



AP PHOTO

Israeli army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz resigned Wednesday. His resignation, along with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's political troubles, has increased calls for Olmert's resignation too.

## Israeli chief of staff resigns

### Pressure mounts for prime minister to step down too

By JOSEF FEDERMAN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

#### JERUSALEM

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz faced new calls to resign Wednesday after Israel's army chief stepped down, succumbing to widespread outrage over the handling of last summer's inconclusive war in Lebanon.



OLMERT

Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz became the first Israeli chief of staff to resign since the 1973 war, but the government's political troubles may not end with his departure. With a government probe into the war looming, and a criminal investigation into Olmert's role in a banking deal, the prime minister's troubles appear likely to grow.

The Israeli public has largely blamed Halutz, along with Olmert and Peretz, for failing to crush Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon and halt Katyusha rocket attacks against civilians.

"Halutz's resignation is a positive and unavoidable move," said Ophir Pines-Paz, a member of Peretz's Labor Party. "But the political leadership also has to take responsibility."

Israel launched the war hours after Hezbollah guerrillas killed three Israeli soldiers and captured two others in a July 12 cross-border raid.

Critics say Olmert moved too hastily with a campaign that ended without achieving its declared aims, including the recovery of the two captured soldiers. Soldiers returning from the battlefield said they were poorly trained, lacked basic ammunition and food supplies, and received conflicting orders.

The prime minister, who is supported by a solid majority in parliament, is not expected to resign soon. But the uproar over the reported mishandling of the war against Hezbollah could harm his chances to remain in office in the long term.

"It is not clear whether the prime minister will be able to survive the resignation of chief of staff Halutz and his own political problems," said Ephraim Inbar, a political scientist at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv.

"We may see pressure in his own party to replace him. This resignation is definitely the beginning of political turmoil in Israel."

Nearly 160 Israelis and more than 1,000 Lebanese died in the fighting, according to tallies by government agencies, humanitarian groups and The Associated Press.

An opinion poll published last week showed Olmert's approval rating at just 14 percent and said his Kadima Party would lose if new elections were held. Peretz's public standing is equally dismal.

The former union leader won the defense portfolio under a coalition deal despite his scant military experience. The war's flaws only cemented doubts about his fitness to serve as defense minister, and he now faces multiple challenges to his leadership within the Labor Party.

# Unhappiness in Iran

## Ahmadinejad faces criticism as housing, food prices rise

By ALI AKBAR DAREINI  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

#### TEHRAN, Iran

Prices for vegetables have tripled in the past month, housing prices have doubled since summer, and as costs have gone up, so has Iranians' discontent with hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his focus on confrontation with the West.

Ahmadinejad was elected last year on a populist agenda promising to bring oil revenues to every family, eradicate poverty and tackle unemployment. Now he is facing increasingly fierce criticism for his failure to meet those promises.

He is being challenged not only by reformers but by the conservatives who paved the way for his stunning victory in 2005 presidential elections. Even conservatives say Ahmadinejad has concentrated too much on fiery, anti-U.S. speeches and not enough on the economy.

"The government has painted idealistic goals like tackling housing problems and unemployment ... but no solution has been offered," said Mohammad Khoshchreh, a prominent conservative lawmaker, said.

Ahmadinejad's government "has been strong on populist slogans but weak on achievement," said Khoshchreh, who campaigned for Ahmadinejad during the election.

The president has touted himself as a tough anti-Western leader, frequently denouncing the United States. His comments that Israel should be "wiped off the map" and his questioning of the Nazi Holocaust have sparked anger in the West and increased Iran's isolation.

At the same time, he has pushed ahead Iran's nuclear program, shrugging off U.N. demands that the country halt uranium enrichment. As a result, the United Nations in December imposed sanctions on Iran.

The sanctions were limited to a ban on selling materials and technology that could be used in Iran's nuclear and missile programs and the freezing of assets of 10 Iranian companies and individuals.

But since then the price of fruit, vegetables and other widely used commodities in Iran — already rising — have skyrocketed, apparently because of fears of harsher punishment.

The inflation has hit Iranians hard, along with unemployment, which the government puts at 10 per-



AHMADINEJAD



An Iranian woman carries items in a supermarket in Tehran, Iran, on Wednesday. Produce and housing prices

have risen since last summer, increasing criticism against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

cent but which economists say could be as high as 30 percent. The government also says inflation is 11 percent, but experts estimate it at 30 percent.

Tehran housewife Maryam Hatamkhani, 28, said her family has given up buying potatoes and tomatoes because prices have tripled or quadrupled in the past month. Tomatoes have gone from around 33 cents a pound to \$1.50.

Lawmakers summoned Ahmadinejad's Housing Minister Mohammad Saeedikia to parliament for questioning over the rising prices, which he blamed on increasing demand. He promised a plan to control prices, but gave no specifics.

Demand for housing has swelled because of a population increase in Iran. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, hard-line clerics encouraged Iranians to have more children, causing a high birth rate in the 1980s and prompting them to reverse the policy in the 1990s.

Ahmadinejad, who has revived much of the revolution's rhetoric, raised a public outcry last year when he said two children per family was not enough and urged Iranians to have more. Despite the criticism, he has stuck by the calls, saying last week that Iran,

a nation of 70 million, has the capacity to feed 300 million.

The president "keeps making empty promises to people in every city he goes. This is causing unhappiness," said Ghaffar Esmaili, another conservative lawmaker.

Some 150 lawmakers signed a letter last week calling on Ahmadinejad's government to reconsider its draft budget for next year. Lawmakers called the draft too dependent on oil revenues. Iran roughly makes about 80 percent of its revenues from oil exports.

Even the president's globe-trotting has come under fire. He has made trips to Asia and Africa, burnishing his reputation as a world leader who can stand up to the United States. This week, he was in Latin America, meeting presidents Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and other anti-U.S. figures.

"Do you really assume people like Chavez (and) Ortega ... can be Iran's strategic allies?" the reformist daily Etamad-e-Melli said in an editorial Tuesday addressing Ahmadinejad. "We should not build a house on water."



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