

Abbas trashes talks with Hamas 'terrorists'

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas delivered a withering attack on Hamas Wednesday in his first public speech since the Islamists' takeover of Gaza and ruled out any dialogue.

Abbas accused Hamas of carrying out killings against his security forces "unprecedented" in Palestinian history and plotting its takeover at the behest of foreign powers.

He said the Islamists had given Israel an "excuse to punish an entire people" and even accused the group with which he uneasily shared power for 15 months of having plotted to kill him.

"It was a premeditated plan agreed between Hamas leaders in Gaza and abroad, with foreign

elements from the region," he said of the Islamists' seizure of control in the territory last Friday after a week of ferocious fighting.

"No dialogue with putschists, murderers and terrorists," he thundered in an address to a meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, of which he is chairman but of which Hamas is not a member.

Abbas strongly defended his decision to dismiss the Hamas-led national unity government last Thursday and swear in an emergency cabinet at the weekend that Hamas has dismissed as an illegitimate lackey of Israel and the United States.

"Our main objective is to prevent the chaos from spreading to the West Bank," he said, adding that the new government of technocrats led by US-educated prime minister

Salam Fayyad was the "clear answer to the coup."

Israel has seized on the formation of the new government in the West Bank -- the first without Hamas representation since the Islamists routed Abbas's secular Fatah faction in parliamentary elections early last year -- as an historic opportunity to relaunch the peace process.

Israeli Foreign Tzipi Livni telephoned Fayyad Wednesday to open dialogue with his government after the 15-month hiatus while the Islamists of Hamas -- blacklisted as a terror group by Israel and the West -- were in power.

The European Union, which like the United States, said it would resume direct aid to the Palestinian Authority, said Wednesday it was making its first transfer of 22 million euros (29.5 million dollars).

Abbas called for an international conference to be convened to oversee the relaunch of the moribund peace process, like the Madrid conference of 1991 that helped pave the way for the secret talks that led to the 1993 Oslo accords.

"We call for negotiations to resume ... and in the framework an international conference the details of which we will agree" with the Israelis, he said.

A meeting of the top diplomats of the Middle East peace Quartet -- US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, UN chief Ban Ki-moon and EU envoy Javier Solana -- set for June 26-27 in Egypt was reportedly called off because of the crisis stemming from Hamas' bloody takeover of Gaza.



PHOTO: AFP

A Pakistani policeman fire teargas shells towards protesters during a protest against regular power cuts in Karachi on Wednesday night. Pakistan's worst electricity shortage in memory has sent rioters onto the streets of several cities and poses a fresh headache for embattled President Pervez Musharraf.

Riots in Pakistan over power outage

AFP, Karachi

Hundreds of people protesting against power cuts ransacked a KFC outlet and two banks in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi, police said yesterday.

Police fired tear gas to disperse the mob late Wednesday and security remained tight across the sprawling port city, whose 12 million inhabitants are experiencing the worst electricity shortage in memory.

"The situation really went bad after the attack on KFC and on public and private vehicles. Security has now been tightened and forces have been deployed at sensitive places," city police chief Azhar Farooqi told AFP.

He said more than a dozen people had been arrested.

The protesters began by hurling stones and using burning tyres to block the main road leading to the airport in eastern Karachi, resulting in a massive traffic jam, witnesses said.



Prince William turns 25, entitled to share of Diana's wealth

AFP, London

Britain's Prince William turned 25 yesterday and became entitled to part of the multi-million pound inheritance left to him by his late mother, princess Diana.

The second in line to the throne is now allowed access to the income accrued on the 6.5 million pounds (9.67 million euros, 12.94 million dollars) he was left in his mother's will after she died 10 years ago in a Paris car crash.

Royal officials said they do not discuss the young prince's financial arrangements, amid media speculation that he could now have access to between 250,000 pounds and 350,000 pounds per year.

But unnamed sources quoted by Britain's Press Association (PA) news agency said the future king will not touch Diana's cash for now.

"Nothing will change on his birthday," another source told the Daily Telegraph newspaper on Tuesday.



PHOTO: AFP

Supporters of Jammu and Kashmir People's Freedom League burn effigies of British author Salman Rushdie during a protest in Srinagar yesterday.

Corruption charges against Thaksin

AP, Bangkok

land deal.

The attorney general's office also recommended that officials seize the 13-acre plot of land in central Bangkok, valued at \$23.7 million.

The Supreme Court said they would decide on July 10 if they will hear the case.

They were the first formal criminal charges against Thaksin since he was accused of corruption and ousted by military leaders in a bloodless coup on Sept. 19.

Thaksin, who has lived in exile overseas since his government was toppled in a military coup last September, was named along with his wife, Pojaman, in a case involving allegations of wrongdoing in a

10 die in Russian retirement home fire

AFP, Moscow

Ten people were killed yesterday in a suspected arson attack on a retirement home in the Omsk region in Siberia, Russian news agencies reported, citing officials.

Four more people were hospitalised and 303 others were evacuated unhurt during the night from the building in the village of Yekaterininskoye, Interfax news agency said.

Local prosecutors have opened a criminal inquiry and are treating the fire as aggravated arson, the local prosecutor's press office was quoted by Interfax as saying.

Now Lanka can shoot down rebel jet

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's military now has the capacity to shoot down Tamil Tiger light airplanes which have bombed four targets on the island this year, the government said Wednesday.

The enhanced capability means the island's only international airport will soon reopen for night flights after its closure earlier this year as a precaution over the attacks, a government spokesman said.

"The night time curfew at the airport will end from July 1," Keheliya Ramabukwella told reporters.

"The air force has assured us that they received material to detect and identify Tiger planes," he said.

Military officials said the decision came after better radar was installed to track low-flying aircraft belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The airport shut for night flights in May.

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