

ISRAEL THE PALESTINIAN INTIFADA REMAINS CROUCHED AROUND THE CORNER IN ISRAEL

War, peace and independence

Israel is celebrating 53 years of independence even as Palestine continues to wait for its first, says JYOTI MALHOTRA

THE gloves were off on the eve of Israel's independence anniversary on Thursday, when General Ariel (Arik) to those who approve, including those in India) Sharon, Prime Minister of Israel, ordered the tanks into Gaza. As the world gaped in horror and the Americans reacted furiously, the Israeli hero of the 1973 war probably learnt the first political lesson of his new tenure: you can helicopter-bomb the Palestinians, raid the Syrians, ignore extended dialogue partners such as the Egyptians and the Europeans, but never mess around with your friend-philosopher-guide-ally, Washington.

The tanks pulled back in less than 24 hours. "Trust the Schlimmel," muttered an editorial in the largest-selling Hebrew newspaper *Yedioth Ahronot*, using the Yiddish word for "bumbler." It went on to say, "What began as a military campaign, an expression of a new uncompromising policy, ended as an embarrassing quickie," adding, "(it was) an unprecedented shot in the foot with no accomplishments." The *Maariv* newspaper pointed out that Sharon had "committed his first blunder."

The temporary occupation even provoked a reaction from India. Privately shrugging its shoulders with indifference, the Ministry of External Affairs nevertheless publicly said the "recent upsurge of violence in the West Asian region is a matter of great concern for us... We urge all to desist from provocative activity and violence and fully respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity." The statement did not once mention the parties involved in the conflict, neither Palestine nor Israel. Tiptoeing around all the real issues, it safely criticised the violence, but didn't attempt to lay the blame on the guilty side.

The "hands off" manner which New



UP, CLOSE AND PERSONAL: An Israeli soldier grapples with a Palestinian Hebron in the West Bank. Reuters

Delhi has adopted on Palestine, Israel and on the Middle East peace process in recent months is the result of a variety of reasons. Primarily, the government's stand is that it supports an independent Palestinian state, but that such a state must be created peacefully. New Delhi, realising that it has little clout left to influence the Middle East peace process, has concluded that it is intelligent to be pragmatic about foreign policy.

It cannot hope to compare with the European Union, which has poured the benefits—primarily, military con-

tracts—that have been accruing from the Israeli relationship.

Clearly, Israel has become a major player in New Delhi. With the result that though India will participate (represented by minister of state in the MEA U R Krishnam Raju) in the emergency meeting on Palestine called on May 3-5 by South Africa, the chairman of the Non-Aligned Meeting, its participation seems to be more out of respect for form than substance. For what clout does NAM wield in a new world dominated by one power and other First World nations struggling to come a remote second? The honest answer is, very little.

Interestingly, the government's ideological leanings in favour of Israel seem to have beautifully tied into the foreign office's increasing and very real indifference towards Palestine.

Jerusalem has, meanwhile, attempted to underline ties by stressing the similarity of the Israeli and Indian situations, with its diplomats and strategic analysts arguing that both nations are surrounded by "hostile" neighbours.

Nothing could be further from the truth. India's problem with Pakistan and Israel's hostility with Palestine are as different as chalk from cheese.

While India and Pakistan have gone to war over Kashmir three times, each recognises the other's basic right to exist. In the latter case, with the seemingly irretrievable breakdown of the Oslo talks, Israel's increasingly hawkish—Sharon prefers the word 'nonbelligerence' to 'peace'—attitude has sparked off a vicious 'intifada' on the part of the Pal-

estinitians. There is so much anger on the streets of Palestine, at what seems a complete betrayal of the last eight years (Oslo was signed in 1993)—whether its over rights of passage in the West Bank, of the question of the return of the Palestinian diaspora or the status of Jerusalem—that the people have preferred the emotional, illogical death of the martyr to the sensible alternative of compromise.

The overwhelming feeling, as children throw stones at nervous, Israeli boy-soldiers wielding deadly weapons, is that there's nothing left to live for. Since the 'intifada' began in late September, about 400 Palestinians have been killed. Still, the end doesn't seem around the corner.

As Israel celebrated its 53rd independence day this week, Palestinians wondered when they would be able to get enough of the world to support their first. Sharon's comeback at the hands of the Americans the week before, asking him to end the Israeli operation code-named 'Hot Days-Pastel Colours' and get their tanks and bulldozers out of Gaza, seems to have emboldened the Palestinians, but they know it is too good to last.

The criticism of Sharon by his own people may have jolted the Israeli PM, who won with a resounding majority in the February elections.

But it doesn't seem to have fazed him. The rest of the world, meanwhile, knows one thing.

The confrontation between the two Semitic neighbours is going to get worse before it gets better.

Israel, Palestinians have agreed on truce: Mubarak

AFP & PTI

CAIRO, April 29. - Israel and the Palestinians have agreed to a ceasefire and a resumption of talks one month after it takes effect, the Egyptian President announced today.

Mr Hosni Mubarak said he had received the news from the Israeli foreign minister, Mr Shimon Peres, who was transmitting a message from his Prime Minister, Mr Ariel Sharon.

He didn't, however, say when the ceasefire would take effect.

Mr Mubarak's announcement came despite a flare-up in violence yesterday in which a Palestinian and an Israeli were killed. Today, mortar shells hit the Kfar Darom and Neve Dakalim settlements in the Gaza Strip, injuring five Israeli youths in spite of measures taken by Mr Yasser Arafat to prevent such attacks.

"The firing of mortar shells must stop," Mr Arafat told his service leaders at the meeting of the high council of Palestinian

national security in Gaza City late yesterday.

The council also decided to dissolve the Fatah body responsible for shelling Israeli settlements and ordered that patrolling be intensified.

Mr Arafat ordered these measures following pressure from Israel and USA to stop violence, reports from Gaza said. The US secretary of state, Mr Colin Powell, had discussed "recent developments" with the Palestinian leader over phone yesterday, they said.

Mr Peres was to visit Jordan later for talks with King Abdullah II at the Red Sea resort of Aqaba, a report from Amman says. His visit is seen in Amman as "a real test" of Israel's intentions.

"This meeting represents a serious opportunity and a real test that will show if the Israeli government wants to put an end to the current situation and allow the right conditions for a resumption of the peace process," an official said.

THE STATESMAN

30 APR 2001

Israel to lift Jericho blockade

Jerusalem, April 24

ISRAEL SAID on Tuesday it would lift a blockade on the West Bank town of Jericho in the next few days after reporting progress at US-arranged Israeli-Palestinian security talks overnight.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Palestinians, who hope to lure Israelis back to Jericho's lucrative casino, had vowed to keep the area safe if Israel ended its closure.

The decision on Jericho followed security talks at which Israel and the Palestinians "decided to make an effort to lower the level of violence and improve security coordination," the Israeli Army said in a statement.

There was no immediate Palestinian comment on the talks to try to reduce the bloodshed inflicted during a nearly seven-month-old Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Army said the sides would hold a field-level meeting on Friday "to translate the principles into specific actions."

Syria broadside against Israel

ARAB NATIONS took over a UN Security Council debate on civilians in war zones, with Syria accusing Israel of genocide against Palestinians and Israel reminding Syria of the 1982 army massacre at Hama. Syria's UN Ambassador Mikhail Wehbe also said during an all-day debate on Monday that Israel had exchanged "secrets and information" with Lebanon's Hizbollah guerrillas, who have launched raids against Israel for years. "Israel and Hizbollah have an April memorandum of understanding," Wehbe said.

Oren David, Israel's UN Minister-counselor, however, said Syria, and not Israel, had contacts with Hizbollah. "Syria is a major supporter of Hizbollah, feeding instability along our northern borders and endangering the lives of Israeli civilians," he said.

Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon last May, but Hizbollah and Lebanon insist the occupied Shebaa farms area is part of Lebanon. The United Nations says it is part of Syria.

UNHQ, Reuters

Peres said lifting the Jericho blockade was part of a policy to let Palestinians lead a normal life despite the violence.

"In the Jericho area, \$700 million was invested in different industries. This plus the tourism, everything has been paralyzed," Peres told Israel Radio.

"Our position is to allow for a normal lifestyle unconditionally and without receiving anything

in return. We are not trying to wheel-and-deal on this issue," he added.

Citing security concerns at the start of the uprising in September, Israel imposed tough restrictions in the West Bank and Gaza that severely hampered movement and prevented some 120,000 Palestinian workers from getting to work in Israel.

Palestinians brand the closure, which has dealt a harsh



Arafat: No response

blow to their fragile economy, collective punishment.

Monday's security talks went ahead despite fresh violence in which a car bomb rocked an Israeli city and Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian teenager at a funeral in the Gaza Strip.

The late-night session, following similar talks on Saturday, signaled that neither side had slammed the door on dialogue in the face of a two-week-long surge in violence.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 APR 1994

Sympathy for Chechen ultras wanes in Turkey

Ankara, April 24

HT 11/25/01

TURKISH SYMPATHIES with the Chechen cause turned to anger on Tuesday, a day after pro-Chechen rebels took over a luxury hotel and held some 120 guests and staff hostage for 12 hours.

Despite the peaceful end to the standoff and assurances from the gunmen that they had no intention of harming the hostages, many Turks fear the attack will have devastating effects on the tourism sector.

"The Turkish people have always looked at the Chechen cause with sympathy, giving it hefty donations," wrote Sabah newspaper. "But they stabbed Turkey in the back during its most troubled times."

Turkey has suffered two economic crises since November with the Turkish lira slumping by more than 40 percent against the dollar, leading to hundreds of thousands of layoffs. Turkey had pinned hopes on lucrative tourism revenues to help ease the crunch.

The Chechen struggle against Russia has always been popular in Turkey and as many as five million Turks can trace their roots to the Caucasus, where Chechnya is located. But Hürriyet commentator Emin Colasan wrote, "If you have a battle with Russia, go and wage it in Russia. What right do you have to harm Turkey?"

Thirteen gunmen stormed the five-star Swissotel in the heart of Istanbul late on Sunday to protest Russia's "bloody attacks" in the Caucasus. Some 600 guests from Europe, the United States, and Japan were staying at the hotel. About 60 guests and 40 workers escaped through fire exits. Other guests were not present.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 APR 2001

Fresh violence delays Israel-Palestine security talks

Jerusalem, April 23

TALKS BETWEEN Israeli and Palestinian security chiefs have been put on hold because of a suicide bombing that killed an Israeli doctor and injured 50 in Kfar Saba, north east of Tel Aviv today.

Also, on the Gaza border with Egypt, Palestinians threw grenades at an Israeli Army position early today, and the Israelis responded with machine gun and tank fire, Palestinians said. Israeli tank shells damaged buildings in the Rafah Palestinian refugee camp.

Israeli forces did not enter Palestinian-controlled areas, the Palestinians said. The Israeli military said grenades were thrown at the Israeli base, and

Israeli forces returned fire, but tanks were not used.

After a suicide bomber blew himself up at a crowded bus stop in Kfar Saba yesterday, city officials met police commanders to discuss security measures. Israel radio reported. It was the third bomb attack in nine days in the city, which is near the West Bank.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon blamed Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's administration for the bombing. "The Palestinian authority is not acting to foil terror attacks and continues its violent activities and incitement in an effort to reach its political goals," Sharon was quoted as saying by his office.

Dismissing speculation that Arafat was losing his grip over the Palestinian areas, Sharon



ARIEL SHARON

said Arafat "has strategic control over what is happening".

Palestinian officials said the

Palestinian authority had nothing to do with the attack.

An unknown group called the 'Popular Army Front' — battalions of the return' claimed responsibility for a bomb attack in Israel yesterday that killed two people and injured dozens more. In a statement, the group confirmed it had "exploded a big device at Kfar Saba (north of Tel Aviv) near number 29 bus". It did not mention any victims.

Israeli police said it was a suicide attack, in which the bomber and a 53-year-old Israeli man died. At least 39 people were reported to have been injured.

The group said the attack was "in response to the bombings, raids, destruction of houses and land and aggression against our people in the West Bank and the

Gaza Strip, as well as in response to the bombing of a Syrian position in Lebanon".

The Israeli Army launched an overnight attack on a Syrian position in eastern Lebanon on April 15, killing, according to Damascus, one soldier and wounding four others.

The group accused Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and the Government of "wanting to impose an interim accord (on Palestinians), while demanding land, peace and security at the same time".

The main Palestinian militant organisation, Hamas, described the bombing as a legitimate self-defence, without going as far as to claim responsibility for the attack.

Agencies

WEST ASIA / BLAST IN TEL AVIV

Israel, PA hold security meeting

KFAR SABA, APRIL 22. A suicide bomber detonated himself at a crowded intersection during the morning rush hour, killing himself and one Israeli, and leaving 19 injured in a Tel Aviv suburb, police and rescue services said.

The attacker, believed to be a Palestinian, set off the bomb outside a bus as it pulled up at the intersection in Kfar Saba.

"When the bus arrived, a suicide bomber approached it and leaned against it while setting off a device," said a police commander, Mr. Yehuda Bahar. Those inside the bus and at the bus stop were injured. The rescue services spokesman, Mr. Yeruham Mandola, said the seriously injured included a child.

Israel has been rocked by repeated explosions carried out by Palestinian militants since the Palestinian uprising began seven months ago. The Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, has pledged swift and harsh retaliation for such attacks, and Israel has carried out several raids in recent weeks following mortar attacks by Palestinians.

The latest explosion went off as commuters were heading to work today, the beginning of the work week in Israel. Police sealed off the area and searched for additional explosives.

Security meeting 'positive'

AFP reports from Jerusalem:

Israel today hailed an overnight security meeting with the Palestinian Authority (PA) representatives as "serious and positive", with the two sides agreeing to cooperate on a joint security plan.

The meeting, near the Erez

crossing point between the Gaza strip and Israel, "was carried out in a serious and positive atmosphere", a spokesman for the Israeli Prime Minister's office said.

The two parties "decided to cooperate on a security plan and to apply measures aimed at putting an end to the violence and terrorism", as well as new measures to ease restrictions on the Palestinian population, the spokesman added. *40-16*

The Palestinian team, at the three-hour meeting, was led by Generals Amin al-Hindi and Abdel Razeq al-Majeida, respectively head of the Palestinian Intelligence and public security chief in the Gaza strip, a Palestinian source said. *204*

The Israeli delegation was led by Gen. Giora Eiland, military commander, southern Israel, Gen. Doron Almog and Avi Dichter, head of Israel's internal security service Shin Beth. The two sides held inconclusive security talks April 4 and 11 in the presence of U.S. officials with the stated goal of ending bloody clashes that erupted in late September.

A third meeting had been slated for April 16, but was cancelled after Israel launched an offensive into land under Palestinian authority control. Palestinians had threatened not to take part in those meetings anymore.

On Saturday, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, said he is engaged in "discreet contacts" with Palestinians aimed at bringing an end to violence, public radio said.

THE HINDU

24 APR 2001

23 APR 2001

Suicide bomber derails peace effort in West Asia

52-9
2399

AP & PTI

JERUSALEM, April 22. - Two persons, including a suspected suicide bomber, were killed and several injured in a bomb explosion in an Israeli town near the West Bank today. The incident occurred hours after Israeli and Palestinian security chiefs met in a bid to quell the bloodshed and amid tentative political contacts between the two sides.

Police said one of the two killed in the suburb of Kfar Saba was apparently a suicide bomber.

The bomber blew up an explosives-packed belt among the passengers as they were boarding a bus in Kfar Saba, north of Tel Aviv.

Earlier, senior Israeli and Palestinian security officials met at Erez Crossing checkpoint overnight in an effort to reduce the violence in the region and resume security coordination.

Following the three-hour US-sponsored meeting between both sides, a statement by Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon's office described the talks as "good and serious", adding the meeting "was carried out in a serious and positive atmosphere".

"It was decided to implement several steps which would bring about a cessation of the ongoing terror and violence and the continuation of the easing of civil and economic restric-



Members of Israeli police bomb squad collect pieces of bombs at the scene of a suicide bomb attack in Kfar Saba, north of Tel Aviv, on Sunday. - AP/PTI

tions on the Palestinians," the statement added.

At the meeting, Israeli team was led by the head of Shin Bet (Israel's internal security agency) and other senior army officials while Palestinians were represented by chief of the General Intelligence Service Mr Amin al-Hindi and the head of national security in Gaza Strip. The Palestinians said they discussed the possibility of

resuming the peace process with the Israelis.

"This was not only a security meeting but also a political one with the idea that political negotiations would make our work much easier," said Mr Abdel Razek Majaidah, a senior Palestinian security official and a participant in the talks.

Media reports said Mr Peres had been meeting, after coordination with Prime Minister,

with Palestinian officials in an attempt to quell the violence.

English daily the Jerusalem Post quoted a source in the Prime Minister's Office as saying that despite these contacts, "We have no indication on the ground that Mr Arafat has given an order to his security services to stop the violence. That has not happened, and for proof of this all you need to do is look at what is happening on the ground."

THE STATESMAN

23 APR 2001

A cauldron called Lebanon

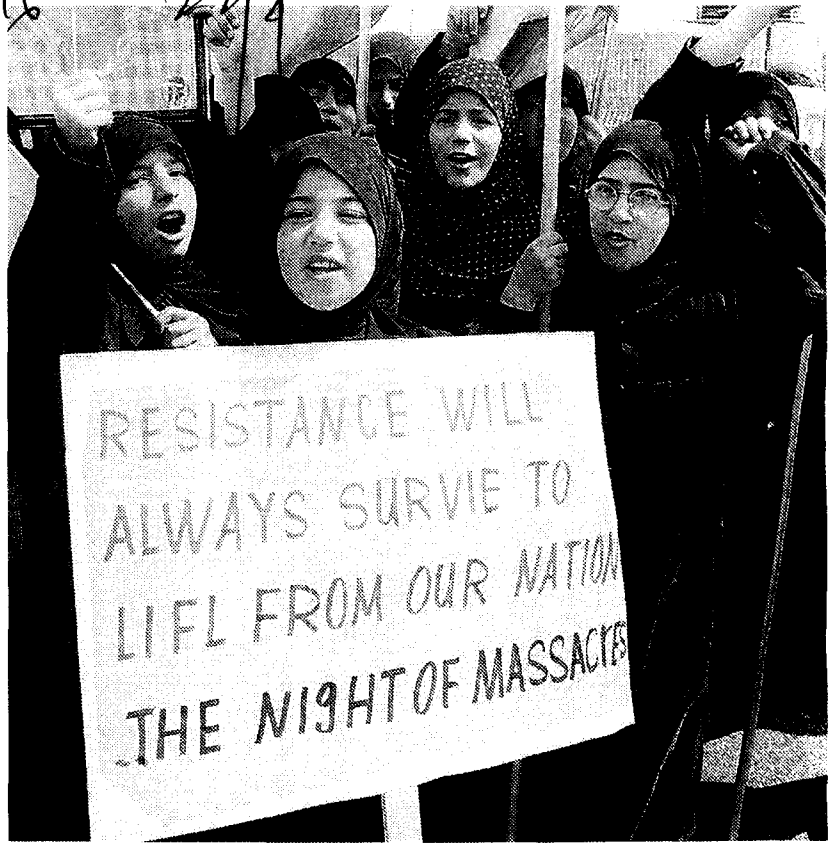
SHEBAA FARMS is a rocky promontory that looms high above the broken hilly countryside that slopes down from Lebanon to Israel. Like the other knobs on the eastern ridge line that dominates this terrain the Shebaa farms area also sprouts a ring of metal rods that indicates the presence of an Israeli military picket. For the Israelis that picket line denotes security but for the Lebanese on the ground below those outposts are a reminder that they are under threat from a superior military power. It provides for an explosive mix.

When Israel pulled its troops out of Lebanon eleven months ago the one area it refused to vacate was the Shebaa farms area. All other justifications aside it is understandable that it had no desire to give up such a militarily valuable piece of real estate. From points along the ridge line which includes the Shebaa farms area it is probably possible to have a clear view across most of southern Lebanon to the west and a great part of Syria to the east.

Israel claims it captured the Shebaa farms area from Syria, and not Lebanon, in the 1967 war. It has also adduced documents from the U.S. State Department that apparently show that Syria had leased this enclave prior to 1967 and that it was protected by Syrian troops at the time of the conflict. Therefore, Israel says, it will return the area to Syria when and if a final peace treaty is made. While the U.S. State Department's findings might be suspect in a matter of dispute between Israel and its Arab neighbours the Israeli position on the subject has found support from the U.N. as well.

Subsequent to the Israeli withdrawal last year the U.N. had to confirm that this pullout was indeed complete. After surveying the border for this purpose the U.N. did issue a notification that the Israeli withdrawal behind the Blue Line — the international border between the two countries — was indeed complete. The implication of course is that the territorial dispute between Israel and Lebanon is over and that the issue of control over the Shebaa farms area is something to be settled in the context of negotiations between Israel and Syria. Neither Syria nor Lebanon has concurred with this finding.

This messy situation under international law makes for a messier political and military situation. Hizbollah, the Lebanese Shia militia that led the resistance to the Israeli occupation, believes that it is justified in attacking Israeli pickets in the



Lebanese women demonstrate against Israel.

Israel's attack on a Syrian radar post inside Lebanon ensures that the Syrians will not leave in a hurry.

This means, says Kesava Menon, that the sectarian differences within Lebanon will take longer to heal.

Shebaa farms and the supply convoys since the enclave in its view is still occupied. In principle, the Lebanese Government agrees with the Hizbollah but for the first time last week a newspaper close to the Prime Minister, Mr. Rafik Hariri, carried an article questioning to the point of criticism the Hizbollah's tactics. The Hizbollah's tactics of striking at the Israeli troops in Shebaa farms was proving counter-productive at a time when Lebanon needed the sympathy and assistance of the international community and was trying to sort out its own internal problems, the article pointed out.

Indeed, the Hizbollah's last attack on the Shebaa farms did tend to exacerbate those internal problems. It

occurred just at the time when the Lebanese Government was working out, through dialogue with the leaders of the various communities in Lebanon, a common approach on the question of the continued Syrian military presence in their country. Some of the major communities in Lebanon, notably the Maronite Christians and the Druze, have been increasingly vocal about their feelings on the Syrian presence.

At the very least these communities want the Syrian troops in country to so re-deploy that their presence in Lebanon is less obtrusive. Below the level of the leadership in these communities the feelings are stronger and they want the Syrians to leave altogether. Some of the Muslim groups want them to remain and the differences between the communities were threatening to reach boiling point.

Mr. Hariri and the President, Mr. Emile Lahoud, were talking to the leaders of the various communities when the last attack on the Shebaa farms took place. In retaliation, Israel attacked a Syrian radar post inside Lebanon killing three people in the process. This attack has ensured that the Syrians will not leave or even re-deploy in a hurry and that would in turn mean that the sectarian difference within Lebanon will take a longer time to heal.

WEST ASIA / ISRAEL EASES SIEGE OF VILLAGES IN GAZA STRIP

Arafat orders troops not to fire

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), APRIL 20. A turn-around from the dangerous situation prevailing in the Palestinian territories and Israel now appears possible after the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, told his security forces to stop firing into Israel and Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Though the usual trouble erupted at the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem after Friday prayers, this order seems to have had an effect since there has been a break from the recent week's routine of mortar shells being lobbed into Israel and Jewish settlements. Israel too moved to partially ease the siege of Palestinian villages in the Gaza strip.

Mr. Arafat was said to have told his security services to prevent the firing on Wednesday. This does not appear to have been the open call for an end to violence that Israel and the U.S. administration have demanded that the Palestinian leader must issue. Nevertheless, it appears to be both an order to his security services not to fire and also an order to them to prevent others — the militias of the "national and religious forces" — from doing the same.

Israel has regularly accused the Palestinian security forces of being directly involved in the violence. More impartial sources have pointed to the involvement of Palestinian security men in the violence in what can perhaps be

headed by Islamic Jihad has spearheaded the Palestinian resistance. Noticeably absent from Mr. Arafat's order is any caveat against armed attacks on Israeli troops in the territories.

The Palestinians have believed since the beginning of the uprising that they were entitled to battle the Israeli security forces that threaten to enter their residential areas or enforce sieges around them.

No Palestinian leader, not even Mr. Arafat, is prepared to order his people to give up resistance to what they perceive as an army of occupation.

Israel wants even these attacks on their troops to be stopped but Mr. Arafat's order appears to be in line with the U.S. call on both sides to de-escalate.

Unlike Israel which wants a complete halt to all violence, the U.S. administration has several times spelled out that a reduction in violence could create the conditions for a resumption of negotiations.

Another question that cannot be answered for the moment is whether Mr. Arafat's troops will be able to effectively stop Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Till the uprising broke out, Mr. Arafat was able to muzzle in the Islamic forces.

Tempers are raging in the Palestinian territories and it will be a while before any assessment can be made of the extent to which, if any, Mr. Arafat's authority has been scorched since the uprising began.



An Israeli soldier leans back after kicking out to change the direction of a burning tyre, as it rolls down a hill and was heading for an Israeli jeep, during clashes with Palestinians in the West Bank town of Hebron on Thursday. — AP

called a "non-official mode". Many of the security men are also affiliated to the Tanzim, the militant arm of Mr. Arafat's political faction Fatah, which together with the religious militias of Ha-

DANGEROUS PORTENTS IN WEST ASIA

ISRAEL'S FORCED WITHDRAWAL from a re-occupied pocket of Palestinian territory has not really defused the new escalation of hostilities in West Asia. Dramatic indeed were the reports on Wednesday about a sudden pull-out by Israel's elite military units from the tiny recaptured area within the Gaza Strip, which remains under the Palestinian Authority's putative control in terms of an internationally recognised accord. Significantly, the timing of the Israeli act of disengagement was a pointer. It followed a strong appeal from the United States. In fact, it was only a day or so earlier that the soldiers of the Jewish state had reconquered the small but extremely volatile segment with an almost undisguised sense of military triumphalism. So, the latest ostensible act of de-escalation by the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, a self-confessed hawk, can be seen as a credible sign that the present Bush administration in Washington may be able to restrain him in the future as well. Yet, the predominant argument in Tel Aviv is that the guided retreat, which in itself was not caused by any Palestinian militant prowess, was also not the direct result of any undue diplomatic pressure from Washington. The question, therefore, is whether the Sharon administration is disinclined to let the U.S. set the peace agenda afresh in West Asia at precisely the juncture when Washington seems to have signalled substantive interest in the affairs of that region for the first time since the departure of Mr. Bill Clinton from the White House.

The U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, has surely appealed to the Palestinians as well to adopt a policy of restraint and rein in political terrorism directed against the Jewish state. Gen. Powell's statement, issued in the latest context of a Palestinian mortar-attack on a Jewish settlement and the Israeli retaliation, is conspicuous for its balanced diplomatic tone. Both the Palestinians and the Israelis have been reminded of their obligations under the agree-

ments that they had reached during the Oslo process in the 1990s. However, it is particularly significant that Gen. Powell described the Israeli act of re-occupying Arab territory, now reversed, as an excessive and disproportionate response to the provocative Palestinian mortar-attack in focus. Moreover, the U.S. Secretary of State's blunt message to Israel is that it should not seek to unravel the agreement which it had previously entered into with the Palestinians. The totality of the circumstances of the latest Israeli pull-out from an enclave within Gaza signifies the political will of the U.S. to re-engage the West Asian players with a view to preventing the region from slipping into further anarchy.

10-12 1999
The Bush administration is willing to facilitate not only a security dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians but also parleys aimed at addressing the differences between the two sides. By definition, a security dialogue is aimed at defusing the current tensions and scaling down the terrorist and other forms of violence. The terminology regarding the objective of narrowing "differences" should denote a more fundamental agenda of seeking a negotiated settlement about the political future of the region, in particular questions regarding Palestinian statehood and Israel's final status in a predominantly Arab milieu. Closely linked to such larger issues is the complication caused by Israel's latest air raid on Syrian positions in Lebanon as a stated retribution for an attack on an 'outpost' of interest to the Jewish state by Hizbollah, a radical outfit linked to Damascus. Also ominous for peace are the Israeli assertion that the rules of the game (of brinkmanship) in West Asia are now changing and the Sharon administration's insistence that the Palestinian Authority rather than any individual Muslim guerrilla outfit was behind the mortar-attack that prompted the Jewish military re-occupation of a strategic enclave in Gaza.

THE HINDU

13 APR 2000

Israel pulls out of reoccupied strip

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) APRIL 18. While violent confrontations between Israel and the Palestinians continue, and although a special spin is being given to a controversial Israeli action taken on Monday night, there is for the first time a sign that there are limits beyond which Israel will not be permitted to go. Following harsh criticism by the U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, of its decision to re-occupy a portion of Palestinian territory, Israel pulled its troops out of the enclave. This U.S. intervention, while welcome, falls short of the level of involvement that the Palestinians and the Arabs in general expect from it.

On Monday night Israel had sent its troops to occupy a slice of territory near the town of Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip. This area had been handed over to full Palestinian control almost at the beginning of the Oslo processes and its re-occupation signalled an escalation of Israel's measures against the Palestinians. The troops were sent in after Palestinian militants (Hamas has claimed responsibility) fired mortar shells that landed near the Israeli town of Sederot. Although the shells did little damage, Israel felt that it was justified in occupying Palestinian land, in the process leveling orchards and farmlands. They hoped to sanitise this stretch of ground on the Gaza Strip/Israel border so that militants could not launch attacks and they also hoped to send a "deterrent" signal to the Palestinian Authority.

In a statement yesterday, Gen. Powell was quoted as saying that the Israeli action was excessive and disproportionate. While Gen. Powell did try to "balance" his statement by criticising the Palestinians for having provoked and precipitated the crisis, the condemnation of the Israeli action became the more noteworthy element of his message. Israel began pulling its troops out of the enclave soon after this statement. The pull-out was reported to have been completed by this morning.

At the time the action was taken a senior Israeli military officer was quoted as saying that the occupation could go on for an indefinite period of time. Israel's Foreign



Palestinians on Wednesday inspect the ruins of the police station destroyed by Israeli tanks and bulldozers after they rolled into the orange groves and fields northeast of the Palestinian town of Beit Hanoun on Tuesday. — AP

Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, appeared on CNN today to give a different spin to events. According to him the officer had been misquoted and the plan was actually for a limited action to clear the area of militants. Holes can easily be picked in Mr. Peres' statement since it would have made little sense for Israel to send in its army into the tract if the only purpose was sanitise it for a very limited period of time. In the overall context, it was clear that Israel had been stung by the U.S. criticism and was making the best it could of the affair.

While Gen. Powell's statement was the first sign of some even-handedness in the approach of the new administration it is clearly not enough. The sequence of events shows that the U.S. administration understands that there are limits beyond which it cannot condone Israeli action and it also shows that Israel will listen when Washington speaks. This will whet the appetite in the Arab world for more American outspokenness. What the Palestinians and the Arabs in general would like to see is that this is not a one-off and that the U.S. ad-

ministration will get more involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict and that it will do so with a greater sense of impartiality.

U.N., U.S. worried

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

UNITED NATIONS, APRIL 18. The United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has resumed telephonic contacts with leaders in West Asia as the world body expressed concern over the escalating violence, first across the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon and then the Israeli attacks on Gaza Strip.

Mr. Annan made his first round of calls to West Asian leaders on Monday, with his spokesman saying that the U.N. chief was "deeply disturbed" by the escalation of military operations across the Blue Line. "He is especially dismayed by the further escalatory response by Israel in the bombing early today of Syrian positions in Lebanon," the spokesman said late on Monday night.

In the last two days, the U.N. has been

making the point that political negotiations must be resumed without delay to prevent the situation from getting worse or even out of hand. The U.N. Special Coordinator for the West Asia Peace Process has said that security measures alone did not produce durable security. The emphasis at the world body, especially as it pertained to actions along the Blue Line, is for the parties to show maximum restraint.

But on Tuesday the focus by way of response was on Washington where the Bush administration slammed Israel for its overnight actions in Gaza. The Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, who blamed the Palestinians for provoking the latest round of violence, took a swipe at the Israeli response by calling its air and sea attacks on Gaza as "excessive and disproportionate." The White House spokesman said the President, Mr. George W. Bush, concurred with this assessment of his Secretary of State.

"We continue to strongly believe that the resumption of bilateral security cooperation is essential to reduce and eventually end the violence. We are continuing to work with the parties so that they can resume as soon as possible the security discussions they began two weeks ago," Gen. Powell said.

But unlike the Clinton administration, the Republican Government has not shown any anxiety to get involved, other than generalised statements of the U.S. remaining "prepared" to assist the parties. During the Clinton administration, the Central Intelligence Agency played an active role in bringing Israelis and Palestinians for talks on security cooperation.

The Bush administration has long taken the position that the West Asia peace process cannot proceed on an American deadline or agenda; rather that it would have to be sorted out by the parties in the region. The White House spokesman, Mr. Ari Fleischer, repeated this on Tuesday during his briefing.

At the same time, analysts are saying it is significant that Washington took a tough line against Israel even while blaming the Palestinians for the current round of violence.

WEST ASIA / INCURSION TRIGGERS JITTERS

Israel re-takes land from Palestinians

HD-16
1579

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) APRIL 17. When Mr. Ariel Sharon, then Israel's Defence Minister, ordered his army into Lebanon over two decades ago he said it was to restore security. The Israeli military stayed there for twenty-two years. Last night, as the Prime Minister, Mr. Sharon, sent his army to re-occupy areas handed over to Palestinians a decade ago, his spokesmen said it was an expedient move to restore security. Given Mr. Sharon's record, there would be very few Palestinians if any who would be assured that last night's incursion into the Gaza Strip is a temporary measure.

Since the current phase of confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians began six months ago the Israeli military has fired heavy ordnance into the Palestinian territories, sent in tanks and bulldozers to demolish buildings there and even sent in troops to snatch Palestinians whom they accuse of involvement in terrorist activity. Last night's action is of a different magnitude, however, since the Israeli army has decided to occupy terrain that was under the full control of the Palestinian Authority until the operation. With its incursion, Israel has sliced Gaza Strip into three separate bits and has also in the process sealed off every exit from the territories. These measures, the Israel Government maintains, will last till the Palestinian Authority asserts itself and stops its militants from firing mortars into Israel.



A grief-stricken relative of one of the victims of Israeli attack in front of her home at Beit Hanoun, a village near the border with Israel, before his funeral on Tuesday. — Reuters

The action taken last night followed a mortar attack by Palestinians into a part of Israel near the town of Sederot. Quite a bit is being made of the fact that some of these mortar shells fell not very far from the ranch that Mr. Sharon runs in southern Israel. This attack was a continuation of a new pattern of action that the Palestinians have adopted of late. While they had been attacking Jewish settlements in Gaza Strip and the West Bank almost from the beginning of the uprising they have started firing at targets in Israel proper over the past few days. No deaths have been caused by these mortar attacks and even the damage to physical infrastructure is understood to be minimal. But

while Israeli officials do appear to view these attacks as little more than irritants they have decided that it merits a severe response.

In the current phase, the Israelis and the Palestinians appear to be locked into a tangle from which no one is able to extricate them. Yesterday's escalation in violence occurred even as Jordan's Foreign Minister, Mr. Abd Illah al Khatib, was in Israel trying to mediate a re-start of negotiations.

With tension also rising on Israel's border with Lebanon and the Israel-Syria equation at a dangerous phase the warning that the region is on the verge of an even more dangerous situation appears more relevant than ever.

THE HINDU

18 APR 2001

Israel retakes parts of Gaza in 'get tough' strategy

Gaza, April 17

ISRAELI TROOPS took back parts of the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip on Tuesday after a withering hail of fire from land, sea and air killed one person, wounded 30 and left life in the area in disarray.

In the latest sign of Right-wing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's "get tough" policy, the 27-mile-long Gaza Strip was effectively carved into three separate areas with its main coastal road cut by Israeli checkpoints.

The Israeli army said Sharon had ordered the assaults after five mortar bombs fired from the strip slammed into the southern Israeli town of Sderot five km away. The military wing of the Muslim militant group Hamas said it had fired them.

The mortar rounds landed deeper in Israel than any since the start of a Palestinian uprising for independence last Sep-

miles wide. Gaza City's main police headquarters and two elite Force 17 security unit posts were among at least seven main targets in an attack that lasted for hours. An army spokesman declined to say how long troops would remain in the strip.

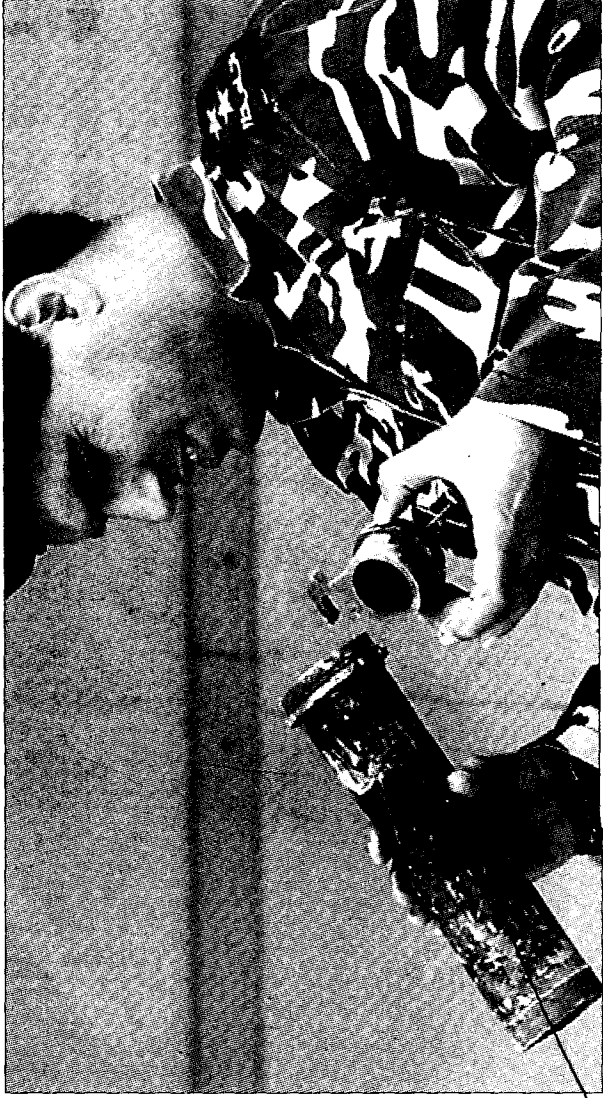
Palestinian sources said a 24-year-old Palestinian policeman had been killed in the Israeli reprisal. Apart from the wounded, hospitals reported that relatives had brought dozens of people in for help from shock after they endured six hours of night bombardment that residents said was the worst since the start of violence seven months ago.

The Gaza attacks, involving tanks, helicopter gun ships, missiles, ships and bulldozers, began less than 24 hours after Israel's first bombing raid on a Syrian target in Lebanon for five years. Arab nations blasted Israel's security offensive and western nations called for restraint on all

sides. In Riyadh, Saudi Arabia said Israel was acting in a "despicable" way and urged a firm stance against what it called Israel's warmongering.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency that the attack demonstrated that Israel had moved away from the language of peace and adopted one of war and destruction.

In the Gaza Strip, hundreds of children, men, women, students and workers turned to beach travel in donkey carts. Israel has tanks on main roads, all of which are closed. A bulldozer dug a trench in the coastal road and piled it with stones to prevent travel. "These escalatory Israeli measures are not intended to put an end to the *intifada*, but are aimed at humiliating us and make us submit to Israel's will," said a bank employee, said.



A Palestinian police officer inspects part of an Israeli missile that hit Gaza's police headquarters on Tuesday.

FINGERS RAISED AT SON SHARON'S ARAFAT VISIT

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Ariel Sharon risked a rift with his Right-wing constituency on Monday on using his son as a secret emissary to Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat. The Prime Minister's use of his business son, Omri, 36, who is regarded as the mastermind of Sharon's election victory, raised hackles in expected quarters: the foreign ministry, legal circles, and the Left. Sharon is under fire from far-right members of his coalition.

The Guardian

tember, falling just down the road from Sharon's Negev Desert ranch.

Some residents were forced into using donkeys and making long detours to get to destinations in the strip, where 1.2 million Palestinians live in an area that at some points is just 2.5

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 APR 2001

Israel needs US, pulls out of Gaza

Wafa Amr &
Nidal Al-Mughrabi
GAZA, APRIL 18

ISRAELI forces withdrew from reoccupied areas of the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, only hours after the United States described Israel's response to Palestinian mortar attacks as excessive and called for a pull-out.

Protected by two tanks, two Israeli bulldozers and an armoured personnel carrier moved out of the Beit Hanoun area, in the north-eastern corner of the Gaza Strip, witnesses said.

The surprise pull-out began less than 24 hours after Israel launched a fierce air and naval strike on Palestinian security targets in the Gaza Strip and seized parts of territory it had handed over to the Palestinians under interim peace deals.

Israel mounted the attack after

five Palestinian mortar bombs landed in and around the southern Israeli town of Sderot in what Israeli officials called a dangerous escalation in the nearly seven-month-old Palestinian uprising.

The sudden movement out of an area which an Israeli general said earlier in the day could remain under the military's control for months raised questions in Israel over whether Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had bowed to US pressure.

"We always said that it will happen when the military operation ends," insisted Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Sharon. "After completing their missions, Israeli Army forces are returning from the Gaza Strip to their previous positions," the Army said in a statement.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat accused Israel of an "unforgivable crime" in reoccupying

parts of Gaza. The United States blamed both Israelis and the Palestinians for fighting that threatened to escalate into a broader conflict.

"The hostilities last night in Gaza were precipitated by the provocative Palestinian mortar attacks on Israel. The Israeli response was excessive and disproportionate," US Secretary of State Colin Powell said in a statement read by a spokesman at a State Department news briefing.

"We call upon both sides to respect the agreements they have signed. For the Palestinians this includes implementation of their commitment to renounce terrorism and violence, to exercise control over all elements of the PLO and the Palestinian authority and to discipline violators," it said.

"For the Israelis, this includes respecting their commitment to withdraw from Gaza, according to

the terms of the agreement signed by Israel and the Palestinians," it said, adding: "There can be no military solution to this conflict."

The Israeli assaults on Monday night led to the closure of the Egyptian border at the southern end of Gaza and left the area in disarray with homes destroyed, one dead and 30 wounded.

It was not immediately clear if the withdrawal also heralded the end of a blockade Israeli troops imposed on main Gaza roads overnight that effectively divided the Strip into three parts.

Israeli soldiers shot dead a 15-year-old Palestinian on the Israel-Gaza border on Tuesday, hospital sources said.

Local medical officials said Israeli soldiers killed a 10-year-old Palestinian boy near the Gaza border with Egypt.

The Israeli Army said it was checking both reports. - Reuters

INDIAN EXPRESS

29 APR 2001

29 APR 2001

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HO-16 1779

Syrian radar station in Lebanon hit

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA(BAHRAIN), APRIL 16. In a dangerous escalation, Israeli war-planes struck a Syrian radar installation in Lebanon and killed two Syrian soldiers in a raid conducted in the early hours of this morning. Lebanon's President, Mr. Emil Lahoud, has warned that this incident could be the cause of a wider confrontation and while an official Syrian response is awaited there is no doubting the mood of anger. Israel has said that the raid was intended to send a message to Syria and Lebanon that they must act decisively to curb the Hizbollah.

Six Israeli war-planes were said to have taken part in the attack on the Syrian radar installation in the Dar al Baydar area of Lebanon. The Lebanese government has announced that two Syrian soldiers were killed in

the raid. Syrian troops stationed in Lebanon believed to number about 30,000 were put on a state of high alert. Approval for the raid was given by the Israeli Cabinet which met late yesterday evening. This meeting was convened to discuss the response that Israel should take in respect of heightened tensions on its borders with Lebanon and the continuing confrontation in the Palestinian territories that has not abated despite the launch of stuttering security talks.

The immediate provocation, or at least the stated justification, for Israel's action of last night was the rocket attack on an Israeli tank by Hizbollah fighters on Saturday. An Israeli soldier was killed in this attack on the patrol in the disputed Shebaa farms on the Israel-Lebanon border. Hizbollah and the Lebanese gov-

ernment claim that the Shebaa farms are their territory and that their attacks on Israel will continue so long as Israel does not vacate the farms.

The U.N. has ruled that the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon is complete and the Secretary-General's envoy warned the Lebanese government after Saturday's attack that such incidents were in violation of the U.N. ruling. (Incidentally, the Shebaa farms area of the Israel-Lebanon border comes under the supervision of the Indian contingent of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon which however has no mandate to insert itself between the contestants).

Saturday's incident was a part of a pattern of sporadic attacks carried out by Hizbollah. In response to that attack, like the ones carried out earlier, Israel had hit Hizbollah targets with artillery shells and rockets from planes and helicopter gunships. Israel had also repeated its warnings that they would not target Hizbollah alone but would also strike against Lebanese infrastructure and the Syrian military if the Beirut and Damascus governments did not curb Hizbollah. But over and above all the raid was intended to send a more general message.

Israeli analysts believe that the Hizbollah, the Palestinians and the Arab world in general have been suffering from a misconception since Israel withdrew its troops from Lebanon nearly 11 months ago. Hizbollah, which had reason to be proud of its long resistance to Israeli occupation, saw the Israeli withdrawal as their victory. But from this they drew the further conclusion that Israel had become a paper tiger militarily speaking and that it was therefore possible to indefinitely continue a confrontation with it.

In the course of their uprising, the Palestinians too have been citing the example of the Hizbollah. Taking into consideration these trends, Israeli analysts and officials believe that the Arab world in general has a misconception of Israel's true strength and there have been several voices in Israel calling for a demonstration of this strength.

Comments to the BBC by Mr. Rannan Gissin, senior advisor to Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, suggest that the intention was to reaffirm that Israel is the main military force in the region and that they will not hesitate to use that clout. The message, Mr. Gissin said, was that Syria and Lebanon should learn "not to mess with us".



Thousands of Palestinians gather on the streets at the al-Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus on Monday to protest against the Israeli airstrikes on the Syrian army in Lebanon. — AP

THE HINDU

Palestine and the war of information

AP-6 1674
BY EDWARD SAID

Until the Intifada is understood in the West as a civilian uprising against colonial oppression, the Palestinians have no chance of obtaining equality and justice. During the past several weeks, the Israeli government has vigorously pursued policies on two fronts, one on the ground, the other abroad.

The first is vintage Sharon, or for that matter, vintage Israeli military. The idea is to hit Palestinians in every way possible, making their lives unbearable and so confined and strangled as to make them feel that they can no longer endure remaining there.

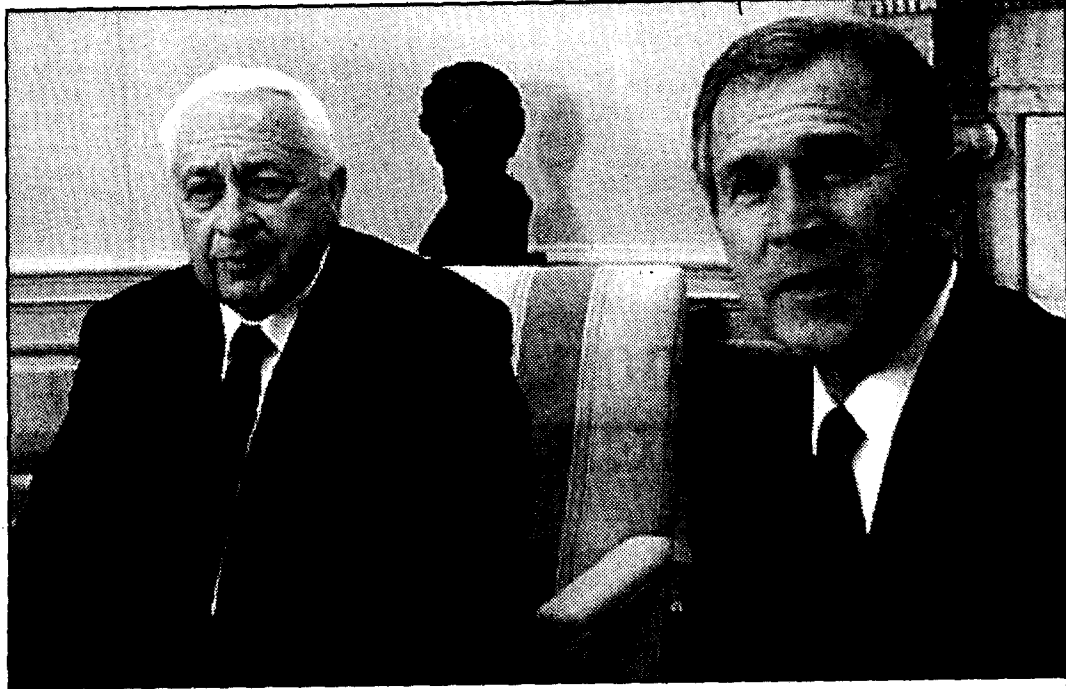
The rationale for this, as the Palestinian scholar Nur Masalha has studied it in three important books, is that Zionism has always wanted more land and fewer Arabs; from Ben-Gurion to Rabin, Begin, Shamir, Netanyahu, Barak and now Sharon, there is an unbroken ideological continuity in which the Palestinian people is seen as an absence to be desired and fought for.

This is so obvious and, at the same time, so carefully obscured from the international (and even regional) public's view as to require only some additional remarks here. The core idea is that if Jews have all the rights to "the land of Israel," then any non-Jewish people there are entitled to no rights at all. It is as simple as that, and as ideologically unanimous. No Israeli leader or party has ever considered the Palestinian people as a nation or even as a national minority (after the ethnic cleansing of 1948). Culturally, historically, humanly, Zionism considers Palestinians as lesser or inferior.

Even Shimon Peres, who occasionally seems to speak a humane language, cannot bring himself ever to consider the Palestinians as worthy of equality. Jews must remain a majority, own all the land, define the laws for Jews and non-Jews alike, guarantee immigration and repatriation for Jews alone. And, though all sorts of inconsistencies and contradictions exist (e.g. why should there be democracy, as it is called, for one people and not for another in a "democratic" state?), Israel pursues its policies — ethnocentric, exclusivist, intolerant — regardless.

No other state on earth except Israel could have maintained so odiously discriminatory a policy against a native people only on religious and ethnic grounds, a policy that forbids native people to own or keep land or to exist free of military repression, but for its amazing international reputation as a liberal, admirable and advanced country.

This brings me to the second front of Israeli policy, which must be seen therefore through a double lens. Even as it besieges Palestinian towns using mediaeval techniques like ditches and total military blockades, it can do so with the aura of a besieged victim of dangerous, exterminationist violence. Israeli soldiers (called a "defence force") bomb Palestinian homes with helicopter gunships, advanced missiles, and tank barrages; Israeli soldiers kill 400 civilians, cause 12,000 casualties... Israeli bulldozers demolish houses, create fortifications... Israeli planners build more settlements... all this while maintaining the image of a poor, defenceless and terribly threatened people. How? By a concerted international, especially American, public relations campaign



ARIEL SHARON WITH GEORGE W. BUSH: 'The US is Israel's strongest supporter at \$5 billion a year, and the one thing that Israelis have long understood is the direct value of their propaganda, which in no uncertain terms allows them to do anything at all, and still retain an image of serene justice and confident right. As a people, we Palestinians have to do what the South African anti-apartheid movement did — gain legitimacy in Europe and especially in the US, and consequently de-legitimise the apartheid regime'

ners build more settlements and settlement roads — all this while maintaining the image of a poor, defenceless and terribly threatened people. How? By a concerted international, especially American, public relations campaign, as cynical as it is effective.

A while back Sharon, Peres, and Abraham Burg (Knesset speaker) were in the United States to consolidate the Israeli image as righteously fighting off terrorist violence. The three of them circulated through one influential public platform after another, gaining support and sympathy for Israel's policies every minute. In addition, the media announced that the Israeli government had hired two public relations firms to

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continue promoting its policies through advertisements, concerted lobbying efforts, and Washington congressional liaisons.

News of the Palestinian Intifada has gradually disappeared from the media. After all, how long can "violence," which seems to be directed neither at long-standing injustice (such as military occupation and collective punishment) nor at a particular policy (such as Israel's adamant refusal to regard Palestinian claims as having any merit whatever), keep hold of reporters whose every deviation from an accepted pro-Israeli editorial policy is punished? It's not only that reporters have no great story to report (such as a ready narrative of Palestinian liberation), it is also that Israel has never been firmly indicted for years and years of massive human rights abuses against the entire Palestinian population.

Senator George Mitchell's commission of inquiry as well as Mary Robinson's similar set of human rights experts, comprising a distinguished group that includes Professor Richard Falk of Princeton, will doubtless come to similar conclusions. I have read the Robinson report and it is unequivocally damning of Israel's cruelty and disproportionate military response to what is in effect an anti-colonial civilian uprising. But one can be certain that few people will see or be affected by these excellent reports.

Israel's public relations machine, in the US especially, will make certain of that. Such propaganda campaigns in the US are far more effective there than they are in the UK, for instance. Robert Fisk, the excellent West Asia reporter for the *Independent*, has complained of attacks on him and his paper by the British-Israeli lobby, but he continues to write fearlessly. And when the Canadian media tycoon, Conrad Black, tried to stop or censor criticism of Israel in the *Daily Telegraph* or *The Spectator*, both of which he owns, a chorus of his own writers and others, like Ian Gilmour, were able to respond to him in his own papers.

This could not happen in the US, where leading newspapers and journalists for the most part

simply do not permit pro-Palestinian editorial comment at all. The *New York Times* has only had two or three columns like that, as against dozens of "neutral" or pro-Israel commentaries. A similar pattern obtains in every major US newspaper. Thus, the average reader is inundated with dozens upon dozens of articles about "violence," as if that violence was somehow equal to, or worse than, Israel's attacks with helicopters, tanks and missiles.

If it is sadly true that one Israeli death appears to be worth many Palestinian deaths on the ground, then it is also true that for all their actual suffering and daily humiliation, Palestinians in the media seem scarcely more human than the

Until the Palestinian struggle resolutely focuses on the battle to represent itself as a narrative surviving valiantly against Israeli colonialism, we have no chance at all of gaining our rights as a people. Every stone cast symbolically in support of equality and justice must therefore be interpreted as such, and not misrepresented as either violence or a blind rejection of peace. Palestinian information must change the framework, must take responsibility for it and must do so immediately. There has to be a unified collective goal. In a globalised world, in which politics and information are virtually equivalent, Palestinians can no longer afford to shirk this task

cockroaches and terrorists to which they have been compared.

The simple fact of the matter is that the Palestinian Intifada is unprotected and ineffective so long as it does not appear to be a struggle for liberation in the West.

The US is Israel's strongest supporter at \$5 billion a year, and the one thing that Israelis have long understood is the direct value of their propaganda, which in no uncertain terms allows them to do anything at all, and still retain an image of serene justice and confident right. As a people, we Palestinians have to do what the South African anti-apartheid movement did — gain legitimacy in Europe and especially in the US, and consequently de-legitimise the apartheid regime. The whole principle of Israeli colonialism must be similarly discredited in order for any progress in Palestinian self-determination to be made.

This task can no longer be postponed. During the 1982 siege of Beirut by Sharon's armies, a substantial group of Palestinian businessmen and intellectuals met in London. The idea was to help alleviate Palestinian suffering, and also to set up an information campaign in the US. Palestinian resistance on the ground and the Palestinian image were seen as two equal fronts. But over time, the second effort was totally abandoned, for reasons I still cannot completely understand. You don't have to be Aristotle to connect the propaganda framework turning Palestinians into ugly, fanatical terrorists with the ease with which Israel, performing horrendous crimes of war on a daily basis, managed to maintain itself as a plucky little state fighting off extermination, and maintaining unconditional US support paid in full by an uncomprehending American taxpayer.

This is an intolerable situation, and until the Palestinian struggle resolutely focuses on the battle to represent itself as a narrative surviving valiantly against Israeli colonialism, we have no chance at all of gaining our rights as a people. Every stone cast symbolically in support of equality and justice must therefore be interpreted as such, and not misrepresented as either violence or a blind rejection of peace. Palestinian information must change the framework, must take responsibility for it and must do so immediately. There has to be a unified collective goal.

In a globalised world, in which politics and information are virtually equivalent, Palestinians can no longer afford to shirk a task which, alas, the leadership is simply incapable of comprehending. It must be done if the loss of life and property is to be stopped, and if liberation, not unending servitude to Israel, is the real goal.

The irony is that truth and justice are on the Palestinian side, but until Palestinians themselves make that readily apparent — to the world in general, to themselves, to Israelis and Americans in particular — neither truth nor justice can prevail. For a people that has already endured a century's injustice, surely a proper politics of information is quite possible. What is needed is a re-directed and re-focused will to victory over military occupation and ethnically and religiously based dispossession.

By arrangement with Dawn

WEST ASIA / BLASTS ROCK TEL AVIV

Israel retaliates in Lebanon, Gaza

JERUSALEM, APRIL 15. Israel used planes, tanks and artillery to hammer home a message of military might after Lebanese guerillas killed an Israeli soldier and Palestinians kept up a defiant campaign of pinprick attacks.

But two small pipebombs that exploded yesterday on a quiet residential street in the heart of Israel, wounding one man, exposed the soft underbelly of vulnerability that has always rested beneath the Jewish state's hard shell of security.

The killing of the soldier, by a Hizbollah anti-tank missile fired at an army post on the Lebanese border, challenged Israel on a second front as it continues to battle a nearly seven-month-old Palestinian uprising for independence.

Israeli warplanes swiftly swung into action over South Lebanon, bombing two Hizbollah targets, after Israeli artillery pounded the area. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The Iranian- and Syrian-backed Hizbollah regards the territory it attacked, Shebaa farms, as still under Israeli occupation despite Israel's U.N.-recognised troop withdrawal from Lebanon last May.

The Foreign Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, "sent strong messages", appealing to the U.S., the U.N. Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi

Annun, and France ^{HD-16} "to intervene before things escalate and there is serious flareup" in Lebanon, a spokesman said.

Israeli officials repeated their demand that Lebanese government forces deploy along the border and called on Syria, the main powerbroker in Lebanon, to rein in Hizbollah.

"Israel will not tolerate continued attacks," said ¹⁶⁷¹ Mr. Raanan Gissin, spokesman for the Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon.

Flexing its military muscle, Israel sent two bulldozers — backed up by three tanks — 100 metres into Palestinian-controlled territory in Gaza to demolish buildings which the army said gunmen used as cover to attack its soldiers.

The operation in the Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza strip was the second incursion in less than a week into an area Israel handed over to full Palestinian control under interim peace deals.

Heavy fighting ensued and the director of the local hospital said at least 35 Palestinians were wounded, including a 16-year-old youth whose leg was blown off by a tank shell. No Israeli casualties were reported.

A headquarters of the Palestinian military intelligence and 15 houses were destroyed, witnesses said. — Reuters

THE HINDU

9 8 APR 2001

14-12 A conflict continues

By Chinmaya R. Gharekhan

In West Asia, the efforts of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the U.S. should be concentrated on ending the bloodshed and the economic strangulation of the Palestinian people.

A TRAGEDY on a huge scale is being played out in West Asia. Scores of innocent civilians are being killed, many more are being maimed and everyone is getting bruised mentally and psychologically. The violence of the past seven months almost certainly has already dealt a mortal blow to the peace process. It is somewhat like a Greek tragedy, in the sense that the risks and dangers in the continuation of the present situation are understood and recognised by everyone, but no one is willing and/or able to prevent the catastrophe. But it is very different in crucial aspects: real people, not just characters in a play, are getting killed and the dimensions of the tragedy are vast. With passions rising almost by the day and public opinion in Arab countries, especially in Jordan and Iraq, intensifying, the risk of a wider conflagration breaking out cannot be discounted altogether, especially given the fact that the majority population of Jordan is Palestinian.

Since the violence broke out in late September last year, nearly 500 people have lost their lives, more than 400 Palestinians and about 70 Israelis. These figures are indicative of the discrepancy in the relative strength of the two sides. However, according to Israeli standards, the number of Israeli casualties is staggeringly high. Israel's society will not accept this rate of casualty and will demand either a return to the negotiating table or a more ruthless response. So far, the preferred option is the latter. By the same token, on the Palestinian side, those responsible for inflicting the losses on the Israelis seem to be getting more emboldened by their 'successes' and more determined to persevere with their terror tactics, in the gravely mistaken conviction that they would eventually succeed in compelling Israel to pull out altogether from the occupied Palestinian territory, somewhat along the lines of what the Hizbullah were able to achieve in south Lebanon. The fact that there were 10 terrorist attacks within the Green Line during the past one month, compared to nine during the previous six months, suggests that the Palestinian groups involved in these events are getting better organised and perhaps better equipped. They also do not seem to experience any diffi-

culty in attracting volunteers to their cause.

Will or can this extremely vicious circle of violence be broken? It depends primarily on the parties themselves to try and bring the situation under some control but external players, especially the United States can play a role. As far as the parties are concerned, the situation is more clear on the Israeli side than on the Palestinian side, but on neither side is it fully clear as to who is in control. It is obvious that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) which have caused most of the casualties on the Palestinian side are an agency of the Government and, as such, clearly under the control of the Government. The groups of extremist settler groups, on the other hand, which often take the law in their own hands, are not fully within the control of the Government. On the Palestinian side, the bulk of those engaging in the suicide missions are not members of the Palestinian Authority's security agencies, but belong to the Hamas and Islamic Jihad religious groups. Of late, however, the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat's Fatah group has publically spoken of revenge and the type of firepower used on more and more occasions is suggestive of the anticipated increasing radicalisation of at least some agencies of the Palestinian Authority. It is doubtful if Mr. Arafat is in a position to effectively order an end to all violence, even if he wished to. As for Israel, the Government has much more control over the situation, although it too cannot maintain surveillance on every single settler. Individual acts of terrorism obviously cannot be eliminated altogether; what both sides need to do is to exercise a much tighter grip on their respective security forces.

Surprisingly, the demands of each side on the other to restore conditions of at least relative calm and peace are moderate and reasonable. End the economic strangulation, demand the Palestinians.

End the violence or terror, demand the Israelis as a precondition. The economic blockade, the collective punishment of the Palestinian population by Israel for the past seven months, in fact for the past several years, has truly wreaked havoc with the lives of ordinary Palestinian people. Unemployment is running at more than 60 per cent and is in fact providing fertile ground for recruiting suicide bombers against whom the closures are intended. The P.A. has been deprived of hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue which Israel is expected to pass on to it under the Oslo arrangements. There are serious concerns that the P.A. might disintegrate in case the financial crunch continues for a few months more. It is in response to this crisis that the Arab Summit recently decided to make available to the P.A. \$ 40 million a month for the next six months. Prolonging the closures will only strengthen the extremist forces and further radicalise Palestinian society.

Israel's need for security, not so much against an external enemy but against acts of terrorism, is understandable. The population in Israel has been traumatised by the suicide bombers. Ordinary citizens are living in constant dread of explosions. They have no idea from where and in what form the next bomb attack would come. Parents are continuously worrying about the safety of their children. At least some of the potential sites for possible terrorist attacks are the result of Israel's own policies, such as the establishment of isolated settlements or settlements in the heart of Palestinian territory, like the one at Netzarim in the Gaza Strip. This is not to justify attacks against innocent civilians, but merely to point out that Israel established those settlements for political, military and bargaining purposes.

Neither side can afford to be perceived by its respective constituency as giving in to the other's precondition. The obvious answer is to simultaneously move on both. This is where the international

community comes in. In the West Asian context, 'international community' is merely another term for the U.S. It is not as if the U.S. can do the trick at its will. But it is the only player which is still in a position to be of help to the parties. The Bush Administration's reluctance to keep aloof is understandable, though its public tough stance against the Palestinians is less so except in domestic political terms. The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon's plea to the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, not to invite Mr. Arafat to Washington will hopefully not be heeded by the latter for long. The Egyptian President, Mr. Hosni Mubarak's and Jordan's king Abdullah's separate visits to Washington in April should prepare the ground for an appropriate invitation to Mr. Arafat in due course. It is not beyond the bounds of American diplomacy's creative talent to devise a compromise, face-saving formula which can break the present deadlock. The Israel-Palestinian conflict is too crucial an issue for the U.S. to adopt a hands-off policy for long, even though the first and the only priority of the Administration for the time being in West Asia seems to be to complete the unfinished business of Bush Sr.

In the present, highly charged atmosphere, no one is even thinking of finding solutions to the final status issues to which Mr. Bill Clinton devoted so much time and energy right until almost his last day in office. Even if his motivation was to leave an important legacy for his administration in history — nothing wrong in that — he did manage to get the two sides to discuss hitherto taboo subjects such as Jerusalem and refugees. Whatever stand the present Government might take on the parameters reached at the Taba talks in January this year, the progress achieved there cannot be wished away by either side. The political scene in Israel can and will in all probability change in a few months or a year even though the coalition clobbered together by Mr. Sharon appears to be stable. Israeli leaders must eschew loose, irresponsible talk of reentering and reoccupying the occupied territories. For the present, the efforts of Israel, the P.A. and the U.S. should be concentrated on ending the bloodshed and the economic strangulation of the Palestinian people.

THE HINDU

13/11/01

End W. Asia violence: U.S., Russia

PARIS, APRIL 12. The United States and Russia today urged Israelis and Palestinians to end their violence and take reciprocal steps to restore calm. "The U.S. and Russia are deeply concerned by the continued violence in the West Asia and the growing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians," they said in a joint statement.

It was issued after the talks in Paris between the U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell and the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov.

At least 375 Palestinians, 13 Israeli Arabs and 71 other Israelis have been killed in nearly seven months of violence that erupted after peace talks hit deadlock. "In order to avoid a further deterioration, Russia and the U.S. call on

both sides to take parallel and reciprocal steps to reduce the violence, calm the situation and create an environment in which both sides can find a way forward," the statement said.

It welcomed a resumption of talks on security cooperation in the region and called upon both sides to find ways to promote political dialogue. "Russia and the U.S. continue to support the goal of a comprehensive peace in the region through direct negotiation by the parties, and stand ready to assist their efforts to make progress on all tracks," the statement said.

Sharon rejects proposal

The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, has rejected a Palestinian proposal aimed at ending the ongoing violence and restart-

ing peace talks, Israel radio reported today. The proposal was made by the Palestinian Legislative Council Speaker, Mr. Ahmed Qrei (Abu Ala).

Meanwhile, Palestinians today fired four anti-tank grenades at Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip, but caused no injuries. Yesterday night, several settlements in the Gaza Strip came under mortar fire.

The Israeli and Palestinian officials began a top-level security meeting, officials said, following a sharp escalation in the violence.

A Palestinian security source said yesterday that the meeting started at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Mr. Martyn Indyk near Tel Aviv. — Reuters
DPA, AFP

THE TIMES

13 APR 2001

West Asia Talks end without result

BY MARK LAVIE

Tel Aviv, April 12: US-hosted cease-fire talks between Israelis and Palestinians ended without result on Thursday, and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon warned he would send troops into Palestinian areas again if attacks on Israelis persist.

In new violence, a Palestinian farmer was killed and three Israeli soldiers wounded in shootings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The meeting between Israeli and Palestinian security officials came a day after Israeli tanks and bulldozers razed a neighbourhood in the Palestinian refugee camp of Khan Yunis in a Palestinian-controlled area of the Gaza Strip.

Two Palestinians were killed, two dozen wounded and hundreds left homeless in the assault which Israel says came in response to persistent Palestinian mortar attacks on Jewish settlements. In an interview with the *Maariv Daily* published on Thursday, Mr Sharon said there were no plans to reoccupy areas from which Israeli troops withdrew several years ago, as part of interim peace deals. However, he said would again order troops into Palestinian-controlled territory, also known as area a, if attacks on Israelis persist.

"All those who carry out terror attacks, those who act as accomplices and those who support them need to know they will not be able to live in peace, even if they live in area A," Mr Sharon said. The Prime Minister said Israeli troops operate in Palestinian areas almost daily, but did not specify whether he was referring to undercover raids. Wednesday's assault on the Khan Yunis camp marked the first major ground assault on Palestinian territory since fighting broke out in the fall. (AP)



SORROW STRUCK: A Palestinian child sits outside her house, which was destroyed by the Israeli Army, on the edge of Khan Yunis refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. The Israeli Army used bulldozers to remove sand embankments and demolish homes. (Reuters)

Fresh violence sweeps Gaza

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Jerusalem, April 12: Scattered violence involving both Israelis and Palestinians swept the Gaza Strip and other areas on Thursday after both sides' security chiefs failed to agree on ways to halt their fighting at a US-hosted meeting.

In a sign of growing international concern, Jordan's foreign minister Abdulilah al-Khatib headed into talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the United States and Russia issued a joint statement calling for an end to the violence. Palestinian officials said Israeli troops killed one Palestinian and wounded another when they opened fire on the pair near the Israeli military junction of Kissufim in the southern Gaza Strip.

The Israeli Army reported mortar bomb, shooting and anti-tank grenade attacks on Jewish settlements

and Army posts, also in Gaza, and two soldiers wounded by gunfire in southern Gaza near the Israel-Egypt border.

Witnesses said Israeli troops shot and wounded a Palestinian during a clash with stone-throwers in the southern Gaza Strip.

In violence elsewhere, an Israeli soldier was seriously wounded by automatic gunfire along a road near the Palestinian West Bank village of Beit Jala. Israeli fire wounded five Palestinians in Hebron in the West Bank on Wednesday night.

Palestinian security officials said Israeli forces briefly entered Beit Jala before withdrawing. But the Israeli Army said it had fired a tank shell in response to Palestinian gunfire on one of its positions.

Witnesses said several homes were damaged during the violence. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

13 APR 2001

Israel retaliates to Palestinian fire, 1 killed

Gaza City, April 10: Israel on Tuesday rocketed Palestinian security targets in the Gaza Strip, killing a policeman and injuring 20 people, after Palestinians fired two mortar shells at a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip.

It was the first daytime attack by Israel in months. Israel's air strikes usually come at night, when Palestinian buildings being targeted are empty.

Brig. Gen. Abel Raze Majaida said the Israeli rocketing was a "declaration of war." Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he was implementing a detailed plan aimed at restoring a sense of security to the Israeli people.

Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres said that despite the flare-up, cease-fire talks would resume on Tuesday. However, Mr. Tay Abel Rah, an aide to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, said no decision has been made to attend such a meeting.

Tuesday's exchange began when two mortar shells hit the Jewish settlement of Katif in the Gaza Strip, causing no injuries.

In response, Israel rocketed a naval installation in Gaza City and a military intelligence building in the town of Deir el-Balah. Palestinians said Israel fired surface-to-

surface missiles and tank shells. The Army would not say what weapons it used. Two missiles hit the naval police headquarters in the Sudaniyeh neighbourhood in Gaza City, killing 1st Lt. Wael Quoweit-

er, a 30-year-old physician who had served in the naval police for the past three years, Palestinian officials said. The missiles destroyed the front wall of the one-story building, and torched two police jeeps parked nearby. In Deir el-Balah, tank shells damaged a building of Palestinian military intelligence, collapsing some walls. "We were

sitting in our office when we saw two rockets coming from the east," said an Army official Nasser Hamid. "Our officers got out threw elevators and some jumped from the windows." Sharon aide Raanan Gissin said Palestinians have fired 50 mortar shells at Israeli communities in recent days.

Israel holds Palestinian security forces responsible for the mortar fire because they are not stopping the attacks, which are often carried out from Palestinian police compounds, the official said.

"They (security officials) themselves become targets. Nobody has immunity," the Army official added. (AP)

US says it will help resume dialogue

BY ELAINE MONAGHAN

Washington, April 10: The US state department said on Monday it would help Israeli and Palestinian leaders to resume security talks after the two sides failed to meet as expected earlier in the day.

"We'd say both parties were positive in their assessment of last week's meeting," state department spokesman Richard Boucher said of the last round of security talks last week.

He said he was basing his assessment on secretary of state Colin Powell's telephone calls on Sunday with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

Jordan's King Abdullah, due to meet United States President George W. Bush at the White House on Tuesday, had no comment on the cancellation of Monday's meeting, but cited reports that last week's meeting was "very successful."

Mr. Boucher said Israel and the Palestinians had agreed in principle to continuing the security discussions and the United States would also work with both parties to ensure that happened.

Mr. Boucher spoke to the reporters after Israeli diplomatic sources said the talks, aimed at easing violence that began last September and has killed at least 370 Palestinians, 71 Israelis and 13 Israeli Arabs, had been cancelled. (AP)

WAR FOR PALESTINE

US asked to continue peace support

Washington, April 10: Jordan's King Abdullah said on Monday he sensed Washington was concerned about "being burnt" in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, but warned that the international community needed to remain engaged to defuse escalating violence in the region.

Mr. Abdullah, who meets US President George W. Bush on Tuesday, told that Israel and the Palestinians had made a step in the right direction toward halting the violence by meeting for security talks last week. Meanwhile Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres arrived in Turkey on Tuesday for talks expected to focus on efforts to restore the peace process in the West Asia.

Turkey has close ties with both Israel and the Palestinian administration. (Reuters)



COUNTER ATTACK: A Palestinian policeman inspects the damage after an Israeli attack on a naval headquarters building on the coastal road leading to the Erez border crossing in the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. Israel launched missile strikes in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

11 APR 2001

Arafat briefs Powell on violence, peace efforts

L. Aziza (w)

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GAZE CITY, APRIL 9. The Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, has spoken with the U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, over phone, the Palestinian Wafa agency said.

"President Arafat and the American Secretary of State spoke mainly about the military escalation and Israeli aggressions against Palestinian civilians and efforts undertaken by the international community to save the peace process," said Mr. Arafat's advisor Mr. Nabil Abu Rudeina, according to the agency.

The Palestinians officially asked the U.S. last week to again take up its role as a leader and mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to abandon its current policy of "unconditional support" for the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon.

Israel shells Fatah office

The Israeli army fired shells at an office of Mr. Arafat's Fatah movement in the northern Gaza strip, wounding four civilians, according to witnesses and security sources.

Two shells, fired from Israeli territory yesterday, targeted a Fatah office and police station in Beit Lahia, a town near the green line separating Israel from the occupied territories, the sources said.

Two other shells fell in the area but did not explode. The incident came just after four mortar shells were fired into southern Israel by Palestinians from the southern Gaza strip.

A military spokesman said the Palestinian shells did not cause any casualties. — AFP



A Palestinian woman sits amidst the ruins of her house in Beit Lahia in Gaza Strip on Monday, a day after the house was bombarded by Israeli missiles. — Reuters

THE HIND

10 APR 2000

U.N. forum upholds Palestinian right to statehood

WASH DC 4/12

GENEVA, APRIL 7. The main U.N. human rights forum overwhelmingly reaffirmed the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and statehood, calling it a basic condition for achieving a lasting West Asia peace.

The United States and Guatemala voted against the resolution, put forward by Arab and Islamic states at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The other four permanent Security Council members — Britain, China, France and Russia — voted in favour, while Canada abstained.

Under the resolution, the commission on Friday upheld the "inalienable, permanent and unqualified right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including their right to establish their sovereign and independent Palestinian state".

The resolution was submitted by Arab and Islamic powers — including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria — to the 53-member

state forum, now mid-way through its annual six-week session. "The vote was 48 in Favour, two against, two abstentions and one delegation was absent. The resolution is therefore adopted," the commission chairman, Mr. Leandro Despouy, Argentina's ambassador, announced after the public roll-call vote.

The U.S. envoy Ms. Shirin Tahir-Kheli and the Israeli ambassador, Mr. Yaakov Levy both took the floor at the Geneva forum to condemn the resolution as preempting the outcome of negotiations and undermining peace efforts. Israel, present at the forum only as an observer state, was not given a vote but was allowed to speak. — Reuters

Exchange of fire

AP reports from Jerusalem: Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen exchanged fire in the West Bank and Gaza strip early today as Israel prepared for the week-long passover holiday amid

new warnings by Islamic militants to set off bombs.

In the West Bank, the Palestinian police arrested a suspected informer who allegedly helped lure two Palestinian gunmen to an area under Israeli control where they were seized by Israeli forces. The army said the two men arrested by troops belonged to Tanzim, the armed wing of the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

In the Gaza strip, three Palestinian policemen were wounded overnight in a heavy gunbattle with Israeli troops near the Jewish settlement of Netzarim. One of the officers was in critical condition with a shot to the head.

In the confrontation, Israeli tanks and naval patrol boats fired heavy machineguns at a position of Force 17, a Palestinian security service, near Netzarim. A bulldozer later razed the position and two abandoned warehouses, the army said.



An Israeli army jeep hits the wreckage of a car used by Palestinians as a barricade during clashes on the outskirts of the West Bank town of Ramallah on Friday. — AP

THE HINDU

28 APR 2001

Turkey set to unveil economic reforms

By Batuk Gathani

BRUSSELS, APRIL 7. Turkey's economic and fiscal nightmare may be coming to end as the Minister of Economic Affairs, Mr. Kemal Dervis, hopes to announce next week "good news" to resolve the country's financial crisis.

This year, the Turkish stock market lost more than half its value. The currency lost 44 per cent against the U.S. dollar since it was floated on February 22. Business confidence is at its lowest ebb. Recently, when a trader threw his empty cash register at the Prime Minister, Mr. Bulent Ecevit, to show that he had no takings, the incident echoed the depressed sentiment in the Turkish market.

Mr. Dervis's optimism is fuelled by prospects of the government reaching a deal with the IMF and the World Bank over a proposed reform programme. Mr. Dervis returned empty-handed last week from an abortive fund raising mission to Washington, Berlin and Paris. Commentators say the root cause of the current malaise could be attributed to the widening chasm of divide and personality clash between the President and the Prime Minister. This has plunged Turkey into severe economic crisis with immediate loss of less than half a million jobs.

Mr. Dervis is working on economic reforms to boost domestic and international confidence in the economy and to ensure that the beleaguered and battered financial institutions are working. The reforms will focus on the inefficient and weak banking system and profligate public sector. The ailing public sector banks would be reorganized along commercial lines. The burden of taxes cannot be raised further as it is politically not acceptable and economically not viable. Instead, the government will embark on privatisation with new vigour and determination to ensure that the private sector's share in national

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economy is drastically reduced. Investors could be provided with new incentives to create more jobs.

Turkey has a high unemployment rate and an equally large number of workers are underemployed. Over four million workers have in recent years migrated to European countries and the government's dependence on their remittances has been increasing.

In February, the Governor of the Bank of Turkey, Mr. Gazi Ercel, resigned in a pique and most Turks then felt the wrong man stepped down. There is also growing disenchantment with the leadership of the 76-year-old Mr. Ecevit, who has consistently blamed "ministers and officials" for the crisis. In February, the President and the Prime Minister met for the first time since Mr. Ecevit stormed out of a meeting of the national security council after being accused of tolerating corruption and adopting a "casual" attitude to the economic reform process.

As politicians dither, the economy is in free fall. Foreign tourists are heading for Turkey to benefit from the devalued currency. The country may attract some 12 million tourists this year or almost 20 per cent more than last year when it earned nearly \$ 10 billion in tourist revenue.

The military is yet to respond to the present crisis. The military, which has staged three military coups in post-war years, regards itself the sole custodian of the Turkey's constitution and strong legacy of 'kamalist' secular heritage.

The army has often suspected the President, Mr. Sezer, of hobnobbing with religious fundamentalists since he opposed the recent military-inspired decree to sack thousands of Islamic fundamentalist civil servants and inviting pro-Islamic journalists at the republic day reception.

Israel vows relentless attacks

Washington, April 7

ISRAEL WILL retaliate "relentlessly" from now on and Palestinian security installations will be considered targets as long as security forces fail to prevent attacks on Israelis, a top aide to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Raanan Gissin, said today.

The Israeli rocket attack, the second this week, came hours after a top member of the militant Islamic Jihad group died in a West Bank explosion blamed on Israel. Earlier this week, another Islamic Jihad activist was killed in a helicopter gunship attack.

Sharon said Israel will conduct a constant struggle against terrorism. "Sometimes we will announce what we did, sometimes we will not announce what we did," he said.

Internal Security Minister Uzi Landau said Israeli forces should hit Palestinian targets "every day, hour after hour.... The price we will extract from the Palestinian Authority will become intolerable".

The latest air strike began around 12:30 a.m. yesterday when Israeli helicopters fired several rockets at two police stations in Beit Lahiya, a town in the northern Gaza Strip. The s knocked out large parts

of the facade of a two-storeyed building in a residential neighborhood. Palestinian police had cleared out when they heard the gunships approaching, but two bystanders were hit by shrapnel.

The attack also damaged a power station, leaving thousands of homes in Beit Lahiya, the nearby town of Beit Hanoun and the Jebaliya refugee camp without electricity.

At daybreak, Palestinians fired four mortar rounds at the isolated Israeli settlement of Netzarim, south of Gaza City, said settler Shlomo Kustiner. Israeli tanks fired shells toward the place where the mortars were fired, he said. The military spokesman was checking.

Just hours earlier, 30-year-old Islamic Jihad activist Iyad Hardan was killed in the West Bank town of Jenin when a public phone he used regularly exploded. The phone was located outside the town's jail, where Hardan was held off-and-on.

Palestinians charged that Israel was responsible, adding Hardan to a list of more than a dozen militants targeted and killed by Israeli forces in the current round of unrest. Israel has acknowledged some of the killings and has not commented on others.

After Friday prayers, some Palestinians threw rocks at Israeli police stationed outside the compound, police said. Islam-

ic officials pushed the rock-throwers back. One policeman was lightly injured, the police statement said.

On Thursday, Sharon directed his security agencies to make arrangements for Jews to visit the site again. A statement from his office said that "adherents of all religions should be allowed to go up to the Temple Mount."

Islamic Jihad leader Abdullah Shami pledged revenge. "The enemy understands only the language of killing," he said in Gaza.

The latest flare-up made it unlikely that Israel and the Palestinians would try to hold more talks soon on resuming security coordination.

A US-hosted meeting of Israeli and Palestinian security officials ended inconclusively on Wednesday. rafat spokesman Nabil Aburdeneh said it was not likely Israel would request another meeting, and unlikely the Palestinians would agree.

A Sharon spokesman said the process appeared to be dead.

The security chiefs' meeting in Athens between Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian Cabinet ministers Nabil Shaath and Saeb Erekat had been seen as a tentative step towards defusing tensions.

USA Today

UN FOR PALESTINIAN SELF-RULE

THE UN Human Rights Committee today adopted a resolution affirming the Palestinians' right to self-rule by an overwhelming majority.

The UN body passed a similar resolution on western Sahara.

A total of 48 countries in the 53-member committee voted in favour of the Palestinians' "inalienable right" to self-determination, with only the USA and Guatemala opposing.

The commission adopted the western Saharan resolution, urging Morocco and the pro-independence Polisario Front to work with the UN to find a lasting solution to the country's 25-year conflict. The human rights body also passed a resolution condemning the use of mercenaries in governments' efforts against those demanding self-rule.

AFP, Geneva

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 APR 2001

West Asia... on the brink

IT WAS a week when the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation appeared poised to spin totally out of control. Both sides upped the calibre of the weapons they deployed against each other and the methods and rhetoric involved with their use. It was also a week when the first glimmer of a return to calm began to appear.

Israel has used helicopter gunships and tanks to strike at Palestinian targets on a few occasions over the six months of confrontation. But towards the end of March and over the first week of April these heavy weapons were being used with far greater frequency. For their part, the Palestinians added mortar shells to the stones and bullets they have been showering on the Israelis. In the beginning of the uprising both sides were relatively careful about directing their fire at actual combatants though there were many innocent bystanders among the killed and injured. Of late, the discrimination has frayed with Palestinian militants carrying out suicide bomb attacks clearly intended to hit mainly civilians and Israelis demolishing the homes and fruit groves of Palestinians who did not appear to have anything much to do with the violence. Israeli settlers in the West Bank were also beginning to take the law into their own hands.

The rhetoric had also begun to change. A war-crazy Minister in the Israeli Cabinet, sickeningly nicknamed Gandhi, was calling for the bombing

of the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat's residence, the full Cabinet authorised a pro-active campaign, the chief of its army was talking increasingly of a war-like situation and their troops had begun to intrude into territory turned over to full Palestinian control. On the other side, the incitement bordering dangerously on racism had not abated, the religious overtones to militancy were getting more pronounced and Mr. Arafat (at the Arab summit) indicated an increasing proximity to hard-line states like Syria.

Several developments over the last fortnight should have tended to reverse the slide into chaos. They did not have the hoped-for immediate impact and it is difficult to assess the manner in which these developments contributed to the more hopeful signs available by the week-end. They should have had an effect, because they produced influences that would have come to bear on Mr. Arafat and Israel's Prime Minister,

Several developments over the last fortnight should have tended to reverse the slide into chaos... Mr. Arafat and Mr. Sharon interpreted these in a way that suited their own rhetorical standpoint, says Kesava Menon.

wider conflict that looms if the uprising continues to rage. Immediately after the summit Mr. Mubarak travelled to Washington and persuaded the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, to formulate a more balanced assessment of the responsibility that Israel and the Palestinians bore for the on-going unrest. Mr. Mubarak also extracted a promise that the U.S. would be actively engaged in peace-making between the two sides. Within a couple of days of the Mubarak-Bush meeting, Israel's Foreign Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, met with leading Palestinian negotiators in Athens. Despite his very strong pro-peace inclinations, Mr. Peres told the Palestinians that it was impossible for



Israeli soldiers struggle with a Palestinian protester in the West Bank city of Hebron near a Palestinian shop which was destroyed by an explosion... a recurring cycle of violence.

Mr. Ariel Sharon, neither of whom has lost control over their security forces or their people. But the two leaders held out interpretations of these developments that suited their own rhetorical standpoint. It is also possible that both leaders realised that they had to pull matters back now if they were to retain control over events.

One development that took place was the Arab summit in Amman on March 27-28. During the summit, Mr. Arafat did cosy up to Syria's President, Mr. Bashar al Assad, and they agreed to bury their differences. But the summit as a whole failed to extend substantial support to the extent that the Palestinians could have hoped for. There are also reports that Egypt's President, Mr. Hosni Mubarak, and Jordan's King Abdullah told Mr. Arafat that they neither believed that the violent uprising would produce results nor would they allow their countries to be dragged into the

the Israeli Cabinet to re-start negotiations on substantive issues so long as the violence continued unabated.

Everything could still go horribly wrong. But as the week-end approached it did seem as if the two sides would begin to try and implement the Sharm-el-Sheikh agreement of last November. As per this agreement the Authority is to re-arrest Islamic militants let out of its jails, order its securitymen not to fire on Israelis, order them to stop other Palestinians from confronting the Israelis and stop incitement over public radio and TV. For its part, Israel will have to pull back its armoured forces from the vicinity of Palestinian towns and villages and end the closure of the Palestinian territories. If these steps are taken in the next few days both sides might be in a position to consider the Taba agreement of December that provides the outline for a final settlement.

THE HINDU

20 APR 2002

Israel rockets Gaza police stations

GAZA CITY, APRIL 6. Israel rocketed two Palestinian police stations early today, shelled another position and knocked out power to thousands of homes after four Israeli communities were attacked by Palestinian mortar fire.

Israel will retaliate "relentlessly" from now on and Palestinian security installations will be considered targets as long as security forces fail to prevent attacks on Israelis, said Mr. Raanan Gissin, a top aide to the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon. A cabinet minister said the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, should be declared a war criminal, and Israeli forces should hit Palestinian targets constantly.

In the past, Israel had only launched air strikes if Israelis were killed or wounded in Palestinian attacks. No one was hurt in Thursday's mortar fire on three Jewish settlements and an Israeli communal farm on the border with the Gaza strip.

The Israeli attack, the second this week, came only hours after a top member of the militant Islamic Jihad group died in a West Bank explosion blamed on Israel. Earlier this week, another Islamic Jihad activist was killed in a helicopter gunship attack.

Alluding to a new stage of confrontation, Mr. Sharon said Israel would conduct a constant struggle against terrorism. "Sometimes we will announce what we did, sometimes we will not announce what we did," he said.

The Internal Security Minister,



**Police officers search
Palestinian police
headquarters after an Israeli
rocket attack in the town of
Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza
Strip, on Friday. — AP**

Mr. Uzi Landau, said Israeli forces should hit Palestinian targets "every day, hour after hour".

He told Israel radio, "the price we will exact from the Palestinian authority will become intolerable". Mr. Landau said Palestinian officials behind attacks on Israel are "not immune" to Israeli attack.

The latest air strike began on Thursday when Israeli helicopters fired several rockets at two police stations in Beit Lahiya, a town in the northern Gaza strip.

The rockets knocked out large parts of the facade of a two-storey building in a residential neighborhood. — AP

THE HINDU

7 APR 2001

Israelis plot little escapes to fight the blues

JEBORAH CAMIEL
JERUSALEM

SICK and tired of a six-month-long Palestinian uprising, Israelis have turned to the one weapon sure to conquer battle fatigue — escapism.

An unprecedented number are easing the strain of what they all refer to as "the situation" by going to the movies or away on vacation, slumping in front of television sets, snacking heavily and even rearranging the furniture.

Some 71 Israelis, at least 367 Palestinians and 13 Israeli Arabs have died in the Palestinian Intifada against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip which exploded in late September when peacemaking reached a stalemate.

Now the Jewish state, which has long prided itself on not blinking in the face of Arab hostility, is flinching if not militarily then emotionally from the impact of a litany of bombings and gun battles that is surging instead of slackening.

Diversion is the key — revenues are up for restaurants, night clubs and travel agencies, according to the newspaper *Ha'aretz*. The travel agents' association predicts a five percent increase in Israelis going abroad in 2001.

Theatre and cinema ticket sales have surged by 15 to 20 percent over the same period last year, the Central Bureau of Statistics reported. For those who no longer feel like leaving home, soap operas and cooking shows help pass the time.

"A Touch of Happiness," Israel's new and only locally-made soap opera, has swept the ratings, captivating 9.1 percent of cable viewers in recent weeks, *Ha'aretz* said.

"We made sure not to bring military reserve duty or politics into the plot," said Leora Nir, co-owner of the Viva soap opera channel, told *Ha'aretz*. "The plots have no relevance to reality."

Viewers have abandoned once-popular political talk shows.

But while Israelis may be home, they don't feel safe. An Interior Ministry spokeswoman said the number of requests for weapons licences had risen in the last six months since the uprising began.

Whether on the town or at home, Israelis are snacking in record volume.

Blue Square, one of Israel's top supermarket operators, posted a fourth quarter profit rise of 23 percent in 2000. The company said gains came despite a sharp deceleration in economic activity in the wake of the uprising.



The Jewish state is flinching emotionally if not militarily from the litany of bombings and gun battles. Diversion is the key — revenues are up for restaurants, night clubs and travel agencies. A five percent increase in Israelis going abroad in 2001 has been reported

Chairman David Brodet said the violence may have helped Blue Square, since many consumers were cooking more at home.

A Bank Hapoalim report said sweets and confections were likely to retain strong sales despite the slowdown as a sombre national mood kept Israelis glued to their televisions.

If Israeli couch potatoes are getting up from the sofa at all, they're doing so only to move it. *Ha'aretz* said the most popular New Age concept in the country was Feng Shui, which says shuffling your furniture fosters a sense of order and harmony.

Those who tear themselves away from the television to read prefer light fare these days.

Steimatzy's, Israel's largest book store chain,

reported an increase in the sale of leisure and crossword magazines; Israeli television guide magazines are also experiencing a sharp rise.

Since the troubles began, bookworms also fancy fables. *Polina*, by Israeli author Gabi Nitzan about a kingdom with no wars and no politics, topped Steimatzy's best-seller list until being bumped by Jose Saramago's *Blindness* — a novel about a community whose members slowly lose their vision.

Despite their dark mood, the number of Israelis submitting requests for U.S. Green Card residency permits since the violence flared has declined from the same period last year, the U.S. Embassy said.

On the other hand, while they may not want to leave it, fewer citizens are prepared to serve their country as before.

Yesh Gvul, a group that supports conscripts and reservists who refuse to report for duty in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, said it had seen a "terrific upsurge" in what it calls selective objectors.

Yesh Gvul spokesman Peretz Kidron said the number of regular conscripts refusing to serve in the two areas for ideological reasons had jumped in the last half-year from zero to 10.

Kidron reported a similar trend among reservists.

"Previous to the Intifada we would count individuals... Now we're unable to keep up. We're getting scores of calls," he said.

A spokeswoman for the Army said it had no figures on selective objectors since "The Army doesn't distinguish between soldiers who refuse to serve in the territories from those who refuse to serve at all".

Love of country is not the only kind to have slackened. Some age-old pastimes have been driven into a slump by the violence.

Jerusalem pharmacist Avi Raz said he had sold less Viagra and fewer condoms since the clashes began, but more over-the-counter tranquillisers.

"There is a greater demand for non-prescription calming drugs like valerian and a decrease in demand for Viagra and means of contraception like condoms. People simply have other things on their minds — and they're not feeling relaxed," Raz said.

Dr Alexander Olshanyetsky, an impotence specialist at a Jerusalem clinic, said Viagra sales had dropped because people were simply "not in the mood".

"A state that loses its security is a state of impotent men," he said. Olshanyetsky noted that the brothel business, similarly dependent on the mood of the nation, was also "in crisis".

He said an Israeli blockade of the West Bank and Gaza meant a 20 percent loss in clients coming to brothels from the Palestinian areas.

"The girls say their base income from regular clients has slumped. Pimps who usually acquire girls for about \$10,000 are now getting them for \$6,000 because demand has dropped," Olshanyetsky said. "People don't feel like having sex. A man who lives in (the Jewish settlement of) Gillo, where Palestinian gunmen are firing — do you think he feels like making love?"

(Reuters)

W Asia peace talks at Athens amid mounting violence

REUTERS

ATHENS, April 4. - The Israeli foreign minister, Mr Shimon Peres, and the Palestinian minister of planning and international cooperation, Mr Nabil Shaath, met here today for the highest level bi-lateral talks in two months, but under the shadow of escalating violence in West Asia.

"We said we wouldn't negotiate under fire, but we can definitely talk about how to stop the fire," Mr Peres said on the eve of the session. This was the first public meeting between Israeli and Palestinian Cabinet ministers since Mr Sharon's election.

Mr Peres and Mr Shaath first

held talks together with the EU security chief, Mr Javier Solana. Mr Solana urged both sides to break the cycle of violence.

He said he had appealed to both sides "to condemn violence from whatever quarter, exercise maximum restraint and to renew their security cooperation on a systematic and regular basis".

Mr Shaath said he had asked EU to intervene in the West Asia crisis. "Europe has intervened in more serious confrontations. We cannot allow Israel to act outside the realms of international legality."

Israeli missiles streaked through the night sky of the Gaza strip yesterday in retaliation

for the wounding of an Israeli baby in a mortar bomb attack on a Jewish settlement.

Israeli helicopters fired about 30 missiles at a Palestinian naval police base, close to Mr Yasser Arafat's presidential headquarters and an installation of the Force-17 security group.

At least five people were wounded in the 45 minute air-raid. Mr Arafat's home was not damaged, but a building at the base was destroyed.

In a separate attack, Israeli helicopters fired about 30 missiles at a compound in Rafah in the southern Gaza strip, used by Palestinian police. At least 43 people were wounded, sources said.

- 5 APR 2001

Mubarak to give Bush a piece of his mind

By Kesava Menon

HD-16

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), APRIL 2. The Egyptian President, Mr. Hosni Mubarak, is to meet the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, later today even as the situation in West Asia has slipped another rung towards a disaster following an Israeli incursion into Palestinian controlled territory.

Mr. Mubarak had said that he was prepared for a combative interaction with his U.S. interlocutors and that he would try to persuade Mr. Bush that the administration's current hands-off policy towards Israel-Palestinian peace-making is mistaken.

Mr. Mubarak has gone to Washington with a sense of grievance. As he told *Newsweek* magazine in an interview, he feels that the U.S. Administration has ignored him last week when they ordered the veto of a resolution at the U.N. Security Council. This resolution, mooted at Palestinian behest and supported by the Arab world, called for the posting of international observers in the Palestinian territories to protect the people there from Israeli security forces.

Even if passed, the resolution would have been redundant so long as Israel refused to allow such observers to come to the area. However, the U.S. administration decided to veto the resolution since they believed that it

was not balanced or impartial. Mr. Mubarak's grievance is that the U.S. exercised its veto even as the Arab League at its summit in Amman was expressing support for the resolution and despite the calls from him asking the U.S. to delay its veto.

The Egyptians are hardly making a secret of their view that the U.S. Administration's policy towards peace-making is a misguided one. They believe that Mr. Bush's stance, that peace-making will not start and that he will not meet Mr. Yasser Arafat, till the Palestinian Authority President issues a call for a halt in violence, is based on insufficient knowledge of the situation on the ground. Mr. Arafat, the Egyptians believe,

cannot issue the call nor will be obeyed so long as the Palestinian people feel as frustrated as they currently are. Egypt's Foreign Minister, Mr. Amr Moussa, recently proposed, on a visit to Washington, that the levels of violence can be brought down if the Palestinian people are given reason to believe that the peace talks will begin in three weeks to a month and if Israel's stranglehold on the Palestinian territories is eased.

It is fortuitous that Mr. Mubarak is meeting Mr. Bush at this critical juncture. But if the meeting fails it could contribute to the potential for danger in the region.

Late on Saturday night, Israeli security

forces intruded into Palestinian controlled territory and abducted five members of a security service that provides bodyguards for Palestinian leaders.

The Israelis believe that this outfit, Force-17, has been acting in collusion with Islamic militant groups to carry out bomb attacks inside Israel and shootings of civilians passing by the territories.

Over the past couple of months, Palestinian suicide bombers have hit targets inside Israel signalling a departure from the practice followed in the earlier days of the current uprising when they avoided attacks inside Israel proper.

Israel has throughout been hitting targets inside Palestinian controlled territory with shells from helicopter gun-ships and tanks. But Saturday night's incursion has been viewed by the Palestinians as the launch of a new Israeli policy to send troops into Palestinian territory. Israel's threat to re-occupy Palestinian territory is still not taken seriously but Saturday night's incursion is being viewed as a minor flourish on the same plan.

Israelis now fear that the Palestinians will kidnap Israeli soldiers and take them into the territories or arrest Israeli civilians who stray there. If such developments do take place matters might soon spiral out of anyone's control.

THE HINDU

3 APR 2001

110-12

SATURDAY, MARCH 31, 2001

WEST ASIA AND THE U.S. VETO

81/3

AN ASSERTIVE VETO on the Palestinian question by the U.S. in the United Nations Security Council is a sad commentary on the failure of the present Bush administration in Washington to energise the stalled West Asia peace process. The United States has now openly upheld Israel's opposition to the proposal for the formation as also deployment of a U.N. observer force that could ensure the "protection" of the Palestinian civilians. The idea has been supported by a majority in the Security Council, including China and Russia as permanent members. Their reasoning is rooted in the empirical reality that most of those killed in recent months in the ongoing confrontation between the Palestinians and the Jewish people in West Asia belong to the former group. Not surprisingly, therefore, the U.S. has taken the line that it is not averse to empathising with the Palestinian civilians in the present West Asian context. Today's inter-state political realities in that region, insofar as they concern the question of rightful space for the Palestinians, are still defined by the proactive peace-making role that Washington began playing within and beyond the framework of the relevant Madrid conference and the Oslo process of the early 1990s. Now a hesitant 'peace-maker', the U.S. is obviously keen to avoid being supportive of Israel in its ongoing conflict at all levels with the Palestinians. Yet, having vetoed a draft Security Council resolution for the first time in several years, the U.S. says that it owes "no apology" to anyone for its "relationship with Israel". Washington cannot also conceal its embarrassment at having been forced by Moscow, an original co-sponsor of the Madrid conference, to play a limited but avoidable zero-sum game in respect of Israel and the Palestinians at the present sensitive juncture. Israel has very recently anointed Mr. Ariel Sharon as its Prime Minister in spite of his dubious reputation as an anti-Palestine fundamentalist.

The U.S. is keen, nonetheless, to retain leverage as a credible and even-handed mediator in regard to the historical dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. Yet, it is a moot point whether and, if so, how long Washington will remain inclined to bend over backwards if necessary to keep the Palestinians in some measure of good humour in these circumstances. Overall, the U.S. has now chosen to describe the vetoed proposals as "unbalanced, unwise and unworkable steps". Washington argues that its veto cannot be seen as a negation of its policy of "standing up for a peace process" in West Asia. But the "process" requires an ability to create a win-win situation for both the Israelis and Palestinians, and there is no sign yet of such a formula.

A fine irony is that the U.S., which still swears by the efficacy of the decade-long U.N. sanctions against Iraq, is now seen to be wary of any intervention by the global organisation in Israel's affairs. Two realities diminish the incongruity somewhat. Washington is inclined to consider reshaping the current anti-Iraq sanctions into punitive measures aimed solely against Mr. Saddam Hussein and his suspected plans of acquiring weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. is also keen, no less, to try and carry conviction with the Palestinians. In the short run, much will depend on how far the U.S. can persuade Israel to avoid brinkmanship of the type indicated by its latest air raids over the headquarters of an elite security outfit of the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat. Another test of statesmanship is whether the U.S. can goad the Jewish state to recognise that almost the entire Arab world has avidly rallied behind the Palestinians in their present "intifada" or "revolt". This critical political affirmation by the Arab League at its latest summit in Amman overshadows the organisation's persistent fractures on the Iraq question.

THE HINDU

31 MAR 2001

Israel attacks Gaza, two killed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

JERUSALEM, March 29. - Israeli defence helicopter gunships rocketed five targets of Force-17, Mr Yasser Arafat's presidential guard unit, in Gaza and West Bank in Palestine, killing two persons and wounding 60 others. The action was criticised by USA which said, force cannot resolve the West Asia problem.

Israel launched attack last night as Arab leaders ended their summit in Amman agreeing to support Palestinian "uprising" against Israel, and demanding for an international force in the region to protect the Palestinians.

Israeli foreign minister, Mr Shimon Peres criticised the final communique of the summit as "an obstacle to peace that only intensifies the hatred. This is an attempt to unilaterally dictate policy instead of return-

ing to the negotiating table".

Two Palestinians, Mr Arafat's presidential bodyguard of Force-17 and a civilian woman, were killed in the latest attacks in Ramallah. The attacks followed two days of three suicide-bombings and sniper attacks, targeting Israelis that left two Palestinian attackers and three Israelis dead, and more than 30 injured.

Mr Arafat's home in Gaza was also damaged as gunships blasted a Force-17 building, used as a weapons arsenal, just 100 metre from Mr Arafat's house.

Mr Arafat was in Amman for the Arab summit during the attacks.

The White House criticised both sides in the conflict and said Israelis and Palestinians "should live up to the commitments they have made, combat terrorism and engage in dialogue".

"The tragic cycle of incite-



A Palestinian police officer walks through the rubble of the headquarters of Mr Yasser Arafat's presidential guard in Ramallah on Thursday. - AP/PTI

ment, provocation and violence has gone on far too long," a White House statement said. "The President calls upon both sides to exercise maximum restraint to calm the situation and set the foundation for a return to negotiations."

THE STATESMAN

30 MAR 2001

Palestinians drop call for UN observers

UNHQ, March 27

AFTER MARATHON negotiations, the Palestinians dropped their call for UN observers to help end six months of violence and agreed instead to let the Security Council decide on measures to protect Palestinian civilians.

But it wasn't clear whether the USA would accept the compromise. The USA, which is Israel's closest ally on the Security Council, had threatened to veto any resolution that referred to a UN force to protect Palestinians.

Palestinian supporters from the Non-Aligned Movement of developing countries said they had reached agreement with the four European members of the Security Council on a compromise resolution that would call for a new "mechanism" to protect Palestinian civilians.

"It is acceptable to everybody and we are waiting for the message from Washington," said Bangladesh's UN Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, current head of the NAM in the Council.

With the Palestinians pressing for a vote before today's summit of Arab leaders in the Jordanian capital Amman, consultations among Council members continued into the Monday night.

Acting US Ambassador James Cunningham refused to comment on the US position when he arrived for the meeting.

Earlier, he said the USA "wanted to support something that would be useful, that had support of the Council... We're looking to



AFP PHOTO

An Israeli policeman inspects the remains of a car that exploded on Tuesday in Jerusalem's Talpiot area. The radical Palestinian group Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the car bomb blast which injured at least three people near a supermarket.

see if that's still possible to find."

"I'm very hopeful," said acting ambassador Valeri Kuchynski of Ukraine, whose country holds the rotating Security Council presidency. "There is a chance there may be a consensus."

Chowdhury said the resolution would ask Secretary-General Kofi Annan to consult the Israelis and Palestinians on steps to implement the resolution and report to the council within a month.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 MAR 2001

UN fails to reach agreement on West Asia

REUTERS

UNHQ, March 27. - The UN Security Council failed to reach an agreement early today on Israeli-Palestinian clashes before an Arab summit opened in Amman, Jordan, despite three days of marathon negotiations.

Delegates missed their self-imposed deadline to have a resolution adopted in time for the beginning of the summit and adjourned for about eight hours to resume talks.

"It doesn't look promising, but we'll give it another try," Palestinian UN delegate Mr Nasser Al-kidwa said.

Chief US representative Mr James Cunningham told reporters: "We are close enough and we could agree if the others were willing to come on board. And we are far enough apart that we could easily not agree."

But Mr Al-kidwa said that his

supporters on the council would put the original Palestinian-initiated resolution to a vote if it appeared no compromise could be found. That draft calls for an unarmed UN observer force to protect Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza - an action Washington would veto.

A resolution in the 15-member council needs nine votes in favour and no veto from any one of its five permanent members.

A measure calling for a UN observer force failed in December because it obtained only eight votes, thereby sparing Washington the use of its veto.

The Security Council is trying to merge three general positions: the Palestinian one, a European compromise and the US stand.

The Palestinians and their seven supporters on the Security Council want members to express willingness for an ob-

server force or at least leave the door open for one by agreeing on an unspecified "mechanism" to protect civilians.

Negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians are Bangladesh, Jamaica, Colombia, Singapore, Tunisia, Mauritius and Mali. China supports this group but the positions of Russia and Ukraine are not clear yet.

The USA, Israel's ally, has been negotiating intensely on a text that would not commit council members to any specific action without the agreement of Israel and the Palestinians.

Western European members of the council - Britain, France, Ireland and Norway - have proposed a compromise text, which is the basis for most of the negotiations.

The Europeans want the council to play a role in the crisis but do not want any resolution that would draw a US veto. They would abstain on the original Palestinian text.

THE STATESMAN

28 MAR 2001

Where Arab, African identities merge

By Kesava Menon

EDFU (UPPER EGYPT), MARCH 27. A line of worshippers straggles down a bare hillside from the turquoise blue mosque perched atop it. In five days of travel up and down the Nile this is a rare occasion in which religious observances are to be seen in open assertive display. Too many centuries have passed for the regular observance of religious custom in the pagan temples of Old Egypt but it seems fitting with Egypt's dichotomous soul that this display should be associated with a small non-descript shrine rather than one of the Turkish style mosques in some of the villages.

Some of the 10 per cent of Egyptians who are Copts (Christians) live in pockets in this stretch of southern Egypt and there is one spanking new church to be seen along the banks of the Nile. But most villagers in these parts, like the majority of Egyptians, are Sunni Muslims and their mosques form the centre of village life. In their architecture these mosques convey a message. Most of these mosques are neither imitations of the style favoured by conquering Muslim dynasties of the past (of which the Turks were the latest) nor are they the confections conjured up by the architectural imagination and wealth of the Gulf. For the most part, they can at best be described as mud-igloos that convey the message that religion, while central to the lives of the people

does not dominate. It is because a religion born in the desert can only penetrate so deep into the consciousness of a people whose ancestors were among the first on the earth to live in settled agricultural communities? Islam, perhaps the entire Semitic religious tradition, was forged in a harsher clime where the raw power of nature overwhelms and the strongest emotion evoked is gratitude for being alive. The Nile valley might well be a "600-mile oasis" since this rich riparian land, that is

INSIDE EGYPT — II

just 12 miles across at its broadest, has barren desert on either side. But while the geographical setting as a whole brings out the contrast between life and death vividly, the Almighty's caprices impact on the lives of the valley's people in finer detail — snake-bites, disease or the variations of plenty and need. In the latter situation, it is not a matter of bending before the Almighty's power but of adjusting to its moods or of invoking it to be more beneficial than punitive.

Islam has perhaps not penetrated into the consciousness of the Upper Egyptians as deeply as it has in other parts of the world because it is still in some ways considered an alien import. The people in these parts are most definitely African in their physiognomy and culture. Traces of other races are notice-

able in physical features and Arabic is, of course, the sole spoken language. But for all that the pride in being African is unmistakable. At a factory producing alabaster figurines for sale to tourists a Saidi (as the denizens of Upper Egypt are called) points to three phallic figures of different sizes. "This is Egyptian", he says pointing to the largest one and then at the middle-sized one, "that is Nubian". (The Nubians are the African people who live in the stretch between the southern Egyptian town of Aswan and Sudan). Then pointing to the smallest-sized he says with a smirk, "And that is Arab".

Besides being proud of their Africanness, the people of Upper Egypt also appear to be stubbornly rural. Like the peasantry in large parts of India these people seem to be in deliberate resistance to sophistication and even to look on some of the mores of modern life as being beneath their dignity. They look well-fed but even those farmers who seem more prosperous than their brethren seem to look on modern conveniences as something not really relevant to their lives. TV antennae sprout from every house-top (and as always, Mr. Amritabh Bachhan is a topic of conversation).

Day-to-day living does not appear to have changed in its essentials from what it was centuries ago but the wine that Egypt was once famous for is no longer on open sale.

West Asia peace efforts fall flat; clashes, terror continue

Bomb blast rocks EU has alternative Israel, no injuries for UN observers

Herzliya Pituach (Israel), March 23: A bomb exploded in the coastal Israeli city of Herzliya Pituach in an apparent rebels attack on Thursday which caused no injuries, Israeli the police said. Israel has been hit by several bomb blasts during almost six months of a Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation.

On Thursday's blast shattered the windows of nearby restaurants but hurt nobody.

"There was an explosion next to a car that was parked outside a restaurant in Herzliya Pituach. The bomb crew has determined that the incident has a terrorist context," a police spokeswoman said.

"It was great luck that there weren't more people in the street. It was a terrorist attack," Ms Shlomit Herzberg added.

The police had earlier said they suspected the bomb might have been linked to a criminal attack rather than rebels.

On Wednesday, Israeli police neutralised a bomb placed in the trunk of a car in a Jewish area of Jerusalem.

The bomb was discovered after a resident of an ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighbourhood bordering Arab East Jerusalem saw a white Mazda parked illegally and called in a traffic warden to issue a ticket.

Many people have been killed in bomb attacks in Israel this month. Well over 400 have died in the uprising against the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip — at least 348 Palestinians, 66 Israelis and 13 Israeli Arabs. (Reuters)

BY EVELYN LEOPOLD

United Nations, March 23: European nations proposed on Thursday an alternative Security Council resolution on the West Asia crisis eliminating Palestinian calls for immediate authorisation of a UN observer force.

Instead council members Britain, France, Norway and Ireland would ask Secretary-General Kofi Annan to consult Israelis and Palestinians in search of agreement "on any kind of mechanism to protect civilians."

Israel has flatly rejected, until at least a peace pact is signed, any international intervention or observers to help quell the six-month uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

At least 348 Palestinians, 66 Israelis and 13 Israeli Arabs have been killed. The European action was an effort to gain US support and avoid Washington's veto shortly before an Arab League summit that begins on March 27.

But the draft may not satisfy Palestinians and their supporters. It also may not satisfy Washington, whose ambassador James Cunningham said was still studying the text.

"We have to take a look at it," Mr Cunningham said, adding that he appreciated the European initiative and "the thought behind it." At issue is a repeat call that the 15-Nation Council, at minimum, state its willingness in principle to send unarmed UN observers to the West Bank and Gaza even if Israel refuses to allow them into the territories. Palestinians want a vote on Friday but diplomats said haggling may stretch through the weekend. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

24 MAR 2001

USA backs Israeli stance on violence

REUTERS & DPA

JERUSALEM, March 22. - Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon said today after a visit to the USA that Washington supported his position of not surrendering to Palestinian "violence and terrorism".

"There is complete American agreement and understanding that we cannot surrender to violence and terrorism," Mr Sharon told Israel's Army Radio today after returning from USA.

Reiterating his refusal to resume peace talks while Palestinians continue their uprising against Israeli rule, he said, "There will be no peace negotiations under threats of terrorism and violence."

There was no immediate comment on his remarks from the United States, where Mr Sharon had held talks with President Mr George Bush and UN's

secretary-general Mr Kofi Annan.

In fresh violence overnight, a member of Palestinian President Mr Yasser Arafat's special guard was killed by Israeli tank shells which the army said it fired in response to mortar fire on two Jewish settlements in Gaza Strip.

The Israeli police said they had foiled a car bombing yesterday in an ultra-orthodox neighbourhood of Jerusalem when they neutralised a bomb in the boot of a stolen car.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian authority warned today that the current deadlock in the peace process will have dire consequences for the entire region unless the United States and the International Community acted quickly.

"The entire region is suffering from political vacuum and paralysis," Mr Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a key aide to Palestinian

CIA ROLE ENDS

WASHINGTON, March 22. - The White House has ended the Central Intelligence Agency's role in the Middle East as broker between the Israeli and Palestinian security services, the Washington Post said today. The decision, aimed at prompting direct co-operation between both sides, came despite requests from top Palestinian officials for a continuation of CIA's role in exchanging intelligence and putting down terrorism, according to an unnamed senior US official quoted by the daily. - AFP

president Mr Yasser Arafat said.

This, he said, was because "the US administration is still considering what steps to take in the peace process and the

government in Israel is unable to make a political decision." He said it is urgent for the international community to move quickly to rescue the situation and save the peace process that has been frozen by Israel.

Mr Abu Rudeineh said Israel "is demanding too many things."

"Israel should honour the signed agreements and move forward in the peace process because the alternative will be disastrous to the whole region," he warned.

The Israeli B'tzelem Human Rights Organisation today said the Israeli army, police and judicial system have treated violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians with "impotence and laxity".

Settlers have killed six Palestinians since the Palestinian uprising began in September last year, the organisation said, and the Israeli Ha'aretz daily

quoted a B'tzelem official as saying that police often fabricate cases of settler violence on the grounds that a complaint had not been lodged.

China stand: China will continue supporting the Palestinians' struggle to regain their legitimate national rights and interests, foreign minister Mr Tang Jiaxuan said here today, PFI reports from Beijing.

China's stand on the vexed West Asia peace process was conveyed during a conversation over telephone between Mr Tang and his Palestinian counterpart Mr Farouk al Kadoumy, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Mr Sun Yuxi said.

"Continuous conflicts between Palestine and Israel have stagnated the West Asia peace process, and threatened regional peace and stability," Mr Tang said.



Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon, (left) is greeted by New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in New York on Wednesday. - AP/PTI

THE STATESMAN

23 MAR 2001

Sharon wins some points

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), MARCH 21. While Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, won some key points in his exchange with the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, in Washington yesterday he did not win all, is the assessment of Israeli analysts. Mr. Bush's statement that he would "facilitate" but not "force" negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians was a key gain for Mr. Sharon but the new U.S. President did not take on board all of the Israeli leader's suggestions as to how the administration should conduct itself on West Asian affairs. The Israeli press also reports that the U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, told Mr. Sharon in private that Israel must ease up the pressure they are currently subjecting the Palestinians to.

It has been clear from the time that the former U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, was unable to close the gap between the Israelis and the Palestinians despite all his efforts that the new President would not get as deeply involved. Nevertheless Mr. Sharon would have been pleased to hear from Mr. Bush himself that the U.S. would be adopting a more hands-off role in the dealings between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

With the Palestinian uprising still raging in the territories, Mr. Sharon has opted for the waiting game. The Palestinians have been subjected to a crippling embargo on the movement of people and goods and there is

evidence that this "collective punishment," as the Palestinians call it, is having an effect. There is a weariness with the on-going conflict and the Palestinians are just about exploring whether they can convert the violent conflict into a non-violent one. Mr. Sharon clearly hopes that attrition will tell and that the Palestinians will eventually come into what he would describe as a more reasonable state of mind. If Mr. Bush, as he has promised, refrains from forcing the two sides to negotiate it would facilitate Mr. Sharon's strategy.

It is, however, far from certain that Mr. Sharon's success will not be shortlived. All said and done, Mr. Bush has not done much more than follow the cautious approach that he had indicated at the outset.

On the down-side for Mr. Sharon he has not been able to get full U.S. endorsement for the view that terrorism is the key issue in West Asia and that the U.S. and Israel should address this jointly before they took up the task of peace-making. Mr. Bush and his officials have also declined to adopt Mr. Sharon's terminology and describe Palestinian violence as terrorism or to endorse his view that the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, has instigated the violence. While Mr. Bush has not categorically stated that he would soon meet Mr. Arafat neither has he accepted Mr. Sharon's suggestion that he should rule out any such meeting till violence in the Palestinian territories has abated.

Starved to death: How Israel punishes Palestine

Cambridge, Massachusetts: On any given day or night, 200,000 Israeli settlers move freely in and out of the West Bank and Gaza to go to work, shop, run errands and attend school or university. Israeli trucks supply their settlements with food, fuel and the necessities to keep these areas running, their gardens green and their supermarkets well stocked.

For Adel Ibrahim T'nuh from the Palestinian village of Teqoa, things don't run so smoothly. A father of four young children and a day labourer in Israel, Mr T'nuh hasn't worked for five months because the Israelis have put West Bank and Gazan Palestinians under total closure.

Mr T'nuh recently tried to enter Israel through the Bethlehem-Gilo checkpoint in a desperate effort to find work. There, at 6 am, he was chased down by dogs and sent back by Israeli soldiers for trying to enter Israel. He tried again to enter, but was arrested and beaten. Fortunately, Israeli and Palestinian human rights workers happened to be at the

scene and intervened. Since September, three million Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and Gaza have been living under a siege imposed by the Israeli military occupation. All movement of people and goods is completely restricted and controlled by the Israeli Army. The Army has dug trenches and moats and built mounds of dirt to close Palestinian towns and villages. Only a few days ago, Ramallah, a city that provides education, health, social and economic services for 80,000 Palestinians in the surrounding area, was totally sealed off. The Israeli government's attempt to dampen international criticism by easing the blockade in Ramallah has had little effect on the siege in the rest of the West Bank and Gaza.

Food, fuel and other basic necessities have become scarce in those areas. After announcing that Palestinians have become among the poorest people in the world, the World Food Program, a United Nations agency, is now distributing flour in Gaza. Poverty levels have doubled in five months. The

permit applications. But the power of final approval still remained in Israeli hands. Since most Palestinian officials received special exemptions from closure restrictions, the authority made only half-hearted demands over the years to end them. Some even profited from the closure through exclusive permits from the Israelis to import goods and maintain monopolies over basic goods in Palestinian markets. However, for Adel T'nuh and the remaining 99 per cent of the Palestinians, closure simply made life worse and a real peace more elusive.

Israeli officials admit that the closure in all its forms cannot protect Israel from suicide bombers or other potential attacks. Yet the desperation and bitterness this policy creates among the Palestinian communities makes the situation more volatile and less safe for all Israelis.

When former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin imposed the closure policy in 1993, he convinced his supporters that it

was part of a "separation" policy that would be the first step toward the two-state solution. But in reality, Israel's 34 years of military occupation, the integration of electric and water systems, and the building of Jewish settlements and bypass roads have made it all but impossible to separate the Palestinian West Bank and Gazan communities from Israel's control. Separation leading to Palestinian statehood is a myth. The closure policy has instead solidified an apartheid-like system of separate rights and privileges for Jews and Palestinians.

Americans have learned in their history that separate cannot be equal. Israelis must understand that the way to end the cycle of violence cannot be through closure and sieges against entire civilian populations. Only when Israel dismantles the closure policy and accepts equality for Jews and Palestinians alike as a matter of human rights will peace be attainable.

By arrangement with the New York Times

BY ALLEGRA PACHECO



NO LIFE: Palestinians protest Israeli occupation

siege has caused over \$2 billion in losses to the Palestinian economy, and unemployment levels have soared to 48 per cent.

The cause of all this suffering is not an act of nature. It is collective punishment that the Israelis can reverse at any time. The failure of other nations to oppose these basic human rights violations has allowed the Israelis to continue impoverishing a whole civilian population. The latest siege is an expansion of the closure policy that restricts the Palestinian movement, a policy that has been in effect since 1993. The Oslo peace agreement further enforced the closure policy by conscripting the Palestinian Authority to serve as the local intake office for processing travel

US won't force peace in West Asia: Bush

Washington, March 21

PRESIDENT GEORGE W Bush promised Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that the United States will help "give peace a chance" in West Asia but said Israel and the Palestinians must reach an agreement of their own accord.

"Our administration will not force peace," Bush said on Tuesday after his first meeting with the new Israeli leader. He added that the United States will "facilitate peace" and work "with those responsible for peace."

Sharon repeated his position that Israel will not reopen negotiations with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat until violence subsides in the region.

"The first thing and the most important thing is to bring security to the citizens of Israel," Sharon said. "That is the first thing we have to accomplish before we start with our negotiations." He said Israel and the United States "are partners in



US President George W Bush with wife Laura (right) at the White House on Tuesday.

the struggle against terrorism," Sharon said. "That is the first thing we have to accomplish before we start with our negotiations." He said Israel and the United States "are partners in

afterward that included a brief question-and-answer session with reporters.

"We both talked about how to best keep the peace," Bush said with Sharon seated next to him in the oval office.

"I assured the Prime Minister that my administration would work hard to lay the foundation of peace in the middle-east. We work with our nations in the middle east to give peace a chance. Secondly, I told him that our nation will not try to force peace, that we'll facilitate peace and that we will work with those responsible for peace," Bush said.

On Jerusalem, which Sharon said Monday night is Israel's eternal, undivided capital, Bush said the city's future should be determined by negotiations. But he also noted that in the presidential campaign, "I said we would begin the process of moving our embassy to Jerusalem" from Tel Aviv. Bush said he had not decided whether to invite

Arafat to the White House. Bush, reminiscing, described how Sharon had taken him on a tour in Israel before the presidential campaign, when neither imagined that they would become leaders of their countries. Later, with a smile, Bush said Sharon ran far better he did.

Sharon extended feelers to administration officials and congressional leaders on a boost in US Military aid, promised by former president Clinton as part of a now-abandoned plan for a settlement with the Palestinians.

At lunch with Bush and then at a larger white house meeting,

Sharon was taking soundings on whether the new administration's affinity for Sharon's government might translate into additional assistance. Israel receives \$3 billion Israel annually and the

White House already has requested a \$ 60 million boost in military aid.

AP

From Nehru to Amitabh Bachchan

By C. Raja Mohan

CAIRO, MARCH 20. "Bachchan": "I like Amitabh Bachchan". Whether it is the boy peddling trinkets outside the step pyramid at Saqqara near Cairo or the young officer at the Aswan high dam way up the Nile, these are usually the first words to an Indian visitor. Films from India have long been popular here. And now satellite television brings Indian stars to Egyptian homes everyday.

Bollywood has created as much if not more goodwill for India in Egypt than the lingering memories of the days when Nehru and Nasser were great friends—the golden age of bilateral relations between the two nations.

At Cairo University, we run into the Dean of the faculty of economics and politics. The esteemed professor had done his Ph.D. on Indian politics in the Nehru era. Others recall the deep links between the two national movements.

As India and Egypt fought against British imperialism, strong bonds developed between the *Wafd* party in Egypt and the Indian National Congress in India.

When he was in prison in 1922, Nehru had read the book *Secret History of English Occupation of Egypt* by W. S. Blunt, who loved Egypt and its people. Nehru travelled to Egypt in 1938 and received a warm welcome. He strongly supported the national liberation movement in Egypt and backed Nasser unstintingly when the Egyptian leader fought off Anglo-French aggression in 1956.

Together Nehru and Nasser shaped the early years of the non-aligned movement.

They laid the foundations for a solid bilateral relationship despite differences over New Delhi's diplomatic recognition of Israel in 1950, and Egypt's attitude towards India's conflicts with Pakistan and China.

But Bollywood and nostalgia for the Nehru-Nasser era cannot be the only bases on which to build a new relationship between the two nations. Conversations with Egyptian intellectuals suggests that all is not well with the relationship. Leading spokesmen of the Government here are polite enough not to emphasise the difficulties.

Dr. Osama el-Baz, a long time adviser of

OUT OF EGYPT — III

Egyptian presidents, is measured and thoughtful in his words. On the relationship with India, Dr. el-Baz said, there "is no conflict of interest" between the two nations, which have shared good relations for decades. He also points out that India is emerging as "a major power in Asia" and is "making big strides in developing modern technology".

But asked about the pervasive unease in Egypt about India's relations with Israel, Dr. el-Baz pointed to the current tensions between Israel and the Arabs, and popular concerns about New Delhi's ties with Tel Aviv. India's military and nuclear cooperation with Israel, "is viewed with great suspicion by Arabs", Dr. el-Baz said. All other cooperation between India and Israel was fine, but cooperation in the security arena

did raise hackles, he suggested.

What Dr. el-Baz put across gently comes as a blast at a Cairo University interaction between the visiting Indian journalists and local academics. In the frank and open discussion many mutual concerns are aired freely. For the Egyptians the alleged statement by the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, during his visit to Israel last year that there is nuclear cooperation between the two is a major sore point.

No amount of formal denial by the Indian Government appears to convince the Egyptians. There is strong concern here that India's strategic cooperation with Israel hurts Arab interests at a time when the West Asian peace process has collapsed.

Even more upsetting for the Egyptians are reported statements from India that it wants to cooperate with Israel in the battle against "Islamic terrorism".

The association of Islam with terrorism, and that India would want to build a coalition with the Jewish state against Islamic countries, are profoundly offensive to the Egyptians coming from a long-standing friend like India.

From the Indian side, it is pointed out that India can no longer be expected to be "more Arab than the Arabs" in its dealings with Israel. While India will build a relationship with Israel, New Delhi is not foolish to wantonly ignore its mutually productive ties with the Arab world.

All evidence is that India is stepping up its contacts with the Islamic world. Also, there is very little that India can offer Israel in the nuclear field. India is battling terror-

ism of many kinds and there is no desire in New Delhi to connect extremism with the teachings of Islam.

At the end of the debate there is a broad understanding that the old days of Nehru and Nasser cannot be reinvented. In modernising the relationship, trade and commerce must be the key drivers. The potential for cooperation in areas such as information technology, where Egypt is making significant investments, may be high. On the political level, there is need for a sustained dialogue between the two establishments, institutionalised for example through an Indo-Egyptian forum. There is also room for greater transparency in the policies of the two nations towards the other region.

The real trick for Egypt and India lies in finding some common political ground. For India, international cooperation in fighting terrorism has emerged as a major foreign policy priority. Egypt is among the countries that has confronted terrorism frontally. Both India and Egypt stand for political moderation and are strongly opposed to extremist tendencies in their own regions.

Can this be a basis for a new political cooperation between India and Egypt? "If the problem of terrorism is not defined in Islamic terms, Egypt should have no problems in cooperating with India," said Dr. el-Baz. Clearly, greater sensitivity in addressing each other's security concerns could help restore the old warmth in Indo-Egyptian relations.

(Concluded)

WEST ASIA / VIOLENCE MUST STOP, SAYS U.S. HD-18

Sharon outlines peace plan

WASHINGTON, MARCH 20. The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, has defended an Israeli crackdown on Palestinian citizens and outlined for American backers his plan for scaled down peacemaking.

As some 300 people protested Mr. Sharon's appearance, the new Israeli Prime Minister told the American-Israel public affairs committee yesterday that a peace agreement with the Palestinians was possible, but not until the violence of the past six months ceased.

"I believe that Israel can reach an agreement with the Palestinians, and I will make every effort to reach such an agreement," he said at the group's annual conference.

Mr. Sharon said he envisioned two stages of any resumption of negotiations with the Palestinians, with the first focused on easing restrictions on Palestinian civilians and restoring Israeli security through an end to violence.

In the second stage, "We will restart the negotiations," said Mr. Sharon, calling for "a new, more realistic approach of non-belligerency and a long-term interim agreement."

Mr. Sharon yesterday met the U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, the CIA Director, Mr. George Tenet, the National Security Adviser, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, and the Defence Secretary, Mr. Donald Rumsfeld. He will meet the President, Mr. George W. Bush, at the White House today.

Gen. Powell told Mr. Sharon Israel must offer hope to the Palestinians, who for months have languished behind intermittent blockades of Gaza and the West Bank.

Israel, which has also faced criticism from the European Union, says the blockade is in response to violence by Palestinians, who rose in revolt last September after peace negotiations with Israel be-

gan to collapse. More than 420 people have been killed, most of them Palestinians.

Mr. Sharon defended Israel's actions in his speech, saying, "more than ever, Israel needs security zones to protect it from the growing dangers in the Middle East (West Asia). The Palestinians need contiguity, and a better economic future." He again accused the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat's Force 17 presidential guard of having planned a car bomb attack in the heart of Jerusalem last week.

Powell unveils approach

Gen. Powell has unveiled the Bush administration's basic approach to the West Asia peace process but said he had no magic formula to end violence.

"I have no magic formula. I cannot snap my fingers and make the current situation go away or turn it around. What I can do, however, is to present some basic ideas that will guide the U.S. ap-

proach as we approach the Middle East (West Asia) and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute in the future," he told the American-Israel public affairs committee.

Evoking applause from the strong lobby group supporting Israel for each of principles he outlined here yesterday, Gen. Powell said: first and foremost, the violence must stop.

"Leaders have the responsibility to denounce violence, strip it of legitimacy, stop it. Violence is a dead end." Gen. Powell said, "The status quo is costly and, if allowed to drift, will only lead to greater tragedy."

He said neither Israelis nor Palestinians were served by the current situation. Both sides required a dialogue that would lead to mutually acceptable political, economic and security arrangements be they transitional or permanent, partial or whole." — Reuters. PTI



The U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, with the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, at the Blair House in Washington on Monday. — AP

Taking to the veil?

By C. Raja Mohan

CAIRO, MARCH 19. Is Egypt, one of the most secular societies in West Asia, becoming more Islamic? Some Western analysts of Egypt argue that the nation is turning towards Islam, quietly but surely. But the leading lights of the intelligentsia here insist there is no Islamisation of Egypt by stealth.

For outside observers, the extent of the use of the veil is often the crudest indicator of the degree of conservatism in an Islamic society. Unlike Saudi Arabia or Iran, where women are obliged to cover themselves in black, Egypt is very liberal. You hardly see any Egyptian woman with the *nakab*, a face covering veil.

But the use of the *hejab* or head scarf, has become widespread. Egyptians concede that the use of the *hejab* has increased over the years. Even in Cairo University, more than half the girls wear the head scarf. Many women wear jeans or western dresses along with the *hejab*.

The use of the *hejab* "is by choice", says Dr. Kamilia Shoukry a senior functionary of the Alliance for Arab Women. This sentiment is echoed by many. For activists like Dr. Shoukry, the question of the veil is a distracting one.

There are far more pressing is-

10-17 WJ3
sues to focus on — expanding employment opportunities for women, ensuring they are not discriminated against in the race for high level jobs, and making divorce laws more equitable. On the status of women, Egypt is surely one of the most progressive states within the Islamic world.

But whether Egyptians are becoming more Islamic is a question that cannot be skirted. A very recent book by Ms. Geneive Abdo, a Western correspondent based in Cairo during the mid 1990s, suggests there is an upsurge of a grassroots Islamist movement in Egypt. *In No God but God: The Triumph of Islam in Egypt*, Ms. Abdo argues that a very unique model of Islamisation has emerged in Egypt.

Ms. Abdo suggests that the religious transformation of Egyptian society has happened peacefully in the form of a popular movement from below. This movement, she believes, has become an alternative to the secular state but not a vehicle for its overthrow. This process, she says, has oc-

curred largely because of Egypt's own history and the special conditions that do not exist elsewhere in West Asia. Abdo argues that Egyptian society has unambiguously rejected the extremist forms of Islam. But at the same time the Egyptian people, including large numbers in the middle class, have turned toward religion. This grassroots movement does not want to return to the medieval ages, Abdo

OUT OF EGYPT — II

says. Instead it believes Islamic principles are compatible with the demands of the modern world.

The proposition of a quiet Islamisation, however, is not accepted by the leaders of Egyptian society. "Egypt has always been deeply religious," said Mr. Nabil Osman the very articulate spokesman of the Egyptian Government. "But it is also middle-of-the-road Islam," with a deep aversion to extremism, he added. Asked whether Egypt was becoming more conservative in religious terms, Mr. Osman said the state "cannot

interfere with religious conservatism". But "it will intervene against terrorism and extremism".

In the last few years, Cairo has cracked down on all religious extremist organisations. While crushing the extremists and terrorists in the 1990s, Egypt wooed the moderate Islamic forces. As a result, political Islam has been checked in its bid for power, but the Islamisation of society has gained ground.

Nothing illustrates the changing equations between the secular state and the religious establishment than the growing weight of the *Al Azhar* seminary in Egypt. Nearly a thousand years old, *Al Azhar* is widely respected in the world as the "Vatican of Islam". Students from all over the world come here to study Islam, and views of *Al Azhar* are much sought after on a variety of theological questions.

Under Presidents Nasser and Sadat, *Al Azhar* was largely reduced to providing religious sanction to the actions of a secular state at home and abroad. For ex-

ample, *Al Azhar* endorsed Sadat's Camp David accords with Israel in the late 1970s. Faced with the political threat from Islamist organisations in the last decade, the state has progressively allowed a stronger voice for *Al Azhar* in national affairs.

The state today retains considerable leverage with *Al Azhar*, in having the right to choose its head as well as providing finances for its activities. But traditional secularists in Egypt worry that in many areas like education, media censorship, women's rights and intellectual freedom, *Al Azhar* has begun to constrain permissible activity.

While many Egyptian liberals believe the state has steadily retreated from secular principles in its accommodation of *Al Azhar*, others see no real threat to secularism in Egypt. Cairo clearly is engaged in a delicate balancing act — of preserving the traditional liberalism in Egypt while accommodating moderate Islam.

Shaikh Mahmoud Ashour, the deputy head of *Al Azhar*, received

us at the seminary's administrative headquarters in the heart of Cairo. He broadly endorsed the policies of President Mubarak's government, emphasised the "centrist" nature of Egyptian Islam and the rejection of terrorism by *Al Azhar*. Shaikh Ashour also condemned the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban. He pointed to the non-sectarian nature of the teachings at *Al Azhar* and its recent expansion in the areas of modern education such as engineering and medicine.

But on women's issues, there is no running away from the conservatism of *Al Azhar*. On the question of donning the veil, Shaikh Ashour said Islam only demands that women fully cover their body except face and hands. He declared that covering the face with the *nakab* is "not obligatory". But on *hejab*, or the head scarf, he suggested the opposite — wearing it may not be a matter of choice, but a duty. No one, of course, is forcing *hejab* on Egyptian women. But the state has certainly stopped discouraging it.

Sharon seeks Bush backing for Palestine policy

Washington, March 19

AT THE White House on Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will be looking for president George W. Bush's endorsement of his cautious approach to peacemaking with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Sharon says violence must stop before he will start peace talks with Arafat, and wants to focus on interim accords rather than a final peace treaty. It is a sharp scaling back from the approach of Ehud Barak, whom Sharon defeated in February.

He is willing, however, to give the Palestinians time before escalating Israel's response to Palestinian violence. "We need patience," Sharon told reporters travelling with him on Sunday from Jerusalem. "After not acting for so long to prevent terror they have to get organised. I'm willing to give them time but not unlimited time."

The White House also is taking a new approach to middle-east diplomacy, with the president more an observer than a mediator. The change is apparent to Dennis Ross, who stepped down in January as special US envoy for the middle-east after pursuing an overall agreement for more



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, surrounded by Secret Service agents, arrives at Andrews Air Force base in Maryland on Sunday.

than a dozen years.

"We are not in a position where we can solve the conflict now," Ross said Friday in an interview. "We have to focus on managing the conflict, on defusing the conflict." Despite Palestinian denials, Sharon is convinced that militant members of Arafat's elite force 17 security unit are responsible for more than two dozen attacks on Israelis in which eight Israelis were killed and about a score injured. Sharon, who arrived in Washington Sunday evening, is

likely to ask Bush to insist that Arafat state publicly and in Arabic that the attacks must end. Only with significantly reduced violence, Sharon has said, will Israel resume peace talks. They ended in January after Arafat rejected Barak's offer of a State, Gaza and almost all the west bank and control of some Arab neighbourhoods in Jerusalem. Sharon has ruled out dividing Jerusalem or yielding the strategic Jordan valley.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 MAR 2001

Sharon heads for talks in USA

REUTERS

JERUSALEM, March 18. — Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon heads for Washington today to meet President Mr George W Bush for the first time since both took office, leaving behind a volatile situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Mr Sharon will meet senior defence officials, US Jewish and congressional leaders and visit the United Nations.

The media has played up the Sharon-Bush meeting on Tuesday but Israeli officials said they did not expect any policy decisions to be made.

Former Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Mr Zalman Shoval, said the Bush administra-

tion shared Israel's assessment of the situation in West Asia and of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"I would say Israel has a good starting point...we are meeting with a government which ...agrees with many of our assessments...regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict," Mr Shoval said, adding the talks would not be "fateful".

Palestinian minister Mr Ziyad Abu Zayyad said the meeting would fail if Mr Sharon stressed only on reducing violence in the Palestinian uprising.

"If Mr Sharon wants to go to the USA and talk to them seriously about how it's possible to pull the region out of this cycle of bloodletting and re-

turn again to dialogue...Then he will succeed," he said.

US-Israeli strategic relations and the situation in West Asia will figure prominently in talks between Mr Ariel Sharon and the Bush administration, PTI reports. Mr Sharon is expected to discuss the idea of "regional approach" to the problems engulfing West Asia and raise Israeli fears that Mr Yaseer Arafat poses "a threat" to stability in the region, media reports said.

Israel's extra-judicial killings of terrorists is also expected to figure during Mr Sharon's meetings with the state department and Pentagon officials beginning tomorrow.

THE STATESMAN

19 MAR 2001

Palestinians march to protest Israeli blockade

Jerusalem, March 17

THOUSANDS OF Palestinians took to the streets of the West Bank and Gaza on Saturday in protest over the Israeli blockade in the occupied West Bank, which the Jewish state had earlier said would be relaxed.

The Israeli announcement brought no easing of the tensions in the West Bank and Gaza, as around 2,000 Palestinians marched on an Israeli checkpoint to the west of the city of Nablus, chanting "Al Quds (Jerusalem) is the capital of Palestine".

In the Gaza Strip, mourners bore aloft the flag-wrapped body of Mohammed Abu Awn, 20, killed by Israeli troops on a day of clashes on Friday in which at least 14 Palestinians were wounded in the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian medical sources said he was shot in the chest while sitting near protesters hurling stones at Israeli troops. On the main Ramallah-Jerusalem road in the West Bank, hundreds of Palestinian artists, intellectuals and locals beat drums and carried placards reading 'Let freedom ring' and 'Land for peace - not food for peace', as they headed for an Israeli blockade.

The protests came a day before Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was due to head to Washington to meet President George W. Bush for the first time since both took office.

An official Syrian spokesman said Bush had meanwhile phoned Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to say he was ready to help achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Israel says the blockade is necessary to stop guerrilla attacks on its citizens and has charged the Palestinian authority with failing to act to control six months of bloodshed, which started after peace talks deadlocked. But Palestinians, who call the closure a "collective punishment" that strangles their economy, rejected Israel's announcement as superficial.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 MAR 2001

Israel eases West Bank blockade

Jerusalem, March 15

ISRAEL HAS decided to ease restrictions that have paralyzed the Palestinian economy and remove roadblocks in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Palestinians however called a strike in reply to the offer on Thursday to protest against the Israeli policy.

On the ground, the death toll continued to rise. Since violence erupted in September 28, following a visit by Ariel Sharon, now Israel's Prime Minister, to a disputed holy site in the old city of Jerusalem, 426 people have been killed.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said the easing of restrictions was "a good will gesture," and Israel did not want to see the Palestinians suffer.

"We know the Palestinians are suffering, we don't want them to suffer, we don't want a Palestinian tragedy, we want a Palestinian neighbour," Peres said outside the UN Security Council in New York, where he defended Israel's opposition to a UN Observer force which the Palestinians want sent to the region.

Israel remains opposed to a UN Observer force demanded by the Palestinians but will allow a US-

led mission to investigate the causes of the violence. Israel argued instead for continued direct negotiations between the two sides to end fighting. Al-Kidwa however demanded an observer force saying it could help reduce tensions and "Israeli repression against the Palestinians," and thus hopefully restore peace.

In the step to ease restrictions Palestinians will be allowed to travel inside the West Bank and Gaza, subject to security needs. That would mean removal of roadblocks that have stopped internal travel and stifled commerce. How-

ever, they will not be permitted to travel between the two territories or to enter Israel.

Israel will permit raw materials to be shipped into the Palestinian territories, and will make preparations to allow other products to be shipped in and out.

Israel clamped a closure on West Bank and Gaza after the violence erupted, and added roadblocks around towns after a series of ambushes and shooting attacks, followed by bombings on Israeli cities.

Sharon, elected on a pledge to restore security, charged that Arafat's Palestinian authority is

directly involved in "terror, violence and incitement. The security cabinet, made up of 13 ministers from the seven parties making up Sharon's broad-based unity Government, said peace negotiations must resume, but not while violence continues.

The statement said there is no evidence that the Palestinian authority plans to stop the violence. Palestinians charge that Israel is responsible for the continuing unrest, over-reacting with lethal force to Palestinian protests and starving the people with economic pressure tactics.

AP

90 MAR 2001

Israel under pressure to lift Gaza blockade

REUTERS

JERUSALEM, March 13. — Israel faced growing international pressure today to lift a blockade of cities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that is strangling the Palestinian economy.

European Union leaders expressed their concern at talks with Palestinian President Mr Yasser Arafat yesterday and were expected to call for the blockade to be lifted and peace talks to resume at a meeting with Israeli leader Mr Ariel Sharon today.

Washington also voiced concern yesterday and Mr Chris Patten, the EU commissioner for external affairs, said after meeting Mr Arafat in Gaza that the collapse of the Palestinian authority under economic pressure would not augur well for peace.

"We think it would be extremely bad for the prospects of peace if the Palestinian administration was simply knocked to smithereens over the next few months," said Mr Patten, who is travelling with Swedish foreign minister, Mr Anna Lindh.

"If more people are plunged into poverty, that in our view is going to further radicalise opinion and make it more difficult to get people to accept the need for a political accommodation," he added.

Israel has dug trenches and positioned tanks in the Palestinian territories in what it says is a bid to prevent militants carrying out bomb attacks inside Israel.

Palestinians say the measures, which severely limit the movement of goods and people, are collective punishment.

Israel said yesterday it would lift blockades of four cities but maintain the closure of Ramallah, the economic capital of the West Bank, because it had information that militants in Ramallah were planning bomb attacks in Jerusalem.

In Washington, the US state department called on Israel to ease the blockade.

"They place hardship on families, undermine relations between Israel and the Palestinians, and they don't really quiet the security situation in the region," US state department spokesman, Mr Richard Boucher said yesterday.

The foreign minister, Mr Shimon Peres, said Israel was trying to formulate a strategy to crack down on Palestinian militants while not harming "people who are innocent".

Mr Peres said Israel must find a way to "distinguish between the people involved in error and people who are trying to live their daily life".

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

9 4 MAR 2001

Intifada II, the choice between microchips and guns

The past six months of warfare between Israelis and Palestinians constitute a fundamental turning point in their struggle — one as important as the 1948 and 1967 wars, and one that demands that we look at their conflict in a new way.

The paradigm, the superstory, through which much of the world first looked at the Arab-Israeli conflict after the 1948 war, was David versus Goliath — a tiny Jewish state standing up against seven Arab armies seeking to destroy it. That paradigm lasted until the 1967 war, when Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai and the Golan Heights, and a new paradigm took hold: Israel as coloniser, with Israeli policies in the territories compared to South Africa under apartheid or France in

Algeria.

The 2000-2001 Israeli-Palestinian war shifts the paradigm once again. Why? Because when Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel and the US President put forth a peace plan that, while not entirely acceptable to the Palestinians, contains for the first time all the elements of a deal that they were seeking — a Palestinian state in virtually all the West Bank and Gaza, territorial compensation for land Israel would retain for settlements, a redivided Jerusalem and restitution for the Palestinians — and the Palestinian leadership rejects this offer and the Palestinian street reacts to Ariel Sharon's silly provocation on the Temple Mount rather than to the Clinton-Barak proposals on the table, then you have to admit that another paradigm is at work today.

To say that Israel's idiotic, rapacious settlements in places like Gaza, its trigger-happy soldiers and roadblocks throughout the West Bank do not prolong the conflict is to deny reality. But to say that those are the whole story is utter nonsense, since it was precisely such settlements that Mr Barak was offering to withdraw. The conflict today between Israelis and Palestinians is not just about territory, politics or religion. It is about modernity — for both Arab leaders and the Arab street. It is about the tension between a developed society that is succeeding at modernisation and an underdeveloped one that is failing at it and looking for others to blame. Why is Israel's most dovish leader, Shimon Peres, who-aspired to forge a "New West Asia," disliked by Arab leaders more than any other Israeli

BY THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

It's not that the Palestinians are anti-modern. It's that their young people are not being given a real choice by their leaders to move in that direction. They are being told by their leaders to stay in the old definition of struggle, to stay in a permanent revolution against colonisation... not through success at modernisation

official? It is because a new West Asia is a problem for certain Arab leaders (but by no means all), because they feel that in a region focused on trade, development and democratisation they cannot succeed — without fundamental change — nor could they blame Israel for their failures. When the only issue on the agenda is liberating Palestine, then Ariel Sharon is the problem. But when the only issue on the agenda is modernising the Arab world, then certain Arab leaders are the problem. And they don't want to be seen as the problem, so they keep their people focused on Israel and the old West Asia. It's not that the Palestinians are anti-modern. It's that their young people are not being given a real choice by their leaders to move in that direction. They are constantly being told by

their leaders and fellow Arabs to stay in the old definition of struggle, to stay in a permanent revolution against colonisation, to build their society and dignity through conflict against Israel, not through success at modernisation.

All of these messages are now wrapped together in this Intifada II. Intifada II is Palestinian youths trying to emulate the Hezbollah in Lebanon, and playing out some heroic Sixties Che Guevara struggle against the "Israeli imperialist"; it's Palestinian youths lashing out at the symbol of their failure to build a modern society — Israel; and it's Palestinian youths lashing out at the instruments of their decline — their own leaders. Their message to Israelis is: "We are somebody. We may not be able to make microchips, but we

can make you miserable and we will do that even if it is making us destitute."

I have argued from the start that such an approach will achieve nothing good for the Palestinians. At least some Palestinians are starting to question it as well. Read the respected Palestinian journalist Daoud Kuttab's op-ed piece in the *Jerusalem Post*: "Some voices in Palestine are starting to say for the first time that looking beyond emotions, where exactly are we now? Barak and Clinton, as well as their ideas, are no longer around... Shouldn't we have accepted the Clinton ideas? Where is the return, in Palestine and the Arab world, of the Seventies and Eighties rhetoric going to lead us?" *By arrangement with the New York Times*

THE ASIAN AGE

13 MAR 2001

Sharon unveils policy on Palestinians

REUTERS

JERUSALEM, March 12. -- Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ariel Sharon, today presented his Cabinet with five principles of dealing with the Palestinians, vowing not to renew peace talks until the five-month-old Palestinian revolt ends.

Convening his full Cabinet for the first time since taking office last week, Mr Sharon said his priority was to bring Israeli security, something which they have been deprived of since the uprising erupted, an official said.

At least 343 Palestinians, 65 Israelis and 13 Israeli-Arabs have been killed in fighting that began last September after peace talks failed.

Mr Sharon said he will make sure that Palestinians do not use violence to squeeze concessions out of Israel in peacemaking, nor will he allow the conflict to become an international issue, or spill over to neighbouring countries.

PM defends blockade: Mr Sharon's office today defended the tightening of Palestinian-ruled West Bank city of Ramallah's blockade, saying it was done to thwart an attack against Israel.

Israeli army used trenches and tanks yesterday to tighten the blockade of Ramallah, which Palestinians say, has made their town a prison. "In light of specific information on an attack from within the city

of Ramallah, the closure has been tightened and operational activity intensified, in order to thwart the attack," Mr Sharon's office said.

"The policy of Prime Minister, Mr Sharon, is to make things easier...But it will act in those places where terrorist activity is carried out. All this is part of a policy to thwart attacks and fight against terrorists, and those who send them," it added.

The statement gave no details of the attack to which it was referring.

Israel's policy of sealing off Palestinian areas in the West Bank and Gaza strip during more than five months of a Palestinian uprising, has been criticised by members of the international community.

Mr Sharon's office released its statement shortly before talks between a European union delegation and Palestinian President, Mr Yasser Arafat.

Jews beat up Arabs: Crowds of drunken Jews celebrating Jewish holiday of Purim attacked Arabs in Jerusalem yesterday, injuring one Arab and five police officers, a Jerusalem police spokeswoman said today.

Eight ultra-Orthodox Jews were arrested after yesterday's incident, she said.

The driver and five cops were hurt. One person was arrested after drunken Jews broke into an Arab home in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem's Old City.

Sharon defends Israel blockade of Arab city

Reuters & PTI

Jerusalem/Washington, March 12

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Ariel Sharon on Monday defended the tightening of a blockade of the Palestine-ruled West Bank city of Ramallah, saying it was done to thwart an attack against Israel.

The Israeli army dug trenches and used tanks to tighten the blockade of Ramallah on Sunday, which Palestinians say has made their town a prison. Angry Palestinians have branded the blockade "collective punishment."

"In light of specific information of an attack from within the city of Ramallah, the closure has been tightened and operational activity intensified to thwart the attack," Sharon's office said in a statement.

"The policy of Prime Minister Sharon is to make things easier, but it will act in those places where terrorist activity is carried out, all this as part of a policy to thwart attacks and fight against terrorists and those who send them," the statement said. It however gave no details of the attack, which it referred to. Sharon's office released its statement shortly before talks between a European Union delegation and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

Israel's policy of sealing off Palestinian areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during more than five months of a Palestinian uprising has received sharp criticism from the international community.

When asked by Newsweek whether he would consider re-entering Palestine-controlled areas of the West Bank if the Palestinian uprising intensified, Sharon, said, "Palestinian controlled areas? The answer is no."

He has stated the "terror attacks" were ensuing from Arafat's loyal forces. "Yasser Arafat's most loyal forces are active participants in violence and terror.

He can stop the violence if he wants," the Israeli Prime Minister said. He said it was not possible to hold peace talks with the Palestinians in the "climate of violence." Sharon said he was ready to meet and negotiate with Arafat but said it could not be done "under pressure of terror or violence." He said the new Israeli Government would be "different" from that headed by Ehud Barak.

Jews held for beating Arabs

Celebrating the Jewish holiday of Purim attacked Arabs in Jerusalem, lightly injuring at least one Arab man and five police officers, a Jerusalem police spokeswoman said.

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13 MAR 2001

27 NEW BATTLE LINES FOR 'PEACE' 119-12

THE FRIENDLY EXCHANGE of 'diplomatic' messages between Israel's new Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, and the Palestinian leadership can hardly conceal the harsh realities of their current warlike hostilities over the intractable issue of peace between their respective peoples. However, it is a matter of civility that Mr. Sharon — the archetypal Israeli hawk with a singular determination to try and outwit the Palestinians to the point of depriving them of their historical rights — has at all sent a message to them about his intention to engage their leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, over ideas for peace. Mr. Sharon has, in his first key initiative after assuming office as the head of a broad-spectrum coalition government, sent a note to Mr. Arafat suggesting the possibility of a "personal contact" between them "in the near future". In outlining this idea without laying down any specific conditions, the Israeli leader has certainly taken care to keep his options open on resuming formal talks with the Palestinians only if the present wave of violence can be certified by Tel Aviv to have subsided. However, he seems to have made at least some amends for having unwittingly or otherwise sparked the latest Palestinian 'intifada' (or 'uprising') about five months ago. It was Mr. Sharon's 'provocative' visit to a holy site in Jerusalem at that time that ignited the current spiral of violent Palestinian anger and Israel's massive counter-offensive. In a sense, the new Israeli Prime Minister owes his position itself to the political dynamics of the ongoing clash of will between the Jewish state and the Palestinians. This should explain Mr. Sharon's latest uncharacteristic 'note' to Mr. Arafat. The larger context, though, is Tel Aviv's diplomatic compulsion to see how West Asia will begin to appear on Washington's radar screen over time under the command of Mr. George W. Bush as the President.

Seizing Israel's moment of hesitation about Mr. Bush's evolving policy options in West Asia,

the Palestinian Cabinet has lost no time to reciprocate Mr. Sharon's surprise letter to Mr. Arafat. Extending a hand in a gesture of 'peace', the Palestinian leaders have told Tel Aviv of their desire to discuss ways of establishing a just and "comprehensive" peace that would ensure "security and stability for all". The apparent platitude is a carefully-crafted message with an immense meaning in the tangled West Asian situation. The notion of a sweeping stability certainly encompasses Israel's constant clamour for its security in the midst of Arab states. Yet, the Palestinian Cabinet's parallel call for an end to Israel's suspected policy of "siege and destruction" is reflective of the seismic faultlines on the West Asian geopolitical terrain. It is in this context that Mr. Arafat has now rightly called for the resumption of "final status" talks on Palestinian statehood "from the point they had reached" prior to Mr. Sharon's poll win.

The Bush administration, in its first impulsive world view, has chosen to narrow down its West Asia-related perspective to the 'strategic' silhouette of Mr. Saddam Hussein, the U.S.-defiant Iraqi leader, rather than the shadows of the old but unresolved Israel-Arab confrontation. The U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, has expended much diplomatic energy on the Iraq issue during his first visit to West Asia in his new position at this juncture. Gen. Powell, who first spoke of "re-energising" the decade-long U.N. sanctions on Iraq, has now begun to recognise that Mr. Hussein does "not" pose "a full-fledged threat" to the U.S. and to look towards its Arab "allies" to modify the sanctions. Given this changing reality, the Palestinians seem to be quietly hoping to catch the attention of the Bush administration. However, Washington must first address the issues arising out of the virtual collapse of the Oslo process — an event that has only convinced the Palestinians that no subtle renegotiation of the U.N. resolution on land-for-peace can now be countenanced.

THE HINDU

12 MAR 27

Israel Prime Minister rules out retaking Arab lands

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12/3

Washington, March 11

ISRAEL'S NEW Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told the US magazine Newsweek that he would not send the Israeli army back into areas ceded to the control of the Palestinian authority.

Asked in the interview whether he would consider re-entering Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank if the Palestinian uprising intensified, Sharon said, "Palestinian controlled areas? The answer is no." He said the situation in these areas was 'irreversible' and Israel did not have to enter them again. "That doesn't mean that Israel will not take steps against people who find shelter there," he added. The interview appears in the issue of Newsweek on sale tomorrow.

Sharon said he planned to provide the Palestinians with a road so they could travel freely from the north to the south of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). "I have a plan so they don't need to cross checkpoints," he said. Because the Palestinian authority is behind the terror, the concept should be to ease the lives of ordinary citizens and harden the lives of those in the Palestinian authority," Sharon said. "Arafat agreed to take the necessary steps, but he freed many terrorists who are now involved in



AFP PHOTO

A Palestinian aims his weapon at an effigy of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Bethlehem on Saturday.

spreading terror. "Peres says it's still too early to meet Arafat New Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres; meanwhile said on Sunday in Jerusalem it was still too early for him to meet Palestinian President Yasser Arafat despite what he called a slight drop in 'terrorism'.

Peres assumed office last week in a National Unity Government led by right-wing Prime Minister

Ariel Sharon, who has said a resumption of peace talks depends on putting an end to violence. Asked if he would meet Arafat, his co-winner of the 1994 Nobel peace prize, Peres told Israel Radio: "I am not ready to declare any meeting. I believe it's too early."

Arafat called on Israel's new government to resume peace talks on the basis of understandings reached in negotiations with Sharon's dovish predecessor Ehud Barak. "It must be said there is a slight drop in terrorism," Peres said. But he added: "It's true that in his speech there was no clear appeal to end terrorism. There were a few formulations that should have been more pleasant to the Israeli ear."

Peres said Israel wanted a clear Palestinian policy to reduce violence. He said a distinction had to be made between agreements already reached and matters only discussed in negotiations. "We don't want to live with our Arab neighbours back to back and on every back a rifle. We want to live with them face to face," Peres said. A deadlock in Barak's talks with the Palestinians fuelled the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, in which at least 343 Palestinians, 65 Israelis and 13 Israeli Arabs have been killed.

AFP & Reuters

Giant Buddhas smashed, say aid workers

Islamabad, March 11

TWO GIANT statues of Buddha, hewn from a cliff face in Central Afghanistan in the 3rd and 5th centuries, have been demolished, international aid workers said.

After centuries of standing guard over the Bamiyan valley in central Afghanistan, the statues are gone, said one aid worker, who said his information comes from eyewitness accounts from the area. His information corroborated reports from Taliban officials in southern Afghanistan. The Taliban said yesterday 80 per cent of the statues, measuring 51 and 36 meters, were destroyed.

Abdul Hai Muttmain, a spokesman for the Taliban's reclusive leader, told the Associated Press that delegations pleading for the preservation of the statues were too late. They were virtually gone, he said. "We have destroyed 80 per cent of the statues. There is only a small amount left and we will destroy that soon," he said. It appears that the remainder has now been destroyed. The destruction followed an order two weeks ago by Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar calling all statues idolatrous and ordering all of them destroyed. However, it has been impossible to verify conflicting reports about the conditions of the statues because the Taliban have refused to allow anyone in the area.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 MAR 2001

Arabs have mixed feelings on Sharon's take-over 71-12

CAIRO: Arab opinion-makers and analysts gave mixed signals on Friday, after Ariel Sharon moved into the Israeli Prime Minister's office, with some suggesting he be given a chance and others saying he would terminate the peace process.

At his inauguration on Wednesday, Mr Sharon said he was ready for "painful compromises" to make peace with the Palestinians, but he stressed he would not negotiate "under the pressure of violence and terror."

He said Israel must also seek peace with Syria and Lebanon, but gave no ideas on how he would do this.

Egyptian foreign minister A. Moussa said he hoped Mr Sharon's statements reflected a change in his thinking.

"This outstretched hand, however, has to be free of the anti-peace policies, practices and statements that marred it before," Mr Moussa told reporters in Cairo.

Mr Sharon's reputation in the Arab world is

based on his hard-line positions on peace negotiations and his role as a soldier and defence minister in offensives against Israel's Arab neighbours. An Israeli judicial commission found Sharon indirectly responsible for the massacre of hundreds of unarmed men, women and children in Palestinian camps in Beirut in 1982, and he had to resign as defence minister.

Mr Moussa said that an end to the five-month-old Palestinian uprising depends on Israel's lifting of the siege on Palestinian territories and on ending "the violence of the Israeli government." In Syria, analysts dismissed Mr Sharon's conciliatory tone, saying his National Unity Government had no chance of reaching peace agreements.

"Sharon will be a disaster on the West Asia peace process. Nothing shows he is a man of peace," said George Jabbour, a political science professor at Aleppo university, North Syria.

"His government includes a minister that has threatened to strike the high dam in Egypt and a minister that has demanded the sending of the Palestinians from the West Bank to Jordan," Jabbour added.

He was referring to infrastructure minister Avigdor Lieberman, who suggested bombing the Aswan Dam if Israel is provoked, and tourism minister Rehavam Zeevi, who advocates the transfer of Palestinians to Jordan.

Imad Shueibi, a political scientist at Damascus University, said that even if Sharon was interested in making peace, his government would not permit necessary concessions.

"Syria will not go back to the negotiating table unless progress is realised on the Palestinian track," Shueibi said.

In Jordan, government officials said King Abdullah II spoke to Syrian President Bashar Assad about the prospects for peace in a phone call on Thursday. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 MAR 2001

HD-16
ISRAEL / COALITION GOVT. SWORN IN

Talks if violence ends: Sharon

JERUSALEM, MARCH 8. On his first full day in office, the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, said on Thursday he would be willing to meet the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, for peace negotiations if the current violence ends.

A smiling, relaxed Mr. Sharon stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the outgoing Premier, Mr. Ehud Barak, at a brief symbolic ceremony marking the handover of power a month after Mr. Sharon won a landslide election victory.

"We're facing a period that's not going to be easy," Mr. Sharon said. "There are security risks and diplomatic issues which are far from simple." Mr. Sharon and his seven-party coalition Government were formally sworn in late on Wednesday night, and the new leader held out the prospect of renewed peace talks with the Palestinians. But he repeated his condition that talks wouldn't begin until calm was restored.

Mr. Arafat sent a letter congratulating Mr. Sharon on forming the new Government and calling for the relaunching of peace talks that broke off shortly before Israel's Feb. 6 election, Mr. Sharon's office said.

"I believe there must be a just



YOU'RE THE BOSS: The outgoing Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak (left), with his successor, Mr. Ariel Sharon, during a handover ceremony at the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem on Thursday. — AP

and true peace brought about through a strong desire and a genuine effort to overcome the difficulties," Mr. Arafat wrote in a separate letter to Israel's President, Mr. Moshe Katsav.

Asked if he was prepared to see

Mr. Arafat, Mr. Sharon replied, "I'm ready to meet and to conduct negotiations with him, but that means we have to have quiet and security."

Mr. Sharon and Mr. Arafat have a long and bitter history that goes

back decades. Mr. Sharon's first full day as Prime Minister fell on the start of the festive Jewish holiday Purim, but many Israelis were afraid to celebrate because of Palestinian bomb threats.

Militant Palestinians have threatened to unleash a stepped up bombing campaign to coincide with Mr. Sharon's accession to power. The Islamic Hamas movement declared it would send 10 suicide bombers to greet Mr. Sharon, and claimed responsibility for a blast on Sunday in the coastal city of Netanya that killed three Israelis and the bomber.

Palestinians rejected Mr. Sharon's condition for resuming talks and blamed Israel for clashes that have taken the lives of 423 people, most of them Palestinians, in five months. In the United States, the White House announced Mr. Sharon would meet the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, in Washington on March 20 to discuss ways to end the unrest.

Meanwhile, the Israeli Parliament voted overwhelmingly on Thursday in favour of reforming its election law to abolish the system of directly electing the Prime Minister, a move that could help the stability of Mr. Sharon's Government. — AP, AFP

MAR 2001

Ariel Sharon sworn in prime minister, extends an olive branch to Palestinians

LEM: Hawk Ariel Sharon started his in office on Thursday as Israel's 11th minister facing the unknown, extending a peace to Arab neighbours but insisting to negotiate with the Palestinians under

hit-wing Likud hardliner, who trounced premier Ehud Barak just over a month ago to restore security after months of fighting, was invested on Wednesday at the largest cabinet in the nation's history as parliament formally approved his government. He was 72 in favour to 21 against, with

no abstentions. Immediately after the ceremony, the White House announced that Mr Sharon would meet on March 20 in Washington with President George W. Bush, who called the Israeli leader to congratulate him.

"The President looks forward to discussing bilateral and regional issues with Prime Minister Sharon, including ways to bring an end to the violence and to advance peace and stability in the region," said Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer.

The burly 73-year-old former general, the fifth prime minister in six years, has a majority of at least 73 in the 120-member parliament after clinching deals with a patchwork of leftist, reli-

gious and right-wing parties. The new cabinet, which contains 26 ministers including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shimon Peres as foreign minister, will have to immediately grapple with a Palestinian revolt that has cost more than 430 lives in almost six months.

"The government under my leadership will be committed to doing everything possible to restore security and stability ... but we will have to go through very difficult days ahead," Mr Sharon said in his investiture speech, appealing for the nation to unite behind him.

"There is an ability if both sides are prepared to do this to turn aside from the tragic path of bloodshed. Our hand is extended in peace. We know that peace involves painful compromises for both sides," Mr Sharon said.

"We are prepared to examine different ideas for advancing dialogue and to ease the suffering of the Palestinians but we cannot do this under the pressure of terrorism and violence."

Mr Sharon called Jerusalem the Jewish people's "eternal" capital, diverting from his prepared text which had described it as the "united eternal capital of Israel under our sovereignty."

The fate of the holy city is one of the key sticking points between Israel and the Palestinians, which claim the eastern sector which Israel cap-

tured in war in 1967 as their future capital. He also called for neighbouring foes Syria and Lebanon to make peace, and pledged no new Jewish settlements would be built in the Palestinian territories, while saying nothing about their removal.

Palestinian information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo stated that Mr Sharon must work to end Israel's near 34-year occupation and stop settlement activity if there is to be peace.

"The continuation of the settlements is the peak of violence. There can be no peace or security or stability with the continuation of settlements," he said, adding, "Our experience is that

negotiating in the shadow of the settlements is a futile exercise."

Syria and Lebanon also said that the return of all Israeli-occupied land was the only way to achieve peace. Britain on early Thursday urged Mr Sharon's new government to pursue the path of peace in the troubled region. Junior foreign minister Brian Wilson said that he hoped it would try to reach a compromise with the Palestinian Authority.

"We look to the new government for wholehearted engagement in the pursuit of peace. Britain will work hard with both parties towards this goal," Mr Wilson said. (AFP)

Sharon's govt. takes shape

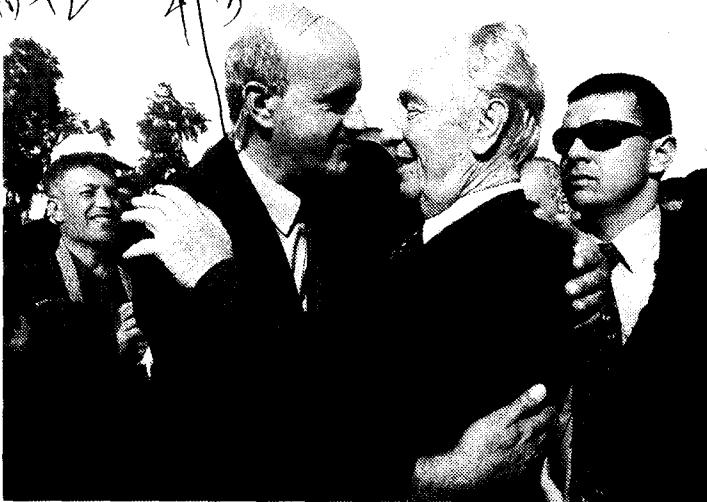
TEL AVIV, MARCH 3. The Israeli Prime Minister-elect, Mr. Ariel Sharon's new Cabinet was taking shape today after two small Nationalist ultra-right parties agreed to join the coalition government, Israeli radio reported today.

It said the Russian Party, Yisrael Beiteinu, and the National Union Party would share two ministries, plus one post of vice-minister, between them in the new Likud-led unity government.

Numerous leading politicians from the defeated Labor Party which has also agreed to join the coalition are opposed to entering a coalition that includes the national union because the party demands the deportation of all Israeli arabs from Israel.

The leader of Yisrael Beiteinu, Mr. Avigdor Liebermann, has in the past few years repeatedly been investigated for a series of crimes.

So far Mr. Sharon has the support of more than 50 mandates in the 120-seat Knesset (Parliament).



Mr. Salah Tarif (left), a member of the Israeli Labor Party, shares an embrace with senior party leader, Mr. Shimon Peres, after it was announced that the former was selected to become a Minister without portfolio in a national unity Government of the Prime Minister-elect, Mr. Ariel Sharon, in Tel Aviv on Friday. — AP

Ongoing coalition talks with the ultra-orthodox Shas Party which has 17 seats and small national religious party have run into diffi-

culties, press reports said. Mr. Sharon wants to present his new government on Wednesday. — DPA

THE HINDU

MAR 2001

HD-16 8/3
L. Arafat

ISRAEL / UNITY GOVERNMENT IN PLACE

Violence: Sharon faces uphill task

JERUSALEM, MARCH 7. Mr. Ariel Sharon is stepping into power at the head of a national unity government that could be Israel's most stable in years but faces the potentially divisive task of confronting five months of Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Mr. Sharon submits his proposed government later on Wednesday to Parliament, or Knesset, and once it wins approval he becomes Prime Minister. Approval seemed assured since Mr. Sharon stitched together a coalition from centre-left to far right with the support of three-quarters of the 120-member House.

The coalition will allow Israelis "to stand together, facing what at this moment poses the greatest danger — the deteriorating state of security," Mr. Sharon told his Likud Party on Wednesday.

But he will have no grace period. The militant Islamic group Hamas threatened to greet Mr. Sharon, considered an arch-enemy by the Palestinians, with a series of suicide bombings.

Hamas said in a statement on Tuesday that it had prepared 10 suicide bombers — the first of whom went into action on Sunday, when a Palestinian set off a bomb in the coastal city of Netanya, killing himself and three Israelis. Hamas said its military wing, the Izzedin al-Kassam, was responsible. "The blood of our women and children will not go to waste, and al-Kassam brigades' response will always be quick and



This combo shows the Israeli Prime Minister and top Ministers of the new Israeli Government to be presented on Wednesday night. From top centre clockwise: the Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon, Likud Party, the Interior Minister, Mr. Eli Yishai, Shas Party, the Housing and Construction Minister, Mr. Natan Sharansky, Israel Ba'Aliya, the Finance Minister, Mr. Silvan Shalom, Likud Party, the Defence Minister, Mr. Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, Labour Party, and the Foreign Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, Labour Party. — AP

painful," Hamas said.

Mr. Sharon was unmoved, blaming the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, for inciting his people to violence and failing to curb the militants, as Israeli military commanders charged that Mr. Arafat's allies and command-

ers were involved in attacks. Mr. Sharon has pledged not to resume peace talks until the unrest ends.

The Palestinians, meanwhile, remain deeply suspicious of Mr. Sharon, whose reputation as a soldier and politician has been built on his willingness to con-

front Israel's Arab rivals. "The new Israeli government must choose between continuing in the policy of talks or continuing its recent policy of blockades and siege and escalation," said Mr. Nabil Aburdeneh, a spokesman for Mr. Arafat.

Overnight, a small explosion went off in Jerusalem inside a garbage truck, police said. The truck was damaged but no one was injured.

Though he has not disclosed how he plans to confront the violence, Mr. Sharon hoped his broad-based government would present a united front to shore up an Israeli populace battered by failed peace efforts and months of clashes that have killed 423 people.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Mr. Shimon Peres, the Foreign Minister, will sit at the same Cabinet table with Mr. Rehavam Zeevi, Tourism Minister, whose party advocates removing Palestinians from the West Bank.

Attracting the Labor party of the defeated Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, then adding faction after faction in the fractious Knesset, Mr. Sharon (73), hopes to remain in power where others have fallen, serving out his term until mid-2003. He is Israel's fifth Prime Minister in less than six years.

Only gross mismanagement or extremist actions can topple him, said an analyst. "The Labor Party can't bring down the government." — AP

THE HINDU

- 8 MAR 2001

Genocide charge infuriates Turkey

By Kesava Menon ¹¹⁰⁻¹⁶

ANKARA, FEB. 28. To those not directly involved, the efforts by France and some other Western countries to make Turkey own up what they call "genocide" of Armenians in the beginning of the last century might appear quixotic. Here in Turkey, these efforts have generated real rage at this "misinterpretation" of history. There is also chagrin over the sense that they have been out-manoeuvred.

The French Parliament has taken measures to make Turkey acknowledge that a genocide of Armenian Christians took place in the dying days of the Ottoman Empire. Their case is that this action constituted a genocide somewhat akin to the Holocaust of the Jews of Europe two decades later. These moves appear to have been influenced by the new international climate in which countries (or institutions, as in the case of the apology demanded of the Church by the Sangh Parivar) are asked to verbally rectify mistakes committed by them in the past. It also appears to be an amalgam of what a Jewish writer calls the "Holocaust industry" and of the more modern "war crimes indict-

ment" industry.

One knee-jerk reaction that the Turks have in respect of these charges is that if anything of the sort had been done by the Ottoman Empire then it is not something that the modern Turkish Republic should be bothered with. Modern Turkey, they point out, was established with the explicit objective of erasing the country's Ottoman legacy. Since this has been accomplished — since Turkey has rid itself of the tendencies that made it undertake such actions in the past — there is no need to take the relatively minor step of making verbal apologies and demands on these lines should be rejected out of hand.

Another, more dominant, stream of opinion is that Turkey cannot and should not shrug off its Ottoman legacy. While there was much that was wrong with the Ottoman legacy much of that has been erased and Turkey can now look back on that period with greater objectivity. This effort to resuscitate what was good in the Ottoman legacy, and to see its faults in clearer perspective, is part of an on-going programme of emplacing Turkish nationalism in a longer historical continuum.

Proponents of this view say that the incidents concerning the Arme-

nian Christians should be seen in context. They do admit that massacres took place in Eastern Anatolia in that period. But, they point out, this was not just a matter of Turks massacring Armenians but of people on both sides killing large numbers of the others. (Turks claim that over 500,000 of their people were killed while Armenians say that over a million on their side suffered the same fate).

The Turks particularly refute the charge that there was anything on the lines of the systematic, bureaucratically-administered, racism-influenced programme such as the Holocaust was.

According to the Turks, these "massacres" took place in a situation where the doddering Ottoman Empire joined World War I on the side of Germany and Austria. When Russian forces, as part of the opposing alliance, invaded Turkey, Armenian nationalists declared their bid for freedom, made common cause with the invaders and began a guerilla war. The Turks claim that the Armenians killed a large number of Muslim villagers — Turks and Kurds — in the course of this uprising. Faced with this guerilla war, the Ottoman authorities did what other national

authorities had done in the beginning of the 20th Century when confronted with guerilla warfare. They transported quiescent Armenians out of the area so as to deprive the guerillas of shelters and bases.

Those Ottoman officials who were strong and efficient were able to carry out this relocation successfully. Others were not so strong and were unable to protect the convoys of Armenians being re-located. Muslim villagers who had previously been the victims of Armenian aggression turned on these convoys. The very fact that Armenians continued to live and thrive in Istanbul and other parts of Turkey where Ottoman authority was effective disproves any theory that there was a state-directed, pre-planned genocide of the Armenians. They also point out that neither diplomats nor U.S. missionaries who were active in the region had recorded any evidence of state-organised genocide.

While the Turks believe that the truth is on their side they also admit that they have been put on the back-foot in the propaganda war. Although millions of Turks live in Europe and the U.S. they have not been able to match the lobbying efforts of the Armenians.

THE HINDU

1 MAR 2001

IS Robin Cook mad, cunning or out of touch? On 17 February, the British foreign secretary jointly authorised an aerial armada of 80 warplanes to invade Iraq's airspace.

They attacked radar sites and command headquarters. The raid was demanded by exasperated pilots who, over the past 10 years, had exhausted targets in the existing no-fly zones and were reduced to "bombing lamp-posts".

On 19 February, Mr Cook's colleague in the More Important House, Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, told the Lords that the raid was in "self-defence, solely in order to reduce the risk to our aircrews".

She seemed unconvinced and hesitant in her body language. The Japanese might have excused Pearl Harbor in similar terms.

In the meantime, Mr Cook was proving as risk-averse as the RAF. Protected by his whips from hostile fire in the Commons, he was answering for his actions in 20 February's *Daily Telegraph*.

His article was headed: "Why it is in the interest of the Iraqi people to bomb Saddam." He was more forthcoming than Lady Symons.

The case was that Saddam Hussein is still a unique menace to world peace. His arsenal of non-conventional weapons is awful. He threatens Kuwait and represses his people.

By buzzing his borders with jets and bombs, Mr Cook claims that Anglo-American forces have "contained" his menace. They have somehow

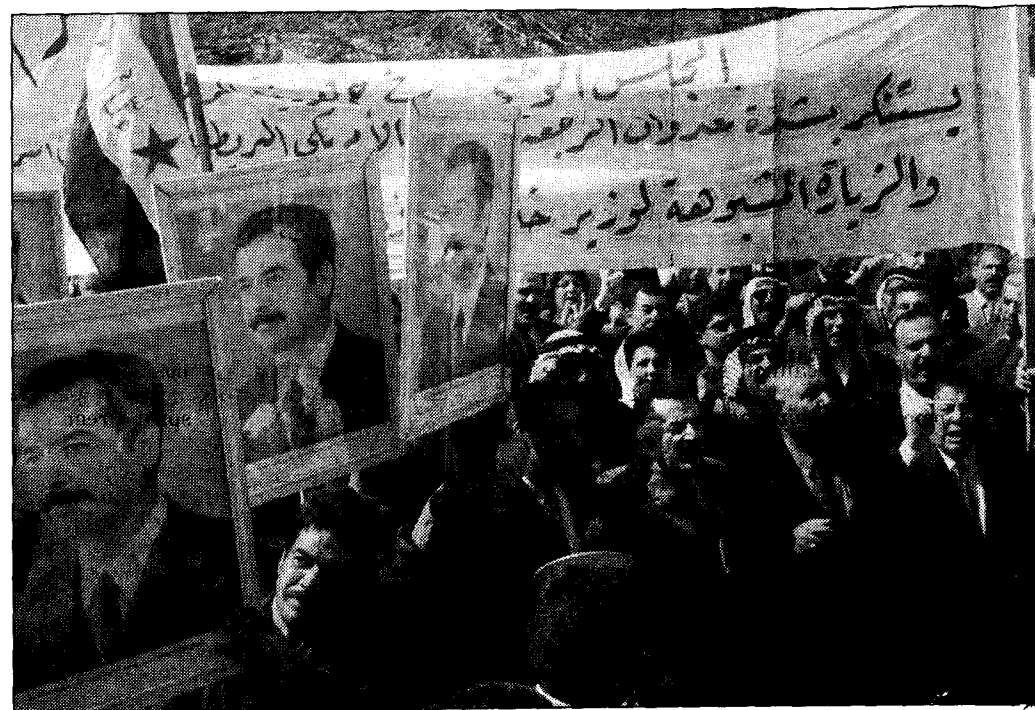
Containment a political pretence

Unlike the British foreign secretary, SIMON JENKINS would like to see Saddam Hussein go, and fast. Neither bombs nor sanctions will achieve this. Ostracism drives the Iraqi President's enemies into exile and supplies excuses for the impoverishment of his people. What is called for is constructive engagement

prevented the complete rebuilding of arsenals and deterred attacks on Kuwait and Iraqi dissidents.

The Iraqi President apparently cannot move his troops by air to gas the Kurds or strafe the Shias. As for any collateral suffering to the Iraqi people: "He alone is to blame." So, it is in the Iraqis' interest for Mr Cook to bomb them.

I assume that the foreign secretary is privy to technical intelligence not granted to the rest of us, so I must accept his premises. If told that a madman is scheming to



Iraqi lawmakers carrying banners and posters of Saddam Hussein demonstrate outside the UNDP office in Baghdad on Saturday to protest against the recent American-British air strike. Below: British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.

— AP/PTI

unleash a weapon so terrible that it may wipe me out, I am all for stopping him. If he threatens my peace and prosperity, I have an interest in curbing him. If he is uniquely cruel to those under his sovereignty and I can prevent it, then I should.

To Mr Cook, Mr Hussein is guilty on all these charges. Yet he has to admit that, after 10 years of containment, Mr Hussein is still repressing his people.

Without bombing, he would have even more chemical and biological weapons. At a recent Shia demonstration, says Mr Cook, "Saddam's troops opened fire into the crowd, killing several hundred".

In which case, what value containment? Where were Mr Cook's brave airmen returning fire? Mr Hussein's humanitarian abuses, says Mr Cook, cannot be allowed to continue unchecked. But they do continue unchecked. Overflights may have limited Baghdad's room for aerial manoeuvre.

But you cannot stop repression from the air, only on the ground. So, it continues.

Mr Hussein is now importing weapons from every corner of the globe. He has fibre-optic radar and anti-aircraft systems enough to scare Lady Symons's pilots. Sanctions may have made it more costly

But you cannot stop repression from the air, only on the ground. So, it continues.

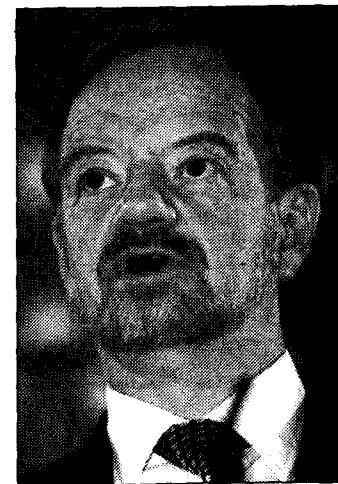
Mr Hussein is now importing weapons from every corner of the globe. He has fibre-optic radar and anti-aircraft systems enough to scare Lady Symons's pilots. Sanctions may have made it more costly to rebuild Scuds and Sams, but rebuilt they are.

Indeed if these and other weapons are as dreadful as Mr Cook says, why are saboteurs not urgently destroying them? A few spies and Tomahawks could surely do the trick, as the Israelis once showed in destroying an Iraqi nuclear installation. The fact is that containment is a political pretence, a policy so ineffective that Mr Cook has periodically to demand that we "make our opposition more effective".

Worse than ineffective, the policy is blatantly counter-productive. I was sickened to

see Mr Hussein's smiling face and his spokesman declaring his "glad heart" at the recent raid. The raid won Mr Hussein more friends in the Arab world and in the former Eastern bloc. At home the bombs, which were bound to kill and injure civilians, gave him a propaganda boost and secured his position as hero and saviour of his people.

Nor was that all. The raid split whatever passes for the wider "Western alliance" and reduced to absurdity the idea of European political co-operation. With Britain so blatantly a slave to the White House and the Pentagon, it ridiculed any common



European defence and foreign policy.

The Russians were handed on a plate an opportunity to replace Western influence in the Gulf, while the Saudis were again left uncomfortably exposed. British servicemen were made to seem half-hearted, even cowardly, in battle.

Above all, the raid demonstrated the hopelessness of continued economic sanctions. Mr Cook has long been their most macho exponent, constantly claiming that they work in containing Mr Hussein. They do not. Iraq is now selling oil on the black market probably

fuelling Mr Cook's limousine at the same level as prior to the Gulf War. The UN is allowing Mr Hussein a staggering \$14 billion a year in oil money supposedly for food and medicine, most of which he is stealing. And Mr Cook offers him a heaven-sent excuse for the poverty and misery of his people: "Western sanctions".

In desperation, hapless British Foreign Office officials have now invented so-called "smart sanctions", embargoes that hurt only the rich and powerful. So much for the FO's argument that sanctions are supposed to make the poor rise and topple a dictator.

Smart sanctions on things such as air tickets and Scotch are even dumber than dumb ones. Mr Cook should hire an economist. In sanctioned economies, the rich are rich because they know how to evade sanctions, often using them to steal from the poor. All Mr Cook's sanctions, like his bombs, are unsmart. They merely cement Mr Hussein and his regime in power.

Yet let us stand back a moment. Let us remember Confucius and never underrate the intelligence of the Opposition. Even the most half-witted Foreign Office clerk would have predicted the manifold results of the raid. They would have been listed

brightly flagged, in Mr Cook's red box. He is no fool, no would Downing Street dare leave him out of touch. So we had better assume something else, that Mr Cook is more cunning than he seems.

The Foreign Secretary holds that Mr Hussein is a danger to world peace, but he knows that neither Britain nor America has the will to crush him by the only means possible, a land war. So the cunning Mr Cook follows a different trail. His purpose is shamelessly to keep Mr Hussein in power by every means possible, by bombing,

sanctions, ostracism and abuse.

This sustains a longstanding Foreign Office objective, which is to maintain any regional status quo, while at the same time keeping Britain and America together on the world stage as lone policemen against totalitarianism.

On this basis Mr Hussein is like Slobodan Milosevic, the monster necessary for a democratic leader's crusading zeal. Mr Cook and British Prime Minister Tony Blair might think they want him to fall, but they cannot help themselves from propping him up.

The honest headline on Mr Cook's article would have been the converse of the real one. It would have read: "Why it is in the interest of Saddam to bomb the Iraqi people."

Unlike the cunning Mr Cook, I would like to see Mr Hussein go, and fast. Neither bombs nor sanctions, dumb or smart, will achieve this. Ostracism merely drives Mr Hussein's

enemies into exile and supplies excuses for the impoverishment of his people. He will fall only when Iraq's politics are unfrozen and its relations with the world normalised. This requires the political economy to be opened to external and internal pressure.

This policy, once called constructive engagement, has often been pursued by the West, for instance towards the equally murderous rulers of Syria, Indonesia and Iran. It subverts an oligarchy with freer markets, freer movement of people, media access and a reinvigorated middle class. It also makes spying easier.

British policy leaves Mr Hussein with his weapons and his terror, his wealth and his excuses intact. Bombs are pinpricks.

Sanctions isolate him and make him even more paranoid which, if Mr Cook is right, is truly dangerous. Since the West has no heart for invasion, there is no alternative to constructive engagement. Mr Cook must know this.

Yet nothing in the world is harder than for a politician to admit he is wrong.

— *The Times, London.*

U.K.-U.S. TIES / NATO, MISSILE DEFENCE FIGURE IN TALKS

Bush, Blair hint at review of Iraq curbs

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, FEB. 24. The leaders of the U.S. and Britain have said that while sanctions against Iraq might warrant a review, there is also the determination to keep the Iraqi President, Mr. Saddam Hussein, in check. The U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, and the visiting British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, met face-to-face for the first time at Camp David.

It was Mr. Bush's first meeting with a European leader and by all accounts a successful one. At least for the public and for the record both leaders seemed to emphasise the close relationship that exists between the two countries. At the same time Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair discussed a range of issues, on some of which Washington and London having their share of differences.

The remarks on Iraq were especially significant for two reasons: the U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, after a meeting with the visiting British Prime Minister, left for a crucial trip to West Asia and very high on the agenda here is Iraq. Allies in West Asia are

angry and appalled that Washington would continue with a policy that has little support, regionally or internationally.

Secondly, the Bush-Blair meeting took place two days before the Iraqi Foreign Minister is to have talks in New York with the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. Among the permanent members of the Security Council, France, Russia and China have openly questioned the sanctions regime now in place.

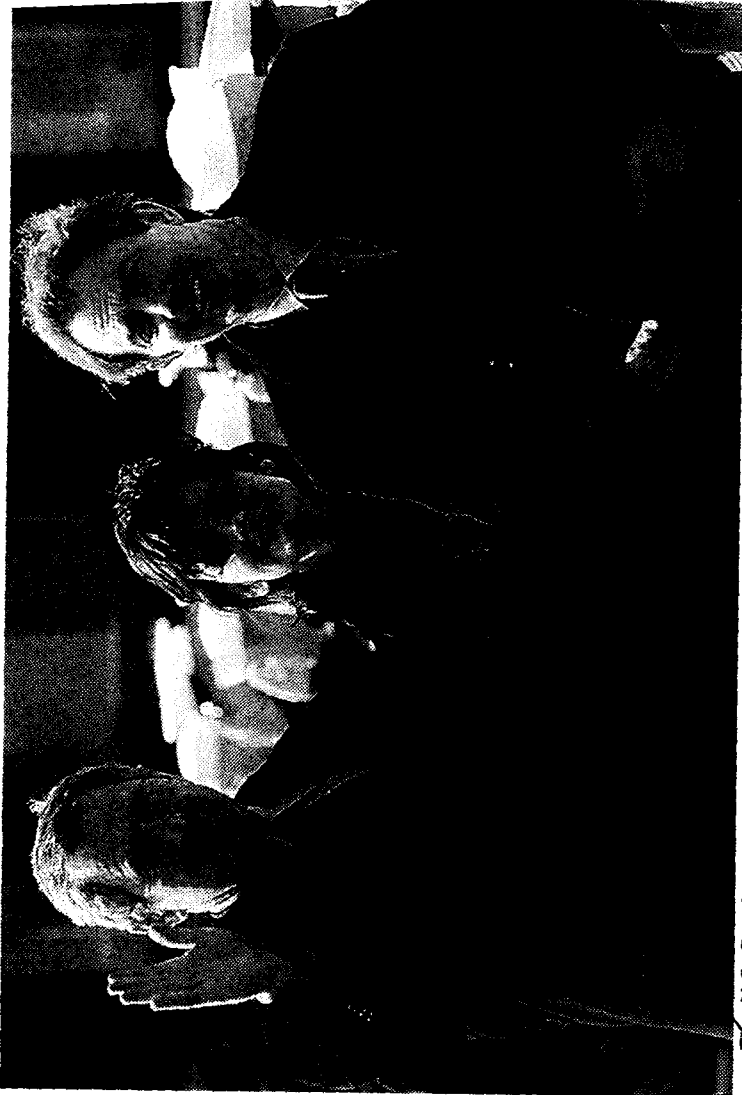
"A change in the sanction regime that is not working should not be any kind of a signal whatsoever to him (Mr. Saddam Hussein) that he should cross any line and test our will, because we are absolutely determined to make that part of the world more peaceful by keeping this guy in check," Mr. Bush said at Camp David.

Mr. Bush also said that Beijing had responded to the accusations that it had helped Iraq by saying that if this was the case it would "remedy" the situation. Mr. Bush said that he accepted this response. "I think you always got to begin with trust until proven otherwise," he said. Other officials of

the Bush administration could not elaborate on the President's statement. But consultations have been taking place between American and Chinese officials and the issue is hardly considered settled.

The two leaders also touched on issues that are critical and important for Europe and for the future of the transatlantic relationship. Though senior members of his administration like the Defence Secretary and the Secretary of State have expressed reservations about a European Rapid Reaction Force, Mr. Bush went along with the idea so long as NATO was the primary force.

And on the subject of the National Missile Defence system that has its share of opponents and sceptics in Europe, Mr. Blair did not go out of his way in endorsing the plan making note of the fact that Washington did not have a specific proposal on the table. But more generally Mr. Blair expressed concerns about missiles being launched by rogue states against allies remarking, "...it is important that we look at every single way we possibly can of dealing with this threat".



The U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, waves to members of the media after greeting the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and his wife, Ms. Cherie Booth, upon their arrival at Camp David on Friday. — AP

Ariel Sharon wants shift in US-Israeli ties

JERUSALEM: Israel's Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon, who is slated to meet U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell this weekend, says that Israel and the U.S. should shift the focus of their relations away from Israel's peace-making efforts with the Palestinians.

In a speech on Thursday to the conference of presidents of major American Jewish organisations, Ms Sharon said too much attention to the Israel-Palestinian issue has damaged bilateral relations.

With an eye on his Sunday meeting with Mr Powell, his first face-to-face contact with a top representative of the administration of new U.S. President George W Bush, Ms Sharon called for a change in emphasis.

"In the past too much focus was placed on the (Israel-Palestinian) peace process, which is very important, but as a result, bilateral relations suffered," Ms Sharon said.

"We must concentrate on the those common issues between Israel and the US," including a coordinated struggle against terrorism, he added. (AFP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 FEB 2001

Work jointly, Sharon, Arafat told

By Kesava Menon

ANKARA (TURKEY), FEB. 25. The U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, today met the Israeli Prime Minister-elect, Mr. Ariel Sharon, and the Palestinian Authority President Mr. Yasser Arafat, and tried to impress upon them that they should both try to contain the ongoing violence and that peace-making was primarily their responsibility.

In these respects, he was pushing the policy of the new U.S. administration that it would not be thrusting itself into the process in the manner the previous administration had done and that it did not consider that the pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian peace-making should be the primary objective of its West Asian policy. These policy postulates were put to the test at the outset of Gen. Powell's visit to the region.

Gen. Powell met Mr. Sharon on Sunday morning and with Mr. Arafat in the afternoon. At both meetings, he impressed upon both that they shared the responsibility to reduce the levels of violence. It did not appear that either of his interlocutors was willing to go along entirely with Gen. Powell's reading of the situation. Mr. Sharon told the Secretary of State that he would not initiate talks or try to ease the economic blockade of the Palestinian territories unless there was a complete end to violence. For his part, Mr. Arafat countered that it was the Israelis



The U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, embraces the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, as they meet for talks in Ramallah on February 25. — Reuters

who were more violent and that he could do little to contain the violence when the Israelis denied him freedom of movement.

To an extent at least, Gen. Powell seemed to have understood the Palestinian predicament when he stressed that easing of the economic conditions of the Palestinians must come as a prelude to the ending of the violence and not the other way around. Mr. Sharon has been saying that he would try to ease the economic

hardships if the Palestinians ended the violence.

However, Mr. Sharon's aides, and presumably he as well, are of the view that the economic blockade is necessary to make the Palestinians give up the violence. Gen. Powell did not agree with this logic and said that while a reduction of violence was necessary, it would not end and would in fact persist if the economic conditions of the Palestinians were not improved.

If the new U.S. administration is seeking to reverse the deep involvement in the peace-making process that the former administration displayed, the Palestinians are in no mood to oblige. At the press conference that he held with Gen. Powell, Mr. Arafat took pains to emphasise that the resolution of the conflict was not just in the interests of the two parties concerned but of the region and of the international community.

Gen. Powell is likely to hear the same refrain from other Arab leaders as he tries to enlist their support for a revival of the hardline policy on Iraq and a push-back of the efforts on the Palestinian-Israeli front. Mr. Arafat also took pains to point out that it was the previous Republican administration of — and this he repeated several times — the current President's father who started the process with the Madrid talks. With this emphasis on the Madrid initiative, and no mention of the Oslo processes, Mr. Arafat appeared to have also dropped the references to the seven-year old processes. Not quite however. Mr. Arafat stressed that he wanted all the agreements that had been signed between his Authority and the Israelis to be implemented strictly.

Reuters reports:

An Israeli motorist was shot in the head in the West Bank today while Mr. Arafat was meeting Gen. Powell in nearby Ramallah, Jewish settlers said.

THE HINDU

7 FEB 2001

Turkey beset by financial, political crises

By Batuk Gathani

BRUSSELS, FEB. 23. Turkey is reeling under political and financial crises which have seen the country's currency devalue by about 20 per cent and the stock market indices knocked out by about a third in three days. The ongoing turmoil also threatens to destroy the country's ambitious economic reforms programme.

Both the IMF and Turkish officials have come to the conclusion that the country's exchange rate regime is no longer sustainable and on Thursday, the currency (lira) was allowed to float freely against the dollar. The Government was reluctant to officially

devalue the over-valued currency. The inter-bank interest rates hit an unprecedented high of 7,500 per cent and currently fluctuates around 4000 per cent compared to 60 per cent recently.

According to financial analysts in major European capitals, the turmoil in Turkey has had a spillover effect on other emerging markets — particularly Russia and Brazil where investors are displaying nervousness with the financial haemorrhage in Turkey. The Russian stock market tumbled eight per cent on Wednesday. Turkey's foreign debt is estimated to be \$ 110 billions of which about 70 per cent is com-

mercial. The European private sector lender's exposure to Turkey is around \$ 54 billions and obviously this has triggered an eerie nervousness in European financial capitals. According to current estimates, the Turkish banking system is exposed to \$ 20 billions in bad debt. It remains to be seen if the weak Turkish banks would be able to meet their financial obligations.

The root cause of the current crisis is a public row between the Prime Minister, Mr. Bulent Ecevit and the President, Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, on how to contain the massive corruption in the country. There is also an unprece-

dent personal animosity between the two men and the military is watching the development with many Generals wondering if the President has the right to interfere with or scrutinise the actions of an elected Government.

The row between the President and the Prime Minister broke out at a meeting of the National Security Council, after which the latter walked out of the meeting. The President was reminded that he was not an elected leader but was chosen by Parliament. Mr. Sezer is a compromise candidate and is the first member of the judiciary to become Turkey's President.

THE HINDU

24 FEB 2007

Barak not to join Sharon Cabinet

By Kesava Menon

Mr Barak
(w)

MANAMA, FEB. 21. Mr. Ehud Barak's prospects of rehabilitation as a leader have been considerably damaged by the political gymnastics he has indulged in since being defeated by Mr. Ariel Sharon in the special Prime Ministerial election held two weeks ago.

On the night of his defeat, Mr. Barak announced he was taking a time-out from politics, then held prolonged discussions with Mr. Sharon on an agreement for a national unity government in which he would be Defence Minister and "finally" last night announced that he was indeed getting out of politics for a while. But this seems to be a work in progress and there may be yet more surprises in the coming nine days during which Mr. Barak continues as care-taker Prime Minister.

Mr. Barak's decision of yesterday to revert to his decisions of February 6 to resign from the chairmanship of the Labour party and to give up his membership in Parliament has thrown his party into confusion. Technically, the party should be headed by its secretary general, Mr. Ranaan Cohen, who could lead Labour into a unity government with Mr. Sharon's Likud. But Mr. Cohen is hardly a well-established leader and the party, as well as Mr. Sharon, would be fare more comfortable if a senior statesman like Mr. Shimon Peres was to head the Labour component of the unity government. Mr. Sharon has made no secret of the fact that he wants Mr. Peres as his Foreign Minister.

There is some talk in the Labour party of bestowing a temporary chairmanship on Mr. Peres. But some of the dovish members of the Labour party whose support in the party's central committee is essential for Mr. Peres to get the post are in no mood to form a national unity government. Without a groundswell of support for Mr. Peres' leadership the party seems slated for an internal struggle when the central committee convenes on Monday.

The Parliament Speaker, Mr. Avraham Burg, has already announced his candidacy as has Labour "hawk" Mr. Benjamin "Fuad" Ben Eliezer. Also waiting in the wings is Mr. Haim



Ramon a man with a considerable following in the labour unions.

In "finally" rejecting Mr. Sharon's offer, Mr. Barak said that he doubted Mr. Sharon's sincerity since he had not publicly said that only Mr. Barak would be considered for this post. This lack of trust discouraged him from taking up the post since he and Mr. Sharon had divergent views on the peace process and only mutual trust and respect would enable them to get along, Mr. Barak said. It is possible that this was just another display of political naivete by Mr. Barak, a relative late entrant into politics, but his zigs and zags have cost him a lot of respect.

THE HINDU

22 FEB 2001

One step forward, two steps back

51-8
19/2

Ariel Sharon's reign has got off to the most discouraging start, says ERIC SILVER

ARIEL Sharon's calculatedly soporific campaign promised the Israeli voters three things: peace, security and a government of national unity. Ten days after the hard-right old warrior registered the most devastating victory in his country's electoral history, he has achieved one of them. The defeated Labour Party has agreed to serve as an (almost) equal partner in Sharon's coalition. But after a week of escalating violence, peace and security look more elusive than ever. Few Israelis believe that the presence of the humiliated outgoing Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, as Defence Minister and the 77-year-old serial schemer, Shimon Peres, as Foreign Minister will bring these goals any closer.

A *Yediot Aharonot* columnist dubbed the new team a lame, almost farcical, government. "Its Defence Minister," he wrote, "will be the man most voters got sick of because of the security situation. Its foreign minister will be the man who masterminded a peace process most voters have despaired over. Mr Barak will kill Palestinians for Mr Sharon, and Mr Peres will carry the can for him." Although Mr Sharon has yet to take the oath or present his full Cabinet, his reign got off to the most discouraging start possible. A leaflet distributed by Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement announced last weekend: "The Sharon era will not be stable and secure, as the criminal Sharon promised. Our goal is to bring down Sharon and all his settlements." Palestinian gunmen intensified their campaign against isolated Jewish settlements and military outposts in Gaza and the West Bank. Israeli troops responded in kind. On Tuesday, two helicopters rocketed a senior officer in Yasser Arafat's Force 17 bodyguard, who was accused of heading a cell that mortared the Netzarim settlement and plotted to kidnap Israeli soldiers. The next day, Khalil Abu Alba, a Palestinian driver, ploughed his bus into a crowd of Israeli soldiers and civilians waiting for a lift on a main road south of Tel-Aviv. The carnage shredded whatever remained of Mr Sharon's softly, softly strategy for a long-term interim deal.

He hoped to silence international critics and separate the mass of Palestinians from the militants by relaxing the siege that is estimated by the UN to have cost the Palestinian economy \$1.5 billion since the Intifada erupted at the end of September. With current losses running at \$8.6 million a day, the Palestinian Authority is so bankrupt that a cheque it paid recently to the family of Mohammed Al Dura, the 12-year-old boy killed in October, bounced. Khalil Abu Alba was the kind of Palestinian worker Mr Sharon planned to foster.

A 35-year-old father of five, he had worked for five years for an Israeli bus company, ferrying day labourers from Gaza to jobs around Tel-Aviv. The rampage undermined the Israeli myth of the "non-political" Palestinian who cared more about feeding his children than fighting the Zionist enemy. If men like Abu Alba cannot be trusted to travel and work among us, Israelis asked, who can? Yet Mr Sharon has no alternative peace policy.

The damage was compounded by Mr Arafat's reaction. First, the Palestinian leader dismissed it as a traffic accident. A spokesman later expressed regret, but only after US Secretary of State Colin Powell read Mr Arafat the riot act. At the same time, the Palestinians persisted in accusing Israel of firing nerve gas and uranium-tipped shells against civilian targets. Israel denies both, and the Palestinians have produced no solid evidence.

The liberal daily, *Ha'aretz*, said: "Arafat's policy of lies," it warned on Friday, "could result in long-term strategic damage to the hopes of the two nations to end the violence and arrive at a stable and enduring peace". The alternative, as Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Hamas leader predicted recently, is "evil, harm and aggression, bloodshed and massacres".

THE STATESMAN

19 FEB 2001

Barak, Sharon agree on national unity government

Jerusalem, February 16

A BROAD-based unity government under prime minister-elect Ariel Sharon was taking shape in Israel today, with outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Barak and elder statesman Shimon Peres in key posts, counterbalancing Sharon's hawkish policies toward the Palestinians.

In a late-night meeting yesterday, Barak accepted Sharon's offer to remain in office as defence minister, and Peres would become foreign minister.

Sharon trounced Barak in an election for prime minister February 6, a vote seen as repudiation of Barak's offer of far-reaching concessions for peace with the Palestinians.

Labour party secretary Raanan Cohen said moderates would have a large voice in Sharon's government. "I think that with the appointment of Ehud Barak on the one hand and Shimon Peres on the other, this will be a government which will determine all the diplomatic policy," Cohen told Israel Television.

Both sides said agreement was close, with final details expected to be wrapped up over the weekend. Then Sharon would approach other parties to join the Labour-Likud nucleus.

The unity government talks came as Israel buried its dead from a Wednesday attack, when a Palestinian driver



Sharon



Barak

rammed his bus into a crowd of Israelis, killing seven young soldiers and a civilian. Violence continued yesterday, when a Palestinian security officer was killed while trying to infiltrate a Jewish settlement in Gaza, and Palestinians fired two mortar rounds at another settlement there. The escalating violence added urgency to the coalition talks, but there was opposition to the results

inside Barak's Labour Party.

Cabinet minister Haim Ramon, a one-time Barak ally who broke with him before the election, said Barak has no right to consider joining Sharon's government. "Public sense requires him to quit" after his defeat, Ramon said.

Barak pledged to retire after Sharon buried him by nearly 25 percentage points.

Newspaper commentators were highly critical of Barak's decision to stay in office. In the Maariv daily, analyst Hemi Shalev called Barak a "knight of no honour," while columnist Sever Plocker wrote in the Yediot Ahronot daily that Barak reached "the lowest level of credibility ever recorded by a prime minister in Israel or any other democratic country."

The Labour Party central committee must approve an agreement to join Sharon's government. After Barak's resounding defeat, approval for his move was not certain.

But Cohen told Israel Television, "whenever Barak and Peres appear together, the party gives its approval." (AP)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 FEB 2001

ISRAEL / UNITY GOVT. TAKING SHAPE

Barak to join Sharon Cabinet

10.16 By Kesava Menon 13/2

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) FEB. 16. Israel's care-taker Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, is to serve as Defence Minister in the Cabinet of Mr. Ariel Sharon, the man who has been elected to replace him. With Mr. Shimon Peres also expected to join the Sharon Cabinet as Foreign Minister there is hope that the national unity Government to be formed will not deviate too far from the "peace option" that has been pursued for the past few years.

At the same time, Israel has been left bewildered by Mr. Barak's political gymnastics that one commentator has dubbed "a back flip with a double twist".

Mr. Barak took his decision to join the Cabinet, and presented the guidelines according to which the coalition Government is to operate, before a committee of his Labour party yesterday. He urged the committee to approve the deal and is likely to repeat the plea when the central committee of the party meets to consider the issue after the week-end.

Between them, Mr. Barak and Mr. Peres have enough clout within the central committee to win approval for the deal but some of the left-wing Labourites are so opposed to any co-existence with Mr. Sharon's Likud party that they might resign from Labour. Labourites such as Mr. Yossi Beilin are expected to join hands with other leftist and pro-peace parties to set up yet another organisation in Israel's political firmament.

With the Likud Labour agreement in his hands, Mr. Sharon has taken a giant step towards the formation of a unity Government

that will also include right-wing parties though perhaps not the most extreme of these.

According to a report in *Haaretz* Mr. Barak has given up his demand that two policy points should be included in the coalition agreement. Mr. Barak had wanted the coalition agreement to enshrine that the Palestinians would be allowed to set up a state and that Israel would dismantle isolated Jewish settlements.

In response, Mr. Sharon was said to have dropped his "red lines", or the limits which he would not cross in dealing with the Palestinians, from the draft of the coalition agreement. The "red lines" were that he would not negotiate while the violent uprising continued, that he would never recognise any right of return of the Palestinian refugees and that he would never divide Jerusalem.

The non-inclusion of these policy points in the coalition agreement does not mean that either side has abandoned its known positions. It is just a matter of putting these matters aside while focusing on the areas in which they could find agreement.

Each and every one of these issues is bound to become the subject of endless bargaining within the coalition.

With the right wing parties bound to contribute their voice to the debate it would be a wonder if some party or the other did not soon tire of the cacophony. For the present, however, Mr. Sharon is expected to form a Government in which his Likud will have eight Ministers, including himself, and the Labour seven.

THE HINDU

17 FEB 2001

Defuse West Asia powder keg

51-7
167

THERE are three great current fault lines running through West Asia: the unsettled, no longer negotiated, issue of the Israeli possession of the Syrian territory of Golan Heights; the now suspended negotiations over the future and nature of a Palestinian state; and the long unresolved threat from Saddam Hussein to both the peace of West Asia and the world.

By electing Ariel Sharon, the Israeli public have in effect decided to toughen up on all three issues, confident that military might will contain them and that even a worse case scenario of a rejuvenated Iraqi President with weapons of mass destruction can be kept in its box by Israel's preparedness, if all else fails, to unleash its nuclear weapons.

It is an almighty gamble and the cost of losing is indescribable. If there were a war in West Asia involving weapons of mass destruction, civilisation would probably be set back 100 years.

Not only would it involve the physical destruction of millions of innocents, it would destroy the heartland and homeland of three of the world's great deistic religions and have repercussions that would tear at the soul of both Europe and North America, not least because they are now home to millions of adherents to the Jewish and Islamic faiths.

All this is to say the obvious. Yet it is clear that the efforts of outsiders, not least Bill Clinton's rigorous and time-consuming commitment have not born fruit.

Israel has elected as Prime Minister a right-winger whose bloodstained history is the living embodiment of the unforgiving, unreconciling, uncompromising and avengeful Jew. And it became very apparent in 2000 that neither the allied war against Iraq a decade ago, nor the aggressive sanctions that have followed it have succeeded in undermining Mr Hussein's regime, despite being responsible in their ham-fisted application for reducing to penury ordinary Iraqis leading, as Unicef claims, to the unnecessary deaths of over half a million children.

As for Syria, earlier hopes that with the passing of Hafez al Assad, his son's regime would be more open to compromise have proved unrealistic. Arab governments feel that their investment in the peace process has been undermined by the election of Mr Sharon and their reticence, already on a fast ebb, about making life easier for Mr Hussein, is all but diminished.

For 10 years, since the defeat of Iraq and the commencement of the Oslo peace process, West Asia has lived on hope. That is gone, and in its place is a vacuum in which almost anything, including the worst, could happen.

No bigger problem is on the desk of President George Bush. Yet all the indications are his new administration has not absorbed the fullness of the change of mood and, in as much as it understands a part of it, is depending on its old reflexes — as with last week's decision to increase funding for Mr Hussein's ineffective Opposition in exile to see it through.

If years of negotiation have produced so little, it is perhaps time for some unilateralism, both by the protagonists and also the heavyweights in the UN Security Council.

The place to start is Iraq, with a joint decision by the Western powers to rewrite the post-war sanctions regime against Iraq. The economic ones should be thrown away and, stripped to the essentials, there should be a tight embargo on military hardware, remembering that it was under the benign era of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Francois Mitterrand that Mr Hussein purchased most of his formidable arsenal.

This would not solve the problem of the potential for Mr Hussein's aggression but it would limit the damage his still broken-backed military can inflict. It would clear the

air and work to keep Arab opinion on the side of the Palestinian peace process.

Second to this should be a joint announcement by the three Western powers that they consider the Oslo nego-

tiations, with its concept of incremental step-by-step withdrawals of Israel from Palestinian turf, dead.

Instead of Israel seeking a formal peace agreement that will make Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories possible, they should make it clear that in their opinion Israel should announce that it was deciding unilaterally to withdraw so that a peace treaty should become possible.

Yes, it would doubtless be done on Mr Sharon's minimalist conception of what to forego, yet if it is coupled with a preparedness to recognise a Palestinian state on what territory they have so far acquired it would be psychologically a big step forward.

If Mr Sharon is not prepared for this step and instead elects for the status quo and military confrontation then Europe and the USA should make it clear that Israel is on its own, even to the point of winding up the hefty amounts of American aid. As for the Golan Heights, Syria will only negotiate once it feels the tide of Arab opinion has turned; it will not negotiate to improve that climate.

The West Asia "order" of the last decade is gone. A new way of approaching old problems has yet been devised. But time is very short and the fuses lying around are even shorter. Sometime in March or even a month later, some big new decisions have to be made.

**WORLD
VIEW**
By JONATHAN POWER

THE STATESMAN

16 FEB 2001

110-16 WEST ASIA / SECURITY OFFICIAL KILLED IN FIREFIGHT

Israel seals off Palestinian areas

JERUSALEM, FEB. 15. A Palestinian security official trying to infiltrate a Jewish settlement was killed in a firefight with Israeli troops early on Thursday, a day after a Gaza Strip bus driver plowed into a crowded bus stop in Israel and killed eight young Israelis.

In response to the hit-and-run bus attack, the deadliest in Israel in four years, Israel sealed off the Palestinian areas by air, land and sea.

The Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, returning to Gaza City from abroad, renewed allegations that Israel was largely responsible for the upsurge of violence.

Asked about the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush's appeal that Israelis and Palestinians try to calm the situation, Mr. Arafat said: "I thank him (Bush), but he must know that we are not the ones who used depleted uranium or poison gas or helicopters or shells or tanks."

Mr. Arafat has repeatedly alleged that Israeli soldiers are using depleted uranium ammunition and poison gas against Palestinians, a charge the Israel has denied.

The Palestinian leader warned that "this escalation does not only endanger peace, but also stability in the area." Israel has said that while the Palestinian Authority was not directly responsible for the bus attack, it has incited against Israel and encouraged such killings.

The attack prompted widespread anxiety in Israel about the future relations with the Palestinians. With peace talks unlikely to resume in the near future, some warned the two sides were sliding into a full-fledged confrontation.

"It is a strange war in which there is both shooting and talking, in which it is impossible to figure out what the front lines are...and whose goals are murky," wrote the commen-



Palestinian workers, lining up at an Israeli checkpoint to enter the Erez industrial area, run for cover as their frustrated co-workers hurl rocks over the adjoining wall and Israeli soldiers fire warning shots in the air on Tuesday. The crossing point was fully sealed off on Wednesday. — AP

tator, Mr. Sever Plotzker, in the *Yediot Ahronot* daily.

"But nonetheless, it is a bloody, gory war."

In nearly five months of Israeli-Palestinian fighting — mostly gun battles, stone throwing clashes and shooting ambushes — 401 people have been killed, including nearly 330 Palestinians and several dozen Israelis.

The bus attack accelerated efforts by Israel's two rival political camps, led by the Prime Minister-elect, Mr. Ariel Sharon, and his defeated predecessor, Mr. Ehud Barak, to negotiate the terms of a joint government. The

negotiator, Mr. Haim Ramon, of Mr. Barak's Labour Party said on Thursday that an agreement was close.

Mr. Sharon and Mr. Barak have already agreed on the outlines of a peace programme, aiming at another interim accord with the Palestinians, instead of a full peace treaty.

Mr. Barak, meanwhile, was expected to announce shortly whether he would accept Mr. Sharon's offer to serve as Defence Minister. Mr. Barak had said after his crushing defeat Feb. 6 that he would leave politics for a while. — AP

THE HINDU

16 FEB 2002

WEST ASIA / PALESTINIAN OFFICIAL KILLED

A near-war situation, says Israel

By Kesava Menon 110-16

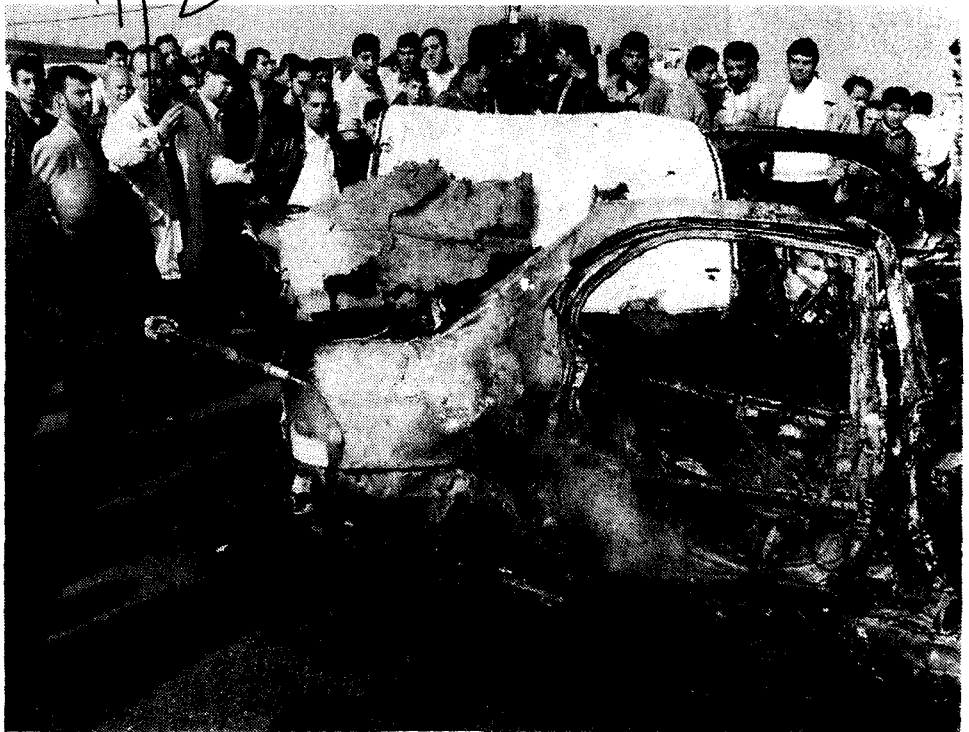
MANAMA (BAHRAIN), FEB. 13. The killing today of a senior Palestinian security official, when his car was blown by a rocket fired from a helicopter, has again brought into focus Israel's policy of resorting to selective assassinations.

Israel argues that it is in a near-war situation and that there is nothing else that they can do against senior cadres who direct terrorist operations against them. However, human rights groups in Israel and outside it alike question a policy which in effect imposes death penalties without the victims being afforded a judicial process.

Col. Masood Ayyad of the Force 17 that has special responsibility for protecting the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, was killed in the Gaza Strip today when the rocket smashed into his car. Four Palestinians travelling in a vehicle behind were injured.

Swiftly admitting responsibility for the attack, an Israeli army spokesman said Col. Ayyad was an operative of the Hizbollah who had ordered at least five terrorist attacks on Israel including a mortar attack on the Israeli village of Kfar Darom yesterday. The Palestinian Authority has denied that Col. Ayyad had any links with the Lebanese group Hizbollah.

Palestinians had not got over the killing of a physician, Dr. Thabet Thabet, by an Israeli hit squad in the West Bank some weeks ago. Dr. Thabet was associated with the Palestinian Red Crescent and was also actively involved in "track two" talks with Israeli peaceniks. Though Dr. Thabet was a member of the PLO's dominant faction Fatah, the Palestinians have denied the Israeli accusation that Dr. Thabet was directly involved in some of the violent attacks carried out by the faction's militant arm Fatah Hawks. Even the Israeli peace camp and media had been disturbed by the killing in front of his family. Another senior activist of Fatah had been killed by a helicopter-launched rocket in November.



A fireman extinguishes fire from a burning Palestinian car after a missile attack by an Israeli helicopter near Jaball camp in Gaza Strip on Tuesday. — AP

The Israeli Deputy Defence Minister, Mr. Ephraim Sneh, who spoke to CNN after Col. Ayyad's killing, defended actions of this type as the last resort. Mr. Sneh said Israel had tried its best to arrest those suspected of involvement in terrorist strikes whenever it was possible and had indeed apprehended Col. Ayyad's son only days ago. But where they were unable to arrest terrorist master-minds they had no choice but to eliminate them ensure the security of Israelis, he said.

The problem here is that though both sides talk in war-like terms, it is not an all out conflict in which the targeting of the leadership on

either side is perhaps justified. This is after all a situation in which the leadership of the two sides send and receive greetings and are insisting that they will soon resume negotiations. If it is a civilian conflict, should the normal rules not be applied and the suspects duly apprehended and brought to justice? But then, as is general in the combat against terrorism, what is civil society to do when terrorists do not follow civilised rules and the normal machinery of justice cannot be brought to bear? But these sort of killings further inflame the atmosphere and make the search for peace all the more difficult.

THE HINDU

14 FEB 2001

Sharon coalition talks hit impasse

Jerusalem, Feb. 12 (Reuters): Attempts by Israel's newly-elected leader Ariel Sharon to forge a unity coalition embracing both Right-wing Likud and Centre-Left Labour parties has suffered a setback, a Labour politician said today.

"I can say the talks have hit an impasse," Labour whip Ofer Pines-Paz told Israel Radio after discussions with Likud on trying to form a joint platform for peace-making. "I hope later on the remaining negotiators will bring it back on track."

Prime Minister-elect Sharon has pledged to form a national unity government with Labour to gather a broad base of support to tackle Palestinian protests against occupation in which hundreds of people, mostly Arabs, have been killed.

Labour Cabinet minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer threw his hat into the ring to head the Labour Party after outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Barak officially resigns, causing fresh turmoil for a party battered by Barak's electoral defeat. Failing a coalition with Labour, Sharon will have to bring right-wing parties into his government by an end of March deadline or face new elections for premier and parliament.

Pines-Paz said Sharon has not really decided "what is the direction of his government. He wants to eat his cake and have it whole in the sense that he both wants us in (the government) and all of his

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partners from the extreme right in too. It won't work."

Israeli troops shot dead two Palestinians in the West Bank today. Soldiers killed Ziad Abu Sway when they opened fire on a bus carrying Palestinian labourers near the West Bank town of Bethlehem, Palestinian witnesses and hospital sources said.

Atef Ahmed al-Nabulsi was shot dead near the West Bank city of Ramallah and was taken by Israeli soldiers to a military base. Israeli security sources confirmed Nabulsi had died.

The deaths followed the killing by Palestinian gunmen of Jewish settler Tsahi Sasson, 35, as he drove along a road outside Jerusalem yesterday. The death toll in more than four months of confrontation has risen to at least 321 Palestinians, 53 Israelis and 13 Israeli Arabs.

The violence erupted in late September.

THE TELEGRAPH

13 FEB 2001

119-12 ✓

A HAWK'S AGENDA OF 'PEACE' ✓

MR. ARIEL SHARON, Israel's new Prime Minister-elect, is known in West Asia and beyond as a quintessential hawk in expounding his country's position on the issue of waging a diplomatic war for 'peace' with the established Arab states and the Palestinians. His decisive victory, not really unexpected in the latest prime ministerial election in the Jewish state, owes much to the sound bites of his politics as a no-nonsense soldier for war and for 'peace'. It is in some ways an irony that the man he defeated, Mr. Ehud Barak, was himself famous for his array of decorations as a military leader before he took up the reins of power in 1999. Yet, if Mr. Barak looks forlorn as he surveys his political Waterloo, the reason seems to have much to do with Mr. Sharon's skill, somewhat unsuspected outside Israel, in having conveyed a message to its voters that a hawk could be relied upon to strike a deal of uncompromised 'peace' with their Palestinian neighbours. Several other factors, all with intrinsically domestic connotations, account for the outcome of this poll. However, Mr. Sharon has signalled his awareness of the shock that his electoral triumph has produced across the larger international stage despite a near-global reach of the sound waves of his hawkishness. This will explain the post-poll reports of a search by him for allies within the Israeli centre-left spectrum, which encompasses Mr. Barak's Labour Party, rather than the right-wing, which is more hospitable to Mr. Sharon's political soulmates within and outside his own Likud. His compulsions centre very much on the composition of the present Parliament, which was not dissolved when the prime ministerial poll was called. However, the Likud leader appears at this stage to be cognisant, too, of the need to craft in due course a new government that would not look like a cabinet for perpetual war with the Palestinians and other Arabs.

It is a welcome sign of political maturity that the long-serving Palestinian leader, Mr.

Yasser Arafat, and the Authority, a pre-statehood entity that he heads, are reported to have taken the line that Mr. Sharon's emergence as Israel's new saviour is its internal matter. At the same time, the Palestinian spokespersons have let the Likud's strongman know in quite categorical terms that there is a condition for any resumption of the West Asia peace process in the new circumstances. The marker being placed by the Palestinians in the diplomatic sands of West Asia is that the ideas floated by Mr. Barak should not be abandoned without a further consideration by all concerned. Some of the 'concessions' that Mr. Barak has made in recent negotiations, as reckoned by his critics in Tel Aviv, have raised hopes among the Palestinians that they might be able to exercise a measure of sovereignty, by whatever means, over the Arab parts of Jerusalem at a future date.

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The Palestinians and the Syrians are still furious over Mr. Sharon's many 'anti-Arab' acts of omission and commission that included his perceived role in engineering Israel's push into Lebanon and a massacre in refugee camps there in the past. However, the international community is keen to ensure that the politics of anger yields way to a diplomacy of hope. This is reflected in the comments by the Bush administration and Russia on Mr. Sharon's win. As the man whose controversial visit to a holy site in Jerusalem had sparked the ongoing Palestinian 'revolt' against Israel, the Likud leader will need to demonstrate statesmanship. His supporters argue that he stands for a soldier's peace of ending the Palestinian 'violence', as distinct from the diplomat's peace, which had been sought by Mr. Barak in the footsteps of an earlier Israeli architect of the Oslo peace process that the U.S. and Russia had helped to fashion. Mr. Sharon may have flaunted anti-Oslo credentials but his new mandate does not exclude the peace option.

THE HINDU

12 FEB 2001

Sharon hopeful of tie-up

✓
w/ Bush
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AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

JERUSALEM, Feb. 11. - The Israeli Prime Minister-elect Mr Ariel Sharon said he would be able to forge a political partnership with the caretaker premier Mr Ehud Barak's Labour Party following a meeting today with his defeated rival.

The two leaders met for an hour at the Prime Minister's office after a first round of transition talks on Friday.

A team from Mr Sharon's Right-wing Likud Party will also hold talks with representatives of Labour Party on the possibilities of a coalition government.

Mr Barak announced after his election defeat on Tuesday that he would quit politics, but has since been leading his labour party's negotiations on a possible partnership with the Likud Party.

The call for a national government has made gains in the Labour ranks, with its endorsement from both Mr Barak and former Prime Minister Mr Shimon Peres, who is also leading the negotiations.

Mr Barak remains in charge of government affairs until Mr

Sharon forms a coalition in parliament. He faces a late-March deadline.

(The Palestinian leader Mr Yasser Arafat meanwhile said he would give Mr Sharon a chance to show his peacemaking credentials as violence flared up in the West Bank and Gaza Strip today, adds Reuters.)

Arafat sued: The families of victims of a bomb attack on a Jewish settler schoolbus in the Gaza Strip two months ago filed a lawsuit today seeking damages of \$25 million from Mr Arafat and top security officials.

The bombing killed two Jewish settlers and injured nine more, including children whose limbs were blown off or mutilated, and triggered massive punitive raids by Israeli forces on Palestinian targets in the Gaza Strip.

Plea to Bush: The Palestinians today urged the administration of Mr George W Bush to restate Washington's support for the international committee looking into the deadly tide of violence that has engulfed the region for more than four months.

THE STATESMAN

12 FEB 2001

Barak, Sharon discuss joint Govt.

JERUSALEM, FEB. 9. The Prime Minister-elect, Mr. Ariel Sharon, and his predecessor, Mr. Ehud Barak, talked today about setting up a joint Government, even though the two disagree sharply on how to make peace with the Palestinians.

Before the meeting, Mr. Barak backed up a key Sharon claim, that concessions he offered the Palestinians do not obligate Mr. Sharon.

Mr. Sharon said in an interview published today in the *Yedio Ahronot* daily that he would seek an open-ended non-belligerency pact with the Palestinians, not a peace agreement. He said he would not follow Mr. Barak's path.

Mr. Barak's offers included setting up a Palestinian state in the almost all of the West Bank and Gaza, sharing Jerusalem and dismantling many Jewish settlements.

The Palestinians did not accept Mr. Barak's proposals, but the negotiator, Mr. Ahmed Qureia, said talks must restart from the point where they ended just before Israel's Tuesday election. "We can't go backwards," said Mr. Qureia.

But Mr. Sharon said all along that Mr. Barak's ideas would not obligate him, and Mr. Barak agreed. "The principle 'nothing is

agreed upon until everything is agreed upon' was accepted by all sides," Mr. Barak said in a letter to the U.S. President, Mr. George Bush, according to his office.

Negotiating teams from their parties, Likud and Labour, discussed dividing up Ministries in Sharon Cabinet. Separated by a low table in Mr. Barak's office, the two stood up to shake hands at the request of photographers.

Mr. Barak's Labour party was the first Mr. Sharon invited for coalition talks, which began last evening. Likud officials told Labour representatives that they would be offered such top portfolios as the Defence or Foreign Ministries, Israeli media reported.

But the Labour negotiators said they wanted details on Mr. Sharon's plans for peace talks with the Palestinians before they agreed to discuss the distribution of Ministries. The two teams will meet again on Sunday.

Mr. Barak and the elder statesman, Mr. Shimon Peres, told a Labour party meeting that they were open to the idea of the party joining a government with Mr. Sharon.

In a surprise development on Friday, the Palestinian President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, called up Mr. Sharon and told him that the Palesti-

nians wanted to resume peace talks. Mr. Sharon replied that violence must end first, a source in Mr. Sharon's office said.

The source said Mr. Arafat and Mr. Sharon had spoken by telephone for the first time since the Likud party leader won the election. Mr. Arafat congratulated Mr. Sharon in a conversation held in a "very good atmosphere", he said. "Arafat told Sharon the Palestinians want peace and are interested in resuming peace negotiations," the source said. "Sharon said we will have to find a way to make progress to talk peace... I would be glad to do all I can to help innocent civilians and the condition for it is a complete halt to violence."

Meanwhile, Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen traded fire in the West Bank city of Ramallah today, witnesses and the army said.

The witnesses said Israeli soldiers shooting from a hotel and a nearby building on the edge of the city used heavy calibre weapons and small arms against Palestinian gunmen firing automatic rifles from buildings under construction. They said the troops were also firing tank-mounted machine guns. Hospital sources said at least 10 demonstrators had been wounded by rubber-coated metal bullets.

In the clutches of a hawk? HD-16

In electing Ariel Sharon, the Israelis have shown that for now their security concerns overshadow their hopes for a permanent peace, says KESAVA MENON.

ISRAELIS HAVE, broadly-speaking, two basic approaches to the central issue in their political life — the terms of their interaction with the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular. One is based on the presumption that the Arabs are an incorrigible hate-filled people who have to be constantly hammered into place. In the other approach, greater emphasis is placed on the belief that the constant resort to force brutalises Israelis and that it can never bring a permanent peace. The successful Israeli politician is the one who can judiciously mix both approaches and in his first outing as Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, has proved that he could not.

At the end of a decade of negotiations, moments of calm and renewed conflict it is noteworthy that only the first of the five Prime Ministers Israel has had in the last six years, Yitzhak Rabin, was able to get the mixture right. When Mr. Barak became Prime Minister in 1999 there were many who were inclined to see him as Rabin reincarnate. Even perhaps better since he was younger and more vigorous. The favourable comparison between the second chief of the Israeli army to become Prime Minister and the first, Rabin, seemed appropriate more so since both came from the liberal end of the country's political spectrum.

In the initial aftermath of Mr. Barak's humiliating defeat in the special Prime Ministerial election held on February 6 the first assessments pointed to the reckless abandon with which he had pursued a final and comprehensive deal with the Palestinians as one of the main causes for his failure. What was most notable about his term in office, said independent analysts and Mr. Barak alike, was his courage in breaking established taboos. He had drawn a vision of the sort of arrangements that would permit Israel and the Arabs to co-exist in peace and promote the prosperity of both. It was also a vision that no Israeli leader with solid aspirations of becoming Prime Minister had ever come close to articulating before.

Even after the exit polls had shown that his defeat would be by an unprecedentedly huge margin

Mr. Barak did not seem to lose his customary ebullience. He had established a new matrix for Israel's relationship with the Palestinians that might have been ahead of its time but would eventually prove the only viable one in the long-term, Mr. Barak. Others were less sanguine. Some felt that Mr. Barak had exhumed deep hidden fears amongst Israelis and Arabs alike by forcing them to look at a reality that neither was ready to contemplate. Since the Arabs had rejected this vision at the negotiating table and the Israelis at the ballot box it was probable that the realisation of this vision had been put off forever, observed some commentators.

To those not directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the vision authored by Mr. Barak appears the only realistic basis for an

end to the conflict. If the last details had been hammered out the final deal would have created two states side by side with both having secure well-defined borders and their capitals in Jerusalem/Al Quds. The Palestinian refugees might have been granted the right of return in principle but would have had to understand that Israel would have control over the exercise of this right. Israel would not have ceded sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif complex but in the future, as now, the Palestinian waqf would have control over Jewish access to the Holy Sites.

After Mr. Barak's defeat by Mr. Ariel Sharon there were declarations from the latter's supporters that this vision would never become reality. Mr. Sharon's victory, they said, proved that Israelis

would never agree to share either the Holy Sites or the whole city of Jerusalem. They would retain the Jewish settlements that are embedded in Palestinian territory and retain control over the Jordan Valley. The kind of state that the Palestinians would be allowed to set up would at best be one that was very limited in power and extending over little more than the territory they currently control. Israelis of the dovish left, who were preparing to join Mr. Sharon's Cabinet said that this was merely his initial bargaining position and that he would surely moderate his stance once he actually began to govern. Implicit in this view was the belief that at least a part of Mr. Barak's vision could be resurrected and sooner than was generally believed.

Also implicit in this assessment was the belief that the Israeli voters had not so much rejected Mr. Barak's vision as they had punished him for persisting with it in the face of Palestinian non-acceptance. There was anger in the left at Mr. Barak's political clumsiness and go-it-alone style of functioning. But there was more anger at the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and his people for rejecting the great concessions on offer.

There was also a deeper concern. After all, they said, Mr. Barak had offered the Palestinians the maximum that Israel could offer. In their rejection had the Palestinians sent the message that they were not interested in co-existence with Israel? Instead of a vision of two states for two people were the Palestinians persisting with their historical vision of a single Arab state between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan river in which Jews would not be welcome?

The Palestinians say that Israelis should have no doubt about their intentions since they have made the strategic decision for peace. In recognising Israel at the beginning of the Oslo processes they had conceded Israel's right to exist.

But the Oslo process had not brought them closer to the substantial fulfilment of their aspirations and the period since the negotiations began has actually been one during which their socio-economic conditions have deteriorated. They also maintain that the violence that erupted in their territories was justified because it was the understandable reaction to the lack of progress in the negotiations.

In electing Mr. Sharon the Israelis have shown that for now their security concerns overshadow their hopes for a permanent peace. It does not appear that the Israelis will be in a mood to think seriously about the negotiations again for months to come.



Ariel Sharon sits beneath an image of Theodore Herzl, founding father of Zionism.

Bush takes cautious first step on West Asia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WASHINGTON, Feb. 9. - In a burst of telephone diplomacy, President Mr George W Bush called Mr Yasser Arafat for the first time yesterday to discuss the West Asia peace process, his press secretary Mr Ari Fleischer said.

They talked on the need to promote peace and stability in the region and bring an end to the violence there, Mr Fleischer said.

Referring to the car bomb attack in a Jewish locality for which a Palestinian organization has claimed responsibility, Mr Fleischer said: The incident is another reminder of the need to create a just and lasting peace in region.

The Bush administration, while moving cautiously on a peacemaking role, has opened a dialogue with Arab and Israeli leaders. The immediate aim is to head off any outbreak of violence over Mr Ariel Sharon's

ISRAEL POLL RESULTS

JERUSALEM, Feb. 9. - Mr Ariel Sharon has got 62.3 per cent of the votes and Mr Barak has secured 37.7 per cent. in the prime ministerial elections. Israel's central election commission released the final results yesterday. Only 62 per cent of the eligible voters cast their ballots, the commission reported yesterday. The official results will be issued in a formal ceremony on Tuesday, commission spokesman Mr Giora Prodes said. From that day, Mr Sharon will have 45 days to form a coalition and win parliamentary approval. - AP

election as Israel's Prime Minister.

US Secretary of State Mr Colin Powell and Mr Bush talked the Middle East to Mr Sharon on Tuesday.

State department spokesman

Mr Richard Boucher said US efforts at this point was primarily directed to involve all concerned parties in the peace process and take concrete steps to restrain violence.

"I think the regional parties appreciate the need to pursue a regional approach, appreciate the fact that we want to work with them to achieve peace in this region," Mr Boucher said.

On the entirely diverse stands of the Palestinians and Israelis on the peace process, he said "We will not prescribe the starting point.

"It is up to the parties to agree, and obviously the Israeli Prime Minister-elect Mr Ariel Sharon first needs to form a government. As he prepares to take office, we will consult with him, we will talk to the Palestinians, we will consult with our Arab friends." He said once the USA has had a chance to consult both sides, it will be in a better position to participate in the peace process.

THE STATESMAN

BARAK GOES DOWN

But Sharon's options are not unlimited

THE chances of peace in the Mideast appear to have receded with the election of the 72 year old Ariel Sharon, an uncompromising hawk. Ehud Barak, to give him his due, had made peace with the Palestinians his central priority since coming to power in 1999, which certainly cannot be said of his predecessor Binyamin Netanyahu. Having raised expectations, however, he failed to deliver and in the end alienated both peacenik and hardline factions in Israeli society. Palestinians accuse him of harsh measures to curb the *intifada*; Barak also played hardball on ceding control over the al-Aqsa mosque and the issue of return of refugees. Israeli Arabs, 12 per cent of the electorate, turned out heavily for Barak last time but stayed at home this election. Other Israelis may have concluded that Barak's efforts to make peace have led to an increase in militant attacks and fatalities, and voted for the only other option.

Sharon was responsible for the push into Lebanon, Israel's equivalent of Vietnam, and was indicted for the role he played in the infamous massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. He has some dangerous ideas about how to put down the *intifada* — for example, sending Israeli soldiers into Palestinian areas to hunt down militants, which would be a violation of the current peace accords and could well suck Jordan and Iraq into a wider war. There are, luckily, other possible outcomes. Sharon's first task will be to cobble together a ruling coalition in the Knesset, whose composition remains the same as before. Assuming Barak's Labour Party does not help him out, he will have to co-opt orthodox religious parties with whom he has an uneasy equation — the secular-orthodox divide in Israeli society is almost as wide as the Israeli-Palestinian one. If there is another election soon, as many predict, and the popular Shimon Peres gets to run as Labour candidate, Sharon will get a run for his money. That prospect, at least, should hold him in check; nobody would carry more conviction than Sharon if he were to initiate peace moves and make necessary concessions to the Palestinians.

WATER REFORM

Kolkata survey indicates acceptability

A SURVEY carried out by consultants on how to improve Kolkata's water supply belies populist premises. It found the majority of Kolkatans, including slum dwellers, willing to pay for improved water supply. Provision of free water over decades has had disastrous consequences all too evident in the quality of the water. The CMC spends far more than it receives on water supply, which means there is no money for maintenance, let alone improving pumps, filters, pipelines and treatment facilities. In addition, Kolkatans have been turned into water guzzlers, since there is no incentive for saving it. This is causing the city's water table to fall rapidly, with alarming consequences. Summers already witness drought-like situations. The presence of arsenic in water is usually attributed to the collapse of aquifers due to subsidence in the water table. In addition the soil gets weakened, and cave-ins and house collapses are possible outcomes.

Buddhadev Bhattacharya's suggested solution is in the old socialist mould — tax "well-off" people and supply treated water. The problem is that this will do nothing to encourage saving — rather, heavily taxing the responsible ones will be counter-productive. The answer lies in installing water meters and charging according to usage. That people are willing to pay for clean water is evident in the numbers installing expensive water treatment units of doubtful utility in their homes. Cross-subsidies could be incorporated in case of equity considerations, but the basic principle ought to be that one pays more if one consumes more. There is an important rider. If water metering comes into widespread use, it will become acceptable only if resources raised are ploughed back into treatment facilities for water. The CMC is overstuffed and needs to float a VRS for excess employees. Such measures would ensure a supply reasonably free of earthworms, bacilli, arsenic, and effect an immense improvement in general health. The technology exists, and funding agencies are willing to financially back the effort. But does the will and organizational capability exist in the present ruling dispensation?

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 2001

Palestinians back to square one?

By Kesava Menon

JERUSALEM, FEB. 8. With the landslide victory of hardliner Mr. Ariel Sharon in the just concluded Prime Ministerial elections, the proposals put forward by Mr. Ehud Barak — for a final peace deal with the Palestinians — are clearly off the table. The framework for an agreement that has been outlined so far by Mr. Sharon fall far short of Palestinian aspirations. The big question in the region today is whether Mr. Sharon will show any signs of flexibility now that he has achieved his life's ambition of becoming Israel's Prime Minister.

The tone adopted by Mr. Sharon after his election has not been as harsh as it was feared it would be. He has emphasised that the security of "all Israelis" (and by that he has made a nod to Israeli Arabs as well) is his first priority. But he has also spoken of the need to live in peace with "our Palestinian neighbours" and of maintaining regional stability. Prior to the election Mr. Sharon had sent emissaries to talk to the Palestinians and he is reported to have received a warm congratulatory message from the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat.

At the early stage of his election

campaign, Mr. Sharon had taken uncompromising positions on three issues while outlining that he preferred a long-term interim settlement instead of an immediate comprehensive one. The Palestinians who were on the verge of being offered an acceptable comprehensive deal by Mr. Barak are impatient to set up an independent State and are in no mood to settle for a long-term interim settlement. Neither are they about to concede Mr. Sharon's initial positions that Israel will retain possession of the whole of Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley and that they will not dismantle a single Jewish settlement.

On the day after his victory Mr. Sharon said he would work for a deal that ensured security and stability but also one that protected Israel's vital historical and security interests. In particular, he has insisted that he will try to retain Jerusalem as Israel's eternal and undivided capital. Although he has not mentioned the Jordan Valley and the settlements in specific terms the phraseology suggests that he has not changed his positions on these matters either. Before he even puts his outline for any deal with the Palestinians on the table Mr. Sharon is bound to insist on the restoration of security — that the Palestinians stop



The Israeli Prime Minister-elect, Mr. Ariel Sharon, touches the Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall, as he prays while visiting Judaism's holiest site in Jerusalem's Old City on Wednesday. — Reuters

their violent agitation against Israel's occupation of their territory.

Indeed, the one clear message from these elections is that a majority of Israelis do not want negotiations to continue so long as the Palestinians persist in their violence. This view is shared even by many of those who do not disfavour an acceptance of Palestinian demands but switched their vote away from Mr. Barak be-

cause he persisted with the negotiations despite the on-going violence. The Palestinian uprising has gone so far that it may probably be impossible for Mr. Arafat and his officials to curb the violence, even if they were so inclined, unless they can see that their aspirations are close to being fulfilled. It is indeed a vicious circle. The Palestinians are unlikely to refrain from violence unless there is progress in the negotiations and Mr. Sharon will find it difficult to resume the negotiations, even if he is so inclined, unless there is an end to violence.

However, the exigencies of domestic politics might force Mr. Sharon to make some moves to get the negotiations re-started. Given the composition of Israel's fractured Parliament Mr. Sharon's best chance of forming a stable government is if he joins hands with the Labour party. The Labour party is in some turmoil after Mr. Barak resigned its chairmanship but there is a strong possibility that a big enough faction of the Labour party, even if not all of it, will join Mr. Sharon's Cabinet. Before joining the Cabinet, however, the Labour will insist on a coalition agreement that enshrines the principle of continuity in negotiations.

THE HINDU

9 FEB 2001

Hardly one to turn the other cheek

EVEN before the votes were counted in Tuesday's prime ministerial election, Israeli pundits were predicting a general election — for Prime Minister and parliament — in the autumn. Like Binyamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon inherits a fractious, brittle body politic. Prospective coalition partners are already squabbling over the spoils.

His chances of serving out the remaining two years of the present parliament, or of making radical domestic policy changes, are slim. But that may not prevent the Likud victor and his Palestinian foes from dragging West Asia towards a war most Jews and most Arabs do not want.

Mr Netanyahu turned down the chance of running against Mr Barak, though the polls suggested he would win in a canter, because he knew a return to the prime ministership he lost in 1999 would bring him more grief than glory, unless there were simultaneous parliamentary elections. At 51, Mr Netanyahu could bide his time. At 72, Mr Sharon could not. In the last elections 21 months ago, 15 parties won seats in the Knesset, Israel's 120-member parliament. Since then, at least three of them have split, bringing the total to 18. To form an even half-stable government, Mr Sharon will have to buy the support of at least 61 MPs. He can never be sure they will stay bought.

Under the two-tier electoral system introduced in 1996, voters can choose a mainstream candidate for Prime Minister and a sectional party — ethnic, religious, ideological, eccentric — for the Knesset. With a low threshold of 1.5 per cent of the votes cast, the small parties thrived. The two major parties, Labour and Likud, shrank to 26 and 19 seats respectively last time. Each minor party that endorsed Mr Sharon for Prime Minister has its own constituency, its own agenda. If it doesn't deliver, it will lose its *raison d'être*. And since they are all competing for limited budgets, their demands are often mutually incom-

The 'compromises' Ariel Sharon is offering have been roundly rejected in advance. If the experience of the past four months is any guide, writes ERIC SILVER, the Palestinians may well decide they have nothing to lose

patible. The ultra-Orthodox want subsidies for their private educational networks, exemption from army service for their *yeshiva* seminarians, government salaries for rabbis and functionaries, a continued Orthodox monopoly on marriage, divorce and conversion.

The Russian immigrants, up to 40 per cent of whom are not recognised as Jews by the rabbinical establishment, want to go on eating pork — and a chance to share Israel's Jewish identity without having to adopt an Orthodox lifestyle. The religious Zionists want to expand West Bank settlements. The Oriental Jews want the money to be invested in the depressed inner-city neighbourhoods and development towns.

Mr Sharon's Likud sees itself as a

modern, secular party of the right, committed to equality of military service and sacrifice. Its MPs' natural appetite for office is frustrated because the broader the coalition, the fewer the jobs up for grabs.

The third biggest party with 17 MPs — the Sephardi ultra-Orthodox Shas, has staked a claim to five ministries, including interior, which determines "who is a Jew", with all the privileges of citizenship that entails. Shas wants to restrict the criteria to those born of a Jewish mother or converted by an Orthodox rabbi. The Russian immigrants' Natan Sharansky also wants interior so he can liberalise the definition.

Shas's Ashkenazi counterpart, United Torah Judaism, is angling for the education ministry, which would give



MORE WOLF THAN SHEEP: Ariel Sharon may have projected himself as the grandfather who could bring "peace with security" but most Israeli commentators doubt whether he has changed more than his clothing

the ultra-Orthodox a say for the first time in the curriculum for secular state schooling. Mr Sharon would like to limit their leverage by recruiting Labour to a national-unity government. But Mr Barak's resignation as party leader immediately after his defeat on Tuesday night makes such an alliance unlikely — at least until Labour chooses a new leader, a pro-

cess that could take up to three months. Even those Labour politicians who are tempted to join a Sharon government insist that he would have to keep to their peace strategy. That would only alienate the new Prime Minister from his own constituency. His campaign partners are united on one issue: they reject the wide-

ranging concessions Mr Barak was prepared to offer the Palestinians for ending the 100-year conflict. Even then, they are split on how much, if anything, the new government should cede and how aggressive it should be in reacting to Arab violence.

During the campaign, Mr Sharon projected himself as the benign grandfather who could bring "peace with security". His handlers made sure he said nothing to frighten off middle-of-the-road voters. Almost all his public appearances were either before adoring Likud audiences or in the party's television spots.

No challenges, no gaffes. Others were less tactful. In particular, Avigdor Lieberman, Mr Sharansky's hard-right rival for the Russian vote, threatened to reconquer the West Bank town of Beit Jallah if Palestinian gunmen persisted in using it as a base from which to snipe at the Jerusalem Jewish suburb of Gilo. He also warned Lebanon, Iran and Egypt that a Sharon government would bomb Beirut, Teheran and the Aswan Dam if they turned nasty. Mr Sharon's record is more wolf than sheep. Most Israeli commentators doubt whether he has changed more than his clothing.

Mr Lieberman sounds more like the Sharon they know than the new model Mr Sharon does. We may find out soon enough. The "compromises" Mr Sharon is offering — a Palestinian state on 42 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; all Jewish settlements to stay in place; no shared rule in Jerusalem; not even a token "right of return" to Israel for Palestinian refugees — have been roundly rejected in advance. If the experience of the past four months is any guide, the Palestinians may well decide they have nothing to lose and escalate their Intifada. Mr Sharon is hardly the man to turn the other cheek.

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

Hectic efforts on to form national Govt in Israel

Jerusalem, February 8

FACED WITH a fractured Knesset (Israeli parliament), prime minister-elect Ariel Sharon has begun hectic efforts to form a new coalition government that he said must be of national unity to govern the troubled Jewish state.

The 72-year-old right-wing leader appointed Likud party director general Uri Shani to lead his team in negotiations with the centre-left Labour party over a national unity government which is expected to have a moderate stance on peace process with the Palestinians.

Sharon has 45 days -- when official election results are due to be announced -- to form a govern-

ment and pass the national budget or face early parliamentary elections.

"I will work to unify the people of Israel, therefore I call on the Labour party to join us in a national unity government. In these trying times, unity must be our first priority, we must address it immediately. We cannot afford to wait until tomorrow," Sharon said.

The hardline Likud chairman pledged to restore the security of Israel's citizens and to achieve "real peace" and stability in the Middle East.

Should Sharon not be able to form a unity government with the Labour, the prime minister-elect may need to hold negotiations with the smaller parties to form a nar-

row coalition.

If Labour joins the government, it is expected to ask for defence, foreign affairs and finance portfolios, political observers said.

On his first day as prime minister-elect, Sharon yesterday made a symbolic visit to the Western Wall, the holiest site of Judaism here, and refused to make concessions to the Palestinians on Jerusalem's status.

"I am visiting Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish people, and the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel," Sharon said at the Western Wall.

(PTI)

25 injured in Paris blaze

Paris, February 8

TWENTY-FIVE people were injured early today, four seriously, when a blaze swept through a private clinic in Paris, firemen said.

All 56 patients were evacuated from the clinic in Saint-Denis, a northern suburb of the French capital.

Altogether 150 firemen and 60 fire engines were called in to extinguish the blaze.

The cause of the fire was not immediately known. It broke out on the second floor of the building, destroying a treatment room and four other rooms, fire brigade spokesman Laurent Vibert said.

The injured were suffering from smoke inhalation. (AFP)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 FEB 2001

Arab, Palestinian leaders show caution as Sharon makes efforts to form govt.

JERUSALEM: Faced with a fractured Knesset, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has begun hectic efforts to form a new coalition government in the troubled Jewish state.



Ariel Sharon

The 72-year-old right-wing leader appointed Likud Party director-general Uri Shani to lead his team in negotiations with the Labour Party over a national unity government which is expected to have a moderate stance on peace process with the Palestinians. Mr Sharon has 45 days—when official election results are due to be announced—to form a government and pass the national budget or face early parliamentary elections.

The hard-line leader pledged to restore the security of Israel's citizens and to achieve "real peace" and stability in West Asia.

A day after his lopsided election win, Mr Sharon stood before the massive tan stones of the Western

Wall, which forms one exterior wall of the Temple Mount and is controlled by Israel, on Thursday and proclaimed Jerusalem the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel. "I am visiting Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish people for the past 3,000 years, and the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel, with the Temple Mount at its centre for all eternity," Mr Sharon said.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership met late on Wednesday to consider the impact of the election of Mr Sharon as Israeli Prime Minister, amid fears that he could bulldoze years of negotiations and push West Asia into a gory conflict. A Palestinian official said that the meeting was chaired by Yasser Arafat and included members of his cabinet and Palestine Liberation Organisation executive.

"If Sharon unilaterally denounces the Israeli-Palestinian accords, he will lead the region towards a bloody confrontation," Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath said the day after Mr Sharon's landslide election victory.

On Wednesday, Egyptian Presi-

dent Hosni Mubarak warned against judging Mr Sharon too soon, saying he hoped the ex-general that has been elected Israel's prime minister would put West Asia peace process back on track.

The Prime Minister of Jordan, the only other Arab state to make peace with Israel, echoed Mr Mubarak's caution on Mr Sharon's victory, saying his country dealt with nations and not individuals.

The Prime Minister of another neighbour of Israel, Rafik Hariri of Lebanon, urged Mr Sharon to abandon his hawkish past and work for peace. He spoke while on a visit to Tokyo. But elsewhere in the Arab world, people reacted with dread and anger to the election of a man whom Arabs associate with atrocities and unwavering support for Jewish settlements on Palestinian territory.

On Wednesday, UN secretary general Kofi Annan congratulated Mr Sharon on his election as Israeli Prime Minister, and said he hoped Mr Sharon would build on the peace efforts of his predecessor, Ehud Barak. (Agencies)

Barak suffers humiliating defeat

By Kesava Menon

TEL AVIV, FEB. 7. Mr. Ehud Barak suffered a humiliating defeat in the special Prime Ministerial election held in Israel on Tuesday, losing to his sole rival, Mr. Ariel Sharon, leader of the Likud party, by a 60-40 margin.

Mr. Sharon wants to form a national unity government with the Labour party and Mr. Barak has resigned from Parliament, the chairmanship of the Labour and intends to take a break from politics. But all this could form just

the beginning of what could be a long and intriguing story.

As predicted in the opinion polls, the turn-out was poor by Israel's standards with only 60 per cent of the 4 million eligible voters casting their ballots. The standard turn-out in Israeli elections is about 80 per cent but it is not clear whether this anomaly should be taken as casting a shadow over Mr. Sharon's victory since many potential supporters might not have bothered to vote since the same opinion polls had predicted his victory by a margin

as big as it eventually turned out to be.

About 80 per cent of the Israeli Arabs, who gave Mr. Barak 96 per cent of their vote in 1999, abstained. Of those Arabs who did bother to turn up, about 20 per cent are estimated to have cast blank ballots. But even if the Arabs had supported him, Mr. Barak would have only been able to reduce the margin of his defeat since about 10 per cent of the Jews who had voted for him in 1999 are estimated to have crossed over to his rival.

In a conversation with Mr. Barak after he had conceded defeat, Mr. Sharon is reported to have reiterated his call for the formation of a national unity government. He repeated the theme while addressing supporters at a rally late last night.

Analysts here believe that Mr. Sharon is even prepared to give the key portfolios of Defence and Foreign Affairs to Labour if they would join his coalition government. However, as he did throughout the election campaign, Mr. Sharon refused to expand on his policy plank or display the signs of flexibility vis a vis negotiations with the Palestinians that would be necessary to induce Labour to extend support.

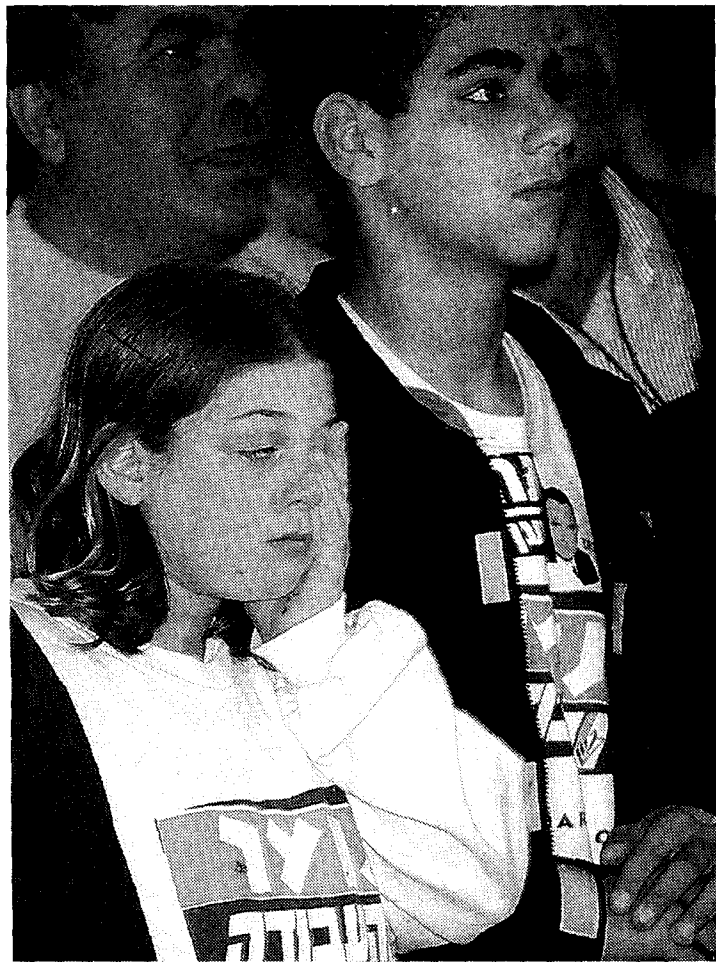
So far, Mr. Sharon has said that he wants peace with security but also that he intends to retain the whole of Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley in Israel's possession and that he will not dismantle a single Jewish settlement. Unless Mr. Sharon changes his position, it is not likely that the Labour will join his government.

Mr. Barak's resignation from the chairmanship of his party complicates matters since there is likely to be a scramble for succession. One possibility is that Labour will temporarily unite behind the former Prime Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, so that they can join the government and keep alive the process of negotiations with the Palestinians.

If Mr. Sharon is unable to coax



Supporters of the Israeli Prime Minister-elect, Mr. Ariel Sharon, celebrate victory in Tel Aviv on Wednesday.



Supporters of the Labour Party leader, Mr. Ehud Barak, react after the first television results showed Mr. Ariel Sharon ahead on Tuesday. — Reuters

the Labour to join his government, Tuesday's poll might be rendered meaningless. Mr. Sharon has to present a fully formed Cabinet to Parliament within 45 days after Feb. 14, the day on which election results will be formally declared. If no Cabinet is formed by March 30, Israel will have to go in for another special Prime Ministerial election by April 15.

Given the configuration in Parliament, Mr. Sharon can theoretically form a government without Labour. But this would then be a narrow coalition largely comprising ultra-nationalist and religious parties all of whom are expected to make impossible demands for portfolio and budgetary allocations. If Mr. Sharon cannot get the annual budget passed by March 31, Parliament will stand automatically dissolved and general elections will have to be held within 90 days.

Since it is unlikely that Labour will want to fight a general election within a few months of Mr. Barak's crushing defeat, they have an incentive to join the Government. At the same time, Mr. Barak, with his resignation from Parliament, has removed himself from contention for any special Prime Ministerial election that

might be held. Labour might not be averse to a special Prime Ministerial election in which Mr. Peres is their candidate since the opinion polls had shown that Mr. Peres had a chance of defeating Mr. Sharon if he had been their candidate.

To further complicate matters, Mr. Barak will continue as Israel's Prime Minister till Mr. Sharon can get his Cabinet approved and can legally take over. As care-taker Prime Minister, Mr. Barak will exercise all the power and authority of a regular incumbent in the job.

Traditionally, a care-taker Prime Minister acts in consultation with, and on the advice of, the person elected to replace him. But if Mr. Sharon cannot meet the first of the March-end deadlines, then Mr. Barak would be free from this inhibition.

While Mr. Barak cannot stand in a special Prime Ministerial election, there is no legal hurdle to his standing in a general election.

If Mr. Sharon is unable to form a Cabinet by March 30 then Mr. Barak will continue to wield all the authority of Prime Minister. What he could potentially do in that situation remains an open question.

WZion's hard man

THE ISRAELI electorate gave a double-edged victory to Ariel Sharon. While the hardline Likud candidate swept aside Prime Minister Ehud Barak with an unprecedented margin of over 25 per cent, he did so in large part thanks to the lowest turnout in Israeli history. In addition, he has inherited a fragmented and unruly Parliament. Mr Sharon won by a landslide but his mandate has been more a product of apathy than fervour. It is no surprise that he has called for Mr Barak's left-leaning Labour party to join him in a government of national unity. It is also no surprise that his victory speech was replete with references to taking a "new path of peace" and a "realistic peace". Mr Sharon and his Likud party do not oppose peace negotiations. However, the past record of Mr Sharon, a man the Arabs call "the butcher" for his role in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp massacres, would indicate an uncompromising stance when it comes to the territorial concessions a lasting West Asian peace would require. More immediately, he has strenuously said he will hold no talks until the *intifada* is brought to a halt.

The Arab world and the international community are quietly worried about what Mr Sharon plans to do. Most Israeli Jews believe Mr Barak went more than the extra mile in his negotiations with Yasser Arafat. He offered the Palestinian leader 95 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and co-sovereignty over Jerusalem. This was spurned as insufficient by Mr Arafat, especially since Mr Barak combined his soft negotiating stance with a brutal security crackdown. Mr Sharon has so far insisted that he will give less land and keep Jerusalem. He has said that the Palestinians' strength lies in the fact that they "need peace now less than us". He would probably seek to reverse this sentiment — which would point to even more repression and violence. Mr Sharon should keep in mind that previous prime ministers, notably Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin, sought to bludgeon Palestinian nationalism into submission. It was Rabin's failure to do so that paved the way for Oslo.

If Mr Sharon, the face of radical Zionism, learns a similar lesson, it could place the peace process on a more tangible track. But such an education is likely to only come with at least a temporary upsurge in violence. The optimistic outlook is that with this election, peace is not dead, merely deferred.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

8 FEB 2001

Sharon will be next PM of Israel

TEL AVIV: Right-wing Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon on Wednesday scored a landslide victory over Prime Minister Ehud Barak to become the eleventh Premier of Israel.

Mr Sharon, who trounced Mr Barak by around 24 points in a stunning turnaround, called for establishment of a national unity government to restore security to Israel and peace in West Asia. Mr Sharon said, "I call from here for the establishment of a national unity government, as wide as possible. I call on the Labour Party to walk together in true partnership on the difficult path to peace and security".

The prime minister-elect urged the Palestinians to cast off violence and return to the path of dialogue and solving the conflicts by peaceful means. But, in his speech to cheering supporters, Mr Sharon ruled out

any territorial concessions to the Palestinians over the status of Jerusalem and vowed to strengthen and consolidate a united Jerusalem, the capital of Israel and the eternal capital of the Jewish people.

Conceding victory to Mr Sharon, Mr Barak told a huge gathering of disappointed, yet cheerful supporters that he had full respect for the people's verdict. "Friends we have lost the battle, but we will win the war. Our path is the one and only path, the path that will lead Israel to peace and security," an emotional Mr Barak, flanked by his wife Nava, said.

"The voters have spoken and I respect the verdict of democracy," the Prime Minister said amid cheers and emotional scenes. (PTI)

► **Victory may thwart peace process, Page 12**



Ariel Sharon

Ajay Jadeja challenges BCCI

NEW DELHI: Cricketer Ajay Jadeja on Wednesday challenged in the Delhi high court the BCCI's decision to ban him for five years from playing for the country as well as the notice from the government regarding withdrawal of his Arjuna Award. In a more than 800-page petition, Jadeja also sought quashing of the CBI report which had indicted him for his alleged involvement in match-fixing. (PTI)

Shah's bail plea rejected

MUMBAI: The bail plea of diamond merchant and film financier Bharat Shah was rejected on Wednesday by special judge A.P. Bhangale, who said that investigation must be allowed to be completed. Granting bail at this stage might result in influencing witnesses and tampering with the progress of investigation, the judge said. But sources close to Shah said the order would be challenged in the high court. (P 3)

OFFICIALS FLED FOR THEIR LIVES AS TALL HOUSE BURNED

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 8 FEB 2001

Sharon's victory may thwart peace process

By Jal Taraporevala

MUMBAI: The election of hard-line Likud leader Ariel Sharon as Israel's Prime Minister has further complicated the search for peace in West Asia. Given his ideological predilections, the restiveness in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the current reluctance of the new U.S. administration to get actively involved as a mediator, Mr Sharon is likely to adopt an even tougher stance towards the Palestinians than that pursued by his predecessor, Ehud Barak.

Mr Sharon can be expected to insist that the negotiations on a final status accord with the Palestinians will not be continued from the point at which they were left off by Mr Barak.

Some Israelis will now be more emboldened to argue that unless headway is soon achieved in the peace process, the Sharon government should unilaterally disengage from parts of the Palestinian

territories and formally incorporate the remaining areas into the Jewish state.

Besides, it will not be surprising if there is an increase in Jewish settlement activity in parts of the West Bank and the Israeli security forces coming down more firmly on Palestinian protesters. As a result, the scale of unrest in the Palestinian territories could well increase in the near future.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The odds are that Mr Sharon will not find the going smooth. Maintaining a working majority in the Knesset will test the political skills of the new Prime Minister.

After all, the Likud Bloc has far fewer parliamentary seats than the Labour Party and a number of small and religious parties together account for a sizable proportion of the representation in the Knesset.

Although Mr Sharon is not

keen about actively pursuing the peace process, he will not find it easy to ignore the consistent findings of opinion surveys which indicate that nearly 60 per cent of eligible voters support the idea of continued efforts to advance the search for a final status agreement with the Palestinians.

This means that the election of Mr Sharon does not signify a positive endorsement of his policy prescriptions, rather a negative vote against the style of functioning of Mr Barak.

Moreover, the current stand of the Bush administration notwithstanding, Washington could adopt a fairly active role in West Asia if tensions on the ground increase. Apart from the challenges on the foreign policy front, Mr Sharon will have to tackle such crucial issues on the domestic stage as economic renewal and the pressures that are bound to be placed on him by some of the small and orthodox parties.

Sharon set to romp home

Jerusalem, February 6

WITH JUST hours before polls open for Israel's leadership election, hard-line challenger Ariel Sharon looked set to storm to victory over caretaker Prime Minister Ehud Barak as deadly violence flared again in the Palestinian territories.

Barak, on the back foot only 21 months since his euphoric victory over Benjamin Netanyahu, told voters they faced a clear-cut choice today between war and peace, while Israeli officials warned of possible attacks after the vote.

Israeli Election

The Israeli army said one of its soldiers was killed in an exchange of fire with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, bringing to 396 the number of people who have lost their lives during the four-month cycle of bloodshed.

Sharon, who was 19 points ahead according to a poll broadcast yesterday on Israeli TV, has vowed not to negotiate with the Palestinians until the violence is brought to a halt. Apparently confident of election victory, the Likud leader stayed off the campaign trail yesterday.

Both candidates made last-minute appeals in the top-selling *Yediot Aharonot* newspaper to Israel's 4.1 million voters, who go to the polls for the first time in their nation's history to elect a Prime Minister without also choosing a new parliament.

"We must decide if between us and peace there will be another bloody war, its outcome unknown," Barak wrote. "A moment before you decide, remember: when a government makes such tragic mistakes, ultimately the boys are the ones buried - not the government."

Jerusalem travel agent Anat Azoulay, 27, said she would not vote. "Barak is not good. We are not in a safe situation.

"Every day someone is killed,



Israeli right-wing prime ministerial candidate Ariel Sharon casts his vote in Beit Hakarem near Jerusalem on Tuesday. Photo: AP

"Azoulay said, adding: "Sharon, he will make war again."

Islamic militants threatened bomb attacks in Tel Aviv, and one of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's lieutenants in the West Bank, Marwan Barghouti, predicted today would be a "day of rage," with large-scale demonstrations against Israel.

"The message we want to send to the Israeli society with the demon-

strations is the uprising, which will continue, regardless of who the Prime Minister of Israel is," Barghouti said. Sharon opposed Israeli offers to the Palestinians over a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and parts of Jerusalem.

The polls opened at 0800GMT today and close at 2000GMT when both major TV stations were planning to announce projected results based on exit polls. (Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 7 FEB 2001

WILL the chance of peace be lost this week in West Asia? On Tuesday, Israel is electing a Prime Minister: from the opinion polls, it seems almost certain he will be Ariel Sharon. There are widespread fears, not least in Israel, that this will lead to the breakdown of the peace process.

Almost all Arabs distrust Mr Sharon and regard him as a war criminal, responsible for the Shatila massacre. His recent remark that he did not "eat Arabs for breakfast" has done nothing to reassure them.

A breakdown in the peace talks would be the greatest single threat to the stability of the world. Last week, I went to Egypt to find out how serious this risk appeared from Cairo's viewpoint. The Egyptians have been the hosts for the final round of peace talks; they themselves made peace with Israel a generation ago.

In population and military power, Egypt is the largest Arab country. Cairo is one of the world's greatest cities, comparable to London, Istanbul or Beijing, and is the communications centre for the whole Arab world. Cairo has its own historic culture, now about 7,000 years old, 5,000 years older than London. I talked to Dr Ossama El-Baz, President Hosni Mubarak's chief foreign policy adviser. I had last seen him in the mid-1970s, after the 1973 war and before the Camp David accord. He then held the same position; he was the chief foreign policy adviser to President Anwar Sadat.

It is the only occasion I have ever interviewed the same official, in the same post, after a 25-year interval. The modest Dr El-Baz is a legendary figure in the diplomacy of West Asia peacemaking.

I went with Christopher Ruddy, the conservative American journalist who founded the news portal *NewsMax.com*. Many of the questions which were discussed had an American connection. If Egypt has been the Arab broker of peace, since the days of President Sadat, the USA has been the political force.

Dr El-Baz defined Egyptian foreign policy as being primarily concerned with four issues: the peace process, other issues of peace in West Asia, terrorism and regional co-operation. Egypt has a national commitment to peace, for its own sake and because the Egyptians want to get on with the development of their own country. I remember Sadat saying very much the same thing 25 years ago.

I found myself intrigued by the way

Arab view of Ariel threat

in which Dr El-Baz, who has spent most of his adult life in the diplomacy of West Asian peacemaking, saw the present stage of the negotiation, now that it has been suspended. He feels real progress is being made, right up to the suspension of the talks. He attaches particular importance to definition. So long as a diplomatic problem remains undefined, no one can begin to solve it.

He also attaches importance to the breaking down of taboos. If both sides feel so passionately about a particular problem that they cannot even discuss it, no progress can be made. As a professional peacemaker, he feels that the most difficult problems had been discussed; it proved possible to bring them into the open. He also felt that they had been defined.

Each side now has a clearer understanding of the real position of the other side. There are inevitably areas in which disagreement still remains. But there are also areas in which the



A breakdown in the West Asia peace talks will be the greatest single threat to world stability. The possibility of Ariel Sharon's victory prompts WILLIAM REES-MOGG to find out how serious this risk appears from Cairo's vantage point

possibility of developing a solution has become more apparent.

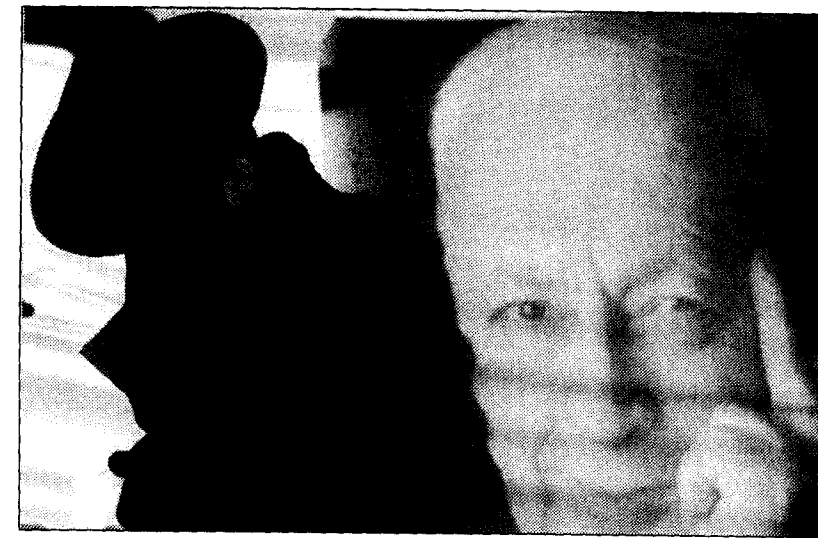
The three most difficult problems to solve are security, Jerusalem and the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Dr El-Baz considers that security — Israel's defence requirements — may in some ways prove the most difficult, though Jerusalem probably has the greatest emotional charge. He said many Palestinians, who would have a potential claim as refugees have made their own lives in Jordan or elsewhere, which they would not want to exchange for an uncertain future in a country where they would always be a minority.

The interview became more sombre when we passed from the discussion of the peace issues to the prospect if Mr Sharon becomes Prime Minister.

We had been repeatedly told by other Egyptians that "no Arab will ever trust Sharon". This is particularly important at the street level, which always has strong political influence in Arab societies.

Dr El-Baz said some delay in the peace process would have been inevitable, to allow the new US administration to develop its policy. He thought that a Sharon victory would also hold up the process and that would be the best thing one could hope for.

His main concern is that the gains made so far in the negotiations should not be thrown away. The consequences if anybody were to renege on the agreements that have been reached so far could be very serious. It could cause greater instability and bring the whole area "back to a state of



Top: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak at a meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, last Monday. Above: An Orthodox Jew walks past a poster of Likud Party's prime ministerial candidate Ariel Sharon in Jerusalem on Sunday. — AP/PTI

war". Dr El-Baz clarified that warning: "Nobody expects all-out war, but limited war cannot be ruled out." In that event, Egypt would not violate its treaty obligations to Israel. But Dr El-Baz believes that there are strong countervailing forces which are likely to prevent such a disastrous outcome from occurring. Plainly, a return to near-war conditions in West

Asia would hurt US interests. The weight of American influence will necessarily support the continuation of the peace process. In Israel, even if Mr Sharon were to take an extremist position, which cannot simply be assumed, he would have to carry other people with him, including the Israeli armed forces, which Dr El-Baz described as "not crazy".

We also discussed the question of the UN sanctions against Iraq. These are unpopular in Egypt; Iraq has been winning the propaganda war and the Egyptians are sympathetic to the plight of Iraqi children. Dr El-Baz feels there is need for better definition of the conditions in which sanctions will be lifted. Iraq could not expect "a free ride".

The conditions must include the questions of nuclear and biological weapons. He feels the regime is using sanctions to discipline its population and that Iraq is suffering from loneliness and isolation of the position. I met other Egyptians of the same character as Dr El-Baz. Egypt is a country with everything to lose from war and much to gain from peace. It has a culture of great depth, psychologically and historically.

I regard Dr El-Baz as a wise man who has spent his life trying to save West Asia from itself, from the damage that follows from its own great rivalries.

It is valuable to have the company of an American Internet journalist. Britain is popular in Egypt. It is the largest foreign investor; British and Egyptian policies on peace are closely aligned. But it is America which counts, the one superpower, the friend of Egypt, the protector. Most Egyptians wanted to ask about American politics and American technology. Many Egyptians are fascinated by the Internet; a live Internet entrepreneur is a figure of great interest to them. Egyptians also focus on the influence which shapes American power and its use in West Asia. They feel American policy is influenced too much by the Zionist lobby.

All Arabs think that. They know *The New York Times* is the most influential newspaper in the USA, that it addresses a Jewish audience in New York, and is owned by a Jewish family. Most Egyptians are not anti-Semitic. They have a strong tradition of tolerance, but fear the power of this lobby.

They were asking whether the fact that most American Jews had voted for Al Gore might mean George W Bush would have greater political freedom. Ruddy said American Jews have very different views. Many of them distrust Mr Sharon as much as any Egyptian does. He spoke of the diversity of American life, including American Jewish life. The Egyptians listened with interest. They still want peace. They still fear Ariel Sharon.

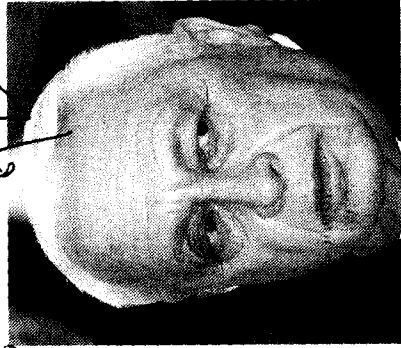
— *The Times, London.*

Election may not bring political stability

By Kesava Menon

TEL AVIV, FEB. 5. There are several absurd aspects to the special Prime Ministerial election that is being held in Israel on Tuesday. Among the most absurd is the fact that whoever wins the poll will find it very difficult to cobble together a coalition in Parliament that can pass the budget by March 31. If the budget is not passed by that date it will necessitate a fresh election.

If the opinion polls hold true and the front-runner, Mr. Ariel Sharon, wins he could either build a coalition composed solely of the hardline right-wing parties or reach out across the political divide and form a national unity Government. Since the hard-right has swung solidly behind Mr. Sharon, they would be most upset if he does not follow their agenda in his dealings with the Palestinians and on issues of domestic politics. Mr. Sharon's problem is that the right-



Ariel Sharon

wing parties, though sharing some views in common, are bitterly divided on others.

Most of the right-wing parties want an end, or at least an indefinite freezing, of negotiations with the Palestinians. However, Shas, the party of the Jews who immigrated from the African and Asian countries, does not traditionally

take a very hard position on the Palestinian issue provided their partisan concerns are taken care of. Besides the special funding for their educational network, what this party which has a large bloc in Parliament, is most interested in is more strict enforcement of religious codes. Other religious parties in Mr. Sharon's putative coalition share this concern.

If Mr. Sharon succumbs to the wishes of the religious parties on matters of observance he is likely to run afoul of the two Russian parties which together have a significant parliamentary presence. Currently, the two Russian parties support a tough approach towards the Palestinians but they are just as vehemently opposed to the imposition of strict religious codes. In the immediate aftermath of the election, if Mr. Sharon wins, the focus would be on the Palestinian front but the differences over religious matters are bound to rise as the budgetary al-

locations are being decided.

Although it is not being shouted from the roof-tops, there is a widespread expectation here that Mr. Sharon would try and form a national unity government centred on his own Likud party and the Labour party and taking in centrist groups. The Labour party leader and current Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, has declared that he will not lead his party into a national unity government that includes extremist parties. But he has tantalisingly left open the possibility of joining a government that does not include such parties.

While the prospect of a national unity government, under either of the two leaders, is being looked on with general favour, it is difficult to see how such a government can last any length of time. The differences between Labour and Likud, in regard to the specific issues being negotiated with the Palestinians, are so sharp as to be almost unbridgeable.

ISRAELI ELECTION / BARAK GOES THROUGH THE MOTIONS

HPD-16

Poll outcome appears certain

By Kesava Menon

BEERSHEVA (ISRAEL) FEB. 5. For anyone accustomed to the tumult and noise of Indian election campaigns, the canvassing process in other democracies can appear as pretty tame affairs. Israel's domestic politics is usually quite turbulent and the lack of public involvement in the campaign for tomorrow's poll could be attributable to the fact that the outcome is virtually certain. But the procedures and practices followed here are such that even "normal" elections are a different, more intimate, affair.

Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, who is battling heavy odds in his bid for re-election, came here last night for his two last public programmes before the polls open on Tuesday morning. Till even an hour before the function began few in the rain-swept sleepy centre of this city seemed aware that the Prime Minister was visiting the town. Even the taxi-drivers, the ubiquitous providers of speedy information, were taken aback at the unexpected sight of a heavy security cordon around a suburban marriage-cum-community hall.

"Is Barak coming here?" the driver asked before muttering, "This is very bad." He was upset not because he was a die-hard supporter of Mr. Barak's rival, Mr. Ariel Sharon, but because the Prime Ministerial presence might disrupt the flow of traffic. Upset because the Prime Minister's visit might disrupt the traffic flow in a part of town where there were only a few factories that were anyway closed at that time of the evening. That man, who has not had to sit in the smog-filled air of an intersection for an hour waiting for a huge cavalcade to pass, had no concept of how lucky he was.

It was a relief, and an education, to know that politicians can go about their business without disrupting the flow of life or defacing property. Venues appear to be chosen with



The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, carries the child of a Russian immigrant during a rally in support of his campaign as Labour Party candidate in Beersheva town on Sunday. — AP

care for the convenience of the general public, posters are stuck only on billboards provided for the purpose and there are no loudspeakers blasting the air at every corner. Private enterprise in the furtherance of either campaign consists of a couple or three men stringing banners from traffic lights and youngsters distributing pamphlets. If campaign events are low-key, relative to the Indian experience, they also give a closer sense of community — of everyone being able to participate in an important social process. It is not just the marriage hall venue that gives the event the semblance of a large family wedding. There are excited youngsters rushing all over the place while the elders have that

expression, of concern carefully masked by courtesy and bonhomie, of people who wish the event will go off well. Unlike the mass impersonal rallies that we are accustomed to in India here most people at the venue seem to know quite a number of the others.

Mr. Barak's first meeting of the evening is with a group of Russian immigrants. Opinion polls show that about 90 per cent of the 1 million recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union now back Mr. Sharon, but these Russians in Beersheva appear to be very firmly within the remaining 10 per cent. Mr. Barak's pointsman harangues them for a while but breaks off to let a choir of war veterans belt out a few numbers.

Some of the youngsters tentatively start a hora (the traditional Jewish dance) but stop with squeals of delight when Mr. Barak walks in promptly at 7.15 — the time set for his arrival. The rhythm of Israeli electoral politics does not perhaps allow for the crowding of too many events into the day but can anyone point out the last time an Indian politician, at whatever level, came to even his first meeting of the day on the set time.

With the music and the spontaneous clapping that greets Mr. Barak's arrival the scene is even more reminiscent of the situation where everyone's favourite relative turns up for the wedding. Mr. Barak spends the first ten minutes or so shaking hands and exchanging hugs and kisses. This is not a "leader" talking down to his audience but an active regular guy trying to convince his people. A short punchy speech later he is off to the adjacent venue where a more orderly group of Bedouin await him. From the televised images of a rally addressed by Mr. Sharon at the same time the atmosphere there does not seem to be very different — except that Mr. Sharon looks more like a grandfather while Mr. Barak carries an "elder brother" image.

THE HINDU

- 6 FEB 2001

Orthodox support for Sharon

SAM KILEY
THE TIMES, LONDON

JERUSALEM, Feb. 4. — The staunchly secular Ariel Sharon yesterday emerged as the unlikely darling of Israel's ultra-Orthodox communities.

Massive support and the promise of special prayers from the Israeli Orthodox on election eve may be the prelude to a crushing defeat for Mr Ehud Barak in the race for Prime Minister.

But the religious parties, which brought down Mr Barak, will extract a heavy price from his successor when he tries to form a government.

Support for Mr Sharon among the ultra-Orthodox stands at 97 per cent despite his refusal to end his backing for a Bill in the Knesset which would end the exemption of students at religious schools from doing

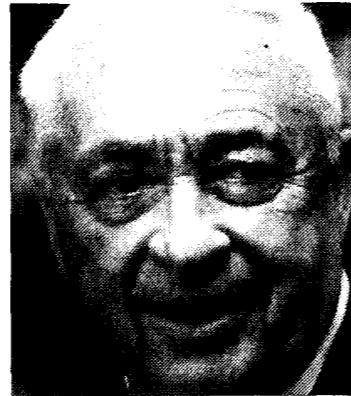
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military service, according to a poll conducted by *Maariv*.

Mr Sharon (72) does not observe the Sabbath or wear a skull cap. He has never made a secret of his irritation at religious laws which affect the everyday life of Israelis.

Yet last week he got the endorsement of Mr Ovadia Yosef, leader of the Shas party. Mr Arieh Deri, former Shas chairman who is in jail for bribery and corruption, too joined the Sharon campaign, likening Mr Barak to the Pharaoh who exiled Jews.

The National Religious Party, dominated by Jewish settlers, was always going to back Mr Sharon, for he is the principal architect of massive settlement expansion on the West Bank.

The nationwide opinion polls may make the elections seem a foregone conclusion, but less certain is how long Mr Sharon



Mr Ariel Sharon

can survive once he takes over. He has made no concessions to the religious parties ahead of the elections, but will need every one of their Knesset votes if he is to govern.

"The religious voters are not strongly pro-Sharon, they are strongly anti-Barak, anti his se-

cular reforms," Prof Yossi Silhav of Bar Ilan University School of Political Geography said.

"Mr Sharon's problems will start the moment he tries to form a government. He will need the Orthodox to try to build what will be a slender coalition," he said.

Mr Barak's coalition was hobbled for months while Shas haggled for extra funds for its schools system, and then crippled when it left his government in protest against "unacceptable concessions" during the Camp David talks.

Shas still holds 17 seats in the Knesset and may use its leverage to extract exactly the same concessions from Mr Sharon that it demanded from Mr Barak.

Mr Sharon's dearest hope is for a coalition partnership with Mr Barak's Labour Party. But the latter has so far ruled out a unity government even if some

of his ministers have signalled that they would be interested.

Mr Sharon will therefore have to draw heavily on the 17 Shas seats and the 10 from United Torah Judaism and the National Religious Party to build his bedrock.

Less than 48 hours before polls opened in Israel, gun battles erupted anew in the West Bank and Gaza strip, adds AFP.

Palestinians fired at an Israeli car near Beit El but no casualties were reported. In the Gaza strip, the army shot at and wounded a Palestinian trying to penetrate the Israel-Gaza border overnight.

Meanwhile, a coalition of Palestinian groups called for a "day of rage" to mark Israel's election on Tuesday and confirm their commitment to the *Intifada* or Palestinian uprising.

THE STATESMAN

5 FEB 2001

119-16 Khomeini's fatwa led to 'mass killings'

LONDON, FEB. 4. Children as young as 13 were hanged from cranes, six at a time, in a barbaric two-month purge of Iran's prisons on the direct orders of Ayatollah Khomeini, according to a new book by his former deputy.

More than 30,000 political prisoners were executed in the 1988 massacre — a far larger number than previously suspected.

Secret documents smuggled out of Iran reveal that, because of the large numbers of necks to be broken, prisoners were loaded onto forklift trucks in groups of six and hanged from cranes in half-hourly intervals.

Gruesome details are contained in *The Memoirs of Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri*, one of the founders of the Islamic regime. He was once considered Ayatollah Khomeini's anointed successor, but was deposed for his outspokenness, and is now under house arrest in the holy city of Qom.

Published privately last month after attempts by the regime to suppress it, the revelations have prompted demands from Iranian exiles for those involved to be tried for crimes against humanity.

The most damning of the letters and documents published in the book is Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa calling for all Mojahedin (as opponents of the Iranian regime are known) to be killed.

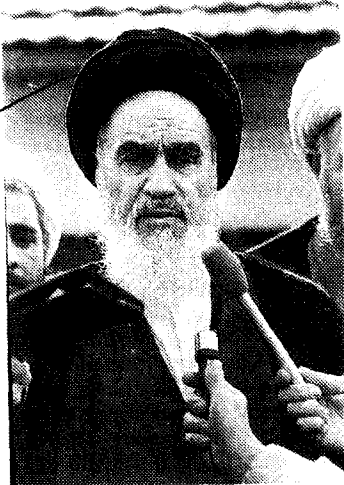
Issued shortly after the end of the Iran-Iraq war in July 1988 and an incursion into western Iran by the Iranian resistance, the fatwa reads: "It is decreed that those who are in prisons throughout the country and remain steadfast in their support for the Monafeqin (Mojahedin) are waging war on God and are condemned to execution."

It goes on to entrust the decision to "death committees" — three-member panels consisting of an Islamic judge, a representative of the Ministry of Intelligence, and a state prosecutor. Prisoners were to be asked if they had changed loyalties and, if not, were to be executed.

Ayatollah Montazeri, who states that 3,800 people had been killed by the end of the first fortnight of executions, includes his own correspondence with Ayatollah Khomeini, saying that the killings would be seen as 'a vendetta' and would spark opposition to the regime.

"The execution of several thousand prisoners in a few days will not have positive repercussions and will not be mistake-free."

The massacres, which came just before the Lockerbie bombing, were seen as a sop to the hardliners at a time when Ayatollah Khomeini was already in failing health and the battle for succession had begun



between fundamentalists and moderates. He died the following year.

According to testimony from prison officials — including Mr. Kamal Afkhami Ardekani, who formerly worked at Evin prison — recently given to United Nations human rights rapporteurs: "They would line up prisoners in a 14-by-five-metre hall in the central office building and then ask simply one question, 'What is your political affiliation?' Those who said the Mojahedin would be hanged from cranes in position in the car park behind the building."

He went on to describe how, every half an hour from 7.30 am to 5 pm, 33 people were lifted on three forklift trucks to six cranes, each of which had five or six ropes. "The process went on and on without interruption." In two weeks, 8,000 people were hanged. Similar carnage took place across the country.

Many of those in the ruling council at the time of the 1988 massacre are still in power, including the President, Mt. Khatami, who was the Director of Ideological and Cultural Affairs.

"The massacre may have happened 12 years ago, but the relevance is that these atrocities are still happening," said Mr. Mohammad Mohaddessin, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Iranian National Council of Resistance (NCRI), the main opposition group, who was in London last week to present evidence to MPs.

The NCRI has prepared files on 21 senior members of the regime whom it alleges were "principal protagonists of the massacre", including Mr. Khatami and Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, Iran's 'Supreme Leader'. Mr. Mohaddessin will travel to New York to present the files to the U.N. and call for a tribunal to try them for crimes against humanity.

Mr. Mohaddessin said human rights abuses were continuing in Iran despite the election of Mr. Khatami, who "presents himself as a reformist". — © Telegraph Group Limited, London, 2001

ISRAELI POLL / VOTERS WARY, BUT MAY BACK SHARON

Barak up against many odds

By Kesava Menon

TEL AVIV, FEB. 4 The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, believes that the on-going violent conflict with the Palestinians and the disastrous effect it is having on his prospects for re-election are the inevitable accompaniment to the birth of a new reality. As has happened very often in the past, Mr. Barak seems to be dead right in his assessment of the situation on the Israel-Palestinian front. Also as has happened very often in the past, Mr. Barak seems incapable of making his people see things his way.

With Mr. Barak almost certain to lose the Prime Ministerial post when Israelis vote on Tuesday there is a wide consensus in the Israeli political centre that he is an acute, perhaps even brilliant, reader of the situation. Opinion polls still show that 60 per cent of Israelis support a peace agreement with the Palestinians which could include an acceptance of Palestinian demands to the extent Mr. Barak was willing to go.

There also seems to be a majoritarian consensus that an agreement on the lines that was almost worked out is the only sustainable one. Left wing commentators have become ever more strident in their warnings that the entry into power of Mr. Ariel Sharon (Mr. Barak's sole rival) and his right-wingers will have dire consequences. None of this is working for Mr. Barak.

Under normal circumstances, Mr. Barak should have been facing his electorate with two, even three, solid achievements to his credit. He did fulfill his promise to pull his army out of Lebanon within a year of assuming office and did thereby close a deep wound which has caused a lot of suffering to Israeli society.

Mr. Barak's Government is also credited with having reversed Israel's economic slow-down. Although his troops have unleashed



An Ultra Orthodox Jew looks at an election poster of the right-wing Likud leader, Mr. Ariel Sharon, in Jerusalem on Saturday. Israelis go to the polls in a prime ministerial election on Tuesday and opinion polls show Mr. Sharon with around 20 percentage points lead over the Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak. — Reuters

excessive force on the Palestinians over the past four months, the international community still believes that Israel under Mr. Barak seeks peace seriously. While the Arab countries have been cold towards Mr. Barak for the past four months, he has definitely rescued Israel from the international isolation it was threatened with under his predecessor, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu.

At the same time, Mr. Sharon's horrible record in domestic politics as in his dealings with the Arabs is being brought out in all its detail in the media. Two of his chief supporters, and possible members of his Cabinet, talk of

bombing Teheran and the Aswan dam and of ethnically cleansing the Palestinian territories.

The most that Mr. Sharon is willing to give the Palestinians is just a little more than what they already have (autonomy in 40 per cent of the West Bank and about 70 per cent of the Gaza Strip). Except for the die-hard wishful thinkers, most Israelis know that the Palestinians will never settle for this. Yet, most Israeli are still prepared to back Mr. Sharon.

To understand Mr. Sharon's appeal, it is perhaps best to begin with his hardcore right wing supporters and then work backwards to the centre or even left of the

spectrum. The most hardcore of them think that Israel can militarily impose whatever solution it wants on the Palestinians and that negotiations are unnecessary.

If the Palestinians, backed by the rest of the Arab world, starts a war then Israel is quite capable of seeing them off. Others think that the Arabs are not prepared to fight for the Palestinians and that if any of them are so inclined then Mr. Sharon's ferocious reputation would quell them.

The great part of Israel's centre that has swung behind Mr. Sharon have done so in the hope that he will at least quell the on-going violence in the Palestinian territories. They just cannot make the mental leap to understand why the Palestinians should resort to violence when Mr. Barak was willing to offer them so many "concessions". If the Arabs still inflict such violence on Israel and incite their children to view Israelis with hatred then there is no point in giving them concessions, goes the argument.

There is yet another segment that recognises that concessions have to be made and even understand the logic of the Palestinian uprising. But they are disgusted with the manner in which Mr. Barak has responded to the violence. Unlike the outside world they do not believe that the Israeli security forces have used sufficient power. They think that Mr. Barak's dealings with the Palestinian Authority in a context of violence has demeaned Israel and made it more vulnerable.

Ironically Israel's hasty, if efficient, pullout from Lebanon is viewed here as further evidence of Mr. Barak's weakness.

Mr. Barak could perhaps have clawed his way back into the contest if he had been able to rally the left wing. Unfortunately for him, many in the left are disgusted at the manner in which he has zigged and zagged while trying to implement his policies.

Gadhafi to 'prove' convict's innocence

By Kesava Menon

TEL AVIV, FEB. 2. Still aggrieved by the conviction of one of his countrymen for involvement in the Lockerbie bombing of 1988, the Libyan strongman, Col. Muammar Gadhafi, has promised that by Monday, he would reveal evidence that would exonerate the convicted man.

The Libyan leader made this promise when he received the other suspect in the case who was cleared of the charges by the special Scottish court.

Col. Gadhafi accused the United States and Britain of having applied pressure on the Scottish court, which conducted its hearings in the Netherlands, to ensure the conviction of Mr. Abdel Basser Ali Megrahi.

Once he revealed the evidence that he had in his possession, the judges on the court would be embarrassed, the Libyan leader said (or at least that was the gist of a message delivered in much stronger language).

Col. Gadhafi did not say why he chose not to reveal this evidence during the course of the trial even though another possible track of

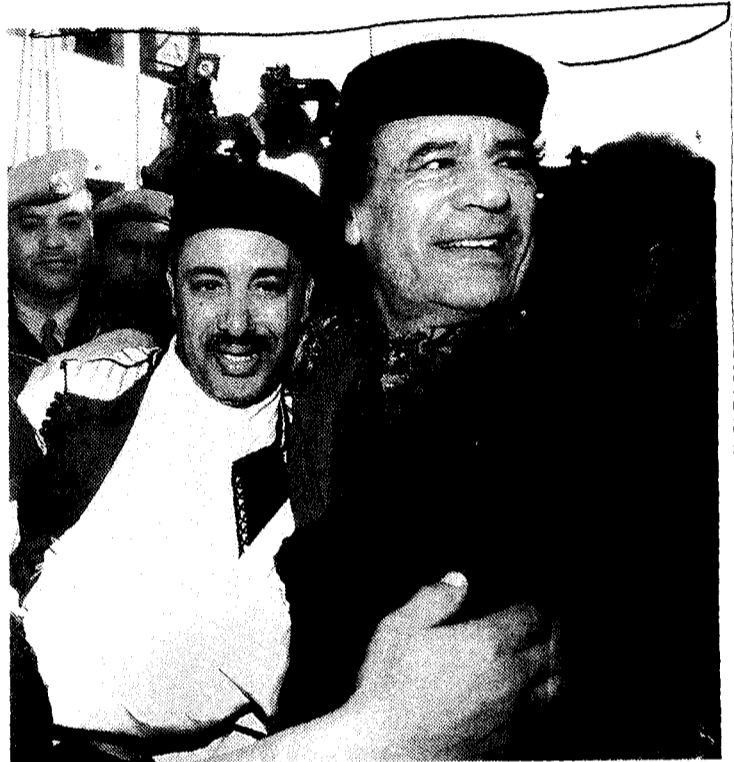
judicial inquiry was foreclosed on account of corroborative evidence from Syria

Col. Gadhafi and dozens of his countrymen gave a rapturous welcome to Mr. Lamem Khalifa Fiham, the co-defendant in the case and Malta manager of the Libyan Arab Airlines at the time of the Lockerbie bombing. (The prosecution's case was that the bomb that blew up PanAm 103 over Lockerbie was first loaded onto a plane in Malta and then transferred to the U.S. carrier).

The Libyan leader has denied responsibility for the bombing and has refused to offer compensation for the victims of the plane crash.

This, despite the U.S. position that it will not allow the lifting of suspended sanctions unless the Libyan leadership accepted responsibility and offered compensation.

The only issue of compensation to be considered, Col. Gadhafi said, was that of paying for the 36 Libyans who had died in the U.S. bombing of Tripoli in 1986.



The Libyan leader, Col. Muammar Gadhafi (right), hugs Mr. Lamem Khalifa Fiham who arrived in Tripoli on Thursday after being acquitted by a special Scottish court in the Netherlands on Wednesday. — AP

THE HINDU

- 3 FEB 2001

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Lift sanctions on Libya: Mandela

By M.S. Prabhakara

CAPE TOWN, FEB. 2. The former South African President, Mr. Nelson Mandela, has criticised the U.S. and Britain for their resolve to maintain the sanctions against Libya, even after the conclusion of the trial, verdict and sentencing of the two accused in the Lockerbie bombing case.

Among the several factors that persuaded the Libyan President, Mr. Muammar Gadhafi, to allow the two Libyan suspects to be extradited to the Netherlands to stand trial in that country according to Scottish law was an initiative by Mr. Mandela.

Much to the annoyance of the West (and even more strongly expressed criticism by its loyalists in this country),

Mr. Mandela has gloried in his special

friendship with the Libyan leader, has welcomed him to this country and has himself made a strenuous journey by the land route to Libya -- all symbolic and material expressions of this solidarity.

Speaking to journalists in Cape Town yesterday evening, Mr. Mandela repeatedly said that both the U.S. and Britain had agreed that the sanctions against Libya would be 'lifted', and not merely 'suspended', when the legal process was complete. He had expected these countries to honour and fulfil that undertaking. "For international affairs to be a success, agreements made must be honoured. Unfortunately, this has not been done. Once agreements are not honoured you are introducing chaos in international affairs... This is moving goalposts," he said.

Mr. Mandela, who said he had spoken to

Col. Gadhafi on Wednesday, also said that he wanted to discuss the issue both with the U.S. President, Mr. George Bush, and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair. He said Mr. Blair had been very good in 'helping me to get a settlement' and also heaped praise on the elder Mr. Bush, the former President, describing him as 'a man of integrity'.

It is to be seen whether Mr. Mandela will be able to persevere with this objective, given the increasing indifference to such initiatives on the part of the U.S. and Britain.

His efforts closer home to secure peace in Burundi, going on now for over a year, have not made much headway. An American commentator speaking on the radio this morning was simply dismissive of Mr. Mandela's criticism of the West in the matter of sanctions against Libya.

THE HINDU

3 FEB 2001

THE ADDRESS IS RETURNED.

✓ Lockerbie Question 01-10

The unprecedented trial of two Libyan suspects accused of placing a time bomb in the Pan Am flight 103 which exploded over Lockerbie in Scotland is over. One of the accused was found not guilty and discharged and the other found guilty and sentenced to 30-year imprisonment. The trial was unique in that it was held in the neutral territory of the Netherlands in an area temporarily declared Scotland under the Scottish law. Meanwhile, Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi has said he would disclose fresh evidence to prove the innocence of the man found guilty. Normally Colonel Gaddafi's assertions would not evoke much credibility. However, there is a perception that the second Libyan is also innocent and the true perpetrators of the crime have not been brought to trial. That the families of the crash victims feel this way is especially significant. The implication is that authorities in the US and UK are shielding the culprits for political reasons. So who committed the crime? There is speculation that the crime may have originated in Syria. In a press conference in London a day after the judgment, Jim Swire, who represents the UK families of the victims, gave very persuasive reasons why the crime could not have been committed by the convicted person. The families have demanded a full public enquiry into the total circumstances leading to the crash over Lockerbie.

According to the prosecution, the accused planted the time bomb in a piece of luggage aboard an Air Malta flight. From there it transited through Frankfurt, where it was transferred to a Pan Am flight on way to the US via London. The bomb, the prosecution said, had a sophisticated timer device which could be set for any time up to hundred hours. Mr Swire pointed out that the plane exploded 38 minutes after take off from London. If a sophisticated timer had been used, the bomb could have been timed to explode over mid-Atlantic which would have effectively destroyed all evidence. Mr Swire's case was that the plane exploded over Scotland because it was triggered by an earlier generation 30-minute timer which is manufactured in Syria. In other words, the bomb was placed on the plane in London and not in Frankfurt. Earlier, an American, formerly in the Drug Enforcement Agency, had written a book in which he alleged that the bombing was carried out by a Palestinian organisation operating from Syria at the behest of Iranians who wanted to avenge the 1988 shooting down of an Iranian Airbus by a US warship in the Persian Gulf. The Syrian government has refused to cooperate with this investigation. Speculation by many independent observers is that since in 1990 Syria joined the Arab alliance against Iraq during the Gulf War, the British and the Americans decided to shield the Palestinian-Syrian-Iran connection and instead accused the two Libyans to mislead the world. The verdict of Justice Sutherland and his brother judges on Wednesday may not have rung down the curtain on the Lockerbie bombing case. //

THE TIMES OF INDIA

3 FEB 2001

3 FEB 2001

Peace is elusive

AA - K WAW. M J ✓
Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, if opinion polls are to be believed, will be contesting the elections scheduled for February 6 with his back to the wall. His trump card, namely the peace initiative with the Palestinians, has failed to pay off and even the so called moderate opinion in his country is distancing itself from his efforts to reach some kind of solution. The extremist opinion is veering around to challenger Ariel Sharon who has given himself a new lease of political life. Barak has described right winger Sharon as an extremist and dismissed the opinion polls which have put the latter at least 20 per cent points ahead. Instead the Prime Minister has dismissed the campaign till date as little more than a beauty contest relying more on images than substance, and has promised that this will change closer to the final date. Obviously the vote in Israel will be coloured by the peace initiative, and victory and defeat will be seen by the political class as a vote for or against Barak's efforts to reach some reconciliation with the Palestinians. If Sharon wins, the world can safely presume that Israel public opinion is against peace, and would like to see military aggression reach its logical conclusion. This despite the fact that Ehud Barak's overtures fall far short of Palestinian expectations, and have begun to appear more like holding operations favouring Israel. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has drawn considerable criticism from his own people for succumbing to US pressure and spending months in a dialogue that was not prepared to concede their rights. All solutions and formulae have been rejected by the Palestinian Authority, of course under pressure from the people, as these have been found wanting on any number of counts. Now the US stepped in to rebuke Mr Arafat for hitting out at Israel in a speech delivered at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He accused Israel of fascist military aggression during the four months and more of violence that engulfed the West Bank and Gaza Strip. US state department spokesperson Richard Boucher claimed that Mr Arafat's remarks had no place in the peace process, although he admitted that both sides were frustrated. However, Mr Arafat was not wrong in what he said. Impartial media reports from the concerned region suggest the use of ugly force by the Israelis against young Palestinians armed with little more than stones and crude home-made devices. Photographs of brutal aggression against Palestinian civilians have been printed in newspapers all over the world creating horror and public opinion against Israel's military tactics. Of course the Barak government has sought to turn tables by insisting that the Palestinians have been deliberately using children against their soldiers to elicit sympathy. This is of course an absurd proposition and does not even merit comment. The Palestinians, old, young and the yet to be born, are fired by a rare spirit that comes from being homeless. The street violence is a manifestation of this, and not a result of any deliberate manoeuvring as the Israeli propaganda would seem to suggest. It is true, however, that Mr Arafat is in trouble with his people with even die-hard supporters questioning his willingness to continue with a dialogue weighed heavily against the Palestinians. He is finding it difficult to convince them otherwise, and his speech at Davos was obviously a direct result of this pressure. Not much will move on the peace front until the elections in Israel are over. And given the trend, not much can be expected, after.

THE ASIAN AGE

2 FEB 2001

Palestinian rider to peace talks

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AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

GAZA CITY, Feb. 1. — The Palestinian Authority has said it is ready to resume peace talks immediately — on condition the Israeli team has a mandate for an agreement.

In a statement late yesterday, the authority said it "is ready to continue the talks from today or tomorrow if the Israeli leadership makes the decision" and mandates a delegation to take part, according to the official Wafa news agency.

However, the Israeli foreign minister, Mr Shlomo Ben Ami, said a final accord was not currently on the agenda.

Sweden emerged as a possible venue for a snap Arab-Israeli summit that would try to lock in gains in the West Asia peace process before next Tuesday's

Israeli elections. W A M

The EU foreign policy representative, Mr Javier Solana, speaking in the European Parliament in Brussels, said "very intensive" contact were currently underway to get a summit off the ground.

Troops kill Palestinian: Israeli troops shot dead a 50-year-old Palestinian man yesterday as he was driving near the Jewish settlement of Netzarim in Gaza Strip, Palestinian police sources said, adds Reuters.

Hospital sources said Ismail Al-Telbani was shot in the chest. Israel had no immediate comment. The death raised the toll to 376 in four months of a Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation. At least 314 Palestinians, 49 Israelis and 13 Israeli Arabs have been killed.

THE STATESMAN

2 FEB 2001

Libyan gets life term for Lockerbie bombing

AP & AFP

CAMP ZEIST (The Netherlands), Jan. 31. — A Scottish court today convicted Libyan Intelligence officer, Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, of murder in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people. It acquitted a second Libyan defendant.

Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, 48 was given a mandatory life sentence, with no possibility of a parole for 20 years.

In addition, the presiding judge Lord Rana Sutherland said he would recommend to the government that Megrahi be deported at the end of his term.

The court acquitted a the Libyan Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah, 44. Both decisions were unanimous.

Mr Jim Swire, whose daughter Flora was killed in the explosion, collapsed in the courtroom about 15 minutes after the verdict was announced. He was carried out by other victims' relatives. He appeared limp and motionless, but later recovered and returned to the courtroom. The 64-year-old retired British physician has attended nearly every session of the trial.



Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi (left), and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah. — AP/PTI

"You are discharged and free to go," Sutherland told Fhimah, who clasped his hands together in thanks and relief.

Megrahi's attorney, Mr William Taylor, told the court that his client "maintains his innocence," an indication he will appeal the conviction.

The session was adjourned for three hours, when it was to reconvene to pronounce the sentence against al-Megrahi. A life sentence is mandatory under Scottish law. A detailed judgment was to be released later and posted on the Internet.

A gasp went up from the dozens of relatives from the USA and Britain who were in

the public gallery in the courtroom. Several brothers and sisters of the two defendants also were in the gallery.

The ruling will mean Fhimah, 44, is immediately free to leave the Netherlands and return to Libya. Al-Megrahi, 48, has 14 days to file an appeal the verdict, which could be heard by a five-member tribunal at the former military base at Camp Zeist.

The other judges sat and stared straight ahead, motionless, as Lord Sutherland pronounced the verdicts.

Then the courtroom endured a seven-minute silence while the clerk recorded minor amendments to the indictment.

THE STATESMAN

1 FEB 2001

Despair in a melting pot

They live so close to each other, but the hostility is intense. In Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank, the peace process hangs on a tenuous thread of hope, writes HARSH DOBHAL

CLOSE TO sunset on January 8, tens of thousands of Right-wing Jewish settlers and Israelis of the other spectrum of political opinion gathered around the ancient wall of the old city of Jerusalem. They were opposing the handing over of any part of the city to the Palestinians in a peace deal.

In any case, the peace process is not really taking off despite the latest round of dialogue at Taba in Egypt.

Palestinian territories also witnessed angry scenes on the same day when protesters marched in support of the Arab refugees' right of return to what is now Israel — a right the US has been urging the Palestinian leadership to waive off for the sake of a possible peace agreement. Similar demonstrations were staged by refugees in Lebanon, whose exiled Palestinian population has grown to about 360,000 since 1948.

These are the latest happenings in a series of bloody clashes since the new Palestinian uprising broke out at a time when the world believed that the two sides were coming closer to achieve lasting peace and put an end to the 52-year-old conflict.

Palestinian protests and clashes with Israeli troops, which have seen over 350 people dead, most of them Palestinians, followed the controversial visit of Right-wing Israeli leader Ariel Sharon to Temple Mount. The sporadic protests turned into a popular uprising fuelled by years of frustration among Palestinians and born out of Israel's occupation of their territories.

Israel has been in conflict with the Palestinians since its establishment in 1948 over issues such as land, water and the future of millions of individuals whose lives have revolved around perpetual insecurity and violence. The talks that began with the Oslo agreement in 1993 were designed to bring peace and prosperity to the region, but in real terms the Palestinians are worse off today than before the Oslo process began. The Oslo accords have not achieved the desired goals, partially because these were not implemented with any sense of conviction.

After the deadlock in negotiations under Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israelis elected Ehud Barak as Premier in 1999 on the promise of quick progress towards a peace settlement. However, the diplomatic efforts

PLATFORM

have proved too slow and difficult.

After coming to power promising peace, Barak withdrew from Lebanon and partly from the West Bank, but he has been under pressure from the hardliners on retaining the Jewish settlements, Jerusalem and on the right of refugees to return to their 'homeland'. Barak's failure is also evident as Israeli Arab leaders have made it clear that the majority of this section are likely to cast blank ballots as an act of protest or 'punishment'. This move is the result of anger felt by the Israeli-Arabs towards Barak for neglecting their aspirations.

While Israel has always appeared to be the coloniser, what is lost sight of is the fact that ordinary people in Israel are longing for peace while their leaders have played on their fears.



Even Barak, while swearing by peace, has used the threat of war for internal political compulsions.

The peace camp, including the Left, is relatively silent in contrast to the Right wing's shrill rhetoric, which has been exemplified by the massive January 8 rally against a possible division of Jerusalem. The peace lobby seems to be confused. It is the hardliners who rule the streets and public squares.

The impression is that the peace camp has lost its way. It has put up its hands and has given up on the election campaign even before it has begun. And since street politics abhors a vacuum, the Right wing is successfully filling the space.

Though Barak has promised peace, he could not curb the settlers' movement which has been encouraged by Right-led Israeli governments in the past and tacitly tolerated by the

Left. Mostly financed by overseas Zionists, the process of settlement expansion has been relentless and often violent.

Jewish settlers have systematically occupied territories ever since Israel captured the Gaza strip in 1967. The peace camp has time and again slipped into complacency, allowing affairs to be dictated by hawkish elements.

Arafat has come under pressure from extremist groups in Palestine. He is also aware of the political damage he will suffer if the peace deal is not signed soon. Also, he is apprehensive over the prospect of dealing with a government headed by Likud leader Ariel Sharon whose victory has been predicted by opinion polls.

Coming under pressure from Islamic hardliners, such as the massive demonstrations held by the Hamas, Arafat is unable to stop the extremist groups from operating freely. Even his coalition, which consists of small Leftist parties like the Fadda Party and the Palestinian People's Party (formerly the Communist Party), appears to be disintegrating as is evident by statements issued by various leaders. Within *Fatah*, Arafat's own movement, he seems to be losing authority.

In this chess-game of diplomacy, accompanied by funeral processions and protests, who is bearing the worst brunt of the situation? The Palestinian people. The economy is in shambles. People, villages and towns are cut off by the Israeli siege in the West Bank. Everyday life is paralysed. Gaza and other Palestinian towns, in the midst of overwhelming poverty and the siege, seem to be living in a time warp in this era of globalisation.

The current siege is accompanied by an excessive use of force, of tanks and missiles, on Palestinian habitats. Amidst this terror and the simmering anger, it is not possible to have any meaningful dialogue for lasting peace.

While Arafat has threatened to declare unilateral statehood if the talks fail, Barak has not ruled out the idea of Palestinian statehood. His electoral fate in February depends on whether he can clinch a peace deal. In this scenario, there is no choice but to divide this bitterly contested land into two states for two people and make the best of it in order to honour the shared dream of Arafat, late Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres that brought them a joint Nobel Peace Prize.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 JAN 2001

W. Asians 'closest' to agreement

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), JAN. 28. Israel and the Palestinian Authority wound up six-day-long intensive discussions in the Egyptian resort of Taba yesterday without a final accord, but with an optimistic declaration that a comprehensive settlement of their dispute was within reach. Besides putting their signatures to this positive statement, the chief negotiators of the two sides exhibited the sort of body language that confirmed their words that progress had been achieved. Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, and the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, could meet in Stockholm on Tuesday if a few details are sorted out.

The statement, issued jointly by the two chief negotiators — Israel's Foreign Minister, Mr. Shlomo Ben Ami, and the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Mr. Ahmed Qorei — noted that the "two sides have never before been so close to attaining an agreement." They also stated their belief that "it will be possible to bridge remaining gaps when the talks are resumed after elections in Israel." The Israeli Minister, Mr. Yossi Beilin, who was also involved in the talks, said that an agreement could be finalised within two weeks when, or if, the discussions are resumed after the Feb. 6 election for the Prime Minister's post in Israel.

While the negotiators, especially the Israelis, said that progress had been made on all the issues they also pointed out that progress was not even on all the issues. "Substantive progress" had been made on some of the issues, Mr. Ben Ami said without specifying which of the four main issues being discussed was



Ehud Barak

proving the hardest to crack. According to the Israeli media, the joint committee considering the question of Jerusalem had held just one meeting but it was not clear whether it was because the two sides were more or less in agreement or whether it was because the issue was found to be too intractable.

Mr. Beilin, who was involved in the discussions on the right of refugees to return, said detailed talks had been held on the compensation, rehabilitation and/or emigration of the refugees. From Mr. Beilin's statements it appears that Israel did discuss the proposal whereby Israel would accept (at least in loosely worded language) the principle that the refugees could return while retaining the authority to administer the return and thereby delay it to the point of non-fulfilment. The question of Israel accepting the moral respon-

sibility for creating the refugee problem in 1948 was also said to have been discussed.

On the issue of borders, the two sides seem to have gone well beyond matters of principle and are looking into such details as the precise alignment of border lines in separate sectors. In respect of the security issue, the two sides are looking into the wording of the agreements to specify what privileges, if any, Israel will enjoy in terms of permission to station armour in the Palestinian territories or overfly its air space in the event of an emergency.

If Mr. Barak and Mr. Arafat do meet in Stockholm they are expected to issue a statement that lays out all that was achieved in the discussions held at Taba. However, the summit meeting is contingent on the two sides coming to a prior agreement on the wording of the Stockholm Declaration. In recent days, Mr. Arafat has begun expressing his concerns that the peace process would come to an end if Mr. Barak lost to his rival, Mr. Ariel Sharon. In this context it is quite possible that Mr. Arafat will respond to Mr. Barak's concerns over the Stockholm declaration.

The Taba statement would probably improve Mr. Barak's electoral chances not so much for its effect on influencing the non-committed voter as in galvanising the left and Israeli Arabs to work for his campaign. Most of the Israeli Arab parties had declared that they would be boycotting the poll unless an Israel-Palestine pact was struck before election day. In letting his negotiators sign the Taba statement and strike an optimistic note Mr. Arafat has signalled to the Israeli Arabs that they must now support Mr. Barak in the elections.

THE HINDU

29 JAN 2001

West Asia talks set to resume

By Kesava Menon

110-26
MANAMA (BAHRAIN), JAN. 25. The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, has said that the talks with the Palestinians at Taba, which were stalled, would resume today.

The Palestinians appear to have partially fulfilled his demand by promptly arresting the perpetrators of the most recent act of violence against Israelis. Some of the Palestinian negotiators have said that they were ready to accept one of two alternative plans produced by the Israeli side. If all these positive things do come together there is a chance for a deal by the week-end but if they do not, peace-making is likely to be put aside for some time to come.

The Palestinian Authority has arrested four men in connection with the murder of two Israelis in the West Bank on Tuesday but Israel says it is waiting to confirm that those arrested are indeed those responsible for the killings. From the reports, this incident was one of those unfortunate accidents that occur in a tense atmosphere.

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The two Israeli restaurateurs had gone to the West Bank town of Tulkarm, accompanied by an Israeli Arab friend, to buy some pottery. A group of Palestinian men, who spotted the Israelis in a Tulkarm eating place, mistook them for agents of the secretive unit that has been assassinating Palestinian leaders. They took the Israelis with them, after chasing off their Arab friend, to a nearby village and shot them in the head. The two Israelis were buried today.

In a manner almost unprecedented over the past three months, the Palestinian Authority was quick to declare its condemnation and order the police to take action. However, Mr. Barak, who is involved in an election campaign in which he just cannot break the two digit lead enjoyed by his adversary, felt it necessary to recall three Cabinet Ministers heading the negotiating team for a day.

With the funerals of the two murdered Israelis over today, the three members of the peace Cabinet are to return. The Palestinians were a little miffed that the Israelis had taken a break especially since they (the Palestinians) had entered into the Taba talks though one of their teenagers had been shot dead by Israeli soldiers just before the talks got underway.

THE HINDU

25 JAN 2001

Substantial progress in West Asia peace talks

Taba (Egypt), January 28

ISRRAELIS AND Palestinians reported substantial progress after a week of marathon talks here, saying they wanted to carry on negotiations throwing down the gauntlet to headline Israeli election candidate Ariel Sharon.

Israel's foreign minister Shlomo Ben Ami, quoting a joint statement, said the two sides had "never been closer to an agreement to end a conflict dating back more than 50 years."

Ben Ami gave his assessment at a Press conference ending one week of peace negotiations here, taking his cue from the statement released moments earlier.

The Taba talks were "unprecedented in their positive atmosphere and their expression of mutual willingness to meet the national, security and existential needs of each side," the statement added.

"The two sides are convinced in a short period of time. It will be possible to bridge the differences remaining and attain a permanent settlement of peace."

But referring to the looming election on February 6, it said: "Given the circumstances and time constraints, it proved impossible to reach understandings on all issues despite the substantial progress that was achieved in each of the issues discussed."

"We can say we have the basis for an agreement, which can be implemented after the elec-

tions in Israel... We've never been so close to an agreement," Israeli foreign minister and chief negotiator Shlomo Ben-Ami told reporters at a joint news conference with Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qorei.

Reaching a deal with Palestinians would give Barak a boost in his election battle with the right-wing Likud candidate Ariel Sharon who is ahead in opinion polls here. Sharon has said if elected premier, he would withdraw concessions offered by his opponent which he described as "steps endangering Israel".

Ben-Ami and Qorei agreed that the talks had gone far toward restoring trust between the two sides that had been lost during a deadly four-month spate of violence which has seen at least 375 people killed, most of them Palestinians.

Palestinian head negotiator Ahmed Qorei would welcome hardliner Ariel Sharon as Israel's Prime Minister if he wants to continue peace talks, but said the Palestinians would use 'all means' to achieve its goals if he did not.

"We cannot chose (with) whom we will negotiate," Qorei told a Press conference yesterday wrapping up one week of peace talks with Israeli negotiators send by caretaker Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

If Barak loses the February 6 election to Sharon, the Palestinians would accept the will of the Israeli people, he said.

"If he wants to continue with the negotiations, welcome," he said. "If not, we have our ways to continue our struggle, diplomatic, political..."

talks

he said, adding the Palestinians would use "all means to achieve our goal."

Qorei also said that what was concluded in the talks was binding on both sides in the future.

Meanwhile, Israel's right-wing Likud opposition party denounced the joint Israeli-Palestinian declaration in Taba as a political manoeuvre 10 days before an election Likud leader Ariel Sharon is poised to win.

Likud MP Meir Shetreet accused the "minority and caretaker" government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak of trying "to sell all that it can to save Barak's job." Recent opinion polls show Sharon trouncing Barak in the February 6 special election for prime minister.

Shetreet also accused Barak of "selling Israel for nothing," alluding to Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qorei's statement that wide gaps still remained between the two sides.

The ultra-orthodox Shas, Israel's third largest party, said the Israeli negotiators have no moral or legal authority, public radio reported.

Separately, national religious party leader Yitzhak Levy called the Taba declaration "electoral propaganda".

After six days of talks at the Egyptian Red Sea resort, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators said yesterday that they made substantial progress and that they wanted to carry on talks after the election.

Sharon has said he will not recognise any accord reached by the Israelis and Palestinians if he is elected.

4 of an Afghan family in Pak shot dead

Peshawar, January 27

FOUR MEMBERS of an Afghan family were shot dead by unidentified assailants at a refugee camp in northwest Pakistan, an official report said today.

The Afghans were asleep at the Shamshatoo refugee camp when they were attacked last night, state-run Associated Press of Pakistan said.

Those killed were among thousands of refugees who arrived recently in Pakistan, it added. Police were investigating.

Pakistan has received since September an estimated 150,000 new refugees fleeing fighting and drought in Afghanistan.

The camps, housing them in northwest Pakistan were overflowing, with UN High Commissioner for Refugees officials complaining of shortage of funds to cope with the influx.

Pakistan already had nearly two million Afghan refugees, many of them from the 1979-89 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, before the new arrivals started. (AFP)

BILL Clinton is out of it and George W Bush is not yet into it, so the Palestinians and Israelis are on their own. That is no bad thing. The meeting in Cairo is make-or-break time. If they fail, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak will surely be voted out in the election on 6 February.

If they succeed, the euphoria unleashed might save Mr Barak, and save Israel, too. A future Israel under Ariel Sharon's leadership can only

be the downward path for both Israel and the Palestinians. It is a future that goes nowhere. For the Israelis, it means more years as an occupying power that demands for its precarious survival increasingly brutal tactics that bilittates Israel at least as much as it does its antagonist. For the Palestinians, it means a future in which there is no possibility of economic

Make-or-break time in West Asia



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak (left) talks to Israeli Arab leaders as part of an election campaign visit in the northern Israeli Arab town of Nazareth on Wednesday. Opposition Likud party leader Ariel Sharon (right) called on Mr Barak to stop the peace negotiations with Palestinians in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba. — AP/PTI

the West Bank that Israel is intent on keeping — an issue that tragically and short-sightedly America never used its muscle to forestall — a reasonable compromise is to give to Palestine another part of Israel, as Mr Barak has suggested.

But it cannot be any old piece of land. Israel owes it to the Palestinians to compensate for its land-grab policy to pay to make this new land a viable economic entity, not to remain as some isolated piece of underdeveloped desert scrub. Israeli justice minister Yossi Beilin, who initiated the Oslo accords on the Israeli side recently said, "We do not need more time, nor do we need new solutions. We need courage." That's it.

advance and a deferral of all their dreams for the indefinite future.

For their leader Yasser Arafat, who is fighting off serious illness, it may mean literally the end of the road. For the West, it means the inevitable radicalising of the Arab states and, not least, their political rehabilitation of Saddam Hussein.

It is, in short, a lose-lose situation. Yet this is exactly what many commentators said after the failure of Camp David last July.

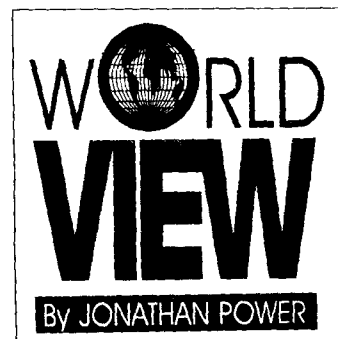
President Clinton blamed the breakdown of the talks on the intransigence of Yasser Arafat. But we can see in retrospect that Mr Arafat was right not to close a deal.

In a short six months, Mr Barak has advanced the Israeli negotiating position even further than the radical steps he had taken before. Mr Barak is now prepared to accept Palestinian sovereignty over much of East Jerusalem, whose Arab neighbourhoods house over 200,000 people and an equally weighted Palestinian Authority over the sacred ground of the historic basin which contains the holy sites of the three monotheistic religions.

In short, contrary to the long-held Israeli position, Jerusalem will remain an open and undivided city.

Not a bad result for six

months work! Does this mean Intifada 2 was right? That the Israelis only bend under the threat of violence? If so, then Mr Arafat should continue until he gets all he wants — the right of return to Israel of the refugees driven out of Israel during the war of 1948



and a removal of Israeli control of the roads that link up Jewish settlements on the West Bank and so on.

Perhaps, there would be an argument for this if General Sharon were less than a month away. But he is all but assured of victory if peace is not declared before hand. Yes, it is an almighty gamble if the Palestinians forsake some of their demands and settle now. Mr Sharon might still win the election, such is the resentment among Jewish voters caused by Intifada 2.

It also means accepting that a new Palestinian state has only 25 per cent of the land the Palestinians had before the

1948 war.

Besides, you never know, General. Sharon might be another Richard Nixon or Charles de Gaulle and turn into a peacemaker once in power.

But measured by how far the Israelis have come since the Oslo accords were first fashioned, the Palestinians have gained far more than any expert observer said they would.

You cannot find one newspaper article in the West, or one article in a mainstream academic journal that even hinted at the possibility of the deal now on the table.

Mr Arafat would be playing Russian roulette if he doesn't now work to clinch a deal. So what remains to be settled? First and foremost, the vexing issue of the so-called Right To Return.

The Israelis must concede the principle of it, even as they win the right to indefinite administrative delay for a majority of the refugees.

If the international community plays its part with the necessary funding, most of the refugees settled in camps can be relocated outside of the Israel that now exists; and most will want to be, once the Palestinian leadership tells them bluntly that Israel will always be Israel. As to the land that the Palestinians have lost to the three large Israeli group of settlements on

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West Asia: little hope of breakthrough

TABA (EGYPT), JAN. 22. Getting down to business in their "peace marathon," Israeli and Palestinian negotiators on Monday split up into working groups, including one tackling the most contentious issue, the fate of Palestinian refugees.

After morning talks at a hotel in the Red Sea resort, both sides said the gaps remained wide, but that the talks were serious and the atmosphere friendly.

A photograph from one session showed a senior Palestinian negotiator, Mr. Ahmed Qureia, and three Israeli officials sitting in a circle in comfortable chairs, all tie-less and laughing. Pens, notebooks and a few apples lay on a table in the middle.

The leader of the Israeli team, Mr. Shlomo Ben-Ami, said that in the unlikely event an accord was reached before Israel's Feb. 6 election, it would only be signed after the vote. Mr. Ben-Ami was responding to criticism by the Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak's hard-line rival, the Opposition leader, Mr. Ariel Sharon, who said the Government did not have the moral authority to make concessions to the Palestinians so close to the elections. Mr. Barak is trailing Mr. Sharon in the polls by more than 20 percentage points.

In the Gaza Strip, meanwhile, an Israeli army tracker was wounded when a roadside bomb went off near the Netzarim junction. Israel responded by closing the main north-south road, cutting the strip in half.

Despite the blast, Israel eased its blockade of the Palestinian territories — in effect during four months of deadly Israeli-Palestinian fighting — and permitted 16,000 Palestinian workers to return to jobs in Israel.

Peace talks in the Red Sea resort of Taba began on

Sunday evening, after Israel accepted an offer from the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, to hold marathon negotiations.

Mr. Arafat said on Sunday night he wanted to "reach an agreement as soon as possible," and one of his negotiators, Mr. Nabil Shaath, said the Palestinians opted for "a full framework for the permanent settlement."

On Monday, negotiators split up into two groups — one dealing with the fate of refugees, and the other with the future of Jerusalem, Israeli land concessions and security issues. Such an arrangement could allow negotiators to make progress on the land and security issues, seen as less charged than the dispute over the refugees.

However, Mr. Qureia, the Palestinian parliament Speaker, said after a morning session of the working group dealing with land and security that differences remained on all issues. He said the two sides had not yet looked at maps.

Mr. Ben-Ami said the gaps were still "considerable." Mr. Barak said in Israel TV's Channel Two on Sunday evening that chances for an agreement were scant.

Mr. Barak, rejecting a fundamental Palestinian demand, said the 4 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants would not be given the right to return to Israel. Israel, with just 6 million citizens, fears such a return would destroy the country's Jewish character.

Mr. Barak also said he would never transfer sovereignty over Jerusalem's most contested holy site to the Palestinians. However, he has not ruled out granting control to a third party. — AP

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2001

W. Asia talks get under way

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) JAN. 21. The revival of Israeli-Palestinian talks has come too late for former U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, who had hoped to sign off his term in office with a last major signing ceremony on the White House lawns. But, if successful, these talks might occur just in time to enable Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, to hang on to his office. Then again, even a peace deal with the Palestinians might not be enough to save Mr. Barak's premiership.

Israel's peace Cabinet, that is the group of Ministers who are intimately involved in the negotiations, last night agreed to join the Palestinian Authority in a 10-day marathon talk to try and clinch a final agreement. The Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, had suggested the holding of this marathon session when he met Israel's Foreign Minister, Mr. Shlomo Ben Ami, in Cairo on Wednesday. Israel, which was supposed to respond by Friday, postponed its decision following the murder of a youth they believe was committed by the Palestinians. With last night's decision, negotiators representing the two sides are expected to begin discussions tonight in an Egyptian venue either the seaside resort of Taba or a site closer to Cairo.

Even before the talks have got under way unnamed Palestinian officials have been quoted as saying that progress, even breakthroughs, had been achieved on some of the key issues. The vexed issue of sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Al Aqsa complex in Jerusalem was among the issues that had either been settled or were close to being resolved, according to these sources. Israel was also said to have offered further land concessions in the West Bank so as to ensure contiguity between Palestinian populated areas.

However Israeli officials have offered an entirely different perspective, insisting that the talks so far had focussed on ways of ending the violence that has gripped the territories since Sept. 28 last year.

From the new line that Mr. Barak is taking in the campaign for the February 6 election, it is fairly clear that he is gambling his future on the deal even if it provides the Palestinians with concessions that most Israelis had thought they would never have to make. Mr. Barak is campaigning on the line that Israel must give up its delusions that they can cling on to most of what they had taken from the Palestinians since 1967. Final peace with the Palestinians will be achieved only if Israel recognises that they will have to make what they have till now consid-

ered as heavy "concessions". Mr. Barak still insists that he will not sign a deal which includes handing sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Al Aqsa complex to the Palestinians and the "right of return" of Palestinian refugees. But these are the very issues that have to be discussed with the Palestinians in the coming talks.

While Mr. Barak apparently hopes that the deal can be made and believes that he can still sell it to his people there might just not be enough time for him to reverse the momentum of the election which is totally against him at this time. Opinion polls still show that about 60 per cent of the Israeli people are still in favour of an agreement though they are now aware what that agreement will entail in terms of "concessions".

But Mr. Barak still trails behind his rival, Mr. Ariel Sharon, by almost twenty percentage points. One option for Mr. Barak is to withdraw from the race in favour of Mr. Shimon Peres. Israel electoral law permits such a withdrawal till 96 hours before the election. Mr. Peres is neck and neck with Mr. Barak in the opinion polls and though he has a horrible electoral record a Peres-Barak combination (ie. an understanding that Mr. Barak will be Mr. Peres' Defence Minister) might still be a winning ticket.

Tajzadeh trial may repeat history in Iran

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA JAN. 29. If the trial and conviction of a leading ideologue, Mr. Abdollah Nouri, contributed significantly to the landslide victory for Iranian reformers in last year's parliamentary poll, there is a strong possibility that the trial of the Deputy Interior Minister, Mr. Mostafa Tajzadeh, might have a similar effect on the Presidential polls to be held on June 8.

The abrupt commencement of Mr. Tajzadeh's trial is in line with the institutional changes that Iranian conservatives have undertaken so as to hem in the reform camp before the Presidential election. But there is a strong possibility that the conservatives in their desperation might be inflicting wounds on themselves.

An administrative court in Teheran summoned Mr. Tajzadeh to answer questions pertaining to the parliamentary poll. When the proceedings commenced, however, Mr. Tajzadeh was abruptly informed that the court was not merely interested in having some questions answered but had actually begun to try him on charges that he had committed irregularities during the parliamentary poll. After being grilled, he was informed that he had 10 days to present his formal reply.

Embittered by their drubbing in the Teheran constituencies, the conservatives had attributed their loss to irregularities committed by Mr. Tajzadeh who was in charge of

supervising elections in the Iranian capital. No voter had made any protest about the vote nor were any complaints received by the dozens of foreign journalists and diplomats who observed the poll.

Mr. Tajzadeh is the latest among a string of strong-headed reformers that the conservatives have knocked out of key positions. Late last year, after months of strenuous effort the conservatives got the Information Minister, Mr. Ataollah Mohajerani, ousted from his post. They had to enlist the support of the Supreme Religious Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khomeini, to ensure that Mr. Mohajerani was packed off. Now it is the turn of Mr. Tajzadeh who is also under another indictment on charges that he was responsible for a violent student protest in a western Iranian city last year. In both cases, the facts have been twisted to allow the perpetrators of violence or poll irregularities go free.

If there were any irregularities in the parliamentary poll, they were committed by the conservative controlled Council of Guardian (the body which has an overall supervisory role) which first delayed the announcement of results inordinately and then astoundingly over-turned some of the results to replace reformers who had won with conservatives who had lost.

The violence in the western Iranian city also occurred because conservative gangs attacked stu-

dents and two leading liberals who had gone there to address a student union conference. After he emerged from the court-room, Mr. Tajzadeh said that his own complaints about vote-rigging by the Council of Guardians had been shelved indefinitely by the courts. He said he would inform the public about them when he gets his day in court.

The trial of Mr. Abdollah Nouri early last year was intended by the conservatives to be the method by which they would demolish the reformers' philosophically. But Mr. Nouri put up such a powerful defence in a trail show live on Iranian television that it turned virtually into the manifesto of the pro-reform revolution.

In encapsulating as he did all the main points in the reformers agenda and defending them on sound Islamic revolutionary principles, Mr. Nouri gave a powerful impetus to the reform movement ahead of the polls. It would be interesting to see whether Mr. Tajzadeh will be as successful. However, given the example of Mr. Nouri's trial, it is quite possible that the conservative-controlled electronic media will not take the same risk again when Mr. Tajzadeh produces his defence.

In their desperation, the conservatives have launched themselves on a new tack that the reform wave of the last four years has given rise to a new mood of lasciviousness.

THE HINDU

30 JAN 2003

'Agreement on borders in sight'

TABA (EGYPT), JAN. 26. Israeli and Palestinian negotiators began tackling one of the touchiest issues, the fate of millions of Palestinian refugees, in one of several working groups convening on Friday in marathon talks ahead of Israel's Feb. 6 election.

But any breakthroughs could be nullified if the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, is defeated in the election by his hardline opponent, Mr. Ariel Sharon. Mr. Sharon maintained a double-digit lead over Mr. Barak in polls published in Israeli newspapers on Friday. Mr. Sharon rejects Mr. Barak's compromise offers to the Palestinians and says he would not honour any agreement Mr. Barak reaches before the election.

The Taba talks resumed on Friday as the Israeli negotiator, Mr. Yossi Beilin, met the Palestinian negotiator, Mr. Nabil Shaath, to discuss refugees. The Palestinians have been demanding that all refugees and their descendants, about 4 million people, be allowed to return to their original homes in Israel, but Israel has rejected that. Mr. Shaath said earlier that progress was made on compensation for the refugees.

Other working groups were to deal with Jerusalem, borders and security matters. The negotiators considered adding an informal session on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, at the Israeli delegation's hotel in the nearby Israeli resort of Eilat, with the end of the talks in sight. Mr. Barak said the negotiations would end several days before the election. Mr. Shaath said the two sides were close to agreement about borders of a Palestinian state. He said Israel would get about 4 per cent of the West Bank, and the Palestinians would receive some Israeli territory in return. Solution of the West Bank border issue would imply agreement about the settlements as well. In public up to now, the Palestinians have been demanding a state in all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and removal of all the settlements.

The talks had reconvened on Thursday after a two-day suspension, Israel's response to the killing of two Tel Aviv restaurateurs by masked gunmen in the West

Bank. When an Israeli motorist was gunned down a few hours after the talks resumed, Israeli negotiators broke off a session, but Mr. Barak instructed them to resume the negotiations.

Police said volleys of gunfire struck the Israeli motorist's car as it passed the Atarot industrial park on the north edge of Jerusalem. Israel radio identified him as Akiva Pashkos (45), from Jerusalem. Mr. Barak denounced the incident as "a despicable murder." In a leaflet circulated in the West Bank, a branch of the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat's Fatah group took responsibility for the ambush. The group named itself the "Thabet Thabet Brigade," after a Fatah leader killed on Dec. 31 in what Palestinians said was an Israeli assassination operation. The leaflet said the shooting was revenge for Thabet's death.

Since violence erupted on Sept. 28, 375 people have been killed, including 318 Palestinians, 13 Israeli Arabs, 43 Israeli Jews, and one German doctor.

Israeli election politics intruded on the talks in Taba briefly on Thursday as sailboats with competing messages floated off the resort's beach. A schooner piloted by the dovish Israeli Peace Now group flew banners encouraging the negotiators, while three smaller vessels carrying signs favouring Mr. Sharon circled nearby.

Negotiators watching from the beach laughed as the competing crews shouted at each other, with Egyptian Coast Guard dinghies hovering nearby. With a week and a half to go before Israel's election, Mr. Sharon maintained a wide lead. A Gallup poll in the *Maariv* daily showed Mr. Sharon ahead of Mr. Barak by 52 to 34 percent, on a sample of 509 Israeli adults with a 4.5 per cent margin of error. A poll in the *Yediot Ahronot* daily showed Mr. Sharon leading by 49 to 32 per cent. The poll, by the local *Dahaf* agency, questioned 603 Israeli adults and quoted a 4.5 per cent margin of error. The poll results were virtually unchanged from previous weeks. — AP

THE HINDU

26 JAN 2001

W Asia talks: clashing claims

4-12
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 22/1

RAMALLAH (West Bank), Jan. 20. — A high-ranking Palestinian official said today that "serious progress" had been made in talks over the past week and that Israel had agreed to some territorial concessions.

But an Israeli foreign ministry spokesman denied that any new concessions had been made. "We haven't changed any of our positions. The main part of talks is how to reduce violence." Israel's peace Cabinet is expected to meet tonight to answer Mr Yasser Arafat's request for 10 days of talks in Egypt.

It delayed its decision yesterday following the discovery of a murdered 16-year-old Israeli's body in the West Bank on Thursday.

The Palestinian official said progress was made in talks between Mr Arafat and Israel's

caretaker Prime Minister, Mr Ehud Barak. Israeli TV said the two spoke over phone three times in recent days following initial contacts with the Palestinians by Mr Yossi Ginosar, Mr Barak's adviser.

The Palestinian official further said: "The Israelis have retreated on their land demands in the West Bank."

He said Israel has agreed in principle to give up control of the Jordan Valley and the northern shoreline of the Dead Sea and assure a future Palestinian state's territorial continuity.

Another Palestinian source said talks would take place near Cairo and not at the Egyptian resort of Taba as proposed.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian authorities called for Mr George W Bush to relaunch the peace process after he takes over today.

THE STATESMAN

21 JAN 2001

Rally in Israel against division of Jerusalem

Jerusalem, January 9

DEALING A further blow to US President Bill Clinton's efforts to clinch a peace deal, tens of thousands of Israelis thronged the streets of the old city of Jerusalem last night to protest against handing parts of the city to the Palestinians.

Huge crowds of religious and nationalist Israelis poured into the congested heart of Jerusalem to pledge allegiance to the holy city and put on a strong show of opposition to an American plan that suggests to divide it.

Clinton's peace plans already appeared faltering as Palestinian negotiators earlier rejected his proposals alleging they were copies of Israel's blueprint for ending the 52-year-old conflict.

Bearing placards and large torches and singing patriotic songs, thousands of right-wing Jewish set-

ters and a number of Israelis from other shades of political opinion formed a human chain around the city - which houses sites holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians amid tight security arrangements.

As per the reported Clinton plan, Israel is required to offer back parts of the city which were seized in 1967 and reactivate peace negotiations, as part of a last push by Clinton before he leaves office on January 20.

"Jerusalem is the heart of our prayers and of our struggle. We cannot give away our heart," Natan Sharansky, a former minister, said.

"Don't be the first precedent in the history of your country to propose the division of the historical and eternal capital of the Jewish people," Olmert, Israel's right-wing mayor of Jerusalem said. "We are a nation with long memories that go back thousands of years," the mayor said. (PTI)

Hillary seeks ghostwriter for her memoirs

Washington January 9

HILLARY RODHAM Clinton, the outgoing US First Lady and newly sworn-in Senator, is searching for a ghostwriter for her memoirs, The New York Times has reported.

She has received more than two dozen applications for the job, which could pay a half-million dollars.

Those wages are just a drop in the bucket compared to the \$ 8 million fee paid to Clinton by publisher Simon & Schuster for the rights to print the book. And the job will come with a collaborator described as difficult by past authors.

Clinton reportedly took an active role in the writing of her past two books, *It Takes a Village* and *Invitation to the White House*. Both of the ghostwriters for those books left before their projects were complete, and their work was then rewritten by Clinton and her aides. (DPA)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JAN 2001

Divide occupied land, Clinton tells Israel

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

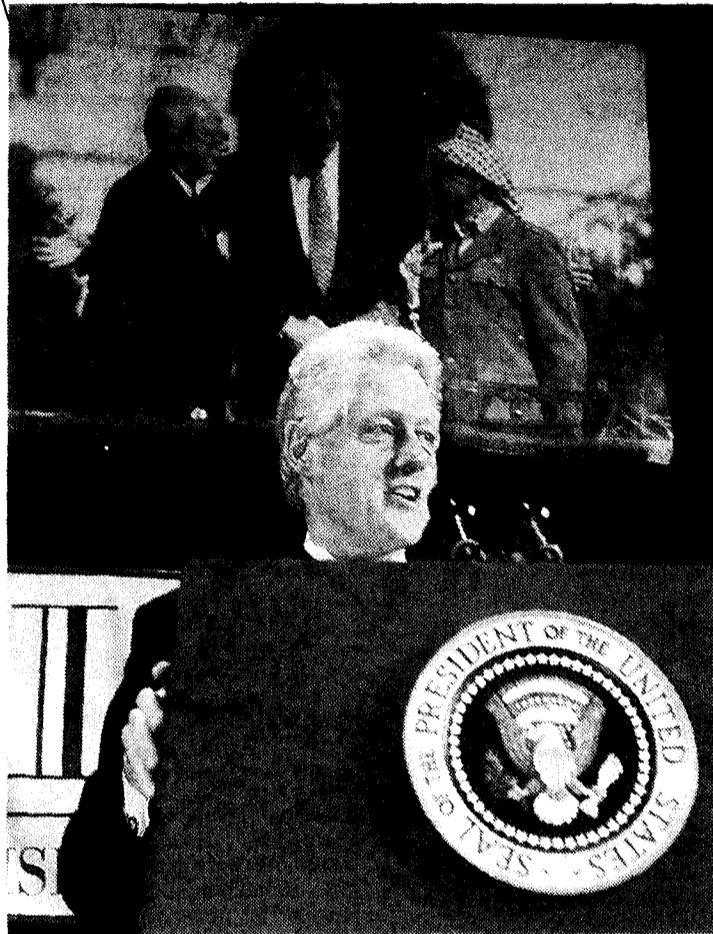
WASHINGTON, JAN. 8. With less than two weeks to go before laying down the office, the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, has told Israel in rather blunt terms that it must divide the land it holds with the Palestinians in the larger interests of peace.

In a speech to the Israel Policy Forum in New York, Mr. Clinton said by ceding land to the Palestinians, Israel would become smaller but there was "no choice but for you to divide this land into two states for two people". Israel, should make "the best of it".

Mr. Clinton has envisaged the two States sharing Jerusalem as the capital with the Palestinian state encompassing all of the Gaza and much of the West Bank with the 170,000 Jewish settlers living there to be moved out. "There can be no peace without compromise." Mr. Clinton also had a few words for the Palestinians and their leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat. Asking them not to hold out "for the impossible more", he rejected one of their key demands that Israel take in millions of refugees which would then change the character of the Jewish state.

"My parameters focus on the establishment of a Palestinian state that will provide all Palestinians with a place they can safely and proudly call their home," Mr. Clinton told the Policy Forum which backs the compromise accord. The outgoing President who has been very intently looking for ways to bridge the differences between the two sides promised to use his last days to further narrow the disagreements; but he held out no predictions.

"We've got a mess on our hands... sometimes you just have



The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, addressing the Israel Policy Forum in New York on Sunday. The photograph in the background shows Mr. Clinton presiding over ceremonies marking the 1993 peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians on the White House lawn with the late Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin (left), and the PLO Chairman, Mr. Yasser Arafat. —AP

to do the right thing. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it does not." Mr. Clinton was also clear that the incoming Republican administration was not bound by the broad framework of his proposals.

"These parameters originated with me and will go with me when I leave office." On the instructions of Mr. Clinton, the West Asia negotiator, Mr. Dennis Ross, heads back to the region to talk to the Israelis and Palestinians. The Bush administration has not said who will take charge of the peace process with one speculation being that the next Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, may continue with Mr. Ross for the sake of continuity.

Palestinians oppose proposals

JERUSALEM, JAN. 8. The Palestinians oppose drafting a 'declaration of principles' that would be based on Mr. Clinton's peace proposals and guide future talks with Israel, their chief negotiator said on Monday.

"We will not accept any kind of pressure," said the negotiator, Mr.

Saeb Erekat, speaking a day after Mr. Clinton urged the Palestinians not to hold out for the impossible.

In Cairo, a meeting of Israeli and Palestinian security officials with the CIA chief, Mr. George Tenet, broke up without result, Palestinian officials said.

The Palestinians had demanded that in exchange for a resumption of security cooperation, Israel lift its blockade of Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel rejected the demand, the Palestinians said.

In the Gaza Strip, a 34-year-old Palestinian man was killed when Israeli troops fired at a neighbourhood close to the Netzarim junction before carrying out arrests there, Palestinian officials said.

The army said it was checking the report.

In separate West Bank incidents late on Sunday, a 20-year-old Palestinian woman was killed and a 10-year-old Palestinian boy was critically injured.

The woman was shot and killed while she was in a car driving from the West Bank town of Nablus to her nearby village along a dirt road.

The army said the car may have got caught in the crossfire of an Israeli-Palestinian gun battle. However, the victim's relatives said soldiers shot without provocation.

All Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank are under Is-

raeli army blockade, meaning residents are barred from leaving and entering. Many Palestinians use backroads to avoid the Israeli barriers. An Israeli army commander in the West Bank, Col. Noam Tibon, meanwhile, confirmed that a Palestinian man was handcuffed when he was shot and seriously wounded by Israeli soldiers near the town of Halhoul late Sunday.

The army said the man was arrested as a suspect in shooting attacks on Israelis. Col. Tibon said soldiers shot him in the leg when the detainee tried to run away.

The Palestinians said they would resist attempts to produce a joint Israeli-Palestinian 'declaration of principles' based on Mr. Clinton's peace proposals. U.N. resolutions 242, 338 and 194, which call on Israel to withdraw from war-won land and grant Palestinian refugees the right to return to former homes, must remain the basis for negotiations, they said.

Mr. Clinton has proposed that Israel withdraw from 95 per cent of the West Bank and all of Gaza. Israel would cede control over a key Jerusalem shrine revered by Muslims and Jews, and in exchange the Palestinians would drop a demand that nearly 4 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants be granted the right to return.

"We cannot accept at this stage a road map or declaration of principles," Mr. Erekat told CNN. —AP



A Palestinian baby looks from a car as vehicles and people wait for Israeli troops to open the road near the Jewish settlement of Netzarim for a two-hour permission to cross to southern Gaza during a tight internal closure imposed by the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip on Sunday. —Reuters

Israel accepts U.S. concept

JERUSALEM, JAN. 8. Israel said today it had accepted the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton's ideas for a peace deal as a basis for negotiations and was discouraged by the Palestinian rejection of his proposal.

"We consider his ideas as a basis for the continuation of negotiations," said the Deputy Defence Minister, Mr. Ephraim Sneh.

In New York yesterday, Mr. Clinton outlined in public for the first time what he called parameters for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal to end the 52-year-old conflict.

Senior Palestinian officials rejected the ideas, including those for dividing Jerusalem and the fate of Palestinian refugees.

"It's regrettable that Palestinian senior officials flatly reject his ideas," Mr. Sneh added. The Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, had previously accepted the Clinton proposals as a basis for talks. —Reuters

Palestinians reject US deal

Washington, Jan. 8 (Reuters): The White House called today for compromise to resolve the impasse in the West Asia peace talks after senior Palestinian officials rejected US President Bill Clinton's proposal to end the conflict.

Asked about a statement by senior negotiator Ahmed Korei which said the Palestinian Authority could not accept Clinton's ideas as a basis for future talks, P.J. Crowley, US National Security Council spokesman, said Washington aimed to narrow the gap between Israel and the Palestinians.

"The President heard directly from both the Palestinian and Israeli sides last week and took their views into account," Crowley said. Crowley added: "He is now sending Dennis Ross to see if we can narrow the gaps. But in order to reach an agreement both sides have to compromise."

Israel accepts

Israel said it had accepted Clinton's ideas for a peace deal as a basis for negotiations and was discouraged by the Palestinian rejection

of his proposal. "We consider his ideas as a basis for the continuation of negotiations," deputy defence minister Ephraim Sneh said.

Clinton outlined in public for the first time yesterday in New York what he called parameters for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. Senior Palestinian officials said today they rejected Clinton's ideas.

"There are ideas of the President that serve for us as the basis for further negotiations and the voices we are hearing from the Palestinian side are very discouraging," Sneh said.

"It's regrettable that Palestinian senior officials reject his ideas," he said, adding he was not sure the Palestinian rejection was an official response. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak had previously accepted the Clinton proposals as a basis for talks.

Clinton said yesterday both sides had accepted his ideas as a basis for talks and that he would be sending his special envoy Dennis Ross to the region in the coming days to try to bring the sides closer to one another.

THE TELEGRAPH

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Dealing for a deal

W-Brin
(W)

THERE IS a slim chance that when the permanent settlement between Israelis and Palestinians is finally arrived at it will go unnoticed. No Israeli or Palestinian leader, and certainly not the U.S. President who will be the master of ceremonies at the agreement-signing function, is ever going to miss the photo-opportunity. But there is a chance that many in the rest of the world will miss the significance because what we seem to be in for at this stage is a series of agreements that could produce a final settlement.

The Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, returned to home territory by the end of the week after a sojourn in Washington and Cairo. By then he appeared to have accepted a U.S. compromise package, though conditionally and tentatively. That compromise package was, however, not the final deal in itself. It was to form the basis for further negotiations which would hopefully produce more agreements. If all went well, Israeli and Palestinian negotiations were to meet for an intensive round of discussions which could produce such agreements. Or so it was thought in the initial euphoria following Mr. Arafat's announcement of his qualified acceptance of the U.S. proposals. Just hours later, it appeared that this set of talks would not produce an agreement proper, but only a declaration of principles that would form the basis for further negotiations.

Confused? So is everyone else. Such confusion is inherent in the circumstances. All three of the principals involved in the deal-making are desperate for some sort of a deal in the next couple of weeks. The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, needs one last glorious moment on the White House lawns before he quits office on January 20 and Mr. Arafat and Mr. Ehud Barak recognise that he deserves one for all the effort he has put in on their behalf. Israel's Prime Minister needs something that will show peace is attainable before he faces his electorate on February 6. Mr. Arafat is not directly under the pressure of any deadline but he too needs to show that Palestinian aspirations are within reach so that he can persuade his people to tone down their *intifada* and provide an escape from the dire



Mr. Ehud Barak makes a point to Mr. Shimon Peres during a poll campaign meeting... can the doves come out on top?

In West Asia, what we seem to be in for at this stage is a series of agreements that could produce a final settlement, says
KESAVA MENON.

economic situation they are sliding into.

But, a comprehensive and detailed settlement might just not be possible within a short period. The Israelis and the Palestinians are now grappling with the nitty-gritty of the arrangements whereby they will co-exist in the future. The details can be as mundane as the alignment of a road or the

location of a water main or as profound as the allocation of legal authority for holy sites. And, once settled, they will have to abide by the decisions for a long time, perhaps forever. The idea of permanent loss or gain is implicit in the negotiations to come and both sides have to also grapple with the emotions this will involve. What is more, the public on neither side has been prepared for the practical and emotional adjustments that will have to be made.

Of all the issues on the table when the negotiations began seven years ago, only the question of Palestinian statehood can be taken as more or less settled. There seems to be little doubt that Israel will accept the coming-into-being of a Palestinian state once the other issues are settled. But it is symptomatic of the tentativeness of the whole situation that even this issue has not been settled, and might never be if the other issues are not resolved. These issues — the borders of the state-to-be and the real power that will be granted to it; whether East Jerusalem (Al Quds) will be its capital; whether people who are emotionally attached to that state will be allowed to settle in Israel; the water resources that will be allocated to that state — are quite a bit closer to resolution than they were seven

years ago. But an inability to reach closure on any one of them could unravel whatever else has been, or could be, achieved.

The world outside might get frustrated at this inability to make the intellectual and emotional leap required for a compromise, but for the Israelis and the Palestinians such compromises could strike at the fundamentals of their identity.

Currently, the main deal-breaker appears to be the question of Palestinian refugees; whether they will be granted "the right of return". As per U.N. Resolution 194 passed in 1949 those Palestinians who in 1948 were living in what became Israel are entitled to return to the homesteads they fled or were driven out of by the Israeli armed forces. They and their descendants, estimated to number nearly four million today, are living in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinian territories and elsewhere.

These refugees certainly deserve fair treatment. But there is some merit in the Israeli argument that the Arab countries that currently host the Palestinian refugees should assimilate them in the same manner as Israel absorbed the Jews who migrated from the Arab countries over the years. Israel will never agree to accept the Palestinian refugees as citizens because to do so would change the Jewish character of their state. The compromise that appears (to the outsider) reasonable, and that has been placed on the table, is that the refugees should be allowed to settle in the territories of the Palestinian state-to-be and given hefty compensation. But for the Palestinians this is a nearly impossible compromise. To give up the right of return would mean the erasure of their historical experience and their identity as a people wronged.

But if the obstacles appear insurmountable the history of the negotiations has also shown that creative solutions can be thought up. Such solutions do crop up from time to time and someone could finally string these together into a comprehensive package. Unfortunately, the one politician in the world who appears to have this gift will soon be quitting office. It appears imperative that at least the outlines of a deal are worked out before Mr. Clinton leaves the White House.



Mr. Yasser Arafat with Mr. Bill Clinton... a last-ditch push for peace.

WEST ASIA / ARAB MINISTERS HARDEN STAND

Palestinian right of return 'sacred'

CAIRO, JAN. 4. Arab Foreign Ministers insisted on Thursday that Palestinian refugees' right of return was "sacred," leaving the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, little room to manoeuvre on a key concession demanded in an American peace plan.

Mr. Arafat had turned to the Arab League Foreign Ministers' meeting in Cairo for support as he contemplated a U.S. suggestion he surrender the right of refugees now in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and elsewhere to return to homes in Israel. In exchange, the Palestinians would gain control of a key holy site in Jerusalem.

Mr. Arafat has reportedly accepted the formula as a basis for talks with Israel. Israel made the same commitment earlier, though the Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, has said he would never sign an agreement giving the Palestinians sovereignty over the Jerusalem

site, holy to both Jews and Muslims.

Israel's Cabinet indicated it might resume peace talks. But with positions hardening on either side, it was unclear how much progress could be made at any talks.

"I would like to point out that Lebanon has totally rejected the idea of resettling the Palestinian refugees (permanently) and insisted on the right of the Palestinians to return. We believe that this is a sacred right," the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Mr. Amr Moussa, speaking as the chairman of Thursday's meeting, told reporters after the talks.

Mr. Arafat had been expected to announce his response to the U.S. proposals after the meeting. But he left without speaking to reporters. Mr. Moussa said he could not say whether the Palestinians would return to the negotiating table.

A day earlier, an aide in Washington said

Mr. Arafat had conditionally accepted the U.S. proposal after two meetings with Mr. Clinton on Tuesday.

Mr. Moussa said the Foreign Ministers also were concerned the Palestinians had not been assured full sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the city's Muslim holy sites. He said Arabs wanted further clarifications from the Americans and that the issues of Jerusalem and the refugees took up most of Thursday's discussions.

Before the Arab League meeting, Mr. Arafat briefed the Egyptian President, Mr. Hosni Mubarak, on his talks this week with Mr. Clinton.

The Syrian Foreign Minister, Mr. Farouk al-Sharaa, whose state media repeatedly denounced the U.S. proposals in recent days, reportedly opened Thursday's Arab League meeting by saying the plan should not even be discussed. The meeting was closed, but a source speaking on condition of anonymity said al-Sharaa called on the Arab League to instead concentrate on supporting the Palestinian uprising.

Arabs ranging from moderate to radical in their stance toward Israel have rejected the U.S. formula. On Thursday, the radical Palestinian Hamas movement said in a statement that with his formula, Mr. Clinton had virtually adopted "Zionist proposals, conditions and visions."

Palestinian-Israeli clashes have killed more than 350 people — most of them Palestinian — in the last three months. The Arab League has held Israel responsible for the violence.

Israel sent its chief negotiator to Washington on Thursday for talks with U.S. officials to get clarifications on the Palestinian stance.

Digging in before any resumption of peace talks, Mr. Barak assured Israel's chief rabbis on Thursday he never agreed to hand over to the Palestinians the Jerusalem holy site, known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary.

And Israel remained deeply sceptical that a peace agreement could be concluded before Mr. Clinton's term ends on Jan. 20. "It is beyond human power to complete the negotiations in such a short time," the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Shlomo Ben-Ami, told Israel radio. — AP



A Palestinian woman breaks down after Israeli bulldozers levelled her farm near the Jewish settlement of Dugit in Northern Gaza Strip on Thursday. — AP

THE HINDU

5 JAN 2001

Arafat takes Clinton plan to Cairo

REUTERS & AFP

CAIRO, Jan. 4. — Palestinian President Mr Yasser Arafat began consulting Arab leaders in Cairo today about US President Mr Bill Clinton's West Asia peace proposals before announcing whether he accepts them.

Mr Arafat began his discussions by meeting Egyptian President Mr Hosni Mubarak after arriving from talks in Washington with Mr Clinton, who is trying to clinch a last-minute peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians before he leaves office on 20 January.

White House spokesman Mr Jake Siewert told reporters in Washington that progress had been made at the talks with Mr Arafat on Tuesday because the Palestinian leader had accepted Mr Clinton's proposals with some reservations.

Israel remained doubtful a peace agreement was imminent. But it decided to send senior envoy Mr Gilead Sher to Washington for talks and a Western diplomat said a



Mr Yaseer Arafat with the Syrian foreign minister, Mr Farouk Al-Sharaa at the Arab foreign ministers' meet in Cairo on Thursday. — AP/PTI

Palestinian negotiator would probably go to Washington for talks next week.

Senior Palestinian negotiator Mr Nabil Shaath said Mr Arafat would issue his response to Mr Clinton's proposals, which are intended to provide the basis for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, only after consulting Arab foreign ministers meeting in Cairo.

"The President (Arafat) will come back to brief his Arab

brothers and only after...Will we declare our final position regarding the American ideas," Mr Shaath told reporters over telephone from the Egyptian capital. But he told reporters the talks in Washington had been "positive".

Israeli foreign minister Mr Shlomo Ben-Ami, his country's chief negotiator, said on public radio today that Israel demands that the Palestinian leadership work to end

terrorism in the area before peace talks can resume.

"In the coming days, we have to tackle the root of the problem... If we perceive in the next few days that the Palestinians are making an effort in the fight against terrorism, then we can return to the negotiating table," he said over telephone from Stockholm.

He told Israel Radio time had been wasted. Even if the Palestinians accepted the US plan, only a miracle could produce a peace treaty before Mr Clinton bows out, he said.

"It is almost beyond human capability to end the negotiations in this short period," he added.

According to the radio report, Mr Ben-Ami will lead an Israeli delegation for talks in Washington on Sunday.

Talks have been deadlocked over issues at the heart of the 52-year-old conflict between Israel and Palestinians such as the fate of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and borders. Israel was non-committal on whether it saw a change in the Palestinian position on Mr Clinton's ideas.

THE HINDU

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WEST ASIA / ARAFAT TO MEET ARAB LEADERS TODAY

U.S. hopeful of clinching deal

WASHINGTON, JAN. 3. The Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, is likely to agree to the West Asia peace proposals initiated by the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, after he meets Arab leaders on Thursday, White House officials have said. Mr. Arafat is scheduled to meet Arab Foreign Ministers in Cairo. Israel had accepted the proposals in principle.

Mr. Clinton and Mr. Arafat held two "productive" and "useful" meetings in the White House and discussed the December 23 proposals, after he came to Washington seeking clarification on the proposals aimed at resolving the deadlocked peace talks with Israel.

According to the White House, Mr. Arafat agreed to "intensify efforts" to end violence in West Asia and to resume cooperation on this with the Israeli authorities. However, a Palestinian paper posted on the web blasted Mr. Clinton's proposals saying the plan "seems to respond to Israeli demands while neglecting the basic Palestinian need — a viable state." "Clinton's plan would divide a Palestinian state into three separate cantons connected and divided by Jewish-only and Arab-only roads and jeopardise the Palestinian state's viability," it said.

Terming the peace proposals as "too vague", it said "we believe any agreement at this advanced stage of the peace process will be counter-productive."

The last-ditch efforts by Mr. Arafat came against a backdrop of ongoing violence, with a Palestinian killed by soldiers guarding a Jewish settlement in Gaza and seven wounded as they rode in a jeep near the Egyptian border. Israeli casualties included two people injured by Palestinians shooting in a highway ambush and two soldiers wounded in separate bomb explosions.

The State Department spokesman, Mr. Richard Boucher, said Israel had raised questions, too, and the U.S. objective was to see if there was a "common understanding" on what to do next. He also said the incoming Bush administration was being kept informed of developments. At a news conference in Austin, Texas, the President-elect, Mr. George W. Bush said Mr. Clinton "is giving it the very best shot he can, and I certainly hope it works."

Shortly after Mr. Arafat arrived in Washing-



The Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat (left), talks with the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, at the White House late on Tuesday night in Washington. Mr. Nabil Aburedina, Mr. Arafat's press secretary, is also seen. — AP

ton, Palestinian negotiators circulated a point-by-point critique that posed tall hurdles to an agreement. The critique said the U.S. plan would "fail to satisfy the conditions for a permanent peace", reward Israel for illegally settling areas of the West Bank and rebuff the rights of Palestinians to return to Israel.

The U.S. plan would give the Palestinians a state, about 95 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza, and limited control in areas of east Jerusalem. The Oval Office meeting gave Mr. Arafat another chance to seek more control in east Jerusalem than the plan suggested, a right of millions of Palestinian refugees to live in Israel and a more favourable configuration for a state.

In Jerusalem, the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, said Mr. Arafat had wasted time "dragging his feet" and that he doubted the Palestinian was serious about concluding a deal before Mr. Clinton leaves office Jan. 20.

Mr. Barak is running behind in the polls in his bid for re-election against the Likud leader, Mr. Ariel Sharon. He had hopes a peace accord would boost his chances. "In the coming weeks, we will not focus on the negotiations with the Palestinians, which in my assessment have no real chance of producing an agreement in the next few weeks, but on containing terrorism", Mr. Barak said. "It is our obligation to provide security for Israeli citizens."

There was no indication Mr. Barak would journey to Washington as well. Last week, Israel accepted Mr. Clinton's proposals as a basis for a negotiated settlement if Mr. Arafat accepted them as well. However, Israel toughened its position on east Jerusalem, saying it would not yield sovereignty over the Temple Mount after the Fatah faction of the PLO called last week for a renewed uprising against Israel. — PTI, AP

THE HINDU

4 JAN 2001

Barak raises peace d

FROM NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI

Gaza, Jan. 2 (Reuters): New violence flared in the Gaza Strip today as Palestinian President Yasser Arafat sped to Washington for talks with US President Bill Clinton, despite Israeli doubts that a West Asia peace deal is imminent.

A day after a car bomb wounded more than 40 people in the central Israeli city of Netanya, Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian farmer following another bomb explosion which wounded an Israeli soldier at a nearby Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip.

The bloodshed added urgency to the Washington talks, which could determine the fate of Clinton's bid to end 52 years of Israeli-

Palestinian conflict and three months of fighting in which more than 350 people have been killed.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said in a radio interview that he doubted a peace deal could be forged before Clinton's presidency ends on January 20.

A US peace blueprint has also drawn strong Palestinian reservations. "President Arafat spoke by telephone with President Clinton for one hour and it was decided that President Arafat would make an urgent visit to Washington to meet with him in order to get a response to the questions raised by the Palestinian side," Arafat's aide Tayeb Abdel-Rahim told the official Palestinian news agency Wafa late yesterday.

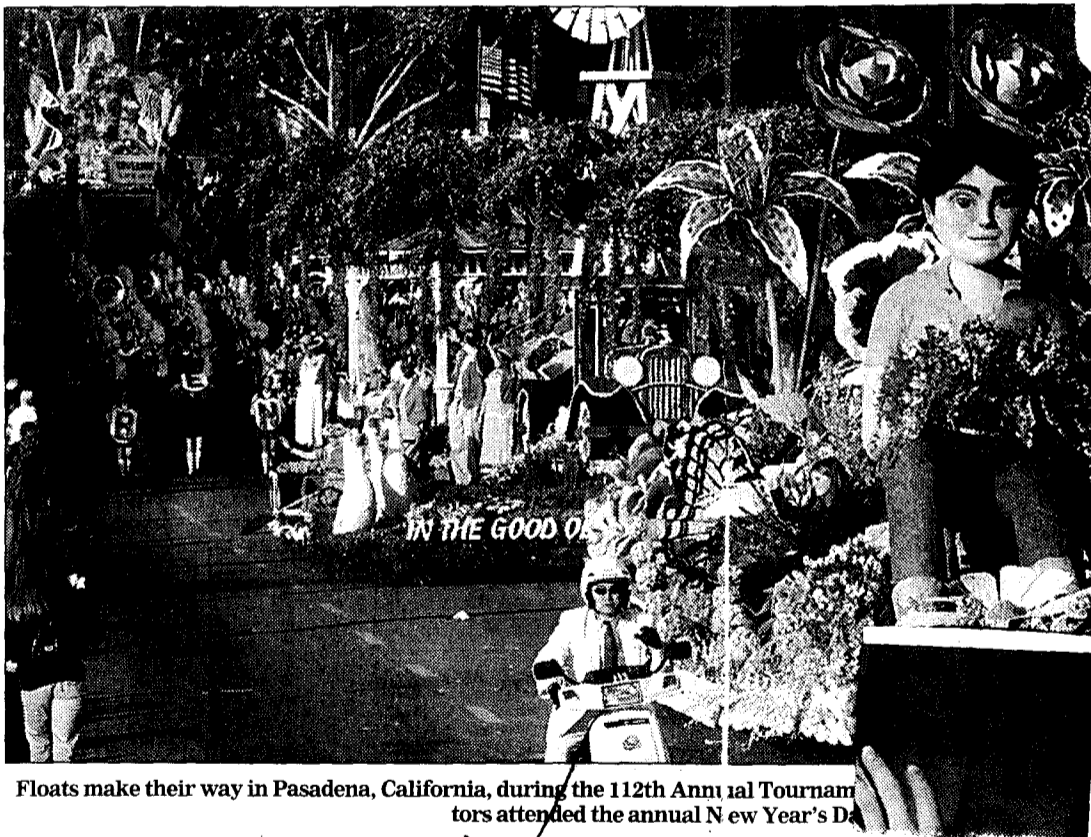
Barak hopes to secure a peace

deal to boost his chances of winning an election for Prime Minister which he has called, under pressure from his critics, for February 6.

But he told Israel's Army Radio: "I don't believe it's reasonable that we will be able to bring about an agreement to be signed in the next two weeks or in the next three weeks, which is still before the elections."

Barak said he would consider sending representatives to Washington should there be a halt to "terrorism" and a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation. He said Israel was concentrating for now on battling the violence.

In the new violence, Palestinian police in Gaza said Israeli



Floats make their way in Pasadena, California, during the 112th Annual Tournament of Roses parade. Spectators attended the annual New Year's Day celebration.

THE TELEGRAPH

3 JAN 2001

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Arafat wasting time, says Barak

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JERUSALEM, JAN. 2. The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, said on Tuesday he doubted Mr. Yasser Arafat was serious about reaching a peace deal soon, even as the Palestinian leader headed to Washington for talks with the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, on U.S. proposals for an agreement.

In the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian man was killed and seven were wounded by Israeli troops in two separate shootings, and two Israeli soldiers were hurt by roadside bombs detonated near two Jewish settlements.

The new violence came just a day after more than three dozen Israelis were hurt in a car

bombing in the coastal city of Netanya.

In response to the car bombing, Israeli troops tightened their blockade of Palestinian towns, in effect since mid-November. Israel also closed the Palestinian airport in Gaza, and shut down border crossings between Gaza and Egypt, as well as the West Bank and Jordan. In Gaza, soldiers closed three main thoroughfares on Tuesday, effectively cutting the strip in half.

The ongoing violence complicated prospects that a peace deal could be reached before Mr. Clinton leaves office on January 20.

Still Mr. Arafat headed to Washington for a

meeting with Mr. Clinton on Tuesday, after the two leaders spoke by phone for about 45 minutes Monday.

A spokesman for Mr. Clinton's National Security Council, Mr. P.J. Crowley, said Mr. Arafat and Mr. Clinton decided they should meet directly to seek a 'common understanding' about what peace talks would cover. Mr. Barak also spoke to Clinton.

Mr. Arafat's spokesman, Mr. Nabil Aburdehneh, called Mr. Arafat's trip "a decisive visit at which the future of the peace process will be determined." Israel has accepted the U.S. ideas in principle, though with some misgivings, but the Palestinians have not responded unequivocally. They raised concerns about the fate of Palestinian refugees and the extent of Arab control over parts of Jerusalem, and sought clarifications from Mr. Clinton.

Mr. Barak on Tuesday accused Mr. Arafat of wasting time.

"President Clinton has three weeks left, and it's unlikely an agreement will be reached in the last three days or week of his term," Mr. Barak told Israel army radio.

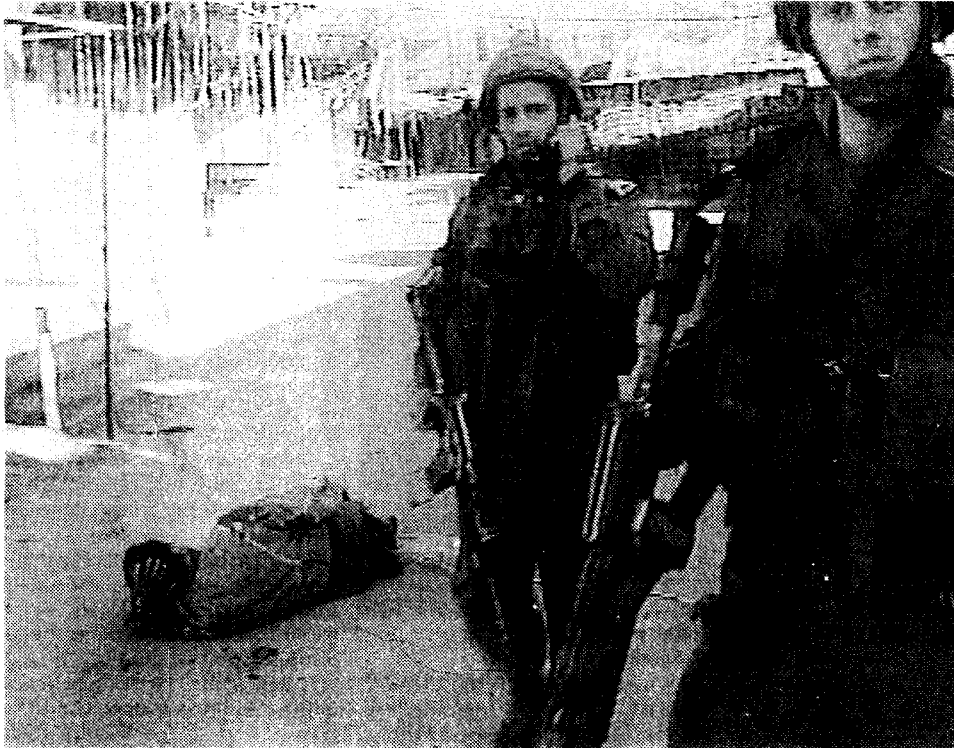
"Since Arafat has wasted most of this time in dragging his feet ... we have very serious doubts about the seriousness of his intentions to reach an arrangement," Mr. Barak said.

The Netanya bombing also shows that Mr. Arafat and his Palestinian Authority are encouraging anti-Israeli violence, Mr. Barak said.

On Monday, Mr. Barak told Israeli army commanders that if Mr. Arafat does not accept the U.S. proposals, violence could escalate and lead to a regional conflict.

Asked about that assessment, Mr. Barak said on Tuesday that "there is a greater possibility of a general deterioration, and the (army's) general command needs to be ready." All contacts between Israel and the Palestinians have been cut off, Mr. Barak said on Tuesday. Official talks broke down after violence broke out three months ago. The bloodshed has killed 357 people, the vast majority Palestinians.

On Tuesday, Palestinians detonated bombs close to Israeli army positions near the Jewish settlements of Dugit and Kfar Darom. Two soldiers were wounded, one lightly and one moderately, the army said. — AP



In this image from television, Jadallah al-Jabaria, a Palestinian, clutches his shattered leg in the nearly-deserted main market in Hebron on Monday, while Israeli soldiers talk on a radio and casually walk past the seriously injured man as he screams, "Why did you shoot me?" Al-Jabari was unarmed when stopped by the Israeli troops for breaking a curfew, and moments later shot at. — AP

THE HINDU

3 JAN 2001

Barak won't sign refugee deal

By DANIELLE HAAS

Jerusalem, Dec. 30: Prospects for new West Asia talks came under a fresh cloud after Israelis and Palestinians locked horns over the right of return for Palestinian refugees and control over Jerusalem.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said on Friday that he would not sign a deal agreeing to the right of Palestinian refugee return or Palestinian sovereignty over the Jerusalem site known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Arabs as Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The Palestinian Cabinet said after its weekly meeting that it would not agree to a deal that failed to fully meet its core demands, but it was still committed to "full and serious negotiations under international sponsorship."

Marking a new channel in negotiations, a senior Palestinian official said that Palestinian delegates were due to hold talks with US officials in Washington to discuss a peace plan proposed by President Bill Clinton to kickstart the talks. The official did not say when Palestinian

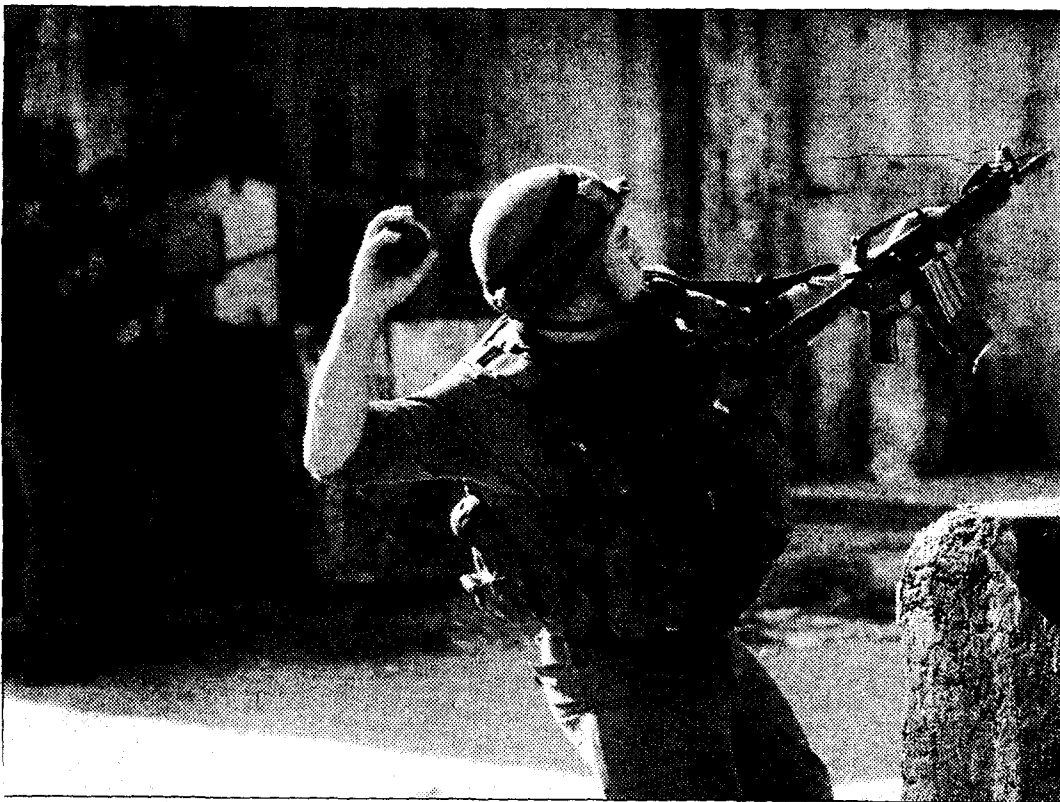
parliament speaker Ahmed Korei and Khaled Salam, an economic adviser to Palestinian Authority president Yasser Arafat, would meet the US officials.

In an interview on Israel's Channel Two television, Mr Barak tried to allay fears of many Israelis that he is ready to cede the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site, to Palestinians. "The government under my authority will not accept any agreement in any form that will recognise the right of return period...I do not intend to sign any document that will transfer sovereignty over the Temple Mount to Palestinians," Mr Barak said. With the concept of sovereignty open to definition, it was not clear whether his statement marked a toughening of the Israeli position after its security Cabinet conditionally accepted Mr Clinton's blueprint for peace on Wednesday.

The Clinton proposal presented last week was reported to give Palestinians sovereignty over the Jerusalem shrine, and maintain Israeli control over the Western Wall beneath. In exchange for land adjoining Gaza, Israel would

annex several West Bank settlement blocs where 80 per cent of the 200,000 settlers now live on land captured in the 1967 war. Palestinians would accept a restriction on the right of refugees to return to the homes they left, or were forced to flee, in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. But the Palestinian Cabinet appeared to rule out compromise, asserting that "the Palestinian leadership confirms its commitment to the full right of refugees to return to their lands and homes in accordance with (UN) Resolution 194." "Our people will never, under any circumstances, concede one inch from its land and from our Jerusalem and our Islamic and Christian holy sites," the statement said.

The Palestinian Cabinet said it was considering the US plans in consultation with "Arab brothers and with friends out of concrete concern to preserve Palestinian national rights." The senior Palestinian official said Palestinians had forwarded a letter to Mr Clinton on Friday outlining their positions and requesting that the proposals be clarified further before giving their final verdict. (Reuters)



NON-STOP VIOLENCE: An Israeli soldier throws a tear gas grenade toward Palestinian rioters during sporadic clashes in the West Bank town of Hebron on Friday. Tension returned to Israel-Palestinian relations on Friday after two bomb attacks killed two Israeli soldiers and wounded 16 other people, further hampering efforts to forge a peace agreement. (AP)

Palestinians bury man killed by tank

Jerusalem, Dec. 30: Thousands of Palestinian mourners in Gaza buried the latest casualty of West Asia bloodshed on Saturday amid little apparent progress from private contacts aimed at resuming Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"Let us teach them how to kill the Jews," chanted mourners bearing the flag-wrapped body of policeman Mahmoud Naseer through the streets, a day after he was killed in a battle involving Israeli tank fire near the Israel-Gaza border.

Fresh violence this week, including Naseer's death and bomb attacks that killed two Israelis, is complicating efforts to revive peace talks and end three months of bloodshed in which at least 346 people, mostly Palestinians, have been killed.

The peace drive stumbled again on Friday when the two sides publicly staked out opposing positions over the right of return for Palestinian refugees and control over Jerusalem. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

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WEST ASIA / RIVAL SIDES VOW REVENGE

Violence engulfs Gaza, West Bank

JERUSALEM, JAN. 1. Gunfire and apparent revenge attacks late on Sunday and early Monday in the West Bank and Gaza Strip left four Palestinians dead, including a 10-year-old boy.

Jewish settlers, angry over the ambush shooting that killed a prominent settler and his wife on Sunday, blocked the entrances of several Palestinian towns in the West Bank on Monday, vowing to "take back the roads." Palestinians, meanwhile, held marches and demonstrations throughout the West Bank and Gaza in a show of support for the 36th anniversary of the Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement. Mr. Arafat founded the movement in exile, and it quickly became the dominant force in the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Grassroots leaders of Fatah and other Palestinian groups have been pressing Mr. Arafat to turn down U.S.-offered peace proposals. Fatah's Jan. 1 anniversary has always been a day for mass gatherings and marches.

The Palestinians have asked the Americans for additional details on the plan proposed by the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, and Mr. Arafat said he expected a response soon. A Palestinian source said Mr. Arafat was expecting a call from Mr. Clinton. Mr. Arafat said Palestinians would continue resisting what he called Israeli aggression.

"I say that our people are very strong and will continue their struggles and confrontations," Mr. Arafat said in Gaza.

Meanwhile, the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, said that if a peace deal could not be reached with the Palestinians, Israel could pursue a plan of unilateral separation, which would include setting boundaries between the two sides.

"We must part from the Palestinians. It is one of our highest priorities to do so in an agreement, but we will have to prepare to do so without an agreement if it becomes clear that the Palestinians are not interested in an agreement," Mr. Barak said.

Monday's deaths included that of the Palestinian boy, Muad Abu Adwan, who died of wounds suffered on Sunday in crossfire in the West Bank town of Hebron, and a 22-year-old Palestinian who died after being shot in the head when Jewish settlers fired on a crowd in his West Bank village, witnesses said.

Elsewhere, two Palestinian policemen were



The mother (centre) of the slain Fatah official, Thabet Thabet, weeps at his funeral in the West Bank city of Nablus on Monday. Thabet (49), was shot in the chest and legs as he left his house on Sunday. — Reuters

killed on the outskirts of the northern West Bank town of Tulkarem, the same town were a senior activist in the Fatah movement was killed earlier in the day.

The Israeli army said the policemen were slain in a gun battle with Israeli forces. But Palestinian hospital officials said bones on their hands had been crushed, suggesting they may have been beaten, and that both were shot by large-calibre bullets.

Tensions rose sharply with an angry funeral procession on Sunday night through downtown Jerusalem, hours after the deaths of Binyamin Kahane and his wife Talia, the son and daughter-in-law of the late Meir Kahane, the extremist U.S. rabbi.

The couple was shot dead on Sunday morning in an ambush-style attack along a road in

the West Bank, where they lived. Five of their six children were also injured.

Chanting "Death to the Arabs!" mourners, including some of the most extreme Jewish settlers in the West Bank, marched behind the coffins of the American-born Kahane.

His supporters swarmed through downtown Jerusalem during the funeral procession, chasing down Palestinians as they spotted them. In the hours-long melee, 10 policemen were injured and a Swedish news photographer was stabbed and slightly wounded. Police reported six arrests.

Thabet Thabet, a Fatah leader from Tulkarem, was gunned down on Sunday outside his home near the cease-fire line between Israel and the West Bank. — AP

THE HINDU

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