

# Israeli Army ready to remove Arafat if gets govt nod

### 'Geneva' peace plan more dangerous than Oslo accords: Sharon

**REUTERS, Jerusalem**

The Israeli army is ready to "remove" Palestinian President Yasser Arafat if the government gives the order, the Jerusalem Post newspaper reported on Thursday, citing a senior military source.

The report in the right-wing daily, which recently editorialized in favor of killing Arafat, followed a decision in principle by Israel's security cabinet last month to oust the Palestinian leader. The ministers did not say how or when.

The Israeli threat against Arafat, a 74-year-old symbol of Palestinian nationalism, sparked an international outcry and drew US opposition.

"We have presented plans showing the risks and the chances of the operation itself, including the options to remove him alive or not," the Post quoted the source as saying.

"The government has to make a decision to allow the army to act. The army is ready," the military source was quoted as saying. The

newspaper did not provide further details. The army declined comment.

Arafat has been confined to his West Bank compound in Ramallah for much of the past two years. Security sources have said commandos in the past year have rehearsed snatching Arafat expelling him to a third country, possibly in North Africa.

Arafat has said he would fight to the death if Israel tried to expel him. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had appeared to rule out expelling Arafat in a newspaper interview last week, but then told parliament on Monday that Israel was still determined to "remove" the Palestinian leader.

In an interview published last Friday, Sharon told the Jerusalem Post: "Our calculations for years have been that expelling him (Arafat) would not be good for Israel."

The right-wing prime minister said security around Arafat increased the chance of him being hurt in any operation to capture him.

Palestinians, who launched an uprising for independence in 2000, have vowed to defend Arafat to the death.

Some members of Sharon's hawkish cabinet last month raised the idea of killing Arafat, but the prime minister opposed it and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom later ruled it out.

Israel accuses Arafat of fomenting violence, a charge he denies. AFP adds: Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon warned late Wednesday that the unofficial Geneva peace plan, drafted by Israeli and Palestinian intellectuals, was more dangerous than the Oslo accords, army radio reported.

Speaking at a local meeting of the Likud party near Tel Aviv, Sharon attacked the symbolic agreement as being "more dangerous than the Oslo Accords", the 1993 agreement negotiated by former Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Under the now-defunct agreement, the Palestinians were granted limited self-rule in preparation for

statehood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Although unofficial, the "Geneva initiative" -- drafted last week by Israeli left-wingers and leading Palestinians -- calls for shared sovereignty over disputed areas of Jerusalem and proposes to grant the Palestinians 97.5 percent of the West Bank.

In exchange, Palestinian refugees would waive their right of return to areas now incorporated in the state of Israel as it was founded in 1948.

"We want to reach peace but there will not be any concessions, not now and not in the future," the radio quoted Sharon as saying in reference to the proposals laid down in the initiative.

"If the Palestinians won't act against terror, we will do it."

The Geneva agreement is likely to be "signed" next month in Switzerland, possibly on November 4, the eighth anniversary of Rabin's assassination by a Jewish extremist.

# Nepali Maoists turn ire on Americans

AP, Kathmandu

The Maoists on Wednesday announced that they would target US-backed organisations in Nepal but cease attacks on government infrastructure.

In a statement sent to the media, the rebels said they were changing their strategy and would stop attacking Nepalese government buildings, telecommunications towers, national heritage and development works. But the elusive rebel leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda said the rebels would not allow organisations that are funded by "American imperialists" to operate in Nepal.

The rebels have been especially critical of Washington because it has provided the Nepalese government with millions of dollars in military and development aid.

The rebel leader also said they would stop killing individual Nepalese policemen and soldiers and instead give them a chance to leave the force. They would also cease extorting money from people and instead impose a "tax" on businesses, Prachanda said.

Most US-funded projects have already withdrawn staff from the field, although there have not been any attacks reported on Americans in Nepal.



PHOTO: AFP  
Sri Lankan Muslims wearing black scarves around their mouths display placards as they take part in a demonstration in Colombo yesterday. The protestors were commemorating the thirteenth anniversary of the ethnic cleansing of the northern city of Jaffna by Tamil Tiger rebels in 1990 who drove thousands of Muslims from the city.



PHOTO: AFP  
Chairman of Kashmir's separatist alliance All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) Molvi Abbas Ansari (L) senior separatist leader Molvi Omar Farooq (2nd from L), Farooq Abdul Gani Bhat (3rd from L) and Billal Lone (R) sit together before a meeting at the Hurriyat headquarters in Srinagar yesterday. Kashmiri separatists said India's new peace initiatives aimed at normalising ties with nuclear rival Pakistan do not go far enough, but relatives separated by the split of the state between the two countries welcomed attempts to bridge the divide.

# Kashmir rebels ask civilians not to mediate in stand-offs: 5 killed

AFP, Srinagar

Indian troops shot dead five rebels in Indian-administered Kashmir, while a hardline militant group yesterday appealed to people not to mediate during stand-offs between rebels and troops.

Police said Indian army soldiers shot dead three Muslim rebels during a four-hour gunbattle in the central Kashmir district of Budgam late Wednesday.

"The fighting erupted during a search operation launched by the Indian army in one of Budgam's villages," the spokesman said, adding some arms and ammunition were recovered from the scene.

In the northern Baramulla district, which borders Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Indian troops shot dead two other rebels who were members of the region's

dominant group Hizbul Mujahedin, police said.

"Both militants were residents of Baramulla district," the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, the hardline Islamic group Lashkar-e-Taiba Thursday appealed to residents not to mediate on behalf of troops with rebels during stand-off situations, spokesman Abu Huzaifa told reporters.

The comments came after police on Monday accused two rebels, who were holed up inside a house, of taking several people hostage in the Tharin village in the southern Pulwama district including four villagers sent in by the troops to negotiate the surrender of the militants.

"I appeal to people not to fall prey to the machinations of the troops and desist from mediating in such conditions as mujahedin do not believe in surrender," Huzaifa said.

# Mahathir defends his legacy in final foreign tour

AFP, Dili

Malaysia's veteran Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, visiting East Timor yesterday on his final overseas tour before retirement, launched a spirited defence of his decades in power and took a swipe at a few old enemies.

In a speech to the parliament of the newly independent nation, Mahathir took aim at the oil majors, US foreign policy, free trade demands by the West, human rights groups and other NGOs, and the media.

Mahathir, 77, steps down on October 31 after 22 years in power during which critics say he has tamed his country's judiciary, royalty and media. He has also imprisoned numerous members of the political opposition without trial.

The subject of his speech was the strengths and limitations of

democracy but much of it was devoted to the Malaysian experience.

His country, Mahathir said, was unfazed by what he called politically motivated complaints that it was undemocratic.

Multiracial Malaysia had avoided problems faced by other multiracial countries because "Malaysians understand the weaknesses and limits of democracy and we do not exceed those limits."

In an apparent reference to the draconian Internal Security Act which allows indefinite detention without trial, Mahathir said preventive laws were needed to inhibit "excessive abuses of democratic freedom."

"The result is that Malaysia can enjoy democracy without the excesses which encroach on the freedom of the majority."

The Malaysian leader said the "human rights, the environmental, the animal rights groups and a host of other NGOs can all frustrate the government at every turn", despite representing only a small minority.

He added: "The media is elected by no one. But it can, if it wants to, give distorted reports so as to promote its own agenda."

The judiciary, he said, also claimed the right to interpret laws differently from the legislators who passed them.

In an apparent reference to the US and British invasion of Iraq, Mahathir said that "the capitalists and the liberal democrats are exhibiting signs of intolerance and authoritarianism. No other systems are allowed now."

"Any attempt to resist will meet with all kinds of pressures, including conquest by force of arms."

# India takes 2-pronged strategy on Kashmir

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

By announcing a slew of fresh measures to push the peace initiative with Pakistan and putting forward Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani for talks with Jammu and Kashmir's separatist group All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC), the Indian government has adopted a two-pronged strategy on the domestic and external fronts.

The decisions announced by the government Wednesday clearly brought out that the government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was keen to end the freeze that had crept into the peace initiative, analysts said.

It was Vajpayee himself who had set in motion the peace process in April this year but it had got stuck somewhere down the line, especially after Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf had indulged in

India-bashing at his speech in U N general assembly last month and the Indian Prime Minister responded to it in equal measure, they said.

In making the fresh overture, however, one thing about which India left no one in doubt is that there was no shift from its stand on resumption of dialogue with Pakistan unless Islamabad stopped sponsoring of cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha made the point when he said that no meaningful dialogue could take place "if Pakistan carried on with cross-border terrorism as an instrument of state policy."

He also ruled out talks between Vajpayee and Musharraf on the sidelines of the SAARC summit in Islamabad next January.

But more importance is being

attached to the government's decision that Advani would hold talks with Hurriyat Chairman Maulvi Abbas Ansari for more than one reason.

First, the government's decision to engage the Hurriyat represents the first high-level political contact between the two sides and marks a substantial shift from its earlier "no-talks-with-the-separatist-amalgam" position.

So is the case with Hurriyat which had in the past insisted on trilateral talks involving India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir.

Significantly, Advani, considered a hardliner on Pakistan, had been in the past a firm opponent of talks with Hurriyat.

The government reasoned that it was responding to a plea made by Hurriyat chairman Ansari on August 25 this year that talks between the two sides begin.

# Indian nuke expert helped Iran develop power plant: Report

AFP, New Delhi

A leading Indian nuclear scientist is believed to have helped Iran build its nuclear power plant, a report said yesterday.

The Hindustan Times said Dr Y.S.R. Prasad took up an assignment in Iran after he retired in July 2000 as head of the Nuclear Corporation of India.

The revelations come as Tehran begins to yield to international demands to prove it is not developing nuclear weapons and to make a complete declaration of all its past nuclear activities.

Iran had promised Tuesday to provide the information following talks in Tehran with the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany.

The Hindustan Times, quoting from a classified government document, said Prasad, who spent years working on India's atomic energy programmes, did not seek government permission to go to Iran.

It said that while the scientist did not break any rules, the government was now seeking to make it compulsory for India's nuclear experts to seek government approval for foreign assignments.

It quoted government sources as saying that while New Delhi and Tehran do have a strategic partnership, they do not collaborate in nuclear programmes.

India stunned the world in 1998 by conducting five nuclear tests and declaring itself a nuclear power. Rival neighbour Pakistan conducted its own tests within days.

# US, Afghan drive against Taliban

REUTERS, Spin Boldak

More than 1,000 Afghan and US-led foreign troops backed by tanks and aircraft are pursuing Taliban and al-Qaeda militants in a big operation in the south of Afghanistan, a local commander said yesterday.

Haji Sayed Mohammad, a military commander in Zabul province, said the operation was being carried out in several districts, including Arghandab, Naubahar and Shinki.

"Around 100 troops of allied forces and over 1,000 Afghan soldiers are participating and they have been supplemented by jets and tanks," he told Reuters by

telephone.

He said some Taliban guerrillas had been captured while witnesses said US warplanes had bombed suspected guerrilla hideouts.

Officials in Zabul and neighboring Uruzgan province told Reuters earlier in the week that 19 Taliban guerrillas, including a group mounted on motorcycles, have been detained.

The 11,500-strong US-led force in Afghanistan has yet to comment on the operation in Zabul.

Earlier this month, the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review magazine quoted Western and Afghan intelligence sources as

saying the Taliban was planning to bring 2,500 guerrillas from Pakistan ahead of the winter.

It said the rebels had bought more than 1,000 motorcycles over the past three months in Pakistan's Quetta region for this purpose.

The Taliban has already stepped up attacks in southern provinces in recent weeks and the period since early August has been the bloodiest since the group's overthrow in late 2001, with more than 300 people killed in clashes across the country.

US and Afghan officials say Pakistan must do more to prevent guerrillas crossing its border to launch attacks.

# India, China pursue talks to end border dispute

AFP, New Delhi

Top-ranking officials from India and China began landmark negotiations here yesterday to try to resolve their dragging border dispute which took the world's two most populous nations to war in 1962.

Dai Binggao, China's vice foreign minister who arrived overnight, met India's National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra to discuss the issue, Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said at the start of the talks.

He said the discussions, which were planned during Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to China in June this year, will last until Friday.

"Dai and Mishra first had a one-to-one meeting for about half an hour before they were joined by their respective delegates," an Indian government source said.

"The talks are being held in an

extremely cordial atmosphere and the two sides have articulated their points of view," the source told AFP.

Mishra's delegation included officials from Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's office and the Indian foreign ministry while Dai is assisted by Chinese Ambassador to India Hua Junduo and senior officials from Beijing.

No further details were available from the closed-door talks, which come after 13 rounds of inconclusive discussions over the border dispute between junior-level officials from India and China for more than a decade.

Mishra and Dai were appointed envoys by New Delhi and Beijing during Vajpayee's trip to China.

During the Indian leader's talks in Beijing, the two sides agreed to reopen the Nathu La Pass between Sikkim, the former protectorate New Delhi merged with the union in 1975, and Chinese-ruled Tibet.

India interprets the agreement on the Nathu La Pass a first, if tacit, recognition by China of Sikkim as an Indian state.

India, where Tibet's spiritual leader the Dalai Lama lives in exile, in turn stated it considered Tibet an "autonomous region" within the "People's Republic of China," a turn of phrase Indian officials insisted did not change its position on the Himalayan territory.

Tibetan exiles, meanwhile, staged noisy street rallies Thursday in central New Delhi to protest the ongoing talks, saying Beijing had no right to discuss the boundaries of Tibet.

"We earnestly appeal to the Indian government not to hold any boundary talks with China," the Tibetan Youth Congress said in a statement after police arrested some 30 of the group's protesters.



PHOTO: AFP  
India's National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra (L) shakes hands with China's Vice-Foreign Minister Dai Binggao, prior to a meeting in New Delhi yesterday.