



GAZA: Senior political leader Ismail Haniyeh (4th left) and Yahya Sinwar (3rd left) the new leader of the Hamas Islamist movement in the Gaza Strip attend a meeting with leaders of Palestinian factions in Gaza City. — AFP

## Palestinian unity tour: Rebirth or another false dawn?

JERUSALEM: West Bank-based Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah is to make his first visit to Gaza since 2015 tomorrow, in a fresh attempt to reconcile with the Islamist movement Hamas which rules the Israeli-blockaded coastal enclave. The trip by Hamdallah and several of his ministers aims to crown a rapprochement between Hamas and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party after a decade of animosity and spurts of violence.

The talks are intended to prepare for a transfer of power in the Gaza Strip from Hamas to Abbas's Palestinian Authority. The renewed attempt at rapprochement, backed by Egypt, has the potential to impact both the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and the wider Middle East. For the two million residents of Gaza, the hope is to see an improvement in the miserable living conditions in the overcrowded and impoverished territory.

Battered by three wars with Israel since 2008, it is under Israeli and Egyptian blockade and suffers from severe water and electricity shortages, an economic slump and unemployment of more than 40 percent. Hamas and its rival Fatah, which dominates the

Palestinian Authority, have both expressed confidence that the latest unity initiative will fare better than the failures of the past. But among many questions to be answered is the central issue of whether Hamas is really prepared to give up its Gaza security apparatus and share power with the PA.

### Turn of the screw

Senior Hamas official Mussa Abu Marzuq has said there is "great hope" for the success of the reconciliation efforts but that disarming Hamas personnel is not on the agenda. "This never was nor will it be up for discussion," he said in a statement. Azzam Al-Ahmad, a leading Fatah member, said he was now "more optimistic of ending Palestinian division in Gaza than at any previous opportunity." But he said the PA must be able to fulfill its responsibilities, "including security, without any interference from any faction".

Hamas, blacklisted as a terrorist group by the European Union and the United States, won a landslide victory in 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections. It ousted Fatah from Gaza the following year after wrangling over the formation of a new government degen-

erated into bloody clashes. Since then, Abbas's limited power is confined to the West Bank which is under Israeli military occupation and located, at its nearest point, 40 kilometers from the Israel-Gaza border. The Palestinian schism is seen as a major obstacle to a peace agreement between Israel and a future Palestinian state combining the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Abbas has this year turned the screw on his rival, halting payments to Israel for electricity it supplies to Gaza, cutting the salaries of officials in the territory and limiting the number of Gazans given approval to receive medical treatment elsewhere. Hit by a fall in financial aid from longtime benefactor Qatar and facing the prospect of social unrest among disgruntled Gazans, the increasingly isolated Hamas finally agreed to demands from Abbas.

### Hot potato

Hamas is now waiting for Abbas to revoke his sanctions. "These measures will be cancelled the moment the Palestinian government takes over its responsibilities in Gaza," Fatah's Ahmad promised. Those respon-

sibilities include a PA takeover of Gaza border crossings with Egypt and Israel, he said. Other issues include the future of the tens of thousands of public officials hired by Hamas since 2007.

Ghassan Khatib of the West Bank's Birzeit University says Hamas's initiative is purely tactical. "Hamas seems to be trying to throw the hot potato into the lap of the Palestinian Authority," he said. Analyst Jihad Harb said Egypt was the key player. "It is evident that this time it is playing a serious role, not only in sponsoring reconciliation but in actually implementing it."

An Egyptian delegation is to monitor the return of central government to Gaza. Harb said there were signs of wider international support for the plan too. "So far, we have not seen any American or Israeli veto of the reconciliation as in the past," he said. "It is clear there is an international will, whether at the European Union or at the United Nations, to achieve the reconciliation." The UN special envoy for the Middle East, Nickolay Maldenov, said the chance must be grasped. "If we miss this opportunity, I don't think another opportunity will come anytime soon," he said. — AFP

## Dubai dreams of flying...

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amount and it's always much more cheaper to have a system where you don't need that infrastructure." Driving in Dubai already makes one yearn for the open skies. Rush hour on Sheikh Zayed Road, a dozen-lane artery running down the length of the city, alternates between dense gridlock and sports-car slalom. Over 1.5 million Dubai-registered vehicles ply its roads, not counting those crowding in from the United Arab Emirates' six other sheikhdoms.

The Volocopter's designers envision the electric, battery-powered

two-seat helicopters taking off and landing from pads set up across the city. The prototype used in Dubai has a maximum flying time of 30 minutes at 50 kph, with a maximum airspeed of 100 kph. Batteries charged in climate-controlled areas near the pads would be swapped in as needed. "I believe (the) urban air taxi will contribute an interesting addition to the existing transportation modes," Volocopter CEO Florian Reuter said. "There are certain routes that are just extremely beneficial if you can go to the third dimension."

In practice, however, there's a long way to go. Convincing white-knuckled flyers to get into a buzzing, pilotless helicopter is just the beginning. Unpiloted passenger flights represent a new frontier for regulators. Dubai's Road and Transportation Authority, which has invested an undisclosed sum in Volocopter, says it will work the next five years to come up with laws and develop safety procedures. — AP

On Friday, tractors paraded through Barcelona, some decked with the "Estelada", the separatists' flag of red-and-yellow stripes with a white star on a blue chevron. They and firefighters have pledged to protect polling stations. From district to district, people gathered to form "Committees to protect the referendum", using the Telegram messaging app to get organized and urging everyone to remain peaceful, said an AFP correspondent who saw some of the messages. The move appeared to be partly coordinated by a platform of "schools open for the referendum."

### Mobilization will continue

Carles Riera, a lawmaker in the regional parliament for the radical CUP party, part of Catalonia's separatist coalition, vowed that mobilization would continue after today's vote-if the "yes" camp won but Madrid opposed the result, as is almost certain. "We're in a process of popular mobilization that is going to last a while," he told reporters. "This democratic wave, this level of auto-organization will have to keep going for a long time to defend the republic." On Friday, Spain's education ministry said in a statement that head teachers in Catalonia "were not exempt from liability" if they cooperated and allowed their schools to remain open for the vote.

Some schools have imagined innovative ways to circumvent an order that public spaces cannot be used for the referendum by organizing leisure activities all over the weekend, from pyjama parties for the kids to volleyball games. Barcelona's Joan Brossa high school, for instance, advertised a series of activities, including film screenings, football matches and Zumba dance fitness classes. It remained unclear though how people would be able to enter sealed-off schools today to vote, even if they are occupied. — AFP

cussed the process of developing, protecting, funding and commercializing innovations and inventions in surgery. The "so you want to be a surgeon..." workshop was aimed at residents and medical students included topics relating to what it takes to be a surgeon, residency programs, fellowships, transition into private practice, academia and more.

The "Stop the Bleed" provided a hands-on training opportunity targeting multiple approaches with stations centered on the theme "Stop the Bleed". In addition to plenary lectures, participants were able to interactively participate and learn experientially at the many stations through the use of simulation of real-life scenarios, including stress inoculation with managing bleeding simulations.

One of the main highlights of the conference was the launch of the national campaign "Stop the Bleed." The campaign is a joint national endeavor between the Kuwait Association of Surgeons, the Kuwait Chapter of the American College of Surgeons and the Ministry of Health. The campaign aims to educate and train the public, healthcare professionals and government agencies to improve accident outcomes by learning to manage bleeding in accidental situations.

## New health fees take effect

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MoH workers, their husbands and children do not pay for X-ray fees and nuclear medical treatment at the public hospitals and clinics. Dr Al-Shatti has also noted that non-Kuwaitis of special needs are to be treated on same par with citizens of same challenges with respect of artificial limbs. The minister of health has issued two decisions raising medical care costs for the expatriates, effective as of today.

Public hospitals and polyclinics in

Kuwait will start collecting the increased fees for services offered to expatriates today. The Health Ministry reportedly sent lists containing the new fees to local medical facilities, which include charging KD 5 for visiting the Emergency Department of general hospital, KD 10 for going to outpatients clinics, KD 10 per day for inpatients, KD 30 for staying at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), KD 50 for the private room and KD 200 as deposit. As for maternity, KD 10 will be collected per visit, in addition to KD 50 paid for normal delivery. — Agencies

## Police seal off polling...

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As such, it has Spaniards the country over worried. In Spain's major cities, Madrid, Barcelona, Sevilla, Santander, Alicante, Valencia and Malaga, thousands protested for Spanish unity. "We shouldn't have got to this point. We've arrived at a point of no return," said Fernando Cepeda, a 58-year-old engineer, a Spanish flag tied around his waist in front of Madrid's city hall.

### Call to remain peaceful

Catalan separatist leaders and organizers of "committees to protect the referendum" stressed that everyone must remain peaceful. In one incident, though, someone fired a pellet gun on Friday night at a group of people standing in front of an occupied high school in the Catalan town of Manlleu, lightly injuring three people, police said.

The referendum has sown divisions among Catalans themselves, with the region deeply split on independence, even if a large majority want to be allowed to settle the matter in a legal vote. Authorities in Madrid have instructed police to ensure no votes are cast in a referendum that the courts have ruled unconstitutional. For days, they have been seizing electoral items such as ballot papers while prosecutors have ordered the closure of websites linked to the vote and the detention of key members of the team organizing the referendum. But those for the vote have mobilized.

## Big strides in medical...

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in medicine and perspectives on regulation and reimbursement. Dr Salman Al-Sabah, conference president and a member of the Board of Governors of the American College of Surgeons stated that "Through the establishment of the Kuwait Association of Surgeons and the Kuwait chapter of the ACS, we hope to achieve an increase in the overall quality of medical services in Kuwait. We will do this with the creation of educational opportunities for surgeons and the promotion of the exchange of knowledge and development of skills between surgeons locally, regionally and internationally as well as through meetings like this, workshops and the publication of national surgical journals and periodicals."

The conference also included workshops. The "I have an idea, now what?" featured many local innovators and inventors. It outlined the process of innovation to take an idea from concept to creation. It dis-

## Bursa Kuwait promoted ...

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economy, forecasting positive impact on most enlisted leading and operating companies.

Bursa Kuwait's elevation is the result of Kuwait's string of economic and legislations' reforms and amendments, Al-Sanea said. Moreover, the move will turn attention of global investment conglomerates to the Kuwaiti banks and services' companies, thus the traded liquidity will grow. He expressed hope that the bourse company would find a formula balancing legislations with facilities for the traders, instead of being stiff in enforcing the regulations.

Salah Al-Sultan, an advisor at Arzak Capital company eyes the bourse placing at this eminent international status as a "normal fruit" of the steps that have been taken by the Capital Market Authority and the bourse, which is managed by the private sector. Among the forecast positive results are greater trades, in terms of turnover and number of trades, luring foreign funds; an eventuality that will lead to higher liquidity, he added.

Anticipating the promotion, some traders have been assembling blue chips, particularly those under Kuwait-15 index, he observes, anticipating that this tendency will persist further. Bursa Kuwait will witness noticeable rebound in the coming week's sessions, Al-Sultan predicts, also expecting record rally by companies' shares, expected to be enlisted by the FTSE.

Mohammad Al-Tarrah of the Traders Society affirms that the promotion will make the Kuwaiti market much more attractive and will result in enlarging the liquidity. Liquidity, Al-Tarrah believes, will swell to KD 100 million (\$327 million) per session once non-Kuwait investments enter the market. Issam

Al-Tawari of New Perry Consulting Company cautioned that some foreign traders might be concerned about their interests if they join Kuwaiti groups, noting that concern must be devoted to sustainable enlisting by the FTSE, with respect of sensitive factors such as risks, transparency and protecting small investors.

Khaled Al-Khaled, the bourse CEO, has affirmed the approach to meet the terms for promoting the national bourse, noting that the development would result in increasing the liquidity, shoring up the market and acknowledging the government success in granting leading role for the private sector in developing the economy. The new FTSE status has been a key objective of Bourse since the inception in April last year, he said. It highlights its mission to enhance the current level of performance in Kuwait, enable Bourse Kuwait to compete with regional peers and build a market reflecting the strength, depth and flexibility of the Kuwaiti private sector. Al-Khaled noted.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of Bourse Kuwait Talal Al-Ghanim has affirmed significance of promoting the bourse to level of an emerging market however he cautions that luring foreign capitals will require enormous efforts. In a statement released hours after The Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) Russel promoted Bourse Kuwait to an emerging market, Al-Ghanim noted that this accomplishment came "within framework of implementing the Government approach outlined in the document stipulating reforms" for financial and economic back-up. Al-Ghanim congratulated His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, the Kuwaiti people and all concerned parties for this substantial historic achievement. — Agencies