



An Israeli soldier walks past an elderly Palestinian man reading a newspaper featuring a front-page story on the Arab summit, in the old city of the West Bank's Hebron yesterday. Arab leaders are due to hammer out a united strategy against Israel's settlement policy in annexed east Jerusalem as they wrap up a two-day summit in Libya dominated by Western and regional concerns over the faltering peace process.

PHOTO: AFP

# Israel vows to 'liquidate' Gaza's Hamas rulers

## Netanyahu blames Palestinians for hindering peace efforts

AFP, Jerusalem

A senior minister yesterday warned that Israel would "liquidate" the Islamist Hamas-run government in Gaza following deadly weekend clashes that killed two Israeli soldiers.

"Sooner or later we will liquidate the military regime of the pro-Iranian Hamas which controls the Gaza Strip," Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz, from the governing rightwing Likud party, told public radio.

"I am not setting a timetable, but we will not tolerate this regime continuing to strengthen itself militarily and providing itself with an arsenal of rockets that threaten our territory," he added.

Earlier Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday blamed the Palestinians for hindering US-led peace efforts by "hardening their positions" and refusing to relaunch negotiations.

"We continue to see that the Palestinians are hardening their positions. They do not show any sign of moderation," Netanyahu said at the start of a

weekly cabinet meeting.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas on Saturday ruled out holding even indirect talks with Israel unless it freezes settlement construction in the West Bank including mostly Arab east Jerusalem, annexed by Israel in 1967.

"We cannot resume indirect negotiations as long as Israel maintains its settlement policy and the status quo," the Western-backed leader said at the opening of a two-day Arab summit in the Libyan city of Sirte.

"There won't be any (peace) agreement that does not guarantee an end to the occupation, starting with Jerusalem, because there is no sense in having a Palestinian state that does not have Jerusalem as its capital," he said.

Netanyahu said the annual meeting, which this year is aimed in large part at condemning Israeli policies in the Holy City, was unlikely to support US-led efforts to revive negotiations suspended over a year ago.

"I do not think that the discussions by the Arab League can support this process,

but we will show restraint and continue our contacts with the Americans in order to restart the talks," he said.

Earlier this month the Palestinians reluctantly agreed to US-mediated indirect talks with Israel but the planned negotiations collapsed two days later when Israel announced plans to build 1,600 new settler homes in east Jerusalem during a visit by US Vice President Joe Biden.

Israel has refused to halt construction in mostly Arab east Jerusalem, which it views as part of its "eternal, undivided" capital. No other government recognises its claim to the eastern part of the city.

The Palestinians have said Israel's construction of settlements is the main obstacle to reaching a peace deal because it is carving off parts of their promised state, including east Jerusalem, which they view as their capital.

Netanyahu imposed a 10-month halt on new construction in the West Bank in November, but the move was rejected by the Palestinians because it did not include east Jerusalem, public buildings, and projects already under way.

# Arabs thrash out strategy against Israeli settlement

AFP, Sirte

Arab leaders met behind closed doors yesterday to thrash out a united strategy against Israel's settlement policy as the Jewish state accused them of lacking moderation and blocking peace efforts.

Delegates said they discussed the stalled Middle East peace process and how to confront Israeli policies in annexed east Jerusalem amid warnings that failure to kick-start Israeli-Palestinian peace talks could lead to new wars.

"There are new channels which the leaders will take," if Israel does not halt its settlement policy, Kuwaiti foreign ministry under-secretary Khaled Jarrallah told reporters on the sidelines of the summit in the Libyan coastal city of Sirte.

"If there is an Arab unified position, Israel will have to submit to it," he added without elaborating.

Another delegate said Arab leaders, who were due to wrap up their two-day summit at a closing session Sunday afternoon, could turn

to the United Nations for help if US efforts to revive the peace process collapse.

The meeting was given added urgency after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has vowed no let-up in plans to build new homes for settlers in annexed east Jerusalem, Sunday blamed the Palestinians for blocking peace efforts.

"We continue to see that the Palestinians are hardening their positions. They do not show any sign of moderation," Netanyahu said at the start of a weekly cabinet meeting in Jerusalem.

Netanyahu also said he did not expect the Arab summit to support US-led efforts to revive negotiations suspended over a year ago.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas ruled out on Saturday any peace talks with the Jewish state until it halts settlements, despite agreeing earlier this month to US calls to enter into indirect "proximity" negotiations with Israel.

"We cannot resume indirect negotiations as long as Israel maintains its settlement policy and the status quo," Abbas told the summit's opening session.

# Probe team satisfied with Modi questioning

## Gujarat riot probe may submit report to court by April 30

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The head of Indian Supreme Court-appointed special investigation team (SIT), which questioned Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi for more than nine hours over his alleged role in a riots case eight years ago, said yesterday he was satisfied with the probe and the outcome of the questioning.

"We are satisfied with the investigations in the case and with the outcome of questioning," RK Raghavan, who was heading the SIT, said.

He told NDTV that "based on evaluation of the statement given by the Gujarat chief minister, we will decide whether to call him or not again."

Replying to a question, he said questioning of Modi took long "as the entire gamut of investigation had to be covered. We hope to complete our report by April 30 before the Supreme Court deadline."

For the first time since the riots in Gujarat eight years ago, Modi had on Saturday subjected himself to marathon questioning by the SIT in two sessions lasting for almost 10 hours.

Modi, who has been named as one of the 63 accused in the petition filed by Zakiya Jafri, widow of Congress MP Ehsan Jafri who was killed by rioters in Gulbarg Housing Society in Ahmedabad city, was questioned by a team of officers headed by AK Malhotra, a former senior official of Central Bureau of Investigation.

Gujarat state Chief Minister Narendra Modi and Gujarat High Court Chief Justice Justice SJ Mukhopadhyaya attend a convocation ceremony at Gujarat National Law University in Gandhinagar, some 30km from Ahmedabad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva (L) shakes hands with Red-Shirt demonstration leader Veera Musikapong during meeting in Bangkok yesterday. Thailand's embattled PM began landmark talks with anti-government protesters, aimed at ending two weeks of street demonstrations.

# 152 trapped in flooded China coal mine

AFP, Beijing

At least 152 workers were trapped when a vast coalmine being built in northern China flooded yesterday, in the latest accident to hit the country's notoriously dangerous mining industry.

A total of 261 people were working in the Wangjialing mine in Shanxi province when underground water gushed in, and just over 100 managed to escape, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

China's coalmines are among the most dangerous in the world, with safety standards often ignored in the quest for profits and the drive to meet surging demand for coal -- the source of about 70 percent of China's energy.

An official at the coalmine safety administration in Linfen city, where the mine is located, confirmed the accident and that men were trapped but declined to provide any further details.

The Wangjialing mine belongs to the state-owned Huajin Coking Coal company, and covers an area of 180 square kilometres (70 square miles), the Xinhua report said.

# Pak troops kill 10 Taliban near Afghan border

## US missile strike kills 4 people

AP, AFP, Parachinar/ Peshawar

A government official says Pakistani troops have repulsed a Taliban attack on an army base close to the Afghan border, killing 10 attackers.

Samiullah Khan says a group of militants attacked the base with rockets and automatic weapons Sunday in the Orakzai region.

More than 100 suspected militants and five soldiers have been killed in fighting in Orakzai in the last week.

The troops have been fighting militants in the region who are believed to have fled from an earlier army offensive in their main stronghold

of South Waziristan.

Officials have said the militants killed so far include Uzbek and Arab nationals.

Meanwhile, a US drone fired two missiles into compounds in Pakistan's northwestern border area near Afghanistan killing four people late Saturday, security officials said, as military activity intensified in the area.

US drone attacks target Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked commanders in the nuclear-armed country's tribal belt, where Taliban and foreign militants have carved out havens in mountainous areas outside direct government control.

# N-plant stays in deal still

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Science and ICT Yafes Osman.

MM Neazuddin, the then joint secretary to the science and ICT ministry, and Mikhail N Lysenko, director of State Atomic Energy Corporation "Rosatom" of Russia, signed the protocol accord on behalf of their respective governments.

The delegation earlier visited several nuclear sites in Russia following a series of talks between the two sides in Dhaka in April and May last year.

According to the protocol deal, a joint working group comprised of representatives from Bangladesh and Russia was supposed to be formed.

"A team of experts from Russia was supposed to visit the proposed site in Kushtia for

installing two nuclear power plants after signing of the protocol deal. Besides, 300 Bangladeshi scientists were to visit and stay in Russia for a few months to develop expertise in the operation of nuclear power plants," said a member of Bangladesh delegation that visited Russia.

He said a feasibility study on the proposed site is yet to be conducted.

Yafes Osman told The Daily Star last week, "We made some progress in talks with Russia last year but could not keep the momentum. However, things are now moving in the right direction and we hope to sign a contract in this regard soon."

The Awami League government that came to power with a promise to improve the coun-

try's power situation started talks with different countries including Russia to strike a deal for installing nuclear power units in Bangladesh.

In April last year, Bangladesh had fruitful discussions with Russia that expressed keen interest in assisting Dhaka in installation of two nuclear power plants.

NN Spasskiy, Deputy Director of Rosatom, visited Bangladesh in May and signed a memorandum of understanding with Dhaka to exchange nuclear technology and set up nuclear power plants in Bangladesh.

According to the MoU, both the sides acknowledged that peaceful use of nuclear energy, and guarantee of safety measures are important factors in ensuring social and economic

development of both the countries.

Moscow will assist in the development of nuclear energy infrastructure in Bangladesh, supply nuclear materials and provide services in the field of nuclear fuel cycle in accordance with national legislations of the two countries and international treaties to which both are parties, it says.

Bangladesh has long been nursing a nuclear power plant site at Rooppur. Feasibility studies found the project technically and economically viable. International Atomic Energy Agency representatives, who visited the site in November 2008, also gave Bangladesh the go-ahead with the project.

The IAEA, which gave

Bangladesh technical support, suggested completing certain regulatory and safety tasks along with infrastructure development at Rooppur.

In line with the 19-point suggestion of the IAEA, the government prepared a draft updating the nuclear law. Once the draft is finalised, it will be sent to Geneva for comments before it is approved, said the officials.

Yafes Osman said the draft is being finalised.

In 1980, Bangladesh National Economic Council approved the proposal for installing the Rooppur nuclear power plant. The project was first taken in 1961.

A total of 431 nuclear power plants across the world now produce about 16 percent of the global electricity.

# 'Killer' Rubel, 2 others held

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Nargis, 45, as they refused to give their school age daughter Iti's hand in marriage to him. The murders took place in the victims' Kalachanpur residence in the capital's Gulshan area.

In the Minto Road office of the Detective Branch in the capital yesterday, Rubel confessed to reporters as well that he fired two fatal shots -- one at Sadequr and another at Romana -- as they tried to drive him away from their flat saying their daughter would no longer maintain any relationship with him.

A team of DB police led by Assistant Commissioner AFM Al Kibria arrested Rubel, Mithun, and Rubel's sister's husband Bappi.

he had a romantic relationship with Iti for about two and a half years, but the relationship had been fraying over the last three months as he had demanded return of Tk 1 lakh that he claimed he had lent Iti's family around six months ago.

He claimed Iti's family took the money through her when her elder brother Shihab went to Malaysia.

He said the night before the killings, he went to his victims' flat and disconnected its internet connection, as he had been suspecting that Iti had been forming a romantic relationship with his friend Mithun, and was chatting at that time with Mithun on the net.

Following the incident, Iti's father Sadequr rebuked Rubel over the cellphone, and told

him not to keep any relationship with his daughter anymore, Rubel said adding that being enraged by Sadequr's admonition he managed a gun from a local criminal, and went to Iti's house again around 8:30am the following day. The identity of the gun lender was however not disclosed either by Rubel or police.

When Rubel was at his victims' door Wednesday morning, Sadequr told him that his daughter would not carry on any relationship with him anymore, Rubel said.

"I asked him to produce Iti before me, so I could hear from her whether she wanted to sever the relationship with me," Rubel said.

But, Sadequr tried to drive Rubel away from their flat, making Rubel angry. "I pulled

out the gun I was carrying in a shopping bag, and pulled the trigger," Rubel confessed.

"Mithun did not know that I had a gun, I took him with me because I was suspecting that he was developing a romantic relationship with Iti. I was trying to be sure of my suspicion," Rubel added.

Mithun told reporters, "Rubel asked me to go to Iti's house with him, as he was suspecting that I and she were having a romantic relationship."

But all of a sudden Rubel opened fire at the couple and fled the scene, Mithun added.

He said he followed Rubel while the local residents were chasing them.

He also said, "After we managed to escape, I accompanied Rubel to the hideout in Jhalakathi, because he con-

vined me that I had become an accomplice to the murders."

Both Rubel and Mithun said they first went to Narayanganj where they met with Rubel's parents, and then they went to the hideout in Jhalakathi via Barisal.

Denying that his family had borrowed any money from Rubel, Iti's brother Shihab said, "My father's situation was not such that he would need to borrow the amount from anybody." He also denied that his sister had any relationship with Rubel.

Police so far arrested four persons in connection with the murders. The fourth arrestee Delwar Hossain Dipu, also a friend of Rubel, was arrested on Friday from Tongi near the capital, and was put on a five-day remand yesterday.

# Judge

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Lack of coordination, internal feuds, lack of seriousness of Awami League high command, role of home minister and state minister for law in the election campaign and wrong nominations were the key reasons for the defeat, the meeting pointed out.

The prime minister herself expressed dissatisfaction with the party's senior colleagues after a party's parliamentary board meeting at Ganabhaban, sources added.

The senior leaders of the party told the prime minister that wrong people were nominated for SCBA election and veteran pro-Awami League lawyers were also ignored in the election process.

Munsurul Hoque, however, said they had to concede defeat because of lack of coordination in the election campaign.

Former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru MP admitted that internal feuds and misunderstandings in the rank and file are responsible for the defeat in the Bar Association election.

While talking to The Daily Star newly elected president Mahubb said, "There have been controversies over some court issues in recent years including the recruitment process of judges."

"No government wants an independent judiciary system in the country," Mahubb said.

He said they would keep an eye on the recruitment of judges and the chief justice for the higher courts. "Competent candidates must be recruited no matter which party they belong to."

Earlier on Saturday BNP leader Moudud Ahmed at a discussion said the election result of the Bar Association proved that people started giving their verdict against the misrule of the ruling party.

Awami League leader Obaidul Quader, however, said there was no link between people's resentment and Bar Association election.