

Palestinians fail to agree on a truce

By Lara Sukhtian
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAIRO, Egypt — Palestinians failed to agree on a truce offer to Israel on Sunday after three days of talks, setting back the Palestinian prime minister's hopes for a halt in violence to jump start the stalled U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which have carried out most suicide attacks against Israel, resisted intense pressure from Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia and the top Egyptian mediator and refused a full cease-fire.

The two groups would agree only to a limited truce, ending attacks on civilians in Israel but not on Jewish settlers or Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israel said it would accept only a comprehensive halt. "There's no half-way cease-fire," said Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. He said Israel is willing to stop shooting if there was a total Palestinian truce.

An official from Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian delegates said a further meeting was planned but no date for it was set.

Egypt had called together the Palestinian factions — more than a dozen, ranging from Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement to the Islamic groups and smaller leftist movements — in hopes of producing a halt to all attacks. Egyptian Intelligence Chief Gen. Omar Suleiman wanted to present the truce to Washington next week in a broad proposal that could win U.S. backing and put pressure on Israel.

But Qureia, who joined the talks Sunday in the hopes of bridging the gap, left the Egyptian capital, and several delegates acknowledged the talks produced no concrete results.

"There are disagreements about the nature of a cease-fire," Maher Taher, a senior delegate for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, told The Associated Press. "The factions have different positions on the issue."

Even when Qureia and Suleiman lay on the pressure in a three-hour meeting Sunday, Hamas and Islamic Jihad refused to buckle in their rejection of the broad halt. The two groups have carried out most of the

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN TURMOIL West Bank checkpoints at issue

The Israeli military says its travel bans in the West Bank, enforced with dozens of roadblocks, are an effective tool in the war on terror. Critics say the lockdown has devastated the Palestinian economy, whipped up resentment and failed to deter militants.



Checkpoints

Employment
Closures are keeping some 130,000 Palestinians from jobs in Israel.
Palestinian civilians
Most need permits to travel between towns, and experience long delays at checkpoints.

Delivering goods
Trucks drive to checkpoints on the outskirts of towns and unload their cargo onto local vehicles.

Soldiers' outlook
Many soldiers are harassed and afraid of being targeted. Orders change quickly, confusing young recruits about whom to stop and whom to let pass.

Circumventing checkpoints
Residents are forced to travel circuitously by foot or change taxis.

Security
Israel says it has arrested hundreds of wanted men at roving checkpoints.

SOURCES: World Bank, Associated Press

suicide bombings against Israel that have killed hundreds during more than three years of violence.

"Hamas is not ready to make a comprehensive cease-fire. This is final," senior Hamas official Mohammed Nazzal said after talks ended Sunday.

The militant factions also rejected giving Qureia authority to speak for them in any negotiations with Israel. "We are not ready to give them authorization to sign a new agreement," Nazzal said.

The two groups said a more limited halt to attacks on civilians in Israel also depended on Israel's stopping its military actions.

"Let Abu Ala (Qureia) talk with Sharon and ask him if he is ready to make a cease-fire. If Sharon is ready to make a cease-fire, we will study it," Nazzal said.

"It was difficult for us and other factions to accept a new truce without guarantees from the Israeli side, because the previous truce failed in the same way, because of no Israeli guarantees," said Nafez Azzam, an

Islamic Jihad spokesman in Gaza.

The Cairo session "ended with the hope of holding another meeting but it hasn't been agreed on a date," Azzam said.

In June, the Palestinians declared a cease-fire on attacks within Israel that also was negotiated in Egypt. Israel was not formally part of that truce, and it collapsed after seven weeks, with Israel attacking Palestinian areas and Palestinians resuming suicide bombings.

In the end, delegates said the Cairo meetings would only produce a final statement, but no deal.

"The statement will have no mention of refraining from attacks on civilians, cease-fire or authorizing" Qureia to negotiate with the Israelis, said Samir Ghosheh, head of the Palestinian Struggle Front.

In exchange for the full truce, Egypt and Fatah were demanding that Israel stop building settlements, pull its troops out of Palestinian areas re-occupied during the uprising and halt construction of its so-called security barrier along the border with Palestinian areas, which juts into Palestinian land.

Essentially, their plan would have met much of the criteria of the "road map."

Sharon said Israel is still interested in a cease-fire.

"The solution is that if there is total quiet and there won't be terror, Israel will make every effort to abstain from its actions against terrorists," he said. He made the comments before the Cairo talks ended, in reaction to reports the Palestinians were considering offering the limited cease-fire only.

No deadly suicide bombings have occurred in Israel for more than two months.

The Palestinian suicide attacks have targeted buses, cafes, restaurants, shopping malls and outdoor markets inside Israeli territory, drawing condemnation from the international community as well as from the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's army has retaliated harshly — using tanks, warplanes and helicopters on Palestinians — and reoccupied most of the Palestinian cities in the West Bank and Gaza. Since the uprising started in September 2000, 2,562 people have been killed on the Palestinian side and 898 on the Israeli side.

BCS Blunder

Continued from page 4B

It's the third time in four seasons that a team in the top two in the polls didn't make it to the BCS title game.

The BCS avoided disaster those years because No. 1 Oklahoma beat Florida State in the 2001 Orange Bowl and No. 1 Miami beat Nebraska in the 2002 Rose Bowl.

The No. 2 teams in the polls won their bowl games those years and could have won the AP title if the top-ranked teams lost. The only way to avoid a disputed finish this year is if Michigan (10-2) beats USC.

"I know there's controversy but that comes with the system," Carroll said. "Until a playoff that's what will happen."

There was talk two years ago when Nebraska made the title game without winning the Big 12 to make a winning a conference a requirement to make the championship game.

There are sure to be more calls for that change because of Oklahoma.

"With the events this year, we'd be foolish if we didn't look at it again in the spring," said Big East commissioner Mike Tranghese, who runs the BCS.

The other BCS matchups have No. 10 Miami (10-2) playing No. 9 Florida State (10-2) in a rematch from the regular season in the Orange Bowl and No. 8 Kansas State (11-3) facing No. 7 Ohio State (10-2) in the Fiesta Bowl.

Champions of the ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-10 and SEC qualify for a BCS

game. Oklahoma and Ohio State were picked as at-large teams.

Despite the controversy, there are still two intriguing matchups.

First up is USC-Michigan on Jan. 1 in the seventh Rose Bowl meeting between the schools.

The game features two high-powered offenses. USC is sixth in the nation in scoring at 42.2 points per game and Michigan is ninth at 37.2.

Quarterback Matt Leinart leads a balanced offense for the Trojans, which features game-breaking receivers in Mike Williams, Keary Colbert and Steve Smith and a dangerous running duo of Reggie Bush and LenDale White.

Michigan is led by quarterback John Navarre, who has delivered his biggest games against the best opponents this year.

The Wolverines also have talented receivers in Braylon Edwards, Jason Avant and Steve Breaston, and a top running back in Chris Perry.

Three days later, LSU will play Oklahoma in what will almost be a home game for the Tigers at the Superdome in New Orleans — a short drive from LSU's campus.

This game features the country's two best defenses. Oklahoma leads the nation, allowing only 255.6 yards per game, slightly better than LSU's 259.5.

The Tigers have the top scoring defense at 10.8 points per game compared to Oklahoma's third-best 14.9.

Both teams also have big-play quarterbacks. Jason White has 40 touchdown passes and is a Heisman Trophy candidate for Oklahoma, while LSU's Matt Mauck has 28 touchdown passes.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Former Nicaraguan president sentenced for money laundering

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (AP) — A federal judge sentenced former Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman to 20 years in prison on money laundering and other charges, in a ruling read publicly on Sunday.

Aleman was accused of illegally diverting some \$50 million in government funds to his party's election campaigns during his tenure in office, which ended in January 2002.

Handing down the sentence Sunday, Judge Juana Mendez cited crimes of fraud, misappropriation of public funds, embezzlement, criminal association and electoral violations endangering the state.

Mendez also stripped Aleman of his ability to serve in congress and imposed a fine of about \$10 million.

Mendez's decision during the trial to release Aleman from jail allow him to be held under house arrest provided international concern that the judicial process had been compromised.

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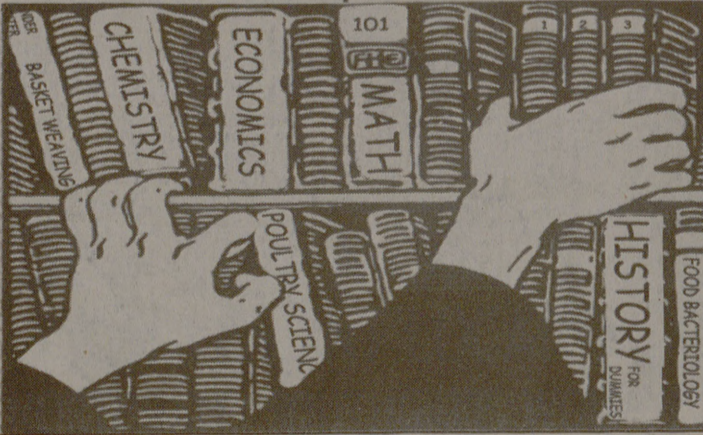
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