In Wednesday's voting, Hamas claimed 76 of the 132 parliamentary seats, giving the party at war with Israel the right to form the next cabinet under the Palestinian Authority's president, Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of Fatah.

Fatah, which has dominated the legislature since the previous elections a decade ago and the Palestinian cause for far longer, won 43 seats. A collection of nationalist, leftist and independent parties claimed the rest.

Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia, another Fatah leader, resigned his post along with his cabinet early Thursday, as reports of Hamas's victory began to circulate. Although the cabinet would have been required to step aside even if Fatah had retained its majority, Qureia



Hamas supporters celebrate outside the Palestinian Legislative Council in Ramallah, where some also scuffled with loyalists of rival Fatah. (By Kevin Frayer -- Associated Press)

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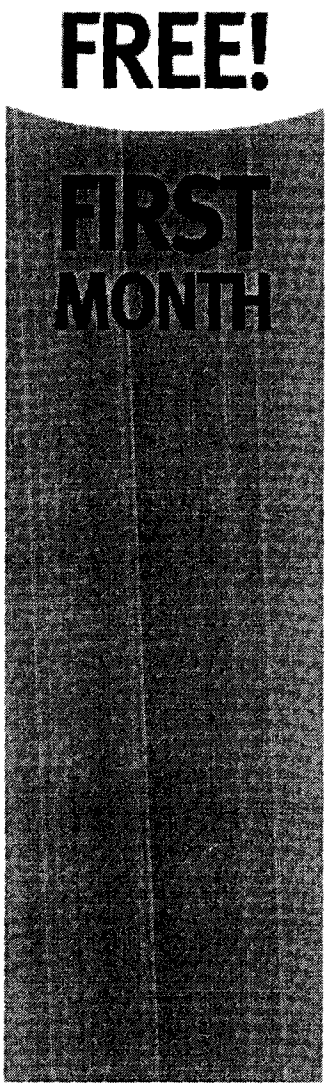
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acknowledged in submitting his resignation that Hamas had earned the right to form the next cabinet.

"This is the choice of the people," Qureia, a member of the party's discredited old guard who did not run for reelection, told reporters here. "It should be respected."

Abbas, on the other hand, will continue to serve the four-year presidential term he won in an election a year ago, shortly after the death of his predecessor, Yasser Arafat, the founder of Fatah. Abbas will maintain the broad power to create national policy and control the security services, though he needs parliamentary approval for his budget and legislative proposals. He will also shape peace policy with Israel as head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which does not include Hamas.

The arrival of Hamas, formally known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, in the Palestinian Authority as a nearly equal partner will severely complicate Abbas's efforts to begin negotiations with Israel under the U.S.-backed peace plan known as the "road map." Hamas, which emerged in 1987 during the first Palestinian uprising as an offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, favors the creation of a Palestinian nation on land that now includes Israel rather than the road map's two-state solution.



PHOTOS



Palestinian Elections
 Palestinians went to the polls Wednesday to choose a 132-member Palestinian Legislative Council in their first parliamentary elections in a decade.

AUDIO

Post's Wilson on Palestinian Elections
 The Washington Post's Scott Wilson reports on the Palestinian Elections from the West Bank.

Palestinian Parliamentary Elections
 What does Hamas's apparent victory mean? It marks a profound change in the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. Under presidents Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas, the secular Palestinian government was committed to the so-called "two-state solution" -- the negotiated establishment of an independent...

FRIDAY, JAN. 27, AT NOON ET
Hamas Gains Power in Palestinian Election
 Washington Post staff writer Scott Wilson, who is based in Jerusalem, discusses the significance of Hamas's win in the Palestinian elections, its significance for Arab-Israeli relations and the prospects for peace in the region.

The election results stunned U.S. and Israeli officials, who have repeatedly stated that they would not work with a Palestinian Authority that included Hamas, which both countries and the European Union have designated as a terrorist organization. In Washington, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that a party could not "have one foot in politics and the other in terror. Our position on Hamas has therefore not changed."

Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said in a statement that the Palestinian people had "voted democratically and peacefully." But, he added, "these results may confront us with an entirely new situation which will need to be analyzed" at a meeting of European foreign ministers next week.

Jubilant Hamas leaders reiterated Thursday that they had no plans to pursue peace talks or disarm the party's armed wing, a condition Israel has set for beginning negotiations under the road map. The plan, which calls for the creation of an independent Palestinian state by the end of 2005, has been frozen during recent years of violence.

Here in Ramallah, a Fatah stronghold where Hamas won every parliamentary seat except the one reserved for a Christian, dozens of activists from both parties clashed in front of the Palestinian Legislative Council, as the parliament is formally known.

PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

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- [Hamas Sweeps Palestinian Elections, Complicating Peace Efforts in Mideast](#)
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Hamas's apparent victory shakes up the political landscape of the Middle East.

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Palestinians vote in their first parliamentary elections in a decade.



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The dispute started when a Hamas supporter hung the party's emerald-green banner above the entrance in place of the national flag. Fatah activists arrived and tore down the banner, which bears the Islamic axiom, "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his prophet." The fight that ensued was broken up by police officers, who fired warning shots into the air.

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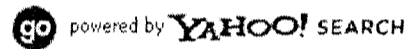
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26 JAN 2006

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Hamis Election Victory Shocks World

By RAVI NESSMAN
The Associated Press
Friday, January 27, 2006; 1:03 AM

RAMALLAH, West Bank -- Islamic militant Hamas' landslide victory in Palestinian elections unnerved the world Thursday, darkening prospects for Mideast peace and ending four decades of rule by the corruption-riddled Fatah Party.

The parliamentary victory stunned even Hamas leaders, who mounted a well-organized campaign but have no experience in government. They offered to share power with President Mahmoud Abbas, the Fatah chief, who said he may go around the new government to talk peace with Israel.

Underscoring the tensions between the secular Fatah and fundamentalist Hamas, some 3,000 supporters of the militant group marched through Ramallah and raised their party's green flag over the Palestinian parliament. Fatah supporters tried to lower the banner. The two sides fought for about 30 minutes, throwing stones and breaking windows in the building.

Abbas, who was elected last year to a four-year term as president of the Palestinian Authority, has yet to decide how closely to work with a group that built its clout through suicide bombings. But his Fatah Party decided not to join a Hamas government, Fatah legislator Saab Erekat said.

"We will be a loyal opposition and rebuild the party," Erekat said after meeting with Abbas.

Hamas won a clear majority in Wednesday's vote, capturing 76 of the 132 seats in parliament, according to official, near-complete results released Thursday. The results of the popular vote were not announced.

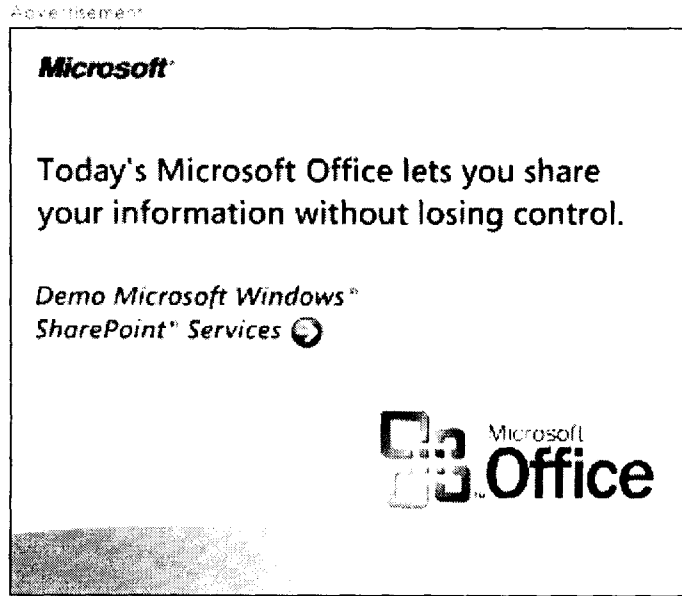
Four independent candidates backed by Hamas also won seats. Fatah, which has dominated Palestinian political life since the 1960s but alienated voters because of rampant corruption, got 43 seats. The remaining went to smaller parties.

Palestinians across the Gaza Strip and West Bank greeted the election results with joy, setting off fireworks and firing rifles in the air.

But leaders across the world demanded that Hamas, which is branded a terror group by the U.S. and European Union, renounce violence and recognize Israel.

"If your platform is the destruction of Israel, it means you're not a partner in peace, and we're interested in peace," President Bush said in Washington.


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Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel will not negotiate with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas members, and senior Cabinet officials held an emergency meeting to discuss the repercussions of the vote. Acting Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni asked the EU not to deal with a "terror government."

Hamas leaders immediately took to the international _ and even Israeli _ airwaves to send out a moderate message.

"Don't be afraid," Ismail Haniyeh, a Hamas leader, told the BBC.

Mahmoud Zahar, another Hamas leader, said the group would extend its year-old truce if Israel reciprocates. "If not, then I think we will have no option but to protect our people and our land," he said.

At a victory news conference late Thursday, however, Haniyeh said Hamas will "complete the liberation of other parts of Palestine." He did not say which territories he was referring to or how he would go about it.

Hamas has largely adhered to the cease-fire declared last February, while a smaller militant group, Islamic Jihad, carried out six suicide bombings against Israelis during that period.

Abbas said he remained committed to peace talks and suggested they be conducted through the Palestine Liberation Organization rather than the Palestinian Authority. That could help him sidestep a Hamas-run government in peace talks.

"I am committed to implementing the program on which you elected me a year ago," he said in a televised speech. "It is a program based on negotiations and peaceful settlement with Israel."

Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia and his Cabinet resigned to make room for a Hamas-led government.

The Islamic group quickly reached out to Abbas to try to work out a partnership, Haniyeh said, adding that he did not expect the Palestinian leader to resign.

Hamas leaders had said before the vote they would be content to be a junior partner in the next government. The group campaigned mainly on cleaning up the Palestinian Authority _ downplaying the conflict with Israel _ and Zahar said Thursday that Hamas planned to overhaul the government.

"We are going to change every aspect, as regards the economy, as regards industry, as regards agriculture, as regards social aid, as regards health, administration, education," he said.

Some experts believed the Hamas victory would force it to moderate. Others feared it would embolden the group to remake Palestinian life in keeping with its strict interpretation of Islam.

"We don't want the Palestinian people and cause to be isolated. We don't want a theocracy," said independent lawmaker Hanan Ashrawi. "Hamas promises reform, sure they will do that, I would like to see reform. But what worries me is things like legislation on education, culture, social welfare, the ramifications for peace in the future."

Hamas' victory was cheered in the Arab world, though many said they feared the group would become even more radical under pressure from its hard-line backers, Syria and Iran.

The rise of Hamas was certain to be a key issue in Israel's March 28 election.

"Today, Hamastan was formed, a representative of Iran and in the image of the Taliban," said Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the opposition Likud Party. Labor Party politician Ami Ayalon, a former head of the Shin Bet security service, said Israel might have to change the route of its West Bank security barrier because of the Hamas victory.

Immediately upon taking power, Hamas will be confronted with an avalanche of issues, including what to do about the Palestinian security services, which are comprised of hard-core Fatah members, said Basem Ezbidid, a political science professor at the West Bank's Bir Zeit University. "It's not going to be easy for Hamas to govern these bodies," he said.

Others expected Hamas to fold its own fighters into the security forces.

Hamas' victory virtually ruled out a resumption of stalled peace efforts, and could push Israel to take further unilateral moves to set its permanent borders, following last year's Gaza pullout.

It also could jeopardize hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign donations to the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority.

Speaking at a news conference, Bush did not directly answer a question about the fate of U.S. aid to the Palestinians, though he suggested Hamas' victory could have an impact. "I made it very clear that the United States does not support political parties that want to destroy our ally Israel, and that people must renounce that part of their platform," he said.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is to meet in London on Monday with U.N., Russian and European leaders as the so-called "Quartet" of would-be international peacemakers evaluates the results and tries to decide how to proceed.

"The Quartet reiterates its view that there is a fundamental contradiction between armed group and militia activities and the building of a democratic state," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said. "A two-state solution to the conflict requires all participants in the democratic process to renounce violence and terror, accept Israel's right to exist, and disarm, as outlined in the 'road map.'"

It will be almost impossible for Israel and the Palestinians to sever ties completely. Much of their infrastructure, including water and electricity networks, is intertwined, and the vast majority of Palestinian imports pass through Israeli-controlled borders. Hamas ministers would also need Israeli permission to travel between the West Bank and Gaza.

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27 JAN 2006

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Vote Complicates Area's Diplomacy

Hamas Emerges as Significant Force Despite U.S. Efforts

By Glenn Kessler
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, January 26, 2006; A19

The Bush administration has strongly urged Palestinian leaders not to permit any Hamas members into the Palestinian cabinet, but yesterday's better-than-expected electoral showing by a group labeled a terrorist organization by the United States greatly complicates the administration's diplomacy in the region, U.S. officials said yesterday.

Hamas, which is dedicated to the destruction of Israel, appears to have ridden a wave of popular disgust at the perceived corruption and incompetence of the ruling Fatah Party. Exit polls indicate Fatah will have only a slim edge over Hamas in the Palestinian Legislative Council, giving Hamas a strong claim to a role in the government.

Fatah in theory may still be able to form a government that excludes Hamas -- formally the Islamic Resistance Movement -- but Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has expressed hope that by bringing Hamas into the political process, it will become a partner in seeking a peace accord with Israel.

The results also suggested the risks inherent in the Bush administration's campaign to bring democracy to the Middle East. Administration spokesmen officially celebrated the "historic moment" for the Palestinians while officials privately reeled at the outcome.

Bush administration officials had hoped Hamas would get as little as 20 percent of the vote. The Washington Post reported Sunday that the United States had spent \$2 million in recent weeks to promote the Palestinian Authority, and by extension Fatah, in a campaign that kept U.S. involvement hidden. Before yesterday, officials were bracing for Hamas to receive 30 to 40 percent of the vote; exit polls indicated that Hamas topped 40 percent of the seats.

U.S. officials, from President Bush on down, reiterated that the United States will not deal with Hamas as long as it does not renounce violence.


"A political party, in order to be viable, is one that professes peace, in my judgment, in order that it will keep the peace," Bush said in an interview with the Wall Street Journal yesterday. "And so you're getting a sense of how I'm going to deal with Hamas if they end up in positions of responsibility. And the answer is: not until you renounce your desire to destroy Israel will we deal with you."

Bush's statement left open the possibility that the United States would not reject a Palestinian government that includes Hamas, but instead that the United States would not work directly with cabinet ministers who have Hamas connections. There is a precedent for this approach: The Bush administration

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26 JAN 2006

already works with the Lebanese government, even though one cabinet member is a member of Hezbollah, also labeled a terrorist group.

The U.S. ambassador to Israel, Dick Jones, was quoted this week in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz as saying the Lebanese model might serve as a guide for dealing with the Palestinian Authority if Hamas joins the government. Jones has told officials in Washington the remarks were made at a dinner party and were taken out of context.

One major issue is that the United States has much more extensive dealings with the Palestinian Authority than it does with Lebanon. Hamas has indicated it would like to obtain ministerial portfolios that touch on social services, raising questions about whether some of the hundreds of millions of dollars in annual U.S. aid could continue to flow to certain public works projects if they are overseen by a Hamas cabinet member.

Moreover, with Israel facing critical elections in March, the administration must deal carefully with the emerging Palestinian government.

The administration must also hold together its allies in the peace process, particularly the European Union. Last late year, the sponsors of the "road map" peace plan, known as the Quartet, issued a statement saying that "a future Palestinian Authority cabinet should include no member who has not committed to the principles of Israel's right to exist in peace and security and an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism."

But that statement was not categorical, and some European officials have indicated in recent days that instead of the black-and-white view expressed by the United States, perhaps Hamas needed greater encouragement to make a break with its past, much like the Irish Republican Army. One U.S. official sighed that the European Union was like the "International House of Pancakes -- there are a ton of waffles there."

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will meet in London next week with her counterparts from the European Union, Russia and the United Nations to try to reach an agreement. "There will be a very healthy debate about how to encourage Hamas to eschew violence and get into the political process," one diplomat involved in the discussions said.

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22 JAN 2006

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Palestinians' Risky Elections

Sunday, January 22, 2006; B06

WITH LEGISLATIVE elections due Wednesday, the Palestinian territories are approaching a state of anarchy. Armed gangs roam the Gaza Strip -- taking foreign hostages, firing rockets at Israel, attacking government offices and occasionally each other -- all without serious impediment by official security forces. Economic activity is choked by the continuing violence and Israeli border controls. The Palestinian Authority itself is bankrupt, its international aid suspended because of its inability to control its own payroll. The balloting itself may provoke considerable violence by gunmen who fear losing their funding.

That the election is nevertheless likely to go forward, with the support of both Israel and the Bush administration, reflects the calculation that a suspension might cause even greater chaos. The voting's greatest beneficiary is likely to be the Islamic movement Hamas, which is participating in a Palestinian national election for the first time and expects to win control of at least a third of the legislature. If denied that chance to gain power, Hamas would likely return to open war against Israel and maybe against the Palestinian Authority. The hope offered by the election is that it will lead the Islamic movement further down a political path that could eventually lead to its disarmament.

Hamas's prospective success has less to do with its fundamentalist platform -- which it has substantially moderated for the sake of the campaign -- than with voters' disgust with the ruling Fatah movement. Riddled with rivalries and weighed down by the corrupt clique of leaders favored by Yasser Arafat, Fatah has been unable to reform itself. Voters rightly blame its undisciplined militias, often little more than local bands of armed thugs, for much of the violence in Gaza. Though he embraces all the right principles, President Mahmoud Abbas has proved utterly incapable of imposing order even on his own movement.

By contrast, Hamas's military wing is disciplined; it has maintained a cease-fire with Israel for nearly a year. Its leaders emphasize their plans to fight corruption and provide better education and health care to a much-deprived population.

Mr. Abbas and other Palestinian moderates hope that once its elected representatives take seats in the legislature and possibly the cabinet, Hamas will choose to extend its cease-fire and allow peace negotiations to go forward. That is certainly what Palestinians want: A recent poll showed that 65 percent want the truce to continue and nearly 80 percent want negotiations to resume. Israel's acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, offered the prospect of renewed talks if the Palestinian Authority disarmed militants after the elections, but virtually no one in Israel expects that will happen. On the contrary, Israeli security authorities are bracing for a new wave of Palestinian terrorist attacks between now and Israel's upcoming elections in late March. Hamas insists it will not disarm, though some leaders speak of integrating its fighters into a unified Palestinian security force.

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Having prescribed democracy as an essential condition for a Palestinian state, the Bush administration can hardly stand in the way of electoral participation by a movement that represents a large fraction of Palestinians. It must hope that Hamas eventually will embrace democracy as the sole means of advancing its agenda, rather than as a mere tool to prevent its own disarmament or any Palestinian concessions to Israel, and that it will feel obliged to moderate its tactics and agenda while serving in government. Whether or not that happens, a Palestinian Authority backed by Hamas may be able to restore a semblance of order to Gaza. In the dismal present circumstances, that would be a step forward.

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Iran and Israel will be kings of the jungle

The U.S. occupation of Iraq has turned its neighbour into a new regional power. But the contagion is likely to spread far wider.

David Hirst

IN MARCH 2003, before U.S. troops re-entred Baghdad, Middle East scholar Volker Perthes wrote that while the risks of this "illegitimate" war were enormous, those of a U.S. failure to stabilise postwar Iraq would be even higher. "With those words looking increasingly prophetic, no one, in picturing the implications of such failure, is now more lurid than the Bush administration. The direness of the prospect has become its strongest argument for 'staying the course,' but for others it is already a given, amounting to 'the greatest strategic disaster in U.S. history.'" in the words of the retired U.S. General William Odom.

If so, what will this disaster look like? In scale, it will surely be at least commensurate with the vast ambitions that came with the invasion in the first place, Iraq being cast as the platform for reshaping the entire Middle East.

A general U.S. retreat from the region, with troop withdrawal at its core, is no doubt a prerequisite for, and yardstick of, the emergence of a healthy, self-reliant new Middle Eastern order. But, with the kind of ignominious scuttle from Iraq that failure would presumably entail, the region won't just revert to the *status quo ante*. Instead of Iraq becoming a beacon of all good things it will become the single most noxious wellspring of all the bad ones the invasion was supposed to extinguish — and new ones

to boot. If the Middle East was a jungle before, it will be a wilder one afterwards, with most elements of the decadent existing order, in their increased insecurity, driven to even cruder methods — increased internal repression or external adventurism — to preserve themselves. And it will become even more anti-American. For while a "good" retreat would decrease such sentiments, a "bad" Iraqi one will only spur and spread the active, often violent expression of them. That is because, for the Arabs, Iraq was only the latest drastic episode in a long history of western interference in their affairs. Until the wider, pre-Iraqi consequences of that interference are remedied, the example of successful anti-American resistance in Iraq will only encourage it elsewhere, especially in Palestine.

Saddam's Iraq was the very model of Arab tyranny — with sectarianism, in the shape of Sunni minority rule, as its main component. With American failure it will become the model of Arab anarchy, embodying the two most disruptive forces in the Middle East today.

One is a sectarianism (chiefly Sunni versus Shia) or ethnic antagonism (chiefly Kurd versus Arab, Turk, and Iranian) as malevolent in its new pluralist form as it was in its more familiar despotic one. The other is universalist, ideologically driven Islamism. Elections show that this is the dominant or rising force on both sides of Iraq's widening sectarian divide. Islamism will spawn its in-

evitable fanatical progeny and Iraq, till now mainly a magnet for pan-Islamic *jihādists*, will become, Afghan-style, a main exporter of them too; it already is, in fact, as the Jordanian suicide bombings illustrated.

The Arab states will be sucked into this Iraqi maelstrom. With the world's only superpower on its way out, who but they — along with Turkey and Iran — are left to replace it there? But they will fail disastrously in their turn. In the past the regimes more or less controlled the business of interference in each other's other affairs, as they exerted such control over their domestic arenas. Now they will be competing with those non-state forces, primarily the ethnic/sectarian and Islamist ones, by which they also are increasingly challenged. In fact almost all these countries are latent Iraqs, especially Ba'athist Syria. Far from mastering Iraq, it is Iraq — in its death throes as a unified state — that is more likely to master them. Nor will Turkey and Iran, Iraq's strongest neighbours, be immune from the contagion, with Iraqi Kurdish emancipation already contributing to a resurgence of Kurdish resistance in both.

If all this portends an unfathomable mess, one thing at least is already clear: Iran will be the main beneficiary of U.S. failure and the long-overdue accession of the Shia majority, its coreligionists, to political ascendancy in Iraq. The increase in regional clout it derives from this will be used at America's expense. For Iran, the sectarian/ethnic and Islamist

factors are now potent assets. Its Kurdish vulnerabilities are more than offset by improved Shia influence throughout the region. This is a reality which, within the Sunni-dominated Arab establishment, Jordan King Abdullah warns of a "Shia crescent" stretching from Iraq, via Syria (so long as its pro-Iranian Alawite regime survives), to south Lebanon. Jordanian politicians even talk of building a "Sunni wall" through Iraq to keep the peril at bay.

In addition, non-Arab Iran is now the main state patron of radical Islamism in the Arab world, and Palestine is its most profitable arena. Long an advocate of Islamising the Palestinian struggle, nothing could better serve its ambition than the effect that U.S. failure in Iraq will have on Hamas, which is now close to supplanting the secular-nationalist Fatah as the dominant political force in the occupied territories.

But the thing that will really make it and Israel the most dangerous animals in the post-Iraqi Middle East jungle is Iran's apparent quest for nuclear weapons.

With U.S. failure, Israel will grow more repressive against the Palestinians, and more ready for military action against Iran. Should the U.S. itself deal with Iran in the same violent and partisan fashion as it did Iraq, the adverse consequences of that new adventure will outstrip those of the earlier one. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

Free speech in secular democracies

The trial resumes next month for internationally acclaimed Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, who commented last year in a Swiss newspaper on the massacre of 30,000 Kurds and one million Armenians on Turkish soil during World War I. He was charged by public prosecutors under a controversial Turkish law, Article 301, for "denigrating Turkishness." The criminal insult provision in this law states: "Where insulting being a Turk is committed by a Turkish citizen in a foreign country, the penalty to be imposed shall be increased by one third." The Turkish Penal Code also stipulates that when an offence is committed through the print or other mass media, the penalties are automatically increased. This is an outrageous measure against free speech. The trial, which opened in December, was postponed for whatever reason. Around the same time, several nationalist lawyers petitioned Turkish prosecutors to file criminal charges against Mr. Pamuk for insulting the military. This stemmed from Mr. Pamuk's reported remark to the prominent German newspaper, *Die Welt*, that the military was a threat to democratisation in Turkey. Prosecutors decided there were no grounds for these charges, and some nationalist lawyers plan to appeal this decision. Although Mr. Pamuk has made it clear he is unwilling to be perceived as the poster boy of Western democracy, these events have raised international concerns about the criminalisation of free speech in Turkey. A group of observers from the European Parliament went so far as to say that if Turkey did not modify Article 301, the chances of its being admitted into the European Union would be severely diminished.

The sequence of events also adds definition to an observed phenomenon that Mr. Pamuk discusses in a recent article in *The New Yorker*, which is the rise of nationalist fanaticism (which is distinct from religious extremism) in rapidly growing economies. According to him, this trend can be seen in secular countries where globalisation has fostered rapid growth. The newly rich ruling class becomes fiercely protective of the country's international image in the interests of preserving its standing in the international 'market.' It does this by brandishing its nationalism and frequently using state power to suppress and undermine dissent in society in the name of national unity. This then injures a nation's commitment to freedom of expression, a core value that ranks high when it comes to assessing democracy and long-term stability in a country. Mr. Pamuk's caveat is that the West's credibility in this regard has been severely damaged by the lies told about the war in Iraq. As far as Turkey is concerned, although changes to offending laws may be on the drawing board, the need honestly and urgently to confront the often painful truths of history through free debate and critical discussion must be placed at the heart of its effort to emerge as a truly secular and democratic nation.

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Uncertainty in Israel

4/17/11

Over the last few months, Ariel Sharon, known as the “butcher of Shatilla” for his role in the attack on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, was trying to create an altogether new legacy so that history could judge him differently. But as the battle-hardened Israeli Prime Minister would have known only too well, uncertainty dogs even the best-laid plans. In his case, it was a sudden stroke, which, even if he survives, has removed him as a player in Israeli politics — and in the most intractable conflicts of modern history. It seems now that at best, he will leave behind a plan for the region that has as many ambiguities as hopes attached to it. Only a month ago, Prime Minister Sharon broke away from the right wing Likud to form Kadima or ‘Forward’, a new party. The move came months after Israel’s dramatic pull-out of troops as well as settlers from Gaza. The decision enraged the Israeli Right that saw it as the ultimate betrayal by a leader who was an architect of the occupation. For the Israeli Left, the disengagement smacked of unilateralism that, unless accompanied by a peace process, would not lead to a solution of the West Asian crisis. Mr. Sharon believed he could build a ‘middle ground’ by selling his plan of withdrawal from the occupied territories as the realistic way forward. From the popularity of Kadima in the days before its leader was incapacitated, it seemed that voters in the March parliamentary election were prepared to give him and his road-map a chance.

Did this map contain two states, the only acceptable solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? Mr. Sharon was convinced two states would come into existence when the withdrawal was complete and a wall built to keep Palestinians out of Israel. But there was no guarantee the Palestinians would get a just deal on territory, or that Israel would emerge ‘secure,’ especially as he was determined to annex the larger blocks of Zionist settlements in the West Bank. How he proposed to deal with the issue of Jerusalem is also not clear. The strengthening of Hamas, a powerful extremist contender in the January 25 Palestinian Authority elections, appears to be a consequence of his unilateralism. It did much to undermine the Government of Mahmoud Abbas and the Fatah party. But the future is uncertain for both the disengagement plan and Kadima, a party built on the larger-than-life image of its leader. The abrupt end of Mr. Sharon’s political career gives Likud, led by the hardline Benjamin Netanyahu, a chance to retrieve some political space. It also gives Labour, under the enlightened leadership of Amir Peretz who wants negotiations with the Palestinians, an opportunity to woo the centrist vote. Much will depend on the results of the Palestinian Authority election — a strong showing by Hamas is likely to spur a hardline one-upmanship in the Knesset elections. With doctors making slow progress in their efforts to wake Mr. Sharon from his induced coma, the future of the region is as uncertain as ever.

Israel allows Palestinian ballot

Move to block Hamas participation is anti-democratic, say Palestinians

Chris McGreal

JERUSALEM: Under pressure from Washington, the Israeli Government said on Tuesday it would allow Arab residents of East Jerusalem to vote in Palestinian parliamentary elections this month — an issue which had threatened to derail the ballot. But the Government says it will not permit Hamas to appear on ballots used in the city. Before he suffered a stroke last week, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered that candidates be prevented from campaigning in Jerusalem and threatened to stop the vote in the city on January 25. Ostensibly the issue was the participation of Hamas in the election, but Mr. Sharon also saw the voting as an encroachment on Israel's claim to sovereignty over the Arab east of the city occupied in 1967.

On Monday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said the American Government had told him that Israel would modify its position. On Tuesday, Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz announced that East Jerusalem Palestinians would be allowed to

vote on the same terms as in earlier elections. "Israel will follow the same policy as in the 1996 elections, which means it will allow people to vote at five post offices in East Jerusalem," Mr. Mofaz said in a statement. The decision will be ratified by a Cabinet meeting on Sunday.

The Foreign Ministry said the voting was conditional on Hamas candidates not appearing on ballots used in Jerusalem. However, they are usually identified as belonging to an alliance of Islamist parties.

The Palestinian leadership has denounced Israeli efforts to block Hamas participation in the election as anti-democratic and interference. The U.S. and other western governments have been torn over the issue, believing that a group with the support of a third or more of Palestinian voters cannot be excluded from the political process. But they have said once Hamas is represented in Parliament, it must disarm and end its war against Israel if it wishes to be accepted by the outside world. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited

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SECURITY CHAOS: Hamas leaders and candidates for the parliamentary elections protest against violence during a rally in Gaza City recently. — PHOTO: AP

In hostility and in peace-making he refused to yield to circumstances. Israel will miss his leadership, says DAVID GROSSMAN

The Incomparable Ariel Sharon

ARIEL SHARON is fighting for his life. He's a man of potent primal urges, of violence, of combat, cunning and brilliant, a sharp manipulator, brave and corrupt. He has swung like a mighty pendulum between construction and destruction, and blatantly ignored limits, whether international boundaries or the boundaries of the law. Clearly, he has seen himself as a man destined to make history, not one who yields to circumstances.

Time after time, Sharon instigated large-scale political and military manoeuvres meant to change the world utterly, to make it fit his own vision. He always did so with determination, sometimes with brutality, without regard for what means he used to achieve his ends.

Even his sworn opponents are concerned today. They are worried about the huge vacuum that has suddenly opened in the Israeli leadership.

Because Sharon, in an amazingly short time, has metamorphosed from being one of the men most hated and feared by most Israelis into a respected leader, accepted and even much loved by his people. He has become a kind of big, powerful father figure whom Israelis are willing to follow, with their eyes closed, to whatever he may lead them. Their faith in him is so great that they do not even demand that he tell them which direction he plans to go, or what his foreign policy will be, or what state of affairs he intends to create for them.

No one, not even the government ministers closest to him, knew Wednesday night — fewer than 90 days before the upcoming elections — whether Sharon intended, after his re-election, to commence peace negotiations with the Palestinians or to conduct another large, unilateral withdrawal in the West Bank. Suspending their right to know, Israelis have preferred to put their future in Sharon's hands, to put aside their personal judgement and their right to information and to criticise their country's policies.

With the huge swell of support the public has given Sharon's new

political party, the Israeli majority has said to Sharon: "We trust you to do the right thing, and we don't even want to know the details."

Here are a few events and statements about Sharon that have been etched in the Israeli consciousness. They offer one possible portrayal (just one, because his personality is complex enough to allow several). David Ben-Gu-

in the elite Unit 101. Then he was known for his violent, brutal and extreme treatment of Arabs, both combatants and innocent civilians. His commanders, such as Moshe Dayan, warned him about his disdain for human life, including the lives of his own soldiers. Time after time, his advancement in the military hierarchy was blocked because of reserva-



tion, Israel's legendary first prime minister, said in the 1950s of the young, bold and brilliant officer: "If he could overcome his bad habit of not telling the truth, he could be an exemplary military leader." Menachem Begin, premier in the 1980s, said: "Sharon is liable to surround the prime minister's office with tanks."

In the '50s, when he wielded no little influence on the Israeli army's way of thinking and carrying out its missions, he was an officer

and severe criticism of his behavior by his superior officers.

In 1972, as general of the southern command, he conducted a campaign to expel Palestinians from Gaza in order to make room for Israeli settlements. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were cruelly, violently displaced. Their homes were destroyed and their wells filled in. That was the beginning of Sharon's career as the architect and contractor of Israel's settlement enterprise.

It is difficult to imagine how the hundreds of flourishing Israeli settlements in the occupied territories could have been built without his determination, his questionable methods and his ideological fervour. As a politician, he built more and more, making sure to locate them so that they would sever Arab population centers one from the other, and

his PM, Begin, and entangled Israel in the Lebanon war. Thousands died on both sides, and Israel's forces spent the next 18 years deep in the Lebanese mire.

His conduct during the Lebanon war, and his responsibility for the massacre that Lebanese Christians carried out against Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, led an official commission of inquiry to disqualify him from serving as defence minister. His visit to the Temple Mount in 2000, when tension between Israel and the Palestinians was combustible, was the match that set off the bloody AlAqsa intifada.

But a short time after he was elected prime minister, a change came over him. No one predicted it. At that point in his life, Sharon seems to have reached the conclusion that Israel could not achieve any further territorial or diplomatic gains and that he had to concentrate on securing what the country had achieved so far. We can only presume that, when he viewed events in Israel, he saw that the country appeared to be losing its way, that its people were in despair about the conflict, which seemed to have turned into an endless, low-grade war.

The Geneva initiative — a process of informal negotiations between leading Israelis and Palestinians — produced an alternative, nongovernmental peace plan that pressured Sharon to set out on the most surprising and bold-est gambit of his life. He realised that the land had to be partitioned between its two peoples, that the occupation could not continue, that the Palestinians would have their own state and that thousands of Israeli settlers would have to be evacuated from Gaza.

Just as he had done every other time he tried to change the world, he carried out the Gaza disengagement with his signature determination and brutality, with virtuosic political manipulation. He established facts unilaterally, displaying personal and public courage that can only be admired.

What will happen now? Israel is a democracy, but we are witnessing a phenomenon that recalls

what happens in totalitarian states when a leader leaves the stage. Sharon's rule was so centralised and total that it seems as if there is no one who can take his place.

The clear will of the majority is to end the conflict with the Palestinians and establish, finally, Israel's permanent borders. Yet the initial impression is that no other Israeli leader would have the political backing to take the difficult and painful steps necessary to reach this goal. Bloodletting was avoided during the evacuation of Gaza in large measure because most Israelis obediently accepted the authority and will of Sharon.

The people saw Sharon as their unchallenged, natural leader, mature, wise. He became a kind of "democratic monarch". Was it his physical presence, his huge farm in the Negev, his profound connection to the land, his tales of heroism? Something about him said power, confidence and stability. It linked him to Jewish warriors and heroes of past ages. Israelis compared him to Bar-Kochba, to Judah Maccabee. His masses of admirers replaced King David's name with Sharon's nickname in a familiar folk song and sang "Arik, King of Israel".

Israel faces a period of political instability. There is no way of knowing who will be its next leader, but we can lament that we will probably miss, or put off for an uncertain period of time, the great opportunity that Sharon created when he set Israel on the road to the end of the occupation. Even if he did so while completely ignoring the Palestinians, and did nothing to shore up the other side, which must be our partners in peace, we cannot but admire his courage and determination.

For now, we can only mourn the fact that only in their eighth decade do Israeli leaders realise that force is not a solution, that concessions and compromises are necessary, and that we must walk the painful but inevitable road to peace.

David Grossman, an Israeli, is the author of 'Death as a Way of Life: Israel Ten Years After Oslo' LA Times-Washington Post

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Israel faces a period of political instability. For now we can only mourn the fact that only in their eighth decade do Israeli leaders realise that force is not a solution and that we must walk the painful and inevitable road to peace

INDIAN EXPRESS

9 JAN 2006

Peace process on tenterhooks

Sharon's Exit From Politics May Dramatically Affect MidEast

Jerusalem/Washington: An era of huge upheaval in Israeli politics and the Middle East peace process has been heralded with doctors saying Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is unlikely ever to return to work after a stroke left him in a coma and clinging to life on a respirator.

Sharon's possible exit from the political scenario takes on added significance with elections coming up in both Israel and Palestine and the peace plan he has begun having reached a crucial juncture. Place this against a backdrop of controversies and unrest across the Middle East, and the world is left with a simmering cocktail of uncertainty and fear.

The list of uncertainties bedeviling the Middle East has grown longer and deeper: Palestinian factions fighting each other in the streets, the unending war and relentless insurgency in Iraq, the rising political clout of Islamic militants in Egypt, political uncertainty in Syria and Lebanon, Iran's conflict with the West over its nuclear programme. Now there's another: the direction Israel will take with Sharon unlikely to return to power.

"This makes a complicated picture even harder to sort out," said Ehsan Ahrari, a political analyst in Virginia. "The old structures of the Middle East are gone or they are imploding."

Sharon sensed the shifts. The former war hero once gave Israeli forces full rein to battle the Palestinian uprising, which he helped restart by his September 2000 visit near Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque, one of the most important sites in Islam.

But then Sharon surprised the world by pushing a peace process on his terms: sealing off Palestinian lands and forcing Israeli settlers out of the Gaza Strip. It gave 1.3 million Palestinians a degree of self-rule, but also amplified power struggles opened by the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in 2004.

Leaders from across the world sent wishes to Jerusalem for a speedy recovery, aware that Sharon's fate could profoundly alter the political dynamics in the Middle East. Israelis believe they need Sharon now more than ever. A part of his popularity among them stems from a belief the man nicknamed 'The Bulldozer' can take bold steps others would not get away with, given his background as the archetypal hawk.

Political analysts said the election, which Sharon had been widely expected to win as head of his new centrist Kadima party, would become an open race if he died or was incapacitated. But two opinion polls published in newspapers on Friday suggested that under present vice-premier Ehud Olmert, Kadima would still win



around 40 of parliament's 120 seats—well ahead of Likud, the rightist party Sharon abandoned, and the centre-left Labour.

Many Palestinians, with the notable exception of the militants, feel Sharon, who has been long reviled in the Arab world, is of use right now. Palestinian National Authority President Mahmud Abbas said, "We see (Sharon's hospitalisation) as an important and serious event and are following with great concern any harm that may come to him." He telephoned Sharon's office to wish him a speedy recovery.

Sharon suffered his stroke at a crucial juncture, as he was fighting for re-election on a promise to end conflict with the Palestinians. He undertook bold initiatives to make Israel withdraw from Gaza and form Kadima. They were seen in the West as key steps toward peace in the region.

In the US, the Bush administration, planning for a Middle East without Sharon, expressed hope on Thursday that Israel would stick to his policies.

The US administration was almost openly hoping that Sharon would win the election and take another set of bold steps, perhaps withdrawing from other parts of the West Bank. Now there are doubts whether a successor will have the political strength

An Israeli medical professional at the eastern hospital where Sharon is recovering.

Former UN Middle East envoy Kofi Annan: He has been a great leader of the people who has taken courageous decisions leading to a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the Middle East. I wish him a speedy recovery.

Italy's Premier Silvio Berlusconi: This is a very painful event on a human level and it is absolutely negative because the peace process.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw: His office is saying publicly they are praying for a miracle, so we hope and pray for a speedy recovery.

Palestinian commentator: Even though Sharon is better for the region, he is still a villain despite all the times he has been in power.

Palestinian National Authority President Mahmud Abbas: We are following with great concern any harm that may come to him and we wish him a speedy recovery for the region.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: Hopefully, the news that the criminal of Sabra and Chatilla has joined his ancestors is final.

Palestinian militant group Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri: The world is on the verge of being rid of one of its worst leaders.

Israeli ultranationalist Michael Bar-Zohar: The angels listened to our prayers.

US Christian evangelical broadcaster Pat Robertson: He was dividing God's land and I would say was into any prime minister of Israel who takes a similar course to bypass the European Union, the UN, or the USA.

or desire to follow that path.

"Sharon's illness is a major setback to the administration," said Aaron David Miller, a scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center and a former Middle East adviser in several administrations. "Disengagement was not only Israel's policy but America's." Among the Palestinians, Sharon is still a villain. They have long suspected Sharon's plans for ending conflict meant he would dictate terms that would leave them only fragments of the state they seek. Agencies & NYT News Service

Sharon undergoes emergency surgery

Doctors fear irreversible brain damage to the Israeli Prime Minister

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's condition appeared to have deteriorated, as he had to undergo another emergency operation after a scan revealed fresh bleeding in his brain.




Shlomo Mor-Yosef, the director of the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem where Mr. Sharon was admitted on Wednesday night following a massive cerebral haemorrhage, said that the scan showed an enlargement of the ventricle. He added that doctors were trying to drain excess blood in order to relieve the pressure. Mr. Sharon had undergone a seven-hour operation on Wednesday night, following his illness.

Ehud Olmert, Mr. Sharon's Deputy, has taken over as caretaker Prime Minister.

Dr. Mor-Yosef said earlier in the afternoon that Mr. Sharon had to be taken to the operation theatre for emergency surgery. Before the operation, doctors said they were planning to keep Mr. Sharon sedated and on a respirator at least until Sunday, to give him a chance to recover. Dr. Mor-Yosef added that predictions for the future were almost impossible to make. "We can't

Ariel Sharon's possible successors

Ehud Olmert has assumed the post of acting Prime Minister following Ariel Sharon's stroke, which has plunged Israel into political upheaval and raised the question of succession in Sharon's newly-formed centrist Kadima party

		
Ehud Olmert, 60 Vice Prime Minister Former Jerusalem mayor Joined government in 2003. Became Sharon's closest ally in right-wing Likud party. Has taken dovish stance towards Palestinians and quickly followed Sharon out of Likud to join Kadima	Tzipi Livni, 47 Justice Minister Experienced lawyer, key dovish figure since joining Likud in 2001. Most senior woman among Sharon's allies and one of Israel's most popular politicians. Supported Sharon's <i>disengagement plan</i> , before joining Kadima	Shaul Mofaz, 57 Defence Minister Former chief of staff of <i>Israeli Defence Forces</i> joined Likud in 2003. Employed tough tactics to counter Palestinian uprising, but backed Sharon's <i>Gaza pullout plan</i> . Defected to Kadima after brief attempt to win Likud party leadership

Shimon Peres, 82. Veteran former Premier left Labour party in November to support Sharon. Vastly experienced but age makes him unlikely candidate

Pictures: Associated Press, Getty Images

39 of the Knesset's 120 seats, with Labour party capturing 20 seats and Likud 16.

AFP reports:

Doctors were conducting a brain scan in the aftermath of the new operation, his third in less than two days, for an update on the damage caused by the massive haemorrhage.

"The Prime Minister's operation was finished a few minutes ago. He was then taken to the CT (computed tomography) scanner unit," hospital sources said.

Battle for life

The former general's battle for life overshadowed the start of the Jewish Sabbath, with Israelis and Jewish visitors flocking to Jerusalem's Western Wall to pray for a man whose departure from the political scene will have implications far beyond the narrow borders of Israel.

"Ours is a changed and uncertain country without him at its helm, and many Israelis feel thoroughly bereft without his massive overwhelming presence," said an editorial in the *Jerusalem Post*.

Only three days ago, Mr. Sharon and his Kadima party seemed to ser for victory for a March 28 general election but even his closest allies have ac-

knowledge he is unlikely to ever return to office, while doctors have privately said he may well have suffered irreversible brain damage. For the moment at least, officials have said the election will go ahead as planned in three months' time.

A White House spokesman said in Washington that the Palestinian elections should go ahead as planned despite the uncertainty caused by Mr. Sharon's illness.

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas on Thursday insisted the ballot would not be postponed.

Few Israelis have left such a mark on both the military and political landscape as the controversial Mr. Sharon over the past 50 years.

While Mr. Sharon lay fighting for his life, the Israeli media began publishing his political obituaries all of which acknowledged his towering presence.

Haaretz said he deserved the nation's gratitude for showing courage by pulling out of the Gaza Strip as well as standing up to Palestinian violence.

"Sharon is completing his term as a revered leader who was able to stand up to enemies at home and abroad, and only faltered on the heroic battle for health," it said.

Handwritten notes: "Amir" with a circled 'u', "711", and "710-19".

7 JAN 2006

THE HINDU

Israeli politics plunges into uncertainty

Illness dashes hopes of a new political equation

BRIAN WHITAKER

JUST A few weeks ago there was a feeling that Ariel Sharon, the master tactician, had finally broken the mould of Israeli politics. With his plans held hostage by the right wing of the Likud party, he decided to call their bluff by breaking away and forming his own group. It was a huge gamble, but it seemed to be working. Other Likud members joined his new party, as well as the former Labour leader, Shimon Peres. For a time it looked as though Sharon, the old warhorse who had been nicknamed "the bulldozer", would become the man who gave birth to a party of the political centre.

Wednesday's events called all that into question. A doctor said he had suffered a "significant stroke" which, even if he survives, means that his capacity to fight the forthcoming general election against a Likud led by Binyamin Netanyahu must be seriously in doubt.

Constitutionally the position is that if the prime minister becomes incapacitated the deputy premier will assume the post for 100 days. After that, Israel's ceremonial president will meet political leaders and choose someone to form a coalition government. But Sharon's newly formed Kadima party — which is still in the process of establishing its organisation and raising campaign funds — now finds itself without an effective leader.

The group includes a mix of politicians who have left the hard-line Likud party and dovish Labour party. If Sharon cannot run, potential replacements include Peres, the justice minister Tzipi Livni and the finance minister Ehud Olmert. Since Kadima grew out of Likud, it is unlikely that it would choose Peres because of his Labour background. Olmert (60) joined the national government in 2003 after a decade as mayor of Jerusalem and became Sharon's closest and most outspoken ally in Likud, as he manoeuvred to overcome internal unity over the Gaza pullout. Olmert has gained a reputation for floating vaguely dovish

ideas on defusing conflict with the Palestinians, such as a more significant pullout in the West Bank.

Livni (47), the most senior woman in Sharon's inner circle, hails from a well-known ultra-nationalist family, but has endorsed some occupied land to the Palestinians as a pragmatic way to preserve Israel's Jewish majority — if not to achieve a peace agreement.

Another possible successor is Shaul Mofaz, Mofaz, born in 1948, became defence minister in 2003 after five years as army chief, which capped a 35-year military career including stints in special forces and a role in a 1976 commando rescue of Israelis held at Entebbe airport after a hijack.

A security hawk, Mofaz adopted harsh tactics towards the Palestinians, such as air strikes and house demolitions, but he staunchly backed Sharon's plan to pull out of the Gaza Strip, and approves of future talks on a Palestinian state, provided they first disarm militants and carry out security reforms.

In theory this is a disastrous position for Kadima to be in, just three months away from the election. However, it is also possible to envisage a scenario where if Sharon dies or is incapacitated for a long time, Kadima might be swept to electoral success on a wave of sympathy by voters eager to see the party carry on where he left off. How it will actually turn out is, at this stage, anyone's guess.

Sharon's illness also poses questions for Washington. Despite his age — he will be 78 next month — the Bush administration has tended to view him as a permanent fixture on the Israeli political scene and has shaped its policies accordingly.

Despite his record over the decades, Sharon has recently tried to position himself as a peacemaker. The question that still cannot be definitively answered, though, is whether his withdrawal from Gaza was intended to be the start of a process that would lead to a Palestinian state or merely a device for avoiding it. Now, perhaps, we shall never know.

The Guardian



Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert sits next to Ariel Sharon's empty chair during an emergency Cabinet meeting.

Global reactions

- Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas offered his best wishes for Ariel Sharon's recovery in a phone call to the office of the ailing Israeli prime minister. Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia said, "No doubt, this is an event that will have an impact, not only on Israel, but also the region."
- US President George W. Bush, in a message said, "On behalf of all Americans, we send our best wishes and hopes to the prime minister and his family."
- "To anyone who entertains any notion to try and exploit this situation ... the security forces and IDF (Israeli military) are ready for any kind of challenge," Sharon spokesman Raanan Gissin said
- French President Jacques Chirac, who shares a love-hate relationship with Israel, sent get-well wishes saying that the ailing leader's "courageous" peace efforts must continue

Israelis stunned, enemies rejoice

REUTERS
Jerusalem, January 5

STUNNED ISRAELIS were glued to radio and television sets on Thursday, desperate for news of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as he fought for his life after undergoing surgery for a massive cerebral haemorrhage.

At Judaism's Western Wall worshippers prayed for the 77-year-old former general.

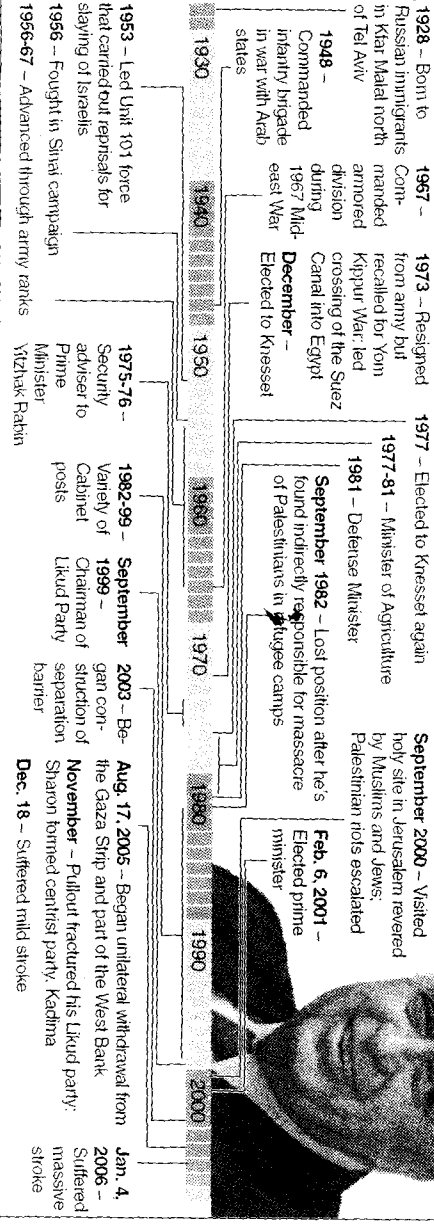
But news the bulky leader was in critical condition was greeted with celebrations among Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and ultranationalist Israelis, groups with nothing in common but their loathing for the man nicknamed "The Bulldozer".

On buses and in shops, radio stations played melancholy music between updates on Sharon's condition and interviews with medical experts. "It's a shame that he has gone," said salesman David Dayan as he rushed to work in Jerusalem. "It's fate". Israeli television stations carried little but updates from Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital and analysis of the potential fallout from Sharon's condition. "The Israeli public is suffering from confusion and stress, anxiety and a feeling of unreality," Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will not return to the political arena," wrote Maya Bangal on the *Maariv* newspapers NRG website.

Elsewhere, Sharon's foes celebrated. Ultranationalists who fought bitterly against Israel's withdrawal from Gaza last year raised glasses of wine in a toast when they heard that Sharon was in critical condition. "The angels listened to our prayers," Michael Ben-Horin, a member of the anti-Arab Kach group, said. News of Sharon's illness was greeted with celebrations in the Gaza Strip, where Palestinian children held up signs saying "Sharon go to hell" and gave out sweets to mark the occasion.

Israeli leader at another crossroad

Ariel Sharon, 77, Israel's oldest serving prime minister, suffered a cerebral hemorrhage Wednesday and underwent surgery. Powers were transferred to his deputy, Vice Premier Ehud Olmert.



Israel may freeze tax payment to Palestinians

ADAM ENTOUS

JERUSALEM, JANUARY 31

IN A potential blow to the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority, Israel said on Tuesday it might suspend monthly tax payments during a policy review after the victory of Hamas. This follows the call by four countries on Monday for Hamas to renounce violence against Israel to continue getting funding from them.

Palestinian Economy Minister Mazen Sonnoqrot decried what he called "an irresponsible and grave decision" and said it would have "negative economic and social consequences on the Palestinians".

Hamas spokesman Mushir al Masri accused Israel of "trying to steal Palestinian money".

Israel collects customs revenue on behalf of the Palestinians and hands it over to the Authority, and the next automatic payment falls due on Wednesday, February 1. The transfers total is expected to be \$55 million this month and the salaries of about 140,000 Palestinian employees depend to a large extent on receipt of the money.

"Acting Prime Minister (Ehud) Olmert has ordered a policy review on whether or not automatic transfers should continue. That review is ongoing and has not reached final decisions," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev. "Pending final decision, it is most likely that automatic transfers will not continue," he said adding that he could not say how long the review of the Israeli tax payments would take. The Palestinian

Olmert: Boycott Hamas gov't

JERUSALEM: Olmert said on Sunday Israel would boycott a Palestinian government that included Hamas, which defeated the Fatah party in Wednesday's parliamentary election. Fatah has so far rejected joining any coalition with Hamas, whose anti-corruption platform, charity network and resistance to Israel since the Palestinian uprising began in 2000 propelled it to victory. —Reuters

Authority faces a financial crunch if Israel withholds the money. Palestinians live on an average of \$2 a day.

Regev said Israel's position on the tax payment was "in synch" with the international consensus.

Jihad al Wazir, the acting Palestinian Minister of Finance, said Israel had promised in talks on Sunday to

make the tax payment on schedule, but that Israel told the Palestinians on Monday it would suspend the transfer.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday, Hamas also rejected as "blackmail" the demand of the Quartet—Russia, EU, US and the UN—that it renounce violence against Israel or risk losing aid. The Quartet also suggested that the newly elected Hamas could look for alternative sources of funding in the Arab world and beyond.

"The Quartet decision was unjust and a punishment to our people for using their freedom of choice in a democratic and fair election," said Hamas spokesman Masri adding, "Hamas seeks to build bridges of trust with all international parties."

—Reuters

Hamas rejects West's conditions for aid

London: The militant Palestinian group Hamas won time on Monday from a wary European Union, Russia and the US to wipe the blood off its hands, renounce violence and recognise Israel's right to exist before it forms the next Palestinian government.

Meeting in London in the wake of Hamas's stunning victory in last week's Palestinian elections, the diplomatic Quartet on Middle East peace—which also includes the United Nations—pledged to keep money flowing into Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas's interim caretaker administration.

"We do believe that Abu Mazen needs to be supported," said US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, using Abbas's nom de guerre, ensuring that funds will be available to pay for Palestinian police officers and civil servants.

But the Quartet warned that the Palestinians' critical lifeline of foreign aid could be lost in the longer term unless Hamas—perpetrator of deadly suicide bomb attacks on Israelis—abandons violence, recognises Israel and



UN chief Kofi Annan, US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice and EU representative Javier Solana warned Palestinians could lose aid unless Hamas abandoned violence and recognised Israel

embraces the diplomatic "road map" to peace.

That blueprint to peace envisions an independent Palestinian nation living side by side with the Jewish state.

The Hamas movement swiftly rejected demands from the international Quartet seeking West Asia peace, which the radical group said served only Is-

rael's interests.

"The conditions posed by the Quartet (UN, US, Europe, Russia) constitute pressure which serves the interests of Israel and not the Palestinian people," Hamas MP and spokesman Mosheer Al Masri said.

"The main problem is the (Israeli) occupation and not the democratic choice made by the

Palestinian people," he said. "We call on the international community to respect the results of the elections, for our part we are willing to have cooperation with the world."

With three months likely to pass before a new Palestinian government is formed, the Quartet's stance amounts to a watch period for Hamas to change its stripes if it wants to be accepted as a serious partner in the peace process. A senior Hamas leader, Ismail Haniya, appealed earlier on Monday in Gaza City to the Quartet to meet the radical Islamist organisation for "a dialogue without preliminary conditions and in a spirit of neutrality".

Israel meanwhile declared that it has decided to freeze funds to the Palestinian Authority, fearing the money could end up being used to attack and kill Israeli citizens.

Two million shekels (\$35 million)—drawn mainly sales tax revenues and customs duties on Palestinian-bound goods passing through Israel—were due to be handed over to the Palestinian Authority on Wednesday. AFP

“ *Hamas ready for a just peace*”

to Amin (b)
FD-11

Palestinians voted for Hamas because of our refusal to give up their rights. But we are ready to make a just peace.

Khalid Mish'al

IT IS widely recognised that the Palestinians are among the most politicised and educated peoples in the world. When they went to the polls last Wednesday they were well aware of what was on offer and those who voted for Hamas knew what it stood for. They chose Hamas because of its pledge never to give up the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and its promise to embark on a programme of reform. The day Hamas won the Palestinian democratic elections the world's leading democracies failed the test of democracy. Rather than recognise the legitimacy of Hamas as a freely elected representative of the Palestinian people, seize the opportunity created by the result to support the development of good governance in Palestine, and search for a means of ending the bloodshed, the U.S. and EU threatened the Palestinian people with collective punishment for exercising their right to choose their parliamentary representatives.

Our message to the U.S. and EU governments is this: your attempt to force us to give up our principles or our struggle is in vain. Our people who gave thousands of martyrs, the millions of refugees who have waited for nearly 60 years to return home and our 9,000 political and war prisoners in Israeli jails have not made those sacrifices in order to settle for close to nothing.

Hamas has been elected mainly because of its immovable faith in the inevitability of victory; and Hamas is immune to bribery, intimidation, and blackmail. While we are keen on having friendly relations with all nations we shall not seek friendships at the expense of our legitimate rights. We have seen how other nations, including the peoples of Vietnam and South Africa, persisted in their struggle until their quest for freedom and justice was accomplished. We are no different, our cause is no less worthy, our determination is no less profound, and our patience is no less abundant.

Our message to the Muslim and Arab nations is this: you have a responsibility to stand by your Palestinian brothers and sisters whose sacrifices are made on behalf of all of you. Our people in Palestine should not need to wait for any aid

from countries that attach humiliating conditions to every dollar or euro they pay despite their historical and moral responsibility for our plight. We expect you to step in and compensate the Palestinian people for any loss of aid and we demand you lift all restrictions on civil society institutions that wish to fundraise for the Palestinian cause.

Our message to the Palestinians is this: our people are not only those who live under siege in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip but also the millions languishing in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria and the millions spread around the world unable to return home. We promise you that nothing in the world will deter us from pursuing our goal of liberation and return. We shall spare no effort to work with all factions and institutions in order to put our Palestinian house in order. Having won the parliamentary elections, our medium-term objective is to reform the PLO in order to revive its role as a true representative of all the Palestinian people, without exception or discrimination.

Our message to the Israelis is this: we do not fight you because you belong to a certain faith or culture. Jews have lived in the Muslim world for 13 centuries in peace and harmony; they are in our religion “the people of the book” who have a covenant from God and His Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be respected and protected. Our conflict with you is not religious but political. We have no problem with Jews who have not attacked us — our problem is with those who came to our land, imposed themselves on us by force, destroyed our society, and banished our people.

We shall never recognise the right of any power to rob us of our land and deny us our national rights. We shall never recognise the legitimacy of a Zionist state created on our soil in order to atone for somebody else's sins or solve somebody else's problem. But if you are willing to accept the principle of a long-term truce, we are prepared to negotiate the terms. Hamas is extending a hand of peace to those who are truly interested in a peace based on justice. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

(Khalid Mish'al is head of the political bureau of Hamas.)

গেরিলারা আজ গণতন্ত্রে হামাস যেন সুযোগটা পায়

গৌতম রায়

প্যালেস্তাইনে একটা আন্তর্জাতিক ডমিকম্পই ঘটে গেল। সেখানকার পার্লামেন্ট নির্বাচনে শাসক ফাতাহ গোষ্ঠীকে পর্যুদস্ত করে বিপুল গরিষ্ঠতায় জয়ী উগ্রপন্থী হামাস।

হামাসই ইজরায়েলে মানববোমা পাঠাত। ইরানের আশুন্খোর প্রেসিডেন্ট আহমদিনেজাদের মতো হামাসও এই গ্রহ থেকে ইজরায়েলকে মুছে দিতে প্রতিশ্রুত, ইজরায়েল সহ সমগ্র প্যালেস্তাইনকে 'ইসলামি ওয়াকফ' বলে গণ্য করে, যা হাসিল করতে জেহাদই একমাত্র পথ। সেই হামাস এখন প্যালেস্তাইনে সরকার গড়ার অধিকারী। সেই সরকারের সঙ্গে আলোচনা, দরকষাকষি চালাতে হবে ইজরায়েলকে? তার পশ্চিমী মিত্র আমেরিকা, ব্রিটেন ও ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নকে দিয়ে যেতে হবে কোটি-কোটি ডলার ত্রাণসাহায্য?

বেঁকে বসেছে ইজরায়েল। সন্ত্রাস ত্যাগ না করলে

হামাসের সঙ্গে কথা নয়। শুষ্ক বাবদ মাসে যে ৫ কোটি ডলার ইজরায়েল হস্তান্তরিত করে (যা ১ লক্ষ ৩৫ হাজার প্যালেস্তাইনি শ্রমিকের মজুরি), তা না দেওয়ার হুমকি। পশ্চিমী বন্ধুরাও সাফ বলেছে, সন্ত্রাসবাদীদের কোনও অর্থসাহায্য দেবার প্রশ্ন নেই, তারা জনাদেশ পেলেও না। সঙ্কট অন্দরেও। হামাসের কাছে অপমানজনক পরাজয়ে ক্ষুব্ধ ফাতাহর সমর্থকরা। জঙ্গি উপদল আল-আকসা ব্রিগেড হামাসের সঙ্গে জোট গড়লে নেতাদের



অগ্নি-পরীক্ষা। হামাস-এর মিছিলে একটি শিশু। রয়টার্স

কোতল করার হুমকি দিচ্ছে। ফাতাহ মন্ত্রিসভা ইস্তফা দিয়েছে। প্রায় গৃহযুদ্ধের পরিস্থিতি। ঘোর অনিশ্চিত পশ্চিম এশিয়ায় মার্কিন রোড-ম্যাপ তথা শান্তিপ্রক্রিয়ার ভবিষ্যৎ।

প্যালেস্তাইনিরা ১৩২ সদস্যের পার্লামেন্টে ৭৬ হামাস প্রার্থীকে জিতিয়েছে। প্রেসিডেন্ট মাহমুদ আকবাসের ফাতাহ গোষ্ঠীই ইজরায়েল ও পশ্চিমের পছন্দের, এটা জেনেও প্যালেস্তাইনিরা ফাতাহকে মাত্র ৪৩টি আসন দিয়েছে। যারা কীসে নিজেদের ভাল হবে বোঝে না, তাদের সর্বজনীন ভোটাধিকার দিলে এমনই হয়। অথচ গোটা আরব দুনিয়ায় এই নির্বাচনই ছিল একমাত্র গণতান্ত্রিক নির্বাচন। উত্তর আফ্রিকার আলজিরিয়ায় অবশ্য এক বার মৌলবাদীরা জিতে গিয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু গণতান্ত্রিক ফ্রাঙ্ক ও তার পশ্চিমী সহোদর সমর্থিত মিলিটারি জুনটা সেই জনাদেশ বাতিল করে ক্ষমতা দখলে রাখে। আর এই দ্বিতীয় বার ইসলাম-ভবনে গণতন্ত্রকে শিরোধার্য করার আকাঙ্ক্ষা জনাদেশে প্রতিফলিত।

সত্তরের দশকের শেষ দিকে মিশরের মুসলিম ব্রাদারহুডের শাখা হিসাবে হামাসের জন্ম। '৬৭-র ইজরায়েলি আগ্রাসনে উদ্বাস্ত প্যালেস্তাইনিদের ৮০ শতাংশ হতদরিদ্রের মধ্যে ধর্মপ্রচার ও সেবামূলক কাজই তাকে পরিচিতি দেয়। প্রথমে হামাস স্কুল, হাসপাতাল, লঙরখানা গড়ে, পরে বাজার, ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন, বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, বৃত্তিমূলক সংস্থা ও স্থানীয় স্বশাসনেও নিজেকে ছড়িয়ে দেয়। দক্ষতা ও কঠোর সততার জন্য জনপ্রিয় হামাস এখনও দুর্নীতিমুক্ত। খোমাইনির বিপ্লবের পর লেবাননে ইরান-প্রভাবিত হেজবুল্লা জঙ্গিদের সশস্ত্র প্রতিরোধের দৃষ্টান্তেই হামাস অস্ত্রের দিকে ঝুঁকি। এ সময় আরাফত পি এল ও-র ঘাঁটি বেইরুটে সরিয়ে নেওয়ায় গাজা, পূর্ব জেরুজালেম ও ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংকে হামাস ফাঁকা জমি পেয়ে যায়। তখনও ইজরায়েল ও তার পশ্চিমী মুকব্বিদের কাছে হামাস তত অজ্ঞাত ছিল না। বরং পি এল ও-র প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী হওয়ায় তেল আভিভ হামাসকে নিয়মিত অর্থসাহায্য দিত। সি আই এ এবং এম আই ফাইভ-এর অবসরপ্রাপ্ত গোয়েন্দাদের সাক্ষ্য এবং ইজরায়েলের

ইন্সটিটিউট ফর কাউন্টার টেররিজম-এর নথি অনুযায়ী সেকুলার ও বাম-ধেঁষা পি এল ও-র প্রতিপক্ষ মৌলবাদী হামাসকে সাহায্য করা কোনও অন্যায্যও ছিল না। ক্রমে পি এল ও যত আপসকামী ও দুর্নীতিপরায়ণ হতে থাকে, সেই অনুপাতেই হামাস জঙ্গিয়ানা বাড়ায়।

হামাস মানববোমা পাঠিয়ে যত নিরীহ ইহুদিদের হত্যা করেছে ইজরায়েলি সেনা ও গুপ্তঘাতকরা অন্তত তার দশগুণ হামাস সমর্থককে হত্যা করেছে। হামাস নেতাদের অধিকাংশ নেতাই ইজরায়েলের জেলে বন্দি থেকেছেন, তাঁদের চুলদাড়ি কামিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে, পঙ্গু করে দেওয়া হয়েছে, ছেলে কিংবা বাবাকে হত্যা করে শিক্ষা দেওয়া হয়েছে। হামাসের জনক হুইলচেয়ারবদ্ধ শেখ ইয়াসিন নমাজ সেরে মসজিদের বাইরে আসতেই হেলিকপ্টার-গানশিপের গুলিতে ঝাঁঝরা হন। তাঁর উত্তরসূরি আবদুল আজিজ রানতিসি সহ প্রথম সারির হামাস নেতাদেরও একই ভাবে মারা হয়। হামাসের মানববোমা আর ইজরায়েলের রাষ্ট্রীয় সন্ত্রাসের মধ্যে কোনটা কার জবাব, তার নিষ্পত্তি তো ইহুদি দখলদারদের হাতে প্যালেস্তাইনিদের স্বদেশ-হারানোর আখ্যানেই নিহিত।

তবু হামাসের দুনিয়া-কাঁপানো নির্বাচনী সাফল্যের মাধ্যমে ইসলামের ভুবনে গণতন্ত্রের এক আন্বেয় পরীক্ষার পরিসর উন্মোচিত। লক্ষণীয়, হামাসের নির্বাচনী ইস্তাহারে ইজরায়েলের রাষ্ট্রিক অস্তিত্ব অস্বীকারের অঙ্গীকারটি অনুল্লিখিত ছিল। চমকপ্রদ সাফল্যের পরেও হামাসের নেতারা প্রকাশ্যে বিজয়-উৎসব উদ্‌যাপন করেননি। একক ভাবে সরকার গড়ার অধিকারী হলেও হামাস নেতৃত্ব ফাতাহ তথা পি এল ও-র সঙ্গে জাতীয় ঐক্যের

যৌথ সরকার গড়ার প্রস্তাব দিয়েছে। লক্ষণগুলি 'গেল-গেল' রব তোলায় নয়। তবে এত দিন হামাস পি এল ও সরকারের মেঘ-আড়াল থেকে তারা অগ্নিবাণ ছুঁড়ত। এখন হামাসই সরকার। সন্ত্রাসের সব দায় তার একার। প্যালেস্তাইনের নিরাপত্তাও এখন তারই দায়, তার গেরিলারাই অতঃপর প্যালেস্তাইনের নিরাপত্তারক্ষী। হয়তো এতটা গরিষ্ঠতা না পেলে হামাস এই রূপান্তরের বাধ্যবাধকতা থেকে বেঁচে যেত। হয়তো হামাস নেতৃত্ব গণতন্ত্রের এই পরিহাসকে অভিশাপ মনে করছে। তবু এই গুরুদায় তাকে শিরোধার্য করতেই হবে।

আর তা করার সুযোগও হামাসকে দিতে হবে। সে দায় কিন্তু ইজরায়েল ও তার পশ্চিমী মিত্রদের। প্যালেস্তাইনকে সাহায্য বন্ধ করে হামাসকে ভাতে মারার যে হুমকি, তা অবাধ গণতন্ত্রের প্রতারণামূলক চেহারা উদ্ঘাটন করে। অপমান করে প্যালেস্তাইনি জনতার রায়কেও। হামাসের জয় অনেক জটিলতাও সঞ্চারিত করেছে। ইরানের নির্বাচিত মোল্লাতন্ত্র, লেবাননের হেজবুল্লা, মিশরের 'ব্রাদারহুড' আজ উজ্জীবিত।

উল্টো দিকে, গণতন্ত্রে হামাসের যোগদান ও আত্মীকরণ শরিয়তি ইসলামের সঙ্গে প্রতিনিধিত্বমূলক গণতন্ত্রের বনিবনার সমস্যাটিরও নিষ্পত্তির সম্ভাবনা জাগাবে। ইসলামের সঙ্গে গণতন্ত্রের বিরোধ মৌলিক কিনা, সেটাও পরখ করে নেওয়া যাবে। পশ্চিমের মেহন্থন মুসলিম দেশগুলিতে তো আজ পর্যন্ত বিশ্বাসযোগ্য গণতন্ত্রের টিকি দেখা যায়নি। ইজরায়েল, আমেরিকা, ইউরোপ অতএব হামাস নেতৃত্বের সঙ্গে কথা বলুক। তাদের বহুত্ববাদ ও বহুসংস্কৃতিবাদের চক্কা সারবান, না ফাঁপা আওয়াজ, তার পরীক্ষাও তো জরুরি। ইসলাম সম্পর্কে জুসেড যুগের অসহিষ্ণুতা ও কুসংস্কার কেটেছে কিনা, তারও যাচাই হোক। দূর ভারতে বসে আমরাও হামাসের এই বিজয়-রথের ধ্বনি শুনতে পাই, যখন কাশ্মীরে 'স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রামে' লিপ্ত হিজবুল মুজাহিদিন সশস্ত্র সন্ত্রাসের বিকল্প হিসাবে নির্বাচনে অংশগ্রহণের 'শিক্ষা' তুলে ধরে।



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Op-Ed Contributor

In the Shadow of Sharon

By BENNY MORRIS

Li-On, Israel

IT is too early to assess Ariel Sharon's legacy. To be sure, he will be remembered as one of Israel's great field commanders, the wily, bulldozing general who cracked the Egyptian bastion at Um Katef-Abu Awgeila in 1967 and led the crossing of the Suez Canal in 1973, turning the tables in the Yom Kippur War. With greater ambiguity, he will go down as the defense minister who orchestrated the 1982 invasion of Lebanon that, paradoxically, set Yasir Arafat on the road to Oslo and (however insincerely) peace with Israel.

Mr. Sharon will also be known as the chief architect of the Likud Party's settlement drive in the occupied territories. His defeat, as prime minister, of the second Palestinian intifada will doubtless be carefully studied, once the hysteria and hype die down, as a model of a relatively clean, successful counterinsurgency.

But that is for the future. Meanwhile, Mr. Sharon's stroke has plunged Israel and the region into deep confusion.

Just a few days ago, there were a handful of certainties. All the polls indicated that in the coming Israeli general elections, scheduled for late March, Mr. Sharon's new Kadima Party would win handily, reinstalling him in the premiership. It was not clear how large a mandate he would enjoy or who would be his coalition partners. But a Sharon-led Israel was a certainty.

Another certainty was that his next term in office would be shadowed by the corruption investigation and charges that have already forced the resignation of his son, Omri Sharon, from the Knesset. But again, this scandal was not expected to be a coalition- or career-breaker: Israeli society has become too jaded, or simply faces too many existential problems, to give much weight to personal miscreancy.

Most important, there was a vague certainty that there would be further steps toward a pacification of Israel-Palestine and a separation of its two warring tribes into two relatively homogeneous states. Mr. Sharon had shown the way, courageously, remorselessly, six months ago with the uprooting of the Jewish settlements and the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the Gaza Strip. And he had shown the way, in defiance of often absurd and mendacious criticism by the Palestinians and their supporters, by pushing forward with the construction of the barrier - overwhelmingly a fence, not a wall - between the Arab West Bank and (Jewish) Israel more or less along the 1967 Green Line.

Many expected, and some feared, that Mr. Sharon would continue with such unilateral steps to separate the two peoples and physically consolidate two separate states. Unilateral, because he believed (as I do) that there was and is no viable Palestinian peace partner. The Palestinian national movement, he

believed, still, in the deepest, immutable recesses of its heart, aspires to Israel's destruction and replacement by an Arab-majority state, a "one-state solution." That aspiration is why Yasir Arafat rejected the two-state compromise proposed by Mr. Sharon's predecessor, Ehud Barak, and President Bill Clinton in 2000 and it is why, from the militant Islamic members of Hamas through the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian national movement refuses to give up the "right of return" of the refugees, the demographic battering ram with which it hopes, ultimately, to bring Israel down.

Now, hopes for further daring steps like a unilateral pullout from parts of the West Bank have been dashed. What successor, however peace-minded, will have the political will or ability to do something so bold and politically problematic? It is profoundly unclear who will win the coming elections and with what sort of mandate: Ehud Olmert, the deputy prime minister who is Mr. Sharon's likely successor as head of the new Kadima list (a party without institutions or structure and a leadership composed of Shimon Peres, the former Labor Party leader, and former Likud stalwarts); Amir Peretz, the new blue-collar chief of the Labor Party; or Benjamin Netanyahu, the resurrected head of the truncated Likud?

What is likely is that there will be no clear mandate for any party or leader. Moreover, none of Mr. Sharon's probable successors to the premiership is made of that leadership stuff that ultimately endeared him to the majority of Israelis.

One certainty remains. Israel, and especially and paradoxically, its large moderate left and center, is in the grip of a great sadness. Those opposed to peace, in the slums of Rafah and the Jewish settlement compound of downtown Hebron, can be expected to rejoice (as they did when Mr. Sharon suffered his small first stroke, on Dec. 18). The Islamic fundamentalists and the so-called Palestinian secularists who view Israel as a cancer and seek its destruction will honk their horns and hand out candy to the cruelly misled children of Gaza; and those Jews who are unwilling to give up the dream of Greater Israel and, perhaps, of ridding this land of its Arab usurpers, will offer thanks to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

There will also be little sadness at Mr. Sharon's passing among those Israelis and their Diaspora supporters who have long demonized Mr. Sharon and Israel and who long ago gave up any hope or desire for a lasting Jewish state, and believe, or pretend to believe, that Jews and Arabs can live together like a bunch of mindless lambs in equality and under one political roof.

But the solid center and left of Jewish Israel, the country's majority, who want to trade land for peace and reach a stable two-state solution, are tuning into their televisions this day with heavy hearts. They realize that the best hope for peace, that most unlikely of peacemakers, is exiting the stage and that a vista of turmoil and uncertainty has opened up. To be sure, Israel's political structure remains solid and reassuring. But at this bewildering moment, for those interested in progress in the peace process, there is little reason for hope.

Benny Morris, the author of "The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited," is a professor of history at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba, Israel.