

Abbas expects Gaza truce within days

Hamas to give 'definitive' response to ceasefire

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas expects Israel and Hamas to reach a truce in and around the Gaza Strip within days, his spokesman said yesterday.

"President Abbas today and yesterday had a series of telephone conversations with the Egyptian leadership to support Egypt's efforts for a truce," spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP.

"During the talks, he expressed hope a truce agreement would be reached in the next days," he added. Abbas asked Israel to reopen border crossings with the impover-

ished territory as part of a truce agreement, the spokesman said.

A delegation from Hamas, the Islamist movement which rules Gaza, was to give its final response to a ceasefire proposal to Egyptian mediators on Monday, Egypt's official MENA news agency reported.

On Sunday, Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, who heads the mediation efforts, briefed the Islamists on Israel's response to the proposals.

Meanwhile, a Hamas delegation was to give the Palestinian Islamist movement's final response to a ceasefire proposal for Gaza to

Egyptian mediators on Monday, Egypt's official MENA news agency reported.

The delegation heard Israel's response to the Egyptian ceasefire proposal on Sunday via Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, who is also in charge of mediation efforts to break the cycle of violence in the impoverished territory.

"A second session of talks between Egyptian officials and the Hamas delegation will be held on Monday to know the movement's definitive position, taking into account the Israeli response," MENA said.

The Hamas delegation, whose

members travelled to Cairo from the Gaza Strip and Syria, informed exiled leader Khaled Meshal in Damascus of their talks' progress overnight on Sunday, it said.

Violence in Gaza, where Hamas seized control from Palestinian rivals Fatah a year ago, is clouding peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians that were revived in November but have made little progress.

A top Israeli official on Sunday said there was "significant progress" toward a possible truce with Hamas, although it would not include the release of captured soldier Gilad Shalit.

Israel kills 3 Palestinian fighters at Gaza border

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli troops killed three Palestinian militants who were trying to plant explosives at the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel on Monday, according to the Islamic Jihad movement.

The group said in a statement that three of its fighters, all men in their early 20s, were killed "during clashes and the explosion of a Zionist military jeep east of the town of Khan Yunis."

An Israeli army spokesman said soldiers spotted three armed men trying to place bombs along the border and opened fire, killing or wounding them, but the army denied any of its vehicles were blown up.

Palestinian medics could not immediately confirm whether the men were killed, as the area where the bodies lay was closed off by the Israeli army.



Anti-war protesters gather in Parliament Square near Downing Street where US President George Bush was meeting British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in central London on Sunday. Police on horseback and vans were also deployed to bring the situation under control as protesters hurled abuse at officers.

EU seeks swift Iranian response to nuke offer

AFP, Luxembourg

The quicker Iran responds to an offer from world powers aimed at resolving the nuclear standoff the better, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said yesterday.

Solana, who made the cooperation offer to Iranian leaders on Saturday, said that so far there had been no response from Tehran to the initiative from the group of six - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States.

"They took the offer. It was a good meeting, they are going to give an answer (and) the sooner the

better," he told reporters as he arrived for a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg.

"The meeting went better than I had expected," he added.

The deal offers talks on a package of technological and economic incentives, so long as Tehran suspends uranium enrichment activities, which the West fears the Islamic republic might use to make an atomic bomb.

It recognises Iran's "right to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes" and offers support for the construction of light water

reactors, help with supplying nuclear fuel and the normalisation of economic ties with the West.

But barely hours into Solana's visit, Iranian government spokesman Gholam Hossein Elham announced that Tehran would reject any requirement that it halt uranium enrichment to negotiate, the key sticking point in the crisis.

US President George W. Bush, whose administration has led the campaign against Iran, has made no effort to hide his belief that the package was effectively dead on arrival.

Talks for US-Iraqi pact 'not dead'

AFP, Washington

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said Sunday that US-Iraqi negotiations for a long-term security pact were not dead and that despite difficulties, a deal would be signed "by the end of July."

"These talks are ongoing. They're not dead," Zebari said of negotiations to decide the future of the US military presence in Iraq after the current UN mandate expires in December.

"Definitely, there hasn't been an impasse," he told CNN.

Zebari said Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's statement Friday in

Amman that Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) talks were at an impasse had been "corrected and clarified."

Maliki had said the talks were deadlocked because of concern the deal infringes Iraqi sovereignty.

Zebari stressed that, as a member of the negotiating team, "I know what's going on. We made a great deal of progress on finalizing the strategic framework agreement."

Asked whether a key stumbling block in the negotiations was who would authorise the movement of US troops inside Iraq - Baghdad or Washington - Zebari was cautious.

Thousands evacuated as rain lashes China

AFP, Beijing

Tens of thousands of victims of China's Sichuan earthquake were evacuated Monday as torrential rain lashed the region, triggering flood warnings on major rivers including the Yangtze and the Pearl.

Heavy downpours have battered large parts of eastern and southern China, leaving at least 65 dead or missing, and adding to the misery in the quake-ravaged southwestern province.

Up to 70,000 people in Wenchuan township at the epicentre of the May 12 earthquake were being removed due to the risk of rock and mudslides brought on with the onset of the rainy season in Sichuan, the Beijing News said.

"Wenchuan has already entered the rainy season and the rain will weaken even more the already brittle mountain sides, making the situation even worse," the paper said.

Xinhua news agency put the number of evacuees at about 50,000 people living in mountainous villages around Wenchuan county seat who would be moved to camps already housing tens of thousands of other quake victims.

Last month's magnitude-8.0 earthquake has left up to 87,000 dead or missing and up to five million homeless in Sichuan.

Wenchuan was flattened during the quake with early rescue and relief efforts mostly flown in due to impassable roads in the mountainous area.

Israel, Syria resume indirect talks

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel and Syria resumed over the weekend indirect peace talks under Turkish mediation, Israeli military radio reported on Monday.

Two close advisors to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Shalom Turjeman and Yoram Turbowitz, traveled to the Turkish capital Ankara for the latest round of the talks that began Sunday and were set to wrap up on Monday, the radio station said.

Israeli President Shimon Peres on Sunday publicly called upon Syria to enter into direct talks, citing the example of former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat,

who forged a peace deal with the Jewish state.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said earlier this month that direct peace talks with Israel were unlikely before 2009, and added that they also depended on the fate of Olmert, who has been dogged by calls for his resignation over a graft scandal.

According to the Israeli daily Haaretz, the Israeli envoys assured their Syrian counterparts the political crisis surrounding Olmert will not affect the talks.

The two countries announced last month they had resumed indirect peace talks under Turkish mediation, after an eight-year freeze.



Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki arrives at the international conference on the 'Persian Gulf' in Tehran yesterday. The quicker Iran responds to an offer from world powers aimed at resolving the nuclear standoff the better, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana told reporters as he arrived for a meeting Monday of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg.

Bush calls for Pak-Afghan talks on militants

AFP, London

US President George W. Bush said yesterday he understood Afghanistan's anger at attacks by Islamist militants based on the border with Pakistan but urged talks to resolve the "testy situation."

"We can help calm the situation down and develop a strategy that will prevent these extremists from developing safe haven and having freedom of movement," he said after talks with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

"There can be more dialogue between the Pak (eds: correct) government and the Afghan government," said Bush, who was on a farewell trip to Europe. "There needs to be better cooperation."

The US leader stopped short of endorsing Afghan President Hamid Karzai's warning of possible cross-border strikes at militants in Pakistan but said he understood the frustration in Kabul.

"It's a testy situation there, and if I'm a president of a country and people are coming from one country to another, allegedly from one country to another, to kill innocent civilians on my side I'd be concerned about it," said Bush.

The US leader also called for a for a new "jirga" or traditional council of tribal leaders in the region to tackle the issue, saying: "That'd be a good idea to restart the jirga process."

"There's a lot of common ground," he said. "It's in no-one's interest that extremists have a safe haven from which to operate."

"Our strategy is to deny safe haven to extremists who would do harm to innocent people. And that's the strategy of Afghanistan, it's in all our interests," he said.

Karzai said Sunday that Afghanistan would be justified to attack Taliban insurgents on the soil of his supposed ally in the US-led "war on terror," saying his war-

torn country had a right to do so in self-defence.

As anger mounted in Islamabad, hundreds of Afghan tribesmen rallied on their side of the porous 1,500-mile (2,500-kilometre) frontier to voice their support for Karzai's tough stance.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said in a statement that he would "like to make it absolutely clear that Pakistan shall defend its territorial sovereignty."

Qureshi described Karzai's comments as "irresponsible."

The row is the most serious since Pakistan abandoned its support for the hardline Taliban movement and backed the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

The volatile situation on the border was highlighted last week when Pakistan accused "cowardly" US-led coalition forces of killing 11 Pakistani soldiers in an airstrike in a lawless tribal region.

Leonard Cheshire Disability and Development, Bangladesh (LCDDB) Vacancy Announcement

We are a human rights-based organisation promoting equal access to appropriate services for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, LCDDB is one of the Global Alliance members of Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) network that provides services covering 55 countries in partnership with more than 250 organizations to promote disability rights. LCDDB actively promotes Inclusive Education, Economic Empowerment, carries out Advocacy for rights and dignity of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others and Campaign to ensure enabling environment in the society, provide Health and Rehabilitation services and a fulfilling Every Day Living for persons with disabilities. For more information please log on to www.lcisouthasia.org

We are currently looking for a Bangladeshi national for the following post:

Director - 1 post

This post is based in Dhaka and involves extensive travel within Bangladesh. The post holder will be expected to use his/her considerable knowledge and experience on disability and development to consolidate the existing work of LCDDB and contribute towards the development of innovative and new initiatives to meet the needs of persons with disabilities in the country. It is a senior most position would need individual with a strong programme development, planning and management skills gained through previous experiences with national and or international NGOs. The Post holder is expected to independently manage the LCDDB office and its programmes throughout Bangladesh and be leading a composition of programme and support function team.

Qualifications & Experience

- University degree in Social Sciences, Development Studies or relevant fields;
- A minimum of 10 years of progressively responsible experience in development work;
- Experience in leading and managing disability programme is a must.
- Sound knowledge and understanding in human rights framework and contemporary shifts in disability and development globally and in Bangladesh;
- Experience in designing, developing community-based disability and development programmes and innovations.
- Experience of effective fund raising, knowledge in official funding and various funding channels and environments;
- Experience in carrying out advocacy, networking and coordination with other agencies, government and corporate bodies to promote disability rights in Bangladesh.

Responsibilities

- The jobs involve planning, identification of issues, effective management and documentation of projects.
- Strategies the programmes and projects to accomplish LCDDB mission;
- Planning and designing the programmes and proactively monitor its overall progress, resolving issues and initiating corrective action as appropriate;
- Managing the programme's budget, monitoring the expenditures and costs against deliverables and realised benefits as the programme progresses;
- Initiating new community-based initiatives in remote and under-served areas either directly or through partnership projects;
- Manage a small team of professionals and ensure effective management of all LCD-SARO assisted programmes in Bangladesh.
- Efficiently represent and liaise with the with all donor organisations, international agencies, prepare proposals for large funding, and fund raise locally for all LCD programmes
- Build capacity of LCD partner organizations to manage programmes effectively;
- Meet the legal requirements of the government regulations and build effective relationships with NGO Affairs Bureau

Salary: Commensurate with qualifications and experience

Please apply within 10 days from the date of announcement of this posting to LC Disability and Development, Bangladesh, C/O: CSID, House # 715, Road # 10, Baitul Aman Housing Society, Adabor, Dhaka 1207, or email it to lcbangla@lcisouthasia.org or lcbid06@yahoo.com

LCDDB is an equal opportunity employer and persons with disabilities & women are encouraged to apply.



Request For EOI

Katalyst is a development project funded by European donors. It aims to improve the growth and competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises in selected sectors.

One of the interventions of Katalyst includes facilitating initiatives by private sector partners to introduce sustainable ICT solutions in rural areas enabling farmers and entrepreneurs to access relevant and need-based information and services. One such initiative is the concept of Rural ICT Centers (RIC), a physical set-up with basic ICT facilities such as phone, computers, printer, scanner, internet connectivity, digital camera, etc. Owned by local entrepreneurs, the RICs provide information and basic services to farmers and entrepreneurs, and the wider community.

To ensure that the target groups benefit, it is essential to develop and effectively deliver need-based information and services. Thus, there is a need for the appropriate "content" which includes: information on agricultural items, crop cultivation techniques, diseases, and input supplies and sources; information on legal, advisory and financial services for small businesses; market price; area-based relevant information etc.

Katalyst is seeking commercial content providers, who collect, collate, validate, digitize and disseminate need-based information for the entrepreneurs targeting the rural audience. Katalyst is interested to partner with eligible private sector companies meeting the following criteria.

1. At least 2 years experience in content development
2. A well written business plan elaborating how the business is running and generating revenue
3. Private sector companies with knowledge about information and content need of SMEs will be given preference
4. Potential partner(s) should have required IT capacity to convert the content(s) in to different useable format under different kinds of environment.
5. Commercial content service providers with ready content pertinent to livelihood of rural/urban SMEs are encouraged to apply.
6. Established network with relevant government and private sector actors

Interested parties are requested to send their company profile along with a description of their experience, the proposed business model, network of partner organizations, types of contents available and at least 1 success story by June 30, 2008 to the following address:

Division Manager
Services Division
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