

THE DAILY STAR

FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 2006

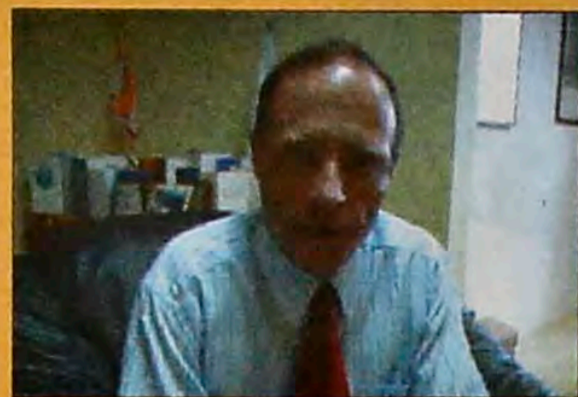
2006 414 0008a-2

DISTRIBUTED WITH THE

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

THE WORLD'S DAILY NEWSPAPER

FIRST PUBLISHED 1952 · NUMBER 11,982



Kidnapping revisited

As Lebanon commemorates its Civil War anniversary, a Swiss citizen who was kidnapped during the conflict speaks of his ordeal as a hostage. **Page 2**



Undeterred under fire

A top Egyptian Al-Qaeda member is reportedly killed in an attack near the Afghan border, as Ayman al-Zawahiri praises Iraq's insurgents in a new video. **Page 6**



Capital designs

Lebanese fashion designer Rabi'h Kayrouz says he drew inspiration for his new spring and summer collection from his country's seductive capital, Beirut. **Page 12**

Al-Aqsa takes over PA offices to back demands

CABINET CALLS FOR 'CIVILIZED' TALKS

Compiled by Daily Star staff

The Palestine Liberation Organisation called Thursday for an international peace conference in order to resume stalled negotiations to solve the Middle East conflict.

At the same time, in a sign of continued lawlessness in the Occupied Territories, masked gunmen from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades briefly occupied the prime minister's West Bank offices to demand benefits from the cash-strapped Hamas government.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the Palestinians are planning to ask the Middle East quartet of the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the United States to prepare the conference as part of the so-called "road map" peace plan.

"We will ask the quartet committee to begin preparing for this conference because we believe we must return to negotiations through a peace conference as stipulated by the roadmap," Erekat told AFP.

"Our policy is that we are ready to negotiate with any prime minister in Israel," Erekat added when asked about the formation of a new government by Prime Minister-designate Ehud Olmert.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said Tuesday that

he expected peace negotiations to resume after Olmert formed the new Israeli government following his victory in last month's general election.

In addition to international pressure to moderate its policies, the Hamas-led government was faced with another challenge - ongoing chaos in the territories.

Around two dozen militants forced their way into the downtown building, which houses the offices of Premier Ismail

PLO urges resumption of negotiations with Israel

Haniyya, in the middle of a video conference linking senior civil servants based in the West Bank town with their counterparts in Gaza City. Simultaneously, gunmen stormed the Transport Ministry, security sources and witnesses told AFP.

Although Ramallah serves as the administrative capital of the Palestinian Authority, Haniyya has had to operate out of Gaza as a result of travel restrictions imposed by Israel on the new administration.

The gunmen took over the offices for around an hour but were later persuaded to end their protest peacefully when a

large number of reinforcements from the security services were sent to the scene.

One of the ringleaders said the protest was staged to demand the restoration of recently revoked benefits, including permits which enable the families of people killed in the intifada to travel free by taxi. The gunmen also want the government to carry out previous pledges to provide jobs for militants who are wanted by the Israeli authorities.

"We had phoned the transport minister (Ziad al-Zhazha) but he refused to answer our demands," local Al-Aqsa leader Moin Alawna told AFP.

"For the last two weeks he had been promising that around 500 families of martyrs and of prisoners would be given permits," Alawna added, "but today he said: 'Do what you want as I can't give you anything.'"

He also complained that the deputy premier, Nasseridine al-Shaer, had pulled out of a meeting to discuss their grievances.

"Now we will close all the Palestinian ministries if they do not give us positive answers to our demands," he added.

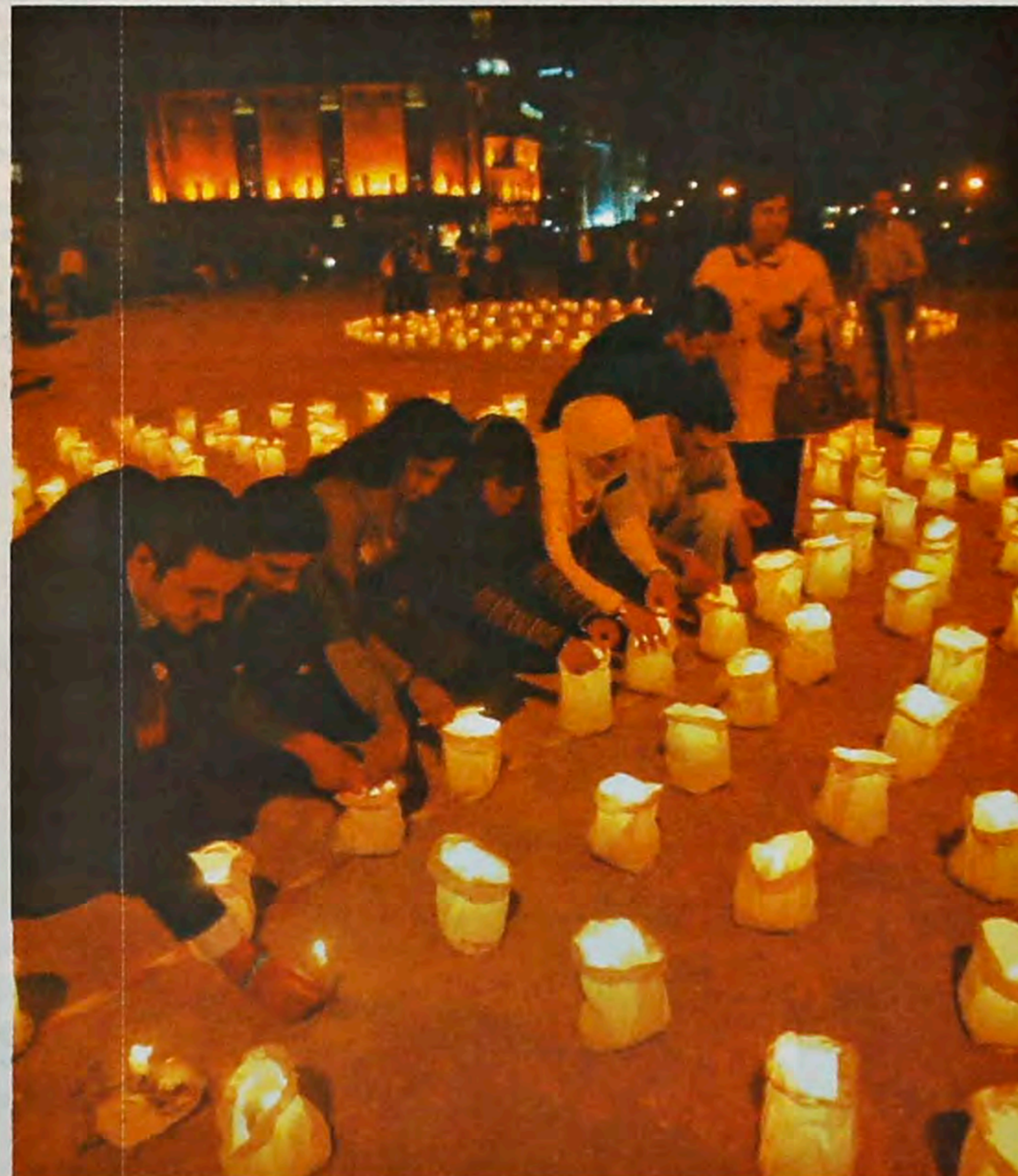
A Palestinian Cabinet statement called the protests "unacceptable" and said the government was committed to trying to solve citizens' grievances "according to a legal framework and in a civilized manner."

Al-Aqsa members have raided government buildings with increasing frequency in recent months to demand jobs and benefits. The Palestinian Authority is in the grip of an acute financial crisis at the moment because of cuts in direct aid payments by both the European Union and United States. Israel has also stopped handing over customs duties to the government, worth around \$50 million a month.

Meanwhile, Israeli troops in bulldozers and tanks entered a short distance into the Gaza Strip from the Kissufim border crossing on Thursday, Palestinian witnesses said.

Witnesses reported seeing two Israeli tanks and two bulldozers enter through the gates, adding that they were just under 100 meters inside Palestinian territory. - Agencies

Never again Candles mark anniversary of Lebanese Civil War



Youths of all ages commemorated the 31st anniversary of the start of Lebanon's Civil War by drawing the symbol of peace with candles facing Beirut's Martyrs' Square on Thursday. The event was organized by the Future Youth Movement.

Hizbullah questions timing of Siniora trip to U.S.

Majdoline Hatoum
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: A senior Hizbullah official criticized the timing of Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's upcoming visit to Washington on Thursday because it will coincide with the commemoration of an Israeli atrocity against Lebanese civilians.

"It is regrettable that Siniora is meeting with the U.S. president on the day that commemorates the Israeli massacre in Qana in 1996," Sayyed Nawaf Musawi, Hizbullah's officer for international relations, said in an interview with Lebanese Broadcasting Corp. television.

"The meeting could have been any other day," he said.

He added, however, that Siniora's meeting with President George W. Bush could also be an opportunity "to remind us of the continuous Israeli aggression against Lebanon."

Speaking to The Daily Star, a source from Siniora's office said the premier would be discussing the overall Lebanese situation during his meeting with Bush, in addition to the problem of regular Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty, especially intrusions into the country's airspace. The source said the premier would discuss four main issues related to Israel with U.S. officials.

"Israeli occupation of the Shebaa Farms, the issue of Lebanese detainees in Israeli prison, minefields and Israeli

overflights will all be discussed" in Washington, the source said.

The source also rebuffed concerns expressed by some factions in Lebanon - namely Hizbullah - that the visit might result in a deal leading to the disarmament of the resistance party in exchange for international financial assistance.

"This is a no-deal," the source said. "The premier has told U.S. officials before that implementing this part of UN Resolution 1559 is subject to an inter-Lebanese dialogue.

"This stance has not changed," the source asserted, noting that the accompanying ministerial delegation would represent all the main factions in the country, including Hizbullah.

Top Shiite cleric accuses Mubarak of stirring strife

Hamza Hendawi
Associated Press Writer

BEIRUT: One of Shiite Islam's top clerics accused Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Wednesday of fueling sectarian tensions by saying Arab Shiites in Iraq and elsewhere are more loyal to Iran than to their home countries.

Lebanon's Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah said in an interview that "some in the Muslim world" fear Shiite empowerment in any country.

Fadlallah was one of the highest-level Shiite figures yet in the region to speak out against Mubarak. The president's comments sparked a wave of anger among Shiites in the region and raised fears of a Sunni-Shiite rift across the Middle East at a time of increased sectarian violence in Iraq.

Fadlallah is the highest ranking Shiite cleric in Lebanon and was believed to be the spiritual leader of Hizbullah in the 1980s. He has followers in Iraq, the Gulf Arab region and among Shiite communities in Pakistan and India. He is closely linked to Iraq's top Shiite politicians as well as that country's top clerics.

On Wednesday, Shiite Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani - possibly the world's most influential Shiite cleric - also sent a letter to Mubarak through the Egyptian Embassy in Beirut regarding his statements about the Shiites, according to Hamed al-Khafaf, Sis-



Fadlallah: Shiites are loyal.

tani's representative in Lebanon. Khafaf declined to provide more details about the contents of the letter.

Mubarak's remarks were made in an interview aired Saturday on the Al-Arabiyya news channel. Fadlallah said such talk only fuels prejudice against Shiites, feeding a false stereotype that they are of Iranian extraction or follow orders from Tehran's ruling clergy.

"We believe that obscuring the stance of Shiites ... can create a rift between Shiites and Sunnis," Fadlallah said.

"The loyalty of Shiites to their countries is not less than that of others," said the 70-year-old cleric. "Such talk has

→TURN TO PAGE 2



Abbas, left, was in Morocco, where he paid his respects at the tomb of late King Mohammad V.



Siniora will also visit New York.

Westerner recalls ordeal as war-time hostage

SWISS CITIZEN HOPES TO RE-ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH HIS FORMER ABDUCTORS

Rym Ghazal

Daily Star Staff

BEIRUT: One thought ran through Stephane Jaquemet's mind as a Kalashnikov was suddenly pointed at his head: "Are they going to kill me?"

Jaquemet, a Swiss citizen, was one of 40 Westerners kidnapped during the Lebanese Civil War. The first kidnapping – David Dodge, the American University of Beirut president – took place in 1981. Dodge was freed in 1982.

"It looked like any of the other checkpoints, which were common and scattered all about Lebanon and run by different militias," Jaquemet told *The Daily Star*, recalling his kidnapping ordeal on his way to Tyre back in August of 1985. By that time, hostage-taking of foreigners had become a common trend in Lebanon.

"But when I opened the window to give them my papers, one of the men pointed the Kalashnikov at my head and shouted at me in Arabic to get out of my car," said Jaquemet, who was 29

years old at the time and on his first humanitarian mission in Lebanon. He was driving in a "clearly" marked International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) car from Sidon to Tyre.

"I was pushed into an old Mercedes car, where two men about my age wearing some form of military attire sat in front, and two young women sat in the back with me, all of them carrying Kalashnikovs, with one of the rifles firmly pointed at my head along a bumpy hour-long road trip," he said.

"I had recently heard of some French citizens being kidnapped, and so I thought, I must be next," he added.

Jaquemet was driven to an isolated house where he was kept, locked up for a couple of hours. Jaquemet recalled the questions that went through his mind during those tense hours: "Will I be tortured? Or will they kill me immediately? My poor family, what will happen to them when they find out? Should I try to escape?"

An older man, who spoke English, then talked to Jaque-

met, and explained why he had been kidnapped.

"The kidnappers were targeting the ICRC specifically, as they needed information about a family member who had been kidnapped by Israeli soldiers, and ICRC wasn't giving them any information. So by kidnapping me, they felt they could pressure ICRC to pressure the Israelis to give information about the missing person,"

|| 'They never tortured me or anything, just verbal abuse'

Jaquemet said.

He added that the kidnapers were the missing person's brothers, who "got desperate after seeing their mother crying over her missing son."

"They never tortured me or anything, just verbal abuse. But then that changed and they stopped tying me up and we talked more about their predicament and slowly a trust formed

between us," said Jaquemet, who wrote a letter to ICRC asking them to help get information about the missing person.

After spending two days in captivity, Jaquemet was handed over by the kidnappers, who he later learned were Shiite, to a group of men from the Amal Movement, who had been asked by ICRC to intervene to secure Jaquemet's release.

"The experience gave me a rare insight into the suffering and plight of the Lebanese people during the Civil War, where so many have lost a family member and never found out what happened to their missing loved ones, as was the case with my captors, who I doubt got any information from the Israelis after that episode," said Jaquemet.

Jaquemet is now back in Lebanon, after 20 years, and working in the humanitarian field again, and is considering re-contacting his kidnappers.

"They invited me for dinner after my release, and even slaughtered an animal in my honor," he said, "so it would be nice to see them again."

Jaquemet's kidnapping was "a family affair," and not politically driven, like most of the other kidnappings that took place in Lebanon, where some kidnappings lasted for years.

"Most of the kidnappings were conducted by Shiite groups, mainly Hizbullah and some by Amal or supported by them and hiding behind different names," said Simon Haddad, a political scientist.

The kidnappings followed the Iranian revolution of 1979 led by Ayatollah Sayyed Ruhollah Khomeini.

"There was an attempt to export the revolution outside Iran, and it was expressed in Lebanon through the kidnapping of Westerners by Shiite groups loyal to Khomeini as an expression of the Iranian revolution's anti-Western sentiments," said Haddad.

At that time, many analysts anticipated that the entire region was on the brink of a Shiite revolt, but it never happened, and it failed in Lebanon, according to Haddad, "after a brief time of 10 years."

"Iran initiated it; Syria tolerated it, but eventually Syria put a stop to it in 1991, and that was the end of it," said Haddad, who added that actual numbers of those kidnapped, killed or released, "has never been officially documented."

By 1987, the ICRC estimated that about 6,000 Lebanese had been kidnapped since 1975, with numbers of the Westerners kidnapped fluctuating between 40 and 50 persons. Most were from the U.S. and were journalists, diplomats, or teachers working in Lebanon.

When contacted by *The Daily Star*, Hizbullah officials denied any role in any of the kidnappings: "They were conducted by various organizations, such as the Islamic Jihad and others that were not Hizbullah as Lebanon was an open ground for anyone during the Civil War."

"At the time of the kidnappings, there was no official Hizbullah party, just a group of soldiers fighting Israel in the South," said the source, adding, "these are all accusations, where is the evidence?"



Jaquemet is back in Lebanon, nearly 21 years after his abduction.