

M-E talks to resume next week: Clinton

AFP
WASHINGTON

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Friday she expected Israelis and Palestinians to begin indirect talks next week, after a false start last month and a year-long stalemate.

Clinton's spokesman Philip Crowley said both Israel and the Palestinians have agreed to resume peace talks, which were aborted in March as soon as



Positive Move

HILLARY CLINTON
SECRETARY OF STATE

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they started amid Arab anger over planned new Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem.

However, Crowley said Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas was still waiting for formal Arab support to start the talks, saying Arab diplomats were due to meet on the issue Saturday in Cairo.

Clinton, who spoke to reporters while receiving Kuwaiti Foreign Minister

Sheikh Mohammed al-Sabah, appeared to believe the talks would go ahead.

"We've been very clear in our efforts. The resumption of talks is absolutely essential for the progress we seek toward a two-state solution. We will be starting with proximity talks next week," the chief US diplomat said.

"We look forward to the meeting of the Arab follow-up committee in Cairo tomorrow night to support the commitment by president Abbas to (move) forward with these talks," she said.

"Ultimately we want to see the parties in direct negotiations and working out all the difficult issues that they must" tackle, she added.

Direct talks, which were launched in the last year of president George W. Bush's administration, collapsed after Israel launched a brief offensive in the Gaza Strip in December 2008, just before President Obama assumed office.

The Obama administration has listed a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a national security imperative, something that will help defuse Islamist militancy aimed at the United States.

During a speech on Thursday to the pro-Israel American Jewish Committee, Clinton urged Arab states to do more to back Israeli-Palestinian peace moves while warning Syria against arming Lebanon's Hezbollah.

But Clinton said she also expected Israel to halt settlements on occupied land, meet the humanitarian needs of Gazans, and help the Abbas-led Palestinian Authority build institutions needed for statehood.



Residents gather at the site of a car bomb attack, in al Shurta al Rabaa area, southwestern Baghdad, on Friday. (REUTERS)

Iraq civilian death toll in April rises to 274

REUTERS
BAGHDAD

THE number of civilians killed by violence in Iraq rose sharply in April from the month before, a sign that insurgents may be trying to exploit political tensions after an election that produced no outright winner.

A total of 274 civilians were killed by bomb blasts or other attacks last month, compared with 216 in March and 211 in February, government figures showed on Saturday. April's toll was a far cry from the dark days of all-out sectarian

war in 2006/07 but remained high.

The rise in deaths occurred as Shiite-led factions try to overturn a slim, two-seat lead which a cross-sectarian alliance heavily backed by Iraq's Sunni minority holds after the parliamentary election on March 7.

The Sunni-backed list, led by secular former prime minister Iyad Allawi, has warned that attempts to deprive it of a chance to form the next government could lead to more violence.

Sunnis dominated Iraq under Saddam Hussein and

resentment at their loss of power after the 2003 US-led invasion helped to fuel the insurgency and sectarian fighting.

Shiite Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki's alliance successfully sought a recount of votes cast in Baghdad which is due to begin on Monday and could change the election result.

Other Shiite-led factions are leading attempts to disqualify candidates with alleged links to Saddam's outlawed Baath party. Most belong to Allawi's Iraqiya list.

The monthly casualty statistics, issued by the interior,

defense and health ministries, showed that 39 police officers, 15 soldiers and 48 insurgents were killed in April. The number of police killed was sharply lower than in previous months.

Suspected insurgents staged a number of significant assaults last month, including a series of car bombs in Shiite areas of Baghdad that killed 56 people on April 23.

Coordinated bombings across the capital destroyed seven buildings and killed 35 people on April 6 while suicide car bombers targeting foreign embassies killed 41

two days earlier.

Around 100,000 civilians have died violent deaths in Iraq since the invasion, according to www.iraqbodycount.org.

Three US soldiers died from hostile fire in April, according to icasualties.org, the same number as the month before but up from one in February.

US forces are increasingly taking on a supporting role for their Iraqi counterparts as they prepare to end combat operations in August and withdraw completely by the end of 2011.

Iraqi Airways boss asked not to leave London

AFP
LONDON

A JUDGE ordered the chief executive of Iraqi Airways to remain in Britain until at least Wednesday after the first commercial flight from Baghdad to London ended in a legal nightmare.

Kifah Hassan Jabbar appeared at London's High Court on Friday after he had his passport seized and the plane he arrived on was impounded at Gatwick Airport on Sunday in a two-decade-long legal dispute with Kuwait Airways.

The Kuwaiti airline claimed in court that Iraqi Airways owes it 1.2 billion dollars (900 million euros) and pressed Jabbar to produce a statement under oath of his airline's worldwide assets.

The dispute dates back to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when, according to the oil-rich emirate, 10 of its planes and aircraft parts were plundered after its airport was seized.

Lawyer David Scorey, for Kuwait Airways, told the court Iraqi Airways had consistently refused to meet its legal obligations and was guilty of "perjury, fraud and perversion of justice on a grandiose scale".



Director-General of Iraqi Airways

He said extensive legal proceedings against Iraqi Airways were also under way in Canada.

But Stephen Nathan, a lawyer for the Iraqi airline, questioned why the Kuwaiti airline had taken no action over the past five years and suggested it had acted on Sunday to ensure maximum publicity to coincide with the inaugural flight.

He also complained that a policeman had come to Jabbar's London hotel in the early hours of the morning to seize his passport after he had refused to hand it over at the airport.

"That is not the way in

which we operate in this country, that is the way in which tinpot dictatorships work," Nathan said.

He asked the court for the airline, which he described as "a large state entity", to be given six weeks to prepare an affidavit of its worldwide assets.

But the judge said that because Iraqi Airways was a "substantial judgement debtor" he would only grant it three weeks to make a sworn statement of its assets.

The judge said Jabbar must return to the High Court on Wednesday to make his case for the return of his passport.

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