

## 'Israel armed itself with nukes 40 yrs back'

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel armed itself with the "nuclear option" 40 years ago for use as a last resort should Arab countries threaten its existence, one of the men responsible for the state's nuclear programme said in remarks published yesterday.

"The Israeli nuclear option had a single aim -- to demonstrate to the opposing camp that we had the same capacities as it (for) the day when they will have the nuclear option," said former science minister Yuval Neeman in an interview with the daily YediotAharonot.

The Jewish state has never formally acknowledged having nuclear weapons although foreign experts believe it used its desert Dimona reactor to arm itself with some 200 nuclear warheads capable of being carried by medium- or short-range missiles.

Neeman added: "We were convinced that Arab states would not hesitate to make use of the nuclear option against us" once they had atomic bombs.

The former minister, who was also a senior military intelligence officer and a distinguished scientist, said: "Never did we see this option as a way to get results which more conventional methods would have enabled us to attain."

# Palestinian militants extend truce

## Israel gives it a guarded welcome

AFP, AP, Jerusalem

Israel gave a guarded welcome yesterday to an agreement by Palestinian militant groups to extend an informal truce until the end of the year but insisted the move still did not go far enough.

"If all the terror organisations, especially the extreme ones, are ready to stop, if only for a while, that in itself is a positive thing," Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said.

"But is it enough? Certainly not. Does it mean the Palestinian Authority is waging a war on terror. Certainly not. But they are definitely making an effort," he told army radio.

At talks in Cairo Thursday presided over by Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas, the 13 main factions pledged to maintain a truce until the end of the year but stopped short of declaring the formal ceasefire hoped for by the international community.

"The participants have reached an agreement on a political programme until the end of the current year which states their

commitment to respecting the atmosphere of calm currently prevailing in exchange for an end to aggressions against our people," a statement said.

Israel immediately reciprocated by announcing an extension to its own halt to military offensives in the occupied territories, first announced at a summit in Egypt last month, as long as the Palestinians maintained the de facto peace.

"At the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, Israel agreed not to launch offensive operations as long as there is a complete end to violence on the Palestinian side and we are sticking to that commitment," an aide to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said.

But the first signs of a crack in the fragile calm emerged early Friday with the announcement by a Gaza-based militant group, which did not attend the Cairo talks, that it would not be bound by the truce.

"We totally reject the results of the Cairo meeting, having not taken part, and we are not bound to respect the outcome," the Popular

Resistance Committees said in a statement sent to AFP in Gaza City.

The group was formed at the start of the Palestinian uprising in September 2000 by security elements from the mainstream Fatah movement, but has since attracted dissident of all the principal Palestinian factions.

Apparently devoid of ideology, its sole raison d'être appears to be to organise anti-Israeli attacks.

The group said it had already respected a two-month period of calm, which is due to expire on Saturday, but said it would not maintain the lull because of "Zionist violations".

"Our patience is up and it is time that our fighters make the enemy pay for these two months," it said.

Abbas has been under intense pressure from both Israel and the United States to disarm the militant groups, but has so far focused his efforts on securing their agreement to a ceasefire for fear that any stronger moves might spark a major confrontation.

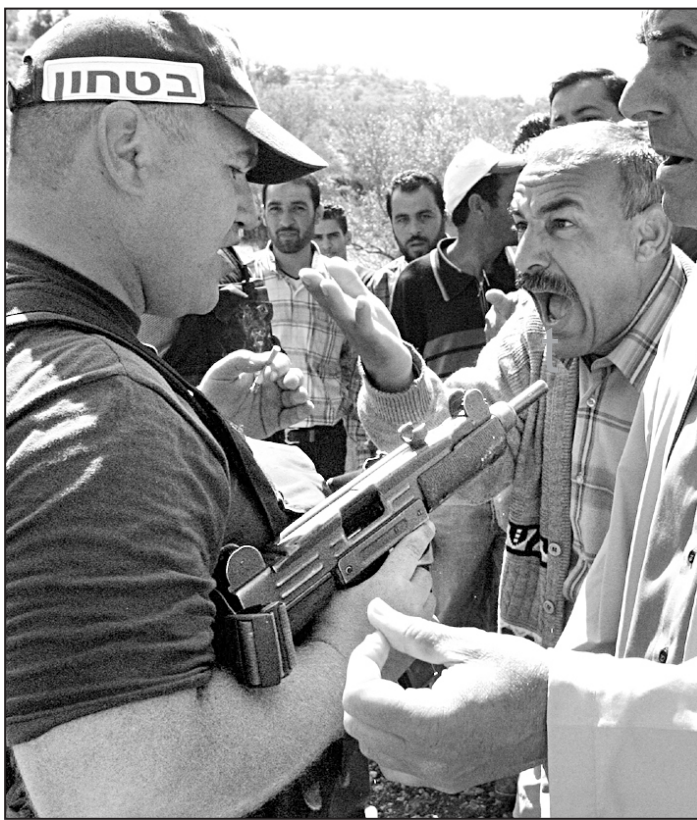


PHOTO: AFP

An Israeli security guard aims his gun at an angry Palestinian during a demonstration against Israel's separation barrier in the West Bank village of Safa, near Ramallah yesterday. An agreement by Palestinian militant groups, reached yesterday in Cairo, to extend an informal truce until the end of the year is "positive" but "not enough", Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said.

## India flays US over visa refusal to Modi

### Gujarat CM allowed riots to brew

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

India yesterday urged the US to review its decision to refuse visa to Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi over the 2002 sectarian violence, calling it an "uncalled for" and insensitive action.

"The action on the part of the US embassy is uncalled for and displays lack of courtesy and sensitivity towards a constitutionally elected chief minister of a state of India," the external affairs ministry said in a statement.

A ministry spokesman said New Delhi had lodged "a strong protest" with the US deputy chief of mission, Robert Blake, and urged Washington to reconsider the decision.

"Foreign Secretary (Shyam) Saran has asked us to review the decision. I will report it back to Washington," Blake told reporters outside the South Block, which houses the external affairs ministry.

The spokesman said: "The government of India expresses its deep concern and regret that the embassy of the US has denied a visa to Modi... to visit the US for an event organised by the Asian-American Hotel Owners

Association.

"The visa has been requested by the ministry of external affairs through a note verbale to the embassy on Feb 28, 2005.

The US embassy announced earlier Friday that Modi's tourist and business visa, issued in 1998, had been revoked under the Immigration and Nationality Act over his involvement in the Gujarat violence. A diplomatic visa was also denied to him.

Meanwhile, Almost two years before the US denied Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi a visa, a State Department report on global human rights had held him responsible for the 2002 sectarian violence in his state.

The 2003 edition of Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, prepared annually by the US Department of State, had found Modi guilty of fuelling violence that it claimed had resulted in the deaths of "an estimated 2,000 Muslims".

It was on the basis of this report that the US invoked against Modi a law that makes any foreign government official guilty of serious violations of religious freedom ineligible for a visa.



PHOTO: AFP

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (L) and her Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Kasuri (R) head for a meeting in Islamabad Thursday. Rice said Washington was keen to ensure that the "tentacles" of a black market run by Pakistan's disgraced nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan were wiped out.

## Rice accuses DPRK of using tyranny label to avoid nuke issue

AFP, Islamabad

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice accused North Korea on Thursday of focusing on the US label of Pyongyang as an "outpost of tyranny" to avoid discussing its nuclear programme.

Rice, who is on her first official tour of Asia -- much of it dedicated to trying to break a deadlock on the nuclear issue and draw the Stalinist regime back to multi-party talks -- refused to be back down over the name-calling.

"The North Koreans are determined to change the subject from what North Korea is doing, and we are not going to let them change the subject," Rice said in an interview with US television network ABC in Islamabad.

The reclusive regime said

Wednesday it would not engage in fresh talks with the United States on its nuclear ambitions and lashed out at Rice, currently on a six-nation tour of Asia.

A foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement published by the North's official Korean Central News Agency that talks were inconceivable until Pyongyang was "delisted as 'an outpost of tyranny'."

Asked about the issue, Rice told reporters in the Pakistani capital: "I am not going to get into a debate on semantics with the North Koreans."

"Everybody knows what life looks like in North Korea and everybody knows what kind of system rules in North Korea and so as I said, I'm not going to let the North Koreans change the subject," she added.

## 8 Pak soldiers, 40 tribals killed in troubled region

AFP, INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Eight soldiers and 40 tribal people were killed and 23 injured in fierce desert gunbattles with tribal rebels in Pakistan's southwestern province of Baluchistan, officials said yesterday.

The tribals, including women and children, were killed during the clash with security forces in the restive province, a tribal chief has claimed.

Leaders of an alliance of four Baloch nationalist groups Thursday staged a protest demonstration in the provincial capital Quetta against the attack on the tribals.

They claimed over 40 Bugti tribesmen including women and children had been killed in the attack and called for a seven-day mourning period from yesterday for the victims.

A ceasefire was agreed to remove the dead and wounded from the site of the day-long exchange of machinegun fire in Dera Bugti southeast of the provincial capital Quetta, officials said.

"The ceasefire is still holding," head of the Interior Ministry's National Crisis Management Cell, Brigadier Javed Cheema, told AFP yesterday.

Fighting broke out Thursday after the heavily-armed renegade clansmen, who want more autonomy and increased benefits from the area's natural resources, ambushed paramilitary Frontier Corps soldiers.

They struck as a six-vehicle military convoy containing 40 personnel was moving towards Pakistan's largest gasfield at nearby Sui -- the site of fierce clashes at the start of the year.

Cheema said the attack, which he blamed on the area's dominant Bugti tribe, was "totally unprovoked and blatant aggression".

Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao said tribesmen used light and heavy weapons and rained more than 150 rockets and mortar shells on a nearby paramilitary base from 12 different directions.

Officials said regular army troops backed by two military helicopters had been sent to tackle the situation.

An assertion by opposition politician Hafiz Hussain Ahmed that up to 50 tribesmen were killed in the incident was "exaggerated," Sherpao and Cheema said.

Tribal representatives and the clan's chieftain Akbar Bugti gave similar figures for the number of dead on their side.

## CIA blames Iran, Syria for meddling in Iraq

REUTERS, Washington

The director of the CIA accused Iran on Thursday of meddling in Iraq and said Syria was not working hard enough to stop militants entering the country to undermine Baghdad's efforts at stability.

"I think it's fair to say that just about everybody who's been watching understands that Iran has been meddling in the affairs of Iraq," CIA Director Porter Goss told the US Senate Armed Services Committee in a presentation on worldwide threats to US national security.

"How that is going to work out in the future is a matter of some concern," he added.

Goss also said that despite international diplomatic efforts, Iran was not being as open about its nuclear program as it needed to be.

"I also would say that their lack of candour, their lack of transparency on the subject of their nuclear pro-

gram causes people to have reasonable doubt about" their intent and capabilities, he said. "That is extremely worrisome from the point of view of proliferation."

Goss, who declined to give specific answers to many questions, said Iran was one of the few obvious state supporters of terrorism, citing the Lebanese militia Hizbollah as an example, and adding: "They ought to stop it."

Asked whether recent events involving Syria -- such as US pressure to stop supporting militants and the start of its withdrawal of troops from Lebanon -- were having an impact on the infiltration of militants into Iraq via Syria, Goss said:

"Despite a lot of very well-intentioned and persistent efforts to try and get more cooperation from the Syrian regime, we have not had the success I wish I could report. How events will affect those efforts to achieve further cooperation

remains to be seen in the future."

Goss said US forces in Iraq have become more successful at catching insurgents as they act or prepare to act. "We're getting good at that," he said.

But Defence Intelligence Agency Director Vice Adm. Lowell Jacoby, who appeared with Goss, said the key to defeating the insurgents was human intelligence from Iraqi citizens willing to report on insurgent activities.

"(If) we get to that situation, that's the way to take on an insurgency more successfully than we've been able to do today," Jacoby said.

But the Iraqi public continues to view US-led forces as occupiers and there is no sign of an increased willingness to help US or Iraqi authorities combat the insurgency.

"I can't pin down perceptible change in participation," he said.

## Nepal's tough talk against India sign of despair: Experts

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

A senior Nepalese official's diatribe against India, accusing it of practising double standards, is being seen as a sign of Kathmandu's despair that would impair traditional ties.

Tulsi Giri, King Gyanendra's senior-most deputy in the government, had also accused India of being oblivious to the threat posed by Maoist guerrillas.

"The Maoists have links with the LTTE (Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam guerrillas), People's War and Naxalites. How can India be oblivious of this and talk about the political system here?" Giri had said in Kathmandu on Thursday.

While officials were studying the import of his remarks, seasoned Nepal watchers minced no words in faulting Kathmandu for its "irresponsible" statement.

Maharajkumar Rasgotra, a former foreign secretary, described the utterances of Giri as an "act of despair."

"We should just ignore it. The king will be much weaker after the crisis. The monarchy can vanish for all you know," Rasgotra told IANS.

Maj. Gen (retd.) Ashok Mehta, a strategic expert on South Asia, read it as a sign of a "tottering monarchy" trying to talk tough.

"This shows the frustration and desperation of the current dispensation. His statements show how badly out of sync he is with real-politick on the international stage," Mehta said.

"The man (Tulsi Giri) who took political nirvana 35 years ago is now making wild statements that does no good to his image or credibility. The best thing for India would be not to take his loose allegations seriously," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Biswonath Upadhyaya (L) ex-chairman of the Constitution drafting committee returns home with his colleagues after being barred from meeting with Nepali Congress (NC) president and former Nepalese prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala at Maharajgunj near Kathmandu yesterday. Koirala (82) has been under house arrest since February 1 when King Gyanendra dismissed a four-party coalition government and imposed emergency rule.

## Ukraine admits to selling missiles to Iran, China

AFP, London

Ukraine admitted to the Financial Times newspaper yesterday that it had exported nuclear-capable cruise missiles to Iran and China, amid tense diplomatic debate over Tehran's alleged quest for nuclear weaponry.

Eighteen Soviet-era X-55 cruise missiles were exported in 2001 -- 12 to Iran and six to China -- Svyatoslav Piskun, Ukraine's prosecutor general, told the London-based paper.

Piskun said the missiles were not exported with the nuclear warheads that they were designed to carry.

Nonetheless, both Japan and the United States were worried about what appeared to be a significant leak of military technology, the newspaper reported.

The X-55, also known as the Kh-55 and AS-15 and first introduced in 1976, has a range of 3,500 kilometers (2,175 miles), which would give China -- or North Korea, if it obtained the missile -- free range over the Asian continent, while Iran could hit its main regional foe, Israel.

Reports emerged earlier this month about the missile sales, but Piskun's statement was the first acknowledgement from the Kiev government.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters shows a plastic human skull during a protest near the US embassy in Manila yesterday. The protesters demanded withdrawal of US forces from Iraq as it marks the second year of the US invasion in March 20, 2003.

## Shias, Kurds make progress in talks over govt formation

AP, REUTERS, Baghdad

Shia and Kurdish officials reported progress Thursday in resolving disagreements over territorial issues and Cabinet posts, but said they may need another week to put together Iraq's coalition government.

In violence around Iraq, six US soldiers were wounded in the northern city of Mosul when a convoy was attacked by a car bomber, Capt. Patricia Brewer said in Baghdad. According to a witness, Faisal Qasim, the bombing was carried out by a suicide bomber who slammed his car into a convoy of seven armoured vehicles, striking the fourth.

Nearly two months after they braved death to vote, many Iraqis are growing frustrated over the slow pace of the talks to form a new government.

"These negotiations included many things, not just the Kurdish issues, but also regarding the shape of the Iraqi government," said interim Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh, a Kurd.

A day after the opening of Iraq's first freely elected parliament in a half century, outgoing US Ambassador John Negroponte returned to the United States after a near nine-month stint.

"The job is far from done, but there is a principle perhaps each of us has experienced in our own lives: what is begun well, ends well, and the Jan. 30 election was certainly a good beginning," Negroponte said earlier this week during a farewell dinner.

Reuters adds: The US Army expects to begin cutting troop levels in Iraq later this year, a move that would reduce the level of American forces there to below 138,000, an Army general said on Thursday.

"I think for the next force rotation, we'll start seeing that (the) force rotation coming in will be smaller than the force that's in there," said Gen. Richard Cody, the Army's vice chief of staff.

"I know you're all waiting for a number here, and I'm not going to give you one because I don't know," Cody added in an interview with defence reporters.

## World's forgotten millions 3m more fled homes last year due to civil war

AFP, Geneva

An additional three million people internally displaced within their own borders were forced to flee their homes last year because of civil wars and human rights abuses, a group monitoring the situation said yesterday.

Those able to return to their homes were equally matched by those forced to leave, meaning that the number of internally displaced people around the world remained at around 25 million for the fourth year in a row.

"Internally displaced people still fall between cracks of the international protection and assistance system," said Elisabeth Rasmussen, the head of the Global IDP Project, the leading international body monitoring the phenomenon.

There are twice as many internally displaced as refugees who flee their countries. But unlike refugees, the internally displaced "cannot count on a functioning international system of protection and assistance," the project said in a report. In 14 countries they were ignored even by the United Nations.

Nor can they count on often indifferent governments to protect

them. In fact, in 13 countries, including Myanmar, Nepal, Sudan and Colombia, authorities were responsible for the displacement either directly or through militias.

The overwhelming majority of the internally displaced people, some 22 million, have been homeless for more than a year, and many of them for a decade or even longer, the report said.

The year 2004 was overshadowed by the dramatic escalation of the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region, which has caused the death of as many as 300,000 people and uprooted close to two million, among them some 1.7 million internally displaced, the report said.

It said they were "among the most vulnerable victims of conflict, and constitute arguably the largest at-risk population in the world. The abstract term "internal displacement", created to distinguish IDPs from refugees, fails to convey the immense human suffering most internally displaced people are forced to undergo.

"The act of displacement itself often is accompanied by violence and the most serious human rights violations such as arbitrary killings, torture, kidnappings and rape," the report added.

"Traumatised and fearing for their lives, every year millions of people, most of them women and children, are forced to leave behind their homes, land and other belongings to seek refuge in more secure areas."

With over 13 million IDPs in 19 countries, Africa remained the continent by far most affected by internal displacement in 2004.

Colombia, the country with the worlds second largest IDP population after Sudan, accounted for most of Latin Americas 3.7 million internally displaced people and nearly all new displacements recorded in the region during 2004.

In Asia, the outbreak or intensification of conflicts led to new displacements, in particular in Nepal, Indonesia, Pakistan and Myanmar.

Iraq still accounted for about half of the Middle East regions 2.1 million internally displaced people. In 2004, hundreds of thousands of people were newly displaced by military operations against suspected militants in Fallujah and other cities.

The Geneva-based Global IDP Project was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council.