

Israel nears decision on truce with Hamas

US Senator Kerry visits Gaza

AP, AFP, Jerusalem

Top Israeli Cabinet ministers opened debate Wednesday on a proposal for a sweeping ceasefire deal with Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip, seeking to deliver quiet to the country's south and bring home a captive soldier before the government leaves office in the coming weeks.

The emerging deal would require Israel to make major concessions, including an opening of Gaza's blockaded borders and releasing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. In return, Israel is seeking an end to all rocket fire on southern Israel, a halt to arms smuggling into Gaza and the freedom of Sgt. Gilad Shalit, an Israeli serviceman captured by Hamas nearly three years ago.

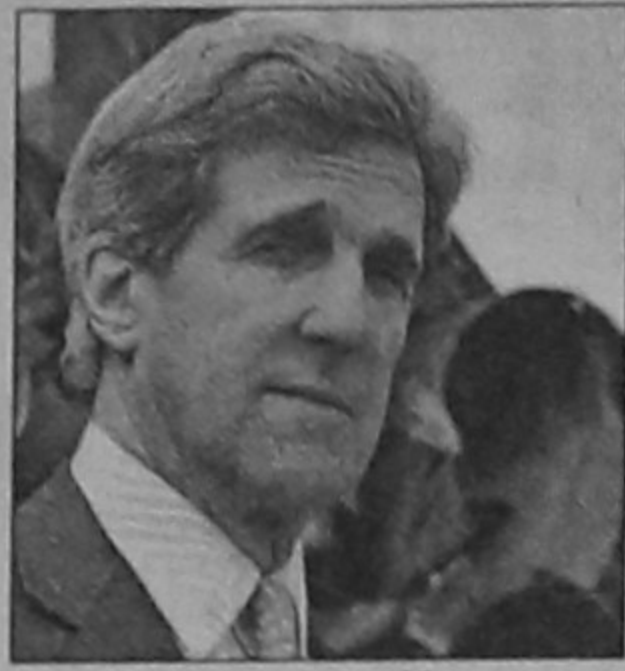
Wednesday's meeting was expected to last for hours and

given the complexity of the situation, one participant said the government might not even make a decision on all issues.

"I think hopes have been raised just a little too high ahead of this Cabinet meeting," Social Welfare Minister Isaac Herzog told Army Radio. "We shall examine what is the current status of the truce and the intense efforts to free Gilad Shalit, where things stand and what are the parameters."

Participants arriving at the meeting went into the closed session without commenting to reporters.

Once Israel makes its decision, it will share its position with Egypt, which has been trying to broker a lasting cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in the wake of last month's punishing Israeli military offensive in Gaza. The



Senator John Kerry

operation ended with an informal truce on Jan. 18.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is eager to work out a deal before leaving office. The country held a parliamentary election last week.

The results were inconclusive and it is expected to take several weeks before either of the top two vote-getters, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni or

opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, can form a new coalition government.

US Senator John Kerry yesterday made a rare visit to the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, but stressed this did not reflect a change of policy towards the territory's Islamist rulers listed by Washington as a terror group.

The visit "does not indicate any shift whatsoever with respect to Hamas," said Kerry, who heads the Senate's powerful foreign relations committee.

His first stop in the impoverished Palestinian enclave was the American school that was left in ruins by the deadly 22-day Israeli offensive that ended on January 18.

His visit coincided with a similar trip by Democratic US representatives Brian Baird and Keith Ellison.

Shoe-thrower defiant as Iraq opens trial

AFP, Baghdad

The Iraqi journalist who threw his shoes at George W. Bush defiantly defended his actions in court on Thursday, saying he had become emotionally overwhelmed when confronted by the ex-US president.

Muntazer al-Zaidi won global fame when his footwear whizzed past Bush's head on December 14 as the then president was making a farewell visit to Iraq before leaving the White House.

His lawyers used the trial's opening arguments to assert that the remarkable protest was lawful, but the judge brought proceedings to a halt 90 minutes later, saying that more information was needed about Bush's trip.

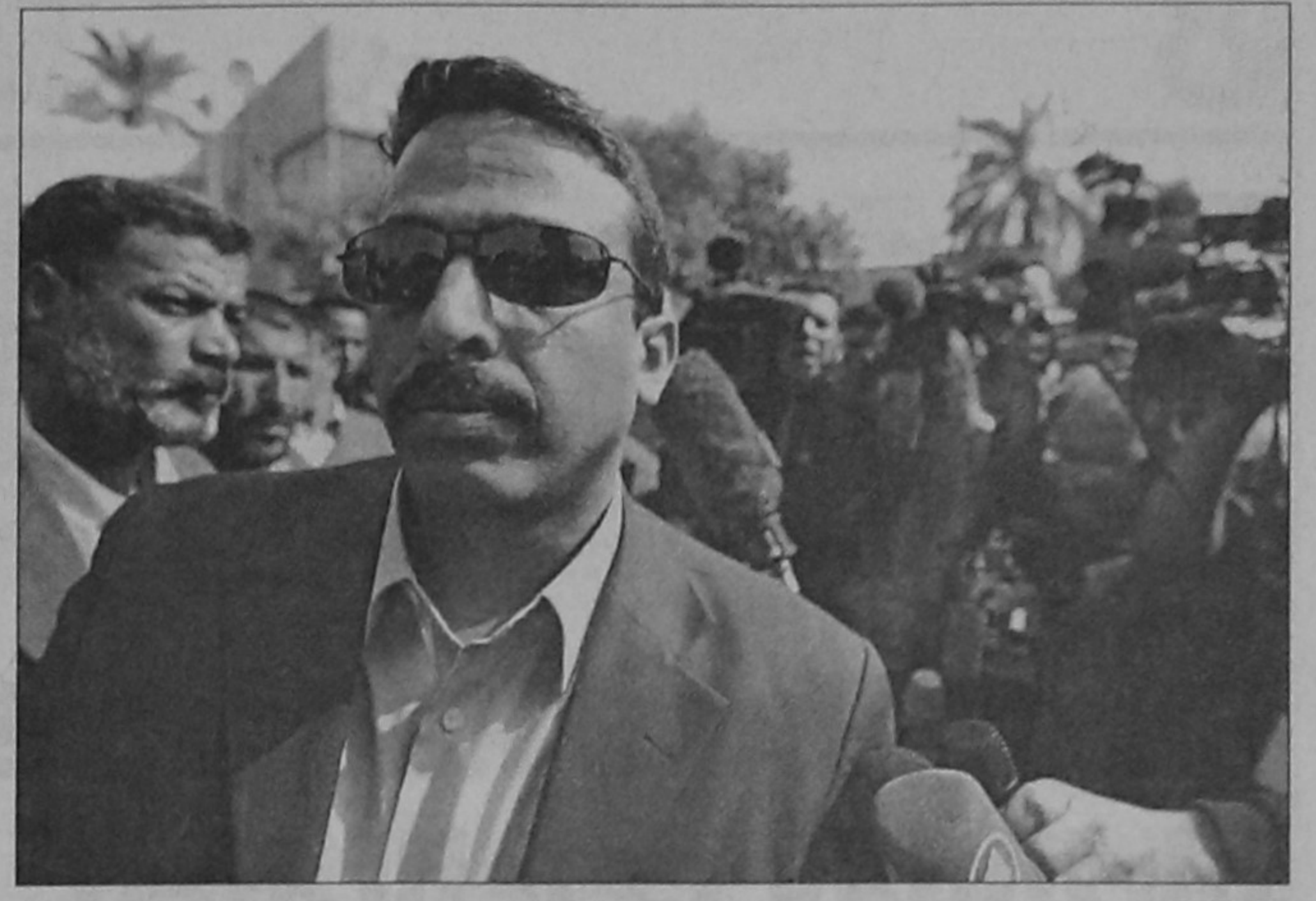


PHOTO: AFP

Udai, the brother of jailed journalist Muntazer al-Zaidi, is surrounded by the press as he leaves the Central Criminal Court in Baghdad yesterday following the first day of his brother's trial. The 30-year-old Iraqi journalist who threw his shoes at former US president George W. Bush went on trial with his lawyers arguing that the remarkable protest was lawful.

US, Poland ink special forces cooperation deal

AFP, Krakow, Poland

The United States and Poland yesterday inked a deal boosting cooperation between their special forces on the sidelines of Nato talks in Krakow, senior US and Polish officials said.

"As Poland expands its special forces, the United States will help in any way we can," said US Defence Secretary Robert Gates after signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Polish counterpart Bogdan Kluch.

Around 100 Polish special forces troops are currently stationed in Afghanistan, part of a 1,600-strong Polish contingent there.

Kluch called Thursday's bilateral deal an historic "milestone on the road to strengthening our special forces in joint operations."

"I think we will test the value of this agreement during the operation in Afghanistan," he said.

According to the memorandum, the US will provide assistance "in the areas of education, training, unit partnerships and officer exchanges."

By-poll duties

FROM PAGE 1
Minister Sheikh Hasina, Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad who won the December 29 election from there opted to leave them.

It will be the first by-election under the new government and also the EC led by ATM Shamsul Huda, widely lauded for free and fair conduct of the parliamentary polls.

Sakhawat said the commission has taken all-out measures to ensure credibility of the by-elections as well.

"We'll write to the government asking it to make sure the ministers and state ministers and those of their ranks do not visit the seven constituencies and campaign for anyone," he said.

Electoral enquiry committees will be formed and judicial magistrates deployed to prevent pre-polls irregularities.

According to the gazette notifications, divisional deputy election commissioner of Rangpur will be RO for Rangpur-3 & -6 and district election officers of Pabna and Gaibandha AROs.

District election officer of Kurigram will be the RO for Kurigram-2 and upazila election officer of Kurigram sadar and district election officers of Natore and Nilphamari AROs.

Divisional deputy election commissioner of Rajshahi has been appointed RO for Bogra-6 & -7. He will be assisted by district election officer-2 of Bogra and Shajahanpur upazila election officer.

Divisional deputy election commissioner of Khulna has been assigned the role of RO for Bagerhat-1, and district election officers of Bagerhat, Gopalganj and Pirojpur have been made AROs.

Divisional deputy election commissioner will work as RO for Kishoreganj-6, where AROs will be district election officers of Kishoreganj and Habiganj.

N Korean disarmament stalled by possible succession: Hillary

AFP, Seoul

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Thursday a looming leadership change in North Korea seems to have stalled its nuclear disarmament and that a new strategy is needed to break the deadlock.

Hillary Clinton suggested that North Korea may be taking a harder line in the disarmament talks as a result of behind-the-scenes moves to find a successor to leader Kim Jong-Il, who was reported to have had a stroke last August.

It was the first time that Hillary Clinton, speaking to reporters on the aeroplane to Seoul, had singled out the succession issue in the secretive Stalinist state as the apparent cause of the deadlock in the six-party talks.

"I think this is an especially important time for South Korea as they are confronting

a lot of worries about what's up in North Korea, what the succession could be, what it means for them," Hillary Clinton told reporters.

"And they're looking to us to use our best efforts to get the agenda of denuclearisation and non-proliferation back in gear," Hillary Clinton said on the plane taking her from Jakarta to Seoul on the third leg of her Asia tour.

"I'll be emphasising that as we meet with the government leaders," she said, referring to talks with the president, the foreign minister and the defence minister.

The six-party talks have "produced some results which we want to build on but we are still facing the reality of North Korea not only possessing, we believe, some number of nuclear weapons but showing very little willingness to get back on track," she said.



PHOTO: AFP

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton looks at a purse made of recycled plastic during her visit to a USAID-sponsored community project in the Petojo neighbourhood of Jakarta yesterday. Hillary received a rapturous welcome as she toured US AID projects in a slum in Indonesia's teeming capital.

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ফা, # 1 বা best হলো S@ifur's, আর অন্যরা হলো 2, 3, 4 উপরের 1 যেমন 2, 3, 4-এর তুলনায় অনেক বড়, তেমনি সব কোর্সেই গুণ-মানে, service ও quality-র দিক দিয়ে অন্যদের তুলনায় S@ifur's অনেক এগিয়ে। প্রতিযোগিতায় না পেরে S@ifur's-এর প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা S@ifur's (বিশেষ করে, বৈপ্লবিক Natur@l English কোর্স)-এর বিরুদ্ধে অনেক গুজব ছড়াচ্ছে এবং বিজ্ঞাপন দিচ্ছে। মজার ব্যাপার হলো, S@ifur's-এর পিছনে অন্যরা লেগেছে মানে হলো S@ifur's সামনে!! অতএব এখন ঠান্ডা মাথায় চিন্তা করুন, Spoken, IELTS, BCS, MBA প্রভৃতি কোর্স কোথায় করবেন:

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Iran 'considering' offer of US talks: FM

AFP, Baku

Iran is considering holding face-to-face talks with Washington but first needs to see a concrete shift in US policy, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said yesterday.

"We are considering this offer. It would be good if the Americans' policy changed not only in words but in deeds," Mottaki said during a visit to neighbouring Azerbaijan.

"We need to wait to see

differences in (US President) Barack Obama's policy compared to that of George Bush. If the United States makes steps towards Iran, counter-steps will be made by Iran as well," he told journalists in comments translated into Azerbaijani.

Asked what changes Iran was looking for, Mottaki replied: "They know well."

Iran's headline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on February 10 that Tehran is prepared to talk with Washington on the basis

of mutual respect and equality.

Formal ties between the two countries have been severed for 30 years and the rift has been further aggravated since Tehran controversially revived its nuclear programme.

But Washington and Tehran have been showing tentative policy shifts after Obama earlier this month said his administration would be ready in coming months to hold a "face-to-face" talk with Tehran.

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