

Israel must give peace a chance: Likud ministers

US won't allow terror to derail ME peace

AFP, Jerusalem

Senior members of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's right-wing Likud party on Sunday urged the party faithful to support the peace roadmap at a party convention in Jerusalem.

Amid constant heckling from a vociferous crowd, Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz called on the Likud to rally around the government and its difficult decision to embark on the roadmap process.

"I will not hide from you that I have big doubts about the process we entered into last week in Aqaba," he said, referring to a Middle East summit at the Jordanian resort convened by US President George W. Bush which formally launched the process.

"However, I am convinced that ... we have to give it a chance, we owe it to ourselves, to our children and to our future as a people," he said.

"In such a fateful period we must be determined and full of faith and everyone must unite around the path along which the government is taking us."

Israel would proceed cautiously, he stressed, but added that without the Palestinians putting up "a true fight against terror on the ground" there would be "not the slightest advance".

Foreign Minister Sylvan Shalom offered similar sentiments.

"Even though I have a lot of doubts about the success of the process, we have to give the political process a chance and to test it," he said.

Interim prime minister and former Jerusalem mayor and Ehud Olmert faced down a raucous crowd, telling them they should congratulate the Sharon government for taking such a brave and painful step.

"This government decided, rightly, that at this particular moment it was ready to examine whether there was a chance of reaching an understanding with a Palestinian government which says it wants to fight terror and make peace with us," he told the hall.

"It is highly possible that all this is shown to be impractical (but) if there is a chance to reach such an understanding with a government like that, we should say 'well done' to the Israeli government, the Likud government, that was ready to start that process," he said.

His comments came in stark contrast to earlier sentiments expressed by minister without portfolio Uzi Landau, who led calls for a vote to show the Likud's opposition to the roadmap.

"There are mistakes that prime ministers do not make," he said, referring to Sharon's use of the word

"occupation" two weeks ago.

"The damage is huge, the political damage is big but worse still is the ethical damage, the damage to (our) values and the educational damage. If we are 'occupiers' in Shilo or Beit El, what are we in Tel Aviv, the Negev or in Galilee?"

"The roadmap will only bring more violence," he concluded.

Meanwhile, the United States reaffirmed Sunday its support for Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas and urged Israel and the Palestinians to stick to an agreed-upon plan for peace in spite of the latest violence.

"We will not allow this kind of terror activity ... to derail our efforts toward the roadmap," Secretary of State Colin Powell said, referring to the earlier attack by Palestinian hardline groups that killed four Israeli soldiers at a military post between the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Hillary has no plan to run for White House

AFP, Washington

Hillary Clinton has no plans to run for the White House, but hopes such speculation will lead to a woman running for president someday, she told ABC News in an interview aired Sunday.

Responding ahead of Monday's release of her memoir, "Living History," to the question would she run for president in either 2004 or 2008, Clinton, a senator from New York, said: "I don't have any intentions or plans of running."

"I'm flattered that the question gets asked. And I hope that it will lead to a woman running for president, and we have a lot of good women," she told ABC News.

Asked whether she would refuse outright if asked by the Democratic leadership to run for president, Clinton said: "I would tell them to take a deep breath -- probably two aspirins -- and get a good night's sleep."

The former US first lady said she had also learned to live politically with former adversaries such as House of Representatives Majority Leader Tom DeLay, one of the chorus leaders for the impeachment of her husband, former president Bill Clinton.



PHOTO: AFP
Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski shakes hands with people celebrating the first unofficial exit poll report that Polish voters had approved European Union membership on Sunday. According to the poll based on results from 1,200 representative voting stations out of a total of 25,165, turnout for the referendum was 56.9 per cent and 81.9 per cent of voters had voted 'yes'.



PHOTO: AFP
Israeli soldiers take position on the roof of buildings in the divided West Bank city of Hebron following an attack by Palestinian gunmen which killed one Israeli soldier on Sunday. An Israeli was shot and killed in the flashpoint city of Hebron by two Palestinian militants, who were themselves gunned down by Israeli soldiers. The Israeli army earlier imposed a curfew on the city after a Palestinian shot and lightly wounded an Israeli border guard near the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the heart of the city. The site is holy to both Jews and Muslims.

Iran urges US to stop using 'language of force'

AFP, Tehran

Iran's foreign ministry appealed to Washington to stop using the "language of force", warning Monday that US posturing would only undermine the cause of dialogue and strengthen the hand of hardliners in the Islamic republic.

"We have seen some confusion over Iran within the American leadership, and we hope they will see sense and not use the language of force, because this will have the opposite effect," spokesman Hame-Reza Asefi told reporters.

"Certain people (in Iran) think that dialogue is a waste of time, and if the pressure becomes too strong, it will strengthen the hand of those against dialogue," he added.

Asefi's comments come amid mounting US pressure against Iran's clerical regime, accused by Washington of seeking to develop nuclear weapons, harbouring al-Qaeda fugitives, sponsoring anti-Israeli militants and meddling in post-war Iraq.

Tehran and Washington cut

diplomatic ties after the 1979 Islamic revolution, but for several months the two sides have been engaged in discreet talks within a forum initially set up to address the crisis in Afghanistan.

But those contacts were abruptly halted after the May 12 suicide bombings in Riyadh that killed 35 people and which US officials believe could have been planned by Iran-based operatives of the al-Qaeda terror network.

US pressure on Iran has since mounted, leading many to fear that Iran could be next on Washington's hit-list -- despite denials from top US officials.

In a swipe at the United States, however, Asefi argued that "the Americans' accusations can be explained by their failures in Iraq and Afghanistan".

The previous day, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi made a similar plea for the US administration -- which had lumped Iran into an "axis of evil" along with Saddam Hussein's Iraq and North Korea -- to cease what is being seen here as a

concerted campaign of intimidation.

"They cannot deal like this with Iran," Kharazi told deputies.

"You have to help Iran, because pressure will lead nowhere and will only make radical thoughts flourish, and this is not in the favour of us, the region or anybody."

But the calls for detente have been matched by defiant comments in recent weeks from Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who on Sunday accused Washington of pursuing a "devilish plot" to undermine the Islamic republic.

Turning to the nuclear issue, Asefi also insisted Iran was fully cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose inspectors are currently in the country probing Iran's civil atomic energy programme.

"We have a transparent policy with regard to the agency, and we are waiting for the world to have a transparent policy with us. This visit is a sign that we wish to cooperate with the agency," he said.

Top al-Qaeda detainees deny links to Iraq

AFP, Washington

Two high-ranking al-Qaeda suspects currently in US custody have told CIA interrogators the terror network did not work with the government of Saddam Hussein, the New York Times reported Monday.

Top al-Qaeda planner and recruiter Abu Zubaydah, captured in March 2002, told the CIA that Osama bin Laden rejected proposals of working with Saddam Hussein because he did not want to be beholden to him, the Times said.

Al-Qaeda chief of operations Khalid Sheik Mohammed, captured in March this year, also told questioners that al-Qaeda did not work with Saddam.

The Times said it had received information about the briefings from several intelligence officials, one of whom downplayed the significance of the denials, saying everything al-Qaeda detainees say must be regarded with skepticism.

Others, however, noted that President George W. Bush's admin-

istration had kept mum about the detainees' denials while playing up other details that seemed to support their case of a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda -- one of the stated justifications for launching war on Saddam Hussein.

"I remember reading the Abu Zubaydah debriefing last year, while the administration was talking about all of these other reports, and thinking that they were only putting out what they wanted," an unnamed official was quoted as saying.

The White House, State Department and Pentagon declined to comment to the Times on why results of the Zubaydah's interrogation were not made public.

"This gets to the serious question of to what extent did they try to align the facts with the conclusions that they wanted," an official told the Times.

"Things pointing in one direction were given a lot of weight, and other things were discounted."

SARS vaccine unveiled

THE KOREA HERALD/ ANN, Seoul

A ground-breaking technology that may prevent and cure the severe acute respiratory syndrome, has been developed in South Korea by two local biotechnology ventures.

BioLeaders Corp. and MDLab Corp. announced on Sunday that they have come up with a technology that forms a SARS-virus antigen on the surface of edible lactic ferments. When prospective or present SARS patients take the lactic ferments, an antibody against the corona virus is established.

The SARS-virus antigen called "spike protein" is known to cover the surface of the virus, invade into the cells and spur antibody production but contains no noxious elements of SARS.

"After we injected pigs and mice

with porcine epidemic diarrhoea virus and transmissible gastro-enteritis virus - variations of the corona virus that is known to cause SARS - their resistance against those viruses was considerably enhanced," said Sung Moon-hee, president of BioLeaders Corp.

Sung further explained the unique features of the treatment. It can simultaneously induce IgG antibodies, which provide naturally acquired passive immunity, and IgA antibodies, which protect mucosal surfaces from the invasion of pathogens.

Mucosal surfaces have been identified as the primary means of SARS transmission.

In addition, lactic ferments' innocuousness and stability are expected to enable long-term medication, he added.



PHOTO: AFP
A British soldier controls an angry protester as Iraqi workers demonstrate near the US Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) in the southern port city of Basra on Monday against the employment of Asian workers in the oil sector in the area by the US company Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR). Banner in English reads: "Democracy Movement Union of Iraqi Labourers never allowed to get foreign labourers at the expense of Iraqi labourers."

N Korea wants Atom bomb to cut conventional forces

REUTERS, Seoul

Communist North Korea said on Monday it wanted to have nuclear weapons so it could reduce the size of its huge conventional forces and divert funds into an economy foreign analysts say is close to collapse.

It was the first time Pyongyang had linked its controversial nuclear program to cutting its conventional military and saving money. North Korea has one of the largest armed forces in the world with 1.1 million troops, many of them forward-deployed near the Demilitarized Zone that bisects the Korean peninsula.

In a Korean-language commentary, the North's official KCNA news agency said if the United States did not

give up what it described as its hostile policy Pyongyang would have no choice but to have a nuclear deterrent.

"We are not trying to possess a nuclear deterrent in order to blackmail others but we are trying to reduce conventional weapons and divert our human and monetary resources to economic development and improve the living standards of the people," KCNA said. A commentary on KCNA clearly has high-level approval.

In Tokyo, before the KCNA commentary was published, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun told Japan's parliament his country would not tolerate North Korea possessing nuclear weapons but called for a peaceful resolution to

the problem.

Yu Suk-ryul, a professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security in Seoul, said the KCNA commentary seemed intended to play up the North's economic difficulties and underscore its desire for bilateral talks with the United States about its nuclear ambitions.

"Because North Korea admitted officially it possesses nuclear weapons, now they can give reasons based on that," he said. Many economists say the North's economy is close to collapse despite -- or even because of -- piecemeal reforms. Many people are malnourished, aid groups say.

Bloodshed follows US troops

AFP, Baghdad

The United States reaffirmed its determination Sunday to find Iraq's banned weapons as new bloodshed in Fallujah highlighted the perils facing US troops two months after the fall of the government of Saddam Hussein.

An Iraqi gunshop owner identified as Mehmid Mutlag, 36, was shot dead Sunday by a US patrol in that town west of Baghdad after soldiers, who saw him repairing an assault rifle outside his store, mistook him for an armed assailant, witnesses said.

Mutlag's death came just a day after US troops killed another Iraqi after coming under fire near a mosque on the town's northern outskirts.

US soldiers also came under attack Friday in Fallujah when a rocket-propelled grenade was fired at a US armoured vehicle, said a resident.

Six people, including a local Baath Party leader, have been detained in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul on suspicion of planning attacks on US troops, coalition ground forces said.

Meanwhile, top US officials insisted they will find evidence Iraq was developing nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, despite growing doubts in many quarters about the existence of such programs.

"I believe we will find them," US national security adviser Condoleezza Rice told NBC's "Meet the Press."

Secretary of State Colin Powell stood by his February statement to the UN Security Council, in which he detailed US claims that Iraq was hiding its weapons from UN inspectors.

"Not only have I been studying this for many, many years, but, as I prepared that statement, I worked very closely with the director of central intelligence, George Tenet," Powell told the "Fox News Sunday" program.

He said his statement had been vetted thoroughly by all of the analysts working on the matter and he had spent four days and nights at CIA headquarters, making sure that data in his speech were supported by intelligence information.