

## Factional fighting must not turn into civil war

Says Abbas after talks with Israeli FM, top militant among 4 killed in air strike

AP, AFP, Sharm el-Sheikh/Gaza

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas warned yesterday that the raging power-struggle between Palestinian factions must not deteriorate into civil war.

Abbas spoke after meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Egypt his first high-level meeting with an Israeli official since the Islamic militant Hamas took control of the Palestinian government in March.

"Civil war is the red line that nobody dares cross, no matter which side they are on... Civil war is forbidden," Abbas said.

His comments came as Palestinian officials said they foiled

an assassination attempt senior Gaza security chief Rashid Abu Shbak, an Abbas loyalist.

Security officials discovered a 154-pound roadside bomb shortly before Abu Shbak's motorcade was scheduled to pass through the area. The discovery a day after Abbas' intelligence chief in Gaza was seriously wounded in an explosion was likely to further inflame tensions between Abbas and the rival Hamas-led government.

Abbas said he told Livni during the 45-minute meeting that Israel and the Palestinians must restore regular contact and work toward resuming peace talks.

Livni said the roadmap peace plan drawn up by the international community remained in force,

though she did not elaborate. The Israeli official also said the Hamas-led government must not gain world recognition.

"It is a terrorist government, on the other hand we want to help the Palestinian people and not to punish them... This was part of the discussion," she said.

She also said Israel had decided to release \$11 million in tax money it had collected on behalf of the Palestinians but was withholding.

Israeli officials and Abbas said the two leaders had discussed preparations for a summit between the Palestinian president and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert once he returns from a trip to Washington that began Sunday.

Israel radio had said Livni and

Abbas wanted to form a "bypass" channel to maintain communications without including Hamas in their talks. Abbas wants to resume peace negotiations with the Israelis.

Meanwhile, an Israeli air strike in Gaza killed four Palestinians, including a top Islamic Jihad militant, on Saturday, prompting calls of revenge by the armed group to continue targeting Israel in rocket attacks.

Saturday's missile strike, which medics said also killed a boy and his mother and grandmother, was the latest such attack since April, when an Israeli air strike killed an Islamic Jihad militant after a deadly suicide bombing by the group in Israel.



Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas and Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni meet during the World Economic Forum (WEF) on the Middle East held in the resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt yesterday.

## FBI raids House of Representatives office building

REUTERS, Washington

FBI officers raided a House of Representatives office building on Saturday night, and NBC television said it had searched the offices of Louisiana Democratic Rep. William Jefferson.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation confirmed the unusual raid at the Rayburn House Office Building on Washington's Capitol Hill but would not say whose office was searched.

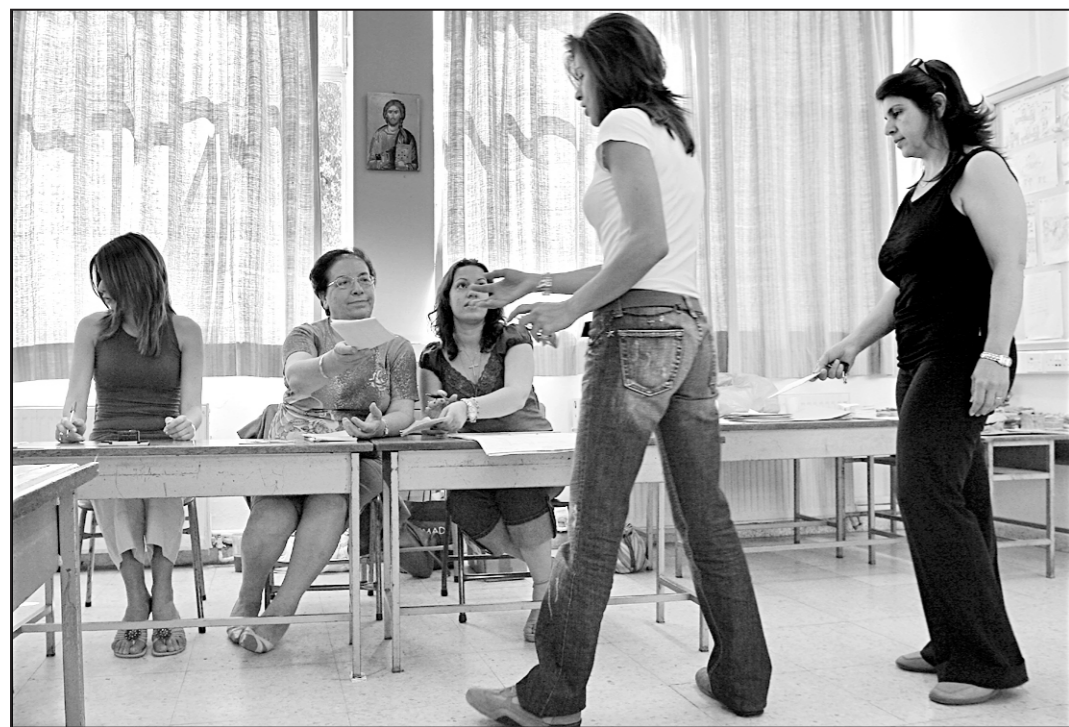
"Agents of the FBI's Washington field office executed a search warrant this evening at Rayburn at approximately 7:15," Debbie Weierman, a spokeswoman for the FBI's Washington field office, said.

Weierman said the search warrant was sealed and she could not confirm whose office was being searched.

But two lawmakers under investigation in separate bribery scandals have offices in the Rayburn building — Jefferson and Ohio Republican Rep. Bob Ney.

Calls to Jefferson's and Ney's offices were not answered.

Jefferson has maintained his innocence, but a former staffer and a Kentucky businessman have pleaded guilty to bribing him in connection with an African telecommunications venture.



Cypriots vote for the parliamentary elections at a polling station in Nicosia yesterday. Cypriots went to the polls yesterday in a parliamentary election expected to show strong support for President Tassos Papadopoulos's staunch opposition to a UN reunification plan for the Mediterranean island.

## 'Washington ignores democratic values in quest for cheap oil'

AFP, Washington

The United States, eager to find new sources of oil at the time when petroleum prices are skyrocketing, is increasingly giving up its strategy of promoting democracy, analysts here say.

The government of US President George W. Bush has recently made contradictory moves towards key foreign oil producers, sowing confusion about its policy goals, according to Frank Verrastro of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank.

If democracy and support for human rights are the main engine of US diplomacy, "then you have to wonder why we have not taken a tougher line with Russia, why we have not taken a tougher line with Kazakhstan, why we have not taken a tougher line with Libya?" he asked.

Yet US officials "use it when we talk about Venezuela, and we use it when we talk about the Middle East," said Verrastro, an expert in energy policy.

"Increasingly it is looking like a case-by-case application of what is more important," he said. "It is depending on what the perceived needs of the day are."

Washington announced on May 15 it was normalising relations with Libya, which has important crude oil reserves, despite the lack of political reforms visible in a country led since 1969 by the same man, Muammar Gaddafi.

On the same day US officials imposed sanctions on Venezuela, a country that supplies 15 percent of US oil imports. The stated reason: populist President Hugo Chavez's lack of cooperation in the US-led "war on terror".

## Split emerges in West's front against Iran

Say diplomats

REUTERS, Berlin

The European Union and Washington are split over an EU proposal to offer Iran a generous package of incentives including nuclear reactors and security pledges if it stops enriching uranium, diplomats said on Saturday.

The EU draft offer of a package of incentives in exchange for a suspension of enrichment has caused a split in the West's previously united position on Iran since Washington has serious reservations about the European plan, EU

diplomats said.

The plan will be discussed in London on Wednesday by senior officials from France, Britain and Germany (the EU3), the United States, Russia and China, an EU diplomat familiar with the EU3's draft told Reuters.

"We agreed to offer Iran a nuclear power plant and possibly more, along with support for an international (nuclear) fuel consortium to guarantee fuel for civilian nuclear activity," the diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

Russia and China are expected

to support the plan but Washington is concerned about the idea of supporting a regional security framework in the Middle East and exempting EU firms from US penalties if they do business with Iran.

"We're still looking at it and we've not yet decided our position," Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns told Reuters.

A British Foreign Office spokesman said public discussion of the EU proposal's contents was "premature" and indicated that there was no guarantee Iran would be offered any reactors.

## Suu Kyi meet aimed at blocking UN action

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar, under international pressure for reforms, has allowed a top United Nations envoy to see detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi in an effort to block UN Security Council action, analysts said yesterday.

Ibrahim Gambari, UN under-secretary general for political affairs, held talks with the 60-year-old Nobel peace laureate at a military guest house in Yangon Saturday for about one hour.

The surprise meeting followed Gambari's talks with Myanmar's reclusive leader Senior General Than Shwe at a secret jungle compound outside the central town of Pinyinana

early Saturday.

"The envoy told the junta leader that Myanmar should speed up democratisation and improve human rights," a Yangon-based diplomat who received a briefing from Gambari on his mission told AFP.

"Also Gambari asked the junta to help UN humanitarian workers operate smoothly in the country," the diplomat said.

The junta crushed pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988 and two years later rejected the results of national elections won by Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD).

She has spent more than 10 of the last 17 years under house arrest in

Yangon and the junta was likely to extend her house arrest later this month. She has also been barred from seeing foreigners for more than two years.

The last foreign visitor to see the opposition leader was Malaysia's Razali Ismail, the UN's special envoy for Myanmar, in March 2004.

Analysts said Myanmar set up the meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and the envoy in an attempt to block UN Security Council action against the junta amid growing international pressure on the regime for democratic reforms.

## Iran big beneficiary of US-led Iraq war

Says Albright

AFP, London

Iran has benefited most from the US-led war in Iraq and would make further gains if the daily bloodshed ended up dividing the country, former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright said Sunday.

As for the Iranian nuclear row, a "high level" member of the administration should respond to a letter from Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to US President George W. Bush and also engage in direct dialogue with Tehran, Albright told the BBC in an interview while on a visit to London.

The former top US diplomat welcomed the formation on Saturday of Iraq's first permanent government since the ousting of Saddam Hussein, but reiterated her concerns about the situation.

"The main problems that I see are the unintended consequences of this war, the biggest one frankly

being at the moment is that the country that gained the most out of this war is Iran so I am very worried about it," she said.

Albright, who served under former president Bill Clinton from 1997 to 2001, highlighted the dangers of an internal conflict between Iraq's Shia Muslim majority and the Sunni minority.

Asked what she thought about the risk of the country being divided into three parts -- the Kurdish north, the Sunni-dominated centre and the Shia south -- Albright said this would be a dangerous development.

"It would have deep implications obviously on Turkey and the Kurdish issue. It would give additional power to Iran in the south with the Shia. Then the centre, which is primarily Sunni, is not homogeneous either, and one is unclear as to what role the Saudis might play or Jordanians," she said.



Claudia Lopez (R) and her 11-year-old daughter Jacqueline get legal advice during a citizenship workshop on Saturday in Chicago, Illinois. Over 200 people attended the workshop, which was held to help legal residents with the necessary paperwork to apply for US citizenship.

## BUSH TO SENATE

## Pass bill on immigration this month

REUTERS, Washington

President George W. Bush pressed the US Senate on Saturday to pass an immigration overhaul bill before the end of next week, when it begins its Memorial Day holiday break.

Bush used his weekly radio address to step up pressure on senators debating legislation that couples tighter border controls with a guest-worker programme, plus measures giving a path to citizenship for millions of illegal immigrants.

The president, who backs immigration reform largely along the lines of what the Senate is considering, announced plans to deploy 6,000 National Guard troops on the US-Mexican border in a rare televised address from the Oval Office on Monday.

"America must secure its borders," Bush insisted on Saturday.

Any Senate bill must be reconciled with a tougher House version, the target of mass street protests in recent weeks, that would make illegal immigrants felons while offering no prospects for gaining temporary work permits or citizenship.