

Iraqi insurgents offer peace for US concessions

AFP, London

An Iraqi insurgency group has offered a ceasefire to American troops in return for a set of concessions from US forces, The Independent reported yesterday.

Citing a statement that was passed to it which quotes Abu Salih Al-Jelani, a military leader of the Islamic Resistance Movement, a Sunni insurgency group, the newspaper said the group suggests that negotiations could be led by the United Nations, the Arab League or the Islamic Conference.

"Discussions and negotiations are a principle we believe in to overcome the situation in which Iraqi bloodletting continues," Jelani said in the statement, according to The Independent.

"Should the Americans wish to negotiate their withdrawal from our country and leave our people to live in peace, then we will negotiate subject to specific conditions and circum-

stances."

According to the daily, the conditions include the release of 5,000 detainees held in Iraqi prisons, recognition of "the legitimacy of the resistance", public negotiations, and an internationally guaranteed timetable for all agreements, among others.

Jelani also calls for the "dissolution of the present (Iraqi) government and the revoking of the spurious elections and the constitution" while also demanding that all agreements previously agreed by either Iraqi authorities or US forces be declared null and void.

The newspaper said that the terms included the disbandment of militias and the outlawing of militia organisations in Iraq, an "Anglo-American commitment to rebuild Iraq and reconstruct all war damage", and the integration of "resistance fighters" into a recomposed Iraqi army.

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Artist Mustafa Monwar, second from left, poses with a crest at an appreciation ceremony at the Spectra Convention Centre in Dhaka recently. Unitrend Ltd., an advertising agency, hosted the appreciation ceremony in honour of Mustafa Monwar, a versatile genius.

International caution over Palestinian deal

AFP, Paris

There was international relief yesterday at the agreement between rival Palestinian factions to form a national unity government, though the United States insisted the Palestinians must commit to peace with Israel.

Israel and the European Union also only gave cautious approval of the accord between Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Meshal reached in the Saudi holy city of Makkah.

Under the deal, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya will lead the new government, Abbas's Fatah movement will name a deputy prime minister and the key post of interior minister will go to an independent.

The US administration, which led an international boycott after Hamas won the Palestinian elections one year ago, said it wanted more details of the agreement aimed at ending

fighting between Hamas and Fatah. The US State Department said it wanted to see the "composition or the political programme" of the new Palestinian government.

A State Department spokesman, Gonzalo Gallegos, said any Palestinian government must meet three Western conditions: recognise Israel's right to exist, renounce violence and accept past Palestinian peace accords with Israel.

Hamas, which is on a US "terrorist" list, has in the past refused to meet the three conditions set by the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East – the United States, European Union, Russia and the United Nations.

There was no immediate indication if the Makkah agreement embodied the demands.

Israel also highlighted the need for Palestinians to recognise the Jewish state.

"Israel expects the new

Palestinian cabinet to respect the three principles laid down by the international community," Miri Eisin, a spokeswoman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, told AFP.

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana's spokeswoman Cristina Gallach said, "We are going to look at all the details with the best will in a positive but cautious manner."

Russia, Britain and the UN Secretary General gave more outright praise for Abbas and Meshal.

"We welcome any forward movement toward the creation of a national unity government, since only in this way can the situation in the Palestinian territories realistically be normalised," Russian foreign ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin was quoted as saying by Interfax news agency.

Pak police foil bombing plot 10 bombs seized

AFP, Dera Ismail Khan

Pakistani police said Friday they had foiled a terrorist plot after seizing 10 bombs on a road used by army convoys near the restive tribal region bordering Afghanistan.

The discovery in the northwestern town of Dera Ismail Khan comes amid a nationwide security alert following a wave of suicide attacks across the country in two weeks.

The devices, weighing between eight to ten kilos (17.6 to 22 pounds), were planted near a bus stop on the road towards the Waziristan tribal zone, a hub of al-Qaeda and Taliban militants, police said.

"The bombs were for terrorist activity and their timely discovery has foiled the plot," town police spokesman Malik Ramazan told AFP.

Pakistan has been rocked by a series of attacks in the last few weeks which have claimed more than 20 lives, including a January 29 suicide bombing in Dera Ismail Khan which killed a policeman.

Most of the attacks have been blamed on Taliban militants fighting President Pervez Musharraf's security forces in the Waziristan tribal belt.