

NEWS WRAP

The Palestine Authority (PA) Security Services provide political power and job opportunities for unemployed militants. Over time Fatah has prevented Hamas from obtaining full control of the PA security services, which has been filled up with Fatah loyalists. In the elections of 2006, Hamas defeated Fatah, and cornered 44% Pa-lesinian votes in Gaza and the West Bank. Hamas is considered less compt than its secular rival, Fatah, which is associated with late Yasser Arafat. The Hamas-led government continues to be boycotted by USA, Israel, and the majority of the western powers. Hamas is stronger in Gaza than in the West Bank, and has added a tough, disciplined “executive force” of Hamas loyalists, to the PA roster in Gaza. To counter Hamas, USA backed Fatah plans of building the presidential guard in Ramallah, to an elitist force. USA has granted \$ 59 million for training and supplying non-lethal equipment to the presidential guard.

Recently, presidential guard troops of Fatah's President Mahmoud Abbas tired rockets at the residence of Hamas' prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh. This has provoked the Islamist Hamas party to launch a full scale attack in Gaza. Hamas troops have taken control of most of the Gaza Strip, a 140-square mile land on the Mediterranean Sea, along Israel's western border, which has about 1.4 million poor Palestinians. Until late 2005, Gaza was occupied by Israeli troops. Now Fatah forces have been driven out of their bases in Gaza. Numerous top Fatah commanders have been killed or fled Gaza. President Abbas has dismissed the Hamas-led Palestinian government. Knee cappings, summary executions and pushing handcuffed captives off from tall buildings is part of the violent struggle between the two main groups in Palestine. Gaza is full of arms, smuggled in through tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border. Hamas has been seizing arms meant for Fatah. With a divided Palestinian leadership, there are few pressures on Israeli leaders to pursue peace.



President Hosni Mubarak and his National Democratic Party have ruled Egypt for 26 years. Since Dacember 2006, 800 members of Muslim Brotherhood have been imprisoned. Constitutional changes and “reforms” banned religious slogans and dispensed with judicial supervision of polling. The Muslim Brotherhood, though officially banned, is the largest opposition group in Egypt. They hold 88 seats in the lower house of parliament. But the Muslim Brotherhood have not succeeded in winning any district, in the June 07 elections for the Shura Council, the upper house. Only 19 members of the Muslim Brotherhood contested 88 places, as half of the Brotherhood candidates were prevented from running. There are allegations of election fraud. On election day, riot police surrounded polling stations, where Brotherhood candidates have a strong base. While certain stations were seated off, security cordons were loosened at other stations, to permit entry of busloads of government supporters. Weaker than the Brotherhood, the two main legal opposition parties, had boycotted the voting. Ayman Nour, the runner-up to Mr Mubarak, soon landed in jail. His Ketaya (‘Enough’) party, a grassroots reform movement, is faced with internal divisions, police repression, and failure to mobilize beyond street protests. The Muslim Brotherhood has also not succeeded in expanding, as it is encircled by police controls, and without the confidence of the secular Egyptians and the large Coptic Christian minority. The Egyptian army has been unhappy over a US Congress Committee voting military aid of \$ 200 million to Egypt, with conditions on human-rights reforms.

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In New Delhi, one-third of adult beggars are disabled, and 88% have no skills. Almost all beggars in India's capital, are migrants from other regions of India—mostly poor states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Failure to obtain work, leads to begging. About half of the beggar adults earn from Rs 50/- to Rs 100/- per day. Recently, the Delhi High court has ordered that begging be erased. Delhi's Department of social welfare has recommended that beggars be arrested by a special police squad, and interned in beggars' homes, which are akin to jails than hostels. If the Delhi authorities succeed, about 58,570 beggars will be soon removed.

Removal of beggars is part of the clean up operations, before New Delhi hosts the Commonwealth Games in 2010. Poor vendors and fast food shops are annoyed at the ban on about 3,00,000 stalls selling hot snacks. Hundreds of monkeys have been rounded up and locked in cages, leading to protests from animal-rights activists. Cow-worshipping Hindus are far from happy, over the herding of stray cows into a large dairy complex. Few economic solutions are available for the human tragedy of beggars.

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About 120 children from Gujarat, affected by the post-Godhra riots, were availing free education in Hyderabad, through a Muslim Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (MESCO) Grades school. In early June 07, the school was closed down, and the children sent home. MESCO officials maintain that the lease for the school building had expired. But parents in Gujarat feel that it is related to Hyderabad's Mecca Masjid blasts, when in May 07, Maulana Tahir Rehman of Juhapura in Ahmedamad was detained and questioned by police. Investigations revealed that Rehman had been speaking to his son on mobile, who studies in a school, close to the MESCO Grades school, during the time of the blasts. Rehman was released from custody, but there was local pressure on the school authorities. □□□