

Israeli army urges govt to attack Iran, strike peace deal with Syria

PTI, Jerusalem

Israel's defence establishment in a recommendation paper to be presented to the Cabinet has asked it to make contingency plans to attack Iran, reach a peace agreement with Syria and prevent polls in the Palestinian areas even if Tel Aviv has to confront with the US.

The paper will be presented to the Cabinet next month as part of the National Security Council's annual situation assessment, daily 'Ha'aretz' reported on Sunday.

The paper warns that Israel may find itself facing a nuclear Iran virtually alone in 2009 following a rapprochement between Washington, Tehran and the Arab world that would also undermine the Jewish state's military superiority.

"Iran's threat to Israel's survival" is at the top of the paper's list of threats, fol-

lowed by the "strategic threat" of long-range missiles and rockets owned by various countries in the region, the daily said.

"Israel faces these threats almost alone. It is imperative to mobilise the international community and obtain regional cooperation. The new American administration is an opportunity to do this," it notes.

The recommendation paper warns that Israel has a limited "window" in which to act before Iran obtains nuclear arms and regional hegemony.

Israel therefore "must establish a military option against Iran, in case other countries abandon the struggle", it reportedly says. The defence establishment also advises the Cabinet to "work discreetly on contingency plans" to deal with a nuclear Iran.

The paper strongly recommends close cooperation with US to prevent a deal

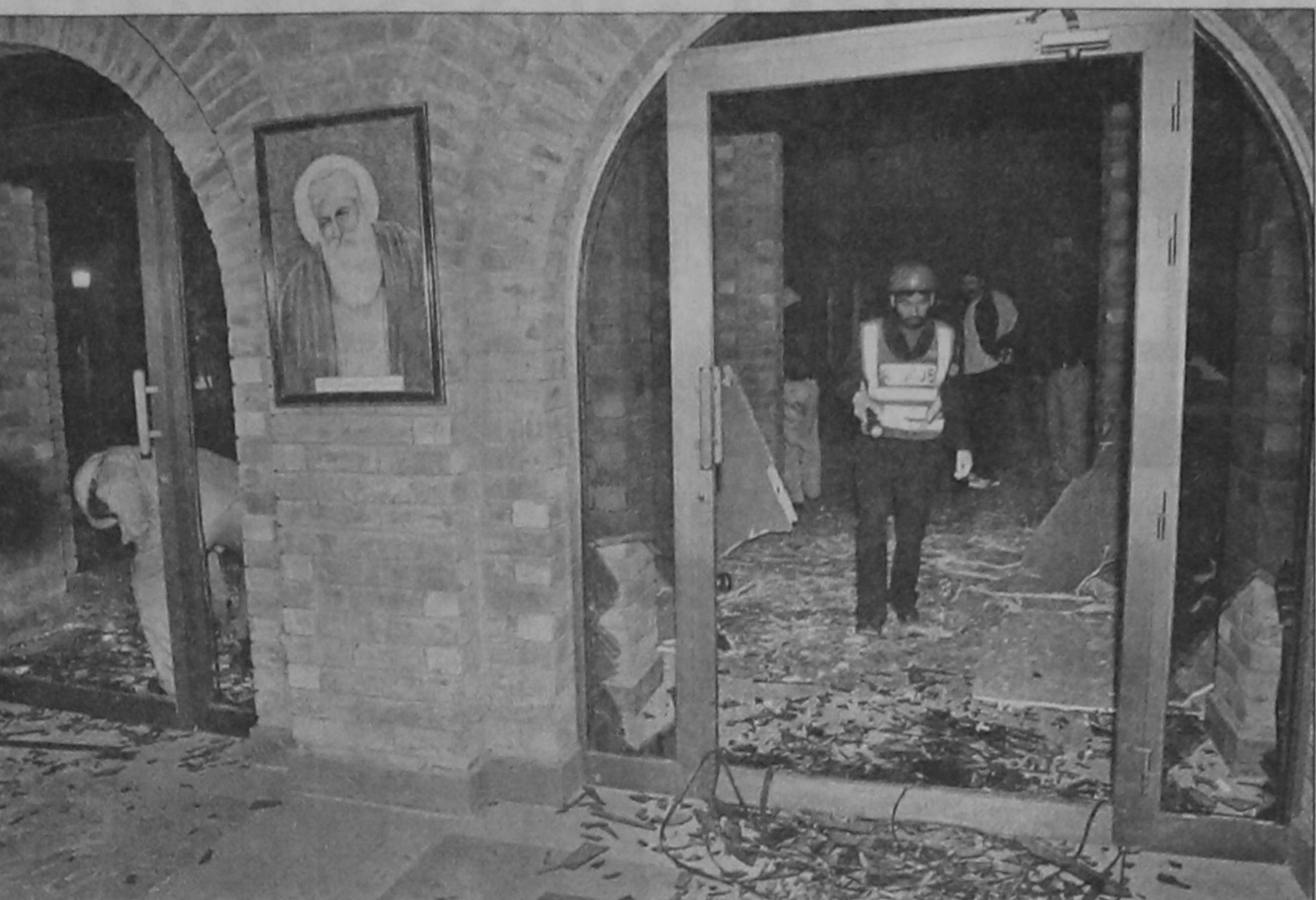
between Washington and Tehran that would undermine Israel's interests.

The paper calls for "an agreement with Syria", despite the "heavy price Israel would have to pay".

The defence establishment believes that removing Syria from the conflict would lead to an agreement also with Lebanon, significantly weakening the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah-Hamas axis.

It recommends persuading Barack Obama administration to support talks with Syria, to which George W Bush objected.

Israel should support moderate factions in Lebanon in next year's parliamentary elections, but not at the expense of its own interests, it says, adding "At the same time, Israel must strengthen its deterrence against Hezbollah and take 'low-profile' action against Hezbollah's arms smuggling".



Pakistani security officials inspect the blast site in cultural centre in Lahore on Saturday. Three bombs exploded on Saturday in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore, wounding two people.



Anti-government protesters shout slogans inside the Government House in Bangkok yesterday. Thai protesters are laying a siege to state offices gathered for a rally which they say will be a final push to topple the government, putting Thailand on edge after a week of escalating violence.

Thai protesters vow final showdown with govt

AP, Bangkok

Anti-government protesters said yesterday they were massing activists in the Thai capital for their biggest rally yet in a final showdown with the government, while the military deployed soldiers to deter violence.

The protest group, which calls itself the People's Alliance for Democracy, planned to rally more than 100,000 supporters Sunday evening, but declined to give details of the rally or its timing. They were expected to try to march on Parliament overnight to disrupt a session

of lawmakers the following day.

"It will be D-Day. This will be our final push to bring down the government," said protester Chokchuang Chutinaton, 64, as he and fellow protesters gathered at the Government House compound.

An Associated Press reporter heard heavy artillery fire and rocket-propelled grenades in the attack in a residential neighborhood of the capital. Dozens of security forces have surrounded the

building. Inside, a reporter saw spent shell casings littering the floors, including in the president's bedroom.

"It's unacceptable that we should have another coup in this country," said Cassama.

The government has issued

Soldiers attack home of Guinea-Bissau president

AP, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau

Mutinous soldiers fought their way into the fortified residence of Guinea-Bissau's president in a three-hour gunbattle yesterday but did not hurt the head of state, a top official said.

The soldiers attacked President Joao Bernardo Vieira's home shortly after midnight, killing at least one of his guards and injuring several others before security forces were able to push them back, Interior Minister Cipriano Cassama said.

The attackers did not reach the room Vieira was hiding in and he was not hurt, Cassama said.

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building. Inside, a reporter saw spent shell casings littering the floors, including in the president's bedroom.

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The government has issued

no formal statement, but is planning an emergency meeting later Sunday, spokesman Fernando Mendonca said.

In a statement Sunday about Guinea-Bissau, African Union commission chairman Jean Ping said the AU rejects "any unconstitutional change of government and condemns in advance any attempt to seize power by force."

The United Nations has said the impoverished nation of 1.5 million on Africa's Atlantic coast is a key transit point for cocaine smuggled from Latin America to Europe.

Tension mounts in Somali pirate lair as Islamists threaten attack

AFP, Mogadishu

Tension mounted yesterday between pirates holding a Saudi tanker and Islamist fighters threatening to attack them, with a week remaining for the ship's owners to meet a 25-million-dollar ransom demand.

"If the pirates want peace, they had better release the tanker," Sheikh Ahmed, a spokesman for the Shebab group in the coastal region of Haradhere, told AFP by phone.

The Sirius Star, a huge tanker carrying around 100 million dollars worth of crude oil and owned by Saudi Aramco, was hijacked in the space of 16 minutes by Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean on November 15.

Pirates have since anchored it off their base in Haradhere, north of Mogadishu, and demanded the ransom be paid

by November 30.

The Shebab (youth) armed group, which controls much of southern and central Somalia and rejects an internationally-backed peace process, has positioned fighters in and around Haradhere in recent days.

Islamist leaders have stressed that piracy is a capital offence under Islam and officially condemned the surge in acts of piracy in Somalia's waters, which has begun to disrupt international trade.

A member of the pirate group holding the Sirius Star retorted that his own men were not afraid of the Shebab's threats.

"We are the Shebab of the sea and we can't be scared by the Shebab of the land," Mohamed Said told AFP. "If anybody attempts to attack, that would be suicide."

Syria hosts Iraq security meet in wake of US raid

AFP, Damascus

A high-level meeting to discuss security in Iraq opened in Damascus on Sunday less than a month after US soldiers raided a Syrian village in a hunt for a "facilitator" of foreign fighters entering Iraq.

"It is everyone's responsibility to step up cooperation to supervise borders" with Iraq, Syria's Interior Minister Bassam Abdul Majid said in an opening speech.

He called on participants to ensure that "Iraq will not be the point of departure for acts of aggression against its neighbours in any circumstances whatsoever."

The minister said Syria's sovereignty

was "gravely violated" by the October 26 attack of helicopter-borne American soldiers on a village near the border with Iraq.

Damascus says the raid left eight civilians dead, but an official in Washington said the raid targeted a "facilitator" of foreign fighters crossing the border from Syria to battle US and Iraqi forces.

"Syria has always taken the necessary steps to supervise its border with Iraq... stability in Iraq is reflected in all countries of the region," Abdul Majid said.

"Sovereignty and independence for Iraq... will only be achieved through the departure of foreign forces from its territory," he said.

Iraqi lawmakers vote on US security pact Wednesday

AP, Baghdad

The Iraqi parliament will vote Wednesday on a pact that would allow American troops to stay in Iraq for three more years, but the government's hopes of winning a wide margin of approval to ensure the deal's legitimacy appeared to be fading.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his top ministers struggled Saturday to rally support for the pact, arguing that Iraqi security forces aren't ready to stand on their own. A UN mandate for the American troop presence expires Dec. 31, and US military operations would have to stop immediately without a new mandate or the legal cover of the pact being considered by parliament.

The defence minister warned that losing the protection of the US Navy could even bring piracy to Persian Gulf waters like that preying on international shipping off the African nation of Somalia.



A woman has her face painted "No fathers, no masters, no husbands" "I am me" as she takes part in a demonstration in the streets of Rome to protest the violence against women on Saturday ahead of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women taking place on November 25.

'Nostalgic' Bush ponders forced retirement'

AFP, Lima

One day after saying he was waxing "nostalgic" about his eight years in office, US President George W Bush joked Saturday that he faces "forced retirement" when Barack Obama takes over in 59 days.

Bush, making his final trip overseas before returning to his adoptive home state of Texas, has always promised to "sprint to the finish" -- meaning not that he can't wait for January 20th but that he won't slow down.

And one of his top advisers for international economic affairs, Dan Price, bristled last week at a reporter's suggestion that Bush's attendance at an Asia-Pacific summit here might be a final bow on the world stage.

"This is a serious meeting; it is not a farewell," said Price. "Every meeting or foreign trip the president has gone on this year has been called his farewell tour," Bush spokeswoman Dana Perino said a day later.

Perhaps inevitably, though, it's both business and bye-bye for the US president, who over

eight years has visited 73 countries, the West Bank, and Kosovo when it was under UN administration, according to CBS Radio statistics.

At a meeting late Friday with Chinese President Hu Jintao, Bush allowed he felt "a little nostalgic" in the face of their final talks as heads of state, then discussed such weighty issues as North Korea's nuclear disarmament, said Perino.

Hu voiced hope that Bush, after he steps down, "can come to China often to continue to have a positive influence on China-US ties," said China foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao.

In a message to Obama, the Chinese president "expressed hope that the next US administration can recognise the importance of China-US ties and at the same time recognise the importance of the Taiwan issue to China-US ties," said Liu.

On Saturday, the US president met with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who said he and his wife "certainly wish Laura and you all the best. I don't see you again before the 20th of January."

Abbas to call snap polls if Hamas talks fail

Palestinians slam lack of progress in talks

AFP, Ramallah

The Islamists won an upset victory in the last parliamentary elections in 2006.

Earlier Abbas hit out at US-backed Middle East peace talks on Sunday on the eve of a White House meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President George W Bush, saying that no one issue had been resolved.

"So far we have not reached agreement on a single question -- every issue remains up for discussion," Abbas told a meeting of the Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

He said that nonetheless he remains "ready to continue the dialogue in which we have been making every effort for success."

The Islamist Hamas movement which controls Gaza pulled out of Egyptian-brokered unity talks with Abbas's secular Fatah faction earlier this month, accusing his security forces of rounding up its supporters in the West Bank.

Abbas's term as president expires on January 8 and Hamas had been threatening not to recognise his authority from the following day.



President of India's Congress Party and Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, Sonia Gandhi (R) addresses the gathering as Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit (L) looks on during an election rally in New Delhi yesterday. The Indian capital is set to go to the polls for the state assembly election on November 29.

Bush, Medvedev put brave face on differences at final summit

AFP, Lima

The Russian and US leaders put a brave face on their differences at a valedictory talks on Saturday, with officials saying Iran and piracy were problems the two sides would continue working on.

President George W Bush and Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev also took up the thorny subject of Georgia among other topics in a last summit on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific summit in Peru.

The two agreed on the need to work together on Iran under US president-elect Barack Obama, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said.

"They talked about the need for the two nations to continue to work together on Iran and that it is important for that cooperation to continue into the new administration," Perino said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the two sides had discussed the economic crisis and "international security" and agreed to work in a "practical way" on problems of mutual concern such as piracy off Somalia's coast.

