

## Kenya on the verge of a peace deal

AFP, Nairobi

Kenya's feuding parties yesterday headed into a decisive week of negotiations on a compromise deal to end the conflict over disputed elections that has left more than 1,000 dead.

Chief mediator Kofi Annan hopes a settlement can be reached in the coming days between the government and the opposition, whose row over who won the presidential election in December ignited Kenya's worst crisis since independence.

The eruption of rioting, police raids and tribal violence since the December 27 vote has also displaced some 300,000 people, shattering Kenya's image as one of Africa's most stable countries.

Negotiators for President Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga were to resume talks on Monday in a Nairobi hotel to hammer out details of an agreement that could include the formation of a power-sharing government.

"I think everyone realises that we have a serious problem in the country," Annan, a former UN secretary general, said last week, setting the stage for the crunch talks.

"We are all agreed that a political settlement is needed, that a political settlement is necessary and we

are working out the details of such a settlement."

Launched nearly two weeks ago, Annan's mediation mission is seen as Kenya's best hope for a political solution to end the violence that has seen Kenyans killed at the hands of machete-wielding mobs, burnt in churches and driven off their land.

Kenya descended into turmoil after the country's central elections commission proclaimed 76-year-old Kibaki, in power since 2002, winner of the election.

Odinga, 62, claimed he was cheated out of the presidency in a rigged vote while international observers found massive irregularities during the tallying of ballots from both sides.

Kibaki's tribe, the Kikuyu, suffered heavily in the first wave of violence at the hands of Odinga's Luo tribe and other ethnic groups, but there have since been numerous revenge attacks.

The violence has tapped into simmering resentment over land, poverty and the dominance of the Kikuyu in Kenyan politics and business since independence from Britain in 1963.

While Annan sought to push the sides into compromise, a string of foreign government officials arrived in Nairobi to express support for his effort and to warn of consequences if the talks failed.



Supporters of Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL) cheer as they watch results from the state's presidential primary on Saturday in New Orleans, Louisiana. Turnout was significantly lower in Louisiana than in most other states.

## McCain ekes out narrow win in Washington state

AFP, Washington

Arizona Senator John McCain eked out a narrow victory in the Republican Party's caucuses in the northwestern state of Washington, the state party chairman announced late Saturday.

Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee earlier Saturday defeated McCain in Republican presidential primaries in Louisiana and Kansas.

McCain, 71, a Vietnam war hero, is far ahead of his opponents in the delegate count and is the party's presumptive 2008 presidential standard bearer, though he faces opposition from core Republican conservatives.

With 87 percent of precincts reporting in Washington state, McCain led with 26 percent of the delegates, against 24 percent for Huckabee and 21 percent for Texas Congressman Ron Paul.

Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who earlier dropped out of the race without announcing an endorsement, won 17 percent.

Nearly 13 percent of delegates reported their preference as "uncommitted," while another 1.1 percent reported their preference as "other," Washington state Party Chairman Luke Esser said in a statement.

## Israel threatens to hit Gaza Hamas leaders

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel threatened yesterday to target Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip as pressure grew on the government to act after a boy hit by shrapnel in a rocket strike on southern Israel had a leg amputated.

Speaking after huddling with security officials, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert warned that no-one from the Islamist movement would be excluded from continuing military strikes against the Hamas-ruled coastal strip.

"We will continue to reach all the terror bodies -- those responsible for them, those who send them and those who operate them. We will not exclude anyone," Olmert said at the start of the weekly cabinet meeting.

"We cannot ignore the feelings and frustrations felt in Sderot and nearby communities, especially after yesterday's attack," he said, referring to the eight-year-old child who had his leg amputated after being hit by shrapnel from a rocket fired from Gaza.

"The rage is understandable," he said. "But it should be clear that rage is not a work plan. We must act in an orderly and systematic way over a long period of time. This is what we have been doing and we will continue doing."

Over a hundred residents of Sderot, which has borne the brunt of rocket fire, briefly blocked the main highway into Jerusalem to press demands for harsher measures against Gaza militants.

"Enough, we want to live," read one of the placards held by the demonstrators, who marched on foot to Olmert's office in the city centre.

Violence in and around Gaza has escalated over the past week as militants have fired dozens of rockets against southern Israel, wounding a handful of people, with the eight-year-old sustaining the most serious injuries.

Israeli military strikes in Gaza have killed at least 20 people over the past week, all but one of them militants.

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni urged the international community to back Israel's action in Gaza.

"It is part of our responsibility to take certain steps... the only way to stop it is in an understanding of Hamas that Israel will retaliate and that the international community supports Israel in doing so," she told reporters in her office.

Livni, who heads Israel's peace negotiations with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's West Bank-based government, said that ending the rocket fire was paramount for peace efforts.

"Israel's security... is a necessary step to achieve peace and the only way to continue the negotiations on one hand is the need to address this challenge and fight it back," she said.

Cabinet ministers urged the prime minister to order strikes against political as well as military leaders of Hamas.

"Those who are responsible for the terror activity are the heads of Hamas," Interior Minister Meir Sheerit of Olmert's centrist Kadima party said at the cabinet meeting. "Our duty is to bring them to justice and to bring justice to them."

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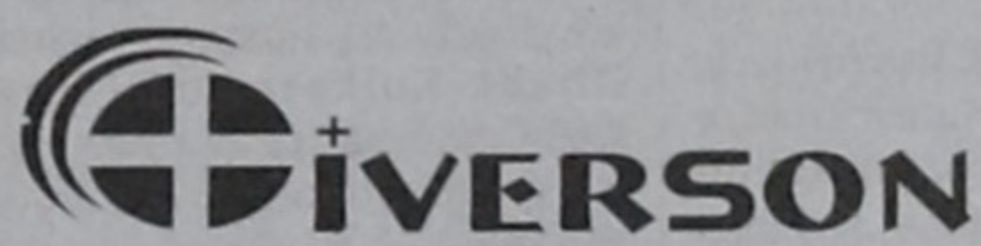
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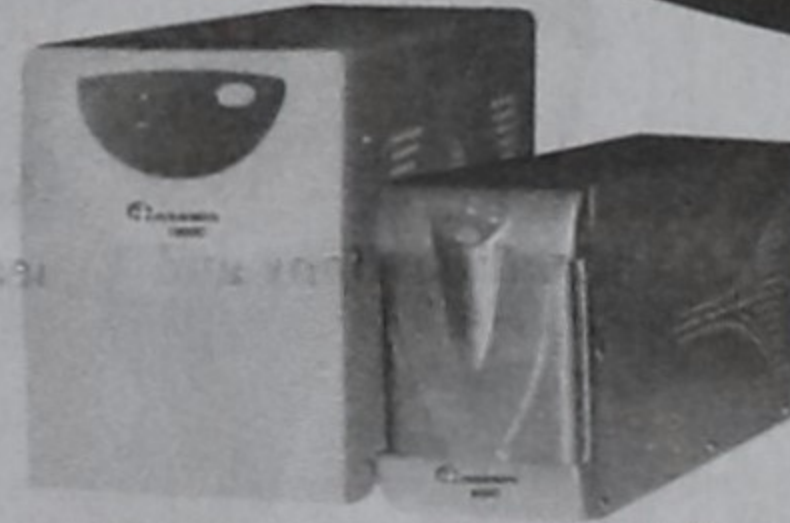
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## Russia not seeking clash with West: Ivanov

AFP, Munich

Resource-rich Russia is not seeking confrontation with the West, but the resurgent country still intends to punch its weight on the world stage, First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said Sunday.

In a speech to the annual Munich Conference on Security Policy -- where President Vladimir Putin last year gave a speech blasting the United States -- Ivanov played down renewed tensions.

"I am sure that everyone here clearly realises that the process of Russia's revival objectively combines our ambition to occupy an appropriate place in world politics and commitment to maintain our national interests," he said.

"We do not intend to meet this challenge by establishing military blocs or engaging in open confrontation with our opponents," he said.

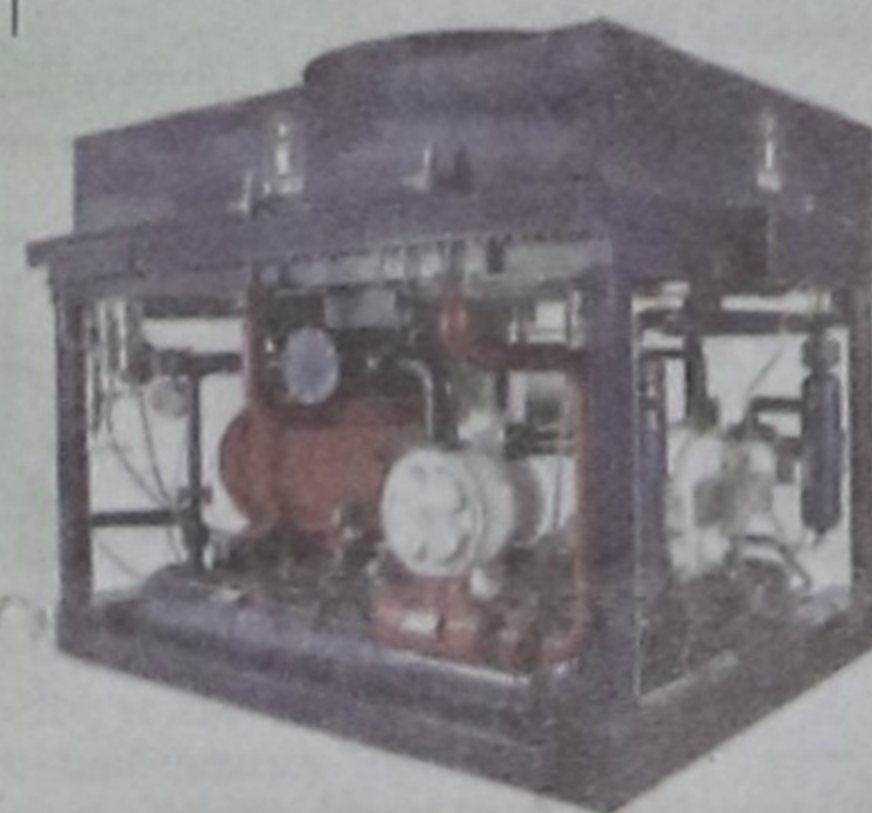
Moscow and Washington are locked in disputes that echo their Cold War sparring, before Russia was temporarily flooded by the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

Bones of contention include Washington's plans to set up an anti-missile shield on Russia's European doorstep, which the United States says is needed to preempt attacks from "rogue states", chiefly Iran, and which Moscow has dubbed a security threat.

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