

USA for W Asia deal without Jerusalem: report

DEUTSCHE PRESS AGENTUR

JERUSALEM, Sept. 21. — The USA has been trying in recent days to persuade Israel and the Palestinians to consent to a non-comprehensive peace agreement which would exclude final status arrangements in Jerusalem, the Israeli *Ha'aretz* daily reported today.

The fate of Jerusalem is seen as the main obstacle preventing the sides from signing an elusive peace agreement, and both Israeli and Palestinians have so far refused to modify their demands regarding the disputed city.

According to *Ha'aretz*, the US approach stems from the belief that there is virtually no chance of convincing the Palestinian President, Mr Yasser Arafat, to withdraw his demand for full sovereignty over the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound in Jerusalem's Old City.

Israel, on the other hand, has said it will not allow the Palestinians to exercise sovereignty over the compound, which is holy to both Muslims and Jews.

To date both Palestinians and Israelis have opposed leaving Jerusalem off the negotiating agenda. The US officials believe Arafat is currently inclined to reject proposals which recommend that the Jerusalem dispute be deferred to a later date.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ehud Barak, for his part, is determined that any peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians include an "end of conflict" clause, which cannot be incorporated in any agreement which does not address the future of Jerusalem.

Even so, the Israeli leader seemed to have softened his position when he told a meeting of his one Israel political bloc that he would be prepared to consider "partial" solutions if they would advance the peace process.

Mr Barak and the acting Israeli foreign minister, Mr Shlomo Ben-Ami, are to meet later today for consultations in advance of a document the USA is expected to issue shortly, and which is reported to contain proposals for bridging the gap between the sides.

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WATSON

A STATESMANLIKE GAMBLE

19-12

THE PALESTINIAN TRYST with political destiny has been postponed once again, this time as a result of a gamble characterised by much wisdom and some frustration. It comes as no surprise in this context that the international community should have, by and large, recognised the restraint shown by the Palestine leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and his team of weary strategists in their unprecedented moment of truth. A unilateral declaration of sovereign statehood, generically placed on the Palestine Liberation Organisation's agenda as an option exercisable last week, has now been put off until at least November 15. The new cut-off date can be seen to have been set by the Palestinian leadership in a calculated move to gain time to try and achieve the same goal through further negotiations with Israel. Such future parleys are, in a sense, mandated under the ongoing peace process, which in turn emanated from the so-called Oslo initiative and other related diplomatic moves by several state-actors with varying degrees of power and influence over one or more aspects of the complex West Asian scene. With the larger international community, as also some of the Arab friends of Mr. Arafat, cautioning or expecting him to keep in focus the big picture of coexistence with the Jewish people, the latest decision by the relevant Palestinian Central Council is certainly explicable and almost inexorable.

The most feared alternative to a negotiated creation of a plenipotentiary state for the hapless Palestinians is of course a renewed flareup of hostilities between them and the Israelis. Any other conceivable scenario of failure, even if less forbidding in scope, is equally unacceptable to the world, given that the Palestinian leader and the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, have already displayed in their recent parleys a certain degree of minimal confidence in each other as purposeful negotiators. While Mr. Arafat requires to be commended, therefore, for reining in the

anti-Israel hawks in his camp at this stage, it is now up to Mr. Barak to try and clinch a final parleyed settlement of the basic Palestinian question. To accomplish this mission, regarded by the Israeli political-military establishment as a herculean task, Mr. Barak will need to leap across a huge hiatus of traditional Jewish pride and prejudice that separates him from the Arabs. Moreover, the time that he has now gained can prove quite illusory in the unfolding context of a possibly receding role by the outgoing U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, who has so far contributed enormously to a defining difference between the near-certain failure of the Palestine-Israel parleys and a periodic renewal of hopes.

(The major stumbling block to a final deal at this time is the question of real control over Arab East Jerusalem which is still under Tel Aviv's suzerainty. The Palestinians seek the comprehensive possession of this territory, with Mr. Arafat sometimes opting for tactical ambiguity about the alternatives to a verifiable sovereignty. The other ideas in focus are the Palestinian sovereignty over the main Al-Aqsa mosque or a "full functional autonomy" that could be exercised by a new Palestine state over the Muslim shrines in East Jerusalem. Mr. Arafat is now reported to have set his face against both these options of partial control which, in his opinion, will amount to a travesty of the Palestinian dream and also a betrayal of the overall Arab cause. The Israelis are in no mood at this juncture to grant more than mere functional autonomy, while the Palestinians are also seen to be stiffening their posture by suggesting that their latest decision against a possible proclamation of statehood should itself be seen as a concession. With Israel promptly accusing the Palestinians of reversing their perceived willingness to settle for sovereignty over some shrines as distinct from the entire East Jerusalem, it can be a new two-way gamble.)

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Whose city is it?

Arabs

FIFTY-TWO YEARS ago, the world, as represented by the majority in the U.N. General Assembly, took two decisions that have impacted on West Asia ever since. It decided that the Jews deserved a state of their own and that it should be on the land that the religious text of the Jews and much historical evidence had identified as their old homeland. The world was more harsh in its treatment of the people who had lived on that land for much of the intervening period when the Jewish presence on the soil was negligible. They were told that they must give up a good part of their patrimony so that the Jewish state could be established. Today the Arabs of Palestine finally face up to the question whether they will abide by these decisions or not.

[A lot of the details of the various issues in dispute between the Israelis and the Palestinians remain to be thrashed out. But there can be no doubt any more that the comprehensive settlement of the differences between the two sides hinges on the single issue of the future control of about a kilometre square area in East Jerusalem where Jewish and Muslim holy sites stand shoulder to shoulder. This is the area the Jews call Temple Mount (or Har Habayat) and the Muslims call Haram al Sharif (the Holy Sanctuary).]

[Since the landscape around it consists of the folds and slopes of a 3000-foot-high hill-chain, the site is perhaps just another hillock among others. If looked at in this way, the Haram al Sharif, consisting of the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque, is the flattened top of the hillock. This is how the Arabs perceive it. But the site could also be a "tel" like the many others scattered between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean sea. A tel is a mound that has accumulated as the debris of past civilisations pile up one on top of the other.]

To go by the Jewish narrative, the first, or bottom-most layer, would have consisted of the first temple built by King Solomon, succeeded at some later stage by the second temple built by Herod and pulled down by the Romans in the year 72 of the Christian era. Perhaps some other structures were later built on the spot only to collapse in their turn and add to the pile of rubble. Arab Muslim armies captured the area about 600 years later and the fact that Al Aqsa is also called the Mosque of Omar (the second Caliph) might suggest that it was built only then.

The Jews are convinced that the

Fifty-two years ago, the U.N. General Assembly did a cop-out by defining Jerusalem as an international city and then standing aside as the Israelis and Palestinians fought for possession... The two sides have yet to work it out. KESAVA MENON reports.

site of their temples lies under the pile of compacted rubble that has become a mound over the centuries and that the western retaining wall of the Mount is but the visible remnant of the temple. Archaeological diggings in the near vicinity of the Mount — but, most importantly, not under it — do confirm that buildings of some importance did stand there.

the ancient temple why did it not collapse or be pulled down by the Romans with the rest of the building. The Koran also speaks of the "Far Mosque", identified as Al Aqsa, and the early Muslims offered their prayers in this direction till Mecca replaced it in prominence. If the Prophet Mohammed had identified this spot as being of special religious signif-

Holy Sanctuary in the control of the Muslim Waqf. To a degree, at least among some Israelis, the approach is somewhat similar to that of the Ramjanmabhoomi activists — their age old beliefs suggest that their temple lies under the mound and archaeological evidence (that is in any case not obtainable) has not much relevance. Whatever their political orientation or the quality of their faith, the Jews remain convinced that this site is the centre of their sense of community and the bedrock of their longed-for but recently acquired nationhood.

Palestinians regard these claims as absurd. They can see that most modern Israelis, or at most their grandparents, came from places such as Minsk, Cracow, and Lithuania. They recog-

These archaeological remnants have also been dated as belonging roughly to the dates that would bear out the Jewish claim. However, there does not appear to be conclusive proof that the Jewish structures actually stretched throughout what has now become the base of the mount.

There is another problem on account of the presence of the Dome of the Rock. Inside the mosque that stands on this spot is a large rock with a cavity in its centre that by its very appearance suggests that it was used as a sacrificial altar at some point in history. According to Jewish legend, this was the site where Abraham was preparing to sacrifice his son Isaac before God stayed his hand. But then, if the Rock was a part of

importance then it surely must have been standing and of importance before his time.

A problem for those who do not belong to either religion is that the legends and beliefs of the two Semitic faiths are so interwoven that it is difficult to unravel the strands. An abhorrence for the defilement of a holy site inhibits archaeological efforts to get at the truth.

Further compounding the problem is the fact that Jewish religious leaders prohibit their followers from praying on top of the Mount since the site has not been duly consecrated. (It is another matter that Israeli Governments have thought it politically prudent to prevent Jews from praying on the Mount and have left the

nise that the demands of realpolitik leave them no choice but to share the lands between the river and the sea with the Jews.

But they just cannot conceive that the presence of Jews on soil they consider their own is in any way buttressed by a claim that the Jews have a spiritual affinity to the soil.

Fifty-two years ago the General Assembly did a cop-out by defining Jerusalem as an international city and then standing aside as the two sides fought for possession. In 1967, the Israelis took control over the site but left the day-to-day possession of the Mount in the hands of the Arabs. The two sides have yet to work out the definitional exercise.

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Barak, Arafat to chase peace in New York

4/9 ✓

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

JERUSALEM, Sept. 3. — The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ehud Barak, and Palestinian leader, Mr Yasser Arafat, are heading for the UN Millennium Summit in New York where they will meet the US President in a last-ditch effort to strike a peace deal.

Mr Barak and Mr Arafat will also meet with dozens of heads of state to explain their negotiating positions.

"Barak intends to present the Israeli positions in the peace process to many state leaders ... Time is not unlimited," Mr Gadi Baltiansky, spokesman for the Prime Minister said.

Another Israeli official described the meetings as background for political activity aimed at bridging the gaps between the Israeli and Palestinian positions on the core issues in the peace process.

EMBASSY ROW

DUBAI, Sept. 3. — The Arab world is concerned over reports that the USA may move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. A meeting of the foreign ministers of Gulf Cooperation Council, comprising Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and UAE, made it clear to USA that any such move would be violative of international laws and resolutions. — UNI

Mr Barak and Mr Arafat are scheduled to meet with Mr Bill Clinton separately on Wednesday on the sidelines of the forum and a tripartite meeting is not being excluded by Israeli and Palestinian officials.

Israeli officials said they await the outcome of Mr Clinton's meeting with Mr Arafat, to see whether he will

be more "flexible". "There are no substantive negotiations at present because we have received no signs of a willingness on Mr Arafat's part to show flexibility or openness," Mr Baltiansky said.

(Addressing 22 Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo, Mr Arafat demanded that Israel return all occupied Arab territories including East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, adds DPA. He called the status of East Jerusalem the central issue in the peace negotiations.)

Jiang snub

Mr Jiang Zemin is refusing to meet Mr Barak in New York in protest against Israel's cancellation of a weapons deal under US pressure, public radio said.

In July, Israel shelved a \$250-million deal for a Phalcon airborne warning and control system, accusing the USA of interfering in its affairs.

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Calm before the storm?

IN THE early hours of Sunday, August 27, a night-clerk at a central Tel Aviv hotel turned around to pull out some papers and revealed the automatic pistol tucked into his waistband. Is that still necessary, he was asked. Bomb blasts had ripped a bus in the Dizengoff square just next door only a few years ago and therefore such precautions were necessary, he said with strong personal conviction.

That night, troops of an elite Israeli counter-terrorism unit named Duvdevan (the Hebrew word for cherry) surrounded the village of Assariya Samhaliya in the northern West Bank in an area where they are allowed under agreements to exercise overall security control. Their intelligence services had pinpointed that the top-most Hamas militant, Mahmoud Abu Hanoun, was holed up in the village. The cherry unit which apparently has wide powers to decide how to tackle any operation had been activated to get him. In the event, the operation went horribly wrong. The troops did manage to wound Hanoun and the person in whose house he had taken shelter. But they could not prevent Hanoun's escape and, worse still, they killed three of their own and wounded another in friendly fire.

Hanoun escaped the dragnet one more time and got himself to a hospital in the wholly-Palestinian controlled town of Nablus. Palestinian security services took him into custody and he will probably soon be tried in a Palestinian court that hands down quick and harsh sentences. Israel made an initial demand that Hanoun be handed over to it but subsequently appears to be satisfied that the Palestinian justice system will hand down a sentence that it can live with. Meanwhile, the villagers of Shamaliya were celebrating one of the rare occasions when a Palestinian militant had got the better of one of Israel's elite security units.

From these dissimilar and unrelated events it might appear that nothing has changed in the Israeli-Palestinian equation. Armed vigilance, the occasional strikes and the celebrations when your own side scores a victory. Yet in the wake of this particular incident at Shamaliya came the reports of how cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security services had foiled over a hundred terrorism-related plots over the past many months. This does not necessarily mean that there is seamless coordination between the two security forces nor is there very open acknowl-

Will the Israel-Palestine dispute erupt in violence again? Like everyone else, reports KESAVA MENON, extremists on either side appear to be waiting to see what negotiations produce.

with the concern in Israel's official circles that the Palestinian political forces opposed to a settlement on the basis of the presently discernible parameters will do something to disrupt the negotiations. In a recent interview to *The New York Times*, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, spiritual head of

edgement of their assistance to each other. Though there might even be some bonhomie between the respective troops at the operational level, neither security apparatus will gain any political mileage by publicly acclaiming their cooperation.

The relationship of professional cooperation that currently appears to exist between the security forces of the two sides need not last forever. It is conceivable that the very same security forces will be fighting each other if the negotiations collapse without any hope of recovery and the rage of the public spills over. The balance of power between the two sides is such that the Palestinians will inevitably believe themselves to be the aggrieved party should the negotiations collapse. Circumstances and history suggest that the first spark of violence will rise on the Palestinian side. But it also suggests that the Israeli reaction will be as tough as it has been. If the negotiations collapse beyond the irrecoverable point, the violence will almost inevitably drag in the Palestinian security forces. Then it will be war between two

heavily armed forces though Israel, as ever, will have the overwhelming advantage.

It is almost axiomatic in journalism relating to the Israel-Palestinian dispute that allusions to the possibility of violence should never be obscured. However, for the moment, the authorised military forces of either side are clearly not just waiting for their political leadership to complete the negotiations but hoping that they will do so. In fact, the two hard-men of the Palestinian security services, Mahmoud Dahlan and Jibril Rajoub, are reputed to be amongst the foremost advocates of the view that the negotiations must be persisted with. From what could be seen in the Palestinian-controlled territories it did not appear that their security forces were making the sort of overt preparations for violence that could by itself provide a provocation.

Subsequent to the Shamaliya incident, the Israeli media has reported about the efforts by Abu Hanoun and like-minded individuals to set off bomb-attacks or drive-by shootings. This dovetails

Hamas, appeared to indicate that he would not authorise a militant strike till the negotiations produced a Palestinian state or unless the possibility of a state was nullified for ever. However, there is concern in Israel that some regional powers that are opposed to a settlement between the Palestinians and Israel might provoke a bout of violence.

It has become so common to talk about the possibility of violence from the Palestinian side that not much thought is being publicly aired about the likelihood of violence by Israeli extremists. After all, those who have dreamed of a Greater Israel, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan river, are the ones who will have their dreams shattered if a Palestinian state arises in a part of those territories. The sort of violent rhetoric that was characteristic of the Israeli extremists has not been very evident of late but that need not mean that their violent intentions have been extinguished. Like everyone else the extremists on either side appear to be waiting to see what negotiations produce.

Israel, Syria fight over a strip of land

By Kesava Menon

ROSH PINNA (ISRAEL), SEPT. 2. Eight hundred metres seems too small a piece of

territory for two countries to be fighting over. On climbing past the Mount of Beatitudes (where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount) on the hills of Galilee, the Golan Heights are clearly visible on the far shore of Lake Tiberias. In the narrow cleft where the Galilee Hills and the Golan Heights come close to each other on the top end of the Lake lies the slice of territory that remains the issue of contention between Israel and Syria.

While there are conditionalities and other details attached to the "best offer" package that Israel has so far advanced in the aborted negotiations with Syria, the basic element is an Israeli willingness to consider the return of the Golan. As put out by the Israelis, though the Syrians insist that Israel has offered nothing so far, the offer is that they will return the Golan Heights and most of its forward slope but not any bit of the shoreline of Lake Tiberias that lies at the foot of the Heights.

According to Israel, the inter-

national border in these parts, insofar as it was demarcated by agreement between the colonial powers Britain and France in 1923, excludes the shore-line of the Lake. Since Syria insists that the international border must be respected in all sectors, then no exception should be made with respect to the Lake Tiberias border either, the Israelis say.

In the Syrian view, however, an 800-metre strip at the north-eastern end of the Lake was under their control and sovereignty on June 4, 1967, that is on the eve of the outbreak of war. The relevant U.N. resolutions, in the Syrian interpretation, call for the evacuation by Israel from all land it had occupied after June 4, 1967 and, therefore, it must vacate this 800-metre strip as well. Israel does agree that Syria did control this strip between 1948 and 1967 but points out that if rights under international law are the matter in issue then the 1923 border line is the relevant one.

It might appear as only a matter of legal technicalities. But the Syrian argument does sound plausible that by sticking to this technicality, Israel in real terms made its own offer worth-

less since it knows that Syria can not accept anything less than all of the territories captured in the 1967 war.

It also does not appear that there is anything more than the legalistic in Israel's effort to hang on to the strip. But they feel that some sign of Syrian flexibility here is necessary as a confirmation that Damascus has finally decided to end the decades of animosity.

Israel has appeared to recognise that the border line will run from the northern reaches of the Jordan river and run along it till a point before it joins Lake Tiberias. From this point along the river bank, before the shoreline of the lake, the border will run along the slopes of the Golan but a few hundred metres away from the shoreline till it finally meets the Israel-Jordan border.

Behind this effort to keep Syria away from the shore of the lake there is a concern about what would happen if their main source of fresh water was to be shared with Syria. But from the manner in which Israelis are willing to discuss some imaginative plans for skirting the problem it does appear they could

soften their stance on the 800 metres.

One of the plans put forward, notably by the British journalist and expert on Syria, Mr. Patrick Seale, was that the 800 metres could be turned into an international park which both Syrians and Israelis could visit. Another, thought up by the Israelis, was that they could hire the 800-metres back after acknowledging by treaty that the land is indeed Syrian.

The Israelis know that Syria will draw water from the upper reaches of the Jordan river, and thus reduce the total supply, and that there will be a real threat of the Lake's waters being polluted once Syria repopulates the Golan. But, at least among pro-peace Israelis, there is a feeling that peace is worth the financial costs that will have to be incurred to solve these matters.

For the moment, the meek are certainly no closer to inheriting the earth or anything in it than they ever were. Whether it is 800-metres at sea level or 8000 metres on the Himalayan heights land is something that people fight over with as much determination as they did millennia ago.

Katsav bags Israel presidency

ASSOCIATED PRESS

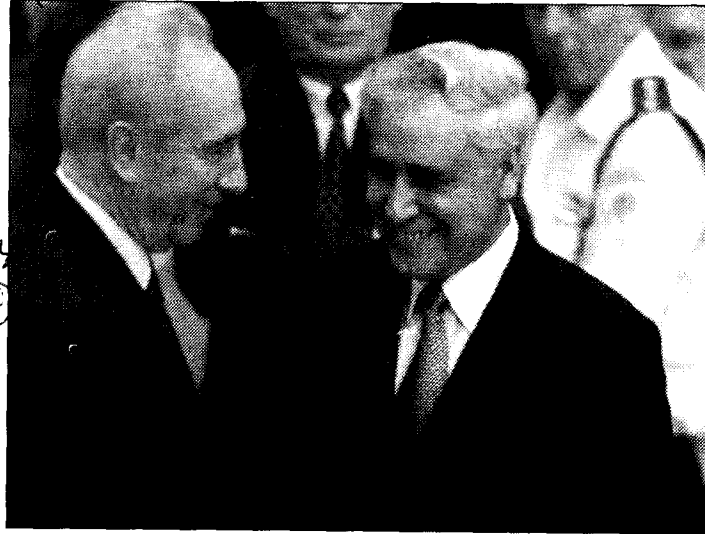
JERUSALEM, July 31. — Moshe Katsav, little-known Opposition lawmaker, stunned Nobel laureate Shimon Peres in the race for Israel's presidency today. The new President, 55, is the first man of truly humble origins to hold the country's highest office.

Mr Katsav, of the right wing Likud, edged out the former Prime Minister 63-57 in a second round of secret balloting in the 120-member Knesset. Neither had got the required 61 votes in the first round.

Mr Peres had counted on the support of many of the 22 religious lawmakers in the House. As Prime Minister, he had been generous to the ultra-Orthodox, a chronically impoverished sector of Israel's society; and his wife, Sonya, is herself Orthodox.

On the other hand, the ultra-Orthodox have identified more with the Likud's foreign policy in recent years. Many see Katsav — who himself is religiously observant — as the more sympathetic candidate.

After the results of the first round, Mr Peres had looked



Former Israeli Prime Minister Mr Shimon Peres (left) shakes hands with Mr Moshe Katsav after casting his ballot in the race for president in Jerusalem on Monday. — AP/PTI

grim, trying hard to maintain composure as he walked past Labour Party members in the plenum. A jubilant Mr Katsav, on the contrary, said he was certain of victory.

Born in Iran, the new President is the first Head of State to represent the "Second Israel", the wave of Sephardic Jews

from Arab and Islamic countries who immigrated in the early years of the state and formed the bulk of the country's underprivileged.

Mr Katsav's family lived in one of the rudimentary "transit camps" set up for immigrants after the 1948 war, and he grew up in Kiryat Malachi, one

of the new towns on Israel's periphery which were populated mainly by immigrants and plagued by unemployment, social problems and government neglect.

During the campaign, his supporters said it was high time the country had a President who did not come from the Ashkenazi, or European, elite. An earlier President, Yitzhak Navon, was Sephardic but was perceived as belonging to the Ashkenazi establishment.

Mr Katsav's achievements are modest when compared with those of Mr Peres's, a statesman who played a major role in the creation of Israel's military power, including its nuclear deterrent, and was an architect of the Oslo agreement with the Palestinians.

Public opinion had been overwhelmingly behind Mr Peres in the presidential race. But equations in the Knesset often throw up situations that are at odds with the popular will.

Mr Katsav became mayor of Kiryat Malachi in 1969, at 24. He was elected to parliament in 1977 for Likud and served in a number of Cabinet posts.

THE STATESMAN

1 AUG 2000

After Camp David

NO ISRAELI Prime Minister commanded the kind of support in the recent period which Ehud Barak did when he assumed office a year ago. There was a broad agreement among his allies to advance the peace process. But even then, given the backroom manoeuvring and the immense clout which the smaller parties enjoy in Parliament, managing a majority required considerable skill. Not surprisingly, therefore, Mr Barak's coalition Government today is somewhat shaky. In fact, the Prime Minister lost his Parliamentary majority in the 120-member Knesset on the eve of the Camp David meeting when two orthodox religious parties quit the coalition. This grim picture for Mr Barak has been further compounded by the shock defeat of Shimon Peres in the Presidential poll, even though his own Government survived a vote of no-confidence.

Besides being a major loss of face for Mr Peres, his defeat at the hands of the little known Moshe Katzav of the Likud Party has dealt a big blow to Prime Minister Barak. Although he still enjoys considerable popularity as is evident from the recent opinion polls, the hardening of positions on the peace process, particularly over the question of Jerusalem, may create difficulties for the Labour Government. Already there is speculation about a mid-term poll and the formation of a national unity government. More and more smaller parties, particularly the ultra-orthodox groups, are identifying themselves with the Likud. However, there is still a great deal of support for the peace process. Having survived the no-confidence vote, Mr Barak now enjoys a three-month reprieve since Parliament will be in a summer recess.

Much will depend on how Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat responds to the failed Camp David summit. There is much in stake for US President Bill Clinton as far as the West Asian peace process is concerned. Washington is likely to exert considerable pressure on Mr Arafat and the friendly Arab regimes not to proclaim a Palestinian state unilaterally. Efforts are already underway to resume the Camp David talks. The Israelis and the Palestinians have travelled together too long to disown the peace process. The outlook for peace is still not wholly pessimistic.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 2 AUG 2000

Palestine: The spectre of Saladin

Israel is not Arab State Number 26

BY AMOS OZ

Arad, Israel: I am sitting in front of the television in the living room, seeing Yasser Arafat receive a triumphant hero's welcome in Gaza, and all this for having said no to peace with Israel. The whole Gaza Strip is covered in flags and slogans proclaiming the "Palestinian Saladin." "Welcome home, Saladin of our era" is written on the walls.

In silence, astounded, I watch, and I can't help reminding myself that the original Saladin promised the Arab people that he would not make pacts with the infidels; he would massacre them and throw them in the ocean. I see Mr Arafat dressed in his grey-green combat uniform. It's an Arafat clothed like Che Guevara and treated like Saladin: my heart breaks.

Already in 1967 I was one of the very few Israelis invoking the solution of two neighbouring states, with Jerusalem as the capital city of both, reciprocal recognition and mutual acceptance. Since then, for many years, I was treated like a traitor by my own people. My children at school suffered all manner of insults, accused of being the children of one ready to sell off his homeland. And after all these difficult years, Prime Minister Ehud Barak went to Camp David to offer the solution I foretold over 30 years ago.

I pause to reflect. I remember how in the old days a single phone booth would have sufficed to contain the entire national assembly of Israeli peace activists. We could literally count ourselves on the tips of our fingers, a tiny minority among minorities. Today everything is different. More than half the nation is with us.

And yet the Palestinians said no. They insist on their "right of return," when we all very well know that around here "right of return" is an Arab



'The whole Gaza Strip is covered in flags and slogans proclaiming the "Palestinian Saladin" (Arafat)' (AP)

euphemism for the liquidation of Israel.

(Mr Arafat doesn't insist on merely the right to a Palestinian state, a right I fully support. Now he demands that the Palestinian exiles should return not only to Palestine, but also to Israel, thus upsetting the demographic balance and eventually turning Israel into the 26th Arab country. After all, there are millions of Germans who will never return to their former homes in Poland, East Prussia or the Sudetenland.)

The Palestinians have a right to their own free and independent Palestine. But if they also want to have Israel, they should know that they will find me ready to defend my country: an old peace activist ready to fight for the survival of Israel. I believe this to be the last opportunity: the Palestinians must choose if they want a new Saladin, or to really work for peace.

AMOS OZ is the author of *Israel, Palestine and Peace*

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THE ASIAN AGE

- 4 AUG 2000

UN troops start final deployment

BY HUSSEIN SAAD

Naqoura (Lebanon), Aug. 5: Almost 400 UN troops deployed along the Lebanese-Israeli border and in south Lebanon on Saturday in the final phase of an operation that comes more than two months after Israel ended its occupation of the area.

International peacekeepers from the UN Force In Lebanon set up 12 new positions, half of them on the frontier, a day after President Emile Lahoud gave the United Nations the green light to complete its deployment in the south. A convoy of Fijian troops kicked off the process at 6 am, setting off from bases near Unifil's Naqoura headquarters.

Nine hours later, Unifil halted the operation after peacekeepers from Ireland, India, Fiji, Finland, Ghana, Nepal and Sweden —

aided by Ukrainian sappers — had fanned out in the south, which was occupied by Israel for 22 years until May 24.

The new positions included Unifil's first maritime observation post on the Mediterranean coast south of Naqoura. "We have deployed in 12 positions as planned. The process went very smoothly and calmly," a UN officer said. A Lebanese official said the UN force would resume operations on Monday. Landmines and weaponry left behind by Israel and its South Lebanon Army militia have slowed Unifil's progress. Peacekeepers got a minor scare when discarded munitions exploded near the southern town of Khiam, but there were no casualties. Landowners reluctant to rent their property to Unifil have also

hindered the deployment, a security source said. "They are worried that the government, which is paying for this, will not give them their money," the source said.

A Unifil statement said that in the final phase of the operation, at least 500 peacekeepers would deploy over several days in the south and along the border, an area controlled by Islamist Hizbollah

rebels since the Israeli withdrawal. Last

week about 200 Unifil troops took up six positions along the border but full deployment was blocked until Lebanon made sure Israel had removed a final encroachment on its soil. Hizbollah, backed by Iran and Lebanon's political master Syria, led the battle to end Israel's occupation of the south. The organisation has several positions in the area and there were no

signs that they would be closed down. On Friday, senior Hizbollah cleric Naim Qassem told a rally that Israel's pullout did not mean the end of the conflict with the Jewish state, which still occupies the Shebaa Farms that Lebanon claims. During Saturday's deployment, rebels stood outside their bunkers, some placed right on the frontier watching the progress of the UN troops, but did not interfere. Last week Hizbollah rebels briefly halted a UN patrol, saying they had no orders to allow the peacekeepers access. Israel's Army also monitored the peacekeepers' activities from its side of the border. Surveillance drones buzzed in the sky above soldiers, patrolling the area in military vehicles. A few kilometres away, a truck carrying Lebanese policemen made its way along the frontier. (Reuters)

WEST ASIA

Palestinian children get war training

Ramallah (West Bank), Aug. 5: Four blindfolded children, chosen as the most nimble-fingered, raced to see who could first assemble an assault rifle.

Friends, parents and military commanders proudly cheered on the youngsters this week at their summer camp graduation ceremony in a high school yard.

In recent weeks, some 30,000 Palestinian children have learned military skills and even rebels tactics, such as abducting enemy officers, in day camps across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, courtesy of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians say they are teaching patriotism, but also preparing the children for a possible confrontation with Israel, should peace talks fail. Many Israelis are appalled. "This is a major mistake," said Israeli legislator Uri Savir, who helped negotiate the interim peace accords that were based on creating mutual trust. "The education of the children will determine the nature of the future relationship between our two states."

Such camps aren't new they've been held in Palestinian areas for years. (AP)



GOOD TERMS: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (right) and Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit embrace each other on Saturday. (AP)

Ecevit backs Arafat on statehood

Ankara, Aug. 5: Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said after talks with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat on Saturday that he supported the principle of Palestinian statehood. Mr Arafat's visit to Turkey is the latest stop on a tour of world capitals to drum up international support for a declaration of Palestinian statehood, which Mr Arafat has scheduled for September 13, with or without a peace treaty with Israel. Mr Arafat has met European, Arab and South African leaders since a US-brokered summit with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak at Camp David in the United States collapsed without an accord last week. "A Palestinian state is not an issue for us," Mr Ecevit told reporters after his hour-long meeting with Mr Arafat. "We have already recognised the Palestinians' right to a state." Mr Ecevit also promised Turkish support to get peace negotiations with Israel back on track.

"As long as the peace process continues, we will do all we can to help find a solution," he said. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

6 AUG 21M

Turkey's militant secularism

40-13
By C. Raja Mohan 18/8

ANKARA, AUG. 17. The excitable media in Turkey is relishing an on-going political controversy here between the Prime Minister, Mr. Bulent Ecevit, and the President of the Republic, Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer. The President has sent back a decree approved by the Government without signing it. Mr. Ecevit, who plans to send it back to the President, has publicly proclaimed that Mr. Sezer has no option but to sign it when he receives it the second time from the Government.

Analysts here say the controversy will soon pass. Mr. Sezer will either back down and sign, or send it to the constitutional court for its opinion. For observers of Turkey, the nature of the decree is far more interesting than the current political battle over it.

The decree authorise the Government to sack its employees if they are suspected of having sympathies with religious extremists. Media here claims that hundreds, if not thousands, of civil servants could lose their jobs when the decree is implemented. The security forces are believed to have made lists of bureaucrats with links to fundamentalists.

Commitment to secularism is serious business in Turkey. The Turkish claim that it is the only Islamic country with constitutional separation of religion and state is not merely rhetorical. It is implemented with ruthless conviction by the Turkish establishment.

The armed forces here zealously guard against any deviation from the principles of secularism. The military frowns upon any one in their ranks who wants to wear a moustache or beard. They periodically weed out elements

that are suspected of having sympathies with Islamic parties.

In early 1999, the former Mayor of Istanbul and a charismatic leader of the younger generations of Turkish Islamists, Mr. Tayyip Erdogan, was imprisoned for four month for reciting a poem mixing religious and military imagery.

Bearded mullahs wanting to take Turkey back to an Islamic way of life are even less welcome. The Turkish military got the first Government headed by an Islamist, Mr. Necmettin Erbakan, dismissed in 1997 and had its organisation, the Welfare Party, banned in 1998. The Welfare Party reinvented itself as the Islamic Virtue Party, and the Government has

A TURKISH JOURNAL-II

moved the constitutional court demanding its closure on the grounds that it has become a focus for anti-secular activities. Political analysts here have no doubt that the party will be banned in its new form too.

Many may find the Turkish practice of secularism a bit too excessive. Some worry about a possible Islamist backlash. There will be some concern that political Islam will only gain more sympathy if it is treated harshly. But for the establishment here, secularism is now a matter of constitutional faith. There can be no dancing around the principle of secularism. It is central to the vision of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who transformed Ottoman Turkey into a modern republic.

In a few dramatic years in the 1920s, Ataturk changed the way Turks dressed, wrote and

thought. The so-called "hat laws" banned the traditional men's headgear, *fez* and forced them to wear western hats. He barred women from wearing the veil. In a reform of the alphabet, Ataturk changed the script for Turkish language from Arabic to Latin. He moved Turkey to the Gregorian calendar. More fundamentally, Ataturk changed forever the mindset of Turkish people in favour of modernity, secularism and republicanism.

The Turkish elite is proud of its great cultural tradition of religious tolerance and accommodation of other faiths so evident during the Ottoman rule, which lasted from the late 13th century to early 20th century. The Ottomans offered safe haven to Jews who were being hounded off other European states. They encouraged Christians to serve in their courts.

The Turkish tradition of secularism, analysts, here argue, is also based on the fact that Islam in Anatolia, the heartland of Turkey, has evolved differently from the Arabian original. Unlike elsewhere in the Islamic world, the modern Turkish state does not use Islam as a source of political legitimacy.

As the Islamic nations struggle to come to terms with modern world, Turkey is now taking the lead. As the only secular state in the Islamic world, it has been on the political defensive for decades.

The Turkish Government had recently organised an international conference in Bosnia on the "reform of Islam", in which representatives from many non-Arab Muslim states participated. Turkey is also making efforts to moderate and modernise the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) that has long been a voice of Islamic conservatism in world affairs.

THE HINDU

18 AUG 2000

West Asia faces uncertain future as Camp David summit fails

By Jal Taraporevala

MUMBAI: (The failure of the American-Israeli-Palestinian summit at Camp David has left West Asia facing an uncertain future. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will now face mounting pressure to make good the threat of declaring the establishment of an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by September 13.

Any failure to do so will unwittingly provide fresh propaganda ammunition to Mr Arafat's fundamentalist critics in Hamas. Postponing the independence declaration after the recent hype about the Palestinians' determination to carry out their warning could under-

score Mr Arafat's relatively weak bargaining position at the negotiating table.

Israel is likely to respond to any such Palestinian announcement by toughening its negotiating stance and continuing with Jewish settlement activity in parts of the West Bank. In any case, in the coming months, Hamas will seek to step up domestic opposition to Mr Arafat by arguing that in the last seven years of the peace process, living standards in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have actually dropped, a final status accord remains elusive and unfettered freedom of movement is still denied to Palestinians within their own territory.

The opposition in Israel will try and exploit the lack of tangible success at Camp David by criticising Prime Minister Ehud

Barak's arbitrary style of conducting negotiations and portraying his willingness to yield some ground to the Palestinians as a move which will undermine the country's bargaining position in the future. Besides, given the political composition of the Knesset, it will be hard for Mr Barak to regain the majority that he lost in early July. It will, therefore, not be surprising if the move by opposition parties to force early parliamentary elections succeeds. This will further complicate the peace process.

With less than six months to go before U.S. President Bill Clinton leaves the White House, time has all but run out for the present administration to

explore the search for peace in West Asia. Bridging the gulf on the issue of Jerusalem, which proved to be the deal-breaker at Camp David, will be exceedingly difficult to stop. After all, acceptance by Mr Arafat of anything less than joint sovereignty over Jerusalem could well be tantamount to writing his political obituary.

Given the broad cross-party consensus in Israel on Jerusalem, it will not be easy for any Prime Minister to accept a substantial dilution of Jewish sovereignty in the city. Even so, the Clinton administration has neither demonstrated the requisite willingness nor is it in a sufficiently strong position to use its enormous financial and diplomatic leverage to pressure Israel to make the concessions needed to facilitate an agreement on the status of Jerusalem.)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

30 JUL 2000

They came, they talked, they went empty-handed

49-16
2007
W

HEN THREE politicians with at least two different compulsions get together to achieve one objective, the process is going to be difficult. And that is what the Camp David talks were all about — 15 days of intensive and extensive negotiations but in the end the U.S. President, the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian leader headed in different directions.

(Mr. Ehud Barak and Mr. Yasser Arafat were undoubtedly bogged down by the political dynamics in their respective societies; and Mr. Bill Clinton, in spite of what may be dished out by his officials, has his eye on the history books. He wants to be remembered not just for the solid economic growth and expansion of the last seven years but also wishes to leave a lasting mark on foreign policy.)

In the end, neither Mr. Barak nor Mr. Arafat felt any compulsion to satisfy their American host who spent long hours in the Maryland mountains Presidential retreat. The bitter animosity of 52 years was not going to be resolved in 15 days. No one had any illusions about the magnitude of the task on hand. Yet when the whole thing was over there was also an element of satisfaction, at least in the Clinton administration, that both the Israelis and the Palestinians were willing to talk about issues that had rarely been touched upon in any seriousness in the past — the status of Jerusalem, the borders of a Palestinian state and the return of millions of refugees.)

If Mr. Barak and Mr. Arafat were unable to bridge their differences, it was only obvious why. Politically both would have been finished — one by the right wing and the other by the militants and radicals still calling for an "armed uprising". When the Camp David talks were called, some were inclined to see them as a meeting of three lame-ducks: Mr. Clinton on the last legs of his Presidency, Mr. Barak who was nearly shown the door prior to his arrival in the U.S. and Mr. Arafat who is also seen as being in the last stages of his leadership.)

(The Camp David process between the Israelis and the Palestinians may have collapsed, but at least there is an element of hope that neither side will do anything unilateral to threaten the entire

There were 15 days of intensive and extensive negotiations but in the end the U.S. President, the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian leader headed in different directions.

SRIDHAR KRISHNASWAMI on the Camp David talks.

framework that has been carefully drawn. In fact, one reason why the Americans had been so wary of statements was the potential of the whole process going down the tube on account of heightened rhetoric. And Mr. Arafat's threat of unilaterally declaring a Palestinian state on the deadline date of September 13 lingers on.)

But when the process collapsed on Tuesday, the scene had been very much travelled before: (Israel blaming the Palestinians; the Palestinians pointing to the intransigence of the Jewish state; and the U.S. wanting to draw a fine line but still ending up criticising Mr. Arafat and praising Mr. Barak as having gone the extra mile.)

(If the Camp David talks did not get to the desired finish, a lot has been attributed to the tough posi-

tions on Jerusalem, although it would be wrong to come to the conclusion that the Israelis and the Palestinians had put other contentious issues out of the way. But by all accounts it was Jerusalem that stood in the way. Mr. Arafat, according to one report, was furious that Mr. Barak would go no further than offering access to the Al Aqsa mosque at a time when the Palestinians were demanding total sovereignty over the city.)

(Mr. Arafat, in the end, could not even be convinced of a U.S.-backed proposal that left the Palestinians with "custodial" sovereignty, but with the "residual" sovereignty still in the hands of the Israelis. According to the Israelis, Mr. Arafat did not change his stance on Jerusalem. The Clinton administration had made it clear

from the beginning that although the President would go the distance in helping the two sides, the time-frame was not open-ended. Hence at about three in the morning on Tuesday, Mr. Clinton decided to bring down the curtains.

From West Asia, the reaction to the collapse of the Camp David process was along expected lines. "The failure is another indication that the only choice we have is resistance. Only by force we are able to retain our rights," said the Hamas. And even before the drama concluded in Maryland, Mr. Barak got wind of what was in store from the right wing. The former Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu maintained that what was coming out of Camp David did not answer the country's hopes.

An American envoy is due to head back to West Asia soon in the hope of picking up the thread again before the Israelis and the Palestinians start undoing what has been achieved thus far. From Washington's point of view, the gains registered would seem permanent and be the starting point for the next round, whenever that is. But Mr. Barak sees it differently — all ideas discussed were "null and void".)



The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, is flanked by the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak (to his right), and the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, at Camp David... differences remain.

10-12
29/7

WAGING THE 'PEACE' BATTLE

H. P. W. (u)

THE U.S. PRESIDENT, Mr. Bill Clinton, cannot be blamed for the manner in which he sought to nurse the latest Camp David summit on the vexed West Asian peace question before giving up his cherished diplomatic quest for the present. For him, the West Asian theatre of almost indefinable pride and prejudice, which cut across civilisational borders, is perhaps the final frontier for waging the battle for peace in the remaining months of his presidency. By citing the U.S. 'efforts' for peace in Northern Ireland as also Bosnia, in the specific context of the latest diplomatic ground realities in West Asia, Mr. Clinton has really made no secret of his current priorities in foreign policy. Yet, the political finesse and realism that he displayed at the latest round of parleys at Camp David between the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, and the Palestinian patriarch, Mr. Yasser Arafat, may have actually saved the hopes for an eventual peace in West Asia. It is much more than a mere procedural triumph for Mr. Clinton and the U.S. entourage of officials that these negotiations, which covered quite some uncharted diplomatic terrain, remained substantially within the bounds of diplomatic confidentiality.

The most significant indicator of Washington's considerable success in sustaining the secrecy of these *in-camera* talks was that the news about the Israeli leader's angry walkout turned out to be quite incorrect. If this passion for a news blackout about the evolving trends of these talks on substantive issues had, in the end, manifested itself in regard to the atmospherics as well, Washington's unusual essay in media-unfriendliness did pay off. The talks did not collapse in the wake of the false alarm over Mr. Barak's exit from Camp David, and more importantly, the Israeli and Palestinian leaders remained there even as Mr. Clinton journeyed to Japan for the G-7 and G-8 summit meetings. If the U.S. President could not keep the Camp David talks on course for long after his return from

Japan, it appeared, too, that it was fruitless to indulge in a blame-game.

The choices before Mr. Barak and Mr. Arafat on issues such as the final status of Jerusalem, the possible contours of a Palestinian state, the intractable refugee question and the like were of historic proportions, insofar as the details that came to light in the public domain both during and after these talks reflected the creative intensity as also the emotive tension of what was in all probability a war of attrition between the two leaders. Judged by his own presentation of a failure, Mr. Clinton seemed to have found himself in a position of being neither a successful umpire nor a direct player. The definitive restriction was that the decisions simply had to be made by Mr. Barak and Mr. Arafat themselves, separately and jointly. Such were the stakes for both the Jewish State and the Palestinians, as the issues impinged on the core-civilisational identities of the two sides. The role of a peace-broker, even a person with a high credibility rating in the reckoning of these two West Asian adversaries, was necessarily that of a privileged observer with only a minimalist acknowledged right to intervene directly. The U.S. did float new ideas, especially in regard to partial or diffused or even shared sovereignty over pockets of Jerusalem, but any intrusive action by Mr. Clinton, despite his own sense of a historic moment of truth, could have ruined the peace process itself in the present circumstances. Now that the hopes have been kept alive for a future diplomatic encounter between Mr. Barak and Mr. Arafat, with or without Mr. Clinton being around as the U.S. President to try and raise the Israeli-Palestinian comfort level for the ultimate test of accommodative statesmanship, the lesson of the latest Camp David summit is that patience is valuable as an art-form of parleys if the adversaries can sustain confidence in each other as interlocutors with or without external help.

THE HINDU

29 1992 2000

CAMP David is dead, long live Camp David.

That was the slogan of the despondent, disappointed Israeli left the morning after the West Asia peace summit collapsed in the Maryland presidential retreat.

The process is not over, said strategic analyst Yossi Alpher, a former special adviser to Prime Minister Ehud Barak. "It is hard to think that Barak will simply say, 'I've finished dealing with the peace process. They're going to have to get back to talking.'"

What, though, would they talk about? "They closed some gaps," Alpher insisted. "They made some progress, on security and territory. On Jerusalem, what we witnessed was the slaughtering of sacred cows. Barak initiated a public debate, far beyond anything we have known before, on what there is about Jerusalem that is important to us."

"Perhaps they might now consider a partial agreement. It is conceivable that (Palestine Liberation Organisation chief) Yasser Arafat felt he had to make a tough stand, but that he can be more flexible next time. Well be back to business sometime, maybe sooner rather than later. And Oslo remains the only frame of reference."

Barak's announcement at the end of the summit that all bets were off ("Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed") was dismissed with scepticism. The mere fact, said the liberal daily *Haaretz*, that the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were discussed was a turning point from which there was no return. The era of sloganeering is over.

Political commentator Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation *Yediot Aharonot*: "What happened at Camp David was not a funeral, nor was it a two-week stand that is now over. The Israeli right was preparing, nonetheless, to deliver its eulogy — on the 1993 Oslo peace formula, if not, heaven forbid, on peace itself."

Likud opposition leader Ariel Sharon said he was willing to discuss joining a national-unity government under Barak. "If he invites me," he said, "I will meet him. The ball is in the Prime Minister's court. It depends what he decides to do."

On the messianic settler fringe, Rabbi Benny Elon held out a poisoned chalice. The only peace that would result from Camp David, predicted the far-right National Union legislator, would be peace among Jews, who would unite now to protect Jerusalem against the joint enemy.

The right, in other words, is ready to join a Barak coalition, provided the Prime Minister repudiates all the compromises he offered at Camp David: withdrawal from most of the territory still occupied in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; transfer of some isolated settlers to blocks that would become part of sovereign Israel; a token return, under the guise of family reunion, of some Palestinian refugees to Israel proper; a measure of shared control in Jerusalem. But there is no sign that Barak is backtracking.

After Camp David

Logic points to elections in Israel within a year, perhaps even sooner, writes ERIC SILVER

Dovish Knesset members, from Barak's One Israel, Meretz and the Centre Party, are already signalling that they would refuse to join a coalition which, as they see it, would write finis to any chance of moving toward peace. Barak would find himself, like Ramsay MacDonald in Britain 70 years ago, as a Lab-

our Prime Minister heading a Conservative government.

"I don't see how Barak can set up a unity government," said Yossi Alpher, "since it is clear to Sharon what his points of departure are in negotiations with the Palestinians and the Syrians, and these are not acceptable to him. If Barak went for the Sharon option, he would be slamming the door in Yasser Arafat's face, slamming the door in Bashar Assad's face."

Only if the assessment shifts to very strong expectations of a violent confrontation with the Palestinians would it look like more of an option. So far, Israeli and Palestinian leaders are appealing for calm, though both communities have been placed on informal alert.

It remains easier to forecast what Barak won't do than what he will, or can. The Camp David failure takes some of the immediate heat off the Prime Minister. The opposition will be less eager to press no-confidence votes. In any case, the Knesset goes into summer recess next week, which will give Barak a three-month respite.

Assuming he does not rush into the arms of the Likud, he will find it equally hard to reconstruct the broad-based coalition that disintegrated on the eve of the Maryland summit. The pro-settler National Religious Party and Natan Sharansky's Russian immigrant Yisrael Balyah remain adamantly opposed to territorial compromise. The Sephardi Orthodox Shas pulled out as soon as Barak announced he was ready to talk turkey with Arafat.

One thing was absolutely clear, Alpher acknowledged. "While Barak has a mandate from the people, that mandate is not reflected in the Knesset. He doesn't have a peace coalition."

The only alternative, in that case, would be a secular coalition, embracing one Israel — the left-liberal Meretz, Tommy Lapid's militantly anti-religious Shinui, the Arab parties and an assortment of floating legislators. But Barak knew, before he went to Camp David, that he would not be able to rely on the loyalty of either these parties or mavericks within them.

Logic points, therefore, to elections within a year, perhaps even sooner. Barak will try to call them on his terms, as the leader who brought the boys home from Lebanon and advanced the peace process, rather than be forced to go to the nation as a discredited lame duck. But even then, under Israel's two-tier electoral system in which the people vote separately for Prime Minister and Knesset, there is no guarantee he will emerge with a more congenial legislature.

(The author is The Statesman's Jerusalem-based correspondent.)

THE STATESMAN

West Asia peace talks collapse

REUTERS

59-10 26
THURMONT, July 25. — A marathon West Asia peace summit collapsed without an agreement today after 15 days of intense efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the White House has announced.

Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ehud Barak, and Palestinian leader, Mr Yasser Arafat, were unable to reach a deal and hence Mr Bill Clinton is returning to Washington, White House spokesman, Mr Joe Lockhart, said.

"The US President has concluded that the two sides are not able to reach an agreement," Mr Lockhart said.

Mr Clinton invested enormous personal energy in seeking a final agreement to the 52-year-old conflict over the status of Jerusalem, borders and pow-

ers of a Palestinian state, the fate of Palestinian refugees and the future of Jewish settlements.

Officials on both sides said the leaders had ordered their planes to be fuelled for departure and each blamed the other for the deadlock. "The Palestinians rejected all American proposals under pressure," an Israeli official said.

Mr Arafat wrote to the US President during the night, saying he saw no point in continuing unless the USA amended proposals on the status of Jerusalem, a Palestinian official said. "Palestinians believe as long as there are no new constructive ideas on Jerusalem, there is no reason to go on," he said, quoting the letter.

Gaps widened as negotiators tried to put on paper points of

agreement and discord on the core issues. White House called the talks "exhaustive and exhausting".

On reaching the most contentious issue of the status of Jerusalem, Israelis were unwilling to put on paper the idea of shared sovereignty over parts of Arab East Jerusalem.

They also balked at the word 'refugees' while the Palestinians clung to their demand for a "right of return" for refugees of the 1948 West Asia war and their descendants to homes in present-day Israel.

"Palestinians will not accept a partial agreement and I think the USA and Israel are aware of that," Palestine Liberation Organisation representative in Washington, Mr Hassan Abdel-Rahim, said.

■ Editorial: American naivete, page 8

THE STATESMAN

26 JUL 2000

West Asia talks collapse yet again

THURMONT: The Camp David summit in pursuit of a West Asia peace settlement collapsed on Tuesday. "The President has concluded that the two sides are not able to reach an agreement at this time," said White House spokesman Joe Lockhart. President Bill Clinton will return to Washington to make the announcement.

It had become clear earlier in the day that no serious headway was in sight despite an offer from Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to recognise some sort of Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem. Palestinian sources said the breaking point came when Israel balked at Palestinian sovereignty over Jerusalem's walled Old City, offering access only to Al Aqsa mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam. This, sources said, infuriated Mr Arafat.

At 3 a.m. on Tuesday, Mr Arafat sent a letter to Mr Clinton, saying he saw no point in continuing because the Israeli position on

Jerusalem could never lead to an agreement.

Reaction to the breakdown was quick. "This failure is another indication that the only choice we have is resistance," said Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin. "Only by force will we be able to retain our rights. We are ready to become martyrs and they will pay a high price if they think they can attack us and reoccupy the land."

The breakdown came despite redoubled efforts by Mr Clinton who returned to Camp David on Sunday night after a four-day trip to Japan. For the second consecutive night, Mr Clinton held late-night talks.

In the course of the contentious summit, there had been repeated reports that one side or the other was ready to pack its bags and walk out.

The main point of dispute is Jerusalem, which both sides claim to be their capital. Among the other important issues discussed were the

fate of several million Palestinian refugees and the boundaries of a future Palestinian state. On Monday, Mr Lockhart told reporters that as long as Mr Clinton thought that discussions were substantive and had the potential to lead to an agreement, he would remain here and keep the parties here.

Meanwhile, Israeli sources, declining to be identified, alleged that the Palestinians had not been responsive to Israel's proposal for sovereignty over predominantly Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. All along, Mr Arafat has demanded sovereignty over all East Jerusalem, including the walled Old City. Israel, however, has insisted that Jerusalem can never be divided.

The breakdown came shortly before Mr Clinton was due to leave for Arkansas for a memorial service for Diane Blair, a University of Arkansas political science professor and a close friend who died of cancer. (AP)

Clinton back in Camp David

ASSOCIATED PRESS

THURMONT, July 24. — Hurrying back from an abbreviated trip to Asia, President Mr Bill Clinton rejoined troubled West Asia talks at Camp David saying, "I'm keeping my fingers crossed" for a peace deal.

Mr Clinton arrived yesterday by helicopter at the presidential retreat, where aides said his first order of business would be to meet with his own negotiating team and then assess the state of the summit. Boarding the chopper at the White House after his flight home from Japan, he crossed his fingers and told reporters he was keeping them crossed.

On the 13th day of talks, neither Israel nor the Palestinians signaled any change in position on the prime point of dispute: Jerusalem. Both sides claim the ancient city as their capital.

"The ball is in the Israeli

court," said Mr Hassan Abdel Rahman, Washington's PLO envoy and frequent spokesman during the talks. "Will they do what is needed to reach an agreement? Or will they stick to their unacceptable positions?"

Israeli spokesman Mr Gadi Baltiansky suggested the Palestinians would need to make concessions to move matters forward.

With Mr Clinton's return, he said, "we will try to see if there are grounds for continuing this effort."

Speaking later on Israel television, Mr Baltiansky said, "It would be easier to prophesy what will happen in 24 years than what will happen here in the next 24 hours."

US Secretary of State Mrs Madeleine Albright, who sat in for Mr Clinton, took both Palestinian leader Mr Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ehud Barak on separate excursions over the

weekend, Mr Arafat to lunch at her Virginia farm and Mr Barak to the nearby civil war battlefield of Gettysburg. It marked the first time the two leaders had left the secluded retreat since the talks began.

State Department spokesman Mr Richard Boucher said no schedule had been set for the evening.

Asked about prospects for the summit going forward, he said Mr Clinton's initial assessment would be extremely important. After US officials prematurely declared on Wednesday that the summit had ended without an agreement, "one hesitates to make any kind of prediction," Mr Boucher said.

No deadline has been set for completing the talks, but he said USA's mediation effort could not continue indefinitely. "We are not here for an unlimited period of time," he said.

Throughout the summit, American spokesmen have freely acknowledged the atmos-

phere has been very tense at times.

Mr Clinton had said before leaving Japan that whatever the outcome, the two sides had made a genuine effort to resolve their long-standing disputes over Jerusalem, the boundaries of a Palestinian state and the fate of several million Palestinian refugees.

If any agreement is reached, both leaders must prepare for a fierce backlash at home.

Mr Barak, almost toppled by hard-liners before he left for the summit, came under renewed criticism yesterday from Jewish settlers.

Settler leader Mr Zeev Hever said most settlers would refuse to budge from homes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip no matter what might be decided at Camp David.

"We are not scared off. We are going to stay on the ground," Mr Hever told Israel's army radio.

THE STATESMAN

Camp David fate hangs on Clinton

REUTERS

JERUSALEM, July 23. — Israel predicts the Camp David summit with Palestinians will either break down or produce a peace breakthrough within hours after President Bill Clinton returns today from the G-8 summit.

Mr Clinton was due to touch down at an air base outside Washington at 3.50 p.m. and rejoin the summit.

The two sides say the 13-day talks are stuck over the fate of Jerusalem. "It won't take a whole lot of time .. President Clinton will return to Camp David .. and then we will see if there's any point in going on or to pack up and go home," Mr Barak's spokesman Mr Gadi Baltiansky told Army Radio, despite a US-imposed news blackout.

THE STATESMAN

24 JUL 2000

CAMP DAVID / STATUS OF JERUSALEM

Palestinians rule out partial rule

THURMONT, JULY 22. An authoritative Palestinian source dismissed suggestions that the Camp David West Asia summit could end with a partial deal that left the disputed status of Jerusalem for further talks.

"There will be no deal without Jerusalem. We will not accept delaying the issue of Jerusalem," the official, in touch with the Palestinian delegation, told Reuters on the 11th day of the secretive summit, rebutting Israeli reports.

An Israeli Cabinet Minister said the Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, had accepted a U.S. proposal for shared rule in parts of Arab East Jerusalem, deferring the issue of who rules the walled old city, but the Palestinians said there was no such official American document.

Mr. Barak and the Palestinian President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, received encouragement from world leaders meeting at a Group of Eight summit in Okinawa, Japan, who praised their courage after being briefed by the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton.

"We welcome their courageous decision to continue negotiations and confirm our support for their endeavours," the G-8 leaders said. The White House announced that Mr. Clinton would hurry home from Japan early on Sunday to rejoin the talks.

Mr. Clinton told reporters he



can paper on Jerusalem has been presented to us." A State Department spokesman reported that Mr. Barak and Mr. Arafat dined on Thursday with the U.S. Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, standing in for Mr. Clinton. It was the two men's first meal together for several days.

The U.S. efforts to keep a lid of confidentiality on the talks suffered a setback on Friday when both sides went public with differing versions of American proposals on Jerusalem. The Israeli Cabinet Minister, Mr. Michael Melchior, who was part of Mr. Barak's public relations team at the talks near Washington, confirmed in television interviews what Israeli officials had been saying privately during a virtual news blackout on the negotiations.

"We're talking about a U.S. proposal which accepts Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem as an undivided city and has some signs of joint sovereignty, expanded self-administration, of some of the Arab Muslim quarters in the outskirts of Jerusalem." He told Israel radio that Mr. Barak had accepted the proposal.

But the Palestinian spokeswoman, Ms. Hanan Ashrawi, urged caution and said Mr. Melchior was discussing matters that were not yet public, adding that the gaps between the sides were still wide. — Reuters

28/7 110-12

Madeleine - A few thoughts from your side!
 20-7-2000
 Bill Clinton, Madeleine,
 Tony Blair, J. Chirac,
 George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac,
 J. Chirac
 Dear Madeleine
 You look like you're
 waiting for success!
 Not under
 Tony Blair
 Bush
 Chirac
 Blair
 Clinton
 Albright

This is a photocopy of messages written on Friday by leaders of the Group of Eight in Okinawa for their summit talks and sent to the U.S. Secretary of State, Ms Madeleine Albright, to encourage her who is working as a mediator in the West Asia peace talks being held at Camp David. — AP

was 'hopeful' about a peace accord.

The Palestinian source, making clear that Mr. Arafat was angered

by Israeli accounts of the talks, said: "We have not agreed, and we will not agree, to delaying talks on Jerusalem. No official Ameri-

Barak backs US Jerusalem plan

W. Barak
(2)

Jerusalem, July 21 (Reuters): An Israeli Cabinet minister said today that Prime Minister Ehud Barak had accepted a US proposal enabling Israel and the Palestinians to share sovereignty over parts of Arab East Jerusalem.

Michael Melchior, part of Barak's public relations team during a 10-day-old Israeli-Palestinian peace summit at Camp David in the United States, confirmed what Israeli officials in the United States had said only privately.

Palestinians have yet to accept the proposal.

"What's being spoken of is a (US) proposal that is definitely within the red line of the Prime Minister and therefore the Prime Minister agreed to the proposal," Melchior, minister for diaspora affairs, said on Israel Radio.

Earlier, an Israeli official said US proposals were on the table that would have the two sides sharing sovereignty over parts of Arab East Jerusalem, captured by Israel at war 33 years ago and annexed in a move never recognised internationally.

The US proposal would also freeze the status quo in Jerusalem's Old City, home to some of the three world religions' holiest sites, for several years — until a permanent solution could be negotiated, the Israeli official said.

Under the proposal, Palestinians would get some form of safe passage to the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex in the Old City, Islam's third-holiest site.

Under the proposal, Israel

would annex Jewish settlements in the West Bank to Jerusalem, including the largest settlement Maale Adumim, while Palestinian neighbourhoods in Arab East Jerusalem could be jointly controlled, Melchior said.

"It's about administration-plus, perhaps also with signs of joint sovereignty, in the (Arab) neighbourhoods outside the Old City, in the neighbourhoods at the edge of Jerusalem such as Shuafat," Melchior said.

Israel says Jerusalem must remain its undivided capital. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, at Camp David with Barak, wants East Jerusalem for the capital of a future Palestinian state.

US secretary of state Madeleine Albright has been urging Israeli and Palestinian officials to make tough decisions on Jerusalem before President Bill Clinton races back to Camp David from a G8 summit in Japan. He left early yesterday.

Israeli officials, leaning on the Palestinians to bend on Jerusalem, have said that Barak plans to leave Camp David on Sunday for Israel if there is no deal.

Washington-based PLO representative Hassan Abdel-Rahman indicated earlier that nothing had changed on an issue that officials said in advance was so difficult it might be left out of any final deal.

"We will not accept any proposal that gives us less than full sovereignty (in East Jerusalem)," he said.

"Without full sovereignty, there will be no deal."

President Bill Clinton said today Israeli and Palestinian officials were still trying to hammer out a peace agreement at Camp David, saying he could provide no details but was "hopeful."

"All I can say is that they're still talking and, consistent with our rules, I'm still not talking, but I'm hopeful," Clinton told reporters when asked if he was optimistic about the peace talks.

Clinton spoke to reporters at the start of a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Okinawa, Japan, where both men are attending the Group of Eight (G8) summit of leading industrial nations and Japan.

The two sides are seeking to resolve the most vexing issues in their 52-year dispute: the borders of a Palestinian state, the status of Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees and of West Bank Jewish settlements.

A Palestinian lawmaker warned Palestinian peace negotiators today against relinquishing the right of refugees to return to their homeland, saying they would face the wrath of their people.

Hussam Khader, speaking as West Asian talks staggered on at the Camp David summit, made clear he was warning negotiators they could be in danger because of the mood of the Palestinian people — but he was not making any specific threat. "A pistol bullet has been passing from generation to generation and its last destination will be the heart of those who cede the refugees' right to return."

THE TELEGRAPH

22 JUL 2000

Arafat, Barak do a U-turn, stay on at Camp David

N.C. Menon

Washington, July 20

IN A dramatic, last-minute development at dawn today, the publicly announced demise of the Middle East peace talks was averted, with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak agreeing to stay on at Camp David and continue negotiations with the aid of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright while President Clinton fulfilled this commitment to participate in the Group of 8 summit of industrial nations in Japan.

President Clinton, with the strain of nine days of practically non-stop nurturing of the difficult negotiations evident on his visage, announced the good news this morning. "We all thought it was over," he told newsmen. "Then we discovered nobody wanted to give up."

The President acknowledged that despite an "intensive effort" by both sides, substantial gaps remained. But there had been progress.

President Clinton went back and forth throughout the day between the two leaders who did not directly meet each other. By the end of the day, despite Mr Clinton's

patient and Herculean efforts, the Palestinian and the Israeli sides seemed to be getting set to blame each other for the failure of the meeting. Both Mr Arafat and Mr Barak wrote formally to President Clinton, appealing to him and explaining their own positions.

The question of sovereignty over Jerusalem was reportedly the main obstacle. White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said that the two leaders were finding it difficult to make concessions on such emotional issues, Mr Arafat would find it very difficult, if not impossible, domestically to give up even part of the Arab claim to East Jerusalem as the capital of the proposed Palestinian State. Similarly, Mr Barak would face severe problems at home if he were seen as making concessions on the holy city of Jerusalem, which Israel wrested from Jordan in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and which it then vowed to keep united under Israeli control. Many Israelis consider Jerusalem theirs by divine writ.

During the day, President Clinton telephoned four other leaders in the Middle East to apprise them of the latest development, and perhaps to seek their assistance in persuading the two negotiators to reach agreement.

THE HINDUSTAN T

21 JUL 2000

Arafat, Barak try to revive failed W Asia peace talks

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
WASHINGTON, JULY 20

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak have decided to remain in the United States overnight amid efforts to revive the failed Camp David peace talks, sources on both sides said early on Thursday.

"There are efforts to resume the negotiations," said Hassan Abdel Rahman, the PLO representative in Washington. "President Arafat is staying, he is not leaving on Thursday night." A senior Israeli source said Barak would stay at Camp David overnight to continue the talks. "I confirm that the Israelis are staying to continue the talks," the source, who refused to be named, said at a hotel in the Maryland town of Frederick where Israeli officials and press are staying.

"There has been progress, we cannot go into details," he said. "President Clinton has asked both sides to stay with (US Secretary of State) Madeleine Albright to continue with her the discussions."

"There is a possibility of reaching a framework agreement and that arrangements on Jerusalem will be put off to a later date," he added. The PLO official had imme-



Arafat & Barak: Back to the table

diately blamed Barak for the failure of the talks, accusing him of behaving like a settler at the negotiations.

US President Bill Clinton was shortly due to make a statement on the failure of the negotiations before leaving to attend a summit of

Barak needs majority

JERUSALEM: ISRAEL'S parliament today approved the first reading of three bills upping the proportion of voters needed to ratify any peace agreement prime minister Ehud Barak makes with the Palestinians.

The bills will need three further votes to become law, and in each case will require an absolute majority of 61 in the 120-seat parliament.

industrialised nations in Japan.

Clinton is scheduled to return to Washington on July 23.

Earlier, Barak wrote a letter of regret to US President Bill Clinton and his delegation packed their bags leaving the US hosts scrambling for a deal ahead of Friday's deadline. Senior Palestinian negotiator Mahmud Abbas left the marathon negotiations to attend his son's wedding saying "of course there is a crisis". "The gaps are still wide, but they are still talking," said Abbas, known as Abu Mazen, the principal Palestinian architect of the 1993 Oslo Accords and PLO secretary general. Israeli delegates received orders to leave the Camp David peace parley and board a plane later in the day for Tel Aviv.

Barak gave Clinton the letter regretting Palestinian unwillingness to take a historic decision for peace, a senior Israeli source said.

The White House confirmed Clinton had received a letter from Barak, but would not unveil the contents.

"Barak wrote that to his sorrow he reached the conclusion that the Palestinian side is not negotiating in good faith and is not willing to negotiate in a serious and substantive way on permanent peace between us," a senior Israeli official said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

21 JUL 2000

West Asia talks teeter on brink

DEUTSCHE PRESS AGENTUR

THURMONT (Maryland), July 19. — The tension-packed Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David teetered on the brink of collapse today as Mr Ehud Barak sent a letter to Mr Bill Clinton accusing the Palestinians for not negotiating in good faith and warning of "tragic results" should an accord not be reached, according to Israeli sources.

While holding out hope for a final concession from Mr Yasser Arafat, Mr Barak wrote that Mr Clinton had created a "golden opportunity" for peace that was about to be squandered.

His government, he wrote, had worked "tirelessly" to seize that opportunity, and Mr Barak had traveled to Camp David seeking "an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict" at great political risk against strong opposition at home.

"But to my sadness, there did not appear a Palestinian readiness to take the required historic decisions at this stage," Mr Barak wrote.

That appeared to refer to Mr Barak's demand that the Palestinians formally end their 52-year conflict with Israel by renouncing any future claims on the Jewish state.

"If there won't be any last-minute developments, the Palestinians will have to face the tragic result of the missed opportunity," Mr Barak wrote.

Clinton puts off Japan trip: With tense W Asia peace talks at crossroads, Mr Clinton today put off his trip to Japan by a day to extend the Camp David summit, adds AP. The move gave Mr Clinton another day to try to reach settlement terms that balance the diverse demands of Mr Barak and Mr Arafat.

THE STATESMAN

20 JUL 2000

on Monday. — AP

West Asia summit at a 'critical' stage

HD-18
1972

WASHINGTON, JULY 18. The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, today began another round of tough negotiations pressing the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to wrap up the outlines of a final peace agreement before he leaves for Japan tomorrow to attend the G-8 summit.

As round-the-clock negotiations entered 'critical' stage on the seventh day of the summit at Camp David, Mr. Clinton was working harder than ever with the Israeli Premier, Mr. Ehud Barak, and the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, with the White House spokesman, Mr. Joe Lockhart, saying "the pace and the intensity (of talks) have both quickened."

Virtually ruling out any change

in Mr. Clinton's planned trip to Tokyo, Mr. Lockhart said "I expect that when the President leaves, the parties will wrap up their business." But he refused to comment on reports that the talks were in crisis citing a news blackout imposed on the summit.

However, the Speaker of the Israeli Parliament, Mr. Avraham Burg, told Israeli radio that Mr. Barak had told him that he was "not really optimistic" about the summit's chance of success.

Mr. Burg noted that the Israelis and Palestinians had in fact "never been so far apart" on the future of Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees and borders of a future Palestinian state — issues at the core of their 52-year conflict. — PTI

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JUL 19 1972

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CAMP DAVID

Peace needs a final push

MA 2X
(11) (1997)

TWENTY-TWO years ago, Israel negotiated a historic peace accord with Egypt at Camp David, brokered by Jimmy Carter. Bill Clinton is trying to repeat the feat by cloistering Ehud Barak with Yasser Arafat at Camp David, to deal with issues that remain unresolved after seven years of negotiations. Since Yitzhak Rabin and the 1993 Oslo accord, serious negotiations had been held up principally by the mendacity of Netanyahu's administration, which appeared willing to talk peace while sabotaging it. Barak has moved forward; although a tough negotiator, he appears sincere about a settlement. Being a former general of the Israeli defence forces provides him, in Israeli eyes, with high credentials. He has been subject, however, to the vagaries of coalition politics, narrowly surviving a no-confidence motion in the Knesset following a revolt by religious right-wing parties in his coalition, wary that Barak may give away too much. This suggests serious obstacles for a comprehensive peace deal.

Contentious issues include the final borders of the Palestinian entity, the status of Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees, what is to be done with Jewish settlers in West Bank and Gaza; all potential stumbling blocks. Clinton's calculation must be that while Barak and Arafat may refuse to budge from entrenched positions when faced with each other, his presence will force them to appear conciliatory and reasonable. From Clinton's point of view, his presidency has been perceived as being weak on foreign affairs; if indeed he can push the two men to a comprehensive settlement, it will silence his critics. Apart from the Palestinians, the only other serious matter remaining to be resolved in West Asia is Israel's relations with Syria. If Barak can arrive at a settlement with Syria's new leadership as well, Israel will be at peace with its neighbours for the first time, a truly historic achievement. It seems early days yet.

THE STATESMAN

West Asian peace deal at hand?

WASHINGTON, JULY 16. West Asian summit talks at Camp David have made progress and a framework agreement for a final Israeli-Palestinian peace could be reached within a few days, sources close to the talks said last night.

The sources reported a mood of growing optimism among the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat's team, which has been the most pessimistic in public since the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, called the five-day-old summit.

"They are working on an agreement that could be finalised within a few days. The main problem now is refugees, and a bit on Jerusalem," one source said.

The United States has maintained a strict news blackout on the substance of the talks. An Israeli delegation source earlier described

the talks as "very difficult" and said there had been no breakthrough. The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak's spokesman, Mr. Gadi Baltiansky, said Mr. Barak was prepared to stay two weeks if necessary to get a deal.

The sources ascribed the mood change among the Palestinians to progress on the ultra-sensitive issue of Jerusalem, which both sides want as their capital. They gave no details but the Israeli Parliament Speaker, Mr. Avraham Burg, this week talked of both "enlarging and shrinking" Jerusalem — bringing some Israeli settlements close to the city within its boundaries, and putting some existing Palestinian neighbourhoods outside a redrawn area under Israeli control.

Israel and the Palestinians are trying to work out an agreement before a self-imposed Sept.

13 deadline. Mr. Clinton would like to reach a deal before leaving for Japan for a summit of major industrial nations. He is scheduled to leave on Wednesday.

But whether the leaders will be able to reach a deal before Mr. Clinton leaves — or at all — remains a mystery.

Israeli and Palestinian sources said on Saturday they do not expect American "bridging proposals" — aimed at bridging the wide gaps between the two sides — until mid-week, which would suggest the summit could be extended while Mr. Clinton is away.

A senior Israeli source said there was a "reasonable chance" of achieving a deal at the talks, but it was not clear if the sides could finally resolve all their differences or would defer some issues to a future summit.

Palestinian sources said the summit's first crisis flared on Thursday, when Mr. Arafat threatened to walk out in anger over U.S. compromise proposals Palestinians felt were too close to Israeli positions.

One source told Reuters that Mr. Arafat was so enraged by the ideas presented by U.S. West Asian envoy, Mr. Dennis Ross, that he ordered his delegation to pack their bags.

Presidential intervention and the withdrawal of the U.S. proposal calmed Mr. Arafat, the source said.

Camp David was being watched with great anticipation in West Asia.

Hundreds of Palestinians demonstrated in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip on Saturday to support the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes in what is now Israel.

In Israel, several hundred motorists formed a convoy from Tel Aviv toward the northern city of Haifa to show their backing for Mr. Barak's peace policies.

In the West Bank city of Hebron, scuffles broke out between Jewish settlers and Palestinians near the Cave of the Patriarchs, the traditional burial place of the Biblical Abraham as well as the nearby Jewish settlement of Kiryat Araba. — Reuters



A young Jewish settler struggles to free himself from the grasp of border police as he was removed from a hilltop near the Efrat settlement in the West Bank on Sunday. — Reuters

THE HINDU

17 JUL 2000

Albright takes over reins at Camp David

THURMONT, JULY 13. After two days of shuttling back and forth between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, stepped back from the summiteering today, temporarily turning over the reins to the Secretary of State, Ms Madeleine Albright.

As Mr. Clinton prepared to honour two previous commitments — a address to the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in Baltimore and a medal ceremony in Washington — the White House adhered to its steadfast refusal to discuss the substance of the talks.

Mr. Clinton's chief spokesman, Mr. Joe Lockhart, described yesterday's meetings at the Camp David presidential retreat as "a busy day between all parties, a day of engagement." In the absence of any claim of progress, Mr. Lockhart warned against drawing any conclusions as to whether gaps were being narrowed in the talks. "Nothing should be read one way or the other," he said.

Without elaborating, he said the two sides had been concentrating on "core issues." Those disputes — the most contentious ones separating the two sides — include the status of Jerusalem, claimed by both sides as their capital; the borders of any future Palestinian state; and the status of more than 2 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

In addition to a series of informal encounters among members of the three delegations, yesterday's sessions included separate

discussions by Mr. Clinton with the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, in the morning and the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, in the late afternoon.

Mr. Arafat and Mr. Clinton talked as they strolled along a wooded pathway, according to Mr. Lockhart, who has repeatedly said that the rustic, informal atmosphere at the retreat was proving conducive to talks.

"This was a substantive encounter," the White House spokesman, Mr. P. J. Crowley, said of the Clinton-Arafat meeting.

The President then met Palestinian negotiators.

Mr. Lockhart stressed he did not expect any loss of momentum due to Mr. Clinton's absence for part of today, pointing out that Ms Albright already had held talks with both leaders and presided over meetings of delegates from both sides.

Enforced togetherness, though, has been credited in the past with contributing to success.

Meanwhile, a report from Gaza quoted the Palestinian Authority as saying that it had asked the U.S. and Europe to pressure Israel to remove military reinforcements from Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. Major-General Abdel-Razek al-Majaydeh, secretary of the Authority's National Security Council, said Israel had brought in tanks and supplied settlements with heavy machine-guns.

He said military attaches of France and Britain, along with U.S. officials in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, had visited the Strip and taken pictures. — AP, Reuters

THE HINDU

Rivals stumble on peace

REUTERS

THURMONT, July 13. — Israeli and Palestinian leaders plunged in earnest into the most intractable obstacles to a peace treaty on the second day of a US-brokered summit yesterday.

The White House said Mr Bill Clinton, Mr Ehud Barak and Mr Yasser Arafat had addressed all the core issues at the heart of the 52-year-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the Camp David presidential retreat.

In the public arena, the Israelis won USA's goodwill by scrapping a controversial 250 million radar plane sale to China, while the Palestinians irked US officials by seeking to hold a meeting of an enlarged Palestinian leadership inside Camp David.



Mr Yasser Arafat



Mr Ehud Barak

"Suffice it to say that it has been a busy day between all of the parties," the White House spokesman, Mr Joe Lockhart, told a news briefing several miles from Camp David. "There has been real engagement today dealing with the substantive issues that define what the par-

ties need to agree on in order to reach an overall agreement."

Mr Lockhart hinted at only the broadest details of the talks, saying Mr Clinton held separate meetings with Mr Barak and Mr Arafat and planned to bring about 40 American, Palestinian and

Israeli delegates together for dinner. The secretary of state, Mrs Madeleine Albright, chaired a meeting with the full Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams.

Earlier, Israel removed a potential obstacle to any US aid package to underwrite a peace accord by announcing the cancellation of the sale of the Phalcon advanced early warning radar to China which had sparked the ire of its US ally. The White House welcomed the decision to drop the signed deal, saying it was pleased that Israel had taken US security concerns into account.

The Pentagon feared the system could jeopardise US forces in any conflict with China, and the Congress had warned it could cut Israel's \$2.8 billion in existing annual aid should the sale proceed.

THE STATESMAN

14 JUL 2000

Bashar Assad elected *W. Amiri* **President of Syria** *7 July 00*

DAMASCUS: Bashar Assad has been elected president of Syria with 97.29 per cent of the national vote, interior minister Mohammed Harba said on Tuesday.

The son of the late President Hafez Assad was the only candidate in a referendum held on Monday amid displays of mass loyalty organised by the ruling Baath party.

Bashar Assad is expected to be inaugurated on July 17, becoming the first president to succeed his father in an Arab Republic. Vice president Abdul-Halim Khaddam has said there will be a cabinet reshuffle after the inauguration. Interior minister Harba said that of the 9.44 million eligible voters, about 8.93 million cast their ballots, making for a turnout of 94.59 per cent. He told a news conference in the interior ministry that a total of 8.69 million voters had said "yes," 22,439 voters said "no," and 219,000 votes were spoilt. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

12 JUL 2000

Clashes challenge Khatami reforms

BY GENEIVE ABDO
International Herald Tribune

Tehran, July 10: A new challenge to President Mohammed Khatami's government emerged on Sunday after violent demonstrations over the weekend in central Tehran, where thousands of disgruntled members of Iran's underclass joined university students in a clash with Islamic extremists.

The spontaneous coalition of students and ordinary Iranians demanding improved social conditions on Saturday night marked a turning point in the struggle to redefine the Islamic Republic.

A year ago, it was primarily students who demanded freedom and political reform as they spilled their blood on campuses and city streets throughout the country. Now, the cries for change have broadened to include mainstream society.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei, summoned Mr Khatami and senior government officials to

his residence on Sunday. State radio said Ayatollah Khamenei had blamed foreign "enemies" for the demonstration, and called on the nation and the government to remain on high alert.

The explosion of anger on Saturday, in which scores were injured, according to Reuters, was directed not only at the hard-line clerical establishment but also at Mr Khatami, who was criticised for failing to make profound changes to the system. "The clerics live like kings, while the people are reduced to poverty," shouted the crowd. Other chants followed: "Khatami. Khatami, show your power or resign," and "Khatami, Khatami, this is the final notice."

It was evident that Mr Khatami's policy of "rule of law" had taken a back seat to the hardliners' policy of brute force. The president is not in control of the armed forces.

That power lies with Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei, who is closely aligned with the conservatives.

THE ASIAN AGE

11 JUL 2000

Opinion poll gives Barak a boost

JERUSALEM, JULY 10. (Israelis support the Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak's readiness to make compromises with the Palestinians despite his Government's near-collapse over a U.S. peace-making summit) according to an opinion poll published today.

The Dahaf Institute poll for the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* showed 52 per cent of the 502 Israelis surveyed yesterday believed he must head for the Camp David summit with the Palestinian President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton. Of those surveyed, 45 per cent believed he did not have to go while three percent had no opinion.

Three right wing and religious parties resigned yesterday, stripping Mr. Barak of a majority in Parliament, but the former army chief elected last year on a promise to accelerate peace moves, vowed to head for the summit near Washington in any event. The poll, with a 4.5 per cent margin of error, showed that 53 per cent of the Israelis surveyed believed Mr. Barak had a mandate to make concessions to Palestinians while 44 per cent believed he did not and three percent had no opinion.



In a televised address from his office yesterday, Mr. Barak shrugged off the Government desertions and appealed to the electorate he has said he will ask to approve a peace deal in Israel's first national referendum. Asked what they would prefer, 43 per cent of Israelis said new elections, 39 per cent a unity Government between Mr. Barak's One Israel faction and the right-wing opposition Likud, and 18 per cent a narrow left-leaning government.

Israel's right-wingers are afraid Mr. Barak will cede West Bank land they view as the Biblical land

of the Jewish people and crucial to Israeli security. Mr. Barak was expected to barely survive a no-confidence vote in Parliament, helped by Arab parties and other leftists who would thwart an opposition bid to muster the 61 votes needed in the 120-seat Parliament to topple him.

Mr. Barak was scheduled to face three no-confidence votes before his departure for the Camp David summit. Mr. Barak, who was to have left for the U.S. in the morning, postponed his departure until after the vote.

The Likud party was in high spirits after three right wing parties quit the ruling coalition. The Likud Chairman, Mr. Ariel Sharon, said Mr. Barak does not have the support of the nation and urged him not to go to Camp David.

Meanwhile, the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, has urged Israel and the Palestinians to work hard toward a peace accord or watch tension and hostility rise in the region. "If the parties do not seize this moment to make more progress, there will be more hostility and more bitterness — perhaps even more violence," Mr. Clinton said. — Reuters, AP

RECEIVED

11 JUL 2000

Israeli minister quits Barak coalition

AGENCIES
JERUSALEM, JULY 9

A LEADING partner in Prime Minister Ehud Barak's coalition resigned today over the Israeli leader's participation in a US peacemaking summit with the Palestinians next week.

Making good on his threat, Interior Minister Natan Sharansky, head of a right-leaning Russian immigrant party, told reporters he had turned in his resignation. By law, it was due to take effect in 48 hours.

"I am here today to deliver my letter of resignation. I am resigning from the Government," he said outside the Prime Minister's office.

The departure of Sharansky's four-seat party in the 120-seat par-

liament, along with the expected resignation of the five-seat National Religious Party by Monday, would leave Barak with a shaky 59-61 minority in Parliament. (Barak was elected) 3 months ago on a promise to accelerate peace moves but his left-right Government is torn over the prospect of making a deal based on ceding land Israel occupied in the 1967 West Asia war.)

Meanwhile, Palestinian Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said in Ramallah that the Palestinians will not accept any partial deals at the Camp David summit which would postpone such issues as the status of Jerusalem or the fate of refugees until a later date.

"We will not accept any partial agreement or a new transitional period," he told a press conference,

India committed
■ KUALALUMPUR: India on Sunday made it clear that it was committed to the Palestinian cause, the recent opening in New Delhi's relations with Israel notwithstanding. "We are supportive of the West Asia peace process... We are committed to various Arab causes, particularly the Palestinian cause," Minister of State for External Affairs Ati Kumar Panja told reporters. Panja arrived here on Saturday night on a four-day official visit to Kuwait.

two days before the three-way summit with the Israelis and United States is due to start.

He was reacting to press reports that a solution to the thorniest issues could be postponed to enable a partial agreement to be reached.

"All issues should be resolved,

specially Jerusalem, the refugees and the withdrawal to the June 4 border," he said, in an allusion to the border in force before Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza strip and East Jerusalem in the June 1967 war. ("We want a practical agreement which leads to the implementation of all its points on the ground," he added, saying that the two sides had issued a declaration of principles when they signed the Oslo interim peace accords in 1993, and there was no need for a new one. Abed Rabbo is a member of the official Palestinian delegation to the Camp David talks.)

Rabbo also said that the Palestinian Authority will hold a popular referendum on any final peace deal.

"We promised our people that there will be a referendum. Today I

want to stress this. I want to confirm it," he said. "There will be a referendum for all the Palestinians, inside the Palestinian territories and outside." Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has promised a referendum in Israel also for any peace deal.

In a related development, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived in Cairo to consult with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak ahead of his summit at Camp David with Barak, sources said. Arafat was due to meet with Mubarak at his seafloor palace in Egypt's Mediterranean port city of Alexandria. After his meet with Mubarak, Arafat is scheduled to fly on to Lome, where he will address the 36th summit of the Organisation of African Unity, then head on to Washington, a Palestinian official said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Israeli coalition collapses on summit eve

AP AND REUTERS

JERUSALEM, July 9. — The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ehud Barak's ruling coalition was collapsing on the eve of the Camp David summit today as coalition partners said they were leaving the government.

In a further blow, Mr Barak's Foreign Minister, Mr David Levy, was planning to boycott the US-brokered summit, set for Tuesday, because of doubts about its chances of success.

Right-wing and religious parties quit one by one, accusing Mr Barak of being ready to give away Israeli-occupied land without eliciting compromises from Mr Yasser Arafat.

Despite the crisis, Mr Barak's office said the Israeli leader would attend the summit on Tuesday with Mr Arafat and Mr Clinton.

Interior minister, Mr Natan Sharansky, head of a Right-leaning Russian immigrant party, was the first coalition partner to quit at noon.

Four hours later, the powerful ultra-orthodox Shas Party, the biggest coalition partner, said it would also leave and at six p.m. the National Religious Party decided to follow suit, leaving Mr Barak with a 42-78 minority in Parliament.

Mr Sharansky, a former Soviet-Jewish dissident, also complained he was not consulted about peace moves. "I've turned in my resignation letter to Mr Barak. I believe it's a big mistake that he travels to Washington without drafting a joint stance of coalition members," he told reporters.

Shas expressed fears that Mr Barak would make painful concessions to the Palestinians without a mandate.

"The process is very important to us and we expect to be genuine partners on the way," said Mr Eli Ishai, Shas head.

THE STATESMAN

10 JUL 2000

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Barak to offer some concessions

WASHINGTON, JULY 7. The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, will arrive at the U.S.-sponsored West Asia summit next week prepared to offer the Palestinians an expanded presence in a reshaped Jerusalem along with admission to thousands of refugees whose families already live in Israel, according to two well-placed Israeli officials.

Stressing the concessions must be matched by conciliatory Palestinian moves, the officials said yesterday the future of Jerusalem was the toughest issue on the table and may be excluded from a settlement between the two sides.

Less progress has been made on Jerusalem than any other issue in the negotiations leading up to the summit the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, will stage beginning Tuesday at

Camp David, Maryland.

By contrast, the two sides have made considerable headway on the question of how much land Israel will turn over to Mr. Yasser Arafat for a state, said the officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

(Mr. Barak, for instance, may not insist on retaining the strategic Jordan valley, provided Israel can maintain a security presence there at least for some time, they said.)

The unusual disclosure of Mr. Barak's likely stance on core issues at the summit appeared to be part of an effort to project him as a reasonable Israeli leader and to coax matching concessions from Mr. Arafat.

(Publicly, at least, Mr. Arafat is demanding transfer of all of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem — more land than Mr. Barak is pre-

pared to relinquish. And Mr. Barak intends to keep Jerusalem united and Israel's capital.

But Mr. Barak is prepared to grant the Palestinians control of day-to-day affairs in their Jerusalem neighbourhoods in exchange for incorporating nearby Jewish settlements into the predominantly Jewish area of the city, the officials said.

(On refugees, Mr. Barak is willing to consider permitting tens of thousands of Palestinians to settle in Israel if they have family members there, but he will not accept the idea they have a legal right to return, the officials said. The precedent is Israel's acceptance of 60,000 to 70,000 Palestinian Arabs in a programme of reuniting families that was in force between Israel's founding in 1948 and the West Asia war of 1967, the officials said.)

Tens of thousands of today's refugees would be absorbed in the Palestinian state, while others would receive assistance under a worldwide funding campaign to be resettled in Arab countries where they now live.)

East Jerusalem was occupied by Jordan before it was captured by Israeli troops in the 1967 war and reunited with the predominantly Jewish western part of the ancient city.

In Arab neighbourhoods, Palestinians already run their day-to-day affairs. This area can be expanded beyond Jerusalem's current boundaries to incorporate predominantly Arab areas, the officials said.

But they stressed that was contingent on Israel absorbing into the city some of the nearby suburbs now on the West Bank.

Concern about Mr. Barak's possible concessions led two Israel political parties to announce this week they were quitting his Government.)

Pre-summit talks

Israeli and Palestinian officials will come to Washington this weekend to prepare for the high-stakes summit, said the State Department spokesman yesterday.

He said the U.S. Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, would be involved in the preparatory talks for the summit.

"They will be senior negotiators, to discuss the issues that will be discussed at the summit." — AFP, Reuters



The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, who said on Thursday that chances for success at the summit meeting between Palestinians and Israelis were no more than 50 per cent, attending a ceremony at the Latrun Military Memorial outside Jerusalem later in the day. — AP

THE HINDU

8 JUL 2000

Israeli PM prepared to offer concessions at Camp David

Washington, July 7

ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER Ehud Barak will arrive at the US-sponsored West Asia summit next week prepared to offer the Palestinians an expanded presence in a reshaped Jerusalem along with admission to thousands of refugees whose families already live in Israel, according to two well-placed Israeli officials.

Stressing the concessions must be matched by conciliatory Palestinian moves, the officials said on Thursday the future of Jerusalem was the toughest issue on the table and may be excluded from a settlement between the two sides.

Less progress has been made on Jerusalem than any other issue in the negotiations leading up to the summit President Bill Clinton will stage beginning Tuesday at Camp David, Maryland.

By contrast, the two sides have

made considerable headway on the question of how much land Israel will turn over to Yasser Arafat for a state, said the officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Barak, for instance, may not insist on retaining the strategic Jordan valley, provided Israel can maintain a security presence there at least for some time, they said.

The unusual disclosure of Barak's likely stance on core issues at the summit appeared to be part of an effort to project him as a reasonable Israeli leader and to coax matching concessions from Arafat.

Publicly, at least, Arafat is demanding transfer of all of the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem - more land than Barak is prepared to relinquish.

And Barak intends to keep Jerusalem united and Israel's capital.

But Barak is prepared to grant the Palestinians control of day-to-day affairs in their Jerusalem neighbourhoods in exchange for incorporating nearby Jewish settlements into the predominantly Jewish area of the city, the officials

said.

On refugees, Barak is willing to consider permitting tens of thousands of Palestinians to settle in Israel if they have family members there, but he will not accept the idea they have a legal right to return, the officials said.

The precedent is Israel's acceptance of 60,000 to 70,000 Palestinian Arabs in a programme of reuniting families that was in force between Israel's founding in 1948 and the W Asia war of 1967, the officials said.

Tens of thousands of today's refugees would be absorbed in the Palestinian state, while others would receive assistance under a worldwide funding campaign to be resettled in Arab countries where they now live.

East Jerusalem was occupied by Jordan before it was captured by Israeli troops in the 1967 W Asia war and reunited with the predominantly Jewish western part of the ancient city.

In Arab neighbourhoods, Palestinians already run their day-to-day affairs. (AP)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 8 JUL 2000

Clinton takes gamble on Israeli-Palestinian summit

Washington, July 6

US PRESIDENT Bill Clinton has convened an Israeli-Palestinian summit outside Washington for next week but admitted his high-stakes gamble on Middle East peace could fail.

Clinton, with barely five months of his presidency remaining, conceded there was "clearly no guarantee of success" at the summit which is opening on Tuesday.

The summit at the Camp David Presidential Retreat in neighbouring Maryland will be attended by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

Bringing peace to the Middle East has topped Clinton's foreign policy agenda for

his second term, but progress has stalled as Israel and the Palestinians remain deeply at odds over key issues.

Clinton said the summit could be over within days but would continue as long as it took to reach an accord. "I think if we work hard, we can get it done in several days. But I will give it whatever time is required as long as we are still moving forward," he said.

The summit is unlikely to continue for more than a week, however, as Clinton is

expected to leave Washington on July 19 for Japan, where he will attend a Group of Eight summit.

However, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would be a constant presence at the summit, her spokesman Richard Boucher said. A senior State Department official underlined the nature of Clinton's gamble, saying that bringing matters to a head at a heavy price tag in the event of failure.

Annan calls for peace

UN SECRETARY General Kofi Annan applauded the summit between Israel and the Palestinian authority planned for next week and called for a "peace of the brave" in the region, a UN spokesman said.

According to a statement released yesterday by spokesman Manoel De Almeida E Silva, Annan "warmly welcomes" the move by US President.

AFP, United Nations

Clinton called on Barak and Arafat to take "historic decisions that only the two leaders can make". Israelis and the Palestinians are still wide apart in negotiations on key peace issues, including borders, the status of Jerusalem and the return of Palestinian refugees.

Fears that Barak would make concessions to Arafat prompted his Interior Minister Nathan Sharansky to announce his resignation following the summit announcement and others have threatened to follow his example.

Barak said in Paris yesterday, "I will sign no agreement which does not take into account our security needs and our interests." He said that any accord will be subject to a referendum in Israel.

(AFP)

Blair, Barak discuss W. Asia peace plan

49-16

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LONDON, JULY 5. The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, held talks on the West Asia peace process with his Israeli counterpart, Mr. Ehud Barak, in London today.

Mr. Blair was "very interested to hear Mr. Barak's views on how he sees things moving forward", a spokesman said, adding that the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, was also present at the hour-long talks.

The possibility of a joint summit with Israel, the U.S. and the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, was also discussed.

Mr. Barak leaves London today for Paris to hold talks with the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac.

Mr. Barak is concerned about the response in Europe's main capitals to a

possible unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state by Mr. Arafat, after the Palestinian leader was given the power to declare such a state by September 13 by the Palestinian Central Council on Monday.

With the September 13 deadline looming, the sides are still deadlocked over such crucial issues as the future of Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees and of Israeli

settlements in the occupied territories, and the borders of the future Palestinian state.

Israel has expressed outrage at the PCC decision.

The British Government is adhering to the European Union policy that a Palestinian state should only be declared with Israeli agreement. — DPA

YIP: [unclear]

[unclear]

Palestinian state in September at any cost, vows PLO council

GAZA CITY: Bowing to pressure from a majority of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) members, the Palestinians vowed to implement an independent state on September 13, 2000, despite the risk of clashes with Israel.

The PLO's 129-strong central council, which concluded a two-day meeting in Gaza city around midnight on Monday vowed to implement its control over all of the West Bank and Gaza strip on September 13, the deadline for a final peace deal. "The establishment and implementation of a Palestinian state on the territories occupied by Israel on June 4, 1967 will happen on September 13," Salim Zanun, head of the central council said, reading from the legislative body's final statement.

"The central council, as we approach the end of the interim phase on the coming September 13, asks the PLO executive committee to take the necessary steps to implement an independent state and its sovereignty on the land of Palestine with its capital of holy Jerusalem during this period," Mr Zanun added. Israel has warned that violent confrontations could erupt if the Palestinians announce statehood without an agreement and Israeli premier Ehud Barak said that

the Jewish state would respond by annexing large chunks of the occupied territories.

A proclamation of Palestinian independence is meaningless without Israeli approval, Israel's justice minister warned on Tuesday.

Without Israeli agreement, the Palestinians would be cut off from the world and would not be able to travel between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which are separated by Israeli territory, justice minister, Yossi Beilin said. The United States on Monday also reiterated its opposition to "unilateral actions."

Officials close to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had previously indicated during the closed-door PLO meeting that they favored leaving the date for the statehood proclamation open in order to give more time for last ditch efforts to organise a peace-saving summit in Washington. Council members, however, stressed that an 'absolute majority' of the PLO supported declaring statehood on September 13 regardless of the cost.

Mr Barak has said that only a summit in Washington can achieve progress in the halted negotiations, but the Palestinians want more land and a new batch of prisoners to be released first.

Meanwhile, an AP report from

Washington said President Bill Clinton talked on phone on Monday to Palestinian leader Arafat and Israeli premier Ehud Barak, but no decision has been reached for a Camp David-style Mid-East summit.

After a recent round of shuttle diplomacy by U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright, Palestinians and Israelis were reported as remaining far apart on crucial issues, including whether Israel would withdraw from all territory it took in the 1967 six-day war. Senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat denied media reports that the U.S. had proposed new dates for a possible Arafat-Barak-Clinton summit.

Israel and the Palestinians agreed in Egypt last year to wrap up peace talks between them in September, but remain deeply divided over all of the key issues, including the size and shape of a future Palestinian state, control over Jerusalem and the fate of millions of Palestinian refugees.

The Palestinians currently control, either partially or completely, about 40 percent of the West Bank and 65 percent of the Gaza strip.

A minister in Arafat's self-rule authority called on Palestinians to prepare for battles with Israel that would follow a declaration of statehood. (AFP)

Arafat firm on state declaration

HD-16
377

GAZA, JULY 2. The Palestinian President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, told the PLO's mini-Parliament today he intended to declare a state this year and said peace-making with Israel was in crisis, participants said.

In Jerusalem, the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, addressing the weekly meeting of his Cabinet, repeated his call for a U.S.-hosted trilateral summit to try to finalise a peace treaty ahead of a September target date for a deal, his office said.

"President Arafat reconfirmed today that he will declare a state this year and it is up to the Palestinian leadership and the Central Council to decide when that state should be declared," said peace negotiator, Mr. Hassan Asfour.

The Palestinian Central Council (PCC) convened in Gaza for a two-day meeting to discuss preparations for a Palestinian state and to hear a briefing from Mr. Arafat on the stalemated peace talks with Israel. "President Arafat gave a speech on the political situation, and he was very pessimistic. He said that the peace process is suffering a crisis," said Mr. Marwan Barghouthi, a senior Fatah member attending the session. "The PCC will overwhelmingly decide to go ahead with the declaration of the state this year," Mr. Barghouthi said.

Of the PCC's 129 members, 105 attended the opening session. With a September 13 target date

2. Arafat

looming for an accord, Israel and the Palestinians are trying to resolve fateful issues including the future of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, borders and Palestinian refugees.

Israeli officials have been quoted as saying a unilateral declaration could prompt Mr. Barak to annex areas still occupied by Israel. Mr. Salim al-Zaanoun, Speaker of the 700-member Palestine National Council, said the PCC would decide after further discussions whether to announce a date for declaring a state.

At the Israeli Cabinet meeting, Mr Barak said the U.S., which sent the Secretary of State, Ms Madeleine Albright, to the region last week to try to woo the Palestinians to a summit, had yet to decide if one should be convened. "The Prime Minister added that in his estimation, the negotiations on the different tracks are reaching their climax, but he stressed that only President (Bill) Clinton can make the decision whether to convene a summit," Mr Barak's office said.

Israel has been pushing for a three-way summit in the U.S. to finalise a peace treaty and prevent what top Israeli military officers have warned could be an outbreak of Palestinian violence in the absence of an agreement.

The Palestinians are opposed to holding a summit now and have called for further negotiations with Israel to try to narrow gaps. — Reuters

THE HINDU

3 JUL 2000

Wise head on young shoulders



Jordan's King Abdullah watches as his new Prime Minister, Mr. Ali Abu Ragheb, signs his acceptance of the office.

IN WHAT field of human endeavour are the Arab youth making a mark in the modern world? A generation ago it could have unequivocally said that radical politics was one field where the Arabs were right up there with their contemporaries but this is a dying tradition. A Moroccan long distance runner, an expatriate Yemeni boxer, a power-boat racer from the UAE and an Algerian or Saudi Arabian soccer team might suggest that it is in the field of sports that the Arabs are set to make their mark, but this is a potential that has yet to be fully developed. The Arab world is in a transitory phase but are the younger generation of leaders able enough to help them make it.

First of all a clarification is necessary. A statement that radical politics is a dying tradition in the Arab world might appear overtly bold considering that the world is currently seized by the threat of Islamic militancy. The fact, however, is that the epicentre of this political phenomenon which disturbs the world's equilibrium is not located in the Arab world any longer. Arab youth from Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, the Palestinian refugee camps and territories and elsewhere might still provide a large number of recruits to the loose federation of groups preaching jihad. But within their

The ease with which Jordan's King Abdullah has ruled for the past year and a half suggests that he has managed to keep the balance between the Bedouin and the Palestinians that is so essential to his country's stability, writes KESAVA MENON.

own societies — unlike say an Afghanistan or a Pakistan — their Governments have so brutally squashed the jihadis that even if their spirit has not been totally broken they are not able to attract adherents in overwhelming numbers.

There is certainly a lot of confusion in the Arab world. Other Muslim-majority countries, Iran being the prime example, have dug into their traditions and sought to evolve a method by which they can relate to the modern world without giving up their past. The Arabs embittered by the 400-year-old onslaught of the West did try a generation or two ago to match up their traditions with contemporary demands. That effort was put aside as Arab radicals sought their answers in Islam but this latter effort too has not produced anything longlasting. So where do they go from here.

Ironically enough it is the

scions of the ruling families who appear to be providing a new kind of leadership to their generation of Arab youth. The general impression about the younger sheikhs, or even the sons of the "republican ruling families", is that they are a decadent self-indulgent lot who care little for their fellow beings. Yet there are several who dispel this impression. A Prince Waleed bin Talal al Saud makes headlines when he buys up prime property and businesses all over the United States or lays the foundation stone for what will be the world's tallest building. But he also digs into his deep pockets to dole out a few million to rebuild shattered power plants in Lebanon.

Philanthropy is an Arab tradition and the oil sheikhs have for long given a part of their wealth to the more deprived members of their religious community. But the Saudi Prince Waleed has shown that there is nothing in-

trinsically deficient about the Arab mindset that prevents them from making their business acumen count for quite a lot. Another example is provided by the Sheikhs of Dubai who have not let the want of oil beneath their sands prevent them from turning their city into a major market and commercial centre and are now trying to position it as a hub of the internet highway. They might be better known for the races that their horses win in Epsom and Kentucky but what is perhaps less well known is how they are also using their wealth to re-build interest in their traditions. Arab poetry, the breeding of Arab horses, the holding of dhow races, the encouragement of architecture informed by Arab tradition are some of the fields in which the Dubai sheikhs spread their wealth to rebuild the morale of their people.

King Abdullah of Jordan knows that his country does not produce the sort of wealth in proportion to population that Saudi Arabia or Dubai does. The young King also does not possess his father's experience to parley an essentially weak position into something of greater importance. But King Abdullah has at least shown that as a man and as an Arab he can deal with the demands of tradition and modernity. At the time when he became Jordan's monarch at the beginning of last year much was made of his atrocious Arab accent. But he has ruled smoothly since that time with only a nipped-in-the-bud challenge by radical Islamists having threatened to disturb his hold over his country.

The ease with which King Abdullah has ruled for the past year and a half suggests that he has managed to keep the balance between the Bedouin and the Palestinians that is so essential to his country's stability. If nothing else, the frequency with which the peripatetic King roams all over the world would show that he has no worries about his backyard. Now wearing a *thob* (the traditional dress) and poking about his country's hospitals to see how they are run, now wearing a smart suit and addressing the press in the company of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, or dressed in jeans and picking up the garbage in Amman, King Abdullah at least shows a youthful zest for the job. Unless an upheaval, which the sad history of West Asia shows is not unlikely,

King Abdullah and his generation of young Arab leaders might just about be able to make their societies come to terms with the modern world.

Israeli democracy proves its maturity

By Kesava Menon

HAZIR
MANAMA (BAHRAIN) MAY 31. In forcing the President, Mr. Ezer Weizman, and a powerful Minister, Mr. Yitzhak Mordechai, to resign, Israel's democratic institutions have demonstrated their increasing maturity. Like most other democracies, Israel has a large number of politicians who try to get away with whatever they can. When democratic institutions begin to make even the most powerful of miscreants behave, as they have in these two cases, it comes as a shot in the arm to democracies everywhere.

Mr. Weizman is to quit his office on July 10, three years before the end of his tenure, it was announced last Friday. This acerbic, haughty former fighter pilot had just about escaped from being indicted by the state's prosecuting arm. In their report made public on May 24, the Attorney General, Mr. Elayakim Rubinstein, and the State Prosecutor, Ms. Edna Arbel, who had investigated Mr. Weizman's "misdemeanours" of the past, had noted that there was no basis for prosecution. But it was also noted that Mr. Weizman had escaped prosecution on at least one of the charges of bribery against him merely because the statute of limitations had come to his rescue.

Although Mr. Weizman's resignation might not have been warranted on legal grounds, his continuance in office had become untenable politically and morally. But he was reportedly determined to cling on till at least November so that the causal connection between the reports and his resignation could be obscured.

Mr. Weizman had been putting out since May that he wanted to resign his post on account of indifferent health. If he had been able to put the two reports behind him he could have tendered his resignation in November, once again pleading ill-health. What angered many Israeli observers at the sign of the President trying to wriggle his way out of a tight spot was that he either did not appear to be aware that his actions were wrong or he believed that he should be immune from punishment.

Mr. Weizman's resignation was forced through by the Speaker of the Knesset, Mr. Avraham Burg, a person renowned for his moral rectitude. Mr. Burg was reported to have spoken to officials in the President's office and told them that Mr. Weizman would face parliamentary action if he did not announce that he would quit by the end of July, the end of the current session of the Knesset.

The Speaker was contemplating action along two lines. In the first move, he would allow a Member of Parliament from the ruling One Israel Party to go ahead and collect the 20 signatures necessary for the commencement of impeachment proceedings (Mr. Burg had so far been retraining the parliamentarian in the belief that the President would see the writing on the wall). In a second move, Mr. Burg had contacted the Leader of the Opposition benches and together they had agreed to proceed with the election of a new President at the current session.

True to his devil-may-care style, Mr. Weizman said he would resign by July 10 or 11, three weeks before the deadline given to him

by the Speaker. This attitude was also revealed in remarks he had made in respect of the charges brought against him. The charges were that he had taken \$ 300,000 from French and Israeli businessmen several years ago when he was a parliamentarian and minister and that he had not reported this income to the authorities.

Where Mr. Weizman was brought down by money Mr. Mordechai has got into trouble allegedly because of his sexual misdemeanour. Three women had told the police, and a great deal of credibility is being attached to their complaints, that Mr. Mordechai had subjected them to his unsolicited attentions. Till a little over a year ago, Mr. Mordechai was a contender for the prime ministership and a person respected for his military record and the integrity with which he served as a minister in the cabinet of the former Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu. Now he faces criminal charges.

While this assertion of the rule of law by the Israeli prosecutors and of moral and political rectitude by the Speaker has been welcomed by the Israeli public, there are observers who feel that more could have been done. One analyst, writing in *Haaretz*, opined that the Attorney General had shied away from completing his job by not taking the matter to court and leaving it for the judges to decide whether or not the statute of limitations came into play. Since the Attorney General failed to do that, he has failed to establish that there is only one law for the elite and the ordinary citizen.

THE HINDU

- 1 JUN 2000

Barak-Clinton meeting will give new impetus to West Asia talks

By Ashok Tuteja

DUBAI: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have been conducting secret negotiations to reach a final peace accord.

The talks are being held between Israeli internal security minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and speaker of the Palestinian legislative council Ahmad Qurei Anu Alaa, regional news agencies said.

The two sides had last month also held secret talks in Stockholm, which broke off after Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak asked his team to return home in the wake of violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Mr Barak is optimistic that the talks, which began on Thursday night, will witness progress in view of his recent meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton in Lisbon. "We expect that my meeting with Mr Clinton will give new impetus to the negotiations," he told a meeting of his Labour Party.

However, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has been quoted as saying in the media that "the Palestinian negotiators will not accept anything less than application of all accords reached and the security council resolutions, notably 242 demanding Israel's withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab territories."

He asserted that the Palestinians "will not give way on any of their unalterable national rights, whether the talks (with Israel) take place in West Asia, in Europe or in the United States."

The Palestine authority has already stated that it would not relinquish its right on an inch of the land in the holy city of Jerusalem, saying there would be no comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict without the Jewish nation's pullout from the city.

The Palestine authority held Israel fully responsible for the stalemate in the talks between the two sides despite several meetings. (UNI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

JUN 2 1997

Decide now: US peace broker Albright to Israel, Palestinians

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
JERUSALEM, JUNE 6

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright kicked off a new peace mission here on Monday telling Israel and the Palestinians firmly that now is the time to make difficult decisions as a deadline for a final peace looms.

"The moment of truth is fast approaching in the pursuit of the Israel-Palestinian peace," Albright said, referring to a September 13 deadline for a permanent agreement and making little secret of Washington's frustration with the slow pace of negotia-

tions. "It's not going to be easy but if Israelis and Palestinians are willing to accept that neither side will get 100 percent of what it wants, that each side must address the needs of the other in the spirit of partnership and that the tough decisions that must be made won't become any easier with time, then they will succeed," she said.

At a joint news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Albright said she and President Bill Clinton, whose is keen to clinch a deal before his term expires in seven months, remained committed to helping the Israelis and Palestinians reach an accord. "We are there ready to roll up our

sleeves," she said, expressing hope that Clinton, Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat could meet together soon at a Camp David-style summit in the United States.

The US presidential retreat at Camp David was the site of peace talks between Israel and Egypt in 1978 which led to the signing of a treaty the following year, the first between the Jewish state and an Arab nation.

But Albright stressed that unless Barak, Arafat and their negotiating teams - who are locked in major disagreements over the "final status issues" including the future of Jerusalem, borders of a Palestinian state, Palestinian refugees and Jewish settlers -

could lay an adequate groundwork for such a summit, it would not happen.

The two sides have already missed two deadlines for a framework deal and are now blaming each other for the current poor state of the negotiations. Clinton "is prepared to have such a summit but we have to make sure that the conditions are right", said Albright.

Barak, who a senior US official said had confirmed his commitment to the peace process in more than two hours of talks and is eager to hear the results of the Arafat meeting, agreed with Albright's assessment. "I believe that such a summit should take place

only when there is a chance to bridge the gaps between the two parties, this is not an event without risks, (but) if the conditions are right for a summit it should happen," Barak said.

"Within the coming few weeks we will know if there is the will and determination on both sides to try to resolve the problems and to put an end to the conflict," he added.

Barak, facing a virulent campaign by Jewish extremists over the transfer to the Palestinians of land they consider part of Biblical Israel, is also grappling with a potential new crisis in his fragile coalition government.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 7 JUN 2000

Hizbollah puts Arafat 'under pressure'

876 By Kesava Menon HD-16

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), JUNE 6. A few days after Israel pulled out of south Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, was reported as having mocked a questioner's suggestion that Hizbollah attacks had led to the Israeli action. "They pulled out because of Hizbollah," Mr. Arafat was reported to have said in a sarcastic tone, implying that such a connection was over-drawn. With the whole Arab world still happy at their perception that Hizbollah has achieved a singular military victory over Israel, and facing pressures of his own, Mr. Arafat appears to have had a rethink.

The Hizbollah's constant attacks on Israeli troops guarding the zone they had occupied in southern Lebanon, and the Israeli society's inability to cope with the attrition were the major factors that led to the precipitate departure from the zone. Soon after Israel withdrew, Hizbollah's political chief, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, had at a rally called upon the Palestinians to follow the example and take up arms to regain their rights.

Negotiations were futile and the only way that the Palestinians would regain their rights was to take up arms as the Hizbollah had done, Sheikh Nasrallah had said. Later on, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, had echoed the same sen-

timents. Palestinian rebel groups within Lebanon and dissident groups within the Palestinian-administered territories, like Islamic Jihad, have also declared that they have adopted this argument.

Although the possibility of violence always shimmers beneath the surface, there is no hard expectation that the Palestinian groups are about to act decisively on the Hizbollah's advice or follow its example. If nothing else, it is well known that the Israeli reaction in the event of a violent uprising inside or from within Palestinian-controlled territories will be of an entirely different order from their reaction to developments in Lebanon.

While over 70 per cent of Israelis had wanted their army to pull out from Lebanon before this was in fact done. An overwhelming majority of Israelis would definitely fight against any attempt to evict them from the whole of the West Bank. There might even be a segment of Israelis willing to return the whole of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians. But the imperatives of security are so strongly ingrained in Israeli society that even these marginal groups would probably resist any effort at a forcible rejection.

However, the voicing of these sentiments has put Mr. Arafat in an awkward position. He has never said that

he will settle for anything less than 100 per cent of the West Bank. But his officials are currently locked in negotiations with the Israelis and, as of now, it does not look like they will get anything more, and this is in the best case scenario, than between 80 and 90 per cent.

These vague hints about what Mr. Arafat's officials might get at best from the Israelis suffer by comparison with what the Hizbollah has already got. The temptation to use the Hizbollah rhetoric and to use the threat of the militant organisation's tactics is strong on the Palestinian street but Mr. Arafat knows that if the Palestinians were to follow the Hizbollah example they would lose (definitely in the short term) even the little they have obtained so far.

But if Mr. Arafat cannot wholly adopt the Hizbollah's tactics he has at least shown that he is still the master of co-option. After a long time he has suddenly spoken of the U.N. Resolutions 242 which enjoins Israel to vacate Arab territories captured in the 1967 war.

In reiterating his position on the Palestinian demand for territory, Mr. Arafat has said that Israel must implement Resolution 242 in exactly the same manner as they implemented Resolution 425 in getting out of Lebanon.

THE HINDU

8 JUN 2007

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Israeli-Palestinian talks to resume

re. Arif
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JERUSALEM, JUNE 7. Israel and the Palestinians have agreed to resume negotiations after a two-week lapse, but despite prodding by the U.S. Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, they remained far apart on terms of a settlement.

The future of Jerusalem, one of the main issues, has not been formally discussed, a senior U.S. official said yesterday. The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, wants it to be taken up later, said the official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity.

"We are not close to an agreement," the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. David Levy, said. He said it was not clear that the Palestinians wanted to move toward the agreement the two sides promised by mid-September.

On the Palestinian side, Mr. Yasser Arafat demanded Israel make good on a promised third pullback on the West Bank and said Israel should quit the West Bank under 1967 and 1973 U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Against that backdrop, the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will reopen their talks in the Washington area early next week, and Mr. Arafat will call on the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, at the White House June 14.

There is a slight chance Mr. Barak might join them for a three-way summit, but "there is too much to do, and we are not there yet," the U.S. official said.

At the White House, with King Abdullah II of Jordan at his side, Mr. Clinton said, "We're working at it, and I'm encouraged." But he added: "You know, it's not going to be easy."

Tough issues: Clinton

In Washington, Mr. Clinton said an elusive peace agreement between Israel and the Pal-

estinians awaited decisions on the most difficult issues, and he expressed hope for progress in U.S. talks next week.

The peace process dominated his talks with the king who is trying to carve out a peace-making role like that of his father, the late King Hussein.

Mr. P.J. Crowley, spokesman for the White House National Security Council, said both leaders agreed on the need to make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian peace track as well as the stalled Israeli-Syrian track.

Door open: Syria

In Damascus, the Syrian Foreign Minister, Mr. Farouq al-Shara, said before meeting Ms. Madeleine Albright today that Syria sought peace with Israel but would not make concessions on land.

"The door for peace is still open and we extend it for peace but we reject any pressure," Mr. Shara yesterday told reporters in Cairo, where he is due to meet Ms. Albright. A copy of Mr. Shara's remarks was obtained by Reuters in Damascus.

The meeting will be the first between Syria and the U.S. at this level since a summit between Mr. Clinton and Mr. Hafez al-Assad in Geneva in March failed to break the deadlock over Israeli withdrawal from the Golan heights.

Diplomats said that Ms. Albright and Mr. Shara would discuss ways of reviving the stalled Syrian-Israeli peace talks.

The U.S. is discouraging expectations that the meeting in Cairo will lead to a quick resumption of the Syrian-Israeli talks, which broke down in January. — AP, Reuters

THE HINDU

24 JUN 2000


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Assad dead

By Kesava Menon

Manama, JUNE 10. Mr. Hafez al Assad, President of Syria, friend of India and one of the towering personalities of West Asia, died today. The announcement was made on Syrian TV. His death has exposed Syria and the region to a bout of uncertainty.

Mr. Assad, who ruled Syria for almost three decades, died without accomplishing the goal that had been central to him throughout the years in power, re-possession of all Syrian land now under Israeli occupation. But given the many vicissitudes of West Asian politics, it must be counted as Mr. Assad's most remarkable achievement that he never compromised on his mission.



AP reports:
 Syria's Parliament amended the Constitution immediately after the death of the President to enable his 34-year-old son, Mr. Bashar, to succeed him. Deputies, in a session of Parliament televised live, voted unanimously to lower from 40 to 34 the age at which someone could lead the country.

Repossessing Syrian land was his goal: Page 12

THE HINDU

11 JUN 2011

OBITUARY/HAFEZ-AL-ASSAD (1930-2000)

A champion of Arab unity

SE-12 11/6 Lr. Asia - (11)
SYRIAN President Hafez al-Assad, who died today, ruled with an iron grip for nearly 30 years to bring stability to his once coup-ridden country and become a key player on the West Asian stage.

The death of the 69-year-old general, who seized power in November 1970, was announced today by Syrian state television.

A medical source in Beirut said Assad had died of a heart attack. An expert on Syrian affairs, who asked to stay unnamed, said the Syrian President had been in an advanced stage of diabetes that "affected his eyes and his circulation" and he had not been able to keep on top of major issues, such as Israel's 24 May withdrawal from Lebanon, in recent months.

A member of Syria's Alawite minority, Assad

was considered a shrewd tactician who overcame internal and foreign challenges to set up a strong centralised state. Assad — which means lion in Arabic — marked his reign with purges of rivals, including former aides, many of whom have been imprisoned or killed.

British journalist Patrick Seale, who has written a biography of Assad, described him as a self-styled champion of the Arabs who nonetheless practices "realpolitik." Assad insisted that Israel return all Arab lands seized in the 1967 war including Syria's Golan heights.

Born on 6 October 1930 in Kardaha, Assad has been a member of the Baath Party since 1946. He completed studies at military school in Homs in 1955 and was sent to Egypt at the time of the Syrian-Egyptian union.

THE STATESMAN

JUN 2000

Syria's Assad dead, son to succeed

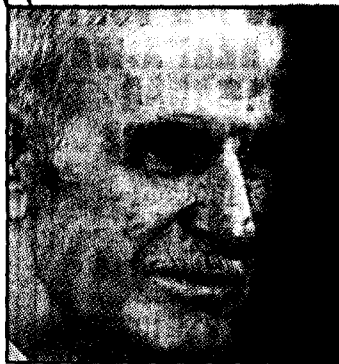
Damascus, June 10

HAFEZ AL-ASSAD, Syria's autocratic President who ruled with an iron hand for nearly 30 years died after a heart attack today in Damascus. He was 69.

A medical source said the Syrian leader was suffering from diabetes, heart problems and a kind of blood cancer, which develops slowly.

Assad's death occurred at a critical stage in the West Asia's peace process and only a week before the opening of a key conference of the ruling Baath Party that had been expected to elect his son Bashar as a member of the party's regional command. It had also been expected that Bashar would be named Vice-President.

The news of Assad's death stunned a regular session of the Syrian Parliament and many



Deputies burst into tears. Parliament amended the Constitution immediately after the President's death to enable his son to succeed him. Deputies voted unanimously to lower from 40 to 34 the age at which someone could lead the country. Bashar, who was born in September 1965, is 34.

Assad was considered an expert of the West Asian game of intrigue and consolidated his position in Damascus with crafty calculation.

US President Bill Clinton will make a statement later. White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said it was "premature to speculate" on whether Clinton would attend Assad's funeral.

Israel reacted in conciliatory terms to the death of its long-time foe, saying it understood Syria's grief and pledging to try to forge peace with whoever succeeds the Syrian leader.

Palestinian peace negotiator Hassan Asfour, expressed "deep sorrow and condolences".

The Russian foreign ministry expressed deep regret at the death of Assad, saying it hoped that it would not damage the West Asia peace process.

Agencies

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 JUN 2000

Syrian succession may be smooth

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), JUNE 11. The succession to Syria's late President, Hafez al-Assad, appears to be going far more smoothly than expected at least at this stage. Less than an hour after the announcement of Assad's death over radio and television, the Syrian Parliament met to amend the Constitution and clear the way for Assad's son, Dr. Bashar, to succeed his father.

Experts close to the Presidential family say Dr. Bashar will be able to firmly grasp the reins of power but the uncertainties of the Syrian situation have to be borne in mind.

Mr. Assad passed away on Saturday apparently after having suffered a heart attack. He was reported to be suffering from diabetes and a heart condition as well as blood cancer.

No official bulletin was put out on the cause of death and the doctors who spoke to the news agencies on condition of anonymity did not say whether Assad was under their treatment at the time of his death.

However, Assad was known to have been suffering from indifferent health and one of the biggest questions in West Asia was whether he had completed his mission of grooming his son to succeed him.

From what happened in Parliament on Saturday, it would appear that Assad had prepared the Baath party and the rest of the country's political class to accept Dr. Bashar as their next leader.

Meeting in an extraordinary session, Parliament pushed through two constitutional amendments which removed debilities that would have prevented Dr. Bashar from taking over.

Under the unamended Constitution, no one could be appointed President unless he was 40

years of age and a member of the Baath party's regional command.

These clauses were changed with the age of eligibility reduced to 34 (Dr. Bashar's present age) and a new clause stating that the President had to be "an Arab" and not necessarily a member of the regional command was introduced.

The smoothness with which amendments were passed show that Parliament and the Baath party, which provides most of its members, have rallied behind Dr. Bashar.

The party has announced that Dr. Bashar will be its nominee for the post of President when Parliament convenes two weeks later to formally institute the succession.

On the formal plane it thus appears that the changeover will go without a hitch. But the question is whether Dr. Bashar has the connections within the more subterranean world of the Baath party, military and intelligence services, to help him establish his grip.

Mr. Patrick Seale, British author of Assad's biography and the man who has often given authoritative revelations of the late President's thoughts, told CNN in an interview yesterday that he expected the succession to be smooth.

Assad had been grooming his son for the past six years and by now Dr. Bashar had his men in key places, Mr. Seale said. Though a trained ophthalmologist, Dr. Bashar has been in the military since 1994 when he became Assad's chosen heir following the death of the eldest Assad scion, Capt. Basil. He is currently a Colonel in the Syrian army.

Dr. Bashar had been exercising widening authority over the past many months. He was apparently put in charge of dealings with Lebanon where Syria maintains a large military

presence and has vital political and economic stakes.

The Internet-savvy Dr. Bashar has also been leading a campaign to eradicate corruption and inefficiency in the administration and is credited with having engineered the change of Prime Minister and Cabinet in March.

From the manner in which Syrians have rallied on the streets it would appear that he has the support of the masses.

With Assad's death, India has lost one of its staunchest friends in West Asia, perhaps in the world. Under his stewardship, Syria had gone out to bat for India on numerous occasions at the Organisation of Islamic Conference and other fora.

Very often Syria provided the cutting edge in slicing up anti-India resolutions drawn up by some of the other participants.

In deciding who should represent the country at Assad's funeral on Tuesday, New Delhi would do well to keep in mind that there is a debt owed that it is a matter of honour.

Caretaker President

DAMASCUS, JUNE 11. The Syrian Vice-President, Mr. Abdel Halim Khaddam, has taken over as caretaker President.

"The Syrian Vice-President today performed a duty that forms one of the prerogatives of the interim President," a spokesman said. "This act was to promulgate by decree the constitutional amendment adopted by parliament yesterday, lowering from 40 to 34 the age of candidates for the presidency."

The amendment clears the way for the son of the late President, Mr. Hafez al-Assad, 34 year-old Mr. Bashar al-Assad, to become President. — AFP

THE HINDU

12 JUN 2000

n/b A master of Arab intrigue 19-16

CAIRO, JUNE 11. Mr. Hafez al-Assad, Syria's autocratic President who ruled with an iron hand for nearly 30 years, was considered an expert of the West Asian game of intrigue and consolidated his position in Damascus with crafty calculation.

Known as the "Lion of Damascus" — based on the meaning of his name in Arabic — the conflict with Israel and Syria's demand for the return of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights right "up to the last grain of sand" remained at the centre of Mr. Assad's political career.

Mr. Assad was born on October 6, 1930 in Quardhaha, a mountain village near the port city of Latakia and as a young man, joined the youth wing of the Arab-Socialist Baath party soon after it was founded by Michel Aflak, a Christian Syrian, in 1948. The party came to power in a coup in Syria in 1963. For the son of a farmer belonging to the Muslim Alawite minority, almost the only way to get ahead in life was to enter the army, which became a decisive power factor in Syria.

The "Syrian nationalist, soldier and pragmatist", as Mr. Assad

characterised himself then, trained at the Homs Military Academy. He rose from being a fighter pilot in 1964 to the position of Air Force commander. During the Six-Day War in 1967, Mr. Assad as Syrian Defence Minister was forced to look on as Arab troops suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis.

After Mr. Assad came to power in a bloodless coup in November 1970, the confrontation with the Jewish state determined his policies and thoughts for two decades. He consistently demanded that the power equation be shifted in favour of the Arabs, before either a fresh war could be fought or peace made with the Jewish state.

The Syrian leader had an innate sense of politics and strategy. He was described as a man of quick perception, incredible self-control, and great charm. But he could also be icy, and when he said "I will reflect on it" there was no further arguing with him. With an unerring knack for power politics, the untiring ascetic who worked for up to 15 hours a day and had hardly any interests other than politics, recognised that

times were changing, when the Soviet empire disintegrated.

The United States rewarded his involvement in the Gulf War of 1990-91 on the side of the U.S.-led coalition against his Iraqi arch-enemy, Mr. Saddam Hussein, by silently acknowledging his demands in Lebanon where Syria has some 30,000 troops and virtually controls its weak neighbour's political decision.

At the same time, he gradually ceased supporting radicals such as the Palestinian Abu Nidal or the terrorist "Carlos" and cut a good figure in Washington by mediating in the freeing of hostages in Lebanon.

Mr. Assad's main consideration through all this was the hope that the U.S. would strike Syria off the list of states supporting terrorism. But the West continued to scorn Mr. Assad on account of his partly proven support of terrorist groups.

Changes in the international power structures that enabled the West Asian peace process put Mr. Assad through the most difficult phase of his term of office. — DPA

THE HINDU

JUN 20 1991

President Assad's death a blow to Israel-Syria peace dialogue

Washington, June 11

THE DEATH of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has dealt a blow to prospects for a quick resumption to stalled, US-brokered Israeli-Syria peace talks, analysts said today.

Though world leaders, particularly US President Bill Clinton, expressed hope that Assad's absence from the scene would not hurt chances for reviving the Syrian track, the analysts said this was likely wishful thinking.

"I think it's a major setback because it's clear that only Hafez al-Assad had the prestige, stature and continuity of leadership that would allow him to sign a peace accord with Israel and get support for it," said Talcott Seelye, a former US Ambassador to Syria.

Israel-Syria peace talks held in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, in January broke down when the two sides could not reach agreement on Syria's demand for Israel to withdraw completely from the Golan Heights and Sea of Galilee.

Since then, Clinton met Assad in Geneva in March in a failed effort to revive the talks.

And the most recent high-level

meeting between the United States and Syria occurred just this week in Cairo, on Wednesday, when US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met there with Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara.

The analysts, noting the lack of recent momentum on the Syrian track, did not discount the possibil-

Funeral tomorrow

SYRIAN PRESIDENT Hafez al-Assad will be buried Tuesday in his home village of Qardaha, 300 km north of Damascus, an official source has said. The announcement came on Saturday after Assad died at the age of 69 after ruling Syria for 30 years. **AFF, Damascus**

ity of a new US push for resumption in the negotiations but said such a move was not practical in the short term.

Assad's successor, widely expected to be his son Bashar, will have a difficult adjustment period during which time he must focus on consolidating his position both within Syria and the Arab world as a whole, Seelye and others said.

"Bashar is not the experienced man that his father was, he doesn't have the prestige and the history. I think it will be a lot more difficult for him to take over and succeed, particularly in the beginning," Seelye said.

"He has to set himself up and take control of the country before he can embark on any major foreign policy moves."

William Quandt, a professor at the University of Virginia and a former member of the US National Security Council who helped negotiate the Israel-Egypt peace accord, said that Assad's death would reinforce the current emphasis being placed on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

"I suppose for the moment this will reinforce the inclination of (Israeli Prime Minister Ehud) Barak and Clinton to give priority to the Israeli-Palestinian track, which is where they seem to be now," Quandt said.

Those talks are expected to resume in the Washington area on Monday, and Clinton is still planning to meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at the White House on Wednesday.

(Agencies)

11 JUN 2000

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SYRIA / MORE OPENNESS IN THOUGHT, ESPOUSAL LIKELY

10-16
13/6
Bashar all set to take over (W) W Asia

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) JUNE 12. Dr. Bashar al-Assad, son of the late Syrian President, Hafez al-Assad, has been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and made head of his country's armed forces. Since he was already nominated as the ruling Baath Party's sole candidate for the office of President, Dr. Bashar is set to slide smoothly into his father's role. Stability and continuity in Syria's foreign and domestic policies seems assured but Dr. (or perhaps Lt. Gen.) Bashar promises to bring the much-needed freshness to the manner in which Syria manages its affairs.

While preparing himself under the tutelage of his redoubtable father for the responsibilities he will assume, Dr. Bashar has dealt with several aspects of his country's internal and external affairs. He is believed to have made key inputs in affecting changes in the Cabinet made a few months ago. This Cabinet change was considered a very important preliminary step in the toning up and cleansing of the administration and that is an important pre-condition for the loosening up of the economy which Syria has been trying to undertake. Dr. Bashar is reported to have taken keen interest in the economic reforms and to have had a pioneering role in introducing his country to the age of the internet.

Dr. Bashar not only represents the younger Syrian generation but has also studied abroad. These elements of his background should ensure that he approaches his country's affairs with a mindset quite different from the rather provincial approach of his father's generation. The older generation was fairly rigid in its so-

cialist outlook and not as attuned to face the challenges of the rapidly changing international economic order as Dr. Bashar's generation would be.

From the very fact that he has been pushing information age technologies, it can be presumed that Dr. Bashar will be amenable to more openness in thought and espousal of opinion. As it is, the Syrian media had been much more open than ever before in criticising high officials in the course of the anti-corruption campaign waged by Dr. Bashar. Expectations of a radical change in the Syrian political scene are likely to be belied since Dr. Bashar has to consolidate his position. Moreover, elements of the old guard might be tempted to intervene on the pretext that Dr. Bashar is imperilling his country's security by opening up too rapidly.

Internal order and stability will continue to be of the highest priority to the Syrian establishment since the regional situation is uncertain and because Syria's linkages in the global power structure are tentative. Syria has no doubt been engaged with its regional enemy Israel and this neighbour's main backer the U.S.

But the dangers posed by Israel's hostility has not diminished in its absolute essence and Syria continues to figure in the U.S. State Department's list of states that promote terrorism. Syria also faces a hostile neighbour to its north, Turkey, and another to its east, Iraq.

Hafez al-Assad had sought to contain these threats by establishing a wider network of alliances. The linkage between Syria and Lebanon is likely to continue not least because the

preponderance of force is so much in the former's favour. Syria's link with Iran is also likely to endure because it is built on perceptions of mutual interest. Both sides would also find it in their interest to work in tandem as they steadily reshape their relations with the West.

The third axis that Mr. Assad had created with Egypt and Saudi Arabia should have been the strongest since it is based on shared cultural and ethnic roots but it remains to be seen how Egypt's President, Mr. Hosni Mubarak, and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and *de facto* ruler, Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, dealt with a man who is a few decades younger than them.

Syria's ties with the main centre of global power would depend on any transformation in its approach to Israel. Dr. Bashar is not expected to deviate from his father's strategic decision to countenance Israel's continued existence in West Asia. Neither is he expected to deviate from Mr. Assad's firm conviction that Syria should not accept any peace with Israel that is less than honourable and equitable. There is no chance that Dr. Bashar will tone down his country's demand that Israel return every inch of Syrian soil captured in June 1967.

There is no fundamental reason why the relations between India and Syria should change. However, the older generation of Syrian leaders had an affinity with India on account of a common opposition to imperialism and colonialism. It does not appear that anti-imperialism is a very strong sentiment amongst the secular elements of the younger Arab generation.

THE HINDU

13 JUN 2000

40-16
14/6

Syrians bid adieu to Assad

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), JUNE 13. Thousands of Syrians poured onto the streets of Damascus in the early hours of Tuesday to pay their last respects to the man who had ruled them for the last three decades. World dignitaries also filed into the Presidential palace to pay homage to Mr. Hafez al Assad and offer their condolences to his son and successor, Dr. Bashar al Assad. The body of Mr. Assad was to be flown to his home village of Quedaha for internment later in the day.

While Dr. Bashar's accession to the office held by his father was proceeding much more smoothly than expected, a note of dissent has been sounded by his uncle in exile, Mr. Rifaat al Assad. The 63-year-old brother of the late President was a key ally after the bloodless coup which brought Mr. Assad to power nearly 30 years ago. Mr. Rifaat al Assad was also the dominant figure in the crushing of the last major domestic challenge to his brother's authority in Syria when his tanks and artillery smashed the Muslim Brotherhood's forces in the city of al Hama in 1982. However, in 1983, at a time when Mr. Assad was bed-ridden, Mr. Rifaat had attempted a coup only to be faced down by his brother. Mr. Rifaat has been in exile since then but continued to be officially designated as the Vice-President for security affairs till he was relieved of this post a few years ago.

An aide told the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* that Mr. Rifaat would return home to challenge the "illegal" new regime. Yesterday, Mr. Rifaat struck the first dissenting note against his nephew's accession to the Presidentship. In a statement broadcast over the Arab News Network owned by his son, Mr. Rifaat said he would

launch a new Rectification Movement (this was how Mr. Assad had termed his coup) to introduce full-fledged democracy in Syria. It was not just that Mr. Rifaat challenged what was otherwise a smooth transition that sounded alarm bells in the region. There is a possibility that Mr. Rifaat still has adherents within the ruling Baath party and the military who might rally to his banner if they believe that Dr. Bashar does not fit his father's shoes.

For the time being, however, the upper echelons of the Syrian establishment does appear to believe that Dr. Bashar has the credentials. He has become the commander-in-chief of the Syrian armed forces, he is the Baath party's sole nominee for the presidency and the leaders of all wings of the armed forces have pledged their allegiance to him. His election as President when Parliament convenes in a couple of weeks seems to be a mere formality. But Dr. Bashar has to consolidate his position and also ensure that people more attuned to his way of thinking occupy pivotal posts in the Government and wider establishment. This is bound to cause some turmoil and Mr. Rifaat appears to be positioning himself to take advantage of any opportunities that may arise.

Body taken to Qardaha

DAMASCUS, JUNE 13. An aircraft left the Syrian capital today carrying the body of the President, Mr. Hafez al-Assad, on the last leg of his state funeral — burial in his home village of Qardaha.

Presidential guards took the coffin from the gun carriage and, while a band played, handed it over to generals with black arm bands before taking it back to carry it the last few metres to the plane.— Reuters

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ASSAD LEAVES HIS IMPRINT

IN THE MATTER of two summers, the death of long serving rulers, monarchical and military, in West Asia has pitchforked to the front young inheritors who hold out the promise of hope, primarily because they have not been weaned on the poison of hatred. These men — King Hussein's son in Jordan, King Hassan's in Morocco and now the son of Syria's uncrowned king Hafez al-Assad — no older than teens in the world of international intrigue, have the potential to bring a breath of fresh air and a needed break from the bloody past. That the young men have had exposure to liberal ideas and ideals is additional cause of hope for the Arab poor, for whom things can only improve after a half century of repressive regimes and unwanted wars. Of the three nations where young men are at the helm, Morocco was all along the silent player in the region while Jordan, dwarfed in the shadow of Israel, was never allowed to perform to its potential. It was Syria under Mr. Assad which emerged as a major player, projecting its power in the neighbourhood in no small measure. The crop of young rulers can give a new thrust and direction to the entire region.

Modern Syria owes all to Assad, who died in Damascus on Saturday. He brought remarkable stability to an ancient land, that had till then remained as unstable as the desert sand, and transformed it into a force to reckon with in the West Asian melting pot. A progressive in a sea of fundamentalist fervour, he stood by his country and by his friends, among whom he counted India, often working behind the scenes to stall and counter anti-India moves. New Delhi's recognition of this is reflected in the despatch of a political heavyweight, the Union Minister, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, to attend Assad's funeral. Assad was an uncompromising nationalist, unwilling to yield under pressure to the Jewish

state and he staunchly opposed Egypt's decision to sign its own peace deal with Israel at the instance of the U.S., considering it a betrayal of the Arab cause. He also demonstrated the courage to criticise Iraq for its annexation of Kuwait, for the first time finding himself in the strange company of the Western powers ranged against Mr. Saddam Hussein. He promised peace with honour to his people by bringing back the Golan Heights lost to Israel in 1967 but could not deliver on it, though undoubtedly he did all he could to bring that goal nearer.

Coming at a crucial juncture when the different strands of the peace process have entered a decisive stage, the death of Hafez al-Assad has no doubt the potential to push the volatile region to the brink yet again. Four years ago the rites of democracy, scarcely practised in the region, derailed the peace process when the Israelis elected a self-declared hawk as Prime Minister and he wasted no time in knocking down the carefully built up peace edifice. Both Israel and Palestine paid dearly for it before another election brought to the forefront a man who understands the region's yearning for peace and a respite from war. Today, when the Israel-Palestine track of the peace process looks like it can survive the doubts of the past months, a degree of uncertainty has been injected by the death of the Syrian leader, who time and time again proved his capacity to remote-control the happenings in the region. The smooth transition in Damascus to his son and chosen successor, Dr. Bashar Assad, carries the promise of continuity and hope of movement along the Israeli-Syrian peace track. Suddenly, for the first time in a long while, a region consigned to the darkness of war and dictatorship sees hope in the arrival of the three new rulers in Amman, Rabat and now the ancient capital of Damascus.

1910 Succession in Syria 1912

For a man whom the West described as a tyrant, the outpouring of grief on the streets of Damascus was staggering. Underlying the sorrow was perhaps trepidation over what will happen in the volatile politics of West Asia now that one of its tallest leaders was gone leaving his son, an untested western-educated ophthalmologist, in his place. Assad's death comes at a time when the fate of the peace process is hanging in the balance. The Israeli government is tottering on the brink of collapse after a coalition partner has pulled out, new leaders have assumed office in two other crucial nations, Morocco and Jordan, and the US itself is moving towards a change of guard. The question everyone is asking is whether peace has receded ever further with Assad's death. Many believed he was the only leader capable of bringing Syria to the negotiating table with Israel to resolve the contentious issue of the Golan Heights captured by the Jewish state in 1967. He was also believed to have the authority to rein in the Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon, both vital for a comprehensive peace settlement in the region. It is unfortunate that it is only towards the end of his life that Assad showed a slight degree of flexibility in his dealings with Israel. In an unprecedented move, he actually met with US officials, a sign many felt signalled the thawing of his famous opposition to cutting a deal with Israel.

Assad's exit from the scene has temporarily frozen the Syria-Israel track of the peace process and it will be a while before his successor, Bashar Assad, can get things back on the rail. For a start, Bashar will have to consolidate his grip internally. Hafez Assad's stature was such that despite belonging to a minority community, no one challenged his rule. His old opponents could well feel that they can take a shy at his son before he actually gets a grip on things. Waiting in the wings is the late president's brother who has staked his claim to forming a government, though he is in exile at the moment. He feels he is entitled to the seat of power since it was he who was at his late brother's side while he ruthlessly crushed an uprising which began in the Syrian city of Hama. Such was the ferocity of the two brothers' wrath towards their adversaries that at the end of the day, the historic city was left in complete ruins. Much is being made of Bashar Assad's western education and his apparent felicity with the Internet. He, many feel, will open up a xenophobic nation to outside influences. For this, he will need more than just internal goodwill. It would be in the interest of the US, which is yet to notch up a foreign policy success in the region, to advise Israel to abandon its 'all or nothing' policy towards Syria. The US would also do well to help shore up Syria's crumbling economy. However, the end of an era of aging leaders could mean a fresh perspective on the peace process. If all the key players adopt a pragmatic approach, a lasting peace may not be as far away as it seems at the moment.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 JUN 2000

W. Asian peace talks resume in Washington

WASHINGTON: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met in Washington under a tight media blackout on Tuesday at the start of a new round of talks aimed at reaching a permanent peace agreement by their self-imposed September 13 deadline.

Aaron Miller, the deputy U.S. envoy to the West Asia peace process, met separately with the delegations on Tuesday morning, and Israeli and Palestinian teams met face-to-face in the afternoon at Bolling air force base in Washington and Andrews air force base in nearby Maryland, state department spokesman Philip Reeker said. Mr Reeker and other U.S. officials refused to disclose specifics of the talks, except to say that the teams at Bolling would discuss "interim issues" and issues "related to permanent status", while the Andrews teams would tackle "permanent status issues only".

A planned "three-way" meeting including the U.S. mediation team at the Bolling talks was delayed until evening, and could be postponed because the two sides were engaged in

bilateral discussions, a U.S. official said.

That the "three-way" was initially scheduled for the Bolling talks appeared to suggest interim issues were receiving the initial emphasis, but officials declined to divulge specifics of the talks at either venue.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has insisted publicly that Israel agree to meet its June 23 deadline for the third pullback, while Israel wants to make the pullback part of an overall package with a framework for a final agreement. Prime Minister Ehud Barak has threatened to limit the pullback to one per cent of the territory now occupied by Israel if Mr Arafat insists on keeping the two issues separate, the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported on Tuesday.

"Everything is on the table," an Israeli official in Washington said. But the official, who spoke on condition he not be identified, expressed impatience with the dual-track talks and said the two sides should focus on the core issues of a peace agreement. "We don't think we should be wasting a lot of time on interim is-

sues, which if we succeed in resolving the big issues, will become irrelevant," the official said. Stressing that "Israel is committed" to a third withdrawal from West Bank territory, the official said "the parties have a responsibility to focus on the core issues of permanent status."

Permanent status issues include Jerusalem, which the two sides have yet to discuss formally, as well as water rights, Israeli settlements and Palestinian refugees. Mr Arafat is due in Washington late on Wednesday and is scheduled to meet with President Bill Clinton and secretary of state Madeleine Albright on Thursday.

The United States hosted two earlier rounds of negotiations in March at Bolling. But U.S. mediators are expected to take a more active role in this week's talks at the request of both sides. Nonetheless, U.S. officials are downplaying hopes of a breakthrough that could lead to a three-way camp David-style summit.

"These are extremely difficult issues," Ms Albright said on Monday. "The United States is not the one setting the pace here." (Reuters)

W. Asia peace talks to resume

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JERUSALEM, JUNE 16. Israelis and Palestinians have agreed to restart the suspended peace talks in Washington, ahead of a visit by the U.S. Secretary of State, Ms Madeleine Albright, to West Asia, Israel has said.

¹⁷¹⁶
Palestinian negotiators had on Wednesday called off negotiations on one of the two channels of peace talks in the U.S., saying Israel had failed to meet obligations on Palestinian prisoners and a third withdrawal from West Bank. "The United States, Israel and the Palestinians agreed this evening to a resumption of the talks. Therefore, the two teams will not return home tonight but will stay in Washington for a number of additional days," the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak's Office said in a statement.

It gave no reasons for the renewal of the interim peace talks, but Palestinians had said they wanted to wait to consult with the Palestinian President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, who arrived in Washing-



The Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, with the U.S. Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, at her residence in Washington on Thursday, following a meeting with the President, Mr. Bill Clinton, at the White House. — AP

ton on Wednesday night. Mr. Barak's office said the U.S. envoy, Mr. Dennis Ross, would visit Israel at the beginning of next week, followed by Ms Albright towards the end of the week, "to examine

if conditions are right for a meeting of the leaders'.

Israeli-Palestinian talks began in the U.S. on Tuesday aimed at laying the basis for a peace deal between the two sides. — Reuters

17 JUN 2000

M. Arin (w)

Like father, like son?

HD-16

HONESTY AND modesty are often mentioned as the main features of Bashar al-Assad's character. Also spoken of are his open-mindedness on political and economic issues and his interest in new technologies. Unmentioned in the atmosphere of respect and mourning attendant on his father's death is the question which really needs to be answered before any prognosis can be made of Syria's destiny under this charge. Will Bashar show the toughness to complete the transfer of his father's authority and protect and promote the country's interests in a world that is different from what his father was accustomed to.

There seems no reason to doubt that Bashar will take control of the levers of power that his father wielded during his 30 years in office. He has already been made the commander in-chief of the armed forces and within the next two weeks will become the secretary-general of the ruling Baath party and President of the country. All powerful state institutions have sworn their allegiance and the masses have rallied round him with a surge of enthusiasm. Those who have followed him in his six years of politics believe that he has been sufficiently prepared to become his father's successor. But the question about his personal strengths will continue to linger until he proves himself in tackling the tough challenges he and his country face.

As a Syrian analyst put it, during a long session in the CNN live telecast of Hafez al-Assad's funeral, the world in which Bashar will have to operate is vastly different from that in which his father manoeuvred. As a Baath party adherent, Hafez al-Assad evinced interest in Arab nationalism and socialism. Even though Arab nationalism has increasingly looked like a chimera, the elder Assad's commitment to the concept was lauded ever, at the time of his death. The elder Assad also did not seem able to shed his socialist leanings even though he had begun to allow his regime to adjust to the imperatives of global capital in the last half-decade or so. Bashar does not have the luxury of dealing with these regional and global developments with his judgment only half-formed on the issues in hand.

Over the last half century Arab nationalism was largely defined in terms of the conflict with Israel. This dream also initially floundered on account of differences which arose over the approaches to be adopted. First Egypt, then Palestinians and then Jordan made their peace separately with Israel. States on the outer periphery of the Arab world, Oman and Qatar, in one direction and Morocco and Tunisia, in the

Will Bashar show the toughness to complete the transfer of his father's authority and protect Syria's interests in a world different from what the elder Assad was accustomed to?
KESAVA MENON on the daunting challenge ahead of the young ruler.

18/6

other, sought to develop trading ties with Israel.

This was not just a matter of silencing the guns but a far more substantial issue of declaring that these states would henceforth countenance the existence of a Jewish state carved out of what was once almost exclusively Arab land.

Hafez al-Assad bit the bullet when he agreed to participate in the Madrid conference. As he was to explain in

about the last public statements to be issued on his behalf, he had made the strategic decision for peace. But from his animosity towards Jordan's King Hussein and the Palestine Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, leaders whom he held responsible for the breach of Arab solidarity, it was clear that the decision to accept Israel was a bitter pill to swallow. In the initial phase of his rule, Bashar will have to deal with senior leaders who feel the

same bitterness but this attitude will not serve him in the long-term.

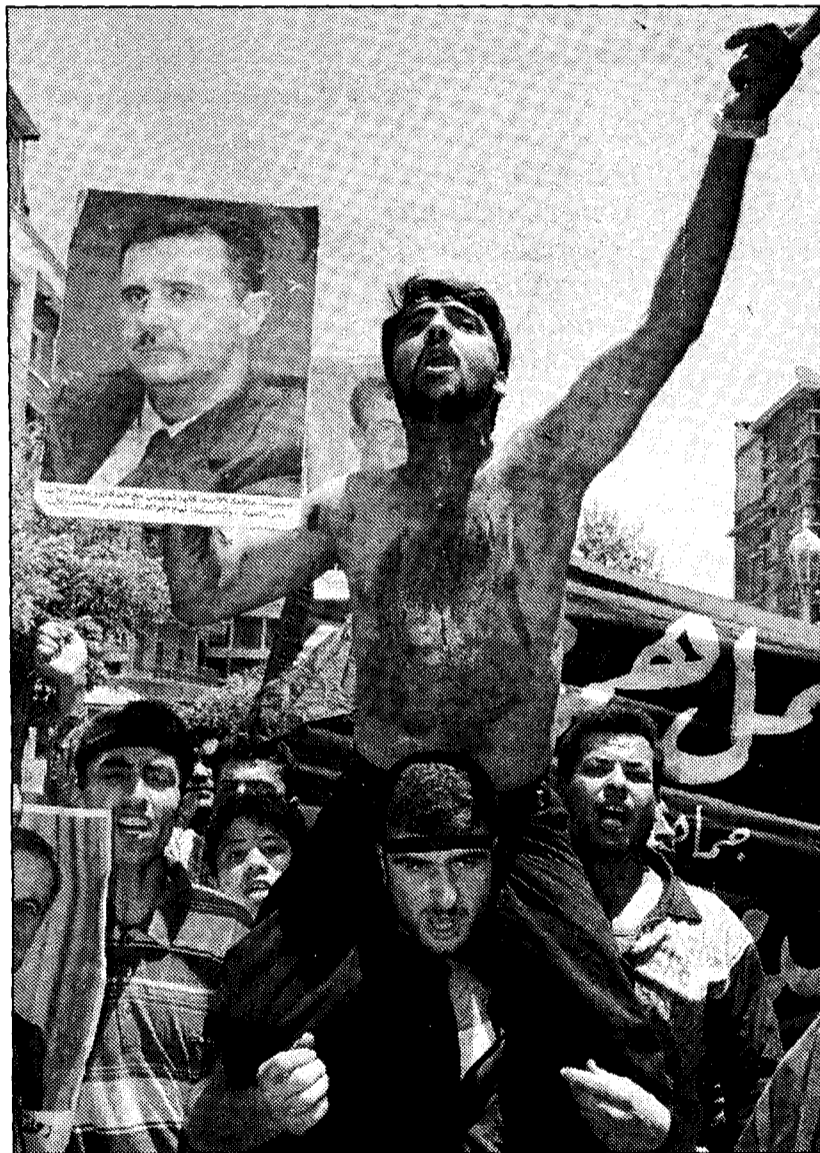
Bemoaning the lack of unity among the Arabs in their approach to Israel will be of no avail. That unity is now splintered by a host of other fissures. Just a cursory examination of how the Arabs have failed to hold a summit despite a spate of attempts over the last decade will show the poor state of this project. So long as some Arab states oppose the participation of Saddam Hussein-led Iraq (and Syria's animosity to this President is only a few shades less than that of Kuwait), this project cannot be revived. But there are also fissures between the monarchical or autocratic regimes which rule every single Arab country and the masses who aspire for greater freedom; between those who impose Islamic regimes and agendas and others who seek to maintain the pluralistic, if not exactly secular, societies that most Arabs still live in.

The collapse of Arab solidarity is more the symptom of a disease where the disease itself has been the birth and development of the several separate nationalisms. For instance, Bahrain and Qatar, whose peoples would have been indistinguishable from each other a hundred years ago when pan-Arabism was born, are today bitterly contesting a territorial dispute before the International Court of Justice. What is most remarkable is the manner the governments and media on both sides attach strident nationalistic content to the disagreement over a few islands.

If Bashar ever devotes his energies to his father's pet project, he would have to begin from entirely different premises and work in a different context. In fact, the very nature of pan-Arab unity and its importance in the scheme of the individual countries are going to be very different. Arab unity in the new context stands for promotion of each country's own interests by cooperating with others.

Economic affairs will dominate the attempts to promote greater cooperation amongst the countries of West Asia and North Africa. In this context, the facts of a common Arabic language and culture might prove important ingredients but economic considerations will be more important. When the future of the region is looked at from this point of view, it will be difficult to ignore strong economic forces like Turkey and Iran, which fringe the region, or overlook Israel, technology superpower of the region.

Bashar will not compromise on his father's policy of not making peace with Israel until Syria regains every inch of its territory. But beyond that, Bashar will have to decide how he deals with a country which his father fought all his life.



A mourner carrying a portrait of Bashar, son of the late Syrian President, Hafez al-Assad. Succession has been smooth, but will he be as successful as was his father?

For peace comes dropping slow

1976
T-11

I gnore all the empty chatter about the future of a "Middle East peace process" that died months ago, and waste no time in futile speculation about the character of Syria's new president — mild-mannered ophthalmologist, Bashar al-Assad. The regime that was run for the past 30 years by Bashar's late father, Hafez al-Assad, ex-fighter pilot, occasional mass murderer, and latter-day statesman, is a system that gives Bashar almost no room for manoeuvre.

Like the regime in neighbouring Iraq, led by his fellow Baathist and deadliest enemy, Saddam Hussein, the basis of Assad's rule in Syria was astonishingly primitive. In a pattern as old as the Hittites and the Assyrians, it was built on his own charisma plus the loyalty and cohesion of his own clan and tribe.

Assad's power base was the Alawites, a people who make up only 10 per cent of Syria's population and are viewed as near-heretics by the orthodox Sunni Muslim majority. The Alawites have reaped enormous benefits from being on top in Syria, but they are riding a tiger, and their main requirement of a leader is that he know how to keep them from falling off.

Assad stayed at the top of the Alawite heap for all that time by careful cultivation of his image, endless manipulation, and occasional savage brutality. When a Muslim brotherhood revolt in Hama in 1983 threatened to destabilize his regime, for example, Assad coldly ordered the destruction of the centre of the ancient city with heavy artillery, killing up to 40,000 men, women and children.

Even the formal structure of a one party state was a mere facade. The Baath Party, originally an Arab socialist party modelled on the communist ruling parties of Eastern Europe, was emptied of all ideological content decades ago.

The truth is that Assad could have been ruling any traditional west Asian autocracy of the past 5,000 years: his system would be completely familiar to Sennacherib, Nabopo-

lassar and Nebuchadnezzar.

To call Assad's system primitive does not mean that it was unstable. After a dozen coups in its first two decades of independence, he gave Syria 30 years of stability. It doesn't even mean that Syria could not make and keep international agreements. If Israel could have brought itself to offer the return of all the Syrian territory it conquered in 1967 during last winter's negotiations, Assad's son and heir would be coming to power in the warm afterglow of a successful peace agreement.

But the deal wasn't made, and Bashar al-Assad cannot now make it. His priority for the foreseeable future is sheer survival, for this is a system that can only transfer power within the family — so the family in question inevitably begins to operate according to the rules of Shakespearian drama. The particular drama that springs to mind is *Richard III*, with Hafez's brother Rifat, 63, in the starring role and Bashar as one of the unfortunate little princes who were murdered.

Rifat was vice-president of Syria and Hafez's strong right arm, in command of the elite troops that safeguarded the regime and destroyed Hama, until he overplayed his hand and challenged Hafez's power in 1984. Since then he has lived in exile, but he is not out of play. He publishes two Arabic language newspapers, his son Soumar runs a British-based satellite television network, Arab News Network, and he controls at least 100 companies and funds worth two to four billion dollars.

It doesn't matter that Bashar probably never wanted power, and was only pressed into his present role after his tough brother Basil, the chosen heir, wiped himself out in a car crash in 1994. Rifat is now his enemy. Last year, Hafez's troops assaulted and destroyed Rifat's heavily defended Syrian headquarters in Latakia, the Alawite "capital", in an attempt to ensure Bashar's succession, but Rifat himself remains safely in his mansion

Bashar al-Assad has no room for manoeuvre in the Syria he inherits from his father, writes Gwynne Dyer



Rifat and Bashar al-Assad, brothers in arms

in Marbella, Spain.

"What is happening in Syria is a real farce and an unconstitutional piece of theatre," said Rifat's spokesman last week. "Rifat al-Assad is a leader of the Syrian people. He loves his people as his people love him. He will go to his people and take up his responsibilities to fulfil the will of the people. He represents legitimacy in Syria." Although, the spokesman added helpfully, he "does not want Syria to drown in blood."

Bashar has ordered Rifat's arrest if he returns to Syria, but if he appears incapable of protecting Alawite power the defections will soon follow. From now on Bashar's life will

consist mainly of thwarting plots and intrigues, with a coup or assassination as a daily possibility. To survive, he must win the support of key players in the military and the secret police, and they will not be interested in risky initiatives in foreign policy at this time.

This matters less than it might seem, since what remains of the west Asian peace process is evaporating in front of our eyes anyway. All the timetables that are now running militate against it.

The key date is September 13, when Yasser Arafat has said he will unilaterally declare a Palestinian state on the territory he now

controls in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip if there has not been decisive progress in the negotiations with Israel for a "final status" deal. Seven years after the Oslo agreement that seemed to promise that state to the Palestinians, the Palestine Liberation Organization leader cannot wait any longer.

Arafat's dilemma was summarized by a recent cartoon in the Beirut newspaper *Al-Nahar*, in which a small Lebanese figure watches from a corner as Syria vainly demands the return of its conquered territory on the Golan Heights and Arafat pleads for concessions from Israel. "Try resistance," suggests the little Lebanese man.

Because the broad coalition government of the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak, was unable to offer Syria a full return to its 1967 border in last winter's peace talks, there was no deal before Assad died. Israel's failure to make peace with Syria, in turn, meant that its withdrawal from southern Lebanon last month was a chaotic retreat that underlined how reluctant the Israeli public has become to accept casualties among its young soldiers.

The success of an Arab strategy of armed resistance in Lebanon creates an attractive example for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip whose patience is exhausted. Why, ask frustrated young Palestinians, can they not do in the occupied territories what Hizbollah did in southern Lebanon, and force the casualty-averse Israeli army to pull out?

Arafat's peace-making strategy is so threatened by this unrest that he has closed down four television and two radio stations and arrested dozens of members of his own Fatah organization in the past few weeks. He cannot let the September deadline pass — and yet there is no chance of a peace deal by then. Bashar al-Assad will not even assume his duties as president of Syria until the end of 40 days of mourning for his father in late July. From late August, the United States presidential election will effectively paralyse Ameri-

can diplomacy for six months. And in any case, Barak's government is falling apart.

Recently, Shas, the orthodox religious party that is the second largest member of Barak's broad coalition, announced that it was quitting the government. This is flagrant blackmail, to extort more funds for its corrupt and bankrupt religious schools, and Shas has given Barak time to convene a cabinet meeting before handing over the money. But Barak cannot afford to capitulate to the demands of people whom his secular supporters despise as parasites.

Without Shas Barak no longer has a "Jewish majority" in the knesset. He could only get any peace deal approved by depending on Israeli Arab votes, which would cause such outrage among Jews that he is unlikely to try. So no final peace offer acceptable to both Palestinians and the Israeli public will be forthcoming before the September 13 deadline for the declaration of a Palestinian state.

That probably means harsh Israeli action against Arafat in September, and a renewed *intifada* in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (but this time with guns). Given Bashar al-Assad's acute vulnerability, Syria cannot be seen to lag behind in Arab patriotism, which is likely to lead to a resumption of rocket attacks by its Hezbollah clients along the Israeli-Lebanese border, followed by the usual devastating Israeli air raids against helpless Lebanon.

Is this the end of all hope for a lasting Arab-Israeli peace settlement? No. But peace is at best a hope that must now be deferred for some years, while some hundreds or thousands more people die to demonstrate that there is really no alternative to compromise and coexistence in West Asia.

If Bashar al-Assad is still alive and in charge of Syria at the time when serious peace talks become possible again, he will be a very lucky man.

~~Lebanon to bar UN troops till Israel retreats~~

Beirut greets Annan with tough talk

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UN

FROM JACK REDDEN

Beirut, June 19 (Reuters): Lebanon told visiting UN secretary-general Kofi Annan today that UN peacekeepers could not deploy toward the Israeli-Lebanese border until it agreed the Israeli occupation was over.

The statement was issued after a meeting between Annan and President Emile Lahoud, described by Lebanese officials as frosty because the UN Security Council had confirmed the Israeli withdrawal despite Beirut's assertion that Israel still held Lebanese land.

"Lebanon considers the continuing existence of Israeli violations means that the Israeli withdrawal is incomplete," Lahoud said. "Lebanon is awaiting results of the work of the joint UN-Lebanese ground team to announce its final position in this regard."

"Lebanon confirms that the removal of these violations is a step that must precede any redeployment for the peacekeepers in the liberated areas," he said.

Just before Lahoud's state-

ment appeared, Annan told a news conference that UN forces were investigating the alleged incursions but added that it was up to the UN — not Lebanon — to decide what constituted a violation.

Annan wants to deploy UN troops on the Israeli-Lebanese border and would like the Beirut government to reassert its authority in the area. Lebanon has announced plans to deploy 1,000 security personnel, half of them soldiers, once it is clear that Israel has withdrawn.

Annan said yesterday he hoped to double the 4,500-member UN interim force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The force is supposed to bolster Lebanese government control in the south, now dominated by the Hizbollah guerrillas who fought the Israeli troops until they left in May.

Annan, who arrived in Beirut minutes after the government repeated that Israelis remained on Lebanese land, told reporters the UN would accept no Israeli violations of the withdrawal line marked out by UN experts.

"If the Lebanese government believes there have been viola-

tions of the withdrawal line they should immediately report the matter to the UN, as they have done in this case," Annan said.

"And UNIFIL is in the process of checking and if we do confirm that there are violations, obviously we will deal with them," he said.

"We will report to the Security Council, make it public and demand that Israel take action to withdraw the forces or the individuals who have crossed the line. From the moment that line was established any crossing of that line was a violation." Lebanon, which originally objected to the line drawn by the UN to determine the withdrawal, maintained Israelis also remained on the Lebanese side of the UN line.

Annan had been guaranteed a cool reception since the UN Security Council yesterday certified Israel had ended its 22-year occupation of south Lebanon despite complaints by Beirut.

Instead of Prime Minister Selim al-Hoss greeting Annan on arrival, he was met by the low-level minister for administrative reform.

THE TELEGRAPH

THE TELEGRAPH

20 JUN 2000

G-15 warns nations against radical economic reforms

Cairo

19 JUNE

TOP LEADERS of G-15, including India, on Monday began a summit warning against the pitfalls of rapid globalisation and demanding greater market access from developed countries and cushion against the negative fallout of rapid economic reforms.

Inaugurating the tenth G-15 summit at the Itihyad Palace here, Egyptian President and chairman of the group Hosni Mubarak reflected the concerns of the developing countries by growing economic imbalances and instability in global monetary markets.

Stating that the current international economic trends do not help in achieving prosperity for the developing countries where the socio-economic conditions have deteriorated, Mubarak asked developing countries to work together for a order characterised



FELLOW FEELING: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (left) and Vice President Krishan Kant at the opening session of the G-15 summit in Cairo on Monday

AFP

by fairness and democracy.

Indian vice-president Krishan Kant said speedy globalisation has

aggravated inequities and marginalisation of developing countries.

— PTI

The Economic Times

20 JUN 2000

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22/6

Ruling party nominates Bashar

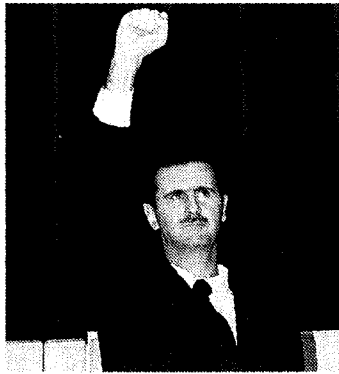
W. Assad

DAMASCUS, JUNE 21. Syria's ruling Baath Party has nominated Mr. Bashar Assad, for President, making it virtually certain that he will succeed his late father as leader of the country.

The nomination will be presented to parliament for endorsement on June 25. The 250-seat parliament, where Baathists enjoy a clear majority, is expected to set a date for a presidential referendum in which Mr. Bashar Assad is likely to be the only candidate.

Addressing the closing session of the party's congress, Mr. Bashar Assad yesterday vowed that Baath would remain faithful to the principles laid down by his father, the President, Hafez Assad.

"My primary concern will be, as it always has been, to work dili-



gently to achieve whatever is in the interest of society and the glory of the nation," he said, according to the official Syria Arab News Agency. Mr. Bashar Assad rejected suggestions that the Baath party, which has monopolized power since 1963, was becoming antiquated.

"As you know, I am among those who are very enthusiastic about technological and economic development, but I categorically reject this idea ... the ideology and slogans of the party today remain relevant," he told the congress, the party's first in 15 years.

Mr. Bashar Assad's nomination was announced by the party's assistant secretary-general, Mr. Abdullah al-Ahmar, who said the congress had confirmed the nomination made by the party executive on June 10. — AP

THE HINDU

22 JUN 2000

W. Abu (W)
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Barak Govt. survives crisis

235/6

JERUSALEM, JUNE 22. The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak's Government was saved today from a collapse that would have risked the end of his push for a peace treaty with the Palestinians.

The powerful ultra-orthodox Jewish Shas Party announced it was withdrawing the resignation of its four Cabinet Ministers at 3:05 p.m. (local time) — 40 minutes before they were due to take effect. Shas's decision followed the resignation yesterday of left-wing Education Minister, Mr. Yossi Sarid, who had refused to meet the religious party's demands for financing and control of its independent school system. "The Council of Torah Sages has ordered Shas to withdraw its resignation letters," the Council secretary, Mr. Rafael Pinhasi, said. The announcement meant Shas's 17 Members of Parliament would stay in Mr. Barak's coalition. The loss of Shas, the biggest coalition partner to Mr. Barak's coalition, would have destroyed his 68-52 parliamentary majority and made it nearly impossible for him to pursue peace for long while staying in power.

Asked if the decision by the party's spiritual leaders meant Shas would stay loyal to the coalition, Mr. Pinhasi said: "Yes, I am now going to the Prime Minister's Office...To withdraw the resignation letters." Mr. Meretz, whose two

other Cabinet Ministers also resigned yesterday, said it had sacrificed its portfolios for the sake of peace with the Arabs and would continue to back Mr. Barak on all issues. Shas and its right-wing supporters view the West Bank, captured in war 33 years ago, as part of Biblical Israel.

But the party's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, has said he would support Mr. Barak's ceding land if it would preserve Jewish lives. "If we really want — for the good of the nation and for the state of Israel — peace with security, we have to work together. We hope that now a new page has been turned," Mr. Pinhasi said.

Meretz officials said their party was vacating its Cabinet posts in the interest of furthering Mr. Barak's peace efforts with the Palestinians.

It vowed to continue to support him in parliamentary votes.

"We don't want to be responsible for the collapse of the Government," Mr. Sarid told reporters after the Meretz Ministers handed letters of resignation to Mr. Barak at his private home in central Israel late yesterday.

Even if Mr. Barak manages to put the crisis behind him, Shas made clear its support was not assured for any and all peace deals the Government negotiates. — Reuters

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23 JUN 2000

Syria is ready to resume peace talks with Israel

BY ISSAM HAMZA

Damascus, June 23: Syria said on Friday it was ready to resume peace talks with Israel at any time but would not compromise on its demand for a return of all occupied land.

Foreign minister Farouq al-Shara said the message was conveyed by Dr Bashar al-Assad, Syria's effective leader, to visiting UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

"The Secretary-General heard from his excellency Dr Bashar that Syria is ready at any time if the Israelis are ready to resume the peace talks," Mr Shara said.

"It is obvious the June 4, 1967, line is the basis which we can never compromise on," he said, referring to the border as it stood on the eve of the Arab-Israeli war that year. "On that basis, Syria is ready and will continue to be ready." Mr Annan said he saw no reason for the transition in power in Damascus following the death of Dr Bashar's father Hafez al-Assad on June 10 to delay talks. Bashar is not expected to formally take the presidency until next month.

Diplomats in Damascus had expressed strong doubts that Dr Bashar, 34 years old and relatively inexperienced, would be in a position to resume peace talks until he had secured his position at home.

"There are strong institutions in Syria, the transition is going smoothly in the country and there is no need for the suspension of the peace process if there are serious proposals," Mr Annan said. Mr Annan was concluding a West Asia tour of states involved in the Arab-Israeli peace process. He had

sought Syrian backing for UN plans to deploy extra UN peacekeepers in the area of south Lebanon vacated by Israeli occupation forces a month ago.

Mr Shara told reporters he had seen no official confirmation of a newspaper report US secretary of state Madeleine Albright intended to visit Damascus on July 25 to discuss a resumption of Syrian-Israeli peace talks.

Peace talks were suspended in January and a subsequent March meeting between the late Hafez al-Assad and President Bill Clinton in Geneva ended in bitterness when the United States pressed Syria to make territorial concessions.

Assad — and now his son — have ruled out accepting Israeli demands to retain enough of the Syrian Golan Heights occupied since 1967 to guarantee Israel control of the Sea of Galilee, a major source of fresh water.

But Mr Shara said Ms Albright had sought during a recent meeting in Egypt to put aside the differences from the Geneva summit and resume the US-brokered peace talks. "I remember when I met her in Cairo 15 days ago she said to me very clearly 'Please convey to President Assad that let's put the Geneva summit between him and President Clinton behind us. We want to have a fresh start in continuing the peace process between Syria and Israel,'" he said.

"And in fact, this is what we are looking forward to resume the peace process on the basis of the Madrid terms of reference and the land-for-peace formula, to continue the talks where they ended," Mr Shara said. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

24 JUN 2000

24/6 Barak's Bargain (11-12)

For people in India, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's attempts to sustain his multi-party coalition government will occasion no surprise. Mr Barak has yielded to the blackmail of the ultra-orthodox Shas party by agreeing to fund its religious schools in the face of strong opposition from another coalition partner, the secular Meretz party and Education Minister Yossi Sarid. The Shas party has a strength of 17 in the coalition of 68 members in the 120-member Knesset. The withdrawal of support of Shas would have reduced the Labour party coalition to a minority of 51. Though Meretz ministers have resigned from the cabinet, the party with a strength of 10 members has promised to support Prime Minister Barak from outside. Prima facie, the present arrangement suggests that Mr Barak has let down the Meretz which is much closer to him in its political philosophy to appease the Shas and save his own office. However, both Mr Barak and Meretz are playing for much higher stakes. Mr Barak needs a strong parliamentary majority to negotiate a final peace deal with the Palestinians and for that purpose he has to survive in office. The Meretz has promised its support to him even though it is not part of the government while the Shas party has expressed its reservations over the peace deal. Therefore, Mr Barak has taken a gamble by giving in to Shas and keeping it in government in the hope of getting its muted support for a peace deal with the Palestinians for which President Bill Clinton has set a September deadline. His logic is that once the deal is signed it will be difficult for any future government to resile from it.

It is to be hoped that he is proved right and the present coalition will stay put for the next three months. In the Israeli system, the prime minister is elected directly by the people simultaneously with the parties being elected. The prime minister puts together a workable majority in the Knesset from among the elected members. Israeli politics has for a long time been coalitional. The prime minister can continue at the head of a minority government till the Knesset votes for its own dissolution in three successive motions. The present house has already voted once for dissolution but that is not operational unless the motion is adopted twice more. This Knesset is hardly a year old and members are not likely to be eager for yet another election. Mr Ehud Barak was elected on his promise to bring peace and he has established his credentials by his withdrawal from Southern Lebanon and his offer to vacate the Golan Heights except for a minor strip. One wonders whether a fresh election will bring about any significant change in the Israeli political landscape. A new presidential election is also due in the next month since President Ezer Weizman is retiring before the expiry of his full term. These are the weighty considerations that appear to have influenced the present compromise with the Shas party. Hopefully this will give Mr Barak time to achieve his primary goal — the final peace deal with the Palestinians.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 JUN 2001

Reformists on the offensive

✓ **W**HEN REFORM adherents in Iranian politics unprecedentedly won a massive majority in Parliament, it was thought that they would implement their agenda with caution. Their conservative opponents hold so many levers of power and have recently shown such a belligerent attitude that it would have been more politic for the reformists to hold their hand.

Instead, they have commenced the work of the new Parliament with a frontal assault on the positions most recently recaptured by the enemy.

In the first three years of the Khatami experiment (or the Khordad-2 processes as the reform programme fanned by the President, Hojatoleslam Syed Mohammed Khatami, is alternatively known), the battle between the reformists and the conservatives was fought in the media field.

The reform-minded Minister for Information, Mr. Mohajerani, issued press licences with such liberality and speed that a host of new publications came forward to widen and open the public debate. Leading ideologues of the reform faction like Mr. Abdollah Nouri used the publications as an instrument for outlining their agendas, indeed to set the conceptual framework on which political parties could eventually be based.

It was small wonder that the conservatives, whose own media efforts fared poorly, came to view the new Iranian media as a machine that was cutting the ground from under their feet. They initially used the judiciary, which they dominate completely, to curb the growth of the media.

But these efforts failed mainly on account of Mr. Mohajerani's proclivity for issuing new licences at will. In fact, the tactic of using the judiciary to try and kill the media backfired when Mr. Nouri used the judicial forum, in a case in which he was being tried for subversion, to launch the most scathing attack imaginable on the entire post-revolutionary political structure.

Conservative desperation peaked in the lead up to the parliamentary election, the first round of which was held on February 18 this year. When the reformists obtained a landslide victory, the conservatives, perversely enough, felt that they had found an opportunity. The thesis they advanced was that the reformists were threatening to overthrow the Islamic regime and subvert Islam itself; therefore there was need to protect Iran from this danger and that the media which had created and advanced the reform campaign should be first brought to order. Over 16 publications, all but one



The Iranian President, Mr. Mohammed Khatami, and the Parliament Speaker, Mr. Mehdi Karrubi...happy about meeting the conservative challenge.

For all the post-poll belligerence of the conservatives in Iran, the reformists have refused to go on the backfoot and begun the work of the new Parliament with a frontal assault on their opponents, says KESAVA MENON.

The ban coincided with some nifty work a conservative-dominated election monitoring body — Council of Guardians — undertook to dilute the mandate. Managing to find some sort of discrepancy in the polls, the Guardians overturned the result in almost a dozen constituencies throughout Iran. But their main efforts were directed at invalidating the vote in Teheran, where the reformists, most of them leading ideologues, won handily.

The absence of the liberal press,

investigative ability, was of great convenience while the Guardians carried out their sabotage.

These efforts by the conservatives however failed to achieve two intended objectives. One line of thought was that the vast majority of Iranians who supported reform would be so outraged by the onslaught on the press that they would erupt in fury. Had they done so, the conservatives would have found an excuse for a clampdown and perhaps cancelled the result of

country's stability was under threat.

This danger failed to materialise mainly because Mr. Khatami was able to exercise great restraint on his following.

The conservatives also seem to have believed that in the absence of the liberal media the reform camp would not be able to mobilise its followers.

Had this come to pass the conservatives, who do have a small but committed following, would have captured a majority of the nearly 90 seats in the second round of elections. And had they done so, they would have been in a position to pose at least a viable opposition in Parliament. This aim was also not achieved since the reformist swept the second round as well.

In another move, of pure political chicanery, the conservative deputy who had dominated the last Parliament but almost all of whom lost their seats, gave a parting shot even as they were waiting to vacate their seats.

They passed a law setting new and stricter regulations for issuance of press licences. They also decreed that journalists, and not just publishers as under the earlier law, would be held liable for any breach of the law in articles published.

Finally, they decreed that the police and the judiciary (and not just the Information Ministry) would have to be involved in the re-issue of licences for banned publications.

The beauty of this new arrangement is that the incoming Parliament would not be able to amend the law just as easily. Under constitutional provisions, the Guardians (once again) have to vet every piece of legislation.

While they had readily allowed the conservative promoted anti-press legislation to enter the statute books they were hardly likely to be as lenient towards a reform measure meant to restore the status quo ante.

Given the desperate struggle that the reformists had to wage during the period of the parliamentary elections, it was thought that they would mount a fresh challenge against the conservatives only after much deliberation.

But they did nothing of the sort. Once they briskly got through the business of election of the presiding officers for the incoming Parliament, the reformists promptly announced their decision to get rid of the restrictions on the press. They have also informed the higher judiciary.

In the circumstances this must be regarded more as a challenge than intimation that the Teheran court which banned the publications earlier

25 JUN 2000

EHUD Barak's war-hero reputation as a strong leader who doesn't yield to threats is in tatters. The Israeli Prime Minister has emerged from the most testing crisis of his 11-month reign with his coalition intact but his credibility diminished.

A poll, published last Friday in the mass-circulation *Yediot Aharonot*, found 59 per cent of Israelis dissatisfied with his handling of the tug-of-war with the oriental Jewish Shas party. Mr Barak's popularity rating, measured by another survey in the tabloid *Ma'ariv*, fell seven per cent in a single week.

Oh, Prime Minister

27/6/01
Ehud Barak's coalition may be intact but his credibility has suffered, says ERIC SILVER

At best, he has won breathing space to make peace with the Palestinians, but support for a deal within his coalition remains shaky.

Three of its six parties — the pro-settler National Religious Party and the Russian immigrants' Yisrael B'aliya, as well as Shas — are already voicing reservations about ceding any more West Bank territory.

Four Shas ministers withdrew their resignations last Thursday after Mr Barak agreed to bail out their bankrupt private school network and legalise their pirate radio stations. As part of a package, the three ministers from the left-liberal Meretz resigned from the government, but their 10 members of Parliament will stay in the coalition to give peace a chance. "We couldn't face being blamed for the failure to achieve peace," Naomi Chazan, one of their dejected backbenchers, told me. Her colleague, Ran Cohen, added that however hard they had juggled the figures, they could see no viable alternative government.

Shas, with 17 seats, is the coalition's second biggest partner. It has no scruples about threatening ethnic and religious mayhem. If Mr Barak aspires to be "everybody's Prime Minister", he cannot afford to drive Shas into opposition. Meretz's education minister Yossi Sarid had precipitated the crisis by insisting on supervising how the Shas schools spent the taxpayers' millions.

Mr Barak reiterated that Meretz remained his Labour party's "natural and most faithful partner", but Mr Sarid complained that the Prime Minister had abandoned them. "We received unsubtle hints," he told the Meretz council, "that either we gave in all along the line, or we would have no choice but to resign." So the Meretz ministers quit, and Israel's secular majority felt more isolated than ever as the aged rabbis of Shas' "Council of Sages" held the nation in their withered hands.

Putting a brave face on his humiliation, Mr Barak said last Thursday night that maintaining a broad coalition would enable him to take "the most critical fateful decisions" in Israel's history. He is now pressing for an early three-way summit with Yasser Arafat and Bill Clinton to thrash out a framework for ending the century-old conflict with the Palestinians — and through them with the Arab nation.

It is still far from certain, however, that the wide-reaching concessions Israel is now offering will be enough for Mr Arafat. The key issues — final borders, competing claims to Jerusalem and the fate of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees — have yet to be resolved.

Mr Arafat has his own script, and his own public opinion to satisfy. He is no longer an unchallengeable giant to the three million Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, who are increasingly disenchanted with his self-rule authority's rampant corruption, disdain for human rights and failure to deliver economic salvation.

In the Israeli camp, Mr Barak secured a promise from Shas to vote down a bill, which passed a preliminary reading on 7



June, calling for early elections. But the Sephardi party, whose constituents tend to the right of the political divide, did not commit itself to support a peace deal.

"We will decide after we see the terms," a Shas spokesman said. "Its record hardly inspires confidence."

"Shas today is a right-wing party," political analyst Shalom Yerushalmi wrote in *Ma'ariv* last Friday, "and the latest crisis only made its positions more extreme. It will sit in this government, it will take all the favours heaped on it, and it will desert the coalition to fight a peace agreement from the opposition. Why? Because that's what its voters want."

Mr Barak's aim is to sign a peace agreement before the Clinton Administration becomes too embroiled in an autumn of American elections, then to bypass the unreliable coalition and submit it to the people in a general election or a referendum. He's banking on the popularity of his bold decision to withdraw Israeli troops from the killing fields of Southern Lebanon. But in a land where elections are long and memories are short, it remains a high-risk strategy.

(The author is the Jerusalem-based correspondent of *The Statesman*.)

THE STATESMAN

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Israeli gesture to remove mistrust

EILAT (ISRAEL), APRIL 30. Israel, preparing to start a crucial phase of peace talks today, plans to transfer to full Palestinian control a village near Jerusalem which has been mooted as a future Palestinian capital.

The senior Cabinet Minister, Mr. Haim Ramon, who often explains the Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak's policies, confirmed that Israel intended to transfer Abu Dis and two other villages on the outskirts of Jerusalem to Palestinian self-rule.

"These areas are areas that are today also under almost complete Palestinian control," Mr. Ramon told army radio. Mr. Barak's office was not available for comment on when or how the decision would be taken. But newspapers reported that Mr. Barak would ask the Cabinet on Wednesday to approve the transfer of the villages, which are already under partial Palestinian rule.

The move was designed to clear the atmosphere of the mistrust surrounding Israeli-Palestinian peace talks which have made little headway in recent months, missing key deadlines.

Accelerated talks

The two sides will launch accelerated talks with the U.S. envoy, Mr. Dennis Ross, planning an active role but the target — a framework accord by May 13 — seems out of reach. "We don't attach importance to the dates, and I don't know if we will meet the May deadline," said the senior Israel negotiator, Mr. Oded Eran. "But, I think in a few weeks we can reach an agreement."

The Palestinian Cabinet Minister, Mr. Hassan Asfour, said differences on fateful final-status issues such as Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, borders and refugees were 'still big'. Mr. Ross intends to join the negotiations in the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat on Tuesday.

The schedule calls for the framework accord to lead to a comprehensive deal in September. Both sides have already missed a February deadline for a

preliminary accord. Mr. Eran said work had begun on drafting the skeleton of the framework agreement in the previous round of talks held in Bolling air force base near Washington.

Mr. Saeb Erekat, the senior Palestinian negotiator on implementing interim peace deals signed since 1993, said interim and final-status issues would be discussed separately in Eilat. "We expect the Israeli side to come with answers on the third and final phase of redeployment from the West Bank so it can be carried out by the agreed deadline in June," he said.

Mr. Erekat was referring to the last Israeli pullback under the interim deals which call for a redeployment from all parts of the West Bank except for Jewish settlements and military areas.

A senior Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) official close to the talks said the Palestinians would discuss with Israel new ideas which Palestinian President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, had raised with the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, in Washington recently. "In his discussions with Clinton, President Arafat proposed building joint economic projects on Palestinian-Israeli borders to achieve economic security," the official said.

The official said that on the issue of Jerusalem, Mr. Arafat suggested keeping the city 'undivided' and 'open', but with Palestinian sovereignty in the East and Israeli sovereignty in the West. Israel captured Arab East Jerusalem in the 1967 war and regards all of the city as its capital.

Settlers evacuated

Israeli soldiers today forcibly evacuated several dozen Israeli settlers who had taken over an area of land in the heart of the West Bank city of Hebron. Israel radio reported that the settlers, claiming the parcel of land was Jewish-owned but had been abandoned, erected a huge container in an attempt to create a 'Jewish presence' there. — Reuters, DPA

E 1 MAY 2000

Israel begins pullout from Southern Lebanon

JERUSALEM, MAY 2. Israel began pulling out of two fortified forward positions in Southern Lebanon in preparation for its planned complete withdrawal from the zone by July 7, a military spokesman said.

Communications equipment was dismantled at Tziporen Fort in the north of the zone Israel has occupied for 22 years, while munitions from the small fort, 100 metres from the de facto Israeli-Lebanese border, were

brought further back.

The same source said a pro-Israeli militia-man was injured yesterday during an attack by the Shia Hezbollah against a position in the north-east of the occupied zone.

The Israeli press reported that the sand dunes around the two small fortified positions were flattened by tractors.

The daily *Yediot Aharanot* said today Israeli security officials believed the pro-Israeli South

Lebanon Army (SLA) should be allowed to hang on to equipment provided by Israel, from light arms to tanks. The Israeli Security Cabinet began discussions with military chiefs this week on the modalities of their retreat from the occupied zone.

Israel has pledged to withdraw its troops from Southern Lebanon by July whether or not it has reached a deal with Lebanon and Syria. — AFP

THE HINDU

MAY 2 1982

Israeli proposal irks Palestinians

REUTERS

EILAT (Israel), May 4. — Palestinian negotiators, angered by an Israeli land proposal for a final peace deal, briefly walked out of peace talks yesterday, a senior Palestinian official said today.

But US Special Envoy, Mr Dennis Ross, managed to bring the sides back together yesterday evening, the official added.

Mr Ross was sent to mediate the peace talks underway at the Israeli Red Sea resort town of Eilat by Mr Bill Clinton who is determined to clinch an historic peace accord.

The negotiators are hammering out a framework deal for a final peace treaty which is supposed to be reached by 13 September.

"The Israelis showed the Palestinians maps of the final status. The Palestinians were angered and walked out of the meeting. Mr Ross succeeded in bringing the sides back to a meeting in the evening," the official said.

He added it was the first time that Israel had shared maps, detailing its territorial proposals with the Palestinians since the talks on a final peace accord began last September.

The Israeli maps, however, placed all major roads under Israeli sovereignty as well as large blocks of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where Palestinians want to create an independent state.

"We refuse to negotiate or accept this map," the Palestinian official said.

Israeli air raids: Israeli warplanes bombed a car near the home of a guerrilla commander yesterday, slightly wounding his mother and at least five other civilians, Lebanese security officials said, reports AP from Beirut.

THE STATESMAN

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Ross joins West Asian negotiators as talks begin

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) MAY 3. The U.S. Special Envoy, Mr. Dennis Ross, has joined Palestinian and Israeli negotiators in a bid to frame an agreement that is supposed to be ready by the middle of this month. This "framework agreement" on final status issues was supposed to have been ready by February, but the failure to meet that deadline did not cause much heartburn on either side. That failure has, however, certainly ensured that no one is eagerly anticipating a breakthrough this time either.

The framework agreement is supposed to provide an outline of how the two sides will settle the outstanding issues and thus set a permanent status for their relations in the future. From the manner in which the negotiations have proceeded so far it is very unlikely that the negotiators will reach an agreement on the main issues — Palestinian sovereignty, ownership over Jerusalem, borders, the future of the Jewish settlements, the plight of Palestinian refugees and distribution of water resources by the September deadline. The framework agreement was designed as an interim measure which would set out the areas on which the two sides could easily agree and at least the principles on which major differences could be resolved. As things stand, it does not appear very likely that even a less ambitious framework agreement will be ready by the middle of this month.

About the only issue which appears close to a resolution is that of Palestinian sovereignty. Israel's chief negotiator, Mr. Oded Eran, has said that the negotiations will end in the creation of a Palestinian state. While a few die-hard rightists in Israel continue to express their opposition, the leaders of the major political parties appear ready to acknowledge an emerging reality that the majority of their people have accepted for some time now. Although they have not expressed it in so many words it appears likely that the Palestinians will accept that their



The United States mediator, Mr. Dennis Ross (centre), speaks during the first round of trilateral West Asia talks in Eliat, Israel, on Wednesday. — AP

state-to-be will not be able to build a full-fledged military or to forge alliances with countries hostile to Israel.

Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, without explicitly accepting the idea of Palestinian sovereignty, has said that the Palestinians are entitled to something more than enhanced autonomy in segmented bits of territory. The first part of this statement could be construed as acceptance of the idea of Palestinian sovereignty. The second part suggests that Israel will transfer land in such a manner that the Palestinian territory is contiguous. At present the Palestinian Authority is in full or partial control of just over 40 per cent of the West Bank. But not all these bits of territory are connected to each other and Palestinians have to pass through Israeli road-blocks in moving from one to the other.

One more land transfer is to take place before the current interim phase of the negotiations come to an end. The Oslo agreements postulate that all West Bank land, other than that belonging to Jewish settlements and "designated military areas" must be handed over to the Palestinians by the end of the interim phase. By defining their security requirements, and thereby the military means needed to ensure

it, in broad terms the Israelis have been able to hold on to the major portion of the West Bank. Palestinians are now demanding that all the West Bank territory outside the settlements must be handed over to them in the interim phase and that the settlements themselves must be evacuated by the end of the final negotiations.

The Israeli media suggests that their Government might be ready to part with about 70 to 80 per cent of the West Bank by the end of the interim phase. These reports also suggest their Government would be prepared to enter into negotiations in respect of another 10 or 20 per cent (to bring it to 90 per cent of the West Bank in total) at later stages. Through this proposal Israel hopes to retain the 10 per cent of the West Bank which contains substantial settlement blocks. The Palestinians have of course not accepted this proposal but it is not certain that this is not just an initial negotiating position.

Mr. Barak's Government is apparently prepared to give the Palestinian Authority full authority over three villages near Jerusalem. One of these villages, Abu Dis, has been identified as the possible site for a Palestinian capital and the foundation for a Palestinian parliament house had reportedly been laid already.

THE HINDU

Palestinians angered by Israeli land proposals

ISRAEL: Palestinian negotiators, angered by an Israeli land proposal for a final peace deal, briefly walked out of peace talks on Wednesday, a senior Palestinian official said on Thursday.

But U.S. special envoy Dennis Ross managed to bring the sides back together on Wednesday evening, the official added.

Mr Ross was sent to mediate the peace talks underway at the Israeli Red Sea resort town of Eilat by U.S. President Bill Clinton, who is determined to clinch an historic peace accord. The negotiators are hammering out a framework deal for a final peace treaty which is supposed to be reached by September 13.

"The Israelis showed the Palestinians maps of the final status. The Palestinians were angered and walked out of the meeting. Mr Ross succeeded in bringing the sides back to a meeting in the evening," the official said.

He added it was the first time that Israel had shared maps, detail-

ing its territorial proposals, with the Palestinians since the talks on a final peace accord began last September.

Another Palestinian official said that the maps showed a state or entity made up of three cantons with no links to one another nor to nearby Jordan, whose population is predominantly Palestinian.

The official said the Israeli maps placed all major roads under Israeli sovereignty as well as large blocks of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where Palestinians want to create an independent state.

According to the maps, Palestinians would have sovereignty over areas only under their full control now, he said. Palestinians today control about 40 per cent of territories captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war. "We refuse to negotiate or accept this map," the official said. "It is even worse than the proposals they (the Israelis) made verbally." (Reuters)

3 MAY 2000

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Israel, Lebanon trade fire

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CAIRO, MAY 5. The Lebanese capital Beirut along with several other areas in the north and east of the country plunged into darkness today after Israeli fighter planes blasted power stations while Hezbollah rebels retaliated by firing seven Katyusha rockets which landed in northern Israel.

The Hezbollah rebels said the attacks this morning were a warning to Israel not to persist in attacking Lebanon. The bombing of power stations would result in power rationing as newly installed transformers were damaged, an official said.

Israel said its strikes, which came hours after the Hezbollah rebels fired rockets into northern Israel yesterday, were in retaliation to the attacks which killed an Israeli soldier and wounded 26 people.

A military statement issued in Jerusalem today said the Israeli air force hit power transformer stations near Beirut in the central part of the country, Tripoli in the north and a 'terrorist's target' in eastern Lebanon's Bekaa valley.

The attack also left a deep crater on the Beirut-Damascus highway, severing the main traffic artery between the Lebanese and Syrian capitals.

At least three air-to-surface missile hits made people dash to bomb shelters this morning in a northern Beirut suburb. Two more explosions rocked the area 15 minutes after the first attack on a power station, one of two major stations feeding Beirut electricity. Two more missiles were fired an hour after the initial strike.

Israeli warplanes also attacked near the northern city of Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest city, targeting the power plant in nearby Baddawi. The air raid was also conducted southeast of Baalbek in eastern Lebanon's Bakes valley.

Reports from Beirut said that the Hezbollah rebels fired seven Katyushas this morning from the coastal area of Mansouri in southern Lebanon which landed inside northern Israel.

The guerillas said the cross-border strikes were to avenge the deaths of two Lebanese civilians — an 82-year-old woman and her 40-year-old daughter — killed by Israeli artillery fire. With the overnight escalation of tension between Lebanon and Israel, hopes of an early peace in the region dimmed.

The Israeli Deputy Defence Minister, Mr. Ephraim Snefu, today declared that Israel would foremost defend its citizens.

The country has promised to unilaterally withdraw its forces from southern Lebanon in July this year where it mans a buffer zone occupying 18 per cent of Labanese land apparently to protect its northern borders.

While the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Selim al-Hoss, condemned the raids as 'barbaric', the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, visiting an Israeli border town hit by the heavy barrage of rockets, said Israel would retaliate.

U.S. urges restraint

The U.S. today condemned attacks on civilian targets in both the countries and said it was extremely important for the two sides to halt the escalation in the fighting.

The U.S. Ambassador, Mr. David Satterfield, said he had delivered separate messages from the Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, to Mr. Hoss after the attacks and counter-attacks. — PTI, Reuters

THE HINDU

5 MAY 2000

Turbulence likely in Turkish politics

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) APRIL 6. The Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. Bulent Ecevit, faced a major problem before he came to India. He hoped it would be resolved by the time he returned from the place he calls his spiritual second home. It has not and suddenly Turkish politics is threatened with the instability that has been endemic in the past. Mr. Ecevit is faced with the prospect that he cannot ensure a second term for the President, Mr. Suleyman Demirel, and that a possible contest for the succession could tear apart his Government.

Before Mr. Ecevit left for India the Turkish parliament was presented with a constitutional amendment package. Among other matters the bill sought to change those provisions of the Constitution which lay down that a President might hold office for only a single seven-year term. Mr. Demirel and Mr. Ecevit have been bitter political rivals in the past. But in recent

times the two — the foremost representatives of an older and wiser generation of statesmen — have found that they can be more effective if they work together. This was not the only reason why Mr. Ecevit wanted to amend the Constitution so as to allow a President two five-year terms in office and thereby ensure that Mr. Demirel continued in office.

If the three-party coalition that Mr. Ecevit heads is now forced to look for a successor to Mr. Demirel, it might put enormous strain on its unity. Though Mr. Ecevit's Democratic Left Party and its main coalition partner the National Action Movement (headed by Mr. Devlet Bahceli) have progressively moved to the centre in recent years their points of origin were at the left and the extreme right of Turkey's political spectrum.

Old ideological strains, and a bitter history of mutual hostility during the early eighties which had left dozens dead on both sides, had been papered over after

both parties did surprisingly well in the elections a year ago and formed a coalition with relative smoothness. But old antagonisms might be resurrected if the parties were to put up rival candidates for the Presidency.

The third party in the coalition, the Motherland party, does not have the seats to put up a candidate in the first instance but it would surely be tempted to enter a possible compromise choice if the two senior partners cannot agree.

Mr. Ecevit, Mr. Bahceli and the leader of the Motherland Party, Mr. Mesut Yilmaz, tried hard to get their followers to fall in line. However, the bill failed to get anywhere near the 367 votes (in a 550-member strong House) that would have pushed the amendment through.

Since the coalition partners themselves hold 350 seats it was clear that some of the members had rebelled. Mr. Ecevit and the other two leaders tried their best to ensure Mr. Demirel's success and even went close

to tampering with the secrecy of the ballot. They got the signatures of all their members to a document supporting Mr. Demirel's candidacy and apparently worked out a method of finding out who had rebelled.

In a second vote yesterday, the amendment bill once again failed to obtain the requisite support 305 for and 177 against and Mr. Demirel's chances of re-election have considerably dimmed.

Theoretically, Mr. Ecevit can approach Parliament a third time. But with the successive heavy margins of defeat it is doubtful whether he will be tempted to do so. Another available avenue is to take the amendment to a referendum but latest opinion polls suggest that about 70 per cent of the people are against giving Mr. Demirel another term. Mr. Demirel might have won many admirers during his seven terms as Prime Minister and one term as President but it was also clear that he has collected a lot of enemies.

7 MAY 2000

TODAY, a day before Israel celebrated its 52nd Independence Day, it solemnly and collectively honoured the 19,109 soldiers, sailors and airmen who died in defence of the reborn state since the United Nations voted to partition British Palestine on 29 November 1947. At the same time, Israel's political and military leaders reaffirmed their determination to pull out of Southern Lebanon by 7 July — a bold decision designed to stem the procession to the nation's 42 military cemeteries.

Deputy chief of staff Major-General Uzi Dayan, whose father Zorik, Moshe Dayan's brother, fell in the 1948 War of Independence, has ordered the army to be ready to leave even earlier than Prime Minister Ehud Barak's July deadline. The soldiers — and

Out of the killing fields

Israeli soldiers and their anxious families can't wait to get out of southern Lebanon. Barak is gambling. And, unusually for him, he is inventing strategy as he goes along, writes ERIC SILVER

their anxious families — can't wait to get out of the Lebanese killing fields. But last weekend's eruption of violence across the troubled border taught a sober lesson. There are no easy answers, more blood may still be shed. Barak is gambling. And, unusually for him, he is inventing strategy as he goes along.

Israel retaliated for a barrage of Katyusha rockets fired on Kiryat Shmona by Hizbollah with air strikes that put out the

lights in the Lebanese capital, cratered the Beirut-Damascus highway and destroyed the Shiite militia's main ammunition depot under Syrian protection in the Beqa Valley.

Lebanon paid a heavy price, but Hizbollah still had the last word with another salvo of Katyushas on Galilee communities. Political wisdom dictated that Israel refrain from a second counter-attack. Barak's priority remained to bring the boys home in good order, if possible under a United Nations umbrella and with the tacit cooperation of the Lebanese government. The alternative would be a humiliating retreat under fire — and a license for Hizbollah to hit Kiryat Shmona from closer range.

The military commentators reflected their despair. "Hizbollah is the one dictating the rules of the game," said Yoday Limor in Ma'ariv. "Whenever they like, they launch Katyushas. Whenever they like, they keep the region quiet. Israel merely reacts, and even then keeps a low profile."

Alex Fishman turned the knife in Yediot Aharonot: "Hizbollah is bent on continued escalation. Israel's airstrike sent Hizbollah a single message: You can carry on, and with even greater intensity. The government of Israel wants quiet and is not willing to take risks. And Hizbollah, as we know, will not have to look too hard for an excuse to fire the next Katyushas."

Others called for Israel to hit back not just at Lebanon, but at Syria's 30,000-strong garrison in the Beqa. President Hafez Assad has far greater leverage over Hizbollah than his Beirut puppet regime has. The Islamic militia receives its Iranian

men have fought alongside their Israeli patron for two decades — and paid an even heavier price in blood.

Israel insists that it will not abandon them or their families. But it is already hinting that it will bow to a UN ultimatum and remove the SLA's heavy arms — tanks, armored personnel carriers and artillery — leaving them only their personal weapons. The UN is confident it can stop the SLA stashing any away unnoticed.

But what then? Israel is reluctant to commit itself to march back into Lebanon and bail the SLA out if it is attacked. Beyond that, there are more creative ideas than concrete solutions. Israel is ready to absorb many of the SLA families in Galilee, but they say they would rather stay on their land in Lebanon. That, after all, is what they have been fighting for.

What SLA commander General Antoine Lahad would prefer is an agreement with Beirut that would grant his fighters, who have always projected themselves as Lebanese patriots rather than Israeli collaborators, an amnesty and absorb them as three territorial battalions in the national army. "Only this way," Lahad said last weekend, "would we be able to continue to live in our homeland." That way, one of his officers added, they could continue to defend their country, "not as a militia, but under the sovereignty of the Lebanese government."

Although soundings are being made in Beirut, this looks like a pipe dream. The alternative would be for the SLA to split into village militias, protecting their communities from Hizbollah or rogue Palestinian revenge squads. It rings more like a prescription for civil war than a formula for peace — a renewal of hostilities that could draw Israel back into the killing fields of Lebanon, whether it likes it or not.

(The author is The Statesman's Jerusalem-based correspondent)

arms, ammunition and instructors via Damascus airport. Assad may not be able to control the fanatics, but he can influence them. "The only way to maintain effective strategic deterrence," Ron Ben-Ishai argued in Yediot Aharonot, "is to threaten Syrian interests in Lebanon. And, if need be, to make good on that threat. Instead of plunging hundreds of thousands of Lebanese civilians into the dark, Israel should strike directly at Syrian military camps inside Lebanon and at economic projects that provide income for Syrian generals and workers."

Despite American urgings to leave the Syrians alone, Barak seems to be edging towards confrontation. "The minute the withdrawal from Lebanon is completed," he told Israel Radio, "Israel will know how to identify anyone behind activity against the state. Nobody will escape a harsh response, including Syria."

For all this sabre-rattling, Barak prefers the diplomatic track. Through Secretary-General Kofi Annan's West Asia troubleshooter, Terje Larsen, he is negotiating quietly with the UN and with the Lebanese and Syrian governments. In return for an enhanced international role in Southern Lebanon, Israel is preparing to pull back from the last inch of Lebanese soil, even if that puts Galilee kindergartens back on the front line.

The UN, however, will expand its peacekeeping operation only if the Lebanese (and behind them the Syrians) agree. Israel also needs Beirut's cooperation if it is to solve the dilemma of what to do about the South Lebanese army, whose 2,000

10 MAY 2000

Lebanon rejects militia's demand for amnesty

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), MAY 10. The chance of violence continuing in south Lebanon has after a promised Israeli troop withdrawal have increased with Beirut rejecting an Israel militia's demand for amnesty. While the militia can cite a precedent in support of its demand, the fact that it has been collaborating with an occupying force, which all segments of Lebanese society are hostile to in varying degrees, reduces the political appeal of the amnesty option as a quick way to bring peace to this troubled land.

Mr. Antoine Lahd, head of the South Lebanon Army that allied itself with Israel through the 22 years of occupation, had on Monday made his demand for amnesty in an open letter to the Lebanese President, Mr. Emile Lahoud. "If for any reason, it is necessary to gratify those with grudges or the propagators of false judgment of patriotism and treason, you may exclude the summit of the pyramid in the frontier regions from the decree of amnesty myself, the author of these lines, take on the entire responsibility," Mr. Lahd said in his letter. The SLA chief has already been tried, in

absentia, and sentenced to death on the charge of treason and many members of his militia have been prosecuted for collaboration "with the enemy."

Yesterday, the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Salim Hoss rejected the demand saying that it was bizarre for the SLA to request amnesty while it was still carrying on acts of aggression "by the side of his nation's enemy against his own civilian people and sometimes doesn't even spare his nation's army. The Lebanese Prime Minister said Mr. Lahd must surrender to Lebanese justice before making any demands. Another unnamed member of the Lebanese Cabinet has said that the militia had before it only the choice of surrender or exile. True to form, the Shia militia Hizbollah, which has been fighting the SLA and the Israeli military in the occupied zone for all these years, has added another option, death.

Armed, trained and supplied by Israel as it is, the SLA has been as involved in some of the more heinous aspects of the Israeli occupation of the 15-km wide occupation zone. It has also been as much a target of Hizbollah rage as the Israeli military. From a distance, the SLA might appear to be a

mere quising force which does not deserve much sympathy. But what complicates the situation is the composition of the SLA itself and the manner in which this is tied with the fragility of Lebanese society. While most of its officers are Christian, the SLA also contains members of other ethnic communities resident, including Shias. For the Hizbollah, the SLA badge might be sufficient for a person to qualify for punishment but the reaction elsewhere in Lebanon does not appear to be so clear cut.

The Maronite Cardinal of Lebanon, Rev. Nasrallah Sefir had in April called on the Government to seriously consider the amnesty option but that does not mean that the entire community is brimming with sympathy for the SLA. Even many Christians in Beirut and elsewhere are incensed by the Israeli occupation of their national territory and their (and the SLAs) shelling of civilian habitats outside the occupied zone. However, with the Israeli promise to withdraw by July 7 looking ever more likely to be fulfilled, other questions pertaining to the SLA situation could arise.

One of the strongest arguments put forward by the SLA, which has been partially

echoed by Cardinal Sefir, is that the militia was born in a vacuum in a situation where the Lebanese Government was not in a position to protect its citizens who were threatened by other militias, including Palestinian bands. They also pointed out that the SLA provided one of the main sources of employment in a war-like situation where the economy of the zone had collapsed.

But perhaps the strongest argument that the SLA puts forward is that it should be treated on par with the other militias active in the 1975-1990 civil war. These militias, which laid down their arms under the Taif agreement which ended the civil war, were granted an amnesty in 1991.

The SLA is reported to have only about 2,500 fighters and Israel has said that it is prepared to give them refuge. However, Mr. Lahd and the SLA leadership insist that they have the right to live on their own lands and have vowed that they would fight to assert this right. Ultimately, it might not be the morality or justness of the situation which provides a solution to the SLA issue but the overall politics of Lebanon.

THE HINDU

11 MAY 2000

Caught in a time warp

“THESE RESULTS are a disgrace,” said a leading conservative member of Iran’s outgoing Parliament after pro-reform parties edged close to a two-thirds majority after the second round of polling on May 5. This pious gentleman did not mean that his leaders had disgraced themselves and their parties through their miserable showing. Nor did he mean that the vote was somehow spurious and not reflective of the true political trends in his country. What he meant, Nazi-like, was that the “Volk” had disgraced themselves by betraying the expectations of their Fuehrer.

Like Hitler, ranting and raving in his bunker about how the German military and people had let him down, Iranian conservatives are caught up in a near-pathological bout of denial. It is not just that they are still trying to subvert the reformers’ massive victory. They just cannot adjust their world view to the new reality. In the world view of the conservatives, they are the custodians of the true interests of the masses and they just cannot believe that the people would vote against their own interests. Since the Iranian people obviously have done so it must be because they are so disgracefully ignorant of their own true interests. The conservatives cannot believe, cannot accept, that the Iranian masses re-defined their own interests on an entirely different basis. Self-delusion is the prime element in the conservative reaction to the verdict and there are several reasons for that.

One example of the psychological crisis inflicting the conservative leadership is provided by the former President, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. He recently took the podium during Friday prayers at Teheran University (the Friday noon prayer at this venue has a status akin to the one at the Jama Masjid in Delhi) and lambasted reformers who had attended a seminar in Germany. Nothing seemed to have left a mark on the man. Mr. Rafsanjani was seemingly oblivious to the fact that he was merely playing out a much-repeated role before a captive audience of Government servants who have no choice but attend these prayers. He did not seem to feel any shame that he was the last of 30 candidates to secure a seat from Teheran



An Iranian man reads the newspapers for the results of the second round of parliamentary elections while a woman in a traditional ‘chador’ uses the telephone... a country of contrasts.

Iran’s conservatives are caught up in a near pathological bout of denial. It is not just that they are still trying to subvert the reformers’ massive electoral victory. They just cannot adjust their world view to the new reality, says KESAVA MENON.

and that even his “victory” was achieved in dubious circumstances. Neither did he appear to consider it at all significant that his brother, son and daughter had been thrown out of his party by the rest of the leadership for their sycophancy towards him.

What lies behind this brazen unconcern for public opinion displayed by the likes of Mr. Rafsanjani? It is partly the arrogance of power; the knowledge that they possess the instrumentalities and the force to block moves against their vested interest. But it also stems from their appreciation of the hierarchical structure of Shia society. In Iranian Shiism the clergy progress through the

ranks — Hojatoleslam, Ayatollah to Grand Ayatollah — through a democratic process. Each cleric is judged for the quality of his theological knowledge and piety and he progresses only when fellow clergymen and the pious among the laity deem that he is worthy. This is not done through a vote or any such formal mechanism but it does require a broad consensus among a large number of people. As such, each Ayatollah knows that he has the adherence of a large number of people — i.e. he is a public representative even if no one has formally cast a vote.

Iranians are, broadly-speaking, a pious people and

the habit of paying instinctive respect to the Ayatollahs is not dead among the leading echelons of the reform movement. But Iran’s conservative clerical establishment is grinding the public regard for them through a succession of millstones. Several of the leading figures in the clerical establishment — Mr. Rafsanjani and the Supreme Religious Leader, Syed Ali Khamenei — have been accorded Ayatollah status though they are not known to have contributed significantly to theological exegesis or the quality of piety. Their work in the areas of administration and political leadership might have been important but the accordance of a religious status as reward demeans the whole process. This is all the more so when authentic theologians such as Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri are strident critics of the establishment.

Secondly, when some of the conservative leaders insist on the inviolability of their aura it is difficult to ascertain whether they are doing so on valid traditional grounds or whether they are using this aura to protect their vested interests. Several of the Ayatollahs head giant financial trusts (*Boniyads*) which own scores of enterprises that once belonged to the ousted ruling family. These unaccountable (unaccountable because their activities cannot be scrutinised by the Government) *Boniyads* are known to have been used to benefit the family and adherents of those who head them. The saga of the Rafsanjani family stands as a metaphor for the clerics’ behaviour in such matters.

Thirdly, the conservative clerics seem unable to comprehend the need to match their theological understanding with the people’s real concerns. The western media has made the mistake of writing as if the revolution under way in Iran was all about youngsters wanting to date and dance. But the clerical establishment also seems incapable of understanding that the need for a degree of personal autonomy is the essential component behind specific demands. In failing to find space for personal autonomy in their theology the clerics have betrayed their calling and their people. If they carry on like this for much longer they will find themselves in utter disgrace.

Israeli pullout may turn chaotic

By Kesava Menon

2395
HO-16

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) MAY 22. Israel had planned for a well-organised withdrawal from southern Lebanon in the first week of July. But events are unfolding so fast that the scenario is becoming somewhat akin to the U.S. departure from Vietnam 25 years ago.

An allied militia appears to be unravelling much faster than anyone expected, U.N. forces are not ready to step into the gap and displaced villagers are rushing back to residences just a kilometre or so away from Israel's borders, accompanied by Hizbollah scouts.

Defence Ministry officials in Israel have denied television reports that the Government had decided to advance the withdrawal date by a month. But most sections of the Israeli media have reported that the process of winding down of forces in the zone they occupy in southern Lebanon is well under way. Units posted in forward or exposed positions had been pulled into secure positions closer to the Israel border, equipment had been removed from abandoned posts and some posts had been handed over to the control of the allied militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA). These reports also suggested that military units in the occupied zone were being



Lebanese villagers wave flags of the Amal movement of Shiite Muslims while another prays on the roof of a bunker belonging to the Israel-supported Allied South Lebanon Army in the southern Lebanese village of Qantra on Sunday. — AP

quickly stripped down to the bare minimum equipment, indicating that the reports about Israel's plans for an early withdrawal were not totally invalid.

However, the whole plan might have become moot. By Monday evening, Israeli military sources

were admitting that their occupied zone had been cut in half as Lebanese civilians returned to 12 villages. The last of these villages is apparently a little over a kilometre from the Israel border and on this sector there are no forces between the Israel border and Le-

banese who have opposed their occupation all along.

Hizbollah members had accompanied the hundreds of villagers who returned to their homes after years (Israel has occupied the zone since 1978) but they were said to be unarmed and they do not appear to have launched any attacks on the Israelis in this sector.

With this wedge having been driven in the occupied zone, a third of it is no longer in Israel's control. This has happened within a few days after Israel started making its preparations for withdrawal. The rapid unfolding of events is due mainly to the unexpectedly swift collapse of the SLA whose leaders had been breathing defiance till a week ago. As many as 200 SLA fighters and their families are reported to have already surrendered to the Hizbollah or the Shia Amal while a few dozen were said to be clamouring for refuge in Israel. It is not clear whether SLA cadres in other sectors and villages will prove more resilient.

In the rapidly changing situation, it would appear that there is very little that the U.N. peace-keeping force (which includes an Indian infantry unit, 2 Madras) can do.

THE HINDU

13 MAY 2000

MAY 2000

HD-18
CAIS

Israel begins pull-out

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By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) MAY 23. Israel's withdrawal from the zone it has occupied in Southern Lebanon is now official. Its Security Cabinet last night empowered the Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, to withdraw the troops five weeks before the July 7 deadline it had earlier set and its troops began rolling back across its northern border by early this morning. As events unfold it is clear that this withdrawal will not be a process carried out through co-ordination with the U.N. or other international actors but a pure unilateral movement that is expected to be completed with a few days.

Overnight, Israel abandoned its main headquarters in the western sector of the zone. This sector had been cut off from the north-east sector of the zone when an allied militia which was in control of the central sector collapsed by afternoon yesterday. Lebanese villagers, many of whom had not seen their houses during the twenty-two years of occupation, have been rushing into the areas vacated by the Israeli troops. As a result the international border between Lebanon and Israel has re-emerged as a fact along two-thirds of the borders of the zone and there is no buffer between the two states any longer.

The Lebanese villagers who returned to their houses were accompanied largely by members of the Hizbollah and Shia Amal militias but by this afternoon some uniformed troops could be seen in the telecasts from the Lebanese villages. It is not however clear whether the Lebanese army and police have been able to reassert their authority or whether they and the militia men are all pooling in their effort to cope with what are chaotic, if extremely happy, conditions. The U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon, which is mandated to help the Lebanese Government restore its authority, is in no position to participate in the process since the international community did not expect events to unfold so fast. UNIFIL has neither the means nor the orders to cope with this sudden situation.

The South Lebanon army, the militia that was allied with Israel, has apparently ceased to exist in the areas vacated by Israel. Some militiamen and their families were



After being away for 10 years, Najib Moussa, a Lebanese villager, kisses his father's foot to show his respect and devotion, while his sister embraces him, in the former Israeli occupied village of Markaba on Monday. — AP

transported into Israel early today and are expected to be granted asylum there or in the U.S. or Europe. Others have surrendered to the Lebanese regular and irregular forces. So far there have been no reports of reprisals against them. The general understanding is that the Shia elements of the militia, who constituted about 60 per cent of its strength, have given up but that the Christian elements are holding out in their villages in the eastern part of the zone. Some reports as of this afternoon spoke of militiamen surrendering in the east as well. Lebanese prisoners held in the Kham prison in the occupied zone are said to have been released.

While Hizbollah prides itself that it was its resistance that has finally ended the 22-year-old oc-

cupation of its lands, Israel can also take some satisfaction that its troops have withdrawn in good order. Reports from the area suggest that the Israelis have secured their withdrawal routes and that none of their troops have been isolated or cut off.

Although reports speak of some panic in Israel's northern communities (people fear that Hizbollah might launch rocket attacks into Israel now that it is sitting on the border) there is reportedly great relief among the troops actually pulling out. As for the jubilation among the Lebanese it is impossible for someone who is not there to describe it. Perhaps it would be difficult for anyone who has not experienced a 22-year personal exile.

THE HINDU

24 MAY 2000

Israeli troops begin withdrawal from Lebanon

EGEL CROSSING (Israel-Lebanon border): Cheering and clapping, Israeli soldiers returned home from Lebanon on Tuesday as part of an accelerated pullout which Prime Minister Ehud Barak said would be completed within days.

"We will redeploy in the next few days on the international border," Mr Barak told Israeli Army radio. "This 18-year tragedy is over."

Mr Barak spoke hours after his security cabinet, meeting in emergency session in the face of advances by pro-Iranian guerrillas in Israel's south Lebanon occupation zone, empowered him to speed up a withdrawal weeks ahead of a July 7 deadline.

Hizbollah guerrillas on Tuesday captured a Christian village abandoned by Israel and the israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia in the western sector of the occupation zone. They moved into Ain Ibil village after sweeping into more than 12 Shiite Muslim villages earlier in the day. At the Egel Border crossing into Israel, dozens of returning soldiers gave the thumbs-up sign, unloaded their rifles, shed flak jackets — and pulled out cellular phones to call their parents.

"The Israeli Army withdrew from the Bint Jbeil outpost in the western sector of south Lebanon in an organised manner," an army

statement said. "The IDF redeployed in the security zone in line with the new situation in the sector." one soldier who left overnight said the troops held a brief ceremony before piling into 10 armoured vehicles for the night-time dash to

with the declared aim of driving Palestinian guerrillas from the border.

Shortly after the Israeli withdrawal from Bint Jbeil, crowds surged into town. The takeover there and in dozens of other villages was peaceful — unlike Monday, when six civilians were killed and 19 wounded as Israeli and allied militia opened fire in an attempt to halt the masses streaming back to their hometowns.

Fighters and civilians alike waved the flags of the main Shiite guerrilla groups Hezbollah and Amal and shouted pro-Hezbollah slogans. Some carried pictures of Hezbollah chief Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, and others shouted "God protect him."

Hezbollah, the main guerrilla group in Lebanon, has claimed victory over Israel and declared it will keep fighting as long as Israel's allied South Lebanon Army is active and armed. Israel, which has in the past repeatedly attacked Lebanese infrastructure to retaliate for guerrilla attacks, has said Lebanon will bear the consequences if Hezbollah strikes its territory and has warned it could send troops into Lebanon again.

Hezbollah has enjoyed popularity for its campaign against Israel, but it could lose support if it is seen as bringing suffering on ordinary Lebanese after Israel leaves. (AP)

Annan calls for orderly pullout

UNITED NATIONS: UN secretary-general Kofi Annan has appealed to all parties to work with the world body in managing orderly withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon, and prevent any further casualties in the region.

"The people in the region have suffered enough. Annan told reporters after a closed-

door meeting with the security council to consider his new report on UN activities in south Lebanon here on Monday.

The UN will verify Israel's withdrawal and work with the Lebanese government to restore its authority, but it can only perform these tasks if the parties cooperate, Annan said.

He said his special envoy on the Middle East, Terje Roed Larson, would be travelling to the region and asked all parties to "exercise maximum restraint both in their actions and in their public statements." (PT)



Kofi Annan

the border. "In the end, we took down the flag in haste and we sang the Tikva (the Israeli national anthem)... So that we would have the good feeling we aren't leaving with our tail between our legs," said the soldier. Most of the soldiers were toddlers when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 MAY 2000

ST 11
2/25

Israel ends 22-year S Lebanon occupation

REUTERS

BEAUFORT CASTLE (Lebanon), May 24. — Israel ended its 22-year occupation of South Lebanon in the pre-dawn hours today in a rushed evacuation after the collapse of its local militia.

The last two Israeli soldiers shut the gate at the Fatma border crossing at daybreak after troops had streamed out of Lebanon during the night, destroying their bases and leaving them behind in smouldering ruins.

Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ehud Barak made public a statement today officially ordering the army to quit Lebanon, ending a 22-year occupation.

"In accordance with the decision of the (Israeli) security Cabinet from Monday 22 May 2000 authorising the Prime Minister and Defence Minister ... to decide on the date for the departure from Lebanon, the Prime Minister and Defence Minister ordered the departure of Israeli forces from Lebanon.

"The Prime Minister appeals to all powers in Lebanon to behave with restraint and responsibility and says that Israel will respond severely to every attack on its sovereignty, its citizens or its soldiers," the statement said.

The military said soldiers had pulled out of more outposts, their planned 7 July departure hastened in the face of advancing Hezbollah guerrillas.

UN peacekeepers reported all quiet across south Lebanon. For the first time in decades there was no shelling and no air or sea violations of Lebanese territory by Israeli forces,



Members of the Lebanese Communist Party ride along the streets of Marjayoun, about 100 km south of Beirut, celebrating the pullout by Israeli forces from southern Lebanon on Wednesday. — AP/PTI

they said.

In the town of Marjayoun, headquarters of the Israel-run South Lebanon Army, residents woke to see the arrival of Hezbollah guerrillas and civilians who had fled the Israeli occupation.

Christians were nervous but Hezbollah officials assured them they had nothing to fear. Many of the senior SLA ranks, all Christians, had fled to Israel yesterday.

As Israeli forces were streaming out of Lebanon, Hezbollah

relished its triumph at a rally in Beirut for dozens of the prisoners freed when a crowd stormed the notorious SLA prison in Khiam, in the former Israeli occupation zone.

"This is the first glorious victory in 50 years of Arab-Israeli conflict," Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah told followers at the organisation's headquarters in the teeming southern suburbs of the capital.

Israelis pleased to leave: Israel tried to take solace in the successful evacuation of its

forces and its soldiers were clearly relieved to be out of a conflict that they had been unable to win. "We are back home," said an officer as the last troops crossed. "We will defend ourselves, and we hope there will be peace."

Russia welcomes withdrawal: Russia today welcomed Israel's troop withdrawal from South Lebanon as an "important step" calling on all sides to show restraint and to cooperate closely with the United Nations.

Israeli tanks target BBC crew

SAM KILEY
THE TIMES, LONDON

MENARA, May 24. — A gunmetal blue Mercedes snaked its way below the escarpment marking the border between Israel and Lebanon yesterday. It stopped for minute or two, then disappeared in a ball of fire blasted by an Israeli tank lurking in the trees 200 yards away. A few hours were to pass before I discovered my personal connection with the vehicle.

It was the second car I had seen the Israelis destroy in 10 minutes. Their pride hurt by the rout of their forces and those of their allies in the SLA, this was payback time.

I learnt later that they were shooting at Jeremy Bowen, BBC correspondent, and his Lebanese cameraman. Inside the car, Abed Taboush, a veteran driver and "fixer" known and loved by hundreds of journalists, was dead.

I first met Mr Taboush in January. It was the finest contact a novice could make in the Lebanese maelstrom. A guarded attitude gave way to enormous warmth. Between risky trips through South Lebanon's tribal maze, Abed would clutch a cold beer and render his listeners tearful with laughter at his irreverent descriptions of our colleagues.

On Sunday when he drove me to Beirut airport, Abed told me then that he feared his luck would run out.

Yesterday I watched what amounted to his execution. Mr Bowen told of how he and Mr Taboush had stopped to film us: the group of spectators with ringside seats on the front line. "I got out of the car and waved my arms so that the Israelis could see that we were not armed," he said.

Then a massive explosion ripped Mr Taboush's car apart and the Israelis used the tank's machinegun to try to kill the rest of the BBC crew. A Red Cross team that tried to retrieve Mr Taboush's body also came under fire.

THE STATESMAN

22 MAY 2000

Rafsanjani quits House

TEHERAN, MAY 26. The former Iranian President, Mr. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the top conservative vote-getter, has withdrawn from the new Parliament, heading off allegations of election fraud that threatened Iran's Islamic system.

Mr. Rafsanjani, a reluctant standard-bearer for the right in the February contest, said in a letter read on state television that he had acted for the good of the revolution. "A heavy dose of adverse and poisonous propaganda by enemies created an ambiguous and doubtful atmosphere and there are still ambiguities (about election results) which could be used by internal and foreign enemies against the system. I withdraw with all due respect to those who voted for or against me and forgive those who engaged in propaganda against me."

The resignation, urged on him by some of his closest allies, clears the way for an orderly transition from the conservative-led outgoing Parliament to a new legislature dominated by supporters of the moderate President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami.

Conservatives had looked to Mr. Rafsanjani, a veteran revolutionary cleric, to mount a strong challenge for the post of Speaker of Parliament — or at least to rein in the powerful reformist bloc in the legislature, which convenes on Saturday.

But in recent days, Mr. Rafsanjani's position had become increasingly untenable, as rival politicians and the public at large questioned official results that showed him taking the 20th of 30 seats from the Teheran constituency. Preliminary results released right after the vote had the former President just clinging to the last slot, and it was only when the con-



servative-led Guardian Council annulled 726,000 ballots that he finally strengthened his grip on a seat.

"With all actions taken in favour of Rafsanjani, I do not know how he could be effective (in Parliament)," the leading reformist, Mr. Abbas Abdi, a long-time Rafsanjani critic, said earlier this week. "With friends like these, Rafsanjani does not need opponents or critics."

Increasingly, angry students denounced him at a pair of recent rallies, raising the spectre of a repetition of last year's campus protests that sparked the worst unrest since the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

— Reuters

TEHERAN, MAY 26

27 MAY 2000

ISRAELI PULLOUT

SV Vietnam all over again? VS

IN what must be Israel's equivalent of America's Vietnam defeat, the Jewish state has been forced to pull out of Lebanon, and the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA) propped up by it has crumbled. The parallels are tantalising: Israel/US, the SLA/South Vietnam, the ideologically fired Hezbollah/the Vietcong, the Hezbollah's main backers and suppliers Syria and Iran/China and the Soviet Union. Although known in the West as being a bunch of mad mullahs, the Hezbollah, like the Vietcong, has been able to combine superb military tactics with guerrilla warfare to humble the "invincible" Israelis. Israel is no longer what it was in 1948; in a sense, it is a victim of its own success. High-tech industries and wealth creation on a scale comparable with those of the world's advanced industrial economies, have changed the aspirations of the average Israeli — today's Israeli youngster would rather party in Tel-Aviv or start a dotcom, than peer out from a bunker in the Lebanese dawn, anticipating guerrilla attacks. It's a question of motivation — in previous Israeli-Arab wars, a young state fresh from memories of the holocaust had faced poorly disciplined and trained Arab armies. The tables are now turned — the Hezbollah are superbly trained and professional, and motivated to the extent of launching suicide attacks.

What are the chances of peace after the withdrawal? Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah has warned Israelis in border areas to "remain in their bunkers", while Damascus has exhibited its willingness to keep the pot boiling by ceding the obscure Shebaa Farms area in Israeli occupied Golan Heights to Lebanon, which Nasrallah now demands back from Israel. The UN is in Lebanon in its usual ineffectual role; its presence is a sign that the world community recognises a problem exists, but not much more. If the Hezbollah continues its attacks, or resorts to large-scale reprisals and atrocities in newly occupied areas, Israel could respond as the West does nowadays, witness Iraq and Kosovo. In other words, from the skies, where Israel's air force still rules. Hold on for a while, the war may not be over yet.

MAY 2 000

HD-20

Lebanon liberated

28/5

ISRAEL'S PRIME Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, had caused some surprise when he declared, at the time of his election a year ago, that a priority would be to get his troops out of Lebanon. Since negotiations with the Palestinians were on the top of Israel's agenda, not only for the Government from which Mr. Barak took over but also for the Government previous to that run by his own party, this promise indicated a departure from a settled programme. However an analyst had pointed out at that time that the pullout from Lebanon would generate such overwhelming goodwill for Mr. Barak amongst the Israeli public that he could then offer painful concessions to the Palestinians.

Well, the withdrawal from Lebanon has taken place. Not in the seamless and confident fashion in which Israel had hoped to do it. But amidst all the confusion and undignified haste with which that withdrawal was accomplished one important fact sticks out is that Israel was able to extricate its troops without a single casualty — not one soldier killed or wounded.

After swallowing their embarrassment at the manner in which the withdrawal was accomplished, the Israeli public appears to be swinging around to a mood of relief and gratitude that a bleeding wound has been finally stitched up. If the northern border with Lebanon continues to remain quiet this graphic departure from the conditions prevalent till recently could generate a deal of goodwill for Mr. Barak.

So does this mean that the Israeli public will be now ready to swallow the concessions that Mr. Barak might make to the Palestinians. The lesson that could be learnt from the Lebanon withdrawal — if the border remains quiet — that peace can be obtained if Israel gives back land that it has wrested by force may not be considered directly relevant by the Israeli public.

Those Israelis who assert a 'historic' or religious claim to West Bank land might be in the minority. But there is strong, and more broad-based, resistance to the giving back of all the West Bank land and the closure of settlements which are considered to be of importance to Israel's security and economic interests. However generous Mr. Barak might feel, he will find an excuse or a



Lebanese wave Hezbollah flags as they stream into the village of Houla after it was vacated by Israel.

Amid the confusion and undignified haste with which the withdrawal from Lebanon was accomplished one fact sticks out, Israel was able to extricate its troops without a single casualty, writes KESAVA MENON.

justification to prevent the return of at least ten per cent of the West Bank.

Most Israelis appear to have realised that Palestinian statehood is inevitable. The Palestinians too seem to have recognised that their state-to-be will not be free to arm itself as it likes or make treaties with powers hostile to Israel. From the manner in which world leaders have been travelling through the Palestinian territories whenever they visit the region it would almost appear the declaration of sovereignty is just a formality that has to be gone through.

However, if the Palestinians were to unilaterally declare statehood in all of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (as defined by the June 1967 borders) and if they won recognition for the same then Israel would be deemed to be in illegal possession of the land it still occupies. Such an outcome could provide the conditions for

violent conflict. The right to declare statehood, or rather the right to choose the time to do so, is an important matter for the Palestinians.

The considerable emotions that are attached to the statehood issue in one way or the other were discernible earlier this month. While Israel celebrated its 52nd year as a state the Palestinians were mourning the *Nakhba* (the catastrophe) that struck them 52 years ago. The attainment of statehood, besides everything else it might bring in practical terms, would also be an affirmation by the world of the Palestinian narrative. That they as a people have undergone tremendous hardship but are now ready to take their rightful place in the council of states.

This year's demonstrations and marches to commemorate the *Nakhba* seemed to have been permeated by a particular bitterness because movement in the negotiations has become painfully slow.

Demonstrations to commemorate the *Nakhba* spilled over into further protests for the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Promises to release these prisoners have not been kept and the whole issue does not appear to have got the attention it deserved.

It was Palestine Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat's *Fatah* movement which organised the protests over the *Nakhba* and the "Days of Anger" for the release of Palestinian prisoners. But the demonstrations spun out of control and Palestinian and Israeli securitymen began firing live rounds at each other.

What was, however, more remarkable was that the exchange of gunfire did not, as in the past, make the leaders from either side retire into a sulk. They, and their security chiefs, continued to talk to each other. For the first time ever these clashes did not evoke apprehensions that the peace process was in danger of collapse. It was as if everyone took these clashes as a mere distraction that would not put an end to the negotiations.

It was when the clashes were at their most intense that the Israeli Knesset passed, by a robust enough vote, the Bill to transfer three villages adjacent to Jerusalem to the Palestinians.

THE HINDU

29 MAY 2000

14.13 Israel steps back 23/11/5

THE ISRAELI decision to end its 22-year-old occupation of southern Lebanon could well provide some relief from the pressure cooker politics of the region. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak had three options. First was a variation of the status quo with the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) holding on to its 15-km deep occupation zone even as it absorbed unacceptable losses in men and machines. After almost 15 years in the security zone, several large scale military operations and hundreds of Israelis dead and wounded (not to mention the countless Lebanese casualties), the Hizbollah can still attack Israel — particularly northern Galilee — any time it wants to. This must have led Israeli strategists to the important conclusion that the IDF's presence in southern Lebanon not only does not protect Israeli residents of the north, but it actually endangers them.

Secondly, Mr Barak could have struck a peace deal with Syria, thus prompting Damascus to rein in the Hizbollah and Shia Amal militias which have been fighting the IDF all these years. But this always seemed like a pipe dream with Damascus insisting on an Israeli withdrawal from Syria's Golan Heights to be tied to any IDF retreat from southern Lebanon. This was never a realistic option for Israel as the 900 sq km Golan plateau towering over the Galilee panhandle and Lake Kinneret is a vital component of the country's early warning system for defending the north and the Jordan valley. So that left Mr Barak with the third, and obviously the best, option: that of a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. And now that Israel is out, the United Nations Interim Force in southern Lebanon (UNIFIL) should fill the vacuum in the region along with the Lebanese army. This will discourage the pro-Hizbollah trouble-makers who are taunting the Israelis in a bid to provoke Israeli retaliation.

By restoring calm, the UNIFIL can bring home the message to everyone, Israelis and Arabs alike, that the best security arrangement for them would be a prolonged peace. Although the Israeli pullback may not ensure any dramatic breakthrough, it will certainly put more pressure on Syria to go easy on the Lebanese track which Damascus had kept zealously closed by refusing to allow the Lebanese to police their own border. All this augurs well for an Israeli-Syrian peace pact which suddenly does not seem so unrealistic after all. And that can help in reviving the comatose peace process in West Asia.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MAY 2000