

Israel Will Release Jordanian Prisoners

AMMAN, Jordan, April 2—Jordan's Foreign Ministry said Friday that Israel will release several Jordanian prisoners detained in Israeli prisons next week, a step that would crown improving ties between both countries, AP reported.

Jordanian officials have said more than 20 prisoners are in line to be released by Israel. Officials at Israel's Foreign Ministry and embassy in Jordan could not confirm the claims, but Jordanian Foreign Ministry spokesman Rajab Al-Sukayri said his government had been notified by Israel of

imminent releases. Al-Sukayri said the prisoners expected to be released would not include four Jordanians whom Israel has accused of direct involvement in attacks that killed Israelis.

"But we hope they (the four) will be released in the near future," he said. He did not say how many Jordanians he expected to be freed.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Hani Al-Mulqi, who visited Israel early last month, has said 25 prisoners—including the four involved in deadly attacks—would be released.

Al-Sukayri said the

releases will set the ground for a visit to Jordan by Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

The prisoner issue was at the core of discussions between Al-Mulqi and Israeli officials during his visit to Israel, the first by a Jordanian official in more than four years following the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising.

Al-Mulqi has said Jordan's king, Abdullah II, is willing to make his first public visit to Israel in four years once confidence-building measures—particularly the release of Jordanian prisoners—take place. Abdullah last visited Israel on a secret trip in March 2004 to meet

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, according to Israeli media.

The foreign minister's visit to Israel follow Amman's return of its ambassador to Israel, another sign of the improving relations between both countries since a Feb. 8 summit in Egypt where both the Palestinian and Israeli leaders pledged to end violence.

In 1994, Jordan became the second Arab country, after Egypt, to sign a peace treaty with Israel. Relations soured after the Palestinian uprising erupted in 2000 and Jordan withdrew its ambassador.

WASHINGTON, April 2—The appointment of Paul Wolfowitz to head the World Bank has prompted new concerns about possible terrorist attacks on the institution, which has ordered a review of its security procedures, bank officials said on Friday, Reuters reported.

Wolfowitz, approved on Thursday as the bank's new president, was the main US architect of the invasion of Iraq as deputy US defense secretary and a leading hawk in the administration of President George W. Bush, which is committed to a global war on terrorism.

World Bank board directors raised security concerns in meetings with Wolfowitz last week.

"Directors raised with him their concerns of the possibility of an increased security risk he would bring to the bank," one senior board official, who did not want to be identified, told Reuters. "He said he'd look into it."

The board official said the unease was that bank

staff and operations, many in far-flung locations, could become possible targets because of Wolfowitz's role in the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

A confidential comment line set up by the World Bank Staff Association on an internal website to let employees express their feelings about the nomination received 1,300 responses, according to an internal email

obtained by Reuters.

The majority expressed concerns about the bank's reputation and effectiveness under Wolfowitz, including staff's ability to interact with clients in a less secure environment.

The concerns were discussed with management and board members, a senior bank official said.

"Management is currently assessing the entire bank's security, including costs," the official added.

WB May Tighten Security Under Wolfowitz

World Bank board directors raised security concerns in meetings with Wolfowitz last week.

"Directors raised with him their concerns of the possibility of an increased security risk he would bring to the bank," one senior board official, who did not want to be identified, told Reuters. "He said he'd look into it."

The board official said the unease was that bank

staff and operations, many in far-flung locations, could become possible targets because of Wolfowitz's role in the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

A confidential comment line set up by the World Bank Staff Association on an internal website to let employees express their feelings about the nomination received 1,300 responses, according to an internal email

obtained by Reuters.

The majority expressed concerns about the bank's reputation and effectiveness under Wolfowitz, including staff's ability to interact with clients in a less secure environment.

The concerns were discussed with management and board members, a senior bank official said.

"Management is currently assessing the entire bank's security, including costs," the official added.

UN Approves Anti-Nuclear Terrorism Treaty

UNITED NATIONS, April 2—A new global treaty to keep nuclear weapons out of terrorists' hands took a major step toward approval on Friday with its adoption by a UN treaty-writing committee, Reuters reported.

The document, the 13th international anti-terrorism convention and the first completed since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, next goes to the 191-nation General Assembly, which is expected to adopt it within weeks.

The pact would then be opened for signature on Sept. 14 in New York, clearing it for ratification by governments. It would take effect 30 days after ratification by 22 nations.

ensure they cannot find safe haven in any country, said Rohan Perera of Sri Lanka, who chaired the negotiations.

It also would create mechanisms for helping governments to deal with a nuclear threat or prevent one, and to exchange information and technical assistance.

It does not address, "in any way, the issue of the legality of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by states," according to the approved text.

The pact was first proposed by Russia in 1998 and took seven years to negotiate. Moscow acted following media reports of attempted black market sales of nuclear materials after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

"Nuclear terrorism is one of the most urgent threats of our time. Even one such attack could inflict mass casualties and change our world forever," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the treaty-drafting committee, congratulating it on its decision to adopt the text by consensus.

All 191 UN members have seats on the committee.

The treaty would oblige governments to either prosecute or extradite individuals who threaten people, property or the environment while possessing radioactive materials or nuclear devices, to

"Today we have concluded very serious work to strengthen the effectiveness of collective efforts to fight the terrorist threat whose cruel and ubiquitous nature calls for very decisive action of the international community," Russian Ambassador Andrei Denisov said.

Washington also welcomed the committee's adoption of the treaty and hoped it would give fresh momentum to a separate comprehensive anti-terrorism pact that has been stalled for years in the same committee over the definition of terrorism. US State Department attorney adviser Hal Collums said.

Abbas Has Security Overhaul Plan

RAMALLAH, Occupied Palestine, April 2—Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas fired a local West Bank security chief and was considering replacing key commanders in response to growing complaints about lawlessness, AP quoted senior officials as saying Saturday.

Abbas was to meet later Saturday with his prime minister, Ahmed Qureia, and his interior minister, Nasser Yousef, to discuss sweeping changes in the security forces.

Ismail Jaber, the West

Bank security commander, is among those expected to lose their jobs, one official said on condition of anonymity.

On Friday, Abbas fired the local security chief in Ramallah, Younis Al-Aas, said Palestinian officials, who declined comment on whether Jaber would be fired.

Earlier this week, gunmen with ties to Jaber rampaged through three Ramallah restaurants and attacked the Palestinian government compound—a defiant response to requests by Abbas that they either lay down their weapons or join the security forces. The gunmen were members of the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, a violent group with ties to the ruling

Fatah movement.

Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rdenah said the Palestinian leader is expected to announce "significant changes" in the Palestinian Authority in coming days, but did not say whether the changes would include security chiefs.

After the gunmen's rampage, Abbas initially decided not to confront them, acting on Jaber's advice that a crackdown would only lead to more violence, officials said.

However, Abbas' decision drew criticism from some of his advisers and security chiefs. Abbas has since reconsidered, the official said.

The incident reflects Abbas' biggest dilemma since being elected



Mahmoud Abbas

Palestinian Authority president in January. If he permits Palestinian militants to continue to act with impunity, he will increasingly be perceived as ineffective by ordinary Palestinians and risks alienating the international community,

which has been pushing for a crackdown and sweeping security reform. Many of the militants have also engaged in extortion, kidnappings and other crimes—in addition to attacks on Israel in the past four years.

WORLD News In Brief

Rio Massacre

RIO DE JANEIRO—Police incensed by investigations of brutality and corruption by "bad" cops may have carried out a massacre in two impoverished suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, killing 30 people, state officials said Friday.

Assassination Bid

MOSCOW—The prime minister of Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia was targeted by an assassination attempt late Friday but escaped unscathed, Russian news agencies reported, quoting Abkhazian police.

Democratic Reforms

YANGON—The pending handover of the leadership of Southeast Asia's top trade and diplomatic bloc to Myanmar has brought unprecedented pressure on the military-ruled regime to speed up promised democratic reforms in the country the United States has labeled an "outpost of tyranny."

Important Step

KABUL—Afghan President Hamid Karzai welcomed the formation of Afghanistan's first opposition party by his main opponent in last year's presidential vote as an important democratic step for the country.

Egypt's Emergency Laws Criticized

CAIRO, Egypt, April 2—As Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential elections approach, the country's decades-old emergency laws used to ban protests and make mass arrests are coming under increasing criticism even as the government makes greater use of them, AP reported.

Egyptian activists are targeting the laws and a raft of other restrictive regulations, arguing that September's presidential elections—the first open to opposition candidates—will be unfair if they are in place.

"How can you trust government-run elections if people are being arrested in the street?" asked Essam El-Erian, a senior member of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest Islamic movement.

The government shows no sign of backing down: It used the laws to quell rowdy pro-democracy protests Wednesday, round up hundreds of Brotherhood members last week, and put down an angry demonstration over hundreds of arrests connected to a deadly resort bombing in October.

President Hosni Mubarak, who succeeded Anwar Sadat following his 1981 assassination by Islamic militants, has defended the emergency laws, saying they are used only for combating terrorism and drug trafficking.

"Terrorism is a menace that we take very seriously, and we must take all precautions like all countries do," Mubarak told French newspaper Le Figaro last week. "In Egypt, only the Islamists demand the abolishment of this law. But I will never let chaos prevail."

Opposition activists and human rights groups argue the laws go far beyond tackling terrorism and drugs and are used to arrest political party members, stop street protests and close down newspapers critical of Mubarak's regime.

Among other things, Egyptian law requires government permission for any gathering of more than five people—including campaign rallies—and gives wide leeway for police to make arrests.

Criticism of the emergency laws has intensified since Mubarak called for the open presidential elections, and has even included members of the close circle of reformists surrounding the president's influential youngest son, Gamal.

"Using exceptional laws against armed or militant groups is one thing, but against political demonstrations? No. This is why it needs to be revised," said Hala Mustafa, a member of a policy reform committee headed by Mubarak's son within the ruling National Democratic Party.

Darfur Resolution Condemned in Khartoum

KHARTOUM, Sudan, April 2—Sudan on Friday slammed a UN resolution sending Darfur war crime suspects to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and said it would refuse to hand its citizens over to face justice abroad, Reuters reported.

In contrast, the two main Darfur rebel groups welcomed the resolution and said they would both comply by sending to the court any members of their groups accused of crimes.

The UN Security Council voted 11-0 with four abstentions late on Thursday to refer a sealed list of 51 people accused of crimes against humanity in Darfur to the ICC, after last-minute wrangling to allow exemptions for US citizens.

It was the first case sent by the council to the Hague-based ICC, set up to try cases of genocide

and other major human rights violations.

"We insist that the question of Sudanese being tried outside Sudan is totally and very much rejected and unacceptable to us," said the head of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), Ibrahim Ahmed Omar.

His party dominates the government and parliament.

Information Minister Abdel Basit Sabdarat said the UN resolution "contravened the fundamentals of justice and objectivity and violated the principle of national sovereignty."

Sabdarat said the exemption for US citizens from prosecution showed the United Nations was corrupt. The United States fiercely opposes the ICC fearing its citizens would be targeted for political reasons. Sudan has not ratified the ICC.



The United Nations Security Council votes 11-0 with 4 abstentions, at UN headquarters in New York to pass a resolution that proposes war-crimes suspects from the Darfur region of Sudan be tried in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, March 31. (AFP Photo)

The war crimes list includes senior Sudanese government and army officials, Arab militia leaders and some rebel leaders and foreign army commanders.

It has remained sealed in the office of the UN secretary-general until the

Security Council decided which court they would be referred to.

Sudan for the first time earlier this week said it had arrested 15 officials from the military and security forces for crimes including rape, killing civilians and burning vil-

lages.

But analysts said it was too little too late for the Security Council, which also strengthened an arms embargo on the African nation and imposed a travel ban and assets freeze on those who violate a shaky ceasefire in remote Darfur.

Mugabe Wins Majority

challenges after unsuccessfully disputing results in both 2000 and 2002 which it said were rigged.

With results from 105 of the 120 contested seats, Mugabe's ZANU-PF had 69—one short of the 70 it needs for a two-thirds majority.

The veteran leader, who has ruled Zimbabwe since independence from Britain in 1980, appoints 30 members in the 150-seat parliament.

By the time the results centre closed for the night shortly before midnight the MDC had 35 seats. Former Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, purged by Mugabe in a row over his succession, hung on to his seat as an independ-

ent. Securing the two-thirds majority it narrowly missed in the outgoing parliament would cement ZANU-PF's 25-year rule.

Analysts say the party could use its majority to push through constitutional changes to protect Mugabe from the kind of prosecutions that have plagued some other African leaders when they stepped down. Mugabe is due to retire in 2008.

Critics accuse Mugabe of ruining once-prosperous Zimbabwe by a chaotic seizure of white farms for landless blacks and economic mismanagement.

Zimbabwe, once a regional breadbasket, is now crippled by huge inflation, unemployment and food and fuel shortages.

Mugabe blames his Western critics for sabotaging the economy and had demanded a crushing ZANU-PF victory to see off the challenge from the MDC, which he pillories as a British puppet.