

## Israeli PM doubts deal with Palestinians this year

AFP, AP, Tokyo

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert vowed yesterday he would push for a comprehensive peace settlement with the Palestinians but cast doubt on meeting a US-backed goal of sealing it this year.

"We have a desire to reach an agreement within the year 2008. But I am not sure we will make it," he said on a visit to Tokyo.

Olmert and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas late last year restarted negotiations with a summit in Annapolis near Washington, ending a long break following a Palestinian uprising in September 2000.

The summit set a goal of concluding a comprehensive agreement by the end of 2008, coinciding with the end of George W. Bush's US presidency.

But despite his reservations,

Olmert said Tuesday there was "no better opportunity" than now to reach a settlement on the Middle East conflict.

"We are determined to make a giant step forward to end this dispute once and for all," he said. "We want to make every possible effort to seize this opportunity."

"We are making an exceptional effort to resolve the outstanding disputes with our Palestinian neighbours. We are hoping to conclude an understanding that will lead to a two-states solution, the Palestinian state and the state of Israel," he said.

Bush made his first trip as president to the West Bank and Israel last month.

Later, in his final annual State of the Union address, he vowed: "America will do, and I will do, everything we can to help them

achieve a peace agreement that defines a Palestinian state by the end of this year."

As part of his efforts to reach a peace deal, Olmert is expected to meet in Tokyo with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who is on a three-nation tour of East Asia.

Olmert spoke a day after a major demonstration in the Gaza Strip where thousands of mostly young people formed a human chain to protest against an economically crippling Israeli blockade.

Israel closed vital border crossings and restricted supplies to the Gaza Strip after the Islamic militant group Hamas, which does not recognise the Jewish state, seized control of the territory of 1.5 million people in June.

On January 17 Olmert's government began reducing fuel and electricity supplies to Gaza in response to near daily rocket fire on

southern Israel.

Two youths were hurt by Israeli bullets in Monday's demonstration while a young Israeli was also injured by a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip, officials said.

Olmert is on the first trip to Japan by an Israeli premier in more than a decade as he tries to boost trade with the world's second largest economy.

Japan has invested little in Israel in recent years, despite both countries having flourishing technology industries.

Tokyo is a major donor of the Palestinian Authority as it seeks a greater role in the Middle East in line with its global aspirations.

"We consider Japan not only an economic but also a political partner which can play a role in the process with the Palestinians," an Olmert adviser told AFP on condition of anonymity.

## India test-fires sea-based nuclear-capable missile

AFP, New Delhi

India conducted its first test of a nuclear-capable missile from an undersea platform on Tuesday, completing its goal of having air, land and sea ballistic systems, the defence ministry said.

The launch from a submerged pontoon took place off India's southeast coast near the port city of Visakhapatnam around 1:00 pm (0730 GMT), a defence ministry spokesman said.

"The test was successful. We are waiting further details," said the spokesman who declined to be named.

India announced earlier this month that it would conduct its first test of a submarine-based ballistic missile named the K-15, which has a top range of 700 kilometres (438 miles).



A Pakistani army soldier walks on a snow covered mountain of Swat Valley in Shangla district on Monday. Pakistan will not halt a military offensive in northwestern Swat Valley until all militants are cleared from the once-popular tourist site, the region's army commander said.

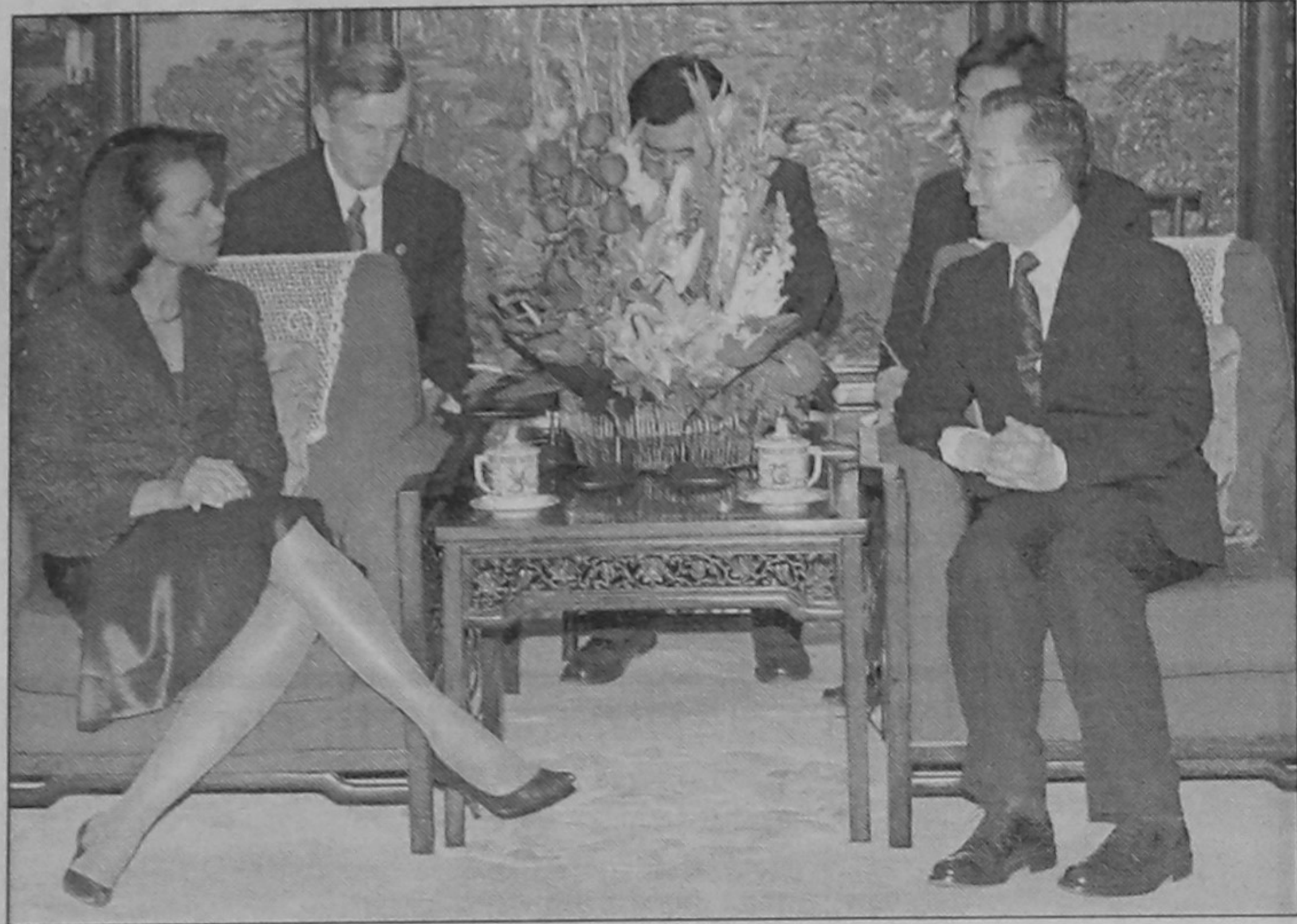


PHOTO AFP

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (R) hold talks with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the Zhongnanhai Chinese leadership compound in Beijing yesterday. Rice urged China to use all its influence with North Korea to ensure the reclusive Stalinist state moved ahead quickly with nuclear disarmament.

## Rice wins Chinese help on NKorea nukes

AP, Beijing

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice won a verbal assurance Tuesday from China to use its influence to jump-start the stalled process of dismantling North Korea's nuclear programmes. Yet it was unclear when or how the Chinese would follow through. In broad discussions with Chinese officials, Rice also won an agreement from China to resume an on-again, off-again human rights dialogue with the United States and she pleased her Chinese hosts by restating her US opposition to a Taiwanese referendum on United Nations entry that has infuriated Beijing.

But North Korea dominated the talks and Rice urged China, which has considerable leverage with its Stalinist neighbour, along with others in the six-nation denuclearisation effort, to "use all influence possible" with Pyongyang to meet its pledges to the group.

"I believe that all of the parties

to the six-party talks have both an obligation and an interest to make certain that the obligations of the first phase are carried out," Rice told reporters at a news conference with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi. "We are the cup of something very special here," she said, referring to the shutdown and continuing disablement of North Korea's main nuclear facility in Yongbyon. "Now it is time to move on because the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula is in everyone's interest."

"What I am expecting from China is what I am expecting from others: Use all influence possible with the North Koreans to convince them that it is time to move forward," Rice said.

Yang said China was "consistently committed to the six-party talks and the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula" and would continue to work on the matter. But he also made clear that Beijing had already pressed the North hard on the matter.

## Pakistan army occupies Swat Valley

440 militants captured in 3 months

AP, AFP, Uchral Sar

Hardcore militants who seized Pakistan's most scenic valley are still holed up in its snowy heights, three months after President Pervez Musharraf sent in the army to show his resolve against spreading Islamic extremism.

Down below, life in the towns that dot the Swat Valley has returned to something approaching normality. But bombings persist and Mullah Fazlullah, the firebrand cleric behind last year's Taliban-style uprising, remains at large.

Earlier Pakistani security forces have arrested more than 440 Islamic "terrorists", including 60 would-be suicide bombers, in the last three months, the interior ministry said on Tuesday.

The announcement comes

amid a wave of violence blamed on al-Qaeda and the Taliban, including a suicide bombing near the Pakistani military headquarters on Monday that killed the army's surgeon general.

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies have arrested 442 terrorists and militants during the past three months, interior ministry spokesman Brigadier Javed Cheema told reporters.

Large quantities of explosives, weapons, suicide jackets and hand grenades were seized from the suspects, Cheema said.

In November, the army launched one of its biggest operations since Pakistan threw its support behind the US-led war against terrorism six years ago. On Monday, the military ferried journalists by helicopter to three mountaintop positions to show the

territory its more than 10,000-strong force has retaken.

"About 90 percent of the area has been cleared of the (militants), and only about 10 percent, pockets of resistance, are remaining," said army spokesman Maj Gen Athar Abbas. "They have taken to the heights. Hopefully those areas will be taken back soon."

Fazlullah leads a banned extremist group that sent reinforcements for the Taliban when US forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001.

In Swat, he used his own FM radio station to preach a harsh brand of Islam and won a large local following by pressing for the introduction of Islamic law in the poorly policed region.

He took up arms in July, calling for holy war against the government, and used his thousands of

## Major powers want Iran sanctions vote soon

Tehran dismisses nuke documents as fake

AFP, AP, Washington/Tehran

The United States Monday pressed for a prompt UN Security Council vote on a new set of sanctions against Iran over its disputed nuclear programme, which Tehran warned would harm the credibility of the UN nuclear watchdog.

The six major powers seeking new sanctions want the 15-member Council to adopt a resolution soon, a US statement Department spokesman said Monday.

Western members of the council said the vote on a third set of sanctions against Iran was likely to take place Friday. They felt confident there were enough votes to ensure passage, which requires nine votes and no veto from the five permanent members.

The United States and its Western allies want Tehran to halt its uranium enrichment programme, which they fear would be used to build an atomic bomb. Iran insists its nuclear programme exists for civilian energy purposes.

Top officials of the council's five permanent members -- the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia -- plus Germany discussed in Washington an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report released Friday on Iran's

nuclear activities and the next steps at the UN panel, State Department spokesman Tom Casey said.

The United States and its European allies are pushing for new sanctions after the UN atomic watchdog said it could still not confirm if the Iranian atomic drive was peaceful.

"We continue to expect a vote soon on the draft sanctions resolution currently being discussed in New York," Casey said in a statement.

In New York, Iran's UN Ambassador Mohammad Khazaei said the "resolution will harm the credibility" of the IAEA.

If the IAEA's credibility is undermined by the Security Council, Khazaei told a press luncheon: "The big question would be that in future: which credible agency is going to monitor the nuclear activities of other countries?"

The UN nuclear monitoring agency presented documents Monday that diplomats said indicate Iran may have focused on a nuclear weapons programme after 2003 the year that a US intelligence report says work stopped.

Iran again denied ever trying to make such arms. Ali Ashgar Soltanieh, the chief Iranian delegate to the International Atomic Energy Agency, dismissed the

information showcased by the body as "forgeries."

He and other diplomats, all linked to the IAEA, commented after a closed-door presentation to the agency's 35-nation board of intelligence findings from the US and its allies, and other information purporting to show Iranian attempts to make nuclear arms.

A summarised US National Intelligence Estimate, made public late last year, also came to the conclusion that Tehran was conducting atomic weapons work. But it said the Iranians froze such work in 2003.

Khazaei said the Islamic Republic had resolved all outstanding questions raised by the agency so far, and reiterated that Tehran would not comply with the latest council resolution because it was based on allegations and "not on the IAEA report."

"We believe that from the legal point view, there is no basis to consider the Iranian nuclear programme in the Security Council," Khazaei said.

Britain and France introduced a draft resolution at the Security Council on Thursday. But non-permanent members South Africa, Indonesia, Libya and Vietnam have expressed reservations about the proposed resolution.

## US defence chief in India to push arms sales, military ties

AFP, New Delhi

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates plunged into one of the world's hottest arms market Tuesday, saying rapidly expanding US-Indian defence ties were in both countries' interests.

His arrival coincided with news that India successfully tested its first nuclear capable missile from a submerged platform, completing its goal of developing air, land and sea-based ballistic missiles.

Asked if helping to arm an emerging nuclear power carried risks, Gates said, "We have to deal with the world as we find it."

"India is the world's largest democracy. It is in our interest to develop this relationship, just as it

is in India's," he told reporters in New Delhi after strolling the grounds of the tomb of 16th century Mughal emperor Humayun.

He cited the ambitious schedule of US-Indian exchanges and exercises, and the growing defence trade relationship.

He also expressed hope for completion of a US-Indian civil nuclear technology agreement that has been held up by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's communist allies, but said that was not part of his talks here.

Gates flew in from Indonesia, where he also pledged strong US support for arms sales to the Indonesian military and its emergence as a power in south-east Asia.

## Obama photo in turban, robe causes stir

AP, Washington

A photograph circulating on the Internet of Democratic Sen Barack Obama dressed in traditional local garments during a visit to Kenya in 2006 is causing a dustup in the presidential campaign over what constitutes a smear.

The Associated Press photograph portrays Obama wearing a white turban and a wraparound white robe presented to him by elders in Wajir, in northeastern Kenya. Obama's estranged late father was Kenyan and Obama visited the country in 2006, attracting thousands of well-wishers.

The gossip and news Web site The Drudge Report posted the photograph Monday and said it was being circulated by "Clinton staffers" and quoted an e-mail from an unidentified campaign aide. Drudge did not include proof of the e-mail in the report.

"I just want to make it very clear that we were not aware of it, the campaign didn't sanction it and I don't know anything about it," Clinton spokesman Howard Wolfson said in a teleconference with reporters. "None of us have seen the e-mail in question. If anybody has independent reporting that they've done on it I would welcome it."

Obama, in an interview with WOL radio in San Antonio, Texas, said voters are "saddened when they see these kind of politics."

"Everybody knows that whether it's me or Senator Clinton or Bill Clinton that when you travel to other countries they ask you to try on

traditional garb that you have been given as a gift," he said. "The notion that the Clinton campaign would be trying to circulate this as a negative on the same day that Senator Clinton was giving a speech about how we repair our relationships around the world is sad."



PHOTO AP

Sen Barack Obama, D-Illinois, right, is dressed as a Somali Elder by Sheikh Mahmed Hassan, left, during his visit to Wajir, a rural area in northeastern Kenya, near the borders with Somalia and Ethiopia in this file photo of Aug 27, 2006.

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**Consultancy to facilitate MIS establishment**

Enhance the Capacity of Department of Livestock Services Project of the Danida funded Agricultural Sector Programme Support II invites proposals from qualified and reputed consultancy firms/consultants to facilitate establishment of the Management Information System (MIS) in the Department of Livestock Services. The consultancy is scheduled to be started in April 2008, with an estimated input of 150 person-days over a period of approximately 1.5 years.

Interested consultancy firms/consultants are hereby invited to send their detailed technical and financial proposals separately to Enhance the Capacity of DLS Project, Pashu Sampad Bhaban (3<sup>rd</sup> floor), Krishi Khamar Sarak, Farmgate, Dhaka 1215 on or before Tuesday, 25 March 2008. The detailed job description for this assignment may be obtained through email address: [om@su-dls.org](mailto:om@su-dls.org)

The project management reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals without assigning any reason whatsoever.

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