

Israeli, Palestinian leaders announce cease-fire

BY LARA SUKHITIAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SHARM EL-SHEIK, Egypt — Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas declared Tuesday that their people would stop all military and violent attacks against each other, pledging to break a four-year cycle of bloodshed and get peace talks back on track.

With their national flags whipping in the wind, Sharon and Abbas met face to face at a Mideast summit, smiling broadly as they leaned across a long, white table to shake hands. In one sign the talks went well, Egypt and Jordan announced afterward that they would return their ambassadors to Israel after a four-year absence, and the Israeli

Mideast leaders try again

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas leaned across a long white table to shake hands at the Mideast summit in Egypt on Tuesday, a hopeful sign of progress in renewing peace talks.



- Second summit** Sharon and Abbas will meet in next few weeks; Sharon invited Abbas to his ranch; Sharon wants to visit Ramallah.
- Security** Committees of security officials will be set up to negotiate thorny issues; Palestinians want amnesty for fugitives.
- Prisoners** Israel will release 500 Palestinian prisoners, another 400 later. Palestinians want large-scale release of most or all of the 8,000 prisoners.
- Transfer of towns** Israel will complete transfer of security of five Palestinian towns and cities within three weeks.
- Reform** British prime minister will host conference on Palestinian reform March 1; Israel will not participate.
- Washington** Sharon and Abbas will meet separately with President Bush to discuss peace efforts.
- Withdrawal** Sharon plans to withdraw Israeli settlers and troops from the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements in the summer; Israel will coordinate withdrawal with the Palestinians.

foreign minister said other Arab countries might follow.

But the Palestinian militant group Hamas immediately called the deal into question, saying it would not

be bound by the cease-fire declarations and was waiting to see what Israel would do next.

As part of the deal, Israel will hand over control of five West Bank

towns to the Palestinians within three weeks and immediately release 500 Palestinian prisoners.

Those agreements, and the sight of Abbas and Sharon shaking

hands, were the clearest signs yet of momentum in the peace process after Yasser Arafat's death in November and Abbas' election to succeed him in January.

One Israeli official, Gideon Meir, said "there was a great atmosphere in the talks, ... smiles and joking."

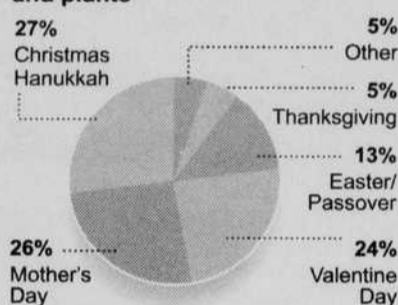
An invitation to both sides to meet separately with President Bush at the White House this spring added another round of momentum on the summit's eve.

"We have agreed on halting all violent actions against Palestinians and Israelis wherever they are," Abbas declared in a statement made after the meetings, as he, Sharon, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah II sat around a round table.

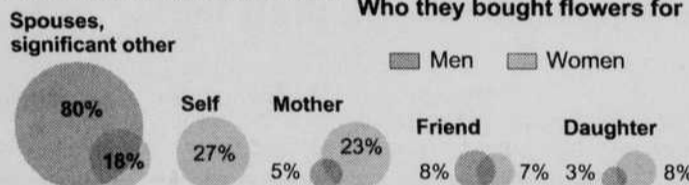
By any other name, not just another day

Florists across the nation are gearing up for Valentine's Day and preparing to sell millions of roses and other blooms in the name of love. While men tend to buy Valentine flowers for romantic reasons, women use the occasion to treat family and friends — and most of all themselves.

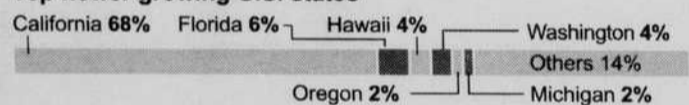
Holiday spending on fresh flowers and plants



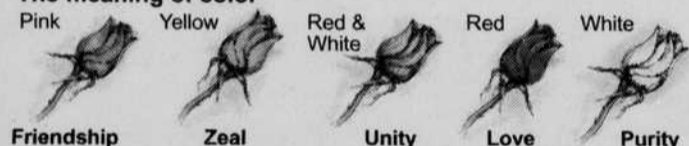
Who they bought flowers for



Top flower growing U.S. states



The meaning of color



SOURCES: Ipsos-Insight for the American Floral Endowment's Consumer Tracking Study, 2004; Society of American Florists

U.S. shippers push to import flowers for Valentine's Day

BY HARRY R. WEBER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — The war of the roses is on.

An expected surge in Valentine's Day flower purchases this year is proving to be a boon for both South American growers and major shipping companies.

Atlanta-based UPS Inc. and Memphis, Tenn.-based FedEx Corp. are bringing in extra workers and planes to handle all flower shipments from Colombia and Ecuador, where the bulk of the roses sold in the United States are grown.

And demand is predicted to be high, with roughly 175 million roses produced for Monday's holiday, according to the Society of American Florists.

FedEx this week expects to carry 900,000 shipments of Valentine's Day gifts, including flowers, teddy bears and chocolates. UPS said it expects to move in excess of 20 million flowers alone.

"While our total volume is roughly the same as last year, our peak day — Monday — is going to be 30 percent higher than last year," said Jack Muhs, FedEx's vice president of global network planning.

FedEx doesn't deliver on Sundays, so more shipments of flowers this year will be made on Monday. Last year, the holiday fell on a Saturday.

"Most of the husbands or sweethearts want to get the product there on Valentine's Day," Muhs added. "This year, with the holiday falling on a Monday, we're focusing a lot of attention on the weekend."

To handle the extra volume, FedEx is adding more than 100 refrigerated trucks and more than 50 flights this week. Spokeswoman Lourdes Pena said about 40 corporate employees have volunteered to help

at the company's Miami distribution hub.

At UPS, the company said that during the run-up to Valentine's Day, it doubles its number of flights out of South America to handle the flower shipments. Retailers place their orders with growers in Ecuador, who then work with export cargo agents to get shippers such as UPS to bring the flowers into the United States.

UPS operates a 200,000-square-foot warehouse at the Miami airport to store the flowers it brings in from South America.

"UPS's transportation responsibility is to deliver the flowers on time to our warehouse in Miami. The import agents collect those flowers from us and take them to distribution centers," Tom O'Malley, UPS's vice president of cargo, said.

The National Retail Federation estimates consumers will spend less on average this Valentine's Day, though more people will be celebrating the holiday, which could give a boost to overall spending. It says 2005 Valentine's Day spending is expected to reach \$13.2 billion.

Greeting cards remain the most popular gift, though nearly 58 percent of men surveyed by the retail group said they plan to buy flowers for their sweethearts.

Valentine's Day cards account for 7 percent of all individual greeting cards sold industry-wide for the year, with about 200 million cards exchanged among sweethearts, said Rachel Bolton with Hallmark Cards Inc. That's not including boxed cards and miniature Valentines often passed among school-aged kids.

That slice of market ties Valentine's Day with Christmas for the biggest card-giving holiday.

And often cards accompany flowers on the most romantic of holidays.

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