

## Israel plans to demolish 3,000 Gaza homes for trench

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli army wants to demolish 3,000 homes in Rafah to dig a trench preventing militants from using smuggling tunnels under the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, an Israeli newspaper said yesterday.

The Israeli army on Sunday confirmed that a plan to dig a trench along the so-called "Philadelpi road" had been revived and that construction could start within weeks.

"The army has submitted for the attorney general's approval a plan for digging a wide trench the length of the route that would extend to the southern part of Rafah," the Maariv daily reported.

"The plan for the widest trench means demolishing 3,000 Palestinian houses" in Rafah, an impoverished southern Gaza Strip city which has been one of the hardest-hit spots since the start of the intifada in September 2000.

## Indonesia restricts aid workers in Aceh

Donors urged to turn tsunami aid pledges into reality

REUTERS, AFP, Banda Aceh/ Geneva

Indonesia told thousands of aid workers helping tsunami victims in its worst-hit region, Aceh, yesterday not to venture beyond two large cities because of what it said were militant threats.

Budi Atmaji, Indonesia's head of relief operations, said agencies would need permission to work outside the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, and the ravaged west coast town of Meulaboh.

Asked if Aceh was unsafe for international aid workers, he said: "Yes, in some places."

However, separatist rebels said they would never attack aid workers -- who in turn said they were not overly worried.

Huge waves unleashed by an earthquake 94 miles out to sea from Meulaboh killed at least 156,000

people on coasts around the Indian Ocean -- 104,000 in Indonesia, 30,000 in Sri Lanka, 15,000 in India and more than 5,000 in Thailand.

GAM (Free Aceh Movement) separatists and Indonesia's government made conciliatory gestures after the tsunami but have since accused one another of initiating several clashes as their three-decade-old conflict drags on despite the devastation.

Indonesian military chief General Endriartono Sutarto said GAM might attack foreign aid workers or troops in Aceh.

"Killing a foreigner here will attract international attention and they need it," the Jakarta Post newspaper quoted him as saying. GAM dismissed his remarks as propaganda.

"We never attacked and will never attack aid workers, be it foreign or Indonesian," GAM military

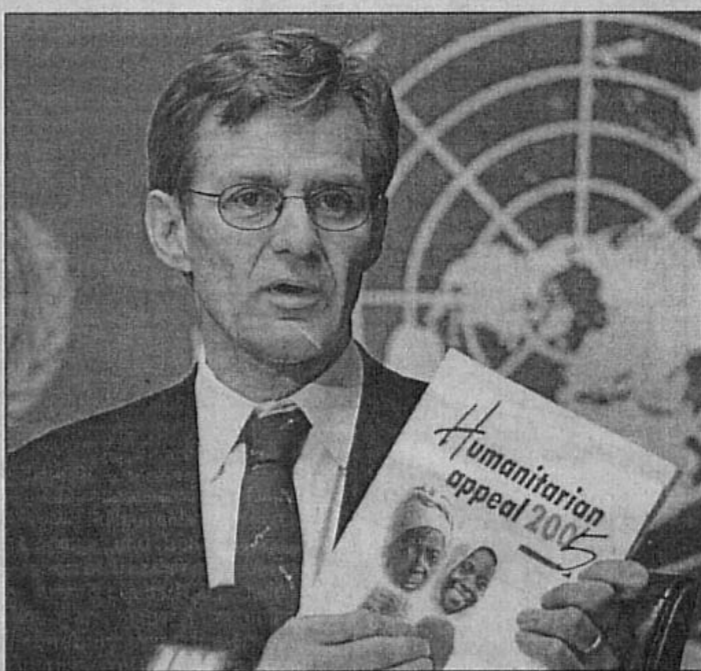
wing spokesman Sofyan Dawood told Reuters by telephone.

Mike Huggins, spokesman for the World Food Program in Banda Aceh, appeared surprised by the Indonesian warning, but not too concerned that the safety of aid workers could be threatened.

"We have no reason to believe GAM would want to do anything untoward," he said.

AFP adds: Pushed by unprecedented global sympathy for victims of Asia's tsunami disaster, donor countries convened under UN auspices yesterday to try to ensure the world's pledges of aid find their way to those in need.

As representatives from more than 80 countries and organisations gathered, the UN's emergency relief coordinator Jan Egeland said the relief efforts now underway showcased humanity at its best.



UN emergency relief coordinator Jan Egeland talks to journalists yesterday in Geneva about efforts to help victims of the tsunami that struck southeast Asia on December 26, 2004. The United Nations launched a new appeal yesterday to harness the unprecedented outpouring of support for Asia's tsunami disaster to help up to 30 million other people around the world, notably in Africa.

## TIGER LEADER SAYS 'Irreparable damage' in ties with Colombo

AFP, Kilinochchi

The tsunami which initially sparked hopes of a renewal of the Sri Lankan peace process has caused "irreparable damage" in relations between the government and the Tamil Tigers, a rebel leader said yesterday.

S.P. Thamilselvan, the Tamil Tigers' political chief, said the rift between the two sides had been widened by the government's barring of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan from rebel-held areas in the northeast and the unfair distribution of international relief at the expense of the Tamil minority.

"We have reached a stage of irreparable damage in relationships," Thamilselvan told AFP in this northern rebel stronghold.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been fighting for an independent Tamil homeland since 1972. The conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the Tamils

claimed some 60,000 lives before the two sides signed a truce in February 2002.

However, the Norwegian-brokered peace process came to a halt in April 2003 when talks broke down.

"Despite declarations, Colombo did not show its willingness to cooperate or sincerity in aid efforts," Thamilselvan said.

The two sides accuse each other of failing to cooperate in the mammoth operation to house, feed and clothe the almost one million people left homeless in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, with the Tigers labelling aid to Tamil zones as "scanty and insufficient".

Thamilselvan regretted that Annan had been prevented from visiting guerrilla-held areas during his weekend tour of parts of the island which bore the brunt of the tsunami fury.

## Abbas extends olive branch to Israel

AFP, Ramallah

Mahmud Abbas offered peace to Israel on Monday after securing the Palestinian presidency with a landslide election victory that boosted worldwide hopes of peace in the Middle East.

"We offer the hand of peace to our neighbours and we hope that the response will be positive," the new leader said after being confirmed as the winner of Sunday's election to find a replacement for the late Yasser Arafat.

Abbas, who is also known as Abu Mazen, won 62.32 percent of the vote, more than 40 percentage

points ahead of his nearest rival.

US President George W. Bush, who boycotted Arafat, invited Abbas to Washington for talks in a congratulatory telephone call.

A senior aide in Ariel Sharon's office said the Israeli prime minister was ready to meet the winner "as soon as possible" before the vote was even finished.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath said the meeting could take place within two weeks.

But Abbas acknowledged that there was a lot to do.

"The elections are only the beginning, not the end. We have a programme full of things to do

in order to achieve peace," the moderate former prime minister said.

The size of his victory grants Abbas the legitimacy he needs in any new talks with Israel.

There were no massive displays of jubilation in the West Bank and Gaza after the election results, but Abbas will take over from Arafat with new-found Israeli cooperation and enthusiastic backing from the international community.

Bush said "I look forward to talking to him at the appropriate time. I look forward to welcoming him here to Washington if he chooses to come here."

## Mudslide claims 12 lives in California

AP, Los Angeles

Rain lashed water-logged California again early yesterday, hampering efforts to find survivors buried under a mud slide in a coastal community and prompting hundreds to flee a mountain town before a rain-engorged lake spills over a dam.

A succession of storms, which have brought heavy snow to parts of Northern California and astonishing amounts of rain to the south, were blamed for the deaths of at least 12 people, turning normally mild Southern California into a giant flood zone.

In La Conchita, a small community of houses wedged onto a spit of land between the hills south of Santa Barbara and the Pacific Ocean, a massive mudslide Monday killed three people, injured eight and left at least 21 unaccounted for.

## Iraq may face civil war after polls: US analysts

Iraqi polls a 'first step' on road to self-govt: Bush

AFP, Washington

Some US analysts are worried Iraq could spiral down into further chaos and even civil war after its January 30 elections, but few here are promoting a delay in the vote.

Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, a leading voice in Congress on foreign affairs, said Washington was stuck between two difficult choices.

"We are left with a bad choice in holding elections and a worse choice of not holding it," Biden told CNN on Sunday.

Another member of Congress, Democratic Representative Adam Smith, said the elections must take place as scheduled.

"It would be, I think, a really bad sign if they didn't," Smith stressed.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell for his part said Iraq's elections will take place on January 30 as planned.

"We are all worried about what's going to happen after the elections, but the elections are a necessary next step," Powell told ABC television.

But some US analysts worry that a lack of security in the Sunni Muslim regions could keep voters in those areas away from the polls, allowing Shias to dominate the elections and leading to more violence.

Two influential former US officials recently warned that Iraq could

freefall into further violence and even civil war after the elections.

Former President George H.W. Bush's national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, sparked a debate after he warned last week that the Iraq elections "rather than turning out to be a promising turning point, have the great potential for deepening the conflict."

And former secretary of state Henry Kissinger told CNN on Sunday: "We will have to decide to what extent we want to be involved in what may become a civil war (after the elections)."

But Kissinger, who negotiated an end to the Vietnam War in the 1970s, said the elections were "now a necessity."

"The consequences of not having it would be much graver than any benefit we would get from delay," he said.

"We will then, hopefully as a united country, be able to deal with creating some political structure in Iraq which will permit a gradual withdrawal of American forces over a period of time," Kissinger added.

Few in the United States are calling for a delay in the vote, a postponement which leading Iraqi Sunnis have requested.

Larry Diamond, a former adviser to the now-defunct US-led Coalition Provisional Authority, wrote in The New York Times that "Iraq is about to reach a point of no return."

Diamond said a delay could be

negotiated in exchange for the cooperation of the Sunni opposition.

"What is needed now is for all of Iraq's social and political stakeholders to sit down and talk," wrote Diamond, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. "The outlines of a compromise are visible."

Meanwhile, President George W. Bush, in an interview published yesterday in the Wall Street Journal, said he was working to make sure the Iraqi elections go forward as planned on January 30, but warned the vote was only a "first step" toward a permanent government.

"This is a step one of a series of steps necessary for Iraq to write a constitution... And I think it is really important to keep this election in perspective... that it's a part of a process... out of which a constitution will be written, and a new form of government in a troubled region will emerge," said the US president.

Asked if there was a plan to bring the Iraqi Sunni population into the future government if they do not participate significantly in the upcoming election, Bush said the United States was working "to make sure the elections... go forward with as big a participation as possible."

"We want there to be wide participation. We want there to be a government that is representative," Bush said while admitting he was also "realistic about Iraq."



## Ukraine names Yushchenko president-elect

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine looked ahead yesterday to Viktor Yushchenko assuming power after he was declared president-elect, with the withdrawal of Kiev's troops from Iraq, economic reforms and relations with the West and Russia topping the agenda.

Yushchenko's pro-Russia electoral rival, former prime minister Viktor Yanukovich, vowed again to appeal the results of a historic December 26 rerun vote to the supreme court, though few expect the complaint to be granted.

The 50-year-old pro-Western opposition leader was officially declared the winner of the repeat election late Monday, when the central election commission released the final results of the poll.



An Indian security guard looks out from a watchtower at a group of jailed fishermen inside a detention camp in Port Blair Monday. India is holding prisoners from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka in the tsunami-hit Andamans who have already served their sentences because no-one is claiming them, an island official said.

## Cuba normalises ties with EU nations

AFP, Havana

Cuba announced Monday that it is renewing official contacts with all European Union countries, including those that took the hardest line against the communist government after its crackdown on dissidents.

The move announced by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque could bring to an end diplomatic hostilities that broke out in June 2003 after many EU nations started inviting dissident critics of President Fidel Castro to embassy cocktail parties.

The EU has said it will "intensify" contacts with dissidents through other means.

## 'Black holes deform space & time'

AFP, San Diego

Black holes, the universe's biggest vacuum cleaners, deform space and time surrounding them, two teams of astrophysicists reported on the sidelines of the American Astronomical Society's winter meeting here.

John Miller, of Harvard University's astrophysical center at Boston, Massachusetts, was able to see gas particles literally "surfing" a space-time wave around a black hole known as GRS 1915-105, some 40,000 light years away in the Aquila constellation.

His observations have confirmed a key theory that nothing is able to escape a black hole's extreme gravitational field, not even light waves, Miller told reporters.

The data shows that "black holes are such extreme objects that they can actually warp and drag the fabric of spacetime around with them as they spin," the scientists reported.

"Gas whipping around the black hole has no choice but to ride that wave of choppy spacetime sea that distorts everything falling into the black hole," they added.

The space-time warp caused by extreme gravity was predicted in 1916 by Albert Einstein in his theory of relativity, said Miller, who did his research with Jeroen Homan of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

They made their observations with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Rossi-X Timing Explorer satellite, the most powerful orbiting X-ray telescope.

## IRAQI PRISON ABUSE Ex-colleagues testify against Graner

AP, Fort Hood

Former members of the military unit accused of assaulting Iraqi inmates at Abu Ghraib prison took turns testifying against the scandal's alleged ringleader, saying he laughed while forcing prisoners to pose naked.

Sp. Charles Graner Jr. is the first soldier accused in the scandal to go on trial. Three guards from the 372nd Military Police Company have pleaded guilty to abusing detainees in late 2003.

Their plea deals required them to take the stand as prosecution witnesses against Graner, a 36-year-old Army reservist charged with conspiracy to maltreat Iraqi detainees, assault, dereliction of duty and committing indecent acts.

One witness, Pvt. Jeremy Sivits, told the jury that Graner knocked an Iraqi inmate unconscious with a punch in the head and that he laughed while forcing prisoners to pose naked.

Asked how hard Graner hit the prisoner on a scale of one to 10, Sivits said, "Seven or eight. Obviously he had to hit him pretty hard to knock him out."

Army prosecutors were expected to wrap up their case Tuesday with videotaped testimony from two former Iraqi detainees who were abused. A third may also present recorded testimony.

Capt. Chuck Neill, a spokesman for prosecutors, said the Abu Ghraib detainees recorded their depositions in December.



Firefighters struggle in vain to contain a bushfire by the South Eastern Freeway on the outskirts of Adelaide yesterday. At least eight people are confirmed dead from wildfires fanned by searing temperatures and high winds, threatening towns and destroying many properties.

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**INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE**

Tender No: BGFC/MATS(FP)082 Date: January 02, 2005

- Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Limited (BGFC), a Company of Petrobangla invites sealed offers in the form of bid under International Competitive Bidding (ICB) procedures for supply, installation, commissioning & testing of 80-125 KW capacity 01 (one) unit Gas Engine Generator set.
- Details of the scope of supply, the terms and conditions of supply, the information required to be furnished by the bidders etc. are provided in the tender document.
- Tender documents will be available from January 16, 2005 to February 15, 2005 between 09:00 hrs & 14:00 hrs on all working days (Sunday to Thursday) on payment of Tk 4,000.00 (non-refundable) each at the following address:  
  
Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Limited  
House No. 75, Road No. 6  
Old DOHS, Banani  
Dhaka, Bangladesh  
Tel # 88-0851-52141/52428  
Fax # 88-0851-53856/52429
- Bids will be received at the above office of BGFC up to 11:00 hrs (BST) on February 16, 2005 and will be opened on the same day at 11:30 hrs (BST) in presence of the bidders or their representatives, if any.
- Reputed firms, manufacturer and suppliers are eligible to submit bids for the supply.
- The purchase will be financed under own cash foreign exchange.
- Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Limited reserves the right to accept any or reject any or all bids at any stage without assigning any reason whatsoever.

The aforesaid tender notice is also available at Petrobangla Web-site no. "www.petrobangla.org" and BGFC Web-site no. "www.bgfc.org.bd".

**General Manager (Technical Services)**

PRS-09/01(TS)/2005  
DFP-537-8/01/05  
G-45

**Labour MPs give Blair, Brown a 'scorching' over rivalry**

AFP, London

Prime Minister Tony Blair and his finance minister Gordon Brown have come under pressure from their own Labour Party to put a lid on their leadership squabbling ahead of Britain's next general election.

Backbench Labour MPs gave both men a dressing down at a closed-door meeting late Monday, at which Blair appealed for unity while the chancellor of the exchequer -- who Tuesday embarks on a week-long tour of Africa -- kept quiet.

"Tony Blair and Gordon Brown both had a scorching," said Labour MP Paul Flynn after the meeting. "It was a Parliamentary Labour Party meeting like no other."

Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott conceded Tuesday: "The troops are saying to the leaders: 'Get in line.'"

Fresh speculation of a breakdown in trust emerged at the weekend, as a new book claimed that Blair repeatedly told Brown last year that he would step down and give him the keys to Downing Street -- and then changed his mind.

"There is nothing that you could ever say to me now that I could ever believe," a frustrated Brown reportedly told Blair, according to "Brown's Britain" by journalist Robert Peston.

The main opposition Conservative Party, always keen to portray Blair as untrustworthy, was quick to jump on that quote, saying it plans to use it in its campaign literature.

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

Office of the Commissioner of Taxes  
Taxes Zone-6  
71/2, Pioneer Road, Kakrail, Dhaka

**Public Notice**

As per provision of Section 107 of the IT Ordinance, 1984 foreign nationals working in Bangladesh are to obtain income tax clearance certificates/income tax exemption certificates (ITCC/ITEC), as the case may be, from appropriate tax Authorities after payment of tax and/or completion of required formalities. Certificates thus obtained should be produced to tax officials (Inspectors of Taxes) at the airport at the time of departure from Bangladesh.

But, it has come to the notice of the concerned authorities that some foreigners at the time of leaving Bangladesh are not producing income tax clearance certificates/income tax exemption certificates (ITCC/ITEC) to tax officials at the Income Tax Clearance Booth at Zia International Airport.

Foreigners working in Bangladesh and their employers are requested to extend their co-operation for due enforcement of law in this regard. For further queries, if any, the following officer may be contacted.

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