

## Militants agree to halt attacks on Israelis

AP, Jerusalem

Palestinian negotiators said on Thursday they have secured a commitment from Islamic militants to halt attacks on Israelis for three months and that a formal truce would be announced before the weekend.

Palestinian Authority officials and Hamas militant leaders in the Gaza Strip insisted the deal is not final, while Israel and the United States were skeptical about the value of such an arrangement, saying Palestinian security forces must quickly disarm the militias.

In violence Thursday, Palestinians fired several mortar shells and homemade rockets at a Jewish settlement in Gaza and an Israeli community bordering the strip, damaging a Jewish seminary. In the West Bank city of Hebron, Israeli troops razed the family house of a Hamas militant who allegedly recruited suicide bombers.

A truce might help end 33 months of violence, a necessary prelude to the US-backed "road map" plan aimed at establishing a Palestinian state by 2005. The plan requires the Palestinians to break up the armed groups, but Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas has ruled out using force, saying he fears it would lead to civil war.

The truce deal was negotiated by Marwan Barghouti, a leader of the Palestinian uprising who has been

jailed by Israel, and the heads of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups in Damascus. Barghouti, using envoys, acted on behalf of Palestinian leaders, the negotiators said.

One of the envoys, Palestinian legislator Kadoura Fares, said a cease-fire would be announced formally by Friday. "The Palestinian Authority believes it is important to get it (the truce) as soon as possible, and not to wait," Fares, a member of the ruling Fatah movement, told The Associated Press.

As part of the truce talks, the Palestinian militias have sought guarantees from Israel that it will halt all military strikes, including targeted killings of wanted Palestinians.

Barghouti's truce document says Israel must halt military strikes, but does not make it a condition for agreement. Nabil Abu Rdenah, a senior aide to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, said that "we're still waiting for guarantees from the Americans to force Israel to stop its assassination policy."

The US national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, is to arrive in the region later this week for meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Israel has said it cannot give a blanket promise to halt strikes against Palestinians planning shootings and bombings as long as Palestinian security forces don't act against the armed groups. Israel

insists that the armed groups be dismantled.

President Bush, siding with Israel, said Wednesday that "in order for there to be peace in the Middle East, we must see organizations such as Hamas dismantled, and then we'll have peace, we'll have a chance for peace."

As word came of the emerging cease-fire Wednesday, Israeli helicopters fired rockets at a car carrying a Hamas militant in the Gaza Strip, killing two bystanders and wounding 17 people. Among those hurt was the targeted man, Mohammed Siam, who Israel said was on his way to fire mortars at a Jewish settlement.

Israel's deputy prime minister, Ehud Olmert, said Israel would not compromise on its security. "Each time, we fear there will be a terrorist attack and it won't be addressed by the Palestinians, we will react," said Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

However, Cabinet Minister Yosef Lapid, head of the moderate Shinui party, said Israel should give a truce a chance. "If they will stop their terror attacks, we can stop the activities against them, and that way we can see if they are proving that they support the road map or are taking advantage of the cease-fire," he told AP.

The truce deal was negotiated over the past few weeks by Barghouti, a leader of Arafat's Fatah movement on trial for his alleged role in attacks that killed 26 Israelis.

With Israel's knowledge, Barghouti forwarded documents to Khaled Mashal of Hamas and Ramadan Shalah of Islamic Jihad in Damascus. Egyptian officials and Abbas have also been pressing the militants.

On Wednesday, Fares announced that after weeks of intensive negotiation, "the Palestinian dialogue has resulted in a cease-fire agreement for a period of three months."

"We consider this as a step to ending occupation and we salute the spirit of responsibility in the Hamas and Islamic Jihad," Fares said.

Another Palestinian source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Mashal, Shalah and Barghouti had signed a document outlining the truce terms. However, Fares said minor issues still needed to be settled, and that there were no signatures.

The truce covers not only Israel, but also the West Bank and Gaza Strip - a key Israeli demand. The document also demands that Israel begin releasing Palestinian prisoners.

This week, as the uprising passed the 1,000-day mark, the death toll stood at more than 2,400 on the Palestinian side and more than 800 on the Israeli side.



PHOTO: AFP  
An Iraqi police officer looks inside a damaged vehicle belonging to the electrical company as US troops are stationed by following an attack on Thursday on the Baghdad highway that leads to the airport. Residents said that a grenade was lobbed at the car, which was being escorted by two US armoured vehicles. The driver of the vehicle was killed and another person was injured.

## Ex-information minister of Iraq 'nabbed'

AFP, London

Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, Iraq's information minister at the end of Saddam Hussein's regime, has been captured in Baghdad, a British newspaper claimed Wednesday.

The Daily Mirror said al-Sahaf - nicknamed "comical Ali" for his robust denials that Baghdad was falling to US troops - was snared in his car at a US military roadblock on Monday.

In a dispatch from Baghdad, it said al-Sahaf's captors allowed him to go back to a house where he had apparently been holed up with his wife and three children "to collect a toothbrush, razor and book."

## Husband of Thatcher dies in London

AP, London

Sir Denis Thatcher, the husband of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, died Thursday at the age of 88, a spokesman for the family said.

Thatcher, who underwent coronary bypass surgery in January and had been hospitalized for several weeks, died at London's Lister Hospital.

A tall, well-dressed and wealthy man who was always a step behind his famous wife during her years in power from 1979 to 1990, Thatcher learned to turn the self-effacing remark into a high art. He once described himself as the most "shadowy husband of all time."

## 10 killed as bridge collapses in Jordan

AFP, Amman

Ten people were killed and seven others injured when part of a bridge under construction collapsed early Thursday south of the Jordanian capital, the official Petra news agency reported.

Four of the injured people were said to be in serious condition, the agency said.

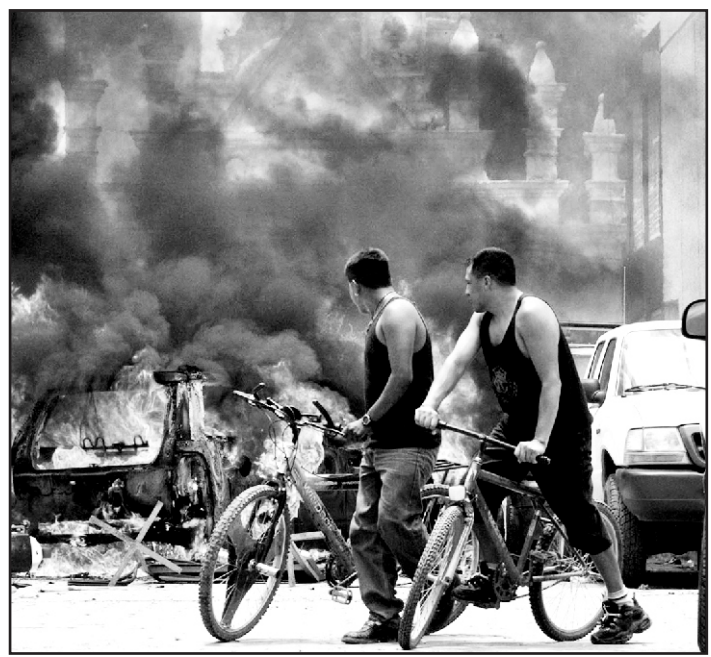


PHOTO: AFP  
Two men on bicycles pass by burning cars on Wednesday during riots in San Juan Cuahutlancingo, Puebla, Mexico. Several vehicles were set ablaze by infuriated protesters after the village mayor prohibited the inhabitants to install the communal market as usual. An undetermined number of persons were injured or arrested in the ensuing incidents.

## US, EU ask Iran to keep word on nukes

AP, Washington

President Bush and European leaders stood united Wednesday in demanding that Iran abandon any nuclear weapons ambitions. "Iran must comply" or face consequences, Bush said.

"If the world speaks together, they'll comply," the president told a joint news conference. Bush and leaders of the European Union said Tehran must agree to new requirements by international nuclear weapons inspectors.

Seeking to ease their own strains over the Iraq war, Bush and the EU leaders also announced new agreements to combat terrorism, including sharing information, freezing assets of terror groups and speeding up extradition of terror suspects.

"If we fail to unite, every problem may become a crisis and every enemy a gigantic monster," said European Commission President

Romano Prodi. He shared an East Room platform with Bush and Greek Prime Minister Constantine Simitis, whose country holds the current European Union presidency.

Bush said he and the European leaders agreed to monitor the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran. Iran must cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN nuclear watchdog, Bush said.

The agency has called on Iran to give inspectors more access to its nuclear programs.

The United States has accused Iran of trying to build an atomic bomb - an allegation Tehran denies. Iran says its nuclear operations are meant to provide electricity, particularly after oil reserves run dry.

"Iran has pledged not to develop nuclear weapons, and the entire international community must hold that regime to its commitments," Bush said.

## N-component unearthed in Baghdad back yard

THE CHINA DAILY/ ANN, Baghdad

The CIA has in its hands the critical parts of a key piece of Iraqi nuclear technology - parts needed to develop a bomb programme - that were dug up in a back yard in Baghdad, CNN reported.

The parts were unearthed by Iraqi scientist Mahdi Obeidi who had hidden them in his back yard under a rose bush 12 years ago under orders from Qusay Hussein and Saddam Hussein's then son-in-law, Hussein Kamel.

US officials emphasized this was not evidence Iraq had a nuclear weapon - but it was evidence the Iraqis concealed plans to reconstitute their nuclear program as soon as the world was no longer looking.

The parts and documents Obeidi gave the CIA were shown exclusively to CNN at CIA headquarters in Virginia.

## Blair aide admits Iraq dossier blunder

AP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's communications chief acknowledged on Wednesday that the British government made a mistake by including material from a graduate thesis posted on the Internet in a government dossier on Iraq's weapons capability.

But Alastair Campbell rejected accusations that he re-drafted intelligence reports on Saddam Hussein's arsenal to exaggerate the threat posed by Iraqi weapons in another dossier as "complete and utter nonsense".

The two documents were a key part of the government's argument for military action in Iraq, and the controversy over them could fuel new calls for Blair to get troops out of the region, especially after six British military policemen were killed on Tuesday near the southern Iraqi city of Basra.

Campbell told the Foreign Affairs Committee, which is focusing on the

two dossiers as part of its probe on government claims about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, that the inclusion of material from the graduate thesis in a dossier published in February was "regrettable".

But he played down the importance of that document, repeatedly calling it a "briefing paper" that did not have the same gravitas as a dossier released in September 2002.

The committee also grilled him on reports that he had persuaded intelligence officials to highlight claims in the September dossier that Iraq could fire chemical or biological weapons within 45 minutes of Saddam giving an order to do so.

"The story that I put pressure on the intelligence agencies is untrue. The story that I 'sexed up' the dossier is untrue. The story that we somehow made more of the 45-minute command-and-control point than the intelligence agencies thought was suitable is untrue," he said.

## OIC summit in KL to focus on Muslim unity

AFP, Putrajaya

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Malaysia in October will focus on bolstering the unity of the group and finding ways to enhance the dignity of Muslims, a senior minister said Thursday.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said the discussions would be in line with the theme of the summit - "Knowledge and Morality."

"In order to be in the mainstream of (global) development we need to have knowledge and morals and in order not to be sidelined we need to be united," he told reporters.

Syed Hamid said the OIC had to be restructured to enable the 57-nation Islamic bloc to remain relevant and to champion the dignity of Muslims.

"We have to do a lot of soul searching to look into ourselves how we are going to progress," he said.

Syed Hamid said other important topics would be the Middle East "roadmap" for peace and Iraq.

"Peace, security and stability will

be an important issue," he said.

Member countries would reiterate the need for a multilateral system to resolve international issues.

"(We will express) our concern about the stereotyping of Muslims with all forms of violence and terrorism."

"It is an important summit because we are at a crossroads. When the Islamic world has been put in a situation, we have become defensive and apologetic. We have to give back the confidence," he said.

Syed Hamid also quashed rumours that the meeting would be cancelled.

"The meeting is going to go on. We consider the rumours as an attempt to derail our good intention to proceed with the summit," he said.

Malaysia would take over the OIC chairmanship for two years from Qatar.

Visiting OIC Secretary General Abdulwahed Belkeziz of Morocco echoed Syed Hamid's comments saying: "There is no basis for the rumours. There is no postponement."

## 300 civilians killed in Liberian fighting

AP, Monrovia

Liberia's health minister on Thursday reported 200-300 civilians killed and 1,000 wounded in the battle for the country's besieged capital, and morgue workers described mortuaries filled to overflowing.

Soldiers commandeered private vehicles to collect more broken bodies from the streets of Monrovia at daylight Thursday, working against a backdrop of pounding rain and crackling gunfire.

Monrovia was on edge but calmer early Thursday, with the shelling, rockets and frantic refugee movements of the past two days silenced.

However, there was no indication of retreat by rebels fighting to take the city, and unconfirmed reports had rebels sighted around the port, a key objective well inside Monrovia.

Rebels are driving home a 3-year war to oust warlord-turned-

president Charles Taylor, a newly indicted U.N.-war-crimes suspect who launched the West African nation into 14 years of conflict in 1989.

Early Thursday, Health Minister Peter Coleman told The Associated Press that the past two days of fighting in the city had killed between 200-300 civilians and injured 1,000.

There was no word on government or rebel casualties.

Mortuary workers put the civilian toll in the "hundreds," describing morgues stacked with dead.

Coleman said the dead included at least nine Liberians killed when rockets struck an evacuated US diplomatic residential compound Wednesday. Thousands of Monrovia's residents had taken refuge in the compound, which is across the street from the heavily guarded US Embassy.

The US State Department confirmed late Tuesday that two Liberian workers at the embassy,

one a gardener and the other a guard, had been killed at the residential compound.

"Everybody in the world is sitting to watch us die," a refugee, Suah Kolli, cried at Monrovia's John F. Kennedy hospital, where 200 wounded brought in by midday Wednesday overflowed the hospital's wards and lay sprawled, moaning and bleeding, in slippery hallways.

The French humanitarian group Medecins Sans Frontiers evacuated another hospital overrun by fighting, and by midday was treating scores of wounded in its own compound.

Refugees packed schoolyards, shell-gutted houses and the country's main soccer stadium, while many of Monrovia's people simply covered in their homes. Aid workers described a humanitarian nightmare even before fighting broke Tuesday, with cholera and starvation rampant among the crowded refugees.



PHOTO: AFP  
Remains of an Iranian air force C-130 transport plane, which crashed after encountering technical problems near the main Tehran-Qom highway and Iran's future Imam Khomeini international airport around 60 km south of the capital, lie in the desert Wednesday. All seven people on board were killed.