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Palestinian interior minister quits

GAZA The Palestinian interior minister resigned on Monday, rocking a two-month-old unity government, after the biggest surge in factional fighting in months revived fears of civil war.

Despite an Egyptian-brokered truce, two Palestinian gunmen and a vegetable seller caught in crossfire were killed in Gaza in clashes between the Hamas and Fatah groups. Eight people have been shot dead since a new round of violence erupted on Friday.

"I told all parties I cannot accept being a minister without authority," Interior Minister Hani Al Qawasmī said at a news conference after Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, a Hamas leader, accepted his resignation.

As Hamas's choice as interior minister, Qawasmī was to have overseen security services, but officials said the former academic was frustrated by competition from powerful Fatah rivals for control of the armed contingents.

Qawasmī's move cast new doubt on whether power-sharing between Islamist Hamas and secular Fatah could continue. Filling the interior ministry post had been one of the main obstacles to forming the current coalition government.

"The cabinet will discuss (the resignation) today ... We hope to find a solution in a very short time," cabinet spokesman Ghazi Hamad said.

Officials said Haniya, a Hamas leader, would temporarily take charge of Qawasmī's ministry.

Earlier, sources in President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah said tensions stoked by the renewed violence with Hamas, after the ceasefire was announced late on Sunday, could lead to the collapse of the unity government within days.

"Talk during the night is like butter -- it melts at sunrise," a man on a bicycle, referring to the truce negotiations, shouted as he passed near masked men.

Agencies

Once-a-day pill to treat HIV

A combination of anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) are currently the best treatment for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), the virus that attacks immune system cells and causes AIDS. Now a drug company has produced a combination therapy in a single pill, costing less than \$1 a day

1 Fusion Inhibitors: Block virus from entering host cell. Therapy costs about \$21,000* per year

2 Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (NRTIs): Stop replication of virus by inserting faulty building blocks. Cost \$2,330

3 Non-nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (NNRTIs): Bind to and disable reverse transcriptase – protein that HIV needs to make more copies of itself. Cost from \$5,400 to \$8,000

4 Protease Inhibitors: Block protease enzyme which is needed for HIV to infect new cells. Cost \$2,600 to \$2,900

Viraday: Once-daily ARV pill combines three drugs and costs just \$339 per patient per year

Tenofovir (NRTI) + Emtricitabine (NRTI) + Efavirenz (NNRTI) = **Viraday**

Global population living with HIV (2006): **39.5 million**
Living with HIV in developing countries: **37.1 million**

People receiving ARV therapy in developing countries: **1.65 million**

Sources: UNAIDS, WHO, Cipla, Clinton Foundation *Costs in United States © GRAPHIC NEWS

Danish MPs differ on Muslim headscarf: Poll

COPENHAGEN The prospect of a member of parliament wearing a Muslim headscarf in the Danish parliament is dividing opinions, a poll published on Monday showed.

Asmaa Abdol Hamid, a Palestinian-born Dane, has sparked a heated debate in Denmark after declaring that she would keep her head covered in parliament if she is elected in 2009.

The poll showed 48 per cent of Danes saying Muslim women have the right to wear a headscarf in parliament and the same number opposing it, with four per cent undecided.

Supporters of the centre-left and the left were the most positive with 81 per cent of the radicals, 74 per cent of the socialists and 55 per cent of the social democrats in favour. Extreme-right and centre-right voters were the most sceptical, with 82 per cent of those supporting the Danish People's Party opposing the idea, followed by 70 per cent of liberal supporters and 63 per cent of conservatives.

Young voters took a more positive stand while older voters were unconvinced.

Agence France-Presse



GREAT HARVEST: Suleiman Bin Suwailim Bin Najim Al Balhassni from Sida village in the Wilayat of Izki shows a Findal potato, which weighs more than 4kg. He said most of the potatoes he grew in his farm were large in size. However, this one is the biggest so far. He attributed this phenomenon to good care of the crop and fertile land.

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'No' private beach for hotels

Continued from Page 1 suitable solutions. The committee turned down the request of some hotels to allow them to keep private beaches.

The meeting also highlighted the issue of setting up a hypermarket for used cars. Within the context of Omanisation, the committee also added the issue of the Friday market in Al Wadi Al Kabir to its agenda.

The committee decided to set up a number of such markets in different wilayats of the Muscat Governorate, which will be operated only by Omani merchants and salesmen.

Oman Tribune

School project

Continued from Page 1 the project at six schools with effect from September. The scheme aims at raising awareness of the importance of keeping the environment clean and safe.

Oman Tribune

Jabel Al Akhdhar fruit crops in danger: Expert

By **Manuela Gutberlet**
OMAN TRIBUNE

MUSCAT Worldwide climate changes endanger fruit crops in Jabel Al Akhdhar. "Some oases in Jabel Al Akhdhar have up to 16 hours less chilling hours per year. The oases are hit by the global climate trend and the fruit crops are hit tremendously. Some farmers even had no pomegranate last year or the production reduced to only five kilograms," said Professor Andreas Buerkert from the University of Kassel (Germany), Institute of Crop Science, Department of Organic Agriculture and Agroecosystems Research in the Tropics and Subtropics, during his presentation at Sultan Qaboos University. The professor is

one of the researchers of the Omani-German project about the Oases of Oman.

Due to the worldwide increase in carbon dioxide gas level, temperatures are rising as well in Al Jabel Al Akhdhar. According to the German researchers all fruits have different chilling requirements. The research team studied fruit crops in different villages of Jabel Al Akhdhar: Al Ayn, Qasha, Salut and Masayrat, which are located at different levels of the mountains.

"From the top to the valley we have different temperatures. Al Ayn is cooler than the village of Salut, located in the valley," said Buerkert. The Al Jabel Al Akhdhar is the green garden of the Sultanate and home to about twenty different varieties of fruits. Pomegranate need



Manuela Gutberlet/Oman Tribune
Buerkert delivering the speech during the presentation, 'Pomegranates in Jabel Al Akhdhar,' on Monday at SQU.

between 100 to 200 hours, apricot 350-1000 hours and walnuts between 400-1500 hours of chilling.

"In Al Ain we had in 2005/06 only 210 hours of chilling, in Qasha only 98 hours and in Salut only 18 hours," said Buerkert. On Tuesday the exhibition Oases of Oman will shift to the premises of the Fine Arts Society in Al Qurum where it can be visited until May 17.

Dolphins have gift of the gab

DUBLIN Irish scientists monitoring dolphins living in a river estuary in the southwest of the country believe they may have developed a unique dialect to communicate with each other, they said on Monday.

The Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation (SDWF) has been studying a group of up to 120 bottle-nose dolphins in the River Shannon using vocalisations collected on a computer in a cow shed near Carrigaholt, County Clare.

As part of a research project, student Ronan Hickey digitised and analysed a total of 1,882 whistles from the Irish dolphins and those from Cardigan Bay in Wales on a computer and separated them into six fundamental whistle types and 32 different categories.

Of the categories, he found most were used by both sets of dolphins -- but eight were only heard from the Irish dolphins.

"We are building up a catalogue of the different whistle types they use and trying to associate them with behaviour like foraging, resting, socialising and the communications of groups with calves," project leader Simon Berrow said.



"Essentially we are building up what is like a dictionary of words they use or sounds they make."

Berrow, a marine biologist, said the dolphins' clicks are used to find their way around and locate prey. The whistles are communications.

"They do a whole range of other sounds like barks, groans and a kind of gunshot," he said. "The gunshot is an intense pulse of sound. Sperm whales use it to stun their prey. When I first heard it I was surprised as I thought sperm whales

were the only species who used it. We can speculate the dolphins are using it for the same reason as the sperm whales." References in local legend indicate there have been dolphins in the Shannon estuary for generations and they may even have been resident there as far back as the 6th century.

They are regularly seen by passengers on the Shannon ferry and an estimated 25,000 tourists take special sight-seeing tours on local boats to visit them.

Agence France-Presse

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