

## Lebanon refuses to free officers held in Hariri murder case

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon yesterday turned down a request to free four army generals held without charge since August 2005 in connection with the assassination of ex-premier Rafiq Hariri.

Prosecutor Saqr Saqr refused to free the four men, who have pleaded their innocence and repeatedly asked for their release through their lawyers, a judicial official said.

But Saqr agreed to release two of the nine suspects detained following Hariri's murder in a massive Beirut car bomb blast in February 2005, the official added. The pair had been held for giving false information.

The officers -- who are believed to be close to Syria -- are former presidential guard chief General Mustafa Hamdan, the former head of the general security department General Jamil Sayyed, the former head of the internal security forces General Ali Hajj and the former chief of army intelligence General Raymond Azar.

In April the government defended as "perfectly legal" the holding of the officers after criticism by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which said their detention without charge was "arbitrary" and "unjust."

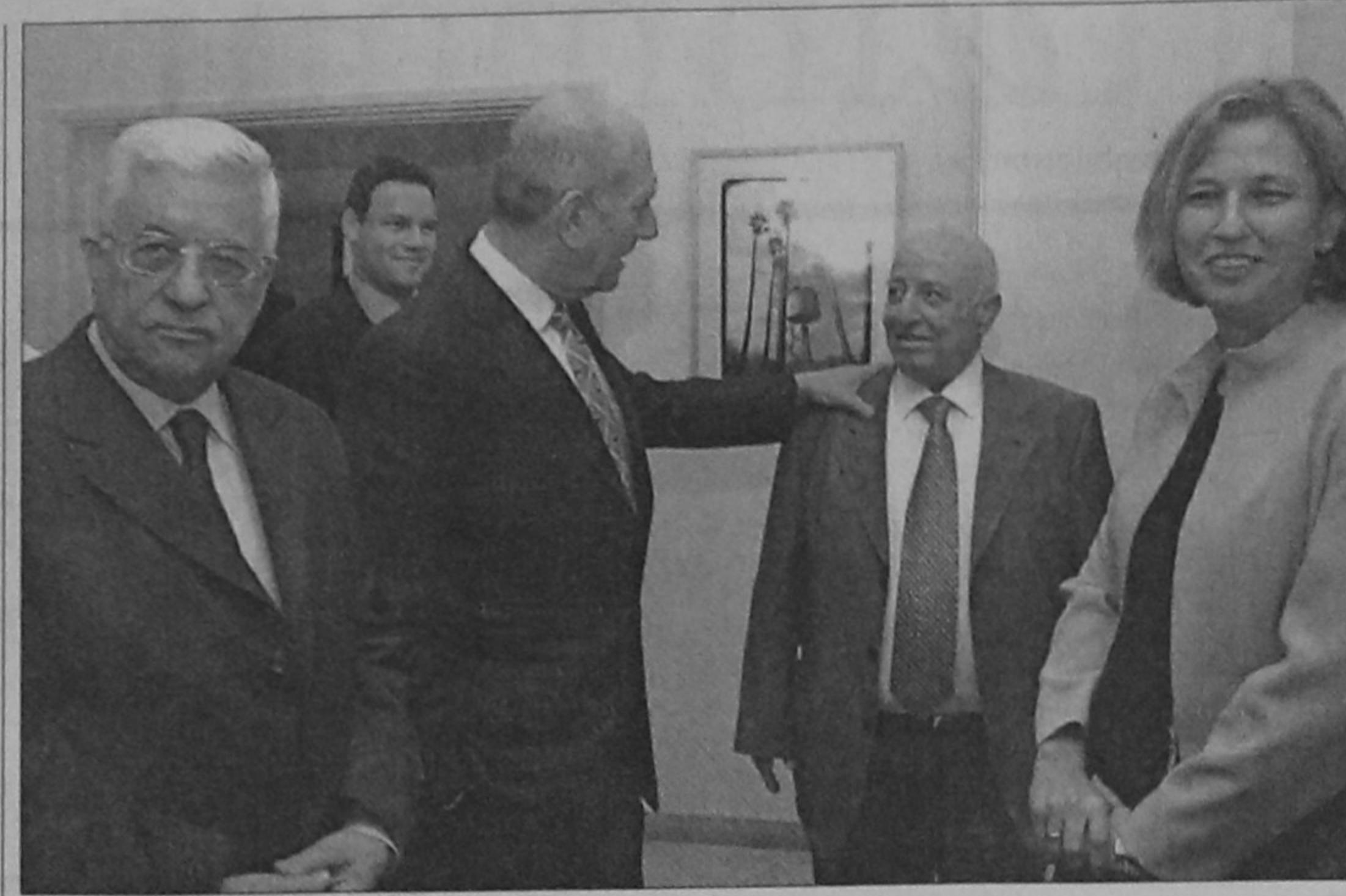


PHOTO: AFP

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (CL) places a hand on the shoulder of Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qorei (CR), as Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni (R) and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas (L) look on during a meeting in Jerusalem yesterday. Olmert met Abbas for a working lunch, a week after the Israeli premier's announcement he would resign cast a cloud over peace negotiations.

## Israel to free arrested Palestinians soon

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday freed five Palestinian prisoners as part of a UN-brokered prisoner exchange with the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, the prisons administration said.

Prisons spokeswoman Yaron Linhar said the five prisoners, all minors, were released from Hasharon prison, where they had been jailed for hurling rocks or firebombs and were due to be released by the end of next year.

A Palestinian security official said the five prisoners, all under the age of 17, had been released at a military checkpoint near the northern West Bank town of Tulkarem.

Meanwhile Israel also said it will release Palestinian prisoners by the

end of August as a "gesture of goodwill" after a request from Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas.

"Israel will be releasing Palestinian prisoners towards the end of August as a gesture of goodwill towards the Palestinians in response to a request by Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas," government spokesman Mark Regev said.

"We hope this gesture will help the peace process," the spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told reporters after the two leaders met as part of continuing US-backed peace talks.

There are currently more than 11,000 Palestinians jailed in Israel.

The release of an unspecified number of Palestinian prisoners

was part of a deal concluded last month that saw Israel trade five Lebanese prisoners and the remains of some 200 Lebanese and Palestinian fighters for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers whose capture sparked the 2006 Lebanon war.

The deal was celebrated in Lebanon as a major victory for Hezbollah but was deeply mourned in Israel, where the soldiers' families only learned their fate when they saw television footage of two black coffins arriving at the border.

Israeli troops meanwhile raided the northern West Bank town of Nablus, arresting 10 Palestinians including Majeda al-Fadda, a city council member, a Palestinian security official told AFP on condition of anonymity.



## Palace denies Prince Phillips has cancer

AFP, London

Buckingham Palace yesterday denied a report that Queen Elizabeth II's elderly husband Prince Philip has been diagnosed with prostate cancer.

In a statement, the palace said: "The Duke of Edinburgh has authorised us to confirm that the claim made by the Evening Standard that he has received a diagnosis of prostate cancer is untrue."

The London newspaper reported earlier that the 87-year-old was diagnosed with cancer while being treated in a hospital in the capital for a chest infection in April.

The palace said it believed the front-page story was "a serious breach of Prince Philip's privacy".

Buckingham Palace has always maintained that members of the Royal Family have a right to privacy, particularly in relation to their personal health," it said.

"For this reason, we have always refused to confirm or deny the persistent rumours that circulate about their health, particularly during the quiet news months."

But it said it had taken the unusual step of formally denying the rumours "because the damaging story is now being reported widely".

The Evening Standard quoted an unnamed cancer specialist as saying "it's become an open secret within the medical community that Philip has prostate cancer."

## Serbia calls on war crimes fugitives to surrender

AFP, Belgrade

Serbia appealed yesterday for the last two war crimes fugitives wanted by a UN tribunal, Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic, to give themselves up.

"I personally would like Mladic to surrender as soon as possible," Defence Minister Dragan Sutanovic was quoted as saying in an interview published in the daily Blic.

Sutanovic added, "We would be in the interests of Serbia and its citizens, and Mladic's too."

Mladic was "holding the whole country hostage" by obstructing its integration into the European Union.

Mladic, accused of genocide and crimes against humanity for atrocities including the Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Muslims during Bosnia's 1992-1995 war, has been on the run from the ICTY for more than a decade.

Hadzic, 49, has been at large since the ICTY unsealed his indictment in 2004 for war crimes in Croatia, where he was the leader of rebel Serbs during its 1991-1995 independence war.

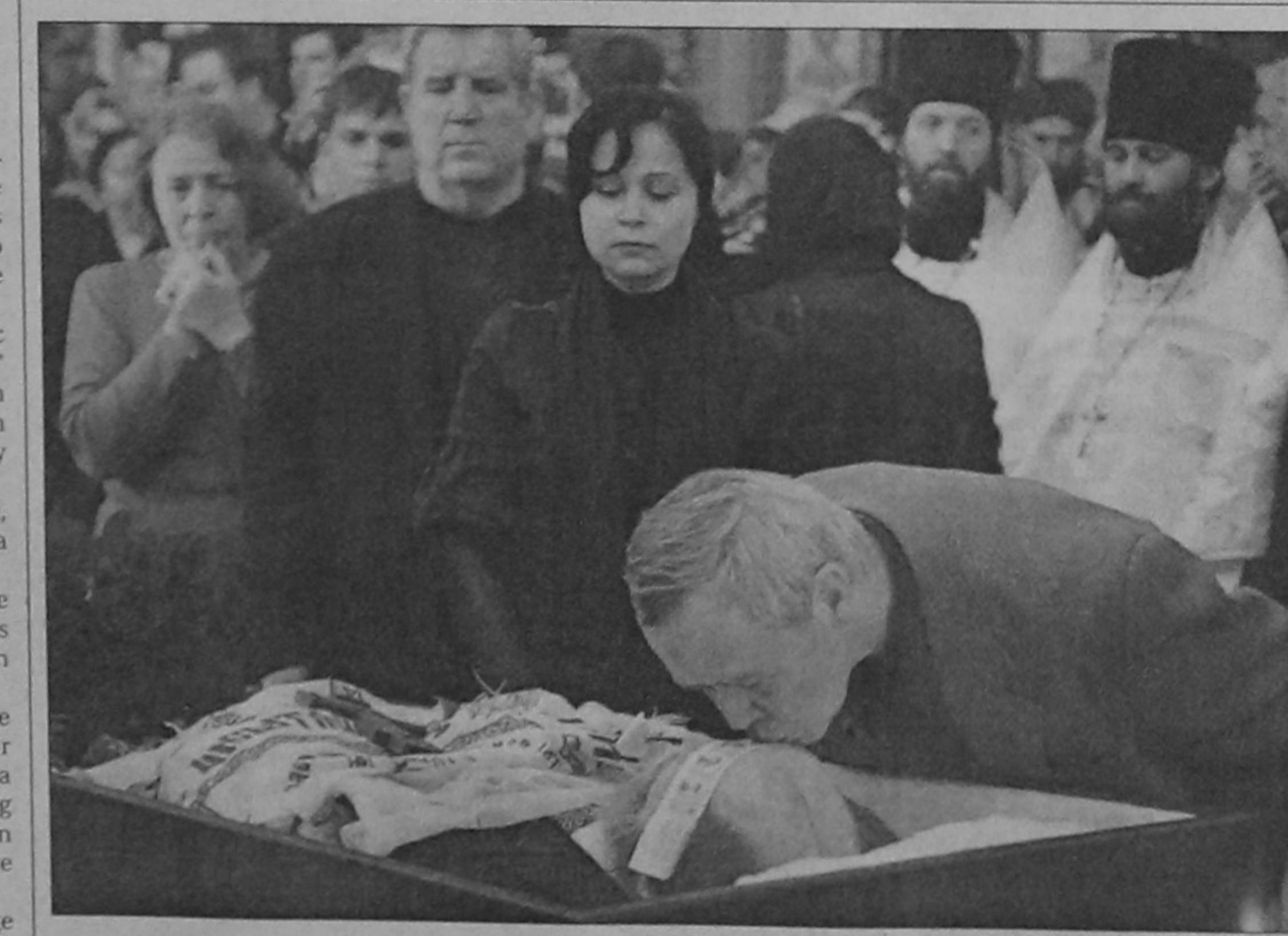


PHOTO: AFP

Russian author Valentin Rasputin kisses the forehead of Russian author and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn in Moscow yesterday during his funeral ceremonies. Nobel Prize-winning Russian writer and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn was laid to rest in a historic Moscow monastery after an ornate church service attended by President Dmitry Medvedev.

## France slams genocide claims by Rwanda

AFP, Paris

France yesterday accused Rwanda of making "unacceptable accusations" by alleging that Paris played an active role in the 1994 genocide, but said it was still determined to rekindle ties with Kigali.

A 500-page report released Tuesday by Kigali alleged that France was aware of preparations for the genocide, and that French forces in Rwanda contributed to planning the massacres and actively took part in killing.

It names 13 senior politicians and 20 military officials as responsible and raises the prospect of Rwandan legal action against them.

"The report contains unacceptable accusations made against French political and military officials," French foreign ministry spokesman Romain Nadal told reporters.

## German man abducted in Kabul

AFP, Berlin

A German-Afghan man has been missing for over a week in Kabul and is believed to have been kidnapped, the foreign ministry in Berlin said yesterday.

"We assume he has fallen victim to a criminal abduction," ministry spokesman Jens Ploetner told a regular government news conference.

He said a crisis team at the ministry had been working closely since July 29 with Afghan authorities to secure the man's release.

Ploetner declined to provide any further information.

Kidnapping by criminal gangs seeking ransom have soared in Afghanistan as security has deteriorated since the 2001 ouster of the Taliban government.

In the ceremony, Hiroshima Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba also announced the launch of a two-year

## Obama, McCain clash in oil, nuclear power play

AFP, Washington

Democratic White House hopeful Barack Obama late Tuesday charged that oil giants were betting their record profits on John McCain and accused his Republican foes of "lying" about his own energy plan.

Senator Obama and fellow Democrats painted McCain as a puppet of "Big Oil," seeking to leverage public anger over high gasoline prices and bind him to the economic legacy of President George W. Bush.

"Under Senator McCain's plan, the oil companies get billions more, we don't pay any less at the pump, and we stay in the same cycle of dependence on oil that got us into this crisis," Obama said in Ohio.

"The oil companies have placed their bet on Senator McCain, and if he wins, they will continue to cash in while our families and our economy

suffer and our future is put in jeopardy."

Obama chose to press home his attack in the heart of Ohio, a mid-western state hammered by the loss of heavy industry jobs which is a perennial bellwether in US presidential elections.

The Illinois senator argued that though McCain was right to argue America had grown addicted to foreign oil over the past 30 years, he was a part of the problem, as he served in Congress for most of that time.

And Obama fought back after being ridiculed by McCain for urging drivers to properly inflate their tires, which even the US government says could reduce national oil consumption by at least three percent a year.

"Instead of running ads about Paris Hilton and Britney Spears, they should go talk to some energy

experts and actually make a difference," the Democrat added, battling back against a McCain offensive on his celebrity status.

The Democratic National Committee backed up Obama's attack with a new video, showing McCain as a puppet being manipulated by oil industry lobbyists.

The McCain campaign, however, pointed out that Obama voted for a Senate energy bill in 2005, which included huge handouts for oil firms. McCain voted against the legislation, slamming its oil industry giveaways and arguing it would not solve the energy crisis.

Obama's aides accused McCain of misrepresenting his position, saying the Democrat was open to more nuclear plants, but only when such issues as security of nuclear fuel and disposal of waste were resolved.

## Hiroshima hopes US will abolish atomic weapons

AP, AFP, Hiroshima

The mayor of Hiroshima yesterday urged the next US president to work to abolish atomic weapons as the city marked the 63rd anniversary of the world's first nuclear attack.

Some 45,000 people, including Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, gathered at a memorial to the dead within sight of the A-bomb dome, a former exhibition hall burned to a skeleton by the bomb's incinerating heat.

They stood up and offered silent prayers at 8:15 am, the exact moment in 1945 when a single US bomb instantly killed more than 140,000 people and fatally injured tens of thousands of others with radiation or horrific burns.

In the ceremony, Hiroshima Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba also announced the launch of a two-year

study to gauge the psychological toll of the Aug. 6, 1945, attack in the closing days of World War II.

Japan submitted a resolution in the UN last year calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Akiba said that 170 nations supported the resolution, while the US was one of only three countries to oppose it.

Delivering a speech at the memorial, Akiba noted the United States was one of only three countries which oppose a UN resolution submitted by Japan calling for the abolition of nuclear arms.

Akiba said the effects of the atomic bombing on the minds of survivors had been underestimated for decades, adding that "the voices, faces and forms that vanished in the hell" had never left the hearts of survivors.

An altar at the Peace Memorial Park quickly filled up with a mountain

of flowers. A group of South Koreans performed a traditional dance to honour the dead, who included a number of Koreans.

A Chinese representative, a diplomat, attended the annual ceremony for the first time in a move welcomed by the city, which each year invites representatives of the world's eight declared nuclear powers to the event.

Previously India, Pakistan and Russia were the only nuclear powers that had sent representatives to the ceremony. The other declared nuclear states -- Britain, France, North Korea and the United States -- have never come.

Three days after the Hiroshima bombing, the United States dropped a second nuclear bomb on Nagasaki, which killed another 70,000 people in the southern port city.



PHOTO: AFP

Refugees from a maverick Georgian region of South Ossetia leave its capital Tskhinvali to Russia in a photo dated August 4, 2008. Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia said it was continuing to evacuate hundreds of children to Russia after the deadliest clashes in the province in years. Six people were killed and at least 12 wounded late on August 1 in South Ossetia from snipers and mortars fire from Georgian positions.

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