

Ahmadinejad wants to defend Iran's position at UN meet

AFP, Teheran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wants to defend Iran's position in person when the UN Security Council meets to discuss the controversial Iranian nuclear programme, state television reported yesterday.

"The president wants to be present at the meeting of the Security Council examining the Iranian nuclear question to defend the right of the Iranian people to master nuclear technology," it quoted government spokesman Gholam Hossein Elham as saying.

"The aim of President Ahmadinejad is to defend the

national and international interests of the Iranian people," he added.

The report did not specify what session and when Ahmadinejad was seeking to attend.

The five UN Security Council permanent members and Germany are currently discussing a draft resolution to tighten sanctions against Iran for its controversial nuclear fuel work.

The council in December agreed a first set of measures penalising Iran for its refusal to suspend sensitive uranium enrichment activities, its first ever sanctions against the Islamic republic.

Ahmadinejad has addressed the

UN General Assembly in New York twice since becoming president in 2005 although he has never been present at a Security Council meeting.

The United States on both occasions reluctantly granted him a visa to travel to New York under its obligations as the host country of the United Nations.

The hardline Iranian president last year offered to hold a televised debate with US President George W. Bush to discuss the international situation although the proposal was laughed off by the White House.



Policeman kills 5 colleagues at Delhi bank

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian police officer shot dead five of his colleagues yesterday after an argument outside the bank they were guarding, officials said.

Another officer was wounded in the early morning incident, a police spokesman told AFP.

The spokesman said the shooting occurred at the private Dena Bank in the busy commercial district of Daryaganj, part of the crowded Old Delhi part of the city and where the Mughal-era Red Fort is located.

Area police chief Alok Kumar said the victims appeared to have been shot at close range. The officer who opened fire has not been found.

"We got a telephone call about the firing in the bank at around 4:50 am and police teams that reached the spot found five personnel of the Sikkim police already dead," Kumar said.

"The service weapons of the five men had not been used which indicates they were taken by surprise," a forensic expert said at the bank, where the bodies lay on the blood-splattered floors.

Local residents said they initially thought the bank, widely used by local shops, was being robbed.

"We had just woken up when we heard a rattle of gunfire and commotion inside the Dena Bank and we alerted the police control room, thinking robbers had broken in," said Dinanth Guleria, a cloth trader.

All six officers belonged to a special taskforce that had been brought in from India's eastern state of Sikkim to guard the bank, India's junior home minister Sripaksh Jaiswal said.

"The shootout appears to be a result of an argument that broke out among the security personnel guarding the Dena Bank," Jaiswal told Star TV television.

"We are trying to find out if the constable who opened fire was under mental strain," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian youth stands near a blazing room at a destroyed office of the Fatah movement after clashes between Hamas and Fatah militants in Gaza Strip yesterday. (Right) An armed Palestinian militant.

Palestinian militant killed in fresh infighting

AFP, Gaza City

A Palestinian militant was killed in a gunfight between rival factions in the Gaza Strip early yesterday, underscoring the simmering tensions that threaten the formation of a unity government.

It was the first deadly incident, apart from a feud between Gaza clans, since the two sides signed a ceasefire and power-sharing agreement in Saudi Arabia a month ago.

The overnight clashes, the second scuffle between the Islamist movement Hamas and Fatah in as many days, came hours ahead of a meeting between Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Mohammed al-Kafarne, a member of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas,

was killed in the clash in the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanun, medical sources said.

The so-called Executive Force loyal to the Hamas-run interior ministry and the Fatah-dominated national security force each set up checkpoints outside the farming village after the violence, but by late morning all appeared calm.

Abbas's Fatah faction accused Hamas of violating the ceasefire pact signed by the warring factions in the Muslim holy city of Mecca on February 8, paving the way for a national unity government expected to agree this week.

"Some members of Hamas fired at cars and fought in Beit Hanun," Fatah spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khussa told AFP. "Hamas violated the Mecca agreement."

On Saturday, Palestinian gunmen

opened fire on a car carrying a Hamas government minister outside the northern West Bank town of Nablus. Hamas blamed Fatah for that attack which sparked a roadside fire fight and left three people wounded.

Palestinian prime minister designate and Hamas leader Ismail Haniya said on Saturday that he will announce the final make-up of the unity government on Wednesday or Thursday.

Haniya has until March 23 to do so after Abbas extended the deadline on Friday by another two weeks.

Abbas said last week after a string of meetings with the Hamas leader that negotiations over the incoming government were 99 percent complete.

Iraqi court denies Al-Jazeera report

AFP, Baghdad

The Iraqi High Tribunal yesterday denied reports that the judge who sentenced former dictator Saddam Hussein to hang for crimes against humanity has fled to Britain to seek political asylum.

"This report is not true, he is having an ordinary vacation outside Iraq," the tribunal said in a statement. "Judge Rauf Rasheed Abdel Rahman called us personally from London and he denied this report completely."

The Arabic satellite news channel Al-Jazeera reported on Friday that Abdel Rahman has applied for asylum both for himself and his family in Britain, citing an unnamed British official.

The Doha-based channel said the Iraqi Kurdish judge has been in Britain since December on a tourist visa.

Ousted president Saddam was hanged on December 30 after being sentenced to death on November 5 for the murder of 148 Shiite civilians from the town of Dujail, north of Baghdad, in the 1980s following a failed assassination bid.

Jews partly responsible for their troubles

Churchill argued in his article

AFP, London

"It exists even in lands, like Great Britain and the United States, where Jew and Gentile are equal in the eyes of the law and where large numbers of Jews have found not only asylum, but opportunity for the antagonism from which they suffer" in an article publicised for the first time yesterday.

Churchill made the claim in an article entitled "How The Jews Can Combat Persecution" written in 1937, three years before he started leading the country.

He outlined a new wave of anti-Semitism sweeping across Europe and the United States, which was followed by the deaths of millions of Jews in the Holocaust under the German Nazi regime.

"It would be easy to ascribe it to the wickedness of the persecutors, but that does not fit all the facts," the article read.

"These facts must be faced in any analysis of anti-Semitism. They should be pondered especially by the Jews themselves.

"For it may be that, unwittingly, they are inviting persecution -- that they have been partly responsible for the antagonism from which they suffer."

The article adds: "The central fact which dominates the relations of Jew and non-Jew is that the Jew is 'different'.

"He looks different. He thinks differently. He has a different tradition and background. He refuses to

be absorbed."

Elsewhere, Churchill praised Jews as "sober, industrious, law-abiding" and urged Britons to stand up for the race against persecution.

"There is no virtue in a tame asceticism in evil. To protest against cruelty and wrong, and to strive to end them, is the mark of a man," he wrote.

The article was discovered by Cambridge University historian Richard Toye in the university's archive of Churchill's papers.

At the time, Churchill's secretary advised him it would be "inadvisable" to publish it and it never saw the light of day.

Churchill was voted the greatest Briton ever in a nationwide poll held by the BBC in 2002.

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UN to decide fate of Kosovo as talks fail

AFP, Vienna

As Serbian and ethnic Albanian negotiators failed to agree over the UN envoy's proposal for the future status of Kosovo province this weekend, the ball is now in the court of the UN Security Council.

After thirteen months of negotiations aimed at finding a solution for landlocked Kosovo, Belgrade and Pristina were unable to find a common ground to settle the fate of the disputed province.

Special UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari, who chaired the talks between the two sides, said Saturday that the potential for

negotiations was exhausted. The next move would be made by the United Nations Security Council, he added.

Kosovo is seen by many as the last hot-spot in the Balkans following a bloody decade of 1990s international conflicts.

The UN has administered Kosovo since June 1999, when a NATO bombing campaign halted a crackdown by Belgrade security forces on the ethnic Albanian community in the province, who were seeking independence.

Some 10,000 ethnic Albanians died and hundreds of thousands fled Kosovo during the 1998-1999

conflict.

Since the UN and NATO moved in to Kosovo however, more than 200,000 Serbs have fled and hundreds have been killed in a series of violent reprisal attacks by ethnic Albanian extremists.

The international community wants to move on from the current status quo in the southern Serbian province, whose 90 percent ethnic Albanian majority has ruled out any institutional links with Belgrade.

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"Kosovo's majority population cannot forget the past and especially Serbia's aggression" in the province, Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu said at the end of this week.

Ahtisaari's draft had avoided any mention of independence for the province, offering instead the trapping of statehood under foreign supervision and with a European Union security presence.

It also provided for self-rule and protection for the 100,000 minority Serb population in the province, promising them close ties with Belgrade.

Despite making a "painful compromise" by agreeing to Ahtisaari's draft, Sejdiu said Pristina welcomed the plan, seeing it as a first step towards the statehood of Kosovo.

But Belgrade insisted it would prefer a new round of negotiations, accusing Ahtisaari of openly supporting Pristina's call for independence.

"This proposal is a brutal violation of the UN Charter," said outgoing Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica.

Belgrade has instead offered wide autonomy for the province, which many in Serbia see as the cradle of their nation and religion. Serbia has vowed it would never accept the loss of some 15 percent of its own territory to a newly proclaimed state.

"Would any country in the world accept losing its own territory in peacetime, no matter what the aspirations of a part of its population?" a source from the Belgrade negotiating team asked.

With Ahtisaari's plan now going before the UN Security Council, Belgrade hopes that Russia, its traditional Orthodox ally, will block any resolution proclaiming the province's independence.

Russia has already said it would only back a solution for Kosovo that would satisfy both Pristina and Belgrade.

But the Contact Group, of which Russia is a part -- together with Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States -- has offered its full support to Ahtisaari's plan.

Since the failure of Saturday's negotiations however, there has been no response from the Group, which could suggest it is taking a more cautious stand over any future moves over Kosovo's status.

The West fears any further delay in finalizing the status of Kosovo would only inspire hardline extremists among the ethnic Albanians to proclaim immediate independence -- and that would provoke further instability in the still-fragile Balkans.

"A new Security Council resolution should support Ahtisaari's plan... which means that Kosovo will become independent," Kosovo Prime Minister Agim Ceku said.

It is not known when the Security Council will discuss Ahtisaari's draft and what further steps it will take.

But for the Kosovo Albanians, the procedure was just a matter of time.

"A long train ride has finally come to the Central station," said politician Veton Surroi of the Kosovar Albanian ORA Party, promising a "new modern state" in Kosovo.