

# Australia Preparing for More Racial Violence

**SYDNEY, Australia, Dec. 14**—Mobile telephone text and e-mail messages calling for racial violence in four Australian states circulated on Wednesday as another overnight security operation began in Sydney to maintain peace in beachside suburbs, Reuters said.

More than 450 police took to the streets in Australia's largest city for a second night on Wednesday, erecting roadblocks to check drivers moving into areas of previous unrest, such as Cronulla Beach in the south.

Sydney's racial violence erupted at Cronulla last Sunday when some 3,000 people, some yelling racist chants, attacked people of Middle East appearance, saying they were defending their beach from Lebanese youth gangs. Police said white supremacists incited violence at Cronulla.

Drunk mobs of youths, some wrapped in Australian flags, said they were defending their beach after lifesavers were attacked. They believe the attackers were of Lebanese background.

Lebanese and Muslim youths retaliated with two nights of violence in several different beachside suburbs.

The burning to the



Police protect a man (front 2nd r) and woman of Middle Eastern descent while escorting them from the beach at Cronulla in Sydney, December 11. (AFP Photo)

ground of a church hall on Tuesday night, smashing of church windows and shots fired at a Catholic school prompted authorities on Wednesday to say they would focus on places of worship to ensure they were safe from violence.

"Special attention will

be paid to places of worship, our churches and schools," said Morris Iemma, premier of the state of New South Wales.

"Obviously we have to be on guard for this, and these hooligans and criminals will not destroy the fabric of our society," Iemma told a news conference.

The New South Wales state parliament will hold an emergency sitting on Thursday to pass legislation giving police extra powers to allow them to "lock down" suburbs and impose alcohol prohibition on areas.

## German Muslims, Authorities To Fight Terrorism

**BERLIN, Dec. 14**—German Muslim leaders, the police and other German authorities pledged on Tuesday to cooperate more closely in the fight against international terrorism, Reuters reported.

The statement, issued by the German police, said the president of the Germany's federal crime bureau (BKA), the head of the constitutional protection office, the chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, the Turkish-Islamic Union and leaders of local state authorities all backed the pledge.

"The two Islamic umbrella organizations reaffirmed their readiness to cooperate to protect all people living in Germany from the threat of international terrorism," the statement said.

The statement said the Muslim organizations and German security authorities would cooperate on organizing informational events and would strive to improve and intensify dialogue between Muslims and German authorities.

The statement also said the two Muslim umbrella organizations agreed to focus on "internal prevention" work.

"In line with their fundamental religious beliefs, the Imams, prayer leaders and local chairmen of both umbrella organizations will continue to take stands against violent acts like suicide bombings and the destruction of any human life," the statement said.

"Furthermore, all possibilities will be used to fight against extremist agitators and radical tendencies at Mosques or other Islamic

establishments," it added.

A Hamburg, Germany-based cell of Al-Qaeda was responsible for the planning and execution of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States. Since those attacks, Germany has cracked down on Muslim extremists living in the country and has had a number of high-profile trials of radical Islamists.

There are 3.5 million Muslims in Germany, most of them Turkish.

## Romas Across Europe Unite Against Discrimination

**STRASBOURG, France, Dec. 14**—Representatives from Roma communities throughout Europe gathered here to organize a united effort to fight for equal rights and to end discrimination against their ethnic group, AFP reported.

"We have long dreamed of a pan-European forum capable of uniting the 12 million Roma living in Europe. Today this dream has become a reality," said Rudko Kawczynski, interim president of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), which is holding its first plenary session at the Council of Europe's headquarters.

Created in December 2004 in partnership with the council, the forum has brought together Roma representatives from 42 European countries. The delegates are set to adopt the forum's statutes and to elect its leaders by Thursday.

What Romas want are "decent living conditions", jobs, an end to segregated schools and the right "to no longer have to be on the run," Kawczynski said.

"We must be recognized as citizens and not as strangers in our own countries," he

said. Terry Davis, the council's secretary general, said the forum faced "a difficult task which will require patience and perseverance."

He urged the Romas to work for their freedoms and "to take their destiny in their own hands."

Romas, who are also known as gypsies and bohemians, live mainly in eastern and central Europe. They are found especially in Romania, where they make up nearly 2.5 million of the country's population, and in Bulgaria, where there are an estimated 800,000 Romas.

The Roma communities are connected by their common culture and language, which is similar to the language spoken in northwest India.

Nearly one million Roma were killed by the German Nazi regime during World War II, while several hundred thousand of them were displaced by the ethnic cleansings during the 1990s Balkan wars.

Most Roma now live in settled communities, except those living in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

## Jumblatt Urges Syria Regime Change

**BEIRUT, Lebanon, Dec. 14**—Lebanese Druze leader and prominent anti-Syrian MP Walid Jumblatt has called for a regime change in Syria, accusing the Damascus leadership of responsibility in a series of political assassinations in Lebanon, AFP reported.

"This time this regime should change and should be tried," Jumblatt told CNN television late Tuesday, as Lebanon prepared to say a last farewell to slain anti-Syrian lawmaker and journalist Gibran Tuani.

"If he stays we won't have stability in the Middle East," he said, referring to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad.

"Anyone who opposes the Syrian regime is assassinated. They execute you then they cry for you, walk at your funeral," said Jumblatt, in his bluntest remarks to date implicating Syria in dozens of political assassinations in Lebanon.

Jumblatt accused Syria of being responsible for the assassinations of his father, Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt, in 1977, former Lebanese president Rene Moawad in 1989, as well as former prime minister Rafik Hariri in February.

He also blamed Syria for the murder of press magazine Tuani in a massive car bombing Monday and several others over the past years.

In other remarks to the Lebanese private television LBC, Jumblatt called on the pro-Syrian head of the Muslim Shiite Hezbollah militia, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, to protect him against any possible attempt on his life.

"I place myself under the protection of Seyyed Hassan (Nasrallah) from the regime of Bashar Al-Assad that kills everyone who says 'no' to the Mafia-like Syrian presence in Lebanon," Jumblatt told LBC.

"Seyyed Hassan must place himself in my shoes. I am threatened and he is threatened. But I am more threatened than him," he added.

The ruling anti-Syrian majority in parliament, in



Walid Jumblatt

which Jumblatt is a member, on Tuesday squarely pinned responsibility on Syria for the killing of Tuani, 48.

"By assassinating Gibran Tuani, the Syrian regime ... has renewed its war on Lebanon," the group said in a statement.

## Israel Will Expand West Bank Settlements

**BEIT-UL-MOQADDAS, Dec. 14**—Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz has given the green light to add nearly 300 new homes in the occupied West Bank, AFP quoted the Yediot Aharonot daily as saying on Wednesday.

Two hundred homes will be built in Maale Adumim, a giant settlement situated just outside east Beit-ul-Moqaddas, 49 in Noqdim settlement near Bethlehem, and the remainder in the northern West Bank settlement of Ariel, the report said.

Mofaz gave his seal of approval to the housing projects last week while he was running for the leadership of the right-wing Likud party, a campaign he has since abandoned to join the rival Kadima party of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

A defense ministry spokesman confirmed to AFP that Mofaz had authorized the construction of 200 homes in Maale Adumim "within the current geographical



Workers build new buildings at the West Bank Jewish settlement of Maale Adumim, August 25. (AFP File Photo)

borders of this settlement".

The spokeswoman added that Mofaz had given the green light "to the initial stage of building projects" in two other settlements but without giving details of the numbers involved.

While housing projects are usually the preserve of the housing ministry, they come under the realm of the defense ministry in the West Bank.

Under the terms of the internationally-brokered roadmap peace plan, Israel is obliged to halt all settlement activity.

Israel has argued that the roadmap has yet to become operational as the Palestinian Authority has not managed to prevent attacks by militant groups which is another condition of the blueprint.

The report in Yediot said that Mofaz had

revealed his decision to approve the projects at a meeting with council leaders, many of whom are members of Likud, last Friday.

The Israeli government has pledged eventually to link Maale Adumim, home to around 28,000 settlers, with Beit-ul-Moqaddas but has held back from starting work on the so-called E1 corridor for fear of upsetting the United States.

## Palestinian Vote Offices Reopen

**RAMALLAH, Occupied Palestine, Dec. 14**—The body overseeing next month's Palestinian parliamentary election announced it was reopening its offices Wednesday, hours before the final deadline for the registration of candidates, AFP reported.

The central elections commission (CEC) had suspended its activities on Tuesday in protest at a series of attacks on its offices in the West Bank and Gaza Strip but finally bowed to appeals for employees to return to work for a 12-hour period.

A statement by the CEC said that the offices would open at midday and operate

until the midnight deadline for registrations.

The decision to reopen the offices came after a meeting between CEC president Hanna Nasser and interior minister Nasr Yusef who discussed ways to improve security around the commission's offices.

Neither the ruling Fatah faction nor the radical Islamist movement Hamas has yet submitted its list of candidates for the elections on January 25 which will be only second ever polls for the parliament.

Security sources said the attacks on the offices in Gaza and the West Bank city of Nablus were carried out by members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed offshoot of Fatah, who are understood to be unhappy with the provisional list drawn up by the Fatah leadership.

In a statement on Tuesday, Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas urged the CEC to "resume its work to save the elections and ensure the

success of the Palestinian democratic process."

Independent MP Hanan Ashrawi, who is running for re-election, called on for greater efforts to be made to ensure the elections proceed peacefully.

"The Palestinian Authority has to act to protect the elections. An election is a democratic process which the Palestinians have a right to and no one should be able to hijack this right," she told a press conference in Ramallah.

## Berlusconi Pushes Through New Electoral System

**ROME, Dec. 14**—The Italian parliament approved on Wednesday a controversial new electoral system that opposition leaders say is designed to help Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in next year's general election, Reuters reported.

The reform will restore

proportional representation (PR), which has traditionally benefited Berlusconi, and will guarantee the winning coalition an absolute majority in parliament.

Berlusconi's allies say the new law is more transparent and democratic than the previous system, which was a

confusing mix of PR and first-past-the-post.

However critics of the reform say it will boost political instability in Italy by giving the election victors too slender a parliamentary majority. They also fear it will throw up different majorities in the two houses of parliament.

Recent opinion polls have put the center-left opposition as much as 10 points ahead of the government, which would have guaranteed them a huge majority under the outgoing system. Under the new system, the expected majority would be halved.

### WORLD News In Brief

#### Early Release

**ALMATY-- Kazakh opposition leader, Galymyjan Jakyaynov, jailed since 2002 for what supporters said were political motives won early release from jail Wednesday, his wife told AFP.**

#### Andijan Trial

**TASHKENT--Closed trials began Wednesday in Uzbekistan for 78 people accused of taking part in a bloodily suppressed revolt in the city of Andijan in May and also for 36 members of the security services accused of negligence, the Supreme Court said.**

#### Aceh Disarmament

**BANDA ACEH--Former separatist rebels in Indonesia's Aceh on Wednesday began the fourth and final phase of a disarmament process central to an historic peace pact with the government.**

#### Demands Rejected

**NAIROBI--Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki on Wednesday flatly rejected opposition demands for snap elections as a cabinet revolt he had been facing sputtered with dissident ministers rejoining the fold.**