

Palestinians agree to enter indirect talks with Israel

AFP, Ramallah

The Palestinians agreed yesterday to enter into indirect US-led talks with Israel, relaunching the peace process after a break of more than a year, a senior PLO official announced.

"The Palestinian leadership has decided to give an opportunity for the American suggestion to hold indirect talks between the Israeli and Palestinian sides," Yasser Abed Rabbo told reporters in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

The decision was taken at a Palestine Liberation Organisation executive committee meeting.

It came as US Middle East envoy George Mitchell was meeting with Israeli leaders on his latest trip to the region. US Vice President Joe Biden is expected later this week.

The Palestinians' approval was expected after Arab foreign ministers last week expressed grudging support for the talks, following months of shuttle diplomacy by Mitchell.

Abed Rabbo, the PLO secretary general, said the indirect talks would be limited to four months as proposed by the foreign ministers and should focus first on final borders.

He stressed that Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, would make direct negotiations impossible and could scupper the indirect talks.

The Islamist movement Hamas, which opposes any talks with Israel and rules Gaza, is not a member of the PLO, an umbrella group that includes president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party and several smaller factions.

Palestinian officials had expressed scepticism about the talks ahead of the meeting but said they did not want to be seen as hindering US-led efforts to revive peace talks suspended during the December 2008-January 2009 Gaza war.

"We think it's unlikely that these indirect negotiations with the Netanyahu government will succeed," senior Fatah official Azzam al-Ahmad

said. "But we want to give an opportunity to the US administration to continue its efforts," Ahmad told AFP, referring to Israel's hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"Even if we agree, we have restrictions and requirements according to what the Palestinian people and the factions want, which means we might say 'Yes, we agree, but,'" he added.

Netanyahu has repeatedly called for direct talks with the Palestinians but has refused to completely freeze settlement growth.

In November, Netanyahu imposed a 10-month halt to building starts in the West Bank but the Palestinians said the move was insufficient because it excluded east Jerusalem, public buildings and existing projects.

Israel seized mostly Arab east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed it in a move not recognised by the international community or the Palestinians, who view it as the capital of their future state.



PHOTO: AFP
An Iraqi woman casts her ballot in her country's general elections yesterday in Baghdad's Sadr City. Iraqis defied waves of bomb, mortar and rocket attacks that killed 26 people to turn in huge numbers to vote in elections seen as a test of the war-shattered state's fragile democracy.



PHOTO: AFP
Palestinians, foreign activists and left-wing Israelis demonstrate on Saturday in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah against Israeli settlements and occupation.

Hopes run high with Indian women's reservation bill

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Homemakers, students, professionals, social activists -- many women are keeping their fingers crossed and hoping that the Women's Reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve 33 percent of seats in legislatures for women, will get passed in the Rajya Sabha today.

"I am quite sure the women's reservation bill will be passed this time. The kind of support the bill has garnered is good and for a change political parties have left behind their differences to stand united on this subject," said Arusha Verma, a school teacher.

Added Rakhi Bajaj, a student, "The government has the support of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the Left. So I am sure we will finally get to see 33 percent reservation in parliament. When that happens, it will be a milestone achievement for the women's movement in India."

Law Minister M Veerappa Moily will move the bill in the Rajya Sabha Monday, the International Women's Day.

"What a day to take up the women's reservation bill. I am quite hopeful that India will observe a unique Women's Day on Monday with the passing of this bill," said Aradhana Dey, a homemaker.

Sunni Arabs go to polls to 'vote against Qaeda'

AFP, Fallujah

Khaled Abdallah dropped his ballot into the box in defiance of al-Qaeda, whose threat to kill any voter in Iraq's election on Sunday was largely ignored in the Sunni Arab bastion of Fallujah.

Amid the echo of blasts from around the former rebel stronghold in the desert of western Iraq, a cry of "vote against al-Qaeda" rang out from Kamal Fawaz, a first-time voter at a polling station in Al-Amine school.

Formerly in the grips of Osama bin Laden followers in Iraq and other insurgents, Fallujah was the scene of two fierce battles against the American military in 2004.

The war for Fallujah was fought a year after the US-led invasion which toppled Iraq's long-time Sunni president, Saddam Hussein.

But many local residents, weary of the bloodshed and destruction, turned out for Iraq's second post-Saddam parliamentary election, in contrast to a Sunni boycott at the last such poll in 2005.

Only 3,500 people voted five years ago, less

than one percent of the electorate in Anbar province of which the city of Fallujah forms a part.

"They terrorised us for many years. Now, we must drive them out because they are doing wrong to the country," said Kamal, referring to al-Qaeda, which on Friday threatened voters with their lives.

After a timid start, the pace picked up, with local dignitaries and clerics encouraging voters not to repeat the boycott which only served to boost the dominance in parliament of Iraq's majority Shiites and their Kurdish allies.

Women in the "niqab" full-face veil, accompanied by their husbands, sought out their names on the registers, avoiding the glances of other men and the cameras of journalists.

Outside, hundreds of police and soldiers patrolled the streets, where motorists were banned amid fears of car bombings.

"They're like rats. They open fire and then just vanish into the air. Let them come and confront us face to face," said Khaled Abdallah, 35, who like voters all around Iraq had to undergo a search before casting his ballot.

Dark, dangerous asteroids spotted near Earth's orbit

ANI, London

Reports indicate that an infrared space telescope has spotted several very dark asteroids that have been lurking unseen near Earth's orbit.

Called the Wide-Field Infrared Survey Explorer (WISE), the new Nasa telescope launched on 14 December on a mission to map the entire sky at infrared wavelengths.

It began its survey in mid-January.

In its first six weeks of observations, it has discovered 16 previously unknown asteroids with orbits close to Earth's.

Of these, 55 per cent reflect less than one-tenth of the sunlight that falls on them, which makes them difficult to spot with visible-light telescopes.

China calls on US to mend fences

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday blamed the United States for causing "serious disturbances" in their relationship but also called for the two Pacific powers to work together to get ties back on track.

Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi reiterated China's criticism of US arms sales to Taiwan and President Barack Obama's meeting last month with the Dalai Lama but appeared to leave the door open for the two sides to mend fences.

"The United States should properly handle the relevant sensitive issues and work with the Chinese side to return the China-US relationship to a track of stable development," Yang told reporters.

Stressing that a harmonious relationship was vital to both sides and to the world, he added "we hope the United States will work with us in a joint effort toward this end."

Yang was speaking in his annual press briefing held on the sidelines of China's March 5-14 parliament session, and his comments come with Sino-US relations at a low point.

The US announced it January it would go ahead with a 6.4-billion-dollar arms sale to Taiwan despite warnings by China, which had also urged Obama not to meet the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader at the White House.

The two sides also are at odds over Google's announcement that it may pull out of China altogether over web censorship and cyberattacks, plus a number of trade issues.

Australia police charge man over India toddler's death

AFP, Melbourne

Australian police yesterday charged a man with manslaughter over the mysterious death of an Indian toddler whose body was found dumped by the side of a road.

Gurshan Singh's body was found in long grass beside an isolated road in Melbourne's north on Thursday night. An initial autopsy on the child, who was in Australia with his parents, was inconclusive.

Police allege that a part-time taxi driver who had been sharing a house with the boy and his family was responsible for his death.

"Gursewak Dhillon, 23, has been charged with one count of manslaughter by criminal negligence," senior constable Marty Beveridge said in a statement.



PHOTO: AFP
Handout image from James Morgan in Sydney shows the largest ship to ever visit Australia, the Cunard superliner Queen Mary 2, arriving into Sydney Harbour near the Harbour Bridge yesterday during a stop halfway through her 101-day world voyage.

Swiss vote a resounding 'no' to lawyers for animals

AFP, Geneva

Swiss voters overwhelmingly rejected in a referendum yesterday a proposal for lawyers to be assigned to defend animals in court proceedings.

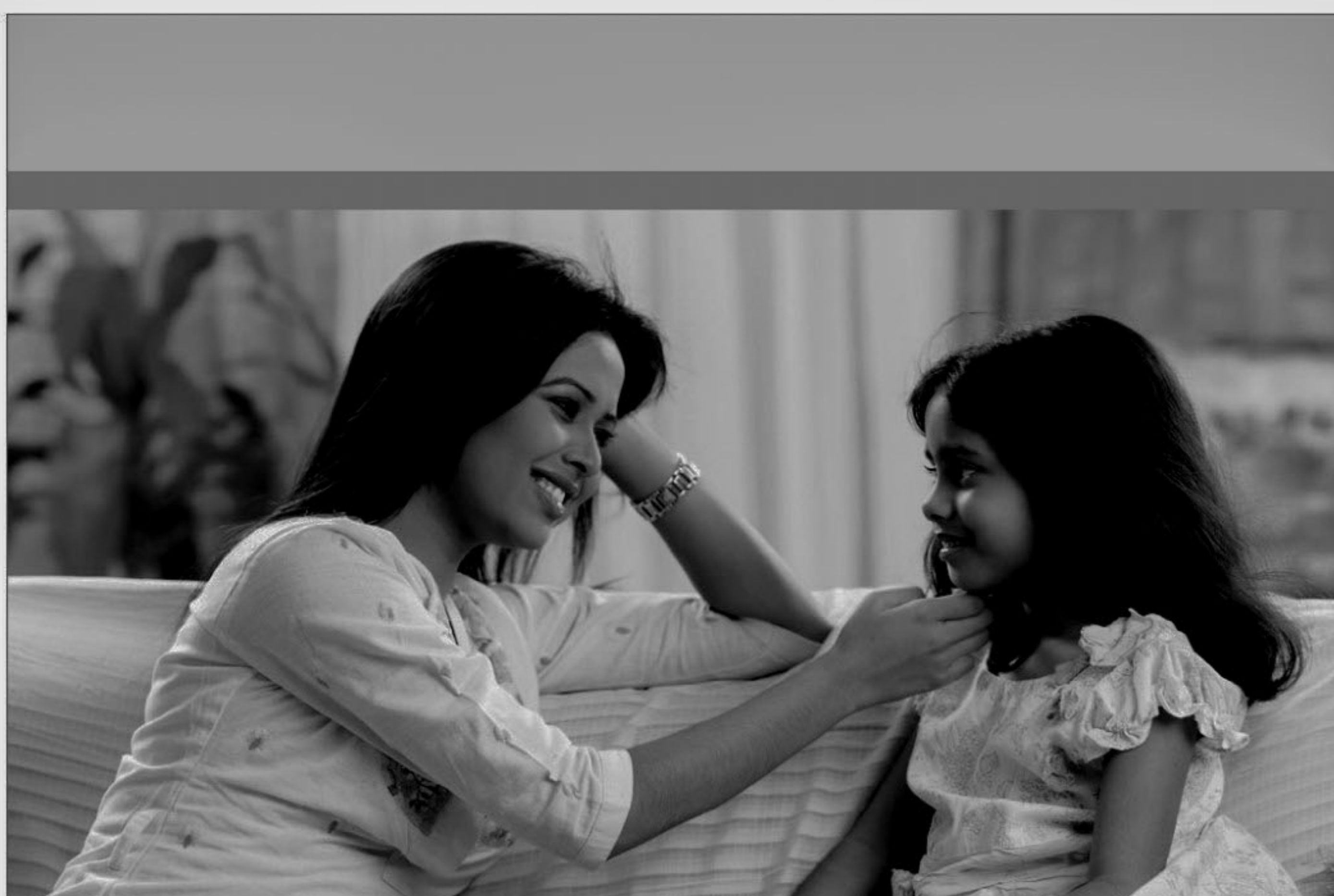
Just over 70 percent of voters chose the "no" option and nearly 30 percent said "yes", according to final results released by authorities.

The referendum was initiated by the Swiss Animal Protection (PSA) group and would have obliged all 26 cantons to name a lawyer for animals during judicial proceedings.

Legal representation in cases involving mistreated animals has been compulsory since 1992 in the Zurich canton. But pet politics could be taken to a new level if voters extend the right to the other 25 mini-states.



PHOTO: AFP
A new-born giraffe is licked by its mother in the giraffe house of the Budapest Zoo and Botanic Garden in the Hungarian capital yesterday. The 14-year old mother from the Czech town of Liberec, Santana, has been living for the last 13 years in the park and the 8-year old father, Jonas, arrived from Denmark about 6 years ago. The three-day old 170cm tall baby's gender is not yet known. According to the zoo, the calf will be presented to the public from next week.



Marketed by: **magnum marketing ltd.** 69, Dilkusha C/A (2nd Floor) Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. Tel : 9563862, 9564447-9, Fax : 8802-9564453, E-mail : info@cargobd.com
 # Gulshan: Cell: 01911742382, Ph: 9863395. # Mirpur: Cell: 01712667186, Ph: 9004014 # Malibagh: Cell: 01911316155, Ph: 9351949. # Lalbagh: Cell: 01711157158. # Bogra: Cell: 01711013715 # Azimpur: Cell: 01712222030, 01815035740. # Khulna: Ph: 041-721760, Cell: 019124185846
 # Mugdipara: Cell: 01921171379. # Kazi Para: Cell: 01552580349 # Faridabad: Cell: 01912848121, Ph: 7443884 # Bangshal: Cell: 01818834973 # Ibrahimpur: Cell: 01914682700, 01915863337 # Jatrabari: Cell: 01715239922 # Mohammadpur: Cell: 01819861632, 01745667100, Ph: 9128185.
 # Middle badda: Cell: 01718257085. # Uttara: Cell: 01712262264 # Laxmibazar: Cell: 01711384546, Ph: 7125637 # Savar: Cell: 01715495960. # Kustia: 01916570813 # Mymensingh: Cell: 01816466502, 01736221999. # Sylhet: Cell: 01199316620, 01712639594
 # CTG-01: Cell: 01720597800, 01190715272. # Jamalpur: Cell: 01712007351, Ph: 098162755 # CTG-02: Cell: 01812077020 # Rangpur: Cell: 01718644224 # Narayanganj: Cell: 01715826269, 01674493485. # Rajshahi: Cell: 01712512433, 0721772534 # Nator: Cell: 01736453542
 # Bhulla: Cell: 01736281471, 01819186110 # Jessore: Cell: 01736281471, 01819186110.
For Corporate sales : Cell : 01727209612. e-mail : corporate-mml@cargobd.com. This additional facilities also available at any of our authorized dealers throughout the country

HITACHI Inspire the Next



Power full anti bacterial and deodorizing effect
 Exceptional air purifying performance