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Palestinian ...

Fatah and the Zionist regime began making obstructionist moves.

The Zionist regime tightened its siege on Gaza, and Fatah, in collusion with Israel, and began trying to undermine the Hamas government.

The later negotiations between Hamas and Fatah leaders in Egypt and Saudi Arabia led to the Mecca agreement, in which the two movements agreed to form a government of national unity.

However, Fatah's unilateral decision to form a government headed by Salam Fayyad shattered the Mecca agreement and intensified the internecine conflict.

In addition, the Zionist regime took advantage of the bad blood between the two movements to assassinate a number of Hamas leaders in order to drive the group out of the political arena.

After the Annapolis conference and U.S. President George W. Bush's recent trip to Israel, the Zionist regime was given carte blanche to massacre the residents of the Gaza Strip, while the PA continued its useless negotiations with the occupiers of Palestine.

Now, after years of trial and error, Fatah officials have finally realized that they can not defend the rights of the Palestinian nation without the cooperation of the Islamic movements and the people's support and thus they are trying to make amends for the mistakes of the past.

Fatah, which has always tried to quell internal conflicts, welcomed Egypt's proposal for mediation in the Hamas-Fatah dispute.

The negotiations could be the last chance for the two movements to resolve their differences and pave the way for the formation of a national unity government.

Otherwise, the situation will be difficult for both of them, because the Zionist regime is opposed to the entire Palestinian nation, not just to Palestine's nationalist or Islamic movements.

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Bush ...

Bush became concerned about the warming relations between Iran and its southern neighbors, which was a result of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's "successful visits to the Persian Gulf states", and thus he headed to the region to continue the U.S. policy of "spreading lies, which we have witnessed over the past three decades," Jafari told Al-Jazeera television on Saturday.

He rejected the idea that the U.S. president was seeking to prepare the ground for a military strike against the Islamic Republic.

The reports of the UN nuclear watchdog and U.S. intelligence agencies, confirming the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities, have removed all pretexts for the West to attack Iran, he said.

Bush launched his Middle East tour to divert attention from the United States' failure in its efforts to gain the international community's support for its baseless accusations about Iran's civilian nuclear program, he opined.

Jafari said Iran does not regard Bush's "meaningless remarks" about Iran's role in the region as a threat to its security and reiterated that the U.S. president is seeking to sow discord between Iran and Muslim Arab countries.

However, the Iranian military will retaliate against U.S. military bases in the Persian Gulf if they are used for an attack on Iran, AP quoted the IRGC commander as saying.

"Of course, if the U.S. attacks Iran, Iran's first response will be defense with all its might and this might is far greater than (Iran's) strength at the time of the war

against Saddam Hussein's regime (the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war)."

However, he assured Persian Gulf littoral countries, some of which host U.S. military bases, that only the U.S. forces would come under counterattack and that Iran "would never endanger regional countries."

"We realize that there is concern among Muslim countries that host U.S. military bases," Jafari said.

"However, if the U.S. launches a war against us, and if it uses these bases to attack Iran with missiles, then, through the strength and precision of our own missiles, we are capable of targeting only the U.S. military forces that attack us," he told Al-Jazeera.

The U.S. military has several bases in Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Yemen.

Despite the U.S. military's supremacy in air power and advanced electronic equipment, Iran can counter any attack just like the Hezbollah forces that achieved victory in the 33-day war against the Zionist regime, Jafari said.

Hezbollah soldiers did not have high-tech weapons but managed to defeat the region's most advanced and best-equipped military, he added.

He said the U.S. military bases in neighboring countries are not a "source of power" but a "source of vulnerability" for the U.S. troops.

"They believe they have encircled Iran, but they are definitely aware that they are within range of our long-range guns and medium-range missiles."

Jafari ruled out the possibility of a ground attack against Iran, saying, "I do not think U.S. troops or even its politicians are crazy enough to try that."

He said the world's secular powers feel threatened by Iran's growing "spiritual, political, and revolutionary power" which has created unity and Islamic vigilance in the country and enjoys the support of many Muslims around the world.

Asked how Iran would respond to an attack by the Zionist regime, Jafari said, "Our information about the regime occupying Qods tells us that they would not make such a great and historic mistake."

However, he said the U.S. and Israel are both pursuing the same objectives and if they are foolish enough to attack Iran, "we will be free to make a decision and we will do what we decide to do, and that is what Israel is worried about."

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Countdown ...

options and the Iran-Alborz drilling rig will start work in an official ceremony if the Presidential Office agrees with its time.

The Iran-Alborz semisub can operate at water depths up to 1,030 meters and drill down to 6,000 meters under the seabed.

The rig weighs 14,000 tons without its attachments and 120 experts will work on it. It will facilitate exploration in deep waters in southern part of the Caspian Sea.

According to initial estimates, the southern region of the Caspian Sea holds at least 32 billion barrels of oil reserves.

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Gandhi ...

Arun Gandhi became the victim of hate propaganda and was left with no choice but to submit his resignation on Friday to the board of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence based at the University of Rochester.

Arun Gandhi had taken a peace mission to Palestine and had met Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat just 10 days before his death. He had met Israeli leaders as well, and later sat in silent protest against the construction of what he described as the "apartheid wall" by Israel to

block the Palestinians in segregated quarters.

Mr. Gandhi said he had come in the line of fire since then with a particularly virulent arm of the Jewish lobby in the U.S. launching a concerted campaign against him. "I forget their name, but I call them Zionist Nazis," he said.

Gandhi had posted a message on an online forum where he said that while the Holocaust was the result of a warped mind and the world felt sorry for the episode, "when an individual or a nation refuses to forgive and move on, the regret turns into anger". He said that "any nation that remains anchored to the past is unable to move ahead, and especially a nation that believes its survival can only be ensured by weapons and bombs".

Gandhi said that in Tel Aviv he had met members of Parliament and peace activists who all said that the wall and the military buildup was necessary for protection. "In other words, I asked, 'You believe that you can create a snake pit, with many deadly snakes in it, and expect to live in the pit secure and alive?' 'What do you mean,' they countered. 'Well, with your superior weapons and armaments, and your attitude towards your neighbors, would it not be right to say that you are creating a snake pit. How can you live peacefully in such an atmosphere? Would it not be better to befriend those who hate you?'"

These remarks unleashed a massive hate campaign against Gandhi, resulting in his exit from his own institute. Gandhi's son said he could only wish that the Jewish lobby had looked at his father's comments dispassionately and acted on his advice. "That would make them stronger, but instead they have proved him correct," Tushar Gandhi stated.

Tushar Gandhi said he felt "very sad that the country that teaches freedom to the world had allowed my father to be hounded and persecuted in this manner". He said that while there were many Americans who were supportive of my father, "official America had maintained a stony silence, and it is their people who come here and try to teach us lessons on human rights".

Arun Gandhi co-founded the institute with his wife, Sunanda, who passed away last year, at Christian Brothers University in Memphis in 1991 and relocated it to the University of Rochester campus in June, a few months ago.

Gandhi later on Friday said, "My intention was to generate a healthy discussion on the proliferation of violence."

However, he stood by his criticism of "the use of violence by recent Israeli governments" and said that "it is also important not to forget the past, lest we fail to learn from it."

(Source: Asian Age/AP)

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More ...

An AFP correspondent there counted five charred bodies in houses, three others that had been hacked to death, and said one policeman had been accidentally shot dead by a colleague.

"It started when a group of about 100 youths divided into two groups," the police commander said. "One group blocked the road and started stoning motorists and another group attacked Kabati slums."

In Nakuru Sunday, many residents complained that the police were not doing enough to help them and said they were standing by as machete-wielding youths prepared for more battles.

"The police came here and ordered us to surrender our arms but are not doing anything to protect us. At the moment we are still insecure," said 22-year-old

Cosmas Makori, whose house was burnt down in a Nakuru slum on Friday.

"The police shot my son as he was trying to rescue our belongings from our burning house. They have followed us into our camp and are harassing us saying that we are planning revenge attacks on the Kalenjins," said a 69-year-old Kikuyu, Lucy Wanjiru, staying in a displacement camp.

On Sunday, trucks piled with luggage were seen transporting thousands of people who had fled their homes, and a new displacement camp was set up in the town's biggest sports stadium.

An overnight curfew still held, police said.

"The curfew is still in place until the security reverts back to normal," said Hassan Noor Hassan, Rift Valley provincial commissioner.

On Saturday, Annan said that unrest set off by Kibaki's disputed re-election last month had led to "gross and systematic" human rights abuses and called for an investigation.

"Impunity cannot be allowed to stand," he said, after visiting the violence-wracked Rift Valley with former Tanzanian president Benjamin Mkapa and Graca Machel, wife of former South African president Nelson Mandela.

Annan, who has said the team will not stay in Kenya for "for months on end", on Thursday orchestrated a symbolic first meeting between Kibaki and Odinga, who shook hands, called for peace and hinted at a willingness to talk.

But the gesture, hailed internationally, was later undermined by further squabbling, with both sides maintaining their hardline positions.

The crisis has damaged the economy and shattered the east African nation's image as a beacon of stability in the region.

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Indonesia's ...

of the nation who has contributed so much service and dedication to the nation and the state."

The flag at the presidential palace was lowered to half mast, and Cabinet Secretary Sudi Silalahi announced a seven-day mourning period.

A presidential spokesman said Yudhoyono would lead Monday's funeral at the family grave near Solo, Central Java, where Suharto will be buried next to his wife of 48 years, Siti Suhartinah, who died in 1996.

Suharto was a ruthless dictator whose success presiding over huge economic progress was overshadowed by his legacy of bloodshed, human rights abuses and corruption on a colossal scale.

His tenure was marked by repression, from the killings of at least half a million communists and their sympathisers after the abortive coup that saw him seize power in 1966, to invading East Timor and quelling separatist movements in Aceh and Papua.

At the same time, Suharto steered the sprawling archipelago nation through an economic boom, making it notably self-sufficient in rice. For many people here, he became known as the father of development.

However, billions of dollars ended up in the hands of friends and relatives as cronyism and corruption ran riot, and he eventually stepped down in 1998, rocked by deadly riots and mass pro-democracy protests triggered by the Asian economic crisis.

International reaction to his death recognised his mixed legacy.

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd hailed Suharto's role in modernising Indonesia and establishing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), calling him "an influential figure in Australia's region and beyond."

But Rudd acknowledged that Suharto "was also a controversial figure in respect of human rights and

East Timor."

The US ambassador to Jakarta praised Suharto's economic achievements.

"President Suharto led Indonesia for over 30 years, a period during which Indonesia achieved remarkable economic and social development," ambassador Cameron Hume said.

"Though there may be some controversy over his legacy, President Suharto was a historic figure who left a lasting imprint on Indonesia and the region of Southeast Asia."

The United States was a steadfast ally of Suharto for much of his rule, seeing him as an effective bulwark against communism.

Malaysia's former premier Mahathir Mohamad described Suharto as a "great leader and an international statesman".

Mahathir, a contemporary of Suharto's during their long terms in power, told the Malaysian state Bernama news agency that accounts the former Indonesian leader presided over hundreds of thousands of violent deaths of communists were "absolute nonsense".

"I know this for a fact. I knew what happened. Indonesia was in a state of anarchy then and he has no authority. At the time of the killings, he was not even the president. He did not order the killing," Mahathir said.

"We looked up to him as a great leader and as an international statesman. For me, it's quite personal. I know him and I have worked with him for a very long time," he said.

"Even though Indonesia was not an ideal democracy during Suharto's time, the fact remained that he brought stability to Indonesia," he added.

Political opponents however, many of whom were jailed under his rule, saw Suharto's demise as a missed opportunity to put him on trial.

"His death is a tragedy for all the victims of his crimes, they will never get justice," said Budiman Sudjatmiko, who was jailed as a student activist.

"Count in his corruption then he is a perfect criminal — he can be put up there with Pol Pot and Hitler."

After leaving office he dropped out of public view while avoiding criminal trial for massive corruption allegations by citing poor health. Doctors said two strokes left him with some permanent brain damage.

Efforts to bring him to justice for alleged human rights atrocities in East Timor, which he invaded in 1975, as well as Aceh and Papua, were stymied by a lack of evidence.

Briton withdraws bid to be UN envoy to Afghanistan

LONDON (Reuters) — Paddy Ashdown, the British politician and former soldier, withdrew Sunday from the contest to be the United Nations' envoy to Afghanistan after Kabul said it favored a British NATO commander for the post.

Violence in Afghanistan over the past two years has been the bloodiest since U.S.-led forces ousted the Taliban. There have been calls for a high-level envoy to coordinate with the Afghan government and groups like NATO and the EU.

However, diplomats say the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, is wary that a powerful "super-envoy," particularly one from Britain, a former colonial power, might make his government appear weaker than it already is.

"This job can only be done successfully on the basis of a consensus within the international community and the clear support of the government of Afghanistan," Ashdown said Sunday.

"It is clear to me that, in Afghanistan at least, the support necessary to do the job effectively does not exist."

Obama routs Clinton in South Carolina

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Barack Obama routed Hillary Rodham Clinton in the racially charged South Carolina primary Saturday night, regaining campaign momentum in the prelude to a Feb. 5 coast-to-coast competition for more than 1,600 Democratic National Convention delegates.

"The choice in this election is not about regions or religions or genders," Obama said at a boisterous victory rally. "It's not about rich versus poor, young versus old and it's not about black versus white. It's about the past versus the future."

The audience chanted "Race doesn't matter" as it awaited Obama to make his appearance after rolling up 55 percent of the vote in a three-way race.

But it did, in a primary that shattered turnout records.

About half the voters were black, according to polling place interviews, and four out of five of them supported Obama. Black women turned out in particularly large numbers. Obama, the first-term Illinois senator, got about a quarter of the white vote while Clinton and former Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina split the rest.

Clinton flew to Nashville as the polls closed, and looked ahead. "Now the eyes of the country turn to Tennessee and the other states voting on Feb. 5," she said, adding "millions and millions of Americans are going to have their voices heard."

Edwards finished a distant third, a sharp setback in the state where he was born and scored a primary victory in his first presidential campaign four years ago. Even so, he vowed to remain in the race, his goal, he said, to "give voice to all those whose voices aren't being heard."

The victory was Obama's first since he won the kickoff Iowa caucuses on Jan. 3. Clinton, a New York senator and former first lady, scored an upset in the New Hampshire primary a few days later. They split the Nevada caucuses, she winning the turnout margin. In an historic race, she hopes to become the first woman to occupy the White House, and Obama is the strongest black contender in history.

The South Carolina primary marked the end of the first phase of the campaign for the Democratic nomination, a series of single-state contests that winnowed the field, conferred co-front-runner status on Clinton and Obama but had relatively few delegates at stake.

That all changes in 10 days' time, when New York, Illinois and California are among the 15 states holding primaries in a virtual nationwide primary. Another seven states and American Samoa will hold Democratic caucuses on the same day.

Obama took a thinly veiled swipe at Clinton in his remarks.

"We are up against conventional thinking that says your ability to lead as president comes from longevity in Washington or proximity to the White House. But we know that real leadership is about candor, and judgment, and the ability to rally Americans from all walks of life around a common purpose — a higher purpose," Obama said.

Looking ahead to Feb. 5, he added that "nearly half the nation will have the chance to join us in saying that we are tired of business-as-usual in Washington, we are hungry for change, and we are ready to believe again."